

Mālik ibn al-Ḥuwayrith narrated:

1

We came to the Prophet, a group of young men of roughly the same age, and stayed with him twenty nights. When he felt that we missed our people, he asked us about the families we had left behind and we told him.

2

God's Messenger was compassionate and kind. He said: "Go back to your people and stay with them,

3

Teach them and instruct them.

4

Pray as you have seen me pray.

5

When prayer is due, let one of you say the call to prayer [i.e. the *adhān*], and let your eldest lead the prayer".<sup>(1)</sup>

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 6008; Muslim, 674.

### 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)
- ﴿Enjoin prayer on your people, and be diligent in its observance.﴾ (20: 132)

### The Narrator

Mālik ibn al-Ḥuwayrith al-Laythī, Abu Sulaymān's name was sometimes given differently by scholars. He later resided in Basrah. He visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) with a group of young men belonging to the same tribe. The Prophet taught them prayer and told them to teach their people when they returned home. He narrated several hadiths concerning prayer. He died in Year 94 AH, 713 CE.

### Summary

A number of young men visited the Prophet and stayed with him for twenty nights, learning about the religion of Islam. When he felt that they missed their families, the Prophet felt compassion towards them. He told them to return to their people and teach them what they had learnt of Islam. He also told them to attend to their prayer and to pray as they saw him pray. The eldest among them should lead the prayer.



# Message and Meaning

1

Mālik ibn al-Ḥuwayrith visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) with a group of his people. They were all young men of similar age. They stayed with the Prophet for twenty nights, learning about Islam. When the Prophet felt that they missed their own people, he enquired about their families and they, in turn, told him about their relatives whom they had left behind.

2

Having learnt this from them, the Prophet ordered them to return, which was a gesture of his compassion which he felt towards all believers. God says describing him: '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)

The Prophet ordered them to return home because their visit was after the takeover of Makkah. When that takeover took place, migration to join the Prophet was ended. The Prophet said that there was no migration after the takeover of Makkah.<sup>(1)</sup> Staying in Madinah became a matter of choice. Anyone could choose either to stay or return home after having learnt what he needed of his faith, and he could then instruct his people accordingly.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) permitted them to return, and indeed told them to return home because he was aware that they had learnt what was sufficient for them. Had they not had that knowledge, the Prophet would not have let them go back, let alone order them to instruct their people.

3

The Prophet not only ordered them to impart what they had learnt of the divine faith to their people, but also told them that this was not enough. Every one of them should instruct his family and watch them. He was responsible for them. God said: 'Enjoin prayer on your people, and be diligent in its observance'. (20: 132) The Prophet said: 'Every one of you is a shepherd and accountable for his flock'.<sup>(2)</sup> Instruction and follow up are duties in the same way as teaching one's family is a duty.

4

The Prophet then states the broad rule concerning religion and its rulings. This is the rule that requires following the Prophet's example in prayer, how it is offered, its rulings, what may be said during prayer and what invalidates it, and which omissions require two prostrations at the end. The Prophet's practice explains what God has stated in general terms in the Qur'an. There are no verses in the Qur'an that state the details of prayer, its number of *rak'ahs*, timings, essential and recommended parts, etc. The Qur'an merely orders attending regularly to prayers at their normal times. Other details are left to be explained by the Prophet's verbal and practical Sunnah. Hence the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Pray as you have seen me pray'.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2783; Muslim, 1353.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 2409; Muslim, 1829.

This applies in all legislation. When he performed the pilgrimage, the Prophet gave the following order: ‘Learn your rituals. I do not know but I may not perform the hajj after this hajj of mine’.<sup>(1)</sup> Scholars are in full agreement that when they are intended as showing the details of something stated in general terms, the Prophet’s actions are understood as obligatory, unless there is special evidence confirming that they are not so. Therefore, such a duty applies to all Muslims, provided that it is confirmed that the Prophet continued to do so. If his continuity is not confirmed, the action is not treated as a duty.



The Prophet then tells the young men that when a prayer becomes due, one of them should call the *adhān*, and their eldest should lead the prayer.

The general rule concerning the choice of the imam is that the one who recites the Qur’an best should lead the prayer. A hadith narrated by Abu Mas’ūd al-Anṣārī quotes the Prophet: ‘God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “The one to lead a congregation in prayer is the one who recites God’s Book best. If they are equally good in recitation, then the one who knows the Sunnah best. If they have equal knowledge of the Sunnah, then the one who migrated first, and if they are the same with regard to migration, then the one who embraced Islam earlier’.<sup>(2)</sup> ‘Amr ibn Salamah led his people in prayer when he was only six years of age, because he was the best among them in reciting the Qur’an. The Prophet ordered this particular group to choose their eldest as their imam because he was aware that they were of the same standard in reciting the Qur’an. This is stated in another hadith: ‘They were of similar standard in recitation’.<sup>(3)</sup> Since they embraced Islam at the same time, then most probably they were of the same standard in their knowledge of the Sunnah. Therefore, the Prophet chose the eldest as their imam.

1 Related by Muslim, 1297.

2 Related by Muslim, 673.

3 Related by Muslim, 674.

# Implementation

1

The hadith shows how the Prophet's companions were keen to learn about their religion and know the rulings that applied to them. They were prepared to undertake long journeys for this purpose, because they were aware of the great merit such knowledge imparts. It is important that a Muslim should not miss out on such reward, particularly because nowadays it is easy to acquire such knowledge without much effort or need to travel.

2

The Prophet took special care of young people and he was keen to teach them their faith, so that they became like ambassadors and advocates of Islam among their people. Young people are the mainstay of their community and the ones who ensure its progress. It is necessary, therefore, to guide them to what is most useful for them and their community.

3

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was well aware of the psychological and emotional needs of young people. He, therefore, told this group of young men to return to their people. It is important to take special care of the needs of young people.

4

Advocates of Islam and educators should be compassionate and ensure that their advocacy is not in conflict with people's needs. They should endeavour to make things easy for people and make the best use of the time when they are most alert and active, allowing them enough time for rest and relaxation.

5

A wise advocate of Islam or educator does not assign to people tasks that are beyond their ability. He must make sure that they are well able to undertake what they are asked to do.

6

The proper thing is that a man should stay with his family and not reside away from them. The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered that when a traveller has completed his business, he should return home.

7

In this and other hadiths, the Prophet (peace be upon him) urges Muslims to present Islam to people and call on them to believe in it. In one such hadith the Prophet orders: 'Deliver what you learn from me, even if it is a single verse'.<sup>(1)</sup> An advocate of Islam is one who delivers the message of God and His Messenger, taking up a position similar to that of the Prophet, as he urges people to do what is good and refrain from evil, and explains the tenets of Islam and its code of law. Who does not like to have such a status?

8

The Prophet (peace be upon him) makes clear that presenting the message of Islam to people and calling on them to believe in it requires good and sustained efforts. It is not merely an explanation of commands and prohibitions. The Prophet (peace be upon him) worked extremely hard to deliver God's message. Therefore, advocates of Islam and scholars must work hard and persevere to ensure its implementation.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3461.

9

The presentation and explanation of Islamic rules and rulings are the tasks of the Prophet (peace be upon him). They are not derived from people's statements, views or preferences. In worship, we learn from what the Prophet himself said and did. We may neither add to, nor omit from what he taught us.

10

Following the Prophet's method and practices means following the right guidance. It was through him that Muslims have learnt how and when to pray, as well as the essentials, form and details of prayer and all other acts of worship, including zakat, fasting and pilgrimage. A Muslim who does not follow the Prophet's Sunnah will remain at a loss, unable to find the right way.



11

When we speak of following the Prophet's example in prayer, we also include using the concessions he identified. Proper following of the Prophet means that an ill person prays seated or reclining, as is suitable to his condition, and that a traveller or a sick person does not fast during travelling and illness in Ramadan, and that a person on a journey shortens and combines his prayers. The same applies to other concessions the Prophet (peace be upon him) used, as he said: 'God loves that His concessions be exercised just as He hates His commandments to be violated'.<sup>(1)</sup>

12

The hadith indicates the need to treat older people with respect and to give them the status that suits them, provided that this is not contrary to Islamic rules and principles. The Prophet (peace be upon him) made age a factor in choosing the imam in prayer when people are similarly qualified in other considerations, such as reciting the Qur'an, knowledge of the Sunnah and history in Islam.

1 Related by Ahmad, 5866.

