

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

A TOUR OF TALES: THE JOURNEY OF YUSUF AS



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The Background of Surah Yusuf

- Just as every story has a background, every surah in the Quran has a background that helps us to contextualize the surah.
 - It allows us to get a behind-the-scenes view
- In Arabic, this concept of the background behind surahs or ayat is known as **شَأْنُ النُّزُولِ**
- Allah promised us as believers that this life will be a life of difficulty.
- This is not a life where we are simply supposed to be happy. If that was the goal of life, then the happiest person to have ever lived would have been the Prophet SAW. But, when you look at the life of the Prophet SAW, you will realize all of the difficulties he went through in his life.
- When a person goes through hardship, one of the most important things they need is emotional support from others.
- The Prophet SAW did not have a mother, father, or uncle to lean on for support. When we realize there is no one else who can support us, we understand that the only one who can really help us is Allah.
- The Prophet SAW had Allah and in every dark moment of his life, Allah stood up for him.

- Allah said in a hadith qudsi:

مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا، فَقَدْ آذَنْتُهُ بِالْحَرْبِ

Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him.

- In Makkah, after the first revelation came, scholars say that no revelation came down for two years. People started to say things about the Prophet SAW and claim that he was a magician and a poet. His own wife Khadijah wondered if Allah was upset with them. So, the Prophet SAW wondered if he had done something wrong. This is when Allah revealed Surah al-Duha:

وَالصُّحَىٰ ﴿١﴾ وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ ﴿٢﴾ مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ ﴿٣﴾

By the morning brightness (1) And [by] the night when it covers with darkness, (2) Your Lord has not left you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you].

- The Prophet SAW lost his son Qasim when he was 18 months. While the Prophet SAW and his wife were grieving, Quraysh began rejoicing and the people said, "Muhammad's legacy has been cut off." Quraysh was pleased because they thought when the Prophet SAW leaves this world, he will not have anyone to keep his legacy and they will be freed from him. But, the legacy of the Prophet SAW did not depend on someone being born from his family. His legacy was dependent on his ummah and their relationship with Allah. In this moment, Allah revealed Surah al-Kawthar:

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ﴿١﴾ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ﴿٢﴾ إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ﴿٣﴾

Indeed, We have granted you, [O Muhammad], al-Kawthar. (1) So pray to your Lord and sacrifice [to Him alone]. (2) Indeed, your enemy is the one cut off. (3)

- The most difficult moment in the Prophet's SAW life was the Year of Sorrow. This took place 10 years after the Prophet's SAW message.
 - The Muslims were boycotted for 3 years and shortly after the boycott ended, Khadijah RA passed away.
 - Anas ibn Malik narrated that after she passed away, the Prophet SAW did not smile for an entire year.
 - When the Prophet SAW would hear the voice of Khadijah's sister, he would get so excited thinking it was Khadijah.
 - At the time of Badr, Abu al-'As was taken as a prisoner. So, Zaynab, the daughter of the Prophet SAW and wife of Abu al-'As, sent her necklace as a ransom. When the Prophet SAW received the necklace, he realized that it was the necklace Khadijah gave Zaynab on her wedding day. So, he said to the people, "Would you be ok with letting Abu al-'As go without taking the ransom?" The companions said of course and they released him.
 - Soon after Khadijah RA passed away, his uncle Abu Talib passed away.
 - Khadijah was the internal support of the Prophet SAW and Abu Talib was the external support of the Prophet SAW.
 - Both of his pillars were ripped away from him right after the boycott.
 - Allah reminds us in the Quran,

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

O man, you have to strive and go on striving towards your Lord, then will you meet Him. (84:6)

- Imam Ghazali says that the reality of this world is difficulty.
- The default is difficulty and the exception is happiness. Happiness and bliss is reserved for the akhirah.

- A person who went through constant difficulty in this world, Allah will give them a tour of Jannah. Then, Allah will ask them, "Have you ever seen a moment of difficulty in your life?" They will reply, "I have never experienced a moment of difficulty."
- After they both passed away, the Prophet SAW went to Taif to seek support from the neighboring city. When he went there, he was pelted with stones and beaten to the point that he could not walk without his feet bleeding.
- Aisha RA asked the Prophet SAW what the most challenging day in his life was and he said it was the day of Taif.
- When the Prophet SAW experienced his most difficult day, Allah gifted him with 2 things:
 - Allah took him on the journey of Israa and Mi'raj
 - Allah gave him the story of Prophet Yusuf AS through which he could understand that there is light at the end of the tunnel
- Umar RA said it was known amongst the companions that if anyone was experiencing grief, they would turn to Surah Yusuf and read it.
- Abdullah ibn Masud RA said, "There is no person who is grieving who reads Surah Yusuf except that their grief diminishes."
- Ibn 'Ataillah said, "There is no person who is experiencing difficulty except that when they hear the story of Yusuf, their pain eases."
- In Surah Yusuf, there are 5 lows that Prophet Yusuf goes through and then 5 highs. This is how Allah teaches us that there will be ease after going through difficulty, but it might not come right away and it might not be in this dunya.

The Virtues of Prophet Yusuf AS

- The sahaba once asked the Prophet SAW, "Who is the noblest of people?" The Prophet SAW said, "Yusuf, the noble, the son of a noble one (Yaqub), the son of a noble one (Ishaq), the son of the friend of Allah (Ibrahim)."
 - The Prophet SAW normally praised other prophets
 - Nothing is lost from a person when he is able to give other people credit and praise others.
 - Allah praises people throughout the Quran
- There are 5 incidents in the seerah where the Prophet SAW uses Yusuf's AS sunnah and applies it in his own life.
 - The stories of the prophets were given to the Prophet SAW as a model for him to follow
- When the Prophet SAW was on the journey of Mi'raj, he met different prophets at every level of the skies. When he reached the 3rd sky, he met Prophet Yusuf. The Prophet SAW said, "He was given half the beauty of this world."

The Best of Stories

- Allah begins the story of Yusuf AS by saying,
 نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِن كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ
We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an although you were, before it, among the unaware. (12:3)
- The word قَصَّ literally means to follow someone's footsteps.
 - When Allah uses this word in the Quran, it means that He will tell the story in sequence. This takes place two times in the Quran: in the story of Yusuf and Ashab al-Kahf.

- The Quran is not a storybook, it is a book of guidance.
- There are 3 themes in the Quran:
 - Tawheed (the oneness of Allah)
 - Risalah (prophethood)
 - Akhirah (the Day of Judgement)
- Allah also begins the story by reminding the Prophet SAW that he knew nothing about it from before.
 - When we engage with the book of Allah or narrations from the Prophet's SAW life, we should not sit with the mentality that we have already heard it.
 - If we sit as learners, then there will be benefits in it, even if we have already heard it before.
 - Instead of asking ourselves if we heard something before, we should ask ourselves if we are implementing it and acting upon it in our lives.

The Dream

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ ﴿٤﴾

when Joseph said to his father, "O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me." (12:4)

- The entire story starts with the dream that Yusuf had when he was a child, at around 7 years old.
 - Every child is allowed to dream and it is the parent's responsibility to guide the child in how to achieve their dreams or guide them to the right thing they should achieve
- Yusuf shared his dream with his father
 - Yusuf was comfortable enough to share something as vulnerable as this with his father and he knew that his father would listen without judging him.

- Our kids will only be that which they see and become that which they hear.
- Whatever environment we cultivate in the home is what our children will become.
- If a child is cultivated in an environment that is conducive to their growth, that child will not lose the trust of their parents.
- The word أَبٍ means, "O my beloved and respected father."
 - He called his father with respect
 - Just the verbiage of how you call your father/mother is an honor for them
- Generally, children repeat themselves when they tell stories. This is something that Yusuf did too as he was a child. He repeated the word رَأَيْتَ.
 - Because he repeated himself, Yaqub realized that Yusuf understood the meaning of his dream. This is why Yaqub did not tell him what the dream meant, because they both already knew.
- Yaqub responded to him and said,

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْضُ زُرِّيَّتَكَ عَلٰى اِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًاۗ اِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْاِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

He said, "O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan. Indeed Satan, to man, is a manifest enemy.

(12:5)
- The word بُنَيَّ means, "O my beloved son."
 - The child spoke with honor and respect and the father reciprocated that
- Yaqub gave him guidance not to tell the dream to his brothers. He did this knowing that Yusuf would take his advice personally or ask him why because he was intelligent.
- The brothers found out about the dream. There are 2 opinions as to how they found out:

- They overheard the conversation
- Or they took it out of Yusuf and made him tell them
- Yusuf had 11 brothers
 - Surah Yusuf is the 12th Surah and there were 12 sons of Yaqub
 - One of his brothers came from the same father and mother, Yaqub and Raheelah. His name was Binyamin
 - The other brothers came from the same father, but a different mother named Liya.
- The brothers began to plot against Yusuf.

إِذْ قَالُوا لِيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ آبَاءَنَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

When they said, "Joseph and his brother are more beloved to our father than we, while we are a clan. Indeed, our father is in clear error. (12:8)

- The youngest ones in the family are normally given more attention. Because Yusuf and Binyamin were the youngest brothers, Yaqub was treating them with a lot of love. But, the brothers could not understand it.
- The brothers had the correct motivation for coming up with the plot. They wanted to spend more time with their father. This is a good reason, but the end does not justify the means.
 - Just because there is a good thought, it does not mean that you can get to it by any means necessary. The means also have to be pure.
 - Our deen is based on a system in which the outcome is less important than the process.
 - In the dunya, everyone is only concerned about the end result, not about how you get there. But, in the deen, the process means more than the outcome.
 - If a person does not have wudu before praying, then their salah is invalid, no matter how much focus they had in the salah. The means was compromised, so it is no longer valid.

- Allah looks at the process and His system is the only system that is effort-driven, not result-driven.
- In the dunya, trying hard does not get you any credit. But, in the realm of akhirah, trying hard brings you reward.
 - The Prophet SAW said, "The one who is proficient in the recitation of the Qur'an will be with the honorable and obedient scribes (angels) and he who recites the Qur'an and finds it difficult to recite, doing his best to recite it in the best way possible, will have two rewards."
- Whoever struggles for something, Allah will give them the reward of the deed, even if they never got to the outcome.

The First Low: The Plot

افْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوْ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهُ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ

Kill Joseph or cast him out to [another] land; the countenance of your father will [then] be only for you, and you will be after that a righteous people."(12:9)

- We should never let a negative thought sit for too long. When a negative thought sits, it marinates, then it becomes a statement, then it becomes justified to us, and then we act on it.
- These are children of prophets. They had a good upbringing, but when a person lets jealousy get to them and lets negative thoughts sit, this is the result.
- Imam Ghazali and ibn Al-Qayyim talk about the 5 steps that occur before an action becomes an action:
 - The first step is هَم, which is a passing thought that comes and goes
 - If you let that thought sit, then it becomes نِيَّة, which is an intention to do something
 - One of the objectives of Shaytan is to make a person believe that what they are doing is good.

- The next step is إِرَادَة, which is when you start planning to do the action
- The fourth step is عَزَمَ, which is conviction, so no matter what happens, you are intent on doing the deed.
 - This is what the brothers of Yusuf did. They were dedicated to doing wrong to Yusuf even though there were so many barriers that could have prevented them from carrying out the plan. They convinced themselves that they were going to do it.
- The fifth step is عَمَلَ, which is doing the action itself.
- These 5 steps can happen for good things too.
- The brothers promised to be good people after killing him.
 - You cannot premeditate your tawbah. That is a form of mocking Allah.
 - Allah's mercy is not a form of empowerment to sin. It is a motivation to seek repentance.
- The oldest brother, named Yahuda, said,

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَأَلْقُوهُ فِي غَيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِن كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ

Said a speaker among them, "Do not kill Joseph but throw him into the bottom of the well; some travelers will pick him up - if you would do [something]." (12:10)
- The names of the other brothers are unknown. But, Yahuda's name was preserved in the religion called Yahud.
 - When someone does something good and no one knows about it, Allah preserves their name.
 - Yahuda spoke up, so Allah preserved his name.
 - We might think that there is no point in speaking up because it will not make an impact. But, our job is not to make the impact. Our job is to do what we are supposed to.

- They carried out their plan by asking Yaqub to let Yusuf go out with them to play. Yaqub felt pressured. He did not want to say no because he did not want them to keep feeling that they were not loved. But, he also did not want to let Yusuf go with them because he was not sure if he would get him back.
- Yaqub said, "I fear that a wolf may eat him."
 - Mufassirun say that this is how the brothers came up with their story afterward.
 - It is better not to even mention the crime.
 - Giving examples of sins might cause the sin, so it is best not to mention sins.
- The brothers had not planned out what they were going to tell Yaqub when they came back. They did not think that far ahead. This shows that they were not bad people inherently. Shaytan induced the thought in their head, but they were not bad people. This is why Allah never mentions their names in the story.
 - When Allah forgives someone, He hides their name in the Quran.
 - Allah also does not mention their crime explicitly for this reason. He says,

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

So when they took him [out] and agreed to put him into the bottom of the well... But We inspired to him, "You will surely inform them [someday] about this affair of theirs while they do not perceive [your identity]."

(12:15)

- In the biblical tradition, all of the details are mentioned. But, Allah does not mention the details of the crime because they were forgiven.
 - The Quran is not a vulgar book. It does not speak of these types of negative details because it is unnecessary.

- Allah's objective is not to embarrass the brothers. His objective is to allow us to understand the harms of jealousy and other lessons. It is not to speak low of them.
- What happened to Yusuf?
 - Yaqub lived at the bottom of a hill.
 - The brothers took Yusuf and climbed up the hill. As they were climbing up, they were carrying Yusuf on their shoulders.
 - When they got to a point where Yaqub could not see them, they threw Yusuf on the ground and all kicked him to the point that his back was broken.
 - Yusuf asked for help from one of the older brothers and he said to Yusuf, "Go ask the 11 stars and the sun and the moon."
 - This is when Yusuf realized that this was the outcome of their jealousy of his dream.
 - Yahuda told them to stop and stood up for him.
 - Allah put softness in the heart of older siblings
 - Older siblings are like parents
 - Younger siblings have to respect their older siblings
 - The other brothers had decided on their plan to throw him in the well, so they did not listen and carried on with the plan.
 - They took him to a well in the desert
 - The word بئر is used for a constructed well that people come to often for water.
 - The word جُب is used for a well that is not really constructed and it does not have a bucket inside.
 - They threw him in such a well because they did not want anyone to be able to help him out.
- When they threw him in the well, Jibreel came down from the heavens to him.

- The Prophet SAW asked Jibreel, "What was the fastest time you ever came down from the highest heaven?" Jibreel said, "Two times: when Ibrahim was thrown in the fire and when Yusuf was thrown in the well."
- Before he touched the bottom of the well, Jibreel grabbed up and put him on the side of a rock.
- While he was in the well, Yusuf started speaking to his brothers. He said, "O brothers! Are you going to forget about me? When you are sitting together to eat, won't you remember that I am alone in this well?"
- Jibreel told Yusuf to turn to Allah and taught him a dua.

يا صانع كل مصنوع، ويا جابر كل كسير، ويا شاهد كل نجوى، ويا حاضر كل ملاء، ويا مفرج كل كربة، ويا صاحب كل غريب، ويا مؤنس كل وحيد، إيتني بالفرج والرجاء، واقذف رجاءك في قلبي حتى لا أرجو أحدًا سواك

O Maker of everything, O He who repairs every broken one, O Witness of every secret counsel, O The one who is present in every gathering, O Reliever of every distress, O Companion of every stranger, and O Friend of everyone who is alone, give me an opening and hope, and cast your hope into my heart so that I hope for no one but you.

The Aftermath

وَجَاءُوا آبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِنْدَ مَتَاعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ ۗ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَّنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

And they came to their father at night, weeping. (16) They said, "O our father, indeed we went racing each other and left Joseph with our possessions, and a wolf ate him. But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful." (17)

- When Yaqub heard them say that a wolf ate Yusuf, he fell unconscious because he could not handle the pain.
- They woke him up and tried to tell him what happened, but he fell unconscious again.

- When he woke up again, he asked if they at least had something of his that he could hold onto.
 - When a loved one passes away, even the smallest thing they leave behind is valuable.
- The brothers gave Yaqub a shirt with the blood of a calf on it to try to prove that Yusuf was eaten by a wolf.
- Yaqub took the shirt and said, "I have never seen a more intelligent wolf than this one. It ate my entire son's body, but there is no tear in the shirt."
- The brothers wanted to prove it to Yaqub so they brought the wolf to him. Yaqub asked the wolf, "What did you do to my son?"
 - Sometimes the way to deal with your trauma is to hear the details of it, and sometimes it is better not to.
 - When Wahshi, the person who killed Hamza RA, came to the Prophet SAW to accept Islam, the Prophet SAW asked Wahshi how he killed Hamza, his uncle. Washi described how he killed Hamza and when he mentioned throwing his spear, the Prophet SAW put his hand up and told him to stop. The Prophet SAW was choking on his tears and he told him he could accept Islam, but he asked Wahshi not to sit in front of him because it reminds him of his uncle Hamza.
 - We can forgive even if we do not forget. Forgetting takes time.
- The wolf told Yaqub that his sons were lying to him. This is when Yaqub said, "Beautiful patience."
 - The meaning of صَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ is that you do not complain to anyone but Allah.
 - Ibn al-Qayyim says there is only one cure for a broken heart and that is to spill your heart to Allah alone.
 - Patience does not mean that you do not cry. It is that you complain to Allah.