128040 - Commentary on the hadith: “Woe to the heels from the fire”

the question

It was narrated from `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) that The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) fell behind us during a journey that we were undertaking, then he caught up with us when the time for `Asr was almost over and we were doing wudu. We started to wipe over our feet and he called out at the top of his voice: “Woe to the heels from the Fire!” two or three times.

I would like a detailed explanation of the hadith.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

We may discuss this hadith from different angles, as follows:

1. **The text of the hadith and who narrated it**

It was narrated from `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with them both), who said:

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) fell behind us during a journey that we were undertaking, then he caught up with us when the time for `Asr was almost over and we were doing wudu. We started to wipe over our feet and he called out at the top of his voice: “Woe to the heels from the Fire!” two or three times. Narrated by al-Bukhari (hadith no. 60).

Muslim (no. 241) narrated another version of it, him which it says:

It was narrated that `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with them both) said:

We came back with the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) from Makkah to Madinah, and when we were at an oasis on the way, some people hastened at the time

of ‘Asr and did wudu in a hurry [because the time for the prayer was almost over]. We came to them and their heels were visibly dry and had not been touched by water. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Woe to the heels from the Fire! Do wudu properly.”

This hadith was narrated from a number of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them), as Imam at-Tirmidhi (may Allah have mercy on him) said after narrating the same hadith from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him):

On the same topic there are reports from `Abdullah ibn `Amr, `A’ishah, Jabir, `Abdullah ibn al-Harith, Mu`ayqib, Khalid ibn al-Walid, Shurahbil ibn Hasanah, `Amr ibn al-`As and Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan.

End quote from *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, 1/96.

2. **The narrator of the hadith**

He is the great Sahabi `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-`As. He was one of the scholars of the Sahabah and he narrated many hadiths. He used to write down everything that he heard from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) on pages that he had, and one of his collections of pages, which he called *As-Sadiqah*, became very famous. He died in at-Ta’if during the time of the al-Harrah campaign.

3. **The meaning of the words**

“[he] fell behind us” means: he lagged behind [and caught up with us later].

“when the time for `Asr was almost over” means: the time for the prayer was about to end.

Badr ad-Din al-`Ayni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

That is: we had to pray straight away. It was also said that what it means is: we had to hasten to pray because there was not much time left.

End quote from `*Umdat al-Qari*, 2/8.

"Woe (*wayl*)": The scholars differed concerning the meaning of this word. Some of them said that it is a valley in Hell, and others said something else, but all of them are agreed that it is a word of warning, alarming and threatening.

Badr ad-Din al-`Ayni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Wayl is a masdar (infinitive or verbal noun) for which there is no verb; it is a word that signals punishment and doom.

End quote from `*Umdat al-Qari*, 2/9.

"heels": the heel is the back of the foot.

4. **What we learn from this hadith in terms of rulings**

i.It is obligatory to wash the feet when doing wudu, and it is not valid to wipe them without washing them. We learn that from the fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) objected to his companions for quickly wiping over their feet, without washing them and letting water flow over them. This ruling is agreed upon among the four madhhabs of the Muslims, hence Imam al-Bukhari included it in a chapter entitled "Chapter on washing the feet and not wiping over them." [*Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Wudu'*, Chapter 27]. Imam at-Tirmidhi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What we understand from this hadith is that it is not permissible to wipe the feet unless they are covered with khuffs or socks.

End quote from *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, 1/96.

An-Nasa'i included it in a chapter entitled: Chapter on the obligation to wash the feet. [*Sunan an-Nasa'i*, *Kitab at-Taharah*, Chapter 89]. Al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) included it in a chapter entitled: Chapter on the evidence that it is obligatory to wash the feet and that wiping them is not valid. [*As-Sunan al-Kubra*, 1/86]. Imam Ibn Khuzaymah included it in a chapter entitled: Chapter on the stern warning about not washing the feet in wudu and the evidence that what is

required is to wash the feet and not wipe them unless they are covered with khuffs or something that takes the place of khuffs; there is no evidence for what the Rafidis claim, that what is required is to wipe the feet and not wash them, because if the one who wipes over his feet has done what is required, then it would not be possible to say “Woe” to the one who has omitted something that is good but not obligatory. [*Sahih Ibn Khuzaymah*, 1/83].

ii.It is obligatory to thoroughly wash the parts that are to be washed in wudu, by making sure that water reaches all of the part in question, without omitting any of it. We see that in the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in this hadith: “Woe to the heels from the Fire.” The heels are singled out for mention because the heel is the back of the foot and it is possible that water will not reach it unless one pays close attention to that. This indicates that it is essential to make sure, when doing wudu, that the water reaches everywhere it should.

Imam al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) derived this ruling from the hadith in one of the places where he narrated it, under the chapter heading: the Chapter on washing the feet and not wiping them. [*Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Wudu’*, Chapter 27]. An-Nawawi included this hadith in a chapter in his commentary on Muslim (*Sharh Muslim*) entitled: Chapter on the obligation to wash the feet completely [*Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Wudu’*, Chapter 9]. Abu Dawud included it in his *Sunan* in a chapter entitled: Chapter on doing wudu thoroughly. [*Sunan Abi Dawud, Kitab at-Taharah*, Chapter 46].

5. **Other things we learn from the hadith:**

There are many other things to be learned from this hadith for the one who reflects on it. They include the following:

i.The Prophet’s compassion for his companions, as he would fall back and travel at the back of the caravan so that he could help the weak, help them to load their mounts and check on how they were doing.

ii.The keenness of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) to offer the prayer and not delay it until the time for it ended, even when travelling and when they were tired and exhausted.

iii. The keenness of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to teach his companions and explain Islamic rulings to them when needed; he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would not keep quiet about mistakes if they made mistakes.

iv.We learn in the hadith something that al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) pointed out in the title of the chapter in which he included the hadith: Chapter on one who raises his voice when teaching people [*Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-`Ilm*, Chapter 3]. Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The author quoted this as evidence that it is permissible to raise one's voice when teaching others, as the report says, "he called out at the top of his voice." But that applies only when there is a need to raise the voice, because of the distance between the teacher and the people, or when there is a large gathering, and so on. We may add to that situations when the teacher is reminding or exhorting people, as is proven in the hadith of Jabir: When the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) delivered a khutbah and mentioned the Hour, he would sound angry and raise his voice. The hadith was narrated by Muslim.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari*, 1/143.

v.The fact that the narrator (may Allah be pleased with him) says that these words were repeated two or three times highlights an effective way of teaching people that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used. He would repeat his words when teaching so that the listeners could retain the information and those who were not sure what he had said the first time could become certain of what he was saying. Al-Bukhari narrated the hadith elsewhere in a chapter entitled: Chapter on repeating words three times to ensure that they are understood [*Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-`Ilm*, Chapter 30].

vi.The hadith also reminds the Muslim that it is important to make sure that he is acting in accordance with the teachings of Islam in all his actions and words, and that he should not take any of it lightly. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) warned those people who did not make sure that the water reached their heels when doing wudu of woe and the Fire on the Day of Resurrection. This is a matter which many people take lightly, but before Allah it is very serious, so the Muslims should beware of becoming heedless about a matter that could be a cause

of doom in the hereafter, as Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{You regarded [it] as a trivial matter, whereas with Allah it was a grievous offence} [An-Nur 24:15].

And Allah knows best.