

CHAPTER FOUR

A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF PROPHET MÚSÁ [P.B.U.H]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Músá⁶⁶ [p.b.u.h], the Prophet of God or the Prince of Egypt as he is referred to ranks as one of the most outstanding and oft-mentioned personalities in Islámic history.

The adopted son of the Pharaoh, the receiver of the Torah and the seer of the luminous light of the Almighty the story of Músá is mentioned in various passages of the Qur'án⁶⁷, at times in brief and in other places elaborately.

Described as a "marvelous story filled with wonders..." [Peters 1994:22]⁶⁸ this tale of Músá has in fact dominated Qur'ánic narrative extensively and has been the centre of Qur'ánic exegetical practice.

This résumé of the biography of the Prophet Músá [p.b.u.h] will be dealt with both in terms of the Qur'án and the Sunnah as well as occasional references to the Bible.⁶⁹

The Egyptian sovereign, the Pharaoh⁷⁰, had a daunting dream in which an enormous fire surfaced from Jerusalem and burnt all of the Coptic people, devastating absolutely everything, except the Israelites. Startled, the frenzied

66. In Hebrew Músá [Moses] means "he that draws out".

67. The Qur'án mentions him no fewer than 196 times.

68. Similar to Súra 12:3... "We relate to you the best of stories."

69. Mentioned in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. The secondary source that is being used at present is Stories of the Prophets by ibn Kathír - rendered into English by Rashad Ahmad Azami.

70. This is a Hebraised dynastic title of the ruler of Egypt [Arabic-*Fir'aun*], the Pharaoh referred to here is Ramses the second of the 19th dynasty of Egypt.

Pharaoh inquired from his advisors the meaning of this apparition; the ghastly reply was, "There will be born a boy from these people, who will destroy the people of Egypt" [Azami n.d:300]. Enraged, the Pharaoh ordered the killing of all newborn boys. Relentlessly he undertook measures to ensure that every baby born to an Israelite would be slain at birth. This inhumane order was promptly put into effect. However Músá bin 'Imrán was born and the life of this Jewish infant is recorded as an exceptional piece of Qur'anic prophetic narrative.

A clearer understanding of this Qur'anic tale can only be garnered by acquiring an insight into the circumstances surrounding this narrative. Músá's infancy requires some attention prior to probing into his later life.

He was born in Egypt during a very volatile situation. His mother⁷¹, fearing for the safety of her infant, placed him in a reed basket and set him afloat on the River Nile.⁷² As the basket floated it reached the banks along which one of the king's palaces was situated.

فأوحى الله أن (لا تخافى و لاتحزنى انا رآدوه اليك و جاعلوه من المرسلين)

و أمرها اذا ولدته أن تجعله فى تابوت ثم تلقيه فى اليم فلما ولدته فعلت ما أمرت به حتى اذا توارى عنها ابنها...

The above extract explains the Divine inspiration given to Músá [p.b.u.h]'s mother stating that she should not fear and that he be placed in a casket which was to be placed in a river, together with the promise that the infant would be returned to his mother [Qur'an 28:7].

(...فالتقطه آل فرعون ليكون لهم عدوا و حزنا...)

Then, ".....the family of Pharaoh picked him up, that (Músá) should be to them an adversary and a cause of sorrow" [Qur'an 28:8].

71. According to Suhailí her name was Jachobed.

72. This was after a three month period.

Upon arrival the Jewish infant quelled the hearts of both the sovereign and his wife.⁷³

...When she opened the basket she saw a boy and experienced a [sense] of love for him as she had not felt for any other person...[al-Tabarí 1989:270].

Overwhelmed, they developed a deep love for the boy and named him Músá.⁷⁴ As the adopted son of the Pharaoh he [i.e. the Pharaoh] would never come to disclose the truth about Músá until the last moment.⁷⁵

The Pharaoh had in all probability recalled that a priest had approached him and said to him: "there will be born an infant among the Baní Isrá'íl who will usurp your kingdom...." [Ibrahim 1969:128]. Exodus [1:15] describes the Pharaoh's premonition as follows:

"Pharaoh said that while he slept he saw a dream; and behold, the whole land of Egypt was in one scale of a balance and a lamb...., the little one of an ewe, was in the other scale, and the scale holding the lamb weighed down. Immediately he sent to call all the magicians of Egypt, and repeated to them his dream. Immediately Yanis and Yimbres, the chief magicians, opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh: A son is about to be born in the congregation of Israel, by whose hand the whole land of Egypt will be ruined."

The adoption issue requires a deeper study, for the Bible states that the one who retrieved him from the Nile was the Pharaoh's daughter with there being no mention of his wife [Bible Exodus II]. This is not mentioned in the Qur'án, but according to various authorities the slave-girls of the Pharaoh picked him up from the Nile and brought him to the Pharaoh's wife [Azami n.d:304].

Músá was now in a secure environment and his immediate acceptance

73. Ásiya bint Muzáhim bin 'Ubaid bin Raiyan bin Walíd; it is also suggested that she was from the Israelite clan of Músá [p.b.u.h]. Another narration is that she was his aunt.

74. Meaning "one taken out of water".

75. A time when Músá would destroy the Pharaoh together with his kingdom.

necessitated the care and nurturing of foster parents, but he refused to be fed by any foster mother.⁷⁶

As the focus of the present study lies in Músá's departure from Egypt emphasis will be placed on his life from prophethood and beyond.

In his youth he was requested by an Israelite to support him in his fight with a Coptic. According to various authorities it was perhaps afternoon or even a time between sunset and early evening when Músá encountered two individuals embroiled in a fight [Azami n.d: 308]. The Israelite pleaded for Músá's assistance and in a rage Músá "struck him with his fist and killed him" [Qur'án 28:15]. Astounded he immediately repented⁷⁷ and asked God's forgiveness [Qur'án 28:16]

Another incident involving the same Israelite and an Egyptian paved the way for Músá's departure from Egypt. When he intended to strike the Egyptian, the Israelite fearing that he would be attacked said:

يا موسى أتريد أن تقتلني كما قتلت نفسا بالأمس....

"O Músá, do you intend to kill me today as you killed a man yesterday?" [Qur'án 28:19].

The divulgence of the mystery meant that Músá's flight from Egypt was inevitable.

4.2 MÚSÁ'S DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT

He was warned of the consequences of this act as follows:

جاء من أقصى المدينة رجل يسعى قال : "يا موسى ان الملا يأتمرون بك ليقتلوك"

76. This incident is described in Súra Qasas [10-13].

77. Although the Coptic was a disbeliever it was not Músá's intention to kill him, his aim was to restrain him.

And there approached a man from the farthest point of the city, and he said, "O! Músá, the leaders are planning to kill you...." [Qur'án 28:20]. Apprehensive and desperate he embarked on a journey⁷⁸ praying that "...my Lord will guide me to the right path" [Qur'án 28:22].

Exhausted, starved⁷⁹ and forlorn he arrived at Midian⁸⁰. A group of people were crowded around a well waiting to draw water; amid the crowd were two beautiful girls⁸¹ {the daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb [p.b.u.h]}. Details of his meeting with them, together with its result are narrated as follows:

...قال ما خطبكما قالتا لانسقى حتى يصدر الرعاء و أبونا شيخ كبير

Músá asked them: "What is the matter with you?"

The two women said: "We cannot draw water until the shepherds⁸² have gone away and our father is a very old man" [Qur'án 28:23]. Músá assisted them. They thanked him profusely and departed. On returning home they related the incident to their father, who was so impressed by the stranger's gesture that he requested a visit from him. One of the sisters approached him bashfully relaying her father's message.

She said:

قالت: "ان أبى يدعوك ليجزيك أجر ما سقيت لنا"

"My father invites you so that he may reward you for drawing water for us" [Qur'án 28:25]. Músá complied and on meeting the father discreetly described the

78. News of the killing aroused the Pharaoh's suspicion about Músá's innocence, thereby necessitating the latter's escape.

79. Regarding his diet ibn 'Abbás says the following: Músá went from Egypt to Midian eating only plants and leaves. He was barefooted and his stomach was stuck to his back as a result of hunger... [Azami n.d:312].

80. Midian is situated between Syria and the Híjáz.

81. According to the Bible [Exodus 2] there were seven sisters, this from a Qur'anic view is inaccurate for the Qur'án states:

وجد من دونهم امرأتين.....[الآية: ٢١]

82. According to several exegetes, after the shepherds watered their flocks, they placed a huge stone on the mouth of the well. This is where Músá [p.b.u.h.] assisted them.

circumstances leading to his arrival in Midyan. On comforting Músá the old man said:

....لا تخف نجوت من القوم الظلمين....

"....Do not fear, you have escaped from an evil people...." [Qur'án 28:28].

At this instance one of the daughters advised her father to "engage him on wages," [Qur'án 28:26] while complimenting Músá's trustworthiness, strength and honesty.

It was agreed that Músá should serve Shu'ayb [A.S.] for eight years, "However, if you complete ten years that will be {grace} from you" [Qur'án 28:27].

A hadíth statement supporting Músá's employment for food, is narrated as follows:

'Alí bin Rabah said that he heard 'Utba bin al-Nádir saying:⁸³

"We were sitting near the Prophet [p.b.u.h], he recited Súra Ta-Sín-Mím", and after the story of Músá he said:

"ان موسى صلى الله عليه و سلم آجر نفسه ثمانى سنين أو عشرا على عفة فرجه و طعام بطنه"

"Músá has employed himself for eight years or ten years due to modesty and for his nutriment [diet]" [Azami n.d: 314].

Músá married one of Shu'ayb's daughters, whose name is not mentioned in the Qur'án. When the time arrived for Músá to leave, he proceeded towards Tuwá,⁸⁴ accompanied by his wife. As they advanced they were in disarray for they had lost their path and entered unfamiliar territory. A stormy, bleak and dismal night added to their already disadvantaged situation.

83. This hadíth has two different chains of transmitters. This one has a minor deficiency and is technically weak. Some hadíth scholars consider it a valid witness [ibn Kathír 2000:7/395].

84. A valley at the foot of the mountain in the Sinai peninsula called Mount Túr.

قال لأهله : (امكثوا انى أنست نارا لعلى آتاكم منها بخبر أو جذوة من النار لعلكم تصطلون)

Músá said to his family: "Stay here, I see a fire, perhaps I will bring for you from there information or some burning fire so that you may warm yourselves" [Qur'án 27:29].

Suddenly a Voice boomed forth,

"O! Músá, I am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds" [Qur'án 28:30]. Músá was petrified.

Allah Almighty said: "O Músá! Indeed I am your Lord, take off your shoes..." [Qur'án 20:11-12].

Allah spoke to Músá and bestowed upon him the title of Prophet.

For now he was endowed with two signs; ⁸⁵ one was the rod ⁸⁶ and the other the shiny hand. It is narrated in the Qur'án as follows:

و ما تلك بيمينك يا موسى [الآية ١٧] قال هى عصاى أتوكؤ عليها و أهش بها على غنمى و لى
فيها مئارب اخرى [الآية ١٨] قال ألقها يا موسى [الآية ١٩] فألقاها فاذا هى حية تسعى [الآية
[٢٠

" 'And what is in your right hand, O Músá?' He said: 'This is my staff I lean upon it, and I beat down leaves with it to feed my sheep, and in it I find other uses too.' Allah said: 'Throw it down O Músá.' " So he threw it down and it turned into a snake slithering [Qur'án 20:17-20].

Músá was terrified and ran away without looking back. Allah said to him: "O Músá! Come back, and do not fear, for you are secure" [Qur'án 38:31]. On turning back Allah commanded him: "Take it, and do not fear, We shall restore it to its

85. These were only two of the nine signs given to Músá [p.b.u.h.] from the Almighty. Súra *al-A'ráf* makes mention of all nine signs.

86. The powers of the rod were phenomenal; for it could be transformed into any shape; it could be used as a weapon; it could produce food and water by striking a rock; it could cure illnesses etc.....

former state" [Qur'án 20:21].

This was indeed a miracle. It proved that the Almighty had spoken to Músá.⁸⁷

و أدخل يدك فى جيبك تخرج بيضاء من غير سوء.....

The Lord favoured him with another miracle when He commanded him to place his hand in his armpit and it would turn white without any stains [Qur'án 28:12].

فذلك برهانن من ربك الى فرعون و ملائته انهم كانوا قوما فسقين

"Those are the two proofs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs, for indeed they are a wicked people" [Qur'án 28:12].

Allah ordered Músá [p.b.u.h] to confront the Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites. Reluctant to return to Egypt he pleaded his case to the Almighty by highlighting two problems he faced: the possible murder charge and stammering.

(قال رب انى قتلت منهم نفسا فأخاف أن يقتلون [الآية ٣٣] و أخى هرون هو أفصح منى

لسانا فأرسله معى رءاء يصدقنى انى أخاف أن يكذبون [الآية ٣٤]

"My Lord! I have killed one of them and I fear that they will kill me. And my brother Hárún, he is more eloquent in speech than me, so send him as a helper to confirm me. Verily, I fear that they will deny me" [Qur'án 28:33-4].

This is explained in greater detail as follows:

قال موسى : (رب اشرح لى صدرى) [الآية ٢٥] - حتى ينفسح لتحمل أعباء هذا الأمر العظيم

- (و يسر لى أمرى) [الآية ٢٦] - برفع المواقف و الصعاب - (و احلل عقدة من لسانى) [الآية

٢٧] - أكن ناصع البيان سديد البرهان... و اجعل لى شريكا وزيرا من أهلى هو هارون

أخى... (قصص القرآن ١٣٧) .

87. The Bible, Exodus 4 relates this incident somewhat differently.

Músá said: "O my Lord! Expand my chest ..." - until it becomes wide to endure the load of this great command... "Make my task easy for me..." - by removing the obstacles and the difficulties... "and remove the impediment from my speech" so I could make clear the declaration, and target my proofs so that my message would be carried to their minds and it would penetrate into their hearts, and give me a minister from my family, my brother Hárún⁸⁸. "Add to my strength through him and make him share my task" [Qur'án 20:25-7 & Azami n.d:137]. Músá's request was granted.

On reaching Egypt he was reunited with his brother Hárún-Aaron.⁸⁹ The two brothers proceeded to the Pharaoh's court, they conveyed to him the Divine message and enjoined upon him and his people to follow the path of the Almighty and worship Him alone.

(فأتياه فقولا انا رسولا ربك فأرسل معنا بنى اسرائيل ولا تعذبهم قد جئناك بأية من ربك
والسلم على من اتبع الهدى [الآية:٤٧] انا قد أوحى اليها ان العذاب على من كذب و تولى)

Allah said: "So go you both to Pharaoh and say: We are Messengers of your Lord, therefore send the Children of Israel with us, and do not chastise them. We have come from your Lord with a sign, and peace to all those who follow guidance. Surely, it has been revealed to us that the chastisement shall befall him who rejects and turns away" [Qur'án 20:47-8].

Hurling accusations of ingratitude against Músá [p.b.u.h], the Pharaoh also reminded him of the murder charge. As to the Pharaoh's insinuations regarding the favours he had shown Músá, the latter replied by saying:

"And that favour with which you reproach me is that you have enslaved the children of Israel" [Qur'án 26:22].

88. His brother was three years his senior, he was also made a prophet.

(ووهبنا له من رحمتنا أخاه هرون نبيا) [الآية:٥٣]

" And out of Our Mercy, We gave him his brother Hárún as Prophet."

89. Aaron-in terms of Hebrew usage meaning "lofty" and "mountaineer."

Enmeshed in a heated debate, the Pharaoh asked Músá: "'...And who is the Lord of the Worlds?' He replied: 'The Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and what is between them..' " [Qur'án 26:23-28].

The obstinate Pharaoh persisted in denying the existence of the Almighty, to which Músá offered to present to him proof.

(قال لئن اتخذت الها غيرى لأجعلنك من المسجونين [الآية ٢٩] قال أولو جئتك بشيء مبين

[الآية ٣٠] قال فأت به ان كنت من الصادقين

Pharaoh said: " If you take a god other than me, I will certainly imprison you."

Músá said: "Even if I bring you a manifest proof."

Pharaoh said "Show it if you speak the truth" [Qur'an 26:29-31]

The Pharaoh desired to see the miracles, Músá threw the rod on the floor and it was immediately transformed into a venomous serpent. Electrified at this the sovereign realised Músá's power, but he decided to counter Músá with a similar act of sorcery and so a test was arranged between Músá and the court magicians.

4.3 THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL

فلنا تينك بسحر مثله فأجعل بيننا و بينك موعدا لانخلفه نحن و لا أنت مكانا سوى

[The Pharaoh said to Músá]: "We can surely produce magic to match yours. So make a tryst between us and you which we shall not fail to keep- neither we nor you, in a place where both shall have even chances" [Qur'án 20:58].

Músá [p.b.u.h.] had selected the Day of the famous Festival, in which everyone could attend, for he said:

قال موعدكم يوم الزينة و ان يحشر الناس ضحى

[Músá] said: "Your tryst is the Day of the Festival and let the people be assembled when the sun is well up " [Qur'án 20:59].

The magicians were the first to try their hand at magic, their rods were cast into

snakes sprawling throughout the courtyard. When Músá threw his rod it devoured all of the magicians' serpents.

Confusion, consternation and panic engulfed the "devotees" of the Pharaoh.

و أوحيناً الى موسى أن الق عصاك فاذا هى تلقف ما يأفكون [الآية ١١٧] فوقع الحق و بطل ما كانوا يعملون [الآية ١١٨] فغلبوا هنالك وانقلبوا صغرين [الآية ١١٩] و ألقى السحرة سجدين [الآية ١٢٠] قالوا آمنا برب العلمين [الآية ١٢١] رب موسى و هرون

"And We inspired Músá to throw down his staff, then it devoured their false magic. So, the truth was established, and that which they did was proved false. So, they vanquished there, and they returned humiliated and the magicians fell down prostrate in adoration, saying:

"We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Músá and Hárún" [Qur'án 7:117-21].

The infuriated and humiliated Pharaoh, refused to surrender and increased his atrocities against the Israelites. Goaded on by his chiefs, the Pharaoh set out to destroy Músá for this is best demonstrated in *Súra al-A'ráf* [Qur'án 7:127-129].

(و قال الملاء من قوم فرعون أتذر موسى و قومه ليفسدوا فى الأرض و يذكر و آلهتك...)

"Would you leave Músá and his people to work corruption in the land and to forsake you and your God's?" [Qur'án 7:127].

The various leaders and dignitaries continued urging him to ruin Músá. Under severe pressure Músá advised his people to place their trust in Allah Almighty.

Assured that Músá was misguiding his people, the Pharaoh assumed the role of preacher; as he feared Músá would lead the Egyptians astray.⁹⁰ His vile intention

90. The Pharaoh said:

"Let me kill Músá, and let him call on his Lord. I fear he will change your religion, or spread mischief in the land" [Qur'án 40:26].

of killing Músá provoked a reaction from a staunch believer⁹¹. This individual believed in Músá's message and regardless of his fear of the Pharaoh he said to him:

(وقال رجل مؤمن من آل فرعون يكتم إيمانه أتقتلون رجلا أن يقول ربي الله وقد جاءكم بالبينات من ربكم و ان يك كذبا فعليه كذبه وان يك صادقا يصبكم بعض الذي يعدكم ان الله لا يهدى من هو مسرف كذاب [الآية ٢٨] يقوم لكم الملك اليوم ظهري في الأرض فمن ينصرنا من بأس الله ان جاءنا قال فرعون ما اريكم الا ما ارى و ما اهديكم الا سبيل الرشاد)

"And a believer from among the Pharaoh's people who concealed his faith said: 'Will you kill a man because he says: My Lord is Allah? and indeed he has brought to you clear signs from your Lord, and if he is a liar, on him will be his lie, and if he is truthful, there will befall you some of that he threatens you with. Surely Allah does not guide any excessive liar. O my people! Today sovereignty is yours, you have the upper hand in the land. But who will help us from the punishment of Allah if it befalls us?' Pharaoh said: 'I but point out to you that which I see myself, and I only guide to you to the right path' " [Qur'án 40:28-9].

He tried to dissuade the Pharaoh from his intended plan in a gentle and subdued manner, but the Pharaoh who was aware of the volatile situation let his pride impede him resulting in his ultimate annihilation. The believers' warnings to the Pharaoh and his people were unheeded, so the result was catastrophic.

The wrath of the Almighty was sure to manifest itself, for the insolent Pharaoh refused to heed to any advice. Calamities befell the Egyptians as a severe drought virtually crippled them.

Allah Almighty states in the Qur'án:

(و لقد أخذنا آل فرعون بالسنين و نقص من الثمرات لعلهم يذكرون [الآية ١٣٠])

91. A cousin of the Pharaoh.

فاذا جاءتهم الحسنة قالوا لنا هذه وان تصبهم سيئة يطيروا بموسى و من معه الا انما طئروهم عند الله و لكن اكثرهم لا يعلمون [الآية ١٣١] و قالوا مهما تأتنا به من اية لتسحرنا بها فما نحن لك بمؤمنين [الآية ١٣٢] فأرسلنا عليهم الطوفان و الجراد و القمل و الضفادع و الدم ايت مفصلت فاستكبروا و كانوا قوما مجرمين)

"And certainly We seized Pharaoh's people with years of scarcity and diminution of fruits that they might be mindful. So when good came to them, they said: 'This is our due,' but if evil afflicted them they would ascribe it to Músá and those with him. Whereas surely their misfortune was in the Hand of Allah, but most of them do not know. And they said:

'Whatever sign you bring to us to enchant us, we will not believe you.'

So We sent to them the flood and the locusts, the lice and the frogs and the blood, self-explained signs, but they were arrogant and were a sinful people' " [Qur'án 7:130-33].

One calamity after another bechanced the people; the flood {طوفان} locusts {جراد}, lice {قمل}, frogs {ضفادع} and blood {دم}.

The locusts destroyed their crops and fruit, frogs leaned into their food and all household dishes, the water was blended with blood. Each time the misfortunes became unbearable, they repented and asked Músá to pray for Divine assistance, after which they would resort to their regular ways. This is described in Súra *al-A'ráf* [134-36].

An example illustrating the above is as follows:

(قالوا يموسى ادع لنا ربك بما عهد عندك لئن كشفت عنا الرجز لنؤمنن لك و لنرسلن معك بنى اسرايل)

"O Músá! Pray for us to your Lord in the name of the covenant He has made with

you, if you remove the plague from us, we will surely believe in you and will send forth the Children of Israel with you" [Qur'án 7:134].

Allah removed their afflictions but they resorted to their former ways, as a result another calamity betied them and the cycle continued.

4.4 DEPARTURE OF THE BANÍ ISRÁ'ÍL FROM EGYPT

The Pharaoh's brutality as well as his rancour against Músá [p.b.u.h] and his brother continued. There were only a handful of the Coptic Egyptians who believed in Músá [p.b.u.h]. According to studies three believing people were the following:

Ásíya {wife of the Pharaoh};⁹²

the believer {the cousin of the Pharaoh} and

the man who ran from the farthest point of the town warning the prophet of the conspiracy levelled against him.

The situation of the Israelites under the tyrannical rule of the Pharaoh intensified, but Músá [p.b.u.h] urged his people:

"O my people! If you do really believe in Allah, then put your trust in Him if you are Muslims {submit your will to the Will of Allah}."

92. No mention is made of this in the Bible. As for the Pharaoh's wife the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] is reported to have said :

حد ثنا يحيى بن جعفر : حد ثنا وكيع عن شعبة عن عمرو بن مرة عن مرة الهمداني عن
أبي موسى رضى الله عنه قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : كمل من الرجال كثير و
لم يكمل من النساء الا آسية امرأة فرعون ؛ و مريم بنت عمران ؛ و ان فضل عائشة على النساء
كفضل الثريد على سائر الطعام . [صحيح البخارى ٤ : ٩٠٩]

"Many amongst men reached [the level of] perfection, but none amongst the women reached this level except Ásíya, Pharaoh's wife, and Mary, the daughter of 'Imrán. And no doubt, the superiority of 'Á'isha to other women is like the superiority of Tharíd [i.e. a meat and bread dish] to other meals".

So they said: "In Allah we trust. Our Lord!...." [Qur'án 10:84-86].

Pharaoh's unbending attitude led to the following prayer by Músá [p.b.u.h] who implored the Almighty to:

(...ربنا اطمس على أموالهم واشدد على قلوبهم فلا يؤمنوا حتى يروا العذاب الأليم)

"...Obliterate their wealth, and harden their hearts, so they will not believe until they see the grievous chastisement" [Qur'án 10:88].

This plea to the Almighty heralded the ultimate annihilation of the Pharaoh and his followers.

Allah says in the Qur'án:

"And We revealed to Músá: Depart with My slaves by night, for surely you will be pursued... " [Qur'án 26:52-68].

The Israelites headed towards Syria, for the reluctant Pharaoh granted them permission to leave. He however pursued them.

Músá continued with his group until he reached the shores of the Red Sea.

(فلما ترآء الجمعان قال أصحاب موسى انا لمد ركون [الآية ٦١] قال كلا ان معى ربهى

سيهدين

"When the two groups saw each other, the people of Músá said, 'We are surely overtaken.'

He said, ' No indeed my Lord is with me, He will guide me' " [Qur'án 26:61-62].

At this point Músá received a command from the Almighty:

فأوحينآ الى موسى أن اضرب بعصاك البحر فانفلق فكان كل فرق كالطود العظيم [الآية ٦٣]

و أزلفنا ثم الآخريين [الآية ٦٤]

"So We revealed to Músa: ' Strike the sea with your staff,' and it parted and each part stood like a huge mountain. And We let the other party approach there" [Qur'án 26:63-64].

This miracle of Músa was the handiwork of the Almighty for he led his people across the sea. Determined to strike the rod and block the way, Músa was yet again ordered by the Almighty:

"....and leave the sea as a furrow {divided}...." [Qur'án 44: 17-24].

The Pharaoh realised this was from Músa's Lord and pretended that he would follow the Israelites, but he harbored no such intention. It has been narrated that the archangel Gabriel appeared as a cavalier on a horse and passed the Pharaoh's horse who followed suit. The entire army followed and as they approached the midsection the sea returned to its former state-all those in it drowned [Azami n.d: 372].

Allah says in the Qur'án:

فلما رأوا بأسنا قالوا آمنا بالله وحده و كفرنا بما كنا به مشركين [الآية ٨٤] فلم يك ينفعهم

إيمانهم لما رأوا بأسنا سنت الله التي قد خلت في عباده و خسر هنالك الكفرون [الآية ٨٥]

"But when they saw Our punishment, they said: 'We believe in Allah Alone and we disbelieve in what we were associating with Him.'

Yet their belief when they saw Our punishment could not avail them. The Ordinance of Allah passed upon all His slaves. And the disbelievers shall be lost" [Qur'án 40:84-5]. Thus the Pharaoh and his entire kingdom were eradicated.

The Israelites, after receiving Divine assistance questioned the Supremacy of the Almighty, for they ignorantly said to Músa [p.b.u.h]: "O Músa! Make for us a God like the god they have" [Qur'án 7:138-39].

After reprimanding them for their foolhardy attitudes, the Israelites once again showed their obtuseness. This was displayed in their refusal to fight the

Canaanites and the Hittites as they advanced towards Jerusalem; this disobedience culminated in the wrath of the Almighty upon them.

Allah says in the Qur'án:

و اذ قال موسى لقومه يقوم اذ كروا نعمة الله عليكم اذ جعل فيكم أنبياء و جعلكم ملوكا و
اتكم ما لم يؤت أحدا من العلمين [الآية ٢٠] يقوم اذ خلوا الأرض المقدسة التي كتب الله
لكم و لا تر تدوا على أذباركم فتتقلبوا خسرين [الآية ٢١] قالوا يموسى ان فيها قوما جبارين
و انا لن ند خلها حتى يخرجوا منها فان يخرجوا منها فانا دخلون [الآية ٢٢]

"And when Músá said to his people: 'O my people! Remember Allah's blessing upon you when he appointed Prophets from among you, and appointed you kings and gave you such as He never given to any of the worlds. O my people! Enter the sacred land which Allah has prescribed for you, and do not turn back or you will become losers.'

They said: 'O Músá! Surely, there is a people of exceeding strength in that land, never shall we enter it until they depart from it, so if they depart from it, then we shall enter' " [Qur'án 5:20-22].

The Israelites were doomed to a life of banishment and exile. Allah had informed them of His favours upon them, as they were also provided with Manna and Quails⁹³ for there was no food in the arid land. This too did not appeal to them for they impudently said to Músá [p.b.u.h]:

"O Músá! We cannot bear one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to produce of that which the earth grows- its pulses, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and onions " [Qur'án 2:60-61].

Later Músá received the following invocation from the Almighty: "O Músá! I have chosen you above all people for My Messages, and to speak with Me...." [Qur'án 7: 144-145].

93. Manna- a bread like dish
Quails- kind of bird.

He was summoned to Mount H^{ur} where he had to stay for a duration of thirty days. The Qur'án says:

و واعدنا موسى ثلثين ليلة و اتممناها بعشر فتم ميقات ربه اربعين ليلة و قال موسى لآخيه هرون اخلفنى فى قومى و اصلح و لا تتبع سبيل المفسين

"And We appointed for Músá thirty nights, and added to them ten, thus he completed the term appointed by his Lord, of forty nights and Músá said to his brother Hárún: 'Stand in my place among my people and do right, and do not follow the way of the corrupt' " [Qur'an 7:142].

During this time his brother Hárún was commissioned to ensure proper conduct of the Israelites. According to Ibn 'Abbás, Masrúq and Mujáhid, the thirty nights are the nights of the month of *Dhu'l-Qa'dah*. Músá fasted during these days and on completion Allah ordered him to stay for a further ten days.

4.5 MÚSÁ ASKS TO SEE THE LIGHT OF THE ALMIGHTY

قال ربه ارنى انظر اليك، قال لن ترانى و لكن انظر الى الجبل فان استقر مكانه فسوف ترانى، فلما تجلى ربه للجبل جعله دكا و خر موسى صعقا، فلما افاق قال سبحنك تبت اليك و انا اول المؤمنين

Músá at this stage was desirous to see the Almighty, for he said:

" 'My Lord! Show to me that I may look upon You.'

The Almighty replied by saying: 'You cannot see Me, but look upon the mountain, if it remains firm in its place then you can see Me.' When his Lord manifested Himself to the Mount, it crumbled to a fine dust, and Músá fell down in shock. When he regained consciousness, he said: 'Glory be to You! I repent to You, and I am the first of the believers' " [Qur'án 7:143].

The Bible recounts this Divine Glory as follows:

"O Moses! None Alive would ever see Me but will die instantly.." [Azami n.d:388].

Abu Músá narrates from the Prophet [p.b.u.h]

"حجابه النور"

"His veil is Light" [Muslim 1981:1/113].

Another narration is as follows:

النار - لو كشفه لأحرقت سبحات وجهه ما انتهى إليه بصره من خلفه

"It is fire, if He would have disclosed it, the splendour of His countenance would consume His creation so far as His sight reaches" [Muslim 1981:1/113].

Músá received the Torah {the Laws} written on Tablets⁹⁴, it contained warnings and explicit explanations of everything, for the Qur'án says: "And We inscribed for him on the tablets the admonition and the explanation of all things"⁹⁵ [Qur'án 7:145].

Consequently during the interim the Israelites were wreaking havoc. Manipulated by Aaron Sámirí⁹⁶ {of Egyptian origin} they began worshipping a calf molded by him. Essentially Sámirí accumulated jewellery brought by these people, melted it and molded it into a calf. He said to the unsuspecting Israelites:

"This is your God and the God of Músá whom he has forgotten"⁹⁷ [Qur'án 20:88].

94. According to the Bible {Exodus 32:16} "the tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God engraved upon the tablets."

95. The Prophet [p.b.u.h] is reported to have said:

ان الله كتب له التوراة بيده و فيها مواظ عن الآثام و تفصيل لكل ما يحتاجون اليه من الحلال و

الحرام [صحيح البخارى]

"Allah wrote the Torah with His Hand, and there were admonitions and detailed injunctions of Halál and Harám."

96. The Bible does not mention the Sámirí, but Christian critics of the Qur'án indicate that the Qur'án has committed anachronism. According to Imám Rází he was an Egyptian who believed in Músá [p.b.u.h] and accompanied the Israelites. It is said that he collected clods from under Gabriel's horse during the crossing of the Red sea. "These were to be valued blessed relics, capable of constant motion" [Assfy 1977:43].

97. Qur'án [20:85-9] explains the foolishness of the people and Allah's test on them.

The disturbing news reached Músá [p.b.u.h] by the Almighty Himself.

Outraged he approached his brother saying: "...O Hárún! What prevented you when you saw them going astray? Why did you not follow me? Have you disobeyed me?" [Qur'án 20:92-93].

Hárún pleaded his innocence for the people refused to listen to him and plotted to kill him.

Músá [p.b.u.h] asked for pardon in the following invocation:

ربى اغفرلى و لأخى و ادخلنا فى رحمتك و انت ارحم الراحمين

"O my Lord, pardon me and my brother and place us in Your Mercy for You are Most- Forgiving, Most- Merciful"⁹⁸ [Qur'án 7:151].

He rebuked the Israelites as well as the Sámirí and burnt the calf.

It was time for retribution and Músá selected seventy people⁹⁹ from the Israelites to ask pardon from the Almighty on behalf of the Israelites.

ثم اختار موسى منهم سبعين رجلا فالخير و قال:

انطلقوا الى الله فتوبوا اليه و مما صنعتهم و سلوه التوبة على من تركتم و راءكم من قومكم
صوموا و طهروا و طهروا اثيابكم.

فخرج بهم الى طور سيناء لميقات و قته له ربه و كان لا يأتيه الا باذن منه...

فلما دنا موسى من الجبل وقع عليه عمود الغمام حتى تغشى الجبل كله و دنا موسى فدخل
فيه و قال للقوم ادخلوا و كان موسى اذا كلمه وقع على جبهته نور ساطع لا يستطيع احد من
بنى ادم ان ينظر اليه فضرب دونه بالحجاب و دنا القوم حتى اذا دخلوا الغمام وقعوا سجدوا
فسمعوه و هو يكلم موسى يأمر و ينهاه افعلا و لا تفعل فلما فرغ اليه من امره انكشف عن

98. Qur'án [7:148-154] discusses at great length Músá's disappointment with his people and his prayer for them.

99. The seventy people according to Suddí and ibn 'Abbás were religious scholars who accompanied Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Nadhab and Abihu [Azami n.d:398].

فقالوا لموسى لن نؤمن لك حتى نرى الله جهرة

...Músá selected seventy men{from among the Israelites}, in order of their virtue. Músá said to them: "Proceed to the Almighty and seek repentance from Him and ask forgiveness for what you have done {i.e. the misdeeds} on behalf of your people. Offer fast, purify yourselves and cleanse your clothes."

Músá accompanied them to mount Ṭúr for the appointed meeting with his Lord, for he did not go there except by the permission of his Lord...When Músá approached the mountain it was engulfed by a pillar of cloud so much so that it covered the entire mountain. Músá approached and entered it and said to his people, "Come closer". When his Lord spoke to Músá, a brilliant light fell on his forehead which no human [from the offspring of Adam] would be able to look upon. A veil was placed on all others and the people came closer until they entered the clouds and fell down in prostration. They heard what Allah had said to Músá commanding him about certain things and prohibiting him from others. When his task had ended, the cloud was removed from Músá. So he approached them. They then said. "We will not believe in you until we see the Almighty openly" [al- Ṭabarí 1989:300].

Ibn 'Abbás and other scholars say that when Músá came with the Tablets containing the Torah he commanded the people to accept them in good faith. But they said: "Show them to us, if its injunctions and teachings are acceptable, then we will take it."

Allah responded to them, "There is no choice but to accept them, otherwise this mountain will fall upon your heads."

4.6 COW SACRIFICE

Another test facing the disbelieving Israelites is mentioned in Súra al-Baqara: "Surely Allah commands that you sacrifice a cow" [Qur'an 2:66]. The reason is discussed below:

According to Ibn ‘Abbás, Mujáhid and Suddí, there was an old, affluent man among the Israelites whose nephew intended to kill him on account of his bounteous wealth. He eventually killed him and threw his body in the path or according to another version - on the door of a man.

The nephew approached the Prophet who in turn encouraged anyone with knowledge of the incident to disclose it, however there was no response. Allah commanded Músá to ask them to slaughter a cow. Frivolous as they were they took it somewhat lightly, only finally to realise that it was not a joke.

Merely slaughtering the cow would have been sufficient, but they continued mocking which complicated their task. For instance they enquired about the size, colour and various characteristics of the cow [Azami n.d:404].

Allah says in the Qur‘án:

قالوا ادع لنا ربك يبين لنا ما هي ان البقر تشبه علينا و انا انشاء الله لمهتدون [الآية ٧٠] قال
انه يقول انها بقرة لا ذلول تثير الأرض و لا تسقى الحرث مسلمة لا شية فيها قالوا الثن جئت
بالحق فذبحوها و ما كادوا يفعلون [الآية ٧١] و اذ قتلتم نفسا فادرءتم فيها و الله مخرج ما
كنتم تكتمون [الآية ٧٢] فقلنا اضربوه ببعضها كذلك يحيى الله الموتى و يريكم آياته لعلمكم

تعقلون

"They said: 'Ask your Lord for us that He may make clear to us which cow it is, for cows are much alike to us, and if Allah wills, we may be directed to it.'

He said: 'He says it is a cow unyoked, which has not ploughed the soil, nor watered the fields, sound without blemish.'

They said: 'Now you have told us the truth.' Then they offered her in sacrifice, but not with good will.

And remember you killed a man and fell into dispute among yourselves as to the crime, but Allah was to bring forth what you did hide.

So We said: 'Strike the body with a piece of heifer,' then Allah did bring the dead

back to life and shows you His Signs. Perhaps you may understand' " [Qur'án 2:70-72].

An exhaustive search resulted in a cow being found but a heavy price tag was attached to it. This cow could only be found by a man who was obedient to his parents. Having found it this man refused to sell it to them and would only sell it at a price ten times its weight in gold. They slaughtered the cow and struck the deceased with a portion of it. He was temporarily revived at which stage he identified his nephew as the killer [Azami n.d:405].

Such was the power of the Almighty that he was returned to its former state of being a corpse.

Another significant event in the life of Prophet Músá [p.b.u.h] was his encounter with Khidr, a learned man to whom Allah had given knowledge that He had not given to Músá [p.b.u.h].

The Khidr that Músá encountered is described in the Qur'án as follows:

فوجدوا عبداً من عبادنا ءاتيناه رحمة من عندنا و علمناه من لدنا علماً

"Then they found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us" [Qur'án 18:65].

This was Khidr as indicated by authentic hadíth. Some Jewish scholars suggest that the Músá who met Khidr was not Músá the prophet. But this is refuted by Islámic sources. Ibn Hajar says:

و الصحيح الذى دل عليه ظاهر سياق القرآن و نص الحديث الصحيح الصريح المتفق عليه

انه موسى بن عمران ان صاحب بنى اسرائيل

قال ابن عباس: كذب عدو الله حدثنا ابي بن كعب انه سمع رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم

يقول: ان موسى قام خطيباً فى بنى اسرائيل اى الناس اعلم؟ فقال: انا فعتب الله عليه ان لم

يرد العلم اليه فاوحى الله اليه ان لى عبداً بمجمع البحرين هو اعلم منك قال موسى: يا رب و

كيف لى به؟ قال: تاخذ معك حوتا فتجعله بمكتل فحيثما فقدت الحوت فهو ثم فاخذ حوتا فجعله بمكتل ثم انطلق و انطلق معه فتاه يوشع بت نون حتى اذا اتيا الصخرة وضعا راسيهما فناما و اضطرب الحوت فى المكتل فخرج منه فسقط فى البحر و اتخذ سبيله فى البحر سربا و امسك الله عن الحوت جرية الماء فصار عليه مثل الطاق فلما استيقظ نسي صاحبه ان يخبره بالحوت فانطلقا بقية يومهما و ليلتهما حتى اذا كان من الغد...

According to the Qur'án and the **H**adíth it is agreed by Muslim scholars that he was Músá bin 'Imrán, the Prophet of the Israelites. Ibn 'Abbás said: He lied, because 'Ubay bin Ka'ab has told me that he heard from the Prophet [p.b.u.h] saying: " 'Músá delivered a speech to the Israelites, so some one asked him: Who is the greatest person in knowledge?'

Músá said: 'I.'

Allah reprimanded him as he did not relate the knowledge to Allah. So Allah said to him: 'I have a slave at the confluence of the sea who is more knowledgeable than you.'

Músá said: 'My Lord! How could I find him?'

He said: 'Take a fish with you in a water filled vessel and wherever you find the fish disappear, the man will be there.' "

Músá took a fish and put it into a water filled vessel and went on his search. He took with him his attendant Joshua bin Nún¹⁰⁰ and when they reached the rock, they lay down on it and fell asleep. While they were asleep the fish wriggled out of the vessel and disappeared into the sea. When he awoke his companion forgot to tell him about the disappearance of the fish and they continued their journey..." [al-Bukhárí 1976:VIII/261-63].

Músá eventually encountered Khier, but he kept interrupting him during the course of the conversation, for the Prophet [p.b.u.h] said:

100. He accompanied the Prophet Músá [p.b.u.h] when they departed from Egypt.

"We wish Músá could have remained patient, so that Allah may have told us more of their story" [al-Bukhárí 1976:IV/402-5].

Abú Hurairah narrated:

The Angel of Death went to Músá [p.b.u.h]. When he came to Músá, Músá slapped him on the eye.¹⁰¹

The Angel returned to his Lord and said: "You have sent me to a slave who does not want to die."

Allah said: "Return to him and tell him to put his hand on the back of an ox and for every hair that will be covered by it, he will be granted one year of life."

Músá said: "O Lord! What will happen after that?"

Allah replied: "Then death."

Músá said: "Let it come now."

Músá then requested Allah to let him die close to the Sacred Land so much so that he could be at a stones throw from it.

Abú Hurairah added that Allah's Apostle said:

"If I were there I would have shown you his grave below the sandhill on the side of the road" [al-Bukhárí 1976:IV/409].

We conclude discussion with a review of the outstanding attributes of Prophet Músá [p.b.u.h].

The Prophet [p.b.u.h] is reported to have said:

"Do not prefer me from among the prophets. People will loose their consciousness on the Day of Judgement, and I will be the first to gain consciousness. But suddenly I will find Moses holding one of the legs of the Throne. I do not know whether he gained consciousness before me or he lost his consciousness as recompense for his unconsciousness on **Ṭūr**" [al-Bukhárí 1976:IV/410].

‘Abd Allah narrated: Once the Prophet p.b.u.h] distributed something among his followers.

101. It is believed that Músá wanted to perform many tasks prior to his death.

A man said: "This distribution has not been done with justice seeking Allah's Countenance."

I went to the Prophet [p.b.u.h] and told him that. He became so angry that I saw the signs of anger on his face.

Then he said: "May Allah bestow His Mercy on Músá, for he was harmed [in a worse manner] than this, yet he endured patiently" [al-Bukhárí 1976:IV/408].

4.7 SUMMATION

The life of Prophet Músá [p.b.u.h] is one endowed with event after event which makes it more intriguing, yet thoroughly inspiring. I have outlined a very brief analysis of his laudable life. As an oft-mentioned prophet, in the Qur'án this work does not do justice to the significance of his life and character, but it does give prominence to his outstanding life. The commentary that follows will bear testimony to this.