YAQEEN INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

40 HADITHS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

LECTURE NOTES

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Chapter Two
God Is More Capable Than You

Why do people commit oppression?

People commit oppression out of a false sense of power.

There are three narrations of this particular hadith (two in Sahih Muslim and one in Sunan Abi Dawud)

وَحَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كُرَيْبٍ، مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْعَلاَءِ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مُعَاوِيَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا الأَعْمَشُ، عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، التَّيْمِيِّ عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي مَسْعُودٍ الأَنْصَارِيِّ، قَالَ كُنْتُ أَضْرِبُ غُلاَمًا لِي فَسَمِعْتُ مِنْ خَلْفِي صَوْتًا " اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ لَلَّهُ أَقْدَرُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْكَ عَلَيْهِ " . فَالْتَفَتُّ فَإِذَا هُوَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ هُوَ حُرٌّ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ . فَقَالَ " أَمَا لَوْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ لَلَفَحَتْكَ النَّارُ أَوْ لَمَسَّتْكَ النَّارُ " .

Abu Mas'ud al-Ansari reported: When I was beating my servant, I heard a voice behind me (saying): Abu Mas'ud, bear in mind Allah has more dominance over you than you have over him. I turned and (found him) to be Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). I said: Allah's Messenger, I set him free for the sake of Allah. Thereupon he said: Had you not done that, (the gates of) Hell would have opened for you, or the fire would have burnt you. [Muslim 1659]

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كَامِلٍ الْجَحْدَرِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْوَاحِدِ، - يَعْنِي ابْنَ زِيَادٍ - حَدَّثَنَا الأَعْمَشُ، عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ التَّيْمِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، قَالَ قَالَ أَبُو مَسْعُودٍ الْبَدْرِيُّ كُنْتُ أَضْرِبُ غُلاَمًا لِي بِالسَّوْطِ فَسَمِعْتُ صَوْتًا مِنْ خَلْفِي " اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ " . فَلَمْ أَفْهَمِ الصَّوْتَ مِنَ الْغَضَبِ - قَالَ - فَلَمَّا دَنَا مِنِّي إِذَا هُوَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَإِذَا هُوَ يَقُولُ " اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ " . قَالَ فَأَلْقَيْتُ السَّوْطَ مِنْ يَدِي فَقَالَ " اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَقْدَرُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْكَ عَلَى هَذَا الْغُلاَمِ " . قَالَ فَقُلْتُ لاَ أَضْرِبُ مَمْلُوكًا بَعْدَهُ أَبَدً

slave with a whip when I heard a voice behind me: “Understand, Abu Masud”; but I did not recognize the voice due to its intense anger. He (Abu Mas'ud) reported: As he came near me (I found) that he was the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and he was saying, “Bear in mind, Abu Mas'ud; bear in mind, Abu Mas'ud.”
He (Aba Mas’ud) said: I threw the whip from my hand. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: “Bear in mind, Abu Mas'ud; verily Allah has more dominance over you than you have over your slave.” I (then) said, “I never beat my servant after that.”

Abu Mas'ud al-Badri reported: I was beating my

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْعَلاَءِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مُعَاوِيَةَ، ح وَحَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ الْمُثَنَّى، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مُعَاوِيَةَ، عَنِ الأَعْمَشِ، عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ التَّيْمِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي مَسْعُودٍ الأَنْصَارِيِّ، قَالَ كُنْتُ أَضْرِبُ غُلاَمًا لِي فَسَمِعْتُ مِنْ خَلْفِي صَوْتًا " اعْلَمْ أَبَا مَسْعُودٍ " . قَالَ ابْنُ الْمُثَنَّى مَرَّتَيْنِ " لَلَّهُ أَقْدَرُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْكَ عَلَيْهِ " . فَالْتَفَتُّ فَإِذَا هُوَ النَّبِيُّ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ هُوَ حُرٌّ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ . قَالَ " أَمَا إِنَّكَ لَوْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ لَلَفَحَتْكَ النَّارُ أَوْ " لَمَسَّتْكَ النَّارُ " .

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Abu Mas'ud al-Ansari said:
When I was beating a servant of mine, I heard a voice behind me saying: "Know, Abu Mas'ud (Ibn al-Muthanna said [this was said] twice) that Allah has more power over you than you have over him." I turned around and saw that it was the prophet (may peace be upon him). I said, "Messenger of Allah! *He is free for Allah's sake." He said,* "If you had not done that [i.e., freed him], fire would have burned you" or "the fire would have touched you." [Sunan Abi Dawud 5159]

Some Lessons:

1. The scholars say here that one of the best and most humble ways to give advice is to reflect on your own experiences. Abu Mas'ud is teaching the ummah a lesson through his experience here.
2. In one narration, Abu Mas'ud mentions at the end of the hadith "I never hit a slave after that incident." He made *tawba* and learned his lessons and is telling others the words of advice he received from the Prophet (ﷺ).
3. The Prophet's voice was so angry that it was unrecognizable.
    a. How different had his voice become that the common person who saw him often and heard him speak often failed to recognize his (ﷺ) voice due to the anger he (ﷺ) was expressing. Some scholars say that it was Abu Mas'ud who couldn't recognize the voice of the Prophet because of the anger he himself was experiencing at the time.
    b. Sometimes our emotions can overcome us and distort reality.
    c. Example: when the Prophet (ﷺ) came upon a woman who was weeping for her child. He said to her: Fear Allah and have patience. She said: What have you to do with my calamity? She was then told that he was the Prophet (ﷺ). She, therefore, came to him. She did not find doorkeepers at his gate. She said: I did not recognize you, Messenger of Allah. He said: Endurance is shown only at the first blow.
    d. He (ﷺ) never got angry for his own sake.
        i. From 'Aishah *radiyallahu 'anha* who said, "I have never seen Rasulullah ﷺ avenge himself for a personal affliction, but if one transgressed a prohibited thing from those prohibited by Allah (i.e., committed a haraam act - the commentators on hadith say transgressions of the rights of human beings are also included) then there was no one more angry than Rasulullah ﷺ.
        ii. You can't make رحمة للعالمين, a mercy to Mankind more merciful than Allah has made him. So when you depict the Prophet ﷺ as a passive man and take away his sense of justice from his

character, you are doing him an injustice.

4. The Prophet ﷺ said اعلم يا ابى مسعود "Know, O Abu Mas'ud!"
    a. There are many verses in the Qu'ran where Allah says اعلموا Know! Imam Al-Qushayri (ra) says that every time Allah (*azza wa jal*) says this, it is always followed by a call to action. It's the natural response of a believer that when someone says to them, "Know, think, understand, reflect" that they immediately respond with action.
5. Notice also that The Prophet ﷺ doesn't question why Abu Mas'ud is hitting the slave because that is irrelevant. One of the worst things that we do sometimes when we see ظلم (oppression) is that we think it is or might be justified.
    a. A Shaykh was speaking with a group of young men and said to them, "If you heard that a man was beating his wife what would be the first thing you'd ask?" To which they replied, "What did she do to make him hit her?" This was not the response of the Prophet ﷺ. For all we know the slave may have done something wrong, but the Prophet is teaching us that it doesn't matter. What's wrong is wrong.
    b. 'Umair, the freed slave of Abu'l-Lahm, said: "My master commanded me to cut some meat in strips; (as I was doing it) a poor man came to me and I gave him some of it to eat. My master came to know of that, and he beat me. I came to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and narrated it to him. He (the Prophet) summoned him and said: Why did you beat him? He (Abu'l-Lahm) said: He gives away my food without being commanded to do so. Upon this he (the Prophet) said: The reward would be shared by you two." [Muslim 1025]
    c. No transgression justifies another transgression in response!
6. After hearing the voice of the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Mas'ud immediately dropped the whip; yet the Prophet still warned him that if he hadn't done so then he would have received punishment in Hell. What does this teach us?
    a. The Prophet ﷺ told him this so that he (Abu Mas'ud) would never return to this sin. He wanted this to be a life-changing lesson for Abu Mas'ud. The Prophet ﷺ didn't tell him to free the slave, but he understood himself that he had to free the slave to atone for his sin.
    b. In undoing injustice, it is not enough to seek forgiveness from Allah (swt) alone; one must also try to right the wrong or harm caused to another human being.

The essential component in seeking forgiveness for injustice is to undo the injustice that was done to the best of your ability.

Example: if you backbite someone and ruin their reputation, the best form of repentance is not only to seek forgiveness from Allah or the person although these are components; rather to undo the damage you need to speak well of them in the company of those you spoke ill of them in front of.

7. The Prophet used the appropriate warning by saying, “The fire would’ve consumed you,” rather than “You wouldn’t enter Paradise.”
    a. The scholars point out the word used by the Prophet (لَلَفَحَتْكَ) is الاصاب في الوج (for something to hit your face). Why did the Prophet say the fire would’ve burned your face? Because Abu Mas’ud was hitting the slave on his face. He would’ve faced a similar punishment from Allah (swt).

أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَقْدَرُ عَلَيْكَ Allah is more capable than you

Power does not necessarily involve sitting on a throne, but rather it is being able to control a situation with no accountability. Sometimes as a person grows in their power they begin to feel a sense of invincibility.

The Messenger (ﷺ) is reminding us that we have no control over situations and we are utterly powerless in the sight of God.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّـهِ

O mankind, you are those in need of Allah [Qur’an 35:15]

Usually when an oppressor is in power, they are able to get away with their crimes and therefore continue upon their actions. Similarly, when there is domestic abuse in a relationship and it isn’t checked, the abuser continues their abuse. In a business relationship, when someone begins to launder money and they aren’t caught, they continue and insist upon this action. Unfortunately as humans we graduate to greater forms of oppression when we get away with lesser forms.

There are دركات (levels) of ظلم (oppression).

It’s important to know that just as good deeds have درجات (levels of elevation), sins have دركات (levels of depths) in the sight of Allah.

The worst types of oppression:

1. To oppress someone who has a great right over you. They should be receiving your good and not your evil.
    a. Your mother is the worst person that you could do wrong to. If there was anyone who has an unconditional right over you in this world it would be her. It's the worst sin in the sight of Allah, after *shirk*, to treat your mother unjustly.
        i. Allah (swt) describes obedience to parents immediately after obedience after worship to Him in Surah Isra where He says, "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and to parents good treatment." [Qur'an 17:23]
        ii. You were created to worship Allah but the medium through which you were created are your parents so you must be good to them.
    b. Imam Hasan Al-Basri said, "I am amazed at a person who eats from his brother's food, who takes from his brother's money, who enjoys his brother's company, but in his absence reverts to nothing but cursing and backbiting him."
        i. When someone does good to you and you reciprocate it with evil, it makes that deed more evil in the sight of Allah (swt).
2. To oppress someone who is beloved to Allah
    a. Allah (swt) says in a Hadith Qudsi, مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا، فَقَدْ آذَنْتُهُ بِالْحَرْبِ "Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him."
    b. The hadith continues by saying, "My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him."
        i. One of the scholars of hadith said notice how Allah started off with this because even if you do obligatory and voluntary good deeds, but you harmed one of Allah's *awliya*, it would negate all of those deeds.
        ii. The tricky part in Islam is that we don't know who Allah's *awliya* are!
        iii. Shaykh Hatem Al-Haj shared a quote from Yahya ibn Maeen who said "Sometimes we curse people and they settled under the throne of Allah two hundred years ago."
        iv. When you write something about someone online be conscious that you could be speaking about a *wali/waliyah* of Allah (swt).
3. To oppress someone who has no protector besides Allah من لا ناصر له الا الله
    a. This is the worst/lowest of the دركات degrees of oppression.
    b. Some examples include the orphans, the poor, and the weak. These people are not protected in society and you oppress them by taking their rights and adding to that vulnerability.

i. Allah gave you an advantage in this life and you chose to take that advantage He (*azza wa jal*) gave you to put that disadvantaged person at a further disadvantage and advance yourself.
ii. The hadith applies perfectly here because Abu Mas'ud had an advantage over his slave and used it to abuse the slave. RasulAllah ﷺ reminds him that Allah has a greater advantage over him.

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "I served the Prophet for ten years. He never said "Uff" (a sound of frustration or annoyance) and never blamed me by saying, 'Why did you do so?'' or 'Why did you not do so?' And the Messenger Of Allah had the best character among all of the people." [Tirmidhi 2015]

iii. Anas was his servant and yet the Prophet ﷺ never admonished him.
iv. After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Anas used to see him in his dreams every night. He loved RasulAllah ﷺ and was one of the last companions of RasulAllah to pass away.

Did the Prophet ﷺ admonish his own children? Yes, on several occasions he admonished his children (never hitting them) but never did so with Anas (ra) because he was sent as a خادم (servant).

Ibn Abbas: "The companions were more afraid of wronging the orphans than their own children."

It was a common practice in society to infringe the rights of the orphans. However after revelation, companions were so afraid of doing so that they wouldn't eat from the same plate as them so as not to take from their wealth. This came with the knowledge that these are people who have no one besides Allah and because they are at my mercy, I should be extra careful in my dealings with them.

Fear Allah with regard to your spouses:

- Examples exist where one spouse is oppressing the other who is completely dependent - this person is engaging in the filthiest type of oppression because this person is at your mercy and you exploit him/her.
- Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ كَانَ عَلِيًّا كَبِيرًا (if they return to you) "Do not pursue further means against them, indeed Allah is ever Exalted and forever Great." [Qur'an 4:34]
- This verse reminds us that while we might have the capacity to oppress someone

without immediate accountability, we should not do so.

Abu Dharr and the slave

Narrated Ma'rur: “I saw Abu Dharr wearing a *burda* (garment) and his slave too was wearing a *burda*, so I said (to Abu Dharr), ‘If you take this (*burda* of your slave) and wear it (along with yours), you will have a nice suit (outfit) and you may give him another garment.’ Abu Dharr said, ‘There was a quarrel between me and another man whose mother was a non-Arab and I called her bad names. The man mentioned (complained about) me to the Prophet. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘Did you abuse so-and-so?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Did you call his mother bad names?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘You still have the traits of (the pre-Islamic period of) ignorance.’

I said. ‘(Do I still have ignorance) even now in my old age?’ He said, ‘Yes, they (slaves or servants) are your brothers, and Allah has put them under your command. So the one under whose hand Allah has put his brother, should feed him of what he eats, and give him clothes from what he wears, and should not ask him to do anything beyond his capacity. And if he asks him to do a hard task, he should help him with it.’" (Bukhari)

Under the khilafah of Umar ibn Al-Khattab (ra), the governor of Egypt was Amr ibn Al-’As (ra). The people of Egypt were well known for their horseracing and it so happened that the son of the governor, Muhammad ibn Amr ibn Al-’As, was a famous horsemen. One day he raced with a Christian slave who lived in Egypt. Much to everyone’s surprise, the Coptic slave beat Muhammad in the race. Humiliated, Muhammad got off of his horse, took out his whip and said:

اتسبقني وانا ابن الاكرمين المؤمنين المهتدين ؟

“Are you going to beat me and I am the son of the noble ones, the guided ones, the believing ones?”

He then hit the slave with the whip.

This Coptic man was not only hurt but humiliated by this public display of dishonor. So he asked some of the people what he should do. They told him to take this affair to the khalifah, Umar ibn Al-Khattab (ra) because he would not overlook his request.

He made the trip all the way to Madinah to issue his complaint to Umar ibn Al-Khattab and then Umar wrote a letter to Amr ibn Al-’As and to his son. He dispatched a messenger along with the letter ordering them to travel to Madinah as soon as they received the letter.

Anas (ra) says Umar provided accommodations for this Christian man until Amr and his son came to Madinah and he and other companions were sitting with Umar when Amr ibn Al-'As finally arrived. He didn't speak to Muhammad ibn Al-'As but rather said "Where is the Egyptian man?" After he was brought, Umar said, "Behind you is my stick, take it and hit the son of the noble ones (i.e., Muhammad ibn Amr)." As people began to gather to watch in the same fashion that the Coptic man had been humiliated, he picked up the stick and hit Muhammad ibn Al-'As in the head. Afterwards Umar (ra) said "Now put it (the stick) on the bald head of Amr." Confused the Coptic man said that he had already hit the one who had hit him. Umar (ra) replied by saying:

ما ضربك هذا إلا بسلطان هذا

This person did not hit you except by the power of that person.

He didn't tell him to hit him, but rather to put the stick upon his head to show that his actions were unacceptable.

Umar (ra) was not simply okay with just giving the Coptic man his right back. Rather, he was more concerned about sending a message to Amr that the system he had set up where his son felt that he could get away with oppressing others simply because he was the governor's son was unjust.

Umar (ra) sent the Coptic slave back to Egypt and assigned a bodyguard to protect him and told him that if anyone did anything to him, that he should write him a letter.

He turned to Amr and said:

ايآ عمر، مذ كم تعبدتم الناس وقد ولدتهم أمهاتهم أحراراً؟

"Since when did you enslave the people though they were born from their mothers in freedom?"

With the proud oppressors, Allah (swt) would humiliate them when they tried to humiliate others.

For example: Fir'awn mocked the lisp of Musa (as) when he spoke to him and called him disfigured.

أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَـٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ

(Fir'awn said) "Or am I [not] better than this one who is insignificant and hardly makes himself clear?" [Qur'an 43:52]

He not only mocked Musa (as) but said that he would make an example out of him. Allah (swt) responded and said:

وَأَتْبَعْنَاهُمْ فِي هَٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً ۖ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُم مِّنَ الْمَقْبُوحِينَ

And We caused to overtake them in this world a curse, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be of the disfigured. [Qur'an 28:42]

Fir'awn used to torture people by burning them alive. As divine justice and retribution Allah (swt) says in Surah Ghafir that Fir'awn is being burned alive as we speak.

النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا ۖ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ

The Fire, they are exposed to it morning and evening. And the Day the Hour appears [it will be said], "Make the people of Pharaoh enter the severest punishment." [Qur'an 40:46]

Abraha threatened that he would destroy the Ka'aba stone by stone and in defense Allah (swt) sent an army of birds to take down his army with stones.

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " مَنْ سَتَرَ عَوْرَةَ أَخِيهِ الْمُسْلِمِ سَتَرَ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَمَنْ كَشَفَ عَوْرَةَ أَخِيهِ الْمُسْلِمِ كَشَفَ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ حَتَّى يَفْضَحَهُ بِهَا فِي بَيْتِهِ "

It was narrated from Ibn `Abbas that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Whoever conceals the (hidden) fault of his Muslim brother, Allah (swt) will conceal his faults on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever exposes the fault of his Muslim brother, Allah will expose his faults, even if Allah exposes him in his home."

From this hadith we learn that whenever a person thinks they have power and they take advantage of the vulnerable, Allah (swt) shows them what true vulnerability looks like.

On the other hand, when we see the most vulnerable in society and we take it upon ourselves to ensure their wellbeing and to put them in a place of honor, Allah (swt) will not allow us to feel vulnerable on the Day of Judgment.