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Section 10: Shu'ayb's Mission to the Dwellers of the Forest

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verse 176-180

كَذَّبَ أَصْحَابُ الأَيْكَةِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ شُعَيْبٌ أَلاَ تَتَّقُونَ

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

176. "The dwellers of the Forest belied the messengers."

177. "When Shu'ayb said to them: 'Will you not fear (Allah)?"

178. "Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger."

179. "Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."
180. "And I do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds."

This is the seventh and the last story of the stories of the prophets mentioned in this Surah. This story is about prophet Shu'ayb and his disobedient people. This great prophet lived in a land called Madyan1 and 'Aykah2.

Verse 70 from Surah Al-Hijr indicates that 'Aykah had been located in the way of those people who used to go from Mecca and Medina toward Syria.

First the verse says:

"The dwellers of the Forest belied the messengers."

They belied not only Shu'ayb (as), the prophet who was divinely appointed for them but also all other prophets, because they said the same thing from the viewpoint of unity and call, or in principle, they had believed in no religion from among the Divine religions.

The Arabic word /'aykah/ originally means a place with condensed trees which usually called forest. The land which was near Madyan, because of having enough water and many trees, was named ''Aykah'. The frame of references shows that these people had a welfare life with abundant wealth, and perhaps it was for the same reason that they were in full pride and negligence.

Then, the Qur'an explains this concise meaning about those people, and says:

"When Shu'ayb said to them: 'Will you not fear Allah!?'"

In fact, the call of Shu'ayb (as) began from the same point of ideology that other prophets (as) had begun. His call was an invitation to piety and being in the awe of Allah which the source of all programs of rectification, and ethical and social changes.

It is important to note that in this story the phrase 'their brother', which was used in the stories of Salih, Hud, Noah and Lut, has not been applied here.

This may be for the fact that Shu'ayb was originally from Madyan and he was relative only with the people of that place, not with the people of 'Aykah.

That is why when in Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 84 the Qur'an refers to only Madyan, this phrase is used, where it says:

"And to (the people of) Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb…",

but since the concerning verse speaks about the People of 'Aykah and they had no relation with

Shu‘ayb, then this phrase has not been mentioned.

Then he (as) added:

"Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger."
"Then be in awe of Allah and obey me."
"And I do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds."

These sentences are the same form of well-calculated sentences which other prophets announced at the beginning of their call.

They are invitation to piety, emphasizing on their background of trustworthiness among people, and saying that their godly call has only spiritual motive and they demand no material wage for it from any one. This was for the sake that the pretext seekers and cynical ones might not misuse it.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara - Verses 181-183

أَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَلاَ تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُخْسِرِينَ

وَزِنُوا بِالْقِسْطَاسِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ

وَلاَ تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءهُمْ وَلاَ تَعْثَوْا فِي الأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

181. "Fill up the measure, and be not of the cheaters,"
182. "And weigh (things) with a right balance,"
183. "And do not defraud people in their (due) goods, and do not act corruptly in the earth, making mischief."

The act of defrauding is unlawful, and observing the right of people is obligatory,

"Fill up the measure…".

The Arabic word /kayl/ (measure) usually is used for liquid substances; the word /qistas/ (balance) is used for weights; and the word /'ašya'/ (goods), in this sense, is used for the things which are counted or bought and sold by the pieces.

In these holy verses, there are two divine enjoinments and two prohibitions which are complementary of each other: (Fill up – and be not), (weight – do not defraud)

It is mentioned in some Islamic narrations that the persons who do not tell the blemish or defect of their goods to the customer the angels will curse them, and those who deceive others with guile and plotting are the worst people.3

However, like other prophets a part of whose history was mentioned in this Surah before, Shu'ayb, after his general and godly invitation to piety and the obedience to the command of Allah, emphasized on the ethical and social deviations of that environment and criticized them in the second part of his teachings.

Since the most important deviation of those tranquil people was their economic disorders, manifest injustice, inequity and exploitation, Shu'ayb emphasized on these subjects more.

At first, he says:

"Fill up the measure, and be not of the cheaters,"
"And weigh (things) with a right balance,"
"And do not defraud people in their (due) goods, and do not act corruptly in the earth, making mischief."

Fraud is one of the great sins and unlawful things of economy which brings all corruptions of unlawful food.

Fraud is not seen only in transaction, but there may also be some unjust persons who fraud people in teaching, medical profession, control, engineering and other affairs of life and do not give others their due right as they must do.

In these recent verses, in a few short calculated sentences Shu'ayb commands these misguided people to follow five commandments.

Some commentators have thought that these commandments are mostly some emphasis on each other, while a sufficient care makes it clear that these five divine commandments, in fact, point to five basic different matters, or in others words, they are four commandments and a general conclusion.

In order that this difference can be clear, this fact must be noted that the people of Shu'ayb (the inhabitants of 'Aykah and Madyan) were living in a sensitive commercial region which was located on the way of those caravans that traveled from Mecca and Medina to Syria and from Syria to Mecca and Medina as well as other regions.

We know that these caravans are in need of many things in this way and sometimes those people who are in the cities along those roads apply the utmost misuse and buy their goods for the lowest price and sell them for the dearest price. (It should be noted that, at that time, many bargains were done in the

form of barters.)

Sometimes, they find many undue faults on the material they are going to buy, while they cammand very much for the thing they are going to sell; and at the time of weighing and measuring their own goods they measure it very exactly and sometimes they fraud, but they weigh and measure others' goods carelessly and sometimes they take more than the due amount, and since the opposite party is dependent and needy he is helpless to acquiesce to all these matters.

However, the Qur'anic phrase ***/la tabxasu/*** is derived from the word /baxs/ which originally means 'to give the people's right unjustly and less than their due', and sometimes it means deceit, dishonesty and trickery which lead to wasting others' rights.

Therefore, the abovementioned expressive holy phrase contains such a vast meaning that it envelops any kind of people's defraudation, dishonesty, deceit, cheat and trickery in transaction, as well as any heedlessness unto others' right.

In regard to the fact that the Arabic word /muxsir/ means the person who exposes someone or something to loss and harm, the Qur'anic sentence: ***/latakunu minal muxsirin/*** (***be not of the cheaters***), also has a vast meaning which, besides defraudation, encompasses any factor that in bargain causes the loss of the opposite party.

Thus, all abuses, injustices and vices in transaction, and any dishonesty, trickery and struggle that end to loss, whether in quality or quantity, are inside the above commandments.

And since the economic disorders are often the causes of destruction in social system, at the end of these great commandments, as a conclusion, it says:

"And do not defraud people in their (***due***) ***goods, and do not act corruptly in the earth, making mischief."***

These commandments not only were helpful for the rich and Unjust society of the time of Shu'ayb, but also they are useful in any age because they cause the economic justice.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 184-186

وَاتَّقُوا الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالْجِبِلَّةَ الأَوَّلِينَ

قَالُوا إِنَّمَا أَنتَ مِنَ الْمُسَحَّرِينَ

وَمَا أَنتَ إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَإِن نَّظُنُّكَ لَمِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

184. "And fear Him Who created you and the former generations."
185. "They said: 'Verily you are only of those bewitched'."
186. "And you are naught but a mortal like us; and we think that you are of the liars."

Piety and Faith hinder corruptions in economy. He Who created you will sustain you, too, and you need not to be worried about your sustenance.

The corrupt customs and traditions of ancestors must not be relied on, because we all are Allah's creatures and we must obey Him.

So, in his last command here, Shu'ayb invites them again to piety, and says:

"And fear Him Who created you and the former generations."

You are not the only nation who have come to live on the earth; before you there were your fathers and other groups of people who came into being and passed away. Do not forget both the events of theirs in the past and yours in future.

The Arabic word /jibillah/ is derived from /jabal/ which means 'mountain'. It is applied for a large crowd of people which, from the point of hugeness, is like a mountain. Some commentators have said that the number of them was about ten thousand.

Also, the man's nature is called /jibillah/, because it is unchangeable and it is like mountain which cannot be moved from one place to another.

The abovementioned change may also refer to this fact that what he said about the abundance of transgression and giving the people's rights to them and observing justice has been inside the innate of man from the beginning and he has come to revive their pure nature.

But, unfortunately the words of this sympathetic prophet did not affect positively in them and they answered his logical statements with the same bitter and ugly label that the sinners and tyrants had ever used, as the Qur'an says:

"They said: 'Verily you are only of those bewitched'."

They told him that he did not say any logical word in his statements at all, and that he thought he could restrain them from their freedom in their deeds upon their properties.

Moreover, you are also a mortal like us, then how do you expect us to follow you? And what superiority do you have over us?

As the verse explains, they said:

"And you are naught but a mortal like us…"

The only consideration we have about you is that you are a lying person.

The verse continues saying:

"…and we think that you are of the liars."

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 187-191

فَأَسْقِطْ عَلَيْنَا كِسَفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

قَالَ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمِ الظُّلَّةِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

187. "Therefore cause a piece of the sky to fall on us, if you are one of the truthful."
188. "He (Shu'ayb) said: 'My Lord knows best what you do'."
189. "But they belied him, then there seized them the chastisement of the Day of Shadow. Verily it was a chastisement of a grievous day."
190. "Verily there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe."
191. "And verily your Lord, certainly He is the Mighty, the Merciful."

The Arabic word /kisaf/, which has been repeated for four times in the Qur'an, is the plural form of the word /kisafah/ in the sense of 'a piece' and here it means: 'a piece of cloud'.

The purpose of /ʻa□aba yaum iz zullah/ (the chastisement of the Day of Shadow) is either the chastisement of the day when people sheltered under the shadow of the trees because of the severity of heat, or on a day a piece of cloud caused a shadow over them.

There are mentioned a few different sentences in the holy Qur'an concerning the chastisement of the people of Shuʻayb mentioned. Once it says it was an earthquake.4 In another place it says they were punished by a (heavenly) blast.5

Here, in this verse it speaks about a piece of cloud. All the three subjects can combine with together.A piece of dark cloud may produce a thunder and a blast which causes them to tremble, or by creating an earthquake simultaneously, they might be destroyed.

Or perhaps the earthquake relates to the people of Madyan and the dark cloud relates to the people of 'Aykah, since Shuʻayb had been the prophet appointed for both of them.

In Surah Al–'Aʻraf, his messengership over the people of Madyan, who were destroyed by earthquake, is mentioned, while in this Surah his messengership over the people of 'Aykah is referred to.

However, after saying some contradictory statements that they sometimes called him a liar by which they meant he intended to be superior over them, and sometimes called him mad, their last word was as follows:

"Therefore cause a piece of the sky to fall on us, if you are one of the truthful."

They wanted to say that he would send the chastisement by which he threatened them so that he could understand that they might not afraid of those threats.

The only answer that Shuʻayb (as) gave them for those inconvenient statements and their indecent words and that they asked for Divine punishment, was as follows:

"He (Shuʻayb) said: 'My Lord knows best what you do'."

Shuʻayb implicitly says that Allah knows best of what you deserve, whenever He finds that you deserve for a chastisement, he may send it down over you.

At last, the time of wiping the earth from these polluted ones came, and as the Qur'an says:

"But they belied him, then there seized them the chastisement of the Day of Shadow. Verily it was a chastisement of a grievous day."

For seven days a blazing heat overtook their land and there existed no wind at all. Suddenly a piece of cloud appeared in the sky, and there blew a breeze. They hastily came out from their own houses and, since they were uncomfortable because of heat, they went under the shadow of the cloud.

At this time a fatal thunderbolt was created by the cloud. It was a thunderbolt accompanied with a very loud sound that followed by falling fire over them, and simultaneously an earthquake shook the earth when all of them were annihilated.

At the end of this story, the Qur'an reiterates the same things that were said at the end of the former six stories of the great prophets. The verse implies that there is a sign and an instructive lesson in the story of the people of 'Aykah and the kind call of their prophet, Shu'ayb, and their stubbornnesses, obstinacies and rejections led to their destruction.

It says:

"Verily there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe."

Yet, Allah, the Kind, the Merciful, gave respite to them sufficiently in order that they might change their way and improve themselves, but when they deserved punishment, He seized them with His Might.

The verse says:

"And verily your Lord, certainly He is the Mighty, the Merciful."

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1. a city located in the south of Syria
2. a town near Madyan
3. Qurar-ul-Hikam
4. Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, verse 89
5. Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 94

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