

The Qur'ānic View of Moses: A Messenger of God from the Children of Israel to Pharaoh*

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The Qur'ān makes more than one hundred references to Moses [Mūsā]¹ and discusses, in different contexts, the various aspects of his Prophetic mission.² No other Prophet is mentioned in the Qur'ān as frequently or discussed in such detail. In the following, we shall briefly discuss the Qur'ānic view of the Prophetic history before Moses and try to understand the significance of Moses' accomplishment in that context. We shall also examine, in some detail, the various dimensions of Moses' accomplishment in the light of the Qur'ānic account of his Prophetic career.

Prophetic Movement before Abraham

The Qur'ān views the Prophetic movement³ as a systematic, step by step process in which its earlier stages prepare the ground for its later stages. After Noah [Nūḥ] many Prophets were sent to various parts of the civilized world.⁴ All of them had the same message — *tawḥīd*.⁵ As a corollary of that, they called their people to end all corruption and mutual exploitation and invited them to

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¹ The name Moses occurs in the Qur'ān 136 times. If we also count the pronouns and other devices used to refer to Moses, the number will be very large.

² For a more detailed discussion of Moses' story see Qur'ān 7: 103–171; 10: 74–93; 20: 9–99; 26: 10–68; 27: 7–14; 28: 2–82; 40: 23–54; 43: 46–56; 44: 17–33; 45: 16–17; 79: 15–26. Also consider Qur'ān 2: 49–61 ff.

³ The way the Qur'ān deals with the history of the Prophets is characterized by considering all Prophets as integral parts of a single movement that started with Noah.

⁴ For a somewhat detailed study of the Prophetic history before Abraham [Ibrāhīm] consider mainly: Qur'ān 7: 59–103; 10: 71–74; 11: 25–95; 26: 105–191. Due to the nature of their work, which in our view belonged to pre-Abrahamic era, we have also included the stories of Shu'ayb and Lot [Lūṭ] in the above list.

⁵ See, for instance, Qur'ān 7: 59–103, especially 7: 65; 7: 73; 7: 85; 11: 25–26, 50, 61 and 84; and often.

become one family as the servants of God, the One and Only Lord of all human beings.⁶ However, none of these Prophets is described as a Messenger to the whole world. The Prophet Hūd, for example, was sent to ‘Ād,⁷ while the Prophet Ṣāliḥ was sent to Thamūd.⁸ The same was the case presumably with other Prophets before Abraham [Ibrāhīm], who were sent to various lands at various times but whose names are not mentioned in the Qur’ān.⁹

In spite of the universal nature of their mission, none of these Prophets was required to take his message outside the specific territory that was the special domain of his addressees. However, given the Qur’ānic description of human settlement at the time of Noah, it is possible that he came at a stage when human population had not yet spread over far off lands,¹⁰ making it impossible for any one Prophet to convey the Divine message to all human beings. In this regard, Noah’s case was, in a way, different from that of the later Prophets. Of course, like the later Prophets, Noah’s own people were still his addressees and like these later Prophets, Noah was also a Messenger to his own nation. It is also true that, unlike these later Prophets, it could be said only of Noah that he was a Messenger to all human beings at that time.

If the above understanding of the Qur’ānic interpretation of the history of the Prophets is granted, then at least one point is clear: there were no international Prophets before Abraham.¹¹ After Noah when human beings spread over far off lands, separate Prophetic missions were sent to nations that were disconnected with each other. No one Prophet could perform the mission that would cover all nations. And, when the time was ripe for the development of an international Prophetic movement, Abraham was given the assignment to make a beginning. The question still remains: what was actually involved in Abraham’s initiating an international movement of *tawḥīd*?

In the light of the Qur’ānic description of the Prophetic movements of the pre-Abrahamic era, each Prophet presumably acted like a farmer who would oversee his cultivation till its very end. In the kind of circumstances in which he lived, it is not difficult to imagine that it was he who would plough the land, plant the seeds, do everything that was required for a good crop and then he would possibly also be there to reap the harvest. Apparently, the movement initiated by each of these Prophets repeated the same story. The overall progress of the Prophetic movement in this stage of its history could

⁶ See Qur’ān 2: 213; 21: 92.

⁷ See Qur’ān 7: 65; 11: 50; 26: 123.

⁸ See Qur’ān 7: 73; 11: 61; 26: 141.

⁹ See Qur’ān 4: 164; 40: 78.

¹⁰ For the Qur’ānic suggestion to this effect, see Qur’ān 17: 3; 19: 58; 3: 33; 71: 26.

¹¹ For the Qur’ānic suggestion to this effect, see Qur’ān 2: 124; 3: 96; 22: 27.

be very well represented by a spiral movement.¹²

In the following pages we shall attempt to understand the Prophetic movement in the light of a brief description of the general pattern of that movement before Abraham. The Qur'ān makes it quite clear that Prophets were sent at a time when the human world became full of corruption (*fasād*) and injustice/oppression (*ẓulm*) due to the prevalence of *shirk* (making partners with God) and the failure of people to conduct themselves as fellow servants of God.¹³ Thus in much later history, Moses' being sent "to the unjust people"¹⁴ does not seem to be an exception. Starting with Noah all the Prophets in the pre-Abrahamic era were sent to peoples that had overstepped all boundaries in their transgression against God and had filled the earth with corruption, oppression and bloodshed. The Qur'ān explains that it is *shirk* which divides mankind into conflicting groups.¹⁵ In a *shirk*-based society, undisciplined in the ethical imperatives of monotheism, the rich and the powerful are prone to exploit the poor and oppress the weak.

Thus the movements of the Prophets in pre-Abrahamic era were, in fact, directed toward unifying humans in service to One God, the way they were before *shirk* divided them. This co-'*ubūdiyyah* (fellowship of human beings as servants of One God) required that people have mutual concern and mutual respect and thereby share their resources with one another.¹⁶

Quite naturally, whenever a Prophetic movement was initiated, it started attracting pious and virtuous elements of human society. However, there were also unjust people who did not show any inclination to change their evil ways. They were not at all interested in repenting and seeking God's forgiveness. Rather, these unjust people considered the Prophetic movement a threat to their unjust authority and selfish interests.¹⁷ Such people stood in the way of the Prophetic mission and created all sorts of problems and difficulties for the

¹² The Qur'ān does give some idea of such a repeating cycle. See, for example, Qur'ān 7: 94–101.

¹³ A coherent study of the following nine occurrences of the theme of "one community" in the Qur'ān will make this point clear. See Qur'ān 2: 213; 5: 48; 10: 19; 11: 118; 16: 93; 21: 92; 23: 52; 42: 8; 43: 33. For further evidence see *Sūrah Hūd* 11: passim, esp. 11: 50–60; 61–68; 77–83; 84–95.

¹⁴ See Qur'ān 26: 10–11.

¹⁵ See Qur'ān 2: 27, 203–208; 13: 25; 16: 91–95.

¹⁶ For the Qur'ānic suggestion to this effect, see for example, Qur'ān 2: 3, 83, 177 and 219; 51: 19; 70: 25.

¹⁷ Just consider the stories of the Prophets in *Sūrah 7*. In Qur'ān 7: 59–63 the stories of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shu'ayb and Lot are discussed. Each of these Prophets addresses his people, calls them to stop being servants of others than God, and denounces the prevailing corruption which is the result of the lordship of man over man. In response, influential persons who had their vested interest in the unjust system stand up against the Prophetic movement. Also note in Qur'ān 7: 103–127, how Pharaoh and his supporters felt threatened and wanted to crush Moses' movement.

believers. The Prophets and their truthful followers were advised to face the opposition coming from such people with great wisdom and tolerance, even to return good for evil.¹⁸ However, the opponents of the Prophets, afraid of the popularity of the Prophetic movement, instead of correcting themselves generally intensified their opposition to the Prophetic movement and their persecution of the believers. These opponents were willing to make concessions to the Prophetic movement only if it showed some relaxation toward them — an ease-up on its vehement insistence on *tawḥīd* and its uncompromising stance in matters pertaining to justice and equity. But the Prophets were not open to any bargain.¹⁹

At times when the situation became seriously bad, and the Prophets and their followers were too weak and too small in number to defend themselves, they had no other choice but to bid farewell to their hearth and home. After they left their homelands, God's Punishment would strike in the form of a natural catastrophe and the unjust people would be totally decimated.²⁰ Thereafter the virtuous people had the freedom to live in peace and justice under Divine Law.

As we have mentioned earlier, in the earliest age of its existence mankind lived as a single community. In that age, goodness, justice and compassion prevailed. However, as time passed, *shirk* or man's lordship over man corrupted human life, and when corruption exceeded certain limits, it was again time for God to send a Prophetic mission to play its corrective role.

Abraham: A New Chapter in the Prophetic Movement

The coming of Abraham marked a new stage in the history of the Prophetic movement.²¹ Even a very cursory reading of the Qur'ānic stories of the Prophets will make it clear that the coming of Abraham marked the beginning of an altogether new chapter in the history of the Prophetic movement. Abraham's movement did not complete the cycle of events in the way that the movements of Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ did. The reason is obvious. Abraham's perspective was much broader. Instead of leading his movement to its natural end on the pattern of these earlier Prophets of God — taking care of its full development in one land and aiming at the completion of this job during his

¹⁸ See Qur'ān 7: 199–200; 13: 22; 24: 63; 28: 52–55; 41: 34.

¹⁹ See, for example, Qur'ān 11: 29–30; 26: 114; and 6: 52.

²⁰ As stated in Qur'ān 8: 32, the general law here is as follows: the Divine punishment will not come as long as a Prophet stays with his people. The above law can also be derived inductively from the Qur'ānic stories of the Prophets.

²¹ For the stories of Abraham see mainly Qur'ān 6: 74–90; 14: 35–41; 19: 41–55; 21: 51–75; 37: 83–113. See also 22: 26–29; 2: 124–134; 3: 96–97.

own lifetime — Abraham decided to prepare the ground for the future progress of the Prophetic movement in two different ways.

1. He tried to make his message reach throughout the world by throwing the seeds of his message over vast lands. Even though Abraham's own people rejected this message, Abraham never lost hope and persisted in his effort to reform the people around him. He seems to have had the hope that in the future an understanding would grow among his people and they would start thinking self-critically about their errant and irrational ways. When he was leaving his family and his people he said: "I am migrating to my Lord. He is All-Mighty, All-Wise."²² "I am going to my Lord. He will show me the way, [He will guide me: "where to go?" and "what to do?"]."²³ He knew how people lose the ability to see the Truth clearly when their vested interests are at stake. He also knew how one's sinfulness makes one blind to Divine guidance. Abraham, therefore, said to his father (who, noting Abraham's firmness in his stand that God alone is the Lord, threatened to stone him to death,²⁴ and told him to leave him alone): "I will pray to my Lord that He may forgive you. He is so kind to me."²⁵

Abraham tried his best to convey his message of *tawḥīd* to his people and prayed to God that this message may reach out to the coming generations in far off futures.²⁶

The Qur'ān depicts Abraham as highly rational and straight in his thinking and possessed the ability to clearly and fearlessly articulate the Truth in all situations. He kept his focus on conveying the message as truthfully and as eloquently as possible.²⁷

2. At the same time, Abraham was seriously concerned with the development of true leadership capacity in his children and grandchildren.²⁸ According to the Qur'ān, Abraham was fully conscious of the fact that in the emerging stage of the Prophetic movement his own progeny might be required to play an important role, let alone the fact that he naturally desired that they do so.²⁹ Likewise, Abraham realized the importance of a stable community of believers which would carry on the mission of *tawḥīd*.³⁰ They

²² Qur'ān 29: 26.

²³ Qur'ān 37: 99.

²⁴ Qur'ān 19: 46.

²⁵ Qur'ān 19: 47.

²⁶ See Qur'ān 26: 84.

²⁷ See, for example, Qur'ān 2: 130 and 258; 21: 51–70.

²⁸ See Qur'ān 26: 83; 37: 100; 14: 35, 37, 40.

²⁹ See Qur'ān 2: 124, 128–129, and 132.

³⁰ See Qur'ān 2: 128; though, of course, this is in the context of the Final Messenger and his believers.

would live this message and take it to the rest of mankind. This community of believers would, again, need a great Prophet who would oversee its spiritual and moral development and thus prepare it for the performance of its job.³¹ Abraham naturally wanted these expectations to be fulfilled by his own progeny. Given the response of the people outside his family in his own life time, as well as the response to the Prophets before him, it is quite understandable why Abraham looked toward his own progeny to take the lead in creating a better state of affairs under the shadow of *tawhīd*.

As the Qur'ān repeatedly underlines, the subsequent Prophets from the progeny of Abraham made valuable contributions to the Prophetic movement.³² However, both Joseph [Yūsuf] and Moses occupied very unique places as the two major leaders of the post-Abrahamic Prophetic movement. As we will briefly explain in the following, under Joseph's leadership the Prophetic movement of Abraham moved one big step forward and thus prepared the ground for the mission of Moses. However, prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān, it was mainly through Moses that the Abrahamic dream of a community of believers, which would arise in the ranks of Abraham's progeny, and would disseminate the message of *tawhīd* to the rest of mankind, was realized.³³

The Most Beautiful Story of Joseph

The Qur'ān narrates stories of various Prophets of God in different Qur'ānic *sūrah*s. Some of these stories are narrated repeatedly in various contexts, elaborating the relevant parts of the same story. This is the case with the stories of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Moses, David [Dawūd], Solomon [Sulaymān], and some other Prophets who are discussed again and again in different parts of the Qur'ān. However, over and above its detailed discussions in other *sūrah*s, one complete but relatively small *sūrah* is also devoted to the story of Noah — giving a total picture of what Noah did to convey the message, reviewing what was the response of his people, and explaining how the story ultimately concluded in a Divinely desirable end.³⁴ Interestingly, it is Noah himself who tells his own story. I mean that the *sūrah* that goes under his name consists mostly of quotations from Noah's own speeches and prayers. The *sūrah* opens with a brief introduction and, in the middle of Noah's story, there is a brief interlude from the Divine Author.

³¹ Qur'ān 2: 129, and the above comment.

³² See Qur'ān 6: 84–90 and 37: 108–138.

³³ See Qur'ān 2: 128.

³⁴ See, for this, *Sūrah Nūḥ*, the seventy first *sūrah* of the Qur'ān.

A relatively much bigger *sūrah* is devoted to the only detailed account of Joseph's story.³⁵ It is called "the most beautiful story." But why is it so called? The beauty of the Qur'ānic presentation is beyond doubt. The way in which it is presented makes it a great piece of literature. Aside from its literary merit, however, the story itself is beautiful in terms of its content and moral. Moreover, I would suggest that we should also see Joseph's own performance in history from the point of view of the success of the Prophetic movement. Is it not the case that, given the perspective of the pre-Abrahamic Prophetic movement and Joseph's assignment in the Abrahamic plan, Joseph was an extremely successful person?³⁶ What makes the story all the more beautiful is that Joseph succeeded in spite of all Satanic plots³⁷ to place impediments in his way.

As we have pointed out earlier, Moses did a great job in the fulfilment of Abraham's dreams. But the very first step in this direction was taken by Joseph. It was Joseph who pioneered Abraham's movement of *tawhīd* in a new land. And when time was ripe for his brothers and their families to join, he invited them to do so.³⁸ If we are correct, never before had a community of believers had such a favourable starting point to lead their mission as the one Joseph provided to the Children of Israel. Thus through Joseph, Abraham's movement obtained a firm foothold in Egypt.

Unlike Abraham, however, Joseph did not internationalize his mission; rather, his Prophetic movement had its locus in Egypt.³⁹ It is this which assisted the Abrahamic cause and prepared the ground for the coming of Moses. Joseph possessed the practical wisdom to work out the social and economic dimensions of Abraham's message in the concrete situation that he faced in this new land. He was a very practical person who endeavoured to give practical shape to Abraham's ideas. He worked out his way through quite difficult circumstances but always looked out for increasingly better opportunities for the future progress of his mission. He worked with great wisdom, planned well, and spared no effort to make use of every available opportunity to further his mission.

Joseph would never miss an opportunity to convey his message to his addressees on any occasion if he thought that he would be listened to with

³⁵ See *Sūrah Yūsuf*, the twelfth *sūrah* of the Qur'ān.

³⁶ Compare Joseph's dream in Qur'ān 12: 4 with the angels' prostration to Adam in Qur'ān 2: 34.

³⁷ See Qur'ān 7: 16–17; 12: 5, 100.

³⁸ See Qur'ān 12: 90–100.

³⁹ See Qur'ān 12: 56.

attentive ears.⁴⁰ He also presented his ideas in the most beautiful and convincing way.^{40a} He was also careful not to create unnecessary hurdles in his way. Therefore, if he thought that his speaking out would create problems for the fulfilment of his future plans, without there being the possibility of any real gain, he would prefer to wait for a better opportunity to convey the Truth.⁴¹ What is most important, he knew the art of conducting himself as a truthful and honest person without creating a situation of uncalled-for conflict or clash. As a well-thought out policy of action, his focus always remained to demonstrate the worth of the way of life rooted in *tawḥīd* through his own performance.

Joseph, who was a man of principles, possessed an exceptionally attractive personality, a personality that represented a balanced combination of excellent moral qualities. He knew how to make people realize their mistakes and then how to forgive them.⁴²

How are Joseph and Abraham Related?

One important consideration seems to be common in the approaches of Joseph and his great grand father, Abraham. Both seemed to desire to avoid completing a cycle of events in the span of a single life-time on the pattern of Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ. Both seemed to desire that their actual and potential addressees should have more time to think and understand. Both seemed to believe that more than one generation of Prophetic mission was required to obtain some substantial achievement to promote *tawḥīd*.

As we noted earlier, Abraham was primarily concerned that the message of *tawḥīd* should reach out to a wide audience. At the same time, he was equally concerned that the Truth must be conveyed in all its purity. It is obvious that if some element of falsehood was also mixed with the Truth so that the thrust of the message lost its utter clarity, then, in fact, the Truth had not been conveyed. Abraham would agree that while explaining a point one should not neglect the addressees' ability to understand. But he was also much concerned that the point at issue should be conveyed so clearly that there was no doubt left in the minds of the addressees concerning its content. The addressees must understand it, as it essentially was — even if they felt threatened with it or failed to appreciate it because something else was more important to them than the Truth. Thus Abraham, who was otherwise a very tolerant and compassionate person, was quite uncompromising in matters

⁴⁰ and ^{40a} See Qur'ān 12: 35 ff. especially 39–40.

⁴¹ See Qur'ān 12: 43–57 and 12: 58ff.

⁴² See Qur'ān 12: 50–53 and 58–92.

pertaining to the core of his message.⁴³

Joseph, a distinctly truthful and honest person, was equally committed to his objectives in Egypt. As we have stated earlier, Joseph was seriously concerned with taking the movement of *tawḥīd* a step forward. He too subscribed to the points we have mentioned above as the guiding principles of Abraham.⁴⁴ But he also seemed to believe that as his basic purpose was to win the people over to the Truth rather than to antagonize them, it was required that he should proceed with caution. His emphasis seems to have been on working out, in practical life, the benefits of the message of *tawḥīd* and showing its beauty to the people. When he oriented his personal life according to the requirements of his message, as a person in authority, the blessings of his worldview became evident in practical terms to all and sundry.⁴⁵

Moses' Special Concern with the Children of Israel

Joseph helped the Children of Israel in two ways:

1. Through his practical performance and through his words of wisdom, the social environment in Egypt became more friendly to the Children of Israel and more favourable for the future growth of the *tawḥīd* movement of their forefathers — Abraham, Isaac [Ishāq] and Jacob [Ya'qūb]⁴⁶ — who were all Prophets of God and were seen by quite some Egyptians with respect and appreciation.⁴⁷
2. Then, at the end, Joseph invited his brothers and their families to Egypt and provided them a respectable and comfortable place to settle down. Obviously, Joseph expected that his brothers and their children would work to further the cause for which he had already prepared the ground.

Now, as the Qur'ān repeatedly suggests, Moses was concerned with preparing the Children of Israel for the leadership of the world which God had promised them.⁴⁸ Over and above conveying the message of *tawḥīd* to the people around him — the task that the Qur'ān underlines in connection with the Prophets before him⁴⁹ — Moses also had an additional responsibility. He

⁴³ See, for example, Qur'ān 2: 258 and 21: 51–66.

⁴⁴ See p. 12 above.

⁴⁵ See the part of his life-story ending with being invested with power and authority in Egypt. See Qur'ān 12: 50–57.

⁴⁶ See Qur'ān 12: 37–40, to see how, while explaining his message, Joseph disclosed his relationship with them.

⁴⁷ See Qur'ān 2: 127–129.

⁴⁸ See Qur'ān 7: 128–129, 146; 28: 4–7; 32: 23–24.

⁴⁹ In *Sūrah* 7 consider Moses' story which is discussed from 7: 103 to 7: 162 after the discussion of earlier Prophets in 7: 59–93. Consider the significance of “(thumma) and then” in the

was required to ensure the spiritual and moral development of the Children of Israel whom the Qur'ān calls "his [Moses'] people" or "his *qawm*." Moses' people, unlike the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Šālīḥ, Abraham and several other earlier Prophets occupied, in his view, the position of a continuing community of believers of which he himself was a member by birth.

Obviously, believing is a way of committing oneself. And, in the context of the Prophetic movement, believing is committing oneself to the mission of *tawḥīd*. However, practically in almost all faith communities more often than not faith is actually inherited and there are persons who even oppose abandoning the religion of one's forefathers and embracing that of another. When a child is born into a specific religious community he or she has a better opportunity to know about the beliefs and practices of that faith community. There are reasons due to which the child develops a sense of belonging to his or her parents' religion and then he/she actually commits himself/herself to it. However, following the religion of one's forefathers blindly is what Abraham attacked vehemently.⁵⁰ This attitude to blindly follow the religion of one's forefathers was so patently in conflict with the basic message of all Prophets that the attitude of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph on this question was evidently the same as that of Abraham. It is not difficult to appreciate that the Prophetic movement after Abraham should have been concerned with turning this inherited belief (*īmān*) into a truly vibrant one — something which is based upon understanding and commitment. Consider particularly Abraham's prayer: "And call to mind when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House (making the prayer): 'Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for You are the All-Hearing, the all-Knowing. Our Lord! Make us (both) submissive (Muslims) to You and make out of my progeny a Muslim community (a people submissive to You) and show us our religious rites and turn unto us (in Mercy); for you are the Oft-Returning, the Most Merciful. O Lord! Send amongst them a messenger from amongst them who shall recite Your signs to them and teach them the Book and the Wisdom and purify them; for it is You Who are Almighty and All-Wise.'"⁵¹

Both Abraham and Jacob had urged their children to remain God's obedient servants till death. This implicitly involved their remaining attached with the believing community which these Prophets were trying to develop

beginning of the 7: 103 which comes after a general review on the stories of the earlier Prophets.

⁵⁰ It is significant that following one's forefathers was the main reason mentioned by Abraham's addressees for not accepting his message of *tawḥīd*. See Qur'ān 26: 69–74. In fact, the blind following of the forefathers was the main reason proffered by the erring nations in response to the Prophets' call of monotheism.

⁵¹ Qur'ān 2: 127–129.

and which very few outside their own family had joined. Abraham and Jacob said to their children: "God has chosen the Religion for you,"⁵² that is, they were fortunate enough to be born in the families of Prophets and to receive education in *tawḥīd* from their childhood and that, therefore, they ought to maintain their relationship with the believing community ever after. This is also illustrated by the case of Jacob. The Qur'ān states that on his death bed Jacob asked his children: "Whom shall you worship after me?" The children responded that they would worship the One God Whom Jacob himself and their forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael [Ismā'īl] and Isaac had worshipped.⁵³

The Qur'ān, apparently in the context of much later history, specifically discusses the inheritance of the Divine Book. It remarks that all the chosen servants of God who had inherited the Divine Book were not at the same spiritual level. There were persons (i) who were unjust to themselves; (ii) who were lukewarm; and (iii) who outstripped others in good works.⁵⁴ This division does give some idea of the work of regeneration that was required of the Children of Israel who represented such a full-blooded community of believers. Being a Prophet of God from the Children of Israel, Moses was their teacher and guide. He was deeply concerned that the Children of Israel should conduct themselves as a community of true believers. He was also engaged in the effort to ensure that these people, who were "obedient servants of God"⁵⁵ by birth, truly became God's obedient servants and, as such, heralds of the movement of *tawḥīd*. As the Qur'ān repeatedly underlines, it was a very tough job to do;⁵⁶ it was a job that required much patience and wisdom. Only a Prophet of Moses' calibre was equal to it.

It is interesting to note that the existence of such a special class of a Prophet's people is not mentioned in the Qur'ān in connection with Prophets before Abraham. We have briefly discussed Abraham's place in the history of the Prophetic movement. In fact, bringing this special class into existence which was required for the future stability of the Prophetic movement that was then entering the international stage of its development should be considered as one of the great achievements of the post-Abrahamic Prophetic movement. As we have noted above, the Qur'ānic descriptions of the Prophetic movement underline Abraham's serious concern with the spiritual and moral development of his own children and grand children, a concern that is not stated in the Qur'ān in a similar vein in connection with the earlier

⁵² See Qur'ān 2: 132.

⁵³ See Qur'ān 2: 133.

⁵⁴ See Qur'ān 35: 32.

⁵⁵ Qur'ān 2: 133.

⁵⁶ See Qur'ān 61: 5; 33: 69; 2: 108. See also Qur'ān 2: 51, 54, 55–56 and 61.

Prophets of God. This concern brought some very special blessings of God to the Children of Abraham which the Qur'ān mentions repeatedly.⁵⁷ This naturally created among the Children of Israel a strong sense of being a very special people. Moses' concern was that the Children of Israel should conduct themselves in a way which would be in consonance with their heritage.

Moses' Relationship with Humanity at Large

But what was Moses' relationship with human beings in general? Obviously, like all the earlier Prophets, Moses also had a wider concern besides his own people, a concern with all human beings around him.⁵⁸ The question arises: was it a concern of the same order which Noah, Abraham, and some other Prophets who came in between and whose stories the Qur'ān narrates repeatedly, had with their peoples? We raise this question mainly owing to the fact that we do not find Moses being mentioned in the Qur'ān as calling them "his people" in the manner these earlier Prophets of God did.

In fact, it is very interesting to see that in the Qur'ānic usage concerning every Prophet before Moses "his people" denotes that Prophet's immediate addressees in general even though most of them did not show any inclination to believe in him, or to give any support to his Prophetic mission. Even Lot's addressees are introduced in the Qur'ān as "his people" and even "his brethren" — presumably because he addressed them as "brethren!" However, in Moses' case, the Qur'ānic usage of "his people" exclusively denotes the Children of Israel with whom he had a very special relationship.

Was Moses sent to Pharaoh?

We cannot answer the above question without considering another very significant point. While the Qur'ān says concerning Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Lot that each of these Prophets was sent to his people (*qawm*), it nowhere says that Moses was sent to the Children of Israel or to his people. On the contrary, the Qur'ān speaks of Moses' being sent "to Pharaoh"⁵⁹ or "to Pharaoh and his chiefs (*al-mala'*)"⁶⁰ or "to Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qārūn (Korah)"⁶¹ or "to Pharaoh and his people."⁶² As the Qur'ān suggests, it was required that at the stage when the Prophetic movement would enter the international stage of its

⁵⁷ See, for example, Qur'ān 6: 83–90.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Qur'ān 40: 23. See also Qur'ān 40: 28 ff. indicating that his message had been embraced by at least some individuals belonging to the Pharonic nation. See 20: 70 ff.

⁵⁹ See Qur'ān 20: 24; 51: 38 73: 15; 79: 17.

⁶⁰ See Qur'ān 7: 103; 10: 75; 11: 97; 23: 46; 43: 46.

⁶¹ Qur'ān 40: 24.

⁶² Qur'ān 27: 12.

development, there should be a community of believers well-equipped to carry on the movement.⁶³ The task performed by God's Prophets and Messengers would henceforth be the responsibility of the believing community as a whole. Therefore, as a believing community, the Children of Israel themselves were supposed to carry on Abraham's mission which Moses was doing on their behalf. According to the Qur'ān, when Moses would go to Pharaoh, the Children of Israel would be behind him. This being the case, Moses' being sent to the Children of Israel would not make much sense. More correctly, the Children of Israel had already been sent to Pharaoh; and Moses, who was part of them, was now being commanded to take the lead. As we know, Joseph, who was a Prophet of God, had invited other Children of Israel to Egypt and they were supposed to work for the Abrahamic cause in that land where Joseph, who had acquired a position of authority, had been working for quite some time.⁶⁴

As we have stated earlier, the Prophets were sent when the earth was filled with corruption, oppression and bloodshed due to man's lordship over man. The efforts of these Prophets were directed to making human beings a single community of fellow servants of One God the way they were before their becoming divided as a consequence of the vogue of *shirk*. The same was the case with Moses. However, in Moses' case, it is Pharaoh who was mainly responsible for this division among the people of Egypt. Pharaoh's people had subjugated the Children of Israel and were engaged in brutally oppressing them. Therefore, Moses was sent to Pharaoh to exert efforts to make him repent and seek God's forgiveness. Like the people of Noah, the people of Pharaoh apparently deserved a severe Punishment from God. But that would not come unless every effort had already been made to make the erring and unjust people repent and seek God's forgiveness. This is a general principle which is repeatedly stated in the Qur'ān.⁶⁵ Contrary to Pharaoh, Moses' efforts were directed to making the people of Egypt become once again a community of God's servants as all humanity had once been in the beginning. And in this task the Children of Israel, as a community of believers and sons and daughters of God's Prophets who had worked in the past for the same goal, were supposed to be his main supporters. However, what made the situation all the more serious was that it was this community of believers itself which was the main target of Pharaoh's oppression. For this reason, Moses was doubly concerned with the Children of Israel.

The Qur'ānic descriptions make it quite clear that Moses, who presented

⁶³ See Qur'ān 2: 124.

⁶⁴ See *Sūrah Yūsuf* 12, but especially verses 58 ff.

⁶⁵ See for example, Qur'ān 17: 15; 28: 47, 59; 9: 32-33.

himself as a Messenger from the Lord of all human beings,⁶⁶ was espousing no narrow, parochial cause. Moses was against every kind of injustice and oppression. However, the greatest injustice in Egypt was being done to his own people⁶⁷ and, therefore, it was his duty as a Prophet of God to stand up against that injustice. This did not detract from the fact that Moses was truly a well-wisher of the people of Egypt. He was also a well-wisher of Pharaoh himself. All he wanted from Pharaoh was that he should cease to act in transgression, should repent, and should mend his behaviour. Moses was interested that Pharaoh, who had been acting arrogantly and unjustly, should purify himself and take care of his moral and spiritual development.⁶⁸ God's command to Moses was that he should speak to Pharaoh gently, not ruling out the possibility of his correcting himself.⁶⁹

There is another clear sign of the universal character of Moses' mission. According to the Qur'ān, on the one hand, Egyptians other than the Children of Israel were entering into Moses' community of believers.⁷⁰ On the other hand, there were unjust persons like Qārūn (Korah) who were originally from the Children of Israel but whom the Qur'ān counts among the members of Pharaoh's party.⁷¹ It is also noteworthy that the Qur'ān mentions Pharaoh's wife as a believer.⁷² Likewise, the magicians who originally supported Pharaoh later joined Moses' believing community when they noticed clear signs of Moses' being a true Prophet of God.⁷³

In what follows we shall present some quotations from the speech of a believer from Pharaoh's people who, apparently, occupied a high rank in Pharaoh's court, but who had hitherto kept his belief hidden.⁷⁴ He declares himself to be a believer and a supporter of Moses during a meeting wherein Pharaoh and his chiefs were plotting to kill Moses.⁷⁵

The speech of this believer opens with these words: "Will you kill a person just because he says that my Lord is God? Will you do so in spite of the fact that he brings clear signs from his Lord?" The believer continues: "O my

⁶⁶ See Qur'ān 7: 104; 26: 16, 23, 48; 43: 46.

⁶⁷ See Qur'ān 2: 49; 7: 127; 14: 6; 28: 4.

⁶⁸ See Qur'ān 79: 18–19.

⁶⁹ See Qur'ān 20: 43–44.

⁷⁰ See Qur'ān 20: 70 ff. and 40: 28 ff.

⁷¹ See Qur'ān 28: 76. Also consider how God mentions Korah with Pharaoh in Qur'ān 29: 39 and 40: 24.

⁷² See Qur'ān 66: 11.

⁷³ See Qur'ān 7: 120–122; 20: 70–73; 26–51.

⁷⁴ For the details of his speech see Qur'ān 40: 28–44. The *sūrah* 40 of the Qur'ān is called "the Believer," which is an allusion to this believer.

⁷⁵ For the full text of his speech see Qur'ān 40: 28–44.

people, today you are a sovereign power. You have supremacy over earth, but who will save us against the might of God if it comes upon us?" In the latter part of his speech, the believer explains how the corrupt and unjust peoples of the past who had supremacy over earth, and who did not repent in spite of repeated warnings from God through His Prophets, were punished by Him. The believer reminds his people of the Day of Judgement when all will stand before God to answer for their deeds. The believer also mentions the name of the Prophet Joseph who came earlier with clear signs from God. He concludes his speech with the following remarks: "My people, what is wrong with you, I am calling you to the path of salvation and you are calling me to the Fire? You are calling me to disbelieve in God and make partners with Him and I am calling you to the Almighty, the Most Forgiving God."

Conclusion

Bearing in mind what we have said above, we shall move forth to consider very briefly the above two issues which are inter-related. We have mentioned earlier that Moses was preparing the Children of Israel for the leadership of the world. What does that mean in the Qur'ānic perspective?

The *Sūrah* 28 of the Qur'ān opens with the story of Pharaoh's arrogance, tyranny and corruption and in this context discloses God's Plan to bestow the leadership of the world upon the Children of Israel and grant them power on earth.⁷⁶ However, the *sūrah* discusses, in the wider perspective of the history of mankind, how God had been testing different nations, one after another, by granting them power on earth. The Qur'ān briefly recounts the pre-Abrahamic Prophetic movement and makes a general review of the fate of these nations. After this, a detailed story of Moses and Pharaoh is narrated. After having tested the people of Noah, Hūd, and Šālīḥ and the peoples to whom other Prophets of God were sent, Moses was sent to the people of Pharaoh. But side by side with that another important development was also taking place. With Abraham the Prophetic movement was entering into its international stage and this required that a whole community of believers be developed to play the leadership role. Abraham, Isaac [Ishāq], Jacob and Joseph had all worked on this project. Moses, who was calling Pharaoh to stop his transgression and act as a servant of God, the Lord of all human beings, was also working for the liberation of the Children of Israel. The Divine Plan was that as a comprehensive educative programme for the spiritual and moral development of this believing community would continue after their liberation, they would also receive the Divine Book that would help this

⁷⁶ See *Sūrah al-Qaṣas* 28, but especially verses 3–6.

believing community to remove oppression and injustice from the earth.⁷⁷

The *Sūrah* 7 discusses Moses' work in great detail. But let us have a brief review of the verses 7: 127–129 which are directly related to the above point. This small section, which is placed in the middle of the story of Moses and the Children of Israel, portrays two scenes. The first scene is that of Pharaoh's court. A consultative meeting is in progress between Pharaoh and his chiefs. Pharaoh's chiefs demand a more severe action against Moses and his people⁷⁸ while Pharaoh assures them that there is no reason to worry. "Be sure, we shall slaughter their sons and let their women live; we stand irresistible over them." In the other scene Moses is having a meeting with his people. Moses is explaining to his people the same philosophy of history that is illustrated in the earlier part of *Sūrah* 7. Moses tells his people to remain firm and to follow the path of *tawhīd*: "Seek help from God and be steadfast." Moses explains that it is God Who grants supremacy on earth to different peoples in succession. His people express their frustration over the continuing persecution by Pharaoh to which they were subjected. Moses further explains: "It is just possible that your Lord will soon destroy your enemy and make you successors in the land and then God will see how you act."⁷⁹

In the pre-Abrahamic Prophetic movement the community of the believers of a Prophet solely consisted of the righteous elements of the human society. And sooner or later all virtuous and pious people joined the Prophet's community of believers. Now in Egypt Moses' efforts were also leading to a similar polarization. As his struggle continued, all truthful and virtuous people gathered around Moses, including the righteous elements from Pharaoh's own people. There were some corrupt elements among Moses' people too. But as time passed and Moses' efforts to educate them progressed, many of them repented and purified themselves while some others joined Pharaoh's camp. Eventually Pharaoh and his supporters were drowned and Moses' community of believers attained its freedom from Pharaoh's unjust rule. However, Moses and the Prophets who were subsequently raised continued the task of educating the Children of Israel and preparing them to perform their collective mission.



⁷⁷ See Qur'ān 7: 145–146.

⁷⁸ They bring the charge against the Children of Israel that they are causing problems in the land due to their failure to cooperate with their national system and their refusal to follow their religion. See Qur'ān 7: 127. It seems that these chiefs wanted the Children of Israel's total submission to Pharaoh and were not open to any pluralism.

⁷⁹ See Qur'ān 7: 128–129.