

Section 5: Lot and Shu'ayb's people

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 61 – 62

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ آلَ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ

61. “So when the (Divine) messengers came unto the family of Lot.”

62. “He said: ‘Verily you are an unknown people’.”

As the angels called upon the household of Lot, the situation was such that Lot was busy with his agriculture in the land outside the town. He wanted to give them a reception. At the same time, he was terrified of his people, therefore, he brought them secretly and by night to the house.

The wife of Lot, on their arrival, went up on the top of the roof and, by burning fire, informed the people about what was going on. Those people, who were thus informed, assembled in that house and determined to commit that heinous and hideous act with them in which case Hadrat-i-Lot (as) was disturbed.

Hadrat-i-Lot told the angels that they were an unknown group of individuals to him as they had not been met before.

The Qur'an says:

“So when the (Divine) messengers came unto the family of Lot.”

“He said: ‘Verily you are an unknown people.’”

The angels introduced themselves saying that they were angels coming from Allah’s side to exterminate the nation and to save the household of Lot.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 63 – 64

قَالُوا بَلْ جُنُنَاكَ بِمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ

وَأَتَيْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ

63. “They said: ‘Nay, but we have come to you with that in which they have been doubting’.”

64. “And we have come to you with the truth, and we are certainly truthful.”

The Qur’an has repeatedly raised this issue that the pagans used to request the prophets to accelerate the Divine outrage and punishment and used to say:

‘... then bring us what you promise us to, if you are of the truthful ones’. 1

Meaning that if you are honest, show us the outrage and they used to ridicule and mock all the warnings. As for the Divine outrage, they were skeptic as to its occurrence whether in this world or in the next. Allah explains in these verses that the outrage, which is the object of skepticism of the pagans, will definitely come.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘Nay, but we have come to you with that in which they have been doubting’.”

Anyway, the angels did not leave Lot in expectation for a long time and they explicitly stated that they had brought him something which his people were in doubt about. That is, they were commissioned to inflict a painful and severe chastisement against them which Lot had repeatedly warned them about and they had never taken it seriously.

To emphasize, they implied that they had brought Lot an unequivocal and an obvious reality for him. That is, a certain and decisive chastisement for those unbelieving and deviant group.

The verse says:

“And we have come to you with the truth...”

To stress further, they added:

“...and we are certainly truthful.”

That is, this group has destroyed all the bridges behind them and there is no room left for any type of mediation or discussion about them. They said such so as Lot would stop thinking about any mediation efforts and become aware of the fact that they were not in the least worthy of such steps to be taken for them.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 65 – 66

فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ وَاتَّبِعْ أَدْبَارَهُمْ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ وَامْضُوا حَيْثُ تُؤْمَرُونَ

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ ذَلِكَ الْأَمْرَ أَنَّ دَابِرَ هَؤُلَاءِ مَقْطُوعٌ مُّصْبِحِينَ

65. “So set forth, you with your family, in a part of the night and do you go behind them and let not any one of you turn back, and go whither you are ordered.”

66. “And We made known this decree to him that the roots of those (sinners) should be cut off by the morning.”

Do not take the Divine warnings and threats as a joke, for the Divine punishments are always based on justice, the truth and what the culprits deserve.

And at the time of war or of exodus, the leader must move keeping abreast with the weakest of the people so as no believer would be left behind and no foes or pagans could join, and rest assured of Allah’s grace in important circumstances, which will be herded down moment by moment and will be of assistance to him once he is in dire need.

The verse says:

“So set forth, you with your family...”

It will be shown to him as to when the exodus must take place, and with whom, by what means, and finally, towards what destination.

The verse continues saying:

“...in a part of the night and do you go behind them and let not any one of you turn back, and go whither you are ordered.”

And as the small group of believers (the household of Lot except his wife) was to be rescued from such a campaign safely, Lot was provided with the necessary instructions.

He should take his family out of the town late at night when the sinners were in deep asleep or they were drunk or engaged in gratifying their sexual desires. However, he should move behind them so that he might be sure that no one was left behind. In the meantime, none of them was allowed to look or turn back.

Then, the tone of the statement changes, where Allah says:

“And We made known this decree to him that the roots of those (sinners) should be cut off by the morning.”

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 67 – 69

وَجَاءَ أَهْلُ الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ

قَالَ إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ ضَيْفِي فَلَا تَفْضَحُونِ

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُخْزُونِ

67. “And the inhabitants of the town came rejoicing.”

68. “He said: ‘Verily these are my guests, therefore do not disgrace me.’”

69. “And be in awe of Allah and do not put me to shame.”

Some authentic quotations indicate that the wife of Lot informed the sinners that there are guests arrived for Lot with beautiful faces and, following their evil intention, they headed for the Lot’s house while giving one another the good news. However, Allah exterminated them all before proceeding to undertake any action. 2

Anyway, they were busy thinking about their misleading and shameful acts, and they intended to commit as to the fact that they had then an easy prey at their disposal; beautiful and good-looking youths and at

the Lot's house.

The verse says:

“And the inhabitants of the town came rejoicing.”

Lot (as), who heard their fuss, got terrified in a state of astonishing terror and feared for his guests.

Therefore, he stood up against them, as the verse says:

“He said: ‘Verily these are my guests, therefore do not disgrace me’.

Then he adds, implying: Fear Allah and do not make me shameful in front of my guests.

“And be in awe of Allah and do not put me to shame.”

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 70 – 71

قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ نَنْهَكَ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

قَالَ هُوَ لَأَوْلَاءِ بَنَاتِي إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ

70. “They said: ‘Did we not dissuade you from (entertaining) people?’”

71. “He (Lot) said: ‘These are my daughters, (you may wed them) if you desire to do so.’”

The prophets' school of thought does not recommend the forbidding of pleasures and repressing of instincts. On the contrary, it offers guidance and mostly provides ways for their control. Therefore, Hadrat-i-Lot (as) offered them guidance and persuaded them to act decently.

Nonetheless, they were so rude and vulgar that they did not have any feelings of shame. On the contrary, they felt that Lot had also to be indebted to them as if he had committed a crime they went on raising objections.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘Did we not dissuade you from (entertaining) people?’”

Anyway, Lot, who noticed such rudeness and vulgarity, tried a different method so as to perhaps be able to awaken them from their state of negligence, drunkenness, deviation and scandal. Turning to them, he

advised them:

Why do you take a deviant path? If your objective in mind is gratification of your sexual instincts why is it that you do not take the legitimate path and the correct marriage path? These are my daughters; (I am ready to give my consent for them marrying you). In case you decide to perform a correct and decent act, this is the right path.

The verse says:

“He (Lot) said: ‘These are my daughters, (you may wed them) if you desire to do so.’”

Lot’s aim was to complete the argument to them, saying that he was ready to preserve the prestige of his guests and to save them from the abyss of corruption by offering his daughters in marriage to them.

Question: Was Lot (as) able to offer his daughters in marriage to the pagans, when he offered such a proposal?

Answer: It may be that the aim of proposing the marriage issue was to make believers out of them; or that, among them, marriage with unbelievers was not legally prohibited at that time.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 72 – 73

لَعَمْرُكَ إِنَّهُمْ لَفِي سَكْرَتِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّيْحَةُ مُشْرِقِينَ

72. “By your life (O’ Prophet), verily they were wandering on in their intoxication.”

73. “So the (violent) blast overtook them at the sunrise.”

The Arabic words /‘umr/ and /‘amr/ both have got an identical meaning, but, at the time of swearing, the term /‘amr/ is employed. 3

The Qur’anic term /ya‘mahān/ is derived from /‘amaha/ which signifies ‘astonishment’; and the Arabic word /mušriqin/ means ‘entering into the illumination and the light which appears at dawn or sunrise.’

Nevertheless, woe unto those who are intoxicated by their passions, deviations, arrogance, and obstinacy.

If there were the slightest of human ethical values or human emotions embedded in them, it would be

adequate to make them feel ashamed for having such a logic to return from the Lot's house at least and feel shameful. But, they were not only unaffected by that, but they became also more rude and tried to violate and rape Lot's guests as well.

It is why Allah, addressing the Prophet of Islam (S), says:

“By your life (O’ Prophet), verily they were wandering on in their intoxication.”

Finally, we find the Divine words and speech, concerning this nation, reaches its climax. Allah states in two concise, compact and short following verses the evil destiny of those people in a decisive and pounding form here which is also instructive as well.

The Qur’an says:

“So the (violent) blast overtook them at the sunrise.”

Such a blast might have been caused by a huge thunderbolt or by a terrible earthquake.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verse 74

فَجَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَارَةً مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ

74. “Thus We turned that city upside down and rained upon them stones of hard clay.”

Raining stones was probably for the extermination of those who had survived at the moment of the turning upside down of the town and were still alive, or for the total annihilation of the town.

Certainly, Allah's Will knows no limits for as He descends His blessings from the sky in the form of rain, He is also able to rain stones, and chastisement as well.

However, Allah did not stop at that, but He turned their cities entirely upside down, overthrowing all its upper part downwards and the lower part upwards.

The verse says:

“Thus We turned that city upside down...”

Such a chastisement was not enough for them either.

The verse continues saying:

“...and rained upon them stones of hard clay.”

The descending of the three-fold kind of punishments (terrible blast, turning everything upside down, and raining stones) each was sufficient by itself to wipe out every nation.

However, for the intensity of the sin and in their submission to sinfulness and ill fame, and that others may take an example, Allah multiplied their punishment.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verse 75

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُتَوَسِّمِينَ

75. “Verily, in this there are signs for those who by tokens do understand.”

The blissful Qur’an, here, draws ethical and educational conclusions. It implies that there are various signs for the wise in this didactic biography, for those who wisely draw their own conclusions from every single symbol, collect facts from every allusion made, and learn from every note what is to be learnt.

The Qur’an says:

“Verily, in this there are signs for those who by tokens do understand.”

The Qur’anic term /mutawassimin/, mentioned in the verse, is derived from /wasama/ which means ‘to affect’ and it is applied to a person who is smart and sharp in drawing conclusions once he has the tiniest clues at his disposal he comprehends the facts.

That is, he is clever and wise. Some Islamic quotations indicate that the objective of applying the term /mutawassimin/ is the Prophet (S) and his Ahl-ul-Bayt (as). 4

Somebody told Imam Sadiq (as) that he had got a question. The Imam answered:

“Do you want me to tell you what your question is before you ask your question?”

That person asked with astonishment:

“How do you know what is in my mind?”

The Imam answered:

“Ibil-tawassum/ (by affection).”

Then he recited this verse. 5

We are informed from the Immaculate Imams (as) who have said:

“We are the /mutavassimin/.”

It is clear that the purpose here ‘is the most complete denotation expansion’, otherwise, there are a lot of intelligent people among the believers. Therefore, there are reliable information from the blissful Prophet (S) who stated:

“Be in virtue with the intelligence of the faithful, since he looks by the light of Allah.”

He also reaffirmed:

“Verily Allah has some servants who recognize people by /tawassum/.” 6

This is the same light of faith which leaves its effect as a sign on a believer’s heart; so it is said:

“Knowledge is a light (that) Allah casts it inside the heart of whomever He wills.” 7

And the Arabic term /wasm/ means the same sign, symbol, and emblem which is being forged on the Arabian horses. Man’s soul also has got a special mark of ‘belief’ or ‘disbelief’, or of ‘obedience’ and of ‘disobedience’ toward Allah, each of which appears from his front view.

Thus, /mutawassimin/, those who by tokens do understand can observe or feel it and, therefore, know everyone.

And again, the Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

“There are certain Allah’s servants who know people by tokens.” 8

Imam Sadiq (as) remarked:

“We are those who think and take instructive lessons. The path towards happiness has been designated and embedded in us. This path is the way towards Paradise.” 9

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 76 – 77

وَأَنَّهَا لَبِسَبِيلٍ مُّقِيمٍ

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

76. “And verily it is on a way (yet) remaining.”

77. “Verily, in this there is a sign for the believers.”

The preservation of the monuments and relics of the past provide instructive lessons for the future generations.

Therefore, He implies in this noble verse: Do not presume that all their relics have been vanished. It is not so. Their relics and monuments have remained constant and fixed on the roads for caravans and those who pass over there.

As the city of Lot is located on the people’s path and when they pass by them for meeting their daily needs, they draw lessons from them. For, the relics, which become focus of attention of the people there, are always constant, fixed and sustaining.

The verse says:

“And verily it is on a way (yet) remaining.”

This city is called ‘Sudūm’. Qatt adah says: The villages of the people of Lot are situated between Medina and Sham (Damascus).

As the author of Tafsir-i-Atyab-ul-Bayan says: Perhaps, the meaning of the above verse is that the Divine outrage is not confined to the people of Lot only; rather, it is the method and the tradition which is constant and holds true for all the criminals of the history. It is also a warning for all those who commit such heinous and hideous acts that the people of Lot used to do.

Some Islamic traditions denote that he who commits the act committed by the people of Lot, will be suffering from the utmost punishment at the time when his soul is being taken out of his body. Further, some quotations indicate that this act has been rendered into the disbelief in Allah and the punishment of which is ‘execution’.

As a further emphasis, and in order to call the faithful to meditate more over this instructive story, the Qur’an implies that there is a sign in this story for those who are believers, as the true believers are always full of insight and are quite intelligent.

The verse says:

“Verily, in this there is a sign for the believers.”

How may one be a believer and yet reads this shaking biography and still does not draw instructive lessons from it?

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 78 – 79

وَإِنْ كَانَ أَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَةِ ظَالِمِينَ

فَأَنْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَبِإِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

78. “And verily, the inhabitants of ‘Aykah were certainly unjust.”

79. “So We inflicted retribution on them and they are both, indeed, on a roadway manifest (in front of your eyes).”

The Arabic word /’aykah/ means a small thick forest in which trees and their branches are often intertwined with one another. The objective of ‘the inhabitants of ‘Aykah’ is the people of Hadrat Shu‘ayb, who used to live in a region with moderate weather and full of trees, somewhere between Hij az and Sham (Syria).

A quotation from the blissful Prophet (S) indicates that ‘the people of Madyan’ and ‘the people of ‘Aykah’ were two nations whose prophet was Shu‘ayb and both of them disbelieved.

The verse says:

“And verily, the inhabitants of ‘Aykah were certainly unjust.”

However, each of these two nations received a different kind of Divine punishment.

The former was entangled in the punishment of ‘the Day of Shadow’ and the latter received ‘the punishment of Blast’.¹⁰

Incidentally, as Allah owes nothing to anyone, whatever we receive from Him must be considered as a gift. But, in case of the Divine punishment, as His chastisement is the consequence of our own faults and sins and what we deserve, the word retribution is usually employed.

The verse says:

“So We inflicted retribution on them and they are both, indeed, on a roadway manifest (in front of your eyes).”

The oppressors must know that their vice and tyranny will be depicted for others throughout history. Hence, we must design and plan roads in such a way as to try to expose historical sites within the reach

of the eye-sight of the passengers.

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1. Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, verse 70
 2. Tafsir-i-Maraghi
 3. Al-Mizan. The commentary
 4. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 5. Tafsir-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
 6. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 23
 7. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 23
 8. Tafsir-us-Safi, the details of the verse
 9. Tafsir-ul-Burhan and Majma'-ul-Bayan
 10. Tafsir-ul-Furqan, taken from Durr-ul-Manthar, vol. 4, p. 103

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