

نبي الله يوسف (ع)

PROPHET Yūsuf [A.S]

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Lesson 1: Prophet Yūsuf (as)

INTRODUCTION

The story of Prophet Yūsuf is detailed by Allah (SWT) in Chapter 12 of the Holy Qur'an (Surat Yūsuf). It is a unique chapter of the Qur'an in that it is the only story that has been revealed chronologically to the Holy Prophet. Also, out of the 27 times that Prophet Yūsuf's name is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, only twice does his name appear outside Chapter 12. This is in contrast to the names of other Prophets like Moses and Abraham that appear frequently over several chapters.

It is in this chapter only that Allah (SWT) praises His revelations as the best of revelations, perhaps referring to all the stories in the Qur'an – or as many exegetes have said that the reference to the 'best of stories' is the story of Prophet Yūsuf.

Caution against myths related to this story

There is a false Ḥadith attributed to Imam 'Ali (as) which discourages women from reading the story of Prophet Yusuf because it would lead to bad temptations. We should be aware of such false Ḥadith and not let them influence us. Allah (SWT) tells us in this surah that there are lessons in the stories of the Qur'an for anyone who is mindful, male or female.

“Indeed in their (the prophetic) stories, there is a lesson for people of understanding” (12:111)

Prophet Yūsuf (as) was the eleventh of the twelve sons of Prophet Ya'qūb (peace be upon them both). Prophet Yūsuf (as) was different to the rest of his brothers, not only because he was the only prophet amongst them, but

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Discuss the story of Prophet Joseph (as) in more detail
- Understand that jealousy is an evil quality
- Understand the negative effects of jealousy
- Discuss the ways of overcoming jealousy and envy
- Discuss that even if jealous feelings are present, we should never act on them
- Discuss al-ghibṭah
- Know that Prophet Joseph was found in the well and taken as a slave
- Know about Prophet Joseph's life in the Egyptian king's house, and his time in prison
- Discuss Prophet Joseph's reunion with his family after coming into a position of power
- Understand the importance of making sure we do not put ourselves in tempting situations
- Understand the importance of chastity and avoiding sexual relations prior to marriage
- Understand the negative consequences of sexual relations prior to, or outside, marriage

also because he possessed remarkable beauty both in his physical appearance and in his personality.

This, together with the fact that Prophet Yūsuf (as) lost his mother when he was a young boy, made Prophet Ya'qūb deeply affectionate toward him. Yūsuf's brothers noticed the special attention that he was receiving from their father and they did not like it.

THE SPECIAL DREAM

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. It is important to understand here that the dreams that Prophets have, unlike ordinary people's dreams, a reflection of some reality (recall the dream of Prophet Abraham where he was ordered by Allah to slaughter his son). Being aware of this, Prophet Ya'qūb advised his son not to relate it to his brothers lest their jealousy should be excited. The Holy Qur'an relates:

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

If we pay close attention to conversation between Prophet Yūsuf and his father, Prophet Ya'qūb, we will notice that they address each other with utmost respect. Yūsuf says "O my father!" and Ya'qūb replies in return, "O my son". Here, Allah (SWT) is teaching us the correct manner of addressing our parents and vice-versa. Unfortunately, many children nowadays call their parents by their first names, and when the parents grow old, these names become very rude.

A fascinating theological discussion

In the exegesis of ayah no 12 of Surat Yusuf, 'Allāmah Tabatabā'i draws our attention to the subtleties of the grammatical structure which in turn proves another concept from another ayah in the Holy Quran.

In Arabic grammar, if a noun or action is intellect-less (ghayr-ʿāqil or non-human being), then the plural form of it or a verb attributed to it is treated as feminine.

In keeping with the above, when Allah (SWT) describes the prostration of the eleven stars, the sun and the moon to Prophet Yusuf (as), the verb used is interestingly not in

the feminine form (*sājidāt*)- in keeping with the actions of a non-intellect being- instead it is masculine (*sājidīn*).

In order to explain this, the author posits that everything thing created by Allah (SWT) has a degree of intelligence by which they glorify Allah (SWT). He uses the following ayah to support his view:

"...and everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies and praises Him, but you (human beings) cannot understand and notice this glorification"ⁱ

THE PLOT AGAINST JOSEPH (AS)

The brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) could no longer tolerate *just* watching the special attention that he was getting from their father. They believed that they deserved it more since they were older than Prophet Yūsuf (as) and were more useful to their father. With what began simply as a negative thought now turned to strong jealousy toward Yusuf and they decided to get rid of him. An initial proposal of killing him was not unanimously accepted by the brothers so they instead decided to throw him into a deep well. The Holy Qur'an says:

"One said: Slay Joseph or drive him to 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 Joseph but cast him down into the bottom of a pit if you must do it so that some wayfarers may pick him up." (12: 9-10)

In order to seek their father's permission to take Yūsuf out from house, they created a lie. They pretended to take Yūsuf out so that he could enjoy and have fun:

"Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and verily, we will take care of him." (12:12)

The way Prophet Ya'qūb replied to the brothers of Yūsuf here is interesting. He did not forbid them to take Prophet Yūsuf out of the house on the basis that having 'fun and enjoyment' is a vain and sinful activity as so many 'spiritual' people today have wrongfully claimed. Instead, he declines their request on the basis of a realistic danger i.e. the wolf. So, we can learn from this that setting aside time in our days for entertainment in the form of sporting activities are all permissible provided they are all within the boundaries of the rules set by Allah (SWT).

As we've learnt previously, jealousy got the better of the brothers of Yūsuf and they all conspired against him. They threw him into the depths of the well with the hope that they would never see him again. Allah (SWT) however had very different plans for His prophet.

In the subsequent sections we will discuss jealousy – its types, source and cures from the hadith of our Imams.

JEALOUSY

There are two types of jealousy; a negative form (*al-ḥasad*) hence strongly condemned, and permissible form called *al-ghibtah*

al-ḥasad means to be unhappy when a blessing is bestowed on someone and to be happy when that blessing is taken away. The Holy Qur'an in describing the characteristics of jealous people says:

“If some good should befall you (O Prophet), it upsets them, but if some ill should befall you (O Prophet), they rejoice at it”ⁱⁱ

On the other hand when someone does not want that blessing to be taken away and does not feel grieved with its continuation for that person, but instead wishes the same for himself, this is called *al-ghibta*.

The Prophet (saw) said in regards to these two types of jealousy:

“A believer only feels *al-ghibta* and is never jealous, whilst a hypocrite is jealous and does not merely stop at feeling *al-ghibta*”ⁱⁱⁱ

The sources of jealousy (al-ḥasad)

Jealousy can be caused by a combination of factors which primarily stem from the meanness in the soul, which in turn finds its roots in the love and attachment to this world. Some of these factors are:

- **Pride/arrogance/self-admiration** – When a person thinks that he is better than others, he will become jealous when others receive some blessing. The brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) thought that they were better than him.
- **Astonishment** – If the blessing that someone receives is so great and lofty, a mean person gets astounded and cannot fathom how anyone

can gain so much in this world, and thus this astonishment becomes a source of his/her jealousy. Satan could not understand why Prophet Adam was given such a lofty status where all angels were commanded to prostrate to him.

- **Competition**–Naturally if someone is competing with another person for something, his nature begins to dislike him. After that, he wants to belittle him so as to feel superior. In contrast, if two people living in different towns have no such connection, there will be no jealousy between them. This is why we see that a scholar is jealous of another scholar, not a layperson, while laypeople are jealous of each other rather than scholars.
- **Supremacy** – a person's jealousy may also be fuelled by a love of supremacy, which is based on the desire for exclusivity in everything, wanting no one to share it.

The evils of jealousy

Jealousy is a fatal disease of the soul and has very evil consequences both in this world and the next. The worldly consequence is that a jealous person is always anxious, sad and grieved. He is pained at every affliction averted from others and this further adds to his misery until it eventually destroys him. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

“How capable Jealous is! And how just it is that it starts off with its perpetrator and ends up killing him”^{iv}

In addition, whatever blessings he would have received in this world and in the hereafter for all the good actions he performed would now equate to nothing since he has 'burnt' away all his actions:

Holy Prophet (saw) said: **“Jealousy consumes good deeds like fire consumes dry wood”^v**

Cures for jealousy:

The only way to cure jealousy is through knowledge of its evil nature – to recognise that jealousy is harmful to you –both to your faith and your worldly life – and not to the victim. After realisation of this a jealous person now

needs to change his previously evil deeds into righteous actions:

- Every time he feels impelled to say something evil, he must do the opposite - If his jealousy urges him to slander someone, he must force his tongue to praise him instead
- If his jealousy urges him to act arrogantly towards someone, he must force himself to act humbly and apologise instead
- If his jealous urges him to deny that person something, he must force himself to give more

The more a jealous person does this, the more the victim will realise this. The victim's heart will incline towards him and he will love him. As the victim shows love to the jealous person, the jealous person will return that love and out of all this a new understanding will be born that will shatter the building blocks of jealousy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) What is the difference between *al-Ḥasad* and *Al-Ghibtah*?

2) How can one purge himself off the evils of Jealousy?

3) Identify an area in your life where you usually get jealous and discuss what you can do to improve your situation.

Lesson 2: Life After the Well

Young Joseph (as) remained in the deep well for an unknown period of time. Was there anyone around who could save him?

Joseph knew that Allah (SWT) was fully aware of his situation and therefore he called onto Him for help. Allah (SWT) responded with what seemed to be a mere 'coincidence'. A trade caravan passed by the well and some of the men needed water to quench their thirst. One of them lowered a bucket and into the well and when he lifted it, to his surprise, Prophet Joseph emerged. The men hid Joseph in their caravan and they

sold him to the King of Egypt in the slave market. The Holy Qur'an says:

"And there came a wayfarer and they sent down a water drawer. He let down his pail into the pit. He said: What a 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)

JOSEPH DEFEATS DESIRES

Joseph found his place as a slave in the palace of the Egyptian King. He grew up into a handsome and attractive young man with great charm. Because of this, everyone loved him.

Like all previous prophets, when Prophet Joseph reached a certain age, Allah (SWT) blessed him with special knowledge and wisdom. This knowledge and wisdom is special because it is not acquirable through any formal education or through reading books. Instead, it is something that Allah (SWT) places into the hearts of those He wishes. These gifts empower them to witness the hidden realities of actions performed in this world. For us as ordinary beings to be recipients of such divine gifts, we need to become sincere doers of good i.e. perform good deeds solely for the sake of Allah (SWT):

"And when he (Joseph) attained his full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge, thus We reward the doers of good" (12:22)

As time passed, the king's wife put Joseph in a very seductive situation because she had fallen deeply in love with him. One day in the absence of her husband (the king), she desired to be very close to him. She locked all the doors in the palace (12 doors according to some narrations) and prepared a seductive room wherein she trapped Joseph and herself.

Remember that Joseph was a young handsome man and the king's wife was a beautiful woman. There was no one around to know about what would happen.

The king's wife took a cloth and covered an idol that was in the room out of respect for her God. Joseph said:

"What about my Lord who is All-Watching"?

She ran towards him, but Joseph ran away from her. Joseph called onto Allah (SWT) in desperation:

“I seek protection in Allah” (12:23)

Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him) refrained from even casting a glance at her. He desperately tried to get rid of her but she chased him. With the special knowledge he was endowed with, Joseph ‘saw’ the evil reality of the sin and he witnessed the glory and might of Allah (SWT) and thus was he able to protect himself.

Remember that whenever a servant calls upon Allah (SWT) sincerely for help, Allah (SWT) responds immediately. Allah (SWT) dispelled the evil of the woman from Prophet Joseph. If we pay close attention to the wordings of the Qur’an, we will notice that because of Joseph’s pure and sincere plea for help, Allah (SWT) caused the evil desires and indecency to turn away from him instead of Joseph being removed from the evil. The latter is a higher degree of divine protection:

“...Thus it was, that We turned away from him evil and illegal sexual intercourse. Surely, he was one of Our sincere, guided slaves” (12:24)

Instead of Allah (SWT) saying that, “We turned Yūsuf away from evil”, He says: “We turned evil away from Yūsuf”. While both forms suggest divine protection, the latter gives a meaning of a greater level of protection. The implied meaning of this structure tells us that Prophet Yūsuf was so pure in his essence that evil on approaching such purity was repelled by it, instead of Prophet Yūsuf (as) moving away from the impurity.

Just at that time the King appeared at the scene and got an idea of what had transpired. The king’s wife became frightened. She immediately tried to rid herself of any fault by pouring all the blame on Prophet Joseph.

Confident that he was innocent, Joseph responded to the accusation very calmly. He said:

"It was she that attempted to seduce me,"(12:26)

Nevertheless, because Joseph disobeyed the king’s wife, she would punish him. Joseph prayed to his Lord:

"O my Lord! Prison is more dear to me than that to which they (women) invite me to. Unless You (Allah) turn away their plot from me, I will feel inclined towards them and be one of the ignorant."(12:33)

SOME LESSONS FROM THE ABOVE:

Prophet Yūsuf (as) and his rejection of Zulaykha in spite of his ability to yield to her and in spite of her desire for him has earned him the praise of Allah (SWT) in the Holy Qur’an. Prophet Yūsuf (as) is the leader of all such people who have managed, through divine help, to fight Satan with regard to this powerful desire.

A person who gives in to his lustful desires will suffer both in this world and the next. Some of the negative consequences in this world are:

- A study carried out in 2005 to determine the effects of pre-marital relationship on teenagers’ emotional state showed that relationships usually regret later and are two to three times more likely to become depressed.
- The rate of divorce in couples who engage in pre-marital relationships is significantly higher than in those who do not. Each partner is usually unhappy with the other and they feel forced to satisfy themselves with other people.
- Eventually youth resort to masturbation and this bad habit has very serious physical and psychological effects. The punishment for this sin in the hereafter is also very severe.

CONTROLLING SEXUAL DESIRES

So, how can we avoid such a negative end and react like Prophet Joseph in controlling our desires and resist any temptation from the opposite gender? Below are a few tips:

1. The most effective practical way is to get married at an early age.

The Prophet (saw) said, 'When any young person gets married at the prime of his youth, his inner Satan cries out in rage, 'Woe unto him! Woe unto him! Two thirds of his faith have now been secured against me, and he has only to be careful of his duty to Allah in the remaining third.'^{vi}

However if this is difficult, then we can avoid falling into sins by other ways prescribed to us by Islam. Remember, the more one obeys his desire, the stronger it becomes until it totally overpowers him. Therefore, follow these practical tips to avoid such a state.

2. Lower your gaze! The Holy Qur'an says:

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things)” (The Holy Qur'an, 24:30)

The Prophet said: “The (evil) gaze is a poisoned arrow from Satan.....”^{vii}

An attack by this poisoned arrow destroys our spirituality and rids us completely of the sweetness in communicating with Allah (SWT).

3. Avoid being in a place or situation where a risk may present itself. This includes being alone with the opposite gender, either physically in a room or over the internet. Also avoid places such as beaches or public pools during busy times.

Remember the story of Prophet Muoses (as) when despite his strong faith, chose to walk ahead of the daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb (as), thus avoiding any potential risk of falling into sin.

4. Avoid having the opposite gender as a friend just for 'social' reasons. This includes friends on Facebook or any other social media sites. These are traps that Satan sets for us and although they seemingly appear harmless, they lead to greater sins.

5. Force yourself to engage in sporting activities or in other extra-curricular activities such as community service etc. Such activities exhaust our energies and prevent our thoughts from straying in the wrong way.

6. Be extremely selective in what you watch on TV/computer programs and read in magazines and newspapers. Most movies these days are packed with sexual themes and so it is better to avoid them totally.

7. Be very selective when choosing your friends. Pious and virtuous friends will have a positive impact on your personality and the opposite is also very true.

8. Always try to stay in a state of Wūḍū'— it acts as an invisible shield around us protecting us from all types of sins

9. Do not over eat. Consuming more food than we require leads to an increased production of testosterone which in turn increases sexual drive. The

best way to achieve this is to get up from the dining-table whilst we still being desirous of the food.

10. Take the daily prayers seriously as it keeps one away from evil and indecency.

“Verily, As-Salat (the prayer) prevents great sins...”
(29:45)

JOSEPH IS IMPRISONED

Allah (SWT) rescued Prophet Joseph from the mischief of the women by responding to his prayer. In prison, Prophet Joseph did not waste any time dwelling on his past. He did not complain about the injustices done to him by his brothers and now by the king's wife. Instead, he immediately began to preach the message of the Oneness of God to his prison-mates. It was only a matter of time before both Joseph's words and immaculate character touched the hearts of the prisoners. They exclaimed:

“...Verily, we consider you (Joseph) as one of the doers of good...” (12:36)

Joseph remained in prison for several years until he was eventually released by the king. The king had heard of Joseph's special dream-interpreting abilities and he desperately needed such a service^{viii}.

Prophet Joseph interpreted the king's complex dream in a way that no other person could.

The king was so amazed by the interpretation that he accepted Prophet Joseph as a minister in his government. Such was Joseph's journey. Allah (SWT) had rescued his beloved Prophet from the depths of the well and placed him into the seat of the minister of Egypt.

REUNION WITH THE FAMILY

Prophet Joseph was a very generous minister. His generosity was not only enjoyed by the people of Egypt but also those from surrounding towns. It so happened once, around 40 years after the incident of the well, that the brothers of Joseph who lived in neighbouring Kan'an desperately needed food. They had heard of the generosity of Prophet Joseph although they did not know who he was. When they visited Joseph, they did not recognise him, but he recognised his brothers.

Joseph treated them very kindly and made their stay very comfortable despite the fact that they had treated him unfairly. Eventually, Joseph introduced himself to them. While Joseph was now capable of taking revenge against his brothers, he instead chose to forgive them. He did not even make them feel guilty for what they had done to him in the past. So noble was his character! He said to his brothers:

"No blame on you this day, may Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!"
(12:92)

Prophet Joseph also eventually met with his beloved father Prophet Ya'qūb and the rest of his family. The moral of the story is that whoever remembers Allah (SWT) and is patient during difficult times, Allah (SWT) will grant them a huge reward.

"Verily, he who fears Allah with obedience to Him, and is patient, then surely, Allah makes not the reward of the good-doers be wasted" (12:90)

Review Questions

Q1. Which of these is a good way to protect ourselves from falling into sins with the opposite gender?

- Get married at an early age
- Read the story of Prophet Joseph
- Both a & b

Q2. According to the Holy Qur'an, which of these were the ingredients to Prophet Joseph's success?

- Piety and Patience
- Power and Wealth
- Physical beauty

ⁱ Holy Quran (17:44)

ⁱⁱ Holy Quran (3:120)

ⁱⁱⁱ Al Kafi – Vol 2 Pg 307

^{iv} Sharh Nahj Al Balagha Vol1 Pg 316

^v Al Kafi – Vol2 Pg 306

^{vi} Bihar al-Anwar, p. 221, no. 34

^{vii} Ibid p 97

^{viii} There are many stories of Allah (SWT) granting youth who had controlled their sexual desires with the special ability of being able to interpret dreams. Amongst these youth is Ibn Sireen