

Original Research Article

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Explaining the concept of the Lord's proof in Surah Yusuf and its manifestation in Yusuf and Zulaikha of Jami and Kamal al-Din Behzad's Miniature

Abstract

Problem Definition: Comparing the Miniature of Yusuf escaping from Zulaikha's seduction by Kamal al-Din Behzad in an illustrated version of *Bustan of Saadi*, written and painted in the later period of the Herat school, with verses from this book to which the Miniature is dedicated, a clear difference will be prominent between Saadi's words and what Behzad has addressed in his Miniature, while previous studies have not paid attention to this point. A closer look at this picture, signs of Behzad's inspiration by *Yousef and Zuleikha Masnavi* from Jami's *Haft Awrang Jami* are highlighted. The interpretation of the mystical points used in this *Masnavi* requires a correct understanding of the verses of *Surah Yusuf* of the Quran. The main question of the present research is the reason for using predominant azure and gold colors and motifs derived from sacred geometry and similar to the decorations of Timurid mosques in Behzad's Miniature. Despite the subject of the Miniature, which is the tense moment of Yusuf escaping and being suspected of treason, the Miniature space is spiritual, and on the other hand it is completely different from the verses of the *Bustan of Saadi* to which it actually belongs.

Objective: The present study aims to study the Quranic term "the Lord's proof" in the Holy Quran and *Haft Awrang* of Jami and comparing them with Behzad's Miniature.

Research Method: The present comparative study has been conducted with an analytical-descriptive approach and the required information has been collected using library method.

Results: This study illustrated that Behzad, inspired by the concept of the Lord's proof, depicted the image not from the appearance of the story, but from Yusuf (AS)'s point of view and understanding Jami's interpretation of this concept in *Surah Yusuf* paves the way for the careful investigation of Behzad's Miniature.

Keywords: The Lord's proof, Yusuf and Zulaikhah, Abd al-Rahman Jami, Kamal al-Din Behzad, Miniature.

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Introduction

The story of prophet Yusuf is one of the richest allegories in the Holy Quran which is full of mysteries and subtle secrets. The story of prophet Yusuf which is referred to as the best of stories in Quran: "We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this, you were one of those who knew nothing about them" (Yusuf, 3). Having deep concepts and being rich in symbolism, this story has become the subject of many mystics and Persian Muslim writers to unveil the symbolism and interpret its mystical secrets so that the truth seekers can benefit from and increase their spiritual thirst. One of the thinkers who worked on the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha is Jami who is often regarded as the last great mystical poet of Iran and narrated this story in verse with highest level of mystical and literary excellence. Persian arts including Persian miniature have always been linked with mystical thoughts of Muslim Iranians. Therefore, it is required to investigate the concepts hidden in the Persian literature and Islamic mysticism to deeply understand the subtle concepts of Persian miniature. In the eastern civilizations, art has a reflective nature and it is not independent. In other words, it has always played a reflective role, mirroring the religious facts. In order to understand the nature of Islamic art, the religious concepts reflected by which should be studied (Bolkhari, 2010, 95). Quran is the origin of Islamic mysticism. Symbolism and allegories are among the common approaches to convey meanings in Quran, and Muslim mystics have also used these methods to explain the concepts in mystical treatise. Moving from outward dimension of Quran and understanding the esoteric aspects of the symbolism is not possible for anyone except the insightful people as God stated: "I was a hidden treasure. I loved to be known. So, I created to be known" (Majlesi, 1983, vol. 84, 199 & 344; Javadi Aamoli, 2001, vol. 3, 110, vol. 2, 356). However, it is the mystic's job to find out the meanings through love. Islamic mysticism is about the esoteric aspects of Quran to unveil the secrets, and aims to reach the origin and essence of everything through interpretation and symbolism. Persian poetry and prose were a tool for Persian mystics to express their thoughts, and as a result, Quranic interpretations entered the Persian mysticism and literature and were manifested in Persian miniature. One of the most famous and valuable miniaturists in the history of Persian art has been Kamaledin Behzad (1456-1535), the miniaturist of the late Herat school and the beginning of the second Tabriz school whose method has greatly influenced the artists after him. One of the most important artworks of Behzad is the miniature depicting Yusuf escaping from Zulaykha's seduction. This miniature is related to a copy of the Saadi's *Bustan* that was written and illustrated in Sultan Hussain Baiqara's palace in 1488, and is currently kept in the Cairo national library in Egypt (Azhand, 2019, vol. 1, 264). Knowing that the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha is one of the deepest allegories on divine love in mysticism and literature, in this research, first the difference between Behzad's approach in creating this miniature

and Saadi's approach in Bustan is explained assuming that Kamaledin Behzad was influenced by Jami's views and his Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi. Next, Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi from Jami's Haft Awrang is analyzed based on Surah Yusuf in Quran and mystics' and theologians' interpretations of this surah. The difference between Behzad's approach and the text from Saadi's Bustan and similarity of his approach to Jami's view in this miniature raises this question that what concept he asked his audience to understand from Jami's thoughts. Understanding of this concept requires thorough study of Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi based on Quranic verses and Iranian-Islamic mysticism. In fact, the main goal of an artistic work is to help the audience deeply understand the concept, and colors and motifs are all the tools to achieve this goal.

Research Method

The purpose of this study is to explain the concept of the proof of the Lord in Surah Yusuf and to analyze Saadi's approach in Bustan, Jami's approach in Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi as well as Kamaledin Behzad's miniature. This comparative study was conducted using analytical-descriptive approach and the data were collected through bibliographical method. To achieve a clear understanding of the concept of the proof of the Lord, authentic interpretations of Surah Yusuf were used and compared with verses from Bustan and Haft Awrang and Kamaledin Behzad's miniature.

Research Background

Due to the symbolic and mystical significance of Surah Yusuf and the fact that many mystics and Muslim Iranian writers have used the allegories in this surah, the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha has become the subject of research in the fields of literature, mysticism and Quranic sciences. Leila Modiri and Mohammad Ebrahim Malmir (2014) in an article entitled "The study of the interpretations of the story of prophet Yusuf in mystical texts based on the poetry works of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries" and Tahereh Dastjerdi (2006) in an article entitled "the study of the interpretation of Surah Yusuf or Yusuf-Nameh by Pir Jamali Ardestani Isfahani" have addressed the literary and Quranic aspects of the story of prophet Yusuf. Also, Moeeneh Sadah Hejazi (2017) in an article entitled "The comparative study of symbolism in the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha and the miniature from a copy of Saadi's Bustan in Timurid period depicting Yusuf escaping from the seduction scene" has merely compared Behzad's miniature with verses from Bustan. However, the comparative study of Quranic verses, Jami's Haft Awrang and Behzad's miniature based on the concept of the proof of the Lord in Surah Yusuf has not been conducted before. In addition, regarding Behzad's miniature from an illustrated copy of Bustan in miniature school of Herat, the previous researches including an article by Zeinab Rajabi and Hasanali Poormand (2020) entitled "The

analysis of Yusuf and Zulaykha miniature by Kamaleddin Behzad based on Gerard Genette transtextuality theory” and another one by Jabbar Rahmani and Sepideh Naeeni (2016) entitled “An interdisciplinary research in art using Hermeneutic approach with the case study of the Yusuf and Zulaykha miniature by Behzad” have mainly focused on the composition, colors and motifs used in this miniature and studied its outward dimension according to the western theories. Therefore, the previous researchers have not conducted a comparative study of Behzad's miniature, literature and interpretation of Surah Yusuf to show why Behzad deviated from the verses in Saadi's Bustan and became closer to Jami's approach in Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi and Quranic verses from Surah Yusuf. Also, the key role of the interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in Surah Yusuf and different approaches by Saadi, Jami and Behzad have not been investigated yet. However, Persian miniature is a reflective art that has always served the text, the best way to analyze which is to compare it with the literature and interpret it through Quran and Islamic mysticism as performed in the current research.

The miniature by Kamaleddin Behzad depicting Yusuf escaping from Zulaykha's

The miniature depicting Yusuf escaping from Zulaykha's seduction (See Figure 1) is one of the six miniatures that Kamaleddin Behzad depicted within the time frame of 1488-1489 to illustrate a copy of Saadi's Bustan according to Sultan Hossain Baiqara's order (1438-1505), one of the art-loving Timurid princes in the late school of Herat (Azhand, 2019, vol. 1, 262-264). In this miniature, the different aspects of a palace are depicted in details with a lot of ornaments and colors. Despite a lot of ornaments in the miniature, the viewer can easily observe two human figures at the first glance. The two domed ceilings, stairs lines and inscriptions lead the eyes to the figures. In the golden point of the picture, the figure of a man in green garment is visible with a halo. The form of the figure shows that he intends to escape. One of his hand is towards the door lock in front of him and the other is holding a woman's hands in red garment who has fallen down trying to prevent him from leaving the scene. The figure of the woman in red has been depicted in a porch separate from the palace building. On the top of the picture, it has been written “the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha” on an inscription. Moreover, on the top and bottom parts of the miniature, there are nine inscriptions on which the relevant verses from Saadi's Bustan have been written. Also, the miniaturist has signed his name on a small inscription. The plant and geometrical motifs in the ornaments of the building depicted in this miniature as well as the dominant golden and cobalt blue colors make it similar to the ornaments of Timurid mosques and provoke a sacred atmosphere. Except the diagonal and broken lines of the stairs on the left side of the miniature, almost none of the visual elements

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demonstrate the subject of this miniature which is the moment when Yusuf is escaping from the Zulaykha's seduction.

Closer looking at Behzad's miniature, it can be observed that there are some blue inscriptions which have not been analyzed in previous studies. However, these inscriptions clarify a subtle point. One inscription is on the top right of the miniature and five inscriptions are in the porch in the floor below the figures. The text of one of the inscriptions shows the date when the miniature was depicted, while on the other five inscriptions, three verses from Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi are written. Behzad has used these inscriptions to highlight that he has been influenced by Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi. The relationship between this miniature and Jami's Masnavi is not limited to these inscriptions, and in fact, the text of the inscriptions just implies that he has been influenced by Jami's views on the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha and draws the audience attention to the Jami's Masnavi.

The story of Yusuf and Zulaykha in the Saadi's Bustan

In the ninth section of the Bustan about the repentance and right way, Saadi explains the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha in twelve verses and employs it as a moral to state that it is better to avoid impure thoughts than to repent after committing improper deeds. He explains that when Zulaykha became impatient with Yusuf's love, she put a white cloth on her marble idol so that it would not witness her deed. Then, Yusuf became sad and asked Zulaykha how she requested him to commit adultery in the presence of God who is omnipresent and seer of people while she is ashamed of her idol for her wrong deed. Then, Yusuf invited Zulaykha to repent from her impure thought prior to making a mistake.

Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi in Jami's Haft Awrang

Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi is the fifth Awrang from Jami's Haft Awrang. Haft Awrang is a book from the literary school of Herat in which Jami expressed his mystical thoughts particularly on the divine love through allegories. Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones) are: 1. Selselat adh-dhahab (Chain of Gold), 2. Salaman and Absal, 3. Tohfat ol-ahrar (Gift of the Free), 4. Sabhat al-abrar (Rosary of the Pious), 5. Yusuf and Zulaykha, 6. Leili and Majnoon, 7. Kheradnama-I Eskandari (Alexander's Book of Wisdom).

In the Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi, Jami has deeply paid attention to the verses of Surah Yusuf and has beautifully expressed his thoughts about divine love, oneness of being, existence of God, manifestation of God, predestination and free will and God's transcendence through allegories. As mentioned before, the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha has been the focus of attention in the Persian literature and Iranian-Islamic mysticism. However, Jami was the only one who addressed all aspects of the story of prophet Yusuf and interpreted the verses of the Surah Yusuf.

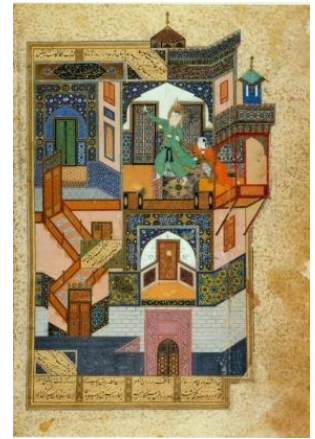


Figure 1. Yusuf escapes from the seduction of Zulaikha, Kamaluddin Behzad, Herat, 893 AH, Saadi Park, Egyptian Library, Cairo. Source: Azhand, 2019, vol. 1, 300.

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Therefore, Jami's Masnavi is the most comprehensive expression of the story of prophet Yusuf in the Persian literature.

The story of prophet Yusuf in Quran

Surah Yusuf is the twelfth surah of the Holy Quran and is in the twelfth and thirteenth sections of this sacred book. This surah is the only one in Quran which completely tells a story from the beginning to the end. It starts from prophet Yusuf's childhood and his father's (Yaqub) love for him. It states his brothers' jealousy, his separation from his father, falling into a well, growing up in the Aziz (emperor) of Egypt's house, the love story of the Aziz's wife to him, accusing him and putting him into jail until Yusuf becomes the emperor and his brothers and father finds him again: "the purpose of this surah is to state the friendship of God with his servants that have pure faith in God and their hearts are full of his love so that they do not pay attention to anything except God. God takes care of all affairs of such a servant, nurtures him in the best way, helps him to get close to God and loves him. God makes him pure for himself and raises him although secondary causes ally to destroy him. God makes him glorious although the incidents try to make him contemptible" (Allameh Tabatabai, 2000, vol. 1, 98-100).

Comparing the verses from Surah Yusuf with Saadi and Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha and Behzad's miniature

It should be noted that in the short story of Yusuf and Zulaykha from the Bustan, Saadi did not have an intention to interpret the verses from Surah Yusuf and merely used this story as a beautiful allegory in the chapter of repentance of the Bustan to explain the merits of avoiding the impure thoughts.

By comparing these verses with Behzad's miniature, it can be found that the miniaturist had a different approach from this story, addressed the story more comprehensively and showed his different perspective from Saadi and his alignment with Jami. Behzad's miniature refers to verses 22-24 of Surah Yusuf which describe the climax of the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha. Verse 22 of this surah is about God's bestowing wisdom and knowledge to Yusuf as it is the reward for those with good deeds. In verse 23 of this surah when the emperor's wife tried to seduce him, he said, "May God grant me refuge. My Lord has provided an honourable abode for me. Such wrongdoers never prosper". Also, verse 24 is about "the proof of the Lord" which is the reason why Yusuf refused to do what Zulaykha asked him (Allameh Tabatabai, 2000, vol. 11, 159). However, during the history and among the interpreters of Quran, there have been different interpretations from the phrases "wisdom", "an honourable abode" and "the proof of the Lord". Jami's impression from these verses could be the concept that Kamaledin Behzad is

referring to in his miniature and it could be the reason why Behzad deviated from Saadi's verses in Bustan.

It should be noted that the reason why verses 22 to 24 of Surah Yusuf are considered as "the climax of the story" is not because of the fact that Zulaykha was overwhelmed by sexual passion and made a demand of Yusuf since it is the climax of the story for the superficial people and the lowest point of the story for the insightful ones. In this article, the climax of the story is the reason why Yusuf refused to commit a sin and turned to the infinite divine love, which is mentioned in Quran that Yusuf refused to commit a sin because he saw "the proof of the Lord". What is the proof of the Lord and how it is related to Behzad's miniature?

An explanation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in Surah Yusuf based on the authentic interpretations

Borhan (Proof) is an Arabic word, and there is a controversy among lexicographers about the root of this word. Some believe that it means becoming white (Ragheb Isfahani, 2014, 121) and others think that it means proof (Ibn Manzooreh, 1954, vol. 13, 476). However, it is likely that it means to become white, and it refers to clear statements without ambiguity. The literal meaning of the word Borhan, is the proof, evidence and clear statement" (Moin, 1998, vol. 1, 516). Among the many credible interpretations of the Surah Yusuf by theologians and Muslim mystics, there are different interpretations of verses 22 to 24 and the Quranic phrase of the proof of the Lord, some of which are as follows:

In the commentary to Kashf al-Asrar and Oddat al-Abrar, Rashideddin Meibodi mentioned: "If I accepted your request and betrayed my Lord after making me glorious and providing an honourable abode for me, I would be a wrongdoer and surely wrongdoers never prosper" (Meibodi, 1993, vol. 5, 40). Meibodi quoted from Imam Jafar Sadegh that explains the proof of the Lord as "the beauty of prophecy and the light of knowledge and wisdom that were placed in Yusuf's heart so that he could see the right way, refused the wrong deed and reached pleased God. He did not achieve it by himself, and it was God who took him to this place. And, he did not see the right way by himself, and it was God who made him see that" (Meibodi, vol. 5, 58).

Baharolanvar by Allameh Majlesi mentions Imam Reza's interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in verse 24 of Surah Yusuf as: "the emperor's wife made a demand of Yusuf, and if he did not see the proof of his Lord, he would decide to do so. However, he was divinely preserved, and the impeccable not only do not commit a sin, but also never decide to do so" (Allameh Majlesi, 1983, vol. 10, 82).

In Tafsirolmizan by Allameh Tabatabai, it was mentioned that verse 22 of Surah Yusuf refers to the emergence of Yusuf's immaculacy and his love for his Lord, which is a blessing from God for his sincere servants (Allameh Tabatabai, 1958, vol. 11, 159). In verse 23 of Surah Yusuf, when Yusuf refused to commit a sin, Allameh

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Tabatabai interpreted Yusuf's refusal as the pure monotheism to which divine love guided Yusuf and made him forget all secondary causes even himself (Allameh Tabatabai, 1958, vol. 11, 165). Regarding the interpretation of verse 24, Allameh Tabatabai explained the proof of the Lord as the evidence that God shows to his sincere savants, which is the knowledge of unveiling and contemplated assurance upon observing which, the human soul surrenders and does not have a desire to commit a sin (Allameh Tabatabai, 1958, vol. 11, 176).

In the thematic interpretation of Quran, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli explains the proof of the Lord as a monotheistic knowledge that accompanied and helped Yusuf in his entire life: "Yusuf saw the proof of the Lord like Ibrahim who went into the fire and did not depend on anyone since he saw the proof of the Lord. He was like Moses who went into the sea with no fear and did not ask for help from anyone except God since he saw the proof of the Lord. When Yusuf went into the well, he saw the proof of the Lord. When he struggled with sexual desire and victoriously overcame it, he observed the proof of the Lord. It is the monotheistic knowledge that solves all issues. In fact, the vision of God cannot come with the sin. When a person commits a sin, he does not see the God and does not realize that God sees him" (Javadi Amoli, 2015, vol. 7, 137).

Also, Mohieddin Elahi Ghomshei interprets the proof of the Lord as the manifestation of God. When the beholder of the manifestation of God's beauty and excellence sees the infinite beauty, he is full of goodness and beauty so that cannot look at anything else. Since Yusuf perceived perfect divine love and beauty and reached that infinite light, he had no desire for sin which was darkness and absence of divine light (Elahi Ghomshei, 2016). This meaning has come from Jami, Ahmad Ghazzali and Ibn Arabi's thoughts. According to Ahmad Ghazzali's teachings, the person who illuminates his heart with divine light does not see anything except God's manifestations and cannot see anything except the essence of the beloved, which is the mystical station of a person who perceives the reality of love. Besides, the truth of love means there is no difference between the lover and the beloved, which is the mystical station of unity (Ghazali, 2016, 143-144). Mohieddin Arabi's thoughts and views are regarded by the followers of Naqshbandi sect. Jami was one of the greatest mystics of this sect and interpreters of Ibn Arabi and his followers' views particularly in the field of oneness of being and divine love and addressed them in his works (Zarrinkoob, 1984, 82-83). In the allegory studied in the present research, Jami considered Yusuf as the manifestation of God's beauty like a mirror in front of the Gods beauty. According to Ibn Arabi, this mirror sits in front of the superficial people like a veil between the eyes and the reality, and they just see their own face. However, when this mirror is in front of the people of vision, they see the reality and beauty of God (Ibn Arabi, 2002, 89).

Manifestation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in Behzad's miniature

As mentioned earlier, according to Jami's verses about Yusuf and Zulaykha, his interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in verse 24 of Surah Yusuf is about Yusuf's immaculacy and not observing anything except God after seeing the reality. In addition to expressing his interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi, Jami again mentions his interpretation from this concept in Salaman and Absal Masnavi from Haft Awrang.

Although it cannot be certainly stated which interpretation of this concept is illustrated in Behzad's miniature, it is clear that Behzad did not depict the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha based on the verses from Saadi's Bustan because despite the tension in this part of the story when Yusuf is escaping from Zulaykha's seduction, the atmosphere does not suggest any tension and is depicted with dominant colors of cobalt blue and golden. Therefore, it can be concluded that Behzad depicted this miniature from the perspective of Yusuf who saw the proof of his Lord. Whether Behzad's interpretation of the proof of the Lord was immaculacy, wisdom or manifestation of God, this miniature was depicted based on the Quranic concept and deviated from Saadi's interpretation. However, since Behzad used verses from Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha in eight inscriptions of this miniature, and that Jami was a knowledgeable and respectable man and the focus of Naqshbandi sect (Jami, 2008, 159) and Behzad was one of his disciples (Khand Mir, 1984, vol. 3, 362), it is likely that the miniaturist's interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord was Yusuf's immaculacy, and there is nothing in the miniature that contradicts this idea. Therefore, it can be understood why one can not observe a palace with erotic images that Zulaykha made to seduce Yusuf in Behzad's miniature. However, the palace in the miniature is decorated with motifs from sacred geometry and cobalt blue and golden colors as if the figures are in a mosque or a holy place because Behzad depicted this incident not from Zulaykha's view who sees the outer image but from Yusuf's one when he saw God's manifestation and became one with God by the help of the proof of the Lord.

Conclusion

Surah Yusuf in Quran has been one of the important resources for Muslim mystics to explain the secrets of divine love as well as the difference between true and metaphorical loves. One of the concepts that is stated in this surah is the concept of "the proof of the Lord" which is expressed in verse 24 of this surah to be the reason why Yusuf refused to commit a sin despite Zulaykha's seduction. In other words, the border between the true and metaphorical loves can be inferred from verses 22-24 of Surah Yusuf when Yusuf as Zulaykha's beloved rejected her and turned to his God who is the true beloved. In fact, this story is the allegory to show

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different manifestations of God's beauty for two creatures, i.e. Zulaykha that is superficial and only seeks her concupiscent soul wishes and Yusuf that in the mystical station of oneness with the adorable, perceives the proof of the Lord and does not see anything in the world mirror except God, even in his own beauty. Comparing this concept with Behzad's miniature, it is clear that Behzad has deviated from Saadi's verses and intended to convey Jami's interpretation of the concept of the proof of the Lord in Haft Awrang which is to see the God everywhere, and this mystical station belongs to a servant who breaks the veils separating him from God, which is the mystical station of immaculacy. Considering the above-mentioned points, it can be clearly understood that why one can not see erotic images in the miniature in the palace that Zulaykha made to seduce Yusuf, and instead we see a palace decorated with motifs from sacred geometry and cobalt blue and golden colors as if the figures are in a mosque or a holy place. Behzad depicted this incident not from Zulaykha's viewpoint who sees the outer image but from Yusuf's one who only sees God's manifestation because of his immaculacy and reached the mystical station of oneness with God. Since Persian miniature is a reflective art that has always served the text, the main objective of studying each of the Persian miniature works, regardless of colors, motifs and composition, should be deep understanding of the concepts. In this research, in order to analyze Behzad's miniature, Surah Yusuf particularly verses 22 to 24 and the concept of the proof of the Lord in authentic interpretations of Quran as well as Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha Masnavi were carefully investigated.

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