



STORIES OF THE PROPHETS

Stories of the Prophets

From Adam to Isa, the prophets before him ﷺ, and
what each life asks of our faith

Before you begin

This is not a summary. It is an invitation to walk the lives of the prophets, peace be upon them all, from the first human being to Isa who foretold the last of them ﷺ, slowly, one chapter at a time, and to let each life move something in our own hearts.

Each chapter is retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, with every Qur'anic verse taken from its canonical translation and verified via quran.ai. Where a report comes from the People of the Book, Mufti Menk's caution is kept: such accounts are neither believed nor denied unless our revelation confirms them. Every chapter reaches back toward the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Read one slowly.

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Why Allah Tells Us Their Stories

An introduction to the prophets, peace be upon them all

Before a single prophet is named, before the clay of Adam is shaped or the ark of Nuh is built or the staff of Musa is thrown down, there is a question worth a whole evening, and a teacher who knows better than to rush past it. Twenty-nine nights stretch ahead of us, a walk through the lives of the men Allah chose and sent before the final Messenger ﷺ. We could begin with the first of them. Instead, on the first night of Ramadan, Mufti Ismail Menk begins where every serious thing should begin: not with a story, but with why there are stories at all. Why did Allah, who is not a storyteller passing time, fill so much of His final Book with accounts of drowned nations and tested fathers and shattered idols? What are these lives actually for?

The honest answer changes how you read every page that follows. So sit with the question before the first story comes. These are not folk tales we dress in robes for the children. They are letters, written by the One who was there, preserved by Him on purpose, and every one of them is addressed to you.

A Lord who does not leave you guessing

Start with the simplest truth there is, the one every other truth in this book hangs from: you were made. You did not assemble yourself, and you do not hold yourself in existence from one breath to the next. The One who did this we call ar-Rabb, and

Mufti Menk pauses on the word, because no single English word can carry it. It would take a whole paragraph. Some of the scholars have said that ar-Rabb is the One who created, who nourishes and cherishes, who provides and protects, the One in absolute control of every aspect of existence. That is the Lord we mean when we say "Lord of the worlds." Not a distant clockmaker who wound up the universe and walked off, but a Master whose hand is on every atom of you, this moment and the next.

A Lord like that does not bring a servant into being and then abandon him to grope his way home in the dark. When He created us, He did not leave us without an instruction, without a manual, without men sent to remind us why we are here. And so a law runs all the way back through history: there is no nation that has passed, not one, except that a warner was raised among them. The Arabic word is nadhir, a warner, one whose task is to say to a heedless humanity, you are not here merely to enjoy yourselves. You are here for an examination, and the result of that examination will set your station in the life that is real, the one that comes after this. It is why every prophet, without exception, cared more for the Hereafter than for this world, and never once preferred the lower life to the higher.

So the stories of these warners are not entertainment, and Mufti Menk lets Allah Himself say what they are. At the very close of the most beautiful of stories, the surah of Yusuf, peace be upon him, Allah seals the whole genre with a verse:

There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was it [i.e., the Qur'ān] a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.

Read that slowly, because it is the charter for everything ahead. A lesson, for people of understanding. Not invented. A confirmation, a detailed explanation, a guidance, a mercy. That single verse is the reason we will spend twenty-nine days here. Each of these lives was kept by Allah deliberately, carried down the centuries uncorrupted, and set before you, so that you would learn from it.

A messenger, a prophet, and the third kind of carrier

When Allah sent His guidance to mankind, He sent it through two kinds of men, and the Qur'an itself draws the line between them. Mufti Menk lays it out plainly, because the difference matters. There is the rasool, the messenger, and there is the nabi, the prophet. The one with the higher rank is the rasool, and the rule that captures it is clean: every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger.

What separates them? A rasool is a man sent with something new. A fresh law, a Book, a command from Allah that he is told to carry to a people and deliver. He arrives with revelation in his hands and a charge to teach it and to warn. A nabi, a prophet, also conveys the message of Allah, but the message he carries was not given to him as a new beginning. It was given to a messenger who came before him, and the prophet upholds it, lives it, calls people back to it. Mufti Menk points to the cleanest example in the Book. When Allah speaks of Musa, peace be upon him, and the burden of prophethood He laid on him, He mentions the brother He sent to stand beside him:

And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet.

QUR'AN 19:53

Whose message was it? It was Allah's, given to Musa. And Harun, peace be upon him, was sent as a nabi to assist him, to hold him up under the weight of it. It is a verse, Mufti Menk says, worth committing to memory, because once you see that Harun was a prophet sent to support a messenger, the whole architecture of rasool and nabi falls into place, and you understand at a glance why the messenger ranks above the prophet.

But the line he draws next is the one that should make you sit up, because it is no longer about Musa and Harun. It is about you. Beyond the messenger and the prophet, there is a third kind of carrier, and he is neither rasool nor nabi. He is, in Mufti Menk's phrase, the rasool of a rasool, the messenger of a messenger. And who is that? Every single one of us. We have the message in our hands. It is our duty to learn it, our duty to live by it, and our duty to pass it on. When the Prophet ﷺ sent one of his companions to teach in Yemen and questioned him at his departure, he praised Allah, who had granted success to the messenger of the messenger of Allah, the man carrying onward what had pleased the Messenger ﷺ himself. And the Prophet ﷺ said to all of us, across the centuries: convey from me, even if it is a single verse. So you are not a spectator at these stories, watching old nations from a safe distance. You are the next link in a living chain that runs from Allah, to His prophets, to His final Prophet ﷺ, and now, this night, to you, with a duty attached.

Why we read it here, and nowhere else

How did the first human being come to be? Why is he here? What became of the nations that rose in their pride and then vanished from the earth so completely that not even their names survived? None of this, Mufti Menk insists, can be reached by digging or by guessing. No scientist, however brilliant, can hand you the name of the first man, or tell you what was said to him on the day he was made, or describe the woman shaped to be his companion and what passed between them. These things lie entirely beyond the reach of the laboratory. They can come from one source only: the One who was present when it happened, speaking to us through revelation. And this, Mufti Menk says, is precisely what makes a believer a believer, the willingness to receive as certain truth what only Allah could have told us, the knowledge of the unseen that no instrument will ever measure.

Open the older scriptures, the books of the Jews and the Christians, and you will meet the same prophets and recognise the same broad outlines, the same beginning of time, the same shaping of the first man. The overlap is real, and it is no accident: these accounts flow from one original source. But Mufti Menk is careful and honest about why we do not lean on those books. Too much rust, as he puts it, has crept into them over the centuries. Their own keepers are still arguing among themselves over which version is authentic; there are so many differing editions of the scriptures and the Bibles that we have no firm ground to stand on there. So we take our account from the Qur'an, and we follow it without apology, because it alone is pure and pristine, the one Book that Allah Himself has guarded so that no hand has ever been permitted to alter it. This is the spirit of caution to keep for all twenty-nine days ahead: where the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah establish a thing, we hold it firmly; where a story carries reports from the People of the Book, we

neither rush to believe nor rush to deny, unless our own revelation confirms it.

When the Qur'an tells you of Nuh, or Yusuf, or Yaqub, or Lut, peace be upon them all, you are therefore not reading a remembered legend that has drifted and warped in the retelling. You are reading the record of the One who watched it unfold, set down exactly as He wished it preserved. And that is why these stories are the natural doorway back into the Qur'an itself, the Book your entire faith is built upon. To learn the prophets from the Qur'an is to learn the Qur'an.

A book to be lived in, not used as a pillow

So we have a Book, blessed beyond measure, and Allah honoured us by tying the month of its revelation to the month of our fasting, so that Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an. He tells us it came down in a single night so weighty that He named it the night of decree, the night the affairs of an entire year are written, the night that displays His power. There is no doubt in this Book at all. And we are fortunate, Mufti Menk reminds us, to follow a religion that makes it a duty upon us to study every verse of it, not merely a handful.

But why did Allah reveal it? He does not leave us to invent an answer; He states His own purpose:

[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.

QUR'AN 38:29

So that its verses would be pondered. That is the reason, said plainly. Not recited and shelved. Not, Mufti Menk says with a

gentle sting, used as a pillow, read for a moment at night and then set aside, to wake the next morning no different. He presses the point on himself before he presses it on anyone else, and it stings because it is true: how many of us have read shelves of novels cover to cover, every fairy tale and bedtime story and the whole of Harry Potter, and yet could not say what the verse we recited this very morning actually meant? We have given those other books a preference over the Book of the One who made us. It is, he says flatly, a fact, and Ramadan is the time to change it. He encourages everyone, himself first of all, to read a portion of the Qur'an in a language they actually understand, because a manual you cannot read cannot run your life. Imagine, he says, that Allah sends down with you a manual for how to operate your own existence, and you never trouble to learn what it says.

He clears away an obstacle while he is at it. Some people claim it is forbidden to read the meaning of the Qur'an. Where, he asks, did they get that from? That is to behave like the very people of the earlier scriptures, who fenced their followers off from the word of their Lord. Yes, there are rules: when a hard question arises in your mind over a verse, you do not answer it on your own; you take it to those who know. But the great mass of the Qur'an is not hard, and the stories of the prophets, which make up its bulk and are the very reason we are entering them this year, are among the most easily understood parts of all. Anyone can follow a story. So here is the mercy folded into where we are starting: this is no detour away from the Qur'an. It is the easiest road straight into it. Walk these twenty-nine nights, and large stretches of the Book that were strangers to you will become familiar, and you will begin to see how everything in it is connected.

The kind of person Allah chooses

When Allah selected men to carry His word, He never reached for the mediocre, and never for the worst. Mufti Menk is emphatic: a messenger or a prophet was always the best of his people. And so a set of qualities runs through all of them, qualities worth knowing closely, because if we mean to continue the work of the messengers, we must learn what Allah looked for when He chose. And there is something else to notice as he walks through them, something that turns this from a checklist into a portrait. Every quality of the chosen, gathered together, is a likeness of one man in particular, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the one toward whom this entire chain of prophets has been climbing from the very first of them.

They were truthful, every one. They never uttered a lie, and they were known for it by their own people long before any revelation reached them, the way Makkah named him ﷺ al-Amin, the trustworthy, and called him the truthful one before they had the faintest idea what he would become. (And what of the apparent exceptions, the moments people raise about Ibrahim, peace be upon him? Mufti Menk sets them gently aside for now; when his days come, we will see they were never lies at all.) They were trustworthy, and known as trustworthy. They were highly intelligent, never thick or simple; Allah did not send dull men to a nation. Look at Ibrahim, peace be upon him, given prophethood and wisdom and authority, debating idols and kings while still a young man, the prophet who argued and questioned more than any of them, his very debates recorded in the Qur'an. They were people you were drawn toward, not repelled by, free of any defect that would chase others away; all of them were described as beautiful, carrying a kind of magnetism, so that of the Prophet ﷺ a companion said simply, when I saw his face I knew this is

not the face of a liar, and others said he was as though a piece of the moon.

Allah trained them, too, and trained them the same way. There was no prophet, the Prophet ﷺ told us, who had not at some point herded sheep. Allah set them to animals before He entrusted them with people, teaching patience on a flock before a nation, because the harder charge by far is the care of human beings. He protected them from sin, all of them, kept them from the disobedience that snares the rest of us. And what they spoke was never merely their own opinion. Of His final Messenger ﷺ, Allah says it outright:

Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed,

QUR'AN 53:3-4

They came with a direct, clear message and never danced around it; when Lut, peace be upon him, came to his people, he named their sin plainly and did not soften it into hints. They held without wavering to the worship of Allah alone; anyone who associated others with Him was, by that fact, no messenger of His. And not one of them ever sought a wage. None asked for money, none chased popularity, none wanted anything in return for the message at all. This is why, in Surah Ya-Sin, Allah preserves the cry of the believing man who ran from the far end of the city to plead with his people on behalf of the messengers sent to them:

Follow those who do not ask of you [any] payment, and they are [rightly] guided.

QUR'AN 36:21

So when you meet Nuh and Ibrahim and Musa and Yusuf in the days to come, peace be upon them all, you will already know the family they belong to. And you will be watching, in every one of them, a feature of the face of the Prophet ﷺ, drawn long before he was born.

Why the stories are really told

Here, at the end of the introduction, Mufti Menk arrives at the lesson that runs underneath all the others, the thread that ties every story to every story. Why does Allah tell these accounts at all? He has already let Allah answer it once, in the verse of Yusuf, but now he draws out what it means for a life that feels, right now, like it is losing.

Consider the people of Nuh, peace be upon him. They transgressed, and they transgressed for a very long time, generation after generation. To the eye of the moment, it looked exactly as evil always looks at its height: wrong was winning, right was a small and shrinking thing, the man of God and his handful of followers were drowning in a sea of mockery. And then the real flood came, and in an instant the picture was reversed, and it became clear who had been winning all along. This, Mufti Menk says, is the whole point. When you watch evil appear to triumph and goodness appear to fail, the prophets' stories have already told you the ending. It may not come immediately. But when Allah pulls, He pulls completely, and the people of goodness are always, in the end, the winners. Maybe not at once. But ultimately, always.

Yet there is a warning folded inside that comfort, because the victory never arrives without a test, not even for the best of mankind. Allah refuses to let us imagine an easy road to Paradise:

Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allāh?" Unquestionably, the help of Allāh is near.

QUR'AN 2:214

Sit with the weight of that. Shaken until even the messenger, a man Allah Himself had sent, cried out, when is the help of Allah? And only then comes the answer: the help of Allah is near. You are tested, Mufti Menk says, right to your very peak. He reaches for an image to fix it in the mind, one he loves: this life is a school. The higher the grade you climb into, the harder the examination becomes, and the more searching the test, the greater is the love Allah has placed in it. The mistake people make is to confuse the school for the life. The school was never the point. The real life is everything that comes after you graduate, certificate in hand, free at last. So whether you enjoy the uniform or resent it, whether you like the teachers or not, you sit the exams, because each one lifts you to a higher rung, and the final examination is the only one that decides where you will live forever. The prophets sat the hardest papers ever set before any human beings, and Allah preserved their answers, kept their working, so that we who come after them would know how the test is passed. The first paper is set tomorrow: the making of the first human being.

What this beginning asks of our faith

It would be easy to take an introduction like this one as throat-clearing, a few preliminaries to get past before the real stories begin. That would be to miss the question it has quietly put to

you. Strip the evening down to what it actually asks, and you will never again open these stories, or the Qur'an itself, the same way.

It asks you to read every one of these lives as a letter, not a legend. Allah did not preserve the people of Nuh and the patience of Yusuf and the staff of Musa as history, for there is nothing He owes the dead. He preserved them as a lesson for those of understanding, and the verse that opens this whole book of prophets says exactly that. So the question to bring to every story is not what happened, the way you would ask of any tale. It is what is this asking of me. The prophets are not behind glass in a museum of vanished nations. They are voices Allah kept alive on purpose, each one speaking, if you will let it, straight into your own week, your own fear, your own house.

It asks you to take your place in the chain, and to feel the weight of it. There was a messenger, and there was a prophet, and then there is you, the messenger of the Messenger ﷺ. That is not a flourish; it is a duty. He carried Allah's final message to its completion, and then he turned to every believer who would ever live and said, convey from me, even one verse. Belief in all of his predecessors, from Adam to Isa, peace be upon them, without preferring one over another, is not optional decoration on your faith; it is one of the six articles of iman itself, the fourth of them, named alongside belief in Allah and His angels and His Books. To learn these stories well is how that article stops being a word you recite and becomes a thing you actually carry. And the whole long climb of them, every truthful and trustworthy and protected man Allah ever sent, ascends toward one summit, the life of Muhammad ﷺ, which is why this road runs naturally onward into his Seerah. The prophets are the foothills. He is the peak.

And it asks you, in the end, to trust the ending before you can see it. This is the hardest thing faith ever requires, and it is the thing the prophets' stories were preserved to teach. You will have seasons when wrong is loud and winning and right is quiet and apparently losing, when you are shaken, as the verse says, until you find the messenger's own cry rising in your throat: when is the help of Allah? The stories answer before you finish asking. The help of Allah is near. When He pulls, He pulls completely, and the people of goodness do not lose; not immediately, perhaps, but ultimately, without fail. The test is not a sign He has forgotten you. It is the examination, set hardest for those He is raising highest, and the real life is the one that opens the moment you walk out of the school with the certificate in your right hand.

So begin the way every prophet began, low before your Lord and hungry to understand, with the one prayer Allah Himself taught for exactly this:

My Lord, increase me in knowledge.

QUR'AN 20:114

Take one thing from this first night down into the ordinary days ahead. Read a little of the Qur'an in a language you understand, so the Book stops being a stranger. Carry one thing you learn to one person who needs it, and become, in truth, the messenger of the Messenger ﷺ. And the next time the wrong around you looks like it is winning, remember that you already know the ending, because Allah wrote it down in the lives of His prophets and kept it safe for you to find. May Allah join us to the chain that carries His message, soften our hearts with the stories of His prophets, send His peace upon them all, and upon His final Messenger ﷺ,

and gather us with them in the home He has prepared for those who believe.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 1: the introduction (delivered on the first night of Ramadan 1432, in Cape Town). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (12:111, 19:53, 38:29, 53:3-4, 36:21, 2:214, 20:114), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's, and his cautions about the earlier scriptures have been kept.

The Creation of Adam

The first human being, shaped by Allah's own hand

Before there was a single human heart anywhere in creation to know its Maker, before one breath had been drawn or one tear shed, Allah decided to make a creature out of the dust of His own earth and to breathe His own command into it. This is not a myth about how people came to be. It is the record handed down by the One who was there before the beginning, the only witness to the first morning of the human story, and it reaches us only because He chose to tell it. Tonight the first of the prophets begins, and he begins where everything begins.

What follows is the story of Adam, peace be upon him: how Allah announced a successor on the earth, gathered the first man's clay from every colour of the ground, breathed life into him, taught him the names of all things, raised him above the angels, and then, after the slip in the Garden, taught him the very first words of repentance ever spoken. Every scene in it is also, quietly, a portrait of you, because you are his child and his heir.

Why we call them stories, and what we do with the old reports
Some people flinch at the word stories, as though it cheapens the Qur'an, as though a thing called a story cannot also be true. Mufti Menk settles the unease from the Qur'an's own vocabulary. Allah Himself calls these accounts exactly that, qasas, stories, and He tells us plainly why He narrates them: so that we may ponder, and

learn a thing or two. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not standing on the mountain on the day Allah called out to Musa, peace be upon him, and yet he knew the whole of it, because Allah informed him. That is the gift on offer across this entire month. Without revelation, none of this could ever be reached by any amount of thinking or digging. And in Surah Yusuf, the surah named for one of these very stories, Allah seals the point:

There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was it [i.e., the Qur'an] a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.

QUR'AN 12:111

Before he shapes the first man, Mufti Menk hands us a tool we will need for the next twenty-eight days, and the honesty of this whole pillar rests on it. Open the older scriptures and you will meet the same prophets there, because all of it flowed from one source. So how does a Muslim treat those reports, the Israiliyyat, the narrations carried down from the People of the Book? Israil is the prophet Ya'qub, peace be upon him, and the Israiliyyat are what reached us through the tribes who held the earlier books. Mufti Menk gives the rule the Sunnah gives, in three clean parts. Whatever our own revelation contradicts, we throw out completely. Whatever our own revelation confirms, we accept, and not because the old book happened to carry it, but because the Qur'an or the authentic Sunnah carried it too. And the great middle category, the reports our revelation neither confirms nor denies, we neither believe nor disbelieve; we may read such a thing, and it may add a little colour, but we build no article of belief upon it. Hold that rule through every chapter to come. It is

the discipline that keeps the telling tethered to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and nowhere else.

I am placing a khalifa on the earth

Notice where Allah chose to announce us. Right near the opening of the Qur'an, in Surah al-Baqarah, almost the first thing the believer reads after the gates of the Book swing open, is the declaration of the human race. Allah turned to the angels and told them what He was about to do:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?" He [Allah] said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

QUR'AN 2:30

Mufti Menk opens the word khalifa out into its two meanings, and the second is the one that should reach into your chest. The first sense is one who stands in another's place and carries on his work, the way Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, was called the khalifa of the Messenger ﷺ, the one who assumed his position and continued his task. The second sense, the more fitting here, is one who succeeds another, generation after generation after generation. Think it through carefully. The angels do not die. We do. Adam came, and after a span his children continued, and he was gone; then they too were gone and their children rose in their place. Now it is your turn, here for a stretch of years, and then you will hand the earth on to whoever comes after you. To be a human being is to be a single link in a line that

never stops moving, a successor holding the ground for a while before passing it down.

And the angels asked the question every honest person eventually asks of the human race: will You place on the earth a creature who spills blood and spreads ruin, while we never cease declaring Your praise and Your perfection? Mufti Menk is careful to mark what this was and was not. It was not objection, and not envy; it was a request to understand, the way a student asks a teacher to see the wisdom in a hard decision. And Allah's answer is the four words that hang over the entire story of mankind: I know that which you do not know. There was a purpose folded into the making of Adam that the angels, for all their nearness to their Lord, simply could not see, a purpose that includes you, because you are the ones who succeeded him. The reason a human being exists at all can come only from the One who said those words, never from any amount of searching in the ground or staring at the stars.

Clay of every colour, shaped by His hands

The Qur'an uses several different words for the substance Adam was made from, and Mufti Menk reads them not as contradictions but as stages in one slow shaping: turab, plain dust; then tin, soil once water had been worked into it; then a clay that was left to settle; then a dark, moulded clay, aged and ready. Allah gathered that dust from across the whole face of the earth, from the valleys and the mountaintops, from the red soil and the pale and the dark, from the soft sand and the hard rock. Here is the announcement of the human family before a single member of it was born:

[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay.

QUR'AN 38:71

So when you look out at the colours and the tempers of the children of Adam, the gentle ones and the hard ones, the easy company and the difficult, the strong and the frail, you are looking at the very earth he was gathered from. We were diverse before we were even alive, because the soil that became us was diverse, and what is in the soil passes into the soil's children. Mufti Menk pauses on one more small mercy in the language. Allah describes the dried clay as like the clay of pottery, and pottery is fired in a kiln, hardened in heat; yet here no fire was used at all. The likeness, he says, is in the look and not in the making. Allah lingered over this creature in a way He lingered over nothing else.

Then there is the matter of size, and of one hadith that has been badly misread for centuries. The authentic narration gives Adam a towering stature, far greater than any of us, and another hadith says that Allah created Adam upon his own image, meaning upon Adam's own final, complete form. Mufti Menk corrects the misreading head on. This does not mean, as some have wrongly claimed, that man was made in the image of God. It means only that Adam did not begin as an infant and grow the slow way we grow; he was brought into being already whole, already adult, already full in his stature, with his eyes and his limbs and his understanding all complete from the first instant. To try to picture the image of Allah is impossible for us, and we do not go there at all. We stay exactly with what the text says, and not one step beyond it.

The soul, the sneeze, and the rush in us

Mufti Menk slows the next scene right down, because the Qur'an itself slows it down. Allah shaped the body of the first man and then left it for a time, a lifeless statue of moulded clay lying in the Garden. And it was during that waiting that a watcher began to circle it. There was a being, very devout, who had earned a place among the heavenly assembly through long worship, named Iblis, and he looked the strange new creature up and down with growing unease. Why was Allah making this thing? Iblis studied the still form, peered at its hollow frame, and concluded that he could master it: this one will not be steady, this one can be pushed. Even before the soul had entered, the narration has him resolving in his pride that if he were ever given the chance, he would lead this creature astray, and that if it were raised above him, he would never bow to it.

Then the command of Allah came, and the soul was breathed in:

So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration."

QUR'AN 38:72

The life entered, the narration says, from the top, from the head. The most honoured organ came alive first, the brain, the very thing that sets a human being apart from every other creature on the earth. Then the eyes opened, and the first sight Adam ever beheld was the fruit of the Garden, for he had been placed in Paradise. And as the breath reached his nose he sneezed, and an angel told him to praise his Lord, so Adam said alhamdulillah, all praise is for Allah. That is where it comes from. When you sneeze today and say alhamdulillah, and the believer beside you answers yarhamukallah, may Allah have mercy on you, the two of you are

repeating, across all those years, the very first words of the very first man.

And then a small, piercing detail that Mufti Menk will not let pass. The life had reached Adam's head and his hands but had not yet flowed down into his legs, and already he was stretching out his hand toward the fruit he could see, unable to wait the few moments for his own body to be finished. Mufti Menk reads our entire nature in that single reach. The human being, the Qur'an says more than once, was created hasty. Look at how we treat this short stretch of life, he says, grabbing for as much as we can before the end, as much wealth, as much pleasure, as much of everything, never quite able to wait. Then he turns the observation, gently, into a prayer: that we would rush like that for the things that actually last, racing for the Qur'an, for obedience, for the worship of Allah, cramming this brief span with what we can truly keep, so that when it closes we are not left empty-handed.

Prostrate to Adam, and the first refusal

When Adam stood complete, Allah commanded the angels to prostrate to him. This was not a prostration of worship, Mufti Menk is careful to say, but a prostration of honour, an acknowledgement that this new creature had been raised in rank above them. Every one of the angels fell down at once. One did not.

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.

QUR'AN 2:34

Mufti Menk lingers on who exactly this refuser was, because it matters. Iblis was not an angel. He was of the jinn, made from a smokeless fire, while the angels were made from light, and Allah states this difference plainly in the Qur'an. The angels do not disobey; it is not in their nature. But Iblis carried a different substance and a different will, and when the test came, the difference showed itself instantly. He had been counted among the heavenly assembly the way, Mufti Menk says, a community of visitors might all be spoken of as having arrived even though the donkey one of them rode in on is not really part of the gathering. Iblis was present, and addressed alongside the angels, but he was never truly one of them. And when Allah Himself put the question to him, the rot came straight to the surface:

[Allah] said, "O Iblees, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands? Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?" He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."

QUR'AN 38:75-76

I am better than him. There it is, the very first sin ever committed against Allah, and its name is arrogance, kibr. Not lust, not greed, not violence, but pride: a creature looking at what Allah had honoured and deciding that it knew better than its Lord who deserved to be honoured.

This is the lesson Mufti Menk presses hardest in the whole episode, and he presses it because it is aimed squarely at us and not at a fallen creature long ago. The Prophet ﷺ defined arrogance with a precision that catches most of us completely off guard. It is not, he said, wearing fine clothes or riding a good vehicle. Arrogance is rejecting the truth and looking down on

people. Sit with how much that re-draws the map. The man who points at someone well-dressed and sneers, look at him, so full of himself, has in that very sneer committed the thing he imagines he is condemning. So never, Mufti Menk warns, let a single good deed convince you that you have arrived and that the next person is nothing, because that is the exact thought that destroyed Iblis after all his worship. We do not judge a book by its cover. The one who looks beneath you today may, by a single sincere turn back to Allah, race far ahead of you tomorrow. Before Allah, he says, people are equal like the teeth of a comb. Allah loves you as much as He loves me, and He is waiting for each of us to turn to Him. A mustard seed's weight of this pride in the heart, the Prophet ﷺ warned, is enough to keep a person from Paradise, which is why no creature's fall is closer to our own daily danger than this one.

The names of everything, and the first salam

If pride was what doomed Iblis, knowledge was what raised Adam, and the contrast is the heart of why he was honoured at all. Adam was not left to learn the world the slow, stumbling way we learn it, one name at a time. Allah taught him the names of all things at once, the whole of creation laid open to him: this is a tree, this is a stone, this is a mountain.

And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful."

QUR'AN 2:31

Allah set those same things before the angels and asked them to name them, and they could not. Exalted are You, they answered, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. So Allah

turned to Adam, and Adam named them, one after another, and the angels were astonished at what this new creature carried inside him. Here Mufti Menk catches the second half of Allah's reply, the part that reaches back to the angels' opening question: I know what you reveal and what you have concealed. The honour of Adam was never muscle or stature; it was knowledge, the one gift that made even the angels see at last why he had been raised above them. What lifts a human being is what they know of their Lord and His creation, and what they choose to do with it.

Then Allah sent Adam to greet the angels, and told him exactly what to say: assalamu alaykum, peace be upon you. And they answered him, wa alaykumus salam wa rahmatullah. Mufti Menk points straight at it: this is where our greeting comes from, the very first words ever exchanged between a human being and the heavens, and Allah preserved it for us, intact, while whole nations let theirs decay into a careless hi or hey. And there is a promise folded inside the words themselves. To say peace be upon you is to say, in effect, you are safe from my harm; there is peace from me to you. That is why the Prophet ﷺ said: shall I not show you a thing which, if you do it, will spread love among you? Spread the salam between yourselves. The first sound of human society was a guarantee of safety, exchanged between Adam and the angels at the dawn of everything, and Allah handed it down, unbroken, into your mouth.

The Garden, the one tree, and the whisper

Adam was the only one of his kind, and he felt the ache of it; he longed for company, and he asked his Lord for it. Then he woke and found beside him one made like himself, Hawa, peace be upon her. A woman, Mufti Menk says, given to a man as a gift

after prayer, and he turns at once to add a word for the sisters too: that they would live their lives as the gift they truly are, and not as a burden. Allah settled the two of them in the Garden and made the whole of it theirs, with a single boundary drawn across it:

And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."

QUR'AN 2:35

When people ask why Allah would forbid anything at all in a Garden of everything, Mufti Menk answers with a child's arithmetic. A mathematics test, he says, is not only addition; there is subtraction in it too, and multiplication, and division, so that you are tested in going one way and also in going the other. One part of your soul grows by doing what Allah commands, and a different part of your soul grows by leaving what He forbids. Almost the entire Garden was permitted; one single tree was not. That, in miniature, is the whole shape of the test, then and now: a wide field of the allowed, fenced by a little that is forbidden, so that the leaving itself becomes a kind of worship.

And Allah had warned the two of them plainly, before any of it began: this one, Iblis, is to you an open enemy, so do not let him drive you out of the good you are in; in this Garden you will never hunger, never thirst, never be exposed, never grow weary. But the enemy was patient, and he was clever. He came whispering that the forbidden tree was the one secret Allah was keeping from them, the key to a life that would never end and a kingdom that would never fade:

But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their private parts. He said, "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become of the immortal."

QUR'AN 7:20

Mufti Menk marks the mistake at its very root, and it is not the eating, not yet. The mistake was that Adam turned to listen. The Qur'an teaches that the instant you feel the whisper of shaytan, you seek refuge in Allah and you shut the door; you do not lean in to hear the rest, you do not stay to weigh the offer, you do not keep the company. But Iblis tried once, and then again, and then a third time, patient and unhurried, until the whisper at last found a crack to slip through, and the gift Allah had named, that in the Garden they would never be exposed, began quietly to loosen in their hands.

The fall, and the first repentance ever made

They ate. And the moment they did, what had been hidden was suddenly bare, and the two of them rushed to fasten the leaves of the Garden over themselves, ashamed for the first time in their lives. Mufti Menk clears away two things our culture loves to drape over this scene. First, the Qur'an does not pin the fall on Hawa. Allah says the whisper came to them both and the two of them ate together, so the old habit of blaming the woman, of making her the one through whom ruin entered the world, has no ground at all in our revelation. The lesson Mufti Menk draws is the exact opposite of that habit: when a fault is ours, we own it, rather than reaching for someone else to carry it. Second, this was not a defiant, deliberate rebellion against Allah. The Qur'an says so itself:

And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.

QUR'AN 20:115

He forgot, and there was in him no firm resolve to disobey. It was a slip, not a mutiny, which is why Mufti Menk holds to what he said on the very first night: the prophets did not deliberately sin; Allah protected them. In a hadith preserved in al-Bukhari, Adam and Musa, peace be upon them both, meet and debate, and Adam answers him: would you blame me for a thing Allah had already decreed for me before I was even created, a thing that was part of the very plan that would bring all of us down to the earth? Musa fell silent, because there was no answer to it. So we do not stand over our father and condemn him. We watch what he did next.

And what he did next is the scene the whole episode has been climbing toward from its first word. Allah did not leave Adam standing in his shame. He taught him words, and through those words He forgave him:

They said, "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."

QUR'AN 7:23

Let the weight of it land the way Mufti Menk lets it land. This was the first repentance in the entire history of existence. Tawbah, the turning back of a servant to his Lord, was an act of worship that no creature anywhere had ever performed, and the angels witnessed something brand new come into the world. Here was the answer, perhaps, hidden inside Allah's words to them, I know that which you do not know. The angels cannot sin, and so they

can never know the particular sweetness of return; you can sin, and you can also turn back, and that turning is among the most beloved things you will ever do in the sight of Allah. Tawbah is the very thing the human being was made for. And Mufti Menk leaves us, as Allah left Adam, with the way home itself, the four conditions of a true return: admit the sin, regret it, ask Allah to forgive it, and resolve never to go back to it. Meet those four, and no soul on the earth ever needs to know what passed. Between you and Allah alone, it is wiped clean.

What the creation of Adam asks of our faith

It is tempting to read the making of the first man as something that happened once, long ago and far away, a grand opening scene safely sealed in the past. That would be to miss the question it puts to you, because every part of this story is also a description of you, his child and his heir. Strip it down to its lessons and you will not read your own days, or your own falls, the same way again.

You are a khalifa, here only for a turn. Allah set the announcement of the human race near the very opening of the Qur'an, in Surah al-Baqarah, and the word He used means a successor, one in a line that keeps moving on. You did not begin this earth and you will not end it; you have been handed it for a span, by those who came before, and you will hand it to those who come after. Live the turn knowing that it ends. A khalifa who forgets he is only standing in for a while, who mistakes the borrowed ground for his own, has already misunderstood why he is here.

Arrogance is the first sin, and the subtlest, and it is the thread that runs straight from Iblis to the danger in your own chest tonight. He did not fall through lust or appetite. He fell through

one thought, I am better than him, and the Prophet ﷺ defined the disease so precisely that most of us would never have recognised it in ourselves: rejecting the truth, and looking down on people. The honour of Adam, by contrast, was knowledge, not stature, the names of everything taught to him by his Lord. So measure yourself by the right thing, and never let a prayer prayed or a good deed done quietly persuade you that you have arrived and the next person is nothing. That conviction did not save Iblis after all his worship; it destroyed him.

And here the line reaches the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself, and through him to you. The salam that Adam first exchanged with the angels, peace be upon you, is the very greeting the Prophet ﷺ urged us to spread so that love would grow between the believers, a guarantee of safety passed down from the first morning of creation into the ordinary doorways of our lives. The truth Mufti Menk anchored on the opening night, that the prophets did not deliberately sin and that Allah protected them, runs unbroken through the whole chain of them to the final Messenger ﷺ, whose seerah the believer follows as the last and clearest of these lives. And the human story whose opening Allah announced to the angels, the long line of successors that began with Adam, has its summit and its seal in him ﷺ, the descendant of Adam sent as a mercy to all that line. To love the story of Adam is to be carried, by its own current, toward the one who completes it.

So when you fall, and you will fall, do not do what Iblis did and let pride keep you standing upright in your wrong, too proud to bow, too proud to admit the truth, arguing with your Lord to the very end. Do instead what your father Adam did, peace be upon him, and turn. He slipped, and then he said the words Allah taught him, and Allah forgave him at once, and the angels watched the

most human act of worship there is enter the world for the first time. That turning is still open to you tonight, on the same four simple conditions, with no soul but Allah ever needing to know. O Allah, You shaped our father with Your own hand and taught him to return to You when he slipped; teach us that same turning, forgive us as You forgave him, keep arrogance far from our hearts, and gather us among the successors who succeed in the home You prepared for the people who believe. 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.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 2: the creation of Adam. Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (12:111, 2:30, 2:31, 2:34, 2:35, 38:71, 38:72, 38:75-76, 7:20, 7:23, 20:115), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports from the People of the Book, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept: what revelation neither confirms nor denies, we neither believe nor disbelieve.

Adam, peace be upon him

He forgot, he slipped, and then he turned back

Yesterday Allah shaped the first human being with His own hand, breathed into him, taught him the names, and the angels fell down in prostration. Tonight the story turns to a single, unglamorous thing that happened next, the thing the whole rest of human history is built on. He forgot. He slipped. And then he turned back. The first sin ever committed in all of creation did not belong to Adam at all. It belonged to one who would not bow, and who then spent the rest of his existence blaming everyone but himself. The first repentance belonged to Adam, peace be upon him, who fell and came home. And we, every one of us, are the children of the one who returned.

Mufti Menk picks up the loose threads of the previous night and draws out of them something startlingly close. The trick the enemy pulled on Adam, peace be upon him, is the exact trick he still pulls on you. To see it clearly, you have to go back to the moment before the fall, to the creature who refused.

The first sin, and who really owned it

When the angels were commanded to prostrate to Adam, peace be upon him, they all went down. One creature did not. He did not bow late, he did not bow grudgingly. He refused, flat. *I am better than him*, he said, *You made me from fire and him from clay*, and in that one sentence of pride he became the accursed, the one

cast out. Mufti Menk stops to name it plainly: that was the first sin ever committed against Allah in all of creation, and it belonged to Iblis. Then Allah turned to the new couple and warned them, in words preserved in Surah Ta-Ha, about exactly who they were now living alongside:

So We said, "O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.

QUR'AN 20:117

Now watch what the enemy does once he is expelled, because it is the most human thing in the world. He does not fall to his knees and say, *my Lord, I was wrong, I sinned, forgive me*. He turns and points at Adam: *because of him I was thrown out*. And Mufti Menk presses the question that breaks the whole excuse open. Was Adam the reason Iblis was cursed? No. His own arrogance was. He had a problem, and he refused to look at its root, so he could never solve it. He ignored the cause that was sitting right under him and went hunting for someone innocent to carry the blame.

Here Mufti Menk turns the mirror on us, and it stings. When something breaks in our lives, at home, at work, between whole nations, how often do we point in every direction except at the cause we are sitting on top of? People look at the Muslim and cry "terrorist" and never once stop to ask how a thing began, what oppression lit it, where it went wrong. He is careful and clear here: Islam preaches none of that havoc. It promotes peace, dignity, respect, security, harmony, in every single direction. But the criminal who comes to create chaos and then blames the victim for it is only doing again, in our time, what Iblis did first. The lesson is not comfortable, because it asks us to do the one

thing the enemy never could. Look at the root. Own your own slip before you reach for a scapegoat.

The enemy you never see coming

After his expulsion, Iblis made Allah a promise. He swore he would come at this human being from every angle, from in front of him and from behind, from his right and from his left. Mufti Menk points to the one direction he conspicuously left off the list. He never said *from above*. He will not come from above, because from above descends the help of Allah, and there Iblis has no reach at all. That single omission is the whole game laid bare.

Think about how a thief works, Mufti Menk says. A thief who announces himself gets nothing, because you would simply get up and leave. So he never announces himself. He waits until you are looking one way and slips in from the other. When your eyes go right, he comes from the left. When you turn left, he is already behind you. And he works the way our wireless devices work, a signal crossing invisibly from somewhere out there to right here, present and powerful and unseen. Raise your hands to the Owner of the entire universe and ask for protection, and the devil has no road left to you, because the only direction he cannot touch is the one Allah holds.

This is exactly how he reached Adam in the garden, after he had already been cast out of it. People ask the sharp question: if Iblis was expelled, how did he get his message back inside? Mufti Menk points to the verse that he says lays bare the mechanism, that Iblis and his tribe see us from where we do not see them. He had a way in that we cannot fully trace, the way a connection reaches a place it is not physically standing in. And it is reported that there was a serpent from his army already inside, and that he came hidden, concealed in its throat, carried past the gate.

Which of these exactly, Allah knows best. What the story fixes, and what Mufti Menk insists we hold, is the manner of it. He did not march in as himself. He came in secret, in disguise, never out in the open. That is his signature, and it has not changed since.

And he came selling the two things people will always buy. He whispered to Adam, peace be upon him, of a tree that would give him a life that never ends and a kingdom that never runs dry. Health and wealth, forever. Mufti Menk lets you feel how ancient and how current that pitch is, because it is aimed at you tonight. Watch what happens, he says, when one of us falls ill. We make a strong prayer to Allah, we go to the doctor, we take the medicine. A month passes. Two months pass. No cure yet. And right there, in the gap, the same old whisper returns: *there is another way, let me show you, come to the fortune teller, the witch doctor, the one who calls himself a great healer and who will name for you exactly who put magic on you.* The very same bait Iblis used on the first man, aimed now at his children.

The lesson, Mufti Menk is careful to say, is not that we abandon medicine. We pray hard, we ask others to pray for us, we see the doctor, we take what we are allowed to take. The line is drawn somewhere else: we will not chase our health, or our wealth, through anything that displeases Allah. Because come what may, we have to die, today or tomorrow, and to arrive at death having failed the test, having bought the cure from a forbidden hand, is the only loss that actually counts.

Cutting lemons for the devil

This is the section Mufti Menk lingers on longest, because he has watched it tear real families apart. The healer gives you instructions, and they escalate. Take three bones and arrange them in a particular shape. Take three lemons, and let no single

one weigh more than eighty grams, and squeeze precisely five drops from each, and gather the juice, and add a little saffron. The deeper you go, the sillier and the darker it gets: bring a tongue, slaughter a dove, and sometimes things worse than that. And the whole time, Mufti Menk says, Iblis is laughing. He is laughing at us, and he is laughing before Allah, because this is the precise thing he promised he would do. *Did I not tell You I would lead them to worship me? Tell them to pray when they are sick, tell them to seek proper treatment, and they will not listen. Tell them to cut eighty lemons, and they will do it.*

He relays something he witnessed: a man told a woman that someone in her very own family had placed magic upon her, and the accusation shattered the whole family to pieces. How did the man know? No angel came to him. Mufti Menk puts the choice starkly. If Jibril did not bring him that information, then Iblis did. And when Iblis comes, he comes playing the Muslim. *I am a clean jinn, a believing jinn, I am a companion, I knew the Prophet.* It is all part of the disguise. The honest believer is fooled precisely because the liar dresses in the clothes of faith.

Against all of this, Allah draws the line that protects you. To Iblis directly, in Surah al-Hijr, He sets the boundary of the enemy's reach:

Indeed, My servants - no authority will you have over them, except those who follow you of the deviators.

QUR'AN 15:42

And about those who go running to the jinn for relief, the verdict in Surah al-Jinn is blunt:

And there were men from mankind who sought refuge in men from the jinn, so they [only] increased them in burden [i.e., sin].

QUR'AN 72:6

They went looking for protection and a cure, and they came away more burdened, more lost, more wretched, not less. So the answer to the question is no. We are not permitted to seek the aid of the jinn, and the ones who boast loudest that they own a jinn, or command one, or keep one on a leash, are in truth the most thoroughly fooled of all. Mufti Menk closes the trap with an argument that is hard to escape. Iblis deceived Adam, peace be upon him, a man who had seen him with his own eyes, who knew exactly what he was, face to face. How much more easily, then, will he deceive us, who have never once laid eyes on him? If a jinn tells you it is a Muslim, do not believe it, because in the law of the jinn they are not permitted to draw close to mankind in that way at all.

There is no quick fix, and this is the whole heart of it. Wealth comes one of two ways. You can work hard, earning a little each day, slowly and surely becoming secure: the difficult road, but the lawful one, and you pass your test walking it. Or you can rob and steal in the night, and yes, you may become rich fast, but you will live the rest of your life in fear of being caught, and when the whole scheme finally collapses it takes everything with it. Health is exactly the same. You pray, you hold to the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah, you take lawful medicine, and the cure comes slowly but surely. Or you go to the one who fixes you overnight, who is only Iblis, laughing.

Why did Adam slip at all

People come to Mufti Menk with the question that sounds so reasonable: a prophet, the first man, honoured above the angels, why on earth would he sin? And he answers it. But then he flips it over like a teacher who has seen exactly where the trap is laid. Listen, he says, to how Allah Himself describes it in Surah Ta-Ha:

And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.

QUR'AN 20:115

Adam, peace be upon him, did not plot it. He was not resolute, not set on disobedience, not calculating his rebellion. He forgot, and he slipped. And Mufti Menk notes a beautiful thread in the language itself: one reading of the word *insan*, the very word for a human being, ties it to *nisyan*, forgetting, as though to be human is, at the root, to be the one who forgets. So yes, our father forgot. There is even a story he tells that shows it twice over. When Allah displayed all of Adam's descendants to him and Adam saw one radiant face, he learned it was Dawud, peace be upon him, given only sixty years. Out of love Adam gave him forty years from his own life, a thousand reduced to nine hundred and sixty. And when the angel of death came at nine hundred and sixty, Adam protested that he still had forty years left. He had forgotten the gift he himself had made. Man forgets.

But here is the flip, and it is the point of the whole section. Why are *you* sinning? You do not forget. You plan it. You calculate it. You arrange the time and the place. You carry it out, and you enjoy it afterward, and then you plan it all over again. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave the cure in a single luminous line, glad tidings of Paradise to the one whose own faults keep him so busy that he has no time left to inspect the faults of everyone else.

Mufti Menk has a small story for it: someone once asked him about an imam who entered the masjid with his left foot, fishing for a ruling that would get the man removed. The wiser response, he was taught, was the opposite, that if the worst thing they could find on this imam was the foot he stepped in with, he must be a remarkable imam, and they should raise his salary. Iblis would love nothing more than to keep you utterly absorbed in the question of why Adam slipped, while you yourself walk calmly and deliberately into a sin you fully intend to commit.

The promise every soul has already made

There is a moment, Mufti Menk says, that all of us have forgotten, and the Qur'an tells us about it precisely because we have forgotten it. When Adam was created, Allah drew out from his back every single soul that would ever descend from him, all of humanity to the very last person before the Hour, and spread them out and showed them to him. *This is your progeny, succeeding one after the other.* And then He put one question to every soul at once. The scene is preserved in Surah al-A'raf:

And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware."

QUR'AN 7:172

Every soul answered. *Yes, we testify.* Yours among them. And Allah seals the scene with the reason He records it, closing the door on the excuse before it can ever be made. The very next verse shuts a second door:

Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allāh before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?"

QUR'AN 7:173

So no one will stand on that Day and plead ignorance, and no one will stand and say *I was only a helpless child, following the shirk of my forefathers*. Each soul gave its own word, in its own voice. Ask yourself honestly, Mufti Menk says, do you remember that day? Not one of us does. So Allah, in His mercy, answers: no matter, I will keep on sending you reminders. And that is what the Qur'an is. The covenant in your chest, the faint pull toward your Lord that you have felt your whole life and could never quite name, has a date older than the world itself, and revelation comes to wake it up. Which means that belief is not some strange, foreign thing being demanded of you. It is the oldest promise you ever made, finally being called in.

And the warning folded inside that mercy is real. No one will be judged through a forefather. Each of us will stand before Allah with nothing and no one between, no translator, no intermediary, and answer for ourselves alone. If those who came before us did right, we praise Allah and hold to it. If they did wrong, it falls to us to stop it, to change it, to break the chain, because on that Day the question comes to you directly and the answer must be yours. The only safe answer is the one we keep ready now.

Turning the page, the road back

When Adam, peace be upon him, was finally sent down to the earth, Allah did not abandon him to it. He sent him down with the

promise that holds the entire human story together, the promise in Surah Ta-Ha:

[Allāh] said, "Descend from it [i.e., Paradise] - all, [your descendants] being enemies to one another. And if there should come to you guidance from Me - then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter]."

QUR'AN 20:123

And the other half of the promise, the warning that completes it:

And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed [i.e., difficult] life, and We will gather [i.e., raise] him on the Day of Resurrection blind."

QUR'AN 20:124

This, Mufti Menk says, is why the restless are restless and the discontented cannot find their rest. Not for lack of money. For distance from Allah. The one who turns away from His remembrance lives a life that is narrow, pinched, joyless however full his hands may be. The atheist, the agnostic, the one certain that this life is all there is and that we simply rot in the ground at the end of it, can be drowning in possessions and still feel that something is missing, because a human being was never built to live without his Lord. We were made for spirituality, and without it this life cannot satisfy us, no matter what we pile into it.

And underneath every line of it runs the mercy that is the real heart of tonight. Mufti Menk says it almost gently. The mercy of Allah is so vast that a person could follow Iblis for seventy years, and if for one single second he turns back to Allah in truth, every last drop of that evil is wiped away, and he begins again on a clean page. Turning the page is not hard. But, and he is insistent

on this, a page does not turn itself. When you reach the end of a page in a book and you want to know what is written on the next one, you have to put your finger to it and move it. Effort is required, and the effort is small, and it is the whole difference.

Adam made that effort. In one narration he stands before his Lord and asks: *my Lord, did You not create me with Your own hand, and honour me, and command the angels to prostrate to me? Yes. Then if I obey You and seek Your forgiveness, will You return me to the garden?* And Allah answers: yes. That, Mufti Menk says, is the whole message, and it is addressed directly to you. The first human being fell, repented, and was promised home. And the door he walked back through has never once, in all the ages since, been shut behind him.

What Adam asks of our faith

It would be easy to read the first day of the first man as a story about loss: the garden behind him, the long exile ahead, an enemy already at work in the world. That would be to miss the question it puts to us. The Qur'an does not remember that day for the loss. It remembers it for the return. Iblis sinned and blamed everyone but himself and stayed cursed. Adam forgot, slipped, owned it, asked, and was promised the way home. Between those two responses lies the whole of your life, and Adam's first day is Allah quietly showing you which one leads where.

So look at the root, not the scapegoat. The enemy was thrown out by his own arrogance and spent his rage on an innocent man, because he could not bear to face the cause that was sitting inside his own chest. We do it constantly, in our homes and our work and our quarrels, pointing in every direction but the one that would actually solve the problem. Adam's first lesson is the hardest and the most freeing: find the cause you are sitting on

before you reach for someone to blame, because the problem you will not name is the problem you can never fix.

And refuse the quick fix. The enemy never comes from above, only from the sides, selling health and wealth on terms that cost you your Lord. The witch doctor, the fortune teller, the one who claims to own a jinn, the overnight cure, these are not new temptations but the oldest one there is, the very bait that worked on the first man, who had actually seen the deceiver face to face. Over Allah's true servants the devil has no authority at all. The whole of your protection is in raising your hands to the One above, taking lawful means slowly and surely, and trusting that what comes by the permitted road is the only thing worth having.

Here is where it all reaches you. The covenant Allah took from every soul in the back of Adam, *Am I not your Lord?*, is the reason faith feels, when you are honest, less like a stranger knocking and more like a memory you cannot quite place. You answered *yes* before the world began. The Qur'an is the reminder Allah promised, sent to wake that ancient *yes* in your chest. And the chain of guidance He pledged on that first day, *whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray nor suffer*, runs forward through every prophet who ever stood and called people home, and completes in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the final reminder, the last messenger sent to rouse the covenant in every soul before the door of revelation closed. From Adam at the start to him ﷺ at the end, it is one unbroken call, and it is calling you.

And Adam's repentance is the model of yours. He did not despair, he did not argue, he did not blame the serpent or the tree or his wife. He turned, with the words his Lord taught him,

the words that became the prayer of everyone who has ever slipped and wanted home:

They said, "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."

QUR'AN 7:23

So do the one thing Iblis never could. Put your finger to the page and turn it. Follow your old habits for years if that is the truth of where you have been, and then turn back to Allah for one sincere second, and watch what His mercy does with it. May Allah, who took our promise before we were born and never once stopped sending us back to it, wake the covenant in our chests, keep the enemy from every side of us, and let us answer His call the way our father Adam answered it, not with excuses, but with *rabbana zalamna anfusana*, and return us, as He returned him, to the home He has already prepared. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 3 (Adam, peace be upon him, on earth, part 1). Qur'an: Sahih International (20:117, 15:42, 72:6, 20:115, 7:172, 7:173, 20:123, 20:124, 7:23), verified via quran.ai. Where the lecture relays a report from outside the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, Mufti Menk's own framing and caution have been kept.

Adam on earth, part 2

The first family, the first murder, and the first soul to taste death

The story of the human race does not begin in a palace, and it does not begin in peace. It begins with a forgiven man who had already lost a Garden, building a family on a young and empty earth, carrying inside him a warning he could never put down: that there are two forces at work in this world, and one of them never stops whispering. Adam, peace be upon him, had felt that whisper take everything from him once. He would spend the rest of his long life telling his children where it comes from. And then, in his own household, in the first generation ever born of man, he would watch it work again, this time not toward a lost Garden but toward a brother's blood.

This is the close of Adam's story, the last we hear of him before the chain of prophets moves on. It runs from a simple question, what is it that truly makes us happy, through the first murder ever committed and the first grave ever dug, to a truth that brought Mufti Menk himself to tears: that when Adam at last met the angel of death, he was not afraid, and he was not sorry. He was glad. He was going home.

What is it that makes us happy

Mufti Menk opens not with Adam at all, but with a question put to the reader's own heart. Be honest, he says. What is it that makes us happy? A good deal struck, a brisk day of business. The lifting

of a sickness. New clothes that fit well, a new vehicle parked out front, a won ticket to somewhere warm, a raised salary with shorter hours. We are honest creatures, and these are honestly the things that lift us. There is nothing wrong with the lift. But Mufti Menk wants us to notice how thin it is, how quickly it passes. That kind of happiness is for a moment. It is not built to last.

He sets beside it a different picture. Our mother Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, watched the Prophet ﷺ stand in prayer through the night until his feet swelled, and she asked him, gently, why: Allah has forgiven you everything, past and to come, so why do you exhaust yourself like this? His answer is the whole lesson. Should I not be a grateful servant? His joy was not in relief from hardship; his joy was the standing itself, the chance to give something back to the One who made him, even at the cost of swollen feet. And Mufti Menk turns it on us with a quiet sting: none of our feet are swollen, and still we find one hour of standing hard. The true excitement, he says, is meant to come when your legs begin to ache and you whisper, Allah, this is for You. When you dress modestly and someone laughs, and instead of shrinking you think, this is what makes me happy, because I know what is being written next to my name.

He reaches for the verse that frames it, the one Allah revealed about exactly this scorn:

Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed.

QUR'AN 83:29

The criminals laughed at the believers in this world. So when a comment lands, when someone mocks the way you cover or

pray, Mufti Menk reads it almost as a sign you are on the right road. This whole opening is not a detour from Adam's story. It is the key to its ending. Hold the question, what makes you happy, all the way to the moment Adam dies, and you will understand why a man could meet death with relief.

Two forces, from the very beginning

Adam was not only the first father. He was the first to carry the message, the first nabi, and what he taught his children was simply what he had lived. He gathered them and told them how everything began, who Allah is, how they must worship Him alone because He alone is the Maker, and how the devil had cheated their parents out of the Garden. From the opening line of the human story, then, there are two camps: the party of Allah and the party of the devil. And Mufti Menk's relief, the thing he keeps returning to, is that we were told this at the very start. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. We were shown where the trouble comes from, which means we are not guessing, and we can actually do something about it.

And Allah does not only warn; He arms. Mufti Menk reads the warning as spoken directly to every one of us:

O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them. Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe.

QUR'AN 7:27

He sees you from where you cannot see him. That is the asymmetry of the fight, and it would be a terrifying one, except that Allah hands us the cover. So we are taught to take refuge

every single morning and evening: the dua at the close of Surah al-Mu'minun, the verse of the Throne three times by day and three by night, and the last two surahs of the Qur'an, the two that seek shelter in Allah from every kind of harm. Read them, Mufti Menk says, and it is as if a steel armour closes around you for the day, against the evil eye, against envy and jealousy, against magic and the unseen, against the whisper itself. The dua Allah teaches is small enough to carry everywhere:

And say, "My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the incitements of the devils, And I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me."

QUR'AN 23:97-98

Not only protection from the whispering, but protection from his presence in the first place. And here is the secret underneath all of it, the one Mufti Menk wants us to walk away convinced of: the devil's plot is weak. He looks strong only because we let ourselves believe he is. Stand up to him with the words of Allah, and he runs.

The first family, and a quarrel over looks

The children of Adam came in pairs, a boy and a girl with each birth, of every colour and shape, the whole spreading future of humanity already fanning out inside one household. Their law was not ours. A brother could not marry the sister born alongside him in the same pair, but he could marry a sister from a different pair, and that was the arrangement Adam, peace be upon him, set in place when his children grew and the longing for marriage was placed in them. Here Mufti Menk pauses to be careful, leaning on the reports the historians carry, Ibn Kathir among them, for the details the Qur'an itself does not name. He hands

them on as the historians did, neither hardening them into certainty nor discarding them.

Two of Adam's sons stand at the centre. The elder, the reports say, was the plainer of the two, but the sister born alongside him was beautiful. The younger was handsome, but his sister was not. Adam paired each son with the other's sister, exactly as their law required. And there, at the very dawn of the human race, looks poisoned the well. The elder brother looked at the sister he was meant to marry, then looked at his own beautiful sister, and refused: why should I hand mine over to him and take his? The question is small and ugly and entirely familiar, and Mufti Menk lets it land on us, because nothing about it has aged. Marriage still tears families apart over precisely this, over beauty and status and who gets whom. The Prophet ﷺ warned that when someone comes whose faith and character please you, you should marry them off, and that if you do not, there will be fitna and corruption spreading across the earth. From the very first family, that is exactly what happened. The corruption that the Prophet ﷺ warned of began with one man's eye for looks.

Two offerings, and a fire that knew the difference

When the quarrel would not settle, Adam took it to Allah, and Allah showed a way out. Let each son bring an offering, and the one whose offering is accepted is the one in the right. There were no poor on the earth yet to receive a charity, so the offering was laid upon a mountain and left, and a fire would descend and consume whatever Allah accepted, leaving the rejected gift untouched where it lay. One son was a shepherd; the other, the one who had been arguing, was a farmer. The shepherd brought a fine animal, his good and his best. The farmer brought produce, but not his good: the near-rotten crop, the leftovers he could

spare without feeling it. They laid the two offerings down and walked away. The fire took one. It left the other. It is not hard to know which.

Allah tells the story Himself, and tells us to tell it:

And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both made an offering [to Allah], and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other. Said [the latter], "I will surely kill you." Said [the former], "Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous [who fear Him]."

QUR'AN 5:27

Here Mufti Menk pulls a lesson straight up out of the ground, because the difference between the two offerings is the difference between two hearts, made visible in two hands. Allah accepts from those who give Him their good, not their throwaways. And he ties it without flinching to the reader's own zakah. The obligatory charity is not the place for the expired tin and the worn-out rags. Give those away as voluntary sadaqah, by all means, somebody will benefit. But the zakah that Allah commands should be something decent, the way the Prophet ﷺ taught Muadh ibn Jabal when he sent him to collect it: do not take people's best, and do not take their worst, but take from the wholesome middle. Do not, Mufti Menk says, deduct your expired stock from your zakah and call it given. And do not flinch at how small the share even is. Two and a half percent, and still a person scrounges and asks, do I really have to give on this too? Other faiths, he notes, ask their people for a tenth and more, and give it gladly. Charity, the Prophet ﷺ promised, has never once decreased anyone's wealth. The brother who held back his best

had already failed the test before the fire ever came down. The fire only revealed what was already true.

The first murder, and a brother who would not strike back. Watch now what the rejected brother does, because Mufti Menk says it is the devil's entire method laid bare. He does not ask the one honest question, the only useful one: why was my offering refused? He never looks at the root. He simply finds someone to blame and turns violent. I will surely kill you, he says, and the threat makes no sense on its face, because killing his brother will not make his own gift acceptable. But sense was never the point. Envy was the point. He looked at his brother and saw a man who was better looking, who was promised the more beautiful wife, whose offering Allah had accepted, who seemed simply to be living well, and he could not bear that he himself was not. The grudge curdled into a wish for blood.

And the answer of the righteous brother is one of the most beautiful lines in the whole Qur'an:

If you should raise your hand toward me to kill me - I shall not raise my hand toward you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds.

QUR'AN 5:28

He would rather carry no sin than win the fight. He would rather lose his life than gain a wrong. The fear of Allah, Mufti Menk teaches, is sometimes precisely this: the strength to not strike back, to let your hand fall when every nerve in you wants to raise it. But envy had already hardened past the reach of words, and the devil, who had taught his father nothing good, now taught the killer the thing that had never been done. There was no

precedent for ending a life; no human being had ever stopped another's breath. So the whisper supplied the method. He took something hard, a rock, and he struck his brother with it, and the breathing stopped. The earth received its first murder. And the Qur'an records the exact mechanism of the fall, the way a soul talks itself into the unthinkable:

And his soul permitted to him the murder of his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers.

QUR'AN 5:30

His soul permitted him. That is how it always goes. And then, the instant it was done, the killer stood over the body with no idea on earth what to do with it, and the regret came flooding in. Mufti Menk catches the pattern with painful precision: sin is dressed up beautifully on the approach, made to look like relief, like justice, like the answer, and the very moment it is committed the devil walks away and leaves you alone with the guilt. The run-up is gorgeous; the aftermath is ash. So Allah, in mercy even toward a murderer, sent him a teacher with feathers:

Then Allah sent a crow searching [i.e., scratching] in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother. He said, "O woe to me! Have I failed to be like this crow and hide the disgrace [i.e., body] of my brother?" And he became of the regretful.

QUR'AN 5:31

A crow scratched a hollow in the earth, and the sight broke the killer open. Am I not even able to be like this crow, and bury my brother? He dug, and he buried, and he was left among the regretful. One report Mufti Menk relays says he could no longer bear to remain near his father at all, that he carried the body a

long way off and buried it at a distance, and then he was gone. The first grave on earth was dug in shame, by the hands that had filled it.

There is a thread here that runs all the way to the Prophet ﷺ, and Mufti Menk's telling carries it: because this man was the first ever to kill, the first to open that door and make the unthinkable thinkable, a share of the burden of every unjust killing that has happened since falls back on him. He set the precedent. He showed the human race that it could be done. Whoever is first to make a sin easy bears something of every time it is repeated, and the first murderer bears a portion of every wrongful death the world has ever seen. It is a heavy and a sobering law, and it is the Prophet's ﷺ own teaching reaching back to interpret the very first crime.

Adam gathers his children, and is glad to go

Adam, peace be upon him, lived on. He saw thousands of his descendants spread across the face of the earth, into its far places and its many tongues, and to the very end he kept doing the one thing he had always done: gathering them, reminding them. This is who Allah is. This is how the devil works. This is how he cheated me out of the Garden, so guard yourselves. That, Mufti Menk says, is the sunnah of every single prophet, and he turns it directly on us. How many of us sit our own children down and tell them plainly what Allah asks, what helps and what harms, the way Adam sat with his? Spend the time with them. It is what the prophets did.

Then Adam grew ill, and Allah set a gentle plan in motion. He sent some of Adam's children to a certain place, where they met a group of angels dressed in white, carrying tools the children of Adam had never laid eyes on, implements for digging. The angels

walked back with them and told them the news: your father's time has come. When the angel of death drew near, Hawwa moved to put herself between him and her husband, to shield Adam, and Adam waved her gently aside. He had been created first; he would go first; he was not afraid. He even asked, almost in passing, do I not have forty more years left to me? And he was reminded that he himself had already given those forty years away, to Dawud, peace be upon him, long before. He remembered. And he was content.

But before they took his soul, he gathered his children one final time, on his deathbed, and left them the message that would echo down the entire chain of prophets that came after him: Allah will send you messengers. He will not leave you alone. They will come in different tongues and different names, in different lands and different times, but the message will be one and the same: worship Allah alone, keep clear of the devil, and know that the very greatest crime a human being can commit is to set up a partner beside the One who made him. That single sentence, given by the first prophet on his last day, is the sentence every prophet after him would be sent to carry, all the way down to the final Messenger ﷺ.

The gift of death, and the chain that carries on

Why was Adam glad to go? This is the question Mufti Menk says brought tears to his own eyes as he read, and the answer reaches back and takes the hand of the question he opened with. Adam was glad because he knew where he was going. He was going home, back toward the Garden he had come from, back to his Lord, away from a world of hardship and sickness and loss, toward the One who had forgiven him long ago. And Mufti Menk hands us the hadith that reframes the whole of it: the gift of a true

believer is death. Not because life is hated, but because death is the door, and on the far side of the door is the prize. He pictures a child who labours all year for an award and then refuses to attend the ceremony, and asks the obvious thing: how is the prize ever collected, if you will not walk up to the stage? We have been promised that prayer and charity and a covered, God-conscious life are rewarded. The stage where that reward is finally placed in our hands stands on the other side of death. So while it is entirely natural to weep for someone we miss, and the tears of grief are a mercy, we never question Allah's decree, because whatever He chose for that soul was the very best that could have been chosen for it.

When Adam passed, the angels showed his children how it is done. They dug a proper grave, washed his body, shrouded him, prayed over him, and laid him to rest, leaving the hollow at the side of the grave that Muslims still leave to this day. This, the angels told them, is how you bury your dead. And the line did not end with Adam. His son Shith carried the message after him, one of the prophets given pages of guidance, and on it went, harder with each generation as the people drifted further from the memory of the beginning, but never broken. We are not told the full number of messengers Allah sent. Twenty-five are named in the Qur'an, and a narration puts the total as high as a hundred and twenty-four thousand, though Mufti Menk is careful to say we cannot be certain of the figure; what the Qur'an tells us plainly is that there were messengers Allah related to us and messengers He did not, and only He knows their number. Adam was the first link in that chain. Every prophet in this series is another. And the whole of it bends, language after language and name after name, toward the final Messenger ﷺ, whose single message was the same single message Adam left his children on

his deathbed. This is why belief in all of the prophets, from the first of them to the last, is woven into the fabric of your own iman, the fourth of its six articles: it is one unbroken thread, and when you learn their stories you are taking hold of the end of it.

What Adam's death asks of our faith

It would be easy to read the close of Adam's story as something heavy and far away, a tale of firsts safely sealed in the deep past: the first envy, the first murder, the first grave. That would be to miss what it is actually doing, which is putting a series of quiet questions to your own heart.

It asks, first, whether you have taken your cover. The devil sees you from where you cannot see him, and that would be a losing fight, except that Allah handed Adam's children the armour and meant it for you too. The words of refuge each morning and evening, the verse of the Throne, the last two surahs of the Qur'an: these are not a ritual to rush through but a steel shell closing around your day. And underneath them is the truth Mufti Menk will not let you forget, the one that changes how the whole battle feels: the devil's plot is weak. He is frightened of the believer who stands firm. Meet his whisper with the words of Allah and he is the one who flees. We spend our lives imagining him strong. Adam's story tells us he is not.

It asks, second, what you actually give. Two brothers laid two offerings on a mountain, and a fire came down and told the truth about both of them, because what was in the hand only showed what was already in the heart. One gave his good; one gave what he would not miss. Ask yourself, honestly, which brother your charity resembles. Is your zakah your good and your whole, or is it the expired and the worn, given to be rid of it? Allah accepts

from those who fear Him, and fearing Him begins with refusing to hand Him your leftovers and call it worship.

It asks, third, whether you can look at the root before you reach for a scapegoat. The killer never once asked why his own offering had failed; he only found someone to blame, and the blame became blood. That is the devil's method in every home and every heart, and the cure is the harder, humbler thing: when something goes wrong, examine yourself before you turn on the person beside you. And in the same breath it asks whether you have the fear of Allah that the murdered brother had, the strength to let your hand fall, to refuse to carry a sin even when carrying it would let you win. I will not raise my hand against you, because I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds. Sometimes the bravest thing faith asks of you is to not strike back.

And it asks, last and deepest, what truly makes you happy, the question Mufti Menk opened with and Adam's death finally answers. Adam met the angel of death glad, because his happiness was never lodged in the things this world gives and takes. It was lodged in his Lord, and so death could not frighten him; it could only carry him home. The believer grieves, but does not despair, and never questions the decree, because the One who decreed it chose only the best. Here is the line that should reach down into your ordinary days: live so that you are walking the same direction Adam was walking, toward Allah and not away from Him, and the day the door opens for you it will open onto the prize and not onto loss. The peace Adam was promised was never going to be found in full on this earth. It is waiting in the home we are all walking back toward, the home the whole chain of prophets, from Adam to the Messenger ﷺ, was sent to point us to. So take what the first prophet left his children, and make it your own: shelter in Allah's words morning and evening, give Him

your best and not your scraps, soften your heart before envy can harden it, and hold to the one thread that runs through every prophet to the last of them. May Allah keep the devil weak before us, gather us as one chain with all of His messengers, and make our own death, when it comes, the gift He has promised to those who believe.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 4 (Adam on earth, part 2). Qur'an: Sahih International (7:27; 23:97-98; 5:27, 5:28, 5:30, 5:31; 83:29), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports beyond the Qur'an and Sunnah, Mufti Menk's own framing and caution have been kept.

Shith, the son who kept the flame

The trust passed on, from a father's hand to a son's

The earth was new and already it had buried a son and a father. One of Adam's boys had lifted his hand against his brother and let fall the first blood the ground had ever drunk, and now the father of all of us had closed his eyes for the last time and been laid in the soil he was made from. The world was barely begun, and it was already grieving. And in that fresh grief a question stood up that has never since sat back down: now that the first man is gone, who will keep the flame? Who will go on reminding people, in a world that has only just learned how to mourn, that there is One God and He alone is to be worshipped?

This is the fifth day of our walk with the prophets, and it belongs to a son the Qur'an never names but the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told us about: Shith, peace be upon him, known to the English-speaking world as Seth. His is a shorter story than most of those still to come, and the shortness is not an accident. So little of it is firmly established that Mufti Menk handles it exactly the way a careful man handles something precious and fragile. He gives you what is sound. He flags what is not. And he never once dresses a guess up as a fact. To read Shith well is to learn that discipline early, because every prophet still ahead will ask it of us again.

The son who stayed close

Of all the children of Adam, Shith was the one who stayed close. While his father still walked the earth, this son sat at his feet and learned from him, obeyed his instructions, and then turned and did for everyone behind him exactly what Adam had done for him. He reminded. He reminded his brothers and his nephews, the grandchildren and the great-nephews coming up after them, and at the dawn of the world there was only one thing in all of creation that needed reminding, because nothing else had happened yet. Worship Allah alone. Remember that the devil swore an oath against you. Hold the line your father held. That was the whole of the message, and it was enough, because it is the message under every other message that would ever come.

Mufti Menk is plain from the outset that Shith is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an. What we know of him reaches us through the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. There is a narration that across the long history of guidance Allah revealed one hundred and four scriptures to the prophets, and that of these, fifty were given to Shith, peace be upon him. Sit with the weight of that for a moment. This quiet son who stayed home and reminded his family was not merely a keeper of his father's words. He was a prophet in his own right, handed pages of revelation from his Lord to guide the very first generations of humankind. The light Adam had carried was not buried with Adam. Before the grave had even settled, it was already burning in another hand. The trust was passed on.

That is the first thing this small story wants you to see, and it is the thing the whole rest of the Qur'an is built on. Guidance is not a single event that happened once and ended. It is a relay. It is a flame cupped against the wind and handed forward, father to son, prophet to people, generation to waiting generation. Adam lit it. Shith carried it. And the carrying never stopped.

Two roads out of one family

The family did not all walk the same way. The story of Adam's children is, almost from the beginning, the story of a road that forks. One of his sons, the one whose name reaches us as Qabil, the very brother who had committed that first murder, was a hard man to be near. He carried aggression in him, and greed, and arrogance; he was a difficult, abrasive character, and he did what difficult men so often do. He gathered his own household and left. He went away from the rest of them, far off, down out of the high mountainous country where Adam and Shith and the faithful had made their home, and out onto the open flatland of the valley below. The believers stayed up on the heights. The line of Qabil went down. Two roads now ran out of one family, and with every passing year they drifted further apart.

Then came a command, part of the sacred law given to Shith, peace be upon him: the people of the mountain were not to mix with the people who had gone down to the valley. Qabil had taken his family and his temperament and his choices away to one side, and the believers were instructed plainly to keep their distance. And they obeyed. They did not mingle, and Mufti Menk notes that by keeping that separation they were kept safe, to a great degree, from what was beginning to grow below them.

Here he stops and turns the moment toward us, because the command lands a question that never expired. When you are told to keep certain company at arm's length, when you are taught not to drift in a certain direction or run with a certain crowd, the very first thing the heart wants to know is: what is so wrong with them? What is the harm? Why the rule? Hold that question in your hand, exactly as the young people on the mountain would soon hold it, because it is about to be answered, and it is going to be answered the hard way.

The promise the devil never forgot

To understand what was waiting in that valley, you have to go back further still, to a vow made before any of this began. When the devil refused to prostrate to Adam, he did not slink away in silence. He made a promise to Allah. Give me time, he said in effect, and I will show You; I will lead them astray. And Allah, in His wisdom, granted him the rope to try, with a warning folded into the grant: whoever follows you from among them will be with you, and they all lose, but over those who truly worship Me you will have no power at all.

Mufti Menk points to where Allah records the licence given to the enemy, in Surah al-Isra. Read it slowly, because it is a battle plan filed away at the very beginning of time and never once thrown out:

And incite [to senselessness] whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children and promise them." But Satan does not promise them except delusion.

QUR'AN 17:64

Every clause of it is a weapon, and Mufti Menk walks through them one by one. The voice, his sound: the word in the verse is his sawt, and the scholars of tafsir, almost every one of them, read it as music and musical instruments, the kind of sound that slips inside a person and finds the strings and pulls. To become a partner in wealth is to teach a man how to earn from the forbidden, to draw his income out of what Allah has shut, the illicit gain. To become a partner in children is to pull people toward unlawful desire, to share in the begetting by way of sin. The cavalry and the infantry are every force the enemy can throw

at a heart. Read the verse and you are reading the enemy's strategy laid out in his own terms, drafted at the dawn of humanity and aimed, without a single edit, straight at you.

And there is a mercy hidden in the telling. The very next breath of revelation reassures the believer:

Indeed, over My [believing] servants there is for you no authority. And sufficient is your Lord as Disposer of affairs.

QUR'AN 17:65

The licence is real, but it is leashed. The enemy can whisper and beckon and decorate, but he cannot drag a true servant of Allah by force; the leash is held by the Lord Himself. The verse before it ends by telling you the enemy's promises are nothing but delusion, so that you would know him before he ever knocked. To be told the trap in advance is already half of being saved from it.

A stranger comes to the valley

Here the telling shifts, and Mufti Menk shifts his footing with it, because what comes next is not from the Qur'an or the authentic Sunnah. It is from what the historians and the earlier generations relate, and he is careful to say so plainly. We do not build our belief on it. He relays it the way the Sunnah teaches us to receive such reports, neither swallowing them as creed nor throwing them away as worthless, because the lesson living inside this one is true, in just the way the Qur'an itself can gesture toward a former age of ignorance without handing us every detail of it. So receive what follows as Mufti Menk does: an old account carrying a real warning, not a line of doctrine.

The devil, it is related, made a calculation. He would not waste his effort on the faithful up the mountain. They knew him, they

had been warned about him, they would not follow. He would go down instead, to the valley, to Qabil's people, who had drifted from the reminder and were ripe for the picking. So he came among them in disguise, in the form of a man, a handsome one, and he played the part of a defector, as though he had abandoned the other side and come over to theirs. And he asked them for work. Look, he said, I need employment; take me in. They looked him over, and they were pleased, a man come over to their side at last, and they gave him a job.

Then the enemy did the patient thing, which is always the frightening thing. He did not rush. He laboured among them and he worked hard and he won their trust, and only then, slowly, did he begin to make sounds. Sounds no human ear had ever heard, because this was the beginning of the world and there had been no such sounds in it. He fashioned a small drum and beat it, and the people came running: what is that? They gathered around him to listen. He took a piece of metal and struck it, and a new sound rang out, and they crowded closer. He shaped a horn and blew into it, and the note carried, and they pressed in around him, delighted, marvelling at how clever these newcomers were, how far ahead of everyone else they had raced. This, the histories say, is how musical instruments first entered the world, and through that sound the enemy began, quietly, to take hold of them. They set aside an evening, a Saturday evening, when they would all come together for the sound, and amazingly, Mufti Menk observes, that very rhythm of the weekend lasts into our own day. They gathered, and they gave themselves over to the sound, and they partied, and little by little the commands of Allah began to slip out of their minds.

And all the while, up on the mountain, Shith, peace be upon him, kept doing the unglamorous work of a prophet. He kept

reminding his people. He kept speaking with them, telling them what was right and what was wrong, holding the line. Below him a man was teaching a people how to forget. Above him a man was refusing to let them.

Not everything that glitters

The young ones on the mountain heard about it. They were, after all, the very ones who had been asking that restless question, what is so wrong with our cousins down there, and they had not been satisfied with the answer. So a few of them decided to slip down and simply have a look. They did not go intending evil, Mufti Menk is careful to say; they went to watch. But from a distance they saw the lights and heard the music and felt the pull of the celebration, and then they saw the women, who, in the way these reports describe it, were strikingly beautiful on that side. And the sight pulled them in. They went closer. And going closer, they were seen, and they were handsome men of the mountain, and so the women began to do something the world had never done before: they began to make themselves up and put themselves on display to draw the men in.

This adorning of oneself to be looked at by those who have no right to the looking has a name. It is *tabarruj*, and Mufti Menk reaches for the verse in Surah al-Ahzab where Allah addresses the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, and the believing women who take their lesson from them:

And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakāh and obey Allāh and His Messenger. Allāh intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.

The former times of ignorance: Abdullah ibn Abbas, Mufti Menk relates, explained that the display of that first ignorance was this very thing, the women of Qabil's side beautifying themselves to lure the men of the mountain down. He offers it as Ibn Abbas offered it, a reading drawn on to illuminate what happened, not a claim hardened past where the evidence stands.

And so the trap closed in the oldest way there is. The youth who came only to look stayed to take part, and they went home and told the others what they had been missing, and the next time the group that came down was larger, and the time after that larger again. With the music came the loss of the lowered gaze, and with the loss of the gaze came the first adultery the earth had ever seen, sin learned the way sin is always first learned, by being shown how. This, Mufti Menk says, is the whole architecture of the trap, and it has not changed in all the centuries since: the enemy rules a person through the sound that reaches the ear and through the sight that reaches the eye. A thing can glitter and pull and delight, and still be poison. Not everything attractive is good for you. Some of the brightest invitations in this world lead straight down off the mountain, and the people on them are smiling all the way down.

Everything you see is a test

Step back and a harder question rises. Why was any of this permitted at all? Why give the enemy his licence, why let the sound be invented, why leave the bright valley glittering within sight of the faithful at all? And the answer, Mufti Menk says, is the answer to why we are here in the first place. Adam, peace be upon him, had asked his Lord's forgiveness and been sent down

to a world built for one purpose, and the word for that purpose is test. We are not here for comfort, or for play, or for the endless gathering of things. We are here to be tested, and the devil's leash is part of the test, and so everything we see, every shining thing put within our reach, is an examination set by Allah to find out who will fear Him when no eye is watching.

He points to the pilgrim in the state of ihram, to whom Allah says plainly that the game will be brought near:

O you who have believed, Allāh will surely test you through something of the game that your hands and spears [can] reach, that Allāh may make evident those who fear Him unseen. And whoever transgresses after that - for him is a painful punishment.

QUR'AN 5:94

The hunting animal comes so close it is almost as if it speaks, hunt me, hunt me, and it is forbidden in that sacred state for exactly one reason, so that the one who fears Allah in the unseen becomes known from the one who does not. And he recalls the people of the Sabbath, forbidden to work their nets on their holy day, and how the fish surfaced in shoals on precisely that day, as if to taunt them, until they engineered a way around the law, casting their nets on Friday evening and lifting them on Sunday morning and telling themselves they had kept the rule. The fish were the test. The pretence was the failure.

The sin, in other words, is deliberately within reach. It is committable. The bright thing is left bright and the forbidden thing is left close, and whether your hand closes around it comes down to one thing only, how much of Allah is alive in your heart. And the danger, Mufti Menk warns, is that it always begins small and then grows. The one who can get your finger tapping along

to a beat can, in time, get that same hand doing far worse; he plants the small surrender, beautifies it, and lets it spread, one thing leading to the next. So the test is not a cruelty laid upon us. It is the entire point of the journey. Adam's children sat the exam on the mountain and in the valley, and we are sitting the very same exam now, in our own valleys, with our own bright sounds glittering a short walk downhill.

The door that never closes

And then, after all that long descent, Mufti Menk lands the story exactly where the Qur'an lands so many of its stories: not in despair, but on hope. For all the falling, the last word does not belong to the fall. Listen to where Allah takes those who have wronged their own souls:

And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allāh and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allāh? - and [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know.

QUR'AN 3:135

Those - their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow [in Paradise], wherein they will abide eternally; and excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers.

QUR'AN 3:136

These, Mufti Menk says, are among the most hope-filled verses in the entire Book. The one who falls into immorality, who oppresses his own soul, and then remembers his Lord and turns to seek forgiveness, and does not stubbornly dig in and carry on knowing full well what he is doing, is not merely pardoned. He is

promised gardens, and a home in them forever. No one, Mufti Menk insists, is ever beyond repair. No one has ever wandered so far down the valley that the road back is closed. Allah gives a chance, and then another, and then ten more, and we are never told how many remain in the account, which is exactly why the only wise thing a person can do is to seize the one chance sitting in his hand right now and turn.

Do not wait, he pleads, for the heart attack that finally makes a man drop a lifelong habit overnight on a single word from a doctor, when the Lord of all the worlds has been gently telling him to drop it for years. Why does it take a brush with death to do what a whole life of reminders could not? Some of the youth who came down off the mountain were lost in the valley, and that is a real and sobering grief. But the door that Allah holds open in these two verses was never shut to them either, just as it is not shut to you tonight, no matter how far down you reckon you have wandered. This, in the end, is the very trust that Shith carried up on the high ground: not only worship Allah alone, but come back to Him, He is waiting. The reminder and the open door are the same message. That is what a prophet keeps alive.

What Shith asks of our faith

It would be easy to let Shith's story stay small, a brief and curious episode at the very start of things, admired in passing and then left behind for the longer lives ahead. That would be to miss the question it presses into our hands, which is one of the largest questions in the whole series, wearing the plainest clothes.

Step back and see what Shith actually is in the long story of guidance. He is a link. Prophethood did not begin and end with Adam, and it did not begin and end with Shith; it was carried forward, father to son, generation to generation, fifty scriptures

here and far more revelation yet to come, each prophet keeping the one same message burning and handing it on like a flame cupped against the wind. That chain runs the entire length of this book and far beyond it, from Adam through Nuh and Ibrahim and Musa and Isa, peace be upon them all, and it does not stop until it reaches the one hand it was always travelling toward: Muhammad ﷺ, the final Messenger, who received the last and complete revelation, after whom the pages of prophethood were sealed and no prophet would ever come again. The very same call Shith made to a handful of relatives on a mountainside, that there is One God and He alone is to be worshipped, is the call that fills the Qur'an from its first surah to its last. Across thousands of years and dozens of prophets, the message never changed by a single word, because the truth has no other word to change into.

And now look where the flame has come to rest. The chain did not stop with the Prophet ﷺ either, because he made sure of it. Convey from me, he said, even if it is one single verse. With that command the relay that ran from Adam to Shith to every prophet after them ran on, past the last of the prophets, and into the hands of ordinary people. It runs on to you. You are the one holding it now. The trust that Shith refused to let die when he sat at his father's feet and then turned to remind everyone behind him is the same trust set down, this night, in your keeping.

This is the line the seerah draws straight back to that mountain. When the Prophet ﷺ stood on a hill at the dawn of his own mission and called his clan to the worship of One God, he was not beginning something new under the sun; he was carrying the oldest message there is, the one Shith carried, the one Adam carried before him. And when the believers of Makkah whispered it to one another in secret, and carried it out under cover of the

hijrah, and taught it to their children in Madinah, they were doing precisely what the people of the mountain did: keeping the flame, holding the line, guarding the gaze, fearing Allah when the powerful were not watching, and passing on what they had been given to the ones coming up behind. The cast changes in every generation. The trust does not.

So the simplest, truest way to honour Shith, the son who stayed close and then refused to let the message slip, is to do the small and unglamorous things he did. Hold the line you were taught to hold. Keep the gaze that the valley below is forever trying to steal. Fear Allah in the unseen, where no eye but His can reach. And when you fall, and you will, do not lie there as if the door has closed, because it has not, and the most hope-filled verses in the Book were written for exactly that moment; turn, and turn now, and do not wait for the heart attack to do what the reminder is begging you to do tonight. And then, having received the flame, pass it on. Read one verse to one person tomorrow. Carry the trust one hand further down the line, because that is all it has ever asked of any of its keepers, from the son of Adam on the mountain to you. The flame is still moving. It is still in living hands. Tonight, for a little while, it is in yours.

May Allah make us keepers of His message and never the ones who let it slip; teach us to know the enemy before he knocks, to fear Him when no eye is upon us, and to turn back the very moment we fall; and join us to the chain of His prophets that runs from Adam to Shith to His final Messenger ﷺ, that we might hand on what we were given, even a single verse, to those who come after us.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 5 (Shith). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International

(17:64-65, 33:33, 5:94, 3:135-136), verified via quran.ai. Where the lecture relays reports from earlier generations, Mufti Menk's own caveat that we do not build belief upon them has been kept.

Idris, raised to a high place

Two verses, and a meeting in the fourth heaven

Some prophets are given a whole surah. Their stories run for pages, scene after scene, a flood and an ark, a brother thrown into a well, a sea split down the middle, a fire turned cool. And then there is Idris, peace be upon him, the man the English-speaking world knows as Enoch, and the Qur'an names him in exactly two places. Two short passages. Four short verses. That is the entire certain record of a prophet of Allah.

It would be the easiest thing in the world to walk past a man mentioned so briefly, to nod at him on the way to the longer lives and forget him before the next chapter. Do not. Because this is the sixth day of our walk through the prophets, still in the early generations of Adam's children, and Idris is not here to be admired and skipped. He is here to teach you something you will need for every single prophet still ahead, and for the rest of your life as a believer. He is the clean test case, the place where Mufti Menk slows the whole series down and hands you a tool: how to tell the difference between what Allah has guaranteed and what people have merely passed down. Almost everything the old books say about Idris sits outside the Qur'an. And learning to hold that material the way a Muslim is supposed to hold it, neither swallowing it whole nor throwing it away, is the quiet, central work of this short and luminous life.

A prophet between Adam and Nuh

Where, exactly, does Idris belong in the line? Yesterday the trust passed to Shith, the son who stayed close to his father and kept the flame burning when Adam was laid in the soil. Tonight the line reaches further down. The majority of the historians, Mufti Menk relays, place Idris among the great-grandchildren of Adam several times over, the seventh generation of his progeny, a prophet of the early world standing somewhere in that long stretch of generations between Adam and Nuh, peace be upon them both. There is a smaller view, held by some, that he came much later, that he was of the Children of Israel, of the progeny of Yaqub and among the people of Musa. But the weight of the scholars settles on the earlier placement, and that is where we will stand with them: Idris, near the dawn of humanity, one of the first prophets to walk the new earth.

And here, right at the threshold of the story, before he has told you a single thing about the man, Mufti Menk stops. Because a question is already forming, and an honest reader has every right to ask it: where do we get any of this from? If the Qur'an gives Idris only four verses, how do the books speak of his lineage, his birth, the shape of his face and the manner of his walk? The answer is the tool, and the tool is the whole point of the evening.

Islamic history, Mufti Menk explains, divides cleanly in two. There is everything from the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ onward, his own age and all the centuries after it, and for that material we have one strict and beautiful rule. We do not simply accept a report because it sounds pious or feels true. We take it bil isnad, with a chain: every story handed to us must come with its full line of narrators, who said it, who they heard it from, link after link, all the way back to the source. And if a single individual anywhere along that chain is known to be a liar, shown to be claiming he heard from someone who had died before he was

even born, the whole report is dropped. Not softened. Not relabelled. Dropped, even if it is dressed in the most Islamic of clothes, because a faith built on lies is no faith at all. That is the discipline that guards the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, and it is the most rigorous system of preserving the truth that any people has ever built.

But for what came before him ﷺ, for the prophets of the ancient world, there is a second body of material entirely, and it answers to a rule of its own.

Believed, rejected, or simply left alone

The stories the People of the Book carry, what the Torah holds, what the Old Testament holds, the accounts handed down through the generations of those given scripture before us, are called the Israiliyyat. And rather than accept them all or reject them all, Mufti Menk lays out the three grades he will return to again and again across this whole month, because they are the believer's compass through every ancient story to come.

The first grade is the reports our own revelation came and rejected. When something in those old accounts contradicts what Allah has told us, we throw it out without hesitation. The example Mufti Menk reaches for is the slander against Lut, peace be upon him, the claim found in some of those sources that he was himself a sinful man. We reject it flatly, because the Qur'an tells us plainly that Lut was pure, the best of his people, a prophet of Allah. Whatever we may have heard from others, when our revelation has ruled, the matter is closed.

The second grade is the reports our revelation came and confirmed. When something in those accounts is echoed and established in the Qur'an itself, we take it, on the authority of the

Qur'an and not of the old books. Mufti Menk gives the example of Hawwa, peace be upon her, being created from Adam, a detail Allah Himself states, in Surah al-A'raf and again in Surah an-Nisa. So we hold it as true, because Allah has held it as true.

And then there is the third grade, and it is by far the largest of the three. It is the great bulk of the material, the reports that Islam has neither confirmed nor rejected, that our revelation simply does not speak to at all. And this is the pile that needs a grown believer to handle it. We do not declare it true, because Allah has not told us it is true. And we do not call it a lie, because we have no grounds to. We may listen to it, understand it, even draw a lesson from it. But, Mufti Menk insists, we do not need it to be Muslims. Our faith does not rest on a single line of it. And so, having told such a story, we say the words he says after every one of them, the words you should take into your own hand and keep there for the whole journey ahead: Allahu a'lam. Allah knows best.

Keep that phrase close. Because nearly everything that the books say about the appearance of Idris, the manner of his life, and the way his death came, lives in exactly that third pile.

What the books say, gently held

From the Israiliyyat, and from nowhere else, comes the human detail, and it is worth telling, because it is beautiful, so long as you remember where it comes from. They say Idris was born when Adam was eight hundred and forty years old. They say he was a tall man, and strikingly good to look at. They say he was calm, that he carried a full beard, that he spoke very clearly and without agitation, never raising his voice or hurrying his words. They say that when he walked he lowered his gaze and watched the ground before him, a man composed and unhurried, one who

pondered and reflected before he spoke. And they say he advised people with so much goodness, with such gentleness and such sincerity, that they were drawn to him, that something in his manner made others want to come close and listen.

It is a lovely portrait, and Mufti Menk tells it warmly. But notice, very carefully, exactly how he tells it, because the manner is the lesson. He keeps the label attached the whole time. This, he reminds you even as he relays it, is a narration of the People of the Book, and over it we say Allahu a'lam. He does not, at any point, let the words slip their tether. He does not turn "they say he was tall" into "he was tall." He does not promote the report from the third grade up into the second when no one is watching. And, just as importantly, he does not reach beyond it. There are famous extra legends that float around the name of Idris, popular stories that have attached themselves to him over the centuries, that he was the first to write with a pen, the first to sew and wear stitched cloth, the first to study the stars, a great teacher of crafts and sciences. Mufti Menk does not pin any of them on as fact. He stays with what the sources he is relaying actually carry, holds it loosely, labels it honestly, and refuses to harden a single word of it into certainty.

This restraint is not dryness. It is reverence. A believer can enjoy a story, can find it moving and even instructive, without swallowing it whole, and the discipline of holding the unverified with an open hand is itself a form of worship, a way of refusing to say about the religion of Allah anything more than you have been given the right to say.

The two verses that are certain

So step out of the Israiliyyat now, off the soft ground of "they say," and onto solid rock. When you do, the figure of Idris shrinks

to four verses and grows, at the same time, immeasurably in weight, because what little there is, Allah Himself has spoken.

The first place is in Surah Maryam, and it settles two things beyond the reach of any doubt:

And mention in the Book, Idrees. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet.

QUR'AN 19:56

Read it slowly, because it is the bedrock. Allah commands His Messenger ﷺ to mention this man, to keep his name alive in the recitation until the end of time, and then He tells us two things about him. He was a siddiq, a man of truth, a person whose whole being was bound up with truthfulness, who spoke truth, lived truth, and was true through and through. And he was a nabi, a prophet, chosen and sent by Allah. Whatever else we cannot verify, however much of the old material we must hold at arm's length, this much is fixed forever: Idris was truthful, and Idris was a prophet of Allah. That is not a report from the People of the Book. That is the word of the Lord of the worlds.

And then comes the verse that gives this whole day its name and its shape:

And We raised him to a high station.

QUR'AN 19:57

We raised him to a high place. Mufti Menk pauses here, on the meaning of that elevation, because it is the hinge of everything that follows. Ask any person what it is to be raised to a high station, and where will their mind go? They will reach, almost always, for the spiritual: a high standing, a near place with Allah,

an exalted rank in the sight of the Lord. And that, Mufti Menk says, is the heart of it. Idris was elevated to a high level in that Allah granted him prophethood, praised him by name, set his name into the Qur'an to be recited by every believer in every generation until the Hour. There is no height truer than that. To have your name spoken in the words of Allah, with honour, forever, is to be raised higher than any throne or empire could ever raise a man.

But some of the mufassirin, he notes, read the elevation more literally still. They say Allah did not only raise the rank of Idris, but raised the man himself, lifted him up, physically, to a high place. And there is a reason the commentators say such a thing, a reason rooted in another report and sealed by an authentic word of the Prophet ﷺ. The next verses and a single hadith are about to make plain what they meant.

Patient, righteous, and brought into mercy

Before the elevation, though, there is the second of the two certain passages, and it adds three more fixed facts to the portrait. It is in Surah al-Anbiya, where Allah names three prophets together in a single breath:

And [mention] Ishmael and Idrees and Dhul-Kifl; all were of the patient.

QUR'AN 21:85

Ismail, Idris, and Dhul-Kifl, peace be upon them all, named side by side, and bound together by one shared quality that Allah singles out: every one of them was of the patient, the sabirin. So to truthful and prophet, add now a third certainty about Idris, fixed by the words of Allah: he was patient. And patience, Mufti

Menk is careful to draw out across this series, is not a passing mood that comes and goes with the weather of the heart. It is a station, a settled rank a believer climbs to and stands upon, the quality that carries a person through the long, slow, quiet stretches when nothing is moving and no relief is in sight. A prophet of the ancient world, calling a people to the worship of one God across the span of generations, would have needed exactly that, the deep, rooted patience that does not break when the answer is slow in coming.

And the verse does not stop at patience. Allah continues:

And We admitted them into Our mercy. Indeed, they were of the righteous.

QUR'AN 21:86

He admitted the three of them into His mercy, and He declared them among the righteous, the salihin, the good and upright servants of Allah. So stand the certain facts side by side now, and watch the portrait of Idris come complete without borrowing a single legend, without one line from the third pile. A man of truth. A prophet of Allah. Raised to a high place. Of the patient. Of the righteous. Gathered into the mercy of his Lord. The Qur'an gave Idris two short passages and four verses, and they were enough. They were more than enough. Whole kingdoms have risen and fallen and left less behind than these six lines that Allah set down about one quiet, truthful, patient man.

The meeting in the fourth heaven

There is one more report, and Mufti Menk saves it for last, deliberately, because of where it lands, and because it is the place where the whole evening has been climbing all along.

The books of tafsir relay a beautiful account, an Israiliyyat, a narration of the People of the Book carried in most of the books of commentary, and Mufti Menk relays it with the label fixed in place from the start: over all of it, as ever, we say Allahu a'lam. They say that Allah told Idris a glad and astonishing thing: that from among those who followed him, anyone who did good deeds, the reward of all that good would be doubled and gathered for Idris himself. Imagine the station of it, others doing good across the earth, and the reward of it flowing back, multiplied, to the one who had guided them. And Idris, the story goes, was overjoyed at this, and so, as he felt his death drawing near, a hunger came over him to amass still more of that reward before he went. He had a friend among the angels, and he turned to this friend and asked a favour: go, he said, and speak to the angel of death, and ask whether my time might be prolonged a little, just a little, so that I might gather more good before the end. The angel told him plainly that the appointed term is a matter decreed by Allah and not his to change, but that there was no harm in asking. Come, he said, ride upon my wing, and let us go. And so Idris was carried up, through the first heaven, and the second, and the third. And when they reached the fourth heaven, the angel of death, acting under the command of Allah and not yet knowing what was about to unfold, found Idris there, and at the fourth heaven, by Allah's decree, took his soul. So it is narrated, Mufti Menk says, and over all of it: Allahu a'lam.

But it does not end there. And this is the moment the day has been built toward, the place where the soft ground of the Israiliyyat suddenly meets the hard rock of authentic revelation, and the two touch. Because what the old books only suggest, an authentic hadith confirms. It is established in Sahih al-Bukhari, in a sound and certain narration, that on the night the Prophet

Muhammad ﷺ was taken up through the heavens, on the Mi'raj, the Ascension, he met Idris, peace be upon him, in the fourth heaven.

Sit with the weight of that. The verse said: We raised him to a high place. The Israiliyyat suggested the manner of how. But it is the Night Journey, established beyond doubt, that shows us where Idris truly is. His soul really is up there, raised, in the fourth heaven, and centuries after his time the final Prophet ﷺ passed through that very heaven and found him there, and greeted him. This, Mufti Menk explains, is precisely why some of the mufassirin took the elevation of verse fifty-seven literally, that Allah lifted him physically and his soul was taken on high. The verse promised that Idris was raised to a high place; the Mi'raj showed the Prophet ﷺ exactly how high, one heaven at a time. And it is the surest, most authentic thing we know about how the story of this prophet comes to rest.

Why a two-verse prophet matters to you

It would be the easiest thing, as we said at the start, to skip a prophet the Qur'an names only twice. But by now it should be clear why you must not, and why Mufti Menk gave a whole evening to four short verses. Idris is the clean test case for the single most important habit a believer can carry through these stories: the ability to tell, instantly and instinctively, the difference between what Allah has guaranteed and what people have merely handed down.

Lay the two apart one final time, so the shape of it is fixed in you. Three things, four if you count them out, are certain about Idris, certain because Allah said them and for no other reason: he was truthful, he was patient, he was raised to a high place, and he was brought into the mercy of his Lord among the righteous.

Everything else, however lovely, however moving, however many books of tafsir carry it, wears the label Allahu a'lam. The birth at eight hundred and forty years, the tall and handsome man with the lowered gaze, the doubled rewards, the ride upon the angel's wing, all of it is held gently, with open hands, neither clutched as creed nor cast away as a lie. That is the discipline. And once you have learned it on Idris, where the stakes are gentle and the story is short, you will carry it into every prophet still to come, where the stories are long and the temptation to harden a beautiful guess into a fact grows with every page.

There is a quiet comfort folded into his name, too, and it is the thread that ties his ancient, brief life to your own. The very elevation that Allah gave to Idris, He has placed within reach of anyone truthful enough and patient enough to climb toward it. You will never be a prophet; that door is shut, sealed forever with the one ﷺ who met Idris in the fourth heaven, after whom no prophet will ever come. But truthfulness is not closed to you. Patience is not closed to you. A heart that ponders and reflects, that advises others with goodness and draws them gently toward the truth, is not closed to you. These are the very qualities Allah praised in Idris, and the very road that raised him. Walk them, and in your own measure you are walking the road that Allah Himself called a high place.

What Idris asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life as short as Idris's and feel that it asks very little of us, that a prophet given four verses can have only a small claim on a heart. That would be to mistake the size of the telling for the size of the lesson. This brief, bright life puts three real questions to your iman, and they are not small at all.

The first is a question about truth. Allah named Idris a siddiq, a man of truth, before He named anything else about him, before patience, before righteousness, before the high station itself. Truthfulness was the ground he stood on, as it was the ground under every prophet who ever lived, because the One calling people to the Truth must himself be true. And it is meant to be your ground too. So the question Idris presses is plain and searching: are you truthful when truth costs you something? When a lie would be easier, smoother, safer, more flattering, do you hold to the truth the way a man whose whole being is truth would hold to it? The path to the high place begins on that ground, and on no other. A believer builds his entire standing with Allah on whether his word can be trusted, and the building starts the first time telling the truth is hard and you tell it anyway.

The second is a question about patience. Allah bound Idris together with Ismail and Dhul-Kifl by their sabr, and made plain that patience is not a feeling but a station, a place you climb to and refuse to leave. Most of us can be patient in a sprint. The test is the long, slow stretch, the season when nothing moves, when the dua seems unanswered and the change seems impossibly far off and the temptation is simply to give up and come down off the mountain. Idris asks whether your patience is a mood that evaporates when the waiting grows long, or a station you have built and can stand upon when everything in you wants to quit. The prophets were of the patient, and the mercy of Allah came to them through that very door.

And the third is the deepest, and it is the one that ties Idris straight to the Messenger ﷺ and straight to you. It is a question about height. We are forever measuring elevation by the things the world measures it by: wealth, position, the size of a name, the reach of a voice. And here is a prophet whom Allah raised to a

high place with none of that, a quiet man of truth and patience whom Allah simply lifted, until the final Prophet ﷺ, on the greatest night of his life, carried through the seven heavens past every veil, came to the fourth heaven and found Idris already there, raised, waiting, exactly where the verse had promised he would be. Think of what that means about the seerah, and about you. The Night Journey was the Prophet's ﷺ own raising to a high place, his being taken up by Allah through the very heavens, and at the fourth of them stood proof, in the person of Idris, that this is what Allah does with His truthful and His patient servants: He raises them. The Prophet ﷺ did not invent a new way up that night. He travelled the same road of nearness to Allah that Idris had travelled before him, the road every prophet travelled, and the road that, in its own measure, is still open to anyone who wants it. The world will offer you a hundred ways to feel high, and almost all of them lead downhill. Allah offers one true elevation, and it is built of exactly the things He praised in Idris: truth, patience, righteousness, a heart that turns to Him.

So take this short life and let it do its long work in you. Be truthful when the truth is the harder word to say. Be patient through the stretches that move slowly and seem to lead nowhere, knowing that patience is a station and that the mercy of Allah arrives through it. Hold what you cannot verify with open hands, and say Allahu a'lam, and feel no need to know more than your Lord has told you. And let the picture of that meeting in the fourth heaven settle the question of what real height is, once and for all. The same Allah who raised Idris to a high place, and raised His final Messenger ﷺ through the heavens on the Night Journey, is the One who measures your elevation now, and He measures it not by what you own or how loud your name is, but by how true you are, how patient, how righteous, how near to Him your heart will

let you come. May Allah make us of the truthful and the patient, gather us among the righteous into His mercy, raise our standing as He raised Idris, and join us in the highest gardens with His prophets and with His final Messenger ﷺ, who met them one heaven at a time.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 6 (Idris). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (19:56-57, 21:85-86), verified via quran.ai. Where the lecture relays reports from the People of the Book, Mufti Menk's own caveat that we neither affirm nor reject them, and say Allahu a'lam, has been kept.

Nuh and the flood

Nine hundred and fifty years of calling, and a handful who listened

Imagine a man who stands up to speak the truth, and the people in front of him push their fingers into their ears. He keeps speaking, and they pull their cloaks up over their heads so they will not even have to look at his face. He does not stop. He comes back the next day, and the next, and the next, and they do it again. Now imagine he does this not for a year, not for a decade, but for nine and a half centuries, and at the end of all of it he can count the ones who listened on his fingers. That is not a parable. That is the life of one man, and the Qur'an gives us his exact arithmetic so we cannot soften it: a thousand years minus fifty, calling, calling, and being run from.

This is the seventh day of our walk with the prophets, and it belongs to the first messenger Allah ever sent to a nation gone astray: Nuh, peace be upon him, known to the wider world as Noah. Mufti Menk tells his story as the longest single lesson in patience anywhere in scripture, and he reads it the way he reads every prophet, holding fast to what the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah establish, flagging clearly the reports that come down from the People of the Book, and never once hardening a guess into a fact. Hold one feeling as you read, because it is the air the whole chapter breathes: the long ache of being right while the entire world walks the other way. That ache is about to become the very air the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ will breathe on a hill in

Makkah, and a lesson Allah hands to every believer who has ever felt alone in their faith.

A man talking to people who would not listen

Nuh came not long after Adam, peace be upon him, to a people close enough to the first man that they should have known their Lord by heart. But the years had done their quiet damage. Righteous men who had once lived among them had died, and little by little their memory was carved into statues, and the statues, over generations, were treated as gods. So Allah sent Nuh to call them back to the One who had made them, and he called the way a man calls when he means it. He called by night and he called by day. He called them in the open square and he drew them aside one by one. He used every door a human being has, and he kept it up across a span of time we can barely hold in the mind.

And the more he called, the further they fled. Mufti Menk lingers on the picture Nuh paints to his Lord, because it is almost unbearable in its detail. Listen to the prophet's own account of it, the complaint of a man who has tried everything:

He said, "My Lord, indeed I invited my people [to truth] night and day. But my invitation increased them not except in flight [i.e., aversion]."

QUR'AN 71:5-6

Then comes the image Mufti Menk asks us to actually picture, because it is so foolish that it indicts us:

And indeed, every time I invited them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered

themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant with [great] arrogance.

QUR'AN 71:7

Grown men, he says, when this prophet of Allah opened his mouth, jammed their fingers into their ears the way a stubborn child blocks out a voice it has decided not to hear. Then they dragged their clothing over their heads so they would not even have to see him. Picture how ridiculous it looks, he says, and then feel it land on yourself, because this is exactly what we do when a reminder reaches us and we would simply rather not take it. We have our own ways of pulling the cloak over our heads. Nuh stood in front of that wall, and he did not turn away from it, for nine hundred and fifty years.

Turn back, and watch what your Lord pours on you

Here is the thing about Nuh that is easy to miss under the sheer weight of his patience: he did not only warn. He held out the gift in the other hand. He did not stand there threatening a people with ruin and nothing else. He told them what was waiting for them on the other side of a single word, and that word was forgiveness. Ask forgiveness of your Lord, he told them, and look at what He sends back to you when you do:

And said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver. He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in [continuing] showers And give you increase in wealth and children and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers.'

QUR'AN 71:10-12

Mufti Menk opens this offer up clause by clause, because every clause is a door. Rain, he reminds us, is not a small thing; the

economy of nearly every land has always turned on rainfall, so that when the right rain comes the crops grow and the whole country breathes, and when it is withheld there is hardship and fear. So the first sign that Allah has forgiven a people is the rain that comes at just the right measure, neither the drought that is a test nor the flood that is a punishment, but the steady showers that mean mercy. Then wealth, and not the cursed wealth chased through forbidden doors, but provision a person is content with, where two coins of barakah stretch further than a fortune of greed. Then children, and not merely children but, by a parent's own repentance, children whose hearts are inclined to good. Then gardens, then rivers. Seek the One who owns provision, Mufti Menk says, and stop chasing it from those who own nothing. He is amazed at the person who begs sustenance from someone who does not possess a grain of it, when the Owner of all sustenance is right there waiting to be asked.

And this, he insists, is not a verse locked away in Nuh's century. Istighfar is still the key. When a believer keeps returning to Allah and asking His forgiveness, Allah forgives, and one of the marks that He has is the door that finally swings open: the rain, the settled provision, the softened heart. He draws in beside it a saying of the Prophet ﷺ, that glad tidings of Paradise belong to the one who finds, in his record on the Day of Judgement, a great deal of seeking forgiveness. It makes perfect sense, he says: when that record is opened and a heap of repentance is found in it, before the eyes of all creation, that is a person Allah Himself told us to congratulate. Nuh's people heard this offer for nine centuries and turned it down. We get to hear it tonight, with the door still open.

The du'a a prophet only makes when everything is gone

Then Mufti Menk slows the story right down, because what comes next teaches us something we must not get wrong about the people who are close to Allah. For nine hundred and fifty years, when his people threatened him, when they reached for stones to silence him, Nuh kept his hands down. He did not call down ruin on them at the first wound, or the hundredth. The friends of Allah, Mufti Menk says, are not quick to curse. Their reflex when they are hurt is to pray: guide him, have mercy on him, soften his heart. That was Nuh's reflex for ten human lifetimes.

But there comes a point, after every door has been tried and every year has been spent and a man knows with certainty that not one more heart will turn, when even a prophet who held on that long finally raises his hands. And when Nuh raised his, the du'a was terrifying in its weight:

And Noah said, "My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant. Indeed, if You leave them, they will mislead Your servants and not beget except [every] wicked one and [confirmed] disbeliever."

QUR'AN 71:26-27

He was not being cruel, Mufti Menk is careful to say. He had simply seen, over ten lifetimes, what these people were and what they made: they would only mislead Allah's servants and raise up children more poisonous than themselves. And the proof was already there in front of him, in the way they charged their own sons never to abandon the idols, training the next generation to be worse than the last. A prophet who watches that for nine centuries is not speaking from temper. He is bearing witness to what he has seen.

So learn the warning folded inside it, Mufti Menk says, and let it land on yourself: never be careless with someone who is sincerely serving Allah. He puts it as plainly as he ever puts anything. If your own life feels like it is in knots you cannot untie, and you are pressing every button trying to find the one that went wrong, the first question to ask is whether you have harmed one of the friends of Allah, some servant of His you mocked, or slandered, or blocked, or wounded. Because that person may be slow to raise their hands, but they have a Boss, and the day they finally say, my Lord, deal with this one, the answer can come, in this life, before death and not only after it. If you can benefit such a person, do. And if you cannot, then at the very least, do not harm them.

The carpenter on the mountain

Then Allah told Nuh that it was over. The hearts were sealed; not one more soul would believe. Stop calling them, He said in effect, the chance has closed. Mufti Menk pauses on the mercy and the terror in that at once: Allah gives a person one chance, two, ten, a thousand, and then a day can come when the door simply shuts. He turns it on himself and on us before he goes on, because none of us can promise we will rise from where we are sitting; the time to turn back is now, while the soul is still in the body and repentance is still accepted.

And in the place of the call came a command no one expected: build an ark. Nuh was no carpenter and no shipwright. He had never built a thing in his life. And Allah told him to construct a vessel, and not by the water, but up on a mountain, miles from any sea. So he obeyed. He would fell a tree and drag it to the top, and find it made ready, the nails provided, every piece sliding into the next like a jigsaw whose every part fits the first time. He

would go back for the next, cut it, carry it, and it too would fit. Mufti Menk relays a description that gives the building roughly a hundred years and the ship the scale of a vast covered vessel, sealed over the top like a submarine rather than open like a boat, and he marks those figures clearly for what they are: a report carried from the People of the Book, Israiliyyat, which the Qur'an neither confirms nor denies. He mentions it only in passing and builds no belief on it. What is certain is what the Qur'an establishes, that Allah taught Nuh to build it under His own direct guidance.

And the chiefs of his people walked past and laughed. So you were a prophet, and now you are a carpenter? You stopped calling us, at least, but now look at you, building a boat on dry land, miles from any sea. How do you plan to get it to the water, will a giant come and carry it for you? Nuh let them laugh. You laugh at us today, he answered, and a day is coming when we will laugh at you. It is the oldest posture of faith there is: doing exactly what Allah said while the clever people of the moment treat you as a fool. Hold the picture, because in a few centuries a man will stand on a hill in Makkah calling his people to the one God, and the chiefs of Quraysh will laugh at him ﷺ in just the same way, and the ending will be just the same too.

The sky opened and the earth burst at once

The sign came as Allah had promised it would: water gushed up from the oven, from the very ground, and at that, Nuh gathered the believers and a pair of every kind of creature and climbed aboard. Mufti Menk notes how few the believers were, somewhere between eleven and eighty souls in the reports, the smallest of harvests for the largest of labours, and he draws the lesson straight out: the majority is not always right. Nine and a

half centuries of calling, and a handful answered, and what is true stays true even when you are the last one holding it, and what is false stays false even if the whole earth has agreed on it. As they boarded, Nuh taught them a du'a we still say, that the Prophet ﷺ would later make part of the sunnah of travel: in the name of Allah it sails and in the name of Allah it comes to rest. You think the brakes stop the car, Mufti Menk says, but it is Allah who grants the stopping; ride in His name and trust the One who sets a thing moving and brings it to rest.

Then the flood came from two directions at once, and Mufti Menk calls the description in Surah al-Qamar one of the most vivid in the whole Qur'an:

Then We opened the gates of the heaven with rain pouring down And caused the earth to burst with springs, and the waters met for a matter already predestined.

QUR'AN 54:11-12

Read it slowly, he says. The gates of the sky were not merely opened to let rain fall; they were thrown open with water unleashed, poured down in a density the word itself can barely carry. And Allah did not leave it there. At the very same moment the earth was split into bursting springs, every drop of water it had been holding sent up from below. The water descending from the sky and the water rising from the ground met at a point Allah had already measured to the inch, for a matter already decreed. Picture a tennis ball pressed all the way to the bottom of a full bucket, he says; that was the earth. Nothing was left to chance, and nothing was left dry.

The son who climbed for higher ground

The ark rode waves like mountains, and through the spray Nuh saw his own son standing apart, on the wrong side, among the people of disbelief. A father's heart broke open. The Qur'an lets us hear the whole exchange, and it is one of the most heartbreaking conversations in the Book:

And it sailed with them through waves like mountains, and Noah called to his son who was apart [from them], "O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the disbelievers." [But] he said, "I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water." [Noah] said, "There is no protector today from the decree of Allāh, except for whom He gives mercy." And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned.

QUR'AN 11:42-43

Do not worry, father, the boy says, with the calm logic of a drowning man who does not yet know he is drowning. I will climb a mountain; the water has never reached that high. Where have you ever heard of a flood that touched the peaks? I will be safe up there. And his father, watching the water that is already swallowing the world, tells him the only truth left: there is no refuge today from the command of Allah, except for the one He has mercy on. Come, my son, come. A wave rose between them, and the son was gone.

What is this scene for, Mufti Menk asks, and turns it straight onto us. How many people are drowning in a sin right this moment, warned by their family, warned by their teachers, warned by their own conscience, and certain, absolutely certain, that they have it handled, that they can climb just high enough to be safe? A man walks out of the bar on a Thursday night, he says, and comes to the masjid on Friday, and the imam, who has never met him and knows nothing of his week, is moved by Allah to say from the

pulpit that there are some who drink on Thursday night and come to the prayer on Friday, and they had better stop. And the man sits there thinking, is he talking about me? He is not. But Allah is. In the very middle of the wrong, the reminder reaches him, and he can wave it off the way Nuh's son waved off the ark, certain he will climb above what is coming. There is no mountain high enough to climb above the decree of Allah. The only safe ground was the deck of the boat his father was begging him to board.

He is not of your family

When the water had taken his son, Nuh turned to his Lord with a grief any parent would feel. My Lord, he said, my son was of my family, and Your promise was to save my family, and You are the most just of all who judge. He did not challenge the decree, Mufti Menk is careful to note; he was a prophet, and he was not questioning his Lord. He was trying to understand. And the answer he received reframed the very word family:

He said, "O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant."

QUR'AN 11:46

He was not of your family. Biologically, Mufti Menk says, the boy was his son; no one is denying the blood. But the bond of faith runs deeper than the bond of blood, and in the only family that counts before Allah, the son had already walked out long before the wave took him. When it comes to the pleasure of Allah, that is what we seek first, even when it costs us the approval of someone we love, even a child, because we will not earn the displeasure of Allah to please a creature. It is one of the hardest

lessons in the whole story, and the Qur'an does not blunt its edge.

Then the water was called home. O earth, swallow your water; O sky, hold back. Mufti Menk dwells for a moment on the verse Allah speaks to Nuh as the ark comes to rest, a verse he loves for its rhythm as much as its mercy:

It was said, "O Noah, disembark in security from Us and blessings upon you and upon nations [descending] from those with you. But other nations [of them] We will grant enjoyment; then there will touch them from Us a painful punishment."

QUR'AN 11:48

Come down in peace, with blessings on you and on the nations that will spring from those who sailed with you. The ark settled on a mountain the Qur'an names Judi; where exactly that lies, Allah knows best, Mufti Menk says, and he sets aside the modern claims of ships discovered here or there. What matters is the gift Allah then gave Nuh, and it touches every single person who will ever read this page:

And We made his descendants those remaining [on the earth]

QUR'AN 37:77

Of all who were saved on the ark, only Nuh's line continued. Every one of us, Mufti Menk says, is a child of Nuh; after Adam, he is the common father of all humanity, sometimes called the second Adam. The man the whole world laughed at became the man the whole world descends from. And Allah closes his story

not with the drowning but with a question aimed across the centuries straight at you: is there anyone who will take heed?

What Nuh asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Nuh's life as a flood story and leave it there, a great catastrophe safely sealed in the deep past, admired and shelved. That would be to miss the question it presses into our hands, and it is a question about the longest and loneliest kind of faithfulness there is.

Look first at what Nuh actually is in the long story of guidance: he is patience itself, stretched to a length no other prophet was asked to hold. Nine hundred and fifty years of being right while the world turned away, and a man who never once stopped, never gave up on a single soul, until his Lord Himself told him the door had closed. And here is where the line runs straight forward to the one this whole book is walking toward. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stood on his hill at the dawn of his mission and called his people to the worship of One God, and the chiefs of Quraysh mocked him and threatened him and pushed their own kind of fingers into their own kind of ears, he was breathing the very air Nuh had breathed first. The carpenter on the mountain whom the clever ones laughed at, and the man in Makkah whom the clever ones laughed at, were doing the identical thing and would meet the identical end: the mockers gone, the message standing. The Qur'an even gave Nuh a surah that bears his own name, Surah Nuh, much of it his own words poured out to his Lord, set down in the Book the Prophet ﷺ would recite so that every believer after him could hear, in a prophet's exhausted voice, what it costs to keep calling. And the very du'a Nuh taught for boarding the ark, in the name of Allah it sails and comes to rest, the Prophet ﷺ made part of the sunnah of every journey we

take. Every early warner was walking toward him ﷺ, and Nuh walked the longest road of all.

So take Nuh's life down into your own. His patience is the first thing he hands you: when your own effort to do good feels slow and thankless, when you have reminded and been ignored, when the result will not come, his is the standard, keep calling and leave the outcome to Allah, who measured even the meeting of the waters to the inch. His istighfar is the second: that same key is still in your hand tonight, and the One who poured rain and wealth and children and gardens on a people the moment they turned back is the same Lord, unchanged, waiting for you to ask. His restraint is the third: keep your hands down when you are wronged and your heart soft toward the servants of Allah, because the friends of Allah are slow to curse and quick to forgive, and that is the company you want to be counted among, not the company they finally pray against. And his hardest lesson is the last, learned over the body of his own son: there is no mountain high enough. When a reminder reaches you in the middle of a sin, do not tell yourself you can climb just high enough to be safe. The only safe ground is the deck of the ark, the obedience your Lord is calling you toward, and the bond of faith outranks every other bond, even the dearest, even blood.

So borrow his patience and his prayer, and carry the du'a he left at the very end of his surah. O Allah, who forgave again and again the moment a heart turned back, make us of those who seek Your forgiveness until the sky pours mercy on us; keep our hands down when we are wronged and our hearts soft toward Your servants; never let us climb away from Your ark believing we are safe without You; and gather us with Nuh and the prophets of patience and Your final Messenger ﷺ in the home that no flood ever reaches.

My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whoever enters my house a believer and the believing men and believing women. And do not increase the wrongdoers except in destruction.

QUR'AN 71:28

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 7 (Nuh). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (71:5-7, 71:10-12, 71:26-28, 54:11-12, 11:42-43, 11:46, 11:48, 37:77), verified via quran.ai. Where the lecture relays reports from the People of the Book, such as the dimensions and the hundred years of building, Mufti Menk's own caveat that the Qur'an neither confirms nor denies them, and that belief is not built upon them, has been kept.

Hud and the people of Ad

The mightiest nation Allah ever made, and the wind that left no trace of them

There is a question buried in this story that the strongest people who ever lived asked out loud, certain it had no answer. They stood among their gardens and their springs, in bodies built on a scale no nation before or since has matched, and they looked at the warning of a man who told them their Lord could undo them in an afternoon, and they laughed, and they said: who is stronger than us? It was not a real question. It was a boast wearing the costume of a question. They already knew, they thought, that nothing in the heavens or the earth could touch them. And the whole of their story is the answer Allah gave them, an answer so total that it became a riddle for every generation after: a nation Allah Himself calls the mightiest He ever created, of whom He then asks, do you see of them any remains?

This is the eighth day of our walk with the prophets, and it belongs to a prophet sent to the strong: Hud, peace be upon him, brother of the people of Ad. Yesterday the water rose over the people of Nuh and the world began again from a single ark. Today nothing rises at all, not even the rain they begged for. Mufti Menk hands us this story the way he found it in the Qur'an, and he asks us to carry one phrase from the first page to the last, because the ending turns on it entirely: these were the strongest nation Allah ever created. Hold that. The whole weight of the lesson is fastened to it.

The giants who inherited the earth

When the survivors of the flood came down from the ark, they told their children how they had been saved, and the children told their children, and for a while the memory was warm and clear. But generations are long, and shaytan is patient. Somewhere down that line, Mufti Menk reminds us, the enemy slipped the old idea back into circulation, the very trap that had drowned the world of Nuh: worship something, anything, beside the One who made you. A frame on the wall becomes a face the grandchildren do not recognise. A face becomes a memory. A memory becomes a stone they bow to. And so the children of the saved drifted back into the sin their fathers had been rescued from.

The people of Ad settled the southern rim of Arabia, the country Mufti Menk places between Oman and Yemen, near Hadramawt, a land of sand dunes so striking that Allah named a whole surah after them, al-Ahqaf, the dunes. According to one report, says Mufti Menk, these were the first of the Arabs. And Allah had given them everything a people could be given. Wealth that did not run out. Gardens watered by springs that gushed up out of the ground. And bodies the like of which the earth had never carried. When Hud stood before them and listed the gifts they were busy forgetting, Allah preserved the listing in the Qur'an:

Then do you wonder that there has come to you a reminder from your Lord through a man from among you, that he may warn you? And remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah and increased you in stature extensively. So remember the favors of Allah that you might succeed.

QUR'AN 7:69

Mufti Menk reads that one phrase, increased you in stature extensively, two ways at once, and insists both are true. It speaks of the people themselves, who were enormous, like towering pillars, taller than any human stock before or after. And it speaks of the houses they raised, vast structures with ceilings high enough that a giant could walk through his own door without stooping, because a tall person needs a tall home, a roof set far overhead so that he is covered and not bent. Both readings hold, he says, because both are described in the Qur'an, their stature and their structures alike. So whenever you recite this verse, and we recite it regularly, picture the people of Ad. That is how tall they were: the successors Allah set on the earth after the people of Nuh, granted greater strength than the first people, and never created again in their likeness anywhere in the land.

A brother stands up and says one word

When their gardens turned them away from the One who grew them, Allah did not abandon them to it. He sent them a man from among themselves, Hud, peace be upon him. The Qur'an calls him akhahum, their brother, and Mufti Menk lingers on the word, because it is a pattern that runs through nearly every nation in this book. The prophet was almost always one of their own, born among them, raised among them, known to every household from childhood, so that no one could wave him away as a foreigner, a stranger, an outsider with a foreign agenda. He was the man they had always called truthful. He was the one they trusted with their secrets and their disputes. And now this trusted brother stood up with a single message:

And to Aad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. You are not but inventors [of falsehood]."

It was the same word every prophet was sent with, the one Mufti Menk calls the prime issue all of them dealt with: O my people, worship Allah, you have no god other than Him. Not a new tax. Not a tribal realignment. Not a reorganisation of their wealth or their power. Just the One who made them, in the place of the stones they had carved with their own hands. The reason it is always the same line, he explains, is that shirk, the association of partners with Allah, was always shaytan's chosen weapon, because it lets him laugh at man and at man's Lord in the same breath: I told You they would not worship You, he says in effect; they will worship someone else, or worship others alongside You. So from the opening pages of the Qur'an to its closing ones, every messenger says the very same sentence. Hud said it to the strongest people who ever lived. Surah al-A'raf preserves the same opening, and then the question he set before them like a door:

And to the Aad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. Then will you not fear Him?"

QUR'AN 7:65

Will you not fear Him. It is a gentle question, and it asked everything. To a people who feared nothing, because nothing in their world had ever been able to hurt them, Hud held up the one thing that could: consciousness of the Lord who made the strength they were so proud of. He may as well have been speaking to a mountain.

We see you as a fool, they said

The chiefs answered the way the comfortable always answer the man who threatens their comfort: with insults, one heaped on another. They reached first for the cheapest one.

*Said the eminent ones who disbelieved among his people,
"Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think
you are of the liars."*

QUR'AN 7:66

A fool. And when fool was not enough, they pulled down the rest of the rack. He is possessed; a jinn has touched him; that is why he raves. Our gods are angry with him for insulting them, and they have struck his mind with madness, so do not listen to a madman. He is a liar, in it for money, doing all of this for some scheme of his own. Mufti Menk lays the charges out side by side and then asks the question underneath all of them: why so many accusations against one honest man? They had known Hud his whole life. They had never caught him in a lie. So why the avalanche?

His answer is plain, and it is the hinge of the whole episode. It was never that they could not understand Hud. It was that understanding him meant changing everything. To accept the message was to tear up their entire way of life, and rather than secure the next world they chose to keep this one, and so they lost the next. So they did what people do when the message is sound and the messenger is inconvenient: they attacked the messenger to avoid the message. And notice, Mufti Menk says, and he means for it to land close to home, how exactly this rehearses us. A man comes and says leave the drinking, leave the cheating, leave the interest you devour, leave the harming of people, and something in us would so much rather discredit the man than examine the words. We call him an extremist. We call

him too poor to be worth hearing. We say he is only in it for himself. Anything, anything but right.

But the truth, Mufti Menk insists, does not check your bank balance before it becomes true. If a child from the very poorest home says something correct, you take it, because what makes a word worth hearing is that it is true, not who happened to carry it. Listen to how Hud himself answered the slander, with a dignity that refused to descend to their level:

[Hud] said, "O my people, there is not foolishness in me, but I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I am to you a trustworthy adviser."

QUR'AN 7:67-68

A trustworthy adviser. He did not insult them back. He reminded them of what they already knew about him, and pointed past himself to the One who sent him. The people of Ad could not get past who Hud was long enough to hear what Hud said. It is the oldest mistake in the book, and it is on offer to every one of us, every time a hard truth arrives in a messenger we would rather dismiss.

Palaces on every hilltop, and a people who thought they would live forever

Hud held a mirror up to the way they lived, and the reflection was strange. On every high place, every ridge and elevation, they raised a great landmark, a vast house carved into the rock of the mountain. And Mufti Menk catches the detail the Qur'an preserves and will not let us miss: these were not homes they lived in. They were monuments to brag over. That one is mine. That one is my brother's. That one belongs to the uncle. They

built on the heights purely to be seen, purely to be counted among the people who could afford to build where no one needed to. And then they went down into the valleys and built the houses they actually lived in, and built them as though death were a rumour that only happened to smaller men.

Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves, and take for yourselves constructions [i.e., palaces and fortresses] that you might abide eternally?

QUR'AN 26:128-129

That you might abide eternally. There is the sickness named in a single phrase. They took those fortresses as if they would live in them forever. No one does. And here Mufti Menk turns the whole scene, gently but directly, onto the wealthy among us, himself included, because he is careful to say there is nothing wrong with owning much, nothing at all. The wrong was never the wealth. The wrong was what the wealth did to Ad. When Allah gives you more, he says, the right response is to come closer to the ground, not to climb above everyone. The more Allah provides, the more down to earth you should become: found more often in the masjid, not less; giving more in charity, not hoarding; greeting the people you pass rather than letting a gulf open between you and them simply because you have become the richest man in the street. He paints the picture exactly: a man so rich he walks by and greets no one, and no one greets him, and a distance has opened that wealth alone dug. That, he says, is the danger. Ad received the gift and forgot the Giver, and built their pride into the very rock of the hills, monuments to a permanence that belongs to no created thing.

Turn back, and your strength will only grow

Like Nuh before him, Hud did not only warn. He held the gift out in his other hand. Two things, he told them, and watch the doors of heaven swing open:

And O my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in showers and increase you in strength [added] to your strength. And do not turn away, [being] criminals."

QUR'AN 11:52

Mufti Menk separates the two acts on purpose, exactly as Hud lays them out. Istighfar is to say, my Lord, forgive me. Tawbah is then to actually move, to set your feet on the road and walk His way, because it is not enough to ask forgiveness while standing rooted in the same spot you sinned in. Seek forgiveness, and then come onto the path. Do both, Hud promised, and the sky will pour rain upon you in showers, and Allah will add strength to the strength you already carry.

Sit with the sheer size of that offer, Mufti Menk says, because it is staggering. These were already the most powerful people Allah had ever made, and He was offering them more, simply for turning back to Him. And he draws out the principle Hud was teaching underneath the promise: honour does not come from arrogance; it comes from humbling yourself before Allah. He sets beside it a saying of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that puts the same truth without a wrapper: whoever humbles himself for the sake of Allah, Allah raises him. The people of Ad could have had everything they had, and kept it, and been given more on top of it, for the price of a bowed head. He gave them an account that only ever credited and never charged. They turned away.

It is one of the quietly devastating notes of the whole story. We tend to imagine that the wages of faith are loss, that to submit is to give something up. Hud stood before a people who would lose absolutely nothing and gain rain, gain strength, gain the world and the next world both, and still they could not bring themselves to bow. The refusal was never about the cost. There was no cost. It was about the bowing.

Who is stronger than us?

And then came the sentence that names the whole disease, the boast they thought no one could top. We are stronger than the people of Nuh, they said; we have more than they ever had; we cannot be destroyed. They threw the old warning back in Hud's face and demanded he tell them the one thing they were sure had no answer:

As for Aad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, "Who is greater than us in strength?" Did they not consider that Allah who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs.

QUR'AN 41:15

This verse, Mufti Menk pauses to note, carries a thread that runs straight into the life of the Prophet ﷺ. It is from Surah Fussilat, and it is part of the very passage the Prophet ﷺ recited to Utbah ibn Rabi'ah when the chiefs of Quraysh sent him to bargain the Messenger out of his message, to offer him wealth and rank and power if he would only stop. The Prophet ﷺ answered by reciting, and he read from Fussilat until he reached the people of Ad and their doom, and Utbah, hardened negotiator that he was, went back to his people visibly shaken, telling them to leave this

man alone. The boast of Ad was read aloud to the men who were busy rehearsing it.

Because the Qur'an answers Ad in the same breath they speak. Did they not see, Allah says, that the One who created them was greater than them in strength? It is the simplest arithmetic in all of creation, and the comfortable forever forget it: the hand that made your muscle is stronger than your muscle. And Mufti Menk gives the image that strips the boast down to nothing. Allah could send a single mosquito, one small insect with a thin whine in the dark, and undo a man lying in a palace built to hold five hundred. You can own the biggest house and the softest bed in the land, and a tiny sound at night defeats you utterly; you lie awake, helpless, ruled by something you cannot even see. We know diseases, he reminds us, that ride into a body on a mosquito's wing and end it. That is exactly how much the strength of Ad was worth against the One who made it. Who is stronger than us, they asked. The Maker of the very strength you are boasting with. There was never any other answer.

The cloud they cheered, and the wind that came instead
At last Hud stood before the whole nation and freed himself of them entirely. They had said, in effect, we will deal with you; so he turned the challenge around and threw it back open:

"Indeed, I call Allah to witness, and witness [yourselves] that I am free from whatever you associate with Allah other than Him. So plot against me all together; then do not give me respite."

QUR'AN 11:54-55

Then do it, he told them: every last one of you, gather and scheme and strike, and give me no breathing room, and watch

what your Lord does. Mufti Menk calls the silence that followed the first crack in their armour. For all their size and all their numbers, they did not come. And the reason they did not come, he says, is that deep down a flicker of fear admitted they were not so sure. A man does not invite the whole world to destroy him unless something larger than the world is standing behind him, and some part of them sensed it. There are many people, he reflects, who know the truth in their hearts and are held back from surrendering to it by one thing only, and that one thing is shaytan. Hud was not bluffing, and they half-knew it. Listen to where his certainty actually rested:

Indeed, I have relied upon Allah, my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature but that He holds it by its forelock [i.e., controls it]. Indeed, my Lord is on a path [that is] straight.

QUR'AN 11:56

He holds every creature by its forelock. Not one moving thing in all the earth, Hud was telling them, stirs except that Allah has hold of it. Then Allah sent a drought, and the gardens they were so proud of began to wither, and when they ran to their stones and begged them for rain and got nothing back, Hud told them again what he had told them before: this rain you want comes through istighfar and tawbah, through asking forgiveness and turning back, and through nothing else. The drought was a mercy still, a warning with the door left open. They read it as an inconvenience and went back to their idols.

So instead they kept demanding the very punishment he had warned them of: bring it, then, if you are one of the truthful. The Qur'an records the same insolent dare in Surah al-Ahqaf, and the name it gives Hud there is its own quiet glory:

And mention, [O Muhammad], the brother of Aad, when he warned his people in [the region of] al-Ahqaf, and warners had already passed on before him and after him, [saying], "Do not worship except Allah. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a terrible day."

QUR'AN 46:21

And so one day a great dark cloud came rolling in toward their valleys, and the healthy, thirsty people of Ad looked up at it and cheered. Rain. At last. The Qur'an lets them cheer, and then turns on them with a flatness that is terrible to read:

And when they saw it as a cloud approaching their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud bringing us rain!" Rather, it is that for which you were impatient: a wind, within it a painful punishment.

QUR'AN 46:24

Not rain. The very thing they had been daring him to produce. A wind. And what a wind. Mufti Menk reaches for Surah al-Haqqah, where Allah names it without mercy, a screaming, violent wind, freezing and howling, that He loosed on them without a single pause:

And as for Aad, they were destroyed by a screaming, violent wind which He [i.e., Allah] imposed upon them for seven nights and eight days in succession, so you would see the people therein fallen as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees.

QUR'AN 69:6-7

Seven nights and eight days, with no break in it, an ice-cold gale with a scream inside it. And the giants, the towering pillars of men who had asked who is stronger than us, were thrown down

across their own ground like the hollow, uprooted stumps of palm trees, snapped off at the root, rolling in the wind that had once carried only the scent of their gardens. The strongest people Allah ever made, scattered like dead wood. The mosquito had become a hurricane, and it answered their question for them.

Then do you see of them any remains?

When the command of Allah came, He saved His prophet and the believers who had stood with him, and let the wind take everything else.

And when Our command came, We saved Hud and those who believed with him, by mercy from Us; and We saved them from a harsh punishment.

QUR'AN 11:58

The wind destroyed all the rest, by the order of its Lord, until nothing of that mighty people was left to see but the empty shells of their houses:

Destroying everything by command of its Lord. And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. Thus do We recompense the criminal people.

QUR'AN 46:25

And then Allah does something with Ad that Mufti Menk says He does not do with the others, and he lingers on it because it is the whole point sharpened to a blade. Of Pharaoh, Allah keeps a body, preserved as a sign for those who come after. Of Madyan and of Thamud, He leaves ruins you can still stand inside and run your hand along. But of Ad, the mightiest of them all, Allah asks His Prophet ﷺ a question that is its own verdict:

Then do you see of them any remains?

QUR'AN 69:8

If the Qur'an had not told us they existed, Mufti Menk says, we would have no trace of them at all, not a stone, not an inscription, nothing for the archaeologist's spade to turn up. And the Muslim historians explain the reason, he relays, and it is exact: they were so strong, so utterly certain that no power could touch them, that Allah did not merely destroy them, He erased them, wiped them off the face of the earth so completely that the proudest nation that ever drew breath left behind less than the weakest. The people who built monuments on every hilltop so that their names would outlast them left no name at all. The ones who asked who is stronger than us became the one nation God removed so thoroughly that their own existence survives only because He chose to mention it.

There is one more verse Mufti Menk sets down beside this one, because it folds the entire lesson into a mirror and holds it up to the reader. Allah reminds Quraysh, and reminds us, of exactly what Ad had been given, and exactly what it bought them:

And We had certainly established them in such as We have not established you, and We made for them hearing and vision and hearts [i.e., intellect]. But their hearing and vision and hearts availed them not from anything [of the punishment] when they were [continually] rejecting the signs of Allah; and they were enveloped by what they used to ridicule.

QUR'AN 46:26

Established more than you, He tells the Quraysh; given hearing, given sight, given hearts; and not one of those faculties availed

them anything, because they spent them all on rejecting His signs. Read that, Mufti Menk says, and then check yourself. We too have ears. We too have eyes. We too have a heart in the chest. Ad had all three in fuller measure than we will ever know, and all three were thrown down with them in the wind, because they used them to turn away. The faculties are not a possession; they are a trust, and they are returned. The only question the whole story finally leaves on the table is whether, when the reminder reaches us, we will use our ears to hear it, our eyes to see it, and our hearts to turn, or whether we will go on standing on our own small hilltop, asking who is stronger than us, until the wind arrives to answer.

What Hud asks of our faith

It would be a comfortable thing to read the destruction of Ad as ancient history, a tale of giants and a screaming wind, safely sealed in a country of dunes a long time ago. That would be to miss the question Hud puts directly to us, because Allah did not tell this story to entertain the Quraysh, and He did not preserve it to entertain us. He told it, Mufti Menk reminds us from the very opening, to steady the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ while his own people troubled him in Makkah. Just as Hud was called a fool, called possessed, called a liar after money by the very people who had known him all his life, so was the Messenger ﷺ; and just as the ending vindicated the prophet and buried the mockers, so it would for him ﷺ. The boast of Ad, who is stronger than us, was the same arrogance the chiefs of Quraysh carried, and it is no accident that those very words were the ones the Prophet ﷺ read aloud to Utbah when Quraysh came to buy his silence. Every early warner was a rehearsal of the patience he ﷺ

would be asked to carry, and the proof that the wind always comes for the proud in the end.

And there is one more place this story has already touched your tongue, even if you never knew it was Ad you were reciting. When you read Surah al-Fajr in your prayers, one of the short surahs of Juz Amma that so many of us know by heart, Allah opens it by swearing oaths and then asking you to consider how He dealt with the mighty nations who came before. The first of them He names is this one:

*Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with Aad,
[with] Iram, who had lofty pillars, the likes of whom had
never been created in the land?*

QUR'AN 89:6-8

Iram of the pillars. That is the people of Ad, and the lofty pillars are exactly what Mufti Menk described: their towering frames, and the high columns of the dwellings they raised to be seen. Allah recalls them at the very start of a surah many of us recite without ever pausing on what we are saying, a warning fastened to the front of the chapter for anyone who has ever trusted in their own strength. The likes of whom had never been created in the land. The mightiest nation, named in a few words and then dismissed, so that the next time the proud forget themselves, the reminder is already on the believer's lips at dawn.

So take from Hud what Ad refused to take. Strength is no shield from Allah; it never was. Wealth, power, security, health, the soft bed and the high roof, all of it is a gift loaned out, and not one piece of it is a verdict that Allah is pleased with you, nor a wall between you and Him. The hand that made your strength is stronger than your strength, and a single wind, a single mosquito,

is enough. When Allah gives you more, the lesson is to come lower, not climb higher: to be found nearer the ground, nearer the masjid, nearer the people you might otherwise look down on, nearer charity, because abundance that lifts you away from Allah and away from His servants is the exact disease that flattened Ad. Weigh the message and never the messenger, for the truth does not check your background before it becomes true. And know that istighfar and tawbah together, asking forgiveness and then actually walking the road, open the very sky, the way Hud promised a people too proud to take the gift.

Above all, use the trust you were given before it is taken back. You have the ears, you have the eyes, you have the heart that Ad had in fuller measure and squandered. When the reminder reaches you, and it has just reached you, hear it, see it, and turn, while there is still time to turn. Do not wait for the cloud on the horizon, cheering for rain, only to learn too late what the wind was carrying. May Allah, who is mightier than all might and gentler than we deserve, keep us low before Him while He raises us, make every gift He gives a reason to thank Him and never a wall between us and Him, open our ears and our eyes and our hearts to His reminder while the door still stands open, and never let us stand on our own small hill asking who is stronger than us. O Turner of the hearts, keep ours firm upon Your religion, and gather us with Hud, peace be upon him, and the prophets of warning, and Your final Messenger ﷺ, in the home no wind will ever reach.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 8 (Hud, peace be upon him). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (7:65-72, 11:50-60, 26:128-129, 41:15,

46:21-26, 69:6-8, 89:6-8), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.

Salih and the she-camel

The sign they asked for out of the rock

There was once a people so strong that a man among them could press his thumb into a boulder the way a child presses into play dough, and leave a hollow in the rock. They did not build their homes on the mountains; they carved their homes out of the mountains, whole palaces cut from solid stone, and they lived inside the answer to their own fear. Wind could not tear rock. Water could not climb to where they sat. And if the very ground convulsed, a mountain is one piece, it would hold. They had walled themselves against everything they could imagine, which left only the thing they could not. They were called Thamud, and Allah had already given them one warning they should never have forgotten: He had raised them up in the place of a nation He had erased.

This is the ninth of the prophets we are walking through, and it carries the strangest sign in all their stories. Not a staff that becomes a serpent. Not a fire that turns cool. A living miracle that these people demanded for themselves, wrote the specifications for with their own mouths, watched walk out of the rock at their command, and then went out one night to destroy. Hold the she-camel in your mind from the start. By the end you will understand why Allah closes a whole short surah, one you may already recite from memory, upon the people who killed her.

A nation that mistook its strength for safety

Yesterday's people were Ad, the giants Allah scoured from the earth so completely that no ruin remains to point to, only their name in the Qur'an. Thamud were their heirs. They moved further north, to a valley of stone that Mufti Menk places at al-Hijr, roughly three hundred and eighty kilometres north-west of Madinah, where the carved cliffs still stand and where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would one day pass with his companions. At first they were a grateful people. They had been spared what swallowed their fathers, and they worshipped Allah, thankful to be alive. Then the gardens came, and the springs, and the wealth, and the long ease that wealth buys. Slowly, without anyone deciding it, Allah slipped out of the centre of their lives.

This is the warning Mufti Menk keeps returning to, gently, because it is aimed straight at us: get close to Allah while your hands are full and your life is well, so that He is already near when the hard day comes. Most of us do the reverse. We forget Him in our comfort, and then, when something finally breaks, we raise our hands to the sky for the first time in years. The Prophet ﷺ himself, when he saw clouds gather over Madinah, would change colour and begin to pray, because he knew that clouds had once been the very thing sent to destroy nations, and he begged that this one carry mercy and not punishment. A people who could read the sky like that would never let their wealth make them deaf. Thamud let theirs.

Allah lists their genius for them not as an achievement but as a favour, set in the same breath as a warning:

And remember when He made you successors after the 'Aad and settled you in the land, [and] you take for yourselves palaces from its plains and carve from the mountains, homes. Then remember the favors of Allāh and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption.

Carved walls feed a particular kind of arrogance. The water cannot reach us up here, they reasoned. The wind cannot tear stone. And if the earth shakes, the mountain holds in one piece. Hold onto that confidence, Mufti Menk asks of the reader, point for point, because at the very end of the story it is answered point for point, in a way they never thought to fear.

One of their own, sent to wake them

When Allah sent them a warner, He did not send a stranger with a strange message, and He did not send a have-not with nothing to lose. He chose their man from inside the family. That is the meaning carried by the word brother in the verse: not a foreigner, but one of their own blood. And He chose one of the brightest among them, a man from wealth and high standing, so well regarded that the people had been quietly grooming him to become their leader. His name was Salih, peace be upon him.

And to Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people, worship Allāh; you have no deity other than Him. He has produced you from the earth and settled you in it, so ask forgiveness of Him and then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is near and responsive."

QUR'AN 11:61

Worship Allah alone, you have no god besides Him. It is the same sentence, word for word, that came from Nuh, from Hud, and that would one day come from the Prophet you are walking toward, Muhammad ﷺ. Mufti Menk pauses here on the strategy of shaytan, because it is so simple it should embarrass us. The trap that catches a rat today is the same trap from a hundred years ago, with the same bait, and it still works, because the rat never

warns its brothers. Idolatry needs no new design. The same lie is set in every generation, and generation after generation walks into it. This is precisely why the Qur'an tells these stories again and again: so that we, at least, might be the ones who recognise the trap and step around it.

Listen to how Salih ends the call: ask forgiveness, then turn back, for indeed my Lord is near and responsive. Qaribun Mujib, the two words Mufti Menk lifts out and turns over, near and answering. It is a promise the reader can take personally tonight, but he attaches to it the Prophet's ﷺ own condition. There was a man, the Prophet ﷺ said, who stretches his hands to the sky crying My Lord, my Lord, while his food is unlawful, his drink unlawful, his clothing unlawful, nourished his whole life on the unlawful, so how could such a one be answered? And he warned us not to rush the answer either: every one of you is answered, so long as he is not hasty, so long as he does not give up and say, I made my du'a and it was not answered. So the door is near, and it does open. But keep your earnings clean, ask first for forgiveness, and do not bang on it once and walk away.

We had such hope in you

What wounded them was not a preacher. It was their own future leader telling them to abandon the very thing their forefathers had always done. They came to him almost hurt, as if he had betrayed a plan they had made for him.

They said, "O Ṣāliḥ, you were among us a man of promise before this. Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worshipped? And indeed we are, about that to which you invite us, in disquieting doubt."

QUR'AN 11:62

Mufti Menk lingers on the wound, because it is so familiar it is almost comic, and he carries it straight into our own living rooms. The sharp child gets pushed toward medicine; the one struggling at school gets sent to study the religion, as though the path of Allah were the consolation prize for the children who could not do better. He says he has watched families actively block a bright young person who leaned toward sacred knowledge, with one question, the same question Thamud put to Salih: but what will you earn? Look at the scholars, look at the old cars they drive. It is, almost word for word, the offer Thamud were making. You were taught, you were intelligent, we would have made you loaded, why would you choose this?

And the answer the prophets keep giving is the answer to a question the world cannot hear. Salih, like every messenger, asked them for no wage at all, no collection plate, no fee; his reward, he told them, was only with Allah. Mufti Menk sets this against the religion-as-business he warns of plainly, where a man with no faith who simply wants to be rich is told the quickest racket is to open a house of worship and let the crowd fill his pockets. The true men of religion, he says, do not chase wealth; Allah takes care of them. Then he turns it back on the reader as comfort, not rebuke. Wealth was never the measure. There are people whose place in Paradise is already secured who never owned a home in this life, who spent their days under the trees and in tents. Paradise was never reserved for the ones with money.

The sign out of the rock

They wanted proof, so they wrote the test themselves, and they made it impossible on purpose. Mufti Menk walks through it the way the lecture builds it, demand stacked on demand, each one

added the moment they feared he might actually meet the last. You see that huge rock? Split it open, and bring a she-camel out of it, alive. Make her pregnant. Make her deep red, a rich dark red. Make her larger than any camel they had ever laid eyes on, strong and solid, with an appetite to match her size, a sign no one could possibly mistake for an ordinary beast. They piled the conditions higher precisely because they were certain the whole thing lay beyond him.

Salih agreed, on one understanding that he made very clear, the same understanding the Qur'an repeats with every nation that ever demanded a miracle: once you ask for a sign and Allah sends it, the matter is closed. There is no after. Whoever refuses to believe past that point has nothing left coming to him but the consequence. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was challenged in exactly this way, the people of Quraysh asking why no angel was sent down with him to settle it, and Allah answered that had He sent the angel down, the matter would have been decided then and there, and no respite given. A demanded sign is not a gift. It is a verdict waiting to be signed.

He called on his Lord, and the rock split. Out of the stone walked precisely what they had described: towering, deep red, pregnant, the largest camel anyone present had ever seen.

And to the Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people, worship Allāh; you have no deity other than Him. There has come to you clear evidence from your Lord. This is the she-camel of Allāh [sent] to you as a sign. So leave her to eat within Allāh's land and do not touch her with harm, lest there seize you a painful punishment."

QUR'AN 7:73

Some looked, and their hearts opened, and they believed. Most looked at a camel that had just emerged from solid rock at their own command, and reached for the one word Mufti Menk says they were always going to reach for. Magic. It is, he notes, the identical verdict that Thamud, and Ad, and the people of every prophet arrived at, as though they had all been trained at the same college under the same lecturer. And the lecturer was shaytan, running the one plan that keeps on working: when the proof is undeniable, deny it anyway, and give it another name.

A split for the right reasons

Notice who believed and who refused, because the line falls exactly where you would expect it to fall. The poor and the powerless came toward Salih; they had little to lose, and they could feel that following the truth would cost them nothing they owned. The wealthy and the powerful dug in, and the Qur'an preserves their exchange almost as a sneer flung across the room.

Said the eminent ones who were arrogant among his people to those who were oppressed - to those who believed among them, "Do you [actually] know that Ṣāliḥ is sent from his Lord?" They said, "Indeed we, in that with which he was sent, are believers."

QUR'AN 7:75

Said those who were arrogant, "Indeed we, in that which you have believed, are disbelievers."

QUR'AN 7:76

Mufti Menk names the disease underneath it without flinching: Thamud worshipped their rich. Whatever the wealthy said, the

crowd ran that way, for no better reason than that they were loaded. He turns it on the reader directly and personally. Be careful, he says, that the partner you earn through, the boss who signs your cheque, the one who controls your income, never quietly becomes the one who controls your religion. It happens by degrees. You make your money through someone, and slowly you cannot afford to disagree with them, until you are blind in matters of faith because the human who pays you has become your god in all but name. There is a supreme boss, Mufti Menk reminds you, and it is not the one on the payroll.

Every day the living miracle stood among them, and every day a few more came onto the right path because of it. The community divided in two, one side for Salih and one against, and Mufti Menk calls that division a mercy, not a tragedy. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came to Quraysh, they split the very same way, those who accepted and those who would not, and that split was healthy, a parting for the right reasons. We are meant to stand as one ummah. But when a man comes with the truth, with the Qur'an and the way of the Prophet ﷺ, and the truth itself divides the room, that division is clean. Better that ten stand on the straight path than that a whole nation walk off the cliff together, holding hands.

Share the water, touch her not

Allah set one term upon the sign, and it was almost embarrassingly easy. The camel they had demanded had the appetite they had demanded, so she drank deep. Very well, Salih told them: the water of the spring would be shared, turn and turn about. One day belonged wholly to her, and the next day to all of their herds, and no one was to change the arrangement, because they were the ones who had asked for her in the first place.

And O my people, this is the she-camel of Allāh - [she is] to you a sign. So let her feed upon Allāh's earth and do not touch her with harm, or you will be taken by an impending punishment.

QUR'AN 11:64

That was the whole test. Take turns at the well with a single camel, and leave her unharmed. The Qur'an frames her plainly elsewhere as a trial deliberately sent: We are sending the she-camel as trial for them, so watch them and be patient, and inform them that the water is shared between them, each day of drink attended by turn. Mufti Menk underlines how small the demand was, how light. Not a war. Not a fortune. A drink of water, every other day, and a little patience with an inconvenient animal.

But the camel was inconvenient, and inconvenience is corrosive. On her day the people's cattle bolted at the mere sight of her, huge and red as she was, and the resentment built into a rumour, and the rumour hardened into a plot. One man decided she had to go. He won over a second, and the two of them pulled in seven more, nine in all. Salih warned them again, plainly, you dare not touch her, the punishment is near. They did it anyway. The Qur'an does not soften their choice with excuses; it calls it what it was, insolence toward their Lord:

So they hamstrung the she-camel and were insolent toward the command of their Lord and said, "O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the messengers."

QUR'AN 7:77

One man fired an arrow into her leg; another moved in and cut; and when she fell, they finished her, and the crowd cheered, glad

to have their water back every single day. They had killed the sign of Allah that they themselves had begged Allah to send. Then they turned to Salih, almost taunting him, and told him to bring on this punishment he kept promising. He gave them a sentence that is also a clock:

But they hamstrung her, so he said, "Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. That is a promise not to be denied [i.e., unfulfilling]."

QUR'AN 11:65

The blast that answered their fortress

Three days came as a countdown they could not stop. On the first, the faces of the whole community changed colour, in one narration to yellow; on the second, to red; on the third, to black, and they wept and called these days of evil omen, knowing now that something was coming and unable to name it or outrun it. And in the night before the end, the nine who had killed the camel swore a secret oath to one another: tonight we will fall on Salih and his family and kill them all, and in the morning we will swear to his heirs that we saw nothing and know nothing. They plotted, and Allah, as the Qur'an puts it elsewhere, plotted too, and theirs came to nothing. Salih, peace be upon him, was commanded to leave with the believers. The disbelievers were glad to see the back of him, never understanding that in chasing away the one true leader their own community had produced, they were destroying themselves and saving him. He would be carried to safety. They would be left to what they had earned.

Then came the thing they had never once been threatened with, the thing no wall they had ever carved was built to stop. Recall their fortress logic, point for point: water cannot reach us, wind

cannot tear rock, and if the ground shakes the mountain holds. So Allah answered with none of the three. He sent the sayhah, a single blast of sound.

And the shriek seized those who had wronged, and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone

QUR'AN 11:67

By morning they lay face-down in the very palaces they had trusted, the carved stone now their tombs. Mufti Menk dwells on it with a kind of awe: a sound, rising and rising until it shook the ground beneath solid rock and stopped every heart at once. He notes, almost in passing, that the world today is only beginning to study sound as a weapon, that anyone who has sat beside a car with its bass turned up has felt the ground itself tremble, and that Allah deployed exactly this against Thamud long before any of our engineers thought of it. Their secure houses held up perfectly. The houses survived. It was the people inside who did not. The Qur'an seals their disappearance in a single line: as if they had never prospered therein.

The surah you may already recite

Here the story clicks into something you may already carry in your chest. Surah ash-Shams opens with that famous run of oaths, by the sun and its brightness, by the moon, by the day and the night, by the soul and the One who shaped it. Most readers know the oaths and stop there, never asking what so many oaths are swearing toward. They are all swearing toward a single point, and the point is Thamud.

Thamūd denied [their prophet] by reason of their transgression,

And the messenger of Allāh [i.e., Ṣāliḥ] said to them, "[Do not harm] the she-camel of Allāh or [prevent her from] her drink."

QUR'AN 91:13

But they denied him and hamstrung her. So their Lord brought down upon them destruction for their sin and made it equal [upon all of them].

QUR'AN 91:14

Mufti Menk pulls this passage out by name at the close of his telling, because it gives you the whole episode in a handful of lines, and one of those lines is the warning Salih gave at the spring, set down in the Qur'an forever: the she-camel of Allah, and her drink. So their Lord levelled them for their sin, and made it equal upon them all. The same destruction they had dealt to the camel was dealt back to them, exact and total, no house spared.

Two threads run out of these verses straight into the rest of your faith. The first is the most wretched of them, the single man sent forth to cut the camel, the one ash-Shams calls ashqaha, whom the Qur'an singles out by name as the wretch of his people. One arrow, one hamstrung camel, and a whole nation buried alongside the act, that is what handing yourself over to the worst counsel can do. Surah al-Qamar tells the same scene and adds the same severe wonder at it:

But they called their companion, and he dared and hamstrung [her]. And how [severe] were My punishment and warning. Indeed, We sent upon them one shriek [i.e., blast from the sky], and they became like the dry twig fragments of an [animal] pen.

The second thread is the ruins themselves, and what we are permitted to do with them. When everything was over, Salih, peace be upon him, came back and stood among his dead people, and the Qur'an records that he still spoke to them, to the silent stone and the fallen:

And he [i.e., Ṣāliḥ] turned away from them and said, "O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the message of my Lord and advised you, but you do not like advisors."

QUR'AN 7:79

Carry that line out of the rubble: you do not like advisors. The carved valley is still out there, and Thamud are remembered by name to this day, the ones who carved out the rocks in the valley, as Surah al-Fajr puts it. When the Prophet ﷺ passed those ruins with his companions and they drew water from the wells and made dough with it, he told them to throw it out and feed it to nothing, and to draw instead only from the well the camel had once drunk from. And he gave them a rule for the whole place: do not enter upon these people who were punished except while weeping, lest what befell them befall you. Not as tourists with cameras and a packed lunch, never that. As people who walk through trembling, because we know the story, and we know it was written down for us.

What Salih asks of our faith

It is easy to read a nation like Thamud and feel only a safe, distant horror, to file them away as a cautionary tale about people who were nothing like us. That would be to miss the question the

story is putting to our own iman, and the question is sharper than it looks.

They forgot Allah the moment life grew comfortable. While their fathers' fate was fresh, they worshipped Him; once the gardens and the springs and the carved palaces arrived, He drifted out of the centre of their days, and by the time they needed Him they had no relationship left to lean on. Mufti Menk presses this without ever raising his voice, because it is the most ordinary way a heart is lost. Most of us do exactly what Thamud did: we are warm toward Allah in our fear and forgetful of Him in our ease, saving our first sincere du'a in years for the night something finally breaks. The story asks you to reverse it, to draw near to Him now, while your hands are full and nothing is wrong, so that He is already near, already familiar, on the day you have nothing left but Him.

They trusted their walls instead of their Lord, and the walls were not the problem. The carved fortress was real, and it worked against everything they had imagined. What failed was the belief that security lives in stone, in wealth, in technology, in being the strongest people in the valley. Allah answered their wind-proof, flood-proof, earthquake-proof homes with a sound, and the homes stood while the hearts inside them stopped. The lesson is not that planning and provision are foolish; it is that they were never your safety. Your safety is being right with the One who gave you the stone in the first place, and nothing else has ever held.

And they could not bear to be corrected, which is, in the end, why they died. A whole nation, far stronger than you or me, was levelled flat with the ground because it hated to be told the truth, and the last words of their own prophet over their corpses were

simply, you do not like advisors. Set that beside the heart of this religion. Salih's call was, word for word, the Prophet's ﷺ call: worship Allah alone. The sign Quraysh demanded was answered as Thamud's was, with the warning that a proof sent and rejected leaves nothing but ruin. And the lone wretch who cut the camel stands in the Qur'an as a warning in himself, of what one man's hand, cheered on from the sidelines, can pull down upon a whole people. The thread runs from the rock in the valley to the streets of Makkah to the chair you are sitting in. One person's sin, cheered on by a crowd too comfortable to object, doomed an entire society that knew better and stayed silent.

So take one thing from Salih down into your ordinary life. Turn to Allah today, in the middle of an unremarkable, comfortable day, before any hardship forces your hand. Stop trusting whatever wall you have quietly decided will keep you safe, and rest your security in Him instead. And the next time someone corrects you, at home, at work, anywhere, do not bristle and do not harden; thank them, and remember that there was a nation stronger than you that was buried equal with the earth for hating exactly that. May Allah keep us soft toward His signs and His warners, draw us near in our ease before He tests us in our need, make us among those who love the ones who advise, and gather us with Salih, peace be upon him, and with every prophet who advised a people and was turned away, in the home He kept for those who listened.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 9 (Salih, peace be upon him). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (7:73-79, 11:61-68, 91:11-15, 54:23-31,

89:9), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.

Ibrahim, the friend of Allah, part

I

A boy who reasoned his way to the One, and stood alone

There is a kind of courage that looks, from the outside, like a child asking an impossible question. A boy stands in a room full of carved stone, the smell of fresh-cut wood still in the air, and watches a grown man set down his chisel, take the thing he has just shaped with his own hands, and sell it to a customer who carries it home to beg it for rain and health and sons. The whole city does this. Everyone the boy loves does this. And the boy, alone among them, cannot make his mind go quiet about it. So he opens his mouth and says the one thing nobody around him will say: what is this, and why are you on the ground in front of it?

From that single honest question, asked by a young man who would not pretend even when pretending was the only safe thing to do, a whole religion of pure devotion is about to be born. His name is Ibrahim, peace be upon him, and Mufti Menk wants us to understand, before the story even begins, just how high Allah has raised this one man. Every messenger who came after him was from his family. Allah tested him, not once and not twice, but again and again across a long life, and again and again he passed. The fire is only the first of those tests, and it is the test of a boy who would not lie.

A boy born in the land of idols

He was born in Iraq, in the city of Babylon, in the days of a king named Nimrud. Allah had given that king enormous power, and the man had let his power swell into something monstrous: he had come to believe that he himself was a god, and his people worshipped idols and worshipped wealth, and saw nothing strange in either. Into that world a child was born whose own father, the man the Qur'an names Azar, made his living from the idols. Azar carved gods out of wood and stone, and then he sold them. So the boy grew up watching his father shape a deity with a tool, hand it to a buyer, and watch that buyer carry it home and fall down before it, asking the stone for long life and food and guidance.

Mufti Menk pauses on the sheer absurdity of it, and on how the absurdity never seemed to trouble a soul. The poor could only afford the small idols; the rich owned the big ones; and when a person had a big problem, he would go and borrow a bigger god from a wealthier neighbour, as though stone came with a scale of strength. People who had working minds had simply switched their minds off. The boy could not. One day, the histories say, he stood before a great idol with enormous ears and asked his father what it was, and his father told him the big ears were so the god could hear everyone who called upon it. A god that needed bigger ears to hear. The boy turned that over and could not accept it, and so he said to his father exactly what he saw:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham said to his father Azar, "Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error."

QUR'AN 6:74

Notice that Allah Himself preserves the father's name in the verse, Azar, so we tell it the way the Qur'an tells it. And notice

what the boy had grasped already. He had not merely disliked the idols. He had reasoned to a verdict: you and your whole people are lost in something that is plainly, obviously wrong. That clarity did not come from a book, for there was no book in his hands. It came from a mind that refused to stop working, and from a heart Allah was guiding from the very start.

The question no one would answer

Allah says of him that He had given Ibrahim his sound judgement early, long before, and that He knew exactly the one He was raising:

And We had certainly given Abraham his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing

QUR'AN 21:51

Some narrations put the boy as young as seven when the questions began, and Mufti Menk hands that detail on as the histories give it, neither hardened into fact nor brushed aside. What the Qur'an fixes for us is the question itself. He went to the worshippers directly and asked them, plainly, what they thought they were doing:

When he said to his father and his people, "What are these statues to which you are devoted?"

QUR'AN 21:52

It was not a sneer; it was a genuine cross-examination, and Ibrahim pressed it the way an honest mind presses anything: do these things hear you when you call out to them? Can they benefit you in any way, or harm you in any way? There was only one honest answer to those questions, and his people could not

give it. They did not say yes, because yes was a lie they could see was a lie. They did not say no, because no would have ended the whole arrangement on the spot. So they reached for the one defence a person grabs when the truth is against him. They reached for their fathers:

They said, "We found our fathers worshippers of them."

QUR'AN 21:53

Mufti Menk lingers here, because this is the oldest excuse in the world, and it is still everywhere. We do it because it has always been done. Our forefathers did it, so it must be right. Ibrahim refused to accept inheritance as proof of anything, and he told them so without softening it: you and your fathers alike have been in clear error all along. In the surah where the same scene is told again, he goes further still, naming the idols for what they truly are to a person who loves the truth:

He said, "Then do you see what you have been worshipping, you and your ancient forefathers? Indeed, they are enemies to me, except the Lord of the worlds,

QUR'AN 26:75-77

Every last one of them, an enemy. And only One worth a single act of worship: the Lord of all the worlds, the One who actually made him. From a boy of seven who would not be told that old meant true.

O my father

With his own father, Ibrahim was gentler than with anyone, and Mufti Menk loves this scene for the way the boy speaks. Four times in a row the Qur'an records him beginning the same soft

way, ya abati, O my father, before he says a single hard word. Hear the tenderness of it, a son reasoning with the man who raised him, terrified for him and unwilling to wound him:

[Mention] when he said to his father, "O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all? O my father, indeed there has come to me of knowledge that which has not come to you, so follow me; I will guide you to an even path. O my father, do not worship [i.e., obey] Satan. Indeed Satan has ever been, to the Most Merciful, disobedient.

QUR'AN 19:42-44

Look at what this young man has already understood about the shape of the universe. There are two forces in the world, he sees: the One who makes, and the one who deceives. And he can watch his own father drifting toward the second, mistaking a chisel and a sale for harmless work, and he cannot bear it. So he says the most frightened, most loving thing a son can say to a father:

O my father, indeed I fear that there will touch you a punishment from the Most Merciful so you would be to Satan a companion [in Hellfire]."

QUR'AN 19:45

Mufti Menk asks us to notice the name Ibrahim chooses. He does not warn his father of a punishment from the Mighty or the Avenger. He warns of a punishment from ar-Rahman, the Most Merciful. And for the Most Merciful, of all His names, to bring punishment, the crime has to be the one crime that mercy itself will not cover: shirk, setting up a partner beside Allah in worship. Allah has told us that He does not forgive a person dying upon

that, though He forgives anything less to whomever He wills. That is precisely why the boy is so afraid for his father, and why his fear is not melodrama but exact theology felt in a child's chest.

The father's answer is ice. Have you no desire for my gods, Ibrahim? Stop this, or I will stone you; now keep away from me for a long while. His own father threatened to kill him. And here is the measure of Ibrahim, peace be upon him: he answered that threat not with a threat of his own, but with peace, and with a promise to keep praying for the very man who had raised a hand against him:

[Abraham] said, "Peace [i.e., safety] will be upon you. I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Indeed, He is ever gracious to me.

QUR'AN 19:47

He took the cruelty and returned a blessing. This is the manner Mufti Menk wants the believer to carry into his own home, where the hardest da'wah of all is often the one owed to the people closest to us. The truth is not made gentle by being made quiet; Ibrahim never once stopped telling his father the truth. But it is carried with *ya abati* on the lips, with tenderness and not contempt, even when the person you are warning is the one most likely to hurt you for it.

The kind of God worth worshipping

This is the heart of the whole episode, and the heart of everything Ibrahim would ever teach. He did not merely attack the idols; he laid out, in the open, the simple test that any honest person can run on whatever he is about to bow down to. He turned the question around. Instead of asking the idols what they

could do, he listed what the true God does, item by item, and let the contrast do the work:

Who created me, and He [it is who] guides me. And it is He who feeds me and gives me drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me And who will cause me to die and then bring me to life And who I aspire that He will forgive me my sin on the Day of Recompense."

QUR'AN 26:78-82

Run the test, Ibrahim is saying. Ask of whatever you worship: did it make me? Because the One who created me is the One who guides me, and I owe my worship to Him alone. Does it feed me and quench my thirst? When I fall sick, is it the one who heals me? Will it take my life and then give it back to me on the Day I am raised? Is it the one I genuinely hope will forgive my mistakes when I stand to be judged? A stick can do none of that. A stone cannot feed you, cannot heal you, cannot raise you from your grave. So from a very young age, Mufti Menk says, the boy had reasoned his way to a conclusion that no one had to teach him, that no scripture had yet placed in his hands: I can only worship whoever made me. That is the whole of it. That is everything.

Sit with how clean that is. This is the pure, unmixed tawhid that is the first half of the testimony you yourself say, la ilaha illa Allah, there is no god but Allah. Every single prophet, from Adam to the final Messenger of Allah ﷺ, was sent with this one message and nothing else. When Ibrahim worked it out alone in Babylon, with the chisel marks still fresh on the idols around him, he was carrying the exact testimony that would one day be proclaimed in Makkah, the exact words you say today. And so, having reasoned his way to the One, he turned the conclusion into a prayer, the

prayer of a young man who wanted, more than anything, to judge rightly and to keep good company:

[And he said], "My Lord, grant me authority and join me with the righteous.

QUR'AN 26:83

Ask the big one

For all of this, remember, he was alone. Not one person had accepted his call. And somewhere in those years he made a quiet, dangerous vow, the kind of vow a person makes only when he can no longer live beside a lie. By Allah, he said to himself, once these people have turned their backs and left, I will deal with their idols:

And [I swear] by Allah, I will surely plan against your idols after you have turned and gone away."

QUR'AN 21:57

The chance came on a festival day, when the whole town streamed out of the city to worship, carrying their portable gods along and leaving the rest behind in Azar's storehouse, the small ones and the big ones, the ones with great ears for hearing and the ones with wide eyes for seeing. They had invited Ibrahim to come along, and he had given them an answer with a meaning folded inside it. He glanced at the stars and said he was about to be ill:

So they turned away from him, departing.

QUR'AN 37:90

He was not lying, Mufti Menk explains; he was sick to his very soul of what they were doing, and he let the words carry that second meaning while the crowd heard only the first and left him behind. Then he was alone with the idols, and he did something almost unbearably pointed. Before he raised a hand against them, he gave them their chance. He spoke to them. He offered them food and waited. He asked them why they would not so much as answer:

Then he turned to their gods and said, "Do you not eat? What is [wrong] with you that you do not speak?"

QUR'AN 37:91-92

Silence, of course. They were wood. So he set upon them, and broke them, one by one, asking each as it fell what it could do to save itself, until the whole storehouse lay in fragments. All of them, except the largest. That one he left standing, untouched, and he hung the axe on its shoulder, and he walked away:

So he made them into fragments, except a large one among them, that they might return to it [and question].

QUR'AN 21:58

When the crowd came home to the wreckage of their gods, fury went up. Who did this? And someone said, we heard a young man speak against them, one called Ibrahim. Mufti Menk catches the exact wording of their report: not Ibrahim our friend, not Ibrahim whom we know, but a young man called Ibrahim, the phrasing of people putting distance between themselves and a person they expect to be condemned. They dragged him before the assembled town, the leaders and the elders and his own relatives, and they demanded an answer: was it you who did this

to our gods, Ibrahim? And here comes the reply Mufti Menk calls the work of a brilliant mind, the answer of a man who has set a trap and is about to watch it close:

He said, "Rather, this - the largest of them - did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak."

QUR'AN 21:63

Ask the big one. He pointed at the single idol still standing with the axe across its shoulder and told the whole town to go and question it. And for one honest moment, the trap did exactly what it was built to do. They turned in on themselves. They knew. They said it out loud to one another:

So they returned to [blaming] themselves and said [to each other], "Indeed, you are the wrongdoers."

QUR'AN 21:64

Do you see what he had done? He had not really destroyed the idols at all; wood can be re-carved. He had forced his people to say, with their own mouths, in front of one another, that the things they worshipped could not lift a finger, could not save themselves, could not so much as form a single word. He pressed the point home while it was raw: then do you worship, beside Allah, what cannot help you or harm you in the least? Then will you not use reason? It is the cleanest argument against idolatry ever made, and it was made by a young man standing alone before a hostile crowd, using nothing but their own admission against them.

O fire, be cool and safe

For a heartbeat the truth had them. Then pride pulled them back, the way pride always does when a person has seen the truth and cannot bear what it costs. They reversed themselves: you know full well, they snapped, that these do not speak. And from there the logic of a frightened, cornered crowd took over. He is guilty. He must be made an example of, so that no one ever dares this again. They reached for the most final answer available to power that has been embarrassed:

They said, "Burn him and support your gods - if you are to act."

QUR'AN 21:68

What follows, Mufti Menk relays from the histories, and the believer should hold it the way he hands it on, as a vivid telling around what the Qur'an plainly fixes. They gathered fuel for a long, long time, until the blaze was so monstrous that no human being could get near it. They had to fling the fuel in from a distance, and it is said that birds passing overhead dropped out of the sky from the heat. Ibrahim they bound in ropes and chains, and because no hand could carry him close enough to throw him in, they loaded him into a catapult to hurl him into the heart of the inferno.

Picture it. One man, bound, alone, with not a single human being on his side, about to be flung into a fire built large enough to kill from a distance. And his entire answer was his Lord. The Prophet ﷺ tells us, in an authentic narration preserved in Sahih al-Bukhari, the words Ibrahim said in that moment, and they are words the believer should carry for the hardest hours of his own life: *hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil*, Allah is enough for me, and He is the best disposer of affairs. No bargaining, no panic, no appeal

to the crowd. Just: the One who made me will see to me, and He is enough.

Then Allah spoke to the fire, and overturned its entire nature with a command of a few words:

We [i.e., Allah] said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham."

QUR'AN 21:69

Mufti Menk draws our attention to the precision of the order. Not merely cool, for cold alone, in a blaze like that, could itself have harmed or killed him. Coolness and safety, both together. The fire burned through the ropes and the chains that bound him, and touched nothing else. The crowd stood and watched a man sit down inside an inferno as calmly as if he had walked into a shaded garden. Later in his life, Ibrahim would say that the best, most peaceful time he ever spent was the time he spent in that fire. And not one voice in the crowd cried sorcery, because every eye there had just seen the truth with brutal clarity: not one of their gods had lifted a finger to help him. The One who made him was the One who saved him. They had meant a plot against him, and Allah turned the plot back upon the plotters:

And they intended for him a plan [i.e., harm], but We made them the greatest losers.

QUR'AN 21:70

The first to believe, and the road out

Through almost all of this, Ibrahim had stood completely alone. Not a single person had accepted his call. And then, in the silence after the fire, when the crowd was still too stunned to

speak, a young man stepped out of it and surrendered. You are right, he said in effect, and these people are wrong; I give myself to whoever made me, just as you have. It was Lut, Ibrahim's own nephew, not yet a prophet himself, and he became the first human being ever to believe in Ibrahim's message:

And Lot believed him. [Abraham] said, "Indeed, I will emigrate to [the service of] my Lord. Indeed, He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise."

QUR'AN 29:26

There it is, the word that names a whole act of faith: I am making hijra, emigrating, to my Lord. Ibrahim had tried everything. His people had seen the broken idols and the cooled fire, the clearest signs imaginable, and still they clung to their stones. He could not worship Allah freely among them any longer, so he resolved to leave, to go where he could bow to his Maker in peace. Take a breath here, because that word will return. Centuries later, the final Messenger of this same family ﷺ, having tried everything in a city that would not hear him, would walk out of Makkah on a hijra of his own. The road out of a hometown that loves its idols more than its prophet is a road Ibrahim opened first.

And before he went, Mufti Menk shares one last scene, because it shows the texture of this man's faith more tenderly than anything else. Ibrahim asked Allah to show him how He brings the dead back to life. Hear the exchange, and hear especially the answer, because it is so easily misread:

And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied." [Allah] said, "Take four birds and commit

them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."

QUR'AN 2:260

This was never doubt. When Allah asked, have you not believed, Ibrahim answered at once, yes, but I want my heart to be at rest, I want to see it with my own eyes. Mufti Menk gives us the perfect image for it: a child who fully believes that his mother made something, and yet still tugs at her sleeve and says, show me how you did it, not because he doubts her, but because he loves to watch the thing made. It is a believer asking to witness the certainty he already holds, and Allah honoured the asking, mercy upon mercy: the four birds came flying back to him at his call, and his heart settled.

And so Ibrahim and Lut, peace be upon them, turned their faces toward a blessed land. But the king had heard. Nimrud, the man who believed he was a god, learned that a boy had walked out of his fire untouched, and he summoned that boy to his court. What passed between the prophet and the king who thought he was God, between *hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil* and "I give life and cause death," belongs to the next chapter. For now it is enough to know that the man who reasoned his way to the One, and stood alone for Him, and sat unburned in the heart of the fire, was only getting started.

What Ibrahim asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this one and keep it at a safe and admiring distance, a thrilling story of a faraway prophet and a miraculous fire. That would be to miss the question it is putting

directly to you. Strip the episode down to what it actually asks, and it stops being a fable and becomes a mirror.

He reasoned his way to Allah, and you can too. Ibrahim was not argued into belief by a crowd, nor frightened into it, nor did he inherit it from a father; if anything he inherited the opposite. He looked, with an honest mind, at who made him and feeds him and heals him and will raise him, and he concluded that he could worship only the One who had done all of that. This matters for you because faith that you have actually thought through, faith you have reasoned your own way into, is the faith that holds when a whole society leans against it. Most of us have never once sat with the question Ibrahim sat with as a boy. Sit with it. Ask honestly who created you and sustains you and will receive you back, and let your shahada become a conclusion you own rather than a phrase you happened to be handed. Because his conclusion is your shahada, word for word: there is no god worth worshipping except the One who made me.

He refused to let "we always did it this way" stand in for the truth. The only answer his people ever managed was that they found their fathers doing it, and Ibrahim would not accept inheritance as evidence, not for an instant. That refusal is owed by every believer to every habit, however old and however beloved. Ask of any practice you have carried your whole life: is this actually true, and did Allah ask for it, or am I only doing it because it was always done? An old wrong does not become right by being old, and Ibrahim is the proof.

He warned the people he loved most, and he warned them gently. Four times ya abati, O my father, before he ever spoke of punishment, and when his father threatened to stone him, he answered with peace and a promise to keep praying for him. The

hardest da'wah of your life is almost always the one you owe to the people closest to you, and this is how it is carried: with tenderness, not contempt, telling the whole truth in a voice soft enough that the person can bear to hear it. Do not mistake harshness for honesty. Ibrahim was never harsh and never silent, both at once.

He kept every act of worship for Allah alone, because he understood that shirk is the one line mercy will not cross. He feared, specifically, a punishment from ar-Rahman, the Most Merciful, because he grasped that the only crime mercy itself will not cover is to give to something else the worship that belongs to Allah. Guard that line in your own life with everything you have. Whatever you fear, whatever you hope from, whatever you turn to in your lowest hour, let it be Allah and not a stone, not a grave, not a tree, not a habit dressed up as devotion. Keep your worship whole and undivided, for Him alone, exactly as he wants to be worshipped.

And when you stand alone, remember that Allah was enough for Ibrahim, and He is enough for you. Bound in chains and flung toward a fire with not one human being beside him, Ibrahim said *hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil*, Allah is enough for me, and He is the best disposer of affairs, and the fire became coolness and safety. The One who made you can change the very nature of whatever is sent against you. You will not likely face a literal furnace, but you will face the fires the world lights for anyone who stands for the truth when it is unpopular: the mockery, the isolation, the cost. When that comes, and it will, say his sentence, and mean it, and watch what your Lord does with a heart that trusts Him completely.

Hold all of this together and see the line that runs through it, because it is the line that ends at the Prophet ﷺ himself. The pure tawhid Ibrahim reasoned out as a boy in Babylon is the message every prophet after him carried, and he was the father of them all; the Messenger ﷺ descends from him through his son Ismail. The idols Ibrahim smashed in a storehouse are the same kind of idols his own descendant ﷺ would one day clear out of the Ka'bah at the Conquest of Makkah, the house Ibrahim himself would later raise. And the testimony that began as one boy's lonely conclusion, la ilaha illa Allah, is the testimony said in Makkah, and the testimony said in your own mouth tonight. This is why Islam is called the way of Ibrahim. You are not admiring a stranger; you are standing in his line.

So take one thing from him down into your ordinary days. Think your faith through, until it is yours and not merely your inheritance. Refuse one old habit that cannot answer the simple question of whether Allah ever asked for it. Warn one person you love, gently, ya abati on your lips. And the next time you find yourself outnumbered for the sake of the truth, with the whole crowd against you and no one at your side, say the words that held a bound man steady on his way into the fire: hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil, Allah is enough for me. May Allah grant us the certainty He gave Ibrahim, that we worship none but Him; may He let us reason our way to Him and stand for His truth even when we stand alone; may He cool every fire the world lights against us as He cooled his; and may He join us with the righteous, with His friend Ibrahim and His final Messenger ﷺ, in the home He has prepared for those who believe.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 10 (Ibrahim, part 1). Qur'an: Sahih International (6:74,

21:51-70, 19:42-50, 26:75-83, 37:90-92, 29:26, 2:260), verified via quran.ai. Where Mufti Menk relays reports from the histories around the fire and the boy's young age, his framing has been kept, neither hardened into fact nor set aside.

Ibrahim, the friend of Allah, part

2

The sound heart that out-argued a king and feared no one but his Lord

The day before, a young man had been bound in chains and thrown into a fire, and he had walked out of it as though he had stepped from a cool garden. That alone would have been enough to make a legend of him. But the story does not pause to let him rest on it. The same calm that carried him through the flames now walks him into the throne room of a man who calls himself a god, out across a whole country that will refuse to believe him, and at last into the house of a tyrant who wants to take his wife. And through every single one of these, watch the one thing that never so much as trembles: his heart.

Of all the prophets, Mufti Menk tells us, none was raised nearer to Allah than this one, save Muhammad himself, peace and blessings be upon him. When the Prophet ﷺ was carried up through the seven heavens on the Night Journey, it was Ibrahim, peace be upon him, whom he found in the seventh, the closest of all to Allah. To understand how a man earns a place like that, you have to watch what kind of heart he carried through the hardest year of his life.

The heart that had no defect

Before any of the night's scenes, the Qur'an stops on a single phrase it uses for Ibrahim, peace be upon him. After it has

finished telling the story of Nuh, peace be upon him, it turns to his line and says:

And indeed, among his kind was Abraham, When he came to his Lord with a sound heart

QUR'AN 37:83-84

A sound heart. Qalb salim. Mufti Menk is careful about what that does and does not mean. It is not a heart that never felt fear; it is a heart with no spiritual defect in it at all, nothing cracked, nothing leased out to anyone besides Allah, a heart that has never once given a share of its worship to another. That is the secret of everything Ibrahim does. A boy who could stand alone in a temple full of idols, with everyone gone, and feel no dread of the stone, was a boy whose heart already belonged, completely and without remainder, to the One who made the stone. Most children raised to believe those statues were gods would have felt the room close in around them. He felt nothing, because there was nothing in his heart for the false gods to grip.

And that same sound heart is the thing he kept trying to hand to the people he loved. He had warned his own father of a Day coming when nothing a person spent a whole life accumulating would be worth a single thing: not wealth, not children, not status, not one of the things we exhaust ourselves chasing. Only one currency will be accepted on that Day. The Qur'an names it in the very same words it used for him:

The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children But only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart.

QUR'AN 26:88-89

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, understood from a young age that the whole of life is a test, and that the closer a servant is brought to Allah, the heavier the test grows, not the lighter. This is the thing, Mufti Menk says, that so many of us never grasp. We pray, we fast, we give, we struggle against our sins, and then we look up and ask why our lives are still not easy, why the turbulence keeps coming. Ibrahim was among the very highest of all human beings, and his life was problem after problem after problem. But he never once read a hardship as Allah turning away from him. He read it as Allah drawing near. Every trial was a fresh opportunity to be brought closer. The Prophet ﷺ would later say the same thing plainly: it is precisely when Allah loves a servant that He tests him, and the greatest rewards are reserved for the greatest tests. So the only thing that ever truly distinguishes a believer's hardship from a punishment, in the end, is the condition of the heart that meets it.

The king who argued because Allah had given him a kingdom

After the fire, word of the young man who could not be burned reached the king. This was Nimrud, a ruler to whom Allah had handed real power and a long reign, and the people of that land worshipped him as readily as they worshipped their statues; they had gone so far as to bow to a human being. So he summoned the youth who had broken their gods and demanded to know: who is this Lord of yours?

Notice the trap the Qur'an itself sets around this scene, the irony Mufti Menk does not let pass. The king dared to debate Ibrahim, peace be upon him, only because Allah had given him a kingdom. Strip away the throne and the soldiers and the borrowed authority, and there is no argument left, only a man:

Have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allāh had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "Indeed, Allāh brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allāh does not guide the wrongdoing people.

QUR'AN 2:258

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, answered cleanly: my Lord is the One who gives life and gives death. The king, sure he was dealing with a boy who had no mind, reached for a cheap trick. He had two condemned prisoners brought before the court, men already sentenced to die. He spared one, had the other executed, and announced to the room: there, I too give life and death. Ibrahim could easily have unpicked the lie, could have explained that sparing a man you were about to kill is not the giving of life that he meant, the whole gift of a life from its first breath to its last. But Mufti Menk draws out the wisdom of what he did instead. There is no profit in wrestling a fool on his own crooked ground, where he will only kick up dust. So Ibrahim lifted the whole contest to a height the king could not climb. Allah brings the sun up from the east every single morning, he said. Bring it from the west.

And there the verse ends the argument in a single word: *fabuhita*, the disbeliever was struck dumb. No answer. No clever reply. Nothing. A youth, with nothing in his hands but a sound heart and the plain truth, had left a self-proclaimed god speechless in his own court, in front of his own people. And Allah seals the scene with a verdict that reaches past Nimrud to every tyrant after him: He does not guide a wrongdoing people. The

word He uses for wrongdoing, *zulm*, is the same word the Qur'an uses elsewhere for the very greatest of all wrongs, *shirk*, the act of setting a partner beside Allah. The man who would not be guided was the man who had first refused to seek guidance.

Stars that set, and a Lord who does not

They had warned him they would stone him to death, so Ibrahim, peace be upon him, left. In a whole land, only two souls had believed him: his nephew Lut, peace be upon him, and his wife Sarah, peace be upon her. He gave up his family, his father, his city, his entire world, and walked out without fear, because he knew his Lord was with him. Allah guided him north, toward the blessed land of Sham, the region that today holds Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and he settled near what we now call Jerusalem.

On the way, he stopped at a place called Haran, and he could not help himself: even passing through, even as a stranger of three, he had to call its people to Allah. What he found there was, if anything, worse than the idols he had left behind. These people did not bow to stone and wood. They worshipped the stars. And stranger still, when they called upon the stars, they seemed to get results. Here Mufti Menk pauses to plant a warning we badly need. A forbidden thing producing a result does not make it permissible. Some people fall ill, go to a soothsayer or a witch doctor, and recover, and they walk away convinced and start sending others. The recovery is real; the path to it is still false. What is wrong stays wrong even when it appears to work. A thief who robs a vault still walks away rich, and is still a thief. The result, in fact, is not the proof. It is the test.

So Ibrahim, peace be upon him, met the star-worshippers in their own language. As night fell and a bright star rose, some say the

planet Venus, he said it with them: this is my lord. They warmed to him at once, certain they had found one of their own. But when the star slipped below the horizon and vanished, he let it go:

So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that set [i.e., disappear]."

QUR'AN 6:76

What use, he was asking them without saying so, is a lord that abandons you the moment the night turns, a lord you cannot reach until it chooses to return? Then the moon rose, larger and brighter, and he said it again, and watched it sink in its turn:

And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray."

QUR'AN 6:77

Then the sun climbed, the largest light of all, and surely now, they thought, he was theirs:

And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allāh."

QUR'AN 6:78

Here Mufti Menk leans deliberately on the reading of Ibn Kathir, because it matters and it is easy to get wrong. This was never Ibrahim doubting. Some read these verses as though the prophet were genuinely wavering, scanning the sky and wondering which body to worship. He was not. His heart was sound from the very first, as the Qur'an had already told us. What he was doing was

building a ladder of argument in front of their eyes, rung by rung, letting each light rise and then set in turn, until there was nothing left in the whole sky to point at. The star sets. The moon sets. Even the mighty sun goes down. And when the last and greatest of their gods had disappeared beneath the horizon, he turned and declared his freedom from all of it:

Indeed, I have turned my face [i.e., self] toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allāh."

QUR'AN 6:79

Listen to the word he reaches for, the word he reaches for again and again throughout his whole life: not the star, not the moon, not the sun, but the One who created them. This is the ground no one can dispute. You cannot argue that the thing made the maker. Whoever fashioned me and you and the skies and the stars and the sun, He alone is the One on whom I will ever put my forehead to the ground.

Which of us, then, deserves to feel safe

His people closed in to argue, and he did not flinch. He had tasted what it is to worship Allah alone, with nothing beside Him, and once a person has tasted that, nothing in the world can shake them loose of it again:

And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning Allāh while He has guided me? And I fear not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. My Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will you not remember?"

QUR'AN 6:80

I do not fear these false gods you set up, he tells them; they can neither harm me nor help me, and nothing will reach me at all unless my own Maker wills it. And then comes the question Mufti Menk singles out as the most powerful of the entire exchange, a young man's question that turns the whole fear of the room inside out:

And how should I fear what you associate while you do not fear that you have associated with Allāh that for which He has not sent down to you any authority? So which of the two parties has more right to security, if you should know?"

QUR'AN 6:81

Read it slowly, because it is devastating. How can I be afraid of your gods, when you are not afraid of the far greater thing you have done, of having given Allah partners He never authorised? So which of us, he asks, actually has more right to feel safe at night: the one who worships only the Maker who holds all things, or the one who has scattered his worship among stones and stars that cannot keep themselves in the sky? The Qur'an does not leave the question hanging. It answers him in the very next breath:

They who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice - those will have security, and they are [rightly] guided.

QUR'AN 6:82

This is the moment to remember something about Ibrahim, peace be upon him: of all the prophets, he is the one who debated the most. He debated his father. He debated his town. He debated the king. He debated the star-worshippers of Haran. And he overpowered every single one of them, leaving each with no

answer at all. That was not merely his own cleverness; Allah names it His gift and His grant:

And that was Our [conclusive] argument which We gave Abraham against his people. We raise by degrees whom We will. Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing.

QUR'AN 6:83

And inside that gift, Mufti Menk hides a quiet warning for the rest of us. When a person has been beaten in argument and still refuses to surrender to the truth, all that is left to them is force: the threat, the fist, the fire, the stone. The people of Haran, defeated in every word, turned at once to threatening his life. So watch for it in your own life and in your own arguments. The instant a person reaches for violence, the moment they raise a hand instead of a point, it is the surest sign that the argument itself is already lost.

A word he left behind in his children

When Ibrahim, peace be upon him, declared his freedom from his people's gods, the Qur'an records the words and then tells us something it did not do for everyone:

And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Abraham said to his father and his people, "Indeed, I am disassociated from that which you worship Except for He who created me; and indeed, He will guide me." And he made it a word remaining among his descendants that they might return [to it].

QUR'AN 43:26-28

Allah preserved his words. What was the word He kept alive? Mufti Menk says it plainly: la ilaha illa Allah. There is none worthy

of worship except the One who made you. Ibrahim did not simply believe it for himself and carry it to his grave. He planted it in his line, taught it deliberately to his offspring, and Allah promised to keep it growing there long after he was gone, a living seed handed down through the generations so that his children might always have it to return to.

Sit with how far that single word travelled. The line of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, runs straight down through the centuries to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who was raised in a Makkah that had buried his ancestor's pure tawhid under three hundred and sixty idols inside the very House that Ibrahim himself would one day be commanded to raise. And the Prophet ﷺ cleared every one of those idols out with the exact same word Ibrahim first spoke at Haran. This is why the Qur'an calls Islam the millah of Ibrahim, his way, his path, his religion. The faith was not founded fresh; it was the friend of Allah's own tawhid, restored and completed. And it reaches all the way to you. Every time your tongue forms la ilaha illa Allah, you are not reciting a slogan you happened to be handed. You are repeating the precise word that Allah promised to keep alive in the children of Ibrahim, and you are one of those children. The sentence that out-argued a self-proclaimed god is the same sentence in your mouth tonight.

The tyrant who could not touch Sarah

When a drought struck the land of Sham, Ibrahim, peace be upon him, sent Lut ahead toward a region that would later be called Sodom, and he himself set out with Sarah, peace be upon her, toward Egypt. Egypt was ruled by a tyrant with an ugly and well-known habit: any beautiful woman who entered his land with a husband, he would have the husband killed and take the woman

for himself. And Sarah was strikingly beautiful. Word of her reached the king's men, and they came.

Here Mufti Menk slows down and handles a delicate matter with exactly the care it deserves, keeping the framing of the Prophet ﷺ himself. There is an authentic hadith of Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, that in his entire life Ibrahim, peace be upon him, said only three statements that sounded like untruths, though not one of them was a real lie. The first was when he told his people he was sick, when he wanted to be left behind to break their idols. The second was when he said the largest idol had done the breaking. And the third was now, when the king's men asked who the woman was, and he said: she is my sister. He meant his sister in faith, for Sarah was the only other believer in all that land, and he quietly told her so himself, so that their words would never clash and betray them. It was a turn of language bent only to save a life, and Mufti Menk lingers on the contrast it forces: this man bent a single word, just barely, only to keep himself from being murdered, while so many of us lie all day long for nothing at all, to seem larger than we are, to dodge the smallest embarrassment. The Prophet ﷺ warned that a person who keeps lying, even in small things, goes on lying until he is written down with Allah as a liar. Ibrahim guarded his tongue even with his life on the line.

Then came the part that no human hand controlled. Sarah was taken to the king's chamber, and she did the only thing she could: she turned to Allah. O Allah, she prayed, I believed in You, and I kept myself pure for my husband, so protect me. Here Mufti Menk is careful again, telling us honestly that the narrations describe what happened next in more than one way, and refusing to harden any single version into established fact. In one report, the moment the tyrant reached for her, his hand seized up and

froze, released only when she prayed for him, then seized a second time, and a third. In another, it was his legs that gave way beneath him. And in the version Mufti Menk considers the strongest of the three, the man simply fell asleep, and saw in a dream that he must release this woman untouched or face his own destruction. But notice that the conclusion of all three reports is identical, and that is what we are meant to carry: he could not touch her. He recoiled in fear and said, you have brought me not a woman but a devil, send her away.

And from this, Mufti Menk draws a lesson worth keeping for the whole of your life. When a person sets out toward a sin and a barrier suddenly drops across the path, the flat tyre on the way to the wrong meeting, the bad news that arrives just before the club, the door that will not open, that is not misfortune. That is Allah's mercy reaching in to stop you. Read it as a rescue, not as bad luck. Turn back, and thank the One who blocked the road.

The gift that became a lineage

Shaken, the king sent Sarah back untouched, and with her he sent a gift: a young woman named Hajar. Here Mufti Menk weighs the reports rather than flattening them. The common narration calls her a servant girl, and she may well have been. But he flags a quieter report that she was no ordinary servant at all, but a woman of noble birth, perhaps the daughter of a nobleman or even of the king himself, given in honour. He leans deliberately toward dignity, and he tells us exactly why it matters: from the line of Hajar would come the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and Allah chose the very purest lineage, from Adam straight through to His final Messenger ﷺ, with no shame anywhere along it. So we hold the report gently, the way the Sunnah teaches us to handle what is not fixed in the Qur'an or the authentic narrations, neither

inflating it into certainty nor reducing this honoured woman to anything less than she truly was.

So Ibrahim, peace be upon him, who had walked out of a fire, out of his homeland, out of a king's court, and out of a tyrant's reach, now had with him the two women through whom Allah would build whole nations: Sarah, and Hajar. They prospered in Egypt, their flocks and their wealth multiplying with such blessing that in time the people around them grew envious. And rather than fight, rather than wait for jealousy to do its work, Ibrahim gathered his household and his herds and turned back toward the blessed land near Jerusalem, where he had begun. The man who feared no one but Allah ends this chapter of his life exactly where he started it: with nothing in his hands but trust, and everything that truly matters still ahead of him. Tomorrow, in a barren and waterless valley, that trust will be asked for the hardest thing it has ever been asked to give.

What Ibrahim asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this and keep it at a safe distance, a thrilling sequence of ancient miracles, a fire that would not burn and a tyrant who could not touch. That would be to miss the question it is putting directly to you. Strip these scenes down to what they actually ask, and they stop being a faraway adventure and become a mirror held up to your own iman.

Tend the heart, not only the deeds. The one thing Allah praised in Ibrahim above almost everything else was a qalb salim, a sound heart with no hidden partner in it, no corner leased out to anyone but Him. And the Qur'an warned that on the Day that counts, no wealth and no children will buy you anything; only the heart you bring will. We pour enormous effort into the outward shape of worship, the prayers counted and the fasts kept, and far less into

the state of the heart underneath it all. Ask, honestly, what your heart actually leans on in its lowest hour, what it fears, what it secretly hopes will save it. Whatever that is, if it is anything other than Allah, that is the defect Ibrahim did not have. Work on it now, while there is still time to work, because it is the only thing you will carry across.

Measure the truth, never by the power of the one who holds it. The king argued only because a kingdom had been lent to him, and the moment the argument rose above his borrowed throne, he had nothing. A young man with no army and no title left a god speechless. So do not be impressed into agreement by status, by volume, by wealth, by the confidence of a crowd. And remember the warning hidden in it: when someone who has lost the argument reaches for force, the threat or the fist or the fire, that is not strength. It is the surest sign they have already lost.

Read the barrier as mercy. When you set out toward something you know is wrong and the way is suddenly and strangely blocked, do not curse your bad luck. That closed door may be the hand of Allah reaching in to save you from yourself, exactly as He reached in to save Sarah. Stop, turn back, and thank Him for the obstacle. Few of us ever learn to see a frustrated sin as a gift, but Ibrahim's story teaches that this is precisely what it often is.

And here is the thread that ties all of it back to the Prophet ﷺ and then to you. Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was taken by Allah as something almost no one in history has been:

And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allāh while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allāh took Abraham as an intimate friend.

Khalilullah, the intimate friend of Allah. It is the highest of titles, a nearness beyond ordinary love, and it was earned by the sound heart you have just watched at work: a heart that gave away every share of its worship until there was nothing in it but Allah. And the only other human being ever given that same title, in authentic narration, is the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who called himself the khalil of Allah and said that if he were to take any human being as his own khalil, it would have been Abu Bakr, but that this rank of friendship he reserved for his Lord alone. The two friends of Allah, separated by thousands of years, met at last on the Night Journey, when the Prophet ﷺ was raised through the heavens and found Ibrahim waiting in the seventh, in the place nearest to Allah, with his back resting against the Frequented House. The word that began as one boy's lonely conclusion in Babylon, la ilaha illa Allah, the word Allah promised to keep alive in his children, ran straight down his line to the man in the seventh heaven beside him, and from there into your own mouth tonight. You are not admiring a stranger. You are standing in his line, carrying his word, called to his sound heart.

So take one thing from him down into your ordinary days. Guard the heart, not just the actions, until there is nothing in it that you fear or hope from besides Allah. Refuse to be moved by power dressed up as truth, and the next time an argument turns to force, recognise who has already lost. And the next time a door slams shut on a sin you were walking toward, read it as the mercy of the One who blocked it, and turn around and thank Him. May Allah grant us the sound heart of Ibrahim, free of every hidden partner, fearing none but Him; may He keep alive on our tongues and in our children the word He kept alive in his; may He let us

read every hardship as His nearness and not His distance; and may He join us to the millah of Ibrahim and to His final Messenger ﷺ who completed it, and gather us with His two friends, His khalil and His Beloved, in the home He has prepared for those who believe.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 11 (Ibrahim, part 2). Qur'an: Sahih International (37:83-84, 26:88-89, 2:258, 6:76-83, 43:26-28, 4:125), verified via quran.ai. Where Mufti Menk relays reports from the histories around Sarah and the tyrant, and around the lineage of Hajar, his framing has been kept, neither hardened into fact nor set aside.

Ibrahim and Ismail, part 3

A wife, a baby, and a valley with nothing in it

There is a kind of obedience so total that it looks, from the outside, like cruelty, and is in truth the highest love a human being is capable of. A man walks across a desert carrying a wife he cherishes and a son he waited the better part of a century to hold. He sets them down in a valley that has no water in it, no shade, no crop, no road, no other living soul. He leaves them a small bag of dates and a skin of water, two days of food at the most. And then he turns around and walks away, and does not look back, and does not answer when his wife calls out to him. Every instinct a father has is screaming at him to stop. He keeps walking, because the One who made him has told him to, and for this man the source of an instruction has always mattered more than whether the instruction makes any sense.

His name is Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the friend of Allah, and we left him at the edge of a fire and the start of a long road out of Babylon. Now he is an old man in the land of Sham, and Mufti Menk wants us to understand that the test waiting for him in this empty valley is, in its quiet way, heavier than the fire ever was. The fire was loud, and public, and over in a moment. This is silent, and private, and it asks him to set down the two things he loves most on the word of Allah alone. What he does with it, and what his wife Hajar does in that valley after he is gone, the whole world still copies, every single year. You will copy it too, the day you go.

The man who would not despair

Years had passed since Ibrahim turned his face toward the blessed land, and Allah had given him almost everything a man could ask for. He had worked hard and prospered; the histories remember the livestock, the sustenance, the wealth that came with the da'wah he never stopped carrying. He had a wife he loved, Sarah, may peace be upon her. He had peace, after a youth of fire and exile. He had everything except the one thing he begged Allah for, night after night, year after year: a child. Not just any child. A child who would be pure, who would serve Allah's cause, who would surrender to Allah the way Ibrahim himself had surrendered.

That du'a, Mufti Menk reminds us, was not a phrase he muttered out of habit. He meant every word of it. He asked, and he kept asking, and the years went by, and the answer did not come. And here is the thing that makes Ibrahim who he is: he never once lost hope. The Qur'an puts the principle in his own mouth, the response of a man who has understood something about his Lord that most people never grasp:

He said, "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord except for those astray?"

QUR'AN 15:56

Who could ever give up hope in the mercy of his own Maker, except a person who has lost his way entirely? To despair of Allah, Ibrahim is saying, is to misunderstand Allah. So he refused to despair, and he kept turning back to his Lord with the same request. Sarah, who could not bear children herself, saw the longing in this good man and gave him her servant Hajar in

marriage. And when Ibrahim was eighty-six years old, after all those years of asking, Allah gave him Ismail.

Sit with the lesson before the story even properly begins, because Mufti Menk lays it down right here. Sometimes Allah withholds a thing precisely so that you keep returning to Him for it, so that the asking itself keeps your heart bound to His door. And sometimes He withholds a thing because He is sparing you from a harm folded inside the very gift you think you want, a harm you cannot see and He can. Either way, the silence is never a refusal. An eighty-six-year wait that ends in Ismail is proof that the door was never closed; it was being kept open, on purpose, for the asking.

Leave them, and go

Then, not long after the boy was born, came the command that breaks the human heart. Take this wife and this child, Allah told him, mother and infant both, and travel until you reach a certain place. So Ibrahim gathered them and walked, and kept walking, until the land gave out entirely and there was nothing left but soil and burning heat: no spring, no crop, no shade, not one living thing. It was the valley we now call Makkah, long before there was a city there, when it was simply the emptiest place in the world. And in that emptiness the instruction came again, plainer and harder than before: leave them here, and go.

There are many stories told about why Ibrahim left them, and here, exactly here, Mufti Menk slows down and is careful, because this is the kind of detail where the discipline of a believer matters most. Almost all of those stories reach us from the People of the Book. And the People of the Book, who had once been sent the truth and then rejected the final Messenger ﷺ, had a reason to dim the honour of his lineage, to make the

line he came from seem less than grand. So the version in which Sarah was simply jealous, fed up, and demanded the mother and child be sent away, is an Israeli report. We neither build our faith upon it nor go out of our way to deny it; we set it gently to one side and reach for what is certain. May Allah protect us from misrepresenting His prophets.

What is certain is the thing the Qur'an makes plain: this was not a family quarrel. This was a command from Allah, and Ibrahim obeyed it because of where it came from, not because it made sense to him. And that, Mufti Menk says, is the whole secret of the man. He did not weigh the instruction against his own logic and act only if it passed. The source was Allah, and that was enough. Mufti Menk turns the contrast straight at us, and it stings. Our own instructions come to us already labelled, this is forbidden, this is commanded, the reasons half-explained, and still we stand there asking why, why this, why that, bargaining with what we already know is from Allah. Ibrahim heard a command that tore at everything inside him, with no explanation attached at all, and he submitted, because a friend of Allah trusts Allah past the very edge of his own understanding.

Has Allah commanded you to do this?

He set them down with their day or two of food, and he started walking away, and he did not look back. Hajar, peace be upon her, called after him into the silence. Where are you going? What is happening to us? He gave her no answer. He just kept walking. She called again, and still he would not turn, and still he would not speak. And then, somewhere in that unbearable silence, she understood the way only a believer understands, that there was only one force in all the world strong enough to make a man like Ibrahim do a thing like this. So she stopped asking the questions

that had no answer, and she asked the one question that did.
"Has Allah commanded you to do this?"

Now, at last, he turned. And he said yes.

And the instant she heard it, she stopped. She did not weep, or beg, or run after him, or demand to know how a baby was supposed to live in a place with no water. She said five words that ought to be carved over the door of every believing heart: "Then He will not abandon us." And she let him go.

Look very closely at what just happened, because Mufti Menk does not want you to miss it, and it is the easiest thing in this whole story to miss. The test was never Ibrahim's alone. We tell it as the trial of a prophet, the great obedience of the friend of Allah, and it is that. But Hajar sat the very same examination, in the very same instant, with a newborn on her hip and a desert closing in on every side, and she passed it with a strength that matches his exactly. His was the surrender of the one who walks away. Hers was the surrender of the one who is left behind, which is, if anything, the harder of the two. She did not need to see the rescue coming to believe with total certainty that it was already on its way. That is tawakkul in its purest form: not a feeling that things will probably work out, but a settled knowledge that the One who commanded this will not let it end in ruin.

The du'a he left in the valley

He kept walking, and as he walked, he prayed. And Allah loved that prayer so much that He kept it for us, forever, in the Qur'an, in the surah that carries Ibrahim's own name. It begins with the valley itself, with the place he was leaving his family in, and with

the one danger that frightened him more than thirst or hunger ever could:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this city [i.e., Makkah] secure and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols.

QUR'AN 14:35

Hear what a father he is. A man who reasoned his way out of idolatry as a boy, who smashed the idols of Babylon and was thrown into a fire for it, leaves his infant son in an empty valley and the very first thing he asks for is not water, not food, not safety from beasts, but that this child and his line be kept from ever bowing to a carved stone. He had felt in his own chest what idolatry costs a soul, and he feared it for his son more than he feared the desert. Then he named, plainly, exactly what he had just done and exactly why:

Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.

QUR'AN 14:37

Listen to the reason he gives Allah for the unthinkable thing he has done. Not abandonment. Consecration. I have settled them here, beside Your sacred House, so that they will establish the prayer. He did not leave his family in a wasteland to be rid of them; he left them there for worship, dedicated to the One who asked for them. The valley that looked, to any human eye, like the cruellest place on earth to leave a baby was in fact the most honoured patch of ground in creation, and Ibrahim knew it.

And then, in that same breath, he asks Allah for two specific things, and Mufti Menk says watch, just watch, how completely Allah answers when Allah decides to give. First: make the hearts of people incline toward them. Stand at that exact spot today and you are not lonely; you are crushed in a sea of millions, drawn there from every corner of the earth, and still it is not enough room, and still they are building outward and outward, and still the hearts keep coming, year upon year, century upon century. Is there a single one of us whose heart does not lean toward Makkah, who would not be there this very moment if we could? That pull you feel, that ache toward a valley most of us have never seen, is this du'a, answered. Second: provide them with fruits. In a valley where, by Allah's own description, nothing grew at all, the produce of the entire world now arrives, the best of it, the finest dates and fruit carried in from every land and traded and shared by people of every nation. He asked for it standing in bare, scorching sand with a baby and a wineskin. Allah granted every word of it, and is granting it still.

Hajar's run, and the water that came

The dates ran out. The water ran out. Everything dried up, and a mother sat in an empty valley with a baby who needed, urgently, to drink. And here Hajar does the thing that turns her trust from a sentiment into an act, the thing the believer is meant to learn from above all else. She did not simply sit in the sand and pray for rescue to fall from the sky. She got up, and she made an effort.

She climbed the small hill nearby, the one we call Safa, and she stood at its top and scanned the whole horizon: any movement, any caravan, any traveller, any sign of life at all. Nothing. So she came down the other side, and at the bottom of the valley, where the low ground dipped and hid the far hill from view, she ran. She

ran through the low stretch because she did not want to be down in that hollow, blind to the horizon, while some traveller passed in the distance and was gone before she could reach high ground again. She climbed the second hill, Marwah, on the far side, and stood at its top, and looked again, and called on Allah again. Nothing. So back she went, down Marwah, running through the low ground, up Safa, scanning, down again, up Marwah again, calling on her Lord the whole way, certain to her bones that He would not let her down. Seven times she crossed that valley between the two hills. Seven.

And then, somewhere in all that effort, she heard a sound, and she turned, and she looked toward where she had left the baby Ismail. And there, gushing up out of the ground where a moment before there had been nothing but dry sand, was water. A spring, rising in the middle of a desert that does not, that simply cannot, produce water from below like that. She rushed to it, and she thanked Allah, and then she began to do something with her hands that we now repeat without always knowing why: she banked the wet sand and clay up around the spring into a little basin to hold the water, so she could gather it and keep it, saying to it in her own tongue as she worked, zam zam, zam zam, stop, stop. That is the well we call Zamzam to this day, named for the word a desperate, trusting mother said to the water as she tried to hold it.

Here Mufti Menk pauses on something quietly astonishing. Of all the contested and disputed histories scattered through the stories of the prophets, where this report and that report compete and the believer must weigh the chains, the origin of this one well has no rival account at all. There is one narration, from the time of Hajar and Ismail, and in all the centuries since, no one has ever produced another. It stands as some of the most

certain history there is. And it is not a relic. It is gushing at this very moment, thousands of gallons an hour, drunk by millions of people across the whole earth, from the exact spot where a mother trusted Allah in a place with nothing in it.

Now feel the full weight of what she did, because it has been built into your own body whether you know it yet or not. When you go for Hajj or for Umrah, you will walk seven times between Safa and Marwah, and you will hurry, lightly, through the low stretch in the middle, exactly where she hurried, exactly because she did. That rite has a name, the sa'i, and it is not a symbol some scholar invented to teach a lesson. It is Hajar's run, kept alive in the legs of every pilgrim who ever came, frozen in time so that no one of us, walking it, can ever forget that effort is woven into trust. She did not wait for the ceiling of heaven to crack open and gold to fall on her. She made tawakkul, and she moved her feet, and Allah met her there in the running. Mufti Menk says it as plainly as it can be said: there is no point sitting at home, doing nothing, waiting for provision to rain down through the roof. If you only sit and wait, the most you will hear in the ceiling is the scratch of rats. Tie your camel, and then trust. Make the effort, and then leave the rest to Allah, and watch Him send the water while you are still on your seventh run.

The tribe that asked permission

The water changed the valley, and the change announced itself the way water always does in a desert: birds began to come. And birds, to anyone who travels open desert, mean one thing and one thing only. You do not hunt them; you follow them, because wherever the birds are circling, there is water beneath. So when a caravan of the tribe of Jurhum passed at a distance and saw birds wheeling over a patch of wasteland where birds had no

earthly business being, they were puzzled enough to send someone to investigate. He went, and he found, around a gushing spring in the middle of nowhere, a lone woman and her infant child. He went back to his people amazed, and they came, and they understood at once that they were looking at a miracle, because water does not rise from the ground in that desert.

And here Mufti Menk asks us to read the character of these people, because it is the easiest thing in the scene to walk straight past. Think about the raw power they held. A whole travelling clan, armed, against one woman and a baby beside the only water for miles. They could have driven the two of them off and seized the spring by force, and who would ever have known. They could have enslaved them and taken everything. Instead, they came to the woman, and they asked her permission to settle. They asked. That single act, that decision to request rather than seize, told Hajar exactly who she was dealing with: these were honourable, disciplined, cultured people, people with a sense of right that held even when no one was watching and nothing could have stopped them.

So she agreed, on one condition, and the condition has outlived her by thousands of years. They could stay, and they could drink, but the water itself remained hers; theirs to benefit from, never theirs to own. And to this day, Mufti Menk points out, that is exactly how Zamzam stands. It is not sold. It belongs to no person and no family and no state. It is drawn freely and given freely, the water of the whole Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ, because of a condition a trusting woman set in an empty valley before there was a city there at all. Jurhum stayed, and they were good to her, and they loved the little boy. As Ismail grew among them, they taught him their pure, clear Arabic and their fine manners, while his father came and went across the years, watching the

family Allah had planted in the emptiest place on earth grow, slowly, into the beginning of a people. From this one child left in the valley would come the Arabs. And from this line, in the fullness of time, would come the final Prophet ﷺ himself.

Why Allah called him His friend

Pull all the way back now and look at the whole shape of the man's life. Told to leave his homeland, he left it. Told to leave his wife and his newborn son in a valley with nothing in it, he left them. And the testing was not even finished: there would come a night, not far off, when he was told in a dream to sacrifice this very son, the boy he had waited eighty-six years for, and he would set out to do even that, and the child would answer him, my father, do as you have been commanded, you will find me patient. That night, and the day father and son raised the walls of the Ka'bah together stone by stone, and the black stone that came down to them, all of it belongs to the next chapter, to tomorrow's telling. But the thread is already shining clearly tonight. Every single time Allah said surrender, Ibrahim surrendered, without flinching, without bargaining, because he knew with total certainty the One who was speaking to him.

The Qur'an captures the whole of that disposition in a single recurring scene: his Lord says one word to him, submit, and he answers without a heartbeat's hesitation.

When his Lord said to him, "Submit," he said, "I have submitted [in Islam] to the Lord of the worlds."

QUR'AN 2:131

That is the man entire, in one exchange. Submit. I have already submitted, to the Lord of all the worlds. No question, no delay, no

plea for an explanation first. And so Allah gave him a title He gave to no one else in quite this way, a name that is the whole reward and the whole point of his life:

And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.

QUR'AN 4:125

Allah took Ibrahim as a khalil, an intimate friend, the closest and most beloved of friends. And Mufti Menk wants us to be clear about where that friendship was earned. Not only by debating idols, and not only by sitting unburned in the heart of the fire, dramatic as those were. It was earned here, in the small, invisible, unwitnessed obediences, in walking away from a wife and a baby in a desert with no audience and no applause, simply because Allah said so. The grand public trials and the silent private ones came from the same source in him: a heart that had decided, completely and permanently, that the word of Allah outranked his own understanding of it.

And then the Qur'an does something that should make every reader of this story sit up, because it reaches across the centuries and lands directly on us. Having named Ibrahim His friend, Allah turns and tells us to follow his way, and warns us about the only kind of person who would ever refuse it:

And who would be averse to the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself. And We had chosen him in this world, and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous.

QUR'AN 2:130

Only a person who has made a fool of himself turns away from the path of Ibrahim. And so completely is his way the model that Allah commanded the final Messenger ﷺ himself, the best of all creation, to follow the pure, undivided worship of his father Ibrahim. This is why our religion is called the way of Ibrahim. The friendship was offered to him for the same reason it is always offered, to him and to anyone who wants it: he gave Allah everything, and held nothing back, not his comfort, not his homeland, not his wife, not even the son he had waited a lifetime to hold.

What Ibrahim and Hajar ask of our faith

It would be easy to read this episode as the quietest and strangest of a faraway prophet's trials and leave it there, sealed safely in the past: a hard story, beautifully resolved, with a famous well at the end of it. That would be to miss the question it is putting directly to you. Strip the scene down to what it actually asks, and it stops being a story about a desert long ago and becomes a mirror held up to your own dry places.

Obey the source, not your own logic. Ibrahim left his wife and his newborn in a wasteland for one reason only: the command came from Allah, and that settled it. He did not first require it to make sense to him. This is the single hardest thing in the whole of faith, and it is the thing that made him the friend of Allah. We are forever doing the reverse, demanding that an instruction satisfy our own reasoning before we will fully give in to it, even when we already know, with no doubt at all, that it is from Allah. His way was the opposite: once you know it is His, the why has already been answered. Find the one command in your own life that you keep negotiating with, the one you obey only halfway because it

does not yet make sense to you, and give it to Allah the way Ibrahim gave Him the valley.

Never despair of His mercy. Eighty-six years he asked for a son, and kept asking, and never once concluded that the silence was a no. Only those who are astray, who do not truly know their Lord, despair of His mercy. Hold that against your own waiting. Whatever you have been asking Allah for, through years of apparent silence, His not-yet is not His no. Sometimes He withholds the thing so that you will keep coming back to His door, because the asking is keeping your heart where it needs to be. And sometimes He withholds it because He is shielding you from a harm hidden inside the very gift you are begging for, a harm only He can see. Either way, keep asking, and read His silence as His timing, never as His refusal.

Trust, and then move your feet. This is Hajar's gift to every believer who ever lived. She did not sit in the sand and wait for the rescue to arrive; she climbed, and searched, and ran the valley seven times, and the water came up while she was still running. Tawakkul was never an excuse for idleness. Tie your camel, then trust. Make the honest, exhausting, practical effort that is yours to make, and then leave the outcome entirely to Allah, and He will meet you in the middle of the effort, as He met her. And here is the wonder that should change how you read your own bleak seasons: the very place that looked like the cruellest, emptiest spot on earth to be abandoned became the most beloved ground in all creation and a spring that has never once stopped flowing. Where Allah seems to have planted you in barrenness may be the exact place He intends to provide for you most.

And do not pray only for yourself. Hear Ibrahim's du'a one more time and notice how far past his own lifetime it reaches: make this city secure, keep my sons from idols, settle my descendants here that they may establish prayer, incline the hearts of people toward them, provide for them. He was asking for children not yet born and generations not yet imagined. Most of our du'a is a small and selfish thing, give me, give me, fixed entirely on ourselves. His reached down the centuries to people he would never meet, all the way to us. Let yours do the same. Ask for your children, and their children, and your whole line, all the way to the Day of Judgement.

Hold it all together and see the line that runs through it, because it ends, as everything in these stories ends, at the Prophet ﷺ himself. The valley Ibrahim consecrated with this du'a became Makkah, the city of the Prophet's birth, the home of the Ka'bah he would one day clear of every idol exactly as his father had cleared Babylon's storehouse. The child left in the valley is his ancestor; from Ismail came the Arabs, and from that line came the final Messenger ﷺ. Hajar's run is the sa'i you will one day walk between Safa and Marwah, breathless in the low stretch where she was breathless. Her well is the Zamzam you will lift to your lips, still gushing after four thousand years, still belonging to no one and to everyone. And when the Prophet ﷺ stood at last on the plain of Arafah at his Farewell Hajj, completing the rites Ibrahim began, he was closing a circle his great forefather had opened in an empty valley with a wineskin and a baby and an unshakeable trust. You are not reading about strangers. You are reading the foundation of the very pilgrimage written into your own faith, the steps your own feet are promised one day to walk.

So take one thing from this barren valley down into your ordinary, comfortable life. Obey one command of Allah that you have been

arguing with, simply because it is His. Keep asking for the thing you have almost given up on, and refuse to call His silence a refusal. And the next time your own valley looks completely empty, when the food has run out and you cannot yet see the caravan on the horizon, remember Hajar between the two hills, and remember that Allah had already sent the water before she finished her seventh run. May Allah, who answered His friend Ibrahim's du'a in a place with nothing in it, incline our hearts to His sacred House, provide for us from where we cannot see, and let us surrender to His command the way Ibrahim and Hajar surrendered, holding nothing back; may He place us and our children among those who establish the prayer, and gather us at His House, on the path of His friend Ibrahim, in the company of His final Messenger ﷺ.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 12 (Ibrahim and Ismail, part 3). Qur'an: Sahih International (15:56, 14:35, 14:37, 2:130, 2:131, 4:125), verified via quran.ai. Where Mufti Menk relays the report that Sarah's jealousy was the cause, his framing has been kept, neither built upon nor denied; what is held as certain is that the leaving was a command from Allah.

Ibrahim and Ismail, part 4

The knife, the ransom, and the house they raised together

Twice in one life a father stood over a son with death laid out between them. The first time, the father lit the fire. Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was a young man then, and his own father had handed him to a mob to be burned alive for the crime of breaking their idols. The second time, the father raised the knife himself, and the son lying beneath it was the boy he had begged Allah for across a lifetime of waiting. Mufti Menk opens this final part of Ibrahim's story by setting the two scenes side by side and asking us, gently, to look at them together. A father and a son in both. Fire in one hand, a blade in the other. And yet the two scenes do not end the same way, and the whole of what this day has to teach is hidden in the difference.

In the first scene, the father was the one who refused to believe, and he lost; the help of Allah came down into the flames and reached the believing son, and the fire was made cool and safe. In the second scene, both the father and the son had submitted, and so there was no loser among them at all. The knife never fell. The boy was ransomed. The father was honored among every generation that came after. The only one who walked away from these stories with nothing, every single time, was Shaytan. This is day thirteen, the summit of the friend of Allah's long climb, and by the time you reach the end of it you will have stood where your Eid comes from, watched two men lay the foundations of the Ka'bah with their own hands, and heard a prayer that would

be answered, centuries later, by a man born in that very city, peace and blessings upon him.

Two fathers, two sons, one rule

Before the knife, there is one last word to say about the fire, because it tells you what kind of man Ibrahim was. He had a heart that ached for people, even the ones who had tried to kill him. He never prayed for punishment to fall on anyone; he prayed that they would be guided, and that included his own father. Even after the fire, he kept asking Allah to forgive the old man, until Allah corrected him: you cannot keep praying for one who has chosen to die in clear, knowing disbelief, who saw every sign and turned away from all of it only to keep his trade in idols and his standing in the town. Mufti Menk pauses on that to be precise about what mercy is and is not. Ibrahim's du'a for his father had always been conditional, hanging on Allah's leave; when the leave was withheld, the prophet of mercy let it go. He loved people enough to want them saved, and he loved Allah enough to stop where Allah told him to stop.

That is the man Allah now tested with the hardest instruction a human being has ever been handed. The command came in a dream, and a prophet's dream is revelation. Ibrahim did not hide it from the boy, did not soften it, did not wait for a gentler moment. He turned to his son and told him plainly, and the answer the boy gave back is one of the most astonishing lines in the entire Qur'an.

And [then] he said, "Indeed, I will go to [where I am ordered by] my Lord; He will guide me. My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous." So We gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy. And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, "O my son, indeed I have

seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think." He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast."

QUR'AN 37:99-102

Read that boy's reply again and let it sink in. No panic. No bargaining. No "why me." A young man, old enough to work alongside his father, looks at the news that his own father has been commanded to slaughter him, and his first instinct is to steady the father: do what you have been ordered. And then a line of pure trust, the kind that only grows in a soul that has stopped clinging to this life: you will find me, if Allah wills, among the patient. Two people, standing over the single most impossible command ever given, and both of them choosing, without flinching, to obey.

This is the rule the whole pillar keeps circling back to, and Mufti Menk states it again here without hedging: victory belongs to those who firmly believe, every single time. He reaches forward across two thousand years to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who would one day stand before his own battles and give this certainty a name. *Ihda al-husnayayn*, he called it, one of two beautiful things: either Allah grants us victory over our enemies, or He grants us martyrdom and the reward of the Hereafter, and a believer wins on both roads. A heart shaped like Ibrahim's and his son's does not grip this life so tightly that it forgets the appointment every soul keeps. Mufti Menk turns this even toward the modern argument over selling organs, refusing to let a man kill or be plundered to buy himself a few more years, because the believer who knows he is leaving anyway is freed from the fear that makes people do terrible things to stay. He is careful to note this is a passing example and not the day's subject; the point

underneath it is the one that matters. When you truly believe, and you truly submit, there is no outcome left that can ruin you.

The ransom, and where your Eid comes from

So they went. The father took his son out to fulfill the vision, and the Qur'an records the moment in words chosen with terrible care.

And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, "O Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice,

QUR'AN 37:103-107

They had both submitted. The Arabic is *aslamaa*, from the same root that gives us the words *Islam* and *Muslim*, and it is laid here at the very heart of the story like a foundation stone: this religion is named after exactly the thing this father and this son did on that day. The boy was put down on his forehead, his face to the ground, so that the father would not have to watch the eyes of the child he loved as the knife went to his throat. And then, with the blade where it was, the call came from above: O Ibrahim, you have already fulfilled the vision. It was over. It had been over the moment they both said yes. The test, it turns out, was never about the blood at all. It was about the willingness, and the willingness had been given whole, withheld in not a single corner of either heart.

So Allah ransomed the boy with a tremendous sacrifice, a magnificent ram sent down in his place, and He left Ibrahim something that has outlasted empires: a greeting passed down on the tongues of the faithful in every age that came after,

"Peace upon Abraham." That is not a line buried in an old scripture. That is the origin of the festival you keep. Every year, when the pilgrims complete their Hajj, the entire Muslim world slaughters an animal at Eid al-Adha and stands inside this exact moment, remembering a father and a son who handed Allah the dearest thing they owned and held nothing back. The stones the pilgrims cast at the jamarat, where the family is remembered to have driven away the whisper to disobey; the very rite of the sacrifice itself; all of it runs straight back to this scene in the valley. When you eat from your Eid, you are eating from Ibrahim's table.

And here is the quiet, devastating center of it, the thing Mufti Menk wants you to carry out of the chapter more than any other. Allah never wanted the child taken. He is not in need of anyone's son. What He wanted was the heart that would give the child up, the soul that would not place even its most beloved possession above the One who gave it. The lesson lands softly, because you are not being asked for a son. But you are being asked, each in your own private way, what it is you are still clutching that you have not yet been willing to lay down for the One who put it in your hands in the first place. The dearest thing. The thing you have quietly decided is yours. Ibrahim and his son show you a kind of person who keeps nothing back from Allah, and then they show you that such a person loses nothing in the end.

A knock at Ismail's door

Mufti Menk now tells a story he is careful to flag as a sound, authentic narration and not a folk tale, and it opens a window onto the household this faith was raised in. Ismail, peace be upon him, had grown into a man, married into the tribe of Jurhum, and settled in Makkah, while his father Ibrahim travelled back and

forth between Makkah and the land of Sham, the region of Palestine. One day Ibrahim made the journey and came knocking, and a woman he did not recognize opened the door, his son away from home. He greeted her and asked, as a traveller might, how their life was. And she poured out her complaints to this stranger at the door: her husband left them with little, life was hard, there was barely enough, she was tired of it. She had no idea who the old man was. He left her with only a message: give your husband my greeting, and tell him to change the threshold of his door.

When Ismail returned he sensed at once that his father had been there. Mufti Menk lingers on that detail, because it is not a small one: the bond between this father and this son was a bond of faith before it was a bond of blood, and a man tuned to Allah feels the presence of the one who raised him in Allah. He asked his wife whether anyone had come, and what the visitor had said. When she repeated the line about the threshold, Ismail understood it instantly, the way you understand a private language: his father was telling him to release this marriage. He sent the woman back to her people with kindness, and Jurhum received her and married him to another.

Time passed, and Ibrahim came again. The same questions at the door, asked of a different wife, and this time the answer was only: alhamdulillah, we are well, we thank Allah in every condition. No airing of private struggles to a passing stranger, no complaint dragged out into the open. Ibrahim left a message shaped almost the same and meaning the opposite: tell him to keep the threshold of his door. And Ismail understood that one too: this one is good, hold on to her. Mufti Menk dwells on the gratitude itself, the habit of saying alhamdulillah ala kulli hal, praise to Allah in every state, and on the wisdom of not laying your blessings or

your grievances before people who may envy the one or gossip about the other. He notes the limit too, half smiling, because a young man once came to him and asked, in earnest, whether this means he must divorce his wife if his father tells him to. Only, Mufti Menk answered, if your father is Ibrahim and you are Ismail. These two stood on a height the rest of us can only look up toward; our own fathers, he reminds us, sometimes need guidance themselves, and our duty of obedience to a parent runs only as far as what is decent and reasonable and pleasing to Allah. But the obedience of a prophet's son to a prophet's coded word is a thing of another order, and it is beautiful to witness.

He looked like the Prophet ﷺ

There is a thread running inside that story that ties this whole pillar together in a single knot. When the second wife described the old visitor at the door, she was describing Ibrahim, and Mufti Menk reaches for another sound narration to tell us what Ibrahim looked like. On the night of the Ascension, the night the Prophet ﷺ was raised through the heavens, he passed the prophets one after another and described them; and when he came to Ibrahim, he said the closest likeness to him is your own companion, meaning himself. Ibrahim and Muhammad ﷺ looked alike. They were one lineage, two faces of a single family, and Allah took them both as His chosen, intimate friends: the two are called al-Khalilayn, the two beloved friends of the Most Merciful.

Sit with that for a moment, because it is the architecture of everything you are reading. The man laying the foundations of this story's house and the man who would one day stand inside it, clear it, and pray in it shared a face and shared the rarest friendship a creature can have with its Creator, across some two thousand years of history. This is the promise the pillar keeps

making to you, night after night: the prophets are not a shelf of separate fables, each sealed in its own age. They are one household, walking in a single direction, and the road they are all walking runs toward the final one of them, peace and blessings upon him. Ismail's wife described an old man at a door, and she was describing the grandfather of the Prophet ﷺ, whose own face she had, without knowing it, half seen.

Show us how to worship You

Now the camera pulls back to the work that gives this day its weight. Years before, in the same barren valley, Ibrahim had left his infant son and the boy's mother with a skin of water and a bag of dates and walked away on Allah's command, praying as he went; and Allah Himself has preserved that prayer, the prayer of a father settling his family in an empty place, trusting that the empty place would one day be full.

Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.

QUR'AN 14:37

The valley had no fruit and no people; the prayer asked for both, and got them. And now, the son grown, the two of them kneel together in the dirt of that same valley and lift the foundations of the Ka'bah, stone by stone, and the Qur'an lets you stand close enough to hear what they whispered as they worked.

And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the

Knowing. Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You. And show us our rites [of worship] and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful.

QUR'AN 2:127-128

Hear the order of it. First, no claim, no pride in the labor of their own hands: our Lord, just accept this from us, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. Then a plea not only for themselves but for everyone who would ever follow: make the two of us submitters to You, and raise from our offspring a whole nation submitted to You. And then the request Mufti Menk lingers over longest, because the entire shape of how Muslims worship is folded inside three words of it: wa arina manasikana, and show us our rites. Show us, ya Allah, how You want to be worshipped. Teach us, through revelation, the way You wish to be served.

Stop and notice what that means coming from this man. Ibrahim built the house of Allah with his own hands. He placed the stones; he was shown where the Black Stone would sit and where the standing place would be. And still, having built the very House, he did not presume to invent a single act of worship to fill it. He asked to be taught. From this, Mufti Menk draws the rule of the Sharia plainly and without apology: every act of worship is forbidden unless Allah has revealed it. We do not worship Allah in whatever manner happens to move us or suit us; we worship Him in the way He instructs, the times of it, the postures of it, the words of it, all of it handed down and none of it guessed at. This is the very reason a Muslim today does nothing in the prayer that the Prophet ﷺ did not do, adds no movement and no formula of his own, because to drift even a step from what was taught is to drift from the religion of Ibrahim himself.

Mufti Menk offers a homely image for the wisdom of staying inside what is certain: a believer's capacity is like a pot, and the things the whole ummah agrees on are the rocks; fill your pot with those first, the five prayers, the Qur'an, the remembrance, the zakah, the fasting, the Hajj, and you will scarcely have room left to wander into the small disputed corners where someone will tell you that you have erred. Fill it with the disputed sand first, and the rocks will never fit.

Announce the pilgrimage

Allah answered the prayer to be shown the rites, and the first rite He taught was the Hajj. And the way He taught it asked Ibrahim to do something that, by every human measure, was absurd. Stand up, Allah told him, in this empty valley, alone with a tiny community, no road leading in and no road leading out, no voice that could carry past the next dune, and call the whole of mankind to come.

And proclaim to the people the hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass -

QUR'AN 22:27

Announce the pilgrimage, and the carrying of the call, Allah said in effect, is My concern and not yours. There was no microphone, no road, no letter, no rumor that could travel; there was one man's voice in a deserted valley, and a promise. Mufti Menk asks you to taste the fruit of that verse with your own eyes, today, fourteen centuries on. There are close to two billion Muslims on the earth. Makkah at its fullest can hold only two or three million pilgrims at one time, so the nations of the world are placed on a quota and still cannot meet the longing of their

people to go. That annual crush of yearning, in every language under heaven, pressing toward one small valley, is the answer to a single voice that once called out to no one.

And it is, Mufti Menk says, the lesson for anyone who ever felt their good work was too small to matter, who looked at the handful of people in front of them and wondered why they bothered. Do the work of Allah sincerely, and never mind the count. If there is one person sitting before you, it is more than enough. You are not the one who makes a thing grow; Allah grows what He chooses to grow, and He will carry a sincere word as far as He wills it to travel, long after you are gone. The disbelievers, he reminds us from the Qur'an, want to blow out the light of Allah with their mouths, and Allah refuses anything but to complete His light. The pilgrimage Ibrahim and Ismail were given is the very pilgrimage you will one day walk; the rites you will perform are the rites a father and a son were taught while they laid stones; and when generations later buried those rites under idolatry, it was the Prophet ﷺ who came to scrape them clean and restore them to their first purity. But the rites themselves run straight back to two men in an empty valley, asking to be shown the way.

The messenger they prayed for

Still kneeling at the foundations, his hands still on the stones, Ibrahim made the du'a that this entire pillar has quietly been moving toward from its first night.

Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise."

Read it slowly, because you are reading a prayer that you live inside. Ibrahim asked his Lord to raise up, from his own offspring, in this city, for this nation, a messenger who would recite Allah's verses to them, teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify their souls. Then he fell silent, and the centuries began to pass. Generations of the children of Ismail came and went in Makkah. And at last, in that very city, a man was born of that very line, who recited the verses of Allah, who taught the Book and the wisdom, who purified the people, exactly, point for point, as the prayer had asked. The Prophet ﷺ said it of himself, plainly: I am the supplication of my father Ibrahim. When you sit at night and read these stories, you are not reading the past. You are reading a prayer being answered in slow motion across two thousand years, and you are reading it because you are one of the people that prayer was made for.

Ibrahim begged Allah for two more things that this city carries to this hour.

And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this city [i.e., Makkah] secure and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols. My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among the people. So whoever follows me - then he is of me; and whoever disobeys me - indeed, You are [yet] Forgiving and Merciful.

QUR'AN 14:35-36

Make this place secure, and keep me and my children far from the worship of idols. The first prayer made Makkah a haram, a sanctuary where it is forbidden to spill blood or harm even the small creatures and the growing things without cause, safe in a way few places on earth have ever been, and that safety is the

fruit of one man's du'a. And the second prayer is where the line to the Seerah pulls suddenly, painfully tight. Ibrahim raised a house for the worship of Allah alone, and prayed with everything in him that it would never hold an idol, that he and his sons would be kept clear of that one sin above all others. And his descendants filled that very house with three hundred and sixty idols. The House built to declare that there is no god but Allah became, over the centuries, the most crowded shrine of false gods in Arabia. It took the very messenger Ibrahim had prayed for, walking back into Makkah on the day of its Conquest, to enter that house and clear it with his own hands, smashing the idols and reciting that truth has come and falsehood has perished, returning the House to exactly what its builder had intended it to be. The grandfather laid the stones and made the prayer; the grandson ﷺ answered the prayer and swept the house clean. Mufti Menk lets you feel the full span of that arc: a du'a made in a bare valley, hanging unanswered while the very thing it feared took root, and then resolved at last by the hands of the man it had asked for in the first place.

There is even an echo of Ibrahim left inside your own Qur'an, a fragment of his lost scripture that Allah preserved for you to read.

But you prefer the worldly life, While the Hereafter is better and more enduring. Indeed, this is in the former scriptures, The scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

QUR'AN 87:16-19

The scrolls given to Ibrahim are long gone from the earth, but Allah lifted this line out of them and set it down in His final Book: that you are giving your preference to this passing world, while the Hereafter is better and lasts forever. The man who would have given up his own son rather than prefer anything to Allah

lived by precisely that truth, and the truth survived him, scripture after scripture, all the way down to the page you are reading tonight. It is the same warning, in the end, as the whole of his life: do not hold the temporary thing above the eternal One.

The line he left behind

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was, the Qur'an testifies, a servant always grateful and never once ungrateful, a man Allah chose and guided to a straight path. He lived out the long evening of his life in faith, and when at last he died he was buried in the land known today as al-Khalil, Hebron, the place itself named for what he was, al-Khalil, the friend; and his own children shrouded him and laid him in the earth. But what he handed forward outlived him like an ocean outlives a single wave. Mufti Menk frames the reward that came to him as the answer to a lifetime of surrender: Allah told Ibrahim, in effect, that the gift He would keep in his family was prophethood and revelation, that the messengers and the Books to come would run down through his line. And the Qur'an then reads out the names like a roll of honor, almost too many to hold, giving you a breath between them: Ishaq, Yaqub, and then Yusuf, Musa, Harun, Dawud, Sulayman, and a pause, and then Zakariyya, Yahya, Isa, Ilyas, on and on, a long chain of prophets descending from one obedient man who once raised a knife and would not hold his son back from Allah.

Mufti Menk turns this against the small jealousy that gnaws at people. We envy a little wealth, a little knowledge, a little status, as if envy could ever move any of it our way. And Allah answers, in the verse, by pointing to what He gave the family of Ibrahim: not one of the things people covet but all three at once, the Book, the wisdom, and a mighty kingdom, prophets among them who were also kings, like Dawud and Sulayman. Staring at another

man's blessing will never place it in your hands; if you want the goodness Allah gives, you ask Him for it and you work toward it, and it comes from the Owner of it, never from your resentment of the one who already has it. Of Ibrahim's two sons, the Qur'an gives most of the narrative to Ismail, the elder, and it seals his portrait in a line worth carrying with you for the rest of your life.

And mention in the Book, Ishmael. Indeed, he was true to his promise, and he was a messenger and a prophet. And he used to enjoin on his people prayer and zakah and was to his Lord pleasing [i.e., accepted by Him].

QUR'AN 19:54-55

True to his promise. The boy who said "do as you are commanded, you will find me among the patient" grew into a man whose defining quality, in the words of Allah, was that he kept his word, every word, and that he never stopped calling his family to the prayer and to charity, and that he was, in the end, pleasing to his Lord. A father who would have sacrificed his son, and a son who never broke a promise: this is the house your faith was built in. And the door that house opens onto, when you step through it, is the life of the Prophet ﷺ himself, the messenger they knelt in the dirt and prayed for.

What Ibrahim and Ismail ask of our faith

It would be easy to read this day as a story of heroic loss, a tale of a man so strong he could give up his only son, admire it from a safe distance, and set it back on the shelf. That would be to miss the question it is actually putting to you. The thing Ibrahim and Ismail were made of was never the willingness to lose. It was the willingness to submit, holding nothing back, and the discovery

that a soul like that loses nothing at all. Strip the day down to that, and it stops being a monument and becomes a mirror.

They believed enough to obey before they could see the reason. A father was told to do the one thing every instinct in him screamed against, and a son was told he was the one to be given up, and neither of them waited for the command to make sense before they said yes. We are the opposite by habit: we obey Allah once we understand the wisdom, once the benefit is visible, once it feels safe. Their faith ran the other way around. They submitted first, and the wisdom, the ram, the rescue, the honored name, all of it came after. Ask where in your own life you are still holding obedience hostage to your own understanding, refusing the command until Allah explains Himself to your satisfaction, when the people Allah loved most simply trusted Him and moved.

They handed over the dearest thing, and Allah handed it back. This is the promise hidden under the knife, and it should change how you spend your days. Allah did not want the child taken; He wanted the heart that would not put the child above Him. And the moment that heart was proven, the child was returned, the family was honored across every generation, and the whole religion of submission was named after what they did. You are not asked for a son. But you are asked, quietly and continually, what you are still clutching as if it were yours: the wealth, the comfort, the relationship, the plan for your life, the version of the future you have decided you cannot live without. Ibrahim and Ismail show you that the thing you are most afraid to lay down for Allah is exactly the thing keeping you from the peace they had. Lay it on the altar, and you will likely find, as they did, that Allah never wanted it destroyed; He wanted you free of needing it more than you need Him.

And here is where the whole arc lands, the line this pillar has been drawing for thirteen days. The two of them knelt in an empty valley and, in the same breath that they raised the House, asked to be taught how to worship and asked for a messenger to be sent from their own children. Everything you do as a Muslim has its roots in that scene. Your Eid is their sacrifice. Your Hajj is the rite they were shown. The Ka'bah you turn your face toward five times a day is the house their hands built and prayed would never hold an idol. And the Prophet ﷺ whose life and Sunnah you follow, whose path is the very next thing this book will walk you into, is the answer to their prayer, the messenger from their offspring, the one who walked back into Makkah and cleared their House of every idol it had gathered. When you pray as he prayed, refusing to invent a single act of your own, you are keeping faith with Ibrahim's plea, show us our rites; you are worshipping Allah the way He taught, not the way that merely suits you. When you stand at the Ka'bah, or turn toward it from the far side of the world, you are standing inside an answered prayer that is older than every kingdom on the map.

So take from this father and this son the one thing they were really made of, and carry it down into your own ordinary day. Submit to Allah in something before you fully understand it. Lay down, for His sake alone, the one thing you have been most afraid to release. Worship Him the way He showed, exactly, and not the way you would prefer. That is how the friend of Allah lived, and that is how the son who never broke a promise lived, and the door they opened with that submission is the same door you walk through every time you say there is no god but Allah. O Allah, accept from us as You accepted from them. Make us, and the children who come after us, submitters to You. Show us how You wish to be worshipped and keep us upon it. Join us to the

House of Your friend Ibrahim, and to the messenger ﷺ You raised from his children in answer to his prayer, and gather us at last where the doers of good are gathered. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 13 (Ibrahim and Ismail, part 4). Qur'an: Sahih International (37:99-111, 2:127-129, 14:35-37, 22:27, 87:16-19, 19:54-55), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.

Lut

One voice against a people who called the forbidden normal

There was a young man in Ibrahim's time who watched the impossible happen and let it change his life. A king had built a fire so vast it could be felt from a distance, and into it he had thrown the man who would not bow to idols, and the man had walked out of the flames unburned. Almost no one who saw it believed. The crowd that gathered to watch a heretic burn went home and told the story as a curiosity, and forgot it, and kept their idols. But one youngster looked at Ibrahim, peace be upon him, stepping out of the fire alive, and something in him broke open, and he believed. His name was Lut, peace be upon him, the one the English Bibles call Lot, and he was Ibrahim's nephew.

Mufti Menk pauses to let the loneliness of that moment register, because it is the key to everything that follows. At the time, the believers in the one God numbered three, and you could name them all: Ibrahim, a woman named Sarah, and this young man Lut. Three souls on the whole earth. Lut did not arrive at faith because the people around him held it and made it easy. He came to it against every person he knew, in a world that had no room for it, which is precisely the kind of man Allah would later need in the place He was about to send him.

The boy who believed when no one else would

Ibrahim moved on, north, into the life the Qur'an tells across many surahs, and at some point he sent his nephew away to a mission of his own. To the north lay a cluster of towns near what we now call the Dead Sea, the towns the West remembers under the names Sodom and Gomorrah, and it was to the people of those towns that Lut was sent as a prophet. He went, while Ibrahim lived his own life elsewhere, and he arrived to find a people unlike any he had imagined.

The Qur'an does not reach for a gentle word for what Lut found. When Allah speaks of saving him, He names the place by what it did:

And to Lot We gave judgement and knowledge, and We saved him from the city that was committing wicked deeds. Indeed, they were a people of evil, defiantly disobedient.

QUR'AN 21:74

The phrase Mufti Menk lingers on is al-khaba'ith, rendered here as wicked deeds, and he will not let us soften it. It is the word for the foul, the filthy, the rotten, the thing that is simply dirty. Hold on to that, because the entire episode turns on a single refusal: the refusal to rename the deed anything cleaner than what Allah named it. The men of these towns had turned away from the women Allah created as their mates and turned toward one another, openly, and over time it had become not a hidden vice but the custom of the place, the ordinary practice of an entire society. And it was, the Qur'an says, something the world had never seen before them.

A sin no nation had committed before

Lut did not creep around the matter. He put it to them in the open, and the Qur'an preserves the words of a prophet confronting a people with a thing they had grown comfortable doing:

And [We had sent] Lot when he said to his people, "Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds [i.e., peoples]?"

QUR'AN 7:80

Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people."

QUR'AN 7:81

He held the mirror up to them: this is a thing no people in the history of the world has done until you. That is why, Mufti Menk notes, the act came to carry the name of their town. The village was called Sadum, and from it the deed took the name the world still uses, because according to the Qur'an this nation was the first in the history of mankind to invent it.

Mufti Menk lingers here on purpose, because the argument is not finished, even now. There are people today, he says, who claim to be Muslims, and he has heard one of them speak at length, who say they have studied the Qur'an thoroughly and concluded that what is forbidden is only the coercion, the rape, and that between two who agree there is nothing wrong. He answers it from the verse itself, and the answer is plain. When Lut tells them they approach men with desire and leave the women their Lord created for them, is he telling them to go and force the women instead? Of course not. The objection collapses the instant you read what Lut actually said. The wrong was never the absence of consent; the wrong was the deed, which Allah calls *fahishah*, gross indecency, and the doers of which He calls a people who

transgress every limit. Read it again in the surah where the angels are named:

Indeed, you approach men and obstruct the road and commit in your meetings [every] evil." And the answer of his people was not but that they said, "Bring us the punishment of Allāh, if you should be of the truthful."

QUR'AN 29:29

And Mufti Menk closes off the other escape route as well, the one that says the inclination is something in the genes, inherited and therefore not chosen. By that logic, he says, the man enslaved to adultery could plead the same alibi, and the man enslaved to drink could plead it too, and every sin on earth would dissolve into an excuse handed down from the forefathers. With respect to those in medicine who would agree to it, he cannot accept a reasoning that would absolve every wrong a person commits. No one is born owing this. It is a choice a heart makes, and then defends, and then teaches. The door of return, he reminds us, stays open to anyone who would turn back through it; but a sin must first be called a sin before anyone walks back from it.

I ask you no wage

Like every prophet who came before him, Lut wanted nothing from the people he warned. When they accused him of arriving in their town with a hidden motive, of preaching at them only to gain something for himself, he answered exactly as Nuh and Hud and Salih had answered their own peoples, and the Qur'an records the words as a refrain that runs through the whole line of messengers:

The people of Lot denied the messengers

QUR'AN 26:160

Mufti Menk catches the strangeness of that plural at once. Only one messenger came to these people. Why does Allah say they denied the messengers, all of them? Because, he explains, the messengers are one message. To deny one is to deny the truth they all carried, and our own faith is built on the same logic from the other side: a Muslim's belief is not complete until he believes in all of them, Nuh and Ibrahim and Musa and Isa and the final Messenger ﷺ alike, for they came with one word from one Lord. To pick and choose among the prophets is to stand outside the whole of what they brought. So when this people belied Lut, in the reckoning of heaven they belied every prophet who ever spoke. Then Lut said to them what every one of those prophets said:

When their brother Lot said to them, "Will you not fear Allāh?"

QUR'AN 26:161

Indeed, I am to you a trustworthy messenger.

QUR'AN 26:162

So fear Allāh and obey me.

QUR'AN 26:163

And I do not ask you for it any payment. My payment is only from the Lord of the worlds.

QUR'AN 26:164

Not a coin, he told them, not a dollar, nothing of gold or silver, nothing material at all. He wanted their souls, not their pockets. And the sin he stood against was never only the one. The Qur'an names the rest of what their society had organised itself around: they were highwaymen, the word is qat' at-tariq, men who lay in wait along the road and fell upon the traveller and stripped him of his goods, and they had their gathering places, their clubs, where they would meet to cheer one another on in evil and then commit it in plain view. They did it, the Qur'an says, while people watched, with no shame left in them at all. Mufti Menk draws the line from there to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: that people keep the hope of Allah's forgiveness open for as long as they do not sin out in the open, and that the one who sins openly, who broadcasts his wrong for all to see, has thrown that hope away. A whole town had reached that point. It had made indecency its entertainment and its custom, and in the middle of it stood one man, calling them back, year after year, while they laughed and called him mad.

When the forbidden becomes the law of the land

Then comes the detail that should reach across the centuries and take hold of the reader, because it is the part Mufti Menk turns directly on us. Watch what their society had become when their answer to Lut finally came:

But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Evict them from your city! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure."

QUR'AN 7:82

Read it slowly. The charge they brought against Lut and the few who stood with him was that they kept themselves pure.

Cleanliness was the offence. Decency was the crime worth exile. They had so completely turned right and wrong upside down that purity itself was now the thing that got you thrown out of town. And they had gone further still: they had passed a rule among themselves that Lut was forbidden to host a single guest, because a guest was prey, and a man who sheltered strangers was interfering with the sport of the place. Wrong was not merely permitted there; wrong was protected by law, and right was the thing you were punished for.

Here Mufti Menk turns it on us, and so must we. As Muslims, he says, we are not free, and he says it as a boast and not a complaint. We chose to surrender, and the day a person surrenders, he accepts a code. He reaches for the image of citizenship to make it land. Live in a country and you are no longer free to break its laws and remain a citizen in good standing; if you cannot abide its laws, you may go and live somewhere else, but you cannot stay and tear them up. Islam is like that. There is a world of difference, he insists, between two things that look similar from outside. A person may sin and still remain a Muslim, weak, in the wrong, in need of repentance, but still inside the fold, because he has broken a law he still acknowledges as law. But the moment a person takes a thing Allah forbade and rebrands it as permitted, declares the haram to be halal and says the religion never forbade it at all, he has tried to edit the law he swore to keep, and that is a different act entirely. That is the line Lut would not let anyone blur.

And this is the very heart of halal and haram, the thread that runs straight out of Lut's mouth into the reader's own faith. What is permitted and what is forbidden are Allah's to define, and no one else's. Not the crowd's. Not the era's. Not the syllabus a society decides to teach its children, even when, as Mufti Menk notes

with sorrow, there are countries now that force this very thing into their schools and reward it and call it something with nothing wrong in it. A whole nation calling a sin normal does not move it one inch on Allah's scale. The people of Lut are the standing proof of it, preserved in the Qur'an forever: an entire society can be wrong, unanimously, about the thing that matters most, and its unanimity changes nothing. The truth was never going to be settled by a show of hands.

I detest your deeds, and a du'a raised in the open
Lut never softened, never trimmed his message to make it easier to live beside. When the threats came, his answer was not retreat but a clean and total disavowal:

He said, "Indeed, I am, toward your deed, of those who detest [it]."

QUR'AN 26:168

I want no part of what you do, he told them, and I never will. He warned them, again and again, that a punishment was on its way to them from Allah. And when a warner warns a stubborn people long enough, the Qur'an records the same chilling reply from them that it records from other doomed nations: not repentance, not even argument, but a dare. Bring it on, then. Bring us the punishment of Allah, if you are telling the truth. They gambled their whole town on the bet that the warner was bluffing.

So Lut did the one thing a servant can always do when the entire world has lined up against him. He stopped arguing with the crowd and turned to the only One whose verdict would hold:

My Lord, save me and my family from [the consequence of] what they do."

QUR'AN 26:169

He said, "My Lord, support me against the corrupting people."

QUR'AN 29:30

Mufti Menk asks us to sit with the arithmetic of that prayer, because it is brutal. Lut was one man. He had been given no sons, only two daughters who believed alongside him. Three souls, in a city of thousands, and the thousands, in the Qur'an's own description of them, blinded, no longer able to tell right from wrong at all, so far gone that the faculty itself had failed in them. When you are outnumbered like that, hopelessly, the prophets show you the move that is always still available. You stop trying to win the argument with the mob, and you start talking to your Lord. The hands go up. That door never closes, no matter how badly the count runs against you.

Guests too beautiful to be safe

The answer to that du'a came walking into town. Three guests arrived, in the form of young men so strikingly handsome that no one in those towns had seen their like. They were angels, though Lut did not yet know it; to him they were simply travellers, and travellers in this town were in mortal danger after dark. His daughters saw them first and ran to their father in fear, because they knew exactly what their city would do to such guests once night fell. Lut hurried the men into his house and bolted the door, hoping against hope that no one had seen them slip inside, and even as he played the host he kept telling his guests, with a

heavy heart, how vile his people were, half in warning that they should leave, half in shame at what he could not protect them from.

Mufti Menk notices a quiet exchange folded inside this. The angels had been given an instruction: not to bring the punishment down until the messenger sent to these people testified, from his own mouth, that they deserved it. So when Lut kept repeating, unprompted, that these were the worst of people, that Allah had created none worse, the angels were glad to hear it, because the final witness was being given before their eyes, the last signature on a sentence already written.

But there was a traitor inside Lut's own home. His wife was not a believer, and she slipped word out to the town: three beautiful men have come to Lut's house. The Qur'an pairs her elsewhere with the wife of Nuh as a standing warning that even a prophet's household guarantees no one's faith, that nearness to a righteous man saves no one who will not believe. The message reached the town, and the mob came running, giving each other the good news as they came, hammering on the door, and the Qur'an captures Lut's agony in a single breath:

And his people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing evil deeds. He said, "O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allāh and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?"

QUR'AN 11:78

Here is the line that has troubled readers and that Mufti Menk meets head on. When Lut said, these are my daughters, they are purer for you, he was not offering his own children to be wronged by a mob. He was a prophet, and a prophet treats the women of

his community as his own daughters; he was pointing these men, in desperation, toward the lawful path of marriage to the women of the town, away from the indecency they were rushing toward, begging them to turn back to what Allah had made permitted. The altered scriptures, Mufti Menk notes, carry a vile story that blames Lut himself for an act with his own daughters, and Islam rejects it outright as the highest blasphemy, the slander of a prophet. When Allah chooses a messenger, He chooses from the very best and cleanest of people; Lut, peace be upon him, is free of every such charge, and the Qur'an's whole portrait of the prophets denies it. The mob, in any case, did not want what was pure. They threw his offer back in his face:

They said, "You have already known that we have not concerning your daughters [i.e., women] any claim [i.e., desire], and indeed, you know what we want."

QUR'AN 11:79

And they reminded him of their law, the law that forbade him to shelter anyone: have we not forbidden you from protecting people? A whole nation came rushing to his door, almost the entire town, and they began to force it, to break it down, and Lut stood between the mob and his guests in a helplessness you can feel through the verse:

He said, "If only I had against you some power or could take refuge in a strong support."

QUR'AN 11:80

If only, he cried, I had the strength to stop you, or some mighty support to lean on.

The towns turned upside down

The mighty support he wished for was already inside the house, sitting at his table. At the last moment, a breath before the door gave way, the guests spoke, and everything changed:

They [the angels] said, "O Lot, indeed we are messengers of your Lord; [therefore], they will never reach you. So set out with your family during a portion of the night and let not any among you look back - except your wife; indeed, she will be struck by that which strikes them. Indeed, their appointment is [for] the morning. Is not the morning near?"

QUR'AN 11:81

Leave by night, they told him, take your family and go, and let none of you look back, except your wife, for what falls on them falls on her too. Their time is the morning, and is the morning not near? So Lut gathered his daughters and went out into the dark, and the dawn came up over those towns for the last time. Mufti Menk walks the punishment through in three distinct blows, each one named in the Qur'an, falling one after another on a single people.

So the shriek seized them at sunrise.

QUR'AN 15:73

First came the shriek, a single shattering cry at sunrise, a sound so vast, the kind of sound wave that can shake a body where it stands, that it began to convulse them. Then came the second blow. Allah commanded the angel Jibril, peace be upon him, who was one of the three, to return to his true form, the form the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said he had seen, with six hundred wings, each wing so immense it stretches from the east to the west, beyond where the eye can find its beginning or its end. And

with the tip of a single one of those wings, Jibril reached down beneath the entire settlement, lifted it high into the sky, and turned it over, so that the top became the bottom and the bottom became the top:

So when Our command came, We made the highest part [of the city] its lowest and rained upon them stones of layered hard clay, [which were]

QUR'AN 11:82

Marked from your Lord. And it [i.e., Allāh's punishment] is not from the wrongdoers [very] far.

QUR'AN 11:83

And then, as the wreckage was still falling, came the third blow, the rain of stones of baked clay, hard and layered, each one marked. Mufti Menk dwells on the detail the Qur'an gives: each stone bore a name, this one for that man and this one for that one, and they came not in a chaotic hail but in order, one following another, so that as one stone struck its target the next was already on its way, until in a very short span nothing of that people remained. And one of those marked stones, falling in its turn, was for the wife who looked back, the wife who had betrayed him to the mob; the punishment that struck the town struck her too, exactly as the angels had said.

A sign left on a road still travelled

To understand how the decree was sealed, the Qur'an takes us back a step, to before the angels ever reached Sodom. They had stopped first with Ibrahim, peace be upon him, who, not yet knowing they were angels, hurried to honour his guests with a roasted calf, and grew afraid when they would not eat. When

they told him their errand, they gave him glad tidings in the same breath, that his wife would bear a son, Ishaq, peace be upon him, who had not yet been born when Lut made his prayer. And ever tender, ever the friend of the Most Merciful, Ibrahim began to plead with the angels for Lut's people, to argue for them, to buy them a little time, until he was told gently to let the matter go, that the decree had already been written and would not be turned aside. The verses Mufti Menk loves to recite here open the twenty-seventh part of the Qur'an, where Ibrahim asks the messengers their business and they name the cargo they carry:

[Abraham] said, "Then what is your business [here], O messengers?"

QUR'AN 51:31

They said, "Indeed, we have been sent to a people of criminals

QUR'AN 51:32

To send down upon them stones of clay,

QUR'AN 51:33

Marked in the presence of your Lord for the transgressors."

QUR'AN 51:34

When the angels reached the town and did their work, they found in all of it only one household that had surrendered to Allah, and they brought its people out:

So We brought out whoever was in them [i.e., the cities] of the believers.

QUR'AN 51:35

And We found not within them other than a [single] house of Muslims.

QUR'AN 51:36

One house, in a whole nation. And Lut, peace be upon him, having escaped with his daughters, went back to find his uncle, to tell Ibrahim what had happened to his people, and was amazed to discover that Ibrahim already knew, because the same angels had stopped with him first. It is reported that Lut went on, to the end of his life, reminding people and teaching them goodness.

Then Allah did something with the ruin. He left it. He says elsewhere that the wreck of those towns lies along an established road, a road that people still pass by, openly, that travellers go by it in the morning and in the night, and He asks whether they will not then use their reason, whether they will not take the warning that a painful punishment is real:

And We have certainly left of it a sign as clear evidence for a people who use reason.

QUR'AN 29:35

And indeed, they [i.e., those cities] are [situated] on an established road.

QUR'AN 15:76

Indeed in that is a sign for the believers.

QUR'AN 15:77

And here Mufti Menk's point lands with its full weight, the point that makes this an ancient story addressed to the present moment. In Lut's day, he says, this evil was confined to one small

pocket of the earth, a single cluster of towns, and Allah overturned it and rained marked stones upon it and left its rubble visible as a warning. Today, whole nations promote it, fund it, teach it in their schools, and reward those who practise it, and still, he insists, it remains exactly what Allah called it; the renaming changes nothing about the thing. Perhaps, he says, it is only the handful of believers scattered through these cities, the few who still call wrong by its name, that holds the punishment back. The Qur'an keeps Lut's towns in front of us, the rubble left on a road we still travel, for the same reason it left the rubble visible the first time: so that no believer is ever fooled into thinking that when the whole world renames a sin, the sin itself has changed. It has not. Allah's halal and His haram outlast every empire that votes against them.

What Lut asks of our faith

It would be easy to read the story of Lut as a thunderclap from the deep past, a tale of fire and overturned cities safely sealed away from us, and to feel only relief that we do not live there. That would be to miss entirely the question it puts to our own iman. Strip the story down and it is not about a punishment at all. It is about a man who refused to let a unanimous world tell him what was true.

He would not rename the sin, and that is the whole of it. Everyone around Lut had agreed on a thing, settled it, built their laws around it, made decency itself the crime and purity the offence worth exile. The pressure on him to go along, to soften, to call the foul thing by a kinder name and be left in peace, was the pressure of an entire civilisation, and he never yielded an inch. This is the line at the centre of your own faith, the heart of what halal and haram even mean: that right and wrong belong to Allah

to define and to no one else, not the crowd, not the age, not the curriculum, and that a billion people calling a forbidden thing normal does not shift it a hair's breadth on the scale that actually weighs us. Lut is the Qur'an's permanent proof that the majority can be wrong about the one thing that matters, and that a believer does not get to vote the truth away.

And notice the shape of his belief, because it tells you what kind of faith this is. He is not free, and he knows it, and he counts that as his honour. He surrendered to Allah, and in surrendering he accepted that he no longer writes the law, only keeps it. He could sin, as any of us can, and remain a servant in need of mercy; what he could not do, what he would have died before doing, was to declare the haram halal and pretend his Lord had never spoken. That is the difference between a weak Muslim and a lost one, and it is a difference worth carrying carefully into a time when so many invitations come dressed as compassion to simply edit the law and call it growth.

There is a thread here that runs straight to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and it is worth following to the end. Lut stood alone in a city that mocked him, one voice insisting on a truth his own people loved to hate, and centuries later, in the streets of Makkah, the final Messenger ﷺ would rehearse that same patience, a lone caller surrounded by a people enraged that he would not bless the idols and the customs they cherished, warning and warning while they laughed and called him mad. The prophets are one message, as Lut's people learned when they belied him and so belied them all. And the very angel who brought the word of Allah down to Muhammad ﷺ in the cave of Hira, Jibril, peace be upon him, is the same one who slid the tip of a wing beneath these towns and turned them over; the messenger of revelation and the instrument of judgement are one

and the same, sent by one Lord whose decree no civilisation outvotes.

So take the one thing Lut carried down into your own ordinary days. When the world around you decides that a thing Allah forbade is now acceptable, even good, even something to be celebrated and taught to children, understand clearly what has happened: the world has not changed the law, it has only chosen the wrong side of it, and the law stands exactly where it stood. Hold the line gently, without cruelty and without apology, the way a prophet held it, detesting the deed and never the person, still warning, still hoping, still praying for the people who curse you. And when you feel the loneliness of being three against thousands, do what Lut did at the breaking point: stop arguing with the crowd, raise your hands, and speak to the One whose verdict is the only one that will ever hold. O Allah, save us and our families from what the heedless do, keep our hearts fixed on what You made pure when everyone around us calls it old and finished, support us against every corrupting tide, and gather us with Your prophets and with Your final Messenger ﷺ in the home You have kept for those who would not bow to the crowd. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 14 (Lut, peace be upon him). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (21:74; 7:80-82; 29:29-30, 29:35; 26:160-164, 26:168-169; 11:78-83; 15:73, 15:76-77; 51:31-36), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's. Where the histories carry reports from the People of the Book, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept: we neither affirm

nor deny what only their scriptures relate unless the Qur'an confirms it.

Yaqub and Yusuf, part I

A dream, a brother's envy, and a father's beautiful patience

Of all the prophets whose lives are scattered across the Qur'an, told in pieces here and echoed there, gathered out of a verse in this surah and a passage in that one, there is exactly one whose story Allah chose to tell whole. From beginning to end, in one unbroken sweep, in a single surah that carries his name. And before He began it, Allah called it by a title He gave to no other narrative in His Book: the most beautiful of stories. It is the story of a boy who dreamed, and of the brothers who could not bear his dream, and of a father who, when that boy was torn from him by a lie he could see straight through, reached not for revenge but for three of the most luminous words a wounded believer has ever been given. To understand how a story this full of betrayal earns the name beautiful, you have to begin where Mufti Menk begins: with a family, and a dream, and a father who understood.

The most beautiful of stories

Allah blessed Ibrahim, peace be upon him, and then He kept prophethood in his line. From Ibrahim came Ismail and Ishaq, peace be upon them, and from Ishaq came a son named Yaqub. Mufti Menk pauses here on a tender detail the Qur'an preserves: Yaqub was born within the lifetime of his grandfather Ibrahim, who saw him, and the two of them spoke, for Allah records Ibrahim counselling both Ishaq and Yaqub together. So the line

was not a name on a chart. It was a grandfather holding a grandson, passing the message down by hand.

Yaqub, peace be upon him, was given twelve sons. Ten came from one mother, and two, Yusuf and the brother named as Binyamin, from another. Mufti Menk notes the wider fact folded into this small family: Yaqub was also called Israil, so that whenever the Qur'an speaks of the Children of Israel, the Bani Israil, it is speaking of the descendants of these twelve sons, each of whom became a tribe. The entire nation begins here, in one house in Canaan, in the rivalry between brothers.

The companions once asked the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to tell them a beautiful story, and Allah Himself answered the request, sending down the surah of Yusuf and telling His Messenger ﷺ plainly that this was knowledge he had never possessed before it was revealed:

We relate to you, [O Muḥammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'ān although you were, before it, among the unaware.

QUR'AN 12:3

Hold onto what that means, because it shapes everything that follows. This is not a legend smoothed and embellished by generations of retelling. It is the record of the One who watched it happen, set down exactly as it occurred, and handed to us as the most beautiful of stories. And so Mufti Menk's whole counsel across these three nights is a single instruction repeated like a refrain: take the maximum lessons out of it. Read it as a man searching a field for every coin buried in it. Nothing in this surah is decoration.

A boy, a dream, and a father who understood

Yusuf was the youngest, and one morning he woke up glowing. Not the way children usually come running to a parent at night, Mufti Menk observes, breathless from a nightmare, but the opposite: bright with wonder. Father, he said, I saw a dream. I saw eleven stars, and the sun, and the moon, and all of them were prostrating to me.

[Of these stories mention] when Joseph said to his father, "O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me."

QUR'AN 12:4

Yaqub was a prophet, and he understood at once that this was no ordinary dream. The heavens do not bow to a child for nothing. Through revelation, Mufti Menk explains, Allah let Yaqub read what the dream was pointing toward: that this little one would be raised to a high and chosen station, lifted above the rest, given something rare. And the Qur'an lets us listen as the father turns and teaches that meaning back to his son, naming the unfinished line of Ibrahim still being written through this boy:

And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives [i.e., events or dreams] and complete His favor upon you and upon the family of Jacob, as He completed it upon your fathers before, Abraham and Isaac. Indeed, your Lord is Knowing and Wise.

QUR'AN 12:6

Picture the scene the way Mufti Menk frames it. A father looking at his youngest, seeing in a dream of stars the favour of Allah that had crowned Ibrahim and Ishaq before, and knowing, with a prophet's certainty, that it would now be completed through this

child. It should have been a morning of pure joy. And it was, for the two of them. The danger was never in the dream. The danger was in who else might hear it.

Do not tell your brothers

Yaqub's first instinct was not pride but protection. Before he let his son carry that dream out the door, he warned him:

He said, "O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan. Indeed Satan, to man, is a manifest enemy."

QUR'AN 12:5

Mufti Menk lingers here, because of the precision of what the father says and, even more, of what he does not say. He does not call his other sons bad. He names the real enemy, and the real enemy is not a person in the family. It is Shaytan. The children are good, the father is saying; it is the whisperer who finds the smallest crack between brothers and works at it, patiently, until a hairline of jealousy becomes a crater. The minute a person lets Shaytan in, Mufti Menk says, he begins to act on his behalf; the minute a person throws him out, he becomes, almost at once, a better human being.

And out of this comes the first lesson the chapter is built to give, a quiet one that most of us learn too late. Good news is not for everyone. A blessing announced in the wrong ears can curdle, in those ears, into envy. So thank Allah for the gift, and keep some of it quietly between you and Him. Mufti Menk presses the wonder of it: here is a prophet of Allah telling his own child not to speak, and to us the warning can seem like nothing at all, a small

caution about a small thing. But the father knew what he was looking at.

Where does that bitterness between siblings even come from? Mufti Menk traces it with unusual gentleness, because he wants no one to feel like the villain of their own family. When the first child is born, he is everything; the toys are his, the love is his, the whole house turns on him. Then a second child comes, and the parents, who have not stopped loving the first at all, must now give the same love to the second. And the first child, watching, feels wrongly that he was never loved, forgetting the days when he was the only one. Then a third arrives, and the pattern repeats, and the youngest, the baby, is usually the most cherished of all, and the older ones cannot remember that they too were once the baby. If we would sit still for a few moments, Mufti Menk says, we could identify the devil in that thinking and throw him out. But people do not sit still. They let it work on them. They grow bitter, and they blame their parents, and some are pulled down dark roads by a wound that was, at the root, a lie Shaytan told them about being unloved.

But Yusuf was a young boy, glad and innocent, and the warning did not land. We do not even know, Mufti Menk says with honesty, whether the child fully grasped that his father had forbidden it, because children miss the weight of what a parent is trying to protect them from. He admits it of himself, of all of us: a parent says do not do this, my son, do not do that, my daughter, and we do not see the light in it, so quietly, behind their backs, we go and do it, and we burn our fingers. Yusuf told his brothers. A small disobedience, the kind any child commits, and from that single small thing the whole storm would gather. The Prophet ﷺ would one day teach exactly this danger from the other side, warning a companion who wished to give a gift to one of his

children: either give to all of them, or give to none, because uneven hands plant a hatred between children that the parents never see growing.

Envy left to brew

The brothers held a quiet meeting of their own, away from their father, and let the envy speak:

When they said, "Joseph and his brother are more beloved to our father than we, while we are a clan. Indeed, our father is in clear error.

QUR'AN 12:8

Look at how far it had already travelled, Mufti Menk says. They are not children whining over toys; they are grown men, the strong ones, a clan, and they have just called their father, a prophet of Allah, plainly astray. And from that judgement the unthinkable was only one short step away:

Kill Joseph or cast him out to [another] land; the countenance [i.e., attention] of your father will [then] be only for you, and you will be after that a righteous people."

QUR'AN 12:9

Kill him, or throw him into some far country and lose him there, and then your father's whole attention will fall on you, and afterward you can be righteous people. Mufti Menk presses the lesson here harder than anywhere else in the night, because it is the one most of us need: this is what becomes of a problem you refuse to solve. The brothers had an honest road open to them. They could have gone to their father directly and said it to his face, we feel you favour Yusuf and his brother over us, help us

understand. Instead they let the grievance sit. And a grievance that sits does not stay the same size. It sours, and it swells, until men who could have asked a simple question are calmly debating the murder of a child.

Solve your matters now, today, Mufti Menk says, and do not leave them for tomorrow, because tomorrow they are bigger, and the day after they grow to the point where you begin plotting someone's downfall in a way that becomes your own. Whatever the rift, between brothers, between husband and wife, between the two sides of a family, go to the source. You have heard something about someone? Go to that person. Talk to them. Why carry the story brewing behind their back? Clear your heart, clean it, and sleep close to Allah. The brothers did the opposite, and Shaytan, who needs only one unanswered question to begin his work, did the rest.

And Mufti Menk will not let us file any of this away under the comforting heading of bad children. This was the household of a prophet, a man who raised his sons on the message and was believed by them, a beautiful upbringing in a home built on revelation. If Shaytan could reach that far into that house, none of us should grow comfortable about our own. It teaches parents, too, that raising children is no light thing, that we must be the role models we hope to produce, because the prophet who taught his sons so well still watched the whisperer slip between them.

Into the well

One brother, the one in whom blood still pulled toward Yusuf, talked the others down from murder:

Said a speaker among them, "Do not kill Joseph but throw him into the bottom of the well; some travelers will pick him

up - if you would do [something]."

QUR'AN 12:10

Throw him into the bottom of an unused well, the brother said, cover it, and let some passing caravan carry him off to wherever they please; at least we will not have killed him. The plan now needed only one thing: their father's permission. So they came to Yaqub wearing their warmest faces, Mufti Menk narrates. Why will you not trust us with Yusuf, when we are his own brothers and feel for him so genuinely? Send him out with us tomorrow; we are going to play, we will enjoy the day together, and we will guard him and bring him home.

Yaqub was a prophet, and he was no fool about the rivalry under their words. He answered with the plain truth of his fear:

[Jacob] said, "Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him, and I fear that a wolf would eat him while you are of him unaware."

QUR'AN 12:13

And they had an answer ready, the way they always did. If a wolf could eat him while there are so many of us, a whole clan, then we would truly be the losers. Mufti Menk turns this into a warning that lands with a smile and a sting: do not underestimate what children will produce when cornered. If the sons of a prophet could lie this smoothly to the face of a prophet, we should be slow indeed to imagine our own children incapable of it. He has watched parents roll up their sleeves and march to the school to confront a teacher on the strength of a five-year-old's account, on the theory that children do not lie. Children, he says, can be professional liars, and a parent who refuses to know it is a parent easily conned. The point is not to think badly of children; it is to

keep our eyes open, and to keep the channels of honesty so open at home that a child would rather tell us the truth than learn to perform a falsehood.

Yaqub let him go. And they took the boy out and lowered him into the dark of the well, after telling him to take off his shirt, as though the whole thing were a game of hide and seek. Their own little brother, at the bottom of a pit, the lid closing over him. What kind of hearts, Mufti Menk asks, must they have carried in that moment, and yet, he adds at once, Allah would forgive them in the end. But read the verse to its close, because here is the turn that holds the entire surah upright:

So when they took him [out] and agreed to put him into the bottom of the well... But We inspired to him, "You will surely inform them [someday] about this affair of theirs while they do not perceive [your identity]."

QUR'AN 12:15

In that very pit, with the dark above him and his brothers gone, Allah inspired the child that a day was coming when he would stand before these same brothers and tell them exactly what they had done, and they would not even know his face. The well was not the end of Yusuf. It was the first step of the dream. Mufti Menk draws the consolation out plainly: had the brothers not done this terrible thing, the end Allah had written would never have arrived; their plot to destroy him was, unknown to them, the road to his elevation. And notice the mercy in the timing. Allah was already steadying the heart of the child at the bottom of the well, and, as the next day will show, the heart of the father waiting at home.

False blood, and a patience that is beautiful

They came home that night, weeping.

And they came to their father at night, weeping.

QUR'AN 12:16

Mufti Menk catches the exact word: Allah says they were weeping, with real tears, and so he wonders aloud whether those were tears of grief or the practised tears of a sympathy-seeker, the kind a person can summon on command to be believed. We should learn from it, he says, that tears are not proof; sometimes the one crying hardest is the one with the most to hide. And then they spoke, and what they said was almost unbearable in its cruelty, because it was the father's own fear handed straight back to him:

They said, "O our father, indeed we went racing each other and left Joseph with our possessions, and a wolf ate him. But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful."

QUR'AN 12:17

A wolf ate him. The very wolf Yaqub had named days before, now returned to him as the alibi, with not even the effort of inventing a new lie. The father, Mufti Menk says, smelled a rat. He knew something was wrong. And so the sons reached for their evidence, the thing that would settle it:

And they brought upon his shirt false blood. [Jacob] said, "Rather, your souls have enticed you to something, so patience is most fitting. And Allāh is the one sought for help against that which you describe."

QUR'AN 12:18

They had cut some animal and sprayed its blood across the shirt, and in their hurry they forgot the one thing the truth would have left behind. The shirt was whole. A prophet is intelligent, Mufti Menk says: if a wolf had truly devoured the boy, the shirt would have been shredded. Yaqub looked at an unbroken garment soaked in blood, and he knew. From this Mufti Menk draws one of his keenest lessons, the one he widens into a warning for our own age. When people set out to deceive, they always forget some detail that an honest eye catches at once, and a believer is given exactly that kind of eye. Be conscious of Allah, the Qur'an teaches, and He grants you a faculty to distinguish the true from the false. A heart truly anchored in Allah, Mufti Menk cautions, is not the heart most easily moved by a sensational sign or a forwarded marvel; it is the heart already moved by the Qur'an, the living miracle, and steadied enough to see through a lie dressed up as proof.

And then comes the line the whole day has been climbing toward, the words a grieving father chose at the worst moment of his life. He did not rage, and he did not collapse. Your souls, he told them, have talked you into something. So patience, beautiful patience, sabrun jamil. And Allah is the One whose help I seek against what you describe. Mufti Menk's reading of these words is steady and exact. This is not patience that has gone numb, nor patience that did not understand what happened. Yaqub saw the lie completely. He knew his sons had done this. And still he chose a patience that does not curdle into bitterness, does not lash out, makes no public theatre of its grief, and turns, quietly, only to Allah. He had just lost his most beloved son to a deception he could see straight through, and he reached past the satisfaction of being proven right and took hold instead of sabrun jamil. That phrase is Yaqub's gift, across the centuries, to every believer

who has ever been wronged by the people closest to them: a patience that keeps its beauty, that holds its dignity, that hands the whole weight of the injustice to the only One who can carry it.

Sold for a few coins

The scene shifts back to the well. A caravan came along the road and sent a man ahead to draw water.

And there came a company of travelers; then they sent their water drawer, and he let down his bucket. He said, "Good news! Here is a boy." And they concealed him, [taking him] as merchandise; and Allāh was Knowing of what they did.

QUR'AN 12:19

He let his bucket down into the dark, and when he pulled it up, a boy was clinging to the rope. Good news, he cried, a boy! He had wanted water, and he had drawn up something far more valuable, and you can hear his excitement. And at once, Mufti Menk observes, the men did what people who deal in the lost and the stolen always do. The honest finder asks, how do I return this? The crook asks, is anyone watching, and how much can I get for it? They hid Yusuf away as merchandise, smuggled goods to be moved quietly and sold, and the verse ends by closing the circle that the brothers thought they had hidden: Allah knew exactly what they were doing. He had seen the meeting, and the well, and the false blood, and now the bucket, and not one frame of it escaped Him.

And they sold him for a reduced price - a few dirhams - and they were, concerning him, of those content with little.

QUR'AN 12:20

So a prophet's son, a boy his father had wept to part with, was sold in the slave market for a reduced price, Mufti Menk says, a handful of dirhams you could count on your fingers, by hands so eager to be rid of him that they took next to nothing. He was carried into Egypt and bought there by a man who told his wife to treat the boy well, that he might benefit them, that perhaps they would even take him as a son, for they had no child of their own. And that, Mufti Menk says, is where part one must leave him, with a warning that the trouble in that grand house had not yet begun. A boy at the bottom of a forgotten well a moment ago, and now a slave carried toward Egypt, sold cheap by the very brothers Allah had already promised would one day stand before him, not knowing his face. Tomorrow, the house he was bought into, and the long, beautiful test waiting for him there.

What Yaqub asks of our faith

It would be easy to read part one of the most beautiful of stories and come away only sad, a tale of a child betrayed and a father broken, sealed safely in the distant past. That would be to miss what it is asking of us. Strip the day down to its bones, and it puts three quiet questions to your own faith, and you will not read your own hard seasons the same way again once you have answered them.

The first is about your blessings. Yaqub told his son to keep the dream to himself, and the boy could not, and the storm followed. Mufti Menk's lesson is gentle and uncomfortable at once: not every good thing in your life is for sharing. Some of what Allah gives you, the people closest to you cannot carry without it souring in their hands, and the wisest, most protective thing you can do with a blessing is to thank Allah for it and keep some of it quietly between you and Him. Ask yourself how much of what

you announce, you announce for the eyes of people, and how much peace you would keep if you simply held it, in private, in gratitude.

The second is about your grievances. The brothers had a problem they could have solved with one honest conversation, and instead they let it brew, and the brewing turned them into men who could throw a child down a well. A problem you refuse to face today is not waiting patiently for you; it is growing. So name the real enemy, which is almost never the person in front of you but the whisperer working in the crack between you, and then go to the source, today, while the matter is small enough to set down. The grievance you carry into tomorrow is always heavier than the one you could have laid down tonight.

And the third, the deepest, is about your patience when the wound is real and the wrong is undeniable. Here is the line of the whole surah, and the gift inside it: sabrun jamil. Yaqub was not patient because he was confused, or because the loss was small, or because he could not see who had done it. He saw everything, and he chose beautiful patience anyway, a patience that did not curdle into bitterness, did not lash out at his sons, made no spectacle of its grief, and turned only to Allah. That is the patience that is hardest of all, the patience of the one who has every right to be angry and lays the right down at the feet of his Lord.

And this is exactly why, the connection the surah was made to carry, Allah sent this story down when He did. The companions had asked the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for a beautiful story, and Allah answered them in the hardest year of His Messenger's life, the year the books call the Year of Sorrow, when he ﷺ had buried his beloved wife Khadijah and lost the uncle who shielded

him, and had been driven, bleeding and refused, out of Ta'if. Into that grief Allah revealed the story of a beloved son betrayed by his own family, thrown into a pit, sold cheap, and carried far from home, and patient through all of it, and raised in the end to a height none of his betrayers could have imagined. The whole of Surah Yusuf is, among other things, Allah saying to His grieving Prophet ﷺ, and through him to every believer who has ever been wronged by their own: I have done this before, and I have written the beautiful ending, and your sabr is not lost on Me. The pit is not the end. It is the first line of the dream.

So if something has been taken from you by the very people who should have protected you, this is your story too, and Yaqub's three words are the inheritance left to you inside it. Do not curdle. Do not perform your pain for an audience. Tie your trust to the only One who saw the whole thing happen, who knew exactly what they did, and who is already steadying your heart in the dark of the well the way He steadied Yusuf's. Choose the patience that keeps its beauty. May Allah grant us, when we are wronged by those closest to us, the beautiful patience of Yaqub, guard our hearts from the envy that overtook his sons, and let us trust, as Yusuf trusted at the bottom of the well, that He is writing a good ending we cannot yet see. He is the One whose help is sought, and His help is near.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 15: Yaqub and Yusuf, part 1. Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (12:3, 12:4, 12:5, 12:6, 12:8, 12:9, 12:10, 12:13, 12:15, 12:16, 12:17, 12:18, 12:19, 12:20), verified via quran.ai.

Yusuf, part 2

He chose the prison over the sin, and Allah was planning all along

Yesterday a boy was lowered into the dark of a well by the very brothers who should have guarded him, pulled out by a stranger's bucket, and sold cheap in a foreign market like merchandise that had no name. Today that boy is grown, and the test changes its whole shape. In the well, other people decided his fate; he was the object of their plotting, and there was nothing for him to do but cling to the rope and trust the One who had whispered to him in the pit. Now the trial turns inward. The door closes from the inside. Everything in the world is arranged to make sin easy, and there is no one to see, and no family to run to, and no consequence anyone would ever know about. Only one thing stands between Yusuf and the thing he is being called to, and it is not a lock on a door or a witness in the hall. It is his fear of Allah.

This is the middle of the only surah Allah tells from beginning to end about a single prophet, and Mufti Menk reads it the way he read the first part: as a field a man should walk slowly, bending to pick up every coin buried in it. Watch where Yusuf, peace be upon him, ends up by the close of this episode. A prison cell that he asked for. And watch, behind every wall, Who was quietly steering the whole time.

Bought to be a son, kept to be a prophet

The caravan carried Yusuf into Egypt and sold him there, and the man who bought him was no ordinary buyer. He was a man of rank, and he had no children of his own, and something in the boy moved him, so that he turned to his wife with an instruction that would shape the rest of the story:

And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife, "Make his residence comfortable. Perhaps he will benefit us, or we will adopt him as a son." And thus, We established Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events [i.e., dreams]. And Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know.

QUR'AN 12:21

Read the verse to its end, because the second half is the whole secret of the surah. A boy is sold into slavery, and Allah calls it being established in the land. The market saw a transaction; Allah was setting a prophet into the exact house, in the exact city, where the long road to a throne would begin. He was bought as property, and Allah was settling him as a son of the line of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, into the one place He had chosen to teach him how to read what dreams mean. And then the line that should be written over this entire chapter and over every reader's hardest year: Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know. The plot of the brothers, the bucket of the stranger, the coin counted out in the slave market, the whim of a childless man in Egypt, all of it, every thread, was Allah threading the boy toward the very height his betrayers could never have imagined. They did not know. The buyer did not know. Yusuf himself could not yet see it. And Allah was never once not in charge of His own affair.

So the boy grew in that house, and as he grew Allah gave him the gifts He had been steering him toward all along:

And when he [i.e., Joseph] reached maturity, We gave him judgement and knowledge. And thus We reward the doers of good.

QUR'AN 12:22

He became a young man of judgement and knowledge, and the Qur'an pauses to name why: this is how Allah rewards those who do good. The boy who had stayed beautiful in his character through betrayal and slavery was now a young man whom Allah was equipping. And he had grown, the histories agree, into a person of striking beauty, raised inside the comfort of a great house. Which is exactly the setting in which the hardest test of his life was waiting for him, because the woman of that house had been watching him grow too.

Behind closed doors, one word

The woman in whose house he lived had grown attached to him, and one day she acted on it. She went through the house and shut every door, and called him to herself.

And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him. She closed the doors and said, "Come, you." He said, "[I seek] the refuge of Allah. Indeed, he is my master, who has made good my residence. Indeed, wrongdoers will not succeed."

QUR'AN 12:23

Sit, for a moment, in how complete the temptation was, because Mufti Menk does not let us look away from it and he does not let us be lurid about it either. She was, by every account, a woman

of beauty, of wealth, of high standing. She held power over him; he was a servant in her house, a stranger in a land where no relative of his drew breath. Every door was locked. There was total privacy. Every single condition that a person bent on sin could ever want was arranged and waiting. If there were ever a moment when a young man could tell himself that no one would know, that he had no choice, that he could not be blamed, this was it.

And out of him came two words that hold the whole of his character in them: ma'adhallah. I seek the refuge of Allah. Not a calculation, not a weighing of the odds of being caught, not a speech. An instinct. Then a reason that turns the entire room upside down: indeed, he is my master, who has made good my residence; the man of this house took me in and treated me well, and I will not repay him with this. Indeed, wrongdoers will not succeed. Notice what Yusuf reaches for first. Not the fear of being seen by people, because there were no people. He reaches straight past the locked doors to the One the doors could never lock out. The only camera that mattered to him was the one that is never off, and he had spent his whole quiet life living in front of it.

This is what real iman sounds like under pressure, and Mufti Menk lingers on it because it is the thing the whole episode is testing. That reflex, the instinct that runs to Allah before the body can move, is not built in the moment the door closes. It is built in a thousand private moments long before, in every small choice no one was watching, until running to Allah becomes the most natural thing a person can do.

There is mercy at the heart of this scene for every believer who has ever felt the pull of a sin and feared their own weakness.

Yusuf did not hold the line because he was made of iron, unmoved like a statue of stone. He held it because, in the decisive instant, he ran to Allah, and it was Allah who turned the harm away from him and kept him whole, as Allah guards the prophets He chooses. The strongest among us do not stand on their own strength. They stand because they ran to Allah, and Allah caught them. That is why, in the moments that follow, Yusuf will not trust his own strength for a second.

The shirt torn from behind

He did not stay to argue with the temptation. He turned and ran for the door, and she came after him, and in the struggle at the threshold his shirt tore. And the door he was running toward opened from the other side at exactly that moment.

And they both raced to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back, and they found her husband at the door. She said, "What is the recompense of one who intended evil for your wife but that he be imprisoned or a painful punishment?"

QUR'AN 12:25

Watch how fast it turns. In a single heartbeat the woman flips the entire story and lays it on him: what is the punishment for a man who wanted evil with your wife, except prison or a painful torment? The one fleeing the sin is, in an instant, named the one who sought it. The victim is about to be sentenced as the criminal. And Mufti Menk says plainly what kind of person does this: she was a woman who controlled her husband so completely that she could make the innocent look guilty and be believed. Yusuf answered with the truth, simply, that it was she who had sought him. And then Allah, who had been in charge of

His affair the whole time, sent the proof through the smallest and unlikeliest of witnesses.

[Joseph] said, "It was she who sought to seduce me." And a witness from her family testified, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth, and he is of the liars.

QUR'AN 12:26

But if his shirt is torn from the back, then she has lied, and he is of the truthful."

QUR'AN 12:27

Someone of her own household reasoned it out with a clean and simple logic, and Mufti Menk notes that the narrations differ on exactly who this witness was, so we hold it as it comes and do not harden the detail beyond what Allah tells us. If the shirt is torn from the front, then she was pushed away and is telling the truth and he is the liar; but if it is torn from the back, then he was fleeing, and she has lied, and he is the honest one. They looked. The tear was at his back. He had been running away. The case was closed by a piece of cloth, and the husband saw it for what it was:

So when he [i.e., her husband] saw his shirt torn from the back, he said, "Indeed, it is of your [i.e., women's] plan. Indeed, your plan is great [i.e., vehement]."

QUR'AN 12:28

This is from your scheming, he said, and your scheming is great; and then he told her to seek forgiveness for her sin, for she was the one in the wrong. And here Mufti Menk pulls the lesson straight off the page and into our own homes, where it stings, because it is one of the most quietly common sins we commit

without ever calling it a sin. How quick we are, when something goes missing in the house or at work, to point at the one who serves us: she took it, he stole it, with not one shred of evidence. We doubt them, we accuse them, sometimes we dismiss them, never once stopping to think that in the eyes of Allah they were innocent the whole time. Yusuf was innocent, and known to be innocent, and still made to look guilty the moment it suited someone powerful. So Mufti Menk turns it into a warning sharp enough to keep: do not doubt people without evidence, and do not accuse them without proof, because if you make a habit of doubting the innocent, a day will come when you yourself are doubted, by people who have no proof either. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught how those who work for us are to be treated, that they are brothers Allah has placed under our hand, to be fed from what we eat and clothed from what we wear and never burdened beyond their strength. Had Allah willed, Mufti Menk reminds us, the arrangement could have been reversed, and our own children might have been serving theirs.

The women who cut their hands

The story would not stay inside the walls of the house. It leaked into the city, and the women of the town began to talk.

And women in the city said, "The wife of al-'Azeez is seeking to seduce her slave boy; he has impassioned her with love. Indeed, we see her [to be] in clear error."

QUR'AN 12:30

The wife of the great man is chasing her servant; love has gone all the way to her heart; she has clearly lost her way. The gossip spread, and it stung her, and so she set a trap, not for Yusuf this time, but for the tongues of the women who were mocking her.

She knew something they did not: she knew what he looked like. So she invited them to a banquet, and she gave each of them a knife and something to cut, and at the chosen moment she sent Yusuf out to walk before them.

So when she heard of their scheming, she sent for them and prepared for them a banquet and gave each one of them a knife and said [to Joseph], "Come out before them." And when they saw him, they greatly admired him and cut their hands and said, "Perfect is Allah! This is not a man; this is none but a noble angel."

QUR'AN 12:31

They looked up, and the sight of him so overwhelmed them that they drew their knives clean across their own hands and never felt it, and cried out, Perfect is Allah, this is no human being, this is nothing but a noble angel. Mufti Menk handles this scene with care, because its point is not the spectacle and not the beauty; its point is the gaze. Every woman in that room cut herself for one reason: she would not look away. Had any one of them simply lowered her eyes, the knife would never have touched her skin. When a person does not control the glance, Mufti Menk says, that is the person who ends up cut, hurt, harmed by the very thing they refused to turn from.

And he carries it straight into the modern heart, because the principle has not aged a day. A young man told him once how it goes: you buy the latest car, the latest of everything, and for you it is the latest, the finest thing you own, right up until the moment you cannot keep your eyes at home and you start looking at a newer one, and then yours becomes nothing in your sight. It is the same when a person marries, Mufti Menk says. By the grace of Allah, your spouse is the latest, your own choice, your gift.

Keep your eyes with blinkers on, and what Allah gave you stays the latest forever; let the glance wander, and the best thing you own turns worthless in your eyes overnight, and the wound is entirely self-inflicted, exactly as the women's wounds were. Lower the gaze, and the knife never reaches you. So much of the damage we take from desire is damage we walked into with our own eyes wide open, when one lowered glance would have spared us the whole of it.

Prison is dearer to me

The banquet had proven her point to the women, but it had not changed Yusuf, and now the pressure dropped its disguise entirely. She said it to his face: do this, or I will have you thrown in prison and disgraced.

She said, "That is the one about whom you blamed me. And I certainly sought to seduce him, but he firmly refused; and if he will not do what I order him, he will surely be imprisoned and will be of those debased."

QUR'AN 12:32

Now the choice was naked: the sin, or a prison cell. And Yusuf did not bargain, and did not stall, and did not look for a third way out. He raised his hands to the only One who had ever rescued him and he made his choice into a prayer:

He said, "My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant."

QUR'AN 12:33

My Lord, the prison is dearer to me than what they are calling me to. He would rather sit in a cell than disobey his Lord, and he said so plainly. But look at the second half of his prayer, because Mufti Menk stops here and will not let us rush past it. Yusuf did not trust his own strength. The young man who had just refused a sin with every door locked against him turned straight to Allah and said: and if You do not turn their scheme away from me, I may lean toward them and become one of the ignorant. This is the humility of the strongest believer, who knows the truth that the weak forget. We do not keep ourselves from sin. He does. The moment a person imagines his own willpower is enough, he is already half-fallen. So the lesson Mufti Menk presses on us is to beg Allah constantly to be kept safe: Ya Allah, keep shaytan away from us and keep us away from him, because we are weak and we falter and we will regret it, and our only protection is the One we are asking.

And then the judgement that Mufti Menk says lifts a person to an entirely new station. When sin is fully facilitated, when every door of opportunity stands open, when the privacy is total and the temptation is at its most complete, and the one and only thing holding a person back is the fear of Allah, that person has arrived at a rare height of faith. This is precisely why the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ named, among the seven whom Allah will shade on the Day when there is no shade but His, a man called by a woman of beauty and rank who answers her, inni akhaful-lah, I fear Allah. Yusuf did not just hear that hadith. Yusuf lived it, to the letter, generations before it was spoken. He chose a cell over a sin, and that is the kind of deed that comes to a person's rescue after death, the kind that walks a believer straight through the gate of Paradise by the mercy of Allah. And every reader has a version of this very door. It is the private temptation no one would

ever find out about, the sin so perfectly arranged and so completely hidden that only one thing could possibly stop it. Turning away from it, for Him alone, with no one watching and no one to applaud, is the same height Yusuf climbed. And Allah heard him:

So his Lord responded to him and averted from him their plan. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

QUR'AN 12:34

He asked to be guarded, and he was guarded. Then the people of the house, even after the sign of his innocence had been plain to them, decided it was easier to bury the scandal by burying the innocent man:

Then it appeared to them after they had seen the signs that he [i.e., al-'Azeez] should surely imprison him for a time.

QUR'AN 12:35

They knew he was innocent. The cloth had told them. And they jailed him anyway, to protect a reputation, on the word of a false accuser. The innocent man went to prison, and the woman who had lied went home.

The cell becomes a pulpit

So Yusuf went to prison for a crime he did not commit, on the testimony of those who had committed it, and Mufti Menk pauses to send a word to everyone sitting today in what he calls the correctional depots of the world, because the surah itself opens the door to them. Some of those in the cells are innocent, he says, not all of them are guilty, for here was a man jailed while the true wrongdoers walked free. And here is the thing to notice,

the thing that turns the whole episode: Yusuf did not languish there, and he did not sink into depression, and he did not waste a single day of it. Two young men were thrown into the prison alongside him, and the moment they saw him, something about him told them this was a good man.

And there entered the prison with him two young men. One of them said, "Indeed, I have seen myself [in a dream] pressing [grapes for] wine." The other said, "Indeed, I have seen myself carrying upon my head [some] bread, from which the birds were eating. Inform us of its interpretation; indeed, we see you to be of those who do good."

QUR'AN 12:36

Stop on the last line, Mufti Menk says, because it is its own lesson: *inna naraka minal-muhsinin*, we see you to be of those who do good. They had not heard him give a speech. His character had announced itself before he opened his mouth. The way a person carries himself, the way he speaks and acts, his conduct and his manners and his iman, should reflect off him so clearly that the people around him sense, by the will of Allah, that this one is upright, this one is good. That is what happened with Yusuf in a prison full of strangers. The two men had each seen a dream, one of pressing grapes for wine, one of birds eating bread off his head, and they came to him for the meaning.

He could have answered in a single sentence and been done. Instead he saw a door for da'wah and walked straight through it. Before I give you the interpretation, he told them, let me tell you Who taught it to me:

He said, "You will not receive food that is provided to you except that I will inform you of its interpretation before it comes to you. That is from what my Lord has taught me."

Indeed, I have left the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they, in the Hereafter, are disbelievers.

QUR'AN 12:37

And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And it was not for us to associate anything with Allah. That is from the favor of Allah upon us and upon the people, but most of the people are not grateful."

QUR'AN 12:38

He told them who he was: a son of the line of the prophets, raised on the worship of the One God, given this knowledge as a favour from Allah. And then he put to two prisoners, with breathtaking gentleness, the single question that every prophet was sent to ask:

O [my] two companions of prison, are separate lords better or Allah, the One, the Prevailing?

QUR'AN 12:39

You worship not besides Him except [mere] names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no evidence. Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.

QUR'AN 12:40

O my two companions of the prison, are many scattered lords better, or Allah, the One, the Irresistible? It is the exact call of his great-grandfather Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the same pure tawhid handed down the line, that what you worship beside Allah are nothing but names you and your fathers invented, with no authority from heaven behind them. And the lesson Mufti Menk

draws for us is urgent and practical. A chance to call others to Allah is bound to your lifetime and bound to your strength; it will not always be there. So wherever you find a door, take it: a word in a gathering, a message on the net, a tweet, a lesson, an article, anything within your reach and your ability. Yusuf had every reason to sit in that cell and feel cursed, betrayed, forgotten. Instead he took the worst day of his life and turned it into a minbar.

He told them the truth, even the hard half

Then he gave them the interpretation, and he did not soften the painful half of it.

O two companions of prison, as for one of you, he will give drink to his master of wine; but as for the other, he will be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquire."

QUR'AN 12:41

One of you will be released and pour wine for the king again. The other will be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. And before the frightened one could start to protest, before he could say I did not really see that dream, that I take it back, Yusuf closed it gently and firmly: the matter you are asking about has already been decreed. He told the truth as it was, because a trust is a trust even when it is heavy to carry, and a man who reads the meaning of dreams as a gift from Allah does not bend the gift to spare a feeling. Then he made one small, human request of the one he knew would go free:

And he said to the one whom he knew would go free, "Mention me before your master." But Satan made him

forget the mention [to] his master, and he [i.e., Joseph] remained in prison several years.

QUR'AN 12:42

Remember me to the king, he said; you know I am innocent, you know what was done to me. And in the excitement of his freedom, the man forgot, and Yusuf stayed in that cell for several more years. Mufti Menk catches the human lesson lightly: we promise people things and then, in the rush of the moment, forget completely; so write it down, and do not feel old for needing to.

But through all of it, hold the long view that Mufti Menk keeps pulling our eyes toward, because it is the spine of the whole story. Count what had gone wrong for this one young man. His own brothers plotted his death. They threw him into a well. He was taken as merchandise instead of being freed. He was sold cheap. He was tested in the house that bought him. He was falsely accused. He was convicted while innocent. He was jailed. And then the one man who could have spoken for him forgot him for years. Eight, nine catastrophes, one after another, falling on a single life. If that string of disasters fell on any of us, Mufti Menk says, we would be certain someone had cursed us, that black magic was at work, that we had simply run out of luck. And not one of those calamities was Allah abandoning Yusuf. Every single one was the road. The pit, the sale, the slander, the prison: each blow was Allah laying the next stone in the path that would lift Yusuf higher than any of the people who wronged him ever stood. Going through hardship is not a sign that Allah is angry with you. For the believer it is the exam, and Yusuf was passing every paper of it. The cell was not the end of his story. It was the corridor. And on the far side of that corridor, the king of Egypt is about to dream a dream that no one in his palace can read, and a

freed prisoner is about to remember, at last, a young man he left behind. But that is tomorrow.

What Yusuf asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this episode as a thrilling escape from temptation, a tale of a beautiful young man and a locked room, safely sealed in the past. That would be to miss what it is asking of us. Strip it down to its bones, and Yusuf hands the reader two reflexes, and behind both of them, one quiet truth about Allah.

The first reflex is for the moment the door closes. Yusuf was alone, with no one watching, with every condition for sin arranged and every door locked and no consequence anyone would ever know, and out of him came ma'adhallah, and his body was already turning to run before the temptation could finish speaking. That reflex was not built in the locked room. It was built in a thousand unwatched moments before it, in the small private choices that no one ever saw, until fleeing to Allah was the most natural motion of his soul. This is the heart of it: iman is built where no one is watching. Guard yourself most carefully in exactly the places you are most sure no eye can see, because those are the places your real faith is being forged or quietly lost. And when the test comes, do not trust your own strength for a second, the way Yusuf would not. Beg Allah to turn the scheme away from you, because the One who caught him is the only One who can catch you. Choosing the harder, cleaner path when the sin is fully available and only the fear of Allah holds you back is not a small thing. It is one of the great stations, the deed of the one whom Allah shades on the Day of no shade, the deed that meets a believer at the gate of Paradise.

The second reflex is for the moment life caves in. When the blows kept landing on Yusuf, betrayal and the well and the sale

and the slander and the bars and the years of being forgotten, none of it was Allah turning away from him. So the reflex Yusuf hands us is to refuse, flatly, to read our disasters as Allah's anger. When the string of bad days comes, do not reach for the explanation that you are cursed or unlucky or abandoned. Reach instead for the truth that the believer's hardship is the exam, not the verdict, and that Allah's help is nearest exactly when the walls are closest. And do not waste the hard place while you are in it. Yusuf turned a prison into a pulpit, because a chance to do good, to call to Allah, to be of the muhsinin, is bound to your life and your strength and will not always be there. Wherever you land, there is a door. Take it.

And underneath both reflexes is the one truth this episode was made to teach, the connection the surah carries to its reader and to the Prophet ﷺ alike. Behind every wall in this story, Allah is al-Latif, the Subtle, the One whose planning is so fine and so gentle that no one inside the tale can see it happening. He floated a boy out of a well on a stranger's bucket. He settled a slave into the one house in Egypt that would carry him toward a throne. He cleared an innocent man's name with the tear in a shirt. He answered a prisoner's prayer to be guarded, and then He used the prison itself, the bars meant to bury Yusuf, as the very corridor to power. It is the same hidden hand that would one day carry the infant Musa, peace be upon him, into the palace of the Pharaoh who was killing the children, and the same hand that would carry the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ safely out of a Makkah plotting his death and on to Madinah, where the religion they had tried to strangle would rise. The tawhid Yusuf preached in his cell, are separate lords better or Allah, the One, is the very message Muhammad ﷺ was sent to carry, the message of their shared father Ibrahim, unbroken down the whole line of the

prophets. And Allah's subtle planning, running a rescue through the very ruin meant to destroy His servant, is exactly what He is still doing, today, in the life of every believer who cannot yet see the shape of it.

So carry Yusuf's two reflexes down into your own ordinary days. When the door closes and the sin is easy and no one would ever know, say ma'adhallah and run, for Him alone. And when life caves in and the blows keep coming, refuse to read them as Allah's anger, and trust the rescue you cannot yet see. May Allah make us of those who fear Him in private as in public, who lower our gaze and guard our hearts, who choose the cell over the sin and the truth over the easy lie. May He avert from us every scheme that pulls us away from Him, plan for us with His subtle mercy when our own plans fall apart, and gather us with Yusuf and his fathers and His final Messenger ﷺ in the home He keeps for those who believe. He is the Hearing, the Knowing, and His help is near.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 16: Yusuf, part 2. Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (12:21, 12:22, 12:23, 12:25, 12:26, 12:27, 12:28, 12:30, 12:31, 12:32, 12:33, 12:34, 12:35, 12:36, 12:37, 12:38, 12:39, 12:40, 12:41, 12:42), verified via quran.ai.

Yusuf, part 3

No blame upon you today: the brother who chose forgiveness over revenge

A man can be thrown into a well by his own brothers, sold like cargo to a passing caravan, carried off to a foreign land, lied about by a woman of the court, jailed for years for a crime he did not commit, and then forgotten by the very man he had helped. And then, one day, decades later, those same brothers can be standing in front of him, worn thin by famine, not knowing who he is, holding out a bowl and begging him for grain. He holds every card. One word from him and they are finished. He could have them seized, ruined, executed; they had, after all, once tried to kill him. The whole long surah has been building, scene by scene, well to throne, to this single moment, and the question it puts is the most searching a believer can be asked: what does a man of God do with power over the people who broke his life? Mufti Menk says the answer Yusuf gives is one of the highest things in the entire Qur'an, and that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would one day borrow it, word for word, on the greatest day of mercy in the history of Islam. To stand where Yusuf stood, you have to begin where this third night begins: with an old blind man in Canaan who never, for a single day, gave up.

The father who would not lose hope

While Yusuf sat in authority in Egypt, his father Yaqub, peace be upon him, was still waiting in Canaan, and by now he was blind.

Mufti Menk does not soften the arithmetic of that wait. Some of those who recorded these histories say twenty-five years had passed, some say thirty, some forty, and some carry it as far as eighty. Whatever the true number, it was a wait measured in decades. Yusuf had vanished into the bottom of a well a lifetime ago. His full brother had now been held back in Egypt too, accused of theft. And still, every single day, the old man rose with the same instruction on his lips and the same refusal lodged in his heart. He sent his sons back out to search, and he told them why they must never stop looking:

O my sons, go and find out about Joseph and his brother and despair not of relief from Allāh. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allāh except the disbelieving people."

QUR'AN 12:87

Read that line slowly, because Mufti Menk turns it into a mirror and holds it up to us. The Qur'an is not making a gentle suggestion here; it is stating a law of faith. The only people who run out of hope in the mercy of the Almighty are the people who do not truly believe in Him. And why should that be so? Because of who Allah is. He is ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. If the One you are asking is mercy itself, how can the one who asks Him ever reach the end of hope? Mufti Menk presses the point until it stings. We lose a job, and we lose hope. We lose a spouse, lose someone we love, and the whole sky goes dark over us. We make du'a for a few days, and when the answer does not come we begin to mutter that it never will. And here is a prophet of Allah, making the same du'a for the return of his son for twenty-five years, for forty, without his certainty cracking even once. The du'a itself, he says,

swearing by Allah, made with hope and held over years, is an act of worship so beloved that it might on its own carry a person into Paradise. So do not give up. The asking is not a sign that Allah has forgotten you. The asking is the proof that you still believe.

Allah speaks the same mercy in another place, in words that Yaqub's whole life was quietly living out, an open door flung wide for anyone who fears it has closed:

Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed, Allāh forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."

QUR'AN 39:53

His own sons thought he had simply lost his grip. They told him, more or less to his face, that he had better stop saying that name, because he would die still saying it. Mufti Menk hears in that the kind of thing an exasperated person snaps at someone who will not let a matter go: when are you ever going to stop? But Yaqub was holding to something his children could not see, because he was holding to Allah, and a man who holds to Allah is never as alone as he looks.

From the prison to the storehouses of Egypt

The road that lifted Yusuf out of his cell had been opened by a dream. Egypt's king had been troubled by a vision no one at his court could read: seven fat cows devoured by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of grain beside seven that were dry. It was Yusuf, still forgotten in prison, who unlocked it. Seven years of plenty are coming, he said, so plant and store, and here was the precise instruction the king's own advisers could never have given:

[Joseph] said, "You will plant for seven years consecutively; and what you harvest leave in its spikes, except a little from which you will eat.

QUR'AN 12:47

Then will come after that seven difficult [years] which will consume what you advanced [i.e., saved] for them, except a little from which you will store.

QUR'AN 12:48

Leave the grain on its stalk, in its husk, so that it keeps. Mufti Menk pauses here on a small, modern wonder folded into that ancient advice, and he is careful to tell it as something handed to him rather than something he is claiming on his own. A brother from Syria had told him, sitting in that very gathering, that his father farmed olives and found that once the olives were pressed and stripped, the harvest spoiled fast. So the man tried Yusuf's method: he left the crop on the branch, in its skin, and the shelf life stretched out. The same, Mufti Menk says, holds for maize and other crops left covered exactly as they grew, the natural preservation built into them by the One who inspired Yusuf to say it in the first place. He took it as a quiet confirmation: a line of the Qur'an we recite without a thought turns out to carry knowledge a farmer can use with his own hands.

When the dream was read and the man behind the reading was summoned, Yusuf would not simply walk out of the prison and up to the palace. First his name had to be cleared. The truth of his innocence in the old affair of the women had to be spoken aloud, established in the open, before he would step out a free man. And then the king set this former prisoner over the treasures and the storehouses of the whole land. Mufti Menk does not let that pass without a lesson, because the way it happened is the

opposite of the way we usually do things. Authority went to the one most fit to carry it, given for his knowledge, not handed to a friend or a relative or a man who would later return the favour. The king's pride did not get in the way; he did not say, this is an inmate, how can I set him over us. He said, in effect, do as you see fit. And Mufti Menk pulls a warning straight out of that contrast, from a saying of the Prophet ﷺ about how things fall apart: when authority is given to the one who does not deserve it, who does not know the work and cannot carry it, then wait for the Hour. It is the end of that committee, that company, that country, that family, the moment you place at the top of it someone who has no business being there. Yusuf was trusted with the food of a nation precisely because he was trustworthy, and a whole starving region would live through the coming famine because of it.

The brothers come to a man they do not recognise

The drought that Yusuf had foreseen spread north and reached Canaan, and the grain ran out. So the brothers made the journey down to Egypt, and they came worn and lowered, their goods too poor and too few to pay properly for what they needed. They stood before the man the country now called al-Aziz, the one in authority, and they did not know they were looking at the boy they had thrown away:

So when they entered upon him [i.e., Joseph], they said, "O 'Azeez, adversity has touched us and our family, and we have come with goods poor in quality, but give us full measure and be charitable to us. Indeed, Allāh rewards the charitable."

QUR'AN 12:88

Mufti Menk holds the picture still so we can see it for what it is. The brothers who had once schemed to be rid of Yusuf, who had plotted his death and settled for the well, were now standing in front of him with a bowl held out, asking him for charity. The pit they dug to bury a boy had become the throne they were begging at. And Yusuf could see what the years had done to them. They came in humbled, softened, sombre, the way prolonged hardship bends a proud person low. Here Mufti Menk turns the scene back on us with one of his sharpest counsels of the night: do not wait for hardship to put you on the ground. Be there already. Do not let it take a calamity to teach you humility that you could have chosen freely. Whoever humbles himself for the sake of Allah, the Prophet ﷺ taught, Allah raises him; and whoever insists on being proud and high, Allah brings him down. That softening that the brothers had been forced into by loss was the very work the Qur'an describes as the mark of a living heart:

The believers are only those who, when Allāh is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited to them, it increases them in faith; and upon their Lord they rely -

QUR'AN 8:2

A heart that trembles at the name of Allah, a faith that grows rather than shrinks when His words are read, skin that shivers at His remembrance and then settles into peace. Mufti Menk says this is a thing a believer should know from the inside: that the recitation of the Qur'an can run straight down the spine, that the hair can stand at the weight of it, and that this is a sign of iman. He sets it beside something he finds almost unbearable about us. A person can watch a film, see an actor pretend to die, and weep real tears over what is only tomato sauce and a paid

performance; and then a verse of the Qur'an, the actual speech of Allah, is recited to that same person and nothing moves in them at all. The brothers, broken down by years of drought and grief, were being made tender. They were being prepared, without knowing it, for the words that were about to be spoken over them.

"I am Joseph"

When they pleaded once more, this time for the younger brother held back in Egypt, telling al-Aziz that hardship had touched their family and asking him to be charitable and let the boy go with them, Yusuf could hold it no longer. The brother they were begging for was his own full brother. And so he asked them one quiet question, and the question itself was the revelation: do you know what you did to Yusuf and his brother, back when you were ignorant? Mufti Menk lets the shock of it land. Nobody alive knew that story. Not one soul on the earth knew what had happened at that well except the brothers who did it, and Yusuf himself. In the instant the words left his mouth, they understood. Are you, they breathed, are you really Yusuf?

They said, "Are you indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allāh has certainly favored us. Indeed, he who fears Allāh and is patient, then indeed, Allāh does not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good."

QUR'AN 12:90

He did not speak to them in triumph. He did not draw himself up. He named, instead, the two qualities he says were the secret of the whole ordeal, and Mufti Menk lingers on them because they are the spine of everything that has happened across these three

nights: taqwa and sabr, consciousness of Allah and patience. Whoever has those two, Yusuf tells the men who wronged him, Allah will not let his reward go to waste, however long the waiting runs. Every step of this long affair, the well and the slave market and the false accusation and the prison and the forgetting, had been resting on those two words the whole time.

And here Mufti Menk pauses the story entirely to point at a piece of timing so deliberate it takes the breath away. This whole surah, the surah of Yusuf, was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Makkah, and it came down in the worst year of his life. He had just buried Khadijah, radiyallahu anha, the most beloved of his wives, the woman who believed in him first and stood by him when no one else would. Then he lost his uncle Abu Talib, who for years had been a wall of protection around him. And then he went to Ta'if hoping for shelter and was driven out, mocked and stoned until the blood ran. It is into that exact wound, the season the books call Amul Huzn, the Year of Sorrow, that Allah chose to reveal the most beautiful of stories: a long, unhurried account of a man wronged for decades who held his patience and was raised. Look how long Yusuf suffered, the surah seemed to be saying to him ﷺ, and look how Allah did not waste a moment of it. If you have taqwa and sabr, your reward will come; only be patient. Mufti Menk says the Messenger ﷺ was made glad by it, and that the story brought a deep comfort to his heart. The same year that carried this grief also carried the gift of the Mi'raj; Allah does not leave His beloved without consolation.

The brothers did not argue, and Mufti Menk wants us to see how completely the situation had been turned over:

They said, "By Allāh, certainly has Allāh preferred you over us, and indeed, we have been sinners."

Look at what they built and what Allah built, he says. They plotted to drag this boy down into a hole in the ground, and Allah lifted him so high that they ended up depending on him for their bread, standing before him with a bowl. So never plot the downfall of another person. There is every chance that the very pit you dig becomes the platform on which Allah raises them, and the scheme you were so proud of becomes the engine of your own undoing. The same hands that threw Yusuf into a well were now lifted before his throne in confession.

No blame upon you today

Here is the hinge of the entire story, the moment toward which every scene since the first night has been bending, and Mufti Menk marks how Yusuf does not hesitate for even one breath. There is no revenge speech. There is no savouring it, no drawing it out, no I-have-waited-a-long-time-for-this, no now-you-will-see-what-it-feels-like. He had the authority and he had the cause; they had tried to kill him, and as the man in power he could have had them executed and no one would have questioned it. Instead, in a single sentence:

He said, "No blame will there be upon you today. May Allāh forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful.

QUR'AN 12:92

Over. Forgiven. Mufti Menk says it the way Yusuf lived it: no blame on you today, I do not want to know anything about it, it is all finished, forgiven and forgotten, let us speak of something else. And then, without so much as a pause to let his mercy be

admired, he moved straight on to mending the next wound, the wound that was waiting back home:

Take this, my shirt, and cast it over the face of my father; he will become seeing. And bring me your family, all together."

QUR'AN 12:93

This, Mufti Menk says, is how you actually solve a problem. Not just a problem between a prophet and the brothers who betrayed him, but the ordinary problems in your own house, between you and your siblings, you and your in-laws, you and the people closest enough to hurt you. You forgive, and you let it die there and then, in that moment, and you never raise it again. He turns the gift of it around so we can see who really benefits. When you forgive, you are the one who is set free. You are liberated, let loose, unburdened. Carry the grudge instead and it is you who are chained to it; it weighs you down, it ties you with chains, it keeps you awake at night with a heart that has refused to let go. And Yusuf did exactly what he said. He never raised it again. He gave his brothers homes in Egypt. He let them live in ease, made them people the community looked up to. And here Mufti Menk catches a temptation we almost all give in to and Yusuf never did: he never went around telling people what his brothers had done to him. He did not lean over to one neighbour and say, you see these brothers of mine, they are criminals, they tried to kill me, and then turn to the next and say it again. To spread the story, Mufti Menk says, would have been the weakness of an ordinary man, and Yusuf was no ordinary man. He had every right in the world to ruin them, and he chose mercy, and his choice became one of the highest moments in the Book of Allah.

The shirt that gave Yaqub back his sight

The caravan set out for Canaan carrying the shirt, and back in that house the old blind father was waiting still. Mufti Menk pauses on what the years of weeping had done to those eyes. Too much crying can damage a person's sight, and worry and grief layered on top of it can wear the eyes down further; somehow, by long sorrow, Yaqub had gone blind. And then the bearer of good news arrived, and laid the shirt over his face:

And when the bearer of good tidings arrived, he cast it over his face, and he returned [once again] seeing. He said, "Did I not tell you that I know from Allāh that which you do not know?"

QUR'AN 12:96

His eyes cleared, and he could see. Did I not tell you, Yaqub said, that I know from Allah what you do not know? The shirt of the very son he had wept blind for was the thing that gave him back his sight, by the will of Allah. Mufti Menk adds, almost in passing and with clear wonder, that researchers in the West have been studying properties found in human sweat that might one day help treat cataracts of the eye, and that these are studies a person can look up. But he is careful, and his caution is the whole point: only Allah knows exactly what the ailment was, whether a cataract or something else, and the cure here was Allah's, plain and simple, not a remedy. The shirt did not heal him. Allah healed him, and used the shirt to do it.

Now the brothers turned to their father with the words they should have spoken long ago:

They said, "O our father, ask for us forgiveness of our sins; indeed, we have been sinners."

At last they owned it, out loud, to the father they had deceived all those years. And notice, Mufti Menk says, the careful shape of what they asked. They did not say, father, forgive us; they said, father, ask Allah to forgive us, for the sin was against Allah and His is the forgiveness that matters. And the father, who was a prophet, answered them in kind:

He said, "I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."

QUR'AN 12:98

He would seek Allah's forgiveness for them, because Allah is the Owner of forgiveness. Mufti Menk draws the lesson out gently and turns it toward us: may Allah give us the courage to admit our wrongs, to say plainly that we were wrong, and to turn back before it is too late. Confession is the doorway, and the brothers had finally, after a lifetime, walked through it.

The dream comes true, and the only thing Yusuf asked for. The whole family came down to Egypt, and the scene of the reunion is one Mufti Menk asks us to picture in full. The parents came in. The brothers came in. And Yusuf, so glad to see his mother and father again, raised them up beside him:

And he raised his parents upon the throne, and they bowed to him in prostration. And he said, "O my father, this is the explanation of my vision of before. My Lord has made it reality. And He was certainly good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you [here] from bedouin life after Satan had induced [estrangement] between me and my

*brothers. Indeed, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills.
Indeed, it is He who is the Knowing, the Wise.*

QUR'AN 12:100

The boy who, on the very first night of this story, had run to his father glowing because he had dreamed of the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him, was now looking up from a throne at his mother, his father, and his eleven brothers, lowered before him in honour. This, he tells Yaqub, is the meaning of that dream from so long ago; my Lord has made it real. Mufti Menk marks the careful boundary the Qur'an itself preserves here, and he does not let it slide by. That prostration was a bowing of respect and acknowledgement of rank, permitted in the law of that time. But in the law brought by Muhammad ﷺ, it is no longer allowed at all. The forehead goes to the ground for the Maker alone, for the One who made you and the One to whom you return, and for no one else, ever. He flags it precisely so that no reader walks away thinking a human being may be prostrated to.

And then Mufti Menk asks us to watch how Yusuf reads his own life, because it is a master class in gratitude. He took me out of prison, Yusuf says, and counts the rescue as a favour, and never once calls the prison a punishment, though he had been thrown into it unjustly. He brought you to me from the desert, Yusuf says, the favour again, after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers, and never once calls the long years of separation a wound. A man given a kingdom, wealth, dazzling beauty, knowledge of the meaning of dreams, the most powerful position of his age, chooses, at the height of all of it, to see only the good. How many of us, Mufti Menk asks, are blinded by two negatives and made to overlook a hundred blessings sitting right in front of us? Yusuf even hands his brothers the gentlest possible exit by naming Satan as the one who came between them, the way a

young man in that same gathering had once observed that blaming Shaytan for the rift lets two people lay down their grievance and come back together; my brothers are good, Yusuf is saying in effect, Shaytan is the one who did this, and the matter is closed.

Then comes the part Mufti Menk finds the most striking of all. At the very peak of his power, with everything a human being could want gathered into his hands, Yusuf wants one thing, and he turns to his Lord and asks for it:

My Lord, You have given me [something] of sovereignty and taught me of the interpretation of dreams. Creator of the heavens and earth, You are my protector in this world and the Hereafter. Cause me to die a Muslim and join me with the righteous."

QUR'AN 12:101

He had the sovereignty and named it as a gift. He had the rare knowledge and named it as a gift. And then he set all of it down before the One who made the heavens and the earth, the One who is his true Protector in this life and the next, and asked for the only two things that would still matter when the throne was gone: take my soul as a Muslim, as one who has surrendered to You, and join me with the righteous. The most powerful man of his age, Mufti Menk says, knew with perfect clarity that none of it would last, and so he spent his peak preparing for his death and asking for good company in the Hereafter. It is, he says, a du'a we should be making ourselves: Ya Allah, You have given us clothing and food and health and a hundred blessings, now grant us death in a state of submission to You, and gather us with those You love. Look beautifully, too, at how the surah is built. It opens with a dream and closes with that dream's fulfilment; the

prisoners dreamed and Yusuf read it, the king dreamed and Yusuf read it, and the very first dream of the boy is now read out loud, made flesh, at the end. The whole most beautiful of stories is a story about dreams, and the One who gives them meaning.

The words he ﷺ chose at the Conquest of Makkah

Now draw the line the Qur'an itself was drawing all along, the line that is the whole reason this story sits where it sits in the Book and in our lives. Years after this surah came down to comfort him ﷺ in his Year of Sorrow, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ returned to Makkah at the head of ten thousand. This was the city that had mocked him, that had boycotted his clan until little children went hungry in a barren valley, that had plotted his murder in its assembly hall, that had killed and tortured his companions, and that had finally driven him out of the most beloved land on the earth to him. Now he came back, and the city that had cast him out lay entirely at his mercy. Mufti Menk paints him entering it, and the image undoes every expectation. He did not come standing tall, beating drums, raising his fists in triumph. He came bowed so low over his camel in gratitude that his head almost touched the saddle, his face down before the Allah who had given him the day. You have granted me victory, his whole posture said, over the people who raised armies against me, who tried to kill me, who murdered so many of my companions and my relatives; today You have given them into my hand.

And he turned to the Quraysh, the very people who had done all of it, gathered now and waiting to learn their fate. O people of Quraysh, he asked them, what do you think I am going to do with you today? They had no power left to bargain with; he had come with ten thousand and there was no facing it. So they reached for the only thing they had, the memory of the man they had known

before they hated him, and they said: we hope for good, for you are a noble brother, the son of a noble brother. And then the Prophet ﷺ reached past every grievance, past every grave, all the way back to the oldest words of mercy in the Book, the words of Yusuf, and he gave them as his answer. I say to you, he told them, what Yusuf said to his brothers: no blame upon you today. Go, you are free. He sought no revenge. A small handful of named criminals aside, he let the whole city go, and Mufti Menk says that so many of them entered Islam that very day for one reason above all others: they had stood and watched a prophet of Allah forgive where he had every right to crush.

Sit with what has just happened across the centuries. A brother thrown into a well by his own blood, and a Prophet ﷺ driven out of his own city by his own people, reached, generations apart, for the exact same sentence. That is no accident, and Mufti Menk does not treat it as one. It is the chain of the prophets, each of them rehearsing the same mercy, the mercy that would reach its perfection in him ﷺ. Yusuf's forgiveness was a rehearsal of the forgiveness of Makkah, and the surah that carried Yusuf's words was the very surah Allah sent to steady the heart of His final Messenger ﷺ in his darkest year. The comfort and the example were folded into one gift.

Allah seals the whole story by turning directly to His Messenger ﷺ and telling him plainly where this knowledge came from:

That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal, [O Muḥammad], to you. And you were not with them when they put together their plan while they conspired.

QUR'AN 12:102

You were not there, the verse says, when the brothers schemed at the well; you could not have known any of this. So it could only have come from the One who watched it happen, set down exactly as it occurred, and handed to him ﷻ as a sign and a solace. And the moral Allah leaves at the end of it, Mufti Menk says, is the simplest one of all, the one He keeps repeating to His beloved: so be patient. Goodness comes to those who wait for it, to those who hold steadfast and do not despair of the mercy of Allah.

What Yusuf asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this third night as a satisfying ending, a wronged man vindicated, a dream come true, a family restored, and to close the book warmed and move on. That would be to miss the question Yusuf is putting to us, because the surah was never really built to reach the throne. It was built to reach a sentence: no blame upon you today. And that sentence is not a museum piece. It is a door, and it is standing open in front of your own life.

Yusuf had the power and he had the cause, and he forgave in a single breath. That is the thing to take, because most of us, when we are finally the one holding the cards, want the speech first. We want to make them feel it, to be admired for our mercy, to let the moment stretch so the other person understands exactly how much they are being spared. Yusuf did none of it. No revenge, no savouring, no negative word, just: no blame upon you today, may Allah forgive you. And then straight on to healing the next wound. Mufti Menk turns the gift of that around so we cannot miss who it is really for. When you forgive, you are the one who is liberated. The grudge you think you are holding over someone else is in truth a chain on your own heart; it weighs you down, it steals

your sleep, it follows you to bed at night. To forgive and let it die there and then is not a favour you do the other person. It is a freedom you give yourself.

Yaqub holds the other half of it. He made the same du'a for decades and never gave up, because to despair of Allah's mercy is the mark of those who do not believe, and the asking itself, made with hope, is worship. When the answer to your du'a is years late, when your own people tell you that you will die still asking, Yaqub's life asks whether your certainty in Allah is strong enough to outlast the silence. And Yusuf, at the summit of everything, asks the rest of it of you: count the favour, not the wound, and call your rescue from the pit a mercy rather than your years in it a punishment; let no two negatives blind you to a hundred blessings; never plot another person's downfall, because Allah may raise them on the very thing you dug to bury them; and want, more than the kingdom and the comfort and the good name, only to die a Muslim and be joined with the righteous, because that is the one thing that will still be yours when all of it is gone.

But the deepest thing this night asks of our faith is the one the Prophet ﷺ lived out at the gates of Makkah. Forgiveness over revenge is not weakness, and it is not the resort of someone who lacks the strength to retaliate. It is the choice of the strongest people who ever walked the earth. The brother thrown into a well chose it, with full power to execute the men who put him there. The Prophet ﷺ chose it, bowed low over his camel before a city that had stoned and starved and exiled him, with ten thousand at his back and not one of his enemies able to lift a hand. Two prophets, generations apart, standing over the people who hurt them most, reached for the exact same seven words, and Allah recorded the mercy of both. So when your turn comes, and it will,

when someone has wronged you and the power to settle it finally rests in your hand, know that you are standing precisely where Yusuf stood and where he ﷺ stood at the gates of Makkah. Remember the sentence two prophets chose, and choose it too. O Allah, give us the patience of Yusuf and the consciousness of You that held him, free our hearts from every grudge as You freed his, let us count Your favours and forgive as those You love forgave, and take our souls as Muslims and join us with the righteous. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 17 (Yusuf, part 3). Qur'an: Sahih International (12:87, 39:53, 12:47-48, 12:88, 8:2, 12:90-93, 12:96-98, 12:100-102), verified via quran.ai. The narration follows Mufti Menk's telling; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.

Ayyub and Yunus

The patience that would not break, and the cry in the dark

Between these two prophets, peace be upon them both, they cover almost everything a human being is afraid of. One man had everything a person spends a whole life chasing, his body, his family, his wealth, and watched it taken from him slowly, piece by piece, until nothing of his old life was left, and he was asked the only question that really matters: will you still thank the One who gave it? The other ran out of patience, made one decision his Lord had not yet given him leave to make, and ended in a place no rescue boat could ever reach, swallowed alive in the dark, and he was asked: do you still know who your Lord is?

Mufti Menk takes Ayyub and Yunus together on purpose, because they are two halves of one lesson. The first shows you how to hold on when the test is long and grinding. The second shows you that there is no darkness so total that a single sentence of truth cannot reach your Lord from inside it. And that second sentence, the cry from the belly of the whale, is one you are allowed to say tonight, before any hard night comes. To feel the weight of either life, you have to meet the men before their trials began.

A man who had everything, and thanked Allah for it

Ayyub, peace be upon him, came from a high house. He was a descendant of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, with the blood of

prophets running through his lineage, and his wife too is reported to have come from the line of one of the prophets, so that his household was noble in the one way nobility actually counts, in its closeness to Allah. He was, the narrations say, a strikingly handsome man, given good health by his Lord, and over the years Allah heaped favour upon favour onto him: livestock and broad stretches of land, wealth on top of wealth, and many children. Mufti Menk stops here and counts on his fingers the three things every person on earth is reaching for: your body, your family, your money. Ayyub had all three, in full, at once.

And he had one quality that mattered more than the three combined. He thanked Allah in every condition. Not only in the easy seasons, the way most of us manage a quick word of praise when things go our way, but as a fixed habit of the heart. Whatever state your Lord keeps you in, he used to say, be grateful. There is only one condition a believer ever asks to be kept away from, and it is not poverty or sickness or loss; it is the condition of those who will be cast into the Fire. Everything short of that is a state in which Allah can still be praised, and Ayyub praised Him in all of it.

That gratitude is the real subject of the whole story. The Qur'an, Mufti Menk points out, does not tell us much about Ayyub's people or the message he carried, the way it does for other prophets. The silence is deliberate: the lesson Allah wants from this life is not about his nation, but about what a servant does when the gifts are taken back. There are narrations, he adds, that speak of the angels remarking on this devoted worshipper, and of Shaytan wagering that Ayyub only worships because he has been given so much, that strip the blessings away and the worship will stop. Those reports we cannot confirm, so Mufti Menk sets them aside and holds to what is certain. And what is

certain is enough: a man who had everything, and thanked the One who gave it, and was about to be tested to the floor of what a human being can bear.

Taken away, one piece at a time

So Allah tested him. The wealth went first. As time moved, quickly now, the livestock died, the land slipped away, the fortune drained, until there was nothing left of any of it. And not a single day did Ayyub complain to his Lord. He kept saying what a believer says into a loss: we belong to Allah, and whatever He gave us was always His; if He has taken it back, it has only returned to the One it always belonged to. Where did any of it come from in the first place? From Allah. He may give now, or give later, or decide never to give at all, and He is never asked about what He does, because He is the Creator and the One who decides. Mufti Menk lets that settle, because it is the hinge of the whole trial: the wealth was never owed to Ayyub. It was a loan he had been thanking the Lender for all along, and the Lender had every right to call it in.

Then the test went deeper, into the place wealth cannot reach. His children were taken from him, one after another, every one of them, dying before his eyes. And still he held the same words on his tongue: they belong to Allah, and to Allah they have returned. Here Mufti Menk draws a line straight to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who would one day hold his own son Ibrahim as the soul left the child's body, and weep, and say that the eyes shed tears and the heart grieves, yet we say only what pleases our Lord. When the companions wondered at his tears, he told them this is mercy, which Allah places in the hearts of those who have mercy. Grief is not the opposite of patience. Ayyub was not made of stone, and neither was the final Prophet ﷺ. What patience forbids is not

the tear; it is the bitterness, the turning of the heart against the decree. Ayyub wept, surely, and never once let the weeping curdle into a complaint against his Lord.

Then came the hardest test of all, his health. Mufti Menk draws out something painfully true about people here. When a person's illness is internal, others still come and sit with him and speak with him; but the moment the sickness surfaces, blistering and visible, people begin to keep their distance, afraid it might be catching. Ayyub was tested with both at once. The narrations say it stretched on for years, and the popular reports of the exact span and symptoms Mufti Menk handles with care, neither leaning on them nor needing them; what they agree on, and what the lesson rests on, is that it reached a point where almost nothing in his body was still working except his heart and his tongue. And he used that tongue to keep remembering Allah, and refused to let that heart slide into frustration against Him. The two things a servant most needs to reach his Lord, a heart that submits and a mouth that praises, were exactly the two things left to him.

Seven years against eighty

Mufti Menk lingers longest on a single conversation, because it answers the question every one of us eventually asks in the dark: how long is this going to last? Ayyub's own wife had served him faithfully through all of it, the loss of the wealth and the children and the long collapse of his health, and Mufti Menk is careful to honour her, because she stayed when the friends had gone and the neighbours had drawn back. But after years of it, worn down, she finally asked the question aloud.

It upset him deeply, and Mufti Menk is precise about why. Not out of pride, and not because the question was unreasonable; let us

be honest, he says, how many of us would have asked it years earlier. It hurt him because to him it sounded like a complaint lodged against the decree of the One he loved, and that was a line he would not let even the person closest to him cross. He had done everything a man may lawfully do, sought every permitted means, but he would not let his tongue, or hers, question why his Lord had willed this. So he answered her with a question of his own, and the arithmetic of it should reorganize the way you count your life.

How many years, he asked her, did Allah keep me in good health and ease? She said: eighty years. Eighty years of health, of wealth, of children, of everything. And how long, he asked, has this hardship lasted? The last seven. So how, he said, can I lose hope in the mercy of my Lord, when the difficulty has not even drawn level with the goodness? Seven years against eighty. Mufti Menk turns it straight onto us, and it lands like a hand on the shoulder. We smile our way through thirty good years and forget them the instant ten hard ones arrive, and let one loss, arriving after a lifetime of gifts, convince us we have been hard done by. Allah, he reminds us, tests with addition and with subtraction both, the way a real exam asks you to subtract and not only to add; He gives to see if you will thank Him, and takes to see if you will still thank Him. The honest response to loss is not "why me," which assumes the gift was owed. It is "look how long He was generous before this," which remembers that it never was.

Adversity has touched me, and the spring from the ground

When Ayyub finally turned to his Lord, listen to how careful the words are. He does not demand. He does not even ask, out loud, to be cured. He lays his state before Allah and stops:

And [mention] Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful."

QUR'AN 21:83

Mufti Menk makes you feel the adab folded into it. The whole request is hidden inside the praise. Harm has touched me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful: if both of those are true at once, then the mercy itself will know what to do with the harm. Ayyub names the trouble and names his Lord, and trusts that putting the two side by side is the entire prayer. He does not instruct the Most Merciful in how to be merciful; he turns his face that way and waits. And notice, Mufti Menk says, the title Allah gives him in the second telling of this same moment, in another surah, something more intimate than "the afflicted" or even "the patient":

And remember Our servant Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship and torment."

QUR'AN 38:41

Our servant. Our worshipper. That is the name Allah is proud to attach to him, and what earned it was not the health or the wealth or the children, all of them gifts and not achievements, but the worship that survived their loss. In the same breath Ayyub attributes the hardship and torment to Shaytan rather than to his Lord, the perfect courtesy of a servant who will not even phrase his suffering as something Allah did to him. He felt the whisper pushing him toward despair, named the whisperer, and refused him.

And the answer came in a form no one would have predicted. No caravan of healers, no slow recovery, just a single instruction:

[So he was told], "Strike [the ground] with your foot; this is a [spring for a] cool bath and drink."

QUR'AN 38:42

That was all, the smallest action a broken man could still perform. He struck it, and cool water came gushing up out of the earth. He washed in it, and the blistering of years fell away and his skin was made new; he drank from it, and his body was restored from the inside, sounder than before. Mufti Menk draws the line from that spring to a gift we still carry: the well of Zamzam in Makkah, of which the Prophet ﷺ said that it is for whatever it is drunk for. Ayyub's spring was its own particular miracle, but the principle it teaches is one we can still live by, water and conviction and a Lord who heals. Drink Zamzam asking Allah for a cure, with real certainty in the heart, and you are standing, in a small way, where Ayyub stood. We must never take that water for granted, Mufti Menk insists; by Allah, it is a gift, the same kind, from the same Giver.

When his wife came back and saw the strong, whole man standing where her ruined husband had been, she did not know him. Who are you, she asked, you only look like him. He told her plainly: it is me; Allah has cured me. And then Allah gave back more than He had taken:

So We responded to him and removed what afflicted him of adversity. And We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for the worshippers [of Allāh].

QUR'AN 21:84

His family restored to him, and the like of them again with them, double what he had lost, named in the verse as a mercy from Allah and a reminder for everyone who worships Him. Mufti Menk loves a detail the authentic narration in Bukhari preserves from those days. As Ayyub was bathing, with nothing on, locusts of pure gold began to fall around him from the sky, and he started gathering them into his clothes, handful after handful. Allah called to him: Ayyub, did We not make you rich enough to have no need of this? And he answered, yes, my Lord, but who could ever turn away a blessing from You? Sit with the man that reveals: so saturated with gratitude that even a shower of gold, even after everything, he would not let fall to the ground unthanked, because it had come from the One he loved. That is what gratitude looks like when it has been tested to the bone and held.

We found him patient

There was one knot left to untie, and the way Allah untied it is one of the gentlest things in the whole Qur'an. Somewhere in the depths of his suffering, stung by that one question, Ayyub had sworn an oath: that if he recovered, he would strike his wife a hundred times. He was a man of his word, and loved Allah far too much to take an oath in His name and then break it lightly. But he had no wish at all to hurt the woman who had carried him through years of ruin and never left. The oath, Mufti Menk underlines, had not come from cruelty or some petty grievance, but from how fiercely he guarded the honour of his Lord's decree. And because his intention was pure, Allah opened a door for him that kept both his word and his wife:

[We said], "And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it and do not break your oath." Indeed, We found

him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allāh].

QUR'AN 38:44

Take a bunch of grass, a light bundle of thin stalks, and strike with that, once, all together, and your oath is kept and no harm is done. Look, Mufti Menk says, how Allah teaches a sincere servant the way out of his own bind: when you have tangled yourself in a knot for the sake of Allah, He will show you the way out, if you turn to Him. The same passage in this surah grants Ayyub his family and a like number with them, mercy from Us and a reminder for those of understanding, the very gift the earlier verse named. And then comes the verdict that every tested believer should want pronounced over their own life. We found him patient. What an excellent servant. He was one who constantly turned back to his Lord. Mufti Menk has you stop and feel the weight of it: for Allah Himself, who knows the true measure of every soul, to look at a man and call him patient, think what that man must have endured for the word to be earned. The popular books carry figures, that Ayyub lived ninety-odd years more, that he was given so many children, and Mufti Menk passes over the numbers because they do not reach us with certainty and the lesson does not need them. It needs only this: he lost everything and thanked Allah, and Allah called him patient.

Yunus, who left before he was told to

Now the second prophet, and a test built the other way around. Where Ayyub's trial was a slow stripping-away over years, Yunus's would arrive in a single night, sharp and total. Yunus, peace be upon him, is called in the Qur'an Dhun-Nun, the man of the great fish, the companion of the whale. Allah sent him to a

people in the land of Iraq, more than a hundred thousand of them, and gave him the prophet's task: call them to their Lord, warn them of what had fallen on the rejecting nations before them, tell them plainly the same can come for them. He called them, and they would not listen. They threw back at him the same stubborn things every rejected messenger has heard, and over time his patience began to wear thin.

And then he made a decision Allah had not yet given him permission to make. Mufti Menk is careful with the motive, because it is not what we might assume. Yunus did not flee in fear, nor abandon the work out of cowardice. He left out of zeal: he reasoned that these people were hopeless, that somewhere far off there might be others who would actually accept the message, and that his calling was better spent on them. So, angry and impatient with his city, he turned his back on it and walked away, before the word to go had come. The Qur'an records the bare fact of him as a messenger, and then his flight:

And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers. [Mention] when he ran away to the laden ship.

QUR'AN 37:139-140

He came down to the coast, found a heavily loaded ship about to put out to sea, and went aboard, meaning to put a great distance between himself and the people who would not hear him. The ship sailed, and out on the open water the wind rose and the storm gathered, and the vessel began to founder. The crew did what sailors did: they threw the cargo overboard, piece by piece, to lighten her, and still she would not steady. So they reached for the last measure left to them. They would draw lots, and

whoever's name came up would go over the side, one life given so the rest might live.

And he drew lots and was among the losers.

QUR'AN 37:141

They drew, and the lot fell on Yunus. They would not believe it; this was plainly a good and blessed man, an asset to every soul on that deck, so they drew again. It fell on him a second time. They refused it again and drew a third time, and a third time the name that came up was his. Mufti Menk holds the moment still: a prophet of Allah, on a sinking ship in the middle of the sea, the lot pointing at him and pointing at him again, because Allah had an appointment with His servant that not one person on that boat could see. There was nothing left to do. He said Bismillah, and went over the side into the water.

The cry in three darknesses

He went into the open sea, and Allah commanded a great fish to take him in. The whale rose, opened its mouth, and in one gulp Yunus was inside it, swallowed alive, carried down into a place no human being had ever worshipped from before.

Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy.

QUR'AN 37:142

Mufti Menk walks you, gently, through what that must have been. These fish do not chew; they take the whole thing in and the belly does its slow work. So Yunus, coming to himself in the dark, would have begun to feel that place working against him, his clothes going, his skin beginning to suffer. And it was from inside exactly that, with no means left and no way out a person could

imagine, that he fell into prostration and called out to his Lord. The Qur'an names the place he called from with a single, staggering word, and it is in the plural:

And [mention] the man of the fish [i.e., Jonah], when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."

QUR'AN 21:87

Within the darknesses, the plural, because Mufti Menk counts three of them stacked one inside the other: the dark of the night, and inside that the dark of the deep ocean, and inside that the dark of the belly of the whale. Nobody could ever find you there. Even now, he points out, when there is a catastrophe at sea, the rescuers have to wait for morning, because the water will not give up its secrets in the dark. There is no place on earth more sealed off from help. And it was from the floor of all three darknesses that the voice of Yunus went up.

Hear what he said, because it is the heart of this entire day, and weigh what he did not say. He did not say "get me out," or "cure me," or list a single one of his needs. He said three things, in order. There is no deity except You. Exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers. Tawhid first, the bare declaration that his Lord alone is worthy of worship; then the glorification of that Lord; and then, last, the open confession of his own fault, his leaving of the people Allah had sent him to. No demand anywhere in it. Mufti Menk points to the very same beauty he found in Ayyub's prayer: neither prophet, in his worst hour, actually asked for the thing he wanted. Each named his Lord and named his own state, and trusted Him to know the rest. Because

Allah already knows what is in your heart, Mufti Menk says, even when your tongue cannot find the words for it; you do not have to phrase the request, only to turn, and admit, and trust. To own your guilt before Him, plainly, is itself among the most powerful things a servant can do. The moment Yunus said it, the mercy was already on its way.

Allah answered, and the verse that records the rescue does something no other rescue in the Qur'an quite does: it turns one prophet's private deliverance into a standing promise for you.

*So We responded to him and saved him from the distress.
And thus do We save the believers.*

QUR'AN 21:88

And thus do We save the believers. Not "thus did We save him," sealed in the past, but thus do We save them, the whole of them, for as long as there are believers to be saved. This is the connection Mufti Menk will not let you walk past. When the companions came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and asked whether they could use these very words, the words Yunus said inside the whale, he told them yes, why not, and taught that no Muslim ever calls upon Allah with the supplication of Dhun-Nun in any distress without Allah answering him. So the cry from the belly of the whale is not a relic. It is a du'a left deliberately open, for anyone, in any darkness, for the rest of time, including yours, including tonight. There is a reason, Mufti Menk says, that the Prophet ﷺ himself warned us never to say that we are better than Yunus. This is not, in the end, a story about a prophet's failure that we look down on from a safe distance. It is a gift handed down to every one of us through his stumble, the most precious sentence a drowning person can hold, and it reached us

because a prophet of Allah was once carried to the floor of the sea so that we would have it.

And mark why Allah caught him in time. The Qur'an gives the reason without softening it:

And had he not been of those who exalt Allāh, he would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.

QUR'AN 37:143-144

Had he not been, before all of this, of those who constantly glorified his Lord, he would have stayed in that belly until the Day of Resurrection. It was the worship of his easy days that came down to find him in his worst hour. Mufti Menk gives the image and it stays with you: a servant's good deeds rise to Allah daily, carried up, recorded, known; and so when this faint cry came up from the bottom of the ocean, the angels who had carried this man's praise so many times before recognised the voice. Is this not Your worshipper, they ask, the one whose deeds we bring up every day? And the answer comes: yes, it is My servant Yunus. Get close to Allah while life is calm and easy, Mufti Menk says, repeating a saying of the early Muslims, and you will find Him rushing to you the day the difficulty comes. That is precisely what happened in the dark.

The fish cast Yunus up onto a bare shore, sick and uncovered, his skin raw, the sun beating on him, and Allah did not leave him half-healed:

But We threw him onto the open shore while he was ill. And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine. And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more. And

they believed, so We gave them enjoyment [of life] for a time.

QUR'AN 37:145-148

A broad-leaved gourd plant grew up over him on that bare shore to shade him, and its fruit to feed and heal him; when Allah cures, Mufti Menk says, He cures completely. And then Allah sent him back to the very people he had left, the hundred thousand and more, and the astonishing thing waited there. While Yunus had been gone, the punishment he had warned them of began to gather over them as a dark cloud, and these people, who had spurned him for so long, looked up, knew it for what it was, and every last one of them believed, with not a single soul holding back. Mufti Menk marks how rare that is. Among all the rejecting nations, theirs is the one town whose faith arrived in time, the one place that saw the punishment coming and turned, so that Allah lifted it from them and let them live out their days. He sets it beside the ones who would not, beside a Pharaoh who only believed as the sea closed over him, when belief was too late to be worth anything; the people of Yunus believed while there was still time, all of them, and were spared.

What Ayyub and Yunus ask of our faith

It is tempting to read two lives like these and feel only distant admiration, to file Ayyub under "patience" and Yunus under "that famous du'a" and move on. That would be to miss the questions they put directly to our own iman. You will not, please Allah, lose everything the way Ayyub did, or end up where Yunus did. But you will have your own seven years set against your eighty, your own night when the rescue boats cannot see you. And for those nights, these two prophets hand you something to hold.

From Ayyub: count the mercy before you count the loss. He would not lose hope when the goodness so far outweighed the difficulty, because he never forgot that the goodness was a gift and not a wage. Before you let one hard season convince you that you have been wronged, do his arithmetic, and count the years Allah was generous to you first. Then thank Him in the state you are in now, even if all you have left, as Ayyub very nearly did, is a heart that still submits and a tongue that still remembers His name. Gratitude that only survives the good times was never really gratitude; his survived the floor, and so was called, by Allah Himself, the mark of an excellent servant. And here is the line to the one this whole book is reaching toward: the patience the Qur'an praised in Ayyub is the same patience the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ carried through the deaths of his own children, through the long grinding rejection of Makkah, through losing in a single year the wife and the uncle who shielded him. Every earlier prophet is a rehearsal of him ﷺ, and Ayyub's steadiness under loss is one of the clearest.

From Yunus: there is no darkness Allah cannot reach into, and you do not have to phrase the request to be heard. From inside three layers of dark, with no means and no hope a person could see, one true sentence carried his voice straight up to his Lord and was answered, and the answer was written down as a promise for everyone who would ever stand in the dark after him. Notice that Allah corrected even His final Messenger ﷺ with this same story. Be patient for the decision of your Lord, He told him, and be not like the companion of the fish when he called out while he was distressed (Qur'an 68:48), and then, of Yunus, that his Lord chose him and made him of the righteous (68:50), so that even the prophet's haste became a lesson the last Prophet ﷺ was taught from, a mercy he passed to us, and a name he told

us never to rank ourselves above. So learn the cry now, before you are desperate for it. There is no god but You; exalted are You; indeed I have been of the wrongdoers. It is the same shape as Ayyub's prayer, your Lord named and your own state named and the rest left to His mercy, and the Prophet ﷺ promised that Allah answers it for anyone in distress who says it.

So take one thing from each of them down into an ordinary day. Tonight, while life is still calm, bank the worship that will come looking for you when it is not; say the words of Yunus before the hard night arrives, so that your voice is already on its way up. And the next time something is taken from you, do Ayyub's sum before you ask "why me," and find that the mercy still outweighs the loss, by years. O Allah, who restored Ayyub and answered him before he even asked, who heard Yunus from the belly of the whale in three darkneses and saved him, and promised that this is how You save the believers: make us of those who thank You in every condition and turn back to You in every distress. Teach our tongues this cry before we are desperate for it, and answer us, as You promised, when we call You with it. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 18 (Ayyub and Yunus, peace be upon them). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (21:83-84, 38:41-44, 21:87-88, 37:139-148, 68:48-50), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports we cannot confirm, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept.

Musa and Harun, part I

Floated down the very river that was meant to kill him

Turn the pages of the Qur'an, and one prophet keeps returning. Not once, not in a single chapter, but across the whole Book, named in some hundred and twenty-four places, his life unfolded in more stages than any other messenger Allah sent. You meet him as a newborn and as an old man, in a palace and in a desert, behind a flock of sheep and in front of a tyrant, at a burning bush and at the edge of a sea torn in half. No other prophet is given to us in such detail. That is Musa, peace be upon him, the most-told prophet in the entire Qur'an, and Mufti Ismail Menk gives him a series of his own, because one sitting could never hold him.

Tonight that series begins, and it begins where Allah chose to begin it: not with the staff, not with the sea, but with a baby and a river. The surah that carries the greatest detail of this part is named al-Qasas, "the stories", in the plural, and Mufti Menk pauses on that plural. Why stories, and not story? Because there is not one lesson buried here but many, and the very first of them is the one this whole pillar keeps circling back to. Watch it carefully as it comes: the hand of Allah is most at work in exactly the place that looks most like the end of you.

A man who told the world he was god

Egypt in that age was held in the fist of one man, and the Qur'an preserves the sentence he actually dared to say aloud: I am your

lord, the most high. He told his chiefs that he knew of no god for them besides himself. And Mufti Menk will not let that pass without quietly taking it apart, because the man's own life betrayed him at every turn. He ate. He slept. He fell ill like everyone else. He gathered his advisors and asked their opinions; he held councils and let men question him; and later, when he had to face Musa, he had to send for magicians. A god who consults, a god who calls others to his rescue, a god who is afraid: it gives him away. Somewhere inside himself, he knew he was not at the top. If he truly were the highest, Mufti Menk asks, why would he ever need to ask anyone anything? Sometimes a person thinks he knows so much that his very brain becomes covered over, and out of his arrogance he begins to sound like a fool.

He had built his whole kingdom around the lie. He carved the people into ranks with himself at the peak, his chiefs just below him, worshipping him and allowed near enough to help him decide things; then a layer of slaves who served and worshipped him; then the professionals he paid when he needed their skill. And beneath all of it, crushed at the very bottom, a people he kept enslaved: Bani Israil, the children of Yaqub, the prophet who was also called Israil, peace be upon him. They were slaves, yes, but they were the one group in all of Egypt who knew with total certainty that this man was not their god. They served him with their hands and refused him with their hearts. So Allah opens the account with His own verdict on him, plain and final:

Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them, slaughtering their [newborn] sons and keeping their females alive. Indeed, he was of the corrupters.

QUR'AN 28:4

The boys he killed, and the favour Allah promised

The slaughter had a reason, and the reason was a dream. The reports say Pharaoh saw a fire sweep across the land and burn down every house except the houses of Bani Israil, and the vision shook him so badly that he gathered his fortune-tellers and his magicians to read it for him. Mufti Menk catches the contradiction and holds it up to the light: a moment ago you were god, and now you cannot even interpret your own dream without a magician? They told him what he feared to hear. A boy would be born among the enslaved Israelites who would one day pull down everything he had built, uproot him entirely, and destroy him at his own hands.

So the tyrant did what tyrants do. He issued the order. Every newborn son of Bani Israil was to be killed, and the girls left alive. Boys were cut down as they were born. The reports Mufti Menk relays say it ran every other year, a rhythm of murder timed to the warnings he had been given. And he is careful to tell us this is no relic sealed safely in the past. The killing of a child for fear of what it might one day become is a policy the world has never fully put down; you are meant to read these verses and find your own time inside them.

But over the tyrant's plan, Allah lays His own, and He announces it out loud in the very next breath, before a single rescue has happened, before the hero is even born:

And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors

QUR'AN 28:5

And establish them in the land and show Pharaoh and [his minister] Hāmān and their soldiers through them that which they had feared.

QUR'AN 28:6

Read it slowly, Mufti Menk urges, because this is the law underneath the entire story. The ones being ground into the dust are the ones Allah intends to raise into leaders and heirs. The very thing Pharaoh was murdering infants to prevent is the thing Allah promises to show him, to his face, through the people he despised. Those who think themselves lofty are on a timer they cannot see; their days are numbered, their oppression cannot run forever, and one day the people they counted as nothing will stand above them. This, says Mufti Menk, is exactly why a believer is taught never to look down on a single soul. You do not know when the tables turn.

Put him in the river, and do not be afraid

Into that hunting season, a baby was born. His mother managed to conceal the pregnancy and the birth, and no one knew. Harun, peace be upon him, was already a little older, born either before the killing or in one of the years when it had paused; but Musa came when the soldiers were watching every Israelite cradle in Egypt, and a newborn cannot be kept quiet. As her fear closed in, Allah did for this woman something He does for those He loves. He sent her an instruction.

Mufti Menk is careful here, and his care is part of the lesson. This was not the revelation of a prophet, not wahy in the way it came to messengers. It was a powerful inspiration cast straight into her heart, with such certainty that she could not doubt it. And what she was told would have stopped any other heart cold:

And We inspired to the mother of Moses, "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers."

QUR'AN 28:7

Sit, Mufti Menk says, with what that asked of a mother. Look at the Nile, that vast moving river, with a whole city living along its banks. Who takes their own newborn child, seals him in a little box of wood or a basket of reeds, sets him on the open water, and lets go? No mother would even think of it. You could not test such a thing on the calmest lake; you would not even allow the thought to form. Only an inspiration that solid, that certain, could have moved her hand. And notice what is folded inside the command, so that she would carry it with her to the water's edge: do not fear and do not grieve, We will return him to you. The promise was already complete, every step of it written, before she had taken a single step toward the river.

In Surah Ta-Ha, Allah lets Musa himself hear, many years later, exactly what was being woven over him from the very first moment:

[Saying], 'Cast him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.' And I bestowed upon you love from Me that you would be brought up under My eye [i.e., observation and care].

QUR'AN 20:39

That basket was never drifting. It only looked, to human eyes, like a fragile thing abandoned to the current. It was being carried, the whole way, under an eye that never blinked.

Fished out by the very house that hunted him

Now watch where the river takes him. The little box glides through a city teeming with people, and not one hand reaches in to lift it out. It floats past every checkpoint that would have stopped a person travelling on land, sliding through the heart of Pharaoh's Egypt untouched, and it comes to rest at the one address in the whole country the mother would never in her life have dared approach: the bank at the back of Pharaoh's own palace.

Try to reach that palace by road, Mufti Menk says, and you would be turned away a dozen times before you ever saw its walls. But coming by water, the child sailed straight into the tyrant's garden and was lifted from the river by the tyrant's own household. The very thing started in the name of Allah arrived in the name of Allah; nothing and no one could have touched that child except by the will of the One steering the current. And the Qur'an names the terrible irony without flinching, stating the outcome before the people in the story have any idea what they have just done:

And the family of Pharaoh picked him up [out of the river] so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief. Indeed, Pharaoh and Hāmān and their soldiers were deliberate sinners.

QUR'AN 28:8

The one infant Pharaoh had slaughtered a generation of boys to be rid of was now drying off in his own wife's arms, inside his own home. Pharaoh, suspicious, wanted the baby gone. But his wife had no children of her own, and when she looked at the child she was undone by him:

And the wife of Pharaoh said, "[He will be] a comfort of the eye [i.e., pleasure] for me and for you. Do not kill him; perhaps he may benefit us, or we may adopt him as a son." And they perceived not.

QUR'AN 28:9

Linger, as Mufti Menk does, on the design hidden in that one sentence. Had Pharaoh been a father many times over, this baby would have meant nothing to him; the order would have stood and the child would have died. But Allah had kept his house empty of children for years, so that on this one morning a sudden softness for a single child could open in exactly the heart that needed to be softened, the heart of the most powerful woman in Egypt, beside the most dangerous man in it. This is the name the whole story carries, the name the bridge into the rest of the library is built upon: al-Latif, the Subtle, the One whose plan runs through the smallest and quietest details, threading a baby through an entire hostile empire and setting him down, dripping, in the safest dangerous place on earth.

The milk he would only take from one woman

Back in her home, the mother of Musa had not collapsed into grief. The Qur'an tells us she sent the baby's sister to follow the basket at a distance and watch where it went, keeping her tied, by a thread, to her son. And Allah quietly arranged the rest. He made the infant refuse the breast of every wet-nurse they brought to him. Woman after woman was summoned to the palace, and one after another the baby turned away, crying with hunger and taking nothing from any of them.

Picture the scene Mufti Menk paints. A royal household in turmoil over a hungry baby; and around such a household, no shortage

of women eager for the honour, the closeness to power, and the rich reward of nursing the new prince. They all came, and they all failed. Into that helpless moment the sister stepped forward with the most natural sentence in the world, a sentence the Qur'an records exactly:

And We had prevented from him [all] wet nurses before, so she said, "Shall I direct you to a household that will be responsible for him for you while they are to him [for his upbringing] sincere?"

QUR'AN 28:12

They were desperate, so they leapt at it: yes, bring her, bring her at once. And so the baby was placed back into the arms of his own mother, and he drank. The whole palace was astonished. Pharaoh himself questioned her, asking how this child suckled from her when he had refused every other woman, and who exactly she was. She did not lie, and she did not give herself away; she answered around the question, saying simply that her milk was sweet and no child had ever refused her breast. It was the truth, told in a way that kept everyone alive.

Look, Mufti Menk says, at the sheer precision of Allah's promise. He had told her, only days before, do not grieve, We will return him to you, soon. And now she was not merely reunited with her son. She was escorted into the palace, paid a stipend, housed and fed and cared for, nursing her own child inside the home of the man who had tried to kill him, free of charge, on the house. Allah had returned the baby to his mother so that her eye would be cooled and her grief lifted, and so that she would know, with her whole heart, the truth the verse spells out:

So We restored him to his mother that she might be content and not grieve and that she would know that the promise of Allāh is true. But most of them [i.e., the people] do not know.

QUR'AN 28:13

And here Mufti Menk turns the verse gently onto us. How often does Allah promise that a good deed will be rewarded, and we do the deed, and then we sigh that we are still suffering, that nothing has changed, that the promise seems to have passed us by? His promise is true. It does not fail. It simply arrives when the time is right, not a single moment before. He speaks tenderly here to anyone who has lost a child early, that the separation is not forever, that Allah unites those who are parted; we are all travelling in one direction, and what looks like loss is, for the believer, an appointment not yet kept.

One blow, and a man on the run

He grew up inside that palace, fed and raised in a splendour beyond anything an ordinary home could offer, in the house of a man who told the world he was god. And he grew into a powerful man. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described Musa for us as dark in complexion, tall, strongly built, with a beard, a solid and forceful presence. But the strength that mattered most was not in his arms. Surrounded every single day, from infancy, by a man claiming divinity, Musa never for one moment believed it. He knew exactly who he was and Who his Lord was, and he worshipped the one Creator alone in the very heart of all that adversity, in an environment built from the ground up to make him forget. That, says Mufti Menk, is the reward Allah gives to the doers of good:

And when he attained his full strength and was [mentally] mature, We bestowed upon him judgement and knowledge. And thus do We reward the doers of good.

QUR'AN 28:14

Hold that for your own life, Mufti Menk presses: whatever environment you walk into, your deen comes first, and nothing should be allowed to shake your belief in Allah.

Then came the day that changed everything. Musa entered the city at a quiet hour, when its people were resting, going at a time he would not be noticed, since one of the elite was always watched. He came upon two men fighting: one of his own, from Bani Israil, and one from the people of Pharaoh. The Israelite cried out to him for help, and Musa, this immensely strong young man, stepped in and struck the Egyptian a single blow.

And he entered the city at a time of inattention by its people and found therein two men fighting: one from his faction and one from among his enemy. And the one from his faction called for help to him against the one from his enemy, so Moses struck him and [unintentionally] killed him. [Moses] said, "This is from the work of Satan. Indeed, he is a manifest, misleading enemy."

QUR'AN 28:15

One blow, and the man was dead. Look, says Mufti Menk, at how powerful Musa must have been, and he adds his own dry caution, that this is no licence for any of us to go striking people. Musa had meant only to break up a fight, to teach a rough man a lesson; he had never intended to kill. And the instant the man dropped, regret crashed over him. This is from the work of Shaytan, he said, the devil is an open and misleading enemy. He turned at once to Allah and begged forgiveness, and Allah

forgave him. But the deed was done. Now he was a man with a secret and a fear, and only one other person had seen it.

Out of Egypt, into Madyan

By the next morning the city was uneasy, and when Musa went back he found the very same Israelite locked in another fight, crying out to him again. As Musa moved to step in, the other man threw the secret in his face: do you mean to kill me the way you killed a man yesterday? Now it was out, spoken aloud for anyone to hear, and the news travelled fast. From the far end of the city a man came running with the warning that saved Musa's life:

And a man came from the farthest end of the city, running. He said, "O Moses, indeed the eminent ones are conferring over you [intending] to kill you, so leave [the city]; indeed, I am to you of the sincere advisors."

QUR'AN 28:20

Musa did not stop to pack or plan. He left at once, on foot, frightened and watching the road behind him, with a prayer on his lips that is the cry of every cornered believer:

So he left it, fearful and anticipating [apprehension]. He said, "My Lord, save me from the wrongdoing people."

QUR'AN 28:21

He walked, and kept walking, with no real knowledge of the roads, until, the reports say, his shoes wore clean through. When he finally turned toward Madyan he made another du'a, that Allah would guide him along the way, toward some good on this unknown road. And it is here, Mufti Menk reminds us, that Allah

folds in the verse from Surah Ta-Ha, telling Musa years afterward exactly what all of this had been:

[And We favored you] when your sister went and said, 'Shall I direct you to someone who will be responsible for him?' So We restored you to your mother that she might be content and not grieve. And you killed someone, but We saved you from retaliation and tried you with a [severe] trial. And you remained [some] years among the people of Madyan. Then you came [here] at the decreed time, O Moses.

QUR'AN 20:40

The killing, the running, the worn-through shoes, the long years in a strange land: none of it fell outside the plan. It was the trial that was shaping him, the testing that was making him into the man who would one day stand before Pharaoh himself and not flinch.

The well, the two women, and a roof at last

At the watering well of Madyan, Musa found a crowd of men pressing their flocks to drink, and off to one side, holding their animals back from the crush, two women waiting their turn. He asked them what kept them standing apart, and their answer told him everything about the house they came from: we do not water our flock until the shepherds finish and leave, and our father is a very old man. They were explaining, with dignity, why two women were out doing a man's work at all, clearing up any thought before it could form. So Musa, exhausted and homeless as he was, stepped in, watered their whole flock himself, and sent them on their way. Then he withdrew to the shade and made one of the most quietly beautiful du'as in the entire Qur'an:

So he watered [their flocks] for them; then he went back to the shade and said, "My Lord, indeed I am, for whatever good You would send down to me, in need."

QUR'AN 28:24

A stranger with no home, no food, no shelter, asking no human being for a thing, laying his bare need before Allah alone. He had scarcely finished when one of the two women came back, walking modestly, to tell him that her father wished to reward him for watering their flock. And here Mufti Menk relays what the historians hold, with the discipline these stories demand: the majority of the scholars say this elderly father was the prophet Shu'ayb, peace be upon him, the prophet of Madyan, though he is careful to note that this is not stated in the Qur'an nor established in the authentic Sunnah of Muhammad ﷺ, so it is passed on as a likely report, not built into belief.

Musa told the family his whole story, how he was born, what had driven him from Egypt, and the old man comforted him: do not fear, you have escaped the wrongdoing people. Then one of the daughters gave her father a piece of advice that doubles as a portrait of Musa drawn from a single afternoon, and as a hiring principle that has never stopped being true:

One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy."

QUR'AN 28:26

She had seen both qualities at the well. The strength was obvious, a man who watered an entire flock alone while the others were still finishing. The trustworthiness she had seen on the walk back: the reports say Musa, out of his modesty, had asked her to walk behind and direct him left or right rather than

ahead of him, so that his eyes would not wander over her. Strength without honesty is a hole in the bucket, Mufti Menk says, the water spilling out as fast as a strong man can carry it; honesty without strength is a worker still asleep at eleven in the morning. In Musa, for once, the two ran together.

So Shu'ayb offered Musa one of his daughters in marriage, on the condition that Musa work for him for eight years, and that if he chose to complete ten that would be his own kindness, freely given; and Musa would find him, Allah willing, among the righteous. Mufti Menk smiles at the warmth of the arrangement, the employer promising to be good, the worker agreeing to give his best, two decent people making an easy thing easy. Musa served the fuller of the two terms, ten whole years, and through every one of them Allah was training him the way He trains all His prophets, with a shepherd's staff and a flock. The Prophet ﷺ told us plainly that Allah sent no prophet who had not at some point herded sheep, because the patience that animals demand is harder than the patience people demand, and a man schooled on a flock that cannot even understand his words is ready, at last, to be sent to a nation. When the years were done, Musa married, gathered his wife, and set out to go home and see his own people again. And that, Mufti Menk says, is where a whole new chapter opens, the staff and the valley and the voice that called him. We have an appointment with it.

What Musa's beginning asks of our faith

It would be easy to read the opening of Musa's life as a thrilling rescue and leave it there, a baby saved against the odds, a story safely sealed in the distant past. That would be to miss the question it puts to us. Strip the river down to what it really was,

and you will never again read a frightening turn in your own life the same way.

Everything about the start of his life looked like a death sentence. He was born into a massacre, hidden in terror, then set adrift by his own mother's hands on a river wide enough to swallow him. He was lifted out by the household that wanted him dead. Years later he became a fugitive with worn-through shoes, walking, alone and afraid, into a country he did not know. And at every single one of those points, Allah was not absent from the scene. He was the one doing the carrying. The river obeyed Him to the inch. The tyrant's wife loved on cue. The baby's hunger walked his mother back into the palace with a stipend in her hand. The flight that should have ended him became the very training that built him. This is the lesson this whole pillar keeps returning to, and Musa's opening chapter says it louder than almost any other: the place that looks most like the end of you is often exactly where al-Latif is most at work. When your own river seems to be carrying you the wrong way, the question is only whether you remember Whose hand is on the basket.

And there is a second thing his beginning asks of you, just as sharp. Musa was raised, from his first breath, inside the home of a man who claimed to be god, surrounded morning and night by everything designed to bend his belief, and his faith did not bend. He knew his Lord in a house built to make him forget. Most of us are not tested by palaces; we are tested by far smaller pressures, a room where the faith is mocked, a workplace that rewards the cutting of corners, a crowd that finds our deen quaint. His life puts the plain question: whatever environment you are forced to stand in, does your faith come first, or does it quietly rearrange itself to fit the room? He kept his intact in the worst environment imaginable. That door is still open to anyone who wants it.

There is a reason this pattern feels familiar, and Mufti Menk names it. The Prophet ﷺ taught that every nation has had its Musa and its Pharaoh, a caller to good and a tyrant who fights him, and he said of his own time that Abu Jahl was his Pharaoh. The line runs straight from this opening to the Seerah: a man kept safe by Allah's hidden care while his enemies plotted his death, a plan that moved forward through what looked, from the outside, like pure danger. Of all the earlier prophets, Musa's is the longest, closest rehearsal of the life of Muhammad ﷺ, which is perhaps why, on the Night Journey, it was Musa whom the Prophet ﷺ met in the heavens, and Musa who sent him back, again and again, to ask his Lord to lighten the prayers on this ummah. The concern that carried a baby down a river was the same concern that, ages later, pressed for ease on people not yet born.

So take one thing from his beginning down into your ordinary days. The next time the current seems to be pulling you somewhere you never chose, do what his mother was made to do: place the thing you fear for most into the water, and do not grieve, because the promise of Allah is true and always on time. Keep your faith first in whatever room you are forced to enter, the way he kept his in a palace of false gods. And when you are cornered and empty-handed, borrow his own words from the road and the well: my Lord, save me from the wrongdoing people; my Lord, whatever good You send down to me, I am in need of it. He named his Lord, named his need, and asked nothing of any human being, and Allah was already carrying him somewhere better. May Allah, al-Latif, who floated Musa through an entire hostile empire and set him down safe, who kept his deen firm in the house of a man who claimed to be God, and who answered him on the road when he had nothing but his need, carry us likewise through what frightens us, keep our faith firm

wherever we are made to stand, and let us trust, as his mother was made to trust, that His promise is always true.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 19 (Musa and Harun, peace be upon them, part 1). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (28:4, 28:5-6, 28:7, 28:8-9, 28:12-13, 28:14-15, 28:20-21, 28:24, 28:26, 20:39, 20:40), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports beyond the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept.

Musa and Harun, part 2

A fire on a dark mountain, and the voice of the One who made him

He had left Egypt as a wanted man, running across the open sand with the memory of a death on his hands and the soldiers of the most powerful empire on earth somewhere behind him. Ten years had passed since then. He had found a well in a town called Madyan, helped two sisters water their flock, and been taken in by their father, a righteous old man most of the scholars name as the Prophet Shu'ayb, peace be upon him. He had married, and worked his years of labour, and grown from a frightened fugitive into a husband and a shepherd with a staff in his hand and a flock to lead home each evening. And now, with the term of his service complete, Musa, peace be upon him, was homesick.

That is the small, human detail the Qur'an keeps, and it is worth pausing on before the mountain and the voice and the fire. A man who had every reason never to look back at Egypt could not stop thinking about it. So he gathered his family and turned toward the one place on earth that still frightened him, travelling by night because he was not a man who knew the roads, unsure of his way in the dark. He was about to walk into the single most extraordinary conversation any human being has ever had, and he did not know it. He thought he was looking for the road.

A light on the mountain

He had lost his way. The night was cold, the road uncertain, and then, off to one side of the mountain, there was a fire. To a traveller in that state a fire means two things at once, warmth and directions, and Musa wanted both. He told his family to stay where they were and let him go ahead.

And when Moses had completed the term and was traveling with his family, he perceived from the direction of the mount a fire. He said to his family, "Stay here; indeed, I have perceived a fire. Perhaps I will bring you from there [some] information or burning wood from the fire that you may warm yourselves."

QUR'AN 28:29

Notice what he hopes for. A burning branch to carry back, so his family can sit out the cold night with a little warmth. Or, if the people at the fire will not share it, at least directions, someone to tell him which way the road runs. In Surah Ta-Ha the same moment is told with the same double wish: a torch, or some guidance at the fire. He was, in that moment, a man who needed to know where he was going even more than he needed to be warm.

Mufti Menk stops the story right here, because this is the part that is about us. How often are we the lost traveller, wandering in the dark, following our own footsteps in a circle, beginning to follow our own desires the way a man in the cold follows the wrong path? And how often, in the middle of that, does Allah send up a light: a reminder, a word that lands at exactly the right moment, the khutbah on a Friday that we are meant to come early for and listen to, because there will be something in it for us. The light is sent. The question is what we do when we see it. Musa did not sit down and wait for the fire to come to him. He

saw it, and he moved toward it. He made the effort, on a hard night, to walk up a dark mountain in the direction of a flame, because he understood that he needed it.

Guidance, the Mufti says, does not simply pour itself down your throat. You have to recognise it, and then you have to walk toward it. He gives the image of straining your tea: nobody wants to drink it with all the leaves still floating in the cup, so you strain it, and what reaches you is pure. The world is full of voices and noise and half-truths; you have to strain it the same way, until what comes through is clean. This is what Allah said. This is what His Messenger ﷺ said. Take that, and walk. Musa hastened toward the light because he was sure he needed it, and that haste is the whole lesson before the miracle even begins.

The voice of the One who made him

He came close, and it was not the light of an ordinary fire. It was brighter than that, brighter than flame, and out of it came something no fire makes. A voice. Calling him, by his own name, in the dark.

And when he came to it, he was called, "O Moses,

QUR'AN 20:11

Imagine it, Mufti Menk says. You are alone on a mountainside at night, far from your family, and something calls your name, and you cannot see who. In our lives, if a voice calls us by name, we recognise it; only those who know us would call us so. But this was a voice Musa had never heard, and it knew him. And then the voice steadied him with the most reassuring words a frightened man could possibly hear.

Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the blessed valley of Ṭuwā.

QUR'AN 20:12

I am your Lord. Your Rabb. It is the word Mufti Menk keeps returning to across this whole series, because no single English word carries it. Rabb is the Maker, the Creator, the One who nourishes and cherishes and provides, the Protector, the One in absolute control of every aspect of existence, the One who holds every atom of you in His hand. The voice on the mountain did not announce itself with thunder or titles. It said, in effect, the most intimate thing of all: I am the One who made you. There is nothing here to fear.

This was Allah Himself, speaking directly to a human being, with no angel in between. And from that night Musa carried a title no other man carries: Kalimullah, the one to whom Allah spoke. We will never know what that voice sounded like. Not one of us has heard it, and not one of us will, in this life. Only Musa did, of all the people who have ever lived, and he was the fortunate one who heard his Lord address him without a veil between them.

The first instruction is small and strange and tender all at once: take off your sandals, for you are standing in the sacred valley of Tuwa, on blessed ground. The scholars note that this was simply a command of Allah, obeyed at once, and that is enough. But Mufti Menk draws a gentle benefit out of the bare feet, one he is careful to say is not necessarily the direct meaning, only a thing we can take from it. If you want to gain something spiritually, you have to let go of whatever is sticking you to the dust of this world. If something is binding you to the ground, what spiritual benefit are you really going to take? So put down what ties you to the earth, leave it to one side, and listen to what your Lord is

about to ask of you. Musa stood barefoot on blessed ground, and the conversation of his life began.

Three things, in order

Before a word about the mission, before Pharaoh is even named, Allah hands Musa three things. And Mufti Menk lays them out in exactly the order they come, because the order is the lesson.

Indeed, I am Allāh. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.

QUR'AN 20:14

First: I am Allah, there is no deity except Me, so worship Me alone. Pure tawhid, the oneness of Allah, before anything else. This, the Mufti says, is the opening line every single messenger was sent with. Allah tells us that to every nation He sent a messenger, and the first words on that messenger's tongue were always the same: worship Allah alone, and beware of false gods, stay away from worshipping anything besides Him. The warning against shirk comes before the mission, before the law, before everything. It came to Musa first, here on the mountain, to be carried later to everyone else.

Second, in the same breath: and establish prayer for My remembrance. Worship Me, and then keep that worship standing. Hold up the salah. Fulfil your acts of worship for Me alone. The belief is the root; the prayer is how the root holds the tree upright.

Third, Allah gives him the horizon that makes the first two urgent:

Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it - so that every soul may be recompensed according to that for which it strives.

The Hour is coming, the end of time, the Day of Judgement, the resurrection, all of it real and on its way. And Allah says He has kept its timing hidden, known to no one, so that every soul can be repaid honestly for what it actually worked toward. Look at the mercy folded into that, Mufti Menk says. If each of us knew the exact hour of our death, we would sin freely right up until ten minutes before, and only then leap up to stand in prayer. Imagine the chaos of a world that could see the clock. So Allah hid it, as a gift, so that no one can game the test, so that everyone is judged by how they truly lived rather than by a last-second performance.

There is a whole life folded into these three lines. Believe in the oneness of Allah and associate nothing with Him. Do what He has commanded. Stay conscious that one day you will stand and answer to Him, which is the very thing that keeps a person away from what He has forbidden. Hold those three together, the Mufti says, and you are already among the best of people. They are not a beginner's lesson Musa would later outgrow. They are the first thing Allah handed His prophet on the night He made him a prophet, and they are enough, in their order, to build an entire soul.

What is in your right hand

Then Allah asks Musa a question He already knows the answer to.

And what is that in your right hand, O Moses?"

A staff. That is all the answer the question needs. Musa could have said one word and stopped. But watch what he does instead, because this is one of the moments Mufti Menk loves most in the whole of the Qur'an. He cannot bring himself to keep the conversation short.

He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep and I have therein other uses."

QUR'AN 20:18

It is my staff, he says, and then he keeps going. I lean on it. I knock down leaves with it for my sheep. And, he adds, I have other uses for it too. Allah only asked what it was. Allah, who knew better than Musa himself what was in Musa's hand, did not ask what it was for. But Musa, now calm, now settled into the wonder of where he was, wanted to stay in the conversation a little longer. When, he must have felt, will I ever get this chance again? So he told his Lord about the leaves and the sheep and the other uses, stretching out every word, because the voice he was answering was the voice of the One who made him, and he did not want it to end.

Mufti Menk turns this straight onto our own prayer, and it stings a little, in the way the best lessons do. When we say Allahu Akbar and stand before Allah, we are communicating with Him directly, the way Musa was. And how many of us are quietly waiting for it to be over, glancing at the clock, what the Mufti once called, in another gathering, worshippers of the watch, the ones who keep checking the time even in salah, willing it along, come on, it is getting late. And here is Musa, with the literal voice of Allah, doing the opposite: drawing the moment out as long as he can, telling Him about the branches he pulls down for his flock. May

we be among those, the Mufti prays, who forget the time the moment we begin to speak with our Lord. He did not even ask Musa for the extra detail. Musa offered it, because love does not watch the clock.

The staff, the serpent, and the shining hand

Then the command, and with it the lesson Mufti Menk will not let us walk past.

[Allāh] said, "Throw it down, O Moses."

QUR'AN 20:19

Throw it down. And Musa throws it down. He does not ask why. He does not say what will happen, or what the point of it is, or what is wrong with leaving a perfectly good staff in his hand. He knows the command is from Allah, and so he obeys, and the answer comes after the obedience, not before it. There was no pause, no argument, no negotiation. The instruction came, and the staff was already on the ground.

So he threw it down, and thereupon it was a snake, moving swiftly.

QUR'AN 20:20

The moment the wood touched the earth it was a living serpent, moving fast, and Musa's body did what any body would: he turned to flee. In another place the Qur'an says he turned in flight and did not look back. And Allah calls him, gently, by name, and tells him the thing a believer most needs to hear.

[Allāh] said, "Seize it and fear not; We will return it to its former condition."

Seize it, and do not fear. Fear, Mufti Menk says, is for those who do not believe; a believer fears Allah, and no one and nothing else. You are a believer, Allah tells him in effect, so what is there to be afraid of? And Musa, trusting that, reaches down and takes hold of a live snake with his bare hands, and as he lifts it, it folds back into the wooden staff he has leaned on for ten years.

Then the second sign.

And draw in your hand to your side; it will come out white without disease - another sign,

QUR'AN 20:22

He puts his hand to his side, into the opening of his garment, and draws it out, and it comes out white, shining, without any illness in it. Mufti Menk describes it: not the yellow of the sun, but a pure white light, brighter than the sun, with no disease, no blemish, no sickness in it, lest anyone imagine it was some affliction of the skin. Two signs, given to one man, on one mountain, in one night.

And then the Mufti sets Musa beside us, and the comparison is the point. Musa was handed a serpent and a blaze of light precisely because he threw the staff down first, and asked nothing. We hear an instruction from Allah, and our first instinct is the opposite of his: we argue. But why? What is wrong with this? Why can't I? The Mufti recalls being asked, once, what is so wrong with eating pork, what is so big about a pig. And the answer is the answer Musa lived: the moment you know a thing is a command, or a prohibition, from Allah, you surrender. Throw it, Allah said, and Musa did not say but why should I, ya Allah. He threw it. And because he obeyed before he understood, he was

the one standing on blessed ground with two miracles in his hands.

Open my chest, ease my task, loosen my tongue

Now comes the command that would have stopped any heart in the world.

Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed [i.e., tyrannized]."

QUR'AN 20:24

One man, alone, sent to the most powerful tyrant of the age. And not just any land, but Egypt, the place Musa had fled as a hunted man, where soldiers still remembered the death he had caused, where the throne claimed divinity for itself and crushed an entire people under its weight. Mufti Menk lets us feel the size of it: one man, sent to confront a superpower, with a death still hanging over his head and the fear of arrest still in his chest. What must a person feel, the Mufti asks, hearing that, were it not for the reassurance of Allah?

And Musa does not refuse. Not for an instant. He does not say it is too much, or find me someone else, or let this cup pass. He answers, instead, with a du'a, and it is among the most beloved supplications in the entire Qur'an.

[Moses] said, "My Lord, expand [i.e., relax] for me my breast [with assurance] And ease for me my task And untie the knot from my tongue That they may understand my speech.

QUR'AN 20:25-28

Open my chest wide enough to carry this. Make the hard thing light. Loosen the words on my tongue so they land, so the people I am sent to can actually understand what I say. Mufti Menk teaches this as the du'a we still reach for, to this very day, whenever we want Allah to make any affair of ours easy: the memorisation of the Qur'an, an exam, a conversation we are dreading, anything we are straining toward. Rabbi-shrah li sadri, wa yassir li amri, wahlul uqdatan min lisani, yafqahu qawli. There is no harm in saying these very words, the Mufti says, and no harm in repeating them with the belief that if Allah heard them once on a mountain and answered them, why on earth would He not answer them again?

But Musa is not finished, and what he asks for next is the part most of us would never think to ask for. Not just help. A helper. By name.

And appoint for me a minister [i.e., assistant] from my family - Aaron, my brother.

QUR'AN 20:29-30

Appoint for me a minister from my own family: Harun, my brother. Strengthen me through him. Let him share my task, that together we may glorify You much and remember You much. Musa knew his brother was the more eloquent speaker, more fluent of tongue, and he wanted that strength standing beside him before the throne of Pharaoh, so that the message would reach further and land harder. And look closely at the shape of the request, because Mufti Menk does. Musa did not first go and find Harun and ask whether he was willing. He did not consult his brother, weigh it, check the man's availability, and then bring the plan to Allah. He turned straight to Allah and asked Him for Harun,

trusting that the One who made them both could arrange it. This is the believer's instinct: when the task is too big, the first move is not to call a friend. It is to call on Allah, and ask Him for the friend.

Go, both of you, and speak gently

Allah answers every part of it. Not most of it. Every part, at once.

[Allāh] said, "You have been granted your request, O Moses.

QUR'AN 20:36

You have been granted your request, Musa. The chest, the ease, the tongue, the brother, all of it, given. Harun is made a prophet alongside him. Allah braces Musa's strength with his brother's and grants the two of them an authority Pharaoh's hands cannot reach, so that the murder Musa feared would not be the end of him. Mufti Menk pauses on the sheer beauty of this, and credits a judgement that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself made: of all people, Musa did the single greatest favour a man ever did his own brother. He asked Allah to make Harun a prophet, and Harun became one. There is no gift like that to give another human being. May Allah, the Mufti prays, grant us families like that, the kind who push us toward Him instead of pulling us back, who, when one of us turns toward Allah, do not mock or discourage but help us run. Musa knew his family would support him in obeying Allah, and so he asked for his brother by name, and his brother was raised to prophethood beside him.

Then comes the instruction that should reorder the way we speak to anyone at all.

Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed. And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allāh]."

QUR'AN 20:43-44

Go, the two of you, to Pharaoh, and speak to him with gentle speech, so that perhaps he may be reminded, or may come to fear. Gentle words. Soft, kind, polite words. To Pharaoh. To the man who stood before his people and claimed to be god, who enslaved the children of Israel and slaughtered their sons, who was, on every measure, the worst tyrant of his age. And Mufti Menk lays the logic out as plainly as it can be laid: there is no one you will ever speak to, on the whole of the earth, who is worse than Pharaoh. And there is no one among us who is better than Musa, peace be upon him. So if Musa, the greater man, was sent to Pharaoh, the worse man, with soft words on his tongue, then who exactly do we imagine we are entitled to be harsh with, when we go out to call people back to Allah? The errand was clear, too: tell Pharaoh to release the children of Israel, the descendants of Yaqub and of Yusuf, peace be upon them, and to stop his oppression. But the manner of it, even with him, even there, was gentleness. Persevere, the Mufti says, choose your words well, use every good method, and keep calling, kindly. That, and not insult, is da'wah.

The same call, kept in Juz Amma

This same night on the mountain is told again elsewhere in the Qur'an, far shorter, distilled almost to its bones, in a surah many of us already carry in prayer, near the very end of the Book.

Has there reached you the story of Moses? - When his Lord called to him in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā, "Go to

Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed. And say to him, 'Would you [be willing to] purify yourself And let me guide you to your Lord so you would fear [Him]?'"

QUR'AN 79:15-19

The same valley, Tuwa. The same command, go to Pharaoh, he has transgressed. The same tyrant, and even the same gentleness, framed now as an open invitation held out to the worst of men: would you be willing to purify yourself, and let me guide you to your Lord? Surah an-Naziat is in Juz Amma, the last part of the Qur'an, the part most of us memorise first and recite most often. Which means that when you reach an-Naziat in your salah, you are standing, in your own prayer, on this exact mountain. The fire on Tur is closer to you than you think. It is folded into the surahs on your tongue.

And the line runs straight from that mountain to the cave of Hira. Years later, on a different mountain above a different city, another man would sit alone and be startled by a voice he could not place, a presence that gripped him and said, read. And he too would come down the mountain trembling, terrified that the task was far too large for one human being to carry. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the final prophet, rehearsed in that cave what Musa lived on Tur: the sudden voice, the weight that seems unbearable, the reassurance from the One who chooses His messengers and never sends them alone. Every prophet who was ever sent felt the weight Musa felt that night. And every one of them was carried by the same Lord who answered, you have been granted your request. The fire on the mountain and the light in the cave are two scenes of one unbroken story, the long chain of prophets all walking, across the centuries, toward him ﷺ, the last of them.

What Musa asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this night as a wonder safely sealed in the past, a story of fire and serpents and a voice in the dark, and to leave it there, admired and untouched. That would be to miss the question it puts to us. Strip the night down to what actually happened in the heart of one man, and you will find it asking you four things, and none of them stay in the past.

He walked toward the light. He was lost, and cold, and unsure of his road, and when Allah sent up a flame on the mountain, he did not sit and wait for it to come to him. He got up, in the dark, and climbed toward it. That is the first thing your faith is asked. Guidance is sent to you constantly, in a reminder, a verse, a Friday khutbah, a word that lands at exactly the moment you needed it, but it does not pour itself into you while you sit still. You have to recognise it, and you have to move. Most of us are lost less because the light is absent than because we will not get up and walk to it.

He obeyed before he understood. Throw it down, Allah said, and the staff was on the ground before Musa had any idea it would become a serpent. He did not bargain, did not demand the wisdom first, did not ask why. He knew the command was from his Lord, and that was the whole of his reasoning. We do the reverse: we hear an instruction from Allah and our first word is but why, and we hold our obedience hostage until the wisdom satisfies us. Musa's two miracles came after his surrender, not before it. Your faith is asked whether you can throw the staff down on the strength of who is asking, and trust that the wisdom will arrive in its time.

He asked Allah before the hard thing, and he asked Him in words. Sent to the tyrant of the age, with a death on his record and an

empire in his path, Musa did not freeze and he did not run. He turned to Allah and made du'a: open my chest, ease my task, loosen my tongue. This is the gift hidden in his story for you, and Mufti Menk hands it over directly. Whatever you are dreading, whatever feels far too large for one person, that conversation, that exam, that page of Qur'an you cannot seem to hold, you have the very words a prophet used on the night his task was impossible. Rabbi-shrah li sadri, wa yassir li amri. Allah answered them once. Say them with the certainty that He can answer them again.

And he asked for a helper, by name, and was not ashamed to. He did not pretend he could carry it alone. He asked Allah, out loud, for his brother beside him, and Allah gave him a prophet for a partner. It is not weakness to ask for support in obeying Allah; it is wisdom, and it may be the kindest thing you ever do for another person. Pray for the people who will hold you up. Ask Allah, by name, for the ones who will pull you toward Him. And then turn around and be that person for someone else, the way Harun was for Musa, the way Musa, in asking, was for Harun.

So take one thing down from this mountain into your ordinary days. The next time you find yourself lost in the dark, walk toward the light instead of waiting for it. The next time Allah asks something of you that you do not yet understand, throw the staff down on the strength of who is asking. And the next time a task rises up in front of you too big to face, do not run from it and do not freeze before it. Stand still, and say the words Musa said when he was one man sent against an empire: my Lord, expand for me my chest, and ease for me my task, and untie the knot from my tongue, that they may understand my speech, and place beside me one who will help me carry it. As Allah answered Musa on the mountain, may He answer us. And may He send His peace

upon Musa, peace be upon him, who took off his sandals on blessed ground and obeyed before he understood, and upon the last of the prophets, Muhammad ﷺ, who heard his own Lord call him on a mountain and came down to carry the whole weight of the message to us.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 20 (Musa and Harun, part 2). Qur'an: Sahih International (28:29; 20:11-12, 20:14-15, 20:17-22, 20:24-30, 20:36, 20:43-44; 79:15-19), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.

Musa and Harun, part 3

The magicians who believed in an instant, and the king who believed too late

Two men stand at the two ends of this day, and the strange thing about them, the thing the whole episode turns on, is that they say the exact same words. One of them is a magician who, an hour earlier, had no faith at all. The other is a king who has spent his whole life calling himself a god. The magician says the words while a sword is being promised for his neck, and dies that afternoon a believer. The king says them with seawater already closing over his mouth, and they are thrown back in his face. Same sentence. The only difference between heaven accepting it and heaven refusing it is when it was spoken: one mouth said it while it still could, and the other waited until it no longer counted.

Hold those two men side by side as the story moves, because Mufti Menk keeps coming back to them, and by the end of the day you will understand that this is not really a story about Pharaoh at all. It is a story about timing, and the timing it is asking about is yours.

He knew exactly who Musa was

A question had been hanging over the whole confrontation, and Mufti Menk answers it before anything else, because everything that follows leans on the answer. When Musa, peace be upon him, walked back into the palace with the message, leave the

Children of Israel, you are not a god, the Lord is the One who made the heavens and the earth, did Pharaoh recognise him? Did the king look at the prophet and see the baby who had floated to his own door, the boy raised inside his own walls?

Of course he did. He knew him at once. And so Pharaoh reaches, immediately, for the oldest weapon a certain kind of powerful man keeps within reach. Not an argument. A favour.

[Pharaoh] said, "Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?"

QUR'AN 26:18

Listen to what is happening underneath the words, because Mufti Menk lingers here, and the move is so familiar it should make you uncomfortable. Pharaoh is not addressing the message. He is changing the subject to the debt. Didn't we raise you? Didn't you live among us for years? You did that thing, you ran, and now you have the nerve to come back and lecture me. The whole point of the sentence is to make Musa go quiet, to bury a crime under an old kindness and dare the prophet to say a word.

It is, Mufti Menk says, a Pharaonic attitude, and you do not have to look as far as Egypt to find it. A parent, a relative, anyone who has ever done you a good turn, can learn to hold that good turn over your head like a bill they will never actually let you pay off. I fed you. I clothed you. I sent you to school. So who are you to tell me I am wrong? The kindness was real, and that is exactly what makes the weapon work, because gratitude is real too, and a decent person feels it. Musa feels it. He does not deny the single favour. But he refuses to let one favour purchase his silence in front of an enormous wrong, and so he answers the boast with the crime it was hiding behind.

And is this a favour of which you remind me - that you have enslaved the Children of Israel?"

QUR'AN 26:22

There it is, the whole thing turned inside out in a sentence. You raised one child in your house, and you are using that one child to wave away the chains on an entire nation. You kept me, and meanwhile you enslaved a people. The favour does not cancel the crime; the crime swallows the favour.

And Mufti Menk catches the mirror in this, which is too sharp to miss. The night before, on the mountain, Allah had reminded Musa of His own favour, that He had bestowed upon him favour after favour, again and again, a baby drawn from the river and a man saved and a prophet sent. Now Pharaoh stands in front of that same man claiming the very same word, favour, favour, as if he too were a small god dispensing blessings on whomever he chose. The same claim from two mouths, and they could not be further apart. One mouth is telling the truth about a mercy that was real. The other is a man enslaving human beings and calling it generosity. This is the whole disease of the episode in miniature: a creature who has confused himself with the Creator, and cannot any longer tell his own cruelty from a gift.

Here is the lesson Mufti Menk pulls straight out of it, and it is one to take home. Acknowledge the good that is done to you, always; ingratitude is its own sickness, and the Qur'an even names this refusal to acknowledge a gift with the same root it uses for disbelief. But never let the good done to you frighten you into silence when the one who did it is going wrong. Part of true gratitude, he says, is precisely that you care enough to say it, gently, with full respect: I have worked for you for years, and because I do not want to see you destroyed, I have to tell you that

what you are doing here is dangerous. Do not do it. To stay quiet in the face of a wrong because someone once helped you is not loyalty. It is a Pharaonic bargain, and Musa would not take it.

Threaten them with everything, they will not take it back

Carry the scene back a single step, to the men who had been standing in this same hall not long before. The magicians. They had been Pharaoh's own champions, the finest sorcerers in the kingdom, summoned for one purpose: to humiliate this shepherd in public and put the people's fear back where it belonged. They threw their ropes and their staffs, and the ground crawled with what looked like serpents. And then Musa's staff came down and swallowed the whole illusion whole, and in that instant the magicians, who of all people knew exactly where magic ends, saw that this was no magic at all. They went down into prostration. They believed, Mufti Menk says, within split minutes, faster than anyone else in the entire story.

Pharaoh is left holding nothing but his rage, so he reaches, as tyrants always reach when the argument is lost, for terror. He swears he will cut off their hands and their feet on opposite sides. He will crucify them. He will hang their bodies up as a lesson to anyone else who thinks of changing sides. And here is the thing that should stop you where you stand. These men, who one hour ago had no faith at all, who had come into that hall to win prizes from the king, do not bargain. They do not flinch. They tell him, plainly, to do whatever he wants:

You can only reach us in this life. Past this life there is an Allah, a real Lord in supreme control, and He will take you to task as surely as you are taking us to task now. Their faith was not yet a single day old, and it was already the most solid thing in the

room. That very afternoon, Mufti Menk notes, they died for it, believers, martyrs, their iman younger than the day itself.

This is the lesson he draws out and underlines, and it is the spine of the whole chapter: when belief in Allah is solid, nothing can shake you. Not a stick. Not a brick. Not a person. Not an army. The magicians had carried that belief for one hour and it was already unbreakable. And set against it, look at Pharaoh, who had a throne, an empire, an army, temples, gods carved with his own name, every visible thing a man could want, and whose nerve was already gone. That contrast is the heart of it. The one with everything was terrified, and the ones with nothing but an hour of faith were calm enough to face crucifixion without blinking.

The fear hiding under the crown

You can hear the fear leak out of Pharaoh in his own voice, and Mufti Menk asks you to read the verse slowly, because the entire pretence collapses inside it. When his chiefs press him, deal with this man, sort him out, you cannot let him carry on, Pharaoh reaches for the worst threat of all, killing the prophet himself.

And Pharaoh said, "Let me kill Moses and let him call upon his Lord. Indeed, I fear that he will change your religion or that he will cause corruption in the land."

QUR'AN 40:26

Read it again and watch the mask slip. Here is a man who has told an entire nation that he is their god, admitting out loud, in front of them, that he is afraid. I fear he will change your religion. I fear he will spread corruption. A god does not fear. A god is not nervous that one shepherd with a wooden staff might empty his temples and turn his worshippers' heads. The swagger is right

there on the surface, let me kill him, let him call his Lord to come and save him, let us see who saves him, and underneath it is a small, frightened man who has understood, somewhere he will not say aloud, that the people might stop worshipping him. The whole sentence is a confession dressed up as a threat.

And his chiefs feed the fire, the way cronies always do. They come to their boss and they point: that one, deal with him, this one, you need to do something. Mufti Menk says you can fit this into ordinary life without any effort at all. People who want someone crushed rarely do the crushing with their own hands; they whisper into the ear of the one who has the power, again and again, until he moves and does the harm for them and carries the blame for it too. It is a Pharaonic pattern, and it is alive in every place where someone uses another person's hand to do their dirty work. The chiefs sharpen the king's fear into policy, and the killing of the Children of Israel's sons, which had haunted the very start of Musa's life, begins again in his old age.

Sign after sign, and a heart that would not bend

So Allah began to take Egypt apart. Gently at first, Mufti Menk stresses, deliberately gently, to prove beyond any possible doubt who was really in charge of this land and its river. The first sign was a drought and a failing of the crops.

And We certainly seized the people of Pharaoh with years of famine and a deficiency in fruits that perhaps they would be reminded.

QUR'AN 7:130

Picture it the way he paints it. The Nile is right there, the greatest river the ancient world knew, and Egypt has never in living

memory known real hunger. And the man who swears he is the lord of those waters suddenly cannot feed his own court. The luxury thins. The granaries empty. His own cronies start to go without. Sign one, and notice that it was a mercy, a small jolt, a chance to remember, sent before anything heavier fell. Allah does not begin with the sea. He begins with a quiet warning and a door left open.

When the drought did not move them, the signs came harder, and the Qur'an names five of them in a single sweeping verse.

So We sent upon them the flood and locusts and lice and frogs and blood as distinct signs, but they were arrogant and were a criminal people.

QUR'AN 7:133

Take them one at a time, the way Egypt had to. First a flood, water turned from servant to enemy. Then locusts, not a swarm but billions of them, so thick, Mufti Menk says, that they blotted out the sun and turned the day to a kind of darkness, on the food, on the walls, in the air, everywhere the eye fell. Then lice, in the bedding and the clothing and the skin, a torment with no dignity in it. Then frogs, climbing out of the blessed river onto every plate and into every bed, squeezing underfoot, impossible to be rid of. Then blood: water lifted from the Nile turning to blood in the bucket between the river and the lip. The very river Pharaoh had boasted he owned, the river beneath whose flow he had said all his goodness came, now refusing to give him a single clean drink. Each sign was bigger than the one before it. Mufti Menk pauses on the blood and lets the irony land: you said you were the god of these rivers, that all this bounty was from you; very well, what about now, when the bucket comes up red, where did all your power go?

And here he catches the detail that exposes the whole heart of these people, the detail that turns the chapter from a story about Egypt into a story about us. Every single time a plague struck, they ran to Musa.

And when the punishment descended upon them, they said, "O Moses, invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised you. If you [can] remove the punishment from us, we will surely believe you, and we will send with you the Children of Israel."

QUR'AN 7:134

Two promises, every time: we will believe, and we will free your people. Just lift it. And Musa would raise his hands, and the plague would lift, and the moment the air cleared and they could breathe again, they broke their word. Not once. Again and again, sign after sign, the same begging in the dark and the same betrayal in the morning. When ease returned they claimed it as their own due, and when disaster came they blamed Musa and his people for it as a kind of bad luck that had been brought down on them.

But when good [i.e., provision] came to them, they said, "This is ours [by right]." And if a bad [condition] struck them, they saw an evil omen in Moses and those with him. Unquestionably, their fortune is with Allāh, but most of them do not know.

QUR'AN 7:131

And this, Mufti Menk says, this exact pattern, is the disease in you and me, only a matter of degree milder. O Allah, let me pass this exam and I will never miss a prayer again, and the morning the result comes through, Fajr is asleep in the bed. The plane hits

turbulence and your sincerity climbs to a hundred percent in a heartbeat, every promise on your lips, and the wheels touch the runway and your iman lands with them. The signs come to us too, he warns, the accident, the diagnosis, the loss, the death of someone close, all of them messages, and we make the same bargain at the bottom and forget it at the top. The distance between us and Pharaoh's court is real, but it is a distance of degree, not of kind, and the only cure is to keep the promise when the danger is gone, when keeping it is hard and unwitnessed and no longer feels urgent.

One believer, hiding in Pharaoh's own house

Inside Pharaoh's own household, all this while, there was a man who had believed in Musa and told no one. He kept it hidden. He made his faith apparent to nobody, walked the corridors of the palace with the truth folded silently inside him, known to him and to Allah and to no one else. And Allah gave that quiet man a whole surah of the Qur'an, Ghafir, named for the moment he finally could not stay silent any longer. When the talk of killing Musa reached its height, when the king and his chiefs were one decision away from the prophet's blood, this concealed believer stood up and reasoned with the entire court in a clean, devastating logic.

And a believing man from the family of Pharaoh who concealed his faith said, "Do you kill a man [merely] because he says, 'My Lord is Allāh' while he has brought you clear proofs from your Lord? And if he should be lying, then upon him is [the consequence of] his lie; but if he should be truthful, there will strike you some of what he promises you. Indeed, Allāh does not guide one who is a transgressor and a liar.

QUR'AN 40:28

Follow the argument, because it is almost mathematical. Why would you kill a man simply for saying my Lord is Allah, when he has brought you clear proof? Think it through to the end. Either he is lying or he is telling the truth. If he is lying, then his lie falls on his own head and harms none of you; leave him, and time will undo him. But if he is telling the truth, then at least some of what he warns you of is going to land on you, and killing the warner will not stop the warning from coming true. So in both cases, leaving him alone is the safe choice. Why on earth reach for blood? It is the kind of cool, exposed reasoning that only a brave man can manage when he is the only one in the room who holds it.

And he went further, and named the graveyards of history out loud.

And he who believed said, "O my people, indeed I fear for you [a fate] like the day of the companies -

QUR'AN 40:30

Like the custom of the people of Noah and of 'Aad and Thamūd and those after them. And Allāh wants no injustice for [His] servants.

QUR'AN 40:31

Remember what happened, he is telling them, to the people of Nuh, and Aad, and Thamud, nations stronger than you who called their prophets liars and were wiped from the earth for it. He puts the whole museum of ruined cities in front of a court that thinks itself untouchable. And then, most piercing of all, he turns the choice around so they can see its shape:

And O my people, how is it that I invite you to salvation while you invite me to the Fire?

QUR'AN 40:41

You invite me to disbelieve in Allāh and associate with Him that of which I have no knowledge, and I invite you to the Exalted in Might, the Perpetual Forgiver.

QUR'AN 40:42

This, Mufti Menk says, is exactly the line you are meant to draw out of him. Here is one man against an entire court, justice with nobody at all standing beside it, and he stands anyway. That is the whole point. When you can see truth on one side and falsehood on the other, you take truth's side even if you are the only soul on it, even if the whole community is gathered on the other bank and you stand alone. And then the proof that this is not a small or empty thing, the proof that Allah was watching the lonely stand the entire time: when the punishment finally came, Allah saved this man among the saved. This is the Qur'an's settled pattern, Mufti Menk reminds us, and it should make us braver. Those who forbade the evil, who spoke up and warned, are rescued first when the reckoning falls. It is when everyone stays silent and lets the wrong pass unchallenged that the punishment comes down wholesale, on all of them together. The bare minimum that faith asks, he says, is that your heart at least hates the wrong it sees; and above that minimum, where you can, you speak.

Two prophets, one du'a, and an answer in the dual

For all of this, Mufti Menk points out something easy to miss: up to this moment, Musa had not once prayed against Pharaoh. Every du'a until now had been a du'a of mercy. O Allah, these

people are suffering, lift it from them, and Allah lifted it. Again and again the prophet had asked for the plague to be taken away from the very people trying to kill him, and again and again it was taken away. So why does a prophet, a man sent precisely to call this king back, finally turn and pray for that king's wealth to be obliterated and his heart to be sealed shut against belief forever?

Because the signs had been endless and loud and merciful, and every one of them had been thrown back in Allah's face. There comes a point, Mufti Menk says, when a heart has refused so completely, so many times, that the most merciful thing left in the world is for the matter to be brought to its end. And so Musa raises his hands.

And Moses said, "Our Lord, indeed You have given Pharaoh and his establishment splendor and wealth in the worldly life, our Lord, that they may lead [men] astray from Your way. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful punishment."

QUR'AN 10:88

You gave them splendour and wealth, and they spent it dragging people off Your path; so wipe out the wealth, and seal the hearts, for these are hearts that will not believe until they see the punishment with their own eyes. It is a heavy prayer, and only a prophet who had exhausted every gentler road had the standing to make it.

And here is the detail Mufti Menk will not let pass, because a whole quiet ruling hides inside it. Standing beside Musa as he prayed was his brother, Harun, peace be upon him, and Harun said nothing the whole time except one word: ameen. And look at how Allah answers.

[Allāh] said, "Your supplication has been answered." So remain on a right course and follow not the way of those who do not know."

QUR'AN 10:89

Your supplication, the two of you. The reply comes in the dual, addressed to both men, though only one of them spoke the words of the du'a and the other only said ameen. From this, Mufti Menk draws a small and beautiful thing to carry: when one person makes a du'a and another says ameen, that ameen is itself a du'a. It means, O my Lord, answer this, I want it too, I am asking for the very same thing. Harun said one word, and Allah counted him a full partner in the asking and named them both when He granted it. There is a mercy in that worth remembering the next time you stand behind someone praying and have nothing to add but your ameen.

The night march and the sea like two mountains

Then the word came to leave.

And We inspired to Moses, "Travel by night with My servants; indeed, you will be pursued."

QUR'AN 26:52

Quietly, in the dark, Musa moved an entire enslaved people out of Egypt. Leave everything, just go, where are we going, just go. Some of the historians, Mufti Menk relays, and he keeps it clearly as their estimate, put the number near six hundred thousand, more than half a million souls walking out into the night with whatever they could carry. Pharaoh got the news and meant to follow, but he was too proud, Mufti Menk notes with a touch of irony, to chase through the dark; he was no god of the moon to

summon light for the road, so he waited for the morning and for his chariots, faster than any column of people on foot, and closed the gap fast.

They reached the sea as the sun came up, and the trap looked perfect, sealed on every side. Water in front of them. Mountains hemming them in to the left and the right. And behind them, rising on the morning air, the dust of Pharaoh's army. The people cried out the obvious.

And when the two companies saw one another, the companions of Moses said, "Indeed, we are to be overtaken!"

QUR'AN 26:61

And Musa, calm the way he had been calm through the whole confrontation, calm the way only a man utterly certain of his Lord can be, answered with the sentence that is the soul of the whole crossing:

[Moses] said, "No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me."

QUR'AN 26:62

No. Never. My Lord is with me, and He will guide me. He did not yet know how. The sea had not yet moved. There was no visible road. And he said it anyway, because his certainty was never in the road; it was in the One who could make a road. Then the command came.

Then We inspired to Moses, "Strike with your staff the sea," and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain.

He struck the water, and it split, and every part of it stood up like a great towering mountain, cliffs of standing sea to the left and the right and the bed of the deep laid bare and open between them. And Allah did one more mercy in the detail of it, the thing that turns a terror into a passage: He made the floor of the sea dry.

And We had inspired to Moses, "Travel by night with My servants and strike for them a dry path through the sea; you will not fear being overtaken [by Pharaoh] nor be afraid [of drowning]."

QUR'AN 20:77

Not a wet road, not mud that would swallow a foot or a wheel, but solid, dry ground, so that they would fear neither being overtaken from behind nor drowning beneath. More than half a million people walked the floor of the sea between two walls of water and came up safe on the far shore. And here Mufti Menk keeps his caveats clean, in the way the gold standard of this whole series asks of us: where exactly this sea was, which body of water it was, precisely how the walls stood, these are details the Qur'an does not press, and we do not need a single one of them to feel the full weight of what happened. We are not told, so we do not invent. What matters is not the map. What matters is the One who split it at the strike of a stick.

Faith with the water at his throat

Pharaoh reached the open road and his pride read it as a gift made for him. It was not, Mufti Menk says, and the line is the whole hinge of the day: that road was opened to destroy him, not

to save him. He drove his army down into the dry channel after them, between the standing mountains of water, and when his soldiers reached the middle of the sea, by the will of Allah the walls began to fall.

So Pharaoh pursued them with his soldiers, and there covered them from the sea that which covered them,

QUR'AN 20:78

And Pharaoh led his people astray and did not guide [them].

QUR'AN 20:79

Now, at last, the small frightened man meets the truth he had spent his entire life denying. The water is at his throat, his army vanishing in front of his eyes, the kingdom and the army and the carved gods all worth nothing in the space of a breath, and he gasps it out.

And We took the Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his soldiers pursued them in tyranny and enmity until, when drowning overtook him, he said, "I believe that there is no deity except that in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of the Muslims."

QUR'AN 10:90

Look at the words. They are the same words the magicians said. They are very nearly the same words you say in your own prayer. There is no god but the One the Children of Israel believe in, and I am of those who submit. The right creed, the true creed, spoken at last by the mouth that fought it the longest. And the answer from the heavens is immediate, and it is terrible.

Now? And you had disobeyed [Him] before and were of the corrupters?

QUR'AN 10:91

Now? After a lifetime of denial, after every sign, after the drought and the flood and the locusts and the blood, now, with the water in your mouth, now you find your faith? Mufti Menk says this single verse was revealed for every one of us, not for a dead king. The door of repentance, he says, is held open your whole life long, wide and unlatched, no matter what you have done; Allah turns no sincere returner away. But it shuts at one moment, and only one: when death is actually at the throat, when the soul has already begun to leave the body, that is the moment the door closes. Faith offered then is faith offered one breath after the deadline. Pharaoh had the door open his entire life and walked past it every single day, and reached for it only when his hand could no longer touch it.

And then the strangest mercy of the whole episode, a mercy aimed not at Pharaoh at all but at us. The sea that swallowed him spat his body back out onto the shore.

So today We will save you in body that you may be to those who succeed you a sign. And indeed, many among the people, of Our signs, are heedless.

QUR'AN 10:92

The tyrant who screamed that he was the lord of the worlds, preserved, his lifeless body tossed up onto the sand, so that anyone who comes after him and feels the same swelling sense of being untouchable can look at the carcass of a man who said the very same thing, and know exactly how it ends. Mufti Menk reflects that the preserving served two ends at once: a sign for

all the generations to come, and a settling of doubt for that generation itself, so that any of the Children of Israel who half-feared the king might yet climb out of the water could see his corpse on the shore and know, finally, that it was over. And the verse closes on the ache that runs through this entire pillar like a thread: many people, even now, are heedless of Our signs. They file past the preserved body taking photographs, Mufti Menk says, posing and grinning and excited, and miss the single reason it was kept. We have the warning laid out in front of us, and we walk past it to take a picture with it.

What Musa's day asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this day as a great adventure, the duel and the plagues and the sea standing up in two walls, and to leave it there, sealed safely in the past as the most cinematic thing in scripture. That would be to walk past the body taking photographs. Strip the day down to its bones, and what is left is a single question, put to you twice, by two men who said the same words.

Believe while the believing still counts. The magicians had their faith for one hour, and it was enough to carry them calmly to crucifixion; Pharaoh had his whole life, and reached for faith only when it could buy him nothing. The terror at the centre of his end is not the water. It is the timing. Allah held the door of repentance open the entire length of that man's life, and shut it only when the soul was already at the throat, and that is exactly the door He holds open for you right now, today, while you read this, with the latch still up. You are not at the sea. The water is not in your mouth. Everything Pharaoh would have given the world to have, another hour with the door still open, you are holding in your hands as an ordinary Tuesday. The only question the day asks is

whether you will use it now or wait, like he waited, until using it is no longer allowed.

And the day asks whether your faith can hold its shape under pressure, because that is the whole difference between the two men. The magicians, an hour old in their iman, were told they would be torn apart and crucified, and they answered, do what you want, you reach us only in this life, and there is an Allah beyond it. The king, with an empire behind him, fell apart at one shepherd and one staff and could not even keep up the lie that he was unafraid. When belief in Allah is genuinely solid, Mufti Menk says, nothing moves it, not a stick, not an army, not a threat, not a crowd; and when it is hollow, no throne in the world can steady the heart inside it. Ask honestly which of those two your own faith resembles when it is actually tested, when standing for the truth would cost you something and you would have to stand for it alone, the way the one believer in Pharaoh's court stood, with nobody beside him and Allah counting every second of it.

There is a quieter thread too, the one that should make you check your own ordinary days, because most of us are not Pharaoh in his cruelty but all of us are his court in its forgetfulness. Every plague, they begged and they promised, and every reprieve, they forgot, and Mufti Menk will not let us pretend that is a stranger's failing. O Allah, let me pass and I will never miss Fajr, and then Fajr sleeps. The turbulence ends and so does the sincerity. The signs come to us as surely as they came to Egypt, gentler and more private, and the test is never the promise we make at the bottom of the fear; it is whether we keep it once we are safe and the keeping is hard and nobody is watching. And one more, small and sharp: never let a kindness done to you, or a kindness you have done to someone else, become the thing that buys silence in the face of a wrong. Musa would not be quieted

by the palace that raised him, and we should not be quieted by the favours we owe or are owed. Acknowledge the good, fully, and then say the true thing anyway, gently, because that is what gratitude actually looks like.

The line runs straight from this sea to the One who would later recite it. Long after Egypt, in the surahs the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would carry into the dark of the Makkan years, Allah recalled this very drowning and held it up as the warning. He commanded Musa to go to Pharaoh because the tyrant had transgressed and to ask him, gently, would you be willing to purify yourself; the king denied and turned his back and gathered his people and said, I am your most exalted lord; and so Allah seized him in exemplary punishment for the last and the first, and the verse closes, indeed in that is a lesson for whoever would fear (Qur'an 79:17-26). That is the use the Qur'an itself makes of Pharaoh: not a tale of a dead king, but a lesson for whoever would fear, which means a lesson for you. And the Prophet ﷺ rehearsed Musa's own composure in his own life: hunted out of his city, hidden in a cave with the enemy's feet at the mouth of it, he said what Musa said at the shore, do not grieve, Allah is with us, the same unshakable certainty that there is a road even when no road can be seen. To believe in Musa, and in every prophet, is itself an article of your iman, a thing you affirm in your own creed, and the day asks you to do with that belief what the magicians did and what Pharaoh refused to do: act on it while it still counts.

So take one thing from this day down into your unremarkable hours. Do not wait for the sea to close. Settle the account with Allah now, while the door is open and the water is nowhere near your throat, while faith is still a choice you are free to make and not a confession dragged out of you too late. Keep the promise you made in the turbulence after the plane has landed. Stand for

the true thing once, gently, even if you stand for it alone. And refuse, when your own end comes, to be the man who held the right words in his mouth his whole life and only said them when they could no longer be heard. May Allah, who split the sea at the strike of a staff and answered the du'a of Musa and Harun together, peace be upon them, keep our hearts soft while softening still saves us, gather us with the ones who believed before the deadline and not after it, and let our last words be words of faith said while they still count, in the company of His prophets and His final Messenger ﷺ. Ameen.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 21: Musa and Harun, part 3. Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (26:18, 26:22, 40:26, 40:28, 40:30-31, 40:41-42, 7:130, 7:131, 7:133, 7:134, 10:88, 10:89, 26:52, 26:61-63, 20:77, 20:78-79, 10:90, 10:91, 10:92, 79:17-26), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry more than one narration, Mufti Menk's own framing and caveats have been kept.

Musa and the Children of Israel, part I

Saved on Monday, asking for an idol by Tuesday

The sea had closed over Pharaoh. The man who had killed their sons and enslaved their fathers and called himself a god to their faces was gone, swallowed whole between two walls of water, and the Children of Israel were standing alive on the far shore, soaked and free, having walked across the floor of an ocean on dry ground while their tyrant and his chariots drowned behind them. You would think a people could not forget a morning like that. You would think it would last them a lifetime, that they would speak of it to their grandchildren, that nothing the world could do to them afterward would ever shake a faith bought at such a price.

It did not last them a week.

This is the strangest stretch of the whole story of Musa, peace be upon him, and Mufti Menk takes us into it carefully, because it is not the part most of us expect. We expect the duel with the tyrant, the staff that became a serpent, the parting of the sea, and we have just lived through all of that. But the Qur'an does not stop there. It walks straight on into something harder to watch: not a prophet's battle with an empire, but his long, grieving struggle with the very people he had been sent to save. A nation handed more miracles than any nation before them, and a heart

that kept slipping back, again and again, to the very thing it had just been rescued from.

Saved at dawn, asking for an idol by noon

They had barely dried off. On the road, still within sight of the water that had drowned their enemy, they passed a people who were bent over a row of idols, tending them, devoting themselves to them, and something in the crowd of the Children of Israel lit up. They came to Musa with a request, and the Qur'an preserves it word for word so that no generation can pretend it did not happen.

And We took the Children of Israel across the sea; then they came upon a people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They [the Children of Israel] said, "O Moses, make for us a god just as they have gods." He said, "Indeed, you are a people behaving ignorantly.

QUR'AN 7:138

Mufti Menk will not let that sentence slip past quietly, and neither should you. These were the people who, moments earlier, had watched the One God split a sea down the middle and drown an entire empire to set them free. The water was still in their clothes. And the first thing the freedom did, the very first instinct it released in them, was the urge to copy the strangers by the roadside. Make us a god like theirs. Look at how content they seem. Look how good it appears. The lesson he draws out of it is one of the plainest and most useful in the whole lecture: not everything you see happening around you is correct. What looks good is not always good. The crowd is not your evidence, and a thing is not true because the people doing it look like they are enjoying it.

Musa's answer is blunt to the point of severity. You are a people who simply do not understand. He reminds them of what Allah has just done, of the family of Pharaoh who slaughtered their boys, of how that whole nightmare ended only moments ago. And here Mufti Menk reaches forward across the centuries, because this exact weakness, the pull to belong, to do what the room is doing, shadowed even the best nation that ever walked the earth. On an early expedition, some of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ passed a tree that the pagans used to hang their weapons on for blessing and good fortune, a tree they called by a name that meant the place where things are hung. And the companions, new in their faith, asked him ﷺ to give them a tree like it. He answered them with a shudder of recognition: this was the very thing the people of Musa had said, make us a god as they have gods. The pull is older than Israel and as near as your own two hands. Faith, in the end, is knowing the difference between what looks alive and what is actually true.

Water from a rock, food from the open sky

Now they were in raw desert. No Egypt behind them, no great river, no shade, only bare land under a hard sun, and they were thirsty. They came to Musa and asked him to pray. And before you read what happened, Mufti Menk asks you to remember one thing about the world these people came from. Egypt was the world capital of magic; they had grown up among illusions, and spectacle did not impress them, because they had seen tricks all their lives. It was precisely the magicians of Egypt, the cream of the sorcerers, who had been the first to believe in Musa, because they alone knew the gap between an illusion and a sign. A magician can make a spring look like it is gushing. He cannot make you drink from it.

So when Musa was told to take the same staff that had parted the sea and strike a rock, and twelve springs burst out of it, this was no conjurer's trick to a people who knew conjuring. It was water you could cup in your hands.

And [recall] when Moses prayed for water for his people, so We said, "Strike with your staff the stone." And there gushed forth from it twelve springs, and every people [i.e., tribe] knew its watering place. "Eat and drink from the provision of Allāh, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption."

QUR'AN 2:60

Twelve springs, one for each of the twelve tribes descended from the twelve sons of Yaqub, peace be upon him, every family knowing exactly which water was theirs, no quarrelling, no crowding, the whole nation watered in a moment from a single stone in the wilderness. And when they were hungry, in a land with nothing growing in it, Allah fed them out of the empty sky.

And We shaded you with clouds and sent down to you manna and quails, [saying], "Eat from the good things with which We have provided you." And they wronged Us not - but they were [only] wronging themselves.

QUR'AN 2:57

A cloud spread above them like a roof against the desert sun, and down came al-mann and as-salwa, a sweet provision and a bird that some of the scholars name as the quail, descending on a people who had planted nothing and earned none of it. Eat of the good things, He told them, and be grateful. Mufti Menk asks you to read the closing words of that verse slowly, because they carry the weight of the whole chapter. They did not wrong Us, He

says, but they were wronging themselves. Every one of these favours was a rope thrown down from above, mercy let down to a people in a wasteland, and what they chose to do with it would decide everything. Allah, in His independence, lost nothing either way. The harm of ingratitude never reaches Him; it only ever falls back on the one who is ungrateful.

The proof of that came at once, with the command that should have been the easiest gift of all and became the hardest. Musa carried them an instruction from their Lord: enter the blessed land, the holy land, march in and do not turn back, and you will be made victorious over those who hold it. They would not go. These were people who had lived their whole lives under Pharaoh, hardened into a strange mixture of fear and stubbornness, frightened of everything and unwilling to believe anything, and beneath it all wanting the easy way. There are tyrants in that land, they told him, and we are not going in until they leave it. And they answered their own messenger with a line the Qur'an keeps as a permanent rebuke to cowardice: you and your Lord go and fight, the two of you, and we will sit right here. Mufti Menk pauses on the cruelty hidden in it. Notice that they said you and your Lord; they knew the signs came from Allah, they had seen it with their own eyes, and knowing exactly Whose command it was, they refused it anyway and made their messenger carry the refusal back to the One who had sent it. When we are called into an act of obedience, the lesson runs, we must enter it wholeheartedly or it is rejected. Allah has no need of our worship. We are the ones in need.

So the refusal carried its own punishment. The blessed land was made forbidden to them, not for a season but for forty years, and they were left to wander the wilderness the Arabic names at-tih, the land of bewilderment. Every morning for forty years they

would rise and set out to find a home, and every evening arrive back exactly where they had started, going nowhere, circling, fed all the while on the manna and the quails and the water that still came down even as Allah held them in their wandering. The sea was at their back and the city closed before them, and there was nothing left to do but walk in circles until a whole generation had died. When we do not hold fast to the gift Allah has placed in our hands, Mufti Menk warns, He may take it away. He reads a verse Allah addresses across the centuries to anyone who turns from His command: if you are going to turn away, we will substitute you with others who will not turn away. There is an Arabic proverb he sets beside it like a blade: give your brother a date, and if he refuses it, hand him a burning coal instead. The Children of Israel were offered the sweetest thing, a land prepared for them, and because they pushed it away, they were handed forty years of fire in its place. Allah is independent of us all. The loss, every time, is ours.

Thirty nights, then ten, and a brother left in charge

A freed people with no law is just a mob with good memories, and Musa knew it. As the wandering nation grew unruly and did as it pleased, he turned to his Lord and asked for guidance to govern them by, for laws and limits a nation could live inside. And he was called to the mountain.

And We made an appointment with Moses for thirty nights and perfected them by [the addition of] ten; so the term of his Lord was completed as forty nights. And Moses said to his brother Aaron, "Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters."

QUR'AN 7:142

Thirty nights of fasting and worship in seclusion, completed by ten more, forty nights in all, at the same spot on the mountain where Allah had first spoken to him at the burning bush. There he would receive the tablets, the commandments the Qur'an still carries within it to this day. Mufti Menk marks the honest seam in the story here, the kind of caveat that is the mark of a careful teacher: the precise chronological order of these desert events is not laid out for us in a single sequence in the books of history, and he will not pretend otherwise. One thing may have come slightly before another. We are not one hundred percent certain of the exact order. But every piece of it, he insists, is established in the Qur'an, and that is what makes it sure even where the timeline is not.

Before he climbed, Musa turned to the one man he trusted with a nation. Take my place among my people, he said to his brother Harun, peace be upon him, set things right, and do not follow the way of the corrupters. It is a striking warning to leave with a prophet. Why caution Harun, of all people, against the troublemakers? Because the troublemakers were strong. As they fled Egypt, some of the Children of Israel had carried off the gold of Pharaoh and his people, armfuls of jewellery and ornaments and wealth, as much as their hands could hold. And a crowd with gold and grievance, idle in a wilderness, is a dangerous thing to leave behind. Musa went up the mountain trusting his brother with everything. The nation, it would turn out, had other plans.

Show me Yourself

On the mountain, in the middle of the conversation no other human being on earth has ever had, the prophet who spoke directly with his Lord asked for the one thing his heart could not stop wanting.

And when Moses arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, "My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You." [Allāh] said, "You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me." But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Moses fell unconscious. And when he awoke, he said, "Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first [among my people] of the believers."

QUR'AN 7:143

Understand what this was and what it was not, because Mufti Menk is careful here. This was not doubt. Musa believed completely; he was speaking to his Lord, hearing Him, certain beyond certainty. It was something else entirely. It was love straining at the absolute limit of what a created body can hold. I have heard You, I am speaking with You, but I want to see You. And the answer was gentle and absolute at once: not here, not with these eyes, not in this world, but look to the mountain, and if it can hold its place, then you will see Me.

Then the smallest unveiling of his Lord's light touched the mountain, the merest fraction of it, and the mountain could not bear what Musa had asked to bear. It came apart, levelled, crushed to dust, and Musa dropped to the ground as though struck dead. And when he came back to himself, his first words were not a complaint and not a question. They were surrender. Exalted are You. I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first of the believers. Mufti Menk draws the awe out of it plainly. If an entire mountain could not stand a fraction of that light, if the prophet who asked collapsed unconscious at the edge of it, then consider the majesty of the One he had asked to see. There are heights of nearness Allah grants His prophets, and there are limits He sets even for them, and the believer's place before both

is exactly the place Musa took when he woke: glory be to You, I have repented to You.

Hold onto that posture, because it is the same one the final Prophet ﷺ would carry home from the heavens on the Night Journey, and we will return to it before this chapter closes.

A calf with a hollow voice

While Musa was on the mountain, down in the camp, a man went to work. The Qur'an names him the Samiri, and he had a talent every age knows. He told the people he had seen something no one else had seen, a trace of dust from the track of the messenger, where the angel's horse had passed, and that he had gathered a handful of it and kept it. Mufti Menk smiles at how familiar this figure is. People still pull strange things from their pockets and insist they are holy, daring you to argue; a man once came to him clutching a fragment he swore was a piece of the ark of Nuh, peace be upon him, his face shining with passion. And what do you say to such a man? Tell him no and he takes it as an insult; tell him yes and you have endorsed a lie. So you say, make du'a, and you keep walking. But when it is not a relic in a pocket and instead a whole nation being led astray, he says, then you owe people the truth: brother, this is wrong.

The Samiri did not stop at a handful of dust. He told the crowd that all the gold they had carried out of Egypt was tainted, ill-gotten, dirty, and ordered them to throw it into a great fire. They melted it down, all of Pharaoh's jewellery and ornaments together, and out of the molten gold the Samiri shaped a calf. He left it hollow, for they did not have enough to fill it, and that hollowness was the trick. When the desert wind passed through it, the calf made a sound, a low, faint, animal lowing. And that was all it took.

And he extracted for them [the statue of] a calf which had a lowing sound, and they said, "This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot."

QUR'AN 20:88

It has life in it, they said. Listen to it. A thing of metal does not low; this one does; therefore it is alive, therefore it is a god. And a nation that had watched the sea split for them weeks before bowed down to a statue that bellowed in the wind. Harun stood in the middle of it and pleaded with them. What are you doing? This is not your Lord. They brushed him aside: we will not stop worshipping it until Musa comes back to us. And the Qur'an is merciless about the sheer absurdity of the choice, and Mufti Menk lets it sting exactly as the verse intends:

And the people of Moses made, after [his departure], from their ornaments a calf - an image having a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way? They took it [for worship], and they were wrongdoers.

QUR'AN 7:148

Did they not see that it could not speak to them, could not answer a single question, could not guide them one step in any direction? A god you have to carry, a god that cannot even reply to you, preferred over the One who had just drowned an empire to set them free. This, Mufti Menk says, is what the human heart does when it is left untended. It does not stay empty. Leave it alone for forty nights and it does not remain a clean and waiting space; it fills with whatever is loudest in the room. The Samiri was simply the loudest voice in a camp that had stopped guarding its own heart.

Musa returns, and the reckoning

Musa came down from the mountain carrying the tablets and a heart full of the light he had just seen, and he walked straight into a nation dancing around a metal calf. The grief in him was total, and Mufti Menk wants you to feel that it was grief before it was anger, the anguish of a man undone not by strangers but by his own people. He threw down the tablets and reached for his brother, taking Harun by the head and the beard and pulling him close, demanding to know how he could possibly have let this happen.

And when Moses returned to his people, angry and grieved, he said, "How wretched is that by which you have replaced me after [my departure]. Were you impatient over the matter of your Lord?" And he threw down the tablets and seized his brother by [the hair of] his head, pulling him toward him. [Aaron] said, "O son of my mother, indeed the people overpowered me and were about to kill me, so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people."

QUR'AN 7:150

And Harun's reply is one of the tenderest lines in the whole of the story, the appeal of a brother to a brother across the wreckage of a nation.

[Aaron] said, "O son of my mother, do not seize [me] by my beard or by my head. Indeed, I feared that you would say, 'You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word.'"

QUR'AN 20:94

Son of my mother, he says, the most intimate way one brother can address another, do not take me by the beard or the head. I

had a different fear. I feared that if I had come down hard on them, if I had drawn a line in the sand and forced the issue, the community would have split in two, faction against faction, and that you would return to find a broken nation and say to me, Harun, you divided the Children of Israel and you did not wait for me. He had been overpowered. They had nearly killed him. And in that impossible position he had chosen to hold a fracturing people in one piece for his brother's sake, rather than break them apart entirely. Mufti Menk is honest about the gravity of what was happening in that camp: this was no small thing, it was plain shirk, the gravest of all wrongs unfolding in front of a prophet. And Harun had done everything he could short of starting a civil war. He tolerated one terrible wound in order to prevent a worse one. Sometimes, the lesson runs, holding people together is the harder mercy, and wisdom is not always the loudest reaction in the room. When Musa understood, the anger turned to where it truly belonged.

For Allah had already told Musa, on the mountain, who was behind it all. So he turned from his brother to the man himself and asked him what he had done. And the Samiri answered without a flicker of regret. I saw what others did not see, he said; I took a handful from the track of the messenger and I threw it in, and my own soul talked me into the rest. No repentance. No shame. Nothing. And so Musa pronounced his sentence, and it is a strange and fitting one.

[Moses] said, "Then go. And indeed, it is [decreed] for you in [this] life to say, 'No contact.' And indeed, you have an appointment [in the Hereafter] you will not fail to keep. And look at your 'god' to which you remained devoted. We will surely burn it and blow it [i.e., its ashes] into the sea with a blast.

Go, said Musa, and for the rest of your life the only words you will speak to any soul who comes near you are these: no contact, do not touch me. He was struck with an affliction that made him an outcast, a man who could only ever say la misas, do not touch, to every person who approached him for the rest of his days. And beyond that disgrace in this life there waited an appointment with Allah that he could never escape or postpone. Then Musa turned to the calf itself, the very thing they had sworn they would never abandon, and reduced it to nothing. Look at your god, he said, the one you would not leave, and we burned it and scattered its ashes across the sea. The statue that had lowed in the wind became dust on the water.

And here Mufti Menk lands the warning of the whole night exactly where it belongs, which is in your own time and not in the deep past. There are Samiris in every age, he says. There always have been. The clever, passionate, persuasive voices who dress something hollow in the clothing of religion and dare you not to follow it, who call you toward disobedience and the worship of things and make it sound like devotion. Some of us are still being made to bow, in one way or another, to calves of metal and to poles and to people and to things with a hollow voice that we have mistaken for life. The lesson of this entire chapter, he says plainly, is to learn to recognise them, and to refuse.

The mountain held over their heads

Even with the calf burned and scattered, the commandments were a hard sell. These were people who had grown used to doing exactly as they pleased, and obedience did not come naturally to them. Allah sent down the laws, the commandments,

the limits of a righteous life, and they did not want them. They were ready to break every one. So Allah did something the Qur'an records, Mufti Menk notes, in more than one place: He took hold of the entire mountain and raised it up over their heads.

And [recall] when We took your covenant, [O Children of Israel, to abide by the Torah] and We raised over you the mount, [saying], "Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that perhaps you may become righteous."

QUR'AN 2:63

The whole mountain lifted off its foundation and hung above them, and then began to lower, slowly, as though it would fall and crush them where they stood. And they were asked: will you take hold of what We have given you, with strength and seriousness? Yes, they cried, we give our covenant, we will keep it. And the mountain returned to its place. Even then, Mufti Menk observes, with the proof of a mountain suspended over their heads, some held to the promise and some drifted right back, the way a crowd always does. Allah turns His signs away from the arrogant, he reads on, from those too full of pride to accept the truth, who see the path of guidance and will not take it and see the path of error and rush straight down it. The signs were everywhere, and the arrogant still would not see.

And the story does not let the Children of Israel off lightly even after this. Mufti Menk carries it further, through episode after episode of a nation testing the patience of its prophet. They tired of the heavenly food and demanded their old Egyptian fare back, the onions and garlic and lentils and cucumbers, asking to trade the provision of the sky for the herbs of their slavery, and Musa asked them in disbelief whether they would exchange what is

better for what is worse. Seventy of their chosen men, brought to the mountain to hear the word of Allah, were not satisfied with hearing and demanded to see Him outright, until a thunderbolt seized them and they fell dead, then were returned to life at Musa's prayer that they might be grateful. Some broke the Sabbath by a cunning trick, casting their nets on the forbidden day and lifting them the next, and were transformed for it. And when a vile rumour was spread about Musa's own body, Allah cleared His prophet of it before them all. Through every one of these, Mufti Menk holds the same thread: a nation drowning in miracles still had to be taught, the hard way, again and again, simply to obey.

What this day asks of our faith

It would be easy to read all of this as a story about a long-dead nation and their peculiar ingratitude, to shake your head at a people who could walk through a sea on Monday and beg for an idol by Tuesday, and to leave it safely in the past. Mufti Menk insists that this is exactly the wrong way to read it. These accounts are not in the Qur'an as folklore, he says, not as old tales to entertain us. They are in the Qur'an to scrape the rust off our own faith. A people who crossed a sea still asked for an idol. A people fed from the open sky still built a calf. A people handed a law still needed a mountain held over their heads before they would keep it. Read with any honesty at all, that is uncomfortably close to home. Every age has its Samiris, and every heart has its short memory, and the heart that is not guarded does not stay empty, it fills with whatever is loudest in the room.

And here is where the whole episode bends back toward the one whose life this entire book is reaching for. On the Night Journey, when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was raised through the

heavens, it was this very Musa whom he met and spoke with, and it was Musa who sent him back, again and again, to ask his Lord to lighten the prayers, out of his own long and bruising experience of how heavily an obligation sits on a people, and how easily a nation lets its covenant slip. Think of what that means. The same prophet who carried the law down this mountain to a people who could barely hold it is the one who, centuries later, urged the final Prophet ﷺ toward mercy for us in the matter of the very prayer we are now asked to keep. The whole chain of prophets is one family, and this day shows you precisely why their hard-won wisdom carries forward into your life.

For the gift Musa's people needed a mountain to accept is the same gift you have been handed with no mountain over you at all. Mufti Menk closes his lecture with an image he says he had used only moments before that very evening, and it is the place to land this chapter. Imagine a wealthy man offered you the grandest building in the city, on one condition: that you come and speak with him, just speak, for five minutes, five times a day. We would beg him for ten. We would never miss a single appointment; we would arrive early, the way a man arrives early for the meeting where something is to be gained. Now look at what Allah asks of you. Not to cross a sea. Not to lift a weight. Not to carry anything heavy at all. Only to stand and speak with Him five times a day, with no effort beyond making your wudu and turning to face Him. And the reward is not one building in one city. It is the whole world and everything in it, ten times over and more.

The Children of Israel needed a mountain suspended over their heads to keep a covenant. You have been given the same kind of covenant, the Qur'an kept pure for fourteen centuries, the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, the five daily prayers, with no

mountain over you at all, only the quiet question of whether you will hold fast to it when no one on earth is forcing you. So take the small, unforced gift seriously, the one that asks no sea-crossing of you. Stand before your Lord the five times He asks. Hold to the Book He preserved. And refuse the calf, however softly it lows, however clever the Samiri who hands it to you. O Allah, the One who fed them from the sky and split the sea and held the mountain over their heads, do not let our hearts slip back to what You saved us from. Keep us firm on Your covenant when no one is watching, grant us Harun's patient wisdom and Musa's trembling awe, and let us say, when we are tested, as he said when he woke on the mountain: exalted are You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am of the believers.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 22 (Musa and the Children of Israel, part 1). Qur'an: Sahih International (7:138, 7:142, 7:143, 7:148, 7:150; 20:88, 20:94, 20:97; 2:57, 2:60, 2:63), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's. Where the histories carry more than one report of the desert years, his own caution about their uncertain order has been kept.

Musa and the Children of Israel, part 2

A nation handed everything, still learning to obey

By the time this part of the story opens, you have already watched the impossible happen, more than once. You have seen an infant slipped into a basket and floated down a river toward the very palace that was killing his people, and then handed back to his own mother to nurse, paid for the privilege. You have seen a fugitive return to the most powerful man on earth holding nothing but a staff and a brother, and walk out alive. You have seen a sea stand up in two walls of water so that the saved could cross on dry land, and then come crashing down over the man who chased them. A people delivered by signs like that, you would think, would never hesitate again. They had been given more proof of Allah than any nation before or since.

This is the part of the story that quietly tells you otherwise. Mufti Menk does not march us through every remaining year of the wandering. He stops at three scenes the Qur'an froze in place forever, and they do not glitter. There is a cow these people could have slaughtered in an afternoon and instead argued into a near-impossible animal. There is a rich man named Qarun whom the earth opened and swallowed whole. And there is the day Allah humbled the very prophet who spoke to Him directly, by sending him off to learn from someone else. Three scenes, and one

thread running underneath all of them, pulled tight: when the instruction comes, obey it.

One woman who would not drown in the crowd

Before any of the three scenes, Mufti Menk pauses on a single woman, because she is the answer to the excuse most of us quietly live by. She lived in the very heart of the tyranny. She was the wife of Pharaoh himself, the woman who had taken the infant Musa into the palace and raised him with her own hands. And she knew. She had watched the boy grow into the man, she had heard what he said, and she understood, in the place where a person cannot lie to herself, that what Musa uttered was the truth and what her husband proclaimed was a lie. She was surrounded on every side by the wrong, and she refused to let it own her heart. Her du'a is preserved in the Qur'an for all time.

And Allāh presents an example of those who believed: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, "My Lord, build for me near You a house in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds and save me from the wrongdoing people."

QUR'AN 66:11

Listen to the order of her words, Mufti Menk says, because she is teaching you how to ask. She did not say, build for me a house in Paradise that is near You. She said, build for me near You a house, and only after the nearness did she name the house. Closeness to Allah came first; the dwelling came second. Once you are near to Him, you already have everything, and a palace at a distance from Him is worth nothing at all. Even our du'a, then, should be ordered by what truly matters, the nearness before the gift.

And consider where she was standing when she lifted her hands. Outnumbered, encircled, every face around her turned the wrong way, married to the man the whole story is warning us against. It is exactly the position of the convert whose entire family is somewhere else, the one person in a room who knows the cruel joke is cruel and will not laugh along, the believer at a table where everyone is doing the thing that should not be done. To stand out like that is hard, and Mufti Menk does not pretend otherwise. The pull of the comfort zone is real; many a person who knows the truth stays silent because to speak would mean sticking out like a sore thumb among friends. But Islam teaches us not to be like that. Make the difference, and Allah will praise you in a gathering far greater than the one you feared. Through the lips of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ we are told that Allah mentions His good servants, by name, to the angels. A soul who refuses to sink with the crowd, who remembers Allah while everyone else forgets Him, is exactly the kind of name He loves to mention up there. She suffered for her stand, and she died a believer, and Allah set her down in His book as an example for the believers until the end of time. That is what one person who will not drown in the crowd is worth.

The cow they argued into a mountain

The first of the three scenes begins with a crime. A very wealthy man had died and left a single son, who inherited everything, and the cousins, eaten up with envy, murdered the heir. Then came the cover. There was a dispute over the body, family against family, every man accusing the next, no one confessing, and the whole community began to tear itself apart along the seam of that one killing. They brought the problem to Musa, peace be

upon him, who turned to Allah for it, and the answer he came back with was so simple it sounds like it cannot be the answer.

And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allāh commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allāh from being among the ignorant."

QUR'AN 2:67

Slaughter a cow. Any cow. Do this one thing, and Allah will expose the murderer, and the whole bleeding affair will be closed by sundown. It could have ended that very afternoon with the first ordinary animal they laid hands on. Instead, they began to ask questions. Not the questions of someone trying to obey, but the questions of someone trying to delay. And here, Mufti Menk says, is the lesson folded into the whole scene before it has even finished unfolding: they did not obey the instruction; they wanted to make life difficult, so Allah made it more difficult for them. When you are given a clear command, obey it. Do not stall and pile question upon question, because the delay is never free.

Watch the net tighten, strand by strand, every strand woven by their own hands. What kind of cow? So Allah told them.

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." [Moses] said, "[Allāh] says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded."

QUR'AN 2:68

Not too old, not too young, somewhere in the middle, and do what you are commanded. They could have gone out and slaughtered one then; a whole category of cows now qualified. Instead they came back. What colour?

They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." He said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color - pleasing to the observers.'"

QUR'AN 2:69

A rich golden yellow, radiant, a delight to the eye of anyone who looked at it. They could have slaughtered one then; golden cows were not so rare. Instead they pressed harder, pleading confusion, as if the more detail they demanded the more obedient they were being.

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allāh wills, will be guided."

QUR'AN 2:70

And so, at last, the description closed around them like a snare of their own weaving.

He said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.'" They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it.

QUR'AN 2:71

A cow that had never been put to the plough or the waterwheel, unblemished, without a single mark anywhere on her hide. Now it was genuinely hard. Obedience would have cost them one common animal at the start. Their delay cost them a hunt across the whole land for the single impossible cow that, by now, was the only one left that fit. The phrase Mufti Menk keeps returning to is the one drawn straight from the words of the Prophet ﷺ about this very people: they made it difficult, so Allah made it

difficult for them. And notice the heartbreak buried in the verse: when the last detail came, they finally said, now you have come with the truth, as though the truth had only just arrived, when in fact it had been standing in front of them since the first word. So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it. They obeyed in the end, expensively, grudgingly, almost too late to be called obedience at all.

Now you have come with the truth

The cow they were now forced to find belonged, it is reported, to an orphan boy and his widowed mother. The story behind that cow is a second story tucked inside the first, and Mufti Menk lingers on it, because it shows you what Allah was quietly doing on the other side of the same events. The boy's father had been a poor man with one possession of any worth, a single calf. As he lay dying, he could not trust the people around him to deal fairly with a weak woman and a fatherless child once he was gone, so he took the calf out and released it into the forest, and left his wife and son in the care of Allah Himself, trusting the Lord over a society he knew would seize a defenceless family's inheritance the moment his back was turned.

That fear was not paranoia, and Mufti Menk turns directly to us with it, because it is alive in our own communities. Inheritance, he reminds us, is one of the most sacred laws of the religion. Allah watches every fraction of every share that is divided after a death, and to take even a single coin of what is not your due, knowingly, is not a small thing. The Prophet ﷺ warned that whatever a person seizes wrongly from another's inheritance is a piece of the Fire, take it or leave it. So the dying man's instinct was right, and his trust was righteous: he handed his family to Allah and walked away from the world, because he believed Allah

was a better guardian than any contract he could leave behind. And Allah kept the trust. He guarded that calf in the wild, grown now into a cow, letting no one near it, year after year, until the precise day a desperate people came looking for exactly the animal that the Lord had been protecting all along. When the boy, grown a little older, finally went to find his father's cow, only one came to him, and it was the only one in the world that matched the description Musa had been given. The price the people paid, the cow's hide filled with gold, made the orphan wealthy in a single afternoon. The same Allah who let a stubborn nation tangle itself in its own questions was, on the other side of the very same incident, running a quiet rescue for a fatherless boy whose father had simply trusted Him.

Then, at last, the purpose for which the whole strange command had been given.

And [recall] when you slew a man and disputed over it, but Allāh was to bring out that which you were concealing.

QUR'AN 2:72

So We said, "Strike him [i.e., the slain man] with part of it." Thus does Allāh bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs that you might reason.

QUR'AN 2:73

They struck the dead man with a piece of the slaughtered cow, and by the leave of Allah he rose up alive, named the one who had murdered him, and lay back down into death. Three lessons fall out of that one astonishing moment, and Mufti Menk counts them off plainly: first, the raw power of Allah over life and death, the Lord who can return a corpse to speech and then to silence at His word; second, the justice He insists upon, dragging the

truth of a hidden murder into the open so the wrongdoer cannot hide behind the chaos he created; and third, the one meant squarely for us, that when the truth arrives we are to surrender to it, not argue it into a mountain. This is why an entire surah, the longest chapter in the whole Qur'an, carries the name of this animal: al-Baqarah, the Cow. Every time you open the Book, the largest chapter in it bears the title of a people who could not, when it came to it, simply obey. The name itself is a standing reminder, set permanently in front of every reader.

Qarun, and the wealth the earth swallowed

The second scene is a man from Musa's own people, and his name was Qarun. Allah had given him wealth on a scale the human mind struggles to hold.

Indeed, Qārūn was from the people of Moses, but he tyrannized them. And We gave him of treasures whose keys would burden a band of strong men; thereupon his people said to him, "Do not exult. Indeed, Allāh does not like the exultant."

QUR'AN 28:76

Sit with the description, because it is staggering. Not the treasure, the keys to the treasure: a band of strong men, putting their backs into it together, would struggle just to lift the keys to his storehouses. Imagine, Mufti Menk says, that today a single credit card can keep a person up at night with worry. Here was a man whose keys alone were a burden that strong men could barely carry, and that was before you opened a single door. And with all of it, he had one disease, and it was the disease the whole scene turns on. Arrogance. Everything he owned, he insisted, had come from himself. His brain. His plan. His

cleverness. His deal. His effort. I worked for it, I was the witty one, I built this, I saved these people, I am the great earner. It was I, I, I, and me, me, me, and never once was any of it traced back to the One who had actually given it. Not a thread of it was returned to Allah.

His own people tried to reach him before it was too late, and their counsel is some of the most balanced advice in the whole Qur'an.

But seek, through that which Allāh has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allāh has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allāh does not like corrupters."

QUR'AN 28:77

Use what Allah has handed you to buy the Hereafter, they told him, and you need not throw away your portion of this life to do it; only do good with it, as Allah has done good to you, and do not spread corruption. It was gentle, it was wise, and he waved it away with a single sentence that is the whole of his arrogance distilled.

He said, "I was only given it because of knowledge I have." Did he not know that Allāh had destroyed before him of generations those who were greater than him in power and greater in accumulation [of wealth]? But the criminals, about their sins, will not be asked.

QUR'AN 28:78

I earned it by my own knowledge, he said, as if Allah had nothing to do with it, forgetting the long line of men richer and stronger than he was whom Allah had already wiped from the earth. And

then he did the thing arrogance always does: he put it on display. He came out before his people in his full glittering adornment, his gold and silver paraded for everyone to see, and the watching crowd split into two kinds of people. Some looked at the spectacle and ached for it, and the Qur'an preserves their wish word for word, because it is a wish we all know the taste of.

So he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, "Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qārūn. Indeed, he is one of great fortune."

QUR'AN 28:79

If only we had what Qarun has. And then the people of knowledge answered them, and their answer is worth committing to memory.

But those who had been given knowledge said, "Woe to you! The reward of Allāh is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient."

QUR'AN 28:80

Do not wish for it, they said. The reward with Allah is better for the one who believes and does good, and no one is handed that reward except the patient. And then, with no warning, the ground gave way.

And We caused the earth to swallow him and his home. And there was for him no company to aid him other than Allāh, nor was he of those who [could] defend themselves.

QUR'AN 28:81

The earth opened and took him, his house, and every last thing he owned, and there was not a faction on the earth that could stand between him and Allah, nor could he lift a finger to save himself. By morning, the very people who had envied his gold the day before were saying something quite different.

And those who had wished for his position the previous day began to say, "Oh, how Allāh extends provision to whom He wills of His servants and restricts it! If not that Allāh had conferred favor on us, He would have caused it to swallow us. Oh, how the disbelievers do not succeed!"

QUR'AN 28:82

It is Allah who opens provision to whom He wills and narrows it, they said; had He not been gracious to us and held back the very thing we were begging for, the earth would have swallowed us along with him. Mufti Menk draws the line straight to us, and it has two edges. Never be a show-off, because the One who gave you what you flaunt has every power to take it back, and the only safe posture before Him is humility, all the way down to the ground. And never let your eyes climb after what Allah handed someone else, because you cannot see what comes attached to it. The crowd wished for Qarun's wealth and woke up grateful they had been spared his grave. What you envy may be the very thing that would have buried you.

The day Musa was sent to learn

The third scene begins with a question put to Musa, peace be upon him: who is the most knowledgeable person alive? And he answered, naturally, that it was him. Why would he not? He received revelation. He had the help of Allah. He spoke with Allah directly. Could there be anyone with more knowledge than that?

So Allah corrected him, gently. No one holds all knowledge, He told Musa; knowledge is handed out in pockets, this one excelling in one field, that one in another, one given the heights of a science and another the depths of a different one, and Allah gives some servants more than one pocket, but to no one does He give all of it. There is a servant of Mine, Allah told him, who has been given a knowledge you were not given. And Musa wanted to find him, certain that a man with such knowledge must be from his own followers, following his own law.

Before the journey even begins, Mufti Menk catches the lesson in it. We are meant to benefit from one another's knowledge. Among us there are skilled doctors and surgeons, sharp accountants, master tradesmen, every kind of expert, and Allah lets us draw on all of them. But the ones we should keep closest, he says, are not the people who polish this world for us; they are the scholars who can carry us toward the next. Think how a man with a heart condition makes sure he has a cardiologist he can call at one in the morning. Many of us, Mufti Menk warns, are walking around with a spiritual cholesterol clogging our systems, on the edge of a spiritual heart attack, and we have no scholar near us at all, no physician for the soul; some of us even look at such people with dislike. And so we die spiritually and move through the world like the walking dead without ever knowing it, because the knowledge that saves a person past the grave is not the knowledge of pipes and ledgers, but the knowledge of the religion. Half and more of what a human being truly needs lies in the knowledge of the deen, because it is the only knowledge that follows you past your own death.

So Musa set out, taking a young companion and a basket of provisions with a fish in it, walking the coast toward the place Allah had appointed, the junction of the two seas.

And [mention] when Moses said to his boy [i.e., servant], "I will not cease [traveling] until I reach the junction of the two seas or continue for a long period."

QUR'AN 18:60

The sign that they had arrived would be the fish. At the meeting place of the waters, the fish slipped from its basket and took its way into the sea, and the young man, awed by it, meant to tell Musa and then forgot, and they walked on, hungry and tired, until Musa asked for the meal and the boy remembered.

[Moses] said, "That is what we were seeking." So they returned, following their footprints.

QUR'AN 18:64

They retraced their own steps to the rock, and there they found the man Allah had sent Musa to meet.

And they found a servant from among Our servants [i.e., al-Khidr] to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge.

QUR'AN 18:65

This is the man the reports call al-Khidr, and here Mufti Menk is careful, and we keep his caution exactly. Al-Khidr was not a prophet, he says; he was a righteous man, a worshipper of Allah, given a particular knowledge directly from his Lord, and he was following the law of Musa himself. The Qur'an does not even name him; it calls him a servant from among Our servants. His name comes to us through the reports, not through revelation, and we hold it the way we hold all such reports, neither hardening it into certainty nor casting it away. What matters is plain in the verse: a servant given mercy and a knowledge from

Allah's own presence. Musa approached him with the humility of a student, though he was a prophet who spoke with Allah.

Moses said to him, "May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?"

QUR'AN 18:66

And the righteous man warned him, twice over, of exactly what was coming.

He said, "Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience.

QUR'AN 18:67

And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?"

QUR'AN 18:68

How can you be patient, he asked, over things you have not surrounded with knowledge, things whose reasons you cannot yet see? Musa promised he would try, and the lessons began.

How can you be patient over what you do not know?

Three times the man acted, and three times Musa, peace be upon him, could not hold his peace, because three times what he saw looked like plain wrong. They boarded a ship, and the man tore a hole in it.

So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, he [i.e., al-Khidr] tore it open. [Moses] said, "Have you torn it open to drown its people? You have certainly done a grave thing."

A ship whose owners had carried them for free, and he had just opened it to the sea. Musa cried out, and the man reminded him: did I not say you would never manage patience with me? Musa apologised, and they walked on, and they met a boy, and the man killed him.

So they set out, until when they met a boy, he [i.e., al-Khidr] killed him. [Moses] said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing."

QUR'AN 18:74

A child, a pure soul, killed for nothing that Musa could see. He was aghast, and again the man reminded him of the warning, and Musa drew a line: if I ask you about anything after this, send me away. They came to a town that refused them so much as a meal, and there the man rebuilt a wall that was about to fall.

So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so he [i.e., al-Khidr] restored it. [Moses] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment."

QUR'AN 18:77

Honest work, done for free, for a town that had just turned them away hungry; the least he could have done was take a wage. And at the third time, they parted.

[Al-Khidr] said, "This is parting between me and you. I will inform you of the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience."

And then the meanings, every single one of them a mercy that had been wearing the mask of harm.

As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to cause defect in it as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force.

QUR'AN 18:79

The boat was the livelihood of poor men, and downstream a king was seizing every sound vessel by force; a damaged boat he would pass over, so the wound in its hull was the very thing that saved it for its owners. Mufti Menk pauses here on a point that goes deep. The king was never actually going to take that boat, because Allah already knew there would be a hole in it. The harm was not a price paid for the rescue; the harm was the rescue.

And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief.

QUR'AN 18:80

So we intended that their Lord should substitute for them one better than him in purity and nearer to mercy.

QUR'AN 18:81

The boy's parents were believers, and Allah knew the child would have grown to crush them with rebellion and disbelief; so He took him young and would grant them another, purer, and nearer to mercy. And here Mufti Menk turns very tender, because this is the verse that meets real grief. This does not mean, he is careful to say, that we may ever treat any child this way; we are not al-

Khidr, and Musa is not walking beside us. But for anyone whose child was taken young, there is a mercy to hold onto. We do not claim to know what the child would or would not have become, for we know nothing of the unseen. But a child lost young is a blessing of Allah, waiting for its parents in the Hereafter, and by the will of Allah interceding on their behalf, pleading with their Lord to bring them to the Garden. Do not drown in the negative, Mufti Menk says, because when we sink into the negative we sink into despair, and in despair a person can lose both this world and the next; look instead for the mercy Allah has hidden inside the loss, even when you cannot see its shape.

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience."

QUR'AN 18:82

The wall stood over a buried treasure that belonged to two orphans whose father had been a righteous man; had it fallen, the treasure would have been exposed and looted, and so it was propped up to stand until the boys grew old enough to claim what was rightfully theirs. And notice the last line, the line that lifts the whole story off the page: I did it not of my own accord. Every act that had horrified Musa had been by the command of Allah, which is exactly why al-Khidr was spared the reckoning the law of Musa would otherwise have demanded for the killing.

Mufti Menk draws out the staggering thing underneath all three. There is a boat, and a wall, and a treasure waiting under it, but

the deepest lesson is about the knowledge of Allah. Allah knows what was, and what is, and what will be, and then, beyond even that, He knows what was never going to happen at all, and exactly how it would have unfolded had He allowed it. The boat was never truly going to be seized, because Allah already knew there would be a hole in it; the wall was never going to be looted, because Allah already knew it would be propped up. That is the ocean of His knowledge. And ours is a single drop. The image Mufti Menk leaves us is the one the righteous man gave Musa at the start of the voyage: a small bird dipped its beak into the sea and lifted it out, and the little drop that clung to the beak, set against the whole ocean it came from, is all the knowledge that any creature holds beside the knowledge of Allah. Musa, peace be upon him, the prophet who spoke with Allah Himself, was sent on this entire journey so that the most knowledgeable man of his age would feel, in his own chest, how little even he could see.

What these stories ask of our faith

Step back from the three scenes and they begin to rhyme. A people who could have obeyed in a single sentence and chose, instead, to debate. A man so drowned in his own wealth that he never once bowed, until the earth bowed him. And a prophet led, gently and deliberately, to feel that the wisdom behind Allah's commands is very often hidden from the very people asked to follow them. The thread Mufti Menk keeps pulling through all three is obedience: when the instruction comes, do it. Do not stall it into something heavy with question after question. Do not demand to understand every reason before you will submit. Because the One issuing the command is looking at the whole ocean, while you are standing there holding a single drop, and

what looks to you like harm may be the precise shape of His mercy.

And near the end, Mufti Menk turns the whole thing onto our own worship, which is exactly where your faith stands inside this story. Look honestly at the pillars, he says. In prayer, in fasting, in Hajj, we gladly do the obligation and then pile far more on top of it, and we love to. The voluntary prayers across a day outweigh the obligatory ones several times over. The recommended fasts across a year, three days of every month, two days of most weeks, run well past the single obligatory month. Whoever can reach the Sacred House for Hajj longs to go again and again for the lesser pilgrimage. We are generous, even eager, with the extra, in every pillar but one. Charity is the strange exception. When it comes to giving, we cling tightly to the bare obligation, the two and a half percent, and grow oddly stingy with anything beyond it, when Allah Himself has said that in wealth there is a due over and above what He has already squeezed out of us. It is the one pillar where the believer reaches for the floor instead of the sky, and Mufti Menk asks us, plainly, to check ourselves on it.

That is where this whole part of the Musa story lands, and it lands on us. Bani Israil were a nation handed everything: a prophet who spoke with Allah, a sea split open, a tyrant drowned, food sent down from the sky, water struck from a rock. They had been given more proof than any people in history. And still, the single hardest thing they were ever asked to do was simply to obey, without arguing, without bargaining, without first demanding to see the reason. That is the warning folded carefully into this whole pillar, and it is the reason these stories were preserved for us at all. This ummah, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, were given the example of Bani Israil to learn from, not to repeat. Their stubbornness over a cow is in the

longest chapter of our Book so that it sits in front of our eyes, not theirs. Their envy of Qarun's gold was recorded so that we would catch our own eyes before they climb after what Allah gave someone else. Their impatience with what they could not yet understand was set down so that we would trust the One who sees the ocean when our own drop runs dry.

So when the command is clear, whether it is the prayer that calls you five times every day, or the wealth Allah is asking you to loosen your grip on, or the loss you cannot make sense of and are being asked to bear, the believer's answer is meant to be the one Bani Israil reached only at the very end, and far too late. Not after a hundred questions. Not after the requirement has narrowed to something near impossible. Now, at the first word, while it is still easy: now you have come with the truth. We hear, and we obey. O Allah, make us of those who hear Your command and answer at once, who trace every blessing back to You and never boast of it, who trust Your wisdom in the very things we cannot see, and who stand for Your truth even when we stand alone. And as a believing woman once asked from inside the house of a tyrant, build for each of us, near You, a house in Paradise.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 23 (Musa and the Children of Israel, part 2). Qur'an: Sahih International (66:11, 2:67-73, 28:76-82, 18:60-82), verified via quran.ai. Where the lecture relays a report from earlier traditions, such as the name and nature of al-Khidr and the story

of the orphan's calf, Mufti Menk's own framing and caution have been kept.

Shu'ayb and the honest scale

The prophet who put faith inside the marketplace

There is a corner of every believer's life that we are quietly tempted to keep behind a curtain, screened off from the rest of our faith, as if the One who hears our prayers has nothing to say about it. It is not our worship, and it is not our family. It is our money: the way we earn it, the way we weigh it out, the small adjustments we make in our own favour when we think no one is watching. We will stand in long, beautiful prayer and then walk out the door and round the invoice, skim the hour we did not work, hide the fault in the thing we are selling, and tell ourselves these are two different worlds. Into exactly this corner of human life Allah once sent a prophet. His people were not idolaters starving in a cave. They were rich, sharp, successful merchants, and the message he carried to them was that the scale they weighed your grain on was a matter between them and their Lord.

This is the twenty-fourth day of our walk with the prophets, and we step aside for one evening from the long story of Musa to meet him. His name was Shu'ayb, peace be upon him, and Mufti Menk introduces him as a prophet whose lesson, of all the lessons in this chain, may sit closest to the way we actually live. Hold one question from the first page to the last, because it is the question Shu'ayb pressed onto a people who thought religion stopped at the shop door: does your faith reach all the way into how you earn?

A different prophet, a different people

Mufti Menk pauses before he even begins, with the honesty this telling keeps. We diverge slightly from the story of Musa, he says, to discuss a prophet who lived, by some accounts, around the same time. Was this Shu'ayb the same righteous man whose daughter Musa married, the one who took the fleeing stranger in at the well of Madyan? Some historians suggest the two lived at a similar time, and some say it was indeed his daughter Musa wed. But the Qur'an does not state it, and neither does the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, so we mention it as a report and build no certainty on it. There is a slight difference of opinion, Mufti Menk notes, over whether the man at the well was this Shu'ayb or another pious servant of Allah. What is certain is the mission, and the message, and the place.

The place was Madyan, a town further across the sea, and Shu'ayb himself fixes it on the map for us. He warned his people that the people of Lut were not far from them, and Mufti Menk reads that nearness in two ways at once: near in time, for those ruined valleys had been overturned only recently, and near in distance, for Madyan lay close to what the histories call the valleys of Sadum. So the ruin of Lut's people was a warning still smoking on the horizon, close enough that Shu'ayb could point to it.

His people carry two names in the Qur'an, and the second name tells you what had gone wrong at the root. They were the people of Madyan, and they were the companions of al-Aykah, the thicket, named after a great tree they had taken to worshipping. So before a single coin was ever short-changed, the foundation was already cracked. They bowed to a created thing instead of the One who created them. And what kind of people were these, beyond their idol? Very wealthy, Mufti Menk tells us, extremely

rich, but their riches came through cheating, through corruption, through dirty and clandestine means. They short-changed people on purpose. They were, in his telling, among the first to charge one another taxes and to take bribes, the first to look at a neighbour's need and say: you want this from me, then you must give me a percentage. The crooked scale was the symptom. The broken tawhid was the disease.

The orator of the prophets

The Qur'an lets you hear a particular gift in Shu'ayb. He was eloquent, a reasoner, a man whose arguments landed clean and proper, and the scholars gave him a title for it: Khatib al-Anbiya, the orator of the prophets, the one who could meet his people on their own ground and out-think them. He could read and write, he could speak and debate. And here Mufti Menk draws the line you should expect by now, straight to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Shu'ayb was lettered and skilled with speech; Muhammad ﷺ was unlettered, unable to read or write, and yet he became the most eloquent of all. So completely that to this very day the linguists of Arabic study not only the verses of the Qur'an but the very wording of his authentic ahadith, not to verify the hadith, but to verify the grammar of the language itself. That, Mufti Menk says, is the power of his eloquence: a man who never held a pen, whose sentences now anchor the rules of the tongue.

Notice, too, how the Qur'an opens the account. It does not say the people of the thicket denied Shu'ayb. It says they denied the messengers, plural, though only one was ever sent to them:

The companions of the thicket [i.e., the people of Madyan] denied the messengers

QUR'AN 26:176

It is a principle Mufti Menk returns to across this whole series. To reject one prophet is to reject them all, because they all carried the one message from the one Sender. A person today who says they are Muslim but do not believe in Isa cannot call themselves Muslim; one who rejects Musa, or any prophet, the same; and one who accepts every prophet but not Muhammad ﷺ, the same again. Knock out one, Mufti Menk says, and you have knocked out all of them. They are not a row of separate claims you may accept and decline one by one. They are a single rope, and you are either holding it or you have let it go.

Worship Allah, and fill the measure

His first word was the first word of every prophet before him. Not business ethics. Tawhid.

And to Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu'ayb. He said, "O my people, worship Allāh; you have no deity other than Him. And do not decrease from the measure and the scale. Indeed, I see you in prosperity, but indeed, I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day.

QUR'AN 11:84

Mufti Menk lingers on the order, because the order is the whole argument. Shu'ayb did not open with the scale. He opened with the worship of Allah alone, you have no god but Him, and only then turned to the weights, because a man who gets his Lord right is being handed the very reason to get his trade right too. Fix the One you answer to, and you have fixed the standard you weigh by. Notice, too, the tenderness folded into the warning: I see you in prosperity. He is not envious of their wealth and he does not despise it. He fears for them, the way you fear for someone you love who is walking happily toward a cliff.

Then comes the line for the shop floor, and the small precision the Qur'an keeps. Shu'ayb names two distinct things, al-mikyal and al-mizan, and Mufti Menk teaches the difference: al-kayl is measure, the volume of what you scoop and pour, and al-mizan is weight, what you set on the balance. He names both because his people had found a way to skim from each, weighing a little light here, pouring a little short there. And then the demand grows fuller still:

And O my people, give full measure and weight in justice and do not deprive the people of their due and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption.

QUR'AN 11:85

Give full measure, in justice, and do not deprive people of what is theirs. This was their daily craft, the cheating done not once in a great theft but a thousand small times a day, a sliver shaved off every transaction until the slivers became a fortune. And here, on day twenty-four, is the spine of the whole episode. Faith is not a thing you perform inside a building and leave at the door on your way out. It walks out with you to where you earn, and it stands at your shoulder over the scale. The same Lord you bowed to at dawn is watching the balance at noon.

Then Shu'ayb hands them a measure they had never weighed on any scale of their own, that what is little but pure is worth more than what is vast but filthy:

What remains [lawful] from Allāh is best for you, if you would be believers. But I am not a guardian over you."

QUR'AN 11:86

The small lawful remainder you keep after you have given every person their full due, he says, is better for you than mountains of wealth swollen with cheating. Mufti Menk lays the warning out plainly: contaminated wealth does not stay neatly inside your bank account. It reaches back out and takes the priceless things money was never able to buy. It takes your sleep. It takes your health. It takes your contentment, the peace inside your own home, the obedience of your own children. Filthy earnings, he says, spell disaster after disaster, however healthy the numbers look on the statement. And to anchor it, Shu'ayb's standard reaches forward to the Prophet's own teaching on the deal itself, the hadith that turns a transaction into worship. If the buyer and the seller are honest with one another and make plain what they are trading, Allah puts blessing into the deal between them; but if they lie, and hide the faults of what they sell, the blessing is torn out of it. That is baraka, and Mufti Menk will not let you confuse it for the figure on the receipt. You can take more and be left with less. You can take less and be made rich. Allah is the One who decides which.

Do not sit on every road

Cheating the scale was not their only crime. They were a people who used their money as muscle. Wealthy and arrogant, expecting the whole town to dance to their tune, they sat on the roads:

And do not sit on every path, threatening and averting from the way of Allāh those who believe in Him, seeking to make it [seem] deviant. And remember when you were few and He increased you. And see how was the end of the corrupters.

QUR'AN 7:86

Stop sitting on every avenue a believer might walk, Shu'ayb tells them, threatening, blocking, bending the path crooked so that anyone who wished to follow Allah had to push past you first. Mufti Menk says it could be read straight off the news: the pattern of a world where people with money expect everyone else to fall in line, where wealth wants to write the rules and watch the crowd obey. We cannot, he says, jump to the tune of finance. We jump to the tune of Allah. The moment the wealthy demand something against the limits of Allah, and the crowd falls in behind them only because they are rich, that is a people who have forgotten why they are alive, who imagine life is a contest to leave the biggest mark when a believer is here for one thing only: to prepare for the life after death.

And then Shu'ayb shakes a memory loose. Remember when you were few, and He increased you. You did not build this. The multiplication was a gift, and a people who clutch the gift while forgetting the Giver are exactly the people about to lose it. Mufti Menk turns it gently and uncomfortably onto us: remember the humble beginnings, the generation before us who had so much less, whose own fathers, he says, did not even have shoes to wear, and who somehow slept easier than we do with our cupboards full. Have you ever noticed, he asks, how ironic it is, that our forefathers had far less than us and were happier, while we have so much more and our days are full of stress? We started running behind the wealth, and the wealth, when it is contaminated, took the very things that were priceless.

Should I contaminate what Allah made pure?

Their counter-offer was the oldest one in the book. Join us. You have a little wealth; throw it in with ours and we will multiply it for you. Stick to your religion by all means, but leave the business to

people who actually understand business. You do not know the world the way we do. Shu'ayb's answer is one of the most upright lines a prophet ever spoke:

He said, "O my people, have you considered: if I am upon clear evidence from my Lord and He has provided me with a good provision from Him...? And I do not intend to differ from you in that which I have forbidden you; I only intend reform as much as I am able. And my success is not but through Allāh. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I return.

QUR'AN 11:88

I have clear evidence from my Lord, he tells them, and He has already given me good, pure provision; why on earth would I poison that by mixing it with what you take by force? I may have less than you, but what I have is clean. And then he sets the standard for every preacher and every believer who would come after him: I will never forbid you a thing and then go and do it myself. What I have told you is off limits, you will not find me touching. I do not say one thing inside the masjid and another at the till. I only want to put things right, as far as I am able, and to do as much good as I can in the short time I have, today, not tomorrow.

Then comes the line Mufti Menk holds up as a du'a every one of us can carry into our own work: wa ma tawfiqi illa billah, my success is only through Allah; upon Him I rely, and to Him I turn. What is tawfiq? It is, Mufti Menk explains, that acceptance which only Allah grants, the reason one shop on a street fills with customers while the shop beside it, opened the same morning with the same goods behind the same doors, stays empty. The one was given tawfiq; the other was simply not granted it. You can know the entire path of guidance by heart, he says, and still

not be given the feet to walk it, because there is the guidance you are shown and there is the tawfiq to actually tread it, and the second is from Allah alone. So the honest trader does not bank on his own cleverness or his own sharp eye for a deal. He asks the One who decides whose hands are blessed.

Keep your prayers, leave our money alone

Here is the sentence that reaches right across the centuries and into our own pockets:

They said, "O Shu'ayb, does your prayer [i.e., religion] command you that we should leave what our fathers worship or not do with our wealth what we please? Indeed, you are the forbearing, the discerning!"

QUR'AN 11:87

Does your prayer tell you to come over here and stop us doing what we like with our own money? They mock him with it, and the praise they tag on the end, the forbearing, the discerning, drips with sarcasm. Keep your worship over there, Shu'ayb. Do not bring it near our trade. Business is one thing; religion is another. Divorce the deal from the deen, and we will get along fine. Mufti Menk says this exact mentality has survived intact, unbroken, into our own generation, and he names it without flinching: the man who prays his salah slowly and beautifully inside the masjid, who looks for all the world like a deeply religious person, and who is a crook the moment he steps out the door, a man everyone in the market warns you about. We become very holy between these walls, and another person entirely once we are back among the scales and the contracts.

And how, he asks, do we sit and read this very story without batting an eyelid, without letting it touch the precise split it is

describing in us? That is the test of the episode. Shu'ayb's people did not reject prayer; they had no quarrel with worship as long as it stayed in its lane. What they rejected was the idea that prayer had any business auditing their income. If you have ever quietly told yourself that your faith lives in one drawer and your earnings in another, this is the verse that is talking to you. The people of Madyan said it out loud. Most of us only act it.

Yet for all the sharpness of his warning, the door Shu'ayb holds open to these very mockers is tenderness itself:

And ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is Merciful and Affectionate."

QUR'AN 11:90

Seek your Lord's forgiveness and turn back to Him, he pleads, before it is too late. And he describes Allah with a name Mufti Menk points out is set, in just this form and this nearness, in only this one place: al-Wadud, the Most Affectionate, the Loving. Your Lord is not merely Merciful, he tells these cheats and idolaters; He loves you, and He is waiting for you to turn. The Prophet ﷺ taught that Allah becomes happier at the repentance of His servant than we could begin to imagine. The man shaving the scale was never out of reach. He had only to set the scale down and come home.

But pride answered instead of repentance:

They said, "O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say, and indeed, we consider you among us as weak. And if not for your family, we would have stoned you [to death]; and you are not to us one respected."

QUR'AN 11:91

We do not understand much of what you say, they sneer at the orator of the prophets, the very man whose clarity they cannot answer. You are weak among us, and were it not for your small clan, we would have stoned you long ago. Shu'ayb's reply cuts to the bone: is my family more worthy of your fear than Allah, whom you have thrown behind your backs? You are afraid to lay a hand on me because of a handful of relatives, while the One who encompasses everything you do, Him you ignore entirely. And Mufti Menk pauses on the mercy hidden in that small clan. See, he says, how Allah gives the righteous a few solid souls to stand with them against a whole town, a small group but a strong one, and how often it is exactly that small, despised band who turn out to be the ones rightly guided while the crowd is wrong.

The arrogant tried one more lever. They threatened to expel him outright, to drive him and the believers out of the town unless they came back to the old religion on the old terms:

Said the eminent ones who were arrogant among his people, "We will surely evict you, O Shu'ayb, and those who have believed with you from our city, or you must return to our religion." He said, "Even if we were unwilling?"

QUR'AN 7:88

His answer was a flat refusal dressed in dignity. We would be inventing a lie against Allah, he tells them, if we returned to your way after Allah saved us from it. There is no going back once He has rescued you. Mufti Menk dwells on that refusal, because going backward after Allah has lifted you is its own ruin: the one who tasted obedience and then abandoned it, the one who prayed and then stopped, the one whom Allah showed the path and who then turned his back on it. When Allah has given you a gift, you do not hand it back to the people who want you crooked.

The day of the shadow

When the arguing was exhausted, they reached for the most foolish dare a people can make. They demanded that a piece of the sky be dropped on them, if he were truthful. Mufti Menk marvels at the stupidity of it: a person who truly wanted proof might have asked for gold to rain from the heavens, but these people asked to see their own punishment fall, and Allah granted exactly what they asked. Shu'ayb raised his hands and handed the verdict where it belonged:

We would have invented against Allāh a lie if we returned to your religion after Allāh had saved us from it. And it is not for us to return to it except that Allāh, our Lord, should will. Our Lord has encompassed all things in knowledge. Upon Allāh we have relied. Our Lord, decide between us and our people in truth, and You are the best of those who give decision."

QUR'AN 7:89

And the answer came as a mercy turned inside out into terror. Allah sent days of suffocating heat, Mufti Menk describes, the air gone utterly still, no breeze stirring, the sun smothered behind thick black cloud until the heat sat on the town like a sealed flask, all warmth and no escape. And the people came running out from their houses toward the shade of that great dark canopy, desperate for the relief of the shadow. The Qur'an calls it the day of the shadow, the day of the black, overshadowing cloud:

And they denied him, so the punishment of the day of the black cloud seized them. Indeed, it was the punishment of a terrible day.

QUR'AN 26:189

Under the shade they ran to, the punishment was waiting. A violent tremor seized them, and a single shattering cry, a sound wave that overtook them where they stood, and in one instant they were gone:

And when Our command came, We saved Shu'ayb and those who believed with him, by mercy from Us. And the shriek seized those who had wronged, and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone

QUR'AN 11:94

They were gone where they sat, Mufti Menk says, dead on the spot, and their wealth, the whole fortune they had cheated and blocked and bullied to build, was still lying there beside their bodies, untouched, as though they had never lived in their homes at all. And here is the reversal that is the entire point. They had warned the whole town that to follow Shu'ayb was to become losers, that his small band were the failures and the cheats were the winners. Allah turned the word back on them to the letter: those who denied Shu'ayb, it was they who were the losers, swept off as if they had never prospered, away with Madyan as Thamud was taken away before them. Shu'ayb turned from the ruins with the dignity of a man who had held nothing back. I delivered my Lord's messages to you, he said, and I advised you; so how could I grieve for a people who refused to believe?

What Shu'ayb asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Shu'ayb's story as a tale about other people, ancient cheats with crooked scales and a great tree they bowed to, safely sealed in their ruined town. That would be to miss the question it puts to us, which is sharper and more

personal than almost any other in this book, because it walks straight into the room we keep curtained off.

He began with the worship of Allah and ended at the weighing scale, and he made them one road. This is the first thing Shu'ayb asks of us: to stop pretending that how we earn is somewhere outside our religion. He did not preach tawhid in the morning and ethics in the afternoon as two subjects. He preached them in one breath, because a man who has truly accepted that Allah is his only Lord has, in the same instant, accepted that Allah owns the scale. Your faith is not something you do between the walls of the masjid and leave at the threshold. It goes to work with you. It rides in the van, sits at the desk, stands at the till. And the test it sets you there, when the scale tips a little in your favour and no one is watching, when the form could be filled a shade dishonestly, when the bribe would be so easy to take and so easy to hide, is one of the truest tests your iman will ever face.

He insisted that little and pure outlasts much and filthy, and he was telling the truth about how wealth actually behaves. We believe, somewhere underneath, that more is always better, that the larger pile is the safer one. Shu'ayb's whole message, and Mufti Menk's whole warning, is that contaminated wealth is not safe at all. It does not stay in the bank. It reaches back and takes your sleep, your health, your peace, the very things you were cheating to be able to afford. So when you are offered the larger crooked gain or the smaller clean one, choose the clean one, not as a sacrifice but as the better bargain it actually is, and ask Allah for tawfiq in your earning the way you ask Him for it in your prayer, because He, not your cleverness, decides whose hands are blessed.

And here the line runs, as it always does in this chain, to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Shu'ayb's people failed the test of the scale; he ﷺ passed it before he was even sent. Long before a single verse was revealed, the people of Makkah, idolaters who would later fight him, had already given him a name they used in the very marketplace where he traded: al-Amin, the trustworthy. He was the man you handed your goods to and trusted to weigh them true, the one whose word in a deal was better than another man's oath. The marketplace, the exact place where Madyan was destroyed, was the place that crowned him honest. That is the proof Shu'ayb died trying to give his people and could not: that a true believer is most himself, not least, precisely where money changes hands. The orator of the prophets argued it; the unlettered Prophet ﷺ lived it so plainly that his city named him for it.

So carry Shu'ayb's question into Monday morning, into the next invoice, the next sale, the next quiet chance to take a little more than is yours. When the scale tips your way and no one would ever know, that is the masjid following you out the door. Refuse to round the figure, to hide the fault, to skim the hour, to pass the bribe. Choose the smaller lawful gain over the larger crooked one, and watch for the reversal Shu'ayb's people never believed in until it sat down on them: what is taken by wrong looks like winning right up until the day of the shadow, and what is given up for Allah is never, ever lost. O Allah, make our earnings lawful and our scales honest, keep our faith on us where money changes hands, grant us tawfiq in our work the way You grant it in our worship, and join us to Your prophets and to Your final Messenger ﷺ, al-Amin, the trustworthy, in the home You have prepared for those who believe.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 24 (Shu'ayb). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (7:86, 7:88, 7:89, 11:84, 11:85, 11:86, 11:87, 11:88, 11:90, 11:91, 11:94, 26:176, 26:189), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry more than one report, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept.

Between Musa and Dawud

The corridor where the dead were shown rising

Most chapters in this book are one life held up to the light and turned slowly. This one is a corridor. It is the stretch of years between two of the greatest men who ever walked the earth, Musa who has just been taken from us and Dawud who is about to arrive, and the road between them runs past a crowd of figures most of us have never had named for us. A prophet who finally led a frightened people through the gate they had refused. A whole population that ran for the high ground to escape a plague and met death exactly where they thought they had outrun it. A man Allah let sleep through an entire century and woke with his lunch still fresh. A king the people sneered at because he had no money. A giant. And, at the very end, a shepherd boy with a stick and a sling whom nobody on the field took seriously.

It can look, the first time you walk it, like a drawer of loose, half-remembered names. It is not. Underneath every door along this corridor is a single question, and it happens to be the question your own faith is built on: can Allah give life back to the dead? The corridor answers it, again and again, in one voice after another, with the same patient reply. Yes. Easily. Watch.

Musa is told it is time

When we last stood with Musa, peace be upon him, his people were being walked in circles. They had reached the edge of the holy land with him and refused to enter it, refused to face the tyrants inside the walls, and Allah had sentenced them to forty years of wandering in a wilderness that was not even theirs. Every morning they set out to cross it, and every evening they were back where they had begun. In those slow years Harun, peace be upon him, was taken. And in those same years, death came for Musa himself.

Mufti Menk tells the moment from an authentic narration of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and it is one of the strangest and most tender scenes in the whole series. When the angel of death came to Musa and told him his time had come, Musa struck him. The angel returned to his Lord and said, in effect, You sent me to a servant who does not want to die. So Allah sent him back with an offer. Put your hand on the back of an ox, Musa, and for every hair that falls beneath your palm, another year of life. And Musa, peace be upon him, asked the one question that cuts through every offer of more time: and then what? And then, came the answer, death. In that case, he said, let it come now. The man who would not be slapped into the grave walked into it willingly the instant he understood that no number of years changes where the road ends.

Mufti Menk turns this on us before we can look away from it. Someone once asked him, he says, about donating their body to science so that an organ might give another person a few more years of life. How many years, he asked back, five, ten? It is the same arithmetic Musa did on the back of that ox. If you are not ready to meet Allah now, when exactly do you imagine you will be ready? Allah even tells us, of some who came after, that you will find them clinging to life more desperately than anyone, and you

can watch that today in the men who pay to have their bodies frozen, on the hope that a future century will thaw them back. We will not outrun the meeting. It would be far better to prepare for it. And notice what Musa was actually asking for: not more years for their own sake, but long enough to see the holy land entered, the promise kept. When he saw that this was not Allah's decree, he let go without a fight. He was buried, the Prophet ﷺ tells us, near a red sandhill by the side of the road, and on the Night Journey he ﷺ passed him there and found him standing in prayer inside his grave.

A new generation, and the sun that waited

After Musa, Allah raised up a prophet to finish what the wandering generation would never finish: Yusha ibn Nun, the one the Bible calls Joshua, peace be upon him. Many of the scholars hold that he was the very youth who had carried the basket of fish on Musa's long journey to meet al-Khidr, grown now into the man Allah chose to lead the people in. And Mufti Menk pauses on the quiet mercy folded into the timing. Those forty years in the wilderness were not wasted; they were a changing of the guard. Not one of the men who had worshipped the calf and defied Musa marched in Yusha's army. An entire generation had passed away, and a new one, raised under the eyes of the pious, born free of the old fear, was the one Allah at last permitted through the gate of Jerusalem. They still carried some of their fathers' stubbornness; people do. But they were, as Mufti Menk puts it, born free, and that made all the difference.

Here he tells one of the most arresting signs in the entire book, again from an authentic hadith of the Prophet ﷺ. Yusha had laid siege to the city, the victory was almost in his hand, and the sun was sinking toward the horizon, which by the law of that war

would force the army to break off the fight until morning and lose its advantage. So Yusha spoke to the sun. Allah has commanded me, he said to it, and Allah has commanded you; by the command of Allah I tell you to hold your place. And Allah heard the prayer of His servant, and held the sun where it stood until the victory was complete, and only then let it set. The whole machinery of the sky paused for the supplication of one obedient man. We ask Allah, Mufti Menk says, for hearts like that, hearts soft enough that they still tremble when they hear what their Lord can do.

The people who ran from death

After Yusha was taken, the Children of Israel stayed in the land but never settled into peace. There was war on the outside against the tyrants who ringed them, and there was quarrelling on the inside, for they were twelve tribes and they did not love one another equally. Into that broken stretch of time Allah kept sending men. One of them was Hizqeel, and Mufti Menk introduces him with exactly the honesty this whole pillar runs on: whether Hizqeel was a prophet of Allah or simply a profoundly righteous man, the scholars differ, so we will say only, peace be upon him, and leave the question precisely where revelation left it. We do not harden what our own revelation kept soft.

His story is short, and it should stop you where you stand. A plague broke out, and thousands of people, in terror of dying, fled their homes, climbed to the safety of a plateau, and settled there certain they had escaped. Then Allah spoke one word to them. Die. And every one of them died at once, the very thing they had run from catching them in the same breath they thought they had outrun it. Allah, Mufti Menk reminds us, needs no cause at all to take a soul. The heart attack, the accident, the failing

body: these are mercies, things Allah gives us so the going feels explained and gentle, something to point at. Here He gave no such thing. He simply commanded it, and it was done. The Qur'an opens this scene for us in a single verse:

Have you not considered those who left their homes in many thousands, fearing death? Allāh said to them, "Die"; then He restored them to life. And Allāh is the possessor of bounty for the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude.

QUR'AN 2:243

And there, in the second half of the same verse, is the turn this whole corridor is built on. Then He restored them to life. They had been made a sign, a two-sided lesson hung up for everyone who came after: you cannot flee the death that Allah has written, and you cannot begin to imagine the life He can hand back. And then, the verse ends, most people will be grateful for neither.

A hundred years, and a meal still warm

Then comes the man the Qur'an does not name, though the reports often call him Uzair, peace be upon him, and once again Mufti Menk keeps the door open rather than nailing it shut: prophet or righteous man, the scholars differ, and we leave it there. He passed by a town that had fallen into ruin, its roofs caved in, its people long dead, nothing left but bones. And a question rose up in him, not out of doubt but out of sheer wonder: how will Allah ever bring this back to life? He wanted to see it happen. So Allah showed him, by making him the demonstration. He caused the man to die for a hundred years, and then He woke him, and asked him how long he had been there.

Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, "How will Allāh bring this to life after its death?" So Allāh caused him to die for a hundred years; then He revived him. He said, "How long have you remained?" He [the man] said, "I have remained a day or part of a day." He said, "Rather, you have remained one hundred years. Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time. And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people. And look at the bones [of this donkey] - how We raise them and then We cover them with flesh." And when it became clear to him, he said, "I know that Allāh is over all things competent."

QUR'AN 2:259

A hundred years gone, and to the man it felt like an afternoon nap. Mufti Menk lingers here, because this is a mercy we taste every single night and never think to thank Allah for. A whole century folded down into the space between closing your eyes and opening them, the way sleep takes the longest night you ever lay awake through and, the instant your eye finally closes, it is already dawn. No one, he says, has ever fully explained sleep, or that stranger thing still, the dream: that a man can wander through gardens in his sleep while the man lying right beside him sweats through a nightmare, and neither one can reach into the other's world. These are not small things to wave past. They are daily, ordinary proofs of the One who made them, laid within arm's reach of every human being who has ever slept.

Then Allah gave Uzair the evidence in his own two hands. Look at your food and your drink, after a hundred years: not gone stale, not touched by time. Now look at your donkey: only bones. And watch. He watched the bare bones lift and gather and knit themselves together and clothe themselves in flesh until the

animal stood up again, his own donkey, alive. And out of him came the line the whole corridor has been building toward, the sentence Allah wanted a human mouth to say after a human eye had actually seen it: I know that Allah is over all things competent. Nothing that people call impossible is the slightest bit difficult for Allah. What we name impossible is, to Him, simple and straightforward and easy.

When a miracle is mistaken for a god

What happened to Uzair after he walked back into the world is the warning Mufti Menk will not let slip past. A hundred years had passed, and no one knew him. His own children had aged beyond recognising him. There was, the reports say, one woman over a hundred years old who had known him as a righteous man whose every supplication was answered; but she was blind. So they told Uzair, if you are truly the man, you whose prayers were always answered, then pray that her sight returns. He made the supplication, and by the gift of Allah her eyes were opened, and she looked at him and confirmed him. His children found a birthmark they remembered, and confirmed him too. Mufti Menk hands all of this on exactly as he received it, naming it plainly as narration from the People of the Book: we do not know with certainty whether it is true, but we hold it gently and never build doctrine on it.

And then the harder report. It is said that the Torah had by that time been lost in all the wars and pulling and shoving among the tribes, and that Uzair, who had it preserved in his heart, dictated the entire book back to the people from memory. So here is a man who returns from a hundred years dead and restores the lost scripture, and the miracles cluster thick around his name, and his people make the leap a human heart must never make. They

began to say that Uzair was the son of God. Allah records that claim in the Qur'an, and places it deliberately beside the very same claim that would later be made about Isa, peace be upon him. Mufti Menk draws the line carefully, and reverently, never with a sneer: a handful of signs ran through one man's life, and people turned the servant into a son, the gift into a god. It is a test, he says, the same test that meets every messenger who is handed something extraordinary. The miracle was never Uzair's to own. It was Allah's, lent for a while, meant only to point back to Allah. And the lesson reaches all the way down the corridor to us: when you see the gift, thank the Giver, and never once let the wonder of a sign pull your worship away from the One who sent it.

A people who wanted a king

The Children of Israel carried with them a box, the taboot, the Ark, and inside it lay fragments of the very tablets Musa had been given, the ones that broke when he set them down in his grief and anger over the calf, along with other relics of the house of Musa and Harun. Whenever they carried that box into battle, a calm settled over them, an assurance, and they won. Then, in a time of deep disobedience, the Ark was lost in a war, and when the king of that day heard the news, he dropped dead on the spot. After him they had no king at all. They went to their prophet, the one the reports name Samuel, peace be upon him, and made a demand: send us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah for the land that was taken from us.

The prophet read them with a clear eye and asked the question that hung over their entire history. He said, in effect, would you perhaps refuse to fight, if fighting were actually written for you, the way your fathers refused Musa? They swore they would not

refuse; how could they, when they had been driven from their homes and their children? The Qur'an preserves the exchange:

Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses when they said to a prophet of theirs, "Send to us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allāh"? He said, "Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if battle was prescribed for you?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the cause of Allāh when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?" But when battle was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And Allāh is Knowing of the wrongdoers.

QUR'AN 2:246

So Allah named the king: Talut, the man the Bible calls Saul, peace be upon him, a man of Banu Israil though not a prophet. And the instant his name was given, the people rejected him, on the two grounds men always reach for when they want to dismiss someone. He was not from the noble tribes. And he was not rich.

And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allāh has sent to you Saul as a king." They said, "How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?" He said, "Indeed, Allāh has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allāh gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allāh is all-Encompassing [in favor] and Knowing."

QUR'AN 2:247

Mufti Menk holds the mirror up to us without flinching. We are no different, he says. We still size up a leader by his wealth and his lineage before we ever pause to weigh his knowledge or his worth, just as we do today, when a man cannot so much as

campaign without money behind him, and then we tell ourselves the result was fair. But Allah answered the people of Talut clear over their heads, in words worth carrying: He has chosen him over you, and given him an abundance in knowledge and in physical strength, and Allah gives His kingship to whomever He wills. Take the lesson, Mufti Menk says, and take it seriously, because it will stand against you on the Day of Judgement. When truth reaches you, do not weigh the one who carries it by the size of his pocket or the rank of his name. Whatever reached your ear was never meant to miss you, and you will answer for what you did with it, no matter who brought it, even a beggar in the street. And to settle the people's hearts, the prophet was given a sign of Talut's kingship: the Ark itself would be returned to them.

And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, a sign of his kingship is that the chest will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord and a remnant of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left, carried by the angels. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

QUR'AN 2:248

The river, and how many a small company

Talut marched out, and the reports put his gathering army near eighty thousand. He was far too wise to trust a crowd that size, knowing how many among them would break the first command they did not happen to like. So Allah set a test for them at a river, on a hot and thirsty day, and the test was almost insultingly small: do not drink from this water, save a single handful cupped in the palm. That was all. And the bulk of them, parched and hot, threw themselves down at the bank and drank their fill, disobeying at the very first instruction they were given. Of eighty thousand, the

historians say, some seventy-six thousand failed at the river. Barely four thousand crossed to the other side.

And when Saul went forth with the soldiers, he said, "Indeed, Allāh will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand." But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them. Then when he had crossed it along with those who believed with him, they said, "There is no power for us today against Goliath and his soldiers." But those who were certain that they would meet Allāh said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allāh. And Allāh is with the patient."

QUR'AN 2:249

And even that handful of thousands faltered when they saw what was waiting on the far bank: Jalut, the giant the Bible calls Goliath, an enormous man at the head of an enormous army, and the cry went up among them, we have no power today against Jalut and his soldiers. But not all of them said it. The ones who were certain, certain in their bones that they were going to meet Allah whatever happened on that field, answered the frightened with the sentence Mufti Menk says is the whole history of the believers compressed into a single line: how many a small company has overcome a large company by the permission of Allah, and Allah is with the patient. This, he says, is the law running underneath every battle that ever mattered. Numbers do not decide it. Conviction decides it, and patience decides it. The one who runs becomes a statistic, one more name the enemy adds to its count; the one who holds his ground, by the leave of Allah, wins. And here Mufti Menk points his finger straight down the road this whole pillar is travelling toward, to the day the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would stand at Badr with three hundred

and thirteen men against a thousand, and Allah would hand the few the victory in exactly this way. The believers at the river were rehearsing Badr centuries before Badr was fought.

A boy, a sling, and the fall of Jalut

Before the two armies could clash they did what was done in the wars of that age: a single combat to set the morale of everyone watching, your champion against ours, and the spirit of the whole host rising or falling on the outcome. Jalut stepped out, sword drawn, scoffing, telling these people to be realistic and send him a real man. And from the believers' side came a young shepherd with a stick in one hand and a sling and a few pebbles in the other. He told the king that he would go. The whole field laughed, Mufti Menk says, Jalut loudest of all, jeering that one swing of his sword would take the boy's head clean off. They tried to fit the youth with armour and it hung too heavy on him; he stripped it off. When the king pressed him, how can you go out there, the boy answered that only yesterday he had killed a lion that came for his sheep, and another day a bear, with his bare hands. They let him go.

This was Dawud, the one the Bible calls David, peace be upon him. He fitted a single pebble into the sling, said Bismillah, swung, and let it fly straight at the giant's head. Jalut dropped where he stood, and within a breath he was dead on the ground, cold, gone, and his whole vast army broke and ran. Allah seals the scene Himself:

So they defeated them by permission of Allāh, and David killed Goliath, and Allāh gave him the kingship and wisdom [i.e., prophethood] and taught him from that which He willed. And if it were not for Allāh checking [some] people

*by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted,
but Allāh is the possessor of bounty for the worlds.*

QUR'AN 2:251

The boy who had passed the river without drinking, who had obeyed when seventy-six thousand disobeyed, who was an obedient worshipper before he was anything else, obedient to his Lord, to the prophet, and to the king, was the one Allah lifted up and gave a throne, and prophethood, and wisdom, and knowledge of what He willed to teach him. We will follow Dawud to that throne tomorrow, and into the gifts Allah poured on him there. For now, hold on to the line Mufti Menk closes the verse with, because it holds this entire corridor of war and death and life together in one hand: were it not for Allah repelling one people by means of another, the earth would have gone to ruin, but Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds. The small band, the obedient boy, the falling giant, none of it was the boy's strength. It was Allah, working His will through the few who would not run. And it is worth saying, with Mufti Menk, that those wounding stories carried in the books of the People of the Book about the sins of the prophet and king Dawud are unauthentic, and a few have unfortunately seeped into our own books too. We believe Dawud, peace be upon him, was a noble and powerful servant of Allah who did not fall into them. None of the messengers chosen by Allah carried a bad record, and we guard them from what reaches us from elsewhere.

What this corridor asks of our faith

It would be easy to walk this corridor once, enjoy the strangeness of it, the slapped angel and the stopped sun and the boy with the sling, and step out the other end having taken nothing. That would be to miss the question the whole passage

was built to put to you. And the question is not a historical one. It is the one your own iman stands or falls on.

Can the dead live again? You say yes. You say it in your declaration of faith, because belief in the Last Day, in the resurrection of every soul that has ever died, is an article of your iman, one of the things you cannot be a believer without. But for most of us it stays an idea, a line we affirm and rarely feel. Watch what Allah does in this corridor. He does not argue the point. He shows it. He shows you a whole people who fled a plague, struck dead on the high ground and then restored to life (2:243). He shows you a man who wondered, exactly as you might, how can this ruin ever live again, and was made to die for a hundred years and woke to find his food unspoiled and his own donkey rebuilt bone by bone in front of his eyes, until all he could say was, I know that Allah is over all things competent (2:259). The resurrection you affirm with your tongue, Allah let human eyes actually witness, and wrote it down so that yours could witness it too. Do not let it stay a slogan. Let it be the thing you know.

And lest you imagine Allah's power to give life reaches only as far as the grave, He shows it on the battlefield in the same breath. The few who obeyed at the river and held their ground, certain they would meet their Lord, were given a giant's whole army through a boy with a stone. How many a small company has overcome a large company by the permission of Allah (2:249). And here the corridor opens directly onto the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, where this is not a story but a promise kept. At Badr, three hundred and thirteen against a thousand, the same law of Allah carried the few over the many, the same conviction, the same patience, the same permission of Allah deciding a thing that numbers said was already decided the other way. The believers who whispered that sentence on the bank of a river

were rehearsing his ﷺ victory centuries before he was born. When you stand outnumbered in your own life, by the people around you, by the size of the thing you face, by your own weakness, this is the law you are standing inside: that Allah is with the patient, and that He has handed the few the impossible before and will again.

So carry three things out of this corridor and down into your ordinary days. First, stop running. Musa walked into death the moment he understood no years could change the destination, and a whole nation died on the very ground they fled to; you will not outrun the meeting either, so prepare for it instead of fearing it. Second, let your belief in the resurrection become something you feel, not just something you affirm, because Allah took the trouble to let men watch it so that the One who is over all things competent would not be an abstraction to you. And third, when you are outnumbered and afraid, do not become a statistic; hold your ground, make the supplication the believers made before the giant, and trust the law of Allah over the size of the army. May Allah, the One who gives life to the dead and victory to the few, make us certain of the meeting with Him, grateful for every sign and never seduced by it, steady when we are outnumbered, and gather us among those who obeyed when others ran.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 25 (the figures between Musa and Dawud: Yusha, Hizqeel, Uzair, Talut, and Jalut). Qur'an: Sahih International (2:243, 2:246, 2:247, 2:248, 2:249, 2:251, 2:259), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's. Where the histories carry reports from the People of the

Book, his caution has been kept: such reports are neither affirmed nor denied unless our own revelation confirms them.

Dawud

Given a kingdom, and he stayed on his knees

There is a kind of test that hides inside a gift. We pray for ease and imagine that if it ever came, we would finally have room in our lives to worship. We tell ourselves the prayers we miss are missed because we are tired, because we are stretched, because the world is heavy on our shoulders, and that a lighter life would lift us straight to Allah. Then Allah gives us a small mercy, and somehow it does the opposite. The ease becomes the excuse. The gift becomes the distance.

Dawud, peace be upon him, is the answer to that quiet lie. Allah did not give him a small mercy. Allah gave him almost everything a human being can be given at once, stacked into a single hand: a kingdom that kept winning, prophethood, a scripture sent down to him alone, wisdom to settle any dispute, wealth beyond anyone of his age, an army few could break, a voice the very mountains answered, and iron that went soft in his fingers like warm clay. Any one of those gifts has been enough to ruin a man. He carried all of them, and the more he carried, the lower he bent.

This is day twenty-six of twenty-nine, and the wonder of Dawud is not the size of what he was given. It is the gratitude. Mufti Menk lingers here for the whole evening, because this is the rarest thing a powerful person can ever be: a king who stays on his knees.

Everything, in one hand

The boy with the sling had grown. After Dawud brought down Jalut, the giant the histories call Goliath, with a single stone, he did not fade back into the crowd. He became famous across the land of Bani Israil, and then he became more than famous. Allah gave him strength. Allah gave him leadership. Allah gave him knowledge. Allah gave him prophethood. And when the old king died, Allah gave him the throne as well, so that the warrior who had saved his people now ruled them.

The Qur'an gathers it into a few dense words, and Mufti Menk slows down to unpack each one, because the list is almost too much to hold:

And We strengthened his kingdom and gave him wisdom and discernment in speech.

QUR'AN 38:20

Read it carefully. "We strengthened his kingdom" means Allah established his rule and then increased it, which in the language of those days meant one thing: he kept winning. War after war, the great warrior whom no one could break in the field, with the ark of the covenant carried before his armies and victory following behind it. "Wisdom," hikmah, is the word the Qur'an uses here for the prophethood Allah gave him, and alongside it came the Zabur, a scripture of his own. And "discernment in speech," fasl al-khitab, is the gift of sound judgment: the ability to sit between two people locked in a dispute and cut clean to the truth of it, to settle a matter so fairly that both sides walked away knowing they had met justice.

So count him, the way Mufti Menk counts him. Dawud was a king. And a prophet. And a judge. And a devoted worshipper. And a

warrior. All at once. All in one man. Hold that picture, because everything that makes this story land is the gap between how much he carried and how little it moved him. The dunya, with all of its weight in his hands, never once made him forget where he came from or where he was going.

When the mountains sang with him

Dawud had a voice unlike any other voice Allah has ever given a human throat. And when he turned that voice to the praise of his Lord, the world did not stay silent. It joined him.

And We certainly gave David from Us bounty. [We said], "O mountains, repeat [Our] praises with him, and the birds [as well]." And We made pliable for him iron,

QUR'AN 34:10

The mountains echoed his glorification back to him. The birds gathered overhead and sang it with him. People used to stand and listen, Mufti Menk says, in plain amazement, because they could hear the very rocks and the very birds of the sky repeating the words of a man praising Allah. Imagine standing in that valley. A man begins to glorify his Lord, and the cliffs answer, and the flocks of birds settle into the air above him and answer too, and for a moment the whole of creation is one tongue.

Mufti Menk uses the wonder of it to turn the lesson back onto us, and the turn is worth following. Because Surah ar-Rahman tells us this is not actually unusual at all. The whole of creation is already glorifying Allah, every moment, in a language we simply cannot hear:

And the stars and trees prostrate.

How does a tree prostrate? We do not know. How does a star bow? We cannot say. Take any creature, Mufti Menk offers: a sheep standing in a field praises Allah in a way you will never understand, and you praise Allah in a way that sheep will never understand, and yet both of you, in that very moment, are praising Him. The mountains answering Dawud were not breaking the rule of the universe. They were letting one man hear, out loud, what is always going on underneath the silence.

Which leaves a single question hanging over your own mouth. Your tongue is a gift too, given to you by Allah, and Mufti Menk presses it gently into a warning we ought to carry: if you do not occupy this tongue with the remembrance of Allah, it will occupy you with the disobedience of Him. The mountains could not help but glorify their Lord. You can. So keep the tongue wet with His remembrance, because it was lent to you for that, and it will not stay idle. It will either lift you or it will sink you.

The full coats of mail

Then there was the iron. In the hands of Dawud, the hard metal of the age went soft, pliable as clay, so that he could shape it without fire or hammer. And what he made with it was armour, the finest coats of mail of his time, so that his people went into battle protected and went on winning. But notice exactly what Allah says in the next breath, because Mufti Menk does not let us rush past it:

[Commanding him], "Make full coats of mail and calculate [precisely] the links, and work [all of you] righteousness. Indeed I, of what you do, am Seeing."

Look at what Allah does not say. He softens the iron, He teaches the craft, and then He does not say, "now relax, you are taken care of, the miracle has handled it." He says: make the armour. Measure the links with care. And all of you, work righteousness, for I see everything you do. The miracle did not cancel the effort. It set him to work. The softened iron still had to be shaped, link by deliberate link, by a king who could have asked for anything and instead picked up the trade himself.

And in another place Allah names the purpose of all that labour, and then asks the question that turns out to be the question of Dawud's entire life:

And We taught him the fashioning of coats of armor to protect you from your [enemy in] battle. So will you then be grateful?

QUR'AN 21:80

So will you then be grateful. That is the thread Mufti Menk keeps pulling all evening, and it runs straight through everything Dawud was given. He received the most, and he answered with the most. Gratitude, in his life, was never simply a word said after a meal. It was a body bent in prayer. It was a hand at the forge. It was a tongue kept wet with praise. It was a king who knew, in his bones, that every link of every gift had come down to him from Somewhere, and Someone, above him, and who lived as though he never forgot it for an hour.

The fast Allah loved best

Here is the heart of it. This is the detail that should stop you where you sit, the one Mufti Menk circles back to as the soul of

the whole story. Picture the man one more time in his fullness. Wealth no one around him could even imagine. An army few on earth could match. Creatures of Allah that obeyed his word. A throne. A kingdom that kept expanding. A scripture revealed to him alone. Every external thing a human being could crave, he had.

And by night, he was alone with Allah, weeping.

He fasted every second day, all his life. One day fasting, one day not, year after year after year, never relenting, a discipline most of us would struggle to keep for a single month. And every night, he stood a fixed portion of the darkness in prayer, one narration says a third of the night, every night, while his kingdom slept. The richest man of his age spent his nights in tears and half his days in hunger, by choice, with the whole world available to him and untouched on the table.

Mufti Menk reaches here for the words of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, because across all the centuries the final Messenger ﷺ singled this very man out for praise. The Prophet ﷺ taught that the most beloved fasting to Allah is the fasting of Dawud, who fasted a day and broke a day; and that the most beloved prayer to Allah is the prayer of Dawud, who slept half the night, stood a third of it, and slept a sixth. Stop and feel the weight of that. Out of all the worship of all the prophets across all of time, the exact rhythm of devotion that the last and greatest Prophet ﷺ held up as the dearest of all to Allah belonged to this king. Not a fast born of a man who had nothing else to do. A fast chosen, deliberately, by a man who had everything.

And then, the way Mufti Menk turns it, the question comes for us, gently. We do not own a fraction of a fraction of what Dawud owned. The richest among us does not hold one part in a million

of what passed through his hands. And still we find ourselves heavy to pray, slow to fast, tired before the Qur'an is even open. We cling to this dunya with both fists, and we would buy more of it in a heartbeat if it were for sale, and meanwhile we cannot find the energy for two units of prayer in the night. He had the whole world in one hand, and he stayed on his knees with the other. So the next time the alarm sounds before Fajr and your body begs for the pillow, or a day comes that you could fast and choose not to, remember whose footsteps those are. And remember Who loved them most.

Two men who climbed the wall

There is a story the Qur'an tells about Dawud that opens, strangely, like a question put to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself.

*And has there come to you the news of the adversaries,
when they climbed over the wall of [his] prayer chamber -*

QUR'AN 38:21

Dawud, Mufti Menk explains, used to pray in a mihrab, a private prayer chamber set deep inside his palace, a place of seclusion where absolutely no one was permitted to disturb him while he worshipped his Lord. There were guards. There was a high wall. There was the whole palace around the wall, and the chamber within it, and the man within that, alone before Allah. And then, mid-worship, two men were simply there, standing in his sanctuary, having somehow scaled the wall and dropped inside. How they got past everything, Mufti Menk says, no one knows. He was startled, shaken, alarmed at the suddenness of two strangers in the one place strangers could never be.

When they entered upon David and he was alarmed by them? They said, "Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other, so judge between us with truth and do not exceed [it] and guide us to the sound path.

QUR'AN 38:22

They calmed him: do not fear, we are two disputants, one of us has wronged the other, so judge between us with the truth, do not be unjust, and guide us to the right path. And then one of them laid out the case.

Indeed this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe; so he said, 'Entrust her to me,' and he overpowered me in speech."

QUR'AN 38:23

My brother, this man says, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have only one. We are partners. And he is pressing me to hand over my single ewe to him on top of his ninety-nine, and his speech overpowers mine, so I cannot win the argument. Now you tell us. Is that fair?

And here, exactly here, Mufti Menk stops us hard, because this is the precise spot where the foreign stories rush in and ruin everything. He will not allow it. He flags it the way he has flagged such things all series long: there are narrations doing the rounds, seeped in from the Hebrew scriptures, the Israiliyyat, that twist this test into a sin, that hang upon Dawud a crime he never committed. As Muslims, he says firmly, we hold that these prophets were the highest and the most pious of all the people Allah ever chose, and Allah does not choose a sinful man to carry His message to mankind. The sad thing, he adds, is that some of our own books of history relay these reports without ever

marking them as foreign, and so they pass mouth to mouth as folklore until people begin to believe a prophet of Allah sinned. We reject that. We strip the slander away entirely, and we keep only what the Qur'an actually places before us: a king, deep in his prayer, suddenly asked to judge.

The test was the judging itself

What Dawud answered was right on its face. He looked at the case, and any of us listening would have reached for the same words, and he gave them:

[David] said, "He has certainly wronged you in demanding your ewe [in addition] to his ewes. And indeed, many associates oppress one another, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds - and few are they." And David became certain that We had tried him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allāh].

QUR'AN 38:24

Notice that Dawud did not stop at the verdict. He widened it into a warning every one of us needs to hear: many partners wrong one another, except those who believe and do righteous deeds, and how few they are. Mufti Menk pauses on that line, because it is a piece of wisdom we need today as dearly as ever. Partnership over wealth is heavy. To go into it safely you need a big heart, a heart that does not love money, real iman, and your eyes fixed on the next life. Without those, the day the partnership cracks, it will tear apart two people who worked side by side for forty years, until they can no longer look one another in the eye. That, Mufti Menk says, is what wealth does, what partnership does, and it is why in Islam such a partnership should be

something close to a last resort, entered only out of genuine need, because in standing on your own there is more barakah.

But the ewes were never the real test. As the verdict left Dawud's mouth, he looked up, and the two men were gone. Vanished. They had not climbed back over any wall. They were angels, sent by Allah, and the trial was not the dispute at all. The trial was this: he had reached a judgment for one side before he had ever heard the other. However obvious the case had seemed, however completely his own mind had already settled it, a man placed over people to judge them does not rule on half a story. Dawud understood it in an instant. He became certain that Allah had tried him, and he did the thing that makes Dawud who he is: he sought his Lord's forgiveness, and he fell down prostrate, turning back to Allah in repentance. (This is one of the places in the Qur'an where the believer reciting it prostrates too. Mufti Menk notes that when he and the worshippers reached this verse in the night prayer, they went down in sajdah just as Dawud did, joining the worshippers of old in falling low before Allah, never too proud to drop to the ground for His sake.)

And look at the mercy of the answer that comes back.

So We forgave him that; and indeed, for him is nearness to Us and a good place of return.

QUR'AN 38:25

Allah forgave him, and then told him, in front of all of us reading it forever after, that he has nearness to Allah and a beautiful place of return. And Allah did not strip the office of judge from a man who had momentarily misjudged. He confirmed it, and turned it into a charge that stands over every person who will ever hold authority:

[We said], "O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allāh." Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allāh will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account.

QUR'AN 38:26

A judge, Mufti Menk draws out of this, rules by the evidence set before him, not by what is already in his head, and never while a storm is on him. He points to the law of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who taught that a judge does not pass judgment while he is angry: he must tell the people to come back when he is calm, because a man ruling in anger might send the next person before him to ruin over a problem he carried from home. This, Mufti Menk says, is why justice is sacred, and why a judge should be among the best provided for of all people, so that no bribe could ever tempt him, because whatever a briber might offer, he already has more. And the Qur'an has already given us the single condition on which the whole sense of justice depends. It is only when you fear Allah that He grants you the inner sense to tell right from wrong:

O you who have believed, if you fear Allāh, He will grant you a criterion and will remove from you your misdeeds and forgive you. And Allāh is the possessor of great bounty.

QUR'AN 8:29

Lose the fear of Allah, Mufti Menk warns, and you lose the criterion itself, the very ability to distinguish right from wrong, and then the innocent languish while the guilty walk free.

The gift named Sulayman

Allah gave Dawud a son, and the Qur'an introduces the boy with the same praise it gives the father:

And to David We gave Solomon. An excellent servant, indeed he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allāh].

QUR'AN 38:30

(If you ever lose track of which is which, Mufti Menk offers a simple trick: Dawud, the D, is the dad; Sulayman, the S, is the son.) And the boy grew up at the very foot of his father's judgments, an intelligent child who would sit to the side and watch and listen as Dawud settled the disputes of the people, until the day a case came that the Qur'an chose to record forever.

A flock had broken loose in the night and grazed a neighbour's field down to the bare earth. Both men stood before Dawud. My crop is destroyed, said the one; this man's flock ate it. My flock did it, admitted the other; it was mine. Dawud ruled simply and fairly: since the flock had caused the ruin, let the flock pass to the owner of the destroyed crop, and the matter is closed. Then young Sulayman spoke up. Father, he said, I have a thought. And here Mufti Menk catches a detail and presses it into a lesson, because Dawud did not bristle the way we so often bristle when our own children interrupt and presume to correct us. He turned to his son and said, simply, speak. Tell me. And Sulayman offered something deeper:

And [mention] David and Solomon, when they judged concerning the field - when the sheep of a people overran it [at night], and We were witness to their judgement.

QUR'AN 21:78

Let the man with the ruined field, Sulayman proposed, keep the flock for now and take its milk and its wool and its young while he holds it; and let the man who owns the flock work the ruined field until he has restored it to exactly what it was before; and then each returns to the other what was always his. The owner of the crop is made whole, and the owner of the flock keeps his flock in the end, and no one is left with nothing. And Allah Himself tells us what He thought of the boy's answer:

And We gave understanding of it [i.e., the case] to Solomon, and to each [of them] We gave judgement and knowledge. And We subjected the mountains to exalt [Us], along with David and [also] the birds. And We were doing [that].

QUR'AN 21:79

Allah gave the deeper understanding of the case to Sulayman, and yet, look, in the same verse He affirms that to each of them, father and son alike, He had given judgement and knowledge. The father was honoured by the son, and the son was a mercy given to the father, and neither was diminished by the other.

Mufti Menk lifts a lesson straight out of this for every parent listening, and it is one of the warmest of the evening. The strongest thing you can ever hand a child is not a lecture but a life they get to watch. Dawud worshipped, and Sulayman grew up worshipping. The point, Mufti Menk insists, is that the most powerful way to raise a child is to lead by example, by what you do and not by what you say. When you fast, the small one beside you wants to fast. When you reach for the Qur'an each morning, you look up to find the little hands reaching for it too. Tell a child to dress modestly while you yourself are uncovered and the words land on nothing; live it in front of them and they will ask for

what you are wearing. Lead by what you do, keep them in an environment that protects what they learn at home, and Allah tends to raise, from your own house, the next ones who will walk the road behind you.

The one wall no king can build

There is a last scene Mufti Menk leaves us with, and it is the quietest and the largest of them all.

Dawud, so careful, so guarded, kept a wall around all that he had, a castle and a high wall and the strict rule that no stranger came near. And one day there was a man standing inside the courtyard whom no guard had admitted and no gate had opened. Dawud called him over. Who are you, he asked, and how did you get in? I am the one, the man answered, whom no wall stops and no power turns back. You can have your wall, you can have your castle, you can have whatever you wish, and none of it can stop me. And Dawud knew at once: this is the angel of death, the only visitor on earth whom a wall cannot keep out, who comes to a man wherever he is, and whom nothing can hold back except Allah.

Now hold the whole of his life in your eye for one last moment. This man had authority. He had a kingdom most people could not picture. He had wealth beyond counting, an army among the most powerful of its age, creatures of Allah that obeyed his command. And when the angel of death stood before him, none of it bought him one more hour. But here is the thing, the thing Mufti Menk wants to be the last thing we take away. Because Dawud had never once allowed any of it, not the wealth, not the power, not the crown, to make him forget where he came from and where he was going, he was ready. He spent his nights weeping before Allah and his days fasting and his tongue in

praise, and so when the moment came that the world could not negotiate, he had nothing to fear from it. Take my soul, he said. And the angel took it.

And then a strange and tender thing. It is reported that when they carried the body of Dawud to the grave, the people came in their tens of thousands, so beloved was he, and even the birds came. It was a burning day, no cloud and no wind, the sun overhead as though the whole of creation were in mourning. And Sulayman, in one of the first of the wonders Allah would give him, commanded the birds, and they gathered into a vast hovering flock and spread themselves between the sun and the mourners, a living canopy of wings shading the people who buried his father. So Sulayman inherited Dawud in the two things that truly mattered, the kingship and the prophethood, exactly what his father had held, handed down to the son.

But you and I are meant to inherit something else from Dawud, peace be upon him. We are meant to inherit the knowing: that everything we clutch will be left behind at a wall we cannot raise high enough, and that the only wealth that crosses over with us is what we spent on our knees. He was given the kingdom of the whole world, and he stayed grateful to the end. The honest measure of our own gratitude was never going to be what we say after Allah's gifts arrive. It is what we do with the night, with the fast, with the tongue He lent us.

What Dawud asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this and feel only the distance of it, to set Dawud so high above us, with his mountains and his miracles and his crown, that he has nothing left to ask of an ordinary believer. That would be the loss. His life is not a monument to admire from below. It is a question put straight to

our own iman, and the question is sharper for the rest of us than it ever was for him.

He had everything, and the gifts never once made him forget Allah. This is the test most of us are quietly failing in the opposite direction. We are not kings, and still the little we have pulls us away. A new comfort, a small rise in status, a season of ease, and the prayers grow thin and the Qur'an gathers dust and we tell ourselves we will return to Allah when life calms down. Dawud is the proof that ease was never the obstacle and was never going to be the solution. He had the world in one hand and his forehead on the ground, because his peace was never in his circumstances; it was in his Lord. So look honestly at whatever Allah has given you, however modest, and ask whether it is drawing you toward Him or away from Him. If a gift is pulling you off your prayer mat, that is the test failing, not passing, and the gift was never the point.

He answered the most with the most, and he did it with his body, not just his tongue. Allah softened the iron for him and then said: now make the armour, measure every link, work righteousness. The miracle did not excuse the effort; it commissioned it. And the man Allah praised for the dearest fast and the dearest night prayer of any servant was not a man with empty hands and nothing to do. He was the busiest, wealthiest, most powerful man of his age, and he fasted every other day of his life and stood a third of every night in tears. Here is where his life reaches across the centuries and touches yours directly, because the door he opened is still open. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ named the fast of Dawud and the night prayer of Dawud the worship most beloved to Allah, and then he left it for the ummah to take up. You can fast a day and break a day, the way he did. You can rise in the last third of the night and pray while the house sleeps, the

way he did. This is not a relic sealed in a king's tomb. It is a path the final Prophet ﷺ pointed his people toward, and it is walkable by anyone willing to be a little uncomfortable for the sake of the One who gave them everything they have.

And underneath all of it runs the name of Allah that Dawud's whole house was built upon: ash-Shakur, the Appreciative. We tend to think gratitude flows one way, from the servant up to the Lord, a small thing we offer in return for a large thing we received. But ash-Shakur is the One who appreciates us, who takes the little we manage and repays it out of all proportion, who lets no act of thanks go unnoticed and no night of worship go unrecorded. Dawud gave Allah his nights and his hunger and his praise, and Allah gave him nearness and a good place of return and a son who shaded his grave with the wings of birds. Nothing he spent on his knees was ever lost. And that is the promise that should change how you spend your days, because the God you are being asked to thank is a God who thanks back, lavishly, forever.

So take one small, concrete thing from Dawud down into your own ordinary life, tonight. Fast a single day this week the way he fasted, one day on. Set an alarm for the last third of one night and pray two quiet units while everyone you love is asleep. Keep your tongue, that gift on loan, wet with the praise of the Lord the mountains could not help but praise. That is how the grateful king lived, in worship he chose when he could have chosen anything, and the road he walked is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah make us of those who bow lower the more He gives, grant us a true sense of justice born of fearing Him, and gather us with Dawud and Sulayman and the final Prophet ﷺ in the good place of return He has prepared for those who were grateful. The prayer Allah taught their own house is still the truest words for it:

my Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed upon me.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 26 (Dawud, part 2). Qur'an translations are from Sahih International (38:17-26, 38:30, 34:10-11, 21:78-80, 55:6, 8:29, 27:19), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports from the Israiliyyat, Mufti Menk's own caution has been kept, and the slander pinned on a prophet has been left out.

Sulayman and the kingdom, part I

A king who asked only to be grateful

Yesterday a king was lowered into the earth, and the road behind his bier was packed with mourners, tens of thousands of them, because the man in the coffin had been just. That was Dawud, peace be upon him, the shepherd boy who had felled a giant and been handed a throne. Today his son inherits him. Not his gold, because a prophet leaves no gold for anyone to inherit, but his prophethood, his kingship, and a gift no human being before or since has ever been handed: the kingdom of Sulayman, peace be upon him, the one the world calls Solomon.

Watch him closely across this chapter, because the most powerful man who ever lived spends the whole of it doing one strange and beautiful thing with all that power. He bends it back, again and again, into gratitude. He commands the wind. He commands the jinn. He hears the speech of birds and ants. He has a throne carried across an empire in less time than it takes to blink. And through every wonder of it, the only thing he ever begs his Lord for is the ability to say thank you, and to mean it.

What it means to inherit a prophet

The Qur'an gathers nearly the whole of Sulayman's story into one chapter, Surah an-Naml, the chapter of the ant, and it opens the account at the moment of handover, with a word Mufti Menk warns us is easy to read wrong.

And Solomon inherited David. He said, "O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty."

QUR'AN 27:16

Inherited. The instinct is to picture a treasury passing from father to son, but the prophets do not work that way. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said it plainly: we, the company of prophets, leave no inheritance of wealth; whatever we leave behind is charity. So what came down from Dawud to Sulayman was never a fortune. It was prophethood, and kingship, and one thing more, the one inheritance of the prophets that is genuinely up for grabs. The Messenger ﷺ told us that the prophets bequeath knowledge, and whoever takes the largest share of it has taken the richest portion of the estate. That door is open to anyone. It is open to us. The wealth of Dawud was buried with the wandering generation, but his knowledge is still on the table, and the one who reaches for the most of it inherits the most.

So Sulayman stands before his people and tells them what he has been given, and notice that he does not name it to boast; he names it to name the Giver. We have been taught the speech of the birds. We have been given from everything. And then he fixes a single word over the whole of it: this is clearly a bounty, a favour, fadl. Hold that word, because it is the thread that runs through this entire day. Everything that is coming, the wind, the jinn, the queen, the throne, Sulayman will keep tracing back to the same source with the same word. This is from the favour of my Lord. The chapter named for an ant opens here, with a king who, at the very moment of his crowning, is busy pointing away from himself.

A kingdom no one after him would have

The kingdom did not simply drop into his lap. It arrived on the far side of a test, and the test is recorded in another chapter, Surah Sad, where Allah first tells us what kind of servant Sulayman was before He tells us what kind of trial He sent.

And to David We gave Solomon. An excellent servant, indeed he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allah].

QUR'AN 38:30

An excellent servant, forever turning back to his Lord. Keep that in your hand, because it explains everything that follows: the worship came first, and the kingdom came after. Then the trial:

And We certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body; then he returned.

QUR'AN 38:34

Here Mufti Menk stops and does the thing this whole pillar is built on. There is a famous story pinned to this verse, carried in from the Hebrew narrations, the Israiliyyat, that Sulayman went around hundreds of his wives in a single night hoping for sons who would grow up to fight in the cause of Allah, and that the trial was a punishment for it. Mufti Menk will not soften it or half-keep it. He calls it by its name: a fabricated, blasphemous report, and he tells you to throw it straight out the window. The rule he hands you is the Sunnah's own rule, and it is worth memorising. When a narration reaches us from the People of the Book and carries any disrespect for a prophet, we discard it without ceremony, because the prophets of Allah were far above what such reports accuse them of. And he adds a warning that lands on the reader directly: do not go chasing details beyond what Allah and His

Messenger ﷺ told us, because in reaching for more than revelation gave, a person can end up, without ever intending it, slandering the very men Allah called excellent.

The reading he leans on instead, the one he takes from the mufassir Fakhr al-Razi, is gentler and far more instructive. Allah tried Sulayman with a severe illness. The most powerful man alive lay on his own throne like a corpse, a body and no more, and not one creature in all his vast dominion could lift the sickness from him. Not mankind. Not the jinn. Not the birds, who, it is said, flew to the corners of the earth searching out cures and came back with nothing. He could not move. His kingdom, in that moment, was as good as gone from him, because what is a kingdom to a man who cannot rise from his bed. And in exactly that helplessness he understood the thing the powerful spend their whole lives forgetting: that with all of this, all the armies and the wealth and the dominion, not one of them can hold death back from me; no one can take my soul but You; I depend, utterly and only, on You. That is the moment that turned him back. And only then, only from inside that surrender, did he ask.

He said, "My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower."

QUR'AN 38:35

Look at the order of the asking, because Mufti Menk points to it as a pattern for our own supplication. Sulayman does not lead with his request. First he cleans the slate, my Lord, forgive me, and only with the slate clean does he ask, and grant me a kingdom that will belong to no one after me. This is the shape of du'a worth learning: praise, then repentance, then the request laid before a Lord you have already turned back to. And notice

what he is actually asking for. It is not greed for the world. He has just lain helpless and learned exactly how little the world is worth. He is asking for a sign, something so singular it could only ever be his, a wonder that would still be standing as a proof of Allah long after Sulayman himself was dust. He wanted his kingdom to be an argument for his Lord that no one could repeat.

The wind and the jinn at his command

Allah answered, and the answer is staggering. He gave this servant command of the wind itself, and command of a race of beings no human eye can see.

And to Solomon [We subjected] the wind - its morning [journey was that of] a month - and its afternoon [journey was that of] a month, and We made flow for him a spring of [liquid] copper. And among the jinn were those who worked for him by the permission of his Lord. And whoever deviated among them from Our command - We will make him taste of the punishment of the Blaze.

QUR'AN 34:12

Sit with the wind a moment, because Mufti Menk does. Its morning run carried the distance of a month's ordinary travel, and its evening run another month, so that in the span of a single day Sulayman crossed what would take a caravan two months to cover. The reports describe a platform of some kind, and Mufti Menk is careful to say we know little more than the word the sources use for it, a kind of seat or deck, and that Sulayman would seat his men upon it and command the wind, and the wind would lift them, carry them two months' distance in a day, set them down, and return. He gave instructions to the wind, and the wind obeyed. And alongside the wind, the jinn: an entire unseen race placed under his authority, building for him whatever he

willed, and diving into the depths of the seas to bring up whatever he asked for. The next verse shows them at their labour:

They made for him what he willed of elevated chambers, statues, bowls like reservoirs, and stationary kettles. [We said], "Work, O family of David, in gratitude." And few of My servants are grateful.

QUR'AN 34:13

Catch that command tucked inside the gift, because it is the whole point of the gift: work, O family of Dawud, in gratitude. The wonders were never handed over as toys. They were handed over as a reason to be thankful. And then the line that should stop every one of us where we stand: and few of My servants are grateful. Few. Of all the people piled high with blessings, only a few ever turn the blessing into thanks.

And here Mufti Menk presses the thing he will not let us miss. For most of us, the more we are given, the further the shaytan manages to drag us from the remembrance of Allah. Wealth arrives and prayer thins out. Comfort arrives and gratitude goes quiet. With Sulayman it ran in the exact opposite direction: the more he was given, the closer he drew to his Lord. He held the wind in his army and the jinn in his ranks and one of the largest hosts in all of history, and he stayed humble, and he stayed just, and he stayed a worshipper. Power did to Sulayman the precise opposite of what power does to almost everyone. It did not inflate him. It bowed him lower. He was an excellent servant before he was a king, and being made a king did not unmake the servant.

The ant, and the prayer she pulled out of a king

Now comes the scene the whole surah is named for, and it begins with that immense army on the march. Men, jinn, and birds, moving together in disciplined ranks, in the strict and beautiful order of a great military column, and the road takes them past a valley of ants.

Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not."

QUR'AN 27:18

One ant, catching sight of the host bearing down, calls out to her colony: get into your homes, or Sulayman and his soldiers will crush you and never even notice they have done it. And Sulayman, given the ability to hear her, hears. The most powerful army ever assembled halts in the dust for the warning of a single ant. Mufti Menk lingers here on the ant herself, on how she lives, and it is worth lingering with him. Watch an ant find a crumb on the floor, he says, and it does not hide its discovery; it hurries back to fetch the others. A whole nation of them streams out along one road, a single highway, two lanes of traffic, those going and those returning, brushing heads as they pass, and though we do not know their language, the ones coming back seem to be carrying the message down the line that the food is still there. They share. They look out for one another. They have an umma, he says, a community with a genuine feeling for its members, and that is more than can always be said of us, who find a good thing and quickly cover it so no one else will see.

But the heart of the scene is not the ant. It is the prayer she draws out of the king. He smiles at her words, and then, watch carefully, he does not say thank you, Allah. He asks for something far harder.

So [Solomon] smiled, amused at her speech, and said, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants."

QUR'AN 27:19

Mufti Menk presses on the difference, because in that difference is everything. We toss the words of gratitude off our tongues all day long, he says. Ask a man how his affairs are and he answers, shukr, alhamdulillah, thanks be to God, while he is missing his prayers and sunk in his sins. What kind of gratitude is that? It is lip service. It is the word without the thing. Sulayman is asking for the thing. He does not say I thank You; he says enable me to be grateful, make me into a person who truly is thankful, and who proves it with deeds You are actually pleased with, and then gather me by Your mercy among Your righteous servants. He is asking to be remade into a grateful man, not merely to mouth gratitude as a reflex.

And here Mufti Menk hands the reader a gift he wants us to take and use. These are Qur'anic words, he reminds us, which means they are ours to pray. There is nothing whatever wrong with standing tonight and asking in the exact words of a prophet. You may say it as he said it: my Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and to do righteousness that You approve, and admit me by Your mercy among Your righteous servants. We should, in fact, use those very words. The most powerful man who ever lived left us the supplication of the grateful, and it costs nothing to make it our own.

One missing bird, and the news from Sheba

Some time later the king is reviewing his forces, and out of a host that size, beyond counting, he registers a single absence.

And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe - or is he among the absent?"

QUR'AN 27:20

One small bird is gone, and Sulayman notices. Mufti Menk marvels at the eye that takes attendance of an army like that and clocks one missing hoopoe, and then he points to the justice folded even into the king's displeasure. Sulayman does not simply vow to kill the bird. He says he will punish it severely, or slaughter it, unless it brings him a clear and acceptable reason for its absence. The door is left open for a good excuse. Even angry, even with a whole army watching, he will not condemn the smallest member of his ranks without first hearing it out. That, Mufti Menk says, is the measure of a just man, and he turns it gently on us, who think nothing of speaking to those who work in our homes as though they were beneath our notice. Sulayman commanded the wind, and still he would give a bird its hearing.

The hoopoe arrives, and what it says to a prophet is audacious. This is a king with scouts that could survey an enemy before the enemy knew Sulayman existed, and the little bird tells him, in effect, I know something you do not.

But he [i.e., the hoopoe] stayed not long and said, "I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news."

QUR'AN 27:22

And the news is this. There is a woman ruling a people far to the south, in Sheba, given abundance and seated on a tremendous throne.

Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne.

QUR'AN 27:23

But the heart of the report is not her wealth. It is her worship.

I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] way, so they are not guided,

QUR'AN 27:24

This is the verse at which a reciter, and everyone listening, falls into the prostration of recitation, *sajdat al-tilawah*. Mufti Menk explains the instinct behind it, and it is a beautiful one. When we hear how the queen of Sheba and her people refused to bow to Allah, beguiled by a sun they had mistaken for a god, the believer answers on the spot by bowing to Allah himself. They would not prostrate, so we do. And then he turns the whole report into a mirror and holds it up to us. The *shaytan*, he says, is in the business of stripping guidance from people, of dressing up the wrong path until it looks like the right one, and he comes for the believer too, not to make us worship the sun but to thin out our *iman*, to lighten our prayer, to chip at our certainty, to coax us into the backbiting that quietly hands our good deeds to the very people we slandered. Sheba's sun-worship is not a distant curiosity. It is a question put to each of us in the dark: what, quietly, have I let slide into the place that belongs to Allah alone?

The letter, and a king who would not be bribed

Sulayman does not raise his army and march on Sheba. He writes. He hands the hoopoe a letter, tells it to deliver the message and then withdraw a little and watch what they do, because he means to verify the bird's report before he acts on a word of it, and because his aim is to win this queen to Allah, not to crush her. The queen gathers her chiefs over a letter she calls noble, and reads it out.

Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it is [i.e., reads]: 'In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful,

QUR'AN 27:30

Be not haughty with me but come to me in submission [as Muslims].'"

QUR'AN 27:31

Mufti Menk notes a piece of wisdom some of the scholars have drawn from the very order of the words. Sulayman opens with his own name, this is from Solomon, before he writes the name of Allah. Why not lead with Allah's name? Because he did not yet know the heart on the other side, and had the message angered her, had she cursed it, he did not want her curse to fall upon the name of his Lord. So he set his own name first and the name of Allah after it, a courtesy and a caution folded into a single line. The letter itself is short and immense: in the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Especially Merciful; do not be arrogant toward me, and come to me in surrender.

The queen is far too shrewd to fight an enemy she cannot measure. So she sends a lavish gift, partly to test what manner of man this is, partly to let her envoys walk through his court and

count his soldiers. But the gift never has a chance. When it reaches Sulayman, his answer is one of the great refusals in the whole Qur'an.

So when they came to Solomon, he said, "Do you provide me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Rather, it is you who rejoice in your gift.

QUR'AN 27:36

Are you trying to enrich me with wealth? What Allah has given me is better than anything He has given you; it is you who delight in your gift, not I. Send it back. He has no hunger for their treasure, Mufti Menk says, because he reads everything in his possession as fadl, favour lent from Allah, never as a hoard to be flattered by, never as a price at which he could be bought. A man already this rich in his Lord cannot be enriched by a queen. And then he sends her envoys home with a plain warning:

Return to them, for we will surely come to them with soldiers that they will be powerless to encounter, and we will surely expel them therefrom in humiliation, and they will be debased."

QUR'AN 27:37

The envoys go back shaken, having seen an army and a dominion that made their grand gift look like nothing, and they tell their queen there is no fighting this; she will have to come herself.

A throne in the blink of an eye, and the line that holds the whole day

Knowing she is on her way, Sulayman puts a question to his assembly: which of you can bring me her throne before they

arrive in surrender? A mighty one among the jinn offers to fetch it before the king rises from his sitting, before the morning session is done, intact, every jewel of it in place. It is a staggering offer, a throne lifted from a palace an empire away and set down before noon. And then another voice answers, and makes the jinn's offer look slow.

Said one who had knowledge from the Scripture, "I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you." And when [Solomon] saw it placed before him, he said, "This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful. And whoever is grateful - his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever is ungrateful - then indeed, my Lord is Free of need and Generous."

QUR'AN 27:40

One who had knowledge of the Book said: I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you. And in the time it takes to blink, the throne of Sheba, raised from her own palace far across the world, stood before him. Mufti Menk is honest that we do not even know with certainty who this knower was; the reports differ, and rather than fill the gap with a name we do not possess, he leaves it open, because the point of the scene was never the man's identity. The point was the knowledge Allah had given him, a knowledge that crossed an empire faster than an eyelid falls. When the gift is a wonder, the lesson is never the size of the wonder. It is the source of it.

And here is the line the whole chapter has been climbing toward. Faced with a miracle that leapt across his dominion in an instant, Sulayman does not say, look what I can do. He says: this is from the favour of my Lord, to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful; and whoever is grateful, his gratitude is only for his

own good, and whoever is ungrateful, then my Lord is free of all need, generous. The richest, most powerful human being who ever lived looked at his own miracle and read it as an examination in gratitude. Not a trophy. A test paper. Allah needs nothing from us, he understood; our thanks add nothing to Him and our ingratitude takes nothing from Him; the whole benefit of gratitude flows back upon the grateful, and the whole loss of ingratitude falls upon the ungrateful. That is the verse to carry out of this day, and it is exactly where Mufti Menk lets the episode pause, with the queen of Sheba still on the road, her surrender still to come, and a king on his throne turning his greatest wonder, once again, into a reason to thank his Lord.

What Sulayman asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a chapter like this one the way you would watch a spectacle, to enjoy the wind that crossed two months in a day and the throne that arrived in a blink, and step away having taken nothing but wonder. That would be to miss the question Sulayman puts to your own iman, because the strangeness of his life was never the point of it. The point was what he did with it, and what he did with it is the one thing every one of us is asked to do with whatever we are given.

He read every blessing as a test, not a trophy. The throne crossed an empire in an instant, and his first words were that it had come to test whether he would be grateful or ungrateful. This is the reading Mufti Menk wants pressed into us, because we get it exactly backwards. We treat our wealth, our health, our influence, our good name, as prizes we have won and may now enjoy, when Allah hands them to us as exam papers, each one quietly asking the same question the throne asked: now that you

have this, will you be grateful, or will you forget the One who gave it? The gift is never the test's answer. The gift is the test.

He asked to be made grateful, rather than settling for saying it. He did not stand over the ant and say thank you, Allah; he prayed, my Lord, enable me to be grateful. There is a chasm between the two, and most of us live on the wrong side of it, scattering shukr and alhamdulillah across our days like loose change while our deeds say something else entirely. Real gratitude, the kind Sulayman begged for, is not a word the tongue tosses out. It is a state the whole person is brought into, thankful in the heart and proving it in action, in prayers kept and sins left and the favour traced back, every time, to its Giver. And the mercy in it is that his words are a du'a Allah has placed in your own mouth: you may ask, tonight, in a prophet's own language, to be made into a grateful soul.

And the gift did to him the opposite of what gifts usually do, because he never once forgot whose they were. For most of us each new blessing loosens our grip on Allah a little, pulls us a half-step further from the prayer mat and the remembrance. For Sulayman, every blessing tightened the grip and pulled him nearer, because he kept naming the Owner behind everything in his hands. The kingdom was never his. It was lent to him by al-Malik, the King, the only One whose dominion answers to no one, who owns the heavens and the earth and everything Sulayman thought he held, and Sulayman knew himself to be the borrower and not the owner. That single piece of clarity is what kept the most powerful man alive from being ruined by his power. He held the wind and the jinn and a throne that crossed the world, and he stayed a servant, because he never confused the loan for a possession.

Here the line runs straight to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, in whom this gratitude and this justice were perfected. There came a day when he ﷺ rode back into Makkah, the city that had mocked him, starved his people, driven him out, plotted his death, at the head of an army it could not resist and with every reason a conqueror could want to enter in triumph. And the companions saw him lower his head over his mount until it nearly touched the saddle, bowed almost double in humility before his Lord, entering the city of his victory not as a man celebrating his own power but as a servant overwhelmed by the favour of the One who had handed it to him. That is the throne of Sheba all over again. The wonder arrives, the victory lands, and the believer's first instinct is not look what I can do but this is from the favour of my Lord. Sulayman on his throne and the Prophet ﷺ at the gate of Makkah are reading the same gift the same way, the way a true servant always reads a gift, as a reason to bow lower.

So carry his prayer and carry his question down into your ordinary days. The next time something good lands in your life, a success, a recovery, a windfall, a door that opens, hear it the way Sulayman heard the throne arrive: this is from the favour of my Lord, to test whether I will be grateful. And then do the harder thing he did, and ask not merely to say your thanks but to be made into someone who truly carries them, in a prophet's own words: my Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour upon me and upon my parents, and to do righteousness You are pleased with, and admit me by Your mercy among Your righteous servants. The whole benefit of it returns to you; Allah is free of all need. May Allah make us of the grateful, the few He called grateful, keep us borrowers who never mistake the loan for our own, and join us to His righteous servants and to His final

Messenger ﷺ, who carried the gift of victory into Makkah with his head bowed low.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 27 (Sulayman, part 1). Qur'an: Sahih International (27:16, 27:18-20, 27:22-24, 27:30-31, 27:36-37, 27:40, 34:12-13, 38:30, 38:34-35), verified via quran.ai. The narration is Mufti Menk's; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's. Where a report from the People of the Book demeaned the prophet, his caution has been kept and it has been thrown out, as he does.

Sulayman, Ilyas, Dhul-Kifl, Zakariyya and Yahya

A king who fell on his staff, and an old man who whispered for a son

The most powerful king who ever walked the earth died standing up, and for a long while nobody knew. He had the wind for a carriage and the jinn for a labour force, and they were so afraid of him that when his soul was quietly taken as he leaned on his staff, his body stayed upright, and they kept working in front of a man who was no longer there. It took a small creature gnawing through wood to bring the truth, and the king, down together.

That is where today begins, and it is not where it ends. From the last breath of Sulayman, peace be upon him, the lecture turns into a corridor of prophets, Ilyas against a god named Baal, patient Dhul-Kifl given a single line of praise, and finally an old man in a quiet prayer chamber who wanted one thing before he died, and was answered with a name no human being had ever carried. The day moves from the grandest power imaginable down to the smallest, most private whisper a person can make, and the whole point is in that descent. Hold both ends of it in your mind, because by the time we reach the old man, you are meant to see your own folded hands in his.

The king who fell leaning on his staff

A rumour had hardened among the people of that age: that the jinn knew the unseen, that they could see what is hidden from the

rest of us. Allah willed to dismantle it, and the way He chose to dismantle it was the death of His prophet Sulayman, peace be upon him.

Sulayman had been given command over the jinn, and he put them to work building what he set them to build, great structures, vast cauldrons, places of worship, labour beyond anything ordinary hands could manage. When he stood among them with his staff, they were terrified of him, and they worked like clockwork under his eye. One ordinary day, as he stood there leaning on it, the Angel of Death came to him, and his soul was taken, gently, the way any soul is taken. And his body did not move. He remained upright on his staff, and the jinn, glancing up at the still figure of the king they feared, bent back to their backbreaking work and carried on. A day passed. Then more. For a long stretch of time the most powerful jinn on earth laboured without rest in front of a corpse, certain he was still watching them.

Then a creature of the earth, small and patient, began to eat away at the wooden staff from underneath. It worked its way up through the grain until, at last, the staff gave out, and the king who had been dead all along finally fell. Only when he hit the ground did anyone understand. Allah records the scene and draws its lesson in the same breath:

And when We decreed for him [i.e., Solomon] death, nothing indicated to them [i.e., the jinn] his death except a creature of the earth eating his staff. But when he fell, it became clear to the jinn that if they had known the unseen, they would not have remained in humiliating punishment.

QUR'AN 34:14

Mufti Menk lets the verse carry its own argument. Had the jinn truly known the unseen, they would never have kept punishing themselves with toil, for nothing, in front of a man who was no longer alive. They did not even know that the figure right before their eyes was dead. So the next time someone tells you that a jinn, a soothsayer, a fortune teller, a reader of palms can disclose your future, remember Sulayman on his staff. The unseen belongs to Allah alone, and the very creatures people imagine can pierce it could not see a death standing directly in front of them.

There is something quieter in the scene too, and it is worth pausing on. This was a prophet who had been given more than any king before or since, dominion over wind and water and the jinn themselves, and yet, as we saw only yesterday, he was so humble that he spoke gently to an ant in his path and listened to the report of a bird. Allah took him as quietly as He takes anyone, on his feet, mid-task, with no ceremony at all, and made his death a single sign for mankind and jinn alike. The greatest power on earth turned out to be the most ordinary thing in the world: a man whose time had come.

Why we will not be questioned about the queen

Before the lecture leaves Sulayman, peace be upon him, Mufti Menk pauses on a question people love to ask, because the way he handles it is a lesson in itself. Did Sulayman marry Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba? One narration says he did. Another says she married a different man from among his own people. A third traces her descendants into the region of Abyssinia, today's Ethiopia. All of it comes to us from the Israiliyyat, the reports of the People of the Book, on a matter our own revelation neither confirms nor denies.

And so we do exactly what the Sunnah taught us to do with such reports: we neither believe them nor reject them, and we let them go. It is, Mufti Menk says plainly, none of our business what happened. On the Day of Judgement Allah will not stop you to ask whom the queen married, or how her line ran out across the centuries. He will ask you about your own life, and how you spent it, and what you did with the worship He asked of you.

It is a discipline worth carrying through the whole of today, because the prophets who come next are given to us in the Qur'an mostly as names crowned with a word of praise, their lives left largely undescribed, the gaps filled in by others over the long centuries. The rule holds the entire way down. Where Allah told us, we hold tight. Where He drew a veil over something, we are content to leave it drawn, and we turn our attention back to the only life we will actually be asked about, which is our own.

Ilyas, against a god named Baal

From the kings the lecture steps into a row of prophets Allah names but tells us little about, and Mufti Menk sets a guardrail before we enter it. Allah calls these men al-akhyar, the chosen, the best of the lot. So whenever a story reaches you that strips a prophet of his dignity, that paints him as corrupt or contemptible, throw it out, because Allah Himself selected these men, and if the prophets had been wicked their own people would have had every excuse in the world: look at you, they could have said, you are a sinner too, who are you to correct us? The honour of the messengers is part of the honour of the message. Guard it.

The first of these is Ilyas, peace be upon him, whom some know as Elijah. He stood before a people who had taken to worshipping an idol called Baal, and he asked them the only question that finally mattered:

And indeed, Elias was from among the messengers, When he said to his people, "Will you not fear Allah? Do you call upon Bal and leave the best of creators - Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers?"

QUR'AN 37:123-126

Notice the phrase the Qur'an reaches for, the best of creators, ahsan al-khaliqin, and notice that Mufti Menk lingers on it exactly the way he did on those opening nights of the series, when he first taught us what it means that Allah creates. When a person says I made this chair, he made nothing of the kind. He took wood that Allah had already created and bent it into a new shape. He had metal, and now he has a vehicle; he had clay, and now he has a pot. That is not creation. To create is to say to a thing be, and for it to be, out of nothing at all. That was the whole difference Ilyas was pressing on his people: the maker against the made, the One who says be against the idol that cannot lift a finger for itself. How can you turn from the One who brought you out of nothing, and bow instead to a thing your own hands carved?

They denied him, as the people of Nuh and Ad and Thamud had denied the warners before them, and the warning the Qur'an records over those nations is the warning it records over these. But Allah did not let the denial be the end of Ilyas. He preserved him, honoured, in the mouths of every generation that came after:

And We left for him [favorable mention] among later generations: "Peace upon Elias." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants.

QUR'AN 37:129-132

His people are gone, their idol forgotten, their names scattered. His name, Allah kept, and set our own tongues to bless it.

Dhul-Kifl, a name and a word of praise

Beside Ilyas the Qur'an places another name with almost nothing attached to it, Dhul-Kifl, peace be upon him. Here Mufti Menk does the honest thing, the thing the whole day keeps teaching: he tells us we simply do not have much detail. What we have is the company Allah lists him in, and a word of praise:

And [mention] Ishmael and Idrees and Dhul-Kifl; all were of the patient. And We admitted them into Our mercy. Indeed, they were of the righteous.

QUR'AN 21:85-86

That is nearly all of it, and Mufti Menk says that this, too, is a teaching. We are not reading the stories of the prophets to collect trivia, who married whom, how many years a temple took to raise, which city a man was born in. We are reading them to draw out the faaida, the lesson we can carry home and lay down in our own houses and our own streets. A prophet handed to us in a single line, named among the patient and the righteous, has given us everything we need: that patience and righteousness are the qualities Allah chooses to immortalise, above wealth, above conquest, above fame.

And there is a quiet mercy folded into that for the rest of us. Not everyone's story will be long. Most righteous people who have ever lived left almost no trace in the eyes of the world; they were not kings, they built nothing the historians thought to record, their names are written on no monument. Dhul-Kifl, peace be upon him, reassures every one of them. If your name is written well

with Allah, you have lost nothing, even if the world forgets you completely. Allah saw him. Allah was pleased with him. Allah preserved his name in a Book that has outlived every empire that ever sneered at the obscure and the patient. That is the only record that does not crumble.

An old man, a private whisper, and a barren wife

Now the lecture arrives at the prophet whose story the whole day is named for, and the temperature of it changes. We leave the kings and the warners and step into a small, quiet room.

Zakariyya, peace be upon him, was a prophet and a deeply pious man who led his people in worship, the kind of man you would today call the imam, the shaykh of his community. He was married to the sister of the wife of Imran, another righteous man, and the two couples shared a private grief: neither had any children. Their wives could not bear, and the years had carried both households into old age with empty arms.

Zakariyya had been made guardian over Imran's daughter, the young Maryam, peace be upon her, dedicated to the house of worship from birth. He kept her in a prayer chamber, a mihrab, a little corner set apart for the remembrance of Allah, and from a very young age she was never idle there; whenever he came to her he found her absorbed in worship. And he kept finding something else. He would enter and discover provision with her that had no business being there: the fruit of summer in the dead of winter, the fruit of winter in the height of summer, fresh, out of all season. Where is this from? he would ask her. And she would answer with the simplest and most devastating theology there is: it is from Allah; indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.

Something in that answer cracked the old man's heart open. Mufti Menk catches the precise thought as it formed in him. If Allah can bring out-of-season fruit to this girl, against nature, against the calendar, then what is my situation but another kind of out-of-season? I am old, my wife is barren, the door to children looks shut, but barrenness is only winter, and Allah brings fruit in winter. He can give even me a child.

So he did not announce his hope. He did not complain it to anyone, or sit in his grief, or tell the people his house was ending. He turned, alone, to his Lord, and he called Him with a call the Qur'an describes with one tender word, *khafiy*: hidden, private, low, just a tired old man and his Maker in a silent room with no one else listening.

[This is] a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zechariah When he called to his Lord a private call [i.e., supplication]. He said, "My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy [i.e., disappointed]. And indeed, I fear the successors after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir Who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]."

QUR'AN 19:2-6

Listen to how he asked, because every line of it is a lesson in how to stand before Allah. He did not march in with demands. He laid his weakness on the floor first: my bones have gone soft, my head is on fire with grey. Then he reminded his Lord, gently, of a lifetime of answered prayer, never have I been disappointed when I called on You, the way only someone who has spent his whole life on his knees can remind Him. And then, at last, the

request, and even the request was not really for himself. He did not ask for a son to comfort his old age or carry his name for pride's sake. He asked for an heir who would inherit the thing that mattered, the prophethood, the worship, the legacy of the family of Yaqub, and he asked that the boy be, above all, pleasing to Allah. A man asking for a child, and what he wants most about that child is that Allah be happy with him. That is the shape of a du'a that gets answered.

We have named him Yahya

The answer came back, and it came back personal. Not a vague yes, not a someday, not a perhaps. A name.

[He was told], "O Zechariah, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be John. We have not assigned to any before [this] name."

QUR'AN 19:7

Allah named the child Himself, Yahya, before he was conceived, before there was anything of him at all, and told Zakariyya that no one had ever carried that name before him. Stop and feel the weight of that. An old man whispers in the dark, and the answer that returns is not only yes but here is his name, a name We are minting new for your son. That is how closely Allah was listening to a prayer no other ear in the world had heard.

And the old man, thankful and stunned at once, did what a human being does when a closed door suddenly opens: he asked how.

He said, "My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife has been barren and I have reached extreme old age?" [An angel] said, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, for I created you before, while you were nothing.'"

That reply is the line that deserves to be carved over the door of every house that believes its situation is finished. It is easy for Me. You ask how I will make a child from two worn-out bodies; I made you, Zakariyya, when you yourself were nothing at all, not old, not young, not barren, not anything. The God who brought you from nothing is not troubled by bringing one more life from two who thought their time was past. Then Zakariyya asked for a sign, and was told he would be unable to speak to people for three nights though his tongue was perfectly sound, a man struck silent not by illness but by wonder. He came out from the prayer chamber and could only gesture to his people to glorify Allah morning and evening. Three days later the silence broke into the most ordinary, most impossible news: his barren wife was carrying a son.

The Qur'an, in another place, tells us plainly why this particular couple was answered, and it is worth reading slowly, because it is a description of the soil a du'a like this grows in:

So We responded to him, and We gave to him John, and amended for him his wife. Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive.

QUR'AN 21:90

They used to race toward good, hurrying each other to it. They used to call on Allah in hope and fear together, never letting hope slide into entitlement, never letting fear collapse into despair. They were humble before Him. That is the ground this miracle was planted in. And in the same passage, the Qur'an preserves the barest, most stripped-down version of the prayer itself, the

one Zakariyya breathed when he had let go of everything but his Lord:

And [mention] Zechariah, when he called to his Lord, "My Lord, do not leave me alone [with no heir], while You are the best of inheritors."

QUR'AN 21:89

Do not leave me alone, and You are the best of inheritors. Even at the very end of his asking, he handed it back to Allah. If You give me no one, You Yourself are enough, the One who remains when everyone is gone. He did not, in the end, ask for himself. He asked for someone to carry the worship of Allah forward after him, and he trusted Allah with the rest.

The boy given wisdom, and the head demanded as a gift

The boy who came was a prophet from his earliest years, and the Qur'an pours its praise over him the way it does over few others.

[Allah said], "O John, take the Scripture [i.e., adhere to it] with determination." And We gave him judgement [while yet] a boy And affection from Us and purity, and he was fearing of Allah And dutiful to his parents, and he was not a disobedient tyrant. And peace be upon him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he is raised alive.

QUR'AN 19:12-15

Take the Scripture with strength, Allah told him, and gave him sound judgement while he was still a child; it is said he held the entire Torah in his heart. Yahya, peace be upon him, was not a child like the others, playing and joking and bending the truth in small ways the way children do. He was serious, drawn to the prayer hall, drawn to learning, and tender, the Qur'an says, with

an affection that reached past people to every creature of Allah. Mindful of his Lord, pure, devoted to his parents, never a tyrant, never in rebellion: the praise piles up line on line. When the glad tidings of him first came, the angels had described him in much the same key:

"Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John, confirming a word from Allah and [who will be] honorable, abstaining [from women], and a prophet from among the righteous."

QUR'AN 3:39

He grew into exactly that. When he spoke to his people, they wept; they would sit and listen and the tears would run down their faces, because they could feel how badly this man wanted them saved, how much love was underneath the warning. His cousin, by the way, was Maryam, peace be upon her, the daughter of his mother's sister, and the two of them stand in the Qur'an as the flowering of these two righteous, childless households that had once prayed in the dark.

And then the world did to Yahya what the world has always done to the man who keeps telling it the truth it does not want. The king of the time set his heart on a marriage within his own family, a union Yahya publicly and repeatedly named forbidden, refusing to soften it, refusing to call wrong anything but wrong, however powerful the man he was correcting. The king seethed. People, he heard, were flocking to Yahya in their thousands and loving him in a way they had never loved their king. And a woman who wanted that forbidden marriage, who would not let it go, pressed the king until he could refuse her nothing, and named her price. She demanded, as her gift, the head of Yahya.

Mufti Menk does not flinch from the ending, and he frames it carefully: the murder of Zakariyya, and the murder of his son, reach us through the Israiliyyat, so we narrate the shape of it without hardening every detail into certainty. What the Qur'an makes plain is the kind of crime it was. Soldiers came for Yahya while he stood in prayer to Allah in his prayer chamber, and there, where he worshipped, they killed a prophet of God and carried his head to a king as a wedding gift. And the lecture closes on the verse Allah sends down over people who do such things:

Those who reject the signs of Allah, and kill the prophets without right, and kill those among the people who command justice, Allah promises them a painful punishment, and their deeds are rendered worthless in this world and the next, and they will have no helpers at all. Mufti Menk draws out the lesson and aims it, deliberately, at our own chests. The first sign of a heart going sick, he says, is irritation when someone reminds you of Allah's command. When a person stands up and says something true and we reach for the word controversial, when we resent the reminder instead of receiving it, that resentment is the first clutch of the devil, and we had better release it before it carries us off. Yahya pressed the right buttons, the ones that needed pressing, and they killed him for it. The least we can do, when someone presses ours, is not hate them for it.

What this day asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a day like this one as a gallery of wonders safely sealed in the past: a king who died on his feet, a prophet who shamed an idol, a barren couple given a miracle. That would be to miss every question it is putting to you. Look again at the shape of it, because the shape is the message.

A king with the wind at his command died as quietly as a candle going out, and his greatness, the Qur'an makes clear, was never in his power but in his humility, a man who held dominion over the jinn and still spoke gently to an ant. Then two prophets passed in a line each, Ilyas and Dhul-Kifl, and a line was enough, because what Allah chose to immortalise about them was not their deeds in the eyes of the world but their patience and their truth in the eyes of Heaven. And then, after all that grandeur, the day spent its longest and most tender passage on an old man with weak bones and a head gone white and a wife who could not bear, who refused to believe his door was shut, and whispered to his Lord for a son, and was handed a boy named before he was born. The Qur'an gives a king's death a single verse and an old man's private whisper a whole movement of Surah Maryam. That weighting is not an accident. It is telling you which of these scenes you are meant to take home.

So take Zakariyya's whisper home. This is the part of the day that is actually about you. There is, almost certainly, a thing you have stopped asking Allah for, because it feels too late, or too unlikely, or already decided against you. The diagnosis came back. The years went by. The door, to every human eye, is closed. Zakariyya stood exactly there, old and childless with a barren wife and no earthly reason left to hope, and he did not despair and he did not complain to people. He lowered his hands in a silent room and asked anyway, reminding Allah gently that he had never once been turned away. And the answer was not only yes; it was a name. It is easy for Me, his Lord told him, for I created you before, while you were nothing. Whatever in your life looks finished, the God who made you out of nothing is not finished with it.

Notice, too, how he asked, because it changes how you pray. He came in his weakness, not his entitlement. He leaned on a lifetime of past mercy. And what he wanted most, even in asking for a child, was that Allah be pleased with the child. The family Allah answered, He answered because they raced toward good and called on Him in hope and fear and bowed their hearts low. That is not a precondition for miracles you cannot meet; it is an invitation. Become, in your small way, the kind of person whose du'a grows in that soil, and then ask, in private, for the thing you had given up on.

And there is one more line to carry out of today, the hard one, the one aimed straight at the ego. Yahya was killed for refusing to soften the truth, and Mufti Menk turns it on us before we can get comfortable: the first sign of a hardened heart is irritation when someone reminds you of Allah. So the next time a reminder lands and you feel the flare of resentment, the urge to call the truth controversial, to resent the messenger, recognise that flare for what it is and put it out while it is still small. The same prophets the final Messenger ﷺ would one day meet, raised through the heavens on the Night Journey, where he found Yahya and Isa together in one of the heavens and they welcomed him as a brother, were the very men whose people rejected and killed them for the truth. He ﷺ would face from his own people exactly what Zakariyya grieved over and what Yahya died for. To stand with them is to receive the reminder, not resent it; to ask Allah in the dark, not despair of Him; and to know that no door, however long it has been shut, is closed to the One who is the best of inheritors.

So carry one thing from this day down into your ordinary night. Find the thing you stopped asking for, and ask for it, quietly, the way Zakariyya did, certain only of this: that Allah has never once

turned you away, and that out-of-season fruit appeared in a young girl's prayer chamber so that an old man would dare to hope, and so that you would too. O Allah, You who answered Zakariyya in his old age and named his son Yahya before he drew breath, do not leave us alone, grant us hearts that race toward good and call on You in hope and in fear, soften us toward Your reminders rather than letting us resent them, and gather us with Your prophets Yahya and Zakariyya, and with Your final Messenger ﷺ, in the home You have prepared.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 28 (Sulayman part 2, Ilyas, Dhul-Kifl, Zakariyya, Yahya). Qur'an: Sahih International (34:14; 37:123-132; 21:85-90; 19:2-15; 3:39), verified via quran.ai. Where the histories carry reports from the People of the Book, Mufti Menk's caution has been kept: we neither affirm nor deny them, and hold tight only to what revelation establishes.

Isa, the word of Allah

Born by His word, raised by His hand, and the last prophet to name the next

We have walked a long way to arrive here. From the clay of Adam, shaped by the hands of his Maker and taught the names of all things, through the ark riding out a drowning world, the idols broken in a silent temple, the brother lifted out of a well to a throne, the staff that swallowed the magicians and parted the sea, the kingdoms laid at the feet of men who only bowed lower to their Lord. Twenty-eight nights of it. And the chain does not simply stop on the twenty-ninth. It arrives. It comes to its last link before the one who would seal it forever, and that last link is a man whose very birth was a word from Allah, and whose last act among his people was to point down the centuries and name, by name, the Prophet who was coming after him.

Mufti Menk delivered this on the closing night of the whole series, in the last days of Ramadan in Cape Town, and he began it differently from every other story. He gave the name first in English: the Prophet Jesus, peace be upon him. He did it on purpose, so that no one listening could be in any doubt about what a Muslim actually believes regarding him. Because here, more than anywhere in the prophets, belief itself is on the line. So let us say it plainly at the threshold, the way he did, and then let the story prove it: Isa, the son of Maryam, is a servant and a messenger of Allah. He was born by Allah's word, he worked wonders by Allah's leave, he was raised up alive and not killed,

and he is the last prophet who foretold the one to come. This is not a lowering of him. It is the truth about him, told with the reverence he is owed. And to begin it rightly, we have to begin not with the child, but with the mother Allah prepared to carry him.

The mother Allah chose

Before Isa, there is Maryam, peace be upon her, and the Qur'an honours her the way it honours almost no one else. A whole surah carries her name. Another carries the name of her family, Aal Imran. Her father, Imran, was a deeply upright man, a sheikh who led the people in prayer, and her mother, while the child was still in the womb, vowed her to the service of the sanctuary, not knowing she was carrying a girl. When the girl came, the promise was kept anyway. By then Imran had passed away, so Maryam grew up an orphan, raised under the care of her uncle, the prophet Zakariyya, peace be upon him, the same Zakariyya whose own miraculous old-age son, Yahya, we sat with the night before. Under his tutorship she became a girl of rare devotion, given knowledge and wisdom while she was still young, and Allah let signs cluster around her even then, as a soul being quietly groomed for something enormous.

Mufti Menk lingers on the words the angels brought her, because they are a portrait of exactly what Allah was making her into:

And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allāh has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds.

QUR'AN 3:42

Chosen, purified, and chosen again, above all the women of her time. Purified, as he reads it, in every direction at once: pure in her reputation, pure in her character and conduct, and above all pure in her worship, which she rendered to no one but her Maker, untouched by the idolatry of her age. She had her own corner in the house of worship, a curtained cubicle set apart from her family, and she barely left it except for need. And notice what the angels told her to do next. Not to rest in the honour. To worship harder:

O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer]."

QUR'AN 3:43

The one Allah was preparing for the single greatest sign He would ever place in a human life was instructed, first of all, to pray more, to bow more, to prostrate more. The honour and the obedience came in the same breath. That is the order of things in this religion: the closer Allah draws a servant, the more that servant lowers their head. Maryam, chosen above the women of the worlds, was told to get back to the ground.

A word from Him

It was in that seclusion that the angel came. He came in the form of a well-made man, and her very first instinct was not curiosity but protection. The Qur'an preserves the exact reflex of a chaste woman alone:

She said, "Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allāh."

QUR'AN 19:18

If you have any fear of Allah, she is saying, then this name I have just invoked is your warning. He answers that he is no threat but a messenger of her Lord, sent to give her a pure boy. And then comes the announcement that Mufti Menk presses on as the heart of everything that follows. In the telling of Surah Aal Imran the child is named before he is conceived, and named as something no child had ever been called:

[And mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allāh gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary - distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allāh].

QUR'AN 3:45

A word from Him. His name, the Messiah, Isa son of Maryam, given in advance. And notice, Mufti Menk says, that he is named for his mother, not his father. Every one of us is called the son of a man: you are so-and-so, son of so-and-so. He alone in all of history is called the son of a woman, Isa son of Maryam, and that naming is itself part of the sign. He will be honoured in this world and the next, brought near to Allah, and the angel adds that he will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, a thing she is being told to expect before he has even drawn breath.

Then Maryam asks the only question a pure woman could possibly ask:

She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?" [The angel] said, "Such is Allāh; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is.

QUR'AN 3:47

And here, Mufti Menk says, a circle that this entire series has been quietly drawing closes at last. Allah made Adam from neither a father nor a mother, from dust and a word. He made Hawwa from a man with no woman. He made the rest of us, every single human after them, from a man and a woman together. One possibility remained, one last way to display the full reach of His power: a child from a woman with no man. That final sign Allah kept in reserve, all the way down the ages, for Isa. So when He decrees a thing He says to it "Be," and it is. Not, Mufti Menk stops to say with great care, a son of God. A servant of God, created by the word of God, exactly as Adam was created by it, and the Qur'an itself lays the two side by side to settle the matter forever:

Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allāh is like that of Adam. He created him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was.

QUR'AN 3:59

No one looks at Adam, who had neither father nor mother, and calls him the son of God. Isa was made by the very same command. A fatherless birth is a proof of Allah's power, not a hint of His having a partner or a child. That, said plainly and early, is the whole theology of this chapter in a single verse.

Born under the palm

The angel had already breathed the soul into her by Allah's command, and she was carrying the child. So she withdrew with him, away from her people, to a distant place toward the east, and the Qur'an names her flight in Surah Maryam:

And mention, [O Muḥammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east.

QUR'AN 19:16

She went, in the histories, toward Bethlehem, and two fears travelled with her. One was the plain terror of delivering a first child entirely alone, in the open, with no woman beside her. The other was deeper and worse: she knew she was pure, and she knew, with absolute certainty, exactly what her people would say the moment she walked back into the city holding a baby. The pains drove her to the only support there was, the bare trunk of a palm tree, and out of her came the most human cry in the surah:

And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said, "Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten."

QUR'AN 19:23

She is not rejecting Allah's decree, Mufti Menk is careful to insist. She is a young woman, alone, in pain, and dreading what is coming, and she is honest about it. And the mercy of Allah answered her at once, from below her:

But he called her from below her, "Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream.

QUR'AN 19:24

There are two narrations of who called, the angel or the newborn himself, and Mufti Menk leans toward the child, just delivered, already speaking. Do not grieve. Look beneath you. In a waterless desert, her Lord had set a stream running. And the comfort kept coming:

And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates.

QUR'AN 19:25

Shake a dead winter trunk and fresh dates fall, the very fruit, rich in iron, that a woman needs most in the hours after childbirth. He dwells on the tenderness of it: a stream to drink, dates to eat, exactly what her body required, provided by the One who made her body. So eat and drink and be comforted. And then He gave her the one instruction that would carry her through the ordeal still ahead, when she walked back to face her accusers:

So eat and drink and be contented. And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, 'Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man.'

QUR'AN 19:26

Say nothing. Vow a fast of silence to the Most Merciful, and let the child answer for you. She was being asked to walk into the worst accusation of her life and not defend herself with a single word, and to trust that the defence would come from the cradle in her arms.

The baby who spoke

She came back to her people in the late afternoon, calm, her face lit, holding the child close. And exactly what she had feared began. These were not strangers. These were her own community, the children of Israil, priests and teachers of the religion who knew her family's piety stretching back through generations of the upright. They saw the dedicated, secluded, pious Maryam returning with a newborn, and they were appalled.

They named her lineage to shame her with it: O sister of Harun, your father was no man of sin, your mother was no woman of sin, what is this you have brought? It was an accusation of grave immorality, levelled at the most chaste person among them. She said nothing. She only pointed to the baby. How, they scoffed, do we speak to a child in the cradle?

And the cradle answered. The infant's very first words were not a defence of his mother and not a defence of himself; they were a declaration of exactly where he stood in the order of creation:

[Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of Allāh. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet.

QUR'AN 19:30

The servant of Allah. Before anything else, before prophet, before Messiah, the first word out of his mouth was abd, servant. He went on:

And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakāh as long as I remain alive

QUR'AN 19:31

And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant.

QUR'AN 19:32

Mufti Menk pauses on that line, dutiful to my mother. There was no father in the picture, so the whole weight of honouring the parent here falls upon her alone, named by the child in his first breath. And it is a rule, he reminds us, that still binds every one of us to both our parents: that some neglect the mother, some the

father, and the believer is to honour both as a priority of their life. Then the infant closed with the very words Allah had spoken over Yahya the night before, here spoken by Isa over himself:

And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive."

QUR'AN 19:33

The rabbis stood silent. There was no trick here and no magic, and they knew it; they knew the piety of this woman and the whole history of her family, and they could see a newborn preaching. This was a sign from the Creator, undeniable. And it split them on the spot. Some believed. But others looked at this child and saw a future in which the carpet was pulled out from under their feet, a teacher who would one day strip them of their leadership, and from that very moment they decided to fight him.

Wonders, but by His leave

He grew, and Allah gave him exactly what had been promised to his mother before his birth: the Scripture, wisdom, the Torah, and a revelation of his own, the Injil. He was sent as a messenger to the children of Israil, and he preached one thing above everything, the same thing every single prophet in this series preached: that Allah is my Lord and your Lord, my Maker and yours, the One who provides for me and for you, so worship Him alone. Mufti Menk dwells here, because it is the cleanest summary of the whole twenty-nine nights. We do not worship a person, a stone, a stick, a prophet, or a grave. We worship the One who made us, with no intermediary, no priest, no confession booth, the believer turning straight to his Maker in the darkest hour of the night and finding Him already there. He brings in the example of Khalid ibn al-Walid, too sharp a mind to stay blind to

the truth, coming to the Prophet ﷺ worried about the wreckage of his past, and being told that Islam wipes clean everything before it: it deletes the bad and keeps the good, a selective formatting of the heart. May Allah clear our drives completely.

And the wonders that came through Isa's hands were extraordinary, all the more so because they came in an age when medicine itself was thought to be at its peak. The Qur'an gathers them into a single long verse, spoken by Allah to Isa on the Day of Judgment, and you must read it to the end to catch the refrain hammered through it:

[The Day] when Allāh will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Pure Spirit [i.e., the angel Gabriel] and you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission; and you healed the blind [from birth] and the leper with My permission; and when you brought forth the dead with My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs and those who disbelieved among them said, "This is not but obvious magic."

QUR'AN 5:110

From clay he shaped a bird, breathed into it, and it flew off alive. He passed his hand over eyes blind from birth and they opened. He touched the leper and the skin came back clean. And greatest of all, he stood before the dead and they rose. But hear the phrase the Qur'an will not let go of, and that Mufti Menk will not let pass: by My permission, by My permission, by My permission, four times in one verse. Not one of these was Isa's own power.

The doctors of the day could, at their best, prolong a life; Allah, through His servant, gave life back to the dead, precisely to put every human claim in its place. Even the laid table, the maidah that gives a whole surah its name, was no act of his own. When the disciples asked for a feast from heaven, Isa did not provide it; he turned and begged his Lord for it:

Said Jesus, the son of Mary, "O Allāh, our Lord, send down to us a table [spread with food] from the heaven to be for us a festival for the first of us and the last of us and a sign from You. And provide for us, and You are the best of providers."

QUR'AN 5:114

The table came down, with a warning attached for anyone who would see such a sign and still disbelieve. Every wonder pointed away from the one performing it and back toward the One who permitted it. That is the line a Muslim never crosses: to marvel at Isa is right; to worship him is to mistake the gift for the Giver.

They did not kill him

His following grew, and so did the jealousy of those who felt the ground shifting beneath them. They went to the king with a lie, that this man of Bethlehem was reaching for the throne, going about calling himself the king, and the king, asking nothing, verifying nothing, sent his men to seize him. The disciples knew where he was. One of them, the name handed down is Judas, turned traitor, the devil getting hold of him, and led the men to the room where Isa was. Mufti Menk ties this directly back to the promise declared over Isa at his very birth, the salam, the peace, which carries within it that no harm shall reach him. As the traitor stepped in to confirm the man was inside, Allah cast the likeness

of Isa upon the traitor's own face and raised Isa up to Himself, whole and unharmed, in the very human body he had, before any hand could touch him. The Qur'an states the outcome with a finality it gives to almost nothing else:

And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allāh." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain.

QUR'AN 4:157

Rather, Allāh raised him to Himself. And ever is Allāh Exalted in Might and Wise.

QUR'AN 4:158

They took the wrong man, certain they had their prize, while he protested that he was not the one they wanted, and the confusion has never lifted from that day to this: those who dispute over it are in plain doubt, following nothing but guesswork. Mufti Menk handles the rest of it with great care and not a trace of spite. We do not believe Isa died on a cross to pay for anyone's sins, because to punish an innocent man for the crimes of the guilty is not mercy, it is injustice, and Allah is never unjust. And we do not call him God, nor a son of God, nor a part of God, for the One who needs only to say "Be" takes no son and shares His divinity with nothing. This, he is at pains to show, is not the Muslim diminishing Isa. It is the Muslim refusing to let Isa be turned into something he himself never claimed to be. He is an honoured messenger, raised by his Lord, alive, who will return near the end of time to break the cross, to establish the truth that

there is only one God, and then, like every soul that has ever lived, to taste death. The Qur'an even tells us that the People of the Scripture will believe in him before that final death, and that he will stand as a witness on the Day of Resurrection:

And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in him [i.e., Jesus] before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness.

QUR'AN 4:159

The name he gave before he left

Here is where twenty-nine nights arrive at their point. Before Isa was taken up, he turned to his people and did something no prophet in this entire series had done so directly. He named the one who was coming after him.

And [mention] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, "O Children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allāh to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad." But when he came to them with clear evidences, they said, "This is obvious magic."

QUR'AN 61:6

Ahmad. From the very same root as Muhammad, the one who is praised. Mufti Menk lets the full weight of it land, and it is the weight the whole book has been carrying toward this night. The last prophet of the children of Israil stood before his people and pointed his finger straight down the centuries at the first and final Prophet of all mankind ﷺ. The chain that began with Adam, shaped from clay and taught the names, does not trail off and fade at Isa. It ends with an arrow, and the arrow has a name

written on it. Every prophet before him had prepared the ground; Isa stepped to the very edge of the prophetic age and announced, out loud and by name, who would close it.

And on the Day of Judgment, the Qur'an shows us Isa cleared once and for all of everything that was loaded onto his name after he was gone. Allah will turn to him and ask:

And [beware the Day] when Allāh will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allāh?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen.

QUR'AN 5:116

I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness.

QUR'AN 5:117

It is the same answer he gave from the cradle as a newborn. The same answer every prophet in the chain gave: I told them only to worship the One who made me and made you. And it is precisely why, at the very end of his own life, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned his companions with real urgency. Mufti Menk closes the night on this hadith, and it is the seam that binds the two prophets together: do not raise me beyond my limit the way the Christians raised Isa beyond his; call me only the servant of Allah and His messenger. The foretelling and the warning are two halves of one truth. Isa announced him by name. And he ﷺ

honoured Isa in return by refusing the very exaggeration that had been built around Isa's name, and by teaching his own followers to refuse it about him. That is why the believer's testimony names him, to this day, *abduhu wa rasuluhu*, His servant and His messenger.

What the whole chain asks of our faith

It would be easy to reach the end of the prophets and feel only that we have finished a long and beautiful story, twenty-nine nights now safely behind us, a series completed. That would be to miss what the finale is actually for. Strip these twenty-nine nights down to their spine and you will see that this was never a museum of vanished nations. It was one long chain, link after link, each one a man Allah chose and preserved, each life a fresh rehearsal of the same submission, and every single one of them, it turns out, facing the same direction.

Believing in Isa is not optional; it is a piece of your own faith. You cannot be a Muslim and turn away from him, Mufti Menk says without hedging. To be a Muslim is to love Isa and honour him exactly as he asked to be honoured, as the servant of Allah and His messenger, born by the word "Be," and to await his return. Your iman has a place in it reserved for this prophet, and the shape of that place is precise: high enough to love him as one of the greatest messengers ever sent, never so high that he is mistaken for his Maker. The believer holds both at once, and that holding is the test the chapter sets.

The wonders were never the prophet's; they were always Allah's. The bird, the sight restored, the leper cleansed, the dead raised, each came by His leave, the Qur'an repeating it until no one could miss it. This is the discipline that keeps reverence from sliding into worship, and it is the discipline of the whole religion:

to love the messengers, to honour the righteous, to marvel at the signs, and never once to let any of it take the place that belongs to Allah alone. We put our heads on the ground for the One who made us, and for no one else, not a prophet, not a saint, not a grave.

And the whole chain was pointing here, to him ﷺ. This is the payoff of twenty-nine nights and the doorway out of them. Nuh's patience across a thousand years, Ibrahim's pure tawhid in front of the fire, Yusuf's mercy over the brothers who broke him, Musa's staff and his trust at the edge of the sea, every one of them was leaning toward the praised one whom Isa named out loud before he was taken up. So the finale of the prophets is not an ending at all. It is a threshold. You step off it not into a closed book but into a beginning, the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the very man toward whom this entire history was bent, whose seerah is the next thing waiting to be read. Carry two things across that threshold with you. The first is belief in every prophet without distinction, from Adam to Isa to Muhammad ﷺ, which is the fourth article of your own faith and not a thing you may pick and choose. The second is a love for Isa and his mother Maryam, peace be upon them, that honours them as the Qur'an honours them, no higher and no lower. Believe in the chain a little more firmly than the world makes comfortable. Honour Isa exactly as he asked. And then turn the page, because the one he promised has come, and his story begins where the prophets end. May Allah join us to the chain of His prophets, let us love Isa and Maryam as He loves them, and raise us with His final Messenger ﷺ, the praised one, whom Isa foretold by name.

Retold faithfully from Mufti Ismail Menk's Stories of the Prophets, episode 29 (Isa, peace be upon him), the closing night of the

series. Qur'an: Sahih International (3:42, 3:43, 3:45, 3:47, 3:59, 19:16, 19:18, 19:23, 19:24, 19:25, 19:26, 19:30, 19:31, 19:32, 19:33, 5:110, 5:114, 4:157, 4:158, 4:159, 61:6, 5:116, 5:117), verified via quran.ai. The narration follows Mufti Menk's telling; the phrasing is The Daily Wird's.