

Section 4: Yusuf Prefers Prison Against the Temptation

Surah Yusuf – Verse 30

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتَاهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ۖ قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا ۗ
إِنَّا لَنَرَاهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

30. “And some women in the city said: ‘The wife of the ‘Aziz has sought to seduce her slave from his (pure) self; he has affected her with love. Verily we see her in manifest error’.”

The term /šaqaf/ refers to the complications of the upper part of the heart, or of the pericardium. It is said that the Qur’anic phrase /šaqafaha hubban/ means that someone’s love has intermingled with the heart of the beloved which, in turn, increases the intensity of the love.

The incident between the wife of the ‘Aziz and Yusuf was a private affair, which the ‘Aziz had sought to cover up, but such affairs do not remain undisclosed for long, especially when they occur in the palaces of kinds and dwellings of wealthy aristocrats where rumor and hearsay abound.

So finally the secret leaked out of the palace. Some of the women of the city spread the rumor that the wife of ‘Aziz had tried to seduce her slave, and that her love for him had overcome her to the extent that it had conquered her entire heart.

The verse says:

“And some women in the city said: ‘The wife of the ‘Aziz has sought to seduce her slave from his (pure) self; he has affected her with love...’”

So they laid the blame squarely at her door, saying:

“... Verily we see her in manifest error’.”

Those women, who said this statement and blamed Zulaykha therewith, were a group of Egyptian aristocratical women that, from the point of sensuality, were not so far from her.

Since they had not have Yusuf, idiomatically, they were hypocritically prudish and, because of that love, considered the wife of ‘Aziz in manifest error.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 31

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكَأً وَءَاتَتْ كُلَّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ

31. “So when she heard about their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a repast for them. Then she gave each one of them a knife, and said to him (Yusuf): ‘Come forth to them.’ When they saw him, they extolled him, and (in their amazement) cut their hands and said (exclaimed): ‘Allah Blameless! This is not a human being. This is not other than a noble angel!’”

When the wife of ‘Aziz became aware of the intrigue of the Egyptian women, she became very angry. Then she came up with an idea. She invited them to an elaborate party which she had organized for them and gave each person a sharp knife to peel the fruit served.

The verse says:

“So when she heard about their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a repast for them. Then she gave each one of them a knife...”

From the sequence of events, one can readily infer that she did not care much for her husband and was not afraid of him, so she had not learnt anything from the previous scandal.

She then ordered Yusuf to come into the hall so that they could see his beauty for themselves and stop blaming her for what she did.

The verse says:

“...and said to him (Yusuf): ‘Come forth to them.’...”

According to several narrations, when the eyes of the Egyptian women fell upon him they were captivated by his unearthly beautiful stature and shining face.

The verse says:

“...When they saw him, they extolled him, and (in their amazement) cut their hands...”

They were so overwhelmed that they fell head over heels in love with him, which profoundly embarrassed him.

As soon as they saw how abstinent and chaste he was, and his attractive eyes in his innocent face which had blushed from modesty and shame clearly illustrated these facts, they all exclaimed that that young man had never done anything wrong in his life, he was not an ordinary man, but was a sublime heavenly angel.

The verse continues saying:

“...and said (exclaimed): ‘Allah Blameless! This is not a human being. This is not other than a noble angel!’”

Explanations

1. The Arabic term /haša/ means: ‘excepting, with the exception’. It was a custom in that time that when they wanted to know a person exempted from an indecency, at first they exempted Allah and then that person.
2. The wife of ‘Aziz was quite politically astute, through the banquet she had arranged she caught the women unawares and was able to expose the vulnerabilities of the rivals in that locality.
3. Talking about other people’s problems is not always a show of compassion. It can be the result of jealousy, or part of a plot against them.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 32

قَالَتْ فَذَلِكُنَّ الَّذِي لُمْتُنَنِي فِيهِ وَلَقَدْ رَاودْتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فَاسْتَعْصَمَ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا
ءَامُرُهُ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونَا مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ

32. “She said: ‘This is before you he about whom you did blame me! And indeed I sought to seduce him from his (pure) self, but he proved continent. And (now), if he does not do what I command him, he shall certainly be imprisoned, and will certainly be of the humiliated!’”

At this moment, the wife of the 'Aziz turned to those women who used to criticize her for her intense love for Yusuf and said that although they had not seen him before, only getting a first glimpse of him caused them to lose their hearts.

How could they possibly have blamed her, when she was exposed to looking at that beautiful face frequently day and night? She also admitted that he was innocent indicating that she was the one who did the seducing.

The verse says:

“She said: ‘This is before you he about whom you did blame me! And indeed I sought to seduce him from his (pure) self...”

Thus while she was justifying her behavior, she explicitly confessed her culpability saying that she was the one who invited him to engage in an illicit act which he had refused to do.

The verse continues saying:

“...but he proved continent...”

However, without expressing her remorse, she threatened him with imprisonment and humiliation if he did not acquiesce to her demands.

She said:

“...And (now), if he does not do what I command him, he shall certainly be imprisoned, and will certainly be of the humiliated!”

Highlights

1– Psychological and social conditions influence individual morality. When 'Aziz' wife was afraid of exposing her evil actions, she closed the doors to the room. However, when she found the Egyptian women on her side, she openly stated that:

“And indeed I sought to seduce him from his self”

The same case applies to society. When people are no longer sensitive to evil doing, it becomes easier to commit sin.

It may be for this very reason that we invoke in the supplication of Kumayl: *“O Allah! Forgive me for all the sins which prevent me from being chaste and break my abstinence”*, for at first, committing sins is difficult for man, but as soon as the barriers are broken, it becomes easy.

2– The liar is always exposed and scandalized. The one who claimed that Yusuf wanted to seduce her

yesterday, and had had evil intentions towards him, today openly confesses that she herself had had the intention of gratifying her sexual desires towards him.

3- It is true, that at times the enemy also testifies to the honesty of the person he opposes.

4- Residing in palaces paves the way for the loss of one's chastity.

(Although the 'Aziz realized that his wife had betrayed him and he asked her to repent of her guilt, they did not become alienated from each other and he did not distance between his wife and Yusuf.)

Surah Yusuf – Verse 33

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ
إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

33. “He said: ‘My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me; and if You turn not their guile from me, I may incline towards them and become of the ignorant ones’.”

Interestingly, some commentators have narrated an astonishing subject and have said that some of the Egyptian women in the gathering supported the wife of the 'Aziz and, giving right to her, defended her behavior.

They surrounded Yusuf and every one of them tried in her own way to persuade him to submit to the desires of the wife of 'Aziz or to her own, in other words, they all had the same intentions as Zulaykha had.

It is in the face of this overwhelming temptation that Yusuf cries out to his Lord that he would welcome a life prison than the corruption to which those women were inviting him.

In a tradition attributed to Abu Hamzah al Thumali, it is narrated that Imam Ali-ibn-il-Hussein (as) said that as soon as those women had parted company with Zulaykha, each one of them sent someone in private to Yusuf and requested an audience with him.

Yusuf had been surrounded by a series of difficulties from all sides. However, being already prepared for any mishap that might befall, he turned to Allah immediately without entering into any relationship with these passionate, promiscuous women and sought His help.

The verse says:

“He said: ‘My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me;...”

He was in the prime of his youth, and naturally, the lower aspect of his soul could have inclined towards them and he would have found himself among the ignorant.

But, since he knew that in all cases, especially at the time of crises, there is no way to safety except relying on Allah, he trusted in Allah and asked Him help by saying:

“...and if You turn not their guile from me, I may incline towards them and become of the ignorant ones’.”

Points to Remember

1. Men of Allah prefer all the difficulties that come with a life of honor to a sinful life of luxury.
2. By seeking assistance from the Almighty, man can distance himself from any kind of sin and temptation under any kind of circumstance.
3. Hardship and suffering cannot provide man with the justification to commit sin.
4. Man's character depends on his soul and not on his body. If man's soul is free and he is in prison, it can be like a paradise for him. And if his soul is under pressure, even a palace may become a prison for him.
5. To please people at the expense of displeasing Allah is manifest ignorance.
6. As was said, the wife of 'Aziz and the other women employed various means to achieve their objectives. They showed intense love and desire, total submission and later profuse promises of great rewards, finally, when all of that failed, they started threatening Yusuf with imprisonment.

This is the usual methodology that all dictators and despots resort to throughout the ages. It has even been experimented many times that they usually at first show excessive moderation and leniency towards men of Allah to make them acquiesce to their designs, putting on a smiling face on one occasion, and, on the other, when they fail to achieve their objectives in this way, they resort to the cruelest of threats sometimes at the end of the same sitting that they had with together.

It never occurs to them that they show contradictions and double standards in their behavior, illustrating an abhorring lack of integrity which deserves the utmost humiliation and kinds of censure.

The reason for this is obvious. They are only after their own objectives, and the means are not important for them, because for them, the ends justify the means. The weak and foolish, in this course, may submit themselves sooner or later to these attempts and thus get caught in their trap forever.

But the men of Allah, who are enlightened by the light of faith, easily pass through all these trials showing their steadfastness and irreconcilability with evil. They go as far as courting their death, for

victory is the ultimate aim.

Victory here does not only mean their own victory but it also denotes the victory of their school of thought based on principle rather than caprice.

7. There are always some people like the whimsical and promiscuous women of Egypt who regard themselves as innocent and clean when they are not principal players on the scene always pretending to be more virtuous and innocent than some others.

They would think the wife of the 'Aziz to be vulgar and seductive. But, as soon as the tables are turned, they immediately lose their hearts and prove that whatever virtues they had claimed had been utterly meaningless.

Whereas Zulaykha had fallen in love with Yusuf after frequent meetings with him and after some years of life, these women fell into the very same situation, in the same meeting and after one glance at him, cutting their own hands with knives instead of the fruit they were supposed to cut.

8. When we are facing the attacks of powerful evil forces, and we find ourselves teetering on the edge of the abyss of destruction, we must turn to Allah for protection. We must seek His support, for if His assistance is not there, nothing can be done for us.

This is the lesson which the great Yusuf, the infallible one, has taught us. It is he who says to Allah if their evil plots are not averted from him, he would tend to incline towards them, and he would be left alone in his plight and will be no more. It is holy Allah Who is the Protector, not one's abilities, powers, or mere virtues.

This state of absolute dependence on Allah (s.w.t.) does not only provide man with a power and perseverance which is unlimited, but it also makes it possible for him to enjoy the hidden Divine favors as well, favors which are impossible to explain and can be only witnessed and accepted. Such people are they who are sheltered by Allah both in this world and the Hereafter.

In one tradition, the Prophet of Islam (S) says that there are seven groups that will be sheltered by Allah on the Day when there will be no shade except His:

1. A just pioneer and leader.
2. A young man who has been trained in servitude unto Allah from the beginning of his life.
3. He whose heart is attached to mosques and places where Allah is worshipped and whenever he leaves those places, he ceaselessly thinks of the time when he can return thereto.
4. Those who work together in obeying Allah, and when they depart from one another, the spiritual bond of their unity remains firm.

5. Those who when they hear Allah's name mentioned, have tears in their eyes because of their sense of responsibility before Allah or for fear of their sins.
6. The man who says that he is in awe of Allah when he is invited to consort with a beautiful woman and he refuses to commit sin.
7. A man who assists those who are in need and provides charity for them in such a way that his left hand does not know what his right hand has done.

Some Narrations Regarding Fear of Allah

1. The Prophet of Allah (S) said:

"He who stops committing sins for the fear of Allah, He, the High, provides him with satisfaction on the Day of Judgment." ¹

2. Once Zayd ibn Suhan asked Amir-ul-Mu'minin (as):

*"Which man is superior with Allah, the Almighty, the Glorious?" He answered: "He who is more in awe of Allah, more aware of piety and morality, and is less inclined to worldliness."*²

3. The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

"The highest ranking man before Allah is he who is the most in awe of Allah." ³

4. Amir-ul-Mu'minin (as) said:

*"How fortunate is he who finds it necessary to be Allah fearing and obeys Allah both in private and in public."*⁴

5. The Prophet of Allah (S) said:

*"How fortunate are those whose fear of Allah prevents them from fearing others."*⁵

Some Narrations Regarding Treason

1. The Prophet of Allah (S) said:

*"The believer accepts all inherent traits and characteristics, except treason and lying."*⁶

2. Amir-ul-Mu'minin (as) said:

*"Abstain from betraying others which is the most heinous of sins, and truly, a traitor will be caught in the torment and torture of the Fire because of his own treachery."*⁷

3. The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

*“There are four characteristics, when each of which appears in a house it causes for the destruction of that house, and blessings do not make headway in that house because of those circumstances. They are; treason, theft, drinking alcoholic beverages, and fornication (or adultery).”*⁸

4. Amir-ul-Mu'minin (as) said:

*“The ultimate in betrayal is betraying a friend and breaking vows and promises.”*⁹

5. Imam Baqir (as) said:

*“It is certain that a true believer never betrays (anyone).”*¹⁰

Surah Yusuf – Verse 34

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

34. “So his Lord answered him and He turned away from him their guile; verily He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.”

According to the Divine promise, Allah always accepts the supplications of the pious. Those sincere fighters for a holy cause (whether it be against one's self, or an outward enemy) and those who assist others in goodness will always get a Divine response to their requests.

Yusuf was not left alone in such a dangerous situation. Allah answered his prayer. Indeed, as the Qur'an says, Allah is the Hearer, the Knower.

The verse says:

“So his Lord answered him and He turned away from him their guile; verily He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.”

He hears the prayers and supplications of His subjects. He is completely aware of their inmost secrets, and He knows the solution to all their problems.

Some commentators reject that while Yusuf knew that Allah would protect him and return away their snare, why did he pray? The answer is that the prayer of Yusuf to Allah was that he could overcome their hearts so that they would dispense with their guile, and Allah answered him either.

As a result of his supplication, the women lost all hope in achieving their objectives and all the tricks that

were within their means proved to be of no benefit to them, so, in despair, they stopped chasing him. It was then that Yusuf felt tranquility.

Zulaykha, after seeing the hopelessness of her attempts, was ready to send him to prison.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 35

ثُمَّ بَدَأَ لَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا الْآيَاتِ لِيَسْجُنَّهٗ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

35. “Then it seemed to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), to imprison him till a time.”

From Palace to Prison

The strange meeting between the Egyptian women and Yusuf in the palace of the ‘Aziz, with its particular tumult, ended. The fear of the increasing damage the sex scandal was causing to the prestige of his family.

In the view of people, it was becoming more and more every day. The ‘Aziz and his advisors thought that the only way to rescue the situation was to remove Yusuf from the scene entirely, and the best way to do that was to send him to prison.

This would not only help the people forget about the situation, but would also make it seem that real culprit had been Yusuf himself.

The Qur’an in this holy verse says:

“Then it seemed to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), to imprison him till a time.”

In such morally decrepit environments, apparently freedom only belongs to those who are corrupt and so does everything else, whereas the pure and God-fearing individuals, like Yusuf, must be isolated and imprisoned. However, such a situation never lasts forever.

Explanations

1. Only a person with a distracted mind would engage in a fruitless act causing trouble for everyone, like throwing an important needle into the bottom of a well which could not be found and taken out by a hundred wise men.
2. Love is such a distraction. A woman fell in love and although many men and high-ranking officials of

a country joined together to solve the problems caused by that woman, they were unable to find a solution.

3. Trials and courts are held in default of a person often as ceremonial gestures in palaces where despots and dictators live, assure the condemnation of the innocent.

4. Those people who dwell in luxurious palaces are usually reckless and brash. Despite all the reasons in his favour, Yusuf was still convicted and sent to prison.

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1. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 67 p. 498
 2. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 74, p. 378
 3. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 74, p. 180
 4. Ghurar ul Hikam, vol. 4, p. 239
 5. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 74, p. 126
 6. Kanz ul-'Ummal, vol. 3, p. 468
 7. Ghurar ul-Hikam vol. 1, p. 150
 8. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 76, p. 125, The Amali of Tusi
 9. Ghurar ul-Hikam, vol. 2, p. 505
 10. Bihar-ul-'Anwar, vol. 100, p. 175
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