

The History of 'Ashurah

﴿ تاريخ عاشوراء ﴾

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Muslims must fear Allah and take lessons from what Allah has told us in the Noble Qur'an regarding the Prophets and Messengers of Allah and the previous nations.

Allah said (which means): "Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding. It (the Qur'an) is not a forged statement, but a confirmation of Allah's existing books (the Torah, the Gospel, and other Scriptures of Allah), a detailed explanation of everything, and a guide and a mercy for the people who believe." (Yusuf 12:111)

And among the stories that Allah has narrated to us in His Book is what happened in Allah's month, the sacred month of Muharram, and that is the story of Prophet Moosa (Moses) and Pharaoh, the tyrant of Egypt. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us this story which means: "We recite to you some of the news of Moosa and Pharaoh in truth, for a people who believe (i.e. those who believe in this Qur'an and in the Oneness of Allah). Verily, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people sects, weakening (oppressing) a group (Children of Israel) among them, killing their sons and letting their females live. Verily, he was of those who work corruption. And We wished to do a favour for those who were weak (and oppressed) in the land, and to make them rulers and to make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the land, and We let Pharaoh and Haamaan (a minister of Pharaoh) and their hosts receive from them that which they feared." (Al-Qasas 28:3-6)

Pharaoh dominated the nation of Israel and enslaved them, killing their newborn sons but letting their females live. The reason he committed this criminal act was the fear of the truth coming out from one of those newborn males. The nation of Israel used to know, according to what came to them from Prophet Ibraheem (Abraham), that someone from his lineage would destroy the king of Egypt. These glad tidings were famous among them; and the news of it was made known to Pharaoh. Pharaoh ordered his soldiers to kill all newborn boys of the nation of Israel; in order to secure himself from destruction.

However, all of the precautions that he made were not enough to protect him from what Allah wanted, which was for this newborn boy to be raised in the house of Pharaoh. The will of Allah cannot be stopped by any precautions and His ability conquers anything. So Allah chose for the Prophet Moosa to be born safely, to be saved from being killed, and also to be raised in Pharaoh's own home under the protection of Allah until he was an adult.

Later, Moosa accidentally killed a person from Pharaoh's people by mistake. Moosa was afraid that he would be captured and be killed for this, so he fled to the land of Madyan and abided there for some time. He married there and then returned to Egypt. On the way back, Allah talked to him (by revelation) and told him he was a Prophet and the Messenger to Pharaoh. Allah told him many signs by which he will be known as the prophet of Allah and they would show that he was a true prophet.

Moosa went to Pharaoh and showed him the signs of Allah but Pharaoh was arrogant and stubborn. Allah says (which means):

"Has there come to you the story of Moosa? When his Lord called him in the Valley of Tuwaa. 'Go to Pharaoh, verily he has transgressed all bounds (in crimes, sins, polytheism and disbelief). And say to him, 'Would you purify yourself (from the sin of disbelief and by becoming a believer)? And that I guide you to your Lord, so you should fear Him?' Then (Moosa) showed him the great signs (miracles). But (Pharaoh) belied and disobeyed; then he turned his back, striving hard against (Allah). Then he gathered his people and cried aloud, saying, 'I am your lord, most high.'" (An-Naazi'aat 79:15-24)

Pharaoh claimed that the signs Moosa brought were only magic and that he had magic that would overtake the magic of Moosa. So Pharaoh gathered magicians from his kingdom and they presented their magic, and Moosa presented what he had from the signs, which Allah had given him.

Allah said (which means): "Thus truth was confirmed, and all that they did was made of no effect. So they were defeated there and then, and were returned disgraced. And the sorcerers fell down prostrate. They said, 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moosa and Haaron (Aaron).'" (Al-A'araf 7:118-122)

At that time Pharaoh decided to try a different plan - fear, force and retaliation. Allah told Moosa to get every believer out of Egypt and direct them to where Allah would tell him. Pharaoh gathered his army and forces, which were around one million soldiers, according to some references, and he chased Moosa and his people, hoping to destroy them completely. Moosa ended up at the sea with Pharaoh and his army behind him. The believers were afraid because the sea was in front of them and the enemy was behind them.

Allah says (which means): "And when the two hosts saw each other, the people of Moosa, said, 'We are sure to be overtaken. (Moosa) said, 'Nay, verily! With me is my Lord and He will guide me!'" (Ash-Shu'araa 26:61-62)

Whoever is close to Allah, Allah will never let him down or leave him on his own. Allah ordered Moosa to strike the sea with his staff. Moosa did so and the sea opened up for them to cross. Allah says (which means): "And indeed We inspired Moosa (saying): 'Travel by night with My slaves and strike a dry path for them in the sea, fearing neither to be overtaken (by Pharaoh) nor being afraid (of drowning).'" (Taa-Haa 20:77)

Moosa walked across the path that opened in the sea and the last of his people left the sea and every soldier of Pharaoh's army was inside the path. At this time Allah ordered the sea to collapse upon them, drowning Pharaoh and his army.

That was the victory of the truth over falsehood. The promise of Allah was true – He made the people of Moosa victorious over Pharaoh and his army. From this story we see how the truth is victorious, regardless of the size or seeming power of falsehood. Falsehood has its own limited time, but the truth is always victorious.

This story should enrich the hearts of the believers and make them steadfast in the face of their enemies, regardless of size or seeming power of their enemies. The believer should also benefit from this story by understanding that the people of falsehood claim that they are on the right path and are calling people to the truth. In fact, the opposite is true - they rely on lies and deception.

This great event – the victory Allah gave Moosa and the believers over Pharaoh and his army - occurred on the 10th of the sacred month of Muharram and the day is called Yaumul 'Ashurah' (the day of 'Ashurah'). It is a day that has a great merit. Prophet Moosa fasted on that day, and ordered the people to fast that day.

Ibn 'Abbass reported that when the Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) arrived in Madinah, he found the Jews fasting on the day of Ashura. The Messenger of Allah asked them, "What is the significance of this day that you fast on?" They said: "It is the day of great significance when Allah delivered Moosa and his people and drowned Pharaoh and his people. Moosa observed fast out of gratitude, and we also observe it." Upon this, the Messenger of Allah said, "We have more right and we have a closer connection to Moosa than you have."

So Allah's Messenger fasted (on the day of Ashura) and gave orders that it should be observed.

We also benefit from the story of Moosa by learning that the Sunnah of the Prophets is to thank and praise Allah in times of peace and when they gain victory over their enemies. Moosa fasted on the 10th, the day on which Allah made his followers victorious over Pharaoh; and this is another sign that the truth will always defeat falsehood.