

Sura Taha, verses 86 (b)

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَمْ يَعِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ وَعَدًّا حَسَنًا أَ أَفْطَالَ عَلَيْكُمْ الْعَهْدُ
أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُمْ مَوْعِدِي

He said: O my people! did not your Lord promise you a good promise: did then the time seem long to you, or did you wish that displeasure from your Lord should be due to you, so that you broke your promise to me?

Reflections

- Nabi Musa asks his people a few questions. What were the questions?
- Why does he start first with questions?
- How would the people have reacted to these questions?
- There are two promises mentioned in this verse; God's promise to the people and the people's promise to Nabi Musa. What would these promises be?

Tafsir

Nabi Musa is upset at what his people have done. He begins by asking them questions.

He asks them if their Lord had not made them a good promise. This could be referring to the promise from Allah:

- that He would send down the Taurat for them, in which there would be rules to help them gain happiness in this world and the Hereafter.
- that He would establish them on earth after saving them from the oppression of Firaun.
- or it could be the promise of reward for those who have faith and do good deeds.

It is possible that all these were referred to when Nabi Musa reminded them of God's promise.

He then asks them if the period of separation from him was too long. Did they lose hope that he would come back? Had that weakened their resolve to stay firm on the right path? The period of his stay at the mountain was supposed to be thirty days and was extended by another ten days. But even if he had been away for a very long time, was it not possible for them to stay on the right path without him? After he had taught them so much. And after they had witnessed the miracle of the splitting of the seas with their own eyes. This question shows that Nabi Musa wanted

to give them an excuse. He wanted to give them a way out of being utterly condemned. They could say his absence was too hard on them. Although it could not completely justify what they did, but at least it would be a reason behind it.

Then he asks if they wanted their Lord to be displeased with them. Although it is obvious that no-one would knowingly want the wrath of Allah to come down on them, but by doing such an evil action it is as though they have willingly brought down His anger on them.

He asks if it is because of these reasons they broke their promise to him - their promise to stay firm on the path while he was away and obey his successor Harun (a). It seems from this that Nabi Musa had talked to his people before leaving and had told them to stay under the guidance of his brother Harun (a). What was the reasoning behind breaking their promise and going astray? A promise, especially when made to a Prophet of God, is binding. Not fulfilling a promise made is a sign of lack of integrity and was the root of the downfall of the community of Nabi Musa.

By asking these questions Nabi Musa wants to find out if their deed was intentionally to disobey Allah and his Prophet or was it due to heedlessness. He asks rather than just scold or reproach, allowing them to say something for themselves. It is an important tactic to sue when there is a disagreement or conflict. Ask and find out the reasons behind a misdeed.

Relevant Verses

7:150 - Nabi Musa returns to his people

14:6-8 - Nabi Musa reminds his people about the favours of Allah. If they disobey Him it does not affect Him at all.

20:80 - The Promise made by God to the people of Nabi Musa.

Important Lessons

- 1) When something wrong is done it should be reproached and condemned, in whatever way appropriate. It cannot be just accepted quietly. This is especially important for a leader.
- 2) Questioning is better than just condemning. It gives the message that the speaker wants to understand what led to the wrong action.
- 3) A community that has learned from its leader must be able to follow him in his absence.
- 4) Breaking a promise, turning back on faith, . . . bring down the anger of Allah.

5) Lack of obedience to the successor of a Prophet is lack of obedience to the Prophet.

Practical Implementation

Students can learn how to confront someone who has done wrong. They should try to understand them and give reasons why they may have done it. They can ask in order to understand rather than just condemn.

Story

A Follower changes sides

Bal'am Ibn Ba'ura was a pious person from the followers of Nabi Musa. He was so sincere and devoted that God granted him special knowledge and always answered his prayers. He was greatly blessed. Firaun asked him to pray for Nabi Musa's destruction. Bal'am was persuaded to use the special powers God had given him against Nabi Musa.

He decided to join the forces of Firaun. He made the intention and mounted on his donkey to ride with them. The donkey would not budge. He began beating the animal, afraid that he would be left behind as the forces of Firaun set off behind Nabi Musa and his followers.

Possible Ideas for activities

- make a poster (diagram, table . . .) for the three questions Nabi Musa asked. Or for the two promises that were broken/forgotten.
- discuss the appropriate way to react when someone does wrong. How can you speak to them without disrespecting them but also making your point that it was wrong. Students could act out some scenarios, or play a game. It could also be turned into a mime where reaction is shown wordlessly.

Sources:

Āytaullāh Nāsir Makārim Shirāzī (ed), *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*;
Aghae Muhsin Qaraati, *Tafsire Nur*