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Section 10: Moses Following the One Gifted with Knowledge of Allah

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 71 – 72

فَانطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ
شَيْئًا إِمْرًا

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا

71. “So they twain departed; until, when they embarked upon the ship, he made a hole in it. He (Moses) said: ‘Have you made a hole therein to drown its inmates? You have indeed done a grievous thing.’”

72. “He said: ‘Did I not say that you could never bear with me patiently?’”

The Arabic term /xarafa/ is used here, in this holy verse, with the meaning of ‘tearing something mischievously and without consideration.’

The Qur’anic word /’imr/ is applied for ‘an important and strange work, or a very indecent one’.

Both of them (Moses and the godly learned man) proceeded and went on their way until when they embarked on a ship. Khidr made a hole in the ship.

Since, on one side, Moses was a great prophet of Allah and he had to protect the lives and properties of

people, and he had to enjoin right and forbid wrong; and on the other side, his conscious did not let him keep silence for such a wrong action, therefore, he neglected the promise he had with Khidr (as) and protested him.

The verse says:

“So they twain departed; until, when they embarked upon the ship, he made a hole in it. He (Moses) said: ‘Have you made a hole therein to drown its inmates? You have indeed done a grievous thing’.”

At this time, that godly learned man (Khidr), with a special firmness, looked at Moses and spoke:

“He said: ‘Did I not say that you could never bear with me patiently?’”

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 73 – 74

قَالَ لَا تُؤَاخِذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا

فَانطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَنِي بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ زَكِيَّةٍ بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا

73. “He said: ‘Do not take me to task that I forgot, and be not hard upon me for my affair’.”

74. “So they twain departed; until, when they met a lad, he (Khidr) slew him. He (Moses) said: ‘Slew you an innocent person who had slain none? You have indeed done a horrible thing’.”

The Arabic term /’irhaq/ from the root /rahiqa/ means both ‘to encompass forcefully’, and ‘to impose a difficult task on any one’.

Moses (as), who regretted for his haste, which was naturally for the importance of the event, remembered his promise and tried to excuse.

He turned to the godly teacher and said:

“He said: ‘Do not take me to task that I forgot, and be not hard upon me for my affair’.”

The voyage of those two (Moses and Khidr) ended and they got out of the ship. They continued their way on the land. In their way, occasionally they met a young boy whom that learned man (Khidr) suddenly killed.

The holy verse in this regard says:

“So they twain departed; until, when they met a lad, he (Khidr) slew him.

Here, Moses (as) became inconvenient again. He saw the horrible scene of killing an innocent young boy, which had no legal permission. As if a curtain of sorrow and discontentment had fallen upon his eyes. It was so hard for him that he forgot his promise again and began protesting against that action.

The verse says:

“...He (Moses) said: ‘Slew you an innocent person who had slain none? You have indeed done a horrible thing’.”

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 75 – 76

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَّكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا

قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَهَا فَلَا تُصَاحِبْنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِن لَدُنِّي عُذْرًا

75. “He (Khidr) said: ‘Did I not say that you could never bear with me patiently?’”

76. “He (Moses) said: ‘If I question you on anything after this, then keep me company no more; you have received an excuse from me’.”

That great godly learned man repeated the former sentence with the same coolness particular to himself.

The holy verse says:

“He (Khidr) said: ‘Did I not say that you could never bear with me patiently?’”

Moses (as) remembered his own promise to him. It was an attention accompanied with shame, because he had broken his promise twice, although forgetfully. Little by little, Moses (as) felt the teacher might be right.

Therefore, he began asking forgiveness again and told Khidr to renounce him his forgetfulness that time, too. But if thereafter he (Moses) wanted him (Khidr) any explanation concerning his affairs, and objected to him upon his deeds, he would keep him company no more, since Khidr had received an excuse from Moses (as).

The verse says:

“He (Moses) said: ‘If I question you on anything after this, then keep me company no more; you have received an excuse from me’.”

This holy phrase of the Qur’an leads us to the utmost justice and far-sightedness of Moses (as), and it also shows that he accepted the reality even if it had been bitter.

An Islamic tradition indicates that the holy Prophet of Islam (S) recited this verse and said that Moses, the prophet of Allah, ashamed. If he had waited and bore patience, he would have seen thousand wonderful actions from Khidr. 1

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 77 – 78

فَانطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَيَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطَعَمَا أَهْلَهَا فَأَبَوْا أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا
جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنْقُضَ فَأَقَامَهُ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا

قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا

77. “So they twain departed; until, when they reached the people of a town. They asked its people for food, but they refused to make them guests. Then they found in it a wall about to fall, and he (Khidr) set it up. He (Moses) said: ‘If you had wished you could have taken a wage for it!’”

78. “He (Khidr) said: ‘This is the separation between me and you. Now I will inform you of the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently’.”

Allah’s saints are not malicious and revengeful. Khidr (as) served the people of the town, although they did not make the twain guests.

The verse says:

“So they twain departed; until, when they reached the people of a town. They asked its people for food, but they refused to make them guests...”

The objective meaning of the Arabic term /qaryah/ here is Nasirriyah, a city, or’Ilah, a harbour.

However, what happened upon Moses and his Teacher in that town leads us to comprehend that the people of it were niggardly and of inferior quality.

The holy Prophet (S) in a tradition concerning them said:

“They had been some mean and of low quality.”

Then, the Qur’an continues speaking about the twain who mended a wall there in order not to fall.

The verse says:

“...Then they found in it a wall about to fall, and he (Khidr) set it up...”

When Moses (as) saw that, in spite of the disgrace of those people, Khidr mended the wall that was going to fall, as if Khidr wanted to give the recompense of their disgrace to them, Moses thought it had better the teacher did that work for a wage so that they could provide a food by it.

Then Moses utterly forgot his promise once more, and began objecting to it, but this time with a protest milder than before.

The verse, in this regard, says:

“...He (Moses) said: ‘If you had wished you could have taken a wage for it!’”

In fact, Moses (as) thought that the action of Khidr was far from justice that a person might sacrifice like that for a group of people who were so mean.

It was at that time that the learned man said his last word to Moses, since, from the total events which happened, he was convinced that Moses could not patiently bear the deeds he accomplished.

Therefore, he announced their separation.

The verse says:

“He (Khidr) said: ‘This is the separation between me and you. Now I will inform you of the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently’.”

The announcement of that separation seemed as a sledge stricken over the heart of Moses (as) – a separation from a teacher who had with him a great amount of secrets! Yes, it was very painful for Moses to separate from such a leader, but it was a bitter reality that Moses had to tolerate.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 79

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسَاكِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ
مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا

79. “As for the ship, it belonged to (some) poor people working on the sea, and I intended to damage it, for there was after them a king who seized every (safe) ship by force.”

The Arabic term /wara’/, used here, is called to any hidden or concealed place whether that place is located in front of a person or behind him.

What a person sees is the apparent feature of the affairs while there may be some hidden features for them, too. The apparent view of Khidr’s affairs seemed wrong to Moses (as), but there was a secret, mystery and reality hidden in those affairs.

The verse says:

“As for the ship, it belonged to (some) poor people working on the sea, and I intended to damage it, for there was after them a king who seized every (safe) ship by force.”

Of course, Khidr did not make a hole in the ship in a way that water could arrive in it and caused it to be drowned, but he made it only defective.

There are sometimes so many defects and faults wherein lie some common good. Khidr (as) made the ship damaged in order that it could not be taken by that oppressive king and its miserable owners would not become more miserable. In fact, he repelled a worse state by a bad one.

This work is not the job of everyone, and the recognition of the difference between an important thing in religion and a more important one is the job of the expert theologians.

Ahlul-Bayt, (the Prophet’s progeny) (p.b.u.t.), sometimes reprimanded some of their sincere friends in front of others in order that they might not be suspicioned by the tyrannical government of the time, and their lives could be saved.

For instance, Imam Sadiq (as) once openly criticized Zurarah, so that he would remain safe from the trouble of the Abbassides.

After that, he (as) sent a message for him saying that he did such to protect his life, and then the Imam (as) recited the abovementioned verse, and said that Zurarah was the best ship of that sea whom the illegitimate ruler was seeking for and watching after.²

Only those can enter the world of mysteries, and may be aware of the innate of the things, who have passed the stage of the apparent of the things; like Moses who knew the laws of the religion and practised accordingly, but by accompanying Khidr in a course, he learned the innate secrets, too.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 80 – 81

وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنِينَ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهَقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا

فَارَدْنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا

80. “And as for the lad, his parents were believers, and we were afraid he would impose on them insolence and disbelief.”

81. “So we did intend that their Lord should change him for them for one better in purity and nearer in affection.”

In this verse, the Qur’an refers to the secret of the second event, i.e., the murder of the lad. It says:

“And as for the lad, his parents were believers, and we were afraid he would impose on them insolence and disbelief.”

However, that learned man killed a young boy and reasoned his action that if that boy had been continuing his life, he would have created a disgrace event for his faithful parents.

Then the Qur’an continues saying:

“So we did intend that their Lord should change him for them for one better in purity and nearer in affection.”

Explanations

1. The Arabic term /’irhaq/ means: ‘to impose a difficult task to anyone’.
2. An Islamic tradition indicates that, instead of that boy, Allah bestowed those couple of believers a daughter from whose progeny seventy prophets came into being.³
3. Sometimes it happens that a child causes his parents to go astray and to pave the way of infidelity. On the contrary, sometimes the parents also drag the pure and godly nature of their child towards infidelity and deviated notions.

The holy Prophet (S) said:

“Every child naturally believes in One God, except that his parents change him.”⁴

4. A wise man does not do a vain, and his deed is based on wisdom and common good, although it may seem apparently wrong.

5. The saints of Allah both have responsibility and think about the future of people.

6. The substitution of the pious child in the place of that impious boy, is a manifestation of the Lordship of Allah.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 82

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا

82. “And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it there was a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man, so your Lord willed that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord, and I did not do it of my own accord. This is the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently.”

In this holy verse the learned man (Khidr) uncovers the secret of his third action, i.e., mending the wall, and said as follows:

“And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it there was a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man, so your Lord willed that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord...”

That is, Khidr was commissioned to mend that wall for the righteousness of the parents of these two orphan boys, otherwise it might fall and, appearing its treasure, it might be exposed to danger.

At the end of the verse, in order to remove any doubt from Moses (as), and that he assuredly knew that all those deeds were fulfilled upon a special plan and commandment, Khidr added that he did not perform them of his own accord, but it was the command of Allah that he followed. Yes, this was the mystery of the affairs that Moses (as) could not bear patiently.

The verse continues saying:

“...and I did not do it of my own accord. This is the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently.”

The Story of Moses and Khidr and Its Facts

1. Finding a learned leader and taking benefits from his knowledge is of so importance that even a great prophet such as Moses paves a long way to find him. This is an example for all human beings in whatever condition and standard of knowledge and age they may be.

2. The essence of the divine knowledge (the metaphysical theology) can be obtained from the servitude and submission to Allah.

3. Knowledge should ever be learnt for practice, as Moses says to his learned teacher that he teaches him a knowledge that leads him to the aim, the right conduct. He means that he does not want the knowledge only for itself, but he wants it to use as a means to reach the aim.

4. We must not haste in some affairs because there are some things which need an appropriate opportunity.

5. The Apparent and the Innate Features of Affairs:

This is another important matter that this story teaches us. We ought not make haste in judging about the unpleasant happenings which come forth in our lives. There are many events in our lives that we are not pleased with them, but later we understand that they have been from the secret divine favours.

This is the same thing which the Qur'an points out in Surah Al-Baqarah, No.2, verse 122.

6. Confessing the Reality:

When Moses (as) unwillingly broke his promise against his learned friend (Khidr) for three times, he did not persist on this bitter reality and gave justly the right to that learned man. Moses (as) kindly separated from him and continued his own affairs.

A person should not be always busy experimenting himself until his life-time ends, and must not turn his living into a laboratory for the future, which will never come. After he examined a matter for several times, he must usually accept its result.

7. The Results of the Parents' Faith for their Children:

Khidr, for the sake of a righteous father, undertook the support of his children in that part that he could. That is, under the light of the faith and trust of the father, a child can become prosperous, and its good consequence reaches his offspring, too.

8. Lifetime Shortens because of Hurting the Parents:

Where a child, for the sake that he may hurt his parents in future with his disobedience and ingratitude, or causes them to come out of the way of Allah, deserves death, how is the state of a child who is busy committing this sin now? What is the circumstance of such persons before Allah?

9. People May Become Enemy because of What They Do not Know:

Many times it happens that a person do good upon us but, since we are not aware of the innate of the affairs, we consider it enmity, and sometimes we may become disturbed in mind and impatient,

concerning what we do not know. But, the abovementioned story teaches us that we should not haste in judgment. We must verify every matter from different points of view.

10. The Courtesy of a Student Before a Teacher:

In conversation between Moses and that learned man (Khidr) some interesting points around the courtesy of a student before his teacher attract the attention; among them are:

A. Moses (as) introduced himself as a follower of Khidr (as) when he said:

“Shall I follow you...?”⁵

B. In the rank of humility, Moses (as) announced that the knowledge of Khidr was abundant, and he said that he desired to learn a part of his knowledge.

Moses said:

“...So that you teach me right conduct of what you have been taught?”

11. The holy Prophet (S) in a tradition said:

“That treasure was the wise words which were written on a golden tablet. Its content was: ‘It is surprising why a person who believes in Allah’s decree becomes grievous’.

‘It is amazing why a person who is sure of the death, is happy; who is certain of Reckoning, is neglectful; who is certain of sustenance, troubles himself more than the common; and who is assured of the change of the world but he trusts in it’.”⁶

12. According to the Islamic literature, the grace of Allah is not limited to the direct children of a person, but it affects on the later generations, too; so that the righteousness of ancestors causes Allah to have favour upon their progenies.⁷

13. Imam Sadiq (as) said:

“Allah revealed Moses (that) He rewards Children for the righteousness of fathers.” Then, he (as) added: “If you are treacherous to the honour of people, others will be treacherous to your honour, too.” ⁸

14. In one occasion, in the story, the child is slain for the protection of the Faith of the parents, and in another one, a prophet works, as a labourer, for the sake of a righteous father, in order that the capital under the wall reaches the child.

15. When some people protested Imam Hassan (as) for making peace with Mu‘awiyah, he (as) said:

“Do you not know that Khidr made a hole in the ship, and killed a lad and his actions caused the anger of Moses? O people! If I did not accept peace, all the Shi‘ite on the earth would be vanished.” ⁹

By the way, in Arabic, the terms /qaryah/ and /madinah/ have been used with the same meaning but, as one of the scholars said, if we work with the Qur'an we will see that 'Madinah' is used wherein the light of guidance is found, and wherever the light of guidance is not found it is called /qaryah/.

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1. Tafsir-i-Tabary; and Tafsir-i-Abul-Futuh
 2. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 3. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 4. Bihar-ul-'anwar, vol.3, p.282
 5. Verse 66
 6. Majma'-ul-Bayan
 7. The Commentary of Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 8. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 9. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn

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