***The Companions of Uhdud and A Child***

***Question: What are the messages for us today in regard to the story called the Companions of Uhdud which is briefly mentioned in the Qur’an* (**Büruj 85/4-9**)** ***and more fully in the Sunnah?***

There is an event regarding the Companions of Uhdud that is described in almost every tafsir book. The event is based on a number of hadith books like Muslim, Tirmidhi and Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s *Al-Musnad*. A king had a sorcerer. The elderly sorcerer said to the king, “I have come to the end of my life. Give me a child so I can teach him sorcery.” The king gave him a child and he began to teach the child. But there was a priest between the child’s house and the sorcerer, and one day the child visited the priest. The things the priest explained pleased the child very much.

One day a terrible monster appeared on the road traveled by the people. The child picked up a rock and saying, “My God, if You like what the priest says more than what the sorcerer says, then kill this monster and let the people go on their way,” and he threw the rock. The monster died and the people continued on their way. When the child related this to the priest, the priest said, “My son, now you are more elevated than me. Keep going, but do not disclose me to others at that moment.” As days passed, the child reached higher levels and became famous, so much so that he began to cure the blind, lepers and other ill people. One day, a blind companion of the king asked the child to cure him. The child replied, “I cannot cure anyone, but God can. If you believe in God, He will restore your health.” The cured companion went to the king. The king was amazed and asked who did this. The companion said, “My Lord cured me.” The king asked, “You mean me?” The companion answered, “No, God who is the Lord of both you and me.” Saying, “Do you have any lord other than me?” the king began to persecute the companion.

Unable to endure the torture, the companion said the child’s name. When the king summoned the child and got the same answer, he began to torture him as well, and learned that this idea came from the priest. The king summoned the three of them and wanted them to forego their religion, and threatened them with death. When they persisted in their beliefs, he had the priest and companion killed with a saw. He turned over the child to his men to have them throw him off a high mountain. However, when the child prayed, “My God, save me from them,” the mountain shook and the men fell down the mountain.

Saved from the men, the child went to the king again and told him what happened to his men. This time, the king gave the child to some others and commanded them to throw him into the deep sea if he did not give up his religion. The child was again saved by prayer and going to the king, he said that as long as he did not do what he was told, he would not be able to kill the child. Then he gathered the people together and told the king to have him hanged on a tree. Then he took an arrow from his quiver and told the king to shoot the arrow saying, “In the name of God, the Lord of the child…” Only in this way could he be killed. The king did as the child said, and the arrow struck the child’s chest and he died. Watching this event, the people said that they believed in the Lord of the child. Then the king had some ditches dug and filled with fire, and then he had the believers thrown into the ditches. (For the story of Ashabul Uhdud see: Müslim, *zühd* 73; Tirmizi, *tefsiru sure* (85); Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad* 6/17)

Such a legendary event has important messages for every age. A hand was extended to a child, and care was given to him, and into his spirit was poured inspirations. As he touched others, these inspirations matured in others’ hearts, and it was the first step toward a new generation, and a new society. Compared to modern times, miracles were more apparent and evident. The Prophet Jesus cured the blind, treated the sick, and, in fact, resurrected the dead, with God’s permission. Of course, these were divine blessings and miracles. A person can correct any defect in others if God allows it.

The knowledge of wonders, and the wonders in the system of guidance, should not be generalized, should not be taken lightly. When a Muslim has reached a high level of understanding, and then is subjected to an atheistic, secular environment for seventy or eighty years, protective circles form around him, and an echo of a brighter future sounds from a distance. Though such a person has read very little, he knows things the size of mountains. Imam Rabbani and Bediüzzaman are two men who were subject to such a wonder. By the grace of God, the voices of those men are still ringing in the heavens. On the other hand, many people, with a much lower level of understanding, perhaps learned Arabic, and dabbled in other religious sciences, but they are just spinning their wheels.

Master Bediüzzaman implied that though wonders exist, he aimed to address the logic and reason of his followers. Today, opening the doors of a person’s heart is more important than opening a person’s eyes or curing his illnesses. Prophet Jesus guided a community whose spirituality had been blocked by materialism, which was more important than his curing a few sick people. This was his greatest miracle—reviving a sick society. Likewise, when our Prophet had water run from his fingers, or when plants and animals greeted him, these were not his most significant miracles. Already, many people had listened to him and taken refuge in Islam. His greatest miracle was his call ringing true in the hearts of people, and their dead hearts coming back to life.

Today, youth who possess the talent of expression, the talent of persuasion, and the talent of guidance, together with the wonder of knowledge, can do great good for their own nation and for all of mankind, just as that child did. I think that these youths have even more advantages than that child raised at the side of the priest. Thus, this story carries much wisdom for us. There is a parallel, too, between this story and the method that Prophet Moses used to convey his message to the Pharaoh.

While making mutual promises with the Pharaoh, Prophet Moses did two significant things—he chose forenoon as the time, and he gathered all the people together in one place. These two choices are very important. It would not have sufficed for only the Pharaoh and a few others to see that he depended on God, that he had absolute trust in Him, that, with God’s power and strength, the rod in his hand turned into a snake, that he could destroy all the tricks of the Pharoah’s magicians. He wanted everyone to hear the truths he would reveal, because this power had been given to him by God Almighty, Lord of the Hebrews, the Egyptians, Pharoah, and everything under the sun, seen and unseen. He wanted a collective conscience to witness this. It was a crucial tactic and a proof of his prophetic wisdom. Choosing forenoon on a holiday to gather the people together allowed for everyone to hear about the magicians’ duel, and allowed them to be well-rested. Abdullah ibn Huzafah as-Sahmi was taken captive and, like the Prophet Moses, when a priest gave him a respite to invite him to Christianity, he said, “Father, I thank you for giving me a three-minute respite, because if I can explain Islam to you within this time, I will not be sorry in the afterlife.” Indeed, though the pharaoh would probably not listen to Prophet Moses, and he might be punished, the event would lead to a broader victory, and remain as a good memory.

It is important to note that the magicians comprised the intellectual class of that time. Consequently, Moses defeating the elite class of that period meant the rest would follow, similar to Muhammad defeating the poets. When the rod in Moses’ hand became a huge snake, and swallowed whole the magic wands and ropes of the magicians, all the magicians bowed down in prostration and said, “*We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.”* (Taha 20:70) Their bow made an impression on the people there. A door to doubt was opened. Prophet Moses took their hearts in his hand, and shaped them like wax, for defiant disbelief had been broken.

In the story of the child raised by the priest, the child may symbolize prophetic logic. Like divine truth, God protected him against evil. While men tumbled down the mountain or drowned in the sea, the child had a sacred power given to him by God. They wanted to kill him, but God did not give them that opportunity. Perhaps because he was a child, they could not stomach the task, or perhaps because of the discord the child had awoken in the community, killing the child could create some social complications. It is not fully clear, but it is possible to read between the lines. Like the Prophet Moses, he said, “After gathering the people together, you will hang me on a tree branch and shoot an arrow saying, ‘In the name of God, the child…’” Though the child became a martyr, he gained his real value. The earth was shaken to its foundation, and God’s existence was felt in all consciences. I don’t know how relevant this situation is today, but I believe that this kind of individual heroism should be avoided as much as possible.

We should use what God has given us to the best of our ability. If a task yields one or two results, we should strive to obtain more results. God tells us that good deeds sometimes earn ten, sometimes seventy, and sometimes seven hundred rewards, and with this is also a goal. One can harvest seven hundred times everything one plants. There is wisdom in every good deed, both material and spiritual, and one must consider this world and the afterlife, as well. The Qur’an and Sunnah are inexhaustible treasures of signs and symbols.

Though the idea of becoming a martyr is a very noble notion, and it is very important, on an individual basis, to go to heaven and reach the gardens of paradise, it is more important to ask, “What more can I do for my country and nation?” and seek ways to do so. Being able to go beyond martyrdom is related to a man better knowing his own worth. This vast universe has been knitted around mankind like lace, with no expense spared for a single man. A person should know his own worth, and even while dying, should die like a human being. Even while being taken to the gallows, he should sing pleasantly to the sky.

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