

The People Of The Ditch

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In numerous places in the Qur'aan, Allah speaks about incidents about people who lived in ancient times. One such people are a group commonly known as 'The People of the Ditch'. They are referred to in the following aayaat of the Qur'aan, in Sooratul-Burooj:

Cursed were the People Of the Ditch. Fire supplied [abundantly] with fuel, When they sat by it [the Fire]. And they witnessed what they were doing against the Believers [i.e.burning them]. They had nothing against them except that they believed in Allaah, the Almighty, Worthy of all praise! The One to Whom belongs the dominion of the Heavens and the earth. And Allaah is Witness over everything. Verily those who put to trial the believing men and the believing women [by torturing them and burning them] and then do not turn in Repentance [to Allah will have the torment of Hell and they will have the Punishment of the Burning

Fire.

[85:4-10]

Further detail regarding the People of the Ditch and an explanation of these aayahs can be found in the following ahadeeth of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam). He said: Among the people before you, there was a king and he had a sorcerer When the sorcerer become old, he said to the king, 'I have now become an old man; get me a boy so that I may teach him sorcery" So the king sent him a boy to teach him sorcery. Whenever the boy proceeded to the sorcerer he sat with a monk who was on the way and he listened to his talks and used to admire them. So when he went to the sorcerer he passed by the monk and sat there with him and on visiting the sorcerer the latter thrashed him, So the boy complained about that to the monk. The monk said to him, "Whenever you are afraid of the sorcerer say to him; My people kept me busy And whenever you are afraid of your people, say to them; The sorcerer kept me busy" So the boy carried on like that (For a period).

(Then one day) there come [on the main road] a huge creature (animal), and the people were unable to pass by. The boy said, "Today I will know whether the sorcerer is better or the monk is better." So he took a stone and said, "O Allah! If the deeds and actions of the monk are more liked by You better than those of the sorcerer then kill this creature so that the people can, cross [the road]." Then he hit (it) with the stone and it was killed, and the people passed [the road]. The boy come to the monk and informed him about it. The monk said to him, "O my son! Today you are better than I, you have achieved what I see! And you will be put to trial And in case you are put to trial, do not inform [them] about me." The boy used to treat the people suffering from born-blindness, leprosy leucodermia and other diseases. A blind courtier of the King heard about the boy. He came and brought a number of gifts for the boy and said, "All these gifts are for you on condition that you cure me." The boy said, "I do not cure anybody; it is Allaah [alone] who cures people. So if you believe in Allah and invoke Allah, He will cure you." He then believed in Allah and Allah cured him.

Later the courtier came to the king and sat at the place where he used to sit before. The king asked him, "Who has given you back your sight?" The courtier said, "My Lord, Allah!" The king said, "Do you have another Lord besides me?" The courtier said, "My Lord and your Lord is Allah I" The king got hold of him and kept on tormenting him until he informed him about the boy. So the boy was brought. The king said to the boy, 'O boy! Has your [knowledge of] sorcery reached to the extent that you can cure born-blinds, lepers, leucodermic patients and do such and such?" The boy replied, "I do not cure anybody it is only Allah who cures." Then the king got hold of him and kept on tormenting him till he informed him about the monk. And the monk was brought and it was said to him, "Give up your Religion" The monk refused to turn apostate. Then the king ordered a saw and it was put in the middle of his (the monk's) scalp and was sawn, till he fell, cut in two pieces. Then that courtier was brought and it was said to him, "Give up your religion I" The courtier refused to turn apostate. So the saw was put in the middle of his scalp and was sawn, till he fell cut in two pieces. Then the boy was brought, and it was said to him, "Give up your religion!" The boy refused to turn apostate. So the King ordered some of his courtiers to take the boy to such and such a mountain, saying, "Then ascend up the mountain with him till you reach its top. Then see if he turns apostate, otherwise throw him down from its top." They took him, ascended up the mountain, and the boy said, "O Allaah Save me from them by anything You wish" So the mountain shook and all of them fell down and the boy came walking to the king. The king asked him, "What did your companions do?" The boy said, 'Allah saved me from them.'

The King then ordered some of his courtiers to take the boy on board a boat into the middle of the sea, saying, "Then if he turns apostate [all well and good], otherwise toss him into the sea." So they took him and he said, "O Allah! Save me from them by anything You wish." So the boat capsized and all the courtiers) were drowned. The boy then came walking to the king. The King said, "What did your companions do?" The boy replied, 'Allaah saved me from them.' And he further said to the king, "You cannot kill me till you do what I command" The King said, "What is that (command)?" The boy said, "Gather all the people in an upland place, and fasten me over the trunk of a tree. Then take an arrow from my quiver and fix it in the bow and say: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of the boy' and shoot (at me). If you do that, you will kill me." So the king gathered the people in an upland place and fastened the boy over a tree-trunk, took an arrow from his quiver, fixed it in the bow and said, "'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of the boy', and shot the arrow. The arrow hit over the temple of the boy, and the boy put his hand over the temple at the point where the arrow hit and then died. The people proclaimed, "We have believed in the Lord of the boy! We have believed in the Lord of the boy! We have believed in the Lord of the boy!" The king came and it was said to him, "That is the thing which you were afraid of, by Allah! The thing which you were afraid of has befallen you: the people have believed [in Allah]!"

So he ordered for deep ditches to be dug at the entrances of the roads and it was done. Then fire was kindled in those ditches, and the king ordered that whoever did not turn apostate be cast into the ditches, and it was done. Then there came a woman with her babe. She nearly retreated back from the ditch [i.e. turned apostate] but the babe [spoke and] said, "O mother! Be patient, you are on the Truth!" (So she threw herself in the ditch of the fire along with her child, to be with the martyrs in Al-Jannah)." [Saheeh Muslim]

This is the inspiring story of a boy who believed in Allah, remained steadfast against the unbelieving king and gave up his life for the sake of conveying the message of Tawheed to his people. Appropriately, this story was revealed in Makkah at a time when the Makkan pagans were doing their best to annihilate the Muslims and make them return to disbelief. This Soorah, and the explanatory hadeeth along with it, gave them a timely reminder that the persecutors are not beyond the watch of Allah, and in the end, victory will always be theirs.

There are many beneficial points which we too can pick up from this story. It tells us for example, that if someone sincerely seeks the Guidance, then Allah will bestow it upon him, just as Allah guided the boy when he sought Allah's help in deciding between the sorcerer and the monk. Even though the boy used to admire the teachings of the monk, he did not simply rely on his own personal judgment to decide the important matter of who to take Ilm (knowledge) from. Instead, he beseeched Allah just as we too have been commanded to beseech Allah's Aid: "You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help." [Al-Faatihah 5]

So seeking Allah's help is not only for worldly matters (e.g. passing exams, removing debts etc.), but we should also ask Allah to help us in matters of worship to increase our eemaan, to purify our intentions, to guide us to the best teachers and the best books etc).

THE MIRACLE OF THE AWLIYAA

This narration about the People of the Ditch also highlights an important aspect of the 'aqeedah of Ahlus-Sunnah, and that is, that it is possible for the allies ('Awliyaa) of Allah to perform miracles (karamaat) by His permission. The ability of the Prophets of Allah to perform miracles, by Allah's leave, is well known and widely accepted by Muslims, but many Muslims are skeptical when it comes to accepting the ability of ordinary Muslims to perform miracles, even though there are many well-documented cases of such events.

Allah grants miracles to His Allies for two main reasons: to fulfill some need that the person has, or to aid him in calling others to guidance - as was the case with this young boy. The most important thing to bear in mind about these miracles is that Allah only grants these special abilities to His allies. These are those people who are upon Tawheed and who follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) in both the obligatory and the

recommended actions, and refrain from the prohibited as well as the disliked actions. As for those deviated 'saints' and mystics who are neither upon Tawheed nor fulfill Allah's commands but claim to be able to perform miracles by Allah's permission, then their apparent 'miracles' are no more than acts of sorcery performed using Shaitan's assistance.

PATIENCE AND SUCCESS

The most important lesson that we can learn from this story is the great significance of da'wah to Allah. Through courage, patience and sacrifice, this boy brought a whole nation from shirk to Tawheed. We can see how Allah brings about victory to His Deen at the hands of whomever He wills - even such a young boy- provided they are upon Tawheed. Does this not tell us the key to our victory? That ultimately it is not our weaponry or our numbers which will give us success over our enemies, but our correct belief in Allah and our nearness to Him? Furthermore, does this story not give us a clear insight into what victory really is? Does it not show us that being victorious does not necessarily mean gaining dominance over the disbelievers, or overpowering the tyrannical rulers? For certainty, if this was the case, then the sacrifices of the monk, the young boy and all those people who were flung into the ditch were in vain and they had failed in their purpose. Yet this cannot be, since Allah stated that these people had achieved '**the Great Success**' [Al-Burooj (85):11].

Clearly therefore, real success and true victory is achieving strong eemaan; that unshakeable faith and conviction which can withstand all pressures and all obstacles. One who achieves this unwavering eemaan - such a person - even if he fails to witness Allah's Law being established on earth; even if he does not get a single opportunity to fight in jihad and liberate the Muslim lands from tyranny and oppression; even if he himself is slain at the hands of the disbelievers - then he has still succeeded, since no one and no thing was able to sway him from the Truth. And indeed the disbelievers wish for nothing more than to turn us back from our religion.

Thus we should never lose sight of the real goal and the ultimate triumph. We may never get to the battlefields and be slain for the sake of Allah, even though we ardently desire that. We may never be able to guide a single person to the Straight Path, even though we sincerely seek that. We may feel that we haven't made the slightest contribution to achieving victory for Allah's Deen, though we have done our best to obtain that. Yet this does not mean that we have failed. Remember that there were Prophets before us who were not able to guide a single person to Tawheed by Allah's Permission, but in the Hereafter they will be on thrones raised high, in gardens of bliss. The most important thing is that we have safeguarded our eeman and striven hard.

"Verily those who believe and do good deeds,

For them will be Gardens under which rivers flow.

"That is the Great Success." [Al-Burooj (85):11]