

YAQEEN INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

# 40 HADITHS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

## LECTURE NOTES

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**YAQEEN**  
Institute for Islamic Research

### The Ruling on Silence and Injustice

عن أبي بكر الصديق، رضي الله عنه ، قال: يا أيها الناس إنكم لتقرءون هذه الآية: {يا أيها الذين آمنوا عليكم أنفسكم لا يضركم من ضل إذا اهتديتم} ((المائدة : 105)) وإنني سمعت رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم، يقول: "إن الناس إذا رأوا الظالم فلم يأخذوا على يديه أوشك أن يعمهم الله بعقاب منه"

From Qays ibn Abi Hazm who said I heard Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) say, "O you people! I hear you reciting this verse: 'O you who believe! Worry about your own selves. If you follow the (right

guidance [and enjoin what is right (Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbid what is wrong (polytheism, disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden)] no harm can come to you from those who are in error.' (5:105) But I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: "Indeed when people see an oppressor but do not prevent him from (doing evil), it is likely that Allah will punish them all." [Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi].

Abu Bakr (ra) makes an important point that there are often verses that are recited and given an improper explanation or they are applied to contexts that give a meaning that is contradictory to the intent of the *ayah* as a whole. And note that he said this to a group of people who were very close to the time of revelation: that they were applying/interpreting the verses incorrectly.

"Any *tafseer* that departs from the *asbab an-nuzul* (reasons of revelation) and the sunnah context of those *tafseer* is bound to go astray." Because then it becomes about the agenda of the *mufasssir* (the one doing the *tafseer*).

Abu Bakr (ra) was correcting the incorrect interpretation of this *ayah*. This *ayah* doesn't give you permission to be silent when you see something wrong being done! Rather, we look to the Prophet (ﷺ) because he is the one who explains these *ayaat* for us. The *sunnah* is the *tafseer* of the Qur'an.

In the *ayah* Allah (swt) is saying that you will not be harmed by those who have gone astray so long as you are guided, whereas the Prophet (ﷺ) has said you will be harmed if you do not stop those who do harm.

How do we reconcile between the *ayah* and *hadith*; what is the intended meaning?

In the *ayah*, Allah (swt) is talking about a people who have already done their job and have exhausted themselves in try to change the people around them and they feel saddened about their inability to make changes to the people and society around them.

This is the natural pitfall that anyone faces when trying to help everyone all at once. They start to suffer because they can't save everyone (the curse of the empath). This was truly the nature of the Prophet (ﷺ) where Allah (swt) says about him in the Qur'an:

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَفْسَكَ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ إِنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهِذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا

Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow. [18:6]

Abu Bakr (ra) is saying to the people that this *ayah* is not an excuse for complacency. If that generation was misinterpreting the *ayah*, then what about us 1400 years later?

The last part of the hadith is what we are focusing on: "When people see an oppressor but do not prevent him from (doing evil), it is likely that Allah will punish them all."

عَنْ جَابِرٍ، قَالَ لَمَّا رَجَعْتُ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - مُهَاجِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ قَالَ " أَلَا تُحَدِّثُونِي بِأَعَجِيبَ مَا رَأَيْتُمْ بِأَرْضِ الْخَبَشَةِ " . قَالَ فَتَيَّةٌ مِنْهُمْ بَلَى يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ بَيْنَا نَحْنُ جُلُوسٌ مَرَّتْ بِنَا عَجُوزٌ مِنْ عَجَائِزِ رَهَابِيْنِهِمْ تَحْمِلُ عَلَى رَأْسِهَا قُلَّةً مِنْ مَاءٍ فَمَرَّتْ بَفَتًى مِنْهُمْ فَجَعَلَ إِحْدَى يَدَيْهِ بَيْنَ كَتِفَيْهَا ثُمَّ دَفَعَهَا فَخَرَّتْ عَلَى رُكْبَتَيْهَا فَانْكَسَرَتْ قُلَّةُهَا فَلَمَّا ارْتَفَعَتِ التَّفَنَّتْ إِلَيْهِ فَقَالَتْ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُ يَا غَدْرُ إِذَا وَضَعَ اللَّهُ الْكُرْسِيُّ وَجَمَعَ الْأَوَّلِينَ وَالْآخِرِينَ وَتَكَلَّمَتِ الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَرْجُلُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُ كَيْفَ أَمْرِي وَأَمْرُكَ عِنْدَهُ غَدًا . قَالَ يَقُولُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - " صَدَقْتُ صَدَقْتُ كَيْفَ يُفَدِّسُ اللَّهُ أُمَّةً لَا يُؤَخِّدُ لِصَعِيْفِهِمْ مِنْ شَدِيدِهِمْ " .

one of their elderly nuns came past, carrying a vessel of water on her head. She passed by some of their youth, one of whom placed his hand between her shoulders and pushed her. She fell on her knees and her vessel broke. When she stood up, she turned to him and said: "You will come to know, O foolish young man, that when Allah sets up the Footstool and gathers the first and the last, and hands and feet speak of what they used to earn, you will come to know your case and my case in His presence soon." The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: 'She spoke the truth; she spoke the truth; she spoke the truth. How can Allah purify any people (of sin) when they do not protect their weak against their strong?'" [Ibn Majah]

It was narrated by Jabir who said, "When the emigrants who had crossed the sea came back to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), he said: 'Tell me of the strange things that you saw in the land of Abyssinia.' Some young men among them said: 'Yes, O Messenger of Allah. While we were sitting,

The sahaba who related this did not get involved because they were refugees in that land and had no power or position to intervene. But this incident bothered them; that is why they reported it to the Messenger (ﷺ) who blamed the society as whole, not just the young man who oppressed the nun. Society is the "facilitating institution" that led him to act in that way, and to feel there would be no punishment for behaving in that way; his society normalized that type of behavior.

The third *hadith* is from Ayesha (ra) who asked, “Will we be destroyed even if we have righteous people amongst us?” The Messenger (ﷺ) said, “Yes, if filth (base sins) becomes rampant.”

Thus, the moral of all three of these *ahadith* is: if people do not speak up when evil is being committed, everyone will suffer.

Nations were destroyed in the past when they became aggressive with their messengers. It wasn't just a matter of disbelief, but also their unjust behavior; e.g., the people of Shuaib (as) were destroyed for *shirk* and *tatfeef* (cheating with weights/scales). We are recommended to live/settle in a place where people do not cheat and to avoid places where they do. People suffer when these types of things are normalized in society.

Umar ibn Abdul Aziz comments on private sins versus public oppression. Allah would not punish a people if every one of them committed sins privately. But if one person's sins are committed publicly, the entire population may become deserving of punishment from Allah swt.

If people wrong one another, they will end up tasting some of what that feels like (i.e., they will experience the power of Allah swt).

What are the rulings on silence?

Silence is *haraam* (becomes criminal) when three conditions are met:

- 1) When you are sure of something being evil/*munkar* (no grey area);
- 2) When you are sure that it was actually committed (not based on gossip or rumors, but strong evidence);
- 3) When the greater likelihood is that speaking up will remove or reduce the *munkar* being committed.

Similarly, when a scholar/imam is in the presence of an unjust ruler it becomes incumbent on him/her to speak about the injustice being committed by that ruler. Sometimes dictators use scholars to legitimize injustice (even massacres). Thus, the silence of religious authorities (imams) in such situations is even more sinful; they have to speak up and they can't be ambiguous.

Imam al-Haraawi: “I was subjected to the sword five times (meaning threatened with execution), and I was not told to change my position. Rather, I was told to be silent about the oppressors, but I refused to be silent.”

Saeed ibn Jubair (ra) showed absolutely no fear in the face of the *thulm* of Hajjaj and that lack of fear drove Hajjaj crazy. Hajjaj said to him: "Don't you know that I will take your life?" Saeed: "If I thought you had the power to take my life, then I would have worshipped you instead of Allah swt." He was killed in his sujood, and this always haunted Hajjaj so much so that when he died he was saying, "Saeed has killed me," over and over.

So sometimes silence is *haraam* - so much so that even backbiting (*gheebah*) can become obligatory (even *fard 'ayn*); e.g., when a serial oppressor/abuser will go on to abuse others, it is required to speak out to warn/protect potential victims. We cannot enable abusers. The Messenger (ﷺ) told us to help our brother whether he is the oppressed or the oppressor. We help the oppressor by stopping him from oppressing others.

Sometimes silence is violence. We cannot be silent in these situations and it is even worse to tell a victim of oppression to be silent. It's a terrible thing to shame victims into silence.

If someone is wronging you, speak so they cannot wrong others like you. You owe it not only to yourself, but also to the next person in line who will become a victim of this oppressor.

In these situations silence enables oppression to continue - whether at the state level or an individual level; we are not allowed to sit with people who are backbiting or at a table where alcohol is being served. By sitting there silently we are approving/condoning the behavior.

What happens when it is not good to speak?

There are times when silence is permissible (*hala*), times when it is forbidden (*haraam*) and there are times when silence becomes mandatory (*fard*).

Abu Saeed (ra) narrates that he heard the Messenger (ﷺ) say Allah will hold a servant accountable on the day of judgment, asking him/her, "What stopped you from calling out that evil when you saw it?" The servant says, "O my Lord, I had hope in you and I left the people." This is a person who tried and was not successful and then withdrew from the people because s/he was incapable of effecting change, and was hopeful of Allah's forgiveness, and so they will be forgiven.

So sometimes it is not wise to speak. Or you try and people are not receptive so you remove yourself from that situation. In some of these cases silence can even become mandatory. When does it become mandatory? When *munkar* (evil) will increase if you speak. This is a very important point that we often don't understand.

When Imam al-Hussein (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (ﷺ) went out to fight, the sahaba didn't think he would be successful (because they sensed people would not support him). They didn't think he was wrong, they just didn't think he would succeed. He thought he could remove the *munkar*.

Sometimes speaking up can harm the cause and empower a *thaalim* to do even more *thulm*; in these cases it is mandatory to remain silent. That is, when speaking will not be effective or will even be harmful, it is required to be silent, or even to leave/withdraw.

Hadith from Ab Saeed al-Khudri (ra): "The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'There will come a time when the best property of the Muslim will be a sheep and he will take that to the top of the mountain so he can flee with his religion from all of the *fitn* (afflictions).'" This means when you withdraw in order to protect your own faith, just take the bare minimum of what you need with you.

You can't use this hadith to try to avoid all forms of *fitnah* (tests)! The sahabah encountered all kinds of afflictions. This hadith is talking about a specific time/situation in which you cannot speak out and are suffering persecution because of your religion and are unable to even practice your religion so you have to withdraw (*al-'uzlah*). We are not in that situation.

Another hadith: "The one who mixes with and tolerates people is better than the one who withdraws from the people." What is meant by this is that there are certain good characteristics and traits you attain by interacting with people. In interacting with people our *iman* is put to the test (controlling your tongue, lowering your gaze, etc). You gain reward for passing these tests that you can't get by withdrawing from people altogether.

The last thing the Prophet (ﷺ) said in the hadith from last week was to avoid doing harm. So, if you are in a gathering and something evil is happening and you can't say anything you can't just hate it in your heart, you have to leave that gathering. You can't consent to it by your silent presence.

With family members (especially those older than you), try to change the topic. Consenting with your silent presence is a serious matter.

