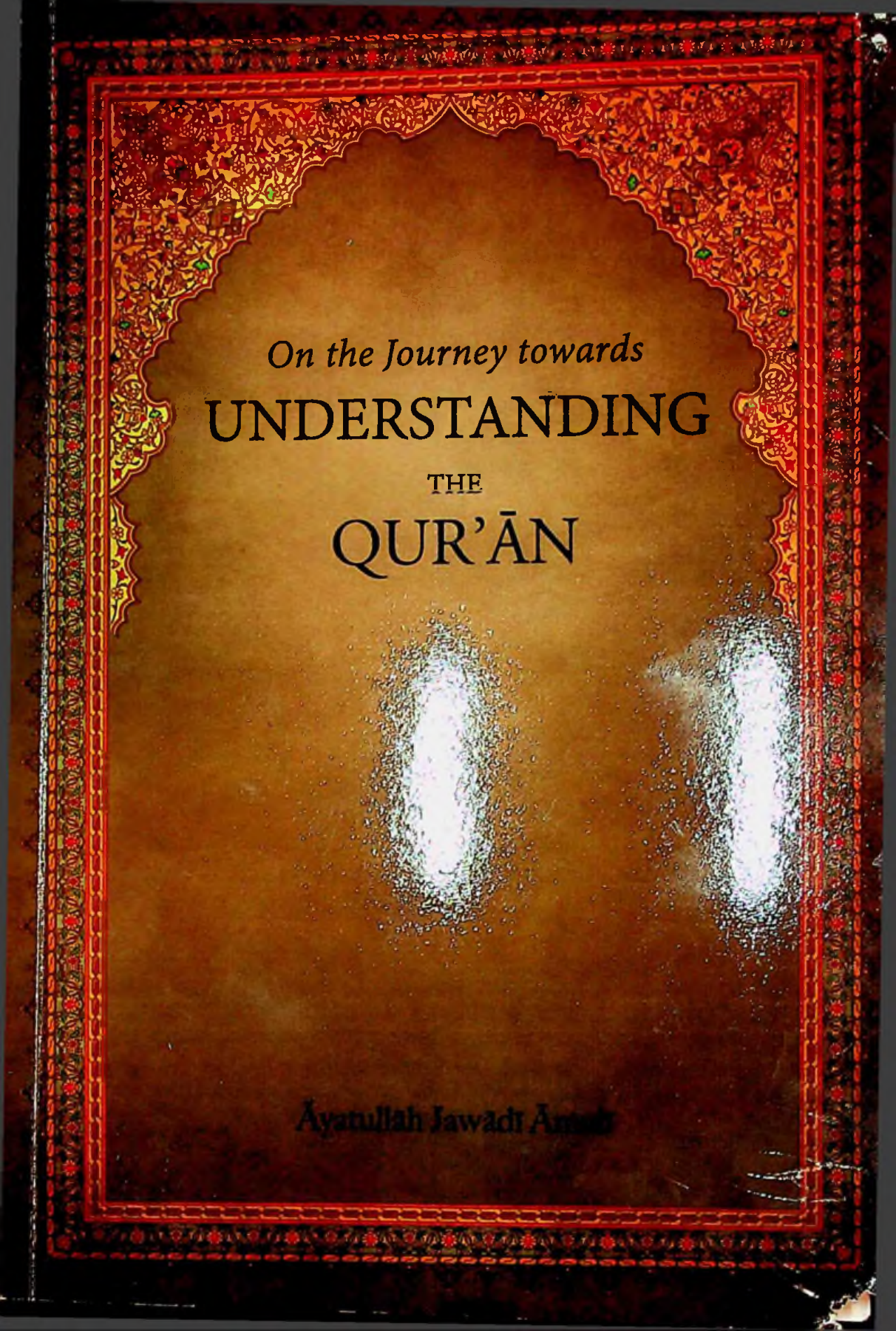
On the Journey towards

UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'ĀN



Āyatullah Jawādī Āmulī

"Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān, or are there locks on the hearts?"
(47:24)

As a creature endowed with mind, man grapples with the meanings behind things. And as a being who acknowledges other minds besides himself, he attempts to interpret the communications of others. When the "other" happens to be the Absolute Himself, the nature, import and fidelity of this interpretation is of a fundamentally different order. This seminal work by Ayatullah Jawādī begins with the premise that God has made the Qur'ān a guide for all of humanity. It then must be able to speak to each and every individual regardless of his particular cultural, linguistic, historical, and geographical conditions. It does this by communicating in a lingua franca that goes to the very core of man's being—what Islam refers to as his 'origination' or fiṭrah. Part of the task of understanding the Word of God, therefore, is predicated on man's ability to pierce through the veils that prevent him from accessing his [illegible]. In so doing he embarks on [illegible]covered and truly [illegible] journey of enlightenment [illegible] understanding this [illegible]ney that brings the soul back [illegible] and the Origin



Āyatullāh Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, a veritable polymath who is acknowledged by his peers as a master in mysticism, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and Qur'ānic exegesis, was born in 1933 in Āmul, Iran. He is renowned for his extensive writings in these fields as well as his attention to current affairs and appraisal of modern schools of thought.

ISRA

U.S.A. & CANADA $29.95

9 780393 611926

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ
مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

On the journey towards

UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'ĀN

ĀYATULLĀH JAWĀDĪ ĀMULĪ

TRANSLATED BY RIZWAN RASHID

ISBN 978-0-9936119-2-6 (pb)

National Library of Canada

© ISRA Publications Corp., 2018
This edition first published in 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission from the author, except in cases of fair use. Brief quotations, especially for the purposes of propagating Islamic teachings, are allowed.

Published by
ISRA Publications Corp.
www.ISRApublications.com
info@ISRApublications.com
Telephone: +1 289 801 1784

Published in Canada

Table of Contents

Preface viii

Translator's Introduction xii

Chapter 1: Accessibility of the Qur'ān 1

Man's Fiṭrah is Familiar with The Language of the Qur'ān 1

The Qur'ān as Unambiguous Light 4

The Qur'ān as a Proof and Manifest Evidence 7

The Qur'ān is Immune from every Doubt 9

Obstacles in Understanding the Qur'ān: Ignorance and Arrogance 14

The Veils of the Heart: Sin and Self-Conceit 17

Chapter 2: Conditions for Approaching the Qur'ān 21

God-Consciousness 21

Purity 23

Comprehending the Outward and Inward Qur'ān 25

Differences in the Capacities to Understand the Qur'ān 26

Chapter 3: The Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt 29

Comprehending the Interior of the Qur'ān 29

The Noble Prophet (ṣ) as the Elucidator of the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān 33

The Messenger of Allah as a Means of Softening the Qur'ān 35

Understanding the Qur'ān is Possible for All 36

The Role of the Narrations in Understanding the Qur'ān 38

Chapter 4: The Qur'ān Interprets Itself 47

Understanding the Verses Collectively 48

Interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān 49

The Exegetical Method of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī 50

Chapter 5: Allegory in the Qur'ān 57
The "Mother of the Book" 58
The Meanings of "al-Tashābuh" 60
Understanding the Definitive Verses Collectively 62
Pursuing Allegory 63
Pursuing Allegory is the Cause of Division 64
The Definitive and the Allegorical in Existence 67
The Definitive and the Allegorical in Narrations 68
The Reason for Allegorical Verses in the Qur'ān 70
The Qur'ān is Unlike other Scholarly Books 74
The Ta'wīl of the Qur'ān 75
Conjoining 'And' or Commencing 'And' 80
Chapter 6: The Qur'ānic Style of Articulation 85
1. Simple Delivery and Profound Delivery 85
2. The Elegance and Diversity of Similitudes 88
3. Stories and the Manner of Delivery 91
4. Distinguishing between Truth and Parables 93
5. Appropriate Use of Allusions 95
6. Stepping Outside Conventional Discourse 96
7. Drawing Attention and Stimulating Questions 98
8. Nurturing a Holistic Approach to the Teachings 99
9. A Succinct Survey of the Natural Sciences 101
10. Mysteries and Allusions in the Qur'ān 103
Chapter 7: The Qur'ān and the Intellect 105
The Criterion, the Key, and the Lantern 106
Understanding the Qur'ān with an Untainted Mind 108
What an Untainted Mind means 109
Understanding the Qur'ān is Perfectible 110
Akhbarism and Understanding the Qur'ān 111

The Perfectibility of Understanding the Qur'ān: A Philosophical Exposition 112

Endnotes **115**

Glossary **117**

Index of Qur'ānic Verses **121**

Topical Index **131**

Preface

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

The ultimate source of all existence is Allah. The cosmos begins with His singular act of creation. This 'beginning' and 'first' exhalation is known as His *Word*. All things are created through this Word and hence all things are essentially His words, or *names*. As creations bear the mark of their Creator, all the words of Allah manifest Him—they reveal Him and make Him known. But some created words are greater than others and have a greater disclosure. Man is such a word and manifests more of His attributes. In manifesting His knowledge, man becomes self-conscious—conscious of his consciousness and aware of his awareness. In participating in His knowledge, man partakes most in Allah's self-disclosure and becomes the locus for a higher more essential and intellectual disclosure through His spoken words and their ultimate meanings—this is Revelation.

Revelation then is the summit of man's intellectual reach and inspires his innermost self and reality. It is the principle by which he participates in his 'own' existence and becomes more real. The direct recipients of Revelation are those whose intellect is the purest, unencumbered by obfuscations implicit in the lower levels of existence as the cosmos becomes more distant from its Origin and as man falls from the supernal realm. These recipients, in their turn, continue the disclosure by presenting in literal words what they have received, so that something of the Word might reach all those potentially capable of intellecting it in some way. Hence the outreach must include all those that have a spirit-intellect of divine inspiration—it must be universal and speak to that which is the most common and most essential in all men. This explains the universal nature of the last Revelation of Allah to humanity—the Qur'ān, as it was revealed to His last chosen recipient and messenger, Muḥammad (upon whom and his Progeny be peace).

The Qur'ān is universal and accessible to all men because it reverberates with that which is deepest and most essential in their selves. On the one hand, it is familiar because it is from man's own self. On

the other, it is extremely profound as it pertains to his essence. Ayatullah Jawādī Āmulī writes,

> The combination of these two merits, being weighty and substantial on the one hand, while being simple, clear, and understandable on the other—is one of the miraculous qualities of the Qur'ān. Being weighty does not imply being difficult just as being easy does not indicate shallowness or superficiality. These two qualities—ease and weightiness—are not really opposites, and that is why they can both be found in the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān then is very understandable and within simple reach, but it is not exhaustible in its meanings. To further penetrate its depths and to continuously ascend through its heights, recourse must be made to supports and aids which are themselves provided by the Revealer. One such support for greater understanding and intellection is knowledge. As Ayatullāh Jawādī says,

> Knowledge is a ladder for the intellect. Intellection is better formulated when the intellectual man has greater knowledge... Every heart which is exposed to deductive thoughts has more of a capacity to bear and receive Qur'ānic knowledge. The more that man benefits from the signs of God's existential book through contemplation over the world of creation, the more will his ability to understand the signs and verses of God's written book, the noble Qur'ān, also increase.

This principle of knowledge helping intellection is not limited to theoretical knowledge only; it also includes practical knowledge, such as the knowledge of ethics. In fact, all knowledge that is qualified by unity and hierarchy, where its divisions end and find their source in the Absolute and the knowledge of Allah, functions as a support to the understanding of the Qur'ān. Hence, even discursive knowledge of the other verses of the Qur'ān, or knowledge of the traditions of the prophets and the saints, helps in the understanding of the Qur'ān. Ayatullāh Jawādī concludes, "As much as man's *fiṭrah* unfolds and as much as his intellectual activity and knowledge increases with respect to mankind and the world, his understanding of the Qur'ān will also blossom."

But knowledge is not the only support for intellection. The other main support for the sharpening of the intellect is the purification of the soul through divinely mandated acts of worship. The tradition

which says that the intellect "is that by which the Merciful is worshipped," reveals this intimate connection between the *ʿaql* (intellect) and *ʿibādah* (worship). As the soul is purified, the spirit-intellect which is buried deep within its core, is further disclosed and revealed. Hence by avoiding sins and performing good deeds, man moves closer to the essential source of his very being, to his divinely inspired intellect, and hence to the Source of that inspiration and the Speaker of the words of the revealed Book, thereby understanding it from within.

From the above it becomes clear why it is totally possible to understand the Qur'ān, but it also becomes clear that the intellectually correct understanding—as it pertains to the Absolute source of all truth—is perfectly objective and not subjective in the least. Hence the whole of modern hermeneutics and textual criticism can have no positive bearing in the understanding of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is composed of the literal words of Allah, revealed by the Creator of man and the intellect, for man and his intellect. The words, as content, are preconfigured to the container that receives them. They are present in all objectivity and must only be consumed in an existential way to allow man, the ultimate recipient of the words, to continue on the path of his becoming and to gain being according to his capacity. Hence the truth of the words of the last and most perfect of the messengers of Allah (upon whom and his Progeny be peace) who said,

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَأْدُبَةُ اللَّهِ فَتَعَلَّمُوا مَأْدُبَتَهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

The Qur'ān is the banquet of Allah so gain knowledge of His banquet as much as you can.

In commenting upon this tradition, Ayatullāh Jawādī writes, "The Messenger of Allah, who is not miserly or tight-fisted according to Allah Himself and who is 'the most generous of the children of Adam' according to his own words, has invited all mankind to the Qur'ān which is the prepared-food for the soul and the 'banquet of Allah'."

The book that is before you is an invaluable resource for gaining knowledge of this Banquet of Allah that the Qur'ān is. Being written by Ayatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, one of the greatest exegetes and *mufassirīn* of our time and a scholar known for his moral uprightness as much as his intellectual perspicacity, it provides us with the keys to understand the words of Allah in a manner that is both relevant and profound. But the profundity of the original text of the author would

be of no use if it was not for the lucidity of the translation provided by Shaykh Rizwan Rashid, who having immersed himself in the tradition of knowledge for many years, was able to provide a text in clear English that is faithful to the original Farsi. This work would also not have seen the light of day if it had not been for the sincere and persistent efforts of Shaykh Muhammad Hasnain who proposed the publication of the translation and saw it through to its very end. Last but not least a note of thanks must be given to Mohammad Reza Kanji who was instrumental in the publication of the book.

Shuja Ali Mirza
12th of Shaʿbān, 1439/ 28th of April, 2018
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Translator's Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

When God speaks to man, it is only befitting that man listens. Beyond that, of course, he must make every effort to understand the meaning behind the divine Words, for words are coined to convey meaning. His distance from his own origination, however, has made this task of deciphering God's Message difficult. Nonetheless, it is possible in principle and the present work is meant to assist him in this journey towards understanding the Words of God in the Qur'ān.

One of the tasks of the Prophet (ṣ) of Islam and his Family (ᶜa) was to teach the Book of God. Those who followed in the footsteps of these divine souls also took on the mantle of teaching the Book. So began the task of writing exegeses and commentaries (*tafāsīr*) of the Qur'ān with the aim of bridging the gap between God's Words and man's understanding. Among the great commentators (*mufassirīn*), one cannot ignore the work of Ayatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, a veritable polymath who, aside from his extensive works in both the intellectual and transmitted sciences, has written numerous volumes of exegesis on various aspects and portions of the Qur'ān.

Exegesis can be of two types: sequential (*tartībī*) and topical (*mawḍūᶜī*). The latter is a more recent development in the history of exegetical composition and the intent is to analyse a particular topic from the perspective of and in light of the Qur'ān. Within the works of Ayatullāh Jawādī, we find both types of exegeses, an indication of his profound attachment to the noble Qur'ān and his proficiency in relation to its contents. His multi-volume series of topical exegeses covers the Qur'ānic perspective on a range of subject-matters including Tawḥīd, revelation, prophethood, eschatology, the way of life of the noble Messenger (ṣ), ethics, epistemology, anthropology, etc. The very first volume of this series pertains to the Qur'ān itself and is entitled *Qur'ān dar Qur'ān* (*The Qur'ān in Light of the Qur'ān*). It includes a discussion on: (1) the reality of the Qur'ān, (2) the inimitability and miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, (3) the message of the Qur'ān, (4) the permanence and preservation of the Qur'ān, and finally (5) understanding the Qur'ān.

That which is offered as a translation here is the final chapter of *Qurʾān dar Qurʾān*. In it, Ayatullāh Jawādī answers certain exegetical questions including the following: Is the Qurʾān accessible to all and if so on what basis? What are the conditions for approaching and understanding the Qurʾān? What are the different levels of the Qurʾān? What is the role of the Prophet (ṣ) and the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) in elucidating the Qurʾān? What is the relation between the narrations and the Qurʾān? What were key features of the exegetical approach adopted by ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī in his exegesis of the Qurʾān? What is the relation between the definitive and allegorical verses? And finally, what is the role of the intellect in understanding the Qurʾān?

A translation of this nature is not possible without assistance. Foremost, of course, is the *tawfīq* granted by Allah for which I am forever grateful. I would like to extend my gratitude to Shaykh Shuja Ali Mirza for his time, advice, and intellectual insights with regard to the topic of this translation. I would also like to thank Shaykh Tahir Ridha Jaffer for reading through the original draft of the manuscript and offering valuable suggestions. Effort was made to try and render the work into a form that is loyal to the original while being fluent for the English reader. Qurʾānic verses have been translated in consultation with Ali Quli Qarai's translation and modified where required. Finally, a note of thanks to Sr. Farheen Fatima Abbas for proofreading the work and to Br. Mustafa Al-Mosawi for generating the topical index.

Rizwan Rashid
12th of Shaᶜbān, 1439
Qom, Iran.

Chapter 1:

Accessibility of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān has been sent down as a guide for all human beings. Therefore, any individual who occupies a part of this vast earth at any time can benefit from the light of its guidance. In order to gain insight into the Qur'ānic teachings, one does not need to belong to any particular culture. Being a part of another culture or civilization does not make the secrets of the Qur'ān inaccessible and does not prevent one from benefiting from its intricacies. In particular, being an Arab is not a requirement for accessing the truths of the Qur'ān nor is being a non-Arab a barrier in reaching the treasures of its teachings. The Qur'ān is a warner for all the worlds and a guide for all mankind. Hence, it is the human *fiṭrah*[1] (man's innate and divinely-originated disposition) which is in touch with the *lingua franca* of the Qur'ān.

Man's Fiṭrah is Familiar with The Language of the Qur'ān

If a book is meant to be universal and eternal, it must speak to the inhabitants of the world in a way that can be understood by everyone. No one should use language—unfamiliarity to it or unclarity of it—as an excuse for not embarking on the path of ascension. They should not consider it as a thorn on their path and nor lose hope because of it from traversing the road to felicity. The only language that harmonizes the vastness of mankind is the language of the *fiṭrah*—i.e., man's common culture. It is the *fiṭrah* that is acquainted with God, and the Creator of the world has ensured its preservation and constancy for all humanity throughout history:

[1] From the root *faṭara* meaning "he created, originated, or moulded."

فَأَقِم وَجهَكَ لِلدّينِ حَنيفًا فِطرَتَ اللَّـهِ الَّتي فَطَرَ النّاسَ
عَلَيها لا تَبديلَ لِخَلقِ اللَّـهِ ذٰلِكَ الدّينُ القَيِّمُ

So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has originated all people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion ...(30:30)[i]

One of the indications that the language of the Qur'ān pertains to man's *fiṭrah* and carries a common universal culture can be seen in the marvellous assembling of individuals such as Salmān the Persian, Ṣuhayb the Roman, Bilāl the Ethiopian, Uways the Qaranī (Yemenite), and ᶜAmmār the Arabian who gathered around the blessed presence of the universal prophet, Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdullah (ṣ). With the slogan, "I have been raised for the reds, the blacks, and the whites,"[i] the Prophet gained a universal following and acceptance. This is for no other reason than the following: in the presence of revelation—which is the complete manifestation of the oneness of the Truth—the multiplicity of forms (*ṣūrah*) is subordinated to the oneness of substance (*sīrah*), and the plurality of languages, races, regions, habits, and customs is subsumed by an inner unity: "United are the souls of the men of God."[ii]

Those who consider colour, race, language, and other ephemeral qualities to be what is essential in man are themselves like minerals, vegetables, and animals. On the surface, they may have distinguishing features but deep down, they are no different than inanimate objects or domesticated beasts. It is only the God-fearing knowers amongst humanity who have preserved the *fiṭrah* of accepting the glad tidings of divine revelation, have taken steps in this direction, and have reached their destination. Such upright individuals possess the distinguishing differentia of being human and with a wise sense of awe arising from their *fiṭrah*, they play a unifying role for others. However, those who are enamoured by the multi-coloured spectacles of the natural world—a world "soft in touch, but lethal in its poison"[iii]—are scattered folk: "The souls of lions and dogs are divided."[iv]

---

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 16, p. 377, no. 28.
[ii] Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Mathnawī*, Book 4, Line 414. An alternative version reads, "United are the souls of the lions of God".
[iii] Nahj al-Balāghah, Letter 68.
[iv] Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Ibid.* An alternative reading is "The souls of wolves and dogs are divided."

The sciences that exist in the world today, whether intellectual or transmitted, have been compiled into specific subjects and are of benefit to specific groups of individuals. Not everyone understands the language of these sciences nor benefits from them. The target audience of each of these sciences—from industry to agriculture and from jurisprudence to the principles of jurisprudence—are a limited number of individuals who are acquainted with the technical jargon of those fields. But the average man cannot benefit from them. In contrast, a book that is for mankind must possess two qualities: (1) it must be understood by all and (2) it must be beneficial to all.

The various sciences of mankind are like assorted fruits of an orchard—i.e., each person has his own preference with regard to them. The noble Qur'ān, however, is not like one fruit amongst an array of fruits; rather, it is more akin to water. No living entity can say, "I have no need for water" since water is essential to man's life. Everyone is well-aware of water and can easily benefit from it.

The Qur'ān, which claims that it has come for all mankind, must be a book that everyone can understand and from which they can benefit. No individual should feel that one can live without it. All the differences we have—whether in gender (male or female), in age (young or old), in profession (medicine, business, or agriculture), in race (blacks, whites, or reds), and in geography (east, west, north, or south)—have divided mankind outwardly. It is true that the Qur'ān requires a particular language—i.e., the clear and eloquent Arabic—in order to descend into this realm of existence; nevertheless, its [essential] language and culture is the language and culture of the *fiṭrah*. Everyone understands this language, and it is this feature which makes the Qur'ān universal. If the Qur'ānic culture was the culture of a particular race or group, it would never have been able to be universal.

God Almighty, describes the Qur'ān as a simple reminder:

وَلَقَد يَسَّرنَا القُرآنَ لِلذِّكرِ فَهَل مِن مُدَّكِرٍ

Certainly We have made the Quran simple for the sake of reminding. So is there anyone who will be reminded? (54:17)

In other words, we have made this book easily attainable for the remembrance of the Truth; so is there anyone who will remember? The Qur'ān is the simplest, the greatest, and the closest means for intimacy with God in one's heart, and for remembering His name on one's tongue. The simplicity of the Qur'ān is precisely because, deep

down at the level of his soul and heart, man is acquainted with its message.

Therefore, the "simplicity" of the Qur'ān should not be understood in terms of it being a "light read" or a rudimentary book. After all, God says:

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا

Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty discourse. (73:5)

The noble Qur'ān is a speech that is heavy and substantial; at the same time, however, due to its harmony and acquaintance with man's *fiṭrah*, understanding it and benefiting from it has been made easy. The combination of these two merits—i.e., being weighty and substantial on the one hand, while being simple, clear, and understandable on the other—is one of the miraculous qualities of the Qur'ān. Being weighty does not imply being difficult just as being easy does not indicate shallowness or superficiality. These two qualities—ease and weightiness—are not true opposites, and that is why they can both be found in the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān as Unambiguous Light

God Almighty, who is the speaker of the Qur'ān and the One who sent it down, knows it better than any creature. Compared to any specialist or expert in Qur'ānic studies, God is most worthy to describe it. In fact, God's worthiness of the task cannot even be compared to that of anyone else; the latter either have no knowledge of the Qur'ān, or if they do, it is only on account of God's exposition of it.

God, who has no equal in terms of His worthiness to describe the Qur'ān, introduces the Qur'ān as a light for the inhabitants of the world:

يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَد جاءَكُم بُرهانٌ مِن رَبِّكُم وَأَنزَلنا إِلَيكُم نورًا مُبينًا

O mankind! Certainly, a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light. (4:174)

قَد جاءَكُم مِنَ اللَّـهِ نورٌ وَكِتابٌ مُبينٌ

... Certainly, there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book. (5:15)

The illuminating quality of the Qur'ān implies two things: (1) its teachings are clear and free from the murkiness of any ambiguity; and (2) those teachings release human societies from all types of dark obscurities pertaining to beliefs and ethics and liberates them from confusion with regard to choosing a path and setting a goal. The Qur'ān takes them towards the bright garden of the Straight Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and the true goal of the Garden of Eden:

كِتابٌ أَنزَلناهُ إِلَيكَ لِتُخرِجَ النّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُماتِ إِلَى النّورِ

[This is] a Book We have sent down to you that you may bring mankind out from darkness into light (14:1)

The noble Qur'ān is an illuminated book which descended from "Allah, the Light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35) and hence it must be "evident in and of itself while making other things evident around it" (*ẓāhir bi-dhātihi wa muẓhir li-ghayrihi*).[i] In other words, not only is its essence clear but it clarifies other things as well. This is the particularity of light. Hence, if some verses of the Qur'ān do not seem sufficiently clear at first glance, in so far as the totality of the Qur'ān has one lofty objective and its verses explain and elucidate each other, the necessary clarity will shine forth with a little bit of contemplation and by referring each verse to other clear verses.

The noble Qur'ān is one light and its chapters are its many rays and beams. These chapters do not contradict one another:

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرونَ القُرآنَ وَلَو كانَ مِن عِندِ غَيرِ اللَّـهِ لَوَجَدوا فيهِ اختِلافًا كَثيرًا

Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from [someone] other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it. (4:82)

Though these chapters are multiple in number, they all constitute one light due to the whole of the Qur'ān being composed of similar motifs (*mutashābihan mathāniya*).[ii]

[i] This is the traditional definition of light in Islamic philosophy. [Tr.]
[ii] See Qur'an 39:23.

With regards to the Qur'ān being clear and far from ambiguity, God the Exalted says:

كِتابٌ فُصِّلَت آياتُهُ قُرآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِقَومٍ يَعلَمونَ

[this is] a Book whose signs have been elaborated for a people who have knowledge, an Arabic Quran (41:3)

This book is an expounded discourse and its verses have been explained one after the other in a clear and open fashion. Every topic has clarity, and truth and falsehood have been separated, one from the other.

إِنَّهُ لَقَولٌ فَصلٌ

it is indeed an expounded discourse (86:13)

If the Qur'ān is unadulterated divine light, then anything which is dark or dim is distant from it. Riddles, enigmas, ambiguities, and complications are barred from the presence of the illuminated Qur'ān. Of course, the luminosity of the Qur'ān differs from verse to verse. Some are as luminous as the sun, others like the moon, while others resemble the stars. Nonetheless, despite the different intensities of luminosity, one cannot find a single verse in the Qur'ān which is bereft of light.

Even the *muqatta'ah* letters[i] of the Qur'ān, about which there are so many opinions, are ultimately understandable, perhaps after undergoing the necessary stages. These letters, which have been placed at the onset of some chapters, are in reference to the very contents of those chapters and the codes which reveal the contents of those chapters. They are like the signboards that are placed at the entrance of academic institutes and mosques which indicate the nature of those organizations. If we are able to access the contents of a chapter, through attentiveness and dexterity, then the encoded meaning of the *muqatta'ah* letters will become clear.

The allegorical (*mutashābihat*) verses have a similar status in that once we connect them to the definitive (*muḥkamāt*) verses, the meaning of the verses will become clear. This topic will be discussed in chapter 5.

Imam Bāqir (*'a*) says: "Anyone who supposes that the Book of God is ambiguous has truly perished and caused others to perish."[ii] In

[i] These are the abbreviated letters prefixed to 26 chapters of the Qur'ān.
[ii] Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 1, p. 12.

other words, not only has such an individual gone astray with regards to knowing the Qur'ān, but he has led others astray as well. The noble Qur'ān is the exposition of all things (*tibyānan li kulli shay*)[i]; hence if there is anything that prevents a complete understanding of the Book, it is the views of the common person. Powerful eyes are needed to be able to see the light of the divine sun. If we are unable to understand it then according to the Leader of the Faithful where he says, "be suspicious of your opinions [if they go] against it"[ii], we should interrogate our own thoughts and views. We should never force our own dubious views on the Qur'ān nor interpret it according to our own opinions.

The Qur'ān contains many teachings, some of which are higher than others. The highest levels can be understood by the select saints of God. Nonetheless, the essential light of the Qur'ān and its necessary contents can be understood by everyone. There is no topic in the Qur'ān which has been left unclarified; the clarification comes through other related verses whereby all ambiguity is removed. In order to awaken the buried treasures of the intellects[iii] and to cause the hidden talents of man to blossom, deep intellectual proofs have been mentioned in the Qur'ān; however, riddles and enigmas which require great effort to solve and which do not lead to intellectual demonstration or mystical witnessing are denied entry into the presence of the wise Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān as a Proof and Manifest Evidence

Referring to the Qur'ān as a proof (*burhān*), God says:

يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَد جاءَكُم بُرهانٌ مِن رَبِّكُم

O mankind! Certainly, a proof has come to you from your Lord ...
(4:174)

A 'proof' is that which is clear, apparent, and free from obscurity and ambiguity. For this reason, a clear and manifest proof which is obvious and decisive in its message is called '*burhān*' in Qur'ānic terms. This is why the miraculous staff of Moses and his bright, unblemished hand was called 'proofs':

---

[i] A reference to Qur'ān 16:89.
[ii] Nahj al-balāghah, Sermon 176.
[iii] A reference to Sermon 1 of the *Nahj al-balāghah*.

فَذانِكَ بُرهانانِ مِن رَبِّكَ

... These shall be two proofs from your Lord ...(28:32)

These two miracles were to be considered two proofs and clear evidences for prophecy, leaving no room for doubt.

God also calls the Qur'ān a manifest evidence (*bayyinah*):

وَهٰذا كِتابٌ أَنزَلناهُ مُبارَكٌ فَاتَّبِعوهُ وَاتَّقوا لَعَلَّكُم تُرحَمونَ
أَن تَقولوا إِنَّما أُنزِلَ الكِتابُ عَلىٰ طائِفَتَينِ مِن قَبلِنا وَإِن كُنّا
عَن دِراسَتِهِم لَغافِلينَ أَو تَقولوا لَو أَنّا أُنزِلَ عَلَينَا الكِتابُ
لَكُنّا أَهدىٰ مِنهُم فَقَد جاءَكُم بَيِّنَةٌ مِن رَبِّكُم وَهُدًى
وَرَحمَةٌ

And this Book that We have sent down is a blessed one; so follow it, and be Godwary so that you may receive [His] mercy. Lest you should say, 'The Book was sent down only to two communities before us, and we were indeed unaware of their studies,' or [lest] you should say, 'If the Book had been sent down to us, surely we would have been better-guided than them.' There has already come to you a manifest evidence (bayyinah) from your Lord and a guidance and mercy ... (6:155-157)

To paraphrase the above verse: This Qur'ān is a book that We have sent down with great blessings and goodness. Hence, you must follow it and be wary of God so that you may be surrounded with his mercy and grace. We have sent down the Qur'ān so that you do not say that the Torah and the Evangel were sent to the two communities of the Jews and the Christians and hence we were unaware of the teachings of such divine books and did not benefit from them. Nor should you say that if a book had been sent to us we would have overtaken them in guidance, for a manifest evidence, guidance, and mercy has come to you from your Lord.

That which is clear, apparent, and indisputable like the sun is called '*bayyinah*'. If the testimony of two individuals is called '*bayyinah*' it is due to the evident nature of their testament.[2] For this reason, the noble Prophet has stipulated the responsibility of a witness and has alluded to the sun when he says, "either give testimony

to its like [i.e., the sun] or do not give testimony at all"[1]—i.e., if that which you wish to give testimony is certain and evident for you like the sun, then go ahead and give testimony; otherwise, step down.

With regard to the Qur'ān being a manifest evidence, God says in another verse:

شَهرُ رَمَضانَ الَّذي أُنزِلَ فيهِ القُرآنُ هُدًى لِلنّاسِ وَبَيِّناتٍ
مِنَ الهُدىٰ وَالفُرقانِ

The month of Ramadan is one in which the Quran was sent down as guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs (bayyināt) of guidance and the Criterion ... (2:185)

If the Qur'ān is a manifest proof (*bayyinah*) and its verses and chapters are also manifest proofs (*bayyināt*), then not only is the inimitability of the Qur'ān clear and without doubt, but its contents, subject matters, and teachings are also clear and evident—so evident that it leaves no room for doubt.

The Qur'ān is Immune from every Doubt

الم ذٰلِكَ الكِتابُ لا رَيبَ فيهِ هُدًى لِلمُتَّقينَ

Alif, Lam, Mim. This is the Book, there is no doubt (rayb) in it, a guidance to the Godwary. (2:1-2)

The Qur'ān is a book of guidance in which doubt has no right of entry—not in its claim of being inimitable nor in its guidance and teachings. It is a book abounding in truth wherein falsehood can find no way:

وَالَّذي أُنزِلَ إِلَيكَ مِن رَبِّكَ الحَقُّ

... That which has been sent down to you from your Lord is the truth ... (13:1)

It is a clear and illuminating book which has come *from* Allah so how can it contain doubt or uncertainty?

Doubt comes about when truth and error are both possible. However, in a place abounding with truth, no one can fall into error for there is no room for doubt. It is like the Day of Resurrection wherein no falsehood will be present and each thing will be evident according

[1] *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, v. 27, p. 342.

to its own capacity. This is why no one will be in doubt regarding the actual Day itself nor regarding any of its realities. Likewise, the Qur'ān is also a Book of Truth which has been revealed with truth from a God who is nothing but sheer Truth:

وَبِالحَقِّ أَنزَلناهُ وَبِالحَقِّ نَزَلَ

With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend ... (17:105)

For this reason, there is no form of falsehood within it:

لا يَأتيهِ الباطِلُ مِن بَينِ يَدَيهِ وَلا مِن خَلفِهِ

Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it ... (41:42)

This is why God has categorically negated any and all forms of doubt from the noble Qur'ān.[3]

The Difference between Rayb and Shakk

Lexically, the term '*rayb*' is a state of anxiety and apprehension which is brought about in a human soul by ignorance or doubt along with slander and its like. Hence, the term '*murīb*' can become an adjective for the term '*shakk*' (doubt)—i.e., a doubt which brings about anxiety. In the blessed chapter of Saba', God says:

إِنَّهُم كانوا في شَكٍّ مُريبٍ

... truly they were in ominous doubt (34:54)

This refers to the unbelievers who are in a state of ominous doubt. Imam Hasan (ᶜa) narrates that he heard from the Prophet of Islam (ṣ) who said: "Let go of that which causes you anxiety and go towards that which does not cause you anxiety; it is doubt which brings about anxiety while it is truth which brings about tranquillity."[4]

To illustrate the difference between the two types of doubt, consider the following: A man who has forgotten how many times a year a particular tree bears fruit may be in doubt about the matter without experiencing the least bit of anxiety. However, if this same man is in doubt regarding the safety of a particular route, apart from his doubt, he may also suffer from a degree of anxiety and apprehension.

[4] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 26, no. 16; *Tafsīr Kashshāf*, v. 1, p. 34.

Answering an Objection:

It is possible that the following objection may be raised: if there are no grounds for doubt or having reservations with regard to the Qur'ān (as is explicitly mentioned in its verses) then how do we explain all the doubts and reservations that the unbelievers expressed in the past and continue to express today with regard to the Qur'ān? After all, does not the well-known dictum support that stance: "The most decisive proof for the possibility of something is the very existence of it."[1] Hence, in so far as doubt has been raised vis-à-vis the Qur'ān, it implies that the grounds for such a doubt lie within the Qur'ān itself. Moreover, the existence of this doubt and mistrust of the unbelievers is explicitly and repeatedly acknowledged in Qur'ān itself:

بَل هُم فِي شَكٍّ مِن ذِكري

... Indeed, they are in doubt concerning My Reminder ... (38:8)

بَل هُم فِي شَكٍّ مِنها

... No, they are in doubt about it ... (27:66)

وَإِنَّا لَفي شَكٍّ مِمّا تَدعونَنا إِلَيهِ مُريبٍ

... 'Indeed we have ominous doubts concerning that to which you invite us.' (14:9)

وَارتابَت قُلوبُهُم فَهُم في رَيبِهِم يَتَرَدَّدونَ

... and whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt. (9:45)

Some of the great exegetes have responded to this objection in the following manner: When a person doubts about a particular matter, there could be two reasons for it: either (1) there is an issue with the matter itself—i.e., the matter is deficient, weak, or false, thereby leading to the formation of doubt in a person; or (2) the doubter himself has a weakness or deficiency. In this latter case, the doubt stems from the doubter himself and not from what he is in doubt about.

To illustrate this, consider the types of premises one finds in classical logic. If the relation between the subject and predicate is one of

[1] In other words, the very existence of people who are in doubt regarding the Qur'ān is proof that it is possible for doubt to enter the Qur'ān.

possibility (as opposed to necessity) then this premise is naturally open to doubt since its predicate may or may not be affirmed for its subject. However, if the relation between the subject and predicate is one of necessity, then the subject of that premise must contain that predicate by necessity just as that predicate must be affirmed for that subject by necessity.[4] This second type of premise is essentially one wherein "there is no doubt in it". In other words, reality gives you no opportunity (possibility) to doubt it. If, however, an individual still has doubt about this second type of premise, it is because he has not understood that premise and the relationship between its subject and predicate.

The noble Qur'ān considers its own teachings to be of a necessary nature. It has described this necessity in various expressions pertaining to the Origin, the Return, revelation, and prophethood. In order to analyse its own perspective on this issue, it emphasizes two essential points: (1) the universal principles of religion are free from any doubt; and (2) some individuals, due to their faithlessness or hypocrisy, have doubt with regard to these principles. As for these individuals, the Qur'ān ascribes their doubt to their blindness since they cannot see the clear and necessary teachings of the Qur'ān. It is quite clear and indisputable that a day is a 'day' and a night is a 'night' but for someone who doubts whether it is daytime or nighttime, it is not due to uncertainty as to whether the rising sun will give rise to the day; rather, it is due to the blindness of the doubter who has given up his ability to perceive.

The noble Qur'ān considers one who has given up his intellectual faculty as one who is blind:

أَفَلَم يَسيروا فِي الأَرضِ فَتَكونَ لَهُم قُلوبٌ يَعقِلونَ بِها أَو آذانٌ يَسمَعونَ بِها فَإِنَّها لا تَعمَى الأَبصارُ وَلـٰكِن تَعمَى القُلوبُ الَّتي فِي الصُّدورِ

Have they not travelled through the land so that they may have hearts by which they may exercise their reason, or ears by which they may hear? Indeed, it is not the eyes that turn blind, but it is the hearts in the breasts that turn blind! (22:46)

The Qur'ānic perspective is this: If the illuminated lantern of man's inner being—which is none other than his intellect and *fiṭrah*—is extinguished due to the effects of sins, faithlessness, and hypocrisy,

then he will be blind-hearted. And if the inner being of someone becomes blind, he will not have the power to differentiate between truth and falsehood. When this happens, he will not be able to perceive the difference between the Words of God and the words of man. Therefore, just as he doubts the words of man, he will also doubt the Words of God:

بَلِ ادّارَكَ عِلمُهُم فِي الآخِرَةِ بَل هُم فِي شَكٍّ مِنها بَل هُم مِنها عَمونَ

Do they comprehend the knowledge of the Hereafter? No, they are in doubt about it. Rather, they are blind to it. (27:66)

Such unbelievers have been afflicted with blindness and for this very reason, they have doubts regarding the Oneness of God, Resurrection, or divine revelation.

This matter is similar to a related one that we find in the Qur'ān. It is said that the noble Qur'ān is a cure for all illnesses. Despite this, there are those who precisely due to their own (spiritual-psychic) illness or "digestive imbalance", are not only deprived from benefitting from the Qur'ān, but their condition is actually worsened through it:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ القُرآنِ ما هُوَ شِفاءٌ وَرَحمَةٌ لِلمُؤمِنينَ وَلا يَزيدُ الظّالِمينَ إِلّا خَسارًا

We send down in the Quran that which is a cure and mercy for the faithful; and it increases the wrongdoers only in loss. (17:82)

فِي قُلوبِهِم مَرَضٌ فَزادَهُمُ اللَّـهُ مَرَضًا

There is a sickness in their hearts; then Allah increased their sickness ... (2:10)

These are like those individuals who have a physiological issue in their digestive system, such that consuming sweet, wholesome fruits not only fails to nourish them, but actually worsens their condition.[1]

[1] The author explains some of the reasons for this spiritual or psychic imbalance in the following sections. [Tr.]

وَأَمَّا الَّذينَ في قُلوبِهِم مَرَضٌ فَزادَتهُم رِجسًا إِلىٰ رِجسِهِم
وَماتوا وَهُم كافِرونَ

But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless (9:125)

In the aforementioned example, the worsening of the condition of those afflicted with a digestive illness due to consuming sweet fruits pertains to the deficiency of the receiver and not to the ineffectiveness of the giver (i.e., the fruits). In the same way, the increase of defilement (mentioned in verse 9:125) has to do with the deficiency of the unbelievers and the hypocrites and not with the ineffectiveness of the noble Qur'ān.

Obstacles in Understanding the Qur'ān: Ignorance and Arrogance

God Almighty, says:

سَأَصرِفُ عَن آياتِيَ الَّذينَ يَتَكَبَّرونَ فِي الأَرضِ بِغَيرِ الحَقِّ
وَإِن يَرَوا كُلَّ آيَةٍ لا يُؤمِنوا بِها وَإِن يَرَوا سَبيلَ الرُّشدِ لا
يَتَّخِذوهُ سَبيلًا وَإِن يَرَوا سَبيلَ الغَيِّ يَتَّخِذوهُ سَبيلًا ذٰلِكَ
بِأَنَّهُم كَذَّبوا بِآياتِنا وَكانوا عَنها غافِلينَ

Soon I shall turn away from My signs those who are unduly arrogant in the earth: [even] though they should see every sign, they will not believe in it, and if they see the way of rectitude they will not take it as [their] way, and if they see the way of error they will take it as [their] way. That is because they deny Our signs and are oblivious to them.' (7:146)

Someone who is unduly arrogant and who is not humble when faced with the Truth, God will turn his heart away from accessing the teachings of religion:

ثُمَّ انصَرَفوا صَرَفَ اللَّـهُ قُلوبَهُم

... Then they turn away. Allah has turned aside their hearts ... (9:127)

Since they were the first to turn aside from the divine signs due to an inner weakness, God also turned their hearts aside from understanding the contents of the Qur'ān. Such individuals do not understand the Qur'ān, and even if they were to "understand" it, they would not benefit from it. Their attention is fixated on the fleeting wares of the world:

يَأْخُذونَ عَرَضَ هٰذَا الأَدنىٰ

... they grab the transitory gains of this lower world ... (7:169)

They take to the lowly commodities of this world giving up their pure, divine intellect and *fiṭrah*; as a result, they become afflicted with a blindness of the heart.

The noble Qur'ān warns all men that if they drown themselves in worldly affairs, they will inevitably bury their pure inner soul in the corporeal world of nature (*ṭabīʿah*) and will gain nothing but loss as a result. If someone submerges his intellect and *fiṭrah* in worldly instincts and desires, he is, in effect, burying his source of inner inspiration and his means of discerning truth from falsehood and virtue from vice:

فَأَلهَمَها فُجورَها وَتَقواها

and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices (91:8)

Naturally, such an individual will never be able to understand the supra-sensory and lofty teachings of the Qur'ān.

Those who do not understand the necessity of revelation and who resist the Prophets of God are ignorant and arrogant. Their ignorance prevents them from contemplation, and hence, they are unable to make sense of the bounties left by the Prophet. Their arrogance prevents them from submitting to the Truth, and hence they rise against it. They lack both the capacity of the tongue to articulate knowledge of reality as well as the receptivity of ears to hear the truth. Not only do they prevent themselves from hearing the enlivening verses of the Qur'ān, but they bar others from accessing it as well:

يَنهَونَ عَنهُ وَيَنأَونَ عَنهُ

They dissuade [others] from [following] him, and [themselves] avoid him ... (6:26)

They prohibit others from divine grace because they are deprived of it themselves:

وَقالَ الَّذينَ كَفَروا لا تَسمَعوا لِهٰذَا القُرآنِ وَالغَوا فيهِ

The faithless say, 'Do not listen to this Quran and hoot it down ... (41:26)

The faithless would say: Do not listen to this Qur'ān; do not accept this speech; rise up and strive in creating sedition, idle talk, and nonsensical speech so as to resist the Qur'ān. God considers such people as being empty on the inside and sealed on the outside—i.e., they are devoid of inner movement, and the opening orifices (i.e., the ears) of their heart and life-source is sealed. As a result, they are empty-headed and inwardly vacant.

وَأَفئِدَتُهُم هَواءٌ

... and their hearts will be vacant. (14:43)

The entire struggle of the divine prophets was to grant man a deep soul, an intelligent mind, ears that hear the truth, and a tongue that speaks the truth by enabling his *fiṭrah* to blossom. God quotes the unbelievers:

وَقالوا قُلوبُنا في أَكِنَّةٍ مِمّا تَدعونا إِلَيهِ وَفي آذانِنا وَقرٌ وَمِن بَينِنا وَبَينِكَ حِجابٌ

They say, 'Our hearts are in veils from what you invite us to, and there is a deafness in our ears, and there is a curtain between us and you ... (41:5)

They would say: our hearts are covered in relation to what you call us towards; there is a heaviness in our ears such that we do not understand your logic; there is a veil between us and you that prevents any mutual understanding and communication.

Noah (*ʿa*) also complains to God about the arrogance and lack of comprehension of the unbelievers of his own time:

وَإِنّي كُلَّما دَعَوتُهُم لِتَغفِرَ لَهُم جَعَلوا أَصابِعَهُم في آذانِهِم وَاستَغشَوا ثِيابَهُم وَأَصَرّوا وَاستَكبَرُوا استِكبارًا

Indeed whenever I have summoned them, so that You might forgive them, they would put their fingers into their ears and draw

their cloaks over their heads, and they were persistent [in their unfaith], and disdainful in [their] arrogance. (71:7)

He would say: O God, night and day I called my community towards the truth but my advice has not increased them in anything but evasion. As much as I called them towards your pardon and forgiveness, they stuck their fingers in their ears, placed their cloaks over their faces, remained persistent in their unbelief, and showed extreme arrogance.

Regarding the deniers of the Qur'ān, God Almighty says to the Prophet (ṣ):

وَإِذا قَرَأْتَ القُرآنَ جَعَلنا بَينَكَ وَبَينَ الَّذينَ لا يُؤمِنونَ بِالآخِرَةِ حِجابًا مَستورًا

When you recite the Quran, We draw a hidden curtain between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter. (7:45)

This raises the question: How is it possible that when reciting the sheer light of the Qur'ān, a veil or darkness comes about? What type of veil is this and why does it come about?

The Veils of the Heart: Sin and Self-Conceit

Sin is a veil and its cloth is weaved from self-conceit. No veil is worse than this. Imam al-Kāẓim (ᶜa) says: "There is no veil between God and his creation apart from creation itself. God is veiled without a veil that has veiled (Him); and He is covered without a cover that has covered (Him). There is no god but Him, the Magnificent, the Sublime."[i]

If there is a veil in question, then it is the self-centeredness of creation. If there is a curtain that is draped, it is man's pride. For true Beauty has no curtain:

> Between the lover and the beloved, there is not barrier
> You are your own veil Hafiz, so remove yourself.[ii]

To the extent that man is entangled in the waft and weave of pride, he will be deprived of seeing God. Moreover, he will not be able to witness or be in the presence of the divine prophets. To the

[i] Tawḥīd Ṣadūq, p. 179; Biḥār al-anwār, v. 3, p. 327.
[ii] Ḥāfiẓ, Ghazal 266.

degree of his own pride, he will be denied the revelation and bounties that they bring.

If a man does not hear the words of the messenger of God and does not comprehend the Qur'ān, then he should know that he is in a veil of sins. The more a man is immersed in this world and his sins, the more will his understanding of the Qur'ān be veiled since the degree of his incomprehension will be proportional to the thickness of his veil. Moreover, the more that he indulges in his animalistic tendencies, the more will he lose out in deriving pleasure from the Qur'ān. This is because, God has said:

فَلَمَّا زاغوا أَزاغَ اللَّـهُ قُلوبَهُم

... So when they swerved [from the right path], Allah made their hearts swerve ... (61:5)

ثُمَّ انصَرَفوا صَرَفَ اللَّـهُ قُلوبَهُم

... Then they turned away. Allah has turned aside their hearts ... (9:127)

Therefore, it is not the Qur'ān that is veiled and draped for it does not contain any ambiguities that would prevent others from understanding its verses; rather, it is the pursuers of this world and the unfaithful who are afflicted with the veil of self-conceit. It is for this very reason that they are not able to perceive anything beyond themselves; all that does not accord with their self-centredness, worldliness, and self-indulgence is beyond their comprehension.

Regarding those who are deprived from contemplating over the Qur'ān, God says:

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرونَ القُرآنَ أَم عَلىٰ قُلوبٍ أَقفالُها

Do they not contemplate the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts? (47:24)

The verse is explicit: it is possible for hearts to have locks. If a heart is locked it is like an eye which has been sealed shut—it does not have the ability to see any light nor anything else that can be seen in the light.

In contrast, the Qur'ān considers an open heart and an expanded chest as prerequisites for comprehending the verses:

فَمَن يُرِدِ اللَّـهُ أَن يَهدِيَهُ يَشرَح صَدرَهُ لِلإِسلامِ

Whomever Allah desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam ...
(6:125)

There is no complexity or ambiguity in the text of the Qur'ān; if there is an obstacle, it is due to the receiver—i.e., it is due to the heart of man which is locked or blocked. God Almighty tells his Prophet (ṣ) to say to the people: though I have received the Qur'ān due to prophecy, when it comes to reciting and teaching it, I will speak to you through discourse, demonstration, intellection, proofs, and clear evidences. And if you have not buried your *fiṭrah* and have not immersed yourselves in sins, you will be able to gain clear access to the divine verses through your faith and virtuous deeds:

قُل إِنَّما أَنا بَشَرٌ مِثلُكُم يوحىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّما إِلـٰهُكُم إِلـٰهٌ واحِدٌ
فَمَن كانَ يَرجو لِقاءَ رَبِّهِ فَليَعمَل عَمَلًا صالِحًا وَلا يُشرِك
بِعِبادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Say, 'I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One God. So whoever expects to encounter his Lord—let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.' (18:110)

Chapter 2:

Conditions for Approaching the Qur'ān

Benefitting deeply from the knowledge of the noble Qur'ān and understanding its lofty teachings is conditional on the relationship one has with the true instructor of the Qur'ān which is none other than God, the All-beneficent. For God says:

الرَّحمٰنُ عَلَّمَ القُرآنَ

The All-beneficent has taught the Quran (55:1-2)

God-Consciousness

Knowledge of the Qur'ān is accompanied by the beneficence (*raḥmah*) of God, and the particular beneficence of God encompasses the state of the God-conscious (*muttaqīn*):

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّـهُ

... Be wary/conscious of Allah and Allah will teach you ... (2:282)

Hence, to benefit from the teaching and knowledge of God, we must become conscious of God. This is why the noble Qur'ān tells us that the best garment for our souls is the pure garment of God-consciousness (*taqwā*):

وَلِباسُ التَّقوىٰ ذٰلِكَ خَيرٌ

... Yet the garment of Godwariness/God-consciousness—that is the best ... (7:26)

In another place, God says in the form of a conditional statement:

إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ يَجعَل لَكُم فُرقانًا

... If you are wary/conscious of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you ... (8:29)

If we take God-consciousness as our vocation and be wary of God's divine commandments, then God will assign for us a light and knowledge that will be a criterion between truth and falsehood.

The noble Qur'ān is not a simple, everyday book such that man can access all of its teachings simply by learning the rules of Arabic grammar, etc. It is a book which has its roots at the extremities of the heavens at the Station of *Ladun*[5] and it originates from the knowledge of God. Hence, perceiving its endless teachings without erecting a ladder of God-consciousness and a connection with God is not possible. Though it is true that man's eyes, ears, and senses play a role in acquiring knowledge, nonetheless, the true depository of knowledge and its treasures is really the heart. God deposits and inspires divine knowledge to a heart endowed with the required level of purity and well-being due to the power of God-consciousness.

In the noble Qur'ān, God-consciousness (*taqwā*) does not correspond to any one particular station of the stations of faith (*maqam-i īmān*) such as repentance (*tawbah*), returning penitently (*inābah*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and goodness (*iḥsān*). God-consciousness lends itself to gradation and, hence, is compatible with every degree and station of faith. Guidance (*hidāyah*) also comprises the same degrees and hence anyone who has a particular level of God-consciousness will also have a share in the respective level of guidance (from God).

The Levels of God-Consciousness

The following verse alludes to the fact that God-consciousness is a gradational reality comprising differing degrees.[6] Anyone with a higher degree of God-consciousness will also be respectively more noble:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّـهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

... Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you ... (49:13)

The noble Qur'ān describes one level of *taqwā* as faith itself which is performing that which is mandatory and refraining from that which is prohibited. This *taqwā* is a general *taqwā* mandated on every individual. This is the lowest level of *taqwā* and can be called 'common *taqwā*'. As the Qur'ān says:

فَأَنزَلَ اللَّـهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَلْزَمَهُمْ كَلِمَةَ التَّقْوَىٰ

... Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and the faithful, and made them abide by the word of Godwariness (taqwā) ... (48:26)

The next level of *taqwā* can be called 'special *taqwā*' and that is when an individual performs that which is recommended and abstains from that which is detested. The final level is the 'exceptional *taqwā*' where the individual thinks of nothing but God and restrains himself from all that is not God. This is conveyed in the following verse:

يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him ... (3:102)

The verse says: O you who have faith, attain the highest level of divine *taqwā*—that which is in God Himself. Of course, attaining a divine *taqwā* that is worthy of God Himself is not possible but that which is called for is a level that is commensurate to man's capacity. Hence, the verse:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

So be wary of Allah, as much as you can ... (64:16)

Purity

Now, in order for man to comprehend the Qur'ān, God requires him to have a heart that is pure:

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

This is indeed a noble Quran, in a guarded Book—no one touches it except the pure ones (56:77-79)

This clear Arabic Qur'ān has a source which is called 'guarded book' (*kitāb maknūn*). This Qur'ān lies within that Qur'ān and is related to it. One can ascertain the preliminary meaning of the words of the Qur'ān though an outward purity, but it is not possible to comprehend the lofty meanings of the 'guarded book' except through an

inward purity of the heart. If someone wishes to have contact with the outward Qur'ān, he must do so with *wuḍū* (minor ablution) or *ghusl* (major ablution) even if he wishes to kiss the verses. However, if one wishes to make contact with the deep contents of the Qur'ān and its inner core, then he needs to approach it with a pure soul and a sound heart. For this, a man must remove from himself ethical vices, rigid thoughts, and deviated beliefs—all of which are filth causing defiling of the soul. He must polish his inner being so that it can become a mirror for the Qur'ān through which its sublime teachings can be reflected.

The custom of the predecessors who were blessed with a share of contemplating and comprehending the Qur'ān was to learn ten verses at a time from the noble Prophet (ṣ); so long as they did not fully absorb the knowledge and practical implications related to those ten verses, they would not venture onto the next set of verses. A narration tells us: "Certainly they would take from the messenger of God ten verses; then they would not take another ten until they knew that which was in the first ten in terms of knowledge and action."[i]

At times, a divine spark of lightning would make an imprint in their souls that the Prophet of God would say about them: "the man departed as a sage."[ii] The Prophet said this about a man who had just heard the following verse:

فَمَن يَعمَل مِثقالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيرًا يَرَهُ وَمَن يَعمَل مِثقالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (99:7-8)

When the man heard this verse, he said, "this is enough for me" and his soul returned to where it had come from. In the words of the Prophet, he "departed as a sage". This is because he had absorbed the juice of the two wisdoms—theoretical and practical—and had realized it in himself.

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 106.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 107.

Comprehending the Outward and Inward Qur'ān

The noble Qur'ān is God's cord which commences at the Station of *Ladun*[i] and extends all the way down to that which has been clothed in a clear Arabic language. This is so that everyone can first recite and listen to it and then benefit from it through intellection and contemplation so as to take flight into the spiritual realms with the Qur'ān:

حم وَالكِتابِ المُبينِ إِنّا جَعَلناهُ قُرآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُم تَعقِلونَ

Ha, Meem. By the Manifest Book: We have made it an Arabic Quran so that you may exercise your reason (43:1-3)

The noble Qur'ān is composed of levels and some of its higher stations are not accessible through the mediated and acquired knowledge (*ʿilm ḥuṣūlī*) of the specialists in the field. This is because those higher stations do not operate at the level of concepts (*mafhūm*), quiddities (*māhiyyah*), conception (*taṣawwur*), and affirmation (*taṣdīq*). Those levels are not accessible to the general rationality of man; rather, they are only accessible when man himself ascends and reaches those lofty posts and finds the Qur'ān in that exalted station. If it is said that "the prayer (*ṣalāt*) is the ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the believer,"[ii] it is because the prayer can elevate man. Once man is elevated, he has received the keys to access the lofty meaning of the Qur'ān. The martyrs who have quenched their thirst with the nectar of martyrdom in the way of God are "alive near their Lord" (3:169); once they have reached this station of 'life near God' they are able to access the inner teachings of the Qur'ān to the degree of their understanding and immateriality of their souls.

In the honoured narrations, the fact that the Qur'ān has an inner self distinct from its outer self has been emphasized and mentioned often. An example is the following: "Certainly for the Qur'ān, there is an exterior and an interior."[iii] Some texts mention seven interiors (*baṭn*) of the Qur'ān[iv] while others talk about seventy. Of course,

---

[i] See Endnote 5.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 79, p. 303.
[iii] *Wasā'il al-Shīʿah*, v. 27, p. 192.
[iv] Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī tafsīr kalām Allah al-wāfī*, 8th Introduction.

what is meant by seventy is not a particular number but the idea of being numerous.

The late Ayatullah Ḥakīm (*r*) relates from some of the great teachers the following: Together with the late Sayyid Ismāʿīl Ṣadr and the late Ākhund and some other great personalities, we used to go to the late Fatḥ ʿAlī who was a great exegete. On the first day, he offered an interpretation of a verse that we had never thought about. The next day, he offered a different interpretation. The following day, he offered a completely different interpretation with even greater depth.

God says:

وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الكِتابِ لَدَينا لَعَلِيٌّ حَكيمٌ

and it is sublime and wise with Us in the Mother Book. (43:4)

With regards to this verse, it is narrated that Imam Bāqir (ʿ*a*) has said: "we are the inward Qur'ān and the term ʿ*alī* (sublime) in the verse refers of Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*)"[i] The Imam's interpretation is an esoteric interpretation regarding the Qur'ān; what he meant was that the ʿAlawī reality and the Muḥammadan light are present in the lofty Station of *Ladun*.[ii]

The following has been related from Imam Ḥusayn (ʿ*a*) and Imam Ṣādiq (ʿ*a*): "the Book of Allah, Majestic is He, is [expressed] in four ways: phrases (ʿ*ibārah*), allusions (*ishārah*), subtleties (*laṭā'if*), and realities (*ḥaqā'iq*). The phrases are for the common folk; the allusions are for the elite; the subtleties are for the saints; and the realities are for the prophets of God."[iii]

Differences in the Capacities to Understand the Qur'ān

From the previous discussion, it is clear that the noble Qur'ān is a profound book that possesses inward meanings. Each person can benefit from it to the degree of his existential capacity. The Imams (ʿ*a*) did not interpret the noble verses of the Qur'ān in the same way for everyone. For some they offered a literal interpretation and for others they presented an esoteric interpretation and this would depend on the recipients and their ability to bear the meaning.

---

[i] Bahrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 4, p. 135, H. 7.
[ii] The verse itself uses the proposition *laday* which is very similar in meaning to the proposition *ladun*. See Endnote 5 for an explanation of the term *ladun*. [Tr.]
[iii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 75, p. 278.

Dharīḥ Muḥāribī was one of the companions of Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) who has a book of narrations and whose position is quite high. Once, he asked Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) about the following verse:

ثُمَّ لْيَقْضوا تَفَثَهُم وَلْيوفوا نُذورَهُم وَلْيَطَّوَّفوا بِالبَيتِ العَتيقِ

Then let them do away with their untidiness, fulfill their vows, and circle around the Ancient House. (22:29)

The Imam explained: "As for the first part (*yaqḍū tafathahum*), it pertains to having an encounter with the Imam and going to visit him after the ḥajj. As for 'fulfill the vows' it means performing the rites of Hajj."[1] When ᶜAbdullah ibn Sinān heard this narration from Dharīḥ Muḥāribī it was new to him, so he went to the sixth Imam and asked him to interpret the same verse for him. The Imam responded, "The first part (*yaqḍū tafathahum*) pertains to trimming one's moustache and cutting one's nails." To this, ᶜAbdullah exclaimed, "May I be sacrificed for you. Dharīḥ told me he heard you say that the first part means having an encounter with the Imam and the second part is about the rights of Ḥajj. But you are interpreting it in a different way for me." The Imam answered, "Dharīḥ has spoken the truth, and so have you." In other words, what Dharīḥ had said was correct and what was told to ᶜAbdullah was also correct. The Imam continued, "Certainly the Qur'ān possesses an exterior and an interior; but who can bear that which Dharīḥ can bear?" In other words, the Qur'ān has an outward nature wherein the phrase *yaqḍū tafathahum* from a literal perspective means to groom the outer part of the body; but it also has an inward nature wherein the same phrase from an esoteric perspective means to rectify the inner man, which is achieved by having an encounter with the Imam. Moreover, since not every inquirer can bear the secrets and inner teachings of the Qur'ān, we interpret the Qur'ān depending on the capacity of the recipient and Dharīḥ is one who can bear the secrets of the Qur'ān.

That which we recite in the Great Comprehensive Ziyārah (*ziyārat al-jāmiᶜah al-kabīrah*) to the Imams, wherein we say *muḥtamilun li ᶜilmikum* ("bearing your knowledge")—i.e., I attach myself to you and ask God to help me bear your knowledge—is related to the well-known narrations in which the Imams have said, "Truly our narrations are extremely difficult; no one can bear them other than a

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 47, p. 338.

divinely appointed prophet, an angel who has been brought near, or a servant whose heart God has tested with God-consciousness."[i]

Jābir once asked Imam Bāqir (*ᶜa*) the interpretation of a particular verse and the Imam responded to him. Another time, he asked the Imam about the same verse and got a different response. Jabir inquired as to the reason for the discrepancy between the two responses. The Imam answered him, "O Jābir, the Qur'ān has an interior, and that interior has another interior. It also has an exterior, and that exterior has yet another exterior. O Jābir, there is nothing further away from the intellects of men than the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Truly, the first part of a verse is about one thing, and the last part is about another thing, yet it is one connected discourse, opening itself to many aspects."[ii]

It should be mentioned that finding out the inner meanings of the Qur'ān is limited to the purified and the infallible Imams as will be discussed in the next chapter; nonetheless the true seekers of knowledge and action will be granted a share of the inner perceptions of those illuminated meanings to the degree that they follow in the footsteps of the purified. Moreover, just as the apparent meanings explain one another and are connected, so too do the inner meanings elucidate one another and are inseparably linked.

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 183, no. 1.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 91.

Chapter 3:

The Qurʾān and the Ahl al-Bayt

God tells us that no one can know the reality and inner aspect of the Qurʾān except for the purified:

لا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا المُطَهَّرونَ

no one touches it except the pure ones (56:79)

Then He introduces them as such:

إِنَّما يُريدُ اللَّـهُ لِيُذهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجسَ أَهلَ البَيتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُم تَطهيرًا

... Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification. (33:33)

God has purified and freed the noble Messenger (ṣ), ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ᶜa), and the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) from all types of impurities. Those who have been purified can be connected to the spirit and essence of the Qurʾān.

Comprehending the Interior of the Qurʾān

These great personalities see the manifestation of God in the Qurʾān while others are deprived of witnessing such a scene. Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) says, "the Most Exalted manifested Himself for them in His Book without them seeing Him."[i] He also said, "Interrogate the Qurʾān but it will never speak to you; however, I will inform you of it."[ii] In other words, apart from the necessary affairs that are required for man's life, the noble Qurʾān contains teachings that it is silent about. However, as its mouthpiece, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) speaks on its behalf. Now if a particular question is not asked from the Qurʾān, no

[i] *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 147.
[ii] *Ibid.*, Sermon 158.

original and appropriate response will be given. However, not everyone has the ability to interrogate the Qur'ān [and actually receive a response].

On the human plane, the only one who has access to *all* the teachings of the Qur'ān is the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). If it cannot be said that his existential position is prior to the Qur'ān then at least it can be said that his position is on par with the Qur'ān. This allows him to gather and protect all of its contents. The perfect man, who is the first manifestation of the Truth and the locus of God's greatest Name (*maẓhar ism aʿẓam*), must encompass all of truths of the existential Qur'ān (*Qur'ān takwīnī*). Moreover, in so far as he is considered to be on the same level as that first manifestation, he must undoubtedly have access to the teachings of the composed Qur'ān (*Qur'ān tadwīnī*).

All of the infallibles (ʿ*a*), in so far as they are of the same light, are themselves the Qur'an: in the intelligible world (*ʿālam-i ʿaql*), they are the intelligible Qur'ān (*Qur'ān maʿqul*); in the imaginal world (*ʿālam-i mithāl*), they are the imaginal Qur'ān (*Qur'ān mumaththal*); and in the world of nature [i.e., this world], they are the articulate Qur'ān (*Qur'ān nāṭiq*). Even though the manner in which the infallible Imams (ʿ*a*) are manifested may differ, they are the same in terms of their knowledge of the divine principles and the interpretation of the Qur'ān. When Imam Ṣādiq (ʿ*a*) was asked if the Imams differed in terms of their knowledge, he responded: "Yes, but their knowledge of the permitted and prohibited and the interpretation of the Qur'ān is one and the same."[i]

For this reason, one can make the claim: "no one can reach the *core of the meaning* (*kunh maʿnā*) of a true interpretation of the Book of God and its esoteric understanding (*taʿwil*) other than His Prophet and his successors."[ii] When Imam Bāqir (ʿ*a*) said, "the Qur'ān can only be known from one to whom it was addressed," it means that the secrets and inner knowledge of the Qur'ān can only be understood and known by its original recipients who are the Messenger of God (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿ*a*). Hence, Imam Bāqir (ʿ*a*) said to Abu Ḥanīfah, one of the well-known jurists of the Ahl al-Sunnah, "how do you give verdicts from the Qur'ān when God has not let you inherit one letter of it (*wa mā warrathuka Allah min al-Qur'ān ḥarfan*)?" In

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 95.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 9, p. 9.

other words, you have learnt bookish knowledge (*ʿilm al-dirāsah*) and have read the science of interpretation, but God has not given you a share in its hereditary knowledge (*ʿilm al-wirāthah*).

Imam Bāqir (*ʿa*) also said, "Truly, the messenger of God is the best of those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*rāsikhūna fi al-ʿilm*),[i] for surely he knew the *taʾwīl* and the *tanzīl*' of all that God revealed. And it is not for God to reveal to him (*tanzīl*) that of which he did not teach him the *taʾwīl*. And his successors also know all of it."[ii] Imam Ṣādiq (*ʿa*) has said, "I am the son of the Prophet (ṣ) and I know the Book of Allah, and in it is the origin of creation and that which will be until the day of Resurrection; and in it is news of heaven, news of earth, news of Paradise, news of the Fire, and news of what was, and news of what will be. I know all this as if I see it on my palm. Truly, Allah says, 'in it is the exposition of all things (*tibyān kulli shay*)'."[iii]

Knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt with regard to all the Divine Books

The pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (*ʿa*) are not only aware of the reality of the Qurʾān and its interpretation, but they are also aware of all the divine sacred books; this is because the Qurʾān is a protector or guardian (*muhaymin*) over the other divine books[iv] and hence, one who has knowledge of the Protecting Book will know all of the divine books. That is why, Imam ʿAlī (*ʿa*) says: "By God, if a place was established for me and I were to be seated on it, I could issue verdicts for the people of the Torah with their Torah ... for the people of the Evangel with their Evangel ... and for the people of the Qurʾān with their Qurʾān."[v] Ghazali quotes Imam ʿAlī (*ʿa*): "If God Almighty and the noble Prophet (ṣ) allow me, I would offer a commentary of the 'Alif' of the Opening Chapter that would equal the load of forty camels." Hence, Ibn ʿAbbās, the well-known exegete, says, "My knowledge and the knowledge of the companions of Muḥammad (ṣ) compared to the knowledge of ʿAlī is like a drop compared to the seven seas."

---

[i] In reference to verse 3:7.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 23, p. 192.
[iii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 98.
[iv] A reference to verse 5:48 "We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it of the Book and as a protector over it."
[v] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 78.

The Purified Truthful Lady Fatimah and the Perfection of Humanity

It should also be mentioned that in so far as the Ahl a-Bayt (ᶜa) are the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt, every intellectual perfection and practical virtue that is established for them—such as their parity with the Qur'ān—is also established for the lady Fatimah (ᶜa). She carries the lofty positions carried by her precious match, Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa). In her ability to clarify the teachings of the Qur'ān, she is at par with him since this purified family is of one light. On the station of the luminous unity of those sacred beings, there is no difference between them. That which manifests itself on the plane of multiplicity is a difference in the various duties and responsibilities, the essence of which they share.

That which defines the reality of the human being is his immaterial spirit; the body just follows it in all its stages. Now since an immaterial being is free from the notions of masculinity or femininity, there is no perfection from among the existential perfections of a human being that is conditional on him being a male or that is impeded by her being a female. For this reason, the true perfection—which is that very lofty station of wilāyah—will be the share of any purified human who has the necessary conditions.

Of course, certain positions allocated for men and women on the executive plane are based on the best system (*niẓām aḥsan*) that governs this world, and each one has been guided to his or her particular responsibilities. Despite this, we find the name of Mary (ᶜa) mentioned alongside other saints:

ذِكرُ رَحمَتِ رَبِّكَ عَبدَهُ زَكَرِيّا ... وَاذكُر فِي الكِتابِ مَريَمَ ...

وَاذكُر فِي الكِتابِ إبراهيمَ ... وَاذكُر فِي الكِتابِ موسىٰ ...

وَاذكُر فِي الكِتابِ إسماعيلَ ... وَاذكُر فِي الكِتابِ إدريسَ

[This is] an account of your Lord's mercy on His servant, Zechariah ... And mention in the Book Mary ... And mention in the Book Abraham ...And mention in the Book Moses ... And mention in the Book Ishmael ... And mention in the Book Idrees (19:2, 16, 41, 51, 54, 56)

The key to understanding this issue is that the true perfection of man lies in his immaterial spirit which is free from the bonds of masculinity and femininity as it is free from the ties of race, language, time, place, and other material phenomena.

If Lady Fāṭimah (ᶜa) is the mistress (*sayyidah*) of the women of the worlds and no one is a match for her other than Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa), it is due to the existential perfection of that lady and not because of any conventional or arbitrary (*iᶜtibāri*) connections. This is because a conventional connection is the cause for an arbitrary perfection not a real one. It is only an essential or existential perfection that is the basis for true perfection. Hence, one should not analyse the perfection of that great truthful lady in terms of her non-essential associations because with regard to those non-essential ties, others were like her or even better than her. For example, in terms of being the child of the noble Prophet (ṣ) or the wife of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa), she is not unique since others also had those ties of being the children of the Prophet (ṣ) or the wives of Imam ᶜAlī; if this is the basis of assessment then they are equal to her. Moreover, being the mother of the Imams is also not exclusive to her since on that basis it could be argued that Fāṭimah bint Asad was greater than her since if she is the mother of eleven infallible Imams, Fāṭimah bint Asad was the mother of twelve infallible Imams; yet Fāṭimah bint Asad would never reach the lofty station of Lady Zahrā.

The Noble Prophet (ṣ) as the Elucidator of the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān

God has described His great messenger as the elucidator (*mubayyin*) and exegete of the Qur'ān:

وَأَنزَلنا إِلَيكَ الذِّكرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنّاسِ ما نُزِّلَ إِلَيهِم

... We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may elucidate for the people that which has been sent down to them ... (16:44)

In other words, We have revealed the Qur'ān to you all-together at once (*dafᶜī*) so that you may be an elucidator and exegete of the clear Arabic Qur'ān which is sent down to the people in stages (*tadrījī*).[8] Of course there is a vast difference between elucidating the bounds of something and offering an explanation or a commentary about the words and concepts of something. At the beginning of this book, it was mentioned that the noble Qur'ān, in so far as it is a clarifying light, carries no obscurity or ambiguity and hence is not in need of anything external in order to become lucid; rather, it is clear in itself and the extra-radiant verses of the Qur'ān make the less-radiant verses more lucid.

Hence, the elucidation of the Prophet (ṣ) is not because there are obscure and vague enigmatic points in the Qur'ān such that the Prophet has been ordered to remove any difficulties or obstacles so that its apparent meaning becomes known. On the contrary, the Qur'ān is pure light and essentially clarifying—i.e., not only is it clear and lucid in itself, but it also elucidates everything else. The task of the Prophet (ṣ) is to grant people vision so that they may see the obvious light of the Qur'ān. The guiding role of the Prophet is to remove the veils from the hearts of the people; to eradicate ambiguity, deviation, doubt, and distrust from their souls; and to make their inner hearts clear and transparent like a mirror. The mission of the first teacher (the noble Prophet), the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt, and the renowned Islamic exegetes is not to remove any covers from the Qur'ān; rather, it is to remove the covers from the hearts and minds of deviated and soiled individuals. This is because the Qur'ān is not a reality that is covered; if there is any cover that must be removed, it is from the heart of man.

When God speaks about the reason for the rejection of some people with regard to divine revelation, He says:

الَّذينَ كانَت أَعيُنُهُم في غِطاءٍ عَن ذِكري

Those whose eyes were blind to My remembrance ... (18:101)

Their eyes are covered and they cannot see the reality of the Qur'ān.[1] The curtain is over their eyes since the Qur'ān is not covered. At the Resurrection, those who are astray will be told that the truths were there in the world but a curtain had covered their eyesight that prevented them from seeing the truths; now that the curtain has been pulled back, their eyesight has become acute and precise and they can see the realities very well:

لَقَد كُنتَ في غَفلَةٍ مِن هٰذا فَكَشَفنا عَنكَ غِطاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ اليَومَ حَديدٌ

'You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so today your eyesight is acute.' (50:22)

The task of the divine teachers, then, is to make the *fiṭrah* of people flourish. In order to make the *fiṭrah* flourish, the thick curtains

[1] One of the titles of the Qur'ān is *Dhikr* (Reminder/Remembrance). See 3:58, 15:6, and other verses.

and veils must first be removed; the rust and grime must be cleansed from the house of the heart so that it becomes possible to see the light of the Qur'ān, to understand the divine verses, and to receive intercession from it.

O You who does not go beyond nature,
how can you traverse up the mount of Ṭarīqah
The beauty of the Friend does not have a veil or curtain,
but remove the dust of the path so that you can see it.

The Messenger of Allah as a Means of Softening the Qur'ān

In so far as the Qur'ān is a manifestation of the Divine Sacred Essence, it is not possible for every person to bear such a manifestation without any intermediary. The noble Qur'ān is a weighty discourse that the Messenger of Allah must bear, remove its heaviness, make it light and tender, teach it to the people, and elucidate it for them. We see this with material entities as well—if a heavy object descends from above, that which it encounters first must endure most of the falling pressure, after which the pressure is reduced. The noble Prophet is the cupbearer (*sāqī*) of the Qur'anic water of life. After having satiated himself from the Station of *Ladun*, he strives to transport the flowing knowledge of the Qur'ān in streams and brooks towards the thirsty palates of man's *fiṭrah* so as to quench their thirst.

The elucidation of the Messenger of Allah is not an external elucidation—i.e., it is not the case that the Qur'ān is vague and inexpressive and hence the Prophet must elucidate the Qur'ān with external knowledge. Rather, he elucidates it with the light of the Qur'ān itself. Given that the Prophet is aware of all the realities of the Qur'ān and completely comprehends every part of it—its beginning, its end, its outward, its inward, and all of its levels and stations—he is well able to elucidate the verses. He uses the luminosity of the entire Qur'ān and illuminates each verse completely.

God says:

وَنَزَّلنا عَلَيكَ الكِتابَ تِبيانًا لِكُلِّ شَيءٍ

... We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things ... (16:89)

If the Qur'ān clarifies all things, how can it contain ambiguities that would need to be clarified from without. The Qur'ān is God's Book and God is free from want (*ghanī*); hence, how is it possible that His Book would need something other than itself. It is important to note that the Qur'ān alludes to the fact that some of the verdicts and divine truths lie with the noble Messenger. Hence, the clear outward text of Qur'ān considers it necessary to refer to the great Prophet (ṣ):

وَما آتاكُمُ الرَّسولُ فَخُذوهُ وَما نَهاكُم عَنهُ فَانتَهوا

... Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you ... (59:7)

Moreover, referring to the noble Prophet is also necessary for other matters such as qualifying absolute statements that appear in the Qur'ān or particularizing some of its general statements or removing any ambiguity in the instantiation—as opposed to the understanding—of a verse. Hence, this reveals another dimension of the Prophet being an elucidator (*mubayyin*), a title that God has established for the Prophet in the Qur'ān.

Understanding the Qur'ān is Possible for All

It should be clear now that like the Prophet (ṣ), his family has a comprehensive and deep understanding of all of the teachings of the Qur'ān including its outer, its inner, its *ta'wīl* and its *tanzīl*.

Some Akbharīs and perhaps others wish to limit the ability to understand the Qur'ān to the noble Prophet (ṣ) and his family using the hadith, "Only those who were addressed by the Qur'ān can understand it." However, as mentioned previously, the noble Qur'ān has come for the guidance of all mankind. It is a clear and clarifying book, and God has invited everyone to contemplate over the Qur'ān, intellect over its verses, and benefit from its life-giving and man-nurturing knowledge. Examples of the many verses of the Qur'ān regarding this were mentioned in the first chapter, and there is no need to repeat them here.

Apart from those verses, the way and custom of the Ahl al-Bayt (*'a*) was to invite people to contemplate over the Qur'ān, which presupposes its understandability. There are many narrations one can

mention in this regard. For instance, Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) states about anything attributed to the Imams, "That which is in accordance to the Book of God, accept it and that which goes against the Book of God, leave it." In another narration, he says, "Any narration which is not in agreement to the Book of God is vain." On other occasions, regarding those narrations which were against the Book of God and hence not from the Imams, he said, "then smash them against the wall."

Such numerous narrations—which are not limited to resolving discrepancies between narrations and, on the contrary, speak of a universal law that can be applied to every narration (regardless of whether or not there is another narration that conflicts with it)—as well as other narrations in which verses of the Qur'ān are used as proof for something or which consider the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān to be comprehensible to its questioners, all point to the fact that understanding the Qur'ān is possible for everyone. Of course, grasping *all* the teachings and subtleties of the Qur'ān requires the guidance of the infallibles. Nonetheless, understanding the Qur'ān is an innate (*wijdānī*) endeavour. By reading the Qur'ān and scrutinizing the verses related to one topic, all of us find that we are able to grasp a clear understanding of that topic and are freed from ambiguity, anxiety, and doubt with regards to it. At the same time, understanding any book requires certain foundational knowledge and sciences pertaining to that book which should be acquired prior to studying it.

Abd al-Aᶜlā says to Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa), "While I was walking, I slipped and injured the toes of my foot. Having placed a bandage over my toes, I am unable to wipe the top of my feet for *wuḍū*." The Imam replied, "Wipe your hand over the bandage that you have wrapped over your toes." He continued, "This [ruling] and others like it can be known from the Book of God." If you were to take off the bandage, it would create hardship while God has said in the Qur'ān:

وَما جَعَلَ عَلَيكُم فِي الدّينِ مِن حَرَجٍ

... and [God] has not placed for you any difficulty in the religion ...(22:78)

Since wiping directly on the wound under the bandage is difficult, one can wipe over the bandage.

Hence, this supposition that understanding the apparent Qur'ān and using it in one's proofs is limited to the Ahl al-Bayt while others must only recite it and have no right to understand it is false. We do not have any verse or narration which explicitly or ostensibly supports such a supposition. Even when Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) says that the Qur'ān does not speak but I will inform you about it, we have other contextual evidence to show that he meant the secrets of the past and the future, and the inner reality of the Qur'ān. Hence, on another occasion, he says, "The Book of God before you is articulate and its tongue will never falter"—in other words, the Qur'ān is an articulate book which speaks in an eloquent language and there is no tiring or stuttering in its tongue. The articulation of the Qur'ān has degrees, some of which are limited to select listeners who have certain expectations from the Qur'ān. They raise particular questions to the Qur'ān and are familiar with the inner voice of the Qur'ān [that responds to them]. It is this voice or articulation that is not for everyone.

The Role of the Narrations in Understanding the Qur'ān

From numerous and authentic verses and narrations, it becomes absolutely clear that a complete and comprehensive knowledge of the Qur'ān—its outward and its inward, its *ta'wīl* and its *tanzīl*—is limited and exclusive to the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt. To understand the inner Qur'ān, its lofty teachings, and its secrets, one must go to those who are pure. We have narrations whose authenticity is substantiated by multiple chains of narrators (i.e., *mutawātir* narrations) that speak of the two weighty objects (*thaqalayn*) and which consider the Qur'ān and the Family (*ʿitrat*) as inseparable from one another. For this very reason, it is said that holding on to the Qur'ān without the infallible Ahl al-Bayt or holding onto the Ahl al-Bayt without the Qur'ān is incomplete and can lead to deviation.

Having emphasized the importance of referring to the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt, one must inquire as to the role of the Family and their narrations in the understanding of the Qur'ān and the nature of the relationship between the noble narrations and the Qur'ān. This will be discussed in several parts:

The authority of the narrations is based on the authority of the Qur'ān:

If we were asked why we act on the narrations and why we take the words of the infallibles as authoritative, we will say because the Prophet (ṣ) has said, "Certainly I leave amongst you two weighty objects: the Book of God and my family."[1] If we are asked why we consider the words of the Prophet as an authority, we will say because God says:

وَما آتاكُمُ الرَّسولُ فَخُذوهُ

... Take whatever the Apostle gives you ... (59:7)

يا أَيُّهَا الَّذينَ آمَنوا أَطيعُوا اللَّـهَ وَأَطيعُوا الرَّسولَ وَأُولِي الأَمرِ مِنكُم

O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you ... (4:59)

No further questions can be asked here because the Word of the Creator of the world, is self-authoritative and cannot be questioned. Therefore, the authority of the narrations of the In fallibles (ᶜa)—i.e., their legitimacy—is traced back to the Qur'ān. It is not traced back to the legitimacy of a trustworthy narration [i.e., a narration transmitted by a trustworthy individual]. This is because, with regard to a trustworthy narration, its authority is based on what is customary among rational individuals—i.e., in so far as rational individuals consider such narrations authoritative and in so far as God as the Legislator has not disapproved such a custom, one can legitimately rely on these types of trustworthy narrations. In any case, the first step is to prove the legitimacy of the original person being narrated from, for without having done this, it makes no sense to even discuss the legitimacy of the chain of narration. In our case, the authority of the source [i.e., the Infallibles] is proven through the Qur'ān as demonstrated above.

The Qur'ān is an arbitrator between conflicting narrations

In the remedial traditions (*nuṣūṣ ᶜilājiyyah*) when the Imams were asked with regards to conflicting or incompatible narrations, they

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 226, no. 3.

first reminded their followers to attempt a semantic conciliation (*jamᶜ dalālī*) before engaging in a resolution regarding the chain of transmission (*jamᶜ sanadī*). Semantic conciliation is to consider an unconditional statement as conditional and to consider a general statement as particularized, which is part of common understanding. If semantic conciliation is able to resolve what are considered "incompatible" narrations, it becomes clear that their so-called "incompatibility" is just on the surface and in reality they were not irreconcilable; hence, there is no need to resolve their chains of transmission.

Resolving the chains of transmission pertains to the case where the narrations are scrutinized in terms of whether they were actually stated or whether they were stated *from* the Imams; in this case, one of the ways of resolving the issue is to compare it to the Qur'ān, as the Imam says: That which is in accordance to the Qur'ān, take it [as true] and that which goes against the Qur'ān, leave it.

Therefore, just as the narrations are in need of the Qur'ān in order to establish their authority, resolving conflicting narrations and determining the validity or invalidity of the contents of a narration are also in need of the Qur'ān—i.e., the criteria and scale of authority lies with the Qur'ān. Hence, with regard to authoritativeness, "it is the first" (*huwa al-awwal*) just as with regard to explaining and resolving difficulties of the narrations, "it is the last" (*huwa al-ākhir*) [i.e., it has the final word] and the narrations are secondary to it.[9]

Of course, what was mentioned above pertains to the level of proof and of understanding and explaining the narrations; however, when it comes to the spiritual level, the Family and divine saints have a level that is on par with the level of the Qur'ān. This is because from the well-known narration of the two weighty objects, we can understand the parity of the Family (not the narrations) with the Qur'ān. Hence when we say that the narrations are subsidiary to the Qur'ān, this does not go against the primacy and parity of the Family with the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān is not intended to relate the particulars of a matter

The noble Qur'ān is not meant to relate the subsidiary religious rulings and its particular details; rather, it presents the general guidelines of the faith and the fundamental tenets for human society in a clear and open manner. It is for this reason that in terms of its

authority, it is not in need of any explanation (*tafsīr*) from the narrations. To offer an explanation is to relate the meanings of terms and to remove the cover from the face of its words; but since the Qur'ān is clear and without ambiguity, it is not in need of a narration-based explanation or exegesis. However, it is the very Qur'ān which has stated that in order to fully become authoritative and binding, one must ask about the limits and particulars from the Messenger of God (ṣ) and from his Family (ᶜa). They are the elucidators and commentators of the generalities of the Qur'ān. They make the limits and particulars clear, as the Qur'ān says:

وَأَنزَلنا إِلَيكَ الذِّكرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنّاسِ ما نُزِّلَ إِلَيهِم

... We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them ... (16:44)

For example, the Qur'ān lays out the general command for prayers:

وَأَقيمُوا الصَّلاةَ

And maintain the prayer ... (2:43)

And the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) relate the method and particulars. After having gone on the ascension (*miᶜrāj*) where the Prophet (ṣ) was taught the ritual prayers, he returned to his nation and said, "pray the way you see me praying."[i]

Again, the Qur'ān says:

وَلِلَّـهِ عَلَى النّاسِ حِجُّ البَيتِ مَنِ استَطاعَ إِلَيهِ سَبيلًا

... And it is the duty of mankind toward Allah to make pilgrimage to the House—for those who can afford the journey to it ... (3:97)

And the Prophet (ṣ) says, "take your rituals [of the ḥajj] from me."[ii]

As a unique book, no analogy can do justice to describing the Qur'ān; after all, it has descended from a unique God—"there is nothing like Him" (42:11). Nonetheless, if one was forced to conjure up an analogy to better understand the role of the Qur'ān, one could compare it to the universal charter of a nation which outlines its overall policies. In this case, with regard to the exposition of the overall policies, there is no ambiguity. Moreover, since such a charter does not

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 85, p. 279.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 82, p. 279.

discuss the particulars, it is the up to the common canon of laws to stipulate such details.

The Qur'ān contains the following statements:

وَأَحَلَّ اللَّـهُ البَيعَ

... Allah has allowed trade ... (2:275)

أَوفوا بِالعُقودِ

... Keep your agreements ... (5:1)

وَأَقيمُوا الصَّلاةَ

And maintain the prayer ... (2:43)

وَآتُوا الزَّكاةَ

... and give the zakat ... (2:43)

There is no ambiguity in the general and universal policies that the above-mentioned statements relate. As for specifying the details and referents of these policies, this has been left up to the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa). The Qur'ān has clearly told us that we should take these details from the Prophet of God and his purified successors. In reality, all that the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) say are the words of the Qur'ān, but they are mediated words which have been taken from the inner secrets of the Qur'ān and have been elaborated on them for the people.

The ascendency of understanding the universal policies of the Qur'ān over understanding the narrations

Now, as mentioned earlier, the Qur'ān is primary (*ᶜaṣl*) while the narrations are secondary (*farᶜ*). The Qur'ān lays out the universal principles while the narrations clarify the bounds, qualifications, and details of these principles. The essential authority of the narrations comes from the Qur'ān. Moreover, since the narrations can be fabricated or factual and in the latter case, can be said in dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) or not, the origin, chain of transmission, and denotation of the narrations (i.e., all three aspects) must be measured against the Qur'ān. Hence, before one can understand the narrations, one must first obtain the universal principles of the Qur'ān by studying the appropriate verses for each topic. It is only after this that one can use the narrations to clarify the secondary

particularities of those established primary principles. If we were to do this, then firstly, we would be able to recognize the narrations that go against the Qur'ān and hence reject them (even when they are not challenged by other conflicting narrations). Secondly, we would be able to accept those narrations which do not go against the authoritative apparent meaning of the Qur'ān and which instead clarify the particulars and concrete applications of the verses of the Qur'ān.

Doctrinal verses and the prima facie meaning of the narrations

The narrations that have come to us from the Ahl al-Bayt with regard to the verses of the Qur'ān are of two types: some pertain to verses of religious precepts while others pertain to verses of the doctrines of faith. With regard to the former—regardless of whether they are of the compulsory type (*wājib* and *ḥarām*) or of the non-compulsory (*mustaḥabb* and *makrūh*)—the outward meanings of the narrations are authoritative. However, with regard to the doctrines and teachings (*maʿārif*) of the faith—for example, if we wished to understand what the *lawḥ* (tablet) or *arsh* (throne) or angels are—the prima facie meaning of the narrations are not authoritative. Rather, such a narration (for example one which explains the *arsh*) is only authoritative on three conditions: (1) it is certain in terms of its chain of transmission (for example, the narration is *mutawātir* or even a single report that is accompanied with context that makes it definitive); (2) it is clear that it was issued to teach a true doctrine (i.e., it was not said in dissimulation, etc.); and (3) the denotation is derived from its explicit (*naṣṣ*) text and not apparent (*ẓāhir*) meaning.

If a narration has these three conditions and brings about certainty, then it can be authoritative on the doctrines and principles of the faith (other than the Origin itself). However, if it does not bring about certainty, then such a narration—regarding, for example, the *lawḥ*, the *qalam*, how the heavens and the earth were created, or any other doctrine which is not a necessary part of the faith—cannot be used to convey Islam's final word regarding that topic in a definitive way. Of course, one can still make use of the narration to facilitate a possible way of approaching the topic and still attribute it to the Legislator, but it cannot be used in an authoritative manner. This is because the proofs for the authority of a single narration pertains to the practical precepts [and not the doctrines]—i.e., one can

rely on such a belief [in practical precepts] since it has been made authoritative.

Narrations of correspondence (*taṭbīq*) and narrations of elaboration (*tafsīr*)

Most of the narrations that pertain to particular verses are meant to convey the most complete instantiation or referent of that verse—whether on the side of perfection and bliss or on the side of deficiency and wretchedness; they are not meant to elaborate the lexical meaning of the verse in question. In other words, they do not stipulate what meaning a particular word has been revealed for thereby limiting the denotation of that word to that meaning and no other. Of course, we have instances of verses where the referent is limited to one individual such as:

إِنَّما وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّـهُ وَرَسولُهُ وَالَّذينَ آمَنُوا الَّذينَ يُقيمونَ الصَّلاةَ وَيُؤتونَ الزَّكاةَ وَهُم راكِعونَ

Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down. (5:55)

This is also the case for the verse of Mubāhalah (3:61), the verse of Taṭhīr (33:33), and the verse of Dhawi al-qurbā (42:23). However, most of the verses of the Qur'ān have multiple referents and hence the narrations regarding particular verses have come in order to illustrate the most evident referent of the verse in question. The benefit of such narrations is that they show the exegetes the most evident referents so that they can then clearly search for other referents as well.

For this reason, if one finds certain narrations under various verses in the noble commentaries of Bahrānī's *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* or Ḥuwayzī's *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* which convey the referents of those verses and associate the verse to its most perfect referent, this association does not eliminate the universality of the verse. If for example, it associates the Ahl al-Bayt (*ᶜa*) with a particular verse or says that a particular verse was revealed in their honour, what is intended is that these great personalities are the most complete referents of the verse in question; however, the verse can also be instantiated in others as well.

Hence, the following two points are important: First, most of the narrations that discuss the context of revelation (*sha'n nuzūl*) of a

particular verse is to show a referent; it does not limit the referents to the one mentioned. Second, the validity of those narrations is when the chain of transmission traces back all the way to the infallibles (*ʿa*) without any break in the chain; hence, if a narration is traced back to the companions or the successors of the companions without culminating with the infallibles (*ʿa*), it will not hold any religious weight. Likewise, the opinion of the exegetes is admissible as a possibility but does not hold religious authority.

Outward and Inward, *Taʾwīl* and *Tanzīl* in the narrations

Like the Qur'ān, the narrations also have an outward and an inward, a *taʾwīl* and a *tanzīl* and one must use them at their corresponding levels. An outward narration pertains to the outward level of the Qur'ān; an inward narration pertains to the inward level of the Qur'ān; and narrations of *taʾwīl* and *tanzīl* pertain to the *taʾwīl* and *tanzīl* of the Qur'ān.

Of course, it should be mentioned that our current discussion pertains to the authority of the outward Qur'ān on the one hand and the necessity to clarify the particulars and bounds using authoritative narrations on the other hand. With regard to the difference between the outward and the inward, the difference between *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*, the distinction of *taʾwīl* over *tanzīl*, the relationship between the *tafsīrs*, the bond between the *taʾwīls*, the connection between the *tanzīls*, the ties between the outer meanings, and the relationship between the inner meaning, these are all beyond the scope of this work. One must refer to specialized books on *tafsīr* to study these matters.

Chapter 4:

The Qur'ān Interprets Itself

Even though there are more than six thousand verses of the Qur'ān, they are all so coordinated and in harmony with each other that they can be viewed as one discourse. This is because the Qur'ān has been descended from a wise origin and after being wise (*ḥakīm*) and definitive (*iḥkām*), it has been elaborated:

كِتابٌ أُحكِمَت آياتُهُ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَت مِن لَدُن حَكيمٍ خَبيرٍ

... [This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One [who is] all-wise, all-aware (11:1)

Since this elaboration has originated from wisdom, definitiveness, and coherence, all of the verses of the Qur'ān are such that not only is there is no discrepancy between them but they are of "similar motifs":

اللَّـهُ نَزَّلَ أَحسَنَ الحَديثِ كِتابًا مُتَشابِهًا مَثانِيَ

Allah has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture [composed] of similar motifs ... (39:23)

God has sent down the best of discourses which is coordinated and harmonized in its entirety, and its verses incline to one another.

Whenever two things of the same substance come together beside each other, they are called *ithnān* (two) where each one is the *thānī* (second) for the other. This is because each one has an inclination towards the other. This pertains to "*mathānī*" in the verse above. As for the term "*mutashābih*" in the same verse, it means to be similar to one another.[1] This similarity is a quality of the entire Qur'ān—i.e., all of the verses of the Qur'ān are similar to one another.

God has likened the unity and cohesiveness of the verses of the noble Qur'ān to the unity and cohesiveness of the world of existence

[1] It should be noted that this '*mutashābih*' is different from the '*mutashābihāt*' (allegorical verses) whose original root is from '*shubhah*' (obscurity)—a term that does not carry positive connotations. The latter is normally contrasted to '*muḥkamāt*' (definitive verses) and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

and creation. With regard to creation, God asks, "Do you see any flaw/break?" (67:3) implying that it is subsumed in unparalleled harmony and coherence. Hence, in the same way that there is no gap or lack of coordination in the world of creation, so too the noble Qur'ān is devoid of any discrepancy or internal inconsistency. It is the monolithic word of God where its past and future verses confirm the contents of and pave the way for one another.

Understanding the Verses Collectively

The cohesiveness of the verses of the Qur'ān is such that if one were to eliminate even one verse, it would be as if one has eliminated all of them. Hence, when it comes to having faith in the Qur'ān, it is not possible to have faith in some of its verses and not in others; it is not possible to accept one Qur'ānic principle and reject another as the unbelievers wished:

نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ

... 'We believe in some and disbelieve in some'... (4:150)

In a divine book which is replete of truth and light, it is not acceptable to split it up. All of the Qur'ānic principles are attached to one another. Those who believe the Qur'ān has parts which are like scattered pieces—as God says, "who represented the Quran as fragments" (15:91)—and have broken it up accepting some of them and rejecting others, have in reality not accepted anything of the Qur'ān.

If a person understood one verse of the Qur'ān but did not pay attention to the other verses or did not understand them, he will not have reached the depth of the meaning of the first verse and will have gained only a very weak understanding of that verse. If the verses of the Qur'ān are understood alongside each other, it will provide a clear and comprehensive meaning of what is intended. If there are some verses that seem vague at first glance, they will be clarified by other verses. As was mentioned previously, the noble Qur'ān is a book of light—some of its verses are resplendent like the sun, others like the moon, while yet others like the stars. The brighter verses of the Qur'ān illuminate the dimmer verses. All of the verses, together, create a complete bright atmosphere as a gift for the guidance of man.

Interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān

The methodology of using the Qur'ān to interpret itself (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*) is to have a collective understanding of the Qur'ān and to explain some of the subsidiary verses by means of its essential and pivotal verses. This is the very method that the noble Messenger and the Imams (*'a*) as the elucidators of the Qur'ān carried out. They would explain certain verses by referring to and using as support stronger verses in the Qur'ān. The valuable exegesis of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) has been composed using this lofty method.

The practice of the jurists and those studying the principles of jurisprudence would be the same with regard to the verses pertaining to practical religious precepts (*aḥkām*). When they came across a general or unconditional verse, they would not suffice themselves with it immediately without first searching for any verses that would particularize, condition, or abrogate the initial verse. They did this so that they would come to a comprehensive understanding by looking at the verses collectively. The custom of rational people is the same: when studying a work, they would read it in its entirety and only after having grasped all the material, would they offer their opinions about its contents. If they wished to approve the work, they would bring certain chapters as support for other chapters and if they wished to critique the work, they would bring up inconsistencies in the text in order to show the deficiency of the work.

Interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān is different from "striking the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān" (*ḍarb Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*) which has been frowned upon in the narrations. Imam Ṣādiq (*'a*) says, "No man has struck some parts of the Qur'ān with others except that he has lost faith."[1] Striking the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān is actually the opposite of interpreting the Qu'ran through the Qur'ān. It means to disrupt the harmony of the verses and to disregard the relationship between the abrogating (*nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*mansūkh*), the bond of particularity between the general and the particular, the connection of conditionality between the unconditional and the conditional, and the continuity between the beginning and end of a verse. It is also to relate two unrelated verses and through this, to remove the original meaning of the verses in question. When such a deviating methodology is accepted, every

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 39.

person will interpret the Qur'ān based on his own opinion and perspective. This is exactly the opposite of interpreting the Qu'ran through the Qur'ān which presupposes the essential connection between the verses of the Qur'ān and which calls for an understanding of the verses of the Qur'ān through the logical and essential connection that they have. Undoubtedly, to disperse that which is properly coordinated and to combine that which is distinctly disconnected can never count as an interpretation of any scholarly work let alone a work such as the wise Qur'ān which descended from the Truth, with the truth, and into a heart of truth—i.e., the heart of the Great Messenger of God (ṣ).

The Exegetical Method of ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī

It is not off-topic to remember the great exegete of the Qur'ān, ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) and his unique exegetical method in *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* with the hope that it can be a guide for appreciating the wonders of the noble Qur'ān and its interpretation. Some of the exegetical characteristics of this divine teacher are as follows:

Knowledge of the Qur'ān

ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) had a relatively extensive knowledge of all the prima facie meanings of the Qur'ān and hence when he spoke of each verse, he would do so by keeping the whole Qur'an within his scholarly purview. To explain, he would bring supporting verses either as proof or support for his interpretation. If there was no proof or support from other verses, he would interpret the verse in question in such a way that it would not contradict any other verse in the Qur'ān. If there were any possibilities that would contradict other Qur'ānic verses, he would discount them since that would entail contradiction which is not in harmony with the miraculous cohesiveness of the Divine Book.

Knowledge of the Sunnah

ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) had a long and deep exposure to the agreed-upon customs (*sunnah*) of the infallibles. Hence every verse that would be discussed would be interpreted in such a way, that if there were any customs from the infallibles that could be used as a proof or support, he would do so in his argument or supporting evidence. If there was no proof or support he would interpret the verse

in question in such a way that it would not contradict the agreed-upon customs of those sacred personalities. This is because the difference between the Qur'ān and the Sunnah is a "separateness" of two divinely extended ropes that will actually *never* be separated, as confirmed by the narration: "they will never separate until they enter in my presence at the Pool."[1]

Being Well-grounded in the Intellectual Sciences

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) had a predisposition towards intellectual contemplation that was exceptional and intensely deep. In his interpretation of verses pertaining to intellectual doctrines (as opposed to precepts of worship), he would utilize self-evident axioms and foundational intellectual principles to support it. If the intellect seemed silent on a topic, he would interpret the verse in a way that would not oppose any intellectually certified proof. Hence, if a particular reading or interpretive possibility went against any intellectually certified proofs, he would deem it to be false. However, if it went against an unproven scholarly theorem, he would still allow for its possibility. The reason for this practice was because he knew that the two harmonic authorities of God [i.e., the intellect and revelation] would never go against one another; rather, the intellect is a bright lantern and revelation is a straight path and neither of them has any use without the other.

Being Well-grounded in the Transmitted Sciences

He was an authority in the transmitted sciences such as jurisprudence and its principles and had a sufficient grasp over their axiomatic principles. Hence if there was no proof or support from these sciences regarding any particular verse, he would not interpret a verse in a way that would go against the definitive principles of those transmitted sciences. Rather, he would construe it in a manner that would avoid conflict with them. This is because those principles—even though they may be counted as secondary—have been formed based on definitive Qur'ānic and transmitted principles. Hence, if there was a discrepancy between the contents of a verse and the definitive foundational principles of those sciences, it would be like a difference between one part of the Qur'ān and another, or one part of the Sunnah and another, or one part of the Qur'ān and one part of the Sunnah, and none of these are valid.

---

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 23, p. 145, no. 105.

Hence, in order to demonstrate one meaning from multiple potential meanings of a verse or finding an explanation for a verse using one of these meanings, effort was made to choose something that was in line with other matters and was not against the established principles of the other sciences; the established findings of the other sciences would not be counted as intellectual evidence to interpret a verse in a way that does not conflict with those findings.

Awareness of Definitive and Allegorical Verses

The ᶜAllāmah (*r*) was aware of the definitive verses (*muḥkamāt*) of the Qur'ān to the extent that is possible for a contemporary exegete. He would say that the most evident definitive verse was the following:

لَيسَ كَمِثلِهِ شَيءٌ

... Nothing is like Him ... (42:11)

He was also an expert in recognizing the allegorical verses (*mutashābihāt*). Hence, he was clearly able to return the allegorical verses to the definitive verses which comprise the Mother of the Book and act as the principle of all of its teachings. By so doing, he blocked the road for any dark-hearted person who wished to follow only the allegorical verses. So, after assessing the definitive verses as the primary reference points, referring the allegorical verses to the definitive verses, and making the collective message of the Qur'ān regarding religious issues clear, he would then present the narrations to what he had concluded from the Qur'ān. These included both conflicting and non-conflicting narrations. This in itself shows how to traverse the right path, since Imam Riḍā (ᶜ*a*) says: "One who turns over the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān to the definitive verses has been guided on the straight path."[i]

Awareness of Principles of Demonstration

The great teacher was fully aware of the principles of demonstration, its conditions, and its prerequisites. Hence, he did not believe scientific theories were equivalent to demonstration. He considered scholarly theorems as the stationary leg and pivot of a compass such that by propping on it, the other leg of the compass [i.e., demonstration] could move and create a circle. In reality, the circle is drawn

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 185.

with that movable leg of the compass and not the stationary one.[1] Hence, he would stay away from using unestablished theorems in his interpretation of the verses of the Qur'ān. For him, progress in science and industry did not provide the basis for the truth of a theorem since he was well aware of the ephemeral nature of such theorems. He would say: that which is constant (the Qur'ān) cannot be interpreted or instantiated by that which fluctuates (i.e., short-lived scholarly theorems). If a theorem has reached the level of a complete intellectual demonstration, it now has the capacity to act as contextual support for preferring certain exegetical possibilities over others.

Mystical Disclosure

He had a comprehensive awareness of the foundations of gnosis (*'irfān*), the universal principles of mystical disclosure (*kashf*), and the categorizations of witnessing (*shuhūd*). However, even though he invited people towards refining the soul, using the Qur'anic method of self-purification, supporting religiously sanctified ascetic practices, expounding the way of the heart, and demonstrating the way of discursive thought, he would never let his own mystical disclosures or that of others become the basis for his interpretations. If that which was disclosed or witnessed was correct, he would use it only as an example of the verse in question and would not make it an exclusive pivot for that verse. Of course, from among the diverse possibilities, he would not accept the one which would close the doors of mystical disclosure and block the path of the purification of the soul.

Ability to Differentiate between Meaning and Instantiation

This great teacher was experienced in differentiating conceptual meaning (*mafhūm*) from its referent (*miṣdāq*) and hence he would never confuse interpretation (*tafsīr*) with corroboration/application (*taṭbiq*). If there was an authentic narration which related the context of the revelation of a verse (*sha'n nuzūl*) or which indicated a connotative correspondence between the verse and a particular individual or group from amongst the companions, he would never

[1] This analogy is trying to show the creative role of demonstration and not the pivotal role of scholarly theorems.

bring this in as a conceptual explanation of the verse where the message of the verse would be stripped of its universal clothing and appear in a particular fashion.

He used to say: "that which the contexts of revelation connote or any other narration which appears in relation to a particular verse is an "application" (*jarī*) and not an interpretation. Even if there is only one referent of a particular verse, it would still be interpreted in terms of its comprehensive meaning and universal conceptual understanding and hence, it would always be living and dominant. This is because the manifestation of the "all-Living who never dies" is an eternal book and a flowing spring of the water of life. Hence, if a Qur'ānic verse falls from its universal conceptual meaning and becomes particularized at the level of an external individual, then if that individual were to perish, the verse in question would also perish.[i] But we know that the Qur'ān will "move on as the sun and moon move on."[ii] The Qur'ān is like the two bright celestial bodies—the sun and the moon—in so far as it illuminates human societies. Moreover, the Qur'ān was revealed on the purified heart of the noble Messenger as a "comprehensive discourse" (*jawāmiᶜ al-kalim*) since he said, "I have been granted the comprehensive discourse." However, if a verse is made exclusive to a particular individual, group, or movement which is susceptible to change, then it would imply that the verse would also change, but then the Qur'an would no longer be a "comprehensive discourse."

From this, it becomes clear that any changes in a referent will not lead to a change in the interpretation of the verse. This is because words have been coined for the spirit of the meanings (*ruḥ al-maᶜānī*); hence, so long as the purpose of a particular entity remains, the accompanying term is still valid in spite of numerous changes in the referent. For example, with regards to the terms 'light', 'scale', 'pen', etc., even though there is a great difference in their forms—between classical referents of these terms and newer referents which were invented after the Industrial Age—they still are included in the universal conceptual meaning of those particular terms. This is because a word is used for its conceptual meaning and not its referent; hence, when the referent changes, it does not create a change in the conceptual meaning.

---

[i] al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr furāt Kūfī*, p. 138, H. 166.
[ii] *Tafsīr ʿayāshī*, v. 1, p. 11.

Awareness of the Hierarchic Nature of the Qur'ān

He considered the descent of the noble Qur'ān as a manifestation (*tajallī*), and not a displacement (*tajāfī*). Hence, he would take into account the vertical levels of wisdom and would place each one on its own level. He would never let any of these levels of wisdom prevent one from taking recourse to the apparent meaning of the verse and to consider that meaning authoritative. When he interpreted the Qur'ān, he considered the apparent meanings as primary. When he was offering a conceptual interpretation of a verse, he would not give primacy to the inner meaning in a way that would make it the exclusive meaning. Rather, while preserving the apparent meaning and considering it authoritative, he would then bring up the inner esoteric meaning and journey from one esoteric meaning to another, as the narrations of the infallibles allude to.

Awareness of the Position of Religious Teachings

He considered religious teachings to be a part of the supra-sensory realm. Hence, they would not be affected by the laws of matter and motion that are characterized by material increase or decrease.

For him, religion was distinct from societal customs which develop and change over time and which eventually are susceptible to decline and decay. Any perspective likening the two would be severely rejected by him. He would respect and take at face value all religious statements pertaining to the very existence of miracles or their various manifestations.

He dismissed the Wahhabi line of reasoning—which he considered to be a variant form of materialism in religious clothing—due to it being against the intellect and revelation. Similarly, he was also dismissive of any interpretive method which was based on the primacy of the senses or sense experience or which was predicated on the primacy of action.[1] For him, the criteria of true thinking was not sense perception, sense experience, or action, but intellectual demonstration.

Intense Affection towards the Qur'ān

The thorough grasp and awareness that ʿAllāmah Ṭabātabā'ī (*r*) had with regard to the Qur'ān, through which he was able to refer some of its passages to other passages, allowed him to solve many

[1] Ṭabāṭab'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 5, p. 211 and v. 1, p. 60-61.

problems. He would use this same method in explaining the *ḥurūf muqatta'ah*. By studying the chapters which contained the simple *ḥurūf muqatta'ah* such as Qāf and Ṣād and comparing them to the chapters which contained the compound *ḥurūf muqatta'ah* such as Alif Lām Mīm and Alif Lām Mīm Ṣād, he realized that the *ḥurūf muqatta'ah* are keys and secret allusions to the contents of those chapters. In fact, the intense affection that the late 'Allāmah had towards the noble Qur'ān was such that by contemplating over the text of a chapter, he would be able to acquire conviction regarding whether it was revealed in Makkah or Madinah even without having gone over historical evidence. Thereafter, the transmitted proofs which indicated if a chapter was revealed in Makkah or Madinah would support his intuition.

Chapter 5:

Allegory in the Qur'ān

God has divided the verses of the Qur'ān into two types: the definitive verses (*muḥkamāt*) and the allegorical verses (*mutashābihāt*):

هُوَ الَّذي أَنزَلَ عَلَيكَ الكِتابَ مِنهُ آياتٌ مُحكَماتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الكِتابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشابِهاتٌ

It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses (muḥkamāt), which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical (mutashābihāt) ... (3:7)

The commonality in words such as '*ḥukm*' (verdict), '*ḥikmah*' (wisdom), '*ḥukūmah*' (dominion), and '*muḥkam*' (solid) is the idea of precision and firmness. Hence the *muḥkam* verses are those verses which are definite in their denotation (*dilālah*) and carry no ambiguity or doubt in terms of what is implied. In such a verse, the denotation (toward a particular meaning) is either explicit (*ṣarīᶜ*)—there being no other semantic possibility—or prima facie (*ẓāhir*), in which case, any other meaning would not carry the same degree of authority.

It should be noted that the word '*muḥkam*' in the Qur'ān also carries another meaning which is contrasted to the term '*mufaṣṣal*' (elaborated) such as in the verse:

الر كِتابٌ أُحكِمَت آياتُهُ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَت مِن لَدُن حَكيمٍ خَبيرٍ

Alif, Lam Ra. [This is] a Book, whose signs have been made simple and then elaborated, from One [who is] all-wise, all-aware. (11:1)

Here '*muḥkam*' means 'simple' and 'unelaborated' and is not the same '*muḥkam*' that appears elsewhere in the Qur'ān with the meaning 'definitive' and which is juxtaposed to '*mutashābih*'.

The "Mother of the Book"

The position of the definitive verses is that of being a mother. In other words, in the same way that a mother nourishes her own child and nurtures him till he can stand on his own, the definitive verses are responsible for nurturing the allegorical verses until the meaning of the allegorical verses becomes clear and there remains no ambiguity in them. Hence, God says:

مِنهُ آياتٌ مُحكَماتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الكِتابِ

... Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book ... (3:7)

The definitive verses are the mother of the Qur'ān.[1] In Arabic, the word *umm* has also been used to signify a 'flag' since the soldiers of an army come together under a flag. In fact, the way to essentially identify one army from another is through their flags. If the soldiers are ever dispersed, it is the flag that brings them back together. A definitive verse is like a flag which preserves the allegorical verses under its shade in a united, coordinated, and combined manner.

In the above verse, three successive plurals have been used for the definitive verses—'*āyāt*' (verses), '*muḥkamāt*' (pl. 'definitive') and '*hunna*' (they)—but the word '*umm*' (mother) appears in the singular. The Qur'ān does not say, "They are the *mothers* of the Book." The reason for this is because there is a unison and solid bond between the definitive verses; they all rely on one essential principle which is *Tawḥīd* (oneness) and they all strive to elaborate it. *Tawḥīd* is a blessed tree; the branches of this blessed tree comprise the doctrinal tenets, and its fruits are the ethical and practical rulings. Hence, the definitive verses—with their connectivity, interdependence, and firmness—are collectively the mother of the allegorical verses. Having nourished the allegorical verses, they make them firm too. In this way, all of the verses of the Qur'ān become definitive. '*Umm*' also means 'principle' and 'root' and this meaning conveys similar qualities to the ones mentioned above as well.

The contents of the definitive verses must return to the principles of the faith since without having a clear and stable worldview, one can never come to know the branches of the faith—i.e., its ethics, precepts, exhortations, tales, etc. Hence, it should be clear now that

[1] Apart from this "mother of the Book" there is also another one which is normally contrasted to "the book of affirmation and annulment", which will be alluded to shortly.

the definitive verses pertain to the principles of the faith while the allegorical verses pertain to the subsidiaries. In other words, the contents of these words must be like their denotations. So, since the allegorical verses are subsidiary to the definitive verses from the point of view of denotation, they must also reflect this in terms of their content—i.e., the allegorical verses refer to the subsidiaries of the faith while the definitive verses pertain to the principles. Of course, it is possible for the allegorical verses to speak on principles of the faith as well, but even there the foundations of that knowledge must first be related by the definitive verses. Hence, it is only after the definitive verses tell us about the existence of the Truth, His lofty attributes, and the primary and foundational teachings regarding Oneness (*tawḥīd*), glorification (*tasbīḥ*), and God's freedom from imperfection (*tanzīh*), that one can understand the allegorical verses such as the following:

الرَّحمـٰنُ عَلَى العَرشِ استَوىٰ

the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne. (20:5)

يَدُ اللَّـهِ فَوقَ أَيديهِم

... the hand of Allah is above their hands ... (48:10)

وَجاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

and your Lord ['s edict] arrives with the angels in ranks (89:22)

Two Points about "Mother of the Book"

The expression "mother of the Book" also appears in the noble Qur'ān with a different meaning than that which is intended in the verse under discussion (3:7). As was made clear in the section explaining the reality of the Qur'ān[1], this Qur'ān which was revealed in the clear Arabic language, has a source and root which God calls "Mother of the Book":

حم وَالكِتابِ المُبينِ إِنّا جَعَلناهُ قُرآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُم
تَعقِلونَ وَإِنَّهُ في أُمِّ الكِتابِ لَدينا لَعَلِيٌّ حَكيمٌ

[1] This refers to the first chapter entitled "The reality of the Qur'ān"of the author's work, *Qur'ān dar Qur'ān* (The Qur'ān from the Perspective of the Qur'ān), Qom, Isrā Publishers, 1385, p. 35.

Ha, Meem. By the Manifest Book: We have made it an Arabic Quran so that you may exercise your reason, and it is sublime and wise with Us in the Mother Book. (43:1-4)

The phrase "Mother of the Book" here is in contrast to the "Station of Annulment and Affirmation" which appears in Surah Ra'd:

يَمحُو اللَّـهُ ما يَشاءُ وَيُثبِتُ وَعِندَهُ أُمُّ الكِتابِ

Allah annuls and affirms whatever He wishes and with Him is the Mother Book. (13:39)

The second point is that the definitive verses are the "mother of the *Book*" and not the "mother of the allegorical verses". If the task of the definitive verses was to only nourish the allegorical verses and remove objections (*shubhah*) from them, then they would have been called "the mother of the allegorical verses." However, since the primary task of the definitive verses is to clarify the principle teachings of the Qur'ān, they are called "the mother of the Book."

The Meanings of "al-Tashābuh"

The word '*mutashābih*' has been employed in various meanings in the Qur'ān. In one usage, the term '*mutashābih*' means to be similar to one another and to incline towards on another:

اللَّـهُ نَزَّلَ أَحسَنَ الحَديثِ كِتابًا مُتَشابِهًا مَثانِيَ

Allah has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture [composed] of similar motifs ... (39:23)

In Surah Āl Imrān, that which is intended by '*mutashābih*' is a verse which creates dubiety or objection (*shubhah*). Simple minds are caught in its snare while deviators and seditionists use it as an appropriate pretext [to incite others]. God speaks about them as such:

فَأَمَّا الَّذينَ في قُلوبِهِم زَيغٌ فَيَتَّبِعونَ ما تَشابَهَ مِنهُ ابتِغاءَ الفِتنَةِ

As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is allegorical in it, desiring discord ... (3:7)

The word '*mutashābih*' [derivative of '*tashābaha*'] in this verse comes from the meaning of '*shubhah*' (objection) which Imam ʿAlī (ʿ*a*) has explained as follows: "certainly 'objection' has been called '*shubhah*' since it resembles (*tashbaha*) the truth." In other words, the reason an objection is called a '*shubhah*' is because it is a false affair which resembles the truth—it is truth-like. Allegorical verses have a prima facie meaning which is not the truth but is like the truth and it is only in the light of the definitive verses that one can understand the true denotations of the allegorical verses.

Unlike the generality (ʿ*umūm*), unconditionality (*itlāq*), and indefiniteness (*ijmāl*) of a word, allegory is not a lexical matter. With regard to the former, if a person resorts to a word's general or unconditional meaning without accounting for any exceptions or conditions, it will not lead to discord (*fitnah*). Similarly, if a text is indefinite it, it has no apparent meaning that one can pursue; as such, it cannot create discord either. This is not the case with allegory which lacks this lexical quality. In other words, the relationship between the definitive and the allegorical is not like the relationship between a lexical context and that which it contextualizes such that the definitive verses become the context for the allegorical verses. Rather, the relationship between them is a semantic relationship. The meaning of the definitive verses brings order to the meaning of the allegorical verses in a manner where there remains no opportunity for the inception of discord and anxiety.

By example, let us look at the following verse:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالمِرصادِ

Indeed your Lord is in ambush. (89:14)

This verse clearly denotes that God is in ambush. However, the intellect does not accept that God, a purely immaterial entity free from the limitations of material bodies, can be "hiding" in ambush at a particular place. Here, a definitive verse such as "There is nothing like unto Him" (42:11) pushes aside the apparent meaning of the previous verse which resembled a truth thereby preventing the potentiality of discord at the hands of empiricists. It clarifies the true meaning of the allegorical verse suggesting that the Lord's ambush pertains to His acts and not His essence. If it pertains to His acts, then we know that this act can appear in a particular place.

Similarly, the true meaning of the verse which says "your Lord arrives" (89:22) can be acquired when one takes account of the definitive verses which free God of any movement.

Again, another example is the following:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking to their Lord (75:22-23)

Empiricists or materialists could conceive of the corporeality of God, thus making him perceptible to the human eye. However, when we take the following verse into account, any corporeal, material, or sensorial perception of God by the physical eye is completely rejected:

لا تُدرِكُهُ الأَبصارُ وَهُوَ يُدرِكُ الأَبصارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطيفُ الخَبيرُ

The sights do not apprehend Him, yet He apprehends the sights, and He is the All-attentive, the All-aware. (6:103)

Understanding the Definitive Verses Collectively

Given the above, if one wished to gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the noble Qur'ān he must first recognize the definitive verses and understand them, following which, he can use them as references for the allegorical verses. Only in this way can he gain a proper understanding of the allegorical verses. Of course, the definitive verses should also be understood collectively since these verses of the blessed tree possess levels; some are more definitive than others and this hierarchy continues until one reaches a definitive verse which is the most definitive of the definitive verses. All other definitive verses are subsidiary to it and correspond to it.

This whole process of the necessity of understanding the allegorical in light of the definitive is itself a proof for the necessity of "interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān" (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*). It should also be said that the existence of allegorical verses in the Qur'ān—which can cause discord if one relies on them without referring them to the definitive verses—is not inconsistent with the entire Qur'ān being a light. This is because the noble Qur'ān illuminates the allegorical verses through the illuminating definitive verses. The allegorical verses will always be illuminated in light of the definitive verses. And if someone takes only the allegorical

verses as the pivot of their references, then they will be afflicted with discord.

The allegorical verses are juxtaposed to the definitive verses. A definitive verse will never lead to an objection regardless of whether it has one, simple meaning or multiple, composite ones; however, an allegorical verse will lead to an objection regardless of whether it has one meaning or multiple. This is because its prima facie contents resemble the truth but are not the truth. Hence, the difference between the definitive and the allegorical lies with their ability to raise objections or not raise objections; not with their status of being simple or composite.

Pursuing Allegory

In verse 7 of Āl-i Imrān, God mentions two types of Qur'ānic verses: the definitive verses and the allegorical ones. Thereafter, He states that the definitive verses act as a mother in relation to the whole Qur'ān in general, and in relation to the allegorical verses in particular. Then, He says:

فَأَمَّا الَّذينَ في قُلوبِهِم زَيغٌ فَيَتَّبِعونَ ما تَشابَهَ مِنهُ ابتِغاءَ الفِتنَةِ

... As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is allegorical in it, desiring discord... (3:7)

In other words, those whose hearts are deviated, not only do they stay away from the definitive verses of the Qur'ān but they go after the allegorical verses and strive to interpret those verses according to their own desires.

In this verse, the term '*zaygh*' (deviance) can be contrasted to '*rusūkh*' (being deeply grounded) in knowledge (which appears later in the verse). The verse shows that the ill-hearted are not actually scholars since knowledge has not penetrated deep into their hearts. Moreover, in comparing those who pursue the allegorical verses with those who are firmly grounded in knowledge, the Qur'ān says the following about the latter:

وَالرّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ يَقولونَ آمَنّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِن عِندِ رَبِّنا

... and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, 'We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.'... (3:7)

In other words, they have faith in the entirety of the Qur'ān. The implication is that those who are deviated do not have proper faith in the entirety of the Qur'ān.

The verb *yattabi'ūna* (they follow and abide by) in this verse means *yatatabbi'ūna* (they pursue); in other words, the ill-hearted deviators track and pursue the allegorical verses so that after finding them, they instigate discord (*fitnah*). It is not that they actually follow the allegorical verses with the intention of believing in them. To 'follow' something implies that the thing being followed is clear and these individuals wish to follow and abide by it. Since the allegorical verses do not have a clear, unobjectionable meaning and since these individuals are really after instigating discord and interpreting the Qur'ān according to their own fancies, they are really "trackers in pursuit" of these verses and not "followers who have faith" in them. Since the apparent meaning of the allegorical verses is what creates objections, that is exactly what they set as the pivot of their own troublemaking.

Pursuing Allegory is the Cause of Division

In his exegetical work, *al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (r) says:

> All 72 sects of the Prophet's Ummah that traversed on the road of corruption and deviation are a result of pursuing the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān. And the secret of success of the saved sect, which is the 73rd sect, pertains to (1) the issue of referring the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān to the definitive verses and (2) the issue of following all of the verses collectively. This is what is alluded to in the verse in question.[1]

All of the seditions (*fitnah*) since the beginning of Islam until now and all of the internal violent battles since the death of the messenger of God (ṣ) are the result of deviant-hearted individuals pursuing the allegorical verses. The *Qāsiṭīn*, *Nākithīn*, and *Māriqīn* were all formed under the pretext of allegorical verses. Imam 'Alī ('a) says about the *Qāsiṭīn*, "but we only kill our brothers in Islam due to that that which has appeared of deviance (*zaygh*), deformity (*i'wijāj*), instigating doubt (*shubhah*), and *ta'wīl*." It is as if he is asking them: When they put the Qur'ān on top of the spears in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, did you not say that these are our brothers in faith? Hence, we should make

[1] *al-Mīzān*, v. 3, p. 37 with some adaptions made.

peace with them and accept their words. Did I not tell you then that this act of theirs was *mutashābih* and a deception? From the beginning I have always been in the service of the Qur'ān, and I still am, and I will never separate from the Qur'ān ... however, the situation was such that now we are at war with our own brothers in Islam because deviation, deformity, instigating doubt (*shubhah*), and *ta'wīl* has become the basis of separation and hence our war with them.

It is not out of place to point out some of the sects which have formed due to their tendency towards the allegorical:

1. The *Mujassimah* (corporealist): proponents who subscribe to the corporeity of God. They resort to verses such as the following to prove their claims:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالمِرصادِ

Indeed your Lord is in ambush. (89:14)

وَجاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

And your Lord arrives with the angels in ranks (89:22)

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking to their Lord (75:22-23)

الرَّحمـٰنُ عَلَى العَرشِ استَوىٰ

the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne. (20:5)

يَدُ اللَّـهِ فَوقَ أَيديهِم

... the hand of Allah is above their hands ... (48:10)

2. The *Mushabbihah* (anthropomorphist): those such as the Asharites who affirm the above-mentioned qualities of God[1] as they appear in their prima facie meanings but consider them to be extraneous to His Essence. They can be contrasted to the *Munazzihah*.
3. The *Munazzihah* (deanthropomorphist): those such as the Mutazilites who believe that the Necessary Being is free from limitation. They are attributed with saying that God does not have qualities such as knowledge and power but He carries

[1] In so far as the corporeal perspective is also the anthropomorphist perspective, the verses that were brought in for the group of corporealists can also be used for the group of anthropomorphists.

out acts which can be described with these qualities—i.e., His acts are performed with knowledge and power. The root source of this dispute can be traced back to the issue of whether the attributes of God are extraneous to His Essence. If the attributes of God are extraneous to His essence, this would entail the problem of co-eternal beings which is what afflicted Asharite ideology. Now since the deanthropomorphists were unable to explain the unity and identity of the attributes with the Essence of God, they ended up rejecting the very attributes of God. Of course, one must question the attribution of the perspective of *niyābah*[1] to the Mutazilities, which is what is common, since one can find evidence against such an attribution in the writings of their own scholars.

4. The *Mujabbirah* (determinists): those who consider man to be compelled in his action. They rely on verses such as the following:

اللَّـهُ خالِقُ كُلِّ شَيءٍ

... Allah is the creator of all things... (13:16)

وَاللَّـهُ خَلَقَكُم وَما تَعمَلونَ

and Allah has created you and whatever you make? (37:96)

فَإِنَّ اللَّـهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشاءُ وَيَهدي مَن يَشاءُ

... Indeed Allah leads astray whomever He wishes, and guides whomever He wishes ... (35:8)

5. The *Mufawwiḍah* (libertarianist): those who consider man to be absolutely free in his acts. Referring to verses which show man's freedom and autonomy in his acts they strive to promote their incorrect perspective by ignoring the verses which speak of God's absolute dominion.
6. Those who do not subscribe to the infallibility of the prophets (*ʿa*) by resorting to verses such as the following:

وَعَصىٰ آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوىٰ

... Adam disobeyed his Lord, and went amiss. (20:121)

[1] The perspective of *niyābah* refers to the idea that the God's essence "sits in" for His attributes.

In this way, they taint the image of the Prophets so that it becomes acceptable for their own fallible loved ones to take up the divine caliphate that was meant for the saints. They accused the Shias of heresy or extremism (*ghuluww*) for believing in the infallibility of the Prophet (ṣ)—both from sin and mistake—but they do not pay attention to the definitive verses of the noble Qur'ān which point to the infallibility of those great divine saints. The late Muḥaqqiq Qumī makes a subtle comment in this regard:

> The reason why the Ahl al-Sunnah limited their schools of fiqh (jurisprudence) to four is due to the following reason. Having only the narrations from the noble Prophet to act on which they found in their *ḥadīth* corpus and having put aside narrations from the purified Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa), a jurisprudential deficiency arose. Since the narrations from the noble Prophet are relatively few, they were forced to make up for it by resorting to analogy (*qiyās*). The only problem is that analogy has no boundary; hence, a new school of jurisprudence would emerge each day. Now in order to prevent this, they had no choice but to limit the official schools of jurisprudence to only four. Had they not taken this measure, the existing schools would have given rise to many more after a short time.[1]

The narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) are extremely constructive even in doctrinal matters and they sufficiently lay out the general principles of the definitive parts of religion. If the clarifying and interpretive role of the Messenger of God (ṣ) and his family—which is emphasized by the Qur'ān itself—was given value, all these divergent schools and perspectives would not have come about. Hence, in the same way that it is not correct to say "sufficient for us is the Book of God" or "sufficient for us is the Ahl al-Bayt", it is also not correct to say "sufficient for us are the allegorical verses." If tending towards the allegorical becomes predominant in society and the definitive verses are ignored, divisiveness and sectarianism with a deviated bent will be on the rise.

The Definitive and the Allegorical in Existence

From some of the narrations of the pure Ahl al-Bayt one realizes that just as the verses of God's written Book (the noble Qur'ān) are divided into two types—the definitive and the allegorical—and the

[1] *Qawānīn al-uṣūl*, v. 2, Section on Qiyās.

true meaning of the allegorical is understood by referring them to the definitive verses, so too is the existential Book of God also divided into these two types.[i] In other words, God has created definitive and allegorical human beings within Islamic society and the allegorical individuals must be nurtured by perfect and definitive human beings.

The divine infallible prophets and saints are the definitive elements of society. In contrast, two-faced individuals whose tasks resemble the truth but are not the truth and who are apparent believers but not true believers are the allegorical elements; they must achieve their stability, permanency, and clarity through the nurturing of infallible individuals who are transparent and unambiguous.

The Definitive and the Allegorical in Narrations

The Imams (*ᶜa*) have said: In the same way that the verses of the Qur'ān have definitive and allegorical elements, our words also include the definitive and the allegorical. The reason for this is because the narrations, like the noble Qur'ān, speak about the lofty teachings of *Tawḥīd*, the Resurrection, the Intermediary World (*Barzakh*), etc. Now since people are exposed to sensory (*maḥsūs*), imaginal (*mutakhayyil*), or at the peak, intelligible (*maᶜqūl*) meanings, and since God's teachings are not only above sense perception and imagination but some of them are in fact above common rationality (*ᶜaql mutaᶜārif*) as well, there is no doubt that one may find words in the narrations which are allegorical in meaning.

An example is the narration that the late Ibn Bābawayh relates in which the blind Abū Baṣīr asks Imam Sādiq (*ᶜa*), "Will the believers see God on the Day of Resurrection?" The Imam replied, "Yes, for they have seen him prior to this world too." The Imam immediately continued, "What, are you not able to see God?" Abū Baṣīr asked, "Can I relate this narration from you?" Imam Sādiq (*ᶜa*) responded, "Do not relate it because when you tell the majority of people that God is perceptible, they either take it to mean outward [physical] perception, which is of course not true, or they reject my words which is also problematic. I have only said these words to you."[ii]

The late Ibn Bābawayh relates these types of narrations in his own book for the elite and he says that the narrations that have come to us about seeing God are accurate according to him. However, he

[i] *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, v. 1, p. 415, H. 14.
[ii] *Ṭawḥīd Ṣadūq*, p. 117, Section on 'That which has appeared in the narrations', H. 20.

intentionally avoided narrating them in case empirical-minded individuals interpreted them inaccurately. If it was not for the existence of definitive narrations, the belief in God's corporeality—which the Asharites fell victim to—would be the natural consequence of certain other narrations. With the existence of these definitive narrations, the elite of the intellectuals are able to fully understand the allegorical narrations and the majority of the people can understand in a general manner that they will see God but not with their physical eyes. They may not understand how this will take place, but at the least, they believe in it.

There are some religious teachings so far from our grasp that we cannot understand them even through intellectual contemplation. Imam Riḍā (ᶜa) has a narration regarding the following verse:

لا تُدرِكُهُ الأَبصارُ وَهُوَ يُدرِكُ الأَبصارَ

The sights do not apprehend Him, yet He apprehends the sights... (6:103)

The Imam says: Not only can we not see God with our eyes, but we are not able to realize or grasp the core of His essence even by using our intellects.[1] The only way to arrive at such knowledge is through the God-consciousness of our spirit and the purification of our hearts so that a type of 'witnessing' (*shuhūd*) can take place. The noble Qur'ān has confirmed and emphasized this particular path:

وَاعبُد رَبَّكَ حَتّىٰ يَأتِيَكَ اليَقينُ

And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you. (15:99)

If certainty is achieved by man, then he will benefit from witnessing:

كَلّا لَو تَعلَمونَ عِلمَ اليَقينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ الجَحيمَ

Indeed, were you to know with certain knowledge, you would have surely seen hell [in this very life]. (102:5-6)

With irrefutable demonstration, man can prove the existence of Paradise, Hell, reward, and punishment but he cannot *see* Paradise and Hell through contemplation nor through academic discoursing. He cannot be like Hārith ibn Mālik who said to the Messenger of God (ṣ), "certainty has affected me to such a degree that it is as if I can see the throne of my Lord which has been set up for the Accounting

[1] *Ṭawḥīd Ṣadūq*, p. 112, Section on 'That which has appeared in the narrations', H. 20.

and the people have been resurrected for that purpose and I am amongst them. It is as if I can see the people of Paradise (who are enjoying its blessings) recognize each other while reclining on cushions. It is as if I see the people of the Fire while they are being punished and are calling out. It is as if the moans of the Fire are beckoning me within my earshot as of now." At this, the Messenger of God says to his companions, "This is a youth whose heart God has enlightened with faith." Then he turns to that youth and says, "Preserve this state in yourself." Ḥārith asked the Messenger to pray for him to become a martyr. The Prophet accepted and it was not long before a battle took place and Ḥārith achieved martyrdom.

The Reason for Allegorical Verses in the Qur'ān

When one examines what the earlier and contemporary exegetes have said regarding the presence of allegorical verses in the Qur'ān, it becomes clear that the opinion of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (r) is a paradigm shift in exegesis and not just a theory alongside the other theories.

All of the opinions regarding the topic as to why the Qur'ān contains allegorical verses are based on the presupposition that the allegorical verses are revealed from God in the same way as the definitive verses. In other words, the allegorical verses were allegorical at the Station of *Ladun*[1]; then when they were sent down, they retained their original quality of allegory. ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī disagrees with this position and posits the following: The entirety of the Qur'ān is definitive but when its descent reaches the level of thought of fallible man, allegory arises. In the same way that rain does not contain any froth before reaching the ground and it is only after touching the ground and moving on it that froth appears, the 'froth of the allegorical' did not descend from the sky of knowledge.

Other exegetes who had presupposed that certain verses were allegorical in essence and that they descended in an allegorical form, found themselves faced with a fundamental question: If allegorical verses have the potential to create problems, then why did God send them down? Hence, they were forced to answer this question and offer explanations for the presence of allegorical verses in the Qur'ān.

[1] See Endnote 5.

If all mankind were at the level of the noble Prophet (ṣ), they could access all the teachings of the Qur'ān in a definitive way from the Station of *Ladun* or on the night of Qadr, without there being any allegory. If the Prophet or the Infallibles (ᶜa) were asked, "Are there any allegorical verses in the Qur'ān that you are unable to understand," they would respond in the negative. This is because the Messenger of God was:

عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِن رَّبِّي

... on a manifest proof from my Lord ... (6:57)

Moreover, the words of the pure Imams (ᶜa) is not different than the words of Imam ᶜAlī (ᶜa) who said, "Since the time I saw the truth, I never doubted it."

The Qur'ān did not contain any allegory at the Station of *Ladun* which the Prophet had reached and had accessed. There was no allegory on the night of Qadr either when the Qur'ān descended on the heart of the Prophet through the trusted archangel Gabriel. This is because, according to God Himself, the descent of the Qur'ān from its beginning to its end is always with the truth:

وَبِالْحَقِّ أَنزَلْنَاهُ وَبِالْحَقِّ نَزَلَ

With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend ... (17:105)

Wherever pure truth is found, there is no room for mistaking the truth for error; consequently, there is no room for allegory. Moreover, at a level free from word and conceptual meaning [i.e., at the level where the Qur'ān originates], there is no allegory either. So where does allegory come from? It can be traced to the following: (1) God wishes to speak to the people in the Arabic tongue; (2) each person subscribes to a particular set of principles, foundations, vocabulary, and culture; and (3) the attentiveness and thought processes of various individuals in using metonyms (*kināyah*), metaphors (*istiᶜārah*), analogies (*tashbīh*), figures of speech (*majāz*), homonyms (*mushtarik lafẓī*), and synonyms (*mushtarik maᶜnawī*) leads to divergent interpretations. These conditions cause some of the verses of the Qur'ān to become allegorical. In other words, allegory is from the accidents (ᶜawāriḍ) of this material world as God did not send down allegorical verses from above.

A Similitude from the Qur'ān on this Topic

The noble Qur'ān explains this reality in the form of a similitude:

أَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً فَسالَت أَودِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِها فَاحتَمَلَ السَّيلُ
زَبَدًا رابِيًا وَمِمّا يوقِدونَ عَلَيهِ فِي النّارِ ابتِغاءَ حِليَةٍ أَو مَتاعٍ
زَبَدٌ مِثلُهُ كَذٰلِكَ يَضرِبُ اللَّـهُ الحَقَّ وَالباطِلَ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ
فَيَذهَبُ جُفاءً وَأَمّا ما يَنفَعُ النّاسَ فَيَمكُثُ فِي الأَرضِ
كَذٰلِكَ يَضرِبُ اللَّـهُ الأَمثالَ

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of] their capacity, and the flood carries along a swelling scum. And from what they smelt in the fire for the purpose of [making] ornaments or wares, [there arises] a similar scum. That is how Allah compares truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people stays in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons. (13:17)

In other words, the existential profusion (i.e., the Qur'ān) that was revealed is like the rain that God sends down. If this rain remains as drops and no flood begins to flow, then it will not be accompanied with any froth. However, in so far as the plane of nature and matter is a plane of motion, drops gather together and form a torrent. From there, every valley and desert will benefit from this rain and torrent to its own capacity. Since it is in motion, froth starts to form on its surface. At first glance, an observer only sees the froth on the water since it is more apparent and more eye-catching. This froth or scum is falsehood that accompanies the truth. However, that which is within and that which remains, is the truth. Even though the froth is more eye-catching and noticeable, it is transient. The meaning of '*jufā'*' is dross. So the froth of the torrent will vanish with the passing of the water and does not need to be eliminated.

The verses of the noble Qur'ān are like the water of life which takes the froth of allegory onto itself. In reality, the allegorical verses are all truth, light, beneficial, and eternal but the false meaning that the minds of the common people take when they come across these verses is the froth of allegory, and there is no escaping from it in this world.

Of course, there are also benefits to having these allegorical verses. One of them, as it appears in some narrations, is so that people refer to the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa). If the people could understand all of the verses of the Qur'ān with ease and clarity, they would have felt a sense of independence with regard to it. That would have prevented them from relying on the true elucidators and interpreters of the Qur'ān and the possessors of deep knowledge (*rāsikhūna fi al-ᶜilm*). But, given the limitations of this world and the necessity of allegory, some of the verses have become allegorical, and now there is a greater need felt towards those who deeply possess knowledge of the Book of God. Of course, in order to understanding the definitive verses in a complete and thorough manner we must seek their assistance since the differences of opinions and misunderstandings are not just limited to the allegorical; rather, misunderstandings and mistakes can also occur with regard to the definitive verses as well, which are the mother of the Book. Although differences of opinion can be found with regard to each of the two types of verses, they differ in the sense that with regard to the definitive verses, there is no fundamental reason for the plethora of opinions and misunderstandings, whereas with regard to the allegorical verses, the grounds for it exist. Of course, the presence of this deficiency and allegor [with regard to the latter verses] is accidental and not the main in tent.

In the angelic and paradisiac world, there is no deficiency but in this world of nature, which is the realm of achieving perfection, the existence of a deficient phenomenon points to the perfectibility of this world. This is because anyone who has reached a position has passed through the plane of motion in the arc of ascent. The phenomenon of evil in this world, the phenomenon of froth on a raging torrent, and the phenomenon of allegory in verses of the noble Qur'ān are all accidentally necessary. Evil, froth, and allegory are secondarily (accidentally) intended and not primarily (essentially) intended; they are relative and not absolute. God created fire so that heat can be of benefit. But this fire which was created for good can be evil for someone else if he gets burnt by it. However, this phenomenon of being burnt is secondary (accidental) and relative.

The Qur'ān is Unlike other Scholarly Books

As was customary with many of the great mystics, their scholarly or mystical works would often be prefaced with a note that the contents were meant for the elite and not the masses. However, a book which is for the guidance of *all* mankind and *all* the inhabitants of the world must be such that its teachings can be of benefit for everyone. As such, it must make use of techniques such as similitudes, metonyms, and allusions, and these may inevitably result in allegory. However, God, in His utmost wisdom, revealed definitive verses alongside the allegorical verses so that the shortcomings of the latter can be buttressed with the definitiveness of the former. In this way, all of the verses can become definitive when placed next to each other.

To speak to people at the level of their senses is very easy since that which is said is at the level of common sense perception, which everyone can understand. However, if someone wishes to transfer the message of the "Knower of the Unseen and the Visible" (13:9) to the ears of people who do not understand anything but the Visible (*shahādah*) and their capacity to disengage [from the material] is weak, he has a difficult task. This is because people perceive metasensory phenomena in a sensory manner and that is problematic.

The masses understand the acts of God—such as His commands, His prohibitions, His judgement, His questioning, His punishments in Hell, and His rewards in Paradise—in the same way that they understand the acts of a sovereign leader in terms of his penalties and remunerations. For many people, encounter with the Divine is conceived as meeting a powerful leader and it is for this reason that they have fallen victim to the ideologies of corporeality and anthropomorphism. Even if we assume that it is possible to convey the teachings of the Qur'ān in a semantically immaterial manner and without any allegories, the Qur'ān would not be a book for all people but only for the elite.

The verses of the Qur'ān are approximations or similitudes (*mithāl*) for a set of lofty doctrines and those doctrines are also approximations for the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān. Moreover, that *ta'wīl* is ontologically real and actual and will show itself at the Resurrection. Hence, the noble Qur'ān is not a simple and shallow book in which its teachings can be summarized through its primary prima facie meaning. Rather, its expressions are similitudes and one must pass through them to get to that which is being simulated (*mumaththal*).

It is like interpreting a dream where the dreamer cannot reach its true meaning or reality by simply carrying out a superficial process of deconstruction and analysis. He is in need of a dream interpreter (*muᶜabbir*) who can use the dream as a bridge and a pass (*maᶜbar*) to get to reality. With regards to Paradise, God says:

مَثَلُ الجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ المُتَّقونَ فيها أَنهارٌ مِن ماءٍ غَيرِ آسِنٍ
وَأَنهارٌ مِن لَبَنٍ لَم يَتَغَيَّر طَعمُهُ وَأَنهارٌ مِن خَمرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشّارِبينَ
وَأَنهارٌ مِن عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى وَلَهُم فيها مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَراتِ وَمَغفِرَةٌ
مِن رَبِّهِم

A similitude of the paradise promised to the Godwary: therein are streams of unstaling water and streams of milk unchanging in flavour, and streams of wine delicious to the drinkers, and streams of purified honey; there will be every kind of fruit in it for them, and forgiveness from their Lord ... (47:15)

This verse is an approximation or similitude (*mathal*) for paradise. However, when this verse falls into the hands of a simpleton exegete, he will take it to be a description of paradise even though a similitude is not the same as a description. The masses are asleep as the hadith affirms: "The people are asleep; when they die, they will awake."[1] God speaks to these sleeping souls while a few people who are awake—i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜ*a*)—are the true interpreters of the noble Qur'ān. Of course, those radiant beings who are the loci of the manifestation of God's Beautiful Names also speak like the Qur'ān. Hence, their narrations are not free from allegory due to the same principle which was mentioned before. These narrations cannot be free from allegory in the same way that a torrent cannot be free from the froth above it.

The Ta'wīl of the Qur'ān

The noble Qur'ān describes the reasons for why the ill-hearted incline towards the allegorical: (1) to incite discord and (2) to access the *ta'wīl* of the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān:

[1] *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, v. 2, p. 240, H. 32.

فَأَمَّا الَّذينَ في قُلوبِهِم زَيغٌ فَيَتَّبِعونَ ما تَشابَهَ مِنهُ ابتِغاءَ الفِتنَةِ وَابتِغاءَ تَأويلِهِ وَما يَعلَمُ تَأويلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّـهُ وَالرّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ

... As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is allegorical in it, courting temptation, and seeking its ta'wil. But no one knows its ta'wil except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge... (3:7)

The primary objective of ill-hearted individuals in their pursuit of the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān is to incite discord, and since the allegorical verses do not have a clear meaning and resemble the truth in their outward meaning, they come up with a *ta'wīl* and pseudo-principle. Then they interpret the allegorical verses based on their own opinions so that they can carry out their main objective which is to incite discord.

The term '*ta'wīl*' comes from the root '*awl*' which means to return something. What is not intended here is returning the word to the meaning, or the general to the particular, or the unqualified to the qualified, or the abrogated to the abrogating, or the contextualized to the context. The relationship between the Qur'ān and its *ta'wīl* is like the relationship between the similitude (*mithāl*) and that which is simulated (*mumaththal*). It is not the relationship between one concept and another or between one concept and its referent. Or course, the noble Qur'ān is not such that it only shows us that which is simulated and plays no other role; with regard to the Qur'ān, the similitude itself is also intended unlike common similitudes. God Almighty sent the Qur'ān for us so that we may come to know it and benefit from its guidance and He has encouraged us to intellect, contemplate, reflect, and understand the Qur'ān. But all of these have to do with interpreting the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*) and not its *ta'wīl*. *Ta'wīl* is in contrast to interpretation (*tafsīr*) since interpretation has to do with words and conceptual meanings—sometimes it is based on the outward nature of the Qur'ān and sometimes on the inward nature, but both of these types have to do with interpretation and not *ta'wīl*. *Ta'wīl* pertains to the external reality of the Qur'ān. In other words, it does not have to do with words, the outward conceptual meaning, or even the inward conceptual meaning of the Qur'ān; rather, it pertains to the actual and external existence of the Qur'ān.

Ta'wīl is not Esoteric Interpretation

The esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān, regardless of how far and deep it extends, is not *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān. Take the following verse as an example:

فَلْيَنظُرِ الإِنسانُ إِلىٰ طَعامِهِ

Let man consider his food (80:24)

We have a narration from Imam Ṣādiq (*ᶜa*) in which he interprets 'food' to means 'knowledge'.[1] So the meaning of the verse is that a man should be vigilant as to who he takes his knowledge from. This subtle expression is an esoteric interpretation of the verse but it is not *ta'wīl*. This is because there are two types of food—food for the body and food for the soul—and even though bread, for example, is more tangible as an example of food, but knowledge is more precise as an example for the food of the soul. If someone is precise, he can see how this verse is talking about knowledge as food, but this is not the case with *ta'wīl*. It is not possible to get the *ta'wīl* of a verse through everyday knowledge.

The point is that the inclusiveness of the above verse with regards to knowledge as an example of immaterial food is because of the fact that the concept of 'food' carries that comprehensive and extensive meaning which can be applied to material referents and which can also be applied to immaterial referents. Hence, after analysing the contents of the narration, is becomes clear that its perspective is based on the comprehensive conceptual meaning [of food] and this aspect pertains to interpretation (*tafsīr*) and not *taᶜwīl*.

In the *Ṭīnat* narrations, the following authentic narration appears: The good works of the non-Shias will be written in the account of the Shias and anyone who does not subscribe to *wilāyah* will not benefit from any of his good deeds. When the Imam was asked where in the Qur'ān this perspective is found, he recited the verse from Surah Yūsuf:

قالَ مَعاذَ اللَّـهِ أَن نَأْخُذَ إِلّا مَن وَجَدنا مَتاعَنا عِندَهُ إِنّا إِذًا لَظالِمون

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 96.

He said, 'God forbid that we should detain anyone except him with whom we found our wares, for then we would indeed be wrongdoers.' (12:79)

He explained, the good is our 'wares' which is with others and which will return to us. Hence, we found our wares with others and give them to our followers.[i]

This understanding cannot be obtained from any aspect of the verse's prima facie nature and cannot be acquired through any type of indication from the verse. Such understandings from the Qur'ān are called *ta'wīl* which is only accepted from the infallibles and others have no access to it.

The Opinion of some of the Exegetes

Some exegetes such as Ṭabarī consider *ta'wīl* as conveying the referents or choosing the best referent of a verse. Based on this understanding, Ṭabarī called his book, *A Comprehensive Exposition of the Ta'wīl of the Qur'ānic Verses*. Under the verse that we are discussing, he states, "As for *ta'wīl* in the Arabic language, it means interpretation." Hence, he considers the verse, "and no one knows its *ta'wīl*" (3:7) to mean "and no one knows its interpretation." However, just as it was mentioned, *ta'wīl* is not interpretation (*tafsīr*) and does not pertain to the lexical aspect of the Qur'ān. In this sense, *ta'wīl* is not limited to the allegorical verses; rather, the entirety of the Qur'ān—its definitive verses and its allegorical verses—have a *ta'wīl* and a concrete reality which has been called "the mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*), "the existential book" (*kitāb maknūn*), "the guarded tablet" (*lawḥ maḥfūẓ*), "with God" (*'ind Allah*), "before God" (*ladā Allah*). Only those firmly rooted in knowledge and the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt ('a) can access this lofty station. It is not accessible by fallible individuals such as the Companions and the Successors. If the Messenger of God said about Ibn 'Abbās that "he taught him *ta'wīl*" or if Ibn 'Abbās himself said that he was among those firmly rooted in knowledge and hence knows the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān[ii], what is intended by *ta'wīl* here is interpretation (*tafsīr*) and what is intended by "those firmly rooted" is those firmly rooted in the acquired and conceptual knowledge of interpretation.

---

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 5, p. 230.
[ii] *Majma' al-bayān*, v. 1, p. 41.

In the noble Qur'ān, the term *ta'wīl* has been used in multiple ways. The encompassing meaning is a reality which appears in a particular form. For example, the term *ta'wīl* has been employed for true dreams in which certain realities have appeared to man in the world of dreams in a particular imaginal form. Those realities are the *ta'wīl* of the dreams. This is like the instances of the dreams that are mentioned in Surah Yūsuf (ᶜa):

يا أَبَتِ هٰذا تَأويلُ رُؤيايَ مِن قَبلُ قَد جَعَلَها رَبّي حَقًّا

... He said, 'Father! This is the ta'wīl of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true ... (12:100)

The dream was as follows:

إِذ قالَ يوسُفُ لِأَبيهِ يا أَبَتِ إِنّي رَأَيتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوكَبًا وَالشَّمسَ وَالقَمَرَ رَأَيتُهُم لي ساجِدينَ

When Joseph said to his father, 'Father! I saw eleven planets, and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me,' (12:4)

Of course, sometimes *ta'wīl* takes on the meaning of [dream] interpretation (*taᶜbīr*) just as when the prisoners said to Joseph:

نَبِّئنا بِتَأويلِهِ إِنّا نَراكَ مِنَ المُحسِنينَ

... 'Inform us of its ta'wīl (dream interpretation) for indeed we see you to be a virtuous man.' (12:36)

Joseph responded to them:

لا يَأتيكُما طَعامٌ تُرزَقانِهِ إِلّا نَبَّأتُكُما بِتَأويلِهِ قَبلَ أَن يَأتِيَكُما

... 'Before the meals you are served come to you I will inform you of its ta'wīl (dream interpretation) ... (12:37)

It is this same meaning of *ta'wīl* that is also intended with regard to the dream of the ruler of Egypt:

قالوا أَضغاثُ أَحلامٍ وَما نَحنُ بِتَأويلِ الأَحلامِ بِعالِمينَ

They said, '[These are] confused nightmares, and we do not know the ta'wīl of nightmares.' (12:44)

Hence, the term *ta'wīl* in the noble Qur'ān has been employed with the meaning of interpretation which is in the realm of words and mental constructs and it has also been used for external reality which is the "text" of actuality and reality. Hence, when it is said that the entire Qur'ān has a *ta'wīl*, it could imply a series of conceptual meanings that the contents of the Qur'ān return to or it could imply a concrete and external reality, one which the noble Qur'ān will manifest at the Resurrection. These two meanings of '*ta'wīl*' are compatible and they do not negate one another. Hence, '*ta'wīl*' which comes from '*awl*' (return) can mean returning or referencing one conceptual meaning to another, or it can mean the return of the conceptual meaning to external reality and also the return of the similitude to that which it is simulating.

Conjoining 'And' or Commencing 'And'

In the verse under discussion (3:7), God says that the ill-hearted do not follow the decisive verses of God but only pursue the allegorical verses. In contrast, those firmly rooted in knowledge have faith in all of the Qur'ān—both the decisive and well as the allegorical—and believe it to be revealed from God:

وَالرَّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ يَقولونَ آمَنّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِن عِندِ رَبِّنا

... those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, 'We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.' ... (3:7)

The noble Qur'ān says that those whose hearts are ill are constantly after the allegorical verses. When a definitive verse is revealed from God in which there is the verdict to engage in war, they look at the Prophet as if about to die and do not follow that verdict:

وَيَقولُ الَّذينَ آمَنوا لَولا نُزِّلَت سورَةٌ فَإِذا أُنزِلَت سورَةٌ
مُحكَمَةٌ وَذُكِرَ فيهَا القِتالُ رَأَيتَ الَّذينَ في قُلوبِهِم مَرَضٌ
يَنظُرونَ إِلَيكَ نَظَرَ المَغشِيِّ عَلَيهِ مِنَ المَوتِ

The faithful say, 'If only a surah were sent down!' But when a conclusive surah is sent down and war is mentioned in it, you see those

in whose hearts is a sickness looking upon you with the look of someone fainting at death ... (47:20)

However, those firmly rooted in knowledge do not differentiate between the verses of God; they have faith in all of them whether they are difficult or easy. They say:

كُلٌّ مِن عِندِ رَبِّنا

... 'all of it is from our Lord.' ... (3:7)

One of the discussions that has taken place with regard to this verse is about the conjunction *wāw* ('and') in the following section:

ما يَعلَمُ تَأويلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّـهُ وَالرّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ يَقولونَ آمَنّا بِهِ

... But no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge (they) say, 'We believe in it' ... (3:7)

The question is this: is the 'and' that appears in the verse a conjoining 'and' (*wāw ʿāṭifah*) or a commencing 'and' (*wāw istīnāf*)? If it is a conjoining one, then "those firmly grounded in knowledge" is conjoined to "Allah" which would imply that the only ones who know the *taʾwīl* of the Qurʾān and in particular the allegorical verses are God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. However, if it is a commencing 'and', then the above implication does not hold ground; instead, a new sentence is begun in which the manner of thought and disposition of those firmly grounded in knowledge is explained as a contrast to those who are ill-hearted.

From the point of view of the Shias, there is no doubt that the Imams (ʿa) are the knowers of the essence of the *tanzīl* and *taʾwīl* of the Qurʾān since intellectual demonstration and transmitted narrations prove this point. This can also be established from other verses of the Qurʾān and it is because of this, the discussion of whether the 'and' in the verse is a conjoining one or a commencing one does not have any practical benefit. However, for someone like Fakhr Rāzī who believes that the knowledge of *taʾwīl* is exclusive to God, there is a great benefit in this discussion. It is for this reason that individuals like him insist that the 'and' in this verse is a commencing one and not a conjoining one.

The Opinion of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (r)

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (r) considers the 'and' in this verse to be a commencing one and not a conjoining one and in order to support his claim, he mentions two reasons and answers one objection. In the first reason, he says:

> The *amma* (as for) in the verse "As for those in whose hearts is deviance" (3:7) is to differentiate between two groups—i.e., the ill-hearted and the sound-hearted. Hence, if the 'and' is a conjunction between those firmly rooted in knowledge and Allah, then there will be nothing to introduce the second group [i.e., the firmly rooted in knowledge] and the "as for" will only include "those in whose heart is deviance." Hence, the natural syntax of the verse dictates that the 'firmly-rooted' be the second part of the "as for" and hence the 'and' is a commencing one.

The second reason he offers is that if we take the 'and' to be a conjoining one and if the verse implies that apart from God and the firmly-rooted in knowledge, no one else knows the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān, then we run into a problem. Since we know that "the firmly-rooted in knowledge" include the Prophet (ṣ) and the believers, then this verse is grouping both the Prophet (ṣ) and the believers in one expression while we know that the custom of the noble Qur'ān is that whenever it wishes to speak of the Prophet and the believers or the Ummah, then it gives special importance to the Prophet by first mentioning the Prophet separately and then mentioning the believers. Examples are as follows:

آمَنَ الرَّسولُ بِما أُنزِلَ إِلَيهِ مِن رَبِّهِ وَالمُؤمِنونَ

The Apostle and the faithful have faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord ... (2:285)

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسولُ اللَّـهِ وَالَّذينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدّاءُ عَلَى الكُفّارِ رُحَماءُ بَينَهُم

Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves ... (48:29)

إِنَّ أَولَى النَّاسِ بِإِبراهيمَ لَلَّذينَ اتَّبَعوهُ وَهٰذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذينَ آمَنوا

Indeed the nearest of all people to Abraham are those who follow him and this prophet and those who have faith ... (3:68)

ثُمَّ أَنزَلَ اللَّـهُ سَكينَتَهُ عَلىٰ رَسولِهِ وَعَلَى المُؤمِنينَ

Then Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and upon the faithful ... (9:26)

ᶜAllāmah then goes on to answer an objection. The objection is that if the 'and' is a commencing one, then the verse would imply that only God has knowledge of the *taʾwīl* of the Qurʾān whereas we know for sure that the Ahl al-Bayt also have knowledge of *taʾwīl*. In response to this objection, ᶜAllāmah says that this exclusivity seems to be a relative one. It is like the following verse:

وَعِندَهُ مَفاتِحُ الغَيبِ لا يَعلَمُها إِلّا هُوَ

With Him are the treasures of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him ... (6:59)

In this verse, the noble Qurʾān considers knowledge of the Unseen t be exclusive to God. However, in other verses, it offers exceptions to this general rule:

عالِمُ الغَيبِ فَلا يُظهِرُ عَلىٰ غَيبِهِ أَحَدًا إِلّا مَنِ ارتَضىٰ مِن رَسولٍ

Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] Unseen to anyone, except to an apostle He approves of ... (72:27)

تِلكَ مِن أَنباءِ الغَيبِ نوحيها إِلَيكَ

These are accounts of the Unseen, which We reveal to you ... (11:49)

These verses point out that other than God, his chosen Prophet also has knowledge of the Unseen. Hence, the exclusivity in the main verse under discussion (3:7) is also a relative exclusivity. Ostensibly the exclusivity is to convey the idea that it is only God who independently knows the *taʾwīl* of the Qurʾān but he has taught this *taʾwīl*

to the pure Ahl al-Bayt which we know through the context of other definitive proofs.

As was mentioned, ᶜAllāmah (*r*) is of the opinion that the 'and' in the verse is a commencing one but this opinion is in no way inconsistent with the knowledge of the Imams vis-à-vis the *ta'wīl* of the noble Qur'ān. It was also clarified that the divinely pure souls are familiar with the spirit and heart of the Qur'ān and the Existential Book; in fact, those illuminated souls are at one with the Qur'ān and reality and its *ta'wīl* at various levels.

Re-evaluating the Second Proof of ᶜAllāmah

Of course, the second proof of ᶜAllāmah is not complete since there is an objection that can be raised to it and a way out of his initial concern. With regard to the objection, the issue of the Prophet and the believers being grouped together is not just limited to the 'and' being a conjoining one; the issue would remain the same even if we take the 'and' to be a commencing one. As to the way out of his initial concern, the verses that he mentioned are ones in which there are grounds for the separation of the Prophet (ṣ) and the believers. However, with regard to certain verses, such as the verse of purification (33:33) or the verse about those firmly rooted in knowledge (3:7) there is no reason why the mention of the Ahl al-Bayt should be separated from the mention of the Prophet (ṣ). This is because the average believers are not those who are firmly rooted in knowledge whereas the Infallibles (ᶜ*a*) are firmly rooted in knowledge; moreover, their reality is no different from the reality of the noble Messenger (ṣ) such that it would call for a separation in expression.

It should also be mentioned that when one studies the narrations regarding the verse in question (3:7), they can be divided into two groups: some of them seem to suggest that the 'and' is a conjoining one while others suggest that it is a commencing one. So there is definitely an inconsistency between the exegetic narrations. Now if the apparent meaning of the verse in question is established, then it can act as an exegetical arbitrator to solve the inconsistency in the narrations. If it becomes clear that the exclusivity of the *ta'wīl* (in the verse) is relative and that the multitude of narrations which indicate that the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜ*a*) know the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān are completely accurate and reliable from a narrational perspective, then the opinion of ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*r*) can be validated.

Chapter 6:

The Qur'ānic Style of Articulation

In order to understand the contents of any book, we must first become familiar with the way it articulates and delivers its message. Similarly, in order to benefit from the teachings of the noble Qur'ān, it is helpful to become acquainted with the articulative qualities that the Qur'ān utilizes in conveying its teachings. Through this, not only will we be able to attain a significant level of those lofty teachings, but we may also be able to answer queries about its articulative method that may be raised. Below are ten qualities that pertain to explaining the teachings of the Qur'ān. There are others, of course, some of which have been alluded to in the previous discussions.

1. Simple Delivery and Profound Delivery

Human beings have a common culture and disposition called the divine *fiṭrah* but they are not the same when it comes to intelligence and mental astuteness; rather, "the people are minerals like gold and silver."[1] A book which is universal must express its *fiṭrī* teachings in diverse ways and at multiple levels so that no scholar feels that he has no need of it due to its simplicity, and no simpleton feels that he is deprived from it due to the depth and sophistication of its teachings.

For this reason, the noble Qur'ān uses the methods of wisdom, exhortation, and the best polemics:

ادعُ إِلىٰ سَبيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالحِكمَةِ وَالمَوعِظَةِ الحَسَنَةِ وَجادِلهُم بِالَّتي هِيَ أَحسَنُ

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best ... (16:125)

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 58, p. 65 and 106.

But it also presents its own way: to bring down many of its lofty teachings by way of presenting similitudes (*tamthīl*) so that the common man can ascend under the patronage of holding onto the similitude (*mathal*). Consequently, man can benefit from exhortation, derive advantage from the best polemics, begin to overflow through wisdom, and proceed from the intellected (*maʿqūl*) to the witnessed (*mashhūd*), from acquisition (*ḥuṣūl*) to presence (*ḥuḍūr*), from the Unseen (*Ghayb*) to the Visible (*Shuhūd*), from knowledge (*ʿilm*) to actual reality (*ʿayn*), and from a state of tranquillity (*iṭmīnān*) to the goal of the Divine Encounter (*liqā*). From there, he may journey the endless shores of "from God to God in God" with the mellow moan of "Oh for the lack of provisions, the remoteness of the journey, and the extent of the road!"[i] Then he may continue with the intended witnessing (*shuhūd maqṣūd*) and the praised perplexity (*ḥayrat mamdūḥ*) of "My Lord, increase my perplexity in You." Finally, he may become united with the prayer of the infallible Imams: "My God, grant me the perfection of exclusive devotion towards You, and illuminate the eyes of our hearts with the radiance of looking at You until the eyes of the hearts break through the veils of light and reach the treasure-trove of grandeur whereupon our spirits can become suspended through the glory of Your sanctity."[ii]

The noble Qur'ān uses demonstration and wisdom for the intermediary souls and through this manner it conveys the teachings to them. However, for the simple-minded who are not able to digest demonstration and proof, the Qur'ān uses similitudes to make the weighty teachings tender and digestible. Such a quality is normally not found in intellectual and demonstrative books. The path of similitudes, as one knows from logic, is not the path of definition or description. This is because neither are the essentials nor the essential accidents of a thing which is being defined brought up; rather, some similar examples are mentioned. For instance, in defining a human soul, one may say, "the soul in the body is like a captain in a ship," so that such an analogy may help one rediscover the role of his soul.

God says in the noble Qur'ān:

[i] Nahj al-balāghah, Wisdom 77.
[ii] *Mafātiḥ al-janān*, the Whispered prayer of Shaʿbāniyyah.

وَلَقَد ضَرَبنا لِلنّاسِ في هٰذَا القُرآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُم يَتَذَكَّرونَ

We have drawn for mankind in this Quran every [kind of] example, so that they may take admonition (39:27)

In using examples, one must ensure that one does not confine oneself to the boundaries of the example; rather, one must consider the example as an aperture towards the extensive world of that which is simulated (*mumaththal*). He must traverse this path and then journey from the level of knowledge to the height of intellect, and from that sublime and towering platform he must take flight to the pinnacle of witnessing and then attach himself to the Glory of God's Sanctity and nothing else.

> Beneath the azure vault, I am that slave of resolution, who
> Is free from whatever taketh colour of attachment.[1]

There may be some verses of the noble Qur'ān which none but the elite understand; nevertheless, there is no subject-matter in the Qur'ān except that it can be comprehended by everyone. This is because with regard to those lofty verses, God has made their contents tender in other verses, through simple expressions, explanations stories, or examples, in a manner that everyone can understand. Fo instance, with regards to His own knowledge of the Unseen, He says

وَعِندَهُ مَفاتِحُ الغَيبِ لا يَعلَمُها إِلّا هُوَ

With Him are the keys of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him ... (6:59)

Many individuals may be perplexed regarding the lofty expression "keys of the Unseen." Yet after conveying the zenith of the verse, God states this issue in a manner that can be understood by all:

وَيَعلَمُ ما فِي البَرِّ وَالبَحرِ وَما تَسقُطُ مِن وَرَقَةٍ إِلّا يَعلَمُها

... He knows whatever there is in land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowing it ... (6:59)

The average man may not be able to understand the zenith of the verse, but is able to understand the same contents at a lower and more palatable level, which appears in the next few phrases. Of

[1] Hāfiẓ, translated by Henry Wilberforce Clarke.

course, one must admit that the strength of an example is not at the same authority of a true definition or description which describes the term being defined; nevertheless, one cannot deny the great role it plays in explaining that which is simulated.

2. The Elegance and Diversity of Similitudes

The more simple-minded a man is, the more he is in need of examples. For this reason, when a mathematics teacher wishes to bring up certain mathematical issues for novices, he must make use of examples. In presenting its multifarious contents, the noble Qur'ān also uses numerous examples, and has applied diversity through its choice of elegant illustrations. With regard to the elegance of the Qur'ānic examples, God says:

وَتِلكَ الأَمثالُ نَضرِبُها لِلنّاسِ وَما يَعقِلُها إِلّا العالِمونَ

We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge. (29:43)

Even though these parables are very simple, understanding them requires knowledge so that they become a means towards reaching the intellect.

Amongst the scholars, there are two perspectives with regard to the use of parables. One group states that these parables are like common comparisons and they have been brought only to bring the material closer to the mind. Another group states that such parables are to describe the imaginal existence of those topics and conveys the reality of the simulated object (*mumaththal*).

Let us take the following parable from the noble Qur'ān for instance:

مَثَلُ الَّذينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوراةَ ثُمَّ لَم يَحمِلوها كَمَثَلِ الحِمارِ يَحمِلُ أَسفارًا

The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books ... (62:5)

Some say that in this verse, those who do not understand anything from the divine books are compared to donkeys since donkeys lack the understanding and awareness of the contents of the books that have been placed on their backs. However, others are of the belief that this parable conveys the inner reality of those people who have

wilfully closed off the channels of perceiving and contemplating divine teachings; in every habitat that reality manifests itself, the truth of the parables also manifests itself. It is for this reason that God Almighty describes the rejecters of the Qur'ān as blind:

وَمَثَلُ الَّذينَ كَفَروا كَمَثَلِ الَّذي يَنعِقُ بِما لا يَسمَعُ إِلّا دُعاءً وَنِداءً صُمٌّ بُكمٌ عُميٌ فَهُم لا يَعقِلونَ

The parable of the faithless is that of someone who shouts after that which does not hear [anything] except a call and cry: deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not exercise their reason. (2:171)

From the perspective of their outward senses, the unbelievers and hypocrites can see, hear, and speak. However, what is intended by God is to convey their inner reality by describing them as deaf, dumb, and blind. To support this perspective, its proponents resort to the following verses:

لا تَعمَى الأَبصارُ وَلٰكِن تَعمَى القُلوبُ الَّتي فِي الصُّدورِ

... Indeed, it is not the eyes that turn blind, but it is the hearts in the breasts that turn blind! (22:46)

قالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرتَني أَعمىٰ وَقَد كُنتُ بَصيرًا

He will say, 'My Lord! Why have You raised me blind, though I used to see?' (20:125)

From the narrations that can support this perspective, one can mention the words of the Messenger of God (ṣ) regarding a man who had two wives and did not treat them equally. In describing him, the Prophet said, "On the Day of Resurrection, he will come shackled while one side of him is slanting until he enters the Fire." In other words, he will lay foot on the plains of the Resurrection with his body split into two parts and one part will be tilted. This is the reality of the action of an unjust man that will manifest itself in this way. The law court of the Resurrection is not like the law courts of this world where the penalties are conventional. On the contrary, all that man performs in this world will appear to him at the Resurrection and the inner substance of his actions will be witnessed.

God Almighty says:

وَلَقَد ضَرَبنا لِلنّاسِ في هٰذَا القُرآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ

Certainly we have drawn for mankind in this Quran every [kind of] parable ... (30:58)

He also says:

وَلَقَد صَرَّفنا فِي هٰذَا القُرآنِ لِلنّاسِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ

We have certainly interspersed this Quran with every kind of parable for the people ... (18:54)

In other words, in order to convey the teachings and realities, we have brought parables of every type. When one studies the Qur'ānic parables attentively, one notices the diversity and skill that has been followed with regard to the contents of the parables and their form. In terms of the form, sometimes the comparison is between two singular objects, sometimes between a singular object and composite one, and sometimes between two composite objects. In terms of their contents, (1) sometimes God gives the parables of light, oil, and a lamp niche; (2) sometimes of those lost in the desert at night and the seekers of a mirage during the day; and (3) sometimes of a donkey, a spider, and a fly. In all this, God brings about diversity.

The opponents of the Qur'ān used to say that it does not befit God to bring parables of flies or spiders since they are lowly creatures and they do not accord with the greatness of God. In response to this objection (of those who focus on the outward), God Almighty says:

إِنَّ اللَّـهَ لا يَستَحيي أَن يَضرِبَ مَثَلًا ما بَعوضَةً فَما فَوقَها

Indeed Allah is not ashamed to draw a parable whether it is that of a gnat or something above it ... (2:26)

This is not a place for being ashamed; in order to convey truths and teachings at the level of the people, one must offer parables of various creatures and there is not deficiency in this.

In order to portray the feebleness of the idols of the polytheists, God Almighty says:

يا أَيُّهَا النّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاستَمِعوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذينَ تَدعونَ مِن
دونِ اللَّـهِ لَن يَخلُقوا ذُبابًا وَلَوِ اجتَمَعوا لَهُ وَإِن يَسلُبهُمُ
الذُّبابُ شَيـًٔا لا يَستَنقِذوهُ مِنهُ ضَعُفَ الطّالِبُ وَالمَطلوبُ

O people! Listen to a parable that is being drawn: Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allah will never create [even] a fly even if

they all rallied to do so! And if a fly should take away something from them, they cannot recover that from it. Feeble is the seeker and the sought! (22:73)

To paraphrase: these wooden, stone-made, human, *jinni*, celestial, and earthly idols that you worship do not have the ability to even create a fly, and if a fly was to take something from these false deities of yours, they do not have the power to take it back. The source of the feebleness of the seeker is either his lack of knowledge and awareness or his lack of power and ability to act. In any case, the idols are weak in preserving themselves.

At the same time, man has not been able to defend himself from the detectable and undetectable microbes nor will he ever have such an ability despite the advancements of science and industry. This is because it is possible that every one of the modern industries may be accompanied with the creation of other undetectable particles which would take away man's power; as a fly is weak so too are the deities of the polytheists.

Hence, the objections of the polytheists to the Qur'ānic method of bringing parables are not valid since the array and diversity of the teachings necessitate an array and diversity of parables. Moreover, for a thing to be abject is not based on its externality nor on it being small in body and size. In the words of Imam Ṣādiq (*ᶜa*), "a fly has all the components of an elephant with the addition of two antennas that an elephant doesn't have."[i] Hence, one cannot state that smallness in size is what makes something abject nor can one state tha' largeness in body is what gives something greatness. Rather, the im portant features to judge between living entities is having a precis structure, an amazing order of creation, and theoretical and practical harmony.

3. Stories and the Manner of Delivery

The noble Qur'ān narrates stories of the prophets and the history of former nations but not in the manner of historians or story-tellers; rather, it narrates only parts of the history of those great personalities and their nations that is in line with its own goal of guidance. Story-tellers in writing stories or narrating them also get into the details of affairs and they capture the attention of their audience, but the Qur'ān does not use this method.

[i] Miᶜrāj al-saᶜādah, p. 145.

As an example, in the account of the children of Adam, the Qur'ān says:

وَاتلُ عَلَيهِم نَبَأَ ابنَي آدَمَ بِالحَقِّ إِذ قَرَّبا قُربانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِن
أَحَدِهِما وَلَم يُتَقَبَّل مِنَ الآخَرِ قالَ لَأَقتُلَنَّكَ قالَ إِنَّما يَتَقَبَّلُ
اللَّـهُ مِنَ المُتَّقينَ لَئِن بَسَطتَ إِلَيَّ يَدَكَ لِتَقتُلَني ما أَنا
بِباسِطٍ يَدِيَ إِلَيكَ لِأَقتُلَكَ إِنّي أَخافُ اللَّـهَ رَبَّ العالَمينَ إِنّي
أُريدُ أَن تَبوءَ بِإِثمي وَإِثمِكَ فَتَكونَ مِن أَصحابِ النّارِ وَذٰلِكَ
جَزاءُ الظّالِمينَ فَطَوَّعَت لَهُ نَفسُهُ قَتلَ أَخيهِ فَقَتَلَهُ فَأَصبَحَ
مِنَ الخاسِرينَ فَبَعَثَ اللَّـهُ غُرابًا يَبحَثُ فِي الأَرضِ لِيُرِيَهُ
كَيفَ يُواري سَوءَةَ أَخيهِ قالَ يا وَيلَتىٰ أَعَجَزتُ أَن أَكونَ
مِثلَ هٰذَا الغُرابِ فَأُوارِيَ سَوءَةَ أَخي فَأَصبَحَ مِنَ النّادِمينَ

Relate to them [O Prophet] truly the account of Adam's two sons. When the two of them offered an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other. [One of them] said, 'Surely I will kill you.' [The other one] said, 'Allah accepts only from the Godwary. Even if you extend your hand toward me to kill me, I will not extend my hand toward you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. I desire that you earn [the burden of] my sin and your sin, to become one of the inmates of the Fire, and such is the requital of the wrongdoers.' So his soul prompted him to kill his brother, and he killed him, and thus became one of the losers. Then Allah sent a crow, exploring in the ground, to show him how to bury the corpse of his brother. He said, 'Woe to me! Am I unable to be [even] like this crow and bury my brother's corpse?' Thus he became regretful. (5:27-31)

The whole incident of Cain and Abel that appears in the Qur'ān is found in the above verses. Yet it carries many lessons: that God accepts good deeds only from the Godwary; that the absence of Godwariness can lead a man towards envy, and envy can compel a man to kill his own brother; that the Godwary are blessed with nobility of soul and that they do not extend their hands towards lowly acts such as killing one's brother and taking revenge before the

crime; that man's soul is first seduced, then he is commanded towards evil, and then his soul pulls him towards evil; that man is a weak creature and does not know many things even at the level of a crow; that the end result of criminality and abjection is remorse and regret. These and other messages are lessons to learn for man and the noble Qur'ān has brought them in this story.

With regards to why the sacrifice was offered in the first place—was the reason for it marriage to a beautiful girl or something else? Where and when did this take place? —these and other such matters are not discussed by the Qur'ān. If there are narrations regarding any of this, their chains of transmission are broken (*mursal*) and are not very reliable. Also one must be vigilant so that falsities and the *Isrā'īlīyāt* [unverified teachings traced to previous scriptures] do not play a role in how we explain the stories of the Qur'ān.

In narrating its stories, when the noble Qur'ān quotes individuals, it will often identify whether what is quoted is true or false. If the content happens to be false, the Qur'ān will show it as being false, and if it happens to be true, the Qur'ān will support it either with a corroborating statement or through the sheer acknowledgement of that very statement. Teaching morals and relating divine customs are other qualities of the Qur'ānic stories which have been mentioned before.

4. Distinguishing between Truth and Parables

The noble Qur'ān has related many stories of the divine prophets and the nations and peoples of the past, all of which are meant to convey the truths and realities of what occurred in the past. The Qur'ān has mentioned them without any addition or deletion. In the account of Cain and Abel, the Qur'ān says:

وَاتلُ عَلَيهِم نَبَأَ ابنَيِ آدَمَ بِالحَقِّ

Relate to them with truth the account of Adam's two sons ... (5:27)

When the Qur'ān uses the term 'with truth', it shows that the actual account took place and is a real affair (and not a myth) and that its transmission is not tainted with mythology. In other words, the transmission and that which is transmitted are both true. Hence, a quality of the stories of the Qur'ān are that they are real. The Qur'ān is not mythology or folklore and is not like the books of Kalila and Dimna (or the Fables of Bidpai), etc. in which tales that are not real

are created for certain purposes. Of course, it is possible for those goals to be valid and for those concocted mythical stories to contain morals; however, the Qur'ān did not adopt that approach. Instead, every story that is narrated is not only real but it is also accompanied with true results.

The stories of the Qur'ān are different from its parables. Offering parables (*tamthīl*) is to bring down and make light the lofty teachings through the use of examples whereas the stories of the Qur'ān relate true events of the past. The Qur'ān makes a distinction between these two affairs and would never allow for them to become confused with each other so as to misinform the audience.

Every time the Qur'ān has a parabolic discourse, it brings in surrounding textual clues so as to prevent any miscommunication. For example, in Surah Ḥashr a parable is mentioned to show the greatness of the Qur'ān, and at the end of it, a statement occurs to show that it is a parable:

لَو أَنزَلنا هٰذَا القُرآنَ عَلىٰ جَبَلٍ لَرَأَيتَهُ خاشِعًا مُتَصَدِّعًا مِن خَشيَةِ اللَّـهِ وَتِلكَ الأَمثالُ نَضرِبُها لِلنّاسِ لَعَلَّهُم يَتَفَكَّرونَ

Had We sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled [and] go to pieces with the fear of Allah. We draw such comparisons for mankind, so that they may reflect. (59:21)

Hence, if there are textual clues either before or after a particular topic to show that it is a parable through surrounding evidence, then it is clear that there is a parable there. If not, then it shows that it refers to a real incident that either took place or will take place. In other words, all that has been said or related is a reality that has either taken place or will take place. If at a particular place in which a reality is being conveyed, the words "and strike for them the example of ..." (36:13) or something similar is mentioned, it is to negate the exclusivity of the instance that has taken place; instead, it shows that that instance is just an example of something universal. In these cases, parabolizing is to mention an example and is not for offering a similitude. However, in cases where a thing has not occurred, parabolizing is to offer a similitude and is not to mention an instance or example.

Hence, since the Qur'ān is pure truth, in the same way that it is true in its content, it is also true in its method of discourse. It does not take the minds of its audience towards falseness or deviation.

Moreover, it never relates a myth in the place of reality and it never considers a mythical matter as a real matter.

5. Appropriate Use of Allusions

One of the expressive qualities of the Qur'ān is the fact that it sometimes speaks in allusions in order to teach etiquettes. A noble narration shows how God speaks with modesty: "God, the Exalted, is modest."[1] Hence, the noble Qur'ān does not make use of offensive and disagreeable words; rather, if the need arises to convey words that are disagreeable, it uses allusions so that proper etiquette is followed. Through this method, it invites its audience towards maintaining as much decorum and proper modesty as they can. For example, in order to convey intercourse and spousal relations, it uses metonyms such as *mass* or *rafatha*. *Mass* means to touch and is a relationship that comes through touching something. *Rafatha* means an active inclination towards women. With regards to *tayammum* (dry ablution) in the place of *ghusl* (the major ablution), the Qur'ān says:

أَو لامَستُمُ النِّساءَ فَلَم تَجِدوا ماءً فَتَيَمَّموا صَعيدًا طَيِّبًا

... or you have touched women, and you cannot find water [for ghusl], then [in its place] make your ablution on clean ground ... (4:43)

In this verse, 'touch' is an allusive phrase to signify spousal relations since simply touching women on its own is not a cause for performing the *ghusl*.

With regard to the rules of fasting, the Qur'ān says:

أُحِلَّ لَكُم لَيلَةَ الصِّيامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلىٰ نِسائِكُم

You are permitted on the night of the fast to incline towards your wives ... (2:187)

In other words, the inclination you have towards your wives and having relations with them is permitted on the night of the fast. Of course, what is intended here is intercourse.

With regard to answering the call of nature and relieving oneself, the noble Qur'ān uses the allusive term *ghā'iṭ* even though the meaning of this word is a sunken piece of ground. Since people used to go

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 47, p. 200. Also, v. 77, p. 221.

to a low-lying place to relieve themselves, which was preserved from the spread of impurities and away from the eye-sight of others, this word was used as an allusion as in the following verse:

أَو جاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنكُم مِنَ الغائِطِ

... or any of you has come from the toilet [lit. a low-lying place] ...
(4:43)

In these instances, the Qur'ān gives us a lesson on proper decorum through its usage of allusive words. Moreover, if one finds a word in the Qur'ān which is not very strong in terms of its allusive aspect, it is because of the repetition of that word over time. When the Qur'ān first began using it, it was an allusive word. In fact, one of the reasons why disagreeable meanings have so many terms for them is precisely because the use of allusive words and its repetition over time causes that word to lose its allusiveness. Hence, people are forced to find another allusive word for it, but that too can become explicit over time just like the original word for it. This process may repeat itself over and over again.

6. Stepping Outside Conventional Discourse

The Qur'ān is not a scholarly book like the books of philosophy, jurisprudence, ethics, etc. where a particular structure and order is always maintained. For example, in all of the books of ethics written by prominent scholars, when they wish to describe justice or Godwariness, they define and analyse justice and Godwariness itself. It is not customary in any book that if one wishes to define justice, one identifies a just individual instead. They would consider this as out of the scope of their topics. However, not only does the noble Qur'ān consider this permissible but, in fact, one of the common valuable features of the Qur'ān in terms of conveying its teachings, is the fact that it uses this form of expression.

The Qur'ān does not wish to formally and completely recognize the prevalent system of grammar and syntax that was found in the Age of Ignorance or after that. It is not the case that the Qur'ān abides by that system completely and does not diverge from it; rather, it intends to shade the system of grammar of the age of idol worshipping with the colour of God and to make it sublime. Hence, in the Qur'ān, one can find multiple instances of the lack of congruence between the excepted clause and that from which it is excepted

and between the defined term and the definition. For instance, in the definition of *birr* (piety), God Almighty says:

لَيسَ البِرَّ أَن تُوَلّوا وُجوهَكُم قِبَلَ المَشرِقِ وَالمَغرِبِ
وَلـٰكِنَّ البِرَّ مَن آمَنَ بِاللَّـهِ

Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is those who have faith in Allah and ... (2:177)

This verse is about the definition of *birr* (piety), but God Almighty departs from the customary practice of lexicologists by instead defining a *bārr* (one who has piety). In fact, due to this very method of expression used by the Qur'ān, a group of exegetes have abstained from what appears in the verse. Some of them say that it is *barr* (with a *fatḥ* not a *kasr* which means "one who has piety") that actually appears in the Qur'ān, while others say that the word 'possessor' should be added to the word (i.e., "the possessor of piety"). The reason they say this is because they have not understood the Qur'ānic method of expressing its teachings.

Another example is the following:

يَومَ لا يَنفَعُ مالٌ وَلا بَنونَ إِلّا مَن أَتَى اللَّـهَ بِقَلبٍ سَليمٍ

The day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart (26:88-89)

The prevalent usage would call for the following "neither wealth nor children will be of benefit, except the soundness of one's heart". Here the excepted ("one who comes to Allah") does not conform in structure to that from which it is excepted ("wealth and children"). To say "soundness of one's heart" would be syntactically more appropriate.

In mentioning certain qualities, when the matter becomes sensitive, the noble Qur'ān begins to talk about the qualified [i.e., those who possess that quality]. The reason for this is to convey the idea that the goal of knowledge must end with action and that qualities must lead to the qualified. It wishes to convey the idea that knowledge and theory on their own cannot promote anything; they must always be accompanied with ethics and action. The reason for this characteristic of the Qur'ān is because the Qur'ān is a book of guidance, ethics, and light; it is not just a scholarly and instructive book. From another point of view, in order for an attribute to be concretely actualized, it is dependent on its nearest source, which is the

very entity that bears the attribute. Hence, to discuss the possessor of the attribute is to discuss the existential cause of that attribute. Moreover, in order to thoroughly analyze the definition of a phenomenon, it is important to mention the cause of existence [of that attribute] just as it is important to mention the cause of its subsistence.

7. Drawing Attention and Stimulating Questions

One of the grammatical and skilful subtleties of the noble Qur'ān is that it purposely breaks certain forms in order to draw the attention of the reader and to probe his thoughts as to why the Qur'ān, which is fluent and eloquent from cover to cover, has broken the syntax of its words. By searching for the reason for this break, he may benefit from its hidden knowledge. For example, God says the following regarding being grateful and ungrateful towards His blessings:

لَئِن شَكَرتُم لَأَزِيدَنَّكُم وَلَئِن كَفَرتُم إِنَّ عَذابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

... *"If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe." (14:7)*

The apparent structure would have necessitated the following: "If you are grateful I will surely enhance you, and if you are ungrateful, I will surely punish you." However, the Qur'ān does not adopt this apparent structure so that after having drawn the reader's attention and stimulated a question in his mind, the Qur'ān wishes to explain the following: the increase in blessings for the grateful is an explicit and true promise but the punishment for ungratefulness could possibly be waived in the presence of God's Mercy. On top of this, to break one's promise (*waʿdah*) is not appropriate for God, but to break one's threat (*waʿīd*) is possible for God due to the predominance of his Mercy over his wrath.

Moreover, in such types of allusive expressions, there are many instructive nuances and nurturing subtleties. Apart from these hidden nuances, there are three pivotal points that must be taken into account: (1) the promise of God is explicit while his threat is suggestive; (2) assuming that God's threat is explicit, it can be repudiated; what goes against wisdom is God breaking his promise not God repudiating a threat since repudiating a threat is in line with God's

extensive mercy; (3) since a threat is a composition (*inshā'*) not a confirmation (*akhbār*), going against it does not entail a lie.

In today's marketing world, it is common to use the same method of highlighting certain parts and provoking questions that the Qur'ān began fourteen centuries ago with its unique manner of syntax. For example, on a banner, they may write all the words of a statement in one colour but write the word 'martyr' in dark or red letters. In lectures, speakers may often accentuate and stress certain words to show their importance to their audience.

Sometimes the noble Qur'ān will have a sentence in which all of the words except one are nominative and that one will be brought in the accusative form. Through this break of pattern, the reader stops and attempts to find out the subtle point that is being made. All of these cases stem from the miraculousness of the Qur'ān—that one thousand four hundred years ago, an unschooled man would bring the gift of a timeless book which is replete with ingenuity and with skilful and erudite subtleties:

لٰكِنِ الرّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ مِنهُم وَالمُؤمِنونَ يُؤمِنونَ بِما
أُنزِلَ إِلَيكَ وَما أُنزِلَ مِن قَبلِكَ وَالمُقيمينَ الصَّلاةَ وَالمُؤتونَ
الزَّكاةَ وَالمُؤمِنونَ بِاللَّـهِ وَاليَومِ الآخِرِ أُولـٰئِكَ سَنُؤتيهِم
أَجرًا عَظيمًا

But as for those who are firmly grounded in knowledge from among them, and the faithful, they believe in what has been sent down to you, and what was sent down before you—those who maintain the prayer [in the accusative form], give the zakat, and believe in Allah and the Last Day—them We shall give a great reward. (4:162)

In this verse, all of the adjective titles have been mentioned in the nominative and it is only the title "those who maintain the prayer" that appears in the accusative. The reason for this is so that the importance of prayer which is the pillar of religion becomes clear.

8. Nurturing a Holistic Approach to the Teachings

One of the other characteristics of the noble Qur'ān is that God Almighty has mentioned theological, ethical, jurisprudential, and political doctrines distinctly in the Qur'ān and many times he has

brought them all together so that it can be a holistic form of guidance in relation to those doctrines. It can also prevent human societies from having an insular perspective regarding the world and from being deficient on the plane of action. The Qur'ān teaches the Islamic Ummah that religious doctrines are multidimensional and that action must accompany them so that it can nurture complete and holistic societies.

The Qur'ān is not like specialized books of philosophy, ethics, jurisprudence, or politics that it would suffice itself with only one dimension. Since the Qur'ān is a light and since it has been blessed with guiding all aspects of society, alongside teaching jurisprudential matters, it also conveys ethical points and other doctrines that are responsible for implementing the jurisprudential verdicts. If it presents acts of worship, it also teaches intellection and analysis alongside it. The entire Qur'ān is replete with this characteristic.

As an example, one can allude to the blessed Surah Nisā' since in the section where it discusses the rules of inheritance in the form of jurisprudential verdicts, it also conveys issues of ethics and affection in order to aid in the implementation of those verdicts:

وَإِذا حَضَرَ القِسمَةَ أُولُو القُربىٰ وَاليَتامىٰ وَالمَساكينُ
فَارزُقوهُم مِنهُ وَقولوا لَهُم قَولًا مَعروفًا وَليَخشَ الَّذينَ لَو
تَرَكوا مِن خَلفِهِم ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعافًا خافوا عَلَيهِم فَليَتَّقُوا اللَّـهَ
وَليَقولوا قَولًا سَديدًا إِنَّ الَّذينَ يَأكُلونَ أَموالَ اليَتامىٰ ظُلمًا
إِنَّما يَأكُلونَ في بُطونِهِم نارًا وَسَيَصلَونَ سَعيرًا

And when the division is attended by relatives, the orphans and the needy, provide for them out of it [i.e., the inheritance], and speak to them honourable words. Let those fear who, were they to leave behind weak offspring, would be concerned on their account [for if they mistreat the younglings of the deceased, their own children who will become orphans after their death may be mistreated by others]. So let them be wary of Allah, and let them speak upright words [regarding the orphans of others]. Indeed those who consume the property of orphans wrongfully, only ingest fire into their bellies, and soon they will enter the Blaze. (4:8-10)

9. A Succinct Survey of the Natural Sciences

Sometimes in order to teach and purify the souls, the noble Qur'ān speaks on scientific and natural topics. Regarding the existential stages of man from soil and a drop of fluid and a clinging mass and a fleshy tissue to a foetus and the spirit being blown in him, God says:

وَلَقَد خَلَقنَا الإِنسانَ مِن سُلالَةٍ مِن طينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلناهُ نُطفَةً
في قَرارٍ مَكينٍ ثُمَّ خَلَقنَا النُّطفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقنَا العَلَقَةَ
مُضغَةً فَخَلَقنَا المُضغَةَ عِظامًا فَكَسَونَا العِظامَ لَحمًا ثُمَّ
أَنشَأناهُ خَلقًا آخَرَ فَتَبارَكَ اللَّـهُ أَحسَنُ الخالِقينَ

Certainly We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him a drop of [seminal] fluid [lodged] in a secure abode. Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! (23:12-14)

Concerning His heavens and stars, He says:

وَلَقَد جَعَلنا فِي السَّماءِ بُروجًا وَزَيَّنّاها لِلنّاظِرينَ

Certainly We have appointed houses in the sky and adorned them for the onlookers. (15:16)

With regard to His earth and mountains, He says:

وَالأَرضَ مَدَدناها وَأَلقَينا فيها رَواسِيَ

And We spread out the earth, and cast in it firm mountains ... (15:19)

With respect to rain and its amount, He says:

وَأَنزَلنا مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسكَنّاهُ فِي الأَرضِ

We sent down water from the sky in a measured manner, and We lodged it within the ground ... (23:18)

Regarding the cultivation of date and grape trees and groves, He says:

فَأَنشَأْنا لَكُم بِهِ جَنّاتٍ مِن نَخيلٍ وَأَعنابٍ لَكُم فيها فَواكِهُ كَثيرَةٌ وَمِنها تَأكُلونَ

Then with it We produced for you gardens of date palms and vines. There are abundant fruits in them for you, and you eat from them ... (23:19)

Concerning the pollination of plants with the help of the wind, He says:

وَأَرسَلنَا الرِّياحَ لَواقِحَ

And We send the fertilizing winds ... (15:22)

The Qur'ān has spoken on these and many other scholarly topics but not in a comprehensive and clear manner; rather through a cursory exposition, it has become the source of inspiration for the wayfarers and the driving force for the researchers so that they may contemplate over the divine signs and phenomena of the world and tread on the road of innovation, invention, and discover of the natural order with the powerful legs of sense perception, experimentation, and rationality.

The noble Qur'ān believes in the immense value of intellection and the scientific quests of man and it encourages human society towards them. At the time of the Messenger of God (ṣ), some people requested a miraculous feat of him so that the mountains of Mecca should move aside and an extensive valley for agriculture should become available for them. The Messenger refused this request and one of the reasons for this refusal was the fact that divine revelation and the religion of God places strong emphasis on encouraging the Muslim Ummah towards intellectual advancement and development in the affairs of their lives and their environment.

Of course, in some of the narrations that have been transmitted from the infallible Imams (ᶜa) in books such as *ᶜIlal al-sharāyiᶜ*, it has been narrated that the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) would respond to questions pertaining to the mysteries of the world. Nonetheless, the primary task of the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) is to nurture mankind, not to relate scientific matters. With regard to scientific matters, mention of the benchmarks and universal principles was sufficient. As

for elaboration, analysis, and discovery, this was left on the shoulders of man through his sense perception, experimentation, and rationality. The products of his intellectual demonstrations can become a part of the Islamic sciences at their own level since the intellect is the other side of the coin of transmission; it is not in opposition to religion.

10. Mysteries and Allusions in the Qur'ān

Sometimes the noble Qur'ān conveys extremely profound doctrines in very short verses and only a few of the exegetic elites can grasp their meaning. Examples of such verses include the following:

هُوَ الأَوَّلُ وَالآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالباطِنُ

He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden ... (57:3)

وَهُوَ مَعَكُم أَينَ ما كُنتُم

... and He is with you wherever you may be ... (57:4)

The contents of these verses are so weighty and precise that if man wished to relate these doctrines in the form of "He is with it, but not through a merger,"[1] he would be faced with the inadequacy of words on the one hand, and the deficiency of concepts on the other.

One of the methods of the noble Qur'ān is that after having presented certain matters that are conveyable, it appends these words with an allusion to other matters that are pertinent but not conveyed. By way of example, with regards to Abraham (*'a*) who was shown the dominions of the heavens and the earth, the following appears in the Qur'ān:

وَكَذٰلِكَ نُري إِبراهيمَ مَلَكوتَ السَّماواتِ وَالأَرضِ وَلِيَكونَ مِنَ الموقِنينَ

Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth and so that he can be of those who possess certitude. (6:75)

A normal way of stating this would be to say: "We showed him the dominions so that he can be of those who possess certitude." However, by bringing in the conjunction "and" before the phrase "so that he can be ...", the noble Qur'ān wishes to inform us that there were

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 77, p. 283.

other reasons and dispensations in this vision of the dominions—reasons, which God did not share with us. Through this method, the Qur'ān encourages the probing scholar to discover those reasons and to understand those doctrines.

The point is this: the technique of beginning "half-way" and not mentioning the original part of the phrase [i.e., the first part of what the "and" connects to] is meant to encourage one to discover the mysterious points which lie behind that which was not mentioned.

Chapter 7:

The Qur'ān and the Intellect

With regard to understanding the Qur'ān, God Almighty says:

وَتِلكَ الأَمثالُ نَضرِبُها لِلنّاسِ وَما يَعقِلُها إِلّا العالِمونَ

We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge. (29:43)

In this verse, there are two fundamental points which clarify the role of the intellect and knowledge in understanding the Qur'ān: The first point is that the parables of the noble Qur'ān are not simple and one must contemplate over them. In other words, the requirement for benefiting from them is to use one's intellect with regard to them. The second point is that contemplating over the parables of the Qur'ān is only possible for those who have knowledge. Now if the parables of the Qur'ān—which are the profound doctrines made tender—require knowledge and intellection, then certainly in order to understand and grasp the sublime doctrines and precise subtleties of the Qur'ān, these two key elements [i.e., knowledge and intellection] are necessary.

The noble Qur'ān describes its deniers as ignorant, foolish, and small-minded individuals, which we have already discussed to some extent. With regard to the faithful, it says:

وَيَرَى الَّذينَ أوتُوا العِلمَ الَّذي أُنزِلَ إِلَيكَ مِن رَبِّكَ هُوَ الحَقَّ

Those who have been given knowledge see that what has been sent down to you from your Lord is the truth ... (34:6)

In other words, those who are knowledgeable understand the Qur'ān well, and since they have understood it, they have faith in its truth and its descent from God. Knowledge is a ladder for the intellect. Intellection is better formulated when the intellectual man has greater knowledge. In the section on *ta'wīl*, it was stated that the firmly-

rooted in knowledge have faith in all of the Qur'ān including the definitive and allegorical verses:

وَالرَّاسِخونَ فِي العِلمِ يَقولونَ آمَنّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِن عِندِ رَبِّنا

... and those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.'... (3:7)

Immediately after this, the verse continues:

وَما يَذَّكَّرُ إِلّا أُولُو الأَلبابِ

... And none takes admonition except those who possess intellect. (3:7)

In other words, it is only the possessors of intellect who benefit from the Qur'ān and take admonition from its beneficial reminders.

The Criterion, the Key, and the Lantern

Of course, the intellect comprehends the essence of religion in that man is in need of laws of a metaphysical order. It also understands the universal principles of jurisprudential, ethical, and civil matters. However, there are hundreds of forbidden, permissible, mandatory, and recommended matters which the intellect is not able to grasp. In terms of the universal principles, the intellect is an immensely strong 'scale' (*mīzān*). In many matters, it is also a 'key' (*miftāḥ*)—in other words, it comes close to the door of the treasure-trove of knowledge, opens it, and says to man, "now use this treasure of the Qur'ān and the narrations." From there onwards, it is a 'lantern' (*miṣbāḥ*)—i.e., when man enters the treasure-trove of the Qur'ān, it accompanies man and it guides society in understanding the Qur'ān.

As an example, if the apparent meaning of a verse suggests that a prophet may have committed a sin, since the intellect considers sin emanating from the prophets to be simply impossible, one must then attempt to gain a true and precise understanding of the verse; one must understand it in a way that is not incompatible with the self-evident axioms and foundational intellectual principles that are acceptable to the intellect.

Similarly, with regards to verses which mention God speaking to others or others seeing God and hearing His voice, the intellect says that it is impossible for God to be material and corporeal. If this is

the case, then not only can one not see the head of God with one's eyes but God will not have material eyes, ears, or a tongue.

God Almighty has described the noble Qur'ān with the qualities of being a light, a guidance, and an exposition. This shows that the Qur'ān is not in need of any science in order for it to instruct and convey the message that it carries. The noble Qur'ān is neither in need of something external to itself in terms of its contents nor is it dependent on an external source of remedy in terms of its denotation. However, this does not mean that man can interact with the noble Qur'ān in an ignorant manner and not take into account the role of knowledge and the sciences in understanding the Qur'ān. Learning the experimental and other sciences expands the capacity of the heart and it increases the ability to understand and bear the teachings of the Qur'ān. It expands the chest of man: "truly these hearts are vessels; the best of them are the ones with greater capacity."[1] Every heart which is exposed to deductive thoughts has more of a capacity to bear and receive Qur'ānic knowledge. The more that man benefits from the signs of God's existential book through contemplation over the world of creation, the more will his ability to understand the signs and verses of God's written book, the noble Qur'ān, also increase.

That which is incorrect and discouraged is to force the conjure theorems of the experimental sciences onto the Qur'ān prior to then having gained the status of intellectual findings. It is not right to explain the verses of the Qur'ān in a way that is based on hypotheses. The reason for this is clear. The hypotheses of experimental science are constantly in the state of flux. So often a new theorem will negate an old one after a period of time. Hence, if we try to make the Qur'ān compatible to these time-bound theorems, what will result is instability and erosion in the teachings of the Qur'ān. But, we know that the Qur'ān is immune and protected from every falsehood:

لا يَأتيهِ الباطِلُ مِن بَينِ يَدَيهِ وَلا مِن خَلفِهِ

Falsehood cannot approach it, at present or in future ... (41:42)

Of course, unsubstantiated theorems can still be used as one of the possible interpretations of a particular verse and the moment that they become established, they can then become acceptable as a basis for an exegetic interpretation.

---

[1] Nahj al-balāghah, Wisdom 147.

Understanding the Qur'ān with an Untainted Mind

The Qur'ān cannot be understood with the technical jargon of philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and the principles of jurisprudence. This is because it has not been revealed for only philosophers, theologians, jurists, and those who study its principles. One cannot access the Qur'ān with terms that are particular to history, composition, trade, and experimental sciences since it has not come only for the specialists in these fields. The Qur'ān has come for the *fiṭrah* of all mankind. Anyone with a sound *fiṭrah* who approaches the Qur'ān can benefit from it and understand its illuminating verses. *Fiṭrah* is that which fully understands virtues and vices in practical affairs and which clearly recognizes the self-evident propositions in intellectual matters—i.e., one which understands that it is impossible for a thing to maintain its identity and exist and not exist at the same time. If anyone approaches the presence of the Qur'ān with these two assets of theoretical and practical wisdom, he will benefit from it even if he does not know any technical jargon. However, if he takes his preconceived tenets along with him and wants the Qur'ān to confirm the presuppositions of his own academic field and then force the tenets onto the Qur'ān, he will not understand a thing from the Qur'ān and will actually use the verses for meanings that were not originally intended for those verses.

There is a narration reported from the noble Prophet (ṣ): "The Qur'ān is the banquet of Allah so learn His banquet as much as you can."[1] In this illuminating narration, the Qur'ān has been described as a *ma'dubah Allah* (banquet of Allah). *Ma'dubah* does not mean a table or a table cloth; it means a cooked and prepared meal. The Messenger of God, who is not miserly or tight-fisted according to God Himself and who is "the most generous of the children of Adam" according to his own words, has invited all mankind to the Qur'ān which is the prepared food for the soul and the "banquet of Allah." If the Qur'ān was an empty table cloth, it would be possible for each person to bring his own food and to eat it on the table cloth; but if the Qur'ān is food that has already been prepared then man should not bring his scholarly opinions and thoughts or his own concoctions and use them in the name of the Qur'ān. If someone comes to the

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 89, p. 19.

presence of the Qur'ān with his own beliefs, he will never benefit from the Qur'ān and he will return with the same thoughts that he came with.

What an Untainted Mind means

In order to understand and make the most of the Qur'ān, one must have an 'empty mind' and one must approach the Qur'ān from an untainted perspective. This does not mean that an exegete or researcher cannot hold any axioms or particular outlooks about man or the world, as some have imagined, so as to state that it is impossible to be empty minded. Instead, what is intended here is that man should not have an intention to force his own educational outlook on the Qur'ān. If a judge is predisposed to one of the two parties in a litigation, he will be swayed in his judgement and verdict. Similarly, if a man's intellect—which is his judge in scholarly matters—approaches the Qur'ān while being predisposed to the axiomatic truths of his own disciplinary field or to his true or untrue findings, and if in his interaction with the Qur'ān he wishes only to confirm his own findings and is not ready to rectify any of his own erroneous views, how can he have a correct understanding of the divine verses?

Of course, as was mentioned before, the noble Qur'ān is in line with established intellectual truths. It always invites mankind towards intellection and proper reasoning. With the advancements in the intellectual sciences, the essential Qur'ānic doctrines can be identified more clearly and man can make more use of the Qur'ān. However, imposing grammatical, jurisprudential, theological, philosophical, or mystical matters onto the Qur'ān is not right and is the tip of "interpreting the Qur'ān with one's opinions" which the Prophet (ṣ) quotes God as saying, "The one who has interpreted My word with his opinions has not brought faith in Me."[1]

In the experimental sciences, if with the advancements of that science a theorem becomes established and is considered valid and if man comes across a verse related to the natural order, one can say that perhaps the opinion of the Qur'ān is the same as that theorem. However, one cannot attribute it to the Qur'ān in an exclusive and irrefutable manner. Moreover, if someone attributes every scientifically inadmissible opinion to the Qur'ān then in so far as the noble

[1] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 2, p. 279, H. 17.

Qur . n is powerful and impenetrable and allows no falsehood to enter, it also does not allow anything to be forced onto it. In a matter of time the Qur'ān will clearly show to everyone the falseness of that opinion and its own immunity from it.

Of course, everyone's established axiomatic beliefs have an effect on the manner in which they make use of the apparent meaning of the Qur'ānic verses, whether they are conscious of this effect or not. Nevertheless, having control over one's mind, mastery over one's memories, and being free from pre-judgements if possible all play a positive effect in a true hearing and an essential finding of the Qur'ānic message. Even though this is a difficult task, it is possible since we have instances of an intellectual transformation among some of the experts in the material schools of thought after having contemplated over the Qur'ān.

Understanding the Qur'ān is Perfectible

The divine prophets came so as to rouse the treasures of man's thought and intellect so that man may perceive the established principles and doctrines of the faith with his developed *fiṭrah*. The seal of the prophets, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (ṣ), through his concluding miracle, the Qur'ān, brought mankind the greatest, most profound, and most precise divine doctrines as a gift from the "omnipotent King" (54:55) and the Station of *Ladun*. With a divine miraculous hand, the verses of the noble Qur'ān have been arranged in such a manner that its illuminating doctrine will be the way forward for man until the end of the world. In every era, understanding the Qur'ān—both in terms of quality and quantity—is increasing and moving towards perfection. As much as man's *fiṭrah* unfolds and as much as his intellectual activity and knowledge increases with respect to mankind and the world, his understanding of the Qur'ān will also blossom.[10] Not only will the quantity of his findings from this lasting Book keep increasing, but his previous understanding will also become deeper and more resplendent.

As an example, consider the following: today, the fact that God cannot be contained in any space or time is one of the clear and self-evident truths that every expert will admit. Anyone who is familiar with even a small portion of the divine affairs will know that God is free from the qualities of corporeal bodies and hence He does not have the categories of position, quantity, quality, place, and time. This same matter which is necessary and self-evident according to

many people was not so at the beginning of Islam; rather, it was speculative at that time.[11] The late Kulaynī reports that Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) was leaning on a wall when Zurārah asked about an issue related to *Tawḥid* which suggested that God was time- or place-bound. When Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) heard this question, he stopped leaning on the wall and in this state of being unsupported, he said: O Zurārah, you have spoken an impossibility. Can there be a body, a place, or a time for God?[i]

What Imam Ṣādiq (ᶜa) said to Zurārah is now part of the self-evident truths. Any beginner who is aware of theological matters does not have the same line of thinking that Zurārah had during the early days of Islam. This shows the expansion of the capacities and the advancement of the understanding of human society from the Qur'ān. If one were to study the perspectives of the exegetes throughout history, this point will become clear.

The late Kulaynī as well as Shaykh Sadūq report a narration from Imam Sajjād (ᶜa) regarding the revelation of Surah Tawḥīd and the first few verses of Surah Ḥadīd (57:1-6) in which the Imam says: "Truly God the Exalted knew that there will be a group of profound sages at the end of time. Hence God revealed Surah Tawḥīd and verses from Surah Ḥadīd until 'and He knows best what is in the breasts' (57:6). Hence if anyone intends more than this [knowledge] he is truly destroyed."[ii]

Akhbarism and Understanding the Qur'ān

The Akhbāri line of reasoning with regard to understanding the narrations is as follows: We must follow the understanding of simple or mediocre Muslims at the beginning of Islam. Whatever they understood, we should preserve it and act on it. This line of reasoning is not only unacceptable with regard to understanding the narrations, but it is also unacceptable with regard to understanding the Qur'ān. This is because people's understanding varies, and divine revelation is like the rain of mercy which descends from the Unseen sky. The hearts of the exegetes are like various containers—each person can take it to the extent of his capacity. It is possible that those in the future may understand the divine doctrines—whether they come from the Qur'ān or from the pure and infallible Ahl al-Bayt—in a more accurate and profound manner in relation to those in the

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 54, p. 160.
[ii] *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, v. 1, p. 91, H. 3.

past. Moreover, the divine verses are such that understanding any level of them can facilitate the way to understanding the higher levels.

It was mentioned before that according to transmitted narrations, the levels of heaven correspond to the verses of the Qur'ān.[i] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) said to his son, Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafiyyah: In heaven, it will be said to the reciter of the Qur'ān, "read and rise."[ii] If the reciter of the Qur'ān understood ten things from one verse, he will rise ten levels. If he understood one thousand things from the verses of the Qur'ān, he will rise a thousand levels. Hence, not only are the levels of the Qur'ān unending, but the levels of heaven, which are in line with the levels of the Qur'ān, are also such. And this is not limited to the Qur'ān: the narrations transmitted from the Ahl al-Bayt are also the same. This is because the original source of the narrations is the noble Qur'ān itself and the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) derived their knowledge from the Qur'ān through a distinctive interrogative process and proclaimed it to the Islamic Ummah. Hence their levels will be on par with the levels of the Qur'ān. This also implies that perceiving and bearing some of the sublime levels of the narrations are not possible for everyone. This is because some of the levels of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) are carried and accepted only by the prophets, the angels, and the believing servant whose heart has been tested with Godwariness.[iii]

The Perfectibility of Understanding the Qur'ān: A Philosophical Exposition[iv]

One: Since understanding (knowledge) is related to existence (*wujūd*) and not quiddity (*māhiyyah*), it is not governed by the laws of quiddity. That which can be extrapolated from the corresponding concrete reality of knowledge is a concept (*mafhūm*) and not a quiddity. Of course, there are some mutual laws that apply to both concepts and quiddities; for example, acquisition in the mind and acquired perception of the concept of knowledge is a shared law between concept and quiddity.

---

[i] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 92, p. 188.
[ii] *Biḥār al-anwār*, v. 7, p. 208, H. 96.
[iii] Nahj al-balāghah, sermon 189.
[iv] This section is a metaphysical exposition of knowing and knowledge and require certain philosophical prerequisites to fully grasp the author's explanation. [Tr.]

Two: Since understanding (knowledge) pertains to immaterial existence and not material existence, it is not governed by the laws of a material existent. Divisibility is a corollary of a material existent. In so far as knowledge is an immaterial entity and can be found in the containing soul of man for example, there is no knowledge which can be split into half, or a third, or a quarter, etc. Moreover, change and flux—whether instantaneous (creation and corruption) or gradual (motion)—are rules that are exclusive to material entities and hence knowledge, which pertains to immaterial being, will never change or fluctuate—neither in the sense of progression nor in the sense of digression. In other words, it cannot intensify (*ishtidād*) nor deteriorate (*taḍa^{cc}uf*) and hence it is not like the temperature of water or air which increases and decreases at various times. Rather, it is characterized with steadiness which is a feature of immaterial entities. Also, since it is free from quantity—continuous or discrete—the laws of continuous or discrete quantity do not apply to such an immaterial entity. Hence, it can be said that understanding (knowledge) is preserved from the fluctuations of progression and digression (qualitative) and the harm of increase and decrease (quantitative).

Three: Since understanding (knowledge) pertains to existence and since the reality of existence is gradational, it possesses intensity (*shiddah*) and weakness (*ḍa^{c}f*) and not intensification (*ishtidād*) and deterioration (*taḍa^{cc}uf*). Hence it is possible that a knowledge be more intense than another. Of course, in order to find intense knowledge that is a level higher than knowledge, there are conditions and causes without which such a supreme knowledge cannot come about.

Four: Since the soul of man is "corporeal in its occurrence and spiritual in its perpetuation" (*jismāniyyah al-ḥudūth wa ruḥāniyyah al-baqā'*), he is perfectible. His perfectibility lies in his ability to reach an intense existential knowledge and his descendibility lies in his being devoid of knowledge or reaching a weak level of existential knowledge. Therefore, change is permissible in the knower even though it is not so in knowledge.

Five: Since knowledge is immaterial in existence, its multiplicity is not a quantitative multiple. In other words, if someone came to know a particular issue, and from there he inferred its consequences, requisites, and corollaries pertaining to its cause and effect, one cannot say that this knowledge has increased quantitatively. This is because quantity, whether continuous or discrete, can never be of

the auxiliaries of an immaterial existent. Of course, knowledge is capable of being multiple, but not all multiples are quantitative; rather, some types of multiples are limited to immaterial existents and cannot be found in material existents. Hence, even though every type of quantitative multiplicity is multiple, not every type of multiple is a quantitative increase. As a result, knowledge possesses non-quantitative multiplicity as it contains degrees of intensity and weakness. It is preserved, however, from quantitative increase and decrease and qualitative intensification and deterioration.

Six: One can mention the existential degrees of knowledge in the following ways: (1) in terms of sense perception (*iḥsās*), imagination (*takhayyul*), estimation (*tawahhum*), and intellection (*taᶜaqqul*); or (2) in terms of dividing knowledge into acquired-mediated (*ḥuṣūlī*) knowledge and presential-immediate (*ḥuḍūrī*) knowledge; or (3) in terms of the different degrees of certainty such as knowledge of certainty (*ᶜilm al-yaqīn*), eye of certainty (*ᶜayn al-yaqīn*), and truth of certainty (*haqq al-yaqīn*). These divisions provide evidence for the gradational multiplicity of the reality of knowledge.

Seven: For the knower to move from one knowledge to another, there are numerous factors and causes. The effectiveness of these factors is dependent on the change of the conceptual and conformational bases of every issue. The interrelation between the objects of knowledge—that exists in a partial and incomplete manner—plays its own particular role in the movement [of knowledge], and this is based upon the changes of the bases.

Endnotes

1. The Qur'ānic translations in this book are from Ali Quli Qarai, *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*, ICAS, London, 2005, and may be modified at times to reflect the author's understanding.
2. In Islamic judicial proceedings, the plaintiff is asked to bring a *bayinnah* (evidence) to prove his claim and traditionally, the most common form was to bring two witnesses to corroborate his allegation. Hence, these two witnesses are often referred to as *bayinnah*.
3. In Arabic grammar, the negative preposition '*lā*' in "*lā rayba fihī*" (2:2) is called '*lā nafy jins*' (the '*lā*' that negates a generic class or type). Hence, this expression categorically denies all types of doubt from the Qur'ān.
4. An example of the first type of premise would be the following: "there are as many unmarried men as unmarried women." An example of the second type would be: "All bachelors are unmarried." There is room to doubt the first premise, but not the second.
5. *Ladun* is a preposition in the Arabic grammar that conveys the idea of proximity and can be translated as "being in the presence of," "being with," "being in front of," etc. What is intended here is proximity to God. It appears many times in the Qur'ān such as 3:38, 4:40, 4:67, 18:65, etc. In reference to the Qur'ān, it can be found in verse 27:6 "Indeed you receive the Quran from **the presence of** One who is all-wise, all-knowing" and also in verse 11:1 "Alif, Lām, Rā'. [This is] a Book whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from **the presence of** One who is all-wise, all-aware."
6. The idea of the gradational reality of God-consciousness is supported by the superlative use of the term "most-Godwary" (*atqā*) for it implies that the quality comprises varying degrees.
7. *Tanzīl* refers to the descent and revelation of the Qur'ān into this world while *ta'wīl* is the "return" of the verses to their esoteric meaning or existential reality at the higher planes of existence.

The former pertains to the arc of descent while the latter to the arc of ascent.

8. "We have sent down (*anzalnā*) the reminder to you [all together] so that you may elucidate for the people that which has been sent down (*nuzzila*) to them [in stages]" (16:44). This translation has to do with one of the commonly held perspectives among scholars in the Qur'ānic sciences regarding the difference between *inzāl* and *tanzīl*. Both signify a "sending down" but the former carries the idea of a collective and immediate sending down while the latter a more gradual sending down. In the verse being paraphrased, the Qur'ān that was sent down to the Prophet uses the term *inzāl* while the Qur'ān sent down to the people uses the term *tanzīl*.
9. In other words, the Qur'ān is what gives initial legitimacy and authority to the words of the Prophet (ṣ) and Ahl al-Bayt (ᶜa) just as it acts as the final arbitrator in cases where there are conflicting narrations. The expressions "it is the first" and "it is the last" is in reference to the following Qur'ānic passage regarding God Almighty: "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge of all things." (57:3)
10. Man's increase in intellectual activity is due to the darkness of the world; more of it is needed since there are more impediments in the way. With regard to his knowledge, it is his horizontal knowledge or the wisdom of hindsight which is gained over time.
11. The revival of the intellect and its "unearthing" after the entry of Revelation is immediate for some while it takes time for others. This cycle of ascent after every revelation continues through history through formal means; at a certain point, however, the formal part of it becomes more dense and hides the essence. This is what is often referred to as "the veil of knowledge" in the narrations.

Glossary

ʿālam-i ʿaql	intelligible world
ʿālam-i mithāl	imaginal world
ʿalayhi al-salām	an expression that means "peace be upon him"; it appears after the name of one of the Infallibles and is abbreviated as (*ʿa*) in the text.
al-insān al-kāmil	the perfect man, the perfect human
ʿaṣl	principle; that which is essential and primary
barzakh	barrier, veil, or isthmus; if capitalized, it refers to the Imaginal or Intermediate World—i.e., the realm between this world and the Afterlife, which acts as a halting spot for the souls after they die.
baṭn	interior
burhān	proof, miracle
farʿ	branch; that which is secondary or subsidiary
fiṭrah	man's divinely-originated and innate disposition
ghanī	independent, free from want
ghayb	realm of the unseen, unknown; metaphysical; lit. absent
ghusl	major ablution of the whole body which brings about a ritual state of purity and is a condition for certain ritual practices.

ḥadīth	transmission, tradition, narration, saying of the Prophet or the Infallibles
ʿilm al-dirāsah	knowledge acquired through bookish means or formal learning
ʿilm ḥuḍūrī	immediate knowledge, gnostic and intuitive knowledge, knowledge by presence
ʿilm ḥuṣūlī	mediated knowledge, acquired knowledge, discursive knowledge
ʿilm al-wirāthah	supra-formal knowledge "inherited" from Above and taught by God
iʿtibāri	that which is conventional, arbitrary, or unreal
jamʿ dalālī	semantic conciliation
jamʿ sanadī	conciliating the chain of transmission
kitāb maknūn	guarded book
lawḥ	tablet
liqāʾ Allah	beatific vision; encounter with God
māhiyyah	quiddity (lit., "what-is-it-ness"), that which makes a thing what it is and differentiates it from what it is not.
mafhūm	concept, notion; subject
miʿrāj	ascension; refers to the Prophet's Night Journey from Makkah to Bayt al-Muqaddas and then his Ascension from there towards the seven heavens.
mubayyin	elucidator
muhaymin	protector
muḥkamah (pl. *muḥkamāt*)	definitive [verse]
muqattaʿah	Lit. "that which has been cut." In the Qur'ānic context, they refer to the abbreviated letters

	prefixed to 26 chapters of the Qurʾān.
mutashābihah (pl. *mutashābihāt*)	allegorical [verse]
mutawātir	refers to narrations that have enough chains of narrators to discount the possibility of it being fabricated
muttaqīn	God-conscious individuals
nāsikh	abrogating [verse]
nuṣūṣ ᶜilājiyyah	remedial traditions
Qurʾān-i maᶜqul	intellected Qurʾān
Qurʾān-i mumaththal	imaginal Qurʾān
Qurʾān-i nāṭiq	articulate Qurʾān
rāsikhūna fi al-ᶜilm	firmly rooted in knowledge
rayb	state of anxiety due to doubt
ṣalāh	the canonical prayer, supplication
ṣallallahu ᶜalayhī wa ālihi wa sallama	an expression that means "may God salute and send peace on him and his family"; it appears after the name of the Holy Prophet and is abbreviated as (ṣ) in the text.
sāqī	the cupbearer
shakk	doubt
shaʾn nuzūl	the context of revelation
ṣidq	truth
ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm	Straight Path
ṣūrah	form
ṭabīᶜah	nature
tafsīr	explanation, exegesis
tanzīl	the "sending down" of revelation
taqiyyah	dissimulation
taqwā	God-wariness, God-consciousness
taṣawwur	mental conception
taṣdīq	mental affirmation of an existential relationship

taṭbīq	correspondence between the meaning of a verse or word and its referent
tawbah	repentance
ta'wīl	a return to (1) the inner meaning or (2) existential reality
thaqalayn	lit. "the two weighty objects"; used by the Prophet (ṣ) in a famous narration to describe the Qur'ān and his family
wuḍū	minor ablution of certain parts of the body which brings about a ritual state of purity and is a condition for certain ritual practices.
ẓāhir	outward, apparent, prima facie

Index of Qur'ānic Verses

Verse	Translation	Page
2:10	There is a sickness in their hearts; then Allah increased their sickness ...	13
2:1-2	Alif, Lam, Mim. This is the Book, there is no doubt (*rayb*) in it, a guidance to the God-wary.	9
2:171	The parable of the faithless is that of someone who shouts after that which does not hear [anything] except a call and cry: deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not exercise their reason.	89
2:177	Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is those who have faith in Allah and ...	97
2:185	The month of Ramadan is one in which the Quran was sent down as guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs (*bayyināt*) of guidance and the Criterion ...	9
2:187	You are permitted on the night of the fast to incline towards your wives ...	95
2:26	Indeed Allah is not ashamed to draw a parable whether it is that of a gnat or something above it ...	90
2:275	... Allah has allowed trade ...	42
2:282	... Be wary/conscious of Allah and Allah will teach you ...	21
2:285	The Apostle and the faithful have faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord ...	82
2:43	And maintain the prayer and give the zakat ...	41, 42
3:7	It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses (*muḥkamāt*), which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical (*mutashābihāt*) ...	57, 58

3:7	As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is allegorical in it, desiring discord ...	60, 63, 76
3:7	... and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, 'We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.' ...	63, 80, 81, 106
3:68	Indeed the nearest of all people to Abraham are those who follow him and this prophet and those who have faith ...	83
3:97	... And it is the duty of mankind toward Allah to make pilgrimage to the House—for those who can afford the journey to it ...	41
3:102	O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah with the wariness due to Him ...	23
4:8-10	And when the division is attended by relatives, the orphans and the needy, provide for them out of it [i.e., the inheritance], and speak to them honourable words ...	100
4:43	... or any of you has come from the toilet [lit. a low-lying place], or you have touched women, and you cannot find water [for ghusl], then [in its place] make your ablution on clean ground ...	95, 96
4:59	O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you ...	39
4:82	Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from [someone] other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it.	5
4:150	... 'We believe in some and disbelieve in some'...	48
4:162	But as for those who are firmly grounded in knowledge from among them, and the faithful, they believe in what has been sent down to you ...	99
4:174	O mankind! Certainly, a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light.	4, 7
5:1	... Keep your agreements ...	42
5:15	... Certainly, there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book.	4

5:27-31	Relate to them [O Prophet] truly the account of Adam's two sons. When the two of them offered an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other ...	92, 93
5:55	Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down.	44
6:26	They dissuade [others] from [following] him, and [themselves] avoid him ...	15
6:57	... on a manifest proof from my Lord ...	71
6:59	With Him are the keys of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him ...	83, 87
6:59	... He knows whatever there is in land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowing it ...	87
6:75	Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth and so that he can be of those who possess certitude.	104
6:103	The sights do not apprehend Him, yet He apprehends the sights, and He is the All-attentive, the All-aware.	62, 69
6:125	Whomever Allah desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam ...	18
6:155-157	And this Book that We have sent down is a blessed one; so follow it, and be Godwary so that you may receive [His] mercy ...	8
7:26	... Yet the garment of Godwariness/God-consciousness—that is the best ...	21
7:45	When you recite the Quran, We draw a hidden curtain between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter.	17
7:146	Soon I shall turn away from My signs those who are unduly arrogant in the earth: [even] though they should see every sign, they will not believe in it, and if they see the way of rectitude they will not take it as [their] way, and if they see the way of error they will take it as [their] way. That is because they deny Our signs and are oblivious to them.'	14
7:169	... they grab the transitory gains of this lower world ...	15

8:29	... If you are wary/conscious of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you ...	21
9:26	Then Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and upon the faithful ...	83
9:45	... and whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt.	11
9:125	But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless	13
9:127	... Then they turn away. Allah has turned aside their hearts ...	14, 18
11:1	... [This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One [who is] all-wise, all-aware	47, 57
11:49	These are accounts of the Unseen, which We reveal to you ...	83
12:100	... He said, 'Father! This is the ta'wīl of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true ...	79
12:36	... 'Inform us of its ta'wīl (dream interpretation) for indeed we see you to be a virtuous man.'	79
12:37	... 'Before the meals you are served come to you I will inform you of its ta'wīl (dream interpretation) ...	79
12:4	When Joseph said to his father, 'Father! I saw eleven planets, and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me,'	79
12:44	They said, '[These are] confused nightmares, and we do not know the ta'wīl of nightmares.'	79
12:79	He said, 'God forbid that we should detain anyone except him with whom we found our wares, for then we would indeed be wrongdoers.'	77
13:1	... That which has been sent down to you from your Lord is the truth ...	9
13:16	... Allah is the creator of all things...	66
13:17	He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of]	72

	their capacity, and the flood carries along a swelling scum. And from what they smelt in the fire for the purpose of [making] ornaments or wares, [there arises] a similar scum. That is how Allah compares truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people stays in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons.	
13:39	Allah annuls and affirms whatever He wishes and with Him is the Mother Book.	60
14:1	[This is] a Book We have sent down to you that you may bring mankind out from darkness into light	5
14:7	... "If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe."	98
14:9	... 'Indeed we have ominous doubts concerning that to which you invite us.'	11
14:43	... and their hearts will be vacant.	16
15:16	Certainly We have appointed houses in the sky and adorned them for the onlookers.	101
15:19	And We spread out the earth, and cast in it firm mountains ...	102
15:22	And We send the fertilizing winds ...	102
15:99	And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you.	69
16:44	... We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may elucidate for the people that which has been sent down to them ...	33, 41
16:89	... We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things ...	36
16:125	Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best ...	85
17:82	We send down in the Quran that which is a cure and mercy for the faithful; and it increases the wrongdoers only in loss.	13
17:105	With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend ...	10, 11
18:54	We have certainly interspersed this Quran with every kind of parable for the people ...	90

18:101	Those whose eyes were blind to My remembrance ...	34
18:110	Say, 'I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One God. So whoever expects to encounter his Lord—let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.'	19
19:2	[This is] an account of your Lord's mercy on His servant, Zechariah ...	
19:16	And mention in the Book Mary ...	32
19:41	And mention in the Book Abraham ...	32
19:51	And mention in the Book Moses ...	32
19:54	And mention in the Book Ishmael ...	32
19:56	And mention in the Book Idrees	32
20:5	the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne.	59, 65
20:121	... Adam disobeyed his Lord, and went amiss.	66
20:125	He will say, 'My Lord! Why have You raised me blind, though I used to see?'	89
22:29	Then let them do away with their untidiness, fulfill their vows, and circle around the Ancient House.	27
22:46	Have they not travelled through the land so that they may have hearts by which they may exercise their reason, or ears by which they may hear? Indeed, it is not the eyes that turn blind, but it is the hearts in the breasts that turn blind!	12, 89
22:73	O people! Listen to a parable that is being drawn: Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allah will never create [even] a fly even if they all rallied to do so! And if a fly should take away something from them, they cannot recover that from it. Feeble is the seeker and the sought!	90
22:78	... and [God] has not placed for you any obstacle in the religion ...	37
23:12-14	Certainly We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him a drop of [seminal] fluid [lodged] in a secure abode. Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a	101

	fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!	
23:18	We sent down water from the sky in a measured manner, and We lodged it within the ground ...	102
23:19	Then with it We produced for you gardens of date palms and vines. There are abundant fruits in them for you, and you eat from them ...	102
26:88-89	The day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart	97
27:66	Do they comprehend the knowledge of the Hereafter? No, they are in doubt about it. Rather, they are blind to it.	11, 13
28:32	... These shall be two proofs from your Lord ...	8
29:43	We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge.	88, 105
30:30	So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion ...	2
30:58	Certainly we have drawn for mankind in this Quran every [kind of] parable ...	90
33:33	... Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.	29
34:6	Those who have been given knowledge see that what has been sent down to you from your Lord is the truth ...	105
34:54	... truly they were in ominous doubt	10
35:8	... Indeed Allah leads astray whomever He wishes, and guides whomever He wishes ...	66
37:96	and Allah has created you and whatever you make?	66

38:8	... Indeed, they are in doubt concerning My Reminder ...	11
39:23	Allah has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture [composed] of similar motifs ...	47, 60
39:27	We have drawn for mankind in this Quran every [kind of] example, so that they may take admonition	87
41:3	[this is] a Book whose signs have been elaborated for a people who have knowledge, an Arabic Quran	6
41:26	The faithless say, 'Do not listen to this Quran and hoot it down ...	16
41:42	Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it ...	10, 107
41:5	They say, 'Our hearts are in veils from what you invite us to, and there is a deafness in our ears, and there is a curtain between us and you ...	16
42:11	... Nothing is like Him ...	52
43:1-4	Ha, Meem. By the Manifest Book: We have made it an Arabic Quran so that you may exercise your reason, and it is sublime and wise with Us in the Mother Book.	25, 26, 60
47:15	A similitude of the paradise promised to the Godwary: therein are streams of unstaling water and streams of milk unchanging in flavour, and streams of wine delicious to the drinkers, and streams of purified honey; there will be every kind of fruit in it for them, and forgiveness from their Lord ...	75
47:20	The faithful say, 'If only a surah were sent down!' But when a conclusive surah is sent down and war is mentioned in it, you see those in whose hearts is a sickness looking upon you with the look of someone fainting at death ...	80
47:24	Do they not contemplate the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?	18
48:10	... the hand of Allah is above their hands ...	59, 65
48:26	... Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and the faithful, and made them abide by the word of Godwariness (taqwā) ...	23

48:29	Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves ...	82
49:13	... Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you ...	22
50:22	'You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so today your eyesight is acute.'	34
54:17	Certainly We have made the Quran simple for the sake of reminding. So is there anyone who will be reminded?	3
55:1-2	The All-beneficent has taught the Quran	21
56:77-79	This is indeed a noble Quran, in a guarded Book—no one touches it except the pure ones	23, 29
57:3	He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden ...	103
57:4	... and He is with you wherever you may be ...	103
59:7	... Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you ...	36, 39
59:21	Had We sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled [and] go to pieces with the fear of Allah. We draw such comparisons for mankind, so that they may reflect.	94
61:5	... So when they swerved [from the right path], Allah made their hearts swerve ...	18
62:5	The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books ...	88
64:16	So be wary of Allah, as much as you can ...	23
71:7	Indeed whenever I have summoned them, so that You might forgive them, they would put their fingers into their ears and draw their cloaks over their heads, and they were persistent [in their unfaith], and disdainful in [their] arrogance.	16
72:27	Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] Unseen to anyone, except to an apostle He approves of ...	83

73:5	Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty discourse.	4
75:22-23	Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking to their Lord	62, 65
80:24	Let man consider his food	77
86:13	it is indeed an expounded discourse	6
89:14	Indeed your Lord is in ambush.	61, 65
89:22	And your Lord arrives with the angels in ranks	59, 65
91:8	and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices	15
99:7-8	So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.	24
102:5-6	Indeed, were you to know with certain knowledge, you would have surely seen hell [in this very life].	69

Topical Index

A

Abel, 93, 94
Ablution, 24, 96
Abraham, 32, 83, 104
Abrogated (*mansūkh*), 49, 76
Abrogating (*nāsikh*), 49, 76
Affirmation (*taṣdīq*), 25, 58
Age of Ignorance, 97
Ahl al-Bayt, 27, 30, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 45, 49, 50, 55, 71, 78, 81, 84, 103
Akbharī, 36
ʿAlī al-Riḍā, Imam, 52, 69
ʿAlī al-Sajjād, Imam, 112
ʿAlī ibn Abī-Ṭālib, 7, 26, 29, 31, 32, 33, 38, 61, 64, 71, 113
ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 64, 70, 82, 83, 84, 85
Allegorical verses (*mutashābihat*), 6, 47, 52, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 107
Allegorical verses (*mutashābihāt*), 47, 52, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 107
Allusions (*ishārah*), 26, 56, 74, 96
Ambiguity, 5, 6, 7, 18, 19, 33, 34, 36, 37, 41, 42, 57, 58
Ascension (*miʿrāj*), 25, 41
Asharites, 65, 69

B

Blindness, 12, 13, 15

C

Cain, 93, 94
Certainty, 43, 69, 70, 115
  Eye of certainty (*ʿayn al-yaqīn*), 115
  Knowledge of certainty (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*), 115
  Truth of certainty (*haqq al-yaqīn*), 115
Clarification, 7, 36
Concept (*mafhūm*), 76, 77, 113
Conception (*taṣawwur*), 25
Contemplation, 5, 15, 18, 24, 25, 36, 37, 51, 56, 69, 70, 76, 89, 103, 106, 108
Correspondence (*taṭbīq*), 44, 53

D

Darkness, 5, 17, 117
Defilement, 14
Definitive verses (*muḥkamāt*), 47, 52, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 70, 73, 74, 78
Displacement (*tajāfī*), 55
Dissimulation (*taqiyyah*), 43
Divine Encounter (*liqā*), 87
Divine grace, 16
Doctrines, 43, 51, 74, 100, 101, 104, 105, 106, 110, 111, 112
Doubt, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 34, 37, 57, 64, 68, 81, 116

E

Etiquette, 96, 97
Existence (*wujūd*), 3, 11, 47, 55, 59, 62, 69, 70, 73, 77, 89, 99, 113, 114

F

Falsehood, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 22, 72, 108, 111

Fāṭimah Zahrā, 32, 33
Felicity, 1
Fiṭrah, 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 15, 16, 19, 35, 86, 109, 111
Foetus, 102
Food, 77, 109

G

Gabriel, 71
Garden of Eden, 5
Ghusl (major ablution), 24, 96
Glorification (*tasbīḥ*), 59
Gnosis (*'irfān*), 53
God-conscious (*muttaqīn*), 2, 9, 21, 75, 93
God-Consciousness (*taqwā*), 21, 22, 23, 93, 97, 113
Goodness (*iḥsān*), 22
Guarded book (*kitāb maknūn*), 23
Guidance (*hidāyah*), 1, 8, 9, 22, 36, 37, 48, 74, 76, 92, 98, 101, 108

H

Hajj, 27
Hell, 70, 74
Ḥurūf muqatta'ah, 56
Ḥusayn, Imam, 26
Hypocrisy, 12

I

Illness, 13, 14
Illuminating, 5, 9, 62, 109, 111
Incomprehension, 18
Inheritance, 101
Inner being, 12, 15, 24, 34
Inner secrets, 42
Intellect, 12, 15, 36, 51, 55, 61, 76, 88, 89, 104, 106, 107, 110, 111, 117
Intellection, 19, 25, 101, 103, 106, 110, 115
Interpretation, 26, 28, 30, 31, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 108
  Dream interpretation (*ta'bīr*), 79
  Esoteric interpretation, 26, 77
  Interpretation (*tafsīr*), 6, 25, 26, 41, 44, 45, 49, 53, 55, 62, 76, 77, 78
  Literal interpretation, 26
Intimacy with God, 3
Isrā'ilīyāt, 94

J

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Imam, 26, 27, 30, 31, 37, 49, 77, 92, 112

K

Knowledge
  acquired knowledge (*'ilm ḥuṣūlī*), 25
  rooted in knowledge (*rāsikhūna fi al-'ilm*), 31, 73, 78, 80, 81, 82, 84, 107

L

Language, 1, 2, 3, 25, 33, 38, 59, 78
Light, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 18, 22, 26, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 48, 54, 61, 62, 72, 87, 91, 95, 98, 101, 108

M

Manifestation (*tajallī*), 2, 29, 30, 35, 54, 55, 75
Meanings
  apparent meanings, 28, 34, 37, 43, 55, 61, 64, 84, 107, 111
  Inner meaning, 55
  inner meanings, 28, 45, 55
Miraclulous, 111
Miraculous, 4, 7, 50, 103, 111
Moses, prophet, 7, 32
Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*), 52, 57, 58, 59, 60, 73, 78
Mufawwiḍah (libertarianist), 66
Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Imam, 6, 26, 28, 30, 31
Muḥammad, the Prophet, 2, 8, 10, 15, 17, 18, 24, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 42, 49, 50, 54, 64, 67, 71,

80, 82, 84, 90, 109, 110, 111, 113, 117
Mujabbirah (determinists), 66
Mujassimah (corporealist), 65
Munazzihah (deanthropomorphist), 66
Muqatta'ah letters, 6
Mūsā al-Kāẓim, Imam, 17
Mushabbihah (anthropomorphist), 65
Mutazilites, 66
Mystical witnessing, 7
Myth, 94, 96

N

Narrations, 25, 27, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 49, 52, 55, 67, 68, 69, 73, 75, 77, 81, 84, 90, 94, 103, 107, 112, 113, 117
Night of Qadr, 71

O

Opinion, 45, 50, 70, 73, 84, 85, 110

P

Parable, 89, 90, 91, 95
Paradise, 31, 70, 74, 75
Path of ascension, 1
Phrases (*'ibārah*), 26
Prayer (ṣalāh), 41
Principles, 3, 12, 30, 42, 43, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 58, 67, 71, 103, 107, 109, 111
Proof (burhān), 4, 7, 9, 11, 37, 40, 50, 51, 62, 71, 84, 87
Prophethood, 12

Q

Quiddity (*māhiyyah*), 25, 113

R

Remedial traditions (*nuṣūṣ 'ilājiyyah*), 40
Repentance (*tawbah*), 22
Revelation, 2, 12, 13, 15, 18, 34, 51, 54, 55, 103, 112, 117

S

Sciences, 3, 37, 51, 52, 104, 108, 109, 110, 117
Self-centeredness, 17, 18
Semantic conciliation (*jam' dalālī*), 40
Sense perception, 55, 68, 74, 103, 104, 115
Similitude (*mathal*), 72, 74, 75, 76, 80, 86, 87, 95
Sin, 67, 93, 107
Straight Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), 5
Subtleties (*laṭā'if*), 26, 37, 99, 100, 106

T

Tanzīl, 31, 36, 38, 45, 81, 117
Tawḥīd, 17, 58, 68, 112
Ta'wīl, 31, 36, 38, 45, 64, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 106, 117
The context of revelation (*sha'n nuzūl*), 45, 53
The existential book (*kitāb maknūn*), 78, 108
The Fire, 31, 70, 90, 93
The guarded tablet (*lawḥ maḥfūẓ*), 78
The ill-hearted, 63, 64, 75, 76, 80, 81, 82
The origin, 12, 43
The perfect man, 30
The Resurrection, 34, 68, 74, 80, 90
The return, 12
The Truth, 2, 3, 14, 15, 30, 50, 59
The two weighty objects (*thaqalayn*), 38, 39, 40
True dreams, 79
Truth, 2, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 22, 27, 31, 48, 50, 53, 61, 63, 68, 71, 72, 76, 90, 94, 95, 106, 115

U

Unbelievers, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 48, 90

Understanding, 4, 7, 15, 16, 18, 21, 25, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 48, 49, 50, 54, 62, 73, 78, 89, 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116
Universal, 1, 2, 3, 12, 37, 42, 53, 54, 86, 95, 103, 107
Untainted mind, 109, 110

V

Veil, 16, 17, 18, 34, 35, 117

W

Wilāyah, 32, 77
Witnessing (*shuhūd*), 29, 53, 69, 87, 88
Words of God, 13
World
  imaginal world (*'ālam-i mithāl*), 30
  intelligible world (*'ālam-i 'aql*), 30
Wuḍū (minor ablution), 24, 37