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**An Elegant and Faith Enhancing Exposition of: Arabic Terms *Ghafr* and *Dhanb* in the Chapter *Al-Fath***

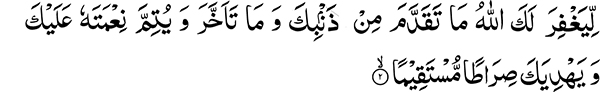
I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah.

After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.



Surely We have granted thee a clear victory,



That Allah may cover (*ghafr*) for thee thy (alleged) shortcomings (*dhanb*) in the past and those to come, and complete His favour to thee and guide thee on a right path (48:1-2)

**Allegations of the Critics**

This chapter of the Holy Quran is named *Al-Fath*: (The Victory). The verses I have recited have been a source of severe criticism against Islam by followers of other religions in particular Christianity. It is assumed that Allah addressing the Holy Prophet states, He has forgiven his past and future sins. Objection is then raised based upon this assumption that since Allah has mentioned forgiveness of sins one can conclude that the Holy Prophet himself must have committed some sins. This is certainly not true. Is it possible that he who has been sent for reformation of the people by Allah the Most High can in person also be guilty of sin? If the Holy Prophet himself was sinful, how could he guide others towards righteousness and away from the path of evil? Only he can serve as a guide who is not involved in sin. It certainly does not seem to be an appropriate tactic for the Christian critics to employ when Jesus himself says: “Why do you call me Good.” (Mark 10:18)

**Critics have not pondered upon the Context**

Nevertheless they have not held back their criticism. In fact if one ponders upon the context of these verses, it becomes abundantly clear that there are no grounds for such an interpretation. The wonders of the Holy Quran are limitless but one only needs to ask a few simple questions; What is the relationship of victory with forgiveness of sins? How does victory lead to such forgiveness?

The second verse is preceded by the words:

Surely We have granted thee a clear victory,

So how can one assume from this clear victory that sins were forgiven as a result of it? It becomes abundantly clear after such deliberation that this conclusion is wrong.

The real meaning becomes apparent if we look at the events leading to this clear victory.

**Meaning of Clear Victory**

A *hadith* of Bukhari (considered the most reliable collection of *Hadith*) states the clear victory in this verse refers to the Truce of Hudaibiyah. Now let me explain how this was a clear victory. In the sixth year of *Hijra* the Holy Prophet departed Madinah accompanied by about 13 to15 hundred companions with the intention of performing the *Hajj* (Pilgrimage). This was after he saw in a vision that he was performing the *Hajj* together with his companions. The Holy Prophet had not performed the Pilgrimage since leaving Makkah six years earlier. As the intent of this journey was to perform the Pilgrimage the companions were instructed not to carry any weapons. A sheathed sword was the only arm allowed to be carried. A sword in those days was almost a part of everyday dress no matter how peaceful the state. The Makkan disbelievers gathered at a place called Hudaibiyah in large numbers. They stopped the Holy Prophet and his followers from moving on towards Makkah to perform the sacred rites. He delegated a group of his esteemed companions to negotiate with and dissuade them from their hostile intentions.

The Holy Prophet also took a pledge from his companions known as *Bait al Rizwan*. They pledged to sacrifice their lives for Islam and exert their full effort for its cause.

**Unfavorable Terms of the Truce of Hudaibiyah**

Eventually a truce was declared with the opponents known as the Truce of Hudaibiyah. Terms of this truce appeared quite humiliating to the Muslims. Upon perceiving this sentiment Hazrat Umar earnestly remonstrated with the Holy Prophet. “Are you not the Messenger of Allah?” He asked. “Is not ours a righteous cause?” On getting a reply in the affirmative, he argued, “Why then should we suffer so much humiliation in the matter of faith?” The Holy Prophet assured him that whatever he was doing was at the bidding of Allah. “Did you not tell us,” rejoined Umar, “that we shall perform the pilgrimage?” “But I never told you,” replied the Holy Prophet, “that we shall do so this very year.”

One of the conditions of this truce was that the Muslims would turn back without performing the Pilgrimage and return the following year not staying more than three days. This condition was imposed only to show the Muslims had successfully been prevented from carrying out their intent. Quraish were not to lose anything by allowing the Muslims to perform Hajj. There were two other conditions also. One was they shall not take with them any of the Muslims already living in Makkah and they were not to stand in the way of any one from among themselves should he wish to remain behind at Makkah. The other one being, should any of the Makkans go over to Madinah the Muslims were to hand him over to the Makkans; but if any of the Madinite Muslims should rejoin the Makkans, the latter shall not restore him to Muslims. This was very painful for the Muslims. Under the stipulations of this treaty, a person recites the *Kalima* (Formula of Faith) and wants to join them and he was to be sent back to bear the severe persecution and torture of the disbelievers.

**Holy Prophet’s Exemplary Foresight**

What this really shows is that the Holy Prophet was certain a Muslim was unlikely to return to disbelief after accepting Islam. The thought that someone might turn away from their religion only passes through the mind of the worshippers of falsehood. Islam is not a religion that those who truly believe in it would return to disbelief. Today we are facing difficulties. People are told not to meet us, share their food with us or listen to what we say. These measures are a sign of being in the wrong. Those who follow the truth are not afraid of communicating with or meeting someone. The Holy Prophet was firmly convinced that a Muslim would not turn back to disbelief after accepting Islam. Nevertheless it was very painful to turn over a Muslim to the disbelievers. Subsequent events, however, confirmed the Holy Prophet’s conviction. After declaration of the Truce, those who came to the Holy Prophet and became Muslims were not allowed to stay with him in accordance with the terms of the treaty. He told them to go back and Allah will create a way for them. This was how strictly he followed the terms and conditions of the treaties he made.

**Exemplary Faith of the Believers**

On the other hand these converts to Islam also remained steadfast. They did not turn away from Islam upon realizing such unfavorable circumstances. They formed another settlement in a place not subject to the terms of the treaty and gradually strengthened their presence over there. People allege that the Holy Prophet converted people to Islam at the point of the sword. These incidents clearly demonstrate that they accepted Islam willingly and were ready to sacrifice their lives for this purpose. Was this the behavior of someone who had been forcefully converted? To have such firm faith in the hearts cannot be the result of forceful conversion. So this chapter mentions victories of Islam. What sort of victories were these? Their foundations were laid upon apparently very weak stipulations. This tells us what is meant by victories in Islam. Superficial analysis shows the enemy to have the upper hand but the Holy Quran calls this a clear victory. It is indeed an amazing Book.

**How was the Truce of Hudaibiyah a clear victory?**

Future events would show how it was a clear victory. During time of war even good qualities of the enemy are always considered as failings. As long as the state of war remained, people did not have the time to think about Islam. Before this truce they harbored many apprehensions, objections and malice in their hearts against Islam. Now with the declaration of truce and establishment of peace they had the opportunity for thoughtful perusal. This is when their hearts and minds underwent a change.

It was for this reason also that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad asked the religious scholars of his time to put their hostile attitude on hold and allow him to carry on his work.

In short after the Truce of Hudaibiyah was established, people’s hearts underwent a change. At the time of this truce, there were thirteen hundred people with the Holy Prophet. After about eighteen to twenty two months, at the time of the conquest of Makkah, there were ten thousand who accompanied the Holy Prophet. This was the clear victory that came about as a result of the Truce of Hudaibiyah, proving the message of Islam was true. Man can fight sword with the sword but his opposition to truth is eventually bound to fail. Years of war and lack of communication had nurtured objections and malice in the hearts against Islam. After the establishment of peace, when they met the Holy Prophet in person they realized that the criticism against him had been spread purely on basis of enmity. These moral victories were really the magnificent victories of Islam. Conquest of Makkah was in a sense a victory that Muslim rule was established over there. It paled in comparison with the great moral victory and example of forgiveness the Holy Prophet manifested on this occasion. After the enemy had surrendered, he repeated the Quranic words, “no reproof be against you this day,” and forgave all their atrocities. It was this great moral example that convinced the Makkans that such a compassionate heart could only belong to a prophet. Henceforth they entered the folds of Islam in great numbers.

**A Great Miracle**

This was a great miracle that came about at the hands of the Holy Prophet. There is another example of his forgiving nature. The Holy Prophet was resting alone under the shade of a tree. A disbeliever came and stood right over his head and asked: “Who can save you now Muhammad?” The Holy Prophet’s calm response was: “My God!” As soon as he uttered these words, hands of the disbeliever started to shake and the sword fell out of his hands. The Holy Prophet picked it up and asked: “Who can save you now?” His reply was, “No one.” He forgave him and let him go. Impressed by this example of moral excellence the disbeliever turned around and immediately accepted Islam. There are many such moral miracles of Islam that were conducive to people’s acceptance of this faith and they joined in large numbers. The chapter *Al-Fath* therefore refers to the Truce of Hudaibiyah as a clear victory.

Moreover it concludes with these words:

He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions. And Allah is enough for a witness. (48:28)

These words indicate that the truce will result in Islam prevailing over other religions because its truths captivate the hearts of people. It was to come about not with use of the sword but as a result of the good character and gentle behavior of the Muslims towards its opponents.

**The Real meaning of Arabic words *Ghafr and Dhanb***

I had mentioned earlier that there should be a connection between the different verses of the Holy Quran. How is this statement of the Holy Quran: (That Allah may cover (*ghafr*) for thee thy (alleged) shortcomings (*dhanb*) in the past and those to come) connected with the clear victory? If we ponder on this we find out that it refers to the objections the disbelievers had against the Holy Prophet. When they did not have the opportunity to think, all they could see were the shortcomings of the Holy Prophet. These objections are referred to in the Arabic word *dhanb*. When there is minimal contact and lack of communication objections tend to be exaggerated.

**Example of Cain and Able**

The Holy Quran has given the example of two brothers (Cain and Able) without mentioning their names. It states:

And relate to them with truth the story of the two sons of Adam, when they offered an offering, but it was accepted from one of them and was not accepted from the other. He said: I will certainly kill thee. (The other) said: Allah accepts only from the dutiful.

If thou stretch out thy hand against me to kill me I shall not stretch out my hand against thee to kill thee. Surely I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds. (5:27-28)

When they both made a sacrifice, it was accepted from one of them and not the other. The righteous brother tells the wicked one that sacrifice is accepted only from those who guard against evil. Even after knowing that he intended to kill him he would not raise his hand against him and kill him:

Surely I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

He calls himself the dutiful or righteous and points out to his brother that is why his sacrifice was accepted. He then goes on to say:

I would rather that thou shouldst bear the sin) against me (*ismi*) and thine own sin (*ismika*), thus thou wouldst be of the companions of the Fire; and that is the recompense of the unjust. (5:29)

*Ithmi* here means not my sin, but the sin committed against me, i.e., the sin of murder; while by *ithmi-ka* is meant thy sin, i.e., his previous sin on account of which his offering was not accepted.

***Dhanbi-ka* means Thine Alleged Shortcomings**

*Dhanbi-ka* does not mean the shortcomings of the Holy Prophet but the objections and allegations against him by the disbelievers. We witnessed how all of these were removed after the Truce of Hudaibiyah. This is the real meaning of the Arabic words *ghafr and dhanb* and the historical record proves the validity of this interpretation.

After the truce when people had time to think they rejected the allegations and objections raised against the Holy Prophet. There is another testimony and prophecy in the Arabic words *ma taqadama* (those in the past), meaning those allegations that have already been made. *Ma takhar* means those yet to come. This includes all the books, posters, and the false propaganda against the Holy Prophet by the Christian and Arya Samaaj critics. Holy Quran reassures the Holy Prophet in these words that Allah will:

Complete His favour to thee and guide thee on a right path (48:1-2)

In another chapter it is stated:

And thou seest men entering the religion of Allah in companies, (110:2)

*Ma takhar* contains the Promise of Allah the Most High that He will also remove those objections that are as yet to be raised. One should not be in doubt that the criticism against the Holy Prophet will remain in place. All the wrong perceptions that have been put into the people’s minds against him and the ugly portrayal of his character will by Allah’s permission be eliminated. We, however, need to make an effort in this regard. This is the meaning of *ma takhar min zambi ka*: the allegations against you (the Holy Prophet) that are yet to come will also be refuted and hearts when purified of these misgivings will turn to Islam.