111963 - The status of a faqeeh is superior to that of a hadeeth narrator, but both are good

the question

Is a Faqeeh in a upper level then a person who is a hadith narrator?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The faqeeh is the mujtahid who derives shar'i rulings, explains the principles of sharee'ah and teaches people the rulings of their religion. The focus of his specialty is the aims and goals of sharee'ah, the clear verses of the Qur'aan and achieving sound understanding of what Allaah wants from His slaves.

This is something that can be done by only a few individuals, because it requires extensive study of the texts, lengthy study and examination of the words of the scholars, and intelligence in studying real life situations and applying the rulings of sharee'ah to them.

As for the narrator of hadeeth, he transmits what he hears of the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and he delivers what he receives with honesty and sincerity. His main concern is to convey the hadeeth as he heard it by any possible means, but he does not concern himself with explaining the meaning of the hadeeth or deriving shar'i rulings from it, or knowledge of what abrogates and what is abrogated, or what is general and what is specific. Rather his role is limited to simply transmitting and narrating.

This task requires precision and care in transmission, but it does not require knowledge of fiqh or the basic principles (usool) of fiqh.

Imam al-A'mash (may Allaah have mercy on him) described the work of both the faqeeh and the narrator of hadeeth in detail. He said:

“O fuqaha’, you are the doctors and we are the pharmacists.” End quote.

Naseehah Ahl al-hadeeth li’l-Khateeb al-Baghdadi (1/45).

It is no secret that the roles of the doctor and pharmacist are complementary; they cannot do without one another. Both of them are good and their influence is important. Islam also confirms that both the faqeeh and the hadeeth narrator are good and will be rewarded by Allaah, but the faqeeh (the doctor) is of a higher standing, as he pays attention to understanding and deriving rulings.

Some scholars derived this meaning from the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “May Allaah bless a man who hears a hadeeth from us and memorizes it so that he can convey it to others, for perhaps he is conveying it to one who will understand it better than him, and perhaps the one who conveys knowledge does not understand it himself.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (3660).

Al-Ramahramzi (d. 360 AH) said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) differentiated between the one who narrates the Sunnah and the one who understands it, and he indicated that the one who understands it is superior, by saying “for perhaps he is conveying it to one who will understand it better than him, and perhaps the one who conveys knowledge does not understand it himself.” By affirming the virtue of one, the virtue of the other is automatically affirmed. For example: Maalik ibn Anas and ‘Ubayd-Allaah al-‘Umari, or between al-Shaafa’i and ‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Mahdi, or between Abu Thawr and Ibn Abi Shaybah. Fair-mindedness leads you to determine that both are people of knowledge and virtue; this is the attitude of fair-minded people that is reached by those who have knowledge of the truth. End quote.

Al-Muhaddith al-Faadil (1/169-170).

As for the one who combines both qualities, who understands the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and memorizes what he brought of knowledge, and understands the meanings, and benefits himself and others thereby, these are the best of all types of people.

It was narrated from Abu Moosa al-Ash’ari (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The likeness of the guidance and knowledge with which Allaah has sent me is that of rain falling upon the earth. Some of it is good ground which receives the water and brings forth a great deal of herbage and grass. Some of it is hard but it retains the water, and Allaah benefits people by it, and they drink it and give it to their animals to drink and use it for irrigation and grazing. And another part of it is barren, it does not retain the water or produce herbage. That is the likeness of one who gains an understanding of the religion of Allaah, and Allaah benefits him by that with which Allaah has sent me, and he learns and teaches others; and the likeness of a man who pays no attention to that, and does not accept the guidance of Allaah with which I have been sent.”

Imam al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

As for the meaning of the hadeeth, it is likening the guidance that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) brought to rain. It says that land is of three types, and the same is true of people.

The first type of land benefits from the rain and comes back to life after having been dead, and it brings forth herbage from which people, animals and plants benefit. This is like the first type of people whom guidance and knowledge reach: such a person memorizes it and his heart is brought back to life; he acts upon it and teaches others, so he benefits from it and benefits others.

The second type of land does not benefit from the rain itself, but it does something good with it, namely holding the water for others, so people and animals benefit from it. This is like the second type of people; they have good memories but they do not have deep understanding or deep insight by means of which they could derive meanings and rulings, and they do not strive hard in worship. They memorize it and preserve it until there comes along one who needs it and thirsts for the knowledge that they have, a scholar who is able to benefit from it. So he takes it and benefits others by means of that which they conveyed to him.

The third type of land is the barren land that does not produce any herbage and the like, and does

not benefit itself from the water, and does not retain it so that others may benefit from it. This is like the third type of people; they do not have good memories or understanding or insight. If they hear knowledge they do not benefit from it or preserve it so that others may benefit. End quote.

Sharh Muslim (15/47-48).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) likened the knowledge and guidance that he brought to rain, because of what each of them bring of life, benefit, nourishment, medicine and all things that are in people's interests. This is true of both knowledge and rain.

And he likened people's hearts to the different types of land on which rain may fall, because the land is the place that retains the rain, and all kinds of beneficial plants grow, just as the heart understands knowledge and bears fruit and manifests blessings and benefits.

Then he divided people into three categories, according to their readiness to memorize and understand its meanings and derive rulings from it.

1-People with good memories and good understanding, who understand and comprehend the meanings, and derive different rulings, wisdom and benefits from it. They are like the land that absorbs the water, which is the likeness of the memory, and brings forth a great deal of herbage and grain, which is the likeness of understanding, knowledge and derivation of rulings. This is the likeness of the one who is both a haafiz and a faqeeh, the people who both narrate and understand the hadeeth.

2-People who are able to memorize and classify reports, but they are not able to understand the meanings or derive different types of rulings and benefits from them. They are like those who read and memorize the Qur'aan, paying attention to the letters and pronunciation, but they are not able to develop a proper understanding of Allaah, as 'Ali ibn Abi Taalib said: "Except an understanding that Allaah grants to His slave concerning His Book." People vary greatly in their understanding of the texts of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. Perhaps one person may understand one or two rulings from

the text, whereas another may understand one hundred or two hundred. They are like the land that retains the water for people so that they may benefit from it, drinking it or giving it to others to drink or irrigating crops with it.

These two types are blessed, although the former are of higher status. This is the bounty of Allaah which He gives as He wills, and Allaah is the Owner of great bounty.

3-Those who have no share of it, who neither memorize it nor understand it, who neither memorize nor comprehend it. Rather they are like the land that is barren and dry, which neither produces herbage nor retains the water.

They are the ones who are doomed. The first two categories share the qualities of learning and teaching, each according to what it has accepted as sound and what has reached it. One may know and memorize the phrases of the Qur'aan, whilst another knows its meanings, rulings and sciences, but the third category does not know or teach. They are the ones who neither benefited from the guidance of Allaah or accepted it. They are worse off than cattle, and they are the fuel of Hell.

This hadeeth also points to the honourable status and lofty position of knowledge and teaching, and the wretchedness of those who have no share of it; it mentions different categories of the sons of Adam with regard to it – who is doomed and who is blessed; and it further divides the blessed into those who are the foremost (in faith) and those who are among "those on the Right Hand" (cf. al-Waaqi'ah 56:8).

This indicates that the people's need for knowledge is like their need for rain, or even greater. If they lose knowledge then they are akin to the land that is lacking rain.

Imam Ahmad said: People need knowledge more than they need food and drink, because they need food and drink once or twice a day, but they need knowledge with every breath they take. End quote.

Miftaah Daar al-Sa'aadah (1/65-66).

So how do you stand with regard to all this? What type of land are you? Are you the type that will benefit itself and others, so that you memorize and understand, act upon it and teach it to others? Or are you one who will preserve it for others so that they may benefit, and the one who points others towards a good deed will be like the one who does it (in terms of reward)?

We pray that Allaah will protect you. We think that you are far above being like the barren land which never holds any water or produces any vegetation, never memorizing or understanding, but appointing yourself as judge to decide between the two groups!

Look at your aims and goals; strive hard and set high goals for yourself. Make yourself memorize and understand, and if you are not able to do some of it, then at least be one who points others towards good deeds, and does that which is enjoined upon him.

And Allaah knows best.