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Section 8: The Ministry of Shu'ayb

Surah Hud – Verse 84

وإِلَي مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْباً قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ وَلا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ إِنّي أَرَاكُم بِخَيْرٍ وإِنّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُحِيطٍ

84. "And to (the people of) Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb. He said: 'O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Allah than He. And do not give short measure and weight. Verily I see you in prosperity and I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day'."

Madyan whose name today is Ma'an, is a town to the east of the Gulf of 'Aqaba. In the Torah its name is mentioned as Madyan. Its inhabitants were among the descendents of Ismail (as) and they enjoyed good commercial ties with Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. Some people regard the term 'Madyan' as the name of a tribe that used to live around Mount Sinai.

The types of corruption that were practiced by the different nations mentioned in the Qur'an vary, and this very fact should be of note.

The corruption of the people of Lot had been sexual deviation, and the corruption of the people of Shu'ayb (as) in this case was economic corruption, i.e. use of short weights; weighing less than what they were assumed to sell or measuring less and claiming to deliver the value of the goods exactly as their clients had ordered.

In keeping with the ways of the other prophets (as), this compassionate and brotherly prophet at first called them to believe in monotheism, the Unity of Allah, the most fundamental pillar of religion, exhorting his people to worship the one and only God.

The verse says:

"And to (the people of) Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb. He said: 'O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Allah than He…"

Then he turned his attention to the economic corruption of the people whose roots were found in the idol worship itself which was prevalent among the people of Madyan at the time. He said that they should not weigh out their goods less than their value by using the wrong scales in their commercial transactions.

The verse says:

"…And do not give short measure and weight…"

This great prophet's words can be interpreted as two reasons for them. At first he seems to be saying that by accepting this advice the gates of commerce will develop, prices will deflate, and peace and tranquility will prevail which will attract Allah's grace upon the community.

It is also possible to interpret this sentence to mean that Shu'ayb sees them having affluence and tremendous wealth; thus, there is no reason for them to infringe upon people's rights, by selling them less goods and charging them the same price.

The second matter is that he also fears their insistence upon idol worship, and abusing Allah's blessings will lead to their punishment on the Day of Judgment.

The verse continues saying:

"…Verily I see you in prosperity and I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day'."

Surah Hud – Verse 85

وَيَا قَوْمِ أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَآءَهُمْ وَلا تَعْثَوْا فِي الأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

85. "And O my people! Fill up the measure and the balance in justice, and do not diminish the people their things: and do not mischief in the land, working corruption."

The Qur'anic phrase /la tabxasu/ is derived from the article /baxasa/ signifying 'not to reduce'; while the Arabic phrase /la ta'au/ means 'not to commit evil or mischief'.

Compromising people's rights in economic matters is a prominent example of corruption, for ailing economies always lead communities to corruption. All economic transactions should be strictly supervised.

Shu‘ayb insisted upon the establishment of a just economic system in this verse and along with dissuading his people from cheating others in economic transactions, he also called upon them to consider the rights of others, saying that they should use scales and weighing devices with fairness.

But this verse says:

“And O my people! Fill up the measure and the balance in justice…”

The establishment of justice and safeguarding everyone’s due rights are principles that must be administered throughout all of society. Taking this one step further, he said that they should not falsely ascribe faults and defects to other people’s goods, thus reducing the value of their goods, properties and belongings.

It continues saying:

“…and do not diminish the people their things:…”

Towards the end of the verse, going even further, he added that they should not corrupt the earth by committing mischief.

It says:

“…and do not mischief in the land, working corruption.”

The above two verses strongly indicate that next to the belief in monotheism, a healthy economy is of primary importance. It also shows that anarchy in an economic system can be a major source of corruption in any society.

Surah Hud – Verse 86

بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَآ أَنَاْ عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ

86. “(The lawful wealth) which is left by Allah is better for you, if you be believers. And I am not a guardian over you.”

The Qur’anic term /baqiyatullah/, mentioned in this verse, refers to the dividends which one can obtain through a godly and allowed capital, and it is certainly a hundred percent clean.

However, according to the Islamic narrations, it refers to everything Divinely sanctioned that is left for humanity as a whole. One example of this are the faithful soldiers who return victoriously from a holy war, for they have remained alive by the Divine will.

It refers also to the contemporary Imam, Imam Mahdi (May Allah hasten his auspicious advent), who is also known as /baqiyatullah/ since that noble person has been retained and stored for the guidance of mankind by the Divine Will.

Some Islamic narrations denote that one of the names of this honorable man (Hadrat Mahdi) is /baqiyatullah/1 whom we greet with this name saying: /'assalamu 'alayka ya baqiatullah fi 'ardeh/.

When he appears in Mecca, he will recite the above verse in a loud voice and say:

*"I am that promised Godly being kept by Allah.*2

Certainly the other immaculate Imams (as) have been also entitled as: /baqiatullah/.

Surah Hud – Verse 87

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ أَصَلاتُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَن نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ ابَآؤُنَآ أَوْ أَن نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَآءُ إِنَّكَ لاَنتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ

87. "They said: 'O Shu'ayb! Does your prayer command you that we should leave off that our fathers worshipped, or we (should forsake to do) what we like with our property? Truly you are the forbearing, the right minded'."

Now let us look at how this obstinate people reacted in face of this Divinely reformist voice.

Those who idol-worshippers regarded their idols as symbols of their ancestral tradition and an emblem of their cultural identity, and who gained profit through fraudulent activity in their transactions, asked Shu'ayb if it was his religion of prayer that ordered him to encourage them to abandon the worship of that which their fathers had worshipped, and interfere in their transactions to make them lose their freedom in dealing with their own property.

The verse says:

"They said: 'O Shu'ayb! Does your prayer command you that we should leave off that our fathers worshipped, or we (should forsake to do) what we like with our property?..."

The people of Shu'ayb wrongly thought that no one should set the minimum limits for proprietors, rights, regarding domination in their properties, when in fact financial affairs should always be governed by correct criteria. Such criteria are clearly elucidated by the Divine prophets otherwise society would see a great degree of corruption.

They wanted to know how could such a forbearing, patient and understanding man, have said such a thing.

They said:

"...Truly you are the forbearing, the right minded'."

Perhaps they thought that the particular movements and words of prayer would have had a negative effect on them, but if they truly meditated they would have found that prayer enlivens man's sense of responsibility, virtue, abstinence, piety, and gratitude, and makes him remember Allah and His Court of Justice.

For these reasons, man would be kept away from idol worship, blind obedience, short selling goods, and all types of fraud under the light of prayer.

Surah Hud – Verse 88

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِن كُنتُ عَلَي بَيِّنَةٍ مِن رَبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقاً حَسَناً وَمَآ أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَي مَآ أَنْهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ إِنْ أُرِيدُ إِلاَّ الإِصْلاَحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلاَّ بِاللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ

88. "He said: 'O My people! Bethink you' If I be upon a clear proof from my Lord, and He has provided me with fair sustenance from Him? And I desire not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you from it. I desire naught save reform so far as I am able. My success is only with Allah. On Him do I rely and unto Him I turn (repentant)'."

In the previous verse, the idol worshippers protested as to why they could not be free to dispose of their own property for good or, in this case, for evil. Shu'ayb (as) answered that if he had kept them from doing this, it would have been for the good of their own lives and their community, and it was not because of such things as hostility, envy, short sightedness or other things.

Individual interests must not be detrimental to the public interest.

The verse says:

"He said: 'O My people! Bethink you' If I be upon a clear proof from my Lord, and He has provided me with fair sustenance from Him? And I desire not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you from it. I desire naught save reform so far as I am able..."

They had to stop thinking that a comfortable life could only be gained through crooked dealings and

sinful activity, and Allah's prophets are an example that one could live a decent life without being polluted by these sins.

We must keep in mind that he who commands others to what is good and dissuades others from what is bad must be a man of practice himself. The prophets themselves were not only planners and leaders; they themselves were the best examples of men of practice.

Shu'ayb continues saying:

"…My success is only with Allah. On Him do I rely and unto Him I turn (repentant)'."

Surah Hud – Verse 89

وَيَا قَوْمِ لاَ يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شِقَاقِي أَن يُصِيبَكُم مِثْلُ مَآ أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِنكُم بِبَعِيدٍ

89. "And O My people! Let not (your) breach with me cause you to sin, lest befalls you the like of what befell the people of Noah, or the people of Hud or the people of Salih; and the people of Lot are not far off from you."

Shu'ayb advises his opponents that they should not burn their bridges behind themselves, i.e., because of their hostility to one person they should not destroy the destiny and happiness of themselves and their society.

They should stop thinking that the tragic stories of their ancestors were simplistic and parochial in nature. The histories of many people are similar and correspond with each other.

We must note that Allah's hands are always capable of meting out punishment. He can annihilate any nation anywhere regardless of what form they might take any time He wants.

Just as He drowned the people of Noah (as), swept away the people of Hud by storm, blasted the people of Salih (as) to extermination, and annihilated the tribe of Lot (as) by assailing them with stones and overturning the land with them.

The verse says:

"And O My people! Let not (your) breach with me cause you to sin, lest befalls you the like of what befell the people of Noah, or the people of Hud or the people of Salih; and the people of Lot are not far off from you."

Surah Hud – Verse 90

وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ

90. "(Then come) and ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): Verily my Lord is Merciful, Loving."

The dissidents and unbelievers must not only be warned and informed of the punishment to come, but they must also be shown the method by which they can reform themselves and the course of action that may attract Divine mercy.

They must be notified that in order to receive Allah's favor and friendship3, they must follow the path of the prophets and the leadership of the Sinless Ones. If they repent and reconstruct their lives, they will receive positive answers from Allah.

The verse says:

"(Then come) and ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance):..."

Allah's (s.w.t.) favor is not a passing affair, rather it is a continuous process and possesses numerous signs and characteristics, He does not only accept repentance, but He also loves those who repent.

It says:

"...Verily my Lord is Merciful, Loving."

Surah Hud – Verse 91

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ مَا نَفْقَهُ كَثِيراً مِمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِينَا ضَعِيفاً وَلَوْلاَ رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيْنَا بِعَزِيزٍ

91. "They said: 'O Shu'ayb! We do not understand much of what you say; and most surely we see you weak among us. Were it not for your family, we would certainly stone you; and you are not mighty against us'."

The prophets and the divine preachers have had to bear the utmost contempt and humiliation in the course of their mission in leading mankind on to the Right Path. Shu'ayb (as) is one of those examples, for they did both to him.

They ridiculed and belittled his words and saw him as someone weak and insignificant. They denigrated his family, threatened him with death, and did not give due regard to his honor.

The verse says:

"They said: 'O Shu'ayb! We do not understand much of what you say; and most surely we see you weak among us. Were it not for your family, we would certainly stone you; and you are not mighty against us'."

The idol worshippers told Shu'ayb (as) that they did not grasp the meaning of his words. But what was his speech about which they claimed they did not understand? Was it not but the following?

1– I am empowered to perform miracles and to offer you valid proofs.

"If I be upon a clear proof..."

2– I have no financial difficulties and I am not in need of your assistance.

3– I practice what I preach.

4– I intend to reform the society.

"I desire naught save reform..."

5– I struggle with all my might.

"...so far as I am able..."

6– I put all my hopes and trust in Allah.

"...On Him do I rely..."

7– I warn you of the consequences at the end of time and the actions of past generations.

"...The like of what befell the people of Noah..."

Surah Hud – Verse 92

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَهْطِي أَعَزُّ عَلَيْكُم مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُ وَرَآءَكُمْ ظِهْرِيّاً إِنَّ رَبّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

92. "He said: 'O my people! Is then my family more esteemed with you than Allah? And you cast

Him behind your back, with neglect. Verily my Lord encompasses what you do'."

We should not give priority to the rights of the people, or of groups, parties, or even of international law over Divine rights. We must stop excluding Allah's role in the political and social domains and not let it be dominated by any other matter.

According to the verse, these people refrained from doing harm to Shu'ayb because of the fear of retaliation from his tribe.

The verse says:

"He said: 'O my people! Is then my family more esteemed with you than Allah?..."

Shu'ayb's response was why could they not accept his words simply for Allah's sake? Given that Allah was infinitely more powerful than his tribe, they did not give any importance to Him at all ignoring Him and violating His commandments.

It continues:

"...And you cast Him behind your back, with neglect..."

In fact they should stop thinking that Allah was not seeing what they did and did not hear what they said, for one can be sure, that the Lord is aware of all of our deeds.

The verse concludes:

"...Verily my Lord encompasses what you do'."

Surah Hud – Verse 93

وَيَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَي مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنّي عَامِلٌ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَن يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ
وَمَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ وَارْتَقِبُوا إِنّي مَعَكُمْ رَقِيبٌ

93. "And O my people! Act according to your ability. I will do (my part). Soon you will know on whom comes the Penalty disgracing him, and who it is a liar. And watch you; Verily I (too) am watching with you."

As the disbelievers of the people of Shu'ayb threatened to stone him to death while giving him their last words, Shu'ayb, declaring his stand in the face of these threats did not flinch from the threat and issued a challenge to them, instead he said that they would do whatever they could, and might not spare anything. He should do what is in his power as well.

The verse says:

"And O my people! Act according to your ability. I will do (my part)..."

However, you will soon realize who will be the one suffering a humiliating punishment, and who is a liar. So, wait and see and I will do the same.

The verse continues saying:

"...Soon you will know on whom comes the Penalty disgracing him, and who it is a liar..."

You try to win me over with your power, numbers, wealth, and your influence and I shall also wait and see how the Divine punishment will soon entangle you and your misguided population, exterminating you from the face of the earth.

The verse says:

"...And watch you; Verily I (too) am watching with you."

Surah Hud – Verses 94 – 95

وَلَمَّا جَآءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْباً وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَأَخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

كَأَن لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَآ أَلاَ بُعْداً لِمَدْيَنَ كَمَا بَعِدَتْ ثَمُودُ

94. "And when Our Command came, We saved Shu'ayb and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us, and the (heavenly) Blast overtook those who were unjust, so they become motionless corpses in their abodes."
95. "As if they had never dwelt there. Behold! Away with (people of) Madyan, even as were cast away (the people of) Thamud."

Ultimately, the final stage did come. The Qur'an implies that when Allah's Command for the punishment of this misguided, oppressing and obstinate people was issued, after Shu'ayb and those who believed with him were saved by Divine favor and blessings, the terrible sound from the skies and the great death-dealing blast came over the people of Madyan and took them all by the throat.

The verse says:

"And when Our Command came, We saved Shu'ayb and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us, and the* (*heavenly*) *Blast overtook those who were unjust…"

In the aftermath of the blast, the Qur'an indicates that the people of Shu'ayb lay face down on the earth, they had died in their houses as a result of this great blast, and their corpses were left there to provide others with didactic lessons. Their lives were terminated in such a way that it was as if they had never existed there before.

The verse continues saying:

"…so they become motionless corpses in their abodes."

The Divine outrage is far superior in destruction than any other form of devastation, in the case of bombardment, for example, some people may have the chance to escape more or less unharmed, and some would remain alive after the event.

However, when the time for Allah's anger and punishment comes, it wipes the evildoers away in such a way that it is as if no one had ever lived there.

The verse says:

"As if they had never dwelt there…"

Eventually, as was explained at the end of the stories of the peoples of 'Ad and Thamud, Allah's favor and blessings were removed from the people of Madyan as they had been removed from the people of Thamud.

It says:

"…Behold! Away with* (*people of*) *Madyan, even as were cast away* (*the people of*) *Thamud."

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1. Bihar ul 'Anwar, vol. 46, p. 259
2. Tafsir-us-Safi, vol. 2, p. 468
3. The term /wadud/ refers to that kind of friendship which is everlasting.

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