

نبي الله يوسف (ع)

PROPHET YÛSUF [A.S]

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 3

The Story of Joseph (as)

In this lesson we shall be examining the life and struggles of Prophet Yûsuf (as).

In the Qur'an Allah (SWT) reveals that the life of this prophet contains important lessons:

“In Yûsuf and his brothers there are Signs for every one of those who want to ask.” (12: 7)

THE BEST OF THE QUR'ANIC STORIES

Allah (SWT) introduces the life of Prophet Yûsuf (as) to the people by saying:

“We will recount to you the best of narrative in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'ân, and indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware [of it].” (12:3)

Almost all of Surah Yûsuf, one of the longest in the Qur'an, is devoted to his life and that of his family. It is also a very detailed story of the events of his life.

PROPHET YÛSUF IN CHILDHOOD

Prophet Yûsuf (as) was one of the twelve sons of Prophet Ya'qûb. His mother's name was Raḥīl. He had a younger sister and a brother named Benyâmin (Benjamin) from the same mother.

Prophet Yûsuf's (as) ten older brothers were his step brothers i.e. from Prophet Ya'qûb's first wife. Prophet Yûsuf's mother died when he was a very young boy, and this is one of the reasons why he was so dear to his father.

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Discuss the story of Prophet Joseph (as)
- Understand that jealousy is an evil quality
- Understand that even if jealous feelings are present, we should never act on them
- Discuss al-ghibṭah
- Discuss the importance of love and strong relationships among family members
- Discuss the importance of forgiving family members

From his childhood Prophet Yūsuf (as) was a very handsome looking boy but in addition to that, he was also very intelligent and his personality and character were also very attractive. This made him a very likeable person to anyone who saw and met him. Thus Prophet Ya'qūb was very fond and affectionate of him.

This affection that Prophet Ya'qūb showed towards Prophet Yūsuf (as), made his older brothers jealous of him. This jealousy became so strong and deep in the hearts of the brothers, that they made a plan to take Joseph away from their father, permanently.

THE STATUS OF PROPHET YŪSUF (AS)

When Prophet Yūsuf (as) was about eight years old, he had a dream that there were eleven stars with the moon and the sun prostrating in front of him and he reported this dream to his father:

"Yūsuf said to his father: o' my father! I have indeed seen in a dream eleven stars and the sun and moon prostrating to me." (12: 4)



On hearing about this dream, Prophet Ya'qūb advised his son not to tell it to his brothers in case their jealousy should be excited. The Holy Qur'an relates:

"He (Ya'qūb) said: O my dear son! Tell not your brethren of your vision lest they should plot against you because surely Satan is the manifest enemy of man" (12:5)

THE PLOT AGAINST PROPHET YŪSUF

The brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) did not like that he should become the only centre of their paternal love and attention. By this time their jealousy had become so deep and dangerous, that they decided to get rid of Prophet Yūsuf (as) by killing him. But Allah (SWT) protected Yūsuf from being killed and the brothers

agreed on another plan of throwing Prophet Yūsuf (as) into a well.

The Holy Qur'an describes how this happened:

"One said: Slay Yūsuf or drive him some other land so that your father's favours may be exclusively for you and after that you shall live as upright persons. One among them said: Kill not Yūsuf but cast him down into the bottom of a pit if you must do it so that some wayfarers may pick him up." (12: 7-10)

The brothers asked their father to allow Yūsuf to accompany them while they grazed the sheep outside town. Although Prophet Ya'qūb feared that the jealous brothers should harm Prophet Yūsuf (as), he accepted their request.

The brothers now got an opportunity to carry out their evil plan of throwing him into the pit. The Holy Qur'an says:

"They said: O our father! Why do you not entrust us with Yūsuf though we, indeed, mean him well. Send him with us tomorrow that he may enjoy himself and sport and surely we shall take good care of him. He said: It grieves me that the wolf should devour him while you are heedless of him. They said: Surely if the wolf should devour him notwithstanding we are so strong a band, then we shall be in that case justly blamed for losing him." (12: 11-15)

When they left the city with Prophet Yūsuf (as), they first began to tease and beat him. After some time, when Yūsuf (as) was hurt and weak, they took him to a well and threw him down. Prophet Yūsuf (as) was now all alone in the dark well with no food or water.

After this they went home and took his shirt, stained in sheep's blood to their father. They put up a false scene upon entering their home, wailing and crying. They lied to their father that a wolf had eaten their young brother, and that they were unable to save him from the terrible fate.ⁱ

Ya'qūb was so grieved at the story and was so saddened by the apparent loss of his son that he wept profusely all day and all night. It is said that he lost his eye sight due to excessive crying.

THE EVIL OF JEALOUSY

Prophet Yūsuf's (as) brothers were suffering from a very bad sickness of the soul, called destructive jealousy. This type of jealousy is among the most destructive emotions or feelings which a person may have towards his fellow human beings. It causes him to wish evil for others and to be happy when misfortune befalls them. Jealousy of this type then leads to anger and rage which we saw in the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as).

The jealousy the brothers had led them to do things which are unimaginable for the children of a Prophet, such as beating up their younger brother, throwing him into a well to be left dead, letting a trade caravan find him and sell him into slavery which led him to be taken hundreds of kilometres away to Egypt. On top of all this, they even lied to their father.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"Jealousy destroys good deeds like a fire consumes wood."



We know the way in which dry wood is burnt and consumed by a hot raging fire. That is what jealousy does to our deeds and our happiness.

Some of the evil effects of jealousy are that we see from the story of Prophet Yūsuf (as) are:

- Jealousy hurts the jealous person himself most of all.
- It makes the jealous person unhappy
- It makes the jealous person ungrateful and selfish.
- Jealousy can end up breaking relations – if family relations in a Prophet's family can be destroyed – no one is safe from this evil.
- The jealous person is constantly occupied with the jealousy and always planning and thinking evil things
- Jealousy leads to hurting others including our loved ones
- The jealous person never has a good ending

HOW TO AVOID JEALOUSY

The solution to jealousy is simple but needs practice. Sometimes, a person may get jealous of another person, but it is important that we **DO NOT** act upon those feelings, like the way the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) did. If we act on those feelings, the jealousy grows in our

hearts and it leads us to commit huge sins that can put us in more trouble.

We should remember what Allah (SWT) has said in the Qur'an – which can help us avoid jealousy:

"And do not covet those things which Allah has given as gifts more freely on some of you than on others; for men shall have of what they earn, and women will have of what they earn: But ask Allah for his bounty. For Allah has full knowledge over all things." (4:32)

JEALOUSY VS AL-GHIBṬAH

Sometimes, we see something that our friend has, and we wish we had the same thing. For example, we may wish that we could play soccer as well as our friend could. However, we do not want this blessing to be taken away from our friend, we just wish that we had it too. This is called al-ghibṭah in Arabic. It is not jealousy, it is simply wanting something good for ourselves as well. There is nothing wrong with this feeling.

If on the other hand, we wish that our friend loses his skills or gets injured or something bad happens to him such that he loses that blessing, then this jealousy, and this is great sin.

Review Questions

Q1. How old was Prophet Yūuf (as) when he got the dream about the sun, moon and stars:

- a. 22 years
- b. 8 years
- c. 2 years

Q2. Why did Prophet Yūsuf's brothers get jealous of him?

- a. He believed in Allah (SWT)
- b. He was handsome, intelligent and lovable
- c. He was always favoured unfairly by his father

Q3. What is the most important lesson we learn from Prophet Yūsuf's (as) life?

- a. That we should spoil the good things other people have if we can't have them
- b. That we should avoid jealousy and be happy with what Allah (SWT) has given us
- c. That we should pray to Allah to punish the bad people immediately

Life after Rescue from the Well

In this lesson we continue studying the life of Prophet Yūsuf (as) and what happened to him after he was thrown into the well. Through this we will see the patience Prophet Yūsuf (as) showed throughout his hardship, and the importance of love and forgiveness, especially towards family members.

JOSEPH'S RELEASE FROM THE WELL

A caravan happened to pass by the well. Some men needed water to quench their thirst. One of them lowered his bucket and into the well and when he lifted it, to their surprise, Prophet Yūsuf (as) emerged. Prophet Yūsuf (as) was then taken to Egypt where he was sold as a slave.



The Holy Qur'an states:

"And there came a wayfarer and they sent down a water drawer. He let down his pail into the pit. He said: What good luck, here is a youth. And they kept his case secret to make merchandise of him and Allah knew what they did, and they sold him for a petty price, a few dirhams and they attached little value to him." (12:19- 20)

As can be seen from this āyah, the group that found Prophet Yūsuf (as) in the well and rescued him thought that they would be able to sell him, and regarded him as a piece of merchandise. That was because the system of slavery was then still prevalent in Egypt and the surrounding area. People actively engaged in the trade, buying and selling children in particular. That was why the people who found him had such cause to celebrate at the prospect of making money out of him.

When the caravan reached Egypt, an Egyptian noble man bought Prophet Yūsuf (as). The Qur'an continues so:

"The man from Egypt who had bought him said to his wife, 'Give him an honourable place [in the household]. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.'" (12:21)

Prophet Yūsuf (as) was given a good place to live, and was treated very well by his master. He was very diligent in the work he was given, he was obedient, polite and very respectful. In addition to all this, he was very intelligent and the master of the house was very impressed with his knowledge and morals. Thus, he became very dear to them also.

However, as Prophet Yūsuf (as) became more mature, he was faced with greater challenges to his faith and devotion to Allah (SWT).

PROPHET YŪSUF OVERPOWERS TEMPTATION

Prophet Yūsuf (as) was a handsome and an attractive young man. As time passed, the lady of the house who was the wife of the nobleman that bought him as a slave put Prophet Yūsuf (as) in a very seductive situation because she had fallen in love with him.

The Qur'an tells us:

"The woman in whose house he was solicited him. She closed the doors and said, 'Come!!' He said, 'God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous. They raced to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind, and they ran into her husband at the door. She said, 'What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful punishment?'" (Surah 12:23-24)

Prophet Yūsuf (as) refrained from even looking at her. He tried to get rid of her but she chased him. She grabbed the back of his shirt and pulled thus tearing it. Just at that time the master appeared at the scene. One of the servants bore witness by saying: "Look at the shirt. If it is torn at the back, Yusuf will be quite innocent. He should not be blamed. In case it is torn from the front the woman is guilty". When the shirt was examined it was torn at the back and the Prophet Yūsuf (as) was found truthful.

This story spread and the women of Egypt began speaking about the wife of the nobleman. The Qur'an tells us what happened after this:

"When she heard of their conspiracies, she sent for them and arranged a feast, and gave each of them a knife, and said [to Yūsuf], 'Come out before them.' So when they saw him, they marvelled at him and cut their hands [absent-mindedly], and they said, 'Good heavens! This is

not a human being! This is but a noble angel! She said, 'He is the one on whose account you blamed me. Certainly I did solicit him, but he was continent, and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall be imprisoned and be among the abased.' (Surah 12:31-32)

The wife of the nobleman continued with her desire to tempt Prophet Yūsuf (as) to commit sin, and the ladies that were there were also influencing him to do what his master's wife told him to, but Prophet Yūsuf (as) was a strong, moral and decent person who did not accept any threat or influence from the women.

The Qur'an tells us his reaction to the threat of being imprisoned when the wife of the master threatened him:

"He said, 'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them and become one of the senseless.'" (12:33)

Because of Prophet Yūsuf (as) disobedience towards her order, the master's wife imprisoned him. Allah (SWT) then accepted Prophet Yūsuf's prayer and turned the evil inclinations of the women away from him.

JOSEPH (AS) IN PRISON

In the prison Prophet Yūsuf (as) was in the company of two prisoners. One night, both prisoners saw strange dreams. The Holy Qur'an tells us what Prophet Yūsuf (as) said about the dreams:

"O my prison mates! As for one of you he shall pour out wine for his lord to drink and as for the other, he shall be executed and the birds shall eat from off his head. The matter is decreed concerning which you inquired." (12:41)

Soon after, the interpretations of those dreams turned out to be true. When the first man was about to leave the prison, Prophet Yūsuf (as) asked this man to remember and ask the king to release him. However, this man completely forgot, until an incident occurred. One day, the king of Egypt had a strange dream that no one could explain. Prophet Yūsuf (as) was then called to explain the dream and his explanation satisfied the king.

He was finally released from prison and his innocence was made clear. The king was much impressed with his goodness and intelligence. He therefore offered him an

important position in the government. He was selected to be the director of the store houses in Egypt. From this position, Prophet Yūsuf (as) was in control of all the food stores in Egypt and he made all the rules and policies about how to store food and who was to store it.

PROPHET YŪSUF (AS) MEETS HIS BROTHERS

After some time, the king's dream came true and Egypt and the surrounding areas went through a severe drought. This famine also affected Kan'ān, where Prophet Ya'qūb and his family were living. The king, under the advice of Prophet Yūsuf (as), had stored food and was now distributing to people affected by the drought. So Prophet Yūsuf's (as) brothers came to take their share of the rations.

When they reached Egypt, Prophet Yūsuf (as) immediately recognized his brothers, but they did not know who he was, and Prophet Yūsuf (as) did not tell them who he was. He gave them their rations and looked after them. However, he asked them to bring Benjamin with them the next time they came to get rations.

The next time they went to Egypt with Prophet Yūsuf's (as) younger brother, they were welcomed and Prophet Yūsuf (as) then told only his younger brother who he was. The Qur'an says:

"And when they came into Yūsuf's presence, he took his own brother aside with him saying: Lo I am your brother. Therefore grieve not at what they do." (12:69)

Prophet Yusuf (as) then hatched a plan to keep his brother with him, and to bring his father to Egypt as well. He planted a silver cup of the king in his bag as an excuse to keep him behind. When the news came out that the king's silver cup was missing, they checked the bags of Prophet Yūsuf's (as) brothers, and found it in his Benjamin's bag. As a result of this, he detained his brother and told the other brothers to leave. However, the oldest brother stayed back in Egypt because he could not face his father again, until he came with his brother.

When they went back and told Prophet Ya'qūb the story, he only said that patience is best for me, and Allah knows best.

After a few weeks, the brothers went back to Egypt to get more food and they had very little money. They finally made it to Egypt in a very bad state. Their clothes were rags and they were very tired. The Qur'an tells us what they did next

"And when they came back into the presence of Yusuf, they said: O' chief! Misfortune has afflicted us and our family and we have brought a small amount, so give us full measure and be charitable to us; Surely Allah will recompense the charitable." (12: 88)

PROPHET YŪSUF REVEALS HIS IDENTITY

Prophet Yūsuf (as) was well known for his generosity. He had a tender and sympathetic heart. He took pity on them. Soon after, he disclosed his identity to his brothers. The Holy Qur'an affirms:

"He (Yūsuf) said: I am Yūsuf and this is my brother. Allah has shown us favour. Surely who fears Allah and endures, is rewarded for surely Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good." (12:90)

Everyone now wished to go immediately to their father to inform him of the happy news that Prophet Yūsuf (as) was alive. At the time of departure Prophet Yūsuf (as) gave them his shirt and said:

"Cast it on my father's face and he will recover his sight and come to me with all your family." (12: 93)

The brothers came home with happy spirit. They put the shirt of Prophet Yūsuf (as) on the face of Prophet Ya'qūb. He regained his eye sight immediately. When the brothers came back with their father, Prophet Yūsuf (as) forgave them and did not hold their past actions against them.

IMPORTANCE OF STRONG FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The above part of the story of Prophet Yūsuf (as) shows how important it is to have a deep sense of love and affection for our family members.

We learn from Prophet Yūsuf (as) that even when our family members sometimes hurt us, we have to be different and act towards them with love and affection. This is important because being loving and affectionate towards our family increases their love for us too – especially after they have wronged us in any way. It makes the family stronger and happier in the end.

If the grudge and revenge was to continue, the pain and suffering would also continue. This would not give the people who did wrong a chance to change and ask for forgiveness which in turn would also not be fair.

From this kind of love, there results a sense of forgiveness and goodwill among the family members. We look at the example of Prophet Ya'qūb (as) who was caused so much pain by his sons, for so many years he lived separated from his son Prophet Yūsuf (as). Even after so much, when he got the news that Prophet Yūsuf (as) was well, he immediately forgave all his sons very sincerely – and this forgiveness changed them and brought them back to the right path. It also made their family much stronger.

It also pleases Allah (SWT) very much to see us able to forgive those who have wronged us, and it gives us a chance to be forgiven by Allah (SWT) too – which is what "we all want in the end.

Class Activity

- Draw a timeline of the life of Prophet Yūsuf (as) showing the good times of his life and the difficult times in his life.
- Make a list of the lessons we can learn from his behaviour in the good times of his life and the lessons we can learn from his behaviour in the difficult times of his life.

Review Questions

Q1. Prophet Yūsuf (as) ended up living in which country after being rescued from the well?

- a. Palestine
- b. Kan'an
- c. Egypt

Q2. Prophet Yūsuf (as) ended up:

- a. Using his power to take revenge on his brothers
- b. Using his power to separate his brothers
- c. Forgiving his brothers despite being in a position of power

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