

Sūrah Kahf (3)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī

Section V: Verses (60-82)

Earlier, the Prophet (sws) was urged to exercise patience on the attitude of his enemies and the arrogant. In the succeeding verses, this topic is brought to completion. It is as if the *sūrah* has reached its pinnacle at this stage. It should be kept in mind that patience is not a negative attitude. It is a positive reality. It is on it that all rights thrive and sustain. He who does not have this quality in him will neither be able to discharge his obligations towards God nor to his fellow human beings. In order for this attribute to be rightly grounded in a person his beliefs should be fully grounded. Otherwise, patience cannot be adopted from outside. There are three bases related to beliefs:

Firstly, whatever happens in this world happens because of God's permission and under His will and intention. Without His intention, even a particle cannot move from its place.

Secondly, God is an embodiment of good and is wise. None of His intention is without wisdom. If He gives respite to evildoers, it is not because He loves them or is helpless before them. In this respite too, He wants to nourish a great good. Similarly, if He afflicts hardships on the righteous, it is not because He wants to put them through hardship but because He wants to open the way to something beneficial for them.

Thirdly, the extent of knowledge human beings can gain is limited. Hence, they cannot have knowledge of the wisdom of all His intentions. All the secrets of these intentions will only be revealed in the hereafter. The right attitude for human beings in this world is that they should be patient and grateful on all of God's decisions and keep discharging their duties. They should rest assured that sweetness is hidden under the hardships of today. They will taste it tomorrow.

In order to understand this secret of the universe, the account of an educational journey of Moses (sws) is related. The way

these secrets of wisdom become evident through incidents is much more powerful than mere statements. The nation for whose reformation and education Moses (sws) was deputed was very weak and meek and the enemy at hand was very powerful and mighty. For this reason, in accordance with God's wisdom, it became essential that he be well instructed and trained in wisdom so that he was able to come to grips with this challenge with full determination. Thus, God sent him to a person who was blessed with special knowledge by Him. That person revealed some secrets of God at His behest to Moses (sws). They were very beneficial to him for the purpose of his education in submitting to the decisions of God and accepting them.

This was the purpose of Moses' journey. However, God knows from where our exegetes have relied on a strange narrative while explaining this incident. According to this narrative, once Moses (sws) audaciously claimed that at that time he was the most knowledgeable person; in order to reprimand him for saying this, God sent him to a person so that he learnt that there was a more knowledgeable person than him.

In the first place, why would Moses (sws) pass such an out of place remark, and if he did, it was not incorrect either. It is a fact that a prophet is the most knowledgeable of all people of his times and he unequivocally proclaims this reality before his nation. Every prophet has declared *إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ* (I know from God what you do not know). Never has this statement been regarded as an expression of arrogance or has he been regarded worthy of reprimand for saying this. So why should Moses (sws) have deserved this treatment? Nevertheless, in my opinion this occasion of revelation is totally baseless and the actual reality in this regard is what has been pointed to earlier.

Readers may now proceed to study these verses in the light of this background.

Text and Translation

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا ﴿١٠﴾ فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنَهُمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ﴿١١﴾ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِفَتَاهُ إِنَّا عَدَاءُكَ لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ﴿١٢﴾ قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ

الْمَوْتُ وَمَا أَسْلَمْنِيهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ ۚ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ۝^(١٣) قَالَ
 ذَلِكُمْ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ ۖ فَارْتَدَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا ۝^(١٤) فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً
 مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ۝^(١٥) قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَىٰ هَلْ أَتَيْتُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّنَ مِنَّا
 عَلَيْنَا رُشْدًا ۝^(١٦) قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ۝^(١٧) وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ
 خُبْرًا ۝^(١٨) قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ۝^(١٩) قَالَ فَإِنِ اتَّبَعْتَنِي فَلَا
 تَسْأَلْنِي عَنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ أُحْدِثَ لَكَ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ۝^(٢٠) فَانْطَلَقَا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ
 خَرَقَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا ۚ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا ۝^(٢١) قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ
 تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ۝^(٢٢) قَالَ لَا تُؤَاخِذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا ۝^(٢٣)
 فَانْطَلَقَا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ ۚ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتُ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ ۚ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ
 شَيْئًا نُكْرًا ۝^(٢٤) قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ۝^(٢٥) قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ
 بَعْدَ هَذَا فَلَا تُصَحِّبْنِي ۚ قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِنْ لَدُنِّي عُذْرًا ۝^(٢٦) فَانْطَلَقَا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَيَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ
 اسْتَطَعَا أَهْلُهَا فَاكُبُوا أَنْ يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَنْقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُ ۚ قَالَ لَوْ
 شِئْتُ لَتَّخَذْتُ عَلَيْهِ اجْرًا ۝^(٢٧) قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ ۚ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ
 تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ۝^(٢٨) أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسْكِينٍ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا
 وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا ۝^(٢٩) وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا
 أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا ۝^(٣٠) فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْبًا ۝^(٣١)
 وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا
 فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا ۚ رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي ۚ
 ذَلِكُمْ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ۝^(٣٢)

And bear in mind when Moses said to his student: “I shall keep walking until I reach the place where the two seas meet or shall keep walking for years in this way.” Thus, when they reached their meeting place, they forgot their fish and it went forth towards the sea. Then when they had moved forward, Moses said to his student: “Bring our food now. We are very tired because of this journey of Ours.” The student replied: “What should I say. When we took refuge near the large rock, I forgot the fish and it was

Satan who made me negligent of remembering it and it took to the sea in a strange way.” Moses said: “It was that which we were seeking.” Thus, they returned tracing their footsteps. So, they found a servant from among Our servants whom We had specially blessed and had bestowed on him special knowledge from Ourselves. (60-65)

Moses requested him: “Can I remain with you on the condition that you teach me a little also from the knowledge given to you?” He replied: “You will not be able to be patient along with me and how at all can you be patient at what is beyond your sphere of knowledge?” Moses said: “God willing, you will find me patient; I shall not disobey your directive in any matter.” (66-69)

He said: “If you have to remain with me, then it will be on the condition that you will not ask me about anything until I mention it to you myself.” At last, both of them set off until when they boarded a ship, that person made a hole in it. Moses said: “Have you made a hole in it that you may drown the people of the ship? This is a very strange thing that you have done!” He said: “Did I not say to you that you will not be able to exercise patience along with me?” Moses said: “Do not hold me accountable for what I forgot and be not so stern with me in my matter.” (70-73)

Then both set off until when they met a boy, he killed him. Moses said: “You have slain an innocent boy even though he has not slain anyone? This is a very terrible thing that you have done.” He said: “Did I not say to you that you will not be able to exercise patience along with me?” Moses said: “If after this I ask you about anything, you may not keep me with you. You would have reached an excuse from me.” At this, both journeyed until when they reached the inhabitants of a city, they requested their people to provide food. But they refused to give hospitality. Then they saw a wall there that was about to fall. So, he erected that wall. Moses said: “If you wanted, you could have asked for some payment for it.” He replied: “Now this is parting of ways between you and me. I shall now tell you the reality behind the acts on which you were not able to exercise patience. (74-78)

As for the ship, it belonged to some poor individuals who would earn their living in the sea. I intended to make it defective and there lived a king ahead who was snatching every ship. (79)

As for the boy, his parents were people of faith. We feared that after growing up, he may be offensive to them because of

rebelliousness and ingratitude. Hence, We wanted that their Lord bless them with a child in his place who is purer and more affectionate than him. (80-81)

And as for the matter of the wall, it belonged to two orphans of the city. Beneath it was their treasure, and their father was a pious person. Your Lord wanted that they reach maturity and take out their treasure themselves. This happened because of your God's grace. And all this that I did was not out of my own intention. This is the reality behind the acts on which you were not able to show patience." (82)

Explanation

وَادَّ قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا¹

I have translated the word فَتَى as "student" instead of "servant" or "young man." Incorporated in this word is both the young age and nature of relationship of that boy with Moses (sws). The way Moses (sws) has interacted with the boy during this journey shows that he was not merely his servant or attendant. He was like a companion who was his student and attendant.

The meeting place of the two seas is most probably the point where the gulf of 'Aqabah and the Suez canal meet. It was from here that Moses (sws) spent the phases of his life with the Israelites.

The word حُقُب means "an era of time", "year", "a period of eighty years or even more."

Moses (sws) must have been divinely asked to undertake this journey. He expressed this desire before his student. Every word spoken by him radiates his interest and passion for the journey. His words reflect his intention that if his student has the strength, he should accompany him for he is to embark on this journey come what may. He will either reach his destination or be overtaken by death.

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنَهُمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا²

The word سَرَب means "flowing away of water from a utensil."

1. And bear in mind when Moses said to his student: "I shall keep walking until I reach the place where the two seas meet or shall keep walking for years in this way."

2. Thus, when they reached their meeting place, they forgot their fish and it went forth towards the sea.

Here a major part of the happenings that ensued is suppressed in words. This is evident from concomitant indications. Both journeyed and reached the meeting place of the seas. There they rested in the valley of a mountain for some time. When they departed from there, they forgot to take the fish that was to be eaten for breakfast. After travelling a certain distance, Moses' (sws) student remembered his mistake and they returned to fetch the fish. When they reached that place, the student saw the fish taking to the sea to survive. So strange was this incident that he did not dare to mention it to Moses (sws) thinking that he would not believe him and he may have to face severe rebuke from him. Thus, they moved forward and the student continued to remain reluctant whether he should disclose this to Moses (sws) or not. On the other hand, Moses (sws) must have thought that his student had picked up the fish.

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ يَفْتَحْهُ إِنَّا غَدَاءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ۝³

The word غَدَاء means “breakfast” and نَصَب means “fatigue.” This word is not appropriate at all for non-roasted fish or fish that is alive. It is a clear indication that the fish was roasted.

Finally, when they were at some distance from that place, Moses (sws) asked his student to give him breakfast, as he was exhausted.

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْخُبْزَ وَ مَا آتَيْنِيهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَ اتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ۝⁴

The student now had no option but to reveal the truth to Moses (sws).

The word أَرَأَيْتَ expresses hesitation of the student. It is like saying “what should I say ...” or “just look and see ...”

The words “and it was Satan who made me negligent of remembering it” politely express his apology on his mistake

3. Then when they had moved forward, Moses said to his student: “Bring our food now. We are very tired because of this journey of Ours.”

4. The student replied: “What should I say. When we took refuge near the large rock, I forgot the fish and it was Satan who made me negligent of remembering it and it took to the sea in a strange way.”

5 قَالَ ذٰلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ ۚ فَارْتَدَّ عَلٰى اٰثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا ﴿١٢٥﴾

Expecting rebuke from Moses (sws), the student revealed the situation in a state of fear. But Moses (sws) jumped up at the news since it was at that place where he had been instructed to meet a servant of God who would reveal certain secrets to him. Thus, as soon as he became aware of this, they retraced their steps to the place.

6 فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِمَّا لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴿١٢٦﴾

Here they met an extraordinary individual who had been specially blessed from God and given exclusive knowledge. The Qur'ān has not named this individual. It has only mentioned some particular attributes he possessed. In some narratives, he has been named as Khiḍr. Since I do not find any reason to reject these narratives, I shall adopt this name.

It is evident from certain indications that Khiḍr was a prophet of God. The first and most obvious reason for this is that a celebrated prophet, in fact a messenger as Moses (sws), was sent to him for instruction and to gain knowledge. If Khiḍr was not a prophet, then it would be very inappropriate for a prophet to be sent to a non-prophet for instruction. Though no prophet is mentioned in the Qur'ān or the Torah by this name, this is not important. The Qur'ān itself has specified that it has not mentioned many prophets. Same is the case with the Torah too. It may be kept in mind – as specified in the Qur'ān – that God has given superiority to every prophet in some respect or another. Khiḍr too had this superiority in a specific sphere. Similar is the case with Moses (sws) too. If Moses (sws) learnt some things from him, it does not necessitate that Khiḍr had absolute superiority over him.

The second reason for regarding Khiḍr to be a prophet is that the attributes the Qur'ān has mentioned about him match the ones a prophet has. Thus, for example, it is said: “He is a servant

5. Moses said: “It was that which we were seeking.” Thus, they returned tracing their footsteps.

6. So, they found a servant from among Our servants whom We had specially blessed and had bestowed on him special knowledge from Ourselves.

from among Our servants whom We had specially blessed and had bestowed on him special knowledge from Ourselves.” Moreover, about his own acts, Khidr has specified that he had not done them on his own will; in fact, he had done them under God’s will. All these aspects show that he was a prophet of God who received His revelations. He also had the distinction that God had revealed some of His secrets to him.

قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَ مِنَّا عِلْمَ رُشْدٍ ۖ قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ
مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ۖ وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا ۗ

The word رُشْد means “knowledge and wisdom.” However, here it means the special knowledge given to Khidr by the Almighty about the secrets of the universe.

Khidr warned Moses (sws) that since he was insisting on accompanying him there would be certain things he would do that would be very abhorrent to him and he would not be able to exercise patience. They have wisdom behind them but Moses (sws) will be unaware of it.

قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ۖ

Moses (sws) promised Khidr that he would stay patient and never disobey him.

قَالَ فَإِنِ اتَّبَعْتَنِي فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِي عَنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ أُحْدِثَ لَكَ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ۖ

After the commitment given by Moses (sws), Khidr allowed him to accompany him on the condition stated.

فَانْطَلَقَا ۚ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا ۚ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ

7. Moses requested him: “Can I remain with you on the condition that you teach me a little also from the knowledge given to you?” He replied: “You will not be able to be patient along with me and how at all can you be patient at what is beyond your sphere of knowledge?”

8. Moses said: “God willing, you will find me patient; I shall not disobey your directive in any matter.”

9. He said: “If you have to remain with me, then it will be on the condition that you will not ask me about anything until I mention it to you myself.”

The word اِمْرًا means something strange and abhorrent.

قَالَ اَلَمْ اَقُلْ اِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيْعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٤٢﴾ قَالَ لَا تَأْخُذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تُرْهِقْنِي مِنْ اَمْرِي عَسَا ۖ ﴿٤٣﴾ 11

The word اِذَاق means to burden someone with more than what he can bear or to inflict hardships on someone. Thus اُرْهِقْهُ عَسَا would mean to cause difficulty for someone.

فَاَنْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ اِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ ۖ قَالَ اَقْتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْئًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٤٤﴾ قَالَ اَلَمْ اَقُلْ لَّكَ اِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيْعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٤٥﴾ قَالَ اِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَ هَا فَلَا تُصَحِّبْنِي ۚ قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِنْ لَدُنِّي عُذْرًا ﴿٤٦﴾ 12

Once again Moses (sww) apologized for his outburst and said that next time he would leave him if did the same again.

فَاَنْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ اِذَا اَتَيَا اَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطْعَمَا اَهْلُهَا فَاَبَوْا اَنْ يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ اَنْ يَنْقُضَ فَاقَامَهُ ۖ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِ اَجْرًا ﴿٤٧﴾ قَالَ هَٰذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ ۚ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَاوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٤٨﴾ 13

10. At last, both of them set off until when they boarded a ship, that person made a hole in it. Moses said: "Have you made a hole in it that you may drown the people of the ship? This is a very strange thing that you have done!"

11. He said: "Did I not say to you that you will not be able to exercise patience along with me?" Moses said: "Do not hold me accountable for what I forgot and be not so stern with me in my matter."

12. Then both set off until when they met a boy, he killed him. Moses said: "You have slain an innocent boy even though he has not slain anyone? This is a very terrible thing that you have done." He said: "Did I not say to you that you will not be able to exercise patience along with me?" Moses said: "If after this I ask you about anything, you may not keep me with you. You would have reached an excuse from me."

13. At this, both journeyed until when they reached the inhabitants of a city, they requested their people to provide food. But they refused their hospitality. Then they saw a wall there that was about to fall. So, he

Again Moses (sws) could not restrain himself at the incident mentioned in the verse. Khidr then promptly announced the parting of ways. Concomitant indication shows that he had not declared this because the truth had been conclusively conveyed to Moses (sws); the fact was that with this third incident his education and instruction too stood completed.

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسْكِينٍ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ
كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا ۝١٤

It seems that the king was forcibly confiscating ships for most probably for a war campaign.

This is an example of the fact that if in this world the poor and the righteous are inflicted with loss, there is some underlying benefit in it from them. Hence, they should remain patient and be content at God's decision. They should have conviction that none of God's decisions is devoid of wisdom; however, a person cannot fully gauge it.

وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا ۝١٥
يُبْدِلُهَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْبًا ۝١٥

The word رُحْم means "affection, sympathy and concern."

The verse shows that if believers are inflicted with a calamity, there is some great benefit concealed in it for them which only God knows. Thus, believers should exercise patience. When they become aware of it, they will understand God's wisdom.

erected that wall. Moses said: "If you wanted, you could have asked for some payment for it." He replied: "Now this is parting of ways between you and me. I shall now tell you the reality behind the acts on which you were not able to exercise patience. (74-78)

14. As for the ship, it belonged to some poor individuals who would earn their living in the sea. I intended to make it defective and there lived a king ahead who was snatching every ship.

15. As for the boy, his parents were people of faith. We feared that after growing up, he may be offensive to them because of rebelliousness and ingratitude. Hence, We wanted that their Lord bless them with a child in his place who is purer and more affectionate than him.

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَبَيْنِ 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 صَبْرًا¹⁶

At the end, Moses (sws) has clarified that none of these acts were done by him because of his own opinion.

This example shows that if the wretched and rogues are given respite in this world, the purpose is not to facilitate them in any way. The real reason is that God wants to facilitate some expediency though we are not aware of it. Through such concessions the miscreants only complete God's conclusive argument against them. However, through them God furthers the cause of the adherents to the truth and it is they who are the primary purpose for the creation of this world.

Some Secondary Benefits of Verses (60-82)

We have already referred to the underlying wisdom of this anecdote of Moses (sws). However, there are some secondary benefits of this as well. They are briefly mentioned below.

Firstly, every person who seeks wisdom is not worthy of it. It is only given to its true seekers. It is not like a commodity that can be purchased from the market by everyone who has money. In fact, those who want to acquire it must work very hard for it. It is not obtained by just sitting at home; it needs a lot of effort and struggle. One must exert hard to acquire it by travelling to far off lands and by navigating oceans. There is all the possibility that one's whole life may be spent in this endeavour. One has to be possessed with a yearning to seek it while letting go of all fanfare and even sacrifice one's ego for it. A person who is not prepared for such an effort should not even embark on this

16. And as for the matter of the wall, it belonged to two orphans of the city. Beneath it was their treasure, and their father was a pious person. Your Lord wanted that they reach maturity and take out their treasure themselves. This happened because of your God's grace. And all this that I did was not out of my own intention. This is the reality behind the acts on which you were not able to show patience."

journey. This huge treasure is only given by God to those who forfeit all other desires other than the desire to obtain wisdom. All these aspects are self-obvious in this anecdote and there is no need to cite arguments in their favour.

Secondly, our real guide is the *sharī'ah*. It is our obligation that we follow it in all circumstances. If we see anything against it, we must not disregard it even if it is done by as great a guide as Khiḍr. Thus, readers can see that even though Khiḍr had been sent by God, Moses (sws) was never silent on anything that he saw from him against the *sharī'ah*. He was only satisfied when Khiḍr told him that whatever he did was in compliance with God's directives and nothing was done at his own initiative. Moreover, he was not merely satisfied by the explanations offered to him; in fact, he had been informed beforehand through divine revelation that Khiḍr was a special person deputed by God and whatever he did, would be in accordance with God's directive.

For this reason, I regard as baseless the view of all those who think that there exist some Quṭub and Abdāl in every age like Khiḍr who in themselves are the yardstick of truth and falsehood; they contend that all their acts should not be judged in the scales of the *sharī'ah* because what they do is directly under God's will. I believe that the terms Quṭub and Abdāl have no foundation. They have no basis in the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth. However, even if it is supposed that a person belongs to these genres, how can we tolerate the acts that are against the *sharī'ah*? Moses (sws) only tolerated such acts of Khiḍr because, as is evident, he knew through divine revelation that the latter did everything at God's behest. However, what is the means through which we can know that a certain person belongs to these genres and that he has been authorized by God to violate His *sharī'ah*. The only means we have to learn God's will and directives is through His Book and the practice of His messenger. Thus, even if Khiḍr, let alone a Quṭub or an Abdāl, comes today and kills someone on the pretext that he has done this at God's behest, his excuse shall be rejected and he will have to face execution for this crime. This is because we have the directive of *qiṣās* with us in the *sharī'ah* but nothing with us that gives him the authority to kill someone.

Thirdly, the style adopted in this anecdote creates an ambiguity and doubt in the mind of a person: on the one hand Khiḍr

ascribes all his acts to God by saying: مَا فَعَلْتُ عَنْ أَمْرِي (all this that I did was not out of my own intention); however, on the other hand, in the case of the ship, he states فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعْيِبَهَا (so I intended to make it defective). Similarly, in the case of the boy, he uses the words فَخَشِينَا (so we feared) and فَأَرَدْنَا (so we intended) and then for the wall he says: فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ (thus your Lord willed).

The question arises: why did he use different styles to say the same thing? When he has ascribed all his doings to God's directive, the clear style for this was: أَرَادَ رَبُّكَ (your Lord willed). Thus, in the presence of this, why did he use the words فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعْيِبَهَا (so I intended to make it defective)? Moreover, when Khidr was responsible for all those acts why did he use the plural: فَأَرَدْنَا (so we intended)? If it is said that he used the plural to include God also, then the word فَخَشِينَا (so we feared) is absolutely inappropriate to be used for God. Why would God have any fear? Readers may keep the following aspects in consideration to dispel these doubts.

First, when a person's will matches the will of God, he can ascribe it to God as well as to himself. The difference has much to do with the requisites of eloquence. Thus, for example, at times in deference to sound etiquette, a person should ascribe an act to his own self instead of God. Thus, making a hole in the ship is something which is inappropriate in its apparent form was attributed by Khidr to himself for this reason. On the other hand, since preserving the treasure of the orphans is something virtuous even in its apparent form, it was attributed by him directly to God.

Second, when on such an instances, a speaker uses the plural, he represents the statement of all members of the category that he stands for or is their instrument of implementation. Since Khidr had done all these acts as someone who implements God's will in this universe, he could have used the plural for this. This made his act the act of all those who implement God's will.

Third, the word فَخَشِينَا (so we feared) used here by Khidr is not in relation to God. It has been used by him to show that he had exercised his own opinion. He was informed through an angel or through divine revelation that he should kill a certain boy because his parents were true believers and he would grow up to become a wretched disbeliever. Through this directive, he himself deduced

that this boy would commit excesses against his parents and for this reason he had been asked to kill him. This reason was not specified in the divine revelation he received. Thus, he expressed it as his own fear.

Section VI: Verses (83-98)

In the succeeding verses, an answer to a question raised about Dhū al-Qarnayn is raised. It must have been posed by the Jews and their purpose must have been the same as what we have explained under the anecdote of the cave-sleepers: to make the Prophet (sws) anxious and worried and to implant hurdles in the path of the true call. However, they did not pose it directly. They must have used the Quraysh for this purpose. The fact that it is probable that the Jews had raised it is because they were deeply interested in Dhū al-Qarnayn. They regarded him to be their benefactor king, as will be seen from later details. He is also mentioned in the scriptures of their prophets. In spite of knowing their miscreant nature, the Qur'ān has only answered their question because the life of Dhū al-Qarnayn could have offered a lesson of life to the arrogant slaves of worldly desires who have been under discussion since the beginning of this *sūrah* right up to its end.

Who was this Dhū al-Qarnayn? Our exegetes have expressed different views in this regard. Generally, he has been regarded to be Alexander. Some regard him to be Cyrus or Darius, who were Persian kings. According to another opinion, this title refers to a king among the Himyar dynasty. There is no argument worthy of mention in favour of this opinion. The attributes mentioned by the Qur'ān also do not apply to Alexander. He is mentioned as a staunch monotheist, an ardent believer of the hereafter and a very just ruler who deeply cared about his subjects. None of these qualities existed in Alexander. The extent of his conquests is also not as wide as mentioned for Dhū al-Qarnayn. Moreover, there is no argument to support this title for Alexander. There are certain conquests notched up by Darius in the East and the West. However, in this regard, his status is not that of a pioneer. He only consolidated the empire established by Cyrus.

However, there are numerous aspects of Cyrus' personality

because of which he can be regarded as Dhū al-Qarnayn. He was a man of faith and a very just ruler whose magnanimity has been praised by both old and new historians. The Qur'ān has mentioned three of his campaigns, out of which two that were in the eastern and western directions are verified by history. Though historians do not say anything with certainty about the third campaign, yet there are signs and indications in its support as well.

A great favour of this king done to the Jews was that he had liberated them from their slavery in Babylon and by his help the Temple was once again built. Jewish prophets had also prophesied about him. In the Book of Isaiah it is written:

This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour. (45:1)

In a vision showed to the Prophet Daniel, it is written:

I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great. (8:3-4)

Gabriel explained this vision to Daniel by saying that the two horns refer to the two kingdoms of Media and Persia which will be conquered by this promised king. It is established that Cyrus did humble both these kingdoms and for this reason he has been called Dhū al-Qarnayn (one having two horns). One of his statues has been discovered in recent times in Estakhr, an ancient city of Persia. It was built in the time of Ardashir 1 (d. 242 AD). Two horns emerging from his crown can be seen in it. It may well be that they are etched to portray his majesty and power or it may be because of these two conquests referred to above.

Readers may now study these verses in the light of this background.

Text and Translation

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٨٢﴾ إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ

mountains people who could not understand anything. They requested: “O Dhū al-Qarnayn! Gog and Magog keep spreading disorder in this land; so, is it possible that if we arrange expenses for you and you make a wall between us and them?” He replied: “Whatever my Lord has given in my control is sufficient. You may however help me with your might. I shall construct a barrier between you and them. Bring me slabs of iron.” When he filled the gap in between the two mountains, he ordered: “Blow!” Until when he made it into fire, he commanded: “Bring me some brass that I may pour over it.” Thus, they could neither climb it now nor create a fissure in it. He said: “This is my Lord’s blessing. Then my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He shall level it to the ground and certain is the promise of my Lord.” (92-98)

Explanation

17 ^{١٧} وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا

It seems that the title of Dhū al-Qarnayn was given to Cyrus by the Jews of Arabia. A sort of appeal exists in سَأَتْلُو. The implication is: “If you ask, I shall narrate to you a part of his anecdote; hopefully you will listen to it intently and benefit from it.” The meaning of reminding and learning a lesson found in the word ذِكْرًا is not hidden from the eyes of those who have a flair for language.

18 ^{١٨} إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَآتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبَبًا

The actual meaning of the word سَبَب is “means.” Here its usage in the word means that his kingdom had means and resources of all kind.

Regarding Cyrus it may however be kept in mind here that in the middle of 6th century BC, he was appointed the governor of a small kingdom called Anshan of his father Cambyses. As soon as he came to power, he had to fight the ruler of Media and earned a huge victory. In the remaining few years, he conquered all great kingdoms of those times and ruled from Balkh and Makran to the Roman sea. Before this, no kingdom of such

17. And they ask you about Dhū al-Qarnayn. Tell them: I shall narrate to you some of his account from which a lesson can be learnt.

18. We had given him great authority in the land and had blessed him with means and resources of all kinds.

expanse and splendour had been founded.

¹⁹ فَاتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٩﴾

The word أَتْبَاعٌ means “to get after and pursue something.” The expression فَاتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا would mean “he evaluated the means and resources and arranged for them.” From here it came to be used to imply the wider meaning of preparing for a campaign or an expedition.

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَغْرُبُ فِي عَيْنٍ حَمِئَةٍ ۖ وَوَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا قَوْمًا قُلْنَا يَذَّكَّرُ أَنْ يَقْرَأَ إِمَّا أَنْ تُعَذِّبَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَتَّخِذَ فِيهِمْ حُسْنًا ﴿٢٠﴾

The expression مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ implies that he reached the sea shore in the west. Here the words “He saw it as if it was setting in a black fountain” mean that all the known world of the west in the times of Dhū al-Qarnayn came under his sway. Only the ocean lay ahead. It was as if that was the furthestmost part of the land inhabited in the west and it was there that the sun would set.

This is a reference to the first expedition of Cyrus which took place towards the west of his capital city Ecbatana (present day Hamadan). In that campaign, he conquered Media (present day Iraq and Syria) and Lydia (present day Turkey). He defeated Croesus, the ruler of Lydia in his capital Sardis (Samarna) and who had the support of the rulers of Babylon, Egypt and Sparta. In this campaign, he reached the shores of the Roman sea.

The word قَوْل is also used to imply a situation, an attitude or authority. In other words, as a result of the campaign, the subjects he gained were made to submit to his authority in such a way by the Almighty that if he wanted he could punish them or treat them with kindness. None could interfere with his power and authority. It does not mean that the Almighty had verbally told him that he if he wanted he could be unjust or just. It was his discretion. The only right he had was to be just and kind. This is the divinely ordained duty of every ruler. However, he also has

19. Thus, once he prepared for an expedition.

20. Until he reached the place where the sun sets. He saw it as if it was setting in a black fountain. And he found a nation near it. We said: “O Dhū al-Qarnayn! It is up to you whether you punish them or treat them kindly.”

the freedom to be oppressive. If he administers justice, he will be rewarded from God and if he is unjust, he will be punished. The real guidance for a ruler is the one which the Almighty has given by addressing David (sws) thus:

يٰدَاوُدُ اِنَّا جَعَلْنٰكَ خَلِيفَةً فِى الْاَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوٰى
فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللّٰهِ اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ يَضِلُّوْنَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللّٰهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيْدٌۢ بِمَا
نَسُوْا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ (٣٨ : ٢٦)

O David! We have made you a caliph in the land. So, deal with justice among people and you must not yield to your desire, lest it turn you away from God's path. Those who stray from the path of God shall be sternly punished because they became unmindful of the Day of Reckoning. (38:26)

In the verse under discussion, the nature of address with Dhu al-Qarnayn is the same as one with Solomon (sws) in the following verse:

هٰذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ اَوْ اَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (٣٩ : ٣٨)

All this is Our bestowal uncountable. So, if you want, you can be kind to people or withhold your kindness. (38:39)

Obviously, these words only express the freedom to exercise the will which people have. A person can either profess belief or disbelief. Similarly, he also has the freedom to be kind and generous after receiving God's favours or become stingy. He has the liberty to adopt either attitude. However, in the eyes of God, only one of them is pleasing and it is that what He has demanded from people.

قَالَ اَمَّا مَنْ ظَلَمَ فَسَوْفَ نُعَذِّبُهٗ ثُمَّ يَرْجُؤْ اِلٰى رَبِّهِ فَيُعَذِّبُهٗ عَذَابًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٢٠﴾ وَاَمَّا مَنْ اٰمَنَ وَّ
عَمِلَ صٰلِحًا فَلَهٗ جَزَآءٌ الْحُسْنٰى ۚ وَسَنَقُوْلُ لَهُ مِنْ اَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ﴿٢١﴾

Just as the previous statement is the portrayal of a situation, the

21. He replied: "The oppressive among them we shall punish as well. Then he will also be returned to his Lord and He shall sternly punish him. As for he who embraces faith and does righteous deeds, for him in return is a good reward also with his Lord and We too shall gently deal with him."

statement of this verse expresses practice. In other words, Dhu al-Qarnayn bore witness through his attitude and behaviour that he who takes to oppression and anarchy will be punished by him and will receive a sterner punishment in the hereafter. However, those who have faith and do righteous deeds will be worthy of a wonderful reward in the hereafter and in this world Dhu al-Qarnayn too would treat them kindly.

To portray an attitude or practice through the word قول is a common Arabic style. The words of the Jews cited in verse 93 of Sūrah al-Baqarah: قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا (They said: we listened and we disobeyed) are actually a portrayal of their attitude. In the verse under discussion, the words سَنَقُولُ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا (we too shall gently deal with him) also similarly portray that attitude. Some people merely because of the earlier words قُلْنَا in verse 86 and قَالَ of verse 87 regard Dhū al-Qarnayn to be a prophet. However, in my opinion, this is not reason enough to regard him to be a prophet. Yet these verses as well as history do vouch for him being a just and compassionate ruler.

Historians write that the army of Cyrus never harmed the inhabitants of any of the cities it conquered. Cyrus was very kind to his conquered subjects. He relieved them of all taxes and tributes. He forgave the staunchest of his enemies when they were brought before him. They were so impressed by his kindness that they became very loyal to him. The ruler of Media was kept by him in his palace until his death and was even granted ten thousand infantry men and five thousand riders by him. In this way, he kept intact his royal stature.

Also evident from these verses is that Dhū al-Qarnayn was a real monotheist who had conviction in the hereafter. History also corroborates these facts. Cyrus was a contemporary of Zoroaster and also his follower. Found in the real teachings of Zoroaster are concepts of belief in God and in the Hereafter. However, like other religions, later this religion too became distorted at the hands of its followers. In fact, it was deeply influenced by Dualism. In his tablets, Dara expresses gratitude to Ahura Mazda (God) and attributes his kingdom to His graciousness. He even asks Ahura Mazda the urge and help to keep his kingdom on the right path. Obviously, he inherited his religiosity from Dhū al-Qarnayn. The latter also had great regard for the prophets of the Israelites. This too contributed to strengthening religious

inclinations in him.

ثُمَّ أَتْبَعَهُ سَبَبًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْرِعَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لَّمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهَا سِتْرًا ﴿٩٩﴾²²

This is a mention of the second expedition of Cyrus. It is evident from the words *مَطْرِعَ الشَّمْسِ* *بَلَغَ* that it took place towards the east. Here too, he reached its farthest limits. According to historians, the reason for this expedition was the rebelliousness of the tribes of Makran, Qandahar and Balkh. They had created disorder at the eastern border of Persia. Ultimately, Dhū al-Qarnayn had to silence this uprising and he conquered all these territories. The words “a nation for which We had placed no barrier against the sun” signify how uncivilized and uncultured these tribes were. It seems that they were not familiar with craft of building houses and were very unrefined.

كَذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَقَدْ أَحَطْنَا بِمَا لَدَيْهِ خُبْرًا ﴿١٠٠﴾²³

This verse has exactly the same occasion and context as verse 51 of Sūrah al-Anbiyā': *وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُشْدَهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَلِيمِينَ*.²⁴ This verse while pointing out the wisdom of blessing Abraham (sws) with guidance and with political authority says that God knew him very well. In other words, if God blessed Abraham (sws) in this manner, it was because He knew his capabilities which made him worthy of those blessings. In a similar way, in the verse under discussion, while pointing to the victories of Dhū al-Qarnayn he gained as a result of God's blessing, it is stated that fully present in him were the abilities and traits needed to govern this huge kingdom and God was fully aware of them.

ثُمَّ أَتْبَعَهُ سَبَبًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهَا قَوْمًا لَّا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ

22. Then he prepared for another expedition until when he reached the place where the sun rises, he saw that it was rising on a nation for which We had placed no barrier against the sun.

23. This is precisely what We did and We were fully aware about his whereabouts.

24. And before this, We gave Abraham his share of guidance and We knew him very well.

قَوْلًا ۖ قَالَُوا يٰذَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ اِنَّ يٰجُوجَ وَمَاجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْاَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلْ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ اَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا ۖ قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَاَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ اَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا ۖ اَتُؤْتِي زُبْرَ الْحَدِيدِ ۖ حَتّٰى اِذَا سَاوٰى بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ اَنْفُخُوا ۖ حَتّٰى اِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا ۚ قَالَ اَتُؤْتِي اُفْرَغْ عَلَيْهِ قَطْرًا ۖ فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا اَنْ يُّظْهَرُوْهُ وَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا لَهُ نَقْبًا ۖ قَالَ هٰذَا رَحْمَةٌ مِّنْ رَبِّيْ ۚ فَاِذَا جَآءَ وَعْدُ رَبِّيْ جَعَلَهُ دَكَّآءً ۚ وَكَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّيْ حَقًّا ۖ ۚ

This is a mention of the third expedition of Cyrus. Historians have not mentioned it anywhere. However, they do record this much that he undertook a journey towards the north east after he conquered Babylon. Perhaps his destination was towards Turkey to the east of the Caspian sea. It was during this journey that he fell in a pit and died. It seems that it was during this journey that the incident of constructing the dam mentioned here took place.

This dam, as referred to by the Qur'ān, was constructed to ward off the onslaughts of Gog and Magog. They refer to the progeny of Japeth son of Noah (sws) who inhabited the northern areas of Asia. Hezekiel states:

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him. (38:1-2)

Son of man, prophesy against Gog and say: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Gog, the prince of

25. He then prepared for another expedition until he reached a pass between two mountains. He found in this pass between the two mountains people who could not understand anything. They requested: "O Dhū al-Qarnayn! Gog and Magog keep spreading disorder in this land; so, is it possible that if we arrange expenses for you and you make a wall between us and them?" He replied: "Whatever my Lord has given in my control is sufficient. You may however help me with your might. I shall construct a barrier between you and them. Bring me slabs of iron." When he filled the gap in between the two mountains, he ordered: "Blow!" Until when he made it into fire, he commanded: "Bring me some brass that I may pour over it." Thus, they could neither climb it now nor create a fissure in it. He said: "This is my Lord's blessing. Then my Lord's promise is fulfilled, He shall level it to the ground and certain is the promise of my Lord."

Rosh, Meshek and Tubal. I will turn you around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north. (39:1-2)

Rosh, Meshek and Tubal today exist as Russia, Moscow and Tubalsac and these areas are in the far off regions to the south of Palestine. The tribes of Gog and Magog lived towards the south of the Caspian sea in Central Asia in the land of Mongolia. They attacked Persia from both Turkey and from the Caucasian pass. Caucasia was situated directly in the south of the capital city of Cyrus. Thus, it may well be that Cyrus actually filled this pass to ward off their onslaughts.

In the pass of Daryal in Caucasia exists an iron wall even today. Travellers and tourists have also mentioned it in their travelogues. It is stated in historical chronicles that Wathiq the Abbasid caliph deputed a team of fifty thousand people to find out its whereabouts. People ascribe this wall to Dara or to Nausherwan. However, stronger evidence indicates that it was constructed by Cyrus. For example, it is now established that the southern boundary of Cyrus' empire extended to Caucasia. Such a large territory under control is only possible if it had been conquered by him. A city and a river by the name of Koresh still exists in Caucasia. The iron wall is called Gora which seems to be a distorted form of Koresh. This wall has been made by a metal between two mountains. Space has been left in its lower part for rain water to escape.

The words "people who could not understand anything" show that these people had no interaction with other nations. They had isolated themselves in this land. As a result, they could not understand the tongue of others.

The word قُوَّة in verse 95 refers to manpower. The implication is that out of generosity Dhū al-Qarnayn did not accept the offer of resources made by his subjects; he however asked them to provide manpower. His words "whatever my Lord has given in my control is sufficient" refer to the fact that not only is the wealth he has enough, it is also clean; it was never earned through loot and plunder.

In verse 96, the word زبر is the plural of زَبْرَة. It means "iron slabs." The word صَدَف means "space and covering." It is used in its dual form صَدَفَيْن to indicate both borders much like the usage in Sūrah al-Raḥmān (55:17) of the words مَشْرِقَيْن (both borders of

the east) and مغربيين (both borders of the west). The purpose is to convey the fact that the space between both mountains was filled.

The word ذكَّاء actually refers to the hump of a camel. Here it means to flatten and level down. The implication of verse 98 is that when such a huge iron and robust wall had been erected that Gog and Magog could not even climb it nor create any fissure in it, Dhū al-Qarnayn did not express any arrogance. He did not say like the haughty leaders of the Quraysh that he had accomplished a feat that would be an abiding one. On the contrary, he humbly said that the service he had done was merely due to his Lord's blessing: at that time the wall might be unassailable but when the time of manifestation of his Lord's promise came, it would be razed to the ground by Him and that his Lord's promise was certain to materialize.

Earlier in verse 32-36, readers have read the parable of two individuals. The mentality of one of them was inflicted with arrogance: when he entered his lush orchard, he haughtily said that he did not think that it would ever be destroyed. After this, the example of a grateful servant of God is cited: he was thankful to his Lord for one his greatest accomplishments and remembered His certain promise

Section VII: Verses (99-110)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah*. They begin with a very eloquent digression. At the end of the last section, Dhū al-Qarnayn seeing the majestic dam had expressed that when the time of manifestation of His Lord's promise arrived, the huge structure would be decimated. Taking cue from this, the Almighty made it a means of reminding people of this promise and admonishing the slaves of this world. In fact, the topic of warning with which the *sūrah* began has come up again in a new style. I have pointed out on numerous occasions this trait of the Qur'ān's coherence that *sūrahs* generally end on the same topic with which they begin. This *sūrah* follows the same pattern too.

Readers may now study these verses in this light of this background.

Text and Translation

وَتَرَكْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعْضٍ وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَبَعًا ۝٩٩ وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَرَضًا ۝١٠٠ الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَاءٍ عَنْ ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَمْعًا ۝١٠١ أَفَحَسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِ آلِهَتِهِمْ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا ۝١٠٢ قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ۝١٠٣ الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعِيَّهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ۝١٠٤ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَزَنًا ۝١٠٥ ذَلِكَ جَزَاءُهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَاتَّخَذُوا الْآيَتِ وَرُسُلَ هَؤُلَاءِ ۝١٠٦ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ۝١٠٧ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حِوَلًا ۝١٠٨ قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِشُلْبٍ مَدَدًا ۝١٠٩ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ ۖ فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ۝١١٠

And on that day, We shall leave them so that they shall be striking one another like waves do, and the trumpet shall be sounded. Thus, We shall gather all of them and on that day, We shall bring forth Hell before those disbelievers whose eyes were covered from Our warning and they were not able to listen. (99-101)

Do these disbelievers think that they will make My servants to be their guardian except Me? We have prepared Hell for the hospitality of the disbelievers. (102)

Say: Should We inform you who the greatest losers are with regard to their deeds? Those people all of whose efforts were wasted while going after the life of the world while they thought that they were doing very noble deeds. It is these people who denied their Lord's revelations as well as meeting Him. Thus, their deeds went waste and on the Day of Judgment, We shall not give them the slightest weight. Their reward is this Hell because they have disbelieved and have made fun of My revelations and My messengers. (103-106)

Indeed those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds, for them is the hospitality of the orchards of Paradise where they shall abide forever; they shall never want to leave that place.

(107-108)

Say: If the sea becomes ink to write down the signs of my Lord, the sea would run dry before the signs of my Lord run out even if We add to it another similar sea. (109)

Say: I am only a human being like you. I receive the revelation that your God is only one God. Thus, he who is hopeful of meeting his Lord should do righteous deeds and not associate anyone in worshipping his Lord. (110)

Explanation

26. ^{٩٦} وَتَرْكُنَا بِعَعْضُهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمٍ فِي بَعْضٍ وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَجَبَعْنَهُمْ جَبْعًا

By connecting this verse to the statement of Dhū al-Qarnayn mentioned in the last verse “then my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He shall level it to the ground and certain is the promise of my Lord” the signs of the arrival of the Day of Judgement are further explained. It is evident from the verse under discussion that the borders between seas and mountains will all go away one day and nations will crash into one another the way sea waves do. Science has already gotten rid of the barriers between the seas and mountains; however, it seems that when judgement day arrives whatever remains of these barriers will also become meaningless. It is evident from this verse and from verse 96 of Sūrah al-Anbiyā’²⁷ that near the Day of Judgement, the progeny of Japeth will prevail over the rest of the world like a storm and then from within this storm the Day of Judgement will appear. Though these things belong to the category of the *mutashābihāt* and their exact nature is only known to the knower of the unknown, yet one cannot close one’s eyes to its signs that are now appearing in this world.

The emphasis of *فَجَبَعْنَهُمْ جَبْعًا* in *جَبْعًا* shows that the trumpet will gather every single soul: small or great, rich or poor, present or absent, worshippers and the worshipped – all of them.

26. And on that day, We shall leave them so that they shall be striking one another like waves do, and the trumpet shall be sounded. Thus, We shall gather all of them

27. Until that time arrives when Gog and Magog are let loose and they launch an onslaught from every high place.

28 **وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَرَضًا ۝**

The verse implies that today these intellectually blind people do not foresee Hell but on that day they will see it with their very eyes.

29 **الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَاءٍ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَا يَسْتَشْعِرُونَ سَعَا ۝**

This verse describes that so intellectually deprived were those people that none of the prophetic reminders could open their eyes and when God's warnings were sounded to them, they could not bear them.

أَفَحَسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِي أَوْلِيَاءَ ۚ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا ۝

A warning is sounded to those wretched people in this verse.

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ۝ الَّذِينَ صَلَّوْا سَعِيَّهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ۝ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَزْنًا ۝ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاءُ هُمُ الْكَافِرِينَ ۝

31 **رُسُلِي هَٰؤُلَاءِ ۝**

These verses strike a blow at the arrogance of these people. Today they regard themselves to be superior but on the Day of

28. And on that day, We shall bring forth Hell before those disbelievers.

29. Whose eyes were covered from Our warning and they were not able to listen

30. Do these disbelievers think that they will make My servants to be their guardian except Me? We have prepared Hell for the hospitality of the disbelievers.

31. Say: Should We inform you who the greatest losers are with regard to their deeds? Those people all of whose efforts were wasted while going after the life of the world while they thought that they were doing very noble deeds. It is these people who denied their Lord's revelations as well as meeting Him. Thus, their deeds went waste and on the Day of Judgment, We shall not give them any weight. Their reward is this Hell because they have disbelieved and have made fun of My revelations and My messengers.

Judgement they will become insignificant. They haughtily made fun of God's revelations and now they will taste the flavour of Hell as a consequence.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ﴿٣٢﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حِوَلًا ﴿٣٣﴾

This verse states the reward of those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds.

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لَكُتِبَ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنْفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِشَلْهِ مَدَدًا ﴿٣٤﴾

The word *كَلِمَاتُ* refers to the signs of God's power and wisdom found scattered within human beings as well as outside them. This verse is a response to the arrogant who would make fun of the Qur'ān and demand a miracle to be shown to them. In Sūrah Luqmān, an even stronger response is given. What is stated is the exact truth and no exaggeration at all. If the sea wants to write all its signs and miracles, its ink will not be sufficient for it. However, these signs can only be seen by those who have eyes.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَتَّبَأِ الْهُكْمِ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

The verse asks the Prophet (sws) to tell those people that showing signs is the prerogative of God. He is only God's envoy who recites divine revelations that He sends to him. The

32. Indeed those who have accepted faith and have done righteous deeds, for them is the hospitality of the orchards of Paradise where they shall abide forever; they shall never want to leave that place.

33. Say: If the sea becomes ink to write down the signs of my Lord, the sea would run dry before the signs of my Lord run out even if We add to it another similar sea.

34. Say: I am only a human being like you. I receive the revelation that your God is only one God. Thus, he who is hopeful of meeting his Lord should do righteous deeds and not associate anyone in worshipping his Lord.

Prophet (sws) should tell them that he has never claimed to be God in that he could fulfil their demand of showing a miracle.

This completes the explanation of this *sūrah*. May God forgive our mistakes and open our hearts to the truth. **وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ** (and our last statement is: all gratitude be to God, the Lord of the worlds).

Lahore,
27th October 1972

