

## Section 18: The Israelites Started Calf Worshipping

### Surah al-'Araf – Verse 148

وَاتَّخَذَ قَوْمُ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ حُلِيِّهِمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ ۚ أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سَبِيلًا ۚ اتَّخَذُوهُ وَكَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ

**148. “And the people of Moses made of their ornaments a calf after him, a (mere) body that lowed. Did they not see that it did not speak to them, nor did it guide them to any way? They took it (for worship) and they were unjust.”**

Through these verses one of the lamentable and surprising events has been referred to. It happened among the Children of Israel after going Moses (as) to the tryst. That event was their worshipping Calf, which was arranged by a person called ‘Sūmiri’ and by means of some golden ornaments offered by the Children of Israel.

The verse implies that after going Moses to the tryst, his people made a calf out of their ornaments which was only a lifeless body with the mooing sound of a cow which they worshipped. At first, it says:

**“And the people of Moses made of their ornaments a calf after him, a (mere) body that lowed...”**

Then the Qur'an, scorning them, says:

**“...Did they not see that it did not speak to them, nor did it guide them to any way?...”**

The objective meaning of this question is that a true deity should recognize the right and wrong and be able to guide his followers. He should save the ability of speaking with his worshippers and guide them

to the straight way, and teach them the way of worship.

In fact, they were unjust to their own selves. That is why the verse says:

**“...They took it (for worship) and they were unjust.”**

## Surah al-‘Araf – Verse 149

وَلَمَّا سَقَطَ فِي أَيْدِيهِمْ وَرَأَوْا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ ضَلُّوا قَالُوا لَئِن لَّمْ يَرْحَمْنَا رَبُّنَا وَيَغْفِرْ لَنَا  
لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

**149. “And when they smote their hands and saw that they had gone astray, they said: ‘Should our Lord have not mercy on us and forgive us (not), we shall certainly be of the losers’,”**

When Moses (as) came back from the mountain, the Children of Israel realized that they had made mistake and were of the losers. The verse says:

**“And when they smote their hands and saw that they had gone astray, they said: ‘Should our Lord have not mercy on us and forgive us (not), we shall certainly be of the losers’,”**

Some of the commentators believe that Sāmeri, with the information he had, had set some special pipes in the breast of a golden calf through which some pressed air could pass out and a sound, similar to the sound of a cow, was heard from the mouth of that calf.

## Surah al-‘Araf – Verse 150

وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ بِئْسَمَا خَلَفْتُمُونِي مِنْ بَعْدِي ۗ  
أَعْجَلْتُمْ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ ۗ وَأَلْقَى الْأَلْوَاحَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُ إِلَيْهِ ۗ قَالَ ابْنَ أُمَّ إِنَّ  
الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضَعُّونِي وَكَادُوا يَقْتُلُونِي فَلَا تَشْمِتْ بِيَ الْأَعْدَاءَ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ  
الظَّالِمِينَ

**150. “And when Moses returned (from the Mountain) unto his people, wrathful (and) grieved, he said: ‘Evil it is that you have done in my place after me. Did you hasten on the bidding of your Lord?’ And, he dropped the Tablets and seized his brother by the head, dragging him toward himself. He (Aaron) said: ‘O son of my mother! verily the people judged me weak and had well-nigh slain me. So do not let the enemies gloat over me, and do not count me among the unjust**

**people.”**

In this verse and the verse after it, the event of the conflict of Moses (as) with calf-worshippers, when he returned from the tryst, has been explained. This event was only hinted out in the previous verse.

This is an explanation upon the hideous and hateful scene of the calf-worshipping of the people of Moses who had spoilt his religion when Moses came back from the Mountain. The verse says:

**“And when Moses returned (from the Mountain) unto his people, wrathful (and) grieved, he said: ‘Evil it is that you have done in my place after me...’”**

Then, Moses (as) added telling them:

**“...Did you hasten on the bidding of your Lord?...”**

The objective meaning of this phrase is that, due to the command of Allah concerning the length of the appointment of Moses (as) from thirty nights to forty nights, the people of Moses hastened and judged over it hurriedly.

They took the absence of Moses (as) as a reason for his death or breach of promises. In that circumstance, Moses had to manifest an intensive wrath, otherwise their return to the truth was not easily possible.

The harsh reaction of Moses against this scene and in that moment has been stated by the Qur’ān as follows:

**“...And, he dropped the Tablets and seized his brother by the head, dragging him toward himself...”**

In fact, this reaction illustrated, on one side, the inward conditions of Moses (as) and his intensive annoyance for the idolatry and aberration of those people, and, on the other side, it was an effective means for moving the minds of the Children of Israel and making them attentive to the extraordinary obscenity of their deeds.

Then, the Qur’ān, referring to the manner of Aaron for exciting the sympathy of Moses (as) and stating his sinlessness, says:

**“...He (Aaron) said: ‘O son of my mother! verily the people judged me weak and had well-nigh slain me. So do not let the enemies gloat over me, and do not count me among the unjust people.’”**

## Surah al-‘Araf – Verse 151

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِأَخِي وَأَدْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

**151. “He (Moses) said (praying): ‘O’ Lord! forgive me and my brother and admit us into Your Mercy, and You are the most merciful of the merciful ones’.”**

When the fire of the wrath of Moses (as) was rather quenched, he refuged to Allah (s.w.t.) and invoked Him as follows:

**“He (Moses) said (praying): ‘O’ Lord! forgive me and my brother and admit us into Your Mercy, and You are the most merciful of the merciful ones’.”**

Moses (as) asked Allah to forgive him and his brother not for the sake that they had committed any sin, but it was a kind of humility and submission unto Allah for returning to Him and in order to express his hatred upon the hideous actions of the idol-worshippers.

It is also a lesson for others to learn and contemplate where Moses and his brother (as), who had no perversion, asked Allah for such a remission, they must certainly be aware of their own reckonings.

---

### Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-6/section-18-israelites-started-calf-worshipping>