

Pearls
FROM THE
Quran



LESSONS FROM

Sūrah al-Kahf

سورة الكهف

❦ DR YASIR QADHI ❦

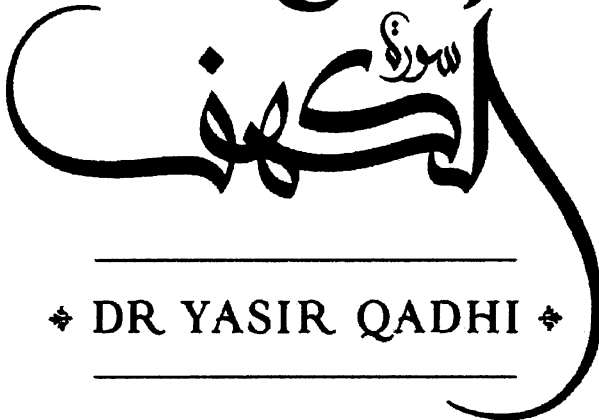
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Arabic Consonants

Initial, unexpressed medial and final: ء ’

ا a	د d	ض ḍ	ك k
ب b	ذ dh	ط ṭ	ل l
ت t	ر r	ظ ṣ	م m
ث th	ز z	ع ’	ن n
ج j	س s	غ gh	ه h
ح ḥ	ش sh	ف f	و w
خ kh	ص ṣ	ق q	ي y

With a *shaddah*, both medial and final consonants are doubled.

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

Short: ا اَ اِ اُ u

Long: اَ اَ اِ اِ اُ اُ

Diphthongs: اَو aw

اَي ay

Introduction and Blessings of Surah *Al-Kahf*



The Virtues of Surah *al-Kahf*

Surah *al-Kahf* is among the earliest revelations received by our Prophet ﷺ. In a hadith narrated by 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, the Prophet ﷺ states: 'Surah *Banī Isrā'īl*, *al-Kahf*, *Maryam*, *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Anbiyā*' are amongst my first earnings and my old property, and (in fact) they are my old property.'¹

The surah summarizes for us the gist of Islam; its main theme is that Allah ﷻ will protect us from all trials. Told through a series of stories that illustrate specific trials, it teaches that Allah ﷻ will protect the believer at times of severity. Here we will focus on four stories detailed in *al-Kahf* that represent the crux of the surah:

1. **THE PEOPLE OF THE CAVE:** The first of the stories is that of the young men who sought refuge in the cave, and it is from this story that Surah *al-Kahf* derives its name. The trial illustrated in this surah is that of the *fitnah* (trial or testing) of religion; when people persecute others because of their belief in Allah ﷻ. The People of the Cave were one such group of young men who believed in Allah ﷻ, for which the king of the land wanted to kill them. As a result, they fled and sought protection in a cave and Allah ﷻ protected them.
2. **THE MAN WITH TWO GARDENS:** This second story illustrates the *fitnah* of money and the consequences of being mentally consumed by it. The story explores what happens when money causes one to become

arrogant, and the solution presented for this trial is to realize that the *dunyā* is temporary, that Allah ﷻ gives and we do not give, and that all we have will eventually be taken away.

3. MŪSĀ AND KHIDR: The third story is the famous account of Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ. The main *fitnah* here is that of false knowledge. If knowledge does not lead to humility, then it too can become a *fitnah*. Knowledge can lead to arrogance if it is misused or abused. Of course, Mūsā ؑ overcomes this *fitnah* and, in his humility and humbleness, he learns from somebody other than himself and rises because of it.
4. DHŪ AL-QARNAYN: The final story is that of Dhū al-Qarnayn, and in this story is illustrated the *fitnah* of power, including the *fitnah* of kingship and the control of people. Allah ﷻ mentions that He tested Dhū al-Qarnayn with this *fitnah*, who overcame it by being aware that Allah ﷻ is *Malik al-Mulk*, the One who is the ultimate king.

It is these four major *fitans*, detailed through the four major stories in Surah *al-Kahf*, that we will study and learn from.

The Blessings of Surah *al-Kahf*

There are numerous hadiths that detail the blessings of Surah *al-Kahf*, and here we will explore a few of them. Prominent among them is the hadith of the famous companion, al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib, who narrates:

A man was reciting Surah *al-Kahf* and his horse was tied with two ropes beside him. A cloud came down and spread over that man, and it kept on coming closer and closer to him till his horse started jumping (as if afraid of something). When it was morning, the man came to the Prophet ﷺ, and told him of that experience. The Prophet ﷺ said, 'That was *al-sakīnah* (tranquillity), which descended because of (the recitation of) the Qur'an.'²

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī explains that *al-sakīnah* referred to here are the angels, because wherever angels go, peace and tranquillity descend. Such is

the beauty of Surah *al-Kahf* that it is this peace and tranquillity that descended upon its recitation.

It has been previously mentioned that Surah *al-Kahf* is one of the earliest revelations, revealed in the first or second year of the Prophet's ﷺ *da'wah*. The reason for this early revelation is that this surah fortifies the believer with *īmān*. It teaches that no matter what is happening, Allah ﷻ will take care of you.

Another blessing of Surah *al-Kahf* is that it protects against the *fitnah* of Dajjāl. As reported in the hadith of Abū al-Dardā' ؓ, the Prophet ﷺ said: 'He who memorizes the first ten verses of Surah *al-Kahf* will be protected from the trial of the Dajjāl. In another narration, it is the last ten verses of Surah *al-Kahf*.'³ In another lengthy hadith on the authority of al-Nawwās ibn Sam'ān, the Prophet ﷺ mentioned the *fitnah* of Dajjāl and stated:

If he comes forth while I am among you I shall be the one who will dispute with him on your behalf, but if he comes forth when I am not among you, then every man must dispute on his own behalf, and Allah will take my place in looking after every Muslim. Those of you who live up to his time should recite over him the opening verses of Surah *al-Kahf*, for they are your protection from his trial.

We asked: How long will he remain on the Earth?

He replied: Forty days, one like a year, one like a month, one like a week, and rest of his days like yours.

We asked: Messenger of Allah, will one day's prayer suffice us in this day which will be like a year?

He replied: No, you must make an estimate of its extent. Then Jesus son of Mary will descend at the white minaret to the east of Damascus. He will then catch him up at the gate of Lud and kill him.⁴

We learn, therefore, that the beginning of Surah *al-Kahf*—and in another hadith the first ten verses of the surah—is a protection from the *fitnah* of Dajjāl.

A further blessing of Surah *al-Kahf* is that our Prophet ﷺ has taught us that: 'Whoever reads Surah *al-Kahf* on the day of Jumu'ah shall have a light that will shine from him from one Friday to the next.'⁵ Similarly, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrates that whoever recites Surah *al-Kahf* as it was revealed, i.e. recited with proper *tilāwah* (recitation), with *tajwīd* (the art of Qur'an recitation) and *khushū'* (humility), should they meet Dajjāl they will be saved from being overpowered by him. This is the first blessing detailed in this hadith about Surah *al-Kahf*. The second blessing detailed in this particular hadith is that whoever recites the surah on Friday will have a light shining from them to Makkah. The hadith therefore shows us that the light emanating as a result of reciting this surah is so powerful that it illuminates all the way to Makkah. In yet another, slightly weaker, version it is reported that whoever recites Surah *al-Kahf* on a Friday will have all of their minor sins forgiven until the following Friday. Thus, the virtues of reciting this surah on Friday are clear.

Protection from Dajjāl

The protection from Dajjāl is evidently a significant blessing of Surah *al-Kahf*. The *fitnah* of Dajjāl will be the worst *fitnah* mankind will ever witness, as Jābir ؓ narrates:

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: There is no *fitnah* that will arise before the Final Hour greater than the *fitnah* of Dajjāl, and there has been no prophet in the past, except that they warned their people, and indeed, I am about to inform you that of which no prophet has informed before.

Then he placed his hand on his eye and said: I bear witness that Allah *Ta'ālā* is not one-eyed.⁶

There is no *fitnah* that will cause more destruction, wreak more havoc, kill more people, and cause more bloodshed than that of Dajjāl. As we learn from our traditions, Dajjāl will come and claim to be God on earth, but the hadith tells us that he even looks imperfect—one of his eyes will be infested—and Allah, exalted is He, is not imperfect in any way. He will be given

what will appear as miracles that will fool mankind into thinking he is divine. These apparent miracles will include the ability to stop and start the rain from falling. Even though it shall be a time of severe drought and hunger, the Dajjāl will be able to make rain fall and plants grow such that people can eat, and accordingly his followers will flourish. As for those who reject him, Dajjāl will be able to kill them, and the trials on Muslim believers from Dajjāl will be more severe than any other.

In the face of such tribulations, what is the relevance of Surah *al-Kahf*? If we consider the beginning of the surah, the first ten ayahs relate the story of the People of the Cave, fleeing persecution from the king for their beliefs. These men fled seeking Allah's ﷻ protection and were granted it. In the context of Dajjāl, he will be that murderous king and the believers will be the men fleeing persecution. Indeed, our Prophet ﷺ has said: 'There will come a time when the best property of a Muslim will be sheep, which he will take to the tops of mountains and the places of rainfall so as to flee with his religion from the afflictions.'⁷ This is exactly what these young men did, and what Muslims will do in a later time.

Furthermore, among the tribulations that Dajjāl will bring will be his ability to control food and water. Those who believe in him will be fed and those who do not, Dajjāl will stop their sources of sustenance and cause the earth to dry up beneath them. In such a context, Allah ﷻ explicitly teaches us in Surah *al-Kahf*: '*In the ultimate, We shall reduce all that is on the earth to a barren plain.*'⁸ Allah ﷻ thus teaches that He is the one who controls the earth and it is to Him that we must turn for sustenance, not to Dajjāl. Furthermore, Surah *al-Kahf* teaches us that the dwellers of the cave sought Allah's ﷻ aid and He paved a way out for them. In some traditions, it is also mentioned that people will seek protection in the caves and mountains from Dajjāl, thus resembling the young men and the cave mentioned in the beginning of the surah.

The tenth verse of the surah concludes in a manner that is perfect and optimistic, with the prayer of the young men: '*Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and provide for us rectitude in our affairs*'⁹ It is notable that it is at this tenth verse that the verses of protection conclude. The eleventh verse goes on to relate the slumber that Allah ﷻ bestowed on the young

men as the manner in which they were saved. Yet this will not be the manner in which those fleeing Dajjāl will be saved. As the Prophet ﷺ has taught us, it will be the arrival of ʿĪsā ibn Maryam عليه السلام that will herald the salvation of the Muslims.¹⁰ And thus we conclude at the tenth verse, a verse of *duʿāʾ* (supplication) which teaches us that the dwellers of the cave prayed to Allah ﷻ for help and He accepted their *duʿāʾ*.

1 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4994.

2 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 5011.

3 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 809.

4 *Al-Jāmiʾ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Tirmidhī, 2190; *Sunan* Abū Dāwūd, 4321.

5 *Mustadrak al-Hākim*, 2/399.

6 *Mustadrak al-Hākim*, vol. 1 p. 76.

7 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7088.

8 *Surah al-Kahf* 18: 8.

9 *Surah al-Kahf* 18: 10.

10 Narrated Abū Hurayrah: The Prophet ﷺ said: 'There is no prophet between me and him, that is, Jesus عليه السلام. He will descend (to the earth). When you see him, recognize him: a man of medium height, reddish fair, wearing two light yellow garments, looking as if drops were falling down from his head though it will not be wet. He will fight the people for the cause of Islam. He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish *jizyah*. Allah will perish all religions except Islam. He will destroy the Antichrist and will live on the earth for forty years and then he will die. The Muslims will pray over him.' (*Sunan* Abū Dāwūd, 4324)



Circumstances of Revelation, Features and the Opening Verses



We have established that the primary theme of Surah *al-Kahf* is that Allah ﷻ will protect those who turn to Him for protection. This theme ties in with the title of the surah; *al-Kahf*, meaning the cave, is a symbolic place of protection. Like the cave of Ḥirā' and the cave of Thawr, where Allah ﷻ protected the Prophet ﷺ, so the title of the surah reflects its primary theme in literal terms in addition to being a reference to the story of the People of the Cave.

In this chapter we will explore the circumstances of the revelation of this surah and consider the first few verses of the surah.

Circumstances of Revelation

Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarānī mention in their respective *tafasir* (commentaries) that the reason Surah *al-Kahf* was revealed was in response to specific questions raised by the Quraysh. The Quraysh had never heard of a prophet from any previously revealed Divine Book until the Prophet ﷺ began preaching. They therefore asked some of their elders to approach the Jewish community in the city of Yathrib (later to be renamed Madinah) and asked them what a prophet is and what are the signs of a true prophet. Accordingly, a delegation from the Quraysh went to Yathrib where they spoke to the Jewish community there, stating that a man among the Quraysh is claiming to be a prophet, so how should the Quraysh know whether he is true or not. The Jews told them to test the Prophet ﷺ with three questions:

1. What is the story of the young men who fled seeking Allah's ﷻ protection (i.e. the People of the Cave)?
2. What is the story of the king whom Allah ﷻ blessed with the east and west (i.e. Dhū al-Qarnayn)?
3. What is the *rūḥ* (i.e. soul)?

The Jews added that the Prophet ﷺ should know the answers to the first two questions, but not the third question as no one knows what the *rūḥ* is apart from Allah ﷻ.

The delegation of Quraysh then returned to Makkah, and the questions were posed to the Prophet ﷺ. Our Prophet ﷺ had become accustomed to Jibrīl ﷺ coming down at a certain time of the week, and in this instance it was the following day. Therefore, expecting Jibrīl's ﷺ arrival at the usual time, the Prophet ﷺ responded to the Quraysh that they should wait until the following day when he will be able to give them the answers to their questions. He was confident in Jibrīl's ﷺ arrival and did not say *inshā'Allāh*. However, instead of coming the following day, Jibrīl delayed his visit; in some reports he came three days later and in other reports it was fifteen days later. The Quraysh were pleased at the delay, given it undermined the Prophet ﷺ.

When Jibrīl ﷺ did come, he came with Surah *al-Isrā'*, which is also known as Surah *Banī Isrā'īl*, and Surah *al-Kahf*. In these surahs were the answers to the questions. The account of the young men of the cave is at the beginning of Surah *al-Kahf* and that of Dhū al-Qarnayn is at the end. As for the question of the *rūḥ*, it is found in Surah *al-Isrā'*. Allah ﷻ states in verse 85: *'They ask you about "the spirit". Say: "The spirit descends by the command of my Lord, but you have been given only a little knowledge."*' This means we don't know what the *rūḥ* is. To this day we cannot scientifically prove that there is a *rūḥ* and it is beyond our understanding.

Notable Features and Verses 1-3

There are some interesting features of Surah *al-Kahf* that connect it both to Surah *al-Isrā'* and the wider Qur'an. According to some Quranic scholars, if one were to count the words of the Quran, the word that occurs in the

exact middle of the entire Qur'an is found in Surah *al-Kahf*, and the word itself is *wa-l-yatalataf*, from the noun *latīf*. To be '*latīf*' has multiple meanings, including to be discrete and to be merciful and kind. Also notable is that because it is the middle of the Qur'an, the surah begins with the exact same opening with which the Qur'an begins. Just as Surah *al-Fātiḥah* begins with *alḥamdulillāh*, so Surah *al-Kahf* begins with *alḥamdulillāh* in its very first verse:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا ۝١

Praise be to Allah Who has revealed to His servant the Book devoid of all crookedness; (*al-Kahf* 18: 1)

Furthermore, we see that the end of Surah *al-Isrā'* is very directly linked to the beginning of Surah *al-Kahf*. The end of *al-Isrā'* calls upon the reader to praise Allah ﷻ, who has no son:

وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِنَ الذَّلِيلِ وَكَبِيرَةٌ تَكْبِيرًا ۝١٧

And say: 'All praise be to Allah Who has neither taken to Himself a son, nor has He any partner in His kingdom, nor does He need anyone, out of weakness, to protect Him.' So glorify Him in a manner worthy of His glory. (*al-Isrā'* 17: 111)

Accordingly, Surah *al-Kahf* begins in praise of Allah ﷻ, as seen above, and warns against those who claim He has a son:

وَيُنذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۝٤

... and also to warn those who say: 'Allah has taken to Himself a son,' (*al-Kahf* 18: 4)

We will now take a closer look at Surah *al-Kahf*'s first three verses:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لِمَنْ عَرَفْهُ ۝

Praise be to Allah Who has revealed to His servant the Book devoid of all crookedness; (*al-Kahf* 18: 1)

فِيمَا لِيُنذِرَ بَأْسًا شَدِيدًا مِّنْ لَّدُنْهُ وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا ۝

an unerringly Straight Book, meant to warn of a stern punishment from Allah, and to proclaim, to those who believe and work righteous deeds, the tiding that theirs shall be a good reward (*al-Kahf* 18: 2)

مُتَكِّينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ۝

wherein they shall abide for ever; (*al-Kahf* 18: 3)

The surah begins in praise of Allah ﷻ who sent down to His 'abd (servant), the Prophet ﷺ, a book, the Qur'an, in which He has not made anything crooked nor incorrect. Allah ﷻ further establishes that the Book is straight and firm, such that He may warn about the severe punishment that is coming from Him and give glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds that they will have much blessings and rewards.

Hamd (الحمد) is a beautiful word that indicates praise. There are many words in the Arabic language that indicate praise; there is *madh* (مدح) meaning 'to praise' and there is *shukr* (شكر) meaning to give thanks and gratitude. The word *madh* means to flatter, and often *madh* is done out of the sense of wanting to impress the person to whom it is directed. One can do *madh* to gain the favour of someone, and it could therefore be insincere and false, or it could be true. *Shukr* is only done in response to a good done

to you. In response to someone doing us a good turn, we say *shukran*, and so *shukr* is an exchange.

However, *ḥamd* is completely different to *shukr* and *madh*. *Ḥamd* is to praise solely because the one that you are praising is worthy of that praise. So it is simultaneously broader and more specific. It is broader because it has nothing to do with what the one that you are praising might have done for you. And it is also more specific in that you have to praise the one being praised solely because he deserves that praise due to internal characteristics that he possesses, and not due to anything he has done to or for you. While *shukr* is in response to a favour of some kind or because you hope for a return, *ḥamd* is done because the one you are praising is worthy of that *ḥamd*.

Surah *al-Kahf* begins with *Alhamdulillah*: All praise is due to Allah ﷻ. Why is He worthy of praise? As the verse states, because Allah ﷻ has revealed upon His *‘abd*, the Prophet ﷺ, the Book which is the Qur’an. So powerful is the miracle and blessing of the Qur’an that has been brought down for the world that it behoves us to praise Allah ﷻ for it. In fact He mentions this in other verses as well; Surah *al-Furqān* begins:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا ﴿١﴾

Most blessed is He Who sent down this Criterion on His servant, to be a warner to all mankind; (*al-Furqān* 25: 1)

Here *Furqān*, or ‘Criterion’, refers to the Qur’an. And so, Allah ﷻ is praised for having revealed this miraculous Book.

In the opening verse of Surah *al-Kahf*, Allah ﷻ mentions who is the recipient of the Book: *‘alā ‘abdihi* عَلَى عَبْدِهِ. Many have translated *‘abd* as ‘slave’, but the real meaning here is not slave but ‘worshipper’. The highest praise for any person is to be a worshipper of Allah ﷻ; this is the highest *maqām* or status a person can reach, as no human will be exalted until they humble themselves in front of Allah ﷻ. The more humble we are in front of Allah ﷻ, the more honoured we are. And the one who has attained the height of humility in front of Allah ﷻ is our Prophet ﷺ. When Allah ﷻ says

‘My ‘abd’, this is the highest praise He can give to any creation. By identifying the Prophet ﷺ thus, He is saying this is My worshipper who has worshipped Me the way that nobody else has worshipped Me.

Indeed, our Prophet ﷺ is referenced as ‘abd in the most honoured places in the Qur’an. For example, in Surah *al-Furqān* when describing the Qur’an being revealed:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا ﴿١﴾

Most blessed is He Who sent down this Criterion on His servant, to be a warner to all mankind; (*al-Furqān* 25: 1)

Similarly, in Surah *al-Baqarah* at a moment where Allah ﷻ is defending the Prophet ﷺ:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

If you are in any doubt whether it is We Who have revealed this Book to Our servant, then produce just a surah like it, and call all your supporters and seek in it the support of all others save Allah. Accomplish this if you are truthful. (*al-Baqarah* 2: 23)

Also, in Surah *al-Isrā’*, when Allah ﷻ praises the Prophet ﷺ by the greatest miracle that he was given, the night journey *al-Isrā’ wa al-Mi’rāj*:

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى
الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنَ الْأَيْتَانِ إِنَّهُ
هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿١٧﴾

Exalted is He Who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque (in Makkah) to the farther Mosque (in Jerusalem) whose surroundings We have blessed that We might show him some of Our Signs. Indeed, He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (*al-Isrā'* 17: 1)

So in all of these occasions, when defending the Prophet ﷺ, raising his rank, and speaking of his *maqām*, Allah ﷻ uses the term *'abd*.

The opening verse of Surah *al-Kahf* also states Allah ﷻ has revealed the '*kitāb*' (كِتَاب), referring to the Qur'an. *Kitāb* has two meanings to it; the first is the literal meaning that is 'book', and *kataba*, which means to write down. However, *Katb*, with a *sukūn*, also means 'a large amount'. So, the meaning of *kitāb* is both that this book, the Qur'an, contains a large amount of wisdom and information, and that this book has been written down. The Qur'an literally means that which is read, and the *kitāb* is that which is written down. As such Qur'an and *kitāb* are complementary, for the Revelation is preserved both via recitation and via writing.

The verse continues: وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فِيهَا غُرْبًا, meaning Allah ﷻ did not place any crookedness or misunderstanding in the Qur'an. This statement proves that the Qur'an and the *risālah* of the Prophet ﷺ are linked. This is because Allah ﷻ has said that this is the book sent to His *'abd*, and so the proof of the Prophet's ﷺ prophecy can be found by examining the book which has been revealed to him. This book is the credentials of the *Rasūl*, i.e. the Messenger ﷺ, and is the miracle given to him. Likewise, the book is therefore also the credentials of Islam, preached by the Prophet ﷺ.

When we seek those credentials in the book, we find it is a book with nothing strange or misunderstood, as verse 2 establishes: قَيِّمًا لِّبِنَاءِ أَصْنَافٍ. '*Qayyiman*' (قَيِّمًا) means both that the book is straight and that it makes others straight. It is noteworthy that in these two verses Allah ﷻ negates crookedness and affirms straightness. This is very similar to the beginning of Surah *al-Baqarah*:

الْقُرْآنِ

Alif, Lām, Mīm.

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١﴾

This is the Book of Allah, there is no doubt in it; it is a guidance for the pious, (*al-Baqarah* 2: 1)

In these verses Allah ﷻ established that there is nothing that is confusing or crooked in the Qur'an, it is a guidance. First evil is negated, then the positive is affirmed; the Qur'an has no evil and is nothing but positive. As the opening verses of Surah *al-Kahf* established, the Qur'an has no *īwaj* or crookedness, it is *qayyiman*, or straight, and straightening of others. It is also a book which warns both of a severe punishment from Allah ﷻ and a great reward from Him for those who believe and do good deeds.

The nature of this reward is then clarified in verse 3:

مُكَيِّمِينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣﴾

... wherein they shall abide for ever; (*al-Kahf* 18: 3)

A place of reward where they will live forever is, of course, *Jannah*.

Significantly, in these verses Allah ﷻ concisely combines the three fundamentals of Islam: *tawhīd* (توحيد), *risālah* (رسالة) and *Ākhirah* (الآخرة). The *tawhīd* element is that of Allah ﷻ praising Himself, *risālah* that He revealed the book to the Prophet ﷺ and *Ākhirah* that those who reject it will be punished and those who accept it will be rewarded. Furthermore, the three pillars of *īmān* have also been referenced: loving Allah ﷻ, fearing Him, and hoping in Allah ﷻ. The verses clarify it thus; Allah ﷻ is worthy of being praised because we love Him, we are warned against punishment and we fear His punishment, and glad tidings are given of reward and we hope for Allah's ﷻ reward. In this manner, from the fundamentals of Islam to the pillars of *īmān*, Allah ﷻ compactly combines all in these remarkably succinct opening verses.

It is noteworthy that Allah ﷻ always combines warnings with glad tidings in the same context, and this we also see in these opening verses.

The Qur'an always uses both together to evoke fear and hope, akin to the carrot and stick concept, and Islam brings these two emotions together where the carrot/incentive is combined with the stick/punishment. Humans being the weak creatures that we are, we need both motivational factors in order to accomplish our best works.

A worthy final point here is that Allah ﷻ mentions the Qur'an as being the ultimate criterion of Him and His Prophet ﷺ, and of the *risālah* and *qiyāma*. All are linked to the Qur'an, and therefore the Qur'an is the ultimate proof of our religion. This is a reality that is often lost on us, and one that we must understand. The Qur'an is the living miracle in every sense; from recitation to hearing, memorization, understanding and implementation. When asked about the proof of Islam or the proof of Prophethood, our response should be that it is the Qur'an. This reality of the Qur'an is one that, as we shall see, is frequently revisited in Surah *al-Kahf*.



Speaking False of Allah and Comforting the Prophet



As we have seen, the opening verses of the surah praise Allah ﷻ and establish the prophethood—the *nubūwa* and *risālah*—of the Prophet ﷺ. In this chapter we will go on to explore verses 4–8, consider its themes of challenging those who make false claims regarding Allah ﷻ, and the Prophet's ﷺ struggle in preaching to the Quraysh. The verses state:

وَنُذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۖ

... and also to warn those who say: 'Allah has taken to Himself a son,' (*al-Kahf* 18: 4)

مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ۖ

a thing about which they have no knowledge, neither they nor their ancestors. Dreadful is the word that comes out of their mouths. What they utter is merely a lie. (*al-Kahf* 18: 5)

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَخِيعُ نَفْسِكَ عَلَى مَا نَذِرُهُمْ إِنَّ لَكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ هَذَا
الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا ﴿٦﴾

(O Muhammad), if they do not believe in this Message, you will perhaps torment yourself to death with grief, sorrowing over them. (*al-Kahf* 18: 6)

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ﴿٧﴾

Surely, We have made all that is on the earth an embellishment for it in order to test people as to who of them is better in conduct. (*al-Kahf* 18: 7)

وإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا ﴿٨﴾

In the ultimate, We shall reduce all that is on the earth to a barren plain. (*al-Kahf* 18: 8)

Verses 4 and 5 mention one of the main purposes of the Qur'an; to negate false accusations about Allah ﷻ and to affirm what we must believe about Him. We have no knowledge of who Allah ﷻ is except through the Qur'an. Here, Allah ﷻ criticizes anyone who claims He has a child. Now these verses came down in Makkah, where there were no Christians or Jews, so the addressees were the Quraysh. The Arabic word *walad* (ولد) used in verse 4 can mean 'son' as well as 'child'. While the Christians claim Allah ﷻ has a son, the Quraysh used to claim that He has daughters, too. Here Allah ﷻ warns against such claims, establishing their falsehood.

When asked as to where such claims came from, the Quraysh would say it was told to them by their forefathers and was in their culture and traditions. In verse 5 Allah ﷻ says neither they nor their forefathers know anything. These verses establish that one of the greatest sins in Islam is to speak about Allah ﷻ and His religion, Islam, without knowledge. Here,

Allah ﷻ challenges those who speak lies about Him. The Qur'an tells us that Shayṭān teaches us to associate partners with Allah ﷻ and one of the tricks of Shayṭān is to speak about Him without knowledge. Indeed, this is one of our biggest challenges. It is not possible to deviate from the truth except if there is a lie about Allah ﷻ and Islam, a lie about true *tawḥīd*, i.e. the oneness of Allah ﷻ, or true *risālah*. It is Shayṭān who misguides to lies, so anybody who speaks without knowledge of Allah ﷻ and His Messenger and the Qur'an and Islam is getting their misinformation from Shayṭān. And so, Allah ﷻ negates this false information, establishing that they have no knowledge, neither they nor their forefathers, and what they utter is a monstrosity and lies.

No person on earth likes to hear slander about himself or herself. It is ingrained in us that we despise falsehood and lies. It is ingrained in us that when we are slandered we want to defend ourselves. This feeling comes from Allah ﷻ; it is He who put it in us. Our Prophet ﷺ clarifies this, stating: 'None is more patient than Allah ﷻ against the harmful and annoying words He hears (from the people): They ascribe children to Him, yet He bestows upon them health and provision.'¹¹ If our enemy lies about us or wrongly accuses us of a crime, of a falsehood, could we be generous to them? No, we could not. Yet, as our Prophet ﷺ said, there is no being who is more patient and forbearing than Allah ﷻ. Even as they lie about Him, reject Him, deny Him and attribute children to Him, He continues to give them their sustenance, their *rizq* (رزق). It is notable here that Allah ﷻ says the dreadful claim comes from their 'mouths', because to claim Allah ﷻ has a child cannot come from intellect, knowledge or a Divine book. It is invented from their mouths as speech without basis in scripture or intellect. To affirm how evil their claims are, Allah ﷻ concludes verse 5 stating what they say is a lie about Him, which is of the greatest crimes.

The Qur'an tells us in Surah *Maryam*, that when the creation around us—the heavens and the earth and the mountains—hear that certain beings attribute a child to Allah ﷻ, the mountains want to crumble at the audacity:

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا ۖ

They claim: 'The Most Compassionate Lord has taken a son to Himself.'

لَقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْئًا إِذَا ۝

Surely you have made a monstrous statement.

تَكَادُ السَّمَوَاتُ يَنْصُرُنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنْشَقُّ الْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ الْجِبَالُ هَدًا ۝

It is such a monstrosity that heavens might well-nigh burst forth at it, the earth might be cleaved, and the mountains fall

أَنْ دَعَوْا لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدًا ۝

at their ascribing a son to the Most Compassionate Lord.

وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لِلرَّحْمَنِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا ۝

It does not befit the Most Compassionate Lord that He should take a son.¹²

How dare such people claim al-Raḥmān has a child? It is not befitting nor appropriate for al-Raḥmān to beget a child. And so Allah ﷻ establishes that one of the main purposes of the Qur'an is to correct such misinformation about Him.

Verses 6 and 7 of Surah *al-Kahf* then go on to addressing the Prophet ﷺ:

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَدِيعُ قَلْبِكَ عَلَىٰ شَايِرِهِمْ إِنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا
الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا ۝

(O Muhammad), if they do not believe in this Message, you will perhaps torment yourself to death with grief, sorrowing over them.
(*al-Kahf* 18: 6)

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ﴿٦﴾

Surely, We have made all that is on the earth an embellishment for it in order to test people as to who of them is better in conduct. (*al-Kahf* 18: 7)

The word *bakha'a* بَخَعَ is a deep word with no English equivalent. Its literal meaning is to die from depression or to be consumed by grief. Here Allah ﷻ is telling the Prophet ﷺ that if he continues down this path of sadness he will cause his own destruction. But where is his sadness coming from? Allah ﷻ clarifies that it is out of grief for those who do not believe in the message the Prophet ﷺ is presenting them. This is a profound verse because it shows us many things. The eloquence of the verse is such that it is as if the Prophet ﷺ is following their footsteps عَظَّمَ as they turn around and walk away, and our *Rasūl* ﷺ is going after them and feeling depressed. Why is he feeling depressed? Because they have rejected him? No, it is because they have rejected Allah ﷻ. This shows us the sincerity of the Prophet ﷺ. When we preach, many of us do so for our own ego, and when we argue we want to win, we don't want *truth* to win. Our Prophet ﷺ wanted the truth to win, not himself. Allah ﷻ clarifies this, stating 'if they do not believe in this Message' (إِن لَّكَ مِنَّا الصِّدْقُ); the Prophet ﷺ is concerned because they do not believe in the Qur'an and have rejected Allah ﷻ, not because they have rejected him.

Notice here that Allah ﷻ mentions the Prophet ﷺ before He mentions the rejectors. After establishing the role of the Qur'an, Allah ﷻ does not speak to those who rejected the Qur'an but rather He addresses the Prophet ﷺ in the singular, urging him to be calm and consoling him so that he does not harm himself. That our Lord does not even address the Quraysh for rejecting the Prophet ﷺ but addresses him for his grief and being rejected

reflects that Allah ﷻ cares for the affirmers, not the rejectors. Allah ﷻ cares about the *mu'min* (believer), not the *kāfir* (disbeliever). In this manner our Lord is concerned about the grief the Messenger ﷺ felt when the Quraysh rejected him, and He calms him half a dozen times at least in the Qur'an. This shows the *maqām*, or status, of the Prophet ﷺ that even Allah (ﷻ) is consoling him. This also shows us that Allah ﷻ cares infinitely more about the one who is on the path than the one who rejects it. The one who rejects, He has rejected.

From our Lord consoling the Messenger ﷺ in distress we gain the simple Sunnah that when we find someone in a difficult situation we should console them and give them words of comfort. If a *musiba*, or calamity, occurs—such as the death of a loved one or financial difficulty or anything by which the heart is grieved—our Prophet ﷺ made it a Sunnah to console and give words of comfort. When his cousin Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib ؓ died, the Prophet ﷺ visited the house of Ja'far, placed his hand on Ja'far's orphaned children and made *du'ā'* for them, and he praised the wives of Ja'far for their patience. As Allah ﷻ consoled the Prophet ﷺ, so he consoled the Ṣaḥābah (Companions). We too should give words of comfort when we find anyone in distress.

That Allah ﷻ used the harsh word *bākhi*, which as Ibn 'Abbās translated it means to kill yourself out of grief, for the Prophet's ﷺ grief for the people reflects the love he had for his people. To call to Islam, we need to have that genuine love for our people, and want them to love this religion and to love Allah ﷻ, not for our ego, but for Allah's sake. No doubt, it is possible that this desire to guide others can go to an extreme, to the point that it will prevent you from living normally, and so in the beginning of the *da'wah* of our Prophet ﷺ, our Lord told him to keep his grief in check and consoled him.

Allah ﷻ then presents verses 7 and 8:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِيَتْلُوهُمْ أَهْلُهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ﴿٧﴾

Surely, We have made all that is on the earth an embellishment for it in order to test people as to who of them is better in conduct. (*al-Kahf* 18: 7)

وَأَنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا ۝

In the ultimate, We shall reduce all that is on the earth to a barren plain. (*al-Kahf* 18: 8)

Thus, everything on earth: men and women, palaces, beautiful trees, rivers and oceans, indeed everything we see is a beautification for this world. This beautification is not for Allah ﷻ, as He is in no need of this temporary world. Instead He is telling the Prophet ﷺ that all this is a beautification to test people, to see who does the best deeds. Allah ﷻ is not looking for the most deeds or quantity, He is seeking quality. A person may donate a million dollars and another may donate ten dollars, yet it is possible the million is worth nothing in the eyes of Allah ﷻ, and the ten is worth millions; ultimately what matters is pure intention.

What is the reason for this verse appearing here, after the verse consoling the Messenger ﷺ? Scholars suggest that it is perhaps natural for a person to wonder as to why the Quraysh, despite their rejection of Allah ﷻ, were wealthy, powerful and respected. This was the case at the time, while the Muslims were persecuted and downtrodden. In this context, Allah ﷻ informs that all their worldly embellishments are a trial for them. Verse 8 then states that Allah ﷻ will ultimately reduce their worldly privileges to nothing. Verse 7 begins *إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا*, implying 'We have done this', while verse 8 begins *وَنَبْعَثُ*, implying 'We will do something else' in response to the previous verse. Accordingly, the latter verse's response is to establish the destruction of the earth and all it contains. *صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا* describes a flatland that is infertile and without greenery. Thus, the world and its beauty are temporary, and the time will come when it will be substituted for another world on the Day of Judgement. Allah ﷻ accordingly is guiding us here to not be deceived or disillusioned by the greenery, finery, power, and all that they have. The real beautification and wealth will be in the next world.

11 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 475.

12 *Maryam* 19: 88–92.



4

Introduction to the People of the Cave



In this chapter we will begin with the story of the People of the Cave and continue it over the next few chapters. We will consider verses 9–13:

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ
آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا ﴿٩﴾

Do you think that the People of the Cave and the Inscription were one of Our wondrous signs? (*al-Kahf* 18: 9)

إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً
وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾

When those youths sought refuge in the Cave and said: ‘Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and provide for us rectitude in our affairs.’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 10)

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا ﴿١١﴾

We lulled them to sleep in that cave for a number of years (*al-Kahf* 18: 11)

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا ﴿١٣﴾

and then roused them so that We might see which of the two parties could best tell the length of their stay. (*al-Kahf* 18: 12)

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾

We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance (*al-Kahf* 18: 13)

Verses 9, 10 and 11 summarize the story of the young men who entered the cave. Thereafter, the next page and a half of the surah goes into further detail. As such the story is arranged with a kind of *muqaddimah*, or introduction, which summarizes the events before expanding into a detailed analysis. In this manner, it is as if Allah ﷻ responded to the questions posed by the Quraysh in a few brief lines before offering much more information beyond their questioning. In this chapter we will explore the summary of the story in these verses.

Allah ﷻ begins the story with the question: ‘*Do you think that the People of the Cave and raqīm were one of Our wondrous signs?*’¹³ Here Allah ﷻ is questioning the Quraysh that they are challenging the Prophet ﷺ regarding his knowledge of the People of the Cave as if it is one of Allah’s ﷻ most amazing signs. In reality, the People of the Cave is a trivial matter and there are far greater miracles they should be asking about. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ is implying that the Quraysh are seeking to establish the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ by this test, whereas the signs of his truth are many more than this. The Prophet’s ﷺ conduct, his character, the Qur’an—all of this is a bigger miracle than the People of the Cave and their story. Ignoring this, the Quraysh are asking about trivial matters, and Allah ﷻ offers the appropriate response in more detail than they expected.

Benefits of Stories in the Qur’an

It is appropriate at this point to briefly consider the purpose and wisdom behind the stories in the Qur'an, such as that of the People of the Cave. Stories in the Qur'an are a major theme, and some scholars have suggested a third of the Qur'an is stories. This is no exaggeration, and it is commonly mentioned by Quranic scholars that a third of the Qur'an is stories, a third is law and a third is theology. Why did Allah ﷻ use stories as a regular theme in the Qur'an? Because it is in human nature to love to hear stories; whether a child or adult, male or female, and whatever our background, the desire to listen to stories is ingrained in us. And so, Allah ﷻ uses stories in His book. Yet, His stories are not like the stories of people, rather His stories are truthful. There are no legends or fables in the Qur'an; every story is real. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an that his stories are *ahsan al-qasas*, the Best of Stories, and in every story there are wisdoms and lessons.¹⁴

An interesting point regarding stories in the Qur'an compared with those of other books claimed to be revealed by Allah ﷻ is that the stories in other books are overly detailed and dry. There are superfluous details, from genealogy to beyond, that are not needed. Stories in the Qur'an contain the essentials of the story, and usually details such as names, places, dates, and genealogy are not included. Such details in other books typically mean the reader becomes lost in the smaller issues of the story and misses the larger picture. The Qur'an does not contain any details that we don't need to know.

Furthermore, an amazing aspect of the Qur'an is that many details are implied. When the story is read, we piece together details from the story without Allah ﷻ even mentioning it. Allah ﷻ does not mention there is a king seeking to kill the People of the Cave, but we understand this. There is no ayah saying there is a pagan king persecuting the Muslims for their belief, yet we understand that they are seeking refuge in the cave from the king, having said they believe in Allah ﷻ and will not worship false Gods. This is the beauty of the Qur'an: that Allah ﷻ condensed so much knowledge into so few verses.

The Sleepers of the Cave

Who were the People of the Cave? Scholars have differed greatly on this and many across the Islamic world have claimed the People of the Cave to be from their culture. Ultimately, Allah ﷻ knows best who they were and where they were from and we do not know for sure. Some have said they were early Christians. In some respects this makes sense, however it is problematic in that had they been early Christians, then the Jews of Madinah would not be asking about early Christians as a test to a true prophet. Others have suggested they were Jews living in the Iranian or Persian province, because in Persia the king was a Zoroastrian, and at times the Jews were persecuted. So, the People of the Cave may have been Jews or Christians, but whoever they were, they believed in Allah ﷻ and in the true prophet of their time, while their society was a pagan, idolatrous one.

In the summary of events in ayahs 10 and 11, Allah ﷻ states:

إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحْمَةً
وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾

When those youths sought refuge in the Cave and said: ‘Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and provide for us rectitude in our affairs.’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 10)

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰ آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا ﴿١١﴾

We lulled them to sleep in that cave for a number of years (*al-Kahf* 18: 11)

Fityah means the young men who sought refuge in the cave were in the prime of their youth, or *fityān*. They were perhaps in their twenties, and when they entered the cave they made a *du‘ā* (our Lord, give us Your mercy and make our affairs firm and straight: رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا). Note here that these young men were fleeing from a problem, seeking refuge, and the first thing they did when they entered the cave was turn to Allah ﷻ in

du'ā'. From this we learn that when in a difficult situation, we must do two things, one a physical act of this world (*dunyāwī*) and another a spiritual act (*dīnī*). If we are ill, we go to the doctor, and we make *du'ā'*. If we are unemployed, we send our résumé to potential employers and make *du'ā'*. If we are not trained, we go to university and make *du'ā'*. We need both; the physical action and the spiritual *du'ā'*. These young men went to the cave and made *du'ā'* for Allah's ﷻ help, they did not sit at home saying, 'We believe in Allah ﷻ and trust in Him,' and then expect Allah ﷻ to pluck them from the heavens and save them from their enemies. Our religion is a religion of action; when in difficulty we must act. At the same time, we must not forget Allah ﷻ and we must make *du'ā'*, because *du'ā'* is the more important weapon of the believer.

In response to the young men's *du'ā'*, Allah ﷻ says: قُمْرَتَا عَلَى عَاقِبَتَيْهِمَا فِي السَّكْنَتِ بَيْنَ عَدَا . *Fa-qarabnā 'alā 'ādhānihim* is an expression in Arabic literally meaning 'we struck at their ears' or put something in their ears. Here it means that Allah ﷻ put them into such a deep sleep that no matter how loud any sound might be they would not awaken. If sleep is light then one wakes up if there is any sound, but Allah ﷻ is saying He covered their ears so they couldn't hear anything. They slept a deep sleep and the verse adds فِي السَّكْنَتِ بَيْنَ عَدَا, that they slept in the cave for many, many years. *Sinīna 'adadan* سِنِينَ عَدَدًا is a double emphasis, emphasising many, many years.

In the following verse Allah ﷻ then says:

ثُمَّ بَمَنْشَهُمْ لَنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحَقُّ لِمَا لَبِئُوا أَمَدًا ﴿١٢﴾

and then roused them so that We might see which of the two parties could best tell the length of their stay. (*al-Kahf* 18: 12)

The term *ba'athnahum* بَمَنْشَهُمْ, meaning 'then we brought them back up', is usually used in the context of resurrecting the dead. This indicates that their sleep was akin to death, and the Prophet ﷺ has said, 'Sleep is the brother of death'.¹⁵ This is because there is a similarity between sleeping and death; when we sleep our *rūḥ* leaves our body and when we die our *rūḥ* leaves our

body. The only difference is when we sleep the *rūḥ* remains connected with some kind of strand, whereas when we die that connection is cut. It is for this reason that most of humanity die in their sleep; Allah ﷻ takes their soul and does not return it.

Verse 12 goes on to explain why Allah ﷻ ‘brought them back’: *لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْسَنُ لِمَا لَمْ نُنَبِّئْكَ*, in order to test which of the two parties are more accurate in their estimate for how long they remained in the cave. This is a reference to the fact that the Jews differed as to how many years the People of the Cave had slept. In making this reference, Allah ﷻ is highlighting that the Jews are daring to question His knowledge and the prophethood of His Messenger ﷺ when they themselves don't know the full details of these events. Rather, Allah ﷻ brought the Sleepers back from their slumber and He will show who has the more accurate information.

As Allah ﷻ says in the next verse:

نَحْنُ قُصُّ عَلَيْكَ بَبَأْمِ الْحَقِّ إِنَّمَا قَبِيْلُهُ مَأْمُونًا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾

We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance (*al-Kahf* 18: 13)

Allah ﷻ is the One who will tell their true story, while the Quraysh and the Jews of Madinah who assist them do not know anything. They did not know the number of people in the cave, as Allah ﷻ will mention, nor how long they slept. In their ignorance and arrogance they challenge the Prophet ﷺ but Allah ﷻ knows and will reveal the real details and story.

Allah ﷻ reveals: *إِنَّمَا قَبِيْلُهُ مَأْمُونًا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى*, that they were a group of young men. By saying they were *fityah*, Allah ﷻ is praising them for being young men who broke away from their misguided culture and society. It is generally true that the younger members of society—the young minds—are more willing to break away from the trends and stand up to their culture. They are willing to speak the truth. Once older, people become entrenched in the ways of their culture and it is difficult to break away from the trends of

society. This is why the younger people of Madinah accepted Islam, while the elders in Makkah rejected it. When young, the mind is more open, and to this day we witness that those who fight for social justice and causes or speak out against the injustices of the government or society are often the student community. However, sometimes the same age group can turn towards negative things. We see this in the Qur'an in the story of Thamūd, where nine young men were causing evil and *fasād* (rottenness). They hamstrung the she-camel Allah ﷻ sent to them as a sign despite the explicit command to not harm the camel.¹⁶ As such, just as youth can be a force for good, it can also be a force for harm. When used for harm it can be severe, but when used for good, the raw *īmān* we get from our young men and women is unparalleled. Therefore, our Lord praises young men and women who are religious.

A hadith of the Prophet ﷺ describes Allah's ﷻ regard for the young person who does not waver: 'Surely Allah, The High, boasts to the Angels in regards to the young person who is a servant (of His) and He says, "Look towards my servant! He has refrained from following his lowly desires for My sake alone."¹⁷ Furthermore, in another hadith we are told that the young person who raises himself in worship of his Lord will be among the seven who will be shaded on the Day of Judgement:

There are seven whom Allah will shade with His shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His: the just ruler; a young man who grows up worshipping his Lord; a man whose heart is attached to the mosque; two men who love one another for the sake of Allah and meet and part on that basis; a man who is called by a woman of rank and beauty and says 'I fear Allah'; a man who gives in charity and conceals it to such an extent that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives; and a man who remembers Allah when he is alone, and his eyes fill up.¹⁸

Thus, we see Allah ﷻ praise the young men of the cave that they believe in Him, and He increased them in guidance. It is interesting to note here that in this verse Allah ﷻ shows a cause and His reaction to the cause; the

young men believed in their Lord and so Allah ﷻ increased them in guidance. This shows us that if we take one step towards Allah ﷻ, He will take ten steps towards us. Every step we take towards Him, the next step will be easier because Allah ﷻ comes closer to us. In a *ḥadīth qudsī* (the words of Allah from the tongue of His Prophet which are not part of the Revelation of the Qur'an), the Messenger ﷺ said:

Whoever draws close to me by the length of a hand, I will draw close to him by the length of an arm. Whoever draws close to me the by length of an arm, I will draw close to him by the length of a fathom. Whoever comes to me walking, I will come to him running. And whoever meets me with enough sins to fill the earth, not associating any idols with me, I will meet him with as much forgiveness.”¹⁹

Just as Allah ﷻ increased the guidance of the cave dwellers, so He increases our *īmān* when we turn to Him. In fact, Imam Bukhārī used ayah 13 of Surah *al-Kahf* to clear a controversy in his time regarding whether *īmān* increases or decreases. So we learn from this verse that the means to increase *īmān* is by turning to Allah ﷻ and *īmān* will increase with every good deed, such that the more *īmān* you have the easier it becomes to gain it even further. This is of the mercy of Allah ﷻ that the religion does not get more difficult when you go towards Him, rather the path becomes easier.

13 Scholars have differed regarding the meaning of *raqīm*; some have said it is the mountain that the cave was in, while others have said that *raqīm* was an inscribed tablet that was placed at the cave's entrance (i.e. after the people discovered the People of the Cave, they made an inscribed tablet and placed it at the entrance).

14 *Yūsuf* 12: 3.

15 Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, 938.

16 *Al-Aʿrāf* 7: 73–78.

17 'Alī al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-Ummāl*, 43057. Note that there is a weakness in this ḥadīth.

18 Bukhārī and Muslim.

19 Muslim.



5

Sleeping for 300 Years in the Cave



After summarizing the story of the People of the Cave in a few verses, Allah ﷻ then goes into detail in the next page and a half of the surah. Here we will consider verses 13–18:

نَحْنُ قُصُّ عَلَيْكَ بَبَأْمِ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾

We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance (*al-Kahf* 18: 13)

وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
لَنْ نَدْعُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذَا شَطَطًا ﴿١٤﴾

and strengthened their hearts when they stood up and proclaimed: 'Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We shall call upon no other god beside Him; (for if we did so), we shall be uttering a blasphemy.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 14)

هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ
بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ﴿١٥﴾

(Then they conferred among themselves and said): 'These men, our own people, have taken others as gods beside Him: why do they not bring any clear evidence that they indeed are gods? Who can be more unjust than he who foists a lie on Allah? (*al-Kahf* 18: 15)

وَإِذْ أَغْرَلْتُمْهُمُ رَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَأَوْفُوا إِلَى الْكَعْبِ يَنْشُرُ
لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَهْتِي لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرَقًا ﴿١٦﴾

And now that you have dissociated yourselves from them and from whatever they worship beside Allah, go and seek refuge in the Cave. Your Lord will extend His mercy to you and will provide for you the means for the disposal of your affairs.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 16)

﴿١٧﴾ وَتَرَى الشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَرَاوِعَ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ
وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقَرَّبُ مِنْهُمْ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجْوَةٍ مِنْهُ ذَلِكَ
مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِّ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ
لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُرَشِدًا ﴿١٧﴾

Had you seen them in the Cave it would have appeared to you that when the sun rose, it moved away from their Cave to the right; and when it set, it turned away from them to the left, while they remained in a spacious hollow in the Cave. This is one of the Signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, he alone is led aright; and

whomsoever Allah lets go astray, you will find for him no guardian to direct him. (*al-Kahf* 18: 17)

وَتَحْسِبُهُمْ أَيَّاقًا وَهُمْ رُؤُودٌ وَقَلْبُهُمْ ذَاتُ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتُ الشِّمَالِ
وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ
فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا ﴿١٨﴾

On seeing them you would fancy them to be awake though they were asleep; and We caused them to turn their sides to their right and to their left, and their dog sat stretching out its forelegs on the threshold of the Cave. Had you looked upon them you would have certainly fled away from them, their sight filling you with terror. (*al-Kahf* 18: 18)

In verse 13, Allah ﷻ says, '*We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance*'. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most important beneficial points from this verse is that when we show our sincerity and *īmān* to Allah ﷻ, He will increase manifold and multiply that sincerity. The People of the Cave wanted to believe in Allah ﷻ, so He increased their guidance. Verse 14 adds, '*[We] strengthened their hearts when they stood up and proclaimed: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We shall call upon no other god beside Him; (for if we did so), we shall be uttering a blasphemy (shatātā)."*'

Several factors arise here. First that the hearts of the young men were fluttering and terrified, such that they needed to be tied tied down and made firm. The Qur'an does not explicitly state it, but it is understood from the context that their community had threatened to kill them. As such the young men needed to be calmed, so Allah ﷻ made their hearts firm and calm. Once again, we see that when we turn to Allah ﷻ, He will turn to us. When we make the decision to stand up for His sake, Allah ﷻ will shower us with

His blessings. Furthermore, it reveals that blessings begin from within before they manifest without. Before protection from their enemies, they needed protection from themselves and their wavering doubts. Allah ﷻ therefore protected them first emotionally in their hearts before physically in the cave. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ sent this firmness on their hearts ‘*when they stood up*’ (لَمَّا قَامُوا); once again there is a cause and effect that when they did their part and showed their determination, Allah ﷻ showered them with blessings.

When did they stand up? There are stories which mention that the tyrant ruler threatened to persecute and kill the young men. In response, the young men stood up and said that they would not believe in the false gods of the ruler. Instead they declared رَبَّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْ نَدْعُوَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا كَذَّبْنَا بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلَيْهِمْ *‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We shall call upon no other god beside Him; (for if we did so), we shall be uttering a blasphemy.’* We learn here the wisdom of the youth in their *dawah*; rather than being accusative towards the disbelievers for their false beliefs, the youth are hypothetically criticizing themselves should they take on these false beliefs. By doing so they indirectly convey to their community how erroneous these false beliefs are. This gives the people food for thought rather than make them defensive and turn away at being criticized directly.

In verse 15, the youth then speak amongst themselves:

هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ
بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ﴿١٥﴾

(Then they conferred among themselves and said): ‘These men, our own people, have taken others as gods beside Him: why do they not bring any clear evidence that they indeed are gods? Who can be more unjust than he who foists a lie on Allah?’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 15)

Their community had convinced themselves and those around them of their false gods, and the young men are wondering at their lack of evidence.

Evidence in religion is something Allah ﷻ has given and the books have revealed. This shows us that our religion is one based upon evidence. As we have previously mentioned, one of the greatest sins is to speak about Allah ﷻ and Islam in ignorance. So, these youth challenge their people to prove the truth of their idolatry, offer evidence of who told them to do it, which prophet and book revealed it. After all, idolatry does not make sense. The youth further state *فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا*, 'so who does more wrong than the one who fabricates lies about Allah'; this includes claims that Allah ﷻ has children and that other beings should be worshipped besides Him. Once again, we are reminded to be careful with regards what we say about Allah ﷻ and the religion of Allah ﷻ because when we speak on His behalf, He will closely monitor our words.

Verse 16 then describes the departure of the young men:

وَإِذْ أَعْرَضْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَشْتَدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَأَوْرَا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ يَنْشُرْ
لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَهْتِكُمْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْقًا ۝

And now that you have dissociated yourselves from them and from whatever they worship beside Allah, go and seek refuge in the Cave. Your Lord will extend His mercy to you and will provide for you the means for the disposal of your affairs. (*al-Kahf* 18: 16)

Here Allah ﷻ mentions that the young men broke away from their community. This leads us to an interesting question: when should people break away from their communities? After all, did the Prophet ﷺ not remain in Makkah for thirteen years despite all the persecution? Is it better to remain in a misguided community or to break away? Our scholars say that as a general rule, you must remain in your communities as long as you are being of benefit to them and preaching to them. But when the situation changes, when your religion is threatened and you are not allowed to worship Allah ﷻ properly, and your life is threatened for your worship, then it is preferable to leave your community and flee with your religion.

Ultimately, every individual must assess his own circumstances. Our Prophet ﷺ remained in Makkah for as long as he could preach his message, but when they began to persecute him and threatened him and the Muslims to death, he migrated to Madinah. Remember that even on the night of the Hijrah, there was an assassination attempt on the Prophet ﷺ by the Quraysh.

And this is what these youths did; they made Hijrah and emigrated. The verse is worded such that it is clearly speech; someone is speaking to the youth and advising them to seek refuge in the cave. Who then is speaking? One opinion is that it is one of the older men of the group. Another is that Allah ﷻ Himself is directing them, not necessarily in direct speech that they can hear, but telling them in a manner that they will implement. This is similar to the way that the mother of Mūsā ؑ was told; she felt it in her heart to put the baby Mūsā into the river. There was no angel that came and told her to do it. The Arabic word for this is *ilhām* (an indirect inspiration), where Allah ﷻ guides us to action in a manner that is not revelation or *wahī*, as it is for the prophets. In this case, if it is Allah ﷻ speaking, then it fits perfectly with the previous verses. This is because in previous verses the young men called on Allah ﷻ to provide for them and have mercy:

إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً
وَمَهَيَّ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا ﴿١٥﴾

When those youths sought refuge in the Cave and said: ‘Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and provide for us rectitude in our affairs.’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 10)

In this verse we then see Allah ﷻ respond, guiding them to go to the cave where He will extend mercy and make their affairs easy.

As Allah ﷻ willed, they acted. This is the reality that when we turn to Allah ﷻ, such as when seeking guidance in *istikhāra* (a prayer performed in the hope of being inspired to make a good decision), He tells us indirectly to go on a particular path and we find ourselves on that path without

necessarily knowing how we got there. Allah ﷻ guided these youths to go to the cave where they would find His mercy and assistance. Here we learn another simple Islamic principle: that never does Allah ﷻ send a hardship except that He also sends ease. As the Qur'an says, ^{عَذَابُ النَّارِ} 'Indeed, there is ease with hardship.'²⁰

Never does Allah ﷻ test us except He also blesses us. With every *fitnah* (trial) there is *faraj* (remedy), and with every *adhāb* (punishment) there is also *rahmah* (mercy). According to one interpretation these young men were the sons of noblemen, the elite of society. They were persecuted and forced to flee, and by fleeing they were forced to leave their luxuries behind and live in a cave. When they sacrificed in this manner for the sake of Allah ﷻ, He blessed them with much more.

Verse 17 then describes the state of the youth in the cave:

• وَتَرَى الشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَّتْ تَزُولُ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ
وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجْوَةٍ مِنْهُ ذَلِكَ
مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِّ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ
لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُرْشِدًا ﴿١٧﴾

Had you seen them in the Cave it would have appeared to you that when the sun rose, it moved away from their Cave to the right; and when it set, it turned away from them to the left, while they remained in a spacious hollow in the Cave. This is one of the Signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, he alone is led aright; and whomsoever Allah lets go astray, you will find for him no guardian to direct him. (*al-Kahf* 18: 17)

Here again we see the Qur'an does not mention details, rather they are understood. It does not mention that the youths went to the cave. Verse 16 says they would go to the cave, so it is understood that they entered the

cave. And Allah ﷻ is saying they entered *fī fajwatin*, meaning deep inside the cave. The verse further mentions the sun would come up from the right and set on the left: *'Had you seen them in the Cave it would have appeared to you that when the sun rose, it moved away from their Cave to the right; and when it set, it turned away from them to the left, while they remained in a spacious hollow in the Cave.'* This means the cave was facing due north, because the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Allah ﷻ is implying that He has had prepared the cave for them such that the ambience, temperature and sunlight of the cave would be perfect. They were placed in one of the inner chambers of the cave, and Allah ﷻ knew they would sleep for 300 years, so if the sun fell directly on them they would die from over exposure. However, the body also needs the sun to survive, so Allah ﷻ willed that the cave is perfectly conditioned such that the sun indirectly gives the youth light without shining directly on them.

Verse 17 then concludes: *'This is one of the Signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, he alone is led aright; and whomsoever Allah lets go astray, you will find for him no guardian to direct him.'* This shows us that Allah ﷻ guided these young men spiritually and physically; spiritually to Islam and physically to the cave.

In verse 18 we are told of the manner in which the youths were lying down:

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ آيَاقًا وَهُمْ رُزُودٌ وَقَلْبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ
وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ
فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُغْبًا ﴿١٨﴾

On seeing them you would fancy them to be awake though they were asleep; and We caused them to turn their sides to their right and to their left, and their dog sat stretching out its forelegs on the threshold of the Cave. Had you looked upon them you would have

certainly fled away from them, their sight filling you with terror. (*al-Kahf* 18: 18)

This shows that they were lying in a manner such that their eyes were open. Allah ﷻ caused them to go to sleep while their eyes were open. And He kept on turning them around on their right and left side. Why would this be the case? Because, as we know, if we lie in one place for a long period our bodies will become incapacitated; blood will sink and muscles atrophy. So Allah ﷻ caused them to turn as we naturally turn in sleep. The verse adds that their dog was at the entrance of the cave (*al-waṣīd*), and he was resting on his two paws in the manner of dogs in a protective position.

Such was the sight at the cave, the verse concludes, that it would cause one to run away out of fear. This illustrates that the manner and state of the youths and their dog was a fearsome sight. Some scholars have explained that, given the understanding of those who reside in caves as usually being criminals or bandits, the very fact that there are seven men and a dog in a cave would strike fear in people. Other scholars have explained that Allah ﷻ permitted the hair and nails of the youths to grow. Still others have said that the very fact that there are seven people lying with their eyes wide open, tossing and turning inside a cave is sufficiently frightening a sight. It also seems to indicate that in the course of the 300 years that the youths were in the cave, someone may have stumbled across them and then fled, too scared to mention it to anybody. This possibility is not difficult to imagine.

Once again, the key message Allah ﷻ demonstrates for us is that He will protect us in manners we cannot expect. Is it possible that these young men could ever have imagined that they would sleep in a cave for 300 years? Who could imagine such a thing? Their situation was dire, with no one coming forward to assist them, no army to protect them, their community searching for them, and they put their trust in Allah ﷻ. They fled to the cave not knowing how they would be protected, but they knew Allah ﷻ would help them when they put their trust in Him. And so, one of the most amazing things in the history of humanity occurred; they fell asleep for three centuries. In 300 years their generation, their tyrannical

king, their entire society perished. Everything changed, and Allah ﷻ protected them from a gruesome and evil end.

20 *Alam Nashrah* 94: 5.



The Promise of Allah and the Seven Sleepers



We now move on to verse numbers 19–21 of Surah *al-Kahf*, continuing the story of the Seven Sleepers from the moment they woke up:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَتَسَاءَلُوا بَيْنَهُمْ قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ كَمْ لَبِثْنَا
قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثْتُمْ فَابْعَثُوا
أَحَدَكُمْ بِرِزْقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا
فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ رِزْقُ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ وَلَا يُشْعِرَنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿١٩﴾

Likewise, We roused them in a miraculous way that they might question one another. One of them asked: ‘How long did you remain (in this state)?’ The others said: ‘We remained so for a day or part of a day.’ Then they said: ‘Your Lord knows better how long we remained in this state. Now send one of you to the city with this coin of yours and let him see who has the best food, and let him buy some provisions from there. Let him be cautious and not inform anyone of our whereabouts. (*al-Kahf* 18: 19)

إِنَّهُمْ إِن يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ أَوْ يُعِيدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ
وَلَنْ تَقْلَحُوا إِذَا أَبَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

For if they should come upon us, they will stone us to death or force us to revert to their faith whereafter we shall never prosper.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 20)

وَكَذَلِكَ أَغْتَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ
لَآتِيَةٌ فِيهَا إِذِ يَتَنَزَّعُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَمْرُهُمْ فَقَالُوا ابْنُوا عَلَيْهِم بُنْيَانًا
رَّبُّهُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِم مَّسْجِدًا ﴿٢١﴾

Thus did We make their case known to the people of the city so that they might know that Allah's promise is true, and that there is absolutely no doubt that the Hour will come to pass. But instead of giving thought to this, they disputed with one another concerning the People of the Cave, some saying: 'Build a wall over them. Their Lord alone knows best about them.' But those who prevailed over their affairs said: 'We shall build a place of worship over them.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 21)

Allah ﷻ uses the term *ba'athnāhum*, a term generally used when resurrecting the dead, not for waking from sleep. But Allah ﷻ uses this term here because the Sleepers had slept so long it is as if they had died and He had resurrected them from the dead. When they awoke, the Sleepers began questioning each other for how long they slept, and one of them suggested they had slept for a day or half a day. They concluded that Allah ﷻ knows how long they slept, and it was time to take some of their silver coins and go to the city to purchase the purest food they can find.

Furthermore, the one purchasing the food should be discreet, so no one detects them.

This demonstrates a number of things: first that their city was a relatively large city such that it is possible to go there and not be recognized. Also, that they had some money with them; as mentioned, some scholars suggested that the young men were the children of nobility and when they fled, they had taken some of their money with them. Furthermore, we learn the very interesting point that despite being persecuted and trapped in a cave, their leader instructs that the one who goes to the market should bring back pure food. Some scholars comment that this was a pagan city and the believers who correctly slaughtered were few, so the youths were keen to ensure they obtain the purest food and avoid pagan slaughterers. It additionally shows that pure food has a very important relationship to answering our *du'ā's*. Pure halal food shows us how much we care about Allah ﷻ, it is the real sign of *taqwā* (fear of Allah). Because when we monitor what we eat and where our money comes from, this truly shows how conscientious we are. The youths were trapped in the cave in exile yet sought pure food, revealing their *īmān*. Some scholars say there were some secret Muslims in the city who correctly slaughtered, so the Sleepers wanted to discretely get their food from them.

This displays a further interesting point; the youths demonstrated their *īmān* by fleeing to the cave and having *tawakkul* (trust) in Allah ﷻ, but this *tawakkul* does not mean they should act foolishly. The elder youth is advising discretion in the city, so nobody notices the one who goes to purchase the food. Being a believer does not mean we act in a foolhardy manner; courage and foolishness are not the same thing. The believer is brave but not foolish, they have trust in Allah ﷻ but they take precautions. In the Battle of Uhud we learn that the Prophet ﷺ had a strategy and when he marched to battle he wore two suits of armour, a double layer of protection.²¹ Thus *tawakkul* means to take the necessary precautions and act sensibly. Accordingly, the Sleepers of the cave were told to get food but to act discretely and not bring any undue attention towards them.

Verse 20 reveals to us why the young people fled:

إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ أَوْ يُعِيدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ
وَلَنْ تَقْلَحُوا إِذَا أَبَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

For if they should come upon you, they will stone you to death or force you to revert to their faith whereafter you shall never prosper.
(*al-Kahf* 18: 20)

From this persecution the youths fled, which shows us that our religion is about common sense; it does not want us to foolishly become martyrs for no reason. Our religion values life and asks us to preserve it and use it in the best way possible rather than throw it away. Our religion says preserve religion, life, sanity and wealth; these are the *maqāṣid* or the goals of the Shariah.

In verse 21, Allah ﷻ mentions the youths' discovery by the people, '*Thus did We make their case known to the people of the city ...*'. In a very beautiful manner, Allah ﷻ reveals how the Sleepers were discovered. He mentions in verse 19 that the youth had *wariq* (coins) that they would take to market. As we know, coins keep changing over time, so by this Allah ﷻ alludes to how they were discovered; the coins with which they attempted to purchase food were 300 years old. It is said that when the youth sent to purchase food arrived to the city he could not recognize anything. Three centuries had passed and everything had changed. When he went to make his purchase, his coin was not recognized and was passed around from trader to trader until finally it was believed the youth had discovered treasure, given his silver dating back 300 hundred years was by then a priceless antique. The people then accosted him. In the Christian narrative, in 300 years the city had embraced Christianity and the youth tells the people of the Sleepers' persecution at the hands of the emperor, at which the people inform him that emperor is long gone. The youth is then taken before the bishop, who struggles to believe the story. Accordingly, the youth takes the bishop to the cave to witness the truth, and then he recognizes its reality; the young men's clothing, utensils, and belongings are all from a

different era. It is said, and the Qur'an also alludes to this, that at this point the seven pass away, dying a natural death following their discovery.

Verse 21 adds:

وَكَذَلِكَ أَخْتَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ
لَآتِيَةٌ فِيهَا إِذْ يَتَنَزَّعُونَ لِيَلْجَأَ رَبُّهُمْ أَمرُهُمْ فَقَالُوا أَبْنِوْا عَلَيْهِمْ بُنْيَانًا
رَبُّهُمْ أَعْمَى الَّذِينَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ عَلَى أَمْرِهِمْ لَتَتَّخِذُنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَسْجِدًا ﴿٢١﴾

Thus did We make their case known to the people of the city so that they might know that Allah's promise is true, and that there is absolutely no doubt that the Hour will come to pass. But instead of giving thought to this, they disputed with one another concerning the People of the Cave, some saying: 'Build a wall over them. Their Lord alone knows best about them.' But those who prevailed over their affairs said: 'We shall build a place of worship over them.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 21)

Allah's ﷻ promise is that He will save His believers and is always on the side of the believers. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an '*If Allah helps you none shall prevail over you*'.²² He promises that never will those who reject gain the upper hand over those who believe, and Allah's ﷻ promise is never broken. So He says 'that they may know that Allah's promise is true, and that there is absolutely no doubt that the Hour will come to pass.' Why does Allah ﷻ mention the Day of Judgement here? It is because Allah ﷻ has illustrated that when He can cause a person to sleep for 300 years and then bring them back, then surely He can bring the dead back to life too. So, this was a sign of the truth of the Day of Judgement. Yet the people began debating amongst themselves as to what to do with the bodies of the deceased youths, some suggesting building a monument and others building a wall. Eventually, they built a place of worship where the Sleepers lay.

The Identity of the Sleepers

An interesting note at this point is with regards to who these people were. As previously mentioned, narratives of the Seven Sleepers exist in other cultures, and the earliest reference we have is of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, first recorded by Jacob of Serugh (Ya'qūb de-Srug), a historian of the Syriac Church who died in 521 CE. This is a century before the time of the Prophet ﷺ and revelation of the Qur'an. Jacob of Serugh does not tell us his source but writes that they were seven Christians from the time of the Roman Emperor Decius (d. 251CE). Decius persecuted the Christians, caught the seven young men and tied them up to kill them. According to Jacob's legend, Allah ﷻ allowed the young men to escape and they fled to the cave. The emperor sealed the opening of the cave so they would die a miserable death within. This is different to the Qur'anic account, where the mouth of the cave was open and the rising and setting of the sun could be seen. Also, Jacob writes that the Sleepers remained in the cave for around 200 years, whereas the Qur'anic account records 300 years. The legend continues that the youths fell asleep until all those years later a farmer wanted to use the bricks that were blocking the cave opening. When he broke down the wall, the youths awoke and when they went to the city they discovered that it had become Christian, with a Christian emperor.

Another similar early account of Ephesus is by a historian named Theophises, who died before the coming of Islam. He mentions a detail that fits perfectly with the Qur'an. In this account, the historian reports that when the dwellers of the cave exited, the heresy of the Sadducees was spreading and they denied the resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmah*). The events of the Sleepers proved to them that Allah ﷻ can resurrect the dead, and this is exactly what the Qur'an says: '*there is absolutely no doubt that the Hour will come to pass*'; there is no doubt about the truth of the Day of Judgement and resurrection. It is striking that this classical historian is describing how the Sleepers quelled a theological *fitnah*; at a time when it seemed the debate around the resurrection would be lost to those who denied it, Allah ﷻ allowed the seven Sleepers to be discovered. The whole community saw that Allah ﷻ had allowed 300 years to pass by as the youths slept, then they awoke and Allah ﷻ caused them to die. It was an open miracle. Although we cannot say for sure who the seven Sleepers

were, the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus would seem the most likely candidate.

The community then debated what they should do about the discovery and the cave where the youths were found. One group suggested erecting a monument, another suggested building a house of worship; a church or monastery, and it is they who eventually won. The Qur'anic phrasing, *قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا*, seems to indicate a level of distaste regarding the final decision to build a place of worship. And this reflects the Islamic point of view, which is that we do not build mosques over the graves of righteous people. There is a clear prohibition in the Shariah regarding this, and our Prophet ﷺ said: 'Verily, the worst of people are those upon whom the Hour will be established while they are alive, and those who take graves as places of worship.'²³ The reason mosques and graves do not occupy the same space is that this is the easiest stepping stone to venerating a grave. And so we do not build a mosque over a grave, and neither do we bury a person within a mosque.

Ephesus is now in modern day Turkey, and in 1925 a site was excavated which had in Syriac an inscription, 'Here lies the Seven Sleepers'. This caused a furore in the Christian community and to this day there is a shrine which tourists can visit. However, for Muslims, we do not know for sure whether this is the actual place of the Seven Sleepers. Nonetheless, the Sleepers of Ephesus does seem a likely candidate. Many other countries have claimed to have the site of the Sleepers, from Jordan to Syria and China. Ultimately, what matters is the story itself, not the location, and Allah ﷻ knows best.

21 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

22 *Āl Imrān* 3: 160.

23 *Musnad Ahmad*.



Etiquette of Saying *Inshā'Allāh*



In verses 22–24, the surah addresses speaking without knowledge or evidence and also etiquette:

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ
 كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُلْ رَّبِّي
 أَعْلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا
 وَلَا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٢﴾

Some will say concerning them: 'They were three and their dog, the fourth'; and some will say: 'They were five, and their dog, the sixth'—all this being merely guesswork; and still others will say: 'They were seven, and their dog, the eighth.' Say: 'My Lord knows their number best. Only a few know their correct number. So, do not dispute concerning their number, but stick to what is evident, and do not question anyone about them.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 22)

وَلَا تَقُولْ لِنَاصِيَةٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَالِكَ غَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

And never say about anything: 'I shall certainly do this tomorrow' (*al-Kahf* 18: 23)

إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَآذُنُكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَى أَنْ
يَهْدِيَنِي رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَذَا رَشَدًا ﴿٢٢﴾

unless Allah should will it. And should you forget (and make such a statement), remember your Lord and say: 'I expect my Lord to guide me to what is nearer to rectitude than this.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 24)

Verse 22 of the surah begins with a comment on the debate around how many Sleepers there were. Allah ﷻ observes that some say there were three and their dog was the fourth and others say there were five and their dog was the sixth, but all of this is estimation without knowledge. Allah ﷻ then observes that some say they were seven and the dog was the eighth, and say my Lord is aware of their number. The fact that Allah ﷻ negates the suggestions of three and five but remains silent on seven has meant the bulk of Muslim scholars have agreed that they were seven in number. We have seen previously the accounts of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Our history books mention that Christian groups debated with regards their number, but Allah's ﷻ silence on seven here affirms that they were seven in number.

Speaking without Knowledge

Allah ﷻ then says to the Prophet ﷺ that He knows their true number and to not argue with the disbelievers except for an argument with evidence (*zāhir*). There are two main opinions as to what *zāhir* means: the first that the Prophet ﷺ should not argue with them without solid knowledge. So to argue or debate, you must have knowledge or else remain silent. This is one of the constant themes of Surah *al-Kahf*; Allah ﷻ warns us that we must speak with knowledge or don't speak at all. He criticizes those who speak without knowledge and chastises those who say about Allah ﷻ that which is not true. This is a very important point for us, especially those of us living in lands with majority non-Muslim populations. Not everybody is qualified to give *da'wah* verbally. We can all give *da'wah* by our actions and we can preach at a basic level what we know, but not everyone is qualified to

respond to argumentation. Hence Allah ﷻ says here to not debate unless you have knowledge of what you are debating. This is one valid interpretation for this.

A second interpretation is *zāhir* meaning 'outer' (as op-posed to *bāṭin*, or 'inner'). This is a beautiful point in which the Prophet ﷺ is being advised to not make his argumentation emotional so that it seeps into his heart and affects him psychologically by depressing him. As we know, when we argue in a manner that enters our heart, it affects our life and is constantly on our mind, making life difficult. The Prophet ﷺ is being told to debate an outer debate, as this matter of the Sleepers of the Cave and their details of how many they were is a frivolous issue. This also shows us that the one giving *da'wah* knows that not every issue has the same priority. Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ is advised to not dispute this matter because he has certain knowledge from Allah ﷻ whereas they do not. Here again, the issue of knowledge and certainty arises. Allah ﷻ tells us in the Qur'an to ask people of knowledge if we don't know.²⁴ In Surah *al-Kahf*, Allah ﷻ says to not ask these people with regards the Sleepers because they do not know. From this we learn that when we face a dilemma and don't know the answer to something Islamic, we must go to the people of knowledge. Our Prophet ﷺ is told here *wala tastafti*, literally, do not get a fatwa from them because they have no knowledge and Allah has told you that which is certain.

The Etiquette of Saying *Inshā'Allāh*

In verses 23 and 24, Allah ﷻ then states:

وَلَا تَقُولْ لِّشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

And never say about anything: 'I shall certainly do this tomorrow'
(*al-Kahf* 18: 23)

إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَآذُنُكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَى أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِي رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَذَا رَشَدًا ﴿٢٤﴾

unless Allah should will it. And should you forget (and make such a statement), remember your Lord and say: 'I expect my Lord to guide me to what is nearer to rectitude than this.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 24)

This is a very profound verse and its reason for revelation is tied to the story of why Surah *al-Kahf* was sent down. If we recall from earlier chapters, the Quraysh had come to the Prophet ﷺ asking about the People of the Cave, and the Prophet ﷺ had confidently responded that he would give the answer the following day. He had assumed our Lord would send the revelation and so did not say *inshā'Allāh*. For this reason, the revelation was delayed by two weeks, and when it finally came down, our Lord lightly chastised the Prophet ﷺ. The message is that *wahī*, or divine revelation, does not come down on demand and it is not the prerogative of the Prophet ﷺ to state when it will come. Rather, it is Allah ﷻ who will send it down when He wants to send it down. *SubhānAllāh*, if this is what is our Prophet ﷺ is told, then what about us? Allah ﷻ is teaching us *adab*, the manners we should have before Him. It teaches us who is the Lord and who is the one the Lord is controlling, who is the *Rabb* and who is the *marbūb*.

Our Prophet ﷺ assumed that the question has been asked so the answer will come the following day, an assumption that he should not have made. So Allah ﷻ says here, do not say something will happen without saying *inshā'Allāh*. This is common etiquette that we are all aware of now; we never speak about something we want to do in the future except that we add on *inshā'Allāh*. For example, we say '*inshā'Allāh*, I will go for Hajj next year' or '*inshā'Allāh*, I will begin a degree next year'. Whether next year or next month, or tomorrow, we must add on *inshā'Allāh*. This is proper etiquette with Allah ﷻ. Note that we only add *inshā'Allāh* with regards to an act we are going to do in the future with certainty. If it is something we are not certain about, then there is no need to add *inshā'Allāh*. For example,

if we say, 'I don't know if I am going to do it or not', then there is no need to say *inshā'Allāh*. Or if we mention a plan without the actual action, such as 'I plan to go for *umrah*' in general terms without specifics then there is no need to add *inshā'Allāh*. If somebody asks, 'are you going to go for *umrah* next year?' and we respond, 'I plan to go', there is no need to add on *inshā'Allāh* because you are referencing the plan in your heart, which is current and now. However, if we say, 'I *will* go next year', then we must say *inshā'Allāh*. There is a difference between narrating the current circumstance and stating something you will do in the future with certainty. At this point, it is also worth commenting that often many brothers and sisters mistake their use of *inshā'Allāh* and use it in the wrong context. There is no need to say *inshā'Allāh* when you give a response to something current, and right here and right now. If someone asks, 'What's your name?' we don't say 'Fāṭimah, *inshā'Allāh*!' We don't need to say it for something current; *inshā'Allāh* is for things that have to do with the future, and this is what Allah ﷻ is telling us here.

Another point of *fiqh* here is that if we ever make a *qasam*, or oath, in the name of Allah ﷻ, then it is advised to say *inshā'Allāh*. Whatever the reason you may have made the oath, such as saying '*wa Allāhi* I will fast for a month', add on *inshā'Allāh* because if you say *inshā'Allāh* and are not able to fulfil the oath then you will not be required to pay the penalty for breaking an oath. Therefore, any time you take an oath, it is always encouraged to say *inshā'Allāh* at the same time. It will not work if you say *inshā'Allāh* later, it has to be at the time of the oath. In the case of a statement of certainty, such as 'Tomorrow I am going to come to your house', if one forgets to say '*inshā'Allāh*' and only remembers later, it is encouraged to verbalize the '*insha Allah*' when you remember. As verse 24 of Surah *al-Kahf* says, '*And should you forget (and make such a statement), remember your Lord*'; Allah ﷻ is saying never be forgetful of Me, whenever you forget about Me remember Me again, and make *du'ā*'. This is similar to when we are eating and forget to say *bismillah* but remember later and say it as soon as we remember. But this does not work for *qasam* or oath; *inshā'Allāh* must be said at the time of the oath for the '*insha Allah*' to be valid.

Verse 24 then concludes: ‘*and say: “I expect my Lord to guide me to what is nearer to rectitude than this.”*’ The reference here is when the Quraysh came to ask about the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* and they wanted two or three facts, Allah ﷻ revealed two pages of detail. And this is the remarkable point, that they wanted a little bit and they got back a lot. There is also a beautiful miracle here: the delay the Prophet ﷺ faced in receiving the revelation, although it caused tension for him at the time—being unable to respond to the Quraysh for two weeks—it shows us that the Qur’an is not the speech of the Messenger ﷺ. He was not sitting at home composing verses, because if that had been the case then he would have presented them with his revelation the next day. The fact that he has to wait for fifteen days demonstrates that he is not the author of the Qur’an, and that it is not in his control. Then when the story came, it silenced the Quraysh because the amount of detail given was much more than even the Jews of Madinah gave them. In fact, the Qur’an refuted what the Jews of Madinah had said regarding the number of the Sleepers—three and five—and established they were seven. The Qur’an also established the Sleepers slept 300 years. Imagine the astonishment of the Quraysh following their fifteen day wait, when they found the revelation that came was far more powerful than expected.

24 *al-Nahl* 16: 43.



The Qur'an and Companions as Protection



We continue with verse 25 of Surah *al-Kahf*. Here Allah ﷻ, after mentioning the difference of opinion about the number of Sleepers in the cave, then mentions a difference of opinion over how long they slept. Here is really the *ijāz*, the miracle, of the Qur'an: that the people who asked about the cave and the Sleepers were themselves ignorant of their number. Yet, they wanted to challenge the Prophet ﷺ to see if he knew anything about the People of the Cave:

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَازْدَادُوا تِسْعًا ﴿٢٥﴾

They remained in the Cave for three hundred years; and others added nine more years. (*al-Kahf* 18: 25)

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا ۚ اللَّهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَبْصِرْ بِهِ
وَأَسْمِعْ ۚ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾

Say: 'Allah knows best how long they remained in it, for only He knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth. How well He sees; how well He hears! The creatures have no other guardian than Him; He allows none to share His authority.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 26)

وَأَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ
تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا ﴿٥٧﴾

(O Prophet), recite to them from the Book of your Lord what has been revealed to you for none may change His words; (and were you to make any change in His words) you will find no refuge from Him. (*al-Kahf* 18: 27)

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْعَدْوَةِ وَالْعَظِيمِ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُ ۖ وَلَا تَقْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطْعِ
مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرْطَا ۖ ﴿٥٨﴾

Keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord, morning and evening, seeking His pleasure, and do not let your eyes pass beyond them. Do you seek the pomp and glitter of the world? Do not follow him whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of excess. (*al-Kahf* 18: 28)

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ إِنَّا
أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ سُرَادِقُهَا وَإِنْ يَسْتَغِيثُوا يُغَاثُوا
بِمَاءٍ كَالْمُهْلِ يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهَ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَقَا ۖ ﴿٥٩﴾

And proclaim: 'This is the Truth from your Lord. Now let him who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve. We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers whose billowing folds encompass them. If

they ask for water, they will be served with a drink like dregs of oil that will scald their faces. How dreadful a drink, and how evil an abode! (*al-Kahf* 18: 29)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ
أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who believe and do good, We shall not cause their reward to be lost. (*al-Kahf* 18: 30)

أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ
فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا خُضْرًا مِنْ سُنْدُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ
مُتَّكِنِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ نِعْمَ الثَّوَابُ وَحَسُنَتْ مُرْتَقًى ﴿٣١﴾

They shall dwell in the Gardens of Eternity, beneath which streams flow. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold, will be arrayed in green garments of silk and rich brocade, and will recline on raised couches. How excellent is their reward, and how nice their resting-place! (*al-Kahf* 18: 31)

Not only did Allah ﷻ respond as to who the People of the Cave were, He told the People of the Book of their own opinions and debates as to whether they were three, five or seven Sleepers, and also He told them their own opinions about the number of years the Sleepers slept. After listing them, Allah ﷻ then resolves these differences of opinion. And so Allah ﷻ shows the perfection of His knowledge; the people dare challenge Him about His knowledge, and He not only resolves their conflicts but further reveals even what they did not know

In verse 25, Allah ﷻ established the Sleepers stayed in their cave for 300 years, observing that others added nine years to get a total of 309.

Some of our scholars have pointed out that 300 years in the Gregorian calendar is 309 years in the Lunar calendar. Both time periods are exactly the same. Again, this clearly shows us the precision of Allah ﷻ. Converting Solar calendar years to Lunar calendar years is knowledge that the average Arab would not possess at the time.

Verse 26 then states:

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا ۚ اللَّهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْصَرِيهِ
وَأَسْمِعْ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا ۝

Say: 'Allah knows best how long they remained in it, for only He knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth. How well He sees; how well He hears! The creatures have no other guardian than Him; He allows none to share His authority.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 26)

Allah ﷻ observes that He knows how long they stayed. This is because, as mentioned before in the accounts of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the People of the Book, as stated by the monk who wrote the account, actually said 370 years. As such, there is even a controversy surrounding the duration of the sleep. Accordingly, Allah ﷻ says He knows how long they stayed and He has complete knowledge of everything in the heavens and earth, adding *absir bihi wa-asmi* (How well He sees; how well He hears!) This is known as *sighat al-ta'ajjub* (formula of wonder); we are called upon to be amazed at Allah's ﷻ sight and Allah's ﷻ hearing. He sees all and He hears all, they have no one that they can turn to for protection besides Him and none share the right of power and legislation other than Allah ﷻ. By this ayah, Allah ﷻ is telling the People of the Book and the Quraysh that given the fact He knows so much about the People of the Cave, it demonstrates that only Allah ﷻ is 'Allām al-Ghuyūb (Knower of the Unseen). Only Allah ﷻ is truly divine and worthy of worship. That Allah ﷻ is the Most Powerful means they should be turning to none but Him for their needs.

This concludes the story of the People of the Cave, following which two points are mentioned that go back to the main benefits of the story. Verse 27 states:

وَأَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ
تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا ﴿٢٧﴾

(O Prophet), recite to them from the Book of your Lord what has been revealed to you for none may change His words; (and were you to make any change in His words) you will find no refuge from Him. (*al-Kahf* 18: 27)

Allah ﷻ tells us how the People of the Cave were saved, and then He derives two benefits for us when we need to be saved as well. He has already told us to turn to Him, so what else can we do? Verse 27 tells us we must recite from the Book of Allah ﷻ. Scholars say that just like Allah ﷻ protected the Sleepers through the cave, the Book will shelter us in a similar manner. As soon as the story of the Sleepers concludes, Allah ﷻ tells the Prophet ﷺ to recite His book in the very next verse. As such, there is an indication that our protection—our metaphorical cave—will be by reciting the Qur'an. And this is exactly what our Prophet ﷺ did when he went on the Hijrah. He recited the Qur'an as he left and it literally blinded the Quraysh such that they could not see him. And there are many other instances of the Prophet ﷺ reciting the Qur'an to seek the protection of Allah ﷻ.

Verse 27 concludes, *lā mubaddila li-kalimātihi wa-lan tajida min dūnihi multahadan*, nothing will change the speech of Allah ﷻ, unlike the stories of the People of the Book that keep on changing; like the disputed number of Sleepers. The speech of Allah ﷻ never changes and therefore you will never find a protector other than Allah ﷻ. This then is the first point: when in trouble, turn to the Qur'an for protection.

Another point of benefit from the story of the People of the Cave is the virtue of having good companionship. The People of the Cave were a group, they were not alone. Believers gain help from the other believers; they seek help from Allah ﷻ for their brothers and sisters. Verse 28 states:

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْعَدْوَةِ وَالْعَشيِّ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُمْ وَلَا تَقْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطْعِمْ
مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord, morning and evening, seeking His pleasure, and do not let your eyes pass beyond them. Do you seek the pomp and glitter of the world? Do not follow him whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of excess. (*al-Kahf* 18: 28)

Our Prophet ﷺ was told be patient in staying with those who are making *du'ā'* to Allah ﷻ in the mornings and in the evenings. It is said that an incident happened before this verse came down: Umayyah ibn Khalaf and some of the leaders of the Quraysh gave an ultimatum to the Prophet ﷺ that if he got rid of Bilāl, Abū Dharr and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, then the leaders of Quraysh would join the Prophet ﷺ. Bilāl and the others were considered to be of low class by the leaders of Quraysh and by joining the Prophet ﷺ they did not want people to say that we are associating with riff-raff. In response, Allah ﷻ revealed multiple verses, and this is one of them; the Prophet ﷺ was warned against giving mind to this idea. In this verse he is told *wa shbir nafsaka*, be patient whatever the cost. Whether people ridicule you, make fun of you, perhaps even some of the Ṣaḥābah may test your patience, you need to be patient with those who make *du'ā'* to Allah ﷻ in the morning and in the evening (i.e. constantly). Such people are always praying to Allah ﷻ, and they only seek His pleasure. The verse continues,

wa-lā ta'du 'aynāka 'anhum turīdu zīnata l-hayāti d-dunyā; don't move your gaze beyond this group who pray, don't even look at the others. Focus your gaze towards the quality over the quantity. Don't look at the finery or prestige, in case you might want the beauty of this world, rather look at the *īmān* and the *tagwā*.

A very important and beneficial point here is that often we read the Qur'an and see something addressed directly to the Prophet ﷺ. We may not understand why Allah ﷻ might say this particular thing to the Prophet ﷺ when we know that he could never be guilty of such a thing. For example, a verse comments that if he dares invent a lie against Allah ﷻ, yet we know that the Prophet ﷺ would never invent a lie. Another verse says to the Messenger ﷺ that if he is in doubt about what has been revealed to him then go ask the People of the Book. However, we know that the Prophet ﷺ is never in doubt. The average person who reads these types of verses may get confused. For example, here in verse 28 of Surah *al-Kahf* it says, *'Do you seek the pomp and glitter of the world? Do not follow him whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of excess.'* It implies the Prophet ﷺ was tempted by the adornments of the Quraysh and willing to dispense with companions like Bilāl and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, but this never happened. Such phrasing is merely a manner of eloquence; while the Prophet ﷺ is addressed directly, the real intent of the verse is us.

This is an eloquent device of rhetoric that we need to understand. Many times in the Qur'an, the Prophet ﷺ is addressed but we are the intended audience: he is being used to get the message to us. Sometimes he is addressed personally, and that too is obvious. But in this case, Allah ﷻ is giving us the message through the Prophet ﷺ to not be deceived by the finery, the *zīnah*, the outer appearance. Stay with the righteous, and that is where Allah ﷻ will protect you. This is why our Prophet ﷺ said Allah ﷻ will help us through those of us who are meek. Allah ﷻ is *Qawī* and *'Azīz*, He will not allow the mighty to trample the weak unjustly. Verse 28 concludes, *'Do not follow him whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of*

excess.' Two groups are separated by this verse: those making *duā'* morning and evening and the other which does not even remember Allah ﷻ and follow their desires. There is a great contrast between the two.

Free Will and the Reward and Punishment of Allah

After presenting the story of the People of the Cave, Allah ﷻ then says in verse 29:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ فَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ إِنَّا
أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ سُرَادِقُهَا وَإِن يَسْتَغِيثُوا يُغَاثُوا
بِمَاءٍ كَالْمُهْلِ يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهَ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَقَقًا ﴿٣٩﴾

And proclaim: This is the Truth from your Lord. Now let him who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve. We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers whose billowing folds encompass them. If they ask for water, they will be served with a drink like dregs of oil that will scald their faces. How dreadful a drink, and how evil an abode! (*al-Kahf* 18: 29)

They made a challenge and asked for evidence, and Allah ﷻ presented it. The truth is from the Lord and it is left to them to decide whether to accept or reject it. This is a very important verse for this point; it proves that we as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* believe in a type of free will, but not ultimate will. We are not robots. Allah ﷻ has given us an element of free will, even though that free will is, of course, controlled by Allah ﷻ via *qadar* or predestination. Nothing can happen without *qadar*. There are verses in the Qur'an that affirm free will and there are verses that affirm Allah's ﷻ complete control over creation. Both of these verses go hand in hand and this is the 'Sunni' doctrine. It is in contrast to the extremist groups, of which one said Allah ﷻ controls us like robots and we are like leaves in the wind, but this is false. Another group said Allah ﷻ has no control over us

and we can do as we please, but this is also false and a type of disbelief. In line with *Ahl al-Sunnah*, a simple way of phrasing this is that Allah ﷻ has given us will but His will is above ours.

In ayah 29, Allah ﷻ essentially says to the Quraysh: 'here is the evidence you wanted, if you want to believe it go ahead, and if you want to reject it go ahead.' There are also threats and punishments presented in the surah, which is very common in the Qur'an, but never does Allah ﷻ threaten except that He also promises His rewards. Never does Allah ﷻ talk about His 'adhab (punishment) without also talking about his *rahmah* (mercy). This is the logical way of Islam, a carrot and stick method. We need to be both frightened and encouraged; Allah ﷻ mentions here the punishments of the Fire of Hell for those who reject, a Fire that will envelop them, and if they want water to relieve their distress they will be given an oil-like drink that will burn their faces even more.

Then in verses 30 and 31, Allah ﷻ mentions the rewards of *Jannah*:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ
أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who believe and do good, We shall not cause their reward to be lost. (*al-Kahf* 18: 30)

أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ
فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا خُضْرًا مِنْ سُنْدُسٍ وَاسْتَبْرَقٍ
مُتَّكِنِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ نَبَّعَتِ الْأَنْهَارُ الْكُتُبَ وَحُشِّنَتْ مُرَقَّاتُهَا ﴿٣١﴾

They shall dwell in the Gardens of Eternity, beneath which streams flow. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold, will be arrayed in green garments of silk and rich brocade, and will recline

on raised couches. How excellent is their reward, and how nice their resting-place! (*al-Kahf* 18: 31)

The good deeds of the righteous will never go to waste. Verse 31 adds that the luxuries they will experience in *Jannah* include gardens with streams, luxurious clothing and jewellery and reclining on couches. This is in stark contrast to the punishments of the Hellfire.

The punishments of Hell and the rewards of Paradise, or *Jannah*, are a constant motif of the Qur'an. A very common question asked by non-Muslims and Muslims is why the punishment, or the *'adhab*, is so severe? The Fire, boiling water, etc. are severe punishments, why can't Allah ﷻ just forgive? Many religions criticize Islam both for the strictness of the punishment and for the pleasures of Paradise; the gardens, rivers and the *hūr* (maidens). As for the punishments, a hadith in *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim explains some of the wisdoms behind them:

Anas ibn Mālik reported Allah's Messenger ﷺ as saying: Allah, the Exalted and High, would say to one who shall have to undergo the least torture (on the Day of Resurrection): Would you like to go as ransom if you had all worldly riches; he would say: Yes. Allah would say to him: When you were in the loins of Adam, I demanded from you something easier than this that you should not associate anything with Me. (The narrator says): I think He also said: I would not cause you to enter Hellfire but you defied and attributed Divinity (to others besides Me).²⁵

This gives us some of the wisdom behind the harsh punishment. For example, suppose your mother asked you for water while you are in the kitchen, and you were to refuse. Everyone would know that it is a significant refusal; she's your mother who gave you her love, your life and absolutely everything, so how dare you say 'no' to her for such a simple request? If you think that your mother has so little right over you that you can deny her just a glass of water, people will say how dare you not answer that call? All that Allah ﷻ wanted in return is that you acknowledge Him

and don't worship others besides Him. Allah ﷻ set up all the evidence, gave us our intellect, the Qur'an, the Prophet ﷺ and our *fiṭrah*. Everything is telling us there is one God and we should worship Him, yet we insist on turning away from our intellect, our nature and from the Qur'an. Rather, as Allah ﷻ says, we live like cattle, or worse than cattle:

*And certainly, We have created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind; they have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle—indeed, even more astray. Such are utterly heedless.*²⁶

After all Allah ﷻ has given us, if we still insist on rejecting so completely, then the punishment makes sense.

As for the rewards of *Jannah*, no doubt many of the rewards are physical in nature. However, there are rewards that are other than physical and these are the greatest rewards of *Jannah*. They are to have that connection with Allah ﷻ: to look at Him and to hear His speech, and these are not the physical pleasures of this world. Furthermore, there are pleasures beyond the physical; as Allah ﷻ says, '*Therein they shall get whatever they desire; and with Us there is even more.*'²⁷ Some people will want things that are other than physical, and they will be granted it. There is the famous hadith regarding this:

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet ﷺ was speaking about the people of Paradise one day when a Bedouin was present. He described how a man of the people of Paradise will ask his Lord's permission to grow some plants. (In Arabic, the past tense is used here to show that this will undoubtedly happen). Allah will ask him, 'Do you not already have all that you want?' He will say, 'Yes, but I like to grow things.' So he will go and plant his seeds, and within the blinking of an eye they will grow, ripen, be harvested and piled up like mountains. Allah will say, 'Here you are, O son of Adam, nothing makes you satisfied!' The Bedouin said, 'O Messenger of

Allah, you will find that he is either from Quraysh or the AnṢār, for they are the ones who like to grow things; we don't like to grow anything!' The Prophet ﷺ smiled broadly.²⁸

This hadith illustrates a joy not mentioned in the Qur'an but specific to people's wishes. Allah ﷻ is telling us generic joys. Furthermore, much as people may question or even mock, they cannot deny their own human nature. When Allah ﷻ blesses people with wealth and status, they build their own mansions and palaces, they have their swimming pools, jacuzzi, greenery. They enjoy this dunyā exactly as Allah ﷻ has described *Jannah*. Human nature is that every person of wealth will build as Allah ﷻ has described: '*Gardens, beneath which streams flow*'. Buildings, greenery and water is ingrained in us, and so Allah ﷻ speaks to us in a language we all understand. *Jannah* is far more than this, yes, so let us not feel embarrassed about its descriptions. It is what Muslims and non-Muslims alike all want. As for the punishments of *Jahannam* (Hell), Allah ﷻ is the Mighty, *al-'Azīz*, and the Wise, *al-Ḥakīm*, and He only requires from us that we acknowledge Him and worship Him. Yet, if somebody insists on turning away from everything, then he is deserving of the punishment. Thus we conclude with the story of the Sleepers of the Cave in Surah *al-Kahf*.

25 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 2805.

26 *Al-A'rāf* 7: 179.

27 *Qāf* 50: 35.

28 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī, 6965.



The Man With the Two Gardens I



In this chapter we move on to verse 32 of Surah *al-Kahf*, continuing until verse 38:

❶ وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ
وَحَفَفْنَاهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زَرْعًا ❷

(O Muhammad), propound a parable to them. There were two men of whom We bestowed upon one of the two vineyards, surrounding both of them with date-palms and putting a tillage in between. (*al-Kahf* 18: 32)

❸ كَلَّمَا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ ءَاتَتْ أَكْلَهَا وَلَمْ تَنْظُرْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا وَفَجَّرْنَا
خِلَالَهُمَا نَهْرًا ❹

Both the vineyards yielded abundant produce without failure and We caused a stream to flow in their midst (*al-Kahf* 18: 33)

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ
مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

so the owner had fruit in abundance and he said to his neighbour, while conversing with him: 'I have greater wealth than you and I am stronger than you in numbers.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 34)

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ قَالَ مَا أَظُنُّ أَن تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

Then he entered his vine-yard and said, wronging himself: 'Surely, I do not believe that all this will ever perish. (*al-Kahf* 18:35)

وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِن رُّدِدْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا
مِّنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Nor do I believe that the Hour of Resurrection will ever come to pass. And even if I am returned to my Lord, I shall find a better place than this.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 36)

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِن
تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ رَجُلًا ﴿٣٧﴾

While conversing with him his neighbour exclaimed: 'Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, and then fashioned you into a complete man? (*al-Kahf* 18: 37)

لَكِنَّا هُوَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٣٨﴾

As for myself, Allah alone is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord in His Divinity.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 38)

In the previous verses, after finishing the story of the People of the Cave, Allah ﷻ mentions the rewards for the people of *Jannah*, or Paradise, and the punishments for the people of *Jahannam*, or Hell. Allah ﷻ mentions that the people of *Jannah* will get '*Gardens of Eternity, beneath which streams flow*'.²⁹ So Allah ﷻ mentions the real *Jannah*, and immediately after He narrates another story about a *Jannah* that is not necessarily fake but is not permanent, like the *Jannah* of the Hereafter. This is a story about an earthly *Jannah* and how many can become deceived by such *jannāt*. This is the second of the four stories in Surah *al-Kahf*, and one that deals with the *fitnah*, or trial, of the temporary *Jannah* and its pleasures in the dunyā.

The first story, of the Sleepers of the Cave, was about the *fitnah* of religion, this second story concerns the *fitnah* of money or the *jannāt* of this world and living in the *zukhruf*, *zīnah* or adornments of the world around us. It begins with, '*Give them a parable*'; this is another example or parable presented by Allah ﷻ. The Qur'an is full of ways of addressing our intellect. Sometimes Allah ﷻ commands, sometimes He threatens, sometimes He promises and sometimes He tells stories. Each are different methods Allah ﷻ employs to impart the point to us. If we don't pay heed to one method, we may pay heed to another. Allah ﷻ uses every single technique, and of the most effective techniques is the narration of stories.

The Man with the Two Gardens

In verse 32, Allah ﷻ says:

● وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا زَوْجَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ
وَحَفَفْنَاهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زُرْعًا ۝

(O Muhammad), propound a parable to them. There were two men of whom We bestowed upon one of the two vineyards, surrounding

both of them with date-palms and putting a tillage in between. (*al-Kahf* 18: 32)

The parable presented is of two men, one of whom has been blessed with two luxurious gardens of grapes, the most precious, delicate, prized and expensive fruit. Allah ﷻ gave one of the men the best fruits, and not just one garden, but two. And Allah ﷻ surrounded the delicate grape vines with a protective border of strong date palms. So, the garden was positioned in a manner that is most beneficial for the man. Furthermore, between these two gardens there were yet other crops in addition to the grapes and dates, which are of the two most essential fruits and most important crops known to man. Verse 33 continues:

كَلْنَا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ مِائَتَ أَكْثَافٍ وَلَمْ نَظْلِمْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا وَفَجَّرْنَا
خِلَالَهُمَا نَهْرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Both the vineyards yielded abundant produce without failure and
We caused a stream to flow in their midst (*al-Kahf* 18: 33)

What a beautiful arrangement the gardens were. Both of these gardens would always yield maximum output with no shortage, loss or pestilence. A farmer fears most that something might happen to harm his crop, yet Allah ﷻ says not only did He give the man the best quality of produce, but He also gave him the best quantity. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ says that between all this He caused a stream to gush forth, such that the man does not even have to irrigate his gardens or pray for rain, the water is there for him. You cannot imagine a better arrangement: the best fruits, the best quality, the best quantity and water flowing without having to do anything. Verse 34 adds:

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ
مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا ﴿٣٥﴾

so the owner had fruit in abundance and he said to his neighbour, while conversing with him: 'I have greater wealth than you and I am stronger than you in numbers.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 34)

Wa-kāna lahū thamarun means that he had *thamar*, or wealth beyond his gardens of fruit. He was not just a farmer, he had riches beyond it whether these were horses, carriages or gold and silver. This man had everything a man might want in that era, and he had the best of it. What did all of this wealth cause him to feel? Allah ﷻ says: 'he said to his neighbour, while conversing with him: "I have greater wealth than you and I am stronger than you in numbers."' Conversing with his companion, he boasts of having more wealth (*akharu minka mālan*) and nobler children (*wa-a'azzu nafaran*). He claims to have better status and a larger, mightier family.

Notice here that throughout all of these verses Allah ﷻ very beautifully states all that He has given this man, yet now the man comes along and says 'I', whereas Allah ﷻ has been saying 'We', to confirm that the bounty is all from Him. Now the man is cutting off all recognition of Allah's ﷻ bounty, and instead ascribes it to himself, using the first person pronoun 'I'. This is how feeble-minded people are, they assume that this is 'my' intelligence, 'my' degree, 'my' hard work, 'my' education, 'my' corporation, 'my' effort, yet do not take into account that they would be nowhere without Allah ﷻ having facilitated all of this for them. Also notice, the man assumes that the wealth he has makes him a better person than his companion and he becomes boastful and arrogant. We know that the sin of arrogance is of the worst sins of Islam.

In verse 35, Allah ﷻ then pitifully describes his status:

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتُهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ قَالَ مَا أَظُنُّ أَن تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Then he entered his vineyard and he was only wronging himself, and said: 'Surely, I do not believe that all this will ever perish.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 35)

Here he is mightily prancing around and Allah ﷻ says he was only wronging himself. While the man thinks he's better than his companion, and is wronging his companion by belittling him, he has not harmed anyone other than himself. In his arrogance and delusion, he thinks he is mighty, yet he is the of the worst; as Allah ﷻ says, he was wronging himself. He further adds that he does not think his gardens will ever perish; how can all this wealth ever be gotten rid of? Here he made yet another fatal mistake; he assumed that just because he's wealthy now he will forever remain wealthy, and just because he's healthy now he will forever remain healthy. Three verses before Allah ﷻ established the eternal garden of *Jannah* beneath which rivers flow. Yet here the man is saying *abada* and assuming his little *Jannah* on earth will be eternal.

The man then adds in verse 36:

وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُددْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا
مِّنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا ﴿٣٦﴾

'Nor do I believe that the Hour of Resurrection will ever come to pass. And even if I am returned to my Lord, I shall find a better place than this.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 36)

Now he has committed yet another heresy. After first assuming his wealth will last forever, he then becomes so engrossed in his wordly *Jannah* that he doesn't even care about the religion. He claims he doesn't think that the Day of Judgment will ever happen and that there is another *Jannah*, rather all life is here. Furthermore, the epitome of his arrogance is then revealed when even on the supposition that there may be a Day of Judgement, he believes he will find something even better to live in, even better than all that he has. This poor man, this *miskīn*, thought that if you are rich in this

world, if you are healthy and wealthy now, this means Allah ﷻ loves you. But Allah ﷻ gives this dunyā to the righteous *mu'min* and the impious *fāsiq*, to the Muslim and the *kāfir*; He gives it to everyone. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an that He gives of the blessings to all groups. This dunyā is not the test that Allah ﷻ loves you, rather it is the next world that determines this.

In response to the man's assertions, his companion then says in verses 37 to 38:

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِنْ
تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْقَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ رَجُلًا ﴿٣٧﴾

While conversing with him his neighbour exclaimed: 'Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, and then fashioned you into a complete man? (*al-Kahf* 18: 37)

لَكِنَّا هُوَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٣٨﴾

As for myself, Allah alone is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord in His Divinity.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 38)

Notice here that his friend has just been insulted, being told that the one with the gardens is wealthier and better. When something like this happens to us we immediately want to defend ourselves, this is our ego. However, he is silent when he is insulted and is willing to swallow that. But when the man begins to insult Allah ﷻ, his righteous companion cannot stand by. When Allah ﷻ is mocked and the Day of Judgment is being denied, then he responds because that is when his *īmān* is being threatened. In his response, *akafarta* can have two meanings: The word '*kafara*' is often translated as rejecting Allah ﷻ, but this is in fact one of the two meanings of the term. The other meaning is to be ungrateful to Allah ﷻ and that is why in the Qur'an '*kufir*' has two opposites. The first opposite of *kufir* is *īmān* and the

other opposite is *shukr* (thankfulness). As the Qur'an says: '*And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, "If you are grateful [shakartum], I will surely increase you [in favour]; but if you are ungrateful [kafartum], indeed, My punishment is severe."*'³⁰

In the context here, the primary meaning of *akafarta* is to question how the man can be so thankless: 'are you so ungrateful to the One who created you from dust and then from this drop of sperm He made you into a man?' What is the point of saying it in these terms? The point is to humble this man and bring him back down to earth. The implication is: who do you think you are that you are arrogantly assuming you're better than everybody else? You and we all come from dust, *turāb*. As the Messenger ﷺ said, 'The people are all the children of Adam and Adam was created from dust.'³¹ And you come from a *nutfah*, a drop of fluid that disgusts you such that if it falls on your garment you wash it off. This is your origin, and now here you are arrogant and mighty, thinking that just because you have a *Jannah* in this world you are better than other people. Out of this *turāb* and then out of *nutfah* Allah ﷻ has made you into this beautiful perfect human being and He has given you all that you have, so be grateful.

The companion continues: '*As for myself, Allah alone is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord in His Divinity.*' Some may ask what partners this man associated with Allah ﷻ, as we have not heard of any paganism or idol here. However, by attributing this garden to himself the man made himself an idol besides Allah ﷻ. Allah ﷻ says it is He who gave the garden and made it rich and abundant, yet the man uses 'I' and attributes it to himself. This is his *shirk*; to associate it to himself and to claim his efforts to be the fruits of all that he has. And so his companion says that he will never commit any *shirk*.

In the following chapter we will continue the discussions on the man with the two gardens.

29 *Al-Kahf* 18: 31.

30 *Ibrāhīm* 14: 7.

31 *Al-Tirmidhī*.



The Man With the Two Gardens II



In the previous chapter we explored the many sins of the man with the two gardens. Of his biggest sins was that he challenged Allah's ﷻ authority to resurrect the dead and to have a *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, or Day of Resurrection. Also of his crimes was that he ascribed all of his wealth to himself and he looked down on his companion (some scholars suggest it may have been his brother) simply because he didn't have the same wealth. So, the man also committed the crime of arrogance. In this chapter we will see how the man's arrogance and sins are punished by Allah ﷻ in verses 39–44:

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ
تَرَنَّا أَكْثَرَ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا ﴿٣٩﴾

(His companion continued) 'When you entered your vineyard, why did you not say: "Whatever Allah wills shall come to pass, for there is no power save with Allah!" If you find me less than yourself in wealth and children (*al-Kahf* 18: 39)

فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَنْ يُؤْتِيَنِي خَيْرًا مِنْ جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتُصْبِحَ صَعِيدًا زَلَقًا ﴿٤٠﴾

it may well be that my Lord will give me something better than your vineyard, and send a calamity upon your vineyard from the heavens and it will be reduced to a barren waste, (*al-Kahf* 18: 40)

أَوْ يُصْبِحَ مَاؤُهَا غَوْرًا فَلَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ لَهُدَّ طَلَبًا ﴿٤١﴾

or the water of your vineyard will be drained deep into the ground so that you will not be able to seek it out.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 41)

وَأَحِيطَ بِشَعْرِهِ فَأَصْبَحَ يَقْلُبُ كَفَّيْهِ عَلَى مَا أَنْفَقَ فِيهَا وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا وَيَقُولُ يَلَيْتَنِي لَمْ أُشْرِكْ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٤٢﴾

Eventually, all his produce was destroyed and he began to wring his hands in sorrow at the loss of what he had spent on it, and on seeing it fallen down upon its trellises, saying: 'Would I had not associated anyone with my Lord in His Divinity.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 42)

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ قُوَّةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنتَصِرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

And there was no host, beside Allah, to help him, nor could he be of any help to himself. (*al-Kahf* 18: 43)

هُنَالِكَ الْوَلِيَّةُ لِلَّهِ الْخَقِّ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ﴿٤٤﴾

(Then he knew) that all power of protection rests with Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, the best to determine the end of things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 44)

When his companion responds to him, he does it not in the order of the man's conversation but in the order of the greatest crime or sin he has committed. Even though the man begins by boasting about himself being superior to his companion, when his companion responds that is the last

thing he mentions. Being personally insulted is not what the companion is concerned with, rather he is affronted by how the man dares to be ungrateful to Allah ﷻ. And so the companion first criticizes the man's rejection of Allah ﷻ as the source of his wealth, saying: *'As for myself, Allah alone is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord in His Divinity.'*³²

Humility before Allah ﷻ

He then responds to the man's arrogance, stating that his wealth should have led to humility:

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ
تَرَنَ أَنَا أَقَلَّ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

'When you entered your vineyard, why did you not say: "Whatever Allah wills shall come to pass, for there is no power save with Allah!" If you find me less than yourself in wealth and children'.
(*al-Kahf* 18: 39)

Allah ﷻ says in verse 35 that when the man entered his garden, he was wronging himself and his arrogance got the better of him: *'Then he entered his vineyard and said, wronging himself: "Surely, I do not believe that all this will ever perish"'*. Accordingly, his companion tells him he should have done the opposite when he entered the garden. Rather than ascribing his garden to himself, using the pronoun '*ana*' or '*I*', he should have been in a state of humbleness and humility reciting , مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ, *mā shā' allāh lā quwwata illā billāhi*. Here, *mā shā' allāh* means 'whatever Allah wills has occurred (i.e. Allah has blessed me with this)' and *lā quwwata illā billāhi* means 'there is no power except the power of Allah'. This implies, 'I didn't have the power to get this garden. It was not my effort, my wealth, or my endeavours; all power is Allah's ﷻ alone such that any power that was needed to get this garden came from Him'.

The phrase is a combination of two very common phrases: *mā shā' allāh* and *lā quwwata illā billāhi*. These phrases are praised in the Sunnah and the Qur'an. In one hadith:

Abū Dharr ؓ narrated: Rasullullah ﷺ said to me: 'Should I not guide you to a treasure from the treasures of Paradise?' I said, 'Yes, O Messenger of Allah.' He ﷺ said: '*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*, there is no might or power except with Allah.'³³

Our Prophet ﷺ has also said that the phrase, *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*, is found under the throne of Allah ﷻ and inscribed on one of the doors that leads to *Jannah*. Hence, this is one of those phrases that we should repeat and make a part of our ritual to remember Allah ﷻ. It is especially important when we feel a sense of *ghurūr*, a type of self-delusion or self-grandeur, or when we feel *ḥasad*, or jealousy, towards another; these are two very common problems amongst all of us. Sometimes we get something new and flashy, like a new house or car, and we feel like we've made it. If we feel this type of *ghurūr* we should get rid of it by saying *mā shā' allāhu lā quwwata illā billāhi*. We say these phrases to cleanse our heart of that delusion. Indeed, this feeling of success only lasts for a week or two then, given human nature, we crave something new and better than that. Similarly, if we feel jealous or greedy for somebody else's wealth, we should also say *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāhi* or the combined phrase, *mā shā' allāhu lā quwwata illā billāhi*. And this has been narrated by many of the Ṣaḥābah, that if we find ourselves feeling jealousy towards somebody, we should say *mā shā' allāhu lā quwwata illā billāhi*.

In another hadith on jealousy:

It was reported from Abū Umāmah ibn Sahl ibn Ḥunayf that his father told him that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ went out and they travelled with him towards Makkah until they reached Shī'b al-Khazzar in al-Juḥfah. Sahl ibn Ḥunayf washed himself, and he was a fair man with a handsome body and skin. 'Amir ibn Rab'ah, the brother of Banī 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, looked at him when he was

washing, and said, 'I have never seen anything like this, not even the skin of a virgin in seclusion!' (this was a metaphor for the intense whiteness of his skin). Then Sahl suffered a seizure (an epileptic fit, in which he fell to the ground). He was brought to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and it was said, 'O Messenger of Allah, do you know what has happened to Sahl? By Allah, he cannot raise his head and he will not wake up.' He said, 'Do you accuse anyone with regard to him?' They said, 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah looked at him.' So the Messenger of Allah ﷺ called 'Āmir and spoke angrily with him, saying, 'Would any of you like to kill his brother? If you see something that you like, why do you not pray for blessing for it?' Then he said to him (Āmir), 'Do ghusl for him.' So he washed his face, hands, elbows, the soles of his feet and inside his *izār* (lower garment) from a vessel, then that water was poured over him (Sahl) —a man poured it over his head and back from behind, tilting the vessel. This was done to him, then Sahl went on with the people and there was nothing wrong with him.³⁴

The Prophet ﷺ told 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah that he should express *bāraka lahu* towards Sahl, meaning saying *mashā'Allāh* and *bāraka Allāhu lak* (may Allah increase you in what you have). It's also a very common phrase to say *mashā'Allāh tabāarak Allāh*, and there's nothing wrong with that. But *tabāarak Allāh* is a praise of Allah ﷻ, and what we're supposed to do when we feel jealous is to make *du'ā'* that Allah ﷻ gives *baraka* in the other person's wealth: *bāraka Allāhu lak*. So if we feel jealous of someone, we should say *mashā'Allāh bāraka Allāhu lak*, meaning may Allah ﷻ give you more *baraka*, or blessings. This gets to the root of the problem, which is for you to make a *du'ā'* for the one that you feel jealous towards. We are supposed to say *mashā'Allāh, bāraka Allāhu lak, lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*. That is why our Prophet ﷺ asked why the Ṣaḥābah didn't say *bāraka Allāhu lak* (may Allah increase you in what you have). When we make this *du'ā'*, jealousy will go away. Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ said, 'Any time a Muslim servant supplicates for his brother behind his back, the Angels say: And for you the same.'³⁵ So if we see someone with wealth or

any blessing, we should make *du'ā'* for them and Allah ﷻ will give us exactly the same as well.

An issue arises here with regards to South Asian culture, where the phrase *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh* is always associated with something negative—such that when it is said it is assumed something terrible has occurred. I remember one of our brothers came to me asking why when we hear the *adhān* at certain phrases we say *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*. The brother believed this phrase is only said when you hear terrible news. But the phrase is not inherently associated with a calamity, even though it can be said at these times. Rather, it is a generic phrase. *Ḥawl* means 'change' and *quwwa* means power; so the phrase means nothing will change unless Allah ﷻ wills it and nobody has the power to execute the change unless Allah ﷻ has willed it. When we hear the *adhān* saying *ḥayya ʿālā al-ṣalāh* (come to *ṣalāh*) we are supposed to stand up and walk to the *masjid*. The *quwwa* or power to stand will not come, that *ḥawl* or change from sitting to standing will not come, until Allah ﷻ gives it to us. That is why we say *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*, that the change and power will come when Allah ﷻ gives it to me. We also say it when we feel *ghurūr* to remind ourselves that all of this is from Allah ﷻ.

A notable point here is the companion who is criticizing the man does so by teaching him as to how the latter should have acted. A Muslim never criticizes just by being negative and demeaning; rather, even in his criticism, he is merciful and tender. The companion didn't just say how foolish or arrogant the man was, but he taught him the right goal. *Wa-law-lā idh dakhalta jannataka qulta mā shā' allāhu lā quwwata illā billāhi*.

The companion then goes to the third and final point. His first point was on the man's rejection of Allah ﷻ, the second on the man's arrogance, the third is on how the man demeans his companion. The companion responds to all of these in the order that it deserves. Nobody likes to be belittled, so he also defends himself. But even here there is an element of threat and mercy. In verses 39 to 41, the companion says:

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ
تَرَنَ أَنَا أَقْلَ مِنْكَ مَا لَا وَوَلَدًا ﴿١٨﴾

‘When you entered your vineyard, why did you not say: “Whatever Allah wills shall come to pass, for there is no power save with Allah!” If you find me less than yourself in wealth and children (*al-Kahf* 18:39)

فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَن يُؤْتِيَنِي خَيْرًا مِّنْ جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَيُصْبِحَ صَعِيدًا زَلَقًا ﴿١٩﴾

it may well be that my Lord will give me something better than your vineyard, and send a calamity upon your vineyard from the heavens and it will be reduced to a barren waste, (*al-Kahf* 18: 40)

أَوْ يُصْبِحَ مَأْوَاهَا غَوْرًا فَلَن تَسْتَطِيعَ لَهُمُ طَلَبًا ﴿٢٠﴾

or the water of your vineyard will be drained deep into the ground so that you will not be able to seek it out.’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 41)

In the use of *in tarani*, i.e. ‘if you perceive’ or ‘if you find’, there is a sense of the companion highlighting the man’s delusion. He did not say, ‘I am less than you’ but ‘you perceive me to be less than you.’ And this is a beautiful way of phrasing it, as it implies Allah ﷻ knows the one who is higher and the one who is lower. The companion continues to say that if the man feels superior because the former has less money and children, Allah ﷻ might give something better to the companion and take away the man’s garden. He is being arrogant, but Allah ﷻ can reverse the situation. The man should fear that Allah ﷻ might destroy him and his garden and cause all the land to become completely infertile, or cause the water to disappear into the ground

such that it cannot be extracted. Furthermore, even if Allah ﷻ doesn't bless the companion with a better garden in this world, he hopes for a better *Jannah* in the next world. The companion has full faith that if he is true to Allah ﷻ and persistent in *'ibādah* that in the next life he will get his *Jannah*.

We know from hadith how much Allah ﷻ despises *kibr* (arrogance) and that people have no right to feel an atom's weight of pride: 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: 'No one who has an atom's-weight of arrogance in his heart will enter Paradise.'³⁶ Who then is the man to feel pride? Allah ﷻ created him and all that he has and Allah ﷻ gave him all that he has, and yet the man comes along and attributes it to himself. This is why the sin of arrogance is such that if a heart has it that heart will not enter *Jannah*. Allah ﷻ will forgive *zinā* (fornication) and Allah ﷻ will forgive *khamr* (alcohol). But the sin of *kibr* is a sin that is not befitting of a created mortal, a human who is created from *nutfah* and from *līn* and *ālaq* (a clot of congealed blood). It is simply not befitting for such a person to feel arrogance against Allah ﷻ.

The Punishment and Reward of Allah ﷻ

Just as the man and his companion are talking, Allah's ﷻ punishment comes into effect:

وَأُحِيطَ بِثَمَرِهِ فَأَصْبَحَ يَقْلُبُ كَفِّهِ عَلَى مَا أَثَقَ فِيهَا وَهِيَ
خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا وَيَقُولُ يَلَيْتَنِي لَمْ أُشْرِكْ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٤٤﴾

Eventually all his produce was destroyed and he began to wring his hands in sorrow at the loss of what he had spent on it, and on seeing it fallen down upon its trellises, saying: 'Would I had not associated anyone with my Lord in His Divinity.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 42)

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ فِئَةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنتَصِرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

And there was no host, beside Allah, to help him, nor could he be of any help to himself. (*al-Kahf* 18: 43)

هَٰذَاكَ أَوْلَىٰ لِلَّهِ الْحَقُّ مُوَخَّرٌ وَأَبَا وَخَيْرٌ عُفْبًا ۝

(Then he knew) that all power of protection rests with Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, the best to determine the end of things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 44)

Allah ﷻ says, *wa-uhīṭa bi-thamarihi* (all his produce was de-stroyed), and this is the height of eloquence. Allah ﷻ spends four verses describing the man's garden and all the ways in which He perfected it, and then He spends two words describing its destruction without any details. *Wa-uhīṭa bi-thamarihi* implies the whole garden was surrounded, but Allah ﷻ doesn't give any detail of what it was surrounded by. Why does He do this? Because this garden means little to Allah ﷻ. It is Allah's ﷻ *qudra*; all of the garden is surrounded by His punishment and destroyed. Some say a fire came, others say a tornado, but ultimately this is all irrelevant. Both men are there and see the garden being destroyed. The owner begins to wring his hands in regret at the loss of all he had spent on his garden, *fa-aṣḥaba yuqallibu kaffayhi 'alā mā anfaqa fihā*. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ employs a metaphorical expression as if to say the roof became the ground: *fa-aṣḥaba yuqallibu kaffayhi 'alā mā 'anfaqa fihā wa-hiya khāwiyatun 'alā 'urūshihā*. The garden was collapsed in totality; the *urūsh*, which is the roof, came down to the ground and became completely empty.

It is at this point the man laments, *wa-yaqūlu yā-laytanī lam ushrik bi-rabbī 'aḥadan* ('Would I had not associated anyone with my Lord in His Divinity.') That is when he realized his crimes, but as usual regret and remorse after the *'adhāb*, or punishment, is of no use. Regret and remorse must come before the *'adhāb*. Everyone will regret when they see the punishment. Even Firawn, the worst person in the history of people, when he saw the Angel of Death and the *'adhāb* of Allah ﷻ said, 'I believe that there is no god but Allah in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am

also one of those who submit to Allah.’³⁷ And Allah ﷻ mocks him: ‘*Āal’ān?*’ (Now?) ‘Now you believe, although you disobeyed earlier and were one of the mischief makers.’³⁸ Similarly, here the man of the garden after witnessing the *’adhab* feels regret. The real test is whether there is repentance to Allah ﷻ before that *’adhab*.

In verses 43 and 44, Allah ﷻ says:

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ قُوَّةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنتَصِرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

And there was no host, beside Allah, to help him, nor could he be of any help to himself. (*al-Kahf* 18: 43)

هُنَالِكَ الْوَلِيَّةُ لِلَّهِ الْخَقِّ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ﴿٤٤﴾

(Then he knew) that all power of protection rests with Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, the best to determine the end of things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 44)

Here was the man saying *a’azzu nafaran*, I have more children, I have an army, I am *’azīz*. In return Allah ﷻ says nobody could protect him when the punishment came, nor could he defend himself. Allah ﷻ adds, *hunālika l-walāyatu li-llāhi l-ḥaqqi*, this is where Allah’s ﷻ *walāyah*, meaning protection, is truly shown. At times of ease the Muslim and the *kāfir* enjoy that ease, but at times of punishment and difficulty and when the *du‘ā* needs to be answered, Allah’s ﷻ *walāyah* is really shown. This is when the *mu’min* (righteous) is separated from the *kāfir* (disbeliever) and the *fāsiq* (sinner); *hunālika*, at that point in time.

Allah ﷻ then affirms in verse 44 that He is the One who has the best reward and the best end result. The man with the garden was only looking at circumstances at a particular point in time, believing himself better than his companion. But the believing companion knew that in the end he will be successful. That is what Allah ﷻ is confirming in verse 44 when He says: *huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun ’uqbā*. In this instance, *’uqbā* means

end result and *thawāb* means reward; Allah ﷻ has the best reward and the best end result. The real winner is not the winner who is rich at one point in his life, but the one who is wealthy and happy for eternity, and that is in *Jannah*. The real winner doesn't just look at one day, he looks at eternity, and the only being that will give you that eternity is Allah ﷻ.

32 *Al-Kahf* 18: 38.

33 Al-Tirmidhī.

34 Aḥmad, *al-Musnad*, 3/486.

35 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 2732.

36 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 91.

37 *Yūnus* 10: 90.

38 *Yūnus* 10: 91.



The Criminal's Book of Deeds



In the previous chapter we looked at the second *fitnah* in Surah *al-Kahf*, which is the *fitnah* of wealth, as illustrated by the story of the man with two gardens. Allah ﷻ then builds on that story with a parable in verses 45–51, explaining in more detail what He means by the *fitnah* of wealth:

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ
اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّقْتَدِرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

(O Prophet), propound to them the parable of the present life: it is like the vegetation of the earth which flourished luxuriantly when it mingled with the water that We sent down from the sky, but after that the same vegetation turned into stubble which the winds blew about. Allah alone has the power over all things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 45)

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ
خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world. But the deeds of lasting righteousness are the best in the sight of your Lord in reward, and far better a source of hope. (*al-Kahf* 18: 46)

وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ
مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٧﴾

Bear in mind the Day when We shall set the mountains in motion and you will find the earth void and bare. On that Day We shall muster all men together, leaving none of them behind. (*al-Kahf* 18: 47)

وَعُرِّضُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ صَفًّا لَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
بَلْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَن لَّنُجْعَلَ لَكُم مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٤٨﴾

They shall be brought before your Lord, all lined up, and shall be told: 'Now, indeed, you have come before Us in the manner We created you in the first instance, although you thought that We shall not appoint a tryst (with Us).' (*al-Kahf* 18: 48)

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ
يَوَيْلَ لَنَا مَا لَ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً
إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظُنُّ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

And then the Record of their deeds shall be placed before them and you will see the guilty full of fear for what it contains and will say: 'Woe to us! What a Record this is! It leaves nothing, big or small,

but encompasses it.' They will find their deeds confronting them. Your Lord wrongs no one. (*al-Kahf* 18: 49)

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ
مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن
دُونِي وَمَرَكَمَ عَدُوِّنِيَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا ۝

And recall when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam'; all of them fell prostrate, except Iblīs. He was of the *jinn* and so disobeyed the command of his Lord. Will you, then, take him and his progeny as your guardians rather than Me although they are your open enemies? What an evil substitute are these wrongdoers taking! (*al-Kahf* 18: 50)

۝ مَا أَشْهَدْتُهُم خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا خَلْقَ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَمَا كُنْتُ مُتَّخِذَ الْمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدًا ۝

I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor in their own creation. I do not seek the aid of those who lead people astray. (*al-Kahf* 18: 51)

The *Fitnah* of Wealth

In ayah 45, Allah ﷻ says:

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُمْ مَثَلَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
فَأَخْضَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتَ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ شَجَرًا فَزَيَّادُهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ
اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُقْتَدِرًا ﴿١٨﴾

(O Prophet), propound to them the parable of the present life: it is like the vegetation of the earth which flourished luxuriantly when it mingled with the water that We sent down from the sky, but after that the same vegetation turned into stubble which the winds blew about. Allah alone has the power over all things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 45)

The example of the life of this world being like vegetation is a very common theme of the Qur'an and appears at least seven times. Allah ﷻ says the example of this world is that it is like vegetation that grows, then dies and withers away to become hay and must be planted again. This kind of parable of the cycle of crops to illustrate the temporality of life is one that is understood by most people. There are a number of commonalities between life and crops. First, the fact that it is temporary. Secondly, that it is luscious when it is alive and green, and thirdly that when it is gone it is useless. Similarly, when this world goes by you cannot retrieve it. And hence Allah ﷻ says it is just like the vegetation around you; pay attention to it and you will learn from your own life as well. Some scholars have said Allah ﷻ compares this world to water: *wa-drib lahum mathal al-hayati al-dunya ka-ma'in* (*ka-ma'in* means 'like water'). This is a beautiful analogy, because we all need the right amount of water to live but if there is too much water we will drown and perish. Like floods and tsunamis, too much water will become something that destroys. So Allah ﷻ says you need a little bit of this world, but if you immerse yourself too much into it then it will cause your own destruction. Allah ﷻ mentions that just as plants wither and become like hay that the wind tosses, so too will we decay, and our bones and flesh will become like nothing. So we must think about that which will remain forever.

Allah ﷻ then says in verse 46, as explicitly as possible:

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ
خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world. But the deeds of lasting righteousness are the best in the sight of your Lord in reward, and far better a source of hope. (*al-Kahf* 18: 46)

Zinah is decoration or a decorative piece, the purpose of which is it pleases the eye. Our homes are full of decorations that are *zinah*—soothing to the eyes—but then what? This is what Allah ﷻ is saying; your money and children are what makes your life look enjoyable to live. Also notice that Allah ﷻ says *māl* (wealth) before he says *banūn* (children). This is because money is always in our hearts. From when we're young to when we're old, we always want money, but we only want children in a particular period of our lives. For a 20-year-old the last thing on their mind is children; they want money. This is also true at an older age, such as sixty or seventy, when the children are much older; they want money. So *al-māl* is first, and then *banūn*. Of course, money and children really do make life worth living. The greatest happiness for people is to live comfortably with family, and Allah ﷻ doesn't negate this but recognises it as *zinah*. However, the Muslim uses it as real *zinah*, as a stepping stone to get to the next world, whereas for the non-muslim, money and children will be a temporary *zinah*.

The verse then continues with that which we should look for: *wa al-bāqiyātu al-ṣāliḥātu khayrun ʿinda rabbika thawāban wa khayrun amalan* (But the deeds of lasting righteousness are the best in the sight of your Lord in reward, and far better a source of hope). This is a very interesting point: technically, from a linguistic perspective, it should be *wa al-ṣāliḥātu al-bāqiyātu*, i.e. the other way around, to mean 'the good deeds that remain'. This is because what remains is the *ṣāliḥāt* or the 'good deeds'. However, Allah ﷻ flipped it around to *wa al-bāqiyātu al-ṣāliḥātu*, 'the remaining

deeds that are good'. Allah ﷻ wants to emphasize the fact that good deeds last forever, even though from a purely linguistic perspective it would make more sense to say *wa al-ṣāliḥātu al-bāqiyātu*, 'the good deeds are those that will remain forever'. Allah ﷻ wants to emphasize what makes good deeds different from everything else.

Māl and *banūn*, or wealth and children, are then like hay, they come and go. What remains is *wa al-bāqiyātu al-ṣāliḥātu*. Ibn 'Abbās said *wa-l-bāqiyāt ṣ-ṣāliḥātu* is *subḥān Allāh wa al-ḥamdu lillāh wa lā ilāha illā'llāh wa Allāhu akbar* (Allah is free from imperfection; praise be to Allah; there is no true god except Allah; and Allah is greatest). Another Ṣaḥābī said it is *lā ilāha illā'llāh* (there is no god but Allah), and another Ṣaḥābī said it is your *ṣalāh*, while a further Ṣaḥābī said it is your *dhikr*. All of these are valid; good deeds of any type are the things that remain. And so, Allah ﷻ says those good deeds that are eternal are *khayrun ʿinda rabbika thawāban*, that is the real reward, *wa-khayrun amalan* and that's where you should put your *amal* (hope). Every one of us thinks about money, children, property and luxury. Allah ﷻ says your *amal* should be *wa wa al-bāqiyātu al-ṣāliḥātu* and not *al-mālu wa-l-banūna*. Don't go to sleep calculating what's going to be your next year's income or other such things, these are temporary. Rather, think about that which will be permanent.

The Day of Judgement and Record of Deeds

Once Allah ﷻ has affirmed that this world is temporary, He then jumps to what will be the Final Day and end result. That is the *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* or Day of Judgement:

وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ
مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿١٧﴾

Bear in mind the Day when We shall set the mountains in motion and you will find the earth void and bare. On that Day We shall muster all men together, leaving none of them behind. (*al-Kahf* 18: 47)

On that Day the mountains won't be where they once were. *Bārīzah* means flat, i.e. the earth will be flattened and there will be nothing on it. We know this from the Qur'an and Sunnah, such as when Allah ﷻ says: '*when the mountains shall be set in motion*'³⁹ that there is going to be a huge cataclysmic event that will change this whole world. As Allah ﷻ says, the world will be changed into another world and the heavens will be changed to another heaven, everything will be changed.⁴⁰ So on that Day the mountains, which we consider to be most stable and will last for centuries, will be moved and the whole world will be laid flat. Allah ﷻ will bring everyone forth and not one of them will be forgotten or left behind. The point in this verse is that Allah ﷻ is threatening those who denied the Day of Judgment. They think they are going to get away from it, but on that Day everyone will be gathered and no one will be forgotten.

Allah ﷻ continues in verse 48:

وَعَرِّضُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ صَفًّا لِّدِّ جِئْتُونَا كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
بَلْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَن لَّنُجْعَلَ لَكُم مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٤٨﴾

They shall be brought before your Lord, all lined up, and shall be told: 'Now, indeed, you have come before Us in the manner We created you in the first instance, although you thought that We shall not appoint a tryst (with Us).' (*al-Kahf* 18: 48)

We learn from the Qur'an that every group of people will be with their own kind. So those who are idolaters, those who are *munāfiqūn* or hypocrites, those who are *kāfir*, each group will be *ṣaffan*, in ranks. Then Allah ﷻ says, '*Now, indeed, you have come before Us in the manner We created you in the first instance*'. Our Prophet ﷺ explained that this meant every human being will be resurrected in front of Allah ﷻ barefoot, naked and uncircumcised. There will be no luxuries of this world, where every one of us is accompanied by luxuries that give our status away, on that Day Allah ﷻ says everyone will come before him as we came into the world: with

nothing. So too will we come back, having absolutely nothing of what we had in this world. Our money, our children will all be gone like the dust in the wind. Allah ﷻ then adds ‘*although you thought that We shall not appoint a trust (with Us)*’; that you denied this appointment but there is indeed an appointment.

Allah ﷻ then speaks of the Book of Deeds in verse 49:

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ
يَوَيْلَئَنَا مَا هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً
إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

And then the Record of their deeds shall be placed before them and you will see the guilty full of fear for what it contains and will say: ‘Woe to us! What a Record this is! It leaves nothing, big or small, but encompasses it.’ They will find their deeds confronting them. Your Lord wrongs no one. (*al-Kahf* 18: 49)

This is the Book of our own deeds; the *kitāb* mentioned here is the book that the *kirāman kātibīn*, the noble angel scribes, are writing. As Allah ﷻ says in Surah *Qāf*:

إِذْ يَتَلَفَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾

Moreover, there are two scribes, one each sitting on the right and the left, recording everything.

مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ ﴿١٨﴾

He utters not a word, but there is a vigilant watcher at hand.⁴¹

These are the angels that are writing our own book, and it is this book that is referenced here in verse 49 of Surah *al-Kahf*. The book is referred to in

the Qur'an multiple times. In Surah *Banī Isrā'īl*, for example, 'We shall produce for him his scroll in the shape of a wide open book, (saying): "Read your scroll; this Day you suffice to take account of yourself."'⁴² Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ said this book will be read by the literate and the illiterate. Even if we cannot read we will be able to understand it because we are the one who authored it. The angels wrote it down but the deeds are ours. Thus, Allah ﷻ says *wa-wuḍī'a al-kitābu*: the book will be placed open in front of them.

The verse then says *fatarā al-mujrimīna*; '*al-mujrimīna*' means 'the criminals', and here Allah ﷻ calls those who reject Him and those who worship others besides Him as criminals, or *mujrim*. To this day, when an Arab says criminal he uses the word *mujrim*. The term is different to *mushrik* or *kāfir*. Anyone who is so arrogant and haughty as to deny Allah ﷻ, to worship other than Him, this man is a criminal in the eyes of Allah ﷻ. That is why *mujrim* is a common term for those who are too arrogant to worship Allah ﷻ and be righteous people. *Mujrim* also encompasses those Muslims who are not righteous and don't live good lives, even if they knew the truth. Allah ﷻ doesn't say *kāfir* in such a case, but says *mujrim*. A Muslim can also be a *fāsiq* or a bad Muslim, as we say. And so *mujrim* incorporates anyone who is not faithful to Allah ﷻ.

Allah ﷻ says *fatarā al-mujrimīna mushfiqīna mimmā fīhi*, you will see the criminals are terrified of what is in this book. *Mushfiq* means to be terrified of the consequences. '*Shafaqa*' is to be terrified of what is going to happen. They are terrified of the consequences of what they have done. The verse continues: '*Woe to us! What a Record this is! It leaves nothing, big or small, but encompasses it.*' They will find their deeds confronting them. Your Lord wrongs no one.' They get angry at the book, even though they should be angry with themselves. *Aḥṣā* means to write in explicit meticulous detail, and there is nothing large or small except that this book has meticulously preserved it. And so Allah ﷻ says that the *mujrim* will get angry at the book because he recognizes it has not left anything out. Allah ﷻ says don't get angry at the book, *wa-wajadū mā 'amilū ḥāḍiran*, all that you have done is in front of you; this is your deeds. Allah ﷻ further adds,

wa-lā yazlimu rabbuka aḥada your Lord is not going to be unjust to you. This is what you have done and nobody else will take responsibility for it other than you.

The Arrogance of Iblīs

After Allah ﷻ mentions the end of times, He then reverses back in time and goes to the beginning of time:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ
 مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ
 دُونِي وَمَرَكُمُ عَذُوبٌ نَّسَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا ﴿١٥﴾

And recall when We said to the angels: ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam’; all of them fell prostrate, except Iblīs. He was of the *jinn* and so disobeyed the command of his Lord. Will you, then, take him and his progeny as your guardians rather than Me although they are your open enemies? What an evil substitute are these wrongdoers taking! (*al-Kahf* 18: 50)

After talking about the Day of Judgement, immediately Allah ﷻ goes back to the beginning of the creation, as if to tell us that this isn’t anything new. There is another beautiful reason why this is mentioned over here. The Quraysh were too arrogant to sit with the lower classes among the Muslims, such as Bilāl and Salmān. In response, Allah ﷻ is saying here that you are not the first to be arrogant; there was a being who had the same arrogance and that being was none other than Iblīs. And when you don’t want to do what Allah ﷻ commands, you are imitating Iblīs. When you don’t want to be in the company of the righteous, you will be in the company of Iblīs.

There is another reason why the story of the Iblīs is mentioned here. Allah ﷻ says He instructed the angels to bow down before Adam and all did except Iblīs, ‘... he was of the *jinn*’. This is very explicit evidence that

Iblīs was of the *jinn*, not of the angels as some other religions believe. Iblīs swerved away from obedience to Allah ﷻ, and He says: *'Will you, then, take him and his progeny as your guardians rather than Me although they are your open enemies? What an evil substitute are these wrongdoers taking!'* Allah ﷻ is saying to the Quraysh that Iblīs showed arrogance from the very beginning, so should they take him as their ally when he refused to honour mankind and hated mankind from the very beginning? Do they believe he will love and honour them now? Will they take Iblīs and his progeny as guardians? This also proves that Iblīs has children, and these children are the leaders of evil.

Some early scholars say that each child took responsibility for one spectrum of evil. For example, one causes divorce, another causes murder, etc. There is no authentic hadith to confirm this, however it is not difficult to imagine that Iblīs would have appointed his children in positions of authority. There is some evidence with regards Shayṭān being allocated specific tasks. In one example, a Ṣaḥābī complained about struggling to concentrate in *ṣalāh* and the Prophet ﷺ said that there is a Shayṭān whose name is Khinzab and whose job is to spoil your concentration in *ṣalāh*. This indicates that for every problem in the world there is one Shayṭān whose responsibility it is to tempt you to it. So Allah ﷻ declares, *'What an evil substitute are these wrongdoers taking!'* Instead of turning to the righteous and admitting themselves to the company of the prophets and the righteous, they have gone over to the side of Iblīs.

Allah ﷻ then states:

﴿ مَا أَشْهَدْتُهُمْ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا خَلْقَ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَمَا كُنْتُ مُتَّخِذَ الْمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدًا ﴾

I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor in their own creation. I do not seek the aid of those who lead people astray. (*al-Kahf* 18: 51)

Allah ﷻ puts the Quraysh and anyone who rejects and denies Him in their place, telling these beings that they are worshipping the Shayṭān and idols, which were not around when Allah ﷻ created the universe. Allah ﷻ didn't show them how He created the universe, and if He didn't even show them how the universe was created, then how can you think these beings are powerful over Allah's ﷻ creation? How then do the disbelievers think these beings share in the creation with Him, and how can the disbelievers worship them besides Allah ﷻ? He then adds, *'I do not seek the aid of those who lead people astray.'* The meaning here is that the Quraysh said these idols are Allah's ﷻ helpers, but Allah ﷻ is saying these beings are in fact Shayṭān and were not around, nor were they witnesses when He created the creation. Furthermore, if Allah ﷻ wanted help from anyone, do the disbelievers really think it would be from *mudillīna*, those who are evil and are causing people to go astray? Allah ﷻ thereby dismisses these assumptions and establishes His authority.

39 *Al-Takwīr* 81: 3.

40 *Ibrāhīm* 14: 48.

41 *Qāf* 50: 17–18.

42 *Banī Isrā'īl* 17: 13–14.



The Day of Judgement and the Futility of *Shirk* and Argumentation



The surah here continues with verses 52–59, giving greater detail about the Day of Judgment:

وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ نَادُوا شُرَكَائِيَ الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا
لَهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُم مَّوْبِقًا ﴿٥٢﴾

What will such people do on the Day when the Lord will say: ‘Now call upon all those whom you believed to be My partners?’ Thereupon they will call upon them, but they will not respond to their call; and We shall make them a common pit of doom, (*al-Kahf* 18: 52)

وَرَبَّاءُ الْمُجْرِئُونَ الْإِثَارَ فَعَلَتْهُمُ أَنْهُمْ مَوَاقِمُهَا وَلَمْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا ﴿٥٣﴾

and the guilty shall behold the Fire and know that they are bound to fall into it and will find no escape from it. (*al-Kahf* 18: 53)

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي مَآزٍ الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ
الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

And surely, We have explained matters to people in the Qur'an in diverse ways, using all manner of parables. But man is exceedingly contentious. (*al-Kahf* 18: 54)

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ
إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةٌ الْأَوَّلِينَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ قُبُلًا ﴿٥٥﴾

What is it that prevented mankind from believing when the guidance came to them, and from asking forgiveness of their Lord, except that they would like to be treated as the nations of yore, or that they would like to see the scourge come upon them face to face? (*al-Kahf* 18: 55)

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَيُجَادِلُ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ وَاتَّخَذُوا آيَاتِي
وَمَا أُنذِرُوا مَسْوًا ﴿٥٦﴾

We raise Messengers only to give good news and to warn. But the unbelievers resort to falsehood in order to rebut the truth with it, and scoff at My revelations and My warnings. (*al-Kahf* 18: 56)

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَنَسِيَ
مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي
أُذُنَيْهِمْ وَقْرًا وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَى فَلَنْ يَهْتَدُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا ﴿٥٧﴾

Who is more wicked than the man who, when he is reminded by the revelations of his Lord, turns away from them and forgets (the consequence of) the deeds wrought by his own hands? We have laid veils over their hearts lest they understand the message of the Qur'an, and We have caused heaviness in their ears. Call them as you may to the Right Path, they will not be ever guided aright. (*al-Kahf* 18: 57)

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ لَوْ يُؤَاخِذُهم بِمَا كَسَبُوا الْعَجَلَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ
بَلْ لَهُمْ مَوْعِدٌ لَّنْ يَجِدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْعِدًا ﴿٥٨﴾

Your Lord is All-Forgiving, full of mercy. Had He wished to take them to task for their doings, He would have hastened in sending His scourge upon them. But He has set for them a time-limit which they cannot evade. (*al-Kahf* 18: 58)

وَتِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَهْلِكِهِم مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٥٩﴾

All the townships afflicted with scourge are before your eyes. When they committed wrong, We destroyed them. For the destruction of each We had set a definite term. (*al-Kahf* 18: 59)

Shirk and Argumentation

Allah ﷻ says in verse 52 that on that Day He will tell the disbelievers to go ahead and call and make *du'ā'* to those false gods that they presumed were

gods besides Allah ﷻ. So, they will call upon their false gods on the Day of Judgment, as they used to call their gods in this world, but there will not be any response. How can there be a response when Allah ﷻ has said He has constructed a barrier of destruction between these false gods and those who used to worship them? In this verse, Allah ﷻ is emphasizing the futility of *shirk*. He threatens and mocks those who commit *shirk*, implying, 'you used to call them in this world, now on the Day of Judgment go ahead and call them, see if they will respond to you.'

After the false gods fail to respond to the call, verse 53 declares: '*and the guilty shall behold the Fire and know that they are bound to fall into it and will find no escape from it.*' This is a threat to the Quraysh and to all of those who worshipped others besides Allah ﷻ. Allah ﷻ says *wa-lam yajidū 'anhā maṣrifa*, that they will not find a way out from the Fire of Hell. Then, in verse 54 Allah ﷻ says:

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ
الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

And surely, We have explained matters to people in the Qur'an in diverse ways, using all manner of parables. But man is exceedingly contentious. (*al-Kahf* 18: 54)

Allah ﷻ says *wa-la-qad ṣarrafnā*; the same verb is applied. This is a form of eloquence called *tajānus*, where similar verbs are used. Allah ﷻ says they will not find a *maṣrifan* away from *Jahannam*, but in the Qur'an He has made *ṣarrafnā*. It is as if Allah ﷻ is saying that if you want to be protected from *Jahannam* then follow the Qur'an, there is no *maṣrifan* from *Jahannam* other than that; He has made the way out through the Qur'an. Allah ﷻ says '*We have explained*': *ṣarrafnā* means shown through a variety of means. And so Allah ﷻ is saying: We have told you through parables, stories, signs and facts. When will you believe and what will cause you to believe?

Despite these multiple methods to get the message across, many still reject it. The problem is, most of mankind seeks to dispute and argue: *wa-kāna l-insānu akthara shay'in jadalān*. *Jadal* is simply argumentation. In the Qur'an, generally speaking argumentation has been discouraged, because truth is clear from error and argumentation or philosophizing too much is simply a waste of time. That is why Allah ﷻ mentions that argumentation is not a sign of the believer. The believer, when they know it is from Allah ﷻ, they hear and obey. In fact there is a hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ quoted this verse, *wa-kāna l-insānu akthara shay'in jadalān*, to show that sometimes even a little bit of argumentation is not encouraged:

It was narrated from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib that: The Prophet ﷺ came to him and Fātimah at night and said: 'Won't you pray?' I said: 'O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, our souls are in the hand of Allah and if He wants to make us get up, He will make us get up.' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went away when I said that to him. Then as he was leaving I heard him striking his thigh and saying: But, man is ever more quarrelsome than anything.⁴³

SubhānAllāh, in this hadith the Prophet ﷺ assumed that his daughter and his son-in-law would be praying *tahajjud* (voluntary prayers). These were not the nights of Ramadan, these were regular nights, but he had a high standard for his daughter and son-in-law. 'Alī's ﷺ response is not haram; it's not *wājib* (necessary) to pray *tahajjud*, But to make an excuse as he did, this too is a type of *mujāhada* (self-mortification) that our Prophet ﷺ did not approve of. Too much philosophizing and questioning is not a characteristic of the believers. The believers believe in what Allah ﷻ has said; they listen to what He has to say and they follow it in the best way possible. Too much questioning will lead you to find ways to block the truth, and this is not the way of the believers.

Punishment, Reward and Allah's Forgiveness

This verse is particularly pertinent here because the Quraysh came to challenge the Prophet ﷺ. They asked him to tell them the truth and Allah ﷻ

told them the truth. Then they would reject the truth by *jadalah*, and they will begin to invent things. Verse 55 continues:

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ
إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةٌ الْأُولَىٰ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مُبَلَّغًا ﴿٥٥﴾

What is it that prevented mankind from believing when the guidance came to them, and from asking forgiveness of their Lord, except that they would like to be treated as the nations of yore, or that they would like to see the scourge come upon them face to face? (*al-Kahf* 18: 55)

The problem is they will not believe until one of two things happen: until the *sunnat al-awwalin*, what has happened to the previous nations, will happen to them: which is destruction. Previous nations had been destroyed by earthquakes, floods, wind, etc. Or they will not believe until *ya tiyahum al-'adhābu qubula*, the punishment will come to them directly face to face: this means death or the Day of Judgment. Allah ﷻ is essentially saying, 'Why don't you believe? Are you waiting for one of two things; the punishments of the people of old or the Day of Judgement and death?' Some have interpreted that *'adhab* here refers to the Battle of Badr. This is not too far from the truth because when this verse came down it was during the Makkan era and their first major punishment was the Battle of Badr. As such, some of the early scholars have said *aw ya tiyahum al-'adhābu qubulan* is a warning that there will be a battle that they will face *qubul*, meaning face to face. Alternatively, if one were to say that this is a generic punishment if they don't believe, there is one of two options: either a punishment will come right here and now or a punishment will come directly to your face through the Angel of Death. Both of these are valid interpretations.

Earlier in this same verse we see the blessings of *istighfār* where Allah ﷻ asks: 'Why didn't they turn and ask Allah for forgiveness?' *wa-yastaghfirū rabbahum*. This means the worst of the worst will be forgiven if

they turn to Allah ﷻ and ask for His forgiveness. Those whom Allah ﷻ has just threatened with the *'adhāb* and to whom He has just said there will be nothing preventing them from *Jahannam*, Allah ﷻ asks why they didn't ask for forgiveness. This shows us that when a person turns to Allah ﷻ, then no matter what their sin is, He will forgive this sin and give them another chance.

In verse 56, Allah ﷻ then says:

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ ۚ وَيُجَادِلُ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ ۚ وَاتَّخَذُوا آيَاتِي
وَمَا أَنْذَرُوا مُزُورًا ﴿٥٦﴾

We raise Messengers only to give good news and to warn. But the unbelievers resort to falsehood in order to rebut the truth with it, and scoff at My revelations and My warnings. (*al-Kahf* 18: 56)

This is a constant theme of the Qur'an; good and bad, punishment and mercy, *Jahannam* and *Jannah* are always paired together. The Prophet ﷺ came with a message of mercy and tolerance as well as one of threat and warnings. If you think about it this is the logical form of religion. Some religions claim that they're all about mercy and compassion, but the fact is that a religion that only speaks about love and compassion can never live up to its own values because we cannot be loving all the time; nobody can live up to this type of lifestyle. There must be a time of strictness. It is the reality that even those countries that claim to be following such religions, they are the furthest in their actions from implementing them. The religion of truth, the religion of common sense, the religion of logic; it is a religion of love and mercy but there's also a side that is strict. If you obey Allah ﷻ and if you are righteous there is *Jannah*, but if you are so arrogant as to disobey then there is punishment waiting. This is common sense and logic, this is the religion of Islam. The prophets have come *mubashshirīn wa-*

mundhirīn, they give glad tidings and they also warn against impending evil. Yet the response of those whom the prophets came to warn: *wa-yujādilu lladhīna kafarū*. Once again *jadal* or argumentation; those who reject have nothing to do other than argue. And they make their argument with *bāṭil*, with no foundation.

There is not a shred of reason or logic to reject the message of the Prophet ﷺ, everything about him is declaring the truth. His message, lifestyle, miracles, the Qur'an, everything tells you this is the true religion. How then can it be rejected, except by inventing false logic, by philosophizing through *bāṭil* and by rejecting the truth through invented rhetoric. *Li-yudhīdū bihi l-ḥaqqā*, so that the truth can be destroyed or wiped out, *wa-ttakhadhū āyātī wa-mā undhirū huzuwan*, and they have taken My verses and My signs and all that I have warned about, as something of ridicule. This shows us that ridiculing Allah ﷻ and His messengers can never come from the heart of the believer. When the people reject the Qur'an they have to end up making fun of it, they have to end up mocking the religion, and this is not the characteristic of a noble opponent. Allah ﷻ says anyone who ends up rejecting His signs, they end up mocking it: *wa-ttakhadhū āyātī wa-mā undhirū huzuwan*.

In verse 57, Allah ﷻ continues:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَلِئِنْ
مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ إِنَّا جَمَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي
ءَازَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَلَنْ يَهْتَدُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا ﴿٥٧﴾

Who is more wicked than the man who, when he is reminded by the revelations of his Lord, turns away from them and forgets (the consequence of) the deeds wrought by his own hands? We have laid veils over their hearts lest they understand the message of the Qur'an, and We have caused heaviness in their ears. Call them as

you may to the Right Path, they will not be ever guided aright. (*al-Kahf* 18: 57)

So who does more wrong and can be more sinful and arrogant than the one who was reminded of the verses of Allah ﷻ and all he did was turn around in arrogance? This shows us that the one who has been exposed to the message has no excuse. However, the one who has not heard of Islam and has not been exposed to the message, this person might have an excuse because Allah ﷻ says: who does more wrong than the one who was shown my sign and then turns away. If he wasn't shown the signs and he didn't know of Islam and he was ignorant of the religion, this person might have an excuse in the sight of Allah ﷻ; we leave their affairs to Allah ﷻ. But the one who heard the Qur'an, learnt the message of Islam and was exposed to the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, and then his response was to turn his back to it, who does more wrong than this person?

Once they have shown this arrogance, Allah ﷻ puts a seal on their hearts and covers their ears such that they will not be able to understand His message. When you embody evil, Allah ﷻ will be strict with you, and when you embody good He will be gentle with you. These people were arrogant so Allah ﷻ made them even more blind, even more deaf, and covered up their hearts. When you call them to guidance, how do they expect ever to be guided? Despite all of this, Allah ﷻ reminds that your Lord will ever remain al-Ghafūr (the Forgiver).

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ لَوْ يُؤَاخِذُهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا أَلْعَجَلَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ
بَلْ لَهُمْ مَوْعِدٌ لَّنْ يَجْدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْعِدًا ﴿٥٨﴾

Your Lord is All-Forgiving, full of mercy. Had He wished to take them to task for their doings, He would have hastened in sending His scourge upon them. But He has set for them a time-limit which they cannot evade. (*al-Kahf* 18: 58)

He will always continue to forgive, and He will always have mercy, and if Allah ﷻ were to deal with you as you deserve in fairness, the punishment would have come right now. But they will have some time to think, to seek forgiveness and be guided if they want. But if they don't take advantage of that time then they will never find an escape from the time that Allah ﷻ has placed for them.

Allah ﷻ offers a consolation to the Prophet ﷺ and to us, and a threat to the Quraysh. Sometimes we question and the Muslims in the time of the Prophet ﷺ also questioned. Bilāl ؓ asked where is Allah's ﷻ *'adhāb* upon these people, why doesn't He take them to account now, why are the Muslims suffering in this manner? We too ask the same when we see the situation in the world, such as what is happening in Syria and beyond. Allah ﷻ says:

وَتِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَوْلَاكُم مَّرْعِدًا ۝١٨

All the townships afflicted with scourge are before your eyes. When they committed wrong, We destroyed them. For the destruction of each We had set a definite term. (*al-Kahf* 18: 59)

Allah ﷻ has everything written down. He sees what they are doing, and when these cities and towns disobeyed and transgressed, He took them to account. But there is a time, and that time will not be hastened just because you don't understand Allah's ﷻ wisdom. The Quraysh had a time, 'Ād had a time, Thamūd had a time, Firawn had a time. Allah ﷻ is watching what they're doing, and He knows the reality. And when the time comes, they will not be saved from punishment. So this is a consolation to the Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims that the Quraysh will face justice. It is a threat to those who reject Islam that the time will come, and until that time, anyone who repents, Allah ﷻ is always forgiving. This is the greatest mercy of Allah ﷻ that no matter how evil a person has been, if they repent before the *'athāb* comes or before death comes, Allah ﷻ will accept that repentance. But when the punishment or death comes, it will never be possible to change that for them.



The Story of Mūsā and Khidr I

An Introduction to Mūsā, Yūsha and Khidr



As we have previously mentioned, Surah *al-Kahf* is composed of four stories: the first is the story of the men in the cave, the second is the story of the men and the two gardens, the third story is the story of Mūsā and Khidr and the fourth story is that of Dhū al-Qarnayn. In this chapter we will consider the story of Mūsā and Khidr.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَتْنَهُ لَا أَبْرُحُ حَتَّىٰ أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ
أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا ﴿٦٠﴾

(And recount to them the story of Moses) when Moses said to his servant: 'I will journey on until I reach the point where the two rivers meet, though I may march on for ages.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 60)

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنَهُمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلُهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ﴿٦١﴾

But when they reached the point where the two rivers meet, they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the sea, as if through a tunnel. (*al-Kahf* 18: 61)

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِقَتْنُهُمَا زِدْنِي غَدَاةً مَّا لَقَدْ لِقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ﴿٦٢﴾

When they had journeyed further on, Moses said to his servant: 'Bring us our meal. We are surely fatigued by today's journey.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 62)

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوْتَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْخُبْزَ
وَمَا أُنْسِيهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَن أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي
الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ﴿٦٣﴾

The servant said: 'Did you see what happened? When we betook ourselves to the rock to take rest, I forgot the fish—and it is only Satan who caused me to forget to mention it to you—so that it made its way into the sea in a strange manner.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 63)

قَالَ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ فَأَرْتَدَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا ﴿٦٤﴾

Moses said: 'That is what we were looking for.' So the two turned back, retracing their footsteps (*al-Kahf* 18: 64)

The *Yahud* had asked the Prophet ﷺ for two stories; that of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* and of *Dhū al-Qarnayn*, but Allah ﷻ revealed four. What then are the other two stories doing here? They didn't ask for it but Allah ﷻ gave them two more as a bonus. The second story, which is the story of the men and the two gardens, is of relevance to the *Quraysh* who felt that they were too powerful to accept Islam. They had might and glory, so they thought: 'who are we to accept this message?' The second story was therefore a perfect response to the *Quraysh*.

The third story—that of *Mūsā* and *Khidr*—goes back to the Jews of *Yathrib* and is directed towards them. In it Allah ﷻ reminds them who their prophet is, the one they claim to be following. Allah ﷻ is reminding them of *Mūsā* ﷺ and what he did. *Mūsā* was the most knowledgeable man on

earth, but when he found new knowledge he submitted himself to it. He didn't have *kibr*, or pride. Rather, he humbled himself to the truth and he accepted knowledge from someone else. And that is why a new prophet has come, in the form of Muhammad ﷺ. Allah ﷻ is saying to the Jews that you were upon the truth and your own Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام would have accepted this new prophet had he been alive. Your own Prophet ﷺ would have been a follower of this Prophet ﷺ, so why then are you rejecting him?

This then is the story of Mūsā and Khidr, and deals with the *fitnah* of the arrogance of knowledge. Knowledge is a blessing if it is acted upon, but it becomes a curse if it leads to arrogance. It is a blessing if it enters the heart, but if knowledge remains in the head and doesn't reach the heart then it becomes a curse. Allah ﷻ compares these types of groups to a donkey that is carrying books, where even if you have the books it is not benefitting you. We seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from this, and in this story of Mūsā and Khidr the main message to the Muslims, the *Ahl al-Kitāb* and all people is to make sure our knowledge does not lead us to become arrogant. Knowledge should lead us to humility.

In verse 60, Allah ﷻ says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتْنِهِ لَا أَرِخُ حَتَّىٰ أَتْلُجَّ الْبَحْرَيْنِ
أَوْ أَمُوتَ حَقًّا ۖ

(And recount to them the story of Moses) when Moses said to his servant: 'I will journey on until I reach the point where the two rivers meet, though I may march on for ages.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 60)

We will not understand this story without turning to the hadith, because our Prophet ﷺ explained it in a lot of detail. This hadith is in al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and it shows us we cannot just open the Qur'an and interpret it without referring to the Sunnah. It is impossible to understand the Qur'an without knowing the Sunnah. We would not know the details of this story if we don't go back and see what details our Prophet ﷺ gave. Who is this

man? What is happening here? The hadith in *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī is a relatively lengthy one, one of the longer hadiths in the collection, and other books of hadith also have variations and details that will be collated in the version below.

Who Was Khidr?

This is the story between Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ. Khidr is an interesting character; his name is not his proper name, it is in fact a title of this person, whom Allah ﷻ blessed to be alive at the time of Mūsā ؑ. The meaning of Khidr ؑ is 'green'. Ibn Hajar and others have said that he was called Khidr because of his blessings, such that wherever he went the land would turn green behind him, that he would flourish and Allah ﷻ blessed him. The name Khidr also has ten different pronunciations, all of which are valid. There are two major opinions in the *ummah* about who Khidr is. One group, in particular those involved in mysticism, say that Khidr ؑ was a *walī min awliyā' Allāh*; a saint or holy man, and Mūsā ؑ was taught to study with him. According to this interpretation, many from this group say Khidr ؑ is a person who is ever-living. As such he's alive right now and visits the sheikhs, *pirs* and *awliyā'*, and teaches them a secret knowledge. This is because Allah ﷻ says in verse 65 *wa-'allamnāhu min ladunnā 'ilmān*, 'we taught him a knowledge', and they say this is *al-ilm al-ladunnī*, a knowledge directly from Allah ﷻ. This is the position of many—if not all — of the mystical groups. In fact this opinion has become so common that often, when one hears the other opinion, they are amazed that there is actually another opinion out there.

The fact of the matter is that the position that Khidr ؑ is a *walī* and that he is still alive has no shred of evidence in the Qur'an and Sunnah, nor in common sense, reason and intellect. It contradicts the Qur'an because Allah ﷻ says 'Everyone is bound to taste death'.⁴⁴ Allah ﷻ has made the status of the *rasūl* and *nabī* higher than the status of a *walī*. It is not possible that Mūsā ؑ is less knowledgeable than a *walī min awliyā' Allāh*, this is simply not something we are allowed to believe. *Walī* means a good person and we believe in that, but *walī* does not mean somebody who knows more than the Prophet ﷺ or that the prophets themselves have to humble

themselves in front of a *walī*. Furthermore, the position that Khidr ؑ is still alive contradicts the Sunnah because when the Prophet ﷺ saw a Muslim reading the Torah to find out what Mūsā ؑ said, the Prophet ﷺ would say, 'if Mūsā had been alive he would have no option but to come and follow me.'⁴⁵ If this is the case for Mūsā, then how about Khidr? If he had been alive at the time of the Prophet ﷺ it would have been *wājib* on him to come to the Prophet ﷺ and give him *bay'ah*, or allegiance, and be his follower.

We also have the hadith in al-Bukhārī:

Narrated 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar: Once the Prophet ﷺ led us in the 'Ishā' prayer during the last days of his life and after finishing it (the prayer) (with *taslīm*) he said: 'Do you realize (the importance of) this night? Nobody present on the surface of the earth tonight will be living after the completion of one hundred years from this night.'⁴⁶

The last Ṣaḥābī would have died literally in the year 110 AH. The Prophet ﷺ said nobody alive on the face of the earth will be alive in 100 years. As such, if Khidr had been alive, he wouldn't be alive after 100 years. Such claims go against the Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as common sense.

No human being, including a *walī* or saint, is going to be so knowledgeable that Mūsā *Kalīmullāh*, the one who spoke to Allah ﷻ, Mūsā ؑ to whom Allah ﷻ said: 'I chose you above all of mankind', will be told to study with the *walī*. Rather, as the real researchers Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr have said, there is no doubt that Khidr ؑ was in fact a *nabī*, or Prophet, whom Allah ﷻ had sent to another nation. No doubt every prophet has some knowledge another prophet does not have, and that is something we believe. Mūsā ؑ had a speciality, 'Īsā ؑ had a speciality, Ibrāhīm ؑ had a speciality, and Khidr ؑ had a speciality. Therefore, Mūsā would have every right to ask to study with Khidr because he was a fellow prophet. This is proven by the Qur'an itself: when Khidr kills the child and does the other actions, as we will see later in the surah, he says to Mūsā: 'I didn't do this from my own command (meaning: Allah told me to do it)'.

We know Allah ﷻ does not communicate except with prophets. Also, Allah ﷻ says in this surah *wa-‘allamnāhu min ladunnā ‘ilm*, (We taught him a knowledge from us). Who is there that Allah ﷻ teaches directly other than the prophets? So there is no question that Khidr ؑ was a prophet and all of these superstitious tales and legends that Khidr is a green-turbaned figure, flying in the air who visits people is false. By Allah ﷻ, our religion is more sensible than this myth! Khidr ؑ is a Prophet of Allah ﷻ whom He had sent to another nation. He was not from the Banī Isrā’īl, had he been from them he would have been a follower of Mūsā ؑ.

The Humility of Mūsā ؑ

The hadith in *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī relates:

Narrated Ubayy ibn Ka’b: The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Once the Prophet Moses ؑ stood up and addressed Banī Isrā’īl. He was asked, “Who is the most learned man amongst the people?” He said, “I am the most learned.” Allah admonished Moses as he did not attribute absolute knowledge to Him (Allah)’.⁴⁷

Mūsā didn’t give the question too much thought and assumed that he must be the most knowledgeable. He had every right to assume this because Allah ﷻ had chosen him like he has chosen no one else, and Allah ﷻ had spoken to him directly. However, immediately Jibrīl came down and reprimanded him: how he could speak without knowledge? *SubhānAllah*, notice that Mūsā made a very rational assumption, for who should be more knowledgeable than him? It was a logical assumption, but this assumption was not based upon what Allah ﷻ had told him. You cannot assume when it comes to the religion of Allah ﷻ. And so immediately Jibrīl came down and reprimanded him, and Mūsā asked him: ‘Who has more knowledge than me?’ Allah ﷻ told Jibrīl to tell him of ‘*one of Our servants upon whom We had bestowed Our mercy, and to whom We had imparted a special knowledge from Ourselves*’.⁴⁸

Mūsā then sought permission of Allah ﷻ to meet and study with this servant of Allah ﷻ, which He granted. The hadith continues:

Moses said, 'O my Lord! How can I meet him?' Allah said, 'Take a fish and put it in a large basket and you will find him at the place where you will lose the fish.' Moses took a fish and put it in a basket and proceeded along with his (servant) boy, Yūsha' ibn Nūn⁴⁹

Yūsha' ibn Nūn is the '*fatā*' mentioned in verse 60. He was to be the next prophet after the death of Mūsā ؑ, going on to lead the Banī Isrā'īl and under whom Allah ﷻ would open up the land of Palestine allowing the entry of the Banī Isrā'īl. He was also the prophet for whom Allah ﷻ would pause the sun. This hadith on Khidr from al-Bukhārī mentioned that it was Friday night and they were fighting the other nation. When the sun set it would be Saturday, the Sabbath when they are not allowed to do anything. So Yūsha' made a *du'ā*' to Allah ﷻ saying, 'O Allah, pause the sun for us so that we can finish the battle and win over and enter the holy land.' Allah ﷻ, for this one and only time as far as we know, paused the sun and the Banī Isrā'īl, who were the true believers at the time, won over their army. This is what Yūsha' ibn Nūn would rise to achieve. But in this surah he is the *fatā* and a teenager in the training of Mūsā.

The Prophet ﷺ told us that Mūsā and Yūsha' went to the place where they were supposed to meet Khidr and, as Allah ﷻ says, Mūsā ؑ said, '*I will journey on until I reach the point where the two rivers meet, though I may march on for ages.*' This shows us his eagerness for knowledge, and one of the main lessons of this story is Mūsā ؑ, being who he is, instantly humbles himself to the extent of travelling. Imam al-Bukhārī said that the first human who ever travelled for the sake of knowledge was Mūsā ؑ. So he travelled and made Hijrah for the sake of *ilm* (knowledge), and after him all the scholars made this their model to leave their lands and travel for the sake of knowledge. Our scholars comment that there is no doubt Khidr ؑ is a *nabī*, but in the grand scale of things Mūsā ؑ is higher than him. This is because we know that the five 'men of fortitude', the *ulūl-'azm*: Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, 'Isā and the Prophet ﷺ, are the elite among the prophets and everybody else is lesser than them in rank. There is no question Mūsā is higher in rank than Khidr, even though Khidr has some knowledge that Mūsā does not. Yet still Mūsā immediately agrees, humbles himself and

asks Allah's ﷻ permission to study with Khidr. Furthermore, he undertakes a long journey; scholars say this was in Iraq or in Jordan, with some even saying it was in Tunisia or Morocco. He left his people for the sake of increasing his knowledge.

A relevant question to ask ourselves is: when was the last time we sat under somebody whom we knew was less knowledgeable than us but still possessed some *ilm* that we don't have? When was the last time our pride allowed us to sit down under somebody younger than us, or who knows less than us overall but in a particular area knows more, so can benefit us with that knowledge? We find it difficult, but Mūsā *Kalīmullah* had no problem doing it. Mūsā *Kalīmullah* immediately said to Allah ﷻ that he wanted to go and meet this man Khidr and the sign, as we said, was the fish that would disappear. When they reached the relevant place they fell asleep; the Prophet ﷺ said they put their head on a rock and went to sleep, and while they were asleep the fish miraculously became alive and returned to the ocean. That was the sign, where the fish leaves the pot that they were carrying. Yūsha' and Mūsā awoke, but they didn't check on the fish and continued on their journey, or Yūsha' checked but forgot to alert Mūsā. They kept going for a whole day, with Mūsā thinking they still had the fish. Finally, at the end of the day Mūsā says to Yūsha' to prepare the dinner, as they are both so tired from the long journey. When they discover the fish is missing, Yūsha' recalls that when they rested on the rock the fish escaped and he forgot to tell Mūsā. Mūsā replies that this is what they have been waiting for and they walk the whole way back.

We see here that Mūsā ~~ﷺ~~ does not make one word of reproach meant to Yūsha'. This mirrors the example of our Prophet ﷺ, when Anas ibn Mālik said that he was ten years in the service of the Prophet ﷺ and never once did he say, 'why did you do this?' or 'why did you not do that?' and never once did the Prophet ﷺ hit Anas or speak harshly to him. These are the prophets of Allah ﷻ: demonstrating modesty, humility, humbleness.

44 *Al Imrān* 3: 185.

45 *Sunan Ahmad*, 14736.

- 46 *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 116.
- 47 *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 122.
- 48 *Al-Kahf* 18: 65.
- 49 *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 122.



The Story of Mūsā and Khidr II

The Incidents of the Boat and the Boy



As discussed in the previous chapter, Allah ﷻ gave Mūsā ﷺ information to go and meet with Khidr ﷺ. Mūsā ﷺ and Yūsha' ﷺ went beyond the appointed place. Accordingly, verse 64 describes *fartaddā 'alā āthārihimā qaṣaṣan* (So the two turned back, retracing their footsteps). In this chapter Allah ﷻ describes Mūsā's meeting with Khidr ﷺ and other events in verses 65–76:

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا
وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴿٦٥﴾

and there they found one of Our servants upon whom We had bestowed Our mercy, and to whom We had imparted a special knowledge from Ourselves. (*al-Kahf* 18: 65)

قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَ مِنَّا عِلْمْتَ رُشْدًا ﴿٦٦﴾

Moses said to him: 'May I follow you that you may teach me something of the wisdom which you have been taught?' (*al-Kahf* 18: 66)

قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٦٧﴾

He answered: 'You will surely not be able to bear with me. (*al-Kahf* 18: 67)

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٦٨﴾

For how can you patiently bear with something you cannot encompass in your knowledge?' (*al-Kahf* 18: 68)

قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ﴿٦٩﴾

Moses replied: 'You shall find me, if Allah wills, patient; and I shall not disobey you in anything.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 69)

قَالَ فَلَبِيبٌ أَتَّبَعَنِي فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِي عَنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ أُحْدِثَ لَكَ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٧٠﴾

He said: 'Well, if you follow me, do not ask me concerning anything until I myself mention it to you.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 70)

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا ﴿٧١﴾

Then the two went forth until, when they embarked on the boat, he made a hole in it, whereupon Moses exclaimed: 'Have you made a hole in it so as to drown the people in the boat? You have certainly done an awful thing.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 71)

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٢﴾

He replied: 'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?' (*al-Kahf* 18: 72)

قَالَ لَا تُؤَاخِذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا ﴿٧٣﴾

Moses said: 'Do not take me to task at my forgetfulness, and do not be hard on me.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 73)

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَهِيبَا عُلَمَاقَتَهُمَا قَالَ أَقْتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ

نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا ﴿٧٤﴾

Then the two went forth until they met a lad whom he slew, whereupon Moses exclaimed: 'What! Have you slain an innocent person without his having slain anyone? Surely you have done a horrible thing.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 74)

﴿٧٥﴾ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَّكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

He said: 'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?' (*al-Kahf* 18: 75)

قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَ هَٰذَا فَلَا تُصَحِّحْ بَنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتَ

مِنْ لَدُنِّي عُذْرًا ﴿٧٦﴾

Moses said: 'Keep me no more in your company if I question you concerning anything after this. You will then be fully justified.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 76)

Let us dissect this amazing story line by line.

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا
وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴿٥٥﴾

and there they found one of Our servants upon whom We had bestowed Our mercy, and to whom We had imparted a special knowledge from Ourselves. (*al-Kahf* 18: 65)

Many things are learnt here. Firstly, our Prophet ﷺ gave us some details that are not found in the Qur'an. He told us that when Mūsā عليه السلام returned to the place, he found Khidr عليه السلام sitting at a rock exactly where the fish they were carrying had gone in. That was where they were supposed to meet him, and Khidr was sitting right there. Mūsā said to him 'al-salāmu 'alaykum' and Khidr responded 'wa annā bi-ardīk al-salām', 'how do you make salām in this land of yours?' This shows us that the salām and the greetings of the salām are uniquely Islamic concepts. That all of the believers of Allah ﷻ would greet one another with salām. So, when Mūsā greeted Khidr with salām, he was astonished because he thought he was in the land of the pagans and idolaters.

Where then did the salām come from? There is a beautiful hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ told us that the first thing Allah ﷻ taught Adam عليه السلام was the salām and its response:

Abū Hurayrah رضى الله عنه reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'When Allah created Adam عليه السلام, He said to him: "Go and greet that company of angels who are sitting there—and then listen to what they are going to say in reply to your greetings, because that will be your greeting and your offspring's." Adam عليه السلام said to the angels: "al-salāmu 'alaykum." They replied: "al-salāmu 'alaykum wa rahmātullāh", thus adding in reply to him: "wa rahmātullāh (and Mercy of Allah)" to his greeting.'⁵⁰

Thus, the *salām* was taught directly to Adam ﷺ, and it became a mark of all those who believe in Allah ﷻ to greet one another with *salām*. That is why of all the religions that Allah ﷻ has revealed, they have within them the concept of *salām*. To this day the Jews greet each other with 'shalom alaykum' and the Christians once upon a time would greet one another with the Latin phrase 'pax vobiscum', meaning 'peace be with you'.

So Mūsā greeted Khidr with the *salām* and Khidr responded by asking where this greeting was from. Mūsā, implying that he is not from this land, replied 'I am Mūsā.' Khidr responded, 'Mūsā from Banī Isrā'īl?' So Khidr knew exactly who Mūsā was. This illustrates the point from the previous chapter that Mūsā's *maqām*, or status, is higher than that of Khidr, because Khidr knew Mūsā yet Mūsā had never heard of Khidr until Allah ﷻ informed him. Generally, the one whose *maqām* is higher is the one everybody knows of. So Khidr knew exactly who Mūsā was, and he was astonished to see him there.

Allah ﷻ describes Khidr ﷺ as a servant of Allah ﷻ from among His servants, *abdān min 'ibādinā*. The implication is we are not to make him bigger than this, or into some entity. Allah ﷻ has many servants and Khidr ﷺ is one of them. But what Allah ﷻ did do to make Khidr special was *ātaynāhu rahmātan min 'indinā*, (We gave him *rahmah* from Us). Allah's ﷻ most specific characteristic is *rahmah*, He is *al-Rahīm*; we say *bismillāh al-rahīm* and the most common names of Allah ﷻ in the Qur'an centre around the concept of *rahmah*. Allah ﷻ gave Khidr ﷺ *rahmah* and He taught him directly a knowledge. Notice it is *rahmah* that comes first before knowledge in the verse. This is because if we have *rahmah* without knowledge, we can still be good people, but knowledge without *rahmah* is a problem. Allah ﷻ said to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ
لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي
الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

(O Prophet) it was thanks to Allah's mercy that you were gentle to them. Had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from you. So pardon them, and pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel from them in matters of importance. And when you are resolved on a course of action place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him). (*Āl Imrān* 3: 159)

Even in the case of our Prophet ﷺ, if he didn't have good *akhlaq*, or manners, the people would have left him. So, the first thing we need to have is manners; we need to have humbleness and mercy, and then comes knowledge. As verse 65 of Surah *al-Kahf* shows, *āṭaynāhu raḥmātan min indinā wa-ʿallamnāhu min ladunnā ʿilma*, the best combination is *rahmah* and *ilm* put together and this is what Allah ﷻ had bestowed on Khidr عليه السلام. The scholar who is merciful and has manners, that is the highest level. The one who does not have manners, even if he has knowledge that knowledge will not benefit him. On the other hand, the one who has manners but doesn't have knowledge can still be of some benefit.

Seeking Knowledge from the Knowledgeable

So, when Mūsā informed Khidr of who he is, Khidr wonders what Mūsā is doing there. In answer to his question, in verse 66, Mūsā says: *'May I follow you that you may teach me something of the wisdom which you have been taught?'* Mūsā is asking if he can follow Khidr to learn from his good knowledge. Notice here that the one with the higher *maqām* is Mūsā عليه السلام, yet he is the one asking permission; Mūsā is humbling himself. After having travelled a long and exhausting distance, and Allah ﷻ knows how

long he has journeyed, he finally finds Khidr عليه السلام. Yet he does not command Khidr to teach him, introducing himself as Mūsā the son of Imrān from Banī Isrā'īl who has come from such and such land, rather he asks to follow and learn from Khidr عليه السلام. Look at the *adab*, the manners of somebody who is higher in status yet still, when it comes to knowledge and benefit, shows we must humble ourselves in front of the one who will benefit us. This is the *maqām* of the *tilmīdh*, or student, in front of the *mu'allim*, or teacher. Here, Mūsā becomes the *tilmīdh* and he is so eager for knowledge that he is willing to sacrifice his *maqām* so that Khidr عليه السلام can become his teacher. Furthermore, he asks Khidr in a gentle and beautiful way, if he may follow him so that Mūsā may learn from the latter's knowledge: *hal attabi'uka alā an tu'allimanī*. He is praising Khidr عليه السلام for his *ilm* even though Mūsā's *ilm* is greater than Khidr's. But Allah ﷻ has told Mūsā that Khidr has knowledge that he lacks, and Mūsā wants that knowledge and seeks it.

This also shows us that the best way—and some scholars have said the only way—to gain knowledge is by studying it with the *'ulamā'*, the teachers of knowledge. Those who try to gain knowledge through books alone fall into many errors. One of our classical scholars said that whoever takes his books as his teachers and makes the *kutub* his sheikhs, his mistakes will be greater than what he is correcting. This is because we can copiously read and might misunderstand something, and nobody can verify that what we are understanding is correct. Furthermore, we don't know what to read and don't have a methodology for reading. If we look at the way we lead our lives, we always mentor under experts. To study medicine we don't just read books, half of medical training is being mentored by doctors one-on-one. This is the way knowledge is taught. On becoming an engineer, the first thing to happen in a company is a training session to learn from the experts. If this is the case with secular knowledge, how much more so with religious knowledge? One of the themes of Surah *al-Kahf* is to not speak without knowledge, and yet unfortunately when it comes to Islam everybody thinks they can be a self-taught Sheikh. Google becomes their teacher and Wikipedia their mufti. Yet, they never do this for any other discipline. Would we medically diagnose and treat ourselves after reading up on Google? Why then do we think that the religion of Islam doesn't

deserve even more respect? To want to know scholarship either we must go find the scholars or become a scholar ourselves—nothing prevents us from doing that.

The real way to learn is to sit with the people of knowledge as Mūsā did with Khidr. So Mūsā asks Khidr if he may accompany him to learn from his *rushd*, or righteous knowledge. Khidr responds: *'You will surely not be able to bear with me. For how can you patiently bear with something you cannot encompass in your knowledge?'* Khidr initially tries to reject Mūsā's request, saying 'You're not going to be able to keep up with me, you're not patient enough to learn from me'. Khidr then makes an excuse, questioning how Mūsā would even have the patience when he doesn't have Khidr's knowledge. Here Khidr is simply attempting to see how serious Mūsā is, and whether he really wants to learn. It is like an entrance exam to assess whether he is serious or needs to raise the bar. It also shows that Khidr is thinking about Mūsā as well, as if to sympathize that as Khidr will act in a manner beyond Mūsā's understanding, he would not blame Mūsā if he cannot do it. This teaches us that any time we're having a conversation or debate, we should always put ourselves in the shoes of the other person, to try to see the world from their perspective. This will lead to empathy and sympathy.

Mūsā then raises the bar, saying: *'You shall find me, if Allah wills, patient; and I shall not disobey you in anything.'* A few ayat earlier in this surah, our Prophet ﷺ was told to never say anything about tomorrow except to say *inshā'Allāh*. Here our Prophet ﷺ is shown that Mūsā too would add *inshā'Allāh* when he said something of the future. In this verse, Mūsā is asking Khidr to take him on. Notice again there is a gentle pleading; there is no commanding or ordering. He just wants to be Khidr's student. Anyone who truly wants to study any science, especially the Islamic Sciences, needs to have patience and dedication. Mūsā ﷺ is demonstrating that dedication. And so Khidr says to him: *'Well, if you follow me, do not ask me concerning anything until I myself mention it to you.'*

Khidr ﷺ establishes that his one and only condition for Mūsā ﷺ to follow him is that Mūsā does not disturb Khidr until the latter is ready to explain his actions that Allah ﷻ has guided him to do. Mūsā's job is simply

to be patient. On the face of it that seems very easy. However, Mūsā does not know what he is getting himself into.

The Incident on the Boat

And so Mūsā ﷺ and Khidr ﷺ both went on their way together. Most likely they left Yūsha' behind to wait, as the term employed in verse 71, *fanṭalaqā*, is a dual verb implying just Mūsā and Khidr. Both of them continued until they boarded a boat. As the surah relates:

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ أَخَرَقْتُهَا لِتَفْرُقَ
أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا ﴿٧١﴾

Then the two went forth until, when they embarked on the boat, he (Khidr) made a hole in it, whereupon Moses exclaimed: 'Have you made a hole in it so as to drown the people in the boat? You have certainly done an awful thing.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 71)

Our Prophet ﷺ mentions that when they were on the ship Khidr and Mūsā had a conversation. That conversation is recorded in al-Bukhārī thus:

When they were on board the boat, a sparrow came and stood on the edge of the boat and dipped its beak once or twice into the sea. Khidr said to Mūsā, 'O Mūsā! My knowledge and your knowledge have not decreased Allah's Knowledge except as much as this sparrow has decreased the water of the sea with its beak.'⁵¹

Khidr says to Mūsā that compared to the knowledge of Allah ﷻ both their knowledge combined does not even equal the amount of water that this bird removed from the ocean, if this ocean were to be the knowledge of Allah ﷻ. That is the *ilm* of Allah ﷻ. The hadith also mentions that the boat owners were poor fishermen, as subsequent verses will reveal, who were gracious enough to allow Mūsā and Khidr to come on board without payment. However, while they were busy fishing, Khidr pulled out an axe

and hacked a hole into the ship such that water began bubbling in. Seeing this, Mūsā forgot his promise to not question and said, *'Have you made a hole in it so as to drown the people in the boat? You have certainly done an awful thing.'* SubhānAllah, what is interesting here is the phrasing. On the ship is Mūsā, Khidr and the fishermen, yet Mūsā is concerned only for the fishermen. He didn't express concern for his own life or say to Khidr, 'We're going to die!' His whole concern is that these are poor fishermen and they've been so generous as to allow them to travel with them, yet Khidr does this to them. This shows us the *akhlāq* of the prophets—that they are concerned about their people and about humanity. Anyone who wants to call others to Islam has to have that same love without selfishness.

Astounded by his teacher's action, Mūsā challenges Khidr, and our Prophet ﷺ said Mūsā genuinely forgot the promise he had made to be silent and not question anything Khidr might do or say. In verse 72, Khidr responds: *'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?'* to which Mūsā replies, *'Do not take me to task at my forgetfulness, and do not be hard on me.'* In effect, Mūsā says: don't blame me or make matters more difficult for me, I actually forgot, it's a genuine mistake. Notice here that Yūsha' ﷺ forgot about the fish and Mūsā did not get irritated at him, but when Mūsā forgot his promise Khidr, while not necessarily becoming irritated, nonetheless reproached him. The reason for this is because of the status of Mūsā. What is neglected in the case of Yūsha' should not be neglected in the case of Mūsā. As 'Ā'ishah r narrated, the Prophet ﷺ commanded us to treat people according to their level. A Bedouin is not treated the same as a scholar. When a Bedouin urinates in the *masjid*, he should not be treated as you would treat a person of knowledge, but you excuse them according to their background.⁵² And so Mūsā is gentler with Yūsha' than Khidr is with Mūsā. Khidr warned Mūsā three times that he would not be patient with Khidr's actions, and Mūsā repeatedly assured him that he would. When he then failed to live up to the promise, it is reasonable that he receives some reproach. When Mūsā then states that he genuinely forgot, they move on.

The Incident of the Boy

Then Mūsā ﷺ and Khidr ﷺ proceeded on their way and found a boy playing with other boys. Verse 74 describes what happened next:

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَنِي زَكِيًّا بَشِيرٍ
نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٧٤﴾

Then the two went forth until they met a lad whom he slew, whereupon Moses exclaimed: 'What! Have you slain an innocent person without his having slain anyone? Surely you have done a horrible thing.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 74)

Barely having finished one conversation, Khidr kills a boy. In this instance Mūsā did not forget his promise, yet he sees this as a crime in front of which he cannot remain silent. So, he questions Khidr as to how he could kill a *nafsān zakīyyah*, or pure soul who has not done any harm, adding that his act of murder is a *nukran*, or monstrosity. In the previous verse regarding the boat, Mūsā used the milder term *imran*, or to do something bad; however here he is using the harsher term *nukra*. It is notable that this action by Khidr also demonstrates that he is clearly a prophet as no one has the right to take another life without a trial or having committed a crime unless Allah ﷻ has commanded it. And only Allah ﷻ commands prophets to do things of this nature that are beyond understanding.

In this instance, Khidr is even more harsh towards Mūsā: 'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?' Whereas in the previous verse it was *qāla a-lam aqul*, in this verse it says *qāla a-lam aqul laka*; there is an extra *laka* that adds emphasis in his saying: 'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?' Here Khidr is prodding Mūsā, and under pressure Mūsā puts forward his own condition: 'Keep me no more in your company if I question you concerning anything after this. You will then be fully justified.' Mūsā promises that should he question Khidr again, then Khidr has every right to move on and break away from Mūsā. Our Prophet ﷺ said, 'May Allah bestow His Mercy on Mūsā! If he had remained patient, we would have been told further about

their case.’⁵³ Mūsā ؑ had become hasty and irritated at himself as he knew he did not live up to his side of the bargain. Khidr ؑ didn’t tell Mūsā he should leave, but he felt so much pressure that he put that condition upon himself. Our Prophet ﷺ thus commented that if only Mūsā had been more patient, he would have seen many more interesting things. In the next chapter we will explore the third story in the events of Mūsā and Khidr, regarding the townspeople.

50 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 6, Hadith 846.

51 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 122.

52 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 285.

53 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3401.



The Story of Mūsā and Khidr III

Khidr Builds a Wall and Explains his Actions on the Boat



Following the previous two incidents in the story of Mūsā عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام, the events on the boat and the events around the child, the two prophets continued on their way together. After commenting on the previous two incidents despite promising not to, Mūsā has asked for one more chance from Khidr to remain in the latter's company.

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَيَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطْعَمَا أَهْلَهَا فَأَبْوَأَ أَن
يُضَيِّقُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَتَفَطَّرَ عَلَيْهِ ۖ قَالَ
لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا ﴿٧٧﴾

Then the two went forth until when they came to a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to play host to them. They found in that town a wall that was on the verge of tumbling down, and he buttressed it, whereupon Moses said: 'If you had wished, you could have received payment for it.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 77)

قَالَ مِمَّا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِأَوَّلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ
عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٨﴾

He (Khidr) said: 'This brings me and you to a parting of ways. Now I shall explain to you the true meaning of things about which you could not remain patient. (*al-Kahf* 18: 78)

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسْكِينٍ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ
أَعْيَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا ﴿٧٩﴾

As for the boat it belonged to some poor people who worked on the river, and I desired to damage it, for beyond them lay the dominion of a king who was wont to seize every boat by force'. (*al-Kahf* 18: 79)

It was the accepted norm of all civilizations of the past that a stranger who is passing through the city is allowed access to the well to get a drink and some basic food before they move on, as these were necessary means of survival. In fact, our Shariah also made this *wājib*. We know through the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ that it is the right of a Muslim upon another Muslim that he feeds him and houses him for one day in a generous manner, and then after that two days in the normal way that he lives (i.e. three days and nights overall). *Ḍiyāfah*, or being a host, is something that is expected. Our scholars have said that this means if a stranger comes to the city and he doesn't have any money, the community is obliged to ensure someone takes care of the stranger's basic needs for three days before he moves on.

Consequently, when Mūsā and Khidr went to the city it was understood they should be given some food and water. Yet this city was so stingy that they refused to give them anything. On another point, this moment also illustrates that although Mūsā and Khidr are the holiest men alive, they don't have any money. This is because they're not interested in money, their

goal, or their main *himmah* (spiritual aspiration) in life is not to amass wealth and hoard fortune. And so in the absence of money they ask for food from the town. Yet, they are told to go away and are generally treated very rudely. You can imagine how much anger Mūsā must have felt at this.

As Mūsā and Khidr were walking out of the city, they found a wall that was on the verge of collapse. Allah ﷻ describes it in a very powerful way: *jidāran yurīdu an yanqadDa*, that the wall itself wanted to fall down. Khidr then physically rebuilt the wall brick by brick. At this Mūsā, who is already hungry, tired and very insulted at how they've been treated, blurts out that Khidr could have done the task in return for payment. The term Mūsā uses is *ajr*, which can mean money or payment, and could also mean get some food. His point is that after being ill-treated by this city, the least Khidr could have done is to be paid for his effort so that they could get some food. Our Prophet ﷺ said that the first time Mūsā said something was a genuine mistake, then the second time he said it was in anger, meaning he knew he wasn't supposed to, and the third time again he didn't make a mistake but he couldn't keep silent. It shows us the human nature of even the greatest of prophets; there is a point of irritation that even Mūsā might reach.

The Meaning of Khidr's Actions on the Boat

At Mūsā's outburst, Khidr said: *'This brings me and you to a parting of ways. Now I shall explain to you the true meaning of things about which you could not remain patient.'*⁵⁴ Khidr is now invoking the condition Mūsā placed upon himself that if he spoke again they would part ways. Khidr says he will inform Mūsā of the meaning of all that he did not have the patience to be silent about. Khidr continues: *'As for the boat it belonged to some poor people who worked on the river, and I desired to damage it, for beyond them lay the dominion of a king who was seizing every boat by force'*. The 'people who worked on the river' implies they were fishermen, and this verse, number 79, brings up a point about zakat; Allah ﷻ says in this verse that the people who owned the boat were *masākīn* (needy). A boat is an expensive item, but still they were called *masākīn*. This shows us that you can be *miskīn* and still have some possessions if those possessions don't give you enough to live off. It is most likely the boat was owned

communally by a group of people, and even though the boat itself was worth a lot they were still struggling. The boat is not going to give you investment unless you work on it, and you may work hard and long hours. This shows us the difference between the *faqīr* and *miskīn*. The *faqīr* is one who doesn't own anything and the *miskīn* is one who owns something but it is not enough to take care of his needs. So, Allah ﷻ referred to these people as poor *miskīn* even though they owned the boat. Hence, it is allowed to give zakat to someone who owns some items that might be worth value but he is still struggling to get by.

Khidr explains in this verse that the boat belonged to these poor people who were working in the ocean, and he wanted to cause some defect in it because behind them was a king that was confiscating every single ship. The story then is very simple: there was an evil king who for whatever reason wanted to acquire many ships and, in the way of tyrants, he was simply taking at will every ship that was usable. Therefore, Khidr doesn't destroy the boat but puts a defect in it so that it is no longer serviceable, and when the king came he would confiscate every single ship in the port except for that one boat that belonged to these *masākīn*. By putting a defect in it, Allah ﷻ actually saved it.

This demonstrates a very profound point. Imagine how the fishermen must have felt when they discovered their boat had been damaged. Imagine their anger at these two strangers, towards whom they had shown charity and agreed to take them aboard their vessel, only to find that they actually caused the fishermen harm. Now, imagine what would happen to that anger as soon as the king comes and begins confiscating every ship except for theirs. Immediately, they would have said, *Alhamdulillah*, Allah ﷻ protected our ship, and that anger would have turned to thanks.

This shows us the wisdom of Khidr's ﷺ actions that Allah ﷻ told him to perform. These poor people were generous with their boat and agreed to carry these two strangers without payment. They were genuinely nice and generous with their vessel. And what did Allah ﷻ do? He protected the very instrument of their generosity. What we learn from this is if we want to protect our wealth we should give it *fi sabīlillāh*, in the way of Allah ﷻ. If we want to protect our car or our money then we should be generous with it

and do with it what Allah ﷻ wants us to do with it. Then Allah ﷻ will protect it. And so Allah ﷻ saved the instrument of the fishermen's generosity because of that generosity. There are many hadiths and ayahs about this. Of them is the famous hadith:

Abū Hurayrah narrated from the Prophet ﷺ that once while a man was travelling in the wilderness he heard a voice in a cloud ordering the angel of the cloud to pour its rain on a particular farm. So the man followed the cloud and saw that it poured its rain on a rocky volcanic plain. All the water gathered in a stream and poured into a farm. The man saw the owner working in that farm and asked him his name. The name was the same one that he had heard from the cloud. The man then related what he had heard and seen, and enquired of the owner of the farm what was special about him that would explain all of this. Given the reason for the enquiry, the owner explained that he would plant his farm and then split the harvest into three equal parts. One part he gave as *ṣadaqah*, the second part he kept as food for himself and his family, and the third part he replanted.⁵⁵

It is notable that giving one-third is a large amount. Who amongst us gives one third of our wealth *fi sabīlillāh*? Yet, the man said he gave one-third *fi sabīlillāh*. *Subhānallāh*, this shows that because he was giving one-third *fi sabīlillāh*, Allah ﷻ provided him manifold. He thought he was giving a third but by giving a third Allah ﷻ gave him ten times more than what he would have harvested if he hadn't given the third.

There is also another hadith in *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī that proves this. There was once a rich businessman in Madinah who had a brother who was a student of knowledge. This brother was of *ahl al-ṣuffah*, he would live with the Prophet ﷺ, learn his hadiths and be with him all the time, and be involved with the academic side of Islam. One day, the businessman came to the Prophet ﷺ complaining that his brother in the *ahl al-ṣuffah* lives off his business earnings and eats at his table but does not help in the business. He essentially complained that the brother is a freeloader. Our Prophet ﷺ

said *lā'allaka turzaqu min aqlihi*, 'perhaps Allah ﷻ is making you wealthy and rich because of him.'⁵⁶ The Prophet ﷺ implied that the man was complaining that he had to take care of his brother yet did not even realize that the reason he was rich was because he was taking care of somebody who was servicing Islam. This is exactly the point that we learn from this story of the boat: when the fishermen were generous with what Allah ﷻ gave them, Allah ﷻ increased that very instrument of their generosity.

Another point here is regarding one of the main themes of all of these three stories: the issue of *qadar* (the decree of Allah) and accepting *qadar*. We don't know the future: the fisherman would have been very angry that their boat was damaged, but Allah ﷻ has a plan and He knew it was in their best interests that the vessel be damaged. Allah's ﷻ *qadar* works in ways that are beyond our understanding. Next time we face a calamity of a financial nature, or an accident, or any misfortune, let us remember this story and realize Allah ﷻ knows best. There are so many accounts of people who were in a minor accident, for example, and because of this they were delayed and yet because they were delayed they were saved from a much bigger calamity. At the time when the accident happened they were frustrated, but Allah ﷻ in His wisdom knew that it was better for them to be delayed. It is a simple fact and reminder for us all.

Every one of us has gone through ups and downs in life, but we would not be where we are today had it not been for those problems over the years. Allah ﷻ knew that for you to be here right now you had to cross those barriers. When they happened, those barriers might have been the biggest calamity, but if we were patient and we put our trust in Allah ﷻ, He blessed us with something that was even better. This concludes the first of the three incidents. *Inshā'Allāh*, in the coming chapters, we will continue the second and the third incidents.

54 *al-Kahf* 18: 78.

55 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim.

56 *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī, 2345.



The Story of Mūsā and Khidr IV

Khidr Explains the Incidents of the Boy and the Wall



Here we continue exploring the story of Mūsā عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام and the three incidents that occurred. The first incident was of and the fishermen and their ship, from which we derive many points. The main point learnt was that if we want to be blessed in any area of life, we must use that area for the sake of Allah ﷻ to gain more blessings. The second story is that of the child that was killed. Now Khidr explains that action:

وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِمَهُمَا
طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا ۖ

‘As for the lad, his parents were people of faith, and we feared lest he should plague them with transgression and disbelief, (*al-Kahf* 18: 80)

فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِمَّا زَكَّوْهُ وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا ۖ

and we desired that their Lord should grant them another in his place, a son more upright and more tender hearted. (*al-Kahf* 18: 81)

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ
كَزْزُ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا
وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَزْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِن رَّبِّكَ وَمَا فَعَلْتُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِي
ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and under it there was a treasure that belonged to them. Their father was a righteous man and your Lord intended that they should come of age and then bring forth their treasure as a mercy from your Lord; I did not do this of my own bidding. This is the true meaning of things with which you could not keep your patience.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 82)

The Meaning of Khidr Killing the Boy

If we want our children to be blessed, we must make sure they love Islam and that they pray and read the Qur'an. If we want our family life to be blessed, we must make sure our household is practising the ethics and the morals of Islam. If we want to be blessed in our money, make sure our money is being spent *fi sabīlillāh ta'ālā*. Whatever we do for the sake of Allah ﷻ, that very instrument of our action will become something that is pleasing and will benefit us.

Both of the child's parents were *mu'min*, and when the Qur'an uses the term *mu'min* it is a higher level than simply a Muslim. This means they were good righteous people who truly believed in Allah ﷻ. Khidr knew that when this boy grew up he would overpower his righteous parents to do sin and *kuf*r. Scholars have differed as to how this would happen, and ultimately we don't know for sure those details. Some scholars, for example, have said that he would have become a highway robber and his parents would have begun to defend him and to hide his sins out of their love for the child. Others have given other explanations. What is established

is that had this child lived, the love that the parents had for the child would have adversely affected their own status in the eyes of Allah ﷻ. In a hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said: 'Your love of something might render you blind and deaf.'⁵⁷ It is true that when we fall in love with anything it makes us blind. An example is someone who loves money to the degree that he forgets where it comes from and that there are rights upon the money.

Allah ﷻ knew that this young boy would grow up to cause his parents to stray from Islam. And *kufʾ* could mean they become *kāfir*, or disbelievers. *Kufʾ* could also mean they become ungrateful, which is a type of sin, and lose their high status before Allah ﷻ. Both meanings are possible here. By removing the boy, the righteous parents would remain righteous. Indeed, their righteousness would increase. Our Prophet Mohammed ﷺ told us:

Allah, the Exalted, says: 'I have no reward other than *Jannah* for a believing slave of Mine who remains patient for My sake when I take away his beloved one from among the inhabitants of the world.'⁵⁸

In another hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said: 'Any woman who loses three of her children, they will all form a barrier for her to protect her from the Fire.' One woman asked him, 'What about a woman who loses two?' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'It is so even if she loses two.'⁵⁹

The loss of a child is the most painful, traumatic experience for any parent. There is no *muṣība*, or calamity, that is more painful for the parents than the loss of your own child or children. The loss of relatives, friends and even parents we recognize and expect as a part of nature, but the loss of children is not something that we expect. Indeed, any parent would give up their own life to save the life of their child. So, when the life of a child is lost, it is an incredibly difficult tragedy. May Allah ﷻ increase the *ajr* of those who lose their child. In another beautiful hadith:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'When a child of the slave (of Allah) died, Allah says to the angels: "Have you taken the fruits of

his work.” They reply: “Yes.” So He says: “What did My slave say?” They reply: “He praised you and mentioned that to You is the return.” So Allah says: “Build a house in Paradise for My slave, and name it ‘the house of praise’.”⁶⁰

In another case, our Prophet ﷺ gave the good news to every parent who had lost a child that those children would be waiting for them. In a further hadith:

Mu’āwiyah ibn Qurrah narrated that his father said: ‘When the Prophet of Allah sat, some of his Companions would sit with him. Among them was a man who had a little son who used to come to him from behind, and he would make him sit in front of him. He (the child) died, and the man stopped attending the circle because it reminded him of his son, and made him feel sad. The Prophet missed him and said: “Why do I not see so-and-so?” They said: “O Messenger of Allah, his son whom you saw has died.” The Prophet met him and asked him about his son, and he told him that he had died. He offered his condolences and said: “O son-and-so, which would you like better, to enjoy his company all your life, or to come to any of the gates of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection, and find that he had arrived there before you, and he is opening the gate for you?” he said: “O Prophet of Allah! For him to get to the gate of Paradise before me and open it for me is dearer to me.” He said: “You will have that.”’⁶¹

This is good news for anyone who has suffered this tragedy of having a young child taken away from them: that our Lord will give them a *bayt al-ḥamd* (a house of praise) if they are patient. As the hadith says, there is no reward less than *Jannah* for anyone who loses a beloved and is patient. In the above hadith, the deceased boy will be waiting for the parent at the gates of *Jannah*. In other hadith, we learn that young children who pass away will be one category of intercessors on the Day of Judgement:

Their little ones are the little ones (*da'āmīs*) of Paradise. When one of them meets his father—or his parents—he takes hold of his garment—or his hand—as I am taking hold of the hem of your garment, and he does not let go until Allah admits him and his father to Paradise.⁶²

In the story of Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ, the parents of the boy were righteous people and Allah ﷻ did not want them to lose their righteousness. He wanted them to be raised in their ranks and so He took away their most beloved son. Why did He take him away? Because Allah ﷻ knew that had this boy remained with them, it would have been to their own detriment. When He took the son away, rather than the rank of the parents going down, their rank increases. Our Prophet ﷺ said that when Allah ﷻ loves somebody, He tests them, and the more that person is tested, the higher their rank rises up in the eyes of Allah ﷻ.

Furthermore, in verse 81 Khidr ؑ says: 'and we desired that their Lord should grant them another in his place, a son more upright and more tender hearted.' Allah ﷻ took this child away, but He wanted to *yubdil*, substitute him for a better child, *khayran minhu zakātan*, a purer child, *wa-aqraba ruḥmā*, and one that was more merciful to them. *SubḥānAllah*, rather than just taking the child away, Allah ﷻ substituted them with a better child. This leads us to a very simple but important rule of our Islamic Shariah given by Allah ﷻ: our Prophet ﷺ has said that never does a person leave something for the sake of Allah ﷻ except that He gives him something better in return.⁶³ This is with particular regard to sins. This ayah in Surah *al-Kahf* shows us a similar rule: never does Allah ﷻ take away something that you love and with whom you are patient, except that He will give you something better in its stead. For every difficulty there will be multiple ease. And so the next time we face a calamity, we must be patient and have full *yaqīn* (certainty) that in place of whatever has been taken away we will get back much more. This is of the *raḥmah* of Allah ﷻ.

The Meaning of Khidr Building the Wall

The surah then continues:

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ
كَزْزُ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا
وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَزْزُهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا عَلَّمَهُ عَنِ أَمْرِ
ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

‘As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and under it there was a treasure that belonged to them. Their father was a righteous man and your Lord intended that they should come of age and then bring forth their treasure as a mercy from your Lord; I did not do this of my own bidding. This is the true meaning of things with which you could not keep your patience.’ (*al-Kahf* 18: 82)

The wall belonged to two orphan boys and beneath it their righteous father had buried treasure for them. The residents of this city were so miserly that they couldn't spare a glass of water for Mūsā and Khidr, so what would they have done if they had found this gold? They would not have given it to the orphans. Their father was a righteous man and Allah ﷻ protected the financial wellbeing of the children because of the righteousness of the father. He did so by causing Khidr to come and rebuild the wall so that when the orphans grew to be fully independent and when they truly need the money and can defend it, they can access it. Allah ﷻ wanted to allow them to grow up so they could find the treasure and then defend it and take advantage of it. Meanwhile, if we think of the mother of the orphans, she must be wondering where the money is and how she will manage, and where was the help of Allah ﷻ. Yet if Allah ﷻ had helped her at that point in time and the people had discovered the treasure, she would have lost it from in front of her eyes. So Allah ﷻ, for a wisdom known only to Him, delayed the response to her *duā*. It must have been difficult, but Allah ﷻ knows to give money when it is needed.

Of the most important benefits of this story of the two orphans is that when faced with a calamity and wondering where the help of Allah ﷻ is, we must remind ourselves that He knows when to respond to our *du'ā*'. Allah ﷻ knows when to give us what we want, and we must put our trust in Allah ﷻ and know that His knowledge is infinite and our knowledge is finite. Remember what Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an: '*But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.*'⁶⁴ As long as we have a connection with Allah ﷻ, whatever happens will be for the best. But if we don't have that connection with Allah ﷻ then nothing will be for the best.

Also, notice here that Allah ﷻ preserved the religion and the finances of the children because of the religion of the parents. Those of us who are parents all want our children to be happy and successful. In the first story, that child would have been an evil child, so Allah ﷻ wanted to give the parents a good child. He gave the parents a good child because the parents were *mu'minayn*, and so Allah ﷻ gave them children that were *mu'min*. Thus, when the parents were good, their children were also good. In the second story, Allah ﷻ blessed the children with wealth because their father was righteous. So, do we want our children to be happy? Do we want our children to be successful? And do we want our children to flourish? Then we must start with ourselves; correct ourselves, be good in our own life, be a role model for the children and have that *khushu* and *taqwā* of Allah ﷻ and then He will shower us with the blessings of this world and the next. Allah ﷻ mentions this explicitly in the Qur'an, where he states that if we fear dying and leaving young children behind, the solution is to have *taqwā*, to say good words and Allah ﷻ will take care of our children. The Qur'an says:

وَلْيَخْشَ الَّذِينَ لَوْ تَرْكُوا مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ ضِعْفًا خَافُوا عَلَيْهِمْ
فَلْيَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْيَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٥١﴾

And those who would have been fearful on account of their helpless offspring they may have behind them, let them fear Allah and say what is right.⁶⁵

This is proven in this case of the orphans. Allah ﷻ took the father but did not neglect the children purely because of his righteousness. The mother is not mentioned in this story; she may have been an average person and not exceptional in her belief. But the father was a good man, because of which Allah ﷻ took care of the children.

Brothers and sisters, start with yourselves, start with your immediate families. You and your spouse have a good Islamic relationship. If husbands treat wives nicely and wives treat husbands nicely in an Islamic manner, they will implant in their children the role model of how to grow up. The children will subconsciously learn what it means to be a Muslim, including the love, tenderness and *rahmah*. If we do this then Allah ﷻ will shower His blessings on us in this world and the next.

Following his explanation, Khidr concludes: *wamā fa'altuhū 'an amrī dhālika ta-wīlu mā lam taṣī' 'alayhi ṣabran*, 'I did not do this of my own bidding. This is the true meaning of things with which you could not keep your patience.' This verse in particular is the strongest evidence that Khidr ؑ is a prophet because he says he didn't do this of his own accord, rather Allah ﷻ told him to do these things. A further interesting point from these two stories that is worth mentioning is that when Khidr mentions that he caused damage to the boat he says it in the first person, *fa-arādtu an aṭbahā*, (I wanted to damage the boat). Then when he mentions the blessing of a new righteous child to replace the boy, and the rebuilding effort to save the treasure of the orphans, here he attributes it to Allah ﷻ, *fa-'arāda rabbuka* (your Lord wanted that the children get the treasure). Here, Khidr is displaying Islamic manners; he ascribes the negative to himself, and the positive to Allah ﷻ. This is also reflected in the *du'ā'* of Ibrāhīm ؑ, when rather than saying 'Allah causes me to fall sick' he said, 'when I fall sick'. Furthermore, he ascribes the cure to Allah ﷻ: 'He is the one who cures me'. Sickness and health are both from Allah ﷻ, but Islamic etiquette dictates we ascribe the evil to ourselves and the good to Allah ﷻ. By contrast, Iblīs

ascribed his own evil to Allah ﷻ, saying 'My Lord because You have deceived me'.

The main theme of all of these three stories is that if you are righteous and put your trust in Allah ﷻ then there is a wisdom behind everything that happens. Good in this world, and of course the next, will come for us, but even in this world any accident, any loss of life, any trial or any sickness, whatever happens there is a wisdom and there is good for us in this world before the next world. It is due to the relationship with Allah ﷻ of those fishermen and the righteous parents that their dunyā, in this world and the next, was taken care of. He who believes in *qadar* should never feel pessimistic. He who believes that Allah ﷻ is in control of everything can never ask 'why is this happening to me?' Allah ﷻ loves us more than our mothers do, as our Prophet ﷺ said. Allah's ﷻ plan is better than our plan and His wisdom is infinitely greater than our wisdom. We must put our trust in Allah ﷻ and know that whatever happens happens for our good, as long as we truly believe in Allah ﷻ and put our *tawakkul* in Him.

57 *Sunan* Abū Dāwūd, 5130.

58 *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, Book 1, Hadith 32.

59 *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, Vol. 1 pp. 2, 9, 36 and 124; *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, Vol. 4, pp. 2028 and 2632; *Musnad* Aḥmad, Vol. 3, p. 34.

60 *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī, 1021.

61 *Sunan* al-Nasā'ī.

62 *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 6370.

63 *Musnad* Aḥmad, 22565.

64 *Al-Baqarah* 2: 216.

65 *Al-Nisā'* 4: 9.



17

The Story of Dhū al-Qarnayn I

The Righteous King and His Early Travels



We now begin the final of the four stories of Surah *al-Kahf*. The first was the story of the young men and the cave, the second story was of the man and the two gardens, and the third was the story of Mūsā عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام. The fourth is the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn. The first of the stories dealt with the *fitnah* of persecution for the sake of religion. The second story dealt with the *fitnah* of money. The third story dealt with the *fitnah* of knowledge. This fourth story deals with the *fitnah* of power; what happens when a person becomes powerful.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٨٣﴾

(O Muhammad), they ask you about Dhū al-Qarnayn. Say: 'I will give you an account of him.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 83)

إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبَبًا ﴿٨٤﴾

We granted him power in the land and endowed him with all kinds of resources. (*al-Kahf* 18: 84)

فَاتَّبَعَ سَبَبًا ﴿٨٥﴾

He set out (westwards) on an expedition, (*al-Kahf* 18: 85)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَغْرُبُ فِي عَيْنٍ حَمِئَةٍ
وَوَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا قَوْمًا قُلْنَا يَبْدَأُ الْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّمَا أَنْ تُعَذِّبَ وَإِنَّمَا أَنْ
تَتَّخِذَ فِيهِمْ حُسْنًا ﴿٨٦﴾

until when he reached the very limits where the sun sets, he saw it setting in dark turbid waters; and nearby he met a people. We said: 'O Dhū al-Qarnayn, you have the power to punish or to treat them with kindness.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 86)

قَالَ إِنَّمَا مَنِ ظَلَمَ فَلْسَوْفَ نُعَذِّبُهُ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ
عَذَابًا نَّكَرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

He said: 'We will chastise him who does wrong, where- after he will be returned to his Lord and He will chastise him grievously. (*al-Kahf* 18: 87)

وَأَمَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُ جَزَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَسَنَقُولُ
لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

But as for him who believes and acts righteously, his will be a goodly reward and we shall enjoin upon him only mild commands.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 88)

ثُمَّ اتَّخَذَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٩﴾

Then he set out on another expedition (*al-Kahf* 18: 89)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْلِعَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لَّمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُم مِّن دُونِهَا سِتْرًا ﴿٩٠﴾

until he reached the limit where the sun rises and he found it rising on a people whom We had provided no shelter from it. (*al-Kahf* 18: 90)

كَذَٰلِكَ وَقَدْ أَحَطْنَا بِمَا لَدَيْهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٩١﴾

Thus was the state of those people, and We encom-passed in knowledge all concerning Dhū al-Qarnayn. (*al-Kahf* 18: 91)

ثُمَّ اتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٩٢﴾

Then he set out on another expedition (*al-Kahf* 18: 92)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِن دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا ﴿٩٣﴾

until when he reached a place between the two moun-tains, he found beside the mountains a people who scarcely understood anything. (*al-Kahf* 18: 93)

قَالُوا بَيْدَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا ﴿٩٤﴾

They said: 'O Dhū al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are spreading corruption in this land. So shall we pay you taxes on the

understanding that you will set up a barrier between us and them?'
(*al-Kahf* 18: 94)

قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ
وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا ﴿٩٥﴾

He answered: 'Whatever my Lord has granted me is good enough.
But help me with your labour and I will erect a rampart between you
and them. (*al-Kahf* 18: 95)

ءَاتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ ءَاتُونِي أُفْرِغَ عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا ﴿٩٦﴾

Bring me ingots of iron.' Then after he had filled up the space
between the two mountainsides, he said: '(Light a fire) and ply
bellows.' When he had made it (red like) fire, he said: 'Bring me
molten copper which I may pour on it.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 96)

فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا أَن يَظْهَرُوهُ وَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا لَمْ يَرْفَعُوا ﴿٩٧﴾

Such was the rampart that (Gog and Magog) could not scale, nor
could they pierce it. (*al-Kahf* 18: 97)

It is a documented fact in the history of humanity that almost every single person in power, and every single powerful nation or superpower, has desired even more power than it already has. However, Allah ﷻ never allowed any nation or any person of power to flourish in this world. Why? Because *al-mulk lillah wa al-'izzat lillah*, kingship and power, belongs to Allah ﷻ. Every single nation that tried to gain more and more power, Allah ﷻ brought about their demise by their own hand. All we need to do is to look at history: where are the great pharaohs? Where are the great tyrants of

old? Where is that mighty civilization of Rome that ruled the world? Indeed, we do not even have to go that far back; one hundred years ago the British Empire, which was perhaps the largest empire in terms of land mass, controlled vast regions of the globe, at one point in time even North America. They boasted to other nations that the sun would never set on their Empire, yet where is that glory now? Such is the Sunnah of Allah ﷻ.

Power and Piety

In the last of these four stories, Allah ﷻ tells us about a king whom Allah ﷻ had blessed with power and he was still righteous. Now, the general rule that history and Islam has taught us is that power corrupts. That is why our Prophet ﷺ warned us from entering the palaces of the emperors, stating: 'Be careful from the doors of the rulers (*abwāb al-salāṭīn*).'⁶⁶ This is because flirting with power and being involved with power, infiltrates a person's mind, and there is nothing more destructive to a person's ego than power. Power gives fame, wealth, fortune and access to all of the other *fitnas* that a man has. Look at the scandals that we see around us involving women, money, etc. Such is the nature of power.

As such, our Prophet ﷺ warned us to be careful when it comes to power and taught us never to seek power or seek to be in charge of others. This is because if you want to be in charge of others, Allah ﷻ will leave you alone. Whereas if others ask you to be in charge and want you to be in charge, then Allah ﷻ will help you. The entire system of Islamic government and the whole concept of Islamic political science is so radically different from the Western concept and from any other concept. In the Islamic concept, the *amīr* does not stand up and say, 'vote for me I'm the best candidate', rather the real candidate will be like Abū Bakr ؓ, who said in response to people who approached him to succeed the Prophet ﷺ: 'Umar is better than me and Abū 'Ubaydah is better than me, so choose between 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah.' To which 'Umar ؓ replied: 'No *wallāhi* (I swear to Allah), you are the best among us.' They fought with each other as to who was the better candidate, and this is the real Islamic sense of power; the definition of a real *Khalīfah*. He does not want that position, rather he wants to run away from it. 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb ؓ would say: 'I swear it before God

that I never coveted this office.’⁶⁷ He wished he had never been given this position and put in charge of the affairs of the believers. There are many stories from the earliest generations and from the Islamic leaders that show that they used to try to avoid being placed in positions of authority.

A person in power who is sincere and pure is the exception and not the rule. That is why our Prophet ﷺ said there are three people to whom we must show respect: ‘Part of respect for Allah is to show respect to an old Muslim and to someone who knows the Qur’an, as long as he does not go to excess in it nor turn away from it, and to respect a just ruler.’⁶⁸ A person who is seventy or eighty years old is *al-shayba*, meaning white haired and elderly, and they have a right from Allah ﷻ that we show respect to them. Second, our Prophet ﷺ said we should show respect to *hāmili al-Qur’ān*, the one who is *ḥāfiẓ* (memorized the Qur’an) and who acts upon it. Third, he said we must respect the *sultan* who is just or the ruler that acts in accordance with the Shariah. This is because it is a rarity, and somebody who has power and is still just is truly something that is worthy of the respect that Allah ﷻ has obligated upon us. Such rulers are also among those whom the Prophet ﷺ has said will be sheltered under the shade of Allah ﷻ.

Allah ﷻ wants to give us an example of one such ruler. In verse 83 He says: ‘(O Muhammad), they ask you about Dhū al-Qarnayn. Say: “I will give you an account of him.”’

Who Was Dhū al-Qarnayn?

Remember that Surah *al-Kahf* was revealed after the disbelievers asked about three questions: The People of the Cave, Dhū al-Qarnayn and the *rūḥ*. Allah ﷻ revealed details of the *rūḥ* in Surah *Banī Isrā’īl* in just one line: ‘They ask you about “the spirit”. Say: “The spirit descends by the command of my Lord, but you have been given only a little knowledge.”’⁶⁹ Allah ﷻ therefore responded to the question of the *rūḥ* by telling mankind that it is a mystery only He knows. Then in Surah *al-Kahf* Allah ﷻ began and finished the surah with the two other questions raised. The first story is of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* and the last is about Dhū al-Qarnayn.

In verse 84, Allah ﷻ explains a little about Dhū al-Qarnayn: ‘*We granted him power in the land and endowed him with all kinds of resources.*’ *Makkannā* means ‘we gave him power’, which implies he was a type of king and Allah ﷻ gave him the ability to follow his own path. This meant he had an army and was able to travel to any land he wanted. Some scholars have said that Dhū al-Qarnayn was a prophet, but when considering the story and this ayah, it doesn’t seem so. When Allah ﷻ described Khidr ؑ, He says ‘*We gave him a knowledge from Us*’;⁷⁰ that is prophethood. But when He describes Dhū al-Qarnayn, Allah ﷻ says: ‘*We granted him power*’, which Allah ﷻ gives to righteous and unrighteous people. If we look at the story here, there is nothing that Dhū al-Qarnayn did that really stands out as being something only a prophet could do. And so the more reasonable position is that Dhū al-Qarnayn was a righteous king. As Ibn ‘Abbās said, he was *rajulun ṣālih*, a righteous man whom Allah ﷻ had given power and a type of kingdom.

Dhū al-Qarnayn is also not this righteous king’s name, rather it is his title. *Qarn* means horn, so Dhū al-Qarnayn was ‘the one of the two horns’. Many stories are given as to why he is called this, some have said he was the only person to rule over both Persia and Rome, so each of these lands represent a *qarn*. Another was that he is called Dhū al-Qarnayn because he would have his hair tied up into two ponytails (the Arabs would call a ponytail a *qarn*). Others have explained that he controlled the East and the West, which represent the two horns. In reality we do not know the exact reason he is named Dhū al-Qarnayn. There is also a popular legend in many Muslim cultures that Dhū al-Qarnayn is actually Alexander the Great. However, there is not a shred of Islamic or historical evidence that links Alexander the Great with Dhū al-Qarnayn. In fact, on the contrary, there are a number of things that do not fit at all with Alexander the Great being Dhū al-Qarnayn. The most important of them is that Allah ﷻ describes Dhū al-Qarnayn as being a pious Muslim and a good man. We know historically beyond a shadow of a doubt that Alexander the Great was a pagan and idolater. His teacher was none other than Aristotle. These people were not believers in Allah ﷻ, they believed in a pagan religion. So, Alexander the Great has nothing to do with the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn.

Who was he then? Only Allah ﷻ knows best. The books of *tafsir* give all of these stories, but ultimately they are simply Islamic legends. There is no shred of evidence in the Qur'an and Sunnah for them, and the more unnecessary detail we go into, the more trouble we put ourselves in. So, let us stick with the Qur'anic story and not go into too much detail that Allah ﷻ did not care to tell us about, because they are not relevant.

The Travels of Dhū al-Qarnayn

Allah ﷻ tells us, '*We granted him power in the land and endowed him with all kinds of resources*', meaning he had an army with him and could march to any land if he so desired. The surah continues: '*He set out (westwards) on an expedition, until when he reached the very limits where the sun sets, he saw it setting in dark turbid waters; and nearby he met a people. We said: "O Dhū al-Qarnayn, you have the power to punish or to treat them with kindness."*'⁷¹ This implies that he travelled until he reached the westernmost lands imaginable. Some have said this is China, others it is Samarqand in modern-day Uzbekistan, while others still have said it is Azerbaijan. However, what we can say is that he reached a land the whereabouts of which Allah ﷻ knows best. It was a very faraway land and he found the sun setting into the water. There are two recitations here: the first, *aynin hami'a*, means 'cloudy water', and then the second, *aynin ḥamiah*, means 'boiling hot water'. Both of these are valid recitations, and it was a clearly a strange kind of lake, one that was muddy and very hot. Some have said this might be lava, or something of this nature. It was something different to regular water, and Allah ﷻ knows best.

Dhū al-Qarnayn found a group of people, and the verse says: *qulnā yā dhā l-qarnayn: 'We said: "O Dhū al-Qarnayn ..."*'. Some have suggested that Allah ﷻ is speaking to Dhū al-Qarnayn, which means he must be a prophet, but in fact the response to this is that the phrasing does not necessarily indicate this. Allah ﷻ can speak in different ways: either direct speech to prophets or indirect speech, called *ilhām* in Arabic, to those who are not prophets. One example of *ilhām* is the mother of Mūsā ؑ. She was not a prophet, but Allah ﷻ gave her *ilhām* that she should put Mūsā in the

basket and cast it into the river. Where did she get this inspiration from? Allah ﷻ says He told her:

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ۖ فَإِذَا خِفَتْ عَلَيْهِ فَالْقِيهِ
فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۚ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ
مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

We suggested to the mother of Moses: ‘Suckle your child, but when you fear for his life cast him into the river and be not fearful nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and make him one of the Messengers.’⁷²

Furthermore, Allah ﷻ mentions speaking to the mountains, yet mountains don’t become prophets as a result. Similarly, Allah ﷻ speaks to the bees:

وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ
الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَرْتَمِشُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Your Lord inspired the bee, saying: ‘Set up hives in the mountains and in the trees and in the trellises that people put up’.⁷³

Nonetheless, bees do not become prophets because of this. So the speech of Allah ﷻ only makes the recipient a prophet when that speech is direct; when it is heard from behind a curtain or revealed through an angel. As for indirect speech, *ilhām*, this does not make someone a prophet, and in the case of Dhū al-Qarnayn, it could be *ilhām* through which Allah ﷻ spoke to him.

Verse 86 then continues that Allah ﷻ inspired Dhū al-Qarnayn with two options in how to deal with these people: ‘O Dhū al-Qarnayn, you have the power to punish or to treat them with kindness.’ These are the options that

every king has when they conquer a new nation, and Allah ﷻ is showing the nature of Dhū al-Qarnayn; he had the option of massacring or being harsh with the people or being good. In response Dhū al-Qarnayn said: *'We will chastise him who does wrong, whereafter he will be returned to his Lord and He will chastise him grievously. But as for him who believes and acts righteously, his will be a goodly reward and we shall enjoin upon him only mild commands.'*⁷⁴ This is the sign of a just and true ruler, that one is strict with the criminals and gentle with the good people. In this account of Dhū al-Qarnayn there are three stories of three groups of people that he met. This first incident demonstrates for us the nature of Dhū al-Qarnayn that he was a righteous king and power did not corrupt him. He had the option of enslaving, killing, looting and plundering, and he had the option of being generous and good, and he chose the latter.

Dhū al-Qarnayn then travelled on a second expedition, *'until he reached the limit where the sun rises and he found it rising on a people whom We had provided no shelter from it.'* Some have said that the people having no shelter from the sun meant that they did not know how to construct buildings and were still living in the open, using just the trees as shade. Others have said that they were people that didn't wear clothes. Thus Allah ﷻ is using a *kināyah*, or indirect reference, to describe a group of people that were so uncivilized they did not even wear clothes. This too is plausible, as Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an:

يٰۤاٰدَمُ قَدْ اَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ لِبَاسًا يُّوَارِي سَوْءَ بَدَنِكَ
وَرِيْشًا وَّلِبَاسُ التَّقْوٰی ۚ ذٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايٰتِ اللّٰهِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُوْنَ ﴿٥٥﴾

O Children of Adam! Indeed We have sent down to you a garment which covers your shame and provides protection and adornment. But the finest of all is the garment of piety. That is one of the signs of Allah so that they may take heed.⁷⁵

Allah ﷻ revealed a *libās* or garment for us to cover ourselves, and here was a group that didn't have that *libās*. Allah ﷻ says in verse 91: '*Thus was the state of those people, and We encompassed in knowledge all concerning Dhū al-Qarnayn.*'

Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj (Gog and Magog)

The purpose of this account is to lay the foundations for the third and final story of Dhū al-Qarnayn. The third story is lengthy and will extend across this and the next chapter. Allah ﷻ relates the third expedition as follows:

ثُمَّ اتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٩٢﴾

Then he set out on another expedition (*Al-Kahf* 18: 92)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا لَا يَكَادُونَ

يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا ﴿٩٣﴾

until when he reached a place between the two mountains, he found beside the mountains a people who scarcely understood anything. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 93)

'A people who scarcely understood anything' means they were cut off from all civilization. When civilizations interact, each has a translator or an interpreter. It is only if you go to a civilization that is cut off from all others that there will not be a translator for their language. We have seen this in recently identified tribes in the jungles of Brazil, for example. Therefore, Allah ﷻ is indicating that Dhū al-Qarnayn went to a faraway land, cut off from civilization and contact with other groups of people. They couldn't even communicate, and this is the height of isolation. So they communicated through a method other than speech, such as through their hands; it is possible to make basic communication like this.

قَالُوا يَبْذَا الْقَرْيَتَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا ۖ ﴿٩٤﴾

They said: 'O Dhū al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are spreading corruption in this land. So shall we pay you taxes on the understanding that you will set up a barrier between us and them?'
(*Al-Kahf* 18: 94)

They told Dhū al-Qarnayn that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj were causing a lot of evil on the Earth. This means that this tribe was interacting with Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, and some have said that the tribe and Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj were related. The tribe complain of the corruption and evil being spread in the land and they seek to pay Dhū al-Qarnayn and his vast army, who clearly are from a superior civilization and seem to be good, to protect them from Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj by building a wall through the valley as a barrier; *sadd* is like a barrier or a dam. In answer to their plea, in verse 95 Dhū al-Qarnayn responds: 'Whatever my Lord has granted me is good enough. But help me with your labour and I will erect a rampart between you and them.' He tells them he does not need their money and will do it for Allah's ﷻ sake, but he will need the tribe's manpower and physical strength. He offers to make a *radm*, which in Arabic is very similar to a *sadd*, but more fortified. The tribe asked for a *sadd* to be built and Dhū al-Qarnayn said he would do something even better, and will build a *radm*.

Dhū al-Qarnayn then began the building process:

ءَاتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ ءَاتُونِي أُفْرِغْ عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا ۖ ﴿٩٥﴾

'Bring me ingots of iron.' Then after he had filled up the space between the two mountainsides, he said: '(Light a fire) and ply

bellows.' When he had made it (red like) fire, he said: 'Bring me molten copper which I may pour on it.' (*Al-Kahf* 18: 96)

فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا أَنْ يَظْهَرُوهُ وَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا لِمُوتِقَابِهَا ۖ

Such was the rampart that Gog and Magog could not scale, nor could they pierce it. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 97)

Dhū al-Qarnayn asked for *zubar al-ḥadīd*, pieces of iron. *Zubar* means nuggets, so he sought nuggets of iron, which he laid between the two mountains, creating an iron barrier that was cold. He then asked them to build a fire and 'blow', and the blowing here is with bellows to create an intense fire that is so hot all of the iron became molten and stuck together. This is the physical help that he needed from these people. Allah ﷻ knows how they built such a large fire, Dhū al-Qarnayn had the technology to do that. When the iron was as hot as fire he told the people to bring him *qitr*, or molten copper. So the *radm* that he built was composed of iron and copper and was so massive that it was between two mountains.

The people of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj were trapped inside an area from which they had no way to escape. Allah ﷻ says: *fa-mā sīṭā'ū an yazharūhu wa-mā sīṭā'ū lahu naqban* (they could neither climb over it nor could they dig underneath it). Notice there is a difference between '*sīṭā'ū*' and '*i sīṭā'ū*'. In reality *istā'a* and *istā'a* are the exact same word and it is allowed to simply cut off the *tā* in order to make the pronunciation easier. This is similar to how 'cannot' becomes 'can't', and 'do not' becomes 'don't'. We have this in Arabic as well, where we cut off when things are a little bit difficult. Because there is a 'sin' and a 'ta' and the additional 'ta' is difficult to pronounce between the two, so you can say *istā'a* instead of *istā'a*. Now notice how Allah ﷻ uses both verbs *istā'a* and *istā'a* even though they are exactly the same word. There is an element of *balāghah*, or Qur'anic eloquence, here and that is to have extra letters in the structure to show an extra emphasis on the verb.

So which is more difficult, climbing over or breaking through a molten barrier? Obviously, breaking through the barrier is more difficult than

climbing over. Of the easier of the two, Allah ﷻ said ‘*fa-mā sṭā’ū*’, and for the more difficult ‘*wa-mā staṭā’ū*’. According to one of the scholars, the reason why the two verbs are different is so that the listener does not become tired or bored of the same verb being used twice in the same sentence. By bringing the same verb but using different structures, *istā’a* and *istatā’a*, and then using ‘*istatā’a*’ for the one that requires more emphasis, Allah ﷻ brings more eloquence to the ears of the listener.

According to one interpreter, Dhū al-Qarnayn actually fell into *sajda* (prostration) thanking Allah ﷻ that he was able to complete the barrier. This shows us that Dhū al-Qarnayn realized how evil Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj were, and he thanked Allah ﷻ for blocking and trapping them. The next chapter will continue the discussion about who Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj are and why they are mentioned here.

66 *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*.

67 Inaugural address of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.

68 Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 357.

69 *Banī Isrā’īl* 17: 85.

70 *Al-Kahf* 18: 65.

71 *Al-Kahf* 18: 85–86.

72 *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28: 7.

73 *Al-Nahl* 16: 68.

74 *Al-Kahf* 18: 87–88.

75 *Al-A’raf* 7: 26.



The Story of Dhū al-Qarnayn II

Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj and the Ten Major Signs of the Day of Judgement



In this chapter we continue the discussion around the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn. The people asked Dhū al-Qarnayn to build a barrier between them and Ya'jūj and Mājūj, and he built a fortified wall made out of iron and copper. Instead of taking any payment from the people, he thanked Allah ﷻ, saying:

قَالَ مِمَّا رَحِمَهُ رَبِّي فَلَمَّا جَاءَ وَعَدُ رَبِّي جَعَلَهُ دَكَّاءَ وَكَانَ
وَعْدُ رَبِّي حَقًّا ۝

Dhū al-Qarnayn said: 'This is a mercy from my Lord: but when the time of my Lord's promise shall come, He will level the rampart with the ground. My Lord's promise always comes true.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 98)

The scholars have interpreted the promise of Allah ﷻ mentioned here to mean the Day of Judgment and the signs of that Day. Then Allah ﷻ will cause this massive barrier, which is impossible for humans to penetrate, to crumble and fall level to the ground. Allah ﷻ says:

• وَتَرَكْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعْضٍ وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ

فَجَمَعْنَاهُمْ جَمْعًا ﴿١٣٩﴾

And on that Day We shall let some of them surge like waves against others, and the Trumpet shall be blown. Then We shall gather them all together. (*al-Kahf* 18: 99)

It is as if Allah ﷻ is saying of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj that there's a huge quantity of them and they are swarming all over one another, like waves on top of one another.

Here let us pause to look more closely at Ya'jūj and Mājūj. They are mentioned only twice in the Qur'an: here in Surah *al-Kahf* and in Surah *al-Anbiyā'*. Surah *al-Kahf* is the first time they are mentioned and in this instance Allah ﷻ tells us of their origin, where they are from and their story. Dhū al-Qarnayn trapped them and Allah ﷻ says, We have left them in this trap and they are so many in quantity it's as if they're like wasps or bees, swarming over one another, but they are isolated from mankind. Allah ﷻ continues, *wa taraknā ba'dahum yawmaidhin yamūju fī ba'din wanufikha fī al-ṣūr fa-jama'nāhum jam'an* (when the Day of Judgment will come that is when We will cause them to come out and they will meet everyone). Thus, in the story of Surah *al-Kahf*, Allah ﷻ says Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are trapped. In Surah *al-Anbiyā'*, Allah ﷻ says:

وَحَرَامٌ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

It has been ordained against every town that We ever destroyed that they shall not return (to enjoy a new lease of life)

حَقُّ إِذَا فُتِحَتْ يَأْجُوجُ وَمَأْجُوجُ وَهُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ
 حَدَبٍ يَنْسِلُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

until Gog and Magog are let loose, and begin swoop-ing from every mound,

وَأَقْرَبَ الْوَعْدِ الْحَقُّ فَأِذَا هِيَ شِخْصَةٌ أَبْصَرُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
 يَتَوَلَّوْنَ أَفْئِدَةً كُفَّرَتْ مِنْهُمْ إِذْ ذُقُوا ذُلًّا مُبَرًّا ۖ فَكَرِهُوا الْمَقِيلَ فَكَرِهُوا
 ﴿٤٠﴾

and the time for the fulfilment of the true promise of Allah draws near, whereupon the eyes of those who disbelieved will stare in fear, and they will say: 'Woe to us, we were indeed heedless of this; nay, we were wrongdoers.'⁷⁶

It has never been the case that Allah ﷻ destroyed a city, a town or a nation and that entity was restored, except that civilization is ended entirely. And this will be Allah's ﷻ law until He lets go of Ya'jūj and Mājūj. He will open up the doors for Ya'jūj and Mājūj, and they will descend from every mountaintop like a swarm.

In the hadiths there is mention of only a few details of Ya'jūj and Mājūj. There are a lot of cryptic issues here, but what we know we will mention. Our Prophet ﷺ warned us of Ya'jūj and Mājūj:

Zaynab bint Jahsh reported: The Prophet ﷺ got up from his sleep with a flushed red face and said, 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah. Woe to the Arabs, from the great evil that is nearly approaching them. Today a gap has been made in the wall of Gog and Magog like this' (Sufyān illustrated this by forming the number 90 or 100 with his fingers). It was asked, 'Shall we be destroyed though there are righteous people among us?' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Yes, if evil increased.'⁷⁷

Signs of the Day of Judgement

In another hadith the Prophet ﷺ spoke of ten signs of the Day of Judgement, among which is Ya'jūj and Mājūj:

Hudhayfah ibn Usayd al-Ghifārī reported: Allah's Messenger ﷺ came to us all of a sudden as we were (busy in a discussion). He said: 'What do you discuss about?' They (the Companions) said, 'We are discussing about the Last Hour.' Thereupon he said: 'It will not come until you see ten signs before' and (in this connection) he made a mention of the smoke, Dajjāl, the beast, the rising of the sun from the west, the descent of Jesus ~~son~~ son of Mary, the Gog and Magog, and landslides in three places, one in the east, one in the west and one in Arabia, at the end of which fire would burn forth from the Yemen and would drive people to the place of their assembly.⁷⁸

Hence, until we see these ten signs we don't have to worry about the actual Day of Judgment. These ten signs are called the major signs of the Day of Judgment, and our Prophet ﷺ said that when one of them happens the rest will immediately follow, like dominoes, one after the other. We seek Allah's ﷻ refuge from seeing any of them. This is the very end of times.

Before these ten are many minor signs of the Day of Judgment. Scholars have written many books about the minor signs; some have made them up to 100, some up to 150, but there are many hadiths that make mention of the signs of the Day of Judgment, and it is safe to say that all of them, or almost all of them, have occurred, one after the other. If you look at the minor signs of the Day of Judgment that the Prophet ﷺ predicted, they were things that were absolutely surreal and unbelievable for his time and place. He told the Muslims of Makkah, when they were being persecuted and had no authority in Makkah, that they were impatient and hasty, for a time will come when a lady shepherd will go from Hadramawt to San'a in Yemen and the only thing she is scared of is Allah ﷻ and then the wolf attacking her sheep. When they were being defeated by the Quraysh and others, the Prophet ﷺ told the Muslims that they would

conquer *Bilād al-Shām* (Syria), *dimashq* (Damascus) and Jerusalem. Indeed, Jerusalem was conquered on the final day of the death of Abū Bakr ؓ. The Prophet ؐ said his only army would be sent to other nations, and the only army that was sent to fight other nations was to *Bayt al-Maqdis* and it was successful, also during the caliphate of Abū Bakr. The Prophet ؐ told the Muslims that they will distribute the treasures of Caesar and the treasures of Kisrā, the leader of the Persian Empire. Surāqah ibn Mālik ؓ could not believe his ears when the Prophet ؐ told him he would be wearing the bangles of Kisrā. During the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ, when a territory of the capital of the Persian Empire was conquered and the treasure came and 'Umar saw in front of him the gold piled high, he himself took out the bangles of Kisrā and sought out Surāqah ibn Mālik. And with his own hands 'Umar put them on the hands of Surāqah, saying this is what the Prophet ؐ predicted.

Our Prophet ؐ also predicted that the Muslims would conquer Egypt at a time when the Muslims didn't even have a caravan to go to Egypt:

Abū Dharr reported Allah's Messenger ؐ as saying: 'You would soon conquer Egypt and that is a land which is known (as the land of *al-qirat*). So when you conquer it, treat its inhabitants well. For there lies upon you the responsibility because of blood-ties or relationship of marriage (with them).'

⁷⁹

The reason why 'kinship' is mentioned is because Hājar, the maid-servant of Ibrāhīm, is from Egypt, and she is the mother of Ismā'īl, from whom the Arabs are descendants. Even though Hājar is at least fifty generations removed from the Quryash, still, the Prophet ؐ is reminding the Ṣaḥābahs that they have some blood relation with the people of Egypt so there is a duty to care for them. All of these hadiths are found before the Conquest of Makkah occurred, and they cannot be denied. There are also many other predictions, such as that knowledge will spread and *fāḥishah*, or lewdness and nudity, will become prevalent. Certainly the spreading of lewdness is a reality of our times. The Prophet ؐ predicted many things, and going down the list we see one after the other of his most famous predictions have

occurred. Hadiths that we memorized as children and wondered when such events would occur we now see happening before our eyes, in our own generation. Abū Hurayrah ؓ also narrated:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ came out one day to the people, and a man came to him and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, when will the Hour be?' He said: 'The one who is asked about it does not know more than the one who is asking. But I will tell you of its portents. When the slave woman gives birth to her mistress; that is one of its portents. When the barefoot and naked become leaders of the people; that is one of its portents. When shepherds compete in constructing buildings; that is one of its portents. (The Hour) is one of five (things) which no one knows except Allah.' Then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited the words: 'Verily, Allah, with Him (alone) is the knowledge of the Hour, He sends down the rain, and knows that which is in the wombs (to the end of the Verse).' [Luqmān 31: 34].⁸⁰

In our own generation and before our very eyes we see that some of the tallest buildings in the world are in the Middle East. Every time one prince or ruler builds one, another says he will build taller. It is as if he believes in the hadith more to make sure it happens. We see these signs of the Hour before our very eyes, and they are the minor signs of the Day of Judgement.

As seen in the hadith mentioned previously, the Prophet ﷺ said there are ten major signs of the Day of Judgement:

1. The coming of the Dajjāl.
2. The coming of Prophet ʿĪsā ؑ, i.e. Jesus Christ.
3. The coming of Yaʿjūj and Mājūj.
4. Major earthquakes in the East.
5. Major earthquakes in the West.
6. Major earthquakes in *Jazīrat al-ʿArab* or the Arabian Peninsula.
7. The coming of *al-Dukhān* or the Smoke.

8. The coming of *Dābbah*, the Beast, as mentioned in both the Qur'an and the Bible.⁸¹
9. The sun rising from the West.
10. The coming of a fire that will gather people to *Arḍ al-Maḥshar*, which is in Syria or Jerusalem.

The first of the ten major signs, the coming of Dajjāl, will cause *fitnah* and *fasād* as the world has never seen. Our Prophet ﷺ has explained how long Dajjāl will be in the world: 'Forty days, one day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week, and the rest of his days like your days.'⁸² No one will be able to harm him because Allah ﷻ has decreed only one person can kill him, who is not on Earth right now. It is Prophet 'Isā ibn Maryam ﷺ and, as our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, 'Isā will come down after Dajjāl has been here for forty days according to the Prophet's ﷺ explanation of that time. When 'Isā comes he will kill Dajjāl at *Bāb al-Lūd*, which is the city of Lod that exists in the land of Palestine. Allah ﷻ says that 'Isā ﷺ will then gather his followers and Allah ﷻ will tell him 'O 'Isā, I have brought forth some of My slaves whom no one will be able to kill, so take My slaves to Tur in safety.'⁸³ This group is Ya'jūj and Mājūj, who are the third of the ten major signs of the Day of Judgement.

Fitnah of Ya'jūj and Mājūj

The Prophet ﷺ described many things about Ya'jūj and Mājūj. He said that they have small eyes and their faces are like a shield that has been hammered. The descriptions he gave led many of the earlier Muslims to think that they are a race of the people of the Far East, and Allah ﷻ knows best. The Prophet ﷺ also said that their clothing is made out of wool or fur, and this is something that is also a hallmark of the people of the Far East. And he also said that they are so many that: 'The first of them will pass by lake Tiberias and drink from it, then the last of them will pass by it and will say: "There was water here once."⁸⁴ Lake Tiberias is a famous lake in Transoxiana, in the portion of Central Asia corresponding approximately with modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and

southwest Kazakhstan, and the hadith implies that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are so many in number that they will drink all of its water.

In another hadith in Tirmidhī, the Prophet ﷺ describes that during the night of *al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'raj* he met together with Ibrāhīm ؑ, Mūsā ؑ and 'Īsā ؑ. *SubhānAllah*, can you imagine the conversation they must have had? Allah ﷻ knows how long they spoke and what they talked about. Among the things they discussed was the Day of Judgement, of which Ibrāhīm and Mūsā said they have no knowledge. 'Īsā, on the other hand, said he had no knowledge except that he will be sent down to kill Dajjāl and that Allah ﷻ will send Ya'jūj and Mājūj. So 'Īsā knew about Ya'jūj and Mājūj. 'Īsā added that when Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj came he would flee with his followers to the mountains and make *du'ā'* for Allah ﷻ to protect them. Allah ﷻ has allowed him to kill the Dajjāl but not Ya'jūj and Mājūj. This shows us the quantity and the fear of Ya'jūj and Mājūj.

Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj will conquer the world and cause *fitnah* and *fasād*. They will kill everyone until finally they will say 'we have killed the inhabitants of the world', but they will not know that 'Īsā ؑ is hiding with his followers. Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj will then seek to kill the inhabitants of the skies, meaning the angels, and they will take their arrows and start shooting into the air. Allah ﷻ will cause their arrows to return with blood on them, to give Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj the impression that they have genuinely killed everyone. Then 'Īsā ؑ will make *du'ā'* to get rid of them and Allah ﷻ will send a disease. According to a hadith, this disease will inflict them in the neck and cause them to fall dead: 'Then Allah will send a worm in their necks and the next morning they will all die as one.'⁸⁵ The stench of their corpses will fill the earth, and according to the Prophet ﷺ the animals will fatten by feeding on their bodies.⁸⁶ 'Īsā and his followers will not be able to bear the stench, so they will make *du'ā'* to Allah ﷻ and He will send birds that will pick up the bodies and throw them far away.

'Īsā will then come down with his followers, which will be the very final time Muslims will be on earth. Our Prophet ﷺ said there will be nothing but happiness and joy, there will be no hatred and no fighting. This is after Ya'jūj and Mājūj, towards the very end of time, and it will be the glorious

time of humanity on this earth. However, it will be for a very short period, the duration of which Allah ﷻ knows best. Then the wind will come and cause all of the believers to pass away, leaving only the non-believers. They will be the worst of the worst people, and then the *Dābbah*, or Beast, and Fire will come forth.

This is all that the Qur'an and Sunnah has told us about Ya'jūj and Mājūj, but we also have Islamic legends, some of which come from folk tales and some from Jewish and Christian sources. Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are mentioned in three places in the Old Testament as Gog and Magog: in the Book of Genesis, the Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Jubilees. All three mentions are very cryptic references with no details. There is a reference of them being towards the end of times, the Armageddon, and that they shall cause *fitnah* and *fasād*. We cannot be certain of the truth of these Biblical accounts, but our scholars have taken them as Islamic legends. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr all mention these accounts. Only Allah ﷻ knows if these accounts are true or not. In the Book of Genesis we learn that Gog and Magog are from the children of Japheth, the third son of Nūḥ عليه السلام. He had three children: Sam, Ham and Japheth. From Sam we get the Semites and the Caucasian races; from Ham we get the people of Africa: and from Japheth we get the people of the Far East. This fits into the Islamic hadiths that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are of the far eastern race, and Allah ﷻ knows best.

In the year 624 AH, Genghis Khan started the Mongolian expansion of his kingdom and human history saw a type of barbarity they had never seen before. This was the invasion of the Tatars, and we have all heard of Genghis Khan. Khan began conquering land after land and even conquered Samarkand, where in one Islamic account we are told he walked into the *masjid* and told the Muslims that his conquest was because of their own sins and that their God has allowed him to conquer them. The Muslims there were living luxurious lifestyles, far from the *dīn*. He told them from the very mimbar (the steps on which the imam stands to deliver the *khuṭbah*) of the *masjid* of Samarkand that this victory of his was because of their faithlessness. The Mongols continued their invasion and one after the other they conquered almost every civilization, land and sultan until they reached the gates of Baghdad in 1258 CE. There they surrounded Baghdad and

killed the caliph after killing his family in front of him. They then went on to massacre over a million people of Baghdad. It is said the streets flowed with blood for months, and the River Tigris was full of ink for over a year because of all the books that had been thrown into it. At that point in time, the Islamic scholars said the invaders must be Ya'jūj and Mājūj, because how else can they explain this phenomenon. But it turned out they were not Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj at all, rather the Mongol invasions were just historical events.

Where then are Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj today? There are some modern scholars who say they are not hiding in some cave or similar, rather they are actually living in the lands of the Far East, and the wall of Dhū al-Qarnayn is the Great Wall of China. However, this does not appear to be valid because the Qur'an tells us the wall was made out of iron and copper, and the Great Wall of China is made out of stone. As well, the Great Wall was not build by any 'Dhul-Qarnyan' like figure, nor did it actually hold in one tribe in one location, for it was meant as a protection for the people of China.

Of course, for a modern mind, understandably this story is one that raises many questions. The world has essentially been mapped out by satellites, and there are no large masses of land where tens of thousands of people are living without our knowledge. Even the isolated tribes in remote areas are isolated because modern civiliziations have made a conscious decision to avoid contact with them, and not because we are not aware of their presence.

Some have said that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are not living secretly on earth somewhere, but rather will be a race, perhaps descendants of the tribe trapped by Dhū al-Qarnayn, who will invade mankind towards the end of time. This group reinterprets or weakens the hadiths regarding Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj and claims that the Quranic verses simply indicate that at one point in time, a tribe was blocked, and that at a later time, that wall shall fall. While this opinion is a bit of a stretch, and it does seem to be a minority opinion that opposes the traditional understanding of the story, it is not wholly impossible either.

The majority position has always been that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are a race that are not mixing with people right now but are in an isolated place, separated from mankind. Allah knows best.

Our Prophet ﷺ told us:

The people of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj dig every day until, when they can almost see the rays of the sun, the one in charge of them says: 'Go back and we will dig it tomorrow.' Then Allah puts it back, stronger than it was before. (This will continue) until, when their time has come, and Allah wants to send them against the people, they will dig until they can almost see the rays of the sun, then the one who is in charge of them will say: 'Go back, and we will dig it tomorrow if Allah wills.' So, they will say: 'If Allah wills.' Then they will come back to it and it will be as they left it. So, they will dig and will come out to the people, and they will drink all the water.⁸⁷

This hadith is significant because Surah *al-Kahf* is linked with the phrase '*insha'Allah*', and Allah ﷻ tells our Prophet ﷺ: '*And never say about anything: "I shall certainly do this tomorrow" unless Allah should will it. And should you forget (and make such a statement), remember your Lord and say: "I expect my Lord to guide me to what is nearer to rectitude than this."*'⁸⁸ Meanwhile, in the same surah Mūsā says to Khidr: '*You shall find me, if Allah wills, patient; and I shall not disobey you in anything.*'⁸⁹ This hadith about Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj is the third *insha'Allah* associated to this surah. Allah ﷻ knows best the secret of the link between Surah *al-Kahf* and *insha'Allāh*.

This is all that we know about Ya'jūj and Mājūj. It is of the mysteries of Allah ﷻ that He alone knows and it is of the major signs of the Day of Judgment. When the Jews came to our Prophet ﷺ they asked about Dhū al-Qarnayn. However, the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn linked to Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj is not found in the Old Testament; even though the account of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj is, and the account of Dhū al-Qarnayn building the wall to trap them is not found either. It is as if Allah ﷻ was showing the Jews that He knows and they do not know. They are asking about one or two stories, and Allah

ﷺ responds with that which they did not even know and is not found in any of their sources.

76 *Al-Anbiyā'* 21: 95–97.

77 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7059.

78 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2901.

79 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2543.

80 *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 4044.

81 Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an: '*And when the time for the fulfilment of Our Word against them will come, We shall bring forth for them a beast from the earth who will speak to them because people did not believe in Our Signs.*' (*Al-Naml* 27: 82)

82 *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 4075.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 4080.

88 *Al-Kahf* 18: 23–24.

89 *Al-Kahf* 18: 69.



The Day of Judgement and the Greatest Losers



In the previous chapter we discussed the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn and how he blocked Ya'jūj and Mājūj. Within two ayahs, Allah ﷻ then begins talking about the Day of Judgement. The transition is a very immediate one:

﴿وَتَرَكْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعْضٍ وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ﴾

﴿فَجَمَعْنَاهُمْ جَمْعًا﴾

And on that Day We shall let some of them surge like waves against others, and the Trumpet shall be blown. Then We shall gather them all together. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 99)

﴿وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْكَافِرِينَ عَرَضًا﴾

That will be the Day We shall place Hell before the unbelievers (*Al-Kahf* 18: 100)

﴿الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَاءٍ عَن ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ سَمْعًا﴾

whose eyes had become blind against My admonition and who were utterly disinclined to hear it. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 101)

أَفَحَسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِي أَوْلِيَاءَ
إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

Do the unbelievers, then, believe that they can take any of My creatures as their guardians beside Me? Verily We have prepared Hell to welcome the unbelievers. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 102)

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

Say, (O Muhammad): 'Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in respect of their works? (*Al-Kahf* 18: 103)

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَبِيلُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ
يَحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

It will be those whose effort went astray in the life of the world and who believe nevertheless that they are doing good. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 104)

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ
أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا تُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَزَنًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

Those are the ones who refused to believe in the revelations of their Lord and that they are bound to meet Him. Hence, all their deeds have come to naught, and We shall assign no weight to them on the Day of Resurrection'. (*Al-Kahf* 18: 105)

After concluding that Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj were locked away, in verse 99 Allah ﷻ says: 'And on that Day We shall let some of them surge like waves against others, and the Trumpet shall be blown. Then We shall gather them all together.' This sudden transition to the Day of Judgement is because as we have established, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are one of the major signs of that Day. As such it is relevant that following their story the conclusion of the surah immediately begins, and that conclusion discusses the Day of Judgment, prophethood and the knowledge of Allah ﷻ. He says that the trumpet will be blown and all of them, everyone from these stories and their opponents and friends, will be gathered together.

Allah ﷻ then says in verse 100: '*That will be the Day We shall place Hell before the unbelievers,*' meaning 'we will give them a real show' or 'we will show them a real display' of *Jahannam*. The showing of *Jahannam* is mentioned many times in the Qur'an. For example, in Surah *al-Fajr* Allah ﷻ says: '*when Hell is brought near that Day.*'⁹⁰ Regarding this ayah, the Prophet ﷺ said: 'Hell will be brought on that Day (the Day of Judgement) with seventy thousand bridles; and with every bridle will be seventy thousand angels dragging each bridle.'⁹¹ So Allah ﷻ will command these angels to drag *Jahannam* physically on the Day of Judgement so that everybody, Muslims and non-Muslims will see it. Allah ﷻ also mentions in the Qur'an: 'You will surely end up seeing Hell; again, you shall most certainly end up seeing it with absolute certainty.'⁹²

Allah ﷻ is saying that we will definitely see Hell and it will be with '*ayn al-yaqīn*, or the eye of certainty. While Muslim and non-Muslim will see *Jahannam*, in verse 100 Allah ﷻ specifies only *kāfir* because the word used is not 'seeing' as in *latarawunna*, which is for everybody. On the other hand, the word *al-'ard*, as used in Surah *al-Kahf*, means to pass, or to pass through, and is a word only used for the *kāfir* or non-Muslim. '*Arḍ*' also has several other meanings along with to 'see'; it means 'We have brought them close to it,' or 'We have brought them all over it'. So, it implies Allah ﷻ has made *Jahannam* '*arad*' for those who reject it.

Those Who are Deaf, Dumb and Blind

Who then are the *kāfirīn*, or disbelievers, mentioned in verse 100? In verse 101, Allah ﷻ tells us of those, ‘whose eyes had become blind against My admonition and who were utterly disinclined to hear it.’ Here were those who had covered their eyes from Allah’s ﷻ reality and remembrance, and were not able to hear anything. Throughout the Qur’an, from Surah *al-Baqarah* all the way to the end, there is a motif of the deaf, dumb and blind. The one who rejects the commandments of Allah ﷻ and His worship and remembrance is called the deaf and dumb and blind. Allah ﷻ specifies very clearly that He is not talking about blindness of the eyes, but this is a blindness of the heart:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكُنْونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ
يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ
الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ ﴿١٠١﴾

Have they not journeyed in the land that their hearts might understand and their ears might listen? For indeed it is not the eyes that are blinded; it is rather the hearts in the breasts that are rendered blind. (*al-Hajj* 22: 46)

When Allah ﷻ says that their eyes were covered and they could not see or hear, this is not physical perception, rather this is spiritual seeing and hearing, which is to recognize the truth and to follow it. This is what Allah ﷻ means when He says they put a veil on their own eyes: ‘*They are deaf, they are dumb, they are blind; they will never return (to the Right Way).*’⁹³ They refuse the light of Islam. The motif of deaf and dumb fits well because the Qur’an is called Light and Allah’s ﷻ revelation is called Light, so anybody who doesn’t see this Light does not deserve to have eyesight. This is exactly what Allah ﷻ says in Surah *Tā Hā*:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى ﴿١٣٦﴾

‘But whosoever turns away from this Admonition from Me shall have a straitened life; We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection,’

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا ﴿١٣٧﴾

whereupon he will say: ‘Lord! Why have You raised me blind when I had sight in the world?’

قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنسى ﴿١٣٨﴾

He will say: ‘Even so it is. Our Signs came to you and you ignored them. So shall you be ignored this Day.’

وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ أَسْرَفَ وَلَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ
وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبْقَى ﴿١٣٩﴾

Thus do We requite him who transgresses and does not believe in the signs of your Lord (during the life of the world); and surely the punishment of the Hereafter is even more terrible and more enduring.⁹⁴

Allah ﷻ will resurrect them blind because they didn’t use their eyes properly to recognise the truth of Islam and Allah ﷻ. It is as if they had put a veil on their eyes and blocked their ears from listening to the truth.

All of this underscores a very fundamental point of our religion of Islam. Islam is simple, logical and rational. It appeals to the mind, body,

intellect and soul. That is why people from every faith and every sincere person will accept Islam when they look at its simplicity. You don't need to have a PhD in philosophy to unwrap this religion. Islam is meant for Humanity; for the average person and the intellectual. It is meant for every single level of society and it appeals to every single characteristic of people: the body, heart, mind and intellect. Therefore, anybody who rejects Islam, knowing what Islam is, from the perspective of our Shariah this person will receive no mercy on the Day of Judgement. However, the one who didn't know Islam and was not exposed properly to the truth of Islam, such as somebody who lived an isolated life or only heard misinformation about Islam and never really studied it, Allah ﷻ will undertake a special test for them on the Day of Judgement. Some people say they will be forgiven, yet this is not academically or intellectually sound, because if it were true then there would be no need to give *da'wah*, given that Allah ﷻ will forgive anyway. However, the hadith is very clear that Allah ﷻ will test the one who has never heard of Islam on the Day of Judgement:

The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said: There are four (who will protest) to Allah on the Day of Resurrection: the deaf man who never heard anything, the insane man, the very old man, and the man who died during the *fatrah* [the interval between the time of 'Isā عليه السلام and the time of Muhammad ﷺ]. The deaf man will say, O Lord, Islam came but I never heard anything. The insane man will say, O Lord, Islam came but the children ran after me and threw stones at me. The very old man will say, O Lord, Islam came but I did not understand anything. The man who died during the *fatrah* will say, O Lord, no Messenger from You came to me. He will accept their promises of obedience, then word will be sent to them to enter the Fire. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, if they enter it, it will be cool and safe for them.

According to another report, he said: Whoever enters it, it will be cool and safe for him, and whoever does not enter it will be dragged to it.⁹⁵

Thus Allah ﷻ will command such people to fling themselves into the Fire and if they do so with full trust in the promise of Allah ﷻ then that Fire will become their *Jannah*. Those who refuse and do not show their trust in Allah's ﷻ promise will then be punished with the real Fire. So these verses of Surah *al-Kahf* apply to those who were exposed to Islam yet they covered their eyes to that reality. As for those who were not exposed, as we have said they will have a different category on the Day of Judgment.

In verse 102, Allah ﷻ now threatens the Quraysh and those who have heard of Islam and still reject it:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَاتَّخَذُوا ءَآيَاتِي
وَرُسُلِي مَرْوًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

Do the unbelievers, then, believe that they can take any of My creatures as their guardians beside Me? Verily We have prepared Hell to welcome the unbelievers. (*al-Kahf* 18: 102)

The gods they have invented are Allah's ﷻ servants and creation, yet instead of worshipping the creator they came to the creation. They took an idol or an angel or a prophet and made them into gods instead of Allah ﷻ. Did they not think that the Creator would call them to task for taking His own creation and making them into gods? Allah ﷻ then concludes that *Jahannam* will be the abode of such people.

The Greatest Losers

As is usual, after criticizing those who reject Islam, Allah ﷻ then praises those who believe in Islam. However, here Allah ﷻ finishes this criticism with a very profound question:

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

Say, (O Muhammad): ‘Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in respect of their works? (*al-Kahf* 18: 103)

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَبِيلُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ
يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

It will be those whose effort went astray in the life of the world and who believe nevertheless that they are doing good’. (*al-Kahf* 18: 104)

Allah ﷻ describes the worst category of losers as those who spend their lives in misguidance while thinking they are doing good. To go to a particular place, we have to follow the road. However, if we take the wrong road, then no matter how many hours we drive and how sincere we are or how beautiful the car we drive is, we will not reach our destination. In order to get to the destination we need to follow the path. This is quite a frightening ayah in its message. Al-Ḥafīẓ Abū Bakr al-Burqānī narrated from Abū Imrān al-Jawnī that he said:

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb passed by the monastery of a monk and he said: ‘O monk!’ Then the monk came out, and ‘Umar looked at him and began to weep. Then it was said to him: ‘O Commander of the faithful! Why are you weeping?’ He replied: ‘I remembered the statement of Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, in His Book, “Labouring, weary. They will enter into Fire [Ḥāmiyah].” So that is what has made me cry.’⁹⁶

The monks were living separate lives isolated from society. They would fast and worship every day, but from the perspective of mainstream Islam they were worshipping other than Allah ﷻ. When they claim that Jesus was the son of God, such claims go against *tawḥīd*. So ‘Umar ﷺ saw them and how they had spent their lives dedicated to this type of worship and recalling how it will not benefit them it made him cry. These monks had done more

than most of us have done and perhaps even 'Umar felt more than he himself had done. They cut themselves off from the world and lived very difficult lives in worship, but their worship was to an icon. They thought they were doing good, but they were on the wrong path as they were not worship-ping Allah ﷻ.

We should mention here that as Muslims we speak in generalities and not specifics. Allah ﷻ knows what fate these particular monks will have on the Day of Judgement. It is not permitted for any Muslim to say this particular person is going to *Jannah* and this particular person is going to *Jahannam*. We speak in generalities: that those who worship Allah ﷻ will enter *Jannah* and those who reject Him will enter *Jahannam*. Similarly, when 'Umar is speaking, it is in general terms that here are a group of people who are worshipping the wrong God and doing so much, yet Allah ﷻ affirms the fate of those who are misguided.

An important point here is on intention. Good intentions are not necessarily sufficient in the eyes of Allah ﷻ. We cannot do evil with good intentions; for example, we cannot rob from the rich in order to give to the poor, like Robin Hood. It is a good intention but you cannot change the laws of Allah ﷻ. Of the fundamental laws of Allah ﷻ is that only He deserves to be worshipped and anybody who worships other than Allah ﷻ is simply not on the straight path, no matter how sincere they are. Allah ﷻ says in verse 105:

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ
أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا تُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَزَنًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

Those are the ones who refused to believe in the revelations of their Lord and that they are bound to meet Him. Hence, all their deeds have come to naught, and We shall assign no weight to them on the Day of Resurrection. (*al-Kahf* 18: 105)

The Prophet ﷺ said a man of this world, who was considered mighty and noble and of great respect, who was also large in size, will be brought forth on the Day of Judgment and will be put on the scales. It will be found that he will not even have the weight of the wings of a mosquito in the eyes of Allah ﷻ.⁹⁷ It doesn't matter what the people thought of you in this world or how they looked at you. Our Prophet ﷺ told us: 'Verily Allah does not look to your faces and your wealth but He looks to your heart and to your deeds.'⁹⁸ Allah ﷻ is telling us here that those who rejected Him, on the Day of Judgment they will not have any weight with Allah ﷻ.

90 *Al-Fajr* 89: 23.

91 *Sahīḥ* Muslim, 2842.

92 *Al-Takāthur* 102: 6–7.

93 *Al-Baqarah* 2: 18.

94 *Tā Hā* 20: 124–127.

95 *Sunan* Aḥmad.

96 *Tafsir* Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir* Surah *al-Ghāshiyah*.

97 *Sahīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 4729.

98 *Sahīḥ* Muslim, 2564.



Paradise and the Conclusion of Surah *Al-Kahf*



We have mentioned that Allah ﷻ threatens those who reject Him with punishments, yet throughout the Qur'an we always see that after threats come rewards and promises. We see after *'adhāb* comes *rahmah*, because Allah ﷻ does not want to leave us on a pessimistic note with something that is only anger and threat. Allah ﷻ always pairs together His Anger with His Mercy. In verses 106–110, Allah ﷻ identifies the punishment of *Jahannam* for the disbelievers and in the conclusion of the surah extols the rewards of *Jannah* for the believers:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَاتَّخَذُوا ءَايَاتِي
وَرُسُلِي مَرْزُومًا ﴿١٠٦﴾

Hell is their recompense for disbelieving and their taking My revelations and My Messengers as objects of jest. (*al-Kahf* 18: 106)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

As for those who believe and do good works, the Gardens of Paradise shall be there to welcome them; (*al-Kahf* 18: 107)

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حَوْلًا ﴿١٠٨﴾

there they will abide forever, with no desire to be removed from there. (*al-Kahf* 18: 108)

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ
تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا ﴿١٠٩﴾

Say: 'If the sea were to become ink to record the Words of my Lord, indeed the sea would be all used up before the Words of my Lord are exhausted, and it would be the same even if We were to bring an equal amount of ink.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 109)

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَنَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ
فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ
بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿١١٠﴾

Say (O Muhammad): 'I am no more than a human being like you; one to whom revelation is made: 'Your Lord is the One and Only God.' Hence, whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 110)

He ﷺ says in the Qur'an, 'know that Allah is severe in punishment',⁹⁹ yet He is also Forgiving and Merciful. Accordingly, immediately after promising that those who reject Allah ﷻ will face Hell 'for disbelieving and

... taking My revelations and My Messengers as objects of jest' in verse 106, the next verse continues: 'As for those who believe and do good works, the Gardens of Paradise shall be there to welcome them'. *Jannāt* here is plural, and it is located in *Firdaws* as a place for the righteous to reside (*muzulan*). Notice that Allah ﷻ mentions two conditions to attain *Jannah*. Firstly, *īmān* and secondly *a'mālun Ṣāliḥah* or righteous deeds. These two conditions are paired together in over seventy verses in the Qur'an. Never does Allah ﷻ praise *īmān* without *a'māl*. This is because *īmān* without *a'māl* is not really *īmān*. If you truly believed and genuinely had a love for something, then that would cause you to act. For example, if we knew our family was in danger and we love our family and we are capable of doing something to save them, it is humanly impossible to do nothing and let our family perish. Then how about our love of Allah ﷻ and fear of His punishment? How about hope in Allah's ﷻ reward? It is human nature, not even *'aqīda* or theology, that once we truly believe in something we will act in accordance with that belief.

Thus, *īmān* must be followed by *a'māl*. This negates that type of philosophy found among some groups of other religions, which has also unfortunately found its way into Islam, that a person who does not pray or fast will say: 'it is fine, my heart is clean, Allah knows my *īmān* is over here.' This is a lie that Shayṭān has tricked them into believing. Indeed, if *īmān* without *a'māl* had been of any value, then the best candidate would be none other than Iblīs himself. This is because Iblīs is in fact a believer in literal terms in that he believes in Allah ﷻ and the Hereafter and the prophets and revealed books. He is not a *mu'min*, but he does 'believe'. Indeed, Iblīs prayed to Allah ﷻ to allow him to live until the Day of Judgement, proving his belief in the Last Day and his belief in Allah's ﷻ power given he is asking of Him. But he is not a true believer and *mu'min* because when Allah ﷻ commanded him to act he refused; he refuses to act on the belief.

The Highest Level of Paradise

We have shown that in Islam *īmān* and *a'mālun Ṣāliḥah* are always paired together. Verse 107 states that those who believe and do righteous deeds

shall have many *Jannāt* in *Firdaws*, and we have all heard that *Jannat al-Firdaws* is the highest *Jannah*. Our Prophet ﷺ said that *Firdaws* is *wasat al-Jannah wa a'lā al-Jannah* (the middle of *Jannah* and the tip of *Jannah*),¹⁰⁰ so from this our scholars have derived that *Jannah* is shaped somewhat like a pyramid such that the higher up you go the fewer people there are. So *Firdaws* is the pinnacle; it is the *wasat*, or middle, and the *a'lā*, or highest point. Therefore, the lower you go it will get bigger and wider, much like a triangle. Our Prophet ﷺ also said that *Firdaws* is beneath the *'arsh*, or throne, of al-Rahmān. Accordingly, the throne of Allah ﷻ is the roof of *Firdaws* and there is nothing higher than *Firdaws*.

An interesting side note on '*Firdaws*' is that the word actually comes from ancient Persian or Farsi, and from this it has made its way into English. In English, we call *Firdaws* 'Paradise', and the English word 'Paradise' is from the same root as the Persian word '*Firdaws*'. Similarly, the Arabic *Firdaws* also comes from this ancient Persian word. There are many words in the Qur'an that are of non-Arabic origin but the Arabs acquired and used them and made them a part of Arabic, hence even if they originated from other languages, they are still fully 'Arabic'. This is the way of all languages: they take from other languages and incorporate words. Arabs have also taken from Sanskrit and Latin. So, in this case *Firdaws* is literally the English equivalent of Paradise.

However, for Muslims *Firdaws* is not just any paradise, rather it is the highest level of Paradise. Our Prophet ﷺ said in a *ḥadīth qudsī* about *Firdaws* that Allah ﷻ said: 'I have created for My chosen servants, what the eyes have never seen and the ears have never heard and the imagination has never conceived.'¹⁰¹ The rest of *Jannah* that we are enticed with is still beautiful, from luscious grapes and pomegranates to the pure spouses *ḥūr al-'ayn*, we are given a picture of what it will be like. However, in the highest level of *Firdaws* there is no picture to draw; it is beyond imagination. Even if somebody could describe it our minds could not conceive of it. Whatever descriptions exist of *Jannah*, these are of the lower levels. Of the highest levels, Allah ﷻ tells us that people have never even thought of such things as exist there. In another *hadith* our Prophet ﷺ said that Allah ﷻ planted the trees of *Firdaws* with His own hands.

If we look at verse 107 we see that Allah ﷻ says that those who believe and do good will have many *jannāt al-Firdaws*, gardens of Paradise, as a place to reside. But will all of those who believe and do good get to *Firdaws*? No, they will not. We know for a fact that not all believers will reach *Firdaws*, it is the highest level for the elite and only a small percentage will attain it. Yet Allah ﷻ says that those who believe and do good will have many *jannāt al-Firdaws*. The explanation is that those who will attain *Firdaws* do so by the same good deeds as others, but their deeds will be greater in quantity and quality. It is by no secret or a miracle that they attain *Firdaws*. They are doing exactly what all of us know we have to do: pray, fast, give charity and be righteous, the same *āmanū wa-‘amilū al-Ṣāliḥāt*, but they are doing it with true *īmān* and in the quality and quantity that is beloved by Allah ﷻ.

After a while we reach a point where we cannot increase our actions. How many *juz'* a day can we complete, how many days can we fast or how much charity can we give? We still need to pay rent and take care of our families. There comes a point where we cannot do more, although for most of us we have not reached that level. But for some there comes a point where they cannot do more. The difference between the residents of *Firdaws* and others is less about quantity and more about quality of their actions and their relationship with Allah ﷻ. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī has said that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ؓ did not win because of the quantity of his deeds, but it was something Allah ﷻ gave that settled in his heart. It is worth mentioning that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is addressing the *Tābi‘ūn* in this statement, a Muslim generation of a spiritual level that regularly prayed *tahajjud* and read Qur'an, etc. When you get to the level of Abū Bakr, when you have maxed out in your actions, then you can say *īmān* is going to be increased in the heart only. Then there is a *ta'alluq* (dependence) on Allah ﷻ, there is *iḥsān* (virtue), there is the relationship that Allah ﷻ is watching me; that will happen to the elite. Those who attain *Firdaws* don't have short cuts or extra knowledge, it is the same path for all of us: *inna alladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū al-Ṣāliḥāt*. They shall have *jannāt al-firdaws* as a place to live.

Verse 108 then continues:

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَتُغَوَّنَ عَنْهَا حَوْلًا ﴿١٥٨﴾

there they will abide forever, with no desire to be removed from there. (*al-Kahf* 18: 108)

An interesting point from this verse is that no matter how much of a thing we have, eventually we get tired of it. This is human nature and we have all experienced this at some time in our own life. We desire a car, for example, and when we get that car we are satisfied for a week or two. Then all of a sudden we notice another car, and then we want that one. We see the same for other material possessions such as houses or other possessions. *SubhānAllāh*, with every blessing we always find that we want something else. However, Allāh ﷻ is saying that no matter how long they are there, the inhabitants of *Firdaws* do not tire of it. How long can we remain in a mansion or palace, or drive the same car, before getting tired of it? Yet this is not the case in *Firdaws* where they will never want to leave. This shows us that the pleasures will be eternal.

The Blessings of Allāh and the Humanity of the Prophet

In the final two verses, Allāh ﷻ then concludes the surah:

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ
تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا ﴿١٥٩﴾

Say: 'If the sea were to become ink to record the Words of my Lord, indeed the sea would be all used up before the Words of my Lord are exhausted, and it would be the same even if We were to bring an equal amount of ink.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 109)

It is said that one of the reasons this verse was revealed was that some of the Banū al-Naḍīr, a Jewish tribe of Madinah, complained to the Quraysh that the Prophet ﷺ was saying that the knowledge of Allāh ﷻ is more than that of the Torah. The Jews asserted that they don't need anything more

than the Torah. So Allah ﷻ revealed that His knowledge is infinite, and whatever knowledge we have been given is very little. Allah ﷻ underscored this point in a verse that was directed to them when they asked about the *rūḥ*, the spirit:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ
الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾

They ask you about 'the spirit'. Say: 'The spirit descends by the command of my Lord, but you have been given only a little knowledge.' (*Banī Isrā'īl* 17: 85)

Allah ﷻ is saying: My knowledge is infinite, you cannot compete with My knowledge. Similarly, in a verse in Surah *Luqmān* Allah ﷻ says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَمَ وَالْبَحْرُ يَدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ
سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

If all the trees on earth become pens, and the sea replenished by seven more seas were to supply them with ink, the Words of Allah would not be exhausted. Verily Allah is Most Mighty, Most Wise. (*Luqmān* 31: 27)

The speech of Allah ﷻ is infinite, and it does not matter how much ink or how many pens we have, His speech and knowledge will nonetheless remain forever.

Hence, Allah ﷻ is telling us that He has given us some knowledge we didn't have—that of Dhū al-Qarnayn, Ya'jūj and Mājūj, the People of the Cave and Khidr and Mūsā—but His knowledge is still more than we can ever encompass. Allah ﷻ concludes the surah by reminding us of the man who is informing us of this knowledge. This man, the Prophet Muhammad

ﷺ, has given the Quraysh and the Jews the answers to their question as to the identity of Dhū al-Qarnayn, who Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are, what the *rū ḥ* is and about the *Aṣṣhāb al-Kahf*. Allah ﷻ reminds them in the final verse:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَنَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا
فَمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ
بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿١١٠﴾

Say (O Muhammad): 'I am no more than a human being like you; one to whom revelation is made: "Your Lord is the One and Only God." Hence, whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 110)

He tells the Jews and the Quraysh that the Prophet ﷺ is a human like us and this knowledge is from Allah ﷻ.

This is a very common sequence in the Qur'an, occurring at least four or five times: Our Prophet ﷺ was a human being. He ate what people ate, he became hot under the sun and would shade himself, he got married and he had children. Like all of us he was born and he passed away. But what made him special is not that he had divine powers but that Allah ﷻ chose him to be the recipient of direct communication; *yū ḥā ilayya*, 'Allah has inspired me'. And the main thrust of this inspiration was: *annamā ilāhukum ilāhun wāḥid*, that 'indeed you have one deity that is worthy of worship'. This is the gist of Islam and the essence of all revelations, the purpose of the Qur'an: *lā ilāha illā 'llāh*. The verse concludes: 'whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord.' Once again we see the same two conditions: *īmān* and *a'mālun Ṣāliḥah*. We have to do good and our *ikhhlāṣ* has to be for the sake of Allah ﷻ.

Our Prophet ﷺ would use this ayah to talk about not worshipping idols and about minor *shirk*, which is when a Muslim does a good deed for the sake of Allah ﷻ but his intention is polluted and he wants to show off that good deed to other people; for example, if we pray, fast extra *nafl* fasts, or give charity with the intention to show off. Allah ﷻ says that if we truly want His blessings then we must do good deeds and not take anyone as a partner besides Him. A part of being a partner is to want spiritual reward for a good deed from someone else. That is why when we do any good deed of *ibādah* we must monitor our intentions and make sure that it is only for Allah ﷻ. And if we find our intention is being corrupted then immediately we need to turn to Allah ﷻ to seek His refuge. We should say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ لَنْ أُشْرِكَ بِكَ وَلَقَدْ أَعْلَمْتُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

Allahumma innī a'ūdhu bika an ushrika bika wa anā a'lamu wa astaghfiruka limā lā a'lamu

'O Allah I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know.'¹⁰²

This is the *du'ā'* that our Prophet ﷺ taught Abū Bakr ؓ that if you feel you are showing off then make this *du'ā'* and Allah ﷻ will remove that showing off. We make *du'ā'* to Allah ﷻ for *ikhhlās*, or sincerity, and we always monitor that we are doing something purely *fi sabīlillāh*. The verse then concludes by reminding us that if you truly believe in the promises of Allah ﷻ, then these promises will come true and will be given to you, as long as you do good for the sake of Allah ﷻ.

99 *Al-Anfāl* 8: 13.

100 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

101 *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 3292.

102 *Musnad Ahmad*, 4/403.



Recap, Main Points and the Lessons of Surah *Al-Kahf*



In this concluding chapter it would be appropriate to summarize some of the main lessons that we have learned from Surah *al-Kahf*.

Key Themes

Several key themes can be identified in the surah which can be found both at the beginning and the end. First, we notice the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet ﷺ is mentioned in the opening verse:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ عَوَاجًا ۝

Praise be to Allah Who has revealed to His servant the Book devoid of all crookedness; (*al-Kahf* 18: 1)

Meanwhile, the final verse mentions *yūhā ilayya*: that the Qur'an has been revealed to the Prophet ﷺ. So the emphasis is given on the Qur'an and its role, and that is why right in the middle of the surah Allah ﷻ says *watlu mā ūhiya ilayka min kitāb*, 'recite what has been revealed to you from the Qur'an'. The importance of the Qur'an and its recitation is established. We further notice that the surah begins and ends with Allah ﷻ mentioning rewards and punishments such that both the beginning and ending of Surah *al-Kahf* deal with *Jannah* and *Nār* (the Fire).

The surah also begins and ends with the theme of the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ and his role and function. The first verse begins by emphasizing the Prophet ﷺ as *'abd*, or servant (of Allah): *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi lladhī anzala 'alā 'abdihi l-kitāb*, 'Praise be to Allah Who has revealed to His servant the Book'. Meanwhile, the last verse states: *qul innamā ana basharun mithlukum*, 'Say (O Muhammad): "I am no more than a human being like you"'. This is the spectrum that our Prophet ﷺ has been given; he has been granted the highest praise as the *'abd* of Allah ﷻ and yet he is also a *bashar* (human). We do not praise him more than he deserves and we don't dispraise him, *Astaghfir 'ullāh*. He is *'Abdullāh*, he is a *rasūlu'llāh* and he is *bashar*; he is a human being and he is not more than human.

Another main theme we notice of the surah, from the beginning to the end, is that this life is full of trials, and the only way to save oneself and overcome them is by having a relationship with Allah ﷻ. We must believe in Him, follow the Shariah of Allah ﷻ and have *īmān* and *tawakkul* in Allah ﷻ.

The key themes of the surah are found in the stories being related. We see the theme of the trials of this world and salvation in Allah ﷻ in the very first story of the surah: The People of the Cave. When the young men were persecuted for their faith, they prayed for protection. They fled to the cave and Allah ﷻ blessed them with a miracle like humanity had never seen and the young men slept for 300 years. We see this same theme in the story of the man with two gardens, where the one who does not thank Allah ﷻ, does not have a relationship with Him and rejects His blessings undergoes punishment in this world, and Allah ﷻ knows what will happen in the next world. We also see this in the story of Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ that Mūsā humbled himself when Allah ﷻ informed him that somebody was more blessed in knowledge than he was. It is notable that this is an amazing paradox: Mūsā humbled himself for the sake of knowledge, and he gained more knowledge when he humbled himself and appreciated Allah's ﷻ blessings.

We also see the theme in the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn when Allah ﷻ tested him with the *fitnah* of power. This is perhaps the most difficult trial

for any person to cope with, and Dhū al-Qarnayn was tested and dealt with this trial with justice and ruled in truth. Allah ﷻ blessed him with having a historic role in trapping Ya'jūj and Mājūj, who are among the major signs of the Day of Judgement.

Benefits of Surah al-Kahf

Among the many benefits of the surah is the constant praising of Allah ﷻ at all times. The surah begins with *alḥamdulillāh* and the People of the Cave praise Allah ﷻ. In the story of the man and the two gardens, the second man praises Allah ﷻ, saying *lākinna huwa Allāhu rabbi*, 'He is Allah, my Lord'. Khidr ؑ praises Allah ﷻ and says of his actions that He told him to do this; he ascribes the good to Allah ﷻ. And when Dhū al-Qarnayn builds the wall he says *hādha raḥmatan min rabbika*, 'this is the *rahmah* from my Lord'. As such, the entire surah reminds us that we need to praise Allah ﷻ and ascribe blessings and good to Him.

We have mentioned in previous chapters how '*inshā'Allāh*' is linked to this surah. There are a number of points on this:

1. The surah was delayed because our Prophet ﷺ forgot to say *inshā'Allāh*.
2. In the surah, Allah ﷻ says to never say something that you are going to do except that you add in *insha'Allah*.
3. Also in the surah, Mūsā ؑ says *sa-tajidunī in shā Allāhu ṣābiran*, 'You shall find me, if Allah ﷻ wills, patient'. This then is a gentle reminder that Mūsā said *inshā'Allāh*.
4. Finally, we have the story of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj that when they seek to break open the wall, the day that the one in charge of them says '*inshā'Allāh* tomorrow you will continue', the the wall remains damaged as they had left it the day before and they will then be able to break through.

'*Insha'Allah*' is thus linked to the whole concept of *dhikr* in the surah.

Another benefit of Surah *al-Kahf* is that we learn that Muslims should have a genuine concern and care for all of humanity. We should be

concerned for the spiritual and physical well-being of other people. Our Prophet ﷺ is described as full of sorrow for his community because they didn't believe. Such is his sorrow that it caused him grief and anxiety. Meanwhile, the man of the two gardens is shown to be advising his brother, and the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn, where he volunteered to help the people who were facing harm from Ya'jūj and Mājūj, is another reflection of concern for humanity. Throughout the story there's a genuine concern around helping other people.

The surah also teaches us to be careful about speaking without knowledge. From the beginning of the surah Allah ﷻ warns those who say He has children and speaks without knowledge:

وَيُنذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۖ

... and also to warn those who say: 'Allah has taken to Himself a son,' (*al-Kahf* 18: 4)

مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنَّ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ۖ

a thing about which they have no knowledge, neither they nor their ancestors. Dreadful is the word that comes out of their mouths. What they utter is merely a lie. (*al-Kahf* 18: 5)

We also see Allah ﷻ criticize those who make conjecture about how many Sleepers there were in the cave and how long they slept:

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ
 رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُلْ رَبِّي
 أَعْلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا
 وَلَا تَسْتَنَبِطْ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٢﴾

Some will say concerning them: 'They were three and their dog, the fourth'; and some will say: 'They were five, and their dog, the sixth' all this being merely guesswork; and still others will say: 'They were seven, and their dog, the eighth.' Say: 'My Lord knows their number best. Only a few know their correct number. So do not dispute concerning their number, but stick to what is evident, and do not question anyone about them.' (*al-Kahf* 18: 22)

Throughout the surah we have clear examples of Allah ﷻ warning people to be careful when they speak about Him and His religion. And this is especially true for our times. In this day and age there is a pseudo-knowledge, where often people will have a presumption that because they have read five books, or have Googled, or have read a paper, that they have achieved a great deal of knowledge. As Surah *al-Kahf* shows us, the fact of the matter is anyone who wants to become an *'alim* needs an actual physical teacher as a mentor and tutor. The teacher-student relationship is necessary for a person to become a scholar. As Mūsā عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام illustrated; Mūsā asked to accompany Khidr, because what we gain from books we can never be certain to have properly understood. We could be mistaken or be reading the wrong books. So, it is essential to have a teacher-student relationship to learn.

A repeated theme of this surah is that this world is temporary and this life is short. Early in the surah, Allah ﷻ says:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ﴿٧﴾

Surely, We have made all that is on the earth an embellishment for it in order to test people as to who of them is better in conduct. (*al-Kahf* 18: 7)

Throughout the surah we have other examples of this. Almost in the middle of the surah, Allah ﷻ says:

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّقْتَدِرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

(O Prophet), propound to them the parable of the present life: it is like the vegetation of the earth which flourished luxuriantly when it mingled with the water that We sent down from the sky, but after that the same vegetation turned into stubble which the winds blew about. Allah alone has the power over all things. (*al-Kahf* 18: 45)

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَةُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world. But the deeds of lasting righteousness are the best in the sight of your Lord in reward, and far better a source of hope. (*al-Kahf* 18: 46)

Throughout the surah, Allah ﷻ reminds us that life is short, so make sure we are ready for the next life.

Another benefit of the surah is that it teaches us the importance of keeping good company and how helpful righteous friends are. Allah ﷻ says of the youths of the cave that they were a group of righteous young men:

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ ءَامَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ
وَزَدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٧﴾

We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance (*al-Kahf* 18: 13)

In the story of the men and the two gardens, Allah ﷻ shows how the good man benefits the evil man by offering sound advice. In the story of Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ they benefit from each other's company. Furthermore, Mūsā takes with him the best of the Banī Isrā'īl; a young lad, Yūsha' ibn Nūn, who eventually becomes a prophet in his own right. Good company leads a person to become good, having good friends makes us good as well. That is why, once again, in the middle of the surah our Prophet ﷺ is told:

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُ ۖ وَلَا تَقْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطِيعَ
مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord, morning and evening, seeking His pleasure, and do not let your eyes pass beyond them. Do you seek the pomp and glitter of the world? Do not follow him whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of excess. (*al-Kahf* 18: 28)

His job was to be patient and stay with those who are worship-ping Allah ﷻ, morning and evening. The rich and elite or arrogant, and those who don't have any relationship with Allah ﷻ should be left. Those who have Allah ﷻ with them, even if they be poor or weak, are the ones to stay with at the expense of the rich and arrogant. Hence, a constant motif of the surah is to choose your friends with Islam in mind; with good manners and the worship of Allah ﷻ in mind.

Another lesson we take from the surah is that Allah ﷻ controls each and every aspect of our lives. Nothing happens even if we consider it to be a *muṣībah*, or calamity, except that there is a blessing for us in it if we have true *tawakkul* in Allah ﷻ. There is no *muṣībah* except that within that *muṣībah* there are also blessings for us, if only we have patience and trust in Allah ﷻ. If we have *yaqīn*, or certainty, then there is no such thing as a pure evil. Any harm will be outweighed by the good and any evil will be won over by the benefit that will eventually happen, if we have *yaqīn* in Allah ﷻ.

The surah also demonstrates for us on multiple occasions the dangers of arrogance. We are given the example of the man of the two gardens and his arrogance. Iblīs is also mentioned by name because of his arrogance. Surah *al-Kahf* also tells us to not follow the community just because they are the ones that are at the pinnacle of civilization, or have more money or power. The surah warns us against being deluded by this false sense of arrogance.

Another takeaway of Surah *al-Kahf* is that we learn that we should treat people according to his or her level. We don't treat people according to our level of knowledge but according to their level. We don't treat people according to what we are doing but based on their circumstance. When you find a person who is not practising Islam at all, we need to be gentle with them and preach to them what is more important at the expense of what is less important. We must not be harsh with the person who doesn't deserve that harshness. The example the surah gives is in the account of Mūsā ؑ and Khidr ؑ. Mūsā brings with him a youth, Yūsha' ibn Nūn ؑ, to accompany him on his journey. Yūsha' would go on to become a prophet, but at that point he was a young man, perhaps even a teenager. When

Yūsha' forgets or makes a mistake, Mūsā overlooks his error. Even though the nature of Mūsā is strong, his character and wisdom is also strong and he knows when to be strong and when to overlook. Khidr عليه السلام on the other hand is a gentle person but when Mūsā makes a mistake, Khidr is not that gentle with him and rebukes him:

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٢﴾

He replied: 'Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?' (*al-Kahf* 18: 72)

This is because Khidr and Mūsā have a different relationship than Mūsā and Yūsha'. Furthermore, Mūsā reassured Khidr of his patience and ability to not question, so when he fails to live up to his promises he deserves a little bit of chastisement. We learn that we treat people according to their level; the *jāhil*, the *āmmī*, the one who doesn't pray are not treated to the same standards as the one who prays regularly or is known to be more righteous. When we find a sin from somebody who you expect more from, no doubt we can be a little bit harsher than we would be with other people.

Of all the lessons from this surah, the primary one is that the ultimate life is the next life. *Jannah* and *Nār* are awaiting humanity in the Hereafter and our response to the *fitans*, or trials, of this world will decide our fate in the next life. So if we wish to be saved from *Jahannam* and enter *Jannah*, the surah tells us:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

As for those who believe and do good works, the Gardens of Paradise shall be there to welcome them; (*al-Kahf* 18: 107)

This is a recurrent theme, not only of Surah *al-Kahf*, but of the whole Qur'an. If we want to get to *Jannah* then we need to have strong *īmān* and

do good deeds for the sake of Allah ﷻ without showing off, without any arrogance and without corrupting and polluting those deeds.

It is for all these benefits that Surah *al-Kahf* is the surah our Prophet ﷺ wanted us to read every Friday. Life is a test and every week we face challenges. When we read Surah *al-Kahf* we calm ourselves, we remind ourselves that trials are a part of this life and we should turn to Allah ﷻ. It reminds us to thank Allah ﷻ for His blessings, to seek refuge in Him from evil and to have a strong *tawakkul* and *yaqīn* in Allah ﷻ. For all these reasons Surah *al-Kahf* is also the protection from Dajjāl. And if Surah *al-Kahf* will protect us from the Dajjāl, then how about the minor trials that we face every day? Dajjāl is the biggest trial that humanity will ever face, and our Prophet ﷺ has taught us that the ten verses of Surah *al-Kahf* will protect us. Imagine the power of the rest of the surah if ten verses alone give such protection.

In conclusion, I advise myself and all of you: let us make it a habit of reading Surah *al-Kahf* every Friday. Let us memorize the surah so we can protect ourselves from Dajjāl. Our Prophet ﷺ also taught us that whoever recites Surah *al-Kahf* on a Friday will have a light shining from him until the next Friday. We want to be of those people who have that light.

May Allah ﷻ bless us with the Qur'an, through the Qur'an, and by the Qur'an. May Allah ﷻ cause us to be of the people of the Qur'an. May Allah ﷻ cause the Qur'an to be an evidence for us and not an evidence against us. May Allah ﷻ allow the Qur'an to intercede for us on the Day of Judgement and we seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from the Qur'an witnessing against us. May Allah ﷻ make us from the people of the Qur'an and the chosen people. *Amīn*.



Glossary of Arabic Terms



<i>'Abd</i> (pl. <i>ibād</i>)	servant/slave/bondsman
<i>'Adhāb</i>	chastisement/suffering
<i>'Alaq</i>	a clot of congealed blood
<i>'Allām al-Ghuyūb</i>	The One Who knows the worlds of the unseen most
<i>'Ayn al-yaqīn</i>	the eye of certainty/the very certainty itself
<i>ʾIbādah</i>	worship
<i>ʾIlm</i> (pl. <i>ʾUlūm</i>)	knowledge/science
<i>ʾIwaj</i>	crookedness
<i>ʾUlamā'</i> (sing. <i>ʾĀlim</i>)	scholar/savant/learned person
<i>ʾUqbā</i>	end result/ultimate end
<i>Alā</i>	highest/most high
<i>A'māl</i> (sing. <i>ʾamal</i>)	works/acts
<i>Adab</i>	propriety/proper conduct
<i>Ahl al-Kitāb</i>	the People of the Book
<i>Ahl al-Ṣuffah</i>	the Prophetic Companions of the Raised Bench
<i>Ahl al-Sunnah</i>	the People of the Sunnah
<i>Aḥsan al-Qaṣaṣ</i>	the best of stories
<i>Ajr</i> (pl. <i>Ujūr</i>)	payment/reward

<i>Akhlāq</i> (sing. <i>Khuluq</i>)	character traits/manners
<i>Alḥamdulillāh</i>	praise be to Allah
<i>Astaghfirullāh</i>	I seek/ask Allah's forgiveness
<i>Ayah</i> (pl. <i>Ayat</i>)	sign/verse of the Qur'an
<i>Banūn</i>	children/offspring
<i>Bāṭil</i>	falsehood/wrong
<i>Bāṭin</i>	inward/non-manifest/what is inwardly hidden
<i>Da'wah</i>	call/invitation
<i>Dābbah</i> (pl. <i>Dawāb</i>)	beast
<i>Dhikr</i>	remembrance/invocation
<i>Dīnī</i>	pertaining to this world
<i>Diyāfah</i>	hospitality
<i>Du'ā'</i> (pl. <i>Adīyah</i>)	supplication
<i>Dunyā</i>	this lower world
<i>Dunyawī</i>	pertaining to the life to come
<i>Fāḥishah</i> (pl. <i>Fawāḥish</i>)	act of obscenity/indecency
<i>Faqīr</i> (pl. <i>Fuqarā'</i>)	destitute person/very poor person
<i>Faraj</i>	release from suffering/joy
<i>Fasād</i>	corruption/mischief
<i>Fāsiq</i>	corrupt/impious person
<i>Fatā</i> (pl. <i>Fityah/Fityān</i>)	youth/young man
<i>Fatraḥ</i>	period of lull/period of cessation of divine revelation between two prophets
<i>Fiṣṭīlillāh</i>	for the sake of Allah
<i>Fitnah</i> (pl. <i>Fitans</i>)	sedition/trial/test
<i>al-Fiṭrah</i>	the state of primordial nature
<i>Furqān</i>	criterion

<i>Ghurūr</i>	self-delusion
<i>Ḥadīth Qudsī</i>	Saying attributed to Allah but in the words of the Prophet ﷺ
<i>al-Ḥakīm</i>	the Wise
<i>al-Ḥamd</i>	praise/laudation
<i>Ḥasad</i>	resentful envy
<i>Ḥawl</i>	change/year
<i>Hijrah</i>	migration/migration from Makkah to Madinah
<i>Himmah</i>	aspiration/resolve
<i>al-Hūr</i>	the houris of Paradise
<i>Iḥāz</i>	inimitability
<i>Ikhḷāṣ</i>	sincerity
<i>Ilhām</i>	inspiration
<i>Īmān</i>	faith
<i>Inshā'Allāh</i>	God willing
<i>Istikhārah</i>	seeking guidance
<i>Izār</i>	lower garment
<i>Jahannam</i>	Gehenna/Hellfire
<i>Jāhil</i> (pl. <i>Jahalah/Juhhāl/Jāhilūn</i>)	ignorant person
<i>Jannah</i>	paradise
<i>Kāfir</i> (pl. <i>Kafarah/Kuffār/Kāfirūn</i>)	unbelievers
<i>Kahf</i> (pl. <i>Kuhūf</i>)	cave
<i>Khamr</i>	wine/alcohol
<i>Khushū'</i>	concentration/focus
<i>Kibr</i>	arrogance/pride
<i>Kināyah</i>	subtle allusion/indirect reference
<i>Kitāb</i> (pl. <i>Kutub</i>)	book
<i>Kufr</i>	unbelief

<i>Laṭīf</i>	subtle/gentle
<i>Madḥ</i>	praising
<i>al-Māl</i>	wealth/property
<i>Maqām</i>	station/position/status
<i>Maqṣad</i> (pl. <i>Maqāṣid</i>)	goal/objective
<i>Marbūb</i>	one who has a <i>rabb</i> (lord/patron)
<i>Miskīn</i> (pl. <i>Masākīn</i>)	a poor man
<i>Mu'min</i> (pl. <i>Mu'minūn</i>)	believer
<i>Mujāhadah</i>	struggle against one's ego
<i>Mujrim</i> (pl. <i>Mujrimūn</i>)	criminal
<i>Munāfiq</i> (pl. <i>Munāfiqūn</i>)	hypocrite
<i>Muqaddimah</i> (pl. <i>Muqaddimāt</i>)	introduction/prolegomenon
<i>Muṣṭibah</i> (pl. <i>Maṣā'ib</i>)	calamity/disaster
<i>Nabī</i> (pl. <i>Anbiyā'</i>)	prophet
<i>al-Nār</i>	Hell/fire
<i>Nubuwwah</i>	prophethood
<i>Nutfah</i>	a drop of sperm fluid
<i>Qadar</i>	Destiny
<i>Qasam</i> (pl. <i>Aqsām</i>)	oath/swearing
<i>Qawī</i>	mighty/strong
<i>Qitr</i>	molten copper
<i>Qiyāmah</i>	Day of Judgement
<i>Quwwah</i>	strength
<i>Rabb</i> (pl. <i>Arbāb</i>)	lord/patron/possessor
<i>Radm</i>	rubble/dam
<i>Raḥmah</i>	mercy/compassion
<i>Risālah</i> (pl. <i>Rasā'il/ Risālat</i>)	message/letter
<i>al-Rūḥ</i>	the spirit

<i>Sadd</i> (pl. <i>Sudūd</i>)	barrier/barrage
<i>al-Sakīnah</i>	Tranquility/great peace
<i>al-Ṣāliḥāt</i>	good deeds/righteous works
<i>Shirk</i>	idolatry/associating something or someone with Allah
<i>Shukr</i>	gratefulness/thanks
<i>Shukran</i>	thank you!
<i>Subḥānallāh</i>	glory be to Allah
<i>Ta'alluq</i>	attachment/association/dependence
<i>Tahajjud</i>	supererogatory night prayer
<i>Tajwīd</i>	the art of Qur'anic recitation
<i>Taqwā</i>	godfearingness
<i>Tawakkul</i>	reliance/trust
<i>Tawḥīd</i>	oneness of Allah
<i>Thamrah</i> (pl. <i>Thamar/Thimār/Athmur</i>)	fruit
<i>Thawāb</i>	reward
<i>Tilāwah</i>	recitation
<i>Ṭīn</i>	clay/mud
<i>Turāb</i> (pl. <i>Atribah</i>)	dust
<i>Wahy</i>	divine revelation
<i>Wājib</i>	necessary/obligatory/mandatory
<i>Walad</i> (pl. <i>Awlād/ Wildān</i>)	son/child/offspring
<i>Walāyah</i>	custodianship/patronage
<i>Walī</i> (pl. <i>Awliyā'</i>)	saint/patron/custodian
<i>Wasat</i>	middle
<i>Yaqīn</i>	certainty
<i>Zāhir</i>	outward/manifest/what is outwardly manifest

Zinā

fornication

Zīnah

adornment

Zukhruf

embellishment



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The Qur'an is full of parables. Each one, when its meaning is unpacked and understood, offers wisdom and guidance. Surah Kahf, chapter 18 from the Qur'an, is particularly thought provoking, and Muslims are advised to read it at least once a week.

But why? And what can we gain from it?

In this book Yasir Qadhi leads us through Surah Kahf, unfolding the lines, stories and symbols that have inspired people for over a thousand years: the people of the cave, Prophet Musa's momentous encounter with Khidr, the two men and their gardens, and Gog and Magog.

And surely We have explained matters to people in the Qur'an in diverse ways, using all manners of parables. (Qur'an 18:54)

