

*name of Allah* that you will bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded. And when they gave their undertaking he said "Allah is the Warden over what you say." (Quran 12:66)

They give the pledge this time, without hesitation and with honesty and conscientiousness. When we compare the two attitudes of the brothers of the father and the sons in the past and then, we observe a number of developments worth mentioning:

1. There is a quantitative as well as qualitative difference in the two discourses.
2. In the first incident the stress of the brothers on Joseph was focussed on: he will play and have fun. Now there is a change of emphasis: "Send with us our brother so that we secure measure and verily we will guard him." They will secure measure and their portion will increase.
3. In the former incident there was no mention of "Allah is the Warden over what you say." This time it is explicit and not implicit.
4. In the former incident he was reluctant. This time, after their finding the merchandise in their saddlebags, he says according to the Quran:

"I will not send him with you till you give me an undertaking in the name of Allah that you will bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded." (Quran 12:66)

In the former incident he said:

"Lo! in truth, it saddens me that you should take him (Joseph) with you and I fear lest the wolf devour him while you are heedless of him." (Quran 12:13)

5. Although the brothers intentionally were malicious in the case of Joseph, this time, they were honest, but they could not pursue the matter any further.
- 6 In the former incident they had the audacity to ask the father to

send Joseph with them. This time their argument was grounded in: "O father: The measure is denied us, so send with us our brother that we may obtain our measure. The *sine qua non* for their securing the measure was taking Benjamin with them.

- 7 In the former incident, Jacob's feeling was one of sadness. This time it was, not sadness, but (I don't want to be stung twice from the same lizard hole.)
8. The undertaking that the brothers gave the father in the name of Allah in the second time was compatible with their real intentionality.

## Jacob's Love for His Sons Motivates Him to Guard Them Against the Evil Eye

Allah says upon his tongue:

“O my sons: Go not in by one gate, go in by different gates. I can naught avail you as against Allah. Lo! *The decision rests with Allah only. In Him do I put my trust*, and in Him let all the trusting put their trust. And when they entered in the manner their father had enjoined, it would have naught availed them as against Allah, it was but a need of Jacob's soul which must be satisfied, and lo! he was a lord of knowledge because we had taught him, but most of mankind know not.” (Quran 12:68)

Thus, after the brothers gave the undertaking to their father in the name of Allah, they knew that another journey was imminent. They were successful in their endeavour to take their brother (Benjamin) with them. They will prove to the governor who was very generous to them, they were truthful. And they will get an extra camel load which will, undoubtedly, be useful to the folk of Jacob. All these factors combined made the brothers prepare themselves for the journey in all seriousness and earnestness at their earliest possible opportunity. Jacob gave them his advice to enter through different gates.

The “evil eye” is mentioned in the Quran in a variety of contents. There is a “hadith” by the Prophet (S.A.W.) that the evil eye causes a man to be interned in the grave and a camel to be put in the cauldron. Muslim believers seek refuge from the devilish eye, that is the eye that harms others. There are other reasons for the father to advise his eleven sons to enter through different gates because as a group of eleven they certainly could attract undesirable attention by their sheer number. When later on the parents and the sons re-entered Egypt, Joseph was out to receive them.

There are a number of reasons why Jacob gave his sons that valuable advice although that journey was not their first one to Egypt. They can be summed up as follows:

1. They are returning to the same place they had gone to.
2. The duration between the first journey and the second was relatively short. Their reappearance so quickly is liable to attract undesirable attention unnecessarily.
3. Their number is ten. Usually this is not a common phenomenon and they probably looked like each other. Any slightest addition to their number is very conspicuous.
4. Jacob's advice is a divine inspiration as stated in the Quran.
5. The offspring of Jacob were good looking men, and therefore more liable to evil eyes than ordinary men.
6. Jacob wanted to inculcate in his sons that caution and submission to the will of Allah are not mutually exclusive. Nothing happens unless Allah wills it.

Al Zamakhshary explains this by saying they were good looking and smart and reputed for having gained the respect and generosity of the ruler which was a privilege denied to others. Therefore they were liable to be envied by the other hordes and people will point out to them saying: These are the guests of the ruler. Look at them. And so Jacob advised them to enter through different gates. ( Al Kashaf vol.2 p.146)

The sons acted as advised by their father. This obedience is indicative of a changing attitude in the brothers. They entered safely without any mishap. The brothers do not return to Jacob in their full number. This time they return not only minus one but minus two, Benjamin and the eldest brother who was the kindest of all to his father from the very beginning after Joseph and Benjamin.



## Joseph's Brothers in Egypt for the Second Time

Allah says in the Quran:

"When they came into Joseph's presence he received his (full) brother to stay with him. He said (to him): Behold! I am your own brother, so grieve not at aught of their doings. At length when he had finished them forth with provisions (suitable for them) he put the drinking cup into his brother's saddlebags. Then a crier shouted out: O you in the caravan! Behold! you are thieves without doubt." (Quran 12:69)

"They said, turning towards them. What is it that you miss? They said: The great beaker of the ruler. For him who produces it is (the reward of) a camel load; I will be bound by it." (Quran 12:71)

"(The brothers) said: by God! Well you know that we came not to make mischief in the land and we are no thieves. (The Egyptians) said: What then shall be the penalty of this if you are proved to have lied?" (Quran 12:73)

"They said: The penalty should be that he in whose saddlebags it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime). Thus it is we punish the wrong-doers." (Quran 12:75)

"So he began (the search) with their baggage before he came to the baggage of their brother. At length he brought it, out of his brother's baggage." (Quran 12:76)

Thus did we plan for Joseph. He could not take his brother by the law of the King except that God willed it (so) we raise to degrees of (wisdom) whom We please: but over all Endued with knowledge is One, the All-Knowing." (Quran 12:76)

The eleven brothers, after a long arduous journey, arrived in Egypt and went to the governor and never thought of going to anyone else. He is now in full authority in all the affairs of Egypt. They must have asked permission to see him and to inform him that they fulfilled the

condition of bringing their brother from their father unto him. The ayat tell us that Joseph received his full brother with marked nostalgia although he tried to control himself.

Joseph had already decided to retain his full brother to stay with him. Obviously when he revealed his identity to Benjamin, the brothers did not hear him: "grieve not at aught of their doings" must have been said after Benjamin had told Joseph of their doings. Benjamin is now in the prime of his youth and certainly that was one of the factors influencing Jacob's consent to send him away with his brothers. He is not as defenseless as Joseph was. The putting of the ruler's cup in Benjamin's saddlebags must have been done with his knowing as part of the scheme. His silence was deliberative. He did not even try to deny the accusation.

## Putting the Cup in the Saddlebags of Benjamin

Allah says in the Quran:

“At length when he had furnished them forth with provisions (suitable) for them, he put the drinking cup into his brother’s saddlebags. Then shouted a crier: O you in the caravan. Behold! you are thieves.”

(Quran 12:76)

Joseph’s scheme must have been to furnish his brothers at the end of the working hours and to confine the scheming to a few confidants. The cry, the search, the finding of the cup, the accusation, the denial, the conditions must have been timed serially according to a pre-plan by Joseph. There are a number of queries emerging from the manner in which the alleged loss, the search and the eventual accusation and judgement were made. They are all speculations which may not be reasonably related to the thematic unity of the sura.

Perhaps, the most significant point in this incident, is the question posed by the governor’s authorities concerning the penalty as presented. In the Quran:

“They said: What shall be the penalty for it, if you prove liars?”  
(Quran 12:74)

Apparently they wanted the brothers themselves to make the judgement. This is obvious from the inspiration by Allah to Joseph in the following ayat. Allah says in the Quran:

“Thus did we contrive for Joseph. He could not take his brother according to the King’s law except that Allah willed it.” (Quran 12:76)

Joseph was sure that the brothers’ answer concerning the penalty would be consistent with the Sharia (divine law) of Abraham and not with the Egyptian secular man-made laws.

Another key observation worth mentioning in this incident is that

Joseph himself made no direct confrontation with the brothers. It was done indirectly through his agents. There are six ayat in the Quran to substantiate this:

“And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking cup in his brother’s saddlebags, and then a crier cried: O camel drivers! You are surely thieves.” (Quran 12:70)

They said, coming toward them: What is it you have lost? They said: We have lost the King’s cup and he who brings it shall have a camel load, and I (said the crier) am answerable for it.” (Quran 12:71-72)

“They said: By Allah, well you know we came not to do evil in the land and are no thieves. They exclaimed: The penalty for it! He in whose bag (the cup) is found *he is the penalty for it*. Thus we requite wrongdoers.” (Quran 12:73)

The lost article itself—the governor’s cup has some significance. It was not just a cup, but the special cup of the governor which the King gave to him as a mark of favour. It is not the governor’s cup, but the King’s cup. Its loss is most unbecoming. Also there is a reward for the finder, a whole camel load which is a substantial quantity.

The brothers were shocked. They, the sons of the prophet of Allah Jacob and his folk renowned for their piety and honesty.....are subject of accusation. Their first response was:

“By Allah, well you know we came not to do evil in the land and are no thieves.”

The response was a mixture of surprise, denial, refutation and self-defense. The crier did not say: o camel drivers, you are accused. But he said you are thieves. Those who heard the crier were not innocent until proven guilty. They were already guilty and had to prove innocent.

When asked about the penalty, the brothers gave the answer expected from the believers in the divine law of Allah: “This is how we

requite the wrongdoer. "The penalty for the thief is to take the thief as a bondman for a year. Allah willed to contrive for Joseph by retaining his brother as a punishment and retribution for the brothers for what they had done to Joseph earlier. It was easy to put the beaker of the King in Benjamin's saddlebags. It was easy to accuse the brothers of theft. It was easy to search their saddlebags and to find it in the brother's. But it was most difficult to leave Benjamin with Joseph because in the Egyptian law the thief was fined a fine worth the stolen item while in the "Sharia" followed by Jacob's folk, the thief was enslaved for a year. The brothers' answer concerning the applicability of the penalty according to the divine law, was motivated by their confidence that they were all absolutely innocent, and even if he had any suspicions, their answer would have been the same.

We must realize that the whole matter was pre-planned by Allah in order to fulfill a divine scheme intended for a specific objective. The brothers' feelings were not very charitable towards the two other half-brothers. Allah says in the Quran:

"So he began the (search) with their baggage, before he came to the baggage of his brother. At length he brought it out of his brother's baggage. Thus did we plan for Joseph. He could not take his brother by the law of the King, except that God willed it (so). We raise degrees (of wisdom) whom We please, but over all Endued with Knowledge is One, the All Knowing.

They said: If he steals there was a brother of his who did steal before him. But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, revealing not the secrets to them. He simply said to himself: You are the worse situated and God knows best the truth of what you assert." (Quran 12:76-77)

The brothers were not only ready to believe evil of Benjamin, but they carry their thoughts back to Joseph and call him a thief as well. They have injured Joseph and by a false charge of this kind they salve their conscience. Little did they suspect that Joseph was before them under another guise and their falsehood, deceit and treacherousness would soon be exposed.

Their accusation of Joseph that he was a thief refers to an early experience in childhood when he took an idol and threw it away. There is also the treatment of Joseph and Benjamin as one camp against their camp. In this situation Joseph shows great self control and lofty character and charitableness. Joseph sums up the situation by saying "God knows best what you assert." The words "You are the worse situated" were expressed to himself.



## **The Brothers are Overcome by Humiliation**

Allah says in the Quran:

“They said,.....O exalted governor, Behold he has a father old aged and venerable (who will grieve for him) so take one of us in his place for we see that you are (gracious) in doing good.”

(Quran 12:78)

The first observation is that the brothers hastened to discuss the penalty that they know their brother deserves for theft. They are now confronted with realities of the consequences. They will return without their brother (from their father). Has their pledge to their father gone with the wind? Will their father believe what actually happened?

They realized that Jacob will be stunned by the story. He knew his darling Benjamin too well to believe that he had committed theft. One question here is worth raising. Why did the brothers request the governor to take one of them in lieu of Benjamin though it conflicted with the divine laws of Abraham? Why did they not agree to apply the Egyptian law?

The answer given by Joseph, though not surprising to the brothers, pained them. Allah says in the Quran:

“He said: God forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property, indeed if we did so, we should be acting wrongfully.” (Quran 12:79)

Joseph’s expression: “God forbid” reminds us of an earlier attitude when the governor’s wife tried to seduce him. In the whole of the Quran, this expression is used only on these two occasions:..... Once to refuse to commit adultery.....and the second time to refuse to act unjustly. The Quran emphasizes individual responsibility. Nobody is answerable for the sin of another. In the Sura Al Najm Allah says:

“Nay, is he not acquainted with what is in the books of Moses— and Abraham who fulfilled his engagements namely that no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another; that man can have

nothing but what he strives for, that the (outcome) of his striving will soon come in sight, then will he be rewarded amply—that to you God is the ultimate goal.” (Quran 53:36-42)

The eldest brother disagrees with his brothers and expresses his dissidence. Joseph’s decisive and brief answer overwhelms the brothers with desperation. Allah says in the Quran:

“So, when they despaired of (moving) him they conferred together apart. The *eldest* of them said: Know you not how your father took from you an undertaking in Allah’s name and how you failed in the case of Joseph aforetime? Therefore I *shall not go forth from the land until* my father permits me or Allah judges for me. He is the best of judges.” (Quran 12:80)

“Return unto your father and say: O our father! Lo your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know. We are not guardians of the unseen.” (Quran 12:81)

“Ask the township where we were and the caravan with which we travelled hither. Lo! we speak the truth.” (Quran 12:82)

The dissention comes from the eldest son whom they disobeyed aforetime and insisted on getting rid of Joseph whose life was saved by an alternative method proposed by the eldest brother.

The eldest brother’s decision to stay in Egypt was rather quick. The burden of responsibility and probably of guilt was weighing heavily on his conscience. He reminds them of their animosity against Joseph. His oscillation between the past and the present is indicative of a deep seated sense of guilt. The conditions set by him: I shall not go forth from the land until my father permits me or Allah judges for me.....points directly to the father’s earlier statement “*unless you are surrounded.*”

Allah has inspired him to say “Or Allah Judges for me.” We feel in this Allah’s compassion and response to him in distress and trial. Consider the emphasis on *ME* in “or Allah judges for *me.*” He seems

to be asking forgiveness from Allah for his past passive attitude resulting in Joseph's loss. We also see there is a ray of hope at the end of the tunnel. Allah says upon his tongue:

"Return unto your father and say: O our father! Lo! Your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know. We are not guardians of the unseen." (Quran 12:81)

Ask the township where we were and the caravan with which we travelled hither. Lo! we speak the truth." (Quran 12:82)

We notice here a *lengthy argument* in which brevity is conspicuous by absence.

Perhaps it is pertinent here to point out to the specific situation in the story in which the characters resorted to elaboration rather than brevity.

1. Jacob's response to Joseph when he conveyed to him his vision. His brevity in warning him against telling his dream to his brothers is contrasted by his elaboration in the promise of Joseph and his religious and worldly future. The rationale for brevity and elaboration is to be found in Jacob's lucidity itself. Being a prophet, endowed with serenity and clairvoyance and extra sensory vision, he warns his son against the jealousy of his brothers. But he does it very briefly with the minimum essentials of warning. But when the matter relates to the promise of Joseph's vision, he elaborates on what augurs happiness and fulfillment.
2. Joseph's attitude concerning the two fellow prisoners. In four ayat, we notice that three of them tend to be relatively lengthy when he advocates worship of God's faith while his interpretation of their dreams tends to be brief. The distinction here is one of means and ends. The ultimate end is the call to Allah's worship. The interpretation of the dreams is only a means to an end.
3. Joseph's attitude after the proof of his innocence is firmly established after a long period of anxiety and almost desperation in his

release from prison. Allah says upon his tongue:

“(Then Joseph said): I asked for this that He (my Lord) may know that I betrayed him not in secret and that surely Allah guides not the snare of the betrayers. I do not *exculpate* myself. lo! the human soul enjoins unto evil, save that whereon my Lord has mercy. Lo! my Lord is forgiving, Merciful.”  
(Quran 12:52)

4. Joseph's stance after Allah blessed him with the re-union when Jacob and his folk left Al Sham for Egypt. Joseph was given the privilege of the sole speaker in the last scene exemplifying the ideal in gratitude to Allah.
5. The attitude of the eldest brother oscillating between the past and the present. The shift of focus from past to present and from present to past with clarity and precision constitutes an integral part in the thematic unity of time, an integration of past, present and future.
6. The following observations seem to be relevant
  - a) The ayat includes the term eldest: “Their eldest said.” The development of the personality of the eldest brother in the direction of goodliness seems to be natural. The seed of goodness is blooming. From the very beginning he was disinclined to the killing of Joseph directly and indirectly. His proposal of placing him in the pit is self explanatory. The directional process of the root... towards goodness expressive of eventual fulfillment of Allah's will,... reveals the rectitude of a character grounded in meritoriousness.
  - b) The eldest brother says: “Don't you know?” not “Did you not know?” This is intentional because it covers past and present. It is the historic present.
  - c) This same brother says: “Don't you know that your father took



from *you* an undertaking” rather than from *us*.

I venture to explain, and Allah knows better, that this brother because of his deep feeling of the dilemma in which they are implicated and the lack of perceptiveness in his brothers and their relative lack of understanding of the implications of the theft which was for all practical purposes proven on their brother,..... thinking that the matter would end at enslaving that brother, seemed to have forgotten the undertaking they pledged to their father and the psychic shock that their father will suffer. This is why he used *you* instead of *us*. The eldest brother was trying to create an awareness in them of the totality of reality.

Obviously he is very sensitive and conscientious. Therefore he says:

“Therefore will I not leave this land until my father permits me or Allah commands me and He is the best to command.” His decision not to leave this land until etc...is also a delay tactic “Go back to *your* father” again not to “*our* father.” He is dissociating himself from them But: “Say to *our father*” he is here assuming the role of the instructor.

7. The eldest brother instructs his brothers to say to Jacob: “Your son stole.” Why did he not say: “Your youngest son stole?” The eldest brother realizes that the youngest brother is the most favorite of Jacob, after Joseph.
8. Allah says in the Quran:  
“And ask the township where we have been and the caravan in which we returned and you will find that we are indeed telling you the truth.” (Quran 12:82)

He is actually providing them with testimonies in their favour.

There is a statement used by both Jacob and Joseph in addressing those brothers which, as we shall see, throws light upon the point we raised earlier. Allah says upon the tongue of Jacob:

“O my sons! go you and inquire about Joseph and his brother and never give up hope of God’s soothing mercy (Rawh), truly no one despairs of God’s soothing mercy (Rawh) except those who have no faith.”

(Quran 12:87)

And when the two brothers eventually re-unite with Jacob, the eldest returns too.

Jacob expressed this hope—in the soothing mercy of Allah by saying:

“May be God will bring them (back) all to me in the end. For indeed He is full of knowledge and wisdom.” (Quran 12:83)

Since Jacob did not know with any degree of certainty for the first time, that Joseph is still alive except when his shirt was cast on him, and after that he left for Egypt, this meant that there was no need for Jacob to permit the eldest son to leave Egypt and return to him.

Now let us consider the second condition:

“Or Allah commands me and HE is the best of commanders.”  
(Quran 12:80)

It refers to the judgement that he was the one who proposed casting Joseph into the pit rather than killing him as suggested by the rest of the brothers.

This judgement is not fulfilled until Joseph is found still alive and until Jacob knows that for sure. This was fulfilled through the *shirt*.

Allah says in the Quran:

“Go with my shirt and cast it over the face of my father: he will come to see clearly. Then come you (here) to me together with all your family.” (Quran 12:93)



When the caravan left Egypt their father said: "I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph. Nay, think me not a dotard. They said: By God! Truly you are in your old wandering mind. Then when the bearer of glad tidings came he cast the shirt over his face and he forthwith regained clear sight." (Quran 12:94)

He said: Did I not say to you: I know from God that which you know not. They said: O Father! ask for our forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly at fault. He said: soon will I ask my Lord for forgiveness for you for He is indeed oft forgiving and most Merciful." (Quran 12:97)

It seems logical that the bearer of glad tidings could be none else other than the eldest brother. Incidentally, we find that the eldest brother made three trips, while the rest of the brothers made four trips. As for Joseph and Jacob and the folk they made one trip...winding up by the reunion and the dream fulfillment.

We are inclined to assume that the eldest brother was not present in some of the activities although he was not far from the scene of action. This means that when they came back to Joseph they were nine only in number. Joseph's question: "Know you not what you did unto Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?" (Quran 12:89).....was actually both a question and an answer for the answer was:

"They said: It is indeed that you are Joseph. He said: I am Joseph and this is my brother, Allah indeed has been Gracious to us all. Lo! he who wards off evil and endures, never will Allah suffer the reward to be lost of those who do right."

"They said: By Allah, verily Allah has preferred you above us and we were indeed sinful. He said: Have no fear this day! May Allah forgive you and He is the most compassionate of those who show compassion." (Quran 12:90-91)

## Jacob and Nine of His Sons

The brothers returned to carry out the instructions of their eldest brother who remained in Egypt. They are now nine. When they departed they were eleven. How did they confront their father? How did they convey to him their brother's instructions? How did Jacob come to know all that had taken place in Egypt including the eldest brother's decision?

The glorious Quran transports us quickly to Jacob's response to the speech of the brothers which is actually in essence, the speech of the eldest brother: Allah says upon the tongue of Jacob:

"He said, Nay, but your minds have beguiled you into something. (My course is) comely patience! It may be that Allah will bring them all unto me. Lo! He, only He, is the Knower, the Wise."  
(Quran 12:83)

The first point to stress is: it may be that *Allah will bring all unto me*. Jacob's hope in Allah's compassion is great. The absent sons are now three: Joseph, Benjamin, and the eldest brother. Jacob's brief response was: *comely patience*. Being a prophet he felt that Allah will bring all of them unto him. This brevity is indicative of the essence of the whole story. The past, the present, and the future are integrated into a unity. Comely patience and hope in Allah and surrender to His Will is an act of piety.

Jacob is continuously tested by Allah by a series of adversities, the loss of his sons and the loss of his eyesight. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is reported to have said: "I asked Gabriel about the extent of Jacob's grief for Joseph and his answer was "The equivalent of seventy mothers who lost their sons." Then I asked him: "What was his reward?" and he said "The reward of a hundred martyrs and he never lost faith in Allah for a second." (Al Kashaf vol.2, p.151)

Allah says in the Quran about Abraham—our father and his attitude toward the disbelievers and Allah's reward for him:

"When he had turned away from them and from those whom they

worshipped besides Allah, We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob and each one of them, We made a prophet and We bestowed of our Mercy on them and We granted them lofty honor on the tongue of truth.” (Quran 19:49-50)

We humans must learn a lesson from this. Allah’s will controls the worlds for a purpose which is concealed from the majority of human-kind. Jacob says: Allah says: “I know from Allah what you don’t know.” Allah says in the Quran:

“He (Jacob) is of knowledge of what WE made him learn but the majority of people do not know.” (Quran 12:68)

Jacob’s painful experience on the return of his sons minus two reminds him of Joseph. He says:

“Alas my grief for Joseph.” (Quran 12:84)

And their reaction was:

“By Allah Lo! You always mention Joseph and never cease remembering him till your health is ruined and you are of those who perish.” (Quran 12:85)

Perhaps it is not amiss at this point to discuss a matter which has been considered by a number of exegisists and that is the duration of time which elapsed between the loss of Joseph and the loss of Jacob’s eyesight. Allah says in the Quran:

“How great is my grief for Joseph. And his eyes became white with sorrow and he fell into silent melancholy.” (Quran 12:84)

Eyes do not become white with sorrow instantly. His grief for Joseph was permanent while each one of the brothers was trying to occupy in his heart a Josephian position.

The sons were shocked by the complications befalling their father. The absence of the eldest and the youngest only reminded him of the dearest and most beloved Joseph.

Jacob's response to his sons' warning, concerning ruining his health out of grief was:

"I only complain of my distraction and anguish to God and I know from God that which you know not. O my sons: Go and enquire about Joseph and his brother and never give up hope of God's soothing mercy. Truly no one despairs God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith." (Quran 12:87)

His complaint of his distraction and anguish is to God alone whose compassion encompasses the earth and the heavens and from Him nothing is concealed. He grants compassion to the distressed when invoked. Only the disbelievers give up hope in Allah's soothing mercy. We notice also that he says: "Go and enquire about Joseph and his brother" without mentioning the eldest brother. We also know that the eldest brother decided out of his own free will to stay back.

We notice also that Jacob, being a prophet represents a special plane of religious existence that is different in quality from the plane of religious existence of his sons except Joseph. Therefore he gives them guidance and inspires them with hope in Allah's soothing mercy.

It seems now that the duration of time that resulted in Jacob's loss of eyesight was a relatively longish period. He tried to suppress grief and inhibit it and gradually lost his eyesight.

When he says to his sons: "Your minds have beguiled you unto something...." he was unconsciously referring to Joseph because this time, Benjamin's absence was not caused by their conspiracy. So the situation now is:

1. Jacob wants his sons to go and enquire about Joseph and his brother.
2. Jacob and his folk are badly in need of provisions for food.
3. The gap between the teachings of Jacob and the learning of his sons is now reduced.



## Joseph's Brothers in Egypt for the Third Time

The first scene in which the drama of the third visit unfolds is an address by the brothers to the governor. Allah says in the Quran:

"Then when they came back unto Joseph's presence they said: O Exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family, we have now brought but scanty capital. So pay us full measure and treat it as charity to us. For God does reward the charitable." (Quran 12:88)

Let us now go back to the first two occasions of the earlier trips to Egypt by way of comparison and contrast. In the first trip Allah says:

"Then came Joseph's brothers. They entered his presence and he knew them but they knew him not and when he had furnished them forth with provisions suitable for them he said: Bring unto me a brother you have of the same father as yourselves but a different mother. See you not that I pay at full measure and that I do provide the best hospitality." (Quran 12:58-59)

On the second occasion, Allah says in the Quran:

"When they came unto Joseph's presence he received his full brother to stay with him. He said to him: "Behold! I am your own brother. So grieve not at aught of their doings. At length when he had finished them forth with provisions (suitable) for them, he put the drinking cup into his brother's saddlebag." (Quran 12:69)

We notice that in the first two occasions they mentioned their dignity as purchasers. In the third one they were humiliated. They also painfully realized that they were the cause of their father's grief and loss of eyesight. Consider what they had already said to the governor:

"They said: O Exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family, we have now brought but scanty capital! So pay us full measure (we pray you) and treat it as *charity to us*." (Quran 12:88)

Consider the last phrase: *as charity to us*. When we analyze the

ayat *in toto* we infer a number of underlying assumptions:

1. It denotes their absolute confidence in the generosity of the governor and his charity to accept their scanty capital.
2. It is indicative of the hardships that Jacob and his folk were suffering in those years of scarcity.
3. It shows that they were in a very low morale.
4. It reveals that the core of their personalities was corrigible. And when the phrase: "God does reward the charitable" was added, it certainly meant a degree of spiritual transparency beginning to emerge in the selfhoods of the brothers.

They also felt some sort of spiritual rapport between them and the governor. Joseph's personality as prophet radiated love. They appealed to his charity.

Joseph now wanted to reveal himself and touch their conscience. He had but to remind them of the true facts as to their treatment of their brother Joseph. He had also, by then, learned from Benjamin what slights and injustices he too had suffered at their hands. But Joseph was charitable not only in the sense which they meant when they asked for a charitable grant of grain, but in a far nobler sense. He would forgive them and put the most charitable construction to what they did—that they knew not what they were doing. Allah says in the Quran:

"Know you how you dealt with Joseph and his brother not knowing what you were doing?"

And their question—affirmative response was, "Are you indeed Joseph?" Here we find that their readiness for this most unexpected surprise was instilled in them by the hope their father seeded in their selfhoods.

And when Joseph told them he was Joseph they instantly confessed their aberration:



“They said: By Allah, verily Allah has preferred you above us and we were indeed sinful.” (Quran 12:91)

Both shame and guilt were pronounced. Joseph saved their face and hastened to say:

“Have no recrimination this day! May Allah forgive you and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.”  
(Quran 12:92)

## Two More Scenes for the Brothers...the Last

Two more scenes in which the brothers appear are worth emphasis:

1. With Jacob and his folk.
2. With Joseph in Egypt.

The first one is when they carried Joseph's shirt and the bearer of glad tidings cast it over Jacob's face and his eyesight was restored. Allah says in the Quran:

"Then, when the bearer of glad tidings came, he laid it on his face and he became a seer once more. He said: said I not unto you that I know from Allah that which you know not? They said: O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us, for lo! We were sinful." (Quran 12:96)

The fact that they did precisely what Joseph instructed them to do shows that Joseph occupied among them a great status. We are inclined to assume that the eleven brothers might have returned to Jacob with Joseph's shirt. Joseph remained in Egypt to receive them in the land of plenty and in God's fulfillment of Joseph's dream.

When we move to the second scene in Egypt, we find none of the brothers saying or doing anything. Their presence is simply in fulfillment of the dream. Allah says in the Quran:

"And he placed his parents on the dais and they fell down before him prostrate and he said: O my father! This is the interpretation of my dream of old. My Lord has made it true, and He has shown me kindness since He took me out of prison and has brought you from the desert after Satan has made strife between me and my brothers. Lo! My Lord is tender unto whom He will. He is the Knower, the Wise." (Quran 12:100)

And thus the curtain falls on the last role played by the eleven brothers of Joseph.

## The Last Four Scenes of Jacob

There are four scenes in which Jacob appears in the last stage of the narrative.

The first is when the caravan departed with the brothers carrying Joseph's shirt and....., Jacob, while still in Al Sham sensed Joseph's breath and was conscious of it. The second is when the bearer of glad tidings cast the shirt on his face and he regained his eyesight. The third is when Jacob and his folk entered Egypt and Joseph met them and he took his parents unto him and said: "Come into Egypt safe, if Allah wills." The fourth is when "He placed his parents on the dais and they fell before him prostrate."

Now we shall elaborate on them serially. When the caravan departed from Egypt to transport the distance between Egypt and Canaan which is approximately 80 (Farsakh), Jacob became conscious of Joseph's breath. This is a miracle. He did not say I scent it, but I am conscious of it as if he embraced him. It implies that Joseph is alive and is not too far from him.

The phrase: I am conscious of Joseph's breath is followed by: though you call me *dotard*. It implies: I feel the hour of the reunion is imminent after long absence, even though you may think I am *dotard*. There is no explanation for that other than prophethood. Those around him, according to his expectation said: By Allah Lo! You are in your old aberration: certainly those around him knew nothing of what had happened in Egypt.

When the bearer of glad tidings cast the shirt on his face, Jacob said:

"Said I not unto you that I know from Allah that which you know not. They said: O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us, for Lo! we were sinful." (Quran 12:96-97)

Jacob's certainty of Joseph's imminent reunion was confirmed when he regained his eyesight after the shirt had been thrown on his face. Jacob understood that his son Joseph was chosen by Allah for

prophethood. He could not ask for more. His eleven sons are now all present, and Joseph is alive. Jacob said to his sons:

“I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Lo! He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.” (Quran 12: 98)

The lesson learned by the sons in this scene cannot be overemphasized. When we move to the third scene, we see Joseph meeting Jacob and his folk outside the city in Egypt. This is evidenced by the Ayat:

“And when they came in before Joseph, he took his parents unto him and said: *come unto Egypt* safe, if Allah wills.” (Quran 12:99)

Incidentally, where is Joseph’s mother in all these scenes? A mother’s grief for the loss of her son sometimes exceeds the father’s, but Jacob is not only a father, he is also a prophet. If we know that 30-35 years elapsed from the time Joseph was cast in the pit to the time of reunion, we realize that perhaps the mother’s role was that of continuous attempt to help Jacob.

The last scene was the fulfillment of the dream. Only Joseph speaks:

“O my father! This is the interpretation of my dream of old. My Lord has made it true and He has shown me kindness, since He took me out of the prison and has brought you from the desert after Satan had made strife between me and my brothers. Lo! my Lord is compassionate unto whom He will. He is the Knower, the Wise. O my Lord! You have given me something of sovereignty and has taught me (something) of the interpretation of events,.....Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my protecting Guardian in the world and the hereafter. Make me die submissive unto You and join me to the righteous.” (Quran 12:101)

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Joseph's Character**

When we discuss Joseph's character, we must realize that we are dealing with the core of the story around which all the other characters and events revolve. It is the motivating force, directly and indirectly that moves the sequence of events throughout the narrative from the beginning to the end....from his father's household, to the pit, to the household of the governor, and his wife and the women of the city, and the prison and the two prisoners, and the King and his brothers' coming....etc., until the reunion and the dream fulfillment.

In general Joseph's life is classifiable into three stages:

#### **Stage I:**

The favorite of his father, a lovable loving child pure and radiating. This period ends when his brothers cast him in the pit.

#### **Stage II:**

Allah exposes Joseph to test through adversity from the moment his brothers placed him in the pit until his innocence was proven and he was released from prison. This stage is subdivided into two phases:

- a) In the household of the governor.
- b) In prison.

#### **Stage III:**

Allah exposes Joseph to test through reward and bounty. He is appointed by the King in the position of governor which was then vacant. From this time until the reunion and the fulfillment of the dream constitutes the third stage.

Some comments on each stage may receive brief notice.

### **The First Stage**

Joseph, the favorite child of his father, a loving lovable child, pure



and radiating. Allah says in the Quran:

“When Joseph said unto his father, O my father! Lo! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me. He said: O my dear son! Tell not your brothers of your vision, lest they concoct a plot against you. Lo! Satan is for man an open foe. Thus your Lord will prefer you and teach you the interpretation of events and will perfect His grace upon you and upon the family of Jacob as He perfected it upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Lo! Your Lord is Knower, Wise.” (Quran 12:4)

The atmosphere in which the dialogue between Joseph and Jacob takes place is very friendly and congenial. There is empathy and mutual love. The content of the dream itself transports us on a wave of spiritual transparency.

A comparison between Joseph's dream and the two dreams of his fellow prisoners is worthy of a brief comment. Joseph's dream is composed of the planets, the sun and the moon. The fellow prisoners' dreams are mundane. The King's dream too is composed of cows and ears of corn.

Joseph's dream inspired Jacob with a vision of the future on the far horizon. Allah's wisdom is to make the miracles of prophets from the very stuff of the excellence and expertise of the nation in which prophets live. The miracle of Moses was the challenge he made to the magicians. The miracle of Jesus was the challenge he made to the medical practitioners. The miracle of Muhammad was the linguistic genius of the Quran. The miracle of Joseph was the interpretation of events.

When we follow Joseph's life from the minutes he was placed in the pit to the time when he settled down in the household of the governor we find that Joseph was favored by fatherly love from the governor. Joseph was never alone. He was always protected by Divine Providence. In fact he outnumbered the ten brothers because they followed Satan and he followed the right path of Allah. Allah always has the upper hand but most people do not know. Justice,



goodness and forgiveness prevailed in the end.

## **The Second Stage**

This stage is subdivided into two divisions:

- a) in the household of the governor of Egypt.
- b) in the prison.

Some comments on each may receive brief notice.

Allah says in the Quran:

“And He of Egypt who purchased him said unto his wife: Receive him with generosity perchance he may prove useful to us or we may adopt him as a son. Thus we established Joseph in the land that we might teach him the interpretation of events. And Allah has full power and control over His affairs but most of mankind know not.” (Quran 12:21)

It was Allah's will that the purchaser of Joseph was the governor of Egypt. His low price could have induced any commoner to buy him.

Joseph's insecurity was replaced by a feeling of security and belonging. The feeling tone in the household of the governor and the standard of living combined to make Joseph relatively contented. Joseph is the chosen of Allah for prophethood and every single event in his developmental stages is intended by Allah for a purpose as we see in the second division of the second stage.

Allah says in the Quran:

“And when he reached his prime, WE gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus WE reward the good.” (Quran 12:22)

This ayat covers a long period of Joseph's career, perhaps between 20 to 30 years. When Joseph was sold to the governor he must have been a very young lad of not more than 12 to 14 years of age or less. From then on until he reached his prime, life went on easily and free from problems.

When he reached his prime and became a very attractive youth, in a society that is loose, he was exposed to temptations requiring resistiveness by strong faith and will. This reached its greatest, severest challenge in his critical crisis with the wife of the governor.

Joseph was pious and possessed forbearance and continence and was guided by Divine Providence in that stage of life characterized by storm and stress especially in a society of laxity in moral standards. Joseph is reputed to have been more beautiful than the full moon. He was like a lamp of light in the darkness. Allah gave him wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is sagacity. It is understanding the consequences of behavior. Knowledge is the intuitive knowledge that Allah inspires unto the chosen of his creatures. Joseph's knowledge and wisdom were commensurate with each stage of his development.

Now we move to the next scene. Allah says in the Quran:

"And she, in whose house he was, asked of him an evil act. She bolted the doors and said: Come! He said: I seek refuge in Allah! Lo! He is my Lord who has treated me honorably, wrongdoers never prosper. She verily desired him with passion and he would have desired her if it had not been that he saw the proof of his Lord. Thus it was, that we might ward off from him evil and lewdness. Lo! He was one of Our chosen servants." (Quran 12:23-24)

"And they raced with one another to the door and she tore his shirt from behind, and they met her lord and master at the door. She said: What shall be his reward, who wishes evil to your folk, save prison or a painful doom?" (Quran 12: 25)

"(Joseph) said: She it was who asked of me an evil act."  
(Quran 12:26)

First of all, seduction implies that the woman must have made great efforts to achieve her aim. His status was that of a slave to his master. By the aid of Allah he proved continent. He could neither leave the house, nor keep away from her in her own household.

Apparently this last attempt was preceded by other advances she had made to seduce him.

Later on when the King summons the women and asks: "What happened when you asked an evil act of Joseph?".....this is indicative of the fact that Joseph was molested by other women as well. Joseph was exposed to this sort of crisis repeatedly. His firm will was exemplary so that when she bolted the doors and he had no way out, his resistiveness drove her crazy.

Allah, the most compassionate, would not put HIS chosen Joseph to such a trying test unless He equipped him with invincible will. One is inclined to assume that the ruler's woman must have tried all sorts of tactics to seduce Joseph, to no avail. The term of temptation: Come, Come, is an invitation to sex. Joseph's answer is:

"I seek refuge in Allah Lo! he is my lord, who has treated me honorably, wrongdoers never prosper." (Quran 12:23)

This ayat may receive brief comment. It is divided into three parts:

1. I seek refuge in Allah. Complete dependence on Allah.
2. Lo! he is my lord, who has treated me honorably.
3. Wrongdoers never prosper.

The first is self explanatory. It refers to Allah.

The second is a repetition of what his master said to his wife when he first bought him. "Treat him honorably." The terms master or lord were used in that society to refer to the ruler. Joseph's gratitude and thankfulness to the master was most pronounced in this situation. Obviously he was trying to stir the woman's conscience so that she remains faithful to her husband, and when he follows this by saying "wrongdoers never prosper," he is actually showing her the consequences of adultery which is prohibited by Allah strictly.

Both adulterer and adulteress deserve Allah's penalty. Adultery has been referred to in the Quran as a most condemned act. Those who keep their honor and are faithful to their spouses are praised in the Quran in a number of ayat:

“The believers must eventually win through....those who humble themselves in their prayers, who avoid vain talk, who are active in deeds of charity, who abstain from sex except with those joined to them in the marriage bond.” (Quran 23:1-6)

“And the servants of Allah Most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility and when the ignorant address them they say “Peace!”

“Those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord Prostrate and standing, Those who say: Our Lord! Avert from us the wrath of hell, for its wrath is indeed an affliction grievous. Evil indeed is it as an abode and as a place to rest in. Those who, when they spend are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just balance between those extremes. Those who invoke not with Allah, any other God. Nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred, except for Just cause, nor commit Fornication—any that does this (not only) meets punishment but the Penalty on the day of judgement will be doubled to him and he will dwell therein in ignomity.....Unless he repents, believes and works righteous deeds for Allah will change the evil of such persons into good, and Allah is oft Forgiving, oft Merciful.” (Quran 25:63-70)

And Allah says in Sura Al Isra (the ascension to Heaven):

“Nor come nigh to adultery for it is shameful deed and an evil opening the road to other evils.” (Quran 17:32)

And Allah says in Sura “The Light”:

“Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any woman similarly guilty or an unbeliever.

“Nor let any but such a man or an unbeliever marry such a woman: To the believers such a thing is forbidden.” (Quran 24:3)

Allah, in his praise of Mariam, daughter of Imran, says in the Quran:

“And Mary the daughter of Imran who guarded her chastity and we breathed (into her body) of our spirit and she testified to the truth



of the words of her Lord and of His Revelation and was one of the devout servants.” (Quran 66:12)

The sura of Joseph, featuring Joseph’s predicament with the wife of Al Aziz, and his resistiveness by the grace of Allah to abstain from lewedness because he is one of the charitable and sincere of Allah’s creatures, attains the same objective of the other ayat prohibiting the crime of adultery strictly. However, Joseph’s story charts a unique course to achieve this goal. It is a directional process goal.

Joseph is a youth blessed with vitality, health and attractiveness. He is alone with a seducing woman who spares no effort to tempt him. But Joseph was pious and obedient to Allah. Allah says in the Quran:

“And for those who fear Allah HE ever prepares a way out.”  
(Quran 65:2)

“And for those who fear Allah, He will make their path easy.”  
(Quran 65:4)

He was single and he was a “slave.” Joseph should be the great example to be emulated by all Muslim youth in all places at all times. Allah saved him from lewedness because Allah does not let down his sincere and pious worshippers. Whatever good befalls us is from Allah alone.

Allah—by showing us the great example of Joseph in his chastity and his respect for the rights of others in obedience to the Almighty, is giving us by experiential evidence a blessing. When men are pure and chaste, women become pure and chaste.

Now we focus on the following ayat:

“She verily desired him with passion, and he would have desired her if it had not been that he saw the proof of his Lord. Thus it was, that WE might ward off from him evil and lewedness. Lo! he was of our chosen worshippers.” (Quran 12:24)

Some comments on this ayat may receive brief notice in spite of the fact that many great scholars were rather hesitant in approaching



this point lest they should err. We ask Allah to give us guidance.

1. It is obvious that the wife of Al Aziz made advances to Joseph and planned to tempt and seduce him.
2. It is equally obvious that Joseph met her advances with resistiveness. The intentionality of evil on the woman's part is met with the intentionality of chastity on Joseph's part.
3. Allah supported Joseph in every moment especially in critical times from the time he was cast in the pit to the end of the narrative.

When the crisis reached its most critical moment, Allah showed Joseph His proof which acted as a deterrent. When the wife accused him before her husband, Allah made the witness prove his innocence. When he was put in prison, Allah planned his release by putting in prison with him the two young men. One of them, the cup bearer who was released, was instrumental in Joseph's release from prison after he had interpreted the King's dream.

Allah has described Joseph with the epithet "charitable." Allah says in the Quran:

"And when he reached his prime WE gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus WE reward the good, the charitable." (Quran 12:22)

Allah described him also as one of HIS sincere worshippers:

"Thus it was, that WE might ward off from him evil and lewdness. Lo! he was one of our chosen, sincere worshippers." (Quran 12:24)

Joseph was sustained by Allah's compassion all the way through while the wife of Al Aziz was pursuing her lewd passion. There is a qualitative distinction between her desire and Joseph (about to be desirous) because he ran away from her seeking exit while she followed him and tore his shirt from behind. When reciting this ayat, the reciter by his intoning makes this statement quite clear.

The proof shown by Allah to Joseph by divine intervention not only gave Joseph protection but inspired him with confidence. Allah ward off two evils: the desire and the consequence of the desire. The Quran depicts this scene in such way as to make it almost visible to us:

“And they raced with one another to the door. And she tore his shirt from behind and they met her lord and master at the door. She said: What shall be his reward who wishes evil to your folk, save prison or a painful doom?” (Quran 12:25)

We wish to emphasize here that had not the woman been still fully dressed she would have never dared to accuse Joseph before her husband. Allah said upon his tongue:

“She it was who asked of me an evil act.”

He pricked her false pride by saying the whole plain truth.

## Joseph's Innocence and a Development in the Woman's Stance

Allah willed to sustain Joseph in this most trying crisis and to prove his veracity against the falsity of the woman. Allah says in the Quran:

“And a witness of her own folk testified: If his shirt is torn from front, then she speaks the truth and he is of the liars. And if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is of the truthful. So when he saw his shirt torn from behind he said: Lo! This is of the guile of you women. Lo! the guile of you is very great. O Joseph! Turn away from this and you (O woman) ask forgiveness for your sin. lo! you are of the sinful.” (Quran 12: 26)

As we said earlier, the matter now is settled not because Joseph is the innocent but because the woman is the guilty. This is indicative of the way such matters were settled in those morally lax societies among the so called upper class. Allah tells us what happens in such societies in Sura Al Isra:

“And when WE would destroy a township WE send commandment to its folk who live at effortless affluence and opulence and afterward they commit abomination therein and so the word of (doom) has effect for it, and WE annihilate with complete extermination.” (Quran 17:16)

The news of the wife of Aziz's attempt to seduce the young man spread and the gossiping women repeated it with all their malicious intent. The wife of Al Aziz invited them to a party and asked Joseph to come in their presence. They were overwhelmed by his beauty and cut their hands absent-mindedly. Joseph did not refuse to come out because he had no other choice but to obey. There was no disobedience to Allah in such act.

When the woman proved her point, Allah says upon her tongue:

“This is he on whose account you blamed me. I asked him an evil act but he *proved continent* but if he did not do my behest, he

verily shall be imprisoned and verily shall he be of those brought low." (Quran 12: 32)

Obviously she spoke about him as if he were merely her property with no will of his own. She was not only ruthless but arrogant. She gives him two choices: either to do as ordered (now the request became a command) or to be put in prison. Since there was choice between two evils, naturally Joseph chose prison.

A question emerges, unavoidably in this episode: Since Joseph has now reached the end of his rope and was in the prime of health and knowledge and knew where Jacob and his folk were, why did he not think of escape from Egypt and gone back to his people? The answer is: Allah's will did not will that alternative.

There are two arguments supportive of this point.

1. Egypt was the venue for the fulfillment of the dream as it occurred at the end of the story.
2. We are of opinion that whether Joseph secured his freedom or not he was disinclined primarily to leave Egypt not because he was favored by the ruler (since the harm of the ruler's wife outweighed the ruler's favor) but because Joseph was a bearer of a trust and a man with a mission to fulfill.

We see that while in prison he called for the worship of the one God in his interaction with his fellow prisoners. The Egyptian society at that time was in need of Joseph to lead it from darkness to light and to reform its economic system much more so than the Shami society where there was Jacob and his folk.

Joseph chose suffering, and struggle in the cause of Allah, in preference to security and comfort in his own home and with his own folk.

This is the destiny of the bearers of trust in the Muslim Ummah. When we consider Joseph's reply to the woman's threat:  
"He said: O my Lord! Prison is more dear to me than that unto

which they urge me and if you fend not off their wiles from me, I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish.” (Quran 12: 33)

Certainly, he would have been better off if he was spared the choice between two evils. Joseph, the impeccable scrupulous and unblemished prophet of Allah is dependent on Allah all the time. He is never dependent on his own self righteousness but does say that he is frail and human and is in need of God’s help to fend off the wiles of women otherwise he would fall into error. Allah, who is closer to man than his jugular vein comes to Joseph’s rescue. He is the Hearer, the Knower.

We don’t know how the fending off the guiles of women was done whether because they despaired of him in spite of his availability or because of his being far from them. All we know is:

“So his Lord heard his prayer and fended off their wiles from him. Lo! He is Hearer, Knower.” (Quran 12:34)

Apparently Joseph was not the subject of passionate desire by one woman but by many women. Joseph suffered agonizing tests and trials during this period of his youthful vitality. Al Maari, the famous poet captured this point in his famous couplet:

Youthful vitality is a fleeting span in man’s life  
After forty.....youth is conspicuous by absence!

To Joseph prison with all its darkness, lonesomeness, and gloom was preferable to the warmth and security of the ruler’s house at the expense of disobedience to Allah.



## Joseph in Prison

The adverb *then* at the beginning of the ayat:

“*Then* it seemed appropriate to them (the men folk) after they had seen the signs (of his innocence) to imprison him for a while....”  
(Quran 12:35)

It is significant. It indicates the passage of some time, of reasonable length which Joseph spent in agonizing struggle against overwhelming odds for the sake of Allah.

The reference to (the men folk) including naturally the ruler, shows the group of decision-makers who have authority. Joseph's behavior did not only wound the pride of the wife of Al Aziz, but a whole class of licentious upper-class women who were capable of putting words into their men's mouths.

The conspiracy against Joseph was a collective one in which the forces of evil joined against an innocent young man. The males of that society were apparently incapable of checking the wiles and beguiles of their women. The decision of the men folk to imprison Joseph *for a time* indicates a sense of guilt that was passive and ineffective.

Now let's follow the ayat concerning Joseph in prison:

“And two young men went to prison with him. One of them said: I dreamed that I was pressing wine. The other said: I dreamed that I was carrying upon my head bread whereof the birds were eating. Announce unto us the interpretation, for we see you of those good. (at interpretation). He said: Before any food which you are given daily shall come unto you I will surely tell you the interpretation. This is part of the duty which my Lord has taught me. Lo! I have forsaken the religion of folk who believe not in Allah and are disbelievers in the hereafter. And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute aught as partner to Allah. This is of the bounty of Allah unto us (the seed of Abraham) and unto mankind, but most men give not thanks.” (Quran 12:36-38)

“O my two fellow prisoners: are divers lords better or Allah the One, the Almighty?” (Quran 12:39)

“Those whom you worship beside him are but names which you have named you and your fathers. Allah has revealed no authority for them. The decision rests with Allah only, who has commanded you that you worship none save Him. This is the right religion, but most men know not.

O my two fellow prisoners! As for one of you, he will pour out wine for his lord to drink, and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head. So has been decreed concerning which you did inquire.

And he said unto him of the twain whom he knew would be released: Mention me in the presence of your lord. But Satan caused him to forget to mention it to his lord so he (Joseph) stayed in prison for some years.” (Quran 12:40-42)

Joseph’s reply to the two fellow prisoners combined two objectives:

1. The interpretation which is caused by the knowledge Allah gave him.
2. The call to the worship of Allah.

No one but a prophet could combine and integrate the two objectives in such a blend. The emphasis is on Allah as the Knower, the bestower of knowledge on whom He chooses. When Joseph said: I followed the religion of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he emphasized a basic fact for Muslims. Abraham said: I am the archytype of Muslims....as a model.

To worship Allah alone is the first mark of a Muslim.

Joseph poses a question to his two fellow prisoners:

“O my two companions in the prison: I ask you: are many gods differing away themselves better or the One God supreme and irresistible.” (Quran 12:39)

Joseph is trying to make them think logically.

## **The Process of Sound Construction of Faith**

Joseph moves from refuting false belief to constructing sound belief:

“Allah is the sole determiner, He commanded all to worship HIM alone. It is Allah and not the idols nor the other human beings. But most people do not know.”

This ayat, as explained, earlier stresses the fact that a small percentage of faithful people are the ones who know while the majority are heedless either because they are ignorant or because they act disobediently, knowingly. All these arguments played a role in providing the Prophet Muhammad with solace during that critical period in Makkah.

## Interpretation of the Dreams of the Two Fellow Prisoners

After Joseph had called the two young prisoners to the religion of Allah, which is the ultimate objective of every Muslim, and availing himself of the opportunity of leading them out of the darkness of Polytheism to the light of Islam, he started to interpret their dreams and answer their queries. Allah says in the Quran:

“O my two companions of the prison: as to one of you he will pour out the wine for his lord to drink. As for the other, he will hang from the cross and the birds will eat from off his head. (So) has been decreed the matter whereof you twain do inquire.”  
(Quran 12:41)

Why was Joseph frank with the one whose end is death?

The answer is that he was frank and truthful with the first and he had to be consistent with the second. On the other hand, and in retrospect, the one who was saved would be absolutely sure that Joseph's interpretation of the dreams were fulfilled.

The question now arises: in which situation should one be explicit and in which situations implicit? We are given the answer by Joseph himself. When accused by the wife of the governor he said quite explicitly: “She it was who tried to seduce me.” When the King summoned him to go to him, Joseph who wanted to prove his innocence did not accuse the woman explicitly but, out of veracity and discretion, said: as Allah says in the Quran:

“But when the messenger came to him, Joseph said: go you back to your lord and ask him: What is the state of mind of the women who cut their hands? For my Lord is certainly well aware of their snare.” (Quran 12:50)

Joseph resorts to explicit and implicit approaches situationally. His basic criterion is the suitability of the technique to the major strategy of his message as a prophet. When Allah says upon his tongue: “So has been decreed the matter whereof you twain do inquire,” Joseph had certainty by Allah's inspiration that it is decreed.

## **Joseph Asks the Spared One to Mention Him to His Lord**

Let us now consider the last ayat in this scene:

“And of the two, to that one whom he considered about to be saved he said: Mention me to your lord. But Satan made him forget to mention him to his lord. And (Joseph) lingered in prison a few more years.” (Quran 12:42)

When did Joseph say this to the would be-saved prisoner? Was it immediately after the interpretation of the dream or at a later time?

The immediacy or tardiness of Joseph’s request are not very significant matters in terms of the consequences. More significant is the fact that the saved cup-bearer forgot to mention Joseph to the King.

Meanwhile Joseph continued to pursue his mission in prison. He kept specifying to them the food they would be provided with before it was offered. He kept calling for worshipping the One God.



## Joseph's Interpretation of the King's Dream

The Quran teaches us a great lesson in this connection. Joseph remains in prison for some time although he asked the cup-bearer to mention him to the King. Joseph, being human, plans for his release as soon as possible. But Allah's will prevails over human planning. Man proposes and God disposes. Joseph left prison when Allah decreed the timing. Allah willed that the King sees a dream which none of his entourage could interpret.

The cup-bearer sees the King's quandary. Only then he remembers Joseph, not simply as a fellow-prisoner but as the one who interpreted his dream which was fulfilled. Allah says in the Quran:

"The King (of Egypt) said: I do see (in a vision) seven fat kine whom seven lean ones devour—and seven green ears of corn and seven (others) withered. O you chiefs! Expound to me my vision if it be that you can interpret dreams. They said: A confused medley of dreams, and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams. But the man who had been released, one of the two who had been in prison and who now bethought him after so long a space of time said: I will tell you the truth of its interpretation, send you me (therefore).

O Joseph, he said O man of truth! Expound to us the dream of seven fat kine whom seven lean ones devour, and of seven green ears of corn and seven others withered, that I may return to the people and that they may understand.

Joseph said: "For seven years shall you diligently sow as is your wont and the harvests that you reap you shall leave them in the ear except a little of which you shall eat. Then will come after that period seven dreadful years which will devour what you shall have laid by in advance for then all except a little which you shall have specially guarded. Then will come after that period a year in which the people will have abundant water and in which they will press (wine and oil)." (Quran 12:43-46)

We are really awe-inspired by Joseph's nobility of character i e

most stressful situations. He is still in prison for no reason except his resistiveness to evil and the temptation of a woman who tried to seduce him. In spite of his proven innocence he is imprisoned. The society was corrupt and justice was conspicuous by absence.

He offered them the interpretation that would save the society and the neighboring communities from famine. And on top of that he gave them the knowledge of the fifteenth year which Allah imparted to him exclusively and which was entirely overlooked by them. Joseph was motivated in his actions by altruistic rather than egocentric incentives.

Let us now consider the first ayat pertinent to Joseph's role in this situation. Allah says upon the tongue of the cup-bearer:

"Joseph! O you truthful one! Expound for us the seven fat kine which seven lean were eating and the seven green ears of corn and other seven dry, that I may return unto the people, so that they may know." (Quran 12:46)

The first observation here is that the cup-bearer calls Joseph by his name which is indicative of endearment and familiarity. He also calls him the truthful one using the emphatic arabic term "seddik." The regular form is "sodik." The cup-bearer has a firm conviction in Joseph's truthfulness and knowledge. He requests him to *expound* which is only used in matters of grave concern.

While the Quran does not mention upon the tongue of the cup-bearer, who was the person who saw the vision, it is reasonable to assume that he could have conveyed it to Joseph one way or the other. The Quran mentioned earlier: "And the King said: Lo! I saw in a dream..."

Let us now focus on the interpretation of the dream. Allah says in the Quran:

"He said: You shall sow seven years as usual but that which you reap leave it in the ear, all save a little which you can. Then after that will come seven hard years which will devour all that you have prepared for them, save a little of that which you have stored." (Quran 12:47-48)

The figurativeness of the Quranic style in this connection may receive brief notice. "Seven hard years will devour all that you have prepared for them..." It is not merely an interpretation of a dream. It is a functional program of pre-planning to save them from the expected consequences. And then came the ayat including the foreknowledge of the fifteenth year which Joseph imparted to them in spite of the injustice done to him. Allah says upon his tongue:

"Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plenteous crops and when they will press (wine and oil)." (Quran 12:49)

The meaning is that the people will be aided by rain in that 15th year which will replemish the earth and revive it after its barrenness. And the people will have plenty not only of food stuff but of what is expressed namely, wine and oil. Joseph...inspired by Allah made the decision makers and planners of Egyptian society future-oriented.

The reference to the fifteenth year as a year of rain, plenty of rain is of special significance because it rarely rains plentifully in Egypt. The only adequate explanation for that is the distinctive mark of prophethood which Allah bestowed upon Joseph as HIS prophet.

## Joseph Refuses to Leave Prison Before His Innocence is Firmly Established

The King received the interpretation of his dream with joy. It made sense to him. He admired the personality of Joseph who contributed this great knowledge in spite of his confinement in prison unjustly.

There is a mystery and a paradox in this most eventful episode. He sent a messenger to summon Joseph from his prison. When he met Joseph, he said, as Allah says in the Quran:

“Joseph said: Return unto your lord and ask him what was the case of the women who cut their hands. Lo! My Lord knows their guile.” (Quran 12:50)

Joseph’s main concern was not his immediate release from prison in which he was confined for many years, but the establishment of his innocence beyond any conceivable doubt. The matter is related to his *pursuit of truth* as a persistent life situation whatever the cost of the pursuit is.

Although his innocence was established earlier by the witness in private, it should be firmly established now, in public, beyond any conceivable doubt. There is a marked difference between the two. His term “return” to your lord and ask him.....etc. are loaded with *dignity* and assertiveness.

Another telling observation is *your lord*. He did not say my lord except in reference to Allah. His reference to his master, the husband of the wife is out of gratitude only. Joseph reminds us of the prophet Solomon, son of David, when he said to the envoy of the Queen Sabaa:

“Return to them. We verily shall come unto them with hosts that they cannot resist and we shall drive them out from thence with shame and they will be abused.” (Quran 27:37)

In the framing of the question in the ayat “and ask him *what was the case* of the women who cut their hands?” Joseph simplifies the

matter with *brevity*. It sums up a whole situation without causing explicit embarrassment to the wife of Al Aziz. On the other hand the women of the city and not only the wife of Al Aziz were implicated in his imprisonment.

Joseph's attitude was crystal clear. Allah knows the women's beguile. Allah sustained him in his resistiveness to evil. Allah does not forsake the ones who obey him with devotion. Joseph wants his innocence to be publicly established. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said: "He who believes in Allah and the hereafter should not place himself in a position of suspicion."

Apparently the King of Egypt at that time was a man of justice. He must have been also a very busy man but he did not hesitate to give this case due attention and scrutiny and to know the whole truth. He summoned the women of the city and the wife of Al Aziz and started interrogating them in the manner asked by Joseph. What happened? What did you do when you asked an evil act of Joseph?

The women became indefensible and were smitten dumb. This is confession in one very real sense. On the other hand, they added:

"God Blameless. We know no evil of him." He is impeccable. The crowning proof was publicly known when the wife of Al Aziz witnessed against herself:

"Now the truth is out and manifest. I asked of him an evil act and he is surely of the truthful."

This descriptive term of *truthful* concurs with the cup bearer's description.



## Two Concluding Ayat in This Incident

Exegesists differ concerning upon whose tongue Allah says these two ayats. Were they uttered by Joseph or by the wife of Al Aziz? Allah says in the Quran:

“I asked for this that he (my lord) may know that I betrayed him not in secret and that surely Allah guides not the snare of the betrayers. I do not exculpate myself. Lo! The human soul enjoins unto evil, save that whereon my Lord has mercy. Lo! My Lord is forgiving, Merciful.” (Quran 12:52-53)

Let us consider the phrase: *I did not betray him*. If it is the woman, it implies the continuity of falsely accusing Joseph. If it is Joseph, and in the light of what the Quran relates about the woman's attempt to seduce him and Joseph's proof to be continent, then it means the betrayal of the Aziz in his household.

Now let us consider the phrase *in secret*. If it were the woman who said it means that at that moment when Joseph is absent from the presence of the King she says nothing but the truth and stops her false accusation. On the other hand if it were Joseph who said it means that Joseph did not betray the man who entrusted his woman to Joseph in his household.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the woman began to distill from the purest sources of religion and the most knowledgeable of Allah, a new direction—in a society that was basically morally lax. The woman of Al Aziz belonged to the most licentious class of that society. Allah says in this connection:

“When we decide to destroy a population, we first send a definite order to those of them who are affluent and prosperous and yet transgress, so that the word is proved true against them, then we destroy them utterly.” (Quran 17:16)

Some comments on the developmental stages through which this woman passed, may receive brief notice:

1. The purchase of Al Aziz of the lad Joseph was a turning point in her life.
2. The hope of Al Aziz was that he would be useful to them in future and/or adopt him as a son if the woman treated him as a prospective son.
3. Joseph spent a number of years in the household of Al Aziz from older childhood to adolescence to adulthood.
4. Throughout his growth and maturation he applied the religious beliefs and laws of Abraham which were inculcated in him in his early childhood by Jacob.
5. The woman was not initially prepared to avail herself of Joseph's value system.
6. It is possible that from the very beginning she considered him as a potential satisfier of her erotic pursuits and not as a spiritual guide.
7. Joseph's resistiveness and refusal to respond to her attempt wounded her pride.
8. When she became the center of gossiping women in the city and invited them to her home and asked Joseph to appear in their presence, she changed her attempt from chasing to command. Joseph's reaction led him to prison which he preferred to disobeying Allah.
9. Joseph was inspired with prophethood and began his call to Allah.
10. Joseph went his way and the woman went her way until the confrontation before the King who asked them: "What have you to say concerning your attempt to seduce Joseph?"
11. The women confess Joseph's innocence. The wife of Al Aziz pleaded guilty.