



نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَن نَّشَاءُ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ



*We bestow of Our mercy on whom We please, and We suffer not, to be lost, the reward of those who do good.*

## Quran English Translation & Commentary

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### Introduction and Summary

For the chronological place of this Surah and the general argument of Surahs 10-15, see Introduction to Surah 10.

In subject matter this Surah is entirely taken up with the story (recapitulated rather than told) of Joseph, the youngest (but one) of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob. The story is called the most beautiful of stories ([12:3](#)) for many reasons;

1. it is the most detailed of any in the Quran;
2. it is full of human vicissitudes, and has therefore deservedly appealed to men and women of all classes;

3. it paints in vivid colours, with their spiritual implications, the most varied aspects of life-the patriarch's old age and the confidence between him and his little best-beloved son, the elder brothers' jealousy of this little son, their plot and their father's grief, the sale of the father's darling into slavery for a miserable little price, carnal love contrasted with purity and chastity, false charges, prison, the interpretation of dreams, low life and high life, Innocence raised to honour, the sweet "revenge" of Forgiveness and Benevolence, high matters of state and administration, humility in exaltation, filial love, and the beauty of Piety and Truth.

The story is similar to but not identical with the Biblical story; but the atmosphere is wholly different.

The Biblical story is like a folklore in which morality has no place. Its tendency is to exalt the clever and financially-minded Jew against the Egyptian, and to explain certain ethic and tribal peculiarities in later Jewish history. Joseph is shown as buying up all the cattle and the land of the poor Egyptians for the State under the stress of famine conditions, and making the Israelites "rulers" over Pharaoh's cattle.

The Quranic story, on the other hand, is less a narrative than a highly spiritual sermon or allegory explaining the seeming contradictions in life, the enduring nature of virtue in a world full of flux and change, and the marvelous working of Allah's eternal purpose in His Plan as unfolded to us on the wide canvas of history. This aspect of the matter has been a favourite with Muslims poets and Sufi exegetics. (R).

**Summary-** Life is a dream and a vision, to be explained by stories and parables, as in the perspicuous Arabic Quran. The truth, which Joseph the Prophet of Allah saw in his vision, was unpalatable to his ten half-brothers, who plotted against him and sold him into slavery to a merchant for a few pieces of silver (12:1-20, and C. 109).

Joseph was taken by the merchant into Egypt, was bought by a great Egyptian court dignitary (Aziz), who adopted him. The dignitary's wife sought, but in vain, to attract Joseph to the delights of earthly love. His resistance brought him disgrace and

imprisonment, but he taught the truth even in prison and was known for his kindness. One of his fellow prisoners to whom he had interpreted even in prison and was known for his kindness. One of his fellow prisoners, to whom he had interpreted a dream, was released and received into favour as the King's cupbearer (12:21-42, and C. 110).

The King had a vision, which Joseph (through the cupbearer) got an opportunity to explain. Joseph insisted that all the scandal that had been raised about him should be publicly cleared. He was received into favour, and was appointed Wazir by the King. His half-brothers (driven by famine) came to Egypt and were treated kindly by Joseph without their knowing his identity. He asks them to bring his full brother, the youngest son, Benjamin (12:43-68, and C. 111).

Joseph detains Benjamin and by a stratagem convicts his half-brothers of their hatred and crime against himself, forgives them, and sends them to bring Jacob and the whole family from Cannon to Egypt. (12:69-93, and C. 112).

Israel (Jacob) comes, is comforted, and settles in Egypt. The name of Allah is glorified. The truth of Allah endures forever, and Allah's purpose is fully revealed in the Hereafter (12:94-111, and C. 113).

### **C.109 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)**

**(12:1-20)**

*Life and Wisdom are explained by Signs,  
Symbols, Parables, and moving Stories,  
In the Holy Quran. A beautiful story  
Is that of Joseph, the best-beloved son  
Of Jacob. His future greatness  
Was prefigured in a vision, but his brothers  
Were filled with envy and hate; they plotted  
To get rid of him and threw him down  
Into a well. Some merchants found him,*

*Bound the Egypt. The brothers sold him  
Into slavery for a few silver coins-  
Him, the noblest man of his age,  
Marked out by Allah for a destiny  
Of greatness, righteousness, and benevolence.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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الر...

1. Alif Lam Ra.

**C1627.** For these mystic letters, see Introduction to Surah 10.

...تِلْكَ آيَاتُ...

These are the Symbols (or Verses)

**C1628. Ayat:** Signs and verses of the Quran.

The whole of Joseph's story is a Sign or a Miracle -a wonder- Working exposition of the Plan and Purpose of Allah.

... الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ (١)

of the Perspicuous Book.

**C1629.** Cf. 5:15, n. 716.

The predominant meaning of **Mubin** here is: one that explains or makes things clear.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (٢)

2. We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, in order that ye may learn wisdom.

**C1630. Quran** means:

something

- to be read, or

- recited, or
- proclaimed.

It may apply to a verse, or a Surah, or to the whole Book of Revelation.

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ...

3. We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to thee this (portion of the) Qur'an:

**C1631. Most beautiful of stories:** see Introduction to this Surah.

Eloquence consists in conveying by a word or hint many meanings for those who can understand and wish to learn wisdom.

Not only is Joseph's story "beautiful" in that sense, Joseph himself was renowned for manly beauty; the women of Egypt, called him a noble angel ([12:31](#)), and the beauty of his exterior form was a symbol of the beauty of his soul.

وإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ (٣)

before this, thou too wast among those who knew it not.

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي...

4. Behold, Joseph said to his father: "O my father!

**C1632.** For the Parable all that is necessary to know about Joseph is that he was one of the Chosen Ones of Allah. For the story it is necessary to set down a few more details.

His father was Jacob, also called Israel the son of Isaac, the younger son of Abraham, (the elder son having been Isma'il, whose story is told in [2:124-129](#)). Abraham may be called the Father of the line of Semitic prophecy.

Jacob had four wives. From three of them he had ten sons. In his old age he had from Rachel (Arabic Rahil) a very beautiful woman, two sons Joseph and Benjamin (the youngest).

The place where Jacob and his family and his flocks were located was in Canaan, and is shown by tradition near modern Nablus (ancient Shechem), some thirty miles north of Jerusalem. The traditional site of the well into which Joseph was thrown by his brothers is still shown in the neighbourhood.

...رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ (٤)

I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon:

I saw them prostrate themselves to me!"

**C1633.** Joseph was a mere lad. But he was true and frank and righteous; he was a type of manly beauty and rectitude. His father loved him dearly. His half-brothers were jealous of him and hated him.

His destiny was prefigured in the vision. He was to be exalted in rank above his eleven brothers (stars) and his father and mother (sun and moon), but as the subsequent story shows, he never lost his head, but always honoured his parents and repaid his brothers' craft and hatred with forgiveness and kindness.

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَى إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا...

5. Said (the father):

"My (dear) little son! relate not thy vision to thy brothers, lest they concoct a plot against thee:

**C1634.** The young lad Yusuf was innocent and did not even know of his brothers' guile and hatred, but the father knew and warned him.

...إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (٥)

for Satan is to man an avowed enemy!

**C1635.** The story is brought up at once to its spiritual bearing.

These wicked brothers were puppets in the hands of Evil. They allowed their manhood to be subjugated by Evil, not remembering that Evil was the declared opposite or enemy of the true nature and instincts of manhood.

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ...

6. "Thus will thy Lord choose thee and teach thee the interpretation of stories (and events)

**C1636.** If Joseph was to be of the elect, he must understand and interpret Signs and events aright. The imagination of the pure sees truths, which those not so endowed cannot understand. The dreams of the righteous prefigure great events, while the dreams of the futile are mere idle futilities. Even things that happen to us are often like dreams.

The righteous man receives disasters and reverses, not with blasphemies against Allah, but with humble devotion, seeking to ascertain His Will. Not does he receive good fortune with arrogance, but as an opportunity for doing good to friends and foes alike. His attitude to histories and stories is the same; he seeks the edifying material which leads to Allah.

وَيُنِّمُ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَى آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَنْمَهَا عَلَى آبَائِكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ  
إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ...

and perfect His favor to thee and to the posterity of Jacob -- even as He perfected it to thy fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime!

...إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ (٦)

For Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom."

**C1637.** Whatever happens is the result of Allah's Will and Plan. And He is good and wise, and He knows all things. Therefore we must trust Him.

In Joseph's case he could look back to his fathers, and to Abraham, the True, the Righteous, who through all adversities kept his Faith pure and undefiled, and won through.

## Section 2

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٍ لِّلسَّائِلِينَ (٧)

7. Verily in Joseph and his brethren are Signs (or Symbols) for Seekers (after Truth).

**C1638.** In Joseph's story we have good and evil contrasted in so many different ways. Those in search of true spiritual knowledge can see it embodied in concrete events in this story of many facets, matching the colours of Joseph's many-coloured coat.

إِذْ قَالُوا لِيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ...

8. They said:

"Truly Joseph and his brother are loved more by our father than we:

but we are a goodly body!

**C1639.** The ten brothers envied and hated their innocent younger brothers Joseph and Benjamin.

Jacob had the wisdom to see that his young and innocent sons wanted protection and to perceive Joseph's spiritual greatness.

But his wisdom, to them, was folly or madness of imbecility, because it touched their self-love, as truth often does. And they relied on the brute strength of numbers-the ten hefty brethren against old Jacob, the lad Joseph, and the boy Benjamin!

...إِنَّ أَبَانَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٨)

Really our father is obviously wandering (in his mind)!

اقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوْ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهَ أَبِيكُمْ...

9. "Slay ye Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, that so the favor of your father may be given to you alone:

...وَتَكُونُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ (٩)

(There will be time enough) for you to be righteous after that!"

**C1640.** There seems to be some irony here, consistent with the cynical nature of these callous, worldly-wise brethren. The goodness of Joseph was a reproach to their own wickedness. Perhaps the grieved father contrasted Joseph against them, and sometimes spoke of it: "Why don't you be good like Joseph?"

This was gall and wormwood to them. Real goodness was to them nothing but a name. Perhaps it only suggested hypocrisy to them. So they plotted to get rid of Joseph. In their mean hearts they thought that would bring back their father's love whole to them. But they valued that love only for what material good they could get out of it.

On the other hand their father was neither foolish nor unjustly partial. He only knew the difference between gold and dross. They say in irony,

"Let us first get rid of Joseph. It will be time enough then to pretend to be 'good' like him, or to repent of our crime after we have had all its benefits in material things"!

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَأَلْفُوهُ فِي غِيَابَةِ الْجُبِّ...

10. Said one of them:

"Slay not Joseph, but if ye must do something, throw him down to the bottom of the well:

...يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ (١٠)

he will be picked up by some caravan of travellers."

**C1641.** One of the brethren, perhaps less cruel by nature, or perhaps more worldly- wise, said:

"Why undertake the risk of blood-guiltiness? Throw him into the well you see there! Some travellers passing by will pick him up and remove him to a far country. If not, at least we shall not have killed him,"

This was false casuistry, but such casuistry appeals to sinners of a certain kind of temperament.

The well was apparently a dry well, deep enough to prevent his coming out, but with no water in which he could be drowned. It was Allah's Plan to save him alive, but not to make Joseph indebted to any of his brethren for his life!

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَاصِحُونَ (١١)

11. They said:

"O our father! why dost thou not trust us with Joseph -- seeing we are indeed his sincere well-wishers?"

**C1642.** The plot having been formed, the brethren proceed to put it into execution.

Jacob, knowing the situation, did not ordinarily trust his beloved Joseph with the brethren. The latter therefore remonstrate and feign brotherly affection.

أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبُ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ (١٢)

12. "Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take every care of him."

**C1643.** They did not expect their protestations to be believed in. But they added an argument that might appeal both to Jacob and Joseph.

'They were going to give their young brother a good time. Why not let him come out with them and play and enjoy himself to his heart's content?'

قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِي أَنْ تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ...

13. (Jacob) said:

"Really it saddens me that ye should take him away:

...وَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَأَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ غَافِلُونَ (١٣)

I fear lest the wolf should devour him while ye attend not to him."

**C1644.** Jacob did not know the precise plot, but he had strong misgivings.

But how could he put off these brethren? If they were driven to open hostility, they would be certain to cause him harm. He must deal with the brethren wisely and

cautiously. He pleaded that he was an old man, and would miss Joseph and be sad without him. And after all, Joseph was not of an age to play with them. They would be attending to their own affairs, and a wolf might come and attack and kill Joseph.

In saying this he was really unwittingly giving a cue to the wicked ones, for they use that very excuse in verse 17 below.

Thus the wicked plot thickens, but there is a counter-plan also, which is drawing a noose of lies round the wicked ones, so that they are eventually driven into a corner, and have to confess their own guilt in verse 91 below, and through repentance obtain forgiveness.

قَالُوا لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ الدَّيْبُ وَتَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذًا لَخَاسِرُونَ (١٤)

14. They said:

"If the wolf were to devour him while we are (so large) a party, then should we indeed (first) have perished ourselves!"

**C1645.** Jacob's objections as stated could be easily rebutted, and the brethren did so. They would be eleven in the party, and the ten strong and grown-up men would have to perish before the wolf could touch the young lad Joseph!

So they prevailed, as verbal arguments are apt to prevail, when events are weaving their web on quite another Plan, which has nothing to do with verbal arguments. Presumably Benjamin was too young to go with them.

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَاجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَةِ الْجُبِّ ...

15. So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well:

... وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ ...

and We put into his heart (this Message):

**C1646.** Allah was with Joseph in all his difficulties, sorrows, and sufferings, as He is with all His servants who put their trust in Him.

The poor lad was betrayed by his brothers, and left, perhaps to die or to be sold into slavery. But his heart was undaunted. His courage never failed him. On the contrary he had an inkling, a presentiment, of things that were to be—that his own rectitude and beauty of soul would land him on his feet, and perhaps some day, his brothers would stand in need of him, and he would be in a position to fulfil that need, and would do it gladly, putting them , to shame for their present plotting and betrayal of him.

... لَتُنَبِّئَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (١٥)

"Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair while they know (thee) not."

**C1647.** This situation actually occurred when Joseph later on became the governor of Egypt and his brothers stood before him suing for his assistance although they did not know that he was their betrayed brother;

see [12:89](#) below; also [12:58](#).

وَجَآؤُوا أَبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ (١٦)

16. Then they came to their father in the early part of the night, weeping.

**C1648.** The plotters were ready with their false tale for their father, but in order to make it appear plausible, they came some time after sundown, to show that they had made an effort to search for their brother and save him.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ ...

17. They said: "Oh our father! we went racing with one another,

**C1649.** They wanted to make out that they were not negligent of Joseph. They were naturally having games and exercise, while the boy was left with their belongings. It was the racing that prevented them from seeing the wolf.

And Jacob's fears about the wolf ([12:13](#) above) made them imagine that he would swallow the wolf story readily.

... وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِنْدَ مَتَاعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ...

and left Joseph with our things: and the wolf devoured him...

... وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَّنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَادِقِينَ (١٧)

But thou wilt never believe us even though we tell the truth."

**C1650.** They were surprised that Jacob received the story about the wolf with cold incredulity. So they grew petulant, put on an air of injured innocence, and bring out the blood-stained garment described in the next verse.

... وَجَآؤُوا عَلَى قَمِيصِهِ بِدَمٍ كَذِبٍ...

18. They stained his shirt with false blood.

**C1651.** Joseph wore a garment of many colours, which was a special garment peculiar to him. If the brethren could produce it blood-stained before their father, they thought he would be convinced that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast.

But the stain on the garment was a stain of "false blood", -not the blood of Joseph, but the blood of a goat which the brethren had killed expressly for this purpose.

Their device, however, was not quite convincing because, as some Commentators have pointed out the garment was intact which is unconceivable if a wolf had indeed devoured Joseph. (R).

... قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا...

He said:

"Nay, but your minds have made up a tale (that may pass) with you.

**C1652.** Jacob saw that there had been some foul play, and he did not hesitate to say so. In effect he said

"Ah me! the tale you tell may be good enough for you, who invented it!

But what about me, your aged father?

What is there left in life for me now, with my beloved son gone?

And yet what can I do but hold my heart in patience and implore Allah's assistance?

I have faith, and I know that all that He does is for the best!"

...فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ...

(For me) patience is most fitting:

...وَاللَّهُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَى مَا تَصِفُونَ (١٨)

against that which ye assert, it is Allah (alone) whose help can be sought"...

وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ ...

19. Then there came a caravan of travellers:

**C1653.** Then comes the caravan of unknown - travellers Midianite or Arab merchants traveling to Egypt with merchandise, such as the balm of Gilead in Transjordania.

In accordance with custom the caravan was preceded by advance parties to search out water and pitch a camp near. They naturally went to the well and let down their bucket.

... فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَى دَلْوَهُ ...

they sent their water-carrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well)...

... قَالَ يَا بُشْرَى هَذَا غُلَامٌ ...

He said: "Ah there! Good news! Here is a (fine) young man!

**C1654.** The water carrier is surprised and taken aback, when he finds a youth of comely appearance, innocent like an angel, with a face as bright as the sun!

What is he to make of it?

Anyhow, to see him is a delight! And he shouts it out as a piece of good news.

Some Commentators think that "**Bushra**", the Arabic word for "Good news", is a proper noun, the name of the companion to whom he shouted. (R).

... وَأَسْرُوهُ بَضَاعَةً ...

So they concealed him as a treasure!

**C1655.** It was a caravan of merchants, and they think of everything in terms of the money to be made out of it!

Here was an unknown, unclaimed youth, of surpassing beauty, with apparently a mind as refined as was his external beauty. If he could be sold in the opulent slave markets of Memphis or whatever was the capital of the Hyksos Dynasty then ruling in Egypt, what a price he would fetch!

They had indeed lighted upon a treasure! And they wanted to conceal him lest he was another's slave and had run away from his master who might come and claim him! The circumstances were peculiar and the merchants were cautious.

**Bidha'at:** stock-in-trade; capital; money; wealth; treasure.

... وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ (١٩)

But Allah knoweth well all that they do!

**C1656.** To different mind the situation appeared different.

Joseph must have felt keenly the edge of his brethren's treason.

His father Jacob was lost in the sorrow of the loss of his best-beloved son.

The brethren were exulting in their plan of getting rid of one whom they hated.

The merchants were gloating over their gains.

But the horizon of all was limited. Allah knew their deeds and their feelings and motives, and He was working out His own Plan.

Neither the best of us nor the worst of us know whither our Destiny is leading us-how evil plots are defeated and goodness comes to its own in marvelous ways!.

وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ...

20. The (Brethren) sold him for a miserable price -- for a few dirhams counted out:

**C1657. Dirham:** from Greek, drachma, a small silver coin, which varied in weight and value at different times and in different States. (R).

...وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ (٢٠)

in such low estimation did they hold him!

**C1658.** There was mutual deceit on both sides.

The Brethren had evidently been watching to see what happened to Joseph. when they saw the merchants take him up and hide him, they came to claim his price as a run away slave, but dared not haggle over the price, lest their object, to get rid of him, should be defeated.

The merchants were shrewd enough to doubt the claim in their own minds; but they dared not haggle lest they should lose a very valuable acquisition.

And so the most precious of human lives in that age was sold into slavery for a few silver pieces! (R).

### C.110 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(12:21-42)

*Joseph was bought by a man high at Court  
In Egypt, who asked his wife Zulaykha  
To treat him with honour, with a view  
To his adoption as a son. But she burnt*

*With a passion of early love for him,  
When Joseph refused to yield to her solicitation,  
There was trouble and scandal, and Joseph  
Had to go to prison. Here were shown  
His greatness, and kindness, and wisdom.  
The King's cupbearer came in disgrace  
To prison. Joseph instructed him and others  
In the eternal Gospel of Unity. When released  
And restored to favour, the cupbearer  
Forgot Joseph-for a time-until  
It pleased Allah to put into Joseph's hands,  
The keys of the prosperity of Egypt and the world.*

### Section 3

وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لَامْرَأَتِهِ ...

21. The man in Egypt who bought him said to his wife:

**C1659.** Joseph is now clear of his jealous brethren in the land of Canaan. The merchants take him to Egypt. In the city of Memphis (or whatever was the Egyptian capital then) he was exposed for sale by the merchants.

The merchants had not miscalculated. There was a ready market for him; his handsome presence, his winning ways, his purity and innocence, his intelligence and integrity, combined with his courtesy and noble manliness, attracted all eyes to him. There was the keenest competition to purchase him, and in the highest Court circles. Every competitor was outbid by a high court official, who is called in verse 30 below "the 'Aziz"- (the Exalted in rank). (R).

... أَكْرَمِي مَثْوَاهُ ...

"Make his stay (among us) honorable:

**C1660.** See [last note](#).

The 'Aziz's motive was perhaps worldly. Such a handsome, attractive, intelligent son would get him more honour, dignity, power and wealth. (R).

...عَسَى أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا...

maybe he will bring us much good, or we shall adopt him as a son."

...وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ...

Thus did we establish Joseph in the land,

**C1661.** How unerringly Allah's plan works!

To teach Joseph wisdom and power, he had to be tested and proved in righteousness, and advanced and established in Egypt, and the way prepared for Israel and his posterity to proclaim Allah's truth to the world and to make possible the subsequent missions of Moses and Al Mustafa. (R).

...وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ...

that We might teach him the interpretation of stories (and events).

**C1662. Ahadith** might be stories, things imagined or related, things that happened, in life or in true dreams.

To suppose that phenomenal events are the only reality is a mark of one-sided materialism. As Hamlet said to Horatio, "there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

External events have their own limited reality, but there are bigger realities behind them, that sometimes appear darkly in the visions of ordinary men, but more clearly in the visions of poets, seers, sages and prophets.

Joseph had to be trained in seeing the realities behind events and visions. He was hated by his brothers and sold by them into slavery; they were sending him into the land of Egypt, where he was to rule men. He loved his father dearly and was separated from him, and his mother had died early; but his affection was not blunted, but drawn to a keener edge when his benevolent work benefited millions in Egypt, and in the world. His own

visions of stars, sun, and moon prostrating themselves before him, was no idle dream of a selfish fool, but the prefigurement of a power, which, used rightly, was to make his own honour an instrument of service to millions he had not seen, through men and women whose own power and dignity were sanctified through him.

He was to understand the hidden meaning of what seemed futilities, blunderings, snares, evil-plottings, love gone wrong, and power used tyrannically. He was to interpret truth to those who would never have reached it otherwise.

وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٢١)

And Allah hath full power and control over His affairs;  
but most among mankind know it not.

### **C1663.**

Cf. "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will." Only, in Shakespeare, (Hamlet, V. 2), we have a vague and distant ideal, an irresolute striving, an unsuccessful attempt at getting beyond "this too, too solid flesh"!

In Joseph we have the Prophet of Allah, sure in faith, above all carnal motives, and advancing the destiny of mankind with a conscious purpose, as the scroll of knowledge, wisdom, and power, unfolds itself before him by the grace of Allah, All-Good and All-Powerful.

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا...

22. When Joseph attained his full manhood, We gave him power and knowledge:

**C1664.** When Joseph left Canaan, he was a young and immature lad, but his nature was innocent and good. Through the vicissitudes of his fortune in Egypt, he grew in knowledge, judgment, and power.

...وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٢٢)

thus do We reward those who do right.

**C1665. Muhsinin:** those who do right, those who do good.

Both ideas are implied. In following right conduct, you are necessarily doing good to yourself and to others.

وَرَأَوَدَتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ...

23. But she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him from his (true) self:

**C1666.** The 'Aziz had treated Joseph with honour; he was more his guest and son than his slave. In trying to seduce Joseph in these circumstances, his wife was guilty of a crime against Joseph's own honour and dignity. And there was a third fault in her earthly love.

True love blots Self out: it thinks more of the loved one than of the Self. The 'Aziz's wife was seeking the satisfaction of her own selfish passion, and was in treason against Joseph's pure soul and his high destiny.

It was inevitable that Joseph should repel the advances made by the wife of the courtier. (R).

... وَغَلَقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ ...

she fastened the doors, and said: "Now come, thou (dear one)!"

... قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ ...

He said: "Allah forbid!"

... إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ ...

truly (thy husband) is my lord!

He made my sojourn agreeable!

... إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ (٢٣)

Truly to no good come those who do wrong!"

**C1667.** Joseph's plea in rejecting her advances is threefold:

1. 'I owe a duty, and so do you, to your husband, the 'Aziz;

2. the kindness, courtesy, and honour, with which he has treated me entitled him to more than mere gratitude from me;
3. in any case, do you not see that you are harbouring a guilty passion, and that no good can come out of guilt? We must all obey laws, human and divine.' (R).

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنْ رَأَى بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ...

24. And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of his Lord:

**C1668.** She was blinded with passion, and his plea had no effect on her.

He was human after all, and her passionate love and her beauty placed a great temptation in his path. But he had a sure refuge,-his faith in Allah. His spiritual eyes saw something that her eyes, blinded by passion, did not see. She thought no one saw when the doors were closed. He knew that Allah was there. That made him strong and proof against temptation.

...كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ...

thus (did We order) that We might turn away from him (all) evil and shameful deeds:

**C1669.** The credit of our being saved from sin is due, not to our weak earthly nature, but to Allah. We can only try, like Joseph, to be true and sincere; Allah will purify us and save us from all that is wrong. Tempted but true, we rise above ourselves.

...إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٢٤)

for he was one of Our servants, sincere and purified.

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِنْ دُبُرٍ ...

25. So they both raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back:

**C1670.** With his master's wife in her mad passion, the situation became intolerable, and Joseph made for the door. She ran after him to detain him. She tugged at his garment to detain him. As he was retreating, she could

only catch hold of the back of his shirt, and in the struggle she tore it.

He was determined to open the door and leave the place, as it was useless to argue with her in her mad passion. When the door was opened, it so happened, that the 'Aziz was not far off. We need not assume that he was spying, or had any suspicions either of his wife or Joseph. In his narrow limited way he was a just man.

We can imagine his wife's consternation. One guilt leads to another. She had to resort to a lie, not only to justify herself but also to have her revenge on the man who had scorned her love. Slighted love (of the physical kind) made her ferocious, and she lost all sense of right and wrong. (R).

... وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَى الْبَابِ...

they both found her lord near the door.

...قَالَتْ مَا جَزَاء مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوءًا إِلَّا أَنْ يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ

أَلِيمٌ (٢٥)

She said: "What is the (fitting) punishment for one who formed an evil design against thy wife, but prison or a grievous chastisement?"

**C1671.** Her lie and her accusation were plausible. Joseph was found with his dress disarranged. She wanted the inference to be drawn that he had assaulted her and she had resisted. For one in his position it was a dreadful crime.

Should he not be consigned to a dungeon or at least scourged?

Perhaps she hoped that in either case he would be more pliable to her designs in the future.

قَالَ هِيَ رَاوَدْتَنِي عَنْ نَفْسِي...

26. He said:

"It was she that sought to seduce me -- from my (true) self."

**C1672.** Joseph bore himself with dignity. He was too great and noble to indulge in angry recrimination. But he had to tell the truth. And he did it with quiet simplicity.

'The love game was hers, not his, and it went too far in seeking to assault his person.'

...وَسَّهَدَ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا...

And one of her household saw (this) and bore witness, (thus) --

**C1673.** In the nature of things there was no eye-witness to what had happened between them. But as there was a scene and the whole household collected, wisdom came through one who was not immediately concerned.

They say it was a child. If so, it illustrates the truth that the most obvious things are not noticed by people who are excited, but are plain to simple people who remain calm. Wisdom comes often through babes and sucklings.

...إِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ فُدًّا مِنْ قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ (٢٦)

"If it be that his shirt is rent from the front, then is her tale true, and he is a liar!

وَإِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ فُدًّا مِنْ دُبُرٍ فَكَذَبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (٢٧)

27. "But if it be that his shirt is torn from the back, then is she the liar, and he is telling the truth!"

**C1674.** If Joseph's shirt was torn at the back, he must obviously have been retreating, and the wife of the 'Aziz must have been tugging from behind.

No one could doubt who was the guilty party. Everybody saw it, and the 'Aziz was convinced. (R).

فَلَمَّا رَأَى قَمِيصَهُ فُدًّا مِنْ دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ كَيْدِكُنَّ...

28. So when he saw his shirt -- that it was torn at the back -- (her husband) said:

"Behold! it is a snare of you women!

**C1675.** When the real fact became clear to every one, the 'Aziz as head of the household had to decide what to do.

His own position was difficult, and it was made ridiculous. He was a high officer of state, say Grand Chamberlain. Was he going to proclaim to the world that his wife was running after a slave?

He was probably fond of her, and he saw the innocence, loyalty, and sterling merit of Joseph. He must treat the whole affair as a woman's prank,-the madness of sex-love, and the tricks and snares connected with sex-love. He must take no further action but to rate his wife and do justice. (R).

...إِنَّ كَيْدَكِنَّ عَظِيمٌ (٢٨)

Truly, mighty is your snare!

يُوسُفُ أَعْرَضُ عَنْ هَذَا...

29. "O Joseph, pass this over!

...وَأَسْتَغْفِرِي لِدُنْبِكَ إِنَّكَ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْخَاطِئِينَ (٢٩)

(O wife), ask forgiveness for thy sin, for truly thou hast been at fault!"

**C1676.** As was only fair, he apologized to Joseph and begged him to give no further thought to the injury that had been done to him,

- first by the love-snare of his wife,
- secondly, by the utterly false charge made against him, and
- thirdly, by the scene, which must have been painful to a man of such spotless character as Joseph.

That was not enough. He must ask his wife humbly to beg Joseph's pardon for the wrong that she had done him. And he must further ask her to consider her unbecoming conduct in itself, apart from any wrong done to Joseph. (R).

## Section 4

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتَاهَا عَن نَّفْسِهِ...

### 30. Ladies said in the City:

"The wife of the (great) 'Aziz is seeking to seduce her slave from his (true) self:

**C1677. 'Aziz:** title of a nobleman or officer of Court, of high rank.

Considering all the circumstances, the office of Grand Chamberlain or minister may be indicated. But "Aziz" I think is a title, not an office. I have not translated the tide but left it as it is. "Excellency" or "Highness" would have specialized modern associations which I want to avoid.

...بِقَدْ شَعَفَهَا حُبًّا...

truly hath he inspired her with violent love:

...إِنَّا لَنَرَاهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٣٠)

we see she is evidently going astray."

**C1678.** The 'Aziz's just, wise, and discreet conduct would have closed the particular episode of his wife's guilty conduct if only Mrs. Grundy had left her alone and she had not foolishly thought of justifying her conduct to Mrs. Grundy.

The 'Aziz had reproved her, and he had the right and authority so to do. He also probably understood her.

Joseph by his behaviour had upheld the highest standard both for himself and for her. (R).

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَكَأً...

### 31. When (Zulaikha) heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them:

**C1679.** When her reputation began to be pulled to pieces, the wife of 'Aziz invited all ladies in society to a grand banquet.

We can imagine them reclining at ease after the manner of fashionable banquets. When dessert was reached and the talk flowed freely about the gossip and scandal which made their hostess interesting, they were just about to cut the fruit with their knives, when, behold! Joseph was brought into their midst. Imagine the consternation which his beauty caused, and the havoc it played with their hearts!

"Ah!" thought the wife of 'Aziz "now is your hypocrisy self-exposed! What about your reproaches to me?

You have yourselves so lost your self-control that you have cut your fingers!" (R).

...وَأَنْتَ كُلِّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ...

she gave each of them a knife;

and she said (to Joseph), "Come out before them.

...فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ...

When they saw him, they did extol him, and (in their amazement) cut their hands: they said

...حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ (٣١)

"Allah preserve us!

no mortal is this!

This is none other than a noble angel!"

قَالَتْ فَذَلِكُنَّ الَّذِي لُمْتُنَّنِي فِيهِ...

32. She said:

"There before you is the man about whom ye did blame me!

...وَلَقَدْ رَاوَدْتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فَاسْتَعْصَمَ...

I did seek to seduce him from his (true) self but he did firmly save himself guiltless!

**C1680.** Her speech is subtle, and shows that any repentance or compunction she may have felt is blotted out by the collective crowd mentality into which she has deliberately invited herself to fall.

Her speech falls into two parts, with a hiatus between, which I have marked by the punctuation mark ( ... ).

In the first part there is a note of triumph, as much as to say, "Now you see! mine was no vulgar passion! you are just as susceptible! you would have done the same thing!"

Finding encouragement from their passion and their fellow-feeling, she openly avows as a woman amongst women what she would have been ashamed to acknowledge to others before. She falls a step lower and boasts of it. A step lower still, and she sneers at Joseph's innocence, his firmness in saving himself guiltless!

There is a pause. The tide of passion rises still higher, and the dreadful second part of her speech begins. It is a sort of joint consultation, though she speaks in monologue.

The women all agree that no man has a right to resist their solicitations. Beauty spurned is the highest crime. And so now She rises to the height of tragic guilt and threatens Joseph. She forgets all her finer feelings, and is overpowered by brute passion. After all, he is a slave and must obey his mistress! Or, there is prison, and the company of the vilest.

Poor, deluded, fallen creature! She sank lower than herself, in seeking the support of the crowd around her! What pain and suffering and sorrow can expiate the depth of this crime? (R).

...وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا أَمْرُهُ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونًا مِّنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ (٣٢)

And now, if he doth not my bidding, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and (what is more) be in the company of the vilest!"

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ...

33. He said:

"O my Lord! the prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me:

**C1681.** "To which they invite me." Notice it is now "they" not "she".

Where there was the snare of one woman before, it is now the collective snare of many women - of womankind!

وَالْأَصْرَفُ عَنِّي كَيْدُهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ (٣٣)

unless thou turn away their snare from me, I should (in my youthful folly) feel inclined towards them and join the ranks of the ignorant."

**C1682.** Joseph's speech is characteristic.

Like a true Prophet of Allah, he takes refuge in Allah. He knows the weakness of human nature. He would not pit his own strength against the whole assault of evil. He will rely on Allah to turn evil away from him, and praise Him alone for any success he achieves in his fight.

It is only the ignorant who do not know man's weakness and Allah's strength!

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ...

34. So his Lord heard him (in his prayer), and turned away from him their snare:

**C1683.** Joseph was saved from the wiles of the women, which would have degraded him. But more, his truth and character were completely vindicated in the eyes of all concerned by the avowal of the wife of the 'Aziz. (R).

...إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ (٣٤)

verily He heareth and knoweth (all things).

ثُمَّ بَدَأَ لَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوْا الْآيَاتِ لَيْسَ جُنَّتْهُ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (٣٥)

35. Then it occurred to the men, after they had seen the Signs, (that it was best) to imprison him for a time.

**C1684.** When Joseph's character was completely vindicated, there was no disgrace to him in being sent to prison after that. On the contrary the blame now would

attach to those who for their own selfish motives restricted his liberty for a time.

As a matter of fact various motives on the part of the many actors in this drama converged towards that end. For Joseph prison was better than the importunities of the women, and now, not one woman, but all society women were after him. To the women themselves it looked as if that was a lever which they could use to force his compliance. Vain, deluded creatures, to think that a man of God could be forced from the path of rectitude by threats or bribes.

To the 'Aziz it appears as if it might be in his wife's best interests that he should disappear from her view in prison. The decisive factor was the view of the men generally, who were alarmed at the consternation he had caused among the women.

They knew that Joseph was righteous: they had seen the Signs of Allah in his wonderful personality and his calm and confident fortitude. But, it was argued, it was better that one man (even if righteous) should suffer in prison rather than that many should suffer from the extraordinary disturbance he was unwittingly causing in their social life.

Not for the first nor for the last time did the righteous suffer plausibly for the guilt of the guilty. And so Joseph went to prison—for a time. (R).

## Section 5

وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السَّجْنَ فَتَيَانٍ...

36. Now with him there came into the prison two young men.

**C1685.** Now opens another chapter in Joseph's life.

The Plan of Allah develops.

- The wicked might plot;
- the weak might be swayed by specious arguments;

but everything is used by the Universal Plan for its own beneficent purposes.

- Joseph must get into touch with the Pharaoh, in order to work out the salvation of Egypt, and yet it must be through no obligation to smaller men.
- And he must diffuse his personality and teach the truth to men of all sorts in prison.

...قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا...

Said one of them: "I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine."

...وَقَالَ الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْزًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ...

Said the other: "I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating thereof."

**C1686.** Two men came to the prison about the same time as Joseph. They were both apparently officers of the king (the Pharaoh), who had incurred his wrath.

- One was a cup-bearer (or butler or chief steward) whose duty was to prepare the king's wines and drinks.
- The other was the king's baker, whose duty was to prepare the king's bread.

They were both in disgrace.

- The former dreamed that he was again carrying on his duties and pressing wine;
- the latter that he was carrying bread, but it did not reach his master, for the birds ate of it.

...نَبِّئْنَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٣٦)

"Tell us" (they said) "the truth and meaning thereof: for we see thou art one that doth good (to all)."

**C1687.** Both these men saw the Signs of Allah about Joseph. They felt not only that he had wisdom, but that he was kind and benevolent, and would give of his wisdom even to strangers like themselves.

They therefore told him their dreams and asked him to interpret them.

قَالَ لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمَا...

37. He said:

"Before any food comes (in due course) to feed either of you, I will surely reveal to you the truth and meaning of this ere it befall you:

**C1688.** The dream of one foreboded good to him, and of the other, evil to him.

It was good that each should prepare for his fate. But Joseph's mission was far higher than that of merely foretelling events. He must teach the truth of Allah and the faith in the Hereafter to both men.

He does that first before he talks of the events of their phenomenal life. And yet he does it so tenderly. He does not tantalize them. In effect he says.

"You shall learn everything before our next meal, but let me first teach you Faith!"

...ذَلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي...

that is part of the (Duty) which my Lord hath taught me.

**C1689.** Joseph does not preach a pompous sermon, or claim any credit to himself for placing himself at their service. He is just doing his duty, and the highest good he can do to them is to teach them Faith.

...إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ (٣٧)

I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allah and that (even) deny the Hereafter.

**C1690.** These men were Egyptians, perhaps steeped in materialism, idolatry, and polytheism. He must teach them the Gospel of Unity. And he does it simply, by appealing to his own experience.

I have found the Lord good; in prosperity and adversity I have been supported by Faith; in life no man can live by error or evil; perhaps one of you had done some wrong for which you find yourself here; perhaps one of you is

innocent in either case, will you not accept Faith and live for ever?

وَأَتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ...

38. "And I follow the ways of my fathers -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;

**C1691.** Again the same note of personal modesty.

'You may think I am as young as you, or younger. Yes, but I have the heritage of great men renowned for wisdom and truth, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Surely what they knew is worthy of respect. Never did they swerve a hair's breadth from the Gospel of Unity.

It is not that we boast. It was Allah's grace that taught us and Allah's grace is teaching all mankind. But men show their ingratitude by inventing other so-called gods'.

...مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...

and never could we attribute any partners whatever to Allah:

...ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا

يَشْكُرُونَ (٣٨)

that (comes) of the grace of Allah to us and to mankind:  
yet most men are not grateful.

يَا صَاحِبِي السِّجْنِ ...

39. "O my two companions of the prison! (I ask you):

**C1692.** Note the personal touch again.

'Are we not also companions in misfortune?

And may I not speak to you on terms of perfect equality, -as one prisoner to another?

Well then, do you really think a conflict of heterogeneous gods is better than Allah, the One (and Only), Whose power is supreme and irresistible?' (R).

... أَرَبَابٌ مُتَّفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ (٣٩)

are many lords differing among themselves better, or Allah, the One, Supreme and Irresistible?

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءَ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ...

40. "If not Him, ye worship nothing but names which ye have named -- ye and your fathers --

**C1693.** 'If you name other gods, they are nothing but your inventions, -names which you and your fathers put forward without any reality behind them.

Who gave you authority to do any such thing?

The only reality is Allah. Authority can come from Him alone. It is only for Him to command. And He has distinctly commanded you to worship none other than Him. That is the only religion that is right, -that has stood and will stand and endure for ever. He has revealed it at all times by His Messengers and by His Signs. If men fail to understand, it is their own fault.

...مَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ...

for which Allah hath sent you no authority:

...إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ...

the Command is for none but Allah:

...أَمَرَ إِلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ...

He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him:

...ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٤٠)

that is the right religion, but most men understand not...

يَا صَاحِبَي السِّجْنِ ...

41. "O my two companions of the prison!

**C1694.** Having fulfilled his great duty, that touching the things of the spirit, Joseph now passes on, and comes to the things in which they were immediately interested, -

the questions which they had asked him about their dreams and what they prognosticated of their immediate future.

Notice how Joseph again puts himself into sympathy with them by repeating the phrase of camaraderie. "my two companions of the prison!"

For one he has good news, and for the other, bad news. He does not mince matters or waste words. He just barely tells the truth, hoping that the higher spiritual truths of which he has spoken will appear in their eyes, too, as of more importance than mere earthly triumphs or disasters, -(in Kipling's words) "both impostors all the same."

... أَمَا أَحَدُكُمَا فَيَسْقِي رَبَّهُ خَمْرًا ...

as to one of you, he will pour out the wine for his lord to drink:

**C1695.** The cup-bearer had perhaps been proved innocent of the crime which had been charged against him, and was to be restored to the favour of the Pharaoh. He was to carry the cup and be the king's confidante again.

How much more good he could do now, after the spiritual influence he had imbibed from Joseph the man of God! He was more fortunate in having had Joseph's company than in being restored to his intimate position with the king! Yet he was not a perfect man, as we shall see presently.

... وَأَمَّا الْآخَرُ فَيُصَلَّبُ فَتَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْ رَأْسِهِ...

as for the other, he will hang from the cross, and the birds will eat from off his head.

**C1696.** For the baker, alas! he had bad news, and he tells it directly without tantalizing him.

Perhaps he had been found guilty -perhaps he had been really guilty- of some act of embezzlement or of joining in some palace intrigue, and he was to die a malefactor's death on the cross, following by exposure to birds of the air-vultures pecking away at his eyes and cheeks, and all that had been his face and head!

Poor man! If he was guilty, Joseph had taught him repentance, and we should like to think that he lost in this life but gained in the next.

If he was innocent, the cruel death did not affect him. Joseph had shown him a higher and more lasting hope in the Hereafter.

...فُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْتَفْتِيَانِ (٤١)

(So) hath been decreed that matter whereof ye twain do enquire..."

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ...

42. And of the two, to that one whom he considered about to be saved, he said:

"Mention me to thy lord."

**C1697.** Joseph never mentioned himself in interpreting the dream, nor ever thought of himself in his kindness to his fellow-sufferers in prison.

It was afterwards, when the cup-bearer's dream came true, and he was being released on being restored to favour, that we can imagine him taking an affectionate leave of Joseph, and even asking him in his elation if he could do anything for Joseph. Joseph had no need of earthly favours,- least of all, from kings or their favorites. The divine grace was enough for him. But he had great work to do, which he could not do in prison-work for Egypt and her king, and the world at large.

If the cup-bearer could mention him to the king, not by way of recommendation, but because the king's own justice was being violated in keeping an innocent man in prison, perhaps that might help to advance the cause of the king and of Egypt. And so he said, "Mention me to Pharaoh."

...فَأَنسَاهُ الشَّيْطَانُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِ...

But Satan made him forget to mention him to his lord:

**C1698.** The eternal Plan does not put Allah's Prophets under obligations to men commanding mere worldly

favour or earthly power. If they are given a chance, the obligation is on the worldly men, however highly placed ...

In this case, the poor cup-bearer was but human. When he was in the midst of the Court, he forgot the poor fellow- prisoner languishing in prison. In this he yielded to the lower part of his nature, which is guided by Satan. (R).

...قَلْبَتْ فِي السَّجْنِ بضعَ سِنِينَ (٤٢)

and (Joseph) lingered in prison a few (more) years.

C1699. **A few (more) years:** bid' in Arabic signifies a small indefinite number, say up to 3, 5, 7 or 9 years.

### C.111 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(12:43-68)

*The king of Egypt saw a vision  
Which none of his grandees could explain.  
The cupbearer referred to Joseph,  
Who was sent for by the king. But Joseph  
Insisted that the voice of scandal,  
Which had pointed to him, should be declared  
In public to be false. After Zulaykha  
Had paid a splendid ungrudging tribute  
To his truth and righteousness, he came,  
And was invested with supreme power  
By the king. In times of plenty he organized  
Great reserves to meet the needs  
Of famine. When wide-spread famine at last  
Prevailed, his brothers came from Canaan  
In search of corn. He treated them kindly  
And got them to bring his youngest brother  
Benjamin; but they knew not that he was Joseph.*

## Section 6

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ ...

43. The king (of Egypt) said:

**C1700.** The Pharaoh is holding a Council. His confidential adviser the cup-bearer is present. The Pharaoh relates his double dream, -of seven fat kine being devoured by seven lean ones, and of seven fine full green ears of corn (presumably being devoured) by seven dry withered ears.

... إني أرى سبع بقرات سمان يأكلهن سبع عجاف ...

"I do see (in a vision) seven fat kine, whom seven lean ones devour --

... وَسَبْعَ سُنْبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابَسَاتٍ...

and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered.

... يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّؤْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ (٤٣)

O ye chiefs! expound to me my vision if it be that ye can interpret visions."

قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَحْلَامِ بِعَالَمِينَ (٤٤)

44. They said:

"A confused medley of dreams: and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams."

**C1701.** No one in the Council apparently wanted to take the responsibility either of interpreting the dream, or of carrying out any measures consequent on the interpretation.

وَقَالَ الَّذِي نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ (٤٥)

45. But the man who had been released, one of the two (who had been in prison) and who now bethought him after (so long) a space of time, said:

"I will tell you the truth of its interpretation: send ye me (therefor)."

**C1702.** At length the cup-bearer's conscience was awakened. He thought of Joseph. He (Joseph) was a truthful man, and the cup-bearer knew by personal experience how skillful he was in the interpretation of dreams. Perhaps he could get him released at this juncture by getting him to interpret the king's dream.

If he had been frank, straight, and direct, he would have mentioned Joseph at once, and presented him to Pharaoh. But he had worldly subtlety. He wanted some credit for himself, at the same time that he fulfilled an old obligation.

His petty conscience would be satisfied if he got Joseph's release, but meanwhile he wanted to see how much attention he could draw to himself in the court. So he just asked permission to withdraw in order to find the interpretation. He went straight to the prison, and addressed himself to Joseph, as in the following verse.

يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي...

46. "O Joseph!" (he said), "O man of truth! expound to us (the dream) of

...سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ

وَأُخْرَى يَابِسَاتٍ...

seven fat kine whom seven lean ones devour, and of seven green ears of corn and (seven) others withered:

...لَعَلِّي أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ (٤٦)

that I may return to the people, and that they may understand."

**C1703.** The speech must have been longer, to explain the circumstances. We are just given the points. From Joseph he conceals nothing. He knows that Joseph knows more than himself. He tells Joseph that if he got the meaning, he would go and tell the Council.

It would be impertinent for the cup-bearer to hold out to Joseph, the Prophet of Allah, the bribe of the hope of his release. Notice how blandly he avoids referring to his own lapse in having forgotten Joseph so long, and how

the magnanimous Joseph has not a word of reproach, but gets straight on with the interpretation. (R).

قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأْبًا...

47. (Joseph) said:

"For seven years shall ye diligently sow as is your wont:

...فَمَا حَصَدْتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلِهِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ (٤٧)

and the harvests that ye reap, ye shall leave them in the ear -- except a little, of which ye shall eat.

**C1704.** Joseph not only shows what will happen, but, unasked, suggests the measures to be taken for dealing with the calamity when it comes.

There will be seven years of abundant harvest. With diligent cultivation they should get bumper crops. Of them they should take a little for their sustenance and store the rest in the ear, the better to preserve it from the pests that attack corn-heaps when they have passed through the threshing floor.

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعٌ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ...

48. "Then will come after that (period) seven dreadful (years), which will devour what ye shall have laid by in advance for them --

...إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّا تُحْصِنُونَ (٤٨)

(all) except a little which ye shall have (specially) guarded.

**C1705.** There will follow seven years of dreadful famine, which will devour all the stores which they will have laid by in the good years.

They must be careful, even during the famine, not to consume all the grain; they must by special arrangement save a little for seed, lest they should be helpless even when the Nile brought down abundant waters from the rains at its sources.

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ النَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعْصِرُونَ (٤٩)

49. "Then will come after that (period) a year in which the people will have abundant water, and in which they will press (wine and oil)."

**C1706.** This is a symbol of a very abundant year, following the seven years of drought. The Nile must have brought abundant fertilising waters and silt from its upper reaches, and there was probably some rain also in Lower Egypt. The vine and the olive trees, which must have suffered in the drought, now revived, and yielded their juice and their off, among the annuals, also, the oil seeds such as , sesame, and the castor oil plant, must have been grown, as there was irrigated land and to spare from the abundant grain crops.

And the people's spirits revived, to enjoy the finer products of the earth, when their absolute necessities had been more than met in their grain crops.

## Section 7

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ انُّونِي...

50. So the king said:

"Bring ye him unto me."

**C1707.** The cup-bearer must have reported Joseph's interpretation to the king, and the king naturally wanted to see Joseph himself. He sent a messenger to fetch him.

...بِهِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ الرَّسُولُ قَالَ ارْجِعْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ...

But when the messenger came to him, (Joseph) said: "Go thou back to thy lord,

...فَاسْأَلُهُ مَا بَالُ النِّسْوَةِ اللَّاتِي قَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ...

and ask him, 'What is the state of mind of the ladies who cut their hands?'

**C1708.** The king's messenger must have expected that a prisoner would be only too overjoyed at the summons of the king. But Joseph, sure of himself, wanted some assurance that he would be safe from the sort of nagging and persecution to which he had been subjected by the ladies.

We saw in [verse 33 above](#) that he preferred prison to their solicitations. He must therefore know what was in the mind of the women now.

...إِنَّ رَبِّي بَكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ (٥٠)

for my Lord is certainly well aware of their snare."

**C1709.** If the king ("thy Lord") did not know of all the snares which had been laid for Joseph by the ladies. Allah ("**my Lord**") knew all their secret motives and plots.

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُمْ إِذْ رَأَوْتُنَّ يُوسُفَ عَن نَّفْسِهِ...

51. (The king) said (to the ladies): "What was your affair when ye did seek to seduce Joseph from his (true) self?"

**C1710.** Joseph's message was conveyed by the messenger to the king, who sent for the ladies concerned. Among them came the wife of the 'Aziz.

"What was this affair?" said the king: "tell me the whole truth". (R).

...قُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِن سُوءٍ...

The ladies said: "Allah preserve us! no evil know we against him!"

...قَالَتِ امْرَأَةُ الْعَزِيزِ ...

Said the 'Aziz's wife:

...الآنَ حَصْحَصَ الْحَقُّ أَنَا رَأَوْتُهُ عَن نَّفْسِهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ

الصَّادِقِينَ (٥١)

"Now is the truth manifest (to all):

it was I who sought to seduce him from his (true) self:

he is indeed of those who are (ever) true (and virtuous).

**C1711.** The wife of the 'Aziz stood by, while the other ladies answered. Their answer acknowledged the truth of Joseph's innocence and high principles. When they had done, she began. She did not mince matters. She acknowledged her own guilt, freely and frankly.

This was no time for her even to refer to other ladies - their jealousy, their gross mindedness, their encouragement of all that frail or evil in herself. (R).

ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ...

52. "This (say I), in order that he may know that I have never been false to him in his absence,

...وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي كَيْدَ الْخَائِبِينَ (٥٢)

and that Allah will never guide the snare of the false ones.

**C1712.** I construe verses 52 and 53 to be a continuation of the speech of the 'Aziz's wife and have translated accordingly. There is both good reason and authority (e.g., Ibn Kathir) for this.

But the majority of Commentators construe verses 52-53 to be spoken by Joseph, in which case they would mean that Joseph was referring to his fidelity to the 'Aziz, that he had never taken advantage of his absence to play false with his wife, although he (Joseph) was human and liable to err.

In my view the 'Aziz's wife while fully reprobating her own guilty conduct, claims that she has at least been constant, and that she hopes for mercy, forgiveness, and the capacity to understand at last what true love is. Whatever false charge she made, she made it in a moment of passion and to his face, (never in cold blood, or behind his back).

Guide the snare of the false ones, i.e. allow such snare to attain its goal. (R).

وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي...

53. "Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame):

إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي...

the (human soul) is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy:

**C1712a. Ammara:** prone, impelling, headstrong, passionate.

[See n. 5810 to 75:2.](#)

...إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٥٣)

but surely certainly my Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

**C1713.** See [n. 1712](#).

1 construe this verse to be a continuation of the speech of the wife of the 'Aziz. It is more appropriate to her than to Joseph. (R).

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي بِهِ أَسْتَخْلِصُهُ لِنَفْسِي...

54. So the king said:

"Bring him unto me; I will take him specially to serve about my own person."

**C1714.** Joseph had not yet appeared before the king. The king's order in the same terms in [verse 50 above](#) had led to a message from Joseph and the subsequent public proceedings with the ladies.

Now that Joseph's innocence, wisdom, truth, and trustworthiness had been Proved, and confirmed by the splendid tribute of the courtier's wife, and Joseph's own manly bearing before the king, the king was much impressed, and took him specially to serve about his own person as his trusty and confidential Wazir.

If, as is probable, the 'Aziz had by this time died (for he is never mentioned again) Joseph succeeded to his office, and he is addressed as 'Aziz in [verse 78 below](#). But Joseph got more than his rank and powers, as specially selected to carry out a great emergency policy to meet the very difficult times of depression that were foretold.

He was given plenary powers and the fullest confidence that a king could give to his most trusted and best-proved Wazir or Prime Minister, with special access to his Person, like a Grand Chamberlain. (R).

...فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُ قَالَ إِنَّكَ الْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينٌ أَمِينٌ (٥٤)

Therefore when he had spoken to him, he said:

"Be assured this day, thou art, before our own Presence, with rank firmly established and fidelity fully proved!"

**C1715.** Who was this Pharaoh, and what approximate date could we assign to him?

He was probably a king of the Hyksos Dynasty, somewhere between the 19th and the 17th century B.C.

See Appendix IV, on Egyptian Chronology and Israel (printed after Surah 7).

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ ...

55. (Joseph) said:

"Set me over the storehouses of the land:

**C1716.** Joseph had been given plenary authority by the king. He could have enjoyed his dignity, drawn his emoluments, put the hard and perhaps unpopular work on the shoulders of others, and kept to himself the glitter and the kudos. But that was not his way, nor can it indeed be the way of any one who wants to do real service.

He undertook the hardest and most unpopular task himself. Such a task was that of organizing reserves in times of plenty, against the lean years to come. He deliberately asked to be put in charge of the granaries and store-houses, and the drudgery of establishing them and guarding them, for the simple reason that he understood that need better than any one else, and was prepared to take upon himself rather than throw on to another the obloquy of restricting supplies in times of plenty.

... إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْهِمْ (٥٥)

I will indeed guard them, as one that knows (their importance)."

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ...

56. Thus did We give established power to Joseph in the land, to take possession therein as, when ,or where he pleased.

**C1717.** What a wonderful example of the working of divine Providence!

The boy whom his jealous brothers got rid of by selling him into slavery for a miserable price becomes the most trusted dignitary in a foreign land, chief minister in one of the greatest empires of the world of that day. And this not for himself only, but for his family, and for that noble example of righteousness and strenuous service, which he was to set for all time.

According to tradition, Joseph's age was barely 30 at that time!

**As when, or where he pleased:** **haithu** refers to manner, time, or place.

He had almost absolute powers, but as his fidelity was fully proved (12:53) these powers were for service rather than for self. (R).

...بُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَنْ نَشَاءُ...

We bestow of Our mercy on whom We please,

...وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٥٦)

and We suffer not, to be lost, the reward of those who do good.

وَلِأَجْرِ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ (٥٧)

57. But verily the reward of the Hereafter is the best, for those who believe, and are constant in righteousness.

**C1718.** To the righteous, whatever rewards (if any) that come in this world are welcome for the opportunities of service which they open out. But the true and best reward is in the Hereafter.

...وَجَاءَ إِخْوَهُ يُوسُفَ ...

58. Then came Joseph's brethren:

**C1719.** Years pass; the times of prosperity go by: famine holds the land in its grip; and it extends to neighbouring countries.

Joseph's preparations are complete. His reserves are ample to meet the calamity. Not only does Egypt bless him, but neighbouring countries send to Egypt to purchase corn. All are received with hospitality, and corn is sold to them according to judicious measure.

Now there has been one sorrow gnawing at Joseph's heart. His poor father Jacob! How he must have wept, as indeed he did, at the loss of his beloved Joseph!

And Joseph's little brother Benjamin, born of the same mother as himself; would the other ten brothers, not by the same mother, have any affection for him, or would they treat him, as they treated Joseph?

How would the whole family be in these hard times?

A sort of answer came when the ten selfish brothers, driven by famine, came from Canaan to buy corn. Joseph, though so great a man, kept the details of the famine department in his own hands, otherwise there might have been waste. But to the public he was a mighty Egyptian administrator, probably in Egyptian dress, and with all the paraphernalia of his rank about him.

When his brothers came, he knew them, but they did not know he was Joseph. In their thoughts was probably some menial slave in a remote household, perhaps already starved to death in these hard times!

... فَدَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَعَرَفَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ مُنْكَرُونَ (٥٨)

they entered his presence, and he knew them, but they knew him not.

## Section 8

وَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُمْ بِجَهَّازِهِمْ قَالَ ائْتُونِي بِأَخٍ لَّكُمْ مِّنْ أَبِيكُمْ...

59. And when he had furnished them forth with provisions (suitable) for them, he said:

"Bring unto me a brother ye have, of the same father as yourselves, (but a different mother):

...أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنِّي أُوْفِي الْكَيْلَ وَأَنَا خَيْرُ الْمُنْزِلِينَ (٥٩)

see ye not that I pay out full measure, and that I do provide the best hospitality?

**C1720.** Joseph treated his brothers liberally. Perhaps he condescended to enter into conversation with these strangers, and enquired about their family. The ten brothers had come.

Had they left a father behind them?

What sort of a person was he? Very aged?

Well, of course he could not come. Had they any other brothers?

Doubtless the ten brothers said nothing about their lost Joseph, or told some lie about him.

But perhaps their host's kindly insistence brought Benjamin into the conversation. How old was he? Why had they not brought him? Would they bring him next time?

Indeed they must, or they would get no more corn, and he-the great Egyptian Wazir-would not even see them.

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَأْتُونِي بِهِ فَلَا كَيْلَ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي وَلَا تَقْرَبُونِ (٦٠)

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

قَالُوا سَنُرَاوِدُ عَنْهُ أَبَاهُ وَإِنَّا لَفَاعِلُونَ (٦١)

61. They said: "We shall certainly seek to get our wish about him from his father: indeed we shall do it."

**C1721.** The brothers said: "Certainly, we shall try to beg him of our father, and bring him away with us; we shall certainly comply with your desire."

In reality they probably loved Benjamin no more than they loved Joseph. But they must get food when the present supply was exhausted, and they must humour the great Egyptian Wazir.

Note that they do not call Jacob "our father" but "his father"; how little they loved their aged father, whom they identified with Joseph and Benjamin! Their trial and their instruction in their duties is now being undertaken by Joseph.

وَقَالَ لِفِتْيَانِهِ اجْعَلُوا بِضَاعَتَهُمْ فِي رِحَالِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَهَا...

62. And (Joseph) told his servants to put their stock in trade (with which they had bartered) into their saddlebags,

**C1722. Bidha'at:** stock in trade; capital with which business is carried on; money-when it is used as capital for trade.

It is better here to suppose that they were bartering goods for grain. Cf. [12:19](#).

...إِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (٦٢)

so they should know it only when they returned to their people, in order that they might come back.

**C1723.** It was most important for Joseph's plan that they should come back. If they came back at all, they could not come without Benjamin after what he had told them.

As an additional incentive to their coming back, he returns the price of the grain in such a way that they should find it in their saddle-bags when they reach home.

فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوا إِلَى أَبِيهِمْ قَالُوا...

63. Now when they returned to their father, they said:

...يَا أَبَانَا مُنِعَ مِنَّا الْكَيْلُ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا أَخَانَا نَكْتَلْ...

"O our father! no more measure of grain shall we get (unless we take our brother):

so send our brother with us, that we may get our measure;

...وَأِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ (٦٣)

and we will indeed take every care of him."

**C1724.** On their return they no doubt told Jacob all that had transpired. But to beg Benjamin of him was no easy matter, as Jacob did not trust them and had no cause to trust them after their treatment of Joseph, So they use the argument of urgent necessity for all it is worth.

قَالَ هَلْ أَمْنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَا أَمْنُتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَخِيهِ مِن قَبْلُ...

64. He said: "Shall I trust you with him with any result other than when I trusted you with his brother aforetime?"

...قَالَهُ خَيْرٌ حَافِظًا...

But Allah is the best to take care (of him),

...وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ (٦٤)

and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!"

**C1725.** I construe Jacob's answer to be a flat refusal to let Benjamin go with them. It would be like the former occasion when he trusted Joseph with them and they lost him.

Did they talk of taking care of him?

The only protection that he trusted was that of Allah. He at least showed mercy to old and young alike. Did man show such mercy?

Witness his sad old age and his lost little Joseph! Would they bring down "his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave?"

وَلَمَّا فَتَحُوا مَتَاعَهُمْ وَجَدُوا بِضَاعَتَهُمْ رُدَّتْ إِلَيْهِمْ...

65. Then when they opened their baggage, they found their stock in trade had been returned to them.

...قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا نَبْغِي هَذِهِ بِضَاعَتُنَا رُدَّتْ إِلَيْنَا...

They said:

"O our father! what (more) can we desire?"

This our stock in trade has been returned to us:

**C1726.** The ten brothers did not take their father's refusal as final. They opened their saddle-bags, and

found that the price they had paid for their provisions had been returned to them. They had got the grain free!

What more could they desire?

The spell which Joseph had woven now worked. If they only went back, this kind Wazir would give more grain if they pleased him. And the only way to please him was to take back their younger brother with them. It would cost them nothing. Judging by past experience they would get a whole camel's load of grain now. And so they stated their case to the aged father.

...وَنَمِيرُ أَهْلَنَا وَنَحْفَظُ أَخَانَا وَنَزِدَادُ كَيْلَ بَعِيرٍ...

so we shall get (more) food for our family;

we shall take care of our brother; and add (at the same time) a full camel's load (of grain to our provisions):

...ذَلِكَ كَيْلٌ يَسِيرٌ (٦٥)

this is but a small quantity."

**C1727.** Two meanings are possible,

- either or perhaps both. 'What we have brought now is nothing compared to what we shall get if we humour the whim of the Egyptian Wazir.
- And, moreover, Egypt seems to have plenty Of grain stored up. What is a camel-load to her Wazir to give away?'

قَالَ لَنْ أَرْسِلُهُ مَعَكُمْ حَتَّى تُؤْتُونِ مَوْتِقًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ...

66. (Jacob) said:

"Never will I send him with you until ye swear a solemn oath to me, in Allah's name,

...لَتَأْتُنَّنِي بِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ يُحَاطَ بِكُمْ...

that ye will be sure to bring him back to me unless ye are yourselves hemmed in (and made powerless)."

**C1728.** The appeal to the family's needs in the time of famine at length made Jacob relent, but he exacted a solemn promise from the brothers, under the most

religious sanctions, that they would bring Benjamin back to him, unless they were themselves prevented, as the Insurance Policies say "by an act of God," so that they became really powerless. To that promise Jacob called Allah to witness.

...فَلَمَّا آتَوْهُ مَوْتِقَهُمْ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ (٦٦)

And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said:

"Over all that we say, be Allah the Witness and Guardian!"

**C1729.** This is more than a formula. Allah is invoked as present and witnessing the bargain, and to Him both parties make over the affair to arrange and fulfil.

وَقَالَ يَا بَنِيَّ لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِن بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ...

67. Further he said;

"O my sons! enter not all by one gate:

**C1730.** The Commentators refer to a Jewish or Eastern custom or superstition which forbade members of a numerous family to go together in a mass for fear of "the evil eye". But apart from East or West, or custom or superstition, it would be ridiculous for any large family of ten or eleven to parade together in a procession among strangers. But there was even a better reason in this particular case, which made Jacob's advice sound, and Jacob was, as stated in the next verse, a man of knowledge and experience.

Here were eleven strangers dressed alike, in a dress not of the country, talking a strange language, coming in a time of stress, on an errand for which they had no credentials. Would they not attract undue attention and suspicion if they went together? Would they not be taken for spies? - or for men bent on some mischief, theft, or organized crime? Such a suspicion is referred to in verse 73 below. By entering separately they would attract little attention.

Jacob very wisely tells them to take all human precautions. But like a Prophet of Allah he warns them that human precautions would be no good if they neglect

or run counter to far weightier matters-Allah's Will and Law.

Above all, they must try to understand and obey this, and their trust should be on Allah rather than on human usages, institutions, or precautions, however, good and reasonable these might be. (R).

...وَأَدْخُلُوا مِنْ أَبْوَابٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ...

enter ye by different gates.

...وَمَا أَغْنِي عَنْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...

Not that I can profit you aught against Allah (with my advice):

...إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ...

none can command except Allah:

...عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ (٦٧)

on Him do I put my trust and let all that trust put their trust on Him."

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَهُمْ آبَاؤُهُمْ...

68. And when they entered in the manner their father had enjoined,

...مَا كَانَ يُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...

it did not profit them in the least against (the Plan of) Allah:

**C1731.** See the [last verse and n. 1730](#).

Though they scrupulously observed their father's injunctions to the letter, their hearts were not yet pure, and they got into trouble, as the later story will show.

They had the hardihood to cast aspersions on Joseph, not knowing that they were in Joseph's power. And Joseph took a noble revenge by planning a reunion of the whole family and shaming the ten brothers into repentance. He was the instrument for the fulfilment of Allah's Plan.

...إِلَّا حَاجَةً فِي نَفْسِ يَعْقُوبَ قَضَاهَا...

it was but a necessity of Jacob's soul, which he discharged.

**C1732.** It is a necessity of a Prophet's soul that he should speak out and teach all that he knows, to the worthy and unworthy alike.

This, Jacob did to his unworthy sons, as well as to his worthy sons whom he loved best. It was not for him as Prophet to guarantee any results. In this case he could not save his sons from getting into trouble merely because they followed the letter of his advice in a small matter.

Apply this to the teaching of one who is greater than Jacob. Men who literally observe some small injunctions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and neglect the greater principles which he taught cannot blame him for their troubles and difficulties. If they examined the matter, they would find that they brought the troubles on themselves.

...وَإِنَّهُ لَدُوٌّ عَلِيمٌ لِّمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٦٨)

For he was, by Our instruction, full of knowledge (and experience):

but most men know not.

**C1733.** The Prophets of Allah are full of knowledge, -not as men, but as taught by the grace of Allah. For men, as such, are (Carlyle said) mostly fools,-devoid of knowledge and understanding. (R).

## **C.112 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)**

**(12:69-93)**

*When the brothers went back without Benjamin,  
Jacob was overwhelmed with grief, but he bore  
His affliction with patience and faith in Allah,  
He refused to be comforted and sent his sons back,  
To Egypt. At last Joseph revealed himself,  
Forgave them, and sent his shirt by them  
To Jacob, to tell him the good news*

*That Joseph lived and did great work  
In Egypt, and had sent for his whole family  
To come and rejoice and live in the land  
Of Egypt, and be a blessing to all.*

## Section 9

*وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ ...*

69. Now when they came into Joseph's presence,

**C1734.** The ten brothers, with Benjamin, arrived in Egypt, and waited on the great Wazir. Joseph again received them hospitably, even more so than before, as they had complied with his request to bring Benjamin.

No doubt many shrewd and probing questions were asked by Joseph, and no doubt it was clear that Benjamin was one apart from the other ten.

Baydawi fills up the picture of the great feast for us. The guests were seated two by two. Baydawi was the odd one, and Joseph courteously took him to his own table.

*... آوَى إِلَيْهِ أَخَاهُ ...*

he received his (full) brother to stay with him.

**C1735.** After the feast the question of lodgings arose. They were to be accommodated two by two. Again Benjamin was the odd one.

What more natural than that the Wazir should take him to himself He thus got a chance of privacy with him. He disclosed his identity to him, charging him to keep it a secret, and to take no notice of any strange doings that might occur.

He must have learnt from Benjamin about his father and about the inner doings of the family. He must get them all together into Egypt under his own eye. He had a plan, and he proceeded to put it into execution.

...قَالَ إِنِّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٦٩)

He said (to him): "Behold! I am thy (own) brother; so grieve not at aught of their doings."

**C1736.** The past tense of **Kanu**, combined with the aorist of **Ya'malan**, signifies that the reference is to their brothers' doings, past, present, and future.

Benjamin was not to mind what wrongs they had done in the past, or how they behaved in the present or the immediate future. Joseph had a plan that required Benjamin's silence in strange circumstances.

فَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُمْ بِجَهَّازِهِمْ جَعَلَ السَّقَايَةَ فِي رَحْلِ أَخِيهِ...

70. At length when he had furnished them forth with provisions (suitable) for them, he put the drinking cup into his brother's saddlebag.

...ثُمَّ أَدْنَىٰ مُؤَدِّنُ أَيُّهَا الْعَيْرُ إِنَّكُمْ لَسَارِقُونَ (٧٠)

Then shouted out a Crier: "O ye (in) the Caravan! Behold! ye are thieves, without doubt!"

**C1737.** Joseph's plan was to play a practical joke on them, which would achieve two objects.

- Immediately it would put them into some consternation, but nothing comparable to what he had suffered at their hands. When the plan was unraveled, it would make them thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and dramatically bring home their guilt to them.
- Secondly, it would give him an excuse to detain Benjamin and bring their aged father into Egypt.

He contrived that a valuable drinking cup should be concealed in Benjamin's saddle-bag. When it was found after an ostentatious search, he would detain the supposed culprit, and attain his object, as the story relates further on.

قَالُوا وَأَقْبَلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ مَاذَا تَفْقَدُونَ (٧١)

71. They said, turning towards them: "What is it that ye miss?"

قَالُوا نَفَقْدُ صَوَاعَ الْمَلِكِ وَلِمَنْ جَاءَ بِهِ حِمْلُ بَعِيرٍ وَأَنَا بِهِ زَعِيمٌ (٧٢)

72. They said:

"We miss the great beaker of the king; for him who produces it, is (the reward of) a camel-load; I will be bound by it."

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَّا جِئْنَا لِنُفْسِدَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا سَارِقِينَ (٧٣)

73. (The brothers) said: "By Allah! well ye know that we came not to make mischief in the land, and we are no thieves!"

**C1738.** As strangers in a strange land, they were liable to be suspected as spies or men who meditated some unlawful design, or some crime, such as theft, which would be common in a season of scarcity. The brothers protested against the absurdity of such a suspicion after they had been entertained so royally by the Wazir.

قَالُوا فَمَا جَزَاؤُهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ كَاذِبِينَ (٧٤)

74. (The Egyptians) said: "What then shall be the penalty of this, if ye are (proved) to have lied?"

**C1739.** "That might be all very well," said the Egyptians, "but what if it is found by a search that you have in fact abused the Wazir's hospitality by stealing a valuable cup?"

قَالُوا جَزَاؤُهُ مَنْ وَجَدَ فِي رَحْلِهِ فَهُوَ جَزَاؤُهُ...

75. They said:

"The penalty should be that he in whose saddle bag it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime).

**C1740.** We must try to picture to ourselves the mentality of the ten, They understood each other perfectly, in their sins as well as in other things. For themselves, the search held out no fears. Besides they had had no opportunity of stealing.

But what of that young fellow Benjamin?

They were ready to believe anything against him, the more so as the Wazir's partiality for him had lent a keen edge to their jealousy. Judging by their own standards, they would not be surprised if he had stolen, seeing that

he had had such opportunities-sitting at the High Table and staying with the Wazir.

They felt very self-righteous at the same time that they indulged in the luxury of accusing in their thoughts the most innocent of men! Supposing he had stolen, here would be a fine opportunity of getting rid of him.

What about their solemn oath to their father?

Oh! that was covered by the exception. He had done for himself. They had done all they could to protect him, but they were powerless. The old man could come and see for himself.

كذلك نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ (٧٥)...

Thus it is we punish the wrongdoers!"

**C1741.** This was their family custom. It was of course long anterior to the Mosaic Law, which laid down full restitution for theft, and if the culprit had nothing, he was to be sold for his theft (Exod. 22:5).

But here the crime was more than theft. It was theft, lying, and the grossest abuse of confidence and hospitality. While the ten felt a secret satisfaction in suggesting the penalty, they were unconsciously carrying out Joseph's plan. Thus the vilest motives often help in carrying out the most beneficent plans.

فَبَدَأَ بِأَوْعِيَّتِهِمْ ...

76. So he began (the search) with their baggage,

**C1742.** The pronoun "he" can only refer to Joseph. He may have been present all the time, or he may just have come up, as the supposed theft of the king's own cup (12:72 above) was a very serious and important affair, and the investigation required his personal supervision.

All that his officers did by his orders was his own act. As the lawyers say: *Qui facit per alium, facit per se* (whoever does anything through another, does it himself).

... قَبْلَ وَعَاءِ أَخِيهِ...

before (he came to) the baggage of his brother:

**C1743.** The Arabic word here used is *wi'ai*, plural *aw'iya*, which includes bags, lockers, boxes, or any receptacles in which things are stored.

Notice the appropriateness of the words used. The cup was concealed in a saddle-bag (*rahl*), verse 70 above. When it comes to searching, they must search all the baggage of every description if the search was to be convincing and effective.

... ثُمَّ اسْتَخْرَجَهَا مِنْ وَعَاءِ أَخِيهِ...

at length He brought it out of his brother's baggage.

**C1744. It** refers to the drinking cup, the *siqayat*, which is a feminine noun: hence the feminine pronoun (*ha*) in Arabic.

... كَذَلِكَ كِدْنَا لِيُوسُفَ...

Thus did We plan for Joseph.

... مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي دِينِ الْمَلِكِ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ...

He could not take his brother by the law of the king except that Allah willed it (so).

**C1745.** Let no one suppose that it was a vulgar or wicked trick, such as we sometimes hear of in police courts, when property is planted on innocent men to get them into trouble.

On the contrary it was a device or stratagem whose purpose was to show up wickedness in its true colours, to give it a chance of repentance, to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation, to give solace to the aged father who had suffered so much.

Joseph was a Prophet of Allah, but he could not have carried out his plan or taken the first step, of detaining his brother, except with the will and permission of Allah, Whose Plan is universal and for all His creatures. (R).

...تَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْ تَشَاءٍ...

We raise to degrees (of wisdom) whom We please:

**C1746.** If we examine this world's affairs, there are all sorts of plans, and all degrees of folly and wisdom.

The wicked ones plan; the foolish ones plan; the simple ones plan; then there are men who think themselves wise and are perhaps thought to be wise, but who are foolish, and they have their plans; and there are degrees of real and beneficent wisdom among men.

Allah, is above all. Anything good in our wisdom is but a reflection of His wisdom, and His wisdom can even turn folly and wickedness to good.

...وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ (٧٦)

but over all endowed with knowledge is One, the All-Knowing.

قَالُوا إِن يَسْرِقْ فَقَدْ سَرَقَ أَخٌ لَّهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ...

77. They said:

"If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before (him)."

**C1747.** The hatred of the Ten for Joseph and Benjamin comes out again. They are not only ready to believe evil of Benjamin, but they carry their thoughts back to Joseph and call him a thief as well.

They had injured Joseph; and by a false charge of this kind they salve their conscience. Little did they suspect that Joseph was before them under another guise, and their falsehood and treachery, would soon be exposed.

...فَأَسْرَهَا يُوسُفُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَلَمْ...

But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, revealing not the secrets to them.

**C1748.** There were many secrets:

- that he was Joseph himself;

- that his brother Benjamin knew him;
- that there was no guilt in Benjamin, but the whole practical joke was in furtherance of a great plan (see [n. 1745, above](#));
- that they were giving themselves away, and were unconsciously facilitating the plan, though their motives were not above-board.

...يُبْدِيهَا لَهُمْ قَالَ أَنْتُمْ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا...

He (simply) said (to himself): "Ye are the worse situated;

**C1749.** "Ah!" thought Joseph, "you think that Benjamin is safely out of the way, and that Joseph was got rid of long since! Would you be surprised to know that you have given yourselves away, that you are now in the power of Joseph, and that Joseph is the very instrument of your exposure and (let us hope) of your repentance?"

...وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَصِفُونَ (٧٧)

and Allah knoweth best the truth of what ye assert!"

قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ إِنَّ لَهُ أَبًا شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا ...

78. They said:

"O exalted one! Behold! he has a father, aged and venerable, (who will grieve for him):

**C1750.** I have translated the title of 'Aziz here as "the exalted one" when addressed to Joseph in order not to cause confusion with the other man, the 'Aziz the Courtier, who had bought Joseph on arrival in Egypt.

See [12:30 above](#), and notes [1677](#) and [1714](#).

... فَخُذْ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ ...

so take one of us in his place:

...إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٧٨)

for we see that thou art (gracious) in doing good."

قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ أَنْ نَأْخُذَ إِلَّا مَنْ وَجَدْنَا مَتَاعَنَا عِنْدَهُ إِنَّا إِذًا نَظَالِمُونَ (٧٩)

79. He said:

"Allah forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property: indeed (if we did so), we should be acting wrongfully."

**C1751.** There is a little sparring now between the Ten and Joseph. They are afraid of meeting their father's wrath, and he holds them strictly to the bargain which they had themselves suggested.

## Section 10

فَلَمَّا اسْتَيْأَسُوا مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا...

80. Now when they saw no hope of his (yielding), they held a conference in private.

...قَالَ كَبِيرُهُمْ...

The leader among them said:

**C1752. Kabir** may mean the eldest. But in 12:78 above, Kabir is distinguished from Sheikh, and I have translated the one as "venerable" and the other as "aged".

In 20:71 Kabir obviously means "leader" or "chief", and has no reference to age.

I therefore translate here by the word "leader", that brother among them who took the most active part in these transactions. His name is not given in the Quran.

The eldest brother was Reuben. But according to the biblical story the brother who had taken the most active part in this transaction was Judah, one of the elder brothers, being the fourth son, after Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, and of the same mother as these. It was Judah who stood surety to Jacob for Benjamin (Gen. 43:9). It is therefore natural that Judah should, as here, offer to stay behind.

... أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ آبَاءَكُمْ قَدْ أَخَذَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَوثِقًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ...

"Know ye not that your father did take an oath from you in Allah's name,

... وَمِن قَبْلَ مَا فَرَّطْتُمْ فِي يُوسُفَ ...

and how, before this, ye did fail in your duty with Joseph?

... فَلَنْ أُبْرَحَ الْأَرْضَ حَتَّى يَأْذَنَ لِي أَبِي أَوْ يَحْكَمَ اللَّهُ لِي...

Therefore will I not leave this land until my father permits me, or Allah commands me;

**C1753.** The pledge he had given was to his father, and in Allah's name. Therefore he was bound both to his father, and to Allah. He must await his father's orders and remain here as pledged, unless Allah opened out some other way. For example the Egyptian Wazir might relent; if so, he could go back with Benjamin to his father, and his pledge would be satisfied.

... وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ (٨٠)

and He is the best to command.

ارْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ أَبِيكُمْ فَقُولُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّ ابْنَكَ سَرَقَ...

81. "Turn ye back to your father, and say,

'O our father! Behold! thy son committed theft:

... وَمَا شَهِدْنَا إِلَّا بِمَا عَلَّمْنَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِلْغَيْبِ حَافِظِينَ (٨١)

we bear witness only to what we know,

and we could not well guard against the unseen!

**C1754.** 'He stole in secret and without our knowledge. How could we in the circumstances prevent it?

This may have been a good statement for the other nine brothers, but Judah was himself personally and specially pledged.

وَأَسْأَلُ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا...

82. "Ask at the town where we have been and the caravan in which we returned,

...وَالْعَيْرَ الَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ (٨٢)

and (you will find) we are indeed telling the truth."

**C1755.** To vouch for the truth of the story, the nine brothers are asked by Judah to appeal to their father to enquire at the place where they stayed and the caravan with which they came, and he would find that the facts were as they stated them. The nine brothers came back and told their father as they had been instructed by Judah.

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ...

83. Jacob said: "Nay, but ye have yourselves contrived a story (good enough) for you.

**C1756.** Jacob was absolutely stunned by the story. He knew his darling little Benjamin too well to believe that he had committed theft. He flatly refused to believe it, and called it a cock-and-bull story, which indeed it was, though not in the sense in which he reproached the nine brothers.

With the eye of faith he saw clearly the innocence of Benjamin, though he did not see every detail of what had happened.

... فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ...

So patience is most fitting (for me).

... عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا ...

Maybe Allah will bring them (back) all to me (in the end):

**C1757.** With the eye of faith he clung to even a larger hope. Perhaps all three of his lost sons would come back, -Joseph, Benjamin, and Judah. His faith in Allah was unswerving, although alas! the present facts altogether unnerved him. (R).

... إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٨٣)

for He is indeed full of knowledge and wisdom."

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ...

84. And he turned away from them, and said: "How great is my grief for Joseph!"

...وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ (٨٤)

And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.

**C1758.** The old father's grief is indescribable. Yet with what master-strokes it is described here! One sorrow brings up the memory of another and a greater one.

'Benjamin is now gone! Oh but Joseph! his pretty dream of boyhood! his greatness foretold! and now how dark was the world! If he could but weep! Tears might give relief, and his red and swollen eyes might yet regain their light!'

But his grief was too deep for tears. His eyes lost their colour, and became a dull white. The light became a mere blur, a white glimmer. Darkness seemed to cover everything. So it was in the outside world. So was it in his mind. His grief was unshared, unexpressed, and uncomplaining.

Who could share it?

Who could understand it?

He bore his sorrow in silence. Yet his faith was undimmed, and he trimmed the lamp of patience, that sovereign virtue for those who have faith.

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَقَىٰ تَذَكَّرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّىٰ تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ

الْهَالِكِينَ (٨٥)

85. They said:

"By Allah! (never) wilt thou cease to remember Joseph until though reach the last extremity of illness, or until thou die!"

**C1759.** A speech full of jealousy, taunting malice, and lack of understanding, one that would have driven mad any one less endowed with patience and wisdom than was Jacob, the Prophet of Allah.

It shows that the sons were still unregenerate, though the time of their repentance and reclamation was drawing nigh. The cruel heartlessness of their words is particularly out of place, as Jacob bore his sorrow in silence and complained to no mortal, but poured out his distraction and grief only to Allah, as stated in the next verse.

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَنِيَّ وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ...

86. He said:

"I only complain of my distraction and anguish to Allah

**C1760.** Jacob's plaint to Allah is about himself, not about Allah's doings. He bewails the distraction of his mind and his occasional breaking out of those bounds of patience which he had set for himself.

... وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٨٦)

and I know from Allah that which ye know not...

**C1761.** He knew of Allah's merciful and beneficent dealings with man in a way his shallow sons did not. And his perfect faith in Allah also told him that all would be well. He never gave up hope for Joseph, as his directions in the next verse show.

They may be supposed to have been spoken after a little silence of grief and thought. That silence I have indicated in punctuation by three dots.

يَا بَنِيَّ اذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ...

87. "O my sons! go ye and enquire about Joseph and his brother,

...وَلَا تَيَاسُؤْا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ...

and never give up hope of Allah's Soothing Mercy:

**C1762.** The word is **rauh**, not ruh as some translators have mistakenly construed it.

**Rauh** includes the idea of a Mercy that stills or calms our distracted state, and is particularly appropriate here in the mouth of Jacob.

...إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْئَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ (٨٧)

truly no one despairs of Allah's Soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith."

**C1763.** Jacob ignores and forgives the sting and malice in the speech of his sons, and like a true Prophet of Allah, still wishes them well, gives them sound advice, and sends them on an errand which is to open their eyes to the wonderful ways of Providence as much as it will bring consolation to his own distressed soul.

He asks them to go again in search of Joseph and Benjamin. Perhaps by now he had an idea that they might be together in Egypt. In any case their stock of grain is again low, and they must seek its replenishment in Egypt. (R).

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ...

88. Then, when they came (back) into (Joseph's) presence they said: "O exalted one!

**C1764.** The nine brothers come back to Egypt according to their father's direction.

Their first care is to see the Wazir. They must tell him of all their father's distress and excite his pity, if perchance he might release Benjamin. They would describe the father's special mental distress as well as the distress which was the common lot of all in famine time.

They had spent a great part of their capital and stock-in-trade. They would appeal to his charity. It might please so great a man, the absolute governor of a wealthy state. And they did so. Perhaps they mentioned their father's touching faith, and that brought Joseph out of his shell, as in the next verse.

...مَسْنَا وَأَهْلْنَا الضَّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِيضَاعَةٍ مُزْجَاةٍ...

distress has seized us and our family; we have (now) brought but scanty capital:

...فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا...

So pay us full measure, (we pray thee), and treat it as charity to us:

...إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ (٨٨)

for Allah doth reward the charitable."

قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ (٨٩)

89. He said:

"Know ye how ye dealt with Joseph, and his brother, not knowing (what ye were doing)?"

**C1765.** Joseph now wants to reveal himself and touch their conscience. He had but to remind them of the true facts as to their treatment of their brother Joseph, whom they pretended to have lost.

He had by now also learnt from Benjamin what slights and injustice he too had suffered at their hands after Joseph's protection had been removed from him in their home.

Had not Joseph himself seen them but too prone to believe the worst of Benjamin and to say the worst of Joseph? But Joseph would be charitable, not only in the sense which they meant when they asked for a charitable grant of grain, but in a far higher sense. He would forgive them and put the most charitable construction on what they did, that they knew not what they were doing!

قَالُوا أَلَيْكَ لَأَنْتَ يُوسُفُ...

90. They said: "Art thou indeed, Joseph?"

**C1766.** Their father's words, the way events were shaping themselves. Joseph's questionings, perhaps Benjamin's manner now, not a slave kept in subjection but one in perfect love and understanding with this great Wazir, -perhaps also a recollection of Joseph's boyish dream,- all these things had prepared their minds and they ask the direct question, "Art thou Joseph?"

They get the direct reply, "Yes, I am Joseph; and if you have still any doubt of my identity, here is Benjamin: ask him. We have suffered much, but patience and right conduct are at last rewarded by Allah!"

...قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي...

He said:

"I am Joseph, and this is my brother:

...قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا...

Allah has indeed been gracious to us (all):

...إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقْ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٩٠)

behold, he that is righteous and patient -- never will Allah suffer the reward to be lost, of those who do right."

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ أَتَرَكْنَا اللَّهَ عَلَيْنَا وَإِن كُنَّا لَخَاطِئِينَ (٩١)

91. They said:

"By Allah! indeed has Allah preferred thee above us, and we certainly have been guilty of sin!"

**C1767.** The scales fall from the eyes of the brothers. We may suppose that they had joined Judah at this interview, and perhaps what Judah had seen when he was alone helped in the process of their enlightenment, They are convicted of sin out of their own mouths, and now there is no *arrier pensee*, no reserve thought, in their minds. They freely confess their wrong-doing, and the justice of Joseph's preferment.

قَالَ لَا تَتْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ ...

92. He said: "This day let no reproach be (cast) on you:

**C1768.** Joseph is most generous. He is glad that they have at last seen the significance of what happened. But he will not allow them at this great moment of reconciliation to dwell on their conduct with reproaches against themselves.

There is more urgent work to do. An aged and beloved father is eating out his heart in far Canaan in love and longing for his Joseph, and he must be told all immediately, and "comforted in body, mind, and estate," and so he tells the brothers to hurry back immediately with his shirt as a sign of recognition, as a proof of these wonderful happenings.

...يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ...

Allah will forgive you,

...وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ (٩٢)

and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy?

اذْهَبُوا بِقَمِيصِي هَذَا فَأَلْقُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بَصِيرًا...

93. "Go with this my shirt, and cast it over the face of my father:  
he will come to see (clearly).

**C1769.** It will be remembered that they had covered their crime by taking his shirt, putting on the stains of blood, and pretending that he had been killed by a wolf: see above, 12:17-18.

Now that they have confessed their crime and been forgiven, and they have joyful news to tell Jacob about Joseph. Joseph gives them another shirt of his to prove the truth of their story.

It is rich shirt, befitting a ruler of Egypt, to prove his good fortune, and yet perhaps in design and many colours (12:18, n. 1651) were reminiscent of the lost Joseph.

The first shirt plunged Jacob into grief. This one will now restore him. See the verses following.

...وَأْتُونِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (٩٣)

Then come ye (here) to me together with all your family."

### C.113 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(12:94-111)

*Jacob was comforted with the news,  
The whole family moved to Egypt,  
Were Joseph received them with honour.  
He forgave his brothers, thanked and praised*

*Allah, and lived and died a righteous man.  
So the story shows how the Plan of Allah  
Doth work without fail: it defeats  
The wiles of the wicked, turns evil to good,  
And ever leads those who are true  
To beatitudes undreamt of. So  
Did it happen in Al Mustafa's life.  
Will man not learn to rely on Allah  
As the only Reality, turning away  
From all that is fleeting or untrue?*

## Section 11

وَلَمَّا فَصَلَتِ الْعِيرُ قَالَ أَبُوهُمْ ...

94. When the caravan left (Egypt), their father said:

... إِنِّي لَأَجِدُ رِيحَ يُوسُفَ ...

"I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph:

**C1770.** Literally, I feel the **scent**, or the air, or the atmosphere or the breath of Joseph; for **rih** has all these significations.

Or we might translate, 'I feel the presence of Joseph in the air'.

When a long-lost friend is about to be found or heard of, many people have a sort of presentiment of it, which they call telepathy. In Jacob's case it was more definite. He had always had faith that Joseph was living and that his dream would be realized. Now that faith was proved true by his own sons; they had been undutiful, and hard, and ignorant; and circumstances had converged to prove it to them by ocular demonstration.

Jacob's soul was more sensitive. No wonder he knew already before the news was actually brought to him.

...لَوْلَا أَنْ تُفَنِّدُون (٩٤)

nay, think me not a dotard."

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ إِنَّكَ لَفِي ضَلَالِكَ الْقَدِيمِ (٩٥)

95. They said: "By Allah! truly thou art in thine old wandering mind."

**C1771.** "They" must be the people around him, before the brothers actually arrived.

These same brothers had sedulously cultivated the calumny that their father was an old dotard, and everybody around believed it, even after its authors had to give it up. Thus lies die hard, once they get a start.

فَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَ الْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَاهُ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ ...

96. Then when the bearer of the good news came, he cast (the shirt) over his face,

**C1772.** We may suppose this to have been Judah (see notes [1752](#) and [1753](#) above) who was pledged to his father for Benjamin, and who could now announce the good news not only of Benjamin but of Joseph.

We can imagine him hurrying forward, to be the first to tell the news, though the plural pronoun for those whom Jacob addresses in this verse, and for those who reply in the next verse, shows that all the brothers practically arrived together.

...فَارْتَدَّ...

and he forthwith

**C1773.** The particle **fa** ("then") has here the force of "forthwith".

...بَصِيرًا...

regained clear sight.

**C1774.** Jacob's sight had grown dim; his eyes had become white with much sorrow for Joseph (see [12:84](#) above). Both his physical and mental vision now became clear and bright as before.

...قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٩٦)

He said: "Did I not say to you, 'Know from Allah that which ye know not?'"

**C1775.** He had said this (12:86) when everything was against him, and his sons were scoffers. Now they themselves have come to say that his faith was justified and his vision was true.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ (٩٧)

97. They said: "O our father! ask for us forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly at fault."

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي...

98. He said: "Soon will I ask my Lord for forgiveness for you:

**C1776.** He fully intended to do this, but the most injured party was Joseph, and it was only fair that Joseph should be consulted.

In fact Joseph had already forgiven his brothers all their past, and his father could confidently look forward to Joseph joining in the wish of the whole family to turn to Allah through their aged father Jacob in his prophetic office.

...إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ (٩٨)

for He is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Merciful."

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ آوَى إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ...

99. Then when they entered the presence of Joseph, he provided a home for his parents with himself,

**C1777.** At length the whole family arrived in Egypt and were re-united with Joseph. They were all entertained and provided with homes. But the parents were treated with special honour, as was becoming both to Joseph's character and ordinary family ethics.

His mother Rachel had long been dead, but he had been brought up by his mother's sister Leah, whom his father

had also married. Leah was now his mother. They were lodged with Joseph himself.

...وَقَالَ ادْخُلُوا مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ آمِنِينَ (٩٩)

and said: "Enter ye Egypt (all) in safety if it please Allah."

**C1778.** This is in Arabic in the plural, not in the dual number. The welcome is for all to Egypt, and under the auspices of the Wazir or Egypt. They came, therefore, under Allah's will, to a double sense of security:

- Egypt was secure from the famine unlike the neighbouring countries;
- and they were to be cared for by the highest in the land.

...وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ...

100. And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity),

**C1779.** Certainly metaphorically: probably also literally. By Eastern custom the place of honour at a ceremonial reception is on a seat on a dais, with a special cushion of honour, such as is assigned to a bridegroom at his reception.

To show his high respect for his parents, Joseph made them sit on a throne of dignity. On the other hand, his parents and his brothers, -all performed the ceremony of prostration before Joseph in recognition of his supreme rank in Egypt under the Pharaoh. And thus was fulfilled the dream or vision of his youth (12:4 above and n. 1633).

... وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا ...

and they fell down in prostration (all) before him.

**C1779a.** The ceremony of prostration for paying respect might have been allowed at the time of previous prophets, but with the advent of the complete and final revelation prostration before anyone other than Allah is a grave sin strictly prohibited. (Eds.).

...وَقَالَ يَا أَبَتِ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُؤْيَايَ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقًّا...

He said:

"O my father! this is the fulfillment of my vision of old!

Allah hath made it come true!

...وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِي إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ السِّجْنِ...

He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison

...وَجَاءَ بِكُمْ مِنَ الْبَدْوِ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ تَزَعَ الشَّيْطَانُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ

إِخْوَتِي...

and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers.

**C1780.** Note how modest Joseph is throughout. The first things he thinks of among Allah's gracious favours to him are:

- that he was brought out of prison and publicly proclaimed to be honest and virtuous; and
- that his dear father was restored to him, as well as the brothers who had persecuted him all his life. He will say nothing against them personally. In his *husn-i-zann* (habit of interpreting everyone and everything in the most favourable and charitable light), he looks upon them as having been misled. It was Satan that set them against him. But now all is rectified by the grace of Allah, to Whom he renders due praise.

...إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفٌ لِمَا يَشَاءُ...

Verily my Lord understandeth best the mysteries of all that He planneth to do:

**Latif.** see [n. 2844 to 22:63](#);

the fourth meaning mentioned there applies here, with echoes of the other meanings.

...إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (١٠٠)

for verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom.

رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ...

101. "O my Lord!

Thou hast indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events,

**C1781.** Then he turns to Allah in prayer, and again his modesty is predominant.

He held supreme power under the king, but he calls it "some power" or authority.

His reading of events and dreams had saved millions of lives in the great Egyptian famine; yet he refers to it as "something of the interpretation of dreams and events". And he takes no credit to himself, "All this," he says, "was Thy gift, O Allah! For such things can only come from the Creator of the heavens and earth."

...فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ...

O Thou Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter,

**C1782.** Power in the doing of things as well as power in intelligent forecasts and plans,-both must look to Allah: otherwise the deed and the plan would be futile.

...تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ (١٠١)

take thou my soul (at death) as one submitting to Thy Will (as a Muslim),

and unite me with the righteous."

**C1783.** Joseph's prayer may be analyzed thus:

1. I am nothing; all power and knowledge are Thine;
2. such things can only come from Thee, for Thou art the Creator of all;
3. none can protect me from danger and wrong, but only Thou;
4. Thy protection I need both in this world and the next;
5. may I till death remain constant to Thee-

6. may I yield up my soul to Thee in cheerful submission to Thy will;
7. in this moment of union with my family after many partings let me think of the final union with the great family of the righteous.

How marvelously apt to the occasion!

ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ...

102. Such is one of the stories of what happened unseen, which We reveal by inspiration unto thee:

**C1784.** The story is finished.

But is it a story?

It is rather a recital of forces and motives, thoughts and feelings, complications and results, ordinarily not seen by men. However much they concert their plans and unite their forces, whatever dark plots they back with all their resources, -the plan of Allah works irresistibly, and sweeps away all their machinations.

The good win through in the end, but not always as they planned: the evil are foiled, and often their very plots help the good.

What did the brothers desire in trying to get rid of Joseph, and what actually happened?

How the Courtier's wife, encouraged by the corrupt women of her acquaintance, tried and failed to seduce Joseph and how Allah listened to his prayer and saved him from her vile designs?

How wrong was it of the cup-bearer to forget Joseph, and yet how his very forgetfulness kept Joseph safe and undisturbed in prison until the day came when he should tackle the great problems of Pharaoh's kingdom?

With every character in the story there are problems, and the whole is a beautifully balanced picture of the working of Allah's providence in man's chequered destiny. (R).

...وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ أَجْمَعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَمْكُرُونَ (١٠٢)

nor wast thou (present) with them when they concerted their plans together in the process of weaving their plots.

**C1785.** The holy Prophet was no actor in those scenes; yet by inspiration he was able to expound them in the divine light, as they had never been expounded before, whether in the Pentateuch or by any Seer before him. And allegorically they figured his own story, -how his own brethren sought to betray and kill him how by Allah's providence he was not only saved but he won through. (R).

وَمَا أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٠٣)

103. Yet no faith will the greater part of mankind have, however ardently thou dost desire it.

**C1786.** In spite of such an exposition and such a convincing illustration, how few men really have true faith, -such a faith as Jacob had in the old story, or Muhammad the Chosen One had, in the story which was actually unfolding itself on the world's stage when this Surah was revealed, shortly before the Hijrah?

Al-Mustafa's ardent wish and faith was to save his people and all mankind from the graceless condition of want of faith. But his efforts were flouted, and he had to leave his home and suffer all kinds of persecution, but like Joseph, and more than Joseph, he was marked out for great work, which he finally achieved.

وَمَا تَسْأَلُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ...

104. And no reward dost thou ask of them for this:

...إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (١٠٤)

it is no less than a Message for all creatures.

**C1787.** The divine Message was priceless; it was not for the Messenger's personal profit, nor did he ask of men any reward for bringing it for their benefit. It was for all creatures, -literally, for all the worlds, as explained in 1:2, n. 20.

## Section 12

وَكَايِنَ مِّنْ آيَةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا...

105. And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by?

...وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ (١٠٥)

Yet they turn (their faces) away from them!

**C1788.** Not only can we learn through Scripture of the working of Allah's providence in human history and the history of individual souls. His Signs are scattered literally throughout nature-throughout Creation-for all who have eyes to see. And yet man is so arrogant that he turns away his very eyes from them!

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ (١٠٦)

106. And most of them believe not in Allah without associating (others as partners) with Him!

**C1789.** Even if people profess a nominal faith in Allah, they corrupt it by believing in other things as if they were Allah's partners, or had some share in the shaping of the world's destinies!

- In some circles, it is idolatry, the worship of stocks and stones.
- In others, it is Christolatry and Mariolatry, or the deification of heroes and men of renown.
- In others it is the powers of Nature or of Life, or of the human intellect personified in Science or Art or invention, and this is the more common form of modern idolatry.
- Others again worship mystery, or imaginary powers of good or even evil: greed and fear are mixed up with these forms of worship. Islam calls us to worship Allah, the One True God, and Him only. (R).

أَفَأَمِنُوا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ غَاشِيَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ...

107. Do they then feel secure from the coming against them of the covering veil of the wrath of Allah --

**C1790. Gtashiyat:** covering veil, pall; used for the Judgment to come, which will be so dark and appalling as to hide up all other and petty things, and be the one great reality for the souls that were slaves to evil.

...أَوْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (١٠٧)

or of the coming against them of the (final) Hour all of a sudden while they perceive not?

**C1791.** The metaphor is changed, from intensity of darkness to suddenness of time. It will come before they are aware of it. Let them not feel any sense of safety in sin.

فُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي...

108. Say thou:

"This is my way: I do invite unto Allah -- on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes -- I and whoever follows me:

**C1792.** Islam holds fast to the one central fact in the spiritual world,

- the unity of God, and
- all Reality springing from Him and Him alone.

There can be no one and nothing in competition with that one and only Reality. It is the essence of Truth. All other ideas or existences, including our perception of Self, are merely relative, mere projections from the wonderful faculties which He has given to us.

This is not, to us, mere hypothesis. It is in our inmost experience. In the physical world, they say that seeing is believing. In our inner world this sense of Allah is as clear as sight in the physical world. Therefore, Al-Mustafa and those who really follow him in the truest sense of the world, call all the world to see this Truth, feel this experience, follow this Way.

They will never be distracted by metaphysical speculations, whose validity will always be doubtful, nor be deluded with phantoms which lead men astray.

...وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (١٠٨)

Glory to Allah!

and never will I join gods with Allah!"

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رَجَالًا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَى...

109. Nor did We send before thee (as Messengers) any but men, whom We did inspire -- (men) living in human habitations.

**C1793.** It was men that Allah sent as His Messengers to explain Him to men. He did not send angels or gods. Into His chosen men He breathed His inspiration, so that they could see truer than other men. But they were men living with men, in men's habitations in town or country; not recluses or cenobites, who had no personal experience of men's affairs and could not be teachers of men in the fullest sense. Their deeds tell their own tale.

...أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ

قَبْلِهِمْ...

Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them?

...وَلِدَارُ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا ...

But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who do right.

**C1794.** The righteous, the men of Allah, had, as in Joseph's history, some evidence of Allah's providence in this very world with all its imperfections as reflecting our imperfections. But this world is of no real consequence to them. Their home is in the Hereafter.

Joseph's earthly home was in Canaan; but he attained his glory elsewhere; and his spiritual Home is in the great Society of the Righteous (3:39).

...أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ (١٠٩)

Will ye not then understand?

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْسَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا...

110. (Respite will be granted) until, when the apostles give up hope (of their people) and (come to) think that they were treated as liars,

**C1795. Zannu** (come to think):

I construe the nominative of this verb to be "the messengers" in agreement with the best authorities.

**Kuzibu** is the usual reading, though **Kuzzibu**, the alternative reading, also rests on good authority.

I construe the meaning to be: that Allah gives plenty of rope to the wicked (as in Joseph's story) until His own Messengers feel almost that it will be hopeless to preach to them and come to consider themselves branded as liars by an unbelieving world; that the breaking point is then reached: that Allah's help then comes swiftly to His men, and they are delivered from persecution and danger, while the wrath of Allah overtakes sinners, and nothing can then ward it off. This interpretation has good authority behind it, though there are differences of opinion.

...جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا فَنُجِّيَ مَنْ نَشَاءُ...

there reaches them Our help. And those whom We will are delivered into safety.

...وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُنَا عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ (١١٠)

But never will be warded off Our punishment from those who are in sin.

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ...

111. There is, in their stories, instruction for men endowed with understanding.

**C1796. Their stories**, i.e., the stories of Prophets or of the wicked; for the two threads inter-twine, as in Joseph's story.

...مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَكِن تَصَدِّقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ...

It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it -

**C1797.** A story like that of Joseph is not a purely imaginary fable. The People of the Book have it in their sacred literature. It is confirmed here in its main outline, but here there is a detailed spiritual exposition that will be found nowhere in earlier literature.

The exposition covers all sides of human life. If properly understood it gives valuable lessons to guide our conduct,-an instance of Allah's grace and mercy to people who will go to Him in faith and put their affairs in His hands.

...وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (١١١)

a detailed exposition of all things, and a Guide and a Mercy to any such as believe.



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