

Abu Hurayrah narrated:

1

God's Messenger (peace be upon him) entered the mosque. A man came in and offered a prayer, then came forward and greeted God's Messenger (peace be upon him). The Prophet replied with a greeting then said: 'Go back and pray, for you have not prayed'.

2

The man went back and prayed in the same way as he prayed earlier. He then returned to the Prophet and greeted him. The Prophet said: 'And peace be to you'. He then said: 'Go back and pray, for you have not prayed'. He did this three times. The man said: 'By Him who sent you with the message of the truth, I know nothing better than this. Teach me'.

3

The Prophet said: 'When you stand up to pray, say *Allah-u akbar*.

4

then recite of the Qur'an what comes easy to you.

5

Then bow until you are well positioned in bowing, then raise yourself until you stand up well. Then you prostrate yourself until you are well positioned in prostration, then raise yourself until you are well positioned seated. Do this throughout your prayer'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 757; Muslim, 397.

From the Qur'an

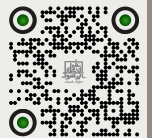
- ﴿It is by God's grace that you deal gently with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely have broken away from you.﴾ (3: 159)
- ﴿Indeed there has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves: one who grieves much that you should suffer; one who is full of concern for you; and who is tender and full of compassion towards the believers.﴾ (9: 128)
- ﴿Call people to the path of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner.﴾ (16: 125)
- ﴿Enjoin prayer on your people, and be diligent in its observance.﴾ (20: 132)

The Narrator

'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Şakhr 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 would accompany 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 his hadiths. Al-Bukhari mentioned that more than eight hundred companions of the Prophet or those who belonged to the *tābi'īn* 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

A man came into the mosque and prayed, then went to the Prophet and greeted him. The Prophet (peace be upon him) returned the greeting and ordered the man to repeat his prayer. The man complied and returned, but the Prophet again told him to repeat his prayer. He did this three times. The man told the Prophet that he knew no better. The Prophet then taught him how to pray.



Message and Meaning

This hadith is one of the most important regarding prayer, as it details its most important and essential aspects. Fiqh scholars give it much attention and use it as evidence regarding many questions in their area of Islamic Studies. It is frequently referred to by scholars as the ‘hadith concerning invalid prayer’.



1 A man entered the mosque and offered a prayer, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was watching. When he finished, he came to the Prophet and greeted him. The Prophet returned the greeting and ordered him to repeat his prayer, because it was invalid and did not fulfil his duty.

Had it not been invalid, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would not have ordered him to repeat it. He would have pointed out his mistakes to avoid them in future.



2 The man did as he was told and repeated his prayer, performing it in the same manner as he prayed the first time. When he went back to the Prophet, the Prophet again ordered him to repeat it. On the third occasion, the man said to the Prophet that he did not know anything better and requested that the Prophet teach him how to pray.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not point out to the man his errors at the beginning perhaps because he thought that the man was aware of the essential requirements in prayer but had not attended to them properly. Hence, he simply told him to repeat his prayer. When the man said that he did not know anything better than what he did, the Prophet taught him how to pray. Or perhaps the Prophet (peace be upon him) felt that teaching him the proper way after the man had done it wrongly several times would ensure that he would give greater attention to learning the proper way and would not commit mistakes in the future.



3 The Prophet (peace be upon him) told the man that when he wished to pray, he should start with the initial *Allah-u akbar*. This means that this *takbīr* is essential for the validity of prayer. Without it, the prayer is invalid. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was teaching the man what makes his prayer valid. As this was a matter of teaching, it is better to limit it to the essentials, without adding recommended practices.

It should be noted that the Prophet did not mention intention, because the man was already aware of it. Intention is an essential requirement in all religious matters, and this is known to all Muslims, because all actions are subject to the intention behind them. This applies to all Islamic worship, including prayer, zakat, fasting, etc.



4 The Prophet (peace be upon him) then ordered the man to recite whatever came easy to him of the Qur'an. This does not mean that he recited any part of it. More details are given in other hadiths, indicating the obligation of reciting the first surah, *al-Fātiḥah*. The Prophet says: ‘No prayer is valid if one does not recite the Opening Surah of the Book’.⁽¹⁾ Thus, the Prophet meant that what comes easy is the opening surah, because God has made it easy to remember for

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 756; Muslim, 394.

men, women and children. Alternatively, the meaning is to recite whatever comes easy after finishing the opening surah. The man must have known that reciting the opening surah is one of the essentials of prayer, and the Prophet indicated following it with whatever was easy.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then ordered him to bow and ensured that he did it well, then to stand up and ensured that he was in a good standing position. Again he should be well positioned when prostrating himself. In all these movements, it is important to do it well, without being hasty. This is also an essential duty that must be observed; otherwise, very hasty prayer is invalid. This is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the man to repeat his prayer. The Prophet criticized a prayer that does not reflect a calm, comfortable approach, saying: ‘That is the way a hypocrite prays. He sits down watching the sun, and when it is in between Satan’s horns, he stands up to knock out four quick [*rak’ahs*], mentioning God in them only very little’.⁽¹⁾

In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions some of the essential duties of prayer, omitting details of which prayer becomes invalid. He did not mention other essentials such as intention, the last sitting and ending the prayer with *salām*. The man apparently was aware of these, and the Prophet saw him doing them. He was only unaware of other things, which the Prophet pointed out to him.



1 Related by Muslim, 622.

Implementation

1

The hadith shows that when a Muslim comes into a mosque and finds some people sitting there, it is recommended that he starts with the prayer of greeting the mosque, then greeting the people present.

2

Every Muslim must learn what he needs to ensure that his worship is valid. Otherwise, his worship may be invalid.

3

It is recommended that a scholar or advocate of Islam sits in a mosque and people gather around him. He will then admonish them and urge them to do what is good. He should describe the Prophet's prayer as he (peace be upon him) offered it.

4

For any deed to be accepted by God, it must be sincere and comply with the Prophet's Sunnah. Needless to say, lack of sincerity renders a good deed invalid. Likewise, when a deed is contrary to the Sunnah, its being done with good intention does not make it good.

5

An advocate of Islam or a scholar may delay explanation for a reason, such as making the listeners more eager to understand the religious ruling, or to ensure that more people arrive and listen to what he has to say, or for a similar need.

6

The hadith shows that spreading the greeting of peace, i.e. *assalām alaykum*, is recommended, and its return is a duty. It is also recommended to repeat the greeting if the meeting is renewed, even after a short period. It is a duty to return the greeting every time.

7

The hadith reflects the importance of treating learners and people lacking in knowledge gently and explaining the relevant matter, making the information clear and limiting it to the important aspect, without adding further details which may not be easy for them to remember and implement.

8

Allah-u akbar is the opening of prayer. When one says it, one is already in prayer. What is now due is to feel that He is greater than the universe and all there is in it. No worldly cares and concerns should distract the worshipper from his devotion and humility.

9

The hadith confirms the importance of making things easy for Muslims and not to burden them with what may be tiresome for them. The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells the man to recite of the Qur'an what comes easy for him. This is contrary to what some imams continuously do, reciting long surahs and making things hard for people. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'When any of you stands up to lead the people, let him make the prayer light. Among them are those who are weak, unwell and old. When he prays alone he may make his prayer as long as he likes'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 703; Muslim, 467.

10

Calmness is an essential duty, without which a prayer is invalid. Its purpose is to understand the meanings of what is recited and stated of glorifications of God and supplication. Prayer is not the mere movements a Muslim performs.

11

One aspect of urging people to do what is right and refrain from what is wrong is to educate ignorant people and draw their attention to what is necessary. Zayd ibn Wahb mentioned that Hudhayfah, a companion of the Prophet, saw a man who did not do his bowing and prostration in prayer rightly. He said to him: 'You have not prayed. Were you to die doing this, you would die doing what is contrary to the right way God showed to Muhammad (peace be upon him)'. This is a case of strong rebuke.



