

Obviously the ayat of the denial of the betrayal could not be upon the tongue of the woman. It was Joseph's because the phrase "surely Allah does not guide the snare of the beguilers" is consistent with the painful experience suffered by Joseph with the wife of Al Aziz and the women of the city. It is also logical with the sense of relief and the feeling of the restoration of justice and truth after the proof of his innocence beyond any conceivable doubt was firmly established.

"Allah does not guide the snare of the beguiles." (Quran 12:52)

This ayat expresses the quintessence of the entire experience of Joseph with the wife of Al Aziz and the women of the city. The use of the term "Allah" in this connection instead of my Lord is intended to make of it a universal law demonstrating the consequences of beguile in any conceivable medium of human misbehavior. And yet Joseph does not claim perfectionism, he is human. Allah says upon his tongue:

"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."

This ayat is replete with modesty and complete submission to Allah. It is consistent with an ayat in Sura Al Najm:

"Therefore Justify not yourselves to claim self-righteousness. He knows best who it is that guards against evil." (Quran 53:32)

Eternal vigilance against human vanity is the lesson we learn from Joseph. The emphasis is on Allah's compassion who sustains us in the most trying circumstances.

## **The King Summons Joseph to Attach Him to His Person**

The King made a public announcement that he wanted to attach Joseph exclusively to his person. By the grace and will of Allah, Joseph is now in process of preparation for the third stage of security, prosperity and fulfillment of his mission. Allah says in the Quran:

“And the King said: Bring him unto me that I may attach him to my person. And when he had talked with him he said: Lo! you are today in our presence established and trusted. He (Joseph) said: set me over the storehouses of the land. And thus we made Joseph owner of it where he pleased. We reach with Our mercy whom We will, We lose not the reward of the good.” (Quran 12:54)

“And the reward of the hereafter is better, for those who believe and ward off evil.” (Quran 12:57)

Joseph asked the King for a position of authority and responsibility. Apparently the position was vacant regardless of the fact whether the governor (Al Aziz) was then alive or dead. Earlier, Joseph referred to him saying “so that he knows that I have not betrayed him in secret.” However, Joseph applies himself to the job with a feeling of confidence in Allah’s support and guidance. He did not even phrase it in the form of request but almost commandingly.

The King’s statement: “You are today in our presence established and trusted” is indicative of unconditional confidence in Joseph. Joseph was certain that the world is on the verge of a famine. He was equally certain that he was the person who could captain the ship to safe harbor by the will and grace of Allah. He offered his services in the hope of leading the society from the darkness of godlessness and polytheism and disbelief to the light of monotheism and belief. Saving the society from famine would re-enforce his call to the worship of Allah. In other words the job he wanted to occupy was only a means to an end. He was motivated by altruistic ends- in-view.....FI SABIL ALLAH (for the cause of God).

The ultimate of Joseph as a prophet was the fulfillment of his

message in the service of Allah and against any odds and no matter what the sacrifices may be. Allah says in Sura "Ghafir": The All Forgiving.

"And to you there came Joseph in times gone by. With clear signs, but you ceased not to doubt of the (mission) for which he had come. At length when he died you said: No messenger will Allah send after him. Thus does Allah leave astray such as transgress and live in disbelief." (Quran 40:34)

Joseph's stress that he was "a skilled, knowledgeable custodian" was rooted in his faith in Allah. Joseph chose to burden himself with a grave responsibility. He could have availed himself of this opportunity to choose to return to his own people.

Joseph was a bearer of trust, a prophet whose words and deeds are motivated by his inspiration by Allah, by divine revelation. His commitment was to the cause of Allah for the achievement of the best for man on this earth and in the hereafter.

He was tested by adversity. Now he is tested by prosperity and bounty, and the possession of power. Allah says in the Quran:

"Thus we gave power to Joseph in the land....we reach with Our mercy whom We will. We lose not the reward of the good. And the reward of the hereafter is better for those who believe and ward off evil." (Quran 12:56)

The ayat "We gave Joseph power in the land" was earlier mentioned when Joseph was sold to the governor who asked his wife to treat him honorably so that he might be useful to them or they might adopt him as a son. Joseph's power in the land now extended in scope and sequence. This is the reward by Allah for the charitable in this world. The reward in the hereafter is ultimately, the better, the more rewarding.

Joseph's treatment of his fellow human beings was always charitable. He could enter into a fellowship of feeling with all sorts of personalities in order to guide them to the right path. His charismatic

personality made him not only popular but also trustworthy. Joseph was master of the land in a figurative sense. He was master of hearts...primarily.

This meaningful purport of the ayat in the Sura of Joseph is also stressed in the Sura of The Bees:

“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith verily, to him/her We will give a new life and life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.” (Quran 16:97)

## **The Third and Final Stage in the Life of Joseph: The stage of Being Tested By Prosperity**

With the appointment of Joseph in the position of the Aziz (general governor) of Egypt, the stage of bounty, security, and fulfillment commences. When the Quran mentions the coming of Joseph's brothers from Al Sham to Egypt seeking food: "And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him and he knew them but they knew him not." (Quran 12:59).....this means that a period of time more than a decade must have elapsed. The ayat does not specify it.

The period of time was the seven years of plenty and perhaps another period of the years of scarcity. It must have taken some time for the news to reach the surrounding regions about the available provision in Egypt and the governor's policy of distributing provisions to the needy.

Joseph's pre-planning and planning-in-process saved the nations of the entire region from famine. Joseph was only instrumental in implementing Allah's will and compassion for the nations. He saved many, many lives from perishing.

Let us now re-consider the ayat of the first scene. Allah says in the Quran:

"And 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 me a brother you have of the same father as yourselves but a different mother.

See you not that I pay out full measure and that I do provide the best hospitality.

Now if you bring him not to me, you shall have no measure (of corn) from me nor shall you even come near me.

They said: We shall certainly seek to get your wish about him from his father. Indeed we shall do it. And Joseph told his servants to put their stock in trade with which they have bartered into their

saddlebags so they should know it only when they returned to their people, in order that they might come back.” (Quran 12:58-62)

We can assume that Joseph was the right man for the right position combining firmness with generosity. He was also accessible to all..... taking up his responsibilities directly with those needing the provisions on the basis of equality of opportunity for all. This is evidenced by the ayat:

“Bring me a brother you have of the same father as yourselves but a different mother. See you not that I pay out full measure (of corn) and that I do provide the best of hospitality.” (Quran 12:59)

Joseph was also firm and resolute in his condition imposed on his brothers.

“If you bring him not to me, you shall have no measure nor shall you even come near me.” (Quran 12:60)

It is important to note that none of the ten brothers recognized Joseph. Perhaps they were awe-inspired in the presence of the governor in person. Even when he told them to bring *a brother* of theirs next time if they wanted provision, it did not occur to their minds then that it was Joseph who set the condition.

Joseph’s new title was Al Aziz and he was known by this title and not by his name which was easy to pronounce in this society. We remember when the witness said to him “Joseph, keep away from that or deal yourself out of that” and the cup bearer saying “Joseph, O truthful Joseph,”.....it was prior to the appointment as “Al Aziz.” However it was the custom in this society to call the person occupying the position of governor by “Al Aziz” as the women of the city said, as mentioned in the Quran:

“The women of the city said the wife of Al Aziz is asking her ‘boy’ an evil act and she is consumed with desire for him.” (Quran 12:30)

The brothers called Joseph “O you Al Aziz” many times. An

observation worth emphasis in this connection is the fact that the language spoken by the Egyptian public then was not the same language spoken by Jacob's folk and therefore Jacob's sons could not communicate to any adequate extent with the Egyptian public. This explains why, the brothers remained ignorant of the news of Joseph which was public knowledge to the Egyptian society.

On the other hand, Joseph does not reveal his identity to his brothers by Allah's will. Whatever he did since they cast him in the pit was by the inspiration of Allah and his guidance.

There are two evidences to substantiate this:

1. Allah inspired Joseph when his brothers decided to cast him in the pit that "he will tell them what they did while they do not know." Allah says in the Quran:

"So they did take him away and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well: And we put into his heart (this message): "of a surety you will one day tell them the truth of this their affair while they know not." (Quran 12:15)

Joseph could have told them in the first encounter about their deed. The fact that he did not is a proof that Allah has not permitted him yet.

2. But for Allah's inspiration for Joseph when he put the King's cup in his brother's saddlebags, to instruct his men to ask the brothers about the kind of judgement they accept applying to the thief of the cup if it is found in his possession, this whole tactic would not have achieved its objective because its success was dependent on this question and on the applicability of their law. Allah says in the Quran:

"Thus we did plan for Joseph he could not take his brother by the law of the King except that Allah willed it (so). We raise to degrees (of wisdom) when We please, but overall endued with knowledge is ONE, the All-Knowing." (Quran 12:76)

Needless to say that Joseph treated his brothers kindly and generously. He instructed his men to accord them special privileges so that he could win their hearts and eventually persuade their father to send their youngest brother back with them.

Obviously his generosity succeeded in achieving its objective as evidenced by the ayat:

“And add at the same time a full camel’s load of grain to our provisions. This is but a small quantity.” (Quran 12:65)

It is obvious that Al Aziz was very generous and that an additional camel load is something very easy for him to give.



## **Joseph's Punishment of His Brothers: Moral and Psychic**

Although Joseph's brothers exposed his life to danger by casting him in the pit and were instrumental in the psychic agonies he suffered in the pit and by the caravan men and by being sold in the slave market, and the crisis in the Al Aziz household and in prison, yet he never tried to punish his brothers in any physical or material manner or expose the life of anyone of them to danger. He did want to punish them morally.

He provides them with food as he does with everyone else. He is generous to them as he does with everyone else and is even more generous to them. The only condition he sets for them to obtain food another time and to prove that they are not "spies" and that they are truthful in what they said, is to bring back with them a brother from their father.

He knows for sure that Jacob, his father, is so closely, emotionally attached to his full brother, and that will be the first psychic dilemma he involves them in. This is evidenced by their saying:

"They said: We shall certainly seek to get our wish about him from his father. Indeed we shall do it" (Quran 12:61)

The arabic word "morawadah" connotes exerting strenuous effort. Joseph's putting their merchandise back in their saddlebags is indicative of a decisive act that unless they fulfill the condition, this is the end and he will not sell them food anymore.

There is also the added factor that these brothers do not accept the acquisition of anything that is "haraam", (unlawful). Joseph succeeded by this means to motivate them to reveal what they concealed and to motivate their father to let off steam. Allah says in the Quran:

"Then when they opened their baggage they found their stock in trade had been returned to them. They said: O our father, what more can we desire? This our stock in trade has been returned to us: so we shall get (more) food for our family. We shall take care

of our brother and add at the same time a full camel's load (of grain to our provisions). This is but a small quantity. Jacob said: Never will I send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me in God's name that you will be sure to bring him back to me unless you yourselves are hemmed in and made powerless. And when they had sworn their solemn oath he said: Over all that we say, be God the witness and the Guardian!" (Quran 12:65-66)

If Joseph had not put the stock in trade in his brothers' saddlebags, the story would have moved into a different direction. The plan was meant to make his forgiveness later on.....the forgiveness of a powerful person which is more effective in its impact on them.

When the brothers return from Egypt, after the second trip, without their youngest brother they were suffering from most agonizing feelings. They had made a solemn oath. They were hemmed in and made powerless. They did enter from many gates rather than from one entrance in obedience to their father and now they return minus not only one but two. And before they left they heard the crier: "O camel drivers, you are thieves." This is evident from the following ayat:

"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 out a crier: O you in the caravan! Behold you are thieves without doubt. They said: turning towards them, what is it that you miss? They said: we miss the great beaker of the ruler, for him who produces it, is the reward of a camel load. I will be bound by it. The brothers said: By God! Well you know that we came not to make mischief in the land and we are no thieves! (The Egyptian) said: What then shall be the penalty of this, if you are proved to have lied? 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 wrongdoers." (Quran 12:70-75)

The brothers, in their adherence to their religion, stress the application of the penalty on the thief as specified in the Ibrahimite divine law, in case the guilty is one of them. They were certain that they were all innocent of such an accusation. When they say: Thus it is we

punish the wrongdoers, the implication is: we are aware of the penalty, the important thing is to prove that the lost cup is in our possession.

The finding of the lost cup in their possession had a most shocking impact on them. It is a mixture of surprise and fury against that brother in whose saddlebags it is found. It also surfaces the deep seated envy they felt against him and against his brother Joseph, as expressed in the ayat:

“If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before him.”  
(Quran 12:77)

Apparently, until that moment they did not feel any sense of guilt for what they did to Joseph in his early childhood. Furthermore, they accused Joseph of having being a thief himself.

Perhaps Joseph’s plan in putting the cup in his brother’s saddlebags was to find out the true feelings of his brothers towards his full brother and incidentally towards himself. They did reveal their true feelings which were not charitable. This explains why Joseph showed no lenience towards them by refusing to take as bondman none of the other brothers in lieu of the one in whose saddlebags the cup was found. Allah says in the Quran:

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

The feelings of the brothers towards Joseph and his full brother were not free from hostility. Joseph, by Allah’s inspiration and guidance was keen in purifying their hearts from its impurities by revealing his identity to them at the appropriate moment which he knew was imminent.

His self control was exemplary. His clemence was superb. He maintained a healthy balance between the need of gradualism in certain actions and rapidity in certain actions. The brothers began to wake up to the totality of reality and the consequences facing them. They shifted their emphasis from a punitive attitude to the brother into the impact of the news on their father. They submissively begged

Joseph to take one of them as bondman in lieu of the youngest.

But Joseph was adamant in his refusal. Allah says:

“He said: Allah forbid that we should seize save-him with whom we found our property: then truly we should be wrongdoers.”  
(Quran 12:79)

When the brothers say “Lo we behold thee of those who do kindness,” to the Al Aziz while they also say “Thus we requite wrongdoers,” they hinted that the thief only is punishable and no one else. Joseph reiterates this subtly when he expresses: Allah says: “If we did so then truly we should be wrongdoers.”

It implies that....“You have been involved and implicated while you claim to be good and honest....you are self-contradicting.”

Since the question was concerning the penalty for the thief apart from who is the one to whom the penal law is to be applied....you have actually passed the verdict in very clear terms. And when it is known that he is one of you, you hasten to request me to forgive the wrongdoer and to punish the innocent. Now: do you consider this to be fairness or injustice as you yourselves confess?

The brothers spent a period in this psychic turmoil until they despaired and felt sure that Joseph will not release their brother scot free! Their withdrawal, shamefully, into a corner whispering in order not to be overheard was a manifestation of the psychic turmoil they suffered in view of their father's, the prophet of Allah Jacob warning and their pledge. Jacob cherished the hope of reunion with Joseph. Now he is going to lose the other son too.

Suddenly, the situation explodes like a cyclone. Allah says:

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

judges. 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. Ask the township where we were and the caravan with which we travelled hither. Lo! We speak the truth.” (Quran 12:80-82)

The implications of these ayat are a reminder of what happened to Joseph when they suggested the killing of Joseph or leaving him in the wilderness to perish and he suggested casting him in the well. He is now putting the blame on them. Allah says:

“And how you failed in the case of Joseph aforetime?” (Quran 12:89)

The decision by this brother to stay in Egypt is indicative of his dissidence and is an emphatic reminder of the gap between him and his brothers. It is also a punitive measure since they, without him, will confront their father with this alarming news. It is customary for the eldest brother to convey the news to the father but he dumped it unto their knees!

To the brothers it was the first experience of its kind, to assume the responsibility of the eldest. For their youngest brother to be enslaved by Al Aziz, would be unbearable for the father in addition to the loss of Joseph.

There is also another aspect in this matter that is significant in the analysis: The eldest brother chose to inflict punishment upon himself. From then on, the psychic pains will intensify while he is away from the direct impact of the news on the already bereaved father. On the other hand the brothers who will return without the youngest brother after their solemn undertaking, are really in a bind. Many years ago they lied to their father and told him the wolf had devoured him. They receive from Jacob the reply which they do not deserve this time but it was the reply which he gave in reaction to their lie aforetime.

Allah says in the Quran:

“Nay, but your minds have beguiled you into something.”  
(Quran 12:83)

This reply pierces them like cruel arrows and revives their hostility against Joseph which they consider to be the root of all that had happened.

## **Joseph, the Governor of Egypt Reveals to His Brothers His True Identity in Their Third Trip**

Allah said in the Quran:

“Then, when they came (back) into Joseph’s presence, they said: O exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family, we have (now) brought our scanty capital so pay us full measure, and treat it as charity to us, for God rewards the charitable.

He said: Know you how you dealt with Joseph and his brother, not knowing what you were doing?

They said: Are you indeed Joseph?

He said: I am Joseph, and this is my brother: God has indeed been gracious to us all: behold he that is righteous and patient—never will God suffer the reward to be lost of those who do right.

They said: By God! Indeed has God preferred you above us and we certainly have been guilty of sin.

He said: This day let no reproach be cast on you. God will forgive you and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy. Go with this..... my shirt, and cast it over the face of my father: he will come to see clearly. Then come you to me together with all your family.” (Quran 12:88-93)

We have previously studied the first ayat of this scene and promised to study the personalities of Joseph’s brothers in contrast to Joseph in the rest of this scene because of the link between what Joseph said and what his brothers did. Before we do this, it is most fitting to mention an ayat indicative of Allah’s inspiration to Joseph when he was a young kid that he will inform those brothers of this—their affair. Allah says in the Quran:

“So they did take him away and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well and we put into his heart (inspired him), this message of a surety...: you will one day tell them the truth of this affair while they know you not.” (Quran 12:15)

Allah's promise to Joseph was fulfilled and here we find him reminding them of their affair. But in what manner?

In the manner expected from a magnanimous gracious prophet of Allah, of course. They are full of weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and deficiencies, and he is full of strength, firmness and resolution. What would he do from a position of power? Have they forgotten what they had committed against him? How can they forget when they departed from their land this last time to probe and to look for Joseph and his brother? Are they fully aware now of the magnitude of their crime?

Presumably they were.....and therefore they kept concealing it. And what is the advantage, in their view, of revealing the secret? None whatsoever.

Let us ponder in appreciation the gentle expression of Joseph to his brothers and his gracious manner of reminding them which acts as a shock absorber to the sudden surprise that the man standing before them is Joseph himself in flesh and blood. The brothers were anxious to hear his reply concerning food and they begged him saying:

“O exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family. We have brought our scanty capital so pay us full measure and treat it as charity to us for God rewards the charitable.” (Quran 12:88)

Their interest was centered on provisions and they expected a favorable, affirmative reply from him, but they are confronted with the interrogative: “Know you how you have dealt with Joseph,” followed sequentially by “Not knowing what you were doing?” suddenly rings in their ears the name can only be uttered by its possessor.

Do you know what you did to Joseph? The time has now come, by God's will, for the revelation of his true identity. He summoned up a whole series of events in a couple of questions with brevity which is the soul of wit. He concludes: Hence.....guilty of sin and ignorance.

Instead of vengeance, he offers forgiveness. They now realize that—in his own words—they were ignorant and irresponsible when



they cast him down in the pit and although they were his elders, they were the less mature!

However, other questions emerge in this scene:

1. Has Joseph's brother actually stolen the cup?
2. Does Joseph's brother know the facts?
3. Is this revelation by prior agreement between the two?

He hastens to say:

“This is my brother. I am Joseph and this is my brother. Allah has blessed and graced us. He who is righteous and patient—God will never suffer the reward to be lost—of those who do right.”

(Quran 12:90)

Joseph, the prophet of Allah is emphasizing this fact: that Allah rewards the righteous amply, not necessarily in the here and now, but definitely in the hereafter and it can be in the here and the hereafter by the will and grace of Allah.

Allah has rewarded Joseph in the here and then for his patience and positive surrender to Allah's will. As far as the brothers are concerned their last encounter with their brother Joseph was when they cast him off in the pit. The Joseph before them now is unknown to them.

When his identity was revealed they made the confession:

“They said: This day has God preferred you above us and we certainly have been guilty of sin.” (Quran 12:91)

They confess that their wrong cannot be righted. The damage was irreversibly done. They are now seeking his forgiveness and primarily Allah's forgiveness.

## Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Joseph, the noble, the sensitive the magnanimous wants to save the face of his brothers. Suffice for them to confess and repent. Allah says in the Quran:

“This day, let no reproach be cast on you. God will forgive you and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.” (Quran 12:92)

He is not concerned with his own rights. He forgives from a position of power. This reunion is a day of rejoicing, of opening a new page of love and tenderness. Drawing a veil over the painful past is sound. He is also certain that Allah, the most forgiving will forgive them. He is the most compassionate of all the compassionate.

What they did in the past was a temporary mischief through Satan. The fact that they repent is indicative of their pure alloy and their return to the straight path of Jacob's forebears and offspring. This attitude draws our attention to a similar attitude by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) on his victorious re-entering of Makkah.

After circumbulating the Kaaba seven times on his camel he called Othman Ibn Talha and took from him the key of the Kaaba , entered it and prayed inside it and then came out. He faced the Quraysh gathering and said among other things: “What do you expect me to do with you in recompense for what you had done?” They answered: “We expect the good, you are a generous brother and you are now the victor, the powerful.” He said: “I say what my brother Joseph said: This day let no reproach be cast on you.”

The obvious resolve of this is a day of generosity and magnanimity. It is reputed that Ali Ibn Abi Talib stood up with the key of the Kaaba in his hand and said: We O Prophet combine for us the two functions of guardianship over the Kaaba and the provision of water. The Prophet's response was: “where is Othman Ibn Talha?” He was summoned. He said: Take the key. Today is a day of piety and magnanimity.”

The Prophets' most generous attitude of forgiveness was practised

even in the case of an atrocious convict who had betrayed the prophet twice and caused irreversible damage to the Muslim community. Joseph, the pious, the charitable, the generous to his parents, his family, the Grateful to his God is acting with the character traits of a Prophet.

Joseph's magnanimity to his brothers restored to them their peace of mind. How about his father who lost his eyesight out of chagrin and weeping for his lost son?

“Go with this 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)

The question arises: How did Joseph know that his father had lost his eyesight which was a recent infliction unknown to his full brother at all? On the other hand, Joseph's brothers naturally did not mention it. The answer is prophethood. It is the intuitive divine knowledge imparted to him by Allah.

Now let us ponder the command “Go”. Does it not remind us of Jacob's similar order earlier?

“O my sons! Go and inquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of God's soothing mercy. Truly no one despairs of God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith.” (Quran 12:87)

We sense here....hope, optimism and expectation of God's soothing mercy. The brothers must have been asking themselves instantly: will our father be able to bear the shock of the happy tidings? The winds are now blowing favorably in their desirable direction. Their thinking was along the following lines: we were instrumental in causing our father the loss of his eyesight.

How long shall we remain languishing under our sense of guilt chased by the ghost of our crime while the victimized Joseph has forgiven us and has prayed for Allah to forgive us? Suddenly the word: “Go” rings in their ear as a reminder of Jacob's earlier “Go.”

The brothers were confident that their father's eyesight will be restored to him. This is the miracle with which Allah privileged his prophet Joseph. Let us now move to the rest of the ayat:

"Then, when they entered the presence of Joseph, he provided a home for his parents with himself and said: Enter you Egypt in safety if it pleases God. (Quran 12:88)

"And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity) and fell down in prostration all before him: He said: O my father, "This is the fulfillment of my vision of old! God has made it come true. He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you all here out the desert.

Even after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers, Verily my Lord understands best the mysteries of all that He plans to do. For verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom. O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed on me some power and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. O you Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my protector in this world and in the hereafter. Take my soul at death as one submitting to Your Will as a (Muslim) and unite me with the righteous." (Quran 12:100-101)

Thus Joseph reunited with his parents and brought them to his abode. It is obvious that Joseph refers their entrance to Egypt in security and safety to the will of Allah. It reminds us of Allah addressing the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in the glorious Ayat:

"Nor say of anything: I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow without adding:.....so please Allah and call Allah to mind when you forget and say: I hope that Allah will guide me even closer than this to the right path." (Quran 18:23-24)

Joseph raises his parents on the throne of dignity. Allah says in the Quran:

"And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity) and they fell down in prostration before him." (Quran 12:100)

Apparently it was a symbol of greeting and respect for Joseph. And Joseph said:

“O my father! This is the fulfillment of my vision of old! God has made it come true.” (Quran 12:100)

There are a number of considerations in this scene as far as religion is concerned:

1. In the person of Joseph, religion and state are inseparable.
2. Joseph was exemplary in his statesmanship and in running the affairs of the country.
3. Joseph, in spite of his highest rank and status in the hierarchy, is modest.
4. He says that his sufferings were a test by Allah and were it not for Allah's compassion he would not have been released from prison.
5. Satan is the root of all evil.

Allah willed for Joseph to combine prophethood and the status of ruler or overlord. Allah says upon his tongue:

“Verily my Lord understands the best mysteries of all that He plans to do. For verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom. O my Lord you have indeed bestowed on me some power and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. O you Creator of heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the hereafter. Take my soul at death as one submitting to Your Will (as a Muslim) and unite me with the righteous.” (Quran 12:100-101)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A. Societies in Surat Joseph

### B. The lessons to be derived from the Surat. The didactic purport of the Sura.

In both scope and sequence Surat Joseph has depicted a number of societies and communities. In the narrative, the Egyptian and (Shami) societies at the time of Joseph are featured in addition to a glimpse of the spirit of the age.

In the second section there is mention of the Makkan community and the attitude of the Arabs concerning the call of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). There is also a shift of focus to past nations which followed the same attitude of the Makkans and the Arabs: they split into two groups:

- a) The few who are the faithful believers
- b) and the majority who are the deniers.

Victory has always been with the army of Allah. Allah said in the Quran:

“And it was due from Us to aid those who believed.” (Quran 30:47)

He also said:

“Already has Our Word been passed before (this) to our servants sent (by Us), that they would certainly be assisted, and that our forces—they surely must conquer.” (Quran 37:171-173)

## **The Makkan Society and Those Similar To It**

The underlying assumption in the entire Sura is that the Makkan community and the Arabian Peninsula represent previous societies and the Makkan attitude towards the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is similar to other societies, attitudes towards the Prophets sent earlier to them.

Allah, in His divine wisdom designates the suitable time and the appropriate prophet to convey His message when humanity is ready for it. The Arabian society at that time can be divided into three layers:

1. The urban communities who are more or less sophisticated and have stability and those are the groups from whom the Prophets are chosen according to the Quran and among whom they initially make the call.
2. The semi-urban communities who are still rooted in their nomadism, and these are the most resistive to the call.
3. The nomads who give priority to tribal allegiances. The Quran condemned most of them and praised some. Allah said in Sura Al Tawbah:

“The Arabs of the desert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy, and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which Allah has sent down to His messenger but Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. Some of the desert Arabs look upon their payments as a fine, and watch for disasters for you: on them be the disaster of evil: for Allah is He that hears and knows (all things).

But some of the desert Arabs believe in Allah and the Last Day, and look on their payments as pious gifts bringing them nearer to Allah and obtaining the prayers of the Messenger. Indeed they bring them nearer (to Him): soon will Allah admit them to His mercy: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Merciful.” (Quran 9:97-99)

Allah will always prevail and gain the upper hand. The army of

Allah always comes victorious in the end but only after trials and sacrifices. This is common among all communities and with all Prophets. Allah says in the Quran:

“Respite will be granted, until, when the messengers give up hope (of their people) and come to think that they were treated as liars, there reaches them Our Help and those whom We will are delivered unto safety but never will be warded off Our Punishment from those who are in sin.” (Quran12:110)

This is a basic rule applicable to all places and all times....Allah saves the faithful believers and devastates the disbelievers and the godless.



## Common Features in the Age of Joseph

The Sura gives us a glimpse of the age. It also clarifies in the narrative of events arranged in their time sequence the societal arrangements of the Shami and the Egyptian communities of the time. One common feature is the significance of dreams and their interpretations. Dreams and visions were a significant component of the mental and emotional and social convictions and creeds of the time.

Allah endowed Joseph with the extraordinary prophetic gift of dream interpretation. As in the case of Moses, the (miracle) was the most suitable for his time as a means to an end, so it was with Joseph (dream interpretation), Al Massih (Jesus) Issa (curing ailments). The miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was the most suitable for his time and the Arabs....namely the genius of the Quran, the unimitable, the incomparable, the unique in eloquence and rhetoric.

Dreams and visions occurred in both the Shami and the Egyptian societies. In Al Sham, there was Joseph's own dream. In Egypt, there were the dreams of the baker, the cup-bearer, and the King. All dreams are interpretable. Joseph proved that his dream interpretations are fulfilled to the letter. In Joseph's own dream of his childhood there were the clear natural phenomena of the clear sky of the region and the clarity of Joseph's perception and inner self. Another feature of the society at that era was the range and content of commercial and trade and business activities. The trade caravans from many regions were common and regular. The caravan from Al Sham to Egypt which picked up Joseph from the pit was indicative of the trade routes of the time.

There were many caravans crossing the routes between the two regions. Traders made their transactions in buying and selling by money or exchange of commodities according to the law of supply and demand. Joseph was sold at a cheap price as a slave. In contrast to that we find the brothers paying in kind for the grains. People in those days used to buy and sell grains not by weight but by bushels.

Also during that age slaves were treated according to a common tradition regardless of color. Joseph was white not black and yet he

was sold as a slave. There were also penalties for theft and penalties for traitors. There was also difference between secular and religious laws. According to Abraham's laws the ordained penalty for the thief was to be enslaved for one year. In the Egyptian legal system, the thief was fined double the worth of what he stole without being enslaved.

## **The Al Sham Society (Mesopotamia)**

It is meant by the Syrian society here, the community comprising Jacob and his household since they are the ones with roles in the narrative. Jacob's sons, in spite of their deed against their brother were raised to be men of responsibility. They used to practice physical training and to race.

They could perform all the chores required by living in such a harsh community and they acquired all the skills needed from able bodied, productive youth. They acquired knowledge of the region, its routes, its wells, its natural resources. Judging from Jacob's treatment of his children and the children's developmental stages throughout the narrative, we cannot but conclude that the Syrian community was more morally advanced than the Egyptian. It was more religious. This is the reason why Joseph by Divine Will was sent to Egypt in order to do what Jacob and his family were doing in Syria.

### **The Egyptian Society**

Joseph's story exposes a variety of personalities in the Egyptian society belonging to different classes and social strata. At the summit there is the King (Pharaoh) and under him there is a hierarchy of status. The King is depicted as firm, fair, and clement. This is manifested in his judgement concerning the baker and the cup-bearer.

His wisdom is manifested in his seeking advice of his subordinates concerning the vision.

“O you chiefs, Expound to me my vision if it be that you can interpret visions.” (Quran 12:43)

It is also manifested in his address to the misbehaving women.

“The King said to the ladies: What was your affair when you did seek to seduce Joseph from his true self?” (Quran 12:51)

His intelligence is revealed in his assessment of Joseph. There was a hierarchy of statuses and responsibilities and authorities in the Egyptian society. Apparently there was abuse of female freedom in that society and the men were no longer capable of controlling women.

Joseph was jailed because of women's intrigues.

It was a society where faith was lacking and therefore women gained the upper hand and controlled men and reversed the natural order of male-female relationships. There is similarity between "women's lib" in Joseph's time and the false women's lib of the present age in societies which deviated from religion.

We Muslims must avail ourselves from the lessons taught by the Quran and never follow those who lead us astray. Apparently the moral values of the Egyptian society were very low. Even when Joseph's innocence was proven the Judgement was: "O Joseph, pass this over! (O wife), ask forgiveness for your sin, for truly you have been at fault."

The baker was crucified because he belonged to the lower class. The wife of Al Aziz got scot free with her attempt to seduce Joseph although she was proven guilty. Also wine drinking was not prohibited.

Last but not least, it was a polytheistic society with a plurality of gods. Allah says in the Quran:

"O my two companions of the prison: I ask you are many gods differing among themselves better OR Allah, the One, supreme and irresistible? If not Him you worship nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers for which Allah has sent no authority, the command is for none but Allah." (Quran 12:39-40)

It is obvious that the Syrian community was more religious than the Egyptian society. Joseph was sent by Allah to guide the Egyptians from the darkness of polytheism to the light of monotheism.

## Lessons to be Derived From the Sura

### 1. The Quran is Arabic

“We know indeed that they say “It is a man that teaches them.” The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign while this is Arabic, pure and clear.” (Quran 16:103)

“Truly this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. With it came down the spirit of faith and truth. To your heart and mind that you may admonish in the perspicuous Arabic tongue.” (Quran 26:192-194)

“We have sent it down an Arabic Quran in order that you may learn wisdom.” (Quran 12:2)

2. The terminology of the Quran is Arabic.
3. The significance of narration in education.
4. Revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) through Gabriel.
5. True dreams.
6. Sincerity in advice.
7. Jealousy as a negative destructive character trait.
8. Jacob as an ideal father.
9. Allah’s will prevails.
10. Male-female relationships in terms of Halal vs. Haraam. If the two sexes were separated, the wife of the ruler could not have had the opportunity to try to seduce Joseph.
11. Trust and fulfillment of promise.

12. Sacrifice for the sake of Allah no matter what the cost.
13. Frankness and clarity against misleading and falsehood.
14. Backbiting and intrigue.
15. The courage of conviction and saying the truth.
16. An innocent man jailed.
17. Recognition and praise of learned men and knowledge.
18. Joseph is the exemplary of goodness.
19. Despair in Allah's compassion and faith are incompatible.
20. Kindness to parents.
21. Humbleness and gratitude to Allah.

The story of Joseph has a happy ending fulfilling Allah's promise and realizing Joseph's dream.

"This (I say) in order that he may know that I have never been false to him in his absence and that Allah will never guide the snare of the false ones. Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the human self is certainly prone to evil, unless my God bestows His mercy, but surely my God is oft-forgiving, most Merciful." (Quran 12:52-53)

Allah says upon the tongue of Joseph after the reunion of the whole family:

"O my God! You have indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events, O You Creator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Protector in this world and in the hereafter. Take you my soul at death as one submitting to your will as a Muslim and unite me with the righteous." (Quran 12:101-102)

## Glossary of Terms

### **Aya (pl. AYAT):**

The Holy Quran is composed of 114 Surahs (chapters).

Each chapter is composed of Ayat which literally means signs, hence individual "verses" of the Quran. As such they connote the manifestations of God's power, guidance, laws and intentions in the universe. The total number of Quranic Ayat is 6236.

The author of this book, in quoting the Ayat shows us how much great is the joy and sense of wonder which keep expanding from the beginning to the end. New worlds of meanings and values are opened to us with every fresh reading of the Ayat. As we progress, still newer and again newer dimensions swim into our ken.

Every earnest and reverent student of the Quran and the stories of the Prophets including Yusuf (Joseph), as he or she proceeds with the study, with an inward joy, will inevitably feel like a traveller climbing a mountain: The higher he goes, the farther he sees.

Yusuf (Joseph) in the Quran opens our spiritual eyes, in every AYA, with a sense of marvel with the gradual unfolding of the Dream Fulfilment.

The miracle deepens and deepens as we read the Ayat, once, twice and repeatedly and almost completely absorbs us as the author masterfully illustrates the thematic unity and the integrated wholeness of this "Best of Stories". The miracle of Yusuf's dream fulfilment, the restoration of Jacob's eyesight, the forces, motives, thoughts, feelings are results ordinarily not seen by men.

In every Aya we see the plan of God working irresistibly and sweeping away all the machinations of human transgression.

**IMAN:** Derived from AMN (security, surety) meaning that the propositions it covers are in fact true, and that their TRUTH has been appropriated (i.e. understood and accepted by the believer).

**IMAN and YAQIN:** are synonymous terms. When Yaqin is present, the truth is as established and convincing as sensory evidence. It has become indubitable. Iman and YAQIN, therefore are a certainty of the Truth, of conviction absolutely free of doubt, of probability, of guessing and uncertainty.

**HALAL:** that which is lawful and permitted in Islam.

**HARAAM:** that which is unlawful and forbidden in Islam and is punishable according to the SHARIA.

**SHARIA:** the revealed and canonical divine laws.

**SHIRK:** it is the worship of 'others' along with ALLAH (God).

It is the opposite of TAWHID (unity of God).

“Say, He is God,  
The One and Only God,  
The Eternal, Absolute.  
He Begets not  
Nor is He Begotten]  
And there is None  
Like Unto HIM.” (Quran: 112)

**KUFR, KAFIR:** and derivative forms of the word imply a deliberate rejection of the faith. The consequence of this rejection is that the spiritual faculties of the rejectionist become dead or impervious to better influences.

**MUSLIM:** a believer who submits to the Will of God.

**TAQWA:** and the verbs and nouns connected with the root in Arabic signify:

- (a) the fear of God
- (b) restraint
- (c) righteousness, piety, reverence and devotion.



**TAWBA:** repentance for which three things are necessary:]

(a) The sinner must acknowledge his sin and wrong.

(b) He must give it up.

(c) He must resolve to eschew it for the future.

In the story of Yusuf, his brothers fulfilled all necessary conditions of TAWBA.

**SABR:** this Arabic word implies many shades of meaning which it is impossible to comprehend in one English word.

It implies:

(1) patience in the sense of being thorough, not hasty.

(2) an attitude of positive resignation to the Will of Allah in sorrow, defeat or suffering as opposed to murmuring or rebellion. It is not mere passivity or listlessness. It is poise and composure and hope in God's support.

In the story of Yusuf, both Jacob the father and Yusuf the son are exemplary in SABR.

**RABB:** this word usually translated 'Lord', has also the meaning of: cherishing, sustaining, bringing to maturity.

Allah cares for all the Worlds He has created.

There are many Worlds: Astronomical and Physical Worlds, Worlds of Thought, Spiritual Worlds and so on.

In every one of them God is all in all. He is Supreme Lord.

**TAWHID:** Unity of God.

It is the core and essence of Islam. God is the final and ultimate end and end for all other ends,....all claims of ends.

Tawhid is the Unization of Divinity.

Divine unity and unity of Truth are inseparable. They are aspects of one and the same Reality.

Tawhid gathers all the threads of causality and returns them to God. It is He who makes every other good....good.

God's Will is the imperative and guide of all lives.

The Prophet Joseph's message in Egypt was TAWHID. "There is no God but Allah."

TAWHID is a general and comprehensive view of Reality, of Truth,

of the Worlds, of Space and Time, of human history and destiny. All prayers, worship, labour, actions....,

All the diversity, possessions, wealth, abundance, culture, learning, wisdom and civilization of Islam....are compressed in the words LA ILAHA ILLA ALLAH. "There is no God but Allah."

**TAKLIF:** responsibility and judgement, the necessary condition of moral obligation or moral imperativeness.

In all the stages of Joseph's life Joseph held to the principle of TAWHID and TAKLIF.

Every Human being, Islam tells us, is MUKALLAF....i.e., charged with the realization of the DIVINE WILL. This responsibility is the essence of morality.

TAWHID with its TAKLIF are the cornerstone of man's faith and responsibility as bearer of the Trust.

Joseph's faith in TAWHID committed him to an ethic of action to achieve FALAH or Felicity through the goodliest rectitude in all his dealings, interactions and behaviour.

He constantly recognized divine ultimacy, unity and transcendence.

He was always guided by the Light of God.

The presence of Joseph in Egypt constituted a genuine breakthrough from the fixations into which ancient Egypt had fallen, divided as it was between all sorts of polytheism, paganism and irrational superstitions.

Joseph demonstrated in all situations, even in prison that TAWHID enabled the believer to see himself as the Vortex of history because he is the only vicegerent of Allah who can bring the Will of Allah to fulfilment by surrendering to Allah alone.

Joseph changed the internal constitution of individuals and the patterns of the daily lives of the Egyptians. He established a system where no injustice can escape without meeting its just redress.

In planning for the years of scarcity following the years of abundance, Joseph's concept of Nature, of God's bounties and blessing was that of A DIVINE Manor, with man as a bearer of its trust.

Nature is not man's property but God's. Man was granted his tenure therein by God and the end prescribed by Him.

Like a good land-tenant, man ought to take care of His Master's (Allah's) Property.

The right of Usufruct which man certainly holds, does not entitle

him to destroy nature, to rape or to so exploit it as to upset and ruin its ecological balance.

The right of Usufruct which is all that man possesses is an individual right which God renews with every individual at his-her birth. It is neither vicarious nor hereditary (as a responsibility and trust) and hence does not entitle man to pre-empt the future of others' enjoyment of it.

As a steward of the earth and vicegerent of God on earth, man is supposed at death to hand over his trust to God in a better state than it was when he received it.

This is precisely what Joseph accomplished in Egypt.

Nature must not be abused, or raped or polluted by over exploitation.

Sensitivity to nature and gratitude to Allah for His bounties and blessings and tender care given to it, is attunement with the DIVINE PURPOSE.

God has invested Joseph with His Trust as a Prophet and whatever he did or undid was inspired by Allah's guidance.

**UMMAH:** this term has a distinctively specific meaning in Islam. The society and/or community or group or nation which Islam seeks and establishes is UMMAH.

Its members constitute a threefold consensus:

- (a) in faith and vision.
- (b) in the intention or will.
- (c) in the realization or action.

It is the brotherhood of the believers under the SHARIA (law of God set into perpetual motion).

Sovereignty belongs to God and His Law. The ultimate good is the DIVINE PATTERN.

The Ummah is the Community of Allah where actionalism is totalist not totalitarian, authoritative but not authoritarian.

It is a corporate organic body, a civic body which is not limited to land, people, race, culture or place.

It is universalist, totalist and responsible in its corporate life as well as in that of every one of its members, male or female....and indispensable for every member's achievement of felicity in this world and the next, for every actualization of the DIVINE WILL in space-time.

In the Ummah, the holder of political power is the DIVINE LAW not the ruler who merely executes it.

In the Ummah, the Unity of God, the Unity of Truth, as well as Value imply that value is value for all, that moral obligation and ethical vocation being predicated of the creature as creature fall equally upon all.

Joseph was inspired — as the Prophet Muhammad will be — by God's eternal command:

“Let there be of you an Ummah to call to the good, to enjoin virtue and forbid vice. Those who do so are the felicitous.” (Quran 3 : 104)

Joseph's authority and responsibility when he was assigned plenary powers over the storehouses and treasury of the land and Allah gave him established power...were guided by the comprehensiveness of his faith, namely Islam which does not divide the world into sacred and profane — nor does it divide life into religious and secular, nor does it divide men into priesthood and laity.

#### **HADITH:** (pl. AHADITH)

The traditional reports of what the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) did and/or said.

They are second only to the Quran in religious importance.

Hadith is also a collective noun referring to the entire corpus of traditions which is composed of thousands of individual AHADITH or narratives that claim to provide information pertaining to the sayings or deeds of the Prophet.

#### *Abbreviations:*

In quoting the Quran, each quotation is marked by specifying the Number of the chapter (Sura followed by the number of the Aya):

#### *Example:*

“Then when the bearer of the good news came, he cast the shirt over his face and he forthwith regained clear sight.” (Quran 12 : 96)

**S.A.W.:** this is the formula applicable to all the Prophets of Allah, meaning Peace, and Salutations of Allah upon the Prophet.

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**JOSEPH**  
**SURAH XII**  
**REVEALED AT MECCA**