

Sūrat al-Naml Verses 41-42

قَالَ نَكُرُوا لَهَا عَرْشَهَا نَنْظُرْ أَتَهْتَدِي أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ

27:41 – He said, ‘Disguise for her, her throne; we will see whether she will be guided or will be of those who are not guided’.

لَمَّا جَاءَتْ قِيلَ أَهَكَذَا عَرْشُكَ ۖ قَالَتْ كَأَنَّهُ هُوَ ۗ وَأُوتِينَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ

27:42 – So when she arrived, it was said, ‘Is your throne like this?’ She said, it is as though it were the same. And we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submissive.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why did Prophet Sulaymān want to disguise the throne of Queen Bilqis?
- 2) What must the queen have felt when she saw her throne? Why does she not admit it is hers?
- 3) Did the queen submit to Allah after seeing her throne? (she accepted Prophet Sulaymān (a)’s miracle but did not yet submit to One God at this time)

Commentary

In order to test the queen’s intelligence and wisdom, and also to lay the grounds for her to accept faith, Prophet Sulaymān (a) orders that her throne should be disguised so it was not easily identifiable. Although the very idea that it would have come all the way from the kingdom of Saba to Syria would itself make it doubtful to the queen that it was her throne, the Prophet wanted to make it more difficult for her to identify it. The changes made could have included moving around the jewels on the throne, painting over some parts, etc.

Why did the Prophet want to test the queen’s intelligence? The following reasons have been given in Tafsir;

- 1) He wanted to discern her way of thinking so that he would deal with her accordingly. It is necessary to speak to people (and interact with them) according to their level of intelligence. A Hadith of the Prophet (s) says, ‘Talk to people according to the level of their intellect’. There is no point in talking to people in a way which they cannot understand, or which is not in line with their way of thinking and understanding. It can bring about conflict. This does not mean that we put people down and think they are not intelligent enough. It means we accept the reality that people are unique creatures and each one thinks in a different way. Sometimes they may not be able to relate to how we think.
- 2) He wanted to understand her potential for responsibilities that he planned to give her. She was an important figure and could play a role in his kingdom. But he needed to know her aptitude first. He could know more about her by putting her through some tests.

When the queen entered, someone from the courtiers of Prophet Sulaymān (a) pointed to the throne and asked the queen if it was hers. The queen gave a very well thought out reply. She did not confirm that it is hers, nor did she deny it. She could have given different answers;

- it is my throne (open to the question of how it could have come there, a subtle acceptance of the miraculous power of Prophet Sulaymān)

- it is not my throne (but it looked so much like it)

- it is similar to my throne (that would deny the possibility that it was it)

History tells us that the throne of the queen was kept in a room that was well locked. It was looked after guards and the possibility of it being taken from its place was very improbable in the queen's mind. She was definitely surprised to see it, but she took control of her emotions quickly and chose her words carefully. Her alertness to the situation is a sign of her inner strength and intelligence.

Most Mufassirin believe that the last part of verse 42 is a completion of Queen Bilqis' words. After she answered the question about her throne, she acknowledged that the miracle behind the bringing of her throne was a sign of truthfulness of the Prophet, about which she had knowledge from before. Other signs had informed her about it. She admitted that she had accepted his greatness even before this incident and had submitted to him. It implied that there was no need of the proof of the throne for her to acknowledge the Prophet's greatness.

Lessons

- 1) Speak to people according to their understanding.
- 2) Choose your words carefully.
- 3) Accept the truth when you see proof of it.

Hadith

Submission to Allah's Will is the best companion; wisdom is the noblest heritage; theoretical and practical knowledge are the best signs of distinction; deep thinking will present the clearest picture of every problem.

Imam Ali (a), Nahjul Balagha, Hadith #4

Connecting topics

- 1) How the Prophets spoke to people according to their level of intelligence.

<https://www.al-islam.org/guiding-youth-new-generation-murtadha-mutahhari/method-prophets>