

THE IMPOSITION OF HANDS IN THE SUNNA

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The slapping or imposition of the hand on the chest or back is a Prophetic gesture associated with driving away evil influence (*waswās*) and conferring blessing as shown by the following reports:

(i) As Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb was sitting, after the conquest of Makka, watching the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ walking with the people close on his heels, he said to himself, “What if I gathered a huge army against Muḥammad? What if I resumed fighting this man?” Whereupon the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ walked over to him and slapped him in the chest or between his shoulder-blades and said: “Then Allāh shall disgrace you!” He raised his head and there was the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, standing next to him. Abū Sufyān said: “I repent to Allāh and seek forgiveness of Allāh! I was never certain, until this moment, that you were truly a Prophet. Indeed, I was saying this to myself just now.”¹

(ii) ‘Āmir ibn Rab‘a and Sahl ibn Hunayf went out to bathe. ‘Āmir took off his woolen robe. He [Sahl] narrates: “I looked at him and I cast the evil eye on him. He went down into the water then I heard a noise coming from him. I called out to him three times but there was no answer. I went to call the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ who came on foot and waded his way in the water. Then he slapped his chest with his hand, saying: “O Allāh! drive away from him its heat and its coolness and its harm.” Then he ﷺ rose up and said: “If one of you sees something that pleases him in his brother – whether in his person or property – let him invoke blessing for him, for the evil eye is a reality.”²

(iii) A report from Ṭalḥa states: A man recited [the Qur’an] before ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab ؓ who corrected him, so the man said: “I recited before the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and he did not correct me. They went for arbitration before the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ where the man said: “Messenger of Allāh, did you not made me recite such-and-such a verse?” He said yes. Something stirred in ‘Umar’s breast. Realizing this from ‘Umar’s face, the Prophet ﷺ slapped his chest (*daraba ṣadrah*) and said: “Off, devil!” saying it three times. Then he said: “O ‘Umar! The Qur’an is, all of it, correct (*ṣawāb*), as long as you do not change mercy into punishment or punishment into mercy.”³

(iv) In similar circumstances, Ubay ibn Ka‘b said: “There occurred in my mind a sort of denial which did not occur even during the Days of Ignorance. When the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ saw how I was affected, he slapped me on the chest. I broke into a sweat and felt as if I were looking at Allāh in fear.”⁴

(v) A woman brought to the Prophet ﷺ a black slave-girl, saying, “Messenger of Allāh, I am obligated to free a Muslim slave. Does this girl fulfill this obligation of mine?” The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ asked her: “Who is your Lord?” She said, “Allāh.” He asked, “And what is your religion?” She said, “Al-Islām.” He asked, “And who am I?” She replied, “You are the Messenger of Allāh.” He asked: “Do you pray the Five [Prayers] and do you accept what I have brought from Allāh?” She said yes. Whereupon the Prophet ﷺ slapped her on the chest and said: “Free her!”⁵

(vi) Jarīr ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Bajalī was sent by the Prophet ﷺ on a mission to destroy Dhū al-Khalāṣa, the idol-house of Khath‘am, nicknamed the Yemenite Ka‘ba. Jarīr narrates: “I went along with an hundred and fifty horsemen but I could not sit steadily on horse. I mentioned it to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ who then struck his hand on my chest so hard that I could see the trace of his fingers on it, saying: ‘O Allah! Grant him steadfastness and make him a guide of righteousness and a rightly-guided one!’”⁶

(vii) One time the Prophet ﷺ went to al-Baqī‘ at night and ‘Ā’isha followed him surreptitiously. After his visit, he turned to walk back home. ‘Ā’isha narrates:

¹Narrated from Abū Ishāq al-Subay‘ī and Ibn ‘Abbās by Ibn ‘Asākir (23:457-458), Ibn Sa‘d, al-Bayhaqī, and others cf. *Isāba* (3:414), *Bidāya* (4:304), *Khaṣā’is* (1:441), and Dahlān’s *Sīra* (2:84).

²Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* (1981 Dar al-Fikr ed. 4:412) through ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir.

³Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, beginning, chapter on the dialects in which the Qur’an was revealed.

⁴Narrated by Muslim.

⁵Narrated – with a chain authenticated by al-Dāraquṭnī in his *‘Ilal* (5:194) – through Abū ‘Āsim al-Nabīl, from Abū Ma‘dān, from ‘Awn ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Utba from his father, from his grandfather, by al-Tabarānī in *al-Kabīr* (17:136), al-Bayhaqī (7:388), and al-Ḥākim (1990 ed. 3:289).

⁶Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

He hastened his steps and I hastened mine. He ran and I ran. He arrived as I arrived except that I entered first. As I lay down in the bed, he entered and said: “Why is it, ‘Ā’ish [*sic*], that you are out of breath?” I said: “No reason!” He said: “Tell me, or the Subtle and Aware will inform me!” I said: “Messenger of Allāh, may my father and mother be your ransom!” Then I told him. He said: “So it was your form I saw in front of me?” I said yes. He gave me a push or slap on the chest which made me sore then said: “Did you think that Allāh and His Apostle would deal unjustly with you?”⁷

(viii) Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad reported on the authority of his father: “We went to see Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh who began attending to his visitors until it was my turn. I said: ‘I am Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Husayn.’ He placed his hand upon my head and opened my upper button and then the lower one and placed his palm on my chest. I was, in those days, a young boy. He said: ‘You are welcome, my nephew.’”⁸

(ix) Shayba ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Ṭalḥa narrated: “The year of the Conquest the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ entered Makka by force. I said to myself, let me join up with the Quraysh and the Hawāzin in Hunayn. Perhaps, in the fray of battle, I shall be able to fall upon Muḥammad unguarded and I shall be the one who obtains Quraysh’s revenge. I also used to say, even if no one [non-Muslim] is left among the Arabs and ‘Ajam, I shall still not follow Muḥammad! I shall never follow him! I was, therefore, very determined against him when I rode out and my determination only increased in intensity. When the people entered the fray, the fighting caused the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to dismount his mule. I unsheathed my sword and approached to carry out my intent against him. I raised my sword and was almost standing over him when he put up, in front of me, a blaze of fire like a lightning bolt that almost charred me! I put up my hand before my eyes, fearing to lose my sight, then I turned towards the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. At that time he called me: ‘Shayba, come here!’ I went near him and he wiped my breast then said: ‘O Allāh, protect him from the devil.’ I swear it by Allāh! – at that very moment, he became more beloved to me than my hearing, my sight, and my own life! Allāh took away everything that was in me. ... Then he said: ‘Shayba, what Allāh desired for you is better than what you desired for yourself.’ Then he revealed to me all that I had harbored in my heart – things I had never mentioned to anyone whatsoever. I said, ‘I bear witness that there is no God but Allāh and that you are the Messenger of Allāh.’ Then I said, ‘Ask forgiveness for me, O Messenger of Allāh!’ He replied, ‘Allāh forgive you.’”⁹

(x) The Prophet ﷺ said to Wābiṣa: “Consult yourself, consult your heart (*istafti nafsak istafti qalbak*), Wābiṣa!” three times while poking Wābiṣa’s chest with his [first] three fingers, adding: “Virtue is what sets the soul and heart at rest (*mā-tma’annat ilayhi al-nafsu wamā-tma’anna ilayhi al-qalb*) while vice is what pricks the conscience [lit. “becomes fixed in yourself”] and nags [lit. “goes back and forth in”] the breast (*mā hāka fil-nafsi wa taraddada fil-ṣadr*), no matter what people keep recommending to you.”¹⁰

(xi) A report states that as Yūsuf ﷺ approached the King’s wife, his father Ya‘qūb ﷺ appeared and slapped him in the chest, whereupon Yūsuf’s lust exited through his fingertips.¹¹

Blessings of Allāh and His Greeting of Peace upon you, Messenger of Allāh, and upon your Family and Companions and their faithful followers to the Resurrection-Day.

⁷Narrated by Muslim.

⁸Narrated by Muslim as part of a longer hadīth.

⁹Narrated through al-Wāqidi by Ibn ‘Asākir (23:255-256) and Ibn al-Jawzī in *Sifat al-Safwa* (1:727-728).

¹⁰Narrated with a weak chain by al-Dārimī, Ahmad, Abū Ya‘lā (3:160-162), and Abū Nu‘aym in the *Hilya* (1985 ed. 2:24 and 6:255). The hadīth also comes through *ṣahīḥ* chains but without the poking.

¹¹Narrated by al-Ṭabarī (12:187), al-Qurtubī (9:170), Ibn Kathīr (2:475), al-Jalālayn, and others.