

Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubaydullāh narrated that

1

A man from the people of Najd, with dishevelled hair, came to God's Messenger (peace be upon him). We could hear his voice [as he was coming] but did not understand what he said, until he was close to the Prophet. He was asking about Islam.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Five prayers during the day and night'. He asked: 'Any more as a binding duty?' The Prophet said: 'No, unless you wish to voluntarily add more'.

3

God's Messenger said: 'And fasting during the month of Ramadan'. He asked: 'Any more [fasting] as a binding duty?' The Prophet said: 'No, unless you wish to give more'.

4

The Prophet then told him about zakat. The man asked: 'Any more duty?' The Prophet said: 'No, unless you wish to add at your own behest'.

5

The man turned to leave and said: 'By God, I shall not do more than this and will not omit any of it'.

6

The Prophet said: 'He will be successful, if he is true to his word'. A different version puts it: 'He will be in Heaven if he is true to his word'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 46; Muslim, 11.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Attend regularly to your prayer and pay zakat; for, whatever good you do for your own sake you shall find it with God. God sees all that you do.﴾ (2: 110)
- ﴿It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed: a guidance for mankind and a self-evident proof of that guidance and a standard to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month shall fast throughout the month.﴾ (2: 185)
- ﴿Take a portion of their money as charity, so that you may cleanse and purify them thereby.﴾ (2: 103)
- ﴿Keep up prayer when the sun is on its decline, in the darkness of the night, and recite the Qur'an at dawn, for the recitation of the Qur'an at dawn is indeed witnessed. (78) At night, rise from your sleep to recite it in prayer, as an additional offering from you. Your Lord may thus raise you to an honourable station.﴾ (17: 78-79)
- ﴿He who does good of his own account does himself good thereby.﴾ (2: 184)

The Narrator

Abu Muhammad Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Uthmān of the Taym branch of the Quraysh, later belonged to Madinah. He was one of the ten companions given the happy news of being admitted into Heaven, and one of the first eight people to embrace Islam. He was one of five of the Prophet's companions who accepted Islam through Abu Bakr, and one of the six-man committee of consultation, chosen on the basis that the Prophet was pleased with them to the end of his life. He was killed on the day of the Battle of the Camel in Year 36 AH 657 CE.

Summary

A bedouin asked the Prophet about Islam and the Prophet's answer detailed the well-known essentials, known as the pillars of Islam. Whoever fulfils them as they should be fulfilled, without addition or omission, will be successful and admitted into Heaven.



Message and Meaning

1

The bedouin came from Najd, which is a plateau extending from Hijaz in the west to Yamamah in the east; today, it includes Riyadh, Qasim and Aflaj. He entered the mosque when the Prophet was sitting with his companions. He had dishevelled hair, was careless about his appearance, spoke aloud at a distance, giving his voice an echo that made it difficult to understand what he was saying. When he drew close to the Prophet, those seated with the Prophet understood him. Essentially, he was asking about Islam and its legislation.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him about prayer, which is the second pillar of Islam, coming immediately after the declaration of belief in God's oneness and Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger. The Prophet told him that there are five obligatory prayers stretching over each day and night. These are Fajr, Zūhr, 'Aṣr, Maghrib and 'Ishā. The bedouin asked whether he had any further duty of prayer once he had offered these five, with all their essentials, in the way and form they should be done. The Prophet told him that no other prayers were obligatory, but that he may voluntarily add to them, if he so wished.

Voluntary worship is offered in excess of what is obligatory, to draw closer to God and in the hope of enhancing one's status on the Day of Judgement. This is recommended, earning reward for the one who offers it, but no punishment is incurred for failure to do so.

3

The Prophet (peace be upon him) then mentions fasting, the fourth pillar of Islam. It means abstention from eating, drinking and other prohibitions from the break of dawn until sunset, with the right intention, dedicating one's action for God's sake. The Prophet tells his questioner that his duty is to fast during the month of Ramadan. The bedouin asked the Prophet whether he had any obligatory fasting other than this month? The Prophet told him that this is the only obligatory fasting, but he may voluntarily decide to fast on other recommended days.

4

The Prophet then tells him about the third pillar of Islam, namely zakat, which follows the declaration of God's oneness and prayer. He tells him that zakat is a duty and he explains to him its details.

Zakat is a financial act of worship constituting the payment of a portion of certain types of property to defined groups of people. It is called zakat, which is a word derived from a source meaning 'purity', because it purifies man's soul from the burden of sin. God says: 'Take a portion of their money as charity, so that you may cleanse and purify them thereby'. (2: 103)

The man asks the Prophet whether he owed any financial duty other than this obligatory zakat. The Prophet told him that this is the only duty, but he may give further charity if he so wished.

5

The man left and said as he was walking away: 'By God, I shall not do more than this and will not omit any of it'. He meant that he would fulfil them as perfectly as he could, without addition or omission.

The man did not mean that he would do only these duties, but not other duties which the Prophet did not include in his answer, such as lowering one's gaze, maintaining one's chastity, stating the truth, etc. To say such a thing is wrong and unacceptable. The Prophet would not have agreed to it. The man simply asked the Prophet about the duties and obligations which would ensure his admittance into Heaven. Therefore, he did not tell him about prohibitions and the need to steer away from them.

6

The Prophet (peace be upon him) then says that if the man did as he promised and was true to his word, he would be successful and have much that is good.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not mention the declaration of belief in God's oneness and the Prophet's message, because he knew that the man was aware of it, or because he was asking about practical Islamic duties. The Prophet does not mention hajj, either because it was not yet legislated, or because it was not applicable to the man as a duty, or the Prophet might have mentioned it but the narrator left it out.



Implementation

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tolerated the rough manners of the bedouin even as he spoke too loudly. This suggests that educators, teachers and advocates of Islam should always be patient, tolerating the difficulties associated with their tasks. They may even be faced with strong disapproval and even harm. They should follow the example of the Prophet, enduring all this patiently.

2

An advocate of Islam, a scholar, an educator and a leader should realize that people differ mentally and psychologically. Therefore, he cannot treat them all in the same way. We note that the Prophet did not criticize the bedouin for raising his voice.

3

The man was keen to learn from the Prophet what was of benefit to him, speaking without hesitation. Every time the Prophet outlined an obligation, the man asked: 'Any more duty?' Everyone should seek to learn what is necessary, unhindered by either bashfulness or arrogance.

4

The hadith shows that a person who limits himself to doing what is obligatory and does the essential Islamic duties in the way acceptable to God will be safe on the Day of Judgement, even though he does not add any voluntary worship. God has made clear that His servants do not draw closer to Him by doing anything better than what He has made obligatory on them. However, neglecting recommended prayers means missing out on much reward. While a person will be safe by doing what is obligatory, adding what is recommended confirms success, enhances one's position and raises one's status.

5

Recommended prayers are many, but the most important are the confirmed sunnah prayers that are associated with the obligatory prayers. These are two *rak'ahs* before Fajr Prayer, four *rak'ahs* before *Zuhr* and two after it, two *rak'ahs* after Maghrib and two after 'Ishā. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever prays twelve *rak'ahs* during a day and night will have a home built for him in Heaven'.⁽¹⁾ Other recommended prayers include the midmorning prayer, i.e. *Duḥā*, night worship, the *Witr* Prayer, etc. Referring to all these, and other voluntary prayers as well, God says in a *qudsī* hadith: 'My servant shall continue to draw near to Me with voluntary works so that I will love him. When I love him, I will be his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his leg with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I will surely give it to him; and were he to ask Me for refuge, I will surely grant it to him'.⁽²⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 728.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 6502.

6

Voluntary fasting is one the most rewarding actions a person does. God grants rich reward for it. Fasting on the Day of Arafat wipes away the sins of the outgoing year and the incoming one; and fasting on the Day of 'Āshūrā' wipes away the sins of the outgoing year.⁽¹⁾ 'Whoever follows Ramadan with fasting six days, starting from the month of Shawwāl, is like one who fasts one's entire life.'⁽²⁾

7

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also mentions zakat because it provides evidence of a person's faith. Only a believer pays out his zakat feeling pleased with his deed. The fact is that human beings love money and like to keep it for themselves. When a person sets aside his zakat duty, as the portion owed to God, Mighty and Exalted, this is a proof of faith and one's belief in God's promise and warnings. Therefore, a believer should test himself and the strength of his faith by paying zakat and voluntary charity, knowing that what God has in store for him is better and longer lasting.

8

The bedouin said: 'By God, I shall not do more than this and will not omit any of it'. He was assured that doing what is obligatory is sufficient to ensure admittance into Heaven. It is imperative that a Muslim should be firm and active in every good thing he does, hoping to receive its reward. He should not slacken after he has started. This applies to deeds done for the life to come and those for one's present life. A student should attend to his studies and a soldier should carry on with his duties. Perfection of one's work should be the motto of every worker, whether in a factory or a farm or a marketplace.

9

The Prophet's comments on what the man said is clearly applicable to every Muslim. Whoever attends well to all obligatory duties and refrains from whatever is prohibited ensures safety from Hell and admittance into Heaven. However, Heaven has grades and levels, the highest of which is to be in the company of prophets, the ones who never deviate from the truth, martyrs and righteous believers. Needless to say, this grade is not attained by merely fulfilling the obligatory part. Everyone is given according to one's deeds, and everyone should work to achieve one's ambition in the life to come.

10

We note in the hadith that the Prophet (peace be upon him) appreciated the position of his questioner. Therefore, he did not tell him more than what was obligatory, because these are what is essential for a person to be a true Muslim. Scholars and advocates of Islam should intelligently assess the condition of a questioner and give him the most suitable and right answers.

1 Related by Muslim, 1162

2 Related by Muslim, 1164.

