

## Tafsīr Sūrat al-Hujurāt

### Learning Objectives:

- A study of verse 3 of Surat al-Hujurat

### A Study of Verse 3/18

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَغُضُّونَ أَصْوَاتَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ امْتَحَنَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ  
لِلتَّقْوَى لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

*Indeed, those who lower their voices before God's Messenger (S) are people whose hearts God has tested for taqwa. For them awaits forgiveness and a great reward.*



### *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.

In contrast to the raising of voices in front of the Prophet (S) mentioned in the previous verse, this verse directs Muslims to lower their voices instead.

### 1. Lowering the Voice

Lowering the voice in front of the Prophet (S) and indeed, in front of others shows our respect for them. In fact, our speaking in a loud voice is disliked by God. He states in the Qur'an,

وَاقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاعْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ

*“Be moderate in your walking and lower your voice when talking; indeed, the most unpleasant sound is the braying of donkeys.” [31:19]*

The “test of taqwa” referred to in this verse is not for God to find out; He already knows all. Here it refers to individuals who display the correct respect for the Prophet (S), both in his time and later as well. They are the ones who have passed the test of taqwa.

The reward (or punishment) that comes from God is not from His knowledge that a person will act in a particular way, rather it only comes once the act has been done. That is why “forgiveness and a great reward” comes only after they have lowered their voices.

## 2. Some Qur'anic Guidance about Speech:

One should speak gently. This will have a better effect than speaking harshly. When Musa (A) and Hārūn (A) were directed to go to take the Divine message to Fir'awn, God instructed them to:

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

*“Speak to him mildly so that perhaps he may heed the warning or become apprehensive (of God).” [20:44]*

One should speak with honesty, because that is what makes a person honourable:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

*“O Believers! Be God-conscious and be from those who are truthful.” [9:119]*

and always stay away from slander and backbiting, because God despises it:

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ

*“Woe to every slanderer and backbiter!” [104:1]*

One should speak pleasantly:

لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

*“...Do not worship any but God, and be kind to your relatives, and the orphans, and the poor, and speak to people pleasantly...” [2:82]*

and speak of useful things that guide people;

وَهُدُوا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَهُدُوا إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْحَمِيدِ

*“And they are guided to goodly counsel and they are guided to the path of the One who Praiseworthy.” [22:24]*

One should himself act on what he advises others to do:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

*“O Believers! Why do you say what you do not do yourselves?”*

كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

**God greatly dislikes that you say what you do not do yourselves.” [61:2-3]**

And one should avoid baseless and vain talk:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

**“(The believers are) those who stay away from vain speech.” [23:3]**

### 3. ...For them awaits Forgiveness and a Great Reward

One of the definitions of *taqwa* is “faith manifested in practice”. This verse was talking about how Muslims who had faith in the Prophet (S) showed their *taqwa* by speaking to him with respect. In this phrase of the verse, God promises two gifts to those who have *taqwa*;

- 1) forgiveness of their lapses and
- 2) a great reward.

Forgiveness of our sins and thereby entry into paradise is one the greatest gifts of God. When we make mistakes, God the All-merciful, is always ready to forgive in return for sincere remorse and repentance. The Quran states:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَعْفُو عَنِ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

**“It is He Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons evil acts; and He knows whatever you do.” [42:25]**

In addition to *tawba*, the Qur’an use several other words in relation to forgiveness:

- *Afw*, (عفو). The word means to decide to possess something, so when God possesses someone’s guilt, it means He pardons them or accepts their apology.
- *Ṣafḥ* (صفح). This word means to turn away. In the context of forgiveness it means to forgive and then not to keep reminding or blaming the person.
- *Ghufrān* (غفران). This means to cover. It refers to hiding the misdeed from others after forgiveness, and not to let the consequences of those actions be an issue either.

God encourages us to forgive one another just as we hope that He will forgive us. The following verses mention this using all the terms above;

وَإِنْ تَعَفُّوا وَتَصْفَحُوا وَتَغْفِرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**“But if you pardon, overlook and forgive (others), then indeed God is oft-Forgiving, Merciful.” [64:14]**

And:

وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

*“So pardon and overlook (the faults of others). Would you not like God to forgive you? Indeed, God is oft-forgiving, all-Merciful.” [24:22]*

#### 4. ...A Great Reward

The rewards that we may get from others tend to be short-lived, small, basic, and occasionally accompanied by reminder of favour. In addition many of our actions go unnoticed and unrewarded, because people do not know or care about them. Sometimes they may want to reward us but are unable to do so.

However, nothing escapes God’s knowledge; He sees and records everything. He is all-Powerful and Able. And consequently we should only rely on Him for truly meaningful rewards for our efforts. God says that nothing is too small to go unnoticed by Him:

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ

*“So whoever does an atom’s weight of good shall see it (its reward).”*

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

*And whoever does an atom’s weight of evil shall see it (its punishment).” [99:7-8]*

And therefore when He promises “a great reward” in this verse, He has the means to give us whatever we can imagine and much more.