

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

TWO VERBS TO DESCRIBE 'FEAR' (KHASHIYA & KHAFa) - THE DIFFERENCE

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Those that have the ability to understand the Arabic Quran will often note the usage of two different verbs (khashiya and khafa) to describe fear. (There are also other Arabic terms which denote 'fear' but are not the focus of this article).

These two terms are rendered almost identically in translations and in many Arabic dictionaries. Therefore, for many readers of translations, it is almost impossible to detect and appreciate the subtle difference in nuance when the terms are encountered in the Quran.

Both the verbs '**khashiya**' (root:kh-sh-y) and '**khafa**' (root kh-w-f) inherently mean **to fear or to be afraid of something**.

Generally, '**khashiya**' implies a fear which is based on actual knowledge or a fear which has a sound basis in knowledge for that fear. For example, a fear based on veneration, awe and in reverence to God would be 'khashiya'.

In contrast, '**khafa**' has a generalised import and denotes a fear which **may or may not** have a sound basis on which the fear is based. For example, a fear that someone may attack you (4:101), fearing poverty, fearing heights, fearing lightening (13:12), fearing darkness, fearing what someone may do after you die (19:5) etc, are examples of 'khawf' which may or may not have a sound basis for the fear.

خشي

1. خَشِيَ, aor. يَخْشِي, inf. n. خَشْيَةٌ (JK, S, M, Mṣb, K) and خَشِيَ (JK, M, K) and خَشِيَ (Sgh, K) [the second and third erroneously written in the CK خَشَا and (by indication) خَشَا] and خَشَاةٌ (M, K) and خَشْيَانٌ, (JK, M, K,) though it has been said that the only instances of this kind are شَتَانٌ and لَيَانٌ, [see the former of these two,] but in one copy of the M found written خَشْيَانٌ, (TA,) and مَخْشَاةٌ (JK, M, K) and مَخْشِيَةٌ, (M, K,) He feared; syn. خَافَ (JK, S, M, Mṣb, K:) or, accord. to Er-Rāghib and others, he dreaded; or feared with reverence, veneration, respect, honour, or awe. (TA.) You say, خَشِيَهُ He feared him, or it; [or he dreaded

him, or it; i. e. feared him, or it, with reverence, &c.;] as also تَخَشَّاهُ. (K.) [And خَشِيَ مِنْهُ, meaning the same: or He feared, or dreaded, what might happen to him from him, or it. And خَشِيَ عَلَيْهِ شَيْئًا He feared, or dreaded, for him a thing.] And فَعَلْتُ ذَلِكَ خَشَاةً أَنْ يَكُونَ كَذَا [I did that in fear, or dread, that such a thing might happen]. (IAṣr, TA.) — خَشْيَةٌ also sig-

Source [1]

خوف

1. خَافَ, (S, Mṣb, K, &c.,) originally خَوَّفَ, (Lth, L, &c.,) first pers. خَفَّتُ, (TA,) aor. يَخَافُ, (S, K, &c.,) originally يَخْوَفُ, (L,) imperative خَفِّ, (S,) inf. n. خَوْفٌ (S, Mṣb, K, &c.) and خَفِيفٌ, [originally خَوْفٌ,] (Lh, TA,) erroneously written in the K with fet-ḥ [to the خ], but some say that this is a simple subst., not an inf. n., (TA,) and خَفِيفَةٌ, (Lh, S, Mṣb, K, &c.,) originally خَوْفَةٌ, (K,) but some say that this also is a simple subst., not an inf. n., (TA,) and [therefore] its pl. is خَفِيفٌ, (Lh, JK, S, and so in the CK,) in [some of] the copies of the K erroneously written خَفِيفٌ, (TA,) or this [as well as the next preceding] may be an inf. n., for some few inf. ns. have pls., (ISd, TA,) and مَخَافَةٌ, (S, Mṣb, K, &c.,) originally مَخْوَفَةٌ, for which last, the first of these inf. ns. is used by a poet, and therefore made fem., (TA,) He feared; he was afraid or frightened or terrified; syn. فَزِعَ. (K.) It is also trans.: (Mṣb:) you say, خَافَهُ and تَخَوَّفَهُ [He feared, or was afraid of, him, or it]; (Mṣb, TA;) both signifying the same: (TA:) [and so خَافَ مِنْهُ; or this may mean he feared what might happen to him from him, or it:] and خَافَ عَلَيْهِ شَيْئًا, meaning خَافَهُ [i. e. خَافَ عَلَيْهِ شَيْئًا He feared for him a thing]: (S, K:) and

Source [2]

This general synonymy of 'khashiya' with 'khafa' to denote **fear** as mentioned in the lexicon excerpt above (left) is supported by the Quran where the terms have been used interchangeably. For example:

005:044

"but fear (Arabic: ikh'shawni) Me and sell not my verses for a miserable price"

003:175

"...but fear (Arabic: khafuni) Me, if you are believers"

Here both types of fear have a firm basis in knowledge and one notes complete synonymy of the two terms given the above contexts.

However, one also notes varying shades of expression when the terms are used in certain contexts to capture different meanings. This difference can be observed when the two different verbs appear in the same verse of the Quran.

004:009 (part)

"And let those fear (Arabic: wal-yakhsha) who if they left behind them weak offspring would have feared / been afraid (Arabic khafu) for them..."

It is noted in the above verse that one is a fear of reverence based on knowledge and truth, possibly a fear of God (yakhsha), the other is a generalised fear of a situation (khafu). Here, the types of fear are differentiated, even though this may not be readily apparent in some translations.

This differentiation can be observed in other examples of the Quran where the two verbs are used closely in a given a context.

020:044

'But speak; to him with gentle speech, perhaps he may take heed of the reminder or fear (God) (Arabic: yaksha)'

020.045

"They said: Our Lord! Indeed, we fear (Arabic: nakhafu) that he will hasten against us or that he will transgress"

020.046

He said: Do not fear (Arabic: takhafa). Indeed, I am with you both; I hear and I see.

In the above continuous verses, the verb 'yaksha' in verse 20:44 is a fear that has basis and is one borne out of a reverence for God (in knowledge).

In contrast, the verbs 'yakhafu' are one of generalised fear of what Pharaoh may do to them (an assumption and based on no knowledge). This fear is unfounded as is apparent from God's response. The nuance is indeed subtle, but it is nevertheless present.

A similar observation can be noted in yet another verse.

020:077

"And verily, We inspired Moses: "Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, without fear (Arabic: takhafu) of being overtaken and without being afraid / having fear (Arabic: taksha)."

In this verse, the 'taksha' clearly carries a legitimate fear of the overall situation. This is supported by the fact that they were asked to leave by night.

The fear 'takhafu' is a generalised fear attributed to them and pertains to being overtaken. This condition on part of those fleeing may or may not have a sound basis for that fear and would not be based on actual knowledge. Hence we note God's response, "...strike a dry path for them through the sea, without fear (Arabic: takhafu) of being overtaken..."

Once again, the different shade of meaning is subtle, yet nevertheless apparent between the two terms.

n.vb. (<i>khashyah</i>)	n.vb. (<i>khawf</i>)
<p>2:74 and others crash down in the fear of God 4:77 as they would fear God 4:77 or with a greater fear 17:31 slay not your children for fear of poverty 17:100 yet would you hold back for fear of expending 21:28 they tremble in awe of Him 23:57 surely those who tremble in fear of their Lord 59:21 thou wouldst have seen it humbled, split asunder out of the fear of God</p>	<p>2:38 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 2:62 and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 2:112 and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 2:155 surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger 2:262 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 2:274 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 2:277 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 3:170 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 4:83 when there comes to them a matter, be it of security or fear, they broadcast it 5:69 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 6:48 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 7:35 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 7:49 enter Paradise; no fear upon you, nor shall you sorrow 7:56 and call on Him fearfully, eagerly 10:62 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow 10:83 for fear of Pharaoh and their Council, that they would persecute them 13:12 it is He who shows you the lightning, for fear and hope 16:112 so God let it taste the garment of hunger and of fear 24:55 and will give them in exchange, after their</p>

Source [3]

fear, security

30:24 He shows you lightning, for fear and hope

32:16 their sides shun their couches as they call
on their Lord in fear and hope

33:19 when fear comes upon them, thou seest
them looking at thee

33:19 but when the fear departs, they flay you
with sharp tongues

43:68 O My servants, today no fear is on you

46:13 no fear shall be on them, neither shall they
sorrow

106:4 and secured them from fear

Source [4]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Even though there is similarity between the two verbs, 'khashiya' and 'khafa' when capturing 'fear', they remain nuanced expressions when used in particular contexts. This is often extremely difficult to detect in translations.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 2, Page 745

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid., Page 823

[3] KASSIS. H E, A Concordance of the Qur'an, University of California Press: Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, Page 712

[4] Ibid., Page 719

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