

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 8: YUSUF IS SOLD AND RESOLD

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After having spent approximately 3 days alone in the well in the darkness of the desert, the next stage of Yusuf (a.s)'s experience starts when a caravan of travellers stop at the well to replenish their water supplies.

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Verse 19 thus says:

“And there came a company of travellers; then they sent their water drawer, and he let down his bucket. He said, 'Good news! Here is a boy.' And they concealed him, [taking him] as merchandise; and Allah was knowing of what they did.”

In the caravans, certain people were always allocated certain responsibilities. Among them were those responsible to always draw water (called a 'waarid') for the whole caravan at the wells along the journey.

So when the water drawer sent down his bucket, Yusuf (a.s) considered that to be his best opportunity to get out of the well. He thus hung onto the rope that was attached to the bucket

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and came out of the well.

The exclamation of the water drawers saying 'Good news' was like the expression of excitement that they had just won the jackpot and obtained something valuable for free. They thus did not want to share their good luck with everyone on the caravan and thus Verse 19 says “And they concealed him as merchandise” like concealing 'stolen' goods.

Even though one can hide something from people and lie to them in our daily dealings including business dealings, one cannot hide anything from Allah. Thus Verse 19 concludes “and Allah was knowing of what they did.”

YUSUF (a.s) IS SOLD FOR A CHEAP PRICE

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So the water drawers immediately sold Yusuf (a.s) in the caravan for a very cheap price. Verse 20 thus says “And they sold him for a reduced price - a few dirhams - and they were, concerning him, of those content with little”.

At this stage in the story we already learn an eternal trend in the Quran is that Allah tests his “pure” servants with difficult tests but never abandons them.

Furthermore we learn that in life, sometimes one's own people deceive you and then strangers come to your rescue.

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There is an interesting discussion regarding why Yusuf (a.s) was sold for a cheap price. The most important reasons for this are:

1. The water drawers obtained Yusuf (a.s) for free and thus did not value him and thus simply got "rid" of him for whatever price they could get. Sometimes the obtaining of religious knowledge can be viewed like that in that often people want access to books and knowledge for free and are not willing to pay for it and in the end it is reflected in their commitment to religion as they do not value the knowledge they obtained for free and even act towards it in contempt.

2. Narrations state that there was an argument among people when they said that Yusuf (a.s) did not belong to the water drawers and thus they could not sell him. People also thought that when looking at Yusuf (a.s) that he did not look like a slave and look like a beautiful boy from a regular family. They thus wanted to get rid of their "stolen goods" at any price. And we see this same phenomenon in South African society where stolen goods are sold everyday for a fraction of their value.

3. The water drawers had no idea regarding the value of Yusuf (a.s). This can be likened to a lay person looking at a diamond and trying to value it and thinking of it simply like a piece of glass. This is also true regarding the early life of the greatest personalities in history who are undervalued at first and its only after many years when people really came to know who they were that they obtained some sort of value and honour in society.

YUSUF (a.s) IS RESOLD IN EGYPTIAN SLAVE MARKET FOR HIGH PRICE

Verse 21 says: And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife, "Make his residence comfortable. Perhaps he will benefit us, or we will adopt him as a son."

Yusuf (a.s) was bought and resold on the caravan itself until their journey reached Egypt and the last buyer on the caravan, who appears to have had knowledge of the potential value of Yusuf (a.s), put him up for sale in an auction in Egypt's biggest slave market.

This is where people were amazed at the possibility of “owning” such a very valuable looking potential “slave” like Yusuf (a.s) and started to bid the highest prices for him. In this market, the governor of Egypt bid the highest price and bought Yusuf (a.s).

OLD WOMAN WHO ALSO BID FOR YUSUF (a.s)

The Imams of the Ahlul Bait (a.s) narrate for us that during the auctioning process to sell Yusuf (a.s), there was an old and poor lady who also came forward and wanted to place her bid for Yusuf (a.s). The auctioneer and others laughed at her asking “why do you waste your time to bid for Yusuf (a.s) when you do not stand a chance as big bidders like the governor of Egypt are bidding for him?” The lady still insisted that her bid should also be entered.

After the auction, some inquisitive people came to ask the lady why she insisted that her bid is also entered, to which she replied that she knew that she could not afford to “buy” Yusuf (a.s) but that she just wanted to be included in the list of those who wanted to buy Yusuf (a.s). This action made her memory eternal and thus centuries later we still speak about her, else she would have been buried in history.

And the lesson for us is that on our own we may be “nobody” but when we become affiliated with the source of greatness, then we achieve prominence and become “somebody” and our memory also becomes eternal.

YUSUF (a.s) SETTLES IN THE PALACE

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After Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was bought by the Governor of Egypt, the Quran says that he lived in the comfortable residence of the Governor. Even though he was purchased as a “slave”, he lived the life of an honourable person in the Governor’s home.

The intention of the Governor in having Yusuf (a.s) in his house appears to be the very same as the intention of the wife of Pharaoh when she came across the baby in the Nile River.

The Governor is quoted as having said “Perhaps he will benefit us, or we will adopt him as a son”.

In the case of the wife of Pharaoh, she is quoted in Verse 9 of Surah Qasas as follows:

And the wife of Pharaoh said, "[He will be] a comfort of the eye for me and for you. Do not kill him; perhaps he may benefit us, or we may adopt him as a son."

SOMETIMES YOUR ENEMY IS A SOURCE OF GOOD

Reflecting on the story of Yusuf (a.s) we see how Allah's Power ultimately dominates.

Yusuf (a.s) who was the subject of a plot of jealousy of his brothers was thrown into the well, was hidden and sold as "stolen goods", was resold in the caravan and eventually sold as a slave in the biggest slave market in Egypt, yet ended up to live in the comfort of the palace of

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the Governor Egypt.

The brothers of Yusuf (a.s) had no idea of the outcome of their actions and how it would result in so much goodness in the life of Yusuf (a.s).

Often in the school of Ahlul Bait (a.s) we see this phenomenon in that people are attracted to this school purely in reaction to the continuous onslaught against this school which plants seeds in the minds of seekers of truth who wonder why the School of Ahlul Bait (a.s) have so many enemies and end up following this School of thought in the end, while the enemies of Ahlul Bait (a.s) simply do not perceive this reality.

Verse 21 thus continues as follows:

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“And thus, We established Yusuf in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events. And Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know”.

If Yusuf (a.s) was still living in the house of Prophet Ya'koob (a.s), it seems extremely unlikely that Yusuf (a.s) would have ended up living in the house of the Governor of Egypt.

And he does not just live in the Governor's house, Yusuf (a.s) was even considered to be taken as a son of the Governor.

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In the case of Musa (a.s) who was the target of Pharaoh's killings, he ended up living in Pharaoh's house like a son!

Thus when one surrenders to Allah and do not complain, we see that Allah never abandons you and plans an unbelievable future for you.

YUSUF (a.s) IS TAUGHT INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

An important question at this point is why the Quran refers to Yusuf (a.s) being settled into the palace of the Governor so that he can be taught the interpretation of dreams.

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Verse 21 says: “And thus, We established Yusuf in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events (dreams).”

What is the relation between Yusuf (a.s) being established in the land and being taught the interpretation of dreams?

Prophet Yusuf (a.s) came from a poor background and then ended up living in a palace. This new environment was itself a fertile ground to become materialistic and removed from the remembrance of Allah.

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The interpretation of dreams however require extraordinary capacity of spiritual elevation as someone who interprets dreams see things which others cannot see. Your soul needs access to a world beyond this world to do so. To have such a soul you need to do many spiritual exercises and purify your soul.

Yusuf (a.s) was never deluded by the environment of material bliss and remained a pious slave of Almighty Allah. Furthermore he did not forget his background, nor did he forget his experience in the slave market where he saw the ugly face of the class structure where few people had all the wealth while the remainder of society was downtrodden. Due to his continuous link to the Divine, he reached spiritual levels where Allah taught him the interpretation of dreams.

INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS BY IBN SEEREN

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There is a famous Muslim scholar called Muhammad Ibn Seereen who was well known for interpreting dreams and wrote a text book on the subject.

It is said that in his life he had a similar experience like Prophet Yusuf (a.s) when he found himself alone in a room with a woman who wanted to seduce him. He was also an attractive man but he resisted, yet she would not let go. So he ended up rubbing his body and face with faeces which made the woman disgusted so that she would leave him.

This amazing resistance and piety caused him to acquire the knowledge of interpreting dreams.