

DAY 9

ANSWER: Door of *Ḥiṭṭah*

SŪRAH AL-BAQARAH: VERSES 58-59

And when We said, 'Enter this town, and eat there to your heart's content wherever you will. And enter the gate prostrating and say: *Ḥiṭṭah* (we seek forgiveness) - so that We forgive your errors. And We shall give much more to those who are good in deeds. ' (Verse 58)

But those who were unjust substituted another word for the one that was set for them. So, We sent down upon those who were unjust a scourge from heaven, because they have been acting sinfully. (Verse 59)

COMMENTARY

There are two views as to when this incident took place. According to Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir, when the Israelites grew weary of eating the same *Mann* and *Salwā* everyday and prayed for being granted the kind of food they were used to (2:61), they were commanded to go to a certain city where they could get what they wished for. So, the commandment in the present verse pertains to the mode of entering this city, and lays down the spiritual etiquette for action and speech on this occasion. On the other hand is the view that the commandment pertains to the city against which the Israelites had been ordered to engage themselves in a *Jihād*. They obeyed it only after their long wanderings in the wilderness, and conquered the city. The commandment reported in **Verse 58** was sent to them through Sayyidnā Yūsha' (Joshua 'alayhis salām) who was the prophet among them at the time.

The discrepancy between the two views, which raises a question about the chronological sequence of the events, should not confuse us as to the nature of the stories narrated in the Holy Qur'ān. The Holy Qur'ān does not tell the stories for the sake of telling stories, the usual purpose of which is to provide entertainment. The real intention here is to draw certain conclusions from the stories, and to illustrate or point out certain spiritual principles. Now, the various episodes of a story help to bring out various principles. So, in view of a particular effect sought in a particular context, the chronological sequence of the episodes may be invented, and the incidents re-arranged to serve the interest of the pattern of meaning that is intended. This is just what the Holy Qur'ān does; in fact, this is a quite usual literary method, and the disturbance of the chronological order in the stories narrated by the Holy Qur'ān should not raise irrelevant questions in the mind of the reader - after all, in any and every piece of writing, or even speech, it is the intention which governs the ordering of the material.

The **Verse** holds out the promise that if the Israelites obeyed the commandment, their errors would be forgiven. On the basis of the first of the two views we have referred to, one must include among the errors their rejection of the *Mann* and the *Salwā* and their request for the normal kind of food. The demand was

DAY 9

really insolent, but Allah promised that if they showed their obedience by following the new commandment, He would forgive this error too. Anyhow, the promise of pardon was general, and extended to everyone who was ready to obey the new commandment, while a special reward was promised to those who devoted themselves to good deeds sincerely and wholeheartedly.

The meaning of *Ihsān*

"We may add that 'sincerity' and 'wholeheartedness' are a very weak rendering in English of the essential quality of the text's *Muhsinūn* (rendered here as "**those who are good in deeds**"). This word comes from *Ihsān* which signifies "*doing a thing beautifully - that is, in the manner that is proper to it.*" Beside this lexical meaning, *Ihsān* has a technical meaning which has been defined in a famous *Ḥadīth*: "*Offer your prayers as if you can see Him, and if you do not see Him, He is seeing you (in any case).*" (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

This **verse (verse 59)** is a continuation of the preceding verse. Allah had commanded the Israelites to keep, while entering the city, repeating the word *Hiṭṭatun* (which indicates repentance for one's sin and the request for pardon). But they replaced this word with another phrase by way of mockery, and started saying, *Habbatun fī sha'īrah* (grain in the midst of barley), or *Hinṭatun* (wheat).

The punishment which descended on them was plague that wiped out seventy thousand men (Qurṭubī). In passing, we may recall a *ḥadīth* which says that plague is a for the disobedient, and a blessing for the obedient.

Injunctions and related considerations

The Israelites were punished for having changed a word ordained by Allah, and substituted a phrase of their own invention, thus distorting the meaning itself. According to the consensus of the *Fuqahā'* (Muslim jurists), a change in the words of the Holy Qur'ān, or of a *Ḥadīth*, or of a divine commandment which invents or distorts the actual meaning is impermissible.

This should be obvious enough. But there is another question -- is it permissible to change the words in such a way that the meaning does not suffer but remains intact? In his commentary, Imām al-Qurṭubī says that in certain texts and in certain kinds of speech the words are as much a part of the intention as the meanings and equally necessary for conveying an idea, and that in such a case it is not permissible to change the words. For example, in the *Adhān* (the call for prayers) it is not permissible to employ words other than those which have been laid down for the purpose by the *ḥadīth*. Similar is the case of the *Ṣalāh*: the different things to be recited in them (like *Subḥānaka Allāhumma*, *At-Taḥiyyāt*, *Qunūt*) or the glorification of Allah during the *Rukū'* (bowing down) and the *Sajdah* (prostration) -- all these must be said exactly in the words which have been reported in the *ḥadīth*; substituting other words is not allowed,

DAY 9

even if the meaning does not undergo a change.

This rule applies to each and every word of the Holy Qur'ān. All the Injunctions with regard to the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān strictly pertain to those words alone which Allah has revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. According to the *ḥadīth*, the merit of reciting the Holy Qur'ān is so great that for every letter that one reads or recites one gets the reward which one would get for performing ten good deeds. But if one reads a very accurate translation of the Holy Qur'ān or even an Arabic version in which the original words have been replaced by certain other words without injuring the sense, the Sharī'ah shall not accept it as a recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, and one will not get any reward of recitation for it. For, it is not the meanings alone which constitute the Holy Qur'ān; "Qur'ān" is the name of meanings inherent in the words revealed by Allah to the Holy Prophet ﷺ so that the two are inseparable from each other.

It appears from the present verse that Allah had commanded the Israelites to say this particular word, *Hiṭṭatun*, while offering their *Taubah* (repentance), and hence changing the ordained word was in itself a sin. They went so far as to distort even the meaning, and drew upon themselves the divine punishment.

Now, as for other kinds of speech in which it is the meanings that are really intended and not the words, the masters of the science of *Ḥadīth* and the jurists in general believe that in such places words can be changed provided that the meaning does not suffer but remains intact. Al-Qurṭubī: has cited Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, Imām Mālik and Imām Shāfi'ī; as holding the view that it is quite permissible to report a *ḥadīth* with regard to its meaning alone provided that the man who reports it should have a perfect knowledge of the Arabic language and also be familiar with the situation to which this particular *ḥadīth* pertains, so that he should not misinterpret the text or distort the sense.

On the other hand, certain masters of the science of *Ḥadīth* do not allow the slightest change in the words of a *ḥadīth*, and insist that it should be reported exactly in the words in which one has received it. This, for example, is the view of Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn, Qāsim ibn Muḥammad etc. Some of them even insist that if in reporting a *ḥadīth* a reporter has made a lexical mistake, the man who has heard the *ḥadīth* from him must, in his own turn, report it in exactly the same words including the mistake, only indicating what the correct word is likely to be. Such scholars cite a *ḥadīth* in support of their view. It has been reported that the Holy Prophet ﷺ advised a man to say this prayer before going to sleep at night: "*I have faith in Your Book which You have made to descend, and in Your prophet whom You have sent.*" The prescribed prayer had the word *Nabiyy* (Prophet), but the man changed it for *Rasūl* (Messenger). The Holy Prophet ﷺ instructed him not to make a change, but to say the prescribed word *Nabiyy*. This shows that it is not permissible to change a single word in reporting a *ḥadīth*. Similarly, another *ḥadīth* says: "*May Allah make the man flourish who heard my speech, and then conveyed it exactly as he had heard.*" This also indicates that it is necessary to report the exact words of a *ḥadīth* as one has received them.

DAY 9

Most of the jurists and the masters of the science of *Ḥadīth*, however, believe that although it is better to report a *ḥadīth* as far as possible in exactly the same words as one has heard without making any change intentionally, yet if one cannot recall the exact words, it is also permissible to report the meaning in one's own words, and that the words of the *ḥadīth* quoted above - "... conveyed it exactly as he had heard" - might also mean that one should report the meaning of a *ḥadīth* exactly and without any alteration. Obviously, changing the words does not necessarily go against this provision. Imām al Qurṭubī has, in support of his view, pointed out that this very *ḥadīth* goes to prove that changing words, when necessary, is permissible, for this *ḥadīth* itself has come down to us in different words in different versions. As for the other *ḥadīth* in which the Holy Prophet ﷺ has insisted that the word *Nabiyy* should be recited and not the word *Rasūl*, one might explain it in this way. The word *Nabiyy* (prophet) carries the sense of sublimity much more than does the word *Rasūl*, for the latter is employed for any messenger whatsoever, while the former is reserved only for those who are specially chosen by Allah for being directly addressed through revelation (*Waḥy*), and who thus occupy a rank higher than all other men. There is another explanation too. As far as prayers are concerned, the words appointed for the purpose by Allah or by the Holy Prophet ﷺ have a much greater efficacy than any other words can have. (Qurṭubī)

So, one may say that the prayers which are considered to be very efficacious, should be included in the first category of speech in which not only the meanings but the words also must be carefully safeguarded, for both are equally intended.

COMMENTARY – TAFSĪR IBN KATHĪR

The Jews were Rebellious instead of Appreciative when They gained Victory

Allah admonished the Jews for avoiding Jihād and not entering the holy land as they had been ordered to do when they came from Egypt with Musa. They were also commanded to fight the disbelieving `Amaliq (Canaanites) dwelling in the holy land at that time. But they did not want to fight, because they were weak and exhausted. Allah punished them by causing them to become lost, and to continue wandering, as Allah has stated in **Surat Al-Ma'idah (5)**. The correct opinion about the meaning of, 'the holy land' mentioned here is that it was Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem), as As-Suddi, Ar-Rabi` bin Anas, Qatadah and Abu Muslim Al-Asfahani, as well as others have stated.

Musa said, **(O people! Enter the holy land which Allah has assigned to you and turn not back (in flight).) (5:21)**

However, some scholars said that the holy land is Jericho, (Ariha') and this opinion was mentioned from Ibn `Abbas and `Abdur-Rahman bin Zayd.

DAY 9

After the years of wandering ended forty years later, in the company of Yuwsha` (Joshua) bin Nun, Allah allowed the Children of Israel to conquer the holy land on the eve of a Friday. On that day, the sun was kept from setting for a little more time, until victory was achieved. When the Children of Israel conquered the holy land, they were commanded to enter its gate while, (prostrating) in appreciation to Allah for making them victorious, triumphant, returning them to their land and saving them from being lost and wandering.

Al-`Awfi said that Ibn `Abbas said that, **(and enter the gate Sujjadan)** means, *"While bowing"*.

Ibn Jarir reported Ibn `Abbas saying, **(and enter the gate in prostration)** means, *"Through a small door while bowing."* Al-Hakim narrated it, and Ibn Abi Hatim added, *"And they went through the door backwards!"* Al-Hasan Al-Basri said that they were ordered to prostrate on their faces when they entered the city, but Ar-Razi discounted this explanation. It was also said that the Sujud mentioned here means, *'submissiveness'*, for actually entering while prostrating is not possible.

Khasif said that `Ikrimah said that Ibn `Abbas said, *"The door mentioned here was facing the Qiblah."* Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid, As-Suddi, Qatadah and Ad-Dahhak said that the door is the door of Hittah in Ilyya', which is Jerusalem. Ar-Razi also reported that some of them said that it was a door in the direction of the Qiblah". Khasif said that `Ikrimah said that Ibn `Abbas said that the Children of Israel entered the door sideways. As-Suddi said that Abu Sa`id Al-Azdy said that Abu Al-Kanud said that `Abdullah bin Mas`ud said that they were commanded to, **(enter the gate in prostration (or bowing with humility))** but instead, they entered while their heads were raised in defiance.

Allah said next, **(and say: `Hittah')**. Ibn `Abbas commented, *"Seek Allah's forgiveness."* Al-Hasan and Qatadah said that it means, *"Say, `Relieve us from our errors."*

(and We shall forgive you your sins and shall increase (reward) for the good-doers) Here is the reward for fulfilling Allah's commandment. This Ayah means, *"If you implement what We commanded you, We will forgive your sins and multiply your good deeds."* In summary, upon achieving victory, the Children of Israel were commanded to submit to Allah in tongue and deed and, to admit to their sins and seek forgiveness for them, to be grateful to Allah for the blessings He gave them, hastening to do the deeds that Allah loves, as He said, **(When there comes the help of Allah (to you, O Muhammad against your enemies) and the conquest (of Makkah). And you see that the people enter Allah's religion (Islam) in crowds. So glorify the praises of your Lord, and ask His forgiveness. Verily, He is the One Who accepts the repentance.) (110).**

Allah said, **(But those who did wrong changed the word from that which had been told to them for**

DAY 9

another).

Al-Bukhari recorded Abu Hurayrah saying that the Prophet ﷺ said, *(The Children of Israel were commanded to enter the door while bowing and to say 'Hittah'. Yet, they entered the door on their behinds, distorting the words. They said; 'Habbah (seed), in Sha`rah (a hair).')*

An-Nasa'i recorded this part of it from Abu Hurayrah only, but he has a chain from the Prophet ﷺ, explaining Allah's statement, (**Hittah**'), saying, *"So they deviated and said 'Habbah."* Similar was recorded by `Abdur-Razzaq, and his route was also collected by Al-Bukhari. Muslim and At-Tirmidhi narrated similar versions of this Hadith, At-Tirmidhi said, "Hasan Sahih."

The summary of what the scholars have said about this subject is that the Children of Israel distorted Allah's command to them to submit to Him in tongue and deed. They were commanded to enter the city while bowing down, but they entered while sliding on their rear ends and raising their heads! They were commanded to say, **Hittah** meaning, *"Relieve us from our errors and sins."* However, they mocked this command and said, *"Hintah (grain seed) in Sha`irah (barley)."* This demonstrates the worst type of rebellion and disobedience, and it is why Allah released His anger and punishment upon them, all because of their sinning and defying His commands.

Allah said, **(So We sent upon the wrongdoers Rijz (a punishment) from the heaven because of their rebellion.)** Ad-Dahhak said that Ibn `Abbas said, *"Every word in Allah's Book that says Rijz means, 'a punishment.'" Mujahid, Abu Malik, As-Suddi, Al-Hasan and Qatadah were reported to have said that Rijz means 'Torment.'* Ibn Abi Hatim narrated that Sa`d bin Malik, Usamah bin Zayd and Khuzaymah bin Thabit said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, *(The plague is a Rijz, a punishment with which Allah punished those before you.)*

This is also how An-Nasa'i recorded this Hadith. In addition, the basis of this Hadith was collected in the Two Sahihs, *(If you hear of the plague in a land, then do not enter it.)*

Ibn Jarir recorded Usamah bin Zayd saying that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, *(This calamity and sickness (i.e. the plague) is a Rijz, a punishment with which some nations who were before you were punished.)*

The basis of this Hadith was also collected in the Two Sahihs.

This concludes the commentary for Day 9.