

Overview**The number of dreams in Sūrat Yūsuf****The king's dream****The response of the chiefs****The plan of God****Related stories****Intellectual humility**

Sūrat Yūsuf

Verses 43-44

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أَرَى سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ
يَابِسَاتٍ ۚ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِن كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّؤْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ

The king said, I saw in a dream seven fat cows being eaten by seven thin ones and seven green ears of corn and seven others that were dry. O chiefs, explain to me my dream if you can interpret dreams

قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ ۚ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَحْلَامِ بِعَالَمِينَ

They said, these are confused dreams and we do not know the interpretation of dreams.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why would the king be concerned about his dream?
2. The chiefs don't seem afraid of giving their opinion to the king. What type of relationship do they have with the king?
3. What is the plan of God in this turn of events? Who is going to need whom?

Commentary

Sūrat Yūsuf has talked about four dreams so far;

- the dream of Nabī Yūsuf
- the two dreams of the prisoners

- the dream of the king

Each dream played a role in the life of Nabī Yūsuf.

Nabī Yūsuf spent many years in prison, waiting for his name to be cleared. He used his time to talk the prisoners. He comforted them, looked after those who were sick, and told them about belief in the Merciful God. He made the most of his time although he was eager to be freed.

Until one day something happened that changed things completely. It changed things not just for him, but for the future of the people of Egypt. The king of Egypt whose name is recorded as Walīd bin Rayān (and whose vizier was the ‘Azīz of Egypt who had taken in Nabī Yūsuf) saw a dream. He saw seven thin cows eating up seven fat cows, and he saw seven ears of corn which were fresh and green and another seven that were dry and withered. He was worried about what he saw and he called the people in his court in the morning to ask them what they thought about his dream. Some people say it is possible he saw the dream more than once and so he was worried. The people of his court said it was a strange dream and they could not interpret it. They describe it as ‘azghāsu ahlām’ meaning dreams that are mixed up, confused, scary . . .

Their message to the king was that some dreams make sense and are good dreams, while others are like nightmares. They worry the dreamer but are a mix of things from his imagination which come together in a scary way. Perhaps this was just an overactive imagination.

It is also possible that they understood that the dream was predicting something that would not be very good. But they were afraid to tell the king. They only told him things that would please him and make him happy. They were afraid to displease him by telling him of an interpretation that he would not like.

Although most chiefs are very respectful to the king, these people seemed to dismiss the dream he saw as a confused nightmare. Perhaps it was because they saw the king was concerned and they wanted to calm him. They tried to laugh it off so he would not think more of it. But the matter worried the king. The dream did not sound good for his kingdom. Would it be attacked and ‘eaten up’ by another king? Would he lose his kingdom? These thoughts bothered the king.

The dream of the king was part of the plan of God to remove Nabī Yūsuf from the prison. It would clear his name and free him from prison. It would give him a respectable position in Egypt and eventually unite him with his family. It was also to

save the people of Egypt from a drought that could have destroyed them. Such is the plan of God. It has far-reaching effects and what He wills always happens. But it takes time and many people lose hope instead of trusting the plan of God for themselves.

Note for teachers – some scholars do believe that the ‘Azīz of Egypt and the king of Egypt are the same person. However according to Tafsīr Namūne, the source for these notes, they were two different people. It may not be necessary to tell this to the students. Differences in history do occur between scholars and do not really affect the moral of the story. Children however may not understand that and get confused.

Related Stories

Queen of Sheba seeks advice:

When Prophet Sulaymān was told by Hudhud about Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba whose people worshipped the sun, he decided to communicate with her. He gave Hudhud a letter to deliver to her. Hudhud flew to the land of Sabā where the queen was and dropped the letter in the lap of the queen. When Bilqīs read the letter, she was worried. She called her advisors to seek their advice. ‘I have received an honorable letter from Sulaymān’ she told them. ‘It begins in the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful and it says; Accept Allāh and worship Him alone. I am his Prophet.’ Bilqīs then asked her advisors what they thought she should do. They were very respectful towards her and said they were strong and could fight if necessary but they said she was the one who would decide. This story shows an example of a leader who was wise and consulted with people around her who had knowledge, even though she was the one in charge.

The Holy Prophet *sallal-lāhu ‘alayhi wa-‘ālihi wasallam* consults others:

During the battle of Khandaq, the Muslims were worried about the enemies who had gathered forces to come and attack them. The army was marching towards Madīna and the Muslims in Madīna knew they would soon reach Madīna. The Prophet consulted his companions and asked them what they thought would be a good plan. Although he was a Prophet of God, God wanted him to consult others. That showed respect for others and strengthened their work together as a team. Salmān al Farsi suggested they build a moat around Madīna which would be filled with water. The enemies would not be able to jump over it with their horses. The Prophet accepted his suggestion and asked the Muslims to begin digging the moat. It was completed in a few days and completely surprised the enemies when they reached Madīna.

Lessons

- 1) Kings and leaders are always worried about losing their power
- 2) Seeking advice from others, especially experts those with more knowledge is a wise action. The King seeks advice of his chiefs and asks their opinion. Consulting others is recommended in Islām.
- 3) If you do not know something, do not be afraid to say it. The chiefs could not interpret the dreams. Only the expert in dream interpretation— Nabī Yūsuf — could.
- 4) Trust in the plan of God for yourself.

Practical Implementation

- a) When something is confusing to you, seek guidance from experts.
- b) If you are leading something, get opinions from your team members before proceeding with a decision.

Cross reference verse

The Holy Prophet *sallal-lāhu ‘alayhi wa-ālihi wasallam* accused of having confused dreams – Q 21:5

Connecting Topics

- 1) Consulting others
- 2) Intellectual Humility - Accepting not knowing something

Imām ‘Alī *‘alayhis-salām* says: *Give up discussing what you do not know and speaking about what does not concern you.* (Nahjul Balāghā, letter no.31)

Imām ‘Alī *‘alayhis-salām* also says; *Whoever abandons saying, ‘I do not know’ meets his destruction.* (Nahjul Balāghā, H#85)

Useful Links

<https://www.al-islam.org/leading-ummah-jafar-subhani/chapter-9-consultation-islam>

<https://behavioralscientist.org/the-benefits-of-admitting-when-you-dont-know/>