

The Great Women behind Great Men (part 2 of 4): The Foster Mother

Description: Assiya, the foster mother of Moses and the wife of Pharaoh.

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Published on 13 Feb 2012 - Last modified on 18 Mar 2012

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Another great woman who raised a great man despite the difficulties and pressures she faced was Assiya. She is more often remembered as the wife of Pharaoh; however this great lady was also the foster mother of Prophet Moses.

Like Mary the mother of Jesus, Assiya was a woman chosen by God to care for a child who would grow up to be a prophet of God. What qualities did Assiya have with which to support and influence Moses? It was, once again, as we will discover her complete and total trust in God. As the wife of the most powerful and arrogant man in all Egypt, Assiya was surrounded by luxury, wealth and beauty yet she was able to recognise that without God human beings were lost bereft and incomplete.

"Many men reached the level of perfection, but no woman reached such a level except Mary, the daughter of Imran and Assiya, the wife of Pharaoh." [\[1\]](#)

When Moses birth mother was compelled by circumstances to put her tiny new born baby in a basket and float him down the waters of the Nile her heart was nearly broken beyond repair. But God is the best of planners. Assiya's maidservant drew Moses from the river and presented the tiny bundle to Pharaoh's wife. Assiya, in contrast to her arrogant, proud husband was a righteous, merciful woman. God opened her heart and Assiya looked down up on the tiny baby and felt overcome by her love for him. She asked her husband to accept him into the family.

The wife of Pharaoh said, a comfort for the eye, for me and for you; kill him not. It may be that he may be of benefit to us, or we may adopt him as a son." And they perceived not (the result of that). (Quran 28: 9)

Once again the Quran tells us very little about Assiya and even less about her relationship with her foster son Moses. However, as a woman of faith, she must have had a profound influence on her foster son. Moses, the man was forthright and believed in speaking his mind and standing up for the weaker members of society. Whenever he witnessed oppression or cruelty, he found it impossible to stop himself from intervening. Today psychology tells us that this sense of justice, and the ability to empathise, is learned at a very early age. They are skills that are often not able to be acquired in later life. Assiya must have helped instil these qualities in her foster son.

As Moses grew up he was considered a wise young man; in all respects regarded as

Pharaoh's son. We do know from the words of the Quran however that Moses' birth mother was his wet nurse. Ibn Kathir believes that Moses' birth mother lived in the palace while she was breast feeding him and that as he grew up she was allowed the privilege of visiting him. Her influence must also have played a part in shaping Moses' character.

"So did We restore him to his mother, that she might be delighted, and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the Promise of God is true. But most of them know not." (Quran 28:13)

Moses was quite possibly a child that was loved by both his real mother and Assiya. There is little doubt that before he reached manhood Moses knew about the Children of Israel and the political situation in Egypt. A number of circumstances, the details of which can be found in the Quran,^[2] forced Moses to flee Egypt. From royal son to common criminal, how must Assiya have felt?

We can surmise that Assiya knew the danger inherent in allowing Moses to understand the differences between his life in the palace and his birth family's life in an impoverished district. Eventually Pharaoh discovered that his wife was secretly worshipping the God of Moses. He was incensed and raged with anger. Pharaoh both threatened and cajoled his wife Assiya, but her heart now belonged to God Alone. Pharaoh offered his wife a choice, to accept him (Pharaoh) as her God or to continue to worship the God of Moses and be tortured until death. Assiya chose torture and death and in her last painful moments she could be heard calling out to God.

"O my Lord! Build for me, a home with You in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong." (Quran 66:11)

As the primary caregiver and educator, the mother has many heavy responsibilities, the most important of which is her responsibility to teach the children entrusted to her by God. It is the mother who first teaches her children how to know and love God. The best way to instruct children is by example because from the moment they can interact with their surroundings they are learning. As mothers, both Mary and Assiya taught the boys in their care to have complete trust in the One most worthy of Trust - God.

Endnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

^[2] God mentions Moses in Quran more than 120 times, and his story ranges across several chapters. It is the longest and most detailed story of a prophet in the Quran and is discussed in elaborate detail. Chapter 28 of the Quran is named, 'The Narration', the first 45 verses focus solely on the story of Moses.

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