




**Madrasah Baytul Ilm**

# **THE EXAMPLE OF LIFE**

**Mawlānā Ismail  
Dhorat Hafizahullāh**

Narrating incidents and stories is a general practise of our pious elders. They are not narrated just for passing time and entertainment. In fact, they are narrated so that we can learn valuable lessons from them. One such incident, which is commonly attributed to the great Imām Ghazālī , holds great lessons and reminders for us.

The story is of a man who was travelling alone in the jungle. Whilst walking, he heard some sounds and footsteps behind him. He looked back to find that he was being followed by a lion. On one hand, there was a lion which is a strong and powerful animal. On the other hand, this man had no means of self defence or safety from this lion. Therefore, as per human nature, he began to run. And as expected, the lion also started chasing.

Whilst running, he looked around for a means of safety. In his search, his gaze fell upon a well. He thought to himself that this is the only safe haven from the lion. He planned to jump into the well and stay afloat in the water until the lion turned away.

As he reached the wall of the well, he had a look inside to make sure there was water in the well to cushion his jump. To his surprise, there was no water in the well. This meant he could not jump as that would lead to a certain death. To his misfortune, he also noticed that at the bottom of the well, there was a large snake with its mouth wide open indicating its hunger and readiness to devour whatever comes its way.

Stuck between a lion and a snake, he looked around for an alternative. Suddenly, his eyes fell on a neighbouring tree, which was very large and had one branch hanging over the mouth of the well. He planned to hang on to this branch and hover over the well, deep enough to avoid the lion and high enough to avoid the snake. He took a brave leap and executed his plan.

However, as he was hanging on for dear life, he began hearing a noise above him. He looked up to find two mice nibbling at the branch he was hanging onto; one white mouse and the other black.

This man realised that if the mice continued nibbling, the branch would weaken and eventually snap, leading to his fall straight into the mouth of the snake. The only thing he could do is hang on to the branch as long as he could. With no other option, he hung on for dear life.

In the meantime, he suddenly felt something dropping on his face. He looked up to find that there was a honeycomb higher up in the tree and droplets of honey were falling from it on his face. He adjusted himself and opened his mouth to catch the droplets of honey. Tasting the sweet delicious honey, he fell into such enjoyment that he even forgot about the lion, the snake and the mice nibbling at the branch.

This incident holds some very valuable lessons for us. Firstly, the lion that was chasing this man represents the angel of death. The angel of death is constantly chasing a person and will eventually catch up to him. Allāh Ta'ālā has mentioned, "Each soul shall taste death." (3:185)

Each and every one of us should be mindful that we have the angel of death chasing behind us. And it can catch us and take our soul away at anytime. By remembering this fact, the love of this world will fade from our hearts and we will be more attentive to the Hereafter. This will create a concern for our wellbeing in the Hereafter and this concern is what will help us prepare for the Hereafter.

Secondly, the well with the snake inside represents the grave. Whenever a believer dies, he is buried in the ground, in his grave. The grave is the first stage of the Hereafter. Nabi ﷺ has mentioned in a hadith, “The grave is a garden from the gardens of Jannah or a pit from the pits of Jahannam.” (Tirmidhi)

If a believer has prepared for the Hereafter, then this grave will be a pleasant garden for him where he will experience a taste of Jannah. If he has lacked in his preparation then this will be a place of punishment and torture for him. The correct preparation is achieved by carrying out good

actions and by staying away from the disobedience of Allāh Ta'ālā.

Thirdly, the black and white mice who are nibbling away at the branch; this branch represents a persons lifespan. Whilst the person has 'the branch', he is temporarily safe from the angel of death and the grave.

As for the white and black mice that are nibbling away at this branch, they represent day and night. Our lives are comprised of days and nights which are passing constantly one after the other. These days and nights are gnawing away at our life.

Finally, the honey which distracted this person from his entire situation; from the lion, the snake and the mice, this honey represents the enjoyments of this world. A person knows that the angel of death could catch up at anytime, he knows that the grave is ever ready, waiting for him, he knows that the passing of days and nights are bringing his life closer to the end. Yet, he becomes

neglectful of preparing for the Hereafter due to the enjoyments of this world, whether it be wealth, comfort, luxury or the unlawful activities of this world. This 'sweet honey' grants him such enjoyment that he becomes totally oblivious of the Hereafter. He forgets the reality of life and that he is to stand in the court of Allāh for his reckoning.

The world may seem very sweet and attractive. However, this is merely a deception. The world and whatever it contains is eventually going to perish.

As for the Hereafter, it will remain forever; Jannah will remain forever, so will the blessings of Jannah and so will the people of Jannah. Allāh Ta'ālā has mentioned in the Glorious Qur'ān, "and the Hereafter is far better and longer lasting." (87.17)

So let us prepare for this everlasting Hereafter. In order to do so, we must carry out good actions, we must stay away from sinful activities and we must remove the love of this world from our hearts. The world should only be acquired according to our

necessities. Yes, a person needs to earn a livelihood, he needs to earn and provide for his family and he is entitled to create a comfortable setting for himself and his family.

However, it should not be that a person spends all his time and effort in the acquisition of worldly possessions and luxuries and remains completely negligent of the Hereafter.

Nabi ﷺ once explained to his companions that the most intelligent people are those who remember death the most and the ones who prepare for it the most. (Ibn Mājah)

May Allāh Ta'ālā grant us the ability to understand the reality of this world and the Hereafter. May He grant us the ability to prepare for the Hereafter. And may He grant us salvation through the blessing of Jannah. Ameen.

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