

same characteristics, holding Joseph's shirt and recognizing his son's odour. He is being reproached by his sons, but his trust in his Lord is never in doubt. "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.' They replied: By God! You are still lost in your old illusions.' 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?' [His sons] said: 'Father, pray to God to forgive us our sins, for we were sinners indeed.' He said: 'I shall pray to God to forgive you. He is certainly Much-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'" (Verses 94-98)

### **The Carnal and the Sublime**

The Qur'ānic approach of faithfully painting reality while maintaining the values of purity and propriety is not limited to the sketching of human characteristics. It is also clearly seen in the faithful narration of events, showing them as they took place, accurately outlining their circumstances, background, time and place. Every movement, feeling, reaction and indeed every word is given at the appropriate time. All this is similarly true of the characters painted.

Even sexual feelings and attitudes are given their full space, within the limits of the clean approach that suits man. We see no falsification, distortion or suppression of the human reality, its scope or integrity. However, giving these moments their proper space in relation to the rest of events does not mean focusing on them as if they were the total reality of humans and the pivotal element in their life. This is contrary to the un-Islamic or *jāhiliyyah* approach which wants us to believe that only such focus produces realist art.

*Jāhiliyyah* deforms man under the pretext of artistic realism. It zooms in on sex as if it were the entire object of human life, making of it a deep swamp surrounded by tempting but evil flowers. It is not faithfulness to reality that makes *jāhiliyyah* adopt this approach to sex. It is done because the Zionist Protocols encourage it. These Protocols want to see man stripped of all values except the animal and carnal, so that the Zionists are not seen as the only people who shed all nonmaterial values. They want humanity to fall into the quagmire of sex, directing all its potentials to it. This is the surest way to destroy humanity and make it prostrate before the approaching Zionist Kingdom. They make art their means to bring about all this evil. In addition, they try hard to propagate new doctrines, exploiting them in such a way that serves the same purpose, while they maintain that such doctrines are 'scientific'. Examples of these are Darwinism, Freudianism, Marxism and Scientific Socialism. All these share in common the purpose of serving evil Zionist designs.

## Historical Dimension

The story does not only relate events and draw characters. It goes beyond this to point out the period in history when these events took place, and describes its general features. Thus the stage acquires an international historical dimension. We will briefly refer to some of these.

Egypt was not ruled at the time by pharaohs of Egyptian descent. It was instead under the rule of a nomadic people who had learnt something about the divine faith from Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob who lived nearby. We deduce this from the fact that the ruler of Egypt at the time is given in the Qur'ān the title of King, while the ruler of Egypt in the story of Moses is given the well-known Egyptian title, Pharaoh. This distinction determines the time when Joseph was in Egypt, namely between the 13th and 17th dynasties, which belonged to the nomads whom the Egyptian people called the Hyksos. This was said to be a derogatory appellation which referred to pigs or pig farmers. Their rule in Egypt lasted about one and a half centuries.

Joseph was sent as a Messenger of God during this period. He started his advocacy of Islam, in its broader sense, which means the religion of absolute monotheism, whilst in prison. We see him there making it clear that it was the faith of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and giving an accurate outline of what it meant: *"I have left the faith of people who do not believe in God, and who deny the truth of the life to come. I follow the faith of my forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not for us to associate any partners with God. This is part of God's grace which He has bestowed on us and on all mankind, but most people do not give thanks. My two prison companions! Which is better: [to believe] in diverse lords, or to believe in God, the One who holds sway over all that exists? Those you worship instead of Him are nothing but names you and your fathers have invented, and for which God has given no sanction from on high. All judgement rests with God alone. He has ordained that you should worship none but Him. This is the true faith, but most people do not know it."* (Verses 37-40)

This is a very clear and comprehensive picture of Islam, as preached by all God's messengers. It outlines the essential beliefs, including belief in God, the Day of Judgement, God's oneness without entertaining any thought of associating partners with Him, a clear understanding of God's attributes, the One, the Overpowering. It also involves a declaration that none other than God has any power, which entails that the deities given control over people have no such status. All power and authority belongs to God alone who has commanded that all worship be addressed to none other than Him. To exercise power, authority and lordship is to demand worship from people, which is contrary to God's order that all worship be dedicated to Him. It defines worship as being subject to authority, rule and lordship, while the true faith is to acknowledge that all worship and rule are God's own. In this sense,

the two are synonymous: *"All judgement rests with God alone. He has ordained that you should worship none but Him. This is the true faith."* (Verse 40) This is the clearest, most comprehensive, accurate and perfect description of Islam.

It is also clear that when Joseph held the reins of power in Egypt, he continued to advocate the divine faith. There is no doubt that this faith spread in Egypt by his efforts, particularly because he did not merely hold power but also controlled people's food provisions. It must also have spread into neighbouring areas, as they sent some of their people to Egypt to buy grains which had been stored there through Joseph's wise policies. As the story describes, Joseph's brothers came from the land of Canaan with caravans that brought provisions from Egypt. This shows that the drought affected the whole area at that time.

Early in the story there are hints at some vague influence of the divine faith which the Hyksos were aware of. The first reference occurs in quoting what the women said when they were surprised by Joseph's appearance: *"When they saw him, they were amazed at him, and they cut their hands, exclaiming: 'God preserve us! This is no mortal man! This is none other than a noble angel.'" (Verse 31)* A similar indication is seen in the Chief Minister's counsel to his wife: *"Joseph, let this pass! And you, woman, ask forgiveness for your sin. You have been seriously at fault."* (Verse 29) Further reference is made later by the Chief Minister's wife who clearly appears to have believed in Joseph's religion and declared her submission to God: *"The Chief Minister's wife said: 'Now has the truth come to light. It was I who tried to seduce him. He has indeed told the truth.' From this he will know that I did not betray him behind his back, and that God does not bless with His guidance the schemes of those who betray their trust. And yet, I am not trying to claim to be free of sin. Indeed man's soul does incite him to evil, except for those upon whom God has bestowed His mercy. My Lord is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verses 51-53)

Since the monotheistic faith was known in Egypt before Joseph assumed power, it must have subsequently spread during his reign and in subsequent Hyksos dynasties. When the Pharaohs of Egypt regained power with the 18th dynasty, they began to suppress the monotheistic faith and its adherents, particularly Jacob's descendants, in order to reinstate the idolatry that gave the Pharaohs their authority.

This explains a major cause behind the persecution of the Children of Israel. Israel's, i.e. Jacob's, sons settled in Egypt and ruled it during the Hyksos period. When the Egyptians expelled the Hyksos, they persecuted their allies, the Children of Israel. But the conflict between the two faiths is in fact the prime reason for such persecution, because the spread of the monotheistic faith destroys the very basis of Pharaohs' rule, since it stands firmly against all tyranny.

There is a reference to this elsewhere in the Qur'ān, when it relates the argument of a believer from Pharaoh's household as he defended Moses, trying hard to

persuade Pharaoh and his people to leave Moses alone. Pharaoh felt that his very rule was threatened by the monotheistic faith Moses preached:

*A believing man of Pharaoh's family, who had concealed his faith, exclaimed: 'Would you slay a man merely because he says, 'My Lord is God' – seeing that he has brought you all evidence of this truth from your Lord? Now if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is speaking the truth, a part at least of what he warns you is bound to befall you. God would not grace with His guidance one who is a lying transgressor. My people! Yours is the dominion today, and you have the upper hand in the land. But who will rescue us from God's punishment, should it befall us?' Said Pharaoh: I but point out to you that which I see myself and I would never make you follow any path but that of rectitude.' The man who had attained to faith said: My people! I fear for you the like of what had befallen those others who were leagued together [against God's truth], the like of what happened to Noah's people, the `Ad, the Thamūd and those who came after them. God never wishes any injustice for His servants. And, my people, I fear for you that day when people will cry out to one another, when you will turn your backs and flee, having none to defend you against God. For he whom God lets go astray can never find any guide. In times gone by, Joseph had come to you with all evidence of the truth; but you never ceased to throw doubt on all that he brought you; and when he died you said: "No messenger will God send after him." Thus God lets go astray a transgressor who is lost in doubt; those who call in question God's revelations, with no authority vouchsafed to them. Exceedingly abhorrent is [their conduct] in the sight of God and of the believers. Thus God sets a seal on every arrogant, self-exalting heart.' (40: 28-35)*

Thus we see that the true conflict was between the monotheistic faith which acknowledges Godhead and lordship as belonging to God alone and the idolatrous faith that gave the Pharaohs the basis of their power.

Perhaps the distorted version of monotheism associated with Akhenaton was a confused version of the lingering influence of the divine faith advocated by Joseph (peace be upon him) in Egypt. This could be seen more so if historical reports to the effect that Akhenaton's mother was Asian, and not of Pharaohic descent.

The story is not confined to Egypt. It accurately reflects the historical period, with the related dreams and predictions spread across a wider area. We see this clearly reflected first in Joseph's dream and its fulfilment at the end, as also in the dreams of the two prisoners, and then the King's dream. All these dreams receive due attention from those who experience or hear them, which is an indication of the prevalent culture at the time.

Artistic elements in the story are varied and plenty. It is rich with the human element, reflected in the feelings and movements described. The narrative clearly

highlights all these. Moreover, the Qur'ānic mode of expression is always inspiring, using varying rhythms to suit the particular atmosphere of every situation.

A father's love is clearly seen in varying degrees. We see it in Jacob's love of Joseph, his brother and also in his love for the rest of his sons. His love is also reflected in the way he reacts to events involving Joseph, from the beginning of the story up to its last line.

We also see envy and jealousy between brothers born to different mothers, according to how they see their father's love expressed. The way these feelings surface also varies, with some of the brothers entertaining murder while others, aghast at the thought of such a crime, advise instead that a much less impacting scheme should be sufficient.

Another prominent trait is that of plotting and scheming. Joseph's brothers plot to get rid of him, while the Chief Minister's wife's plots target Joseph, her husband and the women who gossip against her.

Desire and sex are described, as also the different responses to these. Here we see an unrestrained drive as well as self control. Appeal and fancy on the one side and chastity and restraint on the other. Other feelings and emotions are expressed such as regret, forgiveness and delight at the reunion of long lost family members. The *sūrah* also paints some aspects of the upper class of the then *jāhiliyyah* society: at home, in prison, at the market-place and in government offices in Egypt. Other aspects of the Hebrew society are also drawn, with emphasis on dreams and prophecies.

The story begins with the dream related by Joseph to his father who tells him that he will have a great role to play, but urging him to withhold his dream from his brothers so that their jealousy does not motivate them to scheme against him. The story then proceeds as though it is a realization of the dream, fulfilling Jacob's warnings. When the dream is finally fulfilled the story is ended, unlike what the writers of the Old Testament did. It thus has an artistic closure making it serve its religious purpose fully.

A clear plot adds to the artistic aspect of the story. The fulfilment of the dream is withheld to the end, even though it unfolds little by little. At the end, the plot is explained most naturally.

The story is divided into sections, each relating a number of episodes and scenes, leaving gaps between them to be filled in by the reader. In this way, it increases the story's appeal and entertainment.

We may finally say that the story shows the way for future literary works that benefit from fine artistic features and remain faithful to reality, without indulging in any vulgarity that is unbecoming to human art.

## Moral Lessons

For the Islamic movement, the story provides clear lessons, some of which are particularly relevant to certain stages of its progress, while others answer clear permanent needs. In addition, certain facts are established through the story and within the *sūrah* as a whole, particularly in its final comments. We will briefly refer to some of these.

We have already mentioned that the revelation of this *sūrah* and the story it narrates were particularly suited to the critical period the Islamic message went through in Makkah, and the hardship endured by the Prophet and his few followers. This is manifested through the relation of the trials endured by Joseph, a noble brother of Muḥammad, God's Messenger, and how he had to depart from his land until he was given power elsewhere. This gives us an aspect of the moral of the story which fits in with the needs of the Islamic message at that particular time. We thus have an insight into the action-oriented nature of the Qur'ān, as it explains the nature of the message and gives the Muslim community practical directives with clear and well defined objectives.

In our analysis of the story, we have also referred to the clear, detailed and accurate picture of the divine faith, Islam, drawn by Joseph (peace be upon him). This picture merits long reflection. It begins by establishing the unity of the faith based on full submission to God and preached by all God's messengers. We see that the basic elements of this faith are incorporated in full in every message. They are all based on perfect monotheism, emphasizing God's oneness and His Lordship of mankind, who must submit themselves completely to Him alone. This faith, in all its messages, also establishes the essential belief in the life to come. This is contrary to what is known as the study of Comparative Religion which alleges that humanity began to believe in the One God and in the hereafter only at a very late stage in human history, after having gone through different forms of idolatry and dualism. It also alleges that progress in the field of religion mirrors human progress in science and industry. Thus, Comparative Religion implies that all religions were the product of man, like science and industry.

The *sūrah* also affirms the nature of the divine faith advocated by all God's messengers. It is not confined to the oneness of Godhead, but it also includes the oneness of Lordship. All judgement in all human affairs belongs to God alone, as a result of the divine order that only God may be worshipped. The Qur'ānic statement gives a very precise definition of worship. Judgement belongs to God and people must submit to His judgement. This is indeed the true faith, and not any other form or set of beliefs. No form of worship is valid when people submit to anyone other than God even in a single matter of the whole life spectrum. To believe that God is

One means, necessarily, that the Lord is One, and in practice this means that all judgement belongs to Him, and all worship is dedicated to Him alone. The two are synonymous. The sort of worship that classifies people as Muslims or non-Muslims means submission to God and implementing His judgement, to the exclusion of anything else. This definitive Qur'anic statement should end all argument on this issue.

Another impression that the story radiates shows pure and dedicated faith that fills the hearts of two of the noble and chosen servants of God, Jacob and Joseph. We have already spoken about Joseph's final attitude as he turns to his Lord in all humility, discarding all worldly things and addressing Him in total devotion: *"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."* (Verse 101)

But this final attitude is not the only one sketched in the story. Indeed throughout his life Joseph remains close to his Lord, responding to Him and doing His bidding. When he is the target of seduction, being made very tempting offers, he says: *"God protect me. Goodly has my master made my stay here. Those who do wrong come to no good."* (Verse 23) And when he fears that he may weaken before the temptation, he prays: *"My Lord, I would sooner be put in prison than comply with what they are inviting me to do. Unless You turn away their guile from me, I may yield to them and lapse into folly."* (Verse 33)

Similarly, when he identifies himself to his brothers, he does not forget to acknowledge God's grace and express his gratitude for it: *"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.'" (Verse 90)*

All these attitudes go beyond answering the particular needs of the Islamic message in its early period in Makkah. They answer its needs in all situations at all times.

With Jacob the truth of God appears close and profound in every situation and on every occasion. As the trial deepens, this truth becomes still clearer in his heart and more sublime. At the beginning, when Joseph relates his vision, he reminds his son of God and expresses his gratitude to Him: *"Even thus will your Lord make you His chosen one, and will impart to you some understanding of the real meaning of statements. He will perfect His favour to you and to the House of Jacob, as He perfected it to your forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is certainly All-Knowing, Wise."* (Verse 6) As he is given the first blow with Joseph's disappearance, he appeals to his Lord, saying: *"Your minds have tempted you to evil. Sweet patience! It is to God alone that I turn for support in*

*this misfortune that you have described.” (Verse 18)*

We see him speaking to his sons as a loving father fearing that some misfortune should befall them. He recommends them not to make their entry into the city from the same gate, but to use different gates. However, he clearly states that such a precaution would avail them nothing against God’s will. The only judgement that is certain to take effect is God’s. Yet his recommendation may answer a need he feels within himself: *“And he added: My sons, do not enter [the city] by one gate, but enter by different gates. In no way can I be of help to you against God. Judgement rests with none but God. In Him have I placed my trust, and in Him alone let all those who trust place their trust.” (Verse 67)*

He suffers another bereavement in his old age, when he had grown weak and sorrowful. But at no time does he ever lose hope that God will turn in His mercy to him: *“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.” (Verse 83)*

This truth reaches its most sublime as his sons reproach him for his continued sorrow for Joseph, to the extent that he loses his eyesight through crying. He tells them that he knows God as they do not know Him. Hence, he addresses his complaint to Him only and hopes for nothing other than God’s grace: *“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. They said: By God, you will continue to remember Joseph until you wither away or until you are dead.’ He said: ‘It is only to God that I complain and express my grief. For I know of God what you do not know. 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.’” (Verses 84-87)* He again reminds them of the truth he feels deep in his heart about God of whom he knows what they do not know. *“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.’ They replied: By God! You are still lost in your old illusions.’ 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?” (Verses 94-96)*

It is a glittering picture of how God’s truth fills the hearts of the chosen among God’s servants. This picture generates impressions that suit the period of hardship suffered by the Muslim community in Makkah, but it also shows the fundamental truth of faith to everyone who advocates Islam at any future time.

### **Suitable Comments**

The first comment the *sūrah* makes in its final passage that follows the long story shows the absurdity of the Quraysh’s denial of the truth of revelation with a

statement based on the history related in this *sūrah*. It states that the Prophet was not present when the events of this history took place: *“That is an account which We have now revealed to you, speaking of things that have been beyond your perception. You were not present when they [i.e. Joseph’s brothers] resolved upon their plans and completed their schemes.”* (Verse 102) This comment ties up with the introductory one at the beginning of the *sūrah*: *“In revealing this Qur’ān We relate to you the best of narratives. Before it you were among those who are unaware [of revelation].”* (Verse 3)

The introductory statement thus dovetails with the end one to form a picture of the truth. In this way it also counters the objections and denials raised.

This is followed with a comforting message to the Prophet so that he does not give those who deny his message undue importance. It shows how stubbornly they refuse to consider the signs that God has placed all around them in the universe. These signs are sufficient to alert human nature to the truth of faith and make it listen to the divine message and accept the evidence confirming it. They are threatened with God’s punishment which could take them unawares: *“Yet however strongly you may desire it, most people will not believe. You ask no recompense from them for it. It is but God’s reminder to all mankind. Yet many are the signs in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, paying no heed to them. And most of them do not even believe in God without also associating partners with Him. Do they feel confident that the overwhelming scourge of God’s punishment will not fall upon them, or that the Last Hour will not come upon them suddenly, taking them unaware.”* (Verses 103-107) These verses deliver some fundamental truths about people who do not believe in the true divine faith. This is particularly noted in the statement: *“And most of them do not even believe in God without also associating partners with Him.”* (Verse 106) This is a true description of many people who have not formulated a true concept of God’s oneness, allowing faith to be confused with unfaith.

At this point, the *sūrah*, with strong rhythm and decisive clarity, calls on the Prophet to define his way, showing it to be clearly distinguished from all others: *“Say: ‘This is my way. I call [all mankind] to God on the basis of sure knowledge, I and all those who follow me. Limitless is God in His glory. I am not one of those who associate partners with Him.’”* (Verse 108)

The *sūrah* concludes with another telling comment, explaining the value of giving historical accounts in the Qur’ān for the Prophet and the small band of believers who follow him. The comment also provides solace and reassurance to the believers, together with a promise of better things to come. The unbelievers who persist with their unbelief are also given reminders and warnings. A further assurance is given to both believers and unbelievers of the truth of revelation to the Prophet who only tells the truth. It reasserts the truth of his message: *“Even before your time, We only sent [as messengers] men to whom We gave Our revelations, choosing them from among their people.*

*Have they not travelled the land and seen what was the end of those [unbelievers] who lived before them? Better indeed is the life to come for those who remain God-fearing. Will you not, then, use your reason? When at length [Our] messengers lost all hope and thought that they were denied, Our help came to them, saving those whom We willed [to be saved]. Never can Our [mighty] punishment be averted from people who are guilty. Indeed their stories give a lesson to those who are endowed with understanding. This [revelation] could not possibly be an invented discourse. It is a confirmation of earlier revelation, an explanation of all things, as well as guidance and mercy for people who believe.” (Verses 109-111)*

### **Effective Harmony**

It is useful at the end of this Prologue to the *sūrah* relating Joseph’s story to highlight some aspects of the fine harmony that runs throughout the *sūrah*, citing some of its finer examples.

- This *sūrah* follows the same pattern of the Qur’ān when certain words and expressions are often repeated to contribute to the general atmosphere and character of the *sūrah*. For example, here knowledge is mentioned very frequently, while ignorance is mentioned on several occasions:

*Even thus will your Lord make you His chosen one, and will impart to you some understanding of the real meaning of statements. He will perfect His favour to you and to the House of Jacob, as He perfected it to your forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is certainly All-Knowing, Wise. (Verse 6)*

*Thus We established Joseph in the land, and We imparted to him some understanding of the real meaning of statements. God always prevails in whatever be His purpose; though most people may not know it. (Verse 21)*

*And when he attained his full manhood, We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We reward those who do good. (Verse 22)*

*His Lord answered his prayer and warded off their guile from him. It is He alone who hears all and knows all. (Verse 34)*

*[Joseph] answered: ‘Your food which is provided for you will not have come to you before I have informed you of the real meaning of [your dreams]. That is part of the knowledge which my Lord has imparted to me. I have left the faith of people who do not believe in God, and who deny the truth of the life to come.’ (Verse 37)*

*They replied: ‘This is but a medley of dreams, and we have no deep knowledge of the*