

Sura Taha, verses 88

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ
فَنَسِيَ

Then he produced for them a calf - a lifeless body which made a mooing sound- and they said, This is your god and the god of Musa, but he forgot.

Reflections

- How could people think that a lifeless body of a calf could be god ?
- Why do they say it is the god of Musa too? Had not Nabi Musa told them about his God?
- The verse says he forgot. Who forgot? What did he forget?

Tafsir

Samiri had been one of the people close to Nabi Musa. But he was a hypocrite who knew the weakness of the people and was waiting for a chance to exploit it. He was a smart person with special skills and he used them in a cunning way to fool the people. Not only did he make the calf attractive (golden, mooing sound), but he also spread rumours and made it seem that most people were doing a natural and accepted form of worship. People fell for his cunning ways and were deceived into an enormous sin.

Samiri collected the gold that the people had. This gold had belonged to the people of Firaun. He melted the gold and poured it into a mould he had made. When the gold cooled he cracked the mould open and out came a golden calf. Samiri blew into a hole in the calf and it made a mooing sound. History tells us that Samiri did not make the calf in front of the people. The first word 'Fa-akhraja' conveys the meaning of a sudden appearance of the calf, almost as if by magic. The people did not witness how the calf was made.

The golden calf was an amazing sight for the people of Nabi Musa. They immediately declared that it was their god. They did not ponder over the fact that if Samiri had made or produced the calf he was more worthy of worship than the calf itself. They forgot all that Nabi Musa had told them about the One Unique God who does not have physical qualities. The word spread quickly among the people. It is possible that these words were spread by Samiri and a group of his close followers. But it spread fast. Throngs of people gathered and started to worship the calf. People

are quick to follow others and often do not think for themselves. Very few people at that time stopped to think that a golden calf could not be God. They just followed the others. This type of mentality is repeated often, in history and even in present day times.

When people change, the biggest threat is to go back to their old ways. That is true for any change in life. It is hard to resist the impulse to go back to the old ways. It feels more comfortable to do what has always been done. Thus even after many years, the people of Nabi Musa were quickly deceived into going back to their old forms of worship. Only a small group of people were able to stand strong.

When belief in something does not have a strong foundation and is not based on intelligence and understanding it is easy to give it up. Sometimes people believe in God and religion without really understanding and appreciating it. When they face opposition or are shown alternatives they switch sides very fast. That is what the people of Nabi Musa did. Just by the sight and sound of a golden calf they shifted to idol worshipping. The calf is described as the god of the people and the god of Nabi Musa. It is to give credibility to the calf, and to accuse the Prophet also of idol worship. In this way they hoped to attract more people to what they were doing.

Samiri forgot what Nabi Musa had taught him. He put aside his beliefs that he had accepted and forgot all the principles about God and worship that he had learned. He forgot what he had just witnessed from the blessings of Allah on them when the sea parted for them and they escaped from Firaun.

Relevant Verses

A similar account in a different Sura - 7:148

Hypocrites are liars: 59:11, 63:1

False claims of the hypocrites: 2:11-12

Hadith

Whoever's inner [feelings] contradict his outer [expressions] is a hypocrite.

Holy Prophet (s), Safina, Vol.2, pg 606

A hypocrite is cunning, harmful, and doubtful.

Imam Ali (a), Ghurarul Hikam

How ugly is the human being when he has two faces.

Imam Ali (a), Ghurarul Hikam

Interesting Hadith on Muawiya

By Allah, Mu`awiyah is not more smarter than I am, but he deceives and commits evil deeds. Had it not been for the reprehensibility of deceit, I would have been the most cunning of all men. But (the fact is that) every deceit is a sin and every sin is disobedience (of Allah), and every deceitful person will have a banner by which he will be recognized on the Day of Judgement
Nahjul Balagha, Khutba #200

Important Lessons

- 1) When someone has a skill and understands the mentality of the people, the skill can be used accordingly, both in good or bad ways.
- 2) Hypocrisy and cunningness are dangerous for society. It is a misuse of the intellect and must be recognized for what it is if people want to be safe from it.
- 3) Beliefs have to be strong and based on a firm foundation.
- 4) People who change often have the desire to change back to their old ways.
- 5) Resistance to going back requires clear thinking, will power and discipline.

Practical Implementation

Students need to be firm in their beliefs so they do not give in to those who spread doubts and wrongdoing.

They should think for themselves rather than follow the crowd.

Possible Ideas for activities

- discuss the differences between intelligence and cunningness. Get students to say a sentence for each, or divide them into groups and each group has to describe an intelligent person or a cunning one (Check: <http://vjai.com/post/37123283062/cleverness-intelligence>)
- let students act out the story - Samiri making a calf, telling people, rumours spread and the people are deceived.
- Students can be divided into journalists and some members of the community of Nabi Musa. the journalists interview the people to probe into the story of the golden calf.
- play an adjective word game. Students think of various adjectives to describe Samiri, the golden calf, the people, Nabi Harun (and how he felt at that time) . . .

Sources:

Āytaullāh Nāsir Makārim Shirāzī (ed), *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*;

Aghae Muhsin Qaraati, *Tafsire Nur*

Shaykh Rizwan Arastu, *God's Emissaries*