



The Prophet's ﷺ Parents Are Saved

Imam Jalaluddin as-Suyuti

Imam as-Suyuti wrote no less than five *fatawa* on this topic. What is translated here is an excerpt from his treatise entitled: **“Methods of Those with Pure Belief Concerning the Parents of the Prophet ﷺ”** (*Masalik al-Hunafa' fi walidayy al-Mustafa*)

This writing concerns the question of the ruling (hukm) that the father and mother of the Prophet ﷺ are (believed to be) saved and not in Hellfire. This has been declared by the majority of the scholars, and in reaching that declaration they have several methods (masalik).

FIRST

His parents died before he was sent as Prophet, and there is no punishment for them as **“We never punish until We send a messenger (and they reject him)”** (17:15). Our Ash`ari Imams of those in *kalam*, *usul*, and Shafi`i *fiqh* agree on the statement that one who dies while *da'wa* has not reached him, dies saved. This has been defined by Imam Shafi`i . . . and some of the *fuqaha'* have explained that the reason is that that person is on *fitra* (primordial disposition), and has not stubbornly refused nor rejected any Messenger.

That is the position of our Shaykh, Shaykh al-Islam Sharafuddin al-Munawi, as I received it. He was once asked whether the Prophet's father was in the fire and he groaned loudly at the questioner. The latter insisted: “Is his Islam established?” and he answered that he died in *fitra* and quoted the verse.

It is the position of Ahl al-Sunnah and it was opposed by the *Mu'tazila* and those who follow them among those who say that one is condemned because Allah is known rationally.

It is also the position of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani who said,

The (proper) conjecture (*ẓann*) concerning his parents, meaning also all those who died before his Messengership, is that they shall obey (his call) at the time of their examination (in the grave), as a gift (from Allah) to please him.

This method is based on the following sources:

[Evidence from the Qur’an]

- The aforementioned verse. (17:15)
- The verse, ***“Your Lord does not unjustly (bi zulm) destroy the townships while their people are unconscious (of the wrong they do)”*** (6:131). Al-Zarkashi adduced it to illustrate the rule (*qa`ida*) that one thanks Allah through hearing (about Him), not through rational induction.¹
- The verse, ***“Otherwise . . . they might say, Our Lord! Why sentest Thou no messenger unto us, that we might have followed Thy revelations and be among the believers?”*** (28:47) Adduced by Zarkashi and Ibn Abi Hatim in their tafsirs. The latter adds the Hadith, “Those who die in fitra will say, My Lord, no book nor messenger reached me, and he recited this verse.” (Bukhari and Muslim)
- The verse, ***“And if We had destroyed them with some punishment before it [your coming], they would assuredly have said: Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent unto us a messenger, so that we might have followed . . .”*** (20:134)
- ***“And never did thy Lord destroy the townships, till He had raised up in their mother-town a Messenger reciting unto them Our revelations. And never did We destroy the townships unless the folks thereof were evildoers”*** (28:59). Ibn Abi Hatim quotes Ibn `Abbas’s and Qatada’s explanations that it refers to the people of Mecca, who were condemned only after the Prophet ﷺ was sent to them and they denied him.
- ***“Lest ye should say, the Scripture was only revealed to two sects before us, and we in sooth were unaware of what they read”*** (6:156).

- **“And We destroyed no townships but it had its warners for reminder, for We never were oppressors”** (26:208-209). `Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abi Hatim quote Qatada in their *tafsirs* to the effect that revelation, proof, and exhortation must precede condemnation.
- **“And they cry for help there, (saying), Our Lord! Release us; we will do right, not (the wrong) that we used to do. Did not We grant you a life long enough for him who reflected to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you”** (35:37). The commentators said, “The warner is the Prophet ﷺ.”

[Evidence from the Hadith]

Hadith Concerning the Examination of the People of fitra [Primordial Disposition] on the Day of Resurrection and the Entry into Paradise of Those Who Obey and the Entry into the Fire of Those Who Disobey:

Ahmad, Ibn Rahawayh, Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqi (*al-I`tiqad `ala madhhab al-salaf abl al-sunnah wa-l-jama`ah*) who said, *sahih* through Aswad ibn Sari'. The Prophet ﷺ said,

Four will present excuses on the Day of Resurrection: The deaf one, the idiot, the senile old man, and the one who died in *fitra*. The first will say, I didn't hear anything; the second, Islam came and street-children were throwing dung at me; the third, Islam came and I did not have my wits about me, and the fourth, my Lord, no Messenger came to me. Allah will Himself take their covenant to obey Him. They will be told to enter the fire (as a test). Those who obey will find it cool and safe, while those who refuse will be dragged to it. (Aswad, Abu Hurayra)

Al-Bazzar and Tirmidhi who correctly graded it *hasan*: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The one who died in *fitra*, the imbecile, and the infant will say respectively: No Book or Messenger reached me; You gave me no mind wherewith to understand good or evil; I did not have a chance to do anything. A fire will be presented to them and they will be told to enter it. Those who would have done well in life will obey and enter it (temporarily) while those who would have disobeyed in life will refuse. Allah will tell them, You disobey Me (seeing Me), so how could you obey My Messengers in My absence? (Abu Sa`id al-Khudri)

Al-Bazzar and Abu Ya'la: same as above with the addition of the senile old man. Those who obey and enter the fire will go across it speedily. (Anas)

ʿAbdul Razzaq, Ibn Jarir, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Hatim, with an authentic chain that meets the criteria of Bukhari and Muslim: The Prophet ﷺ said,

“The one who died in *fitra*, the idiot, the deaf, the mute, and the senile will be sent a messenger (at that time) who will say, Enter the fire. They will argue and say: How can it be when no messenger reached us? But woe to them! If they had entered it they would have found it cool and safe. Whoever accepts and obeys will enter it.” Abu Hurayra added, Read, **“We never punish until We send a messenger”** (17:15).”

Al-Bazzar and Hakim, who graded it *sahih* by the criteria of Bukhari and Muslim: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The people of *Jabiliyya* will come on the Day of Judgment carrying their idols on their backs. Allah will question them and they will say: Our Lord, You did not send us a Messenger and nothing from You reached us. If you had sent us one, we would have been your most obedient servants. Allah will say, Shall I test your obedience? And He will tell them to enter the fire and stay in it. They will enter it and return again, in fear of its fury and exhalations, and they will say, Our Lord, protect us from it. He will say: Didn't you promise to obey Me if I ordered you something? They will pledge again and enter it, only to come back and plead again. The Prophet ﷺ said, Had they stayed in it the first time, they would have found it cool and safe. (Thawban)

Tabarani and Abu Nu'aym: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The imbecile will come on the Day of Judgment together with the one who died in *fitra* and the infant etc. (same as (e)) They will keep coming back although the fire would not have hurt them, and Allah will say, I knew your actions from afore, so take them (O Fire).

Comment of Tabari,

Know that the *Ahl al-Sunnah* have one and all agreed on the fact that there is no knowledge of rulings except on the basis of revealed Law as opposed to the productions of the mind, while opponents of the truth such as the Rafidah [Rejecters of the legitimacy of the first three Caliphs], the *Karramiyyah* [anthropomorphists], the Mu`tazila [rationalists] and others consider that the derivation of rulings have different bases, some revealed, some based on pure reasoning. As for us [*Ahl al-Sunnah*], we say that nothing is ruled as obligatory before the coming of a Prophet ﷺ.

Imam Fakhruddin Razi said in the *Mabsul*,

To be thankful to the One Creator is not a mind-based obligation, contrary to what the Mu`tazila say. If it were, those who leave that action before a Prophet ﷺ is sent to them would be punished, which is not the case [citing 17:15].

Similarly, those of his school [i.e. *kalam*] as well as Baydawi and Tajuddin Subki said,

We believe that those whom *da`wa* did not reach die saved, and that while alive they are not fought against until they reject a clear call, and that they enjoy protection in their life and possessions, etc.

Now this method of ruling (exemption from punishment), does it apply to all the people of the *Jabiliyya*? No, rather it applies specifically to those who have never been reached by the call of a previous Prophet ﷺ. As for those who have been reached and who have rejected that previous Prophet ﷺ, no one disputes that they are definitely (ruled to be) in the fire.

The noble parents (of the Prophet ﷺ), from what has been known of them, belong to the former group according to our belief.

No call reached them, because the previous Prophet ﷺ came about six hundred years earlier, and of the rare divines (*ahbar*) of the People of the Book who still knew the (original) prophetic dispensations and called people to the religion, a tiny remnant were left dispersed here and there between Sham and other places.

They apparently travelled little and lived brief lives: eighteen years for `Abdullah who died in Medina, and nearly the same for the reclusive Amina, according to the hafiz al-`Ala'i in his book, *al-durra al-saniyya fi mawlid sayyid al-bariyya* (The pristine pearl: the birth of the Master of Creatures).

They knew no better than the majority of the people of Mecca, whose ignorance even of the fact that Allah sends prophets is shown in the verses, **“Does Allah send a human Messenger?”** (17:94) and **“They said, if our Lord wished, He would have sent angels; we never heard the like from our forefathers”** (23:24).

Imam ‘Izzuddin ibn ‘Abdul Salam said (in *al-Amali*),

Every Prophet was sent to his own particular people except ours, which means that every people not previously sent to, is of the *fitra*, except the descendants of a Prophet that are born in other nations [e.g. the descendants of Ibrahim leading to Shu‘ayb], because his Law addresses them as well. But if the previous dispensation becomes obliterated, then all people become people of the *fitra*.” This is categorical proof that the noble parents are without doubt of the *fitra*, because they are neither descendants of ‘Isa nor of his nation.

We now turn to further proofs from the Hadith. Ibn Hajar’s statement that the correct conjecture is that the Prophet’s entire family will obey when asked on Judgment Day is inferred from these sources:

The Hadith related by al-Hakim in the *Mustadrak* from Ibn Mas‘ud and graded authentic, that:

A young man of the Ansar who asked a lot of questions once asked the Prophet ﷺ, “Are your parents in the Fire?” To which the Prophet ﷺ answered, “My Lord promised to give me what I ask concerning them, and on that day I shall stand at the Praiseworthy Station (of chief intercessor).”

The Hadith cited by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari from Ibn ‘Abbas to the effect that the verse **“And your Lord shall give you so that you will be pleased”** (93:5) alludes to the Prophet’s pleasure that none of his family enter the fire.

The Hadith of Abu Sa‘id in *Sharaf al-nubuwwa*, Tabari (*Dhakha’ir al-Uqba*), and al-Mulla in his *Sira* from ‘Umran ibn Husayn:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “I asked my Lord that He not enter any of my family into the fire and it was granted me.”

Tamim al-Dari in the *Fawa'id* with a weak isnad from Ibn `Umar:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “On the Day of Judgment I shall intercede for my father and mother, my uncle Abu Talib, and a [milk-]brother of mine from the Jahiliyya.” Tabari said, If established, then it is understood in the light of the authentic Hadiths concerning Abu Talib [i.e. that he is in a shallow fire = Bukhari and Muslim]. Tabari said “concerning Abu Talib” in view of the fact that Islam did reach him unlike the other three who died in *fitra*.”²

[Lack of Proof That His Parents were not of the Pure Religion (*Hanifiyya*) and Weakening of the Hadith Whereby His Father is in the Fire]

SECOND

The *shirk* (idolatry) of the Prophet’s parents is not an established fact and that they more probably followed the Pure Religion (*Hanifiyya*) of their ancestor Ibrahim. A group of Arabs did that, such as `Amr ibn Nufayl and Waraqa ibn Nawfal and others. This is the view of Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi and others named below.

Al-Razi states in *asrar al-tanzil* that some scholars have said that Azar was not Ibrahim’s father but his uncle because, among other proofs, the parents of prophets are not unbelievers. Proving the latter, is the verse, “[Your Lord] Who sees you when you stand, and your turning (*taqallubak*) among those who prostrate themselves” (26:218-219), i.e. your descent through the loins of your ancestors, who are called: worshippers.

He continued: And what proves that the Prophet’s parents were not idolaters is his saying, “I was carried from the loins of the pure men into the wombs of the pure women” (*lam azal unqal . . .*) Therefore it is necessary that none of his ancestors be a *mushrik*.

The above is verbatim what Imam Razi said, and I remind you of his status as the Imam of *Ahl al-Sunnah* among his contemporaries, the principal upholder of belief against the various sects of innovators, the one who defended the truth of the Ash`ari creed in his time, and the *Mujaddid* (renewer) of this *Ummah* in the sixth century.

I say also, what further establishes the truth of this method and of what Imam al-Razi said is, first, the authentic Hadiths to the effect that the Prophet's origins are the best in every respect from Adam to his father `Abdullah, and that his century is the best; second, the Hadiths to the effect that the earth is never empty of the True Monotheists (*muwahhidun*) from Adam until Judgment Day, and that it is for their sake that the earth is preserved otherwise it would have perished long ago. These two points categorically prove that the best origins and the true monotheists are first and foremost the parents of the prophets as it ill fits that they should be *mushriks* while other people be considered of the *fitra*.³

Another perspective which verifies that method is the verse whereby Allah keeps *tawhid* - knowledge of Oneness - within the posterity of Ibrahim. [He cites verses, commentaries, and Hadiths to that effect.]

Further probative views are that of Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi in *A`lam al-nubuwwa* who said,

The light of prophecy was present in the Prophet's parents, and the Prophet ﷺ had no partner in inheriting it, that is, no brother and no sister, because the quintessence (*safwa*) of his parents resides in him, and the greatness of their lineage (*nasab*) is derived from him alone, and that is also why they died young.

Further, Ibn al-Jawzi enumerates in *al-Talqih* the names of nine who refused to worship idols in the time of the Jahiliyya: Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Zayd ibn `Amr ibn Nufayl, `Abdullah ibn Jahsh, `Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, Rabab ibn al-Barra', As`ad ibn Kurayb al-Humayri, Qass ibn Sa`ida al-Iyadi, Abu Qays ibn Sarma.

Now for the objections that:

Muslim narrated on the authority of Anas:

A man said, O Messenger of Allah, where is my father?" He said: "In the fire." When the man left he called him back and said, "Verily my father and your father are in the fire."⁴

Muslim and Abu Dawud narrated on Abu Hurayra's authority:

That the Prophet ﷺ asked permission to ask forgiveness for his mother and it was not granted him [and he asked permission to visit her grave and it was granted].⁵

I say: Yes (they did narrate it) and the answer is that the narrators do not agree on the words, “Verily my father and your father are in the fire.” The chain that Muslim used is that of Hammad ibn Salama - from Thabit - from Anas. It is contradicted by the chain of Mu`ammar - from Thabit - (from Anas), which does not mention those words, but which says, “He called him back and said, “When you pass by the grave of an unbeliever, tell him of the fire.”

There is no mention of the Prophet’s father in the latter version whatsoever, and its chain is more established (*athbat*) as Mu`ammar is more established than Hammad, whose memory has been questioned and some of whose narrations have been rejected. Bukhari did not take anything from him, nor did Muslim in the *usul* (Hadiths related to the principles of the Shari`ah) except through Thabit. Mu`ammar is impeccable from all those points of view and both Bukhari and Muslim use him. His version is therefore more reliable.

The Hadith also comes through another chain in a wording similar to the version of Mu`ammar:

Al-Bazzar, Tabarani, and Bayhaqi cite it on the authority of Ibrahim ibn Sa`d - from al-Zuhri - from `Amr ibn Sa`d - from his father, that:

A Bedouin Arab said to the Prophet ﷺ, “Where is my father?” He answered, “In the fire.” The man said, “And where is yours?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Whenever you pass by the grave of an unbeliever, tell him about the fire.”

The above chain is authentic according to the criteria of Bukhari and Muslim: reliance upon it therefore takes precedence over any other (that does not meet such criterion). Tabarani and Bayhaqi add that the Arab later entered Islam and said, “The Prophet ﷺ put a heavy burden on me, because I did not pass by a single grave of an unbeliever except I told him about the fire.” Ibn Majah cites something similar through Ibrahim ibn Sa`d - from al-Zuhri - from Salim - from his father.

The above addition shows beyond doubt that the words spoken by the Prophet ﷺ had a general meaning, and that the Arab was given an order which he carried out all his life. In the first narration, however, he was not ordered anything. It is clear that the first narrator related it in the form he understood (incorrectly).

Al-Hakim in the Mustadrak narrates the following (sahih) on the authority of Luqayt ibn `Amr, that the latter went in a delegation comprising Nuhayk ibn `Asim ibn Malik ibn al-Muntafiq to Medina to see the Prophet ﷺ. The latter asked,

Is there any good among those of us who were in Jahiliyya?” He said, “Your father al-Muntafiq is in the Fire.” Nuhayk said, “I thought an abyss had opened between the skin of my face and my very flesh when I heard him say that about my father in front of everyone. I wanted to say, What about yours, O Prophet, but I considered it more appropriate to say instead, What about your family, O Prophet?” The Prophet ﷺ answered, “Whenever you see the grave of an idolater, whether of the Quraysh or of `Amr, say, Muhammad sends me to you to tell you about the fire.”

The preceding is the clearest narration yet of what took place. Now, even if the words, “My father and your father” are established as authentic, this does not mean `Abdullah but Abu Talib [cf. Bukhari and Muslim’s narrations of the *dakhdakh* or shallow fire in which he is placed due to the Prophet’s intercession], similarly to what Imam Razi said about the Prophet Ibrahim calling his uncle: my father. This is clear from the fact that Abu Talib commonly called his nephew “My son,” and that is how the Quraysh also called him when they said, “Tell your son to stop insulting our gods.”

It has also been stated in the Hadith that the most leniently punished of the inmates of the fire is Abu Talib [Bukhari and Muslim]. If the Prophet’s parents were in the fire, surely they would be the ones to be punished the most leniently. The scholars of the principles of jurisprudence (*usul*) call this an allusive proof (*dalalat al-ishara*).

As for the second Hadith: that the Prophet ﷺ was not allowed to pray at his mother’s grave, (it is authentic; however,) it must be explained correctly, since it is a rule of *usul* that whenever irrefutable proofs contradict an authentic Hadith, that Hadith must be interpreted in a way that clears the contradiction, and the proofs have precedence over it [i.e. it cannot be interpreted to mean that she is in the fire when it is proven otherwise].

The counter-argument may be made that in the beginning of Islam the Muslim who died with unpaid debts was not prayed upon (and asking forgiveness for them was not allowed). [This is still the case in Anatolia, where the *janaza* does not take place until all debts are paid on the spot.] The Prophet’s mother may have had this or other reasons which prevented his praying upon her, which does not make her a *kafira*.⁶

[Conclusion]

The majority of the scholars have agreed to the preceding, namely that the Prophet's parents are in Paradise, without need for them to consider the two Hadiths of Muslim abrogated. However, as al-Suhayli has pointed out, it is not appropriate for Muslims to say such a thing as, "The Prophet's parents are in the fire," as he himself said, "Do not annoy the living by insulting the dead," and Allah said, ***"Those who annoy Allah and the Prophet ﷺ, Allah curses them in this life and in the hereafter"*** (33:57).

Al-Qadi Abu Bakr ibn al-`Arabi the Maliki scholar was asked about the man who did say such a statement, and he replied, *"Such a man is cursed."*

Finally, a portion of the scholars have gone to the position of withholding their opinion on the subject, and Allah knows best.

¹ Yusuf `Ali translates *bi zulm* as "for their wrongdoing" and attributes it to the object (the people) not the subject (Allah). This produces the following meaning: "Thy Lord would not destroy for their wrongdoing men's habitations whilst their occupants were unwarned." Qurtubi mentions both meanings in his Tafsir.

² Other similar Hadiths follow in descending order of authenticity, but which Suyuti adduces nonetheless to build up the strength of the evidence that the explicit intercession of the Prophet ﷺ for his parents is true.

³ Suyuti then cites about 44 Hadiths *sahih* or *hasan* to illustrate the two points above.

⁴ Muslim, *Iman*, chapter 88

⁵ Muslim, *Jana'iz*, chapter 36

⁶ As for the Hadith "Your mother is in the Fire... My mother is with your mother," it is very weak and, moreover, contains an indication that the Prophet's ﷺ intercession may serve to bring them out of the Fire: "Whatever I ask my Lord about the two of them [the Prophet's parents], I hope that He will give me. I shall stand, on that day, at the praiseworthy Station."

This Hadith is narrated from Ibn Mas`ud by Ahmad, al-Tabari in his Tafsir, al-Hakim (2:365=1990 ed. 2:396), al-Darimi (book of Riqaq), Abu al-Shaykh in al-`Azama, and Ibn al- Mundhir, all with very weak chains because of `Uthman ibn `Umayr who is disclaimed as a narrator (*munkar al-hadith*) cf. Shaykh Ahmad Shakir in his edition of the *Musnad* (4:31-32 §3787), al-Haythami (10:361-362), and al-Dhahabi's rejection of al-Hakim's grading of authentic.