69931 - What is meant by the deceased being tormented because of his family’s crying for him?

the question

Is it true that the deceased is tormented because of his family’s crying for him? What is the sin of the deceased that he should be tormented for a sin committed by someone else?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Yes, there are saheeh ahaadeeth from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) that say that, but this does not mean that the deceased is punished for the sin of another, as we shall see below.

‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) denied that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said these ahaadeeth, because she thought that they contradicted the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning):

“and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another”

[Al-An’aam 6:164]

There follow some of the ahaadeeth that have been narrated on this topic, along with an explanation of their true meaning which does not contradict this verse, and the response of the scholars to the objection of the Mother of the Believers ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her).

Al-Bukhaari (1291) and Muslim (933) narrated that al-Mugheerah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: “Whoever is lamented

will be tormented because of that lamentation (or wailing).” Muslim added: “On the Day of Resurrection.”

Al-Bukhaari (1292) and Muslim (927) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar from his father (may Allaah be pleased with them both) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The deceased is tormented in his grave because of the lamentations (wailing) over him.”

Al-Bukhaari (1288) and Muslim (929) narrated that Ibn Abi Mulaykah said: A daughter of ‘Uthmaan (may Allaah be pleased with him) died in Makkah, and we came to attend (her funeral), and Ibn ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbaas also attended. I was sitting between them and there came a sound from the house. ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Umar said to ‘Amr ibn ‘Uthmaan: “Why don’t you tell them not to weep? For the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘The deceased is tormented because of the crying of his family for him.’” Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “ ‘Umar used to say something like that.” Then he narrated the story and said: When ‘Umar was attacked, Suhayb came in crying and saying, “O my brother, O my friend.” ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “O Suhayb, are you crying for me, when the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘The deceased is tormented because of the crying of his family for him’?”

Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: When ‘Umar died, I mentioned that to ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) and she said: “May Allaah have mercy on ‘Umar, by Allaah the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not say that Allaah will punish the believer for his family’s crying over him, rather the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Allaah will increase the torment of the kaafir because of his family’s crying for him.” And she said: “The Qur’aan is sufficient for you: ‘and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another’ [Al-An’aam 6:164].”

Ibn Abi Mulaykah said: By Allaah, Ibn ‘Umar did not comment about that. Al-Qaasim ibn Muhammad narrated to me: when ‘Aa’ishah heard what ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them both) had said, she said: “You are narrating to me from two who were not liars and are not to be disbelieved, but sometimes a man may mishear.”

Al-Haafiz said:

With regard to the remark, “Ibn ‘Umar did not comment,” al-Zayn ibn al-Muneer said: His silence does not indicate that he conceded; perhaps he did not want to argue about the matter.

Muslim (927) narrated from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Umar that Hafsah cried for ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them all), and he said: “Take it easy, O my daughter! Do you not know that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘The deceased is tormented because of the crying of his family for him’?”

These ahaadeeth were narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) by three of the Sahaabah, namely ‘Umar, Ibn ‘Umar and al-Mugheerah (may Allaah be pleased with them all), and speak of the deceased being tormented because of his family’s crying for him.

1 – What is meant by crying in these ahaadeeth

The scholars are unanimously agreed that what is meant in these ahaadeeth is not crying in the general sense, rather what is meant by crying here is wailing and raising the voice.

Al-Nawawi said:

They are all unanimously agreed, despite the differences in their mahhabs, that what is meant by crying here is crying with a loud voice and wailing, not simply tears flowing from the eyes. End quote.

2 – ‘Aa’ishah’s response

The response of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) to these ahaadeeth is ijtihaad on her part, as she thought that ‘Umar and his son (may Allaah be pleased with them both) were mistaken and that these ahaadeeth contradicted the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another” [al-An’aam 6:164].

Al-Qurtubi said: ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) denied that and ruled that the narrator had made a mistake or forgotten, or that he had heard part of the hadeeth and not another. This is

unlikely because those Sahaabah who narrated these ahaadeeth are great in number and they are certain, so there is no room for rejecting it when it can be interpreted in a correct manner. End quote.

If it is said: How could ‘Aa’ishah swear that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not say this even though it is proven that he did?

The answer is that she swore to that effect in the basis of what she thought most likely to be the case, that ‘Umar and his son ‘Abd-Allaah (may Allaah be pleased with them) had misunderstood, and swearing on the basis of what one thinks is most likely is permissible, as al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said.

3 – Reconciling between the ahaadeeth and the verse which ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) quoted as evidence – “and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another” [al-An’aam 6:164] – and there is no contradiction between them.

The scholars varied in the ways in which they interpreted the hadeeth and proved that it does not contradict the verse. They did this in several ways:

(i) The method of al-Bukhaari

He is tormented because of that, if that was his habit and his way and he approved of his family doing that during his lifetime, so he will be tormented for that. If that was not his way then he will not be tormented. Al-Bukhaari said: “Chapter: The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): ‘The deceased is tormented because of his family’s crying for him’ if wailing was his habit.”

Al-Haafiz said:

Based on this, the meaning is that the one who is tormented because of some of his family’s crying for him is the one who approved of that and it was his habit, etc. Hence the compiler said: “If it was not his way” i.e., such as one who does not know that they do any of that, or he did what was required of him by telling them not to do that. Such a person is not to be blamed because of

the actions of others. Hence Ibn al-Mubaarak said: If he used to tell them not to do that during his lifetime, then they do any of those things after he dies, there will be no blame on him. End quote.

(ii)

Al-Nawawi attributed it to the majority and regarded it as the correct interpretation. They interpreted the hadeeth as referring to one who requested that people weep and wail for him after his death, and his request was carried out. This person will be tormented because of his family's crying and wailing for him, because he is the cause of it and it is attributable to him. But if a person's family weep and wail for him without him having asked them to do that, he will not be tormented, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another" [al-An'aam 6:164]. They said: It was the custom of the Arabs to request that that be done, as in the lines of poetry composed by Tarafah ibn al-'Abd:

"When I die, lament me as I deserve and rend your garment for me, O daughter of Ma'bad."

They said: So the hadeeth is to be understood in terms of what was customary for them.

(iii)

It is to be understood as referring to one who requests that people weep and wail for him, or who does not leave instructions that these things should not be done.

The one who leaves instructions that this should not be done will not be tormented because of it, because he has nothing to do with it and he was not negligent. The point here is that he should leave instructions that these things not be done, and whoever neglects that will be tormented because of it. This is the view of Dawood and others.

(iv)

A number of scholars said that what is meant by the ahaadeeth is that they used to wail for the deceased and lament him by listing his so-called good qualities, which in fact were bad qualities according to sharee'ah, for which he would be tormented.

So what is meant by “he is tormented because of his family’s crying for him” is that his torment is commensurate with his family’s lamentation.

This view was favoured by Ibn Hazm and others.

They used to lament the dead for his leadership by means of which he oppressed others, for his courage which he used in ways other than obedience to Allaah, his generosity which was not in support of the truth; so his family weep for him and list these traits, when he is being tormented because of them.

(v)

What is meant by torment is the rebuke of the angels for the things for which his family eulogize him, as narrated by Ibn Maajah (1594) from Aseed ibn Abi Aseed from Moosa ibn Abi Moosa al-‘Ashari from his father, that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The deceased is tormented for the crying of the living. If they say, ‘O my strength, O he who clothed us, O my help, O my rock,’ and so on, he is rebuked and it is said, ‘Were you really like that? Were you really like that?’”

Aseed said: I said, Subhaan-Allaah, Allaah says, “And no bearer of burdens shall bear another’s burden” [Faatir 35:18]. He said, Woe to you, I tell you that Abu Moosa narrated to me from the Messenger of Allaah (S), and you think that Abu Moosa was telling lies about the Prophet (S)? Or do you think that I am telling lies about Abu Moosa?

Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah.

Another version was narrated by al-Tirmidhi (1003): “There is no one who dies and his mourner laments him, saying, ‘O my rock, O my master’ and so on, but two angels are appointed to shove him, saying, ‘Were you really like that?’” Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

This is supported by the report narrated by al-Bukhaari (4268) from al-Nu’maan ibn Basheer (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said: ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Rawaahah fell unconscious, and his sister ‘Amrah started to weep, saying, “O our rock” and so on, enumerating his good traits. When he

regained consciousness, he said: “You did not say anything but it was said to me: ‘Are you really like that?’” When he died, she did not cry for him.

(vi)

That what is meant by torment is the pain that the deceased feels because of the wailing etc that his family does. This is the view favoured by Abu Ja’far al-Tabari among the earlier scholars; it was also regarded as more correct by al-Qaadi ‘Iyaad, and was supported by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah and a number of later scholars.

They quoted as evidence for that the hadeeth of Qaylah bint Makhramah, which says that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade her to cry for her son and said: “If you are kind to your little companion in this world, why can’t you say Inna Lillaahi wa inna ilayhi raaji’oon [Verily to Allaah we belong and unto Him is our return] when he dies? By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, when one of you cries that causes his little companion to shed tears. O slaves of Allaah, do not torment your dead.” Al-Haafiz said: its isnaad is hasan. Al-Haythami said: its men are thiqaat (trustworthy).

This last view is the most correct of what has been said concerning the meaning of the hadeeth.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah was asked in Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (34/364): Is the deceased harmed by his family’s crying for him?

He replied:

There is a difference of opinion concerning this issue among the earlier and later generations and the scholars.

The correct view is that he is harmed by their crying, as is stated in the saheeh ahaadeeth narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

… then he quoted some of these ahaadeeth, then he said:

This was denied by some of the earlier and later generations, because they thought that this

meant that a person was being punished for the sin of another, which is contrary to the verse in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another” [al-An’aam 6:164]. Then they varied in how they commented on those saheeh ahaadeeth. Some said that the narrators, such as ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab and others, had made a mistake; this was the method of ‘Aa’ishah, al-Shaafa’i and others.

Some interpreted that as referring to cases where the deceased had instructed that that be done, so he is punished for his instructions. This was the view of a number of people such as al-Mazani and others.

Some interpreted it as referring to cases where that is the custom, so he is punished for not forbidding an evil action. This is the view of a number of people such as my [i.e., Ibn Taymiyah’s] grandfather Abu’l-Barakaat.

All of these views are very weak. The clear, saheeh ahaadeeth that were narrated by people such as ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab, his son ‘Abd-Allaah, Abu Moosa al-Ash’ari and others cannot be refuted by such arguments.

Some of those who accept this hadeeth as it is think that this comes under the heading of punishing a man for the sins of another, and that Allaah does as He wills and rules as He wants, so they believe that Allaah punishes a man for the sin of another.

But Allaah will not punish anyone in the Hereafter except for his own sin: “and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another” [al-An’aam 6:164].

As for the deceased being tormented because of his family’s crying for him, the word used in Arabic is yu’adhdhab, not yu’aaqab. ‘Adhaab is more general in meaning than ‘iqaab; it refers to pain and not everyone who suffers pain for some reason is being punished for that reason. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Travel is a kind of torment (‘adhaab); it keeps one of you from his food and drink.” So he called travel a torment (‘adhaab), but it is not a punishment for any sin. A man may be tormented by unpleasant things that he senses, such as alarming noises, bad smells and nasty images, so he is tormented by hearing them, smelling them

or seeing them, but this does not mean that he is being punished for some deed. How can we deny that the deceased may be tormented by his family's wailing, even though the wailing is not a deed of his for which he is to be punished?

We cannot decide that every person for whom his family wails is being tormented because of it.

Then Shaykh al-Islam [Ibn Taymiyah] said:

Wailing is a cause of torment, but that may be warded off by the status of the deceased.

This torment which may befall the believer because of his family's wailing for him, is among the hardships by means of which Allaah will expiate the believer's sins.

In the case of the kaafir, his torment will be increased thereby, so the pain of the punishment is exacerbated by the pain that results from his family's crying for him.

Then Shaykh al-Islam said:

The pains or torment that befall the Muslim in this world, in al-barzakh and on the Day of Resurrection are a means by which Allaah will expiate his sins, as it is narrated in al-Saheehayn that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ""No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, butAllaah expiates some of his sins for that." End quote.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: What is the meaning of the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "The believer is tormented because of his family's crying for him"?

He replied:

What it means is that if his family cries for him, he will know of that and will feel pain. It does not mean that Allaah will punish him for that because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another" [al-An'aam 6:164]. Torment is not necessarily a punishment. Have you not heard the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of

Allaah be upon him), “Travel is a kind of torment”? Travel is not a kind of punishment, but a person suffers torment and exhaustion during it. Similarly, when the deceased person’s family weeps for him, he suffers pain and is upset by that, even though that is not a punishment from Allaah. This interpretation of the hadeeth is quite clear and does not cause any confusion. There is no need to say that this has to do with one who left instructions that they wail for him, or one whose family’s custom was to wail but he did not tell them not to do that. Rather we say that a person may be tormented by something but it doesn’t harm him. End quote.

Majmoo’ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 17/408

See Fath al-Baari, 3/180-185.