113875 - Strictness For Greater Reward

the question

I read in the answer to question no. 113385 that “The one who deliberately over-exerts himself will not be rewarded if his aim is hardship; rather he will be rewarded if hardship accompanies an action that he is required to do. That is because hardship is not to be sought in and of itself.” And I find the hadith of Ubayy ibn Ka`b (may Allah be pleased with him) confusing, in which he said: There was a man, and I do not know of any man who lived further away from the mosque than he did, but he never missed a prayer. It was said – or I said – to him: Why don’t you buy a donkey that you can ride when it is dark or when the sand is too hot? He said: I would not like my house to be next to the mosque. I want my walking to the mosque, and my returning when I come back to my family, to be recorded for me. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah has gathered all that (reward) for you.” The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) approved of his not buying a mount because he was seeking extra reward.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is known from the basic principles of Islam that the Lawgiver did not intend, by enjoining religious duties, to impose hardship on people. Rather the intention is to require the Muslim to do what is in his best interests in this world and the hereafter. But sometimes the lawgiver requires him to do that which is hard, such as jihad. In that case the lawgiver will increase his reward, to encourage him to carry out his religious duties.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{ Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship}

[Al-Baqarah 2:185]

{[Allah] has not imposed any hardship on you in religion }

[Al-Hajj 22:78].

And the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Religion is easy, and no one tries to go to extremes in religious matters but he will be overwhelmed. So do your best but do not go to extremes, and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded.” Narrated by Muslim, 39.

The Lawgiver encourages people to go to the mosque to pray, and He has promised reward for that; He has ordained that for every step the worshipper takes towards the mosque, he will have one hasanah (reward). So for one whose house is far away, and he walks to the mosque, the reward for the distance he walks will be recorded for him, and his reward will increase because of the hardship he faces. But this does not indicate that hardship is to be intended from the outset either by the Lawgiver or the Muslim.

The hadith that you mention highlights the virtue of walking to the mosque, and states that the one who walks will be rewarded for that in a way that one who rides is not rewarded. This virtue is affirmed in other texts, such as the hadith which Muslim (655) narrated from Jabir ibn `Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: Some land around the mosque became vacant, and Banu Salimah wanted to move to be close to the mosque. News of that reached the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he said to them: “I have heard that you want to move near the mosque.” They said: Yes, O Messenger of Allah, we want to do that. He said: “O Banu Salimah, stay in your houses, your footsteps will be recorded; stay in your houses, your footsteps will be recorded.”

The reason why the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) encouraged them to stay in their distant houses was not to cause them hardship, and he did not intend hardship for them so that they could be rewarded for it; rather the reason was that he did not want [the outlying districts of] Madinah to become deserted if the people moved to be near the mosque. And this is stated in a report narrated by al-Bukhari (1887) from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: Banu Salimah wanted to move near the mosque, but the Messenger of Allah (blessings and

peace of Allah be upon him) did not want [the outlying districts of] Madinah to become deserted, and he said: “O Bani Salimah, don’t you realize that you will be rewarded for your footsteps which you take towards the mosque?”

What is meant by [the outlying districts of] Madinah becoming deserted is their becoming empty, with no inhabitants.

Based on his deep understanding of the hadith, al-Bukhari included these two hadiths under two headings, the first of which is seeking reward for walking, and the second is the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) not liking [the outlying districts of] Madinah to become deserted.

Al-Hafiz said in *Al-Fat-h*: Chapter: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not like [the outlying districts of] Madinah to become deserted, in which he quoted the hadith of Anas about the story of Bani Salimah. He had already spoken about that in the chapter on seeking reward for walking … Note: he made two different chapter headings that refer to these two reasons, and in the Book of Prayer he had a chapter entitled Seeking reward for walking because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Stay where you are, for your footsteps will be recorded for you.” And here, he made a chapter heading as you see, because the narrator said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not like [the outlying districts of] Madinah to become deserted. It is as if the reason that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave was something that was specific to them, because that would make them more likely to respond and comply, namely the reward for their walking. End quote.

Fat-h al-Bari, 4/99.

Intending to go through hardship because of staying far away is not to be deliberately sought, but whoever is already living far away will have reward for the distance he walks.

Imam ash-Shatibi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: As for hardship, it is not right for a Muslim to deliberately seek it when doing religious duties for the purpose of increasing his reward, but he may seek to do a righteous deed for which he can earn a great deal of reward because it involves greater hardship.

On the other hand, that is because there is some hardship in all religious duties, and because his intention is to do that particular deed which will earn him a greater reward, which is the purpose behind the Lawgiver's imposing religious duties, and whatever is in harmony with the aim of the Lawgiver is what is required.

As for choosing deeds that earn greater reward because they are more difficult, deeds are but by intentions, and the objective behind religious obligations is to be taken into account with regard to deeds. No deed is valid except that which is in accordance with the objective stated by the Lawgiver. So if the Muslim's aim is to put himself through hardship, then his aim is contrary to the objectives of the Lawgiver, in the sense that the Lawgiver did not intend hardship in and of itself when imposing religious duties. Every aim that is contrary to the objectives of the Lawgiver is invalid, so deliberately seeking hardship is invalid, because it is akin to what is prohibited, and there is no reward in what is prohibited; rather it incurs sin and if it is emphatically prohibited, it is unlawful (haram). So seeking extra reward by deliberately incurring hardship is contrary to the objectives of sharia.

If it is said: This is contrary to what is narrated in *As-Sahih* from Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: Some land around the mosque became vacant, and Banu Salimah wanted to move to be close to the mosque. News of that reached the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he said to them: "I have heard that you want to move near the mosque." They said: Yes, O Messenger of Allah, we want to do that. He said: "O Banu Salimah, stay in your houses, your footsteps will be recorded; stay in your houses, your footsteps will be recorded",

And according to another report, they said: We would not have been happy if we had moved. According to another report from Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him), he said: Our houses were far from the mosque, and we wanted to sell our houses and move closer to the mosque, but the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told us not to do that, and he said: "For every step you take, you will rise one degree in status."

In *Raqa'iq Ibn al-Mubarak*, it is narrated from Abu Musa al-Ash`ari (may Allah be pleased with him) that he was on board a ship at sea with its sails furled when a man said: O people of the ship,

stand up – seven times. We said: Don't you see the condition we're in? Then the seventh time he said: Allah has promised that whoever causes himself to become thirsty for His sake on an intensely hot day in this world, He will give him to drink on the Day of Resurrection.

Abu Musa (may Allah be pleased with him) used to seek out long and intensely hot days to fast.

In the religious texts, there are indications that for a Muslim to seek to make it hard for himself when doing an act of worship or other religious obligation is valid and he will be rewarded for it. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed those who wanted to move to stay where they were because of the great reward that would result from taking so many steps to the mosque. It is as if the one who has two paths that lead to doing a righteous deed, one of which is easy and the other is difficult, is instructed to take the difficult one and is promised reward for doing so. In fact, they were told not to take the easier path on the grounds that they would get more reward.

Think about people among the close friends of Allah who have high aspirations; they choose difficult options when worshipping Allah that are the most they can bear, to the extent that it has become a matter of principle for them to choose the more difficult option and forego concessions altogether. All of this is contrary to what we have mentioned above.

In *As-Sahih* it is also narrated that Ubayy ibn Ka`b (may Allah be pleased with him) said: There was a man among the Ansar whose house was the most remote house in Madinah, but he never missed a prayer with the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). We felt sorry for him, and I said to him: O So and so, why don't you buy a donkey to spare you from the burning sand and the reptiles of the land? He said: By Allah, I would not like my house to be beside the house of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). I thought that this was too much, so I came to the Prophet of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and told him about him. So he called him and he told him about that, and mentioned that he hoped for reward for his footsteps. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: "You will have that which you seek.".

The answer to that is to say:

Firstly: these ahad reports all speak of the same story and we cannot reach a definitive conclusion from them because issues that are not definite cannot undermine what is definite, and our view is definitive.

Secondly: these hadiths do not indicate that the objective was hardship itself. Regarding the first hadith, there is a report in al-Bukhari that explains it, because there is an addition in that report which says: He [the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)] did not like that part of Madinah to be deserted lest it be left with no one to guard it. And it was narrated from Malik ibn Anas that he originally settled in al-`Aqiq, then he moved to Madinah. When he settled in al-`Aqiq, he was asked: Why have you settled in al-`Aqiq? It is very far away from the mosque. He said: Because I heard that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) loved it and used to go there. One of the Ansar wanted to move from there to be near the mosque, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: “Don’t you hope for reward for the steps you take?” Malik understood from his words “Don’t you hope for reward for the steps you take?” that this was not in the sense of reward for choosing hardship, but because of the virtue of the place they wanted to move from.

Regarding the hadith of Ibn al-Mubarak, it offers valid proof, based on the action of the Sahabi, if its isnad (chain of narration) is sound. Yet all that the hadith indicates is that a great reward is proven for the one who faces hardship when doing an act of worship, such as doing wudu’ when it is difficult and experiencing thirst and exhaustion when engaging in jihad. So Abu Musa’s choosing to fast on a hot day is like choosing to go for jihad over doing voluntary prayers, giving charity and so on. The aim is not to make it hard for yourself in order to attain more reward; rather the aim is to do an act of worship that brings a great reward because it is so difficult. So hardship in this case is not the aim; rather it is connected to the nature of the act of worship. Our discussion here has to do only with whether the prime objective is hardship. Similarly, there is nothing in the hadith about the Ansari to indicate that putting oneself through hardship is the aim. All that it indicates is that his aim was to show patience with the hardship of walking a long distance to the mosque so that

his reward might increase. And this is applicable to all reports of this type.

Regarding people of high aspirations, their aim is to show true servitude to Allah without paying any attention to their own inclinations, and it is not correct to say that their only aim is to be harsh with themselves and put themselves through hardship, because of the argument stated above, and because of the following argument.

Thirdly: their argument contradicts what was narrated from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbidding those who wanted to go to extremes in showing devotion from doing that. One of them said: As for me, I shall fast and never not fast. Another one said: As for me, I shall pray at night (qiyam) and never sleep. And another one said: As for me, I shall never get married. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) rebuked them for that and said that he himself did all of those things, and he said: “Whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me.” In another hadith, it says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told `Uthman ibn Maz`un not to go to extremes; if he had been given permission, he would have castrated himself. And he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told the one who had vowed to fast standing in the sun to rest; he told him to complete his fast, but he told him not to stand in the sun. And he said: “Those who go to extremes are doomed.” His forbidding people to go to extremes is something that is well known in Islamic teachings, to the extent that it is a well-established principle in Islam. As it is never the objective of the Lawgiver to cause hardship to people, the Muslim’s aiming to put himself through hardship is contrary to the Lawgiver’s aim of making things easy, which is well established and definitive. So if a Muslim’s aim contradicts the objectives of the Lawgiver, his aim is invalid and not sound. This is clear. And Allah is the source of strength.

End quote from *Al-Muwafaqat*, 2/2220229.

However, what we think is the proper explanation of the hadiths which speak of people walking to the prayer, such as those which the questioner mentioned and others in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said that “The people who will have the greatest reward for prayer will be those who walk the furthest distance to come and pray, then those who

walk the next furthest. The one who waits for the prayer until he prays with the imam will have a greater reward than the one who prays then sleeps" (narrated by al-Bukhari, 651; and Muslim, 662) – what we think is the correct interpretation is that walking to the prayer in itself and taking a lot of steps to the mosque is an act of worship in and of itself, just as circumambulating the Ka`bah is an act of worship in and of itself, and walking back and forth between as-Safa and al-Marwah is an act of worship in and of itself.

This is indicated by many hadiths that were narrated about the virtue of walking and taking many steps to the mosque, and giving precedence to a mosque that is far away.

Hence the virtue of walking to Jumu`ah prayer excludes riding. It was narrated that Aws ibn Aws ah-Thaqafi (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: "Whoever causes his wife to do ghusl on Friday and does ghusl himself, listens to the khutbah from beginning to end, walks and does not ride, sits near to the imam and listens, and does not engage in idle talk, for every step he takes, he will have the reward of a year's fasting and praying at night." Narrated by Abu Dawud, 345; classed as authentic (sahih) by al-Albani.

In the hadith about the dispute among those on high it says: "… what expiates sins is staying in the mosque after the prayers, walking on foot to attend prayers in congregation, and doing wudu' properly when it is difficult…" Narrated by Ahmad, 3474; at-Tirmidhi, 3233; classed as authentic (sahih) by al-Albani.

Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Fat-h al-Bari*, 5/21: These hadiths indicate that walking to the mosque will be rewarded. This is something that is mass-transmitted in the hadiths. End quote.

Ash-Shatibi (may Allah have mercy on him) referred to that in the quotation above, when he said that such difficulty is not the objective, rather it is connected to the objective, as the objective is to do this righteous deed, which happens to be more difficult than usual.

And Allah knows best.