

Surah 18. Al-Kahf

Asad: And so, [in the course of time,] We awakened them;²² and they began to ask one another [as to what had happened to them].²³ One of them asked: "How long have you remained thus?" [The others] answered: "We have remained thus a day, or part of a day."²⁴ Said they [who were endowed with deeper insight]: "Your Sustainer knows best how long you have thus remained."²⁵ Let, then, one of you go with these silver coins to the town, and let him find out what food is purest there, and bring you thereof [some] provisions. But let him behave with great care and by no means make anyone aware of you:

Malik: In the same miraculous way We woke them up from sleep so that they could question one another. One of them asked: "How long have you been here?" The others answered: "Maybe we have been here for a day or part of a day." Finally they concluded: "Our Rabb knows best how long we have stayed here. Anyhow let one of us go to the city with this silver coin, and let him find who has the purest food and bring us something to eat. Let him behave with caution and let him not disclose our whereabouts.

Pickthall: And in like manner We awakened them that they might question one another. A speaker from among them said : How long have ye tarried? They said: We have tarried a day or some part of a day, (Other) said: Your Lord best knoweth what ye have tarried. Now send one of you with this your silver coin unto the city, and let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply thereof. Let him be courteous and let no man know of you.

Yusuf Ali: Such (being their state) We raised them up (from sleep) that they might question each other. Said one of them "How long have ye stayed (here)?" They said "We have stayed (perhaps) a day or part of a day." (At length) they (all) said "Allah (alone) knows best how long ye have stayed here...Now send ye then one of you with this money of yours to the town: let him find out which is the best food (to be had) and bring some to you that (ye may) satisfy hunger herewith: and let him behave with care and courtesy and let him not inform anyone about you. ^{2352 2353 2354}

Transliteration: Wakathalika baAAathnahum liyatasaaloo baynahum qala qailun minhum kam labithtum qaloo labithna yawman aw baAAada yawmin qaloo rabbukum aAlamu bima labithtum faibAAathoo ahadakum biwariqikum hathihi ila almadeenati falyanthur ayyuha azka taAAaman falyatikum birizqin minhu walyatalattaf wala yushAAairanna bikum ahadan

Khatab:

And so We awakened them so that they might question one another. One of them exclaimed, "How long have you remained ?asleep??" Some replied, "Perhaps a day, or part of a day." They said ?to one another?, "Your Lord knows best how long you have remained. So send one of you with these silver coins of yours to the city, and let him find which food is the purest, and then bring you provisions from it. Let him be ?exceptionally? cautious, and do not let him give you away.

Author Comments

23 - It seems to me that the prefix li in li-yatasa'alu (which most commentators take to mean "so that they might ask one another") is not a particle denoting a purpose ("so that") but, rather, a lam al-'aqibah-that is, a particle indicating no more than a causal sequence-which in this context may be brought out by the phrase "and they began...", etc.

24 - Cf. {2: 259}, where exactly the same question is asked and exactly the same wondering answer is given in the parable of the man whom God caused to be dead for a hundred years and thereupon brought back to life. The striking verbal identity of question and answer in the two passages is obviously not accidental: it points, in a deliberately revealing manner, to the identity of the idea underlying these two allegories: namely, God's power to "bring forth the living out of that which is dead, and the dead out of that which is alive" ({3: 27}, {6: 95}, {10: 31}, {30: 19}), i.e., to create life, to cause it to disappear and then to resurrect it. Beyond this, the above verse alludes to the deceptive, purely earthbound character of the human concept of "time".

25 - I.e., they understood - in contrast to their companions, who were merely concerned about what had actually happened to them - that the lapse of time between their "falling asleep" and their "awakening" had no reality of its own and no meaning, just as it has no reality or meaning in connection with a human being's death and subsequent resurrection (cf. [17:52](#) and the corresponding note [59]): and this explains the reference to the "two viewpoints" (lit., "two parties") in verse {12} above.

2352 - This is the point of the story. Their own human impressions were to be compared, each with the other. They were to be made to see that with the best goodwill and the most honest enquiry they might reach different conclusions; that they were not to waste their time in vain controversies, but to get on to the main business of life; and that Allah alone had full knowledge of the things that seem to us so strange, or inconsistent, or inexplicable, or that produce different impressions on different minds. If they entered the Cave in the morning and woke up in the afternoon, one of them might well think they had been there only a few hours-only part of a day. This relative or fallacious impression of Time also gives us an inkling of the state when there will be no Time, of the Resurrection when all our little impressions of this life will be corrected by the final Reality. This mystery of time has puzzled many contemplative minds. Cf. "Dark time that haunts us with the briefness of our days" (Thomas Wolfe in "Of Time and the River").

2353 - They now give up barren controversy and come to the practical business of life. But their thoughts are conditioned by the state of things that existed when they entered the Cave. The money they carried was the money coined in the reign of the monarch who persecuted the Religion of Unity and favoured the false cults of Paganism.

2354 - Best food:, i.e., purest, most wholesome, perhaps also most suitable for those who rejected idol worship, i.e., not dedicated to idols. For they still imagined the world in the same state in which they had known it before they entered the Cave.

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