

The Story of Joseph

(part 1 of 7): The Tale Begins



This is a tale of intrigue and deception, of jealousy, pride, and passion... and it is not *The Bold and the Beautiful*. It is a saga of patience, loyalty, bravery and compassion... and it is not Dr Phil or Oprah. It is the story of Prophet Joseph, may God shower him with His praises. The same Joseph known from the Andrew Lloyd Webber production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and the same Prophet Joseph known in Christian and Jewish traditions. God revealed this story to Prophet Muhammad when an Israelite asked him to tell him what he knew about Joseph.^[1] Stories in Quran are usually told in small bit and made known over several chapters; the story of Joseph however, is unique. It was revealed in one chapter, from the beginning to the end. It is the complete story and experience of Prophet Joseph. We learn about Joseph's joys, troubles and sorrows, and move with him through the years of his life as he arms himself with piety and patience, and in the end emerges victorious. The story of Joseph begins with a dream, and ends with the dream's interpretation.

“We relate unto you (Muhammad) the best of stories through Our Revelations unto you, of this Quran. And before this (i.e. before the coming of Divine Inspiration to you), you were among those who knew nothing about it.” (Quran 12:3)

Joseph's Childhood

Joseph was young boy, handsome, happy and very much loved by his father. He awoke one morning excited about a dream and ran straight to his father happily explaining what he had seen in his dream. Joseph's father listened attentively to his beloved son and his face shone with joy, for Joseph related a dream that spoke of the fulfilment of a prophecy. Joseph said,

**“O my father! Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating themselves to me.”
(Quran 12:4)**

Joseph was one of 12 brothers whose father was Prophet Jacob and whose great grandfather was Prophet Abraham. This prophecy spoke of keeping Abraham’s message to worship One True God alive. Prophet Abraham’s grandson Jacob interpreted the dream to mean that Joseph would be the one to carry the ‘Light of God’s house’^[2] However as quickly as the joy had sprung into Jacob’s face, it vanished, and he implored his son not to relate his dream to his brothers. Jacob said,

**“O my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they arrange a plot against you. Verily! Satan is to man an open enemy! Thus will your Lord choose you, teach you the interpretation of dreams (and other things), and perfect His Favour on you and on the offspring of Jacob, as He perfected it on your fathers, Abraham, and Isaac aforetime! Verily! Your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise.”
(Quran 12:5-6)**

Jacob knew that his sons (Joseph’s brothers) would not accept the interpretation of this dream or the advancement of Joseph over themselves. Jacob was filled with fear. The ten older brothers were already jealous of their younger brother. They recognised their father’s particular affection for him. Jacob was a prophet, a man dedicated to submission to One True God and he treated his family and his community with fairness, respect and equitable love; however his heart was drawn to the gentle qualities evident in his son Joseph. Joseph also had a younger brother named Benjamin, who, at this stage of the story, was too young to be involved in any of the trickery and deception brewing.

While Prophets and righteous men are eager to spread the message of submission to God, Satan is waiting to entice and incite mankind. He loves trickery and deception and was now sewing the seeds of discord between Jacob and his elder sons. The jealousy the brothers felt toward Joseph blinded their hearts, disoriented their thinking and made small things seem insurmountable, large things seeming insignificant. Joseph heeded his father’s warning and did not speak of his dream to his brothers; but even so, they became obsessed and overwhelmed by their jealousy. Without knowing about Joseph’s dream, they hatched a plan to kill him.

Joseph and Benjamin were the sons of Jacob’s second wife. The older boys considered themselves men. They were older, they were stronger and saw in themselves many good qualities. Blinded by jealousy, they perceived Joseph and Benjamin as too young and without consequence in the life of the family. They

refused to understand why their father doted on them. The older boy's crooked thinking made them accuse their father of being misguided which, in reality, was far from the truth. Satan made their thoughts fair seeming to them and their utter misguidance was shown clearly, when they spoke of killing Joseph and immediately repenting to God for this despicable act.

“They said, “Truly, Joseph and his brother are loved more by our father than we, but we are a strong group. Really, our father is in a plain error. Kill Joseph or cast him out to some (other) land, so that the favour of your father may be given to you alone, and after that you will be righteous folk (by intending to repent).” (Quran 12:8-9)

One amongst them felt the error of their ways and suggested that rather than killing Joseph, they should drop him into a well. When found by some passing traveller he would be sold into slavery, thus rendering him as good as dead to the family. They believed, in their blindness, that the absence of Joseph would remove him from their father's thoughts. The brothers continued to hatch their evil plan. Satan was toying with them, casting thoughts into their minds and whispering misguidance into their ears. The brothers finished their discussion pleased with themselves and believing they had drafted a clever plan. They approached Jacob with a plan to take Joseph into the desert with them, on the pretext of letting him play and enjoy himself. Fear leapt into Jacob's heart.

Footnotes:

[1] *Ibn Katheer*. Stories of the Prophets.

[2] *Ibid*.

(part 2 of 7): Treachery and Deception

“And Allah has full power and control over His Affairs, but most of men know not.” (Quran 12:21)

The story of Joseph confirms unconditionally that God has total control over all affairs. The treachery and deception of Joseph's brothers succeeded only in preparing Joseph for the great position he would eventually attain. Joseph's story describes God's omnipotence and gives an accurate account of His power and supremacy. The story begins with deception but ends with comfort and joy. A fitting reward for the patience and total submission to God's will, Joseph exhibits

throughout his long journey confronting the schemes and treachery of those around him.

The patience Joseph learned from his ordeal made him amongst the most righteous of men. His lineage was impeccable, his great grandfather, grandfather and father were also Prophets. In Christian and Jewish tradition, these men are known as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Deception and Treachery

When Jacob's older sons sought permission to take Joseph with them deep into the desert to play, fear leapt into Jacob's heart. From their first words, he suspected treachery and expressed his fear that a wolf would take Joseph. Jacob said,

**“Truly, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear lest a wolf should devour him, whilst you are careless of him.”
(Quran 12:13)**

Satan works in subtle and deceitful ways, and with his words, Jacob unwittingly supplied his sons with the perfect reason for Joseph's disappearance. The brothers immediately knew they would blame Joseph's disappearance on a wolf, and this became part of their dastardly plan. Eventually Jacob agreed and Joseph left with his brothers on their journey into the desert.

They went directly to the well and without remorse, picked up Joseph and threw him down into the well. Joseph cried out in fear but their cruel hearts felt no pity for their young brother. The brothers felt secure in their plan that a traveller would find Joseph and sell him into slavery. While Joseph called out in terror, the brothers took a small goat or sheep from their flock, slaughtered it and wiped the blood over one of Joseph's garments. Completely consumed by their jealousy, the brothers took an oath to keep their foul deed secret and walked away pleased with themselves. Terrified Joseph clung to a ledge in the well, and God made known to him that one day he would confront his brothers. He told Joseph the day would come when he would speak to his brothers about this dastardly event, but the brothers would not know they were talking to Joseph.

“Indeed, you shall (one day) inform them of this their affair, when they know (you) not.” (Quran 12:15)

Crying is not Evidence of Truth.

The brothers returned to their father weeping. By this time it was dark, and Jacob was sitting in his house anxiously awaiting the return of Joseph. The sound of ten men crying confirmed his deepest fear. The darkness of the night was

matched only be the darkness in their hearts. The lies rolled easily from their tongues and Jacob's heart constricted in fear.

“They said, ‘O our father! We went racing with one another, and left Joseph by our belongings and a wolf devoured him; but you will never believe us, even when we speak the truth.’ And they brought his shirt stained with false blood.” (Quran 12:17-18)

In a story from the righteous men that came after Prophet Muhammad comes a tale of a Muslim judge who was deciding the case of an old woman. The details of the case are not important; however, the old woman was crying and crying. Based on the evidence the judge ruled against her. A friend of the judge said, “She was crying and crying, she is old, why didn't you believe her?” The judge said “Don't you know from Quran that crying is not evidence of the truth, the brothers of Joseph went to their father crying.” They were crying but they committed the crime.

Both Jacob and Joseph were among the most noble of men. Prophet Muhammad described Joseph as the most dignified and generous of men. When asked who was the most God fearing man he replied, “The most honourable person is Joseph, God's prophet, the son of God's prophet, the son of the beloved servant of God (Abraham).”^[1] While Joseph sat in the well, terrified, yet secure in his submission to God, Jacob, many miles way, felt his heart constricted by fear and pain yet knew his sons were lying. As befitting a Prophet of God, with tears streaming down his face, Jacob said,

“Nay, but your own selves have made up a tale. So (for me) patience is most fitting. And it is God (Alone) Whose help can be sought against that which you assert.” (Quran 12:18)

This was a dilemma for Jacob, what was he to do? He knew his sons were lying, but what were his options? To kill his sons? Due to his complete submission to God, Jacob knew that this affair was out of his hands. He had no option but to trust God and turn to Him with hope and patience.

Deep in the well, Joseph prayed. Father and son turned to God in the deep darkness of the night. A mixture of fear and hope filled their hearts, and the night gave way to the new day. For Jacob, the day dawned on the beginning of many years to be filled with trust in God and patience. For Joseph, the sunrays of dawn shone down on the edges of the well. If he could have scanned the horizon, he would have seen a caravan approaching. Minutes later a man lowered his bucket into its depths of the well expecting to find cool clear water.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari.*

(part 3 of 7): Sold into Slavery

Lead astray by the whisperings of Satan and filled with jealousy and pride, the brothers deceived their father Jacob and betrayed their young brother. Thrown deep into a well by his older brothers, Joseph the beloved son of Prophet Jacob, clung throughout the long night to a ledge and tried to put his trust in God. The time passed slowly and the heat of the morning sun beat down heavily on the scorched earth. Later that day a caravan travelling to Egypt approached the well.

When the caravan arrived, the travellers went about their business, some tethering camels, others tending to the horses, some unpacking, and others preparing food. The water drawer went to the well and lowered his bucket, happy in anticipation of cool, clear water. Joseph was startled as the bucket hurtled towards him, but before it hit the water, he reached out and clung to the rope. Surprised by the weight of the bucket, the man peered over the edge of the well. He was shocked and excited when he saw a child clinging to the rope. The man called his companions to help him draw the child from the well and all were amazed at the sight of this beautiful child, not quite a youth, who stood before them.

Looking at the boy, the water bearer could not hide his excitement and cried aloud, **“What good news!” (Quran 12:19)** The man was overjoyed; he immediately decided to sell Joseph, knowing that he stood to make a lot of money in the slave market. Just as the brothers had predicted, the men of the caravan took Joseph to Egypt expecting to sell him for a handsome price. The slave markets of Egypt were teeming with people, some buying, and some selling, others just watching the proceedings. The beautiful boy found in the well attracted many onlookers, and bidding for him was swift. The price continued to rise beyond their expectations, and Joseph was eventually purchased by Azeez, the Chief Minister of Egypt.

However, God tells us in the Quran that they sold him for a low price. **(12:20)** This does not seem to make sense since the men of the caravan were jubilant by the price they received. God described the price as low because Joseph was actually worth more than they could ever have imagined. The men did not realise just who this child would grow up to be. They believed that although beautiful, Joseph was insignificant. Nothing could have been further from the truth, if they had sold him for his weight in gold, it would have been a cheap price for the man who would grow up to be Joseph, Prophet of God.

In the House of Azeez

The Chief Minister, Azeez, sensed immediately that this was no ordinary child. He took him to his home, one of the great mansions of Egypt, and said to his wife,

“Make his stay comfortable, may be he will profit us or we shall adopt him as a son.’ Thus did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of events.” (Quran12:21)

God placed Joseph into the home of the second most important person in Egypt. Chief Minister Azeez was more than just a prime minister, he was also the treasurer of Egypt. God established Joseph in the land in order to teach him wisdom and understanding. The struggling and striving required by Joseph to overcome the separation from his father and family, the difficulty of being betrayed by your older presumably protective brothers, the ordeal in the well and the humiliation of being sold into slavery were all trials designed to mould Joseph’s character. They were the first steps on the ladder to greatness. God used the treachery of Joseph’s brothers to fulfil His plan for Joseph’s establishment as a Prophet of God.

The brothers of Joseph believed they had matters under control when they put their brother in the well, but in reality, the matter was out of their hands. God is the one in control of all affairs. God was decisive in His action, and His plan was carried out despite the treachery, jealousy and pride of others. Joseph found himself in the decision making centre of Egypt with a man who seemed kind and somehow aware of Joseph’s special qualities. While longing for his father and brother Benjamin, Joseph was well taken care of, and lived in luxurious surroundings. Joseph grew to manhood in the house of Azeez and God bestowed on him good judgement and knowledge.

“And when he (Joseph) attained his full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge (the Prophethood), thus We reward the doers of good.” (Quran12:22)

God granted Joseph both knowledge and wisdom. Not one just one, but both qualities. He was given the ability to understand and the ability to use good judgement when applying his knowledge. This is not always the case. There are many people throughout the history of the world, up to and including the present day, who have knowledge but do not have the ability or judgement to apply that knowledge in an effective way.

One of the great scholars of Islam, Imam Abu Haneefa, held regular learning circles in which presented a topic for debate. The topic would be discussed and opinions given, then Imam Abu Haneefa would give a final verdict. This way of

teaching was unique at that time. There was amongst this circle of learning a scholar of the narrations of Prophet Muhammad; he recited one that Imam Hanifa had never heard before. Just at that time, a woman approached the circle and asked a question. The scholar replied that he did not know the answer, but Imam Abu Hanifa was able to answer her question. He then turned to the members of the learning circle and said. "I know the answer to this question from the hadeeth our brother had just mentioned". Thus, it is possible to have the knowledge but not know how to apply it. Prophet Joseph, as with all the Prophets of God was given the knowledge and the wisdom to understand and apply it.

(part 4 of 7): Beauty and a Test

Although betrayed and sold into slavery, Joseph, the son of Prophet Jacob, settled into one of the great houses of Egypt. His master, Al Azeez, Chief Minister of Egypt vowed to treat Joseph kindly, and Joseph, who was grateful for the relative safety, replied that he would be loyal to his new master. He thanked God for rectifying his situation and placing him in a place devoid of maltreatment and abuse. Joseph went from the position of beloved son to the dark depths of the well, from iron shackles to a position of ease. Joseph's life twisted and turned, but the house of Al Aziz was where he grew into manhood.

The scholars of Islam have estimated that Joseph was around 14 years old when betrayed by his brothers. Imam Ibn Katheer, one of the most respected Quran scholars, explained in his work, "Stories of the Prophets", that Joseph was most probably the personal attendant of Al Aziz's wife. Ibn Katheer described Joseph as obedient, polite and exceedingly handsome. Prophet Muhammad also described Joseph, and called him "**The embodiment of half of all beauty**"^[1]. As Joseph grew, God gave him wisdom and good judgement, and Chief Minister Al Aziz recognised these qualities in his loyal servant and therefore put him in charge of all household affairs. All who knew him, including the wife of Al Aziz, acknowledged Joseph's beauty, honesty, and nobility. She watched Joseph grow into a handsome man and became more attracted to him as each day passed.

The Trial

"And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him (to do an evil act), she closed the doors and said: 'Come on, O you.'" (Quran 12:23)

The beautiful wife of Al Aziz closed the doors and tried to seduce the slave Joseph, but he resisted her advances and sought refuge with God. He sought help in God. Joseph told her he would not betray her husband. Joseph said, "He has been good to me and treated me with respect." Joseph knew that those who commit evil acts will never be successful. The wife of al Aziz had an evil desire

and tried to act upon it; Joseph however resisted the temptation and tried to escape. Prophet Muhammad tells us that if you make the intention to commit an evil act and actually carry out that act, God will have it written against you as one evil act. However if you think about committing an evil act and then do not do it, God will have it written as a good act.^[2]

Joseph drove any thoughts of sleeping with the wife of his master from his mind, sought refuge with God and attempted to remove himself from the complicated situation. Perhaps Joseph had been resisting her advances for many years. A rich beautiful woman from the highest echelons of Egyptian society would not stoop immediately to such behaviour. Her beauty, status and wealth meant that most men or boys would succumb to her desires easily. Joseph however was no ordinary man, and when he immediately turned to God for help, God rescued him.

“Indeed she did desire him and he would have inclined to her desire had he not seen the evidence of his Lord. Thus, it was that We might turn away from him evil and illegal sexual intercourse. Surely, he was one of Our chosen, guided slaves.”
(Quran 12:24)

Joseph is one of the leaders of those who will be shaded by God on the Day of Judgement. Prophet Muhammad explained that the heat of the Day of Judgment would be fierce, and people will be mingling with fear as they wait to be judged by God. There will be however, certain categories of people shaded from this brutal heat. One of them is a man who resisted the temptations of a beautiful, desirable woman by seeking refuge with God.^[3]

Joseph’s refusal only increased her passion. He tried to flee and they raced with each other to the door. The wife of Al Aziz reached for Joseph’s shirt and tore it from his back. At that moment, the door opened and her husband walked in. Immediately, with out even one second’s hesitation, the wife of al Aziz attempted to turn the situation around. She cried out to her husband, **“What is the punishment for one who had an evil design against your wife?”** This was a clear lie, yet she pronounced it easily and suggested that Joseph be put in prison. Joseph tried to defend himself and said, **“No, it was she that sought to seduce me”.** (Quran 12:25 – 26) One of their relatives suddenly appeared and offered a way to solve this dilemma. He said,

“If it be that his shirt is torn from the front, then her tale is true, and he is a liar! But if it be that his shirt is torn from the back, then she has told a lie and he is speaking the truth!”
(Quran 12:27 – 28)

If his shirt was torn from the back, which it was, it meant that he was trying to escape and she was running after him, tearing the shirt from his back. The proof

was unmistakable. The Chief Minister, although clearly upset, was more concerned with covering up this affair. He did not want his good name and position to be sullied by a scandal. He asked Joseph to be silent about the situation and told his wife to ask forgiveness from God. This should have been an end to the matter, but as is common in more wealthy societies, people have a lot of time on their hands. Many hours are wasted having meals and gossiping about the affairs of their friends, neighbours and relatives.

The Women

The women of the city began to talk about the wife of Al Aziz and her infatuation with her slave Joseph. The news was spreading and the women asked themselves how she could desire a slave and put her reputation in jeopardy. The wife of Al Aziz thought she would teach these women a lesson and show them just how beautiful and desirable Joseph was. She invited them to have lunch with her, laid a beautiful table before them and handed them knives to cut the food. The room was probably full of tension and silent looks as the women hoped for a glimpse of this slave, while at the same time considering themselves better than the wife of Al Aziz. The women started eating, and at that moment, Joseph walked into the room. They looked up, saw his beauty and forgot that they had knives in their hands. The women were so entranced by his shape and form that they cut clear through their own flesh. They described Joseph as a noble angel. The wife of Al Aziz, confident and haughty said to her guests,

“This is he (the young man) about whom you did blame me (for his love) and I did seek to seduce him, but he refused. And now if he refuses to obey my order, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and will be one of those who are disgraced.” Quran 12:32)

What was to become of Joseph? Once again, with total humility, he turned to God saying that prison was preferable to succumbing the women’s desires. Therefore, his Lord answered his invocation.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari.*

[3] *Ibid.*

(part 5 of 7): From Prison to Palace

The story of Joseph is an example of patience in the face of adversity. Throughout his life so far, Joseph faced trials and tribulations with complete trust in God. Yet once again, he was in an extremely difficult situation. Once more, he was forced to fend off the advances of the wife of Al Aziz, this time in front of her associates. Joseph called out to God for help. He said,

“O my Lord! Prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. Unless You turn away their plot from me, I will feel inclined towards them and be one of those who commit sin and deserve blame or those who do the deeds of the ignorant.” (Quran 12:33)

Joseph believed living in prison was preferable to living in the house of Al Aziz. The environment was filled with lust and greed, and with unlawful beauty and seduction, perhaps similar to many societies today. He believed prison would be preferable to succumbing to the fitnah^[1] around him. God answered Joseph’s supplication and rescued him.

“So his Lord answered his invocation and turned away from him their plot. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. Then it appeared to them, after they had seen the proofs (of his innocence) to imprison him for a time.” (Quran 12:34-35)

Although convinced of Joseph’s innocence, Al Aziz, chief Minister of Egypt put Joseph in prison. He could see no other way of safeguarding the reputation of his name and position.

Joseph in Prison

Imprisoned with Joseph, were two men who recognised his piety and righteousness. Both had been plagued by vivid dreams and now hoped Joseph would be able to interpret the dreams for them. One man saw a dream in which he was pressing wine, the other; saw a dream in which birds were eating bread from his head. Joseph said, “I will inform you of the meaning of these dreams before your next meal is served”.

“He said, ‘No food will come to you (in wakefulness or in dream) as your provision but I will inform (in wakefulness) its interpretation before it (the food) comes. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. Verily, I have abandoned the religion of a people that believe not in God and are disbelievers in the Hereafter. And I have followed the religion of my fathers, -

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and never could we attribute any partners whatsoever to God. This is from the Grace of Allah to us and to mankind, but most men think not (i.e. they neither believe in Allah nor worship Him).” (Quran 12:37-38)

Notice the demeanor of Joseph. When they ask him a question about dreams he immediately reminds them that it is God who provides their sustenance, as well as his own knowledge of dream interpretation. Joseph is very careful to make a distinction between what is from God and what is from himself. He makes his religion clear. He does not believe the religion being practiced around him but believes in the true religion that includes belief in the Hereafter. Joseph asserts that his family, the family of Abraham, hold the knowledge of the Oneness of God, and that his religion and family do not attribute partners to God. Although the people of Egypt knew about God they choose to worship other deities as partners or intercessors.

After informing his companions that false gods have no substance and explaining the Omnipotence of God, Joseph interprets the dreams. He says, one of you will become a close associate of the King, the other will be crucified and birds will eat from his head.

“As for one of you, he (as a servant) will pour out wine for his lord to drink; and as for the other, he will be crucified and birds will eat from his head. Thus is the case judged concerning which you both did inquire.” (Quran 12:41)

Joseph approached the companion who destined to be close to the King and said “please remember me to your King”. He hoped that the King would look into his case, see his oppression and free him. However, the whisperings and subterfuge of Satan, caused the companion to forget to mention Joseph and consequently he remained in prison for a few more years. The scholars of Islam hold two different opinions about the nature of the forgetfulness. Ibn Katheer mentions that the companion forgot to mention Joseph, whereas other scholars focus on the possibility that Joseph forgot to seek the help of God, and thus the companion forgot to mention him. Whatever the case, Joseph remained in prison and continued to trust in God with patience and fortitude.

The King's Dream

The King dreamed he was standing on the banks of the Nile watching seven fat cows emerge from the river, followed by seven lean ones. The seven lean cows devoured the fat ones. Next, the dream changed and he watched seven green ears of grain growing on the banks of the Nile. They disappeared into the mud and on the same spot grew seven dry ears of grain. The King awoke shocked and frightened, and sent for his sorcerers, priests and ministers. They failed to

interpret the dream and reached the unanimous conclusion that it was just a nightmare. Joseph's companion from the prison came to hear of the dream and remembered Joseph. With the King's permission, he rushed to the prison and asked Joseph to interpret the dream.

“Joseph said, ‘For seven consecutive years, you shall sow as usual and that the harvest which you reap you shall leave in ears, all --except a little of it which you may eat. Then will come after that seven hard years, which will devour what you have laid by in advance for them, all except a little of that which you have guarded (stored). Then thereafter will come a year in which people will have abundant rain and in which they will press wine and oil.’” (Quran 12:47-49)

The King was astonished at this interpretation, not only did Joseph give the meaning but also recommended a course of action. The King demanded Joseph be bought before him. However, Joseph refused to leave prison and insisted the messenger return to the King and ask him, **“What happened to the women who cut their hands?” (Quran 12:50)** Joseph did not want to leave the prison until his innocence was established.

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Fitnah is an Arabic word that does not translate easily into English. It means a time of trial or tribulation. Most particularly a situation that prevents one from worshipping God correctly, or causes acts of disobedience or disbelief..

(part 6 of 7): The Importance of Dreams

Prophet Mohammad said: “Every Prophet was sent to his nation exclusively, but I was sent to all mankind.”[\[1\]](#) God sent Joseph, son of Jacob, to the people of Egypt and supported him with abilities that were observable and made sense to the people the Joseph had been sent to guide. At the time of Joseph, dreams and dream interpretation were very important, and this is clear throughout the story of Joseph. Prophet Jacob (Joseph's father), the companions of the prison and the King of Egypt all have dreams.

When the King heard Joseph's interpretation of his dream, he was astonished, and set Joseph free. However, Joseph refused to leave the prison with out clearing his name of any wrongdoing. He wanted his master Al Aziz to be completely sure that he (Joseph) had not betrayed his trust. Joseph respectfully demanded that the

King investigate the affair of the women who cut their hands. The King became curious and called for the wife of Al Aziz and her associates.

“(The King) said (to the women), ‘What was your affair when you did seek to seduce Joseph?’ The women said, ‘God forbid! No evil know we against him!’ The wife of Al-’Aziz said, ‘Now the truth is manifest (to all), it was I who sought to seduce him, and he is surely of the truthful.’” (Quran 12:51)

Once his innocence was established, Joseph appeared before the King. After hearing, Joseph’s words the King became even more impressed and entrusted him to a position of high rank. Joseph said, **“Set me over the storehouses of the land; I will indeed guard them with full knowledge.” (Quran 12:55)** In the religion of Islam, it is not permissible for one to ask for a position of authority or to talk about oneself in a boastful manner. However when Joseph asked the King to put him in charge of the storehouses he did both of those things.

The scholars of Islam explain that when you are the only person fit for that position then it is permissible to ask for it, and if you are new to a community, it is permissible to introduce yourself. Joseph knew the trials about to face Egypt and he knew he was capable of averting the danger inherent in a time of famine. For Joseph, not asking for this position would have been irresponsible. The young boy betrayed and thrown into the well was now established as the finance Minister of Egypt. His patience and perseverance, and above all his total submission to the will of God had already resulted in great reward. Joseph knew however that the greatest reward for patience and righteousness would be in the hereafter.

Joseph Meets His Brothers

The time passed. During the seven good years, Joseph prepared for the time of famine to come. The drought and famine correctly prophesized by Joseph did not only affect Egypt, but also the surrounding lands including the place where Jacob and his sons were living. Joseph managed the affairs of Egypt so well there was enough grain to feed the people of Egypt and those in the surrounding areas. As life became difficult and food scarce, people began to flock to Egypt to buy the grain Joseph was selling at a fair price.

Among those seeking provisions were Joseph’s ten older brothers. When the brothers were ushered into Joseph’s presence, they did not recognise him. Joseph looked at his brothers and his heart filled with longing for his father and his young brother Benjamin. He greeted them respectfully, asked questions about their family and homeland, and explained that the rations of grain would be distributed per head; therefore, if they had bought their younger brother they would have received more rations. Joseph was hoping to encourage them to bring Benjamin,

in fact Joseph went far as to say that without their young brother they would receive no provision at all.

“But if you bring him not to me, there shall be no measure (of grain) for you with me, nor shall you come near me.” (Quran 12:60)

When they returned to their father, Prophet Jacob, they explained to him that no more grain would be provided to them unless they travelled with their young brother. Benjamin had become very close to his father, especially after Joseph’s disappearance. Remembering his previous loss, Jacob did not want to part with his young son. Once again, the brothers promised to safeguard their youngest brother, and once again Jacob felt his heart constrict with fear. The brothers then found that the money they paid for the grain had been secretly returned to them.

Jacob had complete trust in God and gave them permission to take Benjamin only after they had sworn an oath in God’s name to protect him. Although Prophet Jacob was particularly close to his sons Joseph and Benjamin, he loved all his sons dearly. They were strong, handsome, capable men, and Jacob was afraid that some harm might befall them on yet another trip to Egypt. To minimise the risks, he made his sons promise to enter the city by different gates. Jacob said to them,

“O my sons! Do not enter by one gate, but enter by different gates, and I cannot avail you against God at all. Verily! The decision rests only with God. In Him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him.” (Quran 12:67)

The brothers returned to Egypt, entered by different gates and went to Joseph for the promised provisions. During this meeting, Joseph took Benjamin aside and revealed that he was his long lost brother. The two embraced and their hearts were filled with joy. Joseph, however, asked Benjamin to keep their meeting a secret for the time being. After providing the brothers with their rations of grain, Joseph arranged for golden bowl to be covertly placed in Benjamin’s bag, then according to Joseph’s arrangements someone cried out, **“O you in the caravan, surely you are thieves.” (Quran 12:70)**

The brothers were astonished because they were not thieves. They inquired about the stolen item, and were astounded to hear it was a golden bowl belonging to the King. Whoever returned it, they were told, would be rewarded with camel’s load of grain. The brothers of Joseph claimed to have no knowledge of this theft. They asserted that they were not thieves and did not come to Egypt to create mischief. One of Joseph’s men asked, “What is your punishment for one who steals?” The brothers replied that under the law of Prophet Jacob, the one who steals is taken as a slave. Joseph did not want his brother punished under the laws of Egypt but wanted the opportunity to keep his brother with him while the others

returned to their father Jacob. The bags were searched, and the golden bowl was found amongst Benjamin's possessions.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari.*

(part 7 of 7): Patience Rewarded

The golden bowl was found in Benjamin's belongings and his brothers were astonished. They quickly realised the Chief Minister (Joseph) would follow their own law and keep Benjamin as a slave. This upset them greatly. They were afraid of returning to their father without his beloved youngest son. One of the brothers offered to accept the punishment on Benjamin's behalf, but the offer was refused. Another brother, probably the eldest, chose to stay in Egypt while the others returned to their homeland to face their father Jacob. When the brothers arrived home they went immediately to their father and said,

“O our father! Verily, your son (Benjamin) has stolen, we testify not except according to what we know, and we could not know the unseen! And ask (the people of) the town where we have been, and the caravan in which we returned, and indeed we are telling the truth.” (Quran 12:81-82)

Prophet Jacob had heard this all before. When the brothers betrayed Joseph and threw him in the well, they went to their father pleading and crying yet their words were nothing but lies. This time Jacob refused to believe them. He turned away from them saying, **“Nay, but your own selves have beguiled you into something. So patience is most fitting (for me).” (Quran 12:83)** Jacob had spent years grieving for Joseph and trusting in God. When this new sorrow overwhelmed him, his first reaction was to be patient. He knew, without a shred of doubt, that the affairs of his beloved youngest sons were controlled by God.

Even though he trusted God completely, Jacob behaved as any father would in the same circumstances. He was overcome with grief and wept uncontrollably. He remembered Joseph, and wept until he became ill and lost his sight. The brothers were concerned about his pain and sorrow and questioned his constant grief. They asked him, “Will you cry until the day you die?” Jacob answered that he only complained of his grief and sorrow to God and that he (Jacob) knew, from God, things that they did not. **(Quran 12:86)**

Though many years had passed, Jacob had not forgotten his son Joseph. Jacob reflected on Joseph's dream and understood God's plan would come to fruition. Jacob was deeply hurt by the loss of his sons, but his faith in God sustained him, and he ordered his sons to go back to Egypt in search of Joseph and Benjamin.

Joseph revealed

The brothers once again set off on the long journey to Egypt. The famine had taken its toll on the surrounding areas and people were poor and weak. When the brothers stood before Joseph, they too were amongst the poor. Their level of weakness forced them to ask for charity. They said:

**“O ruler of the land! A hard time has hit our family, and we have brought but poor capital, so pay us full measure and be charitable to us. Truly, God does reward the charitable.”
(Quran 12:88)**

Joseph could not bear to see his family in this position, even though these were the men who had betrayed him. He looked at his family and could keep his secret no longer, he said,

“Do you know what you did with Joseph and his brother, when you were ignorant?” (Quran 12:89)

The brothers recognised Joseph immediately, not because of his looks, for they had seen him many times before, however who else could know the true story of Joseph, but Joseph himself.

“I am Joseph, and this is my brother (Benjamin). God has indeed been Gracious to us. Verily, he who fears God with obedience to Him (by abstaining from sins and evil deeds, and by performing righteous good deeds), and is patient, then surely, God makes not the reward of the good doers to be lost.” (Quran 12:90)

The brothers were afraid, their past deeds were grave sins, and they were now in a position of weakness. They stood in fear before the Chief Minister of Egypt no longer a small, beautiful boy named Joseph. Through his trials and tribulations, Joseph, like his father, found comfort in submission to the One God. He understood patience and the qualities of mercy and piety imbedded in true patience. He looked down at his brothers who were trembling in fear and said, **“No reproach of you this day, May God forgive you.” (Quran 12:91)**

Joseph immediately made plans to reunite his family. He requested the brothers return to their father and cast an old shirt of his (Joseph's) over his

face. This, he said, would cause him to become clear sighted. Immediately, although the old man was so far away he turned his face towards the heavens and sniffed, believing that he could smell Joseph in the air. This is one of the miracles, made possible by God, of Prophet Joseph. When the brothers arrived, they cast the shirt over Jacob's face and he became clear sighted. He cried out, **“Did I not say to you, I know from God, that which you know not.” (Quran 12: 96)**

The family of Prophet Jacob gathered their belongings together and travelled to Egypt. Jacob was eager to be reunited with his sons. They went straight to Joseph and found him sitting on an elevated throne. Joseph spoke to his family saying, enter Egypt, if God wills, in security.

The beginning of chapter 12 of the Quran, *Joseph*, began with the young boy Joseph describing his dream to his beloved father Jacob. He said, **“Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me.” (Quran 12:4)** Quran concludes the story of Joseph in the same way as it began, with the interpretation of the dream. The eleven stars were his brothers, the sun his father and the moon was his mother.

“And he raised his parents to the throne and they fell down before him prostrate. And he said, “O my father! This is the interpretation of my dream of old! My Lord has made it come true! He was indeed good to me, when He took me out of prison, and brought you all here out of the Bedouin life, after Satan had sown enmity between my brothers and me. Certainly, my Lord is the Most Courteous and Kind unto whom He will. Truly He! Only He is the All Knowing, the All-Wise.” (Quran 12:98-100)

The essence of the story of Joseph is patience in the face of adversity and sorrow. Joseph faced every trial with patience and complete trust in God. His father Jacob bore his grief and misery with patience and submission. All the chapters of Quran were revealed at particular times, in response to particular situations. This chapter was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in a time of great sorrow. In fact, the year of its revelation is known as “the year of sorrow”. Prophet Muhammad had to bear the death of his beloved first wife Khadijah and his Uncle Abu Talib. Both had provided him with comfort and support. God was advising Prophet Muhammad that the road may be long and difficult but the ultimate victory belongs to those with God consciousness and patience. The story of Joseph is a lesson for us all. True patience, what the scholars of Islam call beautiful patience is a key to the gate of Paradise.