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5. Was Abu Bakr Even Qualified To Lead?

Apart from the severe contradictions in the *ahadith* on Abu Bakr's alleged leadership of *salat* during the Prophet's fatal illness, there is also the question of its factual possibility. It is one thing for something to be possible; it is another for it to have truly occurred. Where it is impossible, then all reports of its occurrence are false by default. However, where it is possible, then additional, *consistent* and authentic evidence of its actual occurrence must be produced by whoever seeks to rely on that fact. With regards to Abu Bakr's alleged leadership of the *salat*, there are only conflicting, irreconcilable "proofs" of it. As such, there actually are none. In this chapter, we seek to explore the *possibility* of it even ever happening. This way, we bury it for good.

Without a doubt, the very first step in determining the possibility of Abu Bakr's leadership of the *salat* is to establish or discredit his qualification for it. Unless it is proved that he was qualified to lead, then every effort to claim that he did is futile. If he was not qualified, apparently his appointment as prayer leader by the Prophet, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*, would have been impossible. However, if he was qualified, it would, in that case, be at least possible. Then, additional, unquestionable evidence would become admissible to establish its factual occurrence.

So, was Abu Bakr qualified to lead the Messenger of Allah in *salat*? Moreover, was he equally qualified to lead the Sahabah in *salat* in the Prophet's mosque?

The answer to the first question is in this verse:

> يا أيها الذين آمنوا لا تقدموا بين يدي الله ورسوله واتقوا الله إن الله سميع عليم

O you who believe! **Do not lead in front of Allah and His Messenger**, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.[1]

This effectively makes it absolutely *haram* to lead the Prophet of Allah in anything – including in battles and *salat*. Imam al-Mubarakfuri (d. 1282 H) also states:

حكى ذلك القاضي عياض قال ولا يصح لأحد أن يؤم جالسا بعده صلى الله عليه وسلم قال وهو مشهور قول مالك وجماعة أصحابه قال وهذا أولى الأقاويل لأنه صلى الله عليه وسلم لا يصح التقدم بين يديه في الصلاة ولا في غيرها ولا لعذر ولا لغيره

That is narrated from Qa□i 'Iya□. He said, "It is not correct for anyone to lead in *salat* in a sitting posture other than him, peace be upon him." He said, "And this is the famous statement of Malik and the majority of his companions." He said, "And this is the most correct of the opinions, **because it is NOT correct to lead in front of him in *salat* or in anything else, whether due to an excuse or otherwise**."[2]

Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H), while relating the submissions of Qa□i Iya□, reports:

واحتج أيضا بأنه صلى الله عليه وسلم إنما صلى بهم قاعدا لأنه لا يصح التقدم بين يديه لنهى الله عن ذلك

He cited as proof also the fact that he, peace be upon him, led them in *salat* in a sitting posture, **because it is NOT correct to lead in front of him, due to the prohibition of that by Allah**.[3]

In simpler words, it was absolutely impossible that Abu Bakr ever led Muhammad in *salat* or in any anything else. Allah has totally forbidden that; and so, Abu Bakr was NOT qualified in any way or by any means to lead the Messenger in *salat* or in any other situation or circumstance. Even Abu Bakr too realized this, as documented by Imam Muslim (d. 261 H):

قال أبو بكر ما كان لابن أبي قحافة أن يصلي بين يدي رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم

Abu Bakr said, "It is NOT for the son of Abu Quhafah (i.e. Abu Bakr) to lead *salat* in front of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him."[4]

So, all the reports about how the Prophet was led in *salat* by Abu Bakr or anyone else from this *Ummah* are fallacious and hold no truth at all. The Book of Allah rejects them, and Abu Bakr too denounced them. There is also an element of high blasphemy in those *ahadith*. The only way Abu Bakr could have legitimately led the Messenger of Allah in *salat* was if the latter had lost or forfeited his *risalah* (messengership) *and* had become inferior to the former in many areas.

Moreover, we ask our Sunni brothers: who was the ruler of Madinah at that moment when – as your sect claims – Abu Bakr led the Prophet in *salat*? Was it the Messenger? Or, was it Abu Bakr? This question is crucial in the light of some authentic narrations in your books. For instance, Imam al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 H) records:

حدثنا هناد حدثنا أبومعاوية عن الأعمش عن إسماعيل بن رجاء عن أوس بن ضمعج عن أبي مسعود أن رسول الله

صلى الله عليه و سلم قال لا يؤم الرجل في سلطانه ولا يجلس على تكرمته إلا بإذنه

Hanad – Abu Mu'awiyah – al-A'mash – Isma'il b. Raja – Aws b. ?am'aj – Abu Mas'ud:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "**No one can lead a man in *salat* in his place of authority**, and no one can sit in his place of honour except with his permission."[5]

Al-Tirmidhi says:

هذا حديث حسن صحيح

This *hadith* is *hasan sahih*[6]

'Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) also comments:

صحيح

Sahih[7]

Imam al-Nasai (d. 303 H) also documents:

أخبرنا إبراهيم بن محمد التيمي قال حدثنا يحيى بن سعيد عن شعبة عن إسماعيل بن رجاء عن أوس بن ضمعج عن أبي مسعود قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم لا يؤم الرجل في سلطانه ولا يجلس على تكرمته إلا بإذنه

Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Taymi – Yahya b. Sa'id – Shu'bah – Isma'il b. Raja – Aws b. ?am'aj – Abu Mas'ud:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "**No one can lead a man in *salat* in his place of authority**, and no one can sit in his place of honour except with his permission."[8]

And 'Allamah al-Albani declares again:

صحيح

Sahih[9]

So, if the Prophet of Allah was really still the *amir* of the Muslims *at that moment*, then Abu Bakr was further disqualified from ever leading him in *salat* ! Whoever insists that Abu Bakr was his Imam is telling us that he (the Messenger) had lost authority over Madinah. Meanwhile, the authority of the Prophet

was, and still is, tied to his *risalah*, among others. As such, if he had lost authority over Madinah, then he must have lost *all* his divine ranks. The direct implication of this is – the only way Abu Bakr could have been the Prophet's Imam was if the latter was no longer a messenger of Allah, at the least! Therefore, whoever claims that Abu Bakr led him in *salat* has thereby rejected his (i.e. the Prophet's) *risalah*! There is simply no second way to it.

In other *ahadith*, the Messenger of Allah mentions some other conditions with farther reaching implications. Imam Muslim records:

> وحدثنا أبو بكر بن أبي شيبة وأبو سعيد الأشج كلاهما عن أبي خالد قال أبو بكر حدثنا أبو خالد الأحمر عن الأعمش عن إسماعيل بن رجاء عن أوس بن ضمعج عن أبي مسعود الأنصاري قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم يؤم القوم أقرؤهم لكتاب الله فإن كانوا في القراءة سواء فأعلمهم بالسنة فإن كانوا في السنة سواء فأقدمهم هجرة فإن كانوا في الهجرة سواء فأقدمهم سلما ولا يؤمن الرجل الرجل في سلطانه ولا يقعد في بيته على تكرمته إلا بإذنه

Abu Bakr b. Abi Shaybah and Abu Sa'id al-Ashja' – Abu Khalid: Abu Bakr – Abu Khalid al-Ahmar – al-A'mash – Isma'il b. Raja – Aws b. □am'aj – Abu Mas'ud al-Ansari:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "**The people should be led in *salat* by the best reciter of the Book of Allah among them**. But, if they are equal in recitation, then the one who is the most knowledgeable among them concerning the *Sunnah*. If they are equal regarding the *Sunnah*, then the earliest of them to do the *hijrah*. If they are equal in the *hijrah*, then the earliest of them to embrace Islam. **No man can lead another in *salat* in a place where the latter has authority**, or sit in his place of honour in his house without his permission."[10]

There is need to quickly highlight a point here. Where someone is the ruler or administrator of a place, as long as he is a Muslim, none can lead him in *salat* in it. He is the *automatic* Imam, even if he is not the best of them in Qur'anic recitation, or in knowledge of the *Sunnah*. His political authority overrides all the other set conditions. However, where none in the mosque is the ruler of its area, then the various criteria are examined in the specified order. Imam al-Mubarakfuri (d. 1282 H) confirms:

> وفي رواية مسلم لا يؤمن الرجل الرجل في سلطانه ... ولذا كان ابن عمر يصلي خلف الحجاج وصح عن ابن عمر أن إمام المسجد مقدم على غير السلطان

In the report of (Imam) Muslim, it is stated "No man can lead another in *salat* in a place where the latter has authority."... **This was why Ibn 'Umar used to offer *salat* behind al-Hajjaj.** It is also authentically narrated that Ibn 'Umar stated that the Imam of the mosque leads (only) the non-ruler.[11]

These facts reveal that leadership in *salat* is no indicator of superiority before Allah at all. Ibn 'Umar was superior – in the eyes of Sunni Islam – over al-Hajjaj in all ways and by all means. So, even a drunken

Sunni governor can validly be the Imam for a saint of Allah. The other criteria in the *hadith* are of the same effect as well. The best reciter in the *Ummah*, who is the most qualified to lead the *salat* after the ruler or governor, may – just like the executive leader – not necessarily be the best of the Muslims, or their most knowledgeable. Something we wonder about though is – how many of the Sunni kings, sultans, emirs, presidents and sheikhs today lead *salat* in their grand mosques?

Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) also documents:

> حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا محمد بن جعفر ثنا شعبة عن إسماعيل بن رجاء قال سمعت أوس بن ضمعج يقول سمعت أبا مسعود يقول قال لنا رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم يؤم القوم أقرؤهم لكتاب الله تعالى وإقدمهم قراءة فان كانت قراءتهم سواء فليؤمهم أقدمهم هجرة فان كانوا في الهجرة سواء فليؤمهم أكبرهم سنا ولا يؤمن الرجل في أهله ولا في سلطانه ولا يجلس على تكرمته في بيته الا ان يأذن له أو بإذنه

'Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father – Muhammad b. Ja'far – Shu'bah – Isma'il b. Raja – Aws b. ؟am'aj – Abu Mas'ud:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said to us: "**The people should be led in *salat* by the best reciter of the Book of Allah the Most High among them**. But, if their recitations are equal, then the earliest of them in *hijrah* should lead them in *salat*. If they are equal in the *hijrah*, then the oldest of them should lead them in *salat*. **No man can be led in *salat* among his family members or in a place where he has authority**, or none can sit in his place of honour in his house without his permission."[12]

Shaykh al-Arnaut comments:

> إسناده صحيح على شرط مسلم

Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of (Imam) Muslim[13]

It is undisputed that Abu Bakr was not the ruler over the Messenger of Allah at any point in time. Therefore, he was automatically and absolutely disqualified from ever leading his Prophet in *salat*. Besides, was Abu Bakr a better reciter of the Qur'an than the Messenger of Allah? Was he more knowledgeable of the *Sunnah* than the Prophet? Did Abu Bakr do the *hijrah* before him? Was he older than his Messenger? Did he accept Islam before his Prophet? We ask – on what basis *exactly* was Abu Bakr ever qualified lead the Master and Best of all creation in *salat*? Apparently, there is none, and there can *never* be any! As such, all the Sunni *riwayat* about how he supposedly was the Imam of the Messenger are only Sunni exaggerations and hallucinations!

Interestingly, Abu Bakr was equally unqualified to lead even the other Sahabah! In order to be qualified, he had to be their best reciter. But, was he? Imam al-Bukhari (d. 256 H) records the answer of 'Umar:

حدثنا عمرو بن علي حدثنا يحيى حدثنا سفيان عن حبيب عن سعيد بن جبير عن ابن عباس قال قال عمر رضي الله عنه: أقرؤنا أبي وأقضانا علي

‘Amr b. ‘Ali – Yahya – Sufyan – Habib – Sa’id b. Jubayr – Ibn ‘Abbas:

‘Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “**The best reciter among us is Ubayy**, and the best judge among us is ‘Ali.”[14]

‘Allamah al-Albani has equally copied the Prophetic confirmation of this:

عن أنس بن مالك، أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال :أرحم أمتي بأمتي أبو بكر وأشدهم في دين الله عمر وأصدقهم حياء عثمان وأقضاهم علي بن أبي طالب. وأقرؤهم لكتاب الله أبي بن كعب.

Narrated Anas b. Malik:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, “The most merciful of my *Ummah* to my *Ummah* is Abu Bakr. The most severe of them in the religion of Allah is ‘Umar. The most shy of them is ‘Uthman. And the best judge among them is ‘Ali b. Abi Talib. **And the best reciter of the Book of Allah among them is Ubayy b. Ka’b**.”[15]

صحيح

Sahih.[16]

So, it was not Abu Bakr?! Therefore, it was Ubayy who was qualified for the leadership of the *salat* and NOT Abu Bakr! With the presence of Ubayy among the Sahabah, Abu Bakr – the first Sunni *khalifah* – was thereby disqualified from leading either the Prophet or his followers in *salat* in the grand mosque of Madinah. With this, all the reports about Abu Bakr’s leadership of the *salat* drown in the Sunni ocean of fabrications. The Messenger of Allah would never place the wrong rod in the right hole – neither by nepotism nor by mistake. The *Sunnah* is that the best reciter should lead in *salat* – unless where the ruler is present. Abu Bakr was neither the best reciter nor the ruler. Those facts alone terminate the entire story.

1. Qur’an 49:1
2. Abu al-‘Ala Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Mubarakfuri, Tuhfat al-Ahwazi bi Sharh Jami’ al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1410 H), vol. 2, p. 294
3. 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. 146
4. 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. 316, # 421 (102)
5. Abu ‘Isa Muhammad b. ‘Isa al-Sulami al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami’ al-Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-

‘Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 5, p. 99, # 2772

6. Ibid

7. Ibid

8. Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Ahmad b. Shu’ayb al-Nasai, al-Mujtaba min al-Sunan (Halab: Maktab al-Matbu’at al-Islamiyyah; 2nd edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 2, p. 77, # 783

9. Ibid

10. 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. 465, # 673 (290)

11. Abu al-‘Ala Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Abd al-Rahim al-Mubarakfuri, Tuhfat al-Ahwazi bi Sharh Jami’ al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1410 H), vol. 2, p. 29

12. Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu’ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 4, p. 121, # 17133

13. Ibid

14. 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. 4, p. 1628, # 4211

15. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, Sahih Sunan Ibn Majah (Maktabah al-Ma’arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1417 H), vol. 1, pp. 67-68, # 125

16. Ibid

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