

Ibn al-Qayyim on Tawhīd, the Ways and Means, Fear and Reliance



In the context of leprosy and contagion, Ibn al-Qayyim (رحمة الله) wrote the following:¹

As for the issue of the leper, then there is no doubt that it is reported from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that he said: “*Flee from the leper as you would flee from a lion*”, and he sent a messenger to the leper to say: “*We have taken your pledge of allegiance, so return back.*” And he took the hand of the leper and placed it in the vessel and said: “*Eat, trusting Allāh and relying upon Him.*”

There is no conflict between these narrations. The angle [from which this is said] will be clear to the one who comprehends, in terms of knowledge, what we have already presented, and at most, it is that mixing with the

¹ Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa‘ādah (3/385-388).

leper is among the causes of transmission. But this cause is opposed by other causes which prevent it from taking place necessarily. From the strongest of them is placing reliance upon Allāh and trusting Him, for this prevents the effect of that disliked cause from taking place.

However, not everyone from the [Muslim] nation is able to do this. Thus, he advised them to avoid the cause of what is disliked and to flee from it and keep away from it. And [he advised] that a servant should not subject himself to causes of tribulation. But then he put his hand—[that of the leper]—alongside his own into the vessel. This [action of the Prophet] is [based upon] the cause (sabab) of reliance upon Allāh and trusting Him which is the greatest of causes that repel what is disliked and dangerous.

[This], in order to teach his nation to repel the disliked causes with what is greater than them [in their effect] and to inform them that harm and benefit are in the Hand of Allāh (عِزِّهِ). If He wills to harm His servant, He will harm him and if He wills to turn harm away from him, He will turn it away. Rather, if He wills to benefit him through [a cause] among the causes of harm, and harm him through [a cause] among the causes of benefit, He will do so. [All] so that it becomes clear to the servants that He alone is **al-Dārr** (one who harms) and **al-Nāfi‘** (one who benefits). And that the causes of harm

and benefit lie in His hands [alone]. He is the one who made them into causes, if He wills He can remove their [power of] causation, and if He wills He can make what those causes necessitate [of effects] to be other than what routinely occurs from them, so that it may be known that:

—He is the Doer (al-Fā’il) the One who chooses [to do whatever He wishes to do] (al-Mukhtār).

—And that nothing harms or benefits except by His permission.

—And that reliance upon Him and trusting Him averts the disliked causes and [takes them] to [such effects that] oppose their [original] necessities.

—And that their true levels may become clear.²

—And that they [the causes and their effects] are things in which Allāh’s will and wisdom are operative.

—And that He the Sublime is the One who harms [His servants] through them and benefits them. These [causes and their effects] do not have any power over anything. **The whole affair belongs to Allāh.**

Rather, the harm of those causes is obtained by the one whose heart becomes attached to them and who

² Meaning, so that the true level of all of the causes and their powers of causation may become clear, in that they are all under the will and wisdom of their Creator, the One who placed them and that these causes vary in their power of causation.

pauses at them **and who starts to see an evil omen in them through ways that omens can be seen in them.**

That is the one who is afflicted with the detested belief in omens. Harboursing omens [with respect to disliked things] is a cause of bringing the disliked thing to the one who harbours an omen.

But when he relies upon Allāh, trusts in Him, seeks aid from Him, and fear of an omen does not hinder him from embarking upon his need, and he says: *“O Allāh there is no omen but your omen and there is no goodness but your goodness and there is no deity [worthy of worship] besides you. O Allāh no one brings acts of goodness but You and no one removes acts of evil but You. There is no power nor might except by You”*, then he will not be harmed by that which is harboured as an omen at all. Ibn Mas‘ūd said: *“There is none among us except that he [may harbour an omen] but Allāh removes it through reliance [upon Him].”*

Hence, the bad omen afflicts the one who harbours it due to his shirk (associationism), and fear is always alongside shirk. Whereas safety is always alongside Tawhīd.

The Exalted said, quoting from His Khalīl (close friend) Ibrāhīm (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) that he said during his argument against his people:

وَكَيْفَ أَخَافُ مَا أَشْرَكْتُمْ وَلَا تَخَافُونَ أَنَّكُمْ أَشْرَكْتُم بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ
يُنزَلْ بِهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطَانًا فَأَيُّ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ أَحَقُّ بِالْأَمْنِ ۗ إِن كُنتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ

“And how should I fear what you associate while you do not fear that you have associated with Allāh that for which He has not sent down to you any authority? So which of the two parties has more right to security, if you should know?” (6:81).

Then Allāh judged between the two parties with a judgement, saying:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ

“Those who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice (meaning, shirk)—they will have security, and they are [rightly] guided.” (6:82).

The explanation of injustice (ẓulm) is authentically related from Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), he said: “Have you not heard the saying of the righteous servant [Luqmān]:

إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

‘Indeed, shirk (associationism) is a great injustice.’
(31:13).”

Thus, Tawhīd is from the greatest causes of safety from all feared things and shirk is the greatest cause of feared things befalling [a person]. **For that reason, the one who fears anything besides Allāh, it will be unleashed upon Him, and his fear of that thing will be the cause of it being unleashed upon him. If he had feared Allāh instead of it and did not fear it, the absence of his fear of it and his reliance upon Allāh would be the greatest of causes of his deliverance from it.** Likewise, the one who hoped for something other than Allāh, then what he hoped for will be prevented from him and his hope for other than Allāh would be the greatest of causes for its prevention. When he hopes in Allāh alone, then the singling out of his hope would be the greatest cause of being successful in obtaining it or its equal or what is more beneficial for him than it. And Allāh is the One who grants success to what is correct.

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Notes:

1. Ibn al-Qayyim has spoken about how the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) taught his nation to repel disliked and harmful things by adopting the means (asbāb) and he legislated ways and means for all categories of people, those who have strong faith and those who have weak faith, those who have ability to bear harm and those who do not.

2. He explained that anyone who became attached to the means in themselves or who feared them [such as when a person fears that mixing with another will make him sick, **fearing the means itself** and not the Creator of the means] or hoped in them [such as when a person hopes that the precautionary means he has taken will save him, **hoping in the means itself** and not the Creator of the means], then this can lead to the very thing he feared to befall him or the prevention of the thing he hoped for because minor shirk has now entered into the picture. It is only when a person singles out Allāh in his hope, fear and reliance and does not give any share of these matters to what is less than Him—including the created means which he adopts—that he will be delivered from the harm he fears and acquires the safety and security he hopes in.

3. The meaning indicated by Ibn al-Qayyim when he speaks of the heart being attached to the means in themselves and this leading a person to harbour omens,

is alluded to by the Imām, **Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām** (رحمة الله) who said: “The prohibition of ‘*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*’ is not affirmation of contagion. Rather, it is because if the healthy camels became sick through Allāh’s decree, it might occur in the heart of their owner that this was due to contagion. Hence, he would start doubting and be put to trial. Hence, he [the Prophet] ordered the avoidance of this practice.³ And some people have carried [the ḥadīth] to mean that [the prohibition] is due to fear for the healthy on account of the one with the disease, and this is the most evil of what the ḥadīth has been carried to mean, because it facilitates the way for believing in omens which is prohibited against. However, its angle is as I have presented.”⁴

4. Ibn al-Qayyim finished by saying that a believer should fear nothing but Allāh, because fearing what is less than Him leads to that thing befalling him, and his fear of that thing was the cause of this. This shows that fear, anxiety, worry and the likes can be causes of harm coming to a servant, the very harm that he feared.

³ Ibn Hajar also cites this view from Imām Mālik, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭahāwī, Ibn Khuzaimah, and it is mentioned by al-Qāḍī Abū Ya’lā as a view of Imām Aḥmad.

⁴ As cited by Ibn Hajar in *Badhl al-Mā’ūn Fī Faḍl al-Ṭā’ūn*, p. 187.