379067 - We are not allowed to pray in camel pens, so why was the Prophet’s Mosque built in the place where the camel knelt down?

the question

I was talking to a man about the Messenger’s prohibition on praying in camel pens and he said to me: how come, when it was decided that the Prophet’s Mosque would be built where his camel knelt down? I hope that you can explain that.

Summary of answer

Camel pens are the places that they frequent. Thus it becomes clear that there is no contradiction between this prohibition on praying in camel pens and the hadith of the Hijrah. The camel’s sitting in that place was a transient event, so the place where it knelt down was not regarded as a camel pen or a place frequented by camels in which we are forbidden to pray. Similarly, the prohibition on praying in camel pens only applies so long as the place remains like that and is still frequented by camels. But if it is cleaned and the dirt in it is removed, and a mosque is built in that place, then there is no prohibition on praying in it and it is not disliked to do so.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The prohibition on praying in camel pens

It was narrated that it is prohibited to pray in camel pens. It was narrated from Jabir ibn Samurah that a man asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)… Can I pray in sheep pens? He said: “Yes.” He said: Can I pray in camel pens? He said: “No.” Narrated by Muslim, 360.

What is meant by the word translated here as camel pens is:

The place where camels kneel down… What is meant by camel pens is the places where they stay.(*Kashf al-Mushkil min Hadith as-Sahihayn* by Ibn al-Jawzi, 1/457).

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Pray in sheep pens, but do not pray in camel pens.” Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (348), who said: The hadith of Abu Hurayrah is a hasan sahih hadith.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

[The word translated as] camel pens may mean three things: anywhere camels kneel down; the place where they stay and return to at night; or the place where they rest after drinking water or when waiting for water. These are three different things.

The correct view is that it refers to the place where camels stay and to which they return at night, whether it is enclosed by walls or by a fence or trees and the like. It may also refer to where they settle after drinking water. If camels get used to sitting in this place, even though it is not the place they return to at the end of the day, it is to be regarded as being like a camel pen.(*Ash-Sharh al-Mumti`*, 2/242-243).

Hence camel pens are the places that they frequent. Thus it becomes clear that there is no contradiction between this prohibition on praying in camel pens and the hadith of the Hijrah which was narrated by al-Bukhari (3906), in which it says: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) stayed with Banu `Amr ibn `Awf for more than ten nights, during which he founded the mosque that was founded on piety. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) prayed there, then he got on his camel and proceeded, accompanied by the people, until his she-camel knelt down at the site of the mosque of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in Madinah. At that time, some of the Muslim men used to pray in that place; it was a place for drying dates that belonged to Suhayl and Sahl, two orphan boys who were under the care of Sa`d ibn Zurarah. When his she-camel knelt down in that place, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If Allah wills, this place is where we will halt.” Then the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) called

the two boys and asked them to name a price for the date-drying place so that he could take it as a mosque, but they said: No; rather we will give it to you as a gift, O Messenger of Allah. But the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) refused to accept it as a gift from them, and bought it from them, then he built a mosque there….

The camel's sitting in that place was a transient event, so the place where it knelt down cannot be regarded as a camel pen or a place frequented by camels in which we are forbidden to pray.

The place where a camel sits down briefly cannot be regarded as a camel pen. Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

When camels sit down briefly in a place and then move on, such a place does not come under the heading of camel pens, because it is not a place where they habitually sit.(*Ash-Sharh al-Mumti`*, 2/243).

On the other hand, if it is proven that this was a place that was frequented by camels and they habitually sat there, that characteristic ceased when it was turned into a mosque, so the prohibition ceased to apply, because the reason and characteristics that were the reason for the prohibition were no longer there.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If the Lawgiver connects the ruling to a specific reason, that ruling ceases to apply when the reason is no longer there.

For example, in the case of alcohol, the ruling is that it is impure and that the hadd punishment is to be carried out on one who drinks it, because it is intoxicating. But if it is no longer intoxicant, because it has turned into vinegar, the ruling no longer applies. Similarly, if someone is described as an evildoer (fasiq), as a result of that it is not allowed to accept his testimony or narration [of hadith], but if he no longer has that characteristic, the rulings connected to that cease to apply. The same applies to being feeble-minded, a minor, insane or unconscious: the rulings cease to apply when those characteristics are no longer there. Islamic law is based on this principle.(*I`lam*

al-Muwaqqi`in, 5/528-529).

Based on that, the prohibition on praying in camel pens only applies so long as the place remains like that and is still frequented by camels. But if it is cleaned and the dirt in it is removed, and a mosque is built in that place, then there is no prohibition on praying in it and it is not disliked to do so.

And Allah knows best.