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

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**Musa's Situation upon Meeting al-Khidr**

Prophet Musa resorted to al-Khidr after having long suffering of oppression and tyranny under Pharaoh’s rule. He considered al-Khidr his portal to unconditional knowledge away from Pharaoh’s tyranny. The knowledge al-Khidr passed on to Prophet Musa was practical, and this is indeed the most ideal way to educate principles and doctrines, by practice and application. Al-Khidr’s knowledge was about the unseen, the contentment with Allah’s decree and predestination it was a knowledge of certainty concerning Allah’s names: The All-Knowing, The Ever-Wise and The Ever-Merciful.

But let us first reflect on an important and relevant issue, if we look around us we will see how the human life is full of tragedies and calamities; for instance, a mother might lose her child, wives could be unfairly treated and poor families could lose their only means of sustenance. While many are suffering such hardships and miseries, equally many others are enjoying the comfort and pleasure of wealth, health, family and success, life is indeed perplexing and may seem very unfair at times! Moreover, there are the natural disasters claiming thousands of lives, orphaning many children and inflicting misery and separation upon many households and families. Where is Allah’s mercy in all this? Is there wisdom behind all this suffering?

**Contentment with Allah’s Decree and Predestination, Pleasant or Unpleasant**

Faith in Allah’s decree and acceptance of His preordainment be it good or bad. To achieve this degree of faith you need to fully appreciate and consider the three names of Allah: The All-Knowing, The Ever-Wise and The Ever-Merciful. The more you truly believe in these Names of Allah, the stronger your faith in Allah’s Will and Wisdom will grow and the more satisfied and understanding you will be of the world’s contradicting affairs from the falling of a tree leaf to the turmoil of a hurricane.

Allah’s decree for whatever befalls mankind stems from a supreme and absolute wisdom and goodness that most of us cannot recognize and this is what our story focuses on. Recall what Allah says and can be translated as, “And in His Providence are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them except He. And He knows whatever is in the land and the sea. And in no way does a leaf fall down, except that He knows it, and not a grain in the darkness (es) of the earth, not a thing wet or dry, except that it is in an evident Book “ (6:59).

**Examples from the Prophet's Life**

Consider the Prophet and how he wisely dealt with the calamity of losing his son to death, which is the most distressful affliction that can befall any father, by all means. The Prophet had lost seven children already, and on the death of Ibrahim, his son, the Prophet wept and made dua’a to Allah. The All-Knowing knows what happened and will happen and could have happened. Not a single atom in the world shifts except by the Wisdom of the Ever-Wise. Consider what Allah says and can be translated as, “Say, “O Allah, Possessor of the Kingship, You bring the kingship to whomever You decide, and You draw (Literally: pluck out) the kingship from whomever You decide, and You render mighty whomever You decide, and You humiliate whomever You decide. In Your Hand is (the) Charity; (i.e., the choicest) surely You are Ever-Determiner over everything” (3:26).

**Educating Musa of Allah’s Power/Wisdom**

Allah chose to educate Prophet Musa by three incidents relevant to mankind and issues such as sustenance and livelihood, losing loved ones, especially one’s children and getting married late due to the delay of one's sustenance, etc. We will see the events taking place in the beginning of the stories, and eventually we will observe how fate reveals the good that lies behind them.

“Prescribed for you is fighting, and you have a hatred for it; and it may be that you hate a thing, while (Literally: and) it is most charitable for you; and it may be that you love a thing while (Literally: and) it is evil for you; and Allah knows and you do not know. “, (2:216)

So Musa and al-Khidr set off to the vast world of Allah. Prophet Musa encounters people from all walks of life: the poor, the youth, the miserly, the orphan, simply mankind in general. He gets involved in the society with its problems, and as such scholars and preachers should be.

**The First Journey**

Prophet Musa and al-Khidr encounter a coast-to-coast ship whose passengers are poor but chivalrous as they offer to transport Prophet Musa and al-Khidr for no fee out of respect for al-Khidr. When they both embark, a bird comes down to the sea to take a sip of water and al-Khidr asks Prophet Musa how much water he thinks the bird has sipped. Prophet Musa answers that it is likely to be a drop or two. In response al-Khidr says that his knowledge and al-Khidr’s knowledge combined are about the same amount as these drops in relevance to Allah’s knowledge! Observe how al-Khidr uses illustrative methods derived from nature to convey his message and make his point clear.

Al-Khidr punctures a hole in the bottom of the ship after making sure that none of the crew or passengers has seen him and without explaining himself to Prophet Musa which is very much like fate and destiny.

**فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا قَالَ لا تُؤَاخِذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا**

“So they (both) went off until, when they embarked in the ship, he pierced it. He said, “Have you pierced it so as to drown its population (i.e., a passengers). Indeed you have already come with a grave thing.” Said he, “Did I not say that surely you would never be able to (endure) with me patiently?” He said, “Do not take me to task that I forgot, nor oppress me with a command (too) difficult (for me)” (18:71-73).

**The Second Journey**

They disembark and Prophet Musa believes that what al-Khidr has just done is evil. Then they arrive at a village and run into some young boys playing. Al-Khidr stops and gazes at one boy in particular and kills him.

**فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَهَا فَلا تُصَاحِبْنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِنْ لَدُنِّي عُذْرًا**

“So they (both) went off until, when they (both) met a youth, then he killed him. He said, “Have you killed a most cleansed self without (his having killed another) self? Indeed you have already come with a (highly) maleficent thing.” Said he, “Did I not say to you that surely you would never be able to (endure) with me patiently?” He said, “In case I ask you about anything after (this), then keep me in (your) company (no more); you have already had (Literally: reached) excuse (sufficient) on my part.” (Literally: from close to me)” (18: 74-76).

**The Third Journey**

Now, they are in the village and they are both hungry, yet the villagers are miserly and none of them agrees to provide them with food. Al-Khidr keeps walking as if in quest for something. Then he starts restoring a wall in the village that was about to collapse. At this moment, Prophet Musa grows impatient with al-Khidr and complains to him, as he cannot comprehend al-Khidr's contradicting behaviour such as sabotaging the ship of the poor kind people and being kind to the undeserving miserly villagers!

Illustrating this in the Qur'an,

**فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا أَتَيَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطْعَمَا أَهْلَهَا فَأَبَوْا أَنْ يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَنْقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لاتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا**

“So they (both) went off until, when they came up to the population of a city, they asked its population for food, yet they refused to receive them hospitably (i.e. as guests). Then they found therein a wall that would have collapsed down, so he set it up. He said, “If you so decided, indeed you could have taken to yourself a reward for it.”

Al-Khidr responds, "Said he, “This is the parting between me and you. I will soon (fully) inform you regarding the interpretation of what you were unable to (endure) patiently" (18:77-78).

Musa objected to the agreement he had made with al-Khidr for the first time because he felt he was being unjust and evil. Al-Khidr responded, “This is the parting between me and you. I will soon (fully) inform you regarding the interpretation of what you were unable to (endure) patiently” (18: 78).

**Interpretation of Story One**

Al-Khidr clarified matters to Musa regarding his first journey and the ship in which he had made a hole,

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

“As for the ship, then it belonged to (certain) indigent persons who did (their business) upon the sea. Then I willingly damaged it, (and) beyond them was a king who was taking away every ship by force” (18:79).

Belonging to a group of needy villagers, the ship was of economic value to their village. The entire village depended on the small gains the fishermen made using this ship. It was on its way for fishing in a neighbouring village where an evil King happened to live. This king seized every good vessel that passed his village in order to add to his fleet. With this knowledge al-Khidr had to cause a minor damage to the vessel to protect it from a greater harm, for the King would not take a damaged ship. If al-Khidr had not intervened in this way, the boat’s crew could have been killed or imprisoned. This could have led to the loss of the provision of an entire village that was dependent on the ship.

**The Meaning and Value of being Content**

You never know when problems in your life could actually be a source of good for you! If you think back of times when you made big achievements in your life, you will find that these achievements had been preceded by some form of suffering. The beginning of the story of the slaughter of Isma’il appears to be a plight, yet to this day the poor around the world are fed on Eid al-Adha, commemorating this event. If Hajar and her son Isma’il had not gone through their personal trauma, the spring Zamzam would not have gushed out. If Yusuf had not been thrown in the well, Egypt would have suffered starvation.

**The Rewards of Being Content**

To be content is to thank Allah and to accept all that is pre-ordained by Him for his subjects without objecting. It also means being with Allah and complying with His will. The heart should be satisfied with Allah's choice. If a Muslim, repeats “I am content with Allah as my God, Islam as my faith and the Prophet Muhammad as my messenger,” morning and evening and after every adhan, Allah is bound to reward them and to forgive their sins.

Prophet Muhammad emphasizes in his teachings that the best thing a believer can do is to have faith in Allah and his messenger and strive in the cause of Allah. Whereas, the worst thing a Muslim can do is complain with Allah over something that is pre-ordained by Him. Allah says, “Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favour on you, and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you. And whoever is constrained in scantiness, (i.e., compelled by need) without unfairly (inclining) to vice, then surely Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful” (TMQ, 5:3).

**Interpretation of Story Two**

**وَأَمَّا الْغُلامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا**

“And as for the youth, then his parents (Literally: his two fathers) were believers; so we were apprehensive he would oppress them with (his) in ordinance and disbelief (18:80). So we willingly (intended) that their Lord would give them (both) in exchange a more charitable (person) in cleansing (i.e., a better, purer son) than he and nearer in tenderness” (18: 81).

Allah knew that the future of this boy was that he would become a tyrant. Therefore, the wisdom behind the birth of the boy could be that his father was destined for a higher rank in al-jannah in the event of his son’s death. Perhaps Allah was to bless the parents of the boy with another more virtuous son.

The son may have also been killed to provide a lesson to the youth. If this boy had lived he would have been destined for hell but his death at a young age meant he was destined to enter al-jannah. Thus, his death was beneficial to the society, to his parents and himself.

**Other Examples Of Being Content**

I recently met a mother who had lost her young son she was devastated. I told her that sometimes there is wisdom behind the loss of a child at a young age. His death has given her the opportunity to pray and ask for forgiveness for him in order to be admitted in al-jannah. Hence, the son's death is mercy to both son and mother.

**قَالَ اللَّهُ هَذَا يَوْمُ يَنْفَعُ الصَّادِقِينَ صِدْقُهُمْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الأنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ**

“This is the Day the sincere ones will profit by their sincerity (Literally: their sincerity will benefit the sincere “ones”). For them are Gardens from beneath which Rivers run, eternally (abiding) therein forever. Allah is satisfied with them, and they are satisfied with Him. That is the magnificent triumph” (5:119).”

**Interpretation Of Story Three**

**وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلامَيْنِ 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**

“And as for the wall, then it belonged to two orphan youths in the city, and beneath it was a hoarding belonging to them; and their father was a righteous (man). So your Lord willed that they should reach full age and take out their hoarding as a mercy from your Lord; and in no way did I perform it upon my own command. This is the interpretation of what you were unable to (endure) patiently” (18:82).

The father of the two orphans knew that the villagers were very miserly so he hid the treasure under the wall until they were strong enough to unearth it. When al- Khidr passed by the wall he saw that it was about to fall and so he fixed the wall to ensure that the treasure would remain safe until the orphans reached maturity.

We learn from this story that if you are an honest and virtuous parent, Allah will always protect your children. The orphans had to wait longer for their treasure but this delay was beneficial and merciful for them. This story also teaches youth to protect their future by doing good deeds and by respecting their parents.

**Mercy Is The Essence Of Life**

The conclusion of these stories is that the destruction of the boat, the killing of the boy and the postponement of sustenance are all acts of mercy. Mercy is the core of life; motherhood and family embody mercy as does the Prophets. Prophet Muhammad is the epitome of mercy as detailed in the Qur’an, “And in no way have We sent you except as a mercy to the worlds” (21:107).

The three journeys that Musa undertook taught him the virtue of patience and equipped him with the necessary knowledge to complete his missionary work with the Israelites. His journey with al-Khidr taught him how Allah’s decree solves the problems of individuals, consequently entire nations.

This story provides our Muslim ummah with much needed hope, “Prescribed for you is fighting, and you have a hatred for it; and it may be that you hate a thing, while it is most charitable for you; and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you; and Allah knows and you do not know” (2:216).