

[People of the Cave [Ashab al-Kahf]

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The Believing Youths And Their Astonishing Life

One of the most interesting stories in the Holy Quran is the story of the People of the Cave.

The Merciful Allah says to His Messenger, in Surah Kahf:

Or, do you think that the Fellows of the Cave and the Inscription were of Our wonderful signs?

[1]

Kahf means a cave; it was in the mountain called Raaqem. This cave is situated in the outer part of the city of Afsus to the north of Byzantine, which is now known as Turkey.

In those days King Daqyanoos was ruling over this city. He was a merciless idol worshipper who honored temples very much. He was paying much attention to the protection and decoration of temples so that more and more people continue to indulge in idol worship. It was before the advent of Prophet Isa, the Messiah.

Despite all tight regulations imposed by Daqyanoos to ensure that no one ever dared to disobey him and to give up idol-worship, seven youthful handsome boys belonging to a noble family, in order to fulfill the demands of their high nature broke the chains of idol-worship. They stopped worshipping idols and began to worship Only One God, the Creator of the earth, the sky, the sun and the moon as well as the day and the night Who through this creation established His attribute of being Self Existent as all these creations were the brightest evidences of the Might of the Only One God. But because of the fear of Daqyanoos, they could not announce that they believed in God the Great and had given up idol-worship.

It was this strong faith of these wise and intelligent youths due to which they could break social and tribal bondages. They kicked away the desire of name and fame and relied only on Truth and truthfulness. It was a very great and record breaking eventful deed, which they did in that extremely dangerous atmosphere.

The city had plunged in the darkness of blasphemy and polytheism. Men and women were shamelessly taking baths in the waters of immorality. Oppression and injustice had clouded the entire atmosphere. Daqyanoos was forcing everyone to worship the deaf and dumb idols submissively. No one had any courage to disobey him. The decision of the small group of young men in such circumstances was indeed an indication of wonderful courage and steadfastness.

The young men wanted to hide their belief till the time they could get some more people having similar opinion but Daqyanoos become informed of their intentions. As this was an extremely

wonderful and interesting story its description varied from mouth to mouth which was against truth to some extent so the verses through which Almighty God described it in the Holy Quran are thus:

When the youths sought refuge in the cave, they said: Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Thee, and provide for us a right course in our affair. So We prevented them from hearing in the cave for a number of years. Then We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties was best able to compute the time for which they remained. We relate to you their story with the truth; surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.^[2]

Daqyanoos summoned the youths to his court and asked, "What is the matter with you? I have heard that you have stopped worshipping idols, which are gods. Are you worshipping any other deity?"

At this time Almighty Allah strengthened the hearts of the youths. They stood up fearlessly in front of the cruel king and said, "Our God is the God of the skies and the earth. We recognize no other God except the Only One God. This is truth. Everything else is untrue. O King! You see that our community does not worship the only true God. They are worshipping other gods and blindly following their forefathers. This is sheer ignorance. They have no clear evidence in support of idol worship."

Daqyanoos could not give any logical answer to what the youths said. He also noted that they belonged to a great noble family of the city. So he granted them a day's respite and said, "Return now and ponder over for a night about your future. Come here again after a day and explain your decision so that necessary action may be taken according to the prevalent law and political exigency."

When the faithful and courageous youths came out of the cruel king's court they perceived risk to both their faith and their lives. So they left the city in the darkness of night and headed for a far off cave, which was already in their mind for hiding where they would be able to rest and think about future action in the light of Divine Revelation.

It was a silent and safe corner where they could live calmly. On their way to the cave they met a shepherd with his sheep. He also believed in idol-worship like all others in the society. They tried to guide that shepherd with their convincing arguments but he did not listen.

The youths then moved towards the cave. After a while one of them looked back and exclaimed, "Look, the dog of the shepherd is following us leaving his master." They pelted him with some pebbles to drive it back but it made no difference and the dog continued to follow them. They feared that if the dog barked, it would draw the attention of other people.

But see again the Might of God. The animal spoke in human language, "O God-worshipping

gentlemen! What will you gain by hitting me? Please do not fear me, as I will never be dishonest to you. I befriend the true friends of God. You may rest without worrying. I will keep a watch over you."

Now it became quite clear to the youths that it also was a great mercy of God. Never mind if the shepherd did not respond to their selfless admonition here is a dog, which has heard the truth and accepted it. God Almighty guided it. So they took that dog with them, entered the cave and lay down to rest, as they were very tired. The dog also sat at the mouth of the cave putting its head on its outstretched paws keeping a watch.

Summary: The People of the Cave slept restfully. How long, do you think? How many days? How many weeks? How many years...? Three hundred and nine years! Verily God Almighty had decided to show an example of His Might through these youthful and faithful companions who were shining brightly in a dark environment.

Almighty Allah proved that the One who can awaken people hale and hearty after a long sleep of 309 years could certainly make the dead rise after their long sleep and show them what they had done on the Day of Judgment. Verily He is Omnipotent. He kept that cave hidden from the eyes of the world for a long time.

On the other hand, when king Daqyanoos came to know that the rebellious youths had fled he sent nine fellows to find them out. They searched for nine years but could not reach the cave. They could not know what happened to the youths.

During this long period, sunrays used to enter that cave from its mouth. And you might see the sun when it rose, decline from their cave towards the right hand, and when it set, leave them behind on the left while they were in a wide space thereof. This is of the signs of Allah; whomsoever Allah guides, he is the rightly guided one, and whomsoever He causes to err, you shall not find for him any friend to lead (him) aright.[3]

In this way the youths slept during this long period in which happened all that God wanted to happen. Light of the sun kept entering their cave from the right at sunrise and from the left at sunset. Its heat made them change sides in sleep, which in turn kept blood flowing in their veins.

When these youths woke up from their long sleep one of them asked the others: For how long have we slept here? All said: Maybe for a day or for some hours. Only God knows the best. But it is certain that we slept for quite a long time. But then they felt hungry and they put off the questioning about sleeping and said: Let one of us go to the city to bring some food. But he must take full precaution so that no one recognizes him because if we are caught we will be either stoned to death or bound so tightly in the law that it will not be possible to be free.

One of them who had some coins headed for the city. But as soon as he entered the city limits he saw that everything had changed. Roads, lanes, by-lanes, mansions, and buildings, nothing was as before. But since he was very hungry and had also to hide himself from the men of

Daqyanoos he paid least attention to all these changes in the environment.

The further he walked the more he observed with utter astonishment that the designs of all the new houses were also nicer and finer. Then he felt that people were staring at him with wonder. So he hastily brought out some coins from his pocket and handed them over to a shopkeeper asking for some food items. He was very anxious to return to his cave before anything detrimental occurred. The shopkeeper continued to stare at that youth for some time and his dress etc. Then his eye fell on the coins given by that youth, which made the

shopkeeper all the more astonished.

He held the hand of the youth and asked, "Please tell me from where did you get these coins. If you have found a treasure, kindly let me also know and rest assured that the secret will remain between us." The youth replied, "No, my brother! I have not found any treasure. This coin is with me since yesterday." The shopkeeper exclaimed, "Dear friend! You are not telling the truth. This coin is 300 years old." It belongs to the time when King Daqyanoos was ruling over this city.

These words of the shopkeeper shocked the faithful youth. Then he looked at his nails which had grown long and his beard and mustaches gone out of proportion. He concluded that something very unusual had happened and that Almighty God had caused all this in a very mysterious and miraculous manner and only He knew what was behind all this.

When the shopkeeper observed that the youth appeared very panicky he consoled him and asked him to tell what had actually happened. The youth narrated everything. The shopkeeper was then fully convinced that this youth was indeed one of those seven faithful youths who had fled from the idolatrous tyranny of Daqyanoos and who were never again seen by anyone anywhere but whose escape was recorded in history. So he ensured the youth of his safety saying that there was none named Daqyanoos or his like to rule over them and that the king then ruling was a Christian, believing in the religion of Prophet Isa and that there was peace, prosperity and absolutely no cause for worry.

Then the news that the companions of the Cave who were missing had reappeared after three hundred years spread like wild fire all around. The king who also believed in Only One God and who had read in history about the seven monotheist faithful youths who had escaped the tyranny of Daqyanoos also became very happy when he was informed that they had reappeared in his country. He called them respectfully to his court and gave them honor and

inquired about the whole event. The youth narrated every detail to the new king and informed that he and his companions who were asleep in the cave called Rafeem had woken up today from their 309-year sleep!

Hearing this miraculous story the king and his high-ranking courtiers went to the cave to bring back the remaining six companions of the cave and to give them utmost protection and honor. Reaching the mouth of the cave the youth who had led the royal personnel entered the cave first and told his companion all that had happened after he had left them in search of food. When his companions saw that over three centuries had passed and they had become totally alien and that Almighty God had already made them one of His signs, they prayed, "O Lord! Now lift us up (make us lifeless) so that we may not have to go to an alien society and that our faithful hearts may not become rusted with worldly desires."

So it is Almighty Allah Who cautioned the world that He will definitely bring to life all the dead who too are sleeping (like those in the cave of Rafeem) and that all will have to account for their deeds on the Day of Resurrection.

Those who deny the Day of Judgment should know that God's promise is true. When the king and the heads of his state saw that the faithful youths had already expired they thought it was of no use to take back their bodies. After consultation it was decided that a masjid should be built over there. The king constructed a mosque there.[4]

References

[1] Surah Kahf 18:9

[2] Surah Kahf 18:10-13

[3] Surah Kahf 18:17

[4] Please refer to verses 8-21 in Surah Kahf