

The Story of Samiri - An Introduction

Crossing the Red Sea

Nabī Mūsā (a) led his people away from Egypt to escape the oppression of Fir‘awn. When they reached the sea Nabī Mūsā struck the water with his staff. The sea split into two for them to walk across it and over to the other side. Fir‘awn and his army who followed them were drowned.

The Israelite desire to worship idols

The people of Nabī Mūsā then set out for their new land. On the way they saw a pagan people worshipping a golden calf. They were impressed and said, “*O Mūsā, make for us a god just as they have gods*” (Q 7:138). He rebuked them and explained the importance of belief in One God and the evils of idol worshipping. He said, “*Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god, while He has graced you over all nations?*” (Q 7:140).

Nabī Mūsā goes to the Mount Sinai

Nabī Mūsā went with 70 of his people to Mount Sinai to talk to God and receive the Tablet of Guidance. He told his people he would go away for thirty nights. But the period was extended for ten more nights. His people became restless while he was away.

Samiri tempts the Israelites

Samiri was part of the community that fled Egypt with Nabī Mūsā. He was a blacksmith by profession. He had been one of the first to cross the sea. As he watched the remaining people come out of the sea, he saw the angel Jibrā’īl at the rear, riding his horse. When Jibrā’īl rode past, Samiri collected the sand from the horse’s hoofmarks. He kept it aside, thinking it would come in use at some later time.

When Nabī Mūsā was away Samiri devised a plan. He had heard how people asked Nabī Mūsā to make them an idol. He had always wanted an opportunity to turn the people back to idol worshipping. Now that they were unhappy with Nabī Mūsā being away for so long, and unwilling to listen to Mūsā’s deputy Nabī Hārūn, Samiri knew it was a good time for him. He told them they needed a guide since Nabī Mūsā was still away. In fact, he told them, they needed a god. He convinced them that Nabī Mūsā was not going to return and that he could make them the idol they wanted so much.

Samiri made a clay mould of a calf. He asked the people to bring him all the gold they had. He lit a fire and when it was hot he asked everyone to cast their gold into a large pot. He also cast his own share. Then he took the sand he had and with a lot of fanfare cast it into the pot, chanting like a magician. He placed the pot into the fire. When the gold had melted he poured the molten contents into the clay mould he had made.

The gold cooled and Samiri cracked it open. A golden calf emerged. Samiri placed his mouth on a hole in the calf and took a deep breath and blew. He had designed it to make the sound like a real cow. People were excited and began worshipping it as their god. Word about this spread fast and many people gathered from around the camp. They saw the shining golden calf and accepted it as their idol.

Nabī Mūsā’s return

When Nabī Mūsā came back he saw them singing and dancing around the golden calf. He was very angry and asked them why they had done such a thing. He talked to his brother Hārūn (a) who he had been left in charge while he was away. Nabī Hārūn (a) told him they did not listen to him. Only a

small group of people stayed with him and did not worship the calf. Nabī Mūsā (a) also talked to Samiri.

Points from the story

- people are resistant to change and often want to go back to their old habits
- the presence of a leader is very important
- hypocrites study the weaknesses of people and strike them where they are vulnerable
- majority of people are often swayed by wrong
- lack of faith can make a person forsake worshipping Allah and instead become devoted to other than God.

Videos on Samiri

The series ‘Tales of Humans from the Quran’ has a set of videos on the story of Samiri. Episodes 23-25 are about it. The details do not match the exact version in our books, but the children could see it as a version. Most relevant is Episode 24 Part 2, about 2:10 into the video.

Check: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DANOC248YOE&list=PLG7hgjyLl7oGrRjriW4H6R-La-JwmDFnV&index=46