

# Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)

Dr. Hassan Mohi-ud-Din Qadri  
Dean, Faculty of Law, Minhaj University Lahore.  
Email; [hasanqadri@mul.edu.pk](mailto:hasanqadri@mul.edu.pk)

Received on: 10-07-2024

Accepted on: 13-08-2024

## Abstract

Leadership is a timeless concept, deeply analyzed across cultures and histories. In Islamic tradition, Hazrat Yusuf (Joseph) (peace be upon him) emerges as a paragon of exemplary leadership through his narrative in *Sura Yusuf*. His life, marked by dramatic turns—from being betrayed by his brothers to rising as Egypt's Vizier—offers reflective insights into effective leadership. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) story is remarkable not only for its histrionic elements but also for the deep lessons it imparts about leadership. Betrayed and abandoned by his own brothers out of jealousy, Yusuf (peace be upon him) was sold into slavery. Despite these severe trials, his firm faith and integrity shine through, emphasizing the importance of maintaining one's moral area within adversity. Yusuf's (peace be upon him) resilience highlights how steadfastness in values can guide a leader through even the most challenging situations.

**Keywords:** Leadership Traits, Story of Yusuf, Sura Yusuf (Joseph), Egypt, Islamic Traction

## Introduction

A key aspect of Yusuf's (peace be upon him) leadership was his exceptional patience and strategic foresight. His ability to interpret dreams, including those of the Egyptian king, enabled him to propose a comprehensive plan to manage Egypt's resources through years of plenty and famine. This foresight was instrumental in mitigating the famine's impact, showcasing the importance of vision and strategic planning in leadership. Moreover, Yusuf's (peace be upon him) approach to forgiveness—reconciling with his brothers despite their betrayal—demonstrates emotional intelligence and the capacity for empathy. His choice to forgive rather than seek revenge reveals a leader's role in healing and uniting people, fostering trust and collaboration.

Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) story also intertwines with the concept of divine providence, illustrating that leadership is not just about personal achievement but also about fulfilling a greater, divinely orchestrated role. His life offers timeless lessons on maintaining integrity, embracing forgiveness, and managing diverse groups with empathy. By exploring Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) leadership qualities, we gain valuable insights into effective leadership principles that remain relevant in contemporary contexts. His narrative provides enduring wisdom for those seeking to lead with integrity, patience, and compassion.

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

The concept of servant leadership in Islam revolves around the principle of leading by serving others, grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)). This approach prioritizes the welfare of others, emphasizing humility, compassion, and integrity. The story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) revolves around the same trait.

**(1) The Servant Leader**

Rescued and sold into slavery, Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) found himself in the house of Potiphar, the chief minister of Egypt. Here, he chose the path of a servant leader, a concept deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. He embodied the Qur'anic injunction:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ﴾

œWe made them leaders, guiding (people) by Our command. And We revealed to them the performance of virtuous deeds, the maintenance of prayers and the giving of charity (alms).

And they were (always) Our devoted worshippers.Σ<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, there is a famous tradition. Jarir b. 'Abd Allah (may Allah be well pleased with him) narrated that he heard the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) saying:

سَيِّدُ الْقَوْمِ خَادِمُهُمْ.

"Give the hireling his wages before his sweat dries."<sup>2</sup>

Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) unwavering honesty, integrity, and dedication to his duties set him apart. As mentioned in *Sura Yusuf*, verse 55:

﴿قَالَ أَجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

œHe said: 'Make me in charge of the treasures of the country. Surely, I am protective (of economic resources) and knowledgeable (in financial management).Σ<sup>3</sup>

He understood that true Leadership begins with serving others and striving for excellence. The Holy Qur'an mentions this in verse 162 of *Sura al-An'am*:

﴿قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

œSay: 'Indeed my prayer, my ritual sacrifices, my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of all worlds.Σ<sup>4</sup>

This phase of his life teaches us that even in lowly positions, we can demonstrate exemplary leadership qualities.

In the story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him), we find a treasure trove of Leadership principles that transcend time and circumstance. We learn the importance of:

**(1) Servant Leadership**

As mentioned in the verse 24 of *Sura al-Sajda*:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ﴾

œWe raised leaders among them, guiding (the people) according to Our command when they patiently endured and firmly believed in Our revelations.Σ<sup>5</sup>

In examining the story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him), we uncover a rich source of leadership principles that are timeless and universally applicable. His example underscores the importance of servant leadership—leading with humility and a genuine intent to serve others. The Qur'anic verses and Hadiths highlight that true leadership is a reflection of patience, faith, and commitment to the well-being of others. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) life teaches us that even in challenging circumstances, one's character and approach to

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

leadership can be a powerful testament to their values and dedication.

**(2) The Shepherd and the Guide**

Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) radiant character and wisdom did not go unnoticed. Hazrat Zulaikha (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of Potiphar—the 'Aziz, was captivated by him and made advances. Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him), however, remained steadfast in his righteousness, resisting temptation.

﴿وَرَوَدَتْهُ الْمَلِكَةُ وَغَلَقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْت لَكَ قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

œAnd the lady (Zulaikha) in whose house he was living demanded him to surrender himself (to her desire). She locked the doors and said: 'Come forward quickly!' He said: 'Allah be my refuge! Indeed, he (i.e. your husband) is my master. He has kept me in a very respectable manner. Indeed, the wrongdoers do not prosper.'<sup>6</sup>

This episode accentuates the importance of moral fortitude and integrity, especially for those in positions of authority. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) actions not only protected his own virtue but also safeguarded the sanctity of the 'Aziz's household, exemplifying the shepherding aspect of Leadership—a responsibility to guide and protect those under one's care.

**(2) Shepherding Guidance**

The concept of guiding and protecting others with wisdom and compassion is further emphasized in the advice given by Hazrat Luqman (peace be upon him) to his son. As stated in the holy Qur'an:

﴿يَبْنَئِي أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزَمِ الْأُمُورِ﴾

œMy son! Establish the prayer, encourage what is good, forbid what is wrong and be patient through whatever befalls you. That is indeed a course worthy of high resolve.<sup>7</sup>

This verse underscores the responsibility of leaders to guide and protect their charges with wisdom, patience, and an unwavering commitment to righteousness. The advice from Luqman (peace be upon him) the Wise highlights that leadership involves not just authority but also a deep sense of responsibility and moral clarity. In both the stories of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) and the advice of Hazrat Luqman (peace be upon him), we find profound lessons on the nature of effective leadership. Hazrat Yusuf's steadfastness in the face of temptation exemplifies the importance of maintaining integrity and protecting the sanctity of one's environment. Similarly, Hazrat Luqman's (peace be upon him) counsel to his son reflects the essential qualities of guiding others with wisdom, encouraging good, forbidding wrong, and practicing patience. Together, these narratives emphasize that true leadership involves guiding and protecting with a blend of moral strength and compassionate wisdom.

**(3) The Prisoner and the Dynamic Leader**

Despite being falsely accused and imprisoned, Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) faced his trials with remarkable resilience and unwavering faith. Even in confinement, he did not succumb to despair but continued to use his gifts to serve others. He interpreted dreams for his fellow inmates, guiding them towards righteousness:

﴿وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السِّجْنَ فَتَيَانٍ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا وَقَالَ الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أُحْمَلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْرًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ نَبِّئْنَا

بِتَأْوِيلِهِ إِنَّنَا نَرْنَكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

œAnd two young men entered the prison with him. One of them said: 'I saw myself (in a

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

*dream) pressing wine (from grapes).’ The other said: ‘I saw myself carrying bread on my head, of which the birds were eating.’ (Joseph!) Inform us of its interpretation,’ (they said:) ‘Surely, we see you among the virtuously excellent. Σ<sup>8</sup>*

This episode illustrates Hazrat Yusuf’s (peace be upon him) ability to connect with people on a profound level, inspiring them even in the darkest of times.

(3) Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership involves inspiring and empowering others to reach their full potential. The Holy Qur’an emphasizes this concept in verse 9 of *Sura al-Ankabut*:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ فِي الصَّالِحِينَ﴾

œ*And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall surely admit them into (the company of) the virtuous. Σ<sup>9</sup>*

This verse highlights the importance of inspiring and motivating others towards righteousness, as a key aspect of transformational Leadership.

The story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) and the principles outlined in the Qur’an reveal Hazrat Yusuf’s (peace be upon him) ability to provide guidance and wisdom, even while imprisoned, transformed the prison into a place of learning and inspiration. His actions emphasize that true leadership involves empowering and uplifting others, fostering an environment where individuals can achieve their fullest potential. This aligns with the Qur’anic teaching that those who engage in righteous deeds and inspire others are elevated to the company of the virtuous, emphasizing the transformative impact of genuine leadership.

(4) The Vizier and the Visionary

Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) utilized his exceptional dream interpretation skills to rise to prominence in Pharaoh’s court. When Pharaoh had a troubling dream of seven fat cows being consumed by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of corn being overtaken by seven dry ones, he sought an interpretation. The Qur’an recounts this moment in verses 43 to 49 of *Sura Yusuf*:

﴿وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أَرَى سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ الْأَقْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِن كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّءْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ قَالُوا أَضَعَتْ أَحْلَامٌ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَحْلَامِ بِعَالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِي نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾ يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي سَبْعِ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعِ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ لَعَلِّي أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا فَمَا حَصَدْتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلِهِ إِلا قَلِيلًا مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعٌ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ إِلا قَلِيلًا مِمَّا تَحْصِنُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾ ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ النَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعْرِضُونَ﴾

œ*(one day) the king said: ‘I saw (in a dream) seven fat cows, and that seven skinny ones were eating them. Moreover, (I saw) seven green ears (of corn) and (seven) others (that were) dry. O chiefs (of my council)! Give me your opinion on my dream if you can interpret dreams.’*

*They said: ‘(These are) confused nightmares, and we are not experts in interpreting the dreams.’ Said one of the two (prisoners) who was released, remembering (Joseph’s words) after a long time: ‘I will inform you of its interpretation, so let me go (to meet Joseph in prison).’ (Reaching the prison, he said:) ‘Yusuf (Joseph)! O truthful one! Interpret for us (the dream of) seven fat cows that seven skinny ones are eating them. Also, seven green ears of corn and (seven) others dry so that I may return to the people. Perhaps they may know (the truth of the matter).’ He said: ‘You shall sow for seven consecutive years as usual. Then leave whatever*

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

*(grain) you reap in its ear (as storage), apart from the little you eat. Then after that, there shall come seven hard (years of drought) which will consume whatever you have stored in advance for them, except a little which you have preserved (for seed). Then, after that, there will come a year in which people will be granted relief (i.e. abundant rain), and people will press (wines, oils and juices).*  $\Sigma^{10}$

Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) wisdom and strategic foresight not only saved Egypt from catastrophe but also elevated him to the position of Vizier, the highest administrative office. His Leadership during the famine was characterized by meticulous planning, efficient resource management, and equitable distribution, demonstrating his ability to translate vision into action. Verse 55 of *Sura Yusuf* says:

﴿قَالَ أَجْعَلْنِي عَلَىٰ خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

œHe said: 'Make me incharge of the treasures of the country. Surely, I am protective (of economic resources) and knowledgeable (in financial management).  $\Sigma^{11}$

This phase of Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) life underscores the importance of utilizing one's unique abilities for the greater good, as well as the significance of collaboration and consultation in decision-making. It also highlights the Qur'anic emphasis on justice and fairness in Leadership.

(4) Self-Development

Consistently pursuing personal and spiritual development, even in the face of challenges, is a hallmark of effective leadership. It reflects a leader's commitment to self-improvement and resilience, demonstrating their ability to navigate adversity with grace and determination. This ongoing quest for growth not only enhances their own capabilities but also inspires and motivates others, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within their team. By embodying these traits, leaders set a powerful example of perseverance and dedication, driving both personal and collective advancement.

The Holy Qur'an says in verse 39 of *Sura al-Najm*:

﴿وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ﴾

œAnd that nothing belongs to human being (as his right) except what he strives for.  $\Sigma^{12}$

The story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) in Pharaoh's court demonstrates the essence of visionary leadership. His ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream not only saved Egypt from imminent famine but also highlighted his skills in strategic foresight and resource management. Appointed as Vizier, Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) exemplified how effective leadership involves not just vision but also the practical application of that vision through careful planning and equitable distribution. His life reflects the Qur'anic emphasis on justice, fairness, and the importance of using one's skills and knowledge to benefit the greater good.

(5) Reunion and Forgiveness

Years later, Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) brothers, driven by desperation and seeking food, arrived in Egypt. Instead of vengeance, he chose forgiveness, an act of profound compassion and mercy.

﴿قَالَ لَا تَثْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ﴾

œYusuf (Joseph) said: 'There shall be no blame on you today. May Allah forgive you. And He is the Most Merciful of the merciful!'  $\Sigma^{13}$

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

This heartwarming reunion demonstrates the transformative power of forgiveness, a central tenet of Islamic teachings. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) actions not only healed the wounds of the past but also solidified his legacy as a leader who prioritized reconciliation and unity over retribution.

(5) Faith and Resilience

Maintaining unwavering faith in Almighty Allah and persevering through life's trials are critical traits of exemplary leadership. Such steadfastness in belief and resilience in the face of adversity demonstrate a leader's deep commitment to their values and mission. This profound faith fosters inner strength and clarity, enabling leaders to navigate challenges with conviction and grace. The Holy Qur'an states in verse 3 of *Sura al-Talaq*:

﴿وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا﴾

œ*And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He is Sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah carries through His Command. Allah has already set a measure for everything.*Σ<sup>14</sup>

This verse emphasizes the importance of placing our trust in Allah and remaining steadfast through life's trials. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) life exemplifies this unwavering faith and resilience, serving as a beacon of strength and patience for others facing adversity.

The story of Hazrat Yusuf (peace be upon him) is a profound lesson in forgiveness, faith, and resilience. His decision to forgive his brothers, despite their past wrongs, underscores the power of mercy and reconciliation in leadership. Additionally, his unwavering faith in Allah and perseverance through hardship illustrate the importance of trust and resilience in overcoming life's challenges. As we reflect on Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) exemplary qualities, may we strive to incorporate service, compassion, and righteousness into our own lives, drawing inspiration from his noble example. Amen!

**Conclusion**

Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) story provides timeless lessons on leadership, demonstrating how a leader's qualities can transcend personal adversities and influence a broader community. His journey from a betrayed youth to a revered leader in Egypt is marked by remarkable traits: servant leadership, integrity, patience, forgiveness, strategic thinking, and the ability to inspire and manage diverse groups. Yusuf's (peace be upon him) life highlights the importance of maintaining ethical standards and resilience in the face of challenges. His actions show that leadership involves not only making strategic decisions but also managing relationships with empathy and understanding. The way he navigated his trials with patience, extended forgiveness to those who wronged him, and demonstrated strategic acumen in managing Egypt's resources offer profound insights into effective leadership. In contemporary contexts, Yusuf's (peace be upon him) example encourages leaders to adopt a holistic approach, balancing personal values with professional responsibilities. His story serves as a guide for those in leadership roles, illustrating that true leadership involves not just achieving success but also uplifting others, fostering unity, and navigating complexities with wisdom and compassion. By embracing these principles, leaders today can build more cohesive, resilient, and effective teams, ensuring that their leadership not only achieves goals but also inspires and nurtures those they lead. Hazrat Yusuf's (peace be upon him) legacy, as conveyed through his remarkable story and the Qur'anic verses, remains a beacon for aspiring leaders across all walks of life.

*Leadership Traits in the Story of Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)*

**Bibliography**

1. The Holy Qur'an.
2. al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Thabit b. Ahmad b. al-Mahdi b. Thabit (392–463/1002–1071), *Tarikh Baghdad*, Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.
3. Ibn 'Asakir, Ab%00 al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Hibat Allah b. 'Abd Allah b. al-Husayn al-Dimashqi (499–571/1105–1176), *Tarikh Dimashq al-Kabir*, generally known as *Tarikh Ibn 'Asakir*, Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1421/2001.
4. al-Daylami, Abu Shuja' Shirawayh b. Shahardar b. Shirawayh al-Daylami al-Hamdhani (445–509/1053–1115), *Al-Firdaws bi ma'thur al-khitab*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986.

**References**

---

<sup>1</sup> Qur'an 21:73.

<sup>2</sup> Narrated by Khatib Baghdadi in *Tarikh Baghdad*, 10:184; Ibn 'Asakir in *Tarikh Dimashq*, 33:313; and Daylami in *al-Firdaws*, 2:324, §3473.

<sup>3</sup> Qur'an 12:55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6:162.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 32:24.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 12:23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 31:17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 12:36.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29:9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12:43–49.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12:55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 53:39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12:92.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 65:3.