114749 - He is confused about Yoosuf saying “Mention me to your master”

the question

Does Allah punish his prophets? In the story of Yusuf (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was he left in prison for a number of years as a punishment from Allah because he asked one of his prison mates to mention him to his master, while only Allah should be called Master.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We have previously discussed the fact that the Prophets (may be the blessings and peace of Allaah be upon them all) are infallible and protected against major sins, bad attitudes and vile actions that are contrary to chivalry.

See the answers to questions no. 7208 and 42216.

Secondly:

With regard to the story of Yoosuf, the more correct of the two opinions in the commentary thereon is that the one who forgot to mention him to his lord (master) in this verse was not Yoosuf (peace be upon him) but the other prisoner, whom Yoosuf asked to mention him to his lord (master or king). Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And he said to the one whom he knew to be saved: “Mention me to your lord (i.e. your king, so as to get me out of the prison).” But Shaytaan (Satan) made him forget to mention it to his lord. So [Yoosuf (Joseph)] stayed in prison a few (more) years”

[Yoosuf 12:42]

As the apparent meaning of the commentary on the verse is that the one who forgot was the one

who was supposed to convey the message from Yoosuf to the ruler of Egypt, there is nothing in the content of this message – to remind the ruler about Yoosuf – that undermines the position of Prophethood or is contrary to the idea of putting one's trust in Allaah and referring one's needs to Him.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said: Allaah said: "But Shaytaan (Satan) made him forget to mention it to his lord". It was said that he caused Yoosuf to forget to remember his Lord, when he said, "Mention me to your lord." And it was said that the shaytaan caused the one who was saved (from person) to forget to mention him to his lord. This is the correct view, because it follows on from the words "Mention me to your lord". Allaah said: "But Shaytaan (Satan) made him forget to mention it to his lord". The pronoun refers to the nearest person if there is no evidence to the contrary, and because Yoosuf would not forget to remember his Lord, for he was always remembering his Lord. Before interpreting the dream he had called them both [his two fellow prisoners] to believe in his Lord, and said to them:

"O two companions of the prison! Are many different lords (gods) better or Allaah, the One, the Irresistible?

40. "You do not worship besides Him but only names which you have named (forged) — you and your fathers — for which Allaah has sent down no authority. The command (or the judgement) is for none but Allaah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him (i.e. His Monotheism); that is the (true) straight religion, but most men know not"

[Yoosuf 12:39-40]

And before that he had said to them:

"No food will come to you (in wakefulness or in dream) as your provision, but I will inform (in wakefulness) its interpretation before it (the food) comes. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. Verily, I have abandoned the religion of a people that believe not in Allaah and are disbelievers in the Hereafter (i.e. the Kan'aanyyoon of Egypt who were polytheists and used to worship sun and other false deities).

38. “And I have followed the religion of my fathers, — Ibraaheem (Abraham), Ishaaq (Isaac) and Ya‘qoob (Jacob) [عليهم السلام], and never could we attribute any partners whatsoever to Allaah. This is from the Grace of Allaah to us and to mankind, but most men thank not (i.e. they neither believe in Allaah, nor worship Him)”

[Yoosuf 12:37-38]

Thus he mentioned his Lord, and this is what his Lord had taught him, because he left the religion of mushrik people who did not believe in Allaah even though they acknowledged the existence of a Creator, and they did not believe in the Hereafter, and he followed the religion of his forefathers, the leaders of the believers, whom Allaah has made leaders calling people to Him – Ibraaheem, Ishaaq and Ya’qoob. He mentioned his Lord, then he called them to believe in his Lord, then after that he interpreted the dream and said:

“O two companions of the prison! As for one of you, he (as a servant) will pour out wine for his lord (king or master) to drink” [v. 41]

Then when he had finished interpreting the dream, “he said to the one whom he knew to be saved: ‘Mention me to your lord (i.e. your king’)”, so how could the shaytaan have caused Yoosuf to forget to mention his Lord?

Rather the shaytaan caused the one who was saved (from prison) to forget to mention Yoosuf to his lord (or master, the king).

Those who were of this opinion said: It would have been better to put his trust in Allaah and not say, Mention me to your lord; when he forgot to put his trust in his Lord, he was punished by staying a few years more in prison.

It may be said that there is nothing in his saying “Mention me to your lord” that is contrary to putting one’s trust in Allaah (tawakkul), rather Yoosuf said: “The command (or the judgement) is for none but Allaah” [v. 40], just as his father’s words, “Do not enter by one gate, but enter by different gates” [v. 67], were not contrary to putting one’s trust in Allaah, rather he said: “I cannot

avail you against Allaah at all. Verily, the decision rests only with Allaah. In Him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him" [v. 67].

Moreover, Allaah has testified that Yoosuf is one of His sincere slaves, and the sincere person cannot be sincere if he puts his trust in anything other than Allaah, because that is shirk, and Yoosuf was not a mushrik, either in worship or trust. Rather he put his trust in his Lord with regard to his own actions, as he said: "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 deeds) of the ignorant" [v. 33]. How could he not put his trust in Him with regard to the actions of His slaves?

His saying "Mention me to your lord" is like his saying to his master, "Set me over the store-houses of the land; I will indeed guard them with full knowledge" (as a minister of finance in Egypt)" [v. 55]. When he asked to be appointed as governor for a religious purpose, that was not contrary to putting one's trust in Allaah, and it was not the kind of seeking high position that is forbidden. So how could his saying to the boy, "Mention me to your lord" be contrary to putting one's trust in Allaah, when all it involved was telling the king about him so that he would know about his situation and the truth would become clear, and Yoosuf was one of the most steadfast of people.

Hence after this request – "And the king said: 'Bring him to me'" [v. 50] – was made, Yoosuf said: "Return to your lord and ask him, 'What happened to the women who cut their hands? Surely, my Lord (Allaah) is Well-Aware of their plot" [v. 50]. So here Yoosuf referred to the "lord" (master) of that man, as he mentioned him before. And he said: "Return to your lord and ask him, 'What happened to the women…" In saying "Mention me to your lord", he did not fail to do something that was obligatory and he did not do something that was haraam, such that Allaah would punish him by leaving him in prison for a few more years.

What is meant is that Yoosuf did not commit a sin that was referred to in the Qur'aan, and Allaah does not tell us of any sin that any of the Prophets committed but He also tells us that he asked for forgiveness for it. But Allaah does not tell us that Yoosuf asked for forgiveness for these words.

End quote from Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (15/112-118).

Thirdly:

With regard to Yoosuf (peace be upon him) saying when he was in prison, “Mention me to your lord”, this is not the lordship of worship, rather it is the lordship of kingship and control. Al-Fayroozabaadi said: The lord of anything is its owner or the one who is entitled to it or to whom it belongs. But no one can be called the Lord in a general sense except Allaah, may He be exalted, who is looking after all creatures. But when it is mentioned in conjunction with something else in the possessive, then it may be said of Allaah and of others, such as Rabb al-‘Aalameen (Lord of the worlds), rabb al-daar (owner of the house). End quote.

Basaa’ir Dhuwi’l-Tamyeez (3/29).

Al-Raaghib al-Asfahaani said: It may be said; rabb al-daar (lit. lord of the house), rabb al-faras (lord of the horse) meaning the owner thereof. It is on this basis that Allaah tells us that Yoosuf said “Mention me to your lord”. End quote,

Al-Mufradaat fi Ghareeb al-Qur’aan (186).

What al-Raaghib (may Allaah have mercy on him) meant was that the usage of the word rabb (lord) in this verse is permissible, because lord here refers to his master or ruler, not a lord in an absolute sense; that may only be said of Allaah, may He be exalted.

But he may be confused and think that this is not allowed, as in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “None of you should say, Give food to your lord (rabb), help your lord with wudoo’, give water to your lord. Let him say sayyidi or mawlaaya (my master). And no one of you should say my ‘abd or my amah (referring to his slave); let him say my fataa or my fataah, or my ghulaam.” [Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2552) and Muslim (2249).

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: The scholars said: The word al-Rabb, with the definite article al-, cannot be applied to anyone except Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted.

But it may be used in conjunction with something else, in the genitive, e.g., rabb al-maal (the owner of the wealth), rabb al-daar (the owner of the house) and so on. An example of this is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, in the saheeh hadeeth about the lost camel, “Let it be until its owner (rabbuha) finds it, and in another saheeh hadeeth, “until the one who has wealth (rabb al-maal) will be worried about finding someone to accept his wealth (zakaah).” (It also appears) in the words of ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) in al-Saheeh, “… the owner (rabb) of the herd of camels and flock of sheep…” And there are many other well-known examples in the hadeeth.

The scholars said: It is only makrooh for a slave to say to his master “rabbiy (my lord)” because by saying this he is making someone a partner with Allaah in lordship.

With regard to the ahaadeeth “until its owner (rabbuha) finds it” and “owner (rabb) of the herd of camels” and so on, the word is only used here because it refers to things that are not accountable. They are like houses and wealth. Undoubtedly it is not makrooh to say rabb al-daar (owner of the house) or rabb al-maal (owner of the wealth).

With regard to the words of Yoosuf, “mention me to your lord”, there are two answers:

1 – That he was addressing him in terms that he was accustomed to; such usage is permissible in cases of necessity, as Moosa (peace be upon him) said to al-Saamiri: “And look at your ilaah (god)” [Ta-Ha 20:97], i.e., look at that which you have taken as a god.

2 – This was the law of those who came before us, and the law of those who came before us is not a law for us if our law tells us something different. There is no difference of scholarly opinion concerning this point.

The scholars of usool only differed concerning the laws of those who came before us if there is no narration stating that our law is either in agreement with it or differs from it – is it a law that is prescribed for us too, or not? End quote.

Al-Adhkaar by al-Nawawi (1/363).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: The reason for the prohibition is that that the right of Lordship belongs to Allaah alone, because the lord is the owner, the one who is maintaining a thing, and that is true only of Allaah, may He be exalted.

Al-Khattaabi said: The reason why it is not allowed to call another person one's rabb (lord) is that man is under the care of al-Rabb (the Lord, Allaah), and he is required to show sincere belief in the Oneness of Allaah (Tawheed) and avoid associating anything with Him (shirk), so it is makrooh for him to use the same name lest it come under the heading of shirk. There is no differentiation in this case between the free man and the slave. As for other things, animals and inanimate objects, which are not obliged to do acts of worship, it is not makrooh to use this word in the genitive with reference to them, such as saying rabb al-daar (owner of the house) or rabb al-thawr (owner of the bull).

Ibn Battaal said: It is not permissible to call anyone except Allaah rabb (lord), just as it is not permissible to call anyone else ilaah (god). What is to be used exclusively for Allaah is the word al-Rabb (the Lord) with the definite article, without mentioning anything in conjunction with it. But when it is used in conjunction with another word, in the genitive, it is it permissible to use it, such as when Allaah tells us that Yoosuf (peace be upon him) said: "Mention me to your Lord" and he said: "Return to your lord" [Yoosuf 12:50], and when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, describing the portents of the Hour, "When the slave woman gives birth to her lord (i.e., master, rabbaha)." This indicates that the prohibition on using this word applies only to its use with the definite article (al-Rabb), and it is possible that the prohibition is aimed at avoiding usage with reference to human beings of words that are befitting only for Allaah. Reports which indicate otherwise may be taken as meaning that it is permitted. Or it may be that it is not allowed to do that a great deal and take that usage as a habit, and it does not mean that it is forbidden in all cases. End quote.

Fath al-Baari (5/179).

To sum up:

The word al-Rabb (the Lord) which applies only to Allaah is that which appears with the definite article, but when the word is used in conjunction with something else, especially if it is something that has no power of rational thought and is not obliged to worship Allaah, then it is permissible. That includes this verse.

It may also be said that the interpretation is that he was addressing them in their language that they knew, or that this was permissible for them.

And Allaah knows best.