

Tafsīr Sūrat al-Hujurāt

Learning Objectives:

- A study of verse 4 and 5 of Surat al-Hujurat

A Study of Verse 4 ,5/18

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ [4]

(As for) those who call out to you from behind the private chambers, indeed most of them do not understand.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ صَبَرُوا حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ إِلَيْهِمْ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ [5]

And if they wait patiently until you come out to them, it would certainly be better for them, and God is all-Forgiving, all-Merciful.

A group of nomads from the tribe of Banū Tamīm came to Madina and began to call out to the Prophet (S) from behind his house, shouting “O Muhammad! Come out.”¹ This verse was revealed informing us that their disrespectful conduct was because most of them were not using their reason and understanding.

Although this verse is about a past event, its message is timeless and that is that poor manners are a sure sign that the intellect is not being used. In fact, a tradition from Imam Ali (A) states that, “Those who have no manners, have no intellect.”²

In contrast, verse 5 suggests that despite their hurry to meet with the Prophet (S), patience (*ṣabr*) would have been the more befitting and polite behaviour.

1. The Importance of using the Intellect according to the Qur’an and Ḥadīth

Human beings have superiority in God’s eyes over other creatures because of the intellect (*‘aql*) that He has granted to them. And this gives rise to the manners and morals (*akhlāq*) that distinguishes humans from animals. This verse teaches us that if we use the intellect, our *akhlāq* will improve.

In an important tradition we read, “Jibra’īl descended to Ādam (A) and said: O Ādam, I have been directed to grant you one of three qualities. So choose one and return the other two. Choose from intellect (*‘aql*), modesty (*ḥayā*) and religion (*dīn*). Ādam (A) said: I choose intellect. Jibra’īl turned to modesty and religion and said: return back. They said: “we have been directed to always be with intellect, wherever it goes.”³

¹ Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, exegesis of this verse | يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَخْرُجْ إِلَيْنَا

² Al-Āmudī, *Ghurur al-Ḥikam*, tradition 10769 | لَا عَقْلَ لِمَنْ لَا أَدَبَ لَهُ

³ Ṣadūq, *al-Faḥīh*, 4/417 | هبط جبرئيل على آدم عليه السلام فقال: يا آدم إني أمرت أن أخيرك واحدة من ثلاث فاختر واحدة ودع اثنتين، فقال جبرئيل عليه السلام للحياء والدين: فقال له: وما تلك الثلاث؟ قال: العقل والحياء والدين، فقال آدم عليه السلام: فإني قد اخترت العقل، فقال جبرئيل عليه السلام للحياء والدين: انصرفا ودعاه، فقالا: يا جبرئيل إنا أمرنا أن نكون مع العقل حيث كان

The first step in using the intellect is to gain knowledge so that the mind has the raw material from which to understand matters, and make decisions and reach conclusions. After recounting certain parables, the Qur'an states:

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

"We set forth these examples for mankind, but none will understand (use 'aql) them except those who possess knowledge ('ilm)." [29:43]

It has been reported from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that, *"Exposing yourself to knowledge ('ilm) expands the intellect ('aql)."*⁴

In a beautiful tradition explaining what the intellect is designed for, Imam al-Sadiq (A) said, *"Intellect is the means by which God is worshipped and paradise is earned."*⁵

2. Patience (Ṣabr) is a Source of Strength

Ṣabr actually means to persevere with doing the right thing, no matter what the circumstances. It is one of the high levels of faith and gives an individual great strength. That is why the Prophet (S) was told that a few patient soldiers would overcome ten times their number in battle:

إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ عِشْرُونَ صَابِرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتِينَ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِئَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفًا
مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا

"If there are twenty patient soldiers amongst you, they will overcome two hundred; and if there are a hundred, they will overcome a thousand unbelievers..." [8:65]

The Prophet (S) taught: *"Ṣabr is of three types; ṣabr when tempted to sin, ṣabr in carrying out one's obligations to God, and ṣabr in the face of trials."*⁶

3. ... and God is all-Forgiving, all-Merciful

They displayed bad manners because they did not use their intellect, and not because they had meanness in their hearts. This last phrase of the verse assures the Muslims that if they use their intellect and reform their behaviour, then God is always ready to forgive out of His limitless mercy.

⁴ Majlisī, *Bihār*, 1/159 | كثرة النظر في العلم يفتح العقل

⁵ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/11 | "ما عُبد به الرحمن واكتسب به الجنان | قال: ما عُبد به العقل؟ قال: ما عُبد به الرحمن واكتسب به الجنان"

⁶ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2/91 | الصَّبْرُ ثَلَاثَةٌ: صَبْرٌ عِنْدَ الْمِصِيبَةِ، وَ صَبْرٌ عَلَى الطَّاعَةِ وَ صَبْرٌ عَنِ الْمَعْصِيَةِ