

# The Prophet Moses

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 5]

## Introduction

While twenty five prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an by name, Allah says in the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, *'alayhi as-salato wa-s-salaam*,<sup>1</sup> "We did aforetime send messengers before thee: of them there are some whose story We have related to thee, and some whose story We have not related to thee..."<sup>2</sup> We find that many of these stories, except the story of Sayyidna Yusuf,<sup>3</sup> are scattered in the Qur'an. The story of Moses, especially, is one that is scattered in numerous Qur'anic suras.<sup>4</sup> Some of it is mentioned in *Surat Al-Qasas*;<sup>5</sup> this is the period of his birth. Some is mentioned in *Surat Tā-hā*<sup>6</sup> and talks about the start of revelation of the message of Islam to him. The rest is scattered in several other chapters of which some is repetition and some of it is new.

For every prophet God made a plan: how he will be brought up, how he will reach the age of maturity, and how he will be selected to report the message. *Surat Al-Qasas* details the plan that God had made for Musa<sup>7</sup>, *alayhi-s-salām*. The

story of Moses in *Surat Al-Qasas* begins with three letters ط, س, م and, for one who is not familiar with reading the Qur'an, he may read that first verse as "tasam", a word which has no meaning. In the proper reading of the Qur'an, they are pronounced as separate letters: ط, س, م. And if you look at any tafeer<sup>8</sup> about the meaning of these, or other letters that are found at the start of some chapters in the Qur'an, you will not find any satisfactory answer. In the end, they say that only God knows what He means by them; the authors of the tafeers have no knowledge. But some other scholars have offered an explanation for them and said that, in essence, these letters at the start of the suras came as a challenge to the Arabs living at the time of Muhammad. The Arabs, at that time, were remarkably fluent in the Arabic language to the extent that they were known as *Arbab-ul-fasāhah wal balāghah* (*The Lords of the Fluent Arabic Language and The Masters of Expression in the Arabic Language*). They used to tell Muhammad that he was writing the Qur'an himself, or that some Persian man was writing it for him. The style and language of the Qur'an were a challenge to them. It was meant to show them that the Qur'an is not the word of a human being, but the word of God, and that it is the miracle of Muhammad to confirm that

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<sup>1</sup>Upon him be prayers and peace

<sup>2</sup>40:78

<sup>3</sup>The Prophet Joseph

<sup>4</sup>Chapters

<sup>5</sup>Chapter 28 in the Qur'an

<sup>6</sup>Chapter 20

<sup>7</sup>Arabic for Moses

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<sup>8</sup>Qur'anic exegesis

he is a true messenger receiving revelation from God. The ulama<sup>9</sup> explain that these alphabetical letters at the start of certain suras mean that God wants to tell those Arabs that the whole Qur'an is composed of letters like these, and since they are denying that this is the word of God, and because they are most fluent in that language, then they should write something similar to that Qur'an if they think that Muhammad, or any other human being, authored it. They could not. The language and style of the Qur'an are a challenge to human beings until the Day of Judgment.

Nowadays, there is not one standard Arabic language but 22 Arabic dialects. There is a Lebanese language, and there is an Egyptian language, and there is an Iraqi language, and so on – one for each Arab country – to the extent that if I go to Algeria today and someone talks to me in the Algerian dialect, I wouldn't know what he is talking about, although he talks the Arabic language. That is the catastrophe of the Muslims.

Arabic speaking parents are not happy with the Arabic language taught in the school at this Islamic Center. Why? Because all of the parents, here, want their son or daughter who is studying Arabic, to speak to them in the language with which they are familiar – the Lebanese dialect, or the Egyptian dialect, or whatever – and that is because we don't have one standard Arabic language. If you read books written by Jews, they say that the best achievement Israel has made is the revival of the Hebrew language after it was nearly extinct. It is restored now. It has become the language of a country. And if you noticed when Al Gore<sup>10</sup> was visiting Israel, to congratulate them for the building of Israel and the destruction of Palestine, he was talking in Hebrew. And they are very, very proud of this. We, the Arabs, want to cut the Arabic language into dialects. Not only this, I am Egyptian and if I go to Sa'eed, the region in upper Egypt, I don't know what they are talking about because they talk a dialect different from the one spoken in Alexandria, which is lower Egypt. And let me, to get your attention, give you a little story. It happened in fact.

When I was in the Egyptian army, a soldier from Upper Egypt came to the officer and said to him, "Sir, I did not see my family from *dimira to dimira*." The officer was from Lower Egypt so he did not understand what that guy was talking about. What is *dimira*? He called upon another soldier

from that area and said to him, "Do you understand what your friend is saying?" He said: "Yes sir. He would like to tell you he did not see his parents from *gi'ath to gi'ath*." The officer didn't know what *gi'ath* was either. So he called upon a third soldier and said to him, "Do you understand what those animals are talking about?" He said: "Sir, in their own dialect, *dimira to dimira* means 'from harvesting of the wheat to harvesting of the wheat.' And the same thing is meant by *gi'ath to gi'ath*: it means 'from harvesting of the wheat to harvesting of the wheat.' It means that this soldier did not visit his family for one year now." And this is one country and we don't understand each other. Now, the Muslims in America have added something new to that problem. What did we add here? We do what we call transliteration. It means that we write the Qur'an in Arabic language but in English letters. *Fa, tayyab*.<sup>11</sup> How do you write the letter ع (represented in English with a single inverted comma facing forward); how do you write ض (d with a dot under it), how do you write ط (t with a dot under it)? There are no letters in the English language similar to those Arabic letters. How will you write them? And how will a kid be able to pronounce the Qur'an correctly if the letters of the Qur'an do not have an equivalent in English? It is impossible. And it is claimed this transliteration is "to make it easier for the kids to understand." In fact, we are killing the Arabic language more and more. While the Israelis are proud to improve and promote Hebrew, we are very proud to kill the Arabic language more and more. The Arabic language was not killed in Turkey – the center of the Muslim *khilafah*<sup>12</sup> – except when Kemal Ataturk decreed that Latin letters had to be used instead of Arabic letters.

After م, س, ط the second verse says:

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ . It means, the following are the *ayāt* – the verses – of the very clear and obvious Book, which is very clear for us if we *mean* to understand what is in it. Then the story starts by saying to Muhammad that We are going to tell you, in the following verses, news about Pharaoh and Moses and this information which We are telling you is the truth for people who are sure of their belief in God. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

"These are messages of a divine writ clear in itself,

<sup>9</sup>Scholars

<sup>10</sup>The vice president in President Clinton's administration

<sup>11</sup> Okay, fine

<sup>12</sup> Rule

and clearly showing the truth. We now convey unto thee some of the story of Moses and Pharaoh, setting forth the truth for the benefit of people who will believe" [28:2-3].

Muhammad, during times of trouble and hardships, when his people were harsh on him, would sometimes reach almost a point of despair, but then the Qur'anic revelations would come to comfort him, saying to him, Muhammad, let Us tell you a story about those prophets who came before you and see what had happened to them, and compare it to what is happening to you; then, you will be aware that this is the nature of human beings and this is what is taking place with every messenger of God. [Imam quotes:]

“إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ” Verily, surely, Fir'awn<sup>13</sup> put himself above the people on earth. . . .”

True. He used to say to the people “أَنَا رَبُّكُمْ الْأَعْلَى – I am your highest God”, and in another verse: “I have no knowledge of any God for you but me.” That's how Fir'awn was. See how arrogant he was?

How did he come to be so highly esteemed? It was not due to any great merit in him but *it is due to us – the people*. [Imam quotes with extreme urgency, in a hoarse voice, the answer to his question “How did he come to be so highly esteemed?}] *وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا*<sup>14</sup>. Divide and rule!

Exactly what is happening today! Someone will come and say, “Oh, this is the mosque of the Arabs, Pakistanis have no place in it.” Another will say, “Oh, the Pakistanis occupied the Islamic Center.” A Turk will say, “We are new to this city. We have to have a little piece of it.” Huh? Another one says, “Oh, why are they not speaking in that way? Why are they allowing this to happen? This, this, this.” As a result, on the basis of race and nationality, we are divided. And that is what the Qur'anic verse means by the word *شيعة* – *شيعة*. [Imam quotes:]

– *إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا* – it means, Pharaoh put himself above the people on earth and divided its people into groups.

At present there are two factions among the Muslims that are fighting each other since the third caliph<sup>15</sup> of Islam: one

of them is called Shi'a and one is called Sunni. When someone asks me, “Are you Sunni or Shi'i?” I say to them, “Sunni-Shi'i.” The reason is that while the Shi'i is the one who is supporting Ali,<sup>16</sup> I am reciting in every prayer, “O God bestow thy blessings upon Muhammad and his *ahlay bayt*:<sup>17</sup> *allāhumma sally 'ala sayyidina Muhammad wa 'ala ālay sayyidina Muhammad*. . . So in every prayer I am praising and invoking God's blessings on the family of the Prophet, peace be upon him. That means I am more Shi'i than the Shi'a. But do we realize that? We don't. People play on our emotions and on our mentalities to divide us, and when you divide, you rule. This was the motto and the principle followed by the British colonialists in every Muslim country they occupied, and they know our psychology. They know that we are swayed by our emotions and do not think with our brains. So they play on these *trivial* things to divide us, and when we are divided, they rule us easily. Fir'awn followed the same pattern. He addressed some of his people as Bani-Isra'il,<sup>18</sup> others as Egyptian, and still others as something else, and divided them into groups so he could rule them, and by that means he put himself in a high esteem and above the rest.

– *جَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا* – “made them into groups.” [The English translation of the entire verse is:]

“Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes. One group of them he deemed utterly low; he would slaughter their sons and spare only their women: for, behold, he was one of those who spread corruption on earth” [28:4].

But there was a plan; God had made a plan. [Imam quotes in Arabic, then explains:] It is Our plan to bestow Our love on some of those people (the Bani- Isra'il); some of them We plan to make *imams* and they will inherit the power and this land; We'll make them well established in this earth and We'll show Fir'awn, and his Prime Minister, Hāmān, and their soldiers, the very thing they were scared of by slaughtering their sons. That was the plan.

وَجَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ لِدَارًا وَمَا كُنَّا بِمُعْجِزِينَ عَنْ عِلْمِنَا وَنَجْعَلُهُمُ أَئِمَّةً : means “And to make them leaders/forerunners. . . .” That is a point we have to understand.

<sup>13</sup> Arabic for Pharaoh

<sup>14</sup> “He divided his people into sects”

<sup>15</sup> The title of the ruler of the Muslim state

<sup>16</sup> The Prophet's son-in-law and the fourth caliph of Islam.

<sup>17</sup> The members of his household

<sup>18</sup> The Children of Israel i.e. the descendants of Jacob whose title was “Israel”

What is the meaning of the word *imam* [plural = أئمة]? The title “imam” given to someone who leads the prayer is a metaphorical use of the word; it’s not the true meaning of the word. Linguistically speaking, “imam” means “standing up in front” and because he stands up in front, and all the people are behind him, we call him imam. But the true meaning of the word imam is “a head of state”. That’s why I am looking for the day when I remove Clinton and sit in his place! So أئمة means “heads of state”; they will inherit the power on this earth. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“But it was Our will to bestow Our favor upon those very people who were deemed so utterly low in the land, and to make them forerunners in faith, and to make them heirs to Pharaoh’s glory, and to establish them securely on earth, and to let Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts experience through those children of Israel the very thing against which they sought to protect themselves” [28:5, 6].

You know, we have the people dealing in astrology appearing nowadays on television. Even Dr. Amjad Hussain<sup>19</sup> hired some for our festival. They are the ones who read the palms and look into the stars, and then they tell you if your husband is going to love you or hate you, when he is going to divorce you, and all that. We are familiar with that *everywhere* in our Muslim countries.

One day, my great grand-grandfather Fir‘awn,<sup>20</sup> called upon an astrologist to ask him what the future held for him. He, like Nancy Reagan,<sup>21</sup> believed in the fortune-telling business. The astrologist said to him, “Listen, a child from among the Israelites will be born and that boy will be your biggest enemy; that child will make your life miserable. He will take the government from you and will occupy this area. He will be the nail in the casket of your government. He will be against you, and will change the whole system upon which you are functioning.” As you know, Pharaoh was a strong ruler surrounded by power, so he issued a decision. He ordered his people to slaughter every newborn male child among the Israelites but to spare the females. The Qur’an tells us he did this because he wanted to get rid of the predicted danger to

which he was alerted by the astrologist and because “he was corrupting on earth”.

So, how did it happen? Moses was born, and his mother knew what fate was awaiting him. Fir‘awn sent his spies to check on every woman delivering a baby. There was no Toledo Hospital at that time, or Flower Hospital. They used to deliver the kids even while they were walking in the streets or harvesting the wheat. They were not that modern. So, his mother hid herself, and her baby, for few days or few weeks, because she was from the Israelites. But something was bound to show up and she was scared. So the order of God came to her – the *wahy*.<sup>22</sup> That is a point to note. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And so, when he was born, We inspired thus the mother of Moses: ‘Suckle him for a time, and then, when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve – for We shall restore him to thee, and shall make him one of Our message-bearers’” [28:7].

*Assurance! Wahy.* Some people ask the question: “Why did God always send *anbiya*<sup>23</sup> from men, and why have we never heard of a woman *nabi*? Is that discrimination on the basis of sex?” Imam Al Qurtubi<sup>24</sup> said, no, there is no discrimination because God created human beings equal; He created them from the same *Nafs* (Soul). He made them partners so He made women *anbiya* and men *anbiya*. Imam Al Qurtubi says about the mother of Musa that she was a *nabi*. A *nabi* is one who receives *wahy* and the mother of Musa received *wahy* from God so she is *nabi*. This is according to the explanation of Imam Al Qurtubi, and this explanation was given by Imam Al Qurtubi a *long, long* time ago – not since the creation of the women’s liberation movement, but hundreds of years before that.

What happened next? The mother of Moses carried out the order in the *wahy*. She got a box, put the baby in it, and threw it in the River Nile. The Plan is unfolding. The river current carried the box as far as the palace of Pharaoh and something, some tree branch in the River Nile or something, snagged the box in front of the palace of Pharaoh. If you go

<sup>22</sup> Inspiration from God

<sup>23</sup> Plural of *nabi*, which means “prophet”

<sup>24</sup> Imam Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, was born in Cordoba, Spain. He was an eminent Maliki scholar. His twenty-volume tafseer al Jami' li-ahkam al-Qar'an... is famous. He settled in Munya Abi'l-Khusavb in Upper Egypt where he died in 671H/ 1273.

<sup>19</sup> The president of the Islamic Center: 1985-86, 1995-98

<sup>20</sup> Imam was Egyptian and frequently referred, in a joking manner, to past kings and queens as his grandfathers or grandmothers

<sup>21</sup> Wife of President Reagan

## The Prophet Moses. Introduction

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nowadays to the area of Luxor and Aswan and those places in Egypt, you will find that all these palaces, especially the palace of my grandmother, Queen Hatshepsut, is built directly on the River Nile. So the box stopped at that place because the Plan had to be carried out. What happened when the royal household found the box? [Imam quotes Arabic, then explains:] They picked him up, although he was to be their biggest enemy and the one who would cause them sadness all their life. Fir'awn and his Prime Minister, Hāmān, and their soldiers were mistaken. It was the Plan. They took the box, found a very nice baby in it, attractive, and it happened that Fir'awn had no children. His wife saw the baby and turned crazy saying no one was to touch him. That is mine; that will be my baby. And she said to Fir'awn, don't kill him, either he will be our child, or, if we have a child of our own, he will

benefit us as a servant. See how the Plan of God is working – the woman suggested and the man has to obey. So Moses was not slaughtered like the other children. [The English translation of this verse is:]

“And some of Pharaoh's household found and spared him: for We had willed that he become an enemy unto them and a source of grief, seeing that Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were sinners indeed” [28:8].

The story continues. So...You know, on the television when they have a series... Nowadays it is the series of that man of Texas<sup>25</sup> – at the end of the weekly episode “To be Continued” is flashed to attract viewers next week. Now I am saying to you “To be continued next week” so<sup>26</sup>... so you will come next week, and who knows, maybe, the kitchen will have better food, also, next week.

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<sup>25</sup> The television series titled *Dallas*

<sup>26</sup> The audience now understood what Imam is trying to say and this resulted in boisterous laughter, so that Imam could not even finish his sentence.

## The Prophet Moses

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 5]

### The Birth of Moses

Following the directions in the *wahy*, Moses' mother nursed him and, when it was no longer possible to conceal his birth, she put him in a box and floated it down the River Nile. But, as a human being, and as a mother, she was very worried for her little child, not knowing where he might end up. She told Moses' sister, who was older than him, to follow the box by walking along the bank of the river, to see where it would stop, what might happen to it, whether or not someone would pick it up. The box came to rest alongside the palace of the Pharaoh. It came ashore. So they came – the people of Pharaoh – and picked it up. His sister was watching. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“On the morrow, however, an aching void grew up in the heart of the mother of Moses, and she would indeed have disclosed all about him had We not endowed her heart with enough strength to keep alive her faith in Our promise. And so she said to his sister ‘Follow him’ – and the girl watched him from afar, while they who had taken him in were not aware of it” [28:10-11].

Taken by the people of Pharaoh! They opened the box and found a very nice little infant. Pharaoh had no children. The little baby was a nice looking boy and Pharaoh's heart was moved. The Plan of God was working. In Chapter Tā-Hā also this same portion of the story of Moses is referred to and the Qur'anic verse says: “And I spread Mine Own

garment of love over thee – and this in order that thou might be reared under Mine eye.” Anybody who set their eyes on that infant loved him instantly. The wife of Pharaoh saw the boy and liked him instantly like any woman eager to adopt a child because she is barren and can't have a child of her own. So she said to Pharaoh, [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Now the wife of Pharaoh said: ‘A joy to the eye could this child be for me and thee! Slay him not: he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son!’ And they had no presentiment of what he was to become” [28:9].

Now the Plan of God appeared in something else. That infant had to be fed. Infants were breast-fed by their mothers. These bottles of nowadays were not invented yet. They did not feed babies cow's milk at that age. So they got many women to try to feed him. He refused. He was stubborn. Refused any milk! And that little girl, his sister, was watching. The Qur'an narrates the Plan of God when it says: “We made the milk of those women to be prohibited to him (*wa harramna 'alayhim...*)” His sister entered and informed them that she knew some woman whose milk the baby would not refuse and that she could guide them to a certain house where that child will be well taken care of. She gave them the name of his mother and “We returned him back to his mother” and she was the one who took care of him so she would know

that the promise of God is true, but many people don't know the secret behind the plans of God. [Imam quotes in Arabic. The translation is:]

"Now from the very beginning We caused him to refuse the breast of Egyptian nurses; and when his sister came to know this she said: 'Shall I guide you to a family that might rear him for you, and look after him with good will?' And thus We restored him to his mother, so that her eye might be gladdened, and that she might grieve no longer, and that she might know that God's promise always comes true – even though most of them know it not" [8:12-13].

There is a sort of expression in these Qur'anic verses that is not familiar to those who have not studied the Arabic language thoroughly. Notice that when God talks about Himself it is in the plural and not in the singular form. Some people who are not familiar with Arabic ask what is meant by this. Is it a group talking? In the Arabic language and grammar when some person who is great or, at least he claims to be a great person, talks about himself, he talks in the form of plural. For example, in Egypt, when King Farooq, would issue a decree, he would say, "We, Farooq, the first King of Egypt..." So he used the plural language to indicate his own greatness. When God, who is the Greatest of the Great, is talking about Himself, the language should be in the plural form.

We find that the Qur'an jumps from his infancy to his youth, and does not mention anything about the life of Moses between infancy and youth. [Imam quotes in Arabic. The translation is:]

"Now when Moses reached full manhood and had become mature of mind, We bestowed upon him the ability to judge between right and wrong as well as innate knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good" [28:14].

Moses grew up to be a strong young man, and, one day, while he was living at the palace of the Pharaoh in Egypt, he went out of the palace into the city and found two men fighting. One was an Israelite and the other an Egyptian. This is another piece of the Plan made by God. The Israelite beseeched Moses: "Help me." So Moses punched the Egyptian in the stomach. The hit came to be in a sensitive place and the man died, contrary to all expectations. A crime! Now Musa was in trouble. Pharaoh could kill him because he killed one of the people of Pharaoh. He was scared even to return to the house of Pharaoh because he had killed an Egyptian. The Qur'an narrates this part of the Plan of God [Imam quotes Arabic verse] – that is the plan – to lead Musa to some other

thing. [The English translation of the verse is:]

"And one day he entered the city at a time when most of its people were resting in their houses, unaware of what was going on in the streets; and there he encountered two men fighting with one another. هَذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ one from his own people, and the other from his enemies. And the one who belonged to his own people –

فَاسْتَعَاثَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ

cried out to him for help against him who was of his enemies – whereupon Moses struck him down with his fist, and thus brought about his end" [28:15].

When that Israelite called upon Moses to help him, the Qur'an says, اسْتَعَاثَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ which means,

"The one who is *from his own group* (شِيعَتِهِ) asked him to support him against his enemy who is the Egyptian. In this verse [28:15] the word *shi'a* is mentioned twice. In normal usage, the word *shi'a* has a special connotation: this is Shi'a and this is Sunni. But, the word *shi'a* simply means "supporter". "This person is *shi'a* Clinton" means he is one of his supporters. And when there is a group of people who become divided into subgroups, those subgroups are also called *shi'a*. And the Qur'an mentions this when it says [Imam quotes Arabic. The English translation is:]

"Verily, as for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects (*shi'a*) – thou hast nothing to do with them. Behold, their case rests with God: and in time He will make them understand what they were doing"<sup>27</sup> And that is a recommendation to the Prophet, peace be upon him, to maintain unity.

After Moses punched the Egyptian and killed him, he was filled with remorse [Imam quotes] "...But then Moses said to himself: 'This is of Satan's doing! Verily, he is an open foe leading man astray!'" And having committed the crime of killing, he had to ask for forgiveness and indicate his *tawbah* (repentance) for his wrong action, so he prayed: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:] 'O my Sustainer! Verily I have sinned against myself! Grant me, then, Thy forgiveness!' And He forgave him – for, verily, He alone is truly forgiving, a dispenser of grace" [28:16].

<sup>27</sup> 6:159

There is a response for his prayer:

فَغَفَرَ لَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

And He forgave him – for, verily, He alone is truly forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” And when this was made known to Moses, he prayed again. [Imam quotes in Arabic. The English translation is:]

“O my Sustainer! I vow by all the blessings which Thou hast bestowed on me: Never more shall I aid such as are lost in sin” [28:17].

The next day he was scared, and watched everyone around him and prayed to God to save him from his enemies. But while he was again in the street, he found the same man – the Israelite – fighting with another Egyptian and again he called Moses to help him. “You are a guy creating trouble”; that is how Moses answered him. But he felt sorry for him and he intended to intervene just to separate them. But the Egyptian said to Moses, “Are you going to kill me as you killed someone yesterday? Is that the type of a life you are going to lead?” Now Moses was scared to death. He was scared to be in the city and he was living in the palace of the Pharaoh, so where could he go? Killing an Egyptian was a very big crime. Then a man came to Moses and advised him. He told him that there was a plan to kill him because he had killed an Egyptian and he advised him to leave the city. So Moses escaped, left the city immediately, and went through the Sinai desert. That’s why the Jews took Sinai from the Egyptians!<sup>28</sup> He left the city scared, and praying to Allah to save him from his enemies. He was thinking where to go. At last, he decided to go towards Madyan and that was part of the Plan. Madyan is an area between Egypt and Palestine. [The English translation of the verses explained above is as follows:]

“And next morning he found himself in the city looking fearfully about him, when lo! the one who had sought his help the day before once again cried out to him for help – whereupon Moses said unto him: ‘Behold, thou art indeed, most clearly, deeply in the wrong!’ But then, as soon as he was about to lay violent hands on the man who was their common enemy, the latter exclaimed: ‘O Moses, dost thou intend to slay me as thou didst slay another man yesterday? Thy sole aim is to become a tyrant in this land, for thou dost not care to be of those who would set things to rights!’ And then and there a man came running from the farthermost end of the city, and said, ‘O Moses! Behold, the great ones of the kingdom are deliberating upon thy case with a view to killing thee! Begone, then: verily, I am of those who wish thee well!’ So he went forth from thence, looking fearfully about him, and prayed: ‘O my Sustainer! Save me from all evildoing folk!’ And as he turned his face towards Madyan, he said to himself: ‘It may well be that my Sustainer will thus guide me onto the right path’” [28:18-22].

Nowadays it is considered shameful for a girl to propose marriage to a man and the conventional wisdom is that the man should initiate the proposal. No. When a marriage is performed in Arabic, the girl is asked to say, “I propose to marry you” and the boy is supposed to say, “I accept.” That is the way of Islam. Where did we take this idea from? Khadija. She proposed to Muhammad. She sent him a message through a woman to tell him that she was interested in marrying him.

So, next week, we will continue with the story of Moses, *insh’allah*,<sup>29</sup> and see how he got married. So we’ll see you next Sunday, *insha’allah*. *Salam-u-alaykum wa Rahmatullah*.

<sup>28</sup> In the 1967 War

<sup>29</sup> God willing

# The Prophet Moses

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 5]

## Moses in the Sinai Desert

There is an area of the Sinai desert called, to this day, Madyan.<sup>30</sup> This is the Madyan of Egypt, *ya* Dr. Amjad,<sup>31</sup> not Madyan in the north of Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> In Madyan, there lived a man who had two daughters. Who was this man? Nobody knows. [Somebody from the audience says, “Shua‘ib”. Imam responds:] That is not right. There is no proof for that. In some of the books of tafseer it is mentioned that he was the Prophet Shua‘ib.<sup>33</sup> Other tafseers say he was an old, righteous man and not Prophet Shua‘ib. Still others say he was a descendant of the prophet Shua‘ib. So, there is no firm knowledge. Why say something about a subject when there is no definitive knowledge? All that the Qur’an says about him is, “وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ” our father is an old man.” It does not say that he was a prophet, or that he is Shua‘ib, or otherwise. Therefore, take things as they are and there is no need for us to add to them.

When Moses arrived in Madyan, he found a big group of people around the well. They were watering their animals and everyone...like our people...as you know, the one who is strongest will get his way first. Everyone was getting water from the well for their animals except two girls who were sitting aside with their animals. And so he went to them and said, “How come you are sitting aside and you are not watering your sheep?” They said, “Our father is an old man and there are lots of men who are stronger and they are getting the water for their animals, so we are waiting until that crowd is reduced. We don’t like to be in the middle of that crowd pushing the people.” So Moses – young and strong – got the bucket himself and started to water their animals. They thanked him, took their animals, and went home. As soon as they returned home, they told their father the story about the man who had helped them. There is an indication here that the girl recognized that the man is trustworthy and this is implicit in her suggestion to her father to hire him: “The best one to hire is the strong and the trustworthy.” You will see the proposal coming now.

After watering their sheep, Moses went and sat under the shade of a tree and started to pray: “رَبِّ 34 I am hungry.

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<sup>30</sup> Called Midian in the Bible

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Amjad Hussain is from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. President of the Islamic Center: 1985-86 and 1995-1998

<sup>32</sup> Where Imam visited in 1994 and spent a night by the roaring Swat River

<sup>33</sup> He is an Arabian Prophet with no authentic identification with any prophet in the Bible

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<sup>34</sup> “My Lord”

You did not give me any provisions; I am a poor man and there is no one to help me; there is no one to support me.” He is praying to Allah to save him from what he is experiencing at that time. Suddenly, one of the two girls came back and said to him, “My father is inviting you to the house to give you your wage for helping us and for giving the water to our animals.” Moses, at that time, was sitting under the tree complaining to God about his hunger and his poverty and asking for provisions. But now he felt that something is going to take place, his life is moving towards ease, so he went with her to her father. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“Now when he arrived at the wells of Madyan, he found there a large group of men who were watering their herds and flocks; and at some distance from them he came upon two women who were keeping back their flock. He asked them: ‘What is the matter with you?’ They answered: ‘We cannot water our animals until the herdsmen drive theirs home – for we are weak and our father is a very old man.’ So he watered their flock for them; and then he withdrew into the shade and prayed: ‘O my Sustainer! Verily, in dire need am I of any good which Thou mayest bestow upon me!’ Shortly afterwards, one of the two maidens approached him, walking shyly, and said: ‘Behold, my father invites thee, so that he might duly reward thee for thy having watered our flock for us...’” [28:22-25].

Now let us analyze the above verses. How come Moses is talking to those young ladies? Isn't it “haram”<sup>35</sup> to talk to them, as some would say nowadays? Why did he go and talk to them? Let your brain work. Here we have to read between the lines. And notice how Moses helped the women instead of just sitting there and staring at them. He also didn't ignore them, but, as a good and decent man, he got up and helped them finish their work. Then, after the girls told their father the story, their father sent *one of them*, ONE, to go and call upon him. Here, again, read between the lines. How come *one* girl went to call upon Moses? There was no *mahram*?<sup>36</sup> Nowadays, you cannot go to make ‘Umrah or Hajj<sup>37</sup> without a mahram. This girl went alone, by the order of her father, to call upon him to be paid for his service. And she led Moses to her father's house. She *leads* him. Doesn't walk five steps

behind him! And note here the description of the Qur'an: “*one of them went and she was shy,*” and that is one of the virtues of a woman.

How was this girl attired? What type of clothes was she wearing? Nobody knows. How come one girl alone came to take a man to her home? How did they accompany each other from that place where the well was situated to the house? These are the questions that come to mind. If you read books of tafseer, you will find there are some stories about how Moses and this girl went from the well up to the house. You will find that our Muslim scholars sometimes invent stories and spice them to make them very tasty, while, in some other tafseers, certain ulama question those stories: “Who told them this?” “How did they know all this?”

Some tafseers write that when Musa went with the girl to her house, he said to her, “I'll walk in front of you and you walk behind me. And you tell me turn right, turn left” and so on. Why? Because if Moses were to walk behind her he would be seeing her beauty and nice shape, her nice waist and her other things...”<sup>38</sup> This is mentioned in the books of tafseer! But there is no proof for it. Where they got this, I don't know. The Qur'an doesn't talk about this, doesn't say how she was attired, or how she was walking. All the Qur'an says is that “she was shy” – a very normal situation for a young girl. That is a feminine characteristic and it showed in her conduct. That's all that had happened. Then our explanators (exegetes) of the Qur'an put these spices here and there to support some ideas of their own. And, as a result, you see that this putative practice is now imitated by some Muslims. In Saudi Arabia, the woman is supposed to walk several feet behind the man; it has become a tradition. Lately, there was a joke in an American newspaper about the Muslims, saying that they have eased the situation for the women and started to give them some more respect: instead of walking five steps behind the man, they now walk two steps behind. In the story of Sayyidna Musa,<sup>39</sup> there is no indication or any proof that this had taken place. Our brothers among the ulama just invented these stories about Sayyidna Musa that he said to the girl that he would walk in front of her and that she should just direct him to the right or left. Who told them this? From where did they get this information? What is the proof that this

<sup>35</sup> That which is forbidden or sinful

<sup>36</sup> Male escort, who falls in the prohibited category for a woman to marry

<sup>37</sup> The pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia

<sup>38</sup> Imam's gestures and facial expression bespeak amazement and incredulity

<sup>39</sup> The Prophet Moses

## The Prophet Moses. Moses in the Sinai Desert

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happened? Why didn't Moses walk side-by-side with her because he is her guest? No one can confirm such stories, but, the people have their own imagination and they visualize things, and they write them in books and tafseers, but, there is no proof that this ever happened. And inserting such stories in the middle of the *explanation of the Qur'an*...<sup>40</sup> And this happens in many, many verses. Then people read them and take them for fact.

There was a very nice message on our answering machine here in the mosque the day before yesterday. Someone phoned and said, "My name is Abdullah. I am in Toledo. I came to your mosque and – *subhānallah*<sup>41</sup>– it is a fantastic building. And I prayed that God will support that mosque. But, those women who are entering with their hair uncovered... Brother! This is not a nightclub; it is not a movie house; it is a house of God. You have to respect it..." And he went on. It is a very nice message. For the sake of the history of the Islamic Center of Toledo, I have copied that message and kept it in a special tape. Maybe in the future, God will guide someone, one day, to write the history of the Muslim community of Toledo and he can insert these things as their past history.

This amazes me because the people don't look at the core of Islam; they look at the skin. People don't *act* as Muslims but they believe in the *appearance* as Muslims. The same day, Friday, we had a telephone call from a brother<sup>42</sup> here in Toledo, asking for a letter. What did he want in the letter? He wanted a letter from the Islamic Center, directed to Pizza Hut, stating that the beard is an obligation in Islam and they should let him work and not insist that he shave his beard. When this came to my attention, I said that we should phone Pizza Hut and tell them to insist that he shave his head also! Because that person who is working in Pizza Hut could be a very good ambassador for Islam in that place of business, not through his beard or through his hair, but through his actions, through his dealings, through his character, through his morals. That is what Islam is looking for. As I said many times before, we have to utilize our brain; the people who talk about *hijab*<sup>43</sup> emphasize and emphasize and emphasize it, and quote

Qur'anic verses in support of it. If you examine the Qur'an from cover to cover, you'll find the word "hijab" mentioned several times, but *none* of those mean dress, or refer to dress. What is Islam after? It is modesty: a form which will not attract the two sexes to each other. And this is not done *in any place* in the world – not even in those places where the women have, what they call, *niqab*. Niqab is something bigger than hijab. Hijab means covering the hair. Niqab means having a cover on the face with an opening in front of the eyes so the wearer can see, although some ulama issued *fatwas*<sup>44</sup> lately, stating that even that little opening in front of her eyes should not be just open, but it should be in the form of a netting so no one will look at her eyes and turn crazy. And I ask myself: will that stop the attraction between the sexes? It will not. I'll not be attracted to this woman because I cannot see her, but, what I<sup>45</sup> am doing is that I am opening my shirt buttons and wearing a chain with *Ayat-ul-Kursi*<sup>46</sup> dangling at the end, and maybe I'm even putting an earring in my ear, and I am wearing shorts.<sup>47</sup> She is seeing all that; she will be attracted to me. So it will not stop the corruption. If we are to apply the rules of hijab, they have to be imposed on both males and females. Otherwise, we have done only half the job; the men will not be attracted to women, but women will be attracted to men because they are seeing everything, so the corruption will continue. That is why I say, use your brains! Nowhere in the Qur'an is the word "hijab" mentioned to indicate that it is a form of dress. When God spoke to Moses it was from "behind a hijab" – a cover. In this case the "cover" or the "hijab" was the horizon or the universe. It is not a dress! Sayyidna Sulayman<sup>48</sup> forgot his prayer until the sun went below the horizon and "the earth covered (hijab) it"; it is not a dress. There are some other Qur'anic verses in Chapter Al Ahzāb and in Chapter An-Nūr that people interpret wrongly to support their ideas of hijab.

Coming back to the story of Moses now, there is another very important lesson we can learn from this story. Why did the old man send one of the girls only? Why not the two of them? He could have sent the two, so, at least, one

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<sup>40</sup> Imam leaves the sentence unfinished but his expression shows clearly his condemnation and disapproval of this practice

<sup>41</sup> Glory be to God

<sup>42</sup> A Muslim

<sup>43</sup> The traditional head covering of Arab women

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<sup>44</sup> Religious verdicts

<sup>45</sup> The men

<sup>46</sup> Verses from the Qur'an. Wearing *any* kind of jewelry by men is strictly prohibited in Islam with the sole exception of a wedding band

<sup>47</sup> Men are required to be covered from the naval to below the knees

<sup>48</sup> The Prophet Solomon

could guard the other. Or he could look for someone – a male relative of the family – to go and call that man. How could he send only one girl to call a man who is unknown to them and from out of town? That should teach us something. And that is the idea, which I have talked about before, that Islam wants us to fight the devil, not to escape from the devil. Escaping from the devil is very easy. If you imprison a woman in the house and lock her up so she will not be with devils, then you are escaping from the devil, but, if you take your daughter, teach her the right from the wrong, educate your son, teach him the right from the wrong, and put them with the devils, they will survive. They will fight the devil if they believe in themselves and if they are confident of their own identities; then they will stay upright and on the right path, because, especially in this society, there is no protection except for a very strong foundation of values, and an understanding of the difference between right and wrong. If you make it hard on your family at home by being overprotective, remember that they go to school where the boys and girls are together and they share in all kind of activities. Teach them how to resist the devil, and how to behave themselves, and how to be proud of their faith and their values, even if it is contrary to the values of the society. But to isolate them, to imprison them, this will not work and will never achieve the purpose of making them human beings who will function uprightly in this society. This is a lesson we can grasp from the instructions of this pious man when he sent one of his daughters to get that man, who was a stranger, when he was capable of sending a chaperon with her, if he wished.

Moses went home and the girl proposed. You know, nowadays, if a girl proposes to the boy, it is a crime – even in the 20th-century. In ancient times the girls used to propose, and that is the Islamic way. When Moses arrived in the house, he told their father his own story of how he had killed an Egyptian and how he escaped from Egypt to Sinai. The father said to him, “Now you are safe; don’t be scared; you are far away from those tyrannical people.” And as soon as Moses finished telling his story, one of the girls advised her father – look at the democracy, the girl is advising her father – saying to him, “O Father, it will be very nice if you will hire that man. He is very honest and he is very strong, and these are the two qualities for which a man should be hired. Give him a job.” So, what did her father say?

As his daughter had suggested to him, he decided to hire Moses: a proposal made by the girl to her father, and her

father forwarded the proposal to Moses. How did he hire him? What type of money would their father pay him if he employed him? Lebanese lira? Pakistani rupee? Egyptian pounds? Minimum wage? Ten dollars per hour? Possibly he was a poor man and could not afford to pay money.

The Qur’an refers to the mahar or the dowry of the woman as *ajr* (wage). In Chapter Al-Ma’idah<sup>49</sup> the Qur’an talks about marriage with *ahlay kitab*:<sup>50</sup>

إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ

The literal translation is, “If you pay them *their wage*,” but because the word is used in the context of marriage, it means, “If you pay them their dowry.”<sup>51</sup> But what about Moses? He was penniless, homeless, and on the run, and the old man already knows that. How could Moses afford to marry? He has to pay *mahar*<sup>52</sup> to the girl, right? On behalf of his daughter this pious man makes the proposal to Moses: “I would like to give you one of these two girls – you select whomever you like and marry her – and that will be your wage in return for your work in my house for eight years. If you work for 10 years, that will be your prerogative, but, I don’t like to be tough on you.” A negotiation! That is the wage – what is called, nowadays, mahar or dowry. So he agrees to work for them for eight years in lieu of paying mahar to the girl. He doesn’t get wages.

Nowadays, we have a problem in the Muslim world related to mahar. When someone wants to marry a girl, her father will ask that the groom pay this much [money] in advance and that much as late dowry; he has to have an Arabic orchestra and an English orchestra; and in the Gulf area they have added to that by saying that the groom has to arrange to have the party in the Hilton hotel in Switzerland, and charter a flight to take the invitees to that function and, as a result, it is very common now to find girls in the Gulf States who are in their 40’s and they have never married because the boys cannot afford them! This is a big difference from the time of Moses. Who can afford all this even now? So the boys come here to America and marry free of charge. This story indicates to us that the dowry, which was used for the marriage of Moses, was work. And the Islamic way is that the girl is the one who

<sup>49</sup> Chapter 5

<sup>50</sup> “The People of the Book” i.e. the Christians and Jews

<sup>51</sup> 5:5-6

<sup>52</sup> Dowry

proposes, but, nowadays, we say, “O, the girl proposed to marry him that is a very shameful thing” But, in reality, that is the way of Islam.

Omar bin Khattab had a daughter. He went to AbuBakr and asked him if he would marry his daughter. He proposed for her. And AbuBakr said, “I cannot. I have enough of that.” So he went to Ali and said to him: I have a very nice daughter; will you marry her? Ali said, “No, I am not interested.” So he went to the Prophet and complained to him that he had proposed to AbuBakr and Ali to marry his daughter but both of them refused. The Prophet said to him, “Maybe God will give her someone else whom she might feel is better. I’ll marry her.” And that is how Hafza, daughter of Omar bin Khattab, became the wife of the Prophet. Khadija proposed to the Prophet. She sent a lady to the Prophet telling him: “What do you think? She is interested in marrying you.” That is the Islamic way. Today, it is just the opposite. If we look at the story of Moses, we find that the girl proposed to Moses because she said to her father, “Hire him, the best man to hire is the strong man and the trustworthy man, and he has both those qualities.” And that is a form of proposal because she knew that her father would propose to him and offer him one of them as “wages”. And Moses married the same girl who said to her father to hire him. It seems that she proposed him for herself.

Moses accepted the offer saying, “That is the agreement between me and you. I’ll fulfill it.” And see how

they seal the contract between them:

“وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ” God is witnessing that agreement between me and you”, that you will hire me to work for you and my wage will be the marriage of your daughter. Marriage is completed!

[The translation of the verses explained above is:]

“And as soon as Moses came unto him [the father of the two girls] and told him the story of his life, he said: ‘Have no fear! Thou art now safe from those evildoing folk!’ Said one of the two daughters: ‘O my father! Hire him: for, behold, the best man that thou couldst hire is one who is as strong and worthy of trust as he!’ After some time, the father said: ‘Behold, I am willing to let thee wed one of these two daughters of mine on the understanding that thou wilt remain eight years in my service; and if thou shouldst complete ten years, that would be an act of grace from thee, for I do not want to impose any hardship on thee: on the contrary, thou wilt find me, if God so will, righteous in all my dealings.’ Answered Moses: ‘Thus shall it be between me and thee! Whichever of the two terms I fulfill, let there be no ill-will against me. And God be witness to all that we say’” [28:25-28].

Moses fulfilled the term. Eight years or ten? We don’t know. Then he took his wife and left the house. Where did he go? What happened to him and his wife? We are going to talk about that next week. So, to be continued!

## The Prophet Moses

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 5]

### Moses Talks to God and Receives His Mission

**A**fter Moses completed his term of employment with his father-in-law, he took his wife and went into the roadless desert. It was wintertime. Where was he going? He wanted to go back to Egypt! It seems that his homeland was very dear to him. During the night he lost his way. He didn't know where he was, or where to go. [Imam quotes verses 20:9-10 in Arabic, then explains:] It says, do you know about the story of Moses? When he saw a fire, and he said to *ahl-libī*<sup>53</sup> (أَهْلِيَّ), stay here. I am going to that fire, either to bring some of it to warm ourselves, or, maybe, I'll find some people there who can give us news about where the road is and how we can go about in this desert. That is the verse. But, it has its ramifications.

See the word *ahl* (أَهْلٌ)? The word *ahl* in Arabic is causing a lot of trouble among Muslims. Some Muslim scholars interpret the word *ahl* as being limited to certain family members only. But, in fact, it could mean *all* the people who are living under one roof – all of them will be *ahl* for the one who is earning a livelihood for them. That word *ahl* is a source of divisiveness between the people who call themselves Sunni and those who call themselves Shi'ī. The Shi'ī say they

are the supporters of *ahl-il bayt*.<sup>54</sup> Who do they consider as Muhammad's "ahl-il bayt"? Fatima<sup>55</sup> and Ali.<sup>56</sup> To the Sunnis his ahl-il bayt includes everyone who was living with the Prophet under one roof – including his wives. The Qur'an said when directing the talk to the wives of the Prophet [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"And abide quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the old days of pagan ignorance; and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Messenger: for God only wants to remove from you all that might be loathsome, O you members of the Prophet's household (أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ), and to purify you to utmost purity."<sup>57</sup>

When Moses directed his *ahl* to "stay here" the word *ahl* in this context means his wife, because he had no one with him except his wife. But if you tell some of our fanatic brothers among the Shi'ā that 'Aiyshah<sup>58</sup> was from ahl-il bayt,

<sup>54</sup> The family of the Prophet Muhammad

<sup>55</sup> The youngest daughter of the Prophet

<sup>56</sup> The Prophet's son-in-law, the husband of Fatima and the fourth khalifa of Islam

<sup>57</sup> 33:33

<sup>58</sup> The youngest wife of the Prophet Muhammad

<sup>53</sup> His wife

they say “*Astaghfirullah!*”<sup>59</sup> She never was ahl-il bayt.” That is the fanaticism. Islam is very clear: Moses had only one wife who was sharing with him the road and the struggle, until he received the revelation, while she was waiting for him; he had no children, no friends and he had no one else at that time and the Qur’an states: “He said to *ahl-libī* (his *ahl*)” – that is, his wife. So the word *ahl* includes wife.

It was the habit of the people at that time to light a fire, at night, on the top of the mountains, or other strategic places, so the fire would direct the travelers in the desert, in addition to serving the purpose of warming the people on winter nights. Moses had lost his way, and he told his wife to wait while he went to the fire to get some guidance or, at least, he would bring back a burning brand of fire to warm themselves. This is another piece of the plan of God. God had chosen Moses since his childhood, just as He had prepared Muhammad, since his childhood, to be His messenger in the future.

Moses saw the fire on the top of Mount Tūr<sup>60</sup> in the Sinai desert. Moses is also referred to, sometimes, as *Kaleem-ul-Allah*.<sup>61</sup> What had happened? When he arrived at the fire, he heard a call from the sky: “Take off your shoes, Moses, you are in the sacred land. I am your God. Worship Me and establish prayer to remember Me.” The Qur’an explains this very eloquently [Imam quotes verses 20:10-14 in Arabic]. That was the start of the message which Moses received – the message of Islam – not the message of Judaism, as many people think. It is Islam. And that will be spelled out afterwards. [The English translation of the above verses is:]

“And has the story of Moses ever come within thy ken? Lo! He saw a fire in the desert and so he said to his family ‘Wait here! Behold, I perceive a fire far away: perhaps I can bring you a brand therefrom, or find at the fire some guidance.’ But when he came close to it, a voice called out ‘O Moses! Verily I am thy Sustainer! Take off, then, thy sandals! Behold thou art in the sacred valley of Tuwā, and I have chosen thee to be My messenger: listen, then, to what is being revealed unto thee. ‘Verily, I – I alone – am God; there is no deity save Me. Hence, worship Me alone, and be constant in prayer, so as to remember Me’ [20: 9-15].

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي] = Be constant in prayer, so as to remember Me]

As soon as he arrived at the site of the fire “*nūdiya ya Musa...*”<sup>62</sup> It is in the passive voice. The verse does not say directly that God called him, but it says, “Someone calling was heard by Moses” and in another Qur’anic verse, elsewhere, it says, “He heard a voice as if it were coming from the Blessed Tree.”<sup>63</sup> Did he see Allah? He didn’t. He could not, because Allah has no limit. You cannot see Him; the sight of a human being cannot comprehend God so that is why it is in the passive voice. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“No human vision can encompass Him whereas He encompasses all human vision: for He alone is unfathomable, all-aware.”<sup>64</sup>

So he heard that call from the sky, “I am your God”. The Qur’an mentions in another verse, also, that God talked to Moses: *وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْوِيمًا*<sup>65</sup>. The structure of this sentence in Arabic denotes the highest type of confirmation in the Arabic language. The strong emphasis revealed by the structure of this sentence in Arabic cannot be translated into English.

How did this talk between Moses and God take place? [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And it is not given to mortal man that God should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or by a voice, as it were, from behind a veil (*hijab*), or by sending a messenger (the angel of revelation – Gabriel) to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills to reveal: for, verily, He is exalted, wise.”<sup>66</sup>

Those are the three methods of communication with God. “*Or by a voice, as it were, from behind a veil (hijab)*” that is the *hijab* that our brothers interpret in some other way; it is not a scarf. In this situation, God was talking to Moses from behind the universe and it is the horizon or the universe that is the *hijab*.

What did the voice say to him? “*Ya Musa,*<sup>67</sup> I am your

<sup>59</sup> God forgive us

<sup>60</sup> The Arabic name for Mount Sinai

<sup>61</sup> The one who talked to Allah, or, Allah *talked to him*

<sup>62</sup> A voice was heard, calling him

<sup>63</sup> Referred to, in the Bible, as the Burning Bush

<sup>64</sup> 6:103

<sup>65</sup> 4:164

<sup>66</sup> 42:51

<sup>67</sup> O Moses

God, take your shoes off, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwā.” Here is an answer for you when our American friends come here and ask why you take off your shoes when you are going into the prayer room. Tell them, because that is a sacred room; that is a room where you face God. So when you take your shoes off, it is an indication of sacredness and respect for that room, and, tell them, Moses did that even before Muhammad existed.

According to some Muslim scholars “Tuwā” is a description for that valley and not a name for it. Tuwā means “twice done” so the sacred valley of Tuwā means it is “twice blessed or twice sacred”: God’s voice was heard in it and Moses was raised to prophethood in it. Therefore, Moses was instructed to take off his shoes because the place is sacred and the instruction was given to him in the form of an order, “Take off your shoes!” Then God tells him: “I have selected you. Listen to what I am going to reveal to you.” God then mentioned three things:

- 1) I am your God; there is no God but Me.
- 2) Worship Me.
- 3) Establish prayer to remember Me

(أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي) and be aware that the Day of Judgment is coming

This means that prayer (*as-salah*) was imposed upon Moses. Prayer (*as-salah*) was imposed upon Jesus.<sup>68</sup> Prayer is imposed upon Muslims.<sup>69</sup> So, in every heavenly message, the prayer is an essential part of the faith. But, *for what reason? Prayer is a means to an end. It is not an end in itself.* Prayer is given special mention because it serves as a means to an end, and we will talk about it later.

The Oneness of God was the first and foremost message given to every single prophet. Here we see that it is the first message given to Moses. So, if any Christian or Jew or Muslim believes otherwise, then it is a deviation from the original message. For Muslims, the belief in One God came in the form of a declaration – *La ilāha illal-lah*.<sup>70</sup> That is the first proclamation, which will make one a Muslim, or, at least, be identified as Muslim.

“Worship Me.” What does “worship” mean? Worshipping means putting Allah in the place of sacredness.

There are actions imposed in every religion which are called *ibadāt* and their purpose is to make a sort of link between the human being and his Creator. *Ibadāt* include not only prayer, but fasting, *zakah*,<sup>71</sup> and pilgrimage. Why did God select the prayer for special mention? That is because the prayer is the most repeated form of all the *ibadāt*. Some ulama say that prayer is selected for special mention because it is the form of worship which makes a man very close to God; the Prophet described it as “He who establishes the prayer is as if he had established the whole religion.”

Nowadays, the prayer has become an end in itself. We have brothers....The day before yesterday, 1:30, after midnight, a young lady called me on the phone and she was screaming. I ended up telling her that the Imam cannot solve her problem and that she call the police. Now the husband of that lady is going from house to house in lots of Muslim houses saying that Imam Khattab is encouraging his wife to call the police and report him. That guy has never entered this mosque.<sup>72</sup> He goes to another mosque, and his beard is up to here.<sup>73</sup> And I discovered that his wife already filed 14 reports with the police against him. <sup>74</sup>Then I started to reflect: what is Islam? That guy is sitting in the mosque all day; he prays 700<sup>75</sup> raka’ats every night. I think this is useless. Because the prayer was imposed upon Muslims to serve a purpose: “To enjoin what is right and to forbid what is wrong.”<sup>76</sup> If the prayer is not helping you do that job, then you did not pray. The Qur’an says about the relationship between a husband and wife “فَأَمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٍ بِإِحْسَانٍ” The parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness.”<sup>77</sup> I married that young lady and I feel my life is miserable with her, then, I am between two alternatives: either I live with her in an amicable way, or I say to her, “Lady, you are divorced; go, maybe God will give you a man who is a better man than me, and will give me a woman who is better than you.” *As easy as that.* That is Islam. It has no police, no courts; it does not need any such institutions. If you would like to apply

<sup>68</sup> 19:30-33

<sup>69</sup> 2:43

<sup>70</sup> “There is no God but One God”

<sup>71</sup> The obligatory poor-due [2.5% of net income]

<sup>72</sup> The Islamic Center of Greater Toledo

<sup>73</sup> Indicating the navel

<sup>74</sup> Imam begins to talk in a soft, thoughtful tone

<sup>75</sup> An idiomatic expression to indicate “countless”

<sup>76</sup> 9:71

<sup>77</sup> 2:229

Islam in your life, and call yourself Muslim, and give credence to that long beard **فَأَمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٍ بِإِحْسَانٍ** – either stay together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness. Islam made it very easy, while we make it very difficult. In those 14 reports to the police, the woman listed a broken rib; and she had kidney trouble from the beating she received, and our brother is a very “staunch” Muslim.<sup>78</sup> So I started to think it over: what does the Qur’an say about the relationship between a husband and wife? The Qur’an says, “And among His signs is that he created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in peace together, and that he put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect.”<sup>79</sup> Where is the mercy and where is the love if someone is breaking the ribs of his mate? Is that Islam? Will his prayer be of any benefit in that situation? What is the value of living in the mosque? If you cannot establish that love and that mercy, *release her*. Tell her, “Go, *Allahi sal alayki*.”<sup>80</sup> As easy as that and that is the meaning of

**فَأَمْسَاكَ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٍ بِإِحْسَانٍ** I am saying all this to show that we have turned the means into goals. Prayer, fasting, all the ‘*ibadāt* which are imposed upon us, are means to make us Muslims who symbolize living, moving Islam on earth. Islam moving on earth! We have the people of the *Tablighi Jama’at*<sup>81</sup> going from one place to the other, leaving their wives and their children for three months at a time, going for *da’wa*.<sup>82</sup> Sleeping in mosques for *da’wa*. Knocking at your door *two o’clock after midnight* for *da’wa*.<sup>83</sup> Islam does not need that kind of *da’wa*. The *da’wa* of Islam is your actions wherever you are working: if you are an engineer be a *muslim*<sup>84</sup> engineer, if you are a laborer, be a *muslim* laborer. Then people

<sup>78</sup> Imam starts to talk in an intimate whisper

<sup>79</sup> 30:21

<sup>80</sup> “May Allah make it easy for you”

<sup>81</sup> A group of self-appointed men who travel all over the world to preach Islam

<sup>82</sup> Preaching

<sup>83</sup> This actually happened here in Perrysburg

<sup>84</sup> Note that it is not written with a capital ‘M’. It is not a proper noun in this context. The word “muslim” in Arabic could be a noun, or an adjective which means, “one who has surrendered his will to the will of God and lives his life according to the Laws of God at all times, and remains conscious of the Presence of God at all times.” In English the word “Muslim” is used exclusively as a proper noun.

will inquire what religion you belong to. That will be *da’wa*. That is how Islam spread originally. Islam did not spread all over the world through people like me, or the people who graduated from Al- Azhar. It was spread through the business people who traveled from one country to the other and because they were *acting muslim*, the people followed their religion. That’s how Islam spread in China, in India, in Spain and in all these places. That is the way we have to learn, and the way to implement.

So the prayer was imposed upon the Prophet Moses that night when God said to him, I am your God; there is no God but Me. Worship Me. Establish prayer to always remember Me so you will act according to My rules.

[Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Behold, although I have willed to keep it hidden, the Last Hour is bound to come, so that every human being may be recompensed in accordance with what he strove for in life” [20:15-16].

God is telling Moses that the Day of Judgment, for sure, is coming. There is no doubt in that. Don’t let anyone who does not believe in that Day of Judgment dissuade you from that belief, or make you deviate from that belief. “The Hour, or the Day of Judgment, for sure, is coming”, but, here the completion of the verse says, if you translate it literally into English, “I am about to hide it so no one will know its time or when it will come.” The reason given by Allah for His intention to hide the exact time of its coming is “so that every human being may be recompensed in accordance with what he strove for in life.”

We see many people arguing and debating about Time and some people are even calculating, nowadays, that the year 2000<sup>85</sup> will not come and they are *actually saying the Prophet said so!* In response to this claim another question is raised by other thinkers as to which 2000 they are referring to? Is it the year 2000 according to the calendar of the Muslims, or the calendar of the Christians, or the calendar of the Jews which has already exceeded 5000 now? There are, believe it or not, some people who are using the computer to make calculations and they have reached some sort of conclusion that the Day of Judgment is coming on that specific day, that year, that month, and that time. This is completely opposed to the Qur’anic verse, “The knowledge of the Day of Judgment is confined to the knowledge of God.”

<sup>85</sup> This is the end of the year 1992

What about the expression, “I am about to hide it so no one will know its time or when it will come.” This is an idiomatic expression in Arabic which means, “The matter is so secret that I did not even tell myself about it.”

[Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Now, what is this in your right hand, O Moses? He answered: ‘It is my staff; I lean on it; and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and many other uses have I for it’” [20:17-18].

So what type of an answer is this to the question he was asked? God asked him only “What is in your hand?” His answer should have been, “A stick”, period. So why is he extending his answer and saying it is my stick, and I do so and so, and so and so with it. But there is a reason for this. The ulama say the reason is that Moses is talking to God – to the One he loves – and he wants to prolong it and not to finish it off quickly. He is very keen and eager to continue talking with his Creator. So God said to him, “Throw it, O Moses.” It turned into a snake running and moving. Moses got scared of it. But God tells him to take a hold of it and not to be scared for He shall restore it to its former state. That was one of the miracles God gave to Moses. And we can take this as an example – isn’t it that, with the permission of God, Moses turned the dead stick into a living snake? Now, when someone argues with you and tells you that since your Qur’an acknowledges that Jesus gave life to the dead, and since this is an attribute of God only, therefore, Jesus must be God, then you can tell them that if this is applicable to Jesus then it should be applicable to Moses, since he turned a dead thing into a living thing. And we have talked about the example of Ibrahim<sup>86</sup> before.<sup>87</sup> So Jesus was not alone in displaying miracles that make some people argue that, since he had the attributes and the power of God, therefore, he is God. The fact that Jesus used to give life to the dead was just one of his miracles, just as the snake and the birds were miracles for Moses and Ibrahim, respectively.

God gave Moses a second miracle. [Imam quotes Arabic and explains:] “**وَاضْمُمُ يَدَكَ إِلَى جَنَاحِكَ** Now place thy hand within thy armpit: it will come forth shining white, without a blemish, as another sign of Our grace, so that We might make thee aware of some of Our greatest wonders” [20:22-23].

<sup>86</sup> The Prophet Abraham

<sup>87</sup> Sermon: “The Birth of Jesus and his Miracles.”

Put your hand under *your junah* (جَنَاحِكَ) and then take it out; it will be shining white. The literal translation of *junah* is “wing”. Here is a point that should make us think. “Put your hand under your wing.” A human being has no “wing”. What is the meaning of *janahik* here? What does it actually mean? Some ulama say it means “your arm” because the arms of the human being are in the place of where the wings of the birds are located. So it means, “Put your hand under your arm (armpit).” But there is another Qur’anic verse<sup>88</sup> which talks about this same topic and God says to Moses, “Put your hand in *your jaib*<sup>89</sup> and then take it out and it will be shining white – **وَأَدْخُلْ يَدَكَ فِي جَيْبِكَ** – This means that *janahik* and *jaibik* correspond with each other in the meanings of these two verses. So can we say that the word *jaib* here means underarm? That’s a question.

What is the meaning of the word “jaib” in Arabic language? That’s what I would like to know because it still puzzles me. Jaib means “pocket”. But which pocket? At a certain stage in time when the people wore what we call, nowadays, *gallabiya*,<sup>90</sup> it had a jaib here.<sup>91</sup> Today our clothes have many jaibs; we have many pockets: one on the right and one on the left,<sup>92</sup> and one up [indicating his lapel] and one in the pantaloons. So what was Moses wearing at that time? And all this discussion will attract attention to another very debatable Qur’anic verse that lots of people are talking about nowadays:

**وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ**<sup>93</sup>. It means, “Let them put their *khimar* or scarf” – as it is translated into English – “on their *jujub*.”<sup>94</sup> Which jaib? What is the meaning of this? Does it mean “under the arm” – put your scarf under the arm? Does it mean that the women at that time were wearing sleeveless dresses? Or what was the case? If you look into the tafseers, they give yet another interpretation for the word *jaib*: it is the opening of the blouse at the front of the neck. The women have buttons here,

<sup>88</sup> 27:12

<sup>89</sup> *Jaibik* = your *jaib*.

<sup>90</sup> The traditional male Arab outfit

<sup>91</sup> Indicating his right side at waist level

<sup>92</sup> Imam indicates the pockets in his blazer

<sup>93</sup> 24:31

<sup>94</sup> plural of *jaib*

nowadays, so they don't need to put the *khimar* over it. How do you interpret this Qur'anic verse, "Let them put their *khimar* on their *jujūb*"? Which *jaibs*? What is *jaibs*? And God says to Sayyidna Musa, "Put your hand in your *jaib*. It will come out shining white." Was Moses putting his hand inside his shirt opening at the neck, or was he putting it inside his pocket, or in his armpit? Which *jaib* is the Qur'an talking about and how can we reach a decision? These are the things which need some research. That is what invites every Muslim to think, and everyone should think for himself and see what is appropriate. And don't take my word as gospel because I have a brain exactly like yours; I could be right and I could be wrong in my own thinking. So, if what I say makes sense to you, follow it, but if it does not make sense to you, don't follow it. But the main point is that when we read the Qur'an, we should try to learn something from what we read, and apply it, and act according to it in our daily life, and not just read the whole Qur'an in one night, or in one month. Read just a small part and contemplate it, think about it, and get something out of it which will benefit you in life.

I am quoting you all these verses and, at the end, if you ask me what *jaib* means, my answer is: I don't know. My mind could not reach a definite conclusion; I am perplexed, and I am sure you are perplexed also. Therefore, we will leave it as it is – we interpret it the way we see fit because we don't know what type of clothes Moses was wearing at that time. What we can understand from that verse is that Moses used to put his hand somewhere and then bring it out and it would be shining white and this was a sign of the power of God given to this man to prove that he is a messenger of God; this is not something any human being could do.

Why am I telling you all this? I would like to emphasize that the Qur'anic language is very deep. It puzzled the Arabs in the Golden Age of their linguistic skills and it is still puzzling them; there are verses which are elusive in their meaning, and, if we reach a decision today, that decision could be changed by the generation after us based upon the body of knowledge which exists at that time. And it is the job of the Qur'an to perplex you, because it came to challenge the human mind: "If the jinn and the human kind gathered together to write such a Qur'an they will never be able to do that even if they will back one another." That is the challenge the Qur'an poses for the human mind. So what is our role here as human beings? Our role is to make up our minds in such a way so as to be as close as possible to the truth as we

believe it.

In Islam every *hukm* or rule falls into one of two categories: *hukm-qat'i* and *hukm-ijtehadī*. The *hukm-qat'i* is a clear-cut rule. The *hukm-ijtehadī* is a rule which is open for debate and for thinking. The clear-cut rules in the Qur'an are very, very few. The majority are of the other kind. For example, "It is prohibited for you to eat carrion, to drink blood or to eat pork." That's clear-cut. You cannot argue it; you have to follow it; your brain needs not to work here. In the area of family laws, the Qur'an says, if a woman is divorced from her husband three times she cannot remarry him until she marries another man and he dies or divorces her. That is a clear-cut verse.<sup>95</sup> But, you know, we, human beings, are very clever and very skillful, and we even try to trick Allah, sometimes, and to laugh at Him.

I am sure every one of you has gone through this, or, at least, seen it happen back home. The people are looking for appearances; to them Islam is to satisfy the public that we have done what the Qur'an says: she is divorced and now she is allowed to remarry. But see how the people laugh at God – I witnessed this while I was a student and boarding with a family. Their daughter was divorced from her husband three times. Her husband came back and said, "People, I am sorry I would like my wife and my kids back." So they "hired" a guy – an old man – and married the girl to him. Then, they sat with the guy for the whole night – all night; drinking tea all the night – so he will not have the opportunity to be with the woman or even to go to the bedroom. I was a teenager at that time and you know how awkward a teenager would be in such a situation. In the morning, they asked the guy to divorce her. He said, "Are you crazy? I love my wife. She is very nice. Is there any one who can force me to divorce my wife? No way!" And he refused to divorce her until he got a *good* sum of money. The family thought that he was a good man – he was in his 60s – so they thought that he would be an easy guy. The girl was young – in her 30s. My main point here is that, sometimes, we think that we are going to trick Allah so we make up a plan, while the Qur'an, when it stipulated that order, did so as a remedy for something: when a couple is divorced three times, it means their life is unbearable; let her try another man, and he tries another woman – you don't know his or her value until you try another – maybe, when they go back to each other after that, they will know the value of each other. That is how Islam

<sup>95</sup> 2:230

looks at it. This is an example of *hukm-qat'i* in the family law of Islam. There is no argument about it.

*Hukm-ijtehad*: the majority of the rules of Islam fall in this category. Why are they called *ahkaam ijtehad*<sup>96</sup> or rules in the interpretation of which the thinking mind plays a role? This is because these rules are related to the public benefit. And public benefits change from time to time and from environment to environment. Imam Shafi'i,<sup>97</sup> *radiya-Allahu-'an*,<sup>98</sup> lived a period of his life in Baghdad and a period of his life in Egypt. When he went to Egypt he gave *fatwas*<sup>99</sup> opposite to what he gave in Baghdad. So some Muslims said to him, "Imam, aren't you contradicting yourself because you said the opposite in Baghdad?" He said, "Yes, but, that was Baghdad, this is Egypt: this is a special environment and that was a special environment." This means that Imam Shafi'i looked at Islam from the point of view of the public benefit – to see what will benefit the people. And that is why the majority of the rules in Islam are *ijtehad* – shapeable. *Ijtehad* means, to make an effort, to work on something, to make up your mind, and see which is the best. If we utilize this approach, then we will have achieved what is said about Islam: it is a faith that is applicable in every time and every place. The section in Islamic Fiqh<sup>100</sup> which is called *Daab-ul Masaalih al-Mursala*<sup>101</sup> takes up a whole year's study in Al-Azhar.

After instructing Moses about the Oneness of God, the worshipping of God, teaching him about the Day of Judgment, and then supporting him with these two miracles, to prove that he is not an ordinary human being, but that he is supported by a Divine power, God tells him to go directly to Pharaoh because that man had transgressed his limits. So, what did Moses say to God? This is the supplication of Moses – this is a literal translation: "Open my heart, make my mission easy, and take away the knot from my tongue so they will understand my speech" [20:25-35].

Most of the tafeer books write some details and stories here which I don't believe. They write that when Moses was in the house of Pharaoh, one day he pulled Pharaoh from his beard, and so Pharaoh wanted to kill him. But his

wife pleaded with him and said that he was only a child and he did not know what he was doing. As further proof that Moses knew not what he was doing when pulling the Pharaoh's beard, she suggested that he give him a burning hot coal and tell him to put it in his mouth and if he did so, then he'd know that he was only a child and he didn't know what he was doing. So, according to these tafeers, Pharaoh gave Moses a red hot coal and Moses right away put the coal in his mouth and it burned his tongue, and since then he could not speak clearly and that is why he asked God to remove the knot from his tongue so they could understand what he said. This is the junk that is in our books. I don't believe in it. Just read about *all* of the prophets in the Qur'an and you will see that God prepared each and every one of them since their childhood to be His future messengers. If there is any defect in a messenger he will not be listened to because he is supposed to be near perfect. Take, for example, Muhammad who was not educated. AbuBakr said to him, "I have traveled in all Arabia but I have never seen a man as fluent and eloquent as you. Who taught you? Who brought you up?" And he replied "God." In the same manner, with regard to Moses, the Qur'anic verses say, "I (God) have chosen you. . ." "I made you for Myself. . ." <sup>102</sup> How did God make him with half a tongue? And that will indicate to us that not every word written in our tafeers is necessarily correct, but you have to use your brain.

[Imam quotes 20:25-35 again, and explains:] It means, O Allah, open up my heart to Your light; open my heart to Your cause, so when I talk, I'll be talking from my heart. Make my mission easy; don't make it difficult for me. Enable me to talk logic – to talk to their minds so they will listen and will internalize what I am saying. Don't let me tremble; make my language fluent so that they will fully understand my speech and they will be convinced. And designate for me a supporter from my family and I suggest Haroon,<sup>103</sup> my brother, to be my partner in that mission to help me bear my burden.

Moses had escaped from Egypt after he had killed an Egyptian who was quarrelling with an Israelite, but the Mission was to send him back to Egypt. So, Moses was scared. In response to his prayer, God said, "What you have asked for, Moses, will be fulfilled; your prayer is granted." And here God tells Moses about some other favors that He had granted him

<sup>96</sup> Plural of *Hukm-ijtehad*

<sup>97</sup> Founder of the Shafi'i School of Thought

<sup>98</sup> May God be pleased with him

<sup>99</sup> Religious verdicts

<sup>100</sup> Islamic jurisprudence

<sup>101</sup> The benefits of the public

<sup>102</sup> 20:13 and 20:41

<sup>103</sup> Aaron

in his life since his birth. God tells Moses how He took care of him since his birth by relating to him the story of his life in detail. God tells him: I granted you a favor when I inspired your mother to undertake those actions that saved your life – how your mother put you in a box and cast you on the river. I granted you a favor when I planted in you love: any one who looked upon you loved you instantly. I granted you a favor when you were under My care permanently whether in the house of Pharaoh or with your mother. I granted you a favor when We returned you to your own mother so you would be the delight of her eye and she would not be sad for being separated from you. I granted you a favor when I saved you from Pharaoh after you had killed a man. Subsequently, you went to Madyan, where you lived with the people of Madyan for some time. Then you left Madyan and came here.

Moses requested God to make his brother, Haroon, share the burden of his mission with him and God granted his request. Now, the talk is directed to both Moses and Haroon: *Idh-habaa ila Fir'awn*. . . So, we notice the difference. The talk is in the dual form. In the English language more than one is considered plural. In Arabic language we have singular (*mufrad*), dual (*muthanna*), and plural (*jam'*). Two is dual and the dual form of address has its own language and pronunciation. So, when God was talking to Moses alone, He said: *Idh-hab ila Fir'awn*, but when He talked to Moses and Haroon together, He said: *Idh-habaa ila Fir'awn* – both of you go to Fir'awn. The attractive part in this verse<sup>104</sup> is the method of da'wa which Muslim preachers ignore and neglect.

God ordered Moses and Haroon to go to Pharaoh because "Pharaoh has gone beyond his limits and abilities". And why does the Qur'an say "beyond his limits and abilities"? Because Pharaoh gathered his people together one day and said to them, "I have no knowledge of any other god besides me; I am your god. I am your highest god." He persisted in his assertion even after Moses preached to him about Allah. He called upon his Prime Minister Hāmān to make him a ladder so he could "go up and look at that God of Moses because I think that Moses is nothing but a liar." This will show you how man, just a human being, can go beyond his limits and can deny every bounty of God. When he is healthy and wealthy, he thinks there is no power above his power. In spite of Pharaoh claiming that he is god – the ultimate sin – God advises Moses not to talk to him in a form of order; but to talk to him as an

equal, and in a *soft language*, so that he may remember God, or, at least, sense a fear of God. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Go forth, then, thou and thy brother, with My messages, and never tire of remembering Me: go forth, both of you, unto Pharaoh: for, verily, he has transgressed all bounds of equity! But speak unto him in a mild manner (فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَيِّنًا), so that he might bethink himself or, at least, be filled with apprehension" [20:42-44].

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَيِّنًا – *Speak to him mildly*. This is the message of the Qur'an regarding preaching! God orders Moses and Haroon that, when they go to Pharaoh, they should talk to Pharaoh in a soft language, a polite language; maybe Pharaoh will be affected by the kindness and will change and remember God. This is the essence of da'wa or preaching to the way of God: to talk in a very polite and soft language. If it is followed by the Muslim preacher, he will never go wrong. Nowadays, our preachers, no matter where they are, don't follow that. They issue orders. The shaykhs<sup>105</sup> consider themselves above the people, and if they are sitting in a place, all the people around them are not supposed to open their mouths. If someone from the audience argues with them or asks them a question, or declares that he is in disagreement with them, they consider that as a crime in itself. This is not the way. When God sent His own messengers to Fir'awn, whose crimes were unparalleled, He instructed them to speak to him in a soft language, in a nice way.

In the context of our present time, if we apply this part of the verse to ourselves, we find that we are doing the complete opposite. Nowadays, we don't talk that soft and beautiful language. When we have a chance to show the correct way to someone, we say to him, "You *kafir!*<sup>106</sup> Do it this way!" The result is we have no da'wa, and we have no preaching. We'll never influence anyone because we are not following the method. And we find that there is no difference in the recommendation given to Moses and that given to Muhammad. The command to Muhammad was, "Invite all to the Way of thy Sustainer with wisdom and goodly exhortation; and argue with them in the most kindly and gracious manner: for, behold, thy Sustainer knows best as to who strays from His

<sup>104</sup> 20:43-44

<sup>105</sup> Religious leaders

<sup>106</sup> Pagan

Path, and best knows He as to who receive guidance...”<sup>107</sup> We have to take a lesson from this story. It shows us that you cannot propagate Islam by stick or by gun. We witness that in some Muslim countries, the people who are walking in the street at the time of prayer are driven to the mosque by force. And the people, when they are driven by force, will not be praying from their hearts. So what is the value of that? Anything related to religion cannot be imposed by force, but by persuasion. Convincing the mind will establish the logic on which basis a person will believe, and, as a result, will change his or her attitude.

Today our da‘wa to Islam has become a discussion of trifles. Wherever you go in the Muslim world, you see that the only type of da‘wa going on is the concentration on what is *halāl*<sup>108</sup> and what is *harām*,<sup>109</sup> period. No action. To the extent that some people, nowadays, say that working night shifts is haram because it is against the Qur’anic verse: “We made the day to earn your living and We made the night to relax and sleep”<sup>110</sup> so if you work at night you are going against that verse and it is “haram”. In some other instances, in Lebanon, they have gone even further than this saying that it is “haram” for a woman to lean against a door. When you ask them why, they say: “Because ‘door’ is a male gender in the Arabic language.” Imagine! That is the Islam of today. It is all talk and discussion of trifles.

Last month, sixteen people from Lebanon came touring all over the United States and Canada, under the name of da‘wa and collecting money for da‘wa. And they were here in Toledo yesterday, going from door to door, for da‘wa. Talking. Talking. And what is their action? Where is their action? These days the things that are happening to the Bosnian Muslims are unspeakable, and our da‘wa team is still talking about trifles, while our leaders<sup>111</sup> are sitting there on their thrones and spending the wealth of Muslims right and left on liquor and on women in Europe. And the most we Muslims do is to say “God curse America”. Why do we say that? “Because America is not doing anything for Bosnia while the people are being killed by the thousands every day.” So we curse America. I don’t know *why* we curse America. *Why*

don’t we curse ourselves? Who is feeding the Muslims in Somalia, whether it is with a good intention or a bad intention? Eh? The people “we”<sup>112</sup> call “kuffar” – these same Americans. Where are the Muslims – the one and a half billion Muslims – who have all the riches of the world? The Bosnian issue is dragging in the UN for months and months until they will be finished – ethnic cleansing. And what is our da‘wa? Talking about the woman: that it is haram for her to lean against the door! Is that da‘wa? And the people who are cursing the US and Canada and the “kuffar” are the very same ones who are living on American and Canadian disability pension; receiving American and Canadian welfare, and getting every benefit from here while cursing them at the same time. You could be born in a Muslim country, yet you cannot acquire citizenship of that country, as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, but the minute you are born in the land of the “kuffar” [America] you are a citizen. I think the time has come for us to wake up and know the right from the wrong, and to set our priorities straight.

Yusuf Abdouney<sup>113</sup> brought me a book today. He read something in it, and was perplexed. He handed me the book and said, “This is the word of Abu Haneefa.” I read it and then told him that, if Abu Haneefa has said that, then, I am the first *kafir* of Abu Haneefa.<sup>114</sup> And look at this book.<sup>115</sup> That is a very nice book, it looks like a Qur’an, and it is entitled *Al Fiqh al Madhāhib al-khamsah* which means *The Fiqh According to the Five Schools of Thought*. Would you like to know what is written in it?

According to this book, Abu Haneefa states that if you hire a woman to work in your store and you sleep with her there is a “suspicion” here so you cannot be punished. According to this book, the explanation is that you have hired her for everything and not just for the store. Therefore, if you slept with her, it is not clear-cut adultery but there is some “doubt or suspicion” in it and, therefore, you cannot be punished in the usual way. And I said to Abdouney that this is exactly what I am saying that you should use your brains, and

<sup>107</sup> 16:125

<sup>108</sup> That which is permitted or allowed

<sup>109</sup> That which is forbidden or sinful

<sup>110</sup> 40:61

<sup>111</sup> The kings and presidents of all the Muslim countries

<sup>112</sup> A section of Muslims who consider the Americans *kuffar* or disbelievers, an attitude that Imam Khattab condemned.

<sup>113</sup> A member of the Muslim community who owns a carryout store.

<sup>114</sup> Meaning, “the first one to disbelieve in Abu Haneefa”. Abu Haneefa is the founder of the Hanafi School of Thought in Islam and is frequently quoted by Imam Khattab.

<sup>115</sup> Imam is holding it up

don't consider every book you see to be a Qur'an. There is lots of junk written in the books. And the people accuse me of attempting to change Islam. All I'm saying is *use your brains* – nothing else. Apply the above statement to your own life. You don't need any fatwa, or any Qur'an or hadith – just apply it to your own life. Would you like your own daughter or sister to be hired in a store and something like that to be done to her? If you don't accept it for your own self, then it is haram. You don't need any fatwa for that. That is what I am saying to you again and again: people, USE YOUR BRAINS. And don't even take MY word, because I am a human being like you. I could make mistakes. We are equal in the faculty of thinking; we all must utilize our faculties of thinking.

We sit all day and all night arguing about such trifles, while the Muslims everywhere are undergoing humiliation and destruction, and they have become the underdogs. Yet, they are the richest people in the world. We talk about the technology of America and how we would like to move it to our countries. We don't need that. All we need is to take our children, who are the scientists in the United States of America, back to our own countries and treat them like human beings. And I am sure they will be more than happy to serve their countries. But no, if an American goes to Saudi

Arabia, he gets paid twice as much for the same job as an Egyptian or Pakistani Muslim from America. Islam has become a matter of appearance for us, literally: what the woman should wear, how your wife should look, how your daughter should look, while the core of Islam is nowhere to be found and we never quote the hadith which says, "God will never consider your shapes or looks but he considers your hearts and actions." That's a hadith that is never quoted or talked about. Rather we talk opposite to it.

I think I am saying all this because it is so distressing to read the newspaper nowadays. In *The Blade*<sup>116</sup> today there is a whole page about the Bosnian people. Dr. Jabarin<sup>117</sup> is going to read it to you now. You will see what I mean. I know that in this case we cannot do anything. What can we do? If our great and rich Muslim countries and governments are useless, what can we do? But, at least, let us just show our feelings; it's the maximum we can do.

[Dr. Jabarin reads an article from *The Toledo Blade* about the different forms of torture being used in Bosnia. One of them is that the Serbs fill the mouths of the Bosnians with grease and then sew up their lips with wire, and several other very gruesome forms of positioning and beatings.]

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<sup>116</sup> The daily Toledo newspaper

<sup>117</sup> President of the Islamic Center (1979-1992)

## The Prophet Moses

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 5 of 5]

### Moses and Aaron come to Pharaoh

**E**ven both of them together – Moses and Haroon – were scared to go and face Pharaoh. They said to God: “We are scared of him; he may hurt us.”

“Don’t be scared, *la takhafu*” – it is in the dual form – “I’ll be with you; I am hearing and I am seeing.” God is assuring them and telling them not to be scared – I’ll be with you; I hear and I see, and any one who has God with them, Seeing and Hearing, should not be scared. And, then, God said to them again in the form of an order: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Go, then, you two unto him and say, ‘Behold, we are messengers sent by your God: let, then, the children of Israel go with us, and cause them not to suffer any longer. We have now come unto thee with a message from thy Sustainer; and know that His peace shall be only on those who follow His guidance: for, behold, it has been revealed to us that in the life to come suffering shall befall all who give the lie to the truth and turn away from it’” [20:47].

As commanded by God, Moses and Aaron went to Egypt to deliver God’s message to Pharaoh. The Qur’an then raises the curtain upon the scenery of the debates and arguments between Fir’awn and Musa *wa* Haroon. Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh, “We came to you with a sign from your God and

وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ مِنْ أَتْبَعِ الْهُدَى

peace shall be only on those who follow His guidance).” Here it is useful to stop for a moment. A lot of people misinterpret this verse.

What is the significance of *Assalam-u ‘Alaykum*? This is the greeting of Muslims. If you meet or chance upon someone and you say to him *Assalam-u ‘Alaykum*, immediately he understands that you are not his enemy. You are not planning to attack him or to aggress on him. It is exactly as you would greet somebody by saying “Good morning” or “Good evening”. It is just a greeting. When we visit our friends’ houses, we knock on their doors and when someone answers from inside, we say *Assalam-u ‘Alaykum*. This, then, signals to them that this visitor is not an attacker or a robber; he is simply a visitor. This is the etiquette among Muslims and this is in accordance with a recommendation of the Qur’an mentioned in Chapter Nūr.<sup>118</sup> In the present context, Musa and Haroon are saying to Pharaoh that if he listens to them, accepts the message with which God has sent them, then he will live in peace with God, in peace with the people, and in peace with himself because he would become *muslim*. The word *muslim* is taken from the root *silm* which means “peace”. Many of our people misinterpret this verse by saying that it means Muslims are not supposed to say *Assalam-u ‘Alaykum* to a non-Muslim person, and some go

<sup>118</sup> 24:27

so far as to refuse to say Assalam-u 'Alaykum even to some Muslims because, in their view, they are not Muslim enough. And that is going too far.

Moses says to Pharaoh: We are the messengers of *your* God; anyone who denies that message will be punished. This is not our decision; this was revealed to us. The word “your” has a special stress on it in the Arabic. It means, you, Pharaoh, who claim to be God, you are not God, but you have another God who has sent us as His messengers to you.

Now see how Pharaoh responds. “And who is *your* God, O Moses?” as if to imply that He is not *my* God. Moses replied, “Our God is the one who created everything, and gave the guidance to everything to function in a definite way to fulfill the goal for which it was created.” [Imam quotes the verses in Arabic. The translation is:]

“But when God’s message was conveyed unto Pharaoh, he said: ‘Who, now, is this Sustainer of you two, O Moses?’ He replied: ‘Our Sustainer is He who gives unto every thing that exists its true nature and form, and thereupon guides it towards its fulfillment’” [20:49-50].

This verse is a very, very wide and universal verse. God created the sun for a function: to give warmth and light. He guided that sun to function according to a certain law in order to fulfill these functions. This law, which the sun is following, is continuous and it will not change. God is the one who created the stars for a certain function. The Qur’an says, “They are signs, and through the stars they know their way at night.”<sup>119</sup> God created the bees and gave them the guidance to fulfill their function of making honey. They travel very far in search of flowers but they come back to their own houses; they don’t make a mistake – that is the “guidance” meant by “He created everything and guided it”. And how does the Qur’an describe all this? [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And consider how thy Sustainer has inspired (*awhā*) the bee: ‘Prepare for thyself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and in what men may build for thee by way of hives; and then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow humbly the paths ordained for thee by thy Sustainer.’ And lo! There issues from within these bees a fluid of many hues, wherein there is health (*shifā*) for man. In all this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think” [16:68-69].

“Wherein there is health (*shifā*) for man” or, alternatively translated, “In it there is a cure (*shifā*) for man.” There are

people who translate and understand this verse literally, so they say that if you eat honey it kills the bacteria; you will never be sick, and you will have no file with the physician. As a result, the people back home advise you to take one spoon of honey every morning before eating anything else. But the word *shifā* could mean many things: for example, if I am hungry my *shifā* is to eat.

Personally, I believe it is better to use honey in place of sugar. Put honey in your coffee, tea, or make your cake and *baklava*<sup>120</sup> with honey. Sugar – that Cuban stuff – is not good. I had an experience myself in 1968.<sup>121</sup> I had a gallbladder problem and every doctor – *four* different physicians – said to me, “To the operation room! You’ll have to have it taken out.” I said, “Suppose I don’t have it removed?” They said, “You will suffer for the rest of your life, until you die.” So I visited a natural physician.<sup>122</sup> How did he diagnose me? He just rubbed my foot with some salve and said to me, “You have a gallbladder problem.” I asked him how he knew that.<sup>123</sup> He said: “There is a vein connected with your heel, which reaches every part of your body; this is our science, and this is the way we study.” That doctor was from Vienna. Those natural doctors never use sugar; you will never find it in their homes. They use only honey. They are aware of something good in the honey and the man was amazed when I showed him the Qur’anic verse from Chapter an-Nahl<sup>124</sup> and the English translation of it. He invited me to talk to the natural physicians about the role of honey in Islam. And you know how he treated me? With lemon juice, olive oil, and honey, and I never had another gallbladder attack since 1968,<sup>125</sup> although you know I eat a whole tray of baklava!

Another example is the ant kingdom: God showed them and guided them how to function. They obtain and store their food in the summer to eat it in the winter. All this can come under that Qur’anic verse: Our God is the One who has created everything and given it guidance to function in life so as to reach the goal for which it was created.

When Pharaoh could not find in that answer any leeway

<sup>120</sup> An Arabian sweet

<sup>121</sup> In London, Ontario

<sup>122</sup> N.D. or Doctor of Natural Medicine, as opposed to M.D.

<sup>123</sup> Imam was taken by surprise because he had not revealed to the natural physician the story of his visits to the allopathic physicians and their diagnoses and recommendations.

<sup>124</sup> Chapter 16

<sup>125</sup> 24 years

<sup>119</sup> 16:16

to argue, he continued to ask other questions:

“What do you think of the generations of people in the past centuries who already died and perished and who had no messenger to guide them; what is going to happen to them?” Moses answered: “The knowledge of that is confined to God. He is the one that does not err, and He is the one that does not forget. He is the one who is aware of the Unseen and He knows everything”, as if to imply that you need not ask me because my knowledge is limited.

Moses wanted to make Pharaoh aware of God so he continued to talk about God in terms of signs and scenery that were observable in Egypt, and on this earth, in general. He said: “Our God is the God who created this earth and prepared it for your needs; made for you roads so you can move from one place to the other, and made the rain to descend from the sky and because of that water we can grow plants in pairs.” The land not only contains water but also oil, salt, all sorts of minerals, and everything else needed for the sustenance of man. It means that God made this land and everything on it and inside it for our service. Notice the word “pairs” here to indicate that everything created in this life is created in pairs. This is confirmed and corroborated by another Qur’anic verse: “Glory be to the One who has created in pairs everything that the earth produces, and in men’s own selves, and that of which as yet they have no knowledge.”<sup>126</sup>

[Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Eat, then, of this produce of the soil, and pasture your cattle thereon. In all this, behold, there are messages indeed for those who are *endowed with reason* –

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى [20:54].

We always say God is known through reason. Nothing exists without a maker. This instrument<sup>127</sup> will not exist unless there is a maker who will manufacture it, and he must be specialized in that art. And this has a maker,<sup>128</sup> and this has a maker.<sup>129</sup> Nothing will exist in and of itself. Looking at the universe, and all that is in it, one must necessarily conclude that it must have a Maker. That Maker we call Allah. Some people call Him another name, but in the final analysis, it will come to the Creator or Manufacturer who manufactured every item that

exists in this universe. So the Qur’an, after talking to us about the earth and all its spacious paths, and the rain, and the plants, says: إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى which means, verily, in that are signs for those who think, or those who utilize their brains.

[Imam quotes in Arabic the verses explained above. The translation is:]

“Said Pharaoh: ‘And what of all the past generations?’ Moses answered: ‘Knowledge thereof rests with my Sustainer alone, and is laid down in His decree; my Sustainer does not err, and neither does He forget. He it is who has made the earth a cradle for you, and has traced out for you ways of livelihood thereon, and Who sends down waters from the sky: and by this means We bring forth various kinds (pairs) of plants. Eat then of this produce of the soil and pasture your cattle thereon. In all this, behold, there are messages indeed for those who are endowed with reason. Out of this earth have We created you, and into it shall We return you, and out of it shall We bring you forth once again’ [20:51-55].

“Out of this earth have We created you, and into it shall We return you, and out of it shall We bring you forth once again.” Compare this verse with another verse: “He it is who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive, and gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless: and even thus will you be brought forth from death to life.”<sup>130</sup> See the analogy? In Saudi Arabia, nowadays, they plant the desert with wheat. That was a dead land and you could never imagine that this land could be planted, but using the water, even artificially, will revive that land. Another Qur’anic verse says, “From water We made every living being.”<sup>131</sup> The origin is water.

Since man is created from this earth, whenever he falls ill, the doctors look for a cure for him through the elements of this earth. Sometimes a person is anemic due to a deficiency of iron; sometimes he is ill due to a deficiency of calcium, so the doctor gives him iron pills or calcium tablets. Iron and calcium are components of this earth. Sometimes your blood pressure is high or low because the salt in your body is high or low, and the salt is a part of the earth. So, when you come to analyze the human body, you find that the elements in the body are the same as the elements of the earth because the earth is

<sup>126</sup> 36:36

<sup>127</sup> Pointing to the microphone attached to his tie

<sup>128</sup> Indicating his tie

<sup>129</sup> Indicating the desk

<sup>130</sup> 30:19

<sup>131</sup> 21:30

his mother – he was created from it. The soul – that is something beyond the knowledge of man. How a person will be sick in his soul is undiscovered and unknown.

“...Into the earth shall We return you...” So, after death, when the soul and the body separate, the soul goes from where it came originally – and we don’t know anything about that – and the body will go back to where it came from originally – the earth. “...And out of the earth shall We bring you forth once again.” When will that be? That will be the life after death. How will this take place? You know, the Qur’an frequently utilizes metaphorical language to explain things, so, we, human beings, can understand the message that it intends to convey. The Qur’an does not mean exactly or literally what it states in metaphorical language. There is a Qur’anic verse in chapter Az-Zumar which says, [Imam quotes in Arabic. The translation is:]

“And on that Day, the trumpet of judgment will be sounded, and all creatures that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless, unless they be such as God wills to exempt. And then it will sound again – and lo! standing before the Seat of Judgment, they will begin to see the truth” [39:68].

There will be a blowing of the horn and everyone will die. That is the end of life. Then another blowing of the horn and everyone will rise up from his grave. Then there is no more detail as to what will happen after that, or how it will happen – it is a part of the Unseen. All the Qur’an says is that everybody will begin to “see the Truth” and will be standing before the Seat of Judgment waiting to be judged. But you find some books written by Muslims describing the events that will take place after the people wake up from their graves: the manner in which the people will be going, how they are going to hang the women from their hair on the Day of Judgment because they had no scarf, how they are going to pull their nails because they had nail polish... A lot of people have written books of that sort. But no one can know the Unseen. No one knows. All we know is that it will be a scary time – accountability before God. Each person will be given the book of record of what he or she did during his/her life. Some will be rewarded, some punished; some will be forgiven, some not, and it is up to God. No one can interfere in that business.

But the Qur’an describes a scene from the Day of Judgment and from that description, and the Qur’anic expression, you... you get a feeling. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. Then explains:] Those who were bent on denying the

truth will be urged on in groups (*zumara*) towards hell, until, when they reach it, its gates will be opened –

حَتَّى إِذَا جَاؤُوهَا فَتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا – the door of *jahannam*<sup>132</sup> will be opened as soon as they arrive, as if to indicate, ‘Come on! Quickly! Enter!’, as if it is very keen to have them. That is what the Arabic expression conveys. But when it comes to *al-Jannah*:<sup>133</sup> إِذَا جَاؤُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا. You

know, that “*wa*” has a very big meaning: it conveys a sense of step-by-step progression, serenity, lingering and savoring the moment, until, when they arrive, the doors of *Jannah* are opened slowly and unhurriedly, and the guards of paradise receive them with joy and say to them, “*Salām*”.<sup>134</sup>

What is the Qur’an intending to convey from that narration? We don’t know the details of the situation, but the message the Qur’an wants to give us is that there is a distinction between those who work, and those who don’t work, those who act, and those who don’t act: they will not be equal; those will get something they deserve, and those others will have something they deserve; those will be received with joy, and those others will be questioned. That is the message. Otherwise, if there were equality between the two groups, it would mean there is no justice.

All these verses were intended to give Pharaoh and his people a message; maybe they will learn a lesson. But, in spite of all that, Pharaoh did not care: “We have shown Pharaoh every sign of Ours, but he denied them all and refused to believe” [20:56].

How did Pharaoh respond to Moses? As you know, Moses had two specific *ayāt*:<sup>135</sup> his staff which turned into a snake, and when he put his hand in his pocket, or under his arm, and took it out, it shone with a strange and wonderful light. Pharaoh forgot everything else Moses had said to him about the plants of the earth created in pairs, the land and all that it contains, the roads, the rivers, and the rain – he forgot all about them and concentrated on these two: the hand and the staff. He said to Moses, “Are you coming with that sorcery to take us out of our land so you can occupy it and control our country?” See the mentality of the leaders? The leader of

<sup>132</sup> Hell

<sup>133</sup> Paradise

<sup>134</sup> 39:71

<sup>135</sup> Signs or miracles

Egypt – even at that time – was talking like this. Imagine if Moses were to show his power today, in which case Egypt would be a part of Israel and would be in good condition, I am sure! Pharaoh continued: “If that is your intention, then let us have a competition because we have lots of conjurers who are very, very knowledgeable in that art and they will compete with you and we will see who is going to win: my people – and I am their god – or your people with your God.” Pharaoh was very arrogant in the way he talked to Moses: “Appoint a day for the competition. But listen! You have to keep your promise; you have to keep the date; you have to keep the time; don’t fail to show up. Make it a wide open public place (*makānan suwa*) where all the people can see the tug-of-war between you and our conjurers.” Pharaoh was talking arrogantly and making all these stipulations because he was so sure of his own magicians.

Moses said to him, “The day will be *yawm az-zeenah*.” *Yawm az-zeenah* was a day, like our Eid day,<sup>136</sup> that the Egyptians used to celebrate by being on holiday and they would meet together. Moses selected the time by telling Pharaoh it should be “*duha*”, which means the time when the sun is shining high in the sky – say around 10 o’clock to noon. Moses chose that time because everybody would be up by then, and out of their houses, because it would not be too early, and it would not be noon or afternoon, so the people would feel discomfort from the heat of the sun and go away. He fixed that time because it was the best time during the day.

Fir’awn left, *jama’ kayda*, to counsel with his conjurers and to plan his scheme. And look at the Qur’anic expression here: it did not say *jama’ sahara*<sup>137</sup> but it says *jama’ kayda* – the word *kayd* in the Arabic language is indicative of hate; he is fighting Allah and he is bringing those people to express his hatred for Moses and his message. And here the curtain is dropped on the Qur’anic theatre for a week. [Imam quotes the verses he just explained in Arabic. The translation is:]

“And, indeed, We made Pharaoh aware of all Our messages – but he gave them the lie and refused to heed them. He said, ‘Hast thou come to drive us out of our land by thy sorcery, O Moses? In that case, we shall most certainly produce before thee the like thereof! Appoint, then, a tryst

between us and thee – which we shall not fail to keep, nor mayest thou – at a suitable place!’ Answered Moses: ‘Your tryst shall be the Day of the Festival; and let the people assemble when the sun is risen high.’ Thereupon Pharaoh withdrew with his counselors and decided upon his artful scheme; and then he came to the tryst” [20:56-60].

Then a week later, the curtain is raised upon the scene of Moses and the conjurers who are about to compete with each other in that art. What happened when Moses saw those conjurers? He intended to preach Islam to them. He took advantage of that situation and started his talk by inviting them to the way of Allah, and saying: a destruction for you, don’t lie on God, for what you are about to do is a fake; if you are going to do that, God will destroy you with a painful doom, because everyone who disobeys Allah will eventually suffer disappointment and frustration.

As soon as Moses uttered those words, they got scared. They started to whisper to each other. As the Qur’an says, they started to argue secretly with one another about what was going to happen to them, and what kind of a man they were facing? Was he more powerful than them? And their conclusion was that these two – Musa and Haroon – were two conjurers, who, by means of their sorcery, would like to get them out of their country. So what was their final decision? “Let us all bring our collective power and skills together and be united to deceive him; the cleverest one amongst us will be the most successful one.” So they asked Moses: “Are you going to throw your stick first, Moses, or do we start by throwing ours?”

Moses said: “You go ahead, you start first.”

Now, if you get a screwdriver and stab a child in the stomach, blood will come out. It appears to us that the screw driver entered the stomach of the child, causing the bleeding, while, in reality, the handle of the screw driver is hollow and full of colored water like blood, and that is how a magician tricks your eye. That is what we call “*seher*”. So, when the conjurers threw their sticks, even the eyes of Moses were tricked, and it *appeared* to him that their sticks were moving like snakes. Look! The word used in the Qur’an is *khuyyil*<sup>138</sup> – what we call in Arabic *awham*, which means, it *appeared* before him as if they were moving. They were playing a trick; it was not real. But, as a result, Moses got scared.

See, the Qur’an talks about the human element of Moses

<sup>136</sup> Our Eid-ul-Fitr is the day after the completion of the month of Ramadan, and our Eid-ul-Adha is the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Dhul-Hijjah – the day of completion of the Hajj.

<sup>137</sup> *jama’ means* “brought together” and *sahara* means “conjurers”

<sup>138</sup> Imagine

by revealing to us that “Moses got scared”. And God reassured Moses by telling him, “Don’t be scared; you will be the winner; you will be on top. Moses, throw what is in your right hand; it will eat their sticks and their ropes because what they have done is just magic – and the magician will never be successful – while what you are going to do is a manifestation of Divine Power.” Note that the Qur’an did not say “your stick”; it says, “Throw what is in your right hand.” So Moses threw his stick, and it swallowed all their sticks and ropes, and then he took a hold of it again and immediately it was a stick again – it was not fatter because it ate all those sticks and ropes. It was exactly the same.

The conjurers were astonished. The conjurers began to have serious doubts about themselves and the preaching of Moses hit a nerve, because it was very clear to them that here was a power unlike the power of human beings. It was a miracle and it must come from a power beyond the power of men. Immediately they prostrated (*sujjada*) and they declared, “We believe in the God of Musa and Haroon.”

*Sujjada* indicates that *sujood*<sup>139</sup> is not a part of the Muslim prayer only; even those ancient Egyptians, existing before the time of the message of Moses, knew that when worshipping the Creator, one had to be in *sujood*.

Now look at the leader – we see the same kind nowadays also. Pharaoh said to them, “Do you believe in Him before I give you permission? It seems to me that Moses is your chief who taught you how to be conjurers. I am going to cut your right arm and left leg, and I am going to crucify you on the trunks of trees, and then you will see who is the more powerful among us – me or the God of Moses.” But the sorcerers replied, [Imam quotes Arabic verse and his voice breaks with emotion. Then he explains:] We are not going to listen to you. We are not going to make you more important than what we have seen with our eyes, or more important than the God who created us. You have pushed us to do this magic. Issue your sentences and verdicts because all your sentences and orders are limited to this world; we believe in God who will forgive our sins and the sorcery which you urged us to practice; now we have learned a lesson that God is the best and continuous [20:72-73].

Here is a point; and let us analyze it and apply it to ourselves as Muslims today. In fact, there are no true Muslims anymore, and that is why we, the Muslims, are ashamed to say

that we are Muslims. In every Muslim country, nowadays, those sitting on the chairs, just sit complacently while thousands of Muslims are raped, slaughtered, and tortured in different countries. The Muslims say they can do nothing. But, in fact, we can do a lot. For example, if a head of a state nominates someone as a prime minister and that person refuses, and the second refuses, and the third refuses, he is not going to put the whole country in jail. In other words, the public should decline to serve in office for a corrupt leader. I saw a living example of this when I was a child. Shaykh al Azhar<sup>140</sup> was one time invited for lunch by King Farooq and when he went there and the food was put before him, he refused to eat. And when the king asked him why he did not eat, he said, “Because this is from the blood of the poor Egyptians; I don’t eat haram.”<sup>141</sup> See? That is a Muslim. If everyone acted in that way, then we would not be having those crooks in their chairs in our Muslim countries. For our woes we blame America, we blame the British people, we blame Germany, but we never blame ourselves. I would like for us to know, and what we must teach ourselves and everyone else is that Islam is not just talk; it is not enough to say *Ashhadu Allaha ilaha illallah*.<sup>142</sup> Islam is an action. And if some one would like to be a Muslim, he has to ACT and abide by Islam. With

regard to human beings, the Qur’an said **وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ** which means, literally, “And shown him the two highways”<sup>143</sup> one will lead to punishment and one will lead to being rewarded. So God showed them the good way and the bad way and asked them to follow the good way and to avoid the bad way, and that is the meaning of **وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ**<sup>144</sup>

**وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا**<sup>145</sup>

So, if someone would like to be a Muslim, he has to ACT by

<sup>140</sup> The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

<sup>141</sup> “Haram” means “that which is prohibited or sinful”. In this context it means that the food has been acquired by exploitation of the poor and is, therefore, haram.

<sup>142</sup> I bear witness that there is no God but one God

<sup>143</sup> Chapter 90 of the Qur’an: “Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips, and shown him the two highways of good and evil?”

<sup>144</sup> 90:10: “Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God.”

<sup>145</sup> 91:7, 8

<sup>139</sup> Prostration

following the good way and avoiding the wrong way.

[Imam quotes the verses related to Moses that he explained above. The translation is:]

“Said Moses to the conjurers: ‘Woe unto you! Do not invent lies against God, lest He afflict you with most grievous suffering: for He who contrives such a lie is already undone!’ So they debated among themselves as to what to do; but they kept their counsel secret, saying to one another: ‘These two are surely sorcerers intent on driving you from your land by their sorcery, and on doing away with your time-honored way of life. Hence, O sorcerers of Egypt, decide upon the scheme which you will pursue, and then come forward in one single body: for, indeed, he who prevails today shall prosper indeed! Said the sorcerers: ‘O Moses! Either thou throw or we shall be the first to throw.’ He answered: ‘Nay, you throw first.’ And lo! By virtue of their sorcery, their magic ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly: and in his heart Moses became apprehensive. But We said: ‘Fear not! It is thou who shalt prevail! And now throw that which is in thy right hand – it shall swallow up all that they have wrought: for they have wrought only a sorcerer’s artifice, and the sorcerer can never come to any good, whatever he may aim at! And so it happened – and down fell the sorcerers, prostrating themselves in adoration, and exclaimed: ‘We have come to believe in the Sustainer of Moses and Aaron!’ Said Pharaoh: ‘Have you come to believe in Him ere I give you permission? Verily, he must be your master who taught you magic! But I shall most certainly cut off your hands and feet in great numbers, because of your perverseness, and I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers on the trunks of palm-trees: and I shall do this so that you might come to know for certain as to which of us two can inflict a more severe punishment, and which is the more abiding. They answered: ‘Never shall we prefer thee to all the evidence of the truth that has come unto us, nor shall we prefer thee to Him who has brought us into being! Decree, then, whatever thou art going to decree: thou canst decree only something that pertains to this worldly life! As for us, behold, we have come to believe in our Sustainer, hoping that He may forgive us our faults and all that magic unto which thou hast forced us: for God is the best to look forward to, and the One who is truly abiding’” [20:61-73]. Moses took the Israelites and left Egypt. Pharaoh

followed him. When they reached the sea

وَلَقَدْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ

“We inspired Moses thus: ‘Strike the sea with thy staff!’ – whereupon it parted...” and a road was opened for the Israelites to follow. Pharaoh followed them, but he and his army found themselves in the water. And when Pharaoh was about to drown, he said his last words: “I believe in the God of Moses and I am one of the *muslims*.” He did not say I am one of the Jews. The Qur’an says, [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And We brought the children of Israel across the sea; and thereupon Pharaoh and his hosts pursued them with vehement insolence and tyranny, until they were overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. And when he was about to drown, Pharaoh exclaimed: ‘I have come to believe that there is no deity save Him in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender themselves unto Him (وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ).”<sup>146</sup>

So, the message of God, sent through Moses, was Islam.

The Qur’anic verse<sup>147</sup> after that is a marvelous one. [Imam quotes it in Arabic, then explains:] Today, We are going to save you, but your body only, not body and soul, so you will be a lesson for everyone after you. See, the Qur’an stated this 1400 years ago. Today, when you go to the museum in Cairo, you see the body of *Ramsīs ath-thāni* (Ramses II), the Pharaoh of Moses, who governed Egypt for 60 years. His body is still there and you can see it. Then you know exactly what is the meaning of that Qur’anic verse, “Nay, but today We shall save only thy body, so that thou mayest be a warning sign unto those who will come after thee.” Scientists from America, Canada, and Egypt have tried every means to discover how these bodies have been preserved for thousands of years, but they have not yet succeeded; their science has failed to discover what those ancient Egyptians did to preserve the body.

This concludes the story of Moses, and I am sure that every one of you has received that flyer informing you that this is my last lecture on Sunday...<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> “Those who surrender themselves unto Him” is the English translation of the Arabic word “*muslimeen*” (*muslimeen* is the plural of *muslim*). See sermon (#28) of Sura Qaaf, part 6 for more details

<sup>147</sup> 10:91

<sup>148</sup> June 14, 1998. Imam addresses the Toledo Muslim Community specifically. Upon retirement, he was named

