

Musa (Moses) - The Story of the Israelites and the Cow

The Pious Man and His Son

Moses stayed among his people calling them to Allah. It seems their souls were uneasy in a way that the observant eye could not mistake. Their obstinacy and chattering about what has become known as "The Story of the Cow" was unwarranted. This topic did not need so many negotiations between Moses and the people, nor did it need all their bias.

It was said that among the children of Israel there lived a pious man. He was poor but very careful about how he earned his living; it had to be honestly earned. Everything that he did was done for the sake of Allah, never for selfish gain. On his deathbed his last words were: "O Allah, I place my wife, my little son, and my only possession, a calf, in Your care." Strangely, he asked his wife to lead the calf to the forest and leave it there. He did this because he did not trust the children of Israel, for they were a selfish and greedy folk.

After a few years when the boy had grown up, his mother told him: 'Your father has left you a calf in the trust of Allah. It must have grown into a cow by now.' The son was surprised. He did not know of any calf all these years and asked his mother where it was. She replied: "Be like your father and say: 'I trust in Allah,' then go look for it."

With a rope in his hand, he went to the forest and prostrated himself before Allah: "O Allah, Lord of Abraham and Jacob and Job, return to me my father's trust." As he raised his head, he saw a cow coming towards him. It stopped submissively beside him. He tied the rope around its neck and led it to his house. The cow would not allow anyone else come near it except the young man.

The youth was as pious as his father. He earned his living by cutting wood. Whatever he earned he divided into three equal portions: one he gave to his mother, one he used for his needs, and the last he gave as charity. His nights, too, were divided into three parts: during the early part of the night he helped his mother, the middle part he devoted to the worship of Allah, and during the last part he rested.

The People Ask Questions About a Cow

About this time a wealthy man died, leaving behind an only son, who inherited his father's wealth. His cousins envied his good fortune and secretly killed him so that they could inherit it.

The dead boy's other relatives came to the Prophet Moses and asked his help in tracing the boy's murderer. Moses instructed them to slaughter a cow, remove its tongue and place it on the corpse. This would reveal the murderer, he told them. They accused Moses of joking. He replied: "Allah forbid that I be foolish!" They questioned him about the type of cow they should slaughter, and he said: "This cow is neither young nor mature, but in between the two conditions, so do as you have been commanded."

Instead of following his direction, they asked him more questions. "What color must it be?"

He replied: "Verily, it is yellow in color."

They still were not satisfied with his answer and asked for more details. Moses replied: "It is an unyoked cow; it does not plow the soil nor water the tilth, and is entirely without marks."

Moses's People Find the Right Cow

They went out in search of such a cow. The only one that matched the description was the one owned by the orphaned youth. They met him on the way and asked the price for which he would sell his cow. He told them he would have to consult his mother first, so they accompanied him to his house and offered her three gold coins. She refused their offer, saying that the cow was worth much more.

They went on increasing their offer and the mother kept on refusing. Finally they urged the son to speak to his mother to be reasonable. He told them: "I will not sell the cow without my mother's approval, even if you offered me its skin filled with gold!" On hearing this, his mother smiled and said: "Let that be the price: its skin filled with gold." They realized that no other cow would do; they had to have it at any price. They agreed to buy the cow and paid with its skin filled with gold.

The People are Asked to Slaughter a Cow - Qur'anic

Allah the Almighty narrated: And (remember) when Moses said to his people: "Verily, Allah commands you that you slaughter a cow.

They said: "Do you make fun of us?"

He said: "I take Allah's Refuge from being among AlJahileen (the ignorants or the foolish)."

They said: "Call upon your Lord for us that He may make plain to us what it is!"

He said: "He says, 'Verily, it is a cow neither too old nor too young, but (it is) between the two conditions; so do what you are commanded."

They said: "Call upon your Lord for us to make plain to us its color."

He said: "He says, 'It is a yellow cow bright in its color, pleasing to the beholders.

They said: "Call upon your Lord for us to make plain to us what it is. Verily to us all cows are alike, and surely, if Allah wills, we will be guided."

He (Moses) said: "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to till the soil nor water the fields, sound, having no other color except bright yellow.

They said: "Now you have brought the truth." So they slaughtered it though they were near to not doing it.

And (remember) when you killed a man and fell into dispute among yourselves as to the crime. But Allah brought forth that which you were hiding. So We said: "Strike him (the dead man) with a piece of it (the cow)." Thus Allah brings the dead to life and shows you His Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) so that you may understand.

Then after that your hearts were hardened and became as stones or even worse in hardness. And indeed, there are stones out of which rivers gush forth, and indeed, there are of them (stones) which fall down for fear of Allah. And Allah is not unaware of what you do. Surah 2: 67-74

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