



"(ASH-SHAMS - THE SUN) THE HOLY PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)"

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This chapter was revealed in Makkah. In the last chapter, Al-Balad (The City), mention was made of the message and the efforts required to propagate it. This chapter speaks of the bearer of the message informing us that he was the perfect soul and that he was the embodiment of the perfections and excellences that an ideal soul should possess. It promises success to those who follow him and it warns his opponents of destruction. Further, perfect souls are compared to Allah's she-camel. Whoever tries to slaughter her will himself meet with annihilation.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the sun and his brightness!

And the moon when she borrows light from him!

And the day when it exposes it to view!

And the night when it draws a veil over it!

And the heaven and its make!

And the earth and its extension!

And the soul and its perfection!

So He reveals to it its way of evil and its way of good!

He is indeed successful who causes it to grow.

And he indeed fails who buries it.

The conclusion in the last two verses above tells us that the different matters the first six verses deal with provide various categories of evidence concerning the perfection of the human soul.

We shall consider them more closely. Verses one and two describe the perfect soul, that is, they manifest the perfect knowledge of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In other words, just like the sun, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) is the source of heavenly knowledge and light and he was created by Allah for the express purpose of bestowing these bounties on the whole world. However, while on the one hand his light of guidance and knowledge is compared with the sun which distributes its favours without prejudice on the whole world, on the other hand, he is likened to the

moon for he borrows this light of guidance and knowledge from Allah, Himself, and this is so because of his complete submission to Allah and his perfect obedience to His commands. In other words, this light that he sheds on others is really a reflection of Allah's light.

So, from one side he is imparting Divine light like the sun, and from the other, like the moon, he is borrowing it. He is giving knowledge to mankind on the one hand whilst on the other, he is receiving it from his Creator, so he is a teacher and at the same time he is a student.

The next two verses make clear the perfection of his actions. By day, we can witness the benefits of the sunlight which makes it possible for us to engage in strenuous effort which is the root of all progress. Similarly, like the day, the perfect soul makes such efforts and attains such an elevated position through his actions that the blessings of his knowledge begin to be seen as clearly as the sunlight. This is the knowledge which he has acquired from the Divine storehouse and from which he obtained all kinds of progress which accrue from hard labour.

On the other hand, intrinsic to worldly striving is a kind of restlessness and anxiety. Look at Europe today, how it has become a centre for industrious work, but this has led to an absence of calmness and contentment in people. Instead, their hearts are buffeted by waves of restlessness, impatience and anxiety and in order to calm their troubled minds, day and night, they indulge in all kinds of diversions like drinking, gambling and seeking pleasure and merriment between the sexes. But in spite of all this, the fire in their hearts does not abate; instead it flares up even more. On the other hand, when the labour of the perfect soul reaches its climax, this produces in the heart a state of peace and contentment and for us an indication of this is the night when it envelops everything in its embrace.

Just as the night brings with it a natural condition of peace and quietude and all restlessness and perturbation are enwrapped in a shroud of sleep and darkness, and peace and calmness reign supreme, in the same way the perfect soul inherently possesses complete tranquillity, contentment and peace of heart which all go hand in hand with his untiring labour for the sake of his Lord.

After this, the next two verses depict the Holy Prophet's perfect connection with Allah and his deep affection for the creation of Allah. In other words, the perfect soul, through his complete obedience to Allah and his bond with Him creates within himself a glorious position similar to that of the heavens. That is, through obeying Allah and attaining His pleasure, he has conquered the base passions and evil promptings of worldly life so completely and so elevated have his moral and spiritual qualities risen that he, as it were, has reached the sky in height with the result that he is no longer a citizen of this world but is now an inhabitant of heaven. This is the ultimate in closeness to Allah and cutting off everything else in preference to Him.

On the other hand, in his kindness to the creation of Allah he behaves with such humility, courtesy, meekness, generosity and selflessness that he has assumed the qualities of the earth, and in munificence and self-abnegation he gives liberally like the earth, to all, without discrimination.

So, whatever apparently mutually contradictory attributes are visible in the universe - - the giving of light by the sun and the borrowing of it by the moon, the struggle by day and resting by night, the majestic elevation of the heavens and the extensiveness and humility of the earth -- are all contained in the perfect soul which is a universe in miniature and a manifest compendium of all these attributes to the highest degree possible. In other words, all these qualities are found in the most perfect form in the Holy Prophet (pbuh). However, every person according to his own level of perfection or according to his own capacity, partakes of these qualities. Moreover, Allah, Most High, has sent down His revelation to man to help him to develop these natural talents and capabilities and from his own perfect knowledge, He has vouchsafed guidance for him to attain righteousness and to shun evil so that he may not stumble, but that he may advance to the highest position possible.

So, firstly, man is blessed with natural aptitudes and talents in such a way that whatever virtues every thing in the universe possesses individually, are all found together in the human soul. Secondly, for the continued growth of these powers and capabilities, Allah has provided irrigation in the form of revelation so that man may attain the zenith of perfection. Accordingly, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) is a compendium of all excellences as this verse, Successful is he who purifies it, testifies. In other words, both in this world and the Hereafter he has achieved success and felicity and has become the recipient of the perfect attributes mentioned in the previous verses.

On the contrary, those who did not nurture their natural potentialities, but instead buried them in vice and iniquity, have become failures. So, whatever teaching the Holy Prophet brought contained guidance for human growth and development towards perfection and his noble personality is a standing testimony of all perfect attributes. Therefore, whoever becomes a follower of this perfect soul will be successful and whoever becomes an opponent will suffer disappointment and destruction as the people of Thamud were totally destroyed because of their opposition to their prophet, Salih.

Thamud rejected the truth in their inordinacy.

The tribe of Thamud lived to the north of the Hejaz. An appreciation of their civilisation, power and style of government can be gleaned from those remains that are being excavated today. They made houses out of stone and even hewed out habitations from large blocks of rock and indications of their power and glory can be gauged from their city of red stone, pictures of which have been published in contemporary newspapers.

When the basest of them broke forth with mischief --

There can be no more pitiable a plight than that of national leaders who lead their people astray. These errant leaders always stand in opposition to the truth because they suffer a blow to their pride and vanity when their false teachings are exposed.

So Allah's messenger said to them: (Leave alone) Allah's she-camel, and (give) her (to) drink.

Love for extraordinary and miraculous occurrences have forced many of our religious leaders to concoct all kinds of fanciful stories concerning this she-camel. Some put forward this strange tale that this camel came out miraculously from a big rock. Allah alone knows where they got this story from for there is no mention of it in the Holy Quran.

The truth is that among the tribe of Thamud there was a custom where very wealthy or high-ranking people of the nation used to set loose an animal bearing their name. This beast had freedom to eat and drink wherever it wished and could even attack people with impunity. No one had the power to kill that animal or to seize it or even lay hand on it. To slaughter or capture it was tantamount to sending a message to the owner implying that the attacker had no regard for the owner of the animal and was even prepared to do battle with him. This would prompt the master to get ready for battle so as to punish the offender with due punishment in order to demonstrate and preserve his authority and prestige, or to die in the attempt. If he remained alive without having been able to exact retribution, then that signalled the end of his power and rank.

Even today, Hindus allow their fat, young bulls to roam about freely. No Muslim has the power to lay a hand on them. In fact, even though these young, robust oxen move freely around and even cause damage to people, no Muslim has the temerity to slaughter and eat them, nor can he, in order to prevent loss to himself, break their legs or confine them in an enclosure. In fact, this is a concrete demonstration of Hindu power.

The author was once stationed at Gujarat where a saintly person by the name of Karam Ilahi was in seclusion. One of his bulls too, used to wander freely all over the place and would enter the hospital garden and break the flowerpots and destroy the trees. Nevertheless, in spite of his order, no hospital worker would dare touch that animal, so terrified were they at the thought of a dreadful calamity befalling them if they were to do anything to that holy man's bull. In short, this custom was an undisputed sign of power among the people of Thamud.

Now it has always been the way of Allah to show a miracle or demonstrate a sign of His power in a manner which is in accordance with the established custom of a people in order to bring to a culmination the series of arguments presented to them before. To them, Prophet Salih was a weak and helpless person whilst his people, the tribe of Thamud, was a powerful community who considered him of no consequence. Nine tribes among them hatched a plot to kill Prophet Salih and his family during the night as the Holy Quran mentions in the verse, They said: Swear to one another by Allah that we shall attack him and his family by night (27:49).

It is like times like these that Allah deems it opportune to show a miracle and so He presented the sign of the she-camel to the people of Thamud, telling them that that was His she-camel. In other words, in order to demonstrate His power He chose a miracle that would fit in with their own customs. In this, there was a subtle point -- that is, the perfect soul of Allah's messenger, Prophet Salih, was in fact regarded as Allah's she-camel on which Allah was riding and on him divine light and glory were sent down. All his moving about, his speaking and his working were carried out in accordance with the command of Allah in the same way as a she-camel's moving about and resting are under the direction of its master. Similarly, the Prophet's water is really the Divine guidance which he brings from Allah. This water provides eternal life to the human soul. Therefore, whoever desires to destroy Allah's messenger and the guidance he has brought indeed fights against Allah, Himself.

This was the manner Allah chose to make the people of Thamud understand His message for in the light of their tradition this was the ideal way of getting through to them. This example was also a warning to the Makkans reminding them that the Holy Prophet (pbuh), like prophet Salih, was a she-camel of Allah and if they attempted to harm him in any way Allah would not sit quietly by. Instead, He would certainly destroy them as He did to the tribe of Thamud.

But they called him a liar and slaughtered her...

The people of Thamud were a very proud tribe and considered Thamud's appointed she-camel not as that of an All-powerful deity but as that of an insignificant person. In that country water was very scarce so they used to build reservoirs to collect it during the rainy season. Therefore, in no way were they going to allow Prophet Salih's she-camel free access to the water especially since their refusal to accept his message had reached the ultimate limit. Therefore, they killed the she-camel which Allah had presented as a sign to them. In other words, by doing this, they dared the God of Prophet Salih to do whatever He pleased to them if indeed Salih was a true messenger of His and the she-camel was really His. So, in keeping with the custom of their country they met the fate which is meted out to a weak person who is bold enough to challenge a powerful opponent.

So their Lord destroyed them for their sin and levelled them with the (ground).

That was the result of their battle against Allah and their belying the message of His apostle.

And He fears not its consequence.

Allah cared not for the repercussions of His decree because to remove evil people from the world is not a harmful thing but a beneficial act. In giving the example of Thamud, Allah was sending a message to the Makkans telling them that He knew that nine of their tribes, too, were plotting to kill the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) at night just as the nine tribes of Thamud had devised the same conspiracy to kill Prophet Salih. He warned them that the perfect soul, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was His she-camel. Whoever among them wanted to kill the she-camel of Allah would themselves suffer destruction. So He advised them to refrain from laying hand on him else they would suffer the same fate as that of the people of Thamud.

Indeed, this challenge of Allah is as alive today as it was in the past. Those who desire to obliterate the name of the Holy Prophet and his message, that is, the Holy Quran, will, if Allah pleases, themselves become frustrated losers and will ultimately be destroyed for a perfect soul is a she-camel of Allah and to attack him is to run the risk of extirpation.