

Section 9: Yusuf Meets His Brother

Surah Yusuf – Verse 69

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰ إِلَيْهِ أَخَاهُ قَالَ إِنِّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

69. “And, when they entered unto Yusuf, he lodged his (own) brother (Benyamin) with himself, saying: ‘I am your brother; so do not grieve at what they were doing’.”

According to the narrations, when Ya‘qub’s (as) sons arrived in Egypt, Yusuf hosted them and ordered a table full of various foods for every couple of them.

Benjamin remained seated alone, so Yusuf seated him near himself, then he allocated every two persons for one room and made Benjamin his roommate.

While together, Benjamin talked about the infidelities of the brothers and the crimes which they had committed the years before against their brother, Yusuf.

At this moment Yusuf, who had become impatient, exclaimed:

“Stop worrying! I am that very Yusuf!”

He uttered these words so emphatically *“Indeed, I am your brother!”* that it left no possibility of doubt in the truth of his words.

The verse says:

“And, when they entered unto Yusuf, he lodged his (own) brother (Benyamin) with himself, saying: ‘I am your brother; so do not grieve at what they were doing’.”

As for the concept of the sentence: “***So do not grieve at what they were doing***”, there are two possibilities worth consideration.

The first is that Benjamin should stop getting depressed about the past conduct of his brothers.

The second is that it is probable that the plan which was to be put into practice by his slaves for Benjamin’s own goods i.e., placing the cup among the loads in order for him to stay with him, should not be a reason for worry.

Explanations

1. The brothers who boasted of their power the previous day, claiming that they were a powerful group, had to undergo a significant amount of humiliation in order to secure their food supplies.

They practically had to kiss Yusuf’s threshold in a humiliating manner.

2. When a blessing is obtain, the concerning former afflictions should be renounced

(Yusuf and Benjamin had a face to face meeting then they forgot their past sorrows.)

3. Before the execution of any plan and project, the innocent must be spiritually ready and must clearly know the justification for the action. Benjamin was told that he would be kept in Egypt under the pretext of being discovered as a thief to which he agreed.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 70

فَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُمْ بِجَهَّازِهِمْ جَعَلَ السَّقَايَةَ فِي رَحْلِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ أَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ أَيَّتُهَا الْعِيرُ إِنَّكُمْ لَسَارِقُونَ

70. “Then, when he provided them with their provisions, he put the drinking cup into his brother’s saddle-bag. Then a herald shouted: ‘O you men of the caravan! You are certainly thieves!’”

The Arabic term /siqayah/ refers to a container out of which one drinks water. The word /rahl/ means a pouch or saddle-bag which is loaded onto a camel. The term /‘ir/ means: a caravan of camels which carries food supplies.

This incident is the fruit of one of two creative plans which Yusuf designed. In the first instance he hid the brothers’ capital among the load of grain so that they might once again return. This time, he planted the precious cup in his brother’s saddlebag in order to retain him in Egypt as a deposit. It says:

“Then, when he provided them with their provisions, he put the drinking cup into his brother’s

saddle-bag. Then a herald shouted: ‘O you men of the caravan! You are certainly thieves!’”

Some Islamic narrations say that during the meeting between Benjamin and Yusuf, the latter asked Benjamin if he would like to stay with him. Benjamin said that he would, but he mentioned that his father had gotten his brothers to swear to return him to their father.

Yusuf replied that he would devise a plan for him to stay.

Question: Why were these innocent people accused of theft?

Answer: Benjamin, with full understanding, declared his approval of the scheme for him to stay with his brother Yusuf. Although his other brothers became briefly upset and desperate because of the accusation, they were acquitted after an inspection.

In addition, Yusuf’s agents were unaware that he had planted the cup in his brother’s saddlebag, so they naturally proclaimed that the brothers were thieves.

Even if Yusuf had said that they were thieves, still there would have been no problem, since, according to Imam Sadiq (as), what they had stolen was not specified, and the meaning of thieves applied to them really meant that they had stolen Yusuf from his father.

In the story, no one said that they had stolen the cup, but that it was lost. Thus they were thieves, the thieves of Yusuf, not the thieves of the cup.¹

The Prophet (S) has said: that he who tells a white lie in order to reform or to remove conflict between others is not counted as a lie. It was then that he recited this verse.²

Explanations

It is permitted to fabricate scenes in order to discover an offence³, and for the sake of superior objectives it is also admissible to attribute theft to an innocent man who has agreed to play the role of the thief.⁴

If there is one wrongdoer in a group, people will often hold the whole group responsible.

“O you men of the caravan! You are certainly thieves.”

Surah Yusuf – Verses 71 – 72

قَالُوا وَأَقْبَلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ مَاذَا تَفْقَدُونَ

قَالُوا نَفَقْدُ صُوعَ الْمَلِكِ وَلِمَنْ جَاءَ بِهِ حِمْلُ بَعِيرٍ وَأَنَا بِهِ زَعِيمٌ

71. “They said, while turning to them: ‘What is it that you have lost?’”

72. “They said: ‘We have lost the king’s cup, and whoever brings it shall receive (the reward of) a camel-load, and I guarantee it’.”

The Arabic terms /suwa‘/ and /siqayah/ are often used with same sense, meaning a vessel out of which water was drunk and which was also used to measure out quantities of wheat.⁵ This term illustrates the efficiency, and enjoyment of a single device that encompasses a wide range of functions.

The Arabic word /himl/ means a load while /haml/ means a load that is hidden, such as rain which is hidden within the clouds or the child in its mother’s womb.

The Qur’anic sentence saying: ‘whoever brings it shall receive (the reward of) a camel’s load’, in the literature of Islamic jurisprudence, is known as /ju‘alah/ or /ji‘alah/ (wage) which has precedence in terms of legal credibility.

It says:

“They said, while turning to them: ‘What is it that you have lost?’”

“They said: ‘We have lost the king’s cup, and whoever brings it shall receive (the reward of) a camel-load...”

The speaker of this statement, for a more emphasis, said:

“...and I guarantee it’.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 73

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا جِئْنَا لِنُفْسِدَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا سَارِقِينَ

73. “They said: ‘By Allah! You know well (that) we have not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves’.”

The brothers, disturbed by these words, were not aware of the roots of the problem. In their reply, they seem certain that the Egyptian authorities knew that they were not the type to steal.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘By Allah! You know well (that) we have not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves’.”

This statement of the brothers shows that probably the Egyptians had a record of their previous transactions; and now the travelers said that they had declared their readiness to return the capital that was hidden among their supplies on the previous trip.

So how could those who, returning from a remote country to give back the capital found amongst their supplies be guilty of stealing? Moreover, it is said that on their arrival in Egypt, they had firmly closed the mouths of their camels with bridles so that they would not graze on other’s farms or do any damage to fields.

How would they commit such an ugly vice?

Explanations

1. Having a clean record is a powerful argument for exoneration from suspicion.
2. Burglary and theft are examples of corruption on the earth.

A country should monitor the arrival and departure of foreign travelers especially in times of crisis to be sure about their intentions.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 74

قَالُوا فَمَا جَزَاؤُهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ كَاذِبِينَ

74. “They said: ‘What is the penalty thereof, if you are liars?’”

The punishment inflicted upon thieves has varied among different nations due to differences in their living standards.

Theft is a major crime that causes economic disruption and social insecurity; as such it has been always cited as a crime in all legal statutes and customs in all parts of the world. The penalty prescribed for theft has been as varied as the civilizations and cultures of the world.

In Egypt, which was very affluent at that time, the penalty for theft consisted of lashes and imprisonment. In Palestine, on the other hand, the penalty was that the thief would be put into bondage commensurate with the amount he had stolen, because theft was a transgression against the people’s rights and had economical motives.

Thus the import of the question posed, i.e., the penalty if they were proven to be liars and had stolen the cup, is that the brothers would have to choose between the Egyptian and Palestinian penalties.

Anyway, it seems that the questioner was Hadrat Yusuf himself since he knew that the brothers would accept judgment according to the regulations and laws of Kan'an which is exactly what he had anticipated they would choose.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘What is the penalty thereof, if you are liars?’”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 75

قَالُوا جَزَاؤُهُ مَنْ وُجِدَ فِي رَحْلِهِ فَهُوَ جَزَاؤُهُ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ

75. “They said: ‘The penalty thereof is that he in whose bag it is found shall himself be (held as bondsman) in penalty for it. Thus do we punish the unjust’.”

Tribes in the past used to punish thieves by putting them into servitude.⁶ And there is no exceptions or discrimination in law, whoever was found to be a thief would be enslaved. Of course, the retribution of a wrongdoer in a foreign country can often be decided according to the laws of his country.

Thus in Egypt the guilty could be judged by the laws of his land and not according to the laws of the host country. The Qur'an sees theft as an outstanding instance of oppression and thus in the noble verse it calls the thief an 'unjust' one.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘The penalty thereof is that he in whose bag it is found shall himself be (held as bondsman) in penalty for it. Thus do we punish the unjust’.”

Since the law in Kan'an was that the thief must lose his freedom in servitude, the brothers said that his penalty was the same one in whose load it was found; i.e., the thief himself would be its penalty (prevention). Yusuf had achieved his objective which was to detain his brother.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 76

فَبَدَأَ بِأَوْعِيَتِهِمْ قَبْلَ وِعَاءِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ اسْتَخْرَجَهَا مِنْ وِعَاءِ أَخِيهِ كَذَلِكَ كِدْنَا لِيُوسُفَ مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي دِينِ الْمَلِكِ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَنْ نَشَاءُ وَفَوْقَ

كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

76. “And so he began (the search) with their bags before the bag of his brother. Then he drew it out from his brother’s bag. Thus did We contrive for Yusuf’s sake; for he could not take his brother in accordance with the king’s law, except that Allah willed. We raise the degrees of whomsoever We please, and above everyone endued with knowledge, there is one more knowing.”

At this moment, Yusuf ordered everything to be unloaded and each load to be examined separately. However, in order not to make them suspicious, he examined the loads of the brothers before examining Benjamin’s load from which he produced the ‘stolen cup’.

The verse says:

“And so he began (the search) with their bags before the bag of his brother. Then he drew it out from his brother’s bag...”

As soon as the cup was discovered, the brothers were extremely astonished and a mountain of grief and despair overtook them. Their brother had apparently committed theft, which was a blow to their reputation, a matter which would jeopardize their standing with the ‘Aziz.

And what answer would they give their father? How could he believe that it was not their fault this time?

Then the Qur’an adds that this was how Allah contrived the matter for Yusuf’s sake in order that he would keep his brother with him in a manner that other brothers could not resist. The important problem was that Yusuf could not retain his brother by the law of the king except that Binyamin would be beaten and put in prison.

That was why he made the brothers confess what the retribution of theft was if one of them would commit it. They answered that according to the tradition of their land the thief himself would be kept.

The verse says:

“...Thus did We contrive for Yusuf’s sake; for he could not take his brother in accordance with the king’s law, except that Allah willed...”

This verse indicates that Yusuf’s actions according to the laws and traditions of his brothers’ own land, was performed according to the Divine command. This was a plan that protected his brother, provided a test for his father, Ya‘qub, and was an evaluation of his other brothers as well.

In the end, after every test, there is an elevation in rank for those who have the merit. This rank is achieved by going through tests just as Yusuf had successfully done.

Nevertheless, regardless of whatever rank we achieve, there will always be someone superior in knowledge comparing some others. In the hierarchy of knowledge, Allah is at the peak because His knowledge is infinite and is not confined.

The verse says:

“... We raise the degrees of whomsoever We please, and above everyone endued with knowledge, there is one more knowing.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 77

قَالُوا إِن يَسْرِقْ فَقَدْ سَرَقَ أَخٌ لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَأَسْرَهَا يُوسُفُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَلَمْ يُبْدِهَا لَهُمْ
قَالَ أَنْتُمْ شَرُّ مَكَانًا وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَصِفُونَ

77. “They said: ‘If he steals, a brother of his had stolen before.’ But Yusuf kept it secret within his heart and did not reveal it to them. He said: ‘You are in a worse situation, and Allah knows best (the truth) of what you state’.”

The brothers eventually came to the conclusion that their brother Benjamin was a thief and his reputation would ruin their supposedly good relations with the ‘Aziz.

Thus, in order to distance themselves from him, they attributed it to a family trait in so far that his brother Yusuf, like him, who was of the same mother, had also been a thief. They both, on the other hand, should be treated differently because they themselves were from another mother.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘If he steals, a brother of his had stolen before.’...”

On hearing such words, Yusuf became very saddened but he kept it to himself and did not reveal his feelings or his opinion. Even though they had committed the great sin of false attribution and slander he did not answer them. He just went on to tell them in very subtle terms that they had sunk far lower than the brother they had so unjustly accused.

The verse says:

“...But Yusuf kept it secret within his heart and did not reveal it to them. He said: ‘You are in a worse situation, and Allah knows best (the truth) of what you state’.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 78

قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ إِنَّ لَهُ أَبًا شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا فَخُذْ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

78. “They said: ‘O’ ‘Aziz! He has a father, aged and advanced in years, so take one of us in his place; verily we see you of the doers of good’.”

As they realized that in accord with the penalty to which they themselves had agreed, their younger brother Benjamin would have to stay with the ‘Aziz and that they had made a pledge with their father to do their utmost to protect and return him safely to Ya‘qub, they pleaded with Yusuf who was yet unknown to them to take one of them instead.

The verse says:

“They said: ‘O’ ‘Aziz! He has a father, aged and advanced in years, so take one of us in his place;...”

They explained the reason of their request that they had realized the ‘Aziz one of the righteous and that was not the first time that he showed them kindness, then it was better to complete his affection by according their request.

The verse says:

“...verily we see you of the doers of good’.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 79

قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ أَنْ نَأْخُذَ إِلَّا مَنْ وَجَدْنَا مَتَاعَنَا عِنْدَهُ إِنَّا إِذًا لَظَالِمُونَ

79. “He said: ‘Allah forbid that we take (anyone) other than him with whom we found our property. Indeed (if we did so) we would certainly be of the unjust ones’.”

Yusuf immediately turned down this proposal, implying that a just person will never punish an innocent man for an offence which had been committed by someone else. To do such a thing would make one an oppressor.

The verse says:

“He said: ‘Allah forbid that we take (anyone) other than him with whom we found our property. Indeed (if we did so) we would certainly be of the unjust ones’.”

It is interesting to note that Yusuf never uses the word thief to refer to his brother, on the contrary, he says “***him with whom we have found our property***”. This is one of the signs indicating that he was careful to use no offensive language in all of his life.

Explanations

1. It is necessary for everyone to observe regulations and rules and breaking them is forbidden even for the ‘Aziz.
2. Breaking just laws is an act of oppression. One must not break laws at the behest of this and that person.
3. The innocent must not be held responsible and suffer the consequences for what someone else had done even when he consents to do so.

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1. Tafsir Nur-uth-Thaqalayn: This case is idiomatically referred to as /tauriyah/ (homonymy) which implies that the speaker has an objective in mind which differs from the aim of the addressee. That is if the object meaning of ‘the caller’ in the verse is Yusuf this ‘tauriyah’ is correct. And Allah alone knows.
 2. Tafsir Nur-uth-Thaqalayn.
 3. It is just like films and theatrical performances which show people as guilty and summoned to court and addressed as such. They however, accept to play the role as culprits with their own consent.
 4. Tafsir Al Mizan vol. 11, p. 244
 5. In Tafsir Atyab-ul-Bayan, it is asserted that it is a container the volume of which is equal to about 3 kg of wheat.
 6. According to Majma’ ul Bayan the term of servitude was for one year.

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