



# yusuf

THE BAYYINAH TRANSLATION

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## A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATORS

We place this Surah in your hands to explain why we have embarked on the monumental task of translating the Quran after so many others have done it well, even excellently. It is common for students and teachers of the Quran to feel the inadequacy of translations: in an obvious way, that is inevitable. Even the work we have done could not carry all we wished it to, let alone the fullness and perfection of Allah's Word. Yet as we got into our renewed study of the text and commentaries, and debated how the meanings we found could best be expressed in English, it became clear that there was certainly much to add and improve.

**The Bayyinah Translation** is a unique collaboration between two passionate students of the Revelation and its interpretive tradition. We each bring different skill-sets and perspectives to the process, and ensure that every word and phrase is acceptable to both. The footnotes added by Dr. Sohaib reflect this process, explain our reasoning, point to additional meanings, and sometimes compare with common translations. The following are some key principles guiding this project:

1. **Tafsīr:** the work is based on careful study of the possibilities discussed by the expert scholars.
2. **Balāghah:** deep reflection on the linguistic structures and their subtle implications, with close attention to contextual flow of the ayat.
3. **Fluency:** ensuring that the phrasing is natural to native speakers of the target language.
4. **Freshness:** wherever appropriate, new terms and turns of phrase are preferred to those which have circulated in earlier translations.
5. **Transparency:** the rationale for translation choices are made clear through footnotes and documented in other formats.

We invite feedback via the project website: [www.bayyinah-translation.com](http://www.bayyinah-translation.com)  
Please subscribe to receive updates on new releases and developments. Our hope is to go beyond the English translation to produce authorized versions of the Bayyinah Translation in major and underserved languages of the world. Your prayers and support are invaluable.

Nouman Ali Khan & Sohaib Saeed  
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Alif Laam Ra! Those are the divine signs of the clear and clarifying Book.

The "disconnected letters" are generally considered untranslatable. The term *āyāt* is translated to reflect its essential meaning, even as it refers to the units of revelation (usually "verses"). The term *mubīn* carries both senses (intransitive and transitive) which we have spelled out as "clear and clarifying".

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

2

It is We Who brought it down as an Arabic Recital so that you might reason and understand.

Most translators have given "Quran" as a proper name here, but rendering it as "Recital" highlights the contrast with the written aspect of this revelation in "Book" in the previous ayah. As with *mubīn* before, we have given two English words for *ta'qilūn* to convey two intended meanings here.

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ

3

We are going to lay the story out for you (O Prophet) in the finest way, since We have already inspired you with this Recital; whereas before it you had certainly been one of the unaware.

Almost all translators before now have gone with some variation on "the finest story", while we prefer this second interpretation found in exegesis, i.e. the best form of storytelling. We have also paid particular attention to the variation of tenses.

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ

4

When Joseph said to his father, "Dad! I have actually seen eleven stars, and the Sun, and the Moon – I watched them bow down before me!"

We have retained many of the "When" and "And" ayah-openings which form part of the Quranic storytelling style. This transfers the reader from a general point to a specific incident, and is often explained as implying "recall/mention when". We have used English equivalents for people's names where possible. The address "Dad" is intended to convey some of what is in *yā abati* of respect and affection. We have retained the repetition of *ra'aytu* which can be taken to indicate his emotions at what he saw.

قَالَ نَبِيُّهُ لَا تَقْضُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَيَّ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

5

He replied, "My boy, don't retell your vision to your brothers; otherwise they might scheme something terrible against you. After all, Satan is an openly declared enemy to human beings.

This translation provides an alternative to the slightly archaic "lest" found in most English translations. You can also see the effect of the cognate accusative *kaydan* conveyed subtly, and a suitable sense for *inna* which is typically rendered as "verily" and the like.

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

“And that is how your Nurturing Master is selecting you, and He is teaching you some of the meanings behind all kinds of speech. He is going to complete His blessings over you and the Family of Jacob, just as He did for your fathers before you: Abraham and Isaac. Your Master truly is All-Knowing and Wise.”

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٍ لِّلسَّالِفِينَ

There are certainly divine signs in Joseph and his brothers for those who seek them.

إِذْ قَالُوا لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا مِمَّا نَحْنُ غُصْبٌ إِنَّ أَبَانَا  
لِغِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

When they said, “The fact is: Joseph and his little brother are more loved by our father than all of us, even though we’re a whole team! Clearly our father is lost in delusion.

أَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوْ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهَ أَبِيئِيصَ وَتَكُونُوا  
مِنْ بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ

“Kill Joseph! Or toss him away somewhere! That way, your father’s attention will be all yours and after that you’ll be all good.”

6

This is the continuation of Jacob's counsel to his son (peace be on them). We paid particular attention to the tenses in the ayah. Although dreams and their interpretation feature in this story with various terms, for the phrase *ta'wil al-ahādith* we preferred the broader explanations provided by the exegetes, since Joseph is going to encounter "all kinds of speech" and events.

7

The implication is that the events contain these signs, and that one is supposed to ask those who know (such as the Prophet) or search out the answers through pondering and exploration. This ayah may be taken to describe two main parts to the surah, since the first part focuses mainly upon Joseph, and the second part (from 12:58) on what happened with his brothers.

8

Naturally, the speakers here are the brothers (excluding Joseph and Benjamin), and this conveys the sentiment they would express amongst themselves rather than a specific statement. Our rendering of *wa akhūhu* as "and his little brother" is natural in light of this sentiment, especially as Joseph was the main target of their envy. The word *'uṣbah* implies a group which is sufficient to get things done, hence "a whole team" (a slightly informal expression in keeping with our translations of dialogue).

9

These are scattered suggestions that bounced between the brothers. The phrase *min ba'dihi* is either "after that" or "after he's gone". The phrase *qawman ṣāliḥīn* is often taken to imply that they were planning to repent right after their deed, but the broader sense is that they would live a better life without Joseph.

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَالْقَوْمَ فِي غِيبَتِ الْجَبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ  
بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ

One of them spoke up: “No, don’t kill Joseph. Just drop him into the dark hole of the well so some passing traders can stumble upon him – if you’re set on doing something.”

10

This suggestion may be merciful compared to killing, but there is still harshness in the mention of the darkest pit, with the word *jubb* denoting an unfinished well which may be harder to escape from. The definite article makes it possible they had a specific place in mind which traders would pass by.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَنصُحُونَ

They said, “Dad! What’s with you? You don’t trust us with Joseph even though we are his well-wishers?”

11

The phrase *innā lahū la-nāshihūn* is their claim to have sincere intentions and Joseph’s best interests at heart. We chose the expression “WELL wishers” to suggest that their true intentions would sometimes leak out, if not in this ayah then elsewhere in their pleas (like 12:14).

أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبْ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَحْفِظُوكَ

“Send him along with us tomorrow so he can eat his fill and play around, and we’ll be sure to keep him safe.”

12

The word *yarta* (one of several canonical readings) evokes the image of a grazing sheep etc., which is juxtaposed vividly with the fear of “the wolf” to come.

قَالَ إِنِّي لَخِيفَتِي أَنْ تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَأَنْتُمْ  
عَنْهُ غَافِلُونَ

He replied, “It really makes me sad that you’re taking him away, and I’m scared that the wolf will eat him while you’re neglecting him.”

13

We have read the use of *huzn* as indicating Jacob’s (peace be upon him) gradual acceptance that he wasn’t able to stop his sons from taking Joseph (pbuh), since one is not usually “sad” about something that hasn’t happened. Perhaps his evocation of “the wolf” (with definite article) contains an allusion to the aforementioned Satan who is an enemy to mankind, and to how the brothers were acting like predators.

قَالُوا لَيْنَ أَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذًا لَخَسِرُونَ

They said, “If the wolf were to eat him while we’re such a team, then we’d be total losers.”

14

Of course, this is the scenario that the sons chose to present to their father, based on his fear. There are several interpretations of *innā idhan la-khāsirūn* including that they would have to have been killed by the wolf before it could get to Joseph. However, there is a darker interpretation possible: that they would feel defeated if the wolf got to harm him before they could do the deed!

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَاجْتَمَعُوا أَن يُجْعَلُوهُ فِي غَيْبَتِ الْخَبْئِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ  
لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

15

So when they finally took him away and gathered resolve to get him into the dark hole of the well–;

Meanwhile, We communicated to him: “Be sure that you will let them know about this deed of theirs,” yet they did not realize.

There is an important case of ellipsis here which has mostly been overlooked by translators, namely the apodosis of *lammā* – i.e. what exactly happened when they got him to the well is not made explicit because it is too horrific. Instead, our focus is turned to the comforting message Joseph received at that time. It is possible for *wa hum lā yash'urūn* to be part of that message, i.e. that the brothers would not recognize him when he would eventually confront them with their deed (see 12:85-90).

وَجَاءُوا أَبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ

16

And they came to their father by night, in tears.

The fact that this is a distinct ayah gives the sense that the sons of Jacob went to great lengths to set the scene and present themselves in a particular way to their father.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِنْدَ مَتَاعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ  
الذِّئْبُ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَّنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَادِقِينَ

17

They said, “Dad, what happened is: we went racing off and left Joseph with our things, and the wolf ate him. But there’s no way you’ll accept this from us even if we’re telling the truth.”

The order of their points, and the emphasis placed at the beginning, gives rise to the tone of self-justification which we have conveyed with "what happened is". The phrase *wa law kunnā sādiqīn* could be said innocently, but can easily be heard as self-incrimination (and could even be translated "even if we were telling the truth"!).

وَجَاءُوا عَلَىٰ قَمِيصِهِ بِدَمٍ كَذِبٍ قَالَ بَل لَّعَنَّا أَنفُسَكُمْ  
أَمْرًا فَصَبِّرْ هَيِّئْ لِلَّهِ السَّمْعَانَ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ

18

And on his shirt they brought blood stained with lies. He said, “What really happened is that your egos justified something terrible to you. So graceful patience is all I have – and God help me with what you’re portraying.”

The translation attempts to preserve the sense in the ayah that what they brought (or "had brought") was the blood, and that, beyond being false, it was full of falsehood (as the verbal noun *kadhib* is used adjectivally). The retort with *bal* is translated to counter their wording with Jacob's "what really happened". The term *nafs* has various senses, but "ego" seems most apt here to refer to the inner source of evil impulses (later described in 12:53). The word *tasifūn* can refer to the difficult news the father has to bear, but it is frequently used in the Quran for false descriptions.



وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَى دَلْوَهُ قَالَ يَبُشْرَى هَذَا غَدًّا  
وَأَسْرُوهُ بِضَعَّةٍ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ

And a group of traders came along and sent out their water scout, who let down his bucket. He cried out, "Oh my goodness, it's a kid!" They stashed him away as merchandise, and Allah was fully aware of what they were up to.

19

As in 12:10 (see also later for the term *īr* in 12:70, 82, 94), we have chosen a more natural term for *sayyārah* than "caravan". The expression *yā bushrā* (also recited with the possessive suffix *-ya*) expresses surprise but also delight at an opportunity.

وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ

And they sold him off below market rate – just a few coins – as they had become keen to let him go.

20

Since every human is priceless and Joseph (pbuh) even more so, every price would fall short of his value – but the point here is that these traders accepted less than what they could have gotten. The pronoun in *fīhi* can refer either to Joseph or to the payment, neither of which they cared much about. The phrase *min al-zāhidīn* may subtly allude to the fact that his brothers, too, neither valued him nor wanted him in their lives.

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

And the man who bought him in Egypt said to his wife, "Make sure his life here is respectable. There's a good chance he'll be of use to us; we might even adopt him." And that is how We gave Joseph firm footing in that land, and it was so that We teach him some of the meanings behind all kinds of speech. And Allah is in complete control of His own matters, yet most people do not know.

21

It is understood that Joseph (pbuh) was trafficked and sold at least one more time, finally "from Egypt" or by a man from there. We understand *mathwā* as broader than just his place of residence. The two possibilities he mentions are not mutually exclusive, which is why we did not retain the direct translation "or" as others have done. The context here shows why we have not limited *aḥādīth* to dreams (see above 12:6). It is possible to understand the pronoun in *amrihi* as referring to Joseph, i.e. God was in control over his life (hence "most people" is relative to the story).

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ ءَاتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Then, when he came of age, We gave him sound judgment and great knowledge; and that is how We reward those who do good.

22

There is no agreement on what the exact age is, but it was when Joseph (pbuh) was prepared to receive these advanced states. The indefinite nouns *ḥukman wa 'ilman* invite these adjectives of grandeur. *Muhsinīn* is a key term in the Quran which encompasses spiritual excellence and acts of goodness to others.

وَرَوَدَتْهُ الْمَرْءُ بِبَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ؕ وَعَلَقَتْ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مِمَّاؤِي إِنَّهُ لَا يَفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ

And the woman whose house he was in tried to have him give himself to her. She made sure to lock all the doors and said "Get over here!" He said, "I cling to God for safety! My Master has made my life good here! Those who do wrong will never get what they want."

23

Although wordier than "seduce", the phrasing here highlights the core sense of the verb *rāwada* – compare with its appearance below in 12:61 (see also 54:37). The word "cling" evokes a root meaning of *'awdh* aside from its denotation of refuge. We understand Joseph (pbuh) to be saying that, unlike this woman, he keeps in mind the good he has received. There is a duality in *rabbī* which could refer to Almighty God, or to her husband the High Minister (who was a "master" without capital letter). We translated the term *falāḥ* here not as "prosper, succeed" but with a view to context (compare with 12:52).

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهٖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنَّ رَجُلًا بَرَّهَانَ رَبِّهٖ ؕ كَذَلِكَ لِيَتَصَرَّفَ عَنْهُ الشُّرُوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ إِنَّهٗ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ

She wanted him for sure; and he would have wanted her, had he not already seen his Master's convincing proof. We did it that way to divert evil and indecency from him, because he was one of Our own purified slaves.

24

Some exegetes take the ayah to be stating that both the woman and Joseph (pbuh) had a kind of *hamm* (desire) but this was of different types and/or extents. In that case, "had he not seen" is understood to have an apodosis, i.e. "he would have responded to her call" (or similar) – but God protected him. Others, and our translation, take the apodosis of *lawlā* to be the preceding clause, i.e. seeing his Master's proof prevented him from having *hamm* at all (in the stronger sense of intent to approach her). There are numerous statements about *burhāna rabbīhi* including the view that it was some personal item of the "master" of the house, but we understand it to refer to the knowledge and wisdom God had instilled in him, such that he could see the evil of the act and its consequences. The term *mukhlāṣ* is a passive participle meaning that he was purified and chosen, while the other canonical reading with active participle *mukhlīṣ* describes purifying one's religiosity (hence the meaning "sincere").

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

They raced for the door and she tore his shirt from behind, and they ran into her husband at the door. She cried out, "What payback should there be – other than jail or excruciating torture – for someone who wanted to do something vile and shameful to your family?"

25

The term *sayyid* is one of several which denote "husband" in the Quran; perhaps the specific indication here is that her husband was the only authority she accepted, since she failed to acknowledge the true Master. We have used a more expressive and contextual phrase for *qālat* than simply "she said", a choice we have made at numerous places in this surah and beyond. There is a verb-noun variation in "that he be jailed" versus "excruciating torture" which proved too challenging to incorporate smoothly in the translation.

قَالَ هِيَ رَوَدَّتْنِي وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ كَانَ  
قَمِيصُهُ فُدًّا مِنْ قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

He said, "No, she tried to have me give myself to her." Then a witness from her family spoke up: "If his shirt happens to be torn from the front, then she's telling the truth and he is a liar.

26

The placement of *hiya* delivers the sense of rebuttal, which we expressed with the word "No". The "witness" is not necessarily someone who sees the event, but anyone who provides illuminating testimony.

وَإِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ فُدًّا مِنْ دُبُرٍ فَكَذَّبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

"But if it turns out that his shirt is torn from the back, then she lied and he's an honest man."

27

The sense of *min al-ṣādiqīn* (see the same contrast between phrases in the previous ayah) is that someone has honesty (etc.) as a fixed trait.

فَلَمَّا رَأَى قَمِيصَهُ فُدًّا مِنْ دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ كَيْدِكُنَّ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ  
عَظِيمٌ

So when he saw his shirt torn from the back, he said, "This is yet another example of the scheming of you women. Your womanly schemes are truly incredible!"

28

Context indicates it was the Minister who saw this and spoke, and his words should be understood as those of a human, husband and politician. The word *kaydikunna* has a feminine plural possessive suffix, hence "of you women", as he attributes his wife's actions to the whole of her sex or to a certain category of women he has in mind. We have taken the preposition *min* as partitive, though it has also been explained as describing the source of this misdeed or her false accusation.

يُوسُفَ أَعْرِضْ عَن هَذَا وَاسْتَغْفِرِي لِذَنبِكِ إِنَّكَ كُنتِ مِنَ  
الْخَاطِئِينَ

29

At numerous points in this surah, religious-sounding terms are used in non-religious contexts. Here the most notable is *istaghfirī* which might indeed imply that she should repent to God, but is likely here to mean apology to those whom she wronged.

“Joseph, put all this behind you.  
And you, woman, must beg  
forgiveness for your shameful  
deed because you have truly been  
at fault.”

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرْوَدُ فَتَنَّاها عَنْ نَفْسِهَا ۗ قَدْ  
شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا إِنَّا لَنَرُنَّهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

30

The context and commentaries indicate that these were women of status, perhaps married to the High Minister's political rivals. Indeed, they are the first in the surah to bring up this title, as part of what is clearly mockery, not just gossip. Indeed, their intent may have been more sinister (see following note). The expression *shaghafahā ḥubban* is like "he made her overwhelmed with love" but we have given more focus to the etymology which describes surrounding or penetrating the heart.

And a group of women in the city  
started saying, “The High  
Minister’s wife is trying to have  
her servant boy give himself to  
her? Love for him has really taken  
over her heart! As far as we’re  
concerned, she’s clearly lost.”

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكِنًا وَهَاتَتْ  
كُلَّ وَجْدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ  
أَخْضَعْنَ رُءُوسَهُنَّ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا  
إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ

31

Exegetes pondered the description of their talk as *makr* – is this because gossip resembles "plotting" in that both are done secretly? Our view is that they were indulging not in mere gossip but in political intrigue which threatened the position of the Minister and his wife: hence we chose the term "muckraking" which has the happy coincidence of resembling the Arabic word! Some understand the *muttaka'* to describe the food (fruit or meat which requires cutting), but we took the view that it is "cushions" or more broadly a place to relax and recline. While it is typically understood that the women's exclamation was only on seeing Joseph's (pbuh) physical beauty, some note that they marveled at his comportment, and perhaps at his refusal to respond to their initial flirtations. As such, their description of him as *malakun karim* may have a disapproving edge to it, as he was too "noble" to obey them and "angelic" even to show them interest.

When she got word of their  
muckraking, she sent for them and  
arranged a relaxing setting for  
them, then handed each one of  
them a knife, and called: “Come  
on out to them.” So when they laid  
eyes on him, they were awestruck  
by him and sliced into their hands,  
and called out, “Good God! No  
way is this a human: this can only  
be a noble angel!”

قَالَتْ فَذَلِكُنَّ الَّذِي لُمْتُنَّنِي فِيهِ وَلَقَدْ رُودْتُهُ بِعَنْ نَفْسِيهِ  
فَأَسْتَعْصِمُ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا ءَامُرُهُ لَيَكُونَنَّ وَلَيَكُونَا مِنَ  
الصَّغِيرِينَ

32

More than "refused", the term *ista'sama* means that he maintained a protective stance, or that she noticed how Joseph (pbuh) turned to God and sought protection.

She said, "So there you have it: he's the one you were criticizing me about! And yes, I did try to have him give himself to me but he held his ground. Now if he doesn't do whatever I tell him to, I swear he will be imprisoned and he'll join the ranks of the disgraced."

قَالَ رَبِّ اَلَيْسَ اَحَبُّ اِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُوْنَ اِلَيْهِؕ وَاَلَا تَصْرِفُ عَنِّي  
كَيْدَهُنَّ اَصْحٰبُ اَلْاَيْوَمِؕ وَاَطْعَمَنِي مِنَ الْجَبَلِيْنَ

33

"Dearer" is too strong for what Joseph (pbuh) is expressing here in his plea. The word *aşbu* denotes inclining, but the root also evokes the impulsiveness of childhood, which is reinforced by the sense of *jāhil* which we have understood instead of the more common "ignorant".

He said, "Master, I'd prefer prison over what they're calling me to. Now if You don't steer their scheme from me, I might succumb to them and act like the impulsive."

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ اِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

34

The word "true" conveys the exclusivity of these divine attributes from the emphatic pronoun *huwa*.

So his Nurturing Master did respond to him by diverting their scheme from him, for He is the true Hearer and Knower.

ثُمَّ بَدَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا الْآيٰتِ لَيْسَ جُنْدَهُ حَتَّىٰ جِبِينَ

35

The "signs" could refer to the proofs of Joseph's innocence, despite which he was sent to prison. However, it is clearer to take these "signs" to be what caused this to present itself to them as the only suitable action: they saw how events were unfolding, the scandal was spreading, and the position of the High Minister was under threat.

Some time later, upon observing all the signs, it became clear to them that they must imprison him for an undefined term.

وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السِّجْنَ فَتَيَانٍ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا وَقَالَ  
 الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْرًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ نَبِينَا  
 بِتَأْوِيلِهِ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

36

We have taken the present tense *arānī* to indicate that these were repeated dreams. The phrase *a'širu khamran* can be seen as a concise description of how the person saw himself squeezing grapes directly into wine (see Genesis 40:11), though some translators opted for "pressing grapes". The last sentence could have been spoken by the second man, or by both of them.

And along with him, two young men entered the prison. One of them told him: "I keep seeing myself pressing wine," and the other said, "I keep seeing myself carrying, on my head, bread that birds are eating from." "Tell us what it really means, since we see you as one of the good ones."

قَالَ لَا يَا بَيْتِكُمَا طَعَامٌ مُرَرَقَانِيهِ إِلَّا نَبَأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ  
 يَأْتِيَكُمَا ذَلِكَمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّيَ إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ  
 بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

37

It is sometimes understood that Joseph (pbuh) was boosting their confidence in his abilities by stating that he can predict the exact nature of their food before its arrival. However, the clearer meaning is that he was reassuring them that they would receive their answer soon, as he was about to make some other important points.

He replied, "No meal which you're to be fed will come to you except that, before it reaches you, I'll have told you its true meaning. That is part of what my Master has taught me. I have actually walked away from the path of a people who do not believe in God, and who are in complete denial of the Afterlife.

وَأَتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ  
 نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ  
 وَلِكُلِّ أَكْثَرِ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

38

Although Joseph (pbuh) was always on this straight path, he phrased his journey as if he left one path for another, in order to show his companions that they can do the same.

"Instead, I have devoutly followed the path of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We would never equate anything to God at all. That is one of God's favors upon us and on all people, yet most people don't appreciate.

يَصْدِحِي السِّجْنِءَ أَزْيَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

39

“Tell me, prison mates: is it better to have all sorts of Masters, or to have God, the One, the Overwhelming?”

Here and in 12:41, we have rendered the vocative *yā* in a way more fitting to context than the usual, and archaic, "O". The comparison is not between the "masters" and the True God, but between the states of those who worship them. The word *mutafarriqūn* can denote "multiple", "diverse" and "disputing".

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءَ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَءَابَاءُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنْ لِحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمْزَأَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

40

“You’re not worshipping anything in His place except names which you have coined, you and your fathers! God sent no proof for that at all. It is for no one but God to decide. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the upright religion, yet most people don’t even know!”

"Names which you have coined" can also be understood as "which you have called gods", and the pronoun in *bihā* is generally taken by exegetes to refer to this act of naming (or to mean "no proof for worshipping them"); whereas most translators have assumed that the pronoun refers back to the "names" i.e. false gods).

يَصْدِحِي السِّجْنِ أَمَّا أَحَدُكُمَا فَيَسْقِي رَبَّهُ خَمْرًا وَأَمَّا الْآخَرُ فَيُصَلِّبُ فَتَأْكُلُ الطُّيْرُ مِنْ رَأْسِهِ فُضِي الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْتَفْتِيَانِ

41

“Now, prison mates: as for the first of you, he is going to pour wine for his master. As for the other, he will be crucified and birds will eat from his head. The matter about which you both sought a verdict has been decreed!”

Reports indicate that the first young man was previously a cupbearer for the king, but was implicated in a plot and would later be exonerated. Whatever the case, it does appear that the "master" turns out to be the king as this man will be in his presence to hear of his dream. The term "crucified" may suggest a particular type of cross, but the Egyptians may have been using a different method also described as *ṣalb* (such as impaling).

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنَسَهُ  
النَّيْطَلْنُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِءَ فَلَبِثَ فِي السِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ

42

And he told the one he knew would survive from the two, "Bring me up in your master's company." But Satan then made him forget to tell his master, so Joseph remained in prison for a number of years.

There are different views on who *zanna*, but with our assumption that it is Joseph (pbuh), this verb is best rendered as "knew". There is a greater debate over whom Satan caused to forget, with some holding that it was Joseph who forgot to "mention his Master" i.e. God (admittedly a more direct translation for *dhikra rabbih*). However, the idea that this Prophet was punished for an oversight here does not fit well overall. Since there is consensus that the subject pronoun in *labitha* refers to Joseph, we have inserted the name to make the overall sentence clearer.

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أَرَى سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعَ عِجَافٍ  
وَسَبْعَ سُثُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُءْيَايَ  
إِن كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّءْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ

43

And the king said, "I am seeing seven fat cows that seven thin ones eat, and seven green spikes of grain with others dried up. High Council, give me your verdict on my vision, if you really do see what lies behind visions."

As with the prisoners' dreams, the imperfect tense could indicate a recurring vision, or (as exegetes usually say) it is by way of depicting it to the hearers in real time. The term *'ibārah* is used here for dream interpretation instead of *ta'wīl*, and we have drawn upon its root sense of "crossing over".

قَالُوا أَضَعَدْتَ أَخْلَامًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَخْلَامِ بِعَلَمِينَ

44

They replied, "These are bundles of meaningless dreams, and when it comes to deciphering such dreams, we are no experts."

There is a beautiful continuity in the term *adghāth* (bundles or sheaves) after the king's description of grain in his dream. Scholars have explained *ahlām* as used mainly for negative dreams. Otherwise, it could refer to fragmented images which do not have the coherence of a *ru'yā*.

وَقَالَ الَّذِي نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ  
فَارْسِلُونِ

45

The one who survived from those two – who remembered after a long time – spoke up: "I will tell you all its true meaning: just permit me to go out."

This, of course, refers back to the two prisoners. The term *ummah* is used here in its less common sense of a large group of days.



يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي سَبْعِ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ  
عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعِ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ لَعَلَّكَ أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ  
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

46

While the address by *ayyuhā al-ṣiddīq* is undoubtedly respectful, it may also be read as flattery. After all, there is a cynical edge to this character's involvement: neither does he mention Joseph in the previous ayah (after forgetting him for so long), nor the king in this one. Perhaps he was less concerned for the public interest than he claimed so earnestly!

“Joseph, you man of truth! Give us your verdict on seven fat cows that seven thin ones eat, and seven green spikes of grain with others dried up, so that I can go back to the people and hopefully they’ll come to know.”

قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا فَمَا حَصَدْتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلَيْهِ إِلَّا  
قَلِيلًا مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ

47

The word *da'aban* conveys the sense of constant, exhausting work. Joseph (pbuh) here uses a combination of imperatives ("leave inside") and ordinary imperfect verbs "you'll plant" as if he has full confidence that his instructions will be heeded, due to their importance.

He said, “You’ll plant diligently for seven years, and whatever you harvest, leave inside its spikes except the small amount which you’ll eat.

ثُمَّ بَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعَ شِدَادٍ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا  
مِمَّا تُحْصِنُونَ

48

There is powerful imagery in the years themselves being described as being the consumers of the supplies. It would be necessary to retain some of the stock for seed, which would be planted once the drought was over.

“Right after that come seven tough years which will consume what you’ve prepared in advance for them, except for a small amount which you’ll keep in reserve.

ثُمَّ بَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ النَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يُغْصَرُونَ

49

The word *yughāthu* may derive from *ghayth* meaning rain, or *ghawth* meaning relief. There is a beautiful flow in the image from the rain coming above them, then the resultant plant life providing juices and oils (for which a parenthesis seemed necessary here).

“Then, right after, will come a year in which the people will be replenished with rain, and in which they will press (wines, oils and more).”

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ أَتُتُونِي بِهِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ الرَّسُولُ قَالَ أَرْجِعْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ  
مَسْئَلُهُ مَا بِأَلِ التَّمَسُّوَةِ الَّتِي قَطَعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ

And the king said: "Bring him to me." But when the messenger reached him, he said, "Go back to your master and ask him about the current status of the women who cut their hands – because my Master is fully aware of their scheme."

50

By asking about those women who had left a mark on their hands, Joseph (pbuh) is requesting that the king use his resources to establish the facts of that scandalous event so that his name would be cleared before he came to work for him.

قَالَ مَا حَطَبْتُكَ إِذْ رَوَدَّتْكَ يُوسُفَ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فُلَنْ حَدِثْ بِاللَّهِ مَا  
عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنْ سُوءٍ قَالَتْ أَمْرًاكَ الْعَزِيزِ الَّتِي حَصَّصَ الْخَلْقُ  
أَنَا رَوَدْتُهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

He said, "What were you women up to when you tried to have Joseph give himself to you?" They said, "God above! We know of nothing shameful to discredit him." The Minister's wife declared: "The truth is now laid bare: I'm the one who tried to make him give himself to me, and he really is an honest man.

51

The root meanings of *haṣḥaṣa* include removal of hair and exposing of skin, hence "laid bare".

ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي كَيْدَ الْخَائِبِينَ

"I say this so he knows that I didn't betray him behind his back, and that God never leads the schemes of betrayers to fruition.

52

There are two opinions about who is speaking in this and the following ayah. The more common understanding is that the listener is transported back to the prison, where Joseph (pbuh) is saying: "I requested that so the king would know that I did not betray the minister." While some of the content of the speech is easier to understand as Joseph's, we find it more likely to be the continuation of the woman's speech. She is echoing what Joseph said to her in 12:23: "Those who do wrong will never get what they want." It is also possible that the duality is intended, i.e. each uttered these words in their own place, and with diverging meanings.

وَمَا أُرِيئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ الْفَتَىٰ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي  
عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

53

If the speech of Joseph (pbuh), this is an expression of humility and dependency upon the Almighty. As the woman's speech, it demonstrates realization and repentance. There are different ways to understand the grammar and meaning of the exception *illā mā raḥima rabbī*, including the view that it refers to those protected souls such as the Prophets.

“Yet I do not call myself blameless! Every innermost self keeps dictating evil, except as much as my Master shows mercy. Indeed My Master is greatly forgiving and mercy-giving.”

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ أَتُؤْتُونِي بِهِ أَسْتَغْلِضُ بِهِ لِنَفْسِي ۗ فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُ قَالَ إِنَّكَ  
الْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينٌ أُمِينٌ

54

Upon this second summons, the king will receive Joseph (pbuh) while being even more impressed with him. The phrase "upon speaking to him" can also be understood as "when Joseph spoke to him", and this conversation cemented the king's resolve to make the best use of this man of knowledge and lofty character.

And the king said, “Bring him to me so I may appoint him to my exclusive service.” Then, upon speaking to him, he said: “From today you are in a strong position of trust by our side.”

قَالَ أَجْعَلْنِي عَلَىٰ خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ ۗ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْمَ

55

Whereas the two attributes *makīn* and *amīn* were rendered as one phrase in the previous ayah – "in a strong position of trust" – these two attributes *ḥafīẓ* and *'alīm* are each important individually. As well as the qualities imbued in him through divine grace and growing up in a prophetic household, he has already demonstrated remarkable restraint in matters of the world, yet he has learned a great deal about how it operates.

He said, “Put me in charge of the reserves of the whole land, for I am scrupulous and well informed.”

وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُونَ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ۗ نُصِيبُ  
بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَن نَّشَاءُ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

56

Unlike other translators, we see in the verb *nuṣību* the image of causing rain to reach those whom it benefits. This is quite apt in connection with a story of drought and relief. Likewise, there is a beautiful correspondence between their act of storing away grain for its time of need, and how God stores the reward of the righteous to a time when they need it most, in this life or the next.

And that is how We gave Joseph a firm footing throughout the land, stationing himself wherever he saw fit. We rain Our loving care on whomever We will, and We never allow the reward meant for the doers of good to be lost.

وَلَا جُزْءَ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ

And the reward in the Afterlife is better still for those who maintained faith and spiritual vigilance.

57

The tenses and use of *kānū* give an overall sense of adhering to this path of faith. Our preferred translation of *taqwā* also reflects this sense of being conscious and responding to all life's challenges as pleases God.

وَجَاءَ إِخْوَةُ يُوسُفَ فَدَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَعَرَفَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ مُنْكَرُونَ

And Joseph's brothers came and stood before him in his court, and he recognized them while they remained oblivious to his identity.

58

This would have happened after the first seven years had passed, and the drought had spread. The following events can be seen as the second half of the chronicles of "Joseph and his brothers" as described in 12:7 above.

وَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُم بِجَهَّازِهِمْ قَالِ أَتُوتُنِي بِأَخٍ لَّكُمْ مِّنْ أَبِيكُمْ أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنِّي أُرِي الْكَفَّيْلَ وَأَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْمُنْزِلِينَ

Once he had loaded them with their supplies, he said, "Bring me the brother you apparently have on your father's side. Don't you see that I give the full amount, and that I am best at providing lodging?"

59

Of course, Joseph (pbuh) well knew that they had another half-brother, his own brother Benjamin. However, he could not disclose his intimate knowledge for obvious reasons, so he used evasive language in *bi-akhin lakum* which we have indicated with the word "apparently". Exegetes provide several explanations for how this minister would otherwise have come to know of their other brother, e.g. that they had disclosed this to some of his team, or that they had requested an additional camel-load for their father and that brother.

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَأْتُونِي بِهِ فَلَا كَيْلَ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي وَلَا تَقْرَبُونِ

"But if you don't bring him to me, you will have no amount with me and you won't even approach me!"

60

The term *kayl* is a measure of volume, in contrast with weight; we have used a more generic "amount". The plain sense is that Joseph (pbuh) is saying that they will not receive any grain; however, since the word *indī* was used ("with me" as opposed to "from me"), this could also mean that they would fall from his consideration, like the parallel expression to have "no weight". The final phrase can also be read as forbidding: "Do not approach me."

قَالُوا سَتَرُوهُ عَنْهُ أَبِياهُ وَإِنَّا لَمَتَّبِعُونَ

They replied, "We'll get his father to give him to us! We'll get it done for sure."

61

Notice the same expression *murāwadah* being used for getting Jacob (pbuh) to hand over his son, as the attempts to get Joseph (pbuh) to hand over his very self and dignity. Translators have seldom attempted to translate these in the same way.

وَقَالَ لِفِتْيَانِهِ اجْعَلُوا بِضَاعَتَهُمْ فِي رِحَالِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَهَا إِذَا  
 انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

62

*Fityān* can simply mean servants, named such because of servants in these roles typically being young. It seems here that Joseph (pbuh) sought to include these young people in his plans, as if he wanted them to gain the types of knowledge he had picked up in his years of unfreedom. The term *biḍa'ah*, earlier "merchandise", here refers to what the brothers had brought as payment, whether coins or otherwise.

And he spoke to his young attendants: "Put their payment back in their bags, so they might recognize it upon getting back to their families; that way, they should return."

فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَبِيهِمْ قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مُنِعَ مِنَّا الْكَيْلُ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا آخَانَ  
 نَحْمَلْهُ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَحْفِظُونَ

63

Either they meant that they were refused the additional camel-load for Benjamin, or that all future supplies would be refused if they did not bring their youngest brother.

When they did get back to their father, they said, "Dad! The full amount was denied to us, so you have to send our brother along with us so we get the amount. Rest assured we'll keep him safe!"

قَالَ هَلْ ءَامَنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَا أَمِنْتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَخِيهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَاللَّهُ  
 خَبِيرٌ فَحَفِظُوا وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

64

Translators have frequently overlooked the exception *illā* and its effect.

He replied, "Is there any way for me to trust you with him, other than how I trusted you with his brother last time? Regardless, God is better as Protector, and He is the most loving and caring of all."

وَلَمَّا فَتَحُوا مَتَاعَهُمْ وَجَدُوا بِضَاعَتَهُمْ رُدَّتْ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا  
 نَبِيئِي هَذِهِ بِضَاعَتُنَا رُدَّتْ إِلَيْنَا وَنَمِيرُ أَهْلَنَا وَنَحْفِظُ أَخَانَا وَتَزِدُّادُ  
 كَيْلَ بَعِيرٍ ذَلِكَ كَيْلٌ يَسِيرٌ

65

The exclamation *mā nabghī* could be either direct negation or a rhetorical question; since they found what they needed for their next trip, they needed nothing more from their father or anyone else. The final sentence has been interpreted in various ways, depending on whether it describes what they planned to get, or what they received already; *kaylun yasīr* can mean either a small or easy amount.

Then, when they opened their things, they found their payment returned to them. They exclaimed, "Dad, what more could we want? Here's our payment which was returned to us, and we'll get supplies for our families, look after our brother and get an extra camel's load. That's an effortless amount!"

قَالَ لَنْ أُرْسِلَهُ مَعْكُمْ حَتَّى تُؤْتُونِ مَوْثِقًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ لَتَأْتُنِّي بِهِ إِلاَّ  
أَنْ يُحَاطَ بِكُمْ فَلَمَّا آتَوْهُ مَوْثِقَهُمْ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ

66

The phrase *mawthiqan min Allāh* is heavier than the common expressions for oaths, and its sense is reflected in this translation. The phrase *yuhāta bikum* literally means to be surrounded, and often means to be killed.

He said, “I won’t be sending him with you until you give me a pledge sanctified by God and swear that you will bring him back to me unless you’re completely overpowered.” Then, once they had given him their pledge, he said: “God is trustee over these words we speak.”

وَقَالَ يَبْنَئِ لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِن بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ وَادْخُلُوا مِن أَبْوَابٍ مُّتَفَرِّقَةٍ  
وَمَا أَعْنِي عَنْكُمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ مِن شَيْءٍ ۗ إِنِ الْحُكْمُ لِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ  
وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

67

This instruction is often linked to the phenomenon known as the “evil eye”, but can also be understood in practical terms: they may be recognized by various elements (including criminals) after the events of their last visit, and should avoid attracting unwanted attention. This fatherly advice came from a prophet who also knew that human plans and precautions only go so far.

He then said, “My sons, don’t enter through a single gate; instead you should enter through separate gates. But I have no power at all to help you in front of God’s plan. It is for no one but God to decide. I rely on Him alone, and those who are going to rely should rely only on Him.”

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَهُمْ أَبُوهُم مَّا كَانَ يُغَيِّبُ عَنْهُمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ  
مِن شَيْءٍ ۗ إِلاَّ حَاجَةٌ فِي نَفْسِ يَعْقُوبَ قَضَاهَا رَأَاهُ لَدُو عِلْمِهِ لَمَّا  
عَلَّمْتَهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

68

While he took precautions against certain types of harm, what befell them was something else God intended. The phrase *li-mā ‘allamnāhu* can mean that Jacob (pbuh) had knowledge due to God teaching him; but our preferred reading implies that he acted upon what he was taught, and this was the embodiment of true knowledge (see 39:9 along similar lines).

Then, even when they did enter from the places their father instructed them, that did not help them in front of God’s plan at all. It was simply something deep within Jacob which he had to follow through. He certainly possessed real knowledge of what We taught him, but most people do not know.

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَخِيهِ قَالَ إِنَّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ فَلَا  
تَبْتَسِمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

69

We have chosen a more expressive phrase for *āwā* with reference to its root meaning of refuge. Here we learn that the brothers' harm extended to Benjamin, a point highlighted later in 12:89.

When they arrived in front of Joseph, he pulled his brother into his protective embrace, saying: "It's really me, your brother! So don't feel bad any more over what they've been doing."

فَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُم بِجَهَّازِهِمْ جَعَلَ السِّقَايَةَ فِي رَحْلِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ أَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ  
أَتَيْنَهَا الْغَيْرَ لِنَظْمٍ لَّسْرِفٍ

70

There is no prior mention of this *siqāyah*, so its definite article seems to mark it out as a significant item: hence the capital letter. It is possible that Joseph (pbuh) placed it there himself, but the wording allows that this was enacted by his servants, which is more likely. The phrase *adhhdhana mu'adhhdhin* does not necessitate the specific role of a herald, nor that this character remains significant in what follows. We have adopted a more natural expression for *īr*, like earlier *sayyārah* (both typically "caravan"), looking to the fact that it refers literally to camels or donkeys which are ridden.

When he came to load them with their supplies, he had the Cup placed in his brother's bag. Then someone raised the alarm: "You there! Riders! You have turned out to be thieves!"

قَالُوا وَأَقْبَلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ مَاذَا تَفْقِدُونَ

71

The pronouns allow also for this to mean that the brothers had turned back to face the people before saying this. We have inserted an explicit noun "guards" to make our preferred reading clearer.

They asked, as the guards confronted them, "What are you missing?"

قَالُوا تَفْقِدُ صُوَاعَ الْمَلِكِ وَلِمَن جَاءَ بِهِ حِمْلُ بَعِيرٍ وَأَنَا بِهِ زَعِيمٌ

72

Now the Cup is given another designation: the term *ṣuwā'* implies that it functioned as a standard volume measure. The fact that these words are attributed to a collective may mean – as our disconnected quotations show – that these phrases were uttered by a variety of individuals. The first-person singular pronoun in the last phrase has led many to attribute all these words to the "herald" (*mu'adhhdhin*) of 12:70. That or another person may have guaranteed this reward out of fear of punishment for having let the Chalice out their sight. The guarantor may also be Joseph himself, if he has entered the scene by this point.

They said, "We are missing the Royal Chalice—" "And whoever comes forward with it will receive a camel load—" "And I guarantee it personally!"

قَالُوا تَاللّٰهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَّا جِئْتَنَا لِتُفْسِدَ فِي الْاَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا سَافِرِيْنَ

They replied, “We swear to God!  
You know well that we didn’t  
come to make trouble in the  
kingdom, and we are no thieves!”

73

The brothers appeal not only to their oath and self-testimony, but to what has been observed of them since their previous visit to Egypt. Contrast this with their acceptance of Benjamin's guilt, and their smearing of Joseph, in 12:77.

قَالُوا فَمَا جَزَاؤُهُۥٓ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ كٰذِبِيْنَ

They said, “So what do you say is  
the payment for the crime, if it  
turns out you are lying?”

74

This question must have been pre-set by Joseph (pbuh), with his knowledge of the laws observed by the Family of Jacob.

قَالُوا جَزَاؤُهُۥٓ مَنْ رُوِّدَ فِي رَحْلِهٖۚ فَهُوَ جَزَاؤُهُۥٓ كَذٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الظّٰلِمِيْنَ

They replied, “The payment for it?  
Whoever’s bag it’s found in, he is  
the very payment for it. That’s  
how we repay offenders.”

75

There are different ways to read the sentence structure here, but either way, the point is that the culprit would be seized and enslaved as repayment for the crime.

فَبَدَأَ بِاَوْعِيَّتِهِمْ قَبْلَ وِعَاۤءِ اَخِيهٖ ثُمَّ اسْتَخْرَجَهَا مِنْ وِعَاۤءِ اَخِيهٖ  
كَذٰلِكَ كِذٰبًا لِّيُوسِفَۙ مَا كَانَ لِیَاۤخُذَ اٰخَاهُ فِي دِيْنِ الْمَلِكِ اِلَّا اَنْ  
يَنْصَاۤءَ اللّٰهُ تَرْفَعُ دَرَجٰتٍ مِّنْ نَّشَاۤءٍ وَّوَقَّۙ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيْمٌ

So he started with their luggage  
before turning to that of his  
brother. Then he had it pulled out  
of his brother’s bag. That is how  
We provided the scheme for  
Joseph; it was not possible for him  
to keep his brother under the  
king’s law, unless it was Allah’s  
will. We raise to higher ranks  
whomever We will, and above  
every person of knowledge is a  
Knower!

76

Again, it could be either that Joseph (pbuh) was directing his servants to search and bring out the Cup, or that he did this last action personally (in which case the Form X verb *istakhraja* has the simpler sense of Form IV *akhraja*). The wordiness at the start of this ayah reflects the suspense built up until the Cup was finally extracted from the last of the bags. The closing sentence reflects a general hierarchy of knowledge, even though the word *'alim* is most likely to refer here to the Ultimate Knower.



قَالُوا إِنْ يَسْرِقْ فَقَدْ سَرَقَ أَخٌ لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلِ فَأَسْرَهَا يُوسُفُ فِي  
نَفْسِهِ وَلَمْ يُبْدِهَا لَهُمْ قَالَ أَنْتُمْ شَرُّ مَكَانٍ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَصِفُونَ

They said, "If he steals, then he had a brother who stole in the past." But Joseph buried his feelings deep within himself and showed them no sign of them; he said, "No, it's you who are in worse standing, and God knows the reality of what you're portraying."

77

Exegetes mention some possible incidents which they were falsely portraying as theft on the part of Joseph (pbuh). What he "said" here was under his breath, and it may be understood that the feminine pronoun in what he "concealed and did not display" refers to his utterance which follows.

قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ إِنَّ أَبَا شَيْخَا كَبِيرًا فَخُذْ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ إِنَّا  
نَرْنَكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

They said, "Your Highness, he actually has a very elderly father. Therefore we urge you to take one of us in his place, for we see you as the benevolent kind."

78

At this point, Joseph (pbuh) occupied a status second only to the king, so our rendering of *ayyuhā al-'aziz* reflects this conventionally. The brothers appealed to him on account of seeming like a more compassionate authority figure than most.

قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ أَنْ نَأْخُذَ إِلَّا مَنْ وَجَدْنَا مَتَاعَنَا عِنْدَهُ إِنَّا إِذًا  
لَظَالِمُونَ

He replied, "God save us were we to take anyone but the person we found our item with – that would make us the offenders!"

79

There is a gentle mocking here (like "Now, that would just be wrong!") since the circumstances have closed down over the brothers. But it was also true that the scheme God provided for him involved taking Benjamin (with his consent), not anybody else.

فَلَمَّا اسْتَمِعْتَهُمْ مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا قَالَ كَبِيرُهُمْ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ  
 أَبَاتَكُمْ قَدْ أَخَذَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَوْثِقًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَمِن قَبْلُ مَا فَرَّطْتُمْ فِي  
 يُوسُفَ فَلَنْ أَبْرَحَ الْأَرْضَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْذَنَ لِیَ ابْنِی أَوْ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ لِي وَهُوَ  
 خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِیْنَ

80

This *kabīruhum* was the eldest and/or wisest. As usual, the Quran leaves the specific brother unnamed, and exegetes present various opinions.

When they finally gave up on swaying him, they went aside to discuss in private. The most senior of them concluded: “Haven’t you all realized: your father holds over you a divinely sanctified pledge, and you already failed when it came to Joseph! I for one won’t cross beyond this kingdom until my father gives me permission, or unless God decides something for me – and He is best to decide.

أَرْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ آبَائِكُمْ فَقُولُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّ ابْنَكَ سَرَقَ وَمَا شَهِدْنَا إِلَّا بِمَا  
 عَلَّمْنَا وَمَا كُنَّا بِالْعَنِبِ حَافِظِينَ

81

While this begins as the continuation of the senior brother's speech, at some point the walls of the scenes collapse, and we hear Jacob's (pbuh) response to them directly. The last part of their statement here can mean that they cannot know the reality of Benjamin stealing or being framed; or it can be in the sense of "We couldn't have known he would do that, back when we gave you our word to protect him!"

“Go back to your father and say: ‘Dad, your son committed theft! We’re testifying based on nothing but what we know, while we can’t account for what couldn’t be seen.’”

وَسْئَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا وَالْعَيْرَ الَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ

82

They are more emphatic in their declaration here than in 12:17, since they now believe what they are saying. There is a kind of hyperbole in referring directly to the *qaryah* and the *ʿir*, as if they were saying: "You could even ask the buildings in the town, and ask the camels themselves, everyone will back up our story!"

“Go ahead and question the whole town we were in and the riders we approached with, and we are absolutely telling the truth.”

قَالَ تَبَّ سَوَّلْتَ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ أَمْرًا فَصَبِّرْ بِجَمِيلٍ عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ  
يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

83

These words echo those in 12:18. Despite the dark turn in events, Jacob (pbuh) expresses hopefulness with the word *'asā*, and refers to all three of his absent sons.

He replied, “No, your egos have justified something terrible to you, so graceful patience is all I have. There is hope that God will bring them all back to me. He alone is the true Knower, the Wise.”

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا سَقَى عَلَى يَوْسُفَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزَنِ  
فَهُوَ كَبِيمٌ

84

Exegetes discuss the active and passive meanings of *kaẓīm*, i.e. that Jacob (pbuh) controlled his anger at his sons (cf. 3:134), or that he was affected by his pent-up emotions (cf. 68:48). They offered little to no comment on the use of the *fā'* conjunction and nominal sentence, which suggest either that he remained in this state after his eyes glazed over, or that this state explains that outcome.

And he turned away from them and said, “Oh, the terrible sorrow I feel over Joseph!” And his eyes turned white from the grief, since he remained bottled up.

قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَفْتُنَا نَذْكَرُ يَوْسُفَ حَتَّى نَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ نَكُونَ مِنَ  
الْهَالِكِينَ

85

Some have read this as a somewhat sympathetic utterance, and part of their journey towards repentance. We are more inclined to see it as frustration on their part, now that Jacob (pbuh) has brought up Joseph (pbuh) once again. Even as he nears the end of his life, his attention had never become all theirs (12:9).

They cried, “By God, you’re really going to keep on about Joseph until you’re wasting away, or even to the point of death!”

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُرُ بِنِي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

86

Upon hearing their criticism of his mention of Joseph, their father lets them know that it is important for him to express his feelings to his Master; *shakwā* is typically translated as “complaint” but it means here turning for sympathy and support. However, this sorrow does not negate his trust in God, as he explains here and in the next ayah. It is often said that *bathth* is an intense form of *huzn*, particularly the kind that cannot be contained. Looking at its general meaning as “broadcast”, Jacob (pbuh) may have been hinting here that letting his sons hear his expressions is itself a source of regret and pain for him, for which he seeks comfort in Allah.

He said, “All I’m doing is turning to God about my expressions and feelings of sadness – but there are things I know from God that you don’t know.”

يَتَيَّ أذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَأْيِسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ  
اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَأْتِيَنَّ مِنَ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرُونَ

“My sons, go and get a sense of the whereabouts of Joseph and his brother, and don’t give up hope in God delivering relief. Nobody gives up hope in God’s relief except the people of no faith.”

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا  
بِبَضْعَةٍ مُؤَجَّلَةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْزِي  
الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ

Then, when they came into his court, they said: “Your Highness! Hardship has struck us and our families too, and here we are with a meager offering. But please give us the full amount and be charitable to us, for God certainly repays the charitable.”

قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ

He said, “Have you now realized what it is you did to Joseph and his brother back in your state of ignorance?”

قَالُوا أَوْعَدَكِ لَأَنْتِ يُوسُفُ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ  
عَلَيْنَا إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

They gasped, “Is it you, are you really Joseph?” He replied, “I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has granted us favor. Anyone who maintains spiritual vigilance and perseveres will find that God never allows the reward meant for the doers of good to be lost.”

87

The term *tahassus* literally means to use their physical senses to detect their brothers. The word *rawh* is etymologically related to a sigh of relief, which is appropriate after the description of Jacob (pbuh) as “bottled up” as if unable to breathe. It is all the more powerful due to its ascription to God, much like His merciful forgiveness is in 39:53.

88

The request for charity might be part of their asking for the full amount despite deficient payment; or it may be that they asked for something on top of the supplies, namely Benjamin!

89

The tense of *alimtum* implies realization, rather than this being a question of whether they know or remember their deed.

90

As recognition dawns on them, the brothers ask for confirmation in amazement. Joseph (pbuh) lays out the facts with humility and high spiritual wisdom. Our phrase “will find that” is a simple solution to the difficulty translators have faced with this sentence!

قَالُوا تَأْتِلَلَهُ لَقَدْ عَازَرَكَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنْ كُنَّا لَخَطِيئِينَ

They said, “We swear to God that He has chosen you over us, and we were truly at fault.”

91

The brothers respond to that humble statement with a clearer acknowledgement of how God has guided Joseph (pbuh) to a superior position, just as his dream (which they may indeed have heard about) once showed.

قَالَ لَا تَتْرِبْ عَلَيكُمْ الْيَوْمَ يُغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

He replied, “There will be no shaming of you this day. I ask God to forgive you, as He is the most loving and caring of all.

92

Some have divided the sentences differently, such that Joseph (pbuh) says: "Today, God forgives you." However, it is clearer as a supplication on their behalf.

أَذْهَبُوا بِمِصْرِي هَذَا فَأَلْفُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بَصِيرًا وَأُنْتَوِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

“Now take this shirt of mine and cast it over my father’s face so that he comes to see. And bring your entire family here to me.”

93

This shirt, the third to feature in the story, plays a significant role throughout the next few ayat. There is a duality in *ya'ti baṣīran* which our translation has preserved, i.e. not only that Jacob (pbuh) would be restored to sight, but that he would come to Joseph (pbuh) and see him.

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

Then, as the riders made their way out, their father exclaimed: “I can actually pick up Joseph’s scent. If not for the fact that you call me senile, (you would realize)!”

94

Translators have almost universally missed the denotation of *lawlā* and the fact that the first part of Jacob's statement is not at all tentative. He did pick up that scent, somewhat miraculously, from Joseph's shirt which had just been carried out of Egypt. Exegetes explain that there is an implication here, such as: "Were it not for you calling me senile, you would believe me, or I would say that he is alive and nearby." A few suggested something stronger, which is our preferred reading: "...you too would be able to smell what I smell!" It was his powerful faith, and the abject deficiency of those around him, which made all the difference.

قَالُوا تَأْتِلَلَهُ إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الضَّالِّينَ

Those around him said, “We swear to God! You are lost in that same old delusion of yours.”

95

Since his sons were still making their way from Egypt, these must be some other relatives, such as their wives and children.

فَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَ الْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَاهُ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ فَارْتَدَّ بَصِيرًا قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ  
لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

So when the bearer of good news finally arrived, he cast it over his face and was restored to sight. He said, “Didn’t I tell you that I know from God things that you don’t know?”

96

The description *al-bashir* is generally assumed to refer to one of the sons who is carrying the shirt, which is mentioned here only by pronoun. However, for several reasons, we prefer the possibility that this term is a description of the shirt itself, which was "bearing the good news" that Joseph (pbuh) was alive, and had already conveyed this to his father through the air. Some exegetes allowed that the pronouns "he cast it over his face" all apply to Jacob (pbuh), i.e. he took the shirt and cast it over his own face, which is also how we read this.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ

They said, “Dad, please pray for our sins to be forgiven. We have truly been at fault.”

97

It is unusual for the word "please" to be incorporated in such translations, but it is only natural when they are entreating their father.

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

He said, “I will ask my Master soon enough to forgive you. He alone is completely forgiving, loving and caring without limit.”

98

There are several explanations for Jacob (pbuh) delaying this, e.g. he was awaiting the optimal times for supplication. However, it may simply be that he needed a little time to process what had happened, and his feelings towards his sons.

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰ إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ وَقَالَ ادْخُلُوا مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ  
اللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ

Later, when they came in before Joseph, he pulled his parents into his embrace and said, “Come into Egypt safe and secure, God willing.”

99

The "parents" are often identified as Jacob and a maternal aunt or grandmother of Joseph, since his mother Rachel is said to have died while giving birth to Benjamin. The instruction *udkhalū* is literally to "enter", but since they had already arrived in Egypt, it is clearer to think of it as a word of welcome for them to settle there.

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

And he raised his parents up to the throne, and they all fell before him, faces to the ground. And he said, "Dad! This is what lay behind my vision way back then: my Nurturing Master has made it a reality. And He was so good to me when He brought me out of the prison and then brought you all from the countryside even after Satan sowed hostility between me and my brothers. Truly my Master subtly intervenes to enact what He wills! He alone is the All-Knowing, perfect in wisdom.

رَبِّ قَدْ ءَاتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمَلِكِ رِعْظًا مِمَّنْ تَأْوِيلَ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ  
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّيَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا  
وَالْحَقِّي بِالصَّلِحِينَ

"Nurturing Master, You have granted me a measure of worldly authority and taught me some of the meanings behind all kinds of speech. Originator of the skies and of the earth! You are my Protective Friend in this world and the next. When you take me back, let it be in a state of humble submission, and add me to the ranks of the righteous."

Did his parents prostrate (as an act of respect and salutation) along with the others? That would be the clearest fulfilment of the dream, but it is also possible that they were excluded by virtue of being raised up. The divine description as *latīf* has often been translated as "gracious, gentle", then frequently as "subtle", which should be understood like the saying "God works in mysterious ways." It also denotes that His will cannot be prevented by any obstacle (cf. 12:21).

The words *tawaffanī musliman* could be read as a request to go back to Allah at that moment; but they are better understood as a supplication to remain upon Islam until the end of his life.

ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ أَجْمَعُوا  
أَمْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَمْكُرُونَ

102

With the story complete, the surah turns to address the Final Prophet (pbuh) directly.

That is one of the accounts of the Unseen: We deliver it through inspiration to you. You certainly were not there in their midst when they resolved upon their decision and carried out their plot.

وَمَا أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

103

Contextually, the term *al-nās* here concerns the Makkans (an interpretation transmitted from Ibn 'Abbas). The parallels between the story just told, and that of Muhammad (pbuh) with his "brothers", are clear for those who ponder them. No wonder that the Final Prophet is reported to have declared upon the Conquest of Makkah: "There will be no shaming of you this day. I ask God to forgive you, as He is the most loving and caring of all." (12:92)

Yet most of the people around you, despite your best efforts, are not going to believe.

وَمَا تَسْأَلُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

104

This is as if to say: most of them turn away from the Prophet and the Quran despite the fact they see how he conveys it to them without any expectation beside wanting them to benefit from its guidance. The word *al-ālamīn*, sometimes "worlds", is translated contextually here; it signifies that the message will spread far beyond the Makkans and the Arabs.

And clearly you are not asking them any compensation for it! It is nothing but a Remembrance for all communities.

وَكَايْنٍ مِمَّنْ آتَوْا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُمُرُونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

105

Most translators opted for "pass by", i.e. these signs are encountered by observation; but they may also "pass over" them literally, and figuratively: overlooking their significance. Not only that, but they choose a life of heedlessness, oriented away from guidance.

And there are so many divine signs in the skies and the earth that they pass over while actively turning away from them!

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

106

The clause *wa hum mushrikūn* entails a continuous state, and this ayah pertains mainly to people who recognize the True God but fail to single Him out in worship. Why "most of them" after the description of people who are actively turning away from the truth? Either the pronoun refers to people more broadly; or this is an example of the fairness of the Quran in indicating that some of those Makkans, while still not on the right path, are not engaging in *shirk* – at least all the time.

Nor do most of them have faith in Allah without continuing to equate others to Him.



أَفَأَمِنُوا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ غَشِيَةٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً  
وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

107

Surah 88 is the only other occurrence of this term *ghāshiyah*, there with the definite article and in reference to Judgment Day.

Is that because they feel secure from an engulfing episode of divine punishment coming at them? Or from the Hour itself coming to them without notice, and without them sensing?

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ نُبُوءَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنْ أَتَّبَعِيَ  
وَسُبِّحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

108

The term *baṣīrah* is understood as the proofs of the religion; literally they are “seeing”, such is the clarity with which they are seen. The preposition /‘alā/ indicates the firm stance of the Prophet and other callers.

Tell them, “This is my path: I call to Allah from a position of full clarity, I and whoever follows me. I declare Allah free from imperfection, and I am certainly not among those who equate things to Him.”

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوحِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَىٰ أَفَلَمْ  
يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ  
وَلَنَا فِي الْأَجْرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

109

The point here is that Muhammad (pbuh) is no different in his humanity and social status from Messengers selected before him. Alongside the call to ponder the revealed ayat, the Quran reiterates the value of studying history with its recurring themes.

Even before you, We have only ever sent mortal men who received Our inspiration from among the townsfolk; so have they not explored the region and seen how events turned out for those who went before them? And the home of the Afterlife truly is better for those who held onto spiritual vigilance. Then will you not reason and understand?

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْفَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا  
فَنُنَجِّي مَن نَّشَاءُ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُنَا عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

110

When it reached the point at which Messengers gave up hope and (their people) came to think that they had been lied to, Our decisive aid would come to them and whoever We would want was rescued. And the might of Our attack cannot be repelled from any criminal nation.

This ayah refers to unspecified Messengers of the past, as though it is a recurring event. The reading *kudhibū* (of Ḥafṣ among others) means "lied to", and our translation attributes the pronoun to their followers, who thought that they (or the Messengers themselves) had been given false promises of victory. Many translators have (perhaps unwittingly) adopted the other canonical reading *kudhhibū*, which means the Messengers became certain that they had been "belied" altogether. It is also common to find translators eschewing the Ḥafṣ reading *nujjiya* for the other canonical reading which means "We save": *nunji*. The combination of perfect and imperfect tenses provides a concise way of saying: "We saved whomever We willed, and We save whomever We will".

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۗ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ  
وَلَكِن تَصَدِيقَ الْآلِيِّ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً  
لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

111

Their stories are undoubtedly a source of insight for people of refined thought. This is not the kind of speech that is made up, but in fact the verification of what was sent right before it, the exposition of all matters, and guidance and mercy for a people who will have faith.

The word *'ibrah* is from the same root as the term for dream interpretation in 12:43, and shares its sense of "crossing over" mentally from a particular event to a general principle and lesson. The people of intellect and insight learn how to ponder the stories and how they are told (cf. 12:7 above). In closing, the Quran is described in several important ways: it demonstrates its own veracity and that of its Messenger (pbuh); it provides the criteria to assess the earlier scriptures; it elaborates on whatever is important to human life and religion; and it is abiding truth and goodness for those who seek success by believing in it.







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