

Musa (Moses) - The Story of the Golden Calf

Moses's People Turn to Idolatry

Moses had been gone for forty days and his people were becoming restless, for they did not know that Allah had extended his time by a further ten days. Samiri, a man who was inclined towards evil, suggested that they find themselves another guide, as Moses had broken his promise. He said to them: "In order to find true guidance, you need a god, and I shall provide one for you."

So he collected all their gold jewelry, dug a hole in which he placed the lot, and lit a huge fire to melt it down. During the casting, he threw a handful of dust, making actions like a magician's to impress the ignorant. From the molten metal he fashioned a golden calf. It was hollow, and the wind passing through it produced a sound. Since superstition was imbedded in their past, they quickly linked the strange sound to something supernatural, as if it were a living god. Some of them accepted the golden calf as their god.

Aaron Tries to Reason with the Idolaters

Moses's brother Aaron , who acted as their leader in Moses's absence, was grieved and spoke up: "O my people! You have been deceived. Your Lord is the Most Beneficent. Follow and obey me."

They replied: "We shall stop worshipping this god only if Moses returns."

Those who had remained steadfast in belief separated themselves from the pagans.

Moses Sees the Idolaters

On his return Moses saw his people singing and dancing around the calf statue. Furious at their paganistic ritual, he flung down the Tablet of the Law he was carrying for them.

He tugged Aaron's beard and hair, crying: "What held you back when you saw them going astray? Why did you not fight this corruption?"

Aaron replied: "O son of my mother, let go of my beard! The fold considered me weak and were about to kill me. So make not the enemies rejoice over me, nor put me among the people who are wrong-doers."

Moses's anger began to subside when he understood Aaron's helplessness, and he began to handle the situation calmly and wisely.

Moses People Turn to Idolatry - Qur'anic

Almighty Allah narrated: They said: "We broke not the promise to you, of our own will, but we were made to carry the weight of the ornaments of the (Pharaoh's) people, then we cast them (into the fire), and that was what As-Samiri suggested."

Then he took out (of the fire) for them a statue of a calf which seemed to low. They said: "This is your ilah (god), and the ilah (god) of Moses, but (Moses) has forgotten (his god)."

Did they not see that it could not return them a word (for answer), and that it had no power either to harm them or to do them good?

And Aaron indeed had said to them beforehand: "O my people! You are being tried in this, and verily, your Lord is (Allah) the Most Beneficent, so follow me and obey my order."

They said: "We will not stop worshipping it (i.e. the calf), until Moses returns to us." Surah 20: 87-91

The Conversation Between Allah and Moses - Qur'anic

Allah the Exalted revealed some of the dialogue that took place between Him and Moses on Mount Sinai: "And what made you hasten from your people, O Moses?"

He said: "They are close on my footsteps, and I hastened to You, O my Lord, that You might be pleased."

(Allah) said: "Verily! We have tried your people in your absence, and As-Samiri has led them astray."

Then Moses returned to his people in a state of anger and sorrow. He said: "O my people! Did not your Lord promise you a fair promise? Did then the promise seem to you long in coming? Or did you desire that Wrath should descend from your Lord on you, so you broke your promise to me (i.e. disbelieving in Allah and worshipping the calf)?" Surah 20: 83-86

Moses Sees the Idolaters - Qur'anic

Allah the Exalted revealed what happened further on Moses's return. (Moses) said: "O Aaron! What stopped you when you saw them going astray, that you followed me not (according to my advice to you)? Have you then disobeyed my order?"

He (Aaron) said: "O son of my mother! Seize (me) not by my beard, nor by my head! Verily, I feared lest you should say: 'You have caused a division among the children of Israel, and you have not respected my word!'"

(Moses) said: "And what is the matter with you, O Samiri? (i.e. why did you do so?)"

(Samiri) said: "I saw what you saw not, so I took a handful (of dust) from the hoofprint of the Messenger (Gabriel's horse) and threw it (into the fire in which were put the ornaments of the Pharaoh's people, or into the calf). Thus my inner-self suggested to me."

Moses said: "Then go away! And verily, your (punishment) in this life will be that you will say. Touch me not' (i.e. you will live alone exiled away from mankind); and verily (for a future torment), you have a promise that will not fail. And look at your ilah (god), to which you have been devoted. We will certainly burn it, and scatter its particles in the sea." Surah 20: 83-98

The Idolaters' Punishment

However, the punishment which was imposed upon the calf worshipers was severe: death. And (remember) when Moses said to his people: "O my people! Verily, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf. So turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves (the innocent kill the wrong-doers among you), that will be better for you in the Sight of your Creator." Then He accepted your repentance. Truly, He is the One Who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful. Surah 2: 54

Therefore, the crime of worshipping the calf did not pass unpunished. Moses commanded the elite of the children of Israel to pray to Allah for forgiveness and demonstrate their repentance. He chose seventy men out of them and ordered them: "Rush towards Allah and repent for what you did and ask His forgiveness for what you left."

Moses's People Demand to See Allah

Moses returned to Mount Sinai with the seventy elders and there he communicated with Allah. The elders heard Moses speaking with his Lord. (Allah spoke to Moses directly.) This was, perhaps, the last miracle that they would see, and it was hoped that it would be sufficient enough to convey the religion to their hearts forever. However, the seventy elite who heard the miracle were dissatisfied. They said to Moses: "O Moses! We shall never believe in you till we see Allah plainly. " Surah 2: 35

This was truly a tragedy that amazes one. It was a tragedy that indicated those who were hard-hearted and who continued to hold onto sensual and material concerns. Their stubborn demand was rewarded with punishing lightning bolts and a violent quaking that stupefied their souls and bodies at once, leaving them dead.

Moses Prays for His People

Moses knew what had happened to the seventy elite and was filled with sorrow. He prayed to his Lord, entreating Him to forgive them, for they were fools. Foolishness is only expiated by death. Allah forgave the elders and revived them after their death. Allah the Exalted declared: And Moses chose out of his people seventy (of the best) men for Our appointed time and place of meeting, and when they were seized with a violent earthquake, he said: "O my Lord, if it had been Your Will, You could have destroyed them and me before; would You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? It is only Your Trial by which You lead astray whom You will, and keep guided whom You will. You are our Wali (Protector), so forgive us and have Mercy on us, for You are the Best of Those who forgive. And ordain for us good in this world, and in the Hereafter. Certainly we have turned unto You."

He said: (As to) My Punishment I afflict therewith whom I will and My Mercy embraces all things. That (Mercy) I shall ordain for those who are the Muttaqun and give Zakat; and those who believe in Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.); Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write (i.e. Muhammad) whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel, (See Deut. 18:18; Psl. 118:22-23; Isa. 42:1-13; Hab. 3:3-4; Matt. 21:42.43; Jn. 14:16-17. 26.28; 16:7-14.) - he commands them for Al-Maruf (Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam has ordained); and forbids them from Al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism of all kinds, and all that Islam has forbidden); he allows them as lawful At-Tayyibat (all i.e. good and lawful) as regards things, deeds beliefs, persons, food, etc. and prohibits them as unlawful Al-Khabaith (all i.e. evil and unlawful as regards things, deeds, beliefs, persons, food, etc.), he releases them from their heavy burdens (of Allah's Covenant), and from the fetters (bindings) that were upon them. So those who-believe in him (Muhammad), honor him, help him, and follow the light (the Qur'an) which has been sent down with him, it is they who will be successful. Surah 7: 155-157

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