

Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd ibn Nuṣayr al-Ṭā'ī al-Kūfī (d. 160 or 165) narrated ḥadīth from a number of the *Tābi'in* and took *fiqh* from Imām Abū Ḥanīfa who predicted that he would devote himself entirely to worship. Ibn Ziyād al-Lu'lu'ī reported, “[Abū al-Hudhayl] Zufār [ibn al-Hudhayl al-'Anbarī] (110-158) and Dāwūd al-Ṭā'ī al-Kūfī at first were colleagues, then Dāwūd left *fiqh* for asceticism while Zufār joined between the two.”

Ibn al-Jawzī in *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* – from which is quoted all the following material – narrates that Abū Ḥanīfa said to Dāwūd: “Abū Sulaymān! As for the instrument, we have mastered it.” Dāwūd said: “What is left?” Abū Ḥanīfa said: “What is left is to put it to practice!” Dāwūd said: “When I heard this, my soul stirred me to seclusion and solitariness, but I told her: Sit with them for a year and do not raise a peep during that time.” During that year, he said, “A question would come up which made me crave to answer more than someone parched craves water, but I would not answer.” After one year, he went into seclusion.

Among Dāwūd's sayings:

“Fear Allāh and keep piety to your two parents; fast from the world and make death your breakfast; run away from people as you would from a lion, without disparaging them nor leaving their congregation.”

“Be satisfied with little from the world together with safety in Religion, just as worldly people are satisfied with the world together with corruption in their Religion.”

“Despair is the natural end of our deeds, but the hearts drag us to hope.”

“Beware lest Allāh finds you where He forbade you to be; beware lest He not find you where He ordered you to be; be ashamed of His nearness to you and His power over you.”

To a student who wished to learn archery: “Archery is fine but your days are counted; look well how you spend them.”

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Abī Dāwūd said he heard Shīdūyah ask Dāwūd: “What do you think of a man who enters upon those [‘Abbāsī] princes and commands them good and forbids them from evil?” Dāwūd said: “I fear he will be lashed.” He said: “What if he endures it?” Dāwūd: “I fear the sword for him.” He said: “What if he endures it?” Dāwūd: “I fear for him the deeply-hidden disease – vainglory (*al-'ujb*).”

Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān al-Ṣayrafī said that Dāwūd only came out of his house upon hearing the *iqāma* then, when the Imām gave *salām*, jumped up and re-entered his house. His daily diet was bread, salt, and water. One time he ate dates out of craving, after which he swore never to touch dates again. One time his maidservant cooked him a dish but he said: “Take it to So-and-so's orphans. If I eat it, it will end up in the refuse, but if they eat it, it will be stored up in the Divine presence.”

At a funeral one day, Dāwūd was heard to say: “Whoever fears the Divine threat, all that seems far looms near to him; whoever harbors endless hopes, his deeds are feeble; everything that is going to take place is actually near! Know, my brother, that everything that keeps you away from your Lord is a misfortune for you. Know that the dwellers of the graves are happy for what they sent forth and regret their useless occupations, while the dwellers of the world fight and compete with one another precisely over what the grave-dwellers regret.”

Visitors once said to one another, upon seeing him sitting on the dusty ground: “This is an ascetic (*zāhid*).” He said: “The ascetic is one who first evaluates then leaves!” When Sufyān al-Thawrī visited him with Abū Khālid al-Aḥmar the latter was miffed that Dāwūd did not so much as look at Sufyān, but Sufyān told him: “He is unconcerned by affection; did you not see his eyes? They see other than what we fiddle with.” To another visitor who offered to have the cobwebs in his ceiling swept Dāwūd said: “Do you not know that He [ﷻ] detests superfluous gazes?” After that he refused visitors and communicated from behind his door.

Dāwūd inherited from his parents or his freedwoman twenty pieces of gold which sufficed him for twenty years, after which he would sell the wood of his roof for sustenance until he lived in the last sheltered corner of his house.

Ḥammād [ibn Salama] and/or Abū Yūsuf said to him: “Dāwūd! You are satisfied with so little of this world!” He replied: “Do you know who is satisfied with much less? Those who are happy with all this world in exchange for the hereafter!”

To al-Ḥārith ibn Idrīs who asked him for counsel Dāwūd replied: “The soldiers of death await you.”

Dāwūd’s frequent prayer: “*Allāhumma!* Your care has piled cares upon me and barred my way to sleep. My desire to see You has tied me up and barred me from pleasures. I am in your jail – O Generous One – under arrest!” Then he would repeat a verse of the Qur’ān over and over. His neighbor, overhearing, said: “It would seem to me as if all the pleasures of this world were summed up in that verse.” Abū Nu’aym [al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn] said he saw an ant crawl on Dāwūd’s face lengthwise and widthwise while Dāwūd did not even feel it because of his anxiety and sorrow.

Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī said he was present at Dāwūd’s deathbed and he never witnessed a harder agony. Ḥāfṣ ibn ‘Umar al-Ju’fī said the reason for his final illness was that Dāwūd read a verse that mentioned hellfire that affected him deeply. He repeated it all night long until morning then gave up the ghost, his head resting on a clay brick.

Ibn al-Jawzī said the report that “Dāwūd al-Ṭā’ī was a silk-maker” is probably about Dāwūd ibn Abī al-Hind al-Baṣrī rather than al-Ṭā’ī, who did not have a profession. That report states that for forty years, he left his house with his luncheon which he gave away as alms, then he would go home and eat dinner with his family and they never knew that he was fasting.

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