

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 16: DANGER OF NAFSUL AMMAARAH

By: Mowlana Syed Aftab Haider

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After Prophet Yusuf (a.s) interpreted the king's dream in a unique manner, a messenger was sent to Prophet Yusuf (a.s) asking him to come out of prison as the king wanted him close to him.

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The response of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to this request is most amazing. Anyone that has spent any years of his life unjustly in prison would have grabbed the opportunity of freedom the moment it was presented to them. But in the case of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), he is not so hasty and actually lays a condition for his release from prison.

His unique response once again reinforces the truth that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was never deluded by the experiences of the life of this world, whether it was the good times of living in the palace or the difficult times of being in the well or being in prison. In all conditions his heart was with Allah.

Verse 50 thus says: But when the messenger came to him, [Yusuf] said, "Return to your master and ask him what is the case of the women who cut their hands. Indeed, my Lord is Knowing of their plan."

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Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was not willing to leave prison without the issue relating to the women who wanted to seduce him being resolved. If he had to leave prison at this stage without resolving the matter, then his exit from prison would amount to a sort of “presidential pardon” where the ruler forgives your past crimes. This amounts to an acknowledgement that you actual were a criminal and were thus pardoned and set free. Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was definitely interested in being freed from prison, but since he committed no crime he wanted his name to be cleared first before he is released.

Furthermore it is also interesting to note that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) said to the messenger “Return to your Master/Lord (Rabb).” It should be noted that the king was the king of Egypt and thus one would have expected him to say “Return to our Master”, but Prophet Yusuf (a.s) does not consider the king to be his master and thus does not refer to him as being his king!

Prophet Muhammad (sawa) praises the sabr of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) in refusing to leave prison under these conditions and in interpreting the dream of the king unconditionally. It is this Taqwa and consciousness of Allah that is also praised in Quran in Surah Talaq Verse 2 and 3 which says: “And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out. And will provide for him from where he does not expect.”

Prophet Yusuf (a.s)'s Taqwa caused him to go from a point of being in a seemingly hopeless situation in prison to eventually working in the government as Allah opened doors for him from avenues that he would not have expected.

KING CONDUCTS AN INQUIRY INTO THE WOMEN'S CONDUCT

So when this condition was communicated to the king, he immediately summoned all the women to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

Verse 51 thus says: "Said [the king to the women], "What was your condition when you sought to seduce Yusuf?" They said, "Perfect is Allah ! We know about him no evil." The wife of al-'Azeez said, "Now the truth has become evident. It was I who sought to seduce him, and indeed, he is of the truthful."

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The women immediately defended Prophet Yusuf (a.s) testifying that he was innocent. This was the collective reply of all the women to a general question that was posed to all of them.

This response came as a result of having pondered over their actions during the years when Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was gone and having come to the realization that they were at fault. They thus grabbed this opportunity to clean their own conscience by admitting to their wrong doing.

And they don't only negate the accusation of him doing evil against them but also declare that they "know no evil from him."

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At the same time relook at the words of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to the messenger of the king when he says “ask him what is the case of the women who cut their hands.” It should be noted that the other women only arrived on the scene afterwards in trying to seduce him, but the primary culprit was Zuleikha. Yet Prophet Yusuf (a.s) speaks about women in general terms and does not mention Zuleikha’s name in a beautiful gesture of protecting her identity as he did not want to show disrespect to the wife of the Governor.

It is amazing that at this point the wife of the Governor then emerged from the group of women and announced before the king that she was the one who sought to seduce Prophet Yusuf (a.s)! Why did she plead guilty? It is because she wanted Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to know that she not disloyal to him while he was in prison.

The love that Zuleikha had for Prophet Yusuf (a.s) which was originally lust affected Zuleikha’s heart so much during this period of separation that her existence melted to reach the real love of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) and she thus reached the truth and once again virtually exploded (in a different way this time) to declare he guilt.

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People of Tasawwuf say that sometimes a lover has to travel the road of chasing false love to realise that it is not real and to then continue on their search to eventually arrive at the Real Love of Almighty Allah.

Thus Verse 52 says: "That is so he (Yusuf) will know that I did not betray him in [his] absence and that Allah does not guide the plan of betrayers."

DANGERS OF NAFSUL AMMAARAH

After Zuleikha pleading guilty, the next verse focuses on the root cause of why people go astray when it comes to not protecting their chastity.

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Verse 53 thus says: "And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful."

Whose words are these as well as the words in Verse 52? Mufasssireen differ in this regard and thus there are two interesting and very relevant views that both add value to our lives.

Some say these are the words of Zuleikha. After having pleaded guilty she is basically saying that she wanted this declaration to show the fact that she was not disloyal to Prophet Yusuf (a.s) in his absence while he was in prison. Furthermore she is saying that now that she has declared her guilt, she does not regard herself to be some holy person in doing so and someone that is immune from committing such sin as the lower nafs/self is forever suggesting to one to commit sin.

Other interpreters believe that these two Verses are the words of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) in that he

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wanted this matter to be cleared so that the king would know that he was not disloyal to him while he lived in his house after he was rescued in the slave market years before.

Then in response to this Prophet Yusuf (a.s) is also saying that he does not deny that he has the power of lust in him or that he is not challenged with protecting himself from sin as the lower nafs/self is forever suggesting to one to commit sin.

Thus a Prophet who is infallible still tells us that whatever level of spiritual perfection you achieve, you remain vulnerable and should never become over confident that you will never commit sin.

But it is the Mercy of Allah that protects you from sin! Notice that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) does not say it's Allah's Anger or Fear of Allah that protects us from sin but Allah's Mercy towards us that protects us from sin! Thus it's not our personal achievement but Allah's kindness towards us to achieve that.

ANALYSIS OF NAFS

Nafs means “self” or that truth/reality that is pronounced by the word “I”. In terms of the Verses of Quran, the nafs is considered to be the centre of the human existence.

It is separate from our body.

The nafs has various conditions. Sometimes it is nafsul ammaarah as discussed above in the words of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) which is the nafs that continuously invites towards evil.

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However in Surah Qiyamah Verse 2 Allah speaks about another nafs when it says “And I swear by the reproaching soul.” This is the nafsul lawwaamah.

The same nafs has a different condition which is that nafs which continuously condemns us when we approach evil. This is the nafs that drives us to discipline our nafs which is our conscience that causes us to feel discomfort when we commit sin.

However, when we do not pay attention to the nafsul lawwaamah and ignore it's message, we eventually kill it, and it then seems like we do not feel discomfort when we commit sin any more as the only nafs that remains is nafsul ammaarah!

When nafsul lawwaamah is in generally in control, we tend to commit sin less as the moment we do so, then this higher nafs tends to auto-correct our actions.

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But the nafs that is even higher than this is called “nafsul mutma’inna” or the nafs that has reached a state of complete tranquillity.

Thus Surah Fajr Verse 27 – 28 say: "O reassured soul, Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]."

This is the nafs where you have more doubt and battle with your lower nafs and this world's temptation does not bother you at all.

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In its real sense this Verse relates to Prophets and Awliyaa and Imam Hussain (a.s) who went to extreme levels of exercise where they have absolutely no doubt about their attachment to Allah.

In the Munaajat of the “Complainers”, Imam Zainul Aabideen (a.s) complains to Allah about the various conditions of the nafs and the challenges that they present. This is one of fifteen munaajaat of the Imam.

Our Imams have thus taught us to make a dua in which we say “O my Lord, do not dispose me to myself even for a moment!” We thus saying to Allah that if He leaves us to ourselves and does not have Mercy on us, we will reach instant destruction!

And similarly in Dua Abu Hamza Thumali which is recommended at the time of seher in the morning, we are taught how to control the nafsul ammaarah. It is like a stubborn horse that is

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difficult to control and this dua teaches us the skill to do so.

In this dua the Imam says to Allah that whenever he wants to communicate privately with Allah, all of a sudden something seems to come in between and then he loses interest. Is it maybe because Allah has thrown us out of His court, or that Allah does not want to listen to our voice any more or our love for being in the company of entertainment wherein we forget the hereafter that causes this. All of these effects of the nafsul ammaarah and many more prevents us from enjoying communication with Allah.