

## 133060 - What Does Islam Say about high-status Jobs?

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### the question

Are there any jobs and occupations that are regarded as low-status or high-status in Islam? Is a person's keenness to strive for a high position in his job contrary to the idea of contentment [with the divine decree]? When does ambition contradict contentment? Is a person's keenness to work in jobs that are held in high esteem by society contrary to Zuhd [lack of interest in worldly matters] and not making this world one's main focus, or is it something normal that is not forbidden by Islamic teachings?

### Summary of answer

- 1- Islam does not prevent one from seeking a high-status occupation and a good job. Rather Islam encourages that and urges Muslims to seek a better level and better situation; in fact, they should seek what is best and strive to attain it, on condition that they do not give precedence to that over their faith and pursuit of righteousness.
- 2- What many people think about some occupations – such as carpentry, blacksmithing and tending flocks – being lowly, is not correct, and to refute that view it is sufficient to note that these were the occupations and work of the best of Allah's creation, namely the Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them).
- 3- Seeking high status occupations and high status positions is not permissible except for one who attains them in a rightful manner and uses them in a rightful manner.
- 4- The fact that Islam urges the Muslim to seek the highest level in both religious and worldly terms is not contrary to contentment with the divine decree and what Allah has allotted to him, because one of the means of attaining that is taking appropriate measures.

### Detailed answer

[Table Of Contents](#)

- [Worldly life is a means of reaching the Hereafter](#)
- [Importance of wealth in Islam](#)
- [Benefits of wealth in Islam](#)
- [How to earn lawful money](#)
- [What does Islam say about jobs?](#)
- [Does seeking the highest level in religious and worldly terms contradict contentment with divine decree?](#)

## **Worldly life is a means of reaching the Hereafter**

Allah has made this world a means of reaching the Hereafter, and a means by which a person may prepare himself for the Hereafter. Hence Allah has stated in His Book that He has subjugated the earth and everything in it to people. Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth} [Al-Baqarah 2:29]

{It is He who made the earth tame for you - so walk among its slopes and eat of His provision - and to Him is the resurrection} [Al-Mulk 67:15]

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“That is: so travel around in it wherever you wish, from one country to another, for the purpose of seeking different kinds of earning and trade.” (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*; 8/179)

## **Importance of wealth in Islam**

Many verses and Hadiths urge the Muslim to seek a livelihood and travel about in the earth, all for the [purpose of acquiring wealth](#), not merely for the sake of accumulation, but so that he will not have to ask of others, and so that he may uphold ties of kinship with it and use it to do righteous deeds and obey his Lord.

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, explaining the virtue and importance of [wealth](#) :

“Allah, may He be Glorified, has called wealth Khayr (lit. “good”) in more than one place in His Book, such as the verses in which He, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Prescribed for you when death approaches [Any] one of you if he leaves Khayr [wealth] [is that he should make] a bequest for the parents and near relatives.} [Al-Baqarah 2:180]

{And indeed he is, in love of Khayr [wealth], intense.} [Al-‘Adiyat 100:8]

Allah, may He be Glorified, has told us that He has made **wealth** a means of maintaining life, and He has enjoined us to take care of it. He has forbidden giving it to those who are legally incompetent among women, children and others. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) praised wealth when he said: “How good is lawful wealth for a righteous man.”

(Narrated by Ahmad with a sound Isnad (chain of narration)). Sa‘id ibn Al-Musayyab (may Allah have mercy on him) said: There is nothing good in one who does not want to acquire wealth by lawful means, so that he will not have to ask of people, and he can uphold ties of kinship with it and give what is due on it. Abu Ishaq As-Subay‘i (may Allah have mercy on him) said: They used to regard wealth as a help in fulfilling religious duties. Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What a good help in maintaining piety wealth is! Sufyan Ath-Thawri (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Wealth in our time is the weapon of the believer. Yusuf ibn Subat (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Wealth has never been at any time since the world was created more beneficial than it is in this time.

Allah, may He be Glorified, has made wealth a means of maintaining physical wellbeing, and taking care of it is a means of maintaining spiritual wellbeing, so that one will be able to learn about Allah, believe in Him, believe in His Messengers, love Him, and turn to Him. Thus wealth is the means of prosperity in this world and the hereafter.

## **Benefits of wealth in Islam**

One of the benefits of wealth is that it is the basis of acts of worship and obedience. By means of it Hajj and Jihad become possible, by means of it one is able to spend in the ways that are obligatory and encouraged, and by means of it one is able to do righteous deeds such as manumitting slaves, establishing Waqfs (endowments), building mosques and bridges, and

other good deeds. By means of it one becomes able to get married, which is better than focusing completely on supererogatory acts of worship. By means of it, people attain dignity; by means of it people are able to spend generously; by means of it people's honour is protected; by means of it one may connect to brothers and friends; and by means of it the righteous attain the highest levels and will be in the company of those whom Allah has favoured. It is something by means of which one may ascend to the highest chambers of Paradise or drop therefrom to the lowest of the low. By means of it a person may attain glory. One of the early generations used to say: There is no glory except through action, and there is no action except by means of wealth. One of them used to say: O Allah, I am one of your slaves for whom nothing is good except wealth. It is one of the means of attaining Allah's good pleasure, just as it is one of the means of incurring His wrath." (*'Iddat As-Sabirin*, p. 221-223)

## **How to earn lawful money**

In order to attain these noble goals by means of wealth, the Prophets strove in different occupations and crafts, and did various kinds of work. According to a Hadith narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah never sent any prophet but he tended sheep." His companions said: Even you? He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Yes. I used to tend them for the people of Makkah in return for a few coins." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 2134)

Similarly, our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) [worked in trade with his uncle Abu Talib](#), and then worked in trade using the wealth of his wife Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), as is well known in his biography.

According to the Hadith narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Zakariyya was a carpenter." (Narrated by Muslim, 2379)

Allah, may He be Exalted, tells us about the work of Dawud (peace be upon him), as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And We taught him the fashioning of coats of armour to protect you from your [enemy in] battle. So will you then be grateful.} [Al-Anbiya' 21:80]

It was narrated from Khalid ibn Ma'dan from Al-Miqdam (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who said: "No one ever eats any food better than that which he eats from the earnings of his own hands. The Prophet of Allah Dawud (peace be upon him) used to eat from the earnings of his own hands." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1966)

Dawud (peace be upon him) was a Prophet and a king, to whom Allah gave great dominion, yet despite that he (peace be upon him) used to eat from the earnings of his own hands; he used to make chainmail from iron and sell it.

Islam affirms the principle of [travelling about in the land and seeking provision](#). Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Dhu Majaz and `Ukath were marketplaces for the people during the Jahiliyyah [the pre-Islamic era]. When Islam came, it was as if they disliked that, until the verse {There is no blame upon you for seeking bounty from your Lord [during Hajj]} [Al-Baqarah 2:198] was revealed. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1681)

The jurists and scholars of Hadith have stated that. Al-Bukhari gave a chapter in the Book of Sales the title: Going out to do trade and the verse in which Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): {disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah} [Al-Jumu'ah 62:10] Then he quoted the Hadith of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari with `Umar (may Allah be pleased with them), and the words of `Umar: I was distracted [from learning about that] by making business deals in the marketplaces. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1956 and Muslim, 2153)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"Ibn Al-Munayyir said in *Al-Hashiyah*: What Al-Bukhari meant, that it is permissible to move about for the purpose of trade even if the distance is far, is different from what those with extreme views thought, who did not even go to the marketplace." (*Fath Al-Bari*, 4/349)

Al- Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) also included chapters with titles such as: Chapter on travelling for trade by sea; Chapter on what was said about the goldsmith; Chapter on blacksmiths; Chapter on tailors; Chapter on weavers; Chapter on carpenters... And so on

By including these chapter headings and the Hadiths listed under them, Al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) wanted to show that it is prescribed to work and have a profession or occupation. What some people think, that Islam does not urge people to work and earn a livelihood, is not correct.

What many people think about some occupations – such as carpentry, blacksmithing and tending flocks – being lowly, is not correct, and to refute that view it is sufficient to note that these were the occupations and work of the best of Allah’s creation, namely the Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them).

## **What does Islam say about jobs?**

Islam does not prevent one from seeking a high-status occupation and a good job. Rather Islam encourages that and urges the individual to seek a better level and better situation; in fact, he should seek what is best and strive to attain it, on condition that he does not give precedence to that over his faith and pursuit of righteousness.

Hence the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, although both are good.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2664) The word “good” (Khayr) is indefinite and includes what is good in this world and the hereafter.

Islam dislikes people to do some base and lowly occupations, and instructs the Muslim to rise above that, as it says in the Hadith which was narrated from Ibn Muhayyisah from his father, that he asked the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for permission to charge a fee for cupping and he told him not to do that. He kept asking him and seeking permission until he told him to feed his watering camel and his slave with it [those earnings]. (Narrated by Muslim, 2664, and by At-Tirmidhi, 1277, who classed it as sound)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The scholars differed regarding this issue – the earnings of a cupper. The majority were of the view that it is permissible... And they said: They are somewhat lowly and undignified earnings, but they are not prohibited. They interpreted the Prophet's rebuke as meaning that it is Makruh (disliked), not prohibited." (*Fath Al-Bari*, 4/459)

And he (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"The fact that it is lowly does not mean that it is not prescribed or permissible. The street sweeper is of a lower status than a cupper, but if all people refused to do this job, that would harm everyone." (*Fath Al-Bari*, 4/324)

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"Rather the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) disliked it [cupping] for a free man, by way of thinking that it is beneath him, because this occupation is regarded as base and lowly. The fact that he instructed him to feed his slave from the earnings indicates that it is permissible. Thus his prohibiting him from eating from those earnings himself should be understood as meaning that it is disliked, not prohibited." (*Al-Mughni*, 6/133)

Thus we may conclude that there are some occupations and jobs that people may traditionally regard as lowly, such as cupping, collecting trash, working in the sewers, and so on.

But we may point out the following:

- The fact that they are lowly occupations does not mean that it is prohibited to work in them, as we have explained above.
- These occupations may be appropriate for some people, because they are not good at other things, for example. So doing these jobs is better than being idle and unemployed and receiving charity from people.
- Undoubtedly the Muslim society needs these occupations, and they are essential. If the trash is not collected for a few days, life will become difficult in that community, and will lead to the spread of diseases and epidemics. Therefore it is obligatory for the Muslim state

to be generous in paying those who do these jobs, so as to encourage them, and so that there will not be a time when no one does this work.

- Those who do these jobs should not be shamed or looked down on, such as those who had no opportunity for education, or are feeble-minded, or are faced with particular circumstances that compelled them to work in these occupations. The one who works in such an occupation is undoubtedly better than the one who begs from people and exposes himself to humiliation.

## **Does seeking the highest level in religious and worldly terms contradict contentment with divine decree?**

The fact that Islam urges the Muslim to seek the highest level in both religious and worldly terms is not contrary to contentment with the divine decree and what Allah has allotted to him, because one of the means of attaining that is taking appropriate measures. So taking the measures that Allah has created by His wisdom will lead, in most cases, to attaining one's goals.

But if a person seeks a livelihood by means other than what Allah has permitted, such as seeking it through sinful actions, cheating, deceit, lying, or bribery, and his main concern is to attain these worldly gains without intending to use them in obedience to Allah, then this is a sign of discontentment with what Allah has allotted to him, and he has fallen into sin.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave a vivid likeness of a man's eagerness for wealth and status. In the Hadith, it was narrated that Ka'b ibn Malik Al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Two hungry wolves sent against a flock of sheep do not cause more damage to the flock than a man's eagerness for wealth and status does to his faith." (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 2376; classed as authentic by Al-Albani in *Sunan At-Tirmidhi*)

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"Undoubtedly desire for wealth and status in this world is harmful, as At-Tirmidhi narrated from Ka'b ibn Malik Al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: The Messenger of



Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Two hungry wolves sent against a flock of sheep do not cause more damage to the flock than a man’s eagerness for wealth and status does to his faith.” And he [At-Tirmidhi] said: “It is an authentic Hadith.”

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) condemned eagerness for wealth and status – which means leadership and prominence – and stated that that damages faith like, or more than, the damage that two hungry wolves cause to a flock of sheep.” (*Majmu‘ Al-Fatawa*, 20/142).

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The wealth that is condemned is that which is earned in an inappropriate manner and spent in an inappropriate manner, and the one who earns it becomes a slave to it, so that it controls his thoughts and distracts him from Allah and the hereafter. So what is condemned is that which helps the one who acquires it to achieve corrupt aims and goals, or distracts him from praiseworthy aims and goals. What is condemned is the one who abuses it, not the wealth itself. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Wretched is the slave of the Dinar and Dirham and fine clothing.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 2730) He condemned the one who is a slave to these things, not these things themselves...” (*Uddat as-Sabirin*, p. 221, 222)

As for having little interest in this world ([Zuhd](#)), it is not contrary to seeking wealth and working in high-status occupations.

Finally, it should be noted that seeking high status occupations and high status positions is not permissible except for one [who attains them in a rightful manner](#) and uses them in a rightful manner.

As for the one who attains them in an improper manner, or does not fear Allah regarding this position or use it in a rightful manner – rather he uses it as a means to oppress and suppress people, or look down on them, or accumulate wealth even if it comes from prohibited sources – such positions and leadership will be a cause of doom on the Day of Resurrection for the one who attained it.

Regarding that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “You will be very keen to attain positions of authority, but they will be a cause of regret on the Day of Resurrection.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 7148)

Muslim (1825) narrated from Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): O Messenger of Allah, will you not appoint me (to a position of authority)? He struck me on the shoulder with his hand and said: “O Abu Dharr, you are weak and it is a trust, and on the Day of Resurrection it will be a source of humiliation and regret, except for the one who takes it and fulfils all obligations and does all duties required.”

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Sharh Sahih Muslim*:

“This Hadith offers clear evidence that one should avoid positions of authority, especially in the case of one who is weak and unable to carry out the duties required in that position of authority. As for humiliation and regret, they are inevitable in the case of one who is not qualified for that, or was qualified but was not fair in carrying out his duties. Allah, may He be Exalted, will humiliate and shame him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will regret his negligence. As for the one who was qualified for that position of authority and he was fair in carrying out his duties, he will attain immense reward, as is indicated by many sound Hadiths, such as the Hadith which mentions the seven whom Allah will shade [with His shade on the Day of Resurrection] and other Hadiths, and the Muslims are unanimously agreed on that. However, because there is such great danger in that, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) warned against it, and the scholars also warned against it, and many of the early generations refused to accept such positions, and bore with patience the persecution they faced when they refused.”

And Allah knows best.