

Al-Fath [Victory]

Madinan Period

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

[1] (O Prophet), surely We have granted you a clear victory¹

[2] so that Allah may forgive you your shortcomings, whether earlier or later,² and may complete His favours upon you and guide you to the Straight Way,³

1. *When the believers were given the tiding of victory after the Treaty of Hdaybiyah, they were left wondering how that treaty could be called a "victory". This because by virtue of the treaty what the unbelievers had asked for had been granted to them. However, it soon became apparent that what could have been superficially perceived as capitulation was indeed nothing but victory for the believers.*

2. *If we bear in mind the context in which this occurs, it is evident that the shortcomings that God will forgive are those that were related to the struggle in which the Muslims found themselves engaged for the last nineteen years under the Prophet's leadership in order to make Islam operative and triumphant. No human being knows what these shortcomings actually were, and indeed the human intellect finds itself helpless in trying to identify any weaknesses in that struggle. But it seems that God required the highest degree of perfection from His servants during this struggle. Furthermore, it was because of the Muslims' inability to reach these high and exacting standards that they could not achieve a decisive victory against the polytheists of Arabia. What has been said here suggests that had God, in His grace, not decided to overlook such shortcomings, it would have taken a considerably longer time for the Muslims to establish their control over Arabia. But God graciously overlooked these shortcomings and opened the door to victory at Hdaybiyah which would have been impossible merely by dint of the Muslims' own efforts.*

3. *"The Straight Way" here signifies the door leading to victory and success.*

[3] and that Allah may bestow upon you a mighty help.

[4] He it is Who bestowed inner peace on the hearts of the believers⁴ so that they may grow yet more firm in their faith. To Allah belong the legions of the heavens and the earth; Allah is All-Knowing, Most Wise.

[5] (He did this) to admit the believers, both men and women, to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they shall abide, and to efface their evil deeds from them. That, in Allah's sight, is the supreme triumph.

[6] (He also did this) to chastise the hypocrites, both men and women, and those who associate others in His Divinity, both men and women, and who harbour evil thoughts about Allah. They shall be afflicted with misfortune, Allah is wroth with them. He has laid His curse upon them and has prepared for them Hell. What an evil end!

[7] To Allah belong the legions of the heavens and the earth. Allah is Most Mighty, Most Wise.

4. *"Sakinah" (inner peace) denotes a person's mental composure and equanimity. At Hdaybiyah the Muslims were confronted with a great many provocations, but they maintained restraint and patience. They also displayed total faith in the Prophet's leadership. That they were able to overcome the provocations and behave with remarkable maturity represents a great favour that God had bestowed on them for even the slightest mistake on this occasion would have caused much harm to the Islamic cause.*

[8] (O Prophet), We have sent you forth as a witness,⁵ as a bearer of good news, and as a warner

[9] so that (all of) you may all believe in Allah and His Messenger, and support him, and revere him, and celebrate Allah's glory, morning and evening.

[10] Those who swore fealty to you,⁶ (O Prophet), in fact swore fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is above their hands.⁷ So whoever breaks his covenant breaks it to his own hurt; and whoever fulfils the covenant that he made with Allah, He will bestow on him a great reward.

[11] (O Prophet), the bedouins who were left behind⁸ say to you: "We were occupied with our goods and families. So ask forgiveness for us." They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Say to them: "Who can be of any avail to you against Allah if He should intend to cause you any harm or confer upon you any benefit?" Allah is well aware of all that you do.

5. *Shah Wali Allah has translated into Persian the word shahid as "izhar-i haqq kunandah," that is, "a bearer of witness to the truth."*

6. *This alludes to the oath at Hdaybiyah after a rumour was spread that 'Uthman had been martyred in Makkah. The oath being that if 'Uthman had indeed been martyred, the Muslims would settle their account with the Quraysh immediately even though this might lead to the annihilation of them all.*

7. *That is, the hand on which the Muslims were swearing fealty was God's Hand rather than simply that of the Prophet (peace be on him). Furthermore, this oath was not simply an oath of fealty to the Prophet (peace be on him) but to God Himself.*

8. *This refers to the people who lived on the outskirts of Madinah and whom the Prophet (peace be on him) had asked to accompany him while making preparations for 'umrah. Those people held their lives so dear that they rarely left their homes even though they professed to be people imbued with faith. They thought that travelling to the city of the Quraysh to perform 'umrah amounted to putting themselves in the jaws of death.*

[12] (But the truth is not what you say.) You had imagined that the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families, and this notion was embellished in your hearts. You harboured an evil thought, and you are an immensely evil people."

[13] As for those who do not believe in Allah and His Messenger, for such unbelievers We have prepared a Blazing Fire.

[14] To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. He is Most Forgiving, Most Compassionate.

[15] When you press forth for the spoils, those who were left behind will say: "Let us accompany you."⁹ They want to change the Command of Allah. Say to them (in clear words): "You shall not accompany us. Thus has Allah already said." Then they will say: "Nay; but you are jealous of us." The truth is that they understand little.

[16] Say to the bedouins who were left behind: "You will be called against those who possess great might and be asked to fight against them unless they surrender. If you obey (the command to fight), Allah will bestow upon you a goodly reward. But if you turn away, as you turned away before, He shall inflict upon you a grievous chastisement."

9. This prophesies that the time was not far away when those very people who had shirked accompanying the Prophet (peace be on him) on an ostensibly risky mission would display a very different attitude when they sensed the likelihood of easy victory and an opportunity to obtain abundant booty. They would then zealously make themselves available, requesting that they should be allowed to go along.

[17] There is no blame on the blind, nor on the lame, nor on the sick (if they do not go forth to fight). Allah will admit those who obey Allah and His Messenger to the Gardens beneath which rivers flow and will inflict a grievous chastisement on those who turn away.

[18] Allah was much pleased with the believers when they swore fealty to you under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts. So He bestowed inner peace upon them¹⁰ and rewarded them with a victory near at hand

[19] and with abundant spoils which they shall acquire.¹¹ Allah is Most Mighty, Most Wise.

[20] Allah has promised you abundant spoils which you shall acquire.¹² He has instantly granted you this (victory)¹³ and has restrained the hands of people from you¹⁴ that it may be a Sign for the believers and He may guide you to a Straight Way.

10. The word sakinah (inner peace) signifies that on whose strength a man courts dangers with full peace of mind for a great cause. He undertakes the task which is essential for the achievement of the cause to which he is wedded, and this regardless of all risks and dangers he may be exposed to.

11. This alludes to the victory in the Battle of Khaybar and the spoils that they acquired on that occasion.

12. This alludes to the several other victories in quick succession that were attained by the Muslims.

13. *This alludes to the Treaty of Hdaybiyah which is characterised as "a clear victory" at the beginning of the surah (see verse 1 above).*

14. *That is, God did not enable the Qurayshite unbelievers to battle with the believers in Hdaybiyah. This was despite the fact that apparently they were in a far better position and in terms of military strength seemed to have a clear edge over the Muslims.*

[21] He also promises you other spoils which you have not yet taken, but Allah has encompassed them.¹⁵ Allah has power over everything.

[22] Had the unbelievers fought against you at that time, they would have turned their backs (in flight), and would have found none to protect or help them.

[23] Such is Allah's Way that has come down from the past. Never shall you find any change in the Way of Allah.

[24] He it is Who restrained their hands from you, and your hands from them in the valley of Makkah, even though He had made you victorious against them. Allah was watching all that you did.

[25] They are the ones who disbelieved and barred you from the Inviolable Mosque and prevented the animals you had designated for sacrifice from reaching the place of their offering. If it had not been for the believing men and believing women (who lived in Makkah and) whom you did not know, and had there not been the fear that you might trample on them and unwittingly incur blame on their account, (then fighting would not have been put to a stop. It was stopped so that) Allah may admit to His Mercy whomsoever He pleases. Had those believers been separated from the rest, We would certainly have inflicted a grievous chastise-ment on those of them [i.e. the Makkans] who disbelieved.¹⁶

15. *Presumably this is an allusion to the conquest of Makkah. The upshot of the statement is that even though Makkah did not fall to the Muslims, God has caused it to be surrounded from all directions. As a result of the victory of Hdaybiyah, that important city too would soon be theirs.*

16. *It was because of this consideration that God did not allow fighting at Hdaybiyah, At that time there was a considerable number of Muslims, both men and women, living in Makkah some of whom concealed their faith, There were others who were known to be believers but were utterly helpless, were subjected to fierce persecution, and so could not migrate to Madinah. Had fighting taken place and the Muslims made their way to Makkah, these Muslims might possibly have been unwittingly killed along with the unbelievers by their fellow-Muslims. The other consideration was that God did not want Makkah to capitulate to the Muslims after a bloody conflict. Rather, He wanted to surround the Quraysh from all sides, rendering them utterly helpless within a couple of years. Thus they would be overpowered without putting up any armed resistance. This, in turn, would facilitate the embracing of Islam by the Quraysh. And this is exactly what happened after the conquest of Makkah.*

[26] (This is why) when the unbelievers set in their hearts a fierce bigotry - the bigotry of ignorance -Allah bestowed inner peace upon His Messenger and upon the believers¹⁷ and made the word of piety binding on them. They were more deserving and worthier thereof. Allah has knowledge of everything.

*17. The word **sakinah** here signifies that patience and dignity which characterised the resistance put up by the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Muslims to the unbelievers' chauvinistic rancour. They were never provoked by their bullishness and blatant transgression; nor did they respond to their opponents' behaviour by committing any excesses or acting unrighteously, nor did they act in ways that would unnecessarily complicate matters.*

[27] Allah indeed showed His Messenger the true vision,one fully in accord with reality.¹⁸ If Allah so wills you shall certainly enter the Inviolable Mosque, in full security,¹⁹ you will shave your heads and cut your hair short, and do so without any fear. He knew what you did not know, and He granted you a victory near at hand even before (the fulfilment of the vision).

[28] He it is Who sent His Messenger with the True Guidance and the Religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over every religion. Sufficient is Allah as a witness (to this).²⁰

[29] Muhammad is Allah's Messenger, and those who are with him are firm with the unbelievers²¹ but compassionate with one another.²² You see them occupied in bowing and prostrating and in seeking Allah's bounty and good pleasure. They are distinguished from others by the marks of prostration on their faces.²³ Thus are they described in the Torah. And their parable in the Gospel is that of a tilth that puts forth its shoot, then strengthens it so that it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem. This is a sight pleasing to the sowers and one by which the unbelievers will be enraged. As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, Allah has promised them forgiveness and a great reward.

18. This is the answer to a question that had often perturbed the Muslims. They tended to say: how come they had returned home without having performed 'umrah when the Prophet (peace be on him) had seen in his vision that he was entering the Inviolable Mosque of Makkah?

19. This promise was fulfilled the following year in Dhu al-Qa'dah 7 A.H. This 'umrah is well known in history as 'umrat al-qada' in so far as it was performed in place of the 'umrah that had remained incomplete.

20. There is a special reason to state this here. At the time the Treaty of Hdaybiyah was being committed to writing, the unbelievers made a fuss about mentioning the Prophet as the Messenger of God. It is affirmed here that his being God's Messenger was a reality regardless of its acceptance or rejection by people. God's Own testimony was sufficient to establish that, whereafter nothing else was needed.

21. *The Prophet's Companions are here characterised as being "firm with the unbelievers". What this means is that the believers were not lax so that the unbelievers would be able to mould them as they liked either by winning them over or by suppressing them with force. They can neither be overawed nor tempted to change their orientation. The unbelievers simply lacked the ability to throw the believers off their course.*

22. *While the believers are firm and inflexible in dealing with the unbelievers, their attitude to their fellow-believers is quite different. With them they are kind, compassionate, affectionate, sympathetic and lenient. Being wedded to shared ideals and principles has fostered love, concord and harmony among them.*

23. *This, in fact, does not refer to the physical mark that one often sees on the foreheads of people owing to prostration. Instead what is being alluded to here are the traces of their being God-fearing; in other words, their magnanimity and purity of character that are manifest in the entire demeanour of the persons who submit to God in all humility. The thrust of this statement is that the Prophet's Companions are a distinguished group of people who are easily marked out for being the best specimens of humanity and whose faces are radiant because of their righteousness.*