



The Chaining of the *Shayātīn* during a Month of Mercy¹

By Abū al-Ḥasan Mālik al-Akhḍar

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “When Ramaḍān begins, the gates of the heavens are opened, and the gates of the Hell-fire are closed, and the *Shayātīn* (devils) are chained.”

The questioner may ask, “If the *Shayātīn* are chained up during the blessed month of mercy, *Shahr Ramaḍān*, then why does evil and sin still occur?” First, before elucidating the meaning of the narration, using the well-known explications of the scholars of Ḥadīth, we begin by mentioning its derivation in the books of *Sunnah*. It is collected by Imām al-Bukhārī,² Imām Muslim³, Imām al-Nisā’ī⁴ and Imām Aḥmad.⁵

The great scholar of Ḥadīth Ibn Ḥajr, may Allāh ﷻ bestow His Mercy upon him, says in the explication of this narration, found in his classical work *Fath al-Bārī*: “And the *Shayātīn* [here] are those from amongst them who eavesdrop [on the revelation], and their being chained up takes place during the nights (of Ramaḍān), not its days, because they were forbidden from eavesdropping at the time of the Qur’ān’s revelation; so they were chained up as an additional measure of protection (for the revelation). And it is possible that what is intended is that the *Shayātīn* are not as determined to tempt the Muslims as they are able to outside of it (i.e. *Ramaḍān*), because of them (the Muslims) being busy with fasting, which suppresses the desires, recitation of the Qur’ān, and the remembrance [of Allāh]. And others have said: ‘What is intended by *Shayātīn* here are some of them, and they are the evil ones from amongst them...’”

¹ This version was revised on July 2, 2012 corresponding with 13 *Sha’bān* 1433 *Hijrī*

² *al-Saḥīḥ* (no.1899) in the “Book of Fasting” on the authority of Abū Hurayrah ﷺ

³ *al-Saḥīḥ* (no. 2492-2493) in the “Book of Fasting” on the authority of Abū Hurayrah ﷺ

⁴ *al-Sunan* (no. 2104-2106) in the “Book of Fasting” on the authority of Abū Hurayrah ﷺ

⁵ *al-Musnad* (2/281) on the authority of Abū Hurayrah ﷺ

After further clarification, Ibn Ḥajr continues by quoting the statement of al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ: ‘...and it is possible that this alludes to the abundance of reward and forgiveness (in Ramaḍān), and that the temptation of the *Shayātīn* is decreased, so they become as if they are locked up.’ He (‘Iyāḍ) says: ‘And what supports this second view is his statement in the narration of Yūnus on the authority of Ibn Shihāb in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ‘the gates of mercy are opened,’ and it is possible that the opening of the gates of Paradise means what Allāh has facilitated for His worshippers from the acts of obedience, and these are the reasons for entering Paradise; and the closing of the gates of the Hell-fire means a diversion from the desire to commit sins, which leads the sinner to the Hell-fire, and the chaining of the devils means the weakening of their ability to tempt and beautify desires.’”

He (Ibn Hajar) then quotes al-Qurtubī, may Allāh ﷻ bestow his Mercy upon him, when he says: “If it is asked, how do we see so much evil and sin occurring in *Ramaḍān*? Since the *Shayātīn* are chained up, why does this still occur? The answer to this is that few of those who fast do so in a manner that meets these conditions, or that those intended [in the narration] are only some of the *Shayātīn*, specifically the evil ones from among them, not all of them, as has proceeded in some of the narrations; or that what is intended is a reduction in evil during it (*Ramaḍān*). And this can be felt, for indeed this (evil) occurs less during Ramaḍān than at any other time. Yet, the chaining of all of the devils would not necessitate that evil and sin would not occur, because there are other reasons for this besides the *Shayātīn*, like evil natures, wicked customs, and the *Shayātīn* from the humans.’ And others have said, ‘The chaining up of the *Shayātīn* in *Ramaḍān* points to the removal of the person’s excuse; it is as if it is said to him, ‘The *Shayātīn* have been restrained, so do not use them as an excuse for the abandonment of acts of obedience or the commitment of sin.’”⁶

al-Imām al-Nawawī, may Allāh bestow his Mercy upon him, says in the explication of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, “...the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of the Hell-fire are closed and the *Shayātīn* are locked up. Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ says: ‘It is possible that this is literal, and that the opening of the gates of Paradise, the closing of the gates of the Hell-Fire, and the chaining of the *Shayātīn* are signs of entering *Ramaḍān* and magnification of its sanctity; and that they (the *Shayātīn*) are chained up to prevent them from harming the believers and inciting them.’ He also said: ‘And it is possible that what is intended is a figurative meaning, and that it means an abundance of reward and forgiveness, and that the temptation and harm of *Shayātīn*

⁶ *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (4/706, 707)

is decreased so they become as if they are locked up; and that they are locked away from some things as opposed to others, and some people as opposed to others...”⁷

In his explication of *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ādam al-Ithyūbī says: “From the benefits of this narration: 1) The chapter title of the author (i.e. al-Nasā’ī), clarifying the virtue of *Ramaḍān*. 2) The affirmation of Paradise and the Hellfire, that they presently exist and that they have gates that open and close. 3) The affirmation of the existence of the *Shayātīn* and that they possess bodies which can be chained and the rebellious from them are locked up during the month of *Ramaḍān* to prevent them from nullifying the deeds of those who are fasting. 4) Clarification of Allah’s ﷻ great Compassion and abundant Generosity to His worshippers by protecting their fast and repelling the harm of the rebellious *Shayātīn* so they are not able to corrupt the worshippers during this blessed month when good deeds are multiplied.”⁸

In summary, we discover in this narration myriad blessings and glad tidings for those who believe. *Ramaḍān* is a month of forgiveness wherein Allah, the Most Merciful, has opened the gates of mercy and locked shut the gates of punishment. It is therefore crucial that people of fasting seize the advantage of the shackling of the devils, the malevolent troops of *al-Shaytan*, and pray that Allah, the Granter of Favor, rewards them with entry through the gate of *al-Rayyān*.⁹ Indeed Allah is the Bestower of Mercy, Hearer of supplication.

Written by the one in need of his Lord’s Favor,
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⁷ *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (7/186–187)

⁸ *Sharḥ Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (20/255)

⁹ This refers to the narration collected by al-Bukhari in his *Saḥīḥ* (no. 1762) in the “Book of Fasting” and Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the “Book of Fasting” on the authority Sahl ibn Sa’d ﷺ from the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ: “Verily, in Paradise there is a gate called *al-Rayyān*; the people of fasting will enter through it on the Day of Judgement, and no one besides them will be permitted entry. It will be said, ‘Where are the people of fasting?’ They will stand, and no one besides them will enter through it. Once they enter, it will be locked.”