

Prophet Moses (pbuh), Part 4

“Then, one of the two women approached him, walking bashfully. She said, ‘My father is inviting you to compensate you for having drawn water for us.’ And when he (Moses) came and told him the story, he (the father) said, ‘Do not fear, you have escaped from the wrongdoing people.’” [Qur’an 28:25].

When Moses (pbuh) saw the two women standing apart from a group of shepherds who were gathered around the city’s well to water their herds. The women were holding back, carefully ensuring that their sheep would not mix with those of the men. Sensing that something was wrong, Moses (pbuh) approached them. It struck him as unusual to see women out tending flocks, a task usually performed by men, and he felt compelled to inquire. Moses realized that he had to do something. With humility and sincerity, he asked, “What is your situation?” The question was natural and thoughtful; the women instantly understood that such concern came from a noble heart. They realized that for a stranger, their presence at the well seemed out of the ordinary and that an explanation was due. Eager to prevent any misunderstanding about their conduct, the two women responded respectfully, assuring him that circumstances, rather than choice, had brought them there.

In a few concise words, the two women replied, **“We do not water our flock until the shepherds have finished, and our father is an old man”** [Qur’an 28:23]. What an eloquent response! The

women wished to dispel any possible misunderstanding from Moses (pbuh) about their presence among men. Their words subtly conveyed modesty and dignity; they explained that although they were compelled to work outside the home, they did not mingle with others and maintained honorable conduct. They also explained the necessity of their situation: their father was too old to perform such labor. In a single sentence, they revealed their circumstances, their family’s condition, and their integrity. The eloquence of the Qur’an in capturing such depth and detail within so few words continues to astonish both its readers and its scholars. The fact that both women talked together tells us that neither felt proper letting the stranger, Moses (pbuh), think ill of them.

Moses (pbuh) watered their sheep for the two women, fully aware that they should not remain outside longer than necessary. Then Moses (pbuh) went to rest in the shade, indicating that it was noon, not a safe time for the women to stay out much longer away from home. Noon is known to be a quiet, often empty time when streets can be unsafe. Animals roam seeking prey, and danger may lurk as ill-intentioned people are more prevalent. Moses’s (pbuh) actions exemplified the nobility and kindness that defined his character. In the shade, Moses (pbuh) said this prayer: **“Then he withdrew to the shade, and said, ‘My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good you might send down to me.’”** [Qur’an



Guest
Column

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28:24]

The two women returned home, likely fascinated by the young stranger who watered their sheep. They surely spoke of him with joy and admiration. It appears the Midians were not of noble character, as they never offered help to the women, or perhaps they believed such hard labor was normal for women. Adding to this was the father’s desire to meet the stranger. He was wise enough to sense that his daughters were old enough to admire a man worthy of listening to him; the father may have had something even more serious. Therefore, he sent one of his daughters, likely the elder, to invite Moses (pbuh) to their home with words of gratitude: **“Our father calls you to reward you for watering the sheep.”** The family was not poor, but worked diligently to maintain its wealth, giving further reason for the daughters to leave home. The elder daughter was chosen to approach Moses (pbuh) because she was better suited to converse with a stranger.

Moses (pbuh) went with the woman to meet her father. Upon arrival, Moses (pbuh) shared the full story of his flight from Egypt. In response, the father reassured him, saying, **“Do not fear; you have escaped from the wrongdoing, unjust**

people.” This assurance is remarkable when one considers the historical context—Egypt was a powerful empire with a formidable army, intelligence services, and a vast network of informants. Yet the father was confident Moses (pbuh) was safe because the city of Midian was not under Egyptian control. Although there is uncertainty about Midian’s precise location, most historians and Egyptologists agree it lay beyond Egypt’s borders, in the northwestern Arabian Peninsula, east of the Gulf of Aqaba. This geographical fact, only confirmed in modern times, highlights the remarkable accuracy and depth of the Qur’anic narrative and the divine nature of the Qur’an; otherwise, how would the Prophet Muhammad know about these facts that were known to us only less than a hundred years ago?

One of the two daughters, likely the elder, called her father and suggested that he should hire Moses (pbuh), saying, **“The best person to hire is the strong and honest.”** One might wonder how she knew Moses (pbuh) was both strong and honest. The Qur’an provides the answer. Both daughters observed Moses (pbuh) at the well and witnessed his strength. However, only the elder tested his honesty by inviting him to meet her father. Scholars note that Moses (pbuh) asked her to walk ahead of him and guide him to her home. This was because Midian was in the desert, where strong winds could easily reveal the modest attire of women, often simple

cloths wrapped around their bodies. By walking behind her, Moses (pbuh) protected her modesty, demonstrating his deep respect and noble character. His thoughtful consideration for her dignity reflects the high moral standards he upheld throughout his life. The elder daughter noticed this behavior, admired both the behavior and the behavior.

Upon hearing his daughter’s suggestion, the father quickly agreed and put forth a very wise proposal: he would offer one of his two daughters in marriage to Moses (pbuh). The father’s tact in not naming a specific daughter was purposeful; by allowing Moses (pbuh) to choose, the honor remained with the daughters. The chosen girl would be understood as the one who accepted the proposal, never feeling that she was merely handed to Moses (pbuh). This thoughtful arrangement preserved the dignity and autonomy of the daughters. Praised is the Lord who planned all these subtle, noble details in such a perfect way.

Yet this was not all. When the daughter made her suggestion to hire Moses (pbuh), the father understood that his daughter admired the noble stranger. He realized that hiring him would mean he would live among them, and having an unrelated man living with women was not an appropriate arrangement. It is always wiser to consider circumstances and their consequences than to face complications later. Marriage is the best and most proper relationship between a man

and a woman, providing dignity and privacy. Another important lesson emerges from this story: the two daughters desired relief from the hard labor of watering their flock. When the opportunity arose, they proposed hiring Moses (pbuh) so that he might do the work on their behalf while they stayed at home, as is common for women. The verse clearly teaches that a woman can work in difficult circumstances without blame, yet if a chance arises to relieve her from strenuous labor, it is natural and preferable for her to remain in the comforts of her home.

It was an offer Moses (pbuh) could not refuse. Penniless, hungry, tired, a fugitive, and scared, he was now offered a new beginning as a married man with a job and a family. Moses (pbuh) accepted the proposal, agreeing to the contract terms, which included the dowry—the payment made to the bride’s family. Both Moses (pbuh) and the father made Allah a witness to their agreement. This clearly shows that the father was a believer in Allah, Exalted is He, (Allah is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic, it is pronounced with emphatic “L”), and he (the father) likely followed the faith of the prophets Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, peace be upon them all, venerating the one true God. Thus, Moses’s new life began under the guidance and blessing of a righteous household.

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