

TALES OF THE PROPHETS

Part I

By
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Rendered into English By
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The importance which stories and anecdotes occupy in the mental training and upbringing of children is not unknown. Truths that are hard to communicate through weighty books and treatises are easily brought home to a child by means of tales and fables. There is also no easier, more effective and appealing method of teaching languages. For this reason, long series of story-books are found in different languages for the education of children. Modern writers have begun to produce such series in the Islamic countries as well, but, unfortunately, these efforts are devoid of religious spirit and are not representative of high moral and spiritual ideals. The need was, therefore, felt sorely for a new series, which, while meeting the requirements of child-psychology and the latest techniques of education of the young and the neo-literates, could also prove to be a suitable means for the development of Islamic spirit and consciousness and imparting moral and religious instruction.

Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi has compiled a series of books in the Arabic language to fulfil this need. He so adroitly employed the new methods evolved for the teaching of languages by the experts that these books have become a most convenient vehicle for the teaching of Arabic. He has also presented the incidents from the Prophets' lives and the tales associated with them so skilfully and woven into them the truths and ideals of Islam in such a wonderful manner

that according to Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, a noted writer and well-known commentator of the Quran, "a whole course of study in scholastic theology has got compiled for children in the shape of this set of books in which all the fundamentals of belief and the essential teachings of Islam have been most effectively brought in." Both Islamic faith and the Arabic language can be taught in the direct, natural way by means of these books.

These books have been received with great warmth and appreciation in the Arab world. They have been acknowledged there as unique. The Education Department of the Government of Egypt had, sometime ago, compiled a series of its own called *El-Qasas ed-Dini el-Atfal* for the education of Egyptian children. Syed Qutub, a famous scholar of Egypt who had served as one of the compilers of the series, has confessed in the foreword contributed to Maulana Nadwi's books that the present set is superior even to the books of the same category produced in the Arab countries themselves. He has said:—

"I have read a large number of books written for children including those which comprise of tales from the lives of Prophets. I have also been associated with the writing and compilation of a whole series of such books known as *El-Qasas ed-Diri el-Atfal* based entirely on the Quran. But I can say with the least hesitation that the present series are the best of them all. The reason is that in the narration of tales such

excellent comments have been offered by the author that their import and significance and the real purpose of their inclusion in the Quran has come under full light and great spiritual truths and teachings easily get impressed on the mind and heart of the reader as he goes through them."

The Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, (Lucknow) India has brought out this book in the English language so that the Islamic beliefs and doctrines like Monotheism, Apostleship and the Hereafter can be taught easily to Muslim children studying in English schools, and the coming generations of Muslims in countries, where the medium of instruction is the English language, can learn and appreciate the fundamental teachings of their faith without difficulty.

Many African and other countries where English is the language of study and instruction have been asking for such books for a long time. Indian conditions also demand that Islamic literature should be produced in the English language as quickly as possible. The Academy has, therefore, made it an important item of its programme. The present book marks the beginning of the compilation of a whole course of study on Islam and Islamics in the English language for the benefit of children.

It is hoped that well-wishers of Islam and Muslim will lend encouragement to the Academy by including these books

in the school curriculum wherever possible. This will be the most suitable way of co-operating with the Academy in the fulfilment of what is one of the most pressing needs of the day.

Our heartfelt thanks are due to Mr. Ehsanul Haque Nadwi for translating the book into English and to Dr. Mohammad Asif Kidwai for going through the manuscript and improving the translation.

M. Rabey Nadwi
Secretary

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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE KIND, THE MERCIFUL

NOAH'S ARK

1. Adam's Progeny

After Adam, Allah profusely multiplied his progeny. Thousands of men and women sprang up from him. They spread everywhere. Had Adam come back to the world and seen his children he would never have recognised them. If he were told that all the human beings existing on the earth were his children, he would have been greatly astonished. "O my Goodness," he would have said, "All of these are my descendants! So large is my progeny!"

These children of Adam built numerous towns. They had countless buildings to live in. They cultivated lands and produced crops and led a happy life.

These people followed the footprints of their progenitor. They worshipped Allah and associated no one with Him. All of them were a united body. Adam was their common father and Allah their common Creator and Sustainer.

2. Satan's Envy

But the Devil and his flock did not like this happy state of affairs. "Will men worship Allah?" they anxiously thought. "Will they be united? Will they never quarrel among themselves?" This should not be so, they decided "Will Adam's progeny go to Paradise and we to Hell? Never shall it be so," said they.

Satan had not prostrated himself before Adam as commanded by Allah and so he was deprived of Allah's favours and had to live unblessed and damned for ever. Should he not then take revenge upon Adam's Children and make them go to Hell along with him. How could he see them going to Paradise? "Of course, it must not be so, this state of things must change," he resolved.

3. Satan's Thinking

Satan decided to misguide men. He resolved to mislead them towards idolatry so that they may be cast in Hell and deprived of Paradise for ever. He knew that Allah forgives, if He so wills, all sins except those of polytheism and idolatry. To lead men towards

these unholy practices was, therefore, the best way of pushing them into Hell for ever.

But, how was it to be brought about? In what way could he lead them to Hell? Men were already worshipping Allah and no one besides Him. If the Devil had gone to them and said, "O men! worship idols and not Allah," they would have railed at him and beaten him up. "Allah forbid!" they would have exclaimed, "Shall we assign partners to Allah and worship idols? Be off! Thou art none but the damned devil, the malicious Satan."

4. Satan's Trick

Satan thought and thought till he found a way to pollute the human mind.

There had been some God-fearing men who worshipped Allah devoutly and uttered His praises day and night. They had great love for God and, in turn, were loved by Him very much. Their fellowmen also had great love and respect for them. Satan was aware of it.

These godly men had left the world for their heavenly abode. Satan went to the people and

spoke to them about these blessed souls. "What type of men were such and such of you?" he asked. "May Allah bless them," they replied, "Great souls and God's favourites, their prayers were answered and they were granted what they asked for."

5. Portraits of Holy Men

"Do you feel sad that they are no more? Do you miss them?" Satan enquired. "Of course," the people replied. "Do you have a longing to see them?" he asked again. "A very strong one," the answer came. "Then, why do you not give yourselves the pleasure of seeing them every day?" he said. "But how? They have passed away," the people replied. "Why?" said the Satan, "Make their images and then you can see them every morning."

The idea caught the fancy of the people. They made images of the departed divines and remembered them reverently and recalled their lives as they saw the images.

6. From Portraits to Statues

In course of time the people passed on from portraits to statues. They made numberless

statues of the divines and installed them in their homes and mosques.

But they still worshipped Allah and associated no partners with Him. They took the statues for nothing more than what they actually were. They knew that they were mere stones which could do no good or harm to anybody.

As time passed on they began to consider them auspicious monuments, sources of good fortune: to be held in high esteem, statues of righteous ones as they were. These statues went on increasing in number and gaining in reputation. As soon as some holy person among them passed away they carved his statue and called it after his name.

7. From Statues to Idols

This generation came to its end in due course. Its descendants had seen their fathers holding the statues in great respect and seeking blessings from them. They had seen them kissing the images, touching them with respect and making their petitions to Allah in front of them. They had also seen them occasionally, bending their

heads or prostrating themselves on the ground before them.

The sons outdid the fathers; they began to prostrate themselves before them in adoration; they prayed to them for their needs and made sacrifices in their names. In a nutshell, they began to worship them out and out.

Thus, these idols gradually became gods and began to be worshipped by the people in place of a single Allah. There were a great number of them, 'Ud and Su'a, Yaghuth and Ya'uq, and so on and so forth.

8. Allah's Anger

Allah was highly displeased with them for their transgression and decreed for them a severe punishment. Did He bring them to life and nourish them so that they may turn away from Him? They walked on Allah's earth and disobeyed Him, ate His bread and ascribed partners to Him! Was it not flagrant ingratitude?

These men, thereupon, became the object of Allah's wrath. He withheld rain from them and put them to hardship. Their crops began to fail

and the birth rate among them fell down. But this still did not set them right. They had not the good sense to repent.

9. The Apostle

Allah then decided to raise up a man, one of their own kind, to be His Messenger among them. One who could speak to them in their own tongue. It is not given to everyone to converse with the Sovereign Lord. It becomes Him not to issue His commands to everyone individually, nor has everybody the strength to receive them. Do the emperors communicate their edicts personally to each one of their subjects? They cannot do so although they are mere mortals like any other human being and can be seen and heard by everyone. How, then, can everybody be spoken to by Allah who cannot be seen and heard by His servants. This can be done only through the agency of someone whom He pleases to raise up as His Messenger.

Thus it was that Allah decided to raise up an Apostle among men who could talk to them freely and act as a Warner among them.

10. A Human Being or an Angel?

Allah also decided that the Apostle should be a mere mortal like all other men so that they could know him intimately and follow him as their leader. If the Prophet was to be an angel they naturally would have said, "What relation do we bear to him? He is an angel and we are human. We feel hunger and thirst, and need food and drink; we have our children to bring up; we become sick and we die. How, then, can we serve Allah?"

They would have argued with the Prophet, "You have no needs; you know neither hunger nor thirst; you have neither children nor a family; you have no sickness, and you do not die; you are free from all human worries and problems. So you can, as you do, serve Allah devotedly and sing His praises night and day. But how can we?"

But it could not be like that if the Prophet was a human being. He could assure them at once by telling them: "I also feel hunger and thirst and need food and drink like you. I also have my children and family to look after; I fall sick and one day I, too, will die. Nevertheless, I

obey Allah and recite His praises. If I can do so, why can't you?" This would convince the people and they would have no excuse for not listening to him.

11. Noah, The Prophet

Allah decided to send down Noah as His Apostle to mankind. There lived many rich and powerful men among the people in whom he was raised up. But it was Noah whom Allah chose for Apostleship for He knew best who was most suited for the task and could bear the burden of His mission and carry out his duties better than the rest.

Noah was a noble and righteous man. He was wise and affable, affectionate and sincere, honest and trustworthy. So Allah chose him for Apostleship and inspired him with these words, "Warn thy people before there comes to them a grievous penalty." And he got up among the people to declare, "O my people, I am to you a Warner, plain and simple."

12. People's Reply

On hearing Noah say that he was a plain and simple Warner to them from God, the people

were shocked. "Oh" they exclaimed, "Since when has he become a Prophet? Till yesterday he was one of us and today he declares that he is an Apostle of God."

Noah's friends said, "He was our playmate during the childhood days. Almost everyday he sat and chatted with us. When was it that the mantle of Apostleship fell upon him, in the darkness of the night or in the light of the day?"

The rich and the haughty ones said, "Did Allah have nobody else for the purpose? Were all of us dead that He chose a poor man like him out of the whole tribe?"

The ignorant and the foolish said, "He is no more than a mortal like ourselves. If Allah had desired to send down a Messenger He must have chosen an angel." "Never have we heard of such a thing, as he says, to have happened to our ancestors of old," they added.

Some, again, explained, "Noah wants to achieve chieftainship and fame by means of it."

13. Face to Face

People thought idol-worship to be the most correct thing to do. They supposed that the non-idolaters were in the wrong, that they had gone astray. "Our fathers worshipped idols," they remarked, "So why should we not, and why should not Noah too?"

But Noah thought otherwise. He believed that idolatry was a great mistake, a gross transgression and an act of lunacy. The ancestors who worshipped idols were wrong and ignorant. He held that Adam, their progenitor, was not an idolater; he worshipped no one besides Allah. Those of their forefathers, who had taken up idols in place of Allah—who had created and endowed them with life—were very foolish to have done so.

So he called out to them, "O my people, worship Allah, ye have no other God but Him. I fear for you the punishment of a dreadful day." "Ah," the leaders of his community exclaimed, "We see that you have gone off your head!"

Noah replied, "O my people, there is nothing wrong with me. On the contrary, I am an Apostle from the Lord, the Cherisher of the Worlds. I but fulfil the mission of my Lord. Sincere is my advice to you, and I know from Allah something that you know not."

14. "It is the Meanest That Follow Thee"

Noah tried his best to persuade the people to have faith in him and to accept his advice that they should worship Allah alone and give up the idols. But only a few listened to him. These were drawn from men who had to work hard for their living and ate only what they lawfully earned.

As for the rich and the wealthy their arrogance prevented them from joining his followers. Their wealth and children came in the way of their thinking about the Hereafter. "We are the noble born," they said, "and they are mean." "Shall we believe in thee when it is only the meanest that follow thee?" they said to Noah when he approached them again.

They told Noah to drive the poor and the meek ones away. But he declined and said,

“I am not to drive away those who believe. My position is not that of a King. I have been sent only to warn openly and plainly.”

Noah knew that the poor and the meek were faithful and sincere in their belief. Allah would surely be angry if he drove them away, and then nobody would help him against Allah. “O my people,” he replied to the haughty critics, “Who will help me against Allah if I drive them away?”

15. The Argument of the Rich.

The rich people sometimes said that to what Noah invited them was neither right nor good. So did they argue: “It is our experience that whenever there is an addition to the good things of life we are always the first to enjoy it. We are the first to get dainty foods and fancy dresses. The rest are merely the beaters of our track. Nothing good or worthwhile comes in the town without our having the lion’s share of it. Had this religion been something really nice it must have reached us before reaching the other people and they would never have stolen a march over us in this matter.”

16. Noah Delivers a Sermon

Noah, however, was not dismayed. He kept on admonishing them hopefully. He tried his level best and did everything that was possible. In the end he warned them. "O my people," he said, "I am to you a Warner. My warning is plain and simple, that you should worship Allah, fear Him and obey me, so that He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for a stated term. When the term fixed by Allah expires it cannot be extended, if ye only knew."

It has already been mentioned that Allah had held back rains from them. He was displeased with them. The agricultural crops had become poor and birth-rate had fallen low. So, Noah informed them: "O my people, if you accept the faith Allah will be pleased with you and the punishment will end. He will send down the rain upon you and cause your crops and children to prosper."

Noah reminded them of Allah. "Have you forgotten Allah?" he asked, "Do you not know Him? His signs are all around you; do you not see them? The earth and the sky, the sun and

the moon: who is it that created the heavens and set the brilliant moon in them, and the blazing sun like a lamp? Who is it that brought you to life and spread the earth to serve as a floor for you?"

But Noah's tribe did not understand; they had not the good sense to believe. They thrust their fingers in their ears whenever he preached to them and how can one follow when one refuses to listen?

17. Noah Cries out to Allah

Noah had left no stone unturned. He had been striving hard for a long, long time. He had been living among them for fifty short of a thousand years, calling them to Allah. But the people still paid no heed to him. They did not give up idolatry and set their faces against Allah.

How long could Noah wait? How long could he endure the world being corrupted and the stones worshipped? He could not indefinitely forbear with men who nourished themselves with Allah's provisions and yet worshipped others than Him. Would He not be angry with this state of

affairs? Noah had already borne much more than anyone could ever be expected to bear. He had put up with all the injustices of paganish disbelief for as many as nine hundred and fifty years.

It was now revealed to him by Allah: "Not one of your folk will believe save those who have accepted the faith already." Noah's people themselves had said to him after he had been preaching to them for all those long years. "O Noah, you have argued and multiplied your arguments with us; now bring upon us the punishment with which you threaten us if you are of the truthful." Noah now had grown very angry—angry for Allah's sake; he had become thoroughly disgusted with his people. He prayed to Allah: "O Allah! These unbelievers do not deserve leniency any more; destroy them to the last."

18. The Ark

Allah listened to his prayer and decided to destroy them by drowning. Noah and his followers were, of course, to be saved. Allah commanded him to build a large ark and, promptly, he took up the work.

To see him working at it was a sport to the unbelievers. "What is it, O Noah?" they would scoff at him. "Since when have you become a carpenter? We had told you to part company with the lowly ones, but you did not listen to us. You kept company with the carpenters and blacksmiths and now you have become one of them!"

Sometimes they would ridicule him thus: "On what will the ark sail, O Noah—on the sandy plains? Or will it climb up the hills? All that you do is odd! The sea is too far away from here. Will the Jinn drag the ark to it or the oxen?"

Noah heard patiently all this nonsense and ignored it. He had borne much more already. Sometimes he would say to them. "You may mock at us, but we will go on building the ark in spite of you."

19. The Deluge

Allah's commandment was carried out and, then, there was no recourse but to Allah? People wanted a refuge? But where did it lie! Not a patch of earth was left without water! It

rained and rained as if the sky had turned into a sieve. The earth too opened up its water-reservoirs. In fine, the water rose and rose till it surrounded the people from all sides.

Allah had commanded Noah by inspiration, "Take the believers among your people and of your family in the Ark with you." He had also inspired him to take a pair, a male and a female, of each kind of bird and animal with him. For the flood had engulfed the world from which neither man nor beast could escape.

Noah did as he was commanded. He took with him on the Ark those who believed among his people and his family and a pair of each kind of bird and animal.

The Ark floated with its occupants on the high waves towering up like the mountains. The people had climbed over the hillocks and high places to save themselves from Allah's punishment. But no running away from the punishment was there except running back to God Himself!

20. Noah's Son

Among the unbelievers was one of Noah's

own son. Seeing him marooned in the flood, Noah called out to him, "O my son come with us in the Ark and be not with the unbelievers." "I will betake myself to some mountain," the son replied. "It will save me from the flood." Noah said, "Today nothing can save anyone from the wrath of Allah except those on whom He hath mercy." And the waves came in between Noah and his son and the son was among those who were swept away and drowned.

Noah naturally was very sad for his son. He wanted his son to be saved from the fire of Hell in the Hereafter, if he could not be rescued from the water of the flood. No doubt, the fire of the Hell is far more dreadful a thing than the water of the flood and the torture of the Hereafter is, really, much too severe.

Moreover, Allah had promised him to spare his household. His promise, surely, is true. He, therefore, tried to intercede with Allah for the sake of his son.

21. "He is not of thy family"

So, Noah called out to his Lord and said, "Surely, my son is of my family and Your promise

is true. You are more just than all the judges of the world."

But Allah does not see kinship; He sees only one's deeds. Associating partners with Allah being the gravest of all misdeeds, He does not accept intercession on behalf of those who are guilty of it.

Allah, then, spoke to him thus, "O Noah, he is not of your family for his conduct is of the unrighteous. So ask not of Me for that of which you have no knowledge. I give thee counsel, so that ye may not be among the ignorant."

Noah received the admonition with humility and begged for Divine forgiveness. He offered penitence. "O may Lord," said he, "I do seek refuge with Thee lest I ask Thee for that of which I have no knowledge. And unless Thou forgivest me and hath mercy on me I will verily be among the lost."

22. After the Deluge

Allah's will having been fulfilled and the non-believers drowned to death, the sky cleared

up, the rain ceased and the water receded or was absorbed into the earth.

The Ark came to a halt upon the mount of Judi and the word went forth, "Away with those who do wrong." "O Noah," again the Word of God came, "come down from the Ark with peace from Us." Noah and the others in the Ark got down from it and began to walk on the land in peace and safety. The unbelievers among Noah's community were wiped out, one and all, and neither the sky shed a tear for them nor the earth.

Allah now bestowed prosperity and abundance on Noah's children. They spread over the earth and filled it, here, there and everywhere. So much did they prosper that prophets and kings were born among them.

Peace be on Noah and salutations to him.

THE SECOND TALE

2. THE TEMPEST

1. After Noah

After Noah, Allah bestowed abundance and prosperity on his children and they spread far and wide. Out of them rose up a community called by the name of Ad. They were a strong and healthy people; their bodies were as if of iron. They always got the better of the others. The rest of mankind was inferior to them in strength as well as in wealth. So everyone feared the Ad and the Ad feared on one.

Allah had blessed them with abundance in all their possessions; their valleys were rich with camels and sheep. When their cattle issued forth into the meadows they made a beautiful sight. Vast plains abounded with companies of horses which presented a glorious spectacle as they ambled towards the battlefields. Their houses were full of children. How lovely did they look when they came out of their homes at day-break

laughing and playing! The land of the Ad was beautiful as well as fertile. It contained gardens, fruit orchards and delightful springs.

2. The Ad's Ingratitude

But the Ad were not grateful to Allah for His bounties. They had drawn no lessons from the terrible calamity of the Deluge whose story they had heard from their forefathers and the ravages of which could be seen on the earth. They cared not to think why had the Deluge been sent to Noah's people and to profit by the lesson.

Like Noah's people they also began to practise idolatry. They carved idols out of stones with their own hands and then bowed down to them in adoration, made their supplications and offered sacrifices to them.

They blindly followed in the foot-steps of Noah's people. Their wisdom did not hold them back from idolatry nor did it show them the right path. Wise as they were in worldly affairs, they were extremely foolish where faith was concerned.

3. Height of Transgression

The strength and prosperity of the Ad had become for them a scourge in disguise. They were devoid of faith in Allah and the Hereafter and, when that was the case, what was there to stop them from being tyrannical and unjust? Why would they not oppress the weak when they thought that there was no one greater and mightier than themselves and there dwelt no fear of Divine punishment or retribution in their hearts?

They were very much like the beasts among which the big oppress the small, and the strong devour the weak. When aroused with anger they behaved like an enraged elephant which crushes down and destroys everything that comes in its way. In war they plundered the fields and slaughtered the children. As they entered some country they played havoc with it and made noblest of its people the meanest. The poor and the weak lived in constant terror and were always eager to run away from them. Their power and strength had proved to be a great curse for themselves as well as for others. And this, indeed, is the case with all those who have not faith in Allah and the Hereafter.

4. Building Mania

The Ad seemed to have no other object in life than the pursuit of sensuous pleasures and construction of huge mansions. They competed tirelessly with each other in these respects. Every one tried to build a palace higher and bigger than everyone else. They spent their money recklessly on bricks and mortar. No empty space ever came to their sight upon which they did not build a palatial building as if they were to live in it for ever and had never to die. They built mansions after mansions without need or purpose while the bulk of the people went naked and hungry. Their castles often remained vacant while the poor among them did not have a proper roof over their heads. Any one who saw them and their castles and their manner of living would have felt that they had absolutely no faith in the life to come.

5. The Prophet Hud

Allah, by His grace, willed to send down a Prophet to the Ad. He does not like infidelity on the part of His slaves nor is He pleased with corruption reigning supreme on the earth.

The Ad made use of their intellects only in such matters as eating, drinking, entertainment and architecture. Their minds had become perverted. They functioned very well where the worldly affairs were concerned but when it came to religion they got suddenly stupified.

That was why Allah decided to raise up a Prophet among them, who may reform them and lead them back to Him. It was also His wish that the Prophet should be one of them whom they knew thoroughly, and whose speech they understood without difficulty.

Hud, peace be on him, was to be the Prophet. He came from a distinguished family of the Ad and had been brought up to be wise and righteous.

6. Hud Proclaims the Truth

Hud rose up among his people to give them the Divine Call. "O my people," he said, "Worship Allah; you have no other God but Him. O my people, on what account do you

"worship the stones and not the One who created you and gave you life. O my people, the idols are nothing but the stones you had carved yesterday; how can they become gods today that you worship them? It is none but Allah who created you, gave you life and sustained you. It is He that blessed you with wealth and children, granted abundance to your crops and gave you your mental and physical powers so that you have become today the successors and representatives of the Noah's tribe. These favour and gifts of Allah imply that you worship none but Him. Is it not that a dog to which you throw a bone follows you like a slave? Have you ever seen a dog parting with his master and following somebody else? Leave alone the dog, have you ever seen any animal worshipping a stone or bowing down before an idol? Is man, then, more degraded and mean than an animal? Or is it the reverse of it?"

7. People's Reply

The people who were engrossed in the pleasures of life, in eating and drinking and merry making and had become content with this

life of the world felt very cross at Hud's proclamation. In wonder they asked one another: "What does Hud say? What does he want? We could make nothing of his speech." "Only a fool or a knave!" was the judgement they passed.

The nobility of the people remarked when Hud approached it again: "Ah! we see you are an imbecile and we are sure you are also a liar." "O my people," Hud replied, "I am no imbecile, but an Apostle from the Lord, the Cherisher of the Worlds. I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission. I am to you a sincere and truthful adviser."

8. More Preaching

Hud did not cease to admonish people and to preach to them kindness, patience and wisdom. "O my people," he urged, "Till yesterday, I was your brother and one of your friends. Do you not know me? O my brethren! What are you afraid of and why do you run away from me? I will not, in the least, reduce your wealth. O my people! I ask from you no reward for my services; my reward is solely with Him who created me. My people! what fear holds you back from believing in

"Allah. Upon my word, you will lose none of your wealth and riches if you accept this belief. On the other hand, He will bestow abundance on your wealth and possessions and increase your strength and power."

"Well, you wonder at my Apostleship. But, why? Do you expect Allah to talk directly to each and every person? Indeed, that can not be. He does not address everyone individually to say, 'Do this and don't do that.' To every nation He sends down a man belonging to it through whom He speaks. For sure, He has sent me down to speak to you and to admonish you. Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own tribe?"

9. Hud's Perseverance and Trust in Allah

The Ad did not know what to say to Hud. They had no answer. In their confusion they said, "Our gods are very angry with you. Some disease has affected your mind and, no doubt, some calamity has been inflicted on you by our gods." Hud at first laughed and then he said very plainly, "Your gods, these idols! They

are but stones that can do no good or harm to anyone. They can neither speak nor hear nor see. No power for gain or loss do they have in their hands." Hud went on in anger: "They do not have even as much power to do good or harm as you have. You are men and possess the ability of moving about, speaking, hearing and seeing. But even you can do me no harm or good. I have no faith in your gods and I do not fear them at all. I declare myself free from the sin of ascribing partners to Allah. And I do not fear you as well, so, you may conspire against me as you please. I put my trust in Allah, the Lord of both you and me. All and everything rests with Him and lies in His hand; even a leaf does not fall down from a tree but by His will."

10. Stubborn Obstinacy

But, alas! all these speeches fell on deaf ears. They failed to move their hearts. The Ad did not accept the faith. Hud's arguments and admonitions were lost upon them. "O Hud," they said, "You have no sign or proof with you. We are not prepared to leave our long cherished gods because of your strange

sermons. Do we abandon the gods which our forefathers worshipped only for a tale of some teller. Never! never can it be!"

"O Hud," they said further, "You do not believe in our gods nor do you fear them. We also do not believe in or fear your God, nor are we afraid of His punishment about which you talk so often. Bring down the punishment now; we are waiting for it. Where is it? And when would it come?" "The knowledge," Hud replied, "of when will it come is only with Allah. I am but a plain Warner." "Well," they said, "We are looking for the punishment and are very eager to see it." Hud was greatly astonished at their blasphemy and very much saddened by their stupidity.

11. The Irony of Fate

It was the time when the Ad were in a great need of rain. Every day they scanned the sky but could see no patch of cloud in it.

Then one day they saw a dark heavy cloud moving towards them; and, of course, they felt very happy. They cried out, "Here are the clouds! here are the clouds—to give us the rain!

to give us the rain !” They danced with joy and hailed one another. “The rain-cloud! the rain-cloud!” they said.

But Hud knew that the cloud was an irony of fate. It was bringing not rain but punishment. So he made them know. “This cloud is not of Allah’s grace; nay, it is a wind loaded with dreadful recompense.”

12. The Punishment

And so it came to be. There blew such a furious wind as the people had never seen or heard of in their lives. It raged like a terrible storm, and what a mighty devastation did it cause! It uprooted trees, pulled down houses and swept away the cattle.

The sand of the desert flew up to the sky and hung there like a blanket causing darkness everywhere so that nothing could be seen. The people were filled with terror. They ran into their houses and shut the doors upon themselves.

The children clang to their mothers and the men to the walls of the innermost cells of their homes. The children cried, the women

screamed and men called out as loud as they could for help. But wherefrom the help! Destiny seemed to shout back to them: "This day nothing can save you from the Will of Allah." The horrible calamity continued for eight days and seven nights. When it came to an end there was nothing to be seen anywhere but death and destruction. The entire population had been wiped out. Dead bodies of men lay on the ground like uprooted palm trees.

What a strange and awe-inspiring scene it was! People lay dead and vultures preyed on them; houses had turned into ruins and became the haunts of the owls.

Hud and the believers were saved from the clutches of death due to their faith. The Ad were destroyed because of their infidelity and arrogance.

"Ah! behold! the Ad rejected their Lord and Cherisher. Ah! behold! Removed from sight were 'Ad, the people of Hud"

(Quran: 11: 60)

3. THAMUD'S SHE-CAMEL

1. After the 'Ad

Thamud succeeded the 'Ad as the 'Ad had succeeded the community of Noah. They, too, followed in the footsteps of the 'Ad as the 'Ad had followed in the footsteps of Noah's tribe.

Thamud's land was also rich and beautiful, full of lovely groves and orchards, with sparkling streams flowing under them. The Thamud were not at all behind the 'Ad in their fondness for magnificent buildings, in prosperity and in the richness of their crops and the abundance of fruit.

They even excelled the 'Ad in ingenuity and skill. They designed spacious and lovely houses out of the rocky mountains and made miraculous carvings on stones. In their hands the stone had become soft and docile as if it was wax. Anyone who visited their town was struck with

wonder. He saw huge palaces jutting out of the earth like tiny mountains, as if they had been built by the *jinn*. On the walls of the palaces there were carved such beautiful patterns of flowers that it seemed that the flowers were real and had been brought to life by the spring. Allah, indeed, had showered upon them the bounties of the heavens and the earth. He had opened the doors of His grace upon them. The sky was generous to them with its rain, the earth with its crops and grains, and the gardens with their fruits and flowers. They had abundance of food and enjoyed long spans of life by the grace of Allah.

2. Thamud's Thanklessness

But, what a pity! All the Divine gifts and bounties could not teach them to be grateful to Allah and to worship Him. Rather, these led them to arrogance and infidelity. The Thamud forgot Allah and became vainglorious. "Is there anybody superior to and stronger than us?" they boastfully asked.

They felt as if they had never to die. They believed that nothing could take away from them their palaces and orchards and death could

not enter their mountain palaces.

They supposed that Noah's tribe was drowned because it lived in the valley and the 'Ad were destroyed by the storm because they had made their homes in the plains. But, since they had acted wisely and built their palaces in the mountains they were secure against death and destruction.

3. Idolatry

Bad enough as it was, they did not stop at it. Going a step ahead, they turned the stones into idols and started worshipping them in the same way as the Noah's tribe and the 'Ad had done. Allah, by His Grace, had given them mastery over stone but in their foolishness they made themselves slaves of it. He had made them honourable and blessed them with all sorts of comforts and conveniences, but they with their own hands had debased themselves, and, with it, they had debased the very genus of mankind. Allah, indeed does not do the least injustice to men; it is men who are unjust to themselves.

The Thamud debased themselves and fell

prostrate before the very stones they had carved with their own hands. Do the mighty worship the weak? Should the masters kneel down before the slaves? But the Thamud had forgotten Allah and so they had forgotten themselves too. They had wilfully neglected the worship of Allah, so Allah made them lowly enough to fall to worship of stones.

4. Saleh, the Prophet

Allah decided to send down a messenger to the Thamud as He had done to Noah's people and to the Ad. In His mercy He does not want mankind to turn away from Him, nor does He like to see corruption on the earth.

Saleh, the Divine Messenger, belonged to the community of the Thamud. He was of noble birth and had been brought up in an atmosphere of wisdom and righteousness. From his childhood he was so very intelligent that people used to point him out when they saw him in the way and say: "Here is Saleh! Here is Saleh!"

They had laid great hopes in him. "Soon he will hold a high position", they would say

among themselves. They had expected that Saleh would one day be one of the richest and most respected members of the community with a palatial building and gardens all around it to live in.

His father, too, had dreamt the same dreams. He, too, had hoped that his son, by his skill and industry, would earn great riches and become famous in the community. When Saleh will go out on his horse with body-guards behind him, people will salute him and talk among themselves thus : "Do you know him? He is the son of so and so. What a lucky man is his father to have such a son!" How happy would it make him to hear them say so.

But Allah had destined something else. He had destined for him the honour of Apostleship, to make him His messenger towards his people, so that he might take them out from darkness to light. Can there be an honour greater than this?

5. Saleh Preaches

Saleh stood up among his people to give them the Divine call : "O my people", said

he, "Worship Allah ; you have no other God but Him."

The rich members of the community, as is the rule everywhere, were engaged in the pleasures of life, eating, drinking and playing and whiling away their time to no purpose. They paid religious homage to idols and believed in no other God except them. Saleh's call, naturally, made them very angry. They haughtily inquired, "Who is he ?" "He is Saleh," their attendants told them. "What does he say ?" they asked. "He says," the attendants replied, "Worship Allah because there is no other God besides Him. It is Allah who will bring you back to life after death and reward or punish you according to your deeds on the earth. He says that he is the Prophet of Allah raised up among us to serve as His Messenger."

The wealthy lords laughed when they heard it and remarked, "Poor fellow ! could he be a Prophet ? He possesses no castle and no garden, how can he then be a Prophet ?"

6. The Propaganda of the Rich

But the rich people saw that men were

gathering around Saleh and feared that it could be dangerous to their power. They, as such, launched a vigorous propaganda against Saleh among the common folk. "O men," they said, "This man is no more than one like yourselves ; he eats what you eat and drinks what you drink. If you obey but a man like yourselves it is certain that you will be lost."

"Does he not promise," they said, "that when you die and return to the dust you shall be raised again ? Far, very far from truth is what he promises. There is nothing beyond our life in this world ; we live and we will die and shall never be brought back to life again. He invents a lie against God, but, we are not the men to believe him."

7. Hopes Mislaid

In fine, people, on the whole did not believe Saleh nor did they accept the faith. He preached and admonished them again and again and tried his utmost to dissuade them from idol-worship. But, when he preached to them they said, "O dear Saleh, what has become of you, so worthy and reasonable, so

promising and intelligent you were till yesterday. We had laid great hopes in you and thought that soon you would rise to be one of our greatest and most honourable men. But, alas, all our hopes have come to nothing. Your friends and childhood playmates who were behind you in intelligence have become wealthy and honourable while you, Saleh, have walked the way to poverty.

“Pity be on your father. No joy has come to him from you. And your poor mother ! All her pains have come to nothing.”

Saleh had to hear all this. His people laughed and scoffed at him. They used to remark as he passed by them : “May God have mercy upon Saleh’s father ; his son has ruined himself.”

8. Saleh’s Goodwill and Sincerity

But Saleh did not cease to have goodwill for his people. He continued to invite them towards Allah with kindness and wisdom. “O my brethren,” he would say to them, “So you think you are going to live here in this world for ever, residing in these beautiful palaces of

yours roaming about in the gardens along the streams and partaking of their fruit and constructing huge mansions by cutting the mountains ?”

“If it were so, why did your fathers and grandfathers not live for ever ? Why did they die ? My dear brethern, they too, had their castles, gardens and streams. They too, had built houses in the rocks and lived in them.”

“But all these did not save them from death ; they did not stand them in good stead when the appointed time came. The angel of death had no difficulty in making his way to them. You too will die in the same manner and nothing will keep death away from you. Then you will have to answer about all these bounties.”

9. ‘I Seek from You No Reward For It’

“O my brethren,” Saleh would go on, “Why do you run away from me ? What are you afraid of ? I will not deprive you of your wealth. I only offer you advice and pass on to you the message of my Lord. No reward do I seek from you for it ; my reward is with the

Lord of the Worlds. Then, my dear brethren why do you not believe me when I am nothing but a friend and well-wisher? Instead, you believe in those who are cruel to you and who usurp your wealth and possessions, the wicked men who practise foul deeds and make the world more polluted, what to speak of reforming it."

The people were at a loss to give a suitable reply. "You are one of those who are bewitched!" they would simply say in their bewilderment. "You are no more than a mere mortal like ourselves. Show us some proof if you tell the truth."

10. The She-Camel

"What proof do you want?" Saleh enquired from them. "If you are true," they said, "Produce a pregnant she-camel out of this mountain for us to see."

What an odd demand it really was! They knew that the camels could not be given birth to but by a she-camel. They were not begotten by rocks and mountains. So they were sure that Saleh would be put off his feet by the request and they would thus get the upper hand.

But Saleh had too strong a faith in the Lord to be distracted. He was convinced that Allah was the Almighty Creator, the All-Powerful Being. Each and every thing lay in His Hand.

He, therefore, begged to Him for the sign ; and lo ! there happened the impossible. A pregnant she-camel came out of the rocky mountain and gave birth to a baby camel before their eyes.

The people were struck with amazement and fear. But, what was even more amazing was that they did not still accept the faith with the exception of a solitary individual.

11. By Turns

“This is the she-camel created by Allah,” Saleh said. “It is one of His signs. You asked for it and He has shown it, by His Might and Power, for your benefit. Now treat her with respect and do no harm to her, or you shall be seized by a swift penalty.”

“She will take her food and drink from Allah’s earth on which she will wander. You will not have to provide for her maintenance.

God's earth has plenty of nourishment for her."

This she-camel, however, was a unique animal. She was so huge and strong-looking that the other cattle got frightened on seeing her and ran away. Whenever she came to the watering place to quench her thirst the cattle which were there fled away in fright. When Saleh came to know of it he made the following proposal to the people. "Let us fix separate days for the she-camel and your cattle to come to the watering place," he said. "One day may be reserved for her and the next for your cattle. In this way they all will be able to drink the water on their turn and there will be not trouble."

And so was it settled. The she-camel on its turn went to the watering place to quench her thirst and the other cattle on their turn.

12. Open Transgression

But the pride of the Thamud was injured by it and they felt that they had been insulted. They made up their minds to break the arrangement. "Why should not our cattle go to the

watering place every day ?” They resolved to get rid of her.

Saleh had clearly warned them against doing any harm to the animal, but they did not take heed of the warning. “Who will kill the she-camel ?” They conferred among themselves “I” a man stood up and declared. “I, too,” said another.

The two ill-fated men went and lay in wait for her. When the she-camel came they killed her with their arrows.

13. Plot to Murder Saleh

When Saleh came to know that the she-camel had been killed he became very sad. He knew by revelation from Allah that Divine punishment was now ready to strike his people. “Make yourselves merry in your homes for three days then there will be your doom. Here is a promise which will never turn out to be false,” Saleh informed his people. In the city of Saleh there lived nine men who did great mischief and spread corruption on the earth. They swore that they would assassinate Saleh and his band of followers at the dead of night

without telling anyone about it and pretend ignorance when the case would come up for enquiry. "We will say that we know nothing about the matter," they resolved among themselves.

14. The Punishment

But Allah let them do no harm to Saleh and his followers. It was neither before nor after the third day, as Saleh had informed, that the terrible punishment came upon them. At the first break of the day, they heard a strange sound and then there was a mighty earthquake—a loud, piercing sound that rent the hearts to pieces and a violent, fearful earthquake that razed the mountain fortresses to the ground. What a dreadful day, indeed, it was for the Thamud.

The people, one and all, with the sole exception of Saleh and his followers were dead and the city was reduced to a heap of ruins. Saleh and his followers abandoned the ruined city and moved away. What could they do there?

When he was departing from the city, Saleh looked at the dead bodies of his people that

lay everywhere and said sorrowfully, "O my people, I tendered to you good advice, but you listened not to those who wished you well."

Nothing can be seen there today except vacant, dilapidated fortresses and ruined wells and springs—a ghost of a town where not a soul breathes.

Once, the Last of the Prophets, Prophet Mohammad, peace be on him, happened to pass by the ruins of Thamud while on his way to Syria. On seeing them he remarked to his companions, "Do not enter the dwellings of those who did injustice to themselves lest you may be seized with fear and start crying at the thought of meeting the same fate as they did."

"Ah ! behold ! for the Thamud rejected their Lord and Cherisher. Ah ! behold ! Removed from sight were the Thamud."

(Quran 11 : 68)

4. WHO BROKE THE IDOLS?

1. Idol Merchant

Long, long ago, in a town, there lived a very famous man, Azar by name. His profession was to carve idols and sell them.

In that town there was a big house in which the idols were kept. The people of the town worshipped the idols and bowed their heads in adoration before them. Azar, too did the same. He, also, was worshipper of idols.

2. Azar's Son

Azar had a son who was a very pious and intelligent boy. His name was Ibrahim. When he saw people bowing down before the idols and worshipping them it seemed to him to be very strange. He knew that the idols were mere stones which could neither speak nor hear nor do any harm or good to any one. He

saw that flies sat on them and they could not even drive them away. The mice ate the food which was offered to them and they could do nothing about it. "Why are such powerless things, mere stones as they are, worshipped?" Ibrahim wondered. "Why do people bow their heads before them and make petitions to them?"

3. Ibrahim's Advice

Ibrahim often used to enquire from his father, "O my father, why do you worship these idols? Why do you bow your head and prostrate yourself before them? Why do you supplicate to them? Is it not a fact that they do neither speak nor hear nor can they eat or drink or do any harm or good to anybody? Why do you then offer them food and drink? Why do you take them as your gods?"

It made Azar very angry to hear his son talk like that. Ibrahim's words did not touch his mind or heart. He scolded him and sent him away.

Ibrahim then tried to reason with the other people of his community, but they too got

angry and did not understand his talk or take his advice.

Ibrahim now made up his mind to give a practical lesson to them by breaking up the idols in their absence and thus making them realize how powerless they were. "Then they will understand," he said to himself.

4. The Idols are Broken

It was a festival day and the people were very happy. All the men with their children had gone out to celebrate the festival. As Ibrahim's father was about to leave he enquired from his son, "Are you not coming with us?" "I am not feeling well," Ibrahim replied. Thus he managed to stay back while everyone went out to enjoy himself.

When he was left alone in the house, Ibrahim came up to idols and spoke to them thus, "How do you do? Here is food and drink; why do you not help yourselves?" The idols kept mum. Stones as they were, what reply could they give? "What is the matter with you that you speak not?" Ibrahim asked again. But again there was no reply.

Ibrahim now got excited. He took up an axe and began to hit the idols with it one by one till he broke all of them except the biggest idol which he spared on purpose. When his task was finished, Ibrahim hung the axe round the neck of that idol.

5. Who did it ?

On their return from the festivities, people came to the temple to pay their homage to the idols ; for was it not the festival day ? But the sight that met their eyes left them utterly confounded. They were shocked, grieved and furious, "Who has done this to our gods?" they exclaimed. "We have heard," some of them volunteered the information, "a youth called Ibrahim talking disrespectfully about them." They caught hold of Ibrahim at once and began to question him. "Are you the man who has done this to our gods ?" They asked. "No", replied Ibrahim, "It has been done by this, the biggest idol among them. Ask them, and they will tell you if they can talk."

The people were not ignorant of the fact that the idols were nothing but stones which

could neither speak nor hear. The biggest idol was no exception. It could not move a limb. How could a helpless thing like it break the idols? "O Ibrahim," they said, "Do you not know that the idols do not speak!" "Why do you worship them, then?" retorted Ibrahim. "Beyond doubt, they can be of no good or harm to anybody. Why do you make your petitions to them? They can neither hear nor speak; why do you not understand it? It is so very simple." The people could give no answer. They felt shy and speechless.

6. Cold Fire

A meeting was hurriedly called by them. "What should be done?" was the question they had to decide. "Without doubt, it is Ibrahim who has broken the idols. He has insulted the gods like anything. How should he be punished? What should the penalty be?" They asked one another. "Burn him alive. That is the only way to defend the gods," was the conclusion that was arrived at the meeting.

Quickly they went ahead to execute it. They set up a big fire and threw Ibrahim into it. But lo ! there was the miracle ! Allah had protected Ibrahim. He had commanded the fire : "O fire ! become cold and a means of safety for Ibrahim." And so had it become cold and a source of protection. People saw to their limitless wonder that the fire did no harm to Ibrahim. He was quite safe, sound and happy and his persecutors were aghast and awe-stricken.

7. "Who is My Lord ?"

Once in his childhood Ibrahim had exclaimed on seeing a star on a certain night, "This is my Lord". But when after sometime the star disappeared he had felt sorely disappointed. 'No,' he had promptly corrected himself, "It cannot be my Lord."

Then, on another occasion the Moon had made similar impression on him. While looking at it he had thought,.."Perhaps this is my Lord." But when Moon, too, had vanished and its place had been taken by the Sun on the sky, he again had found telling himself : "No, this cannot be my Lord." Later it

was the turn of the Sun to attract the attention of Ibrahim. "This must be my Lord; this is the greatest of all things." He had in his childishness concluded this from its blazing light and heat. But when the night fell and the Sun too had gone, Ibrahim had once again to change his mind. "No, this cannot be my Lord," he had told himself. "Allah, alone is Eternal, Almighty and Everpresent, Unchanging and Everlasting."

"The stars are weak because the dawn of the day puts them out. The sun, too, is weak because it is swallowed up by the night and the clouds cast a veil over it."

"The stars, the moon and the sun can never help me because they are helpless themselves. Only Allah, Everpresent and Almighty, can help."

8. "Allah is My Lord"

Thus it dawned upon Ibrahim that Allah and no one but Him was His Lord and God. He alone was All-Powerful and Omniscient. The stars, the moon and the sun were only His

creations. He was the Lord of them, too, the Lord of the whole universe.

In this way did Allah lead Ibrahim to light. He made him Apostle and His most faithful slave, and commanded him to invite his people towards Allah and to keep them strictly away from idol worship.

9. Ibrahim's Call

Ibrahim acted as he was commanded. He called his people towards Allah and forbade idol worship. "What do you worship?" he asked them. "We worship idols," they replied. "Do they listen to you when you call out to them?" Ibrahim asked. "Or do they do any good or harm to you?" "No, but we found our fathers worshipping them and so we also are doing the same," came the reply. "Even then," said Ibrahim, "I do not worship the idols. No, I am their sworn enemy. I worship none but the Lord of the Worlds who created me, who gives me food and drink and who heals me when I fall ill and who will cause me to die and then will raise me up again."

"These idols, on the other hand do neither

create nor give any guidance, they cannot grant food or drink nor heal the sick nor cause anybody to die; nor can they raise him up again on the Appointed Day."

10. Before the King

The ruler of the land where Ibrahim lived was as cruel as he was powerful. People used to kneel before him. When he came to know that Ibrahim prostrated himself only before Allah and none else he got very angry and summoned him to his court. Ibrahim, accordingly, presented himself before the King but there was no fear in his heart, for he feared no one besides Allah. "Who is your Lord, Ibrahim?" the King enquired from Ibrahim. "My Lord is Allah," Ibrahim replied. "And who is Allah, Ibrahim?" the King asked. "He is the One who gives life and death," replied Ibrahim. "It is I," the King said, "who gives life and death." After this the King called for a man and had him put to death. He, then, called for another man and sentenced him to death, but then granted him pardon and set him free. "I cause men to live and die," the King declared after he had thus shown his

power over the lives of his subjects : "I made a man die before you and the other who was condemned to die was saved by me and allowed to live."

How foolish the King was ? But his case was not unique. It is the same with all the polytheists. Ibrahim wanted to reform them. He wanted the King as well as his people to understand the truth. He, therefore, said to the King. "It is Allah who causes the sun to rise from the east. Can you make it rise from the west ?" The King did not know what to say to this. He could think of no reply.

11. Invitation to Father

Ibrahim desired particularly to invite his father towards the right path. He said to him, "O my father, why do you worship that which can neither hear nor see nor can do you any good or harm ? My father ! serve not the Satan, but the most Gracious Being, Allah".

Ibrahim's father became very angry when he heard his son speak like this. "I must punish you," he said to him, "or you leave

me to my business and talk to me no more.” An obedient and dutiful son as Ibrahim was, he submitted quietly to his father’s order and said no more than this, “Peace be on you. I am now leaving this place and will devote myself to the worship of my Lord.” He was very, very sad. He resolved to move to some other town where he could serve his Lord and call the people to Allah.

12. In Mecca

In his own city Ibrahim’s life had been most unhappy., He had felt lonely and dejected. All the people including the King and even his own father were displeased with him. There was nothing he could do there. So he took leave of the place and of his father and set off towards Mecca along with his wife, Hajirah.

Mecca was a place where there was no trace of life or vegetation. There were no wells, no springs and no living beings, man or animal. On reaching there Ibrahim settled his wife, Hajirah, and the new-born child, Ismail, on a barren patch of land. Then he prepared to leave. “Where are you going, my master?”

cried Hajirah on seeing him ready to start. "Are you to leave us here where there is no food or water?" Ibrahim looked helplessly at her but made no reply. After a moment's thought, Hajirah enquired,, 'Has Allah commanded you to do so?' "Yes," replied Ibrahim. "Then," Hajirah said, "Allah will not expose us to starvation and death." After this Ibrahim went away leaving his wife and child alone behind him.

13. The Well—'Zamzam'

Little Ismail was soon thirsty. His mother wondered how could she quench the thirst of her child when there was not a single drop of water to be found in the whole of Mecca. There was no well or stream over there.

But no mother could sit calmly and see her child die of thirst. She ran in panic here and there. She ran again and again from Safa to Merwa and from Merwa to Safa to see from the top of the hillocks if there was some water anywhere.

Allah came to the rescue of Hajirah and her

child. He produced water for them. It sprang up from the earth, the very place where Ismail was lying. Both Ismail and Hajirah drank the water and had their thirst quenched.

The water stayed even after Hajirah and her child drank their full and it came to be known as 'Zamzam'. Allah bestowed His blessings on it and made it holy. This very 'Zamzam' is the well from which the pilgrims drink during the Haj. They also take its water with them when they return to their homes. You too must have drunk this water.

14. Ibrahim's Vision

Some years later Ibrahim returned to Mecca to live with his wife and child. Ismail was very pleased to see his father. He had grown up to be a small boy who loved to run and play or go for a walk with his father. Ibrahim, too, was very fond of his son.

One night Ibrahim dreamt that he was slaying Ismail as sacrifice to his Lord. Ibrahim was a true Prophet, and so his dream could not be false. He was 'Khaleelullah,' Allah's

faithful friend. Like a devoted friend he made up his mind to put into action what Allah had bidden in the dream. He wanted Ismail, too, to offer himself willingly for the supreme sacrifice. So he said to him, "O my son, I have seen in a vision that I offered you to Allah in sacrifice. What do you say to it now?" "O my father," Ismail replied without hesitation. "Do as you are commanded; you will find me, if Allah so wills, among those who practise patience and constancy."

15. Replaced by a Ram from Paradise

Ibrahim picked up a knife and asked Ismail to come with him. When they arrived at Mina Ibrahim decided to make the offering of his son at that place.

Ismail lay on the ground and Ibrahim placed the knife on his throat. Everything was ready for the deed to be completed. But Allah had willed otherwise. It was not His intention to let Ibrahim carry out the command literally. He had simply wanted to prove through it to the world how ready and willing Ibrahim, His faithful friend, always was to act as he was

desired by Allah whom he loved more than his own son.

Ibrahim had stood the trial and came out of it with flying colours. Allah, at the very moment he was going to cut his son's throat, sent Gabriel with a ram from the heaven with the word, "Slay it in sacrifice and not Ismail."

Allah liked the act of Ibrahim so much that He ordained for Muslims to make sacrificial offerings every year on that day which is now known as 'Id-ul-Adha'. May Allah bestow more and more of His blessings on Ibrahim, His 'friend,' and on his son, Ismail, and grant them peace.

16. The Ka'aba

After it, Ibrahim had once again to go on a journey. When he returned he made up his mind to build a house where people could pray and offer their devotions to Allah.

So many houses were there in the world but not a single house had been built for the sake of Allah, to serve exclusively as a place of Divine worship. It was because of this that Ibrahim undertook the task.

Ismail came forward to work with his father in the construction of the house. Both father and son brought stones from the mountains and set about to construct the *Ka'aba* with their own hands. They recited the names and praises of Allah as they worked. "O our Lord", they prayed, "Accept this service from us for you are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."

Allah heard their prayer and accepted their service. He bestowed His blessings on the house of *Ka'aba*. It is towards this house that we turn our faces during all our prayers. At the time of the Haj countless Muslims visit it, go round, and make their devotions to Allah.

May Allah bless it more and more and bestow His ever-increasing appreciation of the work of Ibrahim. May He bless Ibrahim and bestow His peace on him. And may He bless Mohammad, the last and the sole heir to all the Prophets, till the end of the world and grant him His peace.

17. Baitul-Maqdis (House of Piety)

Ibrahim had another wife, called Sara. She

too bore him a son whose name was Ishaq. Ibrahim had once lived for sometime in Syria where Ishaq had also accompanied him. A house was built there by Ishaq in the name of Allah where worship could be offered to Him just as his father and brother had done in Mecca.

The house built by Ishaq in Syria is the well-known *Baitul Maqdis*, the House of Piety. It is also known as 'The Farthest Mosque.'

By grace of Allah the progeny of Ishaq multiplied as did the progeny of Ismail. Prophets and Kings rose up from among them. One of Ishaq's sons was Yaqub, who also was a Prophet. Yaqub had twelve sons. One of them was Yusuf. An interesting story is related in the Quran about Yusuf. Now we are going to relate it to you.

5. THE JEALOUS BROTHERS

1. A Strange Vision

Yusuf was a little boy with eleven brothers. He was very handsome and intelligent. His father, Yaqub, loved him more than his other sons.

One night Yusuf dreamt a strange dream. He saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon prostrating themselves before him. Little Yusuf was very much puzzled when he woke up. He could not make out what the dream meant. Why should the stars, the sun and the moon should have bowed down to a man, he wanted to know.

He went and related to his father the strange dream he had seen. "O my father," he said, "I have dreamt that eleven stars and the sun and the moon were prostrating themselves before me." His father, Yaqub, was a Prophet. He was very glad to hear about the dream. "O Yusuf," he said to him, "May Allah bless

you; soon you will rise to high position. This dream conveys the tidings of great knowledge from Allah and of Prophethood. No wonder! He did favour to your forefathers, Ishaq and Ibrahim. Certainly, He will bestow His grace on you and your children."

Yaqub was an old and experienced man who understood the human nature well. He knew how Satan misguided people and played foul with them. He, therefore, advised his son, Yusuf, "O son, let none of your brothers know of this dream. They will be jealous of you and will turn your enemies."

2. Brother's Jealousy

Yusuf had only one real brother named Bin Yamin. The others were his step-brothers. Yaqub was extremely fond of these two of his sons and none of the others came near them in his affections. The step-brothers of Yusuf and Bin Yamin looked upon them with envy and bore a grudge against them. "Why does father," they would say, "love them more than us specially when they are so immature

and weak ? We are grown up and strong and deserve to be loved and valued more than Yusuf and Bin Yamin."

Yusuf in his childish simplicity over-looked his father's advice and related the dream to his step-brothers. This made them more envious of him and now their jealousy and hatred knew no bounds.

They held a meeting among themselves to hatch up a plot against Yusuf. "Kill him or take him to a far-off land and leave him there. All our father's love will then be bestowed on us alone," suggested one of them. "No," another said, "Throw him into a blind wayside well. Some wayfarer will rescue him and take him away to his home." All the brothers agreed to this plan.

3. Brother's Deputation to Yaqub

Having drawn up the plan they came to Yaqub. He knew that Yusuf's brothers were jealous of him and would not hesitate to do him harm. So he never let him go with them. Yusuf used to play with his real brother,

Bin Yamin, in the house and was never allowed to go out.

The step-brothers were aware of it but it did not prevent them from going ahead with their conspiracy. They said to Yaqub, "O father, why do you not let Yusuf go with us? What are you afraid of? He is our dear little brother. We are the sons of the same father. Brothers always play together. Why do we not also go out and play? Please let us take him out tomorrow to play with us. We shall take every care of him."

Wise and experienced as Yaqub was, he did not at all like the idea of sending Yusuf away from him. He said to them, "I fear that some wolf might come while you are engaged in play and eat him up." "Never," the sons replied, "How can the wolf attack him in our presence. Are we not grown up and strong?"

At last, Yaqub reluctantly allowed Yusuf to go with them.

4. In the Forest

The step-brothers were very glad to receive Yaqub's permission. They went to a forest

where they threw Yusuf into a well. They had no pity for the little boy or their aged father.

But Allah sent glad tidings to Yusuf. "Do not be grieved or afraid," came the inspiration from Him. 'Indeed, Allah is with you. Soon you will be glorified. Your brothers will appear before you and confess what they have done.'

The step-brothers, having carried out their plan of throwing Yusuf into the well, sat down to think what they would tell their father about his disappearance. "Father had said," one of them remarked, "that he feared some wolf might come and eat up Yusuf. Let us tell him how right he was. Exactly the same thing has happened. Yusuf has been eaten up by a wolf."

The idea appealed to them very much. "Yes," they said with one voice. "It will work. We will tell him so." "But," one of them pointed out, "What proof shall we give in support of our story." "The proof," the other replied, "will be the blood?" They killed a ram and dipped Yusuf's shirt in its blood.

“Now,” they said, “Father will have to believe us.”

5. Before Yaqub

The step-brothers of Yusuf returned home late in the evening to narrate the story to their father. They said to him with tears in their eyes, “O father, we were having a race among ourselves and had left Yusuf behind with our things when a wolf came and ate him up.” They showed him the shirt of Yusuf with the blood of the ram on it and said sadly, “This is your Yusuf’s blood.”

Yaqub was a Prophet and also a man of the world. He was much wiser than his sons. He knew that the wolf would not have left the shirt undamaged. A wolf would first attack a man before eating him up. Yusuf’s shirt, on the other hand, bore no signs of a tear and was completely soaked in blood. It was not difficult for him, in such circumstances, to conclude that the blood on it was not Yusuf’s blood. The whole story, he was sure in his mind, was concocted. “No,” he said to his sons, “It cannot be as you have said. You have

invented the tale. But, the wisest course would be to be patient." Yusuf's loss was a terrible blow to him but he bore it with fortitude and patience.

6. From the Well to the Palace

The step-brothers, back safely home, had their dinner and slept comfortably on their soft beds without giving a thought to Yusuf, while Yusuf, pitifully alone in the well—dark, deep and dry—with neither food, nor drink, nor rest, was crying his heart out for his father and brother. Yaqub was in no happier state of mind. Beaten down by grief and worry he too could neither eat nor sleep.

But not before long, by Allah's grace, a party of travellers happened to pass through the forest. The travellers had become thirsty and were in search of a well, when the well in which Yusuf had been thrown came into their view. They sent one of their companions to fetch water from it.

The traveller let down his bucket into the well but when he was pulling it out he felt that

it had become very heavy. When the bucket came out of the well the traveller was shocked to see that in it a boy was sitting. He shouted the news to his companions who came running and were delighted to see how handsome Yusuf was. They decided to conceal the fact and to take him along with them. When the travellers reached Egypt they thought of selling Yusuf away as a slave. They stood in the market place with him, calling out, "Is there anybody to purchase this boy? Is there?" Al-Aziz, a minister of the Egyptian Court ultimately bought him for a few dirhams.

Al-Aziz took him to his palace and told his wife to treat him well.

7. Loyal and Trustworthy

Yusuf had a soul which was as beautiful as were his looks. Enamoured by his superb physical charm, Al-Aziz's wife tried to seduce him. But he refused saying, "No, not by any manner of means. I will not be treacherous to my benefactor. He has done me great favour and honoured me. I do fear Allah."

The woman got so angry at his refusal that in order to have her revenge she falsely reported

to her husband that Yusuf had tried to molest her. But Al-Aziz knew that she was lying. He had full trust in Yusuf's character and trustworthiness. "Truely", he said to his wife, "It is you who has been at fault."

Yusuf had come to be known all over Egypt for his handsomeness. Whoever saw him said, "No mortal can he be ! He is nothing but a noble angel." The prospect of winning the love of such a handsome man had swelled the vanity of Al-Aziz's wife. But when her overtures were rejected by Yusuf she grew so very angry that she bluntly told Yusuf, " In that case you will have to go to prison." "The prison," Yusuf boldly replied, "is more to my liking than to what you invite me."

A few days later Yusuf found himself in prison. Though Al-Aziz was convinced of his innocence he felt that it would be better and wiser if he was removed for some time to the prison.

8. Preaching in the Prison

Thus, Yusuf was placed in the prison. It soon became evident to the other prisoners and the

officials of the place that he was a noble youth. They were all impressed by his excellent qualities of mind and character and began to like him very much. They showed him great respect and were very pleased with him.

Two other men had been brought to the prison at the same time as Yusuf. Both of them had seen dreams which they related to Yusuf. "I saw," related one of them, "that I was distilling wine." "And I", said the other, "saw that I was carrying bread on my head which the birds were eating." They wanted Yusuf to interpret their dreams for them.

But a Prophet's mission includes much more than the interpretation of dreams. Yusuf had a great deal to do. He had to instruct. In his days people used to worship other objects besides Allah. They had invented many deities of their own like the god of the earth, the god of the oceans, the god of food and the god of rain.

Yusuf saw the absurdity of it. Sometimes he laughed at their ignorance and sometimes he wept. He had wanted so many times to

teach them about Allah and to invite them towards Him.

But Allah had destined for Yusuf's mission to start from the prison. There was nothing strange in it, for do the prisoners also not belong to the human family? Are they not Allah's slaves? Do they not stand in need of salvation and mercy and have they not the right to be shown the right path?

Though in prison, Yusuf's mind, heart and tongue were free. Though poor, he was generous-hearted and handsome. The prophets are always so. They proclaim the truth at each and every place, even in a prison. They sanction the good and spread the Divine gifts of knowledge and learning at all times.

9. Yusuf's Sagacity and Resourcefulness

On being asked by these men to interpret their dreams, he said to himself. "Their need has led them to me, and when a man is in need he is meak and agreeable. If I say something to them now they will listen to it carefully and perhaps pass it on to the other prisoners also."

But he did not hurry. He said to them, "I will interpret the dreams before your meal comes." They sat down quietly to listen. "It is true that I know the science of the interpretation of dreams," he began. "It is a part of the knowledge vouchsafed to me by my Lord." Their interest grew and they were glad to hear him say so.

10. Call to a Single Allah

Yusuf utilized the occasion to deliver his sermon on the Oneness of God. He went on, "There are things which the Lord has taught me and not to you or anyone else. Allah does not bestow the bounty of knowledge on everybody, on the transgressors and the polytheists. He has favoured me with it because I did not adopt the way of those who assign partners to Allah. On the other hand, I follow the path of my ancestors—Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaqub who never attributed any partners to Allah."

"The path of Divine Unity," he said, "is not for us alone but for the whole of mankind. It is a grace and a bounty of Allah upon us and upon the entire human family, but men, generally, are ungrateful."

“Just see !” after a little pause he resumed. “Yóu speak of so many gods, the god of the earth, the god of the oceans, the god of food and the god of rain, and you call out to them in the hour of your need. But we say : Allah is the Lord and God of the whole universe. Now think over it and see whether many lords who are constantly quarrelling with one another are better or the One Allah, Supreme and All-Powerful ?”

“How absurd is it to speak of the god of the earth, the god of the oceans, the god of this and the god of that. Show me what they have created on the earth, or how they have a share in the heavens. Look at the earth and the heavens and the human beings themselves ; such is the creation of Allah. Now tell me what is there that the others besides Him have created ?”

“These gods of yours, pertaining to this and to that, are only creations of your imagination. They are nothing but mere names invented by you and your forefathers. The rule, the sovereignty, the universe, and the Day of Judgement belong only to Allah.

Worship no one, O people, besides Him. This is the right religion, but most men understand it not."

11. Interpretation of Dreams

When Yusuf had finished his sermon, he told the two men what their dreams meant. "As for one of you," he said, "he will pour out wine to his master to drink and, as for the other, he will hang from the scaffold, and the birds will feed from his head." Then, turning to the first man he said, "Tell your master about me when the dream comes true."

It happened to them exactly as Yusuf had foretold. One of them became the cup-bearer of the King while the other was executed. But the cup-bearer forgot to tell about Yusuf to the King with the result that Yusuf had to languish in the prison for some years more.

12. The King's Dream

Now it so happened that the King of Egypt also had a strange dream. He saw that seven emaciated oxen were eating the flesh of seven

fat ones and that there were seven green ears of corn along with seven others that were withered.

The King was curious to know what the dream meant, so he asked his courtiers to interpret it for him. But they were of no help. "It is nothing," they said, "in sleep one sees so many things of no consequence."

It was then that the cup-bearer suddenly thought of Yusuf. "My lord," he exclaimed, "I will tell you what the dream signifies." He went to the prison and asked Yusuf to tell him the meaning of the King's dream.

A noble and generous-hearted man that Yusuf was, having nothing but kindness for Allah's slaves, he did not take the cup-bearer to task for not speaking about him to the King and told him readily what he wanted to know. The dream contained the prophecy of a great famine and also indicated how best to meet its threat. Had Yusuf not revealed what it meant the whole population would have perished due to starvation. But being a Prophet he was full of compassion and mercy for the

mankind. He could not even think of being mean or petty.

“For seven years,” he told, “You will diligently raise crops and should store up what you have produced except the little that you will eat. Then there will come a terrible famine during which you can eat what you have stored. This drought will last for seven years, after which Allah’s favour will return to the land and people will be happy and prosperous once again.”

The cup-bearer went back and told the King the meaning of the dream.

13. The King sends for Yusuf

The King was very pleased to have a foreknowledge of the calamity that was going to befall his kingdom as well as of the steps which could be taken to combat it successfully. He wanted to know more about the man who had interpreted his dream. The cup-bearer, thereupon, told him, “It is the same truthful Yusuf who had told me that I would become the cup-bearer of my master, the King.”

The King was eager to see Yusuf. "Bring him to me," he commanded, "I will appoint him my special attendant."

14. Yusuf's Appeal for the Investigation

A royal messenger went to the prison to inform Yusuf of the King's pleasure. But Yusuf did not want to come out of the gaol unless the stain on his character had been removed. He did not want people to say, "This is Yusuf ! who was in prison yesterday ; he had been treacherous to his master, Al-Aziz."

Yusuf was high-minded and self-respecting, wise and intelligent. Had there been some one else languishing in the prison in his place and a royal messenger had come to tell him that the King was desirous of seeing him he would have certainly rushed out of the prison gate.

But, Yusuf showed no such haste. On the contrary, he said to the messenger, "I first want my case to be investigated and decided finally."

The King then ordered inquiries to be made in the affair as a result of which it was

found that Yusuf was guiltless. After his innocence was established Yusuf came out of the prison with his reputation unsoiled. The King, as well as the people received him with respect and honour.

15. Incharge of the Store-Houses

Yusuf was appointed by the King as his Counsellor. As a member of the royal court he saw that the officers and the people alike were irresponsible and dishonest. Embezzlement and other malpractices were prevalent everywhere. They abused and misappropriated the wealth Allah had scattered all over the earth for the legitimate use and benefit of everyone. Allah is never unkind or ungenerous to His slaves. He had endued the earth with enough resources to suffice for the needs of the mankind but it is man himself who brings about scarcity by his unjust and wasteful ways.

When people do not have the fear of Allah in their hearts they feel no hesitation in usurping the rights of others so much so that while their dogs and other pet animals have all the good things to eat so many of their

brethren go without a regular meal and yet they feel no remorse about it.

Men can never be justly benefited by the treasures of the earth unless those who are in control of them are honest and God-fearing as well as capable of making the best use of them. A person who may be honest and God-fearing but is ignorant and does not know how to exploit the resources of nature cannot derive full benefit from them. In the same way, if a man possesses not the fear of God he will usurp all the advantages to himself and will not let others enjoy their just share.

Yusuf was capable as well as honest. Moreover, he could not tolerate the injustice of the rulers and watch silently the privileged classes misappropriating the share of others while they lived in want and hunger. He was also not afraid of speaking out the truth. "Give me," he boldly advised the King, "the charge of the store-houses. I will look after them as one who knows where and how to spend what he has." The King agreed and made his appointment to the post. Yusuf was now in control

of the granaries and store-houses of Egypt to the great comfort and relief of its people.

16. The Coming of the Step-brothers

According to Yusuf's prophecy, dreadful famine occurred in Egypt and its neighbouring lands including Syria. It soon became known every where that most honest, efficient and charitable person was in charge of the finances and granaries of Egypt who freely distributed food-grains to whoever went to him for help. The news spread to Syria where Yaqub too heard it and decided to send his sons to Egypt to buy food and bring it home.

Bin-Yamin the real brother of Yusuf was left behind with his father. Yaqub would not let him go to Egypt. He had the same fears about his safety as he had about the safety of Yusuf.

The step-brothers of Yusuf set out on their journey not knowing that they were going to no one but to him whom they had thrown into the well. They were sure that he was dead.

How could he be alive when they had thrown him in the well of the forest !

When his step-brothers arrived in Egypt and Yusuf saw them he at once recognised them but they could not recognise him. He knew that it was they who had thrown him into the well in order to get rid of him and he would have certainly died had Allah not saved him. But he said not a word to them about it.

17. The Conversation between Yusuf and His Step-Brothers

He received them as total strangers. "Where have you come from ?" he enquired from them.

"From Kan'an," replied his step-brothers.

"Whose sons are you ?"

"We are the sons of Yaqub, the son of Ishaq, the son of Ibrahim and they all are Prophets."

"Have you any other brother ?"

"Yes, one more, Bin-Yamin."

“Why did he not come with you ?”

“Our father never lets him go anywhere. He never parts with him.”

“Why ? Is he very small ?”

“No, but the thing is that he had another real brother named Yusuf who once went out with us and was eaten up by a wolf while we were having a race among ourselves and had left him behind with our belongings.”

Yusuf felt like bursting with laughter when he heard it, but he kept quiet.

There, however, arose in his heart a powerful urge to meet his brother, Bin Yamin. Yaqub was now going to be put to test for the second time. Such was the will of Allah.

Yusuf ordered the provisions to be given to them but when they were returning he told them to bring their step-brother with them when they came again otherwise no foodgrains would be given to them.

Yusuf also told his men to put back secretly in their luggage the money they had paid for the provisions and so was it done.

18. Back to their Father

When they returned home with the provisions they narrated the whole story to Yaqub and asked him to send Bin Yamin with them to Egypt the next time, "Or else," they added "we will have to return empty-handed." "We will," they assured him, "definitely take every care of him." "Shall I trust you," said Yaqub bitterly, "with him with any other result than what I had to bear when I trusted you with his brother? Have you forgotten the case of Yusuf? Are you going to take care of Bin Yamin as you did of Yusuf? No, Allah is the best Protector of him and He is the Most Merciful."

As they opened their saddle-bags they found that the money they had paid for the provisions had been kept back in them. On seeing it they said to their father, "Al-Aziz, indeed, is a very kind man. He has returned our money and charged no price from us. Do please send Bin

Yamin with us so that we may get still more generous treatment from him.” “Never will I send him with you.” said Yaqub, “until you take a solemn oath that you will bring him back safely as far as it lies in your power.” When they had taken the oath Yaqub said, “Over all that you say may Allah be the Witness and the Guardian.” Then he instructed his sons, “O my sons, enter not the city by the same gate but by different gates.”

19. Bin Yamin with Yusuf

They did as they were instructed by their father and reached Yusuf who was very happy to see Bin Yamin. He took him in and made him stay in his own house. He told him, “I am your brother.” Bin Yamin was overjoyed on hearing it.

Yusuf was meeting Bin Yamin after such a long time. He had to talk with him about their father, mother and family, about their childhood-days and the games they used to play together. But how could he be satisfied with such a brief meeting? He wished Bin Yamin to remain with him and not to go back

to Syria with his step-brothers."

But how could it be done? The step-brothers had sworn upon Allah to bring him to Kan'an. How could Yusuf be justified in detaining Bin Yamin without a valid reason. If he did so, people would say: "You see! Al-Aziz has arrested a Kan'ani for nothing. How unjust of him, really!"

Yusuf thought of a plan. A precious bowl from which he used to drink water was secretly put in Bin Yamin's luggage. After it had been done an announcer called out, "O you of the caravan! behold! you are thieves and there is no doubt about it." "What is missing?" the brothers asked in surprise. "The King's bowl," said Yusuf's men. "There is a camel-load of reward for anyone who finds it. "We swear by Allah," the brothers said, "we did not come here to make mischief in the land, and we are no thieves." What penalty will you pay if you are proved to be thieves?" they enquired. "The penalty shall be," the brothers said, "that he, in whose possession it is found, will be held as a bondman to atone for the crime. Thus it is that we punish the wrongdoers in our land."

The search was made and the cup was recovered from Bin Yamin's luggage to the utter shame and surprise to all of them. "If he steals there is no wonder for he had a brother who also stole before him," remarked the step-brothers of Bin Yamin in anger.

Yusuf heard this shameless lie but he held his tongue. He did not lose his temper, so kind and tolerant he was.

The step-brothers had promised Yaqub to bring Bin Yamin back whatever the circumstances. They, therefore, begged Yusuf to let him go with them. "O Exalted Al-Aziz !" they said, "he has a father, old and infirm, who will grieve very much over his absence. Detain one of us in his place and let him go. We know that you are gracious and good-doing." "God, forbid," replied Yusuf, "that we hold in bondage the innocent in place of the guilty. If we did so, it would surely be unjust."

Thus Bin Yamin was left behind with Yusuf to the great joy of both of them. It was a good long time since Yusuf had departed from

his home or seen anyone of his family. So, now when Allah had brought Bin Yamin to him why should he not have taken advantage of it and brought about a situation in which it could be possible for his brother to stay with him at least a little longer ?

20. Step-Brothers Return to Yaqub

The step brothers of Yusuf and Bin Yamin wended their way back to Syria in a state of great torment. A thousand questions were rising in their hearts. How would they face Yaqub ? What would they tell him ? They had already put him to tremendous pain and grief by depriving him of Yusuf. Were they going to do it again ?

Troubled by these thoughts the eldest of them refused to go to Yaqub.

"You go back to father," he said to his brothers, "and tell him : "O father, your son had stolen. We can tell you only what we know; we could not guard against what was hidden from us."

And so it was done. As Yaqub heard the tragic tale he could see clearly the hand of

Allah in the whole affair. It had all happened by His will. He had been put to test once again. It was not long ago that he had to mourn the loss of Yusuf; now he was to sit and shed tears at the loss of Bin Yamin. Will Allah pile up misfortune after misfortune on him? No. He will not crush him down with the loss of two sons, and what two sons? Yusuf and Bin Yamin.

In the calamities that befall us, there is often a hidden purpose of Allah which is ultimately to our own good, though we may not be able to appreciate it on account of our ignorance. They are brought into effect by His Grace and Will. It is, moreover, a settled practice of His that He puts to test His beloved slaves and when they come out of it successfully, He showers His favours and blessings upon them.

In the case of Yaqub his eldest son had also refused to come to Kan'an from Egypt. But will he lose his patience and start crying because of the fate that had befallen to three of his sons? No, it must not be so. Yaqub's faith in Allah was his greatest source of hope

and comfort. "May be," he said to himself, "Allah will bring them all back to me one day. Indeed. He is full of knowledge and wisdom."

21. The Curtain Rises

Yet Yaqub was a human being and had a human heart, not a slab of stone in his breast. The second wound had revived the earlier one and he began to pine miserably again for Yusuf. "Oh! how great is my grief for Yusuf," he would utter with a sigh. His sons used to reproach him strongly when they heard him say so. "Will you not cease to remember Yusuf until you are dead?" they would say. "I only complain," Yaqub said, "of my pain and grief to Allah and I know from Him that which you know not."

Yaqub believed that it was wrong and sinful to despair. He never lost hope for he knew that to lose hope was to lose one's faith in God. He told his sons to go again to Egypt and search for Yusuf and Bin Yamin as best as they could. They were also warned by him against losing hope in Allah's Grace and Mercy and giving way to despair.

His sons, thus, set out for Egypt for the third time. In Egypt they reported themselves to Yusuf and after describing their poverty and distress begged him for his help and favour.

Sympathy and affection swelled up in Yusuf's heart as he heard their tale of woe. He thought, "My father's sons, the children of the prophets, are complaining of their poverty and distress to me whom they believe to be a King. How long can I conceal the truth from them and watch their misery? How long am I to stay away from my father?" He could control himself no more. "Do you remember," he spoke out, "How you had dealt with Yusuf, not knowing what you were doing?"

The secret about Yusuf's disappearance was known only to them or to Yusuf himself. "How could Al-Aziz come to now about it." they wondered. Was Yusuf alive? Fear gripped their hearts. Did he not die in the well? The more they thought the more did their anxiety increased. They asked themselves, "Is it Yusuf who is Al-Aziz of Egypt, who governs its store-houses and granaries and has

issued orders to provide us with foodgrains.”

“Are you, really, Yusuf?” they exclaimed. “Yes, I am Yusuf, and this is my brother,” said he pointing out towards Bin Yamin, “Allah, has, indeed, been gracious to us. Never will Allah suffer the reward of those to be lost who do right.” “Upon our word,” they said, Allah has, indeed, preferred you above us, and we certainly have been guilty of sin.”

But Yusuf did not put them to further discomfort by scolding them for what they had done. He said to them simply, “Allah will forgive you; He is the most Merciful among those who show mercy.”

22. Yaqub knows the Truth

Yusuf was now eager to meet his father, Yaqub. It had been a long time that he had seen him. Now that the secret had been revealed there was no point in making himself and his father suffer any more by keeping up the separation.

It was here and at this stage that Allah had willed to give back to Yaqub's eyes coolness

and comfort. He had lost his eyesight due to incessant crying. Yusuf told his brothers, "Take this shirt of mine with you and cast it over the face of my father; his vision will be restored. Then you come back to me with the entire family."

23. The Coming of Yaqub

No sooner had the party set forth with Yusuf's shirt for Kan'an than Yaqub in Kan'an began to perceive the smell of Yusuf. He said to the people around him, "I do indeed, perceive the smell of Yusuf." "Upon our word," they remarked, "you have lost the balance of your mind."

Shortly afterwards Yaqub was proved to be true. His sons returned from Egypt with the glad tidings about Yusuf. Yusuf's shirt was thrown over his face and his vision was restored. "Did I not say," he asked his sons and those around him, "that I know from Allah what you knew not?" "O father," his sons begged him, "pray on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins. We are truly at fault." Yaqub replied, "Soon I will beg my Lord to

forgive you; He is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”

After a few days Yaqub left for Egypt. What joy did the father and the son had on seeing each other after so many long and grief-sticken years can be imagined better than described. It was the most happy and auspicious day throughout Egypt. Alongwith Yusuf, all of his subjects also welcomed Yaqub.

Yusuf took his parents to the Court and made them sit on the imperial throne. Then all of them, the parents and the brothers, fell prostrate before Yusuf. “This is the fulfilment of my dream,” said Yusuf. “In that dream I had seen that eleven stars and the sun and the moon were prostrating themselves before me. Allah has made it come true today.” He thanked Him profusely and recited His praises with all his heart.

24. The Happy End

The Kingdom of Egypt had not diverted Yusuf’s mind from Allah. It had made no change in him. He never thought much of it for he knew that it was nothing as compared

to what lay in the Hereafter. His job was only to govern it according to the wishes of Allah and to make the people follow His commands.

He did not want to be raised up in the Hereafter merely as one of the kings. His ambition was that when he made his exit from the world it would be more as a true Muslim than as a mere King. One of his favourite prayers to Allah was: "O my Lord, Thou hast indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events....O Thou, Creator of the heavens and earth, Thou art my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter. So take my soul at death as one submitting to Thy will as a Muslim, and unite me with the righteous."

This prayer of his was granted by Allah to the full. When his time came it was as a true Muslim that Yusuf departed from this world to be united for ever and ever with his predecessors, Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaqub.

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