

Glimpses from the Life of Prophet Yusuf

Description: Events from the life of Prophet Yusuf that teach us valuable lessons as applicable today as they were in Yusuf's lifetime.

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Published on 17 Dec 2012 - Last modified on 03 May 2013

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Objective:

- To examine several events in the life of Prophet Yusuf and discuss them in relation to what advice we can take and apply to our own lives as Muslims in the 21st century.

Arabic Terms:

- *Yusuf* - the Arabic name for Prophet Joseph.
- *Yaqub* - the Arabic name for Prophet Jacob.
- *Surah* - chapter of the Quran.
- *Sabr* - patience and it comes from a root word meaning to stop, detain, or refrain.
- *Sabr Jameel* - beautiful patience.
- *Fitnah* - an Arabic word that does not translate easily into English. It means a time of trial or tribulation, particularly a situation that prevents one from worshipping God correctly, or causes acts of disobedience or disbelief.

The Quran explains the concept of Allah, it explains in detail what is permissible and what is forbidden, it explains the basics of good manners and morals, and gives rulings about worship. It describes Paradise and Hell and tells stories about the Prophets and our righteous predecessors. Stories in the Quran are usually told in small bite size pieces and revealed over several *surahs*; the story of Prophet Yusuf however is told in one *surah* from beginning to end. Although Prophet Yusuf is mentioned in several places throughout the Quran, this one *surah*, *surah* 12 is his complete story and experience.

The essence of *surah* Yusuf is patience, *sabr* in the face of adversity. *Sabr* means accepting what is beyond our control, something that Prophet Yusuf learned from a very young age. In times of stress and anxiety, being able to surrender to the will of God is a relief beyond measure, Yusuf faced hardships first hand, but he did not accept, sit back and let life pass him by. He strove to please Allah in all aspects of his life. Renowned Islamic scholar Ibnul Qayyim told us that *sabr* means having the ability to stop ourselves from despairing, to refrain from complaining, and to control ourselves in times of sadness and worry. He also was able to derive 1000 lessons from *surah* Yusuf.

However in this article we will take a glimpse into the life of Prophet Yusuf and examine just three extremely important lessons.

Lesson 1

Allah alone has control over all affairs.

As a young teenager Prophet Yusuf was cast into a well by his brothers who were jealous of him, and was later picked up by a caravan and then sold into slavery. For a more detailed story about the life of Prophet Yusuf, please see:

<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1790/viewall/>

His older brothers were jealous of Yusuf's bond with their elderly father so they convinced their father to allow Yusuf to accompany them for fun and games, but their intention was to kill him. One amongst them however felt the error of their ways and suggested that rather than killing *Yusuf*, they should cast him into a well. When found by some passing traveller he would be sold into slavery, thus rendering him as good as dead to the family. They also believed, in their blindness, that the absence of Yusuf would remove him from their father's thoughts.

Allah had other plans, so while the brothers congratulated themselves, He established Yusuf in the land of Egypt in order to teach him wisdom and understanding. The pain and suffering Yusuf felt being separated from his father and the frightening ordeal of being sold into slavery were trials designed to mould Yusuf's character. They were Yusuf's first steps on the ladder to greatness and they established him as a Prophet of Allah. The plots and plans of the treacherous brothers were inconsequential.

Lesson 2

True *sabr* is a key to the gates of Paradise.

When Yusuf's brothers returned to their father and told him Yusuf had been taken by a wolf, Yaqub's heart constricted in pain and fear. He knew his sons were lying but he had no option except to face that fear with complete submission to Allah. He turned to Allah with hope and patience. This type of *sabr* is what Islam calls *sabr jameel* - beautiful *sabr*.

"Nay, but your own selves have made up a tale. So (for me) patience is most fitting. And it is God (Alone) Whose help can be sought against that which you assert." (Quran 12:18)

Throughout the many years until Yaqub saw his dear son Yusuf again, he never gave up hope. At one time when his sons asked if he would *weep forever* he replied that he only complained of his grief and sadness to Allah, and that he knew, due to his total reliance on Allah, things that they did not know.

Lesson 3

Complete trust in Allah must be practiced consistently, in all situations, good, bad, easy, or difficult.

If we accept that we are no more than slaves of Allah, put on this earth, to be tried, tested and tempted, life can take on a completely new meaning. Both Yusuf and his father Yaqub recognized that God was the one thing in their lives they could totally rely on.

During his time in the house of one of the top Ministers of Egypt Yusuf was forced to fend off the sexual advances of his benefactor/master's wife. Yusuf called out to Allah for help. He said,

"O my Lord! Prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. 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 or those who do the deeds of the ignorant." (Quran 12:33)

Yusuf believed that being in prison would be preferable to living in an environment of lust, greed and seduction. He did not want to be subjected to the *fitnah*, that is also rife in our 21st century lives. Allah answered his supplication and rescued him by allowing him to be sent to prison. Yusuf's ability to stay patient, persevere and stay away from sin led to his ultimate success.

Lesson 4

Forgiving others.

Prophet Yusuf teaches us to be easy going and forgiving with others and not to lose hope of Allah's Mercy and forgiveness. After all that the brothers did, Prophet Yusuf forgave them. When Yusuf reveals his true identity to his brothers he is careful to speak to them in such a way that they know he has forgiven them for their harsh treatment.

He said: "You will hear no reproaches today, may Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!" (Quran 12:92)

Likewise Prophet Yaqub demonstrated amazing restraint and forgiveness.

They said, "O our father, ask for us forgiveness of our sins; indeed, we have been sinners." He said: "I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you, verily He! Only He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful." (Quran 12: 97-98)

In another place the Quran praises the quality of suppressing anger and pardoning people:

"...and who swallow their anger and forgive people, verily, Allah

loves the righteous." (Quran 3:134)

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