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١٠-٧-١٤٣٥هـ - أ. ابن حميد

## Retirement and Working for Islam

### Khutbah Topic

His Eminence Sheikh Saleh ibn Abdullah ibn Humaid –may Allah protect him– delivered this Friday khutbah entitled “**Retirement and Working for Islam**” in which he spoke about civil servants’ retirement at a certain age. He explained that the retiree is actually in a privileged position of which he should take advantage. He also added that by quitting his job, the retiree has not relinquished work altogether and is therefore not made redundant. On the contrary, he is expected to serve his religion and his community. The Sheikh equally offered advice to institutions, pointing out to the necessity of taking advantage of retirees’ efforts and previous experience in actions benefiting the whole *ummah*.

### Part One

Praise be to Allah! Praise be to Allah! Glory be to Him in His perfection. He is incomparable to any would-be analogous entity or peer! His awesome splendour is such that it resists visual perception and eschews full cognition. Greatness is His encompassing garment and grandeur is His uncontested attire. Whoever contests Him, will definitely be the loser and the uncared for. I praise Allah (May He be extolled) and thank him for His bounteous favours and prolific blessings.

I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah with no associate, a testimony of truthfulness and certitude which will salvage its utterer (from hellfire) on the day when all hidden intentions will be exposed. I also bear witness that our Master and Prophet Muhammad is the Servant and Messenger of Allah. He is endowed with divine commendation, paradisiacal basin (*hawdh*) attended by dwellers of Paradise, and the intercessor on whom is conferred the favour of interceding to expiate believers’ minor and major sins. May Allah send His *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy), Peace and Blessing upon him, his virtuous family, his remarkably pious, wise and astute Companions, the *tabi’in* (the contemporaries of the Companions of the Prophet [May Allah’s *Salat* and Peace be upon him] after his death), and upon all those who follow them in righteousness until the Day of Judgement. May Allah’s invoked *Salat* and Peace be so profuse that it will serve as extra provisions for the Resurrection Day!



Now then,

I enjoin you –O people– as well as myself to observe *taqwa* (fear of disobeying Allah). Adhere to *taqwa* –may Allah have mercy on you– for *taqwa* vis-à-vis Allah is glory without having to pay allegiance to any ancestral lineage, knowledge without strenuous effort, wealth without financial earnings, and companionship outside social bonds.

O servant of Allah! The blessing of one's lifetime depends on the performance of good deeds; remorse is the precursor of repentance; whimsical caprice is the plague of poised mind; the hardest affliction is when enemies gloat over one's grief; excessive blame breeds rancour; cordial relations are half of reason; backbiting is the weapon of the impotent, and whoever shows intent to reform his folks and other people should first start with himself: ﴿...But Sufficient is your Lord as a Guide and Helper...﴾ [Al-Furqān: 31]

O Muslims!

Life cannot be enjoyed without appreciating its sublime value, and its sublime value can never be perceived until the servant of Allah (Glory Be to Him) experiences the supremacy of the Creator and then contemplates the rationale behind creation as well as the fruit of continual activity and work. Only then could he be spared chaotic thinking leading to the loss of any sense of prioritising, distraction of the mind occasioned by accumulated worries, creeping anxiety, and pathological perplexity and bafflement.

The attempt to grasp the significance of life is part of the natural predisposition Allah Almighty has created in humans. He (May He be extolled) equipped His creatures with certain capacities, kinds of knowledge, and talents. Then, He inspired them to follow either way: guidance or misguidance. He ordained that each creature be smoothly orientated without coercion to the destination it was created for:

﴿Allâh is He Who created you in (a state of) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave (you) weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills. And it is He Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful (i.e. Able to do all things).﴾ [Al-Rūm: 54]

Human life consists of cycles and the human being's lifespan is similar to orbital stations. Man keeps going into successive orbits periodically. He experiences each stage in such a cyclical motion, performing tasks, learning lessons from its unpredictable circumstances, and inferring conclusions from its constant fluctuations. In fact, each stage of his life cycle corresponds to a set of compatible actions. Unless he manages to draw maximum benefit from it, he will miss it and fail to recover what he negligently spoiled. This is why the *hadith* insists: “***Profit from five (stages of your life) before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty,***



***your free time before your being busy, and your life before your death.” In another hadith, “Any human being’s feet will remain motionless on the Resurrection Day until he is asked about four things: His lifetime: how he spent it; his money: how he earned it and what he spent it on; his youth: how he passed it, and his knowledge: what he did with it.”***

For the poised mind, one’s lifespan stretches over a continuum ranging from birth to death, comprising the intercalary stages of infancy, youth, adulthood, and old age; all of which involve learning, knowledge, action, worship, and production. It is worth noticing in this regard the perfect wisdom of divine creation and Allah’s mysterious signs; for feeble physiological complexion is coupled with the power of reason, enervation and general decline in vitality is paired with insightfulness, and becoming a grey-haired old person is coterminous with the manifestations of wisdom. Thus, the individual is constantly productive and accountable as long as he is endowed with sound health and reason. All these meanings are synoptically phrased in Allah’s following verse (Glory Be to Him):

﴿And say (O Muhammad SAW) "Do deeds! Allâh will see your deeds, and (so will) His Messenger and the believers. And you will be brought back to the All-Knower of the unseen and the seen. Then He will inform you of what you used to do."﴾ [Al-Tawbah: 105]

This is really the precept of human lifespan in Islam, and this is the Muslims’ perspective of life.

O Muslim community!

This being said, it is to be pointed out that man in contemporary life is governed in all his professional activities by a set of regulations and systems which stipulate that most professions and positions are restricted by a given age limit and contingent upon a number of requirements including skill and expertise, in addition to the notion of a starting and terminal point of any career. All such regulations are imposed by modern life requirements and are based on a well-founded rationale, since they contribute to the ongoing societal dynamism, the estimated increase of labour force, and the pursuit of equal opportunity for competitors on the labour market.

This system seems to be plausible and realistic as it shows a certain correlation with the very stages of human life. As the proverb goes: *“If benefits had been permanently appropriated by your predecessors, they wouldn’t have reached you!”* In fact, your Muslim brother (fellow-citizen) is waiting for his own opportunity after you took yours, just like you were queuing up for your own opportunity. Thus, today’s civil servant is only tomorrow’s retiree and today’s retiree is yesterday’s civil servant. Such are life cycles in their alternation, fluctuation, transformation, and moral lessons:

﴿Did We not give you lives long enough, so that whosoever would receive admonition, - could receive it?﴾ [Fāṭir: 37]



The circumstances being so, our dear civil servants and honourable workers whose service has been terminated in due time (i.e. retirement) should not be imprisoned in the memories of their past life and their expired professional service. Nor does it stand to reason to lay the blame on others, that is, their families, employers, society, and regimes, etc. It is perhaps curious to know that the end-of-service date is normally known in advance. So, where is the element of surprise and why should they feel insecure on reaching it?

Indeed, it stands to reason that one should not show over-attachment to a given stage of one's life; on the contrary, one has to remain optimistic because the future will definitely be better –Allah willing. In addition, wise people are expected to know that happiness does not reside in their salary. Nor does it exclusively lie in their financial income or in getting any specific job. Ranking after Allah's favour of successful orientation, guidance, and devout worship, happiness literally resides in work as such –bearing in mind that work is an endless process.

Work is the dynamic principle shaping one's lifetime. It is the axis of social relationships. In addition, it reveals the value and the real status of a human being. According to this definition, work is permanent; that is to say, it never ends. It accompanies any individual during his lifetime as long as he is still alive and physically fit. Thus, the civil servant/worker may have quitted his job but has not quitted work. Besides, civil service extends over a finite period of time regulated by statutes whereas work, necessity, and competence continue as long as the individual in question is alive and endowed with the aptitude for performing other human activities.

It is actually wise to perceive retirement as a gate through which the retiree looks at the vast spheres of life previously veiled by our jobs or our daily preoccupations. Retirement represents a gate with unlimited access to a new working environment with open-ended horizons. In reality, we do have control over our time until the very last instant of our lives. Judicious people are aware that innovation, serious work, and enthusiasm have nothing to do with age, since nothing but incapacity and laziness which can prevent man from being engaged in hard work.

Retirement is then a shift, an experience, and a transformation rather than inertia and renunciation. It is instead an opportunity to release our latent energy as well as our introverted aspirations either inhibited or blurred by professional commitments. In this regard, some enthusiasts have an eloquent interpretation of the Arabic expression used when referring to retirees in our administrative system: they say "someone's professional *bond*<sup>1</sup> is terminated." On retirement, the retiree is then released from commitment or bondage, as it

<sup>1</sup> In Arabic, the expression "طَوَى قَيْدَهُ" means "end of service" or "terminated registration/enrolment in a professional or academic program"; but the term "قَيْدٌ" also means "chain, fetters, bondage..." The Sheikh is exploiting here this total homonymy: end of service as end of being fettered by professional duties.



were, to become free in larger spheres of life and fields of human activity where he is not bound by the regulations of a statutory system. Terminating the professional commitment is similar to turning a page or folding one's bedcover in order to make oneself ready for further productivity, contribution, and work, since service as such is not terminated and hard work coupled with enthusiasm represents an inexhaustible asset.

A maxim stated by experienced retirees says that each fruitless beginning has a dull ending. In fact, one's life and vitality is not totally dependent on getting a civil service position or a part-time job, for life is replete with endless opportunities in diverse fields requiring a large array of skills, but this only applies to earnest job-seekers. This is not strange because after such a long career, individuals are likely to become a genuine mine of experience and an inexhaustible source of expertise.

O dear ones! This is confirmed by the encompassing concept of worship in Islam. Allah, the Lord of Glory, said:

﴿And worship your Lord until there comes unto you the certainty (i.e. death).﴾ [Al-Hijr: 99]

In our religion, work is one of the most significant forms of worship for those whose intent is virtuous and whose deeds are commendable. Work is a means of earning one's living, gaining one's autonomy, seeking chastity, and receiving reward. It is therefore a manifestation of good deeds par excellence:

﴿Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islâmic Monotheism) verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e. Paradise in the Hereafter).﴾ [Al-Nahl: 97]

In the *hadith* narrated by Al-Hâkim Ibn Jabir –may Allah be pleased with him– the Messenger of Allah (May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him) is reported to have said: **“Shall I inform you about the best people amongst you? His Companions replied, “Do tell us, O Messenger of Allah.” He continued, “The best amongst you are those who live the longest and perform the best deeds.”** The version reported by Imam Ahmed and Al-Tirmithi and narrated by Abdullah Ibn Busr reads as follows: *‘The Messenger of Allah (May Allah's Salat and Peace be upon him) said, “The best of mankind is he who lives long and performs good deeds.”*

Life in Islam is continuous toil and strife. It is spiritual resistance and struggle (against all that is evil), sacrifice and giving. This is embodied in the *sirah* (biography) of Prophet Muhammad [May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him] and in the life style of his



Companions –May Allah Almighty be pleased with them– and of those who followed them in righteousness.

One may wonder –may Allah grant you success– whether you have ever stopped to give a moment of reflection about those selections of supplications reiterated by Muslims daily. Invoking his/her Lord, a Muslim would say: *“O Allah! Make my ending the most benevolent part of my life, and make the last of my deeds the most righteous of them!”* Such supplicating Muslim would also say: *“O Allah! Grant me a good ending in all of my affairs,”* and *“Make better my Dunya (life in this world) which is the source of my living, and make life for me an increase of all that is good!”*

All of these are supplications seeking the best of the best, the most beneficial and the most wholesome.

After all, didn't our Prophet Muhammad [May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him] himself say: ***“If the Final Hour comes while you have a palm seedling in your hands and there is a possibility to plant it before the Hour comes, you should do so.”***

Ibn Massaoud –May Allah be pleased with him– said: *“I loathe a man sitting idle having nothing to do, neither for his Herein nor for his Hereafter.”*

Therefore, O servants of Allah!

Try not to live in the past, for this is a habit not warranted by religion, reason, one's discretion or common sense. Rather, a man must seek to lead a new life and explore new opportunities. Therefore, you are called upon to nurture within you that sense of effectiveness and determination. Also, bear in mind that if you turn sad, then rest assured that nobody shall share your sadness with you. However, if you smile, life as a whole shall smile at you along with everybody else.

Brothers and sisters in faith!

It could be a blessing from Allah Almighty that we currently live in an age of technology where one can dispense with much of the manual and physical work we once used to do and where technology and automation have reached near and far in an inexhaustible spring of opportunities.

Now then, O servants of Allah!

There must be no place for idleness in a Muslim's life for he feels for his *ummah* (nation), shares with it its concerns, rejoices at its glee, grieves at its tragedies, lives on its hopes, and feels its pain. In the meantime, a Muslim is ever in pursuit of knowledge, work and worship. He is ever on the move undertaking family visits, communication, charity activities, community services, bridging gaps, promoting virtue and preventing vice, advising and guiding others, and sacrificing his own prerogatives (in the cause of Allah Almighty).



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You have obligations vis-à-vis your Lord and your own self and family. Therefore, you are called upon to see to it that each and every obligation is carried out in full. If such is the case, one may wonder then if there is at all room for retirement! Is it sensible for a Muslim to stay idle?!

I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan:

[Say (O Muhammad ): "Verily, my *Salat* (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the '*Alamin* (mankind, jinns and all that exists). 163. "He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims." [Al An'ām: 162-163]

May Allah Almighty benefit me and you with the Great Qur'ān and the Guidance of Muhammad [May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him]. I say this and ask Allah to forgive my sins, yours, and those of all the Muslims, so ask Him for forgiveness, for He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful!



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## Part Two

Praise be to Allah! Praise be to Allah, the exclusively Lofty and Great. I praise Him (May He be extolled), thank Him, and ask Him more of His bounty and blessings. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah with no associate to Him in His names, attributes, Lordship and Divinity. I also bear witness that our Master and Prophet, Muhammad, is Allah's servant and Messenger; the one who was sent to be clement with the believers and merciful towards his *ummah*. May Allah's *Salat* (Graces, Honours, Mercy), Peace and Blessing be upon him, his family, wives, and ancestors, the *tabi'in* (contemporaries of the Companions of the Prophet [May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him] after death) and those who followed them in righteousness and followed in his footsteps!

Now then, O fellow Muslims!

It is indeed the right of those honourable souls whose services have formally been terminated (because of age) to feel reassured after they have sacrificed their physical efforts, time and mental capacities and have spent their lives raising a family, running an establishment and serving a nation. They have helped illuminate their community paths of righteousness and caused to flow fountains of goodness. Such benefits must neither stop nor come to a halt on the threshold of retirement.

It is by no means an act of loyalty to turn one's back on those who have devoted their youth and hard work in the service of their *ummah* towards the twilight of their lives when they are officially called upon to retire. Indeed, those are entitled to some appreciation, acknowledgement and special consideration from the part of the community as to further prospects and possibilities where they can still make valid contributions. This is not to show ungratefulness and apathy towards them, but it is rather a gesture of good will and acknowledgement of their merits and capabilities.

By reminding us of our obligation towards our parents and of the time when they were at the peak of their giving and hard work, the Holy *Qur'an* is perhaps making reference to the overall obligation of extending loyalty to every working hand and of paying homage to every act of benevolence that has been invested in this regard:

[and say: "My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small."] [Al-Isrā': 24]

Such special and dear class of individuals is indeed entitled to recognition and honouring in return for the hard work invested in the service of the other.





Fear Allah –may Allah have mercy on you– and bear in mind that the community is never willing to do without the contributions of those individuals, their competencies and expertise. The issue is, therefore, no more than a move to reinforce legality within the labour institution by bringing to an end the services of a worker after reaching a certain age. However, the need for these people’s services, expertise, and capabilities persists and continues to manifest itself over the years. The fact that many countries and institutions tend to make recourse to experts beyond retirement age at home and abroad is but clear evidence as to the validity of such a claim.

With respect to the issue of retirement, the rationalistic *Sunnah* law was the first to pass legislation granting allowances to those unable to work, the covenanters and “the people of the *Dhimma*”<sup>2</sup>

Ask Allah to send His *Salat* (Graces, Honours and Mercy) and Peace upon, the Given Mercy and the Offered Blessing, your Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, for Allah commanded you to do so in the Book of Allah, and Allah has spoken the truth:

﴿Allâh sends His Salât (Graces, Honours, Blessings, Mercy) on the Prophet (Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم), and also His angels (ask Allâh to bless and forgive him). O you who believe! Send your Salât[1] on (ask Allâh to bless) him (Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم), and (you should) greet (salute) him with the Islâmic way of greeting (salutation i.e. As-Salâmu 'Alaikum).﴾ [Al-Aḥzâb: 56]

O Allah! Send Your *Salat* (Graces, Honours, and Mercy) and Peace upon Your servant and Messenger, our beloved Al-Mustafa (the Chosen) Prophet Muhammad [May Allah’s *Salat* and Peace be upon him], his kind virtuous family and his wives, the mothers of the believers! O Allah! Be pleased with the four Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali, all of Companions, and those who righteously follow them till the Day of Judgement. O Allah! Be also pleased with us all, along with them, by Your Pardon and Generosity, O You, the Most Generous and Bounteous of all!

O Allah! Grant glory to Islam and Muslims! O Allah! Grant glory to Islam and Muslims! O Allah! Grant glory to Islam and Muslims and fail polytheism and polytheists (who associate partners with You)! O Allah! Render unsuccessful the despots and atheists and all the enemies of faith and religion!

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<sup>2</sup> It is a historical term referring to non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state. *Dhimma* allows rights of residence in return for *jizyah* –tax collected from non-Muslims (*dhimmis*). *Dhimmis* had their rights fully protected in their communities, but as citizens in the Islamic state, had certain restrictions. They were excused from specific duties assigned to Muslims, but were otherwise equal under the laws of property, contract and obligation.



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O Allah! Grant us security in our homelands! O Allah! Grant us security in our homelands! Make good our leaders and those responsible for our affairs, and make our leadership from among those who are fearful of Allah, who guard *taqwa* (fear of Allah), and follow the path that leads to your acceptance. O You, Lord of al-'ālamīn (the worlds)!

O Allah! Grant our leader who is responsible for our affairs a success of Your own! Grant glory to him through his trust in You and obedience to You! Raise Your word high through him! Make him an asset for Islam and Muslims! Impart on him health and well-being and extend his life in Your obedience! Guide him, his deputies, his brothers and his aides to do what You love and please, and lead them to righteousness and piety!

O Allah! Help Muslim leaders to abide by Your Book and follow the *Sunnah* of Your Prophet, Mohammad [May Allah's *Salat* and Peace be upon him]! Make them a blessing on Your faithful, and unite them on the grounds of righteousness and truth! O Lord of the Worlds!

O Allah! Set right the conditions of Muslims, O Allah! Set right the conditions of Muslims, stop their bloodshed, give leadership to the best among them, unite their word on the Truth, the right guidance, and the *Sunnah*! Grant them victory over Your enemy and theirs!

O Allah! Whoever intends to do any evil against us, our religion, our homeland, our *Ummah*, our security, our leaders, our *ulamā* (religious scholars), the righteous and benevolent among us, or our unity and accord, O Allah, make him preoccupied with himself! Let his plotting boomerang, and make his destruction in his planning, O You, the Lord of the Worlds!

O Allah! Make for this *Ummah* a matter (an affair) of rationality (guidance) whereby the pious are honoured and the sinful are guided, and where virtue is promoted and vice is prevented! Verily, You are the Omniscient!

O Allah! Grant victory to our brothers and sisters! O Allah! Grant victory to our brothers and sisters in Syria! O Allah! Grant victory to our brothers and sisters in Syria, Burma and Central Africa! O Allah! Bring an end to their suffering! Grant them speedy relief and draw them closer at heart! O Allah! Grant them an aid, a fighting power and a triumph of Your own! O Allah! We beseech You to grant them great victory, relief, mercy and perseverance!

O Allah! Defeat the tyrants and oppressors in Syria and those who sympathize and side with them! O Allah! Disperse their gathering, scatter their crowds, and tear them apart! O Allah! Make their plotting boomerang!

O Allah! Destroy the usurpers among the Jews, for You are certainly able to do so! O Allah! Inflict Your wrath which is so inevitably destined to strike the people who are



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*Mujrimûn* (criminals, polytheists or sinners)! O Allah! We pray You to drive them off to their own detriment and we seek refuge in You from their evils!

O Allah! Make better our religion which is our bond, and make better our *Dunya* (life in this world) which is the source of our living, and make better our Hereafter to which we are returning, and make life for us an increase of all that is good, and death a relief from every evil. O Allah! Grant us a good ending in all of our affairs and save us from the humiliation of the worldly life and the punishment of the Hereafter!

O Allah! Make our ending the most benevolent part of our lives, the last of our deeds the most righteous of them, and the best of our days the day we meet you!

﴿Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers.﴾  
[Al-A'râf: 23] ﴿... Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire!﴾ [Al-Baqarah: 201]

Glorified be Your Lord, the Lord of Honour and Power! You are free from what they attribute unto You! May peace be upon all the messengers! And all praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!