

Sura Yusuf, Verse 39-40

يَا صَاحِبِي السِّجْنِ أَرَبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

O my two companions in prison, are many lords differing among themselves better or Allah, the One, the Supreme?

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ
 إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا
 يَعْلَمُونَ

You worship nothing besides Him but names which you have named, you and your father. Allah has not sent down any authority for them. The command is for none except Allah. He has commanded that you do not worship except Him; this is the right religion but most people do not know.

Reflections

- what is Nabi Yusuf trying to do here?
- how would it be if we had different gods whose opinions and commands differed from one another?
- why do people make up gods? No Prophet has come from other gods so where do they get the idea from?
- why is it that most people don't understand the right path? What stops them?

Tafsir

Nabi Yusuf has prepared the minds of the two people who come to him, with what he has told them about himself and his noble family. Now he begins to make them think about their wrong beliefs. He starts with a question. He is not telling them it is wrong, but asking them – is it right to believe in many gods who differ from one another? Does that not lead to problems, disagreements, fights . . . He wants them to wake up, to consider freedom in life not just in a dream. He wants them to understand that the problems they are facing, the hypocrisy, injustice, evil, is all because the people do not worship one God who is supreme and in charge. If they did they would be different people.

Nabi Yusuf then explains that the gods they worship are just made up. Made up by themselves and their fathers, and people have just followed. There is no Prophet or Book that talks about them.

Belief in One God is the true straight path. It guides people to do the right things. Belief in One God makes people conscious of their duties in life. It unites people and strengthens them. However most people don't appreciate and understand its value. They are influenced by others who are astray.

People can be of three types regarding their belief;

- 1) Like water, just flowing everywhere. It takes the shape of any bowl or container you put it in. These people do not stand by what they believe in. They are different with different people.
- 2) Like iron, hard and unyielding. They don't bend or change when affected by others. They are firm on their belief and do not budge.
- 3) The third group not only does not change but will try to affect others so they see the value of their belief. They are the leaders, the responsible ones.

Nabi Yusuf is the third type. He teaches us to speak up and be proud of what we believe in, to not be reluctant to speak when we get a chance and people will listen to us. Nabi Yusuf feels a sense of responsibility even in the prison to help guide others towards the truth. The concept of Tabligh, or spreading the truth, is very important in Islam. It has to be done with wisdom, good advice and reason. Allah says; *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice, and debate with them in the best manner.* (16:125) Note how Nabi Yusuf speaks kindly to them, promises to fulfill their need, asks them to think, and then gives them reasons why their belief is wrong. This is the process of Tabligh.

To tell others about God and the right path is a noble duty for believers. We should take an opportunity when it comes up. It is not necessary to preach or lecture, but just to point out gently. At heart people like good and want to believe in God but outside factors prevent them. When they are reminded they may listen and follow. Imam Ali (a) says about people who tell others about God; *[they] are the vicegerents of Allah on His earth and callers to His religion. Oh, how I yearn to see them!* (Nahjul Balagha, Hadith no.147)

Important Lessons

- 1) When you want to convince others about something ask them to think. Don't just tell them. When they think for themselves and arrive at the correct answer they will be more convinced about it.
- 2) Talk to others about what you believe in. You will be helping them and pleasing God.
- 3) Use reason and gentleness when you try to guide others.

Ideas

- discuss/act out scenarios where children could speak about what they believe in.
- act out the scene in prison. How did each person feel as the conversation progressed? Ask students to imagine going into the minds of the prisoners and see what each must have thought as they listened to Nabi Yusuf.