

Tafseer Al-Baqarah (2: 249-51)

From the Book, Introduction to the Tafseer of the Quran,

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﴿فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَنْ لَمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اغْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ ۖ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ قَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ ۚ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا اللَّهَ كَم مِّن فِتْنَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِئَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ (249) وَلَمَّا بَرَزُوا لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ (250) فَهَزَمُوهُمْ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُودُ جَالُوتَ وَآتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُ مِمَّا يَشَاءُ ۗ وَلَوْلَا دَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ لَّفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (251)﴾

“When Talut marched forth with his army, he cautioned: “Allah will test you with a river. So whoever drinks directly from it is not with me, and whoever does not taste it, except a sip from the hollow of his hands, is definitely with me.” They all drank directly except for a few! When he and the faithful with him crossed the river, they said, “Now we are no match for Goliath and his warriors.” But those who were certain they would meet Allah reasoned, “How many times has a small force vanquished a mighty army by the Will of Allah! And Allah is with the steadfast.” (249) When they advanced to face Goliath and his warriors, they prayed, “Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance, make our steps firm, and give us victory over the disbelieving people.” (250) So they defeated them by Allah’s Will, and Daud killed Goliath. And Allah blessed Daud with authority and wisdom and taught him what He willed. Had Allah not repelled a group of people by another, corruption would have dominated the earth, but Allah is Gracious to all. (251)”

In these Ayaat, Allah (swt) clarified:

1. After the Children of Israel (Bani Israeel), after Musa (as), were given the definitive argument that Taloot [Talut] is their king. That is when the Taaloot was brought to them. They believed and marched with Taloot to meet their enemy. Then Taloot informed them that Allah (swt) tried them with a river as a test to demonstrate their truthfulness and sincerity in meeting their enemy. That trial was that they did not drink from the river, like a shephard. This means that they did not take water with their mouths directly from the river. He informed them that whoever drank water like a shephard from the river is not one of his followers and companions. Whoever does not drink or drinks with a ladle in his hand, is one of his followers.

The result of the trial was that all of them drank as a shepherd except a few of them. So he proceeded with those who believed with him to meet the enemy. When they saw their enemy with their eyes, a part of them said that they had no power to fight Jaaloot [Jalut] (Goliath) and his soldiers. However, another part, were strong in Imaan in Allah (swt) and looked forward to the Afterlife, more than their aspiration to the world. They are the strongest group in Imaan who surpassed the other group by performing acts of obedience and getting closer to Allah (swt). They said to the adherents of the other group that there is no significance in the large number, due to the Help of Allah (swt) and as Nasr (victory) comes with with patience, whilst Allah (swt) is with the patient.

And they surged forward with Taloot, while they were praying to Allah (swt) to bestow patience on them, make their foothold firm and give them victory over the kuffar.

So Allah, Glory be to Him, responded to their Dua and empowered them against their enemies, so they defeated them, Allah willing, and Daud (as) killed Goliath. And Allah (swt) blessed Daud with authority and prophethood. He (swt) taught him other things that would benefit him in this world, such as making weapons with iron, and what would help him in jihad for the sake of Allah (swt).

﴿فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ﴾ “When Talut marched forth.” It means they left the city they were in, and

marched towards their enemy to fight him.

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ﴾ **“Allah will test you with a river”** means informed to pass a river.

﴿فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ﴾ **“So whosoever drinks directly from it.”** It means whoever gulps from the river and drinks with his mouth. It is because drinking from the river like this, is, in reality, not eating.

﴿فَاتَهُ مِنِّي﴾ **“is with me.”** It means whosoever follows me.

﴿وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي﴾ **“and whoever does not taste it, (except a sip from the hollow of his hands) is definitely with me.”** It means he did not taste it. Whosoever eats a thing, then he has tasted it, whether it was eaten or drunk, as related by Al-Azhari. There is agreement in this understanding. So the prohibition against tasting water as a shepherd does mean the severity of the prohibition of what exceeds the taste of water, which is drinking it, as a shepherd does.

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ اغْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ﴾ **“Except the one who sips from the hollow of his hand.”** It means drinking with one’s hand. This is an excluding exception. The prohibition is for drinking like a shepherd, directly with the mouth. The exception is for drinking by sipping from one’s hand. This is not drinking like a shepherd. So it is excluded in the sense of “but,” ‘but whoever sips up from the hollow of his hand is from me.’

Most of the people of Medina and Basra, Abu Amr, Ibn Katheer and Nafi, recite with the accusative vowel sound of Fatha (“aa”) for the consonant “gh,” within the word hollow, (gharfah). It is with the meaning of a single hollow. It is as in the saying, “I hollowed a hollow, and the hollow is the very act of hollowing.”

Others recite with the nominative vowel sound waw (“oo”) with the meaning of the water that comes into the palm of the one who hollows it. So gharfah is the noun, whilst ghurfah is the word origin (masdar). Gharfah in the accusative form, with Fatha (“aa”) is with the meaning of once. Ghurfah with the nominative vowel sound waw (“oo”) means water in the hand. Whether it is once or several times, and since the two recitations are tuwattur in narration, the meaning is the same. The precise common meaning between the two recitations is: what is taken out from the water by the hollow of the palm once.

As for **“of his hand,”** after hollow, it is a restriction for it. Ghurfah is in the indefinite case is in the context of confirmation (ithbaat), so it is absolute (mutlaq).

Thus, **“of his hand,”** is restricted to it. So the exception is the one who took water with his hand and drank once. That is, the one who will be among the followers of Taloot is the one who does not drink like a shepherd from the river directly and goes past it, or he does not drink like a shepherd but scoops from the river with his hand only once, and then goes past it.

As for ﴿الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا اللَّهَ﴾ **“Those who were certain they would meet Allah,”** means those who were retain of meeting Allah (swt) and were strong believers who look towards the Hereafter above their aspiration to this world. The meeting with their Lord dominates their minds, hearing and sight. Thinking (ظن) here means being certain of meeting Allah (swt) with the concatenation (qareenah) of their saying, ﴿كَمْ مِنْ فِئَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ﴾ **“How many times has a small force vanquished a mighty army.”**

As for ﴿فِئَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾ **“a mighty army by the Will of Allah! And Allah is with the steadfast,”** this means that they do not doubt about meeting Allah. It is a concatenation that conjecture (ظم) here means certainty.

As for **“Goliath”** جَالُوتَ it is an Arabized form of a non-Arab name, in the same sense of what we said about Talut.

As for **“wisdom”** الْحِكْمَةَ Allah (swt) combined for Daud over the children of Israel the authority and the prophethood. The authority was separate from the prophethood, as we explained in the previous verses of their saying to their Prophet to send them one in authority.

As for ﴿وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ﴾ **“ Had Allah not repelled a group of people by another”** means had it not been for the obligation of fighting in the way of Allah that deters the people of evil and corruption.