149230 - Ruling on sitting, resting on the heel of the left hand behind one’s back

the question

I have a question about a hadith in the book Riyadh as-Saaliheen. It was narrated that ash-Shareed ibn as-Suwayd said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) passed by me when I was sitting like this: I had put my left hand behind me and I was leaning on the heel of my hand. He said: “Are you sitting in the manner of those with whom Allah is angry?” Narrated by Abu Dawood. Is this hadith saheeh? Is it also haraam to sit resting on the palm of the left hand or is that makrooh? I hope that you will advise me, quoting the views of the scholars.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

This hadith is saheeh. it was narrated by Ahmad (18960), Abu Dawood (4848), and Ibn Hibbaan in his Saheeh (5674).

It was classed as saheeh by al-Haakim, and adh-Dhahabi agreed with him. It was also classed as saheeh by an-Nawawi in Riyadh as-Saaliheen (1/437); Ibn Muflih in al-Adaab ash-Shar‘iyyah (3/288); and al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

At-Teebi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: What is meant by those with whom Allah is angry is the Jews. From the description of them in these terms we learn two things: firstly, that this manner of sitting is something that Allah, may He be exalted, hates and, secondly, that the Muslim is one of those whom Allah has blessed, so he should avoid resembling those with whom Allah is angry and whom He has cursed. End quote.

Al-Qaari (may Allah have mercy on him) commented by saying:

The idea that what is meant here by “those with whom Allah is angry” is the Jews is subject to further discussion; the validity of this interpretation depends on whether this is something unique to them. What is more likely to be the case is that what is meant by “those with whom Allah is angry” is more general and includes the arrogant, conceited disbelievers and evildoers, who show signs of self-admiration and pride in the manner in which they sit, walk and so on.

End quote from Mirqaat al-Mafaateeh (13/500).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It was narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that he saw a man leaning on his left hand when he was sitting during the prayer. He said to him: Do not sit like that, for this is how those who are punished sit. According to another report: That is the way in which those with whom Allah is angry pray. According to yet another report, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade anyone to sit during the prayer leaning on his hand. All of that was narrated by Abu Dawood.

This hadith indicates that it is not allowed to sit in this manner, for the reason that it is the way in which those who are punished sit. This is a more effective way of saying that one should avoid their practices.

End quote from Iqtida’ as-Siraat al-Mustaqeem (p. 65)

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

Some of the scholars said that it is not permissible for a man to rest on the heel of his left hand. Shaykh al-Islam said that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) passed by a man who was leaning on his left hand whilst praying, and he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: “This is the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry.” Does this apply only to this action – leaning on the left hand – whilst praying, or is it applicable in all circumstances?

He replied:

Yes, there is a hadith in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) denounced that. What appears to be the case is that it is general in application and includes prayer and other circumstances, if one is leaning on the left hand and leaning on the heel of the hand, like this. The apparent meaning of the hadith is that this is not allowed.

End quote. Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn Baaz (25/161)

If a person wants to lean back, then he should lean on the heel of his right hand, not his left, or he should lean on both of his hands together.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This manner of sitting was described by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) as being the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry. As for placing both hands behind one’s back and leaning on them both, there is nothing wrong with that, or if he leans on his right hand, there is nothing wrong with it. Rather that which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) described as the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry is placing the left hand behind one’s back and placing the heel of the hand on the ground and leaning on it. This is what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) described as the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry.

End quote. Sharh Riyadh as-Saaliheen (p. 930)

He also said:

The meaning of the hadith is clear; it means that a person should not lean on his left hand placing it behind him, placing the palm on the ground.

The shaykh was asked: if a person’s intention in sitting in this manner is to rest, and not to imitate the Jews, is he sinning by doing that?

He replied: If that is his intention, then let him put the right hand with it, then the prohibition will no longer apply.

End quote. Fataawa Noor ‘ala ad-Darb (111/19)

Secondly:

Some of the scholars described this manner of sitting as makrooh. Abu Dawood included this hadith in his Sunan (12/480) in a chapter entitled: Chapter on disliked manners of sitting.

Ibn Muflih (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It is makrooh for anyone to lean on his left hand, placing it behind his back.

End quote. Al-Adaab ash-Shar‘iyyah (3/288)

Something similar was also stated by as-Safaareeni in Ghidha’ al-Albaab (6/76)

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-‘Abbaad said:

It may be that what is meant by makrooh here is that it is haraam, or it may mean that it is disliked. But the fact that in this hadith this manner of sitting is described as the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry indicates that it is haraam. End quote.

Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood (28/49)

To sum up:

It is not allowed to sit in this manner in prayer or otherwise, regardless of whether or not the intention is to imitate those with whom Allah is angry of the Jews and other arrogant people. The fact that this manner of sitting is described as the manner of sitting of those with whom Allah is angry and of those who are punished indicates that the view that it is haraam is stronger than the view that it is makrooh.

And Allah knows best.