
“INDEED IN THEIR STORIES, THERE IS A LESSON FOR MEN OF UNDERSTANDING”

An Explanation of Soorah Yoosuf (12:111)

By Imaam ‘Abdur-Rahmaan Ibn Naasir as-Sa’dee (*rahimahullaah*)

Translation by Hishaam Ibn Zayd

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As-Shaykh ‘Abdur-Rahmaan Ibn Naasir As-Sa’dee states in his *tafseer*¹,

Regarding the last *ayah* of *Soorah Yoosuf* (*alayhis-salaam*) wherein Allaah *subhaanahu wa ta’ala* says,

“Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding”

Soorah Yoosuf [12:111]

This story is from the best of stories because of what it relates from the varying phases of life; from trial to tribulation, from being tested to being blessed, from humiliation to grandeur, from slavery to kingship, from division to unity, from grief to joy, from superfluity to famine, from famine to glut, from hardship to ease, and from denial to affirmation. So blessed be the One who revealed it in the best manner possible.

From amongst the lessons derived from this *soorah* are:

1. The knowledge of interpreting dreams is a very important branch of knowledge that Allaah gives to whom he pleases from His servants. And most of them (dreams) are based on symbols that are ambiguous in meaning and in description. For indeed the significance of the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing to Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), is that these lights are the beauty of the sky, and from them emanates benefit. Likewise the Prophets and the scholars are the beauty of this earth, and by them mankind is guided through darkness just as they do by the light of the stars, the sun and the moon. Moreover, since the source of this light is his mother and father, hence it is very befitting that the moon and the sun symbolize his parents, for from them emanate the greatest light from which he and his brothers are offsprings. Thus, the sun, which is a feminine noun,

¹“*Tayseer al-Kareem ar-Rahmaan*” (pg. 408 - 412)

symbolizes his mother and the moon, which is a masculine noun, symbolizes his father, and the stars symbolize his brothers.

2. The significance of the dream of his fellow prison-mate, who saw himself pressing wine, is that the one who does such work is usually the servant of someone else. Thus he interpreted it to mean that this prison-mate would be a servant for the king, and this would guarantee his freedom from prison. Regarding the significance of the dream of the one who saw birds eating bread from the top of his head, Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) interpreted this dream as a indication that he will be crucified because the skull protects the brains and once a person is crucified and left in the open, the brains will become exposed, thus the bird will eat it.

3. Therein are evidences of the truthfulness of the prophet-hood of Prophet Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), for he narrated to his people this long story and he never read the previous books nor learned from any one.

4. One should distance oneself as much as possible from situations that can lead to an evil outcome. Also the permissibility of not disclosing what one fears might harm them based on the statement of Yaqoob (*alayhis-salaam*) to Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), “**He (the father) said: "O my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they arrange a plot against you."**

5. The permissibility of a person mentioning to someone else, as a means of sincere advice, a matter that is disliked based on the ayah, “**Lest they arrange a plot against you.**”³

6. The blessing that Allaah bestows upon the servant is not simply restricted to that particular individual; rather it is a blessing that encompasses him, his family and his friends. And whatever good is obtained is because of that person, based on the statement of Allaah, “**Thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of dreams (and other things) and perfect His Favour on you and on the offspring of Yaaqoob (Jacob), as He perfected it on your fathers, Ibraaheem (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) aforetime! Verily, your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise.**”⁴

7. The importance of being cautious of the evil results of sins, because one sin often leads to many others. For the brothers of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) tried varying plots when they wanted to separate him from his father; they lied many times, they falsified the blood on the shirt, they came at night pretending to cry, and all of this is as a result of one sin, one thing leading to another.

² Soorah Yoosuf [12:5]

³ Soorah Yoosuf [12:5]

⁴ Soorah Yoosuf [12:6]

8. The matter that really counts in the life of the servant is the successful ending and not the deficient beginning. For the children of Yaaqoob (*alayhis-salaam*) did what they did in the beginning which was a very reprehensible act, then their affair ended in sincere repentance, complete forgiveness from Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) and their father, and *du'aa* was made for them to be forgiven and have mercy upon.

9. Some evils are lesser than others and committing the least or lesser evil is always better. For when the brothers of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) agreed to kill him or throw him in the well, one of them said, “**Kill not Yoosuf (Joseph), but if you must do something, throw him down to the bottom of a well.**”⁵ Thus his suggestion was better in comparison with those of his brothers (in spite of it still being an evil one) and because of this he lessened the greatness of the sin they committed.

10. There is no sin on a person that buys, sells, or uses anything that is considered as merchandise according to prevailing business practices. Nor is the one who is not aware how this merchandise was obtained guilty of any sin. For the brothers of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) sold him, which was a *haraam*, impermissible transaction, then he was found by a caravan of people who took him to Egypt and sold him there as a slave, and in spite of all this Allaah referred to him as “merchandise.”

11. One should be careful to avoid being secluded with women whom may be a cause of *fitnah*, and one should also be cautious of the love for someone that may be harmful. For the wife of the king did what she did because of her infatuation with Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) that lead her to try to seduce him, tell lies about him and cause him to be imprisoned for a long time.

12. The inclination that Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) would have had for the woman, but resisted it for Allaah’s sake is what actually brings him closer to Allaah. Because this type of inclination is from amongst the soul’s evil suggestions and it is something that happens naturally to most of mankind. However, the love and fear of Allaah overpowered the call of fulfilling desires. Thus, he is from amongst those “who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires and lusts.” And also from amongst the “seven whom Allaah will shade in His Shade on the Day when there is no shade except His Shade: a man who is called by a woman of beauty and position (for illegal intercourse), but he says: ‘I fear Allaah.’”

13. Whenever *eemaan* enters the heart and one makes his whole affair sincerely for Allaah’s sake, Allaah will indeed repel and defend one from all types of evil and vulgarity because of one’s *eemaan* and sincerity due to Allaah’s statement, “**Thus it was, that We might turn away from him evil and illegal sexual intercourse. Surely, he was one of Our sincere slaves.**”⁶

⁵ Soorah Yoosuf [12:10]

⁶ Soorah Yoosuf [12:24]

14. Whenever the servant sees a situation that might be one of *fitnah* or cause of sin, he should flee as far as possible from it to save himself from sin.

15. Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) was beautiful both externally and internally. As for his external beauty, it made the king’s wife do what she did, and it made the other women cut their hands while proclaiming, “...How perfect is Allaah (or Allaah forbid)! No man is this! This is none other than a noble angel!”⁷ His internal beauty was because of his great chastity and self-restraint in spite of the many enticements to commit sin. This is why the king’s wife said, “...I did seek to seduce him, but he refused.”⁸

16. When there is an atmosphere for sin, the servant should always return unto Allaah and distance himself from his own strength and power based on the statement of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), “...Unless You turn away their plot from me, I will feel inclined towards them and be one (of those who commit sin and deserve blame) of the ignorants.”⁹

17. Knowledge and intelligence leads one who possesses it to do good acts and prevents him from evil. Ignorance on the other hand, calls the one who is ignorant to conform to his desires, even if it is harmful to him.

18. Just as the servant worships Allaah during times of ease, similarly he should also worship him during times of hardship. For Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) was constantly calling to Allaah, thus when he entered the prison he continued to make *da’wah*. He called the two young men to *at-tawheed* and he warned them against *as-shirk*. Hence, from his quick-wittedness he saw that they were responsive to his *da’wah*, whereby they said to him, “...We think you are one of the *Muhsinoon* (doers of good).”¹⁰ So this was a golden opportunity for *da’wah* that he seized by calling them to Allaah before interpreting their dreams so his goal (of calling them to Islaam) would be more fruitful. Thus, firstly he made it clear to them that what they notice of him from his noble character and in-depth knowledge is all a result of belief in Allaah and singling him out for worship (*tawheed*), and he abandoned the path of those who do not believe in Allaah and the last day. So he first gave them *da’wah* through his actions, then he gave them *da’wah* by his speech illustrating to them the corruption of *shirk* and the reality of *at-tawheed*.

19. The importance of priorities. For when he was asked by the two young men to interpret their dreams, they were other matters of importance that they were in greater need of knowing before their questions were to be answered. This is a sign of a teacher possessing great intelligence, and the ability to correctly guide and teach, for when Yoosuf

⁷ Soorah Yoosuf [12:31]

⁸ Soorah Yoosuf [12:32]

⁹ Soorah Yoosuf [12:33]

¹⁰ Soorah Yoosuf [12:36]

(*alayhis-salaam*) was asked by the two young men about their dreams; he first called them to Allaah before interpreting their dreams.

20. It is not considered depending on others (instead of Allaah), if one happens to get into a difficult situation and one seeks the assistance of someone whom he thinks can alleviate his situation, for this person there is no blame on him if he does this. This is because it has always been the custom of people to seek each other’s assistance in such matters. Hence, Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) said to the one whom he knew would be saved, “**...Mention me to your lord** (i.e. your king, so as to get me out of the prison).”¹¹

21. The one who teaches should always try to have complete sincerity when he teaches, and he should not use his position as a means to obtain wealth, status or personal benefit. Furthermore, he should not withhold from spreading knowledge or giving advice even if the one whom he taught or advised did not do what he (the teacher) requested. For indeed Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) advised one of the young men to mention his situation to the king, but he forgot and did not mention him. However, when the time came when he was in need of him, he sent someone to get Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*). In spite of this, Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) did not chastise him for forgetting to mention his situation to the king; rather he gave him a complete answer to his question.

22. There is no blame on a person for defending himself against a false accusation. Rather this is something praiseworthy. As Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) refused to leave the prison until his innocence was proven.

23. Dream interpretation is a branch of the Islaamic sciences, and a person is rewarded for studying and teaching it. Dream interpretation also comes under category of giving *fataawaa*, for he said to the two young men, “**...Thus is the case judged concerning which you both did inquire.**”¹² (*tas’taftiyaan* - sought a *fatwaa*) The king said, “Explain (*aftonee* - give me a *fatwaa*) of my dream”, and the young man said to Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), “**...Explain to us** (*aftinaa* - give us a *fatwa*) **regarding** (the dream) **of seven fat cows.**”¹³ Thus, it is not permissible to interpret dream except with (*sharee’ah*) knowledge.

24. As long as a person is not pretentious or dishonest, he should not be criticized if one informs others about his praiseworthy qualities, if he intends by this to bring about a general benefit based on the statement of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), “**Set me over the storehouses of the land; I will indeed guard them with full knowledge.**”¹⁴ Likewise, leadership is not something that is blameworthy if the one who is in charge fulfils the rights of Allaah and the rights of His servants to the best of his ability.

¹¹ Soorah Yoosuf [12:42]

¹² Soorah Yoosuf [12:41]

¹³ Soorah Yoosuf [12:46]

¹⁴ Soorah Yoosuf [12:55]

25. Allaah is very generous to his servants by giving them the best of this life and the next. The means of achieving the best of the next life is by having *eemaan* and *taqwa*. The servant should always ask Allaah for his rewards and bounties and he should not be disappointed whenever he sees the people enjoying the pleasures of this world whereby he is unable to partake. Rather he should ask Allaah for His great reward and bounties in the next life based on His statement, **“And verily, the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and used to fear Allaah and keep their duty to Him.”**¹⁵

26. It is from the “*sunnah*” of the Prophets to host guests and to treat them honourably based on the statement of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), **“...See you not that I give full measure, and that I am the best of the hosts?”**¹⁶

27. Having negative thoughts about someone is not something that is always prohibited if there are accompanying evidences to support this suspicion. For verily, Yaaqoob (*alayhis-salaam*) said to his sons after they came to him claiming that a wolf ate Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), **“Nay, but your ownselves have made up a tale.”**¹⁷ And he said regarding their next brother, “Can I entrust him to you except as I entrusted his brother (Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*)) to you aforetime?”

28. If one does not want another person to be aware of something one has or something one intends to do, one should use a subtle means of distraction that does not contain any lies. As Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) did when he put the golden bowl into his brother’s bag, and he then took the golden bowl out of his brother’s bag leading them to think that their brother is the one who stole it. After which he said, **“...Allaah forbid, that we should take anyone but him with whom we found our property.”**¹⁸ Notice he did not say, “We found our property with him”, or “He stole our property.” Rather, he made a general statement that can apply to this situation as well as others, and there is nothing wrong with what he did. For all he did was make them think that their brother stole the golden bowl, so that his youngest brother can remain with him, as was the objective.

29. It is not permissible for a person to bear witness except to that which he has sure knowledge of. He acquires this knowledge either by witnessing it himself or by being informed by a trustworthy person based on the statement of the Yoosuf’s (*alayhis-salaam*) brothers, “We testify not except according to what we know.”

30. The permissibility of informing others of the difficulties one is enduring, as long as this is not done in a manner that indicates one is annoyed with the decree of Allaah, for

¹⁵ Soorah Yoosuf [12:57]

¹⁶ Soorah Yoosuf [12:59]

¹⁷ Soorah Yoosuf [12:18]

¹⁸ Soorah Yoosuf [12:79]

the brothers of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) complained, “...O ruler of the land! A hard time has hit us and our family...”¹⁹ and Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) did not object to their statement.

31. The merits of *taqwaa* (fear and consciousness of Allaah) and *sabr* (patience), for every good in this life and the next is as result of *taqwaa* and *sabr* based on the statement of Allaah, “...Allaah has indeed been gracious to us. Verily, he who fears Allaah and is patient, then surely, Allaah makes not the reward of the Muhsinoon (good-doers) to be lost.”²⁰

32. The one whom Allaah has blessed after being in a state of poverty or distress should acknowledge the bounties of Allaah upon him by constantly remembering his previous condition. Thus he would be able to thank Allaah every time he remembers his previous condition, as Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*) said, “He was indeed good to me, when He took me out of the prison, and brought you (all here) out of the Bedouin-life, after Shaytaan had sown enmity between me and my brothers.”²¹

33. The servant should always exalt Allaah for making him remain steadfast upon *eemaan* by constantly doing those deeds that causes one’s *eemaan* to remain firm. Also one should always ask Allaah to have a successful ending by perfecting His Favour upon oneself based on the *du’aa* of Yoosuf (*alayhis-salaam*), “My Lord! You have indeed bestowed on me of the sovereignty, and taught me the interpretation of dreams; The Creator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Walee (Protector, Helper, Supporter, Guardian, etc.) in this world and in the Hereafter, cause me to die as a Muslim, and join me with the righteous.”²²

This is by the will of Allaah, this is what He has made possible for me to mention regarding the benefits and lessons obtained from this blessed story, however for the one who contemplates, he is guaranteed to find other benefits from the *soorah* than those mentioned. So we ask Allaah the Most High, to bless us with beneficial knowledge and actions that are acceptable to Him, indeed He is the Most Generous, the Most Gracious.

¹⁹ Soorah Yoosuf [12:88]

²⁰ Soorah Yoosuf [12:90]

²¹ Soorah Yoosuf [12:100]

²² Soorah Yoosuf [12:101]