

## DAILY QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

## From Juz' 9: The Arrogant Elite

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَا شُعَيْبُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُودُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا قَالَ أَوَلَوْ كُنَّا كَارِهِينَ قَدْ افْتَرَيْنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنْ عُدْنَا فِي مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّانَا اللَّهُ مِنْهَا ...

The elite of his people who were arrogant said, 'O Shu'ayb, we will surely expel you and the faithful who are with you from our town, or else you shall revert to our creed.' He said, 'What! Even if we detest [it]?! We would be fabricating a lie against Allah should we revert to your creed after Allah had delivered us from it. (A'rāf 7:88-89)

**Reflections:**

One of the challenges that many of the prophets (ؑ) had to face came not so much from the common people that they interacted with, but from the elite of the communities that they were sent to. The Qur'ānic term for these elites is *mala'*, which is derived from a verb meaning "to fill something." When a group of powerful and wealthy individuals come together on some mutual basis and their joint posturing "fills up" center stage in the eyes of people, they are called *mala'*.

One of the characteristics of this group of elites is that they engage in what can be called a "groupthink mentality"—i.e., they prioritize conformity and party consensus over independent reflection and decision-making. As a result, when a prophet of God is raised in any of their communities, it would be the elite who would often be the first to not only oppose such a prophet, but to ensure that others do not follow him as well, out of fear that this may disrupt the fragile order they rely on.<sup>1</sup>

In the Qur'ān, we find the term *mala'* being used for the elites during the time of P. Nūh<sup>2</sup> (ؑ), P. Hūd<sup>3</sup> (ؑ), P. Mūsā<sup>4</sup> (ؑ), our noble Prophet Muḥammad<sup>5</sup> (ﷺ) and, in the above case, P. Shu'ayb (ؑ).

Like all prophets, P. Shu'ayb (ؑ) encouraged his community to worship one Lord. But he also told the elite to be mindful of their business transactions as they had earned much of their wealth through unethical means. Moreover, instead of being grateful and humble before Allah on account of their material prosperity and numbers, they became arrogant. It was this arrogance that prevented them from being able to think clearly about the message of P. Shu'ayb (ؑ). As a result, not only did the elite blind themselves, but they used their power and prestige to bar others from embracing the prophetic message.

In the end, when they felt that they were unable to control the course of events, they gave P. Shu'ayb and his followers a choice: (1) either to revert back to their ways and customs or (2) to be expelled from their lands. Imam Ḥusayn (ؑ) was given a similar choice by the elite of his time: (1) either to give allegiance or (2) to be killed. And just like Imam Ḥusayn (ؑ) explained how choosing the former was a type of humiliation (*hayhāt min al-dhillah*), P. Shu'ayb also responded by saying that to revert back to their creed was going against Allah (ﷻ), which would lead to nothing but the life of a lie and humiliation.

In Du'ā Iftitāh, we read, "All praise belongs to Allah Who secures the frightened ones, rescues the pious ones, promotes the cause of the weak ones, annihilates the arrogant ones, destroys rulers, and appoints others instead." We pray that the Almighty protects the Muslim people around the world from the oppression of the arrogant elite of our time.

**To ponder:** What is the role of the common people in relation to the elite of their time?

**References:** Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, v. 29.

<sup>1</sup> 7:86, 7:90, 10:83

<sup>3</sup> 7:66

<sup>5</sup> 38:6

<sup>2</sup> 7:60

<sup>4</sup> 7:103