

[Home](#) > [Provisions for the Journey \(Mishkat\), Volume 1](#) > [Lesson 2: The Need for Deriving Correct Benefit from Allah's Blessings](#) > This World's Life Is A Ground Of Choices, Growth And Spiritual Ascension

Lesson 2: The Need for Deriving Correct Benefit from Allah's Blessings

“O Abu Dharr! Act upon my advice so that you may become prosperous in both worlds. O Abu Dharr! The majority of people are defrauded of two graces and they do not appreciate them: one is the blessing of health and the other is the grace of leisure (and ease).

“O Abu Dharr! Make the most of five things before five [other] things befall you: make the most of your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your ability before inability, your leisure before your toil and your life before death.”

Man is always striving to secure his prosperity and he makes every effort to achieve it; in other words, prosperity is man's natural object of desire and primary goal. For this reason, man strives to bring to hand what gives rise to bliss and to attain the roots of success and to know the way of attaining prosperity.

That is why the Noble Prophet (S) emphasizes that if his words are acted upon, man will attain his natural object of desire; that is to say man will bring to hand both worldly and heavenly prosperity and if the human being does not put into practice what the Noble Prophet (S) has advised, he gets deprived of that prosperity. This emphasis is meant to bring about more preparedness and acceptance in man, like the doctor's emphatic advice to his patient to definitely follow the directions on the prescription so as to recuperate his health, otherwise there is no doubt that man visits the doctor to recover his well-being. After that emphasis, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Most people are robbed of two graces: leisure and health.”

Health and leisure, two unknown favors

Health and leisure are two priceless blessings which Allah, the Exalted, has granted to mankind, but most people do not appreciate its value and easily lose it. It is for this reason that the Noble Prophet (S) advises Abu Dharr to appreciate the value of these two blessings and not to easily lose them like the other people.

Allah, the Exalted, has placed countless and priceless graces at man's disposal but man easily loses them, perhaps owing to the fact that he expended no effort at acquiring them. Not only does he not discharge their right, but also uses them in an iniquitous way; a manner which not only does not benefit him, but harms him as well.

Health is one of the priceless blessings which a man in good condition pays no heed to and only knows its worth once he gets afflicted by illness, like the fish which swims in water and does not appreciate its value until it is removed from the water.

Not long ago, a frightening thing happened to one of our friends; he narrated that while giving a sermon on the pulpit, he suddenly lost his voice and no matter how much he tried to continue his sermon, he failed. Finally, he came down from the pulpit and was taken to the hospital where, by Allah's grace and favor, he got well after a while.

Man rarely meditates upon Allah's graces; blessings such as the power of speech, and hardly thanks Allah for that blessing. He only reflects about it the moment that his voice is lost and he no longer has the power to speak. All too often, he is ready to give up all his wealth at that moment of need.

For a moment we ought to reflect about health and meditate over what blessing is higher than being healthy and free from a thousand diseases which threaten our bodies and that we are not even afflicted by any one of them. For that reason, we are enjoying the benefits of enormous wealth at every moment, even though this health is not stable and permanent and is likely to be lost at every moment.

Word like this has been recorded elsewhere, that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“There are two blessings that are always not thanked for: health and security.”^{[1](#)}

Leisure is the second blessing which the Noble Prophet (S) has hinted at, and it denotes ease and the lack of trouble. Man is faced with different conditions and situations in his life. He spends some of those opportunities at leisure and ease and he can contemplate about himself and perceive the concealed aspects of his being and more often than not it happens that he intends to remedy his ethical and psychological deviations.

He plans to meditate about his destiny and to sit in solitude in a secluded corner to embark upon worship and/or study with peace of mind. For every reason, physical and psychological tranquility reigns

over his entire being and this peace has presented a golden opportunity for him to derive the utmost advantage from opportunities and make use of every moment in the direction of his perfection. In contrast, it is possible that man gets confronted by a period in his life which, for different reasons, he is deprived of leisure and ease and regrets every moment of it, but what benefit is there in such regret because time lost is never regained. With regard to making the most of opportunities, Imam 'Ali ('a) says:

“Opportunities and life pass like a cloud, therefore perceive good opportunities.”²

Problems sometimes arise as a result of being entangled in family issues and bearing the responsibilities of children and wife, and at other times they spring up because of social occupations and public responsibilities. These problems absorb all the spiritual and physical abilities of a human being and do not afford man a moment's opportunity to meditate. In the period after the Islamic revolution in Iran, a lot of government officials had gotten affected by this condition and they did not even have a break to attend to their personal affairs.

In contrast, some people are always pursuing vain amusements, and do not even know how to make use of the time of their invaluable lives. They do not know whether they should solve the crossword puzzle in the newspaper or they should spend the hours of the night watching television films? Or should they sit watching sports news? Or get busy with playing chess? They are like a person who has amassed a lot of wealth and searches for a place where he can set it on fire bit by bit, and derive pleasure from watching that. If we encountered such a man, we would surely say that he were mad, heedless of the fact that many of us are afflicted by this same insanity and are busy burning the capital of our lives, life itself, which is by no means comparable to the wealth of this world, in the fire of sensual desire.

In reality, this kind of a person has to be called a loser and a man swindled, because a swindled man is he who exchanges his priceless merchandise for valueless goods or gets less than their worth. There is no asset so prized that it can be compared to life, and it cannot be sold at a price less than paradise. Owing to this fact, appreciate the value of leisure before it is lost and take up work that is more profitable and praiseworthy than the rest of the occupations.

Youth is a period of Vitality And Liveliness

“O Abu Dharr! Make the most of five things before five other things: the first is to make the most of youth before old age...”

The short period of youth, which is accompanied by happiness and vigor, is considered as the best period of man's life and has a special reckoning. Even if life and living are great favors on the whole, but still youth is a twofold blessing. It is for this reason that the Noble Prophet (S) initially mentions the period of young age and lastly hints at the importance of the principle of life itself. Despite that the period

of life includes the period of youth as well His Holiness (S) has cited it at the beginning because this age is viewed with special importance by the Noble Prophet (S).

Imam Khomeini, may Allah be pleased with him, repeatedly used to say, “O Youths! Comprehend and make the most of the period of youth.” The reason is because the blessing of youth is the highest grace which if made use of in a correct and commendable manner can raise man and make him ascend through the spiritual stations towards Allah, something which is less likely to be attained during the period of old age. That is why this truth has been explicitly stated in the words of the Imams (‘a) too, and in this regard, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) says,

“The Qur’an gets mixed with the flesh and blood of every believing youth who recites it.”³

The period of youth is a period of flexibility and accepting the truth. During this age man can build himself and free his self from ugly traits. It is during the period of youth that man:

- a) gets influenced by the truth more than any other period;
- b) enjoys a healthy body and can easily discharge his social obligations;
- c) can perform his religious duties in the best possible form because of having a strong body and spirit;
- d) possesses enough strength for remedying ethical vices;
- e) can achieve high academic levels by making use of his body and mind;
- f) is most likely to have a strong will and iron resolution;
- g) can, without feeling tired, think well and meditate for hours on end;
- h) can firmly establish in himself virtuous attributes and practices at a high level.

And vice versa old age is a period of weakness and decrepitude, a time of the final shaping of man’s personality and of inflexibility; and in brief, it is a period of the predominance of physical infirmity and psychological feebleness.

In the Glorious Qur’an, old age has been referred to as ‘shayb (hoary)’ in three instances and it has been interpreted as ‘shaykh (old age)’ in four cases. And in most occasions, the natural weakness of this age has either been explicitly stated or hinted at; for example, it has been stated about Prophet Zakariya (‘a):

...قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا

“He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened and my head flares with hoariness, and, my

Lord! I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to Thee... ”4

And likewise, with regard to the stages of man’s life, it states:

...ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً...

“...Then he gave strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and hoary hair after strength...”5

(In the rest of the explanations the Qur’an has in one way or another hinted at the disability and feebleness that goes with old age.)

Therefore, the period of youth is a very precious opportunity for cleansing oneself of ethical vices, a thing which is very hard to do during old age, but unfortunately man does not believe anything without feeling or experiencing it; that is to say, he does not understand the pain of elderliness until he has aged, and no matter how many times the difficulties of this period are made known to him, he still does not acknowledge the truth as it ought to be admitted.

We have witnessed great people who possessed very lofty moral perfections, but one point of moral weakness had remained in them which they either had not recognized during their period of adolescence or they had not undertaken to correct it. For whatever reason, that weak point had remained like an incurable chronic illness in their personalities.

The Need For Appreciating Health And Ability

The second is that man ought to make the most of his health before getting afflicted by illness.

The third is that man ought to make the most of his ability before his inability.

If you are able to cope with your life, no matter how simple and plain it is, and economic needs have not made you dependent on other people, you ought to appreciate and make the most of this blessing before, Allah forbid, you are afflicted by abject poverty and distress and you become dependent on other human beings for the daily management of your life. If at the present there are simple facilities at your disposal and you can spend the day with contentment and carry on with your studies, you ought to make the most of this opportunity and apprehend the day when you will be compelled to quit your studies and get occupied with other jobs for the acquisition of the daily needs of this same simple life. If you can presently pass the days of your life ascetically, make use of the opportunity at hand and instead of thinking about privations and wants, contemplate about what you possess at the present moment and appreciate it. The period of your self-sufficiency is a good time for you to help others; for this reason hold the hands of the needy before the arrival of the turn of poverty and destitution.

It is necessary to pay heed to this point that poverty and deprivation which result in disgrace do not accord with the noble status of the human being, and they have been rebuked as forbidden attributes. Allah does not approve of lowliness for his slaves, but desires honor and glory for them. Therefore, man has to make utmost effort to reduce his dependence on other people and strive to the last extent of his ability to confront poverty by adopting values such as contentment, magnanimity of taste, abstinence from pomp and avoidance of waste, have to be well learned and acted upon.

The fourth point is that the human being ought to make the most of the period of leisure and ease before the arrival of the period of entanglement.

A lot of discussion has been held in regard to the contents of this sentence, but it is necessary to be reminded that the Noble Prophet's (S) intention is not that one ought to shirk from obligations and refuse to shoulder social responsibilities and rather prefer unemployment. This is a negative perception. As likely as not, the Noble Prophet's (S) intention is that you ought to appreciate the value of these treasured moments when you can freely choose and decide without imposition and make use of these opportunities to make the best choices before you are compelled to accept uncalled for responsibilities and imposed duties and before you are divested of the power to choose of your own accord.

This World's Life Is A Ground Of Choices, Growth And Spiritual Ascension

The fifth is that man ought to make the most of life before the arrival of death.

The blessing of life is a comprehensive and complete favor which has been mentioned after the rest of the graces. In reality, all the other blessings are affixed to the gift of life. If there were no life, there would remain no room for the other graces. For this reason, the root and fountainhead of the rest of the gifts is the blessing of the life of this world, which has freely been given by Allah to his slaves and even if man enjoys the life of the hereafter after death, but still he gets deprived of the ability to perform volitional deeds, to freely choose and to make decisions. It is there that he regrets his past life, losing opportunities and making bad choices, and he requests to return to the world in order to make up for past vices, but his petition will not be granted.

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ * لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمَنْ وَرَائِهِمُ
بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

“Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: ‘Send me back, my Lord, send me back. Haply I may do good in that which I have left.’ By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks; and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised.”⁶

Some of the great men used to recommend that at the time of sleeping, you ought to imagine that this

sleep may possibly not have an awakening and the Angel of Death will seize your soul in the state of sleep, because the Glorious Qur'an states:

...اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا

“Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep...”⁷

The soul almost gets separated from the body during sleep, and if the hour of man's death arrives, it gets completely detached from his body; it is for this reason that in continuation of the same blessed verse, Allah states:

... فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى... سورة الزمر: 42

“... Then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term; most surely there are signs in this for those who reflect...”

In reality, man travels half the journey towards death when he sleeps; that is why great men have advised that at the time of sleeping, imagine that after the soul has been separated from the body, it will never again return, and when you wake up, you must thank Allah that He has granted existence to your body once again and He has granted you life once more.

To put it another way, you should imagine that you have gone to purgatory (the interval between life and death), and that your unworthy deeds have become apparent, and that you are being called to account for them and you are under admonition, and at that time you ask the angels which are residing in the proximity of Allah to let you return to the world and as per your request they grant you the permission; now that you have returned to the world and you have once again got the chance to perform works, what are you going to do and how are you going to be?

We ought to appreciate the value of this second chance and make the most of every moment of it because a time will come when man will deeply desire for saying just one “*la ilaha illa Allah* (There is no deity save Allah)” and according to the words of Imam ‘Ali (‘a):

“Whoever falls short of performing good deeds falls into grief, and Allah has nothing to do with him who spares nothing from his wealth in the name of Allah.”⁸

¹. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 81, p. 170, section [bab] 1.

². Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 16, p. 84, section [bab] 91.

³. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 7, p. 305.

⁴. Surat Maryam 19:4.

⁵. Surat al-Rum 30:54.

⁶. Surat al-Mu'minin 23:99-100.

[7.](#) Surat al-Zumar 39:42.

[8.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1146, pithy aphorisms 122, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/provisions-journey-mishkat-volume-1-muhammad-taqi-misbah-yazdi/lesson-2-need-deriving-correct#comment-0>