

THE RULING ON SUPEREROGATORY FASTING ON SATURDAYS: An Evaluation of Differing Views

By Salal Ahmed Haque

Introduction

In the Name of Allāh, all praise is due to Allāh and may praise and security be upon the Messenger of Allāh.

To proceed:

Fasting as an act of worship is considered to be one of the most selfless acts of devotion a person can perform. Denying oneself the very edifying substances which support and sustain our worldly existence and from which one derives so much pleasure during the day for the sake of Allāh is highly commendable. The worldly and other-worldly benefits connected to this monumental act of worship, as mentioned in numerous famous aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ reflects the prominent status of fasting which forms one of the pillars of Islām.

Fasting, according to the sound aḥādīth, removes one from the Fire by a distance of 70 years, it places a trench between the Fire and the person at a similar distance, the smell of the breath of a fasting person is better to Allāh than the smell of musk, Allāh rewards a fasting person more abundantly than usual and it helps to subjugate the soul which proves to be a shield from the Fire.

Despite the immense rewards associated with fasting as an act of worship, there are some days on which it is impermissible to fast. So for instance, it is impermissible to fast on the Days of ʿĪd even if they coincide with a person's normal fasting routine.

Although there is consensus over the impermissibility of fasting on the Days of ‘Īd etc, there is great controversy, especially in recent times, over whether one is allowed to perform a supererogatory fast on Saturdays due to the following ḥadīth:

“Do not fast on Saturdays except for what is obligatory upon you; even if one of you does not find anything except for the skin of a grape or the bark of a tree then let him chew it.”

Very little is available in the English language dilating upon the evidences, arguments and principles involved in this interesting issue despite there being a number of scattered articles, treatises and *fatāwā* available in Arabic on the topic. This article, with the permission of Allāh, will fill a gap for the English-reading audience at least for now until something more detailed is written.¹

In this article, therefore, I will be discussing the issue of whether it is permissible to perform supererogatory fasts on Saturdays. The arguments surrounding this issue contain some intricacies related to a spectrum of related Islamic sciences such as *muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and Arabic grammar. In order to provide a coherent framework for the discussion therefore, I will begin by providing a background to the issue and the types of varying views. I will then proceed to mention the central ḥadīth in question and analyse its level of authenticity according to the *muḥaddithūn*.

The arguments and evidences from the proponents of different views will then be presented from a juridical point of view. At the same time I will attempt to clarify

¹ There are a number of translated transcripts of the famous discussion between Imām Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and the contemporary leading Madinan ḥadīth expert ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbād and translated audios of the same online.

NOTE: This article is essentially a summarised translation of Sh. ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī’s treatise on the topic of supererogatory fasting on Saturdays. The page numbers mentioned in brackets refers to his treatise unless otherwise stated. See: al-Ḥalabī, ‘Alī b. Ḥasan, *Zahr al-Rawḍ fī Ḥukm Ṣiyām al-Sabt fī Ghayr al-Farḍ*, 2nd Edition. NP:1420AH.

the reasons and justifications for the views adopted by each side and go further to evaluate the differing views by demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of each side. By doing this, I will seek to establish the strongest opinion regarding the issue and further demonstrate the juridical sophistication utilised by its proponents and the rigorous and robust research and textual deductions conducted, thereby dispelling any claims that the adoption of the strongest view is based on a lack of critical research and juridical insight.

It is hoped that the reader, after having read and digested the contents of this article, will, amongst other things, learn to appreciate the intellectual dexterity of the scholars mentioned therein as reflected through their arguments and the inexhaustible desire and fearlessness they exhibit in seeking the truth no matter who stands against them.

So, let us begin.

A Point of Disagreement amongst Jurists

Before delving into the principal arguments surrounding the issue it is important to dispel any claims that there is consensus on this issue of the permissibility of fasting on Saturdays. It is sufficient to cite three prominent classical jurists to refute any such claims of consensus. Firstly, the exemplary Ḥanafī jurist al-Ṭaḥāwī explicitly states after quoting the ḥadīth in question, “Some have adopted this ḥadīth and disliked fasting on Saturday voluntarily” (p. 9). Secondly, the erudite jurist Ibn Rushd [the grandson] remarks in his seminal work *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, “As for the days which have been forbidden they include those that are agreed upon and those regarding which there is disagreement. As for those that have been agreed upon: Day of Fiṭr, al-Aḍḥā due to the confirmation of prohibition on fasting them. As for those disagreed upon these include the Days of Tashrīq, the Day of Doubt, Jumu‘ah, Saturday, the other half of Sha‘bān and perpetual fasting...”

He then states: “As for Saturday, the reason for the disagreement is their disagreement over the soundness of what has been reported that he –saw- said: “Do not fast Saturday except for what has been obligated upon you...” (pp. 9-10).

Thirdly, Shaykh al-Islām ibn Taymiyyah states when mentioning the issue of fasting on Saturday along with the related ḥadīth that: “The co-jurists² and the remaining scholars have differed in regards to it” (p. 10).

The Central Ḥadīth

The central ḥadīth surrounding this topic essentially states that one is prohibited from fasting on Saturdays other than obligatory ones and that one should resort to chewing or sucking on something as almost nutritionally useless as grape peel or tree barks.

In this section firstly, I will mention some of the routes of the ḥadīth along with the relevant text. Secondly, I will mention the criticisms levelled against the genuineness of the ḥadīth and the responses to them. Finally, it will be shown that the ḥadīth is in fact sound and carries probative force and any claims of *iḍtirāb*, *shudhūdh* and *naskh* are unfounded.

Routes of the Ḥadīth

The ḥadīth is mentioned via four Companions, three of whom are from the same family: the Family of Busr:

1. ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr رضي الله عنه
2. Al-Ṣammā‘ bt. Busr رضي الله عنها his sister
3. Busr b. Abī Busr al-Māzinī رضي الله عنه their father
4. Abū Umāmah Ṣudayy b. ‘Ajlān رضي الله عنه who is unrelated to the above three

² He is referring to the scholars of the Ḥanbalī school of law.

Just to give the reader a taste of the depth of research conducted into the above routes leading up to the ḥadīth I will only mention the route of ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr رضي الله عنه in detail. A complete translation of the *takhrīj* of the ḥadīth will be left for another time.

‘Abd Allāh b. Busr Routes

So, regarding the routes of ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr the ḥadīth from him is reported via three routes:

1. **‘Īsā b. Yūnus** → **Thawr b. Yazīd** → **Khālid** → **‘Abd Allāh b. Busr**
 - a. Ibn Mājah, no. 1726
 - b. *Musnad* ‘Abd b. Ḥumayd
 - c. *Al-Kubrā* of al-Nasā’ī
 - d. *Al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* of Ibn Shāhīn
 - e. *Al-Ḥilyah* of Abū Nu‘aym

The text of the ḥadīth is:

“Do not fast Saturdays except for what has been obligatory upon you, if one of you does not find anything apart from grape peel or the bark of a tree then let him chew it”.

Tammām al-Rāzī reported it in his *Fawā’id*, no. 654 via **‘Utbah b. Al-Sakan** → **Thawr**...with it.

Al-Ḥalabī then discusses the evaluation of each narrator thus stating that ‘Īsā b. Yūnus who is Ibn Abī Ishāq al-Sabī’ī is *thiqah ma’mūn*.

‘Utbah b. Al-Sakan according to al-Dāraqūṭnī is *matruk*.

Al-Bayhaqī stated regarding him that he is *wāhin* and attributed to forgery.

The remainder of the narrators of the isnād are reliable (*thiqāt*) thus the *sanad* is sound and the presence of ‘Utbaḥ does not harm it since it is just *mutāba‘* (corroboratory) thus the primary source of support for our subject is other than his narration.

2. Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Ṭāliqānī → al-Walīd b. Muslim → Yaḥyā b. Ḥassān → ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr al-Māzinī

- a. Aḥmad (4/189)
- b. *Al-Mukhtārah* of al-Ḍiyā‘
- c. *Tārīkh* of al-Khaṭīb

All of its men are *thiqāt*. However, al-Walīd b. Muslim does *tadlīs al-taswiyah* and did not explicitly report from his teacher although it is explicitly reported from the teacher of his teacher. Al-Ḥalabī states in the footnotes that the scholars have stipulated the *mudallis al-taswiyah* must be explicit in his reporting in every level of the *sanad* beginning from his teacher until the Companion. Anything other than that is not accepted as is established in the textbooks of ḥadīth sciences.

Al-Ḥalabī then mentions Sh. Al-Albānī’s analysis from *Irwā‘ al-Ghalīl* (4/122).

3. Ḥassān b. Nūḥ → ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr

- a. Aḥmad (4/189)
- b. *Al-Kubrā* of al-Nasā‘ī
- c. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Ibn Ḥibbān
- d. *Al-Kunā* of al-Dawlābī
- e. *Al-Ṭabarānī* – and via him al-Ḍiyā‘ in *al-Mukhtārah*
- f. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* of al-Mizzī
- g. *Tārīkh* of Ibn ‘Asākir
- h. *Tārīkh* of Abū Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī in summary
- i. *Mu‘jam al-Ṣaḥābah* of Ibn Qānī‘ (2/81)

Al-Ḥalabī states that the *sanad* is *ḥasan* if Allāh wills.

Ḥassān: a group of reliable narrators reported from him, al-‘Ijlī, Ibn Ḥibbān and Ibn Ḥajar declared him reliable (*waththaqahu*) and al-Dhahabī declared him truthful (*ṣadūq*).

Al-Ḥākim declared the ḥadīth via ‘Abd Allāh to be sound and stated that it is according to the condition of Bukhārī. Ibn al-Sakan also declared it sound.

Al-Ṣammā’ bt. Busr

There is some disagreement concerning this al-Ṣammā’. Is she ‘Abd Allāh’s sister, mother or maternal aunt?

Al-Ḥalabī mentions the different reports from ‘Abd Allāh from al-Ṣammā’ who is reported to be his:

1. Sister
2. Mother
3. Maternal aunt

Al-Ḥalabī mentions 10 reporters, nearly all of whom are reliable, reporting from Thawr confirming the fact that al-Ṣammā’ is the sister of ‘Abd Allāh (p. 24).

Abū Umāmah

The report from Abū Umāmah occurs through two routes, one of which is *ḥasan* without a doubt:

1. ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal → al-Ḥakam b. Mūsā → Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh → ‘Abd Allāh b. Dīnār → **Abū Umāmah**
 - a. Al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr* (7722)
2. Salamah → Abū al-Mughīrah → Ḥassān b. Nūḥ → **Abū Umāmah**
 - a. Al-Rūyānī in *Musnad al-Ṣaḥābah* (2/307/1258)

In the first route there are two issues: firstly, ‘Abd Allāh b. Dīnār is known as al-Bahrānī al-Ḥimṣī who has been impugned by al-Dāraquṭnī, Ibn Ma‘īn and Abū Zur‘ah. Secondly, there is a break in the *isnād* between Ibn Dīnār and the Companion Abū Umāmah.

The *isnād* of the second route is *ḥasan* as it is reported via a series of unambiguous direct reporting and auditing (p. 37).

Criticisms of the Ḥadīth

The ḥadīth has been graded as weak by a number of leading *muḥaddithūn*. The charges levelled against the ḥadīth are that it is either *muḍṭarib*, *shādh* or even a lie therefore the prohibition stated in the text does not hold any probative force. Below we will deal with one criticism at a time.

Iḍtirāb

A ḥadīth which is *muḍṭarib* is one which is reported in variant forms of equal strength. This means that the ḥadīth is narrated in conflicting and opposing forms to such an extent that it is not possible to harmonise them at all and all of these reports are of equal strength from all angles that it is not possible to outweigh one over the other in any way. *Iḍtirāb* can occur either in the *isnād* or the *matn* of the ḥadīth. This discordance indicates a lack of precision (*dabt*) of the narrator(s) since one of the conditions for the acceptance of the ḥadīth is that the narrator be precise.

In relation to our ḥadīth it is reported from al-Nasā‘ī that the ḥadīth is *muḍṭarib* and this is the conclusion Ibn Ḥajr came to as well. However, al-Ḥalabī argues that the ḥadīth does not suffer from any form of *iḍtirāb* for it is reported through sound and confirmed chains from three of the Family of Busr: ‘Abd Allāh, his sister and their father (p. 82).

Furthermore, it is reported from the Companion Abū Umāmah via an entirely different *isnād*. Thus, the *iḍtirāb* claim is of a different type, it relates to the *isnād*: is

al-Ṣammā' the sister of 'Abd Allāh, his mother, his paternal aunt or his maternal aunt? (p. 83) Al-Ḥalabī states that the reports mention all of the above however, what has been reported and confirmed authentically is that she is his sister as noted above. The fact that numerous reporters confirm her to be his sister puts the heart at rest with this view. In any case, none of this actually harms the ḥadīth at all in any way for her status as a Companion is well confirmed without any doubts. Thus the extent of her relationship with 'Abd Allāh does not harm the narration and is inconsequential (p. 83).

This is similar to the disagreement of the scholars over the actual name of Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه in which there are at least 19 different views – does this in any way affect the confirmation of Abū Hurayrah as a Companion of the Prophet?!(p. 83, f.n. 1)

Shudhūdh

A *shādh* ḥadīth is one in which reliable narrator reports something contrary to what is reported more reliably and dominantly in terms the memory-precision or numbers. Similar to *iḍtirāb*, *shudhūdh* either occurs in the *isnād* or the *matn*.

In relation to our ḥadīth the *isnād* is sound without doubt. In terms of its *matn* or content the claim of *shudhūdh* holds no water unless the texts cannot be harmonised thus one cannot rush towards the claim of *shudhūdh* until that process has been followed (p. 84).

In summary: the ḥadīth of the prohibition of fasting on Saturday voluntarily is sound and explicit and it qualifies anything that opposes it and it is not qualified by its opposing texts since there is no textual implication stronger than it for its textual implications are the strongest of its kind and its evidence outweighs all of its opposition (p. 84).

It's a Lie!

According to Abū Dāwūd, the Imām and Muḥaddith of Madīnah, Mālik, declared this ḥadīth to be a lie (p. 57). Ibn al-Mulaqqin mentions Ibn al-‘Arabī seconding that view when he states in one of his books that there is no sound ḥadīth regarding fasting on Saturdays and even if it was sound the meaning would be for one to act in opposition to the People of the Book which, in any case, is questionable itself.

Al-Ḥalabī (p.60ff) argues against Mālik’s alleged statement in a number of ways which leads one to conclude definitively that the statement of Mālik on this issue is unacceptable. Firstly, it is difficult to trace this statement directly to Mālik because Abū Dāwūd does not mention the *isnād* of the words attributed to Mālik which means it cannot be accepted without confirmation. This doubt is further compounded by the fact that this statement of Mālik is only found in some of the manuscripts of *Sunan* Abū Dāwūd as noted by al-Albānī and al-Ghumārī (p. 61). Was it interpolated by a scribe by error? Did Abū Dawūd revise and edit his *Sunan* and later include that statement which would explain the inconsistency in the manuscripts?

Some of those who accept the statement to be that of Mālik have dismissed it. Al-Nawawī for instance states that Mālik’s statement is unacceptable due to the fact that leading scholars have declared the ḥadīth to be sound. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī further criticises Mālik’s statement by stating that it is problematic (p. 61).

Other scholars have sought to find excuses for Mālik. Al-Ishbīlī suggests the reason why Imām Mālik may have considered the report to be a lie is due to the narrator Thawr b. Yazīd al-Kalā’ī who was accused of being a Qadarī although he was reliable in what he reported as Yaḥyā and others said about him. Many notables reported from him including; Yaḥyā b. Sa’īd al-Qaṭṭān, Ibn al-Mubārak and al-Thawrī etc (p. 61). Thus if the attribution to Mālik is true then he only said that in relation to the routes of the narration that reached him.

Finally, the fact that Abū Dāwūd mentioned the ḥadīth and remained silent about it, which indicates it is sound according to him, and then claiming that it is abrogated is an evidence that he did not accept the statement of Mālik regarding the report. If Mālik was correct then Abū Dāwūd would have, in refuting the ḥadīth, stated that it was a lie which is stronger than merely saying that it is abrogated (p.62).

Ḥimṣī Ḥadīth

Abū Dāwūd reports whenever the ḥadīth was mentioned to Ibn Shihāb he would retort: “This is a Ḥimṣī ḥadīth” (p. 57). This however is his view according to the route(s) that reached him, otherwise, from a ḥadīth science point of view the report is sound and established as indicated above (p.59-60).

Concealment

Abū Dāwūd also reports that al-Awzā'ī said, “I continued to conceal it until I saw it become widespread” i.e. the ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr (p. 57). The fact that it became widespread is an evidence of its abundant routes, reports and numbers. This in turn suffices as evidence against those who declared it weak or rejected it, as they did so in accordance with what they found not in accordance with what the ḥadīth has in terms of its routes (p. 60).

Naskh (Abrogation)

A further point made against the ḥadīth is that it carries no probative force as it has been abrogated by other aḥādīth. Before delving into the claim of *naskh* though, it is important to set down the principles related to the topic of *naskh*. *Naskh* is the repealing of a divinely legal evidential ruling or wording based on an evidence from the Qur’ān and Sunnah. From this definition it becomes clear that *naskh* involves at least two texts from the sources the first of which indicates a ruling which is revoked by the second to a different ruling.

There are a number of conditions which have to be met in order for *naskh* to be accepted however. Firstly one must demonstrate that the two opposing texts cannot

be harmonised at all. If they can be harmonised one cannot resort to *naskh*. Secondly, one must know the date of the abrogating text which is known either through the text itself, the report of a Companion or through history. If the above conditions are unmet; there is no case of *naskh*.

So in our case, the prohibition of fasting on Saturdays other than obligatory ones is the first text and a second text would have to be presented which repeals the first ruling and replaces it. Abū Dāwūd claims in his *Sunan* that the ḥadīth has been abrogated but fails to provide the evidence to substantiate his claim. As established, claims of *naskh* are not accepted without evidence and there is no sound evidence to prove abrogation in this case. This is why Ibn Ḥajar states, in reply to Abū Dāwūd's claim of abrogation, that the manner of *naskh* is unclear. Al-Subkī states in *al-Dīn al-Khālīṣ*, after quoting the statement of Abū Dāwūd, that it is unacceptable and where if any is the evidence for its abrogation? (p. 59) Ibn Ḥajar does go on to suggest in *Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr* that Abū Dāwūd may have deduced his view from the fact that the Prophet used to love conforming to the People of the Book in the initial stages of his mission but in the latter stages he ordered to "Differ from them". Thus, the prohibition of fasting on Saturdays conforms to the initial stages of his mission and fasting it conforms to the latter stages and this, Allāh knows best, is the mode of abrogation (p. 414). But where is the specific repealing text?

In summary, the ḥadīth is in fact sound as it is reported through a connected chain of reliable narrators from different sources via the Family of Busr. They contain no *iḍtirāb* since the type of *iḍtirāb* mentioned concerns the exact relationship of the Companion 'Abd Allāh b. Busr to al-Ṣammā' which has no effect on the soundness of the report as both are unanimously considered to be Companions and the overriding view is that al-Ṣammā' is in fact the sister of 'Abd Allāh. Claims of *shudhūdh* are similarly rejected both in its *isnād* and *matn*; in the former case because of the proficient calibre of its reporters and the latter case because of the possibility of harmonising it with any supposedly conflicting texts. The assertion of abrogation is completely unwarranted firstly due to a lack of supporting evidence and secondly

due to the juridical possibility of harmonising any apparently conflicting texts thereby negating the need to resort to the procedure of abrogation.

With the soundness of the ḥadīth established beyond doubt thereby qualifying it as having probative force, attention will now be directed towards dealing with juridical arguments regarding how this ḥadīth should be understood and implemented in light of other supposedly contradictory aḥādīth.

The Meaning of the Ḥadīth

Those scholars who accept the soundness of the ḥadīth differ greatly over its legal import. The following is a list of meanings proffered by the scholars:

1. It is completely impermissible to fast on Saturdays unless it is an obligatory one
 - a. Thus one can fast:
 - i. Ramaḍān of course!
 - ii. Qaḍā' of Ramaḍān
 - iii. Vowed fasts
 - iv. Penalty fasts
 - b. One cannot fast the following if they or any of their days fall on a Saturday:
 - i. Any supererogatory fasts including:
 1. Day of 'Arafah
 2. Day of 'Āshūrā' and its connected days
 3. Six Days of Shawwāl
 - a. So you cannot fast them in a row in which one of those days is a Saturday. You would have to break Saturday and continue from Sunday.
 4. White Days or Three Days of every month
 - a. One of those three days cannot be a Saturday
 5. Fast of Dāwūd ﷺ

- a. One would have to break the fast if his alternate day falls on a Saturday and continue from Sunday
- 6. Most of Sha‘bān
 - a. One cannot fast the Saturdays that occur in Sha‘bān
- 7. Nine Days of Dhul-Ḥijjah
 - a. If one chooses to fast these days due to the virtue of the Days of Dhul-Ḥijjah then one must avoid Saturdays
- 2. It is permissible to fast on Saturdays
 - a. The ḥadīth indicates dislike and not prohibition due to opposing ḥadīth – this is how they do *jam* (harmonisation of apparently conflicting evidences)
 - i. The prohibition (*nahy*) is deflected into dislike (*kirāhah*) due to other aḥādīth either indicating explicitly or implicitly that one may fast on Saturdays under certain conditions
 - 1. As long as one does not single it out for fasting
 - 2. As long as one joins it with another day
 - a. Friday and Saturday
 - b. Saturday and Sunday
 - 3. As long as it falls on a virtuous day of fasting
 - a. Day of ‘Arafah
 - b. Day of ‘Āshūrā’
 - c. Six fasts of Shawwāl
 - 4. As long as it falls on a day one would normally fast
 - a. White Days
 - b. Fast of Dāwūd i.e. alternate days

Let us elaborate upon the above mentioned views and how the scholars reached their respective opinions.

The first view states, as you have read above, that it is completely prohibited to fast on Saturdays unless one is fasting an obligatory fast. This relies on the apparent and literal meaning of the ḥadīth which, due to its wording and emphasis placed after the exception, unequivocally indicate one simple meaning: you are not allowed to fast on Saturdays unless it is an obligatory fast. According to the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence the immediate and apparent meaning predominates unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise.

Accordingly, “*Do not fast on Saturdays...*” indicates absolute prohibition of fasting on Saturdays no matter what type of fasting it is, and “*...except for what is obligatory upon you...*” provides an exemption from the absolute rule i.e. the only fast you can keep on Saturdays is one which is obligatory upon you.

The second view states, that it is permissible to fast on Saturdays due to a number of ḥadīth explicitly mentioning supererogatory Saturday fasts which, if sound, indicate permissibility. Below is a list of those aḥādīth, their purported meanings followed by a critical ḥadīth analysis of the genuineness of such reports:

[1] **“*The Messenger of Allāh used to fast from one month: Saturday, Sunday and Monday and from the other month: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.*”**

This ḥadīth clearly states that the Prophet ﷺ would fast Saturday, Sunday and Monday in a row. If it had been impermissible to fast non-obligatory fasts on Saturday he would not have fasted in this way.

This ḥadīth is narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan* who states at the end of it that it is ḥasan and that Ibn Mahdī reported this ḥadīth from Sufyān without raising it to the Prophet (p. 41).

The *isnād* of the ḥadīth, however, according to al-Ḥalabī is weak, the defect occurring as a result of a disconnecting link between Khaythamah and ‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها. Although Khaythamah was reliable he used to practice *irsāl* as al-Ḥāfiẓ states in *al-Taqrīb* (p. 41).

- [2] *Kurayb the client of Ibn ‘Abbās stated that Ibn ‘Abbās and some of the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh send him to Umm Salamah to ask her which days the Messenger of Allāh would fast the most. She replied, “Saturdays and Sundays.” I returned to them and informed them and it as if they rejected that so they all set out together to her and said, “We sent so-and-so regarding such-and-such and he mentioned that you stated such-and-such?! She replied, “He spoke the truth, indeed the most the Messenger of Allāh used to fast was on Saturdays and Sundays and he used to say: “Both of them are days of festivals for the polytheists and I wish to be different to them.”*

This ḥadīth explicitly states that the Prophet ﷺ used to fast Saturdays and Mondays the most. It is reported from one of his wives who would obviously know best what days he fasted. Additionally, the ḥadīth provides the reasoning behind the Prophet’s ﷺ fasts – to be different from the polytheists who would celebrate them as days of festivals.

This ḥadīth however is weak; in fact it is *munkar* to be more precise. In his research of the ḥadīth, al-Ḥalabī originally followed al-Albānī’s research in which the Imām stated that the condition of Muḥammad b. ‘Umar was unknown and that of his son ‘Abd Allāh also. However, al-Ḥalabī revised his view after coming across positive validations of Muḥammad b. ‘Umar from leading ḥadīth experts thereby removing his anonymity. He also revised his view regarding ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad who as it turns out is also known. However, unlike his father, ‘Abd Allāh was disparaged as having very few ḥadīth, prone to errors and contradictory in his reports as

compared to reliable narrators (pp. 43ff). Accordingly, the ḥadīth is *munkar* and is inadmissible as evidence let alone a source for legal deductions.

- [3] *‘Ubayd al-A‘raj stated that his grandmother narrated to him that she entered upon the Messenger of Allāh while he was lunching and that was on a Saturday so he said, “Come and eat”. She replied, “I am fasting”. He said to her, “Did you fast yesterday?” She replied, “No.” He said, “Fasting on Saturday is neither for you nor upon you.”*

This report indicates a supposed indifference to fasting on Saturdays.

The report however is weak. The *isnād* contains a number of unknown persons (pp. 48-9). There is however a sound Companion-report (*mawqūf*) from ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr in which he was asked about fasting on Saturdays to which he replied, “Fasting on Saturdays is neither for you nor upon you” (p. 49).

Al-Ḥalabī states that the meaning of the Companion-report is that one gains no reward for its fasting nor does one suffer any harm from leaving it (p. 49).

- [4] *“Whoever fasts every sacred month; Thursday, Friday and Saturday will have 900 years of worship written for him.”*

This report explicitly indicates the permissibility of supererogatory fasting on Saturdays as part of a pattern of fasting which would yield a prodigious amount of rewards for its practitioner.

This report however is weak (p. 51). Its *isnād* contains a number of unknown persons and weak narrators thereby rendering it unsound and inadmissible as evidence.

- [5] *Juwayriyah reported that the Prophet entered upon her on the Day of Jumu‘ah and she was fasting. He asked, “Did you fast yesterday?” She replied, “No.” He said, “Do you intend to fast tomorrow?” She replied, “No.” He said, “Break your fast.”*

This ḥadīth is sound beyond doubt as it is reported by al-Bukhārī (p. 53). Abū Hurayrah’s رضي الله عنه report in Muslim contains the following words raised to the Prophet ﷺ: “...and do not single out Friday for fasting from the other days except that it be a fast which one of you fasts” (p. 53).

The ḥadīth indicates that if one fasted on a Friday without having fasted the Thursday preceding it then one must fast the immediate Saturday or break the Friday fast.

Those who support the opinion of the permissibility of supererogatory fasting on Saturdays state that this ḥadīth mentions the permissibility of fasting on Saturdays which:

1. Deflects the prohibition or *nahy* mentioned in the ḥadīth of the Busr Family to dislike or *kirāhah*
2. Indicates that one can fast on Saturdays as long as one joins it with another day thereby analogising it with Friday

Dealing with Apparently Conflicting Texts

Thus far, the soundness of the ḥadīth of prohibition has been established thereby qualifying it for legal deduction of a Sharī'ah ruling. Aḥādīth which reportedly oppose the ḥadīth of prohibition have also been mentioned and have been proven to be weak except for the ḥadīth of Juwayriyah regarding the Friday fast. So what we have before us are two sound ḥadīths which appear to the untrained eye to be in apparent conflict with each other: one absolutely prohibiting supererogatory fasts on Saturday except for obligatory ones and the other allowing one to fast Saturday along with a Friday. In such instances, Muslim jurists resort to the methodology of dealing with apparently conflicting texts as outlined in the books of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* or Principles of Islāmic Jurisprudence.

Briefly, when faced with apparently conflicting texts the first obligatory step for jurists is to attempt to harmonise both texts: a process known as *jam'*. If the conflicting texts cannot be harmonised at all and one is sure of the dates of each text then the second step is to apply the procedure of abrogation or *naskh*. If, however, the conditions of *naskh* are not fulfilled then the jurist resorts to weighing up each text and selecting the weightier of the two thereby predominating one over the other in a process referred to as *tarjih*.

Attempts at Harmonisation (*Jam'*) – Joining Saturday with another Day

Those scholars who consider the ḥadīth of prohibition to be sound have attempted to harmonise the ḥadīth with that of the ḥadīth of Juwayriyah  primarily and other peripheral aḥādīth such as the Fast of Dāwūd  etc secondarily in different ways.

Another doubt raised by those who allow fasting on Saturdays is their claim that it is possible to interpret the texts as meaning that one should not fast Saturdays except with another day and the ḥadīth of prohibition refers to fasting it alone and in this way all the texts on the issue are harmonised! (p. 76).

Or to put it another way, if we add another day to Saturday it is permissible to fast it as the prohibition only occurs if it is singled out!

***Dalīl al-Tanāwul* – The All Encompassing Exception**

The response to this – and we hear it a lot – is what Imām Ibn al-Qayyim stated in *Tahdhīb al-Sunan* (3/298) that this method would have been excellent if it was not for the fact that the ḥadīth states: “Do not fast on Saturdays except for what is obligatory upon you” which is an evidence and indication of preventing fasting non-obligatorily whether singularly or joined with another day because the exception utilised in the ḥadīth is something known as *dalīl al-tanāwul*. This exception indicates that the prohibition covers and envelopes all forms and modes of its fasting except for the obligatory fasts. If it was only indicating singling out Saturday then the ḥadīth would have said: “Do not fast Saturdays except if you fast a day before it or a day after it” as is stated for the ḥadīth regarding fasting on Friday...”(p. 77).

Ibn Taymiyyah states that it cannot be interpreted to mean the prohibition refers to singling it out because the wording states “Do not fast on Saturdays except for what is obligatory upon you” and the exception is *dalīl tanāwul* which necessitates that the ḥadīth encompasses its fasting in every form, otherwise if only singling it out was intended then it would not have mentioned the exception of obligatory fasts...which

contrary to the Day of Jumu'ah for it is manifestly clear that the prohibition is only in regards to singling it out (p. 77).

Al-Albānī states in *Tamām al-Minnah* (p. 406) that if the mode of joining it with another day was not prohibited then mentioning that as the *istithnā'* in the ḥadīth would have been more deserving than mentioning the *istithnā'* of obligation because the uncertainty and ambiguity of the inclusion of the ḥadīth of it is more remote than its inclusion of the mode of joining it with another day. So, when the obligation alone is exempted, this indicates the absence of exempting anything other than it (p. 78).

So, all of these are profound knowledge-based responses which no truth seeker can reject or overlook.

***Tarjīh* of the Issue**

If one were to resort to the procedure of *tarjīh* in which one set of evidences is outweighed against another set with regards to this issue then the following arguments can be advanced:

The ḥadīth of Juwayriyah and that of Abū Hurayrah do not have the ascendancy over the ḥadīth of prohibition because the most one can deduce from them is the permission to fast Saturday in sequence for the one who fasted Friday and this permission of sequential fasting is not definitively binding since the fasting person actually has a choice between Thursday and Saturday. When permission and allowance oppose prohibition the principle is that the prohibition is implemented and not the permission because prohibition is stronger and more confirmed as an evidence. This is similar to what the Prophet ﷺ said, “If I command you to do something then do as much as you are able and if I prohibit you from something then desist.” It is not hidden – in light of this ḥadīth, that there is no choice

regarding prohibition, as for the command then it is performed as much as can be implemented.

Thus can the explicit prohibition be opposed by a mere permission of choice? The *nahy* according to the Uṣūlists is a “constructional statement indicating a demand of abstaining from an action directed from a position of superiority.” Advancing the *nahy* over the *amr* – when they coincide – is well known from the Righteous Ancestors for al-Ṭayālīsī reports in his *Musnad* (1922) that Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما was asked regarding a man who took an oath to fast on a Friday to which he replied: “We were commanded to fulfil our vows and we were prohibited from fasting on this day.” Its chain is *ḥasan*.

This is from the intricate precision of his juridical perspicacity and how he advanced the prohibition over the command when both coincide since there is no choice in regards to the prohibition.

This is a well known scientific principle according to the People of Knowledge which al-Ḥāfidh Ibn Ḥajr mentioned in *al-Fath* in commenting upon al-Bukhārī’s mention of a statement by Ibn ‘Umar similar to this (1994) in which he said: “When the command and prohibition coincide in one place which of the two is advanced? The predominant view is that the prohibition is advanced.”

As I have mentioned repeatedly, the opposition here is nothing more than permission!!

At this point Sh. al-Ḥalabī directs his readers to an issue which occurred during the Ḥajj of 1408AH on the Day of ‘Arafah which happened to coincide with a Saturday. The virtue of fasting on the Day of ‘Arafah is extremely great as it remits the sins of the preceding and proceeding year. People differed as to whether they should fast on the day thereby opposing the ḥadīth prohibiting fasting on Saturdays or not to fast thereby losing out on the abundant reward.

Al-Ḥalabī mentions the fact that there is no doubt amongst the scholars that the prohibition is advanced ahead of the permission and allowance when they both coincide as already established. What further supports and emphasises this stance is the report confirmed from the Prophet that he prohibited fasting on the Day of ‘Arafah for those who are present at ‘Arafah. So what is the difference between the two prohibitions?

In the first case one is prohibited from fasting on Saturday even if it coincides with the Day of ‘Arafah. In the second case one is forbidden from fasting the Day of ‘Arafah if he is at ‘Arafah.

Thus both share in confirming the reward of the fasting person on the Day of ‘Arafah and he has the reward of remission of two years sins.

Similarly, both share in their prohibition, the first because it coincides with Saturday and the second because he is standing at ‘Arafah. Both prohibitions are circumstantially specific (p. 66).

This is why al-Dhahabī says in *Siyar*, (p. 67):

“Whoever fasted the Day of ‘Arafah there while knowing of its prohibition and the fact that the Messenger did not fast there nor did any of the Companions from what we know then he is incorrect and Allāh knows best.

Similar to it is the one who fasted Saturday while knowing of its prohibition if it coincides with a virtuous day such as ‘Āshūrā’ or ‘Arafah etc then there is no difference.

All praise is due to Allāh.

The text of the ḥadīth contains a definitive and decisive negation which is: “...except for what is obligatory upon you...”

This exception incorporates all types of voluntary fasting into the arena of prohibition; those that are Sunnah or supererogatory apart from the obligatory. Nothing other than the obligatory fasting is allowed on Saturday.

The Friday and Saturday Fast

What about the fasting of Saturday after the Friday for the one who fasted Friday out of ignorance or forgetfulness is it obligatory or is it a Sunnah?

The response from all is that it is obligatory in order to remove the one who fasted on Friday from the sin of singling it out. This indicates the obligation of fasting Saturday for the one who fasted on Friday out of ignorance or forgetfulness since he has no choice terminating from what we are prohibited

From the methods of outweighing the predominant view according to the scholars is that if one of the two ḥadīths is an explicit statement and the other is related to it via deduction and personal judgement then the first is predominant. This is what al-Ḥāzimī states in *al-I'tibār* and al-Zaylā'ī quoted it and affirmed it in *Naṣb al-Rāyah* and al-Ḥāfidh Ibn Ḥajr said the same in *al-Fath*.

As it relates to our topic here; the prohibition of supererogatory fasting on Saturdays is clear, explicit and unequivocal whilst the one who allows it deduces it from texts which indicate permission and allowance of coupled fasting of Saturdays. This form of coupled fasting of Saturdays would have been acceptable if it was not opposed by something that is explicit and unequivocal (p. 69).

Manṭūq over Mafhūm

Similar to the above is what the scholars mention in terms of *manṭūq* and *mafḥūm*. Those who deduce the permissibility of fasting Saturdays from the ḥadīth of Juwayriyah and Abū Hurayrah only do so from the *mafḥūm* of it indicating the allowance of coupled fasting while the ḥadīth of the Family of Busr are explicit and unequivocal in its prohibiting and disallowance. As al-Dhahabī states, deduction via the *mafḥūm* is not evidence except if it is free from opposition.

Al-Shawkānī dilates in *Irshād al-Fuḥūl* on the fact that the exception (*istithnā'*) is from the strongest forms of specifying the general. *Al-Khuṣūṣ* is extracting some of what falls under the generality. The ḥadīth of the Family of Busr is from the strongest of specifiers because it is explicit, clear and unequivocal in mentioning the prohibition of fasting on Saturdays apart from obligatory ones. Thus the other aḥādīth in which the fasting of Friday joined with either Thursday or Saturday, or the aḥādīth mentioning alternate fasting in which one fasts one day and does not fast the next day, or the aḥādīth regarding fasting three days out of every month are all more general in their indications than the ḥadīth of the Family of Busr for their ḥadīth contains the prohibition of fasting all types of fasts except for obligatory ones. Without any doubt whatsoever, all of these aḥādīth are in relation to other than obligatory fasts therefore they enter into the prohibition without doubt (p. 75).

The Fast of Dāwūd

As further clarification of what al-Ḥalabī mentions above, let us take the Fast of Dāwūd as an example. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged the Fast of Dāwūd wherein a person fasts one day and breaks the next and so on i.e. alternate fasting. Does this ḥadīth not prove that it is permissible to fast on Saturdays since one of those days is bound to fall on a Saturday at some point and the Prophet ﷺ obviously knew that and he did not say: ‘...except Saturdays...’ for instance?

The response to this doubt is simple. If a person was to follow the Fast of Dāwūd and it just so happened that the next day of his fast would fall on the Day of ʿĪd al-ʿĀḏḩā, what does he do? Does he fast it because he is following the Fast of Dāwūd with all the virtues that follow it and the fact that it is the best form of supererogatory fasting? Or does he not fast it even though that would disrupt his pattern of fasting? The answer of course is that he does not fast on that day. Why not? Because the Prophet stated explicitly in a sound ḥadīth that it is prohibited to fast on ʿĪd day and the prohibition is given precedence over recommendations and allowances and because what is established explicitly without any ambiguity overrides what is stated implicitly.

So, did the fact that the Fast of Dāwūd is the best form of supererogatory fasting override the prohibition to fast on ʿĪd day? No. Similarly, if one was fasting the Fast of Dāwūd and one of those days happened to fall on a Saturday he should not fast that Saturday because the Prophet forbade fasting on Saturday just as he forbade fasting on ʿĪd day and just as a person would not perform a supererogatory fast on ʿĪd day neither should he fast on a Saturday.

You can apply the above principle to any other virtuous days of supererogatory fasting.

Finally, al-Ḥalabī mentions another way of weighing out the predominant view is using the principle that what is joined with emphasis is advanced over what is not joined with emphasis. Likewise, the prohibition is advanced over the command, the prohibition is advanced over the permissible and that which contains lesser possibilities (of interpretation for instance) is advanced over what has more numerous possibilities.

All of these are emphatic in outweighing the ḥadīth of the Family of Busr over anything that opposes it (p. 79).

Conclusion

In conclusion in this article I examined the ruling on whether it is permissible to perform supererogatory fasts on Saturdays in light of a ḥadīth prohibiting such fasts unless they were obligatory ones. I did this by presenting the research of Sh. ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī on the topic examining the routes of the ḥadīth and establishing its authenticity beyond doubt. Criticisms made against the ḥadīth that it is *muḍṭarib* were dispelled by the fact that the iḍṭirāb is the type that does not harm the soundness of the ḥadīth due to al-Ṣammā’ being an established Companion and the predominant view is that she is ‘Abd Allāh b. Busr’s sister. Claims of *shudhūdh* were dispelled based on the fact that any claimed aḥādīth conflicting with specifically regarding Saturdays are weak and the fact that any supposedly sound conflicting ḥadīth such as that of Juwayriyah’s regarding Friday fasts can be harmonised or even overridden using *tarjīh* if needed. Allegations that the ḥadīth is a lie were invalidated based on the approval of the ḥadīth by eminent scholars. Claims of *naskh* were extinguished due to a lack of evidence and its opposition to the normative procedure of legal theory in which harmonisation is given precedence over *naskh* and *tarjīh* is given precedence over *naskh* if the conditions of *naskh* are not met as in this case. Thus the ḥadīth contains probative force and is eligible for legal deduction as its soundness is well established.

I then moved on to study the varying meanings of the ḥadīth proffered by jurists and evaluated the strengths of the views based on their evidences and noted that the explicit and apparent meaning of the ḥadīth, the fact that the exception (*istithnā’*) in the ḥadīth excludes every possible form of supererogatory fasting on Saturdays whether that be coupled with another day or whether a virtuous day of fasting falls on that day and the fact that any evidence that is presented that could deflect the prohibition in the ḥadīth to the level of *kirāhah* is weak indicates that that no form of supererogatory fasting is permitted on Saturdays unless it is an obligatory fast. It is also clear that based on a number of principles of *tarjīh* - if we have to resort to it - such as the fact that in cases of apparent textual conflicts prohibitions are given precedence over allowances, the explicit overrides the

implicit, that which contains an added emphasis is given precedence over that which does not and that which has fewer ambiguities is given precedence over that which has many all unequivocally indicate the overwhelming strength and correctness of the view of prohibition from a ḥadīth-criticism point of view and *uṣūl al-fiqh* point of view as well.

First draft completed by the one in complete need of Allāh's eternal forgiveness and mercy on Yawm al-Jumu'ah, 9th Muḥarram 1434 or Friday, 23rd November 2012:

Salal Ahmed Haque

abuhayyaan@hotmail.com

abuhayyaan@wordpress.com