

The Complete Forty Hadith

Fourth Revised Edition

Imam an-Nawawi

Translated by

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الحديث الثالث

عن أبي عبد الرحمن عبد الله بن عمر بن الخطاب رضي الله
عنهما، قال: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَقُولُ:

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ: شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامَةَ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ
الزَّكَاةِ، وَحَجِّ الْبَيْتِ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ.

رواه البخاري، ومسلم.

3. THE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Abu ‘Abd ar-Rahman ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khattabⁱ said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, ‘Islam is built on five: witnessing that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishment

ⁱ ‘Abdullah became a Muslim in Makkah with his father while still young and emigrated with him to Madinah. He was one of the Companions who was learned in *fiqh*. He lived to a great age and transmitted to many of the great ones of the next generation, one of the most famous of whom was his freed slave Nafi’, one of the main teachers of Malik ibn Anas ﷺ. Scholars count the *isnad*: Malik from Nafi’ from Ibn Umar from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as the ‘Golden *Isnad*’. His son Salim was also one of the great *fuqaha*’ of his time.

of the prayer, payment of *zakah*, Hajj of the House, and the fast of Ramadan.” Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated it.

Commentary

His ﷺ saying, “Islam is built on five” i.e. so whoever produces these five has completed his Islam. Just as the corners and walls complete the house, Islam is completed by its pillars which are five in number. This is ‘building’ in the realm of meaning whose metaphor is physical building. The basis of the metaphor is that when one of a physical building’s corners or sides is in ruin then the building itself is incomplete, and it is similar for building in the realm of meaning. For that reason he ﷺ said, “The prayer is the pillar of the *deen*. Whoever abandons it has ruined the *deen*.”²⁵ In that way it (a physical building) is analogous to it (the *deen*).

Something that has been said about building in the realm of meaning is:

The construction of affairs, with the people of the *deen*, is as long as they are right acting,

And if they turn away, then by the worst are they (affairs) guided.

Men do not put chaos right if they have no leader,

and they have no leader if ignorant ones overmaster [them].

And a house is not built unless it has pillars,

and it has no pillar if the pegs are not firm.

Allah struck a metaphor for the believers and the hypocrites. He ﷺ said, “*Who is better: someone who founds his building on taqwa of Allah and His good pleasure...?*”²⁶ wherein He compares the building of the believer to one who places his building right on the middle of a firm mountain, and He compares the building of a disbeliever to one who places his building on the edge of the crumbling bank of a sea, it having no stability, and at which the sea eats away so that the bank collapses, and thus the building collapses and falls with him into the sea, and he is drowned and enters *Jahannam*.

His ﷺ saying, “Islam is built on five...” i.e. “on” with the meaning of “with”, for if that were not the case then the building would be something other than that with which it is built. If we were to interpret it according to the strict literal meaning then the “five” would be outside of Islam and that is a warped meaning. It is possible that it (“on”) is with the meaning of “from” as in His ﷺ words, “...except on (‘ala) their spouses...”ⁱ i.e. “...from their spouses”.

The five which are mentioned in the hadith are the foundations of the building. As for the supplementary matters and things which complete [the building] they are like the rest of the duties, and the other recommended acts which are the ornamentation of the building. It has been narrated in hadith that he ﷺ said, “*Iman* is more than seventy branches the highest of which is the saying ‘There is no god but Allah’” and he said, “...and the least of which is removal of some harm from the pathway.”²⁷

He ﷺ said, “...and Hajj of the House and the fast of Ramadan”, and thus it is in this narration with Hajj preceding the fast. This is according to the order in which they are mentioned but not according to their relative importance in judgement, since the fast of Ramadan is a duty before the Hajj. In other narrations the fast precedes the Hajj.

ⁱ Surat al-Mu’minin: 6. “...those who guard their private parts – except from their wives...”. The *ayah* uses “‘ala (on)” in the sense of “min (from)”.