

## THE STORY OF JOSEPH IN THE GENESIS AND SURAH YUSUF

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### Abstrak

Keindahan kisah Yusuf telah menjadi buah bibir, jauh sebelum kedatangan Islam. Alquran sendiri menegaskan bahwa kisah Yusuf adalah yang paling baik (*ahsan al-qasas*). Kajian terhadap teks Alquran dan Perjanjian Baru (Genesis 37-50) memperlihatkan kesamaan kisah Yusuf secara garis besar, namun juga perbedaan dalam fungsi dan nalar cerita. Fakta pertama menunjukkan adanya kesamaan diskursus keagamaan dan sastra antara komunitas Islam dan Yahudi pada awal kedatangan Islam, sementara yang kedua memperlihatkan orisinalitas kisah Yusuf dalam Alquran. Dalam Perjanjian Baru kisah Yusuf lebih menekankan pada sejarah perjalanan sebuah bangsa, sementara Alquran memaparkan kisah Yusuf untuk memperteguh keyakinan Nabi saw dan para pengikutnya.

*Kata-kata kunci: al Quran, surat Yusuf*

### Introduction

One of the world's oldest recorded folktales is the story of a young man and the married woman in whose house he resides. Overcome by her feelings

for him, the woman attempts to seduce him. When he turns her down, she is enraged. Turning to her husband, she accused to the young man of attacking her. Convinced of his wife's innocence, the husband has the young man who was imprisoned or punished. It is that punishment that eventually leads the young man to power and prominence (Goldman, 1995: xi).

In the latter part of Genesis, we read this episode as part of the adventure of Joseph in Egypt. We also find in the Qur'an, the scripture of Islam, a long and detailed narrative devoted to Joseph. Variations of the tale appears in cultures as far flung in the place and time as those of Inuit, Classical Greece, and Ancient Mesopotamia, and one would have to agree with John Yohannan's assessment that "one would be hard to find a story that has had a wider circulation among more varied audiences over a longer period of time than this story" (Yohannan, 1968: 38).

In the nineteenth century, considerable scholarly energies were expended on proving that the Qur'an story of Joseph was "borrowed" from Jewish and Christian narrative tradition. However, in this century a more objective view has prevailed, one which have been recognized and respects Islam's own claimed to originality (Goldman, 1995: xiv).

According to Firestone, the Quranic Joseph story is not only exhibits a close inter textual relationship with the versions represented in the Hebrew Bible and post-biblical Jewish and Christian narrative exegesis, but also finds important parallels with the pre-biblical Egyptian "Tale of two brothers." (Firestones, 1986: 352). The historical moment when giving a story is transmitted from one culture to another is difficult to pinpoint, therefore, the claims about "original version" and "direct influence" are difficult to substantiate. However, it is true that the emergence of Islam in seventh century Arabia occurred against with a rich and diverse religious background. As related in the Qur'an, there were lively interactions and clashes between nascent Muslim community and Jewish communities in Medina, the heartland of Islam.

Stories and tales about the prophets and sages are called *qisas al-anbiyâ*

which have been already circulated widely in the Muslim community of the first century. The origin of these stories can be traced back to pre-Islamic Arabia; they were disseminated in that period by Jews and Christians (Nagel, 1986: 180). The Qur'an contains of a great many reports concerning prophets and sages. Aiming at widening the scope of the stories, the transmitters of the tales availed themselves of the lore of local traditions currently in Arab peninsula, including of Christians and Jews. This huge mass of material started to infiltrate into realm of hadith (prophetic tradition) and tafsir (Qur'anic commentary) very early on in the Islamic period. Two figures associated with the transmission of Israelite legends of Islam are Ka'b al-Ahbâr and Wahb ibn Munabbih; both are Yemenite Jews who converted to Islam.

The incorporation of Israelite stories into the Quranic commentaries on qisas al-anbiyâ is problematic. Some rigorous Muslim scholars expressed condemnation against with these elaborate and fanciful retellings of the Quranic stories, which is dubbed *isra'iliyât*. In early Islam there arose a class of professional storyteller (qussas) whose subject was mainly the prophets. These storytellers freely borrowed from Jews and Christians the popular exposition of the Bible. It was the extravagant flights of fancy of the qussâs in their overloaded, embellished versions of the histories of the prophets which have been caused of the *isra'iliyât* to be condemned by strict scholars such as Ibn Kathîr (Vadja, 1986: 211). It is important to include the opinion of Dr. Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi regarding to the transmission of *isra'iliyat* into Islamic literature:

Whatever Ka'b and the others narrated from the People of the Book, they did not say that it is from the Prophet, and thus they did not lie to Muslims about it, because they only reported it as the Israelite tradition which existed in their own books, and as the Prophet says, "We are not obliged to believe anything of it not we are requested to trust it" (al-Dhahabi, 1983: 48).

This paper concentrates on the texts of the Joseph story in the Qur'an and the Old Testament. It will discuss the similarity and difference of the story found in both scriptures. On reading the Genesis 37-50 and Surah Yûsuf, the Twelfth Surah of the Quran, it becomes clear that the main events

of the story are same, but the function is differs. The similarity of the Joseph story in both scriptures lead some scholars to believe that between Jews and Muslims there was a shared realm of religious and literary discourse during the early Islamic period. Different functions and preoccupations of the two accounts in their respective contexts, and how this difference affects the choice of material and the treatment which have been given, also discussed in the paper. In order to appreciate the message and qualities of each story, the paper will approach the two versions with this difference in mind. The paper discuss the story in chronological order as it is narrated in the scriptures.

## **The Story of Joseph**

### **a. Joseph's Dream**

The Joseph story in the Genesis is a continuation of the story of Jacob. It is related to the beginning of Chapter 37 that his descendents will be listed. The story is dealt in a greater length than in the Quran, and whereas the Qur'an ends the story with the arrival of Jacob's family in Egypt, the Genesis goes on to narrate the death of Jacob seventeen years after his arrival in Egypt and of Joseph at the age of 110. From the beginning, the story in the Genesis gives the impression of containing a strong element of the chronicle.

Joseph's exact age and his brothers with whom he feed the flock are specified (Genesis 37:1-2). Mentioning the exact name, precise time, locations and quantities is a prominent feature of the story-telling in the Genesis, but it absent in the Qur'an, which concentrates instead of the bold outline of events and the lessons to be drawn from them.

Joseph then tells his brothers about his dream. The Genesis mentions two dreams. The one is about the sheaves which are gathered and bowed before him, and the other is about the sun, moon and eleven stars that bowed to him. Upon listening to the dream, Jacob rebukes his favorite son for not conducting himself properly towards his parents and older brothers (Genesis 37:5-11). It is not clear from the Genesis whether Jacob can interpret the dream or not, or if he is aware of the brother's hatred towards Joseph. Or,

he might be know the meaning of the dream but conceals it from Joseph's older brothers by pretending to rebuke him (Ginzberg, 1998: 9).

The story of Joseph in the Qur'an begins with the dream, which is in fact a preview of the story. Jacob's reaction is to rejoice the dream, seeing that God will perfect His favor upon him as He perfected it on his father Isaac and Abraham. Realizing its significance and clearly aware of the brothers' jealousy and ill feeling towards Joseph, he advises him not to tell his brothers about it (Qur'an 12:4-6). Since the main objective of story-telling in the Qur'an is to strengthen the hearts of the believers, right at the beginning we have been given a forecast of eventual good that presented in a brief symbolic form and leaves the whole story still to be told.

### **The Brothers' Plot Against Joseph**

Genesis gives three reasons for the brothers' hatred of Joseph (Genesis 37:2-5). First, he brings bad report of them to their father. Second, Jacob's favoritism to him, and third, Joseph dreams. It is only the second reason which have been mentioned in the Qur'an, but Jacob is not said directly to have shown favoritism to him. Rather it was the brothers who conceived it so (Qur'an 12:7).

In spite of the terrible harm, the brothers are about what to do to Joseph, Jacob is pictured in the Genesis which having no suspicious of their ill-feeling. Even, he who takes the initiative for sending him to see whether his brothers and the flock are all right (Genesis 37:12-14). The Genesis also gives much detail in tracing Joseph's movements on his way to his brothers until he found them in Dothan (Genesis 37:15-17). In the Qur'an, suggestion that Joseph should be joint them to comes from the brothers, and Jacob reluctantly agrees because he is aware of the brothers' attitude to Joseph (Qur'an 12:11-14).

In the Genesis it was told that after throwing Joseph down to the well, the brothers convinced their father that Joseph is devoured by the wolf, and Jacob as volunteers the explanation of the wolf, believed that Joseph is

gone forever (Genesis 37:31-34). In the Qur'an, Jacob does not appear to be convinced by the wolf story. He knows that the brothers are making up the wolf story, perspicaciously seeing that the stained shirt is not torn (Qur'an 12:18), and Jacob never loses his faith that the grace of God may one day bring Joseph back (Qur'an 12:84-87).

#### b. Joseph in Potiphar's House

The Genesis Chapter 39 resumes the story of Joseph being sold into Egypt. The Genesis mentions the buyer who is identified as Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward. In contrast to the Qur'an, where reference to God's care of Joseph is constant in all situations, we find for the first time in the story where the Genesis refers to God's grace towards Joseph (Genesis 39:3-4). This is not surprising, because what is "the most striking and, in fact, unique of the Genesis is the secularist complexion of its narrative. There are no miraculous or supernatural elements, no divine revelation are experienced by Joseph" (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971: 209).

However, as a result of Potiphar's wife's attempts to seduce him, Joseph was destined to go through another ordeal. The Genesis gives a detailed account of the deception of Potiphar's wife, and the wicked allegation to her husband, which prompts him to throw Joseph into prison. In contrast to the story in Genesis where Joseph left his garment in Potiphar's wife's hand and fled (Genesis 39:12), the Qur'an mentions that Joseph's shirt was torn from behind, a proof that he tried to escape from her and she had tried to get hold of him when he was fleeing (Qur'an 12:25-26). Joseph's loyalty to his master is clear in both scriptures. However, the Qur'an tells us that he would have succumbed to the seduction were he not "see the proof of his Lord." Both Jewish and Islamic traditions provide us with several different stories about the "sign of God" that prevents Joseph from complying with the wish of his mistress. Both traditions mention that the sign could be the image of his mother Rachel, or that of his aunt Leah, or that of his father Jacob (Ginzberg, 1998: 53). After the incident in Potiphar's house, the Qur'an

relates that certain women in the city mocked the noble's wife for soliciting her slave-boy, after which she invites them to a meal and presents Joseph to them. So enraptured by his beauty, they cut their finger with their knife unconsciously (Qur'an 12:30-31).

The Qur'an tells us that when Joseph is threatened with imprisonment if he does not give in to her mistress' lure, he prefers prison to what she calls him to (Qur'an 12:33). The Genesis relates to the chief jailer which is puts in Joseph's charge all the prisoners. The two scriptures agree that Joseph meets two prisoners, who has been happened to be the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt (Genesis 40:1 and Qur'an 12:36). Both of them have similar dreams and ask Joseph to interpret their dream. In this stage of the story, there is a difference in emphasis between the Genesis and the Qur'an. While the Joseph in Genesis only replies in briefly when the two prisoners asks him to interpret their dream (Genesis 40:8), the Joseph in the Qur'an gives lengthy statements (Qur'an 12:37-40).

### **c. Joseph's Beauty**

The Genesis tells us that Joseph was "well built and handsome." Surah 12 vividly dramatizes Yusuf's beauty. In the Qur'an, not only Potiphar's wife, but also, the "women of the city" are smitten with his beauty. Invited by Potiphar's wife to attends a banquet at which she plans to have Joseph appears, each woman was given a knife and some fruit. When they see Joseph "They are so admired by him that they cut their hands, saying 'This is no mortal; he is no other but a noble angle'" (Qur'an 12:31).

Legend in both the Jewish and the Islamic traditions embellish the handsomeness of Joseph and seems like to outdo each other in extolling the uniqueness of his appearance and its compelling appeal. Though other attributes of Joseph are emphasized in these legends, such as his intelligence, piety, and chastity, it is his handsomeness that is most often highlighted. In Tabari's History the chapter of Joseph opens in this way, "Jacob's son Joseph had, like his mother, more beauty than any other human being," ( Brinner,

1987: 148) and al-Tha'labi, quoting Wahb ibn Munabbih, tells us that Yusuf had nine-tenth of the world's beauty (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 109). It just like, if there is competition within folkloric material, and each author attempts to outdo the other in extolling Joseph's charms.

We may propose some questions regards to Joseph's beauty, "in what way was Joseph 'well built and handsome'?" Where did these good looks come from? Did they appeared suddenly in the family or were they inherited? To these questions, we may find the answer from Biblical text. The phrase used to describe Joseph is also used of his mother Rachel, therefore he both resemble her and was equal in beauty. Al-Tha'labi also makes the same connection to Rachel. Al-Tha'labi elaborates upon this genealogy of good looks, tracing the family's beauty through Isaac and his mother Sarah. Sarah inherited her beauty from her grandmother, Eve (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 109). Sarah's beauty is alluded to a number of times in Genesis. In the Genesis 12 and 20 her beauty attracts the attentions of the local king.

Islamic sources praise Joseph's face. It is often compared with the moon. This depiction found in the accounts of Muhammad's "night journey" (mi'rāj, the ascension to heaven). In this journey, Gabriel takes the Prophet through the seven heavens, and each heaven, they meet one of the earlier messengers of God. In al-Tha'labi's account, Muhammad is astounded by Yusuf's beauty and Gabriel asks to the Prophet about him, in which he answers that his appearance is like the full moon (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 108). A composite portrait on Joseph is presented by al-Tha'labi in the name of Ka'b al-Ahbār:

Yusuf was light skinned. He had a beautiful face, curly hair and large eyes. He was of medium build, his arms and legs were muscular, his stomach "hungry" of flat. He had a hooked nose, and a small navel. The black mole on his right cheek was an ornament to his face, and between his eyes there was a spot white as the full moon. His eyelashes were like the feathers of an eagle, and when he smiled the light flashed from his teeth. When Yusuf spoke rays of light beamed from between his lips. No one can fully describe Yusuf (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 109).



#### **d. Pharaoh's Dream**

The story of the prisoners' dreams and Pharaoh's dream told in the Qur'an only briefly, while in Genesis the story of Pharaoh's dream takes 32 verses (Genesis 41:1-32). The dream, interpretation, and solution are the same in both scriptures (Qur'an 12:43-49 and Genesis 41:1-32), but the order of events differs. Joseph considered it important to declare innocent of the accusation made by Potiphar's wife. She confesses her misdeeds and declares his truthfulness (Qur'an 12:50-53). Only after he declares himself innocent, he goes to meet Pharaoh. Unlike the Qur'an, the Genesis mentions that Joseph shaves and changes his clothes before appearing in front of Pharaoh (Genesis 21:14).

It is interesting to note that there is a consistent tendency in Genesis to put Joseph in charge of everything wherever he goes after he is sold to Potiphar. Therefore, we find that Potiphar "made him overseer over his house and all that he had he put into Joseph's hand" (Genesis 39:4, 8). Quite similar things also happens in prison (Genesis 39:22-23). Then, when he meets Pharaoh, the latter says that the first will be made second in command only to the Pharaoh (Genesis 41-44). In the Qur'an, we do not find such tendency.

#### **e. Joseph in Charge of the Storehouse**

The two scriptures agree in reporting that when the brothers come before Joseph, he recognizes them but does not declared himself to them, and asks them to bring the youngest brother for him to see. However, in Genesis Joseph accuses them of spying and then keeping Simeon in prison as security for their returned with Benjamin (Genesis 32:16-24). In contrast, in the Qur'an Joseph have been treats them generously and persuasively (Qur'an 12:59-60). This is keeping with the general picture of Joseph in the Qur'an as a pleasant, gentle, and kind man. Nevertheless, the Genesis presents a very touching situation on personal level, when Joseph turns himself and weeps after his brothers recognize their guilt in regard to the young Joseph (Genesis 42:24).

Both texts (Genesis 42:39-43:14 and Qur'an 12:63) shown the brothers pleading hard with Jacob to send Benjamin. In the Qur'an, Jacob makes them promise in the name of God to bring him back safe, and he advises them not to enter Egypt through one gate together. In Genesis, Jacob asks them to take a present to the man in charge of the storehouse (Genesis 43:11).

### **The Reconciliation**

In the Qur'an, Joseph meets and embraces his brother, Benjamin, and says to him, "I am your brother. Do not grieve at what they did" (Qur'an 12:69). In Genesis, this declaration only comes during the lunch (Genesis 43:30). Both texts also speaks of the placing of the goblet in Benjamin's bag as a device to keep him in Egypt (Genesis 44:2 and Qur'an 12:70). In Genesis, the apprehension of Joseph's brothers who considered themselves strangers in the house of a high official of a foreign land is touchingly expressed in their fear that they will be made slaves as punishment to the theft of the goblet. In Genesis we also have a very moving speech of Judah before Joseph in the aftermath of the capture of Benjamin for the theft of the goblet (Genesis 44:30). At this point, Joseph declares himself to his brothers and reconciliation takes place (Genesis 45:1-14).

In the Qur'an, the reconciliation is delayed. The brothers go back to Jacob without Benjamin and the eldest brother. Jacob's grief increases, but he never loses faith in God's grace, saying, "God may bring them all to me. He alone is all-knowing and wise" (Qur'an 12:83), and he tells them, "Go, my sons, and seek news of Joseph and his brother. Do not despair of God's spirit. None but unbelievers despair of God's spirit" (Qur'an 12:87). They go back to Joseph more distressed than before, and asks Joseph to be charitable to them. It is at this point that Joseph declares himself and reconciliation to takes place (Qur'an 12:88-92). The Joseph asks them to take his shirt to his father and cast it over his face to recover his sight. He also asks them to return to Egypt with all Jacob's house (Qur'an 12:93). In the Genesis, God tells Jacob in a dream to go to Egypt and tells him that Joseph's hand will

be put upon his eyes (Genesis 46:4).

In the Qur'an, Jacob always has faith that Joseph is alive and that his dream will be realized, therefore he shown no apprehension to going to Egypt. In Genesis, where he is convinced from the beginning that Joseph has been devoured by a wolf, when he told that Joseph is alive, his heart fainted because he does not believes the news (Genesis 45:26). Genesis also gives details of the carriages sent by Pharaoh to carry of Jacob and his household to Egypt, and provides a full list of 70 names of people Jacob brought into Egypt (Genesis 46:8-27).

### **The Fulfillment of Joseph's Dream**

In the Qur'an, Joseph provides a home for his parents, and raises his parents high on the dais, and his parents and brothers all bow down to him and he said to his father, "This is the fulfillment of my dream" (Qur'an 12:100). In Genesis, only ten brothers bow to Joseph when they come for the first time to buy corn (Genesis 42:6), therefore the dream seem to be unfulfilled. However, both scriptures agrees on the essence of Joseph's story that the evil act committed against with him turns out eventually to his advantage and, through him, to the advantage of Jacob and his wife, as well as all his children (Genesis 50:18 and Qur'an 12:100). However, in the Qur'an, the story ends with the arrival of Joseph's family in Egypt, whereas the story in Genesis continues until Joseph dies at the age of one hundred and ten (Genesis 50:26).

To conclude this part, it is can be safely stated that all these differences between the two narratives, as well as the similarities, are largely consistent with their different purpose, natures and setting. While the Hebrew Bible is a continuous, extended of historical account, the Qur'an contains very little narrated story, and is disjunctive book of lessons, warnings, instructions and exhortations. The two narratives also compared in other ways. Their shapes are different. The Biblical story flows from one stage in Joseph's life to another; the Qur'anic story is self-contained, enclosed by the prediction of the initial dream's meaning and its fulfillment.

## The Importance of Joseph Story

According to McCarter, the prominence of Joseph in the biblical narrative must be, at least in part, a reflection of the eminence of "the house of Joseph" at the end of the settlement period (about 1000 B.C.E.) and the continuing historical importance of the Manasseh-Ephraim region (McCarter, 1999: 28). Scholars believed that the long story about Joseph and his family in Genesis originated independently of the other patriarchal narratives. The story was probably passed down orally among the inhabitants of the region around Shechem and Dothan. Many scholars believed that the events described in the story Joseph have an ultimate basis in historical fact. However, even if the general outline of the Joseph story is based on the life of a historical individual, it is unlikely that much of the information found in Genesis is historically factual. The biblical Joseph story has more in common with a historical romance than a work of history, and its carefully planned story line is fashioned from narrative motifs that were widespread in the literature and folklore of the ancient Near East (McCarter, 1999: 28).

The Joseph Story (Genesis 37-50) is the Bible's longest narrative devoted to one person that comprises of thirteen chapters with a total of 391 verses. Throughout the last quarter of the Genesis we never lose sight of Joseph as the central figure of the narrative. It is in this spirit that Genesis Rabbah, the sixth century C.E. compilation of Jewish legends, interprets the opening of the story in the Genesis 37:2, "Such then is the line of Jacob, Joseph" as follows, "the following events transpired only on Joseph's merit." For the Rabbinic exegetes, this verse opens a new epoch in Hebrew history, the epoch of Joseph (Goldman, 1995: 1). This narrative tells the story of Joseph and his brothers from the time that Joseph was seventeen until his demise at the age of one hundred and one. Joseph's adventure in Egypt, which culminates in his rise to stewardship over the country, will brings his brother to him. Their tribulations in Egypt culminate in Joseph's reunion with his father and the settlement of all of Jacob's family in the Land of Goshen. Jacob's deathbed blessing to his children and grandchildren signal the closure of the Patriarchal period. The Genesis ends with Jacob's burial in Canaan and Joseph's death and burial in Egypt.

While the nineteenth and early twentieth century Biblical scholarship focused on the source analysis of the narrative, contemporary scholarship has paid more attention to the literary and folkloric aspects of the story. According to Donald Redford, all commentators, no matter of how far they diverge on the subject of its origins, are unanimous in their judgments that the Joseph story is a masterpiece of story-telling, perhaps unequaled in Biblical literature (Redford, 1970: 66). Modern biblical and literary critics were not the first readers to comment on the unique qualities of Joseph story. The testimony of the story's unity and uniqueness can be seen through the elaboration and embellishment that the tale elicited. Redford maintains that one needs only investigate the extent to which the Joseph story itself occurs in Midras and paraphrase in the later literature of the East to learn that it rapidly became one of the most popular of all biblical tales (Redford, 1970: 66).

Although we are reminded that there is a divine plan behind the unfolding events (Genesis 45: 5-8), the story can be read and enjoy without paying full of attentions to this theological element. This "secularity complexion" provides a sharp contrast to the tales of Jacob, and makes the Joseph story eligible for cultural borrowing on a grand scale. The universal aspects of the tale, such as a father's love for the son of his late beloved wife, his brother's jealousy, his descent into slavery and triumph over it, and the temptation of the master's wife, had broad appeal. Cultures that did not share the theology and history of Ancient Israel could share in the richness inherent in the story (Goldman, 1995: 3). It is this non-theological bent, combined with the timelessness of the story, that ties it to analogous literary forms in Middle Egyptian literature. Stories with affinities to the Joseph story, like "The Tale of Two Brothers" and "Romance of Sinuhe," are literature composed for enjoyment, without any religious motive (Goldman, 1995: 3).

The fact that the long sections of the Genesis is devoted to Joseph narratives leads many scholars believed it as a unified tale. The Joseph story is not a collection of isolated and fragmentary incidents. The unity of the Joseph narratives thus poses a methodological problem to proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis, the nineteenth century theory that posits four textual

sources for the later redacted text of the Hebrew Bible (Goldman, 1995: 4). This view is exemplified in the remarks of G. von Rad that:

The story of Joseph ... apart from unimportant sections from the Priestly source, is an artful composition from the representations of the sources J and E. Apparently, both documents contained a story of Joseph. The redactor combined them with each other in such a way that he inserted extensive sections of the Elohist parallel version into the Yahwistic story of Joseph and thus created an even richer narrative. In any case, the gain from this combination of sources is incomparably greater than the loss (Rad, 1961: 342-343).

Whatever an individual scholar's view of the sources of the narrative, the pivotal role of the Joseph story in the unfolding history of Israel is recognized by both the early Rabbinic texts and the modern critics (Goldman, 1995: 6). Joseph is considered the link between Canaan and Egypt, responsible in some manner for the descent into Egypt. Genesis Rabbah also highlights the centrality of Joseph story and sees Joseph's merit as pivotal in Hebrew history and in accounting for miraculous events in Hebrew history. Accordingly, this history was held on abeyance, awaiting Joseph's appearance. It is not only human history, but also the intervention of God in the natural order (Goldman, 1995: 6).

In the Qur'an, the Twelfth Surah is the only one of the lengthy chapters which develops a single theme. Unlike the other Surah in the Qur'an, the unity of the theme's treatment indicates that the Twelfth Surah is not a composite (Stern, 1985: 193). Thus both the length and unity of the two Joseph stories, in the Genesis and the Qur'an, are unusual within their respective scriptural canons. However, since the nature of Qur'anic narrative is not chronological, we cannot assign Surah 12 the pivotal historical position as the Joseph story in the Bible is. The Qur'an seems to assumed a prior knowledge of the basics of sacred history. The stories it recounts come not as consecutive narratives but rather in the form of reminders of episodes which are often presumed to be known to audience, as if he who did not know the story should asks someone to tells it to him before approaching the Qur'an's commentary on it (Hudgso, 1974: 184). According to Stern, personalities from biblical tradition circulated freely in pagan Arabia and they had become a parts of the folkloristic tradition of the Hijaz. When

the Qur'an mentions of biblical figures and tells their lives, his audience already knows something of them (Stern, 1985: 193). In his introductory remarks to the Surah 12, Abdullah Yusuf Ali notes that for the parable all that is necessary to know about Joseph is that he was one of the chosen ones of God. He states that for the story it is necessary to set down a few more detailed, after which he mentioned the genealogy of Joseph (Ali, 1964: 546). Thus, the above views affirm that the Surah 12 presupposes knowledge of pre-existing materials.

One of the unique functions of the Surah 12 in the Qur'an is its teaching narrative. This purpose is central to the understanding of the nature of Surah Yusuf. Comparing with the Biblical and Qur'anic narratives, M. R. Waldman noted that:

When one looks at the place of each story within its entire work, the differences are striking. Joseph is the subject of one of many teaching stories, albeit one of the longest, most detailed, and most colorful. Without it, however, the Qur'an would be still make sense. And without the Qur'an, the Surah of Joseph could still be read on its own, decontextualized as it is. For the Bible, however, the story of Joseph is essential. In the Bible, the telling of the Joseph story is an indispensable step in the unfolding of God's divine plan and manipulation of history to ensure the future of the Hebrews. Consequently, the figure of God seems somewhat more distant in the Biblical story, less concentrated on a relationship with Joseph and more involved with the lives of all the many characters, whereas in the Qur'an, God interferes with and guides His messenger constantly, the other characters remaining more shadowy and less clearly defined (Waldman, 1985: 5).

The Biblical themes found in the Qur'an are not intended to constitute a record of sacred history. Their function is didactic, and they are addressed, purposively, to Muhammad's people. The story of Joseph also serves as a teaching parable with the Prophet Muhammad which is illustrates his triumph over opposition to his mission and message. Stern points out that during the late Meccan period, Joseph became a relevant and significant model for Muhammad. Likes Joseph, Muhammad has to leave his home to fulfill his destiny elsewhere (Stern, 1985: 202).

It is due to the lesson concealed in it, the Surah 12 is considered with "the best of all tales" (*ahsan al-qasas*). The "superior" narrative qualities of Surah Yusuf, in comparison with that in Genesis, are advanced by Muslim polemicists as an argument for the superiority of Islamic revelation. Commenting on the Qur'anic phrase "the best of all tales," al-Tha'labi quotes a tradition in which some of the companions of the Prophet asked Salman al-Fārisi about the best things in the Torah. This incident followed by the revelation to Muhammad that Surah Yusuf is the best of all tales and superior to the story in the Torah (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 107). Al-Tha'labi also notes that Surah Yusuf is the most beautiful tale because of the lesson concealed in it, on accounts of Yusuf's generosity and its wealth of matter, in which prophets, angels, devils, jinn, men, animals, birds, rulers, and subjects play a part (al-Tha'labi, 1985: 107).

### **Conclusion**

It is safe to say that the Genesis story is part of a history. It continues the story of the patriarch of the family of Abraham and follows the story of Esau and the early story of Jacob. The focus of attention in the Genesis narrative is the nobility of Joseph's character and the salvation that came through suffering, placing the incidents in the concatenation of events that led to the migration of the Israelites to Egypt, their enslavement, and redemption (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971: 203). We see how this national historical aspect colors the biblical version and makes it different from that of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, the story is not part of a continuous history. It does not follow on from Surah 11; ends before the end of Surah 12, and does not continue in Surah 13. Like others similar stories in the Qur'an, Joseph's story is aimed to strengthen the faith of the Prophet and the believers and gives them guidance.



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