245339 - Commentary on the verse “Thus did We plan for Yoosuf” [Yoosuf 12:76] and what this plan brought of goodness and blessings to him and to his father and his brothers

the question

The other day, a question poped up.
It said that in Surah Yusuf Verses 70-77 that Nabi Yusuf (SubhanAllah) lied.
That there was deception and tampering with evidence in the process.
And that in Verse 76, Allah said...Thus did we plan for Yusuf (Joseph)...
That Allah planed a way for Yusuf to deceive and lie in order to get what he wanted since the brothers didnt actually take the cup.
Please I would like to know how to answer this dreadful claim as I have very little knowledge of the Al Quran.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, is the most truthful of speakers. He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And who is truer in statement than Allah?”

[an-Nisa’ 4:87]

“and whose words can be truer than those of Allah?”

[an-Nisa’ 4:122].

So it is not permissible to attribute any kind of lie to Allah, may He be exalted, for Allah is majestic,

exalted and holy, and He is far above any such thing. The Prophet of Allah Yoosuf (peace be upon him) was a Prophet and a siddeeq (one who is strong and true in faith); the word siddeeq is an intensive form of noun and comes from a root meaning true and sincere. ar-Raazi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Siddeeq is a word that describes anyone whose habit and custom is to be truthful. End quote.

Tafseer ar-Raazi (10/133).

Al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The siddeeq is the one whose actions confirm his words. End quote.

Tafseer al-Qurtubi (5/272)

Secondly:

Allah, may He be exalted, says in the story of Yoosuf (peace be upon him) and his brothers (interpretation of the meaning):

“So when he had furnished them forth with their provisions, he put the (golden) bowl into his brother’s bag, then a crier cried: ‘O you (in) the caravan! Surely, you are thieves!’

They, turning towards them, said: ‘What is it that you have missed?’

They said: ‘We have missed the (golden) bowl of the king and for him who produces it is (the reward of) a camel load; I will be bound by it.’

They said: ‘By Allah! Indeed you know that we came not to make mischief in the land, and we are no thieves!’

They (Yoosuf’s (Joseph) men) said: ‘What then shall be the penalty of him, if you are (proved to be) liars?’

They (Yoosuf’s (Joseph) brothers) said: ‘The penalty should be that he, in whose bag it is found,

should be held for the punishment (of the crime). Thus we punish the Zalimoon (wrong-doers, etc.)!'

So he began (the search) in their bags before the bag of his brother. Then he brought it out of his brother's bag. Thus did We plan for Yoosuf (Joseph). He could not take his brother by the law of the king (as a slave), except that Allah willed it. (So Allah made the brothers to bind themselves with their way of 'punishment, i.e. enslaving of a thief.') We raise to degrees whom We please, but over each one who is possessed of knowledge is one more knowing.

They ((Yoosuf's (Joseph) brothers) said: 'If he steals, there was a brother of his (Yoosuf (Joseph)) who did steal before (him).' But these things did Yoosuf (Joseph) keep in himself, revealing not the secrets to them. He said (within himself): 'You are in worst case, and Allah knows best the truth of what you assert!'"

[Yoosuf 12:70-77].

Shaykh as-Sa'di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"So when he had furnished them forth with their provisions" that is, when he had weighed out provisions for each of his brothers, including this brother,

"he put the (golden) bowl" which was a vessel from which he drank, and also used for measuring "into his brother's bag, then" they loaded up their luggage, but when they set out, "then a crier cried: 'O you (in) the caravan! Surely, you are thieves!'" Perhaps this caller did not know what was really going on.

They namely the brothers of Yoosuf "turning towards them" – they had no concern except to dispel the accusation that had been made against them, so they said: "What is it that you have missed?'" And they did not say, "What have we stolen?" because they were certain that they were innocent of theft.

"They said: 'We have missed the (golden) bowl of the king and for him who produces it is (the reward of) a camel load" that is, as a reward for finding it

“I will be bound by it” that is, I guarantee it – this was said by the caller who was looking for it.

“They said: ‘By Allah! Indeed you know that we came not to make mischief in the land” by committing all kinds of sins

“and we are no thieves”, for stealing is one of the worst kinds of making mischief in the land. They only swore because they were confident that the Egyptians were aware that they were not making mischief and were not thieves, as they knew them very well and were aware that they were people of dignity and piety, who could not have committed this theft; those who accused them knew that they could not have done that. This is a more eloquent way of refuting the accusation than saying “By Allah we did not make mischief in the land and we did not steal anything.”

“They (Yoosuf’s (Joseph) men) said: ‘What then shall be the penalty, if you are (proved to be) liars?”

“They (Yoosuf’s (Joseph) brothers) said: ‘The penalty should be that he, in whose bag it is found, should be held for the punishment (of the crime)” that is, the one in whose saddle-bag it is found should become the slave of the owner of the stolen item. According to their religion, if the thief was proven to be guilty, he would become the property of the owner of the stolen wealth. Hence they said: “Thus we punish the Zalimoon (wrong-doers, etc.)!’”

“So he” the inspector “began (the search) in their bags before the bag of his brother”, so that there would be no suspicion that it had been done deliberately. When he did not find anything in their baggage,

“Then he brought it out of his brother’s bag”. It does not say “he found it” or “his brother stole it”, so as to reflect the reality of the situation.

Thus Yoosuf accomplished what he wanted to do of keeping his brother with him in such a way that his other brothers would not realise it, Allah says (sa): “Thus did We plan for Yoosuf (Joseph)” that is, We made easy for him this plan which enabled him to achieve something that was not blameworthy

“He could not take his brother by the law of the king (as a slave)” because there was nothing in that law that allowed enslavement of the thief; rather they had some other penalty in such cases. Therefore if the ruling had been referred to the king’s law, Yoosuf would not have been able to keep his brother with him. But he made the ruling come from them, so that he might achieve his aim.

“We raise to degrees whom We please” by means of beneficial knowledge and knowledge of ways and means of achieving desired goals, as We raised Yoosuf in status

“but over each one who is possessed of knowledge is one more knowing.” Above each one who has knowledge is one who is more knowledgeable than him, until knowledge ends with the Knower of the unseen and the seen.

When the brothers of Yoosuf saw what happened, “They said: ‘If he” – namely this brother – “steals”, there is nothing surprising about that, because “there was a brother of his (Yoosuf (Joseph)) who did steal before (him).” They were referring to Yoosuf (as); what they meant by saying this was to declare their own innocence. In other words: this one and his brother may commit acts of theft, but they are not our full brothers.

These words implied a great deal of disparagement, but Yoosuf kept his thoughts to himself “revealing not the secrets to them” that is, he did not respond to their words in a way that would be displeasing to them; rather he restrained his anger and kept it to himself.

“He said (within himself): ‘You are in worst case” because you blamed us when you are worse than us in that regard

“and Allah knows best the truth of what you assert” against us, that is, He knows better than others, as you are accusing us of theft when Allah knows that we are innocent.

Tafseer as-Sa‘di (p. 402)

This was not any kind of lying or prohibited deceit on the part of Yoosuf (peace be upon him); rather it was good planning that Allah planned for him so as to complete His blessing upon him

and reunite him with his parents and family, and so that his brothers might repent, and so that He might highlight to them the wrong that they had done towards their father and their two brothers, and so that Allah might complete His blessing upon their father Ya'qoob (peace be upon him) and restore to him his son after a lengthy absence and great suffering. So Allah, may He be exalted, ordained this good and blessed plan for His Prophet, so that these blessings might be attained by all concerned. This does not come under the heading of wrongdoing, enmity and prohibited deceit – Allah forbid.

The caller who cried out "'O you (in) the caravan! Surely, you are thieves!'" thought that they were the ones who had stolen the king's bowl, so he cried out on the basis of what he knew; so he was not lying.

What Yoosuf (peace be upon him) meant was that they had stolen from his father, and he spoke the truth. This comes under the heading of double entendres by means of which the truth may be found out and proof established.

Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If it is said: How could it have been permissible for Yoosuf to accuse of theft someone who had not stolen anything? There are four answers to this question:

1. That what is meant is: You stole Yoosuf when you cut him off from his father and threw him into the well. This was the view of az-Zajjaaj.

2. That when the caller said this, he did not know that Yoosuf had issued instructions that the bowl be placed in his brother's bag, so he was not lying when he said it. This was the view of Ibn Jareer.

3. That the caller cried out, accusing them of theft, without any instructions from Yoosuf to do so.

4. That what is meant is: You are thieves as it appears to one who is not aware of the reality of your situation; this is like the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Taste you (this)! Verily, you were (pretending to be) the mighty, the generous" [ad-Dukhaan 44:49] – i.e., in your own mind you were mighty and generous, but not in Our view. And the Prophet (blessings

and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Ibraaheem told three untruths” i.e., he said words that seemed to be lies, but they were not really lies.

End quote from Zaad al-Maseer (2/457)

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What Yoosuf (peace be upon him) meant was: You stole Yoosuf from his father, and he was telling the truth when he said that.

What the caller meant was: You stole the bowl; he thought that they had stolen it, and he did not deliberately intend to lie, even though what he said was untrue. End quote.

Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (16/451). See also: al-Fataawa al-Kubra (6/127)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Ighaathat al-Lahfaan (2/118):

Allah, may He be exalted, inspired the brothers of Yoosuf (peace be upon him) to say: “The penalty should be that he, in whose bag it is found, should be held for the punishment (of the crime)” – this was a plan from Allah, may He be exalted, in support of Yoosuf (peace be upon him) that He caused to be uttered by his brothers. It was beyond Yoosuf’s control.

They could have avoided that by saying “There is no penalty for him unless it is proven that he is the one who stole it”, because the mere fact that it was found in his bag did not necessarily mean that he was a thief. But Yoosuf (peace be upon him) was just and would not have held them responsible without proof.

They could also have avoided that by saying “His penalty should be the same as whatever you do to thieves according to your law.” The custom according to the law of the king of Egypt – as was narrated – was that the thief would be beaten and fined double the value of the stolen property. If they had said that, he could not have imposed upon them what he did not impose upon others; therefore Allah, may He be glorified, says: “Thus did We plan for Yoosuf (Joseph). He could not take his brother by the law of the king (as a slave), except that Allah willed it.”

In other words, he could not have taken him according to the law of the king of Egypt, because in his law there was no way for him to take him.

The words “except that Allah willed it” may mean: except that Allah willed that he should take him by some other means. Or it may be that what is meant is: except that Allah brought about some other means for him to take him according to the law of the king, other than theft. End quote.

See also: I‘laam al-Muwaqqi‘een (3/168)

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him):

“Thus did We plan for Yoosuf (Joseph)” – this comes under the heading of planning for good and to achieve that which Allah loves and is pleased with, because of what it involves of wisdom and achieving the desired purpose. End quote.

Tafseer Ibn Katheer (4/401)

The point is that none of that comes under the heading of lying whatsoever; rather it comes under the heading of good double entendres which, among other things, lead to: the truth becoming manifest; the wrongdoers acknowledging their mistake and repenting from it and seeking forgiveness from the one who was wronged; bringing about reunion of the family; fulfilling the promise of Allah to Ya‘qoob and Yoosuf (peace be upon them both); bringing about Allah’s support to the one who had been wronged and fulfilling His plan for him. All of this is part of the immense blessings that they attained through these double entendres that were not lies, even though one who did not understand the reality of the situation might think them to be lies.

And Allah knows best.