

Tafsīr Sūrat al-Hujurāt

Learning Objectives:

- A study of verse 2 of Surat al-Hujurat

A Study of Verse 2/18

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَرْفَعُوا أَصْوَاتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ النَّبِيِّ وَلَا تَجْهَرُوا لَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ
كَجَهْرِ بَعْضِكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ أَن تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالُكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

O Believers! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet (S). And do not speak loudly to him as you speak loudly to one another, in case your actions are nullified while you remain unaware.



The Shrine of the Prophet (S) in Madina

According to hadith, the verse applies today just as it did in the time of the Prophet (S).

This verse is inscribed over one of the sections above the shrine of the Prophet (S) in Madina.

Raising the voice in front of the Prophet (S) could be of two kinds: either people tried to talk louder than him in argument which was an insult, or they just spoke very loudly which was against politeness.¹ In either case, Muslims were cautioned in this verse to lower their tone in respect of the Prophet (S) because he occupied the office of Prophethood, which itself was sacred. That is perhaps why this verse uses the adjective *nabī*, and not *rasūl*. Their manner of talking to him was an indication of their inner esteem for a Prophet of God.

While most Muslims addressed the Prophet (S) with the utmost respect, some spoke in his presence and behind him in a casual and even rude manner, and God censured them for that in this verse and *Surat al-Nūr* also,

لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا

Do not refer to the Prophet (S) amongst yourselves the way you refer to each other... [24:63]

The verse also reminds us that protecting one's good acts from being nullified can be even harder than performing them in the first place.

An important instance when some Muslims ignored the words of the Prophet (S) is when he asked for a paper and pen just before his death. This defiance had a lasting detrimental impact on the Muslim world. The tradition states that, "When the health of the Prophet (S) deteriorated he said: "Bring me paper so that I may write something for you so that you would never go astray after me." At that time 'Umar b. al-

¹ Tabātabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, exegesis of this verse.

Khaṭṭāb said: “The Prophet (S) has been overcome with illness, and we have the Book of God, which is sufficient for us.”²

Only those acts that arise from *taqwa* are worthy and accepted by God. The Qur’an states:

إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Indeed, God (only) accepts from those who have taqwa [5:27]

Those who talked over the Prophet (S) did so because they did not have *taqwa* in the first place, and through their rudeness, they ruined their good acts without even realising.

1. *Iḥbāt* – The Nullifying of Good Acts

Iḥbāt is when God deletes or nullifies the good acts that a person has performed.

Once the Prophet (S) told his companions,³ “Whoever recites *subḥānallāh*, a tree is planted for him in paradise. And whoever recites *alḥamdulillāh*, a tree is planted for him in paradise. And whoever recites *ilāha illallāh*, a tree is planted for him in paradise. And whoever recites *Allāhu akbar*, a tree is planted for him in paradise.” A man from the Quraysh then said, “O Prophet of God! In that case we will have many trees in paradise!” The Prophet (S) replied, “Yes indeed! But be careful that you do not send forth fire to burn them to ashes! And that is why God says in the Qur’an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ

O Believers! Obey God and obey the Messenger, and do not make your deeds worthless. [47:33]

In addition to the verse we are looking at, there are several other causes of *iḥbāt* mentioned in the Qur’an. Some are listed below:

- Those who become apostates:

وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

And whoever of you turns back from his religion, and then he dies while he is an unbeliever – his (good) works shall be nullified in this world and the hereafter... [2:217]

²Attoufi by Khatib al-Bukhari, 7/70/573 | وعندنا كتاب الله حسبنا | ³ *Amāli of Sh al-Ṣadūq*, p. 362 | مَنْ قَالَ: سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ، غَرَسَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهَا شَجَرَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ. وَمَنْ قَالَ: الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ، غَرَسَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهَا شَجَرَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ. وَمَنْ قَالَ: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، غَرَسَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهَا شَجَرَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ. وَمَنْ قَالَ: اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ، غَرَسَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهَا شَجَرَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ. وَمَنْ قَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! إِنَّ شَجَرَتَنَا فِي الْجَنَّةِ لَكَثِيرٌ. فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَجَلَّ يَقُولُ: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ

- Those who do good to progress in this world only:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا
يُبْخَسُونَ {15} أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا النَّارُ وَحَبِطَ مَا صَنَعُوا
فِيهَا وَبَاطِلٌ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ {16}

Whoever desires this world's life and its finery, We will pay them in full their deeds therein, and they shall not be made to suffer any loss in respect of them. (But) These are they for whom there is nothing but fire in the hereafter, and whatever (good) they worked for shall be nullified, and their acts shall be in vain.

[11:15-16]

- Those who have no belief in God:

مَا كَانَ لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ أَنْ يَعْمُرُوا مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ شَاهِدِينَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِم بِالْكَفْرِ ۗ
أُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي النَّارِ هُمْ خَالِدُونَ

The idolaters have no right to maintain the mosques of God while bearing witness to unbelief against themselves, they are the ones whose actions become null, and in the fire shall they abide. [9:17]

- Those who disbelieve in the hereafter:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ ۗ هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ

And (as to) those who reject Our communications and the meeting of the hereafter, their deeds are null... [7:147]

Just like alcohol would cause intoxication even in someone who drank it thinking it was water, certain actions ruin our good deeds, even as we remain unaware.