124611 - Commentary on the hadeeth “No one overburdens himself in his religion but he will be unable to continue in that way”

the question

What is the meaning of the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), “No one overburdens himself in his religion but he will be unable to continue in that way”?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

“Religion is easy, and no one overburdens himself in his religion but he will be unable to continue in that way. So do not be extremists, but try to be near perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded. Gain strength by worshipping in the mornings and afternoons and during the last hours of the night.”

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (39) and Muslim (2816).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Rajab (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The meaning of this hadeeth is that it is not allowed to go to extremes in religion, by overburdening oneself with acts of worship that one cannot do except with extreme hardship. This is what is meant by the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), “No one overburdens himself in his religion but he will be unable to continue in that way”, i.e., religion is not to be approached in an extreme manner, and whoever does that will be defeated.

In Musnad al-Imam Ahmad (5/32), in a report which was classed as hasan by the commentators on the Musnad, it is narrated that Mihjan ibn al-Adra' said: I came with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and when we were at the door of the mosque, we saw a man who was praying. He said: "Do you think he is sincere?" I said: "O Prophet of Allaah, this is So and so, he is one of the best of the people of Madeenah, or one of those who pray the most of the people of Madeenah." He said: "Don't let him hear you lest you be doomed" – two or three times – "you are an ummah for whom I want ease."

According to another report: "The best of your religion is that which is easiest, the best of your religion is that which is easiest." Musnad Ahmad (3/479). It was classed as hasan by the commentators.

According to a marfoo' report narrated by 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas:

"This religion is very profound so approach it in a gentle manner and do not make yourself hate the worship of Allaah because the traveller who does not let his mount rest will not reach his destination and his mount will not be able to keep going."

al-Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi (3/19); classed as da'eef by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Da'eefah (1/64).

The one who does not let his mount rest will not reach his destination and he will become like one who is cut off, because his mount is no longer able to continue, so he is close to doom. Had he been kind to his mount and taken it easy during his journey, his mount would have been able to travel the distance with him and get him to his destination. End quote. Fath al-Baari by Ibn Rajab (1/136-139).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

What is meant is that no one goes to extremes in religious deeds and forsakes the easy approach but he will become incapable and will be unable to continue in that way.

Ibn al-Muneer said: This hadeeth is one of the signs of Prophethood. We have seen and the people

before us saw that everyone who goes to extremes in religious matters will be cut off and doomed.

It does not mean that we should not seek to be more perfect in worship, for that is something praiseworthy. Rather what is forbidden is the kind of extremism that leads to getting bored with it, or going to such extremes in doing voluntary acts that one ends up forsaking that which is better, or it leads to delaying the obligatory act until the time for it is past, like one who stays up and prays all night, until sleep overcomes him at the end of the night and he sleeps and misses offering Fajr prayer in congregation, or until the preferred time for it is over, or until the sun rises and the time for the obligatory prayer ends. End quote.

Fath al-Baari by Ibn Hajar (1/94).

Al-'Allaamah 'Abd al-Rahmaan al-Sa'di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

How great this hadeeth is and how concise and good is its beneficial advice and comprehensive principles. At the beginning of it the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) established this important principle, and said: "Religion is easy" i.e., it is easy and simple in its beliefs, morals and deeds, in its actions and abstentions.

The beliefs that have to do with belief in Allaah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the last Day, the divine decree both good and bad – these are sound beliefs in which hearts find rest and which will bring the one who believes in them to the best end.

Its morals and deeds are the most perfect of morals and the most righteous of deeds, in which are the best interests of religion, this world and the Hereafter. By missing out on them, nothing good can be achieved. They are all easy and simple; everyone who is accountable sees himself as able to do them and does not find any hardship or difficulty in doing so.

Its beliefs are sound and simple, acceptable to the sound mind and sound human nature.

Its obligations are the easiest thing.

The five prayers are repeated five times every day and night, at the appropriate times. The All-Knowing, All-Aware has made them more easy making it obligatory to offer them in congregation and gathering to offer them, because gathering to perform acts of worship makes them easier, and decreed that there should be a great deal of goodness in religious commitment and soundness of faith, and that there should be both immediate and deferred rewards, which makes the believer find comfort in doing them and praise Allaah for enjoining them on His slaves, for they cannot do without them.

Zakaah is not required of any poor person who does not have wealth that reaches the nisaab or minimum threshold at which zakaah becomes due. Rather it is required of the rich so as to complete their religion and their Islam, to purify their wealth and their hearts, to ward off calamities from them and their wealth, to cleanse them of their sins, to offer comfort to the needy and to bring about harmony in society. But despite that it is a very small amount when compared with what Allaah has given them of wealth and provision.

As for fasting, it is obligatory for one month of the year, in which all the Muslims come together and forsake their basic desires – for food, drink and physical relations – during the day, and Allaah compensates them for that by His grace and kindness, completing their religious commitment and faith and increasing their perfection, with His great reward, and many other good things that come as the consequence of fasting. It is also a means of attaining piety (taqwa) which is the basis of doing all kinds of good deeds and avoiding evil things.

With regard to Hajj, Allaah has only enjoined it on the one who is able to do it, and only once in a lifetime. There are many religious and worldly benefits in it, more than can be counted. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “That they may witness things that are of benefit to them” [al-Hajj 22:28], i.e., in both religious and worldly terms.

Then after that there are all the rituals of Islam which are very easy and have to do with the rights of Allaah and the rights of His slaves. They are easy in and of themselves. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Allaah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you” [al-Baqarah 2:185]. Nevertheless, if something prevents a person from

doing things, such as sickness, travel and the like, Allaah has granted some concessions, and waived some duties, or allowed doing them in a different way, as is well known.

Moreover, if a person looks at the various things that people do day and night, both obligatory and naafil, prayer, fasting, charity and so on, and wants to follow the example of the most perfect of mankind and their leader, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), in doing them, he will find that it is not too difficult for him, and it will not keep him from attending to his worldly interests, rather by doing that he will be able to do all his duties, his duties towards Allaah, his duty towards himself, his duty towards his family and friends, and his duty towards everyone who has a right over him, quite easily.

But the one who overburdens himself and is not content with that with which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was content or that which he taught to his ummah, rather he goes to extremes and overburdens himself with acts of worship, will be overwhelmed and in the end he will be unable to continue and will stop doing it. Hence he said: “and no one overburdens himself in his religion but he will be unable to continue in that way.”

So the one who overburdens himself with regard to religious matters and is not moderate will be overwhelmed by it and will lose steam and will find himself going backwards.

Hence the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) enjoined and encouraged moderation, and said: “I urge you to be moderate and you will reach your goal.”

Then he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) enjoined avoiding extremism and trying to be near perfection, and encouraged people to be hopeful and not to yield to despair.

Avoiding extremism means saying and doing the right thing, and following a wise path; it means saying and doing the right thing in all senses. If he cannot do that in every situation, then let him fear Allaah as much as he can, and draw near to the goal, because if a person cannot manage to get things completely right, let him come close, and if he cannot do all that then let him do as much as he can.

From this may be taken a useful principle which is also indicated in the verse in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So keep your duty to Allaah and fear Him as much as you can”

[al-Taghaabun 64:16]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When I tell you to do something, do as much of it as you can.” The issues that are based on this principle are innumerable.

In another hadeeth it says: “Make things easy (for people) and do not make things difficult, give glad tidings and do not put people off.”

Then the hadeeth ends with advice that is easy for people, but is extremely beneficial, which is: “Gain strength by worshipping in the mornings and afternoons and during the last hours of the night.”

These three times are times when, if the traveller travels at these times, he will be able to reach his destination, whether it is far or near, and he and his mount will both still be in good shape. Also these three times could help a person to reach his destination in the Hereafter and travel the straight path and reach Allaah in an easy manner. So if a person occupy himself with good and righteous deeds that are suited to the time – at the beginning and end of the day and part of the night, especially at the end of the night, that will bring him a greater share of good and he will attain happiness, victory and prosperity, and he will be successful in finding ease and rest, as well as attaining his worldly and psychological goals.

This is one of the greatest signs of Allaah’s mercy towards His slaves in this religion which is the means of eternal happiness, as Allaah sent it as guidance to His slaves and explained it on the lips of His Messengers, and has made it easy, and helped with it in all ways, and show kindness to those who strive hard and protected them from obstacles and impediments.

Thus it is known that a number of principles may be derived from this great hadeeth:

1.Islam is easy in general

2.Hardship opens the door to relief

3.If I tell you to do something, do as much of it as you can.

4.It encourages those who strive hard and gives them glad tidings of goodness and reward that stem from their actions.

5.Comprehensive advice on how to reach Allaah, advice which may be sufficient on its own and no other advice could take its place.

May the blessings and peace of Allaah be upon the one who was given the power and benefit of concise speech. End quote.

Bahjat Quloob al-Abraar wa Qurrat ‘Ayn al-Akhyaar fi Sharh Jawaami’ al-Akhbaar (p. 77-80).

And Allaah knows best.