

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN
THEMES AND STYLE “
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CHAPTER 11:

THE STORY OF JOSEPH IN THE QURAN AND BIBLE

Introduction

Joseph's story in the Qur'an has been approached by many non-Muslim writers¹ who were content to list which items have been missed out from the Biblical story and which added, maintaining that these had their origins in Biblical or other Jewish sources. Our treatment here concentrates on the texts of the story in the Qur'an and the Old Testament, attempting to identify the differing functions and preoccupations of the two accounts in their respective contexts, to show how this difference affects the choice of material and the treatment given to it. This chapter concludes that readers, both Muslims and non-Muslims, should approach the two versions with this difference in mind in order to appreciate the message and qualities of each.

The Story and Its Functions

وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ ۚ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرٌ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

AND remember: out of all the accounts relating to the earlier apostles We convey unto you only that wherewith We aim to make firm your heart: for through these accounts comes the truth unto thee, as well as an admonition and a reminder unto all believers..

qur'an 11:120

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ
وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson for those who are endowed with insight. As for this revelation, it could not possibly be a discourse invented by man: nay indeed, it is a divine writ confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations, clearly spelling out everything, and offering guidance and grace unto people who will believe..

qur'an 12:111

Haste ye, and go up to my father and say unto him, Thus saith your son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And you shalt

dwelt in the land of Goshen and you shalt be near unto me, thou, and your children, and your children's children, and your flocks and your herds, and all that thou hast.

genesis 45:9–10

The story of Joseph is common to both the Old Testament (Genesis 37–50) and the Qur'an (Sirat Yisuf: 12). In the Old Testament, outside Genesis, Joseph receives scant attention;² in the Qur'an Yisuf is mentioned only twice outside Chapter 12 – in 6:84

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا ۚ وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُودَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; and We guided each of them as We had guided Noah aforetime. And out of his offspring, We bestowed prophethood upon David, and Solomon, and Job, and Joseph, and Moses, and Aaron: for thus do We reward the doers of good; and 40:34

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِنْ قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا جَاءَكُمْ بِهِ ۚ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا هَلَكَ قُلْتُمْ لَن يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ رَسُولًا ۚ كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُرْتَابٌ

"And remember: it was to you that Joseph came aforetime with all evidence of the truth; but you never ceased to throw doubt on all the messages that he brought you - so much so that when he died, you said, 'Never will God send any apostle even after him!' "In this way God lets go astray such as waste their own selves by throwing suspicion on His revelations –. Therefore the discussion

here concentrates on the story as related in Genesis and Sirat Yisuf. On reading the two texts it becomes clear that the main events of the story are the same in each and the results of these events are the same, but the function of the story differs, and therefore the tone, the timespan, the characterisation and the artistic forms are also different in each.

The Genesis story is part of a history; it continues the story of the patriarchs of the family of Abraham and follows the story of Esau and the early story of Jacob, taking its place 'in the concatenation of events that led to the migration of the Israelites to Egypt, their enslavement and redemption'.

³ We shall see how this national historical aspect – although it is not the only function of the Genesis narrative – colours the Biblical version and makes it different from that of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an the story is not part of a continuous relation of history. It does not follow on from Sirat 11 Hud; it ends before the end of surah 12 and it does not continue in surah 13 Rad. Like other similar stories in the Qur'an it is min anba' al-rusul – namely stories of the apostles to strengthen the Prophet and the believers and give them guidance.

Sirat Yisuf consists of 111 verses. Verses 1–2 “ Alif. Lam. Ra. THESE ARE MESSAGES of a revelation clear in itself and clearly showing the truth: (1) behold,

We have bestowed it from on high as a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason " are about the revelation of the Qur'an and the importance of understanding it. In verse 3" In the measure that We reveal this Qur'an unto thee, O Prophet, We explain it to you in the best possible way, seeing that ere this you wert indeed among those who are unaware of what revelation is". God speaks in the first person plural: 'We relate to you the best of stories in revealing the Qur'an to you ...'. Verses 4–6 LO! Thus spoke Joseph unto his father: "O my father! Behold, I saw in a dream eleven stars, as well as the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves before me!"(4) Jacob replied: "O my dear son! Do not relate your dream to your brothers lest out of envy they devise an evil scheme against thee; verily, Satan is man's open foe! (5) For, as you hast been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6)" are an introduction to the story of Joseph, giving a preview of what is to follow.

In verse 4 above Joseph relates his dream to his father. In verses 5 and 6 above Jacob warns Joseph against telling his dream to his brothers lest they plot against him and interprets it as foretelling a great future for Joseph and the house of Jacob. Verses 7–101 relate the stages of the story, which ends in the Qur'an with the arrival of the whole of Jacob's family in Egypt, fulfilling the dream with which the story began. (Genesis, by contrast, goes on to see Jacob die seventeen years after his arrival in Egypt and later shows Joseph at the age of 110.) Verse 102 in the Qur'an is an immediate comment on the story, stating that it is a revelation to the Prophet Muhammad of things previously unknown (to him and his people),⁴ and verses 103–111 are a general comment on the prophets' call and the unbelievers' response, confirming that a good future lies ahead for prophets – a lesson to be learned from their stories in the Qur'an.

Joseph's Dream(s) and His Brothers' Plot against Him

The introductory verses in the surah describe the dream, which is in fact a preview of the story, forecasting its outcome in symbolic manner. Joseph says to his father:

LO! Thus spoke Joseph unto his father: "O my father! Behold, I saw in a dream eleven stars, as well as the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves before me!"(4) Jacob replied: "O my dear son! Do not relate your dream to your brothers lest out of envy they devise an evil scheme against thee; verily, Satan is man's open foe! (5) For, as you hast been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings

upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6) ,

12:4-6

The essence of Joseph's story is that the evil act committed against him turns out eventually to his advantage and through him to the advantage of Jacob and his wife, as well as all his children, who will need Joseph and benefit from his elevated position in Egypt. All this is contained in the dream of stars, sun and moon, to which the Qur'an goes directly, leaving out the other dream about sheaves given in Genesis, in which only the brothers are involved.

Introducing a long story like that of Joseph with an introduction of this kind – it has been described as a summary – is one of the techniques of storytelling in the Qur'an, employed for instance in Chapter 18:9-12

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا
إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا
فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا
ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا

“AND SINCE the life of this world is but a test, dost you really think that the parable of the Men of the Cave and of their devotion to the scriptures could be deemed more wondrous than any other of Our messages? (9) When those youths took refuge in the cave, they prayed: "O our Sustainer! Bestow on us grace from Thyself, and endow us, whatever our outward condition, with consciousness of what is right!" (10) And thereupon We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year, (11) and then We awakened Christianity was no longer persecuted and had even become the official religion of the Roman Empire. The ancient coin (dating from the reign of Decius) with which the young man wanted to pay for his purchases immediately aroused curiosity; people began to question the stranger, and the story of the Men of the Cave and their miraculous sleep came to light. them: and We did all this so that We might mark out to the world which of the two points of view showed a better comprehension of the time-span during which they had remained in this state. (12)". Since a main objective of telling the story in the Qur'an is to strengthen the hearts of the believers, right at the beginning we are given a forecast of eventual good, presented in a brief symbolic form which leaves the whole story still to be told. In the Qur'an Jacob is a prophet who can interpret the dream, as we have seen. Realising its significance and clearly aware of the brothers' jealousy and ill feeling towards Joseph, he addresses him lovingly (using the diminutive bunayya to denote endearment and tender age) advising him not to tell his brothers about it. Naturally he is pleased to read in the

dream that Joseph will be chosen as a prophet and that God will perfect His blessing upon him (and on Jacob's house) as He did with his fathers Abraham and Isaac before him. It is a joy for Jacob to see the line of prophethood continue in his family, and good education to tell young Joseph that he descends from such a line so that his beliefs and conduct may befit his ancestry. We shall see Joseph refer to this later when in prison in Egypt.

The Genesis version begins differently, as a continuation of the story of Jacob. It is announced at the beginning of Chapter 37 that his descendants will be listed. The stages of the story are gone through at greater length, in Chapters 37, 39–50, than in the Qur'an. Whereas the Qur'an ends the story with the arrival of Jacob's family in Egypt, fulfilling the dream, Genesis continues, as already mentioned. From the beginning the story gives the impression of containing a strong element of the chronicle:

And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

genesis 37:1–4,

This specifies Joseph's age and exactly which brothers – identified by their mothers, his father's wives – he was with while feeding the flock. Specification of exact names and precise times, locations and quantities is a prominent feature in Genesis but is absent in the Qur'an, which concentrates on the bold outline of events and the lessons to be drawn from them (a point to which we will return later).

Joseph then tells his brothers of his dream that they were binding sheaves in a field when their sheaves gathered around and bowed low before him, and there is another dream which he relates to his father and brothers, that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him.

And he told it to his father and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that you hast dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth?

genesis 37:10

Jacob here takes the patriarchal attitude, rebuking his favourite son for not conducting himself properly towards his parents and older brothers even in a dream. He is clearly not an interpreter of dreams; indeed he implies that Joseph should not even have dreamed the second dream, and in fact we find no further reference to it in the story later on. In the Qur'an Jacob's reaction is to rejoice in perceiving a blessing coming to his son, seeing that God will 'perfect His favour upon him' (and the whole house of

Jacob) as He perfected it on his fathers Isaac and Abraham.

In the Qur'an, after the introductory dream and its interpretation, the story begins, giving the reasons for the brothers' hatred of Joseph and their plan to dispose of him:

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٍ لِلْسَّائِلِينَ
إِذْ قَالُوا لِيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا مِمَّا نَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ أَبَانَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ
اقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوْ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهُ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ
قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَالْقَوْهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ
قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَاصِحُونَ
أَرْسَلَهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَع وَيَلْعَبُ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ
قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِي أَنْ تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَأَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ غَافِلُونَ
قَالُوا لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذَا لَخَاسِرُونَ
فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَاجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ ۖ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا
يَشْعُرُونَ

Indeed, in the story of Joseph and his brothers there are messages for all who search after truth. (7) NOW Joseph's brothers spoke thus to one another: "Truly, Joseph and his brother Benjamin are dearer to our father than we, even though we are so many. Behold, our father is surely suffering from an aberration!" (8) Said one of them: "Slay Joseph, or else drive him away to some faraway land, so that your father's regard may be for you alone: and after this is done, you will be free to repent and to live once again as righteous people!" (9) Another of them said: "Do not slay Joseph, but -rather - if you must do something - cast him into the dark depths of this well, whence some caravan may pick him up." (10) On this they agreed; and thereupon they spoke thus to their father: "O our father! Wherefore wilt you not trust us with Joseph, seeing that we are indeed his well-wishers? (11) Let him go out with us tomorrow, that he may enjoy himself and play: and, verily, we shall guard him well!" (12) Jacob answered: "Behold, it grieves me indeed to think that you might take him with you, for I dread lest the wolf devour him at a moment when you are heedless of him!" (13) Said they: "Surely, if the wolf were to devour him notwithstanding that we are so many-then, behold, we ought ourselves to perish!" (14) And so, when they went away with him, they decided to cast him into the dark depths of the well. And We revealed this unto him: "Thou wilt yet remind them of this their deed at a time when they shall not perceive who you art!" (15) 12:7-15

Genesis gives three reasons for the brothers' hatred of Joseph. First, he

reported their misdeeds to their father. Second, Jacob showed obvious favouritism to him, making him a 'coat of many colours' (a beautiful detail) – a favouritism for which he has been taken to task by some rabbis. This second reason is the only one given in the Qur'an, but Jacob is not said to have shown favouritism directly; rather it was the brothers who conceived it so. Third, Joseph's dreams showed him as the object of his brothers' adoration.

In the Qur'an Jacob is shown to be more aware of the brothers' attitude to Joseph, and advises him not to tell them his dream. In spite of the terrible harm the brothers are about to do to Joseph, Jacob is pictured in Genesis as having no suspicion of their ill-feeling: it is even he who takes the initiative of sending his beloved boy to see whether the band of ten men and the flock are all right. In the Qur'an, the suggestion that Joseph should join them comes from the brothers, and Jacob only reluctantly agrees. Genesis gives much detail in tracing Joseph's movements on his way to his brothers. Failing at first to find them, he meets a man who asks him 'Who are you looking for?' He answers 'My brothers,' and the man tells him, 'I heard them say "Let us go to Dothan".' So Joseph goes to Dothan (Genesis 37:15–17).

The brothers sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.
genesis 37:15–25

This is a very full report, of the kind that might perhaps be useful for a detective investigating every available detail surrounding the crime (we nevertheless find no explanation for the absence of Reuben at the crucial moment of Joseph's sale), or to students of history and ancient trade. The Qur'an has a different aim:

And so, when they went away with him, they decided to cast him into the dark depths of the well. And We revealed this unto him: "Thou wilt yet remind them of this their deed at a time when they shall not perceive who you art!" (15) And at nightfall they came to their father, weeping, (16) and said: "O our father! Behold, we went off racing with one another, and left Joseph behind with our things; and thereupon the wolf devoured him! But we know that you wouldst not believe us even though we speak the truth" - (17) and they produced his tunic with false blood upon it. But Jacob exclaimed: "Nay, but it is your own minds that have made so terrible a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But as for myself, patience in adversity is most goodly in the sight of God; and it is to God alone that I pray to give me strength to bear the misfortune which you have described to me." (18) 12:15

In the Qur'an, as we have said, Jacob is a prophet. He always speaks of God and patience, trusts in Him and seeks His assistance. With Joseph, too, God figures prominently, protecting and aiding him, speaking in the first person plural of His revelation to Joseph in the pit, reassuring him; protecting him, then teaching him to interpret dreams, when he is sold into Egypt (12:20-21

وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ
وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

And they sold him for a paltry price - a mere few silver coins: thus low did they value him.(20) And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay with us honourable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We gave unto Joseph a firm place on earth; and We did this so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For, God always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not. (21), and later elevating him (12:56 arabic And thus We established Joseph securely in the land of Egypt: he had full mastery over it, doing whatever he willed. Thus do We cause Our grace to alight upon whomever We will; and We do not fail to requite the doers of good. (56)).

In Genesis, on the other hand, it has been observed that 'most striking and, in fact, unique, is the secularist complexion of the narrative. There are no miraculous or supernatural elements, no divine revelations are experienced by Joseph.' In the Qur'an the brothers' report to their father betrays their pretence; Jacob does not appear convinced by the wolf story, perspicaciously seeing that the stained shirt is not torn. This is important for the development of the Qur'anic story, as Jacob the prophet never loses faith that the grace of God may one day bring Joseph back (12:84-87 But he turned away from them and said: "O woe is me for Joseph!"-and his eyes became dim from the grief with which he was filled. (84) Said his sons: "By God! you wilt never cease to remember, Joseph till you art broken in body and spirit or art dead!" (85) He answered: "It is only to God that I complain of my deep grief and my sorrow: for I know, from God, something that you do not know. (86) Hence, O my sons, go forth and try to obtain some tidings of Joseph and his brother; and do not lose hope of God's life-giving mercy: verily, none but people who deny the truth can ever lose hope of God's life-giving mercy. (87)).

In Genesis the brothers' report to their father is cool and detached and Jacob himself volunteers the explanation of the wolf, believing that Joseph is gone for ever: And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; and they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found; know now whether it be your son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.
genesis 37:31–34

This is followed in Genesis by Chapter 38 – thirty verses which have nothing to do with the story of Joseph, but which talk about Judah who had sexual intercourse for payment with Tamar, his daughter-in-law, who pretended to be a harlot and became pregnant by him. The chapter ends with an account full of vivid and interesting details about how the babies were received by the midwife and named. Here again we have an example of difference in style between the Qur'an and the Bible. The Qur'an would not give such details as those given in Genesis 38; such a deed would also be accompanied in the Qur'an by an explicit condemnation.

Joseph in Egypt

The story resumes in Genesis Chapter 39 with Joseph being sold into Egypt; unlike the Qur'an, which merely speaks of the Egyptian who 'bought him' or the 'noble' (12:21 **arabic** And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay with us honourable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We gave unto Joseph a firm place on earth; and We did this so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For, God always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not. (21), 12:30 **arabic** NOW the women of the city spoke thus to one another: "The wife of this nobleman is trying to induce her slave-boy to yield himself unto her! Her love for him has pierced her heart; verily, we see that she is undoubtedly suffering from an aberration! (30)), in Genesis the buyer is identified as 'Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, Captain of the Guard, an Egyptian', the Arabic Bible saying 'one of Pharaoh's eunuchs'. The Qur'anic version shows tenderness towards Joseph, who is pictured as a likeable person. We feel the cry of jubilation of the man who finds him: 'Rejoice, here is a boy!' and in Potiphar's saying to his wife 'Be kind to him. He may prove useful to us, or we may adopt him as our son.' Then God speaks

(12:21–22

وَشَرُّهُ بِثَمَنِ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ
 وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا
 لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا
 يَعْلَمُونَ

And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay with us honourable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We gave unto Joseph a firm place on earth; and We did this so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For, God always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not. (21) And when he reached full manhood, We bestowed upon him the ability to judge between right and wrong, as well as innate knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good. (22)).

In Genesis we read:

And the Lord was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man ... his master saw that the Lord was with him and made all that he did to prosper in his hand ... and he had made him overseer.
 genesis 39:3–4

In contrast to the Qur'an, where reference to God's care of Joseph is constant in all situations, this is one of very few occasions where such reference is made in Genesis. In the Qur'an, moreover, God's grace, which has been shown to Joseph, is made more general at the end of the verse:

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

12:22 And when he reached full manhood, We bestowed upon him the ability to judge between right and wrong, as well as innate knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good. ‘

Joseph, however, was destined to go through another ordeal as a result of Potiphar's wife's attempts to seduce him. Faced with her repeated attempts, the Qur'an tells us that

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ ۚ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنَّ رَأَىٰ بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ ۚ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ ۚ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ

And, indeed, she desired him, and he desired her; and he would have succumbed had he not seen in this temptation an evidence of his Sustainer's truth: thus We willed it to be in order that We might avert from him all evil and all deeds of abomination -for, behold, he was truly one of Our servants. (12:24).

Joseph's loyalty to his master is clear in both scriptures. Non-Muslim writers have observed with surprise, and considered it an embellishment added by Muhammad, that in the Qur'an Joseph's shirt (which was torn as he tried to escape from her) was torn from behind – proof that she had not protected herself from Joseph, but rather that she had tried to get hold of him when he was fleeing (12:25–26

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِنْ دُبُرٍ وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَى الْبَابِ ۚ قَالَتْ مَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوءًا إِلَّا أَنْ يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

قَالَ هِيَ رَاودَتْنِي عَنْ نَفْسِي ۚ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِنْ قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

And they both rushed to the door; and she grasped and rent his tunic from behind-and lo! they met her lord at the door! Said she: "What ought to be the punishment of one who had evil designs on the virtue of your wife - what but imprisonment or a yet more grievous chastisement?" Joseph exclaimed: "It was she who sought to make me yield myself unto her!" Now one of those present, a member of her own household, suggested this: If his tunic has been torn from the front, then she is telling the truth, and he is a liar;).

In Genesis, however, She caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me': and he left his garment in her hand, and fled.
genesis 39:12

As this stands, either he slipped himself out of his garment, or she stripped it off him – either way, he just left it with her and fled. Genesis gives a more detailed account of the deception of Potiphar's wife, and the wicked allegation to her husband, which prompts him to throw Joseph into prison. The Qur'an relates that certain women in the city mocked the noble's wife for soliciting her slave-boy, at which she invites them to a meal, and presents Joseph to them; they are so enraptured by his beauty that they cut their fingers with their knives. She threatens Joseph with imprisonment if he does not give in to her. He prays: 'Lord, prison is dearer to me than what they call me to. Shield me from their cunning or I shall yield to them and lapse into folly.' His Lord answers his prayer and wards off their wiles from him. Nevertheless, they thought it right to jail him for a time (12:30–35

قَالَ هِيَ رَاودَتْنِي عَنْ نَفْسِي ۚ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِنْ قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكَأً وَآتَتْ كُلَّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ ۚ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ

قَالَتْ فَذَلِكُنَّ الَّذِي لُمْتُنَّنِي فِيهِ ۖ وَلَقَدْ رَاودْتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فَاسْتَعْصَمَ ۖ وَلَئِنْ لَمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا آمُرُهُ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونًا مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ
ثُمَّ بَدَأَ لَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا الْآيَاتِ لَيَسْجُنَّهُ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

NOW the women of the city spoke thus to one another: "The wife of this nobleman is trying to induce her slave-boy to yield himself unto her! Her love for him has pierced her heart; verily, we see that she is undoubtedly suffering from an aberration!

(30) Thereupon, when she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them, and prepared for them a sumptuous repast, and handed each of them a knife and said to Joseph: "Come out and show thyself to them!" And when the women saw him, they were greatly amazed at his beauty, and so flustered were they that they cut their hands with their knives, exclaiming, "God save us! This is no mortal man! This is nought but a noble angel!" (31) Said she: "This, then, is he about whom you have been blaming me! And, indeed, I did try to make him yield himself unto me, but he remained chaste. Now, however, if he does not do what I bid him, he shall most certainly be imprisoned, and shall most certainly find himself among the despised! (32) Said he: "O my Sustainer! Prison is more desirable to me than compliance with what these women invite me to: for, unless you turn away their guile from me, I might yet yield to their allure and become one of those who are unaware of right and wrong." (33) And his Sustainer responded to his prayer, and freed him from the threat of their guile: verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing. (34) For, presently it occurred to the nobleman and his household _ even after they had seen all the signs of Joseph's innocence - that they might as well imprison him for a time. (35).

‘And I Will Teach You to Interpret Dreams’

In the Qur'an when Joseph is asked by the two prisoners to interpret their dream because they can see he is a 'good' man, he replies that he can interpret since:

قَالَ لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمَا ۚ ذَلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي ۚ إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ
 اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ
 يَا صَاحِبِي السَّجْنِ أَرَبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ
 مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءَ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ ۚ إِنْ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا
 لِلَّهِ ۚ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ۚ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Joseph answered: "Ere there comes unto you the meal which you are daily fed, I shall have informed you of the real meaning of your dreams, so that you might know what is to come before it comes unto you: for this is part of the knowledge which my Sustainer has imparted to me. "Behold, I have left behind me the ways of people who do not believe in God, and who persistently refuse to acknowledge the truth of the life to come; (37) and I follow the creed of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not conceivable that we should be allowed to ascribe divinity to aught beside God: this is an outcome of God's bounty unto us and unto all mankind -but most people are ungrateful. (38) "O my companions in imprisonment! Which is more reasonable: belief in the existence of numerous divine lords, each of them different from the other" -or in the One God, who holds absolute sway over all that exists? (39) "All that you worship instead of God is nothing but empty names which you have invented - you and your forefathers- and for which God has bestowed no warrant from on high. Judgment as to what is right and what is wrong rests with God alone-and He has ordained that you should worship nought but Him: this is the one ever-true faith; but most people know it not (40) 12:37-40

*This teaching is mentioned four times, in verses OF SURAH 12 ..6 "For, as you have been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6), 21 And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay with us honourable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We gave unto Joseph a firm place on earth; and We did this so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For, God always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not. (21), 37 Joseph answered: "Ere there comes unto you the meal which you are daily fed, I shall have informed you of the real meaning of your dreams, so that you might know what is to come before it comes unto you: for this is part of the knowledge which my Sustainer has imparted to me. "Behold, I have left

behind me the ways of people who do not believe in God, and who persistently refuse to acknowledge the truth of the life to come;(37) and 101 "O my Sustainer! you hast indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and hast imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! you art near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee, and make me one with the righteous!" (101).

Jacob the prophet foresaw in Joseph's dream that he would be chosen as a prophet to follow in the footsteps of his forefathers (12:6 ABOVE). We now see the fulfillment of this. Joseph's statement here echoes what is said by Abraham and Isaac elsewhere in the Qur'an. The difference in emphasis between the Qur'an and the Old Testament may be illuminated by comparing this long Qur'anic statement with the brief one in Genesis, which on other occasions gives lengthy statements and a wealth of detail. When the prisoners say they have had dreams and there was no interpreter, the Joseph in Genesis replies: 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them' (40:8)

Pharaoh's two dreams and request for interpretation are expressed in the Qur'an in two and a half lines in Arabic and are retold to Joseph, with the request for interpretation again occupying two and a half lines (12:43-46)

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أَرَى سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِن كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّؤْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ
قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ ۖ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَحْلَامِ بِعَالَمِينَ
وَقَالَ الَّذِي نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ
يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي سَبْعِ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعِ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ لَعَلِّي أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

AND one day the King said: Behold, I saw in a dream seven fat cows being devoured by seven emaciated ones, and seven green ears of wheat next to seven others that were withered. O you nobles! Enlighten me about the meaning of my dream, if you are able to interpret dreams!" (43) They answered: " This is one of the most involved and confusing of dreams, and we have no deep knowledge of the real meaning of dreams." (44) At that, the one of the two erstwhile prisoners who had been saved, and who suddenly remembered Joseph after all that time, spoke thus: "It is I who can inform you of the real meaning of this dream; so let me go in search of it." (45) And he went to see Joseph in the

prison and said to him: "Joseph, O you truthful one! Enlighten us about the meaning of a dream in which seven fat cows were being devoured by seven emaciated ones, and seven green ears of wheat appeared next to seven others that were withered - so that I may return with your explanation unto the people of the court, and that they may come to know what manner of man you art!" (46); the cup-bearer's suggestion that he was the one to interpret is one line, yet the statements are very clear as they stand. In Genesis this part of the story takes a full thirty-two verses (41:1–32). This is an example of the remarkable brevity of the Qur'anic style with which we will deal later. The dreams are the same and, apart from the fact that the Qur'an adds a year of abundance which Joseph the prophet could see coming after the lean ones, the interpretation is the same, as is the suggested solution, but there is a difference in the order of events.

Joseph, a prophet wrongly imprisoned, considers it important to be first declared innocent of the accusation made by Potiphar's wife – she confesses her misdeeds and declares his truthfulness (12:50–53)

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ ائْتُونِي بِهِ ۖ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ الرَّسُولُ قَالَ ارْجِعْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَاسْأَلْهُ مَا بَالُ النِّسْوَةِ اللَّاتِي قَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ
 قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُنَّ إِذْ رَاوَدْتُنَّ يُوسُفَ عَنِ نَفْسِهِ ۚ قُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنْ سُوءٍ ۚ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ الْآنَ حَصْحَصَ الْحَقُّ أَنَا رَاوَدْتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ
 ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْخَائِنِينَ
 وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي ۚ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And as soon as Joseph's interpretation. was conveyed to him, the King said: "Bring him before me!" But when the King's messenger came unto him, Joseph said: "Go back to your lord and ask him first to find out the truth about those women who cut their hands-for, behold, until now it is my Sustainer alone who has full knowledge of their guile!" (50) Thereupon the King sent for those women; and when they came, he asked: "What was it that you hoped to achieve when you sought to make Joseph yield himself unto you?" The women answered: "God save us! We did not perceive the least evil intention on his part!" And the wife of Joseph's former master exclaimed: "Now has the truth come to light! It was I who sought to make him yield himself unto me - whereas he, behold, was indeed speaking the truth!" (51) When Joseph learned what had happened, he said: "I asked for this, so that my former master might know that I did not betray him behind his back, and that God does not bless with His guidance the artful schemes of those who betray their trust. (52) And yet, I am not trying to absolve myself: for, verily, man's inner self does incite him to evil,

and saved are only they upon whom my Sustainer bestows His grace. Behold, my Sustainer is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" (53).

Joseph then goes to meet Pharaoh (the Qur'an speaks of him as 'the king'). Genesis, unlike the Qur'an, gives a wealth of colorful detail, not omitting to mention that Joseph shaved and changed his clothes before appearing in front of Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14).

After his appointment 'over the storehouses of the land', we have the comment in the Qur'an, with God speaking in the divine plural:

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ۚ نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَنْ نَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

وَلَا أَجْرُ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ

But in the eyes of those who have attained to faith and have always been conscious of Us, a reward in the life to come is a far greater good than any reward in this world. (57).

12:56–57

Again, God appears on every occasion and the aid He gives to Joseph is universalised as attainable by anybody who follows the course described here. The lessons are there and the way is open throughout the sira. Genesis, on the other hand, delights in listing the profuse honours conferred on Joseph and how powerful he has become, how he 'gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering' (41:49) with an abundance of vivid personal and environmental detail.

It is interesting to note at this point that there is a consistent tendency in Genesis to put Joseph in charge of everything wherever he goes after he is sold to Potiphar. Thus we find that Potiphar

... made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand ... And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat.

genesis 39:4,6

Likewise, when he is in prison, 'the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison ... and looked not to anything that was under his hand' (39:22–23

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَى نُورٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِي تَقْشَعِرُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ

Could, then, one whose bosom God has opened wide with willingness towards self-surrender unto Him, so that he is illumined by a light that flows from his Sustainer, be likened to the blind and deaf of heart? Woe, then, unto those whose hearts are hardened against all remembrance of God! They are most obviously lost in error! (22) God bestows from on high the best of all teachings in the shape of a divine writ fully consistent within itself, repeating each statement of the truth in manifold forms a divine writ whereat shiver the skins of all who of their Sustainer stand in awe: but in the end their skins and their hearts do soften at the remembrance of the grace of God. Such is God's guidance: He guides therewith him that wills to be guided whereas he whom God lets go astray can never find any guide (23)).

Then, when he meets Pharaoh, Pharaoh says to him, 'I have set you over all the land of Egypt ... and he made him to ride in the second chariot and they cried before him "Bow the knee": and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt ... and said to him: without you shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt' (Genesis:41–44). There is no such emphasis in the Qur'an.

Joseph in Charge of the Storehouses

Now all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn: because that the Famine (shortage) was so sore in all lands. Jacob saw there was corn in Egypt and said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? ... I have heard there is corn in Egypt: get ye down thither and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die. genesis 41:57; 42, 1–2

The two scriptures agree in reporting that when the brothers come before Joseph, he recognizes them but does not declare himself, and asks them to bring the youngest brother for him to see; but Genesis shows him as appearing rough, accusing them of spying and keeping Simeon in prison as security for their return with Benjamin (42:16–24). In the Qur'an Joseph does not use this stratagem but generous treatment and persuasion instead (12:59–60)

وَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُمْ بِجَهَّازِهِمْ قَالِ ائْتُونِي بِأَخٍ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَبِيكُمْ ۖ أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنِّي أُوفِي الْكَيْلَ وَأَنَا خَيْرُ الْمُنْزِلِينَ
فَإِنْ لَمْ تَأْتُونِي بِهِ فَلَا كَيْلَ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي وَلَا تَقْرَبُونِ

And when he had provided them with their provisions, he said: "When you come here next, bring unto me that brother of yours from your father's side. Do you not see that I have given you full measure and have been the best of hosts? (59) But if you do not bring him unto me, you shall never again receive a single measure of grain from me, nor shall you be allowed to come near me!" (60). This is in keeping with the general picture of the Qur'anic Joseph as a pleasant, gentle and kind man min al-muhsinin, different from the picture given in Genesis later of Joseph distributing corn in Egypt and the price he exacts for it. Nevertheless, from the time he sees his brothers until the reconciliation, Genesis presents very touching situations on the personal level. Faced with the accusation of spying, the brothers are shown to remember and recognize their guilt in regard to the young Joseph; they see their present predicament as divine retribution and Reuben reminds them of his plea 'not to sin against the child'. When Joseph (whom they think does not understand their tongue) hears this, '... he turned himself about from them and wept' (Genesis 42:24).

Both texts (Qur'an 12:63–66

فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَبِيهِمْ قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مُنِعَ مِنَّا الْكَيْلُ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا أَخَانَا نَكْتَلْ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ
قَالَ هَلْ آمَنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَا أَمِنْتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَخِيهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ قَالَ اللَّهُ خَيْرَ حَافِظًا ۖ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ
وَلَمَّا فَتَحُوا مَتَاعَهُمْ وَجَدُوا بِضَاعَتَهُمْ رُدَّتْ إِلَيْهِمْ ۖ قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا نَبْغِي ۖ هَذِهِ بِضَاعَتُنَا رُدَّتْ
إِلَيْنَا ۖ وَنَمِيرُ أَهْلَنَا وَنَحْفَظُ أَخَانَا وَنَزِدَادُ كَيْلَ بَعِيرٍ ۖ ذَلِكَ كَيْلُ يَسِيرٍ
قَالَ لَنْ أَرْسِلَهُ مَعَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ تُؤْتُونِ مَوْثِقًا مِنَ اللَّهِ لَتَأْتُنَّنِي بِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ يُحَاطَ بِكُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا آتَوْهُ مَوْثِقَهُمْ قَالَ
اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ

And so, when they returned to their father, Joseph's brothers said: "O our father! All grain is to be withheld from us in the future unless we bring Benjamin with us: send, therefore, our brother with us, so that we may obtain our measure (of grain; and, verily, we shall guard him well!" (63) Jacob replied: "Shall I trust you with him in the same way as I trusted you with his brother (Joseph aforetime? Nay, but God's guardianship is better than yours, for He is the most merciful of the merciful!" (64) Thereupon, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them; and they said: "O our father! What more could we desire? Here is our merchandise: it has been returned to us! If you send Benjamin with us, we shall (again be able to bring food for our family, and shall guard our brother well, and receive in addition another camel-

load of grain That which we have brought the first time was but a scanty measure." (65) Said Jacob: "I will not send him with you until you give me a solemn pledge, before God, that you will indeed bring him back unto me, unless you yourselves be encompassed by death!" And when they had given him their solemn pledge, Jacob said: "God is witness to all that we say!" (66) and Genesis 42:39–43:14) show the brothers pleading hard with Jacob to send Benjamin. In the Qur'an he makes them promise in the name of God to bring him back, and when they do, he says 'God is the witness of what we say.' He advises them when in Egypt not to enter through one gate together, but as a prophet he comments:

وَقَالَ يَا بَنِيَّ لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِنْ بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ وَادْخُلُوا مِنْ أَبْوَابٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ ۖ وَمَا أُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ۚ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

And he added: "O my sons! Do not enter the city all by one gate, but enter by different gates. Yet even so, I can be of no avail whatever to you against anything that may be willed by God: judgment as to what is to happen rests with none but God. In Him have I placed my trust: for, all who have trust in His existence must place their trust in Him alone." (67)
12:67

In Genesis, characteristically, he asks them to take a present to 'the man (i.e. Joseph): a little balm, and a little honey, spices and myrrh(natural gum), nuts and almonds' (43:11) (what a lovely present from this old man!).

In the Qur'an, when they meet Joseph he embraces his brother and says, 'I am your brother. Do not grieve at what they did' (Q. 12:69

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ آوَىٰ إِلَيْهِ أَخَاهُ ۚ قَالَ إِنِّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

AND WHEN the sons of Jacob presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his brother Benjamin unto himself, saying to him in secret: "Behold, I am your brother! So grieve you not over their past doings!"(69).

In Genesis this declaration comes later: Joseph first asks his steward to take them to the house and prepare for lunch. In Genesis, Joseph speaks to Benjamin:

'God be gracious unto thee, my son.' And Joseph made haste, for his bowels did yearn for his brother: and he sought where to weep.
genesis 43:30

When they sat for the meal:

He took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five

times so much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.
genesis 43:34

Both texts speak of the placing of the goblet in Benjamin's bag as a device to keep him in Egypt, and both mention the brothers' plea to Joseph (when the goblet is found and Benjamin is ordered to be detained) to let him go back to his old father and take one of them into bondage instead, 'as we see you are a good, kind man' (Qur'an 12:78–80)

قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ إِنَّ لَهُ أَبًا شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا فَخُذْ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ ۖ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ
قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ أَنْ نَأْخُذَ إِلَّا مَنْ وَجَدْنَا مَتَاعَنَا عِنْدَهُ إِنَّا إِذًا لَظَالِمُونَ
فَلَمَّا اسْتِأْذَنُوا مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا ۖ قَالَ كَبِيرُهُمْ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ أَبَاكُمْ قَدْ أَخَذَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَوْثِقًا مِنَ اللَّهِ
وَمِنْ قَبْلُ مَا فَرَّطْتُمْ فِي يُوسُفَ ۖ فَلَنْ أَبْرَحَ الْأَرْضَ حَتَّى يَأْذَنَ لِي أَبِي أَوْ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ لِي ۖ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ
الْحَاكِمِينَ

They said: "O you great one! Behold, he has a father, a very old man: detain, therefore, one of us in his stead. Verily, we see that you art a doer of good!" (78) He answered: "May God preserve us from the sin of detaining any other than him with whom we have found our property-for then, behold, we would indeed be evildoers!" (79) And so, when they lost all hope of moving him, they withdrew to take counsel among themselves. The eldest of them said: "Do you not remember that your father has bound you by a solemn pledge before God - and how, before that, you had failed with regard to Joseph? Hence, I shall not depart from this land till my father gives me leave or God passes judgment in my favour: for He is the best of all judges. (80); and in Genesis 43:18–34).

In Genesis, the apprehension of these strangers in the house of a high official in a foreign land is touchingly expressed in their fear that the man may seize their asses and make them slaves, as punishment for the 'theft' of the goblet. They submissively explain they have brought it back and 'the man' reassures them that they are safe. We also have the very moving speech of Judah before Joseph, repeating material that has been said before but which is therefore all the more effective in this situation, since the intention is to bind Joseph and make him see that the brothers' present predicament is the result of his own earlier instructions:

... 'When I come to your servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life ... when he seeth that the lad is not with us he will die and your servants shall bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave... Let your servant abide instead of the lad, a bondsman to my Lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren' ... Joseph could not restrain himself and wept aloud and the Egyptians and house of Pharaoh heard.
genesis 44:31–34

At this point Joseph declares himself to his brothers and reconciliation takes place.

In the Qur'an the reconciliation is delayed. The brothers go back to Jacob without Benjamin and the eldest brother. As a prophet, Jacob never loses faith in God's grace, saying:

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ۖ فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ۖ عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

AND WHEN they returned to their father and told him what had happened, he exclaimed: "Nay, but it is your own minds that have made so terrible a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But as for myself, patience in adversity is most goodly; God may well bring them all back unto me: verily, He alone is all-knowing, truly wise!" (83) .

12:83

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسَفَى عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزَنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ
قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَفْتَأُ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّى تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْهَالِكِينَ
قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ
يَا بَنِي إِذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيَاسُّوا مِنْ رُوحِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْئَاسُ مِنْ رُوحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا
الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

But he turned away from them and said: "O woe is me for Joseph!"-and his eyes became dim from the grief with which he was filled. (84) Said his sons: "By God! you wilt never cease to remember, Joseph till you art broken in body and spirit or art dead!" (85) He answered: "It is only to God that I complain of my deep grief and my sorrow: for I know, from God, something that you do not know. (86) Hence, O my sons, go forth and try to obtain some tidings of Joseph and his brother; and do not lose hope of God's life-giving mercy: verily, none but people who deny the truth can ever lose hope of God's life-giving mercy. (87)

12:84–87

When they go back to Joseph more distressed than before, and ask him to be charitable with them, he replies: 'God rewards the charitable. Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brothers when you were ignorant?' Thus the revelation made to the young Joseph in the pit –

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ ۚ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

And so, when they went away with him, they decided to cast him into the dark depths of the well. And We revealed this unto him: "Thou wilt yet remind them of this their deed at a time when they shall not perceive who you art!" (15)' (12:15) is fulfilled here.

He declares himself and reconciliation takes place (12:88–92)

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضَاعَةٍ مُزْجَاةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ
قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ
قَالُوا إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ يُوسُفُ ۚ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي ۚ قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا ۚ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجَرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ
قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ آتَرَكَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنْ كُنَّا لَخَاطِئِينَ
قَالَ لَا تَثْرِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ ۚ يَعْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۚ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

AND THE SONS of Jacob went back to Egypt and to Joseph; and when they presented themselves before him, they said: "O you great one! Hardship has visited us and our folk, and so we have brought but scanty merchandise; but give us a full measure of grain, and be charitable to us: behold, God rewards those who give in charity!" (88) Replied he: "Do you remember what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were still unaware of right and wrong?" (89) They exclaimed: "Why - is it indeed you who art Joseph?" He answered: "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious unto us. Verily, if one is conscious of Him and patient in adversity behold, God does not fail to requite the doers of good!" (90) The brothers said: "By God! Most certainly has God raised you high above us, and we were indeed but sinners!" (91) Said he: "No reproach shall be uttered today against you. May God forgive you your sins: for He is the most merciful of the merciful! (92)).

He asks them:

اذْهَبُوا بِقَمِيصِي هَذَا فَاَلْقُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بَصِيرًا وَأْتُونِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

And now go and take this tunic of mine and lay it over my father's face, and he will recover his sight. And thereupon come back to me with all your family." (93). 12:93

Jacob could smell the scent of Joseph (in the shirt) from a distance.

Joseph's shirt figures three times in the Qur'anic chapter: first stained with blood, to grieve Jacob, then used as evidence of Joseph's innocence with Potiphar's wife, and now as evidence he is still alive; placed on Jacob's face, it brings about recovery of his sight, whereas in Genesis God tells Jacob in a dream to go to Egypt, saying: 'Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes' (46:4).

'He Will Perfect His Favour to You and to the House of Jacob'

With such faith and expectation, the Jacob of the Qur'an has no apprehension about going to Egypt. In Genesis, where he is convinced from the beginning that Joseph has been devoured by a wolf, when they tell him Joseph is alive in Egypt his 'heart fainted, for he believed them not' (45:26). Genesis gives details of the carriages Pharaoh orders to be sent to carry Jacob and his household to Egypt, how they come with all their cattle, and then provides a full list of all their names totalling the number of people Jacob brought into Egypt as seventy (46:8-27) – we will return to this point later.

'This is the Interpretation of My Old Dream'

In the Qur'an Joseph embraces his parents, saying:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ آوَىٰ إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ وَقَالَ ادْخُلُوا مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ آمِنِينَ
وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا ۖ وَقَالَ يَا أَبَتِ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُؤْيَايَ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي
حَقًّا ۖ وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِي إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ السِّجْنِ وَجَاءَ بِكُمْ مِنَ الْبَدْوِ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ نَزَغَ الشَّيْطَانُ بَيْنِي
وَبَيْنَ إِخْوَتِي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفٌ لِمَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

AND WHEN they all arrived in Egypt and presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his parents unto himself, saying, "Enter Egypt! If God so wills, you shall be secure from all evil!" (99) And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour; and they all fell down before Him, prostrating themselves in adoration. Thereupon Joseph said: "O my father! This is the real meaning of my dream of long ago, which my Sustainer has made come true. And He was indeed good to me when He freed me from the prison, and when He brought you all unto me from the desert after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers. Verily, my Sustainer is unfathomable in the way He brings about whatever He wills: verily, He alone is all-knowing, truly wise! (100) .

The Qur'an here speaks of the parents and brothers bowing down to Joseph, fulfilling his dream of seeing eleven stars, the sun and the moon bowing to him. In Genesis only ten brothers bow to Joseph when they first come to buy corn (Genesis 42:7) leaving the rest of the dream unfulfilled. In the Qur'an, after telling his father of the fulfilment of the dream, Joseph prays in his supreme moment:

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا ۖ وَقَالَ يَا أَبَتِ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُؤْيَايَ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقًّا ۖ وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِي إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ السِّجْنِ وَجَاءَ بِكُمْ مِنَ الْبَدْوِ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ نَزَغَ الشَّيْطَانُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ إِخْوَتِي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفٌ لِمَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

"O my Sustainer! you hast indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and hast imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! you art near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee, and make me one with the righteous!" (101).

12:101

In the Qur'anic story, the first thing Jacob says of the dream when Joseph speaks to him about it in the beginning is:

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَمَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَبَوَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

For, as you hast been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6)

12:6

Joseph's last statement now echoes these words and completes this cycle; the story does not go any further in the Qur'an. In his last words, Joseph is a true prophet in Abraham's line. The picture given later in Genesis, however, of Joseph having bought all the people's silver, then their cattle, then their land, then their bodies in exchange for bread (47:13–22), does not fit with the picture given in the Qur'an. In the latter, with the arrival of Joseph's family in Egypt all has ended well and he prays that the end of his life, when it comes, will be in true submission to God and that He may bring him together in the hereafter with the righteous. These last words of

Joseph's, which end his story in the Qur'an, also differ from the last words at the end of the story in Genesis.

So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.
genesis 50:26

In Genesis, from the beginning of the story to the time when all the family join Joseph in Egypt, the one single time Jacob talks about God or refers to Him is at the peak of his anxiety and helplessness; sending his sons to Egypt the second time, with Benjamin as required, he says:

God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.
genesis 43:14

In the Qur'an, on the other hand, Jacob constantly speaks of God; the Qur'anic Jacob is a prophet, a descendant of the great prophet Abraham. For both Jacob and Joseph in the Qur'an, all hope and trust is placed in God

(e.g. 12:6

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَمَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَبَوَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

For, as you have been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6), 18

وَجَاءُوا عَلَىٰ قَمِيصِهِ بِدَمٍ كَذِبٍ ۚ قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ۖ فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ۚ وَاللَّهُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ

and they produced his tunic with false blood upon it. But Jacob exclaimed: "Nay, but it is your own minds that have made so terrible a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But as for myself, patience in adversity is most goodly in the sight of God; and it is to God alone that I pray to give me strength to bear the misfortune which you have described to me." (18), 21

وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا ۖ وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

And the man from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay with us honourable; he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We gave unto Joseph a firm place on earth; and We did this so that We might impart unto him some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings. For, God always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not. (21),

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ ۖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنَّ رَأَىٰ بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ ۚ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ ۚ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ

And, indeed, she desired him, and he desired her; and he would have succumbed had he not seen in this temptation an evidence of his Sustainer's truth: thus We willed it to be in order that We might avert from him all evil and all deeds of abomination -for, behold, he was truly one of Our servants. (24), 38 ARABIC and I follow the creed of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not conceivable that we should be allowed to ascribe divinity to aught beside God: this is an outcome of God's bounty unto us and unto all mankind -but most people are ungrateful. (38),

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ۚ نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَنْ نَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And thus We established Joseph securely in the land of Egypt: he had full mastery over it, doing whatever he willed. Thus do We cause Our grace to alight upon whomever We will; and We do not fail to requite the doers of good. (56),

قَالَ هَلْ آمَنْتُمْ عَلَىٰهِ إِلَّا كَمَا آمَنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَخِيهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ قَالَ اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ حَافِظًا ۚ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ
Jacob replied: "Shall I trust you with him in the same way as I trusted you with his brother (Joseph aforetime? Nay, but God's guardianship is better than yours, for He is the most merciful of the merciful!" (64),

وَقَالَ يَا بَنِيَّ لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِنْ بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ وَادْخُلُوا مِنْ أَبْوَابٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ ۚ وَمَا أُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ۚ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

And he added: "O my sons! Do not enter the city all by one gate, but enter by different gates. Yet even so, I can be of no avail whatever to you against anything that may be willed by God: judgment as to what is to happen rests with

none but God. In Him have I placed my trust: for, all who have trust in His existence must place their trust in Him alone." (67),

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْراً ۖ فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ۚ عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

AND WHEN they returned to their father and told him what had happened, he exclaimed: "Nay, but it is your own minds that have made so terrible a happening seem a matter of little account to you! But as for myself, patience in adversity is most goodly; God may well bring them all back unto me: verily, He alone is all-knowing, truly wise!" (83) ,

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

He said: "I shall ask my Sustainer to forgive you: He alone is truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace!" (98),

رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۚ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِماً وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

"O my Sustainer! you hast indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and hast imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! you art near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee, and make me one with the righteous!" (101).

Two Functions: Two Styles

The story of Joseph in the Qur'an is unquestionably that of a Prophet min anba' al-rusul. The only personal names mentioned in it are those of four prophets: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The article on Yisuf in the Encyclopaedia of Islam states: 'The Yisuf surah is strikingly uncertain and hesitating in that it mentions no one by name except Ya'qub and Yisuf and gives no numbers or time. The only references are to one of the brothers or at best the eldest of the brothers, a king, a noble, his wife, a witness.' The evidence cited as showing 'uncertainty' and 'hesitation' shows a lack of grasp of the Qur'anic style, particularly in connection with personal names. By this logic we would have to believe that the Qur'an and the Prophet were uncertain about, for instance, the name of the Prophet's closest friend and father-in-law (Abi Bakr), who is spoken of twice without his name being mentioned, reference, at best, being made to 'his companion'

in the cave. After the name of God, those of Prophets are the most important names in the Qur'an. Muhammad is mentioned by name only five times, and the Qur'an does not begin with or contain a biography or genealogy of him. Apart from prophets and angels, Satan and some idols, the only names mentioned are Mary, for obvious reasons, Zayd (33:37

وَإِذْ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِي أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْسِكْ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَتُخْفِي فِي نَفْسِكَ مَا اللَّهُ مُبْدِيهِ وَتَخْشَى النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَاهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا قَضَى زَيْدٌ مِنْهَا وَطَرًا زَوَّجْنَاكَهَا لِكَيْ لَا يَكُونَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ حَرَجٌ فِي أَزْوَاجِ أَدْعِيَائِهِمْ إِذَا قَضَوْا مِنْهُنَّ وَطَرًا ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا

AND LO, O Muhammad, you didst say unto the one to whom God had shown favour and to whom you hadst shown favour, "Hold on to your wife, and remain conscious of God!" And thus wouldst you hide within thyself something that God was about to bring to light for you didst stand in awe of what people might think, whereas it was God alone of whom you shouldst have stood in awe! But then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that in future no blame should attach to the believers for marrying the spouses of their adopted children when the latter have come to the end of their union with them. And thus God's will was done.), for reasons of legislation and the nickname Abi Lahab (the Father of Flames) (111:1

DOOMED are the hands of him of the glowing countenance: and doomed is he!), for reasons of condemnation. If we bear this in mind, it becomes clear that the Qur'an conveys its message without reference to personal names. For the Qur'an it was not important to specify that Joseph was sold to Potiphar; what is important is that this boy in his affliction reached (by the Grace of God who is 'subtle in disposing His will') a safe refuge in the household of an important person who looked after him well, that it was this very household that later led to another ordeal in prison, and that this in turn led to his meeting and being elevated by the king or pharaoh. (It is true that Genesis does not give the name of the pharaoh but it gives the name of everybody else.)

In Genesis the picture is different because the function of the text is different. Clearly the story there is part of Jewish history. In Chapter 46 we have the names of seventy persons who migrated to Egypt 'all the souls of the house of Jacob which came to Egypt were three score and ten' (47:27).

The historiographical nature of the text here even prompts a grand total to be given at the end of the list. It matters very much to Jewish readers to know the names of their ancestors – whereas to Muslim readers knowing these names is not necessary or, if it is, they can be sought in history textbooks, not in the revealed text of the Qur'an. In connection with revelation, on the other hand, it matters very much to Muslims to know the names of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc., because being Muslim means believing in these prophets: '

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۚ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ ۚ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۚ غُفْرَانِكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

THE APOSTLE, and the believers with him, believe in what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer: they all believe in God, and His angels, and His revelations, and His apostles, making no distinction between any of His apostles; and they say: We have heard, and we pay heed. Grant us your forgiveness, O our Sustainer, for with you is all journeys' end! (2:285).

The moral of the story is quite undiminished by the fact that it follows the regular pattern of the Qur'an as regards personal names. Thus, it is not a matter of 'uncertainty' about names as is suggested in the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

The story of Joseph is told in the Qur'an in 100 verses, 10 pages in Arabic; in Genesis it contains more than 450 verses and takes up 26 pages of the Arabic Bible. The difference in size is due partly to the longer timespan in Genesis, but mainly to the differing styles and functions of the two texts. Genesis talks about Joseph's marriage after meeting Pharaoh and the subsequent birth of two children whose names are included in the long list of Jacob's offspring in Egypt because this is part of Jewish history. The Qur'an, on the other hand, concentrates on the major issue of the famine and its results which were part of the fulfilment of Joseph's old dream. Joseph's marriage and the exact names of his children are not part of this. Genesis also uses more narrative. It obviously delights in including a wealth of personal and local detail, and long lists of names; and within the style of narrative it sometimes includes long statements repeated verbatim (e.g. Pharaoh's long statement of his dream, repeated again before Joseph; compare also 42:29–35 And among His signs is the very creation of the heavens and the earth, and of all the living creatures which He has caused to multiply throughout them: and since He has created them, He has also the power to gather them unto Himself whenever He wills. (29) Now whatever calamity may befall you on Judgment Day will be an outcome of what your own hands have wrought, although He pardons much; (30) and you cannot elude Him on earth, and you will have none to protect you from God in the life to come, and none to bring you succour. (31) And among His signs are the ships that sail like floating mountains through the seas: (32) if He so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea's surface - and herein, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are wholly patient in adversity and deeply grateful to God; (33) or else He may cause them to perish because of what they have wrought; and withal, He pardons much. (34) And let them know, those who call Our messages in question, that for them there is no escape. (35) with the earlier part of the chapter).

The Qur'an uses a different technique for telling the story, which has been called 'dramatic'. The story falls into twenty-eight scenes¹⁷ structured on movement and dialogue; what little narrative there is serves mainly to introduce the characters by 'he said', written as one word in Arabic and followed by the direct speech of the character. I counted seventy-five occurrences of 'he/they said' in the 100 Arabic verses of the story. Thus in verses 8–10 we see the brothers conferring to decide how to dispose of Joseph; in verses 11–13 they attempt to persuade the father to let him go with them; in 16–18 they go back to Jacob with the stained shirt ... and so on in quick succession. As in a play the curtain falls and rises between scenes with gaps left in time and action because they can be filled in from the remaining text – in the Arabic *Sirat Yisuf*, despite the gaps between the scenes, the whole text is clearly understood.¹⁸ Thus at verse 35 the decision is taken to send Joseph to prison; in verse 36 two young men who went to prison with him are already telling him their dreams. In masterly, concise style, both dreams are told in all clarity in a total of two lines. We observed earlier how Pharaoh's dream and request for interpretation were told in two and a half lines, then reported to Joseph in the same amount of space, whereas in Genesis (in the Arabic version), they take up nine times as many lines.

This technique, which relies on scenes (with gaps in between) and dialogue, is sufficient for the purpose of the story in the Qur'an and is by no means unique to the story of Joseph.¹⁹ Naturally this 'gap' technique does not allow the detailed narrative or genealogies found in Genesis. In the Qur'an (verse 69) the brothers come to Joseph with Benjamin as requested, Joseph embraces him, declares himself to him, and reassures him – all succinctly put in one-and-a-half lines. Immediately after this, in verse 70, they are already provided with the corn they came to buy, the goblet is placed in Benjamin's bag and the cry has gone out: 'Travellers, you are thieves' – again, all in less than two lines. This technique serves a different intention to the leisurely, circumstantial narrative in Genesis where the course of the meal is described, together with the seating arrangements, an explanation is given of why the Egyptians will not sit with Hebrews, and Joseph is seen portioning food out from before him and sending it to his brothers, giving Benjamin five times as much as any of the rest!

It is truly remarkable that with all the gaps and great economy of style in the Qur'an, the story is very clear in Arabic and does not require anything from outside the Qur'an in order to be appreciated and its message fully understood. With all the varieties of scenes and dialogue, the story gives a special flavour to the afflictions of Jacob and Joseph – which none of the translators of the Qur'an into English could capture. To an Arab reader the existing translations of *Sirat Yisuf* (and of the whole of the Qur'an) are very disappointing.

In the Qur'anic version, the story is structured very tightly, the scenes being bound together in between the introductory 'summary' (12:4–6 LO! Thus spoke Joseph unto his father: "O my father! Behold, I saw in a dream eleven stars, as well as the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves before me!"(4) Jacob replied: "O my dear son! Do not relate your dream to your brothers lest out of envy they devise an evil scheme against thee; verily, Satan is man's open foe! (5) For, as you hast been shown in your dream, even thus will your Sustainer elect thee, and will impart unto you some understanding of the inner meaning of happenings, and will bestow the full measure of His blessings upon you and upon the House of Jacob -even as, aforetime, He bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Verily, your Sustainer is all-knowing, wise!" (6)) and the final restatement by Joseph (12:100

And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour; and they all fell down before Him, prostrating themselves in adoration. Thereupon Joseph said: "O my father! This is the real meaning of my dream of long ago, which my Sustainer has made come true. And He was indeed good to me when He freed me from the prison, and when He brought you all unto me from the desert after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers. Verily, my Sustainer is unfathomable in the way He brings about whatever He wills: verily, He alone is all-knowing, truly wise!). This structure is reinforced by certain expressions and comments that keep recurring to describe how Joseph is being taught, the knowledge and wisdom of God and His grace made universal, Jacob's and Joseph's patience, their abhorrence of injustice, their truthfulness, and Joseph's being good (min al-mu'sinin) (e.g. vv.6, 18, 19, 21–22, 27, 34, 37, 40, 46, 51, 55, 67–68, 77, 81–83, 86, 96, 101). Compared to the style of the story in the Qur'an as described above, with its scenes following each other in quick succession, it has been suggested of the style in Genesis, that:

of all the Genesis narratives, those about Joseph are the longest, and most detailed. They are not a collection of isolated and fragmentary incidents, but a continuous biography, novelistic in complexion, the artistic creation of a consummate storyteller even though it may have utilised variant traditions.²⁰ Gerhard von Rad also observed that 'the Joseph narrative in the Bible is a novel through and through'.²¹ Part of this technique is the copiousness of detail we have seen in Genesis.²² It was noted earlier that the Joseph story in Genesis forms part of the national history of the Jews. This appears to have affected the emphasis and the selection of the material. 'The biblical narrative is probably intended to emphasise the great indebtedness of the crown to Joseph and hence the base ingratitude of the later Pharaoh 'who did not know Joseph'

(Exodus 1:8).²³ Naturally the story of Joseph is also important to the Jews from the religious point of view because it forms part of sacred history: it is part of the process that culminates in the giving of the Torah to Moses.²⁴ The sacred history of the Old Testament is important also to the Christian because it prepares for the ministry of Jesus. Nevertheless, in addition to the general movement of history in which God's purpose is fulfilled, it seems that such an accumulation of detail also signifies the intention to record the national history as such. This is evidenced by the giving of the names of every one of the seventy individuals who went into Egypt taking their cattle and their goods with them, as well as details of customs and daily life, in the Joseph story. 'National history' and the 'novelistic ... artistic creation of a consummate storyteller'²⁵ have been perceived as important aspects of the Genesis story.

In the Qur'an, on the other hand, the story of Joseph is 'one of the stories of the apostles',

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهَدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson for those who are endowed with insight. As for this revelation, it could not possibly be a discourse invented by man: nay indeed, it is a divine writ confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations, clearly spelling out everything, and offering guidance and grace unto people who will believe. (111) (12:111).

It strengthened the Prophet Muhammad's heart, coming, it has been suggested, at the height of his difficulties and the persecution of the Muslim community in Mecca between 'the year of grief' in which the Prophet lost his wife and uncle and the hijra (the migration to Medina). It remains in the Qur'an 'a moral to men of understanding', especially as the protection and aid of God to Joseph has, as we said, been generalised in such comments as, 'Thus We reward those who do good' (12:22

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And when he reached full manhood, We bestowed upon him the ability to judge between right and wrong, as well as innate knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good. (22),

12:56

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ۚ نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَنْ نَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And thus We established Joseph securely in the land of Egypt: he had full mastery over it, doing whatever he willed. Thus do We cause Our grace to alight upon whomever We will; and We do not fail to requite the doers of good. (56)) and Joseph, commenting on the belief in the One God which he held following his fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: ‘Such is the grace that God has bestowed on us and on mankind, (12:38

وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

and I follow the creed of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not conceivable that we should be allowed to ascribe divinity to aught beside God: this is an outcome of God's bounty unto us and unto all mankind -but most people are ungrateful). The function of a revealed text in Islam is not to give national history; Muslims are not used to this, and the Qur'an does not contain a history of Muhammad's tribe. Nor is it the function of a revealed text in Islam to be like a 'novel through and through'.²⁶ Naturally, a revealed text may utilise historical information and literary style, as the Qur'an does, but as a means to a religious end. The end in Sirat Yisuf is different from that in Genesis.

In the Qur'an both Jacob and Joseph are prophets, their stories are 'for guidance' (12:111 ABOVE) and prophets are models to be followed (33:21

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

VERILY, in the Apostle of God you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope and awe to God and the Last Day, and remembers God unceasingly. (21)). In Genesis, Jacob is not presented as a prophet. Accordingly, the picture given of him does not meet this criterion: here is a father who obviously favours one child, takes the initiative in sending him away to those who would harm him, readily offers an explanation for his disappearance – that a wolf has eaten him – even though the shirt is not torn, then tears his own garment in uncontrolled grief, and up to the time the whole family is reunited in Egypt mentions the name of God only once. This last is, in fact, surprising in a man of his advanced age, who would be expected to refer to God more often – a man, moreover, who was the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac. The Qur'anic Jacob certainly fulfils the function of guidance.

Joseph's religious side is also far more emphasised in the Qur'an than any other aspect of his personality. He is a prophet whose story offers permanent universal guidance to believers. Although he is also guided by God in Genesis, other aspects of his character and of the whole story gain clear prominence. He appears also as a pleasant, handsome, gifted and able Hebrew economist who played an important role in the history of his nation.

‘For Men of Understanding’

The different functions of the story in the two scriptures require different

approaches to understanding them. Muslims who approach Genesis in the light of their experience of the Qur'an will quickly begin to feel that something very important is missing and may find the national chronicling an intrusion; this is liable to interfere with their response to it as a great story recounted in a delightful style. Likewise, non-Muslims who are accustomed to Genesis may find, if they approach the Qur'an with similar expectations, that it fails to provide what they are looking for, and may even find the didactic spirit in Sirat Yisuf an intrusion, which may interfere with their appreciation of this version of the story which has greatly inspired and given guidance and delight to Muslims throughout the ages.

Nevertheless, when all is told – when each story has run its course in its own style with its own preoccupations – readers of all faiths can see from both texts how God supported young Joseph when his brothers plotted against him, and can read what he said to his brothers:

Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive,
genesis 50:20

and what he said to his father when they all met in Egypt:

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا ۖ وَقَالَ يَا أَبَتِ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُؤْيَايَ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقًّا ۖ وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِي إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ السِّجْنِ وَجَاءَ بِكُمْ مِنَ الْبَدْوِ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ نَزَغَ الشَّيْطَانُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ إِخْوَتِي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفٌ لِمَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ
رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۖ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour; and they all fell down before Him, prostrating themselves in adoration. Thereupon Joseph said: "O my father! This is the real meaning of my dream of long ago, which my Sustainer has made come true. And He was indeed good to me when He freed me from the prison, and when He brought you all unto me from the desert after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers. Verily, my Sustainer is unfathomable in the way He brings about whatever He wills: verily, He alone is all-knowing, truly wise! (100) "O my Sustainer! you hast indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and hast imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! you art near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee, and make me one with the righteous!" (101) qur'an 12:100–101

Indeed, in the story of Joseph there will always be 'a moral for men of

understanding'.