

The Concept of Hur in Islam

Rewards of the Righteous Persons in the Hereafter

Ziaul Huq Qutubudidn *

Abstract

The term hur mentioned in the Holy Quran is much misunderstood among the blessings of paradise, promised to the true believers in the hereafter. This word and certain other associated terms are mistakenly considered to mean beautiful, young maidens, to be given as reward in the after-life to Muslim men, and on this basis the teachings of Islam are maligned and criticised as pandering to the crude, lustful desires of men. But this article is on some commentary notes from Holy Quran, explaining the concept of the term hur and its true significance.

Keywords: Hur, Islam, Righteous persons and Hereafter

1. “And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it. And for them therein are pure companions and therein they will abide” (Qur’an, 2: 25).
2. *Allah subhanahuwataala* (May Allah be Exalted) has promised the righteous persons with great blessings and rewards in the Hereafter. Verse 35 of Surah Al-Ahzab and other verses of the Glorious Qur’an make it amply clear that a mighty reward has been prepared for both righteous men and righteous women. An English translation of verse 35 of Surah Al-Ahzab reads as under:

“Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and truthful women, and the patient men and patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember--Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward” (Qur’an, 33: 35).
3. Maulana Muhammad Ali has explained the term “*azwajunmuthharatun*”, translated as “pure companions” occurring in verse 25 of Surah Al-Baqarah quoted above, in the following way in his commentary of the Holy Qur’an:

“The ‘pure mates or companions’ may be the believing wives of the faithful, as elsewhere we have: ‘They and their wives are in shades reclining on raised couches’ (Qur’an, 35: 36). But more probably these are among the blessings of the heavenly life to which men and women are equally entitled. The true nature of these blessings is pointed out elsewhere under the word ‘*hur*’, but it may be remarked here that all the blessings of heavenly life are according to a saying of the Holy Prophet “things which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive of them”

* Former Member of Public Service Commission, Bangladesh, E-mail: zqutub@gmail.com

(Bukhari 59: 8). The words in which these blessings are depicted in the Holy Qur'an, therefore, should not be taken literally".

4. The significance of the word "*azwaj*" used in the verse 25 of Surah Al-Baqarah should not be missed. '*azwaj*' is the plural of the word '*zawj*'. '*zawj*' means: 'A companion, mate, spouse, husband or wife, an individual when consorting with another: that in which individuals are united, as a kind, species, class, or sex: also a pair, a couple' (A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran by John Penrice). It would therefore mean either husband or wife, that is, spouses, mates, or companions in verse 25 of Surah Al-Baqarah. It may be remembered that the Holy Qur'an is full of clear statements (as already pointed out) women shall enjoy the bliss of paradise. It is in this context that Maulana Sayyid Abul Al'a Mawdudi has given the following comments on verse 25 of Surah Al-Baqarah:

"In paradise the spouse will be joined on the basis of piety. For instance, if a certain man lived a pious life in this world, but his wife did not; their marriage will be dissolved in the Hereafter. That pious man will be united with another pious woman whose marriage had been similarly dissolved and so on. But if both the husband and wife led pious lives here, they will continue to live as husband and wife forever in paradise" (Tafheemul Qur'an: Surah Al-Baqarah: Note 27).

5. While discussing the rewards of the righteous persons in the Hereafter, reference may be made usefully to the following verses of the Glorious Qur'an:
 - i. "Save the Servants of Allah, the purified ones. For them is a known sustenance: Fruits. And they are honored. In Gardens of delight, On thrones facing each other. A bowl of running water will be made to go round them: White, delicious to those who drink. It deprives not of reason, nor are they exhausted therewith. And with them are those modest in gaze, having beautiful eyes. As if they were eggs, carefully protected" (Qur'an, 37: 40-49).
 - ii. "Those who keep their duty are indeed in a secure place – In gardens and springs, Wearing fine and thick silk, facing one another – Thus (shall it be). And we shall join them to pure, beautiful ones (*bihurin in*). They call therein for every fruit in security – They taste not therein death, except the first death: and He will save them from chastisement of hell – A grace from thy Lord. This is the great achievement" (Qur'an, 44: 51-57).
 - iii. "The dutiful will be surely in Gardens and bliss. Rejoicing because of what their Lord has given them: and their Lord saved them from the chastisement of burning Fire. Eat and drink with pleasure for what you did, Reclining on thrones set in lines, and we shall join them to pure, beautiful ones (*hi-hur-in in*). And those who believe and whose offspring follow them in faith – We unite with them their offspring and we shall deprive them of naught of their work. Every man is pledged for what he does" (Qur'an, 52: 17-21).
 - iv. "And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Full of varieties. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Therein are two fountains flowing. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Therein are pairs of every fruit. Which then of

the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Reclining on beds, whose inner coverings are of silk brocade. And the fruits of two Gardens are within reach. When then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Therein are those restraining their glances, whom no man or *jinn* has touched before them. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? As though they were rubies and pearls. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness? Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? And besides those are two (other) Gardens. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Inclining to blackness. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? There are two springs gushing forth. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Therein are fruits and palms and pomegranates. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Therein are goodly beautiful ones. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Pure ones (*Hur-un*) confined to pavilions. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Before them man has not touched them, nor *jinn*. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Blessed be the name of thy Lord, the Lord of Glory and Honor” (Qur’an, 55: 46-78).

- v. “And the foremost are the foremost—These are drawn nigh (to Allah). In Gardens of bliss. A multitude from among the first, And a few from among those of latter times, On thrones inwrought, Reclining on them, facing each other. Round about them will go youths never altering in age, With goblets and ewers, and a cup of pure drink—They are not affected with headache thereby, nor are they intoxicated, And fruits that they choose, And flesh of fowl that they desire, And pure, beautiful ones, (*hur-un in*). Like to hidden pearls. A reward for what they did. They hear therein no vain or sinful talk—But only the saying, Peace! Peace (Qur’an, 56: 10-26).
6. In explaining the term ‘*hur-un in*’ occurring in verse 20 of Surah Al-Tur (Qur’an, 52: 20), Maulana Muhammad Ali has offered in his commentary of the Holy Qur’an, the following comments:
- “The word ‘*hur*’ occurs four times in the Holy Qur’an, and on two of these occasions, here in Qur’an, 52: 20 and in 44: 54, the form adopted is ‘*zawwajna-hum bi-hur-in in*’ and in 55: 72 and 56: 22 there is no mention of ‘*tazwij*’. While ‘*zawwaj-tu-huimra’t-an*’ (doubly transitive without a particle) means ‘I gave him in marriage a woman’ (Lane’s Lexicon), ‘*zawwajshai-an bi-shai-in*’ (made doubly transitive with particle ‘*bi*’) means ‘he coupled a thing with a thing’ or ‘united it to it as its fellow or like’ (Lane’s Lexicon). Therefore, the meaning is not the ‘*tazwij*’ commonly known i.e. marriage, for there will be no such ‘*tazwij*’ in paradise. In the Holy Qur’an, in verse 7 of Surah Al-Ala (Qur’an, 81: 7) it is stated: ‘*wa-idha-l-nufusuzuwwijjat*’. This is translated as meaning ‘and when the souls shall be coupled, or united with their fellows’, or according to some, ‘when each sect, or party, shall be united with those whom it has followed’ (Lane’s Lexicon).
7. As regards the word ‘*hur*’ it is the plural of ‘*ahwar*’ (applied to a man) of ‘*hawra*’ (applied to a woman), signifying one having eyes characterized by the quality termed ‘*hawar*’, which means intense whiteness of the white of the eye and intense blackness of the black thereof. The word ‘*ahwar*’ (singular of *hur*) also signifies pure or clear intellect’ (Lane Lexicon). The word ‘*in*’ is plural of ‘*ayan*’ (meaning a man wide in the eyes) and

of *'aina'* (meaning a woman beautiful and wide in the eye). The latter word also signifies a good or beautiful word, or saying (Lane's Lexicon). It may be noted that whiteness is a symbol of perfect and unsullied purity, and hence the two words *'hur'* and *in'* really stand for 'purity' and 'beauty'; and therefore, instead of 'white-eyed' and 'large-eyed' ones, the words pure and beautiful ones, are more expressive of the true significance.

8. To realize the true significance of these words, two points must be borne in mind. The first is that paradise is a place for faithful women as well as for faithful men, and hence the Holy Qur'an often speaks of the faithful as being in paradise with their wives; see for instance Qur'an, 36: 56, where the faithful are spoken of as sitting on thrones with their wives, or, Qur'an, 13: 23 and Qur'an, 40: 8, where they are spoken of as being in paradise along with their wives and offspring. The second is that the blessings of paradise are alike for women and men, there being not the least difference in this respect between the two sexes.
9. The question then is what is meant by *'hur in'* here (Qur'an, 52: 20). The Holy Qur'an does not speak of any conjugal relations being maintained in a physical sense in the life to come. Moreover, where the blessings of paradise are spoken in the Holy Qur'an, these are nothing but physical manifestations of the spiritual blessings which the doers of good enjoy in this life too. There are gardens, trees, rivers, milk, honey, fruits and numerous other blessings spoken of as being met within paradise, but all things are not things of this life. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said: Allah says I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what the heart of man has not conceived (Bukhari 59: 8). This saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) makes it clear that the blessings of paradise are not the things of this life. The Holy Qur'an also speaks of them in similar words:

"No soul knows what is hidden for it" (Qur'an, 32: 17). These clear statements need no comment and they establish beyond the shadow of any doubt that whatever blessings are spoken of as existing in paradise, the one thing sure about them is that they are not things of this world. Hence, even the white-eyed, large-eyed ones, or the pure-beautiful ones, the *'hur in'* of this verse (Qur'an, 52: 20), are not actually the beautiful women of this life. These are heavenly blessings, which the righteous women shall have along with the righteous men, for verse Qur'an, 52: 17 plainly says that those who keep their duty will find these blessings, and therefore, the pure-beautiful ones, (*hur in*) are as much a blessing meant for the righteous women as for the righteous men.
10. The question may still be asked, why are these blessings described in words which apply to women? The fact is that the reward spoken of here is one of having special reference to the 'purity of character' and the 'bountiful deeds' of the righteous, and it is womanhood, not manhood, that stands for a symbol of 'purity' and 'beauty'. Moreover, it should be noted that in Arabic *'salihat'* and *'tayyibat'* signify 'good deeds' and 'pure things' as well as good women and pure women, and this is another reason why the reward or 'good' and 'pure' deeds is spoken of in terms which apply to women. But note also that both *'hur'* and *'in'* are plurals of words applying to men as well as women, as also to qualities and deeds".
11. Verse 48-49 of Surah Al-Saffat ("And with them are those modest in gaze, having beautiful eyes, As if they were eggs, carefully protected") has been explained by Maulana Sayyid Abul Al'a Mawdudias follows:

“Probably these will be the girls who died before attaining the age of discretion in the world, and whose parents did not deserve to enter paradise. This can be said on the basis of analogy that just as boys similarly placed will be appointed for the service of the dwellers of paradise, and they will even remain boys, so will the girls be made the ‘*hur*’ and they will ever remain young and beautiful. The correct knowledge, however, is with Allah” (Tafheemul Qur’an 37: 48-49 Note 28).

12. Maulana Muhammad Ali has the following comments to offer on the above mentioned verses:

“The description of women given here calls attention to the prominent feature of the character of a good woman. In the first place, they are described as restraining their eyes, and modest in their gaze, and attention is thus called to the fact that the most valuable virtue of woman is that rare chastity which is described here a ‘restraint’ or freedom of the eye from lust. Then the beauty of their eyes is praised, the suggestion clearly being that the purity of the eye leads to its beauty, or that the real beauty of the eye consists in its purity.

13. “In the second place, they are described as being eggs carefully protected, which alludes to their pure and unsoiled character. It should, however, be noted that what is apparently a description of women is really a description of the fruits of deeds done in this life, the words adopted being applicable to both, and these are in fact spiritual blessings manifested physically. The blessings which it promises, whatever they may be, are as much meant for men as for women; the only thing certain about them is that their nature is different from the nature of the physical blessings of this life.”

14. Of the rewards of the righteous persons described in Surah Al-Rahman, is “therein are goodly beautiful ones” (Qur’an, 55: 70) and “pure ones (*hur-un*) confined to pavilions” (Qur’an, 55: 72).

15. The following comments have been offered by Maulana Sayyid Abul Al’Mawdudi in his commentary of the Qur’an (Tafheemul Qur’an) of those two verses - verse 70 and 72 of Surah Al-Rahman:

“The tents (pavilion) probably will be similar to those pitched for the nobles and rich people in the public parks. Most probably the wives of the dwellers of paradise will live with them in their palaces and in their parks there will be tents pitched here and there in which there will be ‘*hur*’ to entertain them. This presumption is based on this that in verse 70 of Surah Al-Rahman beautiful and chaste wives have been mentioned, now inverse 72 of the Surah, mention of the ‘*hur*’ signifies that they will be a different kind of women from the wives.

16. “This presumption is further strengthened by the Hadith which Umm Salmah (may Allah be pleased with her) has reported. She says ‘I asked: O Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), who are better: the women of the world or the ‘*hur*’. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) replied: The women of the world are superior to the ‘*hur*’ in the same way as the outer layer of a garment is superior to its lining. I asked: On what grounds? He replied: On the ground that the women have offered their prayers, observed their fasts and performed other devotions” (Tabarani). This shows that

the wives of the dwellers of paradise will be the women who affirmed the faith in the world and left the world while they practiced good and right. They will enter paradise in consequence of their faith and good deeds, and will deserve the blessings of paradise on merit. They would either become the wives of their previous husbands of their own free will and choice, if they two happened to be dwellers of paradise, Allah will wed them to some other dweller of paradise, if the two would like to live together as husband and wife. As for the '*hur*' they will not be entitled to dwell in paradise as a result of any righteous deed of their own, but Allah will create them as young, beautiful women and bestow them also as a blessing among the other blessings of the dwellers of paradise so that they may enjoy their companionship. But they will not in any case be creatures of the kind of the *jinn*s and fairies. Therefore, most probably these would be those innocent girls who died immature, and whose parents did not deserve paradise so that they could be admitted to paradise with them as the children of their righteous parents" (Tafheemul Qur'an 55: 72 Note 51).

17. Muhammad Asad, the author of 'The Road to Mecca' and 'Islam at the Cross Roads' has offered the following comments on the following verse of the Holy Qur'an in his English translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'an, 'The Message of the Qur'an -
 "And (with them will be their) Companions pure, most beautiful of eye" (Qur'an, 56: 22).
18. The noun '*hour*'-rendered as "companions pure" – is a plural of both "*ahwar*" (masculine) and "*hawra*" (feminine), either of which describes "a person distinguished by *hawar*" which latter term primarily denotes "intense whiteness of the eyeballs and lustrous black of the iris" (Qamus). In a more general sense, '*hawar*' signifies simply "whiteness" (*asas*) or, as a moral qualification, purity (compare Tabari, Razi and IbnKathir in their explanations of the term *hawariyyun* in Qur'an, 3: 52).
19. Hence the compound expression "*hur in*" signifies, approximately "pure beings" (or more specifically, "companions pure") "most beautiful of eye" (which latter is the meaning of '*in*' the plural of *a'yan*). In his comments on the identical expression in Qur'an, 52: 20, Razi observed that in as much as a person's eye reflects his soul more clearly than any other part of the human body, '*in*' may be understood as "rich of soul" or "soulful".
20. As regards the term '*hur*' in its more current, feminine connotation, quite a number of the earliest Qur'an commentators – among them Al-Hasan Al-Basri (may Allah be pleased with him) understood it as signifying no more or no less than "the righteous among the women of the human kind" (Tabari)- even those toothless old women of yours whom God will resurrect as new beings (Al-Hasan Al-Basri as quoted by Razi in his comments on Qur'an, 44: 54).

References

Al Qur'an
 Bukhari
 Tafheemul Qur'an