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Abstract

Classical Muslim exegetes, drawn from both Quranic and non-Quranic sources, have described the exodus as an illustration of divine punishment imposed on the Israelites for their transgression against God. This study, however, understands the Quranic accounts of the exodus in terms of a salvational drama. The revelation of Torah, central to the exodus story, is about the deliverance of God's will in the act of law giving. Moses as both a prophet and a legislator plays a key role in manifesting God as the word in the citation of an authentic divine intention through the Torah. Divine presence is also found through miracles when God orders Moses to return the sea to its original form, and so the Israelites would be saved from Pharaoh. For their lack of gratitude for God's help, the Israelites are punished for their transgression against his command. In 5:20–25, God commands the Israelites to enter the “holy land,” but they refuse because of giants. In turn, God condemns the Israelites with 40 years of wandering (5:26). In 7:148–158 and 20:80–98 the Israelites are described to transgress God's command for worshiping the golden calf when Moses was absent for 40 nights. In turn, Moses orders the killing of those who worshiped the golden calf. However, while the Israelites are punished for their disobedience, they are also blessed with God's mercy and generosity. When Moses's anger subsides after throwing down the tables after finding the Israelites worshiping of the golden calf, he took up the tablets for “those who fearful of their Lord” (7:154). Throughout the Quran, the exodus narrative provides numerous instances when God would provide numerous blessings to the Israelites. Beyond punishment and blessing, however, the exodus identifies a metanarrative of spiritual liberation. In such account, the Israelites partake in a redemptive experience of a trial through adversity that ultimately reveals divine grace, a self-reflexive reference that unravels the

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God it cites into existence, and hence a promise for salvation. The exodus story therefore becomes a chronicle about God's presence in the enactment of his will through the performance of delivering the laws, even as he appears to abandon his people, even as he appears to be invisible to all.

The argument proposed here offers an account of exodus in the context of Islamic traditions. While the opinion of overwhelming scholars rejects the Biblical exodus as historically valid, due to lack of archaeological evidence, this paper argues that the significance of exodus, in its Islamic context, is essentially one of a theological account of redemptive suffering rather than historiography. As an example of a non-Biblical account, and yet distinct from other sources such as Hecataeus of Abdera set in the fourth century BC, Islamic traditions bespeak of the exodus in terms of a model to serve a new community of spiritual orientation united by divine law. The story of exodus, I argue, is a performative formula, a self-reflexive reference that makes explicit a new possibility in the discourse of redemption through suffering.

The story of Israelites' wandering in wilderness in connection with Moses' apostolic mission is a significant part of the Islamic traditions. In the Quran Moses is considered a prominent prophet, along with Adam, Abraham, Noah, Jesus, and Muhammad, who is the last messenger of God. Moses, like Abraham, exemplifies an ideal Muslim whose submission to God at the Mount Sinai (*Tur*) testifies to divine guidance and ultimate act of mercy. Moses is also a lawgiver whose guidance and teachings to the Israelites about the oneness of God was characterized with the ability to have direct conversation with the divine. Though he was also able to see God (7:143), Moses was the one Prophet whose bond with the divine was marked through language, a bond that would be later modified by the gospel of Jesus.¹ Hence, in the Islamic literature Moses is known as the *kalim Allah*, the one who has directly conversed with God.

In the schema of prophetic traditions in Islam, the story of exodus plays an integral role in how Moses attained the ability to directly talk with God. Under his leadership, the ancient Hebrews were able to flee persecution and arrive at the promised land. In doing so, they participated in a grander sacred drama that, though the Quran does not provide a coherent chronology (Wheeler 2009: 252), involved plagues, splitting of the Red Sea, arrival at the Promised Land, followed by years of wilderness, and revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai. In particular, the Israelite arrival at Canaan, the Promised Land, only proved to be part of the grander schema of a divine will. When the Israelites refused to trust God and fight on his behalf (5:24), God prohibited them to the land, making them wander for 40 years in the wilderness. But wandering in the wilderness served as only a stage in the teleos toward salvation for the few chosen followers of Moses who repented and accepted God's command.

In terms of discursive traditions, Muslim exegetes, drawn from both Quranic and non-Quranic sources, have primarily described the exodus story as a tale of divine punishment on the Israelites for their disobedience to Moses' authority and, by extension, transgression against God. As Brannon Wheeler has shown, the Muslim commentaries have primarily alluded to such sources in order to advance criticism against the Jews and also elevate him to a higher status than Moses, blamed for the sins of the Israelites (Wheeler 2002a: 124). Here I argue, however, that the Quranic exodus is ultimately an account of redemption and not punishment.² The account of the Israelites wandering in the desert and Moses leading them to the Mount Sinai is one

¹ In the Quran, Jesus explains, "I shall confirm the Torah that was before me, and will make lawful for you some of the things that were before unlawful for you." (3:50).

² Here, my argument is similar to Thomas Dozeman's account of exodus as a salvation history. See Dozeman 2010.

of divine expression through revealed law as a binding sacred commandment. The revelation of God's command, central to the exodus story, signifies an act of citationality or a reenactment that is brought to bear on performatively signifying the divine in the discursive act of textual law. The exodus, in this dramaturgical rather than historic sense, serves as a self-reflexive reference that makes explicit a new possibility for redemption through the experience of suffering. Moses as prophet (i.e., guide) and legislator (i.e., law-giver) plays the key role of a signatory and an enforcer in citing and giving witness to the presence of an authentic divine intention.

Also, Moses as both a prophet and a legislator plays a key role in manifesting God as the word in the citation of the presence of an authentic divine intention through divine law. God's presence is also found in miracles as divine signs when God orders Moses to return the sea to its original form, and so the Israelites would be saved from Pharaoh. Throughout the Quran, the exodus narrative articulates instances when God would provide numerous blessings to the Israelites, a feature that is also noted in Muslim exegesis. Beyond punishment and blessing, however, the exodus identifies a metanarrative of spiritual liberation. In such account, the Israelites overall partake in a redemptive experience of a trial through adversity that ultimately reveals divine grace, a self-reflexive reference that unravels the God it cites into existence, and hence a promise for salvation.

Equally important in the Quranic exodus is how Moses achieves the ability to converse with God through a complex set of divinely inspired events that involve encounters with temptation, transgression and, finally, reconciliation through the utterance of law as manifestation of God on earth. Moses is more than the messenger of God but also the prophet-conqueror. Unlike the biblical version, however, Quran describes Moses's mission not only in terms of seeking the emancipation of the Israelites but also delivering the message of God to Pharaoh in order so to submit to God. Also important to note here is that Moses's prophetic mission is

similar to what Muhammad sought to achieve as he migrated from Mecca, where he and his followers were persecuted, and eventually led the formation of a new religious community in Medina as a legislator and the prophet of God. Muhammad like Moses is to whom the scripture is revealed and responsible for being a protector of the covenant, and also which believers "will have faith in him and assist him" (3:81) for fulfilling the divine will on earth.

Moses in the Quran

Moses appears more than 200 times in the Quran (Ayoub 2004: 36) and referenced more than that of any other prophets (Keeler 2005: 55; Tottoli 2002: 31–35; Wheeler 2009: 249). He is among the so-called prophets of power (46:35) whose ability to directly speak with God (4:164), assigned with the difficult task of delivering the revealed book, the "tablets" (7:150–154), or divine revelation to humanity. Moses is also the performer of miracles, especially while in Egypt where he began his prophetic mission as the leader of the children of Israel.

As Annemarie Schimmel has noted, most Quranic descriptions of Moses were revealed to Muhammad in the middle of his career, as he faced considerable persecution from the Meccans (Schimmel 1995: 15). Moses is a divine informer whose prophetic experience resembles Muhammad's prophetic mission as he travelled from Mecca to Medina to establish a new spiritual community with its distinct set of laws and rules. In the earlier surahs (chapters) of the Quran, during the Meccan revelations (610–622), Moses' mission is described to be as a warner to Pharaoh and deliverer of God's signs to humanity (79–15:25). He is, similar to Mohammad in Mecca, a prophet who informs about God and cautions others about disobeying him. But the Quranic descriptions of Moses as a legislative figure increasingly become apparent in the Medinan surahs when Muhammad began to lead a new community of monotheists after he migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622. It was in Medina where Mohammad led a growing

community of faithful followers and where he, similar to Moses, upheld the legislative authority to implement divine law.

Such stories are marked with long plot-driven episodes, scattered throughout the Quran. Descriptions of Moses in Egypt from childhood to Prophethood revolve around miraculous events or turning points when the young Moses is able to survive death by the grace of divine will. For example, the story of the wife of Pharaoh rescuing Moses to be adopted into the house of Pharaoh and nursed by his own mother (20:38–41; 28:7–13) bespeaks of an unfolding miracle that sets the stage for an escape narrative, caused and guided by God, which essentially characterizes the story of exodus. Moses' flight to Midian after the death of the Egyptian man also underlines the theme of divine benevolence as Moses vows to do God's will.

After years of exile in Midian, Moses encounters God through various miraculous signs. When Moses leaves Midian he receives instruction from God (20:9–24; 27:7–12; 28:29–35), the most important sign being the fire on a tree (28:29:30), which marks the first instance of divine revelations.³ Other signs appear when Moses holds a rod moving like a snake (20:17–22; 27:10; 28:32) and when he puts his hand into his clothes and see it unharmed and shine in whiteness (20:22; 27:12; 28:32). Such signs are of miraculous significance for they not only affirm divine agency but also interruptions in perceived order of things in terms of a stable, natural law of existence. It is through these miracles that the pre-exodus Moses gives witness to an alternative truth identified in supernatural interventions that reveal divine presence. Yet it is with the power of miracles, interruptions of supernatural disposition, which enable Moses to contest Pharaoh and undermine his claims to divine authority. Upon arriving at the court when Moses, along with his brother, Aaron, as his minister and representative, challenged Pharaoh, who claimed to be a deity (17:101–103;

20:49–63; 26:10–29), he mostly did so through the display of “great signs” from God (79:20).

In contrast to magic, as paranormal activities performed by Pharaoh's sorcerers to legitimize his authority, Moses won over the Egyptian magicians in performing acts of miracle that went beyond the mere *manipulation* but a *transformation* of the natural world as willed by God.⁴ At the heart of miracles is the imprint of the sublime on the mundane in contrary to the laws of nature. In fact, the events leading up to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, and afterwards, can be recognized as a metanarrative of miracles, unfolding through episodic events (26:52–68; 44:17–33). All episodes leading up to the exodus, such as Pharaoh's ordering Haman to build the Tower of Babel so to arrogantly attempt to see God (28:36–42) or refusal to let the Israelites leave Egypt and its subsequent punishment with the plagues and other natural afflictions (7-127-36) serve as key stages of leading up to a significant endpoint that rests with the realization of divine power.

In the Quranic sense, Moses and Muhammad are both prophets of miracles. As two messengers who encounter the voice of God, directly or indirectly, in a mountain, they both act as revealers of God's intention to humanity. The miracle is the ability to deliver God's voice to humanity, which transcends human language. But such ability also entails the authority to perform prescribed practices that confirm God's command on earth. As depicted in the hadith traditions of the *Miraj* story in the Quran, for instance, Moses plays a key role in granting Muhammad the authority to designate daily prayers (limited to five) to his followers while ascending through the heavens in the night

³ It may be interesting to note that in contrast to the Biblical account of the bush the Quran describes a burning tree.

⁴ The Quranic distinction between magic and miracles is articulated in 17:101–103: “To Moses we gave ten clear signs. Ask the Israelites. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: ‘I consider you, Moses, to be affected by magic.’ He [Moses] said: ‘You know that these things have been sent down only the lord of the heavens and the earth as something to behold. I consider you, Pharaoh, to be doomed.’”

journey to the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem (Sells 1996: 48).

Meanwhile, Moses is also a liberator–prophet. As a prophet of “firm resolve” (46:35), Moses leads the Israelites to miraculously escape Egypt and find the Promised Land. He is seen as the ideal prophet with the judicial power to govern over a community in quest of spiritual salvation. He provides divine guidance and political legislation; he is both a spiritual and a worldly leader.

Exodus in the Quran

Exodus is ultimately a miracle story. It is a story of enslavement and an eventual emancipation from the bondage of oppression, led by a liberator and depicted in a journey toward a homeland, where God’s covenant can be established and accordingly recognized. The Quranic version in many ways resembles the Biblical one found in the Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Numbers, mostly complied during and after the Babylonian exile (sixth century BCE). But there are some differences. The Quranic version, found in 26:52–68 and 44:17–33, also describes the story of a lost fish in 18:61 and 18:63, plus the mysterious figures in 18:60–65 and 18:65–82. Though Muslim exegetes have linked these verses to the Bible as a way to criticize Christian and Jewish narratives (Wheeler 2002a: 8), such descriptions, as argued by Arent Jan Wensinck, show possible references to non-Biblical sources and legendary tales.⁵ The lost fish story in particular, with its emphasis on the missing fish and the flowing water, are symbolic of the quest for the water of

life, with the quest for eternity playing a central role in the exodus narrative.

In the complex relationship between eternity and damnation, disobedience to God plays an important role. In several episodes, the Israelites transgress God’s command. For instance, in 2:58 God orders the Israelites to enter the gates of a city by saying, “relieve us of our burdens,” though 2:59 depicts some Israelites to change God’s wording and accordingly are penalized by a plague. According to 2:51–56, Moses leaves the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 nights while he received the “book” and returns to find his people worship the golden calf (7:148–158 and 20:80–98). In turn Moses orders the killing of those who worshiped the golden calf and, in a way, as some Muslim commentators have argued, the laws signifies a curse for worshipping the golden calf (Wheeler 2009: 253). In 5:20–25, God commands the Israelites to enter the “holy land” but they refuse because of giants. In turn, God condemns the Israelites to 40 years of wandering (5:26). However, while the Israelites are punished for their disobedience, they are also blessed with God’s mercy and generosity. When Moses’s anger subsides after throwing down the tables after finding the Israelites worshipping of the golden calf, he took up the tablets for “those who fearful of their Lord” (7:154). After some are punished for changing the word of God (2:589) in 2:60 Moses strikes the rock and producing 12 flowing springs of water for the Israelites. But the Israelites continue to disobey. During the exodus the Israelites show ungratefulness for the luxuries God has granted them.

In this sense, the exodus story could be viewed in terms of the Israelite’s failure to recognize God’s mercy. But such understanding is not constant and undergoes various stages of trials, challenges and experiences of endurance toward salvation. Endurance and punishment play an integral role in this process. The plagues of Egypt in the form of floods, locust, and pestilence of lice, described in 7:133–136, for example, serve as natural calamities caused by spiritual wrath caused by Pharaoh’s failure to recognize God’s authority. They are a reminder of how misrecognition of God becomes manifest

⁵Wensinck argues that base of the fist verse is the Alexander romance story. According to the Alexander romance, the dried fish becomes alive when Alexander’s cook washes it in the spring of life (Wensinck 1978: 902–903). Wheeler has correctly criticized Wensinck and Biblical scholars such as Israel Friedländer by arguing that the source of the fish episode based on the Alexander stories was alluded later in history by Muslim commentators of the Quran and that, historically speaking, it is incorrect to assume that the Quranic verses were based on this story (See Wheeler 2002a: 10–19 and also Wheeler 1998: 195–196).

in the natural world where the experience of endurance becomes evident.

But endurance can also about deliverance from hardship. Here, the story of Moses and the emancipation of the Israelites from Egypt parallels in what Muhammad and his followers underwent in the course of their emigration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina (Juan Eduardo Campo 2009: 483). The experience of liberation entails a *flight* from ignorance and ultimately triumph over the oppressors. Similar to the Pharaoh's defeat as his army was drowned in the sea, the enemies of early Muslims too encountered a similar fate as they faced defeat and eventual succeeded to triumph over God's enemies at the end.

But there are also ambiguities in the saga of flight and conquest. As Wheeler has noted, descriptions of the Quranic Moses, especially in relation to the Israelites, lack a single coherent narrative that articulates a common rational behind the story (Wheeler 2009: 252). Such incoherence lies in the fact that the Quran primarily provides an image of Moses who is both prophet-liberator and a legislator-conqueror, who seeks to unshackle his people from the bondage of oppression and also engage in the mission to fulfill God's command on earth while in exile. In this dual prophetic mission, God and his prophet are described to switch back and forth in punishing and rewarding the Israelites for wobbling on the spiritual path set forth for them.

From one perspective, the Quranic exodus is a story of emancipation. As explained earlier, the Israelites flee Pharaoh's oppression, wandering in the wilderness where they receive blessings and gifts from God (2:47–61). According to 2:57, the Israelites are blessed with the cloud, manna, and quails, though they fail to be thankful to God for his charity. In 2:60 Moses strikes a rock and 12 springs of water gush out for the Israelites. When Moses again strikes and this time divide the sea with his rod to help the Israelites escape while drowning Pharaoh and his army (26:63–66) he does so under the command of God, who offers his greatest miraculous intervention in the world of nature.

Yet the most significant episode is when Moses leaves the Israelites while he seeks the "book" (2:51–56). Moses spends 40 days and nights on the mountain, where he asks to see God, and God shows himself to the mountain that eventually crashes. According to 7:142–147, Moses's experience in the mountain comes to an end when finally he has the Torah, as God's revelation. On this crucial moment, the story of exodus becomes a tale of punishment just when God reveals himself through the written word.

The rise of tension with the triumph of Moses to deliver God's message and yet the failure of the Israelites to recognize the truth underscores the breakdown of a straightforward path toward salvation. The breakdown is so significant that not even Moses can repair it by interceding on the behalf of the Israelites (2:48). This is so because a significant act of transgression is committed which revolves around the act of denying God, especially when he shows his mercy. In 7:148 and 20:80–98, the Israelites are described to worship the golden calf while Moses is away, hence rejecting God who helped them to be liberated from Egypt. Upon arriving at the Canaan, the Promised Land (5:20–25), the Israelites refuse to enter it because of giants (5:24). As Moses and Aaron distanced themselves from the ungrateful Israelites (5:25), God then punishes them with 40 years of wandering for their sins in rejecting God's signs and failing to appreciate his generosity (5:26).

Most Israelites are punished for their disobedience to God. But Moses selects a few Israelites. Known as the "people of Moses" (7:159), the few chosen are those who repent and seek forgiveness from God, despite attempts to see him and transgress his will. The chosen Israelites are able to partake in a trial of larger magnitude that can only be realized through endurance.

Islamic Exegeses and Exodus

Drawn from both Quranic and non-Quranic sources, Muslim exegetes of Moses and lessons of exodus are essentially about how, as Wheeler

explains, “Islam and Muhammad demand a simple obedience, not a questioning of the reasons for God’s instructions.” (Wheeler 2009: 264). Knowledge about God and his plans, however difficult they maybe to understand, lie in the prophets whose authority determines what is divinely sanctioned. In many ways, the intimate relationship between knowledge (i.e., light), law (i.e., tablet), and prophetic persona (i.e., Moses) plays an integral role in Muslim exegetical literature of the exodus. Revealed message is more than receiving knowledge about the mercy of God and focusing on his grace alone, but executing such knowledge under the sole authority of a prophet–legislator who can fulfill God’s plan in the world.

While the Quran does not provide a clear account about the relationship between God and the Israelites in the context of exodus story, Muslim exegetes emphasize key themes related to receiving God’s blessings and also the failures to appreciate such gifts. Abul al-Qasim al-Balkhi (d. 931), for example, describes the wilderness years for the Israelites in terms of gifts bestowed by God. With the blessing of God, the Israelites had indulgences amid the wasteland such as clouds, fire, food, and water coming out of rocks (Wheeler 2009: 253). Likewise, Al-Suddi (745) writes about how the Israelites had clothes on their bodies from birth without making the effort to make them. Verse 2:57 reference to honey and quail also identifies a paradisiac state of existence, which shows God’s presence even amid wilderness.

Muslim exegetes on divine punishment also emphasize the motif of transgression understood in terms of the Israelites’ rejection of God’s commands, and its consequence. Here, the role of conquest is central to the story. The reference to God’s command for the Israelites to enter the holy land, for example, underlines the authority of Moses as the conqueror–prophet who earlier confronted Pharaoh, parallel to Muhammad who also engaged in military campaigns against the Meccans. Some Muslim exegetes state that it was Moses who conquered the Promised Land, which was Jerusalem (e.g., Abi Karimah Suddi), Damascus or Palestine, along with parts of

Jordan (e.g., Ziyad al-Farra).⁶ In some accounts, Moses is depicted to be responsible for slaying the main giant Og b. ‘Anaq left from Noah’s flood (Wheeler 2009: 255).

The tale of Og giants in Muslim exegetes brings to light the significant role of myth in the Quranic exodus. In the account of Muhammad b. Jarrir Tabari (838–923), the giant Og is surprised to see the 12 spying Israelite, who were sent by Moses, and placed them in his belt and took them to his wife (Wheeler 2002b: 211). When the wife requested her giant husband to return them to their people, so they could report in what they saw, the 12 Israelites agreed only to inform Moses and Aaron about the giants. But ten of the informers broke the agreement and told their families, which led to the Israelites’ refusal to enter the Promised Land because of the giants (5:24) and the subsequent punishment with 40 years of wandering throughout the wilderness (5:26). The story of giants and 12 spies bespeaks of the Israelites failure to uphold the authority of Moses as God’s commander on earth. Their punishment is not just caused by disobedience to God, but the failure to recognize the authority of Moses as representative of God on earth.

A similar story can be found in reference to other exodus episodes. In the account of the golden calf by Abd Allah Ibn Abbas (619–687), for example, when angel Gabriel arrives on a horse to take Moses to God, Samiri, the man later responsible for convincing the Israelites to worship the golden calf when Moses was away (20:85; 20:87), throws dust left by the hoofprint of Gabriel’s horse in fire, which he requested to make in order to burn Jewelry and ornaments of the Israelites so to purify them from the Egyptian experience of enslavement. According to Ibn Abbas, Aaron, who was in charge during the absence of Moses, gives permission to Samiri to throw the dust into the fire thinking that they are ornaments. Samiri then says, “Be an embodied

⁶ According to Abu al-Hajjaj Mujahid (d. 722), a famous Quranic commentator under in the Ummayd period, the Promised Land, also known as “holy land” in Islamic literature, was Mount Sinai and its surrounding areas.

calf which bellows!” (Wheeler 2002b: 204 and in reference to 20:88) and God caused to come forth from the jewelry a golden calf as a way to test the Israelites. The Israelites then loved and worshiped the calf.

As punishment, those who did not worship the calf began to kill those who had with dagger in their hands, leading to 70,000 deaths (Wheeler 2002b: 205). Later, as Ibn Ishaq describes, the calf is burnt and dispersed into the sea. But at the end of the golden calf story, the sinful are forgiven when Moses is asked by angel Gabriel to stop the killing of the Israelites. God had earlier commanded Moses and Aaron that the sins of the Israelites will be forgiven only if “they [Israelites] kill themselves.” (Wheeler 2002b: 205). At the end, according to Ibn Abbas, “all those who were killed were absolved, and all those who remained were absolve” (Wheeler 2002b: 205). Self-violence by the Israelites brings about a new prospect for redemption.

As for the story of the refusal to enter the Promised Land, after repeated acts of transgression, the Israelites are punished for a longer span of time. While only a few select are saved, as a sign of God’s mercy for those who follow and accept Moses as God’s authority on earth, the Israelites are cursed for their repeated subversion of the divine command. Following Christian commentaries on exodus, Muslim exegetes view the sins of the Israelites as so damning that not even Moses would be willing to intercede (Wheeler 2009: 255). For these accounts, the exodus represents a tale of divine punishment due to the consistency of disobedience, and serving as a reminder of the threat of transgression and its consequences to those who reject the will of God.

Exodus as a Tale of Redemption

But is punishment a mere retribution for violation of a norm ordained by God? In the Quranic sense, punishment is a manifestation of God’s fury for disobedience and yet a way to show his mercy. Miracles, likewise, in the exodus story mirror God’s generosity and also his wrath,

against transgressors such as Pharaoh. The Quranic exodus, seen in this way, is less concerned about how divine law is implemented and more about how God and his commands are abided by his people.

Signs of God are key to the Quranic exodus. It is with the exodus that Moses encounters God’s greatest sign, the “book” as signatory to divine manifestation in the mundane world. It is also in the failure to recognize such signs that the Israelites, at least the few chosen ones (7:155), are able to eventually understand God’s mercy. The “people of Moses” (7:159) are selected precisely because they obey Moses who delivers the will of God. In the unconditional recognition of signs lies the compassion of God.

The motif of perpetual forgiveness, in close connection with punishment, resonates throughout Quranic depictions of Moses and his prophetic mission. In sura al-A’raf (The Heights), Moses seeks God’s forgiveness for Aaron in failing to prevent the Israelites from worshiping the calf (7:151). God grants mercy, including those who repent and believe in him as the true God (7:153).⁷ When Moses throws the tablet, he offers the sinful Israelites the promise of guidance and mercy (7:154). When Moses chooses from his people 70 men, he does so in order to instruct the few about divine mercy. God, the Quran reminds us, is the “best of forgivers” (7:155).⁸

The exodus is about how God can be merciful even when he appears to punish his people because of their acts of defiance. The law as sanctioned by God to provide correct belief and

⁷“And decree for us in this world [that which is] good and [also] in the Hereafter; indeed, we have turned back to you. [Allah] said, my punishment—I afflict with it whom I will, but my mercy encompasses all things.” (7:156).

⁸“And Moses chose from his people 70 men for our appointment. And when the earthquake seized them, he said, “My Lord, if you had willed, you could have destroyed them before and me [as well]. Would you destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is not but your trial by which you send astray whom you will and guide whom you will. You are our protector, so forgive us and have mercy upon us; and you are the best of forgivers (7: 155).

conduct for the Israelites becomes an event of citation, performatively delivering the divine into the world through a reportive frame to establish a new order. The law in a way *enacts* the universality of the divine to purify the world from evil. By extension, it represents a formula, a self-reflexive reference that makes explicit a new possibility for salvation through the experience of suffering.

In this short study, I examined the Quranic accounts of exodus with the aim to rethink its significance in the Muslim traditions. I argued that the Quranic version could be viewed as a type of salvational history, a tale of redemption realized through trial and hardship. In terms of the thematic concepts of emancipation from slavery to encounters with disobedience, the exodus serves as a metanarrative of suffering for the ultimate recognition of God, the essential reality of which transcends human perception.

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