

The Moral Stories (Part 02)

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Table of Contents

Foreward.....	4
Rejection Of Food From Caliph	5
ON THE THRONE OF CALIPH.....	6
Bahloul Consulted By A Trader	7
Bahloul's Advice To Haroon	8
HIS OUTSTANDING WISDOM.....	9
Debate With A Jurist	10
A Question From Haroon	12
The Uncontrolable Flies	13
HEAVEN FOR SALE	14
HAROON'S ANGER ON BAHLOOL	15
Evaluation of Haroon.....	16
THE DRUNKARD CALIPH.....	17
Argument With Abuhanifa.....	18
A Joke With Bahloul.....	19
ADVICE TO ABDULLA MUBARAK.....	20
Inquiry On Bahloul's Welfare.....	21
VISIT TO THE GRAVEYARD	22
DISCUSSION ON LIFE HEREAFTER	23
Haroon Seeks Advice	24
BAHLOOL AND A TOURIST	25
Encounter With Haroon On Hajtrip	27
Haroon's Charitable Offer	28
GOD'S BEST BLESSING.....	29
ON BIRTH OF A BABY GIRL.....	30
A Mosque Slab	31
DESCRIPTION OF THE VIRTUES OF ALI.....	32
Bahloul In Basrah	33
Shoes Not Book Of Philosophy.....	34
HAROON'S NEW PALANCE.....	35
Refund Of Loan On Reapperrance Of Imam	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	37
Acknowledgement.....	38

Foreward

Bahloul is well known in the Islamic history for his readily outspoken ways of expressing his views on deep questions of Islamic jurisprudence and ethics.

What makes his life stories even more interesting is the amusing way in which he behaved and talked, not only to ordinary people but also to those in high positions.

The way he retorted to and admonished Haroon Rasheed - the Abbaside Caliph for his oppressive and lavish life-style is indeed remarkable.

To enable students of Islamic history to benefit from the moral lessons imparted by Bahloul during his life time, I have endeavoured to adapt and translate his stories from a number of sources, adding short explanatory notes and relevant quotations from the Holy Qura'n and ahadith.

Different moral and intellectual topics dealt with and the amusing and logic styles in which they are presented should also make this booklet a useful Source for preparing dialogues in schools for the moral training of young ones.

Readers are requested to accord due respect to this booklet in view of the sacred quotations in Arabic from the Holy Qura'n. May they also help us in circulation so as to spread its benefit far and wide.

Rejection Of Food From Caliph

Haroon once sent with his servant a tray full of some delicious dishes to Bahlool. When they were delivered, Bahlool diverted the food to a dog sitting nearby.

On seeing this, the servant protested saying that this was a disrespect to the Caliph and he would report to him.

Bahlool retorted by asking the servant to keep quiet lest the dog also refused to eat the food if it came to know that the food was from the Caliph. His refusal to eat the food from the Caliph demonstrated his rejection of favours lest it affected his heart to lean towards the tyrant Haroon.

This provides a lesson to us as to how we should avoid such favours in public and religious service so as not to be distracted from one's principles of truth and justice.

The following ayat. of the Holy Qura'n guides us not to lean towards those who oppress people:

"And do not incline to those who are unjust, lest the fire touch you, and you have no guardians besides Allah, then you shall not be helped."
(11:113)

ON THE THRONE OF CALIPH

One day Bahlool entered Haroon's palace and saw the throne of the Caliph to be vacant and none of his guards standing nearby. Immediately he went and sat on the throne. When the court men saw him on the throne, they went forward and forced him to step down by beating him.

Bahlool started crying loudly and when Haroon entered the court, he asked him the reason for crying. The courtiers explained what had happened.

The Caliph comforted him and at the same time scolded his men for the treatment given to Bahlool., To this, Bahlool reacted by saying: "I am not crying for what has happened to me, but I am crying for you, the Caliph. I have been made to suffer so much only for sitting on the throne for a short while.

How much are you going to suffer for sitting on it for so long, because it belongs to someone else while you are the usurper of it".

Haroon was one of those pompous and oppressive kings from Banu Abbas (descendants of Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib) who had usurped the caliphate of the divinely appointed vicegerents of the Prophet.

The above incident afforded an opportunity to Bahlool to warn Haroon of the sufferings awaiting him after death. That Haroon would not be able to escape the punishment for usurping the rights of and oppressing the household members of the Prophet.

That the Prophet of Islam had foretold of the oppressive rulers to come and in what way they would gain power can be readily derived from his following saying:

"Verily times will dawn upon people When power and rule (over people) will not be attainable except with bloodshed and oppression, ner wealth except with by usurpation and miserliness"

Bahloul Consulted By A Trader

A trader in Baghdad came in for consultation and addressed Bahloul as "The Wise". He asked for his advice on which commodity to buy from which he could expect good profit. He was advised to trade in cotton and dates.

The trader followed his advice and he made a good profit within a short period. After some time, that trader came in again but this time called Bahloul "The Insane" and asked him for similar advice.

This time he was advised to invest in onions and water-melons. Accordingly he went and bought some good quality onions and melons. But this time instead of being able to sell at a profit, the goods began to rot and eventually had to be destroyed at a loss.

The trader rather dismayed with the loss this time came to Bahloul asking him to explain the reason for the loss despite following his advice. In reply, Bahloul explained the first occasion, the trader had called him 'Bahloul The Wise'.

So he offered his advice according to his intellect. But on the second occasion he had called him 'Bahloul the Insane', the advice offered was as such according to what an insane would do.

Obviously a wise trader is the one who puts his investment in such items of goods which are not liable to perish soon. How foolish was it for the trader to consult Bahloul at a time when he thought and addressed him to be insane. So Bahloul had taught him a good lesson.

Consultation in Islam is praiseworthy as can be seen from the following saying of the Prophet:

"Consultation is a protection against repentance and safety from the criticism of people".

"The one who seeks advice is helped"

Bahloul's Advice To Haroon

Haroon Al-Rashid once requested Bahloul for his advice in matters of administration of his Caliphate. In reply Bahloul said:

"Suppose for a moment that you get trapped into a jungle and you are suffering from intense thirst whilst there is no water available. If by good luck someone comes to offer you a cup of water to save your life, what would you give him in return?"

Haroon said: "One hundred Dinars of Gold". Bahloul said: "If he was not satisfied with this and willing to accept, then what?"

Haroon said: "I would offer half of my kingdom" Bahloul then asked:

"Supposing after quenching your thirst, you were to suffer from strangury (restriction in passing urine), what would you offer to get cured?"

Haroon replied:

"The Balance half of my kingdom" Bahloul then advised:

"Do not be arrogant on your kingdom whilst you are willing to give away so much in return for a cup of water and cure of your sickness. It is only wise that you should treat your people fairly and kindly" How rightly has the Prophet said that:

"The worldly life is subject to changes. What good is meant for you would reach you even in your state of weakness. And what bad is to have, you will not be able to discard even with your power".

HIS OUTSTANDING WISDOM

A trader accompanied by his slave was travelling in a boat to Basra. By chance Bahlool happened to travel in the same boat. The slave got perturbed with the storm in the river water and started panicking and crying. Bahlool sought the permission of the Master to calm him by some way.

When the permission was granted Bahlool ordered that the slave be thrown into the water and this was done. When the slave was on the verge of drowning, he gave instructions then to rescue him. Following this, the slave sitting quietly in one corner of the boat behaved calmly.

When asked on the wisdom of such a treatment to the slave, Bahlool explained that he had no understanding of a boat and its movement in the water. Only when he was thrown out into the water did he then come to appreciate the condition of a boat.

The Prophet of Islam has encouraged people to travel by saying: "Travel and you will enrich yourselves' (by new experiences and contacts)

Debate With A Jurist

A Faqih (jurist) happened to come to Baghdad from Khorasan and Haroon Rashid invited him to his court. When he arrived, Haroon accorded him every honour and made him sit next to him. By chance Bahlool also appeared in the court and Haroon also accorded him due respect and made him sit nearby.

The jurist on seeing the crazy outlook of Bahlool remarked that it was rather surprising for the Caliph to welcome such people hear him. When Bahlool overheard this remark, he, retorted by telling the jurist not to be puffed up with his little and imperfect knowledge.

He further claimed that he was prepared to debate with him and prove his ignorance. The jurist reacted to this by saying that what could he talk to an insane person. And Bahlool responded by saying:

" I may confess my insanity but you do not accept the challenge to your own ignorance and imperfect knowledge"

On hearing this hot, exchange, Haroon tried to calm Bahlool but he would not. Again he challenged the jurist to enter a polemic conversation with him if at all he was confident of his knowledge. Haroon said to the jurist:

"What is the objection, why not put some questions to Bahlool?" To this, the jurist responded by saying: "I am willing to do so on condition that if he failed to answer satisfactorily, he should pay a thousand dinars in gold coins. Likewise he would pay similar amount if he failed."

Bahlool responded that from the worldly treasure he had nothing but should he be defeated, he was willing to enter into the slavery of the jurist. The jurist then put forward this question:

"Supposing a woman was sitting in a house with her husband. And a man was occupied in prayers and another person was in the state of fasting. During that period another man entered that house, the marriage of wife and husband became mutually null and void, whilst the prayer of the one who was praying and the fasting of the one who fasted also became unacceptable. Who was the person who entered the house?"

In reply to the above question, Bahlool promptly answered by explaining that the person who entered that house was the previous husband of that woman. He had gone on a journey and had not returned for quite some time. The woman was informed that he had died, so after securing the consent of Hakime Sheria (Executer of Islamic Laws) she married again with the man with whom, she was sitting.

Besides she had arranged with those other two men on behalf of the husband who was reckoned to be dead.

Now as soon as her first husband who was alive entered the house , the first marriage revived and the second marriage became automatically null and void. And that prayer and fasting on his behalf also became unnecessary, since prayer and fast on behalf of one who is alive is not acceptable in the Islamic Sharia Haroon and his courtiers were much impressed by this logic answer. Bahlool then took his turn and posed the following question to the jurist:

"Supposing one bowl is full of sugar syrup and while another one with vinegar.

If for the purpose of preparing 'Sikanjabin' (a kind of vinegar syrup), we put them in third bowl and we find a small rat in it. How can we determine whether that rat originally was in the bowl of vinegar or in that of the sugar syrup?" To this question put forward by Bahlooi, the jurist had no answer to give. Haroon noticing his silence, called for the answer from Bahlool himself and Bahlool answered:

"We should first remove the dead rat from the syrup, wash it with water and thence tear open its body to see what was there in its tummy. If we find vinegar, we can conclude that the rat had got into the bowl of vinegar. If however, we find sugar syrup in its tummy, we conclude that it was originally in the bowl of syrup."

On hearing this answer to the question, all those present in the court were awe struck with the remarkable intelligence of Bahlool.

Finally the jurist had to part with the agreed sum of a thousand dinars of gold to Bahlool who instead of pocketing them himself, distributed among the poor. This polemic between Bahlool and the jurist denotes the deep knowledge he had in Islamic jurisprudence. This made him famous to be held in high esteem despite his insanelly ways of living.

The following sayings of the Prophet are herewith worth noting: "He whose knowledge is higher is considered more in value than others" "A slip by a learned becomes widely publicized whereas that of an ignorant gets covered up under his ignorance".

"The happiness of this world and the next Has in learning and the evil of this world .and the next in ignorance"

A Question From Haroon

Sitting in his palace gallery once, Haroon was enjoying the natural scenery of the greenery around and the flow of the river Tigris with the sound of water gushing forward. Bahlool happened to be there and Haroon said to him:

"I shall ask you a question to which if you reply correctly, I shall gift you with a thousand dinars of gold, otherwise I shall throw you out into the river." Bahlool replied:

"I am not in greed of wealth. If I answer correctly, you should agree to release a hundred of my friends from your prison, otherwise you may throw me into the water."

Haroon then put forward to him this question:

"Supposing there is a sheep, a wolf and a heap of grass. How could these be transferred from bank to the opposite bank of the river so that neither the sheep eats the grass nor the wolf is able to devour sheep?" Bahlool replied by saying:

"The sheep should first be taken across to the opposite bank of the river. Thence take the grass heap there and return the sheep this side of the river and leaving it here, take the wolf across to that side. Finally returning to this side, take the sheep back to that side of the water. In this way, neither the sheep would have an opportunity to eat the grass nor the wolf to devour the sheep."

Haroon was touched by Bahlool's intelligence and admired this answer. Bahlool then presented to him a list of a hundred prisoners, who were all the followers and lovers of Ali ibn Abi Taleb (A.S.). Breaking his promise, Haroon refused to release them. However, finally on persuasion, he agreed to release ten of them.

What a profound sense of intelligence as well as deep concern for the innocent prisoners held by Haroon on accusation of professing the love of Ali ibn Abi Taleb (A.S.) and belief in him as the rightful divinely appointed Caliph.

Bahlool always looked down upon the worldly wealth and never compromised against the principles of righteousness and justice. This fact made him feared by one and all and he proved to be one among a few pious personalities of his time.

The Uncontrollable Flies

Haroon once told Bahlool that if he would give correct answer to a question, he would gift him with a thousand dinars in gold. Failing to give the answer, he would give instructions to shave off all his beard and moustache. Further he would be exposed before the people in the streets and bazars, mounted on an ass. To this Bahlool said:

"I do not need any worldly wealth or money from you. But if I reply correctly, then you undertake to order the flies not to harass us." Haroon after a little thought replied:

"That is not possible as the flies around were not under his control" To this Bahlool retorted:

"What could be expected from a person who has no control over tiny weak creatures like the flies."

By this statement, Bahlool implied that one who could not control and rule over flies, how could he be expected to rule over the whole world as claimed. The true and legitimate Caliph and vicegerent of the Prophet could only be the one who had control and rule over all the creatures.

Every small or big thing should be under submission to him. As such Bahlool meant that he may not answer a question from Haroon on his stipulated conditions.

"O people! a parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from i weak are the invoker and the invoked." (22:73)

Anyhow, Haroon then asked what that tree was which had twelve branches and every branch had thirty leaves, and every leaf had one side shining while another dark.

Bahlool replied:

"The tree is the year, the twelve branches are the twelve months and thirty shining and dark leaves are the thirty days of the months" Haroon and his courtiers were flabbergasted to hear this logical answer.

HEAVEN FOR SALE

Once sitting on the bank of a river and playing with mud, Bahlool was constructing small houses and gardens. At that moment, Zubeida - the wife of Haroon - happened to pass nearby. She asked what he was doing and the reply given was that he was building houses in heaven.

"Would you sell to me?" inquired Zubeida. "Why not!" replied Bahlool.

"What is the price?" she asked. "One-hundred dinnars for each house", said he.

Thinking that it would be a sort of help to the poor and insane Bahlool, Zubeida asked her servant to bring the money which she paid to him. The same night she dreamt seeing a fabulous palace in heaven with beautiful hooriya in it. They told her that this palace was the one which she had bought from Bahlool.

Zubeida on waking up in the morning related the dream to her husband Haroon - the Caliph. Upon hearing this, Haroon sent someone with one-hundred dinars to Bahlool with a request to sell him a house in heaven.

Bahlool smiled and said that Zubeida had purchased without first seeing or knowing whereas Haroon wanted to have it after coming to know about its true existence in heaven. Therefore he would not sell to him.

The following ayat in the Holy Qura'n stresses the need of having faith in the unseen:

"This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who guard (against evil). hose who believe in the unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them." (2: 2-3)

HAROON'S ANGER ON BAHLOOL

Haroon had employed some special secret officers to investigate and report on the actual faith and belief of Bahlool. The information passed to the Caliph was that Bahlool was one from the staunch followers of Ahl-ul-Bayt and a close friend of Imam Musa Al-Kazim (A.S.).

Haroon called in Bahlool to accuse him of inciting enmity against him whilst posing as an insane person. He enquired what the Caliph planned to do to him and the reply given was:

"I shall get you unclothed and make you go round the city seated over a donkey and thence kill you."

As this punishment was being arranged, Jaffer Barmaki arrived. On seeing the condition of Bahlool, he enquired of what wrong he had done. Bahlool said the punishment was because he had uttered the truth.

Hearing this, they all laughed. Haroon then instructed that Bahlool be presented with nice and rich clothes instead but he would not accept them. Putting back his old clothes on, he went away.

What is worth noting herewith is that Bahlool remained always steadfast on Islamic principles of justice and fairplay and refused to accept material favours from the oppressive and unjust ruler of the time.

Evaluation of Haroon

By chance once Haroon and Bahlool both were going to Hammam (a public bath). Haroon asked him:

"What would my value be if I were a slave?" Bahlool replied: "Fifty dinars" Haroon in an enraged voice remarked: "Oh mad man! How could that be. My own valuable clothes are worth that much or more"

Bahlool reacted to this saying: "The value I had suggested was for your clothes, otherwise you yourself are of no value at all!"

Perhaps what Bahlool meant to taunt Haroon was that if he were a slave, he would not be able to provide any service to his master because of his easy and lusty life-style. As such he would be of no value on the slave market.

THE DRUNKARD CALIPH

Bahloul once arrived at Haroon's palace to find him drinking wine. Haroon wanted to cover up his vice hence he put this question to him: "Is it haram if one were to eat grapes?"

"Certainly not." Replied Bahloul. "How is it if one were to drink water after eating grapes?" asked Haroon. "Nothing wrong in it" replied Bahloul. "Is there anything wrong if after eating grapes and drinking water, one were to sit in the sun?" further question by Haroon.

"Not at all" replied Bahloul.

Bahloul understood what the drinking Caliph was driving at. After pausing for a while, Bahloul put forward to Haroon the following questions: "If a little earth were to be put over someone's head, what harm would it cause to him."

"No harm" replied Haroon. "If then a little water were to be added to that earth?" asked Bahloul. "No harm also" replied Haroon.

"If bricks were to be made by mixing earth and water and thence strike his head with it, what would happen?" Bahloul asked this question.

"His head would burst open and blood come out" replied Haroon. Bahloul thereafter argued that just as earth and water mixed together could cause severe harm to one's head,

similarly water and grapes (grape juice) when converted into the form of wine would cause much harm and misery to man. Hence the prohibition of drinking wine in the Islamic Sharia. The following hadith of the Prophet of Islam on the harm of wine drinking is worth noting:

"Alcohol is a collection of sins" Obviously one is likely to commit any sort of sin when in senseless condition under the influence of drinks. The ghastly crimes committed today under the intoxication of alcohol need no enumeration.

Argument With Abuhanifa

Abu Hanifa was once giving lessons to his disciples and disclosed to them his disagreement on three things which Imam Jaffer Sadiq (A.S.) had been teaching.

Firstly: Satan would go to hell. How could this happen when Satan himself was created from fire and how could fire burn fire?

Secondly: God is not to be seen. Why could we not see God when everything in existence can be seen?

Thirdly: Every person is responsible for his action and not Allah. Experience shows the opposite that every action of man is caused by God, man has no control over it.

When Bahlool heard of this, he picked up a lump of mud and threw it at the forehead of Abu Hanifa. He then tried to run away quickly from there but the disciples of Abu Hanifa managed to arrest him. They dragged him before the Caliph and lodged their complaint of what he had done.

Before the case was to be convened before the Caliph, Bahlool requested that Abu Hanifa should also be present in the court. When he arrived, Bahlool put forward to him the following questions:

"What inquiry did you receive from me?" "My head pains as a result of the lump of mud you threw at me" said Abu Hanifa.

"Show me the pain", asked Bahlool.

"How could the pain, which is an invisible, be shown" replied Abu Hanifa. "But you yourself had argued before your disciples that what is in existence is possible to be seen with naked eyes" retorted Bahlool and added:

"That the lump of mud had injured you is also untrue. According to your belief, how could something made of earth and mud injure and cause pain to man who is made of earth?"

"You had also argued that whatever actions committed by man are caused by Allah. Therefore why complain against me for hitting you?" concluded Bahlool. On hearing these words from Bahlool, Abu Hanifa was ashamed and dumbfounded. He had no choice but to withdraw from the court.

In this way, by striking with a lump of mud, Bahlool adequately replied and solved the three objections raised by Abu Hanifa before his disciples.

The practical lesson taught by Bahlool to Abu Hanifa was so profoundly logic that it made him dumbfounded. Indeed it was a lesson of Pure TAWHID as expounded by Ahl-ul-Bayt of the Prophet but presented in a practical form by Bahlool.

In his farewell sermon, the Prophet of Islam reminded his followers that they would never go astray should they follow what he was leaving behind for them:

"Verily I have left behind among you that which if you take hold of, you will never go astray: The Book of Allah (the Holy Qura'n) and my progeny (the people of my house)

A Joke With Bahlool

Once Bahlool was sitting in the court of Haroon. In order to create some fun, one of the vazirs of the Caliph said this to him:

"Congratulations Oh Bahlool! I understand the Caliph Haroon has decided to entrust to you the kingdom and rulership over the animals of the cocks and the pigs etc."

Promptly Bahlool reacted to this by saying:

"Be careful not to go against any rule in my kingdom. I shall be very strict to those going against. But I shall be very considerate to those obeying me and providing more grass and water."

On hearing this, Haroon was much amused. He laughed and laughed till he fell backward. What a logic and prompt way Bahlool always responded to any matter put forward to him.

"Throw a stone in return from where one comes to you because evil can be met only with evil."

ADVICE TO ABDULLA MUBARAK

Abdulla Mubarak once approached Bahlool with a request to show him a way of salvation and purification from sins. Bahlool replied that what could be expected from him when he was considered as an insane person by people.

Why not find a sensible person to guide you? he added. Abdulla said that insane persons are quite often expert in their profession hence one ought to listen to words of wisdom from those considered mentally unbalanced. On Abdullah's insistence, Bahlool agreed upon four conditions narrated as under:

What better reason other than this could it be for one always to remain on the path of obedience to Allah.

Firstly: "If you go against any command of Allah then you should refrain from eating from His sustenance. How dare you as a sensible person, claiming to be servant of Allah and enjoying His bounties yet turn against Him?"

Abdulla admitted that this was the absolute truth Secondly: "When you disobey Him, you should not reside in His domain." Abdulla said: "This was rather, difficult condition to comply with" Bahlool said:

"But how unfair it was to enjoy His blessings and reside in His domain yet disobey and go against His commands. Allah Himself has said in the Holy Qura'n:

"Surely to Us is their turning back, Then surely upon Us is the taking of their account." (88:25-26) Thirdly; "If you are bent upon committing a sin, then do so at a place where Allah cannot see you at all"

Abdulla said: "This is impossible" Bahlool said: "How unfair it was for one to enjoy His bounties, reside in His domain and yet commit sins despite the fact that He is seeing you. And Allah has stated in the Holy Qura'n:

"And do not think Allah to be heedless of what the unjust do; He only respites them to a day on which the eyes shall be fixedly open." (14:42)

Fourthly: "When the angel of death approaches you for taking away your soul, tell him to wait so that you may bid farewell to people and perform some good deeds for the benefit of life after death" Abdulla responded saying:

"This was impossible because the angel of death does not allow any respite to anyone"

Bahlool reacted to this by saying:

"How dare you then commit a sin when you know for certain that you are not going to be spared anytime when death approaches. Is it not possible that death comes to you at the very moment when you are committing sin and you are unable to move. And Allah had said in the Holy Quran:

"And for every nation there is a doom, so when their doom is come they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before." (7:34)

Abdulla told Bahlool that he had carefully listed and understood his four conditions and wanted to hear more from him. Bahlool then added: "Man,when committing action, or uttering, or hearing any word, ought to keep in view the commands of Allah"

Inquiry On Bahlool's Welfare

Haroon once inquired from Bahlool about his welfare and how he was keeping. In reply he said:

"So long as I do not take over upon myself the responsibility of governing and matters pertaining to the Muslim Ummah, I shall remain alright" "But don't you know that to maintain justice and fairplay among Muslims is Ibadat - an act of virtue", said Harooh.

"I know that but the Cafiph himself ought to be obedient and not an usurper since the caliphate is the right of the children of Ali (A.S.)". retorted Bahlool. "Don't you like to live forever with pleasure and happiness?". asked Haroon.

"No, because if I were always to enjoy the pleasure of worldly blessings, I am likely to forget Allah, the reality of my true self and my welfare and salvation in the next world and I do not want to risk that. I am only willing to accept and be satisfied with what is my right", replied Bahlool.

Thus Bahlool demonstrated his profound sense of contentment besides his strong belief in the fact that the more one is attached to worldly pleasures, the more the risks of forgetting Allah and the life hereafter. How truly is the saying of the Prophet:

"Contentment is such a wealth which does not get exhausted" Contentment has been regarded as capital and estate for the reason that just as the estate and area under sway dispels need in the same way when a man adopts contentment and feels happy over his livelihood he becomes free of turning to others in the time of need.

Whoever is contented with the morsel he gets, dry or wet, is the king of all the land and sea.

VISIT TO THE GRAVEYARD

Once people saw Bahlool sitting between graves at a graveyard. They joked with him saying: "Oh Bahlool! You are still alive, why do you have to remain seated here between the dead?"

"I prefer to sit with such people because they keep me away from pride and negligence of my moral duties, and are the cause of good advice to me" replied Bahlool. And once Bahlool was returning from a visit to the graveyard, some people asked him:

"Wherefrom do you come. Oh Bahlool?" "I am coming back from a visit of those people who have already descended under the earth", he replied.

"Have you talked and asked them anything?", those people asked. "Yes! I asked them when were they to move away from their present station and they told me that they were awaiting your arrival there. They will move when you also arrive there", replied Bahlool.

That graveyard is the final place we all have to go to one day Is the moral lesson given by Bahlool. Therefore wise is the one who remains always thoughtful and prepared for this ultimate destination.

"I also advise you to remember death and to lessen your heedlessness towards it. Why should you be heedless of Him Who is not heedless of you? Why expect from him (i.e., the angel of death) who will not give you time?"

The dead whom you have been watching suffice as preachers. They were carried to their graves, not riding themselves, and were placed in them but not of their own accord. It seems as if they never lived in this world and as if the next world had always been their abode.

They have made lonely the place where they were living, and are now living where they used to feel lonely. They remained busy about what they had to leave, and did not care for where they were to go. Now they cannot remove themselves from evil, nor add to their virtues They were attached to the world and it deceived them. They trusted it and it overturned them." (Nahjul Balaghah; sermon 188)

DISCUSSION ON LIFE HEREAFTER

Haroon once asked Bahlool whether he new where his place was after death in accordance with this Quranic Ayat:

"Most surely the righteous are in bliss, And most surely the wicked are in burning fire," (82:13-14) And what is to happen to my tie of relationship to the Prophet? Haroon also asked. In reply Bahlool recited the following Ayat of the Qura'n:

"So when the trumpet is blown, there shall be no ties of relationship between them on that day, nor shall they ask of each other." (23:101)

"Without good deeds, your tie of relationship with the Prophet will be of no benefit to you. Whosoever oppresses the decendants of the Prophet shall be denied his intercession on the day of Judgement." Haroon on hearing this asked:

"In what way have the decendants of the Prophet suffered because of me?" Bahlool in reply to this said:

"Imam Musa ibn Jaffer who is the decendant of the Prophet is without any fault or reason in your prison. Could there be worse sin than this?" Haroon thought deeply for a while and wept then asked: "If I were to repent and make Tauba, would I not achieve salvation?" To this Bahlool responded by saying:

"You are so much overtaken by the love of power and so negligent of the life hereafter that you would not refrain from your misdeeds and sins even if the Prophet were to descend from heaven and reproach you giving good advice."

The foregoing polemic denotes the deep concern Bahlool cherished in his heart for the oppressive treatment of the decendants of the Prophet by the Abbasid rulers of his time. That Bahlool dared to raise his voice of protest before Haroon shows the degree of his great courage and uprightness.

Haroon Seeks Advice

Bahloul had for a year left Baghdad and settled in Kufa. Thereafter he returned to Baghdad and when met by Haroon, he asked him:

"Oh Bahloul! where have you been, I have been deeply keen of meeting you?" In reply, Bahloul said: "But I have never remembered you at all." To this Haroon responded:

"Let me hear some advice from you. Oh Bahloul." Bahloul said:

"Instead of hearing my words of advice, it would be better if you were to look at the magnificent palaces and also to the graves in the graveyard. Think of those palaces in which the kings of the past lived with all the pomp and splendour. And also think of these graveyards wherein the kings of the past are hidden beneath the earth.

One day you too are going to lie down in the grave. Therefore, fear that day when you are going to stand before Allah and made to account for your deeds. You would, because of your misdeeds, then look bewildered and would cry whilst others because of their good deeds would be smiling. Therefore, beware of your life after death." Hearing this .Haroon wept with tears rolling down on his cheeks.

How the past rulers and kings passed away from this world unable to defy death and leaving behind all their pomp and material possessions is the best way of deriving moral lesson. How short was the span of their lives during which they did what they liked irrespective of justice and truth. Finally, they departed from this world to account for their misdeeds.

"Where are the Amalekites and the sons of Amalekites? Where are the Pharaohs? Where are the people of the cities of ar-Rass who killed the prophets, destroyed the traditions of the divine messengers and revived the traditions of the despots? Where are those who advanced with armies, defeated thousands, mobilised forces and populated cities?"

(Nahjul Balagha sermon 182)

In his foregoina sermon. Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S.) advises us to dig into the past history of those who ruled with arrogance and oppression and draw lesson from their ultimate fate.

BAHLOOL AND A TOURIST

A tourist happened to come to Baghdad and by chance he also had an opportunity of being present in the court of Haroon. He put forward several questions on different topics but none of the people in the court including the learned and the wise could give any acceptable answer.

Haroon rather upset with this situation told his courtiers that he would divert their belongings and wealth to that tourist if they did not succeed in producing answers to his questions. So hearing, the courtiers pleaded for 24 hours time which was acceded.

Oh retiring from the Royal Court, they got together to discuss how and wherefrom to obtain the answers. One of them advised that no one would be able to give the answers except Bahlool hence they went out to look for him.

When found, they related to him of what had happened and told him; the questions raised by the tourist and he agreed to come forward to the court next day so as to face him and provide the right answers.

Next day Bahlool was present in the court and asked the tourist to speak and raise his questions as he was prepared to answer them.

The tourist stood up and with his stick, drew a circle on the ground. Instantly without any pause Bahlool came forward and drew a line across dividing it into two parts.

The tourist again drew on the ground another circle and again Bahlool immediately applied his stick and this time he drew two lines dividing the circle into four parts, of which one part he described as a dry and the remaining three parts as water.

Then again the tourist kept the back of his hand over the ground and raised the fingers towards the sky. Seeing this, Bahlool did the opposite by keeping his fingers over the ground and raised the back of his hand upwards towards the sky.

As a result the tourist praised Bahlool very much and told Haroon that he needed to have such intelligent and learned people. Haroon then asked him to explain what his aim and object was in raising the questions and drawing the circles.

The tourist then explained that the drawing of a circle by him and line dividing it into two by Bahlool was meant to convey that this world is divided into two portions - the North and the South. Another circle drawn and divided into four portions by Bahlool meant to point to one-fourth land and remaining three-fourth of water in the world.

The placing of hand over the earth and raising the fingers upwards meant the growing of grass and plants from earth. Bahlool by placing his fingers down and raising the hand upwards pointed to the fact that the plants needed rain and the rays of the sun.

Thus Bahlool proved, despite his simplicity and funny and insanely ways, to be one of the most intelligent and learned persons of the time.

Almighty Allah has mentioned about the people of intellect and reason in high terms as per the following avat of the Holv Qura'n:

"He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good and none but men of understanding mind."
(2:269)

Encounter With Haroon On Hajtrip

Haroon once departed from Baghdad on his way for Haj in Mecca. When he arrived at Kufa, the people of that place in large number came forward to greet him. Haroon was seated in a grand and pompous way over a camel back and was majestically passing through the people who had gathered to see him. Among them was Bahlool who shouted at the top of his voice:

"HAROON! HAROON" Haroon rather upset enquired from his people around as to who was that dared to call him in this fashion.

"It is Bahlool", they replied.

Haroon raised the curtain over his seat and looked at Bahlool who said this:

"It has been related by Abdullah bin Amiri that when the Prophet of Islam at the time of Ramiye Hajar, i.e. stone throwing - one of the Haj rites - I noticed that there was no obstruction to people in getting nearer to him and he was walking in perfect humility, whereas you in this Haj trip continue to maintain your show of dignity pomp and pride."

Haroon, hearing this, was moved and he shed tears allowing Bahlool to continue with his words of advice "Oh Caliph! Now that you are endowed with wealth and the dignity of your present elevated worldly status, do not be arrogant and forget Allah. Do not listen to the loose talk of your people.

Let your rule be such that those who do not see you and benefit directly from you remember you after your death.

Refrain from disobeying Allah and from oppression of people under you." On hearing these previous words, Haroon praised Bahlool and ordered some valuable gift be presented to him, but he refused saying:

"I am in no need of your favours. Why not gift to those who can not earn their living." Raising his head towards the sky and then Bahlool said:

"I and you are both the servants of Allah. How would He take care of you and desert me!"

That simplicity and humility before the Lord is the essence of the Haj ritual was what Bahlool meant to teach. Once again Bahlool also demonstrated his ascetic philosophy of life by refusing to accept any favours from the ruler of his time.

Haroon's Charitable Offer

One day Haroon gave an amount of money to Bahlool with suggestion to distribute among the poor and the needy. Bahlool took away the money and after thinking for a while returned the money to the Caliph.

Haroon asked him for the reason of doing so and Bahlool replied:

"Much as thought over your suggestion, I find, there is no other more deserving poor and needy than you the Caliph yourself. Therefore I have returned the money to you as I have found your officers and collectors standing in shops and by lashing their whips extract your taxes by force from people.

Thus your treasury goes on swelling and I conclude that your requirement of money must be much more than the poor man of your domain."

What a splendid lesson to those who take pride in making open charities from the money they obtain by exploiting the poor. Bahlool was driving home to Haroon that it was not worth assisting the charity which was from the money he had illicitly and unjustly obtained.

GOD'S BEST BLESSING

Haroon once asked Bahlool: "What is the best blessing from Allah?" Bahlool replied:

"The supreme blessing from Allah can be nothing else but Aql - intellect and power of reasoning. And Khwaja Abdullah Ansari in his supplication had mentioned:

"Oh Allah! To those blessed with intellect what is it that you have not given? And to those not blessed with intellect, what have you given!"

It is recorded that when Allah wishes to punish someone by taking away from him His blessings, the first thing He takes away is his Aql - intellect. And human intellect is considered also as one of the valuable sustenance from Allah.

"The first thing created by Allah is intellect" The human intellect - reasoning - has been defined in the following hadith: "Intellect Is that by which Allah the Compassionate is obeyed and by which one qualifies to enter heaven."

The Prophet of Islam has also said "Indeed all that is good to attainable by (the help and use of) intellect and he who has no intellect has no religion."

ON BIRTH OF A BABY GIRL

Ishaq bin Mohamed bin Sabah was one of the prominent leaders in Kufa. His wife once gave birth to baby girl. For this reason, he had become exceedingly sad and refrained from normal intake of food and drink.

When Bahtool came to learn about this, he went to him and said:

"Oh leader! Why all this sadness and disappointment!!" The reply to this from him was: "I had hoped for the birth of a son but unfortunately my wife delivered a baby girl." Bahlool responded by saying:

"Would you have preferred in place of this beautiful healthy sound baby girl to have an unhealthy and mentally sick or have a son like myself?" The leader on hearing this laughed and expressed his gratitude to Allah, resuming to enjoy food and drink as usual, and allowing people to congratulate him.

The Holy Qura'n has described the strange mentality of those ancient Arabs who hated to see the birth of girls in their homes:

"And when a daughter is announced to one of them his face becomes black and he is full of wrath." (16:58)

"He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge." (16:59)

A Mosque Slab

It is related that Fazl bin Rabee built a mosque in Baghdad. At the time of placing a plaque on the door, he was asked what should be written on it and he expressed his desire that his name as the donor of the mosque was to appear. By chance Bahlool was present there and he asked him this question: "For whose sake have you constructed the mosque?"

Fazl replied: "For the sake of Allah"

Bahlool said: "If it is for the sake of Allah then do not mention your name on the plaque"

Hearing this, Fazl became angry and said:

"Why not mention my name on the plaque. Let people come to know who the founder of the mosque was!" Bahlool then said: "Why not mention my name then on the plaque". Fazl said: "I shall never agree to that"

Bahlool in response said "If you have built this mosque to show off and boast your name, you will forego your reward from Allah." Hearing this, Fazl became dumb-founded and maintained silence. Thereafter he said:

"whatever Bahlool suggests, you may inscribe on the plaque." At that junction Bahlool instructed that an ayat from the Holy Qur'an be inscribed on the plaque and placed on the door of the mosque.

"And that the mosques are Allah's, therefore call not upon any one with Allah:"(72:18)

DESCRIPTION OF THE VIRTUES OF ALI

One day Bahlool went to visit Haroon who was in a relaxed and good mood. He asked Bahlool this:

"Was Ali (A.S.) of higher status and more elevated than Abbas the uncle of the Prophet or was Abbas higher than Ali (A.S.)?" Bahlool replied:

"Would I be guaranteed safety from you if I were to tell the truth?" When Haroon guaranteed this, Bahlool then said:

"Ali (A.S.) after Prophet Mohamed (S.A) was in status higher than all the Muslims. Not only that but higher than all the previous Prophets. The reason for this is that Ali (A.S.) was that exalted personality who possessed all the good qualities. His staunch faith in Islam is unquestionable.

His bravery in the wars in defence of Islam is unparalleled. He sacrificed not only his but also the lives of his kith and kin in the safe-guarding the tenets of Islam. In all the Islamic wars of defence, he was in the forefront never did he turn his back and run away from the front against the enemies.

And when he Ali (A.S.) was asked: "Why don't you ever look behind when fighting lest an enemy strikes you from behind" he would reply this: "Fighting in a battle for me is for the sake of Islam. No fear of any sort nor any personal interest concerns me. I fully submit to Allah. If I am killed, it would be on the way of Allah, and what better achievement could it be than this."

"Moreover, when Ali (A.S.) was a Caliph of the Muslims, he rested neither during the day nor at night in the service of the people. He did not allow wastage or over-spending of the treasury lest the rights of the needy and poor were ignored."

When Aqeel his brother went to his house and saw how Ali (A.S.) as the Caliph lived so simply, he became ashamed of requesting for favours from the state treasury; He always acted with extreme fairness and justice and terminated the appointment of any state officer found to commit injustice.

For example, Ibne Abbas, when he was the governor of Bassah, once spent an amount from the public-treasury for his personal matters. Ali (A.S.) demanded the return of the money and reproached him considerably for doing so. A time limit for the return of the money was set but Ibne Abbas failed to return.

Ali (A.S.) summoned him to return to Kufa but he instead went to Kaaba in Mecca seeking forgiveness. Ali (A.S.) was such a man to principle and discipline."

Oh hearing this, Haroon rather upset, decided to argue the subject and put this question to Bahlool:

"Despite all these virtues and elevations, why was he then killed?" Bahlool replied:

"Most of the people on the path of truth have been persecuted. Even the Prophets like Issa, Dawood and Yahva were not spared by the people of their times" The Prophet of Islam in one of his numerous sayings about Ali bin Abi Taleb had said:

"The Truth is with Ali and Ali is with the Truth".

Bahloul In Basrah

Bahloul once happened to go to Basrah. Not being acquainted with anyone there, he was obliged to rent a room for some days. But it was so old and in bad condition that a blow of strong wind or rainfall would make the roof and doors rattle and create unusual sound.

Bahloul went to the owner to complain saying that the room was so bad that a slight blow of the wind would make the roof and the walls rattle and create frightening sound.

The owner of the room being of jovial nature responded by arguing that: "As you know. Oh Bahloul, that all creatures in this world sing the praise of Allah and declares His glory. Hence the rattling and sound making of the roof and walls is for that purpose."

Bahloul reacted to this by saying:

"It is true but don't you know that the singing of praise and glory by creatures leads to Sajda, i.e. prostration. I am worried what would happen when the room prostrates into Sajda (i.e. when it falls and collapses by the gush of the wind)."

What a remarkable degree of intelligence possessed by Bahloul. No shrewed argument could ever beat him in his wit and ability to retort instantly.

Shoes Not Book Of Philosophy

It was a day of Idd and Bahlool went to a mosque for prayers. There was multitude of people and the place was getting congested. When he arrived at the door, he was large number of shoes and sandals scattered around.

Since his shoes wen stolen before, he feared he might again lose them if he did not take care this time. Hence he took out a handkerchief and covering around his shoes, he entered the mosque and sat in one corner. A man sitting near him seeing a parcel covered and being taken care of said to Bahlool:

"I guess you are holding a valuable book. Can you tell me of what subject it is?"

Bahlool replied:

"It is on philosophy."

The man then asked him; "Where and from which bookshop you have purchased?" Bahlool replied:

"From a shoe-maker shop have I purchased"

HAROON'S NEW PALANCE

It took quite some time for Haroon to get a new palace built for himself. When ready, he was one day walking about on the top of it, enjoying the scenery and the beauty around him. Suddenly, his attention was drawn downwards towards Bahlool who was passing by and gazing at the structure of the palace. Haroon called him saying:

"Oh Bahlool I have a request to make to you. Can you suggest some suitable words for this magnificent new palace of mine?"

Bahlool instantly found a piece of charcoal and scribbled thickly over the wall of the palace with the following words:

"You have raised the earth-bricks whilst you have lowered your religion (subordinated religious principles) If you have raised this building from your own money, then you have acted extrava-vently. And if you have built it from the money belonging to others (public treasury) then verily you have committed oppression and Allah does not like the oppressors"

How wice befitting is the following saying of Imam Jaffer Sadique (A.S.): "Whoever acquires wealth illicitly, becomes subdued and involved in such a construction work which would absorb all such wealth which is spent after eerth, water and construction work.

Ultimately, he departs from this world before he is able to enjoy the advantage and pleasure of his buildings fully" Bahlool was one of such people as described by Ali bin Abi Tabib (as) in one of his sermons: "There are some people devoted to the remembrance (of Allah) who have adopted it in place of worldly matters so that commerce or trade does not turn them away from it.

They pass their life in it. They speak into the ears of neglectful persons warning against matters held unlawful by Allah," (Nahjul Balaghah sermon 222)

Refund Of Loan On Reapperrance Of Imam

Someone decided to tease Bahlool on the belief of the concealed 12th Imam and his reappearance one day to establish a rule of equity and justice throughout the world.

In a sitting where Bahlool was also present, he said this to him: "Don't you cherish the belief that your Imam (the 12th Imam Hazrat Mahdi (A.F.) will reappear in the end of time and establish a rule of justice? if you are firm on this belief, why not loan to me now five hundred dinars and I shall repay when your Imam reappears."

In reply, Bahlool told him:

"Undoubtedly this is my belief and I am willing to loan you the money on a condition. And it is this that you provide a guarantee that you will not then be transformed into a pig or a dog. Should you then become so, from whom shall I recover my money?"

Hearing this, those present raised a big laughter and the one who was out to tease Bahlool became dumbfounded.

And Bahlool lifting his stick left the place and went away. Recognizing the Imam of the age is so important and essential that the Holy Prophet (S.A.VV.) had said:

"He who dies without recognizing the Imam of his age is like the one who died during the jahiliyya (the pagan era before me advent of Islam) To die during jahiliyya means a death devoid of Islam and faith.

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