

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 17: ﷻ PROPHET YUSUF (a.s) BECOMES MINISTER OF FINANCE

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After Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was exonerated of having committed any crime, the king ordered that he should be released from prison.

Thus Verse 54 says: "And the king said, "Bring him to me; I will appoint him exclusively for

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myself." And when he spoke to him, he said, "Indeed, you are today established [in position] and trusted."

So Prophet Yusuf (a.s) exited the prison and as he was leaving, he wrote the following amazing sentences on the door of the prison (as narrated in a hadith):

"This is a graveyard of living people and the house of sorrows and the place of experience of the truthful and the place where enemies condemn you. O Allah, divert the heart of your pious servants towards these prisoners and do not conceal their views."

He thus still showed great sympathy to the prisoners as he left.

When he reached the king they had a conversation and the king further obtained insight into the capabilities of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) and thus immediately declared that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) should be his second in command and remain close to him.

So from prison, one single dream changed the fortunes of Prophet Yusuf (a.s)!

PROPHET YUSUF (a.s) RATHER WANTS TO BE MINISTER OF FINANCE

After hearing the suggestion of the king, Prophet Yusuf (a.s) presented a counter proposal when he suggested to become the Minister of Finance instead. Verse 55 thus says: "[Yusuf] said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian."

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Prophet Yusuf (a.s) possibly considered the job of being the second in command to the king to be below his dignity and in a respectful manner asked to be appointed to a position wherein he would add real value to manage the looming crisis in the economy. During that time the oversight over the Finances and Agriculture was allocated to the same person.

Furthermore Prophet Yusuf (a.s) indicates his abilities to do the job and thus the Quran thus quotes him saying that he is a "knowing guardian." In other words he has the knowledge to fulfil his responsibilities and he is trustworthy for such a sensitive task where the most corruption occurs.

Verse 56: "And thus We established Yusuf in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We touch with Our mercy whom We will, and We do not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good."

By bringing Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to this high position, Allah is saying that everyone who does good will see its reward. Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was rewarded in this world, which is not the case with every good doer. But Allah promises that their reward will never be wasted and that the reward of the next world is in any case the best reward and thus one should never lose hope of one's reward.

Verse 57 thus says: "And the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believed and were fearing Allah."

WAS PROPHET YUSUF ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY BY WORKING FOR THE KING?

A question that is often asked at this point is why did Prophet Yusuf (a.s) accepted a position in the government of a despotic ruler? One would have expected him to have refused it as it would

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give the message that he was legitimizing the position of the king. This supposed compromise appears anti-revolutionary!

In principle there is no doubt that working for an oppressive system is haraam and considered a big sin and thus those who worked for the former apartheid state in South Africa would have had a problem regarding the unlawfulness of such income.

There is the incident when Imam Musa Kaathim (a.s) said to his student Safwaan (who had a transport business) regarding his renting of camels to the Abbasid ruler to go for haj was haraam as in this act of his he hoped that the ruler would remain alive until he returned from haj so that he could be paid! In this incident, even though Safwaan provided transport to the king for a good cause, the mere earning of income from an oppressive rule was declared haraam.

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So why did Prophet Yusuf (a.s) take up this position in government? The reality was that the people of Egypt were going to experience a difficult economy and people would die if it was not managed properly. Under these conditions, while the majority of the people do not know Prophet Yusuf (a.s) and thus do not support him, there is no point to any revolution. The circumstances thus demand that he needs to take this position in government to protect the lives of potentially millions of people.

This act of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) thus had no intention to protect the ruler or to ensure his long life but was meant to serve the people.

Thus we also see Imam Musa Kaathim (a.s) in a different scenario allows his own close student Ali ibn Yakteen to serve as the prime minister of the Abbasid ruler.

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This is the beauty of the School of Ahlul Bait (a.s) which has so much to offer and enlightens you regarding how one should react in different scenarios where in one case the smallest co-operation with an oppressor is considered haraam and at other times a close association with an oppressor in the greater interest of the people is allowed!

Thus we see how Imam Hassan Mujtaba (a.s) signs a peace treaty with a ruler like Muawiyya to protect the innocent lives of Muslims who were being killed for no reason.

When Imam Reza (a.s) accepted the position of crown prince that was imposed on him, his own Shia questioned him about the validity of this. Imam Reza (a.s) replied saying that he is not a Prophet but the Successor to the Prophet (sawa) and Ma'mun (the Abbasid khalif) is not a non-believer like the pharaohs but is a Muslim, so if Prophet Yusuf (a.s) accepted to be Minister of Finance while he was a Prophet and accepted the ministry of a mushrik, he has accepted to be crown prince of someone who at least is a Muslim!

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So the compensation for working for an oppressive ruler is to use your position to fulfil the needs of your believing brother.

Thus in history, Shia would be allowed to accept positions into the governments and would let their innocent prisoners free or would reduce the unduly heavy taxes that were imposed on Shia businesses.

WAS PROPHET YUSUF (a.s) "SHOWING OFF" WHEN HE STATED HIS CAPABILITIES?

The reason Prophet Yusuf (a.s) proposed that the Department of Finance was allocated to him was to ensure fair distribution of resources else there would be corruption.

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In asking for the position he teaches us that piety is not enough, but knowledge of the job is also critical.

A hadith says that "A believer is not a believer until he has three qualities:

1. He has a deep understanding of religion;

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2. He must know how to properly manage his financial affairs; and

3. He should have sabr/patient perseverance during hardship.

But is this "self-praise" of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) a good thing?

In principle it is not acceptable. However sometimes in a sensitive situation one has to prove yourself and then state your capabilities. It is not acceptable to act humble so that you do not do the job and shy away from responsibility and allow a disaster to result thereafter.

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Thus it was an act of being responsible that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) stated his capabilities.