

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ narrated that he heard God's Messenger (peace be upon him) say:

1

If a judge looks carefully into a dispute and returns a judgement, then if his judgement is right, he earns double reward.

2

If he looks carefully into it and returns a wrong judgement, he earns a single reward.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 7352; Muslim, 1716.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿If any matter pertaining to peace or war comes to their knowledge, they make it known to all and sundry; whereas, if they would only refer it to the Messenger and to those from among them entrusted with authority, those of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would know it.﴾ (4: 83)
- ﴿No blame shall be attached to the weak, the sick or those who do not have the means, if they are sincere towards God and His Messenger. There is no cause to reproach those who do good. God is much-forgiving, ever-merciful.﴾ (9: 91)
- ﴿And remember David and Solomon, when both gave judgement concerning the field into which some people's sheep had strayed and grazed by night. We were witness to their judgement. (78) We gave Solomon insight into the case. Yet We gave sound judgement and knowledge to both of them.﴾ (21: 78-79)

The Narrator

Abu 'Abdullāh 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ ibn Wā'il of the Sahm branch of the Quraysh tribe was one of the most intelligent and clever of Arabs. Prior to embracing Islam, the Quraysh sent him as an envoy to King Negus, requesting him to extradite the Muslim migrants who sought refuge in Abyssinia. He embraced Islam in Year 7 AH, 629 CE, and it is reported that he adopted Islam when he was visiting King Negus. He migrated to Madinah to join the Prophet (peace be upon him) who made him commander of the military expedition known as Dhāt al-Salāsīl. 'Umar appointed him commander of the army which conquered Egypt. He died in Year 43 AH, 664 CE.

Summary

This hadith states that a person who is returning a ruling, including a ruler, judge, *mufti*, etc. will be rewarded for exerting his best effort to arrive at the right ruling. If his ruling is correct, he is rewarded for being correct as well as for his effort, which means that he has a double reward. If he is mistaken, having exerted his best effort, he will be given the reward for so doing.



Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) encourages everyone who is in a position to give a ruling to exert their best efforts (i.e. *ijtihād*) to examine evidence and make the right judgement.⁽¹⁾ This applies to everyone who has scholarly authority, such as a mufti or a teacher, or a practical authority, such as a ruler, judge or father. If such a person has the tools and means to arrive at the right ruling,⁽²⁾ endeavours to do so and returns the right ruling, which is consistent with God's judgement on that particular case, he is given double reward by God: one reward for exerting effort, and one for being right.⁽³⁾

2

On the other hand, if such a person exerts his best effort in trying to establish the truth and determine God's judgement on a particular question, but gets it wrong, he remains blameless. In fact, he is granted the reward for exerting his effort, but his error is pardoned.⁽⁴⁾

The best example is that stated in the Qur'an concerning the judgements given by Prophets David and Solomon (peace be upon both of them). A farmer complained to David that a flock of sheep destroyed his produce. Prophet David ruled that the farmer take the sheep in punishment for the produce they destroyed. Prophet Solomon said that the right ruling was different. The sheep owner should take the farm and manage it until it was back in production and in the meantime the farmer should take the sheep and benefit by them until his farm was back at the same stage of production. God says in the Qur'an: 'And remember David and Solomon, when both gave judgement concerning the field into which some people's sheep had strayed and grazed by night. We were witness to their judgement. (78) We gave Solomon insight into the case. Yet We gave sound judgement and knowledge to both of them'. (21: 78-79) God states that Solomon was right, but He commends both David and Solomon.

Such honourable status applies only to one who is qualified to give a judgement. If an ignorant and unqualified person audaciously gives a judgement, he is guilty of disobeying God and receives no reward, even if his judgement is the right one, because his judgement is not based on a religious basis. An unqualified person giving a judgement is a sinner, whether his judgement is right or wrong.⁽⁵⁾ A hadith quotes the Prophet: 'There are three types of judges: one will be in Heaven and two in Hell. A judge who arrives at the truth and judges accordingly is in Heaven. A judge who arrives at the truth and judges differently is in Hell, and a judge who judges in ignorance is in Hell'.⁽⁶⁾

1 Al-Şan'ānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Şaghīr*, Vol. 2, p. 25.

2 Al-Ṭībī, *Al-Kāshif 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Sunan*, Vol. 8, p. 2594.

3 Al-Qaşṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī*, Vol. 10, p. 343.

4 Al-Şan'ānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Şaghīr*, Vol. 2, p. 25.

5 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Şaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 12, pp. 14-13. (Volume 10 in the English version still to be published.)

6 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 3573; al-Tirmidhī, 1322.

Implementation



Muslims should make every effort to acquire the tools of *ijtihād*, such as studying, careful examination and the like. Whoever is in a position to make a judgement should acquire such tools before passing any ruling, and indeed before looking at a case in order to arrive at a judgement. A person who exerts an effort to make a judgement without working hard to acquire the tools of *ijtihād* is not truly qualified to exercise *ijtihād*.



One type of effort that Muslims should exert is to refer to and ask expert scholars. If a person does not have all the tools of *ijtihād* at his disposal, he should ask the experts in every relevant kind of specialization.



Whoever finds himself in a position to make a judgement should exert their best effort to arrive at the right ruling, and be happy that they will receive God's reward. No one should neglect responsibility out of laziness or in anger. Every person may find themselves ruling over some issue: a father may be judging between his children; a teacher between his students; a *mufti* to his enquirer; a judge; a ruler; a chief of workers; a treasurer in trust of people's dues, etc.



Muslims should not, however, hesitate to undertake tasks, fearing to make errors. Islam gives us all the strength and courage to undertake responsibility and gain experience. It absolves us of blame when we exercise our best efforts.



The truth is one. Seek it with diligence. Muslims should be careful not to be tricked by looking at relativities which may lead to an obscuring of the truth.



We should be careful not to assume that everyone who differs with us is in error or unfair. That person might have exerted his best efforts but arrived at a wrong ruling on the case in question. As such, he is pardoned his error and rewarded for exerting his effort. Be tolerant with all people. Make sure not to level accusations and criticism at scholars for the views they express after having exerted their scholarly efforts.

