

Section 1: Yusuf Suffers

Surah Yusuf – Verse 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الر تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

1. “Alif ‘A’, Lam ‘L’, Ra ‘R’. These are the verses of the Book (which makes the truth) Manifest.”

A General Note

Everything is dependent upon Allah, and every person lives with Him.

Every type of evolution and progress is initiated in His name and will be realized by executing the programs He has ordained by means of prophets, the personal development of prophets has been fulfilled in the Name of Allah, for had there not been any trust put in Him, the prophets could not have overcome the difficulties of the life which had confronted them.

This Surah also begins with the abbreviated letters of alif, lam, and ra' which exhibit the magnificence of the Qur'an and the synthesizing of profound and meaningful verses out of simple letters of the Arabic alphabet.

Perhaps, it is for this reason that after mentioning the abbreviated letters, Allah (s.w.t.) immediately refers to the magnificence of the Qur'an by saying:

“... These are the verses of the Book (which makes the truth) manifest.”

Incidentally, concerning the magnitude of the holy phrase /bismillah–ir–rahman–ir–rahim/ and the abbreviated letters with which the suras begin, please refer to the beginning of the suras Al–Hamd, and Al–Baqarah, and to the detailed narrations discussed under them.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 2

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

2. “Verily We have sent it down – an Arabic Qur’an – that you may understand. ”

No matter in what language the Qur’an had been revealed, other people would have had to become acquainted with that language. However, the revelation of the Qur’an in the Arabic language has several advantages, among which are the following:

A – The Arabic language has a very great capacity for word formation and has so fixed grammatical rules that cannot be easily found in any other language.

B – According to some narrations, Arabic is the language spoken in Paradise.

C – The region in which the Qur’an was revealed was an Arabic speaking region, and it was apparently impossible for the Holy Book to be revealed into any other language.

Regarding the revelation of the Qur’an, Allah (s.w.t.) has employed the word descend /nuzul/ the same word He has used for the falling of rain.

In any rate, the aim of the Qur’an is not merely reading, chanting, browsing through, or barely reciting it for blessedness. The main aim is understanding it, that kind of understanding which is comprehensive and goes deep into its meaning and encourages man to put what he reads into practice.

The indication, occurred in ten suras, to the fact that the Qur’an has been revealed in Arabic is an answer to the accusation that the holy Prophet (S) had learned it from a non Arab and that its content was an imported way of thinking, and not a revelation originated from Allah.

In the meantime, all Muslims must try to learn Arabic as a second language, for it is the language of Divine revelation and the key to understanding the holy Qur’an and Islamic knowledge.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 3

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ

3. “We relate unto you the best of stories, by that We have revealed to you this Qur’an; though before this, you were of those who did it not know.”

The Arabic term /qasas/ means both a story, and the telling of a story. Stories and tales play an important role in man’s education, for they depict the life of a nation and provide practical examples of an Ummah.

History is a mirror that reflects the deeds of nations and the more we are acquainted with the story of our predecessors, the more we acquire the feeling of having lived their lives.

Ali-ibn-Abitalib (as) in a letter to his son, Imam Hassan, implied that he had studied the lives of the former nations in a manner that as if he had lived with them and did it as long as their lifetimes.

Perhaps one of the reasons why stories and tales leave such a great impact upon man is because he has an inherent love for stories.

Usually, books on history, epics and myths have been successful throughout man’s cultural history, and understandable for the majority of people, while issues requiring rational proofs and intellectual matters have been the concern of only a small group among them.

The Qur’an calls the story of Hadrat Yusuf the ‘best of stories’. However, some narrations tell us that the entire Qur’an is also called /ahsanul qasas/ (the best of stories) and certainly, it is not incompatible with the previous definition of the Qur’an, that the Qur’an is the best among all the Holy Books, and the story of Yusuf is the best among the stories of the Qur’an.

At any rate, the story of Hadrat Yusuf is the best of stories for the following reasons:

- A) It is the most relevant to our experience.
- B) It deals with the struggle against one’s innermost self which is the greatest of struggles.
- C) The hero of the story is Hadrat Yusuf, a youth who possesses all human virtues in himself (patience, faith, piety, modesty, wisdom, trustfulness, forgiveness and kindness).
- D) All persons of the story have a happy ending. For example Yusuf attains a high political position, the

brothers repent, his father regains his lost sight, the famine stricken country is saved; complains and envies are converted into the full gratification of love.

There are a number of opposites juxtaposed in this story: Departure and reunion, sorrow and joy, famine and plenty, loyalty and disloyalty, proprietor and tenant; palace and hovel, poverty and needlessness or wealth, servitude and domination; blindness and sight, chastity and making false accusations.

In conclusion, these points illustrate that the Qur'an, as far as telling stories and historical narratives, has utilized the best manner to educate man. Not only the Divine stories, but all the things of Allah are also the best /ahsan/, because:

1 – He is the Best Creator.

2 – He has sent down the Best of Books.

3 – He has produced the best of features.

4 – He has the best of religions.

5 – He provides the best of rewards.

6 – And finally, having such a background, He has demanded the best of actions from man.

Thus, ignorance is mentioned in the Qur'an signified by three forms:

A- The disagreeable ignorance, like what the verse says:

“But verily many among mankind are heedless of Our Signs.”¹

B- The bearable type of ignorance and unawareness which has been referred to here:

“Verily those who accuse chaste believing women unaware (of the evil) are cursed in this world and the Hereafter...”²

Meaning: Those who accuse pure and innocent women, who are unaware of fornication or adultery, are damned in this world and the next.

C- Natural ignorance like being uninformed about something, for example in this verse:

The Qur'an says:

“...though before this, you were of those who did it not know.”

Meaning that before We told you this story, you were not informed about it nor had you heard it from anyone.³

Or, similar to the verse which says:

*“... You did not know what the Book was, nor (what) the Faith (was)...”*⁴

Surah Yusuf – Verse 4

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ

4. “When, Yusuf said to his father: ‘O my father! Verily I did see (dreamt) eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves unto me.’”

A Wonderful Dream and Difficulties Lead to Victory

This Holy Surah cites the profound and guiding role of extraordinary and meaningful Yusuf’s dream which herald the beginning of worldly difficulties and the inevitability of his eventual victory.

The Qur’an starts the story of Yusuf with an extraordinary and meaningful dream. This dream is, in fact the first in a number of important episodes that had far reaching effects in the epic life of Hadrat Yusuf.

One early morning when he was still very young, Yusuf excitedly went to his father to tell him about an experience, which, although on the surface did not seem very important, nevertheless seemed too vivid and extraordinary to keep to himself.

Yusuf told his father that he had had a dream where eleven stars descended from the sky, followed by the sun and the moon and all lay prostrate before him.

The verse says:

“When, Yusuf said to his father: ‘O my father! Verily I did see (dreamt) eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves unto me.’”

According to Ibn Abbas, the famous Islamic commentator, Yusuf had this dream the night before Friday which coincides with (Laylat-ul-Qadr) the night when destinies are determined.

It is evident, of course, that the objective meaning of ‘prostration’ here is ‘humility and modesty’, else, prostration of people in the ordinary form unto sun and moon and stars is meaningless.

According to the Late ‘Allamah Tabataba’i in Al-Mizan, his commentary of the Qur’an, the story of Yusuf begins with a dream which brings him good tidings and gives him hope about the future, thus enabling him to pursue a divine course with patience and perseverance.

Yusuf is the eleventh child of Hadrat Ya'qub born after Benjamin. With the exception of Benjamin, his other brothers were born from a different mother. Hadrat Ya'qub was the son of 'Is-haq who was the son of 'Ibrahim.

The Prophet (S) has been narrated who said:

"Al-karim ibn-il-karim-ibn-il-karim, Yusuf ibn Ya'qub-ibn-'Ishaq-ibn-'Ibrahim."

This is:

'A noble man, the son of a noble man; Yusuf the son of Ya'qub, the son of 'Is-haq, the son of 'Ibrahim.'

The dreams of the men of Allah are of different types. Sometimes they require interpretation, like that of Hadrat Yusuf, and at other times they require no interpretation being identical with reality, like the dream of Hadrat 'Ibrahim who was ordered to sacrifice 'Isma'il.

The sublime Prophet (S) says about dreams and dreaming:

"Dreams are of three types: They are either tidings from Allah or they are sorrows from Satan, or they are composed of the daily concerns that man dreams about."

The Late 'Allamah in his Tafsir Al-Mizan says that there are three worlds: The natural or physical world, the world of symbols or ideas, and the intellectual world.

The human spirit, because of its subjective and non material nature, can communicate with the two other worlds in the dream and, according to the level of its capacity and potentiality, it may perceive some facts.

If the spirit is perfected, it comprehends reality in a pure and translucent context. If it has not reached the final stages of perfection, the reality would present itself to soul's consciousness clothed in different forms.

For example a lion would come to symbolize courage, a fox would mean fraudulence and a mountain could mean exaltedness in our dreams, knowledge would be presented as a light, marriage in the form of clothing and ignorance as darkness.

Those who see things in their dream are divided into three groups:

The first group comprises those who possess perfected souls which are completely detached from the material world and, after their physical senses go to sleep, they enter a relationship with the world of the intellect where they apprehend realities which they perceive from the other world.

(A somewhat relevant example is like that of a television whose antennae receive broadcast signals from far distant places from atop mountains and hills). Such dreams are received directly and are not clothed

in symbolism, thus they require no interpretation.

The second group are those who are in an intermediate spiritual state, their dreams also depict reality, but they are accompanied by imagined accumulations and resemblances which require a commentator to explain and clarify the subject of the dream.

The dreams of the third group are the dreams of those whose souls are so upset and unstable that their dreams make no sense. Such dreams cannot be interpreted, for they have no relationship with reality. In the Qur'an, such dreams are regarded as /adqau 'ahlam/ 'confused dreams'.

The Qur'an has named some dreams as those which have proven to be true and became fulfilled; as follow:

A- The dream of Hadrat Yusuf (as) regarding the prostration of eleven stars, the sun and the moon which was interpreted as his rise to power and the reverence with which his brothers and his parents would treat him.

B- The dream of the two prisoners who were companion inmates with Yusuf, that later one of whom was freed and the other was executed.

C- The dream of the Egyptian king of a fat cow being eaten by a thin one which was interpreted as the occurrence of famine and drought after affluence.

D- The dream of the Prophet of Islam (S) about the small number of pagans in the Battle of Badr which was interpreted as the defeat of the pagans at the hands of the Islamic army.

The Qur'an in this regard says:

“(Remember) when Allah showed them to you as few in your dream...”⁵

E- The dream of the Prophet of Islam (S) about the entry of the Muslims into the Masjid ul Haram with shaved heads, which was interpreted as the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims and their pilgrimage to the House of Allah.

Concerning it, the Qur'an says:

“Certainly Allah had shown to his Apostle the dream with truth;...”⁶

F- The dream of the mother of Hadrat Moses who had placed her infant in a box and cast it into the water.

The Qur'an says:

“When We revealed to your mother what was revealed;”

“Saying: ‘put him into a chest, then cast it into the river...’”⁷

The Islamic quotations confirm the view that the word ‘revelation’ in this verse signifies “dream”.

G- Hadrat ’Ibrahim’s dream of sacrificing of his son ’Isma’il⁸ which says:

“...he said: ‘O my son! Verily I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you...’”

So, as was mentioned earlier, the Qur’an begins the story of Yusuf by narrating his extraordinary and meaningful dream, for this wonderful dream is considered the first highlight of his adventurous life.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 5

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ
عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

5. “He (Jacob) said: ‘O my (little) son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they devise a plot against you: for Satan is to man a manifest enemy.’”

One of the principles of life is keeping other people’s secrets. If the Muslims had put into practice what has been implied in this verse, our vast capital and potentialities, our manuscripts and scientific works, our works of art and antique objects would not have been found in foreign museums.

Foreigners would not be spying on us under the cover of being experts, diplomats and tourists, and they would not have become aware of our resources and assets. Our naivety could not have been so easily used by their treachery to make our secrets easily available to those who are constantly ready to play dirty tricks against us.

Hadrat Yusuf (as) told his father his dream away from the presence of his brothers. This behavior shows a remarkable perceptiveness on Yusuf’s part which definitely did not escape Ya’qub.

The sun, the moon and eleven stars in prostration before his son, what did it all mean? Ya’qub briefly pondered over the vision and then it became clear to him. Certainly, the moon and the sun represented Yusuf’s mother and himself, and the eleven stars represented his brothers.

The dream foretold that his son’s prestige and position would be so elevated that the stars in the sky, the sun and the moon will bow to kiss his threshold. He will be so exalted in rank and position that celestial beings will be subservient to him. It was a fantastic, fabulous, and interesting dream!

Therefore with a mixed feeling of anxiety and happiness, he responded his son not to tell his brothers

about his dream for they would scheme dangerous stratagems against him.

The verse says:

“He (Jacob) said: ‘O my (little) son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they devise a plot against you: for Satan is to man a manifest enemy’.”

I know that Satan is an open enemy to man. He is looking for a pretext to start playing his dirty tricks to win him over, inciting him to envy and avarice and even entangle brothers in quarrels.”

Explanations

1. It is necessary that parents be knowledgeable about the likes and dislikes as well as attitudes of their children so that they may be able to guide them effectively.

2. In order to make a sound prediction about cases, which have significant problems or sensitivities, voicing one’s suspicions or fears or unveiling certain characteristics, may prove useful.

All data and information must be categorized and confidential data should be separated from none confidential ones. Do not tell everyone everything. Do not provide grounds for envy, for the envy of the brothers prepared the way for the realization of Satan’s hostility towards Yusuf.

Surah Yusuf – Verse 6

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ
يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَمَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَبَوَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

6. “And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of sayings (dreams), and perfect His favor to you and to the posterity of Jacob, even as He perfected it to your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime! Verily your Lord is All-knowing, All-wise.”

Prophets are the appointees of Allah, and their selection is based upon Divine knowledge. The positions of prophecy and divinely guided government carry a great deal of blessings.

Interpreting dreams imply the deciphering and realization of their meanings. The Arabic term /ahadi/ is the plural of /hadi/ which means narrating an event. As man recounts his dream for others, the word /ahadi/ is also applied to dreams as well. Therefore, /ta`wil-ul-ahadi/ denotes ‘the interpretation of dreams’.

Hadrat Ya’qub (as) interprets his son’s dream for him in this verse, foretelling his future.

However, this wonderful dream was not merely telling the magnitude of Yusuf's position in an apparent and material sense.

It also indicated that he would attain the rank of prophecy and an elevated celestial position in the future as well, as indicated in the prostration of the celestial beings to him.

Thus, his father Ya'qub said: as follows:

“And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of sayings (dreams), and perfect His favor to you and to the posterity of Jacob, even as He perfected it to your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime! Verily your Lord is All-knowing, All-wise.”

Among the lessons drawn from these verses is the lesson concerning keeping particular secrets which must be observed even sometimes against brothers. There are always instances of secrets in man's life which, when unveiled, may disrupt his future or endanger his society.

Therefore, refraining from divulging secrets is one of the signs of fortitude and will power of a person. In a tradition attributed to Imam Sadiq (as) we read:

“Your secrets are just like your blood which must only be circulated within your own veins.”

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1. Surah Yunus, No. 10, verse 92.
 2. Surah An-Nur, No. 24, verse 23.
 3. The verse under discussion
 4. Surah Ash-Shura, No. 42, verse 52
 5. Surah Al-'Anfal, No. 8, verse 43
 6. Surah Fath, No. 48, verse 27
 7. Surah Taha, No. 20, verse 38, 39
 8. mentioned in Surah As-Safat, No. 37, verse 102.

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