Soon, I will teach you how to hunt Hawks

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

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Indeed, these are emotional moments, and in this place that is cut off from the rest of the world, it is the fourth Ramadan that has come upon us while we are in this trial.

In such times, one is used to being busy with remembering Allah or any other useful activity to not surrender to emotions and memories, especially today and in such moments, as there is a scene in my mind that never fails to surface on the first day of Ramadan each year.

It is the scene of the children running around the dinner table awaiting the call for prayer, and their mother quickly rushing to and fro to prepare their iftar, with none of them having reached the age where fasting is even obligatory for them. Despite this, they are all enthusiastic about fasting, especially during the first days of this noble month.

This is the way it is with everything that is new: the children take it and eat it up with zeal and enthusiasm! Yes…however, zeal alone is not enough to sustain yourself on the path, is this not so?

I extend my sight from the tiny window of my prison cell to catch a glimpse of the beautiful sunset in the deserts of Qahalah. The Sun drags it rays in an amazing way…and quickly, the call is made to signify that it has set.

Ah…how short life is…a flock of birds in the endless red sky are returning to the nests where their young chicks are before the darkness appears. I cannot help but think of what al-Mu’tamid bin ‘Ibad said when he was in prison:

Allah protected the cat’s young * While my young chicks were betrayed by the water and shade

This is human nature, and the effect of the mercy that Allah planted in their hearts that they are gentle with. This mercy sometimes overpowers a man no matter how tough, strong, and patient he is.

I clear my mind of this and turn away from it, remembering some lines of poetry that I’d written on the walls of my tiny cell in the past:

*My brother, we didn’t expect anything bad * Of the promise of the Mighty Lord;

And captivity has only increased us in firmness * And prison has only increased us in certainty;

And the torturing of our brothers * And the killing of the callers, even if by the hundreds;

Has only raised the banner of our faith * And manifested the Tawheed of truth and religion;

To please a Lord and assist a religion * The prisons are perfumed and death is sweet;

To please a Mighty and Generous Lord * Life and children mean nothing.
In these moments, my mind wanders to the words of my young son ‘Umar as he converses with his mother in a previous Ramadan: “My father is a good man, and I love him, and am proud of him. However, I want him to be with us here, not in prison!”

And his mother began to reply, reminding him of some of the signposts along the road, and it is as if I can hear her words echoing in the silence of the night: “What are you saying, ‘Umar? What is this? Didn’t I tell you of the story of Ibrahim and how he was thrown into the fire because of what he was calling to? And the story of Musa and ‘Io and the inhabitants of the Cave, and the People of the Ditch?”

O ‘Umayr, this is necessary, and you remembered past holidays when I was with you all. Where is the statement you made to your mother that she relayed to me at the beginning of this trial when you responded back to those who criticized my methodology: “I love to be like my father, and when I grow up, I’ll do what he did, and I will struggle against the tyrants.”

So, what do you say today? Have the nights and days been that long? My son, this is only the beginning of the road. Have you been like your two younger siblings who were deeply affected by my trial? Have you lost hope in victory and abandoned the path?

I still remember the glimmer in your eye as you screamed at the enemies of Allah during one of their midnight raids on our house, when you suddenly awoke on that winter night and got up out of bed upon hearing their filthy voices to find them spread all over the house, searching through everything and in every corner. One of those disbelievers asked you in a horrid voice: “Where is your father?”

So, you replied to him without hesitation as you still sat in your bed rubbing your eyes: “I don’t know,” and you knew very well where your father was that night.

Abu Hafs, I still remember – and I will never forget – the way you looked at them as you confronted them on the last night that I departed from you, the night of my arrest four years ago. They had placed handcuffs on my wrists and surrounded me from all sides, pushing me and moving me forward with their batons and rifle butts. I noticed you in the darkness of night standing on the terrace looking as I called out: “Don’t be afraid of them! Don’t be scared of them! They are nothing but insects! They are flies!” I remember very well how this stuck in your mind and was imprinted in your memory, because when you saw me six months later after I was transported from their holding cell to the prison and I reminded you of that night, you immediately said: “Yes, I remember it very well, father. You were telling us not to be afraid of them, and that they were insects and flies.”

It isn’t strange that your young mind would retain these specific words from all of what was said on that dark night. And I reminded you that day of a line of Ibn al-Qayyim’s poetry that I had written down for you in some of my letters in the cell:

Do not fear their large numbers, as they are worthless and like flies * Would you fear a fly?
Do you remember this, ‘Umayr? The enemies of Allah were furious when they would read it, and I loved to remind you of it despite their rage.

So, how is it that today, you are impatient in having me with you?

That’s OK, as you are still young, and this road is long and littered with hardships, and even the best fall off at its sides, and many dismount at its various stops.

Haven’t I repeatedly told you and others that the length of our trial is quite short when compared to the trials of our brothers in other lands? Indeed, this is just the beginning, my young son, and these are the first steps in our precious da’wah and valuable treasure whose price nobody stands up to pay except true men: {“...men who have been truthful to the covenant they made with Allah. So, some of them have fulfilled their obligations and others are waiting, and they haven’t changed in the least...”} [al-Ahzab; 25]

O prize of Allah, you aren’t cheap * Rather, you are expensive for the lazy;

O prize of Allah, were it not for * You being surrounded by every hardship for a person;

There would be nobody sitting back * And the second realm of reward would’ve been removed;

However, it is surrounded by every hardship * To ward off those lazy deniers;

And to be given to the aspirations that reach * To the High Lord, if He Wills.

And how beautiful are the words of Ibn al-Qayyim – and the lines of poetry were his – when he described it, saying: “By Allah, it is not cheap so that it could be bought by the bankrupt, and it is not something unsellable to be given away to the needy. It was presented in the marketplace for a high price, and the only price for it was to give the soul. So, the deniers stepped back, and those who loved it stood and looked to see: which of them was most deserving to pay its price? So, the prize was passed around between them, and it fell into the hands of {“...gentle with the believers, harsh against the disbelievers...”} When more and more people stepped forth to claim the prize, it was requested that people prove the legitimacy of their claim to it, since if people were to be given it based merely on their claim to it, those who otherwise don’t care for it would claim to passionately desire it. So, various types of people laid forth their claims, and it was said: “Do not accept these claims except with proof: {“Say: ‘If you truly love Allah, follow me, and Allah will Love you...’”} So, everyone stepped back, and the only ones remaining were the followers of the beloved Prophet in his actions, words, and character. So, they requested an adjustment to the proof required by a specific word of recommendation: {“...they strive in the Path of Allah, and do not fear the blame of the blamers...”}
So, most of those who possessed love for him stepped back, and only the Mujahidin remained. So, it was said to them: “The souls and wealth of those who possess this love do not belong to them. So, go forth to make your contract: [“Indeed, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and wealth in exchange for Paradise...”] So, when they knew the Greatness of the purchaser, the virtue of the price, and the honor of he whose hands seal this deal, they realized the value of the prize, and that it was truly significant. They saw that the greatest loss was to sell it for a cheap price. So, they willingly sealed the deal of pleasure without considering any other option, and they said: “We won’t withdraw from this pact.” So, when the pact was solidified and they completed the transaction, it was said to them: “Whenever your lives and wealth end up with Us, We will return it to you many times more than it was: [“And do not think of those killed in the Path of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive and provided for. They rejoice in what Allah has given them and His virtue...”] So, they praised Him when they arrived at this bounty, and they thanked their Guardian for what He gave them, and in the morning, they praise Him again for this bounty.”

You must understand this very well, my son, and memorize it in order to know the reality of this path and some of its demands. So, don’t be impatient after this day or get tired of it as long as you live.

Remember your last visit, that day, I was looking at your eyes as they widened out of happiness and joy through the visitation window, and you were saying: “Yesterday, father, I went out with my teacher to hunt, and I hunted a pigeon for the first time with a rifle! Yes, father! With a rifle! I hunted a pigeon for the first time with a rifle!”

“Excellent, ‘Umar! Excellent! Now, it is the hawks’ turn. Soon, if Allah Wills, I will teach you how to hunt hawks.”

The call to prayer is made, and the memories stop, and a precious tear forms. I wipe it quickly and hum: “O Allah, this is the beginning of Your night, and the end of Your day, and the voices of supplication to You. So, Forgive me.”

Written by: Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi may Allah free him in Suwaqah Prison. The first night of Ramadan, 1417 years after the migration of the Prophet [peace be upon him]

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