We have been preferred over others by three (privileges): Our rows are like the rows of the angels, the whole earth is for us a place to pray and its dust is for us a means to purify ourselves with if we do not find water

Hudhayfah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: ''We have been preferred over others with three (privileges): Our rows are like the rows of the angels, the whole earth is for us a place to pray and its dust is for us a means to purify ourselves with if we do not find water.'' And he mentioned a third privilege.

[Authentic hadith] [Narrated by Muslim]

This Hadīth indicates the honor of the Muslim nation through the divine favors that it has received apart from other nations. The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) states that Allah, the Exalted, bestowed upon Muslims three special privileges. This, however, does not mean that Muslims were favored with only three privileges, because the Prophet was informed of the characteristics of his nation at intervals, so he would communicate the revelation that he received as occasion arose. The first of these privileges is that Muslims stand in prayer in rows in the same way the angels stand before Allah. They complete the front row first then the one behind it and so on, as explicitly stated in the following Hadīth cited in Sunan Abu Dawūd and other compilations: ''Would you not make rows as the angels make rows before their Lord?'' We (the Companions) asked: ''O Messenger of Allah, how do the angels make rows before their Lord?'' He said: ''They complete the first rows first and they stand close to each other in each row.'' This is different from the practice of previous nations who used to stand in prayer randomly. The second of these privileges is that the whole earth is made a place for Muslims to prostrate on and its soil is good to use for purification. Hence, a Muslim may pray anywhere when the prayer time is due. This is a facilitation and alleviation from Allah to Muslims, contrary to previous nations who had to pray at houses of worship like churches and synagogues. In one of the versions of the present Hadīth, as narrated by Ahmad, the Prophet says: ''and those who were before me would only pray in their churches.'' Another narration says: ''and none of the prophets would pray until he reached his prayer niche.'' Excluded from the broad indication of this Hadīth are certain places which are forbidden to pray in, such as toilets, cemeteries, the resting places of camels, and impure spots. Part of this second privilege is that the soil is made for Muslims a means to purify themselves with. This is a reference to dry ablution, an option that is valid only when water is unavailable. Proof of this is in the Qur'anic verse: {And if you find no water, then seek clean earth} [Sūrat An-Nisā': 43]. Muslim scholars unanimously agreed

upon the permissibility of performing dry ablution when water is unavailable or when a person fears he would be harmed by the use of water. The third privilege is not mentioned in this Hadīth; however, it is mentioned in the narration of An-Nasā'i from Abu Mālik who is one of the narrators of Muslim's version of this Hadīth. He says: ''And I was given these verses at the end of Sūrat al-Baqarah from a treasure under the Throne, from which no one before me was given nor anyone after me will be given.''

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