

Mu'ādh ibn Jabal narrated:

1

I was behind the Prophet riding a donkey.

2

He said to me: “Mu'ādh, do you know what people owe to God by right, and what right is due to them from God?”

3

I said: “God and His Messenger know best”.

4

He said: “The right people owe to God is that they must worship Him associating no partners with Him,

5

and the right due to people from God is that He shall not punish whoever does not associate partners with Him”.

6

I said: “Messenger of God, may I tell people so that they will rejoice”. He said: “Do not tell them, for then they will slacken”.<sup>(1)</sup>

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2856; Muslim, 30.

### From the Qur'an

﴿For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God contrives an awesome sin indeed.﴾ (4: 48)

﴿Unbelievers indeed are those who say: 'God is the Christ, son of Mary'. The Christ himself said: 'Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord'. Whoever associates partners with God, God shall forbid him entrance into Paradise and his abode will be the Fire. Wrongdoers will have no helpers.﴾ (5: 72)

﴿Say: My prayers, my worship, my living and my dying are for God alone, the Lord of all worlds. (162) He has no partner. Thus have I been commanded, and I shall be the first of those who surrender themselves to Him.﴾ (6: 162-163)

### The Narrator

Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān Mu'ādh ibn Jabal ibn 'Amr was of the Anṣār. He was 18 years old when he embraced Islam. He attended the pledge given by the Anṣār at 'Aqabah to the Prophet (peace be upon him), when they invited him to migrate with his companions to Madinah. He was the best of the Prophet's companions in his study of what is permissible in Islam and what is forbidden. He memorized the Qur'an during the Prophet's lifetime. The Prophet appointed him Governor of Yemen. He died at the time of the epidemic known as 'the 'Amwās Plague', during 'Umar's reign. His death took place in Year 18 AH, 640 CE, when he was 38, or perhaps 34 years old.

### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that all people have a duty which they owe to God by right, namely, to worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him. He further tells us that God, Mighty and Exalted, has promised that He will not punish anyone who does not associate partners with Him. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told Mu'ādh not to spread this information so that people would not rely on it and stop doing good work.



# Message and Meaning

- 1 Mu'ādh was with the Prophet (peace be upon him) riding behind him on the same donkey.
- 2 The Prophet (peace be upon him) wanted to draw his attention so that he would learn the information he wanted to give him. He asked him whether he knew what is due to God from His creation, as an obligatory duty, and what is the right due to His servants which God has bound himself to give them.
- 3 Mu'ādh answered saying: 'God and His Messenger know best'. This is the same as saying: 'I do not know'. This answer is given when the question pertains to matters of religion. As for a question about something related to this world or to what is beyond the realm of human perception, etc. which God's Messenger might not have known, the answer should be: 'God knows best'.
- 4 The Prophet (peace be upon him) gave him the answer saying that the right owed to God, Mighty and Exalted, by His servants is their duty to address all worship to Him alone. Worship is a general name that includes all that God accepts and loves of words and deeds, done secretly and openly.<sup>(1)</sup> This is a state of humility, obedience and submission to the Worshipped One. In addition to such worship, it is obligatory that people must not associate any partner with Him to share in such worship, whether such a being is a prophet, angel, saint or devout person. No such association of partnership is admissible, however little, even though it may be only verbal. Such worship belongs by right to God alone, as He says: 'Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him'. (17: 23) 'I have not created the jinn and mankind to any end other than that they may worship Me. (56) No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. (57) God is indeed the Provider of all sustenance, the Lord of Power, the Ever-Mighty. (51- 56-58)



1 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, Vol. 10, pp. 150-149.



People's right due to them from God is something He has committed Himself to, as a gesture of His grace.<sup>(1)</sup> It is that whereby if they worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him, He will not punish them in Hell. Thus, 'whoever meets God [on the Day of Judgement] having associated no partner with Him enters Heaven, and whoever meets Him having associated partners with Him enters Hell'.<sup>(2)</sup> God says: 'Whoever associates partners with God, God shall forbid him entrance into Paradise and his abode will be the Fire. Wrongdoers will have no helpers'. (5: 72)

What this means is that a Muslim who believes in God's oneness will not be in Hell forever. If his or her good deeds are greater than their bad deeds, they are admitted into Heaven and will never be in Hell. Those who often indulge in sin and their bad deeds are preponderant will have their fate determined by God. If He so wills, He may punish such a person for any duration He determines, then send him or her to Heaven. Alternatively, He may forgive them their bad deeds and admit them into Heaven. A person who continues to associate partners with God until he dies will not be admitted into Heaven. He remains in Hell forever and ever, with no intermission in his punishment. God says: 'For a certainty, God does not forgive that partners are associated with Him. He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills. He who associates partners with God contrives an awesome sin indeed'. (4: 48)



When Mu'ādh heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) giving him this good news, he wanted to tell all the people. He first sought the Prophet's advice, but the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him not to do so. When this becomes common knowledge, some people will rely on the fact that they believe in God's oneness but will be lazy in doing what pleases God.

Other versions of this hadith show that Mu'ādh understood the Prophet's response as a recommendation so that people do not slacken in their worship. However, it does not prohibit reporting it as part of Islamic knowledge. Mu'ādh, therefore, narrated the hadith before his death, fearing that unless he did, he would be committing the sin of suppressing knowledge.

1 Al-Kurānī, *Al-Kawthar al-Jārī ilā Riyāḍ Aḥādīth al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p. 438.

2 Related by Muslim, 93.

# Implementation

1

A Muslim should not disdain to use a simple means of transport. No Muslim should disdain to sit with humble people or share a meal with them, as this would be a mark of arrogance, whether open or secret. We note in this hadith that the Prophet shared riding a donkey with Mu'adh. Needless to say, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is our role model in his humility and easy relations with all people.

2

Do not disdain to use animals which God has facilitated for man to use. Use them in an easy and moderate way. The hadith shows that the Prophet (peace be upon him) shared his mount with his companion, Mu'adh.

3

Use the Prophet's method in educating Mu'adh, asking a question of him in order to urge him to use his mind, and to ensure that he learns the answer well, and in the way the Prophet (peace be upon him) would explain to him. An advocate of Islam should choose the means and ways that motivate people to use their minds and pay close attention.

4

There is nothing shameful in having no knowledge of something, whether it pertains to matters of this world or to matters of religion. Mu'adh was the most knowledgeable of the Prophet's companions about what is lawful and what is not. He did not hesitate to say about something that he did not know it. It is wrong for a Muslim to pass an opinion on a matter of religion if he does not know it, motivated by a sense of conceit or shamefulness. God says: 'Mankind, eat of what is lawful and wholesome on earth and do not follow Satan's footsteps: he is indeed an open enemy for you. (168) He enjoins you only to commit evil and indecency and to attribute to God something of which you have no knowledge'. (2: 168-169) 'Do not say – for any false thing you may utter with your tongues – that "This is lawful and this is forbidden", so as to attribute your lying inventions to God. Indeed those who attribute their lying inventions to God will never be successful. (116) Brief is their enjoyment [of this life], and grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come].' (16: 116-117)

5

Every right you demand or others demand from you is inferior to another right, namely, God's right, which is greater and more plentiful than every favour and blessing He has done you. Remember Him always and let your life be a pursuit of what pleases Him: 'Say: My prayers, my worship, my living and my dying are for God alone, the Lord of all worlds. (162) He has no partner. Thus have I been commanded, and I shall be the first of those who surrender themselves to Him'. (6: 162-163)

6

God wants you to not associate partners with Him; none whatsoever. People can make sure of refraining from the obvious forms of associating partners with God [i.e. *shirk*], such as the worship of idols, appealing to stars for help, or seeking support by some subtle forces, etc. A Muslim must also refrain from all minor and subtle forms of such association of partners, or *shirk*, such as swearing by anyone other than God, not even by the Prophet (peace be upon him), or seeking to prevent the evil eye by wearing some beads, etc. Such subtle *shirk* may

even be in the form of seeking good reputation through demonstrating one's devotion or prayer, etc. In a sacred [i.e. *qudsī*] hadith, the Prophet quotes God as saying: 'I am the least in need of partners. Whoever does something in which he associates a partner with Me, I abandon him to his associate'.<sup>(1)</sup>

7

Watch what you entertain in your heart and mind and resist every aspect of associating partners with God that may creep in. If you do, you stand to receive much that is good. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'On the Day of Judgement, God will select a man from my community and place him before all creation. He will spread before him ninety-nine records [of sinful actions], each of which is as long as eyes can see. He will then ask him: "Do you deny any of these? Have my recording angels been unfair to you?" He will say: "No, my Lord". God will ask him: "Do you have any excuse?" He will say: "No, my Lord". God will say: "This is untrue. You have a good deed kept with us. You shall suffer no injustice today". A card will then be produced in which is written: "I bear witness that there is no deity other than God; and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's servant and Messenger". God will say to the man: "Attend the process of weighing". He will say: "My Lord, what will this card weigh against all these records?" God will say: "You shall suffer no injustice". The card will be placed on one scale and the records on the other. The records will be of very little weight while the card will be heavy. Nothing will be heavier in weight against God's name'.<sup>(2)</sup>

8

Hadiths that speak of relaxation of duties should not be widely circulated, because some people will misunderstand them. Mu'ādh heard this hadith from the Prophet, but it served to motivate him to increase his diligence in doing what pleases God and he became even more God-fearing. Anyone who does not have a similar understanding might slacken.<sup>(3)</sup> This is similar to what Ibn Mas'ūd said: 'If you say to people something they cannot comprehend, then some of them will be misguided'.



1 Related by Muslim, 2985.

2 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2639; Ibn Mājah, 4300.

3 Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, Vol. 11, p. 340.



