

Quran Appreciation - Winter Term (Jan-Mar 2018)

The Story of Nabi Isa (a)

Request of the Disciples

Verses for the session

إِذْ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ هَلْ يَسْتَطِيعُ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ
السَّمَاءِ ۗ قَالَ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

When the disciples said: O Isa son of Maryam! can your Lord send us a table [with food] from heaven? He said: Fear Allah, if you are indeed believers.

قَالُوا نُرِيدُ أَنْ نَأْكُلَ مِنْهَا وَتَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبُنَا وَنَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ صَدَقْتَنَا وَنَكُونَ عَلَيْهَا مِنَ
الشَّاهِدِينَ

They said: We desire that we should eat of it and that our hearts should be at rest, and that we may know that you have indeed spoken the truth to us, and that we may be of the witnesses to it. (Sura Maidah, verse 112-113)

Reflections

- What was Nabi Isa's immediate response to the request of the Disciples?
- Why did they make such a request? (four reasons outlined in the verse)
- The name of the Surah is the word from this story - Maidah (table). Which other Surah do you know that is named from a story in it? (Baqarah, story of the cow)

Cross Reference verses

Nabi Ibrahim's request from Allah to show him how He gave life to the dead - 2:260

Tafsir

The Disciples (Hawariyyun) were a special group of followers of Nabi Isa (a). They requested him to ask Allah to send down for them food on a table. The word Maidah refers to a spread on a tablecloth. It is used for the food as well as for the table.

Nabi Isa was taken aback by their request. After all his preaching and the signs he had shown them, were they still doubting Allah? He tells them to fear God and be wary of making such requests. According to Tafsire Nur, Nabi Isa asked them to fear God because of some inappropriate things in their request, namely; calling him Isa instead of Messenger of Allah, saying can your Lord do this instead of will your Lord do this, and referring to Allah as ‘your Lord’ rather than ‘our Lord’. That could have been out of heedlessness and he reminded them to be careful about their duty to Allah in the way they spoke.

The disciples explained their request. They were not being skeptical or ridiculing faith. They were very clear in the reasons behind their request. It was to:

- 1) They wanted to eat food that was directly sent from Heaven. This would be blessed and spiritual, and it would have an effect on their soul.
- 2) Seeing such a table would bring conviction to their hearts. Even though they believed, they wanted to raise their level of faith to Aynul Yaqin and feel at peace with their belief. This is similar to the request of Nabi Ibrahim for Allah to show him how He gave life to the dead (see cross reference verses. Also see notes below on certainty).
- 3) They wanted to prove that what Nabi Isa had told them was the truth.
- 4) They would be witness to others of the miracle they saw.

The request of the Disciples was not out of rebellion or stubbornness. The attitude behind a question or request is important. If it stems from doubt or is based on disbelief, then it becomes a problem. But when it is sincere and genuine, with a desire to understand more and rise higher in the level of spirituality, then it is not only not a problem but it is also a good thing. They wanted to witness the miraculous answer of Allah with their own eyes to remove forever any whisperings that Shaytan may try to put into them.

Certainty - Yaqin

Certainty has various degrees and levels to it and these various levels have an effect on the way a person acts in his life as actions are a reflection of our inner belief. Therefore, the stronger a person's inner beliefs are, the purer his actions will be. Certainty has three levels to it:

1. ‘Ilmul Yaqin [The Knowledge of Certainty]
2. ‘Ainul Yaqin [The Eye of Certainty]
3. Haqqul Yaqin [The Truth of Certainty]

In order to better understand these three levels, think about the following example. Sometimes a person sees smoke bellowing from somewhere and through this, concludes that there must be a fire - this is referred to as ‘Ilmul Yaqin (the Knowledge of Certainty); it is possible that he may

even see the fire itself - and this is referred to as 'Ainul Yaqin (the Eye of Certainty); and sometimes the person would experience the fire with all of his senses - and this is referred to as haqqul Yaqin (the Truth of Certainty).

In other words, sometimes the proofs are logical; other times, the proofs are that which a person sees with his own eyes (through employing his senses) and sometimes the proofs are through trial and experiment

Important Lessons

- 1) To increase in faith and certainty is the goal of the believer.
- 2) People have to be careful about how they speak, especially about God and to the representatives of God.
- 3) Explaining things sometimes helps remove misconceptions. When the Disciples explained their request Nabi Isa was willing to convey it to God.

Ideas

- 1) Discuss different examples of the three levels of Yaqin. Check Sura at Takathur (#102). How many levels of Yaqin are mentioned in the sura?
- 2) Act out the story of the disciples request. Let students take turns to participate in this, using the verses as their script.
- 3) Children can illustrate the incident (a poster, picture book, comic strip . . .) and include the reasons given by their disciples for their request.

Sources:

Tafsir Namune, Ayt. Nasir Makarim Shirazi

Tafsire Nur, Aghae Muhsin Qara'ati

God's Emissaries Shaykh Rizwan Arastu,

<https://www.al-islam.org/ethical-discourses-vol2-makarim-shirazi/discourse-18-levels-certainty>