

Sūrat al-Hud Verse 91

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ مَا نَفَقَهُ كَثِيرًا مِّمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِينَا ضَعِيفًا ۚ وَلَوْلَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ ۚ وَمَا أَنتَ عَلَيْنَا بِعَزِيزٍ

11:91 - They said, ‘O Shu‘ayb, we do not understand much of what you say. Indeed, we see that you are weak amongst us, and were it not for your tribe, we would have stoned you. You do not have a mighty position with us.’

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What are the different things the people tell Prophet Shu‘ayb in this verse?
- 2) What are the roots of their attitude to him?
- 3) Why would they want to hurt him physically rather than argue with him reasonably?

Commentary

Prophet Shu‘ayb talks eloquently to his people (he is the Orator of the Prophets) and reasons with them with wisdom and affection. But the people respond quite rudely. The four statements they make in this verse reveal their stubbornness and ignorance, as well as their hard heartedness which makes them resistant to the truth. They say the following;

- 1) We don’t understand most of what you say. To them what he was saying did not make sense because they had a very different worldview. They were not even willing to consider it and think about it. Rather they rejected it outright.
- 2) We see you as weak. This could refer to physical strength. He could not convince them with his arguments and could not overpower them with physical strength. Thus, there was no way he could win them over.
- 3) We would stone you (hurt you physically) if we were not afraid of facing consequences from your tribe. During those days tribal loyalties played a big role in society. A tribe would stand up for its members and attacking one person from a tribe would be like attacking the whole tribe. The people wanted to show the Prophet that they were not afraid of him personally but more afraid of the tribe behind him. They use the word ‘raht’ for tribe, a word usually used for a small group of people.
- 4) You are not a strong or mighty person to us. This was the final insult they wanted to give, to show the Prophet that he had very little status in their eyes.

In this verse the people insulted the words of the Prophet, they humiliated him personally, put down his tribe (calling it a ‘raht’, usually used for a small group of people to show they are not really important), and threatened him with force. These statements of the people show their lowly way of thinking. All they can think about is physical force and status. The deeper truths and wisdom that the Prophet is offering to them do not reach them as their faculties of mind and soul are not really developed, nor are they willing to try and develop them. Such people are blind and deaf to the truth. Their response to words of truth which they do not like is to use force to overpower them.

We see this type of response in today's world also. Many so-called powers of this world, unable to argue with the truth and appeal of Islam, conspire to weaken the strength of Islam in various ways. They use force and power, wealth and influence, to counter Islam. It is the response of those who cannot argue reasonably with the truth.

As believers we must remember that it is the path of the Prophets to face ridicule and contempt from those whose level of thinking was very different from theirs. The followers of truth will always face that in life as the world is full of people who do not think on higher levels, whose faculties of heart and soul are not developed well. Even if their minds are developed through education, their hearts and souls are under developed and fail to recognize the truth.

This verse also shows the vast gap between the Prophet and his people. The people were not ready to even consider his perspective or understand where he was coming from. They showed no respect for him or for his kind and wise words. Their anger was like a barrier that obstructed their vision. It led to the conflict of words that followed. In life many conflicts happen because of lack of understanding of the other person's perspective. Even when a person is wrong, understanding the roots of their perspective and showing respect for them helps to avoid problems. It is an essential part of resolving conflicts.

Lessons

- 1) Those who cannot respond to truth resort to force.
- 2) A major challenge of Prophets was to face people who could not understand their way of thinking.
- 3) Believers will always face contempt from those whose perspective of life is very limited.
- 4) It is important to understand people's perspectives and counter them, rather than crushing them with contempt and force.

Cross reference verses

- 1) People using force or threatening force to counter the truth;
 - a) Prophet Ibrahim (a) and the idol worshippers – 21:68
 - b) Fir'awn and the magicians – 20:71
 - c) The Messengers of Prophet Isa (a) – 36:18
- 2) Contempt and ridicule by people who cannot understand the truth – 83:29-34

Connecting topics

- 1) Understanding other people's perspectives.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/constructive-controversy/201906/the-importance-taking-the-perspective-others>

- 2) Conflict Resolution

<https://www.spiritofislam.co.in/spiritnew/index.php/conflict-resolution>

Note: These sites are not based on Shia sources so please use with discretion.