

6. Imamah of Bastards and Children

The most qualified to lead *salat* in any circumstance is the Muslim administrator within his domain, according to Sunni Islam. He may be righteous or a drunkard. He may be a good reciter or a poor one. He may be knowledgeable or ignorant. He is the *automatic* Imam. Where he is absent in the mosque, then the most qualified is the best reciter among those present. This best reciter too may also be the best of them in the Sight of Allah – in terms of *taqwa* (piety) and knowledge – or one of their worst. Leadership in *salat* has nothing to do with righteousness or spiritual superiority. A lot of Sunni *ahadith* testify to this. We have discussed some of them in the last chapter. Let us briefly quote a few more before proceeding. Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) records:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا يحيى بن سعيد ثنا هشام قال ثنا قتادة عن يونس بن جبير عن حطان بن عبد الله الرقاشي ان الأشعري صلى بأصحابه صلاة... فقال الأشعري... ان نبي الله صلى الله عليه و سلم خطبنا فعلمنا سنتنا وبين لنا صلاتنا فقال أقيموا صفوفكم ثم ليؤمكم أقرؤكم

‘Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Yahya b. Sa’id – Hisham – Qatadah – Yunus b. Jubayr – Hittan b. ‘Abd Allah al-Raqashi:

Al-Ash’ari led his companions in a *salat* ... So, al-‘Ashari said, “... Verily, the Prophet of Allah, peace be upon him, gave us a sermon and taught us our *Sunnah*, and explained to us our *salat*. So, he said, ‘Establish your congregational rows. **Then, the best reciter among you should be your Imam.**”¹

Shaykh al-Arnaut says:

إسناده صحيح على شرط مسلم

Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of (Imam) Muslim.²

Imam Muslim (d. 261 H) also documents:

حدثنا قتيبة بن سعيد حدثنا أبو عوانة عن قتادة عن أبي نضرة عن أبي سعيد الخدري قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم إذا كانوا ثلاثة فليؤمهم أحدهم وأحقهم بالإمامة أقرؤهم

Qutaybah b. Sa'id – Abu 'Awanah – Qatadah – Abu Na'rah – Abu Sa'id al-Khudri:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “Whenever there are three persons, one of them should be their Imam. **The most entitled to be the Imam among them is the best reciter among them.**³

Imam Ahmad again records:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا عبد الرزاق أنا بن جريج قال لي عبد الملك ان أنس بن مالك قال عن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قال يؤم القوم أقرؤهم للقرآن

'Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – 'Abd al-Razzaq – Ibn Jurayj – 'Abd al-Malik – Anas b. Malik:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “**The people are to be led in *salat* by the best reciter of the Qur'an among them.**”⁴

Al-Arnaut submits:

صحيح لغيره

It is *sahih li ghayrihi*⁵

The Sahabah too put this into practice. Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256 H) documents such an instance:

حدثنا إبراهيم بن المنذر قال حدثنا أنس بن عياض عن عبيد الله عن نافع عن ابن عمر قال : لما قدم المهاجرون الأولون العصابة موضع بقاء قبل مقدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم كان يؤمهم سالم مولى أبي حذيفة وكان أكثرهم قرآنا

Ibrahim b. al-Mundhir – Anas b. 'Iya' – 'Ubayd Allah – Nafi' – Ibn 'Umar:

When the earliest Muhajirun came to al-'Usbah, a place in Quba, before the arrival of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhayfah, used to lead them in *salat*, **and he was the most knowledgeable of the Qur'an among them.**⁶

Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) comments about this *hadith*:

قوله) وكان أكثرهم قرآنا (إشارة إلى سبب تقديمهم له مع كونهم أشرف منه وفي رواية للطبراني لأنه كان أكثرهم قرآنا

His statement (and he was the most knowledgeable of the Qur'an among them) is an indicator towards their reason for making him their leader (in *salat*) despite that they were of more noble statuses than him. In the report of al-Tabarani, it is narrated: “*because he was the most knowledgeable of them of the Qur'an*”[7](#)

The explanation is confirmed by this *riwayah* of Imam Ibn Abi Shaybah (d. 235 H):

حدثنا ابن نمير عن عبيد الله عن نافع عن ابن عمر أن المهاجرين حين أقبلوا من مكة نزلوا إلى جنب قباء فأمرهم سالم مولى أبي حذيفة لأنه كان أكثرهم قرآنا فيهم أبو سلمة بن عبد الأسد وعمر بن الخطاب

Ibn Numayr – ‘Ubayd Allah – Nafi’ – Ibn ‘Umar:

When the Muhajirun fled Makkah, they camped near Quba and **Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhayfah, led them in *salat* because he was the most knowledgeable of the Qur'an among them.** Among them were Abu Salamah b. ‘Abd al-Asad and **‘Umar b. al-Khattab**.[8](#)

Grading another *hadith* with this same exact chain, ‘Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) declares:

وهذا إسناد صحيح على شرط الشيخين

This chain is *sahih* upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.[9](#)

Al-Bukhari further records:

حدثنا عثمان بن صالح حدثنا عبد الله بن وهب أخبرني ابن جريج أن نافعا أخبره أن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما أخبره قال كان سالم مولى أبي حذيفة يؤم المهاجرين الأولين وأصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم في مسجد قباء فيهم أبو بكر وعمر وأبو سلمة وزيد وعامر بن ربيعة

‘Uthman b. Salih – ‘Abd Allah b. Wahb – Ibn Jurayj – Nafi’ – Ibn ‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him:

Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhayfah, used to lead the earliest Muhajirun and the Sahabah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in *Salat* in the mosque of Quba. **Among them were Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, Abu Salamah, and Amir b. Rabi’ah**.[10](#)

So, the most senior Muhajirun – including Abu Bakr and ‘Umar – unanimously appointed Salim, a freed slave, as their Imam in *salat* pending the arrival of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*,

because he was more knowledgeable of the Qur'an than all of them. This, obviously, was in line with the *Sunnah* of Muhammad.

Salim was a freed slave. But, the *ulama* of the Ahl al-Sunnah actually allow leadership in *salat* by even serving slaves and bastards too, as long as they are the best in Qur'anic recitation, as al-Hafiz declares:

وإلى صحة إمامة العبد ذهب الجمهور وخالف مالك ... وإلى صحة إمامة ولد الزنا ذهب الجمهور

The majority (of the scholars) accepted the correctness of leadership in *salat* by a slave. But, (Imam) Malik objected.... **Also, the majority accepted the correctness of leadership in *salat* by a bastard.** [11](#)

The supreme Salafi *fiqh* council in Saudi Arabia and across the world, *al-Lajnah al-Daimah*, also states:

تصح إمامة العبد وولد الزنا في الصلاة، إذا كان كل منهما أهلاً لذلك، من جهة الدين؛ لعموم قوله: يؤم القوم
أقرؤهم لكتاب الله " ولا نعلم دليلاً يمنع ذلك

The leadership of the slave or the bastard in *salat* is correct, as long as each of them is qualified for it, from the religious aspect, due to the generality of his (i.e. the Prophet's) statement, "The people are to be led in *salat* by **the best reciter** of the Book of Allah among them." **We do not know any proof forbidding that.** [12](#)

Even a small child can lead his grandfathers in *salat*, according to the same council:

" تصح إمامة الصبي الذي يعقل الصلاة؛ لقول النبي (ص) " يؤم القوم أقرؤهم لكتاب الله

The leadership of *salat* by a small child, who understands *salat*, is correct, due to the statement of the Prophet, peace be upon him: "The people are to be led in *salat* by **the best reciter** of the Book of Allah among them." [13](#)

As such, if the Messenger of Allah ever truly designated Abu Bakr as Imam in *salat* during the former's fatal illness – and he *never* did – then it would have been only because he considered him as having the best recitation among the Sahabah – nothing more, nothing less. Most importantly, even if Abu Bakr had been a bastard – and he was NOT – he would still have been appointed Imam in *salat* over the Sahabah by the Prophet at that point in time, according to Sunni Islam, as long as he had the best Qur'anic recitation among them. The problem however is that Abu Bakr was never the overall best reciter among his colleagues.

So, he was unqualified, and therefore could never have been appointed as Imam during the period of the illness. Still, even if he had been qualified and had been designated, it would have indicated *absolutely*

nothing of spiritual status or choice for the *khilafah* after the Messenger.

However, the *‘ulama* of the Ahl al-Sunnah go to desperate lengths in exaggerating about the event – which, in the first place, is narrated only in severely contradictory reports. For instance, Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676 H) claims about the alleged leadership of the Sahabah in *salat* by Abu Bakr:

فيه فوائد منها فضيلة أبي بكر الصديق رضي الله عنه وترجيحه على جميع الصحابة رضوان الله عليهم أجمعين وتفضيله وتنبيهه على أنه أحق بخلافة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من غيره ومنها أن الإمام إذا عرض له عذر عن حضور الجماعة استخلف من يصلي بهم وأنه لا يستخلف إلا أفضلهم

There are benefits from it. **Among them is the excellence of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, and his preference over all the Sahabah, *riḥwanullah ‘alaihim ajma’in*, and his overall superiority** and his notice that he (Abu Bakr) was more entitled to the *khilafah* of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, than anyone else. Among them (i.e. the benefits) is that the Imam, if he has an excuse for not attending the congregational prayer, he should deputize someone to lead them in *salat*, and that he cannot deputize except the best of them. [14](#)

For Allah’s sake, where exactly did he get all that? We are certain that this same Nawawi and his followers would object to these words about Salim – the freed slave of Abu Hudhayfah, concerning his leadership over Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and the other Sahabah in *salat*:

There are benefits from it. **Among them is the excellence of Salim, may Allah be pleased with him, and his preference over all the Sahabah, *riḥwanullah ‘alaihim ajma’in*, and his overall superiority** and a notice that he (Salim) was more entitled to the *khilafah* of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, than anyone else.

It is amusing how almost everything about Abu Bakr – whether true or not – is easily interpreted by the Ahl al-Sunnah as “evidence” of his “excellence”, “superiority” and “khilafah”. Sometimes, the ridiculousness of such submissions gets to extreme lengths, as in this case of his alleged leadership in *salat*. For instance, they claim that Abu Bakr’s leadership in *salat* over the Sahabah was evidence of his overall superiority above them. Of course, such a conclusion actually contradicts the authentic *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah. Nonetheless, did Abu Bakr not lead the Prophet in *salat* according to Sunnis? So, did the Messenger consider himself to have lost his overall superiority over Abu Bakr? Moreover, Abu Bakr allegedly offered the leadership of the *salat* to ‘Umar. Was he then admitting thereby the superiority of ‘Umar over himself?

[1.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu’ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 4, p. 409, # 19680

[2.](#) Ibid

[3.](#) Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-‘Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Fuad ‘Abd al-Baqi], vol. 1, p. 464, # 672 (289)

4. Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muassasat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu'ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 3, p. 163, # 12687
5. Ibid
6. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 1, p. 246, # 660
7. Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 2nd edition), vol. 2, p. 156
8. 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. Abi Shaybah Ibrahim b. 'Uthman b. Abi Bakr b. Abi Shaybah al-Kufi al-'Ubsi, Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah fi al-Ahadith wa al-Athar (Dar al-Fikr; 1st edition, 1409 H) [annotator: Prof. Sa'id al-Laham], vol. 1, p. 379, # 11
9. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Sahih Abi Dawud (Kuwait: Muassasat al-Gharas li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 1st edition, 1423 H), vol. 3, p. 270, # 688
10. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 6, p. 2625, # 6754
11. Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 2nd edition), vol. 2, p. 155
12. Fatawa al-Lajnah al-Daimah li al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wa al-Ifta, compiled and arranged by Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Razzaq, al-Duwaysh, vol. 7, pp. 414-415
13. Ibid, vol. 7, p. 415
14. Abu Zakariyah Yahya b. Sharaf al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi; 1407 H), vol. 4, p. 137

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