

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih al-‘Uthaymeen

**SAYING TO THE ONE WHO SNEEZES:
“MAY ALLAH HAVE MERCY UPON YOU”¹**

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

The fifth right [from the six rights of the Muslim] is that he (the Muslim) says to the one who sneezes **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** (may Allah have mercy upon you). And this means that from the duties of a Muslim towards another Muslim is that he says to him when he sneezes **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** (may Allah have mercy upon you). And this is in accordance to the first narration that is found in both Muslim and al-Bukhārī. In a second narration that is found in Muslim, it states,

إِذَا عَطَسَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَحَمِدَ اللَّهَ فَشَمِّتُوهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَحْمِدِ اللَّهَ فَلَا تُشَمِّتُوهُ

When someone sneezes and then praises Allah, the others should respond by saying “may Allah have mercy upon you”. If, however, he does not praise Allah then they should not respond by saying “may Allah have mercy upon you”.²

And so the Prophet (ﷺ) made the reply of **“may Allah have mercy upon you”** conditional on that the person praises Allah. Therefore, if you hear a person sneeze and you hear him praise Allah then you should say **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** (may Allah have mercy upon you). And if you say to him **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** then he must respond to you by saying **يَهْدِيْكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيُصْلِحْ بِالْكُمْ** (May Allah guide you and rectify your affairs). And this is how it is narrated to us in the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ).

However, is saying to the person who sneezed **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** (may Allah have mercy upon you) an individual obligation or a communal obligation? That is, is it sufficient for just one person in a

¹ **Translation:** Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett from the Shaykh’s explanation of *Riyadh as-Saliheen*.

² Saheeh Muslim (2992).

group to respond to him with **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** or must everyone who had heard him respond to him with **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ**? The answer is that some scholars are of the view that saying **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** is a communal obligation (**فَرَضٌ كِفَايَةٌ**), and so if we were in a group and a person sneezed and then praised Allah, it would be enough for one of us to respond with **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ**. Other scholars, however, are of the view that saying **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** is an individual obligation (**فَرَضٌ عَيْنٌ**) upon everyone who hears him praise Allah because the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

إِذَا عَطَسَ أَحَدُكُمْ وَحَمِدَ اللَّهَ كَانَ حَقًّا عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ سَمِعَهُ أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ.

When one of you sneezes and praises Allah, it becomes a duty upon everyone Muslim that hears him to say to him “May Allah have mercy upon you”.³

This hadith demonstrates that it is an individual duty and thus everyone who hears him praise Allah is required to say **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** and in return he states **يَهْدِيكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيُصْلِحْ بَالَكُمْ** (May Allah guide you and rectify your affairs).

If a person does not praise Allah after he has sneezed then you should not reply by saying **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** as a demonstration of your disapproval of him not praising Allah—the Mighty and Majestic. Just as he has denied himself of praising Allah, you should also deny him from receiving this supplication, and so you should not say to him **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ**.

Should we remind him to praise Allah when he sneezes? Well that depends on whether he has neglected to say it or he just forgot to say it. So if he simply forgot to say it, you should remind him to praise Allah, but if he neglected to say it then you should not remind him. Having said that, you can remind him afterwards that when a person sneezes he should praise Allah because sneezing is from Allah and yawning is from the Shaytān. Sneezing causes a jolt of movement in the body, and this is why the person finds himself relaxed after he has sneezed.⁴

Then we have the statement that is said by some of the general masses when it is said to them **يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ** and they reply with **يَهْدِينَا وَيَهْدِيكُمْ اللَّهُ** (May Allah guide us and guide you). This is incorrect

³ Saheeh al-Bukhāri (6226).

⁴ **Translator’s note:** Ibnu Hubayrah said, “When a person sneezes then this is indicative of good physical health, a sound digestive system and good physical strength. Therefore, he should praise Allah, and this is the reason why the Prophet ordered him to praise Allah.” (*al-Aadāb ash-Shar’iyyah* 2/318)

because the person supplicated for you by saying “may Allah have mercy upon you” and so how can you reply by saying “may Allah guide us and guide you”? You supplicated for yourself before supplicating for him. If he had said to you “may Allah have mercy upon us and upon you” then you can say “May Allah guide us and guide you”. However, he said to you “may Allah have mercy upon you” just as he was commanded, so say in reply *يَهْدِيكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيُصْلِحْ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ* (May Allah guide you and rectify your affairs).

It has been mentioned that the Jews used to intentionally sneeze in front of the Prophet (ﷺ) in the hope that he (ﷺ) would say to them *يَرْحَمُكَ اللَّهُ*. And this was because they knew he (ﷺ) was a Prophet (ﷺ) and that his supplication for mercy could be of benefit to them. However, even if he did supplicate for them, it would not benefit them because supplicating for the disbelievers would be to no avail. Actually, it is impermissible to ask Allah to have mercy upon them or to forgive them after they have died, based on Allah’s statement:

مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أُولَىٰ قُرْبَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ ۝۱۱۳

It is not (proper) for the Prophet and those who believe to ask Allah's Forgiveness for the polytheists even though they be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are the dwellers of the Fire (because they died in a state of disbelief).

[At Tawbah 113]

If it is said, “But did not Ibraheem, who was upon pure monotheism, seek forgiveness for his father?” The response to this is made clear in Allah’s statement:

وَمَا كَانَ أَسْتَعْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ ۝۱۱۴

And Ibraheem's invoking (of Allah) for his father's forgiveness was only because of a promise he Ibraheem had made to him (his father). But when it became clear to him that he (his father) is an enemy to Allah, he dissociated himself from him.

[At Tawbah 114]