



## Righteous Men <sup>1</sup>

The manner with which they dealt with their appetites

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What follows are some examples of the attitudes and statements of our righteous forebearers showing us how to strive against the appetites. We mention them as an admonition and lesson for all those with intelligence.

Abūl Khayr al-`Asqalānī ؓ had hankered after fish for years and one day his wish was granted in an entirely lawful way. When he reached out to eat the fish, a sharp bone pierced his finger. He removed his hand, exclaiming,

“O Lord, if this is what happens to someone who reaches, out of appetite, for something lawful, what about someone who reaches for something unlawful?”

Abū Sulaymān ؓ said,

“Abandoning one of the appetites of the lower self is more beneficial for the heart than fasting and praying for a year.”

In one of the traditions attributed to Allah Almighty we find:

***“The least I do to a scholar when he prefers his appetite to My love is to deny him the pleasure of intimate conversation with Me.”***

Abūl Hasan al-Shādhilī ؓ said,

“The *wali* will not reach Allah by any of his appetites or by his own management or any choice of his own.”

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from *Dealing with Lust and Greed according to Islam*, Abdul Hamid Kishk; translated by Aisha Bewley, published by Dar Al-Taqwa, London. Buy a copy from [http://www.daralitaqwa.com/shopping/product\\_details.php?product\\_id=2470&PHPSESSID=44a39a64be419a16afa66c6d3733e52e](http://www.daralitaqwa.com/shopping/product_details.php?product_id=2470&PHPSESSID=44a39a64be419a16afa66c6d3733e52e)

One of the poets said to explain that the appetites are a kind of bondage into which man falls and shackles which fetter him and disgrace him:

“When a blameless lord is captured by his appetites,  
he is stripped of his blamelessness and disgraced.  
One with appetites is a slave. When he masters appetite,  
he becomes a king.”

Here are some sayings on the subject which have been passed down to us:

- “Many an appetite bequeaths long-lasting grief.”
- “If the heart is nourished by love, the appetites depart.”
- “The part of the lower self that plays in acts of disobedience is clear and evident. The part it plays in acts of obedience is hidden and obscure. It is difficult to treat something which is hidden.”

One of the supplications of Ibn `Atā`illāh al-Iskandarī ؒ was,

“My God! The decree and destiny have overtaken me and desire has taken me captive by the shackles of my appetites. Be my helper and help me and help others by me. Enrich me by your bounty so that I have no need to seek elsewhere.”

Imām Abūl Qāsim al-Qushayrī ؒ said,

“Having a heart free of distractions is an incomparable blessing. If someone is ungrateful for this blessing, he opens the door of his lower desires by his own hand and is dragged along in the chains of appetite. Allah disturbs his peace of mind and strips away from him the feeling of purity in his heart.”

Sayyidunā `Umar ؒ said,

“If you fear Allāh, you avoid what Allāh has forbidden.”

That means directing yourself sincerely towards Allāh ؒ, dismissing bodily preoccupations, being scrupulous, and sloughing off the chains of the visible world. All this is obtained as a result of fear of Allāh, as Allāh promises when He says:

***“Fear Allāh and Allāh will teach you.”*** <sup>2</sup>

Lisānuddīn ibn al-Khatīb said,

“Know that when any wise artisan reflects on his business and looks at the results, he knows that one day the shop which is his workplace will fall into ruin, his tools wear out, his strength diminish, and the days of his youth disappear. Someone who seizes the time and works hard before his shop falls into disrepair will not need another shop or new tools. He will receive payment for the things he made and can reap the benefit of his labors and enjoy what he has earned. This is a valid metaphor for the soul after the ruin of the body. Hurry then and work hard, hasten and take provision before your shop is ruined and your house destroyed. The best provision is fear of Allah.”

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<sup>2</sup> Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:282

If you miss this opportunity that is it. The only time you have is now. There is no other. Anyone who puts things off until tomorrow will never be successful. Man is the child of the moment and so you should be careful not to waste it. Procrastination is the death of action and the enemy of completion. He who embarks rarely fails to arrive. Fortune favours the bold. If anyone puts his fate in time, his hands will be tied by the hands of deprivation. Profit is to be found in boldness. He who lets things slip is likely to lose. Ibn `Atā ؓ said,

“Since you know that Shaytān does not ignore you,  
don’t ignore the One who has your forelock in His Hand.”

The enemy sees you and you do not see him because of his intense preparations.

*I complain of a cunning enemy who has me in his sights  
but I do not see him when he sees me.  
If I forget him, he does not forget me.  
O My Master! If you do not help, he will capture me!*

Although he sees you and you do not see him, Allāh sees him and he does not see Allāh. Therefore seek Allāh’s help against him.

*I am afflicted by four enemies attacking me,  
with arrows from a bow stretched taut:  
Iblīs, this world, my self, and low desire.  
My Lord, You have the power to deliver me!*

Sūfyan al-Thawrī ؓ defined the meaning of real asceticism by saying,

“It is for a man to be detached in respect of this world when he has wealth  
and not to desire it when he is poor.”

One of the things that Ruwaym al-Baghdādī ؓ said is:

“Fortitude is to abandon complaint, and contentment is to enjoy affliction,  
and reliance is to discard secondary means.”

Sārī al-Saqātī ؓ said,

“Time consists of only three days: yesterday, whose distress, hardship,  
and sorrow is gone and nothing of it remains; today, in which you  
are living and which will soon leave you; and tomorrow,  
of which you have expectations but which you may never see.”

It is related from Ibn Sirāj that al-Junayd ؒ said,

“I dreamt of Iblīs and he was naked. I asked, ‘Are you not ashamed to appear before people like that?’ He said, ‘By Allāh, are those people who are with you? If they were really people, I could have played with them as children play with a ball. They are not people.’ I asked him, ‘Who are they then?’ He said, ‘They are in the Shuniziyya Mosque. They have undermined me and weakened me. Whenever I aimed for them, they turned to Allāh and I was nearly burned up.’ When I woke up I went straight to the Shuniziyya Mosque and there were three men sitting with their heads in their hoods. When they became aware of me, one of them uncovered his head and exclaimed, ‘Abūl Qāsim! Do you believe everything you are told?’ They were Abū Hamza, Abūl Hasan al-Nūrī and Abū Bakr al-Raqqāq.”

One day, the Gnostic of Allāh, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, one of the Shaykhs of the ascetics, wanted to eat figs. Not having enough money to buy any, he said to the seller, “*Give them to me and I will pay you later.*” The seller said, “*I only sell for cash.*” So Ibrāhīm ibn Adham left, saying, “*By Allāh, I will not eat any figs until the Day of Rising.*” The seller did not know that it was Ibrāhīm ibn Adham and when he was told he sent his boy after him who said, “*My master has sent these figs to you.*” Ibrāhīm ibn Adham said to him, “*By Allāh, I will not take the figs on any terms.*” The boy said, “*Master, accept this gift. If you do my master will set me free.*” The Shaykh said to him, “*That would buy your freedom in this world, but it would mean my enslavement on the Day of Rising.*”

Abū Bakr al-Shiblī said,

“*Jihād against your own selves is better than jihād against other people’s selves.*”

He used to say,

“Someone who is at home with *dhikr* (remembrance) is not the same as someone who is at home with the One who is remembered.”

He said:

“When you find your heart in accord with your self, beware of Allāh.”

*O Allāh, make us among the people who strive against their lower selves. Give us success in what You love and what pleases You, and join us to the Prophets, the true and martyrs: they are the best companions.*

