309602 - About the number of degrees or levels in Paradise, and how to reconcile the hadiths which speak of that

the question

It is said that the number of degrees or levels in Paradise is one hundred, as is stated in the hadith in which the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “In Paradise there are one hundred levels; the distance between each level and the next is like the distance between heaven and earth. Al-Firdaws is the highest level; from it flow the four rivers of Paradise, and above it is the Throne. So when you ask of Allah, ask Him for al-Firdaws.” And there are other hadiths, such as: “Whoever sends blessings upon the Prophet will be raised ten degrees in Paradise”; and the hadith about the one who enters the marketplace, in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever enters the marketplace and says ‘Laa ilaaha ill-Allahu wahdahu laa shareeka lahu, lahu’l-mulku wa lahu’l-hamdu, yuhyi wa yameet wa huwa hayyun la yamoot, bi yadihi’l-khayr, wa huwa ‘ala kulli shay’in qadeer (There is no god but Allah alone, with no partner or associate; to Him belongs sovereignty and to Him be all praise; He grants life and causes death, and He is ever-living and will never die; in His hand is all goodness and He has power over all things),’ Allah will record for him one thousand thousand good deeds, and will erase from his record one thousand thousand bad deeds, and will raise him one thousand thousand degrees.” How can He raise him one million degrees, when in Paradise there are only one hundred degrees or levels? Or is this speaking about something else? Also, there is the hadith in which it says “If a person sends blessings upon the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), he will be raised ten degrees,” so if he says it ten times, he will be raised one hundred degrees.

Detailed answer

Firstly:

There are a number of hadiths in which it is stated that Paradise consists of levels or degrees. These include the following:

The first hadith:

This hadith was narrated by at-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (2914) and Ahmad in his Musnad (6799), via ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr, from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), who said: “It will be said [to the companion of the Qur’an]: ‘Recite and ascend; recite with deliberation as you used to do in the previous world, for your status will be at the last verse you recite.”

This hadith was classed as saheeh by Shaykh al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (2240).

Al-Khattaabi said in Ma‘aalim as-Sunan (1/289): It says in a report that the number of verses of the Qur’an is equal to the number of degrees or levels in Paradise. It will be said to the reciter: ascend in the levels commensurate with what you used to recite of the verses of the Qur’an. So whoever recites the entire Qur’an will attain the highest level or degree in Paradise; whoever recites part of it, his ascent will be commensurate with that. So the reward will commensurate with his recitation. End quote.

Ibn al-Qayyim said in Haadi al-Arwaah (p. 79): In the Musnad it is also narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “It will be said to the companion of the Qur’an, when he enters Paradise, ‘Recite and ascend.’ So he will recite and will ascend one degree for every verse, until he recites the last of what he had memorized.” This clearly indicates that the degrees or levels of Paradise number more than one hundred. End quote.

The second hadith:

This hadith was narrated by al-Bukhaari in his Saheeh (647), from Abu Hurayrah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “A man’s praying in congregation is twenty-five times better than his praying in his house or in his marketplace. That is because, if he does wudoo’ and does it well, then sets out for the masjid, only going out for the prayer, he does not take a single step but he is raised one degree thereby, and one sin is erased thereby. Then when he has prayed, the angels continue to pray for him, so long as he is in the place where he prayed, saying: O Allah, send blessings upon him; O Allah, have mercy on him. And one of you remains in a state of prayer so long as he is waiting for the prayer.”

The third hadith:

This hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh (488) from Ma'daan ibn Abi Talhah al-Ya'mari, who said: I met Thawbaan, the freed slave of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and I said: Tell me of a deed that I may do, by which Allah may admit me to Paradise – or he said: Tell me of the most beloved of deeds to Allah. He remained silent. I asked him (again) and he remained silent. I asked him a third time and he said: I asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about that and he said: "You should prostrate to Allah a great deal, for you will not perform one prostration to Allah but Allah will raise you one degree thereby and erase one sin for you."

The fourth hadith:

This hadith was narrated by an-Nasaa'i in his Sunan (1297) from Anas ibn Maalik, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever sends blessings upon me once, Allah will send blessings upon him ten times, ten sins will be removed from him, and he will be raised ten degrees."

This hadith was classed as saheeh by Shaykh al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Adab al-Mufrad (500).

With regard to the hadith that speaks of being raised one degree alongside a sin being removed, as mentioned in the hadiths quoted above, what degree appears to mean in these hadiths is a hasanah (reward for good deed) and extra reward; it does not refer to a degree or level in Paradise, the number of which is under discussion here.

Ibn Ruslaan (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Except Allah will raise him one degree thereby: it may be that this degree is metaphorical, meaning that he will be raised in status before Allah, may He be exalted, or in Paradise; or it may be literal, referring to the degrees or levels in Paradise. But what comes after it (namely mention of erasing sins) makes the former more likely. And erasing a sin thereby – that is, because of it – means that it is erased from his record of deeds.

End quote from Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood (3/570); see also Fath al-Baari by Ibn Hajar (10/105).

The fifth hadith:

It was narrated by at-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (3428), from Ibn ‘Umar, that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever enters the marketplace and says ‘Laa ilaaha ill-Allahu wahdahu laa shareeka lahu, lahu’l-mulku wa lahu’l-hamdu, yuhyi wa yameet wa huwa hayyun la yamoot, bi yadihi’l-khayr, wa huwa ‘ala kulli shay’in qadeer (There is no god but Allah alone, with no partner or associate; to Him belongs sovereignty and to Him be all praise; He grants life and causes death, and He is ever-living and will never die; in His hand is all goodness and He has power over all things),’ Allah will record for him one thousand thousand good deeds, and will erase from his record one thousand thousand bad deeds, and will raise him one thousand thousand degrees.”

There is a difference of opinion regarding the soundness of the hadith. Most of the leading scholars are of the view that it is da‘eef (weak) or munkar (odd), as has been discussed previously in the answer to question no. 223533.

Secondly:

With regard to the hadith quoted by the questioner about there being one hundred degrees in Paradise, what is most likely to be the case is that it does not prove that the number of degrees or levels in Paradise is limited to one hundred. This may be explained further as follows:

-1-

The hadith was narrated by al-Bukhaari in his Saheeh (2790) from Abu Hurayrah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever believes in Allah and His Messenger, establishes prayer, and fasts Ramadan, it will be incumbent upon Allah to admit him to Paradise, whether he strove in jihad in Allah’s cause or he remained in his land in which he was born.” They said: O Messenger of Allah, should we not give these glad tidings to the people? He said: “In Paradise there are one hundred degrees or levels which Allah has prepared for those who strive in His cause; the distance between two of these levels is like the distance between heaven and earth. So if you ask of Allah, ask Him for al-Firdaws, for it is the

centre of Paradise and the highest part of Paradise; above it is the Throne of the Most Gracious and from it flow the rivers of Paradise."

-2-

This hadith does not contradict the hadiths quoted above with regard to the fact that no one knows the number of degrees or levels in Paradise except Allah, or that their number is the same as the number of verses in the Qur'an.

The meaning of the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): "In Paradise there are one hundred degrees or levels," does not rule out the possibility of there being more than that. This is similar to the hadith "Allah has ninety-nine names" and the hadith "I ask You by every name that You have, by which You named Yourself, or revealed it in Your Book, or kept it hidden in the knowledge of the unseen with You."

The scholars discussed the meaning of the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), "In Paradise there are one hundred degrees or levels that Allah has prepared for those who strive in jihad" and explained it in several ways:

That these degrees or levels are for the mujaahideen only, to the exclusion of others;

or that this number is not to be taken literally; rather what is meant is that there are many degrees or levels;

or it may be that what is meant is that each of the people of Paradise will have one hundred degrees or levels.

What is most likely to be the case is that these hundred degrees or levels will be only for those who strove in jihad, as is stated in the hadith. This does not mean that there will not be other levels, as mentioned in the hadiths quoted above.

Abu'l-'Abbaas al-Qurtubi said in al-Mufhim (12/28): The Prophet said "and other characteristics by means of which Allah will raise a slave one hundred degrees or levels." The degree or level is

a high position; what is referred to here is the chambers and levels of Paradise, the highest of which is al-Firdaws, as mentioned in the hadith.

It should not be understood from this that the degrees or levels of Paradise are limited to this number; rather there are more than that, and no one knows their number except Allah, may He be exalted. Do you not see that it says in another hadith: “It will be said to the companion of the Qur’an: “Recite and ascend, for surely your status will be at the last verse that you recite.” This indicates that in Paradise there are as many levels as there are verses in the Qur’an, which number over six thousand. If a person combines the virtue of jihad with the virtue of memorizing the Qur’an, he will attain all these degrees and levels. By the same token, the more good deeds he does, the more degrees he will ascend to. End quote.

Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd as-Salaam said in al-Fawaa’id fi Ikhtisaar al-Maqaasid (153): The believers vary in their level of faith: some are higher, some are lower, and some are in between.

Those who strive in jihad will have one hundred degrees or levels in Paradise, the highest of which will be commensurate with the highest level of jihad, and the lowest of which will be commensurate with the lowest levels thereof. End quote.

Ibn al-Qayyim said in Haadi al-Arwaah (p. 66): It is proven in as-Saheehayn that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Paradise has one hundred degrees or levels, between each of these levels and the next is a distance like that between heaven and earth.” This indicates that they are very high and lofty, and Allah knows best.

This hadith has two versions. This is one of them, and the other version says: “In Paradise there are one hundred degrees or levels, between each of these levels and the next is a distance like that between heaven and earth; Allah has prepared them for those who strive in jihad in His cause.” Our shaykh thinks this version is more correct. However, it does not rule out the idea that the levels, or degrees in Paradise may be more numerous than that. Similar to that is the Prophet’s words in the saheeh hadith: “Allah has ninety-nine names; whoever memorizes them will enter Paradise.” That is, among the total number of His names is this number. End quote.

Ibn Hajar said in Fath al-Baari (13/413): With regard to the words “one hundred degrees or levels,” there is nothing in the context to clearly indicate that the number mentioned includes all the levels or degrees of Paradise and there are no more than that, because there is nothing to rule that out. This is supported by the fact that in the marfoo‘ hadith of Abu Sa‘eed which was narrated by Abu Dawood and classed as saheeh by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbaan, it says: “It will be said to the companion of the Qur’an, ‘Recite and ascend; recite with deliberation as you used to recite in the first world, for your status will be at the last verse that you recite.” The number of verses in the Qur’an is more than 6200. There are differences of opinion as to how many more than that there may be, but the difference has to do with a small number. End quote.

Conclusion: What is most likely to be the case is that the number of degrees or levels in Paradise is either not limited to a specific number, or it is the same as the number of verses in the Qur’an, and that the hadith “In Paradise there are one hundred degrees or levels; Allah has prepared them for those who strive in jihad” is not to be understood as limiting the number of degrees or levels in Paradise in general to one hundred only; rather what is mentioned in that report is the degrees or levels of the mujaahideen.

And Allah knows best.