

Section 3: Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Surah An-Naml – Verses 32–33

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ

قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُوا قُوَّةٍ وَأَوْلُوا بِأَسِّ شَدِيدٍ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ

32. “She said: ‘O chiefs! Pronounce to me respecting my affair; no affair have I decided except in your presence’.”

33. “They said: ‘We possess force and we possess great might. The affair rests with you; so see what you will command.’”

The Queen of Sheba, Bilqiys, was a wise intelligent one and possessed a high standard of the ability of recognition. She had also some men and counselors with whom she used to propound the news and events of the locality.

Therefore, after being aware of the content of Solomon’s letter and informing it to her people, she, addressing them, said as follows:

“She said: ‘O chiefs! Pronounce to me respecting my affair; no affair have I decided except in your presence’.”

By this action of hers, she wanted to attract their attentions to her and, thus, strengthen her situation among them. By the meantime, she wanted to estimate and study the amount of their agreement with her decisions.

The Arabic holy word /'aftuni/ is derived from /fatwa/ which originally means 'the proper and correct judgment in complicated affairs'. By this means, the Queen of Sheba both told them the complexity of the issue, and made them attentive to this matter that they should take care of expressing their views, so that they might not go a wrong way.

The Qur'anic word ***/tašhadun/*** is derived from /šuhud/ in the sense of 'presence', a presence which is accompanied with cooperation and consultation.

Then, in the next verse it says:

“They said: ‘We possess force and we possess great might. The affair rests with you; so see what you will command.’”

Thus, they not only showed their submission to her and to her commands, but also their willing to relying on power and their participation in the battlefield, since Bilqiys was the commander of the armed forces of her time.

Surah An-Naml – Verse 34

قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

34. “She said: ‘Verily the kings, when they enter a township, despoil it, and make the noblest of its inhabitants the meanest; and thus they (always) do’.”

We should not rely only on our power; we must also keep the potentialities of others in mind.

Those who were around Bilqiys said:

“We possess force and we possess great might”.

But Bilqiys warned them not to take the power of Solomon so little.

Then, when the Queen understood their willing for fighting, while she had not inwardly any inclination for this job, in order to quench this thirst and to encounter this matter calculatedly, she said as follows:

“She said: ‘Verily the kings, when they enter a township, despoil it, and make the noblest of its inhabitants the meanest...’”

This sentence means that the kings may kill a group of people, captivate another group, and finally they make others homeless, and they spoil their properties as much as they can.

Then for the sake of some further emphasis, she said:

“...and thus they (always) do’.”

In fact, the Queen of Sheba, who was a king herself, knew the kings well that their program was summarized in two things: ‘despoil’, and ‘making the noblest into meanest’, because the kings used to think only over their own interests, not over the interests of nations and exalting them. These two things always contrast to each other.

Surah An-Naml – Verse 35

وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

35. “And verily I am going to send a present unto them, and (wait to) see with what (answer) the messengers return.”

The tyrants and the kings knew that the Divine prophets did not seek for money, yet they tried to attract them and make them quiet thereby. So, the Queen of Sheba added implying that before anything else, they should test Solomon and those around him to see, indeed, what was their condition.

Was Solomon a king, or a prophet? Was he a destroyer, or a reformer? Did they use to drug nations to meanness, or to honour? So, for this aim they might use of some presents.

That was why she said:

“And verily I am going to send a present unto them, and (wait to) see with what (answer) the messengers return.”

Kings are often interested in presents very much, and their weakness is found in this very point. They can be made submit by precious presents. The Queen announced if Solomon submit by these presents, it will be known that he is a ‘king’, and we will stand against him, applying our power, because we are powerful.

But if he shows heedlessness to us and insists on his statements and suggestions, it makes it clear that he is the messenger of Allah and we must treat him wisely.

The Qur’an has not mentioned anything about the kind of presents that the Queen of Sheba sent for Solomon; it has only shown their greatness by applying the word ‘present’ as an undefined noun, but commentators have mentioned many matters in this regard, some of which are not free from exaggeration and legend.

Some of the commentators have cited that she sent five hundred selected slaves and five hundred particular slave–maids for Solomon, while slave–men were clothed with beautiful dresses and having ear–rings in their ears with bracelets on their bands; and slave–girls were clothed with men clothing and ornamented with beautiful hats.

Then she had written in her letter addressing Solomon that if he was a prophet he would recognize slave–men and slave–girls from each other. She mounted them on worthy horses which were ornamented very heavily, and sent them accompanied with a considerable amount of jewelry.

By the way, she told her representative that if he observed that Solomon’s look was wrathful to him as soon as he arrived, he should know that it was the manner of the kings; but if Solomon received him kindly and with good temper, he should know that Solomon was a prophet.

Some Points On Letter Writing

Whatever was said in the abovementioned verses about the content of Solomon’s letter to the people of Sheba can be a sample for the style of letter writing, and this is sometimes of the important matters of life. This letter begins with the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, and the essential subject is said through two calculated sentences.

It is understood from Islamic history and narrations that our Islamic great leaders always emphasized that letters should be written shortly, free from useless matters, and completely calculated.

Through a circular, Amir–ul–Mu’mineen, Ali (as) wrote to his employees and representatives that they should make their pen–points sharp and make the lines of their writings close (to each other), and avoid writing unnecessary matters in their letters, because the Muslim properties could not bear any loss.¹

Making the pen–points sharp causes that the words be written in a small form, and the lines being close to each other, and omitting unnecessary things from the letter results not only economy in wealth and private properties but also saving the time of both writer and reader, and sometimes abundance causes that the main purpose of the letter be confused among the additional and ceremonial sentences so that both the writer and the reader of it may not obtain their goal.

Principally, someone’s letter is a sign for showing his personality and it is like one’s messenger.

Ali (as) says:

“Your messenger is the interpreter of your intelligence while your letter is more eloquent in expressing your true self.”²

Imam Sadiq (as) says:

“One’s letter is an evidence for the standard of his wisdom and the situation of his insight, and his

messenger is an indication to the level of his understanding and his intellect.”³

This delicate point should also be noted that some Islamic narrations denote that the reply to a letter must be similar to the reply of a greeting.

Imam Sadiq (as) in a tradition says:

“Answering a letter is obligatory in the same manner that answering a salutation is obligatory.”⁴

Surah An-Naml - Verses 36-37

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ سُلَيْمَانَ قَالَ أَتُمِدُّونَ بِمَالِ أُمَّةٍ فَأَنَا خَيْرٌ مِمَّا آتَاكُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ
بِهَدْيِكُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ

ارْجِعْ إِلَيْهِمْ فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ بِجُنُودٍ لَا قِبَلَ لَهُمْ بِهَا وَلَنُخْرِجَنَّهُمْ مِنْهَا أَذِلَّةً وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

36. “And when (the messenger of the Queen) came to Solomon, he (Solomon) said: ‘What! Aid you me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Nay, it is you (and not I) who exult in your present’.”

37. “Go back to them: so we will certainly come unto them with (such) hosts which they shall not be able to meet, and certainly will we expel them out therefrom in disgrace, while they will feel humbled.”

The motive of the Divine prophets is not gaining worldly materials. The friends of Allah do not sell themselves for money. They are kin, alert and act decisively. They see the corruptible plans behind the presents and they avoid them while rebuking their senders.

However, the officials of the Queen of Sheba, carrying the caravan of presents, left Yemen toward Syria, where Solomon lived. They imagined that Solomon would become happy by seeing those abundant presents and might praise them.

But when they confronted Solomon, there appeared a surprising scene in front of them. Not only Solomon did not receive them well, but also he said whether they wanted to help him with their wealth, while wealth was nothing in comparison with knowledge, guidance and prophethood. He added it was worthy for them to become happy with presents, but it was worthless for him.

The verse says:

“And when (the messenger of the Queen) came to Solomon, he (Solomon) said: ‘What! Aid you me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Nay, it is you (and not I) who exult in your present’.”

Thus, Solomon (as) made the criterion of their values belittle, and manifested that there were other criterions for the values that comparing with which the criterions current among mammonists are very weak and worthless.

Then, in order to show his decisiveness in the issue of right and wrong, Solomon, (sending back the presents with them), told the special official of the Queen of Sheba as follows:

“Go back to them: so we will certainly come unto them with (such) hosts which they shall not be able to meet, and certainly will we expel them out therefrom in disgrace, while they will feel humbled.”

The application of the word /’aḡillah/ (in disgrace) is for the first case and the word /saqarun/ (humbled) is for the second case.

This indicates that not only they will be expelled from their land, but they also will be encountered it with humiliation and degradation, in a manner that they will lose all their castles, properties, and glorious ranks, because they, resorting to guiles, do not submit to the true religion.

This threat, of course, for the representatives who observed the Solomon’s situation closely and visited his troops, was an earnest and considerable threat.

Regarding to what was said in previous verses by which Solomon wanted them two things: ‘abandoning self superiority’ and ‘submitting to the truth’ and that they did not reply to these two great things and they resorted to sending presents as a reason for not accepting them, that was why he threatened them by military force.

If the Queen of Sheba and her entourage had demanded a proof, evidence, miracle and the like, Solomon would have considered them rightful to investigate more. But sending presents showed that they were in a denial position.

We surely know this fact, too, that the most important inconvenient thing that the hoopoe told Solomon (as) about this nation who lived in Yemen was that they had ignored the Mighty Lord Who dominates both the unseen and the seen of the skies and the earth and they were worshipping the sun, a worldly creature.

Solomon became inconvenient with this problem, and we know that idolatry is not something that the divine religion remains silent for it, or bears the idol worshippers as a religious minority. By applying force, he (as) may destroy the idol temples, if necessary, and vanishes idolatry and the polytheistic creed.

The abovementioned explanation makes it also clear that Solomon's threat does not contrast with the principle of

"There is no compulsion in religion",⁵

because idolatry is not a religion, but it is a superstition and deviation.

Some Points

1- It is worthy to note that, from the view point of Divine religions, 'virtue' does not mean that a person deprives himself from the wealth, property and material potentialities of the world, but the reality of 'virtue' is that one does not make himself captive to them but he must be a 'commander' over them.

By rejecting the precious presents that the Queen of Sheba had sent for Solomon, this great Divine prophet showed that he was a 'commander' not a 'captive'.

Imam Sadiq (as) in a tradition says:

*"With Allah, and with His prophets and saints, the world is smaller than that they become happy for something of it or they become sad (for losing it). Thus, it is not suitable for any knowledgeable or intelligent one to be happy for the ephemeral material of the world."*⁶

2- In this part of the life story of Solomon, there are some expressive lessons involved in the verses of the Qur'an:

A) The essential goal of sending army is not killing human beings; but its goal is that the enemy should consider in a weak situation for him and that the enemy does not find the power of fighting with them.

"...with (such) hosts which they shall not be able to meet..."

This meaning is similar to the same thing that the Muslims are ordered:

"And prepare against them whatever you can of (military) power and of war-horses, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah..."⁷

B) Solomon does not threaten his enemies to death, but he threatens them that they will be expelled from their castles with despise and humiliation; and this is worthy noting.

C) Solomon does not attack his enemies unexpectedly, but he informs them of his attack previously.

D) Solomon does not prospect to others' wealth, but he says whatever Allah has given him is better. He does not consider the merits of Allah only in material and financial power, but he is honoured with having knowledge, faith and spiritual merits.

Surah An-Naml - Verses 38-39

قَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُوا أَيُّكُمْ يَأْتِينِي بِعَرْشِهَا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ

قَالَ عِفْرِيتٌ مِّنَ الْجِنِّ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَقُومَ مِنْ مَّقَامِكَ وَإِنِّي عَلَيْهِ لَقَوِيٌّ
أَمِينٌ

38. “(Solomon) said: ‘O chiefs!) which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in submission?’”

39. “One audacious among the jinn said: ‘I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place; I have strength for it and I am trusty.’”

There is a concept of ‘violence’ and ‘strength’ in the Arabic word /‘ifrit/ here.

After returning the representatives of Bilqiys with their presents, and that the Queen of Sheba became aware that Solomon was not a king, she decided to come to him personally in order to see the circumstances closely. Solomon was informed of her decision and made himself ready to show his power.

Finally the representatives of the Queen of Sheba took their presents and other things and returned to their own country. They explained what happened in their mission for the Queen and the people around her.

They also stated about the greatness of the miraculous land and sovereignty of Solomon, each of which was an evidence that Solomon was not an ordinary person, or a king, and that he was really a messenger of Allah, because his government was also a godly government.

It was why the Queen of Sheba and a number of the chiefs of her people decided to come to Solomon and personally investigate this important problem and also to know what kind of religion Solomon had.

From any source it was, this news was given to Solomon. Then he decided to show his marvellous might to the Queen of Sheba and her companions before they could reach his land, so that they could become familiar with the reality of his miracle previously, and surrender to his call.

So, Solomon, addressing his entourage, stated as follows:

“(Solomon) said: ‘O chiefs!) which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in

submission?”

Although some of the commentators have tried to find some reasons for bringing the throne of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, none of them are consistent with the contents of the verses of the Qur'an, and Solomon's aim for this program is clear.

He wanted to show them his might and an extraordinary action to be fulfilled so that the way of their unconditioned submission and their faith to the power of Allah might be leveled and there would not need to attend in battlefield for fighting and shedding tear.

He wanted to send faith into the depth of the entity of the Queen of Sheba and her entourage so that others would easily accept the invitation to faith and submission, too.

In the next verse, the Qur'an implies that two persons of them announced their readiness for the aim. The suggestion of one of them was surprising and that of the other was more surprising.

The verse says:

“One audacious among the jinn said: ‘I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place...’

He said he could do that action very easily and he would not commit any treachery in that valuable deposit.

The verse continues saying:

“...I have strength for it and I am trusty.’

However, the life story of Solomon is full of wonders and supernatural events; and it is not surprising that a jinn be able to do such an important action in a short time in front of Solomon where he (as) was sitting for judging between people, solving the affairs of his country, or for advice and guidance.

Surah An-Naml – Verse 40

قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ فَلَمَّا رَآهُ
مُسْتَقْرَأً عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي ءَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا
يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

40. “One with whom was some knowledge (of a part) of the (Divine) Book said: ‘I will bring it to you before your eye twinkles’. Then when he saw it settled before him, he said: ‘this is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or am ungrateful; and whoever is

grateful, verily he is grateful for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Bounteous.”

It is narrated from Imam Hadi (as) that the one with whom was some knowledge (of a part) of the Divine Book was 'Asif Burkhiya, Solomon's minister and his sister's son.⁸

Imam Baqir (as) said:

*'The great name of the Allah contains seventy three letters and 'Asif-ibn-Burkhiya knew only one letter of it, by the power of which he did such a surprising thing.'*⁹

This verse indicates that the second person who demanded to bring Bilqiy's throne was a righteous man who had a considerable part of knowledge of the Divine Book, as the Qur'an says about him:

“One with whom was some knowledge (of a part) of the (Divine) Book said: 'I will bring it to you before your eye twinkles'...”

And when Solomon agreed with that matter, he brought the throne of the Queen of Sheba there, in front of Solomon, in a very short moment by using his spiritual power.

The verse continues saying about Solomon:

“...Then when he saw it settled before him, he said: 'this is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or am ungrateful; and whoever is grateful, verily he is grateful for his own soul...'”

Then Solomon added:

“...and whoever is ungrateful, then my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Bounteous.”

The Commentators have cited many things that who this person was, where from he obtained this wonderful power, and what the objective of the knowledge of Divine Book was.

But the apparent of the verse shows that this person was one of the specific faithful companions of Solomon whose name has often been introduced in history books as 'Asif Burkhiya' who was Solomon's minister and his sister's son.

The purpose of 'the knowledge of the Book' is having some information from the content of the Divine Book. It was a deep knowledge which made it possible for him to do such an extraordinary action.

Some believe that the purpose of it was 'Preserve Tablet', the same tablet of the knowledge of Allah that this person knew a part of it. It was by the same reason that he could bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba at the presence of Solomon in a very short moment.

Many of the commentators, and others, have thought that this faithful person had known 'the Exalted Name of Allah'; the same great name before which everything becomes humble and gives man an extraordinary power.

This point is necessary to be mentioned that, contrast to what many people think, knowing the Exalted Name of Allah does not mean that one says a proper word and gains those abundant wonderful effects; but the purpose is to be qualified with that qualification of that name.

That is, he must create the quality and meaning of that Divine Name inside his soul so that, from the point of knowledge, piety, faith, and morals, he develops and he himself becomes an example of that Name. This spiritual development, which is a ray from that Exalted Name of Allah, creates such an extraordinary power in man.¹⁰

Upon the Qur'anic sentence:

"I will bring it to you before your eye twinkles",

commentators have delivered different considerations. But, regarding to other verses of the Qur'an, its reality can be found out.

Surah 'Ibrahim, No. 14, verse 43 says:

"... Their eyes (and eyelids) not blinking..."

which implies that on the Hereafter Day people will be so terrified that their eyes will be in a gazing state and even their eyelids do not blink.

Thus, the purpose of this Qur'anic sentence is that before Solomon had time enough to blink, that person could bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba before him.

Some Points

1) Among the questions arise in relation with these verses is that why Solomon, who was the prophet of Allah and had miracles, himself did not do this extraordinary action and 'Asif Burkhiya achieved it.

Answer: It might be for the sake that 'Asif was Solomon's legate, and Solomon wanted to introduce him to all in that sensitive time. And, there is a detailed tradition narrated from the tenth Imam, Ali-ibn-Muhammad-il-Hadi, cited in the commentary of 'Ayyashi, by which he (as) gave the same answer to Yahy-ibn-'Aktham.¹¹

2) In the abovementioned verses, as well as in Surah Al-Qasas, No. 28, verse 26 the most important condition for a good worker is stated two things: A. Ability; B. Trust-worthiness. In other words, Power and trust are two important conditions.

Of course, sometimes there are some occasions that man's mental and ethical fundamentals require that he possesses this quality, (as it is said about Moses in Surah Al-Qasas); and sometimes the system of the society and righteous government requires that a jinn be necessarily qualified with these two qualifications.

However, no small or great affair of the society is doable without existing these two conditions, whether they originate from piety or from the legal system of the society.

3) The difference between 'knowledge of a part of the Book' and 'the knowledge of the Book'.

In the verses under discussion the one, who brought the throne of the Queen of Sheba before Solomon in the shortest time, has been introduced as:

"One with whom was some knowledge (of a part) of the (Divine) Book",

while in Surah Ar-Ra'd, No. 13, verse 43 the Qur'an says:

"...Say: 'Allah is sufficient as a witness between me and you and he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.'"

Abusa'id Khidry narrates a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) and says:

"I asked him about the meaning of the 'one with whom was some knowledge (of a part of the (Divine) Book', (which is found in the story of Solomon).

He answered:

'He was the inheritor of my brother Solayman-ibn-Dawud'.

I inquired:

"Whom is it about the one:

'with whom is the knowledge of the Book'?"

He answered:

'He is my brother Ali-ibn-Abi-Talib' (as)"¹²

Paying attention to the difference between the meaning of the holy phrase:

"Some knowledge (of a part) of the (Divine) Book,"

which is used for a constituent knowledge, and the holy phrase:

"The knowledge of the Book',

which refers to a universal knowledge, makes it clear that how far was the distance between the knowledge of 'Asif and the knowledge of Ali (as).

As it was said in the above, some Islamic narrations indicate that the Exalted Name of Allah contains seventy three letters one of which 'Asif-ibn-Burkhiya knew and he could do such an extraordinary action. There are seventy two letters of it with the Imams of Ahl-ul-Bayt (as) and a letter is particular to the Pure Essence of Allah. 13

4) When the haughty mammonists sit on the throne of power, they forget everything but themselves.

Like Qarun (Croesus) who used to say:

"Said he (Korah): 'I have been given this (wealth) only because of a knowledge that is in me,'..."¹⁴

They think that all the wealth and possibilities that they have obtained are absolutely from their own side, not from any other source.

But the proper servants of Allah, for every thing they gain, they say:

"This is of the grace of my Lord (to me)."¹⁵

It is interesting that Solomon said this sentence not only when he saw the throne of the Queen of Sheba in front of Him, but also he added:

"...that He may try me whether I am grateful or am ungrateful..."¹⁶

Formerly we reiterated in this very Surah that Solomon said all his merits and bounties are from Allah, and he humbly asks Him to grant him the chance of being gratitude for them and to give him success to be able to get His pleasure because of them.

Yes, this fact is the criterion of recognizing the sincere monotheists from haughty mammonists, and this is the manner of the noble persons with capacity and personality comparing those haughty ones who have no capacity.

It has become common that some apparently Muslims write only the Solomon's sentence:

"This is of the grace of my Lord"

at the top of the arrival door of their castles without having any belief in it and that it has any trace in their deeds. But it is important that this meaning could be seen not only at the top of their arrival door, but also in all aspects of their lives and in their hearts so that their behaviour shows that they consider them all from the grace of Allah and try to thank Him by their deeds.

The Virtues of Amir-ul-Mu'mineen and Ahl-ul-Bayt (as)

The verse under discussion remarks:

“One with whom was some knowledge (of a part) of the (Divine) Book said: ‘I will bring it to you before your eye twinkles.’...”

but at the end of Surah Ar-Ra'd, No. 13, Allah says to His Messenger (S):

“And those who disbelieve say: ‘You are not a messenger’. Say: Allah is sufficient as a witness between me and you and he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.”¹⁷

Some Islamic traditions indicate that the purpose of ‘the one with whom is the (whole) knowledge of the Book’ is Ali-ibn-Abitalib (as). When a person who knows a part of the Book brings the throne of Bilqiys to Solomon in a twinkling of eye, then how much power has, in his lifetime, the one who knows the knowledge of the whole Book?

Imam Sadiq (as) says:

*“The knowledge of the one with whom was the knowledge of a part of the Book comparing Ali’s knowledge is like the amount of water which is on the wing of a fly with respect to a sea.”*¹⁸

Another tradition indicates that Imam Sadiq (as), pointing to his chest, said:

*“And with us, by Allah, is the knowledge of the Book utterly.”*¹⁹

Some Islamic traditions indicate that, disregard to time and place, Imams, the infallible, (as) can attend in some places. For example, Imam Jawad (as) at the moment of his father’s martyrdom, went from Medina to Tus.

Imam Kazim (as) came out of his prison and presented in Medina. At the time of his captivity, Imam Sajjad (as) went to Karbala and buried his father’s body, Imam Hussayn (as). Before his martyrdom, Imam Hussayn (as) took a handful of the soil of Karbala and gave it to Um-us-Salamah in Medina.

Therefore, folding of the earth miraculously and rapidly by Imams has happened and has some particular records.²⁰

Surah An-Naml - Verse 41

قَالَ نَكِّرُوا لَهَا عَرْشَهَا نَنْظُرُ أَتَهْتَدِي أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ

41. “(Solomon) said: ‘Disguise her throne for her, we will see whether she follows the right way or she is one of those who do not go aright’.”

This verse points to another surprising scene of instructive event of Solomon (as) and the Queen of Sheba.

In order to test the level of wisdom, perspicacity and intelligence of the Queen of Sheba, and to prepare a ground for her faith to Allah, too, Solomon ordered that her throne, which had been brought there, should be altered in an unknown state for her in order that they see whether she could recognize it, or not.

The verse says:

“(Solomon) said: ‘Disguise her throne for her, we will see whether she follows the right way or she is one of those who do not go aright’.”

Though the coming of the Queen’s throne from the country of Sheba to Syria was enough for her not to recognize it, yet Solomon ordered that some changes should be done on it. These changes may have been removing some signs or jewels of the throne, or changing some colours of it, or the like.

But there arises a question that what was the goal of Solomon in testing the wisdom, perspicacity, and intelligence of the Queen of Sheba?

The test might be done for the sake that he could know with which logic he ought to confront her, and what kind of reason should he bring for her to prove the ideological basic principles.

Or he had the thought of suggesting marriage to her in mind and he wanted to know whether she had really the competency of being his wife, or not. Or, indeed, Solomon (as) wanted to give her a responsibility after she believed in Truth. He must know how much she was capable to undertake the responsibilities.

For the Qur’anic sentence *’atahtadil* (***Does she follows the right way***), there have also been mentioned two commentaries:

Some have said that the purpose was the recognition of her own throne, while some others have said that the objective was her being guided to the path of Allah by seeing this miracle. But the apparent of the verse leads to the first meaning, although the first meaning itself had been a premise for the second meaning.

Surah An-Naml - Verses 42-43

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

وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهَا كَانَتْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ

42. “So when she came, she was asked: ‘Is your throne like this?’ She said: ‘It is as it were the same. And we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submitting’.”

43. “And he barred her from the worship of others besides Allah, verily she was of the disbelieving people.”

However, when the Queen of Sheba arrived, someone pointed to the throne and asked her whether her throne was like that.

The verse says:

“So when she came, she was asked: ‘Is your throne like this?’...”

The apparent of the verse shows that the speaker of this statement was not Solomon himself, else it was not appropriate for the sentence to be said in a passive voice form, because the name of Solomon has been mentioned before and after it, and his words are expressed in an active form.

Moreover, it was not fit for the grandeur of Solomon that he speaks like that at the beginning of the arrival of Bilqiys.

However, the Queen of Sheba gave the most wisely and calculated answers, when she said:

“...‘It is as it were the same...’”

If she said it was like it, she would be wrong; and if she said it was exactly the same, she would have said something contrast to precaution, because, with that length of distance, it was impossible that her throne could be brought to the country of Solomon in an ordinary way, save that there had been done a miracle.

Moreover, it is recorded in history books that she had been protecting her precious throne in a safe place in her particular castle in a room with some firm and strong doors, which was being guarded by some watchful men. Yet, with all the changes which that throne had received, the Queen of Sheba could recognize it.

Then, immediately she added:

“...And we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submitting’.”

This means that she implied if the purpose of Solomon by these deeds was that they comprehended his miracle, they had formerly been aware of his legitimacy by other signs, and even before observing this surprising supernatural event they had believed, and these things were not needed.

Thus, Solomon stopped her from worshipping what was besides Allah, although she was formerly one of the disbelievers.

The verse says:

“And he barred her from the worship of others besides Allah, verily she was of the disbelieving people.”

Yes, by seeing these clear signs, she said farewell to her last dark position and entered into a new stage of life which was full of light of faith and certainty.

Surah An-Naml - Verse 44

قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ سَاقَيْهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ
مُمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوَارِيرَ قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ
الْعَالَمِينَ

44. “It was said to her: ‘Enter the palace,’ but when she saw it she deemed it to be a great expanse of water and bared her legs. (Solomon) said: ‘Verily this is but a palace smoothed of crystal’. She said: ‘My Lord! Verily I have been unjust to myself, and I surrender with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds’.”

We must not encounter the wealthy ones in a way that they think ‘Faith’ means ‘poverty’. The material potentialities should be at the service of propagation of religion. Industry and financial potentialities can be used in the path of Solomon-like goals for the guidance and leading others.

However, in this holy verse, another scene of this event is referred to. The explanation is about the act of entering the Queen of Sheba into the particular castle of Solomon.

Solomon had ordered that the yard of one of the castles should be built of crystal, and beneath it there would be flowing water. When the Queen of Sheba arrived there, she was told to enter the yard of the castle.²¹

When the Queen looked at it, she imagined it was a stream. So she bared her legs in order to pass it

through, (while she had got surprised about the existence of a stream there).²²

The verse says:

“It was said to her: ‘Enter the palace,’ but when she saw it she deemed it to be a great expanse of water and bared her legs. (Solomon) said: ‘Verily this is but a palace smoothed of crystal’...”

There arises here a question that why Solomon, who was a Divine prophet, had such an extraordinary splendid palace. It is true that he was a ruler, but was it not possible that he also had a simple means of life like other prophets?

It did not matter to Solomon that for surrendering the Queen of Sheba, who considered all her power and greatness in her beautiful throne and her glorious castle and the like, he would show her that all her splendours were very little in his view, so that this action could become a turning point in her life for reviewing the standard of values and criterion of personality.

It does not matter that instead of a military expedition, which results to destruction and shedding tear, Solomon makes the mind and thought of the Queen of Sheba so overpowered that she does not think of it at all; in particular that she was a woman and gave prominence to such ceremonial issues.

Many commentators have specially cited that, before reaching the Queen of Sheba to Syria, Solomon ordered that such a castle should be built; and his aim was exhibition of power for surrendering her. That action indicated that a great power, from the point of apparent military forces, was in the hand of Solomon that made him able to accomplish such things.

In other words, this expenditure for creating security and peace in a vast province, and accepting the true religion, and also preventing the large expenditure of war, was not a significant matter.

So, when the Queen of Sheba observed that scene, she expressed, as the verse says:

“...She said: ‘My Lord! Verily I have been unjust to myself, and I surrender with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds’.”

She confessed that formerly she used to fall prostrate before the sun, worshipped idol, applied ornaments, and considered herself the most superior one in the world. But now, she understands that how little and insignificant her power is.

And basically, these ornaments and dazzling glares do not satiate one’s soul. She repents of her past deeds and says that she has come to the Lord of the worlds accompanied with her leader, Solomon.

It is interesting that here she uses the word /ma‘a/ (with Solomon) in order to clarify that, in paving the path of Allah, they are equal and brethren, not like the manner and custom of tyrants that some of them have power over some others and a group are involved as captives in the grips of another group.

Here there is not any one victorious and overcome, and, after accepting the Truth, all are in the same row.

It is true that the Queen of Sheba had announced her faith before that, too, and she said:

“...And we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submitting.”

But here the submission of the Queen reaches its climax, and, therefore, she announces her faith to the Truth with emphasis.

She had seen a number of signs of the legitimacy of Solomon’s invitation before, such as: coming of the hoopoe in that special condition; the lack of acceptance of those valuable presents which had been sent from the side of the Queen; bringing her throne from a long distance in a short moment; and, finally, observing the extraordinary power and greatness of Solomon while he had a particular manner which had no similarity with the behaviour of kings.

Some moods of Solomon, which are expressed in previous thirty verses and point to many different issues, were discussed.

Now some other parts of them are referred to in the following:

- 1) This story begins with the merit and vast knowledge that Allah has bestowed on Solomon; and it ends with monotheism and submitting to the command of Allah, a monotheism the base of which is also knowledge.
- 2) This story shows that sometimes the absence and an exceptional flight of a bird over a region may change the history of a nation and drag them from idolatry to Faith, and from corruption to righteousness. This is an example of the power of Allah, and the example of the legitimate government.
- 3) This story shows that the light of monotheism may illuminate all hearts, and even an apparently mute bird can inform of the depth of the secrets of monotheism.
- 4) In order to attract the attention of a person to his true value, and leading him unto Allah, at first his haughtiness must be broken in order that the dark curtains of vanity be removed from his eyes and he sees the fact. By achieving two things, Solomon broke the pride of the Queen of Sheba: bringing her throne, and causing her to make mistake when she confronted a part of the castle.
- 5) The ultimate goal in prophets’ government is not conquest, but the aim is the same thing that was mentioned in the abovementioned verse, that the arrogant confess their sin and surrender to the Lord of the worlds. So, by mentioning this very point, the Qur’an puts an end to the above story.
- 6) The soul of Faith is submission. That was why not only Solomon emphasized on it in his letter, but also the Queen of Sheba did it at the end of the event.

7) Sometimes someone, who has the greatest possible power in his authority, may become in need of a small weak creature, like a bird. He takes help not only from its knowledge but also from its deed; and sometimes an ant, with that weakness and disability that it has, belittles him.

8) The revelation of these verses in Mecca, where Muslims were under serious pressure from the side of their enemies, and all the doors were shut to them, had a special concept. Its aim was to strengthen their spirits, sooth them, and make them hopeful of the grace of Allah and to the future victories.

By the way, at last the Queen of Sheba believed and gave the suggestion of marriage to Solomon, and said:

“...I surrender with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds’.”

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1. Bihar, Vol. 76, P. 49
 2. Nahj-ul-Balaqah, saying No. 301
 3. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 76, P.50
 4. Wasa'il, Vol. 8, P. 437
 5. Surah Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 256
 6. The Commentary of Ruh-ul-Bayan, following the verse.
 7. Surah Al-'Anfal, No. 8, verse 60
 8. The commentary of Nur-Uth-Thaqalayn
 9. Kafi, Vol. 1, P. 230
 10. The discussion upon 'the Exalted Name of Allah' has been mentioned when commenting Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7, verse 180
 11. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, Vol. 4, P. 91; Tafsir-us-Safi, Vol. 4, P. 67; and Burhan, Vol. 3, P. 20
 12. Some of the commentators of Sunnites and the Sunnite scholars have narrated this tradition in this very form or similar to it. For more details you may refer to 'Ihghagh-ul-Haqq, Vol. 3, PP. 380-381
 13. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, Vol. 4, P. 91; Tafsir-us-Safi, Vol. 4, P.67; and Burhan, Vol. 3, P. 202
 14. Surah Al-Qasas, No. 28, verse 78
 15. The verse under discussion
 16. Ibid
 17. Surah Ar-Ra'd, No. 13, verse 43
 18. Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, the Commentary
 19. Ibid
 20. Tafsir-i-Atyab-ul-Bayan
 21. The Arabic word /sarh/ here means 'the yard of the castle'.
 22. The Arabic word /lujjah/ means: 'depth of the sea', and abundant water.

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