

## Preparing for Death By Khalid Baig

"Suppose you learn today that you have only one more day to live; you'll die tomorrow. How will you spend your last day?"

This interview question was posed long before the age of mass media. The interviewer approached prominent scholars and people known for their virtuous lives with the idea that he would compile their answers in a book. Such a book would provide the readers with inspiration for the most important virtues.

But the most inspiring response came from the person who did not provide a wish list of virtuous deeds. He was the great muhaddith Abdur Rahman ibn abi Na'um and he replied: "There is nothing that I could change in my daily schedule learning that it is my last day. I already spend everyday in my life as if it is going to be my last."

Death is the most certain aspect of life. According to the latest statistics, 6178 people die in the world every hour. These are people of all ages, dying of all causes. Some of these deaths will make headlines. The great majority will die quietly. Yet everyone will enter his grave the same way. Alone. At the time appointed by God. Science and technology can neither prevent nor predict death. It is solely in the hands of the Creator.

**"O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make it clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then give you growth that you attain full strength. And among you there is he who dies young, and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that after knowledge he knows naught!"** [ Qur'aan - Al-Haj 22:5]

We see it happening all the time. Yet it is amazing how we feel that it won't happen to us. At least not anytime soon. We bury our own friends and relatives but think that we'll live forever. Our attitudes about death defy all logic. In a way we recognize it and even plan for it. We take out life insurance policies. We may do estate planning. Businesses and governments have contingency plans to carry out their operations in case of sudden loss of their leaders. But this is recognition of death as an end point of this life. Where we fail is in recognizing it as the beginning of another life that will never end and where we'll reap what we sow here.

A central teaching of Islam is that it is our recognition of and preparation for that eternity that must separate those who are smart from those who are not. As the Prophet, Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam said: "Truly smart is the person who controlled his desires and prepared for life after death."

There is a moving story about Bahlool, who, in his innocence seems to be on the opposite end of the scale of worldly-smartness. Khalifa Haroon ur Rashid had given him access to his court probably because his naiveté was a source of entertainment to him. Once the Khalifa gave him a walking stick saying, "It is meant for the most foolish person in the world. If you find a person more deserving of it than yourself, pass it on." Several years later Haroon ur Rashid fell seriously ill and no medical treatment seemed to work. Bahlool visited him and inquired about his condition. The conversation went something like this:

Haroon: "No treatment is working. I see my final journey ahead of me."

Bahlool: "Where are you going?"

Haroon: "I am going to the Other World."

Bahlool: "How long will you stay there? When will you come back?"

Haroon: "No one ever comes back from that world."

Bahlool: "Then you must have made especial preparations for this journey. Did you send an advance group to take care of you once you arrive?"

Haroon: "Bahlool, you have to go there alone. And no, I did not make any preparations."

Bahlool: "Ameer-ul-Momineen! You used to send troops to make extensive preparations for you for even short trips of only a few days. Now you are going to a place where you'll live forever but you have made no preparations! I think I have found the person more deserving of the stick that you had given me some years ago."

This story speaks to all of us. We may not be kings but we do plan our trips of even a few days very carefully. How about preparing for the journey into eternity? How about making the concern for the Hereafter the cornerstone of our lives here?

Actually, that concern can change our lives here as well. This world is an abode of deception. Here we are not punished the moment we commit a sin. This fools us into thinking that we can get away with it. Remembering death is the antidote for that deception. A person who remembers that he will have to stand before his Creator and be accountable for his actions simply cannot defy God!

In the story of Pharaoh, we learn that when he saw death approaching he declared belief in the God of Moses. Before that he had been fooled by his apparent power. His repentance came too late but it did show how his arrogance and intransigence evaporated when faced with the certainty of death.

It is amazing how a lot of our own "confusions", frivolous arguments, excuses (for why we cannot do this or avoid that), or plain laziness can melt away when we visualize ourselves in our grave! Death settles a lot of arguments. Its remembrance can do that too. Before it is too late. He was indeed a very wise person who spent every day of his life as if it was going to be his last day. But that certainly should be the goal for all of us!

**Allah, The Most Exalted, says: "Say, 'Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts (it) for him. But whatever thing you spend (give) – He will compensate it; and He is the best of Providers.'" (Qur'an Saba', 34:39)**

The Noble Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: **"No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself."**

(Hadith –Bukhari & Muslim)

