

نبي الله يوسف (ع)

PROPHET YÛSUF [A.S]

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Lesson 1: Prophet Yūsuf (as)

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 hadith attributed to Imam 'Ali (as) which discourages women from reading the story of Prophet Joseph because it would lead to bad temptations. We should be aware of such false ahadith 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 also because he possessed remarkable beauty both in his physical appearance and in his personality.

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

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, are always 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.

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 Yusuf out from house, they created a lie. They pretended to take Yusuf 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 Yusuf here is interesting. He did not refuse them to take Prophet Yusuf 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).

Prophet Ya'qūb eventually consented. The brothers executed their plan. Prophet Yūsuf (as), only a young boy, was left in the bottom of the well for an unknown period until he was rescued by a passing trade caravan. Did Prophet Yūsuf (as) deserve this treatment from his brothers? Of course he didn't! Did he then develop any hatred toward them? Did he pray to Allah (SWT) to punish them? We will discuss how Prophet Yūsuf (as) dealt with his brothers later in the story. However, what is clear is that when Allah (SWT) wishes to raise the ranks of his servants in this world and in paradise, He puts them through several trials. Being left alone in the bottom of a well was just the first of many such trials that Prophet Yūsuf (as) would have to face.

JEALOUSY AND ITS EVILS

WHAT IS JEALOUSY?

Jealousy is a mental state in which a person wishes for that a blessing or talent possessed by another person is taken away from them. Sometimes, the jealous person does not even care whether he would then get that blessing himself or not.

The brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) possessed such characteristics. Whilst they did not mind not receiving special attention from their father toward themselves, they simply could not tolerate the fact that Prophet Yūsuf (as) enjoyed it.

Jealousy in a person begins as a negative thought and if not stopped, can cause the person to commit unfathomable crimes such as murder – as some the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as) initially intended.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF JEALOUSY

- A jealous person will never enjoy the pleasures this world and will face punishment in the Hereafter, unless he repents. It was *this* unhappiness that the brothers of Joseph thought they could distance from themselves by throwing him into the well. Imam ‘Ali (as) said:

“The fruit of jealousy is the misery of this world and the Hereafter”ⁱ

- Jealousy eats away all good deeds and the person eventually loses his faith. One again, we see this from the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (as). Remember they were all sons of a Prophet! One would expect them to be faithful and righteous. However, jealousy ate away their faith and caused them to throw their innocent, young brother into the well. Imam ‘Ali (as) has said:

“Jealousy consumes faith like the fire consumes dry wood”ⁱⁱ

- In another Ḥadith, we are warned against jealousy since it is the seed of disbelief in Allah (SWT).
- Jealousy negatively affects one’s mental and physical health so much so that it can end up killing the target of their jealousy. Imam ‘ (as) said:

“How capable jealousy is! And how just it is, that it starts off with its perpetrator (the jealous person) and ends up killing him!”ⁱⁱⁱ

PRACTICAL CURES FOR JEALOUSY

Like every other spiritual malady, Islam has also provided a prescription for curing jealousy. We will mention a few practical ones:

- To force ourselves to be kind and affectionate toward the person we are jealous of. To force ourselves to respect and honour him and to always speak of him positively in his absence. Initially, we will find this to be very difficult but with some persistence, this attitude will become second nature.
- To study the negative effects of jealousy both on our physical health and on our spirituality. We should also study the evil consequences faced by jealous people in the past and thereby understand that we too are not immune from those. As human beings, we are created to naturally avoid those things that are harmful to us, and jealousy is certainly the most harmful, as Imam ‘Ali (as) says:

”Jealousy is the worst disease”^{iv}

- The most effective step to eradicate the roots of jealousy from our minds and hearts is in its earliest stage - similar to our physical health whereby the sooner a cancer is detected, the better the chances that a given treatment will be effective. We should carefully ‘watch’ over our thoughts and as soon as any negative thoughts about others arise, we should chop them down.

IS IT BAD TO DESIRE WHAT OTHERS HAVE?

There is nothing wrong with being desirous of the good others have without wanting them to lose it. This is called *al-ghibṭah* in Arabic and has positive effects since it causes a person to work hard toward achieving these things. A jealous person on the other hand wishes that the other person loses whatever position, wealth or skill he has and therefore as discussed, it is very bad.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1. Which ONE of the following is TRUE?

- a. Prophet Joseph was the son of Prophet Ya’qūb
- b. Prophet Ya’qūb was the son of Prophet Joseph
- c. Prophet Ya’qūb had 12 brothers, one of whom was Prophet Joseph

Q2. Which ONE of the following is TRUE?

- a. Jealousy negatively affects our physical, mental and spiritual health
- b. If a person is moderately jealous then this is good for him.
- c. The best way to treat jealousy is by completely ignoring the person we are jealous toward.

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."

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"^{vi}

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)

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,"^{viii}

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."^{ix}

SOME LESSONS FROM THE ABOVE:

The main lesson we can get this part of Prophet Joseph's story revolves around staying chaste before we get married since the effects in this world and the next are disastrous. Some of these negative effects 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.

LESSONS FROM PROPHET JOSEPH'S LIFE

We should be aware that any intimate relationships that we have with the opposite gender prior to marriage are *harām* and therefore punishable both in this world and in the hereafter. Such a person will never enjoy a happy life after marriage. Divorces are usually the end result as each partner is usually unhappy with the other and they cheat on themselves. Eventually, the whole family becomes separate and fragmented. In the hereafter also, such person will undergo severe punishment.

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?

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.'^{ix}

However if this is difficult, then we can avoid falling into sins by other ways prescribed to us by Islam:

- Avoid being in a place or situation where such a risk may present itself. This includes being alone with the opposite gender, either physically or virtually i.e. over the internet. Even Prophet Joseph preferred to be in prison, away from all the mischief, just so that he is safe.
- Avoid having the opposite gender as a friend just for 'social' reasons. This includes friends on Facebook or any other social media sites.
- Ensure that you are physically active in sport or always occupied in other extra-curricular activities such as community service etc. Such activities prevent our thoughts from straying in the wrong way.
- Always take 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^x.

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'ān 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 (by abstaining from sins and evil deeds, and by performing righteous good deeds), 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?

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

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

- a. Piety and Patience
- b. Power and Wealth
- c. Physical beauty

ⁱ Scales of Wisdom, Pg 289., Hadith No. 1600

ⁱⁱ Scales of Wisdom, Pg 290., Hadith No. 1607

ⁱⁱⁱ Scales of Wisdom, Pg 289., Hadith No. 1599

^{iv} Scales of Wisdom, Pg 289., Hadith No. 1597

^v Holy Quran 12:19-20

^{vi} Holy Quran 12:23

^{vii} Holy Qur'an 12:26

^{viii} Holy Qur'an 12:33

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

^{xx} 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