



On the Benefits of the Remembrance of Death
by Marc Manley

إن الحمد لله ، الذي أنزل رسوله محمد الذي استنقذنا به من عبادة الأوثان
والأصنام. الله ربنا الذي خلق السماوات والأرض في ستة أيام ثم استوى على
العرش يدبر الأمر.
فمن يهده الله فلا مضل له، و من يضلله فلا هادي له، و أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله،
وحده لا شريك له، و أشهد أن محمدا، النبي الأمي، عبده و رسوله، ختم الأنبياء
و أشرف المرسلين، صلوات الله و سلامه و تحياته و بركاته عليه و على آله و
أزواجه و أصحابه و أنصاره و ذرياته و سلم. إن الله و ملائكته يصلون على
النبي، يا أيها الذين ءامنوا صلوا عليه و سلموا تسليما، و بعد

Verily all praise belongs to Allah [God in the Arabic language], Who sent His Messenger, Muhammad, by which he salvaged us from the misguided worship of idols. God is our Lord, He Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and established the Throne and order.

For the one God has chosen to guide, there is no mis-guider for him. And as for one whom God has misguided, there is no guidance. And we bear testimony that there is no god but God, Allah, One is He, with no partner, Lord of lords. We also bear witness that Muhammad, the Unlettered Prophet, is His slave and messenger, Seal of the Prophets and most noble of the Messengers. May God's prayers, His peace, His greetings, and blessings be upon him, his family, his wives, his companions, his helpers, and his progeny. Surely God and His Angels send blessings upon the Prophet therefore O' you who believe!, send prayers and blessings upon him abundantly.

Dear respected brothers and sisters in Islam, I greet you today with the greeting of Paradise, "as-Salaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu".

First Khutbah – Main Points

Opening from the Qur'ān:

كل نفس ذائقة الموت – و إنما توفون أجوركم يوم القيامة – فمن زُحِرَ عن النار
و أدخل الجنة فقد فاز – و ما الحياة الدنيا إلا متاع الغرور.

“Every soul shall taste death. You will be recompensed your due on the Day of Rising. As for the one that is distanced from the fire and is admitted to the Garden – he has triumphed. And as for this life: it is just the enjoyment of delusion.” [Q: 3: 185]

I wish to open the *khutbah* today but discussing death. **Modern life balks at an earnest discussion about death.** It is the **800-pound gorilla in the room.** **Popular culture propagates the illusion of eternal life** with a hyper **fixation on youth.** The consequences are drastic. Not only are people unable to come to terms with the reality of death, it also has **societal repercussions**, namely the **neglect of the elderly and the sick.** Death is **treated as an embarrassment** – never to be looked in the eye. If Muslims are to **not only adhere to lifestyles that are pleasing to God**, but to **engage in thought patterns that engender the type of reflection that leads to a God-pleasing lifestyle**, then we must try and steer the discourse to include contemplation on our own deaths.

It may seem a peculiar subject to talk about in that many of us here are young and can feel the strength and power of that youth. The subject itself is difficult for many of us, let alone modern society and yet, God reveals His Wisdom on this subject through the following verse:

وعسى أن تكرهوا شيئاً وهو خير لكم – و عسى أن تحبوا شيئاً وهو شر لكم – والله يعلم وأنتم لا تعلمون.

“It may happen that you detest something despite it being good for you and you may love something while it is evil for you. And God knows, while you do not.” [Q: 2: 216]

And yet, we know that death can seize us at any moment:

إينما تكونوا يدرككم الموتُ و لو كنتم في بروج مشيدة.

“No matter where you are, death will seize you even if you happen to be in a barricaded fortress.” [Q: 4: 78]

The practice of the current age is to look upon **leaving this world with sadness and regret.** As Muslims, we must always **strike the balance** between “tying our camel” and overzealous fatalism. In fact, we are prohibited to long for death, instead having a state of awareness about its immanent reality, and

preparing ourselves for The Meeting. The scholastic tradition has provided a rubric for us to contemplate this contemplation with. They say **there are three types of people**:

1. The one who is engrossed in this world, meaning not only are all his hopes and passions for it, but he loathes to leave it to such an extent, he belittles the reality of death taking him. This person may even become delusional regarding death.
2. The penitent believer: while struggling with the trappings of this life, the penitent believer often mentions death as a reminder – in that s/he will be raised up on day by God and will have to have their Account. S/he may have fear of death but it is an excusable fear for it is that they fear they may not complete their *tawbah*/repentance before the Return.
3. The third person is someone who sees the world as false – they are solely concentrated on After-worldly affairs.

While we strive to achieve number three [as the Prophet always was conscious of this], we, God willing, fall somewhere around number two. We must be mindful to not slip into such a state of heedlessness that we slide down to the level of number one!

Second Khutbah – Main Points

One of the ways we as Muslims are encouraged to **contemplate about the reality of death is through frequent remembrance of those who have passed on before us**. I often think of **my friend Ron** – who we nicknamed ʿImrān. He was a vibrant, gracious and kind young brother who converted to Islam [may God accept his worship]. Ron was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver one evening while riding his bike to work. We simply never know what lies ahead of us. This idea of remembering the dead is in accordance with a narration from one of the Companions, Abu Dardāʾ, may God be pleased with him:

إذا ذكرت الموتى فعد نفسك كأحدهم.

“When you remember the dead, count yourself as one of them.”

This is not a suicidal thought, but rather keeping in mind we will all join those who have gone into the ground one day.

The Prophet [s] even recommended starting off one’s day by acknowledging the fact that one is not guaranteed to make it through the day:

إذا أصبحت فلا تحدث نفسك بالمساء و إذا أمسيت فلا تحدث نفسك بالصباح و خذ من حياتك لموتك و من صحتك لسقمك فإذا يا عبد الله لا تدري ما اسمك غدا!

“When you wake in the morning, do not speak to yourself about the evening and when you make it to the evening, do not speak to yourself about the morning. Therefore, take something of your life for your death, and something from your health, for when you are sick. O’ Abdullah! You do not know what your name shall be tomorrow!” [collected in Bukhārī]

The idea here, God willing, is that **instead of being presumptuous** about what we may be or do in the future, would should also be mindful of our impending Meeting – not to cast of fate to the wind negligently, but to keep a balance and awareness that we must stand before the Lord of the Worlds and that we should be conducting ourselves, our actions, while we’re in this life/world that will lead to a pleasing encounter.

The tendency to hold dearly to this life is a strong one – no less strong than our sexual drives. In fact, love of the world is co-equal to wealth, per the Prophetic narration:

يهرم ابن آدم و يبقى معه اثنتان: الحرص والأمل و في رواية: الحرص على المال و الحرص على العمر.

“The son of Adam may grow old but two things remain with him even so: greed and hope for this world” – and in a similar narration: “Greed for wealth and greed for longevity.” [reported by Anas in Muslim and Ibn Abī ad-Dunyā]

As Muslims, following the example of our Noble Prophet [s], we can battle the temptation to be heedless about our impending Meeting of God. And by his example [s], we can prepare for it as we would a weather forecast. We do not prepare for the weather itself but for what we need to do in it or after it. This is not dissimilar to death: we must prepare for what we need to do in this life despite its distractions as well as preparing for what comes after death.

We ask Allah to make us the people remember God often and reflect, remember and prepare for the Meeting with the Lord of the Words. Amin.