*The Story of Musa and al-Khidr – Part I*

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Our story today is mysterious. It is narrated in twenty-two ayahs in the Noble Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad narrated it as well which highlights its importance. It is a historical encounter between one of the greatest messengers and an extraordinary scholar/saint of Allah. That prophet sought to meet the scholar/saint and not vice versa. It is the story of Prophet Musa and al-Khidr.

Little is known about al-Khidr: no real name, no age, no exact place, no familial information, almost nothing sure. Was he a messenger of Allah? One of the devotees of Allah? An angel? No one knows this for sure. However, regardless of these details, our concern today is with the secret of this man: knowledge.

Ironically enough, Prophet Musa travelled thousands of miles to learn just three subjects from al-Khidr and then return, and the first ayah that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad was “Read”.

40% of Arabs are illiterate and even the literate do not take an interest in reading. Our history and culture are fraught with examples that urge us to learn and read. The first object Allah created was the pen and He ordered it to write. Allah created Adam and He taught him all the names. At the end of the battle of Badr, Prophet Muhammad asked each one of Quraysh’s war prisoners to teach ten Muslims for their ransom. At that time Muslims were in dire need for money; however, the Prophet opted for knowledge rather than wealth.

This is how we began and, sadly enough, this is how we are right now: rote learning, negligence of knowledge, and the highest illiteracy percentage in the world. Out of all this, the importance of today’s Qur’anic parable arises. Without knowledge there is no hope for a renaissance for this ummah. In twenty years, Mahathir Muhammad, Malaysian previous prime minister, achieved the modern renaissance of Malaysia through education: he allocated 20% of the country’s budget to education. Strangely enough, the lowest illiteracy percentage in the Arab world is in Palestine (0.9%) whose people live in such a continuous disaster.

The aim of our story is: we should read and acquire knowledge. I am going to mention three merits of the true learner and seventeen points of which one can choose. If you can keep them up for six months, then I see a bright future for you and for this ummah.

**Banu-Israel**

It all began in Egypt where Banu-Israel lived under the oppression of Pharaoh. The Egyptians at that time were prosperous because they had prominent scientists and scholars. Prophet Musa believed that there was no hope for Banu-Israel without knowledge; praying and worshipping are not sufficient. Musa kept preaching his people the importance of knowledge but to no avail. They were hungry and rather occupied with the hard circumstances of their lives and the means to make a living.

**Importance Of The Story:**

Allah wanted to change all this:

**وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي الأرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ**

“And We are willing to be bounteous to the ones who were deemed weak in the land, and make them leaders, and make them the inheritors” (28:5) How? Through knowledge first.

Prophet Muhammad tells us that once Prophet Musa was asked about the most learned man amongst the people. Musa said, "I am the most learned." Allah admonished him as he did not attribute absolute knowledge to Allah. Allah revealed to him that there was a person at the junction between the two seas who was more learned than him and that he should go and learn from him. The place was not specified. Musa had to search from north to south Egypt; he had to exert his utmost effort in pursuing knowledge. In the light of this, can you imagine that we do not even like reading? We must do more than seek degrees; we must develop this passion for knowledge.

Musa was ordered to take a salted large fish in a basket and proceed. At the place where he would lose the fish he would find that scholar. The symbol of the fish is important: when one loses the food of the stomach one would have to recourse to the food of the mind. It is a matter of mystery: learning by exciting the curiosity. Allah could have told him the exact place and ordered Jibril to take him there at once. However, the point was to show the importance of practical knowledge and that we should do our best to attain it.

**Choice Of A Companion**

Prophet Musa chose his companion Yusha' Ibn-Nun to accompany him on this mysterious and tiring journey. Although he only carried the basket, this boy learned by experience so much on this journey. Later on, he became the leader of Banu-Israel and retrieved Jerusalem. He achieved this because he was a natural true learner at heart; he had the three merits of a true scholar: profound patience, humility and serenity of soul, and the desire to acquire beneficial knowledge. Prophet Musa was his model.

**وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا**

“And as Musa said to his page, “I will not leave off until I reach the junction of the two seas, or I will spend epochs/years travelling.” (18:60)

One epoch is about 25 years. Prophet Musa was really avid for learning. He was an embodiment of the Qur’anic supplication addressed to Prophet Muhammad “and say “Lord! Increase me in knowledge.” (20:114) Interestingly, this ayah was revealed to Prophet Muhammad when he was fifty years old -we must never have enough of knowledge

**Value Of Knowledge**

Prophet Muhammad stressed the importance of knowledge in many situations. He told his companions that the angels and all creatures pray for the scholars; Allah helps the one who seeks knowledge; the scholar is better than the worshiper as the moon is better than the other planets; and that the scholars are the inheritors of Allah’s prophets.

The Companions and the Followers took a deep interest in seeking knowledge. Ali Ibn-Abi- Talib said, “Knowledge is better than money because knowledge protects you while you protect money.” Imam ash-Shafi'y toured the whole world to learn. He memorized the Noble Qur’an at seven and memorized ten thousand lines of poetry at thirteen. Imam Ahmad Ibn-Hanbal said that his care for knowledge is like that of a mother who searches passionately for her lost child. Averroes (Ibn-Rushd) mentioned that he never left reading except on two days: the day his father died and the day of his marriage.

**Musa’s Search For Al-Khidr**

Prophet Musa set out along with his servant boy. When they reached the rock at the junction they forgot their fish which became alive and got out of the basket and into the sea.

**فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِفَتَاهُ آتِنَا غَدَاءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا**

Allah says what can be translated as “Then, as soon as they passed over, he said to his page, “Bring us our dinner; (Or: early meal, breakfast) indeed we have already encountered fatigue from this, our journey.” (18:62)

**قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْحُوتَ وَمَا أَنْسَانِيهُ إِلا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا**

The reply was “Have you seen (that) as we sought our abode on the rock, then surely I forgot the whale (Or: large fish) and in no way did anything make me forget it except ash-Shaytan (Satan) so that I should not remember it, and it took its way into the sea in a wondrous (manner).” (18:63)

Satan did not want this journey to materialize because it was the meeting of a scholar and a prophet and that would bring forth a lot of knowledge and value to us.

**Musa Meets Al-Khidr**

**فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا**

They turned back and there at the rock “they (both) found one of Our bondmen to whom We had brought mercy from Our Providence, and had taught him knowledge from very close to Us.” (18:65)

Knowledge and mercy should be inseparable. This is the third merit we mentioned before: searching for beneficial knowledge. Knowledge without mercy leads to disasters. The man was asleep. Would they awaken him? No. They would wait for him. Prophet Musa’s unique soul and mentality was evident. The prophet who had been always the leader of his people had become a knowledge-seeker, and he was not ashamed to behave like a modest learner in front of his master.

**قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَى أَنْ تُعَلِّمَنِ مِمَّا عُلِّمْتَ رُشْدًا**

Prophet Musa greeted al-Khidr and asked him, "May I follow you so that you teach me of that knowledge you have been taught." Al-Khidr replied,

**قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا**

"Verily! You will not be able to remain patient with me." It is a dialogue between two great personalities; it is a dialogue about acquiring knowledge. Prophet Musa used the word “follow” not “accompany.”

**قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا**

Although al-Khidr implicitly refused at the beginning, Prophet Musa was insistent. He said “You will find me, in case Allah (so) decides, patient; and I will not disobey you in any command (of yours).” (18:69) Now Musa (AS) and al-Khidr had an agreement: Musa was to follow him provided that he does not ask about anything until he explains it to him. Isn’t it time we start to take interest in reading?

The next are seventeen points, which I believe can assert knowledge in this ummah. Contemplate them. Choose ten and keep them up and I guarantee to you and to our ummah, if Allah wills, a bright and successful future:

* Read A Book Every Week Or Every Two Weeks,
* Read A Purposeful Newspaper Daily,
* Subscribe To A Cultural Magazine,
* Travel Around The World,
* Learn A Handicraft From A Specialist,
* Visit The Landmarks In Your Country Along With An Expert,
* Accompany A Successful Person To Learn From His Experience,
* Watch Discovery Channel,
* Research Your Pedigree,
* Try Writing A Story, A Poem, A Song, Or An Idea,
* Do Not Be Shy To Discuss And Ask Questions In Class,
* Visit A Public Library,
* Learn A New Skill Or A Sport Every Three Months.