

Introduction and Verses 1-7

Learning Objectives:

- Introduction to Surah-e-Yusuf
- Reflection on verses 1 – 7 of Surah Yusuf

Its Objectives

A story with many valuable lessons of faith, virtue, trust in God, and ups and downs of human life. Almighty Allah talks to us about a father's grief and bitter tears of P Yaqub (AS) when he loses his son P Yusuf (AS), and also the ignorance and jealousy of his brothers, and love and passion of the young queen of Egypt, Zulaikha for a handsome young man who had piety and virtue. The purpose of mentioning these stories is so that we learn valuable lessons from it. Just like other stories that have been mentioned in the H Qur'an of P Ibrahim (AS) and P Musa (AS), Allah shows how He can overpower the plots of others. His plan will always succeed. It is the story of miraculous success, which only comes from Allah who is the Ultimate Planner.

Surat Yusuf has 111 verses and was revealed in Makkah. Most of the Surah is about the story of Prophet Yusuf (AS) except a few verses at the end. The different phases and incidents of his life are discussed with interesting details. Majority of the ayat are related to the same story that is not found in other surahs.

Prophet Yusuf (AS)'s name has been mentioned 65 times in this surah and only twice in other surahs.

When it was revealed

The Jews denied the H. Prophet (SAW)'s declaration of Prophethood and in order to undermine his authority, they asked the H Prophet (SAW): when did the family of Ya'qub move from Syria to Egypt and what happened to P. Yusuf (AS). This surah was revealed as proof and to give them a definitive answer.

The Almighty also verified that P Muhammad (SAW) was the recipient of divine message and divine grace by revealing this Surah. Furthermore, it proved the divine nature of the Qura'n as the Rabbis realised that this was also found in their Taurah.

Apart from answering the two questions of the Jewish scholars, this Surah gave a precise account of the life of P Yusuf (AS) from childhood to the pinnacle of his life when he became the Governor of Egypt.

The virtues of Surat Yusuf

There are many virtues for reciting this Surah, one of which is narrated in a tradition by I. Sadiq (as) saying:

“Whoever recites this Surah every day or every night, Allah will enable him to be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection having a beauty equal to that of the beauty of Yusuf, he will have no difficulties on that Day and he will be among the righteous subjects of Allah.”

Verse 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

الرَّ ۙ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

Alif Lam Ra. Those are the verses of the Manifest Book

The opening of the surah begins with three letters, which are known as Hurūf al-Muqatta'at or abbreviated letters. The letters stand for certain words. In al Mizan , Allamah Tabatabai compares this verse to the first verse of Surah Yunus "Alif, Lam, Ra" . These are the verses of a wise Book. The difference being that Surat Yusuf was revealed as a story and an explanation of the family of P Ya'qub (AS). Therefore, the book is described as that which makes things clear as opposed to a wise Book, which is what is found in Surah Yunus.

The Holy Qur'an guides our intelligence and allows a believer to be able to distinguish Truth from Falsehood. It gives us a light that makes the straight path very clear and easy to follow.

Verse 2

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Surely We have sent down it as an Arabic Quran so that you may understand.

Importance of the Arabic Language

1. It is the language of the Arabs. The Arab civilisation during the time of the H Prophet (S) was in ignorance, their customs were inhuman. In order for Islam to bring about complete transformation it had to talk to the people in their own language.
2. The Arabic language is very rich with vocabulary, idioms, verses and prose. It can convey the message more precisely than any other language. Although, the H Qur'an has been translated into so many languages, none of the translations can really do justice to the richness of the original language. The significance of the Arabic language can be appreciated from a narration by Ibn Abbas who quotes the H Prophet (S) as saying: "I love the Arab for three things: because I am an Arab, the Quran is Arabic and the language of paradise is Arabic."

Imam Zaynul Abidin (a) says: The verses of Quran are a treasure house of knowledge, so whenever the door is opened you should look into it. (Mīzānūl Hikmah, H.16235)

Verse 3

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

We narrate to you the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran though before this you were certainly one of those who were unaware.

The usage of parables in the Qur'an

The word Qasas (a narrative), according to traditions, is used here to describe the Quran. According to Ayatullah Nasir Makarem Shirazi, it can mean two things:

1. That Quran is the best of stories or
2. This Surah is the best of narratives.

He also says that this Surah is not about man's low desires and base behavior rather it is about the trials and misfortunes of two of the most beloved servants of Allah, both of whom were unwavering in faith and worship.

The lessons from these misfortunes and hardships benefited many of Yusuf's brothers whose lives changed as a result of these events that were narrated in this Qasas. The benefit of these lessons goes beyond the children of Ya'qub (AS) and remains as lessons for all mankind. This could be why the appeal of this Qasas is timeless. The fact that it narrates a time in history of a previous nation adds to its value.

Why has this Sura been named the best of stories?

1. It narrates many interesting aspects that are emotionally moving; a young child left alone in the well, an old father grieving for his son, life in prison, change of fortunes as P Yusuf (AS) becomes a vizier where he rules on faith and justice.
2. The hand of Allah can be seen in every part of the story. The plan of the brothers fails by the decree of God and P Yusuf (AS) is bestowed with great honour and ultimately reunites with his family.
3. It shows the effects of lying and jealousy.
4. It shows the future of the nation affected by the dream.

It can only be the best of stories if we take lessons from it and apply them to our lives.

Why does the Quran use stories?

The Quran is a book of guidance that trains the human being. But stories are used to teach people.

1. Stories can show practical examples from history. Learning about other peoples lives and experience brings knowledge into a reality.
2. Stories are interesting and a good way of attracting attention of people.

3. People are more eager to learn from stories and profound lessons can be learnt.
4. People love and can understand stories irrespective of their level of intellect, education, background . . . etc. Human beings can benefit from history. I Ali (AS) says in Nahjul Balāgha in his will to Imam Hasan (AS):

“My child, even though I have not reached the age which those before me have, yet I looked into their behaviour and thought over events of their lives. I walked among their ruins till I was as one of them. In fact, by virtue of those of their affairs that have become known to me it is as though I have lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the impure from the clean and the benefit from the harm.”

(Letter no. 31, Nahjul Balāgha)

This verse ends by saying that the Prophet did not know these stories before these verses were revealed to him. This was a reply to those who accused the Prophet of getting the Qur’an from other people. Although the Jews and Christians knew the story of Prophet Yusuf (AS) many of the details differed. Angel Jibra’il revealed it to the Prophet.

Verse 4

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

Call to mind when Joseph said to his father: "My father! I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me."

Prophet Yusuf (AS)'s Dream

Prophet Yusuf (AS) was the youngest son of Prophet Ya’qub (AS), who was the son of Prophet Ishaq (AS), the son of Prophet Ibrahim (AS). P Ya’qub (AS) was also known as “Isra’il”, meaning *the pure servant of God*. He is the father of 12 tribes of Bani Isra’il headed by each of his 12 sons. The mother of P Yusuf (AS) and his brother Benyamin was the same. The other brothers were from different mothers.

The story of P Yusuf (AS) in this surah begins with his dream and it ends with the fulfilment of the dream. He woke up that morning and went in search of his father to share his dream. He saw himself as a young child and eleven stars and the sun and the moon, all of them bowing down to him.

Some tafasir mention that he was 9 years old when he had the dream whilst others say that he was 7 or 12 years old. According to Imam Jaffer As Sadiq (AS), the sun and moon represent his father P Ya’qub (AS) and Raheel, his mother and the eleven stars were his eleven brothers. The interpretation of his vision is that P Yusuf (AS) would acquire a lofty position in Egypt and his family would come to him in Egypt and they would all prostrate out of appreciation to God, as a result of what they were seeing.

P Yusuf (AS) remembered the dream vividly, indicating that it was very important. Often people forget their dreams or only remember parts of it. His dream indicated humbleness of the sun, moon and stars before him. The dreams of Prophets foretell a reality of events that will happen. Sometimes their dreams do not require any interpretation, like P Ibrahim (AS)'s dream where he saw himself sacrificing his son, Ismail (AS). P Yusuf (AS)'s dream required an interpretation. He goes to his father, relates the dream in order to seek

his advice. Parents are the best people to turn to when one is confused about something. They have the wisdom and experience that can benefit you and also know you best.

P Yusuf (AS) respected and trusted his father. P Ya'qub (AS) contemplated deeply and knew that it foretold an important event. The family would humble themselves before him because his son would one day reach such a high position. In this surah, the objects of the dream signify real people – the family of P Yusuf (AS).

Verse 5

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

he said, 'My son, do not recount your dream to your brothers, lest they should devise schemes against you. Satan is indeed man's manifest enemy.

The brothers knew that their father loved P Yusuf (AS) intensely and that he held a special place in his heart. As a result of this they were jealous of P Yusuf (AS). Although P Ya'qub (AS) knew that the dream foretold an important event, he was worried of his sons that if they found out about the dream their anger would intensify and they would be sure that Allah had a special plan for Yusuf. The only way the brothers could have a similar position to that of P Yusuf (AS) would be to get rid of him.

In al-Amthal, Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi relates a tradition of the Prophet (SAW) in which he states: *"Certainly Allah forbade Musa from jealousy, saying to him: The jealous person is displeased with my blessings (Ni'mah) and turns away from my allotment (Qism) which I distribute among my servants."*

Imam Ali (AS) described Hasad as: "The worst of illnesses." He also said: "Hasad is a debilitating disease which does not cease except with the destruction of the jealous person or the death of the person whom they were jealous of." (The saying of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (AS) recorded in Gharar al-Hikam (No. 332 & 1889, respectively)

This verse tells us an important lesson that one shouldn't disclose everything that happens in one's life. Even close friends should not know everything, as it can be harmful sometimes. Precaution and prevention is always better.

Imam Sadiq (AS) says: *"Your secret is like your blood and it should not flow except in your own veins."*

Being a Prophet himself, P Ya'qub (AS) tells Yusuf that Shaitan will put negative thoughts in his brothers' minds and that they will plot against him. Shaitan would take advantage of their feelings of jealousy toward Yusuf (AS) as he is an open enemy.

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

That is how your Lord will choose you, and teach you the interpretation of dreams, and complete His blessing upon you and upon the house of Jacob, just as He completed it earlier for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is indeed all-knowing and all-wise.'

The dream of P Yusuf (AS) was a sign of divine guidance and was not just a means of honouring him. It shows that he was chosen by Allah. An insight into his and his family's affairs was granted to him. Allah chooses whom he wishes.

The completion of favour according to some refers to Prophethood, which is the height of favours that was given to P Yusuf (AS). Others say that P Yaqub (AS) was receiving wahy (revelation) by which he could know the outcome of things before they happened. Some are of the opinion that this favour indicates to the fact that Allah has promised to keep him under His guidance and purity. P Ibrahim (AS) P Is'haq (AS) are also mentioned in this verse, because P Yaqub (AS) and P Yusuf (AS) and his brothers are all their descendants.

P Yaqub (AS) tells his son 3 things to show the importance of his dream:

- He has been chosen by Allah
- He will have the ability to interpret dreams
- Allah will complete His favours on the P Yaqub's family through him

Verse 7

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٍ لِّلسَّائِلِينَ

Verily in the story of Joseph and his brothers there are many signs for those who inquire (about the truth).

This verse refers to the second stage of P Yusuf (AS)'s story and there are many lessons to learn from it for those who ask and reflect. By pondering over the verses and stories of the Qur'an, one can gain a deeper understanding.

What lessons do we learn from this story?

- One who has Taqwa, God-conscious and who does not reciprocate evil against evil will be victorious
- Sibling rivalry in some instances can be more harmful
- Strong and able people when join forces can overcome weaker ones

According to tafasir, these verses were revealed when the H Prophet (S) and the Muslims were experiencing a social and economic boycott. This was a reassurance and easing his grief to the fact some

of his family members did not accept Islam. Like the brothers of P Yusuf (AS) did not like and accept him, he should not be upset at his uncle (Abu Lahab) and other relatives who denied his message.

Sibling rivalry can be healthy. Only when it reaches extreme levels that it can be dangerous. Strong bonds between siblings can have a positive impact. It is good to have older siblings who help younger ones and they in turn look up to them. There will always be competition between siblings but that can be healthy and positive. P Yusuf teaches us that even when siblings wrong you, you have to be kind and forgiving towards them.

P Yusuf (AS) and Benyamin were the youngest siblings and that could be one reason why P Yaqub (AS) showed more affection towards them. Another reason that is related is that their mother had passed away and so their father was more affectionate and kind towards them.

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