Lessons from the Cave *(al-Kahf)*

Story 1
Part II
Samir Mahmoud
Course Contents

1. Introduction: Story Telling
2. The Companions of the Cave
3. Moses & his Mysterious Companion
4. Dhulqarnayn
Questions from Previous Lesson

1. Can you comment on verse [...] where God says: “so that we may know” in relation to Divine Omniscience?

2. Is the surah addressed to Trinity and is it about Christians?

3. Psychedelics and drugs?
La Yu‘awwal ‘Alayha

**Human Being**

**Physical/Somatic /Bodily Sphere**

**Psychological Sphere**

**Spiritual Sphere**

**Psychedelic drugs operate to generate or project somatic or psycho-somatic experiences**

**The Traces of Genuine Spiritual Experiences:**
1. Improved outward adherence to *Shar‘* & overall improved moral behavior and *adab*.
2. Inward states (*ahwal*) that remain with one and lead to a station (*maqam*).
3. Higher level of consciousness
4. True visions

**The Traces of Psycho-Somatic Experiences:**
1. Usually temporary ‘psycho-somatic high’ misinterpreted as a ‘spiritual’ high
2. Addictive and requires renewed high because the previous ones never last
3. No higher level of consciousness
4. No greater moral/ethical behavior, *adab*, or adherence to *shar‘*.
Course Contents

1. Introduction: Story Telling
2. The Companions of the Cave
3. Moses & his Mysterious Companion
4. Dhulqarnayn
2. The Companions of the Cave (Ashab al-Kahf)
Scene One: The Two Paths

Verses 13-16
We are obsessed today with objectivity and objective reality. Can we really ever reach it on our own? The pursuit of what is objective and real is commendable but we must seek it in the right place otherwise it is vain and in vain.

The only objectivity is Divine Objectivity and the only objective reality is the Divine Reality & Truth (al-Haqq).

What is real then? The event as seen through historical materialism or its meaning seen through insight or the Unseen? In other words is its truth an accurate representation of the physical/historical events in their linear unfolding? Or is the truth narrated by God more accurate in that it mirrors the real unfolding of events?

The Quran demands that we listen to what it unfolds before us not to expect to find (or impose on it our own cognitive structures and assumptions).
Comment: Truth & Reality

The Quranic view does not assume that we are somehow just conscious rational creatures in control of things. That is an illusion. It assumes that we partake of a reality where we have choices but that we are also affected by factors we cannot possibly account for.

Therefore, by aligning ourselves with Quranic guidance we align ourselves with what is. If we ignore it we align ourselves with an illusion.
This refers to the fact that they stood firm in their faith in the face of the world and its temptations.

It also refers to the fact that when interrogated before the king about their beliefs, they stood firm and did not waver. They proclaimed their faith and spoke truth to power.

What did they say? The Quran will reveal to us what they said.
Comment: “They said…”

But this ‘saying’ is said with deep faith (iman). The Prophet (SAW) defined the word Iman by saying:

“Faith is a knowledge in the heart, a voicing with the tongue, and an activity with the limbs.”
“Faith (Iman) is a:

1. knowledge in the heart
2. voicing with the tongue
3. activity with the limbs.”
Comment: “Our Lord is...”

The Quranic story shifts again and we are the ones standing before the king/world/ “the arrogant and the proud” Q (40:35)

What do we/they say? “Our Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth. We shall not call upon any deity other than Him.”

Here the deity (ilah) may well refer to another god. But that is not all. Recall the Quran reminds us that we all too often take our desires as our deities and worship them. How? “Do you see the one who take his own desires as his deity; are you to be responsible for him?” (Q 25:43)

By specifying that their Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth they are making the supreme statement of faith: the only Reality around which their whole being revolves is the One (al-Ahad). It is a statement of ikhlas (sincerity) also.
Comment: Multiple deities!

**Dalil al-Tamanu’**

The proof of tamanu’ is quite straightforward. It goes something like this: if there was more than one god, there would be chaos rather than order in the universe. Since there is order in the universe, there must be only one God. The tamanu’ argument is derived from Quranic verse (21:22):

_Had there been in the heavens and the earth any deities other than God, both (of those realms) would certainly have fallen into ruin. All-Glorified God is, the Lord of the Supreme Throne, in that He is absolutely above all that they attribute to Him._

Q (17:42)

_Say: “If there were, as they assert, deities apart from Him, surely they would seek a way to the Master of the Supreme Throne (the dominion of the creation).”_

Q (23:91)

_There is no deity along with Him; otherwise each deity would surely have sought absolute independence with his creatures under his authority, and they would surely have tried to overpower one another._
Comment: Multiple deities!

The argument looks something like this:

If there is more than one god, these gods will not always agree with one another. They will most likely try to have things in the universe happen their own way. One of them may want for a stone to move, for example, while the other may want for it to remain motionless. Having both actions happen at the same time is impossible. If the two gods are equal in power they would be locked in a tie forever never being able to win over the other and so nothing would get done in the universe. But we know from what we see that things are always happening in the universe and so there can only be one God. If, however, one of the gods overcomes the other, one of them will be powerless. A powerless god is not really a god and so there can only be one God.
Comment: Shirk…without proof

What is *shirk* (idolatry or association)?

Anatomy of *Shirk* (Idolatry)
The real causes shirk & unbelief:

2. *Deviations* (*Inhiraf*) : Q (40:36-37)
4. *Ignorance* (*Jahl*) : Q (2:118)

Note ‘azlamu’ can also mean ‘darker’ i.e. who is darker or ‘in darkness.’

It is an illusion to think that *shirk* is real. It isn’t. It has no foundation, i.e. no proof that it is. In addition, the expression suggests that they have never really thought it through. They have no authority for such a belief other than the four causes of *shirk* we mentioned earlier.

The ‘injustice/darkness’ alluded to is twofold:

1. It is an injustice to God because He deserves more from us.
2. It is an injustice against ourselves.
Comment: “Taken...”

The root of ‘ittakhazu’ suggests, in this context, that ‘you have taken possession of...’

While it might be a linguistic stretch, it draws out the essence of ‘idolatry’, which is a ‘taking possession of...’ An idol is a thing we ourselves make and project our own powers into thus committing a grave injustice against ourselves in the process.

We then submit to it without any ‘sultanin bayyinin’ because it has no foundation or authority other than the hot air we have projected.

By submitting to it, a curious thing happens.

We presume we are in touch with it (God, the gods, powers, etc. recall Ibrahim here) but in fact we are only in touch with images of ourselves or to put it in more accurate psychological terms, we are in touch with ourselves in alienated forms.

While I possess the idol because it is my projection, it possesses me too!
Comment: “When you have withdrawn...”

What is it to withdraw? They withdrew from falsehood first and then from the people of falsehood second.

It begins with an inner disposition of withdrawal that translates into an outer withdrawal from all the signs and manifestations of that which is false.

The two ways of life are irreconcilable because each has very different consequences in life; they are mutually exclusive. Here one is confronted with a choice, an existential choice, the most important choice.

Comment: “…from them and what they worship other than God.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iman</th>
<th>Kufr</th>
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<tr>
<td>Light</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
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What is the causal nexus here? Who is saying what? Who is doing what? Did they suggest to each other to seek refuge in the cave? Did God tell them to? If so, how? God inspires in many ways. The Quran describes many instances of this but never explains how. Is it direct speech to them? Is it by planting an idea in their mind? **Wahy?**

1. Revelation
2. revelation
3. inspiration

Who is saying: “Seek refuge in the cave”? Is it one of them or is it God (Allah) or is it both?

Comment: “When you have withdrawn....Seek refuge...”

Who is saying what here? There are multiple overlapping speakers.

1. They say to one another: “When you have withdrawn from that which they worship, seek refuge in the cave.”

2. God says to them: “When you have withdrawn from that which they worship, seek refuge in the cave.”

Who is the one saying: “Seek refuge in the cave”? Is it one of them or is it God (Allah) or is it both?
Comment: “God will spread out his compassion...” Q (42:28)

The constricted space of the cave is expanded by the warmth of faith.

The cave, a womb (*rahim*), is joined to its functional root (*rahma*). It is not a symbol of *rahma*, it *symbolizes with rahma*, therefore it is its ontological extension (spread).

It, like a womb, is a life nurturing environment. There is no death here. There is only life in its true meaning.

The connotations of *n-sh-r* also include ‘to revive’ and ‘to resurrect’.

Life with God.
Scene Two: Death

Verses 17-18
Here we must recall verse 11 that has already informed us that the companions were put to sleep. Verse 16 told us they were inspired by God to take refuge in the cave. This verse presents us with a very vivid, powerful, and moving image of their dynamic sleep. We are spectators here once again brought into the cave as the sun’s rays move across the entrance of the cave and their shadows dance on the cave walls.

This term ‘dhalka’ directly connects with verse 9. This is among the many signs of God.
Comment: “You would flee in terror…”

For all appearances, they look alive. Their eyes are open, their hair has not grown, they do not age, they are still breathing. One flees from them because one’s sense of reality would be distorted.

“Our Power and Care of them…”

“We removed from them the attribute of humanness (bashariyya) and annihilated them in the Attributes of Holiness (Qudsiyya).”

Comment: “You would think them awake…”

For all appearances, they look alive, neither asleep nor awake.

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Scene Three: Resurrection

Verses 19-20
Comment: A Day or part of a day... Q (50:22, 30:55, 23:112-114)

Suddenly the scene fast-forwards to their resurrection. We don’t know how much time has elapsed. They are now awake but they are too confused and disoriented. How much time have they slept? They turn to each other in confusion. They were in another world and now they are back in this world.

Time has an eerie suspended quality. When the Prophet returned form his Night Journey his bed was still warm.

But why would God inform us of this most intimate detail (their questioning one another)? Perhaps to show us that their understanding of reality had become distorted and confused.

When they asked each other, their answer was: we remained for a day or part of a day. The issue is: in their experience in this other world it may well have felt like that. The fact that they woke up and there were no observable changes to them may have confirmed their short stay. But only God knows how long they remained and in which time dimension.
Different Dimensions of Time

Divine Time or Day is the moment

Threshold of Time-Space

One day = 1,000 or 50,000 of our days

Inner Time (Zamān Anfusī)

Outer Time (Zamān Āfāqī)

Creation
‘The time spent with the beloved is short no matter how long it lasts. The lover never gets enough of the beloved even if he spends an Aeon. The end of his yearning is like its beginning.’

‘Those asleep have no awareness of time.’
Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or return you to their religion. And never would you succeed, then - ever.
Scene Four: The Hour is Real

Verses 21
Comment: “So that they may know...”

In the meantime the people of the town had been debating their fate for centuries. They knew of these youth who had disappeared.

Their story is now a *khabar mutawatir*.

*Liya ‘lamu* is concerning not the believers but those who disbelieved in it.
Man says, 'Who will give life to rotten bones?' Say, 'He who created them first will give them life again and He has knowledge of all His creation. He has created for you fire from the green tree and behold, you kindle from it. Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the like of them? He surely is. He is the All-Knowing Creator. His command when He desires a thing is to say to it, 'Be!' and it is. Glory be to Him in whose hand is the dominion of everything and it is to Him you return'. (XXVII.78-83)

M. A. Abu Rida, in the Rasa'il Kindi says about the latter's commentary on these verses:

'Our philosopher sets out the theoretical principle inherent in these verses and also draws conclusions from them. These are:

(i) The return to existence of something after it has been created and has disintegrated is possible, as proved by seeing it actually happen, especially since collecting the scattered parts of something is easier than creating and originating that thing from non-existence - although there is nothing that we can term easier or harder for God. This proof exists in the verse:

'Say, 'He who created them first will give them life again and He has knowledge of all His creation'.

(ii) The emergence of something out of its opposite, like fire from a green tree, is possible, and it does actually happen, and can be perceived by the senses. It is possible, therefore, that life will pulse again in a body that is disintegrated and lifeless, and this is also based on the greater principle which is that something can come into existence out of non-existence by the action of the true Creator. This proof exists in the verse:

'He created for you fire from the green tree and behold, you kindle from it.'

Al-Ash'ari used this proof to demonstrate that the Resurrection is possible.

(iii) The creation of man, or bringing him to life again after death is easier than creating the universe when it was not there in the first instance, and this is the content of the next verse:

'Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the like of them? He surely is. He is the All-Knowing Creator.'

(iv) Creation or any form of activity, however great the object created may be, does not require any substance or time on the part of God, the Originator. Herein lies a contrast with the activity of human beings, which takes time for fulfilment and requires a given substance that can be worked on. This is the meaning of the verse:

'His command, when He desires a thing is to say to it, 'Be!' and it is'.

In the opinion of al-Kindi, this verse should answer the denial in the heart of the unbelievers based on their supposition that the Divine activity manifested in the creation of the great universe needs a time proportionately great. The verse gives the decisive answer by explaining the nature of Divine activity, and that it is Creative Will and Absolute Power needing neither substance nor extent in time.

'Which man can bring together with human philosophy in a speech employing the number of letters in these verses what the Almighty has brought together and explained for His blessed Prophet: that bones will come to life again after having been decayed, and that His power creates heaven and earth and something comes out of its opposite ... the crafty tongues of the logicians are too weak to do this, and the utmost human capabilities would fall far short of this goal, and the limited human intellect is barred from such attainment.'

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Scene Five: Only God Knows

Verses 22-24
They will say there were three, the fourth of them being their dog; and they will say there were five, the sixth of them being their dog - guessing at the unseen, and they will say there were seven, and the eighth of them was their dog. Say, [O Muhammad], "My Lord is most knowers of their number. None knows them except a few. So do not argue about them except with an obvious argument and do not insinuate about them among the speculators; from anyone."

And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow."

Except [when adding], "If Allah wills." And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct."
Scene Six: The Truth

Verses 25-27
And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and exceeded by nine.

Say, "Allah is most knowing of how long they remained. He has [knowledge of] the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth. How Seeing is He and how Hearing! They have not besides Him any protector, and He shares not His legislation with anyone."
Q & A
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