

DAY 11

ANSWER: al-Kahf

SŪRAH AL-KAHF: VERSES 9-12

Do you think that the People of Kahf (the Cave) and Raqīm (inscription*) were unusual out of Our signs? [9]

When the young men took refuge in the Cave and said, "Our Lord, bless us with mercy from Your own and provide us with guidance in our matters!" [10]

So, We veiled their hearing (putting them to sleep) in the Cave for a number of years. [11]

Thereafter We raised them up, so that We know which of the two groups had best calculated the period they remained (sleeping). [12]

***The word Raqīm has been interpreted differently. Most of the commentators have preferred 'inscription' while others have taken it to be a mountain, a valley or a specific town.**

COMMENTARY

Lexical Explanation

Kahf is a large mountainous cave or cavern. If not large, it will be a *ghār*. The word: (*al-raqīm*) literally denotes: (*al-marqūm*) that is, something written. What does it mean at this place? The sayings of commentators differ about it. Ḍaḥḥāk, Sudiyy and Ibn Jubayr following the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās raḍī' allahu 'anhu declare it to mean a written tablet on which the ruler of the time had inscribed the names of the People of Kahf and had it fixed on the entrance to the Cave. For this reason, the People of Kahf are also called the People of al-Raqīm (the inscribed ones). Qatādah, 'Aṭiyyah, 'Awfī and Mujāhid have said that Raqīm is the name of the valley adjoining the mountain in which the hollow cavern of the People of Kahf was located. Some others have identified this mountain itself as the Raqīm. 'Ikrimah raḥimahullāhu ta'ālā, *"I have heard Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās raḍī' allahu 'anhu saying - I do not know whether Raqīm is the name of some inscribed tablet or some town."* Ka'b al-aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih report from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās that Raqīm is the name of a town near Ailah, that is, 'Aqabah, situated in the kingdom of the Romans.

Fityah in **verse 10** is the plural of: *fatā* which means a young man.

The expression: (translated as '**so, We veiled their hearing [putting them to sleep]' - 11**) literally means to plug ears to prevent someone from hearing. It is used to convey the sense of deep sleep. When sleeping, eyes close first but ears remain active. Sounds are heard. When sleep takes over completely, ears stop

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functioning. Later, when awake, ears resume their function first for sound startles the person sleeping who then comes out of his sleep.

SŪRAH AL-KAHF: VERSES 17-18

And you see the sun, when it rises, it turns away from their Cave towards the right; and when it sets, it by- passes them towards the left -and they are in the hollow thereof. That is one of the signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides is the one who gets the right path and whomsoever He lets go astray, you will find for him no one to help, no one to lead. [17]

And you think they are awake while they are asleep. And We turn them on their sides, right and left. And their dog has its forelegs stretched out to the doorstep. If you had a look at them, you would have fled away from them and would have been filled with awe of them. [18]

COMMENTARY

In these verses, Allah Ta'ālā has told us about three states of the People of Kahf. All three are indeed unique and it was the *karāmah*, a matter of wonder, that manifested itself in an extraordinary way around these people devoted to Allah (a thing of wonder that manifests itself at the hands of a prophet of Allah is called a *mu'jizah* or miracle, while if it appears at the hand of some other pious persons, it is called 'Karāmah').

First of all, to be overtaken by continuous sleep for a long time and to stay alive in that state without eating and drinking is by itself a matter of wonder, and certainly contra-habitual and extraordinary. Its details will appear in the verses that follow. Given here is one state of their long sleep, that is, Allah Ta'ālā had arranged for their protection in the Cave in a way that the Sun would pass by them morning and evening but would not shine over their bodies inside the Cave. The advantages of the sunshine passing by them were things like the stabilization of the traces of life, moderation and balancing of the effects of wind, chill and heat etc. And then, the Sun not hitting their bodies directly may have also been a factor in keeping their bodies and dress protected.

This arrangement of keeping them shielded from direct sunlight could also be conceived if the cave lies situated in a particular structural position and the opening of its entrance happens to face south or north in a way that sunlight does not get in there naturally. Ibn Qutaibah went to the trouble of making elaborate mathematical calculations to determine the peculiar location of this Cave precisely in terms of latitude and longitude. (Mazḥarī) Contrary to this was the approach of al-Zajjaj who said that the staying of sunshine away from them was not because of any inherent situation or formation of the Cave, instead, it was an extraordinary phenomenon manifested as a *karāmah*. It seems when it was said: **(That is one of the signs of Allah)** at the end of the verse, it was obviously there to prove that this arrangement of protection from

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the Sun was not the outcome of any particular formation or location of the Cave. Instead, it was a sign of the perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā. (Qurṭubī)

To put it candidly, Allah Ta'ālā had it all arranged for them that sunlight will not reach their bodies. It may have been caused through its particular formation or location, or through the barrier of a cloud or something similar when the Sun would start shining, or the very rays of the Sun would be moved away from them in an extraordinary manner.

All these probabilities exist within the verse. There is no need to insist upon fixing any of these as the absolute reality.

The People of Kahf during their long sleep were in a state that an onlooker would have taken them to be awake

The second state of the People of Kahf pointed out is that there were no signs of sleep on their bodies in spite of having been put to sleep for such a long period of time. In fact, they were in a condition that anyone who looked at them would think that they were awake. Generally, commentators say that their eyes were open. The body is relaxed in sleep but this relaxation was not there. The change in the momentum of breathing that comes upon the sleeping was also not there. It is obvious that this state too was nothing short of being extraordinary, a kind of Thaumaturgy (*karāmah*), in which the apparent consideration of wisdom was their protection lest someone taking them to be asleep attacks them, or steals things with them. Then, the changing of sides to the right and the left could also give an onlooker the realization of their being awake. And then, there was a particular benefit as well in changing sides - in that the dust they were sleeping on does not eat into an unchanged side.

Allah Ta'ālā had invested the People of Kahf with such awe as would make an onlooker run in terror

The address in **verse 18: (If you had a look at them)** is apparently to people at large. Therefore, it does not necessarily follow from it that the Holy Prophet ﷺ could be filled up with awe generated by the state of the People of Kahf in their Cave. So, the address here is to common people. They are being told that, were they to cast a look at them in that state, they would have fled away from them in terror and the resulting awe of them would have gripped them all over.

What was the basis of this awe and what were the reasons for it? This is something in which debate is useless - therefore, the Qur'ān, and Ḥadīth have not explained it. The truth of the matter is that Allah Ta'ālā, in His wisdom, had created such conditions for their protection that the Sun stays away from their bodies, and the onlooker takes them to be awake and is filled with awe of them and is consequently unable to see them fully. It is possible to have these conditions prevail by way of particular physical causes as

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well as by way of an extraordinary input or as the working of wonder (*karāmah*). Now, when the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth have not determined any particular reason for it, debating it with hollow conjectures is futile. Preferring this approach, Tafsīr Mazḥarī cites Ibn Abī Shaibah, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim in support. They have reported an event relating to Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās raḍī'allāhu 'anhu who says: 'we waged a Jihād against Byzantine forces in the company of Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah raḍī'allāhu 'anhu which is known as the battle of al-Maḍīq. On this trip, we passed through the site of the Cave of the People of Kahf. The Qur'ān mentions it. Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah wanted to go into the Cave and see the bodies of the People of Kahf. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās said, *'let us not do so because Allah Ta'ālā has already prohibited someone better than you from seeing them, that is, the Rasūl of Allah.'* Then, he recited this very verse: **(If you had a look at them, you would have fled from them and would have been filled with awe of them - 18)**. [This tells us that, in the sight of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the address in (If you had a look) was to the Holy Prophet ﷺ] But, Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah did not accept his opinion [perhaps, because he may have taken the address as being to common people and not to the Holy Prophet ﷺ]. Or, it may be that the Qur'ān has portrayed the condition of the time when the People of Kahf were alive and asleep. Now a long time had passed since they died. It was not likely that they would still have the same atmosphere of awe around them]. However, Sayyidna Mu'āwiyah, with his position unchanged, sent a few men to find out the facts. But, when they stepped into the Cave, Allah Ta'ālā sent a hot wind upon them because of which they could not see anything. (Mazḥarī)

SŪRAH AL-KAHF: VERSES 19-20

And similarly We raised them up so that they ask each other. One of them said, "How long did you stay?" They said, "A day, or part of a day." They said, "Your Lord knows best how long you stayed." So, send one of you with this silver (coin) of yours to the city and let him look around which of the eatables are the purest and let him bring you some food therefrom. And he must be polite and must not let anyone know about you. [19]

If they know about you, they will force you to revert to their faith and in that case, you will never find success. [20]

COMMENTARY

The word: (*kadhālik*) in the first sentence is for comparison. The purpose at this place is to describe the mutual likeness of two events. One of these is the event of the long sleep of the People of Kahf for an equally long period of time mentioned in the beginning of the story under the verse: **"So, We veiled their hearing (putting them to sleep) in the cave for a number of years - 11."** The second event relates to the rising of these people from that long drawn sleep - intact, healthy and fit despite the absence of any energy-giving intake - and becoming wide awake. Both are alike in being signs of the power of Allah Ta'ālā. For this reason, when **'raising them up'** was mentioned in this verse, the word: (*kadhālik*: **'And**

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similarly') was used to indicate that the way their sleep was not like the habitual sleep of common people, very similarly, their rising too was distinct from natural habit. Then, as for the next statement after that: meaning '**so that they ask each other [as to how long the sleep was],**' it is not the reason of '**raising them up.**' Instead, it is a mention of a usual phenomenon. Therefore, the particle: (*lām*) in: (*liyatasā'alū: so that they ask*) has been identified as the *lām of 'āqibah* (consequence) or *sairūrah* (result) meaning that which naturally follows as a sequel. (Abū Ḥayyān, al-Qurṭubī)

In short, their long sleep was a Divine sign. Similarly, sitting up all awake after hundreds of years - fit and healthy without usual nourishment - was also another perfect Divine sign. And it was also Divinely intended that they too should come to know that they have been sleeping through hundreds of years, therefore, it began with questions asked between each other and ended at the incident mentioned in the next verse: (**And in this way We made them known - 21**). It means that the people of the city knew their secret and, despite the difference in determining the period of their stay, everyone believed that they had been sleeping in the Cave for a long period of time.

Given in: (**One of them said - 19**) is the detail of what was said briefly at the beginning of the story (**12**) - that they differed about the period of their stay in the Cave and that one of them did say the right thing. According to this detail, one person from among the People of the Cave ventured to pose the question as to how long did they sleep. Then, came the response from some that said, '**a day, or part of a day**' - because, these people had entered the Cave in the morning and when they woke up, it was evening. Therefore, they thought, that was the day they had entered the Cave and the duration of their sleep was just about a day. But, some from among these very people realized that, perhaps, this was not the day they had entered the Cave. If so, who knows how many days have gone by? Therefore, they decided to let this particular knowledge about the event rest with Allah. By saying: (**Your Lord knows best how long you stayed - 19**), they dismissed this debate as unnecessary and turned their attention to the need of the hour, that is, to send a man to the city to bring some food from there.

The word: (*al-madīnah*) in the phrase: (*ilā al-madīnah: to the city*) proves at least this much that there used to be a big city close to the Cave where they had stayed. In his Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ, Abū Ḥayyān has said that the name of the city at the time the People of Kahf left was Ifsūs and now, the name was Ṭarsūs. Al-Qurṭubī has said in his Tafsīr that during the time idol-worship and ignorance prevailed in this city, its name was Ifsūs. But, when the believers of that time, that is, the followers of Sayyidnā Masīḥ 'alayhis salām, overtook it, they renamed it as Ṭarsūs.

The word: (**with this silver [coin] of yours - 19**) tells us that these good men had also brought some money with them when they came to the Cave. From here we know that the procurement and management of essential expenditures in life is not contrary to the norms of Zuhd (abstention from worldly desires) and

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Tawakkul (trust in Allah). (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ)

The word: (*azkā*) in: **(which are the purest - 19)** means what is clean and pure. According to the Tafsīr of Ibn Jubayr, it denotes Ḥalāl food. They were alert to the need for such precaution because at the time they had left the city, people used to slaughter animals in the name of idols and that was what they sold in the market. Therefore, they stressed upon the man going out to bring food only after making sure that it was Ḥalāl.

Ruling

This tells us that eating food in any city, bazaar or hotel, where most of the food available is Ḥarām, is not permissible without prior investigation.

The word: (*rajm*) in *aw yarjumūkum* means **‘they will stone you to death – 19.’** It will be recalled that the king had warned them - before they went to the Cave - that they will be killed if they kept adhering to their present faith. This verse tells us that a renegade in their faith used to be punished by being stoned to death in which everyone participated, expressed collective anger and lent a hand in killing him.

Perhaps, the punishment for adultery committed by a married man or woman by stoning to death, as proposed in the Sharī’ah of Islam, may be aimed at exposing the one guilty of this abominable act at the cost of all norms of modesty and propriety. The execution of the culprit was to remain public with everyone joining in so that two things were ensured - let that disgrace be at collective level, and let all Muslims express their wrath practically so that no one dares repeat this act of shame among them.

The expression: **(So, send one of you - 19)** tells us that the group in the Cave picked up a man from among them to go to the city and gave him the money to buy food which he would bring back. Al-Qurṭubī finds this significant. He quotes Ibn Khuwaizmandād and describes some rulings deduced from here:

Rulings

1. Partnership in capital is permissible - because, this amount was shared by all.
2. Power of attorney or delegation of management is permissible in capital, that is, one person can, as an authorized agent, disburse from shared capital with the permission of others.
3. If a group of people shares food, it is permissible - though, individual food intake usually differs with one eating less while the other, more.

SŪRAH AL-KAHF: VERSE 21

And in this way We made them known to the people so that they realize that Allah's promise is true and that there is no doubt about the Hour. When they were disputing among themselves in their

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matter, they said, "Erect a building over them. Their Lord knows them best!" Said those who prevailed in their matter, "We will certainly make a masjid (mosque) over them." [21]

COMMENTARY

Described in this verse which opens with the words: **(And in this way We made them known)** is the disclosure of the secret of the People of Kahf before the residents of the city. Along with it given there is a view of His wisdom, and of the belief in the Hereafter and the Last Day when the dead will rise again, and that they will ultimately believe in it. How this came about has been mentioned briefly in Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī as follows:

The secret of the People of Kahf: How did the people of the city learn about it?

When the People of Kahf went out, the Mushrik king Daqyānūs, the oppressive ruler of that city died. Centuries went by. Then, it was taken over by people who were pure monotheists. Their king was a righteous man (whose name has been given as Baidūsīs in Tafsīr Maḏharī with references to historical narratives). During his time, it so happened that differences became rampant on the issue of the dead rising again on the day of Qiyāmah. One sect rejected the possibility of human bodies rising again after the process of decomposition, disintegration and dispersal as scattered particles all over the world. Baidūsīs, the king of the time, started worrying about ways to dispel these doubts. When nothing worked, he got into ragged clothes, sat down on a heap of ash and prayed to Allah. Lamenting and pleading earnestly, he said, *'O Allah, now it is up to Thee to make things work out in a way that the belief of my people gets corrected and they take to the right path.'* On one side was this king engaged in his plaint and prayer while, on the other side, Allah Ta'ālā arranged to have his supplication answered in His own way. The People of Kahf woke up. They sent one of their men (reportedly named Tamlikha) to the city bazaar to buy food. He went to a shop and paid for the food he bought in the form of a silver coin dating back to the time of king Daqyānūs who reigned there three hundred years ago. The shopkeeper was taken aback. Where did this coin come from? What period does it belong to? He was confused. He showed it to other shopkeepers. Everyone said that the man had struck some treasure and was there with a coin from it. This man told them that nothing of that kind had happened to him and the coin was his own.

The shopkeepers detained him and produced him before the king. As said earlier, this king was a righteous man of Allah. It is said that he was aware of the old state treasure house and in its archaeological section he had also seen the tablet inscribed on which there was a list of the names of the People of Kahf along with the description of the incident of their escape. According to some, the cruel king Daqyānūs was the one who had ordered that such a tablet should be inscribed to declare them as proclaimed offenders, to preserve their names and addresses and to have them arrested on sight. Some other reports say that there were people in the royal court who disapproved of idol-worship by heart and took the People of Kahf as votaries of truth. But, they did not have the courage to declare it openly. What they did was to have this

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tablet inscribed to be kept as memorabilia. The name of this tablet was Raqīm because of which the People of Kahf were also called the People of Raqīm.

So, this king knew something about this event and at that time he was busy praying to Allah that He would somehow make his people believe that making dead bodies rise again was not beyond His most perfect power.

Therefore, when he inquired into the background of Tamlīkhā, he was convinced that the man was one of the People of Kahf. He said that he used to pray to Allah in the hope that He would somehow make him fortunate enough to meet the people who had run away from Daqyānūs for the sake of their faith. Now that Allah had perhaps heard his prayer, he was grateful. May be there is, in this event, some decisive proof that makes people believe in the rising of the dead. After saying this, he asked this man to take him to the Cave from where he had come.

The king arrived there with a retinue of people from the city. When the Cave came close, Tamlīkhā asked the king to wait there for a while so that he could go in and inform his companions about the situation. He would tell them that the king was there to meet them along with his people and that the king was a believer, a monotheist and so were his people. If he failed to do that, and the king appeared there unannounced, it was likely that they might take him to be their enemy like the previous one. When Tamlīkhā went in the Cave, he related the whole story before his companions. They were pleased. They greeted the king showing due respect for him. Then they returned to their Cave. And as most narratives have it, when Tamlīkhā related the whole story before his companions, they died and could not meet the king. At this stage, Abu Ḥayyān has reported a narrative in al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ which says that after the meeting, the People of the Cave took leave of the king and the visiting citizens and went into the Cave. It was at that time that Allah Ta'ālā sent death to them. Allah knows best the reality as it is.

However, the people of the city now had before them a marvel of Divine power manifested so decisively and clearly. They came to believe in the working of that power. They saw living human beings kept alive for three hundred years without food and things essential in life. And then, they also saw them raised intact, healthy and fit after having been kept asleep for such a long time. With all this in view, why should it be at all difficult for that power to make these bodies come alive after having met their death? Through this event, their perception that the resurrection of bodies was a far-out proposition stood refuted. They now realized that taking the Power of the master of the universes on the analogy of the power of human beings was an act of ignorance by itself.

A hint was made towards this very aspect in the words: **(so that they realize that Allah's promise is true and that there is no doubt about the Hour)**. It means, *'Allah raised the People of Kahf after having kept*

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them asleep for a long time so that others realized that His promise to raise the dead on the Last Day of Qiyāmah was true, and that there was no doubt about the coming of the Qiyāmah.'

People differed after the death of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf

As for the holiness of the People of Kahf, everyone agreed about that and thought of making a memorial for them close to the Cave. However, there was a difference of opinion on the nature of the building. Some reports tell us that idol-worshippers, still left in the city, also used to visit the site. They proposed that it should be a public welfare building. But, the king and the official in his government were believers who played a dominant role in public affairs. They proposed that they should make a mosque over there so that it serves as a memorial to them and also becomes the cause of saving people from idol-worshipping the future. At this place in the Qur'ān, the reference to this difference of opinion is hemmed in by the sentence: **(Their Lord knows them best)**.

Regarding the meaning of this sentence, Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ has mentioned two probabilities. (1) This was said by the same people from the city present there, because when a memorial was proposed after their death, people thought of inscribing a tablet mentioning the names and the details about the people of the Cave for the memory of whom the building was to be dedicated. And so they started talking variously about the background details concerning the People of Kahf. In the end, when their differences remained unresolved, they said: **(their Lord knows them best)**. After saying that, they turned to the main job at hand which was raising a building in their memory. Those who were dominant decided to make a mosque. (2) Then, the probability that this was said by Allah Ta'ālā also exists here as it warns people who indulged in mutual disputations around baseless issues during that time. They are being told here that they do not know the reality and they do not have the sources to arrive at that knowledge. Why, then, would they waste their precious time in futile argumentation? Then, it is also possible that the warning was beamed at Jews and others who used the crutch of this event to indulge in baseless debates during the blessed time of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Pure and High is Allah who knows best.

Ruling

This event tells us that making a *masjid* for Ṣalāḥ near the graves of men of Allah is no sin. As for the Ḥadīth in which words of curse have appeared against those who make the graves of prophets a *masjid*, it means making the graves as such a place of *sajdah* or prostration - which is, by consensus, *Shirk*, and *Harām*. (Maḏharī)

This concludes the commentary for Day 11.