302603 - Are calamities connected to the words we say?

the question

Are calamities connected to the words we say, such as a woman saying “I do not want to get married”, but she does not mean it and is only saying that in some context or other? What should one who said such things a great deal do?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The saying “Calamities are connected to the words we say” is not a verse from the Qur’an or a hadith of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him); rather it is reported from some of the Sahaabah and Taabi‘een, and it is a saying that has been widespread among the Arabs since ancient times.

It was narrated as a marfoo‘ hadith attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), but it is not saheeh (sound).

Ibn al-Jawzi said: This hadith is not soundly narrated from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

End quote from al-Mawdoo‘aat (3/83).

Ibn Abi Shaybah narrated in al-Musannaf (13/130), via Ibraaheem an-Nakha‘i, that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ood said: Calamity is connected to one’s speech. Its isnaad was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah ad-Da‘eefah (7/395).

Al-Qaadi Abu Yoosuf narrated in al-Aathaar (p. 196), with his isnaad from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be

pleased with her), that she said: Calamity is connected to one's words.

As-Sakhkhaawi said: There is a similar meaning in the words spoken by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to the Bedouin whom he went to visit when he was sick… and al-Qaadi ibn Bahlool composed the following line of verse:

Do not speak of what you would not like to happen to you; perhaps you may utter something related to an incident and it befalls you.

End quote from al-Maqaasid al-Hasanah (p.242).

As-Sakhkhaawi was referring to a report narrated by al-Bukhaari (5338) from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) according to which the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went to visit a man who was sick, and said: "Do not worry; it is purification [from sins], in sha Allah." The man said: No; rather it is a fever that is bothering an old man so that it will take him to the graveyard. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Then yes, it is so."

Abu 'Ubayd al-Qaasim ibn Salaam said: According to some reports, calamity is connected to one's words. This is one of the commonly-spoken proverbs of the Arabs.

End quote from al-Amthaal (p. 74).

Secondly:

What is meant by the saying "Calamities are connected to the words we say" is that a man may say something, then a calamity befalls him similar to what he spoke of. This is true, and there are many religious texts, events and occurrences in the past and at present which attest to that. Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned something about that in Tuhfat al-Mawdood bi Ahkaam al-Mawlood (p. 122).

Abu'l-Khayr al-Haashimi said: "Calamities are connected to the words we say" means: Perhaps a man may say something that leads to a calamity happening.

End quote from al-Amthaal (p. 91).

Az-Zamakhshari said: It refers to a word that a man may say, which then leads to a calamity.

End quote from al-Mustaqsa fi Amthaal al-'Arab (1/305).

Thirdly:

Despite the above, this is not an unfailing general principle, such that it might be said that every time a person says such words, a calamity will befall him. That is not what was meant by the one who came up with this phrase, and reality is the best proof of the falseness of this notion.

The point of this proverb is to warn people against saying something bad, or saying something wishing ill for himself, or being pessimistic about something and reflecting that in his words, so that he will not suffer because of it. It reminds him to be selective in what he says, and to choose good words with beautiful meanings and good implications, that reflect optimism, hope and cheerfulness.

Ibn Abi'd-Dunya narrated from Ibraaheem an-Nakha'i that he said: I find myself thinking of something, and nothing prevents me from speaking of it except the fear that it might befall me and cause me suffering.

End quote from as-Samt wa Aadaab al-Lisaan (p. 169).

As for the one who has suffered (as a result of uttering such words), he should seek Allah's forgiveness for what he uttered or what he fell into, and he should think positively of the Lord of the Worlds, for He is as His slave thinks He is. He should put his trust in the Lord of the Worlds, for whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him; whatever Allah wills happens, and whatever He does not will does not happen.

See a useful article on this issue and a discussion thereon, by Dr. Haifa ar-Rasheed:

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And Allah knows best.