

## The Story of Moses

### (part 1 of 12): Who is Moses?



In both Judaism and Christianity Moses is a central figure. He is the man from the Old Testament most mentioned in the New Testament, he led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, communicated with God and received the Ten Commandments. Moses is known as both a religious leader and a lawgiver.

In Islam, Moses is loved and respected; he is both a Prophet and a Messenger. God mentions him more than 120 times, and his story ranges across several chapters. It is the longest and most detailed story of a prophet in the Quran and is discussed in elaborate detail.

The word Prophet (*Nabi* in Arabic) is derived from the word *Naba*, meaning news. God's message is revealed and the Prophet spreads the news amongst his people. A Messenger, on the other hand, comes with a specific mission, usually to convey a new ordinance from God. Every Messenger is a Prophet, but not every Prophet, is a Messenger.

Islam teaches that all prophets came to their people with the same proclamation, **“O my people, worship God, you have no other God but Him”**. (Quran 11:50). Moses called the children of Israel to worship God alone and he laid down the laws prescribed in the Torah.

**“Verily, We did send down the Torah to Moses, therein was guidance and light, by which the Prophets, who submitted themselves to God's Will, judged the Jews. And the rabbis and the priests too judged the Jews by the Torah for to them was entrusted the protection of God's Book, and they were witnesses thereto.”** (Quran 5:44)

Quran is a book of guidance for all of humankind. It is not a history book; however, it does contain historical information. God asks us to reflect and contemplate on the stories of the Prophets in order that we may learn from their trials, tribulations, and triumphs. Moses' story contains many lessons for humankind. God says that the account of Moses and Pharaoh in Quran is the truth. It is a story of political intrigue and of oppression that knew no bounds.

**“We recite to you some of the news of Moses and Pharaoh in truth, for a people who believe. Verily, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people sects, weakening (oppressing) a group (i.e. Children of Israel) among them; killing their sons, and letting their females live. Verily, he was of those who commit great sins and crimes, oppressors, tyrant.” (Quran 28:3&4)**

Moses was born into one of the most politically charged times in history. The Pharaoh of Egypt was the dominant power figure in the land. He was so incredibly powerful that he referred to himself as a god and nobody was inclined or able to dispute this. He said, **“I am your lord, most high”, (Quran 79:24)**

Pharaoh effortlessly exerted his authority and influence over all the people in Egypt. He used the strategy of divide and conquer. He set up class distinctions, divided the people into groups and tribes, and set them against one another. The Jews, the children of Israel, were put at the lowest level of Egyptian society. They were the slaves and servants. Moses' family was from amongst the children of Israel.

Egypt at the time was the known world's superpower. The ultimate power rested in the hands of very few. Pharaoh and his trusted ministers directed matters as if lives of the population were of little or no consequence. The political situation was in some ways similar to the political world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a time when the young people of the world are used as cannon fodder for the political and military games of the most powerful, the story of Moses is particularly pertinent.

According to Islamic scholar *Ibn Kathir* the children of Israel talked vaguely about one of their nation's sons arsing to wrest the throne of Egypt from Pharaoh. Perhaps it was just a persistent daydream from an oppressed people, or even an ancient prophecy but the story of Moses begins here. A yearning for freedom coupled with a tyrannical king's dream.

The people of Egypt were influenced by dreams and the interpretation of dreams. Dreams featured prominently in the story of prophet Joseph and once again, in the story of Moses the fate of the children of Israel is affected by a dream. Pharaoh dreams that a child from the children of Israel grows to manhood and seizes his throne.

True to character, Pharaoh reacts arrogantly and gives the order that all male children born to the children of Israel be killed. His ministers however perceive that this would lead to the complete annihilation of the children of Israel and economic ruin for Egypt. How, they ask, would the empire function without slaves and servants? The order is changed; the male children are killed in one year but spared in the next.

Pharaoh becomes so fanatical he sends spies or security agents to seek out pregnant women. If any woman gives birth to a male child, he is immediately put to death. When Moses' mother becomes pregnant with the child destined to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, she conceals her pregnancy. However, God wished to do a favour to those who were weak and oppressed, and pharaoh's plans are thwarted.

**“And We wished to do a favour to those who were weak (and oppressed) in the land, and to make them rulers and to make them the inheritors, And to establish them in the land, and We let Pharaoh and Haman (Egypt's Chief Minister) and their hosts receive from them that which they feared.” (Quran 28:5&6)**

The scene is set, and the child is born. The winds of change begin to blow and God demonstrates that humans may plan and scheme but He Alone is the best of planners.

## **(part 2 of 12): Trust in God**

There are lessons for humankind throughout the story of Moses, which are not only learnt after his prophethood; rather, they are found even when he was a newborn. His righteous mother's behavior gives us numerous lessons that are relevant even today. Put your trust in God!

Moses was born in a year in which the sons of the Children of Israel were put to death the moment they were born. Imagine the sense of fear that permeated every aspect of life under such conditions. Pregnancy was not an event to be celebrated and cherished but a source of fear and insecurity.

Security guards roamed the streets and invaded homes searching for pregnant women, therefore Moses' mother concealed her pregnancy. Imagine the conditions under which she gave birth: fearful, silent, possibly shrouded in darkness. Was she surrounded by women or alone? Did her husband hold her hand praying that she did not cry out revealing herself to the neighbours or guards?

Whatever the conditions, Moses was born. A boy. His parents' heart must have constricted with joy and fear simultaneously. What were they to do now, how would they conceal a newborn baby? Moses' mother was a righteous woman, pious and God fearing, therefore in her hour of need she turned to God and He inspired her next actions.

**“And We inspired the mother of Moses saying, suckle him, but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve. Verily! We shall bring him back to you, and shall make him one of (Our) Messengers.” (Quran 28:2-7).**

Moses' mother has just spent the last months concealing her pregnancy for fear that her child would be put to death, now as she holds him to her breast God inspires her to cast him into the river. Not a gentle stream but the Nile River, a huge powerful river with a strong current. Her initial reaction must have been that such an action would be condemning him to certain death.

Moses' mother put her trust in God. **“Do not fear and do not grieve, for We will bring him back to you.”** She made a waterproof basket, placed her tiny son inside, and cast him into the river. Ibn Kathir narrates that as the basket touched the water the raging current became calm and gentle, sweeping the basket silently downstream. Moses' sister was instructed by her mother to slip silently through the reeds and follow the basket on its journey.

The basket with its precious cargo courses down the Nile River, passing houses, boats, and people, unnoticed until it stops at Pharaoh's palace. Moses' sister watches in fear, as someone from Pharaoh's household removes the basket from the river. Moses was cast into the river to escape certain death and now his resting place is the palace of Pharaoh. This is surely too much for a mother to bear, however events about to unfold will demonstrate that the promise of God is true.

**“...And whosoever fears God and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty). And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. And whosoever puts his trust in God, then He will suffice him. Verily, God will accomplish his purpose. Indeed God has set a measure for all things.” (Quran 65:2-3)**

Baby Moses was taken to Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh. Asiya, in contrast to her arrogant, proud husband was a righteous, merciful woman. God opened her heart and Asiya looked down upon the tiny baby and felt overcome by her love for him. The royal couple were unable to conceive a child and this tiny baby awakened her maternal instincts. Asiya clutched him to her chest and asked her husband to accept the child into family.

Possibly, against his better judgement Pharaoh accepted the child, who was part of God's plan to bring down the royal house. Far from abandoning him, God set Moses up as a royal son of Egypt, he provided him with the strongest human support in the land. Asiya and Pharaoh now had a son, who was now protected by the very person who had sought to kill him.

**“Then the household of Pharaoh picked him up, that he might become for them an enemy and a cause of grief. Verily! Pharaoh, Haman, and their hosts were sinners. And the wife of Pharaoh said; ‘A comfort of the eye for me and for you. Kill him not, perhaps he maybe of a benefit to us, or we may adopt him as a son.’ And they perceived not (the result of that).”  
(Quran 28:8-9)**

Asiya summoned wet nurses to the palace, but the tiny child refused to suckle. This was a cause of great distress; in those days there were no baby formulas or supplements to offer the child. At this stage the royal palace was in turmoil, the women of the household were fussing over Asiya and her new baby therefore no one noticed the presence of Moses' sister amongst the servants. She summoned all her courage and stepped forward offering a solution. She said she knew of a woman who would suckle the child affectionately. Why would the royal household take the advice of an unknown child, if not to fulfil God's plan. Moses' sister was ordered to rush and fetch the woman.

**“And We had already forbidden (other) foster suckling mothers for him, until she (his sister came up and) said: "Shall I direct you to a household who will rear him for you, and sincerely they will look after him in a good manner?"  
(Quran 28:12)**

Moses' mother was in her home. Was she pacing, or weeping silently? We do not know, but God tells us that her heart was empty and that she was about to reveal herself. Was she considering dashing down to the river and searching frantically through the reeds? God relieved her of her torment when her daughter rushed into the house breathlessly relating the story of what had happened to Moses.

Mother and daughter lost no time returning to the palace. When Moses was handed to his real mother, he settled immediately and began to suckle. According to Ibn Kathir, the household, including Pharaoh himself, was astonished. Pharaoh asked the woman who she was and she replied, "I am a woman of sweet milk and sweet smell, and no child refuses me." Pharaoh accepted this answer, and thus Moses was returned to the arms of his mother and raised in the palace as a prince of Egypt.

**“So did We restore him to his mother, that she might be delighted, and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the Promise of God is true. But most of them know not.” (Quran 28:13)**

### **(part 3 of 12): Moses flees Egypt**

Chapter 28 of the Quran is named, ‘The Narration’, the first 45 verses focus solely on the story of Moses. It is from here that we learn about the strength and piety of his mother, and how God rewarded her righteousness and trust in Him by returning her son. Some scholars believe that Moses and his mother returned to their home among the Children of Israel, others, including Ibn Kathir believe that Moses and his mother lived in the palace while she was breast feeding him and that as he grew up she was allowed the privilege of visiting him.

The Quran and the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, are silent about this period of Moses life, although it would be fair to say that by the time Moses was a man, he probably knew about his origin and identified with the children of Israel. The traditions of Prophet Muhammad describe Moses as a tall, well-built, dark skinned man with curly hair. Both his character and physique are described as strong.

**“And when he attained his full strength, and was perfect (in manhood), We bestowed on him Hukman (Prophethood, right judgment of the affairs) and religious knowledge (of the religion of his forefathers, Islamic Monotheism). And thus do We reward the Muhsineen (good-doers).” (Quran 28:14)**

We will discover in the story of Moses that he was a forthright man. He believed in speaking his mind and standing up for the weaker members of society. Whenever he witnessed oppression or cruelty, he found it impossible to stop himself from intervening.

Ibn Kathir narrates that one day while walking in the city; Moses came upon two men fighting. One was an Israelite and the other an Egyptian. The Israelite recognised Moses and cried out to him for help. Moses stepped into the fight and struck the Egyptian one ferocious blow. He immediately fell to the ground and died. Moses was overcome with grief. He was aware of his own strength but did not imagine that he had the power to kill someone with one blow.

**“And he entered the city at a time of unawareness of its people, and he found there two men fighting, one of his party and the other of his foes. The man of his own party asked him for help against his foe, so Moses struck him with his fist and**



**killed him. He said, “This is of Satan’s doing, verily, he is a plain misleading enemy.”**

**He said, “My Lord! Verily, I have wronged myself, so forgive me.” Then He forgave him. Verily, He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.**

**He said, “My Lord! For that with which You have favoured me, I will never more be a helper for the criminals, disobedient to God, polytheists, sinners, etc.!” (Quran 28:15-17)**

Either because the streets were relatively deserted or because the people had no wish to be involved in a serious assault, the authorities had no idea that Moses was involved in the melee. However, the next day Moses saw the same Israelite man involved in yet another fight. He suspected that the man was a troublemaker and approached him to warn him about such behaviour.

The Israelite saw Moses striding towards him and became afraid, he called out, “Would you kill me as you killed the wretch yesterday?” The man’s opponent, an Egyptian heard this remark and rushed away to report Moses to the authorities. Later on that day, Moses was approached by a person unknown who informed him that the authorities were planning to arrest him and possibly put him to death for the crime of killing an Egyptian.

**So he became afraid, looking about in the city (waiting as to what will be the result of his crime of killing), when behold, the man who had sought his help the day before, called for his help again. Moses said to him, “Verily, you are a plain misleader!” Then when he decided to seize the man who was an enemy to both of them, the man said, “O Moses! Is it your intention to kill me as you killed a man yesterday? Your aim is nothing but to become a tyrant in the land, and not to be one of those who do right.”**

**And there came a man running, from the farthest end of the city. He said, “O Moses! Verily, the chiefs are taking counsel together about you, to kill you, so escape. Truly, I am to you of those who give sincere advice.”**

**So he escaped from there, looking about in a state of fear. He said, “My Lord! Save me from the people who are polytheists, and wrong-doers!” (Quran 28:15-21)**

Moses immediately left the confines of the city. He did not take the time to return to his home to change his clothes or prepare provisions. Moses strode into the desert towards Midian, the country that lay between Syria and Egypt. His

heart was filled with fear and he was afraid that he would turn around and see the authorities pursuing him. He walked, and walked, and when his feet and legs felt like lead, he continued walking. His shoes wore away on the rough desert ground and the hot sand burned the soles of his feet. Moses was exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and bleeding but he forced himself to continue, some say for more than a week, until he came to a watering hole. Moses threw himself under the shade of a tree.

Death in the dry dusty heat of the Egyptian desert should have been the likely outcome of Moses journey. Tracking across the inhospitable landscape with no provisions and inappropriate clothing would have been an expedition doomed to failure. Yet once again, the story of Moses reveals a fundamental truth. If a believer submits fully to the will of God, God will provide for him from sources unimaginable. God will replace weakness with strength, and will replace failure with victory.

Moses arrived safely at the desert oasis, the smell of water and the shade of the trees must have seemed like paradise on earth. Moses however was not alone in his newfound paradise; the waterhole was surrounded by shepherds watering their flocks.

### **(part 4 of 12): A Stranger in a Strange Land**

After walking for more than a week across the burning desert, Moses arrived at an oasis where groups of men were watering their animals. They were pushing, fighting, joking, and laughing, behaving in a rough, and tumble manner. Moses flung himself onto the ground grateful for the shade of a tree. As he caught his breath, he noticed two women and their flock of sheep. They were standing well back, hesitant to approach the waterhole.

Moses was a man of honour. Even though he was exhausted and dehydrated Moses could not bear to see the women standing back afraid to move toward the waterhole. He approached them, and asked why the men in their family did not look after the sheep. The two young women explained that their father was an old man and the task of caring for the sheep was now their responsibility.

Moses took the women's sheep to the waterhole, where he easily pushed in amongst the men already there. After completing this task, Moses' energy was totally spent. He sat under the shade of the tree and began to supplicate God. He said, "O Lord, whatever good you can bestow on me, I am surely in need of it".

**"And when he arrived at the water of Midian he found there a group of men watering their flocks, and besides them he found two women who were keeping back their flocks. He said, "What is the matter with you?" They said, "We cannot water**



**(our flocks) until the shepherds take their flocks. And our father is a very old man.” Therefore, he watered their flocks for them, and then he turned back to shade, and said, “My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!” (Quran 28:22-24)**

Quran relates to us the stories of the prophets of God in order that we might learn from them. The Prophets are worthy role models and their lives are not so different from our own. How many times has each one of us sunk to the ground or into a chair in despair? How many times have we felt so physically or mentally exhausted that it seems we will be unable to go on for even one more second?

Moses once again turned to the only real source of help for humankind – God, and before his supplication was finished help was on its way. Moses was probably hoping for a slice of bread or a handful of dates but instead God gave him safety, provisions and a family.

One of the two women returned to Moses. She conducted herself with modesty and shyness and said to Moses, “My father wants to reward you for your kindness and invites you to our home’. Consequently, Moses roused himself and went to see the elderly man. They sat together and Moses related his story. The elderly man allayed his fears and told Moses that he had safely crossed the Egyptian border; he was now in Midian and was safe from any authorities that may have been pursuing him.

**“Then there came to him one of the two women, walking shyly. She said, “Verily, my father calls you that he may reward you for having watered our flocks for us.” So when he came to him and narrated the story, he said, “Fear you not. You have escaped from the people who are polytheists, disbelievers, and wrong-doers.” (Quran 28:25)**

After Moses had been invited to stay with the family, one of the women approached her father privately and advised him to hire Moses. When her father asked why, she answered because he is strong and trustworthy. Two qualities that Islam tells us are signs of leadership. In the years immediately following the death of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, the leaders of the Muslim nation were chosen for these two qualities. They learned their politics from Quran, from the stories of their righteous predecessors.

The elderly man, who some scholars believe was Prophet Shuaib, although there are no authentic sources either confirming or denying this, offered Moses the safety and security of his own family. He gave one of his daughters in marriage to Moses on the condition that he work for eight years, or ten if Moses agreed to stay on for the further two years. Moses was a stranger in a strange

land. Exhausted and alone, but God heard his supplication and provided for him from sources that Moses could never have imagined.

**And said one of them (the two women): “O my father! Hire him! Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy.” He said, “I intend to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years, but if you complete ten years, it will be a favour from you. But I intend not to place you under a difficulty. If Allah wills, you will find me one of the righteous.” He (Moses) said, “That is settled between me and you whichever of the two terms I fulfil, there will be no injustice to me, and Allah is Surety over what we say.” (Quran 28:26-28)**

As believers we must never forget that God hears our prayers and supplications, and answers. Sometimes the wisdom behind the answers is beyond our comprehension but God desires only good for us. Putting our trust in God and submitting to His will allow the believer to weather any storm, and to stand tall in the face of adversity. We are never alone, just as Moses was not alone as he trudged across the desert fleeing the only life and land he had ever known.

### **(part 5 of 12): Moses Hears the Voice of God**

Moses, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, married one of the women he had initially helped at waterhole and spent the next ten years working with her father and raising his own family. His new life was quiet and contemplative, he did not have to endure the intrigue of the Egyptian court or the humiliation of his people, the Children of Israel. Moses was able to ponder the wonders of God and the universe.

Any account of Moses' life is filled with lessons and guidance, for Moses and for humankind. God put Moses through experiences that would hold him in good stead in his coming mission. Moses had been brought up in the house of the Pharaoh of Egypt; therefore, he was well aware of the politics and intrigue of the Egyptian government. Moses also had first hand experience of the corruption of Pharaoh himself – the man who had declared himself God.

It was through God's grace and mercy that Moses was able to escape from Egypt and travel about in the lands. He was able to experience other cultures and people. Travel then and now broadens horizons and opens hearts and minds to the differences and the similarities between people of diverse backgrounds. God says:

**“O humankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another.” (Quran 49:13)**

During his time in Midian, Moses was a shepherd. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, informed us that all the prophets of God had spent time tending flocks of sheep. It may seem a strange profession but on careful examination, we can see that shepherds learn some valuable lessons while tending to their flocks. A shepherd has a lonely quiet life; there is time for personal reflection and contemplation of the wonders of life.

However, at the same time a shepherd must be constantly on alert for danger. Sheep in particular are weak animals requiring constant care and attention. If even one sheep wanders away from the protection of the flock, it becomes easy prey. A prophet usually has the job of protecting a whole nation, he must be alert and aware of any danger threatening his followers, especially the weak, poor and oppressed among them.

After Moses had completed his term of service that he had pledged to his father in law, he was overcome by homesickness. He began to miss his family and the land of Egypt. Even though he was afraid of what would happen if he returned, he experienced a strange longing to return to the land of his birth. Moses gathered his family together and made the long journey back to Egypt.

**“Then, when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his family, he saw a fire in the direction of Mount Tur. He said to his family, “Wait, I have seen a fire; perhaps I may bring to you from there some news, or a burning fire-brand that you may warm yourselves”. (Quran 28:29)**

While Moses was trekking back across the desert, he became lost. It was a cold dark night. Moses saw what appeared to be a fire burning in the distance. He told his family to stay where they were. He had hopes of either getting directions or being able to carry some fire back to warm his family. Unbeknownst to Moses, he was about to participate in one of history’s most amazing conversations. He walked towards the fire, and as he did, he heard a voice.

**“...Blessed is whosoever is in the fire, and whosoever is round about it! And far removed is God from every imperfection, the Lord of all that exists. “O Moses! Verily! It is I, God, the All-Mighty, and the All-Wise.” (Quran 27:8&9)**

God spoke to Moses. He asked Moses to remove his shoes for he would be standing on sacred ground. God revealed to Moses that he had been chosen for a special mission and bid him listen to what was about to be said.

**“Verily! I am God, none has the right to be worshipped but I, so worship Me, and perform prayer for My Remembrance. Verily, the Hour is coming and I am almost hiding it that every person may be rewarded for that which he**

**strives. Therefore, let not the one who believes not therein (i.e. in the Day of Resurrection, Reckoning, Paradise and Hell, etc.), but follows his own lusts, divert you, lest you perish.” (Quran 20:14-16)**

In a direct conversation between God and Moses, prayer was prescribed upon Moses and his followers. Prayer was also prescribed upon Prophet Muhammad and his followers in much the same way on the night of Prophet Muhammad’s journey to Jerusalem and ascent into the heavens.

At this time, Moses must have been mesmerised. He set out for Egypt, following a strange yearning to return to his homeland. He had become lost in the dark and cold and was searching for light and guidance. He walked towards what he thought was a burning fire and found the light and guidance of God.

Moses was holding a stick or staff in his hand. God spoke to him and said what is this stick Moses, tell me about it. Moses answered, **“This is my stick, whereon I lean, and wherewith I beat down branches for my sheep, and wherein I find other uses.” (Quran 20:18)** Moses knew his stick very well; he knew it had no miraculous qualities. God asked Moses to throw the stick to the ground and when he did, it began to slither and shake. The stick had been transformed into a snake.

Moses was afraid; he turned on his heels and began to run away. It is a natural human inclination to be afraid of strange and unknown things, but God wanted to remove this fear from Moses’ heart. He was about to embark on a difficult mission and it was important that he began with complete trust that God would protect him, knowing that there was absolutely no reason for him to be fearful.

**“And throw your stick!” But when he saw it moving as if it were a snake, he turned in flight, and looked not back. (It was said): “O Moses! Draw near, and fear not. Verily, you are of those who are secure”. (Quran 28:31)**

God then instructed Moses to put his hand inside his cloak, He revealed to him another sign of his magnificence and omnipotence. Signs, which Moses would need in his coming mission, proof for those who are disobedient and rebellious.

**“Insert your hand into the opening of your garment, it will come out white without disease, and draw your hand close to your side to be free from fear (that which you suffered from the snake, and also by that your hand will return to its original state). These are two signs, (miracles, evidences, proofs) from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs. Verily, they are the people who are rebellious, and disobedient towards God.” (Quran 28:32)**

God intended to send Moses to Pharaoh. The man he feared most, the man Moses thought would surely put him to death. His heart constricted on fear but God reassured him.

### **(part 6 of 12): An Amazing Conversation**

On a dark night, in the shadow of Mount Tur, God conferred Prophethood on Moses. His first command to him was go to Pharaoh.

**“Go To Pharaoh! Verily! He has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience, and has behaved as an arrogant tyrant).” (Quran 20:24)**

Moses fled Egypt in fear for his life; he had spent 10 years in a country outside the jurisdiction of Pharaoh. Now God was telling him that he must face his biggest fear. He must face the corrupt Pharaoh; the man Moses was sure would want to see him executed. Moses once again felt the fear that had sustained him during his long journey across the desert. He responded to God’s words.

**“My Lord! I have killed a man among them, and I fear that they will kill me” (Quran 28:33)**

Moses was afraid but understood that God was completely able to provide him with all the support he needed for a mission that appeared to be virtually impossible. Moses made supplication; he begged for strength and ease in this most difficult mission. He asked God to open his chest, and grant him eloquence, self-confidence, and contentment. He also called upon God to strengthen him with a trusted and capable companion in prophethood, his brother Aaron.

The dialogue between God and Moses is one of the most amazing conversations contained in the pages of Quran. The words of God are delivered with eloquence and clarity. They paint a portrait of a strong yet humble man, enthralled by his encounter with God. They deliver the ethereal sense that God is all-powerful, omnipotent, yet filled with mercy and love towards His slaves.

**“Moses said, “O my Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness). And ease my task for me; and make loose the knot (the defect) from my tongue, (remove the incorrectness of my speech) that they understand my speech, and appoint for me a helper from my family, Aaron, my brother; increase my strength with him, and let him share my task (of conveying God’s Message and Prophethood), and we may glorify You much, and remember You much, Verily! You are of us ever a Well-Seer.”**

**God said, “You are granted your request, O Moses! And indeed, We conferred a favor on you another time before. When We inspired your mother with that which We inspired, saying, “Put him (the child) into a box or a case or a chest and put him into the river (Nile), and then the river shall cast it up on the bank, and there, an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his shall take him.’ And I endured you with love from Me, in order that you may be brought up under My Eye, when your sister went and said; “Shall I show you one who will nurse him?’ So We restored you to your mother that she might cool her eyes and she should not grieve. Then you did kill a man, but We saved you from a great distress and tried you with a heavy trial. Then you stayed a number of years with the people of Midian. Then you came here according to the term which I ordained (for you), O Moses!**

**“And I have chosen you for My Inspiration and My Message for Myself. Go you and your brother with My proofs, lessons, verses, evidences, signs, revelations, and do not, you both, slacken and become weak in My Remembrance.**

**“Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, verily, he has transgressed all bounds in disbelief and disobedience and behaved as an arrogant tyrant. And speak to him kindly, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear God.”**

**They said, “Our Lord! Verily! We fear lest he should hasten to punish us or lest he should transgress all bounds against us.”**

**He (God) said: “Fear not, Verily! I am with you both, Hearing and Seeing. So go you both to him, and say, “Verily, we are Messengers of your Lord, so let the children of Israel go with us, and torment them not; indeed, we have come with a sign from your Lord! And peace will be upon him who follows the guidance! Truly, it has been revealed to us that the torment will be for him who denies (believes not in the Oneness of God, and in His Messengers, etc) and turns away’ (from the truth and obedience of God)” (Quran 20:25-48).**

This short astonishing conversation changed Moses’ life. It taught him lessons about himself, about his world, about the nature of humankind and most importantly of all, about the nature of God. To this day it continues to teach important lessons to humankind. On a daily basis, the words of Quran change



lives. The lessons learned in the story of Moses are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago.

By reading the story of Moses so far, we have learned the importance of trusting God; we have learned that human beings plan and scheme, but God's plan can overcome any triumph, test, or trial. The story of Moses has taught us that there is no relief from the torments of this world except with remembrance and closeness to God.

The story of Moses teaches us that God can replace weakness with strength and failure with victory; and that God supports the righteous from sources unimaginable. Now as God confers prophethood on Moses and his brother Aaron we learn the true meaning of brotherhood and the true meaning of why choosing righteous companions can be the key to Paradise.

Moses wanted his brother to be his companion in prophethood and on this dangerous mission to confront Pharaoh because Aaron was strong and trustworthy, he was also an articulate, persuasive speaker. Whenever a person stands with his brother united in a common sense of purpose, united in their worship of God, united in righteousness they are unbeatable against even the most formidable enemy.

Ibn Kathir narrates that Moses and Aaron went together to Pharaoh and delivered their message. Moses spoke to Pharaoh about God, His mercy and His Paradise and about the obligation of humankind to worship God Alone.

## **(part 7 of 12): Magic & Illusion**

Quran narrates several conversations between Moses and Pharaoh. One of the most detailed accounts is in chapter 26 which is entitled 'The Poets'. Moses speaks kindly to Pharaoh about God, His Mercy, and His Paradise, but Pharaoh reacts disdainfully and arrogantly. He reminds Moses of his past crime and asks Moses to be grateful that he was raised in the palace amongst luxuries and wealth. Moses excuses himself by saying he committed the crime of killing an innocent man when he was ignorant and points out that he was raised in the palace only because he was unable to live with his own family due to Pharaoh's indiscriminate killing of baby boys.

**“Moses said, “I did it then, when I was an ignorant (as regards my Lord and His Message). So I fled from you when I feared you. But my Lord has granted me religious knowledge, and Prophethood, and appointed me as one of the Messengers. And this is the past favour with which you reproach me, and that you have enslaved the children of Israel.”**

**Pharaoh said, “And what is the Lord of the mankind, jinn, and all that exists?”**

**Moses replied, “The Lord of the heavens, and the earth, and all that is between them, if you seek to be convinced with certainty.”**

**Pharaoh said to those around, “Do you not hear what he says?”**

**Moses said, “Your Lord and the Lord of your ancient fathers!”**

**Pharaoh said, "Indeed, your 'messenger' who has been sent to you is mad."**

**Moses said, “Lord of the east, and the west, and all that is between them, if you did but understand!”**

**Pharaoh said, “If you choose a god other than me, I will certainly put you among the prisoners.”**

**Moses said, “Even if I bring you something manifest (and convincing).”**

**Pharaoh said, “Bring it forth then, if you are of the truthful!” (Quran 26:20-31)**

Pharaoh began by mocking Moses, then accusing him of being ungrateful and finally he threatened him. During this historical period, many people in Egypt practiced magic. There were even schools teaching classes in magic and illusion. Pharaoh jumped to the wrong conclusion, he thought that the manifest signs Moses was able to show by the permission of God were magic tricks and illusions.

When Moses threw his stick and it became a serpent, slithering and sliding along the ground, and when he withdrew his hand from his cloak and it strongly shone bright and white, Pharaoh presumed that Moses has learned the art of illusion. Ibn Kathir narrates the Pharaoh detained Moses and Aaron while he despatched couriers throughout Egypt to summon all the magicians to the palace. Pharaoh promised the magicians prestige and money in return for their tricks. A contest was set up between Moses and the Egyptian magicians.

Pharaoh was confident that his magicians were unbeatable. He had long been using them to influence the hearts and minds of the people. Pharaoh used their conjuring tricks and illusions to dominate and control his subjects. Moses was able to set the day for the contest and he chose a customary festival day. The streets would be crowded with people and the power and strength of God would be

visible to all. There would be maximum exposure to the truth of the words that, there is none worthy of worship except God alone.

**“O Moses! Have you come to drive us out from our land with your magic? We can also show you magic to match it, so set an appointment between us and you, which neither we nor you shall forget to keep, in a fair (open) place.’**

**Moses said, ‘Let the encounter be on the day (of the Festival) of Adornment, and let the people assemble at forenoon.’”  
(Quran 20:56-59)**

Moses asked the magicians to perform first. It is narrated that there were up to 70 magicians lined up in a row. The magicians threw their sticks and ropes in the name of the Pharaoh and the ground became a seething sea of serpents, writhing and slithering. The crowd looked on in amazement. Moses was afraid, but he was steadfast, secure in the knowledge that God would protect him and make his task easy. God covered him with tranquility and directed Moses to throw his stick.

Moses stick transformed into a huge serpent and quickly devoured all the illusionary serpents that covered the ground. The crowd rose up like a great wave, cheering and shouting for Moses. The magicians were astounded. They were well skilled in the art of magic and illusion, for they were the best magicians in the world at the time, but their conjuring was nothing but a trick. The magicians knew that Moses’ serpent was real. They collectively fell in prostration declaring their belief in the Lord of Moses and Aaron.

**“And the magicians fell down prostrating. Saying: “We believe in the Lord of mankind, jinn, and all that exists. “The Lord of Moses and Aaron.” Pharaoh said, “You have believed in him before I give you leave. Surely, he indeed is your chief, who has taught you magic! So verily, you shall come to know. Verily, I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify you all.” They said, “No harm! Surely, to our Lord we are to return. “Verily! We hope that our Lord will forgive us our sins, as we are the first of the believers in Moses and in the Monotheism which he has brought from God.”**

The magicians began that day as disbelievers, corrupt and interested only in riches and fame; however, within a few hours they had recognised the truth. They saw with their own eyes the omnipotence of God and repented for their errant ways. God is the most merciful, and He will forgive those who turn to Him with sincere and humble repentance.

Moses and Aaron left the contest field. The magicians, as it is told, were put to death, their bodies hung in the squares and market places to teach the people a lesson. Pharaoh returned to his palace and his rage magnified. He quarrelled with his ministers and advisors. He sent them away and then summoned them into his presence. He turned to his chief minister and said, "Am I a liar Oh Haman?" The Pharaoh had built his kingdom on the fact that he was a god, what was he to do now that Moses had revealed that there is no god but the one and only God.

**"O Haman! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways, - the ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Moses but verily, I think him to be a liar." Thus, it was made fair seeming, in Pharaoh's eyes, the evil of his deeds, he was hindered from the Right Path, and the plot of Pharaoh led to nothing but loss and destruction for him." (Quran 40:36-37)**

### **(part 8 of 12): Signs of God's Magnificent Power**

Pharaoh was angry. His kingdom of fear was built by oppressing the people and holding their hearts and minds captive. All the people of Egypt from the ministers and magicians to the lowly slaves and servants were afraid of Pharaoh's power and anger but Moses had exposed a weak spot. Pharaoh worried that his kingdom was about to unravel, however he was surrounded by sycophants and parasites who urged him on to greater tyranny.

Pharaoh's security and intelligence officers began to spread rumours. They said Moses and some magicians had secretly organised for Moses to win the competition. The lifeless bodies of the slain magicians were hung in public places to further terrorise the people. Due to their association with Moses the children of Israel, became the scapegoats. They complained to Moses that they were ill treated when he was born and now he had caused them to be oppressed once again.

Pharaoh ordered more killing, pillaging and raping. He imprisoned anyone who spoke out against this oppression, and Moses was powerless. He could not interfere. He counselled patience and watched silently. The children of Israel complained to Moses, and he was put into a very difficult situation. As he contended with Pharaoh's plots and plans, his people were turning against him and one of his own was working with the Egyptian powerbrokers.

Korah was a man from the children of Israel blessed with wealth and status, while all around him were poor and often destitute. He did not acknowledge the blessings of God and treated the poor with contempt. When Moses reminded him that it was his duty, as one who worshipped the One God, to pay poor tax, he refused and began to spread a rumour that Moses had invented the tax to make him rich. God's anger fell upon Korah and the earth opened up and swallowed him as if he had never existed.

**“Verily, Korah was of Moses’ people, but he behaved arrogantly towards them. And We gave him of the treasures, that of which the keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men... He said, “This has been given to me only because of knowledge I possess.” Did he not know that God had destroyed before him generations, men who were stronger than he in might and greater in the amount of riches. So he went forth before his people arrogantly and We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling place. (Quran 28: 76-82)**

Pharaoh summoned Moses to the palace. Ibn Kathir narrates that Pharaoh wanted Moses killed and that he was supported by all his ministers and government officials, except one. This man, believed to be a relative of Pharaoh’s, was a believer in the Oneness of God, although until this moment he had kept his belief secret.

**And a believing man of Pharaoh’s family, who hid his faith said, “Would you kill a man because he says, My Lord is God, and he (Moses) has come to you with clear signs (proofs) from your Lord? And if he is a liar, upon him will be (the sin of) his lie; but if he is telling the truth, then some of that calamity wherewith he threatens you will befall on you. (Quran 40:28)**

The believing man spoke eloquently; he warned his people that they would suffer a day of disaster like those days that had afflicted people in the past. He reminded them that God had sent clear signs with Moses, but his words fell on deaf ears. Pharaoh and many of his ministers threatened to kill the believing man but God kept him safe, and under His protection.

**So God saved him from the evils that they plotted (against him), while an evil torment encompassed Pharaoh’s people. (Quran 40: 45)**

God commanded Moses to warn the Pharaoh that he and the Egyptians would suffer a severe punishment if the children of Israel were not set free. If the torture, oppression, and harassment did not stop, the signs of God’s wrath would descend upon them. Pharaoh’s response was to call all the people of Egypt including the children of Israel to a large gathering. He informed them that he was their Lord, he pointed out that Moses was no more than a lowly slave with no power, strength or might. Moses strength however came directly from God. The people however believed and obeyed Pharaoh: the signs of God’s power began to descend.

God afflicted Egypt with a severe drought. Even the lush, green, and fertile Nile valleys began to wither and die. The crops failed and the people began to

suffer but Pharaoh remained arrogant therefore God sent a huge flood to devastate the land. The people, including the chief ministers appealed to Moses.

**“O Moses! Invoke your Lord for us because of His Promise to you. If you will remove the punishment from us, we indeed shall believe in you, and we shall let the children of Israel go with you.” (Quran 7:134)**

The land returned to normal and the crops once again began to grow, but still the children of Israel were enslaved. God sent a plague of locusts that swallowed up everything in their path. The people rushed to Moses begging for his help. The locusts departed but still the children of Israel remained enslaved. Next came a plague of lice, spreading disease amongst the people, followed by a plague of frogs that harassed and terrified the people in their homes and beds. Each time one of God’s punishments descended the people begged Moses to implore his Lord for relief; each time they promised to free the enslaved children of Israel and each time, they failed to fulfil that promise.

Then the final sign of God’s anger was revealed, the water of the Nile river turned to blood. For the children of Israel the water remained pure and clear but for all others it appeared as thick red blood. Even after this most devastating series of signs of God’s displeasure, the children of Israel remained enslaved.

**And indeed, We punished the people of Pharaoh with years of drought and shortness of fruits (crops, etc.), that they might remember and take heed.**

**But whenever good came to them, they said, “Ours is this.” And if evil afflicted them, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him. Be informed! Verily, their evil omens are with God but most of them know not.**

**They said Moses, “Whatever, signs, you may bring to us, and to work therewith your sorcery on us, we shall never believe in you.”**

**So We sent on them: the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, and the blood, as a succession of signs, yet they remained arrogant, and they were of those people who were criminals, polytheists and sinners.**

**And when the punishment fell on them they said, “O Moses! Invoke your Lord for us because of His Promise to you. If you will remove the punishment from us, we indeed shall believe in you, and we shall let the Children of Israel go with you.”**



**But when We removed the punishment from them to a fixed term, which they had to reach, behold! They broke their word!**

**So We took retribution from them. We drowned them in the sea, because they belied Our signs, and were heedless about them. (Quran 7: 130-136)**

### **(part 9 of 12): We Drowned Them in the Sea**

Pharaoh and the majority of the people of Egypt refused to believe the signs. Repeatedly God sent his punishments and the people appealed to Moses, promising to worship God alone and free the Children of Israel but time and time again, they broke their promises. Finally, God withdrew His mercy and gave the order for Moses to lead his people out of Egypt.

**But when We removed the punishment from them to a fixed term, which they had to reach, behold! They broke their word! So We took retribution from them. We drowned them in the sea, because they belied Our signs, and were heedless about them. (Quran 7: 130-136)**

Pharaoh's spies knew immediately that something momentous was happening and Pharaoh called a meeting of his most trusted advisors. They decided to gather the entire armed forces to pursue the fleeing slaves. Gathering the army took all night and Pharaoh's army did not leave confines of the city until dawn.

Pharaoh's army marched into the desert. It was not long before the children of Israel could look back into the distance and see the dust raised by the approaching army. It was also not long before those in the front ranks of the children of Israel had reached the edge of the Red Sea.

The Children of Israel were trapped. In front of them was the Red Sea; to their back was the avenging army. Fear and panic began to spread through their ranks. They appealed to Moses. Moses had been walking at the back of his fleeing people; he could see the army getting closer and closer. He made his way through the ranks to the edge of the sea. He walked amongst his people allaying their fears and reminding them to keep the faith to continue trusting that God would not let them down.

Moses stood at the edge of the Red Sea and looked out toward the horizon. Ibn Kathir narrates that Joshua turned to Moses and said, "In front of us is this impassable barrier, the sea, and behind us the enemy; surely death cannot be avoided!" Moses did not panic; he stood silently and waited for God to keep His promise, to free the children of Israel.

At that moment, as panic swept over the children of Israel, God inspired Moses to strike the sea with his stick. He did as he was commanded. A fierce wind began to blow, the sea began to swirl and spin, and suddenly it parted to reveal a pathway; the bottom of the sea became dry enough for the people to walk across it.

Moses began to direct the people across the dry corridor in the middle of the sea. He waited until the last person had commenced walking across the sea before he turned back to look at the approaching army and then followed his people across the seabed. As they reached the other side, the panic and fear began to overwhelm the children of Israel. They once again began to beg and plead for Moses to close the corridor. Moses refused, God's plan was already in motion, and he was confident that the Children of Israel would be safe even though Pharaoh's army had followed them into the dry seabed corridor.

**And We took the children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh with his hosts followed them in oppression and enmity, till when drowning overtook him, he said, "None has the right to be worshipped but He, in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am one of the Muslims (those who submit to God's Will)."**

**Now you believe while you refused to believe before and you were one of the evildoers! So this day We shall deliver your dead body out from the sea that you maybe a sign to those who come after you! And verily, many among humankind are heedless of our Signs. (Quran10:90-92)**

Ibn Kathir describes the death of Pharaoh, "The curtain fell on Pharaoh's tyranny, and the waves threw his corpse up to the western seashore. The Egyptians saw him and knew that the god whom they worshipped and obeyed was a mere man who could not keep death away from his own neck." When Pharaoh had power, wealth, good health and strength he refused to acknowledge God but when he saw death approaching he cried out to God with fear and horror. If humankind remembers God in times of ease, God will remember the even the lowliest of human beings in times of distress.

Generations of oppression had left an indelible mark on the Children of Israel. Years of humiliation and constant fear had left them ignorant and obstinate. Most of them had been deprived of comforts and luxuries for all of their lives. They longed for anything that was a sign of wealth or materialism. The children of Israel believed in God, they had just witnessed the most amazing miracles and signs of God's power but still they coveted an idol they saw on their journey out of Egypt.

**And We brought the Children of Israel (with safety) across the sea, and they came upon a people devoted to some of their**

idols (in worship). They said, “Moses! Make for us a god as they have gods.” He said, “Verily, you are a people who know not the Majesty and Greatness of God and what is obligatory upon you.” Moses added, “Verily, these people will be destroyed for that which they are engaged in (idols-worship). And all that they are doing is in vain.”

He said, “Shall I seek for you a god other than God, while He has given you superiority over the mankind and jinn of your time.”

And (remember) when We rescued you from Pharaoh’s people, who were afflicting you with the worst torment, killing your sons and letting your women live. And in that was a great trial from your Lord.” (Quran 7: 138-141)

God had favoured the Children of Israel. They were led safely out of Egypt and they had witnessed the drowning of their cruel ruler Pharaoh. When they needed water God commanded Moses to strike a rock, which sent forth twelve springs of water for the twelve different tribes so that there was no dispute. God also sent clouds to protect them from the scorching sun and to relieve their hunger He sent a special delicious food called *manna*, and quail. Sadly, in spite of God’s generosity many of the children of Israel complained and wanted the food they were used to eating in Egypt, onions, garlic, beans and lentils.

Moses admonished his people and reminded them that they had just left a life of degradation and humiliation. He asked why they whined for the worst bounties when God was providing them with the best. Moses said, “**Would you exchange that which is better for that which is lower? Go you down to any town and you shall find what you want!**” (Quran2: 61). God was providing bounties and making life easy for the children of Israel while they made their way to the Promised land, but they were a broken people, unable to stay away from sin and corruption.

## **(part 10 of 12): The Ten Commandments**

They left under the cover of darkness, carrying their meagre possessions headed across the desert towards the Red Sea. When they reached the sea, the Pharaoh’s army was pursuing them closely, the people of Moses could see the dust stirred up by the approaching army. They looked at the sea in front of them and felt trapped. By the will and permission of God, Moses struck the sea with his staff and the sea parted revealing a pathway. The Children of Israel walked across the seabed. When the last person had safely crossed, the sea fell back into place and drowned the army of Egypt including the tyrannical Pharaoh.

The Children of Israel were a people oppressed and humiliated over a long period. Several generations had lived under the yoke of the Pharaoh. They had become a belligerent people. Always expecting the worst. Always longing for a slice of the good things of this world. Their sense of honour and self-confidence had been eroded. During their journey out of Egypt to the Promised Land, there was ample opportunity for their character flaws to become obvious. The Children of Israel were ungrateful to God, despite His care and attention to them. They were incapable of behaving submissively and accepting the will of God.

When the Children of Israel came across a people worshipping idols, their eagerness to be like those people they perceived to be happy became manifest and they asked Moses to let them have an idol, completely forgetting the miracles of God they had just witnessed. When God provided them with delicious food which was till then unknown to them, they complained, wanting the inferior food they were used to. When Moses directed them to march into a town and overthrow the Canaanites they refused, mostly out of fear and thus disobeyed the command of God. Ibn Kathir narrates that Moses was able to find only two men willing to fight.

**“He (Moses) said, “O my Lord! I have power only over myself and my brother, so separate us from the people who are rebellious and disobedient to God!” God said, “Therefore it (this holy land) is forbidden to them for forty years; in distraction they will wander through the land. So be not sorrowful over the people who are rebellious and disobedient to God.” (Quran 5:20-26)**

The ‘days of wandering’ began. Each day was like the one before it. The people travelled with no destination in mind. Eventually they entered the Sinai; Moses recognised it as the place where he had spoken to God before his great journey into Egypt had begun. God ordered Moses to fast, as purification, for thirty days, and then added ten more days. After the fast was completed, Moses was ready to once again communicate with God.

**“And We appointed for Moses thirty nights and added to the period ten more, and he completed the term, appointed by his Lord, of forty nights. And Moses said to his brother Aaron, “Take my place among my people, act in the Right Way (by ordering the people to obey God and to worship Him Alone) and follow not the way of the mischief makers.” And when Moses came at the time and place appointed by Us, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “O my Lord! Show me (yourself) that I may look upon You.” God said, “You cannot see Me, but look upon the mountain, if it stands still in its place then you shall see Me.” So when his Lord appeared to the**

**mountain, He made it collapse into dust, and Moses fell down unconscious. Then when he recovered his senses he said, “Far removed are you from every imperfection, I turn to You in repentance and I am the first of the believers.” God said, “O Moses, I have chosen you above men by My Messages, and by My speaking to you. So hold that which I have given you and be among the grateful.” (Quran 7:142-144)**

God gave Moses two stone tablets, written upon them were the Ten Commandments. These commandments form the basis of the Jewish law, the Torah, and they are standards of morality still set by the Christian churches. Ibn Kathir and the early scholars of Islam state that the Ten commandments are reiterated in two verses from the Quran.

**“Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you from, Join not anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents; kill not your children because of poverty- We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not near to shameful sins whether committed openly or secretly; and kill not anyone whom God has forbidden, except for a just cause. This He has commanded you that you may understand. And come not near to the orphan’s property, except to improve it, until he or she attains the age of full strength; and give full measure and full weight with justice. We burden not any person but that which he can bear. And whenever you give your word (i.e. judge between men or give evidences) say the truth even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfil the Covenant of God. This He commands you, that you may remember.” (Quran 6:151-152)**

Moses had been absent for forty days. His people had become restless, they were like children, complaining and acting impulsively. Ibn Kathir describes their descent into the unforgiveable sin of idolatry. “As-Samiri, a man who was inclined towards evil, suggested that they find themselves another guide, as Moses had broken his promise.” He said to them, “In order to find true guidance, you need a god, and I shall provide one for you.” So he collected all their gold jewellery, and melted it down. During the casting, he threw in a handful of dust, acting like a magician to impress the ignorant. From the molten metal, he fashioned a golden calf. It was hollow, and when wind passed through it, it produced a sound.”

It was as if they had succeeded in making themselves a living God. Moses’ brother Aaron had been afraid to stand up to the people but when he saw the idol and realised what a grave sin was being committed he spoke up. He reminded the people to worship God Alone and he warned them of dire consequences for their

actions both from Moses on his return and from God Himself. Those who remained true to their belief in One God separated themselves from the idol worshippers. When Moses returned to his people he saw them singing and dancing around the golden calf. He was furious.

### **(part 11 of 12): The Death of Moses**

Moses could not believe his eyes, even though God had just warned him that a severe punishment was about to befall his people for worshipping the golden calf. Moses heart was filled with shame and anger. His own people had witnessed the power and majesty of God yet they acted belligerently and without fear of God's punishment.

**“God said, “Verily! We have tried your people in your absence, and As-Samiri has led them astray.” Then Moses returned to his people in a state of anger and sorrow. He said, “O my people! Did not your Lord promise you a fair promise? Did then the promise seem to you long in coming? Or did you desire the Wrath should descend from your Lord on you, so you broke your promise to me (disbelieving in God and worshipping the calf)?” (Quran 20:83-86)**

Moses turned to his brother Aaron; he was angry and grabbed him by the beard, at the same time he pulled Aaron towards him by the head. He bellowed at his brother demanding that Aaron explain why he disobeyed the instructions he had given him, and why he allowed As Samiri to beguile the Children of Israel. Aaron explained that the people did not listen to him, and were about to kill him. He appealed to Moses not to let the idolaters separate them. Aaron was not as strong and as forceful as his brother and he feared that he would not be able to control the Children of Israel so he waited for his brother Moses to return.

God's promise is true and His punishment was swift. Moses confronted As Samiri and sent him into exile.

**“Moses said, go away! And verily, your punishment in this life will be that you will say, ‘Touch me not’ (you will live alone exiled away from humankind); and verily (for a future torment), you have a promise that will not fail. And look at your god, to which you have been devoted. We will certainly burn it, and scatter its particles in the sea.” (Quran 20:83-98)**

The punishment imposed upon the idol worshippers was severe.



**“Remember when Moses said to his people: “O my people! Verily, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf. So turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves (the innocent kill the wrong doers among you), that will be better for you in the Sight of your Creator.” Then He accepted your repentance. Truly, He is the One who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful.” (Quran 2:54)**

God is the Most Merciful and is forgiving. After the Children of Israel had purged themselves and killed the idol worshippers among them, God accepted their repentance. Even after their continuous belligerence and stubbornness, the Children of Israel once again felt God’s favor upon them.

Moses then chose 70 men from amongst the most pious elders of the Children of Israel. He returned with them to Mount Tur. They were a delegation intending to apologise to God for their behaviour. They stood back while Moses moved into a low-lying cloud to speak with God while the elders waited. When he came back to them, instead of feeling repentant and apologising the elders informed Moses that they would not truly follow him until they had seen God with their own eyes.

**“O Moses! We shall never believe in you till we see God plainly.” (Quran 2:35)**

The ground shook and the seventy men were struck by a lightening bolt. They fell to the ground dead. Moses was astounded. He immediately wondered what he would say to the Children of Israel. These seventy men were the best of people; Moses felt that now the Children of Israel had no hope. He turned to God.

**“O my Lord, if it had been Your Will, You could have destroyed them and me before; would You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? It is only Your trial by which You lead astray whom You will, and keep guided whom You will. You are our Protector, so forgive us and have Mercy on us, for You are the best of those who forgive. And ordain for us good in this world, and in the Hereafter. Certainly we have turned unto You.” He said (as to) My Punishment I afflict therewith whom I will and My Mercy embraces all things. That (Mercy) I shall ordain for those who are the pious and give alms; and those who believe in our signs.” (Quran 7:155-157)**

God is indeed the Most Merciful and His mercy embraces all things. When Moses beseeched God He raised up the seventy dead elders. For many years the Children of Israel wandered about in the desert and wastelands. Prophet Moses suffered greatly at their hands. He endured mutiny, belligerence, ignorance, and idolatry, they even inflicted personal harm upon him. He suffered purely for the

sake of pleasing God. After many years Prophet Aaron died, so Moses was finally without his greatest supporter. Still he remained steadfast; still he remained in the wilderness never quite reaching the Promised land. Moses died, still surrounded by the belligerent Children of Israel. Still surrounded by people who refused to see the miracles before their eyes, yet God in His Mercy continued to give them chance after chance.

From the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, comes the account of Prophet Moses' death. **"The Angel of Death was sent to Moses. When he arrived Moses punched him in the eye. The Angel returned to his Lord and said, 'You have sent me to a slave who does not want to die.' God said, 'Return to him and tell him to put his hand on the back of an ox and for every hair that will come under it, he will be granted one year of life.' Moses said, 'O Lord! What will happen after that?' God replied, 'then death.' Moses said, 'Let it come now!' Moses then requested God to let him die close to the Holy Land so that he would be at a distance of a stone's throw from it."**<sup>[1]</sup>

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#### Footnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

### **(part 12 of 12): Lessons from the life of Prophet Moses**

The human condition is filled with trials, tribulations, and tremendous learning curves. Life is full of surprises. However remembering God and striving to please Him is humankind's lifeline. The Quran contains inspirational stories of prophets, and righteous men and women. The life of Moses is discussed frequently and his story teaches us that God is merciful, trustworthy, and caring. Allah, the Most Forgiving, has not left us alone; He has provided us with His guidance and light.

**"Indeed, in their stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding. It (the Quran) is not a forged statement but a confirmation of God's existing Books (the Torah, the Gospel and other Scriptures of God) and a detailed explanation of everything, a guide, and a Mercy for the people who believe." (Quran 12: 111)**

Throughout this series of articles, we have learned about Moses' tremendous strength of character, and his ability to persevere even in dire circumstances. Moses followed God's commandments with valor and determination, and beyond this all, he possessed a character of great importance, the character of sincerity. Moses was sincere in all his efforts. No matter what he

did, he acted with the express purpose of pleasing God. When determination is coupled with sincerity a person's character can become extraordinary.

During the years that the Children of Israel wandered the desert unable to enter the Promised Land, Moses met and spent time with Khidr. A man whom the majority of scholars believe to have been a prophet.

Ibn Kathir narrates that one day Moses was asked by someone, "O Messenger of God, is there another man on earth more learned than you?" Moses replied, "No!" believing that since God had allowed him to perform miracles and had given him the Torah, he must surely be the most learned man alive. This however was not the case. Moses' encounter with Khidr teaches humankind that no one person can hold all the information available and that even though we may think we are wise and knowledgeable, the need to seek knowledge never ceases. When Moses learned of Khidr's existence, he asked to meet him.

God instructed Moses to take a live fish in a container. When the fish disappeared, he would find the man he sought. Moses set out on his journey, accompanied by a young man who carried the container with the fish. They reached a place where two rivers met and decided to rest there. Instantly, Moses fell asleep. While he was asleep, his companion saw the fish wriggle out of the vessel into the river and swim away. However, he forgot to inform Moses.

When Moses awoke, they continued their journey until they were exhausted and hungry. Moses asked for a meal. Only then did his companion recall that the fish had gotten away. Hearing this, Moses cried, "This is exactly what we are seeking!" They hurriedly retraced their steps to the place where the rivers met and where the fish had jumped out.

When Moses realised that they had taken the wrong direction, he immediately turned back. He did not push forward hoping that he could save face, or time, he acknowledged that his path was incorrect and he changed his way. In this life, so many of us choose the wrong path but are afraid or too embarrassed to turn and face in a different direction. There are great lessons to be taken from the actions of Prophet Moses. Once a person realizes he is heading in the wrong direction in life he must immediately turn around and get back onto the Straight Path. One should not consider this a defeat; rather, it is a victory.

When Moses returned to the correct path, he met Khidr. It was a meeting designed to bring forth knowledge. This momentous story of the meeting of Moses and Khidr is narrated in Quran in Chapter 18, The Cave.

**"Moses said to him, "May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgment?" He said, "Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience. And how can you have patience for what you**

do not encompass in knowledge?" Moses said, "You will find me, if Allah wills, patient, and I will not disobey you in any order." He said, "Then if you follow me, do not ask me about anything until I mention it to you." So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, al-Khidhr damaged it. Moses said, "Have you damaged it to drown its people? You have certainly done a grave thing." Al-Khidhr said, "Did I not say that with me you would never be able to have patience?" Moses said, "Do not blame me for what I forgot and do not cover me in my matter with difficulty." So they set out, until when they met a boy, al-Khidhr killed him. Moses said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than having killed a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing." Al-Khidhr said, "Did I not tell you that with me you would never be able to have patience?" Moses said, "If I should ask you about anything after this, then do not keep me as a companion. You have obtained from me an excuse." So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so al-Khidhr restored it. Moses said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment." Al-Khidhr said, "This is parting between me and you. I will inform you of the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience. As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to defect it as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force. As for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief. So we intended that their Lord should substitute for them one better than him in purity and nearer to mercy. And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience." (Quran 18:66-82)

The story of Moses and Khidr reminds us that God is the Most Wise. For the frail human being life can hold great joy and laughter but sometimes we are beset by trials, tragedies, and calamities that seemingly make no sense. As believers we should believe that whatever God's decree is it stems from His Supreme and Absolute Wisdom.

