

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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## Lessons from the Encounter Between the Prophet Moosaa and al-Khadir

Extracted from *Tayseer al-Kareem ar-Rahmaan fee Tafseer Kalaam al-Mannaan*, by as-Sa'dee

Translated by Aboo Shaybah

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In *Soorah al-Kahf*, from verse 60 through verse 82, a story is told of an encounter between the Prophet Moosaa (ﷺ) and al-Khadir, as well as the events which transpired in the time they spent together.

The scholar 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Naasir as-Sa'dee (ﷺ) explained these verses in his *Tafseer* and he supplemented his explanation by listing 38 lessons derived from that encounter.

This splendid and remarkable story contains many lessons, rulings and principles. We will draw attention to some of them with the assistance of Allaah.

1) The excellence of knowledge and journeying to seek it, as it is the most important of affairs. Moosaa (ﷺ) certainly traveled a long distance and experienced fatigue during his quest. He chose to not stay among Banee Israa'eel in order to teach and guide them and, instead, he preferred traveling for the sake of increasing his knowledge.

2) Prioritizing matters according to their importance. Learning and improving one's knowledge are undoubtedly more important than refraining from doing so and being preoccupied with teaching while not yet being adequately equipped with knowledge. However, the more complete approach is to combine both affairs (i.e. learning and teaching).

3) The permissibility of employing an attendant, whether in residence or traveling, so as to take care of provisions and to seek ease, as done by Moosaa.

4) In the case of someone who travels for the purpose of seeking knowledge, or striving in the cause of Allaah, or something similar; if publicizing the objective and location would prove advantageous, then it should be done. Such would surely be better than withholding it, since publicizing would have benefits including carrying out all necessary preparations, approaching the matter with insight, and letting others know the nobility this venerable act of worship, as Moosaa said, **"I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas or until I spend years and years travelling."**<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in preparation for the battle of Tabook, the Prophet (ﷺ) openly informed his Companions of the objective and location, although it was his custom to conceal such information. That was done taking the resulting advantage into consideration.

5) Ascribing evil and its causes to Shayṭaan, as it relates to his enticement and deceptive beautification, although it is all according to the Divine Decree of Allaah. This is understood from the attendant of Moosaa saying, **"And none but Shayṭaan made me forget to mention it."**<sup>2</sup>

6) The permissibility of informing others about things that are part of human nature – such as fatigue, hunger or thirst – so long as it is truthful and is not done out of displeasure or annoyance. This is understood from Moosaa saying, **"Truly, we have suffered much fatigue in this journey of ours."**<sup>3</sup>

7) The recommendation that one's attendant be clever, perceptive and intelligent, so as to carry out the instructions given to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):60

<sup>2</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):63

<sup>3</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):62

8) The recommendation of one feeding his attendant from his own food, as well as the two of them eating together. The implication from Moosaa saying “**bring us our lunch**”<sup>4</sup> is that they ate together, due to him using the word “our.”

9) Assistance is granted to someone according to his compliance with the command of Allaah, and one who fulfils the command receives assistance that no one else is granted. This is understood from Moosaa saying, “**Truly, we have suffered much fatigue in this journey of ours,**”<sup>5</sup> which refers to the portion in which they went past the junction of the two seas. However, as for the portion prior to that, he did not complain of weariness from it despite its distance, because it was the intended journey that was undertaken. As it relates to the latter portion, it may have only lasted part of a day, because they lost the fish when they took shelter at the rock. Thus, it appears that they spent the night there and moved onward the following day. Then, when lunch time came, Moosaa said to his attendant, “**Bring us our lunch.**”<sup>6</sup> At that time, the attendant recalled that he forgot it at their desired destination.

10) The individual whom the two of them (i.e. Moosaa and his attendant) met was not a Prophet. Rather, he was a righteous servant and Allaah described him with the quality of being an *‘abd* (worshipping servant) and recounted the favor of bestowing mercy and knowledge upon him. Allaah did not mention anything about him being a Messenger nor a Prophet; had he been one, Allaah would have stated that just as He did for others. As for his (i.e. al-Khadir) saying at the end of the narrative, “**And I did not do them of my own accord,**”<sup>7</sup> it does not imply that he was a Prophet. Rather, it only refers to *ilhaam* and *tahdeeth* (forms of divine inspiration). Such is also the case with others who are not Prophets, as Allaah stated, “**And We inspired the mother of Moosaa: ‘Suckle him (i.e. your child, Moosaa)’**”<sup>8</sup>, as well as “**And your Lord inspired the bees, saying: ‘Take homes for yourselves in the mountains.’**”<sup>9</sup>

11) The knowledge with which Allaah instructs His worshipping servants is of two types: knowledge acquired by striving and effort, and inspired knowledge which Allaah imparts to whosoever of His worshippers He bestows blessing upon. This is understood from His saying, “**And whom We had taught knowledge from Us.**”<sup>10</sup>

12) Having proper manners with the teacher, and a student addressing him with the mildest of speech. This is understood from the statement of Moosaa, “**May I follow you so that you teach**

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<sup>4</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):62

<sup>5</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):62

<sup>6</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):62

<sup>7</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):82 [Translator’s note: There is difference of scholarly opinion as to whether al-Khadir was a Prophet. Here, as-Sa’dee holds the view that this verse negates the Prophethood of al-Khadir. However, it should be noted that there are also scholars including at-Tabaree, Ibn Katheer, an-Nawawee and others who are of the opinion that the same verse actually affirms Prophethood for al-Khadir. And Allaah knows best.]

<sup>8</sup> Soorah al-Qasas (28):7

<sup>9</sup> Soorah an-Nahl (16):68

<sup>10</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):65

**me from the guidance which you have been taught?”**<sup>11</sup> Thus, the speech was expressed in the form of a kind request and consultation, as if to ask “do you permit me to do that or not,” as well as admitting that he is learning from him. This is contrary to people that are proud and haughty who do not demonstrate to the teacher their need for his instruction. Rather, they claim that the teacher can assist them while they will assist him as well; even worse, a student may think he could actually teach his own teacher when, in reality, he himself is extremely ignorant. Hence, humility before the teacher and demonstrating the need for his instruction is among the most beneficial things for the student.

13) The humility of a learned person towards learning from someone lower than him, since Moosaa undoubtedly had more excellence than al-Khadir.

14) The erudite scholar learning a branch of knowledge in which he is not yet proficient from someone else who has mastered it, despite that person having less knowledge than him overall. Moosaa (ﷺ) was one of *Ulul-'azm* (the five Messengers of strong will) whom Allaah granted special favors and knowledge which He did not bestow upon anyone else. However, al-Khadir had knowledge of a specific type which Moosaa did not have; thus, Moosaa was eager to learn from al-Khadir. Therefore, if a scholar of *Fiqh* and *Hadeeth* is lacking in the area of *Nahw* or *Sarf* (grammar or conjugation; i.e. aspects of Arabic language), or any other branch of knowledge, he should learn from an expert in that field, although that person may not be a scholar of *Hadeeth* or *Fiqh*.

15) Attributing knowledge and other virtues to Allaah, acknowledging them, and being grateful to Allaah for them. This is understood from Moosaa saying, “**You teach me from the guidance which you have been taught;**”<sup>12</sup> that is to say, from what Allaah has taught you.

16) Beneficial knowledge is that which directs one to goodness. Therefore, all knowledge which contains direction and guidance to the paths of goodness, as well as caution from any path to evil or means to it, is certainly beneficial knowledge. Everything besides that is either harmful or contains no benefit, as understood from Moosaa saying, “**That you teach me from the guidance which you have been taught.**”<sup>13</sup>

17) If someone does not possess strong patience and determination while accompanying scholars and learning from them, he is not fit to receive knowledge; and whoever does not have any patience will not attain knowledge. On the contrary, someone who observes and embodies patience will attain every matter for which he strives. This is understood from al-Khadir excusing himself by mentioning that Moosaa would probably not observe patience, and that was the factor which would likely prevent Moosaa learning from him.

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<sup>11</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):66

<sup>12</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):66

<sup>13</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):66

18) The main factor behind observing patience is having a comprehensive understanding of the matter which requires that patience. If someone has no knowledge of the matter nor its objective, result, benefit, and fruit, he would be unable to observe patience. This is understood from al-Khaḍīr saying, “**And how can you have patience for a thing about which your understanding is not complete?**”<sup>14</sup> Hence, he indicated that a lack of patience could result from an incomplete understanding of the matter.

19) The obligation of being unhurried, careful in verifying matters, and not being hasty to issue a ruling on something until its true intent and purpose are understood.

20) Recognizing that future actions are conditional upon *mashee’ah* (the Will of Allaah). Hence, one should not say that he will do something in the future unless he says *In shaa’ Allaah* (“**if Allaah will**”<sup>15</sup>).

21) Having the resolve to do something is not at the same level as actually carrying out the deed, since Moosaa said, “**You will find me patient, if Allaah wills.**”<sup>16</sup> He resolved to observe patience, yet did not fully achieve his objective.

22) If the teacher deems it best to curb students from inquiring about certain things until he directs their attention to them, then he should do so. This would be to the student’s advantage, such as in the case where his understanding is lacking; or the teacher prevents him from asking about details of certain things when there are other matters of greater importance; or that he would be unable to grasp the concept; or he asks a question not related to the topic of discussion.

23) The permissibility of traveling by sea in circumstances which would not prove dangerous.

24) Someone who forgets is not taken to account for his forgetfulness, whether it pertains to the rights of Allaah, or the rights of others. This is understood from Moosaa saying, “**Do not call me to account for what I forgot.**”<sup>17</sup>

25) Being considerate toward the conduct and dealings of others, and accepting their effort when they willingly do more than what is required of them. It would not be right to impose something upon others which they are unable to do, would pose difficulty, or be overburdening, as this would lead to them turning away and having an aversion towards making any effort. Therefore, accepting what is within their ability makes matters easy and successful.

26) Rulings about matters are based upon what is apparent from them, and this applies to worldly judgments with respect to property, personal safety, and other affairs. Moosaa (ﷺ)

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<sup>14</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):68

<sup>15</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):69

<sup>16</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):69

<sup>17</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):73

disapproved of al-Khadir damaging the ship, and killing the young boy, since these deeds would appear to be reprehensible. Had Moosaa (ﷺ) witnessed these things in any other situation – outside the company of al-Khadir – he would not have remained quiet about them. This is why he (ﷺ) made a quick judgment, which would normally apply to these matters, without considering the exceptional circumstances requiring him to observe patience and not express disapproval.

27) The important maxim: preventing the greater evil by committing the lesser evil; and giving precedence to the greater good by foregoing the lesser. Indeed, killing the young boy was something evil, yet his remaining alive to be an affliction for his two parents in affairs of their religion would have been an even greater evil. Protecting the boy's life and not killing him may appear to be something good, yet the greater good lay in preserving the *deen* and *eemaan* of his two parents, and this is why al-Khadir killed him. There are subsidiary branches and benefits that fall under this principle; too many to be enumerated here. Nonetheless, this principle applies to cases where there exist a number of conflicting benefits or harms.

28) There is also another important maxim: the permissibility of handling someone else's property when it involves bringing about benefit or warding off harm; even if it is done without their authorization, and even if it entails sacrificing some of their property. Al-Khadir damaged the ship, causing it to become defective. As a result, it was not confiscated by the tyrannical king. Based upon this, if a fire, flood or something similar happened to someone's home or property, and some of it must be sacrificed, or parts of the home be demolished to save the remainder, then doing such is permissible. In fact, it is legislated for someone to do so in order to preserve the property of others. Similarly, if a criminal attempted to seize a person's property, it is permissible for someone else to surrender a portion of that property as ransom to save the remainder, even without that person's permission.

29) Working at sea is permissible just as is the case with working on land, due to al-Khadir saying "**working at sea**,"<sup>18</sup> and no disapproval was made of their employment.

30) A *miskeen* (poor person) may have some wealth – although it does not suffice his needs – yet that does not mean he is no longer described as poor, since Allaah mentioned that those poor people had a ship.

31) Murder is among the gravest of sins due to Moosaa saying about killing the boy, "**You have done something *nukr* (dreadful and prohibited).**"<sup>19</sup>

32) Capital punishment for murder is not prohibited, due to Moosaa saying "**Have you killed an innocent person who did not commit murder?**"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):79

<sup>19</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):74

<sup>20</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):74

33) Allaah protects the righteous servant as well as his offspring.

34) Attending to the needs of the righteous, or those associated with them, is better than doing so for others. This is since the reason behind extracting the treasure and subsequently restoring the wall was that the father of the two boys was a righteous man.

35) Having proper conduct with Allaah by using suitable words, since al-Khadir ascribed damaging the ship to himself by saying, **“So I wished to make a defective damage in it.”**<sup>21</sup> As it relates to good things, he attributed them to Allaah by saying, **“And your Lord intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord.”**<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Ibraaheem (عليه السلام) said, **“And when I am ill, it is He who cures me,”**<sup>23</sup> and also the Jinn stated, **“And we do not know whether evil is intended for those on earth, or whether their Lord intends for them a Right Path;”**<sup>24</sup> although it is all by the Divine Decree of Allaah.

36) A person should not part company with his companion under any circumstances, until the companion requests their parting or excuses himself, as done by al-Khadir with Moosaa.

37) Compromising in permissible matters fosters and strengthens the bond of companionship between people, while a lack of agreement is a cause for severing it.

38) The deeds done by al-Khadir were entirely from the Divine Decree of Allaah which He allowed to happen at the hands of this righteous servant so that people could appreciate the subtle wisdom contained in His Decrees. Allaah may decree matters which a person might detest very much, yet they contain good for his *deen* (affairs of religion), as was the case with the young boy; or they contain good for his *dunyaa* (worldly affairs) just as was the case with the ship. Thus, Allaah shows them instances of His Subtle Wisdom and Grace so they might recognize and be entirely content with His Decrees, however detestable they may appear.

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<sup>21</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):79

<sup>22</sup> Soorah al-Kahf (18):82

<sup>23</sup> Soorah ash-Shu'araa' (26):80

<sup>24</sup> Soorah al-Jinn (72):10