



TABLIGH

(A short story)

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The news that Shabban Miya had become a preacher (Tabligi) spread through the neighborhood like wildfire. While no one typically paid much attention to someone becoming a preacher, Shabban Miya's transformation was accompanied by events that reached the men through the women of the community. People gathered at the neighborhood shops, relishing these tales and laughing heartily. Shabban Miya was a brass handicraft factory owner in the city, but his sons, seeing his age and outdated ways, urged him to retire from work. “Abba, you have worked hard for us; now it is our duty to take care of you. Please relax or spend your time on religious matters.” Reluctantly, Shabban Miya was forced into retirement. For someone who had spent his entire life commanding the artisans, stepping away from work felt akin to a king being stripped of his crown. He struggled with the question of whom to command and what to do sitting idly at home. His sons, due to his habits, did not want to employ him, as new methods had emerged in the changing times that rendered his ways obsolete. Thus, it became imperative for them to relieve Shabban Miya of his responsibilities.

As he pondered how to fill his newfound painful free time and reclaim his authority, a preaching group called Tabligi Jamaat crossed his path. For the first time, he joined them for a forty-day journey called ‘Chilla’ outside the province. He enjoyed being with the group and, upon returning, thought that this would not only improve his fate but also help him restore his sense of command. In a short while, he began to relish this new endeavor. During his days as a factory owner, called karkhanedar, there were craftsmen who defied his orders, and there were people in the neighborhood who dismissed him, constantly pointing out his flaws. Now, during the preaching sessions, those same individuals stood silently before him, providing a great sense of satisfaction to his ego.

Most of the residents in this neighborhood were artisans connected to the metalwork industry. After a long day of hard labor, they would gather at the local shops in the evenings to joke and laugh with one another. Since the factories had their weekly holiday on Fridays, payments for the week’s work were made on Thursday evenings. That day, the shops bustled with activity, and the metalworkers

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The story was received on 23/04/2025 accepted on 11/07/2025 and published on 30/07/2025



spent freely. As laughter and jokes filled the air, Shabban Miya would suddenly appear with the preaching group, and the tabligh would commence. In those moments, the people's demeanor transformed as if they had been caught in sin. With heads bowed, they listened quietly, and after the promise to regularly attend the mosque, the preaching group would move on. This became Shabban Miya's daily routine—he would ambush people in this manner. With each passing day, the townsfolk grew increasingly resentful of him. They would murmur among themselves, "We finally get one day of respite during the week, and here he comes! We have our own worries; our children are working hard. If only he could spend a week working by the furnace, he would know how hard life is for us, sucking the blood of laborers."

Shabban Miya's peers, aged like him, vented their frustrations: "After all, what do we know of how he amassed his wealth? Islam teaches us to pay a worker before his sweat dries, yet he disregards that entirely. He's an expert in shortchanging us. As for his eldest son, he's also an exporter—he got a two-crore advance license for importing brass and copper scrap by fleecing the government first." The undercurrents of resentment flowed through the conversations, revealing a growing discontent with Shabban Miya and his newfound role as a preacher. People would criticize him behind his back, saying, "People like Shabban Miya, under the guise of tabligh, only engage in empty rhetoric. None of them ever come and ask if we have food cooked at home or how we are managing our lives. They never inquire if someone is going hungry." Shabban Miya knew that these artisans spoke ill of him when he wasn't around, but he found solace in the thought that even kings are criticized behind their backs; what was he in comparison? Despite all the criticism, Shabban Miya continued his religious work, unwavering in his commitment.

In the neighborhood, there was another man named Jamal, who had returned from the preaching group with Shabban Miya. However, something in the group had changed him; after their return, he became distant from Shabban Miya and the other members. Yet, a significant change did occur in his daily life: he began teaching the local metalworkers in the evenings. He was a math teacher at a nearby intermediate college but did not give private tuition. Instead, he helped the children from poor families without charging them a penny. What set Jamal apart was his unwavering commitment to helping others, day or night. He would often say that a true Muslim is recognized by their actions. "Our community is suffering from a disease of ignorance," he would explain, "and the reason for this backwardness is the lack of knowledge. It is every Muslim's first duty to combat this disease at its roots. If our educated brethren in tabligh decided to dedicate just one hour a day to teach their illiterate brothers for free, we could elevate our community significantly." He pointed out that while Islam advocates for equal education, at gatherings, the volunteers doing hard work were mostly the poor. The wealthy often shied away from labor, opting instead to dig holes for tents



while advising others, “Take a shovel and build a room in paradise.” Jamal questioned why they wouldn’t wield the shovel themselves to secure their own place in paradise. The metalworkers appreciated his words and held him in high regard. Jamal frequently visited the government hospital, assisting needy patients, and sometimes even stayed overnight to care for them.

When Shabban Miya first joined the preaching group Tabligi Jamaat for the forty-day journey, he found it to be quite enjoyable, almost like a picnic. So, when the opportunity arose to go out with the group again, he eagerly signed up. During that trip, an experienced member of the tabligh instilled in him the notion that a true preacher begins their work at home. Upon returning from the journey, Shabban Miya turned his attention to his family’s daily routines. He realized that the religious lifestyle they had been taught in the group contrasted sharply with how his family lived. His grandchildren would come home from school and create a ruckus all day long. His daughters-in-law, as soon as they found a moment of respite from housework, would become glued to the television. In the evenings, after returning from work, his sons would also settle in front of the TV, with remote in hand.

Shabban Miya had a large joint family, consisting of three sons and four daughters, all of whom had already been married off. They lived in a spacious house with large rooms on all sides and a grand lobby that served as the drawing room. On one side, there were dining tables, and on the other, a kitchen with a large window that opened into the drawing room. The TV was positioned in such a way that both the women cooking and those dining could easily watch the programs.

This setup, once a source of comfort, now troubled Shabban Miya. He felt a growing dissonance between the teachings of a simple, religious life he had learned and the chaotic reality of his household. Shabban Miya's three sons each had their own businesses. His eldest son, Nabban, exported decorative handicrafts, the middle son ran a gas agency, and the youngest imported goods from China. Shabban Miya first addressed his daughters-in-law, saying, “Women should adopt an Islamic way of life. They must cover their bodies from head to toe and be diligent about their prayers.” The daughters-in-law listened quietly, nodding their heads, thinking, “Abba just returned from tabligh; this enthusiasm will last a few days at most.” However, their assumption proved incorrect, as Shabban Miya began to closely observe their daily routines. He noticed that they slept late into the morning, causing them to miss their Fajr prayers. While preparing dinner in the evening, their attention was often glued to TV serials. Their conversations revolved only around jewelry, clothes, and weddings, with little focus on anything else.

He urged them not to let worldly distractions make them forsake their faith. “You must wake up early, perform Fajr prayer, and then attend to your other tasks,” he advised. Initially, the daughters-in-law attempted to rise early, but for various reasons, they still missed the prayer. Their late



mornings had valid excuses: they all had small children who took their naps during the day and kept their mothers awake at night. Consequently, their eyes would only open late in the morning. This cycle of distractions and missed prayers troubled Shabban Miya deeply, and he felt compelled to intervene further. Seeing his preaching efforts bear little fruit, Shabban Miya took it upon himself to wake his daughters-in-law before Fajr. He began knocking on their doors every morning. Although his sons found this early morning disturbance bothersome, they were also frustrated by their wives' late sleeping habits. In hopes of improving their routines, they remained silent about Shabban Miya's actions.

However, things escalated when Shabban Miya started imposing restrictions on them. The situation reached its peak when he ordered all the televisions in the house to be turned off. "The TV is a box of sins," he declared. "It drives away blessings from our homes, seduces people like a devil, and when a TV enters a house, the angels of mercy stop visiting." When their favorite serials were suddenly cut off, his daughters-in-law felt as if they had been deprived of an addiction. Meanwhile, Shabban Miya's sons returned home in the evenings, exhausted from their day's work, and would instinctively reach for the remote to unwind. Thus, the sudden ban on TV also displeased them, but they begrudgingly accepted it for the sake of their father's religious concerns.

The atmosphere in the house changed, and a sense of resistance began to brew among the women, while the men, caught in the middle, struggled to balance their own desires with their father's firm beliefs. Although they tried to subtly explain their feelings to Shabban Miya, their attempts were in vain. He remained steadfast in his beliefs, dismissing their concerns as mere resistance to the necessary changes he was trying to instill in the household. The tension grew, as Shabban Miya's determination clashed with the frustration of his family, leaving them feeling increasingly isolated in their own home. Shabban Miya's wife had passed away the previous year, so the responsibility of managing all the household meals fell to his daughters-in-law. While they couldn't care for him with the same attentiveness that his wife had, they still made an effort to ensure he had everything he needed, leaving no room for complaints. Despite the tension surrounding Shabban Miya's newfound rigidity, the daughters-in-law worked hard to maintain a semblance of order and comfort in the home, trying to balance their own frustrations with their duties. The restrictions imposed by Shabban Miya were bearable for a day or two, but they had become a daily affair. No matter how much the children troubled them at night, and even if they fell asleep in the early hours, they still had to wake up before Fajr. A daughter-in-law herself, Shabban Miya's wife had kept the family connected to the outside world as the television was turned off for a month. Now, the daughters-in-law found themselves missing the latest updates from their favorite shows, wondering what twists had befallen the characters in "Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki," what new designer outfits Kashish was



wearing, and what had happened to Tulsi this time. They had to rely on neighbors for such gossip. Frustrated by the ongoing preaching activities at home, the younger daughters-in-law had already visited their parental homes twice. There, at least, they could watch their favorite serials without restrictions. However, staying for too long was not an option either, as the women in the neighborhood began to whisper about why someone's daughter was lingering at her parents' house for so long. This pressure kept them torn between their own needs and the expectations of family and society.

Meanwhile, Shabban Miya's sons were also beginning to feel frustrated with him. The children's faces had lost their smiles, as they constantly worried that their grandfather would scold them for playing and launch into another preaching session. As tensions escalated, the three daughters-in-law convened to discuss the situation. They devised a strategy to restore the household's former atmosphere and promptly set their plan into action. They decided to approach Shabban Miya with a gentle yet united front, expressing their feelings about the impact of his restrictions. Their goal was to strike a balance between his religious fervor and the family's need for a joyful, relaxed environment. By addressing him with respect and understanding, they hoped to show him that their happiness and spiritual well-being were not mutually exclusive. With a clear plan in place, they prepared for the difficult conversation, hoping it would lead to a more harmonious home.

That day, Shabban Miya waited for a long time for breakfast, but it never arrived. He was puzzled about what could be causing such a delay. Was one of his daughters-in-law unwell? But surely not all of them could be sick. Every morning, when he returned from prayer, breakfast was ready for him, and after eating, he would head out again, only returning for lunch. Yet today, he remained seated, waiting for his meal. When he heard no sounds from inside, he called out to his eldest daughter-in-law. After several attempts without any response, he became irritated from hunger and called for his youngest grandson in a stern voice. A moment later, the boy appeared at the door, and before Shabban Miya could ask, he explained, "Dada Abba, they are reciting the Quran inside." Anxiously, Shabban Miya replied, "How long will that take? I don't know!" With that, his grandson disappeared back into the house. That day, he left without having breakfast, and it turned out to be quite a miserable day for him. He wandered among acquaintances, silent and dispirited, feeling the weight of his hunger and frustration.

The next day, breakfast arrived on time, but as soon as Shabban Miya took a sip of his milk, he noticed it was lacking sweetness. He called out, and his youngest daughter-in-law came out. He expressed his frustration, saying, "What's going on these days? You forgot to add sugar to the milk, and you put whole almonds in instead of grinding them!"



In a subdued voice, his daughter-in-law replied, "Abba, we've been reciting Surah Yaseen two thousand five hundred times for the blessings of the house. That's what's been keeping us occupied. With our minds focused on religious work, this slip happened. We will be more careful in the future." Shabban Miya was left speechless. After her explanation, she went back inside, leaving him outside, grappling with the unexpected turn of events. Now it had become a daily affair; sometimes the women were engaged in gatherings, sharing stories of ten wives, reciting Ayat-e-Kareema, or concluding Surah Yaseen. They also organized meals for orphans, leaving Shabban Miya's daily life significantly affected. Breakfast was no longer served on time, nor was lunch or dinner. He could no longer be sure if the food would even be satisfactory. The flavors he once relished were gone, and he began to suspect that his daughters-in-law might be watering down the milk they served for breakfast. He felt like a snake that had swallowed a lizard—unable to digest or regurgitate.

It was a matter of religion, so he couldn't voice his complaints outright. Whenever he tried to express dissatisfaction, his daughters-in-law would counter his points with ease, leaving him speechless. Their engrossment in religious activities meant that his own engagement with preaching diminished. He found himself entangled in the struggles of daily needs, and when outside groups came to visit, he would join them half-heartedly, feeling increasingly isolated in his own home. One day, feeling dejected, Shabban Miya went to visit his close friend Azeem Miya. Sensing his sadness, Azeem Miya casually asked him what was bothering him. Shabban Miya had been waiting for someone to inquire about his plight, and he poured out his heart, detailing everything that had been troubling him. Finally, he asked, "What should I do in this situation?" Azeem Miya listened attentively and, after some thought, replied seriously, "Shabban, I believe I've figured out the real reason behind your troubles. You've brought this predicament upon yourself. If you want to be free from it, here's what you should do: When you get home, announce in front of your daughters-in-law that the period of preaching at home is over, and from now on, it will be done outside." He continued, "Just watch how your troubles will vanish after that. And beware! If you ever try to preach at home again, you'll find yourself in trouble once more. I'm surprised that with all your business experience, you made such a mistake."

"Tell me, does our religion not instruct us to pay a laborer before his sweat dries? Have you ever done that? And what about the other businessmen in this city, many of whom are also regular prayers? They hardly adhere to these Islamic principles. You had dozens of artisans working for you; if you had followed this principle, would your business have thrived? Just look at your eldest son—he runs an export business where manufacturers invest heavily. Your son only pays the manufacturers once he receives payment from abroad. If he were to start adhering to Islamic



principles, would he still be able to make such profits? You've spent your whole life disregarding these Islamic rules, so what has suddenly compelled you to start preaching at home? I'm not discouraging you from doing da'wah; you certainly have time for religious work, but do it outside the home."

Shabban Miya did exactly that. He went home and announced that the period of preaching at home was over, and from now on, it would take place outside. After this announcement, the household gradually began to return to normal. His daughters-in-law resumed their previous roles of caring for him, and the children, who had once been timid, started running around and making noise as they used to. It felt as if the false facade that had settled over the house for a time had been lifted, and slowly, everyone began to forget the events of the past. From this incident, Shabban Miya learned that imparting religious education is one thing, while putting it into practice is another. He realized that preaching is better conducted outside the home. Consequently, after this event, he resumed his work of preaching outside and complete peace was restored at home.