

Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

1

You shall follow the ways of those who were before you,

2

inch by inch, cubit by cubit.

3

Even if they go into a lizard's hole, you will follow their suit.

4

We said: "Messenger of God, the Jews and Christians?' He said: 'Who else?'"<sup>(1)</sup>

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿Guide us on the straight path, (6) The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray.﴾ (1: 6-7)
- ﴿Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of God and the truth that has been bestowed from on high, and not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time? Many of these are now transgressors!﴾ (57: 16)

#### The Narrator

Abu Sa'īd Sa'd ibn Mālik ibn Sinān al-Anṣārī belonged to the Khazraj tribe and to Madinah, and is known as al-Khudrī. He took part in the Encounter of the Moat and joined God's Messenger on another twelve military expeditions. He also took part in the pledge given to the Prophet under the tree. He narrated a large number of hadiths, and was a distinguished scholar, known for his wisdom. He issued fatwas. He died in Year 74 AH, 694 CE.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) says that his community will follow in the footsteps of earlier communities, the Jews and Christians. They will invent practices that are unacceptable from the religious perspective and will commit sinful actions. Thus, they will blindly imitate them.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3456; Muslim, 2669.



# Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) states that his community will blindly follow the same pattern as earlier communities, inventing some deviant religious practices and committing sinful actions. This certainly took place after he had passed away. Many people resort to sham excuses to evade their obligations, take usury, imitate others in their clothing and slogans, punish the weak for their offences while letting the rich and powerful get away with their behaviour, etc. Some even worship deceased people, considering them devout and saintly, instead of addressing worship purely to God alone.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) says that this blind following shall be 'inch by inch, cubit by cubit'. He emphasizes that some Muslims will imitate unbelievers in everything. He says: 'My community will suffer the same deviation from the right path as the Children of Israel did, step by step; even if there were among them some who commit incest publicly with their mothers, there will be in my community some who will do the same'.<sup>(1)</sup> What is emphasized here is following their sinful practices, not going as far as disbelief in God or associating partners with Him.

The fact that the Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us about this does not signify approval of it. It is, in fact, a warning against following their example. Indeed, the Prophet orders us in several hadiths to stick to our way, in opposition to them.



1 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2641.

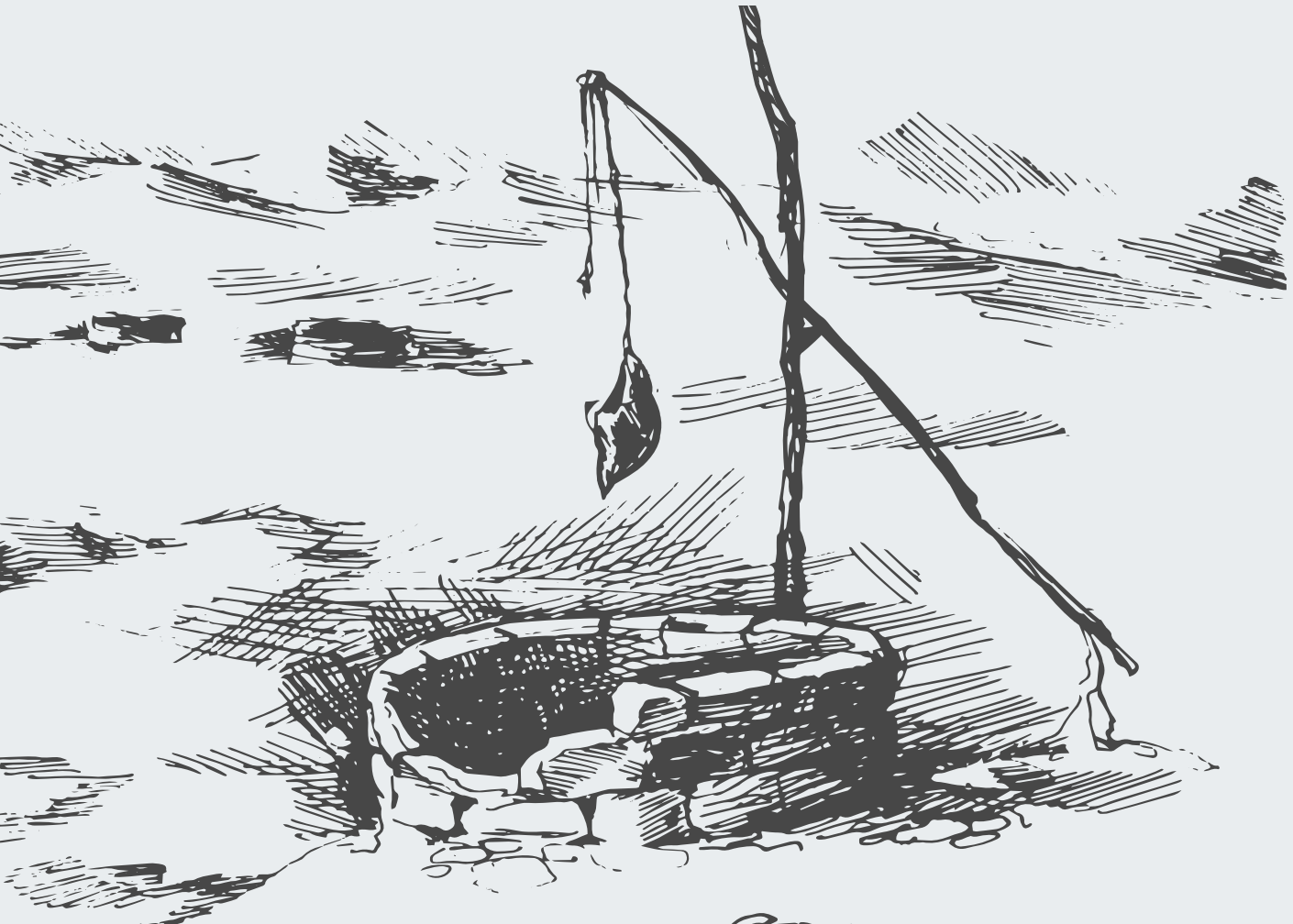
3

The Prophet (peace be upon him) then gives us a simile illustrating this blind following of earlier communities. He says that were they to enter a lizard's hole, many Muslims would do the same. The Prophet mentions a lizard's hole because it is narrow and foul smelling. Thus, if they were to enter a tight, uncomfortable and foul-smelling place, some Muslims would do the same. This is actually happening with some Muslims imitating unbelievers in their sinful ways and foul deeds which no sound mind could ever approve of.

4

The Prophet's companions asked him whether he meant the Jews and Christians, feeling that it would be especially strange for Muslims to follow the ways of the Jews and Christians who had gone too far in error, when they had God's guidance clear and simple. The Prophet confirms that he meant these and none else.

This information given by the Prophet is general, but applies to some people only. Not all Muslims will follow the ways of earlier deviant communities. Many of them will hold on to the right way and remain God-fearing. What the Prophet meant is that there will be within the Muslim community some who will follow in the footsteps of earlier communities.



# Implementation

1

Addressing his companions, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘You shall follow the ways of those who were before you’. Yet his companions were the farthest of people from following the Jews or Christians. This occurred more in later generations. However, the Prophet’s statement points to the unity of the Muslim community and urges that Muslims should always cooperate in following the truth.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) uses similes and figures of speech to get his meaning across to his audience. This is very useful in illustrating meanings, and it should be used by scholars and advocates of Islam.

3

The Prophet preferred not to mention the unbelievers and transgressors, referring to them only as ‘those before you’. It is, therefore, preferable not to mention them by name except when there is need, as this may be useful when mentioning some of their history by way of admonition.

4

It is important not to follow non-Muslims in their way of life and what they eat and dress, let alone their religious habits and rituals. Muslims should endeavour to follow their own distinctive line.

5

This hadith and similar ones should strengthen our belief, as it serves as confirmation of the Prophet’s status. What the Prophet warned against has actually happened with Muslims following unbelievers in matters of lifestyle and religion. This should strengthen our belief in God and His Messenger.

6

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warns us against following the ways of earlier communities. Such warning aims to support, increase and confirm the group that continues to adhere to the truth and will receive God’s support. It strengthens their determination to adhere to their faith. We should always aim to be in this group that adheres to the truth.

7

The hadith refers to the evil consequences of imitating others. Indeed, Muslims suffered a great deal through imitating others. Whole generations lost their true identity and went far adrift into error.

8

The metaphor referring to entering a lizard’s hole indicates that some of the unbelievers’ deeds are contrary to sound human nature and good reasoning. Yet some Muslims imitate them. All praise is due to God for giving us the blessings of reason and faith.

9

The Qur’an and the Sunnah make clear that there will always remain a group within the Muslim community that will continue to follow the truth and uphold it until the end of human life. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: ‘There will always remain a group of my community holding on to the truth, unperturbed by those who let them down. They will remain thus until God’s

decreed is done'.<sup>(1)</sup> The Prophet also mentions that God will always bring up some Muslims who will maintain the way of obeying Him,<sup>(2)</sup> and that these will never be in agreement on an error.<sup>(3)</sup> Every Muslim should be keen to join this group.



The Prophet's companions found it extremely strange that Muslims should follow the footsteps of Jews and Christians, after their errors had become manifest. There is no doubt that whoever imitates them goes farther in error, despite the fact that the way of truth is made very clear.



1 Related by Muslim, 4988.

2 Related by Ahmad, 17787; al-Bukhari in *al-Tarikh al-Kabir*, Vol. 9, p. 61.

3 Related by Ahmad, 27224; al-Tirmidhi, 2167.

