

13. Hadith Al-Tafdhil, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah Raises Objections

Our Shaykh (d. 728 H) is obviously not comfortable with the fact that the Sahabah used to consider Amir al-Muminin, ‘alaihi al-salam, to be superior to Abu Bakr during the lifetime of the Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*. So, he fights back:

الشيعة الأولى أصحاب علي لم يكونوا يرتابون في تقديم أبي بكر وعمر عليه كيف وقد ثبت عن علي من وجوه متواترة أنه كان يقول خير هذه الأمة بعد نبيها أبو بكر وعمر ولكن كان طائفة من شيعة علي تقدمه على عثمان وهذه المسألة أخفى من تلك ولهذا كان أئمة أهل السنة كلهم متفقين على تقديم أبي بكر وعمر من وجوه متواترة كما هو مذهب أبي حنيفة والشافعي وأبي حمزة الثوراني والأوزاعي واللبيث بن سعد وسائر أئمة المسلمين من أهل الفقه والحديث والزهد والتفسير من المتقدمين والمتاخرين

The early Shi'is, the companions of 'Ali, did not doubt the superiority of Abu Bakr and 'Umar over him. How can they when it has been narrated in *mutawatir* reports from 'Ali that he used to say: "The best of this Ummah after its Prophet are Abu Bakr and 'Umar"? However, some of the Shi'is of 'Ali used to consider him superior to 'Uthman, and this issue is more unclear than that. This is why all the Imams of the Ahl al-Sunnah were unanimous on the superiority of Abu Bakr and 'Umar as reported in *mutawatir* reports. This was the view of Abu Hanifah, Shafi'i, Malik, Ahmad b. Hanbal, al-Thawri, al-Awza'i, al-Layth b. Sa'd and all the other Imams of the Muslims, from the jurists, the *hadith* experts, the ascetics and the exegetes, from the early and later generations.¹

Here, he is taking the battle even to the Shi'i home ground! According to him, not a single one of those that are followed by the Ahl al-Sunnah, including the Sahabah and Tabi'in, ever believed that Amir al-Muminin was superior to either Abu Bakr or 'Umar. There was absolute unanimity among them concerning the superiority of the duo over 'Ali. Moreover, even the early Shi'is – whom he identified as the companions of Amir al-Muminin – shared the same view! Rather, 'Ali b. Abi Talib himself used to teach his followers that Abu Bakr and 'Umar were the best of the Ummah after its Messenger. Therefore, all the early Sunnis and Shi'is had a full consensus that both Abu Bakr and 'Umar were better than 'Ali in

the Sight of Allah.

So, did Ibn Mas'ud tell a lie? We will soon find out which party is telling the truth, and which is not. Our Shaykh proceeds:

وقد ثبت في الصحيحين عن عبد الله بن عمر قال كنا نفاضل على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أبو بكر ثم عمر ثم عثمان وفي لفظ ثم ندع أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لا نفاضل بينهم فهذا إخبار عما كان عليه الصحابة على عهد النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم من تفضيل أبي بكر ثم عمر ثم عثمان وقد روى أن ذلك كان يبلغ النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فلا ينكره

It has been authentically transmitted in the two *Sahih*s from 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar that he said: "We used to consider Abu Bakr to be the best during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, and then 'Umar, and then 'Uthman" and in another version, "Then we would leave all the other Sahabah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, **and we did not consider any of them to be superior to another.**" This is information concerning what the Sahabah believed during the lifetime of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in that they considered Abu Bakr to be the most superior, then 'Umar, and then 'Uthman. It has been narrated that this reached the Prophet, peace be upon him, and he did not oppose it.²

The plot deepens considerably here. There is a direct contradiction between the reports of Ibn Mas'ud and Ibn 'Umar. One of them, definitely, was *incorrectly* attributing things to his colleagues. As such, we must investigate their irreconcilable claims in order to determine which of them reflects the true story.

Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256 H) has documented the submission of Ibn 'Umar:

حدثني محمد بن حاتم بن بزيغ حدثنا شاذان حدثنا عبد العزيز ابن أبي سلمة الماجشون عن عبد الله عن نافع عن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما قال : كنا في زمان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لا نعدل بأبي بكر أحدا ثم عمر ثم عثمان ثم ترك أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لا نفاضل بينهم .

Muhammad b. Hatim b. Bazig – Shadhan – 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Abi Salamah al-Majishun – 'Ubayd Allah – Nafi' – Ibn 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both:

During the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, we never considered anyone as equal to Abu Bakr, then 'Umar, and then 'Umar. Then, we leave the Sahabah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, **and we did not consider any of them to be superior to another.**"³

In simpler terms, the Sahabah – as alleged by Ibn 'Umar – viewed Abu Bakr to be their best, then 'Umar, and then 'Uthman. Apart from the trio, those Sahabah did not consider *any* other among them to be superior to another. Without doubt, this *hadith* targets Amir al-Muminin 'Ali, as it places him on the same level with *all* other Sahabah, apart from the three *khalifahs*. Al-Bukhari has even *attributed* a similar report to him:

حدثنا محمد بن كثير أخبرنا سفيان حدثنا جامع بن أبي راشد حدثنا أبو يعلى عن محمد ابن الحنفية قال : قلت لأبي أي الناس خير بعد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ؟ قال أبو بكر قلت ثم من ؟ قال ثم عمر وخشيت أن يقول عثمان قلت ثم أنت ؟ قال ما أنا إلا رجل من المسلمين

Muhammad b. Kathir – Sufyan – Jami' b. Abi Rashid – Abu Ya'la – Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyyah:

I asked my father ('Ali), "Who is the best of mankind after the Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Abu Bakr." I said, "Then who?" He replied, "'Umar." I feared that he would (also) mention 'Uthman. So, I asked, "Then you?" He replied, "**I am only an ordinary Muslim.**"⁴

This report, however, makes no sense in line with 'Ali's documented opinions of Abu Bakr and 'Umar! Imam Muslim (d. 261 H), for instance, quotes the second *khalifah* saying to both Amir al-Muminin 'Ali and 'Abbas:

فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ أَنَا وَلِيُّ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ... فَرَأَيْتَمَاكَانَبَا
آتَمَا غَادَرَا خَائِنَا وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّهُ لِصَادِقٍ بَارِ رَاشِدٍ تَابَعَ لِلْحَقِّ ثُمَّ تَوَفَّى أَبُو بَكْرٍ وَأَنَا وَلِيُّ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَوَلِيُّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ فَرَأَيْتَمَا كَانَبَا آتَمَا غَادَرَا خَائِنَا

When the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, died, **Abu Bakr said: "I am the *wali* of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him."** **So both of you ('Ali and 'Abbas) thought him (i.e. Abu Bakr) to be a liar, sinful, treacherous and dishonest.** And Allah knows that he was really truthful, pious, rightly-guided and a follower of the truth. **Abu Bakr died and I became the *wali* of the Messenger of Allah,** peace be upon him, and the *wali* of Abu Bakr. **So both of you thought me to be a liar, sinful, treacherous and dishonest.**⁵

He considered both Abu Bakr and 'Umar as sinful, treacherous and dishonest liars! How then could he possibly have graded both people as the best of the Ummah? Does it make sense that Amir al-Muminin thought that sinful, treacherous and dishonest liars were better than himself and everyone else?! Besides, on what basis would he have declared himself an *ordinary Muslim* – equal with all others – despite everything that Allah and His Prophet had publicly and privately said about him? We believe that Imam 'Ali was an outstandingly intelligent, sincere believer in Allah and His Messenger, who could never have made such illogical comments. What we find, therefore, in the books of the Ahl al-Sunnah concerning his alleged admission of the superiority of Abu Bakr and 'Umar over himself are only cheap polemical stunts pulled by some enthusiastic Sunnis.

However, in the case of Ibn 'Umar, what has been transmitted from him coincides perfectly with his character and beliefs. He certainly believed in the superiority of Abu Bakr, then his father 'Umar, and then 'Uthman, above all other Sahabah. Moreover, he never recognized the *khilafah* of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, citing a self-made excuse, as al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) confirms:

وإنما لم يذكر ابن عمر خلافة علي لأنه لم يبايعه لوقوع الاختلاف عليه كما هو مشهور في صحيح الاخبار وكان رأي أنه لا يبايع لمن لم يجتمع عليه الناس ولهذا لم يبايع أيضاً ابن الزبير ولا عبد الملك في حال اختلافهما وبايع ليزيد بن معاوية ثم لعبد الملك بن مروان بعد قتل بن الزبير

Ibn ‘Umar did not mention the *khilafah* of ‘Ali only because he did not give *bay’ah* (oath of allegiance) to the latter, due to the difference of opinions concerning him as it is well-known in the *sahih* reports. His (Ibn ‘Umar’s) view was that he would not give *ba’yah* to anyone who was not universally acknowledged (as *khalifah*) by all the people. This was why he also did not give *bay’ah* to Ibn al-Zubayr and ‘Abd al-Malik during their disagreement. **And he gave *ba’yah* to Yazid b. Mu’awiyah**, and then to ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan after the killing of Ibn al-Zubayr.⁶

His excuse, of course, was defeated by his *ba’yah* to Yazid b. Mu’awiyah, the killer of Imam al-Husayn. The *khilafah* of Yazid was never universally accepted. This was why there were repeated revolts against him anyway, resulting in infamous episodes in Islamic history – such as his massacres in Makkah and Madinah, and at Karbala. Interestingly, like his pretext for delegitimizing the *khilafah* of Amir al-Muminin, Ibn ‘Umar’s claim that the Sahabah never considered anyone among themselves as superior to another – apart from Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman – lacks truth! The reality is far different. For instance, Allah states:

لَا يُسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولَئِي الضررِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ
الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ درجةً وَكَلَّا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحَسْنَى وَفَضْلُ اللَّهِ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ أَجْرًا
عَظِيمًا درجاتٍ منه

Not equal are those of the believers who sit (i.e. do not participate in *jihad*) – except those who are disabled – and those who do *jihad* in the Cause of Allah with their wealth *and* their lives. **Allah has made those who do *jihad* with their wealth *and* their lives superior in (spiritual) rank above those who sit.** Unto each, Allah has promised good. But Allah has made those who do *jihad* to be superior to those who sit with a huge reward, ranks from Him.⁷

The Sahabah were in two groups: those who participated in *jihad* with their wealth *and* lives and those who held back. Allah declared the former to be superior above the latter in ranks. Amir al-Muminin ‘Ali, of course, never voluntarily missed the battlefield, and he equally *never* fled – not even once – no matter how deadly things became. Moreover, although he was poor, he still spent his little wealth in the Way of Allah. By contrast, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman have been authentically documented to have fled the battlefield at various times! In other words, they were escaping *with their lives* from *jihad*. They might have done *jihad* with their wealth – which is debatable, anyway. However, they certainly were not doing it *with their lives*. So, why on earth would the Sahabah place Abu Bakr above ‘Ali, despite Allah’s clear verdict? Did they not believe in the Qur’an? Worse still, why would they consider Amir al-Muminin to be equal in rank with those of the Sahabah who used to flee from the battlefield, and with those who used

to stay away from *jihad*?

The Qur'an adds:

وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَا تَنفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيراثُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا يُسْتُوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتحِ وَقَاتَلَ أُولَئِكَ
أَعْظَمُ دَرْجَةً مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ وَقَاتَلُوا وَكَلَّا وَعْدُ اللَّهِ حَسْنِي وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

And what is the matter with you that you do not spend in the Way of Allah? And to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth. Not equal among you are those who spent and fought before the Conquest (of Makkah), **these ones are higher in (spiritual) rank than those who spent and fought afterwards.** But to all, Allah has promised the best. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.⁸

Yet, the Sahabah – according to Ibn ‘Umar – did not believe this verse! Therefore, they used to consider ‘Ali, who spent and fought *before* the Conquest of Makkah, as equal with others among them who only spent and fought *after* it. It is indeed a lose-lose situation for our Sunni brothers. If they agreed that the Sahabah believed in and practised the above verses, then they must reject the report of Ibn ‘Umar as only his mere wishful thinkings and hallucinations. On the other hand, if they chose to believe Ibn ‘Umar, in such a case, they would be left with no other choice but to proclaim the *kufr* of the Sahabah!

1. Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Halim b. Taymiyyah al-Harrani, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah* (*Muasassat Qurtubah*; 1st edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad Rashad Salim], vol. 2, pp. 72–73

2. *Ibid*, vol. 6, p. 153

3. Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma’il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-J’ufi, al-Jami’ al-Ṣahih al-Mukhtasar (*Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir*; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 3, p. 1352, # 3494

4. *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 1342, # 3468

5. Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, *Ṣahih Muslim* (*Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-‘Arabi*) [annotator: Muhammad Fuad ‘Abd al-Baqi], vol. 3, p. 1376, #1757

6. Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari Sharḥ Ṣahih al-Bukhari* (*Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifah li al-Ṣaba’ah wa al-Nashr*; 2nd edition), vol. 5, p. 18

7. Qur'an 4:95–96

8. Qur'an 57:10

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