

TAFSEER OF SURAH YUSUF

LECTURE 11: SHIRT PROVIDES CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

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After Prophet Yusuf (a.s) had successfully resisted the invitation to commit sin with the wife of the Governor, the story continues about how they were caught out and its ramifications. This is captured in Verses 25 to 29.

YUSUF (a.s) TRIES TO ESCAPE

Verse 25 says: “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 punishment of one who intended evil for your family but that he be imprisoned or a painful punishment?"

It is important to notice that the moment Yusuf (a.s) found himself to be in a compromising position and exposed to committing the sin of adultery, he immediately tried to get out of the situation by running towards the door. Often in daily life we will hypocritically criticize people for committing sin and watch them doing it, but we ourselves remain in that environment and don't remove ourselves therefrom.

While he was running away from haraam and sin, she ran behind him towards committing sin!

Yusuf (a.s) broke through the various doors (which were seven as reported in some narrations) until he came to the front door at which time she caught up with him and tore his shirt vertically from behind. At this point the front door was opened and they suddenly found her husband standing there.

In this moment of embarrassment, the Quran refers to her husband as her "Sayyid" having found them in that state, which literally means her leader or boss. This is perhaps also reflective of Egyptian culture at the time highlighting the manner in which women used to address their husband, a culture which still exists in certain societies today.

In this most embarrassing situation, Zuleikha suddenly shifts the focus of the situation in an unbelievably confident manner by appealing to her husband's emotions to deal with the person that intends something evil for his family and not necessarily her specifically. One would normally have expected a person in such a situation to swing into apologetic mode by saying something like "there was nothing intended" or "it's not what you see and I can explain."

She did not say what happened at all, nor does she say Yusuf (a.s) did something bad to her and simply jumps to passing a sentence over Yusuf (a.s) as if he had already been convicted but does not refer directly to him. This shrewd approach of Zuleikha gives one a glimpse into her character at that point in time in that she was rather merciless. She was supposedly in love with Yusuf (a.s) but when her love for him was tested, she was merciless and expected him to be punished. Her so called love for him was thus pure lust as it reflected her extremely selfish nature.

RESPONDING WITH A CLEAN CONSCIENCE TO ACCUSATIONS

Verse 26 [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.

This response of Yusuf (a.s) shows how confident he was that he did nothing wrong and thus did not appeal to any emotion like she did. This confidence is due to Yusuf (a.s) not being guilty and having trust in Allah and thus not being afraid of the extraordinary situation he found himself in.

The witness referred to above is generally accepted to be someone from the family of Zuleikha who suggested a solution to determine who is guilty. The witness thus suggested looking at how his shirt was torn. The presence of a witness from Zuleikha's family made the outcome of the case more decisive as her own family were used as witness and such testimony would be considered to be more credible. This is a Divine miracle that Yusuf (a.s) was again saved through the use of a witness from Zuleikha's family.

SHIRT PROVIDES CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Thus Verse 27 says: "But if his shirt is torn from the back, then she has lied, and he is of the truthful."

And Verse 28 says: "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.

In this amazing manner, the shirt of Yusuf (a.s) again played a crucial role in the life of Yusuf (a.s) in providing circumstantial evidence that he was not guilty. In the case of the brothers of Yusuf (a.s), when the shirt of Yusuf (a.s) was not torn, their father said "what a kind wolf who ate Yusuf (a.s) but spared his shirt." Thus the shirt being in one piece in that incident provided solace to the father that Yusuf (a.s) was still alive. And in this case, his shirt being torn proved that he was innocent.

RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNOR

Verse 29 quotes the Governor as saying: "Yusuf, ignore this. And, [my wife], ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were of the sinful."

The Governor appears to act very indifferently to this matter which affected his dignity and his response itself appears strange. However this often appears to reflect the life of people who have high positions in society and in reality have low self-esteem.

However, the Governor's indifferent approach by telling Yusuf (a.s) to ignore the situation was an attempt to sweep the incident under the carpet as his public image would be affected. But in reality these types of stories are never kept a secret and always leak!

Allah's power is once again reflected in this story as it is reflected in other incidents in history whereby something seemingly very insignificant and small can save you as the following incidents highlight:

1. How Prophet Muhammad (sawa) was saved during the hijrah by a small spider;
2. How the Kaba was saved by small stones that were pelted by birds onto the army of Abraha;
3. How the new born Eesa (a.s) saved the chastity of Lady Maryam (a.s) when he spoke in the cradle while being a few days old; and
4. The circumstantial evidence that saved Yusuf (a.s).

ADULTERY CONSIDERED A SIN IN ALL SOCIETIES

At the time of this incident, Yusuf (a.s) was not yet a Prophet who was actively propagating Allah's message and the Egyptians were thus generally idol worshippers. However, we see the Governor actually telling his wife that she had committed a sin and should seek repentance.

This shows that adultery was considered a sin even in that society and is generally considered a sin irrespective of one's religion.