

23. Verse Of Al-Najwa, A Real Eye-Opener

Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) states:

و الجواب أن يقال أما الذي ثبت فهو أن عليا رضي الله عنه تصدق و ناجى ثم نسخت الآية قبل أن يعمل بها غيره لكن الآية لم توجب الصدقة عليهم لكن أمرهم إذا ناجوا أن يتصدقوا فمن لم ينالج لم يكن عليه أن يتصدق و إذا لم تكن المناجاة واجبة لم يكن أحد ملوما إذا ترك ما ليس بواجب

The reply is to say that what is **authentically transmitted** is that ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, gave charity and had a private conversation (with the Prophet). **Then the verse was abrogated before anyone else could act upon it.**

However, the verse did not make the giving of charity compulsory upon them (i.e. the Sahabah). Rather, it ordered them to give charity whenever they had private conversation (with the Messenger). Therefore, whosoever did not have a private conversation (with the Prophet) did not have to give charity. Since having a private conversation (with the Messenger) was not compulsory, none could be criticized for abandoning what was not obligatory.¹

He adds elsewhere:

وهكذا آية النجوى فإنها لم ينالج الرسول قبل نسخها إلا علي ولم يكن على من ترك النجوى حرج فمثل هذا العمل ليس من خصائص الأئمة ولا من خصائص علي رضي الله عنه ولا يقال إن غير على ترك النجوى بخلا بالصدقة لأن هذا غير معلوم فإن المدة لم تطل وفي تلك المدة القصيرة قد لا يحتاج الواحد إلى النجوى وإن قدر أن هذا كان يخص بعض الناس لم يلزم أن يكون أبو بكر وعمر رضي الله عنهما من هؤلاء كيف وأبو بكر رضي الله عنه قد أنفق ماله كله يوم رغب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في الصدقة وعمر رضي الله عنه جاء بنصف ماليه بلا حاجة إلى النجوى فكيف يدخل أحدهما بدرهماين أو ثلاثة يقدمها بين يدي نجواه

The Verse of *al-Najwa* is like that too. This is because **none had a private conversation with the Messenger before its abrogation except ‘Ali**, and there was no blame on anyone who abandoned having a private conversation (with the Prophet). The like of this act (of ‘Ali) is not part of the exclusive

merits of the Imams, and was not from the exclusive merits of ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him. **It is also not said that others apart from ‘Ali abandoned the private conversation out of miserliness to avoid giving charity. This is because such (a reason) is not known, for the time was short.**

During that short period, it was possible that one did not need to have the private conversation (with the Messenger). If some people were able to do this, it was not necessary that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both, were among such people. How can that be when it was Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, who had spent all his wealth on the day that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, encouraged the giving of charity.

‘Umar too, may Allah be pleased with him, gave half of his wealth (in charity), without the need for a private conversation. How could either of them have been miserly about spending two or three dirhams before his private conversation (with the Prophet)?²

Our dear Shaykh confirms the authenticity of the narration stating that Amir al-Muminin, ‘alaihi al-salam, was the only one who ever complied with the Verse of *al-Najwa* before its abrogation. However, he has made excuses for the failures of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman to fulfill the instruction in the verse, despite Sunni claims about their unmatched generosity and selflessness. According to the Shaykh, the verse was shortlived. When it was revealed, Amir al-Muminin enforced it. But, before anyone else could have a reason or chance to do likewise, it was cancelled. So, others did not have the opportunity. Besides, it was not obligatory upon Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman to comply with the verse anyway unless they intended to have private discussions with the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*. Since they *might* not have intended to privately talk with the Prophet, none can blame them for not having complied with the verse before its abrogation.

In order to understand what happened with the Verse of *al-Najwa*, it is important to understand a background fact about the Sahabah, as stated by Allah:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ ماتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَن يغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ فَلَا تَهْنُوا وَتَدْعُوا إِلَى السَّلَامِ وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنُ وَاللَّهُ مَعَكُمْ وَلَن يَرْكِمَ أَعْمَالَكُمْ إِنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعْبٌ وَلَهُوَ وَإِنْ تَؤْمِنُوا وَتَتَقَوَّلُو بِئْرَكُمْ أَجُورُكُمْ وَلَا يَسْأَلُكُمُ اللَّهُ أَمْوَالُكُمْ إِنْ يَسْأَلُوكُمُوهَا فَيَحْفَكُمْ تَبَخْلُوا وَيَخْرُجُ أَضْغَانُكُمْ هَا أَنْتُمْ هُؤُلَاءِ تَدْعُونَ لِتَنْفَقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْكُمْ مَنْ يَبْخُلُ وَمَنْ يَبْخُلُ فَإِنَّمَا يَبْخُلُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ

O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and render not vain your deeds. Verily, those who disbelieve, and hinder from the Path of Allah, then die while they are disbelievers, Allah will not forgive them. So be not weak and ask not for peace while you are having the upper hand. Allah is with you, and will never decrease the reward of your good deeds. The life of this world is but play and pastime, but if you believe, and fear Allah, and avoid evil, He will grant you your wages, and will not ask you your wealth.

If He were to ask you of it (i.e. your wealth), and press you, YOU WOULD BE MISERLY, and He will bring out all your ill-wills. Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in the Path of Allah, YET AMONG YOU ARE SOME WHO ARE MISERS. And whoever is miserly, he is only miserly to himself.³

A lot of the wealthy Sahabah were misers and ill-willing. This was why Allah generalized about them in the first statement. Even if we were to reject the sweeping declaration of our Creator, we must still, at the least, accept that among the wealthy Sahabah were many who were misers. It was against this background that Allah sent down the Verse of *al-Najwa*:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نَاجَيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ فَقُدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدِي نِجَوَاتِكُمْ صِدْقَةً ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ فِيمَا لَمْ تَجِدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ
غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

O you who believe! When you consult with the Messenger in private, **spend something in charity before your private consultation.** That will be better and purer for you. But, if you find not (the means for it), then verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.⁴

There are two factors for consideration in the blessed verse. Firstly, it covered only those of the Sahabah who used to have private consultations with the Messenger of Allah. Without any doubt, those were primarily the people of Madinah and Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman were chiefs among them. Secondly, the command, apparently, was directed to those of the Sahabah in Madinah who had the means to spend in charity. Some of them were so destitute that they could not afford to give out anything. Allah exempted such extremely poor Sahabah. There is again absolutely no doubt that Abu Bakr ‘Umar and ‘Uthman were able to afford *sadaqah* from their wealth.

Interestingly, once the Verse of *al-Najwa* was revealed, the wealthy and middle-income Sahabah displayed disturbing levels of miserliness. They were required to give only 1 dirham – approximately US \$3 (three US dollars) – or above in charity. But, they all – with only one exception – refrained from giving anything! They instead withheld *entirely* from privately consulting with the Prophet in order to escape spending anything in *sadaqah*!

This was why it was only Amir al-Muminin who enforced the verse. Others *deliberately* declined. They had reasons and needs, as well as very ample opportunities, to privately speak with the Messenger. However, they chose to forgo doing so, just to keep their little dirhams and dinars in their pockets. The wealthy and middle-income Sahabah had great chances to fulfil the commandment in the verse. But, all of them recoiled, except Amir al-Muminin ‘Ali!

Due to the unbecoming attitude of the Sahabah to the command in the Verse of *al-Najwa*, Allah cancelled it:

أَشْفَقْتُمْ أَنْ تَقْدِمُوا بَيْنَ يَدِي نِجَاكُمْ صَدَقَاتٍ فَإِذَا لَمْ تَفْعُلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطْبِعُوا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Are you AFRAID of spending in charity before your private consultation? If then, do not do it, and Allah has FORGIVEN you. So, perform *Salat* and give *Zakat* and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.⁵

They were literally “afraid” to spend just 1 dirham (US \$3) from their wealth, while many of them had several thousands! Looking at the text of the verse, it is general. Therefore, it applied universally to all the wealthy and middle-income Sahabah living in Madinah, except whosoever was exonerated by strong evidence. All of them had needs to privately consult with the Messenger of Allah. But, they stayed back, “afraid” of giving *sadaqah*! The only one exempted from the criticism, of course, was ‘Ali b. Abi Talib – due to the existence of authentic reports clearing him of any guilt. Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) records one of them:

أَخْبَرَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الصِّيدلَانِيُّ ثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ أَيُوبَ يَحِيَّيِّ بْنَ الْمَغِيرَةِ السَّعْدِيُّ ثَنَا جَرِيرٌ عَنْ مُنْصُورٍ عَنْ مَجَاهِدٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ أَبِي لَيْلَى قَالَ : قَالَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ : إِنَّ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ لَآيَةً مَا عَمِلَ بِهَا أَحَدٌ وَلَا يَعْمَلُ بِهَا بَعْدِي أَحَدٌ آيَةُ النَّجْوَى {يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نَاجَيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ فَقُدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدِي نِجَاكُمْ صَدَقَةً}

‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Sayadlani – Muhammad b. Ayub – Yahya b. al-Mughirah al-Sa’di – Jarir – Mansur – Mujahid – ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Layli – ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him:

“Verily, in the Book of Allah, there is a verse that none complied with, and none will ever comply with, apart from me. It is the Verse of *al-Najwa* {O you who believe! When you consult with the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation}⁶

Al-Hakim comments:

هذا حديث صحيح على شرط الشيفيين

This *hadith* is *sahih* upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.⁷

Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) agrees:

على شرط البخاري ومسلم

(*Sahih*) upon the standard of al-Bukhari and Muslim⁸

There is no evidence whatsoever removing the names of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman from the black

list. As such, none can take them out of it. In other words, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman too were among the miserly ones! Allah also considered their omission to have been a sin, but had “forgiven” them on His Own Accord. Apparently, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah’s re-invention of the incident does not tally at all with the reality.

One then wonders. Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman were literally “afraid” to spend a single dirham of their wealth in *sadaqah*. That was their attitude to money and charity. This fact, which has Qur’anic backing, nullifies and throws out all Sunni claims and *riwayat* about the trio’s legendary financial sacrifices in the Path of Allah. If the tales were true, the story of the Verse of *al-Najwa* would have been far different. Wait a minute! ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab stashed up for himself wealth worth more than US \$193, 000000 (one hundred and ninety-three million US dollars) during his *khilafah*. That was about 1400 years ago when poverty levels, across the world, were beyond extreme. If he had wanted to be miserly, what else would he have done?

It would not be out of place to end this chapter with these golden Words of Allah:

وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الْذَّهَبَ وَالْفَضْلَةَ وَلَا ينفَقُونَهَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَبِشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ يَوْمَ يُحْمَى عَلَيْهَا فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ فَتَكُوْيِ
بِهَا جَبَاهُهُمْ وَجَنُوبُهُمْ وَظَهُورُهُمْ هَذَا مَا كَنَزْتُمْ لَأَنفُسِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْنِزُونَ

And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the Way of Allah, announce unto them a painful torment. On the Day when it will be heated in the Fire of *Jahannam* and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs: “This is what you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard.”⁹

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. 7, p. 160

2. *Ibid*, vol. 5, p. 17

3. Qur’ān 47:33–38

4. Qur’ān 58:12

5. Qur’ān 58:13

6. Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-ṣahīḥayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 2, p. 524, # 3794

7. *Ibid*

8. *Ibid*

9. Qur’ān 9:34–35

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