

Abu Hurayrah narrated, saying:

- 1 God's Messenger (peace be upon him) addressed us and said: 'God has made the hajj obligatory to you, people, so perform the hajj'.
- 2 A man said: "Every year, Messenger of God?" The Prophet remained silent while the man repeated his question three times.
- 3 God's Messenger said: 'Had I said, "Yes", it would be a duty and you would not be able to fulfil it'.
- 4 He then added: 'When I leave out something, let it be.
- 5 People before you were ruined by asking too many questions and by their disobedience of their prophets.
- 6 When I give you an order, fulfil it as best you can, and if I prohibit you something, abandon it'.<sup>(1)</sup>

1 Related by Muslim, 1337.

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿Perform to their completion both the pilgrimage and the 'umrah purely for God's sake.﴾ (2: 196)
- ﴿Pilgrimage to this House is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it. As for those who disbelieve, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds.﴾ (3: 97)
- ﴿Believers, do not ask about matters which, if made known to you, may cause you hardship. If you should ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they shall be made plain to you. God will forgive you these; for God is much-forgiving, clement. (101) People before your time inquired about them, and on that account they came to deny the truth.﴾ (5: 101-102)
- ﴿It is He who has chosen you, and has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion.﴾ (22: 78)
- ﴿Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it. Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution.﴾ (59: 7)
- ﴿Therefore, remain God-fearing as best as you can.﴾ (64: 16)

#### The Narrator

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī al-Azdī of Yemen was better known by his appellation, Abu Hurayrah. This is what is best known about his name and his father's name. He embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He remained close to the Prophet, eager to learn, and he accompanied the Prophet wherever he went. He was one of the best memorizers of the Prophet's companions and the one who narrated the largest number of hadiths. Al-Bukhari mentioned that more than eight hundred companions of the Prophet or those who belonged to the *tābi'in* generation narrated hadiths from him. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him as Governor of Bahrain. Later he returned to Madinah and devoted his time to narrating the Prophet's hadiths and educating people about their faith. He died in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) informed his companions that pilgrimage is a duty incumbent on them. One of them asked whether the hajj was a duty to be performed every year? The Prophet did not answer him. So the man repeated his question three times, getting no answer from the Prophet. Then the Prophet told them that they should learn what he tells them and that they should not ask too many questions that may make things harder for them. He further told them that this was the cause that earlier communities were ruined.



# Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) delivered a speech and told his companions that God, Mighty and Exalted, commands them to perform the pilgrimage to His sacred house, the Ka'bah, in Makkah, thus confirming the Qur'anic verse: 'Pilgrimage to this House is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it. As for those who disbelieve, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds.' (3: 97) Thus, they must obey and fulfil their obligation.

Hajj means taking the journey to the Ka'bah at certain times, to perform certain rituals with the intention of obeying God and doing His bidding.

2

One of his companions, al-Aqra' ibn Hābis, asked the Prophet whether the hajj should be done every year. He did not understand whether God's order to perform the pilgrimage meant once only or that it must be repeated time after time.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not answer the man when he put his question twice implying that such a question should not be asked. The Prophet was sent to deliver God's message complete and to explain it fully. He would not withhold any information the Muslim community may need. Had the hajj been a duty to be performed several times, he would have made that clear. To put such a question to the Prophet is rather presumptive, and God orders Muslims not to behave presumptuously when speaking to the Prophet (peace be upon him). He says: 'Believers! Do not behave presumptuously in the presence of God and His Messenger. Have fear of God: God hears all and knows all'. (49: 1)

3

When the man continued to ask his question after the Prophet remained silent twice, the Prophet told him that his silence reflected his compassion for the believers. Had the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that the hajj was to be performed every year, it would have become a duty for all Muslims, one that would have been much too difficult for them.

4

The Prophet then told his companions that it is not permissible for them to persist with their questions about what is given to them in general or restricted terms. When they receive an order, they should do what that order signifies. Thus, an order to give charity or to perform hajj, etc. should be taken at face value. Whatever meets the meaning of that order is sufficient. Thus, a small amount given in charity fulfils the order to give *ṣadaqah*, and performing the hajj once is sufficient because this is what the wording of the command signifies. Indeed, the wording also admits the meaning of repeated performance, but this is to be ignored.

This explains that the original status of all matters is permissibility. No ruling may be given except as God's law states. Whatever is not referred to in God's law retains its original status.

5

The Prophet (peace be upon him) explains this stating that earlier communities were ruined because of asking their prophets too many questions about what was not given to them in detail. Asking many questions indicates lack of conviction. All prophets were commanded to explain to people what benefits them in their present life and in the life to come. They may not remain silent when there is need for explanation. Hence, it is not right for people to precipitate things and ask questions. Good behaviour requires them to listen and to benefit by what is not mentioned.

Moreover, when earlier communities persisted with their questioning, God made things harder for them. Because their duties became hard, they stopped doing them and, thus, they deserved God's

punishment. Therefore, God ordered Muslims not to ask such questions and warned against their outcome. He says: 'Believers, do not ask about matters which, if made known to you, may cause you hardship. If you should ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they shall be made plain to you. God will forgive you these; for God is much-forgiving, clement. (101) People before your time inquired about them, and on that account they came to deny the truth'. (5: 101-102)

One such example is that some of the Children of Israel requested their prophet to appoint them a leader so that they would fight for God's cause under his command. When such fighting became a duty for them, they turned away, unwilling to comply. It is concerning those people that God says: 'Are you not aware of those elders of the Children of Israel, after the time of Moses, when they said to one of their prophets, 'Appoint for us a king, and we shall fight for the cause of God'. He said, 'Would you, perchance, refuse to fight if fighting is ordained for you?' They said, 'Why should we not fight for the cause of God when we have been driven out of our homes and our families?'<sup>(1)</sup> Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they turned back, save for a few of them. God is fully aware of the wrongdoers'. (2: 246)

Another case was that when Prophet Moses ordered the Children of Israel to slaughter a cow. They kept asking about its description, and with every question, God added to the restrictions. Had they initially slaughtered any cow, it would have been sufficient.

Therefore, the Prophet told his companions not to ask unnecessary questions. Anas ibn Mālik reports: 'We were warned against asking God's Messenger (peace be upon him) about anything. We, therefore, loved that a sagacious person from the desert people should come and ask him while we listened'.<sup>(2)</sup> This concession given to the desert people was due to the fact that they were not aware of many things, because Islamic orders were not transmitted to them regularly. Their situation was different from the Prophet's companions who were with him in Madinah.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'A Muslim who does Muslims the worst injury is one who asks about something that has not been forbidden for them, and it was then forbidden to them because of his asking'.<sup>(3)</sup>



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then points out what a Muslim should do. When a Muslim receives an order, he should do it as well as he can. Every Muslim is commanded to offer his prayers, in the form, conditions, essentials and recommended aspects which are well known. If a person is physically unable to perform his prayer as it should be, he does it as he can manage. If he cannot pray standing up, he prays seated, or reclining. If he cannot do his ablution fully, he does of it what he can. This is in line with the Qur'anic order: 'Remain God-fearing as best as you can'. (64: 16)

When Muslims receive an order of prohibition, they refrain from what is prohibited altogether. It is not possible to implement a prohibition if one does some aspects of what is prohibited. For example, an order prohibiting intoxicating drinks cannot be partially implemented, with people stopping drinking some intoxicants but not others. They must refrain from every drink that intoxicates. Hence, God says: 'Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it'. (59: 7)

1 Literally: 'when we have been driven out of homes and our sons', but it is not unusual in Arabic to refer to one's family as one's children.

2 Related by Muslim, 12.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 7289; Muslim, 2358.

# Implementation

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) uses the simplest style in explaining Islamic rulings. He said: 'God has made the hajj obligatory to you, people, so perform the hajj'. A mufti or a scholar should be very clear in putting the Islamic ruling in the clearest form so that what he says is fully and clearly understood.

2

The hadith makes clear that hajj is one of the duties God has made obligatory for His servants. Every Muslim should try to perform it early before he is prevented from doing so by unforeseen impediments.

3

It is permissible for a scholar or an advocate of Islam to remain silent when asked a particular question, if his silence is meant as an indication that the question should not be asked.

4

If the questioner does not understand the scholar's silence as meaning that the question is improper, the scholar should explain the Islamic ruling and tell him not to ask such questions.

5

Muslims should reflect on the Prophet's compassion for his community and how he was keen for their welfare. For example, he did not answer certain questions so that they were not encumbered with heavy duties. He did not come out for night worship during Ramadan, fearing that it might become obligatory. For the same reason, he told his companions not to ask about what is not mentioned in a text. When they reflected on his attitude, they were bound to love him more and appreciate his compassion.

6

One must not try to discuss what is not addressed, so as to find a religious ruling for it. Whatever is not addressed by a text and has no case of analogy is considered permissible according to the original ruling of all things.

7

During the Prophet's lifetime, Muslims were ordered not to ask about things so that these may not become forbidden as a result, which would cause them some hardship. As for us now, it is not permissible to do something without enquiring whether it is permissible or not. We must learn matters of religion and get to know what is permissible and what is forbidden so that we do the former and refrain from the latter.

8

Questions that are not acceptable now are those that bring no benefit, or those which lead to negative results or confusion, such as questions about the form and shape of God's attributes and actions, and speaking without knowledge about His names and attributes.

9

It is preferable that an advocate of Islam should explain the reasons for Islamic commandments and prohibitions, if it is easy for him to do so. Such explanation makes it easier for his addressees to implement such orders.

10

The hadith shows that God's servants should fulfil what they are ordered according to their ability. A poor person is not required to give charity, or *ṣadaqah*. A sick person or a traveller need not fast, but may fast later in compensation. A person who does not meet the condition of ability is not required to perform the hajj. What applies to all Muslims is to do what they can in regard to all obligations and duties.

11

Abandoning sinful action takes priority over the fulfilment of duties. We should remember that orders are subject to ability, while prohibitions must be refrained from. Indeed, we must steer away from prohibitions and everything that leads to them.

12

Refraining from sinful actions is not complete unless a Muslim refrains from all aspects of that sin. The prohibition of associating partners with God, i.e. *shirk*, means by implication the prohibition of its means that may not be considered as clear cases of *shirk*, such as swearing by something other than God without considering it superior, or saying 'whatever God and so-and-so will'. All such preliminaries of *shirk* are also prohibited.



