

Sura 12: Yusuf (Joseph)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It comes in sequence after Surat Hud (Chapter 11). It was revealed during the critical period of time that started after the death of both the uncle and the wife of the Prophet (PBUH) and ended by the pledges of allegiance of Al- 'Aqabah. These pledges of allegiance brought relief to the persecuted Muslims of Mecca and were a prelude for the migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina.

There is an opinion that verses 1,2,3, and 7 were revealed in Medina. However, we are of the opinion that the whole Sura was revealed in Mecca. The first three verses read, "*Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear. We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand. We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforetime you were one of those who were unaware.*" These verses provided a logical introduction to the body and topic of the Sura. The Sura begins with the letters *Alif, Lam, Ra*; stating that these are verses of the Book that makes things clear; and that the Quran has been revealed in the Arabic language. This echoes the typical issues that can be seen in the Quranic verses revealed in Mecca. This introduction is also closely related to the ending of the Sura. Verse 8 is also closely related to verse 7 and complements it. Thus, it is clear that these four verses form an integral part of this Sura and they must have been revealed at the same time at which the rest of the Sura was revealed.

The Sura came down to console the Prophet (PBUH) who was saddened by the death of his uncle then the death of his wife. The Sura narrates the story of the suffering of Prophet Joseph (PBUH) being betrayed by his brothers, thrown in the well, sold in slavery, seduced by the wife of the Egyptian governor, and imprisoned. The story goes on to tell how Joseph (PBUH) moved from the prison to the palace and how he treated his brothers when they came to Egypt as traders. Yusuf (PBUH) gave the highest example of forgiveness and humility. He was not spoiled by the glory and power which were bestowed on him and he did not lose sight of the final goal; he only asked God for one thing, "*My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter. Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will and unite me with the righteous.*"

I can almost feel that the verses introduce the idea of migration from Mecca as a means for Muslims to attain power and security, similar to what happened to Prophet Joseph (PBUH). This thought was confirmed in my mind when I read the last verses in the Sura, "*All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand? (They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and*

thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty. There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who are possessors of intellect. It is not a fabricated story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and guidance and mercy for people who believe.” These verses remind people of God’s promise to His believing servants: ease will follow difficulty even when it seems that difficulty will never cease.

This Sura has a special style which sets it apart from the other Suras of the Quran. The Sura narrated the complete story of Prophet Joseph (PBUH) contrary to the style used in narrating stories of other prophets, where different parts of the story would be told in different Suras. It is interesting to note that the Sura starts by the mention of Joseph’s (PBUH) dream and ends by explaining the interpretation of the dream.

Verses 1 to 20:

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear.*
2. *We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand.*
3. *We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforetime you were one of those who were unaware.*
4. *When Joseph said to his father, “My father, I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me.”*
5. *He (the father) said, “My (dear) little son, do not tell your brothers of your dream, lest they plot a plot against you. Satan is certainly, for man an open enemy.”*
6. *Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events) and perfect His blessing upon you and upon the posterity of Jacob - as He perfected it upon your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime. Your Lord is Omniscient, Wise.*
7. *Verily in Joseph and his brothers are lessons for those who seek them.*
8. *They said, “Truly Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a strong band. Our father is certainly in manifest error.*
9. *Slay Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, so that the favor of your father may be all for you, and (that) you may afterward be righteous folk.”*
10. *One among them said, “Do not kill Joseph but, if you must be doing, fling him into the depth of the well; some caravan will find him.”*
11. *They said, “Our father, why do you not trust us with Joseph, seeing we are indeed his sincere well-wishers?*
12. *Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take good care of him.”*
13. *(Jacob) said, “Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear that a wolf would devour him while you are heedless.”*

14. They said, "If the wolf were to devour him while we are a strong band, then we would indeed be losers."
15. So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well. And We inspired him, "'You will (one day) tell them the truth of this affair while they do not perceive it.'"
16. Then they came to their father in the evening, weeping.
17. They said, "Our father, we went racing with one another, and left Joseph with our things; and the wolf devoured him. But you will never believe us even though we are telling the truth."
18. And they came with false blood on his shirt. He said, "No, your souls have enticed you into something. (My course is) comely patience. And it is God whose help is to be sought in such (predicament) which you describe."
19. Then there came a caravan of travelers. They sent their watercarrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well). He said, "Good news, here is a (fine) young man." So, they concealed him as a treasure. But God knows well all that they do.
20. And they sold him for a low price, a few silver coins; and they showed no interest in him. (12: 1 – 20)

"Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear. We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand. We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforesaid you were one of those who were unaware." We used the letters of the Alphabet that the people know and use to write this Book. It came down in the Arabic language so that you may recognize that He who used the simple letters of the Alphabet to compose such a miraculous book cannot be a human being. It is imperative then that the Book must be a revelation from God. The Quran provides an invitation for people to use their intellect to reflect on this Book.

The main theme of the Sura revolves around the story of Prophet Joseph (PBUH), that is why it starts with stating this objective, "*We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran,*" in spite of the fact that before this Quran you were not aware of any of these stories.

This was the introduction, which is then followed by the first scene of the story. In the first scene we see Prophet Joseph (PBUH) talks to his father about his dream, "*When Joseph said to his father, 'My father, I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me.'*" Joseph (PBUH) was a young boy. However, his father with his insight and wisdom realized that this is not just a young boy's dream. He immediately instructed his son, "*My (dear) little son, do not tell your brothers of your dream, lest they plot a plot against you. Satan is certainly, for man an open enemy.*" The father realized that if the brothers

came to know about this dream, their jealousy of Joseph (PBUH) will increase. He explained to his son how Satan finds a way to trap human beings and seduce them to do evil deeds.

Jacob (PBUH) may have realized that the dream is an introduction to the good news that Joseph (PBUH) will be the second in line as an heir of prophethood. The fathers (a grandfather is also considered a father) of Joseph (PBUH), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (PBUT) were all prophets of God. These thoughts were communicated to Joseph (PBUH), *“Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events) and perfect His blessing upon you and upon the posterity of Jacob - as He perfected it upon your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime. Your Lord is Omniscient, Wise.”* It is interesting that Jacob (PBUH) said, *“Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events),”* Knowing the interpretation of events means knowing how the events will end, but what did he mean by the word, “narratives?” Did he mean that God will give Joseph (PBUH) the insight to see through the events which he will be part of, and predict how they will unravel? Or did he mean that Joseph (PBUH) will be given the ability to interpret dreams, as we will see happen when we read the Sura? Either explanation is possible.

It might be useful at this time to digress a little bit and talk about dreams. We are commanded to believe that some dreams give us glimpses of what will happen in the future. The rationale of this belief is the dreams which Joseph (PBUH) saw, the dream of the two men who were imprisoned with Joseph (PBUH) and the dream that the king of Egypt saw. All these dreams were realized later on. In addition, our own individual experience tells us that sometimes we see in our dreams certain things which would materialize later on.

The verses move to another scene: the scene of Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers conspiring against him. The new scene starts with a strong note which grasps the attention of the reader, *“Verily, in Joseph and his brothers are lessons for those who seek them.”* There are many signs in the story of Joseph’s (PBUH) and his brothers for those who are seeking to learn from these stories. The focus of their complaint was the attention that Joseph (PBUH) and his brother were getting from their father; while they, who were a strong group that can provide protection and power for their father, were not getting similar attention, *“They said, ‘Truly, Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a strong band. Our father is certainly in manifest error.’”* They did not mention Joseph’s (PBUH) dream which indicates that they were not aware of the dream, contrary to what is mentioned in the Old Testament. Their hearts became full of hate which blinded them and allowed Satan to seduce them to plot a scheme to get rid of Joseph (PBUH). It was a heinous crime to contemplate the killing of Joseph (PBUH). How could the children of a prophet, even though they were not themselves prophets, even think of committing such a heinous crime, *“Slay Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, so that the favor of your father may be all for you, and (that) you may afterward be righteous folk.”* This is how Satan seduced them: if you kill Joseph (PBUH) your father’s attention will turn towards you, then you can repent and ask forgiveness for your evil deeds and become righteous again. What

kind of repentance is this? True repentance occurs after an individual has committed a crime as a result of negligence or weakness then regrets what he/she has done. One of their brothers realized the enormity of what they were contemplating, so he suggested a compromise, *“One among them said, ‘Do not kill Joseph but, if you must be doing, fling him into the depth of the well; some caravan will find him.’”* The use of the phrase, *“if you must be doing,”* shows his reluctance to join them and indicates that he was trying to dissuade them from going on with their plans.

They went to their father to entice him to let Joseph (PBUH) join them on their outing. Their appeal carried a tone of hidden reproach. How can their father doubt their love for Joseph (PBUH) and their interest in his well-being, *“They said, ‘Our father, why do you not trust us with Joseph, seeing we are indeed his sincere well-wishers?’”* They assured their father of their sincerity, *“Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take good care of him,”* enticing the father to comply for the benefit of his son.

Jacob (PBUH) ignored their hidden reproach and expressed his fear that a wolf might devour him while they were busy, *“(Jacob) said, ‘Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear that a wolf would devour him while you are heedless.’”* His statement that he will miss Joseph (PBUH) must have revived the feelings of jealousy and hatred in their hearts. However, they found an exit in their father’s statement, *“They said, ‘If the wolf were to devour him while we are a strong band, then we would indeed be losers.’”* If it is the wolf that you are worried about, then there is no need for you to worry, we are a large and strong group who is able to scare any wolf away.

So, their father capitulated and they went off with Joseph (PBUH), *“So, they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well.”* They made up their mind to throw him in the well. Joseph (PBUH) must have felt helpless facing his strong brothers. It must have been a scary moment for Joseph (PBUH) to be thrown into a well in the middle of nowhere, with no hope of being rescued. At this critical moment, God assured him that he will be saved and he will live to face his brothers and remind them of what they have done to him, *“We inspired him, ‘You will (one day) tell them the truth of this affair while they do not perceive it.’”*

We leave Joseph (PBUH) in his moment of difficulty, alone in the well with God’s inspiration as the only consolation and walk with Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers, *“Then they came to their father in the evening, weeping.”* In their haste to get rid of Joseph (PBUH), they did not think of a better plan than to retell their father what he himself had suggested before, *“They said, ‘Our father, we went racing with one another, and left Joseph with our things; and the wolf devoured him.’”* They made up a story to tell their father. However, it is clear that they felt that the story was so flimsy that they doubted that their father would believe them, *“But you will never believe us even though we are telling the truth.”* They brought Joseph’s (PBUH) shirt stained with blood,

thinking that this trick might convince their father of the truth of their story. However, their father realized what they had done, and he was convinced their story was a fabrication, so he confronted them with his opinion of what had happened, *“He said, ‘No, your souls have enticed you into something. (My course is) comely patience. And it is God whose help is to be sought in such (predicament) which you describe.’”*

Now we go back to the well to find out what happened to Joseph (PBUH). The well was on a caravan route. One of these caravans was passing by and they sent a man to get them water from the well, *“Then there came a caravan of travelers. They sent their watercarrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well). He said, “Good news, here is a (fine) young man.” So, they concealed him as a treasure. But God knows well all that they do.”* The verses do not tell how Joseph (PBUH) ended up in the bucket and what transpired between him and the man who found him in the well. The verses go directly to the conclusion of this episode, *“And they sold him for a low price, a few silver coins; and they showed no interest in him.”*

Verses 21 to 34:

21. *The man in Egypt who bought him, said to his wife, “Make his stay (among us) honorable, he may bring us much good, or we shall adopt him as a son.” Thus, did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events). And God has full power and control over His affairs; but most among humankind know it not.*
22. *When Joseph reached maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward the doers of good.*
23. *But she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him to do an illegal act. She bolted the doors, and said, “Now come, you (dear one).” He said, “God forbid. Truly, he (your husband) is my lord. He gave me an honorable home. Certainly, the wrongdoers do not succeed.”*
24. *And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, had it not that he saw the evidence of his Lord. Thus, We warded off from him (all) evil and shameful deeds, for he was one of Our chosen servants.*
25. *And they raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind, and they met her husband at the door. She said, “What shall be the recompense of the one who intended evil to your wife, save prison or a painful torment?”*
26. *He said, “It was she who sought to seduce me.” And a witness of her own folk testified, “If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth and he is one of the liars.*
27. *And if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is one of those who are truthful.”*
28. *So when he saw his shirt was torn at the back, (her husband) said, “This is another instance of your cunning. Indeed, your (women’s) cunning is great.*

29. *Joseph, turn aside from this, and you, (woman), ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were of the sinful.*”
30. *And some women in the city said, “The Governor's wife is seeking to seduce her slave-boy; indeed, he has impassioned her with love. We see her (to be) in plain error.”*
31. *When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them. She gave each one of them a knife; and she said (to Joseph), “Come out before them.” When they saw him, they were stunned with his beauty and (in their amazement) they cut their hands. They said, “God is perfect. This is not a human being. This is none but a gracious angel.”*
32. *She said, “There before you is the man about whom you did blame me. I did seek to seduce him but he did firmly save himself guiltless; but if he does not do what I command him to do, he shall certainly be cast into prison and shall be of those who are in a state of full submission.”*
33. *He said, “My Lord, I would prefer prison to that which they are inviting me to. Unless You protect me from their plotting, I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish.”*
34. *So his Lord heard his prayer and fended off their cunning from him. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient. (12: 21 – 34)*

The narrative did not disclose, so far, who bought Joseph (PBUH), but we will learn later that he was bought by the Governor of Egypt (some say he was the first minister). However, we know that Joseph's (PBUH) time of difficulty has ended and that he is now secure in this new place, *“The man in Egypt who bought him, said to his wife, “Make his stay (among us) honorable, he may bring us much good, or we shall adopt him as a son.”* The man asked his wife to make Joseph's (PBUH) stay with them pleasant. He hoped that Joseph (PBUH) would bring goodness to his house or that they may even adopt him as a son (some scholars are of the opinion that the couple did not have children).

The narrative digressed to emphasize that these developments happened by God's leave. Establishing Joseph (PBUH) in the land started by settling him securely in the house of the Governor. God's will cannot be overturned, *“Thus, did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events).”* Joseph's (PBUH) brothers plotted to harm him, but God's will had overturned their plotting and saved Joseph (PBUH), *“God has full power and control over His affairs; but most among humankind know it not.”*

The verses continued to follow Joseph (PBUH) as he grew up, *“When Joseph reached maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward the doers of good.”* Joseph (PBUH) was given insight and wisdom to discharge the affairs that he was entrusted with. However, it was not long before Joseph (PBUH) faced the second time of difficulty in his life. This time he faced a worse trial than the one he faced before, *“But she, in whose house he was, sought to*

seduce him to do an illegal act. She bolted the doors, and said, "Now come, you (dear one)." He said, "God forbid. Truly, he (your husband) is my lord. He gave me an honorable home. Certainly, the wrongdoers do not succeed." Joseph (PBUH) must have been a teenager at that time and he was facing the temptation of a fully grown woman who knew what she wanted, she plotted to get it, and she was determined to get it. Her invitation to Joseph (PBUH) was unambiguous; she bolted the doors and prepared herself to seduce him.

The following verse (in the Arabic wording) poses a problem in reconciling the chastity of Joseph (PBUH) and the fact that he could have had entertained a desire to succumb to her temptation, but the following translation reflects the interpretation of most of the scholars, *"And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, had it not that he saw the evidence of his Lord. Thus, We warded off from him (all) evil and shameful deeds, for he was one of Our chosen servants."* The verses hint to the persistence of the woman in trying to seduce Joseph (PBUH) and the steadfastness of Joseph (PBUH) in refusing her. When at a moment of human weakness, he was about to fall for her, God intervened and saved him from this fall.

When he *"saw the evidence of his Lord,"* he ran towards the door to escape and she was in pursuit, she was about to catch him but instead she ripped his shirt from behind, *"And they raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind,"* Suddenly, they came face to face with her husband, *"and they met her husband at the door."* But she was a sophisticated woman, and she was able to quickly find a way out of the trap she found herself in, *"She said, 'What shall be the recompense of the one who intended evil to your wife, save prison or a painful torment?'"*

Joseph (PBUH) responded truthfully, *"It was she who sought to seduce me."* One of her relatives provided a suggestion to sort out the dispute; he suggested that they should examine the ripped shirt, *"If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth and he is one of the liars, and if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is one of those who are truthful."* The verses do not detail the circumstances during which the dispute was resolved. We do not know when or where her family member was consulted, but the verse intimates that he was consulted and he gave his suggestion. However, it is interesting to note the reaction of the husband when he realized that his wife lied, *"So when he saw his shirt was torn at the back, (her husband) said, 'This is another instance of your cunning. Indeed, your (women's) cunning is great. Joseph, turn aside from this, and you, (woman), ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were of the sinful.'"* First, he deflected the blame to the whole feminine sex, blaming her act of seduction on women's cunning nature. Then, he turned to the innocent Joseph (PBUH) to say, *"turn aside from this,"* meaning that Joseph (PBUH) should not only ignore the whole story but also keep it a secret. This was the important thing for him, not to make the story public. He was afraid of the scandal. Finally, he asked his wife to repent for her sin.

Life in the palace continued as usual; Joseph (PBUH) continued to live in the palace in close proximity with the woman who tried to seduce him. Very soon after that, rumors started to

circulate, *“And some women in the city said, ‘The Governor's wife is seeking to seduce her slave-boy; indeed, he has impassioned her with love. We see her (to be) in plain error.’”* This is the first time it is mentioned that the woman was in fact the governor’s wife, and we understand that it was the governor who bought Joseph (PBUH).

Her reaction reflected both her audacity and her cunning, *“When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them. She gave each of them a knife; and she said (to Joseph), ‘Come out before them.’ When they saw him, they were stunned with his beauty and (in their amazement) they cut their hands. They said, “God is perfect. This is not a human being. This is none but a gracious angel.”* She invited those aristocratic women to a party in her house. They were leaning on cushions while eating. She gave each one of them a knife to use in cutting up food. She then commanded Joseph (PBUH) to come out before them while they were busy cutting meat or peeling fruits using the knives. They were stunned when they saw Joseph (PBUH). They said, “God is perfect,” expressing their amazement of how perfect God’s creation can be.

This was the reaction she expected of them and thus, she felt vindicated, *“She said, ‘There before you is the man about whom you did blame me.’”* See for yourselves how handsome he is. Like you, I admired him and, *“I did seek to seduce him but he did firmly save himself guiltless;”* She did not refrain from admitting her guilt in front of her women friends. She did not show any remorse, instead she promised to relentlessly pursue him and punish him if he does not yield to her wishes, *“but if he does not do what I command him to do, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and shall be of those who are in a state of full submission.”*

When Joseph (PBUH) heard the conversation, he had no choice but to seek God’s help, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I would prefer prison to that which they are inviting me to. Unless You protect me from their plotting, I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish.’”* This is the prayer of a man who knew the inherent human weaknesses, and he did not want to expose himself to the risk, so he prayed for the help of God to strengthen him while facing this difficult test. God responded favorably to his prayer, *“So his Lord heard his prayer and fended off their cunning from him. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* God’s support could come in different ways. God may have made the women despair of being able to seduce Joseph (PBUH) so they would leave him alone, or God may have strengthened Joseph (PBUH) so he became immune to their seduction. Thus, Joseph (PBUH) was able to cross safely the second trial in his life.

Verses 35 to 53:

35. Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), (that it was best) to imprison him for a time.

36. Now with him there came into the prison two young men. One of them said, "I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine." The other said, "I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating, thereof." "Tell us," (they said) "The truth and meaning thereof, for we see you are one of the doers of good."
37. He said, "I shall tell you the interpretation of your dreams before the food which you are given (daily) shall come to you. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in God and they deny the Hereafter.
38. And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute a partner to God. This is of the grace of God upon us (the seed of Abraham) and upon humankind; but most people are ungrateful.
39. My two companions of the prison, (I ask you): are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, the Dominator.
40. Those whom you worship beside Him are but names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has revealed no sanction for them. The decision rests with God only, who has commanded you that you worship none save Him. This is the true religion, but most men do not know.
41. My two companions of the prison, 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. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquired."
42. And he said to him of the twain, whom he knew would be released, "Mention me to your lord." But Satan caused him to forget to mention it to his lord, so he (Joseph) stayed in prison for some years.
43. The king (of Egypt) said, "I do see (in a dream) seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered. Chiefs, explain to me my vision if you can interpret dreams."
44. They said, "A confused medley of dreams, and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams."
45. And he of the two who was released, and (now) at length remembered, said, "I am going to inform you of the interpretation, therefore send me forth."
46. (And when he came to Joseph in the prison, he exclaimed), "Truthful Joseph, tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones and the seven green ears of corn and other (seven) dry, that I may return to the people, so that they may know."
47. He (Joseph) said, "You shall sow seven years as usual, but that which you reap, leave it in the ears, all save a little which you eat.
48. 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 will store.
49. Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plenteous crops and when they will press (wine and oil)."
50. And the king said, "Bring him to me." And when the messenger came to him, he (Joseph) said, "Return to your lord and ask him what was the case of the women who cut their hands. My Lord knows their plot."

51. *He (the king) (then sent for those women and) said, "What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?" They answered, "God forbid! We know no evil about him." The wife of the Governor said, "Now the truth is out. I tried to seduce him, and he is indeed of the truthful."*
52. *(Then Joseph said, "I asked for) this, that he (my lord) may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that surely God does not guide the mischief of the betrayers.*
53. *Nor do I absolve my own self (of the blame) - the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil unless my Lord bestows His Mercy - but surely my Lord is All-forgiving, Giver of Mercy." (12: 35 – 53)*

Such was the impudence of the society that they decided to imprison Joseph (PBUH), *"Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), (that it was best) to imprison him for a time."* It maybe they thought that this is a way to deflect the blame from the Governor's wife to the innocent Joseph (PBUH).

"Now with him there came into the prison two young men." These were two of the men working for the king. They somehow enraged the king so he threw them into the prison. The verses jump directly to the encounter between the two men and Joseph (PBUH), *"One of them said, 'I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine.' The other said, 'I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating thereof.' 'Tell us,' (they said) 'The truth and meaning thereof, for we see you are one of the doers of good.'"* It seems from the verse that they saw that Joseph (PBUH) was fit to be their counsel. Joseph (PBUH) started by assuring them that he will be able to explain to them what their dreams meant, *"I shall tell you the interpretation of your dreams before the food which you are given (daily) shall come to you. This is of that which my Lord has taught me"* His answer reflected his confidence in his expertise but explained that he only got this expertise because of a special gift bestowed on him by his Lord. He gained this gift because of his devotion to his Lord, *"I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in God and they deny the Hereafter."* He referred to the religion adopted by the governor and his household which happened to be also the religion that these two men followed, but he did not want to confront them with what he thought of their religion in an ugly way. He did not want to discourage them so that they would listen to what he was going to tell them. He wanted to tell them about his religion, *"I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute a partner to God. This is of the grace of God upon us (the seed of Abraham) and upon humankind; but most people are ungrateful."* The verse tells us that he explained to them that he and his forefathers believe in the Oneness of God. He then continued to expound on the logic underlying his faith, *"My two companions of the prison, (I ask you): are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, the Dominator."* He addressed them in an endearing way, *"My two companions of the prison,"* so that they would open up to him. Then he questioned them about their beliefs. This was a question that appealed to the initial natural disposition which yearns to the belief in the One God, the Creator. Then he continued to

show them the falsehood embodied in associating partners with God, *“Those whom you worship beside Him are but names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has revealed no sanction for them.”* These gods whether they are human, angels, spirits, or cosmic phenomena are controlled by God. They have no power on their own. God has full control over everything and only He has the power to make the decisions, *“The decision rests with God only, Who has commanded you that you worship none save Him. This is the true religion, but most men do not know.”* The word worship is more comprehensive than performing the rituals. The word worship in Arabic means to humble oneself. When these verses were revealed there were no prescribed rituals to be performed. Thus, the word worship in the Quran meant that one should obey God in all matters: ritualistic, ethical, and legal. God’s law controls all aspects of human life. We worship God by following His commands in all our human activities. When we understand the true meaning of the word worship, we understand the reason that Joseph (PBUH) made the right of God to be worshipped alone contingent on the fact that He is in control of everything. A god who is not in full control of everything does not deserve to be worshipped. A religion whose adherents practice these principles is the true religion, which deserves to be followed. Unfortunately, most people do not know. The fact that some people do not know places them outside the circle of the adherents to this religion, even if they considered themselves Muslims. Their ignorance is not an excuse for them to be called Muslims.

It is better for humankind to worship God, the Dominator than to worship a multitude of gods who are not in control of anything. Humanity suffered as a result of being under the control of a multitude of gods who usurped the right of God and who continually fight among themselves over power and authority. God the Dominator is Independent and Self-Sufficient. He only wants piety, righteousness, and prosperity.

With these few words, Joseph (PBUH) outlined the hallmark of the religion and the principles underlying the faith. These words undermine the foundations of associating partners with God. One of the characteristics of tyrants is that they usurp the right to be treated like gods. They do not accept less than absolute obedience from their subjects in all matters of life. Even if this principle is not stated explicitly, it is practiced as an unwritten law. Tyranny flourishes only in the absence of a strong faith. It vanishes when it is faced with a strong faith in God deeply rooted in people’s hearts. When a deeply rooted belief in God fills the hearts of people, they will only be obedient to God alone. Worship is in its essence obedience to God’s law.

Having delivered the message, he turned to address the request of the two prison companions, *“My two companions of the prison, 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. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquired.”*

Joseph (PBUH) asked the man whom he thought will be saved to give a message to the king. He wanted the king to investigate his case, *“And he said to him of the twain, whom he knew would be released, ‘Mention me to your lord.’ But Satan caused him to forget to mention it to his lord, so he (Joseph) stayed in prison for some years.”* The man was saved and went back to work for the king, but he forgot to deliver Joseph’s (PBUH) message. So, years went by and Joseph (PBUH) remained in prison. This may have been meant as a lesson for Joseph (PBUH) to remind him to rely only on God and not to seek help from a human being.

The king saw a dream and wanted someone in his court to interpret the dream, *“The king (of Egypt) said, ‘I do see (in a dream) seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered. Chiefs, explain to me my vision if you can interpret dreams.’”* No one in his court was able to provide an explanation for the dream, or it may be that they sensed that the dream carried ominous news and no one wanted to be the bearer of bad news, so they said, *“A confused medley of dreams, and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams.”*

At this moment, the man who was freed from imprisonment remembered Joseph’s (PBUH) ability to interpret dreams, *“He said, ‘I am going to inform you of the interpretation, therefore send me forth.’”* He then went to see Joseph (PBUH) in the prison, he said to him, *“Truthful Joseph, tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones and the seven green ears of corn and other (seven) dry, that I may return to the people, so that they may know.”* Joseph (PBUH) did not only explain what the dream meant but also gave him advice on how to deal with the impending difficult situation, *“He (Joseph) said, ‘You shall sow seven years as usual, but that which you reap, leave it in the ears, all save a little which you eat. 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 will store. Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plenteous crops and when they will press (wine and oil).’”* The difficult years will be followed by a good year during which people will be able to grow plants and grapes, and they will press their grapes and olives to get wine and oil. It should be noted that the king’s dream did not refer to this last year. This was an addition that Joseph (PBUH) was able to predict by virtue of the knowledge that God bestowed on him.

The verses do not mention any details on how the king’s messenger delivered Joseph’s (PBUH) interpretation to the king, but they jump to a scene in the king’s court after the king had been told of Joseph’s (PBUH) interpretation of the dream. The king decided that he wanted to meet the man who gave the interpretation of the dream in person, *“And the king said, ‘Bring him to me.’”* The king’s messenger went tell Joseph (PBUH) of the king’s command. Here we see the effect of the years of training in the divine school on Joseph’s (PBUH) attitude. He was no longer impatient to get out of the prison. Clearing his name was more important to him than leaving the prison. This was a drastic difference in attitude from Joseph (PBUH) who said to the prison

companion, *"Mention me to your lord,"* and Joseph (PBUH) who said to the messenger who came to invite him to the king's presence, *"Return to your lord and ask him what was the case of the women who cut their hands. My Lord knows their plot."* He wanted the king to discover by himself that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent. Joseph (PBUH) did not want to defend himself in front of the king. He wanted to meet king after his name has been cleared.

The king asked the women, *"What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?"* They answered, *"God forbid! We know no evil about him."* The wife of the Governor said, *"Now the truth is out. I tried to seduce him, and he is indeed of the truthful."*

The Governor's wife confessed to her guilt and admitted that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent. This brings us to the end of another episode of Joseph's (PBUH) trials.

Verses 54 to 79:

54. *And the king said, "Bring him to me that I will appoint him exclusively to serve me." And when he had talked with him he said, "You are today in our presence established and trusted."*
55. *He (Joseph) said, "Set me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian."*
56. *Thus, We established Joseph in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We grant Our mercy to whom We will. We do not allow the reward of those who are doers of good to be lost.*
57. *And certainly, the reward of the Hereafter is much better for those who believe and are conscious of God.*
58. *And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him, and he recognized them, but they recognized him not.*
59. *And when he provided them with their provision, he said, "Bring me a brother of yours from your father. Do you not see that I give full measure and I am the best of hosts?"*
60. *Now, if you do not bring him to me, you shall have no measure (of corn) from me, nor shall you (even) come near me."*
61. *They said, "We shall certainly do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall do."*
62. *And he (Joseph) told his servants to put their merchandise back into their saddlebags, so they should know it only when they have returned to their people, in order that they might come back.*
63. *So, when they went back to their father, they said, "Our father, we have been denied any more corn, so send with us our brother that we may obtain another measure, surely we will guard him well."*
64. *He said, "Can I entrust him to you as I entrusted his brother to you before? God is better at guarding, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy."*

65. *And when they opened their belongings, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said, "Our father, what (more) can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us. We shall get provision for our people, guard our brother, and we shall have an extra measure of a camel (load). This is an easy measure.*
66. *He (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 are yourselves surrounded (and made powerless)." And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said, "God is a witness over all that we say."*
67. *And he (Jacob) said, "My sons, do not enter through one gate; but go in through different gates. I cannot help you against God's will. The decision rests with God only. In Him I put my trust, and in Him let all the trusting put their trust."*
68. *And when they entered in the manner which their father had enjoined, it did not help them against God's will; it was but a need of Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied; and he was a person of knowledge because We had taught him; but most people know not.*
69. *And when they went in before Joseph, he drew his brother closer to him, saying, "I am your brother, therefore grieve not for what they did."*
70. *And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking-cup in his brother's saddlebag, and then a crier cried, "Camel-riders, you are indeed thieves."*
71. *They said, turning towards them, "What is it that you have lost?"*
72. *They said, "We have lost the king's cup, and he who brings it shall have a camel-load," and "I (said Joseph) am responsible for it."*
73. *They said, "By God, you know for certain that we did not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves."*
74. *(The Egyptians) said, "What then shall be the penalty for this, if you are liars?"*
75. *They said, "The penalty should be that he, in whose saddlebag it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime). Thus, we recompense the wrongdoers."*
76. *Then, he (Joseph) began the search with their bags before his brother's bag, then he produced it from his brother's bag. Thus, did We contrive for Joseph. He could not have taken his brother according to the king's law unless God willed. We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will, and above everyone who have knowledge there is the One who is all knowing.*
77. *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, and he did not reveal it to them. He (simply) said (to himself), "You are in a far worse situation; and God knows best the truth of what you assert."*
78. *They said, "Noble one, he has a father, aged and venerable, (who will grieve for him); so take one of us in his place; for we see that you are a doer of good."*
79. *He said, "God forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property; indeed (if we did so), we should be wrongdoers." (12: 54 – 79)*

When the king realized that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent and that he is both knowledgeable and wise he wanted to get Joseph (PBUH) to work for him, *“And the king said, ‘Bring him to me that I will appoint him exclusively to serve me.’ And when he had talked with him he said, ‘You are today in our presence established and trusted.’”*

The verses do not tell us what transpired after that, but we find Joseph (PBUH) speaking to the king, *“He (Joseph) said, ‘Set me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian.’”* Joseph (PBUH) knew that his expertise will be needed to save the country from an impending famine. He asked the king to appoint him as a manager of the storehouses. He did not ask this as a personal favor. On the contrary, he was making the king a favor.

It is important to examine Joseph’s (PBUH) request, *“He (Joseph) said, ‘Set me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian,’”* in light of the Islamic tradition. Was this request appropriate? There are two known principles in Islam. It is not allowed to appoint someone to a position of authority, if that person requested such an appointment. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“By God, we do not appoint a person to a position of authority, if that person requested such an appointment.”* The second principle is that it is considered inappropriate to promote oneself as can be gleaned from the verse, *“Do not assert your own goodness.”* (53:32) We will not respond to this question by saying that these rules were established after the revelation of the Quran, so they did not exist in Joseph’s (PBUH) time and therefore were not binding on him. This may be true, but these are fundamental principles and we do not want to base an exception on technicality. Islamic jurisprudence is a product of the intellectual effort of the Muslim scholars to address the actual needs of an existing Muslim community. The laws produced as a result of such an exercise were developed, evolved, and continue to evolve to address the changing needs of the community. The laws of Islamic jurisprudence were developed to address the actual needs of the community, and since these needs are ever changing the process should be dynamic. These are two fundamental principles that should be understood by the scholars of jurisprudence: the laws are dynamic and they are developed to address actual needs. They cannot be developed in isolation of the real conditions of society. Islamic jurisprudence can then be applied only in a Muslim society, and it should be applied in its entirety. Only in a Muslim society people will accept Islamic jurisprudence, will be willing to live by its injunctions, and will be able to benefit from it. Applying Islamic jurisprudence in a non-Muslim society is a futile exercise. One cannot pick and choose certain rules to apply and others to ignore. At the time of this story, the Egyptians were not Muslims and therefore no one can expect them to apply Islamic rules in their daily life.

There is a rationale behind abiding by the two principles mentioned above in an Islamic society. The first principle is not to appoint in positions of authority those who request to be appointed. The second principle is that it is considered inappropriate to promote oneself in public spheres. Holding positions of authority in an Islamic society is a responsibility not a privilege. Being in a position of responsibility is a great burden on people who are charged with such responsibility.

People who are most suitable to discharge the responsibility and only those who are seeking God's reward should be chosen.

We come back to Joseph's (PBUH) story after this brief digression. The verses do not narrate the king's response to Joseph's (PBUH) request, as if all Joseph's (PBUH) needed to do was to ask. We understand implicitly that Joseph (PBUH) got what he wanted from the following verse, *"Thus, We established Joseph in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We grant Our mercy to whom We will. We do not allow the reward of those who are doers of good to be lost. And certainly, the reward of the Hereafter is much better for those who believe and are conscious of God."* God established Joseph (PBUH) in the land, allowing him to choose where to settle. God replaced Joseph's (PBUH) difficulty with ease and rewarded him because He does not let the reward of those who do good to be wasted. The reward in the Hereafter will certainly be better.

The famine plagued the lands around Egypt, but Egypt was saved because of Joseph's (PBUH) planning, wisdom, and vision. The famine drove Joseph's (PBUH) brothers to Egypt looking for food for their people. They did not recognize him when they saw him; however, he recognized them, but he did not reveal his identity to them, *"And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him, and he recognized them, but they recognized him not."* He had a plan, so he treated them well and gave them what they wanted. It is implicit that he must have approached them in a way that made them trust him and reveal to him that they have a half-brother who stayed back with their father. They must have mentioned that their father loves this son very much and cannot bear the thought that his son would travel with them looking for food. He must have shown that he was intrigued and requested to see their half-brother, *"Bring me a brother of yours from your father. Do you not see that I give full measure and I am the best of hosts? Now, if you do not bring him to me, you shall have no measure (of corn) from me, nor shall you (even) come near me."* They responded that they would do every effort to do as Joseph's wishes, *"They said, 'We shall certainly do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall do.'"*

In the meantime, Joseph (PBUH) told his servants to return the goods that his brothers brought to barter in exchange for the food they wanted to get from Egypt. He knew that when they go home and find that they received the food free of charge they will come back again, *"And he (Joseph) told his servants to put their merchandise back into their saddlebags, so they should know it only when they have returned to their people, in order that they might come back."*

The succeeding verses take us to a scene where we listen to an exchange between Joseph's father and his sons after they had returned home, *"So when they went back to their father, they said,*

‘Our father, we have been denied any more corn, so send with us our brother that we may obtain another measure, surely we will guard him well.’” Their promise to guard their half-brother must have reminded Jacob (PBUH) with the promise they made before when they took Joseph (PBUH) in their outing, and he ended up losing his son. So, he exclaimed, *“Can I entrust him to you as I entrusted his brother to you before? God is better at guarding, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.”* It is God whom I should ask for protection.

“And when they opened their belongings, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said, ‘Our father, what (more) can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us. We shall get provision for our people, guard our brother, and we shall have an extra measure of a camel (load). This is an easy measure.’ They used the fact that their money was returned to them to support their argument that Jacob (PBUH) should send their half-brother with them. They also argued that with their brother in the caravan they will be able to get one more share of food from Joseph (PBUH). It seems that Joseph (PBUH) was rationing the food, so each person gets one share only. Finally, Jacob (PBUH) did agree to send his son with them, but he made one condition, *“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 are yourselves surrounded (and made powerless).”* And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said, *“God is a witness over all that we say.”* Jacob (PBUH) reminded them that God is a witness over their oath. Jacob (PBUH) advised his sons to be careful, *“And he (Jacob) said, ‘My sons, do not enter through one gate; but go in through different gates. I cannot help you against God's will. The decision rests with God only. In Him I put my trust, and in Him let all the trusting put their trust.’”*

Let us reflect on Jacob's (PBUH) statement, *“The decision rests with God only.”* It is clear that what he meant was that one should accept God's decrees. No one can change God's decrees; belief in destiny is one of the articles of faith in Islam. However, there is another kind of God's decisions. These are decisions that are accomplished through people's actions and choices. These kinds of decrees are expressed in terms of God commands and prohibitions. God gave his servants the ability to choose whether to follow these commands and prohibitions or not. They have the free will to comply or not to comply; either way they must bear the consequences of their actions and choices. Those who submit truly to God are the those who choose to follow God's commandments.

There is nothing in the verses that explains why Jacob (PBUH) advised his sons to enter Egypt through different gates. We will not speculate on the reasons. We will just accept that it was something that Jacob (PBUH) wanted his sons to do and they obeyed his command. The verses tell us that God bestowed knowledge on Jacob (PBUH) and that the sons obeyed their father, *“And when they entered in the manner which their father had enjoined, it did not help them against God's will; it was but a need of Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied; and he was a*

person of knowledge because We had taught him; but most people know not.”

The verses go on directly to describe the encounter between Joseph (PBUH) and his brothers. The first thing that the verses describe is the meeting between Joseph (PBUH) and his brother and his effort to assure his brother that he is now safe with him. It may have taken Joseph (PBUH) sometime to arrange for such a meeting but it is the style of the Quran to focus on the main issues, *“And when they went in before Joseph, he drew his brother closer to him, saying, ‘I am your brother, therefore grieve not for what they did.’”*

The verses then go on directly to the scene when the brothers were about to leave. The verses describe an exciting scene. First, Joseph (PBUH) hides his cups inside the saddlebag of his brother. Then a strong voice accuses them of theft, *“And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking-cup in his brother's saddlebag, and then a crier cried, ‘Camel-riders, you are indeed thieves.’”* Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers became terrified. How can they be accused of theft and they are the sons of the prophets: Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (PBUT)? So, they went back to find out what was going on, *“They said, turning towards them, ‘What is it that 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 Joseph) am responsible for it.’”*

Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers tried to explain to the king’s servants that they did not come to Egypt to steal, *“They said, ‘By God, you know for certain that we did not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves.’ (The Egyptians) said, ‘What then shall be the penalty for this, if you are liars?’”* Now we understand the scheme which God inspired Joseph’s (PBUH) to carry out so that he would be able to keep his brother with him. One of Jacob’s (PBUH) religious laws was that the thief would be taken as a captive in exchange of what he stole, *“They said, ‘The penalty should be that he in whose saddlebag it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime). Thus, we recompense the wrongdoers.’”* It was God’s plan that they would apply Jacob’s (PBUH) religious laws rather than the Egyptian’s law. This was the only way for Joseph’s (PBUH) to keep his brother with him. Had they applied the Egyptian law the thief would have been punished but he would have been able to travel back to his country with his brothers.

This encounter was in the presence of Joseph (PBUH), so he commanded a search of their belongings. The search started with the brothers’ belongings and finally the cup was found in Joseph’s (PBUH) younger brother belongings, *“Then he (Joseph) began the search with their bags before his brother's bag, then he produced it from his brother's bag. Thus, did We contrive for Joseph. He could not have taken his brother according to the king's law unless God willed. We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will, and above everyone who have knowledge there is*

the One who is all knowing.” This was God’s inspired plan which Joseph (PBUH) undertook so that he could keep his younger brother.

The verse explains what is meant by the word “Deen” which is translated as “religion.” The word religion is used to indicate a whole system and a way of life. Those who think the word religion is limited only to the articles of faith and the rituals are missing the point. Religion is much more than beliefs and rituals. It is a whole system of life. This meaning has been lost on many of today’s Muslims. They limit their understanding of religion to the acceptance of the articles of faith and the performance of the acts of worship. Religion is a comprehensive way of life.

Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers wanted to absolve themselves of the crime and to lay all the blame on their younger brother, *“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, and he did not reveal it to them. He (simply) said (to himself), ‘You are in a far worse situation; and God knows best the truth of what you assert.’”*

They were faced with the problem of the oath that they made to their father. They pleaded with Joseph (PBUH), *“They said, ‘Noble one, he has a father, aged and venerable, (who will grieve for him); so, take one of us in his place; for we see that you are a doer of good.’”*

But Joseph (PBUH) wanted to teach his brothers a lesson, *“He said, ‘God forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property; indeed (if we did so), we should be wrongdoers.’”* One notices the accuracy of Joseph’s (PBUH) expression. He did not say, *“God forbid that we take other than the one who stole,”* because he knew that his brother was not a thief.

Verses 80 to 101:

80. *When they saw no hope of him (yielding), they held a conference in private. The leader among them said, “Do you not remember that your father did take an oath from you in God's name, and how, before this, you did fail in your duty with Joseph? Therefore, I will not leave this land until my father permits me, or God decides for me; and He is the best of decision Makers.*
81. *Return to your father and say, “Our father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know; we are not guardians of the unseen.*
82. *Ask in the town where we have been and the caravan in which we traveled with, and (you will find) we are indeed telling the truth.”*

83. *He (Jacob) said, "No, your souls have enticed you to do something. So, patience is most fitting (for me). It may be that God will bring them (back) all to me (in the end), for He is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise."*
84. *And he turned away from them and said "How great is my grief for Joseph." And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.*
85. *They said, "By God, (Never) will you cease to remember Joseph until your health is ruined or you are of those who perish."*
86. *He said, "I only complain of my distress and anguish to God, and I know from God that which you do not know.*
87. *My sons, go and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of God's Mercy, truly no one despairs of God's Mercy, except the disbelievers."*
88. *And when they came (again) before him (Joseph) they said, "Noble one, misfortune has touched us and our folk, and we bring but poor merchandise, so give us a full measure and be charitable to us. God will certainly reward the charitable."*
89. *He said, "Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?"*
90. *They said, "Are you indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us (all). Indeed, he who is God conscious and perseverant (will be rewarded), never will God allow the reward to be lost, of those who are doers of good."*
91. *They said, "By God, indeed has God preferred you over us, and we certainly were sinners."*
92. *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.*
93. *Go with this shirt of mine and cast it over the face of my father; he will become (again) seeing. Then come back to me together with all your family."*
94. *When the caravan left (Egypt), their father said, "You may think I am senile, but I do indeed smell the scent of Joseph."*
95. *They said, "By God, you are indeed lost in your old illusions."*
96. *Then, when the bearer of the glad tidings came, he cast (the shirt) over his face, and he (Jacob) regained clear sight. He (Jacob) said, "Did I not say to you, 'I know from God that which you do not know?'"*
97. *They said, "Our father, ask forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly sinners."*
98. *He said, "I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."*
99. *And when they came in before Joseph, he drew his parents closer to him, and said, "Come into Egypt safe, God willing."*
100. *And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they fell in prostration, (all) before him. He said, "My father, this is the fulfillment of my old dream. God has made it come true. He was indeed good to me when He took me out of the prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my*

brothers. Verily, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills; indeed, He is the Omniscient, the Wise.

101. *“My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter. Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will and unite me with the righteous.” (12: 80 – 101)*

Joseph’s brothers lost any hope they could convince Joseph (PBUH) to let their younger brother go free. They sat down to discuss the situation, the verses do not mention the details of the discussion, but they outline the end result of the discussion, *“When they saw no hope of him (yielding), they held a conference in private. The leader among them said, “Do you not remember that your father did take an oath from you in God's name, and how, before this, you did fail in your duty with Joseph? Therefore, I will not leave this land until my father permits me, or God decides for me; and He is the best of decision Makers.”* The older brother reminded them of their failure to guard Joseph (PBUH) before. He then told them of his decision not to go back with them but to stay in Egypt until his father allows him to go back or God would command him to go back.

He also asked them to go back to their father and tell him what happened to their brother, *“Return to your father and say, ‘Our father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know; we are not guardians of the unseen. Ask in the town where we have been and the caravan in which we traveled with, and (you will find) we are indeed telling the truth.’”*

The father simply repeated the same words he said when he lost Joseph (PBUH), *“Jacob said, “No, your souls have enticed you to do something. So, patience is most fitting (for me).”* However, this time he had hope, *“It may be that God will bring them (back) all to me (in the end), for He is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise.”* God is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise. He knows Jacob’s (PBUH) condition, He knows the rationale behind these trials, and He allows the events to take place at the appropriate times so that the intended lessons would be learnt. Where did the ray of hope in the old man’s heart come from? It is the close connection with God and the deep feeling of God’s presence and mercy. These are the feelings which fill the hearts of the chosen few, feelings which are more real than the reality that can be seen and touched.

“And he turned away from them and said ‘How great is my grief for Joseph.’ And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.” The verse paints a very emotional image for the father who lost his son. He felt lonely. There was no one to share his sorrow or to console him. His sons whose hearts were full of envy, were not kind to him. On the contrary, they chastised him for what seemed to them as false hope, *“They said, ‘By God, (Never) will you cease to remember Joseph until your health is ruined or you are of those who perish.’”* He only wanted to be left alone with his Lord. He did not seek their help, he was only seeking God’s

mercy, *“He said, ‘I only complain of my distress and anguish to God, and I know from God that which you do not know.’*” These were words which describe the deep faith in a heart connected to his Lord. The apparent reality defied any hope in the return of Joseph (PBUH). He has long been gone. His brothers ridiculed their father for his seemingly farfetched hope in the return of his son. However, the feeling that filled the heart of this righteous man and the trust in the mercy of his Lord filled his heart with hope. He knows about his Lord that which others would not know. This is the benefit of faith which fills the heart and opens it to the divine light to see and feel that which others would not see or feel, *“I know from God that which you do not know.”*

This hope moved Jacob (PBUH) to command his sons never to despair of God’s mercy, *“My sons, go and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of God's Mercy, truly no one despairs of God's Mercy, except the disbelievers.”* He told them to go back and enquire discreetly about Joseph (PBUH) and his brother.

Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers went back to Egypt for the third time carrying their merchandise to barter it in exchange for food, but they knew that the merchandise was poor and they appealed to Joseph’s (PBUH) sense of charity to overlook this fact, *“And when they came (again) before him (Joseph) they said, ‘Noble one, misfortune has touched us and our folk, and we bring but poor merchandise, so give us a full measure and be charitable to us. God will certainly reward the charitable.’”* Joseph (PBUH) felt that the time for the big surprise has come and that his brothers were ready to learn the lesson, *“He said, ‘Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?’”*

They heard this voice before and the face looked familiar, *“They said, ‘Are you indeed Joseph?’”* The answer came to confirm the surprise and to remind them of what they have done a long time ago, *“He said, ‘I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us (all). Indeed, he who is God conscious and perseverant (will be rewarded), never will God allow the reward to be lost, of those who are doers of good.’”* He did not lay any blame on them, but he showed his gratitude to His Lord who bestowed His bounty on him and his brother because they persevered and were conscious of their Lord. The brothers remembered the shameful way they treated Joseph (PBUH) and they felt sorry, *“They said, ‘By God, indeed has God preferred you over us, and we certainly were sinners.’”*

They have admitted their guilt and expressed their sorrow for what they had done. Joseph (PBUH) response was honorable and generous, *“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.’”* Not only he did not blame or chastise them, but he also asked God to forgive them. He then turned his attention to what happened to his father. He yearned to meet his father and to erase the sorrow which filled his heart all these years, *“Go with this shirt of mine, and cast it over the face of my*

father; he will become (again) seeing. Then come back to me together with all your family. ”
How did Joseph (PBUH) know that the smell of his shirt will bring back the sight to the eyes of the old man? This must have been part of the knowledge that God blessed him with.

The verses tell of many surprises one after another, *“When the caravan left (Egypt), their father said, ‘You may think I am senile, but I do indeed smell the scent of Joseph. ’”* No one had imagined that Joseph (PBUH) would come back. How can an old man smell the scent of Joseph (PBUH) over that long distance? The people around Jacob (PBUH) did not smell anything. They thought that senility must have filled the old man’s mind with illusions, *“They said, ‘By God, you are indeed lost in your old illusions. ’”*

But they were up for another surprise, *“Then, when the bearer of the glad tidings came, he cast (the shirt) over his face, and he (Jacob) regained clear sight. He (Jacob) said, ‘Did I not say to you, I know from God that which you do not know?’”* The sons then asked their father’s forgiveness, *“They said, ‘Our father, ask forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly sinners. ’”* However, he was not ready for that yet, but he promised to do it later, *“He said, ‘I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy’”*

The verses continue to describe the meeting between Joseph (PBUH) and his parents after a long time of separation, hope, and despair. It must have been a very dramatic scene full of emotions and feelings. *“And when they came in before Joseph, he drew his parents closer to him, and said, ‘Come into Egypt safe, God willing. ’”* Joseph (PBUH) then reminded his father of the old dream which have now come true, *“And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they fell in prostration, (all) before him. He said, ‘My father, this is the fulfillment of my old dream. God has made it come true. He was indeed good to me when He took me out of the prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers. ’* He did not forget to show his gratitude to God, who blessed him with all these bounties, *“Verily, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills; indeed, He is the Omniscient, the Wise.”*

The final scene of this story, shows Joseph (PBUH) extracting himself out of celebrating the unification of his family to pray, praising his Lord and expressing his gratitude, *“My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power,”* My Lord, You have bestowed on me power, status, honor, and wealth. These are bounties for this life. *“And taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events.”* You have given me the knowledge to interpret dreams and events; and You have given me the vision to predict the future events which these dreams indicate. *“You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth.”* You created them and they run under your control, You decide what will happen to them. *“You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter.”* You

provide the support and the help. My Lord, I do not ask for power, health, or wealth all I ask is this, *“Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will, and unite me with the righteous.”*

The images of success, power, and happiness of the unification of the family recede to the background and the image of the sincere servant of God comes to the forefront. It is the image of a sincere servant who prays God to keep him blessed with the bounty of submission to God until he is put to death and to unite him after death with God’s righteous servants. Joseph (PBUH) achieved total success in the final test.

Verses 102 to 111:

102. *This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not present with them when they put together their plan while they conspired.*
103. *And though you try much, most men will not believe.*
104. *You did not ask them for a reward for this; it is nothing but a reminder to humankind.*
105. *And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them.*
106. *And most of them will not believe in God without associating (others as partners) with Him.*
107. *Do they then feel secure that there will not come to them an overwhelming torment of God, or that the Hour will not come upon them suddenly while they do not perceive it?*
108. *Say, “This is my Way. I and all those who follow me call to God with sure knowledge. Glory be to God; and I am not of the idolaters.*
109. *All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand?*
110. *(They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty.*
111. *There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who are possessors of intellect. It is not a fabricated story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and guidance and mercy for people who believe. (12: 102 – 111)*

The Sura started with a verse, *“We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives,”* and ends with reiterating the fact that Muhammad (PBUH) was not privy to such stories before. The story that was narrated in this Sura was not common knowledge among the people at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This story has been revealed to you and you were not present with them when they were scheming, *“This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to*

you (Muhammad). You were not present with them when they put together their plan while they conspired.” The story tells of the schemes that Joseph’s (PBUH) brother contrived to get rid of Joseph (PBUH), the schemes that women contrived to seduce Joseph (PBUH), and the schemes that the king’s court contrived to put Joseph (PBUH) in jail.

People should have been moved by these verses. They should have realized that they are revelations from God, however most people do not believe. They do not pay attention to many of God’s signs which they see in the heavens and the earth. What are they waiting for? God’s wrath may descend on them any time, *“And though you try much, most men will not believe.* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was keen that his people believe and avail themselves of the goodness, which is associated with this belief, but God who knows the nature of these people tells him that many of them will not believe because they do not want to heed God’s signs. Muhammad (PBUH) will not benefit whether they believe or not, *“You did not ask them for a reward for this;”* His task was only to remind people, *“it is nothing but a reminder to humankind.”* God’s signs are all around them. These signs lead those who reflect to the belief in the oneness of God and His power, *“And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them.”* Have they reflected on sunrise and sunset? Have they reflected on the shadows, and how they change? Have they reflected on the growing plants, the flying birds, the swimming fish, the crawling worms, the persevering ants, and the animal kingdoms? One moment of reflection at the beginning or the end of the day is enough to remind the human being of the Creator; but many people are heedless when they pass by these signs.

Associating partners with God may crawl surreptitiously into the hearts of the believers, *“And most of them will not believe in God without associating (others as partners) with Him.”* Pure faith requires vigilance on the part of the believer, so that the heart remains in a state of absolute submission to God avoiding any form of concealed association of partners with God. Many traditions address this point. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Associating partners with God is as surreptitious as the crawl of an ant.”* There are many practices that may lead to concealed association of partners with God. Ibn Umar (RA) narrated that, *“Whoever took an oath in the name of anything except God, has associated partners with God.”* The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Whoever wore a talisman has associated partners with God.”*

What are they waiting for, *“Do they then feel secure that there will not come to them an overwhelming torment of God, or that the Hour will not come upon them suddenly while they do not perceive it?”* This is a statement that is meant to wake them up from their heedlessness. No one knows what will happen next, so how can the heedless guarantee their safety?

“Say, ‘This is my Way. I, and all those who follow me call to God with sure knowledge. Glory be to God; and I am not of the idolaters.’” It is a straight path, unique in its clarity, illuminated by the guidance of God. Those who walk this way are sure of their path. They do not use guess

work to know what is right and what is wrong. I do not associate partners with God. This is my way, people are free to choose which way they take but I am going to remain on this way, the straightway.

“All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand?” Muhammad (PBUH) was not the first messenger to be sent by God. God sent many messengers before Muhammad (PBUH). They were men, not angels. They were chosen from people living in towns not people living in the desert. They were kind and perseverant. Observing the relics of the past fills the heart with awe. Imagine these places which were once full of people leading a bustling life, and now they have become relics of the past; they remind us of the perpetual cycle of life. These reflections will lead to the fact that worldly life is only a transient phase of life; the Hereafter is the true everlasting life. Those who remain conscious of God in this life will have the good reward in the Hereafter.

The following verse paints a horrific image of God’s messengers who met difficult times dealing with their people who denied them and rejected the guidance they brought. But when the road became darkest, the divine will intervened and help was provided, *“(They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty.”* This is one of God’s subtle laws. Victory is guaranteed but it only comes after the messenger has made use of all the tools available to him and has worked extremely hard to bring the message to people. Delivering the message is not an easy task nor should it be taken lightly but at the end, God’s reward awaits those who work very hard so that God’s guidance is delivered.

Joseph’s (PBUH) story is full of examples of the trials and tests that God’s messengers faced in their lives. He suffered when he was thrown into the well, when he was working in the governor’s house, and when he was imprisoned. But God’s reward was waiting for him at the end of the road. God’s promise never fails. These stories provide lessons for those who reflect, *“There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who are possessors of intellect. It is not a fabricated story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy for people who believe.”*