

70 Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

“So relate the stories that perhaps they
will give thought.” (Quran 7:176)

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Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

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First Edition: 2017

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Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

Contents

Introduction	4
The First of Humanity (Lessons 1—7)	9
The Great Ship (Lessons 8—13)	18
The Perished Nations (Lessons 14—19)	25
A Friend of God (Lessons 20—24)	33
The Estranged Brother (Lessons 25—32)	42
The Saviour of the Israelites (Lessons 33—40)	52
The Warrior King (Lessons 41—44)	62
Two Splendid Kingdoms (Lessons 45—50)	67
The Man of the Fish (Lessons 51—54)	74
A Miraculous Birth (Lessons 55—61)	79
The Man of the Two Horns (Lessons 62—64)	88
The Hidden Cave (Lessons 65—70)	93
Conclusion	100

Introduction

The Quran was revealed by Allah for the guidance of the entire humanity. While this guidance is often conveyed in explicit terms, the Quran also enlightens its readers through narrations and examples from the lives of earlier generations. As human beings, we have an affinity for stories, and lessons conveyed to us through stories make a lasting impact. We also tend to learn more readily through others' experiences rather than plain advice. Moreover, many of us are curious about the lives and circumstances of the prophets and others whom Allah honoured. It is for such reasons that stories and examples from the past are plentiful in the Quran, with many ayaat (verses) and even complete surahs (chapters) dedicated to these.

Allah states in the Quran, **“We relate to you the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran although you were, before it, among the unaware.”** (12:3) Allah describes the stories of the Quran as the “best of stories”; the corresponding Arabic phrase, “ahsan al-qasas” has alternatively been translated as “the most beautiful of stories”. The

Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

purpose of these stories is not to entertain, however. They inspire us to attain true faith, as well as to adhere to it under all circumstances. Some of these stories may even appeal to us in a personal way, and give us true ideals to follow.

The stories of the Quran are further meant to strengthen our trust in Allah, to highlight the power of prayer, and to demonstrate what great things can be achieved with Allah's help and our own unwavering determination. These stories give us beautiful lessons in steadfastness, courage, love, repentance, truthfulness, and trust in Allah. Indeed, every story has its own set of lessons and insights. We must remember though that the Quran does not mention all the stories of previous prophets and their respective nations; it only speaks about the most important ones, as well as those most relevant for all times and places, in keeping with the universal status of the Quran.

Another important aspect of the stories of the Quran is their varied nature. Musa (Moses), for instance, belonged to a tribe in slavery to the Pharaoh whereas Sulayman (Solomon) possessed a magnificent kingdom; the father of Ibrahim (Abraham) was a staunch idol-worshipper whereas the father of Yahya (John) was a

Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

prophet with a noble lineage; Nuh (Noah) lived for nearly a thousand years whereas Isa (Jesus) was raised by Allah at a young age. Some prophets were granted greater authority than others; some were assigned more laborious tasks; and some were honoured by Allah above the rest.

However, all prophets, despite their contrasting circumstances, conveyed the same message of true monotheism, and emphasized good values. They called upon their people to reflect on the universe and recognize Allah through His signs. They informed people about the Day of Judgement, and made clear the consequences of their actions. Moreover, Allah commands us to respect all prophets equally and not to discriminate between any of them: **“Say: We believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us and that which was revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) and Yaqub (Jacob) and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed to Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrendered.” (3:84)**

Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

Although the stories of the Quran mostly revolve around the prophets, they were not the only ones to be honoured by Allah. For example, Allah blew into Maryam (Mary) through His Spirit, miraculously granting her a son, which was a tremendous tribute to her piety and chastity. Similarly, the great strength of Dhul-Qarnayn, the fore-knowledge granted to Khidr, and the resolve of the young men who hid in the cave, all have an honourable mention in the Quran. It is clear from the Quran that any individual can attain a lofty status in the sight of Allah by always being conscious of Him, and remaining steadfast on what is just. The stories of the Quran indeed give us much to ponder over and implement in our lives.

Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

May Allah's blessings and peace be upon all His prophets and righteous servants, and may they be a source of continuous guidance for all of us, for all time to come!

The First of Humanity **(Lessons 1—7)**

Allah created the first human being, Adam, from *turaab* – translated as dust or soil. He then blew into him through the Spirit, and commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, which they did. However, one of the jinn known as Iblis (Satan), present among the angels, refused to do so, and Allah expelled him from the kingdom of heaven for his impertinence. Iblis then asked Allah to grant him respite till the Day of Judgement, so he could try and lead the descendants of Adam astray, to which Allah agreed, revealing that His true servants will not be misled.

Meanwhile, Adam dwelled in the garden of Paradise where Allah created his mate, Hawwa (Eve), the first woman, so the two of them could enjoy the blessings of Paradise together. Allah commanded them not to eat from a particular tree, but Iblis caused them to disobey Allah, leading to their expulsion from Paradise and descent on earth. Adam and Hawwa repented to Allah; He pardoned them, chose Adam as a prophet, and

Lessons from the Stories of the Quran

promised Paradise in the hereafter for whoever among humanity lived righteously.

Let's examine the lessons learnt from this account and analyse its various aspects in detail.

1

Human intellect is a great blessing

Why did Allah command the angels to prostrate to Adam? What made Adam superior to such a noble creation as the angels? It was his superior intellect: his intelligence, and higher faculties of thinking, perceiving, learning, and memorizing. That is why when the angels remarked that the human would cause bloodshed and corruption on earth, Allah commanded Adam to replicate to the angels all the names Allah had taught him, thus proving his higher intellect. We should, therefore, engage our minds for the purpose of gaining knowledge, researching, reflecting on the universe, and making scientific advancements. Allah repeatedly commands us in the Quran to use our cognitive abilities, frequently asking the rhetorical question, **“Then will you not use reason?” (37:138)**

2

Arrogance brings about one's downfall

When Allah commanded Iblis to prostrate to Adam, he objected, saying, **“I am better than him! You created me from fire and created him from clay.” (7:12)**

Iblis's view that he had been created from a superior substance led him to disobey Allah; his arrogance thus changed his status from that of a devoted servant of Allah to becoming an outcast, destined for Hell. Arrogance is an enormous sin that deprives us of Allah's favour, and distances us from Him. Prophet Muhammad said, *“He who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of arrogance shall not enter Paradise.” (Muslim)*

3

Love and mercy are basic ingredients of marriage

What was Allah's wisdom in creating the first pair of human beings a male and a female? We learn from the Quran that this was not just so they would procreate, but because they should find comfort in each other's company: **“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates [i.e. spouses] that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy.” (30:21)** This ayah further asserts that Allah has placed love and mercy between spouses as a gift from Him. The husband and wife should thus sincerely love each other, and adopt mercy by overlooking each other's faults and shortcomings.

4

Be content with what you have

After Allah had forbidden Adam and Hawwa to eat from a particular tree, Iblis approached them and said, **“O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?” (20:120)**

Iblis tried to tempt them with promises of eternal life and kingdom, and succeeded. It is intrinsic in human nature to continuously desire more and not feel satisfied for long. Even though Adam and Hawwa enjoyed the great blessings of Paradise, Iblis used trickery to arouse their curiosity, promising them even greater rewards. We should try to be content with what we possess – be it little or much – and not be greedy for worldly possessions and luxuries. Prophet Muhammad said, *“Wealth is not in having many possessions; rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul.” (Bukhari)*

5

Allah accepts true repentance

After Adam and Hawwa had erred, they became remorseful, and prayed to Allah, **“Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.” (7:23)** Because they sincerely repented, Allah turned to them in mercy, and forgave them. Indeed, He loves to forgive, and pardons all sorts of sins, of all magnitudes. As Prophet Muhammad said, *“Verily, Allah is more delighted with the repentance of His slave than is a person who finds his lost camel in a desert.” (Bukhari)* We should thus repent to Allah frequently and fervently.

6

Always be on guard against Iblis

Iblis approaches us while concealing his enmity towards us – just as he deceived our forefathers, Adam and Hawwa, by claiming to be their well-wisher: **“And he swore to them, ‘Indeed, I am to you from among the sincere advisors.’” (7:21)** Hence, we must always be on our guard against the treacherous whispers of Iblis, and strive against him with all our faith, conscience, and will power, while beseeching Allah for aid against his deceptive ploys. Allah has informed us that Iblis’s traps are ineffective when countered with firm resolve: **“Indeed, there is for him [Iblis] no authority over those who have believed and rely upon their Lord.” (16:99)**

7

Do not grieve over your mistakes

It is not wise to keep grieving over a costly mistake. We must accept that Allah's will always prevails, and sometimes, a regrettable situation could not have been avoided. For example, apparently, Adam and Hawwa got humanity expelled from Paradise, but in reality, Allah had predetermined the earth to be our abode in this world, as He had earlier revealed to the angels: **“Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” (2:30)** Hence, the whole episode of the expulsion from Paradise was merely to demonstrate why human beings are not worthy of Paradise without undergoing a trial period on earth. So, just as there is no point in grieving over the expulsion of our ancestral parents from Paradise, we must try to see Allah's wisdom and purpose in seemingly regrettable situations we encounter, instead of bemoaning them.

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