SAMPLE

Yaqub: The Patient Father and the

Twelve Tribes The Story of Prophet Yaqub (يعقوب) in the Quran and Islamic Tradition

Aira Aurora

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Introduction

Yaqub (عليه السلام) is the prophet of patience. Not the patience of endurance — not the passive acceptance of suffering — but the patience of faith: the refusal to give up on Allah's mercy, no matter how long it takes, no matter how dark the night, no matter how heavy the grief.

The Quran tells Yaqub's story primarily through Surah Yusuf — the twelfth surah, which the Quran calls "the most beautiful of stories" (12:3). Yaqub is not the protagonist of the surah; his son Yusuf is. But Yaqub is the emotional center — the father who lost his beloved son, who wept until his eyes went white, who was told by his own children to stop grieving, and who refused. He refused because he knew — with the certainty of a prophet — that Allah would return his son. Not because he had evidence. Not because he had hope. But because he had faith, and faith does not require evidence to believe.

The Quran says about Yaqub's grief:

In the verse of the whitened eyes, Yaqub turns away from his sons and cries out: how great is my grief for Yusuf — and his eyes become white from grief, and he is suppressing it (12:84).

"White from grief" — the Arabic shuwab means the whiteness that comes from excessive weeping. Yaqub wept so much, for so long, that the whiteness overtook his eyes. He went blind — not from disease, not from age, but from sorrow. And even then, he did not despair. He suppressed the grief — not by denying it but by carrying it. He held the sorrow in his body and kept walking.

Yaqub is the third patriarch — after Ibrahim and Ishaq — and the father of the twelve tribes. His twelve sons became the ancestors of the Bani Isra'il, the Children of Israel. Through his son Yusuf came the migration to Egypt. Through his son Yahuda came the line of Dawud and Sulayman. Through his lineage came Musa, Isa, and the long chain of Israelite prophets.

This book traces Yaqub's story through the Quran: his faith, his sons, the loss of Yusuf, the years of grief, the reunion, his deathbed advice, and his legacy. It is the tenth light in the NurOne - The Prophets series — the light that wept and did not break, the light that waited and was not disappointed.

The story of Yaqub in the Quran is the story of a father who lost his son and waited. In Surah Yusuf, Yaqub speaks words that have echoed through centuries: "O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they contrive against you a plan. Indeed, Satan is a manifest enemy to man" (12:5). And later, when the second loss comes — when Yusuf's brother is taken in

Egypt — Yaqub says: "Patience is most fitting. Perhaps Allah will bring them all back to me. Indeed, He is the Knowing, the Wise" (12:83).

The Quran offers a portrait of Yaqub as the embodiment of patience — a father who endured the loss of his beloved son, the cruelty of his other sons, the passage of decades, and the weight of grief that did not break his faith. His patience was not passive resignation. It was the active, deliberate choice to trust Allah when everything visible suggested despair. The chapters that follow trace Yaqub's story as it appears in the Quran, from the dream of Yusuf, through the separation, the famine, the reunion, and the final gathering in Egypt where father and son meet again.

The Quran extends this principle the final moment of Yaqub's story, when he reunites with Yusuf in Egypt: "And when they entered upon Yusuf, he took his parents to himself and said: Enter Egypt, if Allah wills, secure. 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 former vision. My Lord has made it a reality" (12:99-100). The dream that began the story — the sun, the moon, and the stars bowing — is fulfilled in the final scene.

Yaqub's patience through decades of loss produced this moment: not merely the return of a son but the realization of a vision given by Allah years before. The Quran sets before us this as the reward of patient faith — not immediate relief, but an eventual, complete restoration that validates every year of waiting.

The Quran underscores this Yaqub's final words in the story, as he lay dying: "Were you witnesses when death approached Yaqub, when he said to his sons: What will you worship after me? They said: We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq — One God. And we are Muslims to Him" (2:133). Yaqub's last concern was not his wealth, his legacy, or his comfort. It was the faith of his children. The question he asked — what will you worship after me? — is the question of every generation of believers: what will those who come after us hold to when we are gone?

The answer his sons gave — we will worship your God, the God of your fathers, One God — is the answer the Quran asks of every reader. The faith of Yaqub did not die with Yaqub. It continued through his sons, through Yusuf, and through the line of prophets that the Quran traces from that family across centuries.

Chapter 1: Yaqub in the Quran

Yaqub (عليه السلام) is mentioned by name 16 times in the Quran across 10 surahs. His story is told in two modes: the genealogical mode (where he appears in lists and lineage references) and the narrative mode (where he is a central character in Surah Yusuf).

Surah Yusuf (12) — The most detailed narrative. Yaqub appears throughout: at the beginning (the dream), during the betrayal, through the years of grief, during the famine, and at the reunion. He is the emotional anchor of the surah.

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:132-133) — Yaqub's deathbed advice to his sons:

"Or were you present when death came to Yaqub, when he said to his sons: What will you worship after me? They said: We will worship your God and the God of your fathers — Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq — one God. And we are Muslims submitting to Him" (2:133).

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:136) — Yaqub in the unified prophetic tradition:

"Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the descendants."

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:140) — "Or do you say that Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the descendants were Jews or Christians?"

Surah Al-Imran (3:84) — Revelation to prophets including Yaqub.

Surah Al-Imran (3:93) — "All food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel [Yaqub] made unlawful to himself before the Torah was revealed."

Surah An-Nisa (4:163) — "We revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub."

Surah Maryam (19:6) — Zakariya prays for an heir "who will inherit from me and inherit from the family of Yaqub."

Surah Maryam (19:49-50) — Yaqub given wisdom and scripture.

Surah Al-An'am (6:84) — "And We bestowed upon him Ishaq and Yaqub."

Surah Al-Anbiya (21:72) — "And We gave him Ishaq and Yaqub in addition."

Surah Sad (38:45) — "And remember Our servants Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Yaqub — those of the strong hand and the insight."

The Quran uses another name for Yaqub: Israel (Isra'il). This name appears in two key passages:

Surah Al-Imran (3:93): "All food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel made unlawful to himself."

Surah Maryam (19:6): "Who will inherit from me and from the family of Yaqub."

The Quran uses "Israel" when referring to the nation (the Children of Israel — Bani Isra'il) and "Yaqub" when referring to the person. The two names refer to the same prophet. Islamic tradition holds that Yaqub was given the title "Israel" by Allah, meaning "servant of God" or "one who strives with God." The twelve tribes are called "the Children of Israel" because they are the descendants of Yaqub.

Like Ishaq, Yaqub appears in every Quranic list of prophets. He is consistently grouped with his father Ishaq and his grandfather Ibrahim:

- "Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Yaqub" (38:45) - "Ishaq and Yaqub" (21:72) - "Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the descendants" (2:136)

The grouping is always the same: the three patriarchs together. This three-generation unit — Ibrahim, Ishaq, Yaqub — is the foundation of the Israelite prophetic tradition. The Quran treats them as a unit, a triple cord of faith that cannot be broken.

The Quran describes Yaqub alongside his father and grandfather:

"And remember Our servants Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Yaqub — those of the strong hand and the insight. Indeed, We purified them with a pure attribute: remembrance of the Abode of the Hereafter. And indeed, with Us, they are of the chosen, the excellent" (38:45-47).

Yaqub inherited the qualities of his forefathers: the strong hand (strength in action and faith) and the insight (depth of understanding and vision). But Yaqub's "strong hand" was tested in a way that Ibrahim's and Ishaq's were not — through prolonged, agonizing grief. The strength that faced the fire (Ibrahim) and the strength that maintained the covenant (Ishaq) was, in Yaqub, the strength to weep for years and not break.

The "insight" — the ability to see beyond the surface — was tested in Yaqub's ability to perceive what his sons could not: that Yusuf's dream was from Allah, that the brothers' story about the wolf was a lie, that the eventual reunion would come. Yaqub saw what others could not see because he looked with the eyes of faith, not just the eyes of a father.

The Quran explicitly identifies Yaqub as a prophet who received revelation:

"Indeed, We have revealed to you as We revealed to Nuh and the prophets after him — and We revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and

the descendants and what was given to Musa and Isa" (4:163).

Yaqub received revelation. He was given wisdom and scripture (19:49-50). He was a prophet with a mission — and his mission, as the Quran presents it, was the preservation and transmission of the covenant to the next generation: the twelve sons who would become the twelve tribes.

The Quran also records Yaqub's dietary practices:

Before the Torah was revealed, all food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel made unlawful to himself — the dietary authority Chapter 5 examines in full (3:93).

The record indicates that Yaqub had religious authority — he could make things unlawful for himself and his descendants. This is a prophetic function: the authority to define what is permissible and what is not. The record also suggests that some of the dietary restrictions later codified in the Torah originated with Yaqub, not Musa.

One of the most powerful moments in Yaqub's story is his deathbed question to his sons: "Or were you present when death came to Yaqub, when he said to his sons: What will you worship after me? They said: We will worship your God and the God of your fathers — Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq — one God. And we are Muslims submitting to Him" (2:133).

This scene is the Quran's portrait of a prophet's final concern. Yaqub, dying, does not ask about his wealth, his property, his legacy, or his status. He asks one question: what will you worship? The entire life of a prophet — the struggles, the patience, the grief — converges on this single question. Will the next generation carry the faith?

The sons' response is a declaration: we will worship your God. One God. We are Muslims submitting to Him. The response echoes the language of Ibrahim and Ismail at the Kaaba — "make us Muslims submitting to You" (2:128). The submission that Ibrahim prayed for was fulfilled in his grandchildren. The chain held.

The Quran uses this scene to challenge the People of the Book who claimed to follow the religion of the patriarchs:

"Were you present when death came to Yaqub?" The question is rhetorical: you were not there. You do not know what Yaqub said. But the Quran does — and what Yaqub said was: worship one God. The religion of Yaqub was not Judaism or Christianity — it was the same religion as Ibrahim: submission to one God.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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