

153535 - The hadith “At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah someone who will renew its religious understanding”

the question

In Kitaab al-Mulaahim by Abu Dawood, it says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah someone who will renew its religious understanding”. Is this hadith saheeh? Who narrated it? Is the Muslim obliged to believe this hadith?

Detailed answer

This hadith is one of the well-known, saheeh hadiths; it was narrated by the great Sahaabi Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), that he said:

“At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah someone who will renew its religious understanding.”

Narrated by Abu Dawood (4291); classed as saheeh by as-Sakhkhaawi in al-Maqaasid al-Hasanah (149) and by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (no. 599).

What the Muslim is required to do is to believe in the saheeh hadiths of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and accept them, with no hesitation about what is said in them. This is one of the requirements of belief in the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination”

[an-Nisaa’ 4:59].

Mujaahid and others of the earlier generations said:

“refer it to Allah and His Messenger” means: referring to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger. This is a command from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, stating that regarding every matter concerning which the people may dispute, having to do with both fundamental matters and minor issues of religion, the dispute concerning that must be referred to the Qur’an and Sunnah, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And in whatsoever you differ, the decision thereof is with Allah (He is the ruling Judge)”

[ash-Shoora 42:10].

Whatever ruling is given and testified to by the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger is the truth, and what can there be beyond the truth except misguidance?

End quote from Tafseer al-Qur’an al-‘Azeem (2/345).

The scholars have interpreted this hadith soundly. They said:

The word “man” (translated here as “someone who”) is a relative pronoun that in general in application. It may be that the renewer (mujaddid) is an

individual or it may be a group of people. Based on that, it is not necessary to seek out the names of individual scholars at the beginning of every century and determine who among them is the best in order to decide which of them is the renewer (mujaddid), for they may all play a part in renewing religious understanding and spreading it among the ummah.

Al-Haafiz adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What I believe concerning this hadith is that the phrase “someone who will renew its religious understanding” should be understood as plural, not singular. End quote from Taareekh al-Islam (23/180).

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

A number of scholars said that the correct view is that this hadith includes every individual scholar in any given age who takes on the communal obligation of conveying knowledge from those whom he met of earlier scholars to those whom he meets of the coming generation, as it says in the hadith narrated via mursal isnaads and others: “Among successive generations, this knowledge will be transmitted by the trustworthy and honest, who will defend it against the distortions of the extremists and the fabrications of the promulgators of falsehood.” This has continued, praise be to Allah, until the current time, and we are in the eighth century.

End quote from al-Bidaayah wan Nihaayah (6/256)

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

This does not mean that at the turn of every century there will be only one; rather it may refer to a group, and this is something that makes sense, for the fields in which renewal is needed are not limited to one type, and it is not necessarily the case that all the good qualities

required (to bring about this renewal) will all be found in a single individual. However that may be the case with regard to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azeez, for he was in charge of the ummah at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century, as he combines all the good attributes and virtues, and was ahead of others in that regard. Therefore Ahmad stated that they used to interpret the hadith as referring to him. As for those who came after him, for example ash-Shaafa'i - even though he had many beautiful virtues and attributes - he was not in charge of jihad and establishing justice. Therefore, anyone who had some of these attributes and virtues at the beginning of a century may be among those referred to in the hadith, whether there are several such people or not.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (13/295).

Moreover, it is not necessarily the case that if a person meets the description of the renewer (mujaddid), Islam will prevail in his time, or that the Muslim state will have the upper hand. The renewer may be in the field of knowledge, not in the field of leadership and politics; indeed renewal may be in the field of da'wah, education and the like. This is how we may understand the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) "someone who will renew its religious understanding", as being general in meaning (and not specific).

On the basis of this understanding, we do not think that there should be any confusion in the questioner's mind concerning the meaning of the hadith.

The Standing Committee said:

What is meant by the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, "someone who will

renew its religious understanding”,
is that every time many people deviate from the path of the religion which
He perfected for His slaves, completed His favour upon them and chose for
them as their religion, He sends to them scholars or a scholar who has deep
knowledge of Islam, and a wise caller who helps the people to develop a
proper understanding of the Book of Allah and the proven Sunnah of His
Messenger, and protects them from innovation and warns them against
newly-invented matters, and brings them back from deviation to the straight
path of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (blessings and
peace of Allah be upon him). This is called renewal of the ummah (tajdeed
al-ummah), not renewal of the religion that Allah prescribed and perfected.
Changes, weakness and deviation happen time after time to the ummah; as for
Islam itself, it is protected by means of the protection of the Book of
Allah, may He be exalted, and the Sunnah of His Messenger (blessings and
peace of Allah be upon him), which explains the Book of Allah. Allah, may He
be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily We: It is We Who have
sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Qur’an) and surely, We will guard it (from
corruption)”

[al-Hijr 15:9].

End quote.

‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz, ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq ‘Afeefi, ‘Abdullah
ibn Ghadyaan, ‘Abdullah ibn Qa’ood.

Fataawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa’imah
(2/247-248).

Al-‘Allaamah Hammood at-Tuwaijri (may Allah have mercy on
him) said:

As for interpreting the hadith as referring to a few specific individuals at the beginning of every century, or one of them, that is very unlikely and the hadith does not indicate that, because the word “man” (translated here as “someone who”) may refer to the singular or the plural. Based on that, interpreting the hadith as referring to a group of scholars who take it upon themselves to spread knowledge and renew religious understanding is more appropriate than interpreting it as referring to a single individual, after whom there will come another single individual.

This is supported by the report that was narrated by at-Tirmidhi, who classed it as hasan, from ‘Amr ibn ‘Awf (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Messenger of Allah (sa) (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Islam began as something strange and will go back to being something strange, so glad tidings to the strangers, those who will correct what the people corrupt of my Sunnah after I am gone.”

It is also supported by the report which was narrated by Ibn Waddaah from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which he said: Praise be to Allah Who has blessed people by sending after the Messengers people of knowledge who call those who have gone astray from guidance, bear with patience their harm and bring people back to their senses by means of the Book of Allah...

This indicates that the renewal of religious understanding may be done by a group of scholars, and is not limited to one at a time. End quote.

Ithaaf al-Jamaa’ah bima jaa’a fi’l-Fitan wa’l-Malaahim wa
Ashraat as-Saa’ah
(1/336)

And Allah knows best.