83912 - Travelling to work in a non-Muslim country

the question

Some people want to travel to non-Muslim countries for work, and claim that they have an organised system and treat people well, and other advantages. Is this permissible?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

It should be noted, first of all, that travelling to and residing in non-Muslim countries is not permissible, unless conditions are met that have been explained by the scholars, which are, in brief:

1.. That the individual should feel that he will be safe in terms of his faith and religious commitment, meaning that he should have sufficient knowledge and faith to prevent him from deviating and going astray.

2.. He should harbour in his heart resentment towards the disbelievers and should keep away from taking them as close friends and allies and loving them.

3.. He should be able to practice his religion openly, in terms of prayer and other things.

This is a brief summary. The details of that are as follows:

Residing in a non-Muslim country may sometimes be permissible, sometimes encouraged (mustahabb) and sometimes haraam, depending on the individual's situation, the purpose of his residing there, and the extent to which he is able to practice his religion openly. We have discussed this in answers several times, but here we will quote for you a detailed discussion by Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him), who said, covering this issue from all angles:

The shaykh (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to residing in the lands of the disbelievers, it poses a great danger to the Muslim's religious commitment, morals, conduct and etiquette. We and others have seen immense deviation on the part of those who lived in those countries, then they returned different from when they went. They have come back as evildoers, and some of them have come back having apostatized from their religion, disbelieving in it and in all religions. We seek refuge with Allah. Some of them reject religion entirely, and mock the faith and its people, both the earlier and later generations. Hence it is essential, rather it is a must, to guard against that and set out some conditions and guidelines which will protect one from ruin and destruction.

There are two essential conditions that must be met before residing in a non-Muslim country:

The first condition is that the individual should be secure in terms of his faith and religious commitment, meaning that he should have sufficient knowledge, faith and strong resolve to guarantee that he will remain steadfast in his religion and will beware of deviating and going astray. He should harbour in his heart resentment towards the disbelievers, and should keep away from taking them as close friends and allies, and loving them, because taking them as close friends and allies and loving them are things that are contrary to faith. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred" [al-Mujaadilah 58:22]

"O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you - then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.

So you see those in whose hearts is disease hastening into [association with] them, saying, 'We are afraid a misfortune may strike us.' But perhaps Allah will bring conquest or a decision from Him, and they will become, over what they have been concealing within themselves, regretful" [al-Maa'idah 5:51-52].

It is proven in *as-Saheeh* that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever loves a people is one of them” and “A man will be with those he loves.”

Loving the enemies of Allah is one of the greatest dangers to a Muslim, because loving them implies agreeing with them and following them, or at the very least not denouncing them. Hence the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever loves a people is one of them.”

The second condition is that he should be able to practice his religion openly, meaning that he can perform the rituals of Islam without any impediment. So there should be nothing to prevent him from establishing prayer, Jumu‘ah and prayers in congregation, if there are others with him who pray in congregation and establish Jumu‘ah prayer; and he should not be prevented from giving zakaah, fasting, performing Hajj and other rituals and symbols of Islam. If he will not be able to do that, then it is not permissible for him to reside there, because in that case it becomes obligatory to migrate (hijrah) from that place.

It says in *al-Mughni* (8/457), in a discussion listing the categories of people with regard to migration (*hijrah*): The first category is those for whom migration is obligatory. This refers to those who are able to migrate, and are not able to practice their religion openly or establish the obligatory duties of Islam whilst residing among the disbelievers. In this case, migration becomes obligatory, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves - [the angels] will say, ‘In what [condition] were you?’ They will say, ‘We were oppressed in the land.’ The angels will say, ‘Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?’ For those, their refuge is Hell - and evil it is as a destination” [an-Nisa’ 4:97].

This is a stern warning, which indicates that migrating is obligatory in that case. Moreover, establishing the obligatory duties of Islam is obligatory for the one who is able to do that, and migrating is essential to fulfilling that obligation and completing it; whatever is essential to carrying out an obligation is also obligatory. End Quote.

If these two conditions are met, then residing in the land of disbelief may be divided into several categories:

The first category is residing there for the purpose of calling people to Islam and promoting it. This is a type of jihad, and it is a communal obligation for those who are able to do it, on condition that da'wah is possible, and that there is nothing to prevent it or prevent people from responding to it, because calling people to Islam is one of the obligatory duties of the religion, and it is the way of the Messengers. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) enjoined conveying the message from him in every time and place, as he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Convey from me, even if it is one verse."

The second category is those who go there to study the lives of the disbelievers and find out about their corrupted beliefs, false ways of worship, lack of morals and anarchic behaviour, so that they can warn the people against being deceived by them, and explain to their admirers the reality of their condition. In this case, residing there is also a kind of jihad, because of what it leads to of warning against disbelief and its people, which implicitly promotes Islam and its teachings, because the corruption of disbelief is indicative of the soundness of Islam, as it is said: Things are known by their opposites. But that is provided that he will be able to achieve what he wants to achieve without that resulting in a greater evil. Therefore if what he wants to achieve is not possible, such as if he is prevented from publishing and spreading information about their ways, and warning against it, then there is no point in his staying there. If he can achieve his aim but it will lead to greater evil, such as if they react to his efforts by reviling Islam, the Messenger of Islam and the leading scholars of Islam, then he must refrain from doing that, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do" [al-An'aam 6:108].

Similar to that is one who stays in a non-Muslim country to spy for the Muslims, and find out about the disbelievers' plots against the Muslims, so that he can warn the Muslims about them,

as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) sent Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamaan to the polytheists during the Battle of al-Khandaq to find out about them.

The third category is those who reside there to serve the Muslim state and organize its relationships with the non-Muslim state, such as employees of embassies. The ruling on that is the same as the ruling on the purpose for which it is done. So the cultural attaché, for example, takes care of the affairs of students, keeps an eye on them and urges them to adhere to Islam and its morals and manners. By residing there, he serves a great purpose and wards off a great deal of evil.

The fourth category is those who reside there for permissible personal reasons, such as trade or medical treatment. In this case, it is permissible to remain there for as long as necessary. The scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) have stated that it is permissible to enter non-Muslim countries for the purpose of trade, and they quoted reports to that effect from some of the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them).

The fifth category is those who reside there for the purpose of study. They are similar to the previous category, namely those who reside there for a need, but it could pose a greater danger and could be more ruinous to the religious commitment and morality of the one who stays there. That is because the student usually feels that he is of lower status and that his teachers are of higher status, which leads to him holding them in high esteem, and being readily convinced of their views, ideas and conduct, so he begins to emulate them, except those whom it is Allah's will to protect, and they are very few. Moreover, the student feels that he needs his teacher, which leads to him becoming friendly with him and praising what he follows of deviance and misguidance by way of appeasing him. In his school or college, the student will have classmates, some of whom he will take as friends whom he loves and is close to and is influenced by. Because of the danger posed to this category, there should be greater reservation about them than other categories, and further conditions should be stipulated in addition to the original two conditions, as follows:

The first condition is that the student should have a high level of mature thinking, by means of which he is able to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful, and he is able to

think in the long term. As for sending younger students and those who are not mature in their thinking, this poses a grave danger to their religious commitment, morals and conduct; moreover, it poses a danger to their nation, to which they will return and spread the poison that they imbibed from those disbelievers, as we have seen and are still seeing in real life, for many of those who were sent abroad to study come back different from when they went. They come back with deviation in their religious beliefs, morals and conduct, and a great deal of harm results for them and their communities, as is well known. Sending these students is just like sending sheep in front of hungry wolves.

The second condition is that the student should have sufficient Islamic knowledge to be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to refute falsehood on the basis of truth, so that he will not be deceived by what they follow of falsehood, thinking that it is true, or become confused or unable to refute it, and thus he will remain in a state of confusion and will end up following falsehood. In the supplication (du'aa') that was narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) it says: "O Allah, show me truth as truth and enable me to follow it, and show me falsehood as false and enable me to avoid it, and do not make it unclear to me lest I go astray."

The third condition is that the student should have strong faith and religious commitment that will protect him and shield him from disbelief and evildoing. One who is weak in faith will not be safe when residing there, unless Allah wills it. That is because of the strength of the attackers and the weakness of the resister, for the causes of disbelief and evildoing are very strong there, and they are many and varied, so if they find a weak spot they will wreak havoc.

The fourth condition is that there should be a need for the knowledge for which he is staying there, meaning that his learning it will benefit the Muslims and there is no similar school in the Muslim countries. If it is unnecessary knowledge that does not serve the interests of the Muslims, or there are similar schools in the Muslim countries, then it is not permissible for him to reside in a non-Muslim country for that purpose, because of the danger that residing there poses to his religious commitment and morals, and because it is wasting a large amount of money for no purpose.

The sixth category is those who settled there. This is more serious than the categories mentioned above, because of the ills to which it leads as a result of mixing fully with the disbelievers and feeling that one is a citizen who is committed to what citizenship requires of love, loyalty and increasing the numbers of disbelievers. Thus the individual raises his family among the disbelievers, so they adopt some of their ways and customs, and may even imitate them in their beliefs and worship. Hence it says in the hadith that was narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): “Whoever spends time with a polytheist and lives with him will be like him.” Even though this hadith has a da‘eef isnaad, the idea is valid, for living among people leads to becoming like them. It was narrated from Qays ibn Abi Haazim, from Jareer ibn ‘Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “I disavow any Muslim who resides among the polytheists.” They said: O Messenger of Allah, why? He said: “Their fires should not be visible to one another.” Narrated by Abu Dawood and at-Tirmidhi. Most of the narrators narrated it as a mursal report from Qays ibn Abi Haazim from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). At-Tirmidhi said: I heard Muhammad – meaning al-Bukhaari – say: The correct view is that the hadith of Qays from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is mursal. End quote.

How can a believer be content to live in the country of the disbelievers where the rituals of disbelief are practised openly, and it is ruled by something other than the law of Allah and His Messenger, when he sees that with his own eyes, hears it with his own ears, and approves of it; rather he declares that he belongs to that land and lives there with his family and children, and feels as content there as he would in a Muslim country, in spite of the serious danger that it poses to him, his family and his children with regard to their religious commitment and morals.

This is our conclusion regarding residing in a non-Muslim country. We hope that it is in accordance with what is true and correct.

End quote from *Sharh al-Usool ath-Thalaathah* by Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him), included in *Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa* (6/132).

Secondly:

Based on the above, what appears to be the case is that travelling for the purpose of working in a non-Muslim country comes under the fifth and sixth categories mentioned by the shaykh (may Allah have mercy on him), which cover travelling for the purpose of studying and settling there. In those cases, the stay will be lengthy and the danger will be greater, especially if the person needs to stay there, and he has already been there and was impressed by what they have of civilization and development. If the one who wants to work there can practice his religion openly, and he is mature in thinking and able to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful, what is right and what is wrong, and has knowledge with which he can ward off specious arguments and faith with which he can resist whims and desires, and he can find no opportunity to work in a Muslim country, and his stay is limited to what is essential only, then it is permissible for him to travel there. But the safest approach is not to do that, because even if he himself is safe, it is unlikely that his children will be safe, and he will be distracted by daily life and become heedless, and he will be content to stay there, and thus he will lose his religious commitment, or his children will go astray – we ask Allah to keep us safe and sound.

But as for the one who has no choice but to travel to that country, he should show his loyalty to the Muslims there, remain close to his brothers in faith, and become an active member of the Islamic centres, because the wolf only eats the sheep that wanders away from the flock, and the Shaytaan is close to one who is on his own, but is further away from two.

May Allah help us all to do that which He loves and is pleased with.

And Allah knows best.