

## Sura 20: Ta-Ha (Ta-Ha)

**In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy**

### **Verses 1 to 98:**

1. *Ta-Ha.*
2. *We have not sent down the Quran that you should be distressed,*
3. *But as a reminder to him who fears.*
4. *A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens.*
5. *The Lord of Mercy is firmly established on the Throne.*
6. *To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all that is between them, and all that is beneath the ground.*
7. *If you utter the words aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden.*
8. *God, there is no god but Him. To Him belong the most beautiful names.*
9. *Has the story of Moses reached you?*
10. *When he saw a fire. He said to his family, "Wait, I see a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire."*
11. *And when he came to the fire, he was called by name, "Moses,*
12. *Verily I am your Lord. So take off your shoes, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa.*
13. *And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed.*
14. *Verily, I am God. There is no god but I. So worship Me, and establish regular prayer for celebrating My remembrance.*
15. *Verily, the Hour is surely coming. But I will to keep it hidden, that every soul may be recompensed for that which it strives (to achieve).*
16. *Therefore, let not him who does not believe in it and follows his whims turns you away from it lest you perish;*
17. *And what is that in your right hand, Moses?"*
18. *He said, "It is my rod. I lean on it; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and I have other uses for it."*
19. *He (God) said, "Cast it down, Moses."*
20. *So he cast it down, and it was a serpent, running.*
21. *He said, "Take hold of it and fear not; We will restore it to its former state.*
22. *And thrust your hand within your armpit, it will come forth white without any harm. (This is) another sign.*
23. *In order that We may show you some of our greater signs.*
24. *Go you to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."*
25. *(Moses) said, "My Lord, expand my breast;*
26. *And make my task easy;*
27. *And remove the impediment from my speech,*
28. *So that they may understand what I say;*
29. *And appoint for me a minister from my family;*
30. *Aaron, my brother,*
31. *To strengthen my back by him,*
32. *And let him share my task;*
33. *That we may celebrate Your praise much,*

34. *And remember You often.*
35. *Indeed, You are ever seeing us.”*
36. *(God) said, “Your prayer has been granted, Moses.*
37. *And indeed We conferred a favour on you another time (before).*
38. *When We inspired your mother that which is inspired,*
39. *‘Throw him into the ark, and throw (the ark) into the river. The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.’ And I endued you with love from Me, that you may be raised under My eye.*
40. *When your sister went and said, ‘Shall I tell you of one who will nurse him?’ and we restored you to your mother that her eyes might be refreshed and might not grieve. And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses,*
41. *And I have chosen you for Myself.*
42. *Go, you and your brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in remembering Me;*
43. *Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds;*
44. *And speak to him a gentle word, that perchance he may become mindful or fear.”*
45. *They (Moses and Aaron) said, “Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.”*
46. *He said, “Fear not, for I am with you. I hear and see (everything).*
47. *So go you both to him, and say, ‘Verily we are messengers sent by your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not. We bring you a sign from your Lord. And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance.*
48. *Verily it has been revealed to us that the torment will be for him who denies the truth and turns his back to it.”*
49. *(Pharaoh) said, “Who then is your Lord, Moses?”*
50. *He said, “Our Lord is He who gave everything its nature, then guided it aright.”*
51. *(Pharaoh) said, “What then is the state of the former generations?”*
52. *He replied, “The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded. My Lord never errs, nor forgets.”*
53. *It is He who has made the earth as a bed and has threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky and thereby We have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation.*
54. *Eat and pasture your cattle. Verily, in this are signs for those who are endowed with understanding.*
55. *From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.*
56. *And We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he did deny and refuse.*
57. *He said, “Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?*
58. *But we surely can produce for you, magic like yours; so make an appointment between us and you, which neither we nor you shall fail to keep, at a place convenient (to us both).”*
59. *Moses said, “Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon.”*
60. *Then Pharaoh went and gathered his strength, then came.*

61. *Moses said to them, "Beware, do not fabricate a lie against God, lest He destroys you utterly by a torment; the one who fabricates a lie will never succeed."*
62. *Then they debated their affair among themselves, and they kept their counsel secret.*
63. *They said, "These two are certainly (expert) magicians, their objective is to drive you out from your land with their magic, and to do away with your best traditions.*
64. *Therefore, concert your efforts, and come in battle line. Whoso is uppermost this day will be indeed successful."*
65. *They said, "Moses, will you cast first or we will be the first to cast?"*
66. *He said, "You cast first." Then their ropes and their rods - so it seemed to him on account of their magic - began to move.*
67. *Moses conceived a fear in his mind.*
68. *We said, "Fear not, for you have indeed, the upper hand;*
69. *And cast that which is in your right hand, it will quickly swallow up that which they have faked. What they have faked is but a magician's trick; and the magician will never succeed (no matter) where he goes."*
70. *The magicians were thrown down in prostration. They said, "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."*
71. *(Pharaoh) said, "Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Surely, this must be your leader, who has taught you magic. I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees, so you will know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting torment."*
72. *They said, "We will never choose you above the clear proofs that have come to us, and above Him who created us. So decree what you will decree. You can decide only matters in this life of the world.*
73. *We have indeed believed in our Lord, so that He may forgive us our sins, and the magic to which you forced us to do. God is Best and Ever Lasting.*
74. *Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner - for him is Hell - therein shall he neither die nor live.*
75. *But whoso comes to Him a believer, having done good deeds, for such are the high stations;*
76. *Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow, they will dwell therein forever. That is the reward for those who purify themselves."*
77. *We revealed to Moses, "Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, nor being afraid (of drowning).*
78. *Then Pharaoh followed them with his hosts and there covered them that which did cover them of the sea.*
79. *And Pharaoh led his people astray instead of guiding them.*
80. *Children of Israel, We have delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai), and We sent down to you manna and quails.*
81. *(Saying), "Eat of the good things which We have provided you, and transgress not lest My wrath comes upon you. He on whom My wrath comes, he is lost indeed.*
82. *Verily I am All-Forgiving towards him who repents and believes and does good, and then continues to follow the right direction."*
83. *And (it was said), "What has made you hasten from your people, Moses?"*
84. *He said, "They are close upon my track. I hastened to You, my Lord, that You may be well pleased."*

85. (God) said, "We have tested your people in your absence. The Samiri has led them astray."
86. So Moses returned to his people in a state of indignation and sorrow. He said, "My people, did not your Lord make a fair promise to you? Did then the promise seem to you long (in coming)? Or did you desire that a wrath should descend from your Lord on you, and so you broke your promise to me?"
87. They said, "We did not break the promise to you of our own will, but we were burdened with the weight of the people's ornaments, and we threw them (into the fire), and similarly did the Samiri throw."
88. Then he produced for them a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a mooing sound. And they said, "This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot."
89. Did they not see that it could not return to them any speech (for answer), and that it had neither power to harm them nor to do them good?
90. Aaron had already, before this said to them, "My people, you are being tested in this, for verily your Lord is (God) the Lord of Mercy; so follow me and obey my command."
91. They had said, "We will never cease being devoted to it until Moses returns to us."
92. He (Moses) said, "Aaron, what held you back when you saw them going astray,
93. From following me? Have you then disobeyed my order?"
94. (Aaron) replied, "Son of my mother, do not seize me by my beard or by my head. Truly, I feared that you would say, 'You have caused a division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe my word.'"
95. (Moses) said, "What then is your case, Samiri?"
96. He replied, "I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger, and threw it; thus did my soul entice me?"
97. (Moses) said, "Then go, you have been given (the right) in this life to say, 'Touch me not,' but indeed there is an appointment for you that you cannot break. Now look at your god which you were devoted to. Verily we will burn it and will scatter its dust over the sea.
98. Your god is the One God. There is no god other than Him. He embraces all things in His knowledge. (20: 1 – 98)

*"Ta-Ha. We have not sent down the Quran that you should be distressed, but as a reminder to him who fears."* A gentle opening which starts with two letters of the Alphabet, to emphasize that this Sura as well as the rest of the Quran have been composed using the Arabic Alphabet. The two letters used to begin the Sura has the same rhyme as the other verses in the Sura. The beginning is followed, as usual, with a reference to the Quran. The Prophet (PBUH) is told that the Quran was not revealed to cause him distress. It was not meant to burden him beyond his ability with its recitation. The Quran has been made so that people will find it easy to recite. The commandments that the Quran brought are within the power of people. God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. The Quran has been sent as a blessing, a way to connect with the high host. It is a source for tranquility and assurance. It is a source for happiness and a way to reach to God. It is also implied that, it should not annoy the Prophet (PBUH) to see some people who chose not to believe. It is not his task to force them to believe. The Quran has been sent as a reminder. Those who fear God will heed the reminder. They will then seek the forgiveness of their Lord.

The Quran has been revealed by God, *“A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens. The Lord of Mercy is firmly established on the Throne. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all that is between them, and all that is beneath the ground.”* God who created the heavens and earth is He who revealed the Quran. The Quran is a cosmic phenomenon like the heavens and earth. The verse connects the laws that control the universe with the laws that were revealed in the Quran. The Quran is a revelation from the Lord of Mercy. It came down as a mercy to humankind. The cosmic phenomena mentioned here explain the extent of God’s kingdom. God is the owner of all that exists. He knows the seen and the unseen, *“If you utter the words aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden. God, there is no god but Him. To Him belong the most beautiful names.”* These verses were revealed to assure the Prophet (PBUH) of God’s support. God hears the Prophet’s (PBUH) words and knows his thoughts and He is with him supporting him in his struggle against the disbelievers.

The verses then narrate Moses’ (PBUH) story as an example of God’s support for the people whom He chose to deliver His message. Moses’ (PBUH) story permeates the Quran; it is the most often mentioned story in the Quran. However, it is narrated in episodes, each episode blends well with the main theme of the sura in which it appears. *“Has the story of Moses reached you?*

*When he saw a fire, he said to his family, ‘Wait, I see a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire.’”* The verse tells the story of Moses’ (PBUH) when he was travelling with his family going back to Egypt from Midian. He saw a fire and wanted to get a burning brand so he can start a fire himself for his family. But when he got there he was faced with a great surprise, *“And when he came to the fire, he was called by name, ‘Moses, Verily I am your Lord. So take off your shoes, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa. And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed.’”* The heart dries out and the body trembles when one envisages the scene of Moses (PBUH) alone, in the dark night, in the middle of the desert and he hears the sound, *“Verily I am your Lord.”* The expression, *“he was called by name,”* intimates that Moses (PBUH) heard the voice but did not know from where it came from or who was calling him. Moses (PBUH) was asked to take off his shoes because he was in the scared valley in the presence of God. God bestowed on him the highest honor, *“I have chosen you.”* So he has to listen to what will be revealed. He was commanded to perform three tasks: to believe in the oneness of God, to worship God, and to believe in the Day of Judgement, *“Verily, I am God. There is no god but I. So worship Me, and establish regular prayer for celebrating My remembrance. Verily, the Hour is surely coming. But I will to keep it hidden, that every soul may be recompensed for that which it strives (to achieve). Therefore, let not him who does not believe in it and follows his whims turns you away from it lest you perish;”* The belief in the oneness of God is the cornerstone of the doctrine of Islam. The verse emphasizes the principle of the belief in the oneness of God. The command to worship God is given in the form of establishing prayers. Prayers are the perfect example of the worship of God. Prayers crystallize the remembrance of God. They are the connection between people and their God. The Hour refers to the Day of Judgement. On that Day everyone will be held accountable and everyone will be recompensed fairly. It is coming but no one knows when. Do not let those who follow their whims and desires bar you from preparing for it.

*“And what is that in your right hand, Moses?”* Moses (PBUH) may have realized that the question was about the usage of the rod, *“He said, ‘It is my rod. I lean on it; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and I have other uses for it.’”* Moses (PBUH) used his rod to lean on, to get fodder for his flock, and other things, but he never envisaged how will the divine power transform the rod into another tool to be used in the mission he will soon undertake, *“He (God) said, ‘Cast it down, Moses.’ So he cast it down, and it was a serpent, running.”* A miracle took place and Moses (PBUH) was taken by surprise. The fact that this surprise filled Moses’ (PBUH) heart with fear, which have been mentioned in details in another episode, is only lightly alluded to in this episode, *“He said, ‘Take hold of it and fear not; We will restore it to its former state.’”*

Moses (PBUH) was reassured and he picked up the serpent and it went back to its original form, a rod. Another command was then issued, *“And thrust your hand within your armpit, it will come forth white without any harm. (This is) another sign.”* Moses (PBUH) placed his hand under his armpit and it came out white with no trace of sickness or harm. This was another miracle. He was then promised that he will see the greatest miracle, *“In order that We may show you some of our greater signs.”* To prepare him for the big mission that he was to undertake, *“Go you to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds.”* This was another surprise. He knew who Pharaoh was, he was brought up in his palace; and he knew of his tyranny. But He is now in the presence of his Lord who honored him and chose him for this mission, so he asked his Lord, *“(Moses) said, ‘My Lord, expand my breast; And make my task easy; And remove the impediment from my speech, So that they may understand what I say; and appoint for me a minister from my family; Aaron, my brother, To strengthen my back by him, And let him share my task;’”* Moses (PBUH) asked God to expand his breast; this transforms hard work into pleasure, and provides motivation for completing the undertaking. Then he asked that God would make his task easy for him. This is an essential requirement for a task to be successful. Then he asked God to remove an impediment from his speech and to appoint his brother to help him.

Moses recognized that the new mission that he was asked to undertake will require a special spiritual preparation. So he explained that the things that he asked God for were tools to help him and his brother to celebrate God’s praise, *“That we may celebrate Your praise much, and remember You often. Indeed, You are ever seeing us.”* Moses’ (PBUH) made a long list of requests, he explained his vulnerability, and he requested God’s help; the answer was brief and prompt, *“(God) said, ‘Your prayer has been granted, Moses.’”* The requests have already been granted. The mention of Moses (PBUH) by name shows the blessings of God and His gentleness in treating His Messengers. The verses continued to remind Moses (PBUH) with the blessings that God had bestowed on him before, *“And indeed We conferred a favour on you another time (before). When We inspired your mother that which is inspired, ‘Throw him into the ark, and throw (the ark) into the river. The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.’ And I endued you with love from Me that you may be raised according to My will. When your sister went and said, ‘Shall I tell you of one who will nurse him?’ and we restored you to your mother that her eyes might be refreshed and might not grieve.”* Moses (PBUH) was going to face a tyrant, the mightiest king on earth. He was going to fight for his faith and to deal with the problems that the Children of Israel were plagued with. They have been enslaved and persecuted for a long time. Even if he was successful with Pharaoh, it would not be easy to erase the effects of the long years of slavery and persecution which the Children of Israel suffered in Egypt. But God reminded him that he will not be alone

in his struggle. God has helped him and supported him before and will not let him down in his new mission. These verses mention the favours that God bestowed on Moses (PBUH). When he was born, God inspired his mother to put him in an ark and to throw the ark in the river. The ark was captured by an enemy of both God and Moses (PBUH). But God's love protected Moses (PBUH) from his enemy. Then Moses (PBUH) was raised in his enemy's house according to God's will. Then God brought him back to his mother to nurse him. When Pharaoh's wife convinced her husband to adopt the baby that came in the ark, they looked for someone to nurse him. But by God's will, Moses (PBUH) refused to be nursed by the women that were hired to nurse him. His sister went to the palace and suggested to the queen to give Moses (PBUH) to his biological mother to nurse without divulging her real identity. Thus, God brought Moses (PBUH) back to his mother to nurse him and raise him. God's protection saved Moses (PBUH) from drowning and then from being killed at the hands of the Pharaoh.

Then the verses reminded Moses (PBUH) of another of God's favours, "*And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses, and I have chosen you for Myself.*" Moses (PBUH) grew up in Pharaoh's palace. One day he went to the city where he found an Israeli fighting with an Egyptian. The Israeli called him for help. Moses (PBUH) pushed the Egyptian and the Egyptian fell down dead. Moses (PBUH) regretted this. He did not intend to kill the Egyptian he only wanted to push him, but the push was so hard that it killed the Egyptian. God inspired him to repent and to seek His forgiveness and God relented toward him and forgave him. Moses (PBUH) was tried several times by God. He had to flee Egypt and take refuge in a foreign land. Moses had to work for his living as a Sheppard after having been raised in the king's palace leading a comfortable life. When Moses (PBUH) was ready for his mission, God brought him back, "*And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses, and I have chosen you for Myself.*"

"*Go, you and your brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in remembering Me; Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; And speak to him a gentle word, that perchance he may become mindful or fear.*" Having been supported by God's signs, the command was issued to Moses and Aaron (PBUH) to go to Pharaoh. They should continuously remember God because this was the tool God provided them with to be able to face the tyranny of Pharaoh. They were commanded to talk to Pharaoh gently. A provocative talk may incite stubbornness and arrogance. They should not give up on Pharaoh; he may still have a chance to repent and believe. God new how will Pharaoh react to their call; but God does not punish people on the basis of His knowledge. God punishes people on the basis of their actual deeds.

Moses and Aaron (PBUH) expressed their apprehension of speaking to Pharaoh, "*They (Moses and Aaron) said, 'Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.'*" Aaron (PBUH) was certainly not present with Moses (PBUH) during this exchange between Moses (PBUH) and God but this is one of the features of the style of Quran. The narrative moves from one scene to another ignoring the details in between so that the message which moves people is emphasized. This part of the dialogue must have occurred when

Moses (PBUH) returned back from the meeting with God. He must have told Aaron (PBUH) about his dialogue with God and that resulted in this call to God, *“Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.”* God reassured them of His support in a prompt and firm statement, *“Fear not, for I am with you. I hear and see (everything).”* The reassurance is emphasized by the statement that God hears and sees everything. The verses continued to teach Moses and Aaron (PBUT) the approach they should use, *“So go you both to him, and say, ‘Verily, we are messengers sent by your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not. We bring you a sign from your Lord. And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance. Verily it has been revealed to us that the torment will be for him who denies the truth and turns his back to it.’”* The approach consisted of four points. First they should start by stating the fundamental fact that they are speaking to him as God’s messengers. The phrasing of the expression expressed the fact that they were the messengers of Pharaoh’s Lord, to emphasize the principle of the Oneness of God. He is Moses’ (PBUH) God as well as Pharaoh’s God. He is the God of everyone and everything. The second step was to explain their objective, *“So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not.”* The third point was to give the evidence that they were who they said they were, *“We bring you a sign from your Lord.”* Finally, they were to give an inducement followed by a warning, *“And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance. Verily it has been revealed to us that the doom will be for him who denies the truth and turns his back to it.”*

They went to Pharaoh and they did what they were told to do. Pharaoh responded, *“Who then is your Lord, Moses?”* Pharaoh ignored Moses’ (PBUH) statement that his Lord is also Pharaoh’s Lord. Moses’ (PBUH) response gave the description of God as the Creator, *“He said, ‘Our Lord is He who gave to everything its nature, then guided it aright.’”* God gave each creature its nature and its existence. Then He guided each and every creature to the way which enables them to perform the task which they were created for. This verse outlines the perfect attributes of God: He gives the existence, the shape and form, and the ability to perform the assigned task. These principles apply to all created things. Pharaoh continued to question Moses (PBUH), *“(Pharaoh) said, ‘What then is the state of the former generations?’”* Moses (PBUH) responded wisely, *“The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded. My Lord never errs, nor forgets.”* Only God knows the unseen. He knows everything and He is not forgetful.

Moses (PBUH) continued to explain to Pharaoh the way God controls His creation, *“It is He who has made the earth as a bed and has threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky and thereby We have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation.”* The earth is truly the cradle of humanity in each place and each time. It has been made easy for people to walk on, to till, to plant, and to live. God the Creator created the earth to be suitable for all these tasks. He also gave the human beings the ability to perform these tasks. This was a very appropriate example because it was an example which can be easily appreciated by an Egyptian; Egyptians lived in the fertile valley, tilling and planting. The Creator caused the rain to come down forming rivers like the river Nile. The Nile flew in the valley giving rise to many kinds of plants. The plants come out in pairs like most living things. Some plants carry the male and female cells together and sometimes they are carried separately in different plants like many mammals, *“Eat and pasture your cattle. Verily, in this are signs for those who are endowed with understanding.”*



The narrative continued to describe the earth but in the words of God, *“From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.”* Human beings were created from the dust which covers this earth. Both humankind and the earth are made from the same elements. Humankind was created from the earth, will be buried in the earth, and will be resurrected from the earth. Not only humankind was created from the same elements which constitute the earth, but he continues to eat plants from the earth, drink water that runs through the earth, and breathe air that is produced by the earth. When he dies, he will be buried under its surface and his body will decompose and will become part of the earth. On the Day of Resurrection, he will be raised again as he was created in the first instance. It is appropriate to mention the beginning and end of humankind and his relationship to the earth in view of the fact that Pharaoh, the tyrant, never thought of himself as a human being, he considered himself god.

It is implicit that at this point, Moses (PBUH) must have shown Pharaoh the miracles that God gave him, but the Quran simply cites the conclusion, *“And We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he did reject and refuse.”* Pharaoh could not argue with Moses (PBUH) since he saw the miracles but still he rejected and accused Moses (PBUH) of using magic, *“He said, ‘Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?’”*

It seems that the persecution of the Children of Israel had political dimensions. Pharaoh, the tyrant, wanted to restrict their power base. So, he used to kill their males and enslave the females. So, when Moses (PBUH) requested that Pharaoh should let the Children of Israel leave Egypt he responded saying, *“Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?”* Pharaoh may have thought that freeing the Children of Israel will be a preamble for controlling the land and the government of Egypt. Pharaoh thought that Moses (PBUH) is after worldly gains because the like of Pharaoh only believes in material gains. The answer then was to challenge Moses (PBUH) with magic tricks, *“But we surely can produce for you magic like yours; so make an appointment between us and you, which neither we nor you shall fail to keep, at a place convenient (to us both).”* Pharaoh thought that Moses (PBUH) was simply trying to usurp his power. He challenged Moses (PBUH) to come to a magic competition that would be witnessed by all people. He warned him not to miss that competition. Moses (PBUH) accepted the challenge and named the time and place of the competition, *“Moses said, ‘Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon.’”*

The narrative continued to describe the scene on the day of the competition. The present episode does not mention the details of the dialogue between Pharaoh and the chiefs of his people nor does it mention the details of the dialogue between Pharaoh and the magicians in which he exhorted them to defeat Moses (PBUH) and promised them a great reward. These details were mentioned elsewhere but here the narrative summarized all of this in one verse, *“Then Pharaoh went and gathered his strength, then came.”* Moses (PBUH) advised and warned the magicians before the beginning of the contest, *“Moses said to them, ‘Beware, do not fabricate a lie against God, lest He destroys you utterly by a torment; the one who fabricates a lie will never succeed.’”* It seems that the truth in Moses’ (PBUH) words touched the hearts of some of the magicians. An argument between the magicians ensued when they heard Moses’ (PBUH) words, *“Then they debated their affair among themselves, and they kept their counsel secret.”* However, the group who were interested in Pharaoh’s reward tried to brush aside Moses’ (PBUH) warning and

exhorted their fellow magicians to unite against Moses (PBUH), *“They said, ‘These two are certainly (expert) magicians, their objective is to drive you out from your land with their magic, and to do away with your best traditions; therefore, concert your efforts, and come in battle line. Whoso is uppermost this day will be indeed successful.’”*

A word of truth has a magic power. It is like a bullet that shatters the ranks of falsehood and makes their false beliefs crumble. This explains why Pharaoh accepted to arrange a contest between Moses and Aaron (PBUT) on one side and the magicians on the other side. One wonders what power Moses (PBUH) had in the face of the power of the Pharaoh the tyrant to force Pharaoh to arrange such a public contest and to sit and watch. It must have been the aura that God bestowed on Moses and Aaron (PBUH) that made Pharaoh and the magicians feel intimidated.

The magicians wanted to show their confidence so they asked, *“Moses, will you cast first or we will be the first to cast?”* Moses (PBUH) showed his confidence by letting them start, *“He said, ‘You cast first.’ Then their ropes and their rods - so it seemed to him on account of their magic - began to move.”* The verse paints an image of the power of their magic, to the extent that even Moses (PBUH) became afraid, *“Moses conceived a fear in his mind.”* But God reassured him, *“We said, ‘Fear not, for you have indeed the upper hand; And cast that which is in your right hand, it will quickly swallow up that which they have faked. What they have faked is but a magician's trick; and the magician will never succeed (no matter) where he goes.’”* God reassured Moses (PBUH), He told him you have the truth on your side and they have nothing but falsehood; he had the truthful faith and they had the art of magic; he was fighting for the truth to prevail and they were fighting for the reward and the glory; and he was connected to the greatest power and they relied on the power of an immortal. God told him to cast what he had in his right hand and it will swallow what they cast. The magicians will never succeed because they create illusions that do not last and cannot stand in the face of the truth.

So, the greatest surprise happened when Moses (PBUH) cast his rod. The magicians were awed by the scene of Moses' (PBUH) rod swallowing their ropes and rods and they suddenly realized the truth in Moses' (PBUH) words. The change in their feelings was overwhelming, they did not find the words to describe their thoughts, they simply bowed in prostration to Moses (PBUH), *“The magicians were thrown down in prostration. They said, ‘We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.’”* However, the tyrant was oblivious to the meaning of what he just observed; he was blinded by his own arrogance and tyranny, *“(Pharaoh) said, ‘Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Surely, this must be your leader, who has taught you magic. I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees, so shall you know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting torment.’”* He had the audacity to blame them for submitting to God before asking for his permission. In his denial, he accused Moses (PBUH) to be their master who taught them magic. He did not appreciate the fact that their hearts were guided to the belief in God because God removed the veil that clouded their insight, so they saw the truth. He then continued to threaten them with the harsh punishment that he can inflict on them. He thought he can control the bodies since the hearts eluded him. But it was too late. The touch of faith connected the minute atom with its

huge source and gave it tremendous power. The worldly power became weak, the worldly life became worthless, and the believing hearts yearned for the new horizons of faith, *“They said, ‘We will never choose you above the clear proofs that have come to us, and above Him who created us. So decree what you will decree. You can decide only matters in this life of the world. We have indeed believed in our Lord, so that He may forgive us our sins, and the magic to which you forced us to do. God is Best and Ever Lasting.’”* The magicians simply told Pharaoh that they value their faith much higher than he could ever offer them. He could only control them in this short worldly life. They had hopes in the life of the Hereafter. The life of the Hereafter is better than anything he could offer them and it is everlasting.

God inspired the believing magicians to teach Pharaoh a lesson in faith, *“Verily, he who comes to his Lord as a sinner - for him is Hell - therein shall he neither die nor live. But whoso comes to Him a believer, having done good deeds, for such are the high stations; Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow, they will dwell therein forever. That is the reward for those who purify themselves.”* He could threaten them all he wanted in this life but the real threat is for those who come to their Lord as criminals. They will be in a state between life and death. They will neither be allowed to die and escape the torment nor will they be allowed to live and enjoy life.

The narrative moves to another scene when God inspired Moses (PBUH) to lead his people out of Egypt, *“We revealed to Moses, ‘Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, neither being afraid (of drowning).’”* The verse stated very briefly God’s command to Moses (PBUH) to travel towards the sea. He was again reassured of victory over Pharaoh.

The following verse mentions very briefly how Pharaoh went in their pursuit but he and his soldiers drowned in the sea, *“Then Pharaoh followed them with his hosts and there covered them that which did cover them of the sea. And Pharaoh led his people astray instead of guiding them.”* There is a lesson to be learnt here. This was a battle between the weak believers and Pharaoh’s powerful army. The believers were by far a negligible force compared to Pharaoh’s army. They had no chance to be saved except by a divine interference. When the believers dared the tyrant and were not afraid to die, God provided His support. When the Israelites were persecuted by Pharaoh and they gave in to the oppression there was no divine intervention; but when they revolted against the tyrant and proclaimed their faith, God provided His support.

Having saved them, the narrative continued to remind the Israelites of the bounty of God and to warn them lest they forget that victory is only attainable by the grace of God, *“Children of Israel, We have delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai), and We sent down to you Manna and quails. (Saying), ‘Eat of the good things which We have provided you, and transgress not lest My wrath comes upon you. He on whom My wrath comes, he is lost indeed. Verily I am All-Forgiving towards him who repents and believes and does good, and then continues to follow the right direction.’”* The verses tell of God’s decision to meet with Moses (PBUH) on the right side of the Mount and to give him the

Tablets which included the doctrine and the law that the Israelites should observe. God gave them Manna and quail to eat. This was a great bounty of God which allowed them to survive in the desert. God reminded them of His bounties and warned them against excesses. Over indulgence in material desires promotes heedlessness and laziness. God was preparing them to the serious undertaking that they were about to receive. The fate that Pharaoh met was still fresh in their minds and was used to emphasize the need to seek God's support by remembering Him often. They were also reminded of the availability of the path of repentance for those who forget and sin. Repentance is not merely words to be uttered but it is in the first place a strong intention of the heart, its effect is realized through belief and good deeds, and it should be reflected on the behavior of the believer. The right direction will be followed only when these three steps were completed.

The next few verses describe the scene of Moses' (PBUH) meeting with God. God decided to meet with Moses (PBUH) in forty days after the exodus. In this meeting, Moses (PBUH) was given the undertaking to lead the Israelites in the post victory era. Moses (PBUH) went up the mountain, leaving his people in the valley and appointed Aaron (PBUH) as his deputy. Moses (PBUH) aspired to the meeting with God. His strong yearning to the meeting made him hasten to the appointed place. There he had a surprise, *"And (it was said), 'What has made you hasten from your people, Moses?' He said, 'They are close upon my track. I hastened to You, my Lord, that You may be well pleased.'* (God) said, *'We have tested your people in your absence. The Samiri has led them astray.'*" It was a surprise for Moses (PBUH) to be told that his people fell for the seduction of the Samiri. The verses did not detail the nature of the sin that the Israelites committed, but Moses (PBUH) must have realized the gravity of the situation. Moses (PBUH) went back quickly to his people angry, *"So Moses returned to his people in a state of indignation and sorrow. He said, 'My people, did not your Lord make a fair promise to you? Did then the promise seem to you long (in coming)? Or did you desire that a wrath should descend from your Lord on you, and so you broke your promise to me?'"* These verses explain the details of the trial that the Israelites were subjected to and the sin which they committed. Moses found them worshipping a golden calf. Moses (PBUH) was saddened and hurt by what he saw. He reminded his people of God's promise, the promise to give them victory and to bring them back to the Holy Land. He rebuked them for their forgetfulness and impatience.

Their answer was, *"We did not break the promise to you of our own will, but we were burdened with the weight of the people's ornaments, and we threw them (into the fire), and similarly did the Samiri throw. Then he produced for them a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a mooing sound. And they said, 'This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot.' Did they not see that it could not return to them any speech (for answer), and that it had neither power to harm them nor to do them good?"* They explained to Moses (PBUH) that they brought with them from Egypt jewelry that was entrusted to them. They wanted to get rid of the jewelry because they realized that it was not allowable for them to keep it. The Samiri took the jewelry, melt it, and cast the molten metal into a calf. The calf was made in such a way that it produced a sound when the wind blew through it. The Israelites were awed by the golden calf which produced an amazing sound so they believed the Samiri when he told them that this was their god. It was an obvious trick that they fell for. The trick was naïve, however, they failed to realize that the calf neither spoke nor presented them with any benefit nor harm. They also ignored Aaron (PBUH)

when he tried to advise them of their mistake, *“Aaron had already, before this said to them, ‘My people, you are being tested in this, for verily your Lord is (God) the Lord of Mercy; so follow me and obey my command.’”* Instead of heeding Aaron’s (PBUH) advice they were adamant in pursuing their sinful attitude, *“They had said, ‘We will never cease being devoted to it until Moses returns to us.’”*

Moses (PBUH) came back and listened to what his people said and in his anger looked at his brother and grabbed him by the head, and said to him, *“Aaron, what held you back when you saw them going astray, from following me? Have you then disobeyed my order? (Aaron) replied, ‘Son of my mother, do not seize me by my beard or by my head. Truly I feared that you would say, ‘You have caused a division among the children of Israel, and you did not observe my word.’”*” One can glean from the verse that Aaron (PBUH) was well composed and he appealed to the brotherhood’s link between him and Moses (PBUH) to calm him down. He then explained the underlying rationale for his behavior. He told Moses (PBUH) that had he been forceful in dealing with them they would have had certainly split into divisions, some would have sided with him and some would have been against him. The way he chose to act was actually aligned with Moses’ (PBUH) advice to keep the people united.

Moses (PBUH) addressed his people first because they were the ones who committed the offence. They were not forced to worship the calf but they succumbed to the temptation which the Samiri subjected them to. Moses (PBUH) then turned to his brother because he was the leader and should have prevented the deviant behavior of his people. Moses (PBUH) then turned to the source of evil, the Samiri, *“(Moses) said, ‘What then is your case, Samiri?’”* The undertone of the question reflected Moses (PBUH) displeasure of what the Samiri did. The Samiri replied, *“I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger, and threw it; thus did my soul entice me?”* There are different interpretations of the verse, but none of them is unequivocal. The verse states the reply of the Samiri without further elaboration. We think that the Samiri was evasive in his response, trying to deflect Moses (PBUH) blame. Moses (PBUH) decided to sever all ties between the Samiri and the Israelites until he dies then he would be held accountable by God. Moses (PBUH) spoke to the Samiri harshly to prove to his people that the calf could not protect the Samiri against Moses (PBUH), *“(Moses) said, ‘Then go, you have been given (the right) in this life to say, ‘Touch me not,’ but indeed there is an appointment for you that you cannot break. Now look at your god which you were devoted to. Verily we will burn it and will scatter its dust over the sea.’”* Then Moses (PBUH) stated the fundamental principle of the true faith, *“Your god is the One God. There is no god other than Him. He embraces all things in His knowledge.”*

### **Verses 99 to 135:**

99. *Thus, We narrate to you some stories of what happened before, and We have given you a message from Ourselves.*

100. *Whoso turns away from it, he verily will bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection,*

101. *Abiding under it - an evil burden for them to carry on the Day of Resurrection,*

102. *On the day when the trumpet is blown We will assemble the guilty blue-eyed (with terror),*
103. *Murmuring among themselves, "You remained only ten (days)."*
104. *We know best what they say, when their eminent leader will say, "You did not remain more than a day."*
105. *They ask you concerning the mountains. Say, "My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust;*
106. *He will leave them as plains smooth and level;*
107. *You shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness."*
108. *On that Day they will follow the caller with no deviation therefrom. All voices will be hushed in the presence of the Lord of Mercy and you will hear only a faint murmur.*
109. *On that day no intercession avails except for those for whom permission has been granted by the Lord of Mercy and whose word is acceptable to Him.*
110. *He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them, but they shall not encompass Him with their knowledge.*
111. *(All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) - the Living, the Self-Existing. He who bears iniquity will certainly be unsuccessful.*
112. *But he who does good deeds and has faith, will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.*
113. *Thus, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may be conscious of God, or that they may take heed.*
114. *High above all is God, the King, the Truth. And hasten not (Muhammad) with the Quran before its revelation to you is completed, but say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge."*
115. *We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in firm resolve.*
116. *And when We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam," they prostrated themselves except Iblis; he refused.*
117. *Therefor We said, "Adam, this is an enemy to you and to your wife, so let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil.*
118. *Surely it is (promised) for you that you shall neither be hungry therein nor unclothed;*
119. *You will neither suffer thirst, nor will you be exposed to the sun's heat."*
120. *But Satan whispered evil to him, he said, "Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and a kingdom that never decays?"*
121. *They both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness became apparent to them. They began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.*
122. *Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.*
123. *He (God) said, "Go down from the Garden, all of you, one of you a foe to the other. But when there comes to you from Me a guidance, then whoso follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor come to grief.*
124. *But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him life will be hard, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."*

125. *He will say, "My Lord, why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?"*
126. *(God) will say, "Our Signs came to you and you disregarded them; thus will you this day, be disregarded."*
127. *And thus do We recompense him who was given to excesses and did not believe in the revelations of his Lord, and the torment of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more lasting.*
128. *Is it not a guidance for them (to know) how many a generation We destroyed before them, in whose dwelling-places they walk? Most surely there are signs in this for those endowed with understanding.*
129. *Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, and a term already fixed, the judgment would have been inevitable.*
130. *Therefor (Muhammad), persevere in enduring what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before sunset. And glorify Him some hours of the night and at the two ends of the day that you may be well pleased.*
131. *Do not stretch your eyes toward that which We have given for enjoyment to parties of them - the splendour of the life of this world - through which We test them; but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.*
132. *Enjoin prayer on your family and your people, and persevere in doing it. We do not ask you to provide sustenance, We provide for you. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for (those who remain) God conscious.*
133. *And they say, "If only he would bring us a sign from his Lord." Has not come to them a clear evidence of what is in the former Scriptures?*
134. *And if We had inflicted on them a torment before this, they would have said, "Our Lord, if only You sent us a messenger, we would have certainly followed Your revelations before we were humiliated and put to shame."*
135. *Say, "Each one (of us) is waiting. So you wait. You will come to know who the followers of the straight path are and who the guided are." (20: 99 – 135)*

*"Thus, We narrate to you some stories of what happened before, and We have given you a message from Ourselves. Whoso turns away from it, he verily will bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection; abiding under it - an evil burden for them to carry on the Day of Resurrection. On the day when the trumpet is blown, We will assemble the guilty blue-eyed (with terror), murmuring among themselves, 'You remained only ten (days).' We know best what they say, when their eminent leader will say, 'You did not remain more than a day.'" Like the story of Moses (PBUH), the Quran narrates to you other stories about events of the past. These stories are mentioned in the Quran which was revealed to you as a message to humankind. The verses paint a picture for those who turn away from this message, they are called criminals. The picture shows these criminals as if they were carrying weights. The criminals will be gathered together on the Day on which the trumpet will be blown. They will come whispering to each other and their faces will be darkened as if their guilt has covered their faces with a black veil. The fear will overwhelm them and they will not dare raise their voices. They will be wondering how long did they stay on earth. Their whole life on earth will seem very short. Some will think it lasted ten days, but a prominent leader among them will tell them, "You did not remain more than a*

day.” How trivial will then the pleasures which they were interested in during their worldly lives seem? How short the duration of life on earth is in comparison with the life of the Hereafter?

The scene will become horrific when they ask, “*you concerning the mountains.*” The answer will reflect the horrible scene, “*Say, ‘My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust; He will leave them as plains smooth and level; you shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness.’*” They will follow the caller walking on the smooth plains that were left after the mountains were destroyed, “*On that Day they will follow the caller with no deviation therefrom.*”

Silence will wrap the place every one will be attentive in the presence of the Lord of Mercy, “*All voices will be hushed in the presence of the Lord of Mercy and you will hear only a faint murmur.*” No one will be able to intercede on behalf of another except by the permission of the Lord of Mercy, “*On that day no intercession avails except for those for whom permission has been granted by the Lord of Mercy and whose word is acceptable to Him. He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them, but they shall not encompass Him with their knowledge. (All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) - the Living, the Self-Existing. He who bears iniquity will certainly be unsuccessful. But he who does good deeds and has faith, will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.*” The wrongdoers will be punished and those who believed and did good deeds shall suffer neither injustice, nor fear.

The Quran contained various forms of warning to alert people to the consequences of heedlessness, “*Thus, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may be conscious of God, or that they may take heed.*”

The Prophet (PBUH) used to be anxious that he may forget the Quran as it was recited to him by Gabriel (PBUH), so the verse reassured him that he will not forget, “*High above all is God, the King, the Truth. And hasten not (Muhammad) with the Quran before its revelation to you is completed, but say, ‘My Lord, increase me in knowledge.’*” Muhammad (PBUH) was commanded to pray for knowledge from God.

The subsequent verses address a different theme. The verses narrate the story of Adam (PBUH). God tested Adam but he succumbed to the temptation of Satan and disobeyed God. However, God taught him how to seek God’s forgiveness and he was forgiven. There is an interesting connection between this story and the previous verse. In the previous verse, the Prophet (PBUH) was worried that he might forget the verses of the Quran which Gabriel (PBUH) was reciting to him while in the story of Adam (PBUH), Adam (PBUH) disobeyed God because he forgot God’s warning about Satan, “*We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in firm resolve.*” This was the covenant that Adam (PBUH) pledged to God. Adam (PBUH) pledged to obey God’s command not to eat the fruits of a specific tree. Adam (PBUH) was allowed to eat the fruits of all the trees in paradise except for this single tree. The covenant exemplified the concept of the lawful and forbidden. This was a necessary training course to build up the determination and the discipline which free humankind from the control of the carnal instincts and human desires. Self-discipline is a true measure of the ability of the soul to be free of the control of material desires. It is a valid measure for the progress of human civilisation. Animals have no self-discipline; their behavior is totally controlled by their instincts



and desires. The divine wisdom willed that Adam (PBUH) should be trained for his role on earth. His determination was tested to awaken his ability to resist Satan's temptation and to alert him to the never ending battle between him and Satan.

*“And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves to Adam,’ they prostrated themselves except Iblis; he refused.”* The details of the scene have been omitted here and mentioned in details in other Suras because the focus of the present verses is on God's blessings on Adam (PBUH), *“Therefor we said, ‘Adam, this is an enemy to you and to your wife, so let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil. Surely, it is (promised) for you that you shall neither be hungry therein nor unclothed; you will neither suffer thirst, nor will you be exposed to the sun's heat.’”* God warned Adam (PBUH) to beware of Satan. When Satan was commanded to prostrate to Adam (PBUH), he refused to obey and vowed to be the eternal enemy for humankind. God told Adam (PBUH) and his wife that Satan will do whatever he can to drive them out of Paradise, *“So, let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil.”* God told Adam (PBUH) and his spouse that they will enjoy a life in Paradise that is free of toil, stress, uncertainty, pain, and loss. But Satan discovered the areas of human weakness in Adam (PBUH) and approached him, *“But Satan whispered evil to him, he said, ‘Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and a kingdom that never decays?’”* Two vulnerabilities that humankind has: love of immortality and power. Satan promised him that he will get both when he eats the fruits of the forbidden tree. Adam (PBUH) forgot God's warning and succumbed to the temptation. Their nakedness became apparent to them, *“They both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness became apparent to them. They began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.”* It may be understood that when they ate the fruits of the tree they suddenly became aware of their nakedness. Their private parts became apparent to them, so they became ashamed of their nakedness and started using the tree leaves to cover their private parts. It may also be understood that somehow eating the forbidden fruit awakened their sexual drives. Entertaining sexual desires and thoughts made them feel ashamed. The message that one gets from the verse is that there was a connection between eating the fruits of the tree and the awareness of being naked. The verse stated that, *“their nakedness became apparent to them,”* which implies that they were naked before but they were not aware of their nakedness. The awareness may have resulted from inner feelings that they entertained. The episode was mentioned in different ways in other places of the Quran, *“But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that was concealed from them of their private parts.”* (7: 20) and *“Children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts.”* (7: 27) The clothing that is referred to in this verse may have not been material but psychological. It may be a reference to innocence, purity, and being connected to God. However, these are all conjectures.

God then bestowed His mercy on Adam and his spouse and forgave them, *“Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.”* The details of them seeking forgiveness are not mentioned to leave the ambience for the mercy of God. The command was issued to the two enemies to go down to live on earth, the field of the long battle between the two, *“He (God) said, ‘Go down from the Garden, all of you, one of you a foe to the other.’”* The Children of Adam were thus forewarned of the enmity of Satan. God willed to bestow His mercy on the Children of Adam, so He sent His messengers to guide people to the straight path, *“But when there comes to*

*you from Me a guidance, then whoso follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor come to grief. But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him life will be hard, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment.*” Those who follow God’s guidance will be protected from going astray and they will never grieve. Grief is the fruit of going astray. Going astray may be accompanied with pleasure but it is a pleasure that will promote grief; grief in this life and in the Hereafter. Forbidden pleasure is always followed by pain and leads to bad consequences. Those who turn away from guidance will endure a life of hardship and will be raised blind in the Hereafter. When he asks, *“My Lord, why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?”* The answer will be, *“Our Signs came to you and you disregarded them; thus will you this day, be disregarded. And thus do We recompense him who was given to excesses and did not believe in the revelations of his Lord, and the torment of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more lasting.”* Those who reject God’s guidance have transgressed. They transgressed when they abandoned guidance and rejected the most valuable gift that God gave them. They transgressed when they refused to see God’s signs. They did not make good use of the gift of sight during their worldly lives, so they will be deprived of this gift in the Hereafter.

The following verses deal with a different theme, the stories of ancient generations. These stories may be more compelling to the disbelievers than the description of the Day of Judgment, since the stories are part of the recent history while the scenes of the Day of Judgment are part of the unseen, *“Is it not a guidance for them (to know) how many a generation We destroyed before them, in whose dwelling-places they walk? Most surely there are signs in this for those endowed with understanding.”* When we read the history of these ancient generations, we can close our eyes and imagine the scenes of their lives, their civilizations, their hopes, and their movements. However, when we open our eyes and we find that their homes have been destroyed and their civilizations have been destroyed, we will realize that we will have the same fate. This should be a lesson to those who are endowed with understanding. God in His wisdom has decreed that the people of this generation will not be tormented like the earlier generations, *“Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, and a term already fixed, the judgment would have been inevitable.”*

They are only reprieved until a certain time has been reached, so be patient and celebrate the praise of your Lord, *“Therefore (Muhammad), persevere in enduring what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before sunset. And glorify Him some hours of the night and at the two ends of the day that you may be well pleased.”* Praising God is a link that connects the servant to God. This link provides the soul with security and contentment. The soul will revel in the feelings of being near to God. It will lose the interest in worldly pleasures, *“Do not stretch your eyes toward that which We have given for enjoyment to parties of them - the splendour of the life of this world - through which We test them; but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.”* These pleasures are not only transient pleasures but they are also a test. The provision of your Lord is better because it is a blessing from God. This was not a call to become ascetic, but it is a command to appreciate the true ethical values; God’s nearness is better than transient wealth and power.

*“Enjoin prayer on your family and your people, and persevere in doing it. We do not ask you to provide sustenance, We provide for you. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for (those who remain) God conscious.”* The first duty of a Muslim is to raise a Muslim family, a family that is connected to God through prayer. Establishing prayers is a difficult task. It requires perseverance and steadfastness to produce its effects. Prayers and other rituals are of benefit to people; there is no benefit that will accrue to God. These rituals provide a way for people to become God conscious. God consciousness will be rewarded both in this life and in the Hereafter.

The narrative turns to another theme, an address to those who were asking the Prophet (PBUH) to bring a miracle, *“And they say, ‘If only he would bring us a sign from his Lord.’ Has not come to them a clear evidence of what is in the former Scriptures?”* Their request was motivated only by their arrogance and stubbornness. The Quran itself is a sign that connects Islam with the previous revelations.

God sent Muhammad (PBUH) so that they would have no excuse, *“And if We had inflicted on them a torment before this, they would have said, ‘Our Lord, if only You sent us a messenger, we would have certainly followed Your revelations before we were humiliated and put to shame.’”* They then should wait for their inevitable fate, *“Say, ‘Each one (of us) is waiting. So you wait. You will come to know who are the followers of the straight path and who is guided.’”*