

*Bismé Allah ArRahman ArRaheem*  
In The Name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful

## THE SAGA OF THE CROW

*“Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them  
in?”*

*None can uphold them except (Allah) The Most Gracious:*

*Truly it is He that watches over all things.*

*Surah Al Mulk (67):19*

Every part of Allah’s creation is worthy of admiration. There are so many facets which are thought-provoking if we will just take the time to look around us. The Sea, the Earth and the skies and everything which Allah has made is an incredible work of art and ingenuity far beyond that which we are ever capable of appreciating.

Modern science and technology often only replicate the Greatest Science which is incorporated in Allah’s Creation. We could well look into many things, such as how the study of bats and whales reveals the characteristics of radar and sonar location; how bees are absolutely miraculous in their coded communication skills, to mention but a few. Then, as Allah has instructed us, there are the birds and their flight modes.

In his retirement my Father took up Gliding, flying non-powered aircraft, a Blanik actually. He went very deeply, into this, becoming an Instructor and travelling around Australia and overseas. He was particularly observant of how the birds used air currents in flight. Some of these updraft currents, thermals, may lift a bird, or aircraft, up for thousands of metres. This is dependent upon barometric pressure systems. There are several factors involved here and pilots become very familiar with causes and what to look for, but what of the birds? Science tells us that the birds have what is called the *Vitali organ* which is a small sensory organ located in the inner ear, alerting the bird, quite naturally, to any barometric pressure changes, thus allowing them to source and soar the updrafts.

Note well how Allah, in the Qur’an, mentions the spreading of the wings (gliding or soaring) and the folding them in (flapping). This is very interesting because birds travel great distances and many migrate from continent to continent with the seasons. How do they manage those thousands of miles of land and seas? Allah Most High has equipped them with the ability to use the air currents by which they may glide. Have you ever seen a flight of birds moving in a circle? They are making use of the thermal updraft which carries them forward, but to stay in this thermal they have to retain a spiral soaring pattern. The flapping or folding of the wings takes place at other times and may be likened to power flight. Just think - all birds, large and small, have these abilities. Subhan Allah!

Quite a lot is said about birds in the Qur’an and we find that they are mentioned as being among the creatures to praise Allah: *“Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose*

*praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise, and Allah knows well all that they do.*" [Al Nur (24):41]. They have also been mentioned with regard to the Prophets (peace be upon them). Prophet Dawud and his son Suliman (pbuh) were gifted with being able to understand the speech of birds; Dawud (pbuh) is noted in the Qur'an and in the previous Scriptures as being musical, and in Surahs 34:10 and 38:19 one may see that by Allah's power, the hills and the birds joined in Dawud's singing of praise to Him, their Creator. One can almost visualise this with the hills echoing their chorus of praise.

We see also the hoopoe is mentioned as a messenger for Prophet Suliman (s) in Surah Al Naml. Birds have had the capacity to carry messages back and forth throughout history, as in times of war, man may not be capable of understanding them as did Prophet Suliman (s) but they can be trained to understand man's requirements. They have, as directed by Allah, repeatedly given service to mankind in the capture of prey as in Surah Al Ma'idah. What of the flight of birds in Surah Al Fiil which defended the Ka'bah, destroying the Ethiopian army of Abraha in the year of Prophet Muhammad's (S) birth?

There is, however, one bird, other than the hoopoe, which has been listed by name, that is the raven or *ghurab* as it is known in Arabic. This bird is noted in the 31<sup>st</sup> aya of Surah Al Ma'idah with regard to the slaying of Abel by his brother, Cain. It says in this verse: "*Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother...*" To this day we bury our dead within the earth just as the raven had been instructed to show Cain.

What do we know of the raven? It belongs to the corvidae (crow) family. Interestingly this then means that all ravens are crows, while crows can also be ravens magpies or jays. Apart from this, the black crow we see in every country, and the raven, also black, are looked upon by many people with suspicion. Is it the fact that they eat the eggs or even nestlings of other birds when circumstances permit? Is it because they are also noted by farmers to peck out the eyes of new-born lambs? If we put this into perspective, we have to admit that yes, this is true. They exist on carrion also which is not so pleasant. However, why is it that the eagle is used by many countries as a national standard of valour, while they also may be seen to be killers of other species? Hawks are also a menace, but they are not, as the crow, depicted as being evil. Crows are taken by some to be ill-omens. This is quite probably due to the fact of their connection to Cain. Yet we clearly see in the Qur'an that Allah *sent* the raven.

As Muslims we should not be superstitious. It is notable in the Qur'an that the people of Pharaoh spoke of Musa (s) and his people as being associated with evil omens [Surah 7:131] and again the Thamud accused their brother Salih, the Messenger sent by Allah, as being an ill-omen [Surah 27:47]. The Companions of "the City" (thought to be Antioch), as mentioned in Surah Ya Sin [36:13-18] accused the three Messengers from Allah as being harbingers or bringers of evil. Their reply in aya 19 is an important one: "*They (the Messengers) said 'Your evil omens are with yourselves...*" We should therefore look a little further with regard to the raven or crow.

If we note the Qur'anic references to the Prophet Elias(s) it becomes apparent that the "Elias" of the Qur'an is the "Elijah" of the Old Testament. We do not have a great deal mentioned about this Prophet of Allah (s) in the Qur'an [6:85, 38:48] but we may take note of his story in the Old Testament of the Bible, which is a longer version than that which is within the pages of the Qur'an.

It was this Prophet (s) who was sent by Allah at the time of the Israelite King, Ahab, of whom, it is said in 1 Kings 16: 33 "And Ahab made a grove (to Baal): and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." At this point the Prophet Elijah (s) was sent with a very stern message that there would be a devastating drought upon the land due to his idolatry. This angered Ahab and he sent soldiers to capture Elijah (s) for execution. Then in chapter 17:2 it says that the word of the Lord (Allah) came unto him saying, "Get thee hence and turn thee eastward and hide thyself by the brook, Cherith, which is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Verse 6 confirms: "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening: and he drank of the brook."

This particular incident was brought to my attention with a jolt. I hate to admit it but quite honestly I was one who looked at the crow in a negative light. In the previously mentioned aya 41 in Surah Al Nur, all birds are mentioned as having their own mode of prayer and praise to Allah. It does not say, all except the crow. However, I have to say that I had overlooked this rather large fact.

There can be no excuse for my lapse of courtesy, or of my shameful shooing of the crow which sat boldly in one of our mango trees. The only reason I can give, on cross-examination of myself, is the fact that we have always had a large collection of native birds which visit us regularly, and fearing the reputation of the crow, I was afraid of an incompatibility or worse, which would scare away our finer feathered friends. My Grandfather before me had an affinity with all birds, even the crow, I remember. It was he who planted the mango trees which have always welcomed all species; although I never did see a crow here, only on his out-of-town property. Therefore this was, as far as I remembered, the first crow to make an appearance in this particular part of town.

It had just so happened that I was in the garden when I looked up and there he was! Sitting on a branch enjoying the shade on a hot Summer afternoon. He eyed me carefully with head on one side as much as to say, "Hello there!" "Oh Good Grief! Not a crow!" was the first thought which entered my head. I'd heard dreadful things about noise and the eating of young nestlings, all of which now filtered through. "Shoo!" I said quite loudly, and immediately felt terrible. The crow very obediently flew away leaving me to deal with my conscience and the fact that I was obviously applying some sort of caste system. I had become a bird-snob!

Not too long after this episode I was filling the bird bath and found a complete slice of white bread sitting there. I fished it out and left it to dry for the birds. Then the next day there was another slice. I was quite bemused by this as I could not imagine who could or would have done something so very unusual. My husband, who had also found bread, thought that it must have been one of the neighbourhood children. "Perhaps they think we are hungry?" I had mused.

I have to say that this went on for many weeks. Whoever was doing it was certainly persistent. Then one of our daughters came to visit and we were sitting under the mango trees one morning when I saw a crow go past us with something in its beak. What it carried was not as large as the rounds of bread had been, but it did go into the front yard, so we went to have a look. And yes! It had swooped down and left something in or near the birdbath. On inspecting further we found that there was a lone Sao (cracker) biscuit floating on top of the water.

At that moment it hit me very hard, and I felt so much remorse. Obviously he was not able to obtain bread, so opted for something, anything, edible. This meant much more to me than the loyalty or manipulation of a bird, it drew me right back to my Creator and the Scriptures I had known so very well. What was the message conveyed to me, or of what had Allah s.w.t. allowed him to remind me? Yes, that one of his forebears had been chosen to serve a Prophet of Allah. His crow/raven ancestor had been given the very special task of feeding and thus preserving the life of Allah's Prophet (s) which we are told he carried out until the brook dried up and Allah sent the Prophet to another land. This bird was not the unworthy, evil creature depicted.

So what was the outcome? The crow still visits; still, at times puts bread in the birdbath, and lately has been bringing an odd T-bone or two. My husband, in jest, has been suggesting that he may bring a leg of lamb or something substantial. However, I now greet this bird and while he uses the shade and the birdbath, and has brought his wife and two children to visit, they never stay. We have, Insha'Allah, tacit respect for each other, and that, I believe is a wonderful gift from Allah, may He be praised.

Taken with permission from "They Ask"  
by  
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