

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Sūrah Tāhā (2)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī

وَلَقَدْ مَنَنَّا عَلَيْكَ مَرَّةً أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾ إِذْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ مَا يُؤْتَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾ أَنْ اقْذِفِيهِ فِي
التَّابُوتِ فَاقْذِفِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ لِّي وَعَدُوٌّ لَّهُ ۖ وَالْقَيْتُ
عَلَيْكَ مَحَبَّةٌ مِّمَّنِّي ۖ وَلِتُضِنَّ عَلَيَّ عَيْنِي ۖ ﴿٢٢﴾¹

In order to allay the apprehensions of Moses (sws), just as the Qur'ān had given him glad tidings of the acceptance of his prayer, similarly he was reminded of another favour of God at that juncture: when he was born, there was a grave danger that the heinous scheme² of killing the male offspring of the Israelites chalked out by the Pharaoh would also put him in harm's way. At that time, not only did God protect Moses (sws) through His power and wisdom but in fact made the Pharaoh bring him up. The purpose of this reminder was that he was not to fear the Pharaoh from whom God protected him in such a great way. He was with him.

The words *إِذْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ مَا يُؤْتَىٰ* refer to the fact that the scheme made by God to protect Moses (sws) was revealed to his mother was the same that was then being revealed to him. The purpose was to make evident to him that he had received many great favours in the past. Though he must have had some broad knowledge of this incident through his mother, yet how exactly it was divinely planned must have become known to him through

1. And at another instance as well We did a favour to you when We revealed to your mother what is being revealed to you: "Put him in a box; then place the box in the river." Then the river should cast it on the bank so that he may pick it up who is My enemy also and of this child too. And I shed a reflection of My love on you and so that you be brought up under My supervision.

2. Details of the political motives behind this heinous scheme are explained in detail under verses 109-112 of Sūrah al-A'rāf.

revelation. The words مَا يُوحَى is referring to this aspect.

The nature of divine revelation received by Moses' mother was obviously of the nature of an inspiration and a brainwave. In other words, the Almighty instilled it in her heart and she became sure that it was from God. أَنْ أَقْذِفِيهِ فِي التَّابُوتِ فَاقْذِفِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ فَأِدَا خَفَّتْ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا رَأَدُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ³ were words of revelation that were sent to her. It is evident from Exodus (2:2-6) that when Moses (sws) was born the scheme of killing the male offspring of the Israelites was in full swing. His mother at first hid him from those oppressive elements. According to the Torah, this period was 3 months. However, she continuously feared for his safety. According to the Torah, she finally made a basket from canes and placed it near the river shore under a shelter hoping that he may be seen by some sympathetic person. On the other hand, the Qur'ān states that God inspired her to put the child in a small trunk and place it in the river and not worry for He would have the child returned to her and make him His messenger. Obviously, the account of the Qur'ān is more logical. Without divine indication, how could she have the courage to take this such a step? Even after divine indication, one can only imagine what must have gone through her mind. However, since through divine indication God had assured her that He would protect the child, she took this bold step. In verse 7 of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, this divine indication is explained thus: فَادَا خَفَّتْ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا رَأَدُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ³.

The details of what Moses' mother felt can be seen in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ.

The words فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوُّ لَكِ are not part of the divine revelation sent to her. Had this been the case, they would have been grammatically an answer to a command. The ل on فَلْيُلْقِهِ is that of a command (and not an answer to a command). For this reason, it is structured in this format. Those who have translated it as an answer to a command are mistaken. Its literal meaning would be “so, let the sea cast it on the shore.” Thus, on the one hand, the Almighty sent a revelation to Moses' mother to put him in a trunk and place the trunk in the river and, on the

3. And when you have fear about him, consign him to the river and fear and grieve not. We will then bring him back to you and will make him from among Our messengers.

other hand, ordered the river to cast it on the shore so that the one who picked it up was God's enemy and also that of the child.

To put it another way, God has expressed how He showed favour to Moses (sws) through His might, majesty and wisdom. It was His planning that the Pharaoh who was both His own enemy and that of Moses (sws) be responsible for his upbringing. The Pharaoh was God's enemy because he himself claimed divinity and could not tolerate someone else with him in this matter. Details of the Pharaoh's enmity with Moses (sws) have been mentioned earlier. Not only this, the greatest manifestation of God's planning was that Moses (sws) was nourished and brought up by someone who was his greatest enemy and that of his nation. Thus, by his very hands, the Pharaoh called for his own doom, to save himself from which he had undertaken several measures.

The words **وَالْقَيْثُ عَلَيْكَ مَحَبَّةً مِنِّي** depict the divine scheme God chalked out to endear Moses (sws) to their common enemy. As it is, every child is adorable. Every upright person feels affection as soon as he sees one. It is evident from the Torah⁴ that Moses (sws) was extra-ordinarily cute. And then God Himself cast the reflection of love on him. Who can imagine the cuteness of a child who has been blessed with charm from God. When such an adorable and innocent looking child is seen all alone in a cane basket meandering in the waves of a river, who will not tremble at this sight? The Pharaoh was only the Pharaoh! Not a stone! It thus happened that the Pharaoh and his wife wandered off for a walk on the shores of the Nile. They saw that basket. When they saw a child in it, they thought that it must be of the Israelites; his apprehensive parents, fearing for his death, must have consigned him to the waves of the river; they must have chanced their luck expecting the child to stay safe. Seeing the child created waves of sympathy in them. And it was the Pharaoh's wife⁵ who was more inclined in this regard. Women by nature are tender-hearted towards children. It is evident from verse 11 of Sūrah

4. See: Exodus, 4:2; Hebrews, 11:23; Acts, 4:20.

5. In the Torah, it is mentioned that it was the Pharaoh's daughter and her two friends and not his wife had picked up Moses (sws). The Qur'ān has corrected this. For its details, readers may look up the explanation of verse 9 of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ.

Tahrim that the Pharaoh's wife was very soft hearted and kind. This divine scheme made Moses (sws) reach the palace of the Pharaoh fearing whom his mother had consigned him to the waves.

The co-ordinated clause of *وَلِتُضِنَّ عَلَى عَيْنِي* is suppressed due to concomitant indications. Many examples of this style can be seen in the earlier *sūrahs*. If the whole sentence is gauged, the sense would be: "We cast Our reflection of love on you so that even your enemies adore you and so that you are brought up before My eyes." It was obviously this reflection which became a guardian of Moses (sws). This guardian protected him in such a way that not only he had no fear from someone who was after his life, the enemy became infatuated with him. It is this guardian of love that God has called "My eyes" in *لِتُضِنَّ عَلَى عَيْنِي*. In other words, by casting His reflection of love on him, God protected Moses (sws).

إِذْ تَبَشَّرَ أُخْتُكَ فَتَقُولُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن يَكْفُلُهُ ۖ فَرَجَعْنَاكَ إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ ۚ وَتَتَلَقَّىٰ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَكَ مِنَ النَّعَمِ وَفَتَنَّاكَ فُتُونًا ۚ فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ ۚ ثُمَّ جِئْتَ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يُّوسُفَ ﴿٦﴾

A large part of the account of Moses (sws) has been covered in this verse. Things that did not need a reminder are suppressed here and only a few others have been broadly expressed here and then the whole discourse connects to the main topic.

First, the scheme which the Almighty adopted to restore Moses (sws) to his mother after he had been consigned to the river is alluded to. Earlier verse 7 of *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ* was referred to. It was stated that when God directed Moses' mother to place him in the river, He also told her that soon He would have him returned to her. In the verses under discussion, this is only referred to, but in verses 9-13, details are mentioned thus: When the Pharaoh's

6. At the time when your sister would go repeatedly and would say to them: "Should I inform you of those people who can bring up this child?" Thus, We returned you to your mother so that her eyes were soothed and she did not grieve. And you had killed a person. Then We delivered you from this grief and We fully tested you. Then you stayed for many years among the people of Madyan. Then you have reached here at a specially appointed time, O Moses!

wife saw the child, she told the Pharaoh that the boy was adorable and that he should not have him killed; he would soothe the eyes of both and they could adopt him and gain benefit. On the other hand, though Moses' (sws) mother had consigned the boy to the sea at the intimation of the Almighty, grief and worry were killing her. She asked Moses' (sws) sister to keep an eye on the box. So, she kept track of it secretly. Ultimately, she came to know that it had reached near the palace of the Pharaoh and there the waves had expelled it on the shore. She reached the palace and saw that a wet nurse was trying to feed him but he was not willing to put his mouth to her breasts. She then gave a suggestion to the Pharaoh's wife that she could inform them of a household who would fully take care of the child and become affable with him. Since the Pharaoh and his wife were already worried on Moses (sws) not drinking milk, the suggestion was accepted and in this manner Moses (sws) returned to his mother's lap.

In the Torah, this incident is mentioned in the following words:

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. (Exodus, 2:7-9)

The difference in the accounts of the Torah and the Qur'ān does not need any comment. Every sensible person can see that the Qur'ān's account is more logical as well as natural.

Indefinite tenses are used in *إِذْ تَبَثَّىٰ أَخْتُكَ فَتَقُولُ*. This makes me repeatedly think Moses' sister had to go to the Pharaoh's wife many times in order to satisfy her. It was only then that she was able to convince her. In this way, Moses (sws) was returned to his mother and her fears were put to rest. I have tried to do justice to the translation by keeping in view these indefinite tenses and the fact that incomplete verbs are suppressed before them. If the translation does not fully convey this meaning, the fault is entirely mine.

Consider next the last part: *وَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنِكَ مِنَ النِّعَمِ وَقَتَلْتَ فَتُونًا فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ ثُمَّ جِئْتَ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يُوْسَىٰ*. Among the things that happened to Moses (sws) after being picked from the river until his

adolescence, only the incident of his killing a Copt and his stay in Madyan are referred to here. This reference too is for the same reason as the abovementioned incident: to give solace and satisfaction to Moses (sws) that the Lord Who had helped him in such precarious situations and adverse circumstances would help him in his future struggles also. Here, since only a brief reference is made, I will present details in my own words in the light of what is mentioned in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ. For explanation of the words and verses, its *tafsīr* can be looked up.

Consider verses 14-19 of that *sūrah*. The whole incident can be understood from these verses thus:

When Moses (sws) reached the age of mental maturity, he was deeply perturbed at the oppression to which his nation was subjected. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and for this reason a separate settlement was allocated for them. They only went to the city for service and labour without compensation and there they were badly beaten and humiliated by their Coptic masters. All this had a very telling effect on the sense of honour of Moses (sws), and at times he would forcefully defend his people. The followers of the Pharaoh feared that if the Israelites had an effective leader, they would gain courage and become a danger for their own leadership. For this reason, they became enemies of Moses (sws) and it is quite probable that those at the helm of affairs debarred him from entering the city. However, Moses (sws) would secretly go to the city to remain aware of the circumstances of his people. On one such occasion when he secretly entered the city, he saw an Israelite and a Copt engaged in a brawl. The Israelite called Moses (sws) for help. His call stirred his emotions and he tried to help him. At this, the Copt turned to him. Moses (sws) was a strong person. He threw a punch at him and it was such a mighty blow that the Copt died on the spot.

Moses (sws) was very disturbed at this incident. The killing was entirely unintentional on his part and he regarded himself to be accountable before God for this. Thus, he immediately repented and God forgave him. Upon receiving this favour from God, Moses (sws) promised himself that in future he would never defend criminals. The next day when he again furtively entered the city, the same Israelite once again asked for his help. Once more he was fighting and this time with another Israelite. As soon as he saw Moses (sws), he asked for his help but Moses

(sws) scolded him and called him a mischievous individual. However, he advanced forward to reconcile the two. The Israelite thought that he had made some mistake and that Moses (sws) actually had advanced to grab him. He feared that this time he would receive a fatal punch. So, he cried out telling Moses (sws) that on the previous day he had taken a life and now he was after his life. This is not what reformers did, he contended; it seemed that Moses (sws) wanted to be a tyrant in the land.⁷

It thus became evident to Moses (sws) that the killing of the Copt was no longer a secret. Then it further happened that a person came running from the far side of the city and informed Moses (sws) that the rulers were plotting to kill him and sincerely advised him to leave the city.

At that time, Moses (sws) prayed to God to save him from the evil and reposing trust in Him set off for Madyan. When he reached, he sat at one of its wells or fountains for some time. There he saw a bunch of shepherds watering their flocks and also two women who were waiting for their turn. Moses (sws) felt concern for them and asked them about the ordeal they were facing and as to why were they standing behind with their herd. They replied that their father had grown very old and as a result they had to attend to their herd and that it was not possible for them to force their way into the crowd; so, they had decided to wait for the other shepherds to leave and that unless they left with their herds it was not possible for them to provide water to their flock. After listening to their tale, sentiments of sympathy arose in Moses (sws). He got up and made their flocks drink water and once he had done this job, he turned back and sat under the shadow of a tree. He then prayed to God: "God whatever you send down to me at this time, I am in need of it."

Both these women were daughters of Shu'ayb (sws). After a while, one of them returned walking bashfully and modestly and told him that their father was calling him to compensate him for his effort in making their herd drink water. Moses (sws) then came to Shu'ayb and narrated his whole story to him. Shu'ayb assured him and allayed his fears: God has actually saved him

7. I will discuss this question in detail whether this statement was from the Copt or a foolish utterance by the Israelite himself. Here the purpose is to only present the incident in a simple way so that the implications of the verses under discussion are highlighted.

from the unjust.

One of his daughters requested her father to hire Moses (sws) as a helping hand since he was a strong and trustworthy person and would prove to be fit for the task at hand.

Shu'ayb offered the hand of one of his daughters to Moses (sws) on the condition that he work for him for eight years and if (sws) it pleased Moses he could increase this period to ten years; there was no pressure on him in this regard. He further told Moses (sws) that the latter would find him to be an upright person.

Moses (sws) accepted both the proposal and the condition. He replied that whichever of these two periods he was able to fulfil should be left to his discretion and he should not be pressurized regarding this. God was a witness to this covenant.

After completing the promised time, Moses (sws) left with his family for Egypt. When they reached the mount of Ṭūr, he saw the reflection observing which he set off to get some embers of fire. He ended up being appointed the messenger of God.

The reason that all this detail has been presented from Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ is that it has been rather concisely covered in the verses of Sūrah Ṭāhā under discussion. In the absence of this detail, these verses cannot be fully understood.

Let us now reflect on the components of the verse.

وَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْغَمِّ: The circumstances in which the incident of the killing of the Copt took place have been discussed earlier. Neither had Moses (sws) any intention of killing him nor did he have any other sentiment except helping an oppressed person. This, in itself, is a very commendable thing which is found in every upright and decent individual. For this reason, whatever Moses (sws) did was, in itself, correct but the will of God was such that his blow became fatal. He knew that though the killing was unintentional, such was the gravity of the matter that he could be held accountable before God. This made him very sorrowful. A God-fearing person never gives himself allowance; he holds himself accountable even in things in which they can find an excuse if they want. Moses (sws) did not have any tribal bias either. Thus, it is possible that the person he had helped by regarding him to be oppressed might himself have been the oppressor. In the details mentioned earlier it can be seen that when the next day Moses (sws) saw that Israelite fighting with

another Copt and asking for this help, he scolded him by saying that he was a mischievous person. If Moses (sws) had any prejudice for his people, he would have felt proud that he had accomplished a great feat for his nation, let alone be sorrowful. Thus, this too could not have been a source of assurance for him. For this reason, he was sad on this incident and he sought forgiveness from his Lord. God forgave him and this forgiveness relieved him of his grief.

In my opinion, if fear of revenge from the rulers was part of this grief, then it was to the extent that he thought that they were very oppressive and no justice could be expected of them. Had the government of the rulers been a just one, Moses (sws) would have presented the whole case before them and would have obeyed their verdict. However, consigning oneself to the despotic rule of the Pharaoh was tantamount to suicide. Obviously, this state of affairs must also have been a source of sorrow for Moses (sws). To relieve himself of this sorrow, he ultimately left his homeland and went off to Madyan.

It has been explained at numerous instances in this exegesis that if prophets of God commit any sin whether before their ministry or after it, it is never because they follow any evil intent; it is because they exceed limits in following or seeking the truth. This, in itself, is not a sin. However, since they are a benchmark of the truth, God checks them on such occasions so that any imbalance is set right. This mistake of Moses (sws) was in fact an act of virtue. However, as just mentioned, even if an act of virtue exceeds limits, it is checked at times – especially in the case of prophets of God.

Consider next the phrase: **فَتَنَّاكَ فُتُونًا** means to try and test. When a goldsmith purifies gold, this word is also used to refer to it. The same word is used by the Almighty for trials and tribulations to which Moses (sws) was subjected and tested thereby. The purpose was to fully prepare him for the mission he was to be entrusted with. The extent of the tough life he was used to in Egypt and the precarious circumstances in which he migrated from there can be gauged from details referred to earlier. Even when in Madyan, he became a shepherd for Shu'ayb's herd for eight or ten years. It was while returning from Madyan that he suddenly was made a messenger of God. After that the trying circumstances he faced can be read in Sūrah al-

A'rāf, in the current *sūrah*, in *Sūrah Qaṣaṣ* and in other *sūrahs* as well. In short, right from his birth to his last breath, he passed through continuous trials with each being more intense than the previous one.

Regarding these trials, one needs to keep in mind that they are essential for the training and instruction of people. It is through them that the higher qualities found in them are polished further. Thus, trials must not be avoided. He who is struck with fear because of his enemy and runs off is like one who runs off from his own training. If there is any cause of fear, it is not the trial but that one may fail in it.

These trials do not come merely through hardships; they also happen through favours and blessings. In trials of the former type, God wants to inculcate patience in a person and in trials of the latter type, God wants to engender gratitude in a person. And it is on patience and gratitude that all noble attributes are based. It is through the perfection of these two attributes that a person can achieve the bliss of being a satisfied soul in this world. And the consequence of this bliss is the eternal bliss of hereafter which the Qur'ān calls رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً.

A subtle question regarding the wisdom of the Qur'ān is which one, amongst the trials of patience and gratitude, is more difficult? Sages have different views in this matter. My own inclination in the light of the Qur'ān is that the trial of gratitude is tougher. The percentage of people who pass this trial is very little. There are some who show perseverance in the wake of hardships and succeed but there are few who remain on the straight path even after being blessed with favours. Verse 18 of *Sūrah Sabā* points to this: وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ (very few are My servants who are grateful).

It should also be kept in mind that the higher the status God wants to grant someone, the more and the harder will be his trials. Thus, one is horrified to read about the trials which prophets of God have faced. Other people cannot even imagine enduring these trials.

The real thing to fear in these trials is not the fear of facing them; there are other things that need to be feared. Firstly, as pointed out earlier, a person should fear failing a trial. Secondly, what is to be feared even more is that he is relieved of trials. The

reason is that it is the established practice of God that a person who repeatedly fails is at times relieved from His trials. In the terminology of the Qur'ān, this is called *imhāl* (respite to do evil). This is the greatest punishment that can be given to a person or a nation from God. After that all doors of hope are shut.

The words **فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ** do not specify the number of years Moses (sws) lived in Madyan. However, with reference to the details presented earlier in the light of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, it is evident that in accordance with the covenant he made, the minimum number of years he must have spent there was eight and the maximum must have been ten. What is apparently known is that during this time he was a shepherd to Shu'ayb's herd.

After alluding to all the incidents mentioned earlier, it was stated: **ثُمَّ جِئْتُ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يُّوسَىٰ**. In other words, whatever happened was according to God's plan and, after passing through various phases, he reached exactly the place where he was appointed a messenger. The implication is that God Who had protected him in all phases of his life from birth until that time and had all his missions fulfilled through their mutual enemy created opportunities for him and provided resources.

وَأَصْطَنَعْتُكَ لِنَفْسِي⁸

The word **إِصْطَنَعَ** means “train someone for a specific objective.” The implication is that if God made him pass through many trials, it was to train him for a special task. Now this special task was being assigned to him. He was to carry it out by trusting God.

إِذْهَبْ أَنتَ وَآخُوكَ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَلَا تَنْيَا فِي ذِكْرِي⁹

The directive mentioned in verse 24 earlier is repeated here. The verses in between were meant to provide assurance to Moses (sws). After giving him glad tidings of acceptance of his supplication and reminding him of the past blessings he had received, it is stated that he and his brother are to go to warn the

8. And I chose you for My special assignment.

9. “Go you and your brother with My signs and be not negligent in remembering Me.”

Pharaoh. Earlier on Moses (sws) alone was given this directive but now Aaron (sws) is also included in it because he was also made a messenger at Moses' request.

The words وَلَا تَنِيَانِي ذِكْرِي are a further emphasis on the directive given in verse 14. In other words, they are not to show negligence in remembering God. It has already been stated in verse 34 that remembering God here means both through the prayer and through preaching. Every task of a prophet constitutes God's remembrance. When he prays, he in fact receives strength from God for reminding people. The actual fountainhead of true preaching is God. It is through this source that he receives spiritual fodder. If the relationship with this source weakens, the preaching mission of the prophet loses its vigour and if the relationship with it is completely severed and this preaching mission becomes a tool in the hands of Satan even though the name of God may be taken in it.

10 اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ

Details of the Pharaoh's tyranny have been mentioned under verse 24. Here it needs to be considered that both Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) are addressed. Thus, this directive was necessarily given later when Moses (sws) had reached Egypt because in the valley of Ṭuwā Aaron (sws) was not alongside him.

11 فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيْسَ بِالْعُلَّةِ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ

This directive was not given merely because Moses (sws) was not going to the Pharaoh as a helpless Israelite but as an envoy of God and he also had the staff in his hand, but because softness is the nature of every preaching effort. Prophets of God are sent to educate and reform people; hence their preaching and warning has the element of the affection of a teacher and the sympathy of a well-wisher. It is not known about any prophet imposing himself on people. Even in the toughest of circumstances their style of address and manner of response is very soft, effective and sympathetic. Imposing oneself in an arrogant way is the trait

10. "Go both of you to the Pharaoh. Indeed, he has become very rebellious."

11. "So, invite him softly; he may well pay heed or have fear."

of leaders who have become slaves of this world. It is actually the basis of the satanic propaganda of current times.

The words **لَعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى** express the purpose of the teaching and preaching of prophets: reminding people and making them fear God. Those who have the trait of indifference in them awaken from their slumber as soon as a prophet reminds them. It is as if they had lost their way. As soon as they are guided, they return to the right path. There are others who have gone a little too astray. If such people have the ability to accept faith, they return to the right path when they are warned by a prophet. Here the first of these words (**يَتَذَكَّرُ**) refers to the first category of people and the second (**يَخْشَى**) to the second.

12 ﴿قَالَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا نَخَافُ أَنْ يُفْرِطَ عَلَيْنَا أَوْ أَنْ يَطْغَى﴾

The preposition **عَلَى** is used after **يُفْرِطُ**. This incorporates the meaning of “launching a hasty onslaught against someone,” in the expression. The implication is that the Pharaoh is already annoyed and he will not allow them to even begin any conversation. He will either kill them before they speak or make a plan to do so or will become even more rebellious.

In the supplication depicted in this verse, both Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) have together made the request. As referred to earlier under verse 43, this is an indication of the fact that these directives were given after he had reached Egypt when Aaron (sws) had joined him.

13 ﴿قَالَ لَا تَخَافَا إِنِّي مَعَكُمَا أَسْعَى وَآلِي﴾

The detail concealed in the words “I am with you” does not need elaboration and the splendour and grandeur in “hearing and seeing everything” also does not need any explanation. When God is with them hearing and seeing all, He is sending them on a new mission, there is no need to fear if everyone in the world becomes their enemy.

فَأَتَيْتُهُ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ وَلَا تَعَذِّبْهُمْ ۖ قَدْ جِئْنَاكَ بِآيَةٍ

12. They said: “Our Lord! We fear that he will be cruel to us or his rebelliousness may increase even further.”

13. God said: “Fear not! I am with you hearing and seeing everything.”

مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَىٰ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

The status of Moses (sws) was that of a messenger and Aaron (sws) that of a prophet. Here both are called messengers because it is like addressing the dominant element ('*alā sabīl al-taghlīb*).

The words “so let the Israelites go with us” have been elucidated under verses 104-105 of Sūrah al-A'raf.¹⁵ There it has been explained as to where Moses (sws) wanted to take the Israelites. This also refutes the view of people who think that Moses (sws) was a nationalist leader and his endeavours were more of a movement for freedom.

The word *آية* in *قَدْ جِئْنَاكَ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكَ* means argument and reason regardless of number. In verse 105 of Sūrah al-A'raf, it is similarly said: *قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ* (I have come to you with a clear argument from your Lord). The reason for giving Moses (sws) miracles in the very first phase has already been discussed earlier. The circumstances in which he showed the Pharaoh these miracles forthwith has also been explained.

The words “And peace is on them who follow the guidance” depict the sincerity and sympathy which is a hallmark of the preaching of prophets and which has been instructed to be adopted in verse 44 earlier. At the same time, they also constitute a very subtle warning. The implication is that uptill then whatever the Pharaoh did belonged to the past but now that guidance has come to them through God's messengers, the way to peace is to adopt the straight path or else get ready to face the consequences.

إِنَّا قَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْنَا أَنَّ الْعَذَابَ عَلَىٰ مَن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٥﴾

This verse explains the previous one.

A reflection on it reveals many subtle points:

Firstly, Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) did not forcefully impose any punishment from themselves on the Pharaoh the way common leaders do. They only informed him of the divine

14. “So, go to him and tell him: ‘We both are messengers of your Lord; so let the Israelites go with us and do not put them through torment. We have also brought to you a big sign of your Lord. And peace is on them who follow the guidance.’”

15. See: *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 416-418.

16. ‘It has been revealed to us that there is however torment for those who deny and turn away.’”

revelation they had received from God and that those who reject and turn away are visited by God's torment. Obviously, they adopted this method not to give the Pharaoh any pretext of anger from their own selves.

Secondly, they did not address the Pharaoh and say that if he denied and turned away, then he would be struck by a torment. On the contrary, they used general words and said that he who did that would meet a certain fate. They adopted this style so that what was meant to be communicated to the Pharaoh reached his ears and his ego was also not hurt.

Thirdly, the objects of both verbs **كَذَّبَ** and **تَوَلَّى** are suppressed. It was not said that those who rejected their prophethood and turned away from the guidance brought by them would be visited by a torment. This is because all this was understood and by expressing it would have again been a blow to his ego.

17 **قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يُوسُفٰ**

Concomitant indications show that what transpired after the previous directive is suppressed before this verse. Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) took the message they were supposed to deliver to the Pharaoh and also communicated it to him. After this, the Pharaoh responded with the query mentioned in this verse. His implication was that since he himself was the Lord, whose messengers were they? I have already explained in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* that the Pharaoh was considered as the God-King in Egypt. He was regarded as the avatar of the sun who was considered their greatest deity. On this basis, his idols and statues were worshipped all over Egypt.

This question posed by the Pharaoh was sarcastic in nature. He could not be unaware of the fact that in spite of claiming to be God the Israelites, in spite of being his slaves, did not regard him to be so. However, until then, the status of the God of the Israelites was that of a dead God whose name was probably pronounced in their homes but He had no relationship with their practical affairs. Such affairs were controlled by the Pharaoh as their God. It was for the first time that both these prophets presented God as a living being before the Pharaoh. Not only did they present him in this manner, but also put forth some

17. The Pharaoh asked: "Who is the Lord of both of you, O Moses?!"

important requirements before him on God's behalf and that too with an element of warning. Obviously, the Pharaoh was not aware of the living God of the Israelites. Hence, he found this warning to be rather strange and therefore disparagingly asked the question cited in the verse. This is also evident from its parallel mention in the Torah:

Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." (Exodus, 5:2)

¹⁸ قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ ﴿٥٠﴾

The detail found in the brevity of this verse is that everything has a specific form and structure with regard to its purpose of existence and also possesses guidance from its instincts to fulfil this purpose. To fulfil the purpose for which a honey bee has been created, the Almighty has placed all the necessary abilities and powers in its tiny form. Moreover, He also guided its instinct regarding the usage of these abilities and gather honey for itself. Same is the case with the smallest and the biggest object of this universe. An ant, an insect, a spider, a goat, a lion all have been given a specific physical form by God as well as guidance to their instincts in accordance with their needs. All of them have been guided by God regarding the nature of their sustenance and the way to obtain it, the way they should procreate, the manner in which they should protect their species, the elements they should protect themselves from, the things they should adopt and the role they should play in collectively serving this universe.

Who has inspired the nightingale to chant, the parrots to sing and the cuckoo to chirp? Obviously, their creator. So that creator is their Lord and of everyone.

The blessings of God are not merely confined to living beings. The way the plants and flowers of the orchards blossom forth, the manner in which violets, irises, roses, cypress and pine trees bloom, the amazing sight of apples, pomegranates and grapes – who has given them such form and shape? Who can claim to have created even one of these things or say that he has given the

18. He replied: "Our Lord is one who has given everything its physical shape; then gave guidance."

apple its distinctive taste and acacia trees their distinctive features. Who creates individual colours and odours, separate boons and benefits of every plant of an orchard, every type of grass of a piece of land and every bush of a forest? Whoever has, is surely the Lord and not every idiot who wears a crown and claims to have a share in the sovereignty of God.

Not only the earth, we can take a look at the sky. Who has created the sun, the moon, the galaxies, the rainbows, the sky, the clouds and the air and who has guided them to discharge their duties? It is the Lord surely. It is easy to become an avatar of the sun but who can make the sun appear a minute before its scheduled time or to disappear a minute after its appointed time?

Human beings are the best of God's creation on this earth. They have been given the best form and also been blessed with very great abilities. Yet neither has anyone a share in a person's creation nor in the abilities he has. It is God Who has blessed him with hands, feet, nose, ears and eyes as well as instinct, intellect and cognizance. It is because of these abilities that it is easy for him to equally access the land, sea and mountains. People sail across the sea and fly overhead. Not only can they access the farthest areas and nooks and corners of the earth but also the moon and planets like Mars. Human beings control electricity and harness the atom. In spite of all this, they should not be in the slightest doubt that all this is a product of their own potential and ability. A person who is under this misconception is a fool. All these marvels are the result of God-given intellect. It is as a result of this that human beings have been able to discover some physical laws and land on the moon and Mars. If they are able to discover some laws because of the intellect given to them by God and are able to reach new heights as a result, they should not become so arrogant as to challenge God and His kingdom.

The answer given by Moses (sws) was very precise and brief but it contained great details. Though the words were very soft, his answer cornered the Pharaoh. In very comprehensive words, Moses (sws) explained to him that only that being can claim to be his God who created and guided, neither of which was done by him. Then how has he become the Lord? In verses 1-3 of Sūrah al-A'1ā', this fact is stated thus: **الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ** سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (Glorify the name of your Lord! The Most High, Who made a sketch and then perfected it, and Who imparted

potentials and then gave guidance).

In reality, human intellect and nature are sufficient to conclusively convey the truth to human beings. Thus, in verses 14-15 of Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, it is stated: **وَلَوِ اتَّخَذَ مَعَاذِيرَهُ بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بِصِيرَةٌ**

(in fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses).

It is God's further blessing that He has also sent His messengers and books to guide mankind.

قَالَ فَمَا بَالُ الْقُرُونِ الْأُولَىٰ ¹⁹

This question by the Pharaoh is replete with sarcasm. The implication is that if Moses (sws) has come from his lord, he must be aware of the circumstances of the previous nations and hence can narrate them to him. It should be kept in mind that megalomaniacs and arrogant individuals try to do away with the impact of serious facts by raising such irrelevant questions and through this tactic try to maintain their own impact on their blind followers.

قَالَ عَلَيْهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي فِي كِتَابٍ لَا يَضِلُّ رَبِّي وَلَا يَنْسَى ²⁰

Though the Pharaoh's answer was irrelevant and humiliating too, Moses (sws) not only gave a very solemn answer, he also seized the opportunity to deliver some wise words. The word **كِتَابٍ** is undefined to magnify it. The implication is that no one should think that this register is an ordinary one; it contains every minute detail and when it is opened, everyone will cry out: **مَالِ هَذَا** (strange is this register; it has not left out any small or big thing from persevering it, 18:49).

The second part of the verse implies that the Almighty neither makes a mistake nor forgets. It is not possible that anything not come into His knowledge or do so in a distorted form or get erased. Moses (sws) could have answered the Pharaoh by showing his displeasure on the irrelevant question. He could have said that he was God's messenger and had never claimed to have past

19. The Pharaoh said: "Then what is the situation of the previous nations?"

20. Moses replied: "Their knowledge is with my Lord in a register. My Lord neither errs nor forgets."

knowledge. However, instead of replying in this manner, he very eloquently said that though he himself did not have the knowledge of everything, His Lord had accurate information of everything. No one should be under the misconception that there is no record of nations which have vanished from the face of the earth: each and every detail is fully preserved in God's register. This preservation is not for the sake of it; the purpose is to subject them to accountability and to subsequent reward and punishment. Because all this was evident, Moses (sws) did not express it. However, his style very effectively conveys them. At times, insinuations are much more expressive than explicit mention.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَوَسَّلَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِّنْ نَّبَاتٍ شَتَّى ﴿٥٣﴾ كُلُوا وَارْزُقُوا أَلْعَامَكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى ﴿٥٤﴾ مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ وَفِيهَا نَعِيدُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا نَخْرِجُهُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى ﴿٥٥﴾ وَلَقَدْ أَرَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَأَبَى ﴿٥٦﴾²¹

Concomitant indications show that these four verses are not part of the speech of Moses (sws). They are directly by God. Several examples of such insertions can be seen in the earlier *sūrahs*. The benefit of this is that what is said is not merely a narration of the past, it is also made to have a bearing on the present. Moses (sws) had only responded to the Pharaoh. However, God added His own words to his speech in order to inform the pharaohs of the Quraysh and that what has been said also related to them. They should hear who their Lord is and who is actually worthy of their worship and obedience.

Thus, the first two verses say that only the being responsible for all these phenomena deserves their compliance. It is stated that there are many arguments in them for men of understanding. Here these arguments are not explained but the proofs of God's providence, wisdom, power and mercy they contain cannot be

21. – He Who has made the earth a cradle for you and made in it pathways for you and sent down water from the heavens; thus from it We produced various types of diverse plants. Eat and graze your cattle. There are signs in this for those who have intellect. From it We have created you, to it We shall return you and from it bring you out again. And We showed him all Our signs. In spite of this, he denied and rejected.

hidden for those who use their intellect. This whole system of providence also bears witness to monotheism and to a day of reward and punishment. These arguments have been explained at many instances earlier also and will also be found at succeeding instances. Here the sole purpose is to direct attention to the fact that only the being who has made all these arrangements of sustenance is worthy of being regarded as Lord. When none has any role in these arrangements, how can anyone else be regarded as Lord.

Consider next the words: مِنْهَا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ وَفِيْهَا نُعِيْدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً اٰخَرٰى. Here the Day of Judgement is adduced from God's providence. The implication is that it is a necessary consequence of this providence that a day come in which the justice of the Lord of this universe manifests itself: those who fulfilled their obligations towards His favours be rewarded and those who made these favours a means of spreading disorder in the land be punished. It is stated that creating mankind a second time is not the slightest difficult for God: when He has created it from this earth without any bother, why would he have difficulty in recreating the dead after they are returned to the earth.

Consider now the last verse: وَ لَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنٰهُ اَيُّوْبًا ذَكَّٰبًا وَ اٰتٰىهُ اٰيٰتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَ اٰتٰىهُ اٰيٰتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَ اٰتٰىهُ اٰيٰتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ. The implication is that God showed the Pharaoh signs of all sorts, but he persisted in denying His messengers and continued to deny divine guidance. Here the signs referred to are all those that manifested themselves in Egypt one after the other once Moses (sws) had presented his message to the Pharaoh in order to warn him. However, the Pharaoh persisted in his denial until the very end. Details of these signs are found in the Torah and I have referred to them in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-A'rāf under verse 33.

Deliberation on the afore-mentioned verses show that all of them are in the first person and hence they are not part of Moses' conversation: they are from God.

22. قَالَ اٰجِئْتَنَا لِتُخْرِجَنَا مِنْ اَرْضِنَا بِسِحْرِكَ يٰمُوسٰى ﴿٢٢﴾

It has been explained in detail in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-A'rāf that in those times the greatest danger envisaged by the Pharaoh and his courtiers was the continuous increase in number of the

22. He said: "Moses! Have you come to us to turn us out from our land by a spell of your magic?"

Israelites. They feared that once they got strong, they could be manipulated by external enemies of the Pharaoh and one day expel him and his nation from the land. It was to circumvent this danger that the whole scheme of killing the male offspring of the Israelites was hatched. Yet that scheme ended up in failure. The Israelites continued to increase. However, until then they did not have any leader who could galvanize them into a single unit. Even before him going to Madyan, as indicated earlier, the Pharaoh sensed this danger from Moses (sws) since he was involved in awakening the Israelites from slumber. He would actively defend and support the oppressed Israelites. Thus, to stop him from this “criminal activity,” he was debarred from entering the city. Ultimately, he had to go to Madyan after the accidental killing of a Copt. Then, when he returned and presented some important demands before the Pharaoh in such a grand and majestic way, he understood that the danger he had sensed had actually manifested itself before him. Thus, he uttered the words referred to in the verse under discussion. The Pharaoh was a very astute politician. He firstly painted the call of Moses (sws) as a political danger so as to incite his nation. Secondly, he regarded his miracles to be of the category of magic to do away with their impact on the minds of the common man.

23. فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّكَ بِسِحْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ فَاجْعَلْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكَ مَوْعِدًا لَا نُخْلِفُهُ نَحْنُ وَلَا أَنْتَ مَكَانًا سُوًى ﴿٢٣﴾

The word مَوْعِد occurs both as a locus of time and as a locus of space. It can have both these connotations in this verse. But in the later verse, it occurs as a locus of time. Examples of such loci can be seen in the previous *sūrah*s.

The word مَكَانًا سُوًى means “the middle.” The expression would mean a place that is at an equal distance from both and easily accessible to them. The scheme of the Pharaoh was that the contest take place in an open field in front of the public. His objective was to defeat Moses (sws) before everyone and in this way rout him in the very first phase so that he did not dare challenge him again.

23. Then we too shall bring a similar magic against you. So, appoint a specific location between us and yourself, some place in the middle. Neither should we breach it nor should you.”

24 **قَالَ مَوْعِدُكُمْ يَوْمَ الزَّيْنَةِ وَأَنْ يُحْشَرَ النَّاسُ ضُحًى** ﴿٥٩﴾

Since Moses (sws) was fully sure of his success, he accepted the challenge without any inhibition. It was on two or three occasions that public festivities and carnivals took place in Egypt. One of them was approaching. This carnival was nominated for the contest. The time just before midday is considered to be the most appropriate for any public gathering.

In other words, Moses (sws) too wanted to vanquish the ploy of the Pharaoh in this very contest.

25 **فَتَوَلَّى فِرْعَوْنُ فَجَمَعَ كَيْدَهُ ثُمَّ أَتَى** ﴿٦٠﴾

Other instances in the Qur'ān present more details regarding the measures adopted by the Pharaoh, while here the style adopted is that of brevity. The Pharaoh consulted his courtiers. They opined that employing ordinary magicians for this contest might result in defeat. Thus, it was best if the most adept of magicians were gathered from various parts of the country and took part in the contest. Later, this suggestion was followed.

26 **قَالَ لَهُمْ مُوسَى وَيْلَكُمْ لَا تَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا فَيُسْحِتَكُمْ بِعَذَابٍ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ افْتَرَى** ﴿٦١﴾

The real meaning of *سحت* is to peel off meat from a bone. From this is the word *اسحات* which means to exploit or uproot something.

This is the speech which Moses (sws) delivered foremost in the arena of the contest in front of the gathering.

The expression *افترأ على الله* refers to polytheism as has been explained at several instances. The reason that it is signified by these words has been referred to in detail in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-Mā'idah and Sūrah al-An'ām. It has been pointed out in the previous verses that the real debate with the Pharaoh was that he claimed to be God. Moses (sws) refuted this baseless claim right in front of him. He rebutted him by saying the real Lord was the

24. He said: "For you the promised day is the day of festivity and that people should be made to gather before midday."

25. Thus, the Pharaoh withdrew from there and gathered all his manoeuvres, then came for combat.

26. Moses said: "Be forsaken! Do not impute falsehood to God so that He may crush you through some calamity. And he who imputes falsehood to God shall not succeed."

One Who had created the universe and was sustaining it and not the Pharaoh who had no role in those tasks. This same statement was repeated by Moses (sws) while addressing the supporters of the Pharaoh: none was God's partner; the partners they ascribed to him were their own fabrication because God had not revealed any proof in their favour. Thus, it was a falsehood they ascribed to God which made them worthy of His punishment. They would be destroyed by it because such was the fate of such wrongdoers.

27 ﴿فَتَنَازَعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّجْوَى﴾

The idioms *تنازع في الحديث* and *تنازع الامر* mean to mutually exchange views. The verse states that once all the elders and nobles as well as the magicians had gathered, they held a clandestine meeting. It is evident from the succeeding verses that in this meeting the Pharaoh secretly tried to convince the magicians that both Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) were expert in magic as well. He told them that their objective was to organize their people through magic and sorcery and expel the Pharaoh and his people from the land and wipe out their culture and the advancements they had made: thus, they were not to be negligent at that instance; they were to unitedly face the danger and remember that he who won in the contest at hand would in fact be the real victor.

قَالُوا إِنْ هَٰذِهِنَّ لَسِحْرَانِ يُرِيدَانِ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُم مِّنْ أَرْضِكُمْ بِسِحْرِهِمَا وَيَذْهَبَا بِطَرِيقَتِكُمُ
الْبُشَىٰ ۚ 28 ﴿٢٨﴾

The *إِنْ* here is a shortened form of *إِنَّ* as is evidenced by *ل* on *كِسْرَانِ*. The word *مُثْل* is the feminine of *امثل*. It means “superior and fine.”

The verse actually refers to what the Pharaoh and his chiefs said to the magicians in order to incite them against Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws).

The first thing they said was that both of them were expert

27. At this, they began mutually consulting and secretly advising one another.

28. They said: “Both of them are very adept magicians. They want to turn you out from your land through their magic and uproot this exemplary system of yours.”

magicians. This was meant to instigate professional jealousy. In other words, they had the same expertise and if the court magicians showed any slackness, they would be disgraced.

The second thing they said was that both of them wanted to strike awe in their hearts and expel them from their land by galvanizing the Israelites.

The third thing they stated was that the splendour of their society and the advancements they had made through hard work were in great danger. If those two succeeded in their aims, this development would be ruined.

A reflection on these statements shows that those in authority always use such machinations against the bearers of truth as were used by the Pharaoh and his courtiers against Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws).

It may also be kept in mind that the words “your country” and “your exemplary system” have little truth in them. The Pharaoh and his rule signified an aristocracy in which all the rest were virtually slaves and minorities. When those in authority want to use the masses for their interest, they fool them in this way.

29 ﴿فَاجْبِعُوا كَيْدَكُمْ ثُمَّ اتُّوَاصِفًا ۖ وَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْيَوْمَ مَنْ اسْتَعْلَىٰ﴾

This verse mentions the piece of advice which was given to the magicians after deliberation: since the situation was very precarious and the contest against very adept magicians, they were to unite and then take them on. The need for this advice must have arisen because just as there is mutual jealousy between parties and everyone gives preference to his own interest and benefit, there are rivalries between professional communities and each one vies for its own superiority. The Pharaoh and his nobles feared that if their magicians had such lack of unity, they would be defeated. Thus, they opined that instead of individually displaying their skills, they were to take part in the contest collectively.

The second part of the verse refers to the precarious and sensitive nature of that day: it was a decisive day; if they won, future success would be theirs; otherwise, it was very likely that all their fears about Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) would

29. So, bring together all your schemes; then come united against them and today only he shall succeed who dominates.

materialize.

30 ﴿قَالُوا يٰيُوسَىٰ اِمَّا اَنْ تَكُنَّ اَوَّلَ مَنْ اَلْقَىٰ﴾

After the consultation mentioned earlier, the magicians and Moses (sws) with their respective supporters began the contest. The magicians in accordance with professional ethics offered Moses (sws) to go first. However, it is evident from the style of the sentence that it is they who wanted to begin the proceedings in order to fully grip the audience in their spell. In such contests, the first turn carries great significance. Thus, it is the wish of every contestant that he be given the first chance so that he can mesmerize the audience and strike awe in the heart of his rival.

31 ﴿قَالَ بَلْ اَتَّقُوا ۚ فَاِذَا حَبَالُهُمْ وَعَصِيُّهُمْ يُخَيَّلُ اِلَيْهِ مِنْ سِحْرِهِمْ اَنَّهُا تَسْعٰی﴾

Moses (sws) had full conviction at God's behest that he would be victorious. So, he gave his opponents the first chance to display their skills. They were already waiting for this opportunity. As soon as Moses (sws) offered them this chance, they threw down their ropes and sticks on the ground. Because of the magical spell weaved by them, those sticks appeared to Moses (sws) as if they were running about. Since the magicians already knew that he could turn his stick into a serpent through his magic, they tried to counter and corner him in exactly the same way. The addition they made to this was that they made the ropes too turn into crawling snakes. In their own view, they reckoned that they would win the contest because Moses (sws) could only turn one stick into a snake while they had not only transformed all their sticks into snakes but their ropes too. However, as is evident from the words *يُخَيَّلُ اِلَيْهِ* they were not able to actually make this transformation. They could only cast an optical allusion onto the onlookers, as a result of which they began to see what they wanted them to see. Magic does not change the physical state of a thing; it only deceives a person, and as soon as the reality comes to the fore, the truth is exposed.

30. They said: "Moses! Either you put forth or it can be that we put forth first?"

31. He said: "In fact, you put forth." So, all of a sudden their ropes and their staffs, because of their magic, seemed to him as if they are sliding.

32 ﴿فَأَوْجَسَ فِي نَفْسِهِ خِيفَةً مُّوسَى﴾

It was but natural for fear to arise in Moses (sws) upon seeing the sticks and ropes turning into snakes because until that time he had not yet seen the miracle of his staff. He thought that the contest would nevertheless be a tough one. Even though because of God's promise he was fully satisfied that he would win but when a situation becomes more complex than expected fear does arise in the heart. Thus Moses (sws) too felt scared temporarily. Since the word *خِيفَةً* is undefined, it shows that this fear was transient and little in extent.

33 ﴿قُلْنَا لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْأَعْلَىٰ﴾

In order to alleviate the fear of Moses (sws), immediate glad tidings were revealed, as stated in the verse: whatever the profound nature of their magic, he would remain dominant come what may.

34 ﴿وَأَلْقِ مَا فِي يَمِينِكَ تَلْقَفْ مَا صَنَعُوا إِنَّمَا صَنَعُوا كَيْدٌ سِحْرٍ وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاحِرُ حَيْثُ أَتَىٰ﴾

At the same time, Moses (sws) was directed to place his staff on the ground: it would gobble up the trick played by the magicians; the tricks of magicians never succeed. The real objective was to state the fact that magic can never combat the truth. However, the style adopted was to make a statement of principle: a magician never succeeds because this is a fact. Magic relates to deceiving the eye and playing with the imagination of the onlookers. It does not change reality. Moreover, the people who take up this profession are mostly the lowly sections of the society: they can fool the masses for a few days with their tricks, they have no role in the development of a society; this can never happen. On the other hand, the miracles worked by prophets of God reflect glory and grandeur. Moreover, they emanate from

32. At this, Moses felt a little scared in his heart.

33. We said: "Fear not! Certainly, it is you who shall remain dominant."

34. "And that which is in your hands place it on the ground. Whatever they have fashioned, it will swallow it. This trick they have played is a mere trick of a magician and wherever a magician may go, he does not succeed."

personalities who stand at the pinnacle of mankind; even their enemies vouch for their high character; they have a message for their addressees whose veracity is even borne witness to by their rivals. When these people pass away, they signal the end of an era. Their preaching heralds the beginning of a new chapter of history and a new world is born. Has there ever been a magician who has even contributed even slightly to any sphere of life? Here needs to be kept in mind what has been referred to earlier: the difference between magic and miracle as explained by our theologians is a useless exercise. Such immense dissimilarity cannot be gauged through logic. The decisive factor in this regard is those who see – only if they have eyes.

35.  فَالْتَقَى السَّحَرَةُ سُجَّدًا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ هَارُونَ وَمُوسَى

In other words, in accordance with the Almighty's directive, Moses (sws) placed his staff on the ground and like a serpent it started to consume all snakes. When the magicians saw this, they were bewildered. If there is even a semblance of acknowledgement of the truth left in a magician, he knows the difference between magic and miracle. The court magicians exactly had this. In verse 73 ahead, it is stated that these magicians already had an inkling that what Moses (sws) would present was not magic. Thus, they were hesitant to face him. However, they were pressurized into facing him by the representatives of the Pharaoh. Hence, they did come to encounter Moses (sws) but when they saw the miracle worked by him, their eyes were opened and they immediately fell down in prostration. Falling down in prostration in this way in those times signalled the acknowledgement of someone's mastery of a skill. However, the magicians did not merely do this, they went further and announced to the whole gathering that they had professed faith in the God of Moses (sws). One can imagine what must have happened to the Pharaoh and his courtiers after this acknowledgement and proclamation. Yet the Pharaoh was a very clever political leader. He immediately tried to turn the situation to his own advantage and in order to fool the masses, he made a fresh verbal attack depicted in the next verse.

35. So, the magicians fell down in prostration. They cried out: "We profess faith in the Lord of Moses and Aaron."

قَالَ اٰمَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ اَنْ اَدْنٰ لَكُمْ ۖ اِنَّهٗ لَكَيْدٌ ۙ الَّذِى عَلَّمَكُمُ السِّحْرَ ۚ فَلَا تُقِطَعْنَ اَيْدِيكُمْ وَاَرْجُلُكُمْ مِّنْ خِلَافٍ وَلَا تَصْلَبْنَكُمْ فِى جُذُوْعِ النَّخْلِ ۚ وَلْتَعْلَمَنَّ اَيُّنَا اَشَدُّ عَذَابًا وَّاَبْقٰى ۝۳۶

In reality, the defeat the magicians were being made to go through was very humiliating. However, the scheming mind of the Pharaoh came up with the words referred to in the verse in order to assure his supporters.

It is evident that the magicians did not merely acknowledge Moses (sws) to be a truthful person but also explicitly announced their professing faith in the Lord of Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws). Concealed in this declaration was an obvious rejection of the Pharaoh as god. This had a direct impact on his divinity and sovereignty as a king. Thus, this issue was not merely a religious one in his eyes; it was indirectly a challenge to his political authority. How could he have tolerated this audacity in his rule?

So, he cleverly rebutted the magicians by saying that in reality Moses (sws) was their mentor. He had taught them the skill of magic. In other words, all this happened with their connivance with him. His implication was that they had already mutually agreed that they would openly accept defeat in front of their mentor so that the masses were over-awed by him; ultimately, they would succeed in all their conspiracies against the rule of the Pharaoh. In reality, all these were lame excuses: the Pharaoh had been defeated by an army he himself had constituted. In order to reduce the impact of his defeat he had to make up some excuse, and this he did. He must be praised for fabricating an intelligent pretext and it may well be that he was successful in fooling many. However, the truth cannot be subdued with such deceptive measures.

As soon as the magicians were declared criminals of conspiracy, the punishment declared for them was the same that as was reserved for insurgents: their limbs were to be severed from opposite sides and they were to be publicly crucified so that an example was made out of them for everyone. The words “crucify you on trunks of palm” are meant to refer to the public

36. The Pharaoh said: “You attested to him without my permission? Indeed, he is your mentor who has taught magic to you. So, I shall have your hands and feet severed from opposite directions and crucify you on trunks of palm trees and you shall come to know whose punishment among us is more stern and more lasting.”

nature of the punishment.

Pharaoh's words "you shall come to know whose punishment among us is more stern and more lasting" imply that these magicians knew that if they did something against the will of their mentor he would punish them through their magic; thus they were pawns in the hands of Moses (sww); however, they would soon realize that the punishment given by the Pharaoh was more harsh and lasting. Here it needs to be kept in mind that in those days it was believed that if the disciple of a magician did something against his will and made him angry, then he could face a great calamity from his mentor. By keeping this notion in background, the Pharaoh warned the magicians of his own wrath.

قَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْثِرَكَ عَلَىٰ مَا جَاءَنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالَّذِي فَطَرَنَا فَاقْضِ مَا أَنْتَ قَاضٍ ۖ إِنَّا تَقْعُصِي
هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ۖ ﴿٣٧﴾

The warning sounded by the Pharaoh was very stern and he expected that he would be able to strike awe in the heart of the magicians: but then he was not facing professional magicians; in fact, righteous believers were in front of him. As soon as they heard those threatening words from the Pharaoh, they told him to do what he wanted. This is in fact the consequence of deep faith. At another instance in the Qur'ān, it is mentioned that it was these very magicians who had earnestly requested the Pharaoh to give them a prize if they succeeded. Now faith had lit up their inner-selves in such a way that except for God and the hereafter nothing had any importance in their sight. So much so, they were even prepared to sacrifice their lives in order to protect their faith.

إِنَّا أَمْنَا بِرَبِّنَا لِيَغْفِرَ لَنَا خَطِيئَتَنَا وَمَا أَكْرَهْتَنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنَ السِّحْرِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ ۖ ﴿٣٨﴾

It is clearly evident from the words "the magic to which you have compelled us" that these magicians were not prepared to

37. They replied: "We shall certainly not give you preference over those clear signs that have come before us nor over the Being Who has created us. So, do what you want to. Whatever you can do relates to this worldly life."

38. We professed faith in our Lord so that He may forgive our sins and also forgive the magic to which you have compelled us. And God alone is better and eternal."

enter into a contest with Moses (sws). They knew that whatever Moses (sws) was presenting was not magic; it was something else. However, they had to come as a result of the pressure exerted on them by the Pharaoh and his chiefs. Ultimately, the truth was made evident to them in such a manner that their hearts opened up to acknowledge and proclaim it.

The words “and God alone is better and eternal” are an answer to the Pharaoh’s assertion cited earlier. This rejoinder reflects reality and is very profound too. The implication of their reply was that the Pharaoh was trying to scare them of his harsh and abiding punishment; on the other hand, they had left everything in order to adhere to their Lord – Who is better than everything of this world and everlasting too.

39.  إِنَّهُ مِنْ يَّاتٍ رَبِّهِ مُجْرِمًا فَإِنَّ لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَىٰ

This verse and the two succeeding ones are from God. A similar insertion was seen earlier in verses 53-59. There the Almighty had added His words to the speech of Moses (sws) so that the whole discourse could be related to the circumstances of the time of the Qur’ān’ revelation.

The reason that I regard the verse under discussion and the two succeeding ones to be directly from God is that the way reward and punishment and the circumstances of the hereafter are mentioned only befits His majesty. Their style is very different from the previous verses. The word “wrongdoer” in the translation refers to a person who is disobedient to God and does not have the courtesy to repent. The words “he shall neither die nor live in it” refer to the extent and to the abiding nature of the punishment in such a profound way that it is difficult to explain them in words. Death can alleviate the greatest of punishments. However, where can a person go from a place death does not exist and its pangs attack from all sides.

40.  وَمَنْ يَّاتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَىٰ

This in contrast is a mention of the group that will succeed.

39. Indeed, whoever comes before his Lord as a wrongdoer, for him is Hell. He shall neither die nor live in it.

40. And those go before Him as believers who would have done righteous deeds also, then it is such people for whom there are high ranks.

It is evident from the style of the verse that the only faith which has weight in the sight of God is one which is accompanied by righteous deeds. Faith that is without righteous deeds has no significance. It is like an infertile tree that does not have any branches or fruits. How can a tree which has not borne any fruit in this world do so in the next world?

جَنَّتْ عَدْنٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ﴿٤١﴾

This is an explanation of the high reward these people will acquire. It is evident from this verse that this reward is not the result of false desires. Only they will be eligible for it who try to purify themselves from all types of filth whether ideological, practical or moral. The Almighty has also guided people in this Book of the pitfalls one can encounter in this cause and also informed them in it of the concessions they will obtain because of human weaknesses. Rejection of any of these things will lead to extremism in religion. However, this too must be kept in mind that those who out of their own desire have reduced the importance of deeds, whether they belong to our classical theologians or those of modern times have indeed made it easy for us to enter Paradise; yet the Qur'ān does not entertain this view in any way. The key to Paradise is nevertheless in the hands of God and He has not handed it over to the theologians. Therefore, the only way to a secure future is to protect ourselves from such false desires. The Qur'ān has called them false wishes which were harboured by the Jews and their details can be found in Sūrah al-Baqarah.

وَلَقَدْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي فَاصْرِبْ لَهُمْ طَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْرِ يَبَسًا لَا تَخَفْ دَرَكًا
وَلَا تَخْشَى ۚ ﴿٤٢﴾

The idiom ضرب الطريق means “to make way” as has been explained by al-Zamakhsharī.⁴³ However, here there is also a subtle

41. For them, will be orchards of eternal residence beneath which streams flow. They shall live in them forever. And this is the reward of those who adopt purity.

42. And We revealed to Moses: “Set off with My servants at night. Then make a dry path for them in the sea. Neither will you be in danger of being pursued nor have any fear of drowning.”

43. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 78.

reference in this expression to the staff of Moses (sws) because it had a role in “making way.” The collocation of the verb ضَرَبَ with عَصَا is quite evident.

In the sentence لَا تَخَفُ دَرَكًا وَلَا تَخْشَى the object of the verb تَخْشَى is suppressed in my opinion as a result of parallel construction. Thus, the actual sentence would be to the effect: لَا تَخَفُ دَرَكًا وَلَا تَخْشَى غَرَقًا; the implication being that Moses (sws) will neither have any fear of being captured by the Pharaoh nor any danger of drowning in the sea. Numerous examples of such suppressions can be seen in the previous *sūrahs*. I have translated this sentence accordingly.

A large part of what transpired between Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh has been suppressed here. It has been discussed in detail in the explanation of *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*. Moses (sws) had demanded from the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go with him; not only did the latter reject this demand, he increased the wave of oppression let loose on them. During this time the Almighty sent down many calamities one after the other on Egypt to awaken the Pharaoh from his slumber. However, whenever a calamity descended, he would sweet-talk Moses (sws) to pray to ward off the calamity, in which case he would allow the Israelites to go with him. Then once that calamity was warded off because of Moses’ (sws) supplication and God’s mercy, his rebelliousness would increase and he would go back on his promise. Many years passed in this situation. During this time, Moses (sws) also fully discharged his responsibility of delivering the message of God to the Pharaoh and his nation. Ultimately when the truth had been fully delivered to them, Moses (sws) was directed by God to migrate to Egypt with the Israelites.

Until then, as has been explained in *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, Moses’ (sws) demand was that the Israelites be allowed to go to him to a desert situated at a distance of three days.⁴⁴ However, since by then he had also conclusively communicated the truth to the Pharaoh and the Israelites, he was directed to migrate to that land in accordance with the established practice of God. The words of the directive “take My servants” refer to those who had accepted faith. A vast majority of them belonged to the Israelites;

44. In the opinion of my mentor, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, he wanted to take them to Makkah to carry out the rituals of animal sacrifice.

however, a small group among them also consisted of the Egyptians who had professed faith. Concomitant indications show that the magicians who had accepted faith belonged to the Egyptians and to the Israelites. The word “My servants” refers to all who had accepted faith regardless of their lineage and tribe. In this regard, the Qur’ān has also mentioned a righteous believer who belonged to the Pharaoh’s family.

The *البُحْر* referred to here is the southern gulf of the Red Sea. Moses (sws) was directed to reach its shores with all the Israelites and strike the sea water with his staff, thereby creating a dry path for them. This style also indicates the authority with which he was blessed from God that manifested itself in the form of a miracle. By waving the staff, a dry path would be created. The *alif lām* on *البُحْر* is clear evidence on where God had instructed Moses (sws) to go. Following are the details of this incident as mentioned in the Torah so that it becomes evident how the glory of God manifested itself at that instance. It is written in the Book of Exodus:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground ... Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued them. (14:15-29)

It is evident from this that this miracle was the result of a strong eastern wind. The gulf was divided into chunks of water separated by dry land.

⁴⁵ *فَاتَّبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ بِجُنُودِهِ فَغَشِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمْ*

The style found in the expression *فَغَشِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمْ* is adopted in Arabic when the horrific nature of something is beyond expression.

45. So, the Pharaoh followed him with his armies. Ultimately, they were covered by the sea with that which covered them.

It is evident from the Torah that the Pharaoh was totally cornered by the miracles shown to him. He ultimately allowed the Israelites to go with Moses (sws). However, once they departed, his opinion changed and he went in their pursuit and reached the shores of the sea with his army. Thereafter he was engulfed by its huge waves. In the book of Exodus, this incident is recorded in the following words:

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So, he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. (14:5-7)

After that, the details of their drowning are described thus:

... Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (14:26-29)

46.  وَأَضَلَّ فِرْعَوْنُ قَوْمَهُ وَمَهْدَى

This verse expresses sorrow and regret on the Pharaoh and his leadership's lack of acumen that led them all to devastation. The words *وَمَهْدَى* refer to the fact that it is the responsibility of every leader and ruler to correctly guide their nation. His status is that of a shepherd that God has deputed for the protection of a herd from among his creation. Most wretched is the shepherd who sacrifices his herd for his egotism.

46. And the Pharaoh led astray his nation; he did not show it the right path.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا اِسْرَآءِيْلُ قَدْ اَنْجَيْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ عَدُوِّكُمْ وَاَعَدْنٰكُمْ جَانِبَ الطُّورِ الْاَيْمَنِ وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّٰۤى وَالسَّلٰۤى (٥٧) كُلُوْا مِنْ طَيِّبٰتِ مَا رَزَقْنٰكُمْ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا فِىْهِ فَيَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبِىْ ۖ وَمَنْ يَّحِلَّ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِىْ فَقَدْ هَوٰى (٥٨) وَاِنِّ لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صٰلِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدٰى ۚ⁴⁷

After making them cross the sea, the Almighty reminded the Israelites of His great favours so that they could recall the great responsibility imposed on them as an obligation to these favours. At the same time, they are also informed of the fate that is destined for those who do not value favours and instead of being grateful end up as ingrates and rebellious ones. Precisely in this context with a slight change in words, this topic is brought up in Sūrah al-Baqarah. There I have explained every aspect of it in detail. Hence here I will content myself to hints only. Those who want to read these details can look up what has been written under verses 46-57 of Sūrah al-Baqarah.

The promise referred to in the words *وَاَعَدْنٰكُمْ جَانِبَ الطُّورِ الْاَيْمَنِ* is the one which the Almighty made with the Israelites through Moses of giving them the Torah. For this purpose, he had called them to this blessed side of the mount Ṭūr. It is here that Moses (sws) was made a messenger while he was returning from Madyan. Details of the way the Israelites behaved with this favour are discussed ahead.

The words *السَّلٰۤى* and *الْمَنَّٰۤى* have been explained under verse 57 of Sūrah al-Baqarah together with how the Israelites treated these favours.

The words “eat of the pure things given by Us and do not be rebellious after receiving this favour” mention the obligation they owe to these favours. The Israelites were reminded of these favours by their very existence and also through prophets of God. The Torah contains references to these. The last part cautions them that this abundance of favours should not make them arrogant and rebellious; these traits are the hallmark of the

47. O Israelites! We delivered you from your enemy and promised you a time at the blessed side of Ṭūr and sent down upon you *mann* and *salwā*: “Eat of the pure things given by Us and do not be rebellious after receiving this favour lest My wrath descend on you and he on whom My wrath descends will be ruined. And for those who repent, accept faith and do good deeds, then adhere to guidance, for them I am very Forgiving.”

Pharaoh whose fate they have just witnessed. It is further stated that such rebelliousness invites God's wrath and he who becomes its target is destroyed: from a state of honour, he descends into humiliation. They have seen with their very eyes the fate of the one who claimed to be god.

The last verse mentions the path of deliverance for those have the determination to follow these directives.
