*The Companions of the Cave – Part I*

*Ramadan – Ashton Central Mosque – 17/07/13*

In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. All prayers and peace of Allah be upon Prophet Muhammad.

***Today’s Story:***

Today’s story is mentioned in Surat al-Kahf (the Cave). It is related that the Prophet said that whoever reads this surah every Friday will be shown a light between heaven and earth throughout the whole week.

The story is about a group of young people, about six or seven, who were in their teens.

**نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى**

“Surely they were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.” (18: 13)

This story is considered to be a Qur’anic miracle and a true evidence of Muhammad’s prophethood. Surat al-Kahf was revealed in Makkah at a time when the people of Quraysh were trying to falsify the Prophet’s prophecy. They sent two men, an-Nadr Ibn-al-Harith and Oqbah Ibn-abi-Ma’eet, to the Jewish monks in Madinah asking them for a question that the Prophet Muhammad would not be able to answer. They wanted the question to be about a story that took place after the revelation of Tawrah and Injil (Gospel); one that no-one except a true prophet would know. The monks suggested that they should ask him about a group of young men who lived a very long time ago. They went to the Prophet and asked him about them. The Prophet told them that he would answer them the following day but he did not say “if Allah wills".

**وَلا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًاإِلا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ**

“And definitely do not say, regarding anything, ‘Surely I am performing that tomorrow,’ Except (if you add), If Allah (so) decides…” (18: 23-24)

The revelation was delayed, and the people of Quraysh started to doubt. After 15 days, the Prophet received a Qur’anic revelation relating the story.

**أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا (٩)إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا (١٠)فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا (١١)ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا (١٢)نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى**

“Or even do you reckon that the Companions of the Cave and Ar-Raqîm were among Our signs a wonder? As the young men took (their) abode in the cave, (and) so they said, ‘Our Lord, bring us mercy from very close to You, and dispose for us rectitude in our Command. Then We struck upon their ears for a (great) number of years in the cave. Thereafter We made them to rise again that We might know whichever of the two parties would best enumerate the span they had lingered. We, Ever We, narrate to you their tidings with the truth. Surely they were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.” (18: 9-13)

The whole story is related in the Qur’an so that we can learn from it and at the same time it answers Quraysh’s questions. This is a miracle because the Prophet knew nothing about this story before.

***The First Question Was, “How Long Had They Slept?”***

**وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَازْدَادُوا تِسْعًا**

The answer was, “And they lingered in their cave three hundred years, and to that they increased nine (more).” (18: 25).

***The Second Question Was, “How Many Were They?”***

**سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلاثَةٌ رَابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلا قَلِيلٌ فَلا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا وَلا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا**

The answer was, “They will say, ‘Three, their dog (was) the fourth of them.’ And (others) will say, ‘Five, their dog (was) the sixth of them,’ guessing at the Unseen. (Some others) will say, ‘Seven, and their dog (was) the eighth of them.’ Say, ‘My Lord knows best their right number; none knows them, except a few.’…” (18: 22)

The Qur’an mentions that most likely they were seven. Also, Ibn-Abbas narrated that the Prophet said that he was among the few who knew their number and that they were seven. This defies the Jews and their monks because their exact number is not mentioned in their books. They were few in number but they changed the world, which proves that it does not take a large number of people to create a change.

The events of today’s story took place about 150 years after Isa. The youth had slept for 309 years and woke up in 450 A.D., which is about 150 years before the revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad. The youth in the story were Christians. The surah begins with condemning those who claim that Allah has a child.

**الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجَا (١)قَيِّمًا لِيُنْذِرَ بَأْسًا شَدِيدًا مِنْ لَدُنْهُ وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا (٢)مَاكِثِينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا (٣)وَيُنْذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا (٤)مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلا لآبَائِهِمْ كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلا كَذِبًا**

“Praise be to Allah Who has sent down upon His bondman the Book and has not made to it any crookedness; most upright, to warn of strict violence from very close to Him, and to give good tidings to the believers who do very deeds of righteousness that they will have a fair reward; staying therein forever. And to warn the ones who have said, ‘Allah has taken to Him a child.’ In no way do they have any knowledge of it, (they) nor their fathers. An odious word it is, coming out of their mouths; decidedly they say nothing except a lie.” (18: 1-5)

Isa lived in Palestine and had many followers. However, the Romans oppressed them and continued to do so up to 100 years after Isa. Whoever objected was killed by the Romans and left to be eaten up by lions. This was very unlike Islam where there is no obligation for anyone to follow it, “There is no compulsion in the religion…” (2: 256).

Before Islam, pagan women of the tribes of al-Aws and al-Khazraj lost a lot of children. They therefore used to convert their children to Judaism, in the hope that they would live. When these same mothers became Muslims they wanted to force their children to convert to Islam. This was when this ayah was revealed. The Prophet did not want to force the people of the tribes of Aws and al-Khazraj to embrace Islam.

***The Story In Detail:***

Jordan was once ruled by an oppressive emperor who terrorised and killed Christians. Only one man survived and he decided to convey the message to some young people before he too got killed. He succeeded in convincing seven youth, separately, to believe in Allah. Ibn-Kathir, relates their story as follows.

One day, when the people of this city were celebrating their gods, the seven young men went to the festival with their families; however, they could not celebrate with them because they had become believers in Allah. Each one of them secretly slipped away and sat under a distant tree. They all met at that same tree but they just sat there silently for a considerable time. Then, suddenly, one of them said, “By Allah! I left for the very same cause you all left for.” They then started to converse until they became good friends. Allah praised their friendship in the Noble Qur’an as an example of good friendship and called them “the Companions of the Cave”. Allah teaches us the moral of their story

**وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ**

“And endure yourself patiently with the ones who invoke their Lord in the early morning and nightfall…” (18: 28)

This shows you the importance of having good and carefully chosen friends because they will influence you. They will also affect your relationship with Allah, your family and your entire future. We should also learn to be responsible for the society we live in and to try to reform it.

The seven had a very harmonious relationship despite the fact that they came from different social backgrounds. One of them was the king’s cousin; one was a shepherd and so forth. The driving force that kept them together was the desire to help other people, which was for them an avenue for worshiping Allah.

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“Surely they were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance” (18:13)

The king soon found out about them and became so furious. He ordered that they either give up their new religion or be killed. They then had three options:

* Give up their faith,
* Get killed,
* Conspire against the king,

One of them suggested that they go to the cave they used to meet in to think and plan together how to get back into the city. They decided that there was no way they could give up their faith for the king. They had all left their homes suddenly, without bidding their families farewell and with no supply of food or water. They went out to an unknown destiny. The cave itself symbolizes fear, darkness, suspense, death, and all sorts of scary meanings. However, they overcame all this with the support and guidance of Allah

**وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ**

“And We braced (tied) their hearts…” (18: 14)

This is because they remembered Allah and worshipped him at times of serenity so he was with them at times of suffering.

Why was this Surah named “al-Kahf”

**فَأْوُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ**

“so take (your) abode in the cave…” (18: 16)

Caves are usually dark and creepy. However, the word “abode” indicates that that very cave was a peaceful shelter for the youth. The word “abode”, in its peaceful meaning, is mentioned in the Noble Qur’an only three times. The first is about our Prophet Muhammad when Allah says what can be translated as, “Did He not find you an orphan, so He gave (you) an abode.” (93: 6). The second is about Yusuf when he met his parents after a long time of separation, “he gave an abode to his two parents…” (12: 99). The third time is in today’s story. The cave was small but filled with peace and mercy.

“The cave” was chosen to be the name of the surah because it symbolizes choice. Every one of us will get into a situation where he or she must choose between faith in Allah and this worldly life. For example, when Suhaib ar-Roomi immigrated from Makkah to Madinah, he had to leave all his wealth behind and he did not hesitate in doing that. Another example is that when Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Prize winner, wanted to establish a bank for the needy using his own money. His wife objected and told him that he was wasting the money of their children and asked him to choose between staying with her or going on with his charity project. He chose his project. I wonder what his wife thinks now after he got the Nobel Prize!

***The Moment They Entered The Cave:***

**فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا**

The moment they entered the cave, they prayed to Allah to have mercy upon them, “(and) so they said, ‘Our Lord, bring us mercy from very close to You, and dispose for us rectitude in our Command.’ (18: 10)

When we fall into trouble, we resort to Allah.

**أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ**

“Is not He Who answers the constrained person when he invokes Him…” (27: 62)

There were 6 or 7 young men who had a message and a dream to reform their country and inform their people of the Oneness of Allah. However, their king did not approve that, and a call for their arrest was issued. Thus they decided to flee to the cave in order to plan what they will do next.

We discussed why Allah had allowed their message to face such a hardship. In that we talked about Allah's name al-Wakeel (The Ultimate Trustee). We said that you have to carry out what you are obliged to do and then trust that Allah will grant you success. We should not allow our dreams to be encompassed by mere personal visions. Instead, be like the Companions of the Cave who had a dream to reform their whole country.

Someone's dream might be to enlighten his village. Another could undertake the role of teaching the illiterate. Yet another could aim at using the media to brighten youngsters. The major character that makes humans distinct from other creatures is the ability to dream People who do not dream are not alive. Leave your mark, leave your legacy