

Stories of the Prophets

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THE UNGRATEFUL NATION 52

Prophet Ibrahim (AS)

CHALLENGING THE WILL OF GOD

Namrud (Nimrod), the son of Kan'an, ruled over the city of Babylon. When he totally dominated over the people and the extent of his influence developed, he forced the people to worship him; the people, who prostrated themselves in front of idols made of wood and stone, easily obeyed Namrud and called him their god. For this reason, the people were in deviation for a long time and forgot God the Great, the One. Therefore, God willed to bring a great leader into existence from among that deviated people to guide them.

One day, a court astrologer told Namrud:

"The position of the stars indicates that a man will soon revolt, uproot idolatry, and invite the people to a new religion."

Namrud asked, "In which land will this man begin his rebellion?". The astrologer replied, "In this very land; however, he is not yet born."

To prevent this from happening, Namrud ordered that men and women be kept separate so that the foetus of such a person would not be conceived and he would not be born. Out of ignorance, Namrud thought that he could, in this way, obstruct the Will of God and prevent the Divine Decree from being executed. However, in that very atmosphere of fear and horror, Ibrahim (Peace Be Upon Him) was conceived and his mother became pregnant. The signs of pregnancy, however, not evident in her.

When the time of delivery drew near, Ibrahim's mother left the city to find a hidden and private place to deliver her baby. At last, she took refuge in a cave where she gave birth to Ibrahim (AS) who opened his eyes to the world in that cave. His mother wrapped him in a piece of cloth, tightly covered the opening of the cave, and returned to the city. God, the Creator of the Universe, ordered milk to flow from Ibrahim's thumb and, thereby, provided him with sufficient food. Far from others' watch, Ibrahim (AS) grew and when he reached the age of thirteen, he went secretly to the city with his mother.

Azar, Ibrahim's uncle, was one of the famous idol-makers of Babylon and his sons used to sell the idols which he made. When Azar saw Ibrahim (AS), he sent him with his own sons to sell idols. From the beginning, Ibrahim (AS) disliked the idols. He would tie a piece of rope around their necks and pull them along the ground, making them dirty and muddy. He would scream, "O people, come and buy, from me, these idols which neither have life nor comprehend anything and are unable to defend themselves."

In the eyes of the idolaters, Ibrahim's behaviour toward the idols was very offensive. At last, it reached the point that the people complained to Azar of Ibrahim's bad behaviour toward their idols. Azar tried to advise him, but it was of no use; so, he was compelled to imprison Ibrahim (AS).

IBRAHIM AND A SIGN OF RESURRECTION

God, the Exalted, created Ibrahim (AS) to guide the misled people and idolaters and granted him the position of Prophethood. Ibrahim (AS) had whole-hearted faith in God and didn't allow any doubt to enter his heart. However, in order to understand the true essence of things, he asked God to show him how He raises the dead.

There came a call from God, "Do you not yet believe in resurrection, Ibrahim?" Ibrahim (AS) replied, "Surely I have believed, but I want to see it obviously in order to reach the point of perfect certitude."

Since Ibrahim's intention was to increase his knowledge and certitude, God accepted his request. He told Ibrahim (AS), "Hunt and kill four birds, cut them up, and mix their parts and pieces together. Then, divide the mixed flesh into several portions; put each portion on the top of a separate mountain; after that, call them one by one until, by the Command of God, they revive and come flying to you."

Ibrahim (AS) did as was commanded by God. After killing, cutting up, and dividing the flesh of the birds, and putting each portion on a separate mountain, he called them; the pieces of the birds' dead bodies came together from the different places, spirit was blown into them and they became alive again. Ibrahim (AS) witnessed, with his own eyes, one of the great signs of the Power of God in the revival of the dead; his heart, filled with faith, reached the point of perfect certitude.

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IBRAHIM IN THE IDOL - TEMPLE

Ibrahim (AS) began his divine mission. His uncle, Azar, was the first person to receive the invitation to worship the One God. Ibrahim (AS) respectfully presented the proofs of monotheism, but Azar harshly rejected his words and drove him away. Ibrahim (AS), who had failed at the outset of his mission, sadly left his uncle. After that, he tolerated all persecutions and injuries which he received. These injuries did not lessen his will in the least; rather, he became more determined to guide his people.

Ibrahim (AS) went to his people in order to make them understand that idolatry is a wrong path and a deviation. First, he asked them, "What do you worship?" They said, "Our idols are objects of worship. We worship them; ask them all our needs; and, at the time of calamities, we seek refuge in them."

Ibrahim (AS) asked, "Do the idols hear your words and accept your requests? Are they able to harm or benefit in any way?" They said, "No, but we follow our fathers who worshipped idols."

Ibrahim (AS) said, "You and your fathers have been in manifest error. These stone and wood idols, which are your own handicrafts and cannot have any benefit or harm, are not worthy of being worshipped. Worship belongs to God the one who has created us all and is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all creatures; He has power over all things." Then, Ibrahim went on to explain the Power of God: he said, "The Great Creator is the One Who created me. He guides me; gives me sustenance; when I become ill, cures me. It is He Who destines me to die and brings me back to life. I hope He will forgive me on Resurrection Day."

With these words, Ibrahim (AS) invited the people to worship God The One. They disputed with him, however, and refused to stop worshipping their idols and worship God the One instead. Ibrahim (AS) therefore,

decided to break the idols and make the ignorant people see for themselves that these lifeless idols are incapable of doing anything and do not deserve to be worshipped.

Every year, the people of Babylon celebrated a feast in which they observed special ceremonies. On that day, they would all go out of the city and spend the day in the countryside. That year, when the day of the festival arrived, all the people left the city except Ibrahim (AS) who pretended to be ill in order to remain alone in the city.

When Ibrahim (AS) found the city deserted and the idol-temple without guards, he entered the temple. In a large, decorated room, the idols were placed in order according to their rank. Ibrahim began looking at the idols; then, mockingly and scornfully, he offered them the food that he had with him, saying, "Would you like some food?" He received no reply from the idols. Once again, he mockingly asked, "Why don't you say anything? Why don't you speak? Don't you want to eat anything?" But, again, he didn't hear any answer. He then took an axe and began breaking the idols. Soon, all of Namrud's followers' beautiful and orderly idols turned into little pieces of broken wood and stone. He spared only the biggest idol, which he left to be the base for his further argument to awaken and inform the people.

The idolaters returned to their city after their festivities. When they saw that their temple was in disarray and the idols were broken, they became very distressed and furious. While searching for the guilty person, they asked each other, "Who has committed such a crime and treated our gods in this way; surely he is among the oppressors." Some of them said, "We heard a young man speak badly of our idols. His name is Ibrahim. He considers idolatry foolish. He might have done this."

Ibrahim (AS) was soon identified as the criminal and was summoned to trial and punishment. They asked him, "Was it you who broke our idols?" Ibrahim (AS) firmly answered, "Perhaps the big idol has brought this damage on your idols. If the idols can speak, ask them." Namrud's followers were confounded in the face of this logic. Being unable to deny it, they said, "Idols are unable to speak."

Ibrahim (AS) immediately began an argument which would destroy the foundations of idolatry and would uncover the incorrectness of their belief. He said, "Do you worship instead of God the One something that has no benefit or harm for you? Damnation upon you and what you worship."

In this way, Ibrahim's trial came to an end, and according to the existing evidence, he was found guilty. Everyone demanded his punishment by shouting, "Assist the gods; burn Ibrahim in fire! Burn the guilty!"

IBRAHIM IN THE FIRE

To assist their gods and to take revenge on Ibrahim (AS), Namrud's followers decided to burn him in fire. Since, in their view, Ibrahim's crime was of a social nature, all should participate in taking revenge on him and share in the reward of their act. To put their intention into action, they all began gathering firewood. After only a few days, they had gathered a pile of wood as huge as a hill. Then, they lit the fire; little by little, the fire rose and its flames reached to the sky. There was so much wood that a great and

terrifying fire was set in the desert. The heat of the fire was so much that it could burn a person from a distance.

Using a catapult, they threw Ibrahim (AS) into the fire and, thereby, extinguished the flames of their anger and hatred. Ibrahim disappeared from the sight of the people into the middle of the flames. The people exclaimed and cried out with joy, because they thus had taken revenge on the enemy of their gods.

Jibra'il, the esteemed angel, descended to Ibrahim (AS) and said, "O Ibrahim! Do you have any need? Tell me; I will bring it to pass." Ibrahim (P.B.UH) said, "I am not in need of you; I am in need of my Lord." Then he asked God to save him from the fire. By God's Will, the fire became cold and safe, and Ibrahim (AS) was saved from being burned in it.

Namrud and his followers, who were looking at Ibrahim (AS) from around the fire, saw that, much to their surprise, such a horrifying and burning fire did not harm him at all; he was sitting comfortably in the middle of it. They were all staring at him with wonder and admiration. Namrud told those around him, "If someone worships a god, it must be such an able and powerful god like Ibrahim's God."

The people, who saw this great and Divine sign, realised the legitimacy of Ibrahim's invitation. It was proven to them that the right and just path is the very one to which Ibrahim invited them; however, enmity, stubbornness, ignorance, and the love of wealth and position prevented them from accepting Ibrahim's invitation. Most of the people remained idolaters, and only a small group of them joined Ibrahim (AS).

IBRAHIM'S DISPUTATION WITH NAMRUD

Ibrahim's deliverance from that terrifying fire caused much surprise and wonder among Namrud's followers. Namrud, himself, was also much surprised and astonished. He, therefore, summoned Ibrahim (AS) into his presence and asked him, "Who is this God to Whom you invite the people? And why have you broken our idols?"

"Tell me, who is your God?" Ibrahim (AS) replied, "My God is the One Who gives life and death. The life and death of all living creatures are under His Will and Power." Namrud attempted to cover the truth with fallacy and to confute Ibrahim; therefore, he said, "I am also able to give life and death, in that I release a prisoner who is sentenced to death and kill another prisoner; thus, I have given life to the first one and have taken the life of the second."

Ibrahim (AS) replied, "If you are truthful, give life to the one whom you have caused to die. Furthermore, my God is the One Who causes the sun to rise from the East every day; if you are a god and have power, cause the sun to rise from the West."

Namrud was confounded in the face of Ibrahim's reasoning. Signs of weakness and distress became evident in him, but he didn't leave off his obstinacy and enmity. Since he realised that Ibrahim (AS) is backed by a Divine power and that a human is unable to destroy him, Namrud released Ibrahim out of fear of becoming disgraced. He ordered, however, that Ibrahim (AS) be expelled from the city lest the people might follow him and convert to his religion.

Ibrahim (P.BU.H.) - who was unhappy with Namrud, his followers, and their land -prepared to depart. He gathered his sheep and began his journey with his family. Because Ibrahim (AS) had many sheep, Namrud ordered that all be confiscated.

Ibrahim (AS) said, "I have spent all my life in this land and I have worked hard, so that I could save these properties; if you want to take my sheep from me, you must return to me the time I have spent for this". He then went to the judge and complained before him. After listening to Ibrahim (AS), the judge pronounced judgement in his favour. Ibrahim (AS) won his case; he took his sheep and emigrated from that land toward Syria and the city of Jerusalem together with his nephew, Lut (AS).

ANOTHER EMBARRASSMENT

Ibrahim (AS) was an ardent man. To conceal his wife, Sara, from the sight of others during the journey, he put her in a trunk, closed the lid, and loaded it onto a camel. When they reached a land which was under the reign of an Arab king, the king's agents stopped them at the border to search their belongings in order to evaluate the appropriate taxes. They searched all his belongings. When they got to that trunk, they asked Ibrahim to open it. Ibrahim (AS) said, "Suppose that this trunk is filled with gold and silver; take whatever tax you want, but do not open the lid."

The chief agent didn't accept; Ibrahim (AS) was obliged to open the trunk. When the chief beheld Sara's astonishing beauty, he said, "I will not permit you to leave here until I inform the king of your story and of this woman." He then sent someone to inform the king.

The king summoned them. When they came into his presence and the king beheld Sara, he involuntarily stretched his hand toward her to take hold of her arm. Ibrahim (AS) became very upset; he turned his face away and said, "O my Lord, keep the hand of this stranger away from my wife." The king's hand withered up. The king said, "Did your God wither up my hand?"

Ibrahim (AS) answered, "Yes, my Lord is strict and hates forbidden acts." The king said, "Ask your God to heal my hand and I won't bother your wife anymore." Ibrahim (AS) prayed and his hand was healed.

The oppressive king again looked at Sara and stretched his hand toward her. Again, his hand withered up. Once again, he sought help from Ibrahim (AS). Ibrahim said, "I will pray on the condition that you do not aggress anymore." The king agreed not to disturb them anymore; so, Ibrahim (AS) prayed, "O my Lord, heal his hand if he is telling the truth." The king's hand was healed.

A fear of Ibrahim (AS) entered the king's heart. He honoured Ibrahim and to Sara, he gave a maidservant by the name of Hajar. He told them, "Go anywhere that you want now."

IBRAHIM AND THE STAR - WORSHIPPERS

On the way from Babylon to Palestine, Ibrahim (AS) met a group of people who worshipped stars instead of God the One. Having knowledge of the deviation of those people, Ibrahim (AS) wanted to guide them to the worship of God and save them from depravity.

As it is the way of the prophets to use kindness, gentleness, and tolerance in guiding ignorant and misled people, Ibrahim (AS) used a special method in this instance. He first agreed with their religion while, in the meantime, he shattered the foundations of their beliefs.

When night fell and darkness covered every place and the shining stars appeared in the sky, Ibrahim (P.B.UH) said, in agreement with those people, "This star is my god." After some hours, the stars set and disappeared from sight. Ibrahim (AS) said, "I don't like a god that sets."

After a while, the moon rose from the horizon and threw light everywhere. Ibrahim (P.B.UH) took a look at the moon and, since he realised that the people were staring at him, he said, "This is my god because it is bigger than that star." The moon also set after some time, and Ibrahim (AS) said, "If my Lord guides me not, certainly I will be among those who go astray."

That night ended and the shining sun rose, in perfect beauty, from the East. Ibrahim (AS) looked at the splendour and radiance of the sun and said, "This is my god; this is bigger than and superior to all the stars."

When the day ended, the sun, like the moon and the stars, disappeared from sight. Ibrahim (AS) expressed his aversion to polytheism and idolatry, saying, "I am weary of these beings which constantly change and are subject to different states. I turn to God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all the creatures. I worship only Him, and I am not among the polytheists."

In this way, Ibrahim (AS) completed his reasoning and directed the people toward the True Deity. The ignorant people, instead of welcoming his guidance and accepting it whole - heartedly, began to argue and dispute with him. Ibrahim said, "Do you dispute with me about God? God has guided me to the right path."

When the people saw that their altercation had no effect on Ibrahim (AS), and that Ibrahim didn't stop worshipping God, they threatened him with the wrath of the stars. Ibrahim (AS) looked upon these threats with scorn, because it was clear to him that there is no god but God the One, that the stars are beings lacking will and are under the Command of the God of the heavens and the earth.

Prophet Isma'il (AS)

ISMA'IL AND HAJAR IN MECCA

Prophet Ibrahim's wife, Sara, was barren; furthermore, she had reached the age which had made her lose hope of ever bearing children. She realised that her kind and loyal husband wanted to have a child and was constantly sad and upset. In order to relieve her husband's sorrow, Sara gave her personal maidservant, Hajar, to him. Hajar became pregnant and gave birth to a boy whom they called Isma'il (Peace Be Upon Him).

The infant delighted Prophet Ibrahim (AS) and filled him with joy. Sara, however, was tormented by jealousy which saddened and disturbed her. She soon reached the point that she could no longer tolerate seeing Hajar and the child, so she asked her husband to send them to a place so remote that there would be no news of them.

Prophet Ibrahim (P.B.UH), by the command of God, accepted Sara's request. He took Hajar and Isma'il (AS) with him and began journeying until, under the guidance of God, they entered the land of Mecca. He left them there and returned to Sara.

Hajar, that helpless woman with her suckling baby, was left alone in that waterless and bare desert far from any city or town. But Hajar had learned the way of trust in and reliance on God from Ibrahim (AS), so with faith in God, she followed the path of patience and tolerance. She lived on the provisions that she had until they were used up and hunger and thirst overcame her. Her milk dried up, leaving her baby hungry and thirsty also.

Hoping to find water to save her baby's life, Hajar began to search in the desert; but the more she searched, the less she found. Helplessly, she returned to Isma'il (P.B.UH) and found him crying restlessly. Seeing her baby in this condition broke her heart. She, too, began weeping; she didn't know what to do. Again, she ran this way and that way in that horrible desert, hoping to find water; until, completely disappointed and with tear-filled eyes, she returned to her baby.

The baby was overcome with weakness; it seemed that he was passing the last moments of life. Standing beside her baby, weeping and wailing, Hajar was watching that heartbreaking scene, when suddenly a clear spring gushed out from the ground and began to flow under Isma'il's feet. Hajar was delighted; she sat on the ground next to her baby, wet his lips and poured some of the water into his parched mouth, refreshing him. The danger to his life was over. Hajar also drank some water, recovered her strength, and praised God.

Little by little, birds came to use the water of the spring. The tribe of Jorham, which dwelt in the area, discovered the spring because of the birds flying overhead and the tribe then settled beside it. Hajar became acquainted with them, and her fear and loneliness were removed. In this way, the prayer of Ibrahim (AS) was answered; when he left them in that desert, he had prayed to God, saying, "Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near your Sacred House, so that they could be steadfast in prayer. Lord, fill the hearts of the people with love for them and produce fruits for their sustenance, so that they may give thanks." From time to time,

Ibrahim (AS) would go to see Hajar and his child. Visiting them made him happy and re-strengthened.

When Isma'il (AS) had grown into a young man, Ibrahim (AS) dreamt that God ordered him to sacrifice Isma'il with his own hand.

ISMA'IL GETS READY TO FULFILL WHAT GOD HAD COMMANDED

Ibrahim (AS) knew that the dream was, in fact, a revelation from God and not a satanic whisper; so, he prepared himself, with a heart overflowing with faith, to carry out the command of God. He went to see his son and told him, "I saw in a dream that I sacrificed you for the sake of God. Think about it and tell me your opinion of the matter."

Isma'il, being from that noble family and the child of that pious father, replied without hesitation or anxiety, "O father, fulfil what God has commanded. By His will, you will find me among the patient."

Ibrahim (AS), this man of God, who had faced many difficulties and hardships and had won over them all, he who had succeeded in these great, divine trials, also triumphed with glory in this trial. In the desert of Mena, the same place where pilgrims offer their sacrifices today, the cheek of Ibrahim's beloved son touched the ground. Ibrahim (AS) took a knife in his hand and, when he was prepared to offer his sacrifice, Isma'il (AS) said, "Dear father, tie my hands and feet tightly with a piece of rope so that I don't move them as I am dying, because I am afraid that I would lessen my reward. Keep your clothes away from me so that my blood doesn't splatter on you; if my mother sees that, she may not be able to tolerate it. Sharpen the knife well and sever my head at once so that I can tolerate it better, because dying is difficult."

Ibrahim (AS) said, "Dear son, you are a good assistant in fulfilling the command of God." He put the knife on Isma'il's throat and, with all his strength, tried to cut; but, by God's Will, the knife didn't cut and didn't harm Isma'il (AS). Ibrahim (AS) received a revelation from God, the Exalted, "O Ibrahim, truly you have done your duty, fulfilled the meaning of your dream and shown your submissiveness and devotion."

A sacrifice was then sent from God as Isma'il's ransom. Ibrahim (P.B.UH) sacrificed that sheep instead of his son. Ibrahim and his son returned from the altar; Isma'il (AS) went to his mother and Ibrahim (P.B.UH) returned to his wife, Sara. From that day, sacrifice in the land of Mena became a tradition. Later, when Islam was revealed, God prescribed, as a rite, that pilgrims offer a sacrifice of animals in that desert each year in commemoration of Isma'il's sacrifice.

Isma'il (P.B.UH), who had become friendly with the Jorham tribe, married a chaste woman who was worthy in all aspects, and God gave them children from that pure woman.

Isma'il's mother, Hajar, died in that same land after a few years. He was deeply affected by the death of his devoted mother and became very distressed and sad. Ibrahim (AS) continued to go there to visit him; and this consoled Isma'il somewhat.

IBRAHIM BUILDS KA'BA

One time that Ibrahim (AS) went to Mecca, he told his son, "My dear son, God has commanded me to rebuild His Holy House, the Ka'ba." Ibrahim (P.B U.H.) immediately declared his readiness to help Ibrahim (P.B.UH) fulfil the Divine commandment. With reliance on the Divine Power, they hurried to the site of the Ka'ba with the necessary tools; and began the job with a firm intention.

They called upon God, "Our Lord! Accept this service from us, for You are the All-Hearing, All-Knowing. Our Lord! Make us Muslims, bowing to Your Will; and make our progeny Muslims, bowing to Your Will. Show us our places for the celebration of due rites, and turn to us in mercy, for You are the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful."

Isma'il (AS) gathered stones from the desert and Ibrahim (AS) rebuilt the Ka'ba; until the walls were raised. Jibra'il-God's esteemed angel, who was Ibrahim's guide in all situations-showed them the site of "Hajar-ol-Aswad", the black stone. They dug the stone out of the ground, and Ibrahim (AS) placed it in the spot where it remains today. He made two doors for the Ka'ba; one toward the East, the other toward the West.

When the construction of the Ka'ba was completed, Ibrahim (AS) and Isma'il (AS) performed the pilgrimage (Hajj) rites. Then Ibrahim (AS) raised his hands in supplication, saying, "My Lord, make this a city of peace and feed with fruits those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day."

Prophet Noah (AS)

Noah was a great messenger of God. He laboured hard to propagate theism even though he was persecuted by many individuals. Although he lived an extended life and did much to promulgate his religion, few people accepted his faith and believed in him because they practised idolatry. Blessings in abundance were anticipated from these images which were nothing but man's handicrafts. Nevertheless, they sought protection and refuge in their idols whenever faced with hardship and adversity, begging them for release and deliverance as well as pardon. Daily activities and other life events were attributed to the idols; will, and various names and titles were bestowed upon them.

In such chaos, Noah was granted a prophet's mission by God, the Almighty, to go among the people and show them the true path. He was in actuality a wise man as well as a fair-spoken person with unlimited tolerance in the face of difficulties. He was also endowed with divine power that enabled him, through logical conviction, to be victorious in debates or disputes.

Noah called his people to God, but the ignorant did not accept the sacred invitation. He then learned them of God's wrath, but they were still stubborn in rejecting the summons. He also tried to make them hopeful of God's rich reward, but they utterly refused his words, plugging their ears with their fingers, and pretending that they did not hear. Despite these disobedience's, Noah tolerated all persecution with patience and tirelessly continued preaching his sermons. Using the day and the night, he attempted to put every policy he knew into action to draw the people's attention towards the wonders and mysteries of the universe. Addressing his speech to them, he said:

Lo! Look at this dark night, at that high sky, this bright moon, the shining sun, the vast earth, the running rivers, the boundless seas and the multicoloured plants, and see for yourselves how all these phenomena speak eloquently of the One God and His amazing omnipotence.

This was the way of reasoning in which Noah called the people to worship of the Single God. Gradually a few individuals accepted his creed and accepted his Prophethood. However, being vile and vicious, the chiefs of his tribe did not submit to his summons. Consequently, they began hurting Noah and ridiculing him as if he were mad.

They possessed large amounts of riches, held high ranks and positions among their people and therefore believed themselves to be superior to others. Thus they used to tell Noah:

You are a human being just as we are human beings similar and equal to us. If it were God's will to dispatch a prophet, he would have sent an angel which is not of our species and essence. We would then have listened to its words and accepted its calling. Besides, they continued, (only a few common people, holding lowly jobs, have been converted as your followers. They are all ignorant and unenlightened about what they do in accepting your creed. Had your faith reported good tidings of benevolence and prosperity, we would not have been preceded by these rogues and rascals. You should have known that intelligent persons like us would believe in you first and become your disciple.

Having augmented their obstinacy and hostility, those wicked people then said :

O Noah, we do not grant you and your followers any privilege or preference. Not only you do possess a low level of intellect and foresight in comparison to us, but you are actually a host of liars and offenders.

Their foolish words as well as their meaningless speeches had no impact upon Noah. He continued as patiently as before by answering: I have definite proof of the truth of my claim, and I have been endowed with God's blessing. But since you are inwardly blind. you cannot have deep insight of the truth. You intend to eclipse the shining sun with your. bare hands and veil the moonlight and twinkling stars. How can I lead you to the true path and persuade you to believe in God, when I find you bound by your ignorance and obstinacy.

In idiocy, they replied :

O! Noah, if you expect us to be guided and believe in your Prophethood and become your companions, you should have these rogues and rascals who pretend to be your followers cast out. You must know that we are superior to them; therefore, we cannot co-operate with them.

How can we be expected to accept a faith which favours the superior along with the inferior equally, not making a distinction between monarchs and beggars?

Noah said:

My summons is the divine grace of God, embracing all, and people of all classes or ranks are equal in this faith. Accepting your request in relation to the dismissal of men a round me would result in the problem of whom I should trust with the confirmation of my mission and Prophethood.

Furthermore, how could I dismiss the faithful souls who have cordially assembled to assist me while you despised me? Whatever I declared, they accepted while you did not listen to any of my words and harassed me instead. These believers have always defended God's faith, taking the role of guides to His path.

If I were to abolish them what would be my answer to God upon hearing their complaints about my bad deeds in return for their good ones.

Noah concluded his speech with :

O! people, you are all ignorant as well as stubborn.

Due to the intensity of the Opposition and enmity against Noah and his people, they became hopeless and said :

O! Noah, you have disputed against us and surpassed the bounds of quarrelling. Now if you are telling the truth, let the promised curse descend upon us - that catastrophe which we have been threatened with.

Smiling bitterly, Noah replied :

You indulge yourselves in ignorance and continue the wrong way. Who am I to send a curse upon you or rescue you from punishment. I am but a human being as you are. I am sometimes inspired through divine revelation that there is only one God and that there is nothing or anyone similar to Him. I communicate what Jam inspired to you. Sometimes I give you glad tidings so that you will be blessed with God's good reward, and sometimes I warn you of God's wrath. O! People, you must know that all will finally return to Him. As he wishes, you will be directed; otherwise, you will be stricken by his wrath inevitably. Finding it expedient, He gives you time to sin more and have more torment and adversity.

Prophets are appointed by God with the mission of guiding people towards theism. Their tolerance is a gift of God which equips them in the face of hardship and enables them to carry out the mission to which they are assigned. They are also divinely endowed with optimism and hope that they can acquaint people with reality. There remains no room for heathens who seek excuses because they have been given the last words.

Noah was a great prophet who lived a very long life, spending most of his time among those who had gone astray. He underwent persecution of the people in hope that he might guide them towards the One God. He tried to make them believe in Him and accept His faith. But as time went on, they became more and more obstinate, drawing further from the truth day by day. Finally, Noah became desperate, giving up hope for his people's salvation. Then he sought refuge in God's threshold, reporting their stubbornness to him, complaining of their hostility. He begged for God's Voice which informed him that he would not gain more disciples than the few who already believed in his creed.

Do not ever worry or be disappointed about what these ignorant people do, The divine Voice added.

Being aware of the fact that those malicious people would remain misled and stubborn against all logical proofs and reasons, Noah got tired and lost his temper. He then said :

O! My Lord, please leave not a soul of these heathens alive upon the earth. If you shows them mercy, they will mislead your other servants, and they will breed evil, pagan offspring.

The Lord accepted Noah's request and later commanded him to build an ark but not say anything more about the oppressors to Him. They were destined to be drowned in the midst of the roaring waves risen by a tempest sea because of their disobedience and ingratitude toward God. In a place quite far from town, Noah gathered the necessary implements for making a ship. While busy manufacturing the vessel, he did not escape the ridicule of the people. One said :

O! Noah, you were a prophet yesterday, while you are a carpenter today!? Perhaps you got sick and tired of the prophet hood and for that reason you have chosen carpentry as a profession.

Others said:

Why don't you build your ship in the river bank or the sea coast? Maybe you intend to have it driven by oxen to the sea so that you may sail it or fly it in the sky!

Each of them made mocking statements, injuring Noah's heart, but Noah paid no attention to what they said. Sometimes he told them: If you make fun of us today, there will come a day when we do the same to you, and you will soon find out who will be stricken by everlasting adversity.

Noah was consistent in his work, joining large and small pieces of the ship together. He then made the ship fast and it was completed.

Waiting for God's order, Noah was inspired to prepare to load the vessel with his believers and pairs of male and female animals of various species as soon as he saw signs of God's wrath. He was awaiting the next commandment when suddenly it started to rain. In addition to the downpour, water sprang from the earth covering the entire area, and all the high places and hills were soon hidden under the flowing floods. Rushing towards the ark, Noah took with him the men, animals and plants which God had commanded to be embarked. As soon as all were installed on board, the vessel began its voyage with God's will.

A strong wind blew, the raging waves rolled on and on looking like moving hills. Floods and tempests were severe. The roaring waves swallowed the heathens who struggled for their lives. However, they were overwhelmed by death, being drawn into the very depths of the cold waters where their books of life ended.

Sitting somewhere on deck, Noah suddenly saw his son, Kanan, terribly entangled by the waves of the stormy ocean, struggling to rescue himself from that horrible scene. Being overcome by paternal affection, Noah shouted :

My son, believe in the Great God. Abandon blasphemy and ignorance until God shows His mercy upon your sins and saves you from death. Embark with us. Forget your pagan ways.

The words uttered by the kind father had no influence upon the stone-hearted son who thought that he could save himself from God's wrath by human strength. Then, answering his father, he said : I do not need your

ship. I will not embark upon your vessel. I will take shelter somewhere in the mountains and be safe from drowning.

Overcome by grief, Noah said : O! Son, there is no way now but submission to God's commandments for one to receive His blessings.

A high wave rose at that moment, separating the father and the son. Noah was sad and took refuge in God, saying :

O! God, my son is my kin, and thy pledge was to save and pardon my family and me who believed in thee. Thy promise is just and true whilst thou art the most impartial judge.

Noah was inspired by God's revelation to adopt only the believers as his relatives, those who had previously accepted his Prophethood as well as his summoning. I have promised to deliver the believers and protect their lives continued God's Voice. He who does not admit openly that you are a prophet, and reckons the words of your Lord to be false, isn't a relative of yours; though he might be your son. This son of yours would perish in the ocean of death, tormented by God's wrath on account of his persistence in blasphemy and ingratitude. O! Noah, beware of requesting what you do not know about and telling Me of affairs whose reality is unknown to you. I advise you not to be of ignorant people.

Noah felt he was approaching danger for the sake of the love he had for his son. His paternal instinct and affection had concealed the truth from him while he should have thanked God for the rescue of himself and his companions along with the perdition of the heathens. Asking God's forgiveness, he repented of the sin and the mistake he had made. He again took refuge in God, begging his pardon and protection, so that he might not be considered a sinner. A huge wave swallowed Kanan, drowning him in the very depth of those cold waters.

As soon as the lives of the oppressors had been extinguished by God's wrath, the rain stopped and the floods were gradually absorbed by the earth. Finally, Noah's Ark anchored on Mount Arafat. He was ordered to land, attended by his companions in order to start a happy new life under the auspices of God's blessings.

Prophet Sulaiman (AS)

Hazrat Daud (AS.) was a prophet of Allah and a king. He had nineteen sons and every one of them wanted to inherit his throne. He agreed with one of his wives to nominate their eldest son to the throne. Allah commanded him not to appoint anyone but to wait for His order.

One day, he was asked to decide in a dispute between Elia who was a cultivator and his neighbour Yohanna who was a herdsman. Elia complained that the sheep belonging to Yohanna had grazed in his cornfield and had eaten the fruits causing him a great loss.

Yohanna admitted that it had happened at night while he was asleep. By the command of Allah, Prophet Daud called all his sons and told them that whoever decided the case correctly, would be his heir.

Sulaiman, who was the youngest son, ruled that Yohanna would have to surrender to Elia the milk and the wool that he would obtain from his sheep during that year. Prophet Daud asked him how he had decided in this manner. Sulaiman replied, "The sheep did not eat the plants, but only the fruits; thus only the produce from the sheep should make up for the loss."

Allah informed Prophet Daud that the ruling given by Sulaiman was the best and he should be made his heir. Prophet Daud gathered all his sons in the presence of the learned people and chiefs of tribes and declared, by Allah's command, Sulaiman to be a prophet of Allah and his heir to the throne.

Prophet Daud died and Sulaiman became a king at the age of thirteen. Once Prophet Sulaiman said that he would have a son from each of his wives. Since he did not leave the fulfilment of his desire upon the will of Allah by saying Insha-Allah, only one of his wives bore him a child and even then it was still-born.

When Prophet Sulaiman realised his mistake, he became very sorry and asked Allah to forgive him and to grant him a kingdom which no one else would have after him. Allah accepted his prayers and granted him a mighty kingdom. He also gave him power over the jinn's, Satan's, birds, animals and the wind. They all had to obey his orders.

And He taught him the languages of every living creature on the earth. At the command of Prophet Sulaiman, they built huge temples, fortresses, towers palaces made of glass, large basins of water reserves and immovable cooking pots.

Once Prophet Sulaiman and his army of jinn's and animals were passing over the valley of the ants. Seeing the pomp and glory of the army, the chief of the ants alerted all the ants to get into their holes so that the army would not trample over them. With the help of the wind, Prophet Sulaiman heard what the chief of the ants had said. He smiled and ordered his army not to move forward until the ants had got into their holes.

He then addressed the chief of the ants, "How could my army harm you and your kind when we were passing well above you in the air? And don't you know that I am the prophet of Allah and would never hurt anyone unjustly?"

The ant replied, "O Prophet of Allah, I did not warn them because of any harm that they would suffer, but I was afraid they would forget the glory of

Allah after seeing your army." In spite of his wealth, glory and vast empire, Prophet Sulaiman remained a humble and devoted servant of Allah.

He spent his nights in prayers and fasted during the days. He used his power and might only in the way of Allah to bring mankind to the right path. For his livelihood, he used to make baskets and sell them in the market and with the money he obtained, he bought food and shared it with the poor. One day, when he was inspecting the birds, he noticed that a bird called Hudhud was not present.

He said, "Where is Hudhud? I will punish him severely if he remains absent without a good reason." Shortly after that, Hudhud arrived and told Prophet Sulaiman that he had flown over the land of Saba where he had seen a beautiful woman ruling over the people. Her name was Bilqees.

She had plenty of wealth, a strong army and a throne made of gold, diamonds and other precious stones. He saw her and the people worshipping the sun, instead of Allah. Prophet Sulaiman was very pleased with Hudhud and gave him a letter to deliver to Bilqees. Hudhud flew to the land of Saba and dropped the letter in the lap of Bilqees while she was in the palace.

When Bilqees received the letter, she called her advisors and said, "I have received an honourable letter from Sulaiman. It begins 'IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL' and it reads:

"Accept Allah and worship only Him. I am His prophet, believe in what I say and accept my command."

She then asked them to advise her what she should do. They replied, "We are very strong and have a powerful army to fight against Sulaiman, but the decision is yours and we will obey your order. Bilqees was wise and decided not to fight Prophet Sulaiman. Instead, she sent him valuable gifts to see what he would do.

When the messengers of Bilqees arrived in the land of Prophet Sulaiman and saw his glory and his wealth, they were struck with wonder. They thought the gifts they had brought were worthless. Prophet Sulaiman became very angry when he was presented with the gifts and said, "What! Do you offer me wealth? What Allah has given me is more superior to all the wealth on this earth. Go back to your queen with her gifts and tell her that I will soon march to conquer her land with a huge army."

When Bilqees heard what had happened, she decided to surrender herself to Prophet Sulaiman and made preparations to go to meet him. Meanwhile, on the orders of Prophet Sulaiman, a palace of glass was built in honour of the visit of Bilqees. Even the floor was made of glass and water was put under it with different kinds of fish.

The whole floor looked like a pool of water without the glass showing on top. He then asked who could bring the throne of Bilqees to him. A jinn stepped forward and said, "I will bring the throne before you rise from your seat."

One man who was given a little spiritual knowledge by Allah, said, "I will bring it in the twinkling of an eye." When Prophet Sulaiman saw the throne before him, he praised Allah and thanked Him for His favours.

When Bilqees arrived, she was amazed to see her throne and realised what power Allah had given to Prophet Sulaiman. She then entered the

palace through the courtyard whose floor was made of glass. Thinking that it was a pool of water, she raised her clothes to pass through it. When Prophet Sulaiman informed her what it was, she was overwhelmed with wonder and accepted him to be a prophet of Allah.

She said, "O Lord, I have wronged myself in worshipping the sun instead of you. I therefore give in myself with Sulaiman to You, the Lord of the worlds." Prophet Sulaiman then married Bilqees and thereafter she returned to her land where he visited her frequently.

The people of Saba who were sun-worshippers, were converted to believe in Allah and to worship none other than Him. One day, Prophet Sulaiman told his attendants that he was going to the top of his palace and no one was to enter without permission. While Prophet Sulaiman, with the staff in his hand, was viewing the kingdom around him, he saw a young man approaching him.

He was surprised and asked him, "Who are you and who gave you permission to enter the palace?" The visitor replied, "I have come in with the permission of Allah, the Owner of the universe. I am the angel of death and Allah has sent me to take your life away" Prophet Sulaiman said, "Then discharge your duty."

While Prophet Sulaiman stood leaning on his staff, his soul left him. His body remained standing for such a long time that people and the jinn's believed him to have become a god or a magician. They carried on with the work entrusted to them by Prophet Sulaiman, until Allah caused the ants to eat away the staff he was leaning on and his body fell on the ground. Prophet Sulaiman ruled for forty years and died at the age of fifty three.

Prophet Joseph (AS)

THE DREAM

One morning, when Joseph woke up and got out of bed, he was cheerful and happy. He went to Jacob, his father, and said: "O my dear father! Last night I had a wonderful dream. In my dream, I saw eleven stars, the sun and the moon prostrating themselves before me". On hearing this, his father became very happy and said: "Dear son! This dream is a true vision and shows your brilliant future. Remember not to say anything about it to your brothers, as they may become jealous of you and plot something evil against you.

When Joseph was a small boy, his mother Rachel died and he and his brother, Benjamin, became orphans. That was why Jacob loved Joseph so much. His father's affection caused his other brothers to hate and be jealous of him. They made a plan to separate Joseph from his father, so that he may love them only.

One day, his brothers went to their father and said: "Dear father, why don't you trust us with Joseph? We want nothing but good for him. Let him come with us tomorrow to the desert, where he may play and enjoy himself. We will take good care of him." Jacob was aware of their evil thoughts and knew that they had plotted to kill him. It was the reason why they insisted on taking Joseph with them. Their father did not want to show them his fear and anxiety, so he said: "It makes me unhappy that he goes away from me and besides, I fear that a wolf might eat him while you are heedless of him".

Joseph's brothers replied: "We are a brave group and accept responsibility for anything that may happen to him. We are sure that everything will be all right".

Early next morning, Joseph and his brothers left Canaan gate. They had not gone very far when his brothers became angry and rough and behaved harshly towards him. When they got to the Canaan well, they stripped Joseph of his clothing and cast him naked into the well. His wailing and his cold sighs had no effect on them. Their jealousy towards him could not stop them from doing such a crime. His merciless brothers felt relieved after throwing him into the depth of the well. They thought his father would forget him and grow to love them instead. This is what they thought, but the fate was different and God's will was done.

It was dark when his brothers returned to their father, weeping. They showed him Joseph's shirt, which they had stained with the blood of a bird. They said: "O dear father! We are sorry to tell you, what you feared and tried to prevent just happened. To tell you the truth, we were busy in a shooting race and left Joseph by himself. Suddenly a wolf attacked him and tore him to pieces. There was nothing we could do. His blood - stained shirt and our weeping eyes are good evidence that we speak the truth. You may not believe us, though we are telling the truth."

Jacob knew that they had committed a crime, and that it was God's will for Joseph. He then looked at his sons and said: "Your vicious souls, jealousy and hatred have tempted you to do evil. I will be patient and ask God's help."

While Jacob was scolding his sons, Joseph was sitting alone in the darkness of the bottom of the well. He was thinking about the future; his miserable father and his own innocence, and different things were passing through his mind. At this time, a caravan, going to Egypt and passing near the well, decided to stay there overnight. They sent a man to bring some water from the well. The man lowered his bucket into the well and then pulled it up. To his amazement, he saw a very handsome boy hanging from the bucket. The man was so glad that he shouted: "There came out a boy!" All the caravan people rushed to see Joseph and looked at him in astonishment. They decided to take Joseph with them and sell him in Egypt as a slave.

It is of course very amazing that the people in the caravan neither asked how he got there nor did they think of returning him to his family. If they had only some humane feelings, they should have thought that Joseph must have parents or some relatives, who were undoubtedly feeling anxious for him. Instead, they only thought of their own benefits. They were glad that they had found a handsome boy without any trouble, to be their slave. They only thought of selling Joseph in Egypt and getting a good price for him. They did not think of the misery of his parents.

At last, the caravan set out for Egypt, where they stayed and opened their luggage, Then they took Joseph to the slave market and sold him for a few pieces of silver. The Egyptian who bought him, was the second man of the country after the king and was called Aziz. He took Joseph home as a

servant and later appointed him as head servant. Aziz treated him with kindness and respect. The servants were told to obey all Joseph's commands.

Aziz said to his wife: "Treat this young Canaanite boy kindly. I see he is wise and gentle. He may prove to be useful to us in future. We may adopt him as our son."

JOSEPH AT THE HOUSE OF AZIZ

Joseph, hadn't yet recovered from the miseries he suffered, found himself involved in another difficult situation. Aziz's wife found that Joseph had a dazzling charm. She fell in love with him. As Joseph lived in her house, anytime she looked at him, her heart skipped a beat. The more she tried to forget Joseph, the less she found she could do so. She was always thinking of Joseph and he became all her life. After all, she found no remedy for her suffering except asking Joseph for his affection. Whenever she had a chance, she exposed herself to Joseph and begged his love. Joseph who was from the house of the Prophethood and had grown up in a noble, chaste and modest family, paid no attention to her request. Aziz's wife wouldn't leave Joseph alone. The more Joseph ignored her, the more determined she was to accomplish her intention.

One day, when Joseph was alone in the mansion, Aziz's wife entered stealthily. She first closed all the doors and locked up Joseph. She asked Joseph to embrace her. Joseph, finding himself trapped, thought that it was best to escape from her. He tried to get away through the locked doors, but Aziz's wife followed him. She caught Joseph by his collar and pulled him towards her, tearing off his shirt. Just at that moment, Aziz entered the palace. He saw something that nearly made him go mad: Joseph running in front with his shirt torn off, and his wife following him, looking very distressed.

Without any embarrassment, Aziz 's wife decided to change the scene to show herself innocent and Joseph guilty. She then spoke to her husband and said: "This Canaanite young man has betrayed you in your absence. He wanted to violate the chastity of your wife. Now what is the penalty for such a person but going to prison or suffering a severe torture?"

Joseph who was an honest young man, began to tell the truth: "O Aziz of Egypt! This woman asked me to involve myself in something immoral. She then pulled me towards her, but I hated it and tried to run away."

Then a witness from Aziz's household gave evidence in favour of Joseph and said: "If his shirt is torn from the front, she is speaking the truth and the boy is lying, but if it is torn from behind, then he is speaking the truth and Joseph's shirt had a tear in the backside, he knew that Joseph was not guilty. He said: "O young man, forget the matter, and say no more about it, otherwise, the people may speak bad of us." He then turned to his wife and said:

"This is the slyness of the women; you played a terrible trick. Go and ask forgiveness for your sin; you are a sinful woman."

Although Aziz tried to conceal his wife's secret, the wives of the grandees and the nobles of the city heard all about the affair, and the "Love Story" was of a great attraction at their parties and gatherings. Some of them even spoke ill of Aziz's wife and scolded her. Aziz's wife heard about the

things they said. She got very upset and began to think of a plan to prevent bad things being said about her.

After a lot of thinking, she invited those ladies to a banquet at her house. The party was magnificent. All the noble ladies of Egypt were resting on comfortable cushions. Some fruits which needed peeling were served. Each lady took her knife. Just at that moment, Aziz's wife ordered Joseph to enter and pass through the party. No sooner he did so that all those women fainted and were so enchanted at seeing Joseph that they cut their hands instead of the fruits. They did not know what they were doing. They said: "Holy Allah! This is not a mortal, this is but a noble angel, appearing as a man!"

Aziz's wife who saw her plan had worked, was very happy and with a victorious smile, she said: "This is he about whom you blamed me."

"If you see him and you distinguish your hands from the orange, you can then blame Zulaikha (Aziz 's wife)."

"Would that those who blamed me, could see thy face, O, sweetheart, to cut their hands instead of the orange."

"Only once you saw his face and you were so enchanted by his charm that you were unaware that you have cut your hands. Think of me who see him all the time and on different occasions. He is in my house and I see him sitting, standing, sleeping, walking, and in other positions. I have fallen in love with him. I asked him to have me, but as he was noble and a chaste boy, he refused my immoral wishes. He does his own job and with his heavenly soul, he never passes the boundaries of purity. I will ask him again, and if he does not fulfil my demands, he will be imprisoned."

Since then, Aziz's wife did everything to tame Joseph, but she was not successful. At last, she was completely disappointed. Joseph also found himself in a miserable state. He begged God to help him against the mischief of this sensual woman. Truly, he who has believed in God, will in all conditions ask Him for refuge and for help.

Joseph prayed to God and said: "O God! The situation I am involved in, is worse than suffering the horrible dark prison. If you do not save me from Aziz's wife and the other Egyptian women, I may go astray and lose my dignity and be one of the sinners." The merciful God answered Joseph's prayer and saved him from a great disaster.

JOSEPH IN PRISON

Aziz s wife who was disappointed by Joseph, complained to her husband, saying: "Joseph has made me infamous among the women of Egypt, and has disgraced me. Now, if you want my fame returned and this stain removed from my reputation, you must put him in prison."

Although Aziz had seen with his eyes the purity of Joseph, and one of his household had testified to his innocence, he sent Joseph to prison for a time, even though he was innocent.

On the day that Joseph was taken to prison, two other young men were also taken there with him. One of them was the king's butler and the other, his cook. They had been accused of intending to poison the king. The next day, the butler came to Joseph and said: "In my dream, I saw myself pressing grapes for the king". And the cook said: "I dreamt I was carrying bread on my head and the birds were eating it. Tell us what our dreams

mean. We see that what you do is honest and good and your nobility is obvious."

Joseph realised that these men were ready to listen to him, so he took the chance of propagating his religion in prison and said: "Before they shall bring you food, I shall tell you its interpretation. This is what my Lord has taught me. Surely I have rejected the religion of the people who did not believe in God and denied the existence of life after death. I follow the religion of my forefathers; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not right for us to believe that there is more than one God."

"O my fellow prisoners, can anyone prefer useless and false gods to the One Mighty God? The false gods that you and your fathers worshiped, were not true. Allah has sent down no authority for them." After showing the right way, Joseph began to interpret their dreams, and said: "O my fellow prisoners, one of you, the one who dreamt that he was making wine, will soon be freed, and will start his work in the palace. The other will be hanged and the birds will eat from his head. This is the interpretation of your dreams."

Then Joseph said to himself: "Now that the king's butler is to be freed, and will return to the king's court, it would be better to ask him to tell the king of my innocence, perchance I may be freed from prison."

Their dreams came true, exactly as Joseph had told them - the butler was saved and the cook was executed. Unfortunately, the butler forgot Joseph, after he was freed, and Joseph remained in prison for some years.

The Rescue

One morning, when the king got up, he seemed distressed by a dream he had at the night. He summoned the wise men and told them about his dream. He said: "I saw seven fat and beautiful cows coming out from the river and started grazing in the pasture. Later, seven thin and ugly cows came out from the water and ate the other seven up. Then I saw seven green ears of wheat and seven withered ones. Now interpret my dream." They thought for a while, looked at each other and as they could not find any reasonable explanation, shook their heads and said: "We don't have any interpretation for your dream. What you had, must have been a nightmare."

The king's dream was God's way of rescuing Joseph from the prison. The forgetful butler at last remembered what Joseph had told him. He immediately went to the king and said: "O king! There is a young learned, noble, pious now in your prison who is skilful in interpreting of dreams. Allow me to go to the prison and ask him about your dream." The king allowed the butler to go to the prison. He went to Joseph and said: "O truthful Joseph, tell me about the king's dream". Then he retold the king's dream. Joseph who was God's divine prophet, had a mission to improve the people's secular life as well as their faith. He not only interpreted the king's dream, but also gave the solution to the problem. He said: "In Egypt there will be seven years of excellent harvest and then seven years of famine, and people will suffer hunger. So people should grow lots of wheat, use only as much as they need, and store the rest in the storehouses, so that it can be used in the seven years of famine."

When the butler heard the interpretation, he went to the king quickly and explained what he had heard from Joseph. The explanation removed sorrow from the king's face. He found the interpretation of his dream logical, and realised it had come from a noble mind. The king ordered Joseph to come to the court and stay there and help him with his noble ideas. The king's men went to the prison to free Joseph, but he refused to leave, although freedom was so important for him, as he had been suffering in prison for years, deprived of seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, having had no good food or a sound sleep. In spite of all these past hardships, and the king's pardon, he still refused to leave. He said: "Go and say to the king that I won't leave the prison until he sorts out my past so that my innocence can be proved to the public, and say to the king to go and ask the noble ladies of Egypt why they cut their fingers at the party given by Aziz's wife and why they bothered me".

The king's men inevitably returned to him and told him the case. The king recalled the ladies of Egypt (whom possibly Joseph had introduced by name), and asked them about the story of cutting their hands at the party. All those women confessed and testified that Joseph was innocent. At the end, Aziz's wife also admitted that she had been wrong and Joseph has been innocent. Thus Joseph, glad to be proved truthful and honourable, left the jail.

Joseph at the Royal Court

The king was very eager to see Joseph. As soon as Joseph entered the palace, the king welcomed him and talked to him for a while and reassured him. Soon he found that Joseph was clever, noble, and intelligent. He said; "O Joseph, you have a high position among us today and you shall be entrusted with our affairs. Now choose your position." Joseph said:

"Put me in charge of production storage and consumption of the crops of Egypt, because I am able to do this job."

The king ordered his attendants to obey Joseph's commands carefully and that his orders would be the same as him. Joseph tried hard to serve the people. He knew that the Nile would be generous for some years, but suddenly it would change its mood and deprive the people of its water. So he ought to take advantage of the suitable opportunity and save the people from the hardship of the coming years of famine.

Joseph made a short trip around the country, to get a brief idea of how the agricultural situation was. He gave enough money to the farmers to cultivate different grains and increase the cultivation. He then ordered to build granaries to store the extra grain.

In the first seven years, Joseph provided the corn for people, but only as much as they needed. He left the rest in their ears and stored them in the granaries. As these stores were filled up, the seven famine years began to appear. The Nile began to dry and the land hadn't enough water for the corn to grow. But with Joseph's anticipations, no danger threatened the people, and there was more than enough corn in the granaries to feed people on.

The famine gradually extended to the neighbouring countries and up to Palestine and Canaan. Jacob and his family also suffered from the famine. Joseph as the Aziz of Egypt became well - known among nations.

Everywhere they were talking about Joseph's good services to people and admired his work. Outside Egypt people said there is a learned Minister in Egypt, whose wisdom has saved the people from famine. He is a very clever and wise man. He treats people equally and gives them the corn they need, and behaves fatherly towards them.

Jacob called his sons and said: "O my sons, we are under the pressure of famine which threatens our lives. Go to the commander of Egypt whose generosity has spread throughout the kingdom, and ask him to give you some corn. But leave Benjamin with me in order that your absence may not make me too depressed". Joseph's brothers set out for Egypt on their camels to buy the necessary corn and return to Canaan.

Joseph's Brothers in Egypt

When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they went to him to buy the corn they needed. As soon as Joseph looked at them, he recognised them, but they didn't know him. For they thought that Joseph couldn't be alive now. Time had also changed Joseph's face and made it difficult to recognise him.

Joseph was very glad to see his brothers, but suddenly felt sad that his full-blood brother, Benjamin, was not among them. He received his brothers cordially and asked them to introduce themselves. His brothers said: "We were twelve brothers, all sons of Jacob. Ten of us are here and enjoying your generosity. One of our brothers stayed with our father to help him. We had another brother who has been lost for years and we have no news of him. Joseph became assured that his father and brother (Benjamin) were well. He ordered his men to give them corn and to put their money which they had paid, back into their sacks. By doing this, Joseph meant that his brothers might return to Egypt sooner without spending time in Canaan. Joseph addressed them, saying: "Bring your other brother with you when you come back, so that I may know you are honest and if you don't bring him, do not come to me again, as I will give you no corn." They said: "We will talk to our father and will try to get his permission to bring our younger brother with us".

Joseph said good-bye to his brothers and they happily left for Canaan! They went to their father and said: "O father! As we had heard, we found the commander of Egypt to be noble and generous. He received us, and gave us lots of corn, but we promised him that next time we would take our brother, Benjamin, with us in order that he may be sure that we are telling the truth and that we have gone to Egypt for no other purpose than buying corn."

Jacob said: "I shall never let Benjamin go with you. Would you like him to have the same fate as Joseph? Mind your own business and leave me alone." Joseph's brothers unloaded their camels. They found that the money they paid for crops, had been returned to them. "Father!" they said, "Look at the generosity of the commander of Egypt, who didn't accept our money and secretly gave it back to us, so there is nothing to worry about. Let Benjamin come with us to Egypt. We promise to take good care of him and bring him back safely."

Jacob knew that they were in need of provisions and that they had promised to Aziz of Egypt to take their brother with them. So he unwillingly let them take their brother, but made an agreement with them: He asked them to take good care of him and bring him back safely, unless something happened that they were unable to save him. They promised in God's name and all together set out for Egypt. Jacob suggested: "O my sons! Do not enter all by the same gate." By this, perhaps the experienced father meant to keep people's evil eyes away from them, or not to draw people's attention. As a group, they might think that they were spies or thieves who had come to Egypt.

Joseph's brothers met him for the second time and introduced their brother Benjamin. Joseph, seeing his brother, became very glad and ordered his servants to provide extra food, for them all, so that they could have lunch together.

At lunch-time, Joseph took his brothers home and every two of them sat together. Benjamin who had no companion began to cry. "If my brother Joseph were alive, I wouldn't be alone." Joseph sat beside him and they ate together. When the night came, Joseph let every two brothers sleep together in a separate room and kept Benjamin with him. he said to Benjamin: "Would you like to have a brother like me instead of Joseph?" Benjamin replied:

"How can I find a brother better than you? But I am sorry, you are not from the Loins of Jacob and not from the womb of Rachel."

Tears appeared in Joseph's eyes. He hugged Benjamin and whispered to him: "I am your lost brother that you longed to meet. I have also suffered hardship from my brothers, but I have endured it. God, by His grace and mercy, has solved my problems and has raised me to a high position. Keep this secret from your brothers and we will wait for the nature to take its course."

Joseph plans to keep Benjamin with him

The banquet days were over. Joseph's brothers prepared themselves to return to Canaan, after getting their share of corn. Joseph made a plan to keep Benjamin with him. He ordered his servants to hide the golden measure, by which they measured corn, in Benjamin's baggage. The servants did as they were ordered to. The Caravan had not gone very far when a servant of Joseph shouted:

"O you Canaanites stop! You are not respectable people. You do evil for the good done to you. You have forgotten Aziz's hospitality and have stolen the king's golden measure." On hearing this, Jacob's honourable sons were astonished and said: "By God, you know well that we have come not to act corruptly in this land, neither are we thieves."

The Egyptian said: "What shall be the punishment for the one who has stolen the cup? Joseph's brothers who were sure about themselves said: "As for his punishment in anyone's sack it maybe found, let him become a bond man and your slave." Saying these words, they got down from the camels and Joseph's servants began to search their loads. They first searched the other brothers', then they found the cup in Benjamin's bag.

They were all very upset and returned to the city and went to Joseph. Joseph scolded them and said: "On the agreement made by yourselves, we will keep Benjamin here." Joseph's brothers begged him and said: "O Aziz, he has an old and weak father, who loves this boy very much. It is really difficult for him to live without his son. Take any of us instead and set him free."

Joseph said: "It is impossible to take an innocent man instead of a sinner. If we do this, we have done injustice to an oppressed." The brothers who were very angry on account of this incident, looked at Benjamin angrily and turned to Joseph and said: "No wonder he has stolen the cup, as his brother also had stolen something before".

By this, they meant the story in which they had accused Joseph of being a thief, a short account of which is as follows: When Joseph was a small boy, his mother, Rachel, died. His aunt took him to her house and took care of him. Joseph's aunt loved Joseph very much and did not want to lose him. She had a belt, and fastened it round Joseph's waist, and sent him to Jacob's house. She then claimed that Joseph had stolen the belt.

They searched Joseph's clothes and found the belt under his shirt. Then according to the rules of their religion, she took Joseph back to her house as a punishment for the theft, and demanded his labour for a certain period of time. The brothers were referring to this story. Joseph knew what they meant, but he didn't take any notice, and said to himself: "You brothers are worse than him and God is aware of what you say."

Joseph's brothers were disappointed, because he was not freed and then decided to go home. Their elder brother (Judah) said: "Have you forgotten your pledge that you should return Benjamin to your father? I shall not leave from this land until my father gives me permission or Allah makes known to me His Judgement. He is the best of judges. Return to your father and say to him: "our son committed a theft and Aziz arrested and kept him as a slave. Everybody witnessed this and we are not guilty."

Benjamin and Judah, therefore, stayed in Egypt and the other brothers returned to Canaan. Jacob was very glad to see his sons, but when he didn't find Benjamin with them, he asked about him. The brothers told him the whole story. On hearing this, Jacob fainted. When he recovered his senses, he wept much and called them liars and perjurers. He thought they might have played tricks on Benjamin, or have killed him; like they did to Joseph. He became sick with grief and his eyes lost their sight. Being in such a condition, Jacob said to his sons: "Go, my sons, and seek news, of Joseph and Benjamin and do not despair of Allah's Mercy." The brothers, for the third time, went to Egypt and went to Joseph. They said with desperation: "Aziz of Egypt, we are going through very bad times. We have brought little money. Give us some corn, and kindly free our brother. God will not forget kindness and rewards the good people a lot."

Joseph reminded them of their past: "Do you remember such a cruelty you committed to your brother Joseph? You separated him from his father and brother and burned the old man's heart. You threw him into a well."

Perhaps Joseph uttered these words in Canaanite language so that his brothers could realise that he was Joseph. They said: "Are you Joseph?" He

replied: "Yes, I am Joseph and this is my full-blooded brother. Allah has been gracious to us. Those who keep away from evil and bear with patience, Allah will not withhold from them their reward."

Joseph's brothers lowered their heads in shame. They apologised and asked Joseph for pardon. Joseph said: "You are forgiven and may Allah forgive you - He is the Merciful. Take this shirt of mine and spread it over my father's face: he will recover his sight. Then return to me with all your family."

The Visit

Joseph's brothers took his shirt and quickly returned to Canaan. Their Caravan had just set out when Jacob, addressing his attendants, said: "I smell the breath of Joseph." The old father who had suffered for years crying for Joseph, now felt the breath of Joseph and told that to all who were around him. They said: "By God you are repeating your mistakes. Forget it. There is no Joseph that you may smell his breath." The Caravan, after some time reached Canaan. When the bearer of good news entered, he looked for Jacob and spread Joseph's shirt over the old prophet's face. Then Jacob's sight returned and his weak body and soul were revived. Jacob and his family, then left for Egypt with excitement, at the thought of seeing Joseph.

As soon as Joseph saw his parents, he beheld them, and tears of joy filled his eyes. He helped his parents to sit in his own couch, and they and his brothers all kneeled before God as a sign of gratitude. Then Joseph said: "O father, all this is the interpretation of my dream, which my Lord has fulfilled. He has been gracious to me. He released me from prison; gave me the key to all the granaries and brought you out of the desert and united us. All this is His Mercy for us."

What does this story convey?

An Egyptian writer says: If one is willing to absorb good morals, Joseph's story would be the best example. This story shows the reader how to stand truth and justice and how to bear difficulties. It also bears good results from the psychological point of view. If a psychologist would like to write a book on human ethics, and get all his subjects from Joseph's Sura, he has followed the right way.

Yes, you can learn many lessons from Joseph's story, some of which are stated as follows:

The story tells us that believing in God makes difficulties seem easy and sufferings bearable. As you see in the story, Joseph's belief in God solved all his problems, though he was young and every thing could be deceitful at that age. But Joseph bravely left all those difficulties behind and came out honourable.

Other point from this story is that one should take refuge in God, when faced with hardships. Just like Joseph who, at the bottom of the dark well, when exposed to the devilish demands of sensual Zulaikha and in the horrible prison took refuge in God and asked God to save him. And God the Almighty, saved him from all those dreadful incidents.

The other lesson, which is taught through this story, is that Joseph, being faced with so many problems and difficulties, didn't even for one moment

forget to preach his religion. And even when his two fellow prisoners asked him an interpretation to their dreams, first he explained the importance of his religion and told them not to call anything except God, then he told them about their dreams.

Another point which must be noticed and is of great importance in human dignity and honour: Any oppressed person who has been in prison for some years, when he gets his freedom, rushes out of the prison. But Joseph, after his pardon, did not come out of the prison, until his innocence was proven to the public. So, when he was freed, his dignity remained pure in society.

We should also learn how to be patient and tolerant while reading this story. Joseph was patient against his brothers' oppression - against those mean people who took him out of the well and sold him as a slave. He resisted against sexual drives and other inclinations. So God blessed him with a high reward.

Above all, the story teaches us generosity and forgiveness. Joseph's brothers hurt him very much, undressed him, beat him, threw him into a well and left him to die. For years, he was separated from his father and brother. When his brothers afterwards humbly came to him, even though he could punish them severely, instead he forgave them and proved his humane generosity.

These were just some drops from the boundless sea of Joseph's story and the excellent results we could draw.

Prophet Sulaiman (AS)

Hazrat Daud (AS.) was a prophet of Allah and a king. He had nineteen sons and every one of them wanted to inherit his throne. He agreed with one of his wives to nominate their eldest son to the throne. Allah commanded him not to appoint anyone but to wait for His order.

One day, he was asked to decide in a dispute between Elia who was a cultivator and his neighbour Yohanna who was a herdsman. Elia complained that the sheep belonging to Yohanna had grazed in his cornfield and had eaten the fruits causing him a great loss.

Yohanna admitted that it had happened at night while he was asleep. By the command of Allah, Prophet Daud called all his sons and told them that whoever decided the case correctly, would be his heir.

Sulaiman, who was the youngest son, ruled that Yohanna would have to surrender to Elia the milk and the wool that he would obtain from his sheep during that year. Prophet Daud asked him how he had decided in this manner. Sulaiman replied, "The sheep did not eat the plants, but only the fruits; thus only the produce from the sheep should make up for the loss."

Allah informed Prophet Daud that the ruling given by Sulaiman was the best and he should be made his heir. Prophet Daud gathered all his sons in the presence of the learned people and chiefs of tribes and declared, by Allah's command, Sulaiman to be a prophet of Allah and his heir to the throne.

Prophet Daud died and Sulaiman became a king at the age of thirteen. Once Prophet Sulaiman said that he would have a son from each of his wives. Since he did not leave the fulfilment of his desire upon the will of Allah by saying Insha-Allah, only one of his wives bore him a child and even then it was still-born.

When Prophet Sulaiman realised his mistake, he became very sorry and asked Allah to forgive him and to grant him a kingdom which no one else would have after him. Allah accepted his prayers and granted him a mighty kingdom. He also gave him power over the jinn's, Satan's, birds, animals and the wind. They all had to obey his orders.

And He taught him the languages of every living creature on the earth. At the command of Prophet Sulaiman, they built huge temples, fortresses, towers palaces made of glass, large basins of water reserves and immovable cooking pots.

Once Prophet Sulaiman and his army of jinn's and animals were passing over the valley of the ants. Seeing the pomp and glory of the army, the chief of the ants alerted all the ants to get into their holes so that the army would not trample over them. With the help of the wind, Prophet Sulaiman heard what the chief of the ants had said. He smiled and ordered his army not to move forward until the ants had got into their holes.

He then addressed the chief of the ants, "How could my army harm you and your kind when we were passing well above you in the air? And don't you know that I am the prophet of Allah and would never hurt anyone unjustly?"

The ant replied, "O Prophet of Allah, I did not warn them because of any harm that they would suffer, but I was afraid they would forget the glory of

Allah after seeing your army." In spite of his wealth, glory and vast empire, Prophet Sulaiman remained a humble and devoted servant of Allah.

He spent his nights in prayers and fasted during the days. He used his power and might only in the way of Allah to bring mankind to the right path. For his livelihood, he used to make baskets and sell them in the market and with the money he obtained, he bought food and shared it with the poor. One day, when he was inspecting the birds, he noticed that a bird called Hudhud was not present.

He said, "Where is Hudhud? I will punish him severely if he remains absent without a good reason." Shortly after that, Hudhud arrived and told Prophet Sulaiman that he had flown over the land of Saba where he had seen a beautiful woman ruling over the people. Her name was Bilquees.

She had plenty of wealth, a strong army and a throne made of gold, diamonds and other precious stones. He saw her and the people worshipping the sun, instead of Allah. Prophet Sulaiman was very pleased with Hudhud and gave him a letter to deliver to Bilquees. Hudhud flew to the land of Saba and dropped the letter in the lap of Bilquees while she was in the palace.

When Bilquees received the letter, she called her advisors and said, "I have received an honourable letter from Sulaiman. It begins "IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL" and it reads:

"Accept Allah and worship only Him. I am His prophet, believe in what I say and accept my command." She then asked them to advise her what she should do. They replied, "We are very strong and have a powerful army to fight against Sulaiman, but the decision is yours and we will obey your order. Bilquees was wise and decided not to fight Prophet Sulaiman. Instead, she sent him valuable gifts to see what he would do.

When the messengers of Bilquees arrived in the land of Prophet Sulaiman and saw his glory and his wealth, they were struck with wonder. They thought the gifts they had brought were worthless. Prophet Sulaiman became very angry when he was presented with the gifts and said, "What! Do you offer me wealth? What Allah has given me is more superior to all the wealth on this earth. Go back to your queen with her gifts and tell her that I will soon march to conquer her land with a huge army."

When Bilquees heard what had happened, she decided to surrender herself to Prophet Sulaiman and made preparations to go to meet him. Meanwhile, on the orders of Prophet Sulaiman, a palace of glass was built in honour of the visit of Bilquees. Even the floor was made of glass and water was put under it with different kinds of fish.

The whole floor looked like a pool of water without the glass showing on top. He then asked who could bring the throne of Bilquees to him. A jinn stepped forward and said, "I will bring the throne before you rise from your seat."

One man who was given a little spiritual knowledge by Allah, said, "I will bring it in the twinkling of an eye." When Prophet Sulaiman saw the throne before him, he praised Allah and thanked Him for His favours.

When Bilquees arrived, she was amazed to see her throne and realised what power Allah had given to Prophet Sulaiman. She then entered the palace through the courtyard whose floor was made of glass. Thinking that

it was a pool of water, she raised her clothes to pass through it. When Prophet Sulaiman informed her what it was, she was overwhelmed with wonder and accepted him to be a prophet of Allah.

She said, "O Lord, I have wronged myself in worshipping the sun instead of you. I therefore give in myself with Sulaiman to You, the Lord of the worlds." Prophet Sulaiman then married Bilqees and thereafter she returned to her land where he visited her frequently.

The people of Saba who were sun-worshippers, were converted to believe in Allah and to worship none other than Him. One day, Prophet Sulaiman told his attendants that he was going to the top of his palace and no one was to enter without permission. While Prophet Sulaiman, with the staff in his hand, was viewing the kingdom around him, he saw a young man approaching him.

He was surprised and asked him, "Who are you and who gave you permission to enter the palace?" The visitor replied, "I have come in with the permission of Allah, the Owner of the universe. I am the angel of death and Allah has sent me to take your life away" Prophet Sulaiman said, "Then discharge your duty."

While Prophet Sulaiman stood leaning on his staff, his soul left him. His body remained standing for such a long time that people and the jinn's believed him to have become a god or a magician. They carried on with the work entrusted to them by Prophet Sulaiman, until Allah caused the ants to eat away the staff he was leaning on and his body fell on the ground. Prophet Sulaiman ruled for forty years and died at the age of fifty three.

Prophet Isa (AS)

The Holy Qur'an says:

"When the angels told Maryam that Allah had given her the glad news of the birth of a son whom He calls His Word, whose name would be Massiah, 'Isa son of Mary, who would be a man of honour in his life and the life to come and who would be one of the ones nearest to Allah, who would speak to the people while in his cradle and preach to them when he would be a grown - up man, who would be one of the righteous ones, Maryam said, 'How can there be a son for me when no mortal has touched me?' The angels replied, 'That is how Allah creates whatever He wants. When He decides to do something, He just orders it to 'be', and it comes into existence" (Surah Ale Imran, 3:45-47)"

Lady Maryam, daughter of Imran, was from the progeny of Prophet Da'ud. Her mother was a noble and pious woman. One day she invoked Allah to bless her with an issue whom she would dedicate to the service of the Holy Land, Baytul Maqdis. Her prayer was granted by Allah and she was blessed with the birth of Maryam. She took her daughter, Maryam, to Baytul Maqdis and invoked Allah to save her and her daughter from the inducement and guiles of the Satan. This prayer was also answered by Allah.

When Lady Maryam was brought to Baytul Maqdis, differences arose between the trustees of the Holy Place about the bringing up of the newborn child. Everybody wanted to bring up the child himself. After all, for arriving at an impartial decision, a lot was drawn from the names of the

people and incidentally the lot came to the name of Prophet Zakariya and thus he took the responsibility of looking after the child. When Lady Maryam came of age, Prophet Zakariya set aside a chamber in Baytul Maqdis exclusively for Lady Maryam. Lady Maryam then got herself busy in the worship of Allah and in the glorification of His Name. Lady Maryam was blessed by Allah with the exalted position of infallibility and she was given by Allah the designation of the most superior woman of her time.

When Lady Maryam was in the Sanctuary, a special place for the worship of Allah, Archangel Jibril appeared in the garb of a handsome young man before her and she got very much scared to see him with her. Jibril said to her, "Do not get frightened. I am the Angel of Allah and have brought to you the glad news that the Almighty Allah is going to bless you soon with a son who would be one of the most worthy Divine personages in this world and the Hereafter and he would speak from his cradle." Maryam said, "How could that be possible when I have not been touched by any man?"

Jibril said, "There is nothing which is impossible for Allah. He has Power over all things. He can create as He would wish. And whenever Allah wills to do a certain thing, that happens at once with His will"

At that time Lady Maryam felt herself to be pregnant and she became much embarrassed and frightened. She was pondering over as to how a virgin could give birth to an offspring. The more she pondered over, the more she got puzzled and worried. Although she was the most dignified of all the women in the world and had an unflinching faith and belief in Allah of highest degree and knew quite well that the Almighty Lord would help her in all moments, still she was afraid of the mischief and the wicked tongue-lashing of the mischievous and spiteful Jews. She wondered as to what answer she would have against their false accusation to establish her innocence and infallibility!

Much has been written on this topic and different narration's from various sources have been quoted. Some of those writers who have written the biographies of the Prophets and particularly some of those who follow the Egyptian writers have given the duration of Lady Maryam's pregnancy as normal period and have said that she remained in constant mental worry. But according to the narration's of the Shi'ah scholars and authors, Jibril blew his breath into the bosom of Lady Maryam; as a result of which she became pregnant in the night and in the morning she was delivered of the child and thus the duration of her pregnancy was of nine hours instead of the normal nine months. However, the infallible Maryam resigned herself to the will of Allah and entrusted all her affairs to the care of her Lord up to the time of her giving birth to the child.

At the onset of her labour pain, she reached a dried date-palm tree and without the aid of any midwife or any other attendant she gave birth to a handsome child all by herself. The only thing she uttered in her grief was, "Would that I were to die before all this could happen and that I were to be among those who are completely forgotten.

But suddenly, Lady Maryam, the sad and worried, heard a welcome voice. It was as though somebody was consoling her heart and was saying,

"Do not be sad. The Almighty Allah has erupted a brooklet from near your feet. Drink its water and shake the old date-palm tree. Ripe dates will fall down from it. Eat them and get rid of all your worries. Still, Lady Maryam seemed to have not been satisfied as she was very much scared of the gossiping of her enemies.

Lady Maryam was asked by her Lord that if she found people making false allegations against her, she should tell them that she had vowed before Allah to observe fast and as such she was unable to talk with them.

Lady Maryam took hold of her dear son and brought him to Baytul Maqdis. Soon after that the Jews saw her, they started casting aspersions upon her and started calling her with strange names and said, "O Maryam! You have done a very strange thing. Your mother was not that one who mixed up with the strangers, and your father, too, was not in favour of doing any unlawful or immoral thing. How is it that you forsook their ways and adopted a different way by which you gave birth to a child without a husband"

The infallible Maryam pointed out to the cradle of her new-born son, implying thereby to ask him and not her the answer to their question. The Infinite Power of Allah came into action and the new-born child then started speaking about his exalted position and said, "I am the servant of Allah, my Lord. My Lord has showered on me His Mercy and Benevolence. He has sent me as the Prophet of Allah. He has designated me as the most exalted and the most blessed. As long as I am going to be alive, I have been ordained by my Lord, the Almighty Allah, to offer prayers (Salat), pay Zakat (poor-rate) and to treat my Mother in the most respectable manner".

Thus Prophet 'Isa introduced himself to the critics of his mother in those words and established the innocence and the infallibility of his most exalted and worthy mother.

As a matter of fact, the birth of a child under the most extra-ordinary circumstances is a great miracle in itself and such a child could never have been born of a mother who was not pious and virtuous herself. And similarly, the Almighty Allah who made the new-born child speak from his cradle was still demonstrating a greater miracle than giving birth to him without the father; which is so very easy for the All-Powerful Allah.

But despite the clear proofs and Divine signs, the Jews continued committing the sins and saying silly and unworthy things. They stuck their neck in the noose of ignorance and obstinacy all the same without remorse. But still there were a few pious who after witnessing this great miracle did not entertain any doubt and misgivings in their mind and instead acknowledged the birth of the new-born child as one of the greatest signs of the Greatness of the Almighty Allah and considered Lady Maryam as the most chaste, virtuous and pious woman free from all sorts of sins and evil things.

When the astrologers of the day came to know of the birth of such an infallible child, they came from all over the country to pay their homage and tribute to him and brought presents for him.

As soon as the Jewish emperor, Herodotus, learnt about the birth of Prophet 'Isa, he got terribly frightened, as he feared that some unexpected

circumstances might lead to the downfall of his kingdom. Thus he plotted to kill Prophet 'Isa so as to save his empire from any possible mishap. When Lady Maryam sensed the danger to the life of her son, Prophet 'Isa, she took him away to Egypt. In Egypt, Prophet 'Isa was brought up by his mother until the time he grew up and reached the age of 30 years. The Almighty Allah then revealed upon Prophet 'Isa the Divine Book, Injil (Evangel) and afterwards Prophet 'Isa came back to Baytul Maqdis and invited the Jews to the true religion of Allah. For three years, he continued preaching to them the commandments of Allah.

Prophet 'Isa was one of the accredited Prophets of Allah and he was endowed with certain miracles. One of such miracles was the raising of the dead to life again under the command and will of Allah. His another miracle was that he could restore the eyesight of the blind and cure the lepers.

A few of the Jews accepted the faith of Prophet 'Isa and embraced his religion after having been convinced of his miracles, but the rest of them became his enemies so much so that they decided to kill him. From amongst the few people who had embraced the faith, Prophet 'Isa selected 12 of them as his apostles. These people remained with Prophet 'Isa all the time and followed his teachings. Prophet 'Isa delegated them his authority to preach the people the laws as laid down by Injil.

The so-called religious leaders of the people of Bani Isra'il and the Jews who had worldly gains before them thought that with the advent of the Prophethood of Prophet 'Isa their influence and domination over the people would be brought to an end and they would be deprived of the people's devotion as well as many gifts and money which they used to receive as a token of love and respect by the people. They formed a united front to oppose the preaching of Prophet 'Isa and to extinguish the light which the Almighty Allah had kindled in the person of Prophet 'Isa and so that they might pass an easy and carefree life. They openly refuted the Prophethood of Prophet 'Isa and called him a magician and skilled juggler.

However, Prophet 'Isa remained undaunted and stood like a firm rock against the dissidents, and continued preaching the people to the path of Allah. For his safety, he only considered Allah as his Saviour and he never became frightened of his opponents. Wherever he went, he preached the people with firm determination. His devotees and followers used to come to Baytul Maqdis on pilgrimage and Prophet 'Isa then had an ample opportunity of holding big congregations to deliver his sermons. This enabled the large number of people to come to the fold of Divine religion and the number of his supporters and admirers increased day by day. The Jews became all the more worried to see the popularity of Prophet 'Isa and their enmity against him was deeply rooted in their hearts, but they were helpless against the will of Allah. They tried hard to extinguish the Light of Allah, but the Light continued glowing with all its brilliance.

Food From Heavens

The Holy Qur'an says:

"When 'Isa prayed, "Lord, send us a table full of food from heavens so that it will make a feast for us and for those who are yet to come in this world as an evidence from You. Give us sustenance, for You are the best

Provider. Allah replied, "I am sending it to you, but if anyone of you turns back to disbelief I will make him suffer a torment that no one has ever suffered". (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:114-115)

It has been the tradition and style of the Prophets that in times of difficulties they remained patient and steadfast against the opposition and tortures of their opponents who used to mock them, but they never shirked their responsibility of fulfilling their Prophetic mission and instead by their perseverance and steadfastness they brought their mission to its successful completion.

Prophet 'Isa with the aid and assistance of the twelve of his disciples who were dedicated to the preaching of Injil, and who suffered at the hands of the unbelievers, went from place to place, from towns to villages, inviting the people towards Monotheism and the Divine teachings of Injil. He used to stay a few days at each place and called upon the people to believe in the Oneness of Allah, Resurrection and the Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hell, and to banish the evil desires and inclinations towards sins from the people's hearts.

It is but natural that honest men respect a noble and pious man for his piety and virtue and are enthusiastic about learning good things from him. Here we see that Prophet 'Isa was an exalted Prophet and his twelve disciples too were very pious and virtuous. They possessed noble attributes and from the point of view of their strong attachment to Prophet 'Isa, they asked him to show them one of the signs of Allah so that they could literally satisfy their hearts and souls by experiencing them personally with their own eyes and reach the extreme limit of perfection of spiritual enlightenment. But they requested Prophet 'Isa in an awkward way and said, "O Prophet 'Isa, son of Lady Maryam! Does your Lord not possess enough Power to send food for us from the heavens?"

Prophet 'Isa said to them, "If you have really faith and belief in Allah, then you must fear Him". The disciples said, "What we mean is that while eating the food sent from the heavens, we become literally convinced in our hearts of the truthfulness of your words of promise and become a witness to your statement of facts". At last, Prophet 'Isa invoked Allah thus: "O my Lord, send food for us from the heavens which may become the cause of our happiness and satisfaction, and by which the first and the last amongst us become happy and that would serve as a sign from You of Your Greatness, and You are the best Provider of sustenance. The Almighty Allah granted his prayers and said, "I am sending food from the heavens, but if anyone of you turns back to disbelief, I will make him suffer a torment that no one has ever suffered".

Thus the Almighty Allah sent food to them from the heavens and everyone was benefited by His benevolence. Prophet 'Isa then addressed himself to his apostles and said, "Eat this food and be grateful to Your Lord, the Almighty Allah, so that He increases your means of sustenance further by showering upon you His benevolence".

They took advantage of the advice and this incident became famous so much so that many people after witnessing this sign of Allah, embraced

their faith in the Divine religion and those of the believers who had already embraced the faith became more fervent in their faith.

Prophet 'Isa from his side spared no pains to invite the Jews towards the right path, for doing the good and forbidding the evil. But the obstinacy of the Jews had overpowered them so strongly that despite the preaching of Prophet 'Isa they remained stubborn and arrogant and did not give up abominable things such as greed, usury, etc. They continued showing their bias and animosity against Prophet 'Isa. The only reason for all these was their love for power and they did not want to leave it. They feared that the time of their domination was coming to an end and somebody else was going to snatch their power and kingdom. The Jews did not give up their opposition to the Prophet of Allah who was endowed with piety and virtue. Instead they blamed him for making disruptions in the rank and file of the people by which the peace and tranquillity of the land was in jeopardy. The Jews thought that by adopting such nefarious designs they would succeed in their aims; but it was their sheer ignorance. Prophet 'Isa had belief in his Lord and he knew that Allah was the best Protector and Helper and He had promised him that he would be saved from harm done by his enemies.

The Jews not only remained content with their nefarious deeds, but they termed Prophet 'Isa's guidance towards Allah a magical charm and accused him of witchcraft and wizardry. They also claimed that Prophet 'Isa had become dissident of the religion of Prophet Musa and he did not consider Saturday a sacred day.

The Jews ultimately decided to do away with the exalted Prophet of Allah and so they started looking for Prophet 'Isa. They sent their spies and informers all over the place to trace Prophet 'Isa out. At last they caught hold of one of Prophet 'Isa's apostles, Sham'un al-Safa. The Jews interrogated him about Prophet 'Isa, but could not succeed in getting any information about his whereabouts. They then came across someone named Yahuda and this man who was one of the apostles of Prophet 'Isa, was cunning and hypocrite. He told the Jews the whereabouts of Prophet 'Isa, his benefactor and mentor.

Prophet 'Isa was busy in a cave, offering worship to Allah in deep meditation. The Jews caught hold of him and took him away to crucify him by nailing his hands and feet on a cross. They rejoiced in thinking that they had achieved their purpose and by crucifixion of the Prophet of Allah, all their problems would be solved. But it was their utter ignorance as the Power of Allah is supreme and His humble creature can not stand before it. Whenever Allah wills to do a thing, it happens. Prophet 'Isa was the great sign of Allah. He was born under an extraordinary and unbelievable circumstances and it was obvious that his life too would be extraordinarily quite different from others.

Therefore under the most dangerous situation when Prophet 'Isa was soon going to be crucified by his enemies, the Infinite Power of Allah came into action and Allah raised his chosen Prophet to the heavens where he is still alive.

According to the prophecy of the Prophet of Islam, when the advent of the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, (Imam of the Time) will take place, Prophet

‘Isa will descend on the Earth from the heavens and offer his prayers behind him.

Since there is a hidden Power to take revenge upon the oppressors, it is but necessary that sooner or later the culprit would have to meet his ill-fate by suffering from unbearable torment. Therefore, Yahuda, the apostle who had betrayed Prophet ‘Isa was caught hold of by the Jews as he resembled Prophet ‘Isa very much. Taking him as Prophet ‘Isa, they crucified him. By this, the Divine Will and Power prevailed.

The Propagation of the Religion of Prophet ‘Isa The Christian calendar begins from the date of birth of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus Christ). At the time of his raising alive to the heavens, Prophet ‘Isa's age was 33 years. After this, according to the testament of Prophet ‘Isa, his apostles dedicated themselves to the propagation of the religion of Prophet ‘Isa.

Some of them went to Baytul Maqdis, some to Rome, and some to Asia Minor, India, and other countries of Asia and Africa. After his apostles, the responsibility of propagating the teachings of Prophet ‘Isa and Injil fell on the shoulders of the vicegerents of Prophet ‘Isa. At that time, most of the countries of Europe, Asia and Africa were under the domination of the Roman Emperor. The emperor used to torture the followers of Prophet ‘Isa, but still the followers of Prophet ‘Isa continued their mission of preaching, and despite oppressions and severe tortures, they did not give up their mission and instead, they preached the people secretly.

This state of affairs continued for about 300 years. In 313 A.D., Qustuntin (Constantine), the Roman Emperor, after seeing the popularity of Christianity, embraced this religion and dedicated himself to the propagation of Christianity. The big Roman Empire having come under the influence of Christianity gave an impetus to its propagation in far - off places. After Constantine, the succeeding emperors too contributed a lot towards increasing the numerical majority of the Christians

Prophet Moses (AS) - Part 1

THE STORY OF THE ISRAELITES

As we saw in Prophet Joseph's (AS) story, when his brothers recognised him, he ordered them to return to Canaan to bring the whole family back to him. So Jacob (AS) and his family went to Egypt. Joseph (AS) asked the king to grant them a fertile land where they could settle with their sheep and camels, and engage themselves in farming and raising animals. It is believed that Joseph (P.B.UH) requested this land in order to prevent, as much as possible, the offspring of Jacob (P.B.UH) from mingling with the Egyptians, who were idolaters. In this manner, he hoped to protect their monotheistic religion.

Jacob (AS) and his offspring settled in the land that the king of Egypt had granted them and began a new life there. According to the Old Testament, at that time, the number of Israelites was seventy persons, and increasing day by day. After residing in that land for seventeen years, Jacob (AS) passed away. As was his will, Jacob's (AS) body was carried to Palestine and buried there.

After Jacob's (AS) death, the Israelites came under the guardianship of Joseph (P.B.U.H.) As their population increased, they occupied more lands in the area. However, the Israelites did not remain in peace and comfort for long because after Joseph (AS) died, the times were changed.

The Pharaohs who came to power after the death of Joseph (AS), were worried about the large number of Israelites, and they feared that the Israelites would unite with the enemies of Egypt and rise in revolt against them. So the Pharaohs gradually cut them off from important positions and began to kill, torment and scatter them; they allowed all manner of disrespect and molestation of them.

The Pharaoh in whose time Moses (AS) was born, was more arrogant and more eager for superiority than the others. As soon as he came to power and saw that the people speak of worshipping God, he claimed superiority, saying, "I am God on earth. I am-the Lord and master of you all. The command is my command".

A group of flattering and ignorant people gathered around Pharaoh and began honouring him in order to benefit from his power.

The Israelites, however, did not submit to Pharaoh's pretension, because they worshipped the One and Only God. For this reason, Pharaoh increased the persecution and molestation of the Israelites. He killed their babies and sought to annihilate them all. He ordered that all the arduous and toilsome jobs be turned over to them. He assigned some agents to engage them in continuous work and to not permit them, even for a moment, peace and rest. Whenever a servant was needed for base and toilsome labour, they chose one from among the Israelites. Every low and difficult job was forced on the Israelite men and women, including the preparation of the soil for farming and cultivation. These insults, torments and tortures are mentioned in numerous chapters (suras) of the Holy Qur'an. One of the bounties that God bestowed on the Israelites was rescuing them from those intolerable conditions.

PHARAOH'S MOTIVE FOR THIS HARSH TREATMENT

One night, Pharaoh dreamed that a fire came from the direction of Jerusalem and surrounded the houses of the Egyptians and Coptics; it burned and destroyed them all, but did not damage any of the houses of the Israelites.

The next morning, Pharaoh summoned astrologers, sorcerers and dream-interpretors. He narrated his dream to them and asked them to interpret it. They told him, "From among the Israelites, a child will be born who will cause your downfall; the time of his birth is at hand." Upon hearing this, Pharaoh summoned all the midwives of Egypt and commanded them to kill all the baby boys born among the Israelites, but to spare the lives of the baby girls. In order to enforce his command, he assigned some agents to oversee this job.

THE BIRTH OF MOSES (AS)

Imran was an Israelite man who was a descendant of Prophet Jacob (AS); he worshipped God. He lived in Egypt, and earned his living by raising animals. Imran's wife became pregnant with Moses (AS).

With each passing day, the birth of the saviour of the Israelites drew closer; however, by the will of God, no one realised that Imran 's wife was pregnant. On the night that Moses was born, nobody was aware of his birth except his sister.

Moses' mother secretly suckled her child until she feared lest the agents should become aware because of the baby's cry and kill him. She and her family gave this matter much thought. At last, God inspired her to put her child in a chest and release it on the river Nile; to entrust him to God and to be sure that God would protect him. So, Moses' mother wrapped him in a piece of cloth and placed him in a chest. In the cover of darkness, she went to the bank of the river Nile and released the chest on the river. The river's waves carried the chest away and Moses' mother watched with anxiety; she appealed to God to help her baby.

Nobody can exactly imagine the emotions of this mother in these sensitive moments, but the Persian poetess, Parvin Etesami, has, to an extent, brought this scene to life in her beautiful, sentimental poem:

When Moses' mother, Moses into the Nile threw, For the glorious Lord had ordered her to,

From the riverside, with grief, she did stare; "O, my little innocent babe", she did declare,

"If the Mercy of the Lord, you forgets, How will you be saved from this boat, pilotless?"

"If the Immaculate God remembers you not, The water will suddenly put you to nought."

Inspiration came, "What a wrong thought! Our wayfarer already home We've brought.

"That which you threw, We caught; The Hand of Truth you saw, but knew not.

"Within you is but motherly love and affection; Justice and Kindness from Our direction.

"Don't lose your calm, jest is not God's way; We will return that which We carried away."

MOSES IN THE PALACE OF PHARAOH

Pharaoh had a wife named Asieh who worshipped God, but hid her faith. She had no children. One spring she asked Pharaoh to erect a pavilion in the bank of the river Nile in order to enjoy the spring weather on the riverside. Pharaoh ordered that a pavilion be built, and he and Asieh stayed there.

One day Asieh was looking at the beauty of the river Nile when suddenly she caught sight of a chest which was being carried along by the water. She called upon some servants to get the chest from the water. When they opened the chest, they saw a fair baby therein. Upon seeing the baby, Pharaoh's wife was filled with love for him. She took him out of the chest, put him in her lap and said, "This is my son". Asieh took the baby to Pharaoh and asked him not to kill the baby; rather, to adopt him as his child.

Pharaoh said, "O woman! I fear that this child is the very person whom we are afraid of. Let's kill him and put our worries to rest." Asieh replied, "Don't fear. Isn't it a pity that all the people have a child while you, with all this glory and power, have none? The water has brought this child as a gift for us. We can adopt him as our own child and educate him however we wish."

Pharaoh grudgingly accepted. They named the child Moses and sought a wet nurse to feed him. Several women volunteered to feed Moses, but he would not take any breast and would not drink milk.

Meanwhile, Moses' mother had sent her daughter after Moses to - see what would happen to him. She secretly watched, and Pharaoh's people did not notice her. When she saw that Pharaoh's agents were looking for a wet nurse for Moses (AS), she came forward and said, "May I show you a family who can nurse him for you with kindness?"

They accepted and Moses' mother went to Pharaoh's palace. They brought the baby to her, and she took him into her arms. She began feeding him, and the baby drank with complete delight.

GOD'S PROMISE FULFILLED

When Pharaoh's wife saw that the baby accepted the woman's milk, she asked Pharaoh to provide a salary for the woman - who was, in fact, Moses' mother - so that she would stay in their palace to feed and care for the baby. Moses' mother, who had become assured of the promise of God at the sight of her child, declined to stay in the palace. She told them, "I have a husband and children; I can't leave my home and husband and children in order to nurture this baby. If you wish, I will take the baby to my home and care for him there."

Pharaoh's wife agreed; so, although Pharaoh was against her being wet nurse for the baby, Moses' mother brought her beloved child home and, with peace of mind, began caring for him.

Days and months passed and Moses (AS) grew in the lap of his mother and brightened the life of his family. During this time, Moses (AS) was sometimes taken to Pharaoh's palace so that they could see him. And so it

was until Moses' period of nursing was over and he was taken back to Pharaoh's palace.

RETURN TO PHARAOH'S PALACE

It was the will of Almighty God that Moses (AS) be raised in the home of his worst enemy - the enemy who, in order to annihilate Moses (AS), had slaughtered thousands of innocent babies and had ripped the stomachs of pregnant women. So Moses (AS.) was again taken to Pharaoh's palace, and Pharaoh's wife, with the deep affection for Moses (AS.) that God had put into her heart, became in charge of his guardianship and education. So Moses passed the first days of his childhood in comfort and riches in the home of his worst enemy.

In Pharaoh's palace, Moses (AS) was respected and cherished by Pharaoh's family and companions. But Moses (AS) always tried to make his presence in Pharaoh's court beneficial to the Israelites; he was always kind to slaves, and promised to rescue them.

When Moses (AS) became matured and grew to manhood, God, the High, granted him wisdom; thus, Moses was rewarded by God for his good deeds.

WHY MOSES LEFT EGYPT?

From the prophecies that their ancestors had handed down to them about the advent of Moses (AS) and from the signs that they saw in him, the Israelites little by little came to know that the time of their affliction and wretchedness was drawing to an end. They came to know that, God, the High, has willed to deliver them from under the yoke of the oppression and torture of Pharaoh's people and the Coptics by way of Moses (AS) - the very same strong, brave young man who grew up in Pharaoh's palace. For this reason, whenever the Israelites saw Moses (AS), they honoured him and related their sufferings to him, asking him for help. On various occasions, Moses (AS) went to the Israelites and made them hopeful about the future. Whenever he found an opportunity, he would take action in their support and remove aggression from them.

One day as Moses (AS) was walking around the city, far from the sight of Pharaoh's agents, he saw an Israelite-who was fighting with a Coptic. The Coptic was trying to impose a job on the Israelite and wanted to force him to do it. The Israelite did not want to do the job, so they were fighting. When the Israelite caught sight of Moses (P.B.UH.), he called on him to help. Moses (AS) went forth to prevent the Coptic from coercing and oppressing others. The Coptic resisted; so, in defence of the Israelite, Moses (AS) struck him in the chest. The Coptic fell to the ground and died.

Moses (AS) was full of regret and repentance. He prayed, "O my Lord! I have wronged my soul. Forgive me!" And God forgave him. Moses (AS) said, "O Lord! Because you have bestowed Your Grace on me, I shall never be a help to those who sin.

Worried and frightened, Moses (AS) passed the night in a haven. In the meantime, the story of the killing of the Coptic man spread through the city. Everyone knew that he was killed by an Israelite, but no one knew who the killer was - except the Israelite man whom Moses (AS) had helped. The

news of the killing of the Coptic also reached Pharaoh, and he scattered a number of agents around the city to find the killer.

The next morning, Moses (AS) was walking around the city in fear lest he should be recognised and arrested. Suddenly, he saw the same Israelite fighting with another Coptic. Moses (AS), upset about the incident of the day before, reproached the Israelite, saying, "It is clear that you are truly a quarrelsome person!"

When Moses (AS) went forward to lay hold of the Coptic, the Israelite, imagining that Moses intended to punish him, became frightened and said, "Do you want to kill me as you killed that man yesterday? Your intention is none other than to become a tyrant in the land, and not to be one who sets things right!"

The Coptic then understood that Moses (AS.) was the killer that they were looking for, and he informed Pharaoh's agents, who tried to find and arrest him. At this time, Pharaoh's treasurer, who believed in God and worshipped Him in secret, went to Moses and said, "O Moses, the chiefs are taking counsel together about you to slay you. I sincerely advise you to leave the city."

MOSES' DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT

Moses (AS) left the city with fear and anxiety; he asked God to help him and protect him from the unjust people. For a person like Moses (AS), who had never travelled, this Journey was very difficult. Besides this, he did not even have any provisions with himself. He began walking, not knowing which way to go, until by the help of God, he set out in the route which led to the city of Midian. Moses (AS) walked for several days and lived on desert herbs until, wearied and fatigued, he arrived at the city gates of Midian. Near a well, he rested under a tree.

While resting, Moses (AS) saw a group of people gathered around the well drawing water for their sheep. He saw two women who were standing aside with their sheep, waiting for the men to finish watering; then, if any water remained at the bottom of the watering hollow, they would water their own sheep. When all the men had watered their sheep and gone from the well, no water remained in the hollow. The two women were standing, perplexed; they were not strong enough to draw water for their sheep. Moses' sense of honour and feeling for protecting the weak did not allow him to sit by and watch. Although he was exhausted, he went forth, drew water from the well, and watered the women's sheep. Then he returned to his place. Overcome by hunger, he said, "O Lord, truly I am in need of any good that You send me!"

The two women were Prophet Shu'aib's daughters. When they returned home, they told their father about the kindness of Moses (AS). Shu'aib told one of them, "Bring that man to me so that I may reward him for his good deed."

The girl went to Moses (AS) and said, "My father has invited you and wants you to go to see him." Moses (AS) accepted Shu'aib's invitation and set out. The girl was walking in front, and Moses (AS) was following. After going a few steps, Moses (AS) said, "I will go in front; you come behind me and tell me which way to go."

Guided by the girl, Moses (AS) arrived at Shu'aib's house. Shu'aib ordered that food be brought. Then he asked Moses (AS) out himself and Moses narrated his story. Shu'aib consoled him and said, "Do not be afraid. Now you are secure from the unjust people."

MOSES' MARRIAGE

Upon hearing Moses' life story and seeing his virtues and good manners, Shu'aib wished to somehow keep Moses (AS) with himself and to make use of him in the supervision of his wealth. He consulted his older daughter, Zipporah, about the matter; she encouraged him to do so. Therefore, Shu'aib told Moses (AS), "I want to marry one of my daughters to you, provided that you serve me for eight years; but if you serve for ten years, it will be a grace from you. But I do not want to place you under a difficulty. God willing, you will find me a righteous person."

Moses (AS) accepted Shu'aib's offer and said, "Let it be a binding contract between you and I: whichever of the two terms I fulfil, let there be no ill-will to me. God be a witness to what we say." Thus, Moses (AS) married the daughter of Shu'aib, and with complete sincerity, began serving Shu'aib.

As Moses (AS) had promised, he stayed with Shu'aib for ten years. When the ten years were over, he told Shu'aib, "I must return to my own country and visit my mother, brother and family". Shu'aib agreed to Moses' return and gave him a number of sheep and the rod which he had inherited from his forebears. Moses (AS), with his wife and sheep, set out for Egypt.

THE TUR VALLEY

Fearing lest he should be captured by the rulers of Syria, Moses (AS) took a by-way, trying to stay away from cities and towns. On a cold winter night, they lost their way; perplexed, they remained where they were. The desert in which they had stopped was the Desert of Tur which lies south of Jerusalem.

Moses (AS) tried to find a fire from which to get an ember. He was looking all around when suddenly he saw a fire in the direction of Mount Tur. He said to his family, "Wait here. I see a fire. I hope to bring you some news from there, or a burning ember so that you may warm yourselves."

Moses (AS) then went hastily toward the fire. When he approached it, a voice was heard from the right side of the valley, from a flaming tree, saying, "O Moses! Verily I am your Lord. Take off your shoes; you are in the holy valley of Tuwa. I have chosen you as my Messenger. Listen, then, to the revelation: I am God; there is no God but I. So, worship only Me and establish regular prayer for remembrance of Me." Then God said, "O Moses, what is in your right hand?" Moses (AS) replied, "It is my rod." God said, "Throw it, O Moses."

Moses (AS) threw it and suddenly he saw that it was a serpent in motion. God said, "Seize it and do not fear; We will return it to its original form." Then He said, "Now place your hand into the clothes at your bosom; it will come forth white and shining without harm, as another sign to show you two of Our greater signs. Go to Pharaoh, for he has transgressed all bounds."

Moses (AS) said, "O my Lord! I have slain a man among them, and fear lest they slay me. My brother Aaron is more eloquent in speech than I, so send him with me as a helper to confirm and strengthen me; for I fear that they may accuse me of falsehood."

God said, " We will certainly strengthen you through your brother, and grant you both with authority so they shall not dare to touch you. With Our signs, you shall triumph: you two as well as those who follow you."

In this way, Moses (AS) was appointed as a Prophet of God, and, for the first time, he spoke with God; thus, he was called "Kalim-ollah", the one who speaks with God.

FULFILLING THE DIVINE MISSION

After receiving the Divine mission, Moses (AS) returned to his wife and, after a few days, sent her and his new-born baby back to Midian; he headed for Egypt. Moses (P.B.UH) recounted the command of God to Aaron. So, Moses (AS) and Aaron, encouraged by the promise of God, prepared themselves and, with an iron will, headed for Pharaoh's palace. With reliance on God, they entered the palace and met with Pharaoh.

Pharaoh was surprised to see Moses (AS), and asked, "What do you want and why have you come here?" Moses (AS) replied, "My brother and I are prophets and we have come, by the order of God, to invite you and your nation to desist from your improper claim; to leave off worshipping idols; and to worship the Wise, Great, and Unique God. Also, you must release the Israelites from slavery and the yoke of oppression and tyranny."

Pharaoh was surprised to hear this, and said, "Didn't we cherish you as a child among us, and didn't you stay in our midst many years of your life? And when you killed that Coptic man, you escaped from here. Now you have come to invite us to worship the 'Unique God' among the gods of Egypt."

Moses (AS) replied, "The Unique and Powerful God is he who created the Universe, the earth and sky, human beings and all creatures. In His hand are life and death."

"As for the day that I killed the Coptic, I wasn't aware of what the result of my action would be, and my Lord forgave me because the cause of that incident was the oppression which you permitted against the Israelites." Pharaoh was perplexed by Moses answer and asked him to present a clear proof of his Prophethood. Moses (AS) said, "My proof is in my hand; this is a sign of the power of the Great God." Then he threw his rod to the ground. The rod turned into a huge serpent. Pharaoh and those around him became terrified. Moses (AS) caught the serpent and it turned back into the same rod. Then he said, "This is another sign," and he drew his hand out from his bosom; a light glowed from it that dazzled the eyes.

All those present were astounded; they were seeing things that they had never seen before. Pharaoh was greatly afraid, and did not know what to do in the face of these miracles. Those around Pharaoh, who saw their Lord so weak and overpowered, told him, "Hold Moses and his brother off for a while, and send some men to the cities to collect and bring all the skilful sorcerers to you."

Pharaoh told Moses (AS), "Have you come to drive us out of our land with your magic? But we can surely produce magic to match yours! So make a contest between us and you - which we shall not fail to keep - at an appointed time and place." Moses (AS) accepted and set the day of the contest with Pharaoh's sorcerers for the Festival Day. Pharaoh, without delay, sent agents all over his country to bring the skilful sorcerers.

THE ASSEMBLY OF SORCERERS

On the appointed day, a large number of skilful sorcerers gathered in Pharaoh's court. Pharaoh encouraged them, promising that he would reward them well if they won the contest with Moses (AS). Then Moses and Aaron entered and Pharaoh said, "O Moses, that day you performed some acts and considered them as a sign of your Prophethood, while my slaves and servants can also do such acts; you cannot deceive people in this way."

Moses (AS) replied, "God, the Great, has chosen me as a prophet, and no one can fight the Will of God." Pharaoh said, " We shall try. People have intelligence and will understand everything." Moses (AS) replied, "Yes, if the people did not have intelligence, they would not have responsibility either." Then, at Pharaoh's command, the sorcerers gathered and brought forward the devices which they had prepared. They said, "O Moses, will you begin, or shall we begin?"

Moses (P.B.UH) replied, "You begin." Upon hearing this, the sorcerers said, "By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win," and they set into motion a multitude of magic tricks which were very astonishing for the people; sticks and ropes turned into serpents and began jumping and leaping. This bizarre spectacle bewitched the people's eyes and struck terror in their hearts.

Then Moses (AS) declared, "Now behold the Power of God, "and threw his rod to the ground. The rod turned into a great serpent, swallowed up all their magic tricks, and attacked the people around Pharaoh. Moses (AS) reached out and caught hold of the serpent, and it turned back into a rod.

At this time, an uproar arose from the people. The sorcerers fell down in prostration, saying, "We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron." Thus, the sorcerers were the first people to believe, and they confessed their incapability and weakness in the face of the Power of God.

Pharaoh was enraged by this event. In order to cover up his defeat and helplessness, he furiously said to the sorcerers, "Do you believe in him before I permit you? Surely he was your master and has taught sorcery to you!"

Pharaoh threatened them with the most terrifying tortures, but they said in reply to Pharaoh, "Never will we prefer you to these miracles, which have been sent for us, and the God Who has created us. So decree whatever you desire to decree; you can only decree as regards to the life of this world. As for us, we will return to our Lord!"

Pharaoh ordered that they all be arrested and thrown into prison, and that the Israelites be treated more severely. And, he said, "I will think of something for destroying Moses!"

Prophet Moses (AS) - Part 2

THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING

So, Pharaoh summoned a few of his intimates - including Haman, the minister, and Hezghil, the treasurer - and held a consultative meeting to decide about Moses (AS).

Hezghil was one of Pharaoh's relatives and was a learned and truthful man whom Pharaoh respected and consulted on important affairs. He believed in Moses' prophethood - and was later called "The believer of the family of Pharaoh" - but he hid his belief in order to be able to make Pharaoh accept his sensible ideas.

At the consultative meeting, Haman said, "In my opinion, Moses must be destroyed as soon as possible; because, in this way, with each passing day, the people's belief in idols and in Pharaoh weakens; in the future, the followers of Moses will be dangerous for us."

Hezghil said, "In my opinion, harming loses is a difficult task; if Moses is truthful in his claim and has a connection with the God of the heavens like Noah and other prophets, when it is not possible to oppose him." The consultative meeting did not result in my conclusion, but Haman formed a grudge against Hezghil. He instigated some people to take accusations against Hezghil in front of Pharaoh, saying, "Hezghil encourages people to oppose you and to cooperate with your enemies."

Pharaoh summoned a group of prominent men of his land, and dragged Hezghil to trial. He said, "I have heard that you believe in the God of Moses and have denied my divinity." Hezghil replied, "Have you ever heard me say?" Pharaoh said, "No, I haven't." Hezghil said, "Do you believe that whatever I say is the truth?" Pharaoh said, "Yes, I do." Hezghil said, "Now ask those present who their Lord is."

They replied, "Pharaoh is our Lord, and it is he who keeps evil away from us." Hezghil said, "O Pharaoh, you and all those present be witness that their Lord is my Lord, and their Provider is my Provider. I don't have any lord, provider and creator besides theirs; and I hate all lords, providers and creators besides theirs."

By way of this discretion, Hezghil did not lie and was safe from the evil of Pharaoh. Pharaoh ordered that all the accusers of Hezghil be severely punished. However, Hezghil's wife and Pharaoh's wife were later harshly punished and martyred when their secret of worshipping God was discovered and they didn't abandon their faith.

HARSHNESS INCREASED

Apart from Pharaoh's relatives and intimates who had believed in Moses, a large group of the Israelites, especially their youth, believed in Moses, and thereby added to Pharaoh's worry and annoyance. Pharaoh was continuously consulting with his intimates and advisors about Moses. Sometimes they would incite him, saying, "You have allowed Moses and his followers to do corruption in the land." Thus they would obtain permission to kill the Israelite men, and they would do so. But since these massacres were unable to prevent the progress of Moses (AS) and the religion of God, they would again complain to Pharaoh, provoking him to kill Moses (AS).

Meanwhile, the Israelites, wearied from the intensity of the pressure of persecution complained to Moses (AS), saying, "Before you came, we were tormented and tortured, and now that you came, we are still ensnared. So, when will the promise of our release be fulfilled?"

Moses (AS), according to the Divine order, told them, "Pray to God for help, and wait in patience and constancy. It may be hoped that your Lord will destroy your enemies and replace them with you."

Day by day, Pharaoh's worry severely increased; so, he increased his tyranny and oppression. Pharaoh's people, following the example of their tyrant ruler, did not neglect to inflict any kind of torture and torment on the Israelites, cornering them from all directions.

God inflicted Pharaoh's nation with years of drought and shortages in food. But, they would always ascribe their well - being to themselves and their misfortunes to Moses (AS). They said, "Whatever signs you bring to bewitch us with, we shall never believe in you!"

So, God sent plagues on them: widespread death, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood.' When the torment would strike them, they would say, "Pray for us to your Lord through your covenant with Him. If He removes the torment from us, we shall certainly believe in you and permit the Israelites to leave." However, whenever the torment was removed from them, they would again break their promise. And thus it continued until the day arrived that Israelites be saved.

LEAVING EGYPT

Moses (AS) was commissioned by God to take the Israelites out of Egypt and go toward Palestine. Moses (AS) gave glad tidings to the Israelites, saying, "The day of rescue has arrived; no longer are you the slaves of Pharaoh's people or the Coptics. Everybody be ready to leave Egypt on an appointed day; whoever is with us will be saved, and whoever helps Pharaoh's people will be annihilated." So, the Israelites became prepared and, at the order of Moses (AS), left Egypt on a dark night, setting out for the Holy Land.

News reached Pharaoh that the Israelites had emigrated from Egypt, taking whatever they could with themselves. Therefore, Pharaoh ordered that the army be mobilised: he gathered his forces and followers, and began pursuing Moses (AS) and the Israelites. Pharaoh's army was several times larger than the number of the Israelites.

The path that Moses' followers took, led to the sea. They were aware of Pharaoh's power and the great size of his army, and knew that they did not have the power to face them; so, terrified, they went to Moses (AS) and said, "We will soon be attacked by Pharaoh's army, and we will all be killed by them." Moses (AS), with a calm heart and a strong morale, told them, "Never will this occur. My Lord is with me and will guide me." Those of little faith gathered around Moses (AS) and repeated reproachingly, "O Moses, what has happened to the promise of victory that you gave us? The sea is before us, and the enemy behind. If we remain here, we will be slain by Pharaoh's army."

Moses (AS) replied, "Whatever I do is by the command of God, and God is the Most Able. We will now pass through the sea and none of us will be drowned."

MOSES' FOLLOWERS SAVED

At this time, by the command of God, Moses (AS) struck his miraculous rod to the sea. Suddenly, the sea split, and the waters piled up like walls on two sides, forming a passage of dry ground. Moses' companions happily passed through the sea and stepped out onto the opposite shore. When they looked back, they saw that Pharaoh and his army were preparing to pass through the sea; this caused them concern again and they raised their hands in supplication toward the Divine court to seek the help of God.

When Pharaoh reached the edge of the sea and saw that the sea had split and a passage was open in front of him, on his horse, he entered the passage through the sea; his army followed him, pouring into the passage. Suddenly, the piled up waters poured onto them, and soon Pharaoh and his people had plunged to the bottom of the sea and were drowned. A short while later, the water threw Pharaoh's lifeless body onto the shore. With this occurrence, all who helped Pharaoh were destroyed; those who were less guilty, remained in Egypt and understood that Pharaoh's claim was false. Since they were relieved of the oppression of Pharaoh and those around him, they began a new life under the guidance of Hezghil.

After the drowning of Pharaoh and his people, Moses (AS), by the command of God, took the Israelites and, continuing on the journey to Palestine, entered the Sinai Desert.

THE DISOBEDIENCE OF THE ISRAELITES

Since God had sent them a prophet and had rescued them from the oppression of Pharaoh, it would be expected that the Israelites, in appreciation for these blessings, would not neglect -even for a moment- to worship and serve God until the end of their lives, and to obey Moses' commands on all occasions. However, they soon forgot their miserable past and began to be ungrateful. Since true faith had not found the way into the hearts of some of them and as a result of long association with the idol-worshipping people of Egypt, the same attitude of worldliness and pleasure-seeking had become firmly rooted in them, soon after crossing the sea, the Israelites came upon a people who worshipped idols. They said, "O Moses, make a god for us like the gods they have."

Moses replied, "You are an ignorant people. What these people worship is doomed to perish, and their deeds are based on falsehood." He asked, "Shall I seek for you a god other than the true God, while it is God Who has favoured you above all nations? And remember that God rescued you from Pharaoh's people, who afflicted you with the worst torments, killing your sons and keeping your women alive. There was a great trial from your Lord in it."

"We admit that what you say is true," they replied. "But", they further complained, "at that time, we were under the yoke of Pharaoh's oppression and now we are no better off because we must work in the hot, dry desert, ploughing the soil. And besides, the book that was supposed to be revealed

by God, still hasn't been revealed, so that we may know our status and duty." Moses (AS) replied, "God's promise is true; He will reveal the book which he has promised."

MOSES AT MOUNT TUR

Moses (AS) petitioned God to fulfil His promise and grant him a book. God, the High, ordered Moses (AS) to purify his body and clothes, and fast for thirty days on Mount Tur in order to receive the revelation.

Moses (AS) appointed Aaron as his deputy in his absence. He told Aaron, "Act for me amongst my people. Do right and do not follow the way of those who do mischief." When Moses was at the appointed place on Mount Tur, he said, "O my Lord! Show Yourself to me so that I may see you." God answered, "By no means can you see Me. But look at the mount; if it remains firm, then you shall see Me."

When God manifested His Glory on the mount, it became dust, and Moses (AS) fell down in a faint. When Moses (AS) regained his senses, he said, "Glory be to You! I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe."

God said, "O Moses, I have chosen you above other men by the mission I have given you and by speaking to you. So, take the revelation which I give you, and be one of the thankful." So, God ordained laws for the Israelites and inscribed them in stone tablets: laws in all matters, commanding and explaining all things. And God said, "Follow these laws and command your people to follow the good advice therein."

THE GOLDEN CALF

Moses (AS) was supposed to stay at Mount Tur for thirty days, but he was ordered to stay ten more days. While he was away, a deceitful and ambitious man called Samari gathered the people's golden ornaments, melted them, and formed a golden statue of a calf which emitted a sound like the lowing of a cow. Samari brought the calf before the people and said, "Moses did not keep his promise; he will not return again. Our misfortune is that they took our gods away from us, and now we have no god to worship for ourselves. So, now I have made, of pure gold, a deity in the form of a calf. O people, now worship this god."

The ignorant people were deceived by his words. They began worshipping the idol, and thus, were reverted to idolatry. Aaron tried to prevent the people from this great sin. He told them, "O my people! You are being tested by this. Your Lord is Most Gracious, so follow me and obey me." The Israelites, however, refused to listen. They said, "We will not abandon this; we will continue worshipping it until the return of Moses."

MOSES' RETURN

While Moses (AS) was still at Mount Tur, God told him that he had tested the people in Moses' absence, and that Samari had led them astray. Moses (AS) returned to his people, angered and grieved by their disobedience. He told them, "You have done evil in my absence. Didn't your Lord make a good promise to you? Did the promise seem late in coming? Or did you desire that the Wrath of the Lord should descend on you?"

Moses (AS) put down the tablets, turned furiously to his brother, Aaron, and said, "O Aaron, what prevented you from following my order when you saw them going astray? Did you disobey my order?"

Aaron answered, "The people ignored my words and they almost intended to kill me. Do not humiliate me or count me among the deviated ones." So, Moses (AS) forgave Aaron, and prayed, "O my Lord, forgive me and my brother." Moses (AS) banished Samari and warned him of his punishment in this life and in the next. Thereafter, he burned the calf in a blazing fire and scattered its ash in the sea.

When his anger calmed, Moses (AS) took up the tablets and presented them to the people. He built a strong room and put the tablets therein. Then, with the guidance of the Book of God, Moses (AS) showed the Israelites the path of righteousness. He said, "O my people! You have wronged yourselves by your worship of the calf; so turn to your Creator in repentance. And don't slay each other by yourselves; that will be better for you in front of your Creator. He will forgive you."

ISRAELITES DEMAND TO SEE GOD

The Israelites understood that they had wronged themselves and committed a great sin by worshipping the calf. For this reason, Moses (AS) chose seventy of them and took them to Mount Tur to repent. At Mount Tur, Moses (AS) talked with God, but some of them didn't believe and said, "We shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly." Suddenly, a lightning struck, and they fell to the ground, dead. Moses (AS) prayed for their forgiveness; God forgave them and returned them to life.

THE COVENANT OF THE ISRAELITES

God, the High, made a covenant with the Israelites that they not worship any but God, and treat parents, kindred, orphans, and the needy with kindness; speak well to people, establish prayer and practice regular charity. The Israelites, however, were a rebellious people, and they soon began to be disobedient. Moses (AS) was commissioned to take the Israelites to the "promised land", Palestine. On the way, the Israelites came across cities and towns. The rulers of these cities had strong armies, and the Israelites would have to fight against these rulers if they wanted to free the way to Palestine.

Moses (AS) told them, "O my people! Enter the holy land which God has assigned to you, and do not turn away disgraced, for you will be overthrown."

The Israelites, however, were afraid to fight, and refused to obey the command of Moses and their Lord to enter the land. They complained of the strength of the armies and said, "We shall not enter this land until they leave it." Thus, they disputed with Moses (AS) and persisted in their disobedience and rebellion. Moses (AS), angry about the Israelites' rebellion, prayed, "O my Lord! I have control only over myself and my brother, so separate us from this rebellious people."

As a punishment for their rebellion, God left them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Since that generation had grown accustomed to baseness and contemptibleness, they did not deserve independence and dignity. Therefore, God, the High, willed that this despised generation

perish within the forty years of wandering, and that a new generation - which has the spirit of freedom and freedom seeking - be able to obtain independence and greatness through perseverance and persistence.

THE COW OF THE ISRAELITES

Moses (AS) told the Israelites, "God has ordered that you sacrifice a cow for the expiation of your sins, and give the meat to the poor." They said, "Do you want to make fools of us?" Moses (AS) replied, "God save me from being one of the ignorant." When the Israelites felt sure that Moses (AS) was serious about this request, they said, "Ask your Lord to describe the cow for us."

Moses (AS) said, "He says that it should neither be too old nor too young." And in order that they not drag out the matter more than this and make pretexts to delay carrying out the order of God, he added, "Now do what you are commanded."

But they didn't leave off their stubbornness, and said, "Ask your Lord to describe its colour to us." Moses replied, "He says that the cow must be yellow." Again, they weren't satisfied with this much seeking of pretexts. And each time, by making excuses, they made the job of finding such a cow more difficult for themselves. They said, "Ask your Lord to describe the cow to us -for all cows are alike to us - so that, God willing, we would be guided."

Moses (AS) said, "He says that it must not have tilled the soil or watered the fields. It must be sound and without blemish." Finally, the Israelites accepted and said, "Now you have brought the truth." Then, with much difficulty - for only one such cow was to be found in all the cities - they bought the cow and killed it in sacrifice; however, they did so without good will.

THE UNGRATEFUL NATION

The Israelites continuously found fault with Moses (AS); each day they made excuses and wanted things which were never reasonable. Moses (AS) suffered much from his people and continuously had problems with them. Since the Israelites were ungrateful for God's blessings and no advice had effect on them, Moses (AS) cursed them. For this reason, the Israelites suffered long in hardship and wretchedness; they wandered homeless and had little happiness.

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