72234 - What is meant by the hadeeth, “Whoever visits a people should not lead them in prayer”

the question

The Prophet Muhammad forbad a visitor/ guest from leading locals in prayers, instead one of the locals should lead the prayers (Ref Hadith reported from Malik ibn al-Huwayrith in Tirmizi and Abudawud. Imam Tirmizi classed it Hasan, or perhaps Hasan Sahih). This Hadith (a 'Nas', as I believe) is not abided by in our Mosques when a guest of the Khateeb comes. The Khateeb invites the guest to lead prayers, and the guest does so. In support of this, the Khateebs bring the Hadith which says that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) led prayers in Makkah on the day of victory of Makkah (though he was a visitor/ not local). I seek your guidence for education purpose and to guide/advise others accordingly.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The hadeeth of Maalik ibn al-Huwayrith that is referred to here was narrated by al-Tirmidhi (356) and Abu Dawood (596) from Abu ‘Atiyyah who said: Maalik ibn al-Huwayrith used to come to us in our prayer place and talk to us. The time for prayer came one day and we said to him: “Go forward (to lead the prayer).” He said: “Let one of you go forward, until I tell you why I will not go forward. I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: ‘Whoever visits a people should not lead them in prayer. Let a man from among them lead them in prayer.’”

Abu ‘Eesa al-Tirmidhi said: This is a saheeh hasan hadeeth, which is to be followed according to the majority of scholars among the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and others. They said: The owner of the house is more entitled to lead the prayer than a visitor.

Some of the scholars said: if the owner of the house gives permission, then it is acceptable for the visitor to lead the prayer.

Based on the hadeeth of Maalik ibn al-Huwayrith, Ishaaq was strict on this issue and said that no one should lead the owner of a house in prayer, even if the owner of the house gives him permission. He said: Similarly in the mosque, no one should lead them in prayer in the mosque if he is visiting them. He said: Let a man from among them lead them in prayer. End quote from Sunan al-Tirmidhi.

Al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) said of this hadeeth: It is saheeh apart from the story of Maalik. Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi.

There is evidence in the Sunnah that it is permissible for a visitor to lead the owner of the house in prayer, if that is with his permission. This is the report narrated by Muslim (673) from Abu Mas'ood al-Ansaari (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No man should lead another in prayer in the place of his authority, or sit in his place of honour in his house, except with his permission."

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) "No man should lead another in prayer in the place of his authority" mean what our companions and others have said, that the owner of the house or majlis, or the imam of the mosque, have more right to that than anyone else, even if the other man has more knowledge of Islam or Qur'aan or is more pious or better than him. The owner of a place has more right, so if he wants to lead the prayer he may do so, and if he wants to ask someone else to do that he may do so, even if the one whom he asks to lead the prayer is not as good as the rest of those who are present, because it is his place of authority and he may do whatever he likes.

With regard to the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) "sit in his place of honour in his house, except with his permission", the scholars said: the place of honour refers to the rug etc that is just for the owner of the house. End quote.

Al-Shawkaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the hadeeth of Maalik ibn al-

Huwayrith: Most of the scholars are of the view that there is nothing wrong with a visitor leading the prayer with permission from the owner of the place, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in the hadeeth of Abu Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him): "except with his permission."

End quote from Nayl al-Awtaar, 3/170

The fact that a visitor may lead the owner of the house in prayer is also indicated by the report narrated by al-Bukhaari (424) and Muslim (33) from 'Itbaan ibn Maalik (may Allaah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) came to him in his house and said: "Where would you like me to pray for you in your house." I pointed out a spot to him, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said takbeer, and we lined up behind him, and he prayed two rak'ahs.

The fact that a traveller may lead residents in prayer is indicated by the report narrated by al-Tirmidhi (545) from Abu Nadrah who said: 'Imraan ibn Husayn was asked about the prayer of a traveller. He said: I performed Hajj with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and he prayed two rak'ahs, and I performed Hajj with Abu Bakr and he performed two rak'ahs, and with 'Umar and he performed two rak'ahs, and with 'Uthmaan for six or eight years of his caliphate and he prayed two rak'ahs. Al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) said concerning this hadeeth: it is saheeh li ghayrihi.

Maalik narrated in al-Muwatta' (349) that when 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) came to Makkah, he led them in praying two rak'ahs then he said: "O people of Makkah, complete your prayers, for we are travellers." Narrated by Abu Dawood, 1229 and attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), but with a da'eef (weak) isnaad. It was classed as da'eef by al-Albaani in Da'eef Abi Dawood. But the hadeeth of 'Imraan ibn Husayn quoted above is sufficient. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to pray two rak'ahs during his journey to Hajj, and the people of Makkah used to pray behind him in Makkah, then they undoubtedly completed their prayers to make them four rak'ahs.

Al-Shawkaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: The men in the isnaad of ‘Umar’s report are all thiqaat (trustworthy). End quote from Nayl al-Awtaar, 3/177

The conclusion we reach from all these ahaadeeth is that the owner of a house and the imam of a mosque are more entitled to lead the prayer than anyone else, but if they give permission to a visitor and traveller to lead the prayer, they have the right to do so.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: how can we reconcile between the hadeeth which says “No man should lead another in prayer in the place of his authority, or sit in his place of honour in his house, except with his permission” and the hadeeth which says, “Whoever visits a people should not lead them in prayer”?

He replied:

It is to be understood as referring to leading them in prayer without their permission, or they may be reconciled by noting that it is better not to do that even if he is given permission. The word permission indicates that this is allowed. End quote.

Fataawa wa Rasaa’il al-Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem, 2/285

And Allaah knows best.