

The Hadeeth of the Ghoul

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Abu Hurayrah (RadiAllaahu anhu) narrated,

"Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) assigned me to guard the Ramadhaan zakaah. Someone came and tried to take some of the food, so I grabbed him and said, 'ByAllaah! I will bring you before Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam)!'. He said, 'I am poor, I have a family, and I am in dire need!' Then I let him go.

In the morning, the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said to me, O Abu Hurayrah! What did your prisoner do yesterday? I said, 'O Messenger ofAllaah! He complained that he was poor, that he had a family, and that he was in dire need, so I had mercy on him and let him go.' He said, 'But he lied to you and he will come back.

Since I Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) had told me so, I knew that he would come back again so I waited for him. When he began to take the food I grabbed him and said, 'I am taking you to Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) !' He said, 'Leave me, for I am poor and have a family. I will not return.' So I had mercy on him and let him go.

In the morning, Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said to me, O Abu Hurayrah! What did your captive do? I said, 'O Messenger of Allaah! He complained that he was poor, that he had a family, and that he was in dire need, so I had mercy on him and let him go.' He (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said, 'But he lied to you and he will come back. So I waited for him a third time.

When he began taking the food I grabbed him and said, 'I am taking you to Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam)! This is the third time! And you promised not to come back, but you came anyway!' He said, 'Let me go, I will teach you some words by which Allaah will give you some benefit.' I asked, 'What are they?' He said, 'Whenever you go to bed, recite aayat al-kursee- Allaahu laa ilaha illaa huwa al-hayyul-qayyum - until the end of the aayah. Then Allaah will appoint a guard to remain with you, and no shaytaan will come near you until the morning.' So I let him go about his way.

Then in the morning, Allaah's Messenger (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said to me, What did your captive do yesterday? I said, 'O Messenger ofAllaah! He claimed that he would teach me some words by which Allaah would give me some benefit, so I released him.' He said, 'And what was that? I said, 'He said, "When you go to bed recite aayat al-kursee from the beginning until the end - Allaahu laa ilaha illaa huwa al-hayyul-qayyum, then Allaah will appoint a guard to remain with you, and no shaytaan will come near you until the morning."

One of the narrators added, "And they (the companions) were always trying to find something good." "Then the Prophet (S) said, He told you the truth, but he lies. Do you know who it was that spoke to you these past three nights Abu Hurayrah? He (Abu Hurayrah) said, "No." That was a shaytaan. "

This is a well known hadeeth recorded by al-Bukhaaree in mu'allaq form in his Saheeh, as well as at-Taareekh al-Kabeer. His version is also cited by al-Baghawee. Additionally, Ibn Hajar has shown that the hadeeth's chain of narrators is connected by a variety of routes.

In Fath ul-Baaree, Ibn Hajar mentioned a number of things that we can learn from this hadeeth besides some of the virtues of aayat ul-kursee, below are some of them;

1. That the shayateen are aware of what benefits a believer.
2. That wisdom may be taken from an evil person by which, although he did not benefit from it, one may benefit from it.
3. That a person can know something and not act upon it.
4. That a kaafir may believe some of what the believer believes, but that does not make him a believer.
5. That a liar may tell the truth.
6. That the shayateen usually lie.
7. That they can appear in a form that can be seen by us, and that the aayah (as translated) below refers specifically to when they are in their natural form;

"...And he and his kind can see you from a place that you cannot see them..."
(Al-A'raaf 7:27)
8. That the jinn eat the food of humans.
9. That they may appear to humans, with the exceptions mentioned above.
10. That they speak the language of humans.
11. That they are thieves and tricksters.
12. That the jinn eat from food that Allaah's name has not been mentioned over.
13. That the thief's hand is not cut off in the case of starvation.
14. To accept one's excuse and forgiving him when you think he is telling the truth.
15. It demonstrates the Prophets' awareness (S) of matters unseen.

16. The permissibility of collecting zakaat ul-fitr before the night of fitr, and entrusting someone to guard it.

There are many hadeeths like that of Abu Hurayrah's, mentioning the virtue of aayat al-kurse, and the strange visitor offering to inform the companion about it. The following is an example, and this time the visitor is called a ghou:

'Abdurrahmaan Bin Abu Laylaa reported "Once a ghou came into Abu Ayyub's shed and he caught her. He told the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) about the incident, so he said; When you see her, then say, "In the name of Allaah, come and answer to Allaah's Messenger." So she came back, and he said that to her and grabbed her, then she said to him, 'I will not return.' So he released her. He came back and the Prophet (S) said to him, What did your captive do? He said, 'I grabbed her, but she said she would not return, so I released her.' He (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said, She will return.

'I caught her a second time and a third, each time she said she would not return. So I went to the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) and He said, What did your captive do?' He said, 'I caught her, but she said she would not return.' He (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said, She will return. So he caught her again, and she said, 'Release me and I will teach you something to say and nothing will come near you. It is aayat al-kurse.' So he came to the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) to tell him. He said, She told the truth, and she is a liar. "

This hadeeth is recorded by Ahmad, at-Tirmithee and others.

'Abdullaah Bin Ubayy narrated that his father had a storage space that contained some dates. He went into it and found that some were missing. So he kept watch over it. Later he found a beast that resembled an adolescent boy in it. He said, "So I gave him salaams, and he return salaams. So I said, 'What are you, a jinn or a human?' He said, 'Jinn.' I said, 'Show me your hand.' He showed me his hand, it was the hand of a dog with hair like a dog's. I said, 'Is this the way that jinns are?' He said, 'I know of the jinn what is worse than me.' Ubayy said to him, 'What made you do as you have?' He said, 'We have learned that you are a man who likes to give sadaqah, so we like to get some of your food.' Ubayy said, 'Is there something that will protect us from you?' He said, 'This aayah, aayat al-kurse. [Whoever says it in the evening, he will be protected from us until the morning, and whoever says it in the morning, he will be protected from us until the evening.]' The next day Ubayy went to the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) and informed him about what happened. He (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said, The evil one told the truth.

This hadeeth is recorded by an-Nasaa'ee in 'Aml al-Yawm wal-Laylah, al-Baghawee in Sharh as-Sunnah, al-Bukhaaree in at-Taareekh al-Kabeer, and Ibn Hibbaan in his Saheeh as well as others.

There are other similar hadeeths, with varyng degrees of authenticity, and in some of them the narrators call the creature a ghou, sometimes the creature is a male, sometimes a female. Among the other similar narrations are the narrations of Mu'aath, Buraydah, and Abu Usayd, the last two of which mention the ghou.

All of these hadeeths support the existence of the ghou due to their multiple routes of transmission - this is the saying of Ibn Hajar in Fath al-Baaree, al-Bayhaqee in Dalaa'il an-Nubuawah, Ibn Katheer in his Tafseer, and al-Mubaarakpooree in Tuhfat al-Ahwathee. After the narration of Abu Ayyub,

al-Haakim said, "These chains of narration, when combined together, make the hadeeths' level mashhoor (well known), and Allaah knows best."

What is a Ghoul?

The most popular name for evil jinns would be shayateen, and the ghouls fall under this category. However, a variety of opinions have been mentioned about the exact nature and characteristics of the ghoul. Some have even claimed that the ghoul is a kind of monkey!

As for the word ghoul (pl.; ghilaan), it comes from one of the words meaning to murder or assassinate; ightiyaal for example. The more popular Arabic dictionaries define ghoul as the sorcerer or magician among the jinn, some have said that ghoul is the word for the jinns that are seen at night, and that si'laah is a word for the jinns that are seen during the day. Even in his Tafseer, Ibn Katheer said that "ghoul" is used for the jinn when it appears at night. Al-Jaahiz said, "It is the name for every jinn that the traveler comes across, appearing in different forms and shapes, both male and female."

Ibn Hajar endorsed the view that the ghoul can change its appearance due to magic, and this is supported by the hadeeth of Ubayy above, the hadeeth of Mu'aath, as well as a narration from Abu Ayyub that mentions the ghoul first appearing as a cat, then changing. Additionally this view is supported by the report recorded by Abdurrazzaq in his Musanaf that the ghoul was mentioned to 'Umar (R), and he said: "Nothing can change from the form it was created in except by some kind of magic, so say the athaan when you see them doing this kind of thing."

Reports Denying the Ghoul

The Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said, No 'adwaa, no tiyarah, and no ghoul. (Muslim)

There are a number of hadeeths like this that mention the statement, Laa (no) ghoul, such are found with al-Bukhaaree and Muslim as well as others. In light of the discussion above confirming the ghoul, the following is the explanation of the scholars rectifying the apparent contradiction between these two types of texts.

The statement "No ghoul" does not negate the actual existence of the ghoul, but it negates the superstitions commonly held in jahiliyyah about ghouls, i.e., that they are assassins, that they hijack travelers from the road, and that they eat people, etc. Additionally, when the Prophet said, Laa (no) ghoul he said the same about other things, like 'adwaa for example, yet he commanded a form of 'adwaa on other occasions, like fleeing from the area of plague if you hear about it before you reach it. And in one variation of the hadeeth mentioning 'adwaa, he (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said: But stay away from the leper like you would stay away from a lion.

This is all related to the Qadr of Allaah, i.e., that the believers should not believe that fleeing the disease is the only way to save oneself from it. This is the interpretation of scholars like al-Bayhaqee, Ibn as-Salaah, Ibn Rajab and others. So the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) did not negate the existence of 'adwaa, he only negated the pre-Islaamic belief about it. Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree said, "By his (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) saying, Laa (no) ghoul he negated what the people of jahliyyah were saying about it, that is about its abilities to harm and cause benefit, and to control humans in that way...and this is the same with the rest of what he mentioned that the Arab believed would harm him or benefit him, like 'adwaa, safr, and tiyarah (bad omens)." Imaam an-Nawawee

said, "...And the meaning of Laa (no) ghoul is they are not able to mislead anyone..."

Tools to Fight the Ghouls

The following are some of the things that are mentioned by the scholars for warding off ghouls;

THE NAME OF ALLAAH

This was mentioned in the hadeeth of Abu Ayyub above.

RECITING AAYAAT AL-KURSE

In the previous hadeeths, the ghouls themselves noted that this would protect against them, and the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) stated that this was true.

STAYING INSIDE DURING THE DEAD OF NIGHT

The Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam) said: Beware of socializing after the night settles, for you do not know what creatures Allaah lets out then. (Al-Haakim, graded hasan by al-Albaanee in as-Saheehah 4:346)

THE ATHAAN

The scholars agree that the shayaateen leave when the athaan is called. There are many hadeeths stating this, and some of them mention calling it in case of the ghouls too. This position is supported by the combination of the hadeeths mentioning the ghoul particularly in this regard, with their varying degrees of authenticity, when taken with the authentic report from 'Umar (R) mentioned earlier which holds the status of hukm marfu' - or a ruling raised to the Prophet (Salla'Allaahu Aleyhi wa'Salaam).

In Conclusion

Finally, the most important lesson from the narrations about the ghoul, is that a shaytaan may know some of the Qur'aan - he may even reach the level of hafiz of the Qur'aan - and he may have a great deal of knowledge about its virtues as well as other benefits related to the religion, but that doesn't mean that everything he says is worth listening to.