

33. Hadith Al-Ikhtiyar, 'Ali: The True Second Of Two

In the cave, the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*, repeatedly assured Abu Bakr of Allah's Presence. But it did not work:

إذ يقول لصاحبه لا تحزن إن الله معنا

When **he was saying** to his companion: “**Do not fear**, surely Allah is with us.”

Al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H) comments about this verse:

عام الهجرة ، لما هم المشركون بقتله أو حبسه أو نفيه ، فخرج منهم هارباً صحبة صديقه وصاحبه أبي بكر بن أبي قحافة ، فلجأ إلى غار ثور ثلاثة أيام ليرجع الطلب الذين خرجوا في آثارهم ، ثم يسيرا نحو المدينة ، فجعل أبو بكر ، رضي الله عنه ، يجزع أن يطَّلَع عليهم أحد ، فيخلص إلى الرسول ، عليه السلام منهم أذى ، فجعل النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يُسَكِّنُهُ وَيَثَبِّتُهُ ويقول : " يا أبا بكر ، ما ظنك باثنين الله ثالثهما "

During the year of the *Hijrah*, the pagans tried to kill, imprison or expel him (i.e the Prophet). So, he escaped with his friend and companion, Abu Bakr b. Abi Quhafah, to the *Thawr* Cave. They remained in there for three days. So the scouts who were sent in their pursuit returned, and they proceeded to Madinah. (While in the cave), Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, was afraid that they might be discovered by someone, that some harm might come to the Messenger, peace be upon him, from them.

Therefore, the Prophet, peace be upon him, kept reassuring him and strengthening his resolve, saying, “O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two, the *third* of whom is Allah?”¹

Apparently, one word was *not* enough for Abu Bakr. When the Prophet mentioned the presence of Allah the first time, he obviously noticed that his companion was not convinced. So, he kept repeating it, telling him not to fear. The Sunni argument is that Abu Bakr only had great, uncontrollable fears for the life and safety of the Messenger of Allah. Well, there is nothing in the verse or *hadith* remotely suggesting that.

By contrast, the words of the Prophet, “Allah is with *us*”, suggest that Abu Bakr’s fears were about both of them together in the cave. Otherwise, he would have said, “Allah is with *me*”, placing the emphasis upon himself. Abu Bakr’s fears about the Prophet could also have actually been self-serving! Their fates were interconnected in that dire situation. If the Messenger fell into any danger, Abu Bakr was sure to have a good taste of it too. So, he wanted the Prophet safe, so that he too could be safe.

What support our contention – that Abu Bakr did not really care about the Prophet’s life – are his latter actions on the battlefields. For instance, he abandoned the Messenger of Allah to the mercy of the pagans on different days of battle, and fled away, again and again, with his life from *jihad*. Imam Muslim (d. 261 H) records:

حدثنا محمد بن أبي بكر المقدمي وحامد بن عمر البكراوي ومحمد بن
عبد الأعلى قالوا حدثنا المعتمر (وهو ابن سليمان) قال سمعت أبي عن أبي
عثمان قال لم يبق مع رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم في بعض تلك الأيام التي
قاتل فيهن رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم غير طلحة وسعد عن حديثهما

Muhammad b. Abi Bakr al-Muqaddami, Hamid b. ‘Umar al-Bakrawi and Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-A’la – al-Mu’tamar (and he is Ibn Sulayman) – father – Abu ‘Uthman:

“**None remained** with the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, **on some of the days** in which the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, was fighting **apart from Talhah and Sa’d**. They both (i.e. Talhah and Sa’d) narrated that to me.”²

On several expeditions of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman fled and escaped from battle! They ran way, and did not look back, knowing fully well that their actions could get the Prophet killed, injured or imprisoned.

In any case, what matters to our discussion in this chapter is that Abu Bakr *doubted* the assurances of the Messenger of Allah while they both were in danger, in the cave. He was unconvinced by them. Therefore, when Allah sent down His *sakinah*, He excluded him. The same thing happened with ‘Umar later on the Day of al-Hudaybiyah. Imam Ibn Hibban (d. 354 H) records his own words concerning what

he did on that day:

فقال عمر بن الخطاب رضوان الله عليه والله ما شككت منذ أسلمت إلا يومئذ
فاتيت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقلت ألسنت رسول الله حق

So, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, may Allah be pleased with him, said (about the Day of al-Hudaybiyyah): “By Allah! **I never doubted since I accepted Islam EXCEPT on that day.** So, I went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said, ‘**Are you not truly the Messenger of Allah?**’”³

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

صحيح

*Sahih*⁴

Moreover, Shaykh al-Arnauṭ agrees:

حديث صحيح

It is a *sahih hadith*⁵

He doubted the *nubuwwah* of Muhammad on that day! This removed him from the ranks of believers. So, when Allah sent down His *sakinah*, He excluded ‘Umar, and whoever was like him:

فأنزل الله سكينته على رسوله وعلى المؤمنين

So, Allah sent down His *sakinah* upon His Messenger **and upon the believers.**⁶

And:

لقد رضي الله عن المؤمنين إذ يبايعونك تحت الشجرة فعلم ما في قلوبهم فأنزل
السكينة عليهم

He knew what was in their hearts. Therefore, He sent down *sakinah* upon them.⁷

At this point, it is apposite to quote this verse:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ
فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

The believers are only those who have believed in Allah and His Messenger, **and do not doubt afterwards**, and they do *jihad* with their wealth *and with their lives*, for the Cause of Allah. They are the truthful ones.⁸

Did Abu Bakr and ‘Umar ever doubt Allah or His Messenger after they had accepted Islam? Did Abu Bakr and ‘Umar ever shield their lives from *jihad* by running away? Were they true believers then? Can people like them really be the best ones in this Ummah after our Prophet? What about those of the Sahabah, like Imam ‘Ali, *‘alaihi al-salam*, and perhaps others, who never doubted after their acceptance of Islam, and who never fled the battlefield? How could they have been inferior?

How can a doubter be superior to a firm, unshakable believer? How can someone who escapes with his life from *jihad* be better than someone who completely sold his life to Allah? How can someone who abandoned the Messenger of Allah in fatal danger and ran to save his own life be more valuable than another who placed his life in the midst of pagan swords so that the Prophet could live?

Most importantly, the Messenger also specifically named the second best of the entirety of this Ummah – during his lifetime – after himself. It is in *Hadith al-Ikhtiyar*, recorded by Imam al-Tabarani (d. 360 H):

حدثنا محمد بن جابات الجند نيسابوري و الحسن بن علي المعمرى قالاً : ثنا
عبد الرزاق عن معمر عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد عن ابن عباس قال لما زوج
النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم فاطمة عليا قالت فاطمة : يا رسول الله زوجتني
من رجل فقير ليس له شيء فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم : أما ترضين
يا فاطمة أن الله عز و جل اختار من أهل الأرض رجلين أحدهما أبوك
والآخر زوجك

Muhammad b. Jabat al-Jund Naysaburi AND al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Ma’mari – ‘Abd al-Razzaq – Ma’mar – Ibn Abi Najih – Mujahid – Ibn ‘Abbas:

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, married Faṭimah to ‘Ali, Faṭimah said, “O Messenger of Allah!

You are marrying me to a poor man who has nothing.” So, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, “Are you not pleased, O Faṭimah, that **Allah the Almighty the Most Glorious chose, from the people of the earth, two men**: one of them is your father and the other is your husband?”⁹

Concerning the *First Narrator B*, ‘Allamah al-Albani states:

الحسن بن علي المعمرى ... هو صدوق حافظ

Al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Ma’mari ... **He is *sadūq* (very truthful), a *hafiz* (hadith scientist)**.¹⁰

Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) says something similar:

الحسن بن علي بن شبيب المعمرى الحافظ واسع العلم والرحلة

Al-Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Shabib al-Ma’mari: **the *hafiz* (hadith scientist), very knowledgeable** and widely travelled (in search of knowledge).¹¹

And Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) corroborates them:

المعمرى: الامام، الحافظ، المجود، البارع، محدث العراق، أبو علي، الحسن بن علي بن شبيب البغدادي المعمرى.

Al-Ma’mari: **the Imam, the *hafiz* (hadith scientist)**, the generous, the pious, **the *hadith* master of Iraq**, Abu ‘Ali al-Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Shabib al-Baghdadi al-Ma’mari.¹²

Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) has equally documented his chain in his *Mustadrak*:

حدثنا أبو سعيد أحمد بن يعقوب الثقفي ثنا الحسن بن علي المعمرى ثنا أبو مصعب الزهري ثنا هشام بن عمار السلمى

Abu Sa’id Ahmad b. Ya’qub al-Thaqafi – **al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Ma’mari** – Abu Mus’ab al-Zuhri – Hisham b. ‘Ammar al-Sulami....¹³

Al-Hakim says about the chain:

هذا حديث صحيح الإسناد

This *hadith* has a *sahih* chain. 14

And al-Dhahabi corroborates him:

صحيح

Sahih 15

This proves that al-Ma'mari was *thiqah* (trustworthy).

Al-Hafiz also states about the second narrator:

عبد الرزاق بن همام بن نافع الحميري مولاهم أبو بكر الصنعاني ثقة حافظ

'Abd al-Razzaq b. Hammam b. Nafi' al-Humayri, their freed slave, Abu Bakr al-San'ani: **Thiqah** (trustworthy), **hafiz** (a *hadith* scientist). 16

He further says about the third narrator:

معمر بن راشد الأزدي مولاهم أبو عروة البصري نزيل اليمن ثقة ثبت فاضل

Ma'mar b. Rashid al-Azdi, their freed slave, Abu 'Urwah al-Basri, he lived in Yemen: **Thiqah** (trustworthy), **thabt** (accurate), **fadhil** (meritorious). 17

The fourth narrator is like him, as confirmed by Imam al-Dhahabi:

عبد الله بن أبي نجیح المكي، صاحب التفسير. أخذ عن مجاهد، وعطاء، وهو من الأئمة الثقات.

'Abd Allah b. Abi Najih al-Makki: the scholar of *tafsir*. He learnt from Mujahid and 'Aṭa and was one of the **thiqah** (trustworthy) Imams. 18

Al-Hafiz adds:

عبد الله بن أبي نجیح یسار المکی أبو یسار الثقفی مولاہم ثقة رمی بالقدر وربما
دلس

‘Abd Allah b. Abi Najih Yasar al-Makki, Abu Yasar al-Thaqafi, their freed slave: **Thiqah (trustworthy)**, accused of believing in fatalism, **and maybe he practised *tadlis***.¹⁹

There is a *probability* that he practised *tadlis*. It is not definite. In any case, his ‘an-‘an reports from Mujahid are accepted as *sahih*. For instance, Imam Muslim records this chain in his *Sahih*:

وحدثني حسن بن علي الحلواني حدثنا زيد بن الحباب حدثني إبراهيم بن نافع
حدثني عبدالله بن أبي نجیح عن مجاهد عن عائشة رضي الله عنها

Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Halwani – Zayd b. al-Habab – Ibrahim b. Nafi’ – ‘Abd Allah b. Abi Najih – Mujahid – ‘Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her.²⁰

Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 H) also records:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا عبد الرزاق ثنا معمر عن بن أبي نجیح عن مجاهد
عن عبد الرحمن بن أبي ليلى عن كعب بن عجرة

‘Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – ‘Abd al-Razzaq – Ma’mar – Ibn Abi Najih – Mujahid – ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Layli – Ka’b b. ‘Ujrah.²¹

And Shaykh al-Arnanu²² comments:

إسناده صحيح على شرط الشيخين

Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.²²

Imam al-Hakim is not left out:

أخبرني عبد الرحمن بن الحسن القاضي بهمدان ثنا إبراهيم بن الحسين ثنا آدم بن أبي إياس ثنا ورقاء عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما

‘Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hasan al-Qadi – Ibrahim b. al-Husayn – Adam b. Abi Iyas – Waraqa – **Ibn Abi Najih – Mujahid** – Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them both.²³

Al-Hakim states:

هذا حديث صحيح على شرط الشيخين

This *hadith* is *sahih* upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.²⁴

Imam al-Dhahabi concurs:

على شرط البخاري ومسلم

(*Sahih*) upon the standard of al-Bukhari and Muslim.²⁵

Imam al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 H) has documented a similar chain:

حدثنا ابن أبي عمر حدثنا سفيان عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد عن أبي معمر عن ابن مسعود

Ibn Abi ‘Umar – Sufyan – **Ibn Abi Najih – Mujahid** – Abi Ma’mar – Ibn Mas’ud²⁶

Al-Tirmidhi says:

هذا حديث حسن صحيح

This *hadith* is *hasan sahih*.²⁷

'Allamah al-Albani agrees too:

صحيح

*Sahih*28

Imam Abu Ya'la (d. 307 H) records as well:

حدثنا زهير أخبرنا يزيد بن هارون أخبرنا محمد بن إسحاق عن عبد الله بن أبي
نجيح عن مجاهد عن ابن عباس

Zuhayr – Yazid b. Harun – Muhammad b. Ishaq – **'Abd Allah b. Abi Najih – Mujahid – Ibn 'Abbas.**29

Shaykh Dr. Asad comments:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is *sahih*30

And finally, Imam Ibn Khuzaymah (d. 311 H) has documented this chain in his *Sahih* too:

ثنا الفضل بن يعقوب الجرزي ثنا عبد الأعلى عن محمد عن عبد الله بن أبي
نجيح عن مجاهد عن ابن عباس

Al-Fadhl b. Ya'qub al-Hirzi – 'Abd al-A'la – Muhammad – **'Abd Allah b. Abi Najih – Mujahid – Ibn
'Abbas.**31

Shaykh Dr. al-A'zami states:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is *sahih*.32

At this point, it is needless to prove that Mujahid, the last narrator of *Hadith al-Ikhtiyar* – was also *thiqah* (trustworthy). However, we shall still do so, in case there is someone who prefers that. Al-Hafiz says about him:

مجاهد بن جبر بفتح الجيم وسكون الموحدة أبو الحجاج المخزومي مولاهم
المكي ثقة إمام في التفسير وفي العلم

Mujahid b. Jabr, Abu al-Hajjaj al-Makhzumi, their freed slave, al-Makki: **Thiqah (trustworthy)**, an Imam in *tafsir* and in (religious) knowledge.³³

With this, it becomes absolutely proven that *Hadith al-Ikhtiyar* is *sahih*. All its narrators are *thiqah* (trustworthy), and there is no disconnection whatsoever in the chain. The *hadith* establishes that Allah chose only Muhammad and ‘Ali – in a special selection – out of all the people of the earth. It is clear from the text that Allah had not chosen anyone else among them before He chose the two. As such, whatever other selections were made by Him, apparently, came *after* this first, unique selection.

The Qur’an makes it absolutely clear that creation and choosing are *exclusive* divine functions:

وربك يخلق ما يشاء ويختار ما كان لهم الخيرة

And your Lord creates whatever He wills, **and He chooses**. They have no right to choose.³⁴

Among those He chose was His Messenger, Musa:

وأنا اخترتك فاستمع لما يوحى

And I have chosen you. So listen to that which is inspired to you.³⁵

He equally chose the Israelites:

ولقد اخترناهم على علم على العالمين

And We had knowingly **chosen them above the worlds**.³⁶

The chosen ones, of course, are also the best:

وإنهم عندنا لمن المصطفين الأخيار

And with Us, they are verily from **the chosen ones, the best**.³⁷

So, when Allah chose His Messenger and Amir al-Muminin out of all the people of the earth, He was basically declaring them both as the best of all. Since Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman were alive at that time, it is obvious that both Muhammad and 'Ali were better than them, by Allah's Own Decree. These facts are *very* uncomfortable to mainstream Sunni teachings, and pose an existential threat to Sunni Islam as a whole.

If the *khilafah* of Abu Bakr collapses, nothing else can survive from the Sunni *madhhab*. This is why Sunnis generally feel very uneasy about *Hadith al-Ikhtiyar*. Perhaps, it is also why 'Allamah al-Albani grades the authentic *hadith* in this manner:

موضوع

Mawdu' (fabricated)³⁸

Fabricated?! By who? By the *thiqah* (trustworthy) narrators?! Then, our 'Allamah states:

روي من حديث أبي هريرة، وعبد الله بن عباس، وأبي أيوب الأنصاري، وعلي الهلالي، ومعقل بن يسار.

It is narrated by Abu Hurayrah, 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas, Abu Ayub al-Ansari, 'Ali al-Hilali and Ma'qil b. Yasar.³⁹

Five Sahabah! That is enough to make it *mutawatir* by the standards of some Sunni *muhadithun*! What exactly is the problem with our dear 'Allamah al-Albani? The worst part of it all is that the 'Allamah – whether deliberately or by mistake – omits the *sanad* of al-Ma'mari above in his extensive discussion against the authenticity of the *hadith*!

This, of course, makes it possible for him to reject it! However, if he had included that *sahih* chain in his analysis, the story would have been far different. It is unclear how the 'Allamah misses that *sanad* of al-Ma'mari, despite that he has quoted other chains of the same *hadith* from the same *Mu'jam al-Kabir* of

al-Tabarani! In any case, ‘Allamah al-Albani’s verdict upon the *hadith* is based upon incomplete research. As such, it is void.

Sadly, our ‘Allamah takes things even more disturbing levels – to an all-time low – with this comment of his over a chain that has some common names with that of al-Ma’mari:

ولو أنه ثبت عنه؛ لبقى فيه علة أخرى تقدر في صحته، وهي احتمال أن يكون هذا الحديث أيضاً مما أدخله ابن أخي معمر في كتب معمر؛ فإنه كان رافضياً

Even if it is established from him (i.e. ‘Abd al-Razzaq), there is still another defect in it which discredits its authenticity. It is the *possibility* that this *hadith* too is one of those things which the nephew of Ma’mar inserted into the books of Ma’mar, for he (that nephew) was a Rafidhi.⁴⁰

Possibility?! Mere conjecture? So, there is no concrete evidence? But even then, no such possibility *ever* exists, to begin with! We will simply round off this chapter with this angry reply of the Sunni *hadith* master, ‘Allamah al-Maghribi:

قلت : هذا كلام باطل جدا ، وبيان ذلك : أن ابن أخي معمر، شخص وهمي لا وجود له ، ولا يعرف أخ لمعمر . وكيف يوجد ابن بدون أب غير عيسى عليه السلام ؟

I say: This is complete nonsense! The reason for this is: **That nephew of Ma’mar was only an imaginary figure. He never existed!** Ma’mar was not known to have any brother. How could a son exist without a father, apart from ‘Isa, peace be upon him?⁴¹

1. Abu al-Fida Isma’il b. ‘Umar b. Kathir al-Qurshi al-Dimashqi, Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘Azim (Dar al-‘Aybah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 2nd edition, 1420 H) [annotator: Sami b. Muhammad Salamah], vol. 4, p. 155

2. Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, Ṣahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-‘Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Fuad ‘Abd al-Baqi], vol. 4, p. 1879, # 2414 (47)

3. Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad b. Hibban b. Mu’adh b. Ma’bad al-Tamimi al-Darimi al-Busti, Ṣahih Ibn Hibban bi Tartib Ibn Balban (Beirut: Muasassat al-Risalah; 2nd edition, 1414 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Shu’ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 11, p. 216, # 4872

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

6. Qur’an 48:26

7. Qur’an 48:18

8. Qur’an 49:15

9. Abu al-Qasim Sulayman b. Ahmad b. Ayub al-Ḥabarani, Mu'jam al-Kabir (Mosul: Maktabah al-'Ulum wa al-Hukm; 2nd edition, 1404 H) [annotator: Hamadi b. 'Abd al-Majid al-Salafi], vol. 11, p. 93, # 11153
10. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. 'Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Ḥahihah wa Shayhun min Fiqihah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 1st edition, 1415 H), vol. 6, pp. 59–60, # 2520
11. Shihab al-Din Abu al-Fadhl Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, Lisan al-Mizan (Beirut: Manshurat Muassasat al-'Alami li al-Matbu'at; 2nd edition, 1390 H), vol. 2, p. 221, # 975
12. Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad b. 'Uthman al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 9th edition, 1413 H) [annotators of the thirteenth volume: Shu'ayb al-Arnaut and 'Ali Abu Zayd], vol. 13, pp. 510–511, # 254
13. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Ḥahihayn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 2, p. 279, # 3005
14. Ibid
15. Ibid
16. Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, Taqrib al-Tahdhib (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 1, p. 599, # 4078
17. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 202, # 6833
18. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. 'Uthman al-Dhahabi, Mizan al-I'tidal fi Naqd al-Rijal (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah; 1st edition, 1382 H) [annotator: 'Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi], vol. 2, p. 515, # 4651
19. Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, Taqrib al-Tahdhib (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata], vol. 1, p. 541, # 3673
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