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Section 12: Histories of the Ancient People Serve as a Lesson

Surah Yusuf – Verse 105

وَكَايْنٍ مِنْ ءَايَةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

105. “And how many a sign there is in the heavens and on the earth which they pass by while they turn away from it.”

They have been misled for their eyes are not open and their ears do not hear. Thus they disregard and turn away from the many signs of Allah which are in the heavens and on the earth as if they were nonexistent.

They do not realize the Divine implications associated with all those events which they experience in their everyday lives and see with their own eyes, such as the profound system at work in the sunrise and the sunset, the dynamism of the everyday lives of plants, birds, insects, and human beings, the flow of streams and rivers, the submission of all of creation to laws and commands, and finally, the universal plan and purpose inherent in the entirety of existence, written, as it were merely drawings on its doors and walls.

This verse was probably revealed to the Prophet (S) in order to soothe him. Every authentic leader and Imam would naturally be concerned and saddened if his call to the people was ignored.

Such needless people always see the signs of Allah's power and wisdom in nature and in creation and are not mindful about them for one minute. They witness earthquakes, solar and lunar eclipses, thunder and lightning, the revolution of the stars and the galaxies, and still pay no attention to them in their minds.

The verse says:

“And how many a sign there is in the heavens and on the earth which they pass by while they turn away from it.”

Explanations

1. The purpose of man “passing by” the Divine signs is for him to observe them.
2. The objective of man ‘passing by’ the signs is the motion of the Earth which makes it possible for man to observe astronomical phenomena in the skies.
3. Some verses have indirectly predicted that man would bring outer space under his control.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 106

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

106. “And most of them do not believe in Allah except that they associate others (with him).”

This verse indicates that most of those who claim to be believers in Allah in fact associate others with Him, their faith is not pure but mixed with the worship of and reliance upon others.

Imam Rida (as) has said that polytheism in this verse does not mean blasphemy and the worship of idols. Rather, it means focusing one’s attention on anything other than Allah. ¹

Also Imam Sadiq (as) has said that polytheism in man is more hidden and latent than the movement of black ants on a black stone at night.”²

And, in a tradition, Imam Baqir (as) has said that people are monotheistic in their worship but in their obedience to other than Allah they enter into polytheism.³

In some other narrations, we read that the purpose of polytheism mentioned in this verse is polytheism in regard to favours: for example, when one says that someone else has accomplished his task for him and were it not for his sake, he would have perished; and the like of it.⁴

A pure monotheist is one who does not have anyone or any object upon which he depends and which occupies a central role in his life, and worship except Allah. His words are for Allah’s sake, his deeds are for Allah, whatever he does, he does it having Allah in mind, and he recognizes no laws except the laws of Allah.

To sum up, faith is hierarchical, and pure faith is that which allows no room for polytheism.

The Signs of a Sincere Believer

1. He who does not expect a reward or thanks from any one when he spends out something to someone.

“...no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.”⁵

2. In worship: he will only be subservient to Allah and to no one else.

“...and make none sharer to the worship due unto his Lord.”⁶

3. In propagation of the faith he will not receive rewards from any other than Allah.

“...my reward is only with Allah...”⁷

4. In matrimony, he will not fear poverty, and he will marry being confident that Allah is true to His promises.

“...if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of his grace...”⁸

In his communication with people he will surely be more concerned about satisfying Allah (s.w.t.) than satisfying others.

“...Say Allah; then leave them sporting...”⁹

In fighting the enemy he will fear no one but Allah.

“...and do not fear any one but Allah;...”¹⁰

In love and affection, he will love no one as much as he loves Allah.

“...but for those who have faith, their love of Allah is more intensive.”¹¹

In business and commerce he will never forget Allah (s.w.t.).

“Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah...”¹²

Surah Yusuf – Verse 107

أَفَأَمِنُوا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ غَاشِيَةٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ أَوْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

107. “Do they then feel secure from the enveloping punishment coming upon them from Allah, or the coming of the Hour suddenly, while they are unaware?”

The Qur’anic noble term /qaṣīyah/ means a punishment that encompasses the entire society or each individual.

In this verse, Allah issues a warning to all those who have not yet accepted the faith, and who pass by clear Divine signs and heedlessly overlook it. Such people are polytheists in their deeds and should not consider themselves safe and secure from the all-encompassing Divine penalty which will suddenly be inflicted upon them.

The verse says:

“Do they then feel secure from the enveloping punishment coming upon them from Allah...”

The Day of Judgment will suddenly arrive and the Divine great court of justice will be established in order to settle their accounts while they are unaware and ignorant about it. The Divine punishment is all encompassing and there is no possibility for escape, yet they behave as if they were secure from all this.

The verse continues saying:

“...or the coming of the Hour suddenly, while they are unaware?”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 108

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

108. “Say (O’ Our Apostle): ‘This is my way. I invite to Allah with clear sight, I and whoever follows me; and glory be to Allah! And I am not (one) of the polytheists’.”

The way of the Prophet of Islam (S) is clear and transparent to all those who want to seek guidance, and true guidance comes from Allah, thus his way is a call to Allah, the only true Reality. The verse says:

“Say (O’ Our Apostle): ‘This is my way. I invite to Allah with clear sight...”

Indeed, he does not follow this path without knowledge or by imitation; rather he and those who follow him traverse this path with full knowledge and insight. This verse implies that every Muslim who follows the Prophet (S) must show the Way of Allah to others in his words and deeds.

This is the path of pure monotheism, the path to Allah the One, Who is free of all defects and has no

partners or companions.

The verse says:

“...I and whoever follows me; and glory be to Allah! And I am not (one) of the polytheists’.”

Thus the believer in the One True God cannot and should not be considered as one of the polytheists.

This verse being located within the context of the Surah Yusuf itself indicates that the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad (S) is not differentiable from that of Yusuf, the great Divine prophet.

From the prison he used to call people to worship the One Allah, and regarded deities other than Him as merely fictitious names which when called upon could not answer, for they are ignorantly worshipped only through imitation and superstition.

Explanations

1. The Prophet's way of life is visible and transparent and is the object of attention and concentration for all those who seek the truth.
2. A leader must have full insight into everything that is relevant to his position.
3. A leader's call must be directed towards Allah, not towards himself.
4. Religious propagators and preachers must be sincere and genuine and their propagation techniques must revolve around making the concept of Allah that is free of all symbols of polytheism and partnership.
5. Each and every one of the followers of the Prophet must be a propagator and preacher calling the people towards Allah with insight.

Incidentally, the basic pillar of Islam is monotheism and the negation of polytheism.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 109

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رَجَالًا نُوحِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَىٰ أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي
الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَدَارُ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا
أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

109. “And We did not send (apostles) before you but men from the people of the towns whom We did inspire with revelations. Have they not traveled in the earth and seen what was the end of

those who came before them? And certainly the abode of the Hereafter is better for those who are pious. Do you not understand?"

The opponents of the prophets always used to criticize them for being human and therefore not different to those who did not believe. This was also the case with the people who were the contemporaries of our Prophet (S).

They also used to raise such a criticism which this verse answers. The verse does not deny the humanity of the prophets, it affirms that they were men, but men upon whom descended Divine Revelation.

These men used to live in the same towns and villages as other human beings, and had social intercourse with them and were well aware of their pains, needs and difficulties.

The verse says:

"And We did not send (apostles) before you but men from the people of the towns whom We did inspire with revelations..."

All of the history of mankind is the history of sending prophets and their acceptance or rejection by the people to whom they were sent. In this regard the Qur'an challenges the skeptical to travel throughout the earth and see the end of those who rejected the truth.

The verse continues saying:

"...Have they not traveled in the earth and seen what was the end of those who came before them?..."

This investigation and research, because its subject is tangible and evident, provides the best instructive lesson that is available to all and can be experienced by everyone.

Compared to this passing and transient world, the Hereafter is more suited to the pious and is better than this world, it is free from troubles and is eternal, and man would come to this very conclusion if he utilized his intellect.

The verse says:

"...And certainly the abode of the Hereafter is better for those who are pious. Do you not understand?"

Explanations

1. The prophets were human beings like other people in the fullest sense of the word and used to live among them. They were not angels, nor were they seeking after their own welfare.

2. All the prophets were men for the means of propagation and long arduous travel in its way can only be accomplished by men.
3. The knowledge of the prophets has been gained through revelation from the omniscience of Allah. Technically it has been 'inspired'.
4. The dispatch of the prophets (as) on their mission, the descent of the Divine revelation, and the uprooting of obstinate unbelievers are all examples of the traditional way of the Divine in history.
5. The polytheists, however, have nothing to gain from their opposition to the prophets. Even in this world they will be surrounded by punishment and pain. However, for the virtuous people in this world, the Hereafter would be much more than they could have imagined while being in this world.
6. Wisdom and meditation lead man directly towards the teachings of the prophets.
7. It is necessary, of course, to preserve historical relics and monuments for the experience and instruction of the future generations.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 110

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْأَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا فَنُجِّيَ مَنْ نَشَاءُ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُنَا عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

110. “Till when the messengers despaired and they (disbelievers) thought they had been told a lie, Our help came to them and We delivered whom We pleased. But Our punishment will not be averted from the guilty people.”

Whilst preaching the Divine message, incorrigible and obstinate elements would raise such a hue and cry and put up such an opposition that even the prophets began to despair of ever guiding such ungrateful and ignorant folk and became concerned that the people would take them to be liars.

It was at these low moments that Allah would send them His assistance and saved those whom He chose and punished whom He willed.

The verse says:

“Till when the messengers despaired and they (disbelievers) thought they had been told a lie, Our help came to them and We delivered whom We pleased...”

After insisting on doing their evil deeds, after actively resisting the Divine call, and after all the

ultimatums delivered to him, when the inveterate sinner is confronted with the Divine punishment, it is impossible for him to avert it by any power.

The verse says:

“...But Our punishment will not be averted from the guilty people.”

Some Examples of the despair of the prophets throughout their call:

Only a few individuals accepted the faith after Noah had tried for very many years to call the people to the worship of the One True God.

Allah told him:

‘None of your people will believe except those who have already believed.’¹³

Noah then, condemning those people which reveal his desperate situation says that no one except immoral, ungrateful children will be born from this generation.¹⁴

In the lives and call of the prophets Hud, Salih, Shu’ayb, Musa, and ‘Isa (as), one sees their despair when confronted by the recalcitrance of their enemies.

There are many examples where the people suspected the prophets of lying. We read in Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 27:

“...may we think you are liars.”

And the Pharaoh told Musa (as):

“Truly, I think that you have been bewitched O Moses!”¹⁵

As for Allah’s triumph in this state, the Qur’an also shows that during this state of despair Allah bestows victory over the unbelieving folk, which is a right that Allah has reserved for Himself.

In Surah Ar-Rum, Allah says:

“And helping the believers is ever incumbent on Us.”¹⁶

Elsewhere He says:

“We saved Hud and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us, and delivered them from a harsh punishment.”¹⁷

With regard to the inexorability of Allah’s punishment, we see in Surah Ar-Ra’d, No. 13, verse 11, which implies that when Allah intends evil upon a people, there is no averting it.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 111

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَى وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ
الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

111. “Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for the possessors of intellect. It is not an invented tale, but a confirmation of what came before it, and a clear exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy for people who believe.”

The Arabic words /‘ibrat/ and /ta‘bir/ denote to pass, and the passing from one stage to another. When Yusuf says that this was the interpretation of his dream of old, it signifies the passing of his dream into reality.

And /‘ibrat/ also means passing from what was capable of being seen and heard into a state where they are not capable of being seen or heard but exist nevertheless.

The Qur’anic term /qasasim/ perhaps refers to the story of all the prophets or it probably focuses on the stories of Yusuf, Ya‘qub, the brothers, the ‘Aziz of Egypt, and the bitter and sweet events associated with them told in this story.

Anyway, the last verse of this Surah is comprehensive in content dealing with all the issues of this Surah in a concise manner. It tells us that all the stories of the holy Qur’an, including the story of Yusuf and his brothers as well as that of the prophets, the faithful and the unbelievers, are useful and instructive lessons for all those who are not afraid to use their minds.

These stories teach us about the causes of victory and defeat, success and frustration, happiness and misfortune, and elevation and degradation. Briefly put, they show us what should be of value or should lack value in our lives. However, it is only the /‘ulil al bab/ (the people of understanding) that can learn from the instructive lessons that are taught.

The Qur’an says:

“Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for the possessors of intellect...”

These stories, the Qur’an adds, have not been fabricated or false. They have been revealed to the Prophet unveiling the true history of past generations which confirm the original books of the past prophets. The verse says:

“...It is not an invented tale, but a confirmation of what came before it...”

Whatever is needed by man and the identification of all those things that are the real bases of man's true happiness, have been elucidated in these verses.

For this reason the Qur'an is the source of all guidance for those who seek it and the source of blessings for all those who are believers. The verse continues saying:

"...and a clear exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy for people who believe."

These stories, as instructive and heart rending as they are, are identical with the truth and there is not the slightest deviation in their authenticity or objectivity. They therefore carry an enormous impact for we know that fables, no matter how interesting they might be, are not as impressive as true stories.

Therefore, it becomes clear how the school of Yusuf, the fighter for holy causes, the abstinent, the champion of faith and virtue, the angel like man, the exemplar of benevolence and humanitarianism, the man of peace and reform and, finally, the representation of human perfection, is formed.

The godly school represented by this spiritual and political personality, does not only have a beneficial impact upon all social classes, but it can also provide valuable lessons for world leaders as well, saving the political world from lack of faith, mischief, lying, and aggression, leading them towards faith, humanitarianism and virtue, thus guaranteeing world peace and security for all.

We send warm greetings to you O' celestial and heavenly man from the lovers of truth and humanitarianism whose illustrious story has been the center of attention of the entire world. Your life is a torch that leads and directs man towards his true happiness.

We who aspire to truth and justice send loving greetings to you, the champion of faith and virtue who did not surrender himself to the illegitimate tendencies of deviants, who was jailed for not having committed any crime, adding another page of pride to the history of enlightened people.

O Allah! bestow upon us open eyes, open ears, and zealous hearts so that we can benefit from the ways of our predecessors to find a path of salvation from the difficulties in which we are immersed.

O Allah! Make us so receptive and kin to be able to see the true end of the life of the former nations who, after victory, painfully defeated because of disunity and that we do not go along the way they went.

O Allah, provide us with such a sincere intention to be able to trample upon our egoistic selves and bestow upon us a wisdom which does not make us arrogant when we are victorious, and bestow upon us such tolerance which would enable us to leave others to undertake tasks which they are more capable of performing.

Once you bestow these on us, we shall then be able to overcome all difficulties and illuminate the world with the Everlasting Light which shines forth from Islam and the Qur'an. O Allah, the Almighty, illuminate our hearts with the light of the Qur'an and put us in a position to execute all the commands of the

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1. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 2. Safinat ul Bihar, vol. 1, p. 697
 3. Kafi vol. 2, p. 292
 4. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn vol. 2, p. 475
 5. Surah 'Insan, No. 96, verse 9
 6. Surah Kahf, No. 18, verse 110.
 7. Surah Saba', No. 34, verse 47.
 8. Surah An-Nur, No. 24, verse 32.
 9. Surah Al-Ana'am, No. 6, verse 91.
 10. Surah Al-Ahzab, No. 33, verse 40.
 11. Surah Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 165.
 12. Surah An-Nur, No. 24, verse 37.
 13. Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 36.
 14. Surah Noah, No. 71, verse 27.
 15. Surah Al-'Isra', No. 17, verse 101.
 16. Surah Ar-Rum, No. 30, verse. 47.
 17. Surah Hud, No. 11, verser. 58.

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