

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 15: PROPHET YUSUF (a.s)'s UNIQUE INTERPRETATION OF KING'S DREAM

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While Prophet Yusuf (a.s) spent an extended stay in prison, time passed and his interpretation of the dreams of his two prison inmates came true. So the one was crucified and the other was freed to serve wine to the king as predicted.

But the one who was freed had forgotten about him and suddenly something occurred that caused him to remember Prophet Yusuf (a.s) again.

KING OF EGYPT HAS A DREAM

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Verse 43 says: "And [subsequently] the king said, "Indeed, I have seen [in a dream] seven fat cows being eaten by seven [that were] lean, and seven green spikes [of grain] and others [that were] dry. O eminent ones, explain to me my vision, if you should interpret visions."

The Quran uses the word "mala" in different places for the elite of society who always control the wealth and are always part of the close circle of the rulers. These are usually the ones who are resistant to change during revolutions as they always want to protect their personal interests the most.

The king had a dream and thus asked this group of people to interpret his dream.

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Their response to the king's dream is amazing and is captured in Verse 44 which says: "They said, "[It is but] a mixture of false dreams (nightmares), and we are not learned in the interpretation of (such) dreams."

The reason they avoided interpreting this dream was that they actually saw it to have a bad meaning and kings hate receiving bad news and always want to hear good things. Thus if they attempted to offer the negative interpretation of this dream to the king that difficult times lie ahead, the king might be infuriated in the process and they might lose their own lives for being the bearer of bad news!

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At this point when they could not or would not interpret the dream of the king, the freed prison inmate remembered Prophet Yusuf (a.s).

Verse 45 thus says: "But the one who was freed and remembered after a time said, "I will inform you of its interpretation, so send me forth."

He remembered that he had a friend in prison who was capable of interpreting dreams and thus asked to be sent to prison to make the enquiry about the meaning thereof.

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Verse 46 thus refers to him entering prison and enquiring about the dream's meaning from Prophet Yusuf (a.s) when it says: “[He said], "Yusuf, O man of truth, explain to us about seven fat cows eaten by seven [that were] lean, and seven green spikes [of grain] and others [that were] dry - that I may return to the people; perhaps they will know.”

When the free prisoner was out of prison and having a good time, he forgot to mention the case of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to the king, but now suddenly when he was in need, he addresses Prophet Yusuf (a.s) as “Yusuf, O man of truth!”

PROPHET YUSUF (a.s) PRESENTS FOURTEEN YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN WHEN INTERPRETING KING'S DREAM

Try to picture the scene at this point to predict what a normal person's response would have been. Would one not first have chastised the prison inmate for having forgotten you and then laid down pre-conditions to say that one first wants to be released before you interpret the dream, etc.?

But Prophet Yusuf (a.s) does not do that. He immediately gets into interpreting the dream. But the manner in which he does it is not to offer a mere interpretation which would be a prediction of what Egypt was going to experience in the near future but he offered the solution to his prediction in the form of a fourteen year strategic plan! It was this method of his response which would secure his future release from prison!

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Thus Verses 47 to 49 narrates his interpretation together with his strategic plan.

Verse 47 says: “[Yusuf] said, “You will plant for seven years consecutively; and what you harvest leave in its spikes, except a little from which you will eat.”

And Verse 48 says: “Then will come after that seven difficult [years] which will consume what you saved for them, except a little from which you will store.

And Verse 49 says: "Then will come after that a year in which the people will be given rain and in which they will press [olives and grapes]."

Prophet Yusuf (a.s) thus says that during the first seven years it's critical to enforce a culture of saving so that only a portion of the good harvest is consumed. And in the second seven years when the savings are consumed it would be critical to also do so frugally and still save some more, else Egypt would not survive the famine. And if this is done, then they will experience a good year in which good harvests return.

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This presentation of a fourteen year strategic plan exposed the fact the Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was more than a mere “fortune teller”, but had vision and capacity to be able to offer guidance on how to manage an economy during a looming recession.

Thus as soon as the king heard this amazing interpretation, he wanted Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to be released immediately.

Verse 50 thus says: “And the king said, "Bring him to me."

The king thus wanted Prophet Yusuf (a.s) to be fetched to play an important role in the government.

And this is how Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was about to go from a state of being imprisoned to being in a position of government.

WHY PROPHET YUSUF (a.s) WAS GIFTED WITH ABILITY TO INTERPRET

DREAMS

The purpose of the miracles that were given to various Prophets over time was to serve as a proof of their Prophet hood to their people. These miracles were always presented in the form of a challenge to something that the people of their time considered themselves to be experts in.

Thus during the time of Prophet Eesa (a.s) when the science of medicine was advanced, Prophet Eesa (a.s) was able to heal the leper and bring the dead back to life.

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And similarly Prophet Musa (a.s) was able to turn his stick into a snake to overcome the magicians "false snakes" during his time.

And Prophet Dawood (a.s) was able to soften iron with his bare hands.

It appears from Surah Yusuf that Egyptian society were experts in the field of interpreting dreams and having a view into the future. Thus in this Surah, the dream of the king is the fourth dream that Prophet Yusuf (a.s) interprets.

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And the interpretation of the king's dream served as a miracle to prove his Prophet hood and ability to see into the future and manage the economy.