Yusuf - The Truthful One

Human History's Matchless Youth Having An Iron Will And A Unique Foresight

Yusuf (a.s) was the son of Prophet Yaqub (a.s) the son of Ishaq (a.s), the son of Ibrahim through his first wife Sarah. Yusuf (a.s) once saw in his dream that, "the stars, the sun and the moon have come down on earth and they are bowing to him." When Yusuf (a.s) mentioned this dream to his dear father Yaqub, the latter said, "You will acquire a very high rank. So much so that your father, mother and eleven brothers would bow down before you to accord you respect." Then he added, "Do not mention this dream to your brothers otherwise they will burn in jealousy and may create some trouble."

The brothers anyway came to know about the dream and Yaqub's interpretation thereof. As a reaction, they took, by some excuse, Yusuf (a.s) to a forest out of Canaan in Palestine. There they threw him in a well. Then they smeared Yusuf's shirt in wolf's blood and brought that shirt to their father and said weeping that a wolf had devoured Yusuf (a.s).

But actually Yusuf (a.s) was safe and sound in that well. After a few days a caravan proceeding towards Egypt passed by that well. They lowered a bucket in that well and Yusuf (a.s) came out in that bucket. The caravan men took Yusuf (a.s) to a slave market and sold him away. At that time Yusuf (a.s) was only nine years old. The person who bought Yusuf (a.s) was the King of Egypt having in his hands all power in the country. The Holy Quran has mentioned him as the Aziz of Egypt. The king of Egypt was one of the Arab Pharaohs who ruled over Egypt for centuries.[1] The Aziz of Egypt was almost sure that Yusuf (a.s) belonged to a respectable family and was of a noble race. So he told his wife, Zulaikha, "Take full care of him. Perhaps he can be very useful to us and maybe I could take him as a son."

Zulaikha was a very beautiful and pompous woman while the Aziz was sexually impotent, therefore he was unable to satisfy her sexual urges. On the other hand, Yusuf (a.s) who had entered this royal house was so handsome, healthy and attractive due to his good manners that he immediately won the love of anyone who saw him once. As an added value to his noble personality, besides being very handsome he was also extremely modest. This had made him doubly attractive.

Yusuf (a.s) had passed nine years in the house of Zulaikha. During all these times, Zulaikha used to sit by the side of Yusuf (a.s). Gradually she began to be infatuated with Yusuf (a.s). This misplaced love and the elegance of Yusuf (a.s) by and by broke down all the threads of Zulaikha's patience and she became almost mad after him. Now she saw only Yusuf (a.s) all the time even during her dreams.

One day when the Aziz of Egypt had gone to Saqooyah for some business of the state, Zulaikha called Yusuf (a.s) in her bedroom. She had adorned and beautified herself attractively. When Yusuf (a.s) entered her room, she locked up all doors and told Yusuf (a.s), “O Yusuf (a.s)! Now I am in your control and possession.” Yusuf (a.s) replied, “I seek protection from God. I will never indulge in this evil affair. You are the wife of the Aziz of Egypt. I cannot ever encroach upon his rights. He has done me favors and provided me all kinds of facilities in his palace. How can I be dishonest to him?” Saying this, Yusuf (a.s) ran towards the door so that he could save himself from the sin. Zulaikha also ran after him and caught up the hind portion of his shirt. She tried hard to draw him back to her room. In this tussle, a part of Yusuf’s shirt was torn and remained in the hands of Zulaikha. Yusuf (a.s) was successful in running out of her room.

Accidentally the husband of Zulaikha, the Aziz of Egypt returned from his journey and saw this strange episode. Zulaikha at once made an allegation against Yusuf (a.s) saying, “If somebody attacks the honor of your wife, the only punishment of such a crime is either imprisonment or severe torture.” Yusuf (a.s) said, “This is a lie. I never intended anything evil nor had I at all advanced towards Zulaikha. It was only she who had ordered me to come to her room and only her intention was evil.” The Aziz saw that the hind part of Yusuf’s shirt was torn. So he understood that Zulaikha was the guilty one and he retorted, “All this is a dishonesty and dishonesty of women. In fact you are the offender.”

It is said proverbially that love and musk fragrance cannot remain hidden; it is necessarily manifested. So the secret of Zulaikha’s love and distress too became open. Women of Egypt began to gossip that Zulaikha had lost her heart to a slave from Canaan and that she was mad after him. Thus she became a target of taunts among the ladies of Egypt.

When Zulaikha became aware of her disgrace, she invited the leading ladies of the town for a feast in her palace. She adorned her apartment; spread valuable carpets on the floor and placed precious pillows by walls. When the women of Egypt’s high society arrived in the profusely decorated apartment of Zulaikha, she made all of them sit comfortably on the soft seats and according to the custom in vogue in those days, gave everyone of them a lemon and a knife and then said, “I request all the honorable ladies to please cut this lemon when Yusuf (a.s) is made to pass before us.” Then she commanded that Yusuf (a.s) should be brought over there. Accordingly Yusuf (a.s) arrived and passed away before them as ordered. When the eyes of the ladies fell on that handsome youthful gentleman, and they saw his radiant face and his admirable stature all of them became uncontrollable and, in this state of awe cut their fingers instead of the fruits. All exclaimed at once, “By God! Yusuf (a.s) is not a man. Rather he is an

angel coming down from the heavens!”

Zulaikha found this occasion fit for her and she said, “This is the man about whom you are taunting and maligning me. Just listen; you have observed him only for a split second whereas I have remained before him for years. Now when the situation has come to this extent I, hereby, announce that if he does not do what I command him he will either pass his life in prison or I will disgrace him in such a way that he will not be able to come out in the open.”

In the words of the Holy Quran:

So, when she heard of their sly talk she sent for them and prepared for them a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and said (to Yusuf): come forth to them. So when they saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement), and said: Remote is Allah (from imperfection); this is not a mortal; this is but a noble angel.[2]

Many ladies belonging to the high society of Egypt saw that a great personality was serving in the palace of Zulaikha and they cut off their fingers being struck by his elegance! Among them were even some who at once desired to be embraced by Yusuf (a.s)!

When Yusuf (a.s) found himself in a strange situation wherein, on one hand, his handsome youthfulness had made Zulaikha madly desirous of him, so many high status ladies of Egyptian elite were keeping their eyes on him and also that Zulaikha had already threatened that he would be jailed if he did not submit to her desire, he raised his hands towards the heavens praying to the Almighty God:

My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me; and if Thou turn not away their device from me, I will yearn towards them and become (one) of the ignorant. [3]

Prophet Yusuf (a.s) was a messenger of God. He was as steadfast as a rock in his stand. Zulaikha and other noble ladies of Egypt did not like it. Finally Yusuf (a.s) was sent to jail at the behest of Zulaikha. On the day of his imprisonment two other men were brought to that jail. One of them was a bartender for the Pharaoh and another a baker in the royal kitchen. Both were charged with allegations of poisoning the king. These inmates looked at Yusuf (a.s) with full respect saying:[4]

Surely we see you to be of the doers of good.[5]

By and by, two years passed away in which Yusuf (a.s) remained with the said two inmates. During these years, whenever these prisoners saw a dream they narrated it to Yusuf (a.s) and the latter gave its interpretation, which came true. One day both the prisoners came to Yusuf (a.s) and described their dreams to him. One had seen a true dream and the other mentioned an untrue vision. Yusuf (a.s) interpreted that the bartender would be freed and reinstated in his job whereas the baker who had narrated a false dream would be hanged. What Yusuf (a.s) said

came true.

After a long time, Pharaoh saw a dreadful dream. He saw that there were seven thin cows and seven healthy and fat cows and that the fat cows ate up the thin cows; also that there were seven dry and seven fresh green clusters of corn, which were destroyed. The Pharaoh called interpreters of dreams but all of them said that his dream was too confusing to be interpreted by them and hence they were helpless. Now the bartender who had spent two years in jail was also present and he recalled his experience to Pharaoh, “I know a man who can interpret your dream. His name is Yusuf and he is now in jail.”

Pharaoh ordered his men to go to the prison and narrate his dream to Yusuf and get his interpretation. So some people went to jail and requested Yusuf to interpret the royal dream. Yusuf (a.s) said, “Go to your king and tell him that there will come seven years of full and plentiful crops followed by another seven years of severe famine. So you should keep aside the required quantity of grain produced in the first seven years and store up the rest just as the corn is stored safely in its clusters. The grain so saved should be utilized for feeding the famine-struck people in the next seven years of draught so that people may not starve.”

The Pharaoh was much pleased with such a wise advice of Yusuf (a.s) who was leading a prisoner’s life. He was also astonished with Yusuf’s intelligence and foresight. He called Yusuf (a.s) to his court.

When the king’s men approached Yusuf (a.s) in jail to take him to the king, Yusuf said, “Go back to your king and ask him to explain why I was imprisoned? What was my offense? The ruler should first inquire into this matter and a find out why the high society women of Egypt had cut their fingers in Zulaikha’s apartment? My God knows full well why they did thus?”

The Pharaoh was struck with wonder by Yusuf’s reply. He summoned the elite women to his court and asked for their explanation. All of them at once replied that Yusuf (a.s) was not at all at fault. He was totally innocent. Now Zulaikha’s love spoke up truly. She got up and revealed the entire episode. She said, “Yusuf (a.s) is not guilty on any account. It was I who had called Yusuf (a.s) to my bedroom. What Yusuf is saying is hundred percent true. His character is absolutely blotless and clean.”

Then the Pharaoh sent a message to Yusuf (a.s) conveying to him that Zulaikha had confessed her sin and it has been fully proved that he was quite unjustly sent to jail. “You are not guilty. Please come out of prison with full respect and honor and see for yourself what will happen to Zulaikha and the concerned womenfolk. They will be punished for their offence.”

Yusuf (a.s) entered the court with all honor and told the Pharaoh, “I do not wish that the ladies be punished.” After a brief but exhaustive talk with Yusuf (a.s) the king was so much

impressed by Yusuf's all round personality, intelligence and honesty that he at once gave up all of his royal state affairs and requested Yusuf (a.s) to take the charge of the state as he saw that it would make Egypt prosperous and the people of his country happy during the aforementioned years of prosperity followed by the said seven years of famine. Taking up the state affairs in his hands, Yusuf (a.s) ordered that all the land should be brought under cultivation; that after harvest the produce should be preserved and that enough stock be stored up for use in time of need.

Seven years passed away gradually giving abundant crop. A big quantity of it was stored up. Then came the time of draught. People felt severe shortage of food grains and became fearful of starving. Yusuf (a.s) made the following arrangements for selling the stored stuff:

The First Year of Famine: The grain was sold in exchange of gold and silver. Thus all the precious metal in possession of people was transferred to the state treasury.

The Second Year of Famine: Grain was sold in exchange of ornaments, jewels and arms etc to the populace. Thus all precious things came in public trust.

The Third Year of Famine: Wheat was sold to people in exchange of animals like cows, sheep and goats, which transferred all animals to state control.

The Fourth Year: State acquired all slaves and bondmaids in exchange of wheat.

Fifth Year: People sold their houses and bought wheat from the state to save their lives.

Sixth Year: People sold all of their private irrigation fields and canals to state for buying wheat. Thus all this facility came in state control.

Seventh Year: Wheat was sold on condition that every man and woman would serve as a state servant. Thus everyone in populace became slaves to the state.

In this way Yusuf (a.s) became the controller of all the people and their possessions. No one starved or remained hungry and all began to say that Egypt had never before seen such an intelligent ruler who saved the people in extremely severe years of famine unprecedented in history.

When the emergency was over, Yusuf (a.s) approached the Pharaoh and said, "I never wanted to make people, through these reforms, feel that they are my slaves as it would only mean that a calamity called starvation turned into the trouble called slavery or bondage. You saw that Almighty Allah saved the people through my hands." The Pharaoh replied, "You are absolutely right. Now the entire populace of Egypt is under your control. It is now for you to deal with them as you please."

Prophet Yusuf (a.s) said, "I call God Almighty to witness. I believe that Allah is Omnipresent and Omniscient. Thereafter I make you a witness and say that I have freed each and everyone

of the countrymen. I am returning all the things, which were acquired from them to them, that they may once again live a happy and prosperous life."

The Pharaoh who had now become aged died after some time. Yusuf (a.s) became the ruler of Egypt both according to the custom in vogue and also as a result of his popular service to the people and he came to be known as the Aziz of Egypt. His fame spread far and wide all around.

Thereafter Yusuf (a.s) called Zulaikha who had become a widow following the death of the Aziz of Egypt and asked her as to why did she do all that; why she disgraced herself and jailed him for years? Zulaikha replied, "Satan had, at that time excited me to do wrong. I am very sorry for that. Now I have put faith in your God." Then Yusuf (a.s) proposed to marry Zulaikha, which she accepted. Then Yusuf (a.s) prayed to Almighty Allah. "My Lord! Zulaikha is very much repentant over her offence. You are All-powerful. Kindly return her youth to her." Yusuf's prayer was answered by God and Zulaikha became youthful once again.

But now her beauty had doubled. Thus started the new life of Yusuf (a.s).

The news about the new generous ruler reached Prophet Yaqub (a.s) and his other sons. As they also were hit by famine they intended to go to Egypt for importing grains to Palestine. So Yusuf's brothers made another journey to Egypt. In their second journey they found that this ruler was Yusuf (a.s) whom they had thrown into a well. They told one another, "How wonderful that Yusuf (a.s) not only came out of the well but also attained such status that we now see him as the Aziz of Egypt!" On the other hand they were also feeling guilty and were afraid what would happen if Yusuf (a.s) recognized them.

But Yusuf (a.s) knew them very well. He called them to himself and told them all that had happened. The brothers bowed their heads in shame. Prophet Yusuf (a.s) gave pardon to all of them, behaved very nicely with them and also invited them along with another brother and their parents to Egypt.

References

[1] Maybe he was from the line of Pharaohs, one ofwhom had confronted Musa (a.s.) and who were very oppressive rulers of theirtimes.

[2] Surah Yusuf 12:31

[3] Surah Yusuf 12:33

[4] Almighty God has always remembered His messengerslike this.

[5] Surah Yusuf 12:36