



مجلة كلية التربية



# **"The Best of Narratives": A Literary Reading of the Spatiotemporal Leaps in Surat Yusuf (Joseph)**

**By**

**Prof. Anwar Abdelkaream Elsayed**

Professor of English Literature,  
King Faisal University, KSA.

"أحسن القصص": قراءة أدبية للقفزات المكانية والزمانية في سورة

يوسف

الأستاذ الدكتور/ أنور عبد الكريم السيد عطية

أستاذ الأدب الانجليزي بجامعة الملك فيصل

المملكة العربية السعودية

"أحسن القصص": قراءة أدبية للقفزات المكانية والزمانية في سورة يوسف

### مستخلص

يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على سورة يوسف كأحسن القصص وذلك بتطبيق معايير الرواية الحديثة عليها حيث أظهر البحث كيف أن السورة تنطبق عليها تلك المعايير بشكل مثالي وغير مسبوق. علاوة على ذلك فالبحث يؤكد بشكل لا يدع مجالاً للشك بأن القفزات المكانية والزمانية محاكاة بطريقة غاية في الروعة والسلاسة وأن الراوي لا يقف كثيراً عند الوصف التفصيلي للاماكن لأنه يركز على عملية السرد بشكل رئيسي. أضف الى ذلك فالقفزات الزمانية تتناسب بشكل لطيف لا يفسد التدفق السلس للمتابعات الزمنية ومن ثم يمنع أي إحساس بالملل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أحسن القصص - سورة يوسف - القفزات المكانية الزمانية

**The Best of Narratives": A Literary Reading  
of the Spatiotemporal Leaps  
in Surat Yusuf (Joseph)**

**Abstract**

This paper sheds light on Surat Yusuf as "the best of narratives" by applying the criteria of modern novel to it. It shows that the Surah meets all the criteria in unprecedented and unsurpassed ways. Moreover, it reveals how the spatiotemporal leaps are perfectly schemed in what can be called an ideal cinematic scenario. Furthermore, the transitions among places are smooth and logical, following the linear movements in the story. Further still, any descriptive details about the different places are not provided simply because they are not as important as the act of recounting itself. In addition, the temporal leaps fluctuate in a fine way which does not create any distortion in the flow of time sequence or allow any kind of boredom.

**KeyWords:** the best of narratives– Surat Yusuf–  
Spatiotemporal leaps

This paper tries to show how Surat Yusuf is "the best of narratives" by applying the elements of modern novel to it, though the researcher assures that this Surah is never meant to be a "novel." Beside its aesthetic value, it has much greater religious morals behind it. The paper also traces the significance of the spatial and temporal leaps in Surat Yusuf, which have been roughly divided by the researcher into twenty spatial leaps and twenty-four temporal ones. Yet when discussed, these leaps are much less abridged for brevity reasons. The paper further focuses on places and times explicitly mentioned in Surat Yusuf and not in any other source falling outside the scope of the Surah. The researcher, however, seeks to find information that helps find names of places and exact times, if possible. Noteworthy to mention that it is unnecessary to tell the story in details because it is known to anyone who could have read the Holy Quran. Furthermore, the paper depends on a close textual reading of the Surah with the aim of showing the harmony between the spatial leaps and the temporal gaps.

Reading this Surah from a literary perspective reveals how it combines the best elements of a modern novel, though it was revealed almost fourteen and half centuries ago, and of course much earlier than the appearance of any modern novel – the first of its genre is held to be in the eighteenth century. In the opening verses of the Surah, Allah (God) addresses His Prophet Mohammed saying: "We will recount to *you* the best of narratives in what We have revealed to *you* of this Qur'ān, and indeed prior to it *you* were among those who are unaware [of it]. (2) 1 In addition, the Arabic phrase "ahsanu alkassas" (the best of narratives) could also mean that the story has the best effect on readers and listeners

due to its great moral lessons. The following paragraphs show how the Surah presents the elements of modern novel at their highest excellence.

First, the story of Prophet Yusuf falls within **the boundary of one Surah**, unlike the story of Moses, for instance, which falls in scattered snapshots in more than twenty different Surahs (plural of Surah) of the Holy Quran. Such a fact testifies to the tight organic unity of the story, its significance, completion and unsurpassed excellence. It is also said that the Surah was revealed in a single sitting to answer a tough question posed by the Jews to Prophet Mohammed: "Why did the Israelites go to Egypt?" Knowing that neither Arabs nor the Prophet had prior knowledge of the story because it was not mentioned in their traditions, the Jews challenged Mohammed with that question. In support of His Messenger, Allah has revealed the whole story to Him in one sitting to answer the Jews' question on the spot and expose their arrogance. Revealed as both a warning and a reward, Allah decrees that He "does not further the schemes of the treacherous." (52) Just as Yusuf receives a bad treatment at the hands of His brothers, so does the Prophet at the hands of His kinsmen of Quraysh. In the same way, just as Yusuf's brothers are punished, so will the unbelievers be. Moreover, as Joseph is rewarded for all His virtues, so is Prophet Mohammed for His greater ones. Allah says: "We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish, and We do not waste the reward of the virtuous." (56) Hence, though complete in itself, the story also symbolizes other Qur'anic stories, since all of them are meant to teach and moralize.

Second, **setting (place)**: the events of the story do not take place in one site, but in different ones, moving from Badiya (desert) in Canaan, Palestine, where Yacoub

(Jacob) lived, to Egypt, where Yusuf travelled and lived. The move is never one way, but it is usually to and fro. For Edward (Ted) Relph, such a "strong sense of place, can make the difference between you enjoying a piece of writing and being fully immersed in it." (np) In fact, such place leaps give the impression of a good scenario in a modern movie. They also prepare the readers for the mood of the story, the complications of the plot and the development of the characters in a way that makes the story more interesting, attractive and believable

**Time:** The Surah does not exactly tell when Yusuf was born or at what age He saw the dream. However, according to scholars of the Bible, Yusuf was born around 906 B.C. and was between eleven to seventeen when he was thrown into the well. He was at His late thirties when His parents came to Egypt. (Genesis 37) So this story falls within the span of almost twenty-five years or so. The time before seeing the dream and the time after the family reunion in Egypt are not handled in the story because, according to the narrator, they must be of much less importance. That period in between is the one that really witnesses Yusuf's suffering and success; it is the one that carries the real dramatic tension of the story. In addition, this period is concerned with "psychological or social problems – the significance of the characters in themselves, the theme of change, and the recurrent struggle to shape and control the forces controlling life." (Mateusz Brodowicz, np)

Third, **themes:** This story handles many themes, like jealousy, envy, filial ingratitude, human vulnerability, seduction vs chastity, patience, trust vs betrayal, resourcefulness, repentance and forgiveness. Nonetheless, the door is open for other suggested themes. Mustansir Mir

affirms that the main theme of this story is the inexorable fulfillment of divine purposes. He contends, "The story of Joseph is presented as a dramatic vindication of the thesis that God is dominant and His purposes are inevitably fulfilled." (5) Mir suggests another controversial theme which is the relationship between the divine decree and human freedom. He illustrates: "while the scheme of existence is ultimately determined by God, this does not absolve man of the responsibility of taking moral initiative. Jacob has complete trust in God, and yet he realizes that he must make use of his judgment and discretion." (9) Such an infinite multiplicity of themes makes the story more complicated and hence more interesting.

Fourth, **Plot**: the events of this story are very tightly knit. The story mainly follows a chronological order, tracing the life story of Yusuf from his early years up to his empowerment as the king's confidante – a "Minister of Finance and Provisions" in the modern sense of the title. However, flash backs can be also traced, especially when Yusuf's brothers allude to His "act of stealing" and also when Yusuf reminds His family of the blessings of Allah on all of them (His getting out of the prison and their coming to Him from Badiya to the city where He lived.) Such nonlinear moves add to the story's attractive nature, and hence its being "the best of narratives". In fact, the events are so closely related that if just one event is omitted, the whole story will be badly affected, if not totally destroyed. It is noteworthy that the story has just one main plot, without subplots. This adds to the condensation of dramatic tension.

The plot further follows a logical development of causality. Yusuf's distinct talents and virtues attract His father's attention to Him, yet they also arouse His brothers'



jealousy and envy. Hence, the credulous nature of Yacoub is met with the evil side within the brothers, who plot against their brother. Moreover, Yusuf's beauty arouses Zulaykha's sexual attraction, and so she seduces Him. When He refuses her temptations, he is imprisoned. He is released from the prison because He manages to interpret the dream of the king. Owing to His honesty, wisdom and knowledge, Yusuf becomes the king's confidante. The trade of Yusuf's brothers in Egypt is the means through which the whole family is reunited. Thus, the plot is built on a series of cause and effect interconnected relationships.

Mir notices that the plot is brilliantly based on parallels. In Canaan, Yusuf is thrown into a well; in Egypt into a prison. In both cases he is punished for crimes he has not committed. Further, Yusuf's brothers take Him out of home with ill intentions, while they take Yusuf's brother Benjamin with good intentions. Furthermore, they try to win their father's love, while Zulaykha tries to win Yusuf's heart. In both cases, the brothers and Zulaykha use intrigues to achieve their goals. Further still, the brothers have secret gatherings: once to get rid of Yusuf and another time to save their brother Benjamin and themselves as well. (3) Such parallels, in fact, effectively aggrandize the dramatic acuteness of the story and lead to its supreme quality and interest.

Fifth, **structure**: the story is structured in a way that reflects its beauty and excellence. It begins with Yusuf's dream, his brothers' plot against Him, the seduction He is exposed to by Zulaykha as well as some Egyptian ladies, His imprisonment, the King's dream and the release of Yusuf from the prison after interpreting it, the empowering of Yusuf, the meeting with His brothers and parents and finally the fulfillment of His dream when the eleven

brothers (planets) and His parents (the sun and the moon) prostrate to him in respect. Thus, the story runs a full circle, and what begins with a dream ends with its fulfillment. However, at the end of the surah, Allah reveals the real moral lessons behind it when He says: "Yet most people will not have faith, however eager *you* should be." (103) Allah adds: "There is certainly a moral in their accounts for those who possess intellect. This [Qur'ān] is not a fabricated discourse; rather it is a confirmation of what was [revealed] before it, and an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith. (111)

Sixth, **characterization**: the characters in this story are magnificently drawn. All of them have their realistic, individual human sides. Almost no one of them remains the same, except, perhaps, Yacoub Whose virtues, attitudes and reactions witness no real changes. The main character is of course Yusuf Whose name becomes the title of the Surah. Also, the events of the story mainly rotate round Him, whether He is present in the scene or not. Yusuf is a shy and modest young boy, a chaste, honorable and respectful adult, a wise, resourceful and all-knowing statesman, a humble, tolerant and benevolent son and brother. Being the subject of His brothers' envy and the sexual fascination of Zulaykha, Yusuf is severely tested, and He consequently undergoes many hopeless situations and hardships. Yet, he is supported by Allah's infinite divine powers, and He finally finds Himself "at the pinnacle of fame and power. The dominance of God has been established." (Mir 5)

Yacoub, though a Prophet with prophetic knowledge, has realistic human qualities. When He first appears in the story, He responds to Yusuf's dream by

asking Him not to inform His brothers so as not to arouse their envy and exasperate their jealousy. Recognizing His son's exceptional talents, the father is apprehensive of the dire consequences that might befall Yusuf. That is why He does not easily consent sending Him with them to the Badiya. As a fallible human being, it is He Who gives the clue to His sons about the idea of Yusuf being devoured by a wolf. And when they falsely accuse the wolf of that sham act, He knows that they have devised something malicious for their brother. However, He exercises unprecedented self-control and patience over the loss of His son. Pathetic as it appears, He loses His eye sight because of his tremendous grief and shedding of copious tears. His human side becomes manifest when He advises His sons, later in the story, not to enter Egypt in large groups or through one gate: He fears any probable envious eyes against them or any evil that may befall them. The depth of His human passion as a father appears when He perceives the smell of Yusuf when His sons come back from Egypt carrying Yusuf's shirt. Ecstatic over the good tiding of the shirt, He regains His eye sight. The peak of His ecstasy appears when He is reunited not only with Yusuf but also reconciled with all His other sons.

Representing various human dimensions, the other characters – the brothers, the caravan, Zulaykha, the king and the two inmates of the prison – have their roles in pushing the events of the story, though the scope here is not wide enough to discuss them in details. However, of the good things about the characters in general is that each one has his/her own unique usage of language. For example, the fatherly, enduring and patient Yacoub uses a tender and passionate language. Yusuf's language reveals much of His modesty, piety, gratitude, humility and

benevolence. The King, on the other hand, uses a language entailing a lot of orders and authority, as expected from a king. Yusuf's brothers often use a language that carries violence, plotting, accusation, though as human beings they also use one that expresses regret and repentance. The language of Zulaykha is seductive, aggressive, authoritative yet finally regretful.

Seventh, **style**: the style of the Surah reflects a wide range of rhetorical devices. For example, symbolism is widely used especially with regard to Yusuf's dream. The eleven planets, the sun and the moon symbolize His brothers, His father and His mother respectively. Beside its literal meaning, the wolf can also stand for the evil side within the human soul, one that is ready to devour and hurt. In the king's dream, the seven lean cows and the seven dry ears symbolize seven years of adversity and famine, while the seven fat cows and the seven green ears stand for seven years of abundance and welfare. Yusuf Himself, though fully recognized as an individual, further symbolizes other human virtues: honesty, integrity, honor, tolerance and humility, while Zulaykha represents feminine seductiveness and guile. Moreover, the Surah itself is symbolic of other didactic and moralizing stories in the Holy Quran.

The Surah also uses dramatic irony. For instance, when the brothers tell their father that the wolf ate Yusuf, it is only the credulous Yacoub Who may have believed that fabricated story, though the readers are assured that the wolf did not do that. Also, when Yacoub cautions Yusuf against telling His brothers about the dream for fear that they might plot against Him, it is Yusuf alone Who could not believe that His brothers could do that.

Foreshadowing is another rhetorical feature of the Surah. Yusuf's dream at the beginning foreshadows that event at the end of the story when Yusuf's family comes from Canaan to Egypt. In fulfillment of the dream, all the family members prostrate to him as a sign of respect, not of worship. Moreover, when plotting against Yusuf, the brothers suggest to throw Him into a well, anticipating that He might be picked up by a caravan, something that actually happens later. These clear examples of foreshadowing capture the readers' attention, emotionally prepare them for the big reveals, build dramatic tension, make the story more exciting and create suspense and coherence.

In his study entitled "Stylistic Phenomena of Surat Yusuf," Wissam M. Jassim traces many other stylistic features: deletion (omission), mention, delay (inversion), arrangement, the perfect precision in choosing words; verbs; prepositions and the ideal use of the passive voice as well as the definite and the indefinite articles. For example, in his discussion of how Allah precisely uses words in Surat Yusuf, Jassim contends, "it is noteworthy that no single word can be replaced by any of its synonyms since each one carries a distinct semantic significance." (3) (our translation) In fact, the scope is not wide enough to discuss such stylistic features in details. However, all the aspects of style mentioned above, and so many others of course, help make this story "the best of narratives."

Eighth, **conflict**: The conflict in this story is between Yusuf and his brothers on one hand and between Yacoub and His sons on the other hand. The first kind of conflict is set from the beginning of the story. When Yusuf tells His father about His dream, Yacoub tells His son not to tell His brothers about it for fear they might plot against Him.

After that encounter, Yusuf's brothers plot against Him by suggesting either to kill Him or cast Him in another land (expatriate him.) This conflict continues when the brothers accuse Yusuf of a theft though he was innocent. However, they are reconciled at the end when they know the truth about Yusuf and the nice treatment they receive from Him. On the other hand, there is another kind of conflict between Yacoub and His sons who accuse Him of bias and unjustified errors. Aware of the burning jealousy inside them, Yacoub tolerates it with "beautiful patience" and extreme endurance. The double-faced and intense conflict in this story dramatizes it and makes it more exciting and interesting for the readers.

Ninth, **point of view**: this story is narrated by a third person, Omniscient narrator identified as Allah Himself. It is He Who narrates everything with all candidness, clarity and Omniscience. He also introduces the direct speeches of other speakers in the form of dialogues without quotation marks. The subtle intermingling of the narrative with the dialogue is so perfectly woven that a casual reader feels a smooth transition between both. Usually, the narrator precedes the dialogue with a few introductory words that push the events forward. Then He gives room to the speakers to articulate their feelings and thoughts freely in the form of fine-framed dialogues. This creates a dramatic effect and sets limitations between the divine voice and human voices and deeds.

After the actual finale of the story at verse (101), and from there up to verse (111), where the Surah ends, the narrator takes time and space to pass judgments on the events and to decree the moral and religious lessons behind the story. He confirms that this story is revealed to, not fabricated by, Prophet Mohammed, stressing that Guidance

comes only from Him and not due to any other, for example, family, considerations. He further comments that the story is meant as "a reminder for all the nations." (104) Widening the scope, Allah the narrator confirms that the stories of other prophets in the Quran are all revealed to Prophet Mohammed, and that all of them aim at guiding people, terrifying the unbelievers and promising paradise to the good doers. In conclusion of the Surah, the narrator states: "There is certainly a moral in their [*prophets'*] accounts for those who possess intellect. This [Qur'ān] is not a fabricated discourse; rather it is a confirmation of what was [revealed] before it, and an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith. (111) (Italic ours)

After discussing the literary elements that may, as far the researcher upholds, testify to why Surat Yusuf is "the best of narratives," it is necessary to discuss the infinite, divine genius in manipulating the leaps in place and time in the Surah. Both are, in fact, so interrelated that they cannot be separated. Hence, the discussion of any of them entails that of the other. Prior to the beginning of the Qur'anic story, Yusuf used to live with His aunt Leah, as mentioned in the Bible. But as that period does not witness a real dramatic escalation, it is not mentioned in Surat Yusuf. And when the Quranic story opens, the first setting is naturally Canaan, Palestine, where Yusuf, then aging between eleven and seventeen, lives with His family. Unlike realistic novels, the descriptive details about the different places in this story are not provided at all simply because the **narrator finds them to be of no importance as compared to the act of recounting itself**. On the other hand, as will be seen, the temporal leaps, though vary in length, move in a subtle, evolving way which does not

create any distortion in the flow of time or allow any monotony.

It seems that there is a very short span of time between the secret plotting of Yusuf's brothers and their execution of the intrigue somewhere in the Badiya where they graze their flocks. That first leap of setting (place and time) is so subtle that a reader feels that there is nothing really missing. The following spatiotemporal leap is even subtler: Yusuf's brothers come back home in the evening, crying and carrying His shirt smeared with sham blood. This rather quick transition in place and time reflects the speed with which Yusuf' brothers plot and act, thus further exposing much of their envy and jealousy.

A few days pass since that last event when the scene changes and the readers find themselves in front of a well (jub) watching how a lad joyfully draws out a bucket at which Yusuf is clutching. The scene has vivid pictorial descriptions: the visual and the audio impulse are so clear that readers imagine they are watching a movie. The domination of /d/ and /g/ sounds in the Arabic words (in the Surah), and which are associated with the scene, indicates the suddenness of the discovery of Yusuf; meanwhile, the domination of the /s/ and /z/ sounds (in the Arabic words in the same scene) reflects the over joyous and noisy reactions of the caravan. When the narrator says, "And they sold him for a cheap price, a few dirhams" (20), He leaves the door open for guessing the identity of those who sell Him. Some interpreters think that the sellers are Yusuf's brothers themselves; others believe they are the servants of the caravan; others still affirm that they are the noblemen of the caravan. Leaving the identity unknown enriches the story and creates suspense and excitement.



The following space leap is wider; the narrator transports readers from the Badiya, Palestine to Potiphar's palace in Egypt. Likewise, the time leap covers the long time of the journey. No details are provided about that journey, since there is no significant event that could have pushed the plot forward. This denies any boring element about the story and adds to its beauty. No sooner are readers told about the nice reception and treatment of Yusuf at the palace than they are carried to His maturity. Though many years must have passed, the readers do not really miss anything. The dramatic tension reaches its peak when Zulaykha seduces Yusuf, and when she fails she accuses Him of "rape". The tension also soars up to its pinnacle when Yusuf desperately but successfully defends Himself. Despite acquitted of the sin at the hands of Zulaykha's relative witness, Yusuf is sent, nevertheless, to the jail after refusing to succumb to the other Egyptian ladies' seductions.

In the prison, another wider and longer spatiotemporal leap, Yusuf spends some years (around seven) for a crime He has not committed. During that period, He instructs prison inmates in the monotheistic teachings of His forefathers Abraham and Isaac: "O my prison mates! Are different masters better, or Allah, the One, the All-paramount? (39) He also shows a great talent at interpreting dreams, one that would carry His voice to the king outside and later release Him from the prison. Interpreting the king's dream of seeing "seven fat cows being devoured by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and [seven] others [that were] dry" and telling him of what to do (43), Yusuf is divinely empowered and made the king's confidante. Such details tell the readers many things about Yusuf's innate religiousness, dedication to the cause

of Allah, exceptional ability at dream interpretation and Allah's incessant support and unbreakable promise to Yusuf. Revealing the truth about her scheme, Zulaykha says: "Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth." (51) Seizing the opportunity, Yusuf promptly responds: "[I initiated] this [inquiry], that he [Potiphar] may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous." (52) Thus, the prison scene witnesses Yusuf's initial subjugation, yet it also witnesses His growing power, supreme elevation and long-lasting glory.

During the following seven years of famine (another longer time leap), Yusuf's brothers come to Egypt to trade in their goods for food. Older now by almost twenty years since they last met, Yusuf recognizes His brothers, but they fail to do so for age reasons. That very long time gap does not, however, obliterate Yusuf's negative memories of His brothers' betrayal, nor does it erase their jealousy of Him so far. At their first visit, He baits them by showing benevolence to them in order to bring their brother Benjamin the next time they come to Egypt: "When he had furnished them with their provision, he said, 'Bring me a brother that you have through your father. Do you not see that I give the full measure and that I am the best of hosts?'" (59) This is clear evidence of Yusuf's growing resourcefulness.

The journey back home to Palestine (a further spatiotemporal leap) does not carry important details to be mentioned in the story. When the brothers go home, they implore their father to send Benjamin (Yusuf's brother) with them the next time, and to their surprise they discover that their traded goods is returned to them in their

saddlebags, though they think they are denied it. Apprehensive of the evil that might befall Benjamin – as was the case with Yusuf before – the father takes a solemn pledge to His sons that they will surely bring him back unless they perish. And "when they had given him their [solemn] pledge, he said, 'Allah is witness over what we say.'" (66) This last situation shows Yacoub's passionate and fatherly feelings, yet it also shows His bias.

In a much more accelerated spatiotemporal leap, Yusuf's brothers, as advised by their father, enter Egypt from different gates: "When they entered whence their father had bidden them, it did not avail them anything against Allah, but only fulfilled a wish in Jacob's heart. Indeed, he had the knowledge of what We had taught him, but most people do not know." (68) Aside, Yusuf reveals His identity to Benjamin. His resourcefulness appears one more time when He surreptitiously puts the king's drinking cup into Benjamin's saddlebag. Then "a herald shouted: 'O [men of the] caravan! You are indeed thieves!'" (70) The brothers deny the theft and pass the judgment that he in whose saddlebag the cup is found deserves punishment. Now Yusuf, having a prior plan in mind to retain Benjamin with Him, searches their saddlebags first and brings the cup out of Benjamin's. The brothers beg Him to release their brother but in vain.

Convening secretly outside Yusuf's palace (a nearer and shorter spatiotemporal leap), the brothers worriedly discuss how to initiate this matter of Benjamin's detainment with their father. This situation shows a good human side in them since they are both worried about their brother and the pledge they have given to their father. Having no way out of this dilemma, they go home (a rather long spatiotemporal leap) and explain the situation to their

father, who reacts in a very sorrowful, miserable human manner: "And he turned away from them and said, 'Alas for Joseph!' His eyes had turned white with grief, and he choked with suppressed agony." (84) Their reaction, nevertheless, reveals suppressed envy and jealousy: "By Allah! You will go on remembering Joseph until you wreck your health or perish." (85). Such contradictory reactions reflect the complexity of their characters and hence their full humanity. And, so, the debate among the family members continues until Yacoub with utter fatherly love and deep faith orders them: "'Go, my sons, and look for Joseph and his brother, and do not despair of Allah's mercy. Indeed, no one despairs of Allah's mercy except the faithless lot.'" (87) Here, it is Yacoub Who pushes the plot further and spurs the next spatiotemporal leap.

Back to Yusuf's palace in Egypt, the brothers implore Him to show compassion to them and treat them generously. To their astonishment, Yusuf reveals His true identity to them, and they acknowledge their earlier misdeeds. As a noble and tolerant man, He promptly forgives them: "He said, 'There shall be no reproach on you today. Allah will forgive you, and He is the most merciful of the merciful.'" (92) He further asks them: "Take this shirt of mine, and cast it upon my father's face; he will regain his sight, and bring me all your folks.'" (93) Being a prophet and son of a prophet, Yusuf is knowledgeable of what Allah has taught Him; He knows that the smell of His shirt would miraculously have its medical and psychological healing effect on His father, which actually comes true.

In the much-accelerated penultimate spatiotemporal leap, the brothers, now at home, beg their father to plead Allah to forgive their sins and wrongdoings. Asking for

forgiveness, in fact, testifies to the deep complexity of their humanity, the development of their characters and, hence, the beauty of the story. As a loving, forgiving and faithful father, Yacoub responds: "I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed, He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful." (98) No sooner do readers finish reading this verse than they are immediately transported to the final spatiotemporal leap, where all the family members meet Yusuf at His palace. At a moment of utter humility, Yusuf welcomes them all to Egypt, forgives His brothers and sets His parents close to Him upon the throne, acts that spur them to prostrate themselves before Him as a sign of showing respect and loyalty. Seizing the opportunity, Yusuf humbly "draws the curtains" and puts the finale of the story:

Father! This is the fulfillment of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true. He was certainly gracious to me when He brought me out of the prison and brought you over from the desert after that Satan had incited ill feeling between me and my brothers. Indeed, my Lord is all-attentive in bringing about what He wishes. Indeed, He is the All-knowing, the All-wise. (100)

Just as Yusuf, among many other speaking voices, is the first one to speak at the beginning of the story, it is also He Who speaks last. It is not surprising that the Surah is named after Him. Moreover, as the story begins with telling a dream, it also ends with its fulfillment and interpretation. Further, it is not a coincidence that the last words of Yusuf carry His acknowledgment of Allah's grace and blessings on Him: "My Lord! You have granted me a share in the kingdom, and taught me the interpretation of

dreams. Originator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and the Hereafter! Let my death be in submission [to You], and unite me with the Righteous. (101) These words further show Yusuf's deep faith in the divine providence, utter submission to Allah and true desire to be one of the righteous people.

As a sovereign narrator, Allah comments on the story at the end of the Surah just as He does at its beginning. Both the opening and the end of the Surah carry the divine confirmation that the Quran is an authentic revelation from Allah, and that it never contains fabricated annals or legendary stories. Miraculously revealed in the Arabic letters, the Quran challenges Arabs' knowledge, understanding and rhetoric. Also, both the opening and the end stress the human short-sightedness, powerlessness and lack of true knowledge in face of the infinite divine omniscience and omnipotence. The end in particular witnesses Allah's moralization that Surat Yusuf, proposed as and proven to be the best of narratives, is also symbolic of the miraculous beauty of all other Quranic stories. It further states that such stories are meant to intimidate and admonish the unbelievers, as well as give good tidings to the true believers. Furthermore, the Holy Quran as a whole is "an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith." (111)

In conclusion, the initial, divine, judgmental statement about Surat Yusuf as "the best of narrative" comes from the perfect-calculating Mind of Allah, since the Surah embodies all the elements that make it so. Applying the criteria of modern novel to it, this study has shown that the Surah meets all the requirements in unprecedented and unsurpassed ways. The study has also shown that the Surah has a tight organic unity, a clear-cut

setting of place and time, a multiplicity of themes, an idealistically-woven plot, a spotless structure, a perfect characterization, a multi-layered style, a fascinating conflict among characters and a point of view that subtly intermingles the third person's omniscient narration and the first person's crystal-clear, expressive dialogues. The harmonious integration of all these elements helps make Yusuf's story the best story ever recounted, simply because it is recounted by Allah himself.

The study has further revealed how the spatiotemporal leaps are perfectly schemed. First, the space leaps are carried out in what can be called an ideal cinematic scenario – to use modern terminology. The transitions among places are smooth and logical, following the linear movements in the story. In addition, descriptive details about the different places are not provided simply because they are not as important as the act of recounting itself. Second, the temporal leaps, though vary in length, fluctuate in a fine way which does not create any distortion in the flow of time sequence or allow any kind of boredom. It is noteworthy that the temporal leaps are rather slower at the beginning of the story, but they soon gain momentum and become more accelerated as the story approaches its finality. In addition, almost all time leaps are not exactly defined except twice: first, when Yusuf's brothers come back to their father telling Him about the sham news of the wolf that ate Yusuf, the narrator says that it is the "evening time." Second, the period which Yusuf spends in the prison is defined, according to the Arabic phrasing, as "several years." In the view of Quran interpreters, this period is very close to seven years. At the end, the researcher invites other literary studies to be conducted on Surat Yusuf

because it is infinitely open for more interpretations and new visions.

## Notes

Any other reference to the translation of the Quran is taken from [Al-Quran \(القرآن\) — Online Quran Project — Translation and Commentary. https://al-quran.info/#home](https://al-quran.info/#home) 21-8-2024. The numbers given are those of the verses.

### Works Cited

- Al-Quran (القرآن) — **Online Quran Project — Translation and Commentary.** <https://al-quran.info/#home> 21-8-2024.  
<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org> /9-9-2025.
- Brodowicz, Mateusz (2024). "The Symbolism of Time in Modern Novels" <https://aithor.com>. 14-9-2024.
- Jassim, Wissam M. (2024) "Stylistic Phenomena of Surat Yusuf," *Humanity and Natural Science Journal*. HNSJ, 2024, 5.  
<https://doi.org/10.53796/hnsj53/12>. 25-8-2024
- Mir, Mustansir. (1986) "The Quranic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes and Characters". *The Muslim World*. Vol. LXXVI January No. 1
- Relph, Edward. (2024) Placeness and Place <https://www.placeness.com/place-in-literature-various-interpretations/> 14-9-2024.