2534 - How sound is the hadeeth “Whoever visits my grave after I die, it is as if he visited me when I was still alive”?

the question

I was once told that Rasulullah(saw) has said that visiting his grave after his death is the same as visiting him when he was alive and that, therefore, when we visit his grave in Madinah, there is no harm in speaking to him as if he were alive and requesting him to intercede on our behalf with Allah. But I'm worried that this might be 'shirk'. Please answer soon; I hope to go for an Umrah in the near future and visit his grave too, insya Allah.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Al-Daaraqutni reported in his Sunan (2/278) with an isnaad from Haatib that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever visits me after I die, it is as if he visited me when I was still alive…” This is a hadith which many of the scholars of hadith judged to be false and not to have been reported with a saheeh isnaad from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Among the scholars who voiced this opinion was al-Haafiz al-Dhahabi in Lisaan al-Meezaan (4/285), in his biography of one of the narrators, Haaroon ibn Abi Qaz’ah. Al-Dhahabi said: “…Haaroon ibn Abi Qaz’ah al-Madani [reported] from a man” – about visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Al-Bukhari said: “This is not to be accepted or followed.”

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said in Lisaan al-Meezaan (6/217): “Al-Azdi said: ‘Haaroon Abu Qaz’ah reports mursal ahadith from a man of Aal Haatib.’ I [Ibn Hajar] say: from this we understand that what he is referring to is al-Azdi. Ya’qoob ibn Shaybah also classed him as da’eef (weak).”

Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar also mentioned him in al-Talkhees al-Habeer, in his comment on the ahadith of

al-Raafa'i al-Kabeer (2/266). He said, "In his isnaad is the unknown [majhool] man" – meaning a man from Aal Haatib.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said in al-Tawassul wa'l-Waseelah (p. 134) about this hadith: "It is obviously a lie that goes against Islam. Anyone who visited him during his lifetime and believed in him, was one of his Companions, especially if he was among those who migrated to join him or fought alongside him. It is proven that he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'Do not slander my Companions, for by the One in Whose hand is my soul, if any one of you were to spend gold equal to the size of Uhud, it would not equal the deeds of one of them, not even half of it.'

[Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim]. Anyone who comes after the Sahaabah cannot be like the Sahaabah by doing obligatory duties such as Hajj, jihaad, the five daily prayers and sending blessings upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), so how can he become equal to them by doing something that is not obligatory according to the consensus of the Muslims? We are not even supposed to travel for this purpose, in fact it is forbidden to do so. However, travelling to the [Prophet's] Mosque, and to al-Masjid al-Aqsaa [in Jerusalem], for the purpose of praying there, is mustahabb (encouraged), and travelling to the Ka'bah for Hajj is waajib (obligatory). If a person who undertakes a journey that is waajib or mustahabb still cannot be like one of the Sahaabah who travelled to visit the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) during his lifetime, how can they achieve this by undertaking a journey that is not allowed?"

He also said (p. 133): "All of the ahadith about visiting his grave are da'eef, and are not to be relied upon in matters of religion. For this reason none of the authors of books of Saheeh and Sunan reported them at all; they were only narrated by those who reported da'eef ahadith, such as al-Daaraqutni, al-Bazzaar and others.

Shaykh al-Albaani said in al-Da'eefah (no. 1021) about this hadith: it is baatil (false). He mentioned what is wrong with the hadith, namely the man who is not named, and classed Haaroon Abu Qaz'ah as da'eef. There is a third fault with the hadith, which is that it causes confusion and contradiction. Then Shaykh al-Albaani said: "In general, the isnaad of this hadith is weak."

He also said in al-Da'eefah (no. 47): "many people think that Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah and those who follow him among the Salafis forbid visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) altogether. This is a lie and a fabrication, and it is not the only lie told about Ibn Taymiyah, may Allah have mercy on him, or about the Salafis. Everyone who reads the books of Ibn Taymiyah will see that he says it is permissible to visit his grave (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and that doing so is recommended (mustahabb), so long as it is not associated with any objectionable practices or innovations (bid'ah), such as travelling solely for that purpose, because of the hadith "No one should set out purposely except to visit three mosques." The hadith does not describe a ban only on travelling to visit other mosques, as many people think; it also includes a ban on setting out to visit any place which people think will bring them closer to Allah, whether it is a mosque, a grave or any other place. This is indicated by the hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah who said: 'I met Basrah ibn Abi Basrah al-Ghifaari and he asked me, 'Where are you coming from?' I said, 'From al-Toor [Sinai].' He said, 'If I had met you before you left, you would not have gone there! I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: 'Do not travel except to three mosques.'"

(Reported by Ahmad and others with a saheeh isnaad).

This clearly indicates that the Sahaabah understood the hadith to be general in application [i.e., it did not apply only to mosques]. This is supported by the fact that it is not reported that any of them ever set out with the intention of visiting a grave. They are the predecessors of Ibn Taymiyah in this regard, so whoever condemns Ibn Taymiyah is in effect condemning the salaf (the righteous predecessors), may Allah be pleased with them. May Allah have mercy on the one who said:

"All goodness is in following those who went before (the salaf)

and all evil is in following the innovations of those who came later."

In conclusion, travelling with the intention of visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is bid'ah and is haraam, because of the hadith which forbids travelling to worship in any place except the three mosques. As for visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and

blessings of Allah be upon him) when one happens to be in Madeenah, this is perfectly acceptable, as is travelling with the intention of praying in the Prophet’s Mosque as an act of worship and seeking to draw close to Allah. Those that are confused about this issue are those who do not understand the difference between what is permitted and what is forbidden.

And Allah knows best.