

Ramadan Immersion



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The Story of Ka'b ibn Malik

- Ka'b ibn Malik is a man who was known for his piety, goodness, loyalty and he was dutiful to the Prophet. However, he was not protected from falling short.
- His story teaches us how easy it is to become a person who falls short with Allah and who falls short in the things that are obligated upon them.
- The details of this story were narrated by Ka'b himself to his son, Abdullah ibn Ka'b. Abdullah was also Ka'b's guide after he lost his eyesight – he served him at his elderly age.
- While we often paint a perfect picture of ourselves to our families, Ka'b was open and vulnerable to share both his sins and shortcomings, as well as the good that he did with his sons.
- This is part of the growing experience. We don't need to go out of the way to expose our sins, but rather utilize the opportunities that Allah has given us to reference our own spiritual journey as a means of inspiration to them so that we can grow with each other and through one another.
- Ka'b narrated about the time that he did not participate and remained behind during the expedition to Tabuk.

- I never remained behind Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) from any expedition which he undertook except the Battle of Tabuk and that of the Battle of Badr. So far as the Battle of Badr is concerned, nobody was blamed for remaining behind as Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and the Muslims (did not set out for attack but for waylaying) the caravan of the Quraysh, but it was Allah Who made them confront their enemies without their intention to do so.
- Never did I possess means enough and more favorable circumstances than at the occasion of this expedition. And, by Allah, I had never before this expedition simultaneously in my possession two rides.
- Whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) decided to go on a campaign, he would not disclose his real destination till the last moment (of departure). But on this expedition, he set out in extremely hot weather; the journey was long and the terrain was waterless desert; and he had to face a strong army, so he informed the Muslims about the actual position so that they should make full preparation for the campaign.
- The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) set out on this expedition when the fruit were ripe and their shade was sought. I had a weakness for them and it was during this season that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and the Muslims made preparations.
- I also would set out in the morning to make preparations along with them but would come back having done nothing and said to myself: 'I have enough means to make preparations as soon as I like'. And I went on doing this (postponing my preparations) till the time of departure came and it was in the morning that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) set out along with the Muslims, but I had made no preparations. I would go early in the morning and come back, but with no decision.
- I went on doing so until they (the Muslims) hastened and covered a good deal of distance. Then I wished to march on and join them. Would that I had done that! But perhaps it was not destined for me.

- After the departure of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) whenever I went out, I was grieved to find no good example to follow but confirmed hypocrites or weak people whom Allah had exempted from marching forth for Jihad.
- The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) made no mention of me until he reached Tabuk. While he was sitting with the people in Tabuk, he said, 'What happened to Ka'b bin Malik?' A person from Banu' Salama said: 'O Messenger of Allah, the (beauty) of his cloak and an appreciation of his finery have detained him.' Upon this Mu'adh bin Jabal admonished him and said to Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): 'By Allah, we know nothing about him but good.' The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), however, kept quiet.
- When the news reached me that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was on his way back from Tabuk, I was greatly distressed. I thought of fabricating an excuse and asked myself how I would save myself from his anger the next day. In this connection, I sought the counsels of every prudent member of my family. When I was told that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was about to arrive, all the wicked ideas vanished from my mind and I came to the conclusion that nothing but the truth could save me. So, I decided to tell him the truth.
- It was in the morning that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) arrived in Al-Madinah. It was his habit that whenever he came back from a journey, he would first go to the mosque and perform two rak'ah (of optional prayer) and would then sit with the people. When he sat, those who had remained behind him began to put forward their excuses and take an oath before him. They were more than eighty in number. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) accepted their excuses on the very face of them and accepted their allegiance and sought forgiveness for them and left their insights to Allah, until I appeared before him.

- I greeted him and he smiled and there was a tinge of anger in that. He then said to me, 'Come forward'. I went forward and I sat in front of him. He said to me, 'What kept you back? Could you not afford to go in for a ride?' I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, by Allah, if I were to sit before anybody else, a man of the world, I would have definitely saved myself from his anger on one pretext or the other and I have a gifted skill in argumentation, but, by Allah, I am fully aware that if I were to put forward before you a lame excuse to please you, Allah would definitely provoke your wrath upon me. In case I speak the truth, you may be angry with me, but I hope that Allah will be pleased with me (and accept my repentance). By Allah, there is no valid excuse for me. By Allah, I never possessed such good means, and I never had such favorable conditions for me as I had when I stayed behind.'
- The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, 'This man spoke the truth, so get up (and wait) until Allah gives a decision about you.' I left and some people from Banu' Salama followed me. They said to me, 'By Allah, we do not know that you committed a sin before. You, however, showed inability to put forward an excuse before the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) like those who stayed behind him. It would have been enough for the forgiveness of your sin that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would have sought forgiveness for you.'
- By Allah, they kept on reproaching me until I thought of going back to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and retract my confession. Then I said to them, 'Has anyone else met the same fate?' They said, 'Yes, two persons have met the same fate. They made the same statement as you did and the same verdict was delivered in their case.' I asked, 'Who are they?' They said, 'Murarah bin Ar-Rabi' Al-'Amri and Hilal bin Umaiyyah Al- Waqifi.' They mentioned these two pious men who had taken part in the battle of Badr and there was an example for me in them. I was confirmed in my original resolve.

Lessons from Ka'b's Story

- This story teaches us what we must repent from was not something we did but what we didn't do (i.e. the delaying of prayer, charity etc.). We not only sin in what we chose to do but we can equally sin what we chose not to do, or delay them until the time for them has passed.
- Opportunities for acts of obedience and making tawbah are like windows that Allah gives and part of our responsibility is to take advantage of those windows while we have them, because they are a gift from Allah. They are from the tawfiq of Allah; if He had not guided us to it, we wouldn't be able to do it — it is His favor upon us.
- In this story we see the man from Banu' Salama indicating that Ka'b was caught up with his worldly desires. Thus, it teaches us that we should never backbite our brothers and sisters or speak about someone in their absence when they cannot defend themselves. Whenever we find ourselves in such predicaments, we should be like Mua'dh ibn Jabal and come to their defense as this will help recover the backbiting instead of enhancing it. Allah loves to see us focusing on ourselves rather than others.

◦ Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

" أَتَدْرُونَ مَا الْغِيْبَةُ " . قَالُوا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ . قَالَ " ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ " . قِيلَ أَفَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ فِي أَخِي مَا أَقُولُ قَالَ " إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ اغْتَبْتَهُ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ فَقَدْ بَهْتَهُ " .

Do you know what is backbiting? They (the Companions) said: Allah and His Messenger know best. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: Backbiting implies your talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like. It was said to him: What is your opinion about this that if I actually find (that failing) in my brother which I made a mention of? He said: If (that failing) is actually found (in him) what you assert, you in fact backbited him, and if that is not in him it is a slander. (Sahih Muslim)

- There are many ways we can react to regret; whether it is giving ourselves justifications for our actions etc. and many of us can get caught up with the relief from our sins in the moment. However, in Ka'b's story we learn that there are no excuses when it comes to us falling short with Allah — we are responsible to hold ourselves accountable.

- Ibn al-Mubarak reported: Hasan al-Basri said,

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ قَوَّامٌ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ يُحَاسِبُ نَفْسَهُ لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَإِنَّمَا خَفَّ الْحِسَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَى قَوْمٍ حَاسَبُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّمَا شَقَّ الْحِسَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَى قَوْمٍ أَخَذُوا هَذَا الْأَمْرَ مِنْ غَيْرِ مُحَاسَبَةٍ

"Verily, the believer is a guardian over himself and he holds himself accountable to Allah Almighty. The reckoning will only be lightened on the Day of Resurrection for people who held themselves accountable in this world. Verily, the reckoning will only be grueling on the Day of Resurrection for people who did not hold themselves accountable." (Al-Zuhd wal-Raqa'iq)

- Ka'b's honesty became a barrier between him the righteous people, the masjid etc., nevertheless, he never stopped turning to Allah and seeking His pleasure.