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The Case of Prophet Muhammad (S)

Before we proceed further, it is advisable to refresh your memory by reading the first part of the discussion on *'ismah*, especially the verses which prove the infallibility of the prophets in general.

[Chapter 93 \(az-Zuha\) verse 7](#)

"Did He not find you an orphan and so gave shelter? And find you dhalan and so He guided? And find you in need and so made rich?"

If the Prophet of Islam (S) is infallible (*ma'sûm*), then why does Allah say that He found him *dhalan* which normally means “one who has gone astray” or “one who strays from the right path” or “one who is lost”?

First of all, the common meaning is not applicable here. In the normal usage of the word, it is applied for non-believers. But this meaning is negated by another verse of the Qur'an where Allah says,

"I swear by the star when it goes down, that your companion {i.e., Muhammad (S)} has not gone astray (ma dhalla), nor does he err..." (53: 1–2)

Secondly, even if we take it in the meaning of “lost” or “gone astray”, it could be interpreted without denying the *'ismah* of the Prophet (S): you can say that he was wandering in search of revelation.

Finally, the idea of being “lost” does not always have a negative sense to it. Read the following two sentences carefully: (1) “I was lost.” (2) “The ring was lost.” In the first sentence, there is a negative sense; but in the second sentence, there is no negative connotation to the ring that is lost. If we use the word “lost” for the Prophet (S) in the second sense, then there should be no problem at all. We can then explain the verse as follows: “And [did not God] find you lost [among your people], and so He guided [them to you].”

The last interpretation is supported by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, a close companion of the Prophet (S), and also by Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha (a.s.).

Chapter 48 (al-Fath) verses 2-3:

*Verily We granted thee a manifest victory; so that God may:
forgive thee thy sins of the past and those to follow,
fulfill His favour to thee,
and guide thee on the straight path
and that God may help thee with powerful help.*

These verses were revealed in reference to the Treaty of Hudaibiyya in which the Prophet (S) made peace with unbelievers of Mecca in the year 6 A.H. The Prophet (S) had gone with only 1400 lightly armed Muslims with the intention of doing the minor pilgrimage (*'umrah*). The idol-worshippers of Mecca barred them from entering Mecca; after much discussion, they agreed to a ten years peace treaty with the Prophet (S).

Allah described this peace treaty as a “manifest victory”. Then He goes on to explain why He gave this “manifest victory” to the Prophet (S). He gives three reasons: The first reason is very interesting as well as controversial.

“So that God may forgive thee thy sins of the past and those to follow.”

This clearly implies that Prophet Muhammad (S) had committed sins in past and could commit sins in future; he was not a *ma'sûm*.

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The problem is that this interpretation of the verse creates other problems:

It goes against the verses we discussed earlier about *'ismah* in general.

The first reason, as commonly translated, seems out of place and irrelevant to the issue of the peace treaty. There is no clear connection between granting a manifest victory and forgiving of sins. Moreover, it would seem ridiculous to help a messenger to spread the word of Islam (“to submit to God's laws”) and then grant absolute license for committing sins to that very messenger!

3. It would seem that in Islam, the Prophet (S) is above the law: we are forbidden from committing sins but he is allowed!

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In light of these problems with the common translation, many exegetists have attempted other interpretations:

1. Some say it means “sins of Adam and sins of the Muslims”;
2. Others say it means “past sins of your *ummah* are forgiven and their future sins will be forgiven by

your intercession”;

Yet others say it means “your past and future **at-tarku 'awla** is forgiven”.

Besides lacking any credible basis, such interpretations fail to relate the particular sentence to the event of Treaty of Hdaybiyyah.

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The best interpretation that I have seen is of 'Allamah at-Tabataba'i in his **al-Mizan**. At-Tabataba'i goes to the literal meaning of the words: **dhanb** which is commonly used for “sin” and **ghafara** which is commonly used for “forgiving”.

The word **dhanb** is from the verb- form **dhanaba** which means “to follow”; its noun form **dhanab** means “tail; something that follows”. So the main idea in the word **dhanb** is the concept of something following the other. “Sin” is known as “**dhanb**” because it is an act that entails evil consequence in form of Allah's displeasure and punishment.

The word **ghafara** actually means “to cover or conceal something” which also implies the meaning of protecting something. This word is used in its original meaning in our **hadith** literature. For example, a hadith say “**Ghaffir ash -shayb bi 'l-khidhab**” which means “Cover the white hair by dyeing” or “Conceal the old age by dyeing.” “Forgiving” is known as “**ghafara**” because by forgiving, Allah covers the evil consequence of sins, and protects the sinner from it.

With the literal meanings of the two crucial words in the verse: **dhanb** and **yaghfira**, the entire passage under discussion becomes more meaningful and relevant to the Treaty of Hdaybiyya. The verses would now read as follows:

Verily We granted thee [in the Treaty of Hdaybiyya] a manifest victory; so that God may protect you from the past and future consequences of your [policy with the Meccans].

Prophet Muhammad (S)'s mission had angered the idol-worshippers of Mecca to the extent that they planned to kill him and when they failed, they waged war after war against him. This had greatly limited the missionary activities of the Muslims outside Medina. With the peace-treaty of Hdaybiyya, the Prophet (S) got the chance to peacefully convey his message to all people of the Arabian Peninsula and outside it.

History shows that within three years of the peace treaty of Hdaybiyya, almost all of Arabia had come into the fold of Islam — the year 9 AH is known as the “Year of Delegations” since many delegations of Arab tribes came to Medina and accepted Islam. It was this peace treaty that laid the ground for the fall of Mecca at the hands of the Muslims.

So Almighty Allah fulfilled His promise by saying that He gave a great victory through the treaty of

Hudaybiyya: Through this treaty, He protected the Prophet (S) from evil consequence of unbelievers' reaction to what Muhammad (S) had done before and whatever he did after the peace treaty.

Thus the verse is connected to the treaty of Hudaybiyya and our belief in the 'ismah of the Prophet of Islam (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is also intact.

Chapter 80 ('Abasa) 1–10

He frowned and turned (his) back because there came to him a blind man. And what would make you know that he may purify himself; or he may be reminded and the reminding would benefit him?

But when a free from need (i.e., rich person come to you), then you address yourself to him...

But when a hard-working person comes to you (and he also fears), then you turn away from him?!

The Event: These verses refer to an incident in Mecca, when 'Abdullah bin Umm Maktúm, a blind man, came to a gathering where the Prophet (S) was talking to some people among whom were some leaders of Quraysh ('Atba bin Rabi'a, Abu Jahl, 'Abbas, Ubayy bin Khalaf, Umayya bin Khalaf) were also present. When 'Abdullah bin Umm Maktúm came to that gathering, someone frowned and turned away from him.

The Problem: Who frowned and turned away from the blind man? The Qur'an does not give the name. There are two versions of this story.

1st View: Sunni sources and a few Shi'i sources say that it was the Prophet of Islam (S) who frowned and turned away from the blind man.

2nd View: Most Shi'i sources, following the teachings of the Imams of Ahlu 'l –Bayt (who obviously knew the Prophet (S) better than others), say that it was one of the Umayyid leaders of Quraysh who frowned and turned away from the blind man.

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We accept the second view because there is an internal proof from the Qur'an that it was well below the character of Prophet Muhammad (S) to behave in this way.

(a) **Allah addresses the Prophet (S): "Nun. I swear by the pen and what [the angels] write that you are not, by the grace of your Lord, a lunatic; and that surely you shall have a perpetual reward [for your work]; and most surely you are on the sublime [level] of morality." (68: 1–4)**

This testimony about the Prophet (S)'s character was revealed after súrah al-Iqra and before súrah an-Najm; i.e., before the revelation of the verses under discussion. How can a person described so highly by Allah allegedly behave in such a repelling manner!

(b) In the very early stage of his mission, the Prophet (S) was clearly told how to behave in conveying his message to the people: ***"And warn thy nearest relatives; and be kind to him who follows you of***

the believers.” (26:214-215) In another verse, Allah says, **“Therefore, declare openly what you have been ordered, and turn away from the polytheists.” (15:94)**

It seems improbable that a Prophet (S) praised so highly in the previous verse and told to be kind to the believers, would frown when approached by a blind person.

(c) The character of the Prophet (S) and his criterion of preference have historically been proved by the following event: Many early converts to Islam were the oppressed and weak people of Mecca like Bilal, 'Ammar, Salim Maula Abi Hudhayfa, Ibn Mas'ûd, Miqdad and others. The Qurayshi leaders once told the Prophet (S) that, “Why do you sit among these people? If you turn them away from yourself, we might accept you as our leader.” The Prophet (S) refused. And Allah confirmed the Prophet (S)'s response by revealing the following verse:

“And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord at morning and evening desiring His favour. Nothing of their account falls upon you, and nothing of your account falls upon them. So if you drive them away, you will become one of the unjust. In this way, We try some of them by others. [Because of their spiritual perfection, Allah exalted those poor persons, and thus He tries those rich people who lack faith and] who say, 'Are these [poor people] the ones upon whom Allah has been gracious to among us?' Does not Allah know very well the grateful [servants]?” (6:52-53)

In conclusion, ascribing the act of frowning and turning away from the blind man cannot be ascribed to the holy Prophet of Islam (S).

Chapter 66 (at-Tahrim) Verses 1-12:

1. O Prophet! Why do you forbid (for yourself) what God has made lawful for you? You seek to please your wives; and God is Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.
2. Indeed, God has made lawful for you the dissolution of your oaths (in such cases), and God (alone) is your Lord. And He is All-knowing, the Wise.
3. When the Prophet confided to one of his wives (Hafsa) a matter, but when she divulged it (to 'A'isha) and God apprised him about it — he made known a part of it (i.e., the talk between Hafsa and 'A'isha) and avoided a part of it. So when he informed her (Hafsa) about it, she said, “Who informed you of this?” He said, “Informed me, the All-Knowing, the All-Aware.”
4. If you two ('A'isha and Hafsa) turn (in repentance) unto Allah, then indeed your hearts are inclined (to righteousness) but if you two back up each other against him, then verily God is his Protector; and Jibrail, the most virtuous among the believers, and the angels will thereafter back him up.
5. Happily his Lord, if he (Muhammad (S)) divorces you, will give in your place wives better than you (who will be) submissive, faithful, obedient, repentant, prayerful, observers of fast, widows and virgins

{... }

10. God set forth the similitude of those who disbelieve the wife of Núh and the wife of Lút: they both were under two of Our righteous servants, but they were unfaithful and they (i.e., their husbands) availed them nothing against God; and it was said to them (the two wives): “Enter you both the fire with those who enter it.”

11. God set forth the similitude of those who believe (A) the wife of Fir'awn, when she said, “O My Lord! Build for me a house in the Garden and deliver me from Fir'awn and his doing, and deliver me from the unjust people.”

12. And (B) Maryam, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her Our spirit (i.e., 'Isa), and she testified the truth of the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and she was of the obedient ones.

This chapter was revealed in regard to Hafsa and 'A'isha, the wives of the Prophet (S). Besides Khadijah, the only wife of the Prophet who bore child for him was Mariya Qibtiyya, the Egyptian slave gifted to him by the Egyptian King. After the birth of Ibrahim (the Prophet's son from Mariya), 'A'isha and Hafsa became very jealous of Mariya.

There are many views on the occasion for the revelation of this chapter. The narrations are different but most relate to the jealousy of Hafsa and 'A'isha against Mariya and/or Zaynab bint Jahash. A version of the event considered authentic by some of our scholars is as follows: Hafsa entered her room and found the Prophet (S) with Mariya; she became very upset with him. The Prophet (S), in order to calm Hafsa, took an oath that he would not see Mariya again. He also asked Hafsa to keep the issue of his oath to herself and not divulge it to anyone.

Another version says that in order to change the Prophet (S)'s love for Zaynab bint Jahash, Hafsa and 'A'isha made a plan that whenever the Prophet (S) came from Zaynab, they both would say that his mouth is smelling bad—and attribute the bad smell to a drink of honey (*maghafir*) which Zaynab always made for the Prophet (S). The Prophet (S) took an oath not to partake the honey–drink that Zaynab made for him. He also asked Hafsa to keep the issue of his oath to herself and not divulge it to anyone. [1](#)

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Did the Prophet (S) commit a sin by making an oath that he will no longer see his slave–girl, Mariya Qibtiyyah or no longer drink the honey–drink made by Zaynab?

The chapter as a whole is mostly directed to the attitude of the wives who conspired against the Prophet (S): it talks about God willingly to replace those two wives with better wives and asks them to repent. The opening verse, at most, is a friendly rebuke by God to the Prophet (S) for imposing un–necessary deprivation upon himself. There is no prohibition in making an oath to abstain from a thing that is

permissible. If a person makes such an oath and then indents to nullify it, then he is permitted to do so after paying expiation for it.^{[2](#)}

So these verses cannot be used against the concept of infallibility of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny.

¹. For various version of the event, see at-Tabataba'i, al-Mizan fi Tafsiri 'l-Qur'an, vol. 19 (Tehran: Darul Kutub, 1362 [solar]) p. 391-395; Abu 'l-Ma'la Mawd-di, Tafhimu 'l-Qur'an, vol. 6 (Lahore: Idara-e Tarjumanu 'l-Qur'an, 1994) p. 16-17; Fakhru 'd-Din ar-Razi, Mafatihul 'l-Ghayb, vol. 30 (Beirut: Darul 'l-Kutub, 1990) p. 37.

². See 5:89.

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