

The Story of Moses (part 4 of 12): A Stranger in a Strange Land

Description: Moses finds shelter in Midian.

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After walking for more than a week across the burning desert, Moses arrived at an oasis where groups of men were watering their animals. They were pushing, fighting, joking, and laughing, behaving in a rough, and tumble manner. Moses flung himself onto the ground grateful for the shade of a tree. As he caught his breath, he noticed two women and their flock of sheep. They were standing well back, hesitant to approach the waterhole.

Moses was a man of honour. Even though he was exhausted and dehydrated Moses could not bear to see the women standing back afraid to move toward the waterhole. He approached them, and asked why the men in their family did not look after the sheep. The two young women explained that their father was an old man and the task of caring for the sheep was now their responsibility.

Moses took the women's sheep to the waterhole, where he easily pushed in amongst the men already there. After completing this task, Moses' energy was totally spent. He sat under the shade of the tree and began to supplicate God. He said, "O Lord, whatever good you can bestow on me, I am surely in need of it".

"And when he arrived at the water of Midian he found there a group of men watering their flocks, and besides them he found two women who were keeping back their flocks. He said, "What is the matter with you?" They said, "We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take their flocks. And our father is a very old man." Therefore, he watered their flocks for them, and then he turned back to shade, and said, "My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!" (Quran 28:22-24)

Quran relates to us the stories of the prophets of God in order that we might learn from them. The Prophets are worthy role models and their lives are not so different from our own. How many times has each one of us sunk to the ground or into a chair in despair? How many times have we felt so physically or mentally exhausted that it seems we will be unable to go on for even one more second?

Moses once again turned to the only real source of help for humankind - God, and before his supplication was finished help was on its way. Moses was probably hoping for a slice of bread or a handful of dates but instead God gave him safety, provisions and a family.

One of the two women returned to Moses. She conducted herself with modesty and shyness and said to Moses, "My father wants to reward you for your kindness and invites you to our home'. Consequently, Moses roused himself and went to see the elderly man. They sat together and Moses related his story. The elderly man allayed his fears and told Moses that he had safely crossed the Egyptian border; he was now in Midian and was safe from any authorities that may have been pursuing him.

"Then there came to him one of the two women, walking shyly. She said, "Verily, my father calls you that he may reward you for having watered our flocks for us." So when he came to him and narrated the story, he said, "Fear you not. You have escaped from the people who are polytheists, disbelievers, and wrong-doers." (Quran 28:25)

After Moses had been invited to stay with the family, one of the women approached her father privately and advised him to hire Moses. When her father asked why, she answered because he is strong and trustworthy. Two qualities that Islam tells us are signs of leadership. In the years immediately following the death of Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, the leaders of the Muslim nation were chosen for these two qualities. They learned their politics from Quran, from the stories of their righteous predecessors.

The elderly man, who some scholars believe was Prophet Shuaib, although there are no authentic sources either confirming or denying this, offered Moses the safety and security of his own family. He gave one of his daughters in marriage to Moses on the condition that he work for eight years, or ten if Moses agreed to stay on for the further two years. Moses was a stranger in a strange land. Exhausted and alone, but God heard his supplication and provided for him from sources that Moses could never have imagined.

And said one of them (the two women): "O my father! Hire him! Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy." He said, "I intend to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years, but if you complete ten years, it will be a favour from you. But I intend not to place you under a difficulty. If Allah wills, you will find me one of the righteous." He (Moses) said, "That is settled between me and you whichever of the two terms I fulfil, there will be no injustice to me, and Allah is Surety over what we say." (Quran 28:26-28)

As believers we must never forget that God hears our prayers and supplications, and answers. Sometimes the wisdom behind the answers is beyond our comprehension but God desires only good for us. Putting our trust in God and submitting to His will allow the believer to weather any storm, and to stand tall in the face of adversity. We are never alone, just as Moses was not alone as he trudged across the desert fleeing the only life and land he had ever known.

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