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Section 3: Yusuf's Firmness in Piety Against the Great Temptation

Surah Yusuf - Verse 21

وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِن مِصْرَ لِإِمْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَي أَن يَنفَعَنَآ أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَداً وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِن تَأْوِيلِ الاَحَادِيثِ وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَي أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لاَ يَعْلَمُونَ

21. "And he of Egypt who bought him said to his wife: 'Receive him honorably, maybe he will profit us, or we shall adopt him as a son.' Thus did We establish Yusuf in the land, and that We might teach him the interpretation of tales (dreams). And Allah is predominant over His affair; but most people do not know."

The adventurous story of Yusuf and his brothers, which culminated in them throwing him down the bottom of the well, came to an end and a new chapter in the life of this small boy began in Egypt.

Yusuf was eventually taken to Egypt and, according to the usual procedure, he was put up for sale. Evidently he was seen as a valuable piece of property and was sold to the 'Aziz (the Great One) of Egypt who enjoyed a high rank in the Pharaoh's court, very much like the position of Prime Minister today.

The holy Qur'an implies that the 'Aziz of Egypt, who had bought him, told his wife to receive Yusuf honorably and not treat him as a slave for he might be useful to them or else they could adopt him as their son.

It says:

"And he of Egypt who bought him said to his wife: 'Receive him honorably, maybe he will profit us, or we shall adopt him as a son.'..."

One can conclude from this sentence that the 'Aziz had no children and aspired to have one. As soon as his eyes fell upon the beautiful and dignified boy, he was immediately attracted to him and thought that he could fill the role of a son for him.

Then the Qur'an in this holy verse continues saying:

"...Thus did We establish Yusuf in the land..."

After that, the verse also adds that this opportunity was made available in order to teach him the interpretation of tales. It says:

"...and that We might teach him the interpretation of tales (***dreams***)***..."***

The "***interpretation of tales***" here signifies the art of interpreting dreams through which Yusuf could have access to any important secret of the future.

At the end of the verse, the Qur'an says:

"...And Allah is predominant over His affair; but most people do not know."

Surah Yusuf – Verse 22

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ ءَاتَيْنَاهُ حُكْماً وَعِلْماً وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

22. "And when he reached his prime (***maturity***)***, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. And thus do We reward the doers of good."***

The Arabic term /ašudda/ is derived from /šadd/ meaning a firm knot which, in this verse, denotes bodily and spiritual development. This word is also sometimes used in the Qur'an to mean maturity, as in verse 34 of the Surah Al 'Isra', No. 17 which says:

"Do not approach the orphan's property until he attains his maturity...".

Sometimes, the term is used to mean attaining the age of forty as in verse 15 of the Surah Al Ahqaf No. 46 where it says:

"...until when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years..."

Sometimes it refers to the peak of one's development and strength before old age as in verse 67 in

Surah Ghafir No. 40 The Qur'an says:

"…then He brings you forth as a child, then that you may attain your maturity, then that you may be old…"

Gradually Yusuf became acquainted with the problems besetting this new environment which was in fact an important political center of Egypt.

On the one hand, he would notice the fabulous palaces of the Egyptian aristocracy with their unlimited wealth, and on the other, the misery of the slave market and the suffering imposed upon the common people.

At the same time he was engaged in self–actualization and purification of his soul. The Qur'an implies that Allah gave Yusuf wisdom and knowledge.

The verse says:

"And when he reached his prime (maturity), We gave him wisdom and knowledge…"

The purpose of employing the words /hukman wa 'ilma/ (wisdom and knowledge), in the above verse, is that Allah had bestowed the rank of prophecy upon Yusuf as soon as he had developed physically and spiritually.

His physical maturity was crowned by the gift of /hukm/wisdom, understanding, and the power of correct discrimination which is free of egoistic influences and mistakes. The term 'knowledge' is employed here to mean the awareness which is associated with wisdom.

The gifts of "hukm" and "'ilm" were two valuable Divine favors which were bestowed upon Yusuf for his virtue, patience, righteousness, and trust, since those sincere believers who can control their restive desires in the field of struggle of soul are divinely given some merits out of knowledge and sciences which are far beyond any material criteria.

The verse continues saying:

"…And thus do We reward the doers of good."

Surah Yusuf – Verse 23

وَرَاوَدَتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَن نَفْسِهِ وَغَلَّقَت الاَبَوْابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ قَالَ مَعَاذَ
اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ رَبّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ إِنَّهُ لاَ يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ

23. "And the woman, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him from his self and she closed the doors and said: 'Come here'. He said 'I seek refuge in Allah! Verily He is my Lord. He made good my abode. Verily the unjust do not prosper'."

Two possibilities have been advanced for the interpretation of the Qur'anic phrase: /'innahu rabbi 'ahsana mawaya/ (verily He is my Lord. He made good my abode).

A– It is the Almighty, my Lord, Who has honored my position and I seek refuge in Him.

B– The 'Aziz is my lord who has honored me as his guest and he told you about me to give me a good abode, and I will not betray him.

Both possibilities have their own advocates which they support with their own documentations.

We are of the opinion that the first theory is more acceptable, for Yusuf did not commit sin because of his Divinely bestowed virtue, and not simply because he was staying in the palace of 'Aziz and that being indebted to him, he could not violate the wife of 'Aziz.

Such a scenario requires much less virtue that that required for the fear of Allah. Certainly, we see allusions made several times to the word /rabbika/ in this Surah which refers to the 'Aziz. However, the use of the term /rabbi/, which is used in this sentence refers to Allah.

Moreover, it is not in consonance with Yusuf's position and character to lower himself to such an extent to call the 'Aziz /rabbi/ "my lord".

Not only had Yusuf attracted the 'Aziz to himself with his Divine beauty and conduct, but he had also completely conquered the heart of his wife, Zulaykha, as well. With the passage of time, her love for him grew to great heights but Yusuf, who was righteous and self–abstaining, thought of no one but Allah, and his heart was always filled with the love of Allah.

Other factors also helped to inflame Zulaykha's burning desire for him.

On the one hand, she was childless and lived a luxurious and aristocratic life, and on the other hand, she had no domestic conflicts or problems in her life which left her with ample time to engage in fantasy and plan schemes.

Her weak faith and lack of ethical virtues left her in the grip of her satanic lust and passions which eventually led her to decide to take action in order to realize the pleasure she was seeking.

So, to obtain her wish and reaching her aim, she applied all means and methods she could. By asking and requesting him, she tried to gain his heart and make him agree, as the Qur'an says:

"And the woman in whose house he was, sought, to seduce him from his self…"

Finally, it came to her one day to entrap him in a secluded place in the house. She used every possible means to tempt and excite him, putting on the most attractive clothing, make up and the best scented perfumes. She set the scene so that to bring Yusuf to his knees.

The Qur'an says that she locked all the doors securely, telling him to come and take her. The verse says:

"…and she closed the doors and said: 'Come here.'…"

Here was this very attractive woman, alone with him in a locked room, with no one else aware of what was going on. Or so she thought that, by this circumstance, she might make him understand that no one was able to penetrate into inside and he would not be worry.

Yusuf saw the whole thing was wrong and sinful from the beginning, he was trapped, it seemed that he had no other option open to him. To her insistent demands, when all seemed lost, he simply replied,

"I seek refuge in Allah."

By saying this he both confessed to the oneness of Allah, and to the practical aspect of this belief. All things being equal, how could he possibly have submitted to such a request, while he was still living in the house of the 'Aziz and eating from his generous pocket, and who provided him with many favors regarding him in great esteem?

The verse says:

"…Verily He is my Lord. He made good my abode…"

Yusuf continues saying whether that was not a manifest injustice and a treachery and certainly the unjust will not be prosperous.

The verse says:

"…Verily the unjust do not prosper."

Messages

1. Do not leave young men alone in the houses where there are forbidden women who are not virtuous, since the situation may result in a passionate involvement with each other.

2. Capital sins first begin gradually with lax rules of social intercourse and free association. Therefore, shun association between forbidden men and women in secluded places as it paves the way for sinful behavior.

3. The sin of adultery has been established as a sin throughout history, and it was for this reason that

Zulaykha securely fastened all the doors to the room.

4. The best kind of Islamic virtue is to keep oneself from committing sin for the sake of the favor, affection and right of Allah, and not because of the fear of scandal in this world or out of the fear of Hell Fire in the Hereafter.

5. Every door might often be closed but the door for those seeking shelter with Allah always remains open.

6. Keeping Allah in mind is a factor that hinders us from committing sin and error.

7. Adultery, fornication and conspiring against innocent youth are considered as tyranny against oneself, one's own spouse and the members of society.

8. One must not obey any authority of any rank if it orders us to commit sins, because the immaculate Imam (as) said:

*"Do not obey a created (man) in disobeying the Creator."*1

9. One moment's sin puts a great distance between man and salvation.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 24

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلآ أَن رَءَا بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ
وَالْفَحْشَآءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ

24. "And indeed she desired him, and he would have desired her if he had not seen the evidence of his Lord. Thus (it was) that We turned away from him evil and indecency. Verily he was (one) of Our chosen servants, (sincere and purified)."

Imam Sadiq (as) has said that /burhanu rabbi/ (a Sign from my Lord), is identical with the light of knowledge, certainty and wisdom which Allah has said in a phrase of the previous verses:

"We gave him wisdom and knowledge" and whatever has been mentioned in some narrations which claim that the "***Sign from his Lord***" means his witnessing the face of his father or that of Gabriel does not have a firm chain of transmission.

At any rate, if Divine assistance is absent, everyone is liable to commit mistakes. However, Allah protects His sincere subjects.

The incident with the wife of the 'Aziz is a very sensitive issue. The holy Qur'an indicates her powerful

sensuality and attractiveness when it says that she was about to seduce him and had it not been for Allah's evidence which Yusuf had noticed, he would have fallen into her arms.

The verse says:

"And indeed she desired him, and he would have desired her if he had not seen the evidence of his Lord..."

Yusuf was a young man and not yet married, and he was confronting an extremely exciting sexual situation for the first time, with all these frailties he would have succumbed and given in, had it not been for the sake of Allah's evidence.

That is, had it not been for Allah's evidence, which means the essence of faith, piety, training, and, finally, the rank of inerrancy, it seems that he would have succumbed to the temptation despite his core of faith, virtue and chastity.

This interpretation has been concisely expressed in a noble narration from Imam Rida (as) where Ma'mun, the Abbasid caliph, asked the Imam:

"Aren't you one who believes that the prophets are immaculate?"

He answered:

"Yes".

Then Ma'mun asked:

"Then what is the interpretation of this Qur'anic verse, which says:

"And indeed she desired him, and he would have desired her if he had not seen the evidence of his Lord..."

The Imam (as) answered:

"The wife of the 'Aziz decided to gratify her desire with Yusuf and were it not for the evidence of Allah which Yusuf witnessed, he would also have decided the same way she had decided.

*However, he was an immaculate person and such a person never intends to commit sin and never seeks to engage in sinful acts.*2

Ma'mun said:

"Well done O 'Abul Hassan!"

Let us turn to the commentary of the rest of the verse. The Glorious Qur'an implies that Allah (s.w.t.)

showed Yusuf His evidence in order to divert him from evil and indecency, for he was one of His sincere and purified servants.

The verse says:

"…Thus** (**it was**) **that We turned away from him evil and indecency…"

The reason for this was, as Allah says, that:

***"…Verily he was** (**one**) **of Our chosen servants,** (**sincere and purified**)."*

In this verse, allusion is made to the fact that He had sent invisible Divine assistance to rescue him from falling into evil and sin. This kind of Divine assistance, which comes during moments of trouble and crisis, is not confined to the prophets, such as Yusuf. They can also cover those sincere servants of Allah among ordinary people as well, who also deserve such favors.

Solemnity in Statement

One of the amazing things about the Qur'an, which is also one of its miracles, is its solemnity and its use of respectable language. That is, it never uses indecent words or concepts.

It's speech is never in keeping with the ordinary and illiterate individuals, in the environment of ignorance, but at the same time, it is accessible to all, using a language that the ordinary men and the intellectual can understand.

Among all the biographies mentioned in the Qur'an, there is only one real love story which is the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha.

This story explains the ardent love of a beautiful sensual woman unto a handsome youth, but pure.

However, the Qur'an has beautifully combined precision in expression with solemnity and chastity, and despite the fact that it talks about affairs of the heart, it has utilized the principles of piety, morals and respect without being paralysed in the process.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 25

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِن دُبُرٍ وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَي الْبَابِ قَالَتْ مَا جَزَآءُ
مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوءاً إِلاَّ أَن يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

25. "And they both raced to the door and she tore his shirt form the back. They both found her husband by the door. She said: 'What is the punishment for him who intends evil to your wife

save he be imprisoned or a painful chastisement?'"

The Arabic word /'istibaq/ means one or several persons racing with each other; and the term /qadda/ signifies to be torn apart lengthwise. The word /lafa'/ refers to the sudden finding of something.

Yusuf's firm resistance almost made Zulaykha lose hope. But Yusuf, who had won against the restive low desires in the course of confrontation with that beautiful woman who burned with desire for him, felt he would not be out of danger if he remained in that situation, so he bolted for the door.

Zulaykha, not to be outmaneuvered, took off after him, as the verse indicates, they both raced towards the door, and not being able to catch up to him, she reached out for his shirt to pull him back and tore it from the back. Yusuf did eventually make it to the door, and, on opening it, they came face to face with the 'Aziz.

The verse says:

"And they both raced to the door and she tore his shirt form the back. They both found her husband by the door…"

The need to protect herself from scandal and the desire to punish Yusuf for rejecting her advances flooded her thoughts. Putting on a specious face, she looked at her husband with a straight face and accused Yusuf of having evil designs against her, and sought his punishment by prison or a grievous chastisement.

The verse says:

"…She said: 'What is the punishment for him who intends evil to your wife save he be imprisoned or a painful chastisement?'"

Surah Yusuf – Verse 26

قَالَ هِيَ رَاوَدَتْنِي عَن نَفْسِي وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِنْ أَهْلِهَآ إِن كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِن قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

26. "He said: 'She (it was who) sought to seduce me from my (pure) self,' and a witness from her own family bore witness, 'If it be that his shirt is torn from the front, then she speaks the truth and he is of the liars'."

Some narrations say that the witness was a child who, like Jesus (as), spoke from inside the cradle, but since this report is not well documented it cannot be disregarded.

It might be better to think of the witness as one of the counselors of the ‘Aziz who was a relative of his wife and who was fairly intelligent that, like ‘Aziz, saw the situation.

This “witness” however, did not actually witness the main event, because if he did himself, he would not have used the conditional sentence and circumstantial evidence to make a judgment, therefore the word “witness” is used to describe him as a referee.

At first, Yusuf said nothing, and perhaps if the wife of the ‘Aziz did not speak out accusing him with a flagrant lie, her reputation would not have been damaged by the saying:

“She it was (who) sought to seduce me…”

However, once she had made her accusations, Yusuf did not see any wisdom in continuing to hold his tongue, he had to defend himself which meant disclosing the truth where she was concerned, so he said that it was she who was the one who was doing the seducing.

The verse says:

“He said: ‘She (it was who) sought to seduce me from my (pure) self,’ and a witness from her own family bore witness…”

Obviously, it is hard to believe at first that the unmarried male slave in the prime of his young manhood would be the one who was innocent and the older married woman who was apparently noble, would be the one with the sinful character. Thus, there would have been a greater tendency to accuse Yusuf in this connection than the wife of the ‘Aziz.

As Allah is always an advocate of those who are upright and good, He would not allow this pious abstemious man to be the object of false accusations.

Thus, as the Qur’an says a witness from among her very own household suggested that the true culprit would be determined by looking at the way the shirt was torn, that if it were torn from the front, it would indicate that she was right and he would be the liar.

The verse says:

“…‘If it be that his shirt is torn from the front, then she speaks the truth and he is of the liars’.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 27

وَإِن كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ فَكَذَبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

27. "And if his shirt is torn from the back, then she tells a lie, and he is of the truthful (ones)."

In the story of Yusuf, his shirt plays a decisive role. In one part of the story, his shirt, being torn from behind, provides good evidence to prove his innocence and leads to the establishment of Zulaykha's guilt.

This incident is a good example of the application of criminological investigation in establishing guilt. In another part of the story the shirt also plays a pivotal role, the fact that it was not torn apart by a wolf indicated to the father that the brothers had played foul with Yusuf and had fabricated a lie to cover it up.

At the end of the story, the shirt once more plays a major part, becoming the means whereby the father regains his eyesight.

However, generally the application of the proper methods of recognition of crime is necessary for finding the crime and the criminal.

That was why the witness said:

"And if his shirt is torn from the back, then she tells a lie, and he is of the truthful (ones)."

The witness was one of the relatives of the wife of the 'Aziz, as indicated by the phrase /min ahliha/. He was a wise, knowledgeable and intelligent man, and it is said that he had been one of the counselors and consultants of the 'Aziz, who was accompanying 'Aziz at that moment.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 28

فَلَمَّا رَءَا قَمِيصَهُ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مِن كَيْدِكُنَّ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٌ

28. "So when he (the 'Aziz) saw his shirt was torn from behind, he said: 'Verily it is of the guile of you women! Truly, your guile is great'."

The Qur'anic terms /kayda kunna/ (your guile) here means: 'to accuse some guiltless people while hiding one's own guilt and swiftly dissociating it from oneself without having the slightest anxiety'.

The Qur'an regards the Satan's tricks as weak, but the guile of women have been mentioned as great in this verse. According to the 'Tafsir-us-Safi', it is because the satanic guile is momentary, invisible and acted in a subtle way, whereas the guile of women is acted along with delicacy, and affection, which are both focused and continuous.

Allah sometimes accomplishes major tasks by means of some small things.

For example: ’Abraha was defeated by the birds of ’Ababil; the life of the Prophet of Islam (S) was saved because of a spider’s web; a crow was used to instruct a human being (Cain) on how to bury a human being (Abel); the chastity of Mary was made manifest through the infant’s talk, Yusuf’s innocence was proved by the tear in his shirt; the faith of a country’s people was known through the messages of a bird (Hoopoe); and finally, the People of the Cave were recognized through the kind of their money.

All of these incidents are examples of great occurrences divinely fulfilled through objects and incidents that are otherwise seen as commonplace or insignificant.

The ‘Aziz accepted the method proposed by the “witness” and gazed at Yusuf’s shirt. He noticed that the shirt had been torn from the back, and he remembered that he had never heard Yusuf tell a lie, even once, he turned to his wife and said that this act was part of the guile of women, that their guile is indeed, very powerful.

The verse says:

“So when he (the ‘Aziz) saw his shirt was torn from behind, he said: ‘Verily is of the guile of you women! Truly, your guile is great’.”

Surah Yusuf – Verse 29

يُوسُفُ اَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَذَا وَاسْتَغْفِرِي لِذَنبِكِ إِنَّكِ كُنْتِ مِنَ الْخَاطِئِينَ

29. “O Yusuf! Overlook this matter; and you, (O my wife), ask forgiveness for your sin, for surely you are of the wrong-doers.”

At this moment, owing to his fear that the embarrassing event might come to light and damage his prestige, the ‘Aziz saw it convenient to put an end to the whole affair by keeping it quiet. Turning to Yusuf, he told him to forget about it, and turning to his wife, he told her to repent and ask forgiveness for her sin, for she had definitely been the one who did wrong.

The verse says:

“O Yusuf! Overlook this matter; and you, (O my wife), ask forgiveness for your sin, for surely you are of the wrong-doers.”

Another great lesson that this part of the story of Yusuf teaches us is that very support of Allah, Who assists man in the most difficult states. According to His statement which says:

“…whoever is in awe of Allah, He will make for him an outlet,” “And give him sustenance from

whence he thinks not;…"[3]***,***

Allah caused Yusuf to be proved innocent by means of existence of the tear in his shirt as an evidence.

Yusuf's shirt was also the same thing that one day manifested the lie of Yusuf's brothers before their father because of lack of tear in it, and again his shirt was put over the face of Jacob when he regained his eye sight, and it was brought from Egypt to Kan'an and gave the glad tidings to Jacob.

However, Allah has some secret favours of which no one is aware. When the breeze of this favour blows the affairs may change in a way that it is not predictable for any one, even for the most intelligent members.

Some Explanations

1. The 'Aziz of Egypt wanted to cover up the incident, but the people of the world in all centuries came to know about it in order for Yusuf's innocence to be maintained.

2. The 'Aziz, typical for those among the affluent classes, had a lenient attitude towards matters regarding chastity, and refrained from seriously chastising his wife.

3. Non-godly leaders are usually not able to take a decisive stand towards their own impure wives.

A woman's sexual relationship with any man other than her husband is illegitimate and indecent.

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1. Bihar ul-'Anwar, vol.10 p.227
2. Tafsir Nur-uth-Thaqalayn, vol.2, p.421
3. Surah At-Talaq, No. 65, verses 62 and 63

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