

EXPRESSING SADNESS IN ADVERSITY: PROPHET YA'QŪB'S EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN SURAH YŪSUF

MENGUNGKAPKAN KESEDIHAN DALAM KESUSAHAN: EKSPRESI EMOSI NABI YA'QŪB DALAM SURAH YŪSUF

Siti Ameerah Fauzi¹, Nadzrah Ahmad^{2*}

¹ Master's Student, Department of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia, sitiameerah99@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia, anadzrah@iiu.edu.my

* Penulis Penghubung

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Abstract

This study examines the Quranic perspective on expressing sadness during times of distress, drawing specifically from the narrative of Prophet Ya'qūb in Surah Yūsuf (verses 84, 86, and 87). Despite the well-established psychological benefits of emotional expression, cultural stigma, and misconceptions surrounding emotional vulnerability often prevent individuals from expressing emotions constructively, contributing to anxiety, depression, and other adverse health outcomes. To address this issue, the study explores how Prophet Ya'qūb's responses to the loss of his sons reflect patterns of healthy emotional expression that are both spiritually grounded and psychologically insightful. Using qualitative thematic and textual analysis, the study identifies six aspects of expressing sadness, namely pausing before responding, acknowledging and accepting one's emotions, verbal expression, crying, direct supplication to Allah, and seeking support from others. Based on this analysis, several principles are proposed to ensure that emotional expression remains constructive and aligned with Islamic guidance. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the Quran, help address cultural stigma surrounding emotional vulnerability, and promote mental well-being within society. By integrating Islamic teachings with psychological perspectives, this study offers a practical framework for understanding healthy emotional expression in Islam. It concludes that expressing sadness is permissible in Islam when conducted appropriately, highlighting the Quran's role as a source of guidance and offering Muslims effective tools to cope with adversity.

Keywords

Emotional expression, sadness, Prophet Ya'qūb, Quran, mental health

Abstrak

Kajian ini meneliti perspektif al-Quran terhadap ekspresi emosi sedih ketika menghadapi kesusahahan dengan memberi tumpuan khusus kepada naratif Nabi Ya'qūb dalam Surah Yūsuf (ayat 84, 86, dan 87). Walaupun manfaat mengekspresikan emosi dari sudut psikologi telah terbukti,

stigma dan salah tanggapan mengenai kerentanan emosi sering menghalang individu daripada mengekspresikan emosi secara konstruktif, seterusnya menyumbang kepada kebimbangan, kemurungan, dan pelbagai masalah kesihatan lain. Bagi menangani isu ini, kajian ini menerokai bagaimana respons Nabi Ya'qūb terhadap kehilangan anak-anaknya mencerminkan corak ekspresi emosi yang sihat berteraskan agama dan psikologi. Melalui analisis tematik dan tekstual secara kualitatif, kajian ini mengenal pasti enam aspek dalam mengekspresikan kesedihan iaitu berhenti sejenak sebelum bertindak balas, mengakui dan menerima emosi diri, ekspresi secara verbal, menangis, berdoa kepada Allah, dan mendapatkan sokongan daripada orang lain. Berdasarkan analisis ini, beberapa prinsip digariskan bagi memastikan ekspresi emosi kekal bersifat konstruktif dan selaras dengan panduan Islam. Dapatan kajian ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam terhadap al-Quran, membantu mengatasi stigma berkaitan kerentanan emosi, serta mempromosikan kesejahteraan mental dalam kalangan masyarakat. Dengan mengintegrasikan ajaran Islam dan perspektif psikologi, kajian ini menawarkan kerangka yang praktikal untuk memahami gaya ekspresi emosi yang sihat menurut Islam. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa mengekspresikan kesedihan adalah diharuskan dalam Islam apabila dilakukan dengan cara yang sesuai, sekaligus menonjolkan peranan al-Quran sebagai sumber panduan serta membekalkan umat Islam dengan cara yang efektif untuk menghadapi kesusahan.

Kata Kunci

Ekspresi emosi, kesedihan, Nabi Ya'qūb, al-Quran, kesihatan mental

1.0 Introduction

Emotional expression is essential for helping individuals navigate difficult experiences and maintain psychological balance, particularly in times of sorrow and adversity. It enables individuals to communicate their feelings, process hardship, and maintain physical and mental well-being. Research has shown that habitual suppression of emotions is associated with higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Yoon et al. 2017; Li et al. 2015). Despite the centrality of emotional expression to human well-being, many individuals struggle to express their emotions due to social expectations that stigmatize vulnerability and promote emotional restraint (Patel & Patel 2019). These realities underscore the contemporary need to re-examine timeless spiritual sources, especially the Quran, to understand how divine guidance acknowledges human emotions and offers meaningful ways to cope with hardship.

The Quran as the divine revelation and the foundational text of Islam presents narratives that transcend historical boundaries and speak directly to universal human struggles. Quranic stories serve not merely as historical accounts, but as dynamic repositories of insight and wisdom. This role is emphasized in the concluding verse of Surah Yūsuf where Allah states:

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَكِن تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْقَوْمِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Meaning: There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Quran a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.

Surah Yūsuf (12):111

Islam as a religion rooted in *fiṭrah* recognizes the existence and legitimacy of human emotions including sadness. Al-Jurjānī (1983: 86) defined sadness (*al-ḥuzn*) as “an expression resulting from the occurrence of something harmful or the loss of a loved one in the past.” Within the Quranic worldview, sadness is described as one of the earliest emotions experienced by Prophet Ādam prior to his descent to Earth as indicated in Surah al-Baqarah 2:38. According to Abas (2021), this verse reflects the soul’s distant memory of the blissful life experience in Paradise (*Jannah*) before being ordained to descend onto the Earth where trials and hardships are inevitable. In this context, sadness is not merely an emotional response but part of the trial of human existence, prompting individuals to recognize their purpose in this world; to perform the best of deeds (*aḥsanu ‘amalan*) as emphasized in Surah al-Mulk 67:2, and ultimately earn the right to return to Paradise.

The Quran portrays sadness as a multifaceted emotional experience arising from diverse human circumstances. It records grief resulting from loss such as the sorrow of Prophet Ya‘qūb over his missing son (Surah Yūsuf 12:84), as well as feelings of helplessness exemplified by the companions who were unable to join an expedition and returned with eyes overflowing with tears (Surah al-Tawbah 9:92). Emotional hardship is also illustrated in contexts of isolation and physical pain such as Maryam during childbirth (Surah Maryam 19:23-24), and in situations involving separation or concern for loved ones as seen in the account of Prophet Mūsā’s mother when she placed her child into the river (Surah Ṭāhā 20:39-41). The Quran further acknowledges sadness in times of collective adversity and uncertainty such as the emotional turmoil experienced during the Battle of Uhud (Surah Āli ‘Imrān 3:153). Across these narratives, sadness is acknowledged within personal, relational, and communal contexts, presented as a legitimate human response that is both validated and accompanied by divine guidance.

Among these narratives, the story of Prophet Ya‘qūb in Surah Yūsuf stands out for its profound portrayal of emotional suffering in the face of prolonged adversity. This surah is unique in that it recounts the story of a prophet in a continuous and cohesive structure, allowing readers to observe the unfolding of emotional, spiritual, and interpersonal dynamics over time. Prophet Ya‘qūb’s response to the loss of his son Yūsuf offers a compelling model for examining emotional expression grounded in unwavering faith. His sorrow is vividly captured in the following verse:

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنِّيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

Meaning: And he turned away from them and said, “Oh, my sorrow over Yūsuf,” and his eyes became white from grief, for he was [of that] a suppressor.

Surah Yūsuf (12):84

This verse reflects an intense emotional burden that manifests physically, verbally, and behaviorally. Notably, the Quran presents this emotion not as a weakness or disgrace, but as a natural and genuine human response that coexists with deep spiritual conviction when faith is strong and certainty in the Most Merciful is maintained (Al-Zamakhsharī 1987; Al-Shanqītī 2013).

The Prophetic tradition reinforces the understanding of sadness as a meaningful and spiritually integrated experience. A well-known hadith affirms that every form of sorrow or distress serves as expiation for a believer's sins:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ وَعَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: "مَا يُصِيبُ الْمُسْلِمَ مِنْ نَصَبٍ وَلَا وَصَبٍ وَلَا هَمٍّ وَلَا حُزْنٍ وَلَا أَذَى وَلَا غَمٍّ، حَتَّى الشُّوْكَةِ يُشَاكُهَا، إِلَّا كَفَّرَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ خَطَايَاهُ".

Meaning: Narrated Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and Abū Hurayrah: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that."

Al-Bukhārī, no. 5641

Contemporary scholarship further highlights Islam's holistic approach to emotional well-being, emphasizing that Islamic teachings guide individuals to navigate emotions through faith, patience, and spiritual resilience (Achour et al. 2020). Thus, Islam not only recognizes sadness as an inherent aspect of human existence but also provides a holistic framework for understanding and managing it with dignity and spiritual grounding.

Despite the significance of emotional expression during adversity, this subject remains relatively underexamined through the lens of specific Quranic narratives. Most contemporary discussions focus on medical or psychological paradigms while Muslim scholarship often addresses emotional regulation broadly rather than examining emotional expression as a distinct coping strategy. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to existing scholarship by examining how emotional expression during adversity is depicted in the story of Prophet Ya'qūb in Surah Yūsuf. Ultimately, it aims to offer practical insights into cultivating personal and collective resilience, empowering Muslims to engage with their emotions in constructive and meaningful ways that align with Islamic teachings.

2.0 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based approach employing thematic and textual analysis to examine Quranic narratives on emotional expression, with particular focus on the story of Prophet Ya'qūb in Surah Yūsuf. Primary and secondary sources, including the Quran, hadith, classical and contemporary *tafsīr* works, scholarly books, and academic articles were consulted through academic libraries and reputable online databases to ensure scholarly rigor and credibility.

The study focuses on three selected verses, namely Surah Yūsuf 12:84, 12:86, and 12:87, due to their explicit and implicit portrayals of Prophet Ya'qūb's emotional responses to prolonged adversity. Textual analysis, as commonly employed in *tafsīr* studies, is utilised to examine the linguistic expressions, contextual meanings, and exegetical interpretations of the selected verses through close reading of authoritative *tafsīr* sources. Thematic analysis is subsequently applied to identify and analyse recurring themes related to emotional expression such as verbalizing sadness, crying, and supplication. These themes are then related to contemporary psychological

perspectives on emotional well-being, highlighting the practical relevance of Quranic guidance in managing sadness and emotional distress.

3.0 Research Findings

The findings of this study are presented in four main sections. The first section discusses the concept and significance of expressing sadness in adversity from both psychological and Islamic perspectives. The second section presents the sad events experienced by Prophet Ya'qūb as narrated in the Quran. The third section analyses the specific aspects of expressing sadness derived from his experiences. The fourth section outlines the principles for constructive emotional expression in Islam.

3.1 The Concept and Significance of Expressing Sadness in Adversity

Emotional expression is a fundamental concept in psychology and plays a crucial role in human functioning. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), emotional expression is defined as “the outward manifestation of an internal emotional state”. Kane et al. (2019: 2) described it as “expressing one’s thoughts and feelings about stressors” while Kennedy-Moore and Watson (2001: 4) defined it as “observable verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate and/or symbolize emotional experience”. Overall, these definitions indicate that emotional expression encompasses a spectrum of behaviors ranging from private manifestations to interpersonal communication, incorporates both verbal and nonverbal forms, and functions as a vital mechanism for processing and conveying emotions.

Verbal expression is delivered through speech and language whereby individuals articulate their thoughts, emotions, intentions, and wishes. In contrast, nonverbal expression occurs without words, frequently conveyed by emotions, feelings, and thoughts through gestures and body language such as movements of the hands, eyes, and head. Both forms are essential components of human interaction and contribute significantly to psychological well-being. Kennedy-Moore and Watson (2001) further noted that emotional expressions may occur consciously or unconsciously, may be partially controllable, and may involve varying levels of intentionality.

On another note, sadness, defined by the APA (2018) as “an emotional state of unhappiness ranging in intensity from mild to extreme and usually aroused by the loss of something that is highly valued”, is a natural response to undesirable circumstances such as loss, disappointment, or separation (Shiota & Kalat 2007). It manifests through several behavioral signs such as sad facial expression and crying. Sadness is closely linked with grief, which refers to a strong emotional response accompanied by disorientation and intense distress following the loss of someone or something of great significance. A persistent feeling of extreme sadness, depressed mood, or loss of interest may result in a serious mental disorder known as depression (Strongman 1996). According to the World Health Organization (2025), approximately 332 million people worldwide were living with depression in 2021, a statistic that reflects an alarming rise and underscores the urgent need to understand its causes and address effective solutions.

The relationship between emotional expression and health has been a long-standing subject of scholarly debate. Some scholars argued that emotional expression

is not inherently beneficial or harmful as its impact depends on several factors including personality, social context, and the nature of the stressor (Stanton & Low 2019; Kennedy-Moore & Watson 2001). Others, however, maintain that expressing emotions, especially sadness, contributes positively to physical and mental health while suppression leads to adverse outcomes (Pandey & Choubey 2010). According to this perspective, expressing sadness allows individuals to release psychological tension, reduce physiological stress responses, and prevent the accumulation of negative emotions that could otherwise result in mental or physical ailments (Stanton & Low 2012).

In contrast, suppressing emotions during adversity is widely recognized as harmful. Early scholars such as William James (1890) and Franz Alexander (1950) emphasized that chronic inhibition of strong emotions could lead to physical health issues by activating fundamental biological stress-related mechanisms (Slatcher & Pennebaker 2007). Modern psychological research supports this view, linking emotional suppression to the onset of anxiety, mood disorders, and various stress-related conditions. Pandey and Choubey (2010) further asserted that the consistent repression of sadness may impair immune function and exacerbate physical health problems. Hence, the evidence suggests that acknowledging and expressing sadness can help individuals process their experiences more effectively and maintain psychological equilibrium.

Cultural and societal factors influence whether emotions are expressed or suppressed. Certain cultures tend to discourage open emotional expression and associate it with weakness or lack of composure (Van Hemert 2007). Similarly, traditional masculinity norms often promote emotional suppression among men which contribute to their higher rates of suicide despite lower rates of diagnosed depression (Kilmartin 2005). As Slatcher and Pennebaker (2007) mentioned, emotional expression is viewed ambivalently across societies. On one hand, it is sometimes perceived as uncivilized or as a sign of surrendering to passion (King & Emmons 1990). On the other hand, it is also regarded as a healthy and natural way of processing emotional experiences, which is widely reflected in psychological literature. Despite this ambivalence, extensive research from early psychological studies to contemporary scholarship has consistently emphasized the inherent importance of expressing one's authentic thoughts and emotions, recognizing it as a natural and meaningful part of human life.

Another essential dimension of expressing sadness lies in social support, which serves as a vital coping mechanism during adversity. Achour et al. (2010) noted that emotional expression allows individuals to seek comfort, empathy, and guidance from family, friends, or professionals. Through communication, people not only release inner distress but also strengthen bonds with family and friends, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional safety. Talking about feelings can help pinpoint the underlying causes of sadness, allowing people to deal with problems more effectively and work towards solutions and recovery. This is supported by qualitative research on depressed married women, which identified the concealment of feelings and the inability to express emotions as significant contributors to depression. The study found that failures in communication often prevented married women from openly expressing sadness to their partners, leading them to struggle silently with prolonged psychological burdens (Elias et al. 2024). In this sense, expression is not merely a personal act, but a social and relational process that enhances collective well-being.

From an Islamic perspective, expressing sadness is encouraged through spiritually constructive channels such as supplication and crying. For example, Prophet Ayyūb turned to Allah in supplication when afflicted with severe illness and prolonged hardship as recorded in the following verse:

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَيُّ مَسَّنِي الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

Meaning:

And [mention] Ayyūb, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful."

Surah al-Anbiyā' 21:83

The Prophetic traditions further affirm the legitimacy of emotional expression through crying. Several hadith reported that the Prophet (PBUH) wept on several occasions, including upon the death of his son Ibrāhīm as narrated below:

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: دَخَلْنَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى أَبِي سَيْفِ الْقَيْنِ، وَكَانَ ظَنُرًا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، فَأَخَذَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فَقَبَّلَهُ وَسَمَّهُ، ثُمَّ دَخَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ وَإِبْرَاهِيمُ يَجُودُ بِنَفْسِهِ، فَجَعَلَتْ عَيْنَا رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَدْرِفَانِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ عَوْفٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: وَأَنْتَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! فَقَالَ: "يَا ابْنَ عَوْفٍ إِنَّهَا رَحْمَةٌ" ثُمَّ اتَّبَعَهَا بِأُخْرَى، فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "إِنَّ الْعَيْنَ تَدْمَعُ، وَالْقَلْبَ يَحْزَنُ، وَلَا نَقُولُ إِلَّا مَا يَرْضَى رَبُّنَا، وَإِنَّا بِفِرَاقِكَ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَمَحْزُونُونَ".

Meaning: Narrated Anas bin Mālik: We went with Allah's Messenger (PBUH) to the blacksmith Abū Sayf, and he was the husband of the wet-nurse of Ibrāhīm (the son of the Prophet). Allah's Messenger (PBUH) took Ibrāhīm, kissed him, and smelled him. Later, we entered Abū Sayf's house and at that time Ibrāhīm was in his last breaths. The eyes of Allah's Messenger (PBUH) started shedding tears. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf said, "O Allah's Apostle, even you are weeping!" He said, "O Ibn 'Awf, this is mercy." Then he wept more and said, "The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord, O Ibrāhīm! Indeed we are grieved by your separation."

Al-Bukhārī, no. 1303

This hadith affirms the validity of sadness as a genuine human emotion and permits crying as a natural means of expressing grief, provided that one maintains acceptance of Allah's decree (*qadr*) and refrains from objection or despair. Moreover, the Quran and hadith recognize socially mediated emotional expression such as sharing grief with family or community, thereby reinforcing social support and collective well-being (Maklai & Yahya 2023; Al-Domi 2015).

In sum, the act of expressing sadness during adversity holds profound psychological significance. Those who can articulate or communicate their emotional pain whether verbally or nonverbally tend to experience greater emotional relief, improved mental health, and stronger social connections. On the contrary, persistent suppression of sadness can deepen distress and impede emotional healing. Therefore,

emotional expression during adversity should be understood as a vital aspect of resilience that enables individuals to confront hardship with honesty, strength, and faith.

3.2 Prophet Ya'qūb's Sad Events in Surah Yūsuf

The narrative of Prophet Ya'qūb in Surah Yūsuf presents a profound depiction of a father's journey through sorrow and spiritual strength amid repeated hardships. The surah chronicles several devastating events that befell Prophet Ya'qūb, each contributing to his deep sadness while simultaneously demonstrating his unwavering faith in Allah's decree and wisdom.

1. Sadness due to the Separation and Loss of Prophet Yūsuf

The first and most significant tragic event that brought extreme sadness to Prophet Ya'qūb occurred when he lost his beloved son, Yūsuf. The Quran captures Prophet Ya'qūb's sons' request to take Yūsuf out to play and enjoy themselves outside the home as recorded in the verse below:

أَرْسَلُهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعُ وَيَلْعَبُ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Meaning: Send him with us tomorrow that he may eat well and play. And indeed, we will be his guardians.

Surah Yūsuf (12):12

Prophet Ya'qūb responded to this request by expressing his sadness at the prospect of separation from his son Yūsuf and his concern for his well-being as described in the following verse:

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

Meaning: [Ya'qūb] said, "Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him, and I fear that a wolf would eat him while you are of him unaware."

Surah Yūsuf (12):13

Commenting on this verse, al-Zuḥaylī (2003) stated that Prophet Ya'qūb experienced extreme grief and profound sadness. According to al-Zamakhsharī as reported by al-Rāzī (2000), Prophet Ya'qūb had two primary concerns. The first concern was his inability to endure a lengthy separation from Yūsuf, and the second was his fear of grave danger befalling him. Ibn Kathīr (1999) further explained that Prophet Ya'qūb's reluctance to let Yūsuf go was not solely due to his paternal affection for his child but because he sensed in his heart that Yūsuf would play a significant role in the future as he saw the light of prophethood in Yūsuf's countenance.

Hamka (2015) noted that as the sons prepared to depart, Prophet Ya'qūb embraced, kissed, and continuously prayed for Yūsuf's safety. Meanwhile, the brothers conspired to dispose of Yūsuf by placing him in a well, hoping that travelers would find him and take him to a distant place. As darkness fell, the sons of Prophet Ya'qūb returned home sobbing while carrying Yūsuf's shirt, which they had stained with false blood. To

perfect their scheme, they fabricated a false narrative to explain Yūsuf's disappearance to their father. They claimed that they were engaging in a running competition to train their agility, leaving Yūsuf to guard their belongings. Upon returning to Yūsuf's location, they found that he had been devoured by a wolf during their absence, as recorded in the verse below:

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

Meaning: They said, "O our father, indeed we went racing each other and left Yūsuf with our possessions, and a wolf ate him. But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful."

Surah Yūsuf (12):17

Prophet Ya'qūb's response to his children's claim revealed both his emotional intelligence and spiritual depth as he said:

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا فَصَبِرْ حَمِيلٌ وَاللَّهُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ

Meaning: (Ya'qūb) said, "Rather, your souls have enticed you to something, so patience is most fitting. And Allah is the one sought for help against that which you describe."

Surah Yūsuf (12):18

Despite his pain and profound sadness over losing his beloved son, Prophet Ya'qūb chose to exercise patience, restraint, and acceptance. Had he not responded with beautiful patience, his family would have been destroyed, and his children might not have been reformed (Hamka 2015).

2. Sadness due to the Loss of Bunyāmīn

The second major trial came with the detention of Bunyāmīn in Egypt as narrated in verses 73-80 of Surah Yūsuf. This loss exacerbated Prophet Ya'qūb's existing grief as Bunyāmīn was both Yūsuf's full brother and a source of solace after Yūsuf's disappearance (Al-Rāzī 2000). When asked to entrust Bunyāmīn to his sons, Prophet Ya'qūb recalled the earlier loss of Yūsuf and expressed his lingering fear and apprehension as described in the following verse:

قَالَ هَلْ آمَنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَا أَمَنْتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَخِيهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ حَافِظًا وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

Meaning: He said, "Should I entrust you with him except [under coercion] as I entrusted you with his brother before? But Allah is the best guardian, and He is the most merciful of the merciful."

Surah Yūsuf (12):64

The detention of Bunyāmīn in Egypt reopened old wounds and revived the sorrow associated with Yūsuf's loss. The Quran captures the depth of Prophet Ya'qūb's grief, where he said:

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسَفَى عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

Meaning: And he turned away from them and said, “Oh, my sorrow over Yūsuf,” and his eyes became white from grief, for he was [of that] a suppressor.

Surah Yūsuf (12):84

According to Hamka (2015), Allah demonstrated the profound internal struggle of Prophet Ya‘qūb, an elderly man, in this verse upon receiving the grievous news of his youngest son Bunyāmīn’s detention in Egypt. It illustrated Prophet Ya‘qūb’s remarkable endurance and patience in containing his grief and inner turmoil. Although he naturally harbored sadness in his heart over the loss of his two sons, he allowed this sadness to remain confined within himself. This sorrowful state provoked concern among his other children who worried about his deteriorating condition due to his constant thoughts of Yūsuf. The long-suppressed grief that Prophet Ya‘qūb experienced over Yūsuf led to years of illness and impaired his vision. Hamka (2015) further noted that this condition resulted from his contained grief and years of suppressed tears to the point where no more tears could flow. In response to his children’s concern, he said:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning: He said, “I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah, and I know from Allah that which you do not know”.

Surah Yūsuf (12):86

Even in this deep sorrow, Prophet Ya‘qūb persevered and instructed his sons to go and seek news of both Yūsuf and Bunyāmīn, as documented in the subsequent verse:

يَا بَنِيَّ اذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْأَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Meaning: O my sons, go and find out about Yūsuf and his brother and despair not of relief from Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people.

Surah Yūsuf (12):87

Ibn Kathīr (1999) stated that this verse is a clear manifestation of Prophet Ya‘qūb’s unwavering hope in Allah’s mercy despite years of separation and grief. In this situation, he was teaching his sons a fundamental principle of faith that a believer should never lose hope in Allah’s mercy regardless of how difficult circumstances become.

After years of separation and sorrow, Prophet Ya‘qūb’s patience and faith were ultimately rewarded with a joyous reunion with his son, Prophet Yūsuf. When Prophet Yūsuf sent his shirt to Prophet Ya‘qūb and it was placed over his face, Prophet Ya‘qūb regained his sight, restoring his physical and emotional well-being as he was eventually reunited with his beloved family in Egypt (Al-Rāzī 2000). This reunion highlights the *sūrah*’s overarching theme of hope and divine mercy, showcasing how adversity can ultimately lead to profound joy.

3.3 Aspects of Expressing Sadness Depicted by Prophet Ya‘qūb

Prophet Ya'qūb was not only a messenger chosen by Allah to guide his people, but also a human being who experienced natural emotions. One of the most profound portrayals of human sorrow in the Quran appears in Surah Yūsuf, where his grief over the loss of his son Yūsuf, and later Bunyāmīn, is depicted with remarkable depth. While his emotional expression is often associated with inward spiritual responses such as supplication and patience, the narrative also presents other dimensions including behavioural and verbal responses, as well as interpersonal engagement.

Prophet Ya'qūb's experience reflects patterns consistent with modern understandings of sadness and grief. His responses encompass verbal and nonverbal expressions as categorized in psychological literature while also highlighting broader dimensions of emotional expression, illustrating that sadness can be expressed directly and indirectly, individually and socially, spiritually and physically (Kennedy-Moore & Watson 2001). Six aspects of expressing sadness can be identified from his narrative, offering practical guidance for Muslims facing emotional hardship.

1. Pausing before responding

Upon receiving the news of the loss of Bunyāmīn, Prophet Ya'qūb immediately turned away from his sons. This is recorded in the following verse:

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِبيضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

Meaning: And he turned away from them and said, "Oh, my sorrow over Yūsuf," and his eyes became white from grief, for he was [of that] a suppressor.

Surah Yūsuf (12):84

Focusing on the phrase *wa tawallā 'anhum*, al-Qurtūbī (1964) explained that turning away means Prophet Ya'qūb left his children and withdrew from their gathering as his sorrow culminated and his suffering reached its limit as he was tested a second time with the loss of Bunyāmīn following the earlier loss of Yūsuf. In the same vein, al-Sha'rāwī (1997) noted that he turned away because the news they brought pierced his heart and grieved him. He withdrew into himself, for in his human nature he deeply lamented Yūsuf since the root of his calamities was the loss of Yūsuf.

This act of turning away can be understood as a moment of pausing to calm oneself, reorganise thoughts, and prepare before responding. Pausing helps a person process emotions during difficult situations and approach stress more thoughtfully. It also prevents one from reacting emotionally or impulsively (Campbell 2023). In the Quranic context, this pause highlights the legitimacy of taking a moment to process grief without suppressing it entirely.

2. Accepting and acknowledging his emotion

Prophet Ya'qūb recognized and acknowledged his sadness due to the loss of both his sons, as described in the same verse as above (12:84) where he said:

وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ

Meaning: And he said, “Oh, my sorrow over Yūsuf.”

Surah Yūsuf (12):84

This phrase explicitly identifies the specific emotion experienced by Prophet Ya‘qūb, namely sorrow. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) recorded narrations from Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, and Qatādah stating that the term *asafā* means sadness and distress, representing the most intense form of sorrow and regret.

Al-Qurṭubī (1964) further accentuated the intensity of Prophet Ya‘qūb’s sadness, offering three explanations:

1. His grief intensified when he learned that Yūsuf was alive because he feared for his son’s faith.
2. His sorrow stemmed from the regret of having entrusted Yūsuf to his brothers while he was still young.
3. Grief itself is not prohibited; what is prohibited is wailing, tearing clothes, or speaking inappropriately.

This interpretation highlights the legitimate basis of his sadness, indicating that Islam validates human emotion, particularly sadness. As mentioned by al-Ālūsī (1994), this verse serves as evidence for the permissibility of feeling sad and shedding tears in times of calamity. Restraining such natural emotional responses is not obligatory since very few individuals can maintain complete composure under extreme distress. This highlights the Quranic recognition of the human emotional capacity during adversity.

From a psychological perspective, studies show that individuals who accept their emotions and acknowledge them as natural occurrences, rather than judging their mental experiences, may attain better psychological health. Acceptance helps reduce negative emotional reactions to stressors (Ford et al. 2018).

3. Verbalizing sadness

The phrase *yā asafā ‘alā Yūsuf* in Surah Yūsuf 12:84 highlights the importance of verbal expression of sadness. According to Hamka (2015), Prophet Ya‘qūb did not express his sorrow to others but complained directly to Allah, believing that only Allah could remove the sadness and hardship he was experiencing. This demonstrates that verbalizing emotion in Islam may occur privately through supplication to Allah or interpersonally through communication with trusted individuals, depending on the context and purpose of the expression.

Expressing emotions with words may remarkably alleviate sadness through psychological, emotional, and social mechanisms. By verbalizing sadness to others, individuals can gain encouragement and motivation that can reduce the emotional burden in the heart. Additionally, expressing sad emotions helps individuals understand and reappraise stressful situations, making these experiences more coherent and meaningful. While verbal expression does not guarantee the total elimination of the

feeling, it initiates cognitive and behavioral efforts toward achieving relief and serenity (Stanton & Low 2012).

4. Crying

Crying without questioning the destiny of Allah is a vital way to express sadness during adversity. This form of expressing sadness is illustrated in the story of Prophet Ya'qūb who wept until his eyes turned white after losing his son, as narrated in the Quran through the following verse:

وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ

Meaning: And his eyes became white from grief.

Surah Yūsuf (12):84

Hamka (2015) interpreted this verse as an indication that Prophet Ya'qūb's sadness was profound and enduring, leading to physiological consequences, namely the loss of vision. Al-Bayḍāwī (1996) explained that Ya'qūb's intense grief over Yūsuf caused him to weep so excessively that his eyes lost their natural darkness and turned white, symbolizing both the physical effect of prolonged crying and metaphorical blindness. Al-Zuhaylī (2003) noted that crying or grieving while accepting and submitting to divine decree does not contradict patience and faith. This is evidenced by the fact that Prophet Ya'qūb himself was praised by Allah as someone who possesses *ṣabr jamīl* (beautiful patience). Therefore, the prophets' tears are a testament to their humanity, not a flaw in their trust in Allah.

Crying is considered a healthy phenomenon and has several positive effects on health such as reducing sadness and stress, elevating mood, and providing relief (Mehraiki & Gholami 2017). It provides a sense of comfort as tears eliminate chemicals related to stress and pressure from the body. Emotional tears contain high levels of prolactin and other substances produced during stress. By shedding these tears, the body reduces harmful elements, promoting overall well-being (Al-Domi 2015).

5. Direct communication with Allah through supplication

The most significant method by which Prophet Ya'qūb expressed his sadness was through direct supplication to Allah. Instead of excessively venting his sorrow to people, he sought comfort in divine communication, which is described in the following verse:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning: He said, "I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah, and I know from Allah that which you do not know."

Surah Yūsuf (12):86

This verse represents Prophet Ya'qūb's intimate supplication and faith in Allah after losing both of his sons. According to al-Bayḍāwī (1996), the sadness experienced by Prophet Ya'qūb was so extreme that he was unable to refrain from expressing and

complaining to God. Moreover, Sayyid Quṭb (2024) interpreted these words as reflecting the true feelings of a steadfast believer in which Prophet Ya'qūb placed his hope solely in Allah, bringing him into sharp relief when going through the adversity.

Islamic spirituality has a remarkable effect on one's health. It is highly essential for Muslims to foster a close relationship with Allah through acts of worship such as supplication. Engaging in spiritual pursuits can provide a sense of direction, fulfillment, and inner serenity, which are beneficial for maintaining overall well-being (Saeed et al. 2023). Moreover, reciting supplication may relieve tension and anxiety since the believer is aware that, even when alone, he can always turn to God for support and assistance in overcoming adversity. This reflects the role of *tawḥīd* as the foundation of a Muslim's spiritual intelligence, shaping the way believers understand, regulate, and respond to life experiences (Sudi et al. 2020). Dale Carnegie, a prominent psychologist, similarly highlights psychiatrists' findings that having a firm faith in religion is key to relieving anxiety, fear, and concern (Mehraiki & Gholami 2017). Therefore, it is clear that direct communication with Allah during times of sorrow significantly impacts one's health.

6. Seeking help and support from others

Another form of expressing sadness demonstrated by Prophet Ya'qūb is by seeking help and support from others as depicted in the verse below:

يَا بَنِيَّ اذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْئَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Meaning: "O my sons, go and find out about Yūsuf and his brother and despair not of relief from Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people."

Surah Yūsuf (12):87

According to Ibn Kathīr (1999), although his sons had betrayed his trust, he continued to communicate with them, instructing them to search for Yūsuf and Bunyāmīn. This verse illustrates Prophet Ya'qūb's balanced approach to managing sadness. While he placed his ultimate trust in Allah, he also recognized the importance of human effort and interaction in difficult times. His command to his sons to seek out their lost brothers demonstrates that relying on divine help does not negate the necessity of taking practical steps toward a solution.

Since humans are social creatures, they cannot live fulfilling lives without forming bonds with friends, family, and acquaintances. Emotional connections and the understanding of others' emotions and circumstances may alleviate mental pressure. Conversely, living an individualistic life can increase vulnerability to life's hardships such as illness, divorce, death, and unemployment. Moreover, Islam strongly emphasizes brotherhood. This can be seen through the numerous examples of cooperation and compassion among Muslims as exemplified in the prophetic traditions (Mehraiki & Gholami 2017).

Notably, beyond inward emotional regulation, the narrative also reflects a significant interpersonal dimension of coping. Despite enduring profound sorrow and betrayal, Prophet Ya'qūb did not withdraw completely from his family system. Instead,

he maintained communication with his sons and continued to engage them through instruction and responsibility, particularly when he commanded them to search for Yūsuf and his brother. This indicates that his response to sadness was not limited to internal emotional endurance, but combined reliance on God with sustained human connection rather than isolation.

From a psychological perspective, this pattern corresponds to social support theory which emphasizes that emotional well-being is strengthened through meaningful relationships and mutual assistance (Taylor 2011). Social support functions as a protective factor that buffers psychological distress and enhances resilience by providing emotional comfort, a sense of belonging, and practical assistance (Sharp 2023; Taylor 2011). Empirical studies further show that perceived social support is consistently associated with lower levels of depression and stress, and higher psychological well-being (Alvarado-García et al. 2026; Alsubaie et al. 2019). In this sense, Prophet Ya'qūb's narrative reflects an integrated model of coping grounded in both one's relationship with God and with fellow human beings.

In sum, the Quran presents a model in which human emotions are recognized, expressed, and guided by faith. Prophet Ya'qūb exemplifies balanced emotional regulation through acceptance, expression, reliance on God, and social connectedness. His story offers both practical and spiritual guidance for coping with adversity, illustrating that sadness is neither a weakness nor incompatible with patience, resilience, and hope.

3.4 Principles for Constructive Expression of Sadness in Islam

Although expressing emotions has recognized psychological and physical benefits, it is not inherently adaptive in every circumstance, nor does it guarantee effective management of sadness. Contemporary psychological research indicates that the effects of emotional expression are shaped by multiple factors, and when expressed in maladaptive ways, it may intensify distress rather than alleviate it (Stanton & Low 2019). In line with this understanding, Islam permits emotional expression provided it remains within religious boundaries. Building on the aspects of emotional expression demonstrated by Prophet Ya'qūb as presented above, the following principles outline effective ways of expressing sadness:

1. Express emotions without questioning the decree of Allah

In Islam, emotional expression becomes constructive when it is accompanied by acceptance of divine decree (*riḍā*) and reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*). Prophet Ya'qūb expressed his sorrow over the loss of Yūsuf and Bunyāmīn, yet he never framed his grief as an objection to divine will. His statement, "I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah" (Surah Yūsuf 12:86), reflects the integration of emotional honesty with submission to Allah.

Modern psychological research supports this approach, demonstrating that emotional acceptance is associated with lower psychological distress and greater emotional well-being (Kashdan & Rottenberg 2010). Studies have found that individuals who acknowledge painful emotions without resistance tend to experience reduced anxiety and depression compared to those who suppress or reject emotional experiences

(Kotsou et al. 2018). Acceptance thus functions as a form of emotional resilience, reducing vulnerability to maladaptive emotional responses.

2. Reflect before responding

Before acting on intense emotions, reflection is essential to ensure that responses align with faith, personal values, and contextual demands. Prophet Ya'qūb's turning away after receiving the news of Bunyāmīn's detention exemplifies this principle, demonstrating deliberate restraint and measured response in the face of overwhelming grief.

Reflective processing can lead to emotional clarity, transforming vague or overwhelming feelings into emotions that are consciously recognized, acknowledged, and understood (Kennedy-Moore & Watson 2001). Neuroimaging studies have demonstrated that reflective evaluation of emotional states activates prefrontal regulatory networks while reducing activity in emotion-related regions such as the amygdala, thereby mitigating impulsive reactions (Herwig et al. 2010). Therefore, reflection enables individuals to process emotions consciously, label them accurately, and respond in a measured and adaptive manner rather than reacting reflexively under emotional pressure.

3. Exercise moderation in emotional expression

Emotions should be expressed in a balanced and respectful manner, avoiding excessive behaviors such as wailing, screaming, or uncontrolled lamentation, as well as speech or conduct that implies despair, objection to divine decree, or loss of moral composure. Although Prophet Ya'qūb's sorrow was profound, his emotional expression through crying remained natural and measured. The physiological effects of his tears, such as temporary blindness, were beyond his control and did not contradict his beautiful patience (Al-Shīrāzī 2013).

Unregulated or excessive expression of negative emotions without reflection such as repeated venting or cathartic outbursts can exacerbate emotional distress and increase the intensity and duration of negative affect rather than alleviate it. Conversely, the beneficial outcomes often mistakenly attributed to venting are actually achieved when the expression is moderate, controlled, and integrated with meaning-making strategies that allow individuals to process and understand their experiences (Kennedy-Moore & Watson 2001).

4. Accompany expressions of sadness with positive emotions

Sadness is a natural and unavoidable emotional response. However, its expression can be rendered constructive when it is accompanied by positive emotional states such as faith, hope, love, and gratitude. Prophet Ya'qūb's sorrow was intertwined with deep trust in Allah and patience, enabling him to endure adversity with resilience and composure.

Modern psychological literature highlights the regulatory role of positive emotions in coping with stress, demonstrating that they can counterbalance the negative effects of distressing emotions (Kennedy-Moore & Watson 2001). For example, Leger et al. (2020) found that positive emotions serve to replenish psychological resources and

provide relief from stressful experiences. On days when individuals experience higher levels of positive emotion in the context of stress, they show smaller increases in negative emotions and recover more quickly than on days when positive emotions are low. These findings suggest that positive emotional experiences dampen the lingering impact of stress and facilitate the regulation of negative emotions.

5. Select appropriate recipients for emotional expression

Constructive emotional expression involves not only what is shared but also with whom it is shared. Prophet Ya'qūb's primary recourse was to Allah, whom he recognized as the ultimate confidant and source of relief. Accordingly, emotional sharing should be directed toward trustworthy and supportive individuals who can provide comfort, guidance, and draw one closer to Allah.

Empirical studies on self-disclosure support this principle. Sharing emotional experiences with trusted individuals is associated with improved mental health and stronger relational bonds. For example, adolescents who engage in deeper emotional disclosure with mothers and close friends demonstrate better psychological well-being (Nowell et al. 2023). Additionally, emotional sharing that elicits empathy and prosocial responses strengthens social connections and mitigates loneliness, underscoring the importance of choosing appropriate recipients for emotional expression (Keum et al. 2023).

6. Balance emotional expression with practical action

Constructive emotional expression should be accompanied by proactive efforts to address the source of distress. Prophet Ya'qūb's instruction to his sons to search for Yūsuf and Bunyāmīn demonstrated that reliance on Allah does not negate proactive efforts. Emotional expression, therefore, should complement rather than replace problem-solving and purposeful action.

This principle emphasizes transforming emotional awareness into direct, problem-focused actions, ensuring that feelings of sadness motivate positive steps rather than passive rumination. Research by Cho and Choi (2024) indicates that individuals who regulate emotions alongside problem-focused coping strategies experience better psychological outcomes, including lower depressive symptoms and greater life satisfaction. In their study of older adults, emotional clarity was found to contribute to higher life satisfaction and lower depression, with this relationship mediated by problem-focused coping. These findings suggest that understanding one's emotions and translating them into constructive action facilitates emotional adjustment and reduces sadness.

7. Seek support when appropriate

While personal action remains central and turning to Allah is primary, seeking support from reliable and knowledgeable individuals can play a valuable role in coping with sadness. Emotional connections and guidance from trusted people can provide comfort, perspective, and encouragement, aligning with the social dimension of Islam (Mehraki & Gholami 2017).

Psychological research consistently demonstrates the protective role of social support during adversity. Early studies showed that identifying and utilizing social support facilitates coping by strengthening adaptive coping capacities (Pearson 1986). Conversely, lack of support from spouses, family, and friends is associated with increased psychological distress, whereas higher levels of social support are linked to reduced distress and improved mental health outcomes (Kendler et al. 2005; Khatiwada et al. 2021).

These principles collectively illustrate that emotional expression in Islam is not merely an individual or affective act but a holistic practice integrating psychological, social, and religious dimensions. By adhering to these principles, believers can navigate experiences of sadness in a manner that preserves dignity, strengthens faith, and fosters emotional resilience.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that expressing sadness during moments of distress can serve as an effective and healthy means of emotional regulation. Against the backdrop of rising cases of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges, developing a nuanced understanding of emotional expression from an Islamic perspective is both timely and necessary. Through an analysis of the narrative of Prophet Ya'qūb in Surah Yūsuf, specifically verses 84, 86, and 87, this study reveals that the Quran not only acknowledges the human need to express sadness, but also provides insight into constructive ways of expressing it as reflected in the aspects of Prophet Ya'qūb's emotional responses. When practised within its principles and boundaries, these aspects of expression offer substantial physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual benefits. Moreover, the harmony between these Quranic insights and modern psychological theories on healthy emotional expression underscores the Quran's relevance to contemporary discussions on mental well-being. Overall, this study highlights the Quran as a comprehensive guide that equips believers with practical and meaningful tools to navigate life's challenges, underscoring its enduring role as *hidāyah* (guidance), *shifā'* (healing), and *rahmah* (mercy) for Muslims.

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