The Repentance of Abu Mu'aadh

By the Eminent Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi
May Allah hasten his release

Translated by brother Tarek Mehana "Abu Sabaya", may Allah hasten his release

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The story begins like this:

Two bandits lay their eyes on their prey. They choose a house whose appearance pleases them between the other houses, and they begin to approach it.

The issue for them is quite easy and without the threat of danger, as their prey is usually weak. They usually only go out during the day, when the men of the house are at work. If they were surprisingly met by a man in the house, retreat was easy and calculated. All they would have to do would be to pretend to be looking for anyone whose name came to mind, apologize for the disturbance, say that they must have the wrong address, and leave in silence. They would need a ruse, as their simple weapons would not hold up against anyone strong.

They approached the door of their chosen house.

Neither of them knew that this door would be closed with them behind bars and within the harsh confines of prison for a period of fifteen years. When they were waving their weapons in the woman’s face, it didn’t occur to them that their plans would consist of anything more than theft and robbery. They would take whatever they could carry and sell for a good price. However, Allah Willed for an eternal wisdom to test them with prey that they could easily catch, and that would cause them both to fall.

So, while one of them was looking through the personal possessions in the house scattered here and there, he came across a gun. He held the gun and began shaking it wildly while looking at the woman.

Indeed, the problem was a bad choice of friends, O Aba Mu’adh. Was it not said that the friend is like a chain? So, this bad companion has dragged you like a chain with him to the depths of prison for fifteen years.

Look at how quickly Satan toyed with their minds when they saw her hold her children tight in fear as they screamed and cried. She said: “Take whatever you want and leave me!” What she feared was not part of the plan. However, how many birds of prey have caught the attention of the hunter when he had never noticed them? Indeed, it is the base desire that dominated the one who abandoned fear of Allah, and the deterrent of faith became weakened, and what happened happened.

This was the beginning: a few moments’ passing desire accompanied by fear, terror, and regret. Because of it, both were convicted and punished for the crimes of robbery and rape. Since the punishment for rape was greater, this is what they became known for upon entering prison. What you are charged with carries a certain significance and importance in the world of prison when it comes to your reputation. Here, charges are of all sorts. Some are noble, and some are despicable – a prisoner carries either pride or shame depending on his charge. Some are elevated over others, and some become the laughing stock of others.
Days and months pass, and gray hairs start appearing on the head of our friend.

Indeed, prison is a grave for the living. Some who have tried it said:

“We left the world while we are still in it. In it, we are neither alive nor dead;”

“If our captors come to us one day with something. We are amazed and say that he has come from the world;”

“And we are amazed by our dreams and speak about them. As our conversations have become only about dreams;”

“If it is good, it is slow in manifesting. And if it is bad, it is not held back and is quick to manifest;”

“We complain to Allah, as He is the One to complain to. And in His Hand is the cure for all disasters and crisis.”

Indeed, it is prison, my friend. It will either break you, squeeze you, or benefit you. If one does not enter it with a reserve of faith, he will be counted amongst the dead. Regarding these, Allah Said: (“Dead, lifeless, and they know not when they will be raised up.”) [an-Nahl; 21]

And if one does not learn from it or bring his heart to life in it, he will simply go from one grave to the next, and from one death in it to another death in the Hereafter…a life in a prison that is unlike these prisons…

And the days in prison turn into weeks, and the weeks into years with deadening repetition. Nothing new happens from one day to the next. One’s life is wasted away, as life is but a collection of days – when a day passes, part of your life passes. It is as al-Hasan al-Basri said – and he was right when he said it – as Allah Said: (“By time, man is indeed in a state of loss…”) [al-‘Asr; 1-2]: “Indeed, the human being is in a state of constant loss if he is not met with Mercy from Allah.”

And what life is this that one lives in prison? It is a life that is worse than death. One feels nothing in it except pain, torture, and regret. So, death is better than this, and this is why everyone who enters it longs for death and prays for it.

Suddenly, during the course of these dry and dead years, our friend began to awaken and rise from his slumber. His eyes widened, his face brightened with the light of faith, his life began to change, his heart was given life, and it was as if he was born anew by simply meeting some of his brothers in Tawheed… And how many of them are in prison in our times!

He met and lived with the waves of them that would come into prison, groups and individuals. One group would leave only to be replaced by another group in which he saw honour, faith, unique methodology, and pure belief. Their tribulations varied, and some of them had heavy sentences just as he did. Rather, some had even heavier and harsher sentences than he. Despite this, their morale was high, and their noses were even higher: they would not lower their heads for anyone other than Allah, and they would not accept humiliation at the cost of their religion.
They were accused of being extremists, terrorists, and troublemakers. However, whenever they are asked about their charges and crimes, they insist on saying in unison: لا إلّا إلّه إلا اللّه! They would then explain this with clear proofs and arguments, paying no mind to the prison guards, officers, or torturers. They would not comply with their orders or be intimidated by their egos.

It was normal for prisoners to stand up out of respect for the guards and officers when they would enter to carry out the routine morning cell search. So, they would become uptight and enraged at the lack of respect shown by these brothers towards them as the rest of the prisoners did. They would not even greet them, let alone stand for them out of respect. As a result, they stopped searching their cells except on rare occasions. They did not want to be embarrassed in front of their superiors when entering upon these brothers of Tawheed, as these brothers would pay no mind to them when they entered, and would be left to engage in whatever reading or teaching they were in without even turning their faces or standing up as others would do.

Beware! They are troublemakers! They are terrorists! They are ex-communicators! (“Indeed, these are but a small band, and verily, they have done what has enraged us. But, we are host all assembled, amply forewarned.”) [ash-Shu’ara’; 54-56]

However, our friend paid no heed to this warning or pressure. Despite all of these obstacles and potential consequences, he stuck with these strangers, and one obstacle after another began to fall away.

The obstacle of fear fell away, as he learned of what Ibn al-Qayyim referred to as the concept of removing from yourself the fear and awe of anything other than Allah, which is manifested in the monotheist exalting Allah, fearing Him in such a way that his entire self is filled with an awe that overpowers his heart, and he is therefore unable to exhibit a bit of fear of anything other than He.

So, fear of Allah, the One who has overwhelmed the Heavens and Earth, prevents him from fearing or exalting anyone else. Therefore, everything that is feared or called upon besides Allah is, in reality, nothing, as Allah Said: (“The likeness of those who take protectors and helpers other than Allah is as the likeness of a spider who builds a house. But, the frailest of houses is the spider’s house, if they only knew.”) [al-‘Ankabut; 41] And He Said: (“Indeed, Allah Knows what they invoke instead of Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise.”) [al-‘Ankabut; 42]

And the obstacle of the bad reputation due to his charge also fell, as they taught him that Islam removes all sins that came before accepting it, and were the past deeds of the Companions of the Prophet before their Islam anything other than murder, theft, and rape? However, when they tasted the honour of true monotheism through the religion of Islam, they became the leaders of nations and people, and they obtained through this the honour of this world and the next. They conquered lands and commanded populations, and they are today the ultimate examples and
the best of generations that ever lived.

Our friend was unaffected by these obstacles, as nothing was more beloved to him than these study circles, listening to the verses of the Qur’an being recited, or delving into the teachings of monotheism. It took only a few days for our friend’s life to change, and he parted ways with his old friends and raised himself above their foolish ways, becoming a manifestation of the poet’s words:

They have prepared you for something, if you have the intellect for it * Protect yourself from being swept to ruin.

He knew that he was not brought into this world to fool around or waste his time. Rather, he was brought here for a great goal that he was heedless of in the past. He now knew the source of his honour and joy. So, he was no longer counted among the rest of the people who were in constant loss. Rather, he was now of those who Allah had made to be exceptions by Saying: [“…except those who believe and perform good deeds, and enjoin truth and enjoin patience.”] [al-'Asr; 3-4] As a result, he no longer cared that he was in prison or that the days of his life were passing by in it. Is this entire worldly life itself not a prison for the believer, as the Messenger of Allah informed us? And what is this life? What are its days, especially when compared to the Hereafter and what is with Allah? Indeed, if Allah blesses one with the gift of firmness upon this great treasure and keeps him that way until the end of his life, and he is thus pushed away from the Fire and entered into Paradise, he has indeed succeeded! And what comes after? One dip in Paradise will cause him to forget all the pain he ever experienced in prison. If he ends up like this, what loss is there?

Yes. Indeed, faith causes the most amazing changes in a man’s life. It causes a test to become a gift just as a person you hate becomes a person you love. It makes torture sweet just as a disaster becomes a blessing, and this cannot occur by playing around with words. Rather, it only occurs by believing in the Unseen, and looking to the end with patience, firmness, and an attitude of purification until the believer comes out as clean and pure of all sins and blemishes as gold that is put through fire.

And tell yourself to seek joy through an hour’s patience * In the end, those who toiled will forget their exhaustion;

It is but an hour, and it will end * And those who were sad will become happy.

Yes, by Allah! It is but an hour, after which those who were pained will feel no pain, those who were sad will feel no sadness, and those who were tired will feel no exhaustion.

Our friend became a lion of the lions of Tawheed, and he became a guiding light calling to pure monotheism. How many are those prisoners who were guided by his hands and became the best brothers and propagators! I remember a disbeliever who was of the heads of disbelief and corruption and sin who was feared by most of those in the prison. Allah had opened his heart to this blessed call, and he stood after his guidance to the truth announcing to those close by – prisoners and guards –
saying: “Listen! Today, Allah has guided me, and I will not accept to hear anyone insulting Allah or the Religion! If I hear anyone doing this, I will slap him across the mouth!” These were words directed at the heads of disbelief and the foulest of criminals, and he did not care. He was formerly strong upon falsehood, and he took hold of the Qur’an with strength in the same way. Now, when he hears the verses of the Qur’an and the call to monotheism, you will see him crying like a small child.

How many are those who were guided by the hands of our friend and many others like him! I remember one day how some of those who were guided by his hands were telling me with joy of how almost thirty prisoners in their unit were now praying and were living upright lives, and most of them were under the guidance of Abu Mu’adh. May Allah keep you and your brothers firm, Abu Mu’adh!

One morning, the lieutenant and his officers entered the unit for the routine search. None except a few in Abu Mu’adh’s unit would stand for them out of respect. Indeed, what a strange, new scene! They usually pick this unit because of the shameful charges of those in it. So, how can these people have the nerve to act this way?

The officer knew who their leader was, and he approached him in a provocative manner in order to disgrace him just as he used to in the past. He would ask him questions that he already knew the answer to.

“What is your charge?”

Abu Mu’adh would reply: “Rape.”

He would then ask in a mocking tone: “A boy or girl?”

Abu Mu’adh would then reply with a clear, straight voice, and without thinking about the consequences of what he was about to say: “Either way, it is nowhere as bad as the polytheism that you are upon!”

May Allah keep you firm, O Aba Mu’adh! By Allah, it is but a few days.

And tell yourself to seek joy through an hour’s patience * In the end, those who toiled will forget their exhaustion;

It is but an hour, and it will end * And those who were sad will become happy.

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