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عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ رَضِيَ
اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا أَنَّ رَجُلًا سَأَلَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
فَقَالَ: أَرَأَيْتَ إِذَا صَلَّيْتُ الْمَكْتُوبَاتِ وَصُمْتُ رَمَضَانَ
وَأَحَلَلْتُ الْحَلَالَ وَحَرَّمْتُ الْحَرَامَ وَلَمْ أَزِدْ عَلَى ذَلِكَ شَيْئًا
أَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ: نَعَمْ. رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ. وَمَعْنَى حَرَّمْتُ
الْحَرَامَ: اجْتَنَبْتُهُ. وَمَعْنَى أَحَلَلْتُ الْحَلَالَ: فَعَلْتُهُ مُعْتَقِدًا
حِلَّهُ.

Abu 'Abdullah Jabir bin 'Abdullah al-Ansari, radiyallahu anhuma, reported that a man questioned the Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ), saying: "Do you see, if I pray the prescribed (prayers), fast during Ramadhan, treat the lawful as permissible and treat the forbidden as prohibited, but do nothing more than that, shall I enter Paradise?" He (the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) answered: "Yes." [Muslim]

Background

Imam Nawawi said that the meaning of "treat the forbidden as prohibited" is to avoid the forbidden, and the meaning of "treat the lawful as permissible" is to perform them believing that they are permissible.

Ibn Rajab gave two other interpretations:

1. "To treat the lawful as permissible" - to believe that it is permissible; "To treat the forbidden as prohibited" - to believe that it is prohibited and to avoid it.
2. "To treat the lawful as permissible" - to perform it. "Lawful" here means what is not prohibited, which includes wajib (obligatory deeds), mustahab (preferable deeds) and mubah (allowed).

One thing that we notice about the hadith is that Hajj and Zakah are not mentioned even though they make up the five Pillars of Islam. According to some scholars, the person who asked the question passed away (in the Battle of Uhud) before hajj was made an obligation. As for zakah, it is possible that it also was not yet made an obligation; alternatively, the person questioning was not a person of wealth and therefore was not required to pay zakah.

Lessons

This hadith indicates that the one who fulfils the obligations and avoids the prohibitions will enter Paradise. This meaning has been emphasised in a number of other hadiths.

This hadith emphasises surrendering to the Will of Allah subhana wa ta'ala - to accept as permissible what Allah has permitted and to accept as forbidden what Allah has prohibited. This also emphasises Islam itself because Islam means to 'fully surrender to the Will of Allah and to accept everything that has been commanded by Allah'.

In our contemporary times, there arise the issue of Muslims not fully adhering to the shariah, i.e. Allah's commandments. If this is because they are new Muslims or that they live in areas where there is a lack of knowledge or poor dissemination of information (e.g. there are no scholars to advise them), then this lack of adherence is excusable. However, if a Muslim chooses to intentionally ignore or reject the obligations and prohibitions set by Allah without good reasons, then he may be in danger of losing his Islamic entity or identity.

These obligatory acts mentioned in the hadith that will lead a person to Paradise require strong belief in Allah, commitment and continuous efforts. Only then will it be an easy task to achieve.

This hadith implies that the mustahab (or sunnah or preferable deeds) are not necessary for one to be able to enter Paradise. What counts or what matters is fulfilling the obligatory acts. However, we are encouraged to perform preferable deeds according to our capacity and whenever possible.

The significance of performing preferable acts is that it will lead us in getting closer to Allah subhana wa ta'ala. In addition, preferable deeds compensate for our shortcomings in performing the obligatory acts.

Some scholars have made the assumption that the person asking the question in the hadith was new to Islam. This gives insights to educators (murabbi) and preachers (du'at) to observe the following lessons when dealing with new converts to Islam:

1. The murabbi or scholar should take into account the background or status of the questioner before attending to and answering his or her questions. Different people with different backgrounds may require different answers or different approaches in conveying the answers. This is because a person who comes from a different culture or lives in a different environment from the murabbis or scholars may not fully understand the scholar's explanations if it cannot be related to his/her situation.

If the murabbi or scholar doesn't know the background of the questioner (e.g. if questions are being asked through mail, through the telephone, on the radio, etc.), then he needs to find out as much as possible about the questioner before answering. Some scholars try to speculate what could be the status of the person asking the question by, for example, trying to read between the lines of the text of the question. The end-result is that the scholars do not provide one fixed answer - there will be a few answers, each applicable to a different situation.

2. The murabbi or scholar should not overburden new Muslims by asking them or encouraging them to perform preferable acts. The murabbi should just get them to start with the obligatory acts. If they are given too much to do, it may become too much for them to cope and they may lose interest in Islam altogether. The murabbi or scholar should start slowly and when the new Muslims are settled and are performing the obligatory deeds, only then should they be introduced to the preferable acts.

Similarly, new Muslims should not be subjected to conflicting issues or views in Islam. For example, they should not be told about the four different schools of thought (madhab) and be asked to choose which madhab to follow. This will only confuse the new Muslims. The murabbi or du'at should make it easy and simple for converts to start their new lives in Islam. Only later on can such issues be discussed.

The same thing can be said about the awam (general public). Scholars should not overburden them or bombard them with too many obligations or concepts. This is also a lesson we can learn from this hadith: the murabbi or scholar should observe the background of the questioner as well as the audience in general if there is no questioner.

An area related to this issue is the question of Islamic websites on the Internet. A website can be accessed by people from all over the whole world - people from different backgrounds and cultures. We have to be careful about the information that we put on these websites. Unfortunately there are Islamic websites that contain controversial issues and conflicting views, where different Muslim groups or sects promote only their school of thoughts and criticise other groups. Not only will this confuse those interested in Islam, new Muslims or existing Muslims from other parts of the world, it will also give a negative impression to the non-Muslims. It will provide information to the opponents of Islam to use as a means of discouraging

people from embracing Islam. Islamic websites should be neutral and fair and should not be one-sided or controversial because the purpose of these websites should be to promote Islam and not to condemn it.

Conclusion

This hadith shows a significant characteristic of Islam that it is a religion based on ease. There is a minimum requirement to be fulfilled by every one, which is practicing obligations and avoiding prohibitions. By fulfilling this minimum requirement a person deserves to enter Paradise. Preferable acts are encouraged, based on one's capacity and ability.