

An account of the People of the Cave and Inscription

The Lord of the World says:

“Or do you think that the People of the Cave and the Inscription were of Our wonderful signs? (18:9)”

Some say the People of the Cave (the Seven Sleepers) are the same who are mentioned as People of the Inscription and that ‘Inscription’ is the name of a mountain or a cave or the city (from where they had fled) or of the plate on which their story was inscribed and hung at the opening of the cave or the name of their dog. Still others say Ashaab-e- Inscription is another group whose story will be told later on.

According to reliable authorities Imam as-Sadiq has said that People of the Cave and Inscription were a group which had become untraceable and that the king of their time had inscribed their and their forefathers’ names on lead slates and hung the slates at the opening of the cave.

“When the youths sought refuge in a cave, they said, “Our Lord! grant us mercy from Thee, and provide for us a right course in our affair” (18: 10)

It is recorded in authentic traditions that somebody asked Imam Ja‘far as-Sadiq, ‘May we be sacrificed for you! We use the word ‘fataa’ for the youth.’ Imam said, “Perhaps you do not know that the People of the Cave (people of the cave) were aged and yet Allah has mentioned them as ‘Fityah’ (young) because they had believed showing much courage and the one who believes (puts faith) in Allah is pious and ‘Fataa’ even if he is old.”

So We prevented them from hearing in the cave for a number of years. (18 11)

Then We raised them up that we might know which of the two parties was best able to compute the time for which they remained. We relate to you their story with the truth; surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in Guidance. And We strengthened their hearts with

patience when they stood up and said,

“Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; we will by no means call upon any Allah besides Him, for then indeed we would have (said an extravagant thing) These, our people, have taken Gods besides him; why do they not produce any clear authority in their support? Who is then more unjust? He who forges a lie against Allah? (And when you forsake them and what they worship save Allah, betake yourselves for refuge to the cave) your Lord will extend to you largely of His mercy and provide for you a profitable course in your affair. And you might see the sun when it rose from their cave towards the right hand, and when it set behind them on the left while they were in a wide space thereof. This is of the signs of Allah; Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the rightly guided one, and whomsoever He causes to err, you shall not find for him any friend to lead (him) aright). (12:17)

And you might think they are awake while they sleep, and we turned them about to the right and to the left, while their dog lay outstretching its paws at the entrance.

‘Ali ibn Ibrahim has narrated that the said turning makes one think that they are awake and that Allah is turning them so that their sides may not be damaged by the earth (hard rock). ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim says that Allah makes them turn sides twice in a year.

If you looked at them you would turn back from them in fright, and you would certainly be filled with awe at their sight (owing to their huge bodies or open eyes or the horrible environment). Imam al-Baqir has said that these words are not addressed to the holy Prophet but is the description of the awful situation shown to all.

And thus did We rouse them that they might question each other. A speaker among them said, How long have you tarried? They said, we have tarried for a day or a part of a day. (Others) said, Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried. Now send one of you with this silver (coin) of yours to the city and let him see which of them has the purest food. Let him bring you provision from it, and let him behave with gentleness so that by no means is your case known to any one:). ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim has said that here ‘pure food’ means lawful food.

For surely, if they prevail against you they would stone you to death or force you back to their religion, and then you will never succeed. And thus did We make (men) to get knowledge of them, that they might know that Allah’s promise is true and that as for the hour there is no doubt about it. When they disputed among themselves about their affairs and said, Erect an edifice over them -- their Lord best knows them. Those who prevailed in their affair said, We would certainly raise a Masjid over them. (Some) say: (They are) three, the fourth of them being their dog; and (others) say: Five, the sixth of them being their dog, making conjectures at what is unknown; and (others yet) say: Seven, and the eighth of them is their dog. Say: My Lord best knows their number, none know them but a few; therefore contend not in the matter of them but with an

outward contention, and do not question concerning any of them. And do not say of anything: Surely I will do it tomorrow, Unless Allah pleases; and remember your Lord when you forget and say: Maybe my Lord will guide me to a nearer course to the right than this. And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and (some) add (another) nine). (18:25)

Say: Allah knows best how long they remained: to Him are known the unseen things of the heavens and the earth.

‘Ali ibn Ibrahim says that what Allah has mentioned is the statement of the People of the Book and therefore He has added: Say: “Allah knows better.” It is related that that group lived in a period between the time of ‘Isa and the Prophet of the last age, i.e., Muhammad and that “Inscription” were two copper plates on which their events were inscribed such as their becoming Muslims, the intention of king Decius to kill them, their entering the cave etc.

According to authentic reports Imam Ja‘far as-Sadiq is reported to have said that the cause of the revelation of Surah Kahf in the Holy Qur’an was this: The infidels (unbelievers) of the Quraysh tribe sent Nafar bin Haaris, Aqabah bin Abee Mueet and Aamir bin Waail to religious scholars of the Jews who were living in Najran to obtain some information from them so that they might put questions before the holy Prophet.

They (the Jews) told them to put three questions to the holy Prophet. “If his reply is the same we will know then that he is a true man. Moreover ask one more question, in response to which, if he says that he knows about it then (Allah forbid) he is a liar.” The trio asked what the questions were. The scholars said, “In earlier times, how many youths were there who became untraceable after quitting their town and who had remained asleep? For how many days were they asleep and what was the non-human companion with them? What was their story? Another question is: who was the knowledgeable man to whom Allah had sent the Musa for acquiring knowledge and how did Musa reach him? The third query is who was the man who traveled the whole of the east and the west and reached the point of sunrise and sunset until he went up to the wall of Yajooj and Majooj and what is his story? Then they narrated the replies known to them and said that if he (Prophet) Muhammad says what we have said then he is a true Messenger. If his reply is other than this do not testify to his Prophethood. Then they asked what the fourth question was? They said, ask him when the Resurrection Day will arrive. If he says that he knows when it will occur then he is a liar, because, the knowledge of the Last Day is with none but Allah.”

So they left the Jewish clergy and came back to Abu-Talib and told him that his nephew claimed that he was getting news from the heaven. “So we want to test him by some questions. If he gives the correct replies then he is true. Otherwise we will know that his claim is false.” Abu-Talib said, “Ask him whatever you want.” They asked the aforesaid three questions. The holy Prophet said he would reply the next day but did not utter the words ‘Inshallah’. Consequently, he did not receive Divine revelation for forty days. As a result, he became very sorrowful. Those who believed in him also began to doubt in his Prophethood and non-believers of Quraysh began to ridicule him joyfully. Abu-Talib too grieved. After

forty days, when the Archangel Gabriel arrived with Surah Kahf, the holy Prophet asked the reason for this inordinate delay. Archangel Gabriel replied, "We have no ability to arrive without command of Allah." Then he recited the verses of Surah Kahf and related the entire story of the people of the cave.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq has said that the 'People of the Cave and Inscription' had lived in the time of a cruel and oppressor king. He called upon his citizens to worship idols and killed all those who refused to do so. These People of the Cave were Mu'min (worshippers of only one Allah). The king had posted a team of watchmen at the gates of the city so that they would not allow those persons to go out who did not prostrate before the idols. The People of the Cave left the city under pretext of hunting. On their way, they met with a shepherd. The Ashaab invited him to Islam (worship of only one Allah) and asked him to accompany them but he did not accept. However, his dog accompanied them. Imam as-Sadiq says: "No animal except the ass of Balaam, Bao'or the wolf of Yusuf and the dog of People of the Cave will enter Paradise. Anyway, the People of the Cave defied the religion of the king and left their town. In the evening, they entered a cave. The dog was with them. Allah subjected them to a deep sleep. They remained asleep until Allah finished that king and his men. That age ended, another period dawned and another generation came up. (After a long interval) they woke up and saw one another and asked "How long have we slept?" Seeing the sun high in the heavens they said, "We have slept for a day or a little more than a day." Then giving some coins to one of them, said, "Go to the bazaar in such a way that no one recognizes you and bring us some food. If they come to know who we are they will kill us or force us into their religion." When that person entered the town, he found that it was very different from before. He saw people he had never seen before. They did not follow his language nor could he understand their talk.

People asked him: "From where have you come?" When he told them everything, the king of that city and his court men went up to the cave and looked therein. Some of them said, "There are three men in it and the fourth is their dog." Some said that there were five men the sixth being a dog. Some stated that there were seven men the eighth being a dog. Allah hid them under the cover of awe and horror. No one had the courage to enter the cave to try and reach them. At last, their companion who had been to the bazaar came back. They were frightened imagining that the mob at the mouth of the cave were men of king Decius, but their companion informed them that Decius died long ago and that they had been asleep for ages and had become a thing of wonder for all. Whosoever hears about us gets absolutely astonished. Hearing this, the cave men prayed to Allah earnestly and humbly to put them to sleep again. In short, the king of that time said, "It is preferable if we build a Masjid out of this cave and continue to visit this place as this is a group of the faithful. Allah makes them turn sides twice a year. They sleep on their right side for six months and on the left for the next six months. Their dog sits extending his front legs at the entrance of the cave."

In some reliable traditions, it is narrated by the same Imam that he told his companions that if your community puts pressure on you to do what the community of the People of the Cave has put then act upon it. It was asked what it was. Imam said, "Polytheism." They made a show of shirking by way of

Taqiyyah but faith was hidden in their hearts until Allah freed them from their community. Then he said, When they refuted their king, Allah rewarded them for it and when they attested to him by way of Taqiyyah, Allah gave them a reward thawaab and they were money changers. In other traditions, it is clarified that they were not bankers of gold and silver but of words who knew the testing of truth and untruth. He added: they left the city one by one and collected in a forest. There they met one another and exchanged promises and oaths and revealed the secrets of their hearts. Then it was revealed that all of them were Mu'min and that all had left their residences with a common intention.

Imam said, they had concealed their faith and were making a show of being infidels by way of Taqiyyah strategy. Hence, the reward of their Kufr was more than that of concealing "man. In some other authentic hadiths it is mentioned that nobody's Taqiyyah can equal that of people of the cave as they had worn Zunnar strings and had attended the festival ground of the polytheists. Allah increased their reward.

Ibn al-Babawayh and al-Qutb al-Rawandi have through their chains quoted from Ibn 'Abbas that during the caliphate of the second caliph a group of Jewish clergy came to them and asked: "What are the locks of the skies? Who was the one who warned his community of the anger of Allah though he was neither a man nor jinn? What are those five animals which did not come out of their mothers Wombs and yet were walking on earth? And finally, what do they say when a francolin, a cock, a horse, an ass, a frog and a hochan." The caliph could not reply and bowed his head. Then turning towards the Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali said, "O Abul hasan! I do not think anybody except you knows the answers to these questions." So 'Ali addressed the Jewish clergy and said, "I will reply to your questions but on condition that if my replies are in accordance with the Torah you will become Muslims." They agreed. He said, "What locks up the heavens is Polytheism meaning the deed of a polytheist man or woman does not go beyond the heavens (to heaven)." They asked "What is the key to the skies?" He said, "The announcement of *laa ilaha illallaahu muhammadun Rasulullaah* (confessing that there is no deity besides only one Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger)." Then they asked: "What was the grave which carried its inmate from one place to another?" He said, "That was a fish which had swallowed Yunus and carried him into the seven seas." They asked "Who is the warner who is neither a human being nor a jinni?" He replied, "It is the ant which had frightened its community about the army of Sulayman and asked them to enter their anthills so that Solomon and his army might not crush them."

Thereafter they asked: "Which are the five creations which have not been delivered from their mothers' wombs but yet were walking and moving?" He said, "They are Adam and Hawwa' and the she-camel of Salih and the ram of Ibrahim (which had replaced Isma'il at the time of intended slaughtering) and the staff of Musa." Finally, they asked: "What is the meaning of the calls of the five animals." He said, "The hedgehog says '*ar rahmaan ustawaa*' and the cock says: '*uzkuroo.....*' meaning (O Careless people! Remember Allah), the horse says: '*allaahumm..*' (O Lord! Help the faithful against the denier infidels), the ass curses those who levy tax on grain and the frog says: '*subhaan.....*' (Holy is my Lord and the residents of the sea are praising Him) and the hochah says: O Allah! Curse the enemies of Muhammad

and of the family of Muhammad.”

Two of the three scholars became Muslims and the third one said, “The light of Islam which has appeared in the hearts of my companions has also radiated in my heart but one more question remains. If you provide its reply, I will also become a Muslim. ‘Ali said, “Do ask.” He said, “Enlighten me about a group of people who had lived in the past ages and who had remained dead for 309 years and were made alive thereafter by Allah. Tell me their story?” ‘Ali started reciting Surah Kahf. He said, “I have heard your Qur’an several times. If you are scholar then give the details about that group’s events, their names, their period, and the names of their dog, their cave, their king and their city.

‘Ali said, *“Iaa hawla walaa quwwata illaa billaahil aliyil azeem.* My Prophet has informed that in the country called Room (Byzantine) there was a city named Ephesus. Its king was a pious gentleman. When he died there arose a dispute. When Decius, one of the kings of Faaris came to know about it he invaded them with an army of one lakh soldiers, captured Ephesus and made it his capital. He built a palace in it measuring one Parasang (6 kms) in length and width. He made a meeting hall in that palace with a ceiling of shining glass measuring 1000 feet in length and width. There were 4000 pillars of gold. 1000 lamps of gold were hanging by chains made of silver. The lamps burnt with the most fragrant oil. There were one thousand windows on the eastern side which allowed in the sunlight until the time of sunset. He had made a throne of gold with silver legs. It was studded with various jewels. A best quality carpet was spread on it. On the right side of the throne there were one thousand golden chairs decorated with green chrysolite which were occupied by army officers and emirs. On the left side of the throne there were one thousand silver chairs decorated with red topaz. The kings of room used to sit on them. In short, Decius sat on that throne and put a crown on his head. In the meantime, a Jew stood up to ask: “O ‘Ali! Just tell me what was the crown made of?” ‘Ali said, “It was made of golden musk having seven corners. Every corner was studded with white pearls which shined like lamps in the darkness of the night. He had fifty slaves belonging to kings’ dynasty who stitched the cloaks of red colored brocade and pants of silk. They wore crowns and had bangles on their hands and feet. He made six of them his ministers. Three used to stand on his right and three on his left. The Jew again asked the names of the six ministers. ‘Ali replied, “The three on his right were Talmeeekhaa, Maktalmeena and Manshalmeena and those on his left were Marnoos Veernoos and Shaazaryoos.

The king took their advice in every affair. He used to sit in his court daily. Emirs and Sultans used to sit on his right and left. Then the three slaves used to enter the court. One of them had in his hand a golden cup filled with powdered musk. The glass in the hand of another slave was filled with rosewater and the third slave used to hold a white sparrow in his hand. Its beak was red. When the king looked at it and called out to it, it used to plunge first in the cup of rose, then it used to dive in the glass of musk. Her wings would be covered with the contents of both glasses. Then the king would call out to it and it would come and sit on the king’s crown and shower everything from its wings on the crown. In short, the king, due to all this pomp and luxury had become extremely proud and haughty to such an extent that he claimed to be Allah. He would call people of great personalities from his kingdom and order them to

prostrate before him and to accept him as Allah.

Whoever obeyed was made very rich and whoever defied him was killed. His entire populace became obedient to him. He fixed one day in the year for festivity. Once on the festival day he was sitting on his throne with emirs and Sultans on his right and left. Suddenly a sultan came and informed him that the army of Faaris was coming to fight with him and that it had arrived very near to them. Hearing this Decius became very gloomy. He shivered and his crown fell down. Tamleekhaa, an elderly man, seeing this told himself: "had this man been a god as he claimed to be, then he would never have been frightened like this, nor would he urinate nor go to the toilet nor would sleep overtake him. These are not the attributes of Allah." Those six People used to gather daily in a house (for talk and gossip and pastime, in each one of their houses in turns).

When it was the turn of Tamleekhaa, he prepared good food for his companions. When they gathered (after feasting) he said, "My brothers! A thought makes me restless all the time. I have lost my hunger, thirst and sleep." His companions asked what his worry was. He replied, "I have pondered about the sky very much as to how high is its ceiling without any pillar, as to who has made the heavens and the two shining lamps of sun and moon which are the signs of radiance, who has decorated the heavens with stars? I also thought deeply about the earth as to who has spread it so wide on flowing water and kept it steady by fitting mountains so that not all on it may drown. I also pondered over my own self as to who is it who has created me in the womb of my mother, provided food for me and nourished me? He must be someone other than Decius who has created all these things and who is directing all the affairs. Decius is only one of the unjust and oppressor kings of the world." Hearing this all the companions of Tamleekhaa fell at his feet and kissed him and said, "Allah has guided us through you. Now tell us what should we do?"

Tamleekhaa got up hurriedly, sold out his date garden for an amount of 3000 dirhams, concealed the amount under his sleeve and all six of them rode on horses and went out of the town together. After traveling for three miles, Tamleekhaa said to his companions: "O brothers! now stop thinking about the worldly kingdom and be prepared to bear hunger and hardship for the sake of the life of the other world (Hereafter); get down of your horses, and walk on foot; maybe Allah will relieve us from our current troubles and difficulties." Then they got down from their horses and walked for seven parasangs until their feet began to bleed. Suddenly they met with a shepherd. They asked him whether he could give them milk or water? He said, "I can give you whatever you want but you look like princes and I presume you have fled from the king." They replied, "We cannot speak an untruth but (we are also convinced that) undoubtedly telling the truth will save us from your harm." Then they narrated their story in detail. The shepherd fell down at their feet and kissed their feet and said, "You have indeed told me what was and is in my heart. But give me some respite so that I may hand over these sheep to their owner and return to accompany you." So they stopped there.

The shepherd went, returned the sheep to their owner and came back. His dog also came running after

him. Hearing all this the Jew jumped up and said, "O 'Ali! tell me what was the name of that dog? What was its color?" 'Ali said, "Its color was black and white and its name was Qitmir. When the group of six saw that dog, they became frightened. They feared if it started barking they would be exposed. So they wanted to throw stones to make it run away. But Allah gave power of speaking to that dog and it said, "Leave me, to protect you from your enemies." Finally, the shepherd made them climb a hill and all of them hid themselves in a cave of that mountain. That cave was called Waseed. There was a spring of water near it and so also a fruit tree. They ate fruits of that tree, drank water from the spring and when night fell they slept in the cave. Allah Almighty, the Lord of the whole world, commanded the angel of death to retrieve the souls of the inmates of the cave. The angel complied with the Divine Order. Allah appointed two angels for each one of them for turning them from one side to the other during their deep sleep (of death). According to one tradition once a year and according to another tradition twice a year. And Allah Almighty ordered the angels in charge of the sun not to allow the falling of the sun's rays on them from sunrise to sunset. When Decius returned from the festival ground and inquired about those youths, he was told that they had fled. He went with 80 thousand men on horses in search of them and arrived up to the cave.

There he saw them asleep in a very tired and pitiable condition. He thought that even if he wanted to punish them he would not have been able to do more than what they had done to themselves voluntarily. Then he called masons and closed the opening of the cave with lime and stone. Then he asked his companions to tell the Cave men to appeal to their Allah so that he may deliver them from this trouble, and bring them out of that cave. Thereafter they remained in that cave for 309 years. Then when Allah desired to make them alive He ordered Israfil to instill their souls in their bodies. So they woke up and seeing the sun rising they said, "Last night we remained unmindful of worshipping our Lord." Then coming out of the cave, they saw the water springs were dry and so also the trees. One of them exclaimed: "Events are indeed very strange, despite a lot of water and overflowing springs everything has dried up within a night!"

Becoming restless due to hunger, they consulted one another and decided that one of them should bring food from the bazaar, but so stealthily, that nobody could recognize him. Tamleekhaa said he would go. He wore the old clothes of the shepherd and went towards the town. Nearing the city, he saw that everything had changed. When he reached the gate of the city he noticed that there was a green flag with the words '*laailaah illallaah, eesaa Rasulullaah*' (There is no Allah but Allah and Jesus is His Messenger). He rubbed his eyes and stared at the flag for quite a while murmuring to himself: "This is as if I am seeing a dream." He did not choose to enter the city but went to a bread-seller out of the city-gate and asked him the name of the city. He said, "It's name is Ephesus." Then he asked the name of their king. The baker replied, "'Abd al-Rahman." Then he gave him a dirham coin for purchasing bread. When the shop owner saw that the coin was much bigger and weightier than usual, he was very surprised. In the meanwhile, a Jew asked what the weight of that coin was. 'Ali said, "Each dirham with the cave man was $10 + \frac{2}{3}$ times heavier than then current dirham."

Then continuing his narration, 'Ali said that the baker told Tamleekhaa that perhaps he (the latter) had found a treasure. Tamleekhaa said "These dirhams have been obtained by me by selling my date trees three days ago in this city, but I left this city because the people were worshipping Decius." The baker took Tamleekhaa to the king and told him that this man had a treasure. The king said to Tamleekhaa: "Do not be afraid (tell the full truth) because our 'Isa has ordered us not to take more than one-fifth of a treasure. So give us 1/5th of it and take back all the rest conveniently." Tamleekhaa replied, "Please listen to what I have to say. I have not found any treasure. I am a resident of this very town." The king asked him surprisingly: "Are you really a citizen of this city?" He said, Yes. Then the king said, "Does anyone in this city know you?" He said, "Yes." Then the king asked him his name and he said, "Tamleekhaa." The king said no one of our time has such a name! Then he questioned him: "You must have your house also in this city?" He said, "Yes, come along with me, I will show you the house." Hearing this reply, the king riding his horse and a group of people also accompanied them.

Tamleekhaa led all of them to the gate of a grand mansion which was the tallest and nicest in the town. He said, "This is my house." The people knocked at the door. A very aged man came out whose eyebrows were hanging on his eyes and asked the reason for the knocking. The king told him: "This youth (Tamleekhaa) is a newcomer in town who speaks strange things and claims that this building is his property." The old man asked Tamleekhaa "Who are you?" He replied, "I am Tamleekhaa, son of Qastalileen." Hearing this, the old man fell at his feet and began to kiss his feet saying: "By the Lord of the Ka'bah! He is my great grand father." Then he narrated: "O king!, they were a group of six who had fled this city fearing the anger of Decius." Hearing this, the king jumped off his horse and held Tamleekhaa by the hand. All began to kiss his hands and feet. Then they asked: "O Tamleekhaa! What happened to your companions?" He said, "They are in a cave." At that time, there were two kings in that city: one of the Muslims (followers of Jesus) and another of Jews. On hearing this, both the kings walked toward the cave along with the other citizens. When they neared, the cave Tamleekhaa told them: "You may wait here. Let me go in first and inform them. Otherwise, hearing the horse-steps they will be frightened thinking that soldiers of Decius have come to arrest them." So Tamleekhaa entered the cave. His companions embraced him and thanked Allah for saving them from the evil of Decius.

Tamleekhaa said, "Leave aside the story of Decius and tell me how long have we slept here?" They said, "One day or less than a day." Tamleekhaa said, "No, we have slept here for 309 years. Decius died long back. Centuries after his death Allah sent a Messenger, whose name is 'Isa. He is also called Messiah. He is the son of Maryam. Allah Almighty has raised him up to heaven. Now here with me is today's king and the citizens of this town. They have come to see you." They said, "O Tamleekhaa! Do you intend that our Lord may make us a means of test for the people of the world?" Then Tamleekhaa asked his companions "What do you want to do?" They said, "Let us pray to Our Lord that he may again retrieve our souls." And they raised their hands towards the heavens. Allah ordered the retrieval of their souls. Both the kings and their mobs kept on circumambulating the cave for seven days but could not find its door.

Finally, the Muslim—followers of the Prophet of that age, ‘Isa said, These people (cavemen) have died on our faith and so I will build a Masjid here. The king of the Jews said, “I will build a synagogue as they were following our religion.” Then there was war between the two. The Muslim king won and he built a mosque at the cave. After narrating all this, ‘Ali said, “O Jew! Now tell us whether or not all this is according to Torah (the Divine Message brought by Musa?” The Jew said, Undoubtedly, it is exactly according to Torah, not a word more nor a word less. So I testify the oneness of Allah and the Messengership of Muhammad.”

It is narrated that Imam Muhammad al-Baqir said and others have also related from reliable chains, especially Thalabi in his tafsir that one day the holy Prophet, after performing his Isha prayer went towards the graveyard of Baqee, called Abu Bakr, Umar and ‘Ali and told them: “Go towards the People of the Cave and convey to them my Salaam; and O Abu Bakr! you may salute them first as you are elder in age, then Umar, and next Uthman. If any of you gets a reply then he should convey to them my salaam. In case they do not respond to your salutation then O ‘Ali You should step forward and salute them.”

Then the holy Prophet ordered the breeze to raise all of them up and take them to the cave of People of the Cave. Another tradition says that the holy Prophet made them sit on a board and commanded it to carry them all to the cave. The, after reaching there, Abu Bakr stepped forward and said, Salaam, there was no response. Next Umar and Uthman too did the same but there was no reply. Finally Amir al-Mu’minin stepped forward and said, *“Assalaamu alaikum wa rehmatullaah wa beraakaatuhu O Residents of the Cave! You believed in your Creator. May Allah increase your guidance and keep your soul sound on faith. I am a courier of Allah’s last Messenger.”*

Hearing the voices of the People of the Cave, they rose and they said, “Welcome! Long live the Prophet of Allah and his Legatee courier. O Wasi of the Prophet! may peace and blessing of Allah be upon you.” ‘Ali asked them, “How did you know that I am the Legatee of the last Prophet?” They said, “A kind of barrier has been put on our ears so that we may not be able to hear anyone’s voice nor will we be able to talk with anybody except a Prophet or a Legatee of a Prophet. O Legatee of the Prophet! How is the Prophet? How is his army” and they enquired very extensively about the holy Prophet and his events. Then they said, “Tell us also about your companions because we can talk only with a Prophet or his legatee (Wasi).” addressed his companions and asked: “Did you hear whatever the People of the Cave said?” They said, “Yes, we did.” Then ‘Ali said, “Be witness.” In short, all of them (thereafter) turned towards Madinah. The air then raised them up and carried them to the holy Prophet. They related to him whatever they had seen and heard. He also asked Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman to be witness to what had happened. They said, “All right.” Then he told them emphatically to remember their witnessing well and went to his residence.

On the basis of some reports, it is reported that the holy Prophet said, “These were three people who traveled together. It rained and they took shelter in a Cave. Suddenly, a big rock rolled down from the

mountain and closed the door (opening) of the cave. One of the three said, O servants of the Lord! It is not possible to be freed from this trouble but with the help of truth. So let everyone of us who might have done any good work truthfully for pleasing Allah describe it. Perhaps then, our Lord will remove this huge rock. So one of them began to relate his story.

He said, O my Lord! my parents had become aged. I had my little children also to look after. I used to graze goats. Every night I would first feed my old parents and thereafter my children. Once I returned home late to find my parents asleep. I took a can of milk in my hands and stood near them. My hungry children were restlessly crying for food. But I did not think it proper to break the rest of my parents by awakening them from their sleep. So I kept standing there so that as soon as they woke I would offer them the milk. The whole night passed by in this waiting and a new day dawned. My Lord! If this gesture of mine was truly for Your pleasure, please relieve us from this imprisonment. The rock at the opening of the cave moved a little and they could see some of the heavens. Then another person began to say: My Lord! I had a cousin sister whom I loved very much. Once I became so passionate as to indulge in a prohibited deed with her. She said she would not allow me to approach her again until I brought a hundred coins for her. At last I brought the amount and when I intended to get intimate with her again she said "Fear Allah, and do not break the divine seal illegally." I refrained from that evil. My Lord! You know everything. If this gesture of mine was truly for Your pleasure kindly, free us from this bondage. The rock moved a little more aside. Then the third person said, I had engaged a laborer for some work. While making payment he disputed with me and went away without taking his wages. I invested that amount (which was his dues) in my agriculture work. When its profit increased, I purchased some cows. Another tradition says that the payment to be made was only half a dirham but the business profit multiplied it up to ten thousand dirhams. After a long time that laborer came to me. I gave him the entire amount which had become manifold of the original amount. O My Lord! If this gesture of honesty was truthful in Your view, please open the way for us completely. The stone moved away entirely and all the three came out of the cave.

The holy Prophet said whosoever behaves truthfully with his Lord attains Salvation. Some have said that the "Ashaab-e-Inscription" was this group of three men.

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