

## **TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF**

### **LECTURE 19: RISK MANAGEMENT THROUGH PURSUING VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES**

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After the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) returned home with the food supplies they obtained from Egypt, they shared it with their father. The Surah then narrates a portion of their conversation with their father regarding their whole experience.

Verse 63 says: "So when they returned to their father, they said, "O our father, [further] measure has been denied to us, so send with us our brother [that] we will be given measure. And indeed, we will be his protectors."

Notice in these words how the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) seem to immediately be focussing on their next trip. There is no mention (in the Quranic narration at least) of their appreciation for the Governor's generosity towards them and having treated them kindly. This also gives one a further hint into their character.

Their attention seems to be more on what they did not achieve than appreciation for the fact that they were saved. They thus speak about their measure that they did not receive since their younger brother Bienyamin had not accompanied them. Since the food supplies that they had brought would have to be shared with more people, individually they would thus receive less.

Furthermore they were also too concerned about the future as their next trip had a condition attached which, if not fulfilled, would result in them receiving nothing.

It thus appears that from the first day of their return, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) started placing pressure on Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) to send Bienyamin with them during their next trip to Egypt. And to potentially guarantee this, they use their famous old saying that they previously used when taking Yusuf (a.s) with them, which was "And indeed, we will be his protectors!"

### **ALLAH IS THE BEST PROTECTOR**

In response to this supposed guarantee of protection, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s)'s response is captured in Verse 64 which says: "He said, "Should I entrust you with him except as I entrusted you with his brother before? But Allah is the Best Protector, and He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful."

Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) makes reference to how they failed in their previous guarantee of protection and further states that from his perspective that they are not the real protectors but “Allah is the Best Protector.”

By referring to “Allah is the Best Protector”, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was saying that though he did not trust the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), due to circumstances he would have no option except to eventually entrust them with Bienyamin, but when that happens, he would not place his faith in them, but would place his trust in Allah.

Furthermore Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) refers to Allah as the “Best Protector” as he was aware, by virtue of the fact that he was a Prophet, that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was still alive. So in the same way, just as Allah protected Prophet Yusuf (a.s), if Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) sends Bienyamin with them as well, then he too will be protected by Allah.

And this Verse ends with Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) referring to Allah as “ He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful” which was an indirect hint to them that all their sins that they had committed could be forgiven by Allah.

### **RETURNED MERCHANDISE STRENGTHENS THEIR CASE**

Verse 65 says: “And when they opened their baggage, they found their merchandise returned to them. They said, "O our father, what [more] could we desire? This is our merchandise returned to us. And we will obtain supplies for our family and protect our brother and obtain an increase of a camel's load; that is an easy measurement."

All this time during the return journey from Egypt, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) appear to have been stressed about obtaining future food as the possibilities of Bienyamin accompanying them were always slim, given their past record.

However, when they found that their merchandise, which was the price they paid for their food, was actually returned, they were pleasantly surprised and this gave them confidence that they could present an even stronger case to their father. They immediately thus said to him "O our father, what [more] could we desire?" It was presented as an offer that he simply could not refuse. Of course it was part of the plan of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to strengthen their case for them as he knew that Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) would require extraordinary convincing before Bienyamin would be allowed to accompany them.

After presenting this argument, they even conclude it by saying "that is an easy measurement" meaning that this Governor of Egypt was so good to them by even returning their merchandise, so there was no doubt remaining that their next trip would be just as successful, provided the set condition is fulfilled.

Verse 66 says: "[Jacob] said, "Never will I send him with you until you give me a promise by Allah that you will bring him [back] to me, unless you should be surrounded by enemies." And when they had given their promise, he said, " Allah, over what we say, is Witness."

With all the logical and convincing arguments presented by the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was simply not convinced as their promise to him was just not sufficient.

He thus required them to take an additional oath before Allah that they would bring Bienyamin back safely. However he did include the inevitable that could happen in the oath in that the only acceptable reason why Bienyamin would not return safely would be if they were faced with circumstances beyond their control.

After they gave their oath, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) called upon Allah as the Witness to their oath.

### ENTER EGYPT THROUGH DIFFERENT GATES

After having obtained an oath from the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) started preparing them for their next trip by setting guidelines on how to execute it.

If one asks why Prophet Yakoob (a.s) eventually agreed to Bienyamin accompanying his brothers given their prior evil record with regards to Prophet Yusuf (a.s), there are various views in this regard which include:

1. With the passage of time, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) assessed the behaviour of the brothers to have improved in that they had now matured and there were no apparent signs of their childish jealous behaviour that they displayed towards Prophet Yusuf (a.s) once upon a time. Their purpose for getting rid of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was so that they would receive the exclusive attention of their father. But the nature of jealousy is that you never gain from such actions that you commit as a result thereof, and in the case of the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), they never received the exclusive attention of their father as his heart was still with Prophet Yusuf (a.s).



2. Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) had no other option as he was old with no eyesight and the famine had affected them and was thus forced, due to circumstances to send Bienyamin with his brothers.

3. It's possible that during this passage of time, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) repented.

4. Since Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was a Prophet, he had some knowledge that this trip eventually would be to their benefit.

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Verse 67 says: "And he said, "O my sons, do not enter from one gate but enter from different gates; and I cannot avail you against [the decree of] Allah at all. The decision is only for Allah; upon Him I have relied, and upon Him let those who would rely [indeed] rely."

The guidance to enter Egypt from different gates has attracted much discussion among interpreters.

And the next verse indicates that they complied with this guidance.

Verse 68 thus says: "And when they entered from where their father had ordered them, it did not avail them against Allah at all except [it was] a need within the soul of Ya'koob, which was satisfied. And indeed, he was a possessor of knowledge because of what We had taught him, but most of the people do not know."

Firstly Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) asks them to enter Egypt from various gates but at the same time says that he “cannot avail you against Allah at all.” And when they execute this instruction, Verse 68 reconfirms that this action “did not avail them against Allah.”

The only thing they seem to have achieved through this action was to satisfy a “need” of Prophet Ya'koob (a.s).

### **RISK MANAGEMENT THROUGH PURSUING VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES**

So why then ask them to enter through various gates? Mufasssireen have offered various explanations for this which essentially relate to managing a variety of risks:

1. Since the challenge of “jealousy” is a central theme in the story of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was very sensitive about this issue. The narrations indicate that the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) were also handsome and very attractive, and if all eleven of them had to enter Egypt through one gate, they would be making a “grand entry” and would unnecessarily be attracting the attention of people. Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) thus was managing the risk of losing all eleven brothers at the same time like he lost his one son in the past due to jealousy. By entering separately, people would not notice that they are one group.

2. Some narrations indicate that Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) also wanted to protect his sons from people casting an “evil eye” over them. While certain people believe that the concept of “evil eye” is not a reality, others have concluded that it is a reality. Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi indicates that it appears from the reading of certain narrations and verses in the Quran that “evil eye” has a reality and can have some effect on you. Surah Qalam Verse 51 says: “And indeed, those who disbelieve would almost make you slip with their eyes when they hear the message” Certain scientific studies even try to prove that energy from one's eye can be directed to achieve extraordinary effects. The Imams have thus taught us that paying sadaqah is the best protection from “evil eye.”

3. Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was teaching them that when one is struggling to achieve a purpose, seek the solution to your problem through alternative options. By placing all one's reliance on one possible solution, its like placing "all your eggs in one basket" which is poor risk management.

However, while suggesting these "material causes" in finding a solution to their problem of obtaining food during the famine, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) insisted in the ultimate importance of Tauheed and relying on Allah who is the "cause of causes." He thus says "I cannot avail you against [the decree of] Allah at all." People with real trust in Allah, while giving some regard to the "material causes" to achieve something, their primary focus is on Allah being the Real Cause.

While the action of the brothers entering Egypt resulted in them obeying their father, but at the same time this action "did not avail them against Allah", the Quran still emphasises that one should never under estimate Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) as "he was a possessor of knowledge because of what We had taught him, but most of the people do not know."

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The nature of the knowledge of Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) was that he was taught by Allah directly (Ilmun Ladunni) and thus we see Wisdom in all the advise and actions of Prophet Ya'koob (a.s).