

'Ā'ishah; she said that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:



Whoever introduces into this matter of ours something that does not belong to it will have it rejected.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿ Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way. All this He has enjoined upon you so that you may remain God-fearing. ﴾ (6: 153)
- ﴿ As for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects, you certainly have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with God. In time He will tell them the truth of what they were doing. ﴾ (6: 159)
- ﴿ Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?' ﴾ (10: 59)
- ﴿ Do they believe in alleged partners [of God] who ordain for them things which God has not sanctioned? ﴾ (42: 21)

#### The Narrator

Mother of the Believers, 'Ā'ishah bint Abu Bakr 'Abdullāh ibn Abu Quhāfah 'Uthmān ibn 'Āmir. She belonged to the Taym branch of the tribe of Quraysh. She was pure and her innocence was revealed from on high. She was the Prophet's beloved wife and was the leading scholar of the Muslim nation. She was the only one of the Prophet's wives who was a virgin on her marriage. All his other wives had previous marriages. He loved her more than any other woman. No other woman in the Muslim nation, or indeed among all women achieved a higher status as a scholar. According to authentic reports, she died in Madinah in Year 57 AH, 677 CE, aged 66.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us in this hadith that acceptable worship is that which conforms to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Whoever introduces something into Islam which is alien to it will have it rejected. It earns no reward. On the contrary, it incurs a sin.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2697; Muslim, 1718.



# Message and Meaning

This hadith is one of the most important hadiths as it serves as a basis for many rulings and essential rules of Islamic law. Imam Ahmad said: 'The fundamentals of Islam are based on three hadiths: 1) 'Actions are by intentions'; 2) 'Whoever introduces into this matter of ours something that does not belong to it will have it rejected'; and 3) 'What is lawful is plain and what is unlawful is plain'.

In this hadith the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that following divine guidance is a condition for the acceptance of religious deeds. Whoever invents something new, without basis in the Islamic faith and the Prophet's Sunnah, will find his invention rejected, earning no reward. Indeed, it may even incur a punishment for being contrary to the Prophet's guidance.

Deviation is the introduction of a new matter which does not rely on a proper religious basis. This may be a matter of belief, such as negating *qadar*, i.e. the divine decree, or believing that a dead person can bring benefit to someone. Alternatively, it may be an action, which means offering worship in a way that is not a part of Islamic worship, such as celebrating the Prophet's birthday, or using phrases of worship that have no basis in the Qur'an or the Prophet's Sunnah, or devoting certain nights for worship such as the middle night of the month of Sha'bān. All such matters are due to ignorance, following personal desire, imitating non-Muslims and giving priority to one's own reasoning above religious rules.

God, Mighty and Exalted, has warned against the pursuit of desire and following deviant ways. He says: 'Do not follow the example of those who became divided and fell into conflict with one another after clear proofs had come to them. For these there will be grievous suffering'. (3: 105) Qatādah said: 'The ones who became divided and fell into conflict are those who follow deviant ways'. Ibn 'Abbās said that on the Day of Judgement 'the faces of the people who follow the Sunnah will be bright while the faces of those who follow deviant ways will be dark'.

God berates the idolaters for making things lawful or unlawful without His permission. He says: 'Say: Do but consider all the means of sustenance that God has bestowed on you! Some of it you then made unlawful, and some lawful'. Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?' (10: 59)

At the beginning of his speeches, the Prophet used to say: 'the best of discourse is God's Book, and the best guidance is Muhammad's. The worst of matters are new inventions, and every deviation is errant'.<sup>(1)</sup> He urged his companions in the following terms: 'Adhere to my Sunnah and that of my rightly-guided successors. Hold on firmly to it. Beware of new inventions, for every such invention is a deviation and every deviation is errant'.<sup>(2)</sup>

1 Related by Muslim, 867.

2 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 4607; al-Tirmidhī, 2676; Ibn Mājah, 42.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against inventions in religion because this was the cause of the destruction of earlier communities. Moreover, the Jews and Christians altered their faiths, claiming that Ezra or Christ were sons of God. They also claimed that they are God's beloved children. They distorted their scriptures, the Torah and the Gospel, and stopped the implementation of mandatory punishments. They set their own reason against their religious laws.

This hadith refutes the argument of those who claim that some inventions are good. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has ruled that every invented practice in religion is rejected. This includes all invented practices. Some people cite the case of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he arranged for people who were offering the Tarāwīḥ Prayer during Ramadan to form one congregation and appointed Ubay ibn Ka'b to lead the prayer.<sup>(1)</sup> He then commented: 'How good is this *bid'ah*!' He used the word *bid'ah* in its linguistic sense, which refers to every new thing, whether it relies on some religious basis or not. In this linguistic sense, doing something new is not a religious deviation. What 'Umar did was not an act of deviation. The Prophet (peace be upon him) led such prayer with a congregation for a few days, then he feared that it might become obligatory on Muslims. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed away, and no new revelation was to be given, what the Prophet feared no longer applied. Therefore, 'Umar's action in effect followed the Prophet's practice and Sunnah.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Prophet (peace be upon him) made his address specific, relating to 'this matter of ours', meaning the religion of Islam. Thus, invention and innovation in matters of this present life is neither wrong nor restricted. Indeed, many inventions are useful and contribute to life's progress. As such, this type of invention is to be encouraged.



1 The hadith narrating this is related by al-Bukhari, 2010.

2 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol. 2, p. 128.

# Implementation

1

This hadith sets out an highly important and fundamental principle of the Islamic faith. It serves like a standard for the evaluation of man's actions as they appear on the surface. Likewise, the hadith that says, 'Actions are but by intention', is a standard for the evaluation of actions in essence. Every religious deed that is not intended for God's sake earns no reward. Likewise, every deed that is inconsistent with what God and His Messenger have established is rejected. Whatever is introduced into the religion of Islam remains alien to it unless it is sanctioned by God and His Messenger. Therefore, every Muslim should implement these two hadiths in evaluating his actions. He checks whether they are consistent with Islamic law and are intended for God's sake.

2

The hadith refers to the principle that all people's deeds must be consistent with the Islamic code of law. They are subject to the Islamic rulings of approval and prohibition. Any action that is consistent with Islamic law is accepted and whatever is not is rejected.

3

A Muslim must not judge Islamic rulings by his own reasoning. No one may permit what Islam prohibits or forbid what Islam makes lawful as he thinks fit. Islamic law is derived from God's Book, the Qur'an, and the Prophet's Sunnah.

4

To uphold the Sunnah is a great act which earns a Muslim his own reward and the equivalent of the reward of all those who follow his example in practising it. By contrast, an introduction of an unwarranted action in religion and calling on people to practise it is a very grave sin to which is added the burden of everyone who heeds such introduction and acts on it. Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever advocates right guidance earns the same reward as the reward of those who follow him, without diminishing their reward in any way; and whoever advocates error bears the same burden as the burdens of those who follow him, without diminishing their burdens in any way'.<sup>(1)</sup>

5

Al-Fuḍayl commented on the Qur'anic verse that says: '[God] has created death as well as life, so that He may put you to a test to show who of you is best in conduct'. (67: 2) He said: 'The best of conduct is the most sincere and most right. An action which is sincere but not right is unacceptable. Similarly, right but insincere action is unacceptable. To be accepted, action must be right and sincere. A sincere action is that which is done for God's sake, and right action is what follows the Sunnah'.<sup>(2)</sup>

6

Every question that relates to religion has a basis in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and a ruling is deduced for it through analogy. Therefore, reference to Islamic scholars is necessary to avoid deviation in matters of religion. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'Be followers, not deviators. You have been spared that. Every invented thing in religion is a deviation, and every deviation is errant'.<sup>(3)</sup>

1 Related by Muslim, 2674.

2 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Hikam*, Vol. 1, pp. 72-71.

3 Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, Vol. 4, p. 115.

7

Muslims of the early generations were very keen to follow the example of the Prophet and his companions. Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaī said: 'If I learn that in doing the ablution, i.e. *wudu*, the Prophet's companions did not exceed a finger nail, I would not exceed it. It is burden enough for anyone that their work is at variance with the work of their Prophet's companions'.<sup>(1)</sup>

8

'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said: 'Stop where they stopped; say the same as they said; and remain silent as they did. They stopped where their knowledge suggested, and refrained as their critical view indicated. They were better qualified to determine what was right, and more eager to ensure what was best for them'.<sup>(2)</sup>

9

The only way to remain safe from temptations and trials is to adhere to God's Book and the Prophet's Sunnah. Whoever holds on to God's Book, will find it sufficient as his guide and protection. The Prophet's Sunnah provides light along the way when the darkness of trials becomes very confusing. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'After I am gone, you shall witness great controversy. Therefore, adhere to my Sunnah and that of my rightly-guided successors. Hold on firmly to it. Beware of new inventions, for every such invention is a deviation and every deviation is errant'.<sup>(3)</sup>



1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 4607; al-Tirmidhī, 2676; Ibn Mājah, 42.

