

messengers did, and it is what the advocates of the divine faith should do in all communities and at all times when they confront a state of *jāhiliyyah*.

### Unsuccessful Appeal

Turning back to Joseph's brothers whose grudge against Joseph and his brother has been aroused, we find them trying their best to deny having anything to do with theft, while they attach it to the other branch of their father's children: *"They said: 'If he has stolen – well, a brother of his had stolen previously.'"* (Verse 77) There are countless reports which try to endorse their statement, quoting various excuses and legends, forgetting that these people had themselves previously lied to their father about Joseph. These attempts forget that they could lie again to Egypt's Chief Minister in order to deny their responsibility for an embarrassing act. They thus try to absolve themselves of anything to do with Joseph and his younger brother. Their action shows that they still harboured a grudge against both Joseph and his brother. Hence they put the blame squarely on these two.

*"Joseph kept his secret to himself revealed nothing to them."* (Verse 77) He simply bore their accusation without showing that he was affected by it, knowing that both he and his brother were totally innocent. He only said to them: *"You are in a far worse position."* (Verse 77) What this means is that their false accusation put them in a far worse position in God's sight than that of the accused. His is a statement of fact, not an insult. *"God knows best what you are speaking of"* (Verse 77) This he says so as not to enter into any argument about their accusation, which he presumably had nothing to do with.

They, however, now start to feel the embarrassing situation they are in. They remembered the solemn pledge they gave to their father when he made it a condition of his consent to send their brother with them that they would *"indeed bring him back to me"*, unless the worst befell them. Hence they appeal to Joseph to let their younger brother return with them, pleading the suffering that his detention would cause to his old father. They offer one of themselves in his place, if he would not free him for the sake of his aged father. They further appeal to his kindness and compassion, saying to him: *"Chief Minister, this lad has a father who is very old. Take one of us instead of him. We see that you are indeed a generous man."* (Verse 78)

Joseph, however, wanted to teach them a lesson, and he wanted to arouse their interest in the surprise he was preparing for them, and for his father and all who knew him, so that its effect would be appreciated by all. Hence he rejects their offer out of hand: *"God forbid that we should take any other than the man with whom we found our property; for then we would be wrongdoers."* (Verse 79) He does not say that he would not take an innocent person in place of a thief, because he knew that his

brother was no thief. He expresses the situation very precisely and accurately: *“God forbid that we should take any other than the man with whom we found our property.”* That is the whole situation without any addition to make the accusation appear true or false. He further comments, *“for then we would be wrongdoers.”* We have no wish to do anyone any wrong. That concludes the whole episode, and Joseph’s brothers knew then that their appeals would not bring any desired result. They retreated to reflect on the situation they now faced.

## 5

# A Child's Dream Comes True

*When they despaired of [moving] him, they withdrew to begin earnest consultations among themselves. The eldest of them said: 'Do you not recall that your father took from you a pledge in God's name, and that previously you were at fault with respect to Joseph? I shall not depart from this land until my father gives me leave or God judges for me. He is certainly the best of judges.'* (80)

*Go back to your father and say: 'Father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know. We cannot guard against the unforeseen.'* (81)

*You may ask the [people of the] town where we were, and the caravan with which we travelled. We are certainly telling the truth.'* (82)

*He said: 'No, but your minds have tempted you to evil. Sweet patience! God may well bring them all back to me. He is All-Knowing, Wise.'* (83)

فَلَمَّا اسْتَيْسَسُوا مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا ۗ قَالَ  
كَبِيرُهُمْ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ أَبَاكُمْ قَدْ  
أَخَذَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَوْتَقًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَمِن قَبْلُ مَا  
فَرَطْتُمْ فِي يُوسُفَ ۗ فَلَن أَبْرَحَ الْأَرْضَ  
حَتَّى يَأْذَنَ لِي أَبِي أَوْ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ لِي ۗ وَهُوَ  
خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

أَرْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ آبَائِكُمْ فَقُولُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّ  
أَبْنَكَ سَرَقَ وَمَا شَهِدْنَا إِلَّا بِمَا عَلَّمَنَا وَمَا  
كُنَّا لِلْغَيْبِ حَافِظِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

وَسَأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا وَالْعِيرَ الَّتِي  
أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا ۗ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ۗ فَصَبْرٌ  
جَمِيلٌ ۗ عَسَىٰ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا ۚ  
إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٨٣﴾

He then turned away from them and said: 'Oh, woe is me for Joseph!' His eyes became white with grief, and he was burdened with silent sorrow. (84)

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسَفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ  
وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزَنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

٨٤

They said: 'By God, you will continue to remember Joseph until you wither away or until you are dead.' (85)

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَفْتَأُ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّىٰ  
تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ  
الْهَالِكِينَ

٨٥

He said: 'It is only to God that I complain and express my grief. For I know of God what you do not know. (86)

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَىٰ اللَّهِ  
وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

٨٦

My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother; and do not despair of God's mercy; for none but unbelievers can ever despair of God's mercy.' (87)

يَبَنِيَّ أَذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ  
وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْسَّرُوا مِنْ رَّوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا  
يَأْيَسُ مِنْ رَّوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

٨٧

When they presented themselves before [Joseph] again, they said: 'Exalted one! Hardship has befallen us and our people, and so we have brought but little merchandise. Give us our full measure [of grains], and be charitable to us. Indeed God rewards those who are charitable.' (88)

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا  
وَأَهْلَنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضْعَةٍ مُزْجَلَةٍ  
فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
تَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ

٨٨

He said: 'Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother, when you were still unaware?' (89)

They said: 'Why — is it indeed you who are Joseph?' He replied: 'I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us. If one remains God-fearing and patient in adversity, God will not fail to reward those who do good.' (90)

They said: 'By God! Most certainly has God raised you high above us, and we were indeed sinners.' (91)

He replied: 'None shall reproach you today. May God forgive you. He is indeed the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.' (92)

Now go and take this shirt of mine and lay it over my father's face, and he will recover his sight. Then come back to me with all your family.' (93)

As the caravan set out, their father said [to the people around him]: 'I feel the breath of Joseph, though you will not believe me.' (94)

قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ  
إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

قَالُوا أَيْنَكَ لَأَنْتَ يُوسُفُ ۖ قَالَ أَنَا  
يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي ۖ قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا ۖ  
إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ  
أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ ءَاثَرَكَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنْ  
كُنَّا لَخَطِئِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَيُّومَ ۖ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ  
لَكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

أَذْهَبُوا بِقَمِيصِي هَذَا فَاثْبُتُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ  
أَبِي يَأْتِ بِصِيرًا ۖ وَأْتُونِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ  
أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

وَلَمَّا فَصَلَتِ الْعِيرُ قَالَ أَبُوهُمْ إِنِّي  
لَأَجِدُ رِيحَ يُوسُفَ ۖ لَوْلَا أَنْ تُفَنِّدُونِ

They replied: 'By God! You are still lost in your old illusions.' (95)



But when the bearer of good news arrived [with Joseph's shirt], he laid it over his face; and he regained his sight. He said: Did I not say to you that I know from God something that you do not know?' (96)



[His sons] said: 'Father, pray to God to forgive us our sins, for we were sinners indeed.' (97)

He said: 'I shall pray to God to forgive you. He is certainly Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (98)

When they all presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his parents to himself, saying: 'Enter Egypt in peace, if it so pleases God.' (99)

And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour, and they fell down on their knees, prostrating themselves before him. He said: 'Father, this is the real meaning of my dream of long ago. My Lord has

قَالُوا تَاللّٰهِ اِنَّكَ لَفِي ضَلٰلِكَ الْقَدِيْمِ

فَلَمَّا اَنْ جَاءَ الْبَشِيْرُ اَلْقَنُهٗ عَلٰی وَّجْهِهٖ

فَارْتَدَّ بَصِيْرًا ۗ قَالَ اَلَمْ اَقُلْ لَّكُمْ اِنِّيْ

اَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللّٰهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٩٦﴾

قَالُوا يَا اَبَانَا اَسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوْبَنَا اِنَّا كُنَّا

خٰطِئِيْنَ ﴿٩٧﴾

قَالَ سَوْفَ اَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّيْ ۗ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ

الْغَفُوْرُ الرَّحِيْمُ ﴿٩٨﴾

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوْا عَلٰی يُوْسُفَ ءَاوٰى اِلَيْهٖ اَبُوَيْهٖ

وَقَالَ اَدْخُلُوْا مِصْرَ ۗ اِنْ شَاءَ اللّٰهُ ءَامِنِيْنَ



وَرَفَعَ اَبُوَيْهٖ عَلٰی الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوْا لَهٗ

سُجَّدًا ۗ وَقَالَ يَا بٰتِ هٰذَا تَاْوِيْلُ رُّءْيَايَ

*made it come true.*

*He has been gracious to me, releasing me from prison, and bringing you all from the desert after Satan had sown discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is gracious in whatever way He wishes. He is All-Knowing, truly Wise.’ (100)*

*My Lord, You have given me power and imparted to me some understanding of the real meaning of statements. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my guardian in this world and in the life to come. Let me die as one who has surrendered himself to You, and admit me among the righteous.’ (101)*

مِن قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقًّا ط

وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِي إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ السِّجْنِ  
وَجَاءَ بِكُمْ مِنَ الْبَدْوِ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ نَزَغَ  
الشَّيْطَانُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ إِخْوَتِي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي  
لَطِيفٌ لِّمَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ



رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمَلِكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي  
مِن تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّ ۚ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ط  
تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

## The Crisis Reaches Its Climax

When Joseph’s brothers realized that all their attempts to rescue their young brother were in vain, they left Joseph and went away. They sat in council, deeply involved in earnest consultations. We see them exchanging views in a very serious manner. The *sūrah* does not mention all that they said. It only records the last statement which formed the basis of their next steps: “When they despaired of [moving] him, they withdrew to begin earnest consultations among themselves. The eldest of them said: Do you not recall that your father took from you a pledge in God’s name, and that previously you were at fault with respect to Joseph? I shall not depart from this land until my father gives me leave or God judges for me. He is certainly the best of judges.’ Go back to your father and say: ‘Father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know. We cannot guard against the unforeseen. You may ask the [people of the] town where we were, and the caravan with which we travelled. We are certainly telling the truth.’” (Verses 80-82)

The eldest reminds them of the pledge they had given and of their carelessness

about Joseph and his welfare. He combines the two events as the basis for his own decision which is not to leave Egypt or meet his father until the latter has given him permission to do so, or God has made a judgement to which he would certainly submit.

He asks that the rest go back to their father and tell him in all frankness that his son had stolen something, and was subsequently detained on account of this. That was all that they knew. If their brother was innocent, and if there was something different about the whole situation, it was certainly hidden from them, and they could not be answerable for what God, in His wisdom, chose to conceal from them. They had not expected anything like this to happen. It could never have been foreseen. If their father doubted what they said, and did not believe them, he could ask the people of the capital city of Egypt where they had been, and the people in their caravan. They were not alone on this business. Indeed there were many caravans travelling to and from Egypt, buying its grain in those years of poor harvest.

The *sūrah* leaves out everything about their actual trip. It places them face to face with their grieved father as they tell him their distressing news. We are in fact told only his short reply which expresses his great pain and distress. Yet he does not give in to despair. He still has hope that God will return his two sons, or indeed his three sons, including his eldest who vowed not to leave Egypt until God had judged for him. It is indeed remarkable that hope should continue to fill his distressed heart: *"He said: 'No, but your minds have tempted you to evil. Sweet patience! God may well bring them all back to me. He is All-Knowing, Wise.' He then turned away from them and said: 'Oh, woe is me for Joseph!' His eyes became white with grief and he was burdened with silent sorrow."* (Verses 83-84)

*"No, but your minds have tempted you to evil. Sweet patience!"* (Verse 83) These were his very words when he lost Joseph. However, this time he adds an expression of high hope that God will return Joseph and his brother to him, as well as his other son: *"God may well bring them all back to me. He is All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 83) He certainly knows the state Jacob was in, and knows what lies beyond events and tests. He lets everything take place at the appropriate time, when His purpose is fulfilled according to His wisdom.

Where did this ray of hope come from filling the old man's heart? It is nothing more than placing all hope in God and trusting completely to His wisdom, feeling His existence and His endless compassion. It is a feeling that fills the hearts of the elite of believers and becomes more true and profound than the reality they see, hear and touch. *"He then turned away from them and said: 'Oh, woe is me for Joseph!' His eyes became white with grief and he was burdened with silent sorrow."* (Verse 84)

This is an inspirational portrayal of a bereaved father. He feels that his tragedy is all his own. No one around him shares in his distress or feels his pain. Hence, he moves away to nurture the loss of his beloved son, Joseph, whom he has not forgotten despite the passage of so many years. Indeed time has not reduced his sorrow; it has all been brought back to life by the new calamity involving his youngest son, Joseph's younger brother. This is a moment when his sorrow is shown to be stronger than his patient resignation: *"Oh, woe is me for Joseph!"* (Verse 84)

But he soon suppresses his sorrow and hides his feelings. As his intense grief and sadness are suppressed, his eyes lose their sight: *"His eyes became white with grief and he was burdened with silent sorrow."* (Verse 84)

But his sons continue to harbour their grudge, hurt that he still misses Joseph and suffers distress on his account. They do not show him any compassion. Indeed they do not even try to encourage his hopes. Instead they want to extinguish his last ray of hope. They say to him: *"By God, you will continue to remember Joseph until you wither away or until you are dead."* (Verse 85)

This is indeed a cruel thing to say. They are reproaching him for remembering Joseph and feeling sadness at his loss. They tell him that if he continues in such a state, his sorrow will soon deprive him of all his strength or he will die in despair. Joseph is certain not to return.

Their father tells them to leave him alone, because he is only pinning his hopes in his Lord. He makes no complaint to anyone. His relationship with his Lord is different from theirs, and he knows of Him what they do not know: *"It is only to God that I complain and express my grief. For I know of God what you do not know."* (Verse 86) These words describe in a most vivid way the true feelings of a firm believer concerning the truth of the Godhead. That truth itself is also brought up here in sharp relief.

### **Meeting a Lost Brother**

Whilst everyone else despairs at Joseph's return, this has no effect on this pious old man who knows the truth about his Lord, which is a knowledge that is not readily apparent to others. Such knowledge is based on real feeling and an experience of God's ability, kindness, grace and the mercy He bestows on pious servants. His statement, *'I know of God what you do not know,'* expresses this fact as we cannot. It embodies a truth which is only appreciated by those who have had a similar experience. Such people do not succumb to hardship or despair in the face of adversity. In fact adversity only enhances their faith and trust in God's power and mercy. We will not say more than that. We praise God for the grace He has bestowed on us. He knows and sees what is between Him and us.

Jacob then instructs his sons to go back and seek information about their two younger brothers: *"My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother; and do not despair of God's mercy; for none but unbelievers can ever despair of God's mercy."* (Verse 87) That is the attitude of a person whose heart is keenly aware of the truth of Godhead. *"My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother."* The Arabic expression for 'seek news', *taḥassasū*, adds connotations of gentleness and patient pursuit, so that they can demonstrate something of their own souls in their efforts to find out what happened to their brothers. They must never despair of God for He may yet turn to them in mercy and kindness. Even the Arabic word *raḥm*, used here to denote 'mercy', adds connotations of a spirit experiencing release from hardship.

*"None but unbelievers can ever despair of God's mercy."* (Verse 87) Believers, on the other hand, are always in touch with God, enjoying His grace, unshaken by distress or hardship, even though the circumstances may be exceedingly tough. Indeed a believer finds in his faith and bond with his Lord a blessing that gives him reassurance, even in the most difficult moments and under enormous pressure.

For the third time Joseph's brothers go to Egypt. However, their state this time is different. The famine had affected them badly, their money had been spent, and the merchandise they carried with them to barter for food was of a low quality. Hence, they spoke in a tone that invited sympathy, which was not known in their earlier conversations. Their complaint tells of what the famine had done to them: *"When they presented themselves before [Joseph] again, they said: 'Exalted one! Hardship has befallen us and our people, and so we have brought but little merchandise. Give us our full measure [of grains], and be charitable to us. Indeed God rewards those who are charitable.'" (Verse 88)*

At this point, and with such a passionate appeal that tells of their misfortune, Joseph is no longer able to carry on presenting himself only as the Chief Minister of Egypt, hiding his true relationship to them. The lessons he wished that they should learn have become well known to them. It is now time for the great surprise that they could never have expected. Hence he puts it to them in a careful, easy way, reminding them of the past which they alone had full knowledge of. None was aware of it besides them, except God. He says to them gently: *"Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother, when you were still unaware?" (Verse 89)*

It was a voice that they might have recalled, with features they might have remembered. Perhaps they did not pay attention because they were talking to the Chief Minister in his place of government. A thought presented itself to them suddenly: *"They said: 'Why – is it indeed you who are Joseph?'" (Verse 90)* Could it be true? Their minds, hearts, eyes and ears could now see traces of little Joseph in the man talking to them. He replied: *"I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us. If one remains God-fearing and patient in adversity, God will not fail to reward those who do good." (Verse 90)*