

Joseph in the Quran

Thematic Unity

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Contents

	Page
(1) Authors' Preface	vi
(2) Translators' Introduction and Viewpoint	1
(3) Chapter I	25
(4) Chapter II	70
(5) Chapter III	127
(6) Chapter IV	172
(7) Glossary of Terms	182
(8) Authors' Publications	188
Sura Yusuf	—

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In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Author's Preface

This book: Thematic unity in Surat Yusuf, Peace Be Upon Him, comprises four chapters.

The first chapter is an attempt to elucidate and clarify the thematic unity of the ordered sequential progress of the events in the Sura in both its narrative sequence and its consequences in the light of its totality as an organic unity: each part leading to the next as an integrated whole so that if one action is eliminated or added the whole structure disintegrates.

We have also stressed the fact that the Quran combines the artistic and religious components in such a manner as to make of the artistic a means to the religious. The inseparability of the two in the Sura reinforces the aim of the Sura namely to inspire the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) with confidence and unshakable faith. Each of the two components of the Sura uses a different method to achieve the objective of the Sura, one indirectly and the other directly. The reunion of the family of Jacob in the end is the indirect method leading to the fulfillment of the direct.

The first sector fulfills its aim in the musical structural narrative which penetrates the emotions and stimulates the mind while the direct sector is a logical development stressing the mental and rational component. In both sectors there is harmony uniting the two in an integrated whole.

In the second chapter, we have discussed the major *dramatis personae* which played a decisive role in moving the events of the story to their progressive sequence. On the other hand, we have dealt very briefly with the personalities which played fleeting roles in the story. A study is made of both the major and the minor personalities in terms of their ordered progress in the narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. Some personalities are dealt with individually, others are treated in groups.

This is followed by a study of the dream of Joseph which he

narrated to his father Jacob, the Prophet of Allah.

"When Joseph said unto his father: O my father! Lo! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me." (Quran 12:4)

This was interpreted through the unfolding of events and literally in the Sura as:

The eleven planets are his brothers.

The sun is his father.

The moon is his mother.

The interactive process throughout the story between Jacob and Joseph's brothers on the one hand, and between the brothers themselves on the other hand, necessitated a study of the scope and sequence of the dynamics of the interaction between all the parts of the whole.

Because of the fact that Joseph (S.A.W.) since he was taken away by his jealous brothers to play and have fun, in fact from the very beginning of the story, was the dynamic force and motivation in the events of the household of Jacob and in the ensuing events, we have devoted a special chapter to this blessed personality in chapter three.

We have followed the sequence of the narrative as a developmental study leading into a change in the characters of the brothers from evilness to goodliness.

This is clarified in the Quranic ayat (verse):

"Kill Joseph or cast him in some (other) land so that your father's favor may be all for you, and that you may be afterward righteous folk." (Quran 12:9)

When the brothers returned to Egypt in their third trip feeling internal transformations in their phenomenal selves, Joseph who was then the Treasurer and chief executive of Egypt did not hesitate to reveal the reality of his personality.

We have also mentioned how Jacob expressed his absolute faith in Allah all the time through without one moment of despair in Allah's compassion. His patience was exemplary in the most trying moments. Allah rewarded him by the reunion of Jacob's family including Joseph his beloved son and most favorite.

As far as the personality of Joseph is concerned, it is certainly the most dynamic force in the story with all its dimensions, either directly or indirectly, whether in his presence or his absence away from his family.

We have discussed the three stages through which he passed throughout his blessed life:

First stage - The stage of the favorite of his father who possesses a transparent radiating character. This stage ends by his half brothers flinging him into the depth of the pit.

Second stage - The stage of his exposure to Allah's test through temptation, suffering, alienation, lonesomeness since he was flung by his brothers into the depth of the pit until he was proved innocent and released from prison.

This phase is subdivided into two substages:

- a) The first in the household of the Aziz of Egypt.
- b) The second in prison where he was interned because of his restraint from sin.

Third stage - The stage of Allah's showering him with His Bounty and blessings which is also a test. The King of Egypt appointed him the chief executive of Egypt, which was then a vacant position. This stage extends to the reunion of the household of Jacob and the ultimate fulfillment of his dream.

The fourth chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the societies in the story of Joseph - the royal traditions, the societal arrangements of the Near East and the Egyptian society. This is a comparative study. The second section is a distillation of the

moral issues in Surat Joseph and their meanings in behavioral terms.

We have included in the book Surat Joseph in its entirety because the research is confined to it. There is also a glossary of terms which is sourced from the Indexed Quranic Terms by Muhammad Fuad Abdul Baqi. The only addition is the Arabic term (Thalika) [that] because of the significant role it plays in the Sura. In doing this I have followed the same process devised by Ustaz Abdul Baqi.

I swear by Allah that I have not, at any moment, overburdened any letter in the Book of Allah beyond its task.

I welcome any criticism and request any reader not to hesitate in drawing my attention to the truth. We are all truth seekers and will follow it with unflinching tenacity.

I pray to Allah to bless our good efforts and our intentionality in bringing to light this humble piece of research. May Allah enlighten our path. He is the all Powerful, the Omnipotent.

Glory to Allah

And Peace on His Messenger

And Praise to Allah the Lord of the Worlds.

Allah's benediction, salute and Peace Upon the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his family and his companions copiously.

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Translator's Introduction

The valuable contents of this book on Joseph in the Quran is a work of a great scholar who has authored fifty books dealing with the Quran. In bringing out succinctly the story of Joseph, the author has contributed a study that satisfies a real felt need indeed. The author has brought out into relief the values which can establish a harmonious equilibrium in the whole sphere of human relationships. The author has dealt with the story as Revealed Truth and also as a work of art.

In my translation, I have tried to follow the Arabic text as faithfully as possible but have avoided the strictly literal rendering in the interest of capturing the mood and content of the original.

I must express my deep gratitude to the author who *favored me with* the translation of this book into English and writing the introduction. I have known Professor Hassan Bajouda as a scholar who has contributed with sustained effort to Islamic studies especially Quranic studies, many books which have enriched modern Islamic input and which are worthy of translation into English, French, German and Russian. Professor Bajouda has delivered innumerable papers in international conferences which were very meticulously researched and kindled the interest of non-Muslims in Islam.

It is my sincere hope that the "story of Joseph" will benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is my conviction that Muslim minorities born and raised in English speaking countries will welcome this book with both arms.

The story of the Prophet Joseph is narrated in the three monotheistic religions namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The distinctive quality of Joseph in the Quran is its Thematic unity, ordered progress, consistency and emphasis on the moral dimension of the story. Many Western scholars have pointed out the salient differences that exist between the Quranic story of Joseph and the Biblical story of Joseph, which give a moral lustre and an illuminating glow to the narrative given in the Quran while the one given in the Bible is boring and in certain places even vulgar and show insipid narratives and a poor borrowing from folklore. Professor Bajouda has succeeded in his

presentation and analysis of the story to substantiate this thesis.

When we deal with the story as an organic whole from Joseph's dream, the plot by his brothers, the character of Jacob, Joseph's firmness under temptation, his preaching in the prison, his clearance of the charge and ascending to eminence, his treatment of his brothers and disclosure of his identity to them, to the dream fulfillment, we see the difference between the Quranic story which is divine revelation and the Biblical which is based on folklore.

The story of the Bible begins with Joseph carrying evil reports about his brothers although he is the hero of the story under God's care who is destined for Prophethood. The Bible shows that his brothers had the justification of hating him on account of his backbiting about them to his father and presentiment of his becoming a greater person than themselves. Jacob is treated in the Bible not as a prophet but as an ordinary man who acts on the level of mean dross of humanity.

Compare this with how the Quran tells the story in which we find the main theme avoiding everything common place and revolves on dreams and their interpretations. It deals with three kinds of visions:

- a) Joseph's dream
- b) The King's dream
- c) The two prisoner's dreams

It provides underset ending of Egyptian society more than 3000 years ago and information about the organization of government, the economy, the relationships of nobility, the slave system, the changes in religious and artistic traditions.

The 18th dynasty of Pharonic Egypt was a turbulent colorful period in Egypt's history. The story of Joseph in Egypt has fascinated historians not only because it is the prime romance of ancient Egypt, but also it is the period of agrarian reform and economic passing from one phase to another.

The leading figure of the 18th dynasty was Akhenaten who discarded the multiple gods of his people and adopted the beginning of

the doctrine of monotheism under the influence of Joseph. He established the cult of Aten, the sun god or solar disk which he believed to be the sole bearer of the universe. He also established a new Egyptian capital at Tal-el Amarna, dedicated to the celebration of Aten. Historians have generally considered Akhenaten to be a pacifist. When Akhenaten died in 1334 B.C. there was a short interregnum before Nefertiti assumed the throne briefly. She was followed by Akhenaten's son-in-law, Tutankhamen.

What brought Akhenaten's monotheism to an end in Egypt? The Quran answers this question and indicates that even though the movement of monotheism was interrupted for some time, it was revived again through the Prophet Moses, then Jesus and at last Muhammad when Egypt became a part of the Muslim world since 639 A.D.

The Uniqueness of Joseph's Story

The story of Joseph is narrated by Allah unto Muhammad (S.A.W.) *"as the most beautiful of narratives."*

The Quran narrates stories for the lessons which they convey as admonition, warning for the generations of mankind of all times. The story of Joseph occupies a special significance because almost all the incidents connected with the life of Joseph as revealed in the Quran depict in a parallel manner the dealings of the adversaries of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) with him at Makkah and his responses to them. The distinctive mark of the story of Joseph as marked from all other stories of the Prophets is that it is narrated in one chapter from beginning to end.

It concludes with the ayat:

"This is of the announcements of the things unseen which We reveal unto you and you were not with them when they resolved their plan and were scheming against him." (Quran 12:102)

This is an indirect reference to the conspiracy of the Quraysh plotters which schemed either killing the Prophet or banishing him or

imprisoning him. These alternative plots were the very ideas that the brothers of Joseph concocted (Quran 12:9-10) in order to get rid of him.

It is obvious that in the Quranic story of Joseph revealed to Muhammad (S.A.W.) is a prophetic announcement of the Prophet's success and that the will of Allah will prevail.

Allah says in the Quran (12:7)

“Certainly in the story of Yusuf and his brothers there are signs for the inquirer.”

After being raised to the highest dignity in the land, Joseph prays to God, and then follow the verses:

“This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which we have revealed to you and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affairs and they were devising schemes.” (Quran 12:102)

The enemies of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) were devising to put an end to his life. Allah is telling him that their plan would fail and that they will eventually come to him as Joseph's brothers came to Joseph asking forgiveness and pardon for their ruthlessness, cruelty and criminal intentions. Joseph's response was magnanimity, big-heartedness, beneficence and good for evil.

When the Prophet Muhammad, on the conquest of Makkah, took hold of the two sides of the door of the Kaaba and said to the Quraysh, “What treatment do you expect from me after all you have done to me and to my followers?” They said, “We hope for good from a noble brother and the son of a noble brother.” Then he said, “I say to you as my brother Joseph said, ‘There shall be no reproof against you this day. Allah may forgive you and He is the most Merciful of the merciful ones.’ (Quran 12:92)”

Distinguishing Features of Prophethood and Prophets

- 1) Their moral conduct is above reproach in nature and disposition. They are noble and generous and in every affair their attitude is always that of truthfulness, straight forwardness, and generosity.
- 2) Their intellect is sound and well balanced, their discussion is dictated by wisdom.
- 3) Their expression is simple, direct, easy of comprehension.
- 4) The prophets have knowledge of Reality with oracular guarantee of truth and certitude unparalleled by the discoveries of senses and intellect. They present a well- knit order of morals. The prophets do not claim to wield any power over the forces of nature nor do they claim to have an answer to every question.
- 5) They await revelation from God for enlightenment. The prophets are in close communion with the Almighty whose succor would always appear to be available to them. Sometimes supernatural phenomenon would appear to establish the truth of their message. The evidence of the Revealed Book is a living miracle for it contains innumerable miracles, verbal and solid, explicit and hidden for all time to come.

The story of Joseph in the Quran provides the frame for many stupendous literary accomplishments by Muslim writers, philosophers and poets.

The author of this book is an eminent scholar of the Quran and of the Arabic language. And this accomplishment is the product of years of patient laborious and indefatigable effort.

I am filled not only with justifiable astonishment at an almost incredible achievement in the art of religious-literary writing but also with memories of the author's enthusiasm when I volunteered to translate the book into English. The story of Joseph has a special appeal to all readers. Its narrative of events flowing in their time sequence telling of the occurrences of human life:

love and hate,
blessing and curse,
fraternal strife and paternal grief,
pride and penance,
fall and rise,

all these instabilities of human life within the comprehensive DIVINE Purpose constitute an organic epic of DREAM FULFILLMENT.

I started translating this book during the most turbulent circumstances of my life when everyday, in the period following 1967 onwards, hurled the wildest demands at the heart and the brain. As for me, I yield not to surprise or despair. I found in the story of Joseph solace and hope and I am grateful to this work whose translation sustained my steadfastness and my perseverance in the tempestuous change of things which decided my migration to Australia where I finished the translation of this book.

I enjoyed translating this book with a certain degree of regularity with a feeling that I am undertaking a task on behalf of human morality.

It is a unified, continuing story with strong political, social, societal, economic dealing with the human condition in a certain geographical historical area in which Joseph was destined to be what Allah wanted him to be and to have what Allah wanted him to have. He was involved head and heart in changing the course of events. He was exposed to rigorous self-examination and introspection.

“And with passion did she desire him. And he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of His Lord. Thus did We order that We Might turn away from him all evilness and disgraceful deeds, for he was one of Our servants, sincere and purified.”
(Quran 12:12)

“He said: O my Lord! The Prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me unless You turn away their snare from me. I should (in my youthful folly) feel inclined towards them and join

the ranks of the ignorant.” (Quran 12:33)

“So His Lord harkened to him (in his prayer) and turned away from him their snare, verily, He hears and knows all things.” (Quran 12:34)

Significance and Relevance: The Distinctive Highlights of the Story

1. The ruling passion of this blessed man who obviously never took for granted all the privileges and luxuries available to him, was his faith in Allah as His messenger.

Faith always finds lodgement best in the hearts of the true believers.

There is no descent whatever upon which a rising does not follow. The two belong together.

2. The general and the typical vary when they fulfill themselves to the particular so that the known becomes unknown and you cannot recognize it.
3. That which is undermost shall be turned uppermost.
4. Our being is only the meeting-place between not being and ever being - our temporal only the medium of the eternal.
5. For we avoid not the purposes of God but to anticipate and provide against it by proper foresight.
6. How to deal with the abundance to make it serve the scarcity.
7. The King of Egypt whose dream was interpreted by Joseph was Ikhnaton who was rather young and whose ruling passion was the knowledge of God. He was seeking the truth. He was a wanderer and even the sun which symbolized his belief was but as way-station on his painful wandering. He was restless and unsatisfied.

His thoughts went out beyond the sun and above it.

8. Joseph's economic plan was that they must husband the fullness against the ensuing scarcity and collect enormous stores in the barns to be given out in the barren years and establish the laws governing collection and distribution.

He was appointed the head of all the heads and overseer of all the overseers into whose hands the highest power is given. The King gave him plenary power and representative status. His status was that of Grand Vizier, sustainer of Egypt, vice-king. He was the overseer of that which the heavens give, the earth produces, and the Nile brings forth.

9. Joseph was not interested in the glory of the kingdom, in the color and pomp, in the extravagance of luxuries, in the titles attached to his name. He carried through important agrarian and economic reforms, among them the ground-rent law which has particularly impressed itself on history.
10. So we can imagine how Joseph's reputation as the overseer of all that plenty, waxed among the people and with what zealous joyful punctuality his ground-rent law, the tax of the fifth, was carried through not less by the taxed than the tax officials.

He was now in the prime of his life. God had snatched him away and transplanted him into Egypt for a purpose, a comprehensive plan of deliverance.

The friendship between the King and Joseph grew with the years into a warm and spiritual bond. Every expression of Joseph made on the King a great impression.

11. Everybody has a place in the history of the world. Simply to be born into it one must one way or the other contribute by one's little span one's mite to the whole of the world span. Most of us, however, swarm in the periphery, far off to one side, unaware of the world's history, unsharing in it, modest and at bottom not displeased at not belonging to its illustrious "dramatis personae".

12. Joseph was a harbinger of Truth in a land where there reigned Pharaohs and priests.

They believed, and from generation to generation taught their children that the River Nile arose out of the under world on its way to the Great Green, the unmeasureable ocean, that a human sacrifice of a beautiful maiden should be thrown unto the Nile every year.

Joseph managed to stop this most utterly superstitious ignorance and brutality. Joseph taught them that the Nile flood comes from the heights of Abyssinia as high as the rain. The well being of Egypt depends on how high the Nile rises. If the rains do not come, if instead of the moisture-bearing wind it blows regularly from the south and east from off the desert, then there is no hope of a harvest, aridity, crop failure and famine follow.

The winds, the rains, all the natural phenomena are controlled by God's will. Joseph saved Egypt from famine.

The King had dreamed and Joseph had interpreted.

Joseph was a glorious and awe-inspiring leader of men where elsewhere there had been no provision, no building of bins, no pre-planning. Egypt had enough to sustain it. Scarcity was controlled as the plenty had been before.

The grain business superintended by thousands of scribes and underscribes reached out all over Egypt throughout its length and breadth. Rich and poor came before Joseph for grain.

To the poor he distributed from the stores for nothing. He sold abroad too.

No provision, no looking ahead, no measure against calamity, which after all does exist in the world and can take on presentness at any moment. Joseph, the Prophet of Allah provided the measure by the grace and will of Allah. Only in Egypt there was corn and a grain market and Joseph was the keeper of the market and great lord of Egypt.

Jacob's question to his sons when death approached him and their answer sum up the continuity of time in faith: past, present and future.

“Were you witnesses when Jacob was on the verge of death. Behold, he said to his sons, What will you worship after me? They said, We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers of Abraham, Ismail and Isaac. The One True God, to Him we bow (in Islam).” (Quran 2:133)

The story of Joseph is cited as instance of men whose faith in God was rewarded and who found strength to resist particular temptations. The elaborations on his encounters with the wife of the Egyptian Aziz who had bought him as a slave illustrates how Allah recompenses the righteous.

In the time of most severe temptation Joseph exclaims:

“God keep me! Verily my Lord has given me a good home and the injurious shall not prosper.” (Quran 12:23)

“But she longed for him, and he had longed for her had he not seen a token from His Lord. Thus we averted evil and defilement from him for he was one of our sincere servants.” (Quran 12:24)

It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said the Hadith:

“The believers who are in the most perfect in faith are those who are the *happiest in disposition*.”

A good disposition is a bond of friendship from the mercy of Allah.

A good disposition melts offenses as the sun melts ice.

A good disposition is the greatest of Allah's creations.

He who has a good disposition will receive the same reward.

The Prophet was by nature full of mercy and forgiveness and of a good disposition. So was Joseph.

The Climax

“Go with 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 the family.” (Quran 12:93)

It was spring time.

Wild flowers gushed, blossoms far and wide, white, yellow and sky blue, purple and rose, low bushes, mats and tussocks of bloom. Only the merest flaky cloudlets gathered high up in the heavenly blue.

The glad tidings about Joseph will soon reach Jacob.

God has turned all to good in ways that humans keep wondering about and awe inspired.

The Quran does not give the details of this episode but we can surmise or assume that:

On the approach of the brothers to their father's abode they were met by some members of the family, some of the children, sons and daughters of the brothers, and one of them ran with the news as a clever bird singing, and perhaps the singer began to move steadily through the flowers, now fast, now slow, according to the measure of the song:

In praise of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Let my soul sing a new song as it flies with the glad tidings:

“Joseph is alive! Sweeter than the purest honey in the comb is to bring this news to Jacob in his home.

O God, Beneficent and Munificent

What has been decreed and what I have just heard from my cousins who were in Egypt and returned is a matter of splendor unmeasured."

"For who was it in Egypt they discovered lovely as a dream yet true and just as real as it is wonderful.

"I sing how God in His Mercy has blessed us. Joseph is alive, overlord of Egypt. His name they call Kings of the earth, His praise sing stranger folk kneeling to him tribute sing.

"Over all the storehouses is he set.
To all the people he gives their meat.
From thousands of barns he spends their bread to carry them over their hunger and need.

"And Joseph's name is over all accoladed. His garments is myrrh and in aloes are pressed. In ivory palaces he sets up his rest.

"While you believed him mangled and dead
And with tears overflowing mourning him in heart and head,
God preserved him for God can heal.
How marvelous all God's ways can be for human childrens' weal

"Past comprehension is God's rule.
Joseph, your beloved, your dearest and best was snatched and disappeared and Jacob has agony and pain.
But now Joseph is alive again
And we will all go to him in train.

"O grandfather Jacob, let me sing the glad tidings
For a word of wonder-rareness in my tune interweaves matching
all it has of fairness and it says "Your darling lives! How marvelous all the ways of God can be. God disposes no matter what man proposes.
Rarest wonder, in my singing interweaves.
Praise be to God - our darling lives."

A translator must carry the work of the author with all its major and minor ramifications in his head and on his shoulders. He must see the translation through the author's eyes.

I was filled with a powerful urge to do the author and to do myself justice, transforming the Arabic text into meaningful English.

Sometimes I felt impelled to place my heart and my head and my pen into the expressive rendering of the musicality and figurativeness of the aesthetic eloquence of the Arabic into English. The Arabic genius cannot be translated without some "loss." Its dignity, spirituality, majesty, elegance, gracefulness, refinement, exquisiteness have to be sustained with the earnestness of a devotee. Professor Bajouda possesses extraordinary Arabic linguistic gifts which make it easier for the translator to convey the Arabic meanings into English.

The story of Joseph is full of vitality and energy, of scenes of embarrassments, disappointments, bitterments and the ebb and flow of the vicissitudes of life. The cruelty of the jealous brothers who cast their brother in the pit to lay there for a time in the dark of the pit with worms crawling and rustling about him, is in sharp contrast to Joseph's magnanimity and forgiveness of his brothers who inflicted this torture on him. These contrasts evoke man's grimmest and brightest qualities. Joseph's heart was always sore for his father Jacob.

Joseph's downfall and abasement was followed by uplifting and elevation.

In the sequence of the story, especially during the period of his imprisonment, the past, the present and the future are blended so that they are like the colored ball which jugglers send flying out of their hands and catch again and you cannot see them as separate balls because they make a bright bow in the air.

Joseph found himself in a new environment where its denizens worship a King against a background of "death-like" rigidity of a religion of the tomb, where one did not speak in the first person to superiors but said your servant, or even with greater self-disparagement "this servant here." In prison where utter boredom reigns, the

Presence of God fills Joseph's heart. Joseph's beauty is impressive. He was beautiful beyond all beauty. His wisdom is impressive. He was a reed in the hand of God. A provider of wisdom. His talents worked together. His virtues were surpassing.

Joseph was put in prison for a crime that required discreet handling. It is an offense where the wife of the Aziz was concerned. It is not murder or theft or trespass or refusal to pay taxes or conniving with the tax collector or conspiring against the King.

Joseph brought with him to the prison superiorities and excellences that made him stand outside above and beyond his environment even though in confinement. Joseph's soulfulness and his mind always thought of God the Almighty who is the Supreme Willer of the above that becomes below and again mounts upward, of the laws of opposites of how order is reversed and things turned upside down. He is the Eternal, the all-wise, the Knower. The two prisoners whose dreams Joseph interpreted with the baker of bakers and the butler of butlers were realized.

Anyone who came into contact with Joseph felt him like the rosy dawn after the night and like cooling shade after the sizzle of the sun.

With majestic brilliance and blessing, Joseph spent the years of his imprisonment in a frame of mind of serenity. In Allah's will he found his peace.

Time passed for him as it does pass in the usual way, which we may call neither quickly or slowly, for it goes slowly, especially when one lives in expectation, yet when one considers all the phases of Joseph's life in their totality it appears to have gone very quickly. Then came the day of his release with extreme celerity, after long forgetfulness.

Joseph's faith in God and IMAN sustained him with serenity, tranquility, composure and calmness. Calmness means nothing but that a man is prepared for every event and when it comes he is not surprised. Joseph's unconquerable yearning to his father, and his devotion to God and his sense of mission were the stable ingredients

in his noble selfhood, the wonderful, illuminating supports in times of adversity.

The Dream of the King

The Quran mentions The King's dream with brevity.

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

Joseph said: “For seven years shall you diligently sow as if your wont, and the harvests that you reap you shall leave them in the ear except a little of which you shall eat. Then will come after that period seven dreadful years which will devour what you shall have laid by in advance of them—(All) except a little which you shall have (specially) guarded. Then will come after that (period) a year in which the people will have abundant water, and in which they will press (wine and oil).

So the King said: Bring you him unto me but when the messenger came to him (Joseph) said “Go back to your lord and ask him: What is the state of mind of the ladies who cut their fingers for my Lord is certainly well aware of their snare.” (Quran 12:43-50)

The Quran does not refer to the details of The King's life and the lavish and opulent sensual extravagance and hedonism in which the super rich lived. All the available evidence about ancient Egypt tells us that The King nestled into the cushions of his exquisitely ornate bed

which stood on a dais in the middle of the room, its headboard decorated with the finest ivory work displaying figures of jackals, goats and bees. To Joseph all such exorbitant waste was anathema, abhorrence and abomination.

The details of The King's dream are not given in the Quran. Perhaps it is not amiss to give the details here which are sourced from ancient Egyptian records and which do not conflict with the Quranic statement. The following is its synopsis:

In his dream he stood on the bank of the Nile, in a lonely, marshy, uncultivated spot. He had on his head the red crown of Lower Egypt, the beard was on his chin and the Jackal's tail fastened to his upper garment behind. Quite alone he stood, heavy hearted and held his crooked staff in his hand.

Then there was a rippling noise not far from the shore and seven shapes mounted from the stream: seven cows came on shore, they had probably been lying in the water like buffalo cows. They moved in a straight line one behind the other, seven without the bull for no bull was there, only the seven cows.

Magnificent cows they were: white ones, black ones, with lighter backs, grey with a lighter belly and two-dappled - five smooth fat kine with bursting udders, and long-lashed hathor eyes, and high curving lyre-shaped horns. They began to graze contentedly among the reeds. The King had never seen such fine cattle, not in the whole country. Their sleek well-fed bodies were something to see. Then more cows came out of the water joining those to these seven more cows climbed upon the bank, again without the bull. The King shuddered at the kine, they were the ugliest, leanest most starveling cows he had ever seen in his life - their bones stood out on their wrinkled hides, their udders were like empty bags with stringlike teats.

They were an alarming and upsetting sight. The wretched creatures seemed scarcely able to keep their legs. And yet they were so aggressive, bold and sudden - one could never have expected the like from such decrepit beasts, yet truly it was all too natural, since it was the recklessness of starvation.

The King watched: the haggard herd advances on the boney one, the calamitous cows leap on the well-favored ones as cows do when they play the bull, the poverty stricken devour and swallow the well-fed and simply wipe them out off the earth. Afterwards they stand there on the spot as lean as ever before, without one single sign of being any fuller.

Here this dream ended and the King, started for his sleep in a perspiration of fear, sat up with throbbing heart and looked about in the mildly lighted chamber.

But scarce was he asleep again when he dreamed again: again - or still - he stood on the bank in beard, and crown and tail and now there was on it a ploughed strip of black earth. And he beholds the loam disturbed, the crust rises, curls over, a stalk picks forth, and one, two, even up to seven ears sprung swiftly from it, one after another, all on one stalk, seven, full, fat ears bursting with golden fullness.

How blithe the heart could feel at such a sight.

Yet, cannot, for the stalk keep on shooting forth ears, seven ears more: poor, pathetic, dead and dry, scorched by the east wind, blackened with mildew and blight, and as they push out raggedly below the full ones, the seven large ears vanish as though into the poor lean ones. Truly it was like that: the wretched ears swallowed up the fat, just as before the ill-favored cows had devoured the sleek ones. And grew neither fuller nor better favored than before.

The King woke up. His excitement was great, it took the form of anger and the anger swelled up into a great resolve that danger must be revealed and recognized for what it was in order to meet it.

The dream interpreters were brought before him. Affliction was painted upon his face and his chin quivered. Some cows ate up some other cows? Some withered ears, some full ones? The twin dreams must have the unmistakable stamp of political significance.

The explanations he had been given by the interpreters were ineffectual twaddle, they did not in the least fit the dream, nor could the

dreams recognize themselves in the interpretation as dream and interpretation must recognize each other.

Danger threatened him. He panicked.

Leaving the dreams to interpret themselves without any preventive measures and proceed to their evil communication was beyond his capacity. He was in a state of tense expectancy and neurotic anxiety.

It was then that the Divine scheme of Allah intervened. His cup bearer remembered Joseph the youth in prison who had the greatest gift in the field of dream - exegesis. Joseph interpreted the dream. He said the cows are years: seven and seven and the ears of the corn which sprouted one after the other and to the same number.

When the King's messenger went to fetch Joseph, Joseph said: "Go back to your lord and ask him about the ladies who cut their hands and the snare they plotted against him."

The King brought the ladies and began his inquiry which revealed the manifest truth of Joseph's innocence by the confession of the Aziz's wife. The King then decided, "I will take him especially to serve about my own person", and he made his assurance to Joseph to firmly establish him in the highest rank.

The Quran, the speech of Allah gives the highlights of the story.

We learn from the annals of ancient Egypt that Joseph listened unaffectedly to the King. Then there would certainly be no time to lose thinking about expedients and preventive measures. Joseph said that by doing this they would not be avoiding evil because man cannot avoid the purposes of God, but he can anticipate it and provide against it by proper foresight.

He said to the King that the order of the dream was meant to instruct him. The fat kine came up first, then the lean which means from an economy of plenty to an economy of scarcity. How to deal with the abundance to make it serve the lack was the wisdom of Joseph. Joseph worshipped Allah alone who is further than far and nearer than near, the Merciful, the Compassionate from whom comes

light, beauty and Truth.

Joseph advised the King: "We must husband the fullness against the ensuing scarcity and collect enormous stores in the barns to be given out in the barren years."

In the Quran we read:

"Joseph said, Set me over the storehouses of the land. I will indeed guard them as one that knows their importance. Thus did we give established power to Joseph in the land, to take possession therein as, when or where he pleased." (Quran 12:55-56)

He shall build barns, direct the host of officials and establish the laws governing the collection. He shall investigate and find out where it is to be distributed gratis and where sold, shall arrange that the poor shall receive their due. Joseph became the head of all the heads and overseer over all the overseers into whose hands the highest power was given. He possessed, by the grace and will of Allah, after bondage, plenary power with loftiness and splendor. He had the power of the keys unlimited.

Joseph had strings of titles hung around his neck. But all these titles meant nothing to him nor the honeyed homage and adulation of the Egyptians. He felt in his soul the tenderest gratitude to Allah. We must not forget that at the bottom he was not interested in the glory of the Egyptian Kingdom, however much he had become Egyptian in his outward appearance and ways. And that whatever energetic benevolence he displayed to the inhabitants, however judiciously he served the public good, his inward eye remained concentrated on Allah. The Presence of Allah filled his consciencousness. Whatever he did was FI SABIL ALLAH (For the cause of God).

He carried through important reforms which have particularly impressed themselves on history. He never overstepped the limits of his field however likely it is that the affairs of the treasury and the administration of the granaries were too closely connected with his own operations for his authority not to have reached out unto them, for all that, designations like Lord over Land of Egypt and Regent of the

Lands remained for him mere ornamentation.

In Egypt, in the lands of the Nile all the soil except the properties of the priesthood belonged to the Pharaoh. The lands including the conquered or tributary provinces as far as the Nubia and the borders of Mitanniland were Pharaoh's private property. Joseph introduced many measures to relieve the poor and destitute from the Zulm (Oppression) of the Pharaoh.

Throughout the book the author has explicitly and implicitly emphasized the moral purport of the story. The knowledge imparted by the Prophets about God:

- a) Moral responsibility
- b) Accountability before God is the spiritual dynamic that exercised a profound influence on the attitude and behavior of Joseph.
- c) The firm belief in God and the hereafter and the conviction that every action of man will be adjudged by the Omniscient God Himself creates a sense of responsibility.

“Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is informed of what you do.” (Quran 5:8)

Jacob's eyesight is restored, another miracle by God. He departed from his own place and set forth with flocks and possessions with sons and sons' sons and daughters and daughters' sons. Their actual number is not known. The Caravan included shepherds, drivers, baggage, men, camels, mules, asses. Men were dressed in garments of woven wool and heavy desert cloaks.

Jacob was a very fine and dignified sight, surrounded by his sons. The breezes played in his silver beard. The inward gaze of his gentle eyes shows that he was most grateful to Allah while musing on both past and future. He thirsted for the reunion with Joseph. He had need to his heart's depths for the confirmation that God will fulfill his son's dream.

A trade route ran from the north east of the delta through the arid south land of Canaan via Beersheba to Hebron. The region was peopled with many settlements large and small. The road ran through stretches where not a blade of grass grew. They reached the borders of Egypt in seventeen days or perhaps a few more.

They had passes and official escort. For them there were no gates, no walls, no gratings. There was nothing but smiling politeness in lieu of the usual control. The King's officers had their orders from Joseph. Jacob and his family were invited into the land by Joseph, the overlord.

The reunion between Jacob and Joseph was a moment of gratefulness, thankfulness and praisefulness to Allah. It was a moment of exultation, blessedness, joy and wonder. Joseph's smiling lips shaped the word "Father" and he held his arms open before him. One can imagine that Joseph's eyes slowly filled with tears under Jacob's gaze. Their blackness swam in moisture, they overflowed.

Jacob said, "God has given and has taken you and He has given you back. He has raised you above your brothers just as in your dream. You are blessed, blessed from the heavens downward and from the depths that lie beneath, blessed with blitheness and destiny and with prophethood."

As the story nears its end we note with amazement and wonder how Joseph's presence in Egypt was decreed by Allah for a specific purpose in the Divine scheme. Joseph achieved popularity in Egypt as the reformer, the provider, the just. Joseph displayed the qualities of a prophet with a message.

Hand in hand with his services were the free distribution of grain among the famished and hungry little people of the cities. His tax reform and property reform, however, were short lived. His proceedings had as their consistent goal the dislocation of the property concept and its transformation into a state with the greatest benefit for the greatest number.

Scholars agree that this must have been towards the end of the

succession of the hungry years, when the bonds of infertility began to loosen, the rainfall returned to more or less normal and the fields would have been capable of yield if one could have sown them.

Joseph introduced new laws which changed the out-of-date of methods injurious to the general weal. Joseph, the prophet and statesman exploited the crisis to force the arrogant super-rich into compliance with the spirit of monotheism (TAWHID), which is based on compassion, justice, and righteousness.

What happened under Joseph was the breaking up of the still existing large estates and the setting of peasant owners on the smaller ones, farmers who became responsible to the state for an up-to-date management, improvement of canals, and irrigation of the soil. The result was a more even distribution of the land among the people, an improvement of the agriculture under government supervision.

Joseph's economic system and agrarian reform was an astonishing mixture of the welfare system, free enterprise and freehold occupancy by the individual - a mixture which the children of Egypt thought of as "magic." It was surely a mixture which only Divine Guidance through a prophet could balance. The criterion of free and personal property is the right of sale and inheritance and these Joseph permitted to continue. In the whole of Egypt all the land belonged to Pharaoh. At the same time it could be sold and inherited under Joseph's system.

The events of all these years, the plenty, the abundance, the preparation, and the saving of the people from famine, were quite enough to weigh down the scale of Pharaoh and the prestige and power of the "KAHANA" (the Priesthood). The Kings pacifism, his unwillingness to wage war were very much the product of the teachings of Joseph.

The author has succeeded in demonstrating that the story of Joseph in the Quran corrected the legendary vagueness and the resulting false impressions about Joseph's role in Egypt. Joseph's work of agrarian reform continued to bring the greatest justice for the greatest number.

From the time Joseph was cast in the pit by his brothers until he became the Regent of Egypt and the dream fulfillment, Joseph grew

older as the story went on. If we stop to consider we must conclude that the whole span covered a period of almost half a century.

Joseph, the Prophet, the statesman, the social and economic reformer, the most dearly beloved by all conveyed Allah's message with friendly appealingness, shrewdness and compassion. The main spring of all his actions and reactions was his faith in God and his message as a Prophet and son of a Prophet.

He was the herald of the light to a country that was ruled by Pharaohs. Pharaoh is mentioned in the Quran in different contexts seventy-five times. He is associated with tyranny, despotism, imperiousness, injustice, and disbelief in Allah. Joseph's presence in Egypt influenced the attitude of a Pharaoh but eventually it was aborted.

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers for their misdeeds and sin, his firm resolve and standing the test of temptation, his powers of resilience, his eventual triumph and the dream fulfillment form an integrated whole with organic unity and ordered progress, as shown by the author throughout this book with emphasis on the Thematic unity. The Quranic story itself has the characteristic stupendous genius of the Quran, the speech of Allah, in which we see love and hate, blessing and curse, fraternal strife and paternal grief, pride and penance, fall and rise.

As for me, I am grateful to this work as translator and introducer. As a unified continuing story, it is the story which inspires every reader with self-examination and introspection. No one remains quite what he was after reading this book.

The author, Professor Bajouda, has made a worthwhile contribution to both religious and literary studies. I must admit that in some parts of the story I felt that my translation is short of conveying the brilliance and genius of the Arabic language. In fact the Quran itself cannot be translated without grave loss.

I must also admit that I would not have been able to accomplish this task without faith in the worthiness of the task. There is always a measure of durability inherent in such assignments. I have a firm

conviction that this translation into English of the Arabic original will find its rightful place in libraries, homes, schools, Islamic centers, mosques and last but not least in the minds and hearts of Muslim youth all over the world.

CHAPTER ONE

The Sequential Unity and Ordered Progress in the Story of Joseph

When critics studied the development of the dream and the story, which are considered recent literary arts in Arabic literature, they found that thematic unity is the *sine qua non* for a work of art. When we discuss this thematic unity in the story of Joseph, we do not intend at all to make a comparison between the Quran on the one hand and the literary arts on the other. We only mean to discuss the thematic unity in the Quranic Sura, explain the organic unity and stress the artistic integratedness with all its refinements and expressiveness.

What is meant by thematic unity? Thematic unity means that the work of art possesses structural wholeness to such a degree that each part of the whole leads to the next and each part is indispensable in its own right as an integral part of the whole. No part can be dispensed with, and no addition can be made. The integrated whole of the parts constitutes a structural unity in itself and by itself.

In this connection we must emphasize from the outset that the Quran combines by its linguistic genius as a divine book, the best in artistic and religious aspects. The artistic is always a means to the religious. Hence they are inseparable.

The story of Joseph is composed of two divisions:

- a) The narrative division
- b) and the evaluative division in retrospect.

Firstly, we shall deal with the narrative one:

The Narrative

The story opens with the dream of Joseph (A.S.)

Allah said:

“When Joseph said unto his father: O my father! Lo! I saw in a

dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me. He said: O my dear son! Tell not thy brethren of thy vision, lest they conspire a plot against thee. Lo! Satan is an open foe to man. Thus thy Lord will prefer thee and will teach thee the interpretation of events, and will perfect His grace upon thee and upon the family of Jacob as He perfected it upon thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Lo! Thy Lord is Knower, Wise.” (Quran 12: 1-6)

The dream in this Sura plays a significant role in moving the sequence of events forward. The sun and the moon were interpreted to mean Joseph’s parents, while the planets were interpreted to mean his brothers. Jacob responds to his son that Allah chooses and prefers him and will teach him the interpretation of events.

The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is reported to have said: “The vision of the true faithful is one of forty (1/40), in another version it is one of forty-six (1/46) of prophethood.” This was the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad’s (S.A.W.) prophethood - “Every dream he saw was fulfilled as clear as daylight.”

The characters, the dramatis personae around which the story revolves and evolves are mentioned from the outset. There is also mention of the expected plot in the words of Jacob warning his son not to narrate his vision to his brothers. All of them were united in their jealousy of Joseph and in their intent to get rid of him, but were in disagreement as to the means to this end. Some suggested murdering him. Others suggested casting him off to some other land where his safety and survival are most precarious.

Only one of them proposed flinging him into the depth of the pit and thus achieving the desire of getting rid of him and the slight possibility of his safety and survival. This was the action-proposal that received consensus at the end. Allah said in the Quran:

“When they said verily Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, many though we may be. Lo! Our father is in plain aberration. Kill Joseph or cast him to some (other) land so that your father’s favor may be all for you and (that) ye may after-

ward be righteous folk. One among them said: Kill not Joseph but, if ye must be doing; fling him into the depth of the pit, some Caravan will find him.” (Quran 12:7-9)

And so the attempt starts by Joseph’s brothers to take him away and to fling him into the depth of the pit. Jacob’s response to them reinforced their envy of Joseph for it implied the very reason for it, namely Jacob’s preferential love of Joseph and his protective fear for him:

“They said: O our father! Why will you not trust us with Joseph, when lo! We are his good counselors? Send him with us tomorrow that he may have fun and play. And lo! We shall look after him. He said: Lo! In truth it grieves me that ye should take him with you and I fear lest the wolf devour him while you are heedless of him. They said: If the wolf should devour him when we are (so strong) a band, then surely we should have already perished.” (Quran 12:11-14)

We notice that the mention of the wolf to which the devouring of Joseph is later attributed is made twice and thus when later on the brothers tell the lie that the wolf devoured Joseph, we do not find this false pretense strange. It does not shock us since there is an association between the wolf and deceit especially with the defenseless.

The same pre-conditioning applies to the caravan people who picked up Joseph from the pit and sold him. The word “caravan” and the act of picking up have already been mentioned prior to the event: “Some caravan will find him.” Also the expectation of selling Joseph as a slave in that age of buying and selling slaves does not surprise us. The caravan who sold him were afraid lest they should be inquired as to the source or origin of the boy. This is normal in such transactions. Therefore they preferred to sell him at a cheap price.

“And they sold him for a low price, a number of silver coins and they attached no value to him.” (Quran 12:20)

Joseph in the House of Al Aziz of Egypt

Joseph eventually arrives in Egypt and is treated generously by its Aziz who bought him from the caravan. He requests his wife to treat him as if he were her son as he himself did. This is quite normal from a husband and wife who were childless, have no offspring and find a beautiful boy who augers well for the future.

Joseph reached his prime in that household. Allah said in the Quran:

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

Allah gave him sagacity which will save him from the critical conflict in which he found himself. And gave him knowledge which enabled him to attain the highest office.

As to the critical conflict which confronted him by the attempt of the wife of Al Aziz to seduce him, bolting the doors closed and saying: “Come!”, Joseph’s fear of Allah saved him from an evil act.

“And she, in whose house he was, asked of him an evil act. She bolted the doors and said: Come! He said: I seek refuge in Allah. Lo! He is my Lord, who has treated me honorably. Wrongdoers never prosper.” (Quran 12:24)

She was burning with desire to seduce him and he would have desired her if it had not been that he saw the proof of His Lord.

“Thus it was, that we might ward off from him evil and lewdness. Lo! He was of our chosen worshippers. And they raced one another to the door and she tore his shirt from behind and they met her master at the door. She said: What shall be his recompense, one who wishes evil to thy folk save prison or a painful doom? Joseph said: “She it was who asked of me an evil act.” (Quran 12:25)

Consider this conflict in such an ominous situation. Seduction and insistence from one side and resisting the temptation with will power

from the other side. Let us consider, as if we were seeing the act on a stage, that movement made by Joseph towards the door to escape with his religion while the wife of Al Aziz is racing after him to force him back until she tore his shirt from behind.

The appearance of the husband at this very moment motivated the wife to accuse Joseph which prompted him to deny the accusation saying:

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

If Joseph had one iota of evil intention, he would have never dared utter that refutation which infuriates the wife who, if she had found him responsive to her advances, she would have saved him from the crisis of confronting the husband at the door. The answer of Joseph was decisive. It is the answer of an innocent pure person.

By the will of Allah, the mind, the enlightened mind, plays its restraining role and saves the young man from this quandary for the moment until a witness of her own folk testified against her:

“And a witness of her own folk testified: If his shirt is torn from front then she speaketh truth and he is of the liars. And if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is of the truthful. So when he saw his shirt torn from behind he said: Lo! This is of the guile of you women. Lo! The guile of you is great.

O Joseph! Turn away from this and then (O woman) ask forgiveness for your sin. Lo! You are of the sinful.” (Quran 12:26-27)

The witness from her household, hastening to advance evidence, is indicative of divine Providence. It corresponds with Joseph's need to prove innocent while at the same time the relative's motivation is the reverse. The logical argument: “If his shirt is torn from front, she is truthful and he is a liar, and if his shirt is torn from behind then she has lied and he is truthful....” was not meant to prove the woman guilty. In fact he wanted to prove her innocence beyond any conceivable doubt. But Allah wanted to confirm veracity and refute falsehood.

The story of the wife of Al Aziz's attempt to seduce Joseph spread in the city and became the chatter of the women. Like all corrupt societies, women waste their time in backbiting. On the other hand, it did not occur to Al Aziz's mind to separate his wife and a young man. The Egyptian society of that time lacked the wisdom of the separation between sexes.

The woman decides to justify to the city chatterboxes her desire to seduce Joseph:

“And women in the city said: The ruler's wife is asking of her slave-boy an ill-deed. Indeed he has smitten her to the heart with love. We behold her in plain aberration. And when she heard of their sly talk, she sent for them and prepared for them a cushioned couch (to lie on at the feast) and gave to every one of them a knife and said to (Joseph): come out unto them! And when they saw him they exalted him and cut their fingers, exclaiming: God blameless! This is not a human being. This is no other than some gracious angel.” (Quran 12:30-31)

The ruler's wife has made her point. She has rationalized her desire to seduce Joseph by the comments made by the city women. She confesses that she attempted to seduce him and that it was he who resisted the temptation and refused it.

“She said: This is he on whose account ye blamed me. I asked of him an evil act, but he proved continent, but if he does not my behest he verily shall be imprisoned, and verily shall he be of those degraded.” (Quran 12:32)

Suddenly she makes public her intention to cause his imprisonment and degradation if he insists on his attitude. In a corrupt society, women of such status are capable of all sorts of intrigue.

Joseph seeks refuge in Allah declaring his powerlessness in the face of such overwhelming odds. Allah answers his prayer as He does for sufferers when they pray to him sincerely.

“He said: O my Lord! Prison is more dear to me than that unto

which they urge me, and if you fend not off their wives from me I shall incline unto them and become of the ignorant. So His Lord heard his prayer and fended off their wives from him. Lo! He is Hearer, Knower. And it seemed good to them (the men-folk) after they had seen the signs (of his innocence) to imprison him for a time." (Quran 12:33-35)

Here we see the integration of the artistic objective and the religious objective.

Thus Joseph is imprisoned unjustly. The idea of imprisonment is no surprise to us. It has already been explicitly hit upon more than once. Joseph is prepared for it, and we the readers are psychologically ready to accommodate it.

1. "She said: What shall be his recompense who intends evil to your folk save prison or a painful doom." (Quran 12:25)
2. "If he does not do my behest he verily shall be imprisoned and verily shall be of those degraded." He said: "O my Lord! Prison is more dear to me than unto which they urge me." (Quran 12:32-33)

Joseph in Prison

In prison, dream has another significant role to play when two young prisoners narrated to Joseph their dream and asked him to announce to them the interpretation. The story of Joseph commences with his dream which is not interpreted yet in terms of fulfillment. Now comes his interpretation of other dreams while in prison which plays another significant role in the progressive movement of the narrative of events.

Joseph is forgotten in prison. He could have remained in it forgotten until he died, had it not been for Allah's will. The King of Egypt dreamt a dream which none could interpret for him. His cup bearer, who was one of the two prisoners with Joseph suddenly remembers Joseph the dream interpreter who formerly interpreted his dream and the other dream of the baker—both came true. What were the dreams of the two young prisoners? Allah says in the Quran:

“And two young men went to prison with him. One of them said: I dreamed that I was pressing wine. The other said: I dreamed I was carrying upon my head bread whereof the birds were eating. Announce unto us the interpretation for we see you of those good (at interpretation).

He said: The food which you are given daily shall not come unto you but I shall tell you the interpretation ere it comes unto you. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. Lo! I have forsaken the religion of folk who believe not in Allah and are disbelievers in the hereafter.

And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute aught as partner to Allah. This is of the bounty of Allah unto us (the seed of Abraham) and unto mankind, but most men give not thanks.

O my two fellow-prisoners! Are diverse Lords better or Allah the One, the Almighty. Those who you worship beside Him are but names which you have named you and your fathers. Allah has revealed no sanction for them. The decision rests with Allah only,

who has commanded you that you worship none save him.

This is the right religion, but most men know not.

O my two fellow-prisoners! As for one of you he will pour out wine for his lord to drink and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head.

Thus is the case judged concerning which you did inquire.”
(Quran 12:36-41)

It is evident that the last ayat (verse) only includes the interpretation of the dream. What preceded it is an introduction to it.

Let us examine the thematic unity in the entire ayat. We know that the primary function of the Prophets of Allah is to convey His message and communicate the trust of unity of Allah. The verses which preceded the interpretation of the two dreams are an integral part of the thematic unity of the story.

Joseph communicates the message in prison. The two prisoners resort to him because they have heard of his impeccable character. They confide to him their innermost souls. Joseph avails himself of this confidence and calls them to reject polytheism and to worship the One God.

Joseph's approach to the two prisoners is the approach of a true messenger. He reveals to them that his knowledge comes from God. The unfortunate prisoner who would be crucified is now ready to accept his fate. His belief in God sustains him in time of adversity. On the other hand, he requested the one who would be released to mention him in the presence of his lord and thus to undo the injustice done to him.

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

In one very real sense Joseph's request or no request were the same in terms of outcome.

Joseph could have stayed in prison indefinitely until his death but Allah's compassion had aided him always and Allah's will willed that the King dreams a most disturbing dream. Here comes the third role played by dreams in moving the events of the story forward. Allah says in the Quran:

“And the King said: Lo! I saw in a dream seven fat kine which seven lean were eating, and seven green ears of corn and other seven dry. O Notables! Expound for me my vision, if ye can interpret dreams. They answered: Jumbled dreams! And we are not knowing in the interpretations of dreams.” (Quran 12:43-44)

Thus there was unanimity in the ignorance of interpreting the dream. It was then, at this very moment, and after such a long pause that one of the two prisoners who had been spared remembered Joseph whose precise interpretation was earlier realized for him and his companion in prison who was crucified and the wild birds devoured his head. He promised, with confidence that he would see to it that the King's dream would be interpreted and said: “Therefore send me forth.” (Quran 12:45) Concerning this remembrance, Allah, the exalted said:

“And he of the two who was released and (now) at length remembered said: I am going to announce unto you the interpretation, therefore send me forth.” (Quran 12:45)

And when he came to Joseph in the prison he exclaimed:

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

Joseph said: “You shall sow seven years as usual, but that which you reap, leave it in the ear, 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 have stored. Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plentiful crops and then they will press wine and oil. And the King said: Bring him unto me....” (Quran 12:47)

And thus the persuasive meaningful interpretation of the dream, reached the King and he summoned Joseph.

Joseph, mindful of fulfilling his message, did not deny his oppressors the advice by interpreting the dream significant to them. He offered them what Allah granted him of knowledge concerning the fifteenth year.

What was Joseph’s stance on being summoned by the King? He knows with certainty that his confinement in prison, during this long period is the will of Allah, therefore he bears it with patience and resignation to Allah’s will. When the King summons him he does not rejoice in being released. He is not even concerned with this audience with the King and its consequence, not in the least. What concerns him most is that everybody should know that he was imprisoned unjustly and as an act of vengeful aggression.

Here is revealed the magnanimity and lofty character which distinguish every Prophet. He very subtly hints at the matter without exposing the lustful wife, who was the first cause in what befell him. He only mentions the women who cut their fingers.

“When the messenger came to him, he replied: Return to your master, and ask him how it is with the women who cut their hands. My God knows all their cunning.” (Quran 12:50)

Let us consider the question posed by the King implying his certainty in Joseph’s innocence.

“(The King) said (to the women): What have you to say about your tempting Joseph to commit adultery?” They replied: “God Almighty we know no evil of him.” The wife of the ruler said: “Now the truth has been made clear. I did tempt him to commit adultery

with me. It was indeed he who was speaking the truth.” (Quran 12:51)

So his innocence was established by the women and was firmly established beyond any conceivable doubt by the confession of the Ruler’s wife.

Here we notice also the overflowing of Joseph’s integrity and his abundant modesty.

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

Joseph, the Chief Executive of Egypt

After Joseph's innocence has been publicly established, the King is not satisfied with merely summoning him as he had done before, but goes beyond that to keep him exclusively for himself.

"The King said: Bring him to me. I will keep him exclusively for myself." (Quran 12:54)

And when Joseph, who refused to come earlier until his innocence was proved, came to the King, he says to Joseph:

"Today you are firmly established with us, you are trustworthy." (Quran 12:54)

Thus the incidents of the story keep moving sequentially. Joseph's purity and his integrity played a major role in the succession of scenes. Joseph had proven his integrity and had interpreted the King's vision foretelling hard times to come, brought on by a famine that would bitterly affect the people. The King was confident that Joseph was the most suitable to take over the responsibility of Treasurer of the land of Egypt and he favored him with this high status. Joseph, with integrity and strength, did not hesitate to say:

"Set me over the storehouses of the land. Lo! I am a skilled custodian." (Quran 12:55)

It is public interest and the welfare of the people that motivated him to apply for such a then vacant responsible job which required integrity and knowledge. And thus Joseph achieved his objective and became the Treasurer and chief executive of Egypt. The King's happiness at accepting Joseph's application was not less than Joseph's happiness for having the opportunity to perform a serious undertaking most imperative for the people's survival. Joseph's distinguished qualifications of integrity and strength of character were eloquent testimony of the Divine Will of Allah in guiding his path. The status and power he was granted also gave him the ability to call for the religion of Allah which Allah has favored for all his creatures. This was partial recompense for Joseph's goodness granted to him in this

world since what awaits him in the hereafter is only known by Allah. Allah says in the Quran:

“Thus we gave power to Joseph in the land. He was the owner of it where he pleased. We reach with Our mercy whom We will. We do not stint the reward of those who do good. Indeed the reward of the world to come is better (than this) for those who believe and are devout.” (Quran 12:56)

The Holy Quran aims at man's happiness in the two worlds in order to emphasize the fact that the world to come is better than the first world.

The First Journey of Joseph's Brothers to Egypt

The seven green years passed followed by the seven hardship years as prophesied by Joseph in his interpretation of the King's dream. The hardship was not confined to one area nor was the famine restricted to one community or group. In the first seven green years, Joseph acted exactly as he described himself. "I am a skilled custodian." (Quran 12:55) He put into practice the advice he gave to others. "That which you reap, leave it in the ear all save a little which you eat."

So, he had surplus to satisfy the unmet needs of the people in time of hardship. He could, thus help the needy according to a well organized plan. His good reputation spread all over every place and people flocked towards him. Among those who came to receive corn were his brothers. They do not recognize him. He asks them to bring to him their younger brother as a condition for receiving more corn. Allah said:

"And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him, and he recognized them but they did not recognize him. And when he supplied them their provision he said: "Bring unto me a brother of yours from your father. See you not that I fill up the measure and I am the best of hosts?" And if you bring him not unto me, then there shall be no measure for you..., nor shall you draw near. They said: We will try to win him from his father, that we will surely do. He said unto his attendants: Place their merchandise in their saddlebags, so that they know it when they go back to their folk, and so will come again.

So when they went back to their father they said: O our father! The measure is denied to us, so send with us our brother that we may obtain the measure, surely we will guard him. He said: Can I entrust him to you same as I entrusted his brother to you aforetime? Allah is better at guarding and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy.

And when they opened their belongings they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said: O our father! What more can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us.

We shall get provision for our folk and guard our brother, and we shall have the extra measure of a camel (load). This (that we bring now) is a light measure.”

(Quran 12:58-65)

And so Joseph's brothers came to him after all that long period. It was natural for him to recognize them and for them not to recognize him because it did not occur to their mind at all that the Treasurer and chief executive of Egypt before them is their brother Joseph whom they had left in the depth of the well. They probably believed that he perished in one way or another and certainly, in such a harsh environment, as they abandoned him in, there are many means and ways of perishing. The generous Joseph was especially overgenerous with them to the greatest possible extent. Joseph's full brother did not join them in the first visit because he was Jacob's solace after Joseph. But Joseph's plan was to retain his brother with him as a first step to bring all his folk at the proper time and in God's good time to live with him.

What were the steps that Joseph took to bring over his brother and to induce his father to permit him to depart from his company? We already learned that Joseph was generous with his brothers. He supplied them with their provisions and left their merchandise for them knowing they were in desperate need for corn and they would be forced to return to him to satisfy the same recurrent need. He asked them to bring him their brother from their father, the full brother of Joseph, and promised to treat him very generously. He would treat them with equal generosity because they would prove their veracity and truthfulness by bringing him over. He would then have no reason for suspicion in them another time.

Joseph was fully aware of the difficulties they would encounter in bringing his brother. Because of this expectation, he strongly motivated them to bring him setting it as a condition that if they return without him they would be denied provisions. He even went further by telling them not to come near him if the brother is not with them:

“And if you bring him not unto me, then there shall be no measure for you with me, nor shall you draw near.” (Quran 12:60)

Joseph's brothers expected their father's opposition who found solace in Joseph's brother after Joseph's disappearance. They were also painfully aware of their desperate need for food. Their reply implied the great effort they had to make to persuade their father to fulfill the desire of the Treasurer and chief executive of Egypt.

"They said we will try to win him from his father: that we will surely do." (Quran 12:61)

Was Joseph satisfied with this promise from them? No, he was not. He advanced a number of attractive temptations to make them return on the condition fixed by him in his deal. He instructed his attendants to place the merchandise they had used to pay for the corn, in their saddlebags and so that when they returned to their folk they would find the merchandise that they had paid to the governor. Since they would not accept anything illegal they would hasten to return to settle the account. This would be another motivation for their return accompanied by his brother.

He said unto his young men: "Place their merchandise in their saddlebags, so that they may know it when they go back to their folk, and so will come again." (Quran 12:62)

We should remember this particular act by Joseph, for this would be his means in the future for the retention of his brother after he came to him. Allah said:

"And when he provided them with their provision he put the drinking cup in his brothers' saddlebags and then a crier cried: "O camel riders, You are surely thieves." (Quran 12:70)

The brothers returned to their father. The first thing they uttered was the governor's denial to give them provisions in the future unless their brother is with them. They added that if he joined them, they would get what they were given before. The brothers did not forget what they did to Joseph earlier. They stressed that they would guard their brother using the emphatic term "we will guard him well," as if, out of a sense of guilt they were denying the accusation condemning them for not guarding Joseph. They were also hoping Jacob would not

recall to them blamingly what happened to Joseph. In fact, they unwittingly behaved against what they tried to escape from.

He said: "Can I entrust him to you same as I entrusted his brother to you aforetime?"

Allah is better at guarding and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy." (Quran 12:64)

Jacob had certainty that Allah is most guarding and the most compassionate toward him. Certainly more than his own sons. The matter was just about to end there. Jacob did not want to reopen the old wound by further talking about Joseph. On the other hand, the brothers, whose crime of throwing Joseph into the well was like a perpetual ghost hovering before them, dare not push the issue of the provision any further because it was connected with their brother who was Jacob's solace after Joseph.

Here the role of the merchandise placed in their saddlebags plays its intended role. The brothers break their silence. The father leaves his stubbornness for retaining Benjamin, the full brother of Joseph. The sequence of events in the story moves forward.

"And when they opened their belongings they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said: "O our father: What (more) can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us. We shall get provision for our folk and guard our brother and shall have the extra measure of a camel (load). That is a light measure (in the sight of the governor of Egypt)." (Quran 12:65)

And thus the presence of the price of their provision in their saddlebags, which they never expected, was instrumental in forcing the brothers to resume the discussion of the same subject, not in a hurry as they did earlier, but in a more detailed discourse. In addition to that their morale was raised by finding the price of the provision in their possession. While earlier they advanced their concern for the denial of their measure, they now focused on the food they could secure and their guard for their brother, assuming that their father would permit them to take him with them. The extra measure of a camel (load) is

the portion of that brother. They also signified the generosity of the governor of Egypt to whom the extra measure of the camel (load) is a light measure.

Before we discuss the change in Jacob's attitude, we like to consider the statement of the brothers concerning the full brother: "Surely we will guard him." Here, they were completely truthful while in the case of Joseph they were not. They were not jealous of Benjamin as they were jealous of Joseph.

On the other hand, Jacob's grief for Joseph, which they did not expect to be so intense, had a decisive impact on them especially on the eldest as we shall see. In Jacob's reprimand for them he hit upon the "guarding" that they committed themselves to concerning Joseph

"They said: O our father! Why don't you trust us with Joseph, when lo! We are good advisers to him?"

This time, his reaction was expressed as follows:

"He said: Can I entrust him (Benjamin) to you same as I entrusted his brother to you aforetime?"

Jacob was aware of the brothers' jealousy of Joseph but when they asked him to send him over with them to play and have fun he had no concrete evidence to motivate him to refuse their request. Therefore he simply expressed his worry that a wolf might eat him while they neglect him. But now he has very strong reasons from experience to refuse their request and to blame them for their past.

But what was the dynamic behind Jacob's change of attitude and breaking his silence?

Allah said: "He said: I will not send him with you until you give me an oath/pledge in the name of Allah that you will bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded. And when they gave him their pledge he said: Allah is the warden over what we say."
(Quran 12:66)

Jacob was certain that Allah's Will shall prevail, if He wills to protect him, He will and if He does not He will not. Thus he comments on the brothers' statement: "verily we will guard him by emphasizing God's Will." He also adds to his saying "Can I entrust him to you same as I entrusted his brother to you aforetime?", the following: "Allah is better at guarding and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy." The purport is that the brothers' guarding is dependent on Allah's guarding, otherwise it is futile. The statement "unless you are surrounded or overpowered" is indicative of Jacob's complete submission to Allah. Therefore, Jacob did not ask them more than a pledge and when they gave their pledge he said "Allah is the warden over what we say." Jacob's faith in the Will of Allah is absolute.

However, Jacob's worry is not confined to Joseph and his full brother but to all his sons naturally. Therefore he advises them not to enter the city through one gate but to go in by different gates:

"And he said: O my sons! Go not by one gate; go in by different gates. I can avail you nothing against Allah. The final decision rests with Allah only. In Him I put my trust and in Him let all the trusting put their trust." (Quran: 12:67)

The fear of the ill-luck that comes from envy in the hearts of others, can only be prevented by submission to Allah's Will unconditionally.

The Brothers' Second Journey to Egypt

The brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin. They enter the city in the manner advised by their father. Here the Quranic ayat refer to the fact that the father's advice, for fear of unexpected evil or malice was by inspiration from Allah, the Exalted. This is an assurance of the existence of evil and malice and that men should protect themselves against it. Offsetting the evil and malice by human effort and submission to Allah are not mutually exclusive.

“And when they entered in the manner which their father had enjoined, it would have naught availed them as against Allah. It was but a need of Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied. And lo! He was a lord of knowledge we had taught him, but most mankind know not.” (Quran 12:68)

Although they entered the city in the way their father had ordered them, this did not protect them against Allah's Will. What he ordered them was given out of a longing in Jacob's soul for he had knowledge that Allah had imparted to him. When they eventually came before Joseph, Joseph took his brother Benjamin apart and told him who he was and comforted him and told him not to put any blame on his brothers for their ill-treatment and not to feel offended or take it to heart.

In the Quran we read:

“When they came before him, Joseph took his brother apart and said to him: “Truly I am your brother, so do not be distressed at what they did.” (Quran 12:69)

Now, how did Joseph retain his brother Benjamin?

A gold vessel is put in Benjamin's bag. He is accused of theft. We know already that Joseph placed their merchandise in their saddlebags to ensure their return with his brother. Now he resorts to the same deliberate plan, but this time in order to retain, or rather detain, his brother after having informed him about his identity. He has hope by the help of Allah of achieving success in his stratagem.

Allah said "And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking cup in his brother's saddlebags, and then a crier cried: O camel riders! You are surely thieves." They cried, coming toward them: What is it you have lost? They said: We have lost the King's vessel and he who brings it shall have a camel load and I (the caller in the name of Joseph) am answerable for it. They said: By Allah, well you know we came not to do evil in the land, and we are not thieves. They said: And what shall be the penalty for he whose bag the cup is found? "The penalty should be that he in whose saddlebag it is found, should be held as (bondsman) to atone for the crime. Thus it is We punish the wrong doers". (Quran 12:70-75)

Joseph's brothers, with the exception of their treatment of Joseph and his brother, were almost perfect in character. So the accusation was shocking to them and most provocative. The reward for the person who finds the lost vessel was a camel load guaranteed by Joseph.

Here the prevailing atmosphere of famine still plays its role. The pressing need for food imposes a number of imperatives. First, there is the extra camel load expected by the brothers to return with, and with their brother (Benjamin) as well. This is a quantity in excess of the quantity they got last time. There is also the promise of a camel load for the person who finds the King's vessel and returns it.

The psychological and pragmatic factors in the situation are too obvious to warrant further analysis. Suffice it to mention that here we find ordered progress in the cumulative impact of the narrative of events in their time sequence each one leading logically to the consequentiality.

They said: "By Allah, well you know we came not seeking mischief (or malice) in the land and are not thieves." (Quran 12:73)

They felt hurt to be falsely accused and denied their intentionality to corrupt the earth by their coming to the governor. They refer to the past as an eloquent testimony of their honesty.

Before we move to the next ayat (verse), it is relevant to stress a point of great significance in this context, namely the penalty for theft in the concept of Jacob and Joseph's brothers on the one hand and in the concept of the King of Egypt on the other hand. In Joseph's community-concept the penalty for the thief was enslavement for a year. In the Pharonic code it was simply to return the stolen thing plus the value of its worth. No enslavement was imposed.

Here the divine intervention plays its role in order to achieve the planned scheme by Allah. The brothers are asked about the penalty that the thief deserves in case the cup is found in his saddlebags. The answer was consistent with Jacob's code since it was unthinkable for the brothers to deviate from the norms of their father, a Prophet of Allah, and have recourse to a secular code that is man-made. Let us ponder the statement by Allah:

“They said: And what shall be the penalty for it if you prove liars? They said: The penalty for it! He in whose bag (the cup) is found should be held as bondsman to atone for it! Thus we requite wrongdoers.” (Quran 12:74)

“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 Allah willed. We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will and over every lord of knowledge there is One more knowing.” (Quran 12:76)

Now let us consider Allah's saying:

“Thus did we contrive for Joseph.”

If divine providence had not interfered and Allah's inspiration for Joseph to ask the brothers publicly about the penalty for theft in their own code, and their choice for its application because it is ordained by Allah, all Joseph's scheming would have not been adequate to justify the retention of his brother.

Let us also consider the saying by Allah:

“He could not have taken his brother according to the King’s law unless Allah willed.”

The application of the King’s law was supposed to be imposed. However, although it was considered suitable by the King’s folk and well approved by them, yet the will of Allah aided Joseph in taking his brother. Thus the secular human law was discarded and Allah’s law and Judgement were used.

Let us also consider Allah’s saying:

“We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will.”

Joseph was tested and proved his patience in adversity and his piety and true worship and surrender to Allah. He called for his religion (TAWHID). Allah granted him in this world authority and intuitive knowledge and incalculable blessings and raised his status in this world and in the hereafter, as Allah said

“And the reward of the hereafter is better, for those who believe and are pious.”

And then comes this significant statement:

“And over every knower there is One more knowing.”

The meaning is: no matter how knowledgeable a human can be, Allah the exalted is more knowing. The same meaning is referred to in the Sura Al Isra (The night Journey) ayat 85:

“Whatever knowledge you possess is meager.”

As an illustration the knowledge possessed by Joseph was nothing but inspiration from Allah.

The sequence here satisfies both the religious and artistic objectives. The brothers were flabbergasted and the impact of the shock imbalanced them. It never occurred to their mind that the stolen cup would be found in their brother’s bag. They also realized the danger

of the Judgement they advanced in terms of their code that a thief is to be enslaved.

What is the consequence of all this? Will they return to their father without their brother? Where are the sugary promises they pledged to their father? How will they confront him brotherless after giving him the oath for Allah and the pledge to bring him back? Certainly what happened to Joseph's brother is implied in the saying by Allah upon Jacob's tongue: "Unless you are surrounded."

However, they were wondering when would Jacob believe them that what happened was ordained destiny. What they had done to Joseph in the past was looming large in their horizon. Their father will eventually believe them but after grief had ruined him.

How would Jacob receive the shock, (while he cherished the hope in Joseph's return one day) of his brother's disappearance, a wound similar to the former? All hopes will be futile and new grief will be added to the old.

There is an old Arab saying as follows: "Piercing an old wound by a new wound is excruciatingly painful." What is the excruciating pain here? It is Joseph. Joseph's brother was the solace for Jacob. Now the solace, too, is gone. The brothers know with certainty how beloved their brother is to their father. They were also aware that he was his solace after Joseph of whom they got rid of...out of envy.

Now this envy developed into further envy and from this feeling they expressed:

"They said: If he steals, a brother of his stole before." (Quran - 12:77)

The implication here is that Joseph was the source of their distress before, and his brother is the source of distress now since the evidence of his theft is established and this will entail numerous troubles.

The incident reminded them of an occurrence which Joseph carried out in his early childhood. There was an idol worshipped by idolaters

and Joseph took it away and smashed it. The brothers were so consumed with jealousy that they ignored the difference between the two thefts.

What was Joseph's response?

“Joseph kept it secret in his innermost soul and revealed it not unto them. He said within himself: You are in worse case and Allah knows best (the truth of) that which you allege.” (Quran 12:77)

It is obvious that the statement Allah knows best refers to the allegation which Allah knows that Joseph is innocent of.

The brothers pursued the matter that was of vital concern to them. Allah said “They said: O ruler of the land! Lo! He has an aged father, so take one of us instead of him. Lo! We behold you of those who do kindness.” (Quran12:78)

They requested the governor who was good to them to treat them with the same goodliness in this crisis which they themselves brought upon themselves by their choice of Jacob's code concerning the penalty for him. But Joseph, the fair, replies as the Quran reports:

“He said: Allah forbid that we should seize save him with whom we found our property, otherwise we should be wrongdoing.” (Quran12:79)

The logical reply by Joseph made them restlessly despair of their brother's return. They moved away from the crowd and sought seclusion to discuss the matter privately.

Allah said: “So when they despaired of (moving) him they conferred together apart.” (Quran 12:80)

One relevant observation here is that the hearts of the brothers were not purified. Joseph's stratagem was to purify their hearts and to bring them to the folds of the pure honest family of Jacob and its firm roots and branches so that they would be thoroughly integrated into their bosom.