



A Story of Light in the Depths

Had He Not Been of Those Who Exalt

الله

Allāh

Hossam Ash-Sharqawy



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*Allāh***

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Had He Not Been of Those Who Exalt *Allāh*

All praise is due to *Allāh*, who hears the crawling of a black ant on a solid rock in the darkest night.

I bear witness that there is no deity but *Allāh* alone, with no partner; and I bear witness that *Muḥammad* is His servant and Messenger.

In a small village in Iraq called Nineveh, *Yūnus* (Jonah) ﷺ (Peace be upon him) grew up. *Allāh* ﷻ (Glorious and Sublime Be He) honored him with *Ar-Risālah* (the mission of conveying His message) to His creation and chose him as one of His prophets.

Yūnus ﷺ called his people to worship his Lord ﷻ (Glorified and Exalted be He), and though none of them accepted his *Da‘wah* (call) and believed. Yet he remained patient, seeking reward from *Allāh* ﷻ, using every situation in his *Da‘wah* and all available means to deliver his *Risālah*. However, his people’s stubbornness remained an obstacle to his goal and prevented faith from entering their hearts.

Days, months and years passed without change. *Yūnus* ﷺ continued his *Da‘wah*, while his people persisted in disbelief and stubbornness. Until one day, *Yūnus* ﷺ grew extremely angry with his people and decided to abandon his village and go to another land to call people to *Allāh* ﷻ.

It seemed a logical decision given his people’s stubbornness and their refusal to respond to his *Da‘wah*: Let us leave this village that rejected the Message of *Allāh* ﷻ, and go elsewhere; perhaps its people would

believe what those before them disbelieved.

Any *Dā'iyah* (caller) to *Allāh* would see this as a solution under these circumstances: it is what one would do when the *Da'wah* makes no progress and the people are unwilling to follow the religion of *Allāh* and its teachings.

But for *Yūnus* ﷺ, this posed a major dilemma: it is not permissible for the Messengers and Prophets of *Allāh* to act on their own; they must await the commands of *Allāh* ﷻ through *Al-Wahy* (revelation) before making such decisions.

Yet *Yūnus* ﷺ did not pay sufficient attention to this crucial point. He left the village that had belied him all these years and went in search of another in which to call people to his Lord ﷻ. He hoped that *Allāh* might open their hearts to his *Da'wah* and that they might accept the religion of *Allāh* and believe in Him.

Yūnus ﷺ went to where there were ships that would carry him to the other village. He found one and asked its captain to take him with them. They welcomed him and said, "Welcome, righteous servant."

Yūnus ﷺ set sail. When the ship reached the open sea, winds and storms intensified, and the waves began to toss the ship like driftwood on the water. The captain ordered that excess cargo be thrown overboard to prevent the ship from sinking. They began throwing their belongings overboard, but the water kept rising in the depth of the sea, nearly sinking the ship. They then decided that one of the passengers must be thrown into the sea so that the rest might survive!

O Allāh!

Who would accept being thrown into the sea, knowing he would surely perish?!

Is it possible that someone would volunteer to throw himself into the water to save the others?! How would the problem be solved if no one volunteered to be thrown into the water?!

Indeed, the instinct of self-preservation overcame altruism, and no one volunteered. It became necessary to resort to another means to resolve and settle the dilemma.

The captain wrote down the names of all the passengers, then cast lots to determine who would be thrown into the sea. All the while, Yūnus ﷺ was watching, sensing that something was amiss, and that what was happening was a form of warning from Allāh. Even so, he did not know what it was, nor what mistake had occurred.

The captain drew the arrow bearing the name of the one to be thrown into the sea. The arrow that no one expected came out: that of Yūnus ﷺ !

Shock spread amongst them, and they said, "How can we throw the righteous servant off the ship?". So, they agreed to cast lots once more. They repeated the process, and Yūnus's arrow came out again!!!

They then said, "Let us cast lots one final time." Again, Yūnus's arrow was drawn out!

At that moment, Yūnus ﷺ realized that what was happening was a decree (Qadar) from Allāh ﷻ, and that leaving his village had been a mistake. Hence, what happened, happened. Now, he had to face the destiny that Allāh ﷻ had written for him and be content with His ordainment. He hoped that Allāh ﷻ would forgive him for not waiting

for *Al-Wahy* before leaving the village to which he had been sent with His *Risālah*.

Yūnus ﷺ requested that they throw him into the sea, for this was *Allāh's Qadar* for him. So, he was thrown into the sea. Then the most astonishing thing one could imagine happened. A whale emerged from the depth of the waters, opened its mouth, and swallowed him. Thus, *Yūnus* ﷺ began a new journey in the depths of darkness!

What would you do when distress intensifies upon you?!

What would you do when the world grows dark before your eyes?!

To whom would you turn when people abandon you and no one remains by your side?!

When *Yūnus* ﷺ was thrown into the sea and swallowed by the whale, he became certain that there is no refuge from *Allāh* except to Him. He knew that *Allāh* ﷻ would not constrain him further than this. So, he turned to his Lord, making *Du‘ā'* (supplicating Him), exalting Him, and seeking His forgiveness. He hoped that *Allāh* ﷻ would pardon him, remove his distress, and save him from anguish.

Allāh ﷻ mentioned the story of *Yūnus* ﷺ in two places in the Noble *Qur'ān*: in *Sūrah Al-Anbiyā'* (The Prophets) and in *Sūrah Aş-Şaffāt* (Those Lined Up). In *Sūrah Al-Anbiyā'*, we find a description of what happened, as *Allāh*, ﷻ, said (what means):

﴿And [mention] the man of the fish [i.e., Yūnus], when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."﴾

[Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets), 21:87].

Yūnus ﷺ found himself in the heart of darknesses: the darkness of the whale's belly, the darkness of the sea, and that of the night!

In the heart of those darknesses, it was necessary to reflect on oneself and identify one's mistakes. Therefore, Yūnus ﷺ began glorifying Allāh ﷻ, affirming His oneness, exalting Him, and praising Him. Then he confessed his sin. He realized that he should never have left his village without the permission of Allāh ﷻ, and that he should have awaited Allāh's Wahy and command to know whether he should go or not.

All of this made Yūnus ﷺ reflect upon what he had done and what had happened afterward, until he was thrown into the sea and swallowed into the whale's belly!

When was the last time you reflected upon the trials you face?

Do you connect what is happening to you with a sin you committed? Do you feel that this trial has befallen you only because of a sin? Do you sense that you must repent so that Allāh may remove this trial from you?

Do you have certainty that Allāh will not increase your hardship?

Do you think well of your Lord?

Do you utter 'Lā ilāha illallāh' (affirming His oneness), exalt Him, and

seek His forgiveness?!

Do you confess your sin to your Master?!

Do you seek His pardon, clemency, and forgiveness?!

Yūnus ﷺ continued making *Du‘ā’* to his Lord, exalting Him, and asking for His forgiveness. Then came the first drops of mercy, and his Lord ﷻ commanded the whale to protect Yūnus ﷺ in its belly.

***”Then Allāh revealed to the whale: ‘Do not eat his flesh,
nor crush his bones, for Yūnus is not your
sustenance—rather, your belly shall be a prison for him.’”^a***

^aNarrated by *Al-Bazzar* in *”Al-Musnad”* (8227), and it is weak (in authenticity). *Al-Haythamī* said in *”Majma‘ Az-Zawā’id”* (11300): ”It was narrated by *Al-Bazzar* on the authority of some of his companions whom he did not name, and among its narrators is *Ibn Is-ḥāq*, who was a *Mudallis* (one who conceals the identity of his source), and the rest of its narrators are from the narrators of *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

O Allāh!

How Gentle You are, O Allāh!

O You Who protect Your servants in the heart of trials!

O You Who have mercy on Your creation despite their sins!

O You Who take charge of their affairs despite their disobedience!

O You Who take them by the hand and guide them back to You!

Yūnus ﷺ remained in this state: uttering 'Lā ilāha illallāh', exalting Him and asking for His forgiveness until relief came, and his Lord, ﷻ, responded to him. Allāh forgave him, as He ﷻ, said (what means):

﴿So We responded to him and saved him from the distress.﴾

[Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets), 21:88].

His Lord ﷻ responded to him and saved him from the anguish in which he had been immersed. Yūnus did not know when he would be delivered, nor whether his Lord would accept his repentance. Yet he thought well of his Lord, sought refuge in Him, asked for His forgiveness, and turned to Him in repentance. Thus, his Lord accepted his repentance, washed away his sin, forgave his transgression, and removed his distress!

So, is this specific only to Yūnus ﷺ?

Is it a unique case that cannot be repeated?

Is it a rare situation and a special miracle just for him ﷺ?

The answer comes in the rest of the previous *Ayah* (verse), where Allāh ﷻ, said (what means):

﴿So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers.﴾

[Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets), 21:88].

O Allāh!

And thus do We save the believers!

Rejoice, O afflicted one — in *Allāh*'s relief!

Rejoice, O one overwhelmed by calamities and surrounded by darkness — in salvation! Rejoice, O one whose paths are cut off, who has sought refuge with the Lord of all worlds — for *Allāh* saves the believers!

What must *Yūnus* ﷺ have felt when he was in the whale's belly, not knowing his fate nor what would become of him?

How was his *Du'ā'*, his pleading, and his humbling before his Lord?

What was the state of his heart in this trial and distress?

When crises intensify and distress surrounds you, how do you make *Du'ā'* to your Lord? Do you occupy yourself with remembrance, *Du'ā'*, and asking for forgiveness when the trial becomes severe upon you?

Do you seek refuge in people, or do you seek refuge in the Lord of the earth and the heavens?

Yūnus ﷺ began to humble himself, make *Du'ā'*, and asking for forgiveness — not knowing when relief would come. Yet he was certain that *Allāh* ﷻ would answer him, sooner or later, whether the trial was prolonged or brief!

What if *Yūnus* ﷺ had not humbled himself before his Lord, made *Du'ā'* to Him, uttered '*Lā ilāha illallāh*', exalted Him, and asked for His forgiveness?

What would have become of him had he not realized that he had erred, and that he must repent, ask for forgiveness, and exalt his Lord.

What if *Yūnus* ﷺ had not been among those who exalt *Allāh*?

Allāh, ﷻ, tells us of this in *Sūrah Aṣ-Ṣāffāt*. After mentioning the story of *Yūnus* ﷺ and the whale swallowing him, He ﷻ, says (what means):

And indeed, Yūnus was among the messengers. When he ran away to the laden ship. And he drew lots and was among the losers. Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy.

[*Aṣ-Ṣāffāt* (Those Lined Up), 37:139-142)].

Then *Allāh* mentions the state of *Yūnus* ﷺ :

And had he not been of those who exalt Allah.

[*Aṣ-Ṣāffāt* (Those Lined Up), 37: 143)].

What would have happened to him, O Lord, if he had not been among those who exalt You?

He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.

[*Aṣ-Ṣāffāt* (Those Lined Up), 37: 144)].

O Allāh!

Had he not been among those who exalt *Allāh*, he would have remained in the belly of the whale until the Day of Resurrection (*Yawmu-l-Ba‘th*)!

Had he not been among those who exalt *Allāh*, the whale would have become his grave until the Day of Judgment (*Yawmu-d-Dīn*)!

Had he not been among those who exalt *Allāh*, this affliction would never have been lifted from him until *Yawmu-l-Ba‘th*!

Had he not been among those who exalt *Allāh*, he would never have seen the light again!

Had he not been among those who exalt *Allāh*, he would never have returned to his life, his family, his home, and his *Da‘wah* again!

When affliction befalls you, then rush to exalting Him, asking His forgiveness, and making *Du‘ā*’!

When your distress intensifies, then intensify your humbling before the One in Whose hand is all affairs!

When the earth — vast as it is — becomes narrow for you, then say: ‘O *Allāh*!’

When your very soul becomes narrow for you, then say: ‘O *Allāh*!’

When the world grows dark before your eyes, then say: ‘O *Allāh*!’

The exaltation of *Allāh* by *Yūnus* ﷺ was the cause of his salvation after several days of the darkness that surrounded him. His asking for forgiveness and *Du‘ā*’ were the reason *Allāh* ﷻ commanded the whale to release him onto the shore, where deliverance awaited him!

The whale cast *Yūnus* ﷺ onto the shore of salvation. *Allāh* ﷻ caused a gourd plant to grow over him, providing him with shade and food until his health was restored and he regained his strength!

﴿And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine.﴾

[*Aş-Şaffāt* (Those Lined Up), 37:146)].

Then *Allah's* care for *Yūnus* ﷺ continued, as He took charge of his affairs, so *Allāh* ﷻ sent him to a hundred thousand or more — and they all believed!

O Allāh!

No one had believed in him for many years, and then a hundred thousand believed all at once!

The religion is *Allāh's*, and the command is His. All that is required of us is to act, make *Du'ā'*, strive, and ask *Allāh* to guide mankind. He ﷻ is the One who guides to the straight path!

Goodness may come from the last place you expect, and from the last person you could imagine!

Yūnus ﷺ returned to his people and found that they had all believed.

When *Yūnus* ﷺ left them, in wrath at their disbelief, disobedience, and refusal to believe, they came to realize that *Allāh's* punishment would inevitably befall them. They saw his departure as a sign that punishment was imminent, and consequently, they all believed. *Yūnus* ﷺ then returned to find that they had believed in *Allāh* ﷻ, and what he had hoped for came to pass!

When *Yūnus* ﷺ left his village, he could never have imagined that such a success would come about, nor that such a vast number of people would believe in him!

Yūnus ﷺ could never have conceived that he would be afflicted with such a severe trial: that he would be cast into the sea, swallowed by a whale, and remain in layers of darkness!

Yūnus ﷺ did not know that Allāh ﷻ would make him a miracle for mankind until *Yawmu-l-Ba‘th*. He did not know that his *Du‘ā* would become an *Ayah* recited in the Book of Allāh. It would continue to be recited until Allāh inherits the earth and all who dwell upon it. Nor did he know that his glorification of Allāh would become a *Du‘ā* by which Allāh removes distress!

Yūnus ﷺ was saved, his people believed, and his story came to an end — but its lessons never will!

His story was a confirmation of what has been narrated in the saying:

”No affliction befalls except due to a sin, nor is it removed except through repentance.”^a

^aIt is attributed to ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd-Muṭṭalib (may Allah be pleased with him) and it is part of his supplication for rain. See: *Faṭḥ -Bārī* by Ibn Ḥajar (3/150), who attributed it to the book *Al-Ansāb* by Az-Zubayr ibn Bakkār.

His story is that of a righteous servant who was zealous for the religion of Allāh and grew extremely angered by his people’s disbelief. However, he acted hastily and left his village without awaiting the permission of Allāh ﷻ or His commands. Thus, came the affliction, followed by *Du‘ā*, then relief, after which a hundred thousand or more came to believe.

His story serves as a lesson for us and for all those who come after us. Let no one say: “I am better than Yūnus ibn Mattā,” nor assume that, had he been in his place, he would have acted better: Yūnus ibn Mattā is of a higher rank and is among the chosen servants of Allāh.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him)

defended him, saying:

***”It is not befitting for a servant to say: ‘I am better than
Yūnus ibn Mattā”^a***

^aNarrated by *Al-Bukhārī* (3395) and *Muslim* (2376)

When affliction befalls you, then hold fast to *Du‘ā’*, and always remember:

***❦ And had he not been of those who exalt Allāh. He
would have remained inside its belly until the Day they
are resurrected. ❦***

[*Aṣ-Ṣāffāt* (Those Lined Up), 37:143- 144)].



*“And had he not been of those who exalt Allāh,
he would have remained inside its belly
until the Day they are resurrected.”*

Aṣ-Ṣāffāt 37:143–144

In the depths of the sea, in the darkness of the whale’s belly, in the darkness of the night — Yūnus called upon his Lord. His *tasbīḥ* became his deliverance.

A meditation on hope in despair, on the power of glorification, and on the mercy of Allāh that delivers believers from the deepest of darknesses.



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