

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 7: YUSUF THROWN INTO THE WELL

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Verse 15 of Surah Yusuf says: "So when they took him [out] and agreed to put him into the bottom of the well... But We inspired to him, "You will surely inform them [someday] about this affair of theirs while they do not perceive [your identity]."

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The Quran provides a brief account of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) being placed into the well. However, ahadith have more information on the matter and certain tafaseer like that of Qurtubi and others have recorded many details in this regard.

The narrations indicate that the next morning Yusuf (a.s) went with his brothers for the outing that they requested. The farewell of Yusuf (a.s) is recorded to have been a very sad affair as Prophet Ya'koob (a.s), being a Prophet knew that this was going to be the last time he sees Yusuf (a.s) for a very long time. Some narrations state that Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) came with him to the Gate of the city before separating and looked at him with sad eyes.

As soon as they could not see their father in the distance any longer, the brothers of Yusuf (a.s) started to beat him and to torture him.

RESPONSE OF YUSUF (a.s) TO THE ACTIONS OF HIS BROTHERS

It is very interesting to note that even though Yusuf (a.s) was a young child, his response to this horrible attitude of his brothers was sublime.

Narrations indicate that his first response was to try to appeal to their conscience by saying to them "Why are you beating me? I always thought that I am well protected as I have eleven powerful brothers to take care of me." This attempt did not work as they continued beating him.

After his words fell onto deaf ears, Prophet Yusuf (a.s) raised his hands for dua by calling Almighty Allah and saying "You are my Master, you are the one I depend on, you are the one who will rescue me, you are the one who is my shelter,...."

This shows how such a young boy could divert his attention to Allah in time of difficulty and present his complaint to Allah instead.

Finally after beating him they also removed his shirt and placed him inside a well. The wells in those days used to have a type of recess in it in which you could rest and that is where Yusuf (a.s) was placed.

YUSUF (a.s) ALONE IN THE WELL

Eventually Yusuf (a.s) found himself all alone in a dark well in the middle of the desert after

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having grown up under the extreme care of his father. What a dramatic change of circumstances that he had to endure.

At this point, when Yusuf (a.s) was in a low, humiliating situation, Allah sent him revelation to place him at ease indicating that "You will surely inform them [someday] about this affair of theirs while they do not perceive [your identity]."

A day would come when Yusuf (a.s) would tell them about their act and they would not even recognize him as he would have the upper hand over them.

FALSE TEARS AND FALSE BLOOD, LIES UPON LIES

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After having achieved their purpose, the brothers of Yusuf (a.s) returned home. The Quran says in Verse 16:

"And they came to their father at night, weeping."

This is an important lesson to be careful to not be fooled by some people who act as if they are sad as they only intend to manipulate your emotions.

The Quran refers to 4 types of crying:

1. Sometimes people cry out of excitement as you can't control yourself when they come across something new. In Surah Ma-ida, Verse 83 one such example is indicated when it says: "And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth".

2. Sometimes people cry out of "awe" of Almighty Allah. The Quran refers to this phenomenon in many places. One such example is in Surah Israa Verse 109 "And they fall upon their faces weeping, and the Qur'an increases them in humble submission."

3. Sometimes people cry out of regret when one loses something.

4. Sometimes people cry falsely to deceive others.

The manner in which the Quran presents the story that the brothers of Yusuf (a.s) offered to their father regarding what happened to him highlights for us the characteristics of lying, the first of which is that when tell a lie, you end up lying many times to cover the first lie and to try to present a story that appears coherent.

So they basically wanted to say that their brother was eaten by a wolf. But they could not just say it so bluntly and thus needed to create a story about what the scene was like and how this could have happened in the first place.

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They said, "O our father, indeed we went racing each other and left Yusuf with our possessions, and a wolf ate him. But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful."

The reality is that they neither went racing, nor did they leave Yusuf (a.s) to look after their possessions, nor did a wolf eat him.

They lied further by producing false evidence i.e. a shirt of Yusuf (a.s) with false blood on it making it seem to be his blood. Different narrations indicate where the blood came from and it's generally believed that they killed an animal like a deer and soaked the shirt in its blood.

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A further characteristic of liars is that in their string of lies, they miss a crucial point along the way. In the case of the brothers of Yusuf (a.s), the crucial point that they missed was to present the shirt of Yusuf (a.s) soaked in blood to their father, but the shirt was in one piece! Their father responded after seeing this shirt to say that it seems the wolf was very kind to leave the shirt intact after having eaten the whole of Yusuf (a.s) alive.

Thus Verse 18 narrates:

"And they brought upon his shirt false blood. [Ya'koob] said, "Rather, your souls have enticed you to something."

Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) exposed them at that very point and rejected their excuse and told them that they deceived themselves.

AMAZING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHIRT OF YUSUF (a.s)

In the story of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), his shirt has great significance and is responsible for different roles in different parts of his life. Reference is made to the shirt of Yusuf (a.s) in three different places in this surah.

In Verse 18 as explained above, it serves to expose the lies of his brothers' false evidence.

Later in the story, when the wife of the Governor of Egypt tried to seduce him, again his shirt bore testimony to his truthfulness and the falsehood of the lady. This incident is referred to from Verses 25 to 28 as follows:

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"And they both raced to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back, and they found her husband at the door. She said, "What is the recompense of one who intended evil for your wife but that he be imprisoned or a painful punishment?"

[Yusuf] said, "It was she who sought to seduce me." And a witness from her family testified. "If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth, and he is of the liars.

But if his shirt is torn from the back, then she has lied, and he is of the truthful."

"So when her husband saw his shirt torn from the back, he said, "Indeed, it is of the women's plan. Indeed, your plan is great."

And towards the end of the story Yusuf (a.s) gives his brothers his shirt to take it to their father to prove to him that Yusuf (a.s) was still alive and to use it as a miracle cure by rubbing it over the eyes of their father so that his eyesight would be restored.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HAVING A GUILTY CONSCIENCE

The actions of the brothers of Yusuf (a.s) upon their return also reflect the characteristics of people who have a "guilty conscience" in that they like to state their case before you even ask them anything.

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Upon hearing their story, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) did not yet even say anything or accuse them of lying. And before he could even say something, they immediately complain by saying that he would in any case not believe them. Verse 17 ends with their words: "But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful."

This was their guilty conscience that was bothering them as Ahlul Bait (a.s) taught us that for our guidance Allah appointed two Prophets. An external Prophet of which 124 000 were sent over time, and an internal Prophet which is our conscience.

Thus after exposing their guilty conscience, Prophet Ya'koob teaches them that satan made their sin look attractive which caused them to do this ugly act. And sin should be recognized for what it is and that it is a path to hell and thus one should never justify and rationalize it.

PATIENCE IS BEAUTIFUL

To bear this calamity, Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) decided to travel the long road of having "sabr" or "patience" and called it something beautiful. Verse 18 quotes him saying "So patience is beautiful."

You may ask how is it that Prophet Ya'koob (a.s) decides to be patient, yet the Quran says that he cried so much for the rest of his life to the extent that he lost his eyesight. Is there any contradiction between having patience and shedding tears?

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Sabr does not mean that one should not cry or have emotions. Prophets and especially our Prophet Muhammad (sawa) were the most perfect human beings and their emotions were the most sensitive. We do not cry very easily. But since their souls are pure, they cry very easily. This is not in contradiction with sabr.

What is in contradiction with sabr is to complain about your loss.

At the death of the young baby son of Prophet Muhammad (sawa) he cried and when people inquired why he cried he said that "eyes shed tears and one's heart feels hurt, but we do not utter anything that displeases Allah."

Sabr is to persevere and remain focused on the path of Allah. But the tears are "signs of mercy in one's heart".

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Thus when you look at ISIS today, you see no humanity in them as they kill people indiscriminately and feel excited about it.