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The People of the Cave Standing Firm in Faith

God informs us that the Quran is meant for reflection and contemplation. "A Book which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Passages, and that those of understanding may remember."

[38:29] One such story that is worthy of contemplation is the story of the people of the cave - a story of how to remain firm in faith in the face of harm and persecution. It is a story centering around a group of young men who were not messengers, but ordinary people who accepted the message of God.

The story of the people of the cave is about a group of believing youth who lived in a polytheistic society, wherein those who accepted the call of God were persecuted for their beliefs. These youth were the only ones in the city to believe in God. The king was a tyrannical man and their people were known for their dislike of anything except their false religion. When the time came for them to be questioned by the king about the rumours being spread that they had abandoned his religion, and found a different path, they were full of courage and steadfastness.

The believing youth realized that if they remained in the city, their lives would be forfeit, so they decided to flee and find another land. They fled their city for fear of their lives just as the Disciples of the Messenger Muhammad fled Mecca seeking the sanctuary of Medina. "When you withdraw from them, and that which they worship along with god, then seek refuge in the Cave, your Lord will open a way for you from His Mercy and will make easy for you your affair." [18:16] They sought refuge in a cave to rest for a while before continuing their journey, not knowing that God would answer their supplication in ways they could not imagine. When the young men sought refuge in the cave and said, 'Our Lord, grant us Your mercy, and find us a good way out of our ordeal,' [18:10]

God records how they stood firm upon their beliefs, addressing their despot ruler and their people, “We made their hearts firm and strong when they stood up and said: ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, never shall we call upon any god other than Him; if we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief.’” [18:14] In many ways this resembles the situation of the early Muslims in the time of the Messenger Muhammad, when they were often tortured and persecuted simply for saying ‘There is no deity worthy of worship except the One True God’.

God answered this supplication and gave these believing youth a great miracle, showing His mercy towards the believers, and His power over the creation. "And they stayed in their Cave three hundred years, and additional nine." [18:25] God decreed that they would sleep for three centuries. God describes their sleep conditions and its surroundings so that this sign of divine mercy would be complete. God allowed the sun to rise and set upon the cave in such a way that its bright light and heat would not disturb their sleep, yet they would still benefit from its rays and warmth. He made them turn in their sleep so that their bodies would remain intact and healthy. Their dog remained at the mouth of the cave wherein they slept to keep other animals from wandering in.

After three centuries generations had come and passed, God decreed that these young believers should awake. They awoke in the same state of worry in which they had gone to sleep. They did not realize that they had slept for so long, instead thinking it to be a part of a day or a full day. They did not look any different or feel any different. They still believed that their lives were in danger, so decided to send one of the group to quietly return to the city to buy food and provisions for the journey ahead. Even in this state, they stipulated that the food be pure and permissible to eat, "Send one of you with these silver coins of yours to the city, and let him find which food is the purest..." [18:19]

As they sent one of them to find food, he was discovered by the people of the city because his questions, mannerisms and currency aroused suspicions. He was asked to explain himself, so he told the people his story and took them to the rest of his companions. The people of the time saw God's power and His ability to resurrect. "That is how We caused them to be discovered so that their people might know that God's promise is true and that there is no doubt about the Hour." [18:21]

This story demonstrates one of the most common trials the believers will face; trials to do with their faith. At its most extreme, it can lead to persecution and torture, but there are many other forms it can take. Derogatory remarks, uncomfortable stares from others and sometimes an inferiority complex within when having to openly show our faith in front of others. At times, it can be our own family and friends who attempt to dissuade us when we want to embrace Islam or increase in our attempts to practice it. Throughout this story we are told of the ways to overcome this trial; strong faith, turning to God at all times, depending and trusting in Him and praying to Him. "Truly! They were youth who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance." [18:13]



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