

FRIDAY SERMON

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by Imam Zafrullah Domun

Summary: Death is inevitable- Story of Ibn Abi Al Hasan Al Basri- life is transitory.

After reciting the *Tashahhud*, the *Ta'uz* and the first chapter *Al Fatiha* of the Holy Quran Imam Zafrullah Domun said:

Most people lead a negligent life. They do not care to accomplish their religious duties as is expected of them. They are so enamoured with this life that they think erroneously, of course, that whatever they are enjoying will last forever. Islam does not in any way tell us that we should neglect our lot in this life. On the contrary we should use this life to prepare for the next. In the Holy Quran there are many verses which remind us of the other life. One such verse is in chapter *Al Ala* which is usually read on Fridays. It says “*Bal tou’serounal hayaatad dunya wal akherato khayroun wa abqa*” meaning “you prefer the life of this world whereas the hereafter is better and more lasting” (87:17-18). And the chapter ends with the following “this indeed is what is taught in the previous scriptures – the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.”

In brief the essence of the teachings of all scriptures is that the life to come is better than the life that we live here. This hope in a better future of eternal bliss is a great comfort to all those who suffer here. So when someone dies we feel sorry that such a person has left us prematurely. But it helps to also remember that this is the order that prevails on earth: people are born, they grow up, and they eventually become old and die or they die prematurely. No one knows when he or she will die or in what land it will die as the Holy Quran points out when it says:

“And no soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Surely Allah is all knowing and all aware.”
(31:35)

Hence we should see to it that what is expected of us as Muslim we should accomplish everyday of our life. Here what is most important is our duty towards Allah in the form of worship. We should not be amiss in this regard at all. Unfortunately when people are young they think that there is still a long time in front of them. But that long time is just an illusion. Hazrat Masih Maood (as) has advised us to do the best of our worship when one is young because then one enjoys good health and one is strong and can perform worship in the best possible way. With age plenty of problems will creep in of which one who is young is not at all aware. So it is best to strive to do good deeds when one is in full possession of one’s force and one’s faculties. Old age will give plenty of time but at the same time plenty of problems as well. That is why the Holy prophet (saw) has advised us as follows:

Ibn Abbas reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said to a man and he was admonishing him, **“Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your leisure before your work, and your life before your death.”**

These are words full of wisdom. But you will not understand their meanings unless you take the time to reflect on them. It is unfortunate that young people think that they know better than their elders. Older people have a better experience of life and they know better how things might turn out whereas youth are just idealistic and they think that their ideals will definitely materialize. It will always be in their advantage that they care about what their elders might advise them. We all need to think about this important hadith.

When I was young I used to read a translation of *“Tazkiratul Awliya”* of a great Persian Sufi Fariduddin Attar in English. Many of the stories about the Muslim saints that have been told there might seem quite improbable to a modern mind. Anyhow this is another discussion. The book contains several stories about Muslim Saints. Later I came to know that Hazrat Masih Maood (as) also used to read that book. In it there is a story about how one man was converted to follow the path of Allah devoting himself thoroughly to Him. His story as told in the book is quite long. I have chosen an extract from it and even that extract I have abridged it. It is as follows:

“Al-Hassan ibn Abi '1 Hassan al-Basri was born at Medina in 21 (642). Brought up in Basra, he met many Companions of the Prophet including, it is said, seventy of those who fought at the Battle of Badr. He grew up to become one of the most prominent figures of his generation, being famous for his uncompromising piety and outspoken condemnation of worldliness in high places. Whilst the Mo'tazelite theologians claim him as the founder of their movement (and 'Amr ibn 'Obaid and Wasel ibn 'Ata' are counted amongst his pupils), in Sufi hagiography he is revered as one of the greatest saints of early Islam. He died at Basra in 110 (728). Many of his speeches — he was a brilliant orator — and sayings are quoted by Arab authors and not a few of his letters have been preserved.

The beginning of Hassan of Basra's conversion was as follows. He was a jewel merchant and was called Hasan of the Pearls. He traded with Byzantium, and had to do with the generals and ministers of Caesar. On one occasion, going to Byzantium he called on the prime minister and conversed with him a while.

"We will go to a certain place," the minister told him, "if you are agreeable."

"It is for you to say," Hassan replied. "I agree."

So the minister commanded a horse to be brought for Hassan. He mounted with the minister, and they set out. When they reached the desert Hassan

perceived a tent of Byzantine brocade, fastened with ropes of silk and golden pegs, set firm in the ground. He stood to one side. Then a mighty army, all accoutered in the panoply of war, came out; they circled the tent, said a few words, and departed. Philosophers and scholars to the number of nigh four hundred arrived on the scene; they circled the tent, said a few words, and departed. After that three hundred illumined elders with white beards approached the tent, circled it, said a few words, and departed. Thereafter more than two hundred moon-fair maidens, each bearing a plate of gold and silver and precious stones, circled the tent, said a few words, and departed. Hassan relates that, astonished and filled with wonder, he asked himself what this might be.

"When we alighted," he went on, "I asked the minister. He said that the Caesar had a son of unsurpassed beauty, perfect in all the branches of learning and unrivalled in the arena of manly prowess. His father loved him with all his heart."

Suddenly he fell ill, so Hassan related on the authority of the minister. All the skilled physicians proved powerless to cure him. Finally he died, and was buried in that tent. Once every year people come out to visit him. First an immense army circles the tent, and they say: "O prince, if this circumstance that has befallen thee had come about in war, we would have all sacrificed our lives for thee, to ransom thee back. But the circumstance that has befallen thee is at the hand of one against whom we cannot fight, whom we cannot challenge." This they say, and then return.

The philosophers and the scholars come forward, and say: "This circumstance has been brought about by one against whom we cannot do anything by means of learning and philosophy, science and sophistry. For all the philosophers of the world are powerless before him, and all the learned are ignorant beside his knowledge. Otherwise we would have contrived devices and spoken words which all in creation could not have withstood." This they say, and then return.

Next the venerable elders advance, and say: "O prince, if this circumstance that has befallen thee could have been set right by the intercession of elders, we would all have interceded with humble petitions, and would not have abandoned thee there. But this circumstance has been brought upon thee by one against whom no mortal man's intercession profits anything." This they say, and depart.

Now the moon-fair maidens with their plates of gold and precious stones advance, circle the tent, and say: "Son of Caesar, if this circumstance that has befallen thee could have been set right by wealth and beauty, we would

have sacrificed ourselves and given great moneys, and would not have abandoned thee. But this circumstance has been brought upon thee by one on whom wealth and beauty have no effect." This they say, and return.

Then Caesar himself with his chief minister enters the tent, and says: "O eye and lamp of thy father, O fruit of the heart of thy father, O dearest beloved of thy father, what is in thy father's hand to perform? Thy father brought a mighty army, he brought philosophers and scholars, intercessors and advisers, beautiful maidens, wealth and all manner of luxuries; and he came himself. If all this could have been of avail, thy father would have done all that lay in his power. But this circumstance has been brought about by one before whom thy father, with all this apparatus, this army and retinue, this luxury and wealth and treasure, is powerless. Peace be upon you, till next year!" This he says, and returns.

These words of the minister so affected Hassan that he was beside himself. At once he made arrangements to return. Coming to Basra, he took an oath never to laugh again in this world, till his ultimate destiny became clear to him. He flung himself into all manner of devotions and austerities, such that no man in his time could exceed that discipline."

The message is quite simple. No one can do anything against death. It can come at any time and no one knows when it will come but we should all be ever ready to welcome it. Death is a decree and nothing can avert it. Concerning the fickleness of this life I read the following from the poems of Sheikh Saadi who is better known for his book "*Gulistan*" which is quite an interesting book indeed. He says:

"Forty years of thy precious existence have expired;
Yet thy life hath not passed beyond childhood.
Thou hast spent all in lust and licence;
Not a moment hast thou acted according to righteousness.
Rely not upon unstable life;
Be not confident that thou art safe from the sport of fortune."

Sheikh Saadi spoke only about "forty years", but today we can easily speak about sixty years if we make an allowance for the first twenty years of existence in which we are not quite well aware of what is expected of us. Hence today we may see people of around eighty years of age who have spent their life in amusement and their reasoning is like that of a child. Such persons have never in their life moved beyond childhood. Their reasoning is similar to that of a child who does not understand important matters of life and thinks that he was born just to play and think that what he thinks is the truth. Unfortunately there are many such persons living today.

As far as the last two verses of this poem are concerned I have seen that Hazrat Masih Maood (as) also received several times a message to the same effect. The words are “*Makan takiya dar umar na paidaar-Mobaash ayman az bazi e roze gaar*” meaning “Do not put your trust in uncertain life. Do not feel secure against the tricks of time.” We should be ever ready to meet death. We should not think that when we will be very old that we will meet it. It might come at any time. If we observe well we will notice that such is life, death does not take an appointment. It comes at any time. Our task is to live in such a way that when it comes we are ready to go. This earth is not the place of our eternal abode. That eternal abode will come after we die *incha* Allah. May Allah prepare for each one amongst us and all those who have true fear of Allah in their heart an excellent place of rest in the hereafter. May we all live in such a way that we give Allah the importance that He deserves in our life. May He continue teaching us the path that will lead all of us straight to Him *incha* Allah.