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The Woman Who Was Heard Above the Seven Heavens

In an age when everyone is busy and eager to speak, the story of Khawlah bint Tha'labah reminds us that one of the most Prophetic qualities is simply to listen.



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By **Rabiah Tul Adawiyah Mohamed Salleh**

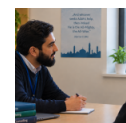


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We Are All Busy

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"We are all busy."

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That was the reply. I had just said something true about my own life, and the answer came back smooth and quick, like a door closing politely in my face.

It was an ordinary conversation. We were talking about workload. Teaching, meetings, students, deadlines, research, administration, the usual things that fill most of our days in academia. At some point I mentioned that I carry all of it while raising two children on my own. The responses were not cruel. They were not even wrong.

"We are all busy."

"I am struggling too."

"There is just too much work."

And yes. Everyone is busy. Everyone has something to carry. But I walked away from those conversations feeling heavier than when I came. Not because anyone intended to hurt me. Not because what they said was false. I felt heavy because I realised that although many words had been exchanged, I did not feel heard.

"We are all busy."

I learned something too. When a person shares a burden, the first thing they need is not a comparison. Not a reminder that everyone else is struggling too. Not a quick turn toward someone else's difficulties. Sometimes all a person needs is to be heard.

The Prophet ﷺ Listened

That was when I thought of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and how fortunate they were. Not because their lives were easy. Their lives were not easy at all. Many of them lived through hunger, grief, fear, loss, migration, poverty, and wars we can barely imagine. But they had something we often lack. They had access to a man who listened.

We praise the Prophet ﷺ for so many things. Only a few of those are his mercy, truthfulness, patience courage and leadership. Lately, though, one quality has stayed with me above the rest. Despite everything he carried, he listened. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ received revelation. He led a nation. He settled disputes, taught, faced hostility, cared for his family, and held the weight of an entire ummah on his shoulders.

And still, people could come to him. A woman could come with a complaint about her husband. A companion could come with confusion. Someone could come with grief, or with a question. Even children could approach him. None of them were treated as an interruption.

One striking example comes at the opening of Surah Al-Mujadilah.

The Woman Heard Above the Seven Heavens

A woman named Khawlah bint Tha'labah came to the Prophet ﷺ about her husband. Her marriage was breaking under an old, cruel custom, and she had nowhere else to take her pain. So she brought it to him, and she pleaded.

Here is the detail that stops me every time. Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, was in the same small room. The Prophet's home was modest, barely more than a chamber beside the mosque. Yet Aisha later said that even sitting that close, she could not catch all of Khawlah's words. A woman whispering her private grief in a corner, her voice almost too soft for the person beside her to follow.

And then Allah revealed:

Indeed, Allah has heard the argument of the woman who pleaded with you (O Prophet) concerning her husband, and appealed to Allah. Allah has heard your exchange. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (58:1)

Let us think about this. A voice too quiet for the woman next to her was heard perfectly from above the seven heavens. Aisha understood exactly what it meant. She said, “Blessed is the One whose hearing encompasses all things.” [1]

This is not a small thing.

In a world crowded with great events, wars and treaties and public affairs, a single woman’s private pain was not waved away. Her voice was not deemed insignificant. Her struggle at home was not ranked beneath the matters of state. She was heard, and her words were placed in the Qur’an till the Day of Judgment.

Maybe that is what I felt was missing. I had brought my small, ordinary weight to people, and the room stayed full of their own voices. I do not say this to blame them. Rather, I say it because I recognise the same habit in myself. We have all done it. We hear the first half of a sentence and we are already preparing our reply.

The age in which we live is a *tired* age. Everyone is stretched. Everyone has deadlines, bills, responsibilities, and challenges they rarely mention. And because everyone is carrying so much, our conversations have slowly turned into a competition of burdens.

“I am tired.”

“I am tired too.”

And just like that, listening disappears.

The Prophet ﷺ was busier than any of us will ever be. His busyness never became a reason to dismiss a single soul. That is the part I keep returning to.

The Forgotten Sunnah of Listening

Perhaps one forgotten sunnah is the sunnah of listening. Not listening in order to reply. Nor listening in order to correct. Also not listening just so we can steer the talk back to our own story. Listening so that another person does not feel alone with what they carry.

The companions were blessed because the Prophet ﷺ lived among them. They saw his mercy in his words, and they saw it in the way he gave people his full attention. We do not have him with us today. But we have his example. And

maybe, in an age where everyone is speaking over one another, one of the most Prophetic things we can do is simply to listen.

[1] Narration of Aisha may Allah be pleased with her, on the revelation of Surah Al-Mujadilah 58:1, cited in Tafsir Ibn Kathir at the opening of the surah.

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Rabiah Tul Adawiyah Mohamed Salleh teaches psycholinguistics at the Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia. Between lectures, research, the many demands of academia, and raising children, both human and feline, she finds solace in reflecting and writing about life through an Islamic perspective.

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