44877 - Our attitude concerning da’eef (weak) ahaadeeth which speak of good deeds

the question

What is the attitude of the scholars concerning a hadith whose isnaad is da’eef (weak), but whose text encourages a righteous deed or a du`a? Please respond.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The scholars differed concerning acting upon weak ahadith which encourage righteous deeds. Some of them were of the view that it is permissible to act upon them, subject to certain conditions, and others were of the view that it is not permissible to act upon them.

Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) summed up the conditions for it to be permissible to act upon a weak hadith, which are as follows:

1 – It should not be very weak, and one should not act upon a hadith which was narrated only by one of the liars or those who are accused of lying, or whose mistakes are serious.

2 – It should mention a good deed for which there is a basis in sharee’ah.

3 – When acting upon it one should not believe that the action is well-founded, rather he should do it on the basis of erring on the side of caution.

Acting upon a weak hadith does not mean that we believe it is mustahabb to do an act of worship simply because a da’eef hadith has been narrated concerning it. None of the scholars has said such a thing – as we shall see from the words of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, below – rather what it means is that if it is proven that a certain act of worship is mustahabb because there is

sound (saheeh) shar'i evidence – as in the case of qiyaam al-layl (supererogatory prayers at night), for example – then we find a da'eef hadith which speaks of the virtue of qiyaam al-layl, then there is nothing wrong with acting upon this weak hadith in that case. What is meant by acting upon it is narrating it in order to encourage people to do this act of worship, in the hope that the one who does it will earn the reward mentioned in the da'eef hadith, because acting on the weak hadith in this case will not lead to doing something that is forbidden in sharee'ah, such as saying that an act of worship is mustahabb that is not proven in sharee'ah. Rather, if he earns this reward all well and good, otherwise no harm is done.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo' al-Fatawa, 1/250:

It is not permissible in Islam to rely on weak ahadith that are neither saheeh nor hasan, but Ahmad ibn Hanbal and other scholars regarded it is permissible to narrate reports concerning righteous deeds which are not known to be proven, so long as they are not known to be lies, on the basis that if an action is known to be prescribed in Islam from shar'i evidence, and there is a hadith which is not known to be a lie, it is possible that the reward referred to in that weak hadith may be true. None of the imams said that it is permissible to regard something as obligatory or mustahabb on the basis of a weak hadith; whoever says that is going against scholarly consensus. It is permissible to narrate reports that are not known to be lies in order to encourage and warn people, but only with regard to matters where it is known that Allah has encouraged or warned against them on the basis of other evidence the status of whose narrators is not unknown. End quote.

Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi said that it is not permissible to act on the basis of a weak hadith at all, whether with regard to virtuous deeds or otherwise… See Tadreeb al-Raawi, 1/252.

This is the view favoured by al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him). See the introduction to Saheeh al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb, 1/47-67.

The saheeh proven reports from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) offer us sufficient evidence that we have no need to act on the basis of weak hadiths.

The Muslim must strive to find out which ahadith are sound (saheeh) and which are weak (da’eef), and be content to act on the basis of the sound reports.

And Allah knows best.