

Fast 23: Qualities for leadership: 3. Leaders must be above suspicion

- The life of a leader must be above suspicion, transparent and above board. In the story of Joseph given in the Quran in chapter 12, he was sold into slavery and became a servant in the household of a chief in Egypt (12:19–21). The chief's wife attempted to seduce Joseph, and when caught she falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape and he was imprisoned on this charge (12:23–35). While he was in prison, he preached the oneness of God to his fellow-prisoners and also interpreted their dreams (12:36–41). The King of Egypt had a dream which his advisors failed to understand (12:43–44). One of Joseph's former fellow-prisoners remembered that he used to interpret their dreams, and he took the King's dream to him in prison, and Joseph interpreted it (12:45–49). When the interpretation was conveyed to the King he ordered Joseph to be brought out of prison into his presence, but Joseph refused to leave prison until the charge against him was investigated and his innocence proved (12:50). The King questioned the chief's wife and her accomplices:

“(The king) said: What was your business when you sought to seduce Joseph? They said: Holy Allah! We knew of no evil on his part. The chief's wife said: Now has the truth come out. I sought to seduce him and he is surely truthful.” (12:51)

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكَ إِنَّ إِيَّادُوتُنَّ يُوسُفَ عَنْ
نَفْسِهِ قُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنْ
سُوءٍ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَرِيزِ إِنَّنِي حَصَّصْتُ الْحَقَّ
أَنَا وَإِيَّادُوتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

Joseph said:

“This is so that he (the woman's husband) might know that I have not been unfaithful to him in secret, and that Allah does not guide the plan of the unfaithful. And I do not call myself sinless; surely (man's) self is apt to command evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy. Surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.” (12:52–53)

ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ
وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي كَيْدَ الْخَائِبِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾
وَمَا أَبْرَأُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ
لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي
إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

Joseph gives the reason why he chose to remain in prison until the investigation cleared him: “so that he (the woman's husband) might know that I have not been unfaithful to him in secret”. Joseph was anxious for his name to be cleared and for the stain to be removed against his character. In Joseph's eyes the fact that he found

favour with the King, for a service that he performed, could not be used to forget about this outstanding charge against him. This teaches the great lesson that the life of a leader, religious or national, and in particular the life of one appointed by God for the reform of people, must be above all suspicion and open to scrutiny.

Notice that Joseph does **not** say: I am innocent because I am a prophet of God. Instead, with humility, he says that any human being may be tempted to commit a wrongful act, but it is Allah Who has had mercy on him and granted him strength to resist temptation. As the Quran said about the attempted seduction by the chief's wife:

“And certainly she desired him, and he would have desired her if he had not seen the clear evidence of his Lord. Thus (it was) that We might turn away from him evil and indecency. Surely he was one of Our chosen servants.” (12:24)

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ^ء وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنْ
رَأَىٰ بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ^ط كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ
عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ^ط إِنَّهُ مِنْ
عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

- The Holy Prophet Muhammad too ensured that there was no misunderstanding or suspicion about his actions. There is an incident reported in several versions in Hadith, one of which is as follows. Safiya, a wife of the Holy Prophet, related:

While the Messenger of Allah was in *I'tikāf* (retreat in solitude during the last days of Ramadan), I called on him at night and having had a talk with him, I got up to depart. He got up also to accompany me to my dwelling place, which was then in the house of Usama ibn Zaid. Two Ansari men passed by, and when they saw the Prophet they hastened away. The Prophet said (to them): “Don’t hurry! It is Safiya, the daughter of Huyay” (i.e., his wife). They said: “Glorified be Allah (*subhān Allāh*)! O Messenger of Allah!” (meaning, how could we suspect you?) He said: “Satan circulates in the human mind as blood circulates in it, and I was afraid that Satan might throw an evil thought into your hearts.” (Bukhari, h. 3281)

The two men might have had a suspicion in their minds that the Holy Prophet was alone with some other woman at night. He did not want them to dismiss this thought only because they believed him to be the Prophet of God, and he did not want to rely on their goodwill or to be given the benefit of the doubt by them. In fact, the seed of suspicion in their minds might gradually gnaw away at their faith. The Holy Prophet did **not** say: I can do no wrong because I am a Prophet. Instead, he was saying: I have not done any wrong because you can see with your eyes **evidence that I have not done any wrong.**