

Sura Yusuf, Verses 89-90

قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ

?He said: Do you know how you treated Yusuf and his brother when you were ignorant

قَالُوا أَأِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ يُوسُفُ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

They said: Are you really Yusuf? He said: I am Yusuf and this is my brother; Allah has indeed been kind to us; Surely he who is God conscious and patient, Indeed Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good

Reflections

- why does Nabi Yusuf say they did what they did to him when they were ignorant?
- how must the brothers have felt when they recognised Nabi Yusuf?
- what favors is Nabi Yusuf speaking of in the verse?
- how would you describe the attitude of Nabi Yusuf?

Tafsir

When the brothers come to Egypt with a letter from their father, Nabi Yusuf takes the letter and kisses it. He is overcome with emotion to see something from his father. He weeps and cannot hide his secret anymore. He turns to the brothers and asks them about what they did to Yusuf and his brother when they were ignorant.

Note how magnanimous Nabi Yusuf is in the way he asks his brothers. He indicates that it was done in the past when the brothers were ignorant, implying that they are now different. They are not ignorant any more. It becomes easier for someone to accept their mistake when the opportunity is given to them to show they have changed. Saying that it was due to their past ignorance gives the brothers an excuse and maintains their dignity.

Nabi Yusuf mentions that wrong was done to him and his brother. It shows that Benjamin also suffered from the actions of the brothers. It is possible that he had narrated this to Nabi Yusuf while he was with him in Egypt.

To soften his words Nabi Yusuf smiled as he spoke. The brothers looked at him and were surprised at the resemblance they could see to the brother they had. That, along with Nabi Yusuf's emotion at seeing his father's letter and then his question about their actions, all made the brothers realize that this really must be Yusuf himself. Hesitatingly they ask if he actually is Yusuf himself.

There were a few moments of silence. Would Nabi Yusuf admit the truth or would he continue to keep it a secret? Nabi Yusuf knew it was time to tell the truth. He identifies himself. He tells them he is Yusuf and that with him is Benjamin his brother. It was a stunning moment that left the brothers speechless. They felt ashamed of what they had done and were ready to seek forgiveness.

Nabi Yusuf continues and thanks God for His favors. It was through His grace that Nabi Yusuf had been able to achieve much. This is the sign of a true believer. Any blessing or any event that happens is due to the planning and strength of God. Nabi Yusuf says that patience and God consciousness ultimately bear fruit. Allah will reward that in both the worlds. Even at such a sensitive moment when there was a lot of family emotion Nabi Yusuf reminds others about God. This is also what he did in the prison. It shows his strong connection with God and his true belief that the real controller of all things is God.

Hadith

Imam Sadiq (a) says:

Surely in the coming of al Qaem there is a practice from the life of Nabi Yusuf. People will not recognize him until God gives him permission to identify himself.

(Biharul Anwar, Vol. 12, pg 283)

Imam Ali (a) says:

Pardon [and overlooking mistakes] is the crown of all noble qualities.

Important Lessons

1) When you have a conflict with someone do not remind them about the details later. It only creates anger and bitterness on both sides.

- 2) Be understanding of the mistakes people make.
- 3) Always recognize the hand of God behind all that you achieve in life.
- 4) Use an opportunity to talk about God even in awkward and sensitive moments.

Possible Ideas for activities

- discuss conflict scenarios. How do people react to each other a long time after? Act out the scenarios or play a game, write on posters . . .
- let students think of a mistake they made and how it affected someone else. What can be the consequences of a mistake? The teacher could talk about a mistake and ask students for their reactions.
- write down the emotions that the brothers and Nabi Yusuf must have felt at that meeting. Discuss each emotion and do an activity or story on it.
- ponder over the second hadith and discuss overlooking mistakes. Why is it a crown? What is the function and effect of a crown? Make a crown and label it ‘pardon’ or ‘forgiveness’.

Related Story

Pardon of Malik al Ashtar

Malik al Ashtar was a respected companion of Imam Ali and the commander of his army. But on the normal days, he looked a poor man. He wore simple clothing. He walked humbly. Thus most people did not know him.

One day, while Malik al Ashtar was walking in the street, a foolish person was eating some dates and throwing the stones. Malik al-Ashtar passed before the foolish person. He threw a stone at Malik al-Ashtar. The stone hit him on the back. The foolish person began laughing at him. A man saw the foolish person. He said to him: What are you doing? Do you know that man? The foolish person answered: No, who is he? He's Malik Ashtar commander-in-chief of Imam Ali's Army!

Malik Ashtar went on walking. He did not pay attention to the foolish person. He remembered how the polytheists treated Prophet Muhammad (saw) in Makkah. They threw dust and rubbish at him but he kept silent.

Malik Ashtar came into mosque. He began praying for Allah to forgive the foolish person. The man ran quickly. He came into the mosque. He embraced Malik Ashtar apologizing and saying: I want to apologize to you for my bad behavior! So, accept my apology. Malik Ashtar answered with a smile: Brother, don't worry. By Allah, I've entered the mosque to pray for Allah to forgive you.

Sources:

Āytaullāh Nāsir Makārim Shirāzī (ed), *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*;
Aghae Muhsin Qaraati, *Tafsire Nur*
<http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/companion3a.asp>