

## Section 3: Pharaoh's Sorcerers Embrace the Truth

### Surah Ash-Shu'ara – Verses 34–35

قَالَ لِلْمَلَإِ حَوْلَهُ إِنَّ هَذَا لَسَاحِرٌ عَلِيمٌ

يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنْ أَرْضِكُمْ بِسِحْرِهِ فَمَاذَا تَأْمُرُونَ

**34. “(Pharaoh) said to the chiefs around him: ‘Verily this is a skilled sorcerer,’**

**35. “Who intends to drive you out of your land with his sorcery, what do you command?”**

In order to move and encourage the sorcerers to compete with Moses (as), Pharaoh called him ‘a knowing sorcerer’.

Loving home and country and the motivation of ownership are among men's instincts which Pharaoh used as pretext for inciting people to fight Moses (as).

However, when the staff was changed into a great serpent by Moses hand, Pharaoh got astonished and feared a lot, but to keep his devilish power, which was really exposed to danger, because of Moses' acts, and also to maintain their belief, to have the confidence of his companions and to improve their moral, Pharaoh embarked on justification of Moses' miracles.

First he said to his companions that Moses (as) was a skilful and knowing wizard.

The verse says:

***“(Pharaoh) said to the chiefs around him: ‘Verily this is a skilled sorcerer,’”***

The person who had been introduced as mad by Pharaoh was now called a learned one. This is the custom and method of oppressors that they change their opinion several times in one meeting or gathering and every time they resort to a new means to achieve their aim.

Since wizardry was common in that age, Pharaoh thought this accusation, after showing these miracles, is the best one that Moses (as) can be charged of.

Then, to mobilize the audience against Moses, Pharaoh continued:

***“Who intends to drive you out of your land with his sorcery, what do you command?”***

This is that very Pharaoh who knew all territory of Egypt as his very own sovereignty and was saying:

***“...Is not mine the sovereignty of Egypt and these rivers flowing under me? Can you not then discern?”***<sup>1</sup>

Now that he saw his government was going to be overthrown, he totally forgot his exclusive rulership of this region and counted it as people's property and implied that their country was facing danger and they had to find a way to defend it.

Pharaoh who did not listen to anyone's words one hour ago and was always an unrestrained ruler and no one could oppose him, was now so miserable that he told his companions to provide a command! He demanded a humble and hopeless counseling!

It is understood from verse 110 of Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7 that the companions started counseling and they were so panicky that they could not think and every one of them asked another one:

***“...Now what do you command?”***

Yes, this is the tradition of all oppressors in all ages that when they can control everything they count everything as their own property and everyone as their own slave, and their logic is only despotism.

However, when they see that their tyrannical kingdom is going to be subdued and in danger, they temporarily abandon despotism and resort to people and their opinions; they count country as people's country, everything as property of people and they respect people's opinions, but when storm abates, they return to their previous behaviour.

In our time and age we also saw in Iran the same kings and rulers who counted all country as their own property when everything was good and o.k., and even they ordered those who opposed him to leave country and said that Allah's land is vast and they could go anywhere.

The last king said:

“This is my order and no one can disobey it.”

However, we saw that when revolution took place, they bowed down before people and repented their former sins and asked forgiveness, but this had no effect on people who knew them for a long time.

## Surah Ash-Shu‘ara - Verses 36-37

قَالُوا أَرْجِهْ وَأَخَاهُ وَأُبْعَثْ فِي الْمَدَائِنِ حَاشِرِينَ

يَأْتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَحَّارٍ عَلِيمٍ

**36. “They said: ‘Give him (Moses) and his brother respite, and send heralds into the cities to collect’,”**

**37. “(That) they bring to you all skilful sorcerers.”**

Since the age in which Pharaoh lived was the age of wizardry and sorcery, Pharaoh tried his best to call wizards to be at his service.

Of course, after much counseling, his close companions told Pharaoh not to haste in the affair of Moses and his brother but give them respite, and send some summoners into the cities of Egypt.

The verse says:

**“They said: ‘Give him (Moses) and his brother respite, and send heralds into the cities to collect’,”<sup>2</sup>**

As a matter of fact, Pharaoh’s companions were either deceived or consciously accepted Pharaoh’s accusation of Moses (as) and they planned that he was a sorcerer and they had to resort to better wizards to fight him.

They thought that fortunately there were a lot of skilful wizards in the vast country of Egypt and if Moses (as) was a wizard, they would gather so many skilful wizards that the secret of Moses (as) would be revealed.

The verse says:

**“(That) they bring to you all skilful sorcerers.”**

The Arabic word /haširin/ is derived from the word /hašr/ that means to mobilize people for war or

suchlike. Thus, now officers had to mobilize wizards at any price to fight Moses (as).

## Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 38-39

فَجُمِعَ السَّحَرَةُ لِمِيقَاتِ يَوْمٍ مَّعْلُومٍ

وَقِيلَ لِلنَّاسِ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُجْتَمِعُونَ

**38. "So the sorcerers were got together for the appointment of a day well-known."**

**39. "And it was said to the people: 'Will you assemble?'"**

Attracting public opinion and having their presence in the scene is important to the illegitimate rulers.

Pharaoh asked people to attend a given place at a particular time, for this gathering and presence would make Moses (as) and Aaron (as) feel alone and might cause the wizards to feel morally boosted. It also would switch on his propaganda machine.

Finally, after the proposition of Pharaoh's companions, some selected officers went to different cities of Egypt and sought everywhere for skilful wizards.

The verse says:

**"So the sorcerers were got together for the appointment of a day well-known."**

In other words, they were already gathered and were made ready for such a day in order to fight Moses (as).

As it is understood from the verses of Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, the purpose of the Qur'anic phrase */yaumin ma'lum/* is one of the feasts of Egyptians which was selected by Moses (as) for fighting, and his aim was to provide people opportunity to attend in that gathering, for he was sure that he would overcome Pharaoh and he wanted to show all people the power of divine signs and weakness of Pharaoh and his companions.

He (as) wanted the light of faith to shine in the hearts of more persons.

Then, the next holy verse implies that the people were also invited to attend this struggling, as it declares:

**"And it was said to the people: 'Will you assemble?'"**

This statement shows that Pharaoh's officers did their jobs very calculatedly and they knew that if they forced people to attend the gathering, they might react negatively, therefore, they declared that if they were willing to attend it, they could do it. Certainly such way of speaking attracted more people to that gathering.

## Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 40-42

لَعَلَّنَا نَتَّبِعُ السَّحَرَةَ إِن كَانُوا هُمُ الْغَالِبِينَ

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ السَّحَرَةُ قَالُوا لِفِرْعَوْنَ أَئِنَّا لَنَا أَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ الْغَالِبِينَ

قَالَ نَعَمْ وَإِنَّكُمْ إِذَا لَّمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ

**40. "Haply we may follow the sorcerers if they are victors."**

**41. "Then, when the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh: 'Shall we have a reward if we should be the victors?'"**

**42. "(Pharaoh) said: 'Yes, and surely you will then be among the near-stationed'."**

Moses (as) and Aaron were standing alone on one side, for they had faith, and Pharaoh, all rich people and the wizards were standing on the other side and were worried. Here the role of faith and its power gets clear.

Finally, they told the people that their aim was that if their sorcerers became victorious, whose victory was the victory of their gods, they would follow them, and they promised to treat so enthusiastically that the enemies of their gods would perish forever.

The verse says:

**"Haply we may follow the sorcerers if they are victors."**

Therefore, they wanted people to warm up the gathering so that the enemies of their gods would be defeated totally.

It is completely clear that the considerable presence of fans and supporters, who advocate one party, is both to boost morale and to provide hope and assurance. It also cause them to try their best. When they

succeed, they can make such ado that their contending party will go to seclusion and they can frighten the opposite party from the beginning of the struggle, too.

Yes, imaging these aims, Pharaoh's officers wanted to call people to the gathering and Moses (as) also asked Allah such presence of people so that he could achieve his aim in the best way.

Apart from these, when the wizards came to Pharaoh and saw that he was in severe tight corner, they thought to use this opportunity best and to achieve some important advantages of him:

***“Then, when the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh: ‘Shall we have a reward if we should be the victors?’”***

Pharaoh, who was in tight corner and hopeless, agreed to give them the best advantages and immediately answered them as follows:

***“(Pharaoh) said: ‘Yes, and surely you will then be among the near-stationed.’”***

In fact, Pharaoh wanted to tell them what they did want; it was whether property (wealth) or position and rank that all of these would be given to them.

This statement shows how important it was in that society and environment to be near to Pharaoh, which he mentioned as a great reward. In fact, for man no reward is higher than being near to his preferred power.

If those deviated persons counted nearness to Pharaoh as the best reward, the knowing worshippers of Allah count no reward higher than propinquity to Allah. Even they do not exchange Paradise with its all blessings for a manifestation of His Pure Essence.

Therefore, those who are martyred for the sake of Allah must achieve the best rewards for their great self-sacrifice. According to the holy Qur'an, they will achieve the reward of divine propinquity and the Qur'anic phrase *l'inda rabbihim/ (with their Lord)* indicates this reality.

Also, because of this fact, every pure-hearted believer only asks Allah's nearness when he worships.

## **Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 43-44**

قَالَ لَهُمْ مُوسَىٰ أَلْقُوا مَا أَنْتُمْ مُلْقُونَ

فَأَلْقَوْا حِبَالَهُمْ وَعِصِيَّهُمْ وَقَالُوا بِعِزَّةِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْغَالِبُونَ

**43. “Moses said to them: ‘Cast what you are going to Cast’.”**

**44. “So they cast down their ropes and their rods, and said: ‘By Pharaoh’s dignity we shall certainly be the victors’.”**

The men of Allah believe in the victory of divine truth and nothingness of wizardry and, when they are in such a condition, they speak calmly and powerfully not weakly and with fear.

When the wizards reached agreement with Pharaoh, who promised them the reward of nearness to him and they became assured and hopeful, they went to make the necessary things ready. They gathered many ropes and staffs which apparently they hollowed out and filled with a special chemical material (such as mercury) which is liquid and light when the sun shines on it.

Finally the promised day came and a lot of people gathered in that place in order to witness that historical struggle. Pharaoh, his companions and the wizards were on one side and Moses (as) and his brother Aaron were on the other side.

But, as it is the custom of the holy Qur’an, these secondary matters, which are understood from later discussions, here are omitted, and it brings up the main subject.

Now it depicts this fateful scene as the Qur’an says:

**“Moses said to them: ‘Cast what you are going to cast’.”**

It is understood from verse 115 of Surah Al-’A’raf, No. 7 that Moses (as) said this sentence when the wizards told him:

**“... ‘O Moses! Will you throw or shall we be the (first) throwers?’”**

This proposition that Moses (as) offered originated from his self-assurance of victory and his calmness and indifference when he was before a lot of foes and Pharaoh exponents.

This was the first hit on the wizards and showed that Moses (as) was especially psychologically calm and, facing with the great mass of enemies and the obstinate advocator of Pharaoh, he was assured and hopeful.

The wizards, who were conceited and very proud, started their job.

As the verse says:

**“So they cast down their ropes and their rods, and said: ‘By Pharaoh’s dignity we shall certainly be the victors’.”**

Yes, like all sycophants, they also started with the name of Pharaoh and relied on his unreal power. At this time, as the holy Qur’an has mentioned in other verses, the ropes and staffs moved like big and

small snakes.3

They had intentionally selected some means of their own wizardry from staffs for they thought they could compete with the staff of Moses (as), and they added ropes to prove that they are stronger.

At this time, people cried joyfully and happily and Pharaoh and his companions became so hopeful that they could not contain themselves for joy. By looking at this pleasant scene, they got very happy.

## Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 45-48

فَأَلْقَى مُوسَى عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ

فَأُلْقِيَ السَّحَرَةُ سَاجِدِينَ

قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

رَبِّ مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ

**45. "Then Moses cast down his rod, when, behold, it swallowed up that which they falsely displayed."**

**46. "Then the sorcerers were flung prostrate."**

**47. "They said: 'We believe in the Lord of the worlds!'"**

**48. "The Lord of Moses and Aaron'."**

Under Allah's administration the universe is on the way of perfection.

As soon as the wizards saw that Moses' staff changed into a great serpent, they became faithful. It is narrated that when Imam Mahdi (as) appears, the western and eastern experts will believe in him, for they will understand the magnificence of his job better than others.

Anyway, we read in the previous verses that Pharaoh and the wizards got happy and satisfied by seeing their wizardly action.

In these verses, we read that Moses (as) did not give them much time to enjoy their action.

The Qur'an says:

***“Then Moses cast down his rod, when, behold, it swallowed up that which they falsely displayed.”***

At that time, all people got silent and the mouths remained open and the eyes remained still out of astonishment, as if they were dried over there. But very soon terrible cries took place of silence, some people escaped, some stood to see what would finally happen, some cried unintentionally, and the wizards' mouth remained open surprisingly.

At that time, suddenly every thing changed; the wizards, who advocated Pharaoh and fought Moses (as) up that moment, came to their senses, for they knew all mysteries and skills of wizardry. They were assured that this issue was not certainly magic and it was a great divine miracle.

The Holy Qur'an says:

***“Then the sorcerers were flung prostrate.”***

It is interesting that the holy Qur'an uses the word /'ulqiya/ which philologically means to be thrown down. It refers to this matter that the wizards were so influenced by the miracle of Moses (as) that all of a sudden they spontaneously fell on the ground and prostrated.

Finally, the next verse implies that accompanied with this action, that was a clear proof for their faith, they also said by their tongues that they believed in the Lord of the worlds.

The verse says:

***“They said: ‘We believe in the Lord of the worlds!’”***

Then to clarify any doubt and to prevent Pharaoh from interpreting this sentence according to his own will, they added:

***“The Lord of Moses and Aaron’.”***

This shows that although Moses (as) did speak to the wizards and performed throwing the staff, his brother, Aaron, was accompanying him and was ready to help him in any way possible.

After this strange change that happened in the wizards' morale, they, in a short moment, came out of an absolute darkness and stepped into a dazzling brightness.

They turned their back on all the benefits and advantages they expected Pharaoh. It was easy for them to expose their life to danger, for they could differentiate the Truth from the falseness and they resorted to the Truth because of their new knowledge.

They did not pave the rest of the path by the foot of intellect, but they went on eagerly, mounting on the fine mount of 'Love'. They were so devoted that they could encounter any danger. We will see that, for this very reason, they heroically resisted all Pharaoh threats.

The Prophet (S) said:

*“Every heart is at the mercy of Allah, the Beneficent. If He wills, He will guide it. And if He wills, He will mislead it.”*<sup>4</sup>

(It is clear that Allah's will in these two phases is derived from individuals' predisposition and readiness, and this divine success and lack of it is because of various situations of hearts, and it is not undue.)

## Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 49-51

قَالَ آمَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ آذَنَ لَكُمْ إِنَّهُ لَكَبِيرُكُمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَكُمُ السِّحْرَ فَلَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ  
لَأَقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ وَأَصْلَبَنَّاكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

قَالُوا لَا ضَيْرَ إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنْقَلِبُونَ

إِنَّا نَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ لَنَا رَبُّنَا خَطَايَانَا أَنْ كُنَّا أَوَّلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

**49. “(Pharaoh) said: ‘You have believed in him before I give you leave. Verily, he is the chief of you who taught you the sorcery; so, soon shall you know! Certainly I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and certainly I will crucify you all.’”**

**50. “They said: ‘No matter! Verily we unto our Lord shall Return.’”**

**51. “Verily we hope that our Lord will forgive us our faults, since we are the first of the believers’.”**

When the wizards saw Moses' (as) miracle, they fell on the ground and prostrated. At this time, Pharaoh embarked on an analysis to deceive common people. He said that it was a preplanned conspiracy. They are Moses' students and they planned this puppet show to overthrow him.

But those wizards were scattered and were gathered from all over the country and they could not meet Moses (as). Moreover they swore by Pharaoh dignity that they would defeat Moses (as).

Finally, on one hand, Pharaoh did not keep his end up and, on the other hand, he saw his all kingdom

and entity exposed to danger. He knew especially what effect the wizards' belief in Allah would have on people's morale and it was possible that a great number of people, following the wizards, might prostrate.

Therefore, he planned a new method and addressing the wizards, he said:

***"...‘You have believed in him before I give you leave...’"***

Not only did Pharaoh, who ruled people tyrannically for many years, expect people to take permission for every thing, but also he expected to have control over people's mind, intellect and heart. He wanted people not to think and decide unless he allowed them. This is the custom and tradition of oppressors.

This unrestrained conceited person did not even utter the name of Allah and Moses (as). He used only the pronoun /lahu/ (in him) which is here for scoffing.

However, Pharaoh did not get satisfied with this and said two other sentences in order to, according to his imagination, both stabilize his situation and to suppress people's awakened consciences. He first accused the wizards that this was a conspiracy done from before with the help of Moses (as). A conspiracy which was against all people of Egypt.

He said:

***"... Verily, he is the chief of you who taught you the sorcery..."***

He accused them that they had planned such a program to deceive the great people of Egypt and to dominate them. He imputed them that they wanted to expel the real owners of that country and to put slaves in their places.

He meant that he would not allow their conspiracy to be successful and he would nip it in the bud.

He continued:

***"...so, soon shall you know! Certainly I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and certainly I will crucify you all'."***

It means that not only would they be killed totally, but also their death would be along with torture and suffering, for cutting the right hand and the left leg or otherwise will prolong man's death and suffering and torture will be doubled. Pharaoh would kill them in the presence of people and on the top of tall palm trees.

This is the method and approach of the oppressors of any age, which first they usually accuse divine reforming men of conspiracy against people and then they use force and sword in order to weaken the position of those who seek the Truth and their public support and then they annihilate them.

However, Pharaoh did not understand the situation, for those who had been wizard a moment ago were now believers. Their heart was so lighted with the light of faith and was full of Allah's love that they decisively answered Pharaoh's threat in the presence of people and cooked his goose by nullifying his Satanic plan.

The Qur'an informs:

***“They said: ‘No matter! Verily we unto our Lord shall return’.”***

Not only did not Pharaoh decrease them anything by his action, but also he would cause them to reach their real and true Beloved and Deity. The day when such threats had effect on them, they did not know themselves and Allah, they had lost the path of the Truth and were wandering in the desert of life, but now they found what they had lost. Therefore, he would do what he desired.

They added implying that they had committed sins and in this scene they were the leader of struggle with Moses (as), Allah's righteous prophet, and they initiated fight with the Truth, but they hoped Allah's mercy.

The verse says:

***“Verily we hope that our Lord will forgive us our faults, since we are the first of the believers’.”***

They no longer feared anything, neither Pharaoh's threats nor being in the bath of their blood.

They feared only their former sins and they hoped that they would be forgiven under the auspices of faith and Allah's mercy.

What power is it that when it comes in the heart of man, the biggest powers will be nothing in his view and he resists the severest tortures and is generous in sacrificing himself? It is the power of faith.

This is the light of the flame of love which makes martyr for the sake of Allah in man sweeter than honey, and reaching the Beloved the supreme aim.

This is the power from which the Prophet (S) gained help and support and with which he educated the first Muslims, whose history surprises the people of the world, and very quickly brought a back-held nation to pride of position.

Anyway, this event cost Pharaoh and his government dear, although, according to some narrations, he materialized some of his threats and martyred the wizards, not only did not it suppress people's feeling and their sentiments were initiated in favour of Moses (as), but also it exasperated them.

Everywhere people talked about the newly appeared prophet as well as the first faithful martyrs. In this way, some people, including the relatives of Pharaoh and even his wife, got believers.

The question that rises here is how those faithful and repentant wizards called themselves the first believers!

Was their purpose that they were the first believers in that event?

Or were they the first believers from among the supporters of Pharaoh?

Or were they the first believers who were martyred in that event?

All the above commentaries are likely while they are not inconsistent with each other.

These commentaries are true when we believe that before them some of the Children of Israel or other than them had believed in Moses (as), but if we say that they were told to meet directly Pharaoh and to plant the first blow on him after being appointed to prophecy, it is likely that this group of believers were really the first believers and it needs no other commentary.

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1. Surah Az-Zukhruf, No. 43, verse 51

2. The Qur'anic word /'arjih/ is derived from the word /'irja'/ that means to postpone and not hastening in judgment.

3. Surah Ta-Ha, No. 20, verse 66

4. The commentary of Fi Zilal, Vol. 6, P. 208

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