

# Hadith Al-Tafdhil, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah Raises Objections

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?">

Our Shaykh Ibn Tamiyyah (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

الشريعة 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 ومالك وأحمد بن حنبل والثوري والأوزاعي والليث بن سعد وسائر أئمة المسلمين من أهل الفقه والحديث والزهد والتفسير من المتقدمين والمتأخرين

*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.<sup>1</sup>*

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 و سلم أبو بكر ثم

عمر ثم عثمان وفي لفظ ثم ندع أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم لا نفاضل بينهم فهذا إخبار عما كان عليه الصحابة على عهد النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم من تفضيل أبي بكر ثم عمر ثم عثمان وقد روى أن ذلك كان يبلغ النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم فلا ينكره

*It has been authentically transmitted in the two Sahihs 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.*<sup>2</sup>

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 عبيد الله عن نافع عن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما قال : كنا في زمن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم لا نعدل بأبي بكر أحدا ثم عمر ثم عثمان ثم نترك أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم 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.*<sup>3</sup>

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 و سلم ؟ 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."*<sup>4</sup>

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

فلما توفي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال أبو بكر أنا ولي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم .... فرأيتماه كاذبا  
آثما غادرا خائنا والله يعلم إنه لصادق بار راشد تابع للحق ثم توفي أبو بكر وأنا ولي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم  
وولي أبا بكر فرأيتماني كاذبا آثما غادرا خائنا

*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.*<sup>5</sup>

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 رأى

أنه لا يبايع لمن لم يجتمع عليه الناس ولهذا لم يبايع أيضا لابن الزبير ولا لعبد 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.*<sup>6</sup>

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

لا يستوي القاعدون من المؤمنين غير أولي الضرر والمجاهدون في سبيل الله بأموالهم وأنفسهم فضل الله  
المجاهدين بأموالهم وأنفسهم على القاعدين درجة وكلا وعد الله الحسنى وفضل الله المجاهدين على القاعدين  
أجرا عظيما درجات 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.*<sup>7</sup>

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

وما لكم ألا تنفقوا في سبيل الله ولله ميراث السماوات والأرض لا يستوي منكم من أنفق من قبل الفتح وقاتل أولئك أعظم درجة من الذين أنفقوا من بعد وقاتلوا وكلا وعد الله الحسنى والله بما تعملون خبير

*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.*<sup>8</sup>

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!

## References

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-ahih 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, ahii 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 Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Ibada'ah wa al-Nashr; 2nd edition), vol. 5, p. 18
7. Qur'an 4:95-96
8. Qur'an 57:10