

21982 - He wants something that will guide him in his worldly and religious affairs

the question

Can you advise us of something that will guide us in our worldly and religious affairs?

Detailed answer

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah was asked the following question:

I ask the shaykh and imaam, the follower of the salaf (earlier generations) and the leader of the later generations, the most knowledgeable man whom I have met in the east or the west, Taqiyy al-Deen Abu'l-Abbaas Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah, to advise me of something that will guide me in my worldly and religious affairs.

He (may Allaah have mercy on him) replied as follows:

With regard to advice, I do not know of any advice more beneficial than the advice of Allaah and His Messenger, for those who understand it and follow it:

“And verily, We have recommended to the people of the Scripture before you, and to you (O Muslims) that you (all) fear Allaah, and keep your duty to Him”[al-Nisaa’ 4:131]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) advised Mu’aadh, when he sent him to Yemen, “O Mu’aadh, fear Allaah wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed, and it will wipe it out, and treat people in a kind manner.” Mu’aadh (may Allaah be pleased with him) was held in high esteem by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and he said to him, “O Mu’aadh, by Allaah I love you.” And he used to let him ride behind him. It was narrated that he was the most knowledgeable of this ummah concerning halaal and haraam, that he will be gathered (on the Day of Resurrection) one step ahead of the scholars. One of his virtues is that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent him to Yemen to convey the message from him, as a daa’iyah, mufti and judge for the people of Yemen.

And he used to liken him to Ibraaheem (peace be upon him), and Ibraaheem was a leader of mankind.

And Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) used to say that Mu'aadh was an ummah (a leader having all the good righteous qualities), obedient to Allaah, and he was not one of the mushrikeen (cf. al-Nahl 16:120), likening him to Ibraaheem (peace be upon him).

Moreover, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave him this advice, so we should note that it is concise and comprehensive. It is like that for the one who understands it, even though it is an interpretation of advice given in the Qur'aan.

With regard to its conciseness, that is because each person has two duties: his duty towards Allaah and his duty towards others. It is inevitable that he will fall short sometimes with regard to those duties, either by failing to do something he is commanded to do or by doing something he is forbidden to do. So the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Fear Allaah wherever you are." This is a comprehensive phrase. The words "wherever you are" refer to the need for taqwa in secret and in the open. Then he said: "and follow up a bad deed with a good deed, and it will wipe it out". For when the doctor sees a patient and realizes that he has ingested something harmful, he will tell him to take something that is good for him. Sin is something inevitable for man, so the smart man is the one who keeps doing good deeds so that they will wipe out his bad deeds.

In the wording of the hadeeth, the word sayi'ah (bad deed) is mentioned first, even though it is the object, because the aim here is to wipe out bad deeds, not to emphasize good deeds.

The good deeds should be of a similar nature to the bad deeds, for that will be more effective in wiping them out. The consequences of sin may be erased by several things, the first of which is repentance, and the second is seeking forgiveness (istighfaar) without repenting, for Allaah may forgive him in response to his du'aa' even though he has not repented. But if repentance and seeking forgiveness are combined, this is perfect. The third thing is doing righteous deeds that expiate for sin.

With regard to specific acts of expiation, such as those prescribed for one who has intercourse during the day in Ramadaan, one who divorces his wife by zihaar (a jaahili form of divorce by which a man says to his wife “You are to me as my mother’s back), the one who commits some actions which are forbidden during Hajj or who fails to fulfil some of its obligations and the one who hunts during Hajj, these expiations are of four types: offering a sacrifice, freeing a slave, giving in charity and fasting. With regard to kinds of expiation that are not specified, as Hudhayfah said to ‘Umar: The fitnah faced by a man (i.e., his shortcomings with regard to religious duties) because of his family, wealth and children may be expiated by prayer, fasting, charity and enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. This is indicated by the Qur’aan and the saheeh ahaadeeth which speak of expiation via the five daily prayers, Jumu’ah, fasting, Hajj and all the actions concerning which it is said, whoever says such and such or does such and such, he will be forgiven, or his previous sins will be forgiven. There are many such reports in the books of Sunan, especially those books which have been written concerning virtuous deeds.

It should be noted that paying attention to such matters is one of the things of which man is in the greatest need. When a person reaches the age of puberty, especially in these times and similar periods which resemble the time of jaahiliyyah in so many ways, the person who grows up among knowledgeable and religious people may be affected by matters of jaahiliyyah to some extent, so how about others?

In al-Saheehayn it is narrated in the hadeeth of Abu Sa’eed (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “You will follow the path of those who came before you step by step, so that even if they entered the hole of a lizard, you will enter it too.” They said, “O Messenger of Allaah, do you mean the Jews and Christians?” He said, “Who else?” This report is confirmed by the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“so enjoy your portion (awhile) as those before you enjoyed their portion (awhile); and you indulged in play and pastime (and in telling lies against Allaah and His Messenger Muhammad) as they indulged in play and pastime”

[al-Tawbah 9:69]

And there are further corroborating reports in the saheeh and hasan ahaadeeth. This is something which affects those among the elite who claim to be religiously committed, as more than one of the salaf, including Ibn ‘Uyayanah, said. For many of the characteristics of the Jews are things from which some of those who claim to be knowledgeable are suffering, and many of the characteristics of the Christians are things from which some of those who claim to be religiously-committed are suffering – as is clear to everyone who understands the religion of Islam with which Allaah sent Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), then tries to understand people in the light of Islam.

If this is the case, then the one whose heart Allaah opens to Islam will be following light from his Lord, for he was dead then Allaah revived him and gave him light by which to walk among mankind. So he will inevitably notice the characteristics of jaahiliyyah and the path of the two nations with whom Allaah is angry and who have gone astray, namely the Jews and Christians, and he will see that he is also afflicted with some of that.

The most useful thing that both the elite and the common folk may know is that which will cleanse their souls of these bad effects, and that is following bad deeds with good deeds. Good deeds are those which Allaah has encouraged on the lips of the final Prophet, whether they are actions, attitudes or characteristics. Among the things which remove the consequences of sin are disasters or calamities which expiate sin; these include all kinds of anxiety, grief or harm with regard to wealth, honour, one’s body, and so on, but which are not brought about by a person’s own actions.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had stated the rights of Allaah with regard to doing righteous deeds and putting right bad deeds, he then said, “and treat people in a kind manner”. This refers to one’s duty towards other people. A good attitude towards other people is based on maintaining contact with one who cuts you off by greeting him with salaam, honouring him, making du’aa’ for him, praying for forgiveness for him, praising him and visiting him; giving to one who has deprived you of knowledge, benefits and money; forgiving one who has wronged you with regard to blood, wealth or honour. Some of these matters are waajib (obligatory) and some are mustahabb (encouraged).

With regard to the “exalted standard of character” [al-Qalam 68:4] with which Allaah described Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), this is the religion which includes all that Allaah has enjoined. Hence Mujaahid said that he was the interpretation of the Qur’aan, as ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: “His character was the Qur’aan.” The essence of his character was that he hastened to do what Allaah loves with a willing spirit and an open heart. All of this may be summed up in the word taqwa (fear of Allaah), which includes doing everything that Allaah has enjoined whether it is waajib (obligatory) or mustahabb (recommended), and avoiding all that He has forbidden, whether it is haraam (forbidden) or makrooh (disliked). This combines both duties towards Allaah and duties towards other people. But as taqwa may sometimes mean fearing the punishment which makes one refrain from forbidden things, it was explained in the hadeeth of Mu’aadh. Similarly, in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with them) which was narrated and classed as saheeh by al-Tirmidhi, “it was said, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, which thing most commonly brings people into Paradise?’ He said, ‘Fear of Allaah (taqwa) and a good attitude.’ It was said, ‘And which thing most commonly brings people into Hell?’ He said, ‘The two hollow things: the mouth and the private parts.’”

In al-Saheeh it is narrated from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The most perfect of the believers in faith is the one who is best in attitude.” So he connected perfection of faith to good attitude. It is well known that faith is all fear of Allaah (taqwa), but this is not the place to discuss the basic principles and minor details of that. This is the whole of religion, but the source of goodness is sincere devotion of the slave to his Lord, worshipping Him alone and seeking His help alone, as in the aayaahs (interpretation of the meaning):

“You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything)” [al-Faatihah 1:5]

“So worship Him (O Muhammad) and put your trust in Him”[Hood 11:123]

“in Him I trust and unto Him I repent”[Hood 11:88]

“so seek your provision from Allaah (Alone), and worship Him (Alone), and be grateful to Him”
[al-‘Ankaboot 29:17]

Thus the slave does away with any hope of benefiting from created beings and does not strive for their sake, and he focuses all his concern on his Lord, by praying to him for all his needs, fears, etc., and striving to do all that He loves.