

## Sūrat al-Baqarah Verse 249 (part I)

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَنْ لَمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنْ  
اعْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ ۖ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ

2:249 (i) - As Talut set out with the troops, he said, ‘Allah will test you with a stream. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong to me, but those who do not drink from it will belong to me, except he who takes with his hand as much of it as fills the hand.’ But they drank from it, except a few of them.

### Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why does Allah test people? (To sift out the true believers from the rest)
- 2) What exception did Talut make? Why would taking one scoop - as much as fills the hand - of water be okay? (that was what was necessary to relieve intense thirst, a need, not a want)
- 3) The Banu Israel were so keen on having a leader to lead them to fight their enemies? Why did they fail this test then?

### Commentary

The Banu Israel finally accepted Talut as their king. He gathered a large army to fight the enemies and they set off. The people were setting off on an important venture and needed to be firm and determined. Their past history in war was not very good and they had lost to the enemies. To make sure the army was ready this time they were tested with a test that was quite difficult – refraining from water when they were thirsty. This was to sift out those who were weak and unable to endure difficulties.

The success of an individual as well as a group depends on their inner strength. This strength is manifested during difficult tests and can even increase through these tests. The Banu Israel had wanted to fight the enemies for a long time. Mentally they were prepared but the question was if they were all determined enough to see it through. The test was to see if they would persevere when things would get difficult.

The test would also show how obedient the people were to their leader. The success of a group depends on their acceptance of the leader’s authority. If they objected to what he asked them to do, and disobeyed, the chances of winning over the enemies were slim. There was no point in taking people to fight who were not ready to follow the leader’s command.

The allowance of drinking only a handful of water is to fulfill the need of the body. The command was not to drink nothing. It was to refrain from taking a long sip of water or to drop a lot. Drinking more than what was required to alleviate the intense thirst would be for satisfaction, but the test was to deny satisfaction to the self. It was a test to train and discipline the nafs which is always seeking

comfort and satisfaction. Indulging in comfort, satisfaction, ease, makes a person less in control of the nafs. When a believer controls the desires of the nafs he/she can reach higher levels of faith and obedience to Allah.

Sadly, only a small section of the army passed the test. Most of them drank the water even though they were told not to. This led to a second division in the army. The first division was when they set off. Some of the people did not accompany them due to their work or family commitments. Those who proceeded and were eager to fight were then tested for their inner strength. Only some remained who would actually go with Talut to fight the enemies.

According to a hadith of Imam al-Baqir (a) quoted in Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn, the number of people who remained with Talut was 313.

### Some Lessons

- 1) Difficulties and tests in life reveal the true character of people.
- 2) Obedience to authority that comes from God means accepting without questioning or rejecting.
- 3) The ones on the right path have always been in minority.

### Connecting verses

- 1) Enduring life's tests and trials with strong conviction; 2:155-156, 3:186
- 2) Struggle against the nafs – 91:7-9

### Connecting Topics

#### 1) Tests and trials in Life

- <https://www.al-islam.org/philosophy-islamic-laws-nasir-makarim-shirazi-jafar-subhani/question-29-why-does-allah-subject>
- <https://imam-us.org/trials-and-tribulations-lessons-from-imam-musa-al-kadhim-p>

#### 2) Struggle against the Nafs

- <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/merits-soul-struggle-against-self-jihad-al-nafs>
- <https://en.wikishia.net/view/Tazkiya>
- <http://www.zaynabacademy.org/understanding-the-three-types-of-nafs/> (non-Shia source)