

Read by millions of Muslims every day and studied by scholars throughout history, the Qur'an still needs to be reintroduced to most of us as we remain heedless of its reality. The Qur'an is indeed not just a book but rather has its origin and ongoing connection with the world of closeness (*'ālam al-'indiyah*) to Allah (swt).

This work discusses some common themes studied in the Qur'anic sciences but the main aim is to know more about the Qur'an itself. Verses of the Qur'an, hadiths and sayings of scholars are brought together to help us better appreciate the Qur'an and better relate to it. Some of the subjects discussed include the relation between Allah (swt) and the Qur'an, the reality of the Qur'an, the two faces of the Qur'an, the proper meaning of descent (*nuzūl*) of the Qur'an, the notion and function of divine rope (*ḥabl*) which has been extended from heaven to us, the freshness of the Qur'an, the Qur'an being an ongoing source of light, the Qur'an being a channel of guidance and a healing medicine and the concept of "carrying the Qur'an" (*ḥaml al-Qur'an*).

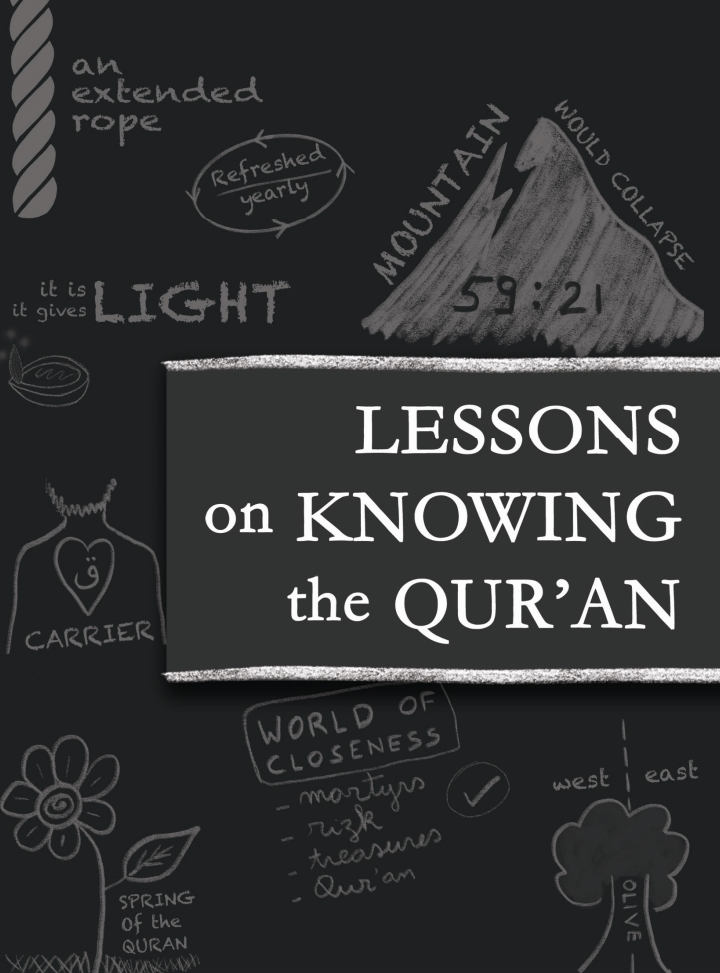


Huj. Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali is a graduate of the Islamic Seminaries of Qum, Iran. After completing his BA and MA degrees in western philosophy at the University of Tehran, he earned his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Manchester. He is currently the founding director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies in Qum. He is also the founding director of the Risalat International Institute, which is devoted to Islamic curriculum development and educational training, among other initiatives. He has led numerous Islamic educational courses and seminars in over 30 cities across four continents.



LESSONS ON KNOWING THE QUR'AN

Mohammad Ali Shomali



Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Beneficent the Merciful

Lessons on Knowing the Qur'an

Mohammad Ali Shomali

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Risalat International Institute

www.risalatinstitute.com

Email: info@risalatinstitute.com

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Introduction

And We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers... (Qur'an 17:82)

I am delighted to present you this volume. This book was initially conceived of as two series of lectures on the Glorious Qur'an. One was a series of 14 lectures given at the Islamic Centre of England during the month of Ramadan 2011. The other one was a course of 13 lectures on the Qur'anic Sciences conducted in 2015 at the Hawzah Ilmiyyah of England.

In both series, my main aim was to further explore the status and significance of the Qur'an itself and see how we can improve our personal relationship with the Book of Allah (swt). Although we covered some technical and theoretical themes which are typically discussed in courses on the Qur'anic sciences (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) or methods and manners of Qur'anic exegesis, I tried to be more selective. My focus was more on knowing the reality of the Qur'an and understanding how to better relate and connect to it.

Thanks be to Allah (swt), in addition to researching for these lectures, I had the opportunity to reflect on many of these

themes and personally came to a deeper recognition of this great divine gift and sometimes discovered clearer or new ways of understanding some major issues. For example, one may refer to the relationship between Allah (swt) and the Qur'an, the reality of the Qur'an, the two faces of the Qur'an, the proper meaning of the descent (*nuzūl*) of the Qur'an, the notion and function of divine rope (*ḥabl*) which has been extended from heaven to us, the secret of the freshness of the Qur'an, the concept of 'carrying the Qur'an' (*ḥaml al-Qur'ān*), and the Qur'an being an ongoing source of light, a continuous channel of guidance, and a healing medicine.

In addition to those topics discussed in the above-mentioned lectures, this book covers more topics and has many additional references in Arabic and English translation which would particularly benefit scholars and teachers.

The compilation of this book would not be complete without the dedication and sincere help of several people. I feel very much indebted to them and remain forever grateful to them. I should also thank Dr Amina Inloes for editing and proofreading the entire book. I humbly request Allah (swt) to reward all who helped generously and let them enjoy the light of the Qur'an in this world and its intercession in the hereafter.

Mohammad Ali Shomali

26 May 2020

Revelation

Types and Characteristics

Chapter 1

Definition and types of revelation



Introduction

Throughout the history of mankind, Allah (swt) has communicated to some people. All the Abrahamic faiths believe that there were some individuals who received direct communications from Allah (swt).¹ There are many common prophets and many common books between these religions. Perhaps we do not have the exact names or the complete content of the books, but according to the Qur'an, we know that there were such books.² For example, the Qur'an refers

¹ In this context, 'direct' indicates that it was not through other people but could still be through angels; I make this distinction because Allah (swt) has indirectly communicated to all human beings; that is, through the prophets. In any case, all Abrahamic religions agree that Allah (swt) has communicated with some individuals without any other human being involved.

² This is referred to in the following verse:

آَمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ
وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ

The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His

to books, such as the book of Prophet Abraham,¹ Prophet Moses,² Prophet Jesus³ and Prophet David,⁴ and we have no doubt about this.

We now try to delve into the nature and reality of this communication. Of course, we can never understand it completely, because unless you experience it yourself you would not be able to understand the reality of it completely. It is like other kinds of experiences. For example, we cannot really understand what it means to lose a child unless we experience this ourselves, no matter how much we read or hear about it. Similarly, the beauty of having presence of heart

apostles. [They declare,] 'We make no distinction between any of His apostles.' (2:285)

¹ This is referred to in the following verse:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَىٰ صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ مُوسَىٰ

This is indeed in the former scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses. (87:18-19)

² Ibid.

³ This is referred to in the following verse:

نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ

He has sent down to you the Book with the truth confirming what was] revealed [before it, and He had sent down the Torah and the Evangel. (3:3)

⁴ This is referred to in the following verse:

وَأَتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا

and We gave David the Psalms. (17:55)

in the prayer or sweetness of love for Allah (swt) cannot be understood unless they are experienced. Hence, we cannot understand the reality of revelation, but we can try to get closer to it through some concepts.

Definition of revelation (*wahy*)

In the Qur'an, the term used for 'revelation' is *wahy*. In Arabic, the term *wahy* literally means giving a message quickly and hiddenly, whether by gesture, in written form, or by inspiration.¹ This term has been used in this sense both before² and after the advent of Islam. There is also a technical sense in which the term *wahy* is used to mean 'communication of Allah (swt) to the prophets.' As usual, the relation between the two meanings is clear. The technical sense is a specific and precisely defined instance of the literal. Another example is the term *ṣalāt*, which originally meant to call, but later took on the meaning of ritual prayer.

In the Qur'an, the term *wahy* or one of its derivatives occurs seventy-eight times, and it is used in its broad sense. All those cases pertain to Allah (swt) as the giver of the message except a few.³ One of those exceptions is related to Prophet

¹ Raghib, Ḥusayn, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 858.

² For example, in pre-Islamic poetry.

³ The messenger of God (Qur'an 42:51), Prophet Zachariah (Qur'an 19:11), the devils from among humans and jinn (Qur'an 6:112) and the satans (Qur'an 6:121).

Zachariah. When he received the good news of having a child, he asked Allah (swt) for a sign. The sign was not to be able to talk for three nights. Therefore, when he went out of the temple, instead of talking to the people, he signalled to the people to glorify Allah (swt) morning and evening:

فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَى إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ سَبِّحُوا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا

So he emerged before his people from the Temple, and signalled to them that they should glorify [Allah] morning and evening. (19:11)

The Qur'an also uses the term *wahy* to refer to the way demons communicate to their own people:

إِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ لَيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِهِمْ لِيُجَادِلُوكُمْ

Indeed the satans inspire their friends to dispute with you. (6:121)

Therefore, the main usage of the term *wahy* and its derivatives in the Qur'an is to refer to divine communication, though it is also used in a broader sense to refer to other forms of secret or private communication.

The recipients of *wahy*

Reflecting on the verses in which the term *wahy* or one of its derivatives is used to refer to divine act of giving messages,

we can classify them according to who the recipients are into the following:

1. The prophets: At times, the Qur'an talks about the prophets receiving *wahy*, for example, Israelite prophets, of whom Prophet Moses is most frequently mentioned as a receiver of *wahy*. Prophet Jesus is mentioned in the same way. The Prophet Muhammad (s) is one of the recipients of *wahy* as mentioned in the Qur'an, and nearly half of the cases in which the term *wahy* or its derivatives are used in the Qur'an relate to him.

We read in the Qur'an:

إِنَّا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ كَمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى نُوحٍ وَالتَّائِبِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا
إِلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَعِيسَى
وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَارُونَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا

*We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed
to Noah and the prophets after him, and [as]
We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac,
Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah,
Aaron, and Solomon, and We gave David the
Psalms. (4:163)*

2. People other than the prophets: The Qur'an also refers to some people who received *wahy* but were not prophets, for example the disciples of Jesus and the mother of Prophet

Moses. The Qur'an refers to them with the term *wahy*, whereas they are not prophets. The Qur'an says:

وَإِذْ أَوْحَيْتُ إِلَى الْحَوَارِيِّينَ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِي وَبِرَسُولِي قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَ
 أَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

And when I inspired the Disciples, [saying], 'Have faith in Me and My apostle,' they said, 'We have faith. Bear witness that we are Muslims.' (5:111)

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى أُمِّ مُوسَى أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خِفَتْ عَلَيْهِ فَالْتَقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ
 وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

We revealed to Moses' mother, [saying], 'Nurse him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear or grieve, for We will restore him to you and make him one of the apostles.' (28:7)

3. Angels: The Qur'an also talks about angels receiving *wahy*:

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبَّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

Then your Lord inspired the angels [with the message]: 'I am indeed with you; so steady the faithful.' (8:12)

4. The bee: The bees also are mentioned as the recipient of *wahy*:

وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنِ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ
وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ

And your Lord inspired the bee [saying]: 'Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect.' (16:68)

5. The heavens: The skies are another recipient of *wahy*:

فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا
وَزَيْنًا لِّلسَّمَاءِ الَّتِي بَصَّيْحُهَا الْحِفْظُ ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

Then He set them up as seven heavens in two days, and revealed in each heaven its ordinance. We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and guarded them. That is the ordaining of the All-mighty, the All-knowing. (41:12)

***Wahy* as a form of divine guidance**

Reflection on above verses shows that *wahy* is not restricted to the prophets. Rather it is used in a more general sense to refer to different sorts of guidance given by Allah (swt) to His creatures, and since divine guidance is all-inclusive, His *wahy* reaches out to all forms of creation.

There are two types of divine guidance.

Generative guidance: The Qur'an teaches that Allah (swt), the Wise, has provided all His creatures with guidance so that they

may achieve their proportionate perfection. The first form of divine guidance is an inner and instinctive instruction, which is innate in all beings. It is from Him that each creature derived its form and nature, including such free-will and power as that of man. Allah (swt) has granted everything all the means and opportunities of development. The Qur'an says:

قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يَا مُوسَىٰ قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

[Pharaoh] said: 'Who then, O Moses, is your Lord?' He said: 'Our Lord is He Who gave to each [created] thing its form and nature and further gave [it] guidance.' (20:49-50)

Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read:

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ
Glorify the name of your Guardian-Lord Most High Who has created and further given order and proportion; Who determined and guided.
 (87:1-3)

Human beings in addition to the guidance that animals receive, e.g. through their instincts, enjoy some innate guidance as well as intellect.

Legislative guidance: This is exclusive to human beings who have free will and can make responsible moral choices.¹ In addition to their instincts, innate understanding, moral conscience and intellect, God has provided humanity with legislative guidance by sending the prophets and divine books to show them further the purpose of their creation and how they can realise their true potentials. The prophets inform man of what is outside the realms of his knowledge and experience, explain the consequences of his actions to him, confirm and support what man can understand by his reason and serve as a role model for him to follow.

Thus, human beings enjoy two sorts of guidance: the general guidance (*al-hidāyah al-takwīnīyah*), which is shared by all creatures, and the legislative guidance (*al-hidāyah al-khāṣṣah*), which is exclusive to those beings that have reason and free-will. This is where Allah (swt) communicates to human beings through the prophets and is called *waḥy* by Muslim theologians.

The Qur'an also informs us about extra or additional guidance of Allah (swt) for those who benefit from the general

¹ Jinn also have free will and can benefit from the guidance given through the prophets to human beings. All the prophets are thought to be human.

guidance provided by Allah (swt) and act upon it. For example, the Qur'an talks about the increase in guidance:

وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَآتَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ

As for those who are [rightly] guided, He enhances their guidance, and invests them with their Godwariness.

Three types of *wahy* from Allah (swt)

Having understood the concept of guidance, the occurrences of divine *wahy* in the Qur'an can now be classified according to the nature of the messages into the following categories:

Natural instinct (*gharīzah*): The guidance that Allah (swt) provides the bee – for example how to choose a good place to live and how to build their hives, or how to produce honey – all these things are contained in *wahy*, but here it does not mean that a book or Gabriel came to them, but rather that it is the guidance that Allah (swt) provides them with through their instincts; they follow this instinct (*gharīzah*) and behave accordingly. This is an instance of general guidance provided by Allah (swt) for all His creatures.

Inspiration (*ilhām*): Sometimes Allah (swt) suggests certain ideas or courses of action to some people who are not necessarily prophets. For example, we saw above that in order

to protect Moses, Allah (swt) inspired his mother to put the baby in the river.¹

This inspiration was not conveyed through an angel, and the mother of Moses was not a prophet. We also saw above a similar case regarding the disciples of Prophet Jesus.²

Therefore, this is also a kind of general inspiration for all people. For example, the Qur'an tells us that Allah (swt) has inspired mankind with discernment between virtues and vices:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

By the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices. (91:7-8)

Prophetic revelation: This is the highest and the most sophisticated form of divine communication. This is exclusive to the prophets and has been referred to in the Qur'an more than seventy times.³ For example, we read in the Qur'an:

¹ Qur'an 28:7.

² Qur'an 5:111.

³ In addition to using the term *wahy* to refer to Prophetic revelation, the Qur'an frequently, more than 200 times, uses cognates with the root (*nuzūl*) meaning 'descending.' In its transitive form, the term means 'to send down.'

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ
وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الْغَافِلِينَ

*We relate unto you the most beautiful stories
in that We revealed to you this Qur'an. Before
this, you too were amongst those who knew it
not. (12:3)*

This verse confirms that the Prophet (s) did not already know these stories and the content of the Qur'an, but Allah (swt) revealed them to him.

The best communication that we human beings can have is when Allah (swt) communicates to our prophets. There is a maximum level of knowledge in the sender and the maximum capacity in the receiver.

Different ways of receiving prophetic revelation

As far as we know, only human beings receive prophetic revelation (*wahy*). Jinn do not receive *wahy*; this means they follow human prophets, and they do not have prophets from amongst themselves. The Qur'an mentions that we have prophets from ourselves:

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ

*There has certainly come to you an apostle
from among yourselves. (9:128)*

Different ways in which the prophets received divine revelation (*wahy*) can be understood from the following verse:

وَمَا كَانَ لَبَشِيرٍ أَنْ يُكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ
يُرْسِلَ رَسُولًا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ حَكِيمٍ

It is not [possible] for any human that Allah should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or send a messenger who reveals by His permission whatever He wishes. Indeed, He is all-exalted, all-wise. (42:51)

No human being can be spoken to by Allah (swt) except in three ways.

Direct and immediate communication

In this context, the term *wahy* is used in a narrower sense. Here, the term *wahyan* refers to a special type of *wahy*, when Allah (swt) communicates directly to a person, not through an angel, and not from behind a veil (*hijāb*).¹ This is interpreted to be of two kinds.

1. The first is that sometimes Allah (swt) projects a suggestion or an idea into the heart or mind of a prophet, and that

¹ In the previous section we mentioned two hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a) in this regard.

prophet will understand that message. It can be a command, a prohibition, or a truth.

In some ways it is similar to inspiration, *ilhām*, but of a nature that it has the characteristics of the prophetic revelation. With *ilhām*, sometimes the one who is inspired does not know it is from Allah (swt), but a prophet is always aware of divine communication.

It also may happen in a dream. For example, when Prophet Abraham dreamt that he must slaughter Ishmael, he understood this as a form of inspiration. The Qur'an says that he said to his son:

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ
فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ
مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

When he was old enough to assist in his endeavour, he said, 'My son! I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. See what you think.' He said, 'Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. If Allah wishes, you will find me to be patient.' (37:102)

He understood it very well even though there was no verbal utterance where he was told 'sacrifice Ishmael!'

2. Verbal or literal communication, by which the actual words of Allah (swt) are conveyed in human language. Thus, sometimes *wahy* is more than an idea, and it comes with verbal expression. In this situation, the messenger receives some words directly.

From behind a veil

Sometimes, Allah (swt) speaks from behind a veil. A person may see the veil but not Who is behind the veil. For example, when Prophet Moses saw a fire and went towards it, there was a tree and from it he heard a voice which addressed him. He did not see Allah (swt), nor did he see an angel. He heard a voice from that tree. We read in the Qur'an:

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ مِنْ شَاطِئِ الْوَادِ الْأَيْمَنِ فِي الْبُقْعَةِ الْمُبَارَكَةِ مِنَ الشَّجَرَةِ أَنْ يَا مُوسَى إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

When he approached it, he was called from the right bank of the valley at the blessed spot from the tree: 'Moses! Indeed, I am Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!' (28:30)

This also has been referred to in Du'ā' Nudbah:

وَبَعْضُ كَلِمَتِهِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ تَكَلِّمًا

And some You have spoken to via a speaking tree.¹

So, in this case of Prophet Moses, he received *waḥy* from behind a veil. Of course, this veil is not something that Allah (swt) is hiding behind. This veil is something related to *dunyā*, and we hear a voice from this worldly object, but He who is creating that voice is not in this world. Between this world and the other world, there are things like gates and channels. One of the channels through which Allah (swt) speaks to a person is by creating a voice which goes to his ears. But Allah (swt) is not here in this world.

It is not like a phone, because the one who speaks to you over the phone is in *dunyā*, and he speaks to you from this world. But Allah (swt) is not in *dunyā*. He does not have a voice because he does not have a mouth and a throat like the way we speak. He creates the voice.

Through a messenger (angel)

A human being who receives *waḥy* is sometimes brought *waḥy* through an angel who is a messenger bringing Allah's (swt) message to him.

¹ Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Zāʾid al-Maʾād*, p. 304.

The angel could be Gabriel, but not all prophets had the privilege of having Gabriel come to them. For the Prophet Muhammad (s), it was often Gabriel who brought *wahy*. Consider the Qur'an where it says:

وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ
This is indeed [a Book] sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart. (26:192-193).

In these verses, there is mention of the Trustworthy Spirit, which means Gabriel who brought this message.

In another verse, Allah (swt) says:

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلْجَبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا
 لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
Say, 'Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel [should know that] it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of Allah, confirming what has been [revealed] before it, and as a guidance and good news to the faithful.' (2:97)

Some people developed an enmity towards Gabriel. Allah (swt) asks why people are enemies of Gabriel. Gabriel did not decide to do anything by himself. If people are not happy with the message coming to the Prophet Muhammad (s), they should not think it is Gabriel's fault. Anyone who is an enemy

of Gabriel should know that he brought it to the heart of Prophet Muhammad (s) by the permission of Allah (swt), and with His blessings. This means it is the choice of Allah (swt). When we say *bi idhnillāh* here, it means ‘with the permission from Allah (swt)’.

So, in many cases, Gabriel would bring revelation to Prophet Muhammad (s). It has been reported in some books that Gabriel did not always come to Prophet Muhammad (s) in the same way.

Different ways of communication through angels

a. Depositing the message in the spirit of the Prophet (s)

Sometimes the angel – whether or not it was Gabriel – would deposit the message in the spirit of the Prophet (s), like the first type of revelation where an idea was placed, but by an angel and not by Allah (swt) directly. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (s) is quoted as saying:

إِنَّ رُوحَ الْقُدُسِ نَفَثَ فِي رُوعِي أَنْ نَفْسًا لَنْ تَمُوتَ حَتَّى تَسْتَكْمَلَ
رِزْقَهَا فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَجْمِلُوا فِي الطَّلَبِ

Surely, the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) breathed into my heart (the message) that no soul will die until its allotted provision and time have

expired, so be wary of Allah and keep seeking in a good (and lawful) way.¹

b. In a form of human being

Sometimes an angel in a form of human being can come to deliver *wahy* to a prophet just as we read regarding the Virgin Mary:

فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

And he became incarnate for her as a well-proportioned human. (19:17)

Of course, regarding Mary, this was not prophetic revelation, but the angel brought a message.

Or, for example, in the case of the Prophet Abraham and his wife, when the angels came to give them the good news of the birth of Isaac:

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ

Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, and said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied. Presently he brought [for them] a roasted calf. (11:69)

¹ Warrām b. Abī Farās, Mas'ūd, *Tanbīh al-Khawātir wa Nuzhah al-Nawāzīr (Majmū'ah Warrām)*, vol. 1, p. 163.

In the case of Prophet Muhammad (s), according to some hadith, when Gabriel wanted to appear to him, sometimes he used to appear in the form of Diḥyah Kalbī. Diḥyah Kalbī¹ was the foster-brother of the Holy Prophet (s) and he was wet-nursed by Ḥalimah. We do not know a great deal about him, but we can conclude that he must have been a good person and a good-looking person for Gabriel to appear in his form.²

People could see him, but they may have thought it was a human being, and of course, they could not understand the *wahy*. It has been narrated that once Abū Dhar came to the Prophet (s) while the Prophet (s) was alone with Gabriel in the image of Diḥyah Kalbī. When Abū Dhar saw them, he turned away from them and did not interrupt their conversation. So, Gabriel said to the Prophet (s), ‘This is Abū Dhar – he has passed by us and did not greet us. But, had he greeted us, we would have returned the greeting to him.’ When Gabriel departed, Abū Dhar came back to the Prophet (s). The Prophet (s) said to him: ‘What prevented you from greeting us when you passed by?’ Abū Dhar said: ‘I thought that you were alone with Diḥyah Kalbī for something

¹ He was the messenger of the Prophet to the emperor of Rome. He lived until the time of the caliphate of Mu‘āwiyah. al-‘Asqalānī, Abū al-Faḍl, *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥābah*, vol. 2, pp. 321-323.

² Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr Nemūneh*, vol. 20, p. 488.

important.’ The Prophet told him that he was Gabriel and if he had greeted them, Gabriel would have returned the greeting to him. So, when Abū Dhar realized that it was Gabriel, he regretted not greeting them.¹

c. Like the sound of a bell

When an angel would communicate with a prophet, sometimes the angel would make a sound like a bell in the ears of the prophet. These expressions have been used to make us understand. So, we say it is like a bell although it was not exactly a bell. As the Prophet has said in a hadith, it was one of the most difficult types of receiving *wahy*:

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 587. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

إِنَّ أَبَا ذَرٍّ أَتَى رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص) وَمَعَهُ جِبْرِيلُ (ع) فِي صُورَةِ دَحِيَّةِ الْكَلْبِيِّ وَ
 قَدْ اسْتَخْلَاهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص). فَلَمَّا رَآهُمَا أَنْصَرَفَ عَنْهُمَا وَلَمْ يَقْطَعْ كَلَامَهُمَا
 فَقَالَ جِبْرِيلُ (ع): «يَا مُحَمَّدُ! هَذَا أَبُو ذَرٍّ قَدْ مَرَّ بِنَا وَلَمْ يُسَلِّمْ عَلَيْنَا. أَمَا لَوْ
 سَلَّمَ لَرَدَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ...» فَلَمَّا ارْتَفَعَ جِبْرِيلُ جَاءَ أَبُو ذَرٍّ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ فَقَالَ لَهُ رَسُولُ
 اللَّهِ (ص): «مَا مَنَعَكَ يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ أَنْ تَكُونَ سَلَّمْتَ عَلَيْنَا حِينَ مَرَرْتَ بِنَا؟» فَقَالَ:
 «ظَنَنْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَنَّ الَّذِي كَانَ مَعَكَ - دَحِيَّةُ الْكَلْبِيِّ قَدْ اسْتَخْلَيْتَهُ لِبَعْضِ
 شَأْنِكِ». فَقَالَ: «ذَلِكَ جِبْرِيلُ (ع) يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ وَقَدْ قَالَ: أَمَا لَوْ سَلَّمَ عَلَيْنَا لَرَدَدْنَا
 عَلَيْهِ». فَلَمَّا عَلِمَ أَبُو ذَرٍّ أَنَّهُ كَانَ جِبْرِيلُ (ع) دَخَلَهُ مِنَ النَّدَامَةِ حَيْثُ لَمْ يُسَلِّمْ
 عَلَيْهِ.

Sometimes the angel comes to me with a sound like the ringing of a bell. This form of revelation is the hardest upon me. Then the angel departs from me, while I have memorized everything that he has said. At other times, the angel appears and talks to me in the form of a man, and I memorize everything that he says.¹

d. In its original form

Another type was when Gabriel appeared in the same form that Allah (swt) created him, and this happened only twice during the lifetime of the Prophet (s).² According to some

¹ Ibn Shahr Āshūb Māzandarānī, Muhammad, *Manāqib Āl Abī Tālib (a)*, vol. 1, p. 43. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

أَحْيَانًا يَأْتِينِي مِثْلَ صَلَاصَةِ الْجَرَسِ وَهُوَ أَشَدُّ عَلَيَّ فَيَقْصِمُ عَنِّي فَقَدْ وَعَيْتُ مَا
قَالَ وَ أَحْيَانًا يَتَمَثَّلُ لِي الْمَلِكُ رَجُلًا فَيَكَلِّمُنِي فَأَعِي مَا يَقُولُ.

² Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū ‘Abdillah, *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, vol. 43, p. 133, no. 25993. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ مَسْرُوقٍ، قَالَ: كُنْتُ مُتَكِنًا عِنْدَ عَائِشَةَ، فَقَالَتْ: يَا أَبَا عَائِشَةَ! أَنَا أَوَّلُ مَنْ
سَأَلَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ هَذِهِ؟ قَالَ: «ذَلِكَ جِبْرِيلُ لَمْ أَرَهُ فِي
صُورَتِهِ أَلَّتِي خَلِقَ فِيهَا، إِلَّا مَرَّتَيْنِ رَأَيْتُهُ مُنْهَيطًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ سَادًا عَظُمَ خَلْقُهُ، مَا
بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ»

Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, in his book *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr al-Ma’thūr*, vol. 6, p. 123 quotes the following hadith in this regard:

عن ابن مسعود رضى الله عنه قال: رأى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم جبريل في صورته وله ستمائة جناح كل جناح منها قد سد الأفق يسقط من جناحه من التهاويل والدار والياقوت ما الله به عليم.

hadith, on the night of Mi‘rāj, the Prophet Muhammad (s) saw Gabriel everywhere, and the whole sky was filled with Gabriel. Even this is just a description, because Gabriel is much greater than the sky. But this is the way the Prophet Muhammad (s) could explain it to us.¹

In all of these cases, what is important for us to understand is that the message comes clearly, because the purpose of it is to guide humanity. If the Prophet (s), who is the first one to receive the message, had no clear idea of the message, then what confidence could we have of other people who are to be guided by him? In all these cases, the message is clear.

Why different methods of revelation have been used

A question arises: why does Allah (swt) choose different ways of speaking to people? Why does He sometimes use *wahy*,

Also Ṭabarsī, in his *tafsīr*, *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, commenting on the verse ‘*Certainly he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord*’ (53:18) says:

وهي الآيات العظام التي رآها تلك الليلة مثل سدرة المنتهى و صورة جبرائيل
(ع) و رؤيته و له ستمائة جناح قد سد الأفق بأجنحته

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *al-Tawḥīd li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 263. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

رَأَى جِبْرِئِيلَ (ع) فِي صُورَتِهِ مَرَّتَيْنِ هَذِهِ الْمَرَّةَ وَمَرَّةً أُخْرَى وَ ذَلِكَ أَنَّ خَلْقَ
جِبْرِئِيلَ عَظِيمٌ فَهُوَ مِنَ الرُّوحَانِيِّينَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُدْرِكُ خَلْقُهُمْ وَ صِفَتُهُمْ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ
الْعَالَمِينَ.

speak sometimes from behind a veil, and speak sometimes via a messenger?

The answer is that it depends on the condition of the prophet at that particular time, or the rank of the prophet in general. Some prophets are higher in rank than other prophets.

It can also depend on the message itself, i.e. what the message is and how important it is. So, depending on the message, Allah (swt) chooses different ways to communicate. But, in all these cases, it is the message of Allah (swt) and it comes with a clear presentation.

Chapter 2

Important aspects of the Prophetic revelation



Introduction

After discussing the concept of revelation, its literal and technical meaning, its different types, and the differences in the ways the prophets received revelation, now in this chapter we will discuss some of the important aspects of the prophetic revelation in general.

1. To receive *wahy* requires qualifications

A very important point is that a person who is able to be addressed directly by Allah (swt) – meaning that no other human being is involved, but there may be angels – and receive His message, requires certain qualifications.

A person needs to have certain qualities to be able to receive prophetic revelation. It is not like a formal appointment when someone may be simply appointed to a particular position even if they are similar to other people; for instance, from a group of 5 or 10 people, one person is chosen to be the leader, director or head. Therefore, up until the time of their appointment, such a person was equal to the other people in

the group but now, due to the necessity of having a leader, that person was chosen. Indeed, sometimes a person who is less qualified may be promoted over his colleagues and be appointed for a higher position. However, receiving revelation from Allah (swt) is not like that. The person receiving revelation from Allah (swt) needs to be really qualified for that position, and this requires the person to be in the highest position when it comes to capacity, intelligence, purity and piety.

Capacity

Revelation is a powerful and weighty message which is not easy to receive or carry. We can compare it in some aspects to the electricity coming from a power plant. This is too powerful to be used directly; unless it passes through transformers, it will burn everything. If we were to connect our TV directly to the cable coming from a power plant, it would burn out and might explode, because that electricity is too strong. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا

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

The Prophet Muhammad (s) had a great heart. Nevertheless, hadith clearly tell us that when the Prophet Muhammad (s)

received *wahy*, sometimes he would become very pale and would sweat even on very cold days.¹

When Allah (swt) describes the Qur'an as heavy, then we can conclude that it is truly heavy! So much so that Allah says if He had sent it down to a mountain, the mountain would have become humbled and would have shattered:

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْنَاهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ
اللَّهِ

Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have surely seen it humbled [and] go to pieces from the fear of Allah. (59:21)

When we wish to explain the strong nature and power of a believer (*mu'min*), we say a *mu'min* is like a firm mountain, so much so that strong winds cannot move him.² This is the

¹ Ibn Shahr Āshūb Māzandarānī, Muhammad b. Ali, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib (a)*, vol. 1, p. 43. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

رَوَى أَنَّهُ كَانَ يَنْزِلُ عَلَيْهِ الْوَحْيُ فِي الْيَوْمِ الشَّدِيدِ الْبَرْدِ فَيَفْضَمُ عَنْهُ وَأَنَّ جَبِينَهُ
لَيَنْقُصُ عَرَقًا.

² In some books, a hadith has been narrated which reads as follows:

المومن كالجبل الراسخ لا تحركه العواصف

A believer is like a mount. The storms cannot move him.

We have not been able to find this hadith in major collections of hadith. In *Man lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh* (vol. 2, p. 593) and *al-Āmālī* (p. 314) by Sheikh Ṣadūq and some other sources, there is a *ziyārah* of Imam Ali in which he is addressed as:

power of faith (*īmān*). But when it comes to the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says it not only moves mountains but breaks them into pieces. It is amazing that something that can break mountains into pieces did not harm Prophet Muhammad (s). So we can understand how great the capacity of Prophet Muhammad had to be.¹

In a hadith, Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (a) says that Allah (swt) found the heart of the Prophet Muhammad (s) the best and with the greatest capacity, and therefore He chose him for prophethood and revealed the Qur'an to him.²

كنت كالجبل لا تحركه العواصف ولا تزيله القواصف

¹ It should be noted that the point here is about the heaviness of the Qur'an even after being sent down (*inzāl*). Allah (swt) does not say that had the Qur'an before descending been received by the mountain, it would have crumbled. This point becomes clearer later in this book when two faces of the Qur'an will be studied.

² Imam Ḥasan b. Ali (s), *al-Tafsīr al-Mansūb ilā al-Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (a)*, p. 156-157; Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, p. 205-206, no. 36. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

نَظَرَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِلَى قَلْبِهِ فَوَجَدَهُ أَفْضَلَ الْقُلُوبِ وَأَجَلَهَا، وَأَطْوَعَهَا وَأَخْشَعَهَا
وَأَخْضَعَهَا، أَذِنَ لِأَبْوَابِ السَّمَاءِ فَفُتِحَتْ، وَ مُحَمَّدٌ (ص) يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا، وَأَذِنَ
لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ فَنَزَلُوا وَ مُحَمَّدٌ ص يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ، وَ أَمَرَ بِالرَّحْمَةِ فَانْزَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ لَدُنْ
سَاقِ الْعَرْشِ إِلَى رَأْسِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ غَمَرَتْهُ، وَ نَظَرَ إِلَى جِبْرِيلَ الرُّوحِ الْأَمِينِ
الْمُطَوَّقِ بِالنُّورِ، طَاوَسَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ هَبَطَ إِلَيْهِ، وَ أَخَذَ بَضْعِهِ وَ هَزَهُ وَ قَالَ: «يَا
مُحَمَّدُ اقْرَأْ». قَالَ: «وَمَا أَقْرَأُ؟» قَالَ: «يَا مُحَمَّدُ اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ،

This great capacity means that such a person should firstly be able to cope with the pressure of receiving the message and, secondly, with all the challenges of delivering the message which is also an enormous task. As a very simple example, sometimes someone is told a very important secret on which the lives of many people depend. Simply keeping such a secret is very difficult, as one often wants to tell other people. However, a further challenge is finding reliable people and then passing the message on to them.

Therefore, it was a great challenge for the Prophet (s) to receive the Qur'an and then to pass it on to people despite all the obstacles and threats, whilst neither concealing anything nor adding or omitting anything, just as it was revealed by Allah (swt).

Note: In some verses of the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says '*We sent the Qur'an down to you* (plural form).' For example, in the following verse Allah (swt) says:

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا

Certainly, We have sent down to you a Book.
(21:10)

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ إِلَى قَوْلِهِ مَا لَمْ يَلْعَلْ ثُمَّ أَوْحَى [إِلَيْهِ] مَا أَوْحَى إِلَيْهِ رَبُّهُ
عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

Although it says ‘to you’ (in the plural), it does not mean that the Qur’an was sent to us directly, but rather that it was sent to Prophet Muhammad (s), and then through him to us. Certainly we have not received the Qur’an in the way that Prophet Muhammad (s) received it.

Intelligence/understanding

A second vital quality needed is very good understanding. Let me give you an example. If the greatest philosopher of the world is going to teach his most subtle ideas and the issues that he is deeply thinking about, not everyone can be his student. Perhaps only two or three people in the world can have the capacity to be his students.

Prophet Muhammad (s) is quoted as saying:

لَا بَعَثَ اللَّهُ نَبِيًّا وَلَا رَسُولًا حَتَّى يَسْتَكْمِلَ الْعَقْلَ وَ يَكُونَ عَقْلُهُ
أَفْضَلَ مِنْ جَمِيعِ عُقُولِ أُمَّتِهِ

Allah (swt) has not sent any prophet or messenger without them perfecting their intellect, and their intellect being superior to the intellect of his entire nation.¹

Such a receiver of *wahy* has to be the most intelligent of his time. Prophet Moses. Prophet Jesus and Prophet Muhammad

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 13.

(s) were the most intelligent and understanding people of their time.

Purity and piety

Allah (swt) is the purest, and it is only the pure hearts that can fully grasp His message. It is impossible to choose a sinful or vicious person and then tell them that because they are going to be a prophet, from now on they have to change and become a good person so that then they will be made a prophet. A person who has been worshipping idols all their life cannot suddenly repent and become a prophet. This simply does not work. Thus, one requirement for receiving revelation from Allah (swt) is to be pious, to have a pure heart, because without having a pure heart one cannot receive revelation. The Qur'an itself says that without having a pure heart, one cannot really understand the Qur'an.

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a hidden Book; no one touches it except the pure ones.
(56:77-79)

A person who is not purified cannot even properly understand the Qur'an, let alone be someone who receives the Qur'an by revelation and teaches it to others. Therefore, purity is another important quality for someone who is going to be a prophet.

Thus, to be able to receive revelation from Allah (swt) needs a well-established quality of piety, intellect, greatness of heart, and immense capacity. It is not that everyone can be randomly selected to be a prophet.

2. The prophets are fully aware of divine communication to them

According to the Shi'a school of thought, when a prophet receives communication from Allah (swt), then it is not possible to remain in doubt and to wonder whether it was Allah (swt) who spoke, or Satan, or one's imagination. The people who believe that a prophet may doubt the very fact that he has been communicated to by God have not understood the meaning of *wahy*. The receipt of *wahy* is of a kind that the prophets would never doubt the veracity of what has been revealed to them.

There is a story that can be found in some non-Shi'a sources, and some orientalists have also cited it, which states that when Prophet Muhammad (s) received *wahy* for the first time, he was shocked. When he went home and met with his wife, Lady Khadijah, she saw him in that shocked state and suggested that they visit her cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, because he was a man who possessed some knowledge of the previous scriptures. They went to him, and he listened to

Prophet Muhammad (s) and concluded that he must have become a prophet.¹

This story has unfortunately been spread, but it does not make any sense. This person, who is supposed to be a prophet and is supposed to guide people, himself needs to be informed by another person that he has become a prophet! This shows that they have not understood the proper meaning of *wahy*. We will explain that *wahy* is of a different nature and is more obvious than seeing something with one's eyes. When I see you, I do not need anyone to tell me that I have seen you; I know it myself. Now, whether people tell me or not, it does not make any difference to me. *Wahy* is even more obvious than this. So, when they receive communication from Allah (swt), they can have no doubt about it. If a prophet himself is in doubt about his mission and message, then how can people be expected to believe in him, follow him wholeheartedly, and sacrifice their lives and possessions in the way he asks of them?

If a prophet says to the people that they should change their lifestyles, and that they must stop worshipping idols, and must abandon the ill-treatment of slaves, and so on, they will ask him what right he has to tell them this. If he then says: 'Something happened to me and the cousin of my wife says

¹ 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, Jamāl al-Dīn, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah li Ibn Hishām*, vol. 1, p. 237-239.

this was from Allah (swt), so now you have to change your lifestyle,' no one would accept this.

The Qur'an speaks of revelation as a kind of vision (*ru'yah*) which allows for no illusion or error, and cannot be disputed. For example, after talking about the incident of ascension (*mi'rā*), the Qur'an says:

مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ أَفَتِمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً
أُخْرَىٰ عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ
مَا يَغْشَىٰ مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ

The heart did not deny what it saw. Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?! Certainly, he saw it yet another time, by the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, near which is the Garden of the Abode, when there covered the Lote Tree what covered it. The gaze did not swerve, nor did it overstep the bounds. Certainly, he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord. (53:11-18)

It is a matter of seeing, not guessing or thinking. In just these few lines, you will note how many times Allah (swt) mentions 'seeing' with the word *baṣar* and verbs derived from the root *ru'yah* because for us the best type of knowledge we have is when we see something. Therefore, Allah (swt) uses vision, but it is vision of the heart, as the vision of the eye can still be mistaken, such as a mirage for example. The vision of the

heart is the best and it does not allow mistakes, illusion, or confusion.

In a conversation with Imam Ṣādiq (a), Zurārah¹ asks the Imam (a) how Prophet Muhammad (s) was certain that it was a genuine revelation that he received and not a satanic temptation. Imam Ṣādiq (a) replied:

Verily, when Allah chooses a servant of His to become an apostle, he bestows upon that person confidence and tranquillity, so what comes to him from Allah is like what he sees with his eyes.²

Hence, there is no doubt and no kind of uncertainty. In another hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) was asked how the apostles knew they were apostles. He replied: "The veil was removed from them."³

¹ One of the companions of Imam Ṣādiq (a) and he is a is another well-known narrator of hadith.

² 'Ayyāshī, Muhammad, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, p. 201. The text of Zurarah's question and Imam's answer is as follows:

ان زرارۃ بن أعین سأل الإمام الصادق (ع): كيف لم يخف رسول الله
(ص) فيما يأتيه من قبل الله أن يكون مما ينزع به الشيطان؟ فقال: ان الله إذا
اتخذ عبدا رسولا أنزل عليه السكينة والوقار، فكان الذي يأتيه من قبل الله
مثل الذي يراه بعينه

³ Ṣaffār, Muhammad, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt fī Faḍā'il Āl Muḥammad (s)*, vol. 1, p. 522. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

Now, when there is no veil and you can see the hidden and unseen world, then you can have no doubt. Then, someone else who has a veil cannot help you; you will have to help them.

Muhammad ibn Muslim, another well-known narrator like Zurārah, had a conversation with Imam Ṣādiq (a), regarding *muḥaddath*.¹ *Muḥaddath* is someone who is inspired by Allah (swt) and receives some words, presumably by an angel, and is not necessarily a prophet. Imam Ṣādiq (a) said: ‘A *muḥaddath* is one who hears the voice but does not see.’ A prophet can see, but a *muḥaddath* is not necessarily a prophet, and can be a non-prophet. Then Muhammad ibn Muslim asked: ‘In that case, how does he know this was the speech of an angel?’ Imam Ṣādiq (a) replied:

إِنَّهُ يُعْطَى السَّكِينَةَ وَالْوَقَارَ حَتَّى يَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ مَلَكٌ

He will be bestowed with confidence and tranquillity, so he knows it was an angel.²

عَنِ الْمُفَضَّلِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): بِأَيِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِمْتَ الرَّسُلُ أَنَّهُا رُسُلٌ. قَالَ: قَدْ كُشِفَ لَهَا عَنِ الْغَطَاءِ.

¹ There is a similar word in Arabic, *muḥaddith*, who is a scholar of hadith, for example, when we say that *muḥaddith*-e Qummī is a scholar of hadith.

² Ṣaffār, Muhammad b. Hasan, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt fi Faḍā'il Āl Muḥammad* (s), vol.1, p. 323, no. 9. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

Thus, one should not compare the knowledge that the prophets receive through revelation to the ordinary type of knowledge that human beings have, which is subject to doubt, confusion, misunderstanding, or even forgetfulness.

3. Receiving divine revelation should not be taken as an odd or a strange phenomenon

Although receiving divine revelation or direct communication from Allah (swt) is not easy¹ and it is not something that happens often, or that happens to the majority of people, at the same time, this is something that has happened more than we know of.

What the Qur'an tells us is that no one should be surprised, because Allah (swt) has spoken to many people. Allah (swt) says:

أَكَانَ لِلنَّاسِ عَجَبًا أَنْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى رَجُلٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ أَنْذِرِ النَّاسَ وَبَشِّرِ
الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ لَهُمْ قَدَمٌ صَدَقَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ قَالَ الْكَافِرُونَ إِنَّ هَذَا
لَسَاحِرٌ مُبِينٌ

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ قَالَ: ذَكَرْتُ الْمُحَدَّثَ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: فَقَالَ: إِنَّهُ
يَسْمَعُ الصَّوْتَ وَلَا يَرَى فَقُلْتُ: أَصْلَحَكَ اللَّهُ كَيْفَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ كَلَامُ الْمَلِكِ؟ قَالَ:
إِنَّهُ يُعْطَى السَّكِينَةَ وَالْوَقَارَ حَتَّى يَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ مَلِكٌ.

¹ As was mentioned earlier, we mean by 'direct communication' a situation when no other human being is involved, but an angel could be involved.

Does it seem odd to these people that We have revealed to a man from among themselves, [declaring], 'Warn mankind, and give good news to the faithful that they are in good standing with their Lord?' The faithless say, 'This is indeed a plain magician.' (10:2)

Hence, no one should be surprised or should wonder at this. In the course of history, there have been many prophets. Prophet Adam was the first prophet and Prophet Muhammad (s) was the last. In the Qur'an, twenty-six of the prophets are mentioned by their names, and there are some other prophets that the Qur'an speaks about but does not mention their names.¹ For example, the Qur'an says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذِ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ
لَهُمْ أَوْعِثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا

Have you not regarded the elite of the Israelites after Moses, when they said to their prophet, 'Appoint for us a king?' (2:246)

¹ Tabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, pp. 141-142.

الذين قصهم الله تعالى في كتابه بالاسم بضعة وعشرون نبيا وهم: آدم، ونوح، وإدريس، وهود، وصالح، وإبراهيم، ولوط، وإسماعيل، واليسع، وذو الكفل، وإلياس، ويونس، وإسحاق، ويعقوب، ويوسف، وشعيب، وموسى، وهارون، وداود، وسليمان، وأيوب، وزكريا، ويحيى، وإسماعيل صادق الوعد، وعيسى، ومحمد صلى الله عليهم أجمعين وهناك عدة لم يذكروا بأسمائهم بل بالتوصيف والكناية.

This verse refers the Prophet Samuel (Samū'īl) when he was asked to appoint a king for Israelites, so Saul (Ṭālūt) was appointed by Allah (swt): *'Their prophet said to them, "Allah has appointed Saul as king for you."*¹ But the Qur'an itself tells us there are many prophets that it has not mentioned. Allah (swt) says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن لَّمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا جَاء أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

Certainly, We have sent apostles before you. Of them are those We have recounted to you, and of them are those We have not recounted to you. An apostle may not bring any sign except by Allah's permission. Hence when Allah's edict comes, judgment is made with justice, and it is thence that the falsifiers become losers. (40:78)

According to hadith, there were a total of 124,000 prophets.² In some periods of time, there was more than one prophet in

¹ Qur'an 2:247.

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *al-Khiṣāl*. The Arabic text is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ قَالَ: «دَخَلْتُ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) وَهُوَ جَالِسٌ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ وَحْدَهُ ... قُلْتُ: «يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ كَمْ النَّبِيُّونَ؟» قَالَ: «مِائَةُ أَلْفٍ وَ أَرْبَعَةٌ وَ عِشْرُونَ أَلْفَ نَبِيٍّ.» قُلْتُ: «كَمْ الْمُرْسَلُونَ مِنْهُمْ؟» قَالَ: «ثَلَاثُمِائَةٍ وَ ثَلَاثَةُ عَشَرَ جَمَاءً غَفِيرَاءَ»

one place. Sometimes, there were tens of prophets living at a certain time. According to the hadith, just in one day, Banī Isrā'īl killed seventy prophets.¹ The Qur'an also mentions the phrase '*and their killing of the prophets unjustly*'² to refer to such incidents. This means by the way of implication that there were many prophets, and they were able to find seventy of them in one place.

Revelation is not always to teach a new book

Allah (swt) mentions in the Qur'an that He did not send any messengers before Prophet Muhammad (s) except men to whom He sent revelation.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَى
*We did not send [any apostles] before you
except as men to whom We revealed from
among the people of the towns. (12:109)*

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, vol.1, p. 217. The Arabic text is as follows:

كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ يَقْتُلُونَ فِي الْيَوْمِ نَبِيَّيْنِ وَثَلَاثَةَ وَأَرْبَعَةَ حَتَّى إِنَّهُ كَانَ يَقْتُلُونَ فِي
الْيَوْمِ الْوَاحِدِ سَبْعُونَ نَبِيًّا.

Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr*, vol. 1, p. 73 quotes a hadith that mentions three hundred prophets were killed in one day:

كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْيَوْمِ يَقْتُلُونَ ثَلَاثَمِائَةَ نَبِيٍّ ثُمَّ يَقِيمُونَ سَوْقَ بَقَالِهِمْ فِي آخِرِ
النَّهَارِ.

² Qur'an 3:181, 4:155.

This means that all the prophets who were sent by Allah (swt) received revelation. But it does not mean that they all received separate books. Among those 124,000 prophets (*nabī*), 313 are called *rasūl*. These are the prophets that received a new book. Every prophet (*nabī*) received revelation, but they did not all receive books. Some of them just received revelation which enabled them to preach the book of the last *rasūl*. So, if they lived in the time of Prophet Moses or after Prophet Moses, then before the next messenger came, they preached the book of Prophet Moses.

Therefore, not every prophet had a book, but every prophet received revelation. That was to make sure that they had an authentic book, because the books were sometimes not preserved. It was important to have an authentic understanding of it and an authentic presentation of it. Therefore, *wahy* is not always to teach a new code of law (*sharīʿah*) or a new book.

4. Consistency between divinely revealed books

There is consistency and homogeneity in the message given to the prophets. The harmony and consistency in the divine creation extends to His revelations. Divine messages communicated to the people through His prophets and messengers are to be harmonious too. If they are revealed by the same Lord to the same recipients (human beings), who have the same nature and genuine needs in order to show them the path towards the maximum possible happiness and

salvation, they must be similar in nature. Thus, Muslims confirm and believe in all the prophets and consider all believers in Allah (swt) members of the same community of faith.

Of course, depending on varying conditions and factors, some details or the depth of the message may be changed. As we advance with time, the revelation becomes more sophisticated. This is because human beings are developing in their understanding. Or it could be that in the beginning, because the message was not going to be preserved by people, Allah (swt) had not given them something permanent. Allah (swt) gave them something, and then He had to send that again, with changes in the details. And in the end, they were able to preserve the message and they were able to derive principles and draw the details from the principles. Then Allah (swt) gave them the last and final message.

There are differences in details, there may also be differences in depth and in terms of the message becoming more abstract and more theoretical, but the essence is the same. And this is why we as Muslims are required to accept all the books, all the revelations, and all the prophets. Even if a person says they do not believe in one of the prophets or in one of the books, then it means they have no faith. The Qur'an makes this clear:

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا
وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] 'We make no distinction between any of His apostles.' And they say, 'We hear and obey. Our Lord, forgive us, and toward You is the return.' (2:285)

We cannot discriminate between any of the messengers. We cannot say we accept one of them and we do not accept another. We cannot have any issue with any of them. If we have any issue with any one of them, it means that we have an issue with Allah (swt) as He sent them. We believe in all the prophets and all the prophecies.

Chapter 3

The light of the revelation of the divine books



Introduction

Thus far, we have addressed several important aspects of the Prophetic revelation. We will now turn to another aspect found in the Qur'an itself and in hadith: the light of the revealed scriptures.

Firstly, we will explain the concept of the light in the Qur'an in general – the source of light which is Allah (swt) – and then we will explore the light of guidance and the divine books.¹

Allah (swt) is the Light

The Qur'an uses several concepts to explain the whole world of existence, including Allah (swt) Himself. These concepts have the ability to not only describe the creation, but also to

¹ For more elaboration, see Mohammad Ali Shomali, 'The Supreme Light and Created Lights: A Quranic Perspective', in *Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 14, no. 4.

describe the Creator.¹ One of these concepts is the concept of *nūr* (light).

Light is such an all-inclusive and broad notion that it can be applied to Allah (swt), the Creator and to all His creatures. It can also be applied to other things such as guidance, holy scriptures and the outcomes of good actions.

Verse of *nūr* (light)

In the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says that He is the Light. In Surah al-Nūr, verse 35 – known as the verse of *nūr* – Allah (swt) says:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth

From this very brief sentence, we can conclude:

- I. Allah (swt) is the Light.
- II. The heavens and the earth also have light.
- III. The light of the heavens and the earth comes from Allah (swt). Their light is a reflection of the light of Allah (swt).
- IV. When the phrase '*the heavens and the earth*' is mentioned in the Qur'an without anything else being mentioned, it often

¹ For example, the concepts of *ḥaqq* (truth) and the concept of *ḥayāt* (life).

includes whatever is between them as well and perhaps it is also extended to include the whole universe, including the angels and spirits. In other words, it may refer to everything created by Allah (swt).

Allah (swt) is the source of light, and everything else reflects light from Him. The difference between created beings is not because of the difference in the source, because the source is one. Their differences are due to the difference they have in their limitation and capacity; some objects can receive and reflect more light, and some can receive and reflect less. For example, if different containers are placed under a waterfall, they will be filled with water in different amounts. Some will have more, and some will have less. The waterfall has plenty to give, and more than they can contain, but the capacity of what they can contain is different and is limited.

Similarly, the creatures which are created by Allah (swt) have different amounts of light, based on their capacities. Nothing in this world is absolutely dark. Absolute darkness does not exist, for everything is created by Allah (swt), and so it is impossible for something to have no light whatsoever. Everything is a sign of Allah (swt), and so every sign of Allah (swt) must somehow be a reflection of Allah (swt) or must reflect somehow His light.

Even Satan, because he is an existent and has been created by Allah (swt), has some amount of light. However, due to a kind

of misorientation, Satan did not benefit from the light that Allah (swt) placed in him during his creation. He did not misguide people because of a defect in his creation. Rather, the problem was in his misorientation; otherwise, he could have functioned properly. Hence, anything that is created by Allah (swt) is in the possession of some amount of light.

In order to enable us to understand, Allah (swt) gives an example.¹ In the next part of the verse, He says:

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ

The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp – the lamp is in a glass.

A *mishkāt* (niche) is something that people in the past used to have. It was a space in the wall – they used to have very thick walls – and then, on both sides, there was glass. A person could open this glass and put a lamp inside and then close it. The advantage of this was that people on both sides of the wall would benefit from the light of the lamp. This shows that this was a very beneficial light and had great exposure. So, there is a *miṣbāh* (lamp) inside this *mishkāt*. *Zujājah* is the

¹ Since the Qur'an is a book of guidance, it gives many examples and parables to enable us to understand abstract ideas better:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

We have put forth for men in this Qur'an every kind of Parable, in order that they may receive admonition.

(39:27)

glass which is used to cover this area. That glass protected it from the hands of children, wind, and so on.

In this world, a piece of glass around a fire or a lamp will glow even though the glass itself does not have any light of its own. Since it is transparent, we see the firelight through it. Actually, it is not completely transparent, and some of the light is absorbed by the glass, but it is one of the best materials available for this purpose, since the transparency of glass is very high compared to other materials. Once the light is put out, the glass also becomes dark, for it has lost its source of light. However, Allah (swt) says that this glass is different:

الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ

The glass as it were a glittering star

The glass around the lamp is like a shining star. A shining star has so much light that despite the huge expanse of space between us and that star, we can still see it. This is the example of the glass. Then the verse explains the fuel of the lamp:

يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ

Lit from a blessed olive tree.

The fuel for this lamp is olive oil. There is a relationship between the olive tree and light. An olive tree normally grows in places with plentiful sunshine. The best olive oil is produced when an olive tree is exposed to maximum sunshine. It is as if the olive tree is absorbing the light and the

light is saved in its oil. A tree can have maximum exposure when it grows straight and does not lean. If the tree leans towards the east or west, then one side of the tree will not receive enough sunshine. But if it is straight, then for half the day one part of the tree will receive sunlight, and for the other half of the day the other side will; and the top of the tree will receive sunlight the whole day. This is why Allah (swt) says:

لَا شَرْقِيَّةَ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةَ

Neither eastern nor western.

This olive tree is not leaning towards any side. Now, such a blessed olive tree which is leaning neither towards east or west will produce very good oil. In this world, even the best olive oil does not have light. But here, the example is different:

يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ

Whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it.

This oil is so invested with light that even before being ignited or exposed to fire, it shines and illuminates. So, the oil, without being lit, gives light, and the glass is like a shining star. Then, imagine what happens when the lantern is lit:

نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ

Light upon light.

This example, with all its depth, is still not able to explain what the light of Allah (swt) is. It simplifies the issue, but the light

of Allah (swt) is much more than this. Moreover, the light described in this verse is not the light that is Allah (swt) Himself. It is the light which is a reflection of the light of Allah (swt) through the creation.

Then, at the end of the verse, Allah (swt) says:

يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allah guides to His Light whomever He wishes. Allah draws parables for mankind, and Allah has knowledge of all things. (24:35)

The will of Allah (swt) is not arbitrary. It is based on the performance of people, as well as their will and determination.

It seems that this is the only verse that refers to the source of the light, the light of Allah (swt) Himself. Unlike what some people may think, all other verses about light seem to refer to the created light and not to Allah (swt) himself.¹

¹ For example, one verse is in Surah Tawbah number 32:

يُرِيدُونَ أَن يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّأ أَن يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

They desire to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah is intent on perfecting His light though the faithless should be averse. (9:32)

The second one is a similar verse with slight differences:

Creation of light

In another verse, the same idea that we understood from verse of *nūr* regarding the creation being founded in light is explained:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ الظُّلُمَاتِ وَالنُّورَ
ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ يَعْدِلُونَ

All praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made the darknesses and the light. Yet the faithless equate [others] with their Lord. (6:1)

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

They desire to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah shall perfect His light though the faithless should be averse. (61:8)

Literally, these verses mean that those who are opposed to light and do not like it, and who want darkness for themselves and other people, think that they are able to extinguish this light by blowing it out. But they are not able to extinguish it, and in fact Allah (swt) will make His light even greater, like the effect that oxygen has on fire. Those who are in darkness cannot extinguish light.

Since these verses mention that the light of Allah (swt) will be completed, they cannot refer to the light which is Allah (swt) Himself, for He is not subject to completion or strengthening. He is absolute. Therefore, this is light that is from Allah (swt) and which is the light of guidance; that is available at different levels. But it is not meaningful to discuss the completion of the light that is Allah (swt) Himself, for that light is already perfect. Anything else seems to be the light coming from Allah (swt), created by Him, and given by Him.

Interestingly, the word *ẓulumāt* (darknesses) appears in the plural, but *nūr* (light) appears in the Qur'an always in the singular. Although in Arabic *anwār* can be used as a plural of *nūr*, in the Qur'anic usage, *nūr* is used in the singular, because there is only one light. Darkness can be of different types and of different natures, but light is only one. Light comes from Allah (swt), and He is only one. But there are many ways to be away from Allah (swt). It is like the shortest distance between two points. There can be many indirect routes, but the shortest route is only ever one. And this is why the straight or right path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) also is used in the Qur'an always in a singular form. Religion is only one, because it is to face Allah (swt) and move towards Him. There are innumerable ways to be evil and misguided, so *ẓulumāt* is in the plural but *nūr* is in the singular.

Additionally, the Qur'an does not say that Allah (swt) created light and 'darknesses' (*ẓulumāt*). This is because darkness is not created. Yes, the skies and the earth are created, but when it comes to darkness, He uses the word 'made' (*ja'ala*) because darkness is simply the lack of light, like a shadow. Since there is no absolute darkness, darkness is merely a lack of some level of light. It is a relative issue. So, there are different levels of light, and when we compare a lower level of light to a higher of light, we will call one of them 'dark'. Otherwise, there is no absolute darkness. For example, when there is no light at all, there is no shadow. A shadow can only exist when there is some light. On a pitch black night, there are no shadows.

As you can see in this verse, there are two ways of describing the creation. One way is to say: ‘Allah (swt) created the skies and the *earth*’ and another is to say: ‘*And made the darknesses and the light.*’ These are two sides of the same coin. As said previously, there is no absolute darkness. Darkness is always relative. And, to have light depends only upon one’s proper encounter with Allah (swt). Lacking light can be due to different reasons – for example, how much a person has turned away: perhaps 1% for one person and 2% for another person. Maybe for one person it is due to *kufi*, but for another person it could be due to bad *akhlāq*. There are different ways to be imperfect, whereas the way to perfection is one.

Everything that Allah (swt) has created has a fixed portion or level of light; this includes mountains, stars, animals, birds, and even angels. All of these have fixed portions of light. Regarding angels, the Qur’an says:

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

There is none among us but has a known place.
(37:164)

An angel, at the time of creation – and here when I say ‘time’ it is due to the limitation of language, because angels are outside earthly time – has been given some light, and that light remains constant, neither increasing nor decreasing. One cannot work harder to become better than another; their position is fixed.

When it comes to human beings and jinn, we have been given free will and choice. Therefore, we can do things which add to our light, and we can do things which cause us to lose part of our light. These are the three major conditions.

Every human being is born (or, in other words every human soul is created) with some level of light.¹ We have all been given enough light to find our way towards Allah (swt). Hence, since every person has been given a capital of light, he or she can add to it or can lose part of it.

Guidance is taking people towards the light

When it comes to human beings and jinn, the Qur'an also refers to the light of guidance, the light of faith, the light of righteous deeds, the light of remembrance (*dhikr*), the light of prophets, and the light of divine books. This is in addition to the general idea of light in creation.

Therefore, Allah (swt) is light, and has created this world by giving beings different portions of light. Everything that is created acts as a mirror to reflect a portion of the absolute and perfect light which is Allah (swt). For most of the creation, the amount of light is fixed by their very nature, except for

¹ Of course, speaking of 'birth' is not philosophically accurate because the human being is born even before the biological delivery. We often think about birth as the date of our delivery, whereas every human being is born when their spirit is created, and so our date of birth is really much earlier.

human beings and jinn who have freedom of choice, and for whom it is possible for the light to increase or decrease.

Allah (swt) takes people towards the light

Allah (swt) guides people and takes them from darkness to the light. He has sent prophets and all the divine scriptures and the Qur'an for this purpose, in order to show us how to gain more light and take them from darkness to the light.

This is a very important concept that is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an. In this hierarchy, Allah (swt) is at the top. We read in the Qur'an:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
أُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ أُولَئِكَ
أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

Allah is the Guardian of the faithful: He brings them out of the darknesses into light. As for the faithless, their patrons are the Rebels, who drive them out of light into darkness. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it [forever]. (2:257)

Of course, guidance is available for everyone, but only those who believe in Allah (swt) and embark on this journey will actually benefit from it and receive more light. In another verse Allah (swt) says:

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ
إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

*With it Allah guides those who follow [the
course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace,
and brings them out from darkness into light
by His will, and guides them to a straight path
(5:16)*

This verse clearly says that taking people towards light and taking them towards the straight path are very closely related. There is only one straight path, and that is to move towards further light. Someone who adopts any other direction will stray further from the light and move towards darkness. The straight path (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) is only ever one path. However, there are many ways to go away from the light; the commonality between all these different routes is that all of them have gone away from the straight path.

The difference between *subul* and *ṣirāt*

In the Qur'an, *ṣirāt* is never used as a plural. *Ṣirāt* is one, as is *ṣirāt mustaqīm*, and *ṣirāt al-‘azīz al-ḥamīd*. But the term *subul* (the ways) is plural.

This is because *ṣirāt* signifies the main direction of travel. We are moving towards Allah (swt) and towards light. This, then, can be analysed further and categorised into sub-pathways and routes. If I am moving towards Allah (swt) and towards light, it could be that I need to discover my role as a father,

mother, son, daughter, brother, or sister; or as a neighbour, boss, employee, politician, scholar, farmer, or consumer. Hence, moving on the right path should be translated into different areas of life; and in all the different parts of our life, we should ensure that we are on the right path. Allah (swt) says:

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ وَأَنْ أَعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, ‘Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me. That is a straight path’?
(36:60-61)

This verse confirms that the straight path is to worship or serve Allah (swt). Thus, we need to know how to obey Him in all the different scenarios we might face in life.

Therefore, *subul* (ways) is the name for those different areas of life in which we should move towards light, and *ṣirāt* is the general direction that we take. Interestingly, when the Qur’an wants to give one general title to those *subul*, He calls them *subul al-salām* (the paths of peace). This means that the Qur’an aims to show us how to achieve peace and tranquillity in every area of life. It aims to show us the ways to establish peace for ourselves and for other people, whatever our role is – as a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a sister, a brother, a neighbour, and so on. This is the difference between *ṣirāt* and *subul*.

If we try to gain the pleasure of Allah (swt) and if we try to please Him, then what we will gain is guidance towards these ways of peace which shows how to move away from darkness towards further light. In another verse Allah (swt) says:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لِّيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى
النُّورِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُمْ لَرَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

It is He who sends down manifest signs to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light, and indeed Allah is most kind and merciful to you. (57:9)

The prophets take people towards the light

According to the Qur'an, the main task of the prophets was to take people from darkness to light. For example, regarding Prophet Moses, the Qur'an says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا أَنْ أَخْرِجْ قَوْمَكَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى
النُّورِ

Certainly, We sent Moses with Our signs: 'Bring your people out from the darknesses into light.' (14:5)

Earlier in the same chapter, the Qur'an confirms that Prophet Muhammad (s) also was given the book to take people from darkness to light:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ
رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

[This is] a Book We have sent down to you that you may bring mankind out from the darknesses into light, by the command of their Lord, to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable. (14:1)

In this verse first Allah (swt) says: ‘you may bring mankind out from the darknesses into light.’ Then He says: ‘to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable.’ Thus, ‘into light’ means ‘to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable.’

Thus, once again we see that the same path that we wanted to be guided to – ‘the straight path’ (*ṣirāt mustaqīm*), which is the path of Allah (swt) – is the path of light (*nūr*). Hence, when a person is moving towards the source of light and towards the absolute light, this is *ṣirāt mustaqīm*.

In another passage, Allah (swt) says:

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
قَدْ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا رَسُولًا يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ
لِيُخْرِجَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

Allah has prepared for them a severe punishment. So be wary of Allah, O you who possess intellect and have faith! Allah has already sent down to you a reminder: an apostle reciting to you the manifest signs of

Allah that He may bring out those who have faith and do righteous deeds from the darknesses into light. (65:10-11)

There are different views among the commentators of the Qur'an regarding what is meant in this verse by 'reminder' (*dhikran*) and 'apostle' (*rasūlan*). Some say that 'reminder' is the Qur'an, and that 'apostle' refers to Prophet Muhammad (s).¹ Others say that 'reminder' and 'apostle' refer to the same thing. In this case, some say 'apostle' means Gabriel, and others say it refers to Prophet Muhammad (s).²

So, the meaning is 'Allah has sent down to you a reminder, which is a *rasūl* (a messenger)' or 'Allah has sent down to you a reminder and a *rasūl*.' However, even if the term *dhikran* does refer to the Qur'an, the fact that Allah says *dhikran* and then *rasūlan* communicates the same idea – that is, that there is a close relationship between the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (s).

¹ Ṭabrisī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 10, p. 466. Regarding the connection between the words, *dhikran* and *rasūlan*, some scholars have said that there is a hidden verb (*muqaddar*, i.e. not mentioned but implied), and that *rasūlan* is the object for that verb (e.g. *arsala rasūlan*).

² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 19, p. 325. In this case, *rasūlan* is the *badal* or 'atf bayān for *dhikran*.

The divine books illuminate

When it comes to divine books, Allah (swt) makes it very clear that all the books that He has sent have light. Not only do they have light, but they also illuminate (*munīr*). The Qur'an says:

فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ جَاءُوا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ
وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ

But if they deny you, then before you [other] apostles have been denied, who came with manifest signs, holy writs, and the illuminating book. (3:184)

Elsewhere the Qur'an says:

وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ الَّذِينَ مِّن قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ
وَبِالزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ

If they impugn you, those before them have impugned [likewise]: their apostles brought them manifest proofs, [holy] writs, and the illuminating book. (35:25)

In these two verses, the book is mentioned in the singular form '*al-kitāb al-munīr*' whereas '*apostles*' (*rusul*) is in the plural. This is because the true book is one, and all the divine books (like the Torah, Gospel and the Qur'an) are images or representations of that single book. This *illuminating book* also is mentioned in other verses:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ
Among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance, or an enlightening Book. (22:8)

Also in a similar verse we read:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ
Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture. (31:20)

All of these verses give the same idea: that the book gives light *munir*. This is in general. Practically speaking, the Qur'an refers to the Qur'an, Gospel and Torah as being light.

Regarding the Torah, the Qur'an says:

قُلْ مَنْ أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابَ الَّذِي جَاءَ بِهِ مُوسَى نُورًا وَهُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ
Say, 'Who had sent down the Book that was brought by Moses as a light and guidance for the people.' (6:91)

Elsewhere the Qur'an says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ
We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. (5:44)

Regarding the Gospel, the Qur'an says:

وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَى آثَارِهِم بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ
التَّوْرَةِ وَأَتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ

And We gave him the Evangel containing guidance and light, confirming what was before it of the Torah, and as guidance and advice for the Godwary. (5:46)

Then we see several verses referring to the Qur'an being light. For example, in following verse we read:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ
فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ
لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ
الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ
الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ مَعَهُ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Those who follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, whose mention they find written with them in the Torah and the Evangel, who bids them to do what is right and forbids them from what is wrong, makes lawful to them all the good things and forbids them from all vicious things, and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them—those who believe in him, honour him, and help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the felicitous. (7:157)

The light that the verse mentions is the Qur'an. Interestingly, the verse does not say 'the light that has been sent down to him' but rather '*sent down with him*.' This is very important because it shows there is a very close relationship between the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet (s). It is not the case that the Qur'an is a light and the Holy Prophet (s) had no light; then the light of the Qur'an came to him. No, the Prophet (s) is a light, and light has come to light.

In another verse, Allah (swt) states:

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ
 مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ

O People of the Book! Certainly Our Apostle has come to you, clarifying for you much of what you used to hide of the Book, and excusing many [an offence of yours]. Certainly there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book. (5:15)

Allah (swt) addresses the people of the book and mentions that light and a clear book has come to them from Him. The Qur'an is a clear book. It is clear and can be understood; otherwise, there is no point in sending something that cannot be understood. Something intended to guide people must be understandable, because it has to clarify and shed light on other things. If it is itself light, then it can shed light on other things.

In the following verse, Allah (swt) addresses all humanity:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا
*O mankind! Certainly, a proof has come to you
from your Lord, and We have sent down to
you a manifest light. (4:174)*

This verse says that the Qur'an is 'a manifest light'. Thus, the Qur'an is a light which is meant to be understood by us, and so it is *kitab mubīn* or *nūr mubīn*. And in this context, light refers to it being clear. A person just needs to open his heart and let the Qur'an reach it. The Qur'an knows how to enter the heart, but we must open our hearts to it. Consider these verses:

فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالنُّورِ الَّذِي أَنزَلْنَا وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ
*So have faith in Allah and His Apostle and the
light which We have sent down, and Allah is
well aware of what you do. (64:8)*

مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي بِهِ
مَنْ نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا

*You did not know what the Book is, nor what
is faith; but We made it a light that We may
guide by its means whomever We wish of Our
servants. And indeed you guide to a straight
path. (42:52)*

Prophet Muhammad (s), a radiant lamp

In the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (s) is described specifically as light. Of course, this does not mean that others are not light, but it means that this is emphasised, and that his light was very strong. The Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ
يَاذُنْهُ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

O Prophet! Indeed, We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner; as a summoner to Allah by His permission, and as a radiant lamp. (33:45-46)

Allah (swt) describes the Holy Prophet (s) as *sirājan munīran* (a shining, luminous lamp). It is possible for a lamp to exist that cannot be lit and does not shed light. An electric lamp can be switched off. From this type of lamp there is no benefit. However, the lamp (*sirā*) that is Prophet Muhammad (s) is *munīr*: it is ever shining.

Therefore, all the divine scriptures are *a manifest light*, and Allah (swt) particularly says this regarding the Torah, Gospel and Qur'an. Regarding the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says that it is a clear light. Under Allah (swt) are the messengers and the books, all of whom have come to give light to people. Hence, all of this is to help us in our journey towards perfection, towards truth, and towards *ḥaqq*.

Qur'anic Revelation

Descent, Complication, Features

Chapter 4

The descent of the Qur'an (*nuzūl*)



Introduction

Now that we have examined different aspects of the prophetic revelation in general, in this section we are going to discuss different aspects and characteristics of the Qur'anic revelation. In this chapter, we discuss the issue of the descent (*nuzūl*) and related topics like the sender and receiver, different types of *nuzūl* and particularly when the Qur'an descended.

The sender of the Qur'an

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an that He is the One Who has sent down the Qur'an. However, there are various verses of the Qur'an explaining the ways in which the Qur'an was sent down.

Passively: Sometimes it is explained in a passive way with no mention of who the sender was. For example, the Qur'an says:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ

The month of Ramaḍān in which the Qur'an was sent down. (2:185)

From and by Allah (swt): In some verses the sender is mentioned as Allah (swt). For example, we read in the Qur'an:

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ

Allah has sent down the best of discourses.
(39:23)

Surah al-Qadr says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

We sent it down on the Night of Qadr. (97:1)

Gabriel: Sometimes Allah (swt) explains that the archangel Gabriel brought down the Qur'an. For example, Allah (swt) says:

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجَبْرَيْلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا
لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Say, 'Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel [should know that] it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of Allah, confirming what has been [revealed] before it, and as a guidance and good news to the faithful.' (2:97)

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says:

نَزَّلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ

...brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit.
(26:193)

Also in the following verse, Allah (swt) says:

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ

*Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation
from thy Lord in Truth. (16:102)*

According to ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī in his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, in these verses *rūḥ al-amīn* and *rūḥ al-quḍus* both refer to Gabriel.¹

Angels: There is another category of verses of the Qur’an in which the angels are introduced as the ones who brought down the Qur’an. For example, the Qur’an says:

فِي صُحُفٍ مُكَرَّمَةٍ مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُطَهَّرَةٍ بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ كَرَامٍ بَرَّةٍ
...in honoured scriptures, exalted and purified,
in the hands of envoys, noble and pious. (80:13-16)

The word ‘envoys’ refers to angels that they work for and help Gabriel in conveying the revelation to the Prophet (s).²

¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 12, p. 346:

قد تقدمت في أول السورة إشارة إلى معنى الروح، و القدس الطهارة و النزاهة و الظاهر أن الإضافة للاختصاص أى روح طاهرة عن قذارات المادة نزيهة عن الخطأ و الغلط و الضلال، و هو المسمى في موضع آخر من كلامه تعالى بالروح الأمين، و في موضع آخر بجبريل من الملائكة.

² Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 20, p. 202:

Thus, there are four categories of verses referring to how the Qur'an was brought down. It should be mentioned that there is no conflict between these verses because when Allah (swt) does something, He does not need to do it directly Himself but can do it through His agents.¹ For instance, when a president or a king or a prime minister does something, he can say he has done it whether or not he himself actually did it because he is in charge of affairs overall. Alternatively, it can be said that a certain head of a certain office or the staff employed did it. They are all correct descriptions.

و يظهر من الآيات أن للوحي ملائكة يتصدون لحمل الصحف و إحياء ما فيها
من القرآن فهم أعوان جبريل و تحت أمره و نسبة إلقاء الوحي إليهم لاتنافى
نسبته إلى جبريل في مثل قوله: «تَزَلَّ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ»

¹ Indeed, we have something similar regarding death. Sometimes Allah (swt) says He is the One Who takes away the soul:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا

Allah takes the souls at the time of their death. (39:42)

Sometimes He says the angel of death takes away the soul:

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ

Say, You will be taken away by the angel of death. (32:11)

Sometimes He says 'Our messengers' or apostles which are angels do so:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا

When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away. (6:61)

The receiver of the Qur'an

Allah (swt) also explains the recipients of the Qur'an in three different ways.

The recipient is not mentioned. In some verses, Allah (swt) does not mention the recipient of the Qur'an. He simply says that it has been sent down. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

We have sent down the Reminder, and We will preserve it. (15:9)

This verse does not mention to whom the Qur'an ('the Reminder') has been sent down but instead focuses on the sender and on the protection of the message.

The Prophet (s). In many places the Prophet (s) is mentioned as the one who has received the message. For example, Allah (swt) says:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ

But those who have faith and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down to Muḥammad, and it is the truth from their Lord.... (47:2)

People. Sometimes the Qur'an says it has been sent down to people. For example, Surah al-Nisā', verse 174 says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا
*O mankind! Certainly, a proof has come to you
from your Lord, and We have sent down to
you a manifest light. (4:174)*

In this verse, people in general are mentioned as those who receive the Qur'an sent down by Allah (swt). In Arabic, *al-nās* includes all human beings wherever they live in the world, whatever skin colour they have, whether they be male or female, young or old.

There is no conflict between these verses because the first recipient is the Prophet (s), but he has not been given the Qur'an for himself as he is to deliver it to the people. Thus, people are the recipients of the Qur'an too, but through the Prophet (s).

When was the descent (*nuzūl*) of the Qur'an?

There are references in the Qur'an about when it was revealed. When we put those together, we realise that the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s) during the night of Qadr in the month of Ramaḍān.

I. The first verse is verse 185 of Surah al-Baqarah:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَ بَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ
الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ

The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs of guidance and the Distinguisher. (2:185)

II. In verse 3 of Surah al-Dukhān, Allah (swt) says regarding the Qur'an:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُّبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ

We sent it down on a blessed night, and We have been warning [mankind]. (44:3)

In other words, Allah (swt) revealed the Qur'an during a blessed night. This verse does not mention explicitly that this happened in the month of Ramaḍān or that it was during the night of Qadr.

III. In Surah al-Qadr, which is the most familiar verse about the revelation of the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

We sent it down on the Night of Qadr. (97:1)

Thus, by combining the above verse with the verse from Surah al-Baqarah and the one from Surah al-Dukhān, we can deduce that the Qur'an was actually revealed during a blessed

night, that this night was the night of Qadr, and that this was in the month of Ramaḍān.

A multitude of blessings

It is interesting to note that we are surrounded with many blessed things regarding the Qur'an.

I. First of all, Allah Himself is the Most Blessed One Who has sent the Qur'an:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا

Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant that he may be a warner to all the nations. (25:1)

II. The Qur'an which Allah (swt) has sent is also blessed and is a source of blessings.

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ

Blessed is this Book which We have sent down.
(6:92)

III. Prophet Muhammad (s) who received the Qur'an is blessed. Even before he became a prophet, he was a blessed person. For example, just fostering and looking after the Prophet (s) changed Lady Ḥalīmah's entire life. Her family had a very difficult life, living in poverty under very bad

conditions, but just taking care of the Prophet (s) changed all of this, and he was always a source of blessings.¹

There is a beautiful poem which says that one of the characteristics of the Prophet (s) was that when there was a shortage of rain, people expected rain to come because of him.² According to some Sunni sources, at a time when there was a shortage of rain after the demise of the Prophet (s), Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (s), suggested that a hole should be made above the grave of the Prophet (s) so that there would be no barrier between the sky and the grave of the Prophet (s), and after doing so rain came.³ This hadith is very important because it shows that it is acceptable to appeal

¹ ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām, Jamāl al-Dīn, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, vol. 1, pp. 162-164.

² Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *Iʿlām al-Warā bi Aʿlām al-Hudā*, p. 27. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

وَأَبْيَضُ يَسْتَسْقَى الْغَمَامُ بِوَجْهِهِ ثَمَالُ الْيَتَامَى عَصْمَةٌ لِلْأَرَامِلِ
يَطُوفُ بِهِ الْمَلَكُ مِنْ آلِ هَاشِمٍ فَهُمْ عِنْدَهُ فِي نِعْمَةٍ وَفَوَاضِلِ

³ Dārimī, ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Raḥmān, *Sunan al-Darimī*, Bāb mā akrama Allah taʿālā nabīyyau (s) baʿda mawtihi, vol. 1, p. 227, no. 93.

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْجَوَّاءِ أَوْسُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ: فَحُطُّ أَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ فَحُطًّا شَدِيدًا، فَشَكُّوا إِلَى عَائِشَةَ فَقَالَتْ: انْظُرُوا قَبْرَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَاجْعَلُوا مِنْهُ كَوِيًّا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ حَتَّى لَا يَكُونَ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ سَقْفٌ. قَالَ: فَفَعَلُوا، فَمَطَرْنَا مَطَرًا حَتَّى نَبَتَ الْعُشْبُ، وَسَمِنَتِ الْإِبِلُ حَتَّى تَفْتَقَتْ مِنَ الشَّحْمِ، فَسُمِيَ عَامُ الْفَتْقِ.

This narration is also is with a slight difference quoted by Al-Samhūdī in his book *Wafāʾ al-Wafāʾ bi Akhbār Dār al-Muṣṭafā*, vol. 4, p. 195.

to the Prophet (s) even after his death and that this was accepted and practised by the early Muslim community.

IV. The month of Ramaḍān is blessed. Prophet Muhammad in his well-known sermon in the last Friday of the month of Sha‘ban told people:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّهُ قَدْ أَقْبَلَ إِلَيْكُمْ شَهْرُ اللَّهِ بِالْبَرَكَةِ وَالرَّحْمَةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ
O people! Ahead of you is the blessed month
of Allah, a month of blessing, mercy and
forgiveness.¹

V. The night of Qadr is also blessed:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنْذِرِينَ
*We sent it down on a blessed night, and We
have been warning [mankind]. (44:3)*

Thus, we can understand that the Prophet (s) was a very blessed person, the Qur’an is a very blessed book, the month of Ramaḍān is a very blessed month, the night of Qadr is a very blessed night, and Allah (swt) obviously is the One Who is the Most Blessed and all blessings come from Him.

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Amālī li al-Ṣādūq*, p. 93.

Therefore, we are faced with an abundance of different sources of blessing, and it is up to us to expose ourselves to these blessings and benefit from them.

Two types of revelation of the Qur'an

We know that the whole duration of the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad (s) was 23 years from the first time that he received revelation up to the end of his life. The Qur'an was gradually revealed to the Prophet (s), so we know that some chapters were revealed in Mecca and some in Medina. Sometimes parts of a large chapter were revealed in different times and places. The Qur'anic verses could be revealed on different occasions in different places, and then they were organised into the various different chapters according to the instructions of the Prophet (s) himself.

The gradual revelation of the Qur'an

The beginning of the revelation was on the 27th of the month of Rajab, on the day of Mab'ath, which marks the very first time that the Prophet (s) received revelation. On this day, only a few verses of Qur'an from Surah al-'Alaq were revealed. It then took 23 years for the whole revelation to be completed; this covers the whole period of prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (s).

According to the Qur'an, some of the enemies of the Prophet (s) used to complain and accuse him by asking him why the

Qur'an had not been given to him all at once as a complete package. The Qur'an says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ لَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا

The faithless say, 'Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?' So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone.
(25:32)

Allah (swt) then explains that the reason for this is that He wanted to send the Qur'an down gradually so that when Muslims faced difficulties and challenges and then received a message from Allah (swt) in response, this would be reassuring and a great support for them.

The revelation of Qur'an as a whole

In addition to the gradual revelation of the Qur'an, the Qur'an also has another form of descent, *nuzūl*, and that is on the night of Qadr in the month of Ramaḍān. On this night, the Qur'an was sent down as a whole.

Here are then two ideas about the revelation of the entire Qur'an, found in our hadith and our sources, both of which could be correct.

I. To al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr: According to some hadith, the entire Qur'an was initially revealed by Allah (swt) to al-Bayt al-

Ma'mūr.¹ Al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr only once is mentioned in the Qur'an in the fourth verse of Surah al-Ṭūr.² It literally means 'the house which is developed' and which is in a very good condition.³ Al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr is in the fourth heaven and is parallel to the Ka'bah.⁴

¹ Commenting on the first verse of the Surah al-Qadr, Qummī in his *tafsīr* says:

فَهُوَ الْقُرْآنُ أَنْزَلَ إِلَى الْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً، وَعَلَى رَسُولِ
اللَّهِ (ص) فِي طُولِ ثَلَاثٍ وَعِشْرِينَ سَنَةً.

Qummī, Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, p. 431.

² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 19, p. 6:

قوله تعالى: «وَالْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ» قيل: المراد به الكعبة المشرفة فإنها أول بيت
وضع للناس و لم يزل معموراً منذ وضع إلى يومنا هذا قال تعالى: «إِنَّ أَوَّلَ
بَيْتٍ وَضَعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بَكَّةَ مُبَارَكاً وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ» (3:96) وفي الروايات
المأثورة أن البيت المعمور بيت في السماء يحذاء الكعبة تزوره الملائكة.

³ Raghib, Ḥusayn, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 586.

⁴ Tabarsī, Faḍl b. Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 9, p. 247:

«وَالْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ» وهو بيت في السماء الرابعة بحيال الكعبة تعمده الملائكة
بما يكون منها فيه من العبادة عن ابن عباس ومجاهد

The Ka'bah is a kind of reconstruction of al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr. When we perform *tawāf* around the Ka'bah we are actually copying what the angels do around al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr. There is a hadith that a person asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) why the Ka'bah is cubic. Imam (a) replied that it is because the Ka'bah is under al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr. So Imam (a) explained that the Ka'bah is under Bayt al-Ma'mūr, and al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr has four corners so it is cubic. Then that person asked why al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr is cubic, and Imam (a) replied that the al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr is under the 'arsh of Allah (swt), the Divine throne, and that has four pillars consisting of *subḥān Allah*, *al-*

Thus, some hadith say that Allah (swt) first sent the Qur'an to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr, and then from al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr it was gradually revealed to the Prophet (s).¹

II. To the Prophet (s): 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains another idea in *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. He says that the Prophet (s) himself received the Qur'an in two ways. Once he received the whole Qur'an on the night of Qadr, and then he gradually received it in a detailed version over 23 years. There are some

ḥamdu lillāh, lā ilāha illā Allāh and *Allāhu akbar*. Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Ilal al-Sharā'i*, vol. 2, p. 398. The full text is Arabic is as follows:

رَوَى عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (ع) أَنَّهُ سُئِلَ لِمَ سُمِّيَتِ الْكَعْبَةُ كَعْبَةً. قَالَ: لِأَنَّهَا مُرَبَّعَةٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَتْ مُرَبَّعَةً قَالَ لِأَنَّهَا بِحِذَاءِ الْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ وَهُوَ مُرَبَّعٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَ الْبَيْتُ الْمَعْمُورُ مُرَبَّعًا قَالَ لِأَنَّهُ بِحِذَاءِ الْعَرْشِ وَهُوَ مُرَبَّعٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَ الْعَرْشُ مُرَبَّعًا قَالَ لِأَنَّ الْكَلِمَاتِ الَّتِي بُنِيَ عَلَيْهَا الْإِسْلَامُ أَرْبَعٌ وَهِيَ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ.

These are the four most fundamental items of truth, and if someone understands this properly, they would understand that these are the foundations of the whole creation.

¹ For example, Imam Ṣādiq (a) responded to someone that asked him about the way the Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramaḍān:

نَزَلَ الْقُرْآنُ جَمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً فِي شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ إِلَى الْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ ثُمَّ نَزَلَ فِي طَوْلِ عَشْرِينَ سَنَةً

The Qur'an was revealed all at once in the month of Ramaḍān to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr; then it came down in a period of twenty years.

'Ayyāshī, Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, p. 80, no. 184; Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, pp. 628-629.

reasons to support this view as well. For example, the Qur'an says:

وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ

Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you. (20:114)

According to some interpretations, this means that because the Prophet (s) already knew what was going to be revealed to him, when a particular revelation started, he knew the completion of it. So sometimes he was so amazed that he wanted to recite all of it before the actual revelation at that time was finished. Therefore, Allah (swt) told him to wait until revelation finished and then start narrating those verses to other people.¹

Thus, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī says there are two revelations of the Qur'an: one is in one go as a whole package to the Prophet (s) as mentioned in Surah al-Qadr or Surah al-Dukhān and

¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 14, pp. 214-215:

أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ (ص) كَانَ إِذَا جَاءَهُ الْوَحْيُ بِالْقُرْآنِ يَعْجَلُ بِقِرَاءَةِ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَتِمَّ الْوَحْيُ فَتَنْهَىٰ عَنْ أَنْ يَعْجَلَ فِي قِرَاءَتِهِ قَبْلَ انْقِضَاءِ الْوَحْيِ وَتَمَامِهِ فَيَكُونُ الْآيَةُ فِي مَعْنَى قَوْلِهِ تَعَالَىٰ فِي مَوْضِعٍ آخَرَ: «لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ» (75:18) وَهَذِهِ الْآيَةُ مِمَّا يُؤَيِّدُ مَا وَرَدَ مِنَ الرِّوَايَاتِ أَنَّ لِلْقُرْآنِ نَزُولًا دَفْعَةً وَاحِدَةً غَيْرَ نَزُولِهِ نَجْوًا عَلَى النَّبِيِّ (ص) فَلَوْ لَا عَلِمَ مَا مِنْهُ بِالْقُرْآنِ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ لَمْ يَكُنْ لِعَجَلِهِ بِقِرَاءَةِ مَا لَمْ يَنْزِلْ مِنْهُ بَعْدَ مَعْنَى.

one was gradually over 23 years.¹ He also says that normally when verbs derived from *inzāl* are used, like *anzalnā*, it refers to the revelation as a whole, and when a verb is derived from *tanzīl*, like *nazzalnā*, this refers to the detailed and gradual revelation.²

Both ideas could be true as we could say that the Qur'an was sent first to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr and then again after this to the Prophet (s), once as a complete package in the night of Qadr and then as a detailed, gradual version over the years. In any case, the revelation of the Qur'an as a whole happened in the

¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 18:

هذا الذى ذكرنا هو الموجب لأن يحمل قوله: شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ، وقوله: إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ مُبَارَكَةٍ، وقوله: إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ، على إنزال حقيقة الكتاب و الكتاب المبين إلى قلب رسول الله ص دفعة كما أنزل القرآن المفصل على قلبه تدريجاً في مدة الدعوة النبوية وهذا هو الذى يلوح من نحو قوله تعالى: «وَلَا تُعْجِلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَى إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ»: (20:114)، وقوله تعالى: «لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ»: (75:16-19)، فإن الآيات ظاهرة في أن رسول الله (ص) كان له علم بما سينزل عليه فنهى عن الاستعجال بالقراءة قبل قضاء الوحي.

² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 330:

قوله تعالى: «إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ» ضمير «أَنْزَلْنَاهُ» للقرآن و ظاهره جملة الكتاب العزيز لا بعض آياته و يؤيده التعبير بالإنزال الظاهر في اعتبار الدفعة دون التنزيل الظاهر في التدريج.

month of Ramaḍān in the night of Qadr, either to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr or to the Prophet (s) or to both.

Timing of the night of Qadr

Ahl al-Bayt (a) deliberately did not specify exactly which night is the night of Qadr, but they did say that it might be the 19th, the 21st or the 23rd. Sometimes people really insisted that they tell them which night it is but they were reluctant to say because they knew that if most of people were sure about which night it is then on the other nights they would probably just sleep and do nothing.

Also the night of Qadr needs careful preparation beforehand if we are to benefit fully from it. So although people insisted on knowing, the Ahl al-Bayt (a) said the 19th, 21st or 23rd to make it more specific; however, sometimes they said it is in the last ten nights, meaning from the 19th up to the end of the month of Ramaḍān.¹

Some hadith mention the 21st and 23rd. For example, there is a hadith from Imam al Ṣādiq (a) in which the narrator asks Imam (a) which night is the night of Qadr. The Imam (a) replies:

الْتَمِسْهَا فِي لَيْلَةِ إِحْدَى وَ عَشْرِينَ أَوْ لَيْلَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَ عَشْرِينَ

¹ Ḥurr 'Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasāil al-Shrāh*, vol. 14, p. 474.

Seek it on the night of the twenty-first or the night of the twenty-third.¹

There is another hadith in which the narrator, Ali, the son of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, narrates: ‘I was with Imam Ṣādiq and Abū Baṣīr said: “May I be your ransom! The night during which one hopes for what is hoped for.” Imam (a) said: “The 21st or 23rd.” Then Abū Baṣīr said: “Supposing I am not strong enough upon both these nights?” Imam (a) said: “For all the things that you expect to be given by Allah, it is easy just to spend two nights.”’

Then Ali, the narrator, says: ‘I told the Imam (a) that sometimes we sighted the crescent with us, and there come to us from another land someone who informed us that they saw the crescent on a different night. The Imam (a) replied: “Four nights is easy for all the things that you expect to be given by Allah.” I said: “May I be your ransom! The night of the 23rd is the night Juhanī went to the Mosque of the Prophet (s).”’²

¹ Kulaynī Muḥammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 156.

² There was a person in the time of the Prophet (s) called Juhanī. He went to the Prophet (s) and said to him, ‘I live outside the town because I have cattle and I have to look after them so I cannot come three nights to Medina for the night of Qadr. Please tell me which night the night of Qadr is!’ The Prophet (s) asked him to come near, so whispered to his ear so that no one would hear the night. After that everyone was waiting to see when Juhanī came, and he came to Medina in the night of the 23rd. But one cannot be fully sure because he could have made a mistake or perhaps could not go on the 21st and went on the 23rd.

Imam (a) said: “This is what has been said.” He did not say yes or no. He wanted to leave this not known.¹

In the continuation of the hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

The delegations of the hajj are ordained during the night of Qadr, and the immunities, and the afflictions, and the livelihoods/sustenance (*rizq*) and whatever is to transpire up to the like of it during the coming year. Therefore, look for it (*Laylah al-Qadr*) in the night of the 21st and 23rd, and pray during each one of these two one hundred *rak‘ah*, and stay awake during it in accordance to your ability up to daylight, and bathe (perform *ghusl*) during these two.²

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 156. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي حَمَزَةَ الثُّمَالِيِّ قَالَ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فَقَالَ لَهُ أَبُو بَصِيرٍ: «جَعَلْتُ فِدَاكَ! اللَّيْلَةُ الَّتِي يُرْجَى فِيهَا مَا يُرْجَى». فَقَالَ: «فِي إِحْدَى وَعِشْرِينَ أَوْ ثَلَاثَ وَعِشْرِينَ». قَالَ: «فَإِنْ لَمْ أَقْوِ عَلَى كِلْتَيْهِمَا». فَقَالَ: «مَا أَيْسَرَ لِيْلَتَيْنِ فِيمَا تَطْلُبُ». قُلْتُ: «فَرُبَّمَا رَأَيْنَا الْهَيْلَالَ عِنْدَنَا وَجَاءَنَا مَنْ يُخْبِرُنَا بِخِلَافِ ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَرْضٍ أُخْرَى». فَقَالَ: «مَا أَيْسَرَ أَرْبَعَ لَيَالٍ تَطْلُبُهَا فِيهَا». قُلْتُ: «جَعَلْتُ فِدَاكَ! لَيْلَةُ ثَلَاثَ وَعِشْرِينَ لَيْلَةُ الْجَهَنَّمَ». فَقَالَ: «إِنْ ذَلِكَ لَيَقَالَ».

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 156:

وَقَدْ الْحَاجُّ يَكْتَبُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ وَالْمَنَآيَا وَالْبَلَايَا وَالْأَرْزَاقُ وَمَا يَكُونُ إِلَى مِثْلِهَا فِي قَابِلٍ فَاطْلُبُهَا فِي لَيْلَةِ إِحْدَى وَعِشْرِينَ وَثَلَاثَ وَعِشْرِينَ وَصَلِّ فِي كُلِّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ رَكْعَةٍ وَأَحْيِيهِمَا إِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ إِلَى النُّورِ وَاعْتَسِلْ فِيهِمَا.

Then he (the narrator) said: ‘Supposing I am not able to do that?’ The Imam (a) said: ‘So pray while seated’. I said, ‘Supposing I am not able?’ He said: ‘Pray lying upon your bed.’ The Imam (a) also said, ‘If you are very tired there is no problem if you sleep a little bit during the beginning of the night.’ Then the Imam (a) talked about the importance of the night of Qadr and the month of Ramaḍān and said:

The gateways of the skies are opened during Ramaḍān, and the satans are chained, and the deeds of the believers are accepted. The best of the months is Ramaḍān. It used to be referred to, in the time of the Messenger of Allah as *al-marzūq* (the month in which sustenance is determined).¹

According to some hadīth, the night of 19th is the night in which the major decision-making starts and somehow measures are taken as when one makes a draft of something. On the 21st, this draft is finalised, and on the 23rd it is signed

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 157. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

قَالَ: قُلْتُ: «فَإِنْ لَمْ أَقْدِرْ عَلَى ذَلِكَ وَأَنَا قَائِمٌ». قَالَ: «فَصَلِّ وَأَنْتَ جَالِسٌ». قُلْتُ: «فَإِنْ لَمْ أَصْطَلِحْ». قَالَ: «فَعَلَى فِرَاشِكَ. لَا عَلَيْكَ أَنْ تَكْتَحِلَ أَوَّلَ اللَّيْلِ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ النَّوْمِ. إِنَّ أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ تَفْتَحُ فِي رَمَضَانَ وَتُصَفَّدُ الشَّيَاطِينُ وَتَقْبَلُ أَعْمَالُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نِعَمَ الشَّهْرِ رَمَضَانَ كَانَ يُسَمَّى عَلَى عَهْدِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) الْمَرْزُوقَ.

and sealed.¹ So we should not miss or waste these nights and should greatly appreciate this golden opportunity.

We should do some preparation to be properly ready for it. It has deliberately not been made very specific so that we work hard for such an important night. Indeed, some people work throughout the year so that they can be ready for this night. At least we have to work really hard in the month of Ramaḍān to get ready for the night of Qadr. If we want to have a spiritual Qur'anic calendar, according to hadith, the beginning of it is the night of Qadr and the end is the night of Qadr.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 159. The full hadith in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ زُرَّارَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ: أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) التَّقْدِيرُ فِي لَيْلَةِ تِسْعِ عَشْرَةَ وَالْإِبْرَامُ فِي
لَيْلَةِ إِحْدَى وَعِشْرِينَ وَالْإِمْضَاءُ فِي لَيْلَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَعِشْرِينَ.

Chapter 5

The importance of the month of Ramaḍān and the Night of Qadr



Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed the revelation of the Qur'an as a whole on the night of Qadr in the month of Ramaḍān, either to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr or to the Prophet (s) or to both. In this chapter, we will study the importance of the month of Ramaḍān and specifically the night of Qadr.

The importance of the month of Ramaḍān

One of the things which make the month of Ramaḍān very special is that Allah (swt) has chosen this month for sending His message to humanity. Indeed, according to some hadith, it is not only the Qur'an which was revealed in the month of Ramaḍān, as the Gospel and Torah were also revealed in this blessed month, which adds to its significance.¹

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol, 4, p. 157. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

Connection between fasting and revelation

It is not accidental that Allah (swt) has asked us to fast in this month. There is a connection between fasting, the revelation of the Qur'an and the whole value of this month. In other words, one reason why Allah (swt) has asked us to observe fasting in this month is that He wants to keep us continuously reminded of its value. This fasting is a kind of special protocol and etiquette for this month so that we do not incorrectly think that it is a normal and ordinary month.

The month of Allah (swt)

As Prophet Muhammad (s) said:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّهُ قَدْ أَقْبَلَ إِلَيْكُمْ شَهْرُ اللَّهِ بِالْبَرَكَةِ وَالرَّحْمَةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ
شَهْرٌ هُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَفْضَلُ الشُّهُورِ وَأَيَّامُهُ أَفْضَلُ الْأَيَّامِ وَلَيَالِيهِ
أَفْضَلُ اللَّيَالِيِ وَسَاعَاتُهُ أَفْضَلُ السَّاعَاتِ

O people! Indeed, ahead of you is the blessed month of Allah. A month of blessing, mercy and forgiveness. A month which with Allah is the best of months. Its days are the best of

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: نَزَلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ فِي سِتِّ مَضَتْ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ وَنَزَلَ
الْإِنْجِيلُ فِي اثْنَتَيْ عَشْرَةَ لَيْلَةً مَضَتْ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ وَنَزَلَ الزَّبُورُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ
تَمَانِي عَشْرَةَ مَضَتْ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ وَنَزَلَ الْقُرْآنُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ.

days, its nights the best of nights, and its hours
the best of hours.¹

This is the month which Allah (swt) attributes to Himself in a very special way. In the sight of Allah (swt), this month is the best month, its days are the best days, its nights are the best nights and its hours are the best hours. Compared to their counterparts throughout the year, each and every portion of the days and nights in it is the best.

The month of blessings, mercy and forgiveness

This month is such a very special setting and such a very fertile time that the Prophet (s) said that this is the month which has come to us with blessings (*barakah*). During this month, the chance of receiving mercy from Allah (swt), of being forgiven, of being blessed and of being inspired is much greater than at any other time. The way that Allah (swt) treats us in this month with His forgiveness is almost unbelievable. Indeed, as the Prophet (s) has said, the people who are not fortunate enough to be forgiven in this month are really people who are in the worst condition:

فَإِنَّ الشَّقِيَّ مَنْ حُرِمَ غُفْرَانَ اللَّهِ فِي هَذَا الشَّهْرِ الْعَظِيمِ

The unfortunate people are the people who are
deprived of Allah's forgiveness in this month.²

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 93.

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 93.

Importance of the night of Qadr

One of the aims of this part of our discussion is to help us to better understand and appreciate the night of Qadr. Certainly, all people live through the night of Qadr, whether they realise it or not and whether they understand it or not. Whoever is alive experiences the night of Qadr, but there is a great difference between merely being alive at that time and actually fully witnessing, recognising and interacting with the night of Qadr.

Sometimes we meet someone, but because we do not know who they are, we do not benefit from them very much, and sometimes we may even treat them in an unacceptable way because we are unaware of who they are. Sometimes we may even spend quite some time with someone, for example when sitting next to them on a train or in a plane. This person might be someone very important, maybe a very pious servant of Allah (swt) who many people would give anything to meet, and yet because we do not know who that person is, we do not benefit from the opportunity. It is only later on that we realise whom we were sitting next to all that time but unfortunately by then it is too late to benefit from their company.

In the same way, the night of Qadr is with us in every month of Ramaḍān, but often we are like someone who sits next to a very important personality without knowing who they are

and benefitting from them, or we might even treat them disrespectfully.

Concerning the night of Qadr, we are told that not only is it the best night of the year, but it is better than one thousand months. Thus, it is not merely better than the nights of one year, it is better than the nights of more than eighty years.

One might ask why Allah (swt) chose the night of Qadr when He wanted to send the entire Qur'an. The answer is that even before the Qur'an was sent down, the night of Qadr was a special night, and so revelation of the Qur'an added to the value and significance of this night. The night of Qadr was not an ordinary night which became important after the Qur'an was revealed in it. Throughout the history of mankind, the night of Qadr has always been there, but people did not know about its significance. Even the Prophet Muhammad (s) seemed not to know about the night of Qadr during his early years.¹ Therefore, Allah (swt) says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

*We sent it down on the night of Qadr. And
what will show you what is the night of Qadr?*
(97:1-2)

¹ Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr Nimūnih*, vol. 27, p. 183.

Qualities of the night of Qadr

In the Glorious Qur'an, the night of Qadr is characterised with two qualities:

I. A blessed night

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ

We sent it down on a blessed night. (44:3)

In Arabic, '*barakah*' means 'a goodness which grows, increases and remains.'¹ Sometimes we have two similar quantities of money or time, and yet we find that one of them has *barakah* and one of them does not. We can do many things with the one which has *barakah* whereas the one which does not is spent quickly, and we hardly realise what has happened to it. Sometimes two people have a similar salary but one of them is much better off whilst the other one is always suffering from a shortage of funds. This is not necessarily because one of them is better at financial management. Sometimes there is *barakah* in certain knowledge. Two people may have a similar level of education but one of them appears blessed and successful, writing many

¹Rāghib, Ḥusayn, *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, p. 119:

وَالْبَرَكَةُ: ثُبُوتُ الْخَيْرِ الْإِلَهِيِّ فِي الشَّيْءِ.

Al-Jawharī, Ismā'īl b. Ḥammād, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ-Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-'Arabīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 1575:

الْبَرَكَةُ: النَّمَاءُ وَالزِّيَادَةُ.

books and training many students whilst the other one is not even appreciated by their own circles. Another example is Lady Fāṭimah (a). From just one lady we have innumerable benefits. For example, we have eleven Imams (a) in her progeny. Allah (swt) gave *kawthar*, a source of abundance, to the Prophet (s), by placing so much *barakah* in this holy Lady (a).

Thus, the concept of *barakah* is an important concept in the Qur'an, and Allah (swt) says that certain people and certain places or times are *mubārak*, blessed. For example, when Allah (swt) refers to the story of the Ascension (*mi'rāj*) of the Prophet (s) in Surah Isrā', He says:

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ
الْأَقْصَى الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا

Glory be to Him who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose environs We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. (17:1)

Allah (swt) took the Prophet (s) on the night of the *mi'rāj* from al-Masjid al-Harām to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā and then from al-Masjid al-Aqṣā to Heaven to show him some of His signs. So, the journey had two aspects. One was on this planet and one was from al-Masjid al-Aqṣā to Heaven.

Allah (swt) mentions that the area around Masjid al-Aqṣā is very blessed. It is not only blessed because it is a very fertile land as that area indeed is one of the most fertile lands in the world, but it is also spiritually blessed because many prophets have been there. Therefore, it was a suitable place from which the Prophet (s) ascended to Heaven on the night of *mi'rāj*.

Another example of *barakah* is when Allah (swt) talks about Prophet Jesus. In the Qur'an, one of the things that Prophet Jesus says is:

وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ

He has made me blessed, wherever I may be.
(19:31)

Allah (swt) has made him blessed, meaning a source of blessings. He was a blessing for people no matter whether he was in his home or outside or travelling. He was always blessed, *mubārak*, and Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) says *mubārak* means 'beneficial'.¹ So this means he was beneficial for people wherever he was.

Regarding the Qur'an, Allah (swt) also says that this is a blessed book:

¹ Qummī, Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, p. 50. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فِي قَوْلِهِ «وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ» قَالَ: نَفَاعًا.

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ

And this Book that We have sent down is a blessed one. (6:155)

Thus, the night of Qadr – in addition to the blessings that the whole month of Ramaḍān has – by itself is very blessed.

II. The night of peace

Another quality of the night of Qadr is mentioned in Surah al-Qadr:

سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

Peace this is until the rising of the dawn. (97:5)

This is the night of peace. It does not say ‘peaceful’; it says ‘peace’, which is much more than being peaceful. Sometimes something is peaceful, but it does not make other things at peace, whereas this is the night which has the ability to make everyone feel peaceful. The verse continues ‘until the rising of the dawn,’ so the peace of this night continues up to the time of the dawn, *fajr*, and including *fajr* itself.¹ This therefore corresponds with the hadith which says that reviving the night of Qadr (*iḥyāʾ*) should be done until the rising of the dawn.²

¹ This point is understood because of usage of *ḥattā* according to Arabic grammar.

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Faḍāʾil al-Ashhur al-Thalāthah*, p. 137, no. 146. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

Of course, this would then be followed by the call to prayer of *fajr* and the prayer itself.

Events on the night of Qadr

According to the Qur'an, there are certain events which take place during the night of Qadr. Some might have happened once, and some might happen repeatedly every year in the night of Qadr.

I. Revelation of the Qur'an

The revelation of the Qur'an as a whole to the heart of the Prophet (s) happened once only in one particular year.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

We sent it down on the Night of Qadr. (97:1)

Of course, there is also a sense in which the Qur'an is always fresh and refreshed, which we will talk about later in this book.

II. Descent of the Spirit and angels

The night of Qadr did not just occur in one particular year or only in some years. It exists in all years. What happens

قَالَ مُوسَىٰ بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ (ع): مَنْ اغْتَسَلَ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ وَأَحْيَاهَا إِلَى طُلُوعِ الْفَجْرِ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ.

continuously year after year is the descent of the Spirit and the angels. The Qur'an says:

تَنْزِلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ

In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. (97:4)

The verb ‘*tanazzalu*’ (descend) which is used is in the present tense, and in Arabic the present tense demonstrates continuity. Therefore, it means this is something which is happening every night of Qadr – that the angels and the Spirit descend, of course with the permission of Allah (swt), and bringing all affairs with them.

In Surah al-Dukhān, Allah (swt) refers to the same thing by saying:

فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ

Every definitive matter is resolved on it. (44:4)

This means that in each and every night of Qadr every firm decision is made, and every firm affair is decided and detailed.

What happens when angels and the Spirit descend

According to hadith, every year on the night of Qadr, Allah (swt) decides what will happen over the coming year. This is a true mercy from Allah (swt) because our affairs are decided at the best of times and in the best of situations. When Allah

(swt) wants to make decisions about us, these depend on several different factors related to ourselves, other people, the role of angels and the role of the *hujjah* (a) of Allah. So Allah (swt) has chosen the most peaceful and blessed time, when the satans are chained up and the gates of heaven are opened,¹ as the best opportunity in which to plan and make decisions about the affairs of His people.

There is a beautiful hadith from Imam al-Bāqir (a) in which the narrator has asked Imam al-Bāqir (a) about the verse ‘We sent it down on a blessed night.’² Imam (a) replied:

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ وَهِيَ فِي كُلِّ سَنَةٍ فِي شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فِي الْعَشْرِ الْآخِرِ
فَلَمْ يُنْزَلِ الْقُرْآنُ إِلَّا فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ - فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ
كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ

It is the night of Qadr (destiny). Every year this night is during the last ten days in the month of Ramaḍān.³ The Qur’an was not revealed

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 95. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

قال رسول الله (ص): أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ أَبْوَابَ الْجَنَّةِ فِي هَذَا الشَّهْرِ مُفْتَحَةٌ فَاسْأَلُوا رَبَّكُمْ أَنْ لَا يُغْلِقَهَا عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَبْوَابَ النَّارِ مَغْلَقَةٌ فَاسْأَلُوا رَبَّكُمْ أَنْ لَا يُفْتَحَهَا عَلَيْكُمْ وَالشَّيَاطِينُ مَغْلُوبَةٌ فَاسْأَلُوا رَبَّكُمْ أَنْ لَا يُسَلِّطَهَا عَلَيْكُمْ.

² Qur’an 44:3.

³ We discussed it in the previous chapter that some hadith mention the last ten nights whilst others say the 19th, 21st or 23rd and others say the 21st or 23rd.

except on the night of Qadr. Allah has said:
'Every definitive matter is resolved in it.'¹

Then Imam (a) said:

يُقَدَّرُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ يَكُونُ فِي تِلْكَ السَّنَةِ إِلَى مِثْلِهَا مِنْ
قَابِلٍ خَيْرٍ وَشَرٍّ طَاعَةٍ وَمَعْصِيَةٍ وَمَوْلُودٍ وَأَجَلٍ أَوْ رِزْقٍ

During the night of Qadr all things of good or evil, obedience or disobedience, birth or death, or sustenance that are to take place in the year up to the next night of Qadr are measured [and determined].

Then the narrator asked about the meaning of the verse, '*The Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months*'² and Imam (a) replied:

الْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ فِيهَا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَأَنْوَاعِ الْخَيْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ
الْعَمَلِ فِي أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ لَيْسَ فِيهَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

Righteous deeds like prayer (*ṣalāt*), *zakāt* and other form of good deeds performed in the night of Qadr are better than the same deeds done in one thousand months wherein the night of Qadr does not exist.

Then there is a beautiful sentence which seems to offer almost too much reward to us. The Imam (a) said:

¹ Qur'an 44:4.

² Qur'an 97:3.

وَلَوْ لَا مَا يُضَاعَفُ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَا بَلَّغُوا وَلَكِنَّ
 اللَّهُ يُضَاعَفُ لَهُمُ الْحَسَنَاتِ بِحَبْنًا

Had it not been that Allah (swt) multiples [the rewards] for believers, they would not have been able to reach [their destination in their spiritual journey or goals], but Allah multiples for them their good deeds [rewards] due to their love for us.¹

This means that everyone would have died on the way to the destination (proximity to Allah (swt)) as no one would be able to reach it because they do not have enough provisions. Allah (swt) knows this, so He asks us to do something to give Him a ground to come and help us by increasing our reward.

We should ask ourselves how much distance there is between us and Allah (swt) and how much provision we need for an eternal life. For example, if we want to go from London to Birmingham, we only need a little provision. If however we want to go from London to Mecca or Medina, we need more, and if we want to go from here to the moon or Mars we will need even more. Therefore, imagine how much provision we would need if we want to go towards Allah (swt)! As Allah (swt) and eternal life are infinite, we need an unimaginable amount of provisions so that when they are divided by infinity something still remains, because of course every number

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, pp. 157-158.

divided by infinity becomes an insignificantly small amount. Thus, it is only Allah's generosity that comes to rescue us. When we have love for the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a), then Allah (swt) helps us and allows us to join the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a).

So the night of Qadr is a very special opportunity and is the best offer given by Allah (swt) throughout the whole year because it is the best time for worshipping, praying and performing good deeds. If we want to do something good, we should make the intention during the night of Qadr, even if we are actually going to do it later on in the year.

Who is the Spirit?

In this part we are going to explain what happens when angels and the Spirit descend during that night and what do they do. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا

In it the angels and the Spirit descend. (97:4)

There is a disagreement about who the 'Spirit' is. Some scholars say that this is Gabriel, the same angel which brings the Qur'an.¹ However according to some hadith the 'Spirit'

¹ Ṭūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 10, p. 386; also Fakhr Rāzī in his book *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 32, p. 234 after mentioning different views in this regard says:

(*Rūḥ*) is different from Gabriel and the *Rūḥ* is not one of the angels.¹ For example, a person asked Imam al-Šādiq (a): ‘Is this Spirit the same as Gabriel?’ The Imam (a) said:

جِبْرِيلُ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالرُّوحُ خَلْقٌ أَعْظَمُ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ
يَقُولُ «تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ»

Gabriel is one of the angels and the Spirit is a creation [of Allah] which is greater than Gabriel. Does not Allah say that ‘*angels and the spirit descend*’?²

Gabriel is one of the angels although an archangel and the best of them. The Spirit is different from angels and greater than them. So this creation of Allah (swt), which is greater than Gabriel, comes along with the angels from Heaven, from the kingdom of Allah (swt), the *malakūt*, and they bring all the affairs for the coming year.

Where do they descend?

The place of descent of the Spirit and the angels is not a geographical location or indeed a physical issue. Logically they must choose the highest place in this world to descend to. In this world, where is the highest place? Where is the highest

و الأصح أن الروح هاهنا جبريل و تخصيصه بالذكر لزيادة شرفه كأنه تعالى
يقول الملائكة في كفة و الروح في كفة.

¹ Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muhammad Muḥsin, *Tafsīr al-Sāfi*, vol. 5, p. 353.

² Šaffār, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt fī Faḍā’il Āl Muḥammad (a)*, vol. 1, p. 442.

position? In this world, the highest place is the heart of the *hujjah* of Allah who is living, so he is in this world. As mentioned in many hadith, his heart is the place to which they descend.¹

As we read in the Qur'an it is possible that the angels will come down to any believer who remains persistent. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

'Those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah!' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised.' (41:30)

We do not actually hear the words of the angels, but they come to us and address us, telling us not to be fearful or sad because Allah (swt) is pleased with us and has accepted us, so everything is taken care of and we should not worry. This brings incredible peace to us.

The concept that the Spirit descends to the heart of the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) also has its roots in the Qur'an. For example,

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 250, no. 7.

the Qur'an talks about the messengers of Allah (swt) that the Spirit descends to:

رَفِيعُ الدَّرَجَاتِ ذُو الْعَرْشِ يُلْقِي الرُّوحَ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ

Raiser of ranks, Lord of the Throne, He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes. (40:15)¹

Thus, the Spirit (*Ruh*) comes down to people. In every age there is one person who is in the highest position and who is the closest person to Allah (swt) at that time, the *hujjah*. He would be the host and would receive the angels and the Spirit. In the time of the Prophet Muhammad (s), he was the *hujjah* and after that his successors one after another; therefore, in our time, it is Imam Mahdī (a) who will be the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) till the end of the time.

¹ Tabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 17, p. 318:

و قوله: «يُلْقِي الرُّوحَ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ» إشارة إلى أمر الرسالة التي من شأنها الإنذار، و تقبيد الروح بقوله: «مَنْ أَمْرِهِ» دليل على أن المراد بها الروح التي ذكرها في قوله: «قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي» (17:85) و هي التي تصاحب ملائكة الوحي كما يشير إليه قوله: «يُنْزِلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرُوا» (16:2) فالمراد بإلقاء الروح على من يشاء تنزيلها مع ملائكة الوحي عليه، و المراد بقوله: «مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ» الرسل الذين اصطفاهم الله لرسالته.

There are some hadith which explain the details about what happens to the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) during the night of Qadr, particularly with reference to the type of knowledge he receives and why this is different from the rest of the year.

Imam Ṣādiq (a) quoted from Imam Ali (a) that two people visited the Prophet (s) while the Prophet (s) was reciting Surah al-Qadr. The Prophet (s) was in a very special condition, deeply humbled and crying a great deal. When they saw the Prophet (s) reciting Surah al-Qadr in such a condition, they said: ‘Why have you become so soft hearted and so affected by this Surah?’ The Prophet (s) said:

لَمَّا رَأَتْ عَيْنِي وَوَعَى قَلْبِي

Because of what my eye has seen, and my heart
has grasped.

This means that the Prophet (s) had understood something about the night of Qadr which had made his heart very soft because he was deeply moved by it and it brought tears to his eyes. Then the Prophet (s) indicated Imam Ali (a) and said:

وَلَمَّا يَرَى قَلْبُ هَذَا مِنْ بَعْدِي

And also for what the heart of this [person]
him is going to see after me.

Then they asked the Prophet (s), ‘What have you seen and what is he going to see?’ So the Prophet (s) wrote on the ground:

تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ

In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every affair. (97:4)

Then the Prophet (s) said: ‘When Allah (swt) says “*every affair*,” is there anything which is not included?’ They said: ‘No.’ Then the Prophet (s) said:

هَلْ تَعْلَمَانِ مِنَ الْمُنْزَلِ إِلَيْهِ بِذَلِكَ

Do you know who is the one to whom all affairs are brought down?¹

They replied: ‘To you, the messenger of Allah.’ The Prophet (s) said: ‘Yes.’ Then he said: ‘Will the night of Qadr come again after I am gone?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ The Prophet (s) said: ‘Is it going to happen again in the night of Qadr that all affairs come down?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ Then the Prophet (s) said: ‘To whom?’ They said: ‘We don’t know.’ Then the Prophet (s) put his hand on the head of Imam Ali (a) and took hold of it and said:

إِنْ لَمْ تَدْرِيَا فَادْرِيَا هُوَ هَذَا مِنْ بَعْدِي

If you do not know, now you should learn.
This is going to happen to him after me.²

¹ The Prophet (s) was trying to explain to whom the angels and the Spirit they bring all affairs to submit them to him.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 249, no. 5. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

In another hadith, Imam Javād (a) said that Imam Ali (a) told Ibn ‘Abbās:

الْقَدْرُ فِي كُلِّ سَنَةٍ وَإِنَّهُ يَنْزِلُ فِي تِلْكَ اللَّيْلَةِ أَمْرُ السَّنَةِ وَلِذَلِكَ
الْأَمْرُ وَلَا بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص)

The night of Qadr is in every year and the affairs of that year come down in that night. And for this there are people who are in charge after the Prophet (s).

Then Ibn ‘Abbās asked: ‘Who are those people (who are going to be in charge after the Prophet (s))?’ Imam Ali (a) said:

أَنَا وَاحِدَ عَشَرَ مِنْ صُلَيْبِ أُمَّةٍ مُّحَدَّثُونَ

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: كَانَ عَلِيٌّ (ع) كَثِيرًا مَا يَقُولُ: «مَا اجْتَمَعَ النَّبِيُّ وَ
الْعَدُوُّ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) وَهُوَ يَقْرَأُ: «إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ» بِتَخَشُّعٍ وَبُكَاءٍ.»
فَيَقُولَانِ: «مَا أَشَدَّ رِقَّتَكَ لِهَذِهِ السُّورَةِ؟» فَيَقُولُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): «لَمَّا رَأَتْ
عَيْنِي وَوَعَى قَلْبِي وَلَمَّا يَرَى قَلْبُ هَذَا مِنْ بَعْدِي.» فَيَقُولَانِ: «وَمَا الَّذِي رَأَيْتَ
وَمَا الَّذِي يَرَى؟» قَالَ: «فَيَكْتُبُ لهُمَا فِي التُّرَابِ تَنْزِيلُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا
يَأْذِنُ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ.» قَالَ: ثُمَّ يَقُولُ: «هَلْ بَقِيَ شَيْءٌ بَعْدَ قَوْلِهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
«كُلُّ أَمْرٍ؟» فَيَقُولَانِ: «لا.» فَيَقُولُ: «هَلْ تَعْلَمَانِ مِنَ الْمَنْزِلِ إِلَيْهِ بِذَلِكَ؟»
فَيَقُولَانِ: «أَنْتَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ.» فَيَقُولُ: «نَعَمْ.» فَيَقُولُ: «هَلْ تَكُونُ لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ
مِنْ بَعْدِي؟» فَيَقُولَانِ: «نَعَمْ.» قَالَ: فَيَقُولُ: «فَهَلْ يَنْزِلُ ذَلِكَ الْأَمْرُ فِيهَا؟»
فَيَقُولَانِ: «نَعَمْ.» قَالَ: «فَيَقُولُ: إِلَى مَنْ؟» فَيَقُولَانِ: «لَا نَدْرِي.» فَيَأْخُذُ بِرَأْسِي
وَيَقُولُ: «إِنْ لَمْ تَدْرِيَا فَادْرِيَا هُوَ هَذَا مِنْ بَعْدِي.»

Me and then eleven Imams from my progeny
and these are the people who are *muḥaddath*.¹

What happens to the *hujjah* in this particular night?

Some hadith even tell us further details about what happens to the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) on that particular night.

Imam Ṣādiq (a) says that on the morning after the first night of Qadr after the demise of the Prophet (s), which was the first night of Qadr of Imam Ali's imamate, Imam Ali (a) said to the people:

سَلُونِي فَوَاللَّهِ لِأُخْبِرَنَّكُمْ بِمَا يَكُونُ إِلَى ثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ وَسِتِّينَ يَوْمًا مِنَ
الذَّرِّ فَمَا دُونَهَا فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ثُمَّ لِأُخْبِرَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ لَا يَتَكَلَّفُ
وَلَا بَرَأَى وَلَا بِادْعَاءٍ فِي عِلْمٍ إِلَّا مِنْ عِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَتَعْلِيمِهِ وَاللَّهُ
لَا يَسْأَلُنِي أَهْلُ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَا أَهْلُ الْإِنْجِيلِ وَلَا أَهْلُ الزَّبُورِ وَلَا
أَهْلُ الْفُرْقَانِ إِلَّا فَرَّقْتُ بَيْنَ كُلِّ أَهْلٍ كِتَابٍ بِحُكْمٍ مَا فِي كِتَابِهِمْ

Ask me. By Allah, [if you ask me today,] I will certainly inform you about what is going to happen in the next 360 days. It can be about something as small as a particle, or bigger than that or smaller than that. And when I am going to answer, it is not going to be difficult or a struggle for me. Nor am I going to just give my

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 532-533, no. 11.

Muḥaddath means that they do not receive revelation in a prophetic sense but that they are inspired by Allah (swt) and receive knowledge from Him which is not acquired through learning from a teacher or in a school.

opinion or just claim to know. This is from Allah's knowledge which Allah is giving to me. By Allah, those who follow the Gospels or the Torah or the Psalms or the Qur'an do not ask me about anything unless I am going to explain to each people of a book what the ruling of their own book would be.

Then that person asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) whether when the Imams (a) receive some knowledge in the night of Qadr, they disclose all of it throughout the year or whether they keep some of it to themselves. The Imam (a) replied that it depends. If they come to know through what they are taught in that night that that they should keep some things hidden from the enemies, they will then keep silent as silence can [sometimes] be stronger than speech.¹

¹ Ṣaffār, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt fī Faḍā'il Āl Muḥammad (s)*, vol. 1, p. 223. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): قَالَ عَلِيٌّ (ع) فِي صَبْحِ أَوَّلِ لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص): «سَلُونِي! فَوَاللَّهِ لأُخْبِرَنَّكُمْ بِمَا يَكُونُ إِلَى ثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ وَسِتِّينَ يَوْمًا مِنَ الدَّرِّ فَمَا دُونَهَا فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ثُمَّ لأُخْبِرَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ لَا يَتَكَلَّفُ وَلَا يَرَأَى وَلَا يَدْعَا فِي عِلْمٍ إِلَّا مِنْ عِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَتَعْلِيمِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْأَلُنِي أَهْلُ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَا أَهْلُ الْإِنْجِيلِ وَلَا أَهْلُ الزَّبُورِ وَلَا أَهْلُ الْفُرْقَانِ إِلَّا فَرَّقْتُ بَيْنَ كُلِّ أَهْلٍ كِتَابٍ بِحُكْمٍ مَا فِي كِتَابِهِمْ». قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): «رَأَيْتُ مَا تَعْلَمُونَهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ هَلْ تَمْضِي تِلْكَ السَّنَةُ وَبَقِيَ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ لَمْ تَتَكَلَّمُوا بِهِ؟» قَالَ: «لَا وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَوْ أَنَّهُ فِيمَا عِلْمِنَا فِي تِلْكَ اللَّيْلَةِ أَنْ أَنْصِتُوا لَأَعْدَانَكُمْ لَنَصْتَنَّا فَالْنَصْتُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْكَلَامِ.»

So the hadith explains that the Imam of that time receives special knowledge from Allah (swt) and knows all the details of events to come in the following twelve months.

There is another hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a) which goes even deeper and further by explaining that the nature of this knowledge is very special and different from the kind of knowledge which they receive outside the night of Qadr. The hadith reads as follows:

The heart which is able to see what is happening in the night of Qadr is a very great heart.

Then Imam (a) was asked by someone to explain how it works. So Imam (a) explained that on the night of Qadr, knowledge is not simply passed on in an ordinary way. Knowledge is written with the ink of light on the opened heart of that person. This does not refer to their physical heart but rather it means that Allah (swt) gives them the capacity and then all the knowledge will be written down on their hearts with ink made from light. Therefore, the heart of the *ḥujjah* of Allah (swt) becomes like a book.

Thus, later on, after the night of Qadr, when the *ḥujjah* of Allah wants to know something, he just needs to refer to his heart because all the necessary information has already been imprinted on his heart.

Nowadays, in light of modern technology, we can much more easily and better understand how it is possible to contain vast amounts of information in a very small object such as a microchip. However even that is not really comparable with the case of God's *hujjah*, because the storage of knowledge here is not through physical means and is very different to what happens in a computer but at least we now have something which makes it much easier for us to imagine the concept than it was for people at that time. For them, it was perhaps unthinkable to imagine how even a single book can be transferred from one place to another in few minutes, let alone seconds, whereas for us it is much easier to understand and perhaps it will become even easier in the future as we surely will witness more advances in the transfer of information.

Then that person asked Imam (a) further: 'Does the same thing happen to the heart at other occasions outside the night of Qadr so that the heart is opened and then information is written by light?' The Imam (a) said: 'No. Throughout the rest of the year, Allah (swt) inspires the knowledge into his heart.'¹

¹ Şaffār, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt fī Faḍā'il Āl Muḥammad (s)*, vol. 1, p. 223-224. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَبَّاسٍ بْنِ حَرِيشٍ أَنَّهُ عَرَّضَهُ عَلَى أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع) فَأَقْرَبَهُ قَالَ
فَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): إِنَّ الْقَلْبَ الَّذِي يُعَايِنُ مَا يَنْزِلُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ لِعَظِيمِ
الشَّأْنِ. قُلْتُ: وَكَيْفَ ذَاكَ يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: لِيُشَقُّ وَاللَّهِ بَطْنُ ذَلِكَ الرَّجُلِ

So, acquiring knowledge in the night of Qadr is like a form of surgery for the *hujjah* whilst throughout the rest of the year it is a very quick form of transfer.

Preparations for a successful night of Qadr

Preparations for a successful night of Qadr are needed throughout the year. We understand that the night of Qadr is a very special event and so the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) would be carefully preparing himself to be ready for such an event because it is something which not only affects him but also affects humanity as a whole. He is going to receive all the knowledge about humanity; however, if it were simply a matter of knowledge and information being passed on and received by him without him being able to do anything about it, it would be a very passive event. However, this is not the whole story. At the same time the *hujjah* of Allah (swt) prays hard to Allah (swt) before the decisions are fixed so that people will receive the best decisions which will give the best outcome for their affairs.

ثُمَّ يُؤْخَذُ إِلَى قَلْبِهِ وَ يُكْتُبُ عَلَيْهِ بِمِدَادِ النُّورِ فَذَلِكَ جَمِيعُ الْعِلْمِ ثُمَّ يَكُونُ الْقَلْبُ مُصْحَفًا لِلْبَصَرِ وَ يَكُونُ اللِّسَانُ مُتَرْجِمًا لِلْأُذُنِ إِذَا أَرَادَ ذَلِكَ الرَّجُلُ عِلْمَ شَيْءٍ نَظَرَ بِبَصَرِهِ وَ قَلْبُهُ فَكَأَنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ فِي كِتَابٍ. قُلْتُ لَهُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ وَ كَيْفَ الْعِلْمُ فِي غَيْرِهَا أَيْشَقُّ الْقَلْبُ فِيهِ أَمْ لَا؟ قَالَ: لَا يَشَقُّ لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُلْهِمُ ذَلِكَ الرَّجُلَ بِالْقَذْفِ فِي الْقَلْبِ حَتَّى يُخِيلَ إِلَى الْأُذُنِ أَنَّهُ تَكَلَّمَ بِمَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ [مِنْ] عِلْمِهِ وَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ.

Therefore, we need to consider our role in this. When Imam (a) is praying so hard on our behalf and working so hard so that he can get the best for us, should we sleep or merely carry on with our normal life? For example, imagine what someone would do if a barrister is taking their case to court and is trying to collect all the evidence in support of the case. Should that person go on holiday or instead help the barrister in any way they can by trying to gather everything they possibly can? First of all, they need to prove that they are a good and sincere person of good will and should work hard to do this. If they have a bad record, they must do something to override that. Finally they could pray to Allah (swt) to guide and help the barrister.

Therefore, in this special night, we have to be extra alert. However, if we simply wait all year for the night of Qadr to arrive, it will be too late because we have to work in advance prior to the night of Qadr so that everything is ready by that time and works out in the best way possible. We have to start our preparations even before the month of Ramaḍān. This is why the months of Rajab and Sha'bān are considered so important, for people should at least start preparing themselves for the night of Qadr from the beginning of Rajab.

Imam Ali (a) told us that we cannot be like him because his level of detachment from *dunyā* is something that we could not cope with, but nevertheless he (a) says:

وَلَكِنْ أَعِينُونِي بِوَرَعٍ وَاجْتِهَادٍ وَعِفَّةٍ وَسَدَادٍ

But at least help me in piety, exertion/making efforts, chastity and uprightness.¹

Perhaps this means that as our Imam (a), he feels responsible for us and wants to help us. He wants to ask Allah (swt) to be pleased with his people, but we also have to help him. We cannot just be indulging ourselves in whatever we want and then expect the Imam (a) to be able to do everything for us. We have to work hard and then we can hope and expect that the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) will help us.

So, we have understood two qualities of the night of Qadr, *barakah* and *salām*, and introduced two events, one of which is an ongoing event which occurs each year and one which happened during one particular night of Qadr, this being the revelation of the Qur'an.

¹ Imām Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubhī Şālîh, letter 45, p. 417.

Chapter 6

The Qur'anic revelation involved actual wording



Introduction

After discussing the month of Ramaḍān and the night of Qadr as the timing of the descent of the Qur'an, now we are going to study different characteristics of the Qur'anic revelation. In this chapter we mention different pieces of evidence to explain that the Qur'anic revelation involved actual wording which means that when the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet (s) it was not mere concepts; that is, it did not just consist of meanings from Allah (swt) which the Prophet (s) put into his own words. The Qur'anic revelation involved wording.

A wrong idea about the words of the Qur'an

Sometimes, when Allah (swt) communicated with people, it did not involve wording. For example, one way of differentiating between a divine saying (*al-hadith al-qudsi*) and the Qur'an is this. A divine saying is from Allah (swt) and the receiver is a prophecy, but it is not part of the Scripture like the Torah or the Gospel or the Qur'an. A divine saying represents some kind of communication between Allah (swt)

and His Prophet (s), by which the Prophet receives only the meaning or the idea but expresses it in his own selection of words. However, in the case of the Qur'an, the selection of the words was not made by Prophet Muhammad (s). Both the meanings and the words are selected by Allah (swt).

Prophet Muhammad's hadith also are different from the Qur'an. After rigorous study of the hadith of the Prophet (s) and then comparison of them with the Qur'an, anyone who is familiar with the Arabic language can easily ascertain that, compared to the Qur'an, these hadith are completely different. The hadith of the Prophet (s) are very special. He has the beautiful quality of speaking in a very eloquent and yet simple manner. His hadith are very beautiful, very concise, and very deep. However, compared to the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet (s) are still completely different, and the way the Prophet (s) speaks and the way the Qur'an speaks are incomparable. This, by itself, shows that the wording of the Qur'an is not from the Prophet (s).

Unfortunately, especially recently, some people have suggested that the Qur'an is only some concepts revealed to the Prophet (s), and it was then the Prophet (s) himself who found the words to express them.

This idea very much resembles and perhaps is even influenced by the Christian understanding of the Bible. The mainstream Christian view today is that the four gospels are not the direct

words of Allah (swt). They believe they were written by authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit about the Word of God, who they believe to be Jesus, and so the four gospels are simply reports about the mission and ministry of Jesus, about what he said and did. However, they do not believe that these four gospels are the words of God in the literal sense which we mean by words of Allah (swt). Indeed, in Christianity, the Word of Allah is only Jesus. They do not believe that there was any revelation in the form of some words or a book. They believe such things were for previous eras such as at the time of the Old Testament. They say that when the time of Jesus came, Allah (swt) changed His plan and, instead of sending prophets with revelation, Allah (swt) revealed Himself to mankind by sending Jesus. Thus, the Word was made flesh. So, the four Gospels are not the literal words of God but rather are reports about the Word of God. They are sacred because it is believed that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

However, then a problem occurs, because there are differences between some of the reports which actually conflict with one another. So the question then arises about how the Holy Spirit could inspire four people if there are differences in what they wrote, especially when one of the gospels, the Gospel of John, is very different from the other three, although all four are considered to be the canonical gospels. To resolve this, they say that only the overall meaning was inspired by the Holy Spirit, not the wording. The wording

was the authors' own choice based on their knowledge and on the culture and scientific information of that era, according to which they transformed the meaning into the form of words. Therefore, for example, it is not surprising that these gospels may contain inconsistencies or some information which is scientifically incorrect, because these were merely additions to the inspired ideas.

Unfortunately, some have tried to apply this idea to the Qur'an as well and have said that the Qur'an is also a combination of two realities. One is a reality which is divine, which is coming from Allah (swt) and is sacred and does not change. However, then they say that it has another aspect which is human and was added by the Prophet (s). They say he used the theological, conceptual, and philosophical framework that would make sense to the people and put those divine meanings into words according to the culture and scientific information of that time and according to the language of his society. They conclude that it is therefore not divine in its final form and can change.

Sometimes they even say that if the Prophet (s) had spoken another language, he would have chosen another language instead of Arabic for the Qur'an. Strangely they also sometimes say that if the Prophet (s) had lived longer, the Qur'an would have increased in volume.

This sort of attitude – believing that the Qur'an is only the words of the Prophet (s) used by him to express various meanings – leads to many problems. People can then claim that all the rulings of the Qur'an which they are not pleased with are due to this human aspect of it.

If someone does not agree with them, they can claim that these ideas are not from the divine aspect of the Qur'an, but rather from the Prophet (s) and according to the culture of the society at that time. They will say that the Prophet (s) received some brilliant ideas from Allah (swt), but when he wanted to present these ideas, he used the current culture as a context, and therefore now we should remove those additional elements so that we have the core of the Qur'an which is then something that we can implement today. This attitude has many implications, and indeed because of such implications, it is possible that people say such things to justify what they themselves want to do.

The Qur'an consists of actual words from Allah (swt)

In this regard, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes:

The general belief of Muslims concerning the revelation, based on the Qur'an, is that the text of the Qur'an is the actual speech of Allah transmitted to the Prophet by one of His chosen angels. The name of this angel, or heavenly being, is Gabriel or the Faithful Spirit (Rūḥ al-Amīn). He transmitted the word of

Allah over a period of twenty-three years to the Prophet (s).¹ He would bring the divine instructions to the Prophet (s), who would relate them faithfully to the people using the same words in the form of a verse.²

The main reason for this belief is the Qur'an itself. When we look at the Qur'an itself, it is very clear that what was revealed to the Prophet (s) included the words and was not merely ideas and meanings. What follows are different types of evidence from the Qur'an for this idea.

Evidence from the Qur'an

The idea of challenge (*taḥaddī*)

One of the ideas that we find in the Qur'an is the idea of challenge (*taḥaddī*). Allah (swt) asks the Prophet (s) to challenge the pagans who did not believe in the Qur'an to produce a book similar to the Qur'an. The Qur'an says:

فَلْيَأْتُوا بِحَدِيثٍ مِّثْلِهِ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ

Let them bring a discourse like it (52:34)

¹ Of course, when we say twenty-three years, we mean from the time the revelation began until it ended. The entire twenty-three years was not constantly a time of receiving *waḥy*. There was a period of three years when Prophet Muhammad (s) was not receiving *waḥy* and then it resumed once again.

² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *Qur'ān dar Islām*, p. 89.

The Arabs at that time were masters of eloquence. They very much focussed on and were actually very proud of their language. Poems were so important for them that there were seven poems hanging on the wall of the Ka'bah, known as *al-mu'allaqāt al-sab'*. They used to gather and recite poetry. They had a very good command of language and at the same time had very strong memories. So in response to their claim that the Qur'an was not a divine revelation, the Prophet was asked by Allah (swt) to challenge them to produce a book like it. Instead of going into battle and fighting wars and such like, they could have produced something like the Qur'an and proved their point. However, despite their attempts, they were unable to do so.

After this, Allah (swt) asked the Prophet to tell them to produce just ten chapters like those of the Qur'an:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ وَادْعُوا مَنْ
اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Do they say, 'He has fabricated it?' Say, 'Then bring ten chapters like it, fabricated, and invoke whomever you can, besides Allah, should you be truthful.' (11:13)

When they could not do this, they were asked to bring just one chapter and yet they could not:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُوْرَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ

And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a surah like it, and invoke your helpers besides Allah, should you be truthful. (2:23)

Even after fourteen centuries, no one has been able to bring something similar to the Qur'an and meet the challenge. Sometimes some people tried to meet the challenge, but they put themselves to shame and made themselves targets of ridicule.¹

Thus, the Qur'an was so special that they had no choice other than to believe in it or use fallacies and false claims to push people away from it. When they could not produce something like the Qur'an, they were not ready to admit that they had failed to match the Qur'an because it was not the word of a

¹ History has preserved some samples of those pathetic attempts. Musaylimah (who posed as a prophet) wrote these words in reply to Surah al-Fil (the Elephant):

الفيل، ما الفيل، وما أدريك ما الفيل، له ذنب وبيل وخرطوم طويل

The elephant, what is the elephant! And what will make you understand what the elephant is? It has an unwholesome tail, and a long trunk.

In another attempt in reply to Surah al-Fāṭiḥah, we find:

الحمد للرحمان، رب الاكوان، الملك الديان لك العباد، وبك المستعان، اهدنا صراط الايمان

All praise is due to the Beneficent, the Lord of the beings, the King, the Subduer. For You is the worship, and from You is the help. Guide us to the path of faith.

All attempts to meet this challenge suffered the same fate. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 68-69.

human being. So, sometimes they said that the Prophet was a magician who had performed some magic to produce the Qur'an in the way people could not match it and could not resist its attraction.

Some other times they used to say that he was mad. However, this is very interesting as it brings together two contradictory things. If the Prophet (s) were mad, then he would have said things which were irrational and nonsensical. It is impossible for someone to be mad and at the same time produce a work that the best experts in the field cannot reproduce. It is clear that calling the Prophet (s) a magician or a madman and so on were merely excuses which they used as reasons for not being able to produce anything like the Qur'an.

People were asked not to listen to the Qur'an especially when they were performing *tawāf*, which was a ritual that had remained in practice from the time of Prophet Ibrahim. They were advising each other to be very careful when doing *tawāf* and not to listen if Muhammad (s) was there reciting the Qur'an. They suggested that people should either go at another time or put cotton in their ears. Why would there be such a strong impact from recitation of this Book, so much so that people were being advised against even listening to it, if it was merely the words of the Prophet (s) and not the Word of Allah (swt)?

There is also the story about As'ad ibn Zurārah¹ who was performing *ṭawāf* and told himself that it was irrational to put cotton in his ears to avoid listening to the recitation. He reasoned that if something acceptable and reasonable was being said, then he should follow it. So, he removed the cotton material from his ears, listened to the Qur'anic recitation, and was convinced of the truth of it, so he embraced Islam.²

Some of the leaders of the Quraysh themselves were so interested in the Qur'an that they used to go at night to hide themselves behind the house of the Prophet (s) and listen to the Prophet (s) when he was reciting the Qur'an. During the day, they could not go and listen because people would have followed them and realised what they were doing, so they used to hide outside the house of the Prophet (s) at night to listen to the Qur'an. One night, as dawn was breaking and it was getting light, they caught sight of each other. They realised it would be very detrimental for them if people came to know that they had asked them not to listen to Muhammad (s) but then they had spent the whole night listening to him. So, they promised each other that they would not come there anymore. However, the next evening each person thought

¹ He was from Medina, the tribe of Khazraj.

² Later on, he asked the Prophet (s) to send someone to Medina to teach them the Qur'an. Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *I'lām al-Warā bi A'lām al-Hudā*, pp. 55-57.

that the others were not going, so they themselves went again. They met each other there and once again promised not to go in future. This happened three times, and then they decided that this would definitely be the last time.¹

The four best Arab experts in rhetoric together resolved to produce something similar to the Qur'an. After one year they met again. Each of them was stuck at a certain verse and could not proceed any further.² Therefore, those experts in Arabic

¹ 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, Jamāl al-Dīn, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah li Ibn Hishām*, vol. 1, p. 315-317.

² Ṭabrisī, Aḥmad ibn Ali, *al-Iḥtijāj 'Alā Ahl al-Lijāj*, vol. 2, p. 377. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

وَعَنْ هِشَامِ بْنِ الْحَكَمِ قَالَ: «اجْتَمَعَ ابْنُ أَبِي الْعَوَّاءِ وَ أَبُو شَاكِرِ الدِّبْيَانِيُّ
الزَّنْدِيقُ وَ عَبْدِ الْمَلِكِ الْبَصْرِيُّ وَ ابْنُ الْمُقَفَّعِ عِنْدَ بَيْتِ اللَّهِ الْحَرَامِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ
بِالْحَاجِّ وَ يَطْعَنُونَ بِالْقُرْآنِ. فَقَالَ ابْنُ أَبِي الْعَوَّاءِ: «تَعَالَوْا نَنْقُضْ كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنَّا
رُبْعَ الْقُرْآنِ وَ مِيعَادُنَا مِنْ قَابِلٍ فِي هَذَا الْمَوْضِعِ نَجْتَمِعُ فِيهِ وَ قَدْ نَقَضْنَا الْقُرْآنَ
كُلَّهُ فَإِنْ فِي نَقْضِ الْقُرْآنِ إِبْطَالُ نُبُوءَةِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ فِي إِبْطَالِ نُبُوءَتِهِ إِبْطَالُ الْإِسْلَامِ وَ
إِبْتَاتُ مَا نَحْنُ فِيهِ.» فَاتَّفَقُوا عَلَى ذَلِكَ وَ افْتَرَقُوا فَلَمَّا كَانَ مِنْ قَابِلٍ اجْتَمَعُوا
عِنْدَ بَيْتِ اللَّهِ الْحَرَامِ. فَقَالَ ابْنُ أَبِي الْعَوَّاءِ: «أَنَا أَنَا فَمَفْكَرٌ مِنْذُ افْتَرَقْنَا فِي هَذِهِ
الْآيَةِ (فَلَمَّا اسْتَيْسَسُوا مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا) فَمَا أَقْدَرُ أَنْ أَضْمَّ إِلَيْهَا فِي فَصَاحَتِهَا وَ
جَمِيعِ مَعَانِيهَا شَيْئًا فَشَغَلْتَنِي هَذِهِ الْآيَةُ عَنِ التَّفَكُّرِ فِيمَا سِوَاهَا.» فَقَالَ عَبْدُ
الْمَلِكِ: «وَأَنَا مِنْذُ فَارَقْتُكُمْ مَفْكَرٌ فِي هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ (يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضَرْبٌ مَثَلٌ
فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَ لَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَ
إِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمْ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَ الْمَطْلُوبُ) وَ لَمْ أَقْدِرْ
عَلَى الْإِتْيَانِ بِمَثَلِهَا.» فَقَالَ أَبُو شَاكِرٍ: «وَأَنَا مِنْذُ فَارَقْتُكُمْ مَفْكَرٌ فِي هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ

rhetoric realised the preciousness the Qur'an better than anyone else. They had enjoyed and were mesmerised by masterpieces of the Arabic language throughout their whole lives, but when faced with the Qur'an they knew that it was not the word of a human being. This by itself shows that the Qur'an was not revealed to the Prophet (s) only as ideas and meanings and then he used his own words to express them.

The titles used in the Qur'an for the Qur'an

Here we refer predominantly to those verses in which the Qur'an is described.

a. Qur'an: The term 'Qur'an' literally means 'something which is readable.' Thus, it must consist of words. In the first instance of divine revelation to the Prophet (s), he was asked:

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا لَمْ أَقْدِرْ عَلَى الْإِتْيَانِ بِمِثْلِهَا. «فَقَالَ ابْنُ الْمُقَفَّعِ: «يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ لَيْسَ مِنْ جِنْسِ كَلَامِ الْبَشَرِ وَأَنَا مِنْذُ فَارَقْتُكُمْ مُفَكِّرٌ فِي هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ (وَقِيلَ يَا أَرْضُ ابْلَعِي مَاءَكَ وَ يَا سَّمَاءُ أَقْلَعِي وَ غِيضَ الْمَاءِ وَ قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَ اسْتَوَتْ عَلَى الْجُودَى وَ قِيلَ بُعْدُ لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ) وَ لَمْ أَبْلُغْ غَايَةَ الْمَعْرِفَةِ بِهَا وَ لَمْ أَقْدِرْ عَلَى الْإِتْيَانِ بِمِثْلِهَا.» قَالَ هِشَامُ بْنُ الْحَكَمِ: فَبَيْنَمَا هُمْ فِي ذَلِكَ إِذْ مَرَّ بِهِمْ جَعْفَرُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الصَّادِقُ (ع) فَقَالَ: «قُلْ لِّئِنْ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَ لَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيراً» فَظَنَرَ الْقَوْمُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ وَ قَالُوا: «لَئِنْ كَانَ لِلْإِسْلَامِ حَقِيقَةٌ لَمَا انْتَهَتْ أَمْرُ وَصِيَّةِ مُحَمَّدٍ إِلَّا إِلَى جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ اللَّهُ مَا رَأَيْنَاهُ قَطُّ إِلَّا هَبْنَاهُ وَ اقْشَعَرَّتْ جُلُودُنَا لِهَيْبَتِهِ» ثُمَّ تَفَرَّقُوا مُقِرِّينَ بِالْعَجْزِ».

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ... اقْرَأْ وَ رَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ
بِالْقَلَمِ

*Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher
Who created.... Read! And your Lord is Most
Bountiful He Who taught by the Pen. (96:1-4)*

This shows that what was revealed was a matter of words that could be read or recited. In Arabic, the root *q-r-'* means to read or to recite, and this is only applicable when a text or script is involved.

b. *Kitāb* (Book) or its cognates: *Kitāb* means ‘something that is written’ (*maktūb*). For example, the Qur’an says:

كِتَابٌ أُحْكِمَتْ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ
[This is] a Book, whose signs [verses] have
been made definitive and then elaborated,
from One [who is] all-Wise, all-Aware. (11:1)

You cannot refer to ideas as a book; rather, it is more likely to be words that express an idea. Of course, when we are not speaking accurately, we say: ‘I wrote down my idea on a piece of paper.’ But in reality, you cannot write your idea on a piece of paper. You have to find words that can convey your idea, and then those words can be put on a piece of paper.

c. *Ṣuḥuf*: In the Qur’an, we have the concept of *ṣuḥuf*. In Surah 98, verses 2 and 3, Allah (swt) says:

رَسُولٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُّطَهَّرَةً فِيهَا كُتِبَ قِيمَةٌ

An apostle from Allah reciting impeccable scriptures, wherein are upright writings. (98:2-3)

Ṣuḥuf is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah*, and *ṣaḥīfah* refers to ‘something which has pages.’ Here it refers to the parts of the Qur’an.¹ Today, this term is used to refer to a newspaper.

d. **Kalām Allāh:** *Kalām* means ‘word’ or ‘speech’, and not ‘meaning.’ We read in the Qur’an:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ
ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of Allah. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know. (9:6)

e. **Qawl (speech):** The Qur’an says:

¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 20, p. 337:

والصحف جمع صحيفة وهي ما يكتب فيها، والمراد بها أجزاء القرآن النازلة وقد تكرر في كلامه تعالى إطلاق الصحف على أجزاء الكتب السماوية ومنها القرآن الكريم قال تعالى: «فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكْرَمَةٍ مَّرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ كَرَامٍ بَرَّةٍ»: عبس: 16.

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا

For we shall charge you with a weighty speech.
(73:5)

The verbs used in the Qur'an to describe how to treat it

The way in which the Qur'an is or should be treated can be understood from the following verses:

a. *Qirā'ah* and its cognates: For example, Allah (swt) says:

فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ

And when We read it, follow its reading! (75:18)

b. *Tilāwah* and its cognates: For example, we read in the Qur'an:

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

These are the signs of God which We recite for you in truth, and you are indeed one of the apostles. (2:252)

c. *Tartīl* and its cognates: The Prophet (s) was told:

وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا

and recite the Qur'an in a measured tone. (73:4)

Not only was Prophet Muhammad (s) supposed to recite the Qur'an in a measured tone, but also Allah (swt) says that in the first place, He himself has recited the Qur'an to the Prophet (s) in a measured tone:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا

The faithless say, 'Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?' So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone.
(25:32)

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic language

Furthermore, it is a recognised fact that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. If the revelation did not include the actual wordings of the Qur'an, there would be no place for discussions about its language. For example, the Qur'an says:

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

In a clear Arabic language. (26:195)

Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read:

وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَى إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّنُذِرَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ

Yet before it the Book of Moses was a guide and a mercy, and this is a Book which confirms it, in the Arabic language, to warn those who do wrong, and is a [bearer of] good news for the virtuous. (46:12)¹

¹ Even if Arabic here is taken to mean 'clear' and not 'Arabic language,' the fact that it describes 'lisān' (tongue; language) makes it clear that it is a

Language is used for words, not ideas. Ideas do not have a language.

Evidence from hadith

In addition to Qur’anic evidence, we can also refer to numerous hadith in which the same titles or verbs are used for the Qur’an. For example, Imam Ali (a) says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ بَعَثَ مُحَمَّدًا (ص) بِالْحَقِّ ... ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْكِتَابَ
نُورًا

Verily, Allah, the Glorified, deputed Muhammad (s) with truth... then Allah sent to him the Book as a light¹

In conclusion, taking everything into consideration, it is obvious that the Qur’an is definitely a complete package of both meanings and words. The verses, sentences and chapters are all part of what was revealed. Allah (swt) did not merely inspire some meanings to the Prophet (s) and leave the Prophet (s) to struggle to find the words that could express these meanings, and at the same time could also fit the cultural concepts, scientific information and customs of Arab society at that time , meaning that, nowadays, we would have to refine

matter of words. This is about this verse, but in the previous verse i.e. 26:196, ‘Arabic’ must be taken as referring to Arabic language as ‘*mubīn*’ meaning ‘clear’ is already mentioned.

¹ Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubhī Şālīh, p. 315.

the message and leave aside those human elements which are distinct from the divine. This is not the case, for everything which we have in the Qur'an is from Allah (swt), whether meanings or words. Even the amount of emphasis in some places is important. So, sometimes Allah (swt) says, for example, 'truly', 'verily', or sometimes Allah (swt) swears oaths by different things. These means of emphasis are all part of the revelation itself.

This is why Muslims believe that translations of the Qur'an, however accurate and perfect they may be, are just translations and can by no means be considered the Qur'an itself. Even if you rewrite the Qur'an in Arabic, it is not the Qur'an. Those words that have occurred in the Qur'an are very important, because every single letter of these words has been selected by Allah (swt).

Chapter 7

The compilation of the Qur'an



Introduction

The Qur'an was revealed in two different ways. First it was revealed all at once to the heart of the Prophet (s). Then, it was gradually re-revealed over the course of 23 years, including a period of three years when there was no revelation. The Qur'an which we have is thus a compilation of the verses and chapters which were re-revealed over the course of 23 years.

But how was it compiled? And who compiled it? Who decided which verses should be put into each *surah*, especially since some *surahs* were not revealed all at once? For example, Surah al-Baqarah was definitely revealed over time. There are also *surahs* which may contain verses which were revealed in Mecca as well as verses which were revealed in Medina. The question about who decided these things is historical, and so we have to consult hadith and historical reports to understand what happened.

The two main views

Muslim scholars have two dominant views. Some believe that it was the Prophet (s) himself who – at divine instruction – defined the *surahs* of the Qur'an. Others say that because revelation continued up until the end of the life of the Prophet (s), after the Prophet (s) passed away, the arrangement was done by some of the companions of the Prophet. Some of the second group say that the Prophet (s), before passing on, asked Imam Ali (a) to focus on the compilation of the Qur'an.

The former group is more in line with the Qur'anic point of view that (as we will discuss later in this chapter) includes scholars from the early to the modern era. They include people like Sayyid Murtaḍā (965-1044), a distinguished scholar who lived in the early years of the occultation of Imam Mahdi (a), up to the modern scholar Āyatullāh Khū'ī (1899-1992). In his book *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*,¹ Āyatullāh Khū'ī has a detailed discussion about this issue. Here we will summarise some of the points from his book.²

He explains that some people hold that the Qur'an that we have today was designed by the caliphs and some companions of the Prophet (s), in the sense that the order of the verses and which verses were to be included in which *surah* were

¹ Available in English as al-Khū'ī, al-Sayyid Abu al-Qāsim al-Mūsawī, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'an*, trans. A. Sachedina (Qum: Anṣārīyān, 2000).

² Khū'ī, Abū al-Qāsim, *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, pp. 237ff.

decided by them. These people, for example, say that the Qur'an was collected under Abū Bakr's order, following the slaying of seventy memorisers of the Qur'an at the battle of Bi'r Ma'ūnah, and of four hundred memorisers at the battle of al-Yamāmah,¹ out of fear that the Qur'an would be lost and would disappear.

In one sense, this shows how careful Muslims were about the Qur'an: if hundreds of memorisers of the Qur'an were present in just one battle, it must have been very common for Muslims to memorise the Qur'an. However, there was also a concern that if these memorisers died or were killed, there would be a problem in preserving the Qur'an.

Therefore – this narrative goes – the first caliph commissioned people like Zaid ibn Thābit to collect all the records of the Qur'an from fragments written on palm branches, flat stones, and pieces of wood, and 'from the chests of the people' (that is, from those who had memorized it), provided that two witnesses would testify that what they reported was part of the Qur'an. Thus, they produced a written copy of the Qur'an. They also say that the caliph decided which *surah* the verses should be put into, since not

¹ At the time of the first caliph, someone called Musaylimah (known as 'Musaylimah the Liar') claimed to be a prophet, and some people believed in him, so the caliph sent some people to fight them, and in this battle 400 memorisers of the Qur'an were killed.

all the verses were revealed at the same time (especially *surahs* like Surah al-Baqarah which are quite lengthy).

However, reports like this are dubious. If two people could come and swear that certain words are part of the Qur'an, then how would the Qur'an be immune from any change? It would also not make sense that in a society with hundreds of memorisers of the Qur'an, people would be asked to bring records of the Qur'an. The Qur'an was not a rare book that only some people had pieces of; rather, it was well-known, and the Muslims were very strict about it.

Hadith to prove the compilation after the Prophet (s)

Āyatullāh Khū'ī then mentions 22 reports about this – mostly from non-Shi'a sources – and addresses the problems with them. For example, he discusses a report from Zaid ibn Thābit.¹ According to this report, after the war of al-Yamāmah when hundreds of memorisers² were killed, Abū Bakr sent for Zaid ibn Thābit while 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was with him. Abū Bakr then told him:

'Umar came to me and said, 'Casualties were heavy among Qur'an reciters during the battle of al-Yamāmah, and I am afraid that heavier

¹ One of the companions of the Prophet (s) who was also close to the Prophet (s).

² In the report the word *qurrā'* is used. *Qurrā'* literally means 'reciters'. However, here, it refers to people who were able to recite the Qur'an because they had memorised it.

casualties might take place among the reciters in other battles, whereby much of the Qur'an would be lost. I am of the opinion that you should give the order for the collection of the Qur'an.' I asked 'Umar, 'How do I do something the Messenger of Allah did not do?' 'Umar replied, 'This, by Allah, is a good thing [to do].' 'Umar kept urging me until Allah opened my chest to that, and I came to view the matter as he did.

Then Abū Bakr said to Zaid ibn Thābit:

You are a wise young man and we trust you. You used to record the revelation for the Messenger of Allah. So, go and find [all the fragments of] the Qur'an and put them together.

Then Zaid said:

By Allah, had they required me to move a mountain, it could not have been heavier for me than their order to collect the Qur'an.

Thus, Zaid replied to Abū Bakr:

How I do something that the Messenger of Allah did not do?

Still, according to this report, Abū Bakr kept insisting and Zaid finally accepted this task, and continues:

Thereupon, I traced the Qur'an, collecting it from palm branches, flat stones, and the breasts of the people [who had memorized it], until I found the last part of Surah al-Tawbah in the possession of Abū Khuzayma al-Anṣārī, having found it with no one else: *'There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress...'* (9:128) till the end of the *surah*.

This seems meaningless. How is it possible that in a town which boasted hundreds of memorisers of the Qur'an, only one person knew the end of Surah al-Tawbah? And if only one person could vouch for it, how could anyone verify it was authentic?

Then Zaid says:

The scrolls (*ṣuḥuf*) remained with Abū Bakr until he died, then with 'Umar till the end of his life, and then with 'Umar's daughter Hafṣah.¹

¹ Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, Bāb jam' al-Qur'an, p. 183, no. 4986. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عُبَيْدِ بْنِ السَّبَّاقِ، أَنَّ زَيْدَ بْنَ ثَابِتٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: «أُرْسِلَ إِلَيَّ أَبُو بَكْرٍ مَقْتُلُ أَهْلِ الْيَمَامَةِ، فَإِذَا عُمَرُ بْنُ الْخَطَّابِ عِنْدَهُ». قَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: إِنَّ عُمَرَ أَتَانِي فَقَالَ: إِنَّ الْقَتْلَ قَدْ اسْتَحَرَّ يَوْمَ الْيَمَامَةِ بِقِرَاءِ الْقُرْآنِ، وَإِنِّي أَخْشَى أَنْ يَسْتَحَرَّ الْقَتْلُ بِالْقِرَاءِ بِالْمَوَاطِنِ، فَيَذْهَبَ كَثِيرٌ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ، وَإِنِّي أَرَى أَنْ تَأْمُرَ بِجَمْعِ الْقُرْآنِ، قُلْتُ لِعُمَرَ: «كَيْفَ تَفْعَلُ شَيْئًا لَمْ يَفْعَلْهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى

There is another report that says a person called Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān went to see the third caliph. He had recently led the people of Syria and Iraq in the conquest of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ḥudhayfah was alarmed by the dispute between them over the recitation of the Qur'an. Thus, Ḥudhayfah said to the caliph:

يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، أَدْرِكْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْتَلِفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ
اخْتِلَافَ الْيَهُودِ وَالنَّصَارَى

O Commander of the Faithful, save this community before it falls into dispute over the

اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ؟» قَالَ عُمَرُ: هَذَا وَاللَّهِ خَيْرٌ، «فَلَمْ يَزَلْ عُمَرُ يُرَاجِعُنِي حَتَّى شَرَحَ
اللَّهُ صَدْرِي لِذَلِكَ، وَرَأَيْتُ فِي ذَلِكَ الَّذِي رَأَى عُمَرُ»، قَالَ زَيْدٌ: قَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ:
إِنَّكَ رَجُلٌ شَابٌّ عَاقِلٌ لَا تَنْهَمُكَ، وَقَدْ كُنْتَ تَكْتُبُ الْوَحْيَ لِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَتَتَّبِعُ الْقُرْآنَ فَاجْمَعُهُ، «فَوَاللَّهِ لَوْ كَلَّفُونِي نَقْلَ جَبَلٍ مِنَ الْجِبَالِ
مَا كَانَ أَثْقَلُ عَلَيَّ مِمَّا أَمَرَنِي بِهِ مِنْ جَمْعِ الْقُرْآنِ»، قُلْتُ: «كَيْفَ تَفْعَلُونَ شَيْئًا لَمْ
يَفْعَلْهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ؟»، قَالَ: هُوَ وَاللَّهِ خَيْرٌ، " فَلَمْ يَزَلْ أَبُو
بَكْرٍ يُرَاجِعُنِي حَتَّى شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرِي لِلَّذِي شَرَحَ لَهُ صَدْرُ أَبِي بَكْرٍ وَعُمَرُ رَضِيَ
اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا، فَتَتَّبِعْتُ الْقُرْآنَ أَجْمَعَهُ مِنَ الْعُسْبِ وَاللَّخَافِ، وَصُدُورِ الرِّجَالِ، حَتَّى
وَجَدْتُ آخِرَ سُورَةِ التَّوْبَةِ مَعَ أَبِي خُرَيْمَةَ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ لَمْ أَجِدْهَا مَعَ أَحَدٍ غَيْرِهِ،
{لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ} [التوبة: 128] حَتَّى خَاتَمَهُ
بِرَاءَةً، فَكَانَتْ الصُّحُفُ عِنْدَ أَبِي بَكْرٍ حَتَّى تَوَفَّاهُ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ عِنْدَ عُمَرَ حَتَّى تَمُوتَ ثُمَّ عِنْدَ
حَفْصَةَ بِنْتِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ.

Bukhārī also mentions this hadith with a slight difference in the same volume, Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'an, p. 71, no. 4679.

Ḥafṣah also was the wife of the Prophet (s).

Book, as the Jews and the Christians have done.

Therefore, ‘Uthmān sent a message to Ḥaḥṣah asking her to send the scrolls which were in her possession. She sent them to ‘Uthmān. Then he ordered Zaid ibn Thābit, ‘Abdullāh ibn Zubair, Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith to copy them.

Zaid ibn Thābit was from Mecca, the tribe of Quraysh, and the other three were from Medina. Therefore, ‘Uthmān told them:

إِذَا اِخْتَلَفْتُمْ اَنْتُمْ وَزَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ فَارْكِبُوهُ بِلسَانِ
قُرَيْشٍ فَإِنَّمَا نَزَلَ بِلسَانِهِمْ

Whenever you disagree with Zayd ibn Thabit on any point of the Qur’an, write it in the dialect of the Quraysh, for it was revealed in their tongue.

They followed the guidelines. When they finished copying, ‘Uthman returned Ḥaḥṣah’s copy and sent each province one of the codices they had copied so that they could be taken as models for other Muslims. Then he ordered them to burn all

other Qur'anic materials, whether in fragmentary manuscripts or full codices.¹

Then there is another report quoted from Imam Ali (a):

أَعْظَمُ النَّاسِ أَجْرًا فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ أَبُو بَكْرٍ فَإِنَّهُ أَوَّلُ مَنْ جَمَعَ بَيْنَ
اللَّوْحَيْنِ

The greatest reward for collecting the Qur'anic text goes to Abū Bakr, for he was the first to collect that which is between the two covers.²

¹ Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Bāb jam' al-Qur'ān, pp. 183-184, no. 4987. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

أَنَّ أَنَسَ بْنَ مَالِكٍ، حَدَّثَهُ: أَنَّ حُذَيْفَةَ بْنَ الْيَمَانِ قَدِمَ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ وَكَانَ يَغَارِي أَهْلَ الشَّامِ فِي فَتْحِ أَرْمِينِيَّةٍ وَأَذْرَبِيحَانَ مَعَ أَهْلِ الْعِرَاقِ فَأَفْرَعَ حُذَيْفَةُ اخْتِلَافَهُمْ فِي الْقِرَاءَةِ فَقَالَ حُذَيْفَةُ لِعُثْمَانَ: «يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، أَدْرَكَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْتَلِفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ اخْتِلَافَ الْيَهُودِ وَالنَّصَارَى» فَأَرْسَلَ عُثْمَانُ إِلَى حَفْصَةَ: «أَنْ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْنَا بِالصُّحُفِ نَنْسُخُهَا فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ، ثُمَّ نَرُدُّهَا إِلَيْكَ» فَأَرْسَلَتْ بِهَا حَفْصَةُ إِلَى عُثْمَانَ فَأَمَرَ زَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ وَعَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ الزُّبَيْرِ وَسَعِيدُ بْنُ الْعَاصِ وَعَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ الْحَارِثِ بْنُ هِشَامٍ فَتَنْسَخُوهَا فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ وَقَالَ عُثْمَانُ لِلرُّهْطِ الْقُرَشِيِّينَ الثَّلَاثَةِ: «إِذَا اخْتَلَفْتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَزَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ فَاصْنَعُوا بِلسَانِ قُرَيْشٍ فَإِنَّمَا نَزَلَ بِلسَانِهِمْ» فَفَعَلُوا حَتَّى إِذَا نَسَخُوا الصُّحُفَ فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ رَدَّ عُثْمَانُ الصُّحُفَ إِلَى حَفْصَةَ وَأَرْسَلَ إِلَيَّ كُلِّ أَقْبَى بِمُصْحَفٍ مِمَّا نَسَخُوا وَأَمَرَ بِمَا سِوَاهُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ فِي كُلِّ صَحِيفَةٍ أَوْ مُصْحَفٍ أَنْ يُحْرَقَ.

² Abū Bakr ibn Abī Dāwūd, ‘Abdullāh ibn Sulaymān, *al-Maṣāḥif*, Bāb jam' al-Qur'ān, p. 49.

Another report says:

أَنَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقَ كَانَ جَمَعَ الْقُرْآنَ فِي قِرَاطِيسٍ

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq collected the Qur'an on parchment [i.e. instead of on bones and skins].

The report then continues that Abū Bakr asked Zaid ibn Thābit to scrutinize them. But he refused to do so until Abū Bakr sought 'Umar's help in persuading him, and Zaid agreed.¹

Another report says:

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb inquired about a verse of the Book of Allah. He was informed that it was in the possession of a person who was slain in the battle of al-Yamāmah. On hearing this, he recited the verse expressing loss – '*We belong to Allah*' – and ordered the collection of the Qur'an, and thus was the first to collect it in a codex.²

¹ Abū Bakr ibn Abī Dāwūd, 'Abdullāh ibn Sulaymān, *al-Maṣāḥif*, Bāb jam' al-Qur'ān, p. 57. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

أَنَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقَ كَانَ جَمَعَ الْقُرْآنَ فِي قِرَاطِيسٍ وَكَانَ قَدْ سَأَلَ زَيْدَ بْنَ ثَابِتٍ
النَّظَرَ فِي ذَلِكَ فَأَبَى حَتَّى اسْتَعَانَ عَلَيْهِ بِعُمَرَ فَفَعَلَ.

² Abū Bakr ibn Abī Dāwūd, 'Abdullāh ibn Sulaymān, *al-Maṣāḥif*, Bāb jam' al-Qur'ān, p. 60. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

Another report says:

‘Uthmān ordered Ubayy ibn Ka’b to dictate, Zayd ibn Thābit to write, [and] Sa’īd ibn al-‘Āṣ and ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-Ḥārith to vocalize [the Qur’an] in accordance with the rules of Arabic.¹

These are some examples of the narrations and reports that Āyatullāh Khū’ī has mentioned in his book. After mentioning all of them, he evaluates them carefully and raises many questions about the contradictions among them.

Contradictions between these hadith

For example, there are inconsistencies regarding the person in charge and when the verses were put together. He observes that in these 22 reports, some say it was the first caliph, some says it was the second, and others say it was ‘Uthmān. Yet other hadith say it was Zaid ibn Thābit.

عَنِ الْحَسَنِ، أَنَّ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ سَأَلَ عَنْ آيَةٍ مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَقِيلَ كَانَتْ مَعَ
فُلَانٍ فَقَتِلَ يَوْمَ الْيَمَامَةِ فَقَالَ: «إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَأَمْرٌ بِالْقُرْآنِ فَجُمِعَ، وَكَانَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ جَمَعَهُ
فِي الْمُصْحَفِ»

¹ Ibn ‘Asākir, Abū al-Qāsim Ali ibn al-Ḥasan, *Tarīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 34, p. 276. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

و روى مجاهد: «ان عثمان أمر أبي بن كعب يملئ و يكتب زيد بن ثابت و
يعربه سعيد بن العاص و عبد الرحمن بن الحارث».

And how much authority did Zaid ibn Thābit have? Some reports say that the first caliph, Abū Bakr, gave full authority to Zaid. Others say that he was supposed to ask people to bring two witnesses along with the verses.

So, there are many critical questions. And what then did they do with these copies: did they send them to other places or not? Altogether, these reports (a) have not come through very reliable sources, and (b) conflict. Therefore, the whole story is very clouded and unclear.

These traditions also are contradicted by information that indicates that the Qur'an was collected and recorded during the lifetime of the Prophet (s).¹ For example, in a hadith, the Prophet (s) is quoted as saying:

أَتَانِي جِبْرِيلُ فَأَمَرَنِي أَنْ أَضَعَ هَذِهِ الْآيَةَ هَذَا الْمَوْضِعَ مِنْ هَذِهِ
السُّورَةِ: {إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْأِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ} إِلَى
آخِرِهَا.

Gabriel came to me and commanded me to put
this verse (16:90) in this place in this *surah*.²

In a narration, someone asks 'Uthmān why he put Surah al-Anfāl, next to Surah al-Barā'ah without writing between them

¹ Āyatullāh Khū'ī has mentioned some of them in his book.

² Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 212.

the *basmalah* and made it as one of *ṭuwāl surahs*.¹ ‘Uthmān replied:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِمَّا يَأْتِي عَلَيْهِ الزَّمَانُ وَهُوَ
تَنْزِلُ عَلَيْهِ السُّورَ ذَوَاتِ الْعَدَدِ فَكَانَ إِذَا نَزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الشَّيْءُ دَعَا
بِبَعْضِ مَنْ كَانَ يَكْتُبُ فَيَقُولُ: «ضَعُوا هَذِهِ الْآيَاتِ فِي السُّورَةِ الَّتِي
يَذْكُرُ فِيهَا كَذَا وَكَذَا»

There were times when [long] *surahs* with numerous [verses] used to come down to the Messenger of Allah. And when something was revealed to him, he would call for one of his scribes and say, ‘Include these verses in the *surah* in which this-and-that is mentioned.’²

¹ The seven longest *surahs* of the Qur’an are called *sab’ ṭuwāl*.

² Ṭabarī, Muhammad ibn Jarīr, *Tafsīr Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, p. 34. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

حَدَّثَنِي ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِعُثْمَانَ بْنِ عَفَّانَ: مَا حَمَلَكُمْ عَلَى أَنْ عَمِدْتُمْ إِلَى
الْأَنْفَالِ وَهِيَ مِنَ الْمَنَانِي وَإِلَى بَرَاءَةِ وَهِيَ مِنَ الْمَنِينِ فَقَرَنْتُمْ بَيْنَهُمَا وَلَمْ تَكْتُبُوا
سَطْرَ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَوَضَعْتُمُوهُمَا فِي السَّبْعِ الطُّوْلِ؟ مَا حَمَلَكُمْ عَلَى
ذَلِكَ؟ قَالَ عُثْمَانُ: كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِمَّا يَأْتِي عَلَيْهِ الزَّمَانُ
وَهُوَ تَنْزِلُ عَلَيْهِ السُّورَ ذَوَاتِ الْعَدَدِ فَكَانَ إِذَا نَزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الشَّيْءُ دَعَا بِبَعْضِ مَنْ
كَانَ يَكْتُبُ فَيَقُولُ: «ضَعُوا هَذِهِ الْآيَاتِ فِي السُّورَةِ الَّتِي يَذْكُرُ فِيهَا كَذَا وَكَذَا»
وَكَانَتْ الْأَنْفَالُ مِنْ أَوَّلِ مَا نَزَلَ بِالْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَتْ بَرَاءَةً مِنَ آخِرِ الْقُرْآنِ نَزُولًا
وَكَانَتْ قِصَّتُهَا شَبِيهَةً بِقِصَّتِهَا فَظَنَنْتُ أَنَّهَا مِنْهَا فَقَبِضَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ وَلَمْ يَبَيِّنْ لَنَا أَنَّهَا مِنْهَا فَمِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ قَرَنْتُ بَيْنَهُمَا وَلَمْ أَكْتُبْ بَيْنَهُمَا سَطْرَ
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَوَضَعْتُهُمَا فِي السَّبْعِ الطُّوْلِ.

Thus, the Prophet (s) himself was instructing them to put certain verses after others. So, some *surahs* were finished, some *surahs* were left open, and the Prophet (s) was saying one part must go after another verse. There is another narration in this regard which says:

جَمَعَ الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى عَهْدِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَرْبَعَةُ نَفَرٍ،
كُلُّهُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ: أَبِي بَنْ كَعْبٍ وَمُعَاذُ بْنُ جَبَلٍ وَزَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ
وَأَبُو زَيْدٍ

The Qur'an was collected during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah by four persons, all of them from the Anṣār (Helpers): Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, Zaid ibn Thābit, and Abū Zaid.¹

Another narration from Zaid ibn Thābit says:

We were with the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, compiling scattered copies of the Qur'an.²

Another version of this hadith is mentioned in: Naysabūrī, Abū 'Abdillāh Hākim, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, vol. 2, p. 241, no. 2875.

¹ Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū 'Abdillāh, *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, vol. 21, p. 114, no. 13441; Al-Naysābūrī, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1914, no. 2465.

² Naysabūrī, Abū 'Abdillāh Hākim, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, vol. 2, p. 249, no. 2901. The text in Arabic is as follows:

Those traditions are also contrary to the Qur'an. For many verses of the Qur'an demonstrate that the *surahs* were distinct in form and content from each other, and were widely spread among the people, including the pagans of Mecca. The Qur'an itself challenged the unbelievers to produce the like of the Qur'an, and the like of ten *surahs* from it, and even one *surah*. This means that the *surahs* were formed and determined in the time of Prophet (s).

Moreover, many verses of the Qur'an apply the word *al-kitāb* (the Book) to the Qur'an. It would not be correct to call it *al-kitāb* if it were merely in people's memories. Indeed, it would even be inappropriate to apply the word *al-kitāb* to fragments written on palm branches, flat stones, and shoulder blades. The word *al-kitāb* signifies a single and united entity. It is not applied to a text which is scattered and not collected, let alone one which is still unwritten and preserved only in people's memories.

The obligation of reciting one optional *surah* in addition to Surah al-Fātiḥah is further evidence that the *surahs* were formed; if people did not know what *surah* meant, and they just had scattered verses, how could they decide where they started or ended?

عَنْ زَيْدِ بْنِ ثَابِتٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: كُنَّا عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
نُؤَلِّفُ الْقُرْآنَ مِنَ الرِّقَاعِ.

Or, for example there are some hadith in which the Prophet (s) mentions the reward for the recitation of specific *surahs*.¹ This means that these *surahs* were known to them and were already formed as one package; it was not something left for the people later to decide.

Moreover, in many cases, significant points from a verse can be understood according to the previous or next verse. If we accept that these verses were just put there by chance or accident or the decision of an ordinary human being, then it becomes very confusing. If I write a book and then someone else decides how to arrange my lines, my whole idea will be lost; I will no longer be able to say this is my book. Even if I give a letter to someone, and he keeps the lines but changes the order, I cannot accept this as my writing; this is someone else's writing and can drastically alter the meaning.

So, it is impossible to think that Allah (swt) and the Prophet (s) did not arrange the Qur'an and that it was only later that they decided to do this – or that it was done just by relying on

¹ See: Nūrī, Ḥusain, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il*, vol. 4, pp. 338-355. For example, the Prophet (s) quoted as saying:

مَنْ قَرَأَ سُورَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ أُعْطِيَ عَشْرَ حَسَنَاتٍ بَعْدَ مَنْ أَتَى الْجُمُعَةَ
وَمَنْ قَرَأَ سُورَةَ التَّغَابُنِ دُفِعَ عَنْهُ مَوْتُ الْفُجَاءَةِ
وَمَنْ قَرَأَ سُورَةَ الْمُمْتَحِنَةِ كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ لَهُ شَفَعَاءُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

For Sunni sources see, for example, Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 213.

some people's memories, or some pieces of bone or skin found in people's houses. This makes no sense especially when we have many reports that the Prophet (s) himself was arranging it.

Besides, how could so many people memorise the Qur'an if it did not have any organisation? Organisation is critical to memorising. The Qur'an has more than 6,000 verses; memorising 6,000 verses without any organisation is impossible. One of the main techniques for memorisation is to classify things – to put them in different 'folders' – otherwise it is difficult to remember everything. For instance, some people can quickly remember numbers, even a 20, 30, or 40-digit number. However, they do this by breaking it down into smaller blocks and memorising them. Even remembering a phone number without dividing it into chunks of 3 or 4 digits is challenging. So how could these people memorise more than 6,000 verses if there were no structure, such as surahs?

Last but not least, we can refer to the following verses of the Qur'an itself:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ
فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ

*Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it.
Indeed, it is up to Us to put it together and to
recite it. And when We have recited it, follow*

its recitation. Then, its exposition indeed, [also] lies with Us. (75:16-19)

According to some commentators of the Qur'an like 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his *al-Mīzān*, because the Prophet (s) had already received the entire Qur'an in the night of Qadr and he had the knowledge of the whole Qur'an, when some verses were revealed to him, he would become so anxious that he would start to read them before the revelation finished. Hence, Allah (swt) tells him not to rush to recite before the revelation ceases, and not to worry, for it is upon Allah to put the Qur'an together.¹

Thus, in this verse, Allah (swt) is guaranteeing the Prophet (s) that He will put the Qur'an together. He recites the Qur'an to the Prophet (s), explains it, and makes it understandable to the Prophet (s). Nothing will be lost or left unrecited, unarranged, or unexplained. Instead, Allah (swt) tells the

¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 20, p.109:

فقوله: «لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ» الخطاب فيه للنبي (ص) و الضميران للقرآن الذي يوحى إليه أو بالوحي و المعنى لا تحرك بالوحي لسانك لتأخذه عاجلا فتسبقنا إلى قراءة ما لم نقرأ بعد فهو كما مر في معنى قوله: «وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَى إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ» (20:114) و قوله: «إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ» القرآن هاهنا مصدر كالفرقان و الرجحان و الضميران للوحي و المعنى لا تعجل به إذ علينا أن نجمع ما نوحيه إليك بضم بعض أجزائه إلى بعض و قرأته عليك فلا يفوتنا شيء منه حتى يحتاج إلى أن تسبقنا إلى قراءة ما لم نوحه بعد.

Prophet (s) to follow the recitation from Him when it is recited to him.¹ Therefore, the Prophet (s) should not fear missing something, forgetting something, not being able to recite later, or not understanding something. All this is to make sure that the message of Allah (swt) is delivered to humanity, for if there were no guarantee, the whole point of sending revelation would have been lost.² Furthermore, if the order of the verses were just done by people who were not instructed by the Prophet (s), it would damage the whole message, whereas many things can be understood from the arrangement of the Qur'an as done by Allah (swt).

Therefore, what we believe is that the *surahs* were formed and introduced to the people by the Prophet (s) himself.³ The most that could have been left to the people after the time of

¹ Thus, after that, the Prophet (s) always waited until Gabriel left, and then he would recite the revelation to the people. Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 10, p. 600. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

«فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ» أَى قراءته عن ابن عباس: «و المعنى اقرأه إذا فرغ جبريل عن قراءته قال فكان النبى (ص) بعد هذا إذا نزل عليه جبريل (ع) أطرق فإذا ذهب قرأ»

² Even if some people say this refers to the process of choosing words and putting them together before revelation, it does not make much difference. If Allah (swt) has made this incumbent upon Himself (*'alaynā*) to put the words together before recitation for its importance, the Prophet (s) must have also instructed people to do whatever was needed according to will of God and could not have left this to the people themselves.

³ This is not what all scholars in the school of Ahl al-Bayt (a) hold. Some may say that some *surahs* were finalised later.

the Prophet (s) would have been to gather all the *surahs* of the Qur'an which had been already written and memorised and to place them between two covers. This would not affect the meaning or interpretation of the Qur'an.

One way of bringing it together was what Imam Ali (a) did. This was mainly according to chronological order, with comments and points about the time, the place and the occasion of revelation (*sha'n al-nuzūl*). This would have made it very easy for people to understand which verse was revealed first and which was revealed second, which verse was abrogated and which one was abrogating, and similar characteristics.

As mentioned earlier, it is narrated that the Prophet (s) asked Imam Ali (a) to be extremely focused on making the Qur'an available in the way that he instructed him. The Prophet (s) said to Imam Ali (a):

أَوَلَيْسَ كِتَابُ رَبِّي أَفْضَلَ الْأَشْيَاءِ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

Is it not that the Book of my Lord, after Allah (swt), is the most important thing?

In the whole world, after Allah (swt), the Qur'an is the most important thing. It is even more important than prophets, Imams, human beings, and angels because this is Word of Allah (swt). They are all creations; creatures of Allah (swt) are not the same as the Word of Allah (swt).

Thus, Imam Ali (a) says that the Prophet (s) gave him the task of compiling the Qur'an.¹ According to Imam Ali (a), after he buried the Prophet (s), he did not put his cloak onto his shoulders except to go to Friday prayers; this means that he did not go out till he had finished his task.²

The Qur'an that we have today is largely arranged according to the length of the *surahs* (apart from Surah al-Fāṭihah). We do not know how much this was inspired by Allah (swt) and the Prophet (s), but what is important is that, firstly, this does not affect the meaning. This does not affect our understanding because to understand any issue Qur'anically, all the relevant verses need to be discussed. One does not start with the beginning of the Qur'an to identify the Qur'anic view; rather, the beginning and end are both treated to

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 579. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

أَوَلَيْسَ كِتَابُ رَبِّي أَفْضَلَ الْأَشْيَاءِ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَالَّذِي بَعَنَنِي بِالْحَقِّ لَنْ
لَمْ تَجْمَعَهُ بِإِتْقَانٍ لَمْ يُجْمَعْ أَبَدًا فَخَصَّنِي اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بِذَلِكَ مِنْ دُونِ الصَّحَابَةِ.

² Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 204. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

مِنْ طَرِيقِ ابْنِ سِيرِينَ قَالَ: قَالَ عَلِيٌّ: لَمَّا مَاتَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
أَلَيْتُ أَلَا أَخَذَ عَلَيَّ رِدَائِي إِلَّا لِصَلَاةٍ جُمُعَةٍ حَتَّى أَجْمَعَ الْقُرْآنَ فَجَمَعَهُ.

However, when Imam Ali (a) presented it to them, they did not accept it. Imam Ali (a) did not insist because they had something similar to that, but his version had extra notes. If there had been a big difference, or something from Qur'an had been missing, Imam Ali definitely would not have compromised because the Book is the whole basis for Islam.

understand the overall picture. Since some verses are *‘āmm* (general) and some are *khāṣṣ* (specific), there may be some general ideas which were later modified. There also may be verses that are *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated);¹ this is why the Qur’an must be studied carefully. However, those issues do not relate directly to the sequence of the surahs in the Qur’an.

Secondly, the integrity of the Qur’an has also been recognised by the Ahl al-Bayt (a). The twelve Imams never challenged it. Instead, they encouraged people to refer to the Qur’an as it is, and even told people to use the Qur’an to verify their hadith.

Therefore, there is nothing ambiguous or unclear about the Qur’an. The Qur’an itself is very clear. No matter what has happened, none of the message of Allah (swt) has been lost, and nothing has been added. Whatever Allah (swt) has sent for our guidance must be there in the Qur’an and cannot have been lost, nor can anything have been added. There is nothing that could affect the meaning of the Qur’an which was not done by Allah (swt) and, by extension, the Prophet (s).

¹ For example, Allah (swt) said to the Muslims that when they want to talk to the Prophet (s) privately they should pay *ṣadaqah*. Then later this was abrogated because no one other than Imam Ali (a) was paying *ṣadaqah*. Or initially people were asked not to have spousal relations in the nights of the month of Ramaḍān, but later this was abrogated.

Chapter 8

The Qur'an's immunity to distortion



Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed the compilation of the Qur'an. We mentioned the two main views, and argued that, during the compilation of the Qur'an, anything with any effect on the meaning or understanding of the Qur'an was done by the supervision of the Prophet (s), according to Allah's will. The issue of the compilation of the Qur'an is very much related to the question of distortion. Therefore, in this chapter, we will discuss the immunity of the Qur'an to any change or distortion.

Semantic alteration

'Semantic alteration' (*al-tahrīf al-ma'nawī*) refers not to a change in the text itself but rather to distorted interpretations – that is, some people (including some commentators) might have imposed meanings on the scripture which are different from their true meanings, based on their own misunderstandings or perhaps deliberately in order to justify their own ideas and stances. This is what is meant by some

hadith that refer to ‘alteration’. For example, Imam Bāqir is quoted as saying:

كَانَ مِنْ نَبَذِهِمُ الْكِتَابَ أَنْ أَقَامُوا حُرُوفَهُ وَحَرَفُوا حُدُودَهُ فَهُمْ
يُرْوُونَهُ وَلَا يَرِيعُونَهُ

They were among those who cast aside the Book. They upheld its letter but altered its limits. They narrate it but do not abide by it.¹

This kind of alteration is very dangerous but does not affect the authenticity of the Qur’an because the actual text is still available so that people can investigate its true meaning.

Textual alteration

‘Textual or linguistic alteration’ (*al-tahrīf al-lafzī*) refers to changes to, additions to, or deletions of the text of the scripture. Unlike semantic alteration, which has certainly happened and still may happen, there have never been any changes to the text of the Qur’an in the sense that would make the original text unavailable or unknown. Yes, maybe some people have made mistakes in copying or printing the Qur’an or might have even tried to take away some parts of the Qur’an, but these have never remained unattended or been accepted. The original text has always been available with clarity and through consensus for all Muslims and indeed humanity. No one has ever suggested that something has been

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 53.

inserted in the Qur'an that we have today, and practically no Muslim believes that anything is missing from the Qur'an. Yes, there are some hadith in Sunni and Shi'a sources that might suggest something has gone missing, i.e. some verses that were there previously are no longer there, but these hadith are not taken seriously by any group of Muslims.

In Sunni texts, missing verses are attributed to *naskh al-tilawah* (abrogation with respect to recitation); that is, some verses were initially recited but their recitation was abrogated or cancelled and hence removed when the Qur'an was compiled after the Prophet (s). For example, it is narrated from Aishah:

One of the things that were revealed in the Qur'an was that ten known breast-feedings make marriage prohibited. Then that was abrogated and changed to five known breast-feedings. So the Messenger of Allah passed away while this was still being recited in the Qur'an.¹

¹ Dārimī, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Raḥmān, *Musnad Dārimī (Sunan Dārimī)*, vol. 3, pp. 1444-1445, no. 2299. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ: «نَزَلَ الْقُرْآنُ بِعَشْرِ رَضَعَاتٍ مَعْلُومَاتٍ يَحْرَمَنَّ ثُمَّ نُسِخَ
بِخَمْسٍ مَعْلُومَاتٍ فَتَوَفَّى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَهَنَّ مِمَّا يُقْرَأُ مِنَ
الْقُرْآنِ»

In some Shi'a sources, there are also hadith which suggest that some verses of the Qur'an are missing.

What is extremely important is that none of the above texts in Sunni or Shi'a sources suggest that anything has been *added* to the Qur'an. That is, not even a single word of the Qur'an – let alone a sentence – is said to be the product of humans. Therefore, since the existing text has a stamp of divine authenticity, we can use the same text of the Qur'an to refute the idea that anything was removed from it.

Arguments from the Qur'an against distortion

Since the Qur'an originated from Allah's knowledge, it must be true and pure.

لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَشْهَدُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكَ أَنْزَلَهُ بِعِلْمِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ وَ
كَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

But God bears witness that what He has sent unto you He has sent from His [own] knowledge, and the angels bear witness: but enough is God for a witness. (4:166)

The Qur'an was sent down with the complete observation of the truth. Allah (swt) has made it very clear that the message was sent *with the truth (bil-haqq)*:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ نَزَلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ
لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ

That is so because Allah has sent down the Book with the truth, and those who differ about the Book are surely in extreme defiance.
(2:176)

Nothing other than truth is found in this Book. So, the content of the Book is completely true; indeed, the Qur'an was sent to serve the truth by making people familiar with the truth and inviting them to observe the truth. Therefore, as far as Allah (swt) is concerned, everything is in full compliance with *ḥaqq* (truth).

Allah (swt) also chose the Prophet (s) and sent him to people with truth:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ

Indeed, We have sent you with the truth.
(2:119)

Thus, Allah (swt) designed the message and sent it truthfully, and then Gabriel conveyed the message truthfully to the Prophet (s):

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُدًى
وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it down from your Lord in truth to fortify those who have faith and as a guidance and good news for the Muslims. (16:102)

Gabriel took the message and carried it to the Prophet (s) *bil-haqq*, observing truth. He did not add or conceal anything. He did not even tell the Prophet (s) anything false about the importance of certain parts. He conveyed the message exactly as it was with Allah (swt).

Sometimes Allah (swt) directly sent the message to the Prophet (s):

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ

These are the signs of Allah, which We recite for you in truth. (2:252)

Hence, there is no falsehood in it at all. Allah (swt) is *al-Haqq*, the Truth. His Word is *haqq*, truth, and He has decided to send it *bil-haqq*. He says in the Qur'an:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ
وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ

We have sent down to you the Book with the truth confirming what was before it of the Book and as a guardian over it. (5:48)

This verse explains that the Qur'an confirms all the previous books which were sent before it, but at the same time it is a guardian over them by protecting them against doubts and denial and by helping humanity to fully understand the whole picture and complete message that God wanted to deliver

through these scriptures. Then Allah (swt) continues by saying:

فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ

So, judge between them by what Allah has sent down, and do not follow their desires against the truth that has come to you. (5:48)

Allah (swt) tells the Prophet (s) not to follow the whims and desires of people, because by doing so he may miss the truth that has come to him. The Prophet (s) had to observe the truth and not merely try to please this or that person. It was not acceptable for him to sacrifice the truth in order to please people. After being given the true message of Allah (swt), he had to observe it entirely; if he observed it, more people would be pleased in the long term. Sometimes a particular individual may not be pleased, but it is better for humanity as a whole if we observe the truth.

Moreover Allah (swt) speaks strongly about the necessity of observing the truth by saying:

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ
الْوَتِينَ

Had he faked any sayings in Our name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta. (69:44-46)

Allah (swt) says that if the Prophet (s) had wanted to add or fabricate even a tiny word, He would have killed him! Therefore, Allah (swt) would not have any hesitation in preserving His Book, and would be very serious and strict about any distortion in His word, since the guidance of humanity depends on it.

Of course, we know that the Prophet (s) would never have done anything like that; Allah (swt) simply wished to send us a message. Sometimes something is said to one person so that others hear it. By saying this, Allah (swt) is confirming that no one was, is, or will ever be permitted or able to change the Qur'an.

Therefore, the Prophet (s) correctly received and transmitted the message. Sometimes we deliver a message to someone and that person does not receive or transmit it correctly because he misunderstands, misinterprets or forgets it. Sometimes we plan very carefully to send something, so that everything from our side is fine, but in transit a problem arises, and it does not reach its destination intact. However, in the case of the Qur'an, Allah (swt) says that the whole process of sending it – all the way till it reaches us – is *bil-haqq*, observing the truth. When Allah (swt) says that the Prophet (s) received it truthfully, it means that the Prophet (s) kept and preserved the message, did not misquote or misinterpret it, and neither added nor lost anything. Everything was done with complete and perfect observance of truth.

Therefore Allah (swt) says:

بالحق انزلناه و بالحق نزل

We sent it truthfully and it was received truthfully. (17:102)

The above-mentioned verses explain and emphasise that the Qur'an – the word of Allah (swt) – has been delivered and reached people truthfully and with complete care. After such an assertion, it is impossible to imagine that Allah (swt) has left it to chance or to people to protect and preserve it, especially considering that it is the last message and is supposed to remain till the end of the time.

Indeed, Allah (swt) has guaranteed that He will protect the Qur'an and does not let any alteration or distortion happen to it. He clearly tells us this fact:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُزَلِّلُ الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

We have sent down the Reminder, and We are protectors of it. (15:9)

In what follows, we will mention what some exegetes of the Qur'an have said about this verse. For example, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his *al-Mizān* says:

It [the Qur'an] is an eternal Reminder, ever-alive, protected from its source from perishing or being forgotten. It is protected from having something added to it that would make it no

longer valid as the Reminder; it is protected from similar deletions. It is protected from alterations in its form or context that would interfere with it being the clear Reminder from Allah of the truths of divine knowledge.¹

In his explanation of this verse in his exegesis of *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, Fayḍ Kāshanī says: ‘We are protectors of it (15:9) from distortion, alteration, increase and decrease.’² Ṭabrisī says the same in *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*.³

Among Sunni scholars, Fakhr Rāzī says in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* that Allah (swt) declares in this verse that ‘We protect this Reminder (*dhikr*) from distortion, increase, and decrease.’⁴ Zamakhsharī also says that ‘unlike previous books, Allah (swt) Himself is the protector of the Qur’an in every era from any

¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol 12, p. 101. The original text is as follows:

فهو ذكر حى خالد مصون من أن يموت و ينسى من أصله، مصون من الزيادة عليه بما يبطل به كونه ذكرا مصون من النقص كذلك، مصون من التغيير فى صورته و سياقه بحيث يتغير به صفة كونه ذكرا لله مبينا لحقائق معارفه.

² Fayḍ Kāshanī, Muhammad, *Tafsīr al- al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 33, p. 110022. The original text is as follows:

«وَأِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ» من التحريف و التغيير و الزيادة و النقصان.

³ Ṭabrisī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 6, p. 508. The original text is as follows:

«وَأِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ» عن الزيادة و النقصان و التحريف و التغيير

⁴ Fakhr Rāzī, Muhammad, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 1199, p. 112233. The original text is as follows:

يعنى: و إنا نحفظ ذلك الذكر من التحريف و الزيادة و النقصان

increase, decrease, distortion and alteration. He has not left it to people to protect the Qur'an, so that what happened to previous books will not happen to the Qur'an.¹

Another verse that clearly refutes any distortion or alteration in the Qur'an is the following:

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ
تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

It is an august Book. Falsehood cannot approach it, neither from before it nor from behind it. [It is] a [gradually] sent-down [revelation] from One all-wise, all-laudable.
(41:42)

This book is 'azīz – meaning it is a Book of exalted power which cannot be defeated. No one can penetrate it or damage it. Just as Allah (swt) is 'azīz, His Word is also 'azīz. Commenting on this verse, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī says:

In any case what is meant is that there is no contradiction in its accounts and no lies in what it says. Falsehood cannot enter its teachings and [its] wise sayings and rulings and

¹ Zamakhsharī, Mahmūd, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, p. 572. The original text is as follows:

و هو حافظه في كل وقت من كل زيادة و نقصان و تحريف و تبديل، بخلاف الكتب المتقدمة، فإنه لم يتول حفظها. و إنما استحفظها الربانيين و الأحرار فاختلّفوا فيما بينهم بغيا فكان التحريف و لم يكل القرآن إلى غير حفظه

cannot conflict or be changed by inserting in it what is not from it or by alteration of any verse from any aspect.¹

‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī also says that, according to this verse, this immunity from any falsehood spans from the time of revelation to the Day of Resurrection.²

Thus, from these verses, we can be confident that anything that can affect our understanding of the Qur’an – any removal, any alteration in words, alteration in the order of the verses, or any distortion – would not happen. Anything that suggests this is against the Qur’an itself. The Qur’an is and will always remain available in the way that Allah (swt) willed. Otherwise we will not have understood how Allah (swt) works.

Arguments from the hadith against distortion

In addition to the Qur’an itself, many hadith deny any alteration to the Qur’an. In fact, in many hadith, Ahl al-Bayt (a) refer people to the same Qur’an that people had access to.

¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 17, p. 398. The original text is as follows:

و المدلول على أى حال أنه لا تناقض فى بياناته و لا كذب فى إخباره و لا
بطلان يتطرق إلى معارفه و حكمه و شرائعه و لا يعارض و لا يغير بإدخال ما
ليس منه فيه أو بتحريف آية من وجه إلى وجه.

² Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 17, p. 398.

For example, when two hadith conflict, they say to compare them with the Qur'an. The one which is in compliance with the Qur'an should be accepted, and the one which is not should be rejected. Imam Bāqir (a) has been quoted as saying:

إن على كل حق حقيقة و على كل صواب نورا فما وافق كتاب
الله فخذوا به، و ما خالف كتاب الله فدعوه

There is a reality for any truth and there is a light for anything that is right. So, take whatever complies with the book of Allah, and leave whatever conflicts with the book of Allah.¹

Similarly, Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

ما أتاكم عنا من حديث لا يصدقه كتاب الله فهو باطل

Any hadith that reaches you from us which does not comply with the book of Allah is void.²

In another hadith he says:

¹ 'Ayyāshī, Muhammad, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, p. 8. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عن أبي جعفر عن أبيه عن علي قال: الوقوف عند الشبهة خير من الاقتحام
في الهلكة و تركك حديثنا لم تروه خير من روايتك حديثنا لم تحصه، إن على
كل حق حقيقة و على كل صواب نورا فما وافق كتاب الله فخذوا به و ما خالف
كتاب الله فدعوه.

² 'Ayyāshī, Muhammad, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, p. 9.

مَا لَمْ يُوَافِقْ مِنَ الْحَدِيثِ الْقُرْآنَ فَهُوَ زُخْرُفٌ

Any hadith that is not in compliance with the Qur'an is but glittering artifice.¹

They even trained their followers (i.e. the Shi'a) to seek Qur'anic references for instructions from them. For example, someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) why in ablution (*wuḍūʿ*) only part of the head should be wiped, not all. The Imam (a) referred to the following verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ

O you who have faith! When you stand up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads (5:6)

He then explained that because in this verse before the word *ru'ūsakum* (your heads) there is a *bāʿ*, wiping part of the head suffices.²

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 69.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 30. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ زُرَّارَةَ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي جَعْفَرٍ (ع): لَا تُخَيِّرُنِي مِنْ أَيْنَ عَلِمْتَ وَ قُلْتَ إِنَّ الْمَسْحَ بِبَعْضِ الرَّأْسِ وَ بَعْضِ الرَّجْلَيْنِ فَضَحِكَ ثُمَّ قَالَ: «يَا زُرَّارَةُ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) وَ نَزَلَ بِهِ الْكِتَابُ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ يَقُولُ- فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ- فَعَرَفْنَا أَنَّ الْوَجْهَ كُلَّهُ يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يُغْسَلَ ثُمَّ قَالَ- وَ أَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى

So, Ahl al-Bayt (a) trained their followers to always focus on the Qur'an, and to ask for everything to be based on the Qur'an, and be verified via the Qur'an. This shows that the Qur'an as it existed in their age and our age was completely accepted and recognised by them as the true presentation of word of God, and there was no hesitation or ambiguity in this regard.

It should be noted that there are similar hadith in Sunni sources from the Prophet (s) in which he asked Muslims to use the Qur'an to verify hadith that might be conflicting, ambiguous, or problematic. For example, the Prophet (s) said:

إذا روى لكم عنى حديث فاعرضوه على كتاب الله فان وافقه
فأقبلوه وإلا فردوه

When a hadith from me is narrated to you, compare it with the Book of Allah; accept what agrees with it and reject what contradicts it.¹

Regarding this kind of hadith, Fayḍ Kāshānī in *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* says:

There are abundant traditions from the Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) which require comparing with the Book of Allah, in order

المرافق - ثُمَّ فَصَلَ بَيْنَ الْكَلَامِ فَقَالَ - وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ - فَعَرَفْنَا حِينَ قَالَ
- بِرُءُوسِكُمْ - أَنَّ الْمَسْحَ بِبَعْضِ الرَّأْسِ لِمَكَانِ الْبَاءِ .

¹ Fakhr Rāzī, Muhammad, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 10, p. 36.

that their veracity should be known by agreeing with the Book, or their falsity be confirmed by contradicting it. Now, if the Qur'an that is in our hands today is regarded as having undergone distortion, what would be the use of comparing any tradition with it? Therefore, it must be said that the traditions which imply the occurrence of distortion are contrary to the Book of Allah, and hence it is necessary either to reject them as inauthentic or to reinterpret their meaning.¹

There are also other hadith which support the immunity of the Qur'an from distortion, such as the Hadith of Thaqaalayn, which has been widely narrated in both Sunni and Shi'a sources. In this hadith, the Prophet (s) says:

وَأَنَا تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ ثَقَلَيْنِ: أَوَّلُهُمَا كِتَابُ اللَّهِ فِيهِ الْهُدَى وَالنُّورُ فَخُذُوا
بكِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَاسْتَمْسِكُوا بِهِ ... وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِي أَذْكُرُّكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي
أَذْكُرُّكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي أَذْكُرُّكُمْ اللَّهُ فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي

I leave behind among you two weighty things: the Book of Allah, and in it is guidance and light, so hold on to the Book of Allah – and my

¹ Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Muḥsin, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 51. The original text is Arabic is as follows:

قد استفاض عن النبي (ص) و الأئمة (ع) حديث عرض الخبر المروى على كتاب الله ليعلم صحته بموافقته له و فساده بمخالفته فإذا كان القرآن الذي بأيدينا محرّفاً فما فائدة العرض مع أن خبر التحريف مخالف لكتاب الله مكذب له فيجب رده و الحكم بفساده أو تأويله.

Ahl al-Bayt. I call upon you to bear Allah in mind regarding my Ahl al-Bayt. (The Prophet (s) said this thrice.)¹

‘Holding fast to the Qur’an’ means deriving guidance and light from it, and this requires that it be immune from any change or distortion.

Imam Ali (a) also offers a beautiful description of the Qur’an:

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ هُوَ النَّاصِحُ الَّذِي لَا يَغُشُّ وَ الْهَادِي الَّذِي لَا يُضِلُّ وَ الْمُحَدِّثُ الَّذِي لَا يَكْذِبُ وَ مَا جَالَسَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا قَامَ عَنْهُ بِزِيَادَةٍ أَوْ نُقْصَانٍ زِيَادَةٌ فِي هُدًى أَوْ نُقْصَانٌ مِنْ عَمًى وَ اعْلَمُوا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ عَلَى أَحَدٍ بَعْدَ الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ فَاقَةٍ وَ لَا لِأَحَدٍ قَبْلُ الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ غِنًى فَاسْتَشْفُوهُ مِنْ أَدْوَانِكُمْ وَ اسْتَعِينُوا بِهِ عَلَى لَاوَانِكُمْ فَإِنَّ فِيهِ شِفَاءً مِنْ أَكْبَرِ الدَّاءِ وَ هُوَ الْكُفْرُ وَ النَّفَاقُ وَ الْغَىُّ وَ الضَّلَالُ

Know that this Qur’an is an adviser that does not deceive, a leader that does not mislead, and a speaker who never lies. No one sits in its company without achieving an addition and a diminishing – an addition in guidance and a diminishment in blindness. And know that there is no [spiritual] poverty for one after association with the Qur’an and there is no plenitude for anyone before that. Therefore, seek from it a remedy for your ailments and seek its help in your distress, for indeed, it contains the cure for the greatest of diseases,

¹ Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1873, no. 2408.

which are unbelief, hypocrisy, rebelliousness and misguidance.¹

Therefore, we have a very clear theological ground to suggest that nothing that can affect our understanding of the Qur'an was permitted to happen. Everyone must have access to the original revelation, including the wording and the order. We can be certain that the Qur'an which we have today is not only *not* missing any words and does not have any extra words, but also everything in each chapter, on each page, and in each passage of the Qur'an was scrupulously placed there by the instruction of the Prophet (s).

Furthermore, the way we have received the Qur'an through *tawātur*² leaves no chance for any alteration, even after the early age of Islam.

While archaeological evidence of the above is not necessary, it was fascinating to learn that a Qur'anic manuscript held by the University of Birmingham was recently found to be one of the oldest in the world. This parchment, on which are written verses of the Qur'an in Arabic Hijazi script, has been dated with radiocarbon analysis to the period between 568

¹ Sharīf al-Raḍī, Muhammad, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubhī Şalīh, p. 252 (sermon on the merits of the Qur'an).

² *Tawātur* is a term in the science of hadith which is used when a narration or religious text is reported by so many different narrators and chains of transmission generation that it would be impossible to have been fabricated. Such a report is called *mutawātir*.

AD and 645. Regarding it, Susan Worrall, Director of Special Collections at the University of Birmingham, said, “The radiocarbon dating has delivered an exciting result, which contributes significantly to our understanding of the earliest written copies of the Qur’an.”¹ The writing on the parchment is still clearly legible; the leaves preserve portions of the Qur’an from Surah al-Kahf to Surah Ṭāhā. A remarkable find!

¹ Ward, Victoria. ‘Oldest Fragments of the Koran found in Birmingham Library’, in *Telegraph*, 22 July 2015 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11754962/Oldest-fragments-of-the-Koran-found-in-Birmingham-library.html>>. Accessed 14 August 2018. The manuscript was on display at the University of Birmingham in 2015 and then at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery until 5 August 2016.

Chapter 9

The Qur'an is a clear book



Introduction

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the issue of understanding the Qur'an. Unfortunately, some people who seem to be overwhelmed by some theories of hermeneutics speak about the interpretation of the Qur'an as if it is impossible to understand the Qur'an or indeed any text. Their view is that the only one who truly understands what has been said or written is the speaker or the writer. They assert that every reader is projecting his own understanding onto the text, that the text does not have any specific interpretation and, at the end, that no one can really understand any text; it is a person's own reading of the text. When there are two different views, they say that both can be correct. This means that the text itself is not helping us; the text is leaving us in disagreement or in a kind of confusion.

The Qur'an is clear

The above is not the idea that the Qur'an presents about itself. This is also not compatible with Allah's purpose for sending the Qur'an to mankind. If the Qur'an could not be

understood, then what would be the point of sending it? Allah (swt) has sent this book for guidance, and something which has come to us for guidance must be at least clear in itself. The point of having a guide is that the guide must be known, must be understood, can be trusted, and then can be followed. However, if the guide that is sent cannot even be understood, then this is not wise. For example, if you need a guide and I know that you only speak English, I should not send someone to guide you who only speaks Chinese. You do not understand Chinese and he does not understand English, so there is no point in sending him to you.

Therefore, if someone is to benefit from the Qur'an and if he is to find his path towards Allah (swt) and salvation through the Qur'an, the Qur'an must be clear. Otherwise, he would have difficulty even in understanding the Qur'an in the first place.

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an in several places that He has made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember. For example, in Surah al-Qamar, He says in four verses:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to remember: then is there any that will receive admonition? (54: 17, 22, 32, 40)

Elsewhere Allah (swt) describing the Qur'an says:

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

In a clear Arabic language. (26:195)

Allah (swt) has made the Qur'an a Book which is easy to read, to understand, to remember, and to reflect on. It is not something which is confusing or clouded.

Furthermore, as we know, the main job of the Qur'an is to remind us:

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

It is just an admonition for all the nations.
(6:90)

Therefore, if we are not able to understand it, there would be no point in Allah (swt) sending it.

Allah (swt) says in Surah al-Dukhān:

فَأَنَّمَا يُسْرِنَا بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

We have made it simple in your language so that they may take admonition. (44:58)

Allah (swt) has specifically designed the Qur'an in a way that people can both understand and remember it. This can be true regarding remembrance of the meaning. It can also be true regarding remembrance of the letters of the Qur'an because even the letters are revealed. Many people have memorised the Qur'an. Memorising a book of this size is not easy. Some of the memorisers do not even know Arabic, but, still, the way

these words are designed and put together is so beautiful that they can remember them. However, more important than the remembrance of the words is remembrance of the concepts.

There is a similar message in verses 27 and 28 of Surah al-Zumar. Allah (swt) talks about guidance and how it is made easy:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ
We have put forth for men in this Qur'an every kind of parable, in order that they may receive admonition. (39:27-28)

Allah (swt) says that He has deliberately made the Qur'an easy, and within the Qur'an He has deliberately used some parables (*mathal*) to make it even clearer. When a speaker wants to make sure his audience understand something, he will try to simplify difficult issues by using parables and examples.

Thus, in all these verses, the focus is on remembrance. Allah (swt) has sent the Qur'an to remind us of our innate knowledge of Himself and of what is good and what is bad and also to teach us something new. Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ
As We sent to you an Apostle from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and

purifies you, and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know. (2:151)

The Qur'an also teaches us something that we were not able to understand. However, the most essential things are the things that we just need to be reminded of. The Qur'an has been revealed in the way that a person can understand and therefore remember.

These verses are just examples. Many more verses indicate that the Qur'an is a book which has been sent to be understood. It really does not make sense to say that Allah (swt) has taken all these initiatives to send Gabriel to the Prophet (s) over 23 years, revealing the Qur'an, but then people cannot understand it. It must be understandable. If I want to invite you to my house and I send you a confusing or ambiguous message which cannot be understood, what would be the point? This is not the way Allah (swt) speaks with His servants. Allah (swt) uses very clear language for the people who want to understand.

However, some people want to be confused. A famous example is the story of the cow and some Children of Isrā'īl. Allah (swt) told them to slaughter a cow. Since they did not want to do this, they asked many questions – what must be the colour? the size? the age? – and at the end, Allah (swt) said:

فَذَبَّحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

*And they slaughtered it, though they were not
about to do it. (2:71)*

They finally slaughtered it, but they were just hoping that when they asked many questions, Moses would get angry, give up, and not answer, so they could say that they were confused and did not know which kind of cow to slaughter and that therefore they could not do it.

Preparation for receiving guidance from the Qur'an

Thus, the Qur'an guides everyone who is ready and wants to understand. However, this does not mean that we do not need preparation or that everyone can understand the same level of the depth of meaning of the Qur'an. The Qur'an has been made easy and understandable, but we also need to prepare ourselves. In what follows, we will refer to some of the requirements for the proper understanding of the Qur'an.

I. Familiarity with the entire Qur'an

There are some aspects of the Qur'an that everyone, with some basic knowledge, can understand. If we know the language, or if we have a good translation, we can benefit from the Qur'an without any prior knowledge. But if we want to really get the message of the Qur'an, if we want the Qur'an to become our guide, we need to be familiar with the entire Qur'an. In many cases we have to put several verses together so that we can come up with the answer. For example, there

are some verses in the Qur'an that are called 'unspecific verses' (*āyāt mutashābihāt*). These verses can be understood in different ways and can have different meanings. They are understandable, but they need a proper methodology to be understood correctly. To understand 'unspecific verses' (*āyāt mutashābihāt*), we should refer them to and put them next to the 'definitive verses' (*āyāt muḥkamāt*).¹

For there are two sets of verses of the Qur'an that are very clear in their meanings. The first set are those that are 100% clear, and in the language of principle of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), they are called *naṣṣ*. This means they offer only one possible meaning, no other. The second set of verses are *ẓāhir* verses. *Ẓāhir* refers to a text that is understood in a way that is most likely to mean what the speaker intended (the apparent meaning), but still contains another possibility. For example, if I say that the person who is walking along with me and my father is my brother, this has two possible meanings. One meaning is that he is my biological brother, and the other meaning is that he is my brother in faith. However, the latter

¹ The Qur'an:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ

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

option would be against the apparent meaning. The apparent meaning is that he is my biological brother.

Or, for example, if I say that ‘I owe this person a lot.’ In this case the apparent meaning is that I owe him money. But there is a possibility that it means that he has been very kind to me and has done great favours to me. This possibility exists but is against the apparent meaning. If I were to put this into financial terms, then I would say that I owe him a million pounds. In this situation, if a person admits that he owes another person one million pounds, then if he is taken to court, he will not be able to deny it by saying: ‘I did not mean that; I meant something else.’ This is because the people who speak that language will say that although there is a possibility that it was meant as a moral debt, that possibility is disregarded and dismissed. This is the meaning of *ẓāhir*.

Therefore, *naṣṣ* is different from *ẓāhir*, but both have the same characteristic – that when we hear them we know what is meant. If the speaker is wise, and if he does not intend the apparent meaning, and instead he intends something other than what is normally understood, then he will use a form of evidence (*qarīnah*) to lead us to the other meaning. Otherwise, we will understand it in the normal way.

In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, both *naṣṣ* and *ẓāhir* are called *mubayyan* (clear). This is in contrast to *mujmal*. *Mujmal* is a text that is neither *naṣṣ* nor *ẓāhir*. It is a text from which either a person

does not understand anything, or there are different possibilities of meaning and none of them are strong enough to rule out the other possibilities. None of the meanings are so strong that rational people (the *‘uqalā*) who know that language would say that one of the other possibilities cannot apply. This kind of text is called *mujmal*. Or, as you know, at times some people like to speak in riddles. You cannot understand what they mean. It is *mujmal*.

In the case of the Qur’an, although we have *āyāt mutashābihāt*, these *āyāt mutashābihāt* are not *mujmal* like riddles or like someone who speaks vaguely and ambiguously. Rather, the situation is that there are verses in the Qur’an that we should use as principles and with which we should build a framework. Then, based on them, we can try to interpret *āyāt mutashābihāt*. Furthermore, *āyāt mutashābihāt* can be different from person to person. It could be that for one person, *āyāt mutashābihāt* are many, because he is not familiar with the Qur’anic framework. But for another person, *āyāt mutashābihāt* are very few. It is not a fixed number.

In any case, what is important is that if you are faced with a verse that has different possibilities in meaning, you must not impose your own understanding on the verse. Instead, try to use other verses of the Qur’an in order to shed light on the verse.

In any case, having *āyāt mutashābihāt* does not contradict the idea that the Qur'an, as a whole, is clear, even though to understand some of the verses of the Qur'an we have to refer to other verses. It is like other books in this respect; sometimes in the first chapter of a book, or in the introduction, the author defines some technical terms. A person who does not read that chapter or introduction might not understand the rest of the book. A person should therefore first read that introduction or first chapter, and then he will be able to understand the rest of the book.

So, if someone is not familiar with the entire Qur'an, that person will not necessarily be able to get the answer they seek; otherwise the answer is definitely there. In this regard, Imam Ṣādiq (a) has said:

There are no two people who disagree on something unless there is a principle regarding it in the Qur'an.¹

That is, if they refer to that principle, they can solve the problem. Thus, it is necessary to be familiar with the entire Qur'an.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 60. The original text in Arabic is as follows:

مَا مِنْ أَمْرٍ يَخْتَلِفُ فِيهِ اثْنَانِ إِلَّا وَلَهُ أَصْلٌ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَبْلُغُهُ عَقُولُ الرِّجَالِ.

II. Piety (*taqwā*)

In addition to familiarity with the entire Qur'an, understanding the Qur'an requires *taqwā*. The Qur'an says:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

*This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a
guidance to the God-wary (2:2)*

This is the guidance. Everyone can come and benefit from it, but everyone should qualify himself or herself. In addition to knowledge, there is need for *taqwā*. If there is no *taqwā*, the Qur'an may not make sense to us; the Qur'an may not disclose its beauty and its wonders to us.

Of course, here we mean by *taqwā* the minimum requirement which is to be honest and truthful. To be able to get guidance from the Qur'an, a person needs to be sincere and really seek the truth. Even a person who is not yet a Muslim or who does not believe in Allah (swt) at all can benefit from the Qur'an, if they are sincere and seek the truth. Of course, when a person discovers the Qur'an, he follows it and implements it, but to begin with, only sincerity and seeking the truth would be enough to enable someone to benefit from the Qur'an for their guidance.

So, the Qur'an has been sent for understanding. Even today, after 14 centuries, people who do not know Arabic and the conceptual framework of that time read translations which are not always very good, but still, they read the Qur'an and

understand – not only understand, but appreciate it. Many people embrace Islam just because of reading the Qur'an. This means that it is possible to understand the Qur'an; it makes great sense to them.

The Qur'an has multiple layers of meaning

Thus, the Qur'an is a book which can be understood. At the same time, we have to emphasise that no one can understand everything about the Qur'an. There are different levels of understanding. No one can say they have understood everything; this is one of the beauties of the Qur'an. Even if we spend tens of years on reflection, reading and studying the Qur'an, still the next morning we can understand something new; this never ends.

The Prophet Muḥammad (s) said:

لَهُ ظَهْرٌ وَبَطْنٌ فَظَاهِرُهُ حُكْمٌ وَبَاطِنُهُ عِلْمٌ

It has apparent and hidden meanings. Its apparent meaning is law and its hidden meaning is knowledge.

The Qur'an has outward and inward dimensions. The outward aspect of the Qur'an is *ḥukm*, which often means 'verdict', 'law' or 'judgement'. However, it also indicates firmness and decisiveness and may also refer to wisdom or *ḥikmah*. *Ḥikmah* is not separate from knowledge; rather, it is a special type of knowledge. *Ḥikmah* is something you need in order to have a proper life, to have success. But knowledge

does not stop with that. In addition to having a successful life, we can learn more and more. So, knowledge goes up to the depths of the ocean of the Qur'an, but if we are at least familiar with the surface, we have enough to be successful in life.

Then the Prophet (s) said:

ظَاهِرُهُ أُنِيقٌ وَبَاطِنُهُ عَمِيقٌ

Its apparent meaning is beautiful, and its hidden meaning is deep.

Sometimes for example, we have a box and the surface of the box is very beautiful, but there is something inside the box which is very valuable and more beautiful. The Qur'an has a beautiful surface but also depth. The hadith continues:

لَهُ نَجُومٌ وَ عَلَى نَجُومِهِ نَجُومٌ لَا تُحْصَى عَجَائِبُهُ وَ لَا تُبْلَى غَرَائِبُهُ

It has stars and upon its stars there are stars. Its wonders do not end and its marvels do not grow old.¹

The Qur'an is like the sky with stars but not one level of stars; above the stars are more stars, so one can never reach the end of this sky. No one can exhaust the wonders of the Qur'an;

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 599.

no one can say they have made a list of all the wonderful ideas of the Qur'an. No one can exhaust it, for this list never ends.

Thus, the Qur'an has a level which is available to us; we hear it, we recite it, and that is the surface. This is the apparent and the literal meaning. However, there is a deeper, underlying layer. Therefore, in a verse, Allah (swt) means, by the same words, something at the surface and also something at a deeper level.

In a hadith the Prophet (s) says:

إِنَّ لِلْقُرْآنِ ظَهْرًا وَبَطْنَاً وَلِبَطْنِهِ بَطْنٌ إِلَى سَبْعَةِ أَبْطُنٍ

Verily, the Qur'an possesses external and internal aspects, and its internal aspects have other internal aspects up to seven internal levels.¹

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *Awālī al-La'ālī, al-'Azīzīyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīniyyah*, vol. 4, p. 107. It also has been mentioned in many recent books (for example, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 7.) that according to hadith the layers of the Qur'an go up to 70 layers but there is no trace of such hadith in the books that are collections of hadith. It seems one of the early sources for this hadith is *I'jāz al-Qur'ān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Qur'ān* by Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (died 673 A.H.). He has referred to this hadith in the discussion about layers of the Qur'an and secrets of the letters on the page 128:

و من لا يكشف له هذا الطور لم يعرف سرّ بطون القرآن التي ذكرها رسول الله
(ص) بقوله: «القرآن ظهر و بطن إلى سبعة أبطن»، و في رواية «إلى سبعين
بطنا»

In any case, there are different layers of meaning. Āyatollāh Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm, in a discussion in the beginning of his book *Ḥaqā'iq al-Uṣūl*¹ mentions a story about one of the great scholars² who gave a very beautiful *tafsīr* regarding verse 7 of Surah Ḥujurāt: ‘*But Allah has endeared faith to you and made it appealing in your hearts*’. In the next session, he gave another beautiful *tafsīr* of it. And on a daily basis for thirty days, he was interpreting the verse in different ways, and all of them were correct.³

Hence, Allah (swt) has spoken to us in the Qur’an at different levels. When Allah (swt) talks to us in the Qur’an, at the same time He is talking to Prophet Muhammad (s). What he understood is different from what we understand. These

¹ A commentary on *Kifāyah al-Uṣūl*.

² Al-Ākhūnd Mullā Faṭḥ Ali Sulṭān Ābādī.

³ Ḥakīm al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muḥsin, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 95. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

حدث بعض الأعظم دام تأييده: أنه حضر يوما منزل الآخوند (ملا فتح على
(قدس سره)) مع جماعة من الأعيان منهم السيد إسماعيل الصدر (ره) و الحاج
النوري صاحب المستدرک (ره) و السيد حسن الصدر دام ظله قتلا الآخوند
(ره) قوله تعالى: (و اعلموا أن فيكم رسول الله لو يطيعكم في كثير من الأمر
لعنتم و لكن الله حبيب إليكم الإيمان ... الآية) ثم شرع في تفسير قوله: تعالى
فيها: حبيب إليكم ... الآية و بعد بيان طويل فسرهما بمعنى لما سمعوه منه
استوضحوه و استغربوا من عدم انتقالهم إليه قبل بيانه لهم، فحضروا عنده في
اليوم الثاني ففسرها بمعنى آخر غير الأول فاستوضحوه أيضا و تعجبوا من
عدم انتقالهم إليه قبل بيانه، ثم حضروا عنده في اليوم الثالث فكان مثل ما كان
في اليومين الأولين و لم يزلوا على هذه الحال كلما حضروا عنده يوما ذكر
لها معنى إلى ما يقرب من ثلاثين يوما فذكر لها ما يقرب من ثلاثين معنى.

layers are not different in the sense that they contradict one another. They just go deeper and deeper. It is like an addition to the meaning, and not a contradiction. It is not like they understand it in an affirmative way, and we understand it in a negative or vice versa. No, it is a matter of different layers.

The important point is that, to begin with, we start with the apparent meaning. This issue is very important; no one can bring an idea out from his pocket and say this is what this verse says. Now, it could be that we refute this, and that person may answer: 'This is a deeper layer of meaning. You are not able to understand now. In the future you will be able to understand.' No, this is not correct. In order to bring forth a hidden meaning, it is necessary to be able to show how this was understood from the apparent meaning.

Of course, we are talking about non-infallible people, ordinary people. Prophet Muhammad (s) and Ahl al-Bayt (a) are different because they have some sources of knowledge which we do not have access to. But, if other people come up with an interpretation of the Qur'an, we cannot accept it unless they show us how it is compatible with the apparent meaning, and this would be the least that they must do.

Hence, there are different layers of meaning of the Qur'an, and there is always the possibility of delving further into the layers of the meaning of the Qur'an. But what is important is being loyal to the apparent meaning and the literal meaning.

A person has to show that what they have understood is at least compatible with the Qur'an, but it is also important to show how they came up with this idea, the methodology that they used, and the process of reasoning that they followed.

From this point, the process of *tafsīr* begins. As long as someone is trying to understand the apparent meaning, it does not involve much *tafsīr*. It is like translating Arabic words into other Arabic words. Sometimes, a type of translation is done by using synonyms from the same language. The real *tafsīr* starts when one wants to go further, more than just understanding the terms in a literal manner.

In the next chapter we will discuss the issue of *tafsīr* and *mufasssīrīn*.

Chapter 10

Tafsīr and *mufasssīrīn*



Introduction

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that, in addition to its literal meaning, the Qur'an has hidden layers of meaning. We have to be able to go deeper so that we reach those layers, and that is the job of an interpreter or exegete – *mufasssīr* – of the Qur'an. In this chapter we study the issue of interpretation (*tafsīr*) and the interpreter (*mufasssīr*).

Definition of *tafsīr*

Tafsīr literally means 'to unveil', or 'to reveal', or 'to clarify'.¹ *Tafsīr* technically means to interpret a text and clarify any

¹ Al-Zabīdī, al-Murtaḍā, *Taj al-ʿArūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, vol. 7, p. 349. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

الْفَسْرُ: الْإِبَانَةُ وَكَشْفُ الْمَغْطَى كَمَا قَالَ ابْنُ الْأَعْرَابِيِّ، أَوْ كَشْفُ الْمَعْنَى الْمَعْقُولِ،
كَمَا فِي الْبَصَائِرِ، كَالْتَفْسِيرِ.

Abū al-Ḥusayn, Aḥmad ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāṭis al-Lughah*, vol. 4, p. 504. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

فسر: الفاء و السين و الراء كلمة واحدة تدلُّ على بيان شيء و إيضاحه.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muhammad, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 5, p. 55. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

ambiguities that might be there in understanding what is meant by a word or a phrase or by the text as a whole. *Tafsīr* also involves bringing to light underlying and esoteric meanings of the text, especially with respect to the scriptures which represent divine communication to mankind across ages and cultures.

Tafsīr is now a very established term, and it is also mentioned in hadith. For example the Prophet (s) is quoted as saying:

مَنْ فَسَّرَ الْقُرْآنَ بِرَأْيِهِ فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

One who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion has surely secured his seat in the fire [of hell].¹

History of interpretation (*tafsīr*) and interpreters (*mufasssīrīn*)

The first interpreter (*mufasssīr*) of the Qur'an was Prophet Muhammad (s) himself. Although Arabs were, at that time, in general, very good in their Arabic, and the standard of Arabic was very high, they were still in need of *tafsīr* and explanation (*tabyīn*). Prophet Muhammad (s) was not only reciting the

فسر، الفسر: البيان. فسر الشيء يفسره، بالكسر، و يفسره، بالضم، فسراً و فسرته: أبانه، و التفسير مثله. ابن الأعرابي: التفسير التأويل والمعنى واحد. وقوله عز وجل: وأحسن تفسيراً؛ الفسر: كشف المعطى، والتفسير كشف المراد عن اللفظ المشكل.

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *‘Awālī al-Lā’ālī al-‘Azīzīyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīnīyah*, vol. 4, p. 104.

Qur'an (*tilāwah*), but was also teaching them the book. The Qur'an says:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَ
يُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

As We sent to you an Apostle from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know. (2:151)

Elsewhere we read in the Qur'an:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

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

We do not know how many verses were commented on by the Prophet (s), but today there are a substantial amount of hadith from the Prophet (s) in Sunni and Shi'i books in which the Prophet (s) commented on the verses of the Qur'an. They are called 'interpretative hadith'. For example, Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī in his book *al-Itqān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān* has compiled many hadith of the Prophet (s) and has put them in the order according to chapters of the Qur'an.

After the Holy Prophet, the task of *tafsīr* of the Qur'an was given to the Ahl al-Bayt (a). In Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn, Prophet

Muhammad (s) asked the Muslim community to refer to the Ahl al-Bayt (a), and hold firmly to both the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (a):

وَإِنِّي مُخَلِّفٌ فِيكُمْ الْثَّقَلَيْنِ مَا إِن تَمَسَّكْتُم بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضَلُّوا كِتَابَ
 اللَّهِ وَ عِترَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي هُمَا الْخَلِيفَتَانِ فِيكُمْ وَ إِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا
 حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَى الْحَوْضِ

Verily, I am leaving among you two precious things: the Book of Allah and my progeny, the members of my Household [Ahl al-Bayt]. If you hold fast to them, you shall never go astray. These two will never separate from each other until they meet me at the Pond (of Kawthar).¹

The Prophet says the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) will never be separated from each other, and so long as a person grasps onto both of them, he will never go astray. Therefore, the Muslim community, in order to understand the Qur'an, were told to refer to Ahl al-Bayt (a), and the task of explaining and teaching the Qur'an was handed over to Ahl al-Bayt (a).

Imam Ali (a) continued the job of the Prophet (s) in teaching the Qur'an, and even those who were not followers of Imam Ali (a) went back to him when it came to the knowledge of the Qur'an.

¹ Daylamī, Ḥasan, *Irshād al-Qulūb ilā al-Ṣawāb*, vol. 2, p. 340.

Then, after Imam Ali (a), among the companions, the one who was renowned for his knowledge of the Qur'an was Ibn 'Abbās, the cousin of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. He is very famous and respected by all Muslims. Ibn 'Abbās was very young at the time of Prophet Muhammad (s) but later became a student of Imam Ali (a). His comments on the verses of Qur'an which were quoted in *Tafsīr Ṭabarī* were collected and put together by Muhammad Fīrūz Ābādī.¹ It became two volumes and is called *Tanwīr al-Miqbās fī Tafsīr ibn 'Abbās*.

After Ibn 'Abbās, there is Mujāhid ibn Jabr who was a distinguished disciple of Ibn 'Abbās. He is the first to compile a written exegesis of the Qur'an, *Tafsīr Mujāhid*. The significance of Mujāhid's *tafsīr* is that it is said he had reviewed the whole Qur'an thirty times with Ibn 'Abbās. They would read it together from the beginning, and Ibn 'Abbās would comment and explain things, and if Mujāhid had a question then he would ask.

However, his *tafsīr* did not reach us in its original form. Some scholars have compiled the various quotations attributed to Mujāhid from the *tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī and others and put them together as *Tafsīr Mujāhid* in two volumes.

¹ The author of *Qāmūs al-Lughah*.

These are the early *mufasssīrīn* of the Qur'an. Initially, these materials were scattered in different books. Gradually, people began compiling *tafsīr* for the entire Qur'an; that is, from Surah al-Fātiḥah to Surah al-Nās. In what follows, we refer to some examples of the books of *tafsīr* in chronological order.

Sunni books of *tafsīr*

In the Sunni school of thought, the first early comprehensive book is a *tafsīr* by Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (225-310 AH). Although the title is not mentioned in the book itself, in his other book, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, Ṭabarī has referred to it as *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*.

A notable work in the fifth century AH is *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* or *Tafsīr Tha'labī* by Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Tha'labī. It is composed of 10 volumes.

Another important Sunni *tafsīr* is *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq-i al-Tanzīl* popularly known as *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* by Jārullāh Zamakhsharī (467-538 A.H). Zamakhsharī took a Mu'tazilī approach,¹ and his *tafsīr* is famous for its deep linguistic analysis, demonstrations of the supremacy of declamation of the Qur'an, and the representation of the method the Qur'an

¹ The Mu'tazilīs are a school of theologians with a rational approach in religion and theology.

uses to convey meaning using literary elements and figurative speech.

An important sixth century AH book of *tafsīr* is *Kashf al-Asrār wa 'Uddat al-Abrār* by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī. It is the longest Sunni commentary in the Persian language. Maybūdī began writing *Kashf al-Asrār* in 520 AH. It was edited and printed in the twentieth century by Ali Aṣghar Ḥikmat in ten volumes.

The late sixth century and beginning of the seventh century AH saw one of the most important and most detailed books of *tafsīr*, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, also known as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.¹ *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* has an Ash'arī approach and has been published in 32 volumes.

A prominent seventh century AH work is *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī. The basic objective of this *tafsīr* was to deduce juristic injunctions and rulings from the Qur'an. While doing so, al-Qurṭubī also provides the explanation of verses and addresses verbal, moral, literary, historical and social issues.

¹ One of the titles of Fakhr Rāzī was 'Imām al-Mushakkikīn' (the Leader of the Sceptics). This is because he always used to bring doubts and ask lots of questions. He was very much against philosophy, and it is said that his questions, challenges, and objections to philosophy actually helped in the development of philosophy, because philosophers had to answer his questions, and this helped develop it even further.

Later in the seventh century, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* was composed by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685 AH). In the eighth century AH, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* was composed by Ibn Kathīr. These are two valuable, important and popular books of *tafsīr*.

The next important book of *tafsīr* is *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*. It was compiled by Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, a prominent Sunni scholar who died in 911 AH. He explains each passage of the Qur'an through the reports and narrations from Prophet Muhammad (s), his companions and the immediate generations following the companions. Al-Suyūṭī compiled all the reports and narrations that he could gather for each particular passage, even contradictory reports.

In the thirteenth century (AH), *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī* was written by Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī. Al-Ālūsī's book is the most comprehensive of its kind in Sunni scholarship. It contains the views and opinions of many previous commentators and includes excerpts from previous interpretations.

Tafsīr al-Marāghī by Aḥmad Muṣṭafā and *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quṭb are two important fourteenth-century AH books of *tafsīr*.

Books of *tafsīr* written by contemporary Sunni scholars include *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, written in the fifteenth century AH by Muhammad Sayyid Ṭaṇṭāwī. Ṭaṇṭāwī

was an influential Islamic scholar in Egypt. From 1986 to 1996, he was the Grand Mufti of Egypt. In 1996, he was appointed as the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, a position he retained until his death in 2010.

Another important, recent book is *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-‘Aqīdah wa al-Sharī‘ah wa al-Manhaj* by Dr Wahabah al-Zuhaylī. Dr. al-Zuhaylī was head of the Department of Islamic Denominations at the University of Damascus. His *tafsīr* was published for the first time in 1991 (1411 AH) in sixteen volumes. It was a joint project of Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āshir in Beirut and Dār al-Fikr in Damascus. In 1994 it won the Book of the Year award in Iran.

Shi’a books of *tafsīr*

In the Shi’a school of thought, the earliest available book of *tafsīr* is *al-Tafsīr al-Mansūb ilā al-Imām al-Hasan al-‘Askarī (a)*. This is a Shi’a, hadith-based exegesis of the Qur’an from the third century (AH).

It starts with some hadith about the merits of the Qur’an, interpretations of it, and the etiquette of reciting it, and continues with hadith about the virtues of Ahl al-Bayt (a). Its interpretation of a verse usually starts with explanation of the words in the verse; then, hadith related to the verse are quoted. Overall, 379 hadith are quoted in the book, most of which are several pages in length. What we have today only

addresses the section from the beginning of the Qur'an to the verse 282 of Surah al-Baqarah.

The chain of narrators of the book shows that narrating this book was prevalent among narrators of hadith (*muḥaddithīn*) and jurists of the fourth and fifth centuries (A.H.) in Qum. Although the book is among the earliest Shi'i exegeses, its authenticity is a subject of discussion. Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) is the first Shi'a scholar who quoted frequent excerpts from this book in his works without discussing the authenticity of them. In addition, Fayḍ Kashānī, 'Allāmah Majlisī, Shaykh Ḥurr Āmilī and Āyatullāh Burūjīdī are among many scholars that have accepted its authenticity and have quoted this *tafsīr* in their books.

In the Shi'a school of thought, the oldest works of *tafsīr* from third and fourth century AH, which are all hadith-based, are *Tafsīr al-Qummī* by Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī* by Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī and *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* by Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī.

The most important book among the early books of *tafsīr* is *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Shaykh Ṭūsī who is a great jurist, scholar of hadith, theologian and exegete of the Qur'an in fifth century AH. *Al-Tibyān* is the first Shi'i comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an, which, in addition to quoting authentic hadith, by using intellect and different sciences, has dealt with evaluating the interpretive views of past and

contemporary scholars. This comprehensive interpretation includes different types of sciences that are related to interpretation of the Qur'an like theology, jurisprudence, syntax, morphology, history and hadith.

In the sixth century AH, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* was written by Faḍl ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī. This is one of the most important Qur'anic commentaries in the Islamic world. Both Shi'i and Sunni scholars have referred to it and have regarded it as a long-standing reference excellently compiled with consistent headings. This book is particularly notable for the authenticity of its content, its precise order, its clear and useful points, and the author's fairness in reviewing different opinions.

Rawḍ al-Jinān wa Rawḥ al-Janān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān is another important sixth-century AH *tafsīr* by Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, who was a theologian and hadith scholar. This book, which is the most famous work of Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, is the oldest Shi'i commentary written in Persian which served as a reference work for later commentators.

Later, in the tenth century AH, *Manhaj al-Ṣādiqīn fī Ilzām al-Mukhālifīn* was written by Mullā Faṭḥullāh, also in Persian. He discusses various issues of theology, jurisprudence, Arabic literature, and the like. According to him, he wrote the book in order to produce a Persian exegesis of the Qur'an which

was not boring, neither too lengthy nor too brief, and which reflected Shi'ī beliefs, including hadith from Ahl al-Bayt (a).

The eleventh century AH saw *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* by Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī. The book may be classified as a work on hadith, for it consists largely of citations from the Ahl al-Bayt (a). The book contains theological, mystical and literary topics.

Al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān by Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī and *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn* by 'Abd Ali al-'Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī are other important hadith-based books of *tafsīr* written in the early twelfth century AH.

Contemporary books of *tafsīr* in Shi'a world include a very detailed and comprehensive book by the name of *Tafsīr Nemūneh*, written by Āyatullāh Nāṣir Makārim Shīrazī and other authors working under his supervision in 27 volumes. These commentators addressed the contemporary era and the related social issues. *Tafsīr Nemūneh* was originally written in Persian but has been translated into other languages, including Arabic (*al-Amthal fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb Allah al-Munzal*), Urdu and partly into English.

Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān is one of the most comprehensive exegeses of the Qur'an in Arabic, authored by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1904-1981). The book's methodology is the exegesis of the Qur'an by appeal to the Qur'an itself, which means interpreting a

Qur'anic verse in terms of other verses of the Qur'an. By virtue of its intellectual honesty and fairness, accuracy and depth, *al-Mizān* has attracted the attention of Shi'i and Sunni scholars and found a place as one of the most reliable sources of inquiry about the Qur'an. Soon after its publication, tens of books and hundreds of articles and dissertations were written about it.

One of the significant advantages of this exegesis is its profound inquiries about important issues such as the miraculous character of the Qur'an, the stories of the prophets, human soul and spirit, Allah's response to people's prayers, monotheism, repentance, divine sustenance (*rizq*), divine blessings (*barakah*), jihad, and annulment of actions (*iḥbāt*), which are discussed when relevant to the verse that is being interpreted. His exegesis has been translated into, and published in, Persian, English, Urdu, Turkish, and Spanish.

Another prominent contemporary Shi'i book of *tafsīr* is *Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*, written in Persian by Āyatullāh Javādī Āmulī. Similar to *al-Mizān*, the methodology of this book is the interpretation of a verse based on other verses. In addition to the Qur'an, hadith and rational argumentation, in many cases Arabic literary, theology, philosophy and mysticism are used. So far, fifty-two volumes of *Tafsīr Tasnīm* have been published; the entire series, covering the entire Qur'an, comprises eighty volumes.

Different methodologies of *tafsīr*

Muslim exegetes have used different methods in relation to the interpretation of the Qur'an. In what follows, first the major methods will be discussed, and then the focus will move to the one that is the most promising.

I. Interpretation of the Qur'an through hadith (*al-tafsīr al-riwā'ī*).

This is one of the oldest methods of *tafsīr*. According to this method, the process of *tafsīr* consists of clarification of the Qur'anic terms, if needed, and then reference to hadith to find out the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. People who adopt this method try to explain the meaning of the verse only when there are relevant hadith. Hence, whenever they find no hadith, they may keep silent. Therefore, there may be many verses of the Qur'an on which they make no comment.

Jāmi' al-Bayān by Ṭabarī and *al-Durr al-Manthūr* by Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī are some of the most important works written by Sunni Scholars with this approach. Among the Shi'a, *Tafsīr al-Qummi* by 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *al-Burhān* by Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī and *Nūr al-Thaqalayn* by 'Abd Ali al-'Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī are some of the most well-known works that use the same method.

II. Mystical interpretation of the Qur'an (*al-tafsīr al-ʿirfānī; al-tafsīr al-bātinī; al-tafsīr al-ishārī*)

Although there is no fixed pattern among those who have adopted this approach, the general assumption among them is that the most important aspect of the Qur'an is the inner or esoteric aspect, which can be understood only by those who are at a high level of spirituality and whose hearts are so pure that they can receive divine inspiration.

Some of these exegetes have still been loyal to the literal or exoteric meanings of the Qur'an, so they introduce the inner meanings in line with the outer meanings. However, there have been some exegetes who followed this approach and were not committed to presenting their interpretation in accordance with the outer meanings of the Qur'an. For example, in the following verse, the word *bayt* (lit. 'house'; here, used as 'the house of Allah') is interpreted by some as 'heart':¹

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ
*The first house to be set up for mankind is the
one at Bakkah. (3:96)*

¹ Ibn ʿArabī, Muhammad ibn Alī, *Tafsīr Ibn ʿArabī*, vol. 1, p. 114:

فالبيت إشارة إلى القلب الحقيقي، و ظهوره على وجه الماء تعلقه بالنظفة عند
سما الروح الحيواني.

Similarly, in verse 125 of Surah Baqarah, the phrase *maqām-i Ibrāhīm* ('the place where Ibrāhīm stood') is interpreted as 'spirit':¹

وَاتَّخِذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى

*Take the venue of prayer from Abraham's
Station. (2:125)*

Also in the following verse, *al-arḍ* (the earth) is taken to mean 'body':²

وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ

*And the earth, He laid it out for mankind.
(55:10)*

Of course, as said before, this does not mean that all those who have adopted the mystical approach to interpretation have disregarded the outer meanings of the Qur'an. In fact, in some cases, the same person might have different styles in different works, such as Ibn 'Arabī.

Some of the important mystical works on *tafsīr* are *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* which is attributed to Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638 AH),

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*, vol. 1, p. 114:

وَاتَّخِذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ: الذى هو مقام الروح و مقام الخلّة مُصَلًّى موطناً
للصلاة الحقيقية التى هى المشاهدة و المواصلّة الإلهية و الخلّة الذوقية.

² Ibn 'Arabī, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*, vol. 2, p. 302:

وَالْأَرْضَ أَى: أرض البدن وَضَعَهَا لهذه المخلوقات المذكورة فيها فأكهة أَى:
ما تفيد اللذات الحسية من إدراكات الحواس و المحسوسات

Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt by ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin Qushayrī (465 AH), *Kashf al-Asrār wa ‘Uddah al-Abrār* by Maybudī (d. 481 AH) and *Bayān al-Saʿādah fī Maqāmāt al-Tbādah* by Muhammad ibn Ḥaydar Gunābādī (d. 1327 AH).

III. Scientific interpretation of the Qur’an (*al-tafsīr al-‘ilmī*).

Although this type of *tafsīr* can be found among earlier works of *tafsīr*, it has become more popular in the twentieth century. In this type of *tafsīr*, the Qur’an is interpreted according to scientific or empirical findings. Therefore, the emphasis is put on those verses of the Qur’an that pertain to nature or the physical world in general. People who adopt this method of *tafsīr* seem to hold that modern science is the most certain knowledge and embodies a very fruitful (if not the most fruitful) achievement of mankind. Therefore, they take it to be a service to the Qur’an and Islam to show how the Qur’anic verses comply with modern science. They think it makes the Qur’an more understandable and also more acceptable to the people of the modern age, and since the Qur’an has preceded modern science in referring to those facts for centuries, it proves that the Qur’an is a divine miracle and not a human book.

The most outstanding scientific *tafsīr* of the Qur’an is *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* by Shaykh Ṭanṭāwī (1287-1359 AH).

In some of these works, the authors seem to deny supernatural facts such as angels or jinn, or miracles of the prophets such as the revival of the dead. For example, sometimes Satan is interpreted as infective germs that cause problems in the nervous system. On the topic of the miracles of Jesus such as curing the ill and giving life to the clay statue of birds, it has been suggested that these verses are just a description of what Jesus claimed and that the Qur'an does not tell us that Jesus actually performed these acts.

A very materialistic *tafsīr* with this approach is *al-Qur'ān Huwa al-Hudā wa al-Furqān* by Sir Aḥmad Khān (1232-1315) from India. For example, he interprets *wahy* (revelation) as an echo of an internal voice from one's heart. On the miracle of Moses, who opened a dry passage for the Israelite trip into the sea, he says that it was not a miracle; rather, it was just an effect of the moon's gravity.

IV. Interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil-Qur'ān*).

The best method of *tafsīr* is interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. In this type of *tafsīr*, the most important source of understanding the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an is revealed to be a 'clear book',¹ a 'reminder'² and a clear

¹ Qur'an 5:15; 6:59; 10:61; 11:6; 27:1&75; 34:3.

² For example, 21:50.

account of whatever human beings need for their happiness.¹ Human beings are asked to reflect on the Qur'an,² something that presupposes their ability to understand the Qur'an. Many people came to believe in Islam after listening to the Qur'an and finding it very convincing. In many hadith, the Prophet (s), his household and companions all ask Muslims to refer to the Qur'an and benefit from its guidance.

The most outstanding example of this type of commentary of the Qur'an is *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭāba'ī (1903-1981). In the preface to *al-Mīzān* he discusses the issue of the interpretation of the Qur'an and after a lucid exposition in this regard, he holds that a true exegesis of the Qur'an is possible only through profound contemplation of the verses and a reference for guidance to all the other related Qur'anic verses. This is the same method that was employed by the Prophet (s) and the Imams (a), as we learn from their teachings. Emphasising this, he says:

Allah has said: '*and We have revealed the Book to you explaining clearly everything*' (16:89). Is it possible for such a book not to explain its own self? Also He has described the Qur'an in these words: '*a guidance for mankind and clear evidence of guidance and discrimination*

¹ Qur'an 16:89.

² For example, 4:82 and 38:29.

[between wrong] (2:185); and He has also said: *‘and We have sent down to you a manifest light’* (4:174). The Qur’an is, accordingly, guidance, evidence, a discrimination between right and wrong and a manifest light for the people to guide them aright and help them in all their needs. Is it imaginable that it would not guide them aright in its own matter, while it is their most important need? Again Allah says: *‘And [as for] those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them onto Our ways’* (29:69). Which striving is greater than the endeavour to understand His Book? And which way is straighter than the Qur’an?¹

Thus, he explains this method of *tafsīr*, and he himself follows the same pattern throughout the twenty volumes of *al-Mīzān*. This method was also adopted by some of the previous exegetes of the Qur’an, but what has made *al-Mīzān* so important and in a sense unique is its clear and consistent methodology, the author’s exceptional familiarity with the Qur’an, and his unquestioned knowledge of hadith, theology, mysticism and philosophy. He was also a very spiritual man. Abū al-Qāsim Razzāqī writes in this regard:

In his commentary on the Qur’an, ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī shows his great originality in pointing out, firstly, the close interrelatedness of the verses of the Qur’an with one another,

¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 11.

and then he proves that due to this inherent coordination, the Qur'anic verses explain and interpret one another. In other words, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī brought to light the fact that some parts of the Qur'an interpret some other parts. For the understanding of the verses and their interpretation, we should seek help from the Qur'an itself.¹

¹ Razzāqī, Abū al-Qāsim, 'An Introduction to *al-Mizān*.'

**The Status and Reality
of
the Qur'an**

Chapter 11

The significance of the Qur'an in hadith



Introduction

There are many teachings of the Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) about the Qur'an. Here we will mention some hadith about the significance of the Qur'an, about how the Qur'an appears on the Day of Judgement and about how important it is to be with the Qur'an so that the Qur'an can bear witness on the Day of Judgement that one has been a person who has respected and honoured the Qur'an.¹

How the Qur'an is manifested and how much it is respected

There is a long hadith from Imam Muhammad Bāqir (a) in which Imam Bāqir (a) encourages one of his companions, Sa'd, to learn the Qur'an. The hadith shows the respect that the Qur'an has and also describes how the Qur'an will be manifested on the Day of Resurrection; the position of the

¹ Most of them have been selected from *al-Kafl* by the late Shaykh Kulaynī, in the sections titled 'Merits of the Qur'an' and 'Merits of the Carriers of the Qur'an.'

Qur'an then cannot be compared to the position of any other thing.

The Imam (a) says to Sa'd:

يَا سَعْدُ تَعَلَّمُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَإِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ يَأْتِي يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِي أَحْسَنِ
صُورَةٍ نَظَرَ إِلَيْهَا الْخَلْقُ

O Sa'd! Learn the Qur'an, for indeed the Qur'an will come on the Day of Judgement in the most beautiful form that people will have ever seen.

To understand this hadith, we should know that on the Day of Judgment, everything will be alive. We read in the Qur'an:

وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life,
had they known! (29:64)

The real life is in the hereafter. This world (*dunyā*) compared to the hereafter is like the life of an embryo compared to life after birth. Therefore, we should not be surprised that on the Day of Judgement, everything will have life and understanding, even our hands, eyes, ears, and our tongue, and they will be able to speak. The Qur'an says that our skin may even bear witness against us:

وَقَالُوا لَجُلُودِهِمْ لَمْ شَهِدَتْمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

They will say to their skin, 'Why did you bear witness against us?' They will say, 'We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things.' (41:21)

Thus, everything on the Day of Judgment has understanding and life and can speak. Things that will appear there are explained or somehow translated into a language that is familiar to us – like appearing as a human being – even if, in reality, this is not their true form. For instance, when explaining to a small child the pleasure that a scientist feels after solving a problem that had been unresolved for centuries, a person might say that it feels like having a never-ending chocolate bar, because the child may not understand anything greater. Similarly, this is how Allah (swt) speaks to us about the pleasures of heaven because we lack the experience to understand what will happen in the hereafter except through the things which we know.

Then the Imam (a) mentions the condition of the people on that day and says:

وَالنَّاسُ صُفُوفٌ عَشْرُونَ وَمِائَةُ أَلْفٍ صَفٍّ ثَمَانُونَ أَلْفَ صَفٍّ أُمَّةٌ
مُحَمَّدٍ وَأَرْبَعُونَ أَلْفَ صَفٍّ مِنْ سَائِرِ الْأُمَمِ

[...] while people will be assembled in 120,000 rows. 80,000 will be from the nation of Muhammad (s) and 40,000 will be from the rest of the nations.

The large number of rows mean that either Muslims will be more numerous than other nations, or that simply the number of rows and groups consisting of Muslims will be high. This is because the number of people in each row has not been mentioned.

Then Imam (a) says:

فَيَأْتِي عَلَى صَفِّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فِي صُورَةِ رَجُلٍ فَيَسْلَمُ فَيَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْهِ

The Qur'an will come to the row of Muslims in the form of a human being. It will greet them with '*salam*', and they will look at it.

They will say:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْحَلِيمُ الْكَرِيمُ إِنَّ هَذَا الرَّجُلَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ نَعْرِفُهُ
بِنَعْتِهِ وَصِفَتِهِ غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ كَانَ أَشَدَّ اجْتِهَادًا مِنَّا فِي الْقُرْآنِ فَمِنْ هُنَاكَ
أُعْطِيَ مِنَ الْبَهَاءِ وَالْجَمَالِ وَالنُّورِ مَا لَمْ نُعْطَهُ

There is no god but Allah, the forbearing, the generous. Indeed, this is a man from the Muslims; we know him by his qualities and attributes, but he is different from us because he has struggled more and made more efforts with respect to the Qur'an. And because of this, he has been given a type of awe, beauty and light that we have not been given.

The logic of this hadith suggests that when Muslims see the Qur'an, they will think it is a Muslim man, and when they see that he is a Muslim that is better than all others, they will

conclude it is because he has put more effort into learning, practising, teaching, and reading the Qur'an. The Qur'an will be a factor of how one person can be better than another person on the Day of Judgement.

But the Qur'an will not stop with them. It will pass by until it stops at the row of the martyrs, and the martyrs will look at the Qur'an and will say:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الرَّبُّ الرَّحِيمُ إِنَّ هَذَا الرَّجُلَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ نَعَرَفُهُ بِسْمَتِهِ
وَصِفَتِهِ غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ مِنْ شُهَدَاءِ الْبَحْرِ فَمِنْ هُنَاكَ أُعْطِيَ مِنَ الْبَهَاءِ وَ
الْفَضْلِ مَا لَمْ نُعْطَهُ

There is no god but Allah, the Lord, the Merciful. Indeed, he is one of the martyrs. We know the qualities and attributes of this person, but he is better than us – he must be a person who was martyred at sea. And because of this he has been given a type of awe and light that we have not been given.

And then it will walk on until it stops at the martyrs who were killed at sea. This means the martyrs of the sea are of a higher level than those of the land. They will look at it and be very surprised. They will say:

إِنَّ هَذَا مِنْ شُهَدَاءِ الْبَحْرِ نَعَرَفُهُ بِسْمَتِهِ وَصِفَتِهِ غَيْرَ أَنَّ الْجَزِيرَةَ الَّتِي
أُصِيبَ فِيهَا كَانَتْ أَعْظَمَ هَوْلًا مِنَ الْجَزِيرَةِ الَّتِي أُصْبْنَا فِيهَا فَمِنْ
هُنَاكَ أُعْطِيَ مِنَ الْبَهَاءِ وَالْجَمَالِ وَالنُّورِ مَا لَمْ نُعْطَهُ

This is one of the martyrs killed at sea. We know this through his signs and attributes, but he is different; maybe he was killed in battle on an island that was more difficult than our battle. And this is why he has been given such awe, beauty and light that we have not been given.

The Qur'an will then proceed until it reaches the row of prophets and messengers, and then it will embody the form of a messenger. The prophets and messengers will look at it and will be very surprised. They will say:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْحَلِيمُ الْكَرِيمُ إِنَّ هَذَا النَّبِيُّ مُرْسَلٌ نَعْرِفُهُ بِسَمْتِهِ وَ
صِفَتِهِ غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ أُعْطِيَ فَضْلًا كَثِيرًا

There is no god but Allah, the forbearing, the generous. Indeed, this is a messenger. We recognise him through his signs and attributes, but he has been given an immense amount of grace.

Then all the prophets will gather and ask the Holy Prophet (s): 'O Muhammad! Who is this?' He will say to them: 'Do you not know who this is?' They will say: 'We do not know who this is, but we only know this must be a person with whom Allah has never been displeased with.' The Prophet of Allah (swt) will say: 'This is the *hujjah* of Allah upon His creation.' The Qur'an will greet them and will then walk on until it comes to the row of angels embodying the form of an angel which is near to Allah (swt) (*malik muqarrab*). The angels will

look at it and will be very surprised and perplexed when they see its merits; they will wonder who this is. They will say:

تَعَالَى رَبُّنَا وَتَقَدَّسَ إِنَّ هَذَا الْعَبْدَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ نَعْرِفُهُ بِسَمْتِهِ وَ
صِفَتِهِ غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ كَانَ أَقْرَبَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَقَامًا فَمِنْ
هُنَاكَ أَلْبَسَ مِنَ النُّورِ وَالْجَمَالِ مَا لَمْ نَلْبَسْ

Our Lord be high and purified, surely this servant is one of the angels! We recognise this from his signs and attributes, but he must be the closest angel to Allah (swt) and this is why he has been given a type of light and beauty that we have not been given.

It will then walk on until it reaches the Lord of honour and there it will bow down before the 'Throne ('*arsh*), and Allah (swt) will call it, saying:

يَا حُجَّتِي فِي الْأَرْضِ وَكَلَامِي الصَّادِقِ النَّاطِقِ ارْفَعْ رَأْسَكَ وَ سَلِّ
تُعْطُ وَ أَشْفَعُ تُشَفِّعُ

O my *hujjah* on the earth and my true speaking word, raise your head [as he had bowed down] and ask Me and you will be given and intercede, and your intercession will be accepted.

Then it will raise its head, and Allah (swt) will ask: 'How did you find my servants [i.e. how did they treat you]?' The Qur'an will reply:

يَا رَبِّ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ صَانَنِي وَحَافِظَ عَلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُضَيِّعْ شَيْئًا وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ
ضَيَّعَنِي وَاسْتَخَفَّ بِحَقِّي وَكَذَّبَ بِي وَأَنَا حُجَّتُكَ عَلَى جَمِيعِ
خَلْقِكَ

O my Lord! Some of them protected me and were very careful regarding me; they did not let anything about me be wasted or disregarded. And others of them abandoned me, and they underestimated my right and position. They belied me while I was the *hujjah* over all Your creation, but this is how they responded to me.

Allah (swt) will say:

وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي وَارْتِفَاعَ مَكَانِي لِأَتِيَنَّ عَلَيْكَ الْيَوْمَ أَحْسَنَ
الثَّوَابِ وَلَأُعَاقِبَنَّ عَلَيْكَ الْيَوْمَ أَلِيمَ الْعِقَابِ

By My dignity and glory and high position, on this day I shall reward with the best reward according to how they treated you, and I shall punish with the most painful punishment those who have not respected you.¹

In another beautiful hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s), we read:

حُرْمَةُ الْقُرْآنِ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَحُرْمَةِ الْوَالِدِ عَلَى وَلَدِهِ

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 596, Kitāb Faḍl al-Qurʾān, no. 1.

The respect that the Qur'an has before Allah is like the respect a child has for his father.¹

We must of course understand that this hadith provides an example and a likeness for us to be able to understand, but in fact the Qur'an has more respect before Allah (swt) than this. In other words, Allah (swt) has the maximum level of respect for the Qur'an. Consequently we too should be very respectful in matters of the Qur'an. Hence, if a person wishes to please Allah (swt) and get close to Him, then the key is to love the Qur'an, respect the Qur'an, honour the Qur'an, and this must be proven with his words and actions.

Some people think that kissing the Qur'an is enough, but this is not true respect. If a person kisses the Qur'an and does not act according to it, then what is the value of this outward respect? For example, if we go to a scholar and we kiss his hand but do not take his advice, what is this worth? Such a person may think he has done something great, but he has missed the most important step, which is to take his advice. The same applies to a doctor; imagine if a person visits the doctor, kisses his hand, takes away a prescription for medicine, but then never takes it. What would be the point of his respect? If you kiss the Qur'an but are not following it, this is not enough. Your life should kiss the Qur'an, not just your lips. This is very important.

¹ Shu'ayrī, Muhammad, *Jāmi' al-Akhbār*, p. 40.

Hence, the Qur'an is a shortcut to get closer to Allah (swt). Try to become a lover of the Qur'an and *inshallah* Allah (swt) will select you as one of His best servants.

The information that the Qur'an provides

Regarding the information that Qur'an tells us, Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq (a) states:

إِنَّ الْعَزِيزَ الْجَبَّارَ أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ كِتَابَهُ وَهُوَ الصَّادِقُ الْبَارُّ فِيهِ خَبْرُكُمْ
وَأَخْبَرَ مِنْ قَبْلُكُمْ وَخَبَرٌ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ وَخَبَرُ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَوْ
أَتَاكُمْ مَنْ يَخْبِرُكُمْ عَنْ ذَلِكَ لَتَعْجَبْتُمْ

Indeed, the All-mighty, the All-compeller [or the Irresistible], has sent down to you His book, and it is truthful and good. In it is information about you, and information about people before you, and information about people who are to come after you, and information about the sky and the earth. And if someone had come and informed you about all these things, you would have been surprised.¹

Everything is in the Qur'an, but this information requires decoding. To understand this better, we can use this example: suppose a teacher tells one of his students, 'While I am teaching you, when I say "I repeat this sentence," it means, "Bring me water."' Thus, when the teacher says: 'I repeat this

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 599, Kitab Faḍl al-Qur'ān, no. 3.

sentence,’ the other students understand the literal meaning, but that student knows that it has another meaning, and he has to bring water for the teacher. Sometimes something is commonly understood in a way which is different from the way an expert or a person who knows the secrets understands it. There can be many secrets between ourselves and someone that we trust, transmitted via ordinary speech.

Allah (swt) has put much information in the Qur’an for those who are able to understand to decode. As we previously mentioned, there are hadith that say the Qur’an has up to 7 underlying layers¹ (*batn*) of meaning, and at each level something different can be understood; it depends how deeply someone can dive into those layers. The Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) are able to decode that information and understand from the same text what we cannot.

The condition of the reciters of the Qur’an on the Day of Judgement

There is another hadith from Imam Bāqir (a), which is a brief version of the first hadith that was mentioned at the beginning of this section. At the end, it talks about the condition of the reciters of the Qur’an on the Day of Judgement. In this hadith, the Qur’an says to Allah (swt):

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *‘Awālī al-Li’ālī, al-‘Azīziyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīniyyah*, vol. 4, p. 107.

يَا رَبِّ فُلَانُ بْنُ فُلَانٍ أَظْمَأْتُ هَوَاجِرَهُ وَأَسْهَرْتُ لَيْلَهُ فِي دَارِ الدُّنْيَا
وَفُلَانُ بْنُ فُلَانٍ لَمْ أَظْمِئْ هَوَاجِرَهُ وَلَمْ أُسْهِرْ لَيْلَهُ

O Lord! So-and-so are those whose throats I made very thirsty, and I made them unable to sleep [due to their recitation and reflection over me], but not so-and-so.

Then Allah (swt) will say: 'Bring them into heaven according to their ranks.' Then the Qur'an will stand, and the believers will follow it. It will be said to a believer:

اقْرَأْ وَارْقُ

Read and rise!

So, they will be admitted into heaven according to how much they can read and how devoted they were to the Qur'an.¹

The question is, at that time, how much can a person actually read? It will be dependent upon the nature and strength of your relationship with the Qur'an in this world. If you were following the Qur'an 100%, then you will be able to read all of the Qur'an on the Day of Judgement, and you will be able to reach the highest rank. If you followed it 99%, or 98%, or 10%, whatever the amount was, that will determine your status. Even if you are a memoriser (*ḥāfiẓ*) of the Qur'an, you may not be able to read the entire Qur'an there.

¹Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, Kitāb Faḍl al-Qur'ān, p. 601, no. 11.

No loneliness with the Qur'an

In a hadith from Imam Sajjād (a), we read:

لَوْ مَاتَ مَنْ بَيْنَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَمَا إِسْتَوْحِشْتُ بَعْدَ أَنْ يَكُونَ
الْقُرْآنُ مَعِيَ

If all the people in the east and west were to die, I would not feel lonely as long as the Qur'an was with me.¹

There are many points in this hadith; we will mention one. Everyone should consider what provides himself with comfort in this world. If, when you are with the Qur'an, reading it and reflecting upon it – even if it is a sad moment in your life and you are alone – you feel comfortable and derive tranquillity (*sukūn*), this is a very good sign. But if you feel lonely and that you need to phone someone, turn on the television, or play music to get rid of that loneliness, this suggests a problem. Unfortunately, in order to feel comfortable, we look for something to make noise, or to keep busy, or to kill time. The Qur'an may not look attractive to us as an option, and this is a problem. Imam Sajjād (a) says that if he only had the Qur'an with him, he would not feel lonely. Perhaps this also implies that even when there are people

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb Faḍl al-Qur'ān, p. 602, no. 13.

around you, your main source of comfort is not people, but rather the Qur'an.

In the continuation of the hadith, the narrator says: 'When the Imam was reciting Surah al-Fātiḥah, when he would reach *mālik yawm al-dīn*, he would repeat it so many times that you would think that the Imam (a) was going to die.'¹ He could not continue because of what he understood from the verse. It is very important to understand the Qur'an. In fact, we are able to read the Qur'an very quickly because we do not understand it. For example, if someone goes to an art museum, if the visitor is not an artist, it may take him five minutes to complete a tour of the whole museum. However, if a person is an artist, then perhaps every piece of art will take an hour to view, and perhaps one piece will take the entire day! This is because that person will understand and not rush. We read it very quickly because we do not understand. Otherwise, every verse should make us stop and think.

The rank of the people of the Qur'an

Imam Ṣādiq (a) relates that the Holy Prophet (s) said:

¹ The Arabic text is as follows:

كَانَ (ع) إِذَا قَرَأَ «مَالِكِ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ» يُكْرِّرُهَا حَتَّى كَادَ أَنْ يَمُوتَ.

إِنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرْآنِ فِي أَعْلَىٰ دَرَجَةٍ مِنَ الْأَدَمِيِّينَ مَا خَلَا النَّبِيِّينَ وَ
 الْمُرْسَلِينَ فَلَا تَسْتَضَعِفُوا أَهْلَ الْقُرْآنِ حُقُوقَهُمْ فَإِنَّ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ
 الْعَزِيزِ الْجَبَّارِ لَمَكَانًا عَلِيًّا

Indeed, the people of the Qur'an are in the highest rank among human beings, excluding prophets and messengers. So do not underestimate the rights of the people of the Qur'an. For surely with Allah – the Mighty, the All-Compeller – they have a very high position.¹

The people who have the highest rank after prophets and messengers are the people of the Qur'an. Hence, if you want a very high position with Allah (swt), this is a way and a shortcut.

In another hadith also, Imam Ṣādiq says (a):

الْحَافِظُ لِلْقُرْآنِ الْعَامِلُ بِهِ مَعَ السَّفَرَةِ الْكِرَامِ الْبَرَّةِ

The one who memorises the Qur'an and acts upon it will be with the angels who are honoured and good.²

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Bab Faḍl Ḥāmil al-Qur'ān, p. 603, no. 1.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Bab Faḍl Ḥāmil al-Qur'ān, p. 603, no. 2.

The question arises: who are the people of the Qur'an (*ahl al-Qur'ān*)? In Arabic, *ahl* comes from the root word *āl*. The people of a family are known by this term because *āl* means 'to return' and a person's family always go back to him, i.e. if they leave the house for an errand or to go to school, work, shopping, or to the park, they will eventually return home. On the other hand, friends may visit but then leave. Hence, family are called *ahl* or *āl*.

Hence, *ahl al-Qur'ān* are those whose main station and base is with the Qur'an. If they go do something else, they finish that task and come back to the Qur'an. They live with the Qur'an and they are acquainted with it and have a close and constant relationship with it.

Mixing the Qur'an with one's flesh and blood

In a very beautiful hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

مَنْ قَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ وَهُوَ شَابٌّ مُؤْمِنٌ اخْتَلَطَ الْقُرْآنُ بِلَحْمِهِ وَدَمِهِ

Whoever recites the Qur'an while he is a young believer, the Qur'an becomes mixed with his flesh and blood.

If a person recites the Qur'an and he is young and is a believer, the Qur'an will be mixed with his flesh and blood, and in that scenario, nothing can separate him from the Qur'an. We can explain it in this way: sometimes, when a person is under pressure and trauma, they even forget their name. If someone's attention is divided and scattered because too

many things come to their mind at the same time, or if a person experiences a deep calamity, then he can forget things. Now, death is extremely difficult for those who are not prepared for it, and therefore people may forget what they have learned, like a person who has an exam and, because of the stress of that exam, forgets everything; or like a person who goes for an interview and becomes so nervous that he forgets what to say and how to present himself. Similar is the case for those who are not used to giving lectures; they may prepare to give a lecture for one hour, and then when they actually come to deliver it, they will finish it in just five minutes. Hence, death is very stressful for those who are not prepared for it.

After death, we then have the terror of the Day of Judgement, a day that can be full of worries, pain, and stress, to the extent that the Qur'an says:

يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ

The day that you will see it, every suckling female will neglect what she suckled. (22:2)

Usually, a mother may forget anything except her baby. But on the Day of Judgement, the stress and trauma will be so severe that mothers may forget even their own child.

Now let us consider the questions we will have to answer after going through difficulties of death and the Day of Resurrection: 'Who is your Lord?', 'Who is your Imam?',

‘What is your book?’, etc. Incredibly, we may not be able to answer such basic questions, let alone, say, recite a chapter of the Qur’an. This is why we recite the *talqīn* at the time of burial to help the deceased person.

Therefore, if a person has learned something and it is stored in his memory, when he goes through the difficulties and stress of death and the Day of Judgement, the memory may be erased. However, he will not forget the things he learned and then absorbed in his life, and that later became a fixed quality of his soul. If the Qur’an is just in a person’s memory, then if they suffer a blow to the head, this can be forgotten. But if it occupies a place in the person’s flesh and blood, then it cannot separate from him. This is like a traveller who may not be allowed to carry a bottle of water, but if he drinks it and it goes inside him, he can easily take it with him. It is the same when someone is moving from this world. He has to leave everything external – for instance, in his pocket or hand. But there is no problem taking anything which is in his heart, flesh and blood. This is why it is important to absorb the Qur’an.

There is hadith in which the Prophet (s) says that when a believer goes along the *ṣirāt* and says *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, the blaze of the fire of Hell will be extinguished and it will say: ‘O believer! Pass! Truly your light has extinguished

my blaze.¹ But the question is who will be able to remember *bismillāh* and say it at that time. If in this world, *bismillāh* has become part of a person, he will remember to say it then as well; otherwise, he will not be able to say it at that time.

Therefore, we have to make sure that we have absorbed the Qur'an, and the Qur'an is mixed with us so much that it will never be separated from us. Then it will be always with us not only in *dunyā* but in the *barzakh*,² on the Day of Judgement, and then in heaven.

Then in the continuation of the hadith, the Imam (a) says:

وَجَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَعَ السَّفَرَةِ الْكِرَامِ الْبَرَّةِ وَكَانَ الْقُرْآنُ
حَاجِزًا عَنْهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Allah (swt) will place this person with the angels who are honoured, and who are very close to Him. And on the Day of Judgement, the Qur'an will be a barrier [of protection] for this person.

¹ Shu'ayrī, Muhammad ibn Muhammad, *Jāmi' al-Akhbār*, p. 42. The hadith in Arabic is as follows:

إِذَا مَرَّ الْمُؤْمِنُ عَلَى الصِّرَاطِ يَقُولُ: بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، طَفِنَتْ لَهُبُ
النَّيِّرَانِ وَتَقُولُ: جَزَى يَا مُؤْمِنُ! فَإِنْ نُورِكَ قَدْ أَطْفَأَ لَهُبِي

² *Barzakh* is a place of transit between the two worlds. In the transitory period between life in this world and the resurrection, human spirits stay in *barzakh*.

On the Day of Judgement, the Qur'an protects this person and will not let the fire touch him. If in every cell of the body, in every drop of the blood there is the Qur'an, the fire of hell cannot burn this person. Of course, such a person would never become too sinful or a criminal or a mischief-maker.

Then the hadith goes on saying that the Qur'an on the Day of Judgement will negotiate on behalf of that person and says:

يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ كُلَّ عَامِلٍ قَدْ أَصَابَ أَجْرَ عَمَلِهِ غَيْرَ عَامِلِي فَلَبَّغْ بِهِ أَكْرَمَ
عَطَايَاكَ قَالَ فَيَكْسُوهُ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ حُلَّتَيْنِ مِنْ حُلْلِ الْجَنَّةِ وَ
يُوضَعُ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ تَاجُ الْكَرَامَةِ ثُمَّ يُقَالُ لَهُ هَلْ أَرْضَيْتَكَ فِيهِ فَيَقُولُ
الْقُرْآنُ يَا رَبِّ قَدْ كُنْتُ أَرْغَبُ لَهُ فِيمَا هُوَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ هَذَا فَيُعْطَى
الْأَمْنُ بِيَمِينِهِ وَالْخُلْدُ بِيَسَارِهِ ثُمَّ يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ فَيُقَالُ لَهُ اقْرَأْ وَاصْعَدْ
دَرَجَةً ثُمَّ يُقَالُ لَهُ هَلْ بَلَّغْنَا بِهِ وَارْضَيْتَكَ فَيَقُولُ نَعَمْ

[The Qur'an will say:] 'O my Lord, surely everyone who has worked has been paid except the person who has been working for me, so give him the best of Your gifts.' Then Allah (swt) will give this person two garments from heaven and will place a crown of honour atop his head. Allah (swt) will then ask: 'Are you now satisfied with what We have done for this person?' The Qur'an will say: 'O my Lord, I was expecting more!' The person will then be given [a writ of] protection from the fire in his right hand and [a writ of] permanence in heaven in his left hand. Then he will enter heaven, and it will be said to him: 'Read, and

go one level higher.’ Then the Qur’an will be asked: ‘Have we made him reach [what you expected]? Are you satisfied?’ The Qur’an will reply: ‘Yes.’¹

Learning and teaching the Qur’an

Regarding learning and teaching the Qur’an, Imam Sadiq (a) has said:

يَنْبَغِي لِلْمُؤْمِنِ أَنْ لَا يَمُوتَ حَتَّى يَتَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ أَوْ يَكُونَ فِي تَعْلِيمِهِ

It is expected of a believer that he does not die until he has either learned the Qur’an or else is teaching it.²

This means that a believer, before he dies, either should have learned the Qur’an and be teaching it, or be in the process of learning it. This is regarded as the best condition in which to meet the Angel of Death: he should come and find a person either learning the Qur’an or teaching it.

We have also many hadith regarding the people who try to learn the Qur’an despite their difficulties. For example, some hadith state that if someone has difficulty in learning the Qur’an, but continues to learn it more, Allah (swt) will reward that person with a double share compared to someone who

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 603.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 607, no. 3.

did not have this difficulty.¹ This difficulty can be because a person does not have a strong memory or cannot concentrate, or that he has to travel far to come to a class or a teacher, and so on.

Hence, no one should be disappointed if he sees others reciting the Qur'an fluently but cannot recite, or is struggling. It does not matter how fast or fluent one is, it matters how much effort is put in. We cannot say we are better than those who cannot read the Qur'an properly or quickly.

The carrier of the Qur'an

If Allah (swt) has given a person the blessing of being a carrier of the Qur'an,² then he must observe the requirements of this position. Prophet Muhammad (s) says:

إِنَّ أَحَقَّ النَّاسِ بِالتَّخَشُّعِ فِي السِّرِّ وَالْعَلَانِيَةِ لِحَامِلُ الْقُرْآنِ

The one who is supposed to have the greatest humbleness secretly and openly is the carrier of the Qur'an.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 603. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

مَنْ قَرَأَهُ كَثِيرًا وَتَعَاهَدَهُ بِمَشَقَّةٍ مِنْ شِدَّةِ حِفْظِهِ أَعْطَاهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَجْرَ هَذَا
مَرَّتَيْنِ.

² The meaning of the 'carrier of the Qur'an' will be discussed later in this book.

The situation should not be such that because you learn, memorise, and teach the Qur'an, you think you are special and important, become arrogant, or, when you are alone, you do not act on the Qur'an. No, if you are a person who has been able to get close to the Qur'an then you have to become very humble, whether in public or at home, and even alone and with your family. You must be as humble and obedient in private as you are in public. The Qur'an should bring *khushū'* (humbleness of the heart).¹ Regarding the prayer, the Qur'an says:

وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ

And take recourse in patience and prayer, and it is indeed hard except for the humble. (2:45)

The students of the Qur'an should try their best to achieve this *khushū'*. If there is any arrogance or dishonesty, and if in public we are humble and obedient but in private we are arrogant and disobedient, then we are not students of the Qur'an and we are just tiring ourselves. There are two ways to be a student. One is to register your name formally on a list of students, and the other is to be accepted by Allah (swt) as a student of the Qur'an. Those accepted by Allah (swt) should be humble (*khāshi'*).

¹There is also *khushū'*, which means that humbleness appears on a person's outward body.

Then the Prophet (s) continued:

وَأَنَّ أَحَقَّ النَّاسِ فِي السِّرِّ وَالْعَلَانِيَةِ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالصَّوْمِ لِحَامِلِ
الْقُرْآنِ

The people who are expected to have the best relationship with fasting and prayer are the carriers of the Qur'an.

This hadith also emphasises that closeness to the Qur'an should make a person more appreciative of prayer and fasting. Then the Prophet Muhammad (s) called out with the highest voice:

يَا حَامِلَ الْقُرْآنِ تَوَاضَعْ بِهِ يَرْفَعَكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَعَزَّزْ بِهِ فَيَذَلَّكَ اللَّهُ

O carrier of the Qur'an! Be humble by it and Allah will raise you! Do not try and raise yourself by it; otherwise, Allah will remove your honour.¹

This hadith stresses that it should be Allah (swt) that raises a person, and it is not for that person to seek other ways of raising himself. If a person is humble, he will be raised. The Prophet Muhammad (s) stresses that we must be humble towards the Qur'an, and as a result Allah (swt) will raise us.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kaḥfī*, vol. 2, p. 604.

Chapter 12

The Qur’anic understanding of the universe



Introduction

There are many things one can learn from the Qur’an about the Qur’an itself. In the next two chapters, we will mention some points that can fundamentally change our understanding of the position of the Holy Qur’an with Allah (swt). To be able to understand this, first we need to present an understanding of the universe that is based on the Qur’an, and once that is established, we will build upon it and explain the position of the Qur’an. Here we mean by ‘universe’ the whole creation, everything other than Allah (swt).

The physical universe

We already know that the world that we experience – such as this planet, the moon, the sun, the stars, and so on, according to the Qur’an, is a very small part of creation. This is despite its vast and huge size and even despite the fact that it is still expanding, and despite the fact that we have not achieved a complete understanding of the physical world. Our galaxy is not even a drop in the ocean of creation. They are a small part of the creation of Allah (swt).

The spiritual universe

Beyond this world, there is another universe and another world that is not physical but is spiritual and immaterial or abstract (*mujarrad*). That world is regarded as being greater in existence and more real than this physical world that we know. Because of our limitations, the material world is more understandable and familiar to us than the immaterial and unseen world. We cannot perceive this world by our five senses, and it is not visible to us. For us, an angel is more difficult to understand than a bird. If we see a pigeon, we can easily understand that it is there, and we can see its size and shape, but if an angel is there we cannot understand its presence or its form. Not because a pigeon is greater than an angel and therefore, we can see it more easily, but because a pigeon is much less perfect than an angel, so it is closer to our level more than an angel, so it is easier for us to understand it.

Thus, we should know that when we divide the realities into the seen world (*‘ālam al-shuhūd*) and unseen world (*‘ālam al-ghayb*), this is for us and based on our own limitations. Indeed, anything in the unseen world is much greater than the things that are in the seen world, and we are in between. We are partly in the seen world and partly in the unseen world and, therefore, we can have some understanding of both, but most of us are more engaged with the seen world, with the worldly universe, and therefore our understanding of this side is easier.

The relationship and interaction between physical world and the spiritual world

This physical world and the spiritual world are two different worlds, but they are not disconnected in the sense that there is no interaction between them. Here we study the relationship and interaction between these two worlds of creation.¹

For example, our soul is a reality that essentially belongs to that world but has a connection with our body which is physical and from this world. Scholars have said that the soul is abstract (*mujarrad*) in essence but that its actions are connected to this world and related to matter (*māddah*). This is why we need a body; our soul functions through the body and therefore is limited. Our soul by itself has no space. For example, you cannot say ‘my soul is in this room’ or ‘this is in front of my soul’ or ‘behind my soul’ because the soul has no space and no physical dimensions. Rather, the window for the soul to come into the physical world is the body; therefore, the body can limit the soul. I cannot see something which is behind my head; I can see something which is in front of my eyes – not because the soul has these limitations but rather these limitations come from the body, and the body is the gate or window for my soul to encounter this world. Or, for example, I can move something with my hand if it is near my

¹ These are also termed *mulk* and *malakūt*, or *‘ālam al-khalq* and *‘ālam al-amr*.

body, but I cannot move something in another part of the room, let alone in other rooms, but this is not because my soul is here. It is because my soul functions through my body, and my body has these limits. If your soul becomes very strong and can bypass your physical body, then the soul might be able to see things which are not before your eyes, or you could move things which are not near your hand.

Hence, if something happens to our body, then it can affect the soul. But there are times when something may happen to our body and affect it, but it may not affect our soul at all. For example, a person may lose his memory due to an accident or illness. If he were asked about Allah (swt), he might fail to answer. It could be that he prayed regularly, but then due to something like Alzheimer's, he forgot to pray. Now, certainly we cannot conclude from this situation that this person has lost faith and is no longer a believer. This is a challenge that has occurred in the interaction between body and soul. What happens in this world and in the body does not necessarily reflect the position of the soul. Or, if a person is in a vegetative state such as brain death, then when we look at his body, we think he does not understand anything. This still does not show us that the soul is not understanding or is in a bad situation. The soul could be in the heavenly areas of the *barzakh* and be much happier and actually more understanding than us! But we cannot understand the position of the soul through the body of this person.

However, sometimes the connection between the soul and the body is normal, so by watching or talking to a person, we can guess what is in his mind or soul. If we watch someone, then we may be able to tell from what he is doing what his state is, or if we interview someone, then we can understand many things about his soul. This all applies to normal situations.

Hence, sometimes the body and what is done through the body in this world can help us get an understanding of the state of the spirit to some extent; and sometimes the door is closed, and we cannot understand what is happening on that person's spiritual side. This is about human beings.

Then we have things that are even more abstract, such as angels. Angels are not like human beings. As we mentioned previously, the human soul is abstract in essence but in action is material. But an angel is totally beyond our reach in this world. In *dunyā* we may not see or feel anything to do with angels. They are a matter of the unseen (*ghayb*), and we do not understand them. Therefore, there are some kinds of connections that we understand, and some connections that we do not understand. But the angels play an active role in *dunyā*. In fact, they have lots of responsibilities and activities here. We read in the Qur'an:

فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا

By those who direct the affairs [of creatures].
(79:5)

Angels are like agents of Allah (swt); they do many things, but we do not see them and we do not understand them. One of the reasons we need revelation is because of the limit in our understanding. There is a great part of reality that we cannot understand through our own senses or reason. Only religion can teach us these things. One of the jobs of the prophets is to clarify what we can know by ourselves, and also to teach us what we cannot know by ourselves:

وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

and teaches you what you did not know. (2:151)

Therefore, there is at times an interaction between the two worlds, and we can understand this from things like the normal situations of the body and soul. And sometimes there are interactions that we cannot understand, such as when the angels carry out certain tasks in this world.

One thing we must recognise is that sometimes things in this world that are very important for us and which we have a high regard and value for may not necessarily have the same value in the other world. For example, some people will do anything to become famous. However, even if a person is famous for good reasons, such as having served the people, and in return people give him recognition, admire him, and hold events for him, this does not necessarily mean that this fame is

improving his situation in the other world. It does not necessarily mean that the person's spirit is improving, growing, and becoming more perfect. In this world, people could praise us day and night, and all the channels, stations, newspapers, and websites could praise us, but this does not necessarily mean that we have grown and ascended in the spiritual world.

How to transfer a worldly action to the other world

Another point that we want to discuss is how to transfer something we do in this world to the spiritual world. For example, suppose I want to do something via worldly means to benefit my parents who have passed away – for example, I establish a soup kitchen. Does this mean that my parents will benefit? Not necessarily. Or for example, even if I build a hospital or school for my parents, they may not benefit. This is because giving food, providing services, establishing hospitals, and so on all happen in this world. We need to find a way to give these things a spiritual reality and give it significance for that world. Running a soup kitchen does not mean anything in that world unless our intention transforms this worldly action into another type of reality. The things that are happening in *dunyā* do not necessarily show any positive progress in the other world. We need to find the alchemy or transformer that can change these worldly things into spiritual things.

A very important part of this is intention (*nīyyah*). Intention has the ability to give these actions a good (or a negative) spiritual status and a new identity.

Investing in the Hereafter

Hence, a great deal of smartness is needed in order to transfer as much as we can from this world or this realm of reality to the Hereafter or the higher realm of reality. If a person is really clever and wants to make great business, then they will not invest all their capitals in *dunyā* and the worldly affairs, but will invest in the Hereafter.

This can be done by transferring the things of *dunyā* to the Hereafter as much as possible. This is done through *nīyyah*, and the *nīyyah* is improved by way of a person's understanding (*maʿrifah*) and belief (*ʿaqīdah*). It is *maʿrifah* and *ʿaqīdah* that are crucial.

Imagine that two people are believers and have good intentions, but one has *maʿrifah* whereas the other does not; the result of their actions is totally different.¹ There are different levels of good intention, and one factor to improve an intention is the *maʿrifah* (understanding) of the agent.

¹ In the Islamic theory of ethics, a good intention is not enough in determining the moral value of an action.

So, we have to find out the best ways of transferring more to the other world. If we keep things only in *dunyā*, then they will not benefit us at the time and where we have greater need for them. We have to transfer them. This transfer is not something that can happen physically through banks and the like. Even if a person establishes a kitchen to give free food to needy people, or a hospital, or a mosque, then just the construction or the donation of time and money does not necessarily mean that anything has been sent there. However, if these things are done with a good intention and good understanding, then they will be transferred there as light and valuables.

Anything that remains in *dunyā* will expire and finish. Firstly, it will finish for the agent, and secondly it will finish altogether. For example, a person may collect millions of pounds. Will he benefit from them? He may use some of the money and die, and so for him it will come to an end. And even if this money passes to his children, there will come a time that it will also run out for them. In the end, everything in *dunyā* will perish. But those things in *dunyā* that were done for the other world will remain permanently, because they have been constructed in another way, and they actually belong to the other world. The Qur'an says:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

Everything is to perish except His Face. (28:88)

In another verse we read:

مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

What is with you passes away, and what is with Allah is enduring. (16:96)

These terms and concepts mean that the things in *dunyā* will expire and finish, but if anything is done for the sake of Allah (swt) then it is transferred from *dunyā* to the other world and will be saved there forever. This is because that world completely faces Allah (swt), and nothing there is going to expire. With this kind of outlook, we can then begin to try and transfer things to that world as much as possible.

To explain how things from this world can be transferred to the other world, we can give this example. Say that someone wants to send one thousand pounds to another country, in order to be able to use it there. It becomes necessary to convert the money to another currency, as pounds cannot be used there. To transfer from *dunyā* to the Hereafter requires conversion, but does not require us to transfer it. The transfer happens automatically once it is transformed. We do not need to do anything. We often say that we must ‘take’ good things with us to the Hereafter, but in reality, we do not need to, as the good deeds are already there, and they get there faster than us. We do not need to worry about ‘taking’ any good deeds there. The Qur’an says:

وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ

*and let every soul consider what it sends ahead
for tomorrow (59:18)*

The highest level of the spiritual world

After discussing the relationship and interaction between this material world, *dunyā* and the spiritual world, to discuss this issue further we need to refer and explain *‘ālam al-‘indīyah*.

The immaterial and unseen world itself has different levels of existence. What we understand from the Qur’an is that the highest level of existence in this unseen world is very near to Allah (swt). We can refer to it as the universe of *‘indīyah* or *‘ālam al-‘indīyah*. Before explaining this, we should mention some points regarding nearness to Allah (swt).

When we talk about nearness to Allah (swt), we always say that Allah (swt) is near to everything but not vice versa. Certain things may be near to Him, other things may be far from Him, but He is near to everything. For example, when it comes to human beings, He is very near to us. He is not far from us, and certainly He is not absent anywhere. We read in the Qur’an:

هُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

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

Elsewhere we read:

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (50:16)

In another verse the Qur'an says:

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ

Know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart. (8:24)

However, we cannot say that we are also near to Allah (swt). We have to seek nearness to Him (*taqarrub*). There are some people who have been brought nearer by Allah (swt). First, they are called *mutaqarribūn* as they seek nearness to Allah (swt), and then after working hard to get nearer to Allah (swt), then He accepts them, and takes them further towards Himself, and brings them nearer to Himself; they are called *muqarrabūn*. It is the same with *mukhlis* and *mukhlas*. *Mukhlis* is the one who is seeking purity, and *mukhlas* is the one who is purified by Allah (swt). First they start with *ikhlas* and they are *mukhlis*, and when they are accepted, then Allah (swt) completes the job. For we can get purity through our efforts – of course with the assistance of Allah (swt) – but a time comes that we are not able to do anything further. We do things that we know and understand, but then purification needs more; therefore, Allah (swt) will take over and purify us completely.

In any case, the Qur'an teaches us that Allah (swt) is near to us but we have to seek nearness to Him. The Qur'an says that those who are very close to Him – compared to others – are *'indallāh* or *ladallāh* (close to Allah). However, the Qur'an never says that anything or anyone is with Him (*ma'a Allāh*). He is with us (57:4), but we cannot say anyone is 'with' (*ma'a*) Allah. Actually, the Qur'an says:

فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا

so do not invoke anyone along with Allah.
(72:18)

In English or perhaps even in Arabic, sometimes being near to Allah (swt) is expressed by saying being 'with' Him, but according to the Qur'an which is very precise and accurate, we cannot say anything is 'with' (*ma'a*) Allah because *ma'a* shows being next to; we do not have anything next to Allah (swt) or anything at His level. Allah (swt) is with all beings in all levels, but nothing is with Him. Nothing can be called 'next to' Allah (swt), whether it is in the form of prayer and worship, which is the first meaning of the verse, or even in the consideration. We cannot think of anything next to Him, so the maximum is *'indallāh* or *ladallāh*.

Every blessing descends from the universe of *'indīyyah*

According to the Qur'an, everything that is good, every blessing, and every bounty (*ni'mah*) that comes to this world originates from the sources and treasures that are in the part

of the universe which is very close and near to Allah (swt), the universe of ‘*indīyah*. The Qur’an says:

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنْزِلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ

There is not a thing but that its sources are near Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure. (15:21)

The unlimited source of everything good is near Allah (swt), but when it is sent to this physical world, it is sent with a fixed measure. We also read in the Qur’an:

إِنَّا كُلُّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ

Indeed, We have created everything in a measure. (54:49)

Therefore, everything in the physical world has a measure, a size, and a limit. But there are unlimited treasures with Allah (swt). Here we refer to some instances.

Sustenance: Sustenance (*rizq*) comes from those sources near to Allah (swt). In verse 3:169, the Qur’an describes those who are killed for His sake i.e. the martyrs as those who are living near their Lord (*‘inda rabbihim*) and receive sustenance:

وَلَا تَحْسِبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أحيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ
يُرْزَقُونَ

Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of Allah to be dead; rather they are living and provided for near their Lord. (3:169)

We also are receiving our sustenance (*rizq*) from those sources which are near Allah (swt) after they descend. However, it should be noted that sustenance is not simply whatever you eat, drink, or use. If we look at the Qur'an carefully, we realize that sustenance has a positive or sacred meaning. Therefore, if someone misappropriates something, for example, if someone takes someone else's money and buys bread and eats it, this cannot be called sustenance or *rizq* because this food is *harām*, whereas true *rizq* always comes from the universe of '*indīyah* and is always *halāl* and pure.

There are cases that it is obvious that the *rizq* comes from Allah (swt). For example, if someone does not expect something and then all of a sudden receives money or a nice gift, he says this was from Allah (swt); otherwise he may say it was his salary or the result of his hard work. This distinction is wrong; any *rizq* comes from Allah (swt). In the story of Qārūn, we read that the people tell him: '*With the [wealth] which Allah has bestowed on you, seek the abode of the Hereafter, while not forgetting your share of this world.*¹ He answers: '*I have indeed been given [all] this because of the knowledge that I have.*² This is not what only Qārūn says.

¹ Qur'an 28:77.

² Qur'an 28:78.

Unfortunately, many people think the same way. They think what they have is only because of their knowledge, expertise, or hard work. They say, ‘I have been working day and night, I have been working tirelessly and this is what I have now earned.’ This is wrong. You have to work hard, but everything good is only possible because Allah (swt) is behind it. Something should not have to arrive miraculously for you to say that it is from Allah (swt).

Of course, there are cases that are extraordinary. For example, the Qur’an refers to the fact that in the case of Lady Mary, her *rizq* came from Allah (swt) miraculously:

كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ
أَنْتِ لَكَ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

Whenever Zechariah visited her in the sanctuary, he would find provisions with her. He said, ‘O Mary, where does this come from for you?’ She said, ‘It comes from Allah.’ (3:37)

Since the verse says ‘*whenever*’, we understand that this did not happen once or twice, but was ongoing. The food that she had with her was always very fresh, and perhaps included fruits that were not in season, or were not available in that area, so Prophet Zechariah could not believe that this was ordinary sustenance. He was very surprised to see those fruits near Mary. He therefore asked her where they had come from,

and she replied that they were from Allah (swt). Hence, *rizq* is one of the things that originate from that realm near Him.

Knowledge: Knowledge also comes from Allah (swt). We have some knowledge, more or less, and it is something that comes from the universe of *‘indīyah*. This is why Allah (swt) says:

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

The knowledge is with Allah. (46:23)

This verse shows that knowledge comes from Allah (swt), and then a small part of it is distributed in this world. The Qur’an also says:

وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

and you have not been given knowledge except a little. (17:85)

Now, we see thousands upon thousands of books in this world, and all of this knowledge is miniscule compared to the real knowledge. This real knowledge includes the knowledge of all the stars and planets – and they are also a very small part of the creation of Allah (swt). The real knowledge is vast.

Sometimes, your knowledge comes from going to school or university, or through reading, memorising, practicing, and so on. But this is all still coming from Allah (swt), even though it is collected and obtained in *dunyā* through worldly or

conventional means. And sometimes your knowledge comes directly from Allah (swt) and not from any worldly means. This is the knowledge that Allah (swt) puts into the hearts of people. Imam Ṣādiq (a) says to ‘Unwān al-Basrī:

لَيْسَ الْعِلْمُ بِكَثْرَةِ التَّعَلُّمِ وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ نُورٌ يَقْدِفُهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِي قَلْبٍ
مَنْ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ.

Real knowledge is not a matter of learning a lot, but rather it is a light that Allah projects into the hearts of people whom He wants to guide.¹

Some people misunderstand this. They say that there is therefore no reason to go to school, university or seminary, and there is no reason to study. Instead, they say, we should wait for the knowledge to come from Allah (swt) to our hearts. This is not what the hadith of Imam Ṣādiq (a) means, and neither was this a practice of Imam Ṣādiq (a). He would train people and hold classes. What the Imam (a) really meant was that a search for knowledge should start with reading, taking notes, taking exams, and attending classes, but we must realise that this is just the beginning of the journey for knowledge. Once a person proves that he is thirsty for knowledge and if Allah (swt) sees that he is honest and sincere in searching for understanding, He will give that person knowledge directly. In that situation, that person will understand things that are not mentioned in books. But the

¹ Shahīd Thānī, Zayn al-Dīn ibn Ali, *Munyat al-Murīd*, p. 167.

first step is to seek knowledge through conventional methods of learning.

The same applies to *rizq*; real *rizq* comes from Allah (swt), but this does not mean that a person should sit at home and do nothing, and hope that he will be provided with *rizq* from Allah (swt). One must work and make efforts in search for *rizq*. But, ultimately, *rizq* does come from Allah (swt). Similarly, healing comes from Allah (swt) but one must still go to a doctor for treatment and take medicine, whilst in the realisation that healing comes from Allah (swt).

Reward: Another bounty that can be traced in this way is *thawāb* (reward). This is a particularly beautiful point. The Qur'an says:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا فَعِنْدَ اللَّهِ ثَوَابُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ
سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

*Whoever desires the reward of this world,
[should know that] with Allah is the reward of
this world and the Hereafter, and Allah is all-
hearing, all-seeing. (4:134)*

Sometimes, Allah (swt) gives reward in this world, and sometimes He gives it in the Hereafter. It could be that the *thawāb* in this world is that a person is given divine light, good children, a blessed life, good health, or praise. These are good things and can be good rewards in this world. Or, the reward can be given in the Hereafter.

It is important to understand that if the reward is coming from Allah (swt), then whether it is given in *dunyā* or the Hereafter, it should not be regarded as being from *dunyā*. It is not the case that if He gives a reward in *dunyā* it is regarded as a worldly thing, and if He gives it in the Hereafter, it is regarded as a heavenly thing; no, both are from Him and both should be highly regarded. For example, say you go for hajj, and while you are there you purchase some souvenirs to give to people back at home. The souvenirs were bought in Mecca, and perhaps you took them to Masjid al-Ḥarām to bless them, and then you give them to people once you return home. Now, just because you gave the souvenirs to them in their own town does not mean they originated in their town; rather, they originated from a holy land. However, suppose you forget, or lack money or time; when you return home, you realise that they will expect something from you when they see you. So, in this situation, you might buy gifts in your hometown and give them to people. But if you had brought them from Mecca, then they would have been regarded as being from the holy land. Therefore, when Allah (swt) gives a reward to a person in *dunyā*, this does not mean it has only worldly qualities, but rather it has heavenly qualities. Therefore, reward comes from Allah (swt), and it cannot be compared to those gifts which are only worldly like the reward that your company may give you.

To conclude this part, the above are some examples that I have selected for you from the Qur'an that explain that there

is a part of the creation and existence, or universe in the spiritual realm, that is very close to Allah (swt), and we can refer to it as ‘*indallāh*. Some scholars call it ‘*ālam al-‘indīyyah* (the world of closeness). Compared to the physical world, which is the lowest level of creation, that world – although it is still created – is higher and closer to Allah (swt). And the good things we see here such as *thawāb* and *rizq* originate from the treasures of that world.

The meaning of ‘sending down’ (*inzāl*/ *tanzīl*)

We discussed the point that we have a realm that is much higher in status than the physical world (*dunyā*) and is closer to Allah (swt), and in it are treasures of all the good things that we receive in this world. This process of sending down those treasures to this world which has been, for example, referred to in verse 15:21 is known as *tanzīl* (or *inzāl*).

The nature of *tanzīl* is very important. Unfortunately, when most of us think of the term ‘sending down,’ we think of a thing that is sent down from a higher place in the physical world to a lower place in the physical world. This is because we are used to this kind of sending something down, e.g. an object being sent down from the second floor of a building to the ground floor.

It involves major change

However, when the Qur’an speaks about *tanzīl* of divine scriptures or knowledge or sustenance, it is totally different.

It is a process of sending something from *‘ālam al-‘indīyyah* – the spiritual realm – to this physical realm. But how does it come down to this world? In the physical world (*dunyā*), it is possible that when an object is sent from a higher place to a lower place, it can remain as it is, unchanged. If I give you a book on the tenth floor, and you bring it down to the ground floor, then the book will not change. Or if I give you a letter or food, it comes down but does not necessarily change. Of course, at times, due to things like change in temperature, a solid can become liquid. In this regard, a thing can change or it can stay the same. Thus, in *dunyā*, *tanzīl* does not necessarily involve any major change. And the same goes for sending a thing up.

However, when something is sent down from the spiritual world to this world, it undergoes a major change. This is because the natures of these two worlds are very different. When something is there, it does not have the limitations that we have here. Everything here has limit, size, and proportion. In *dunyā* we do not have an unlimited number of good things, and this is why there is competition and conflict; sometimes people fight over things because we are unable to give them in sufficient quantities to everyone, and some people end up having some and others do not. But in that world there are no limitations and no quotas. Also, there are no restrictions in time or space. So, when it comes to knowledge – and this is something very important to understand – knowledge in that world is unlimited, and if it were given to people here in its

original form without them being prepared, it could drive them mad. It would be like connecting a high voltage cable to someone.

In *dunyā*, if you attend a lecture given by a person from *dunyā* about something, although it is a subject that can be learned, you may get a headache, if the lecture is too advanced. For example, if you attend a lecture on philosophy and you do not have any idea of what philosophy is, then, after one hour, you might get a headache. The professor or expert may have used the same words and language that you know, and may have been an ordinary person, but because you could not absorb it you may end up with a headache. And if this continues for a long time, it might cause mental illness. If a person attends lectures every day that they do not understand, then they might develop psychological problems, even though this is still *dunyā* that we are talking about.

Now, imagine knowledge that is unlimited, that is not differentiated, that is not put into multiplicity, but is simple (*basīṭ*). If that knowledge were given to us, we would not be able to cope with it. Allah (swt) therefore narrows down this knowledge, limits it, restricts and modifies it, simplifies it many times and to such an extent that it can come into this world, and even when it comes to this world, we still cannot cope with it! He chooses those servants of His who have the greatest capacity and gives it to them. He does not expect His

ordinary servants to be able to take it, so He gives it to His special servants to take it and explain it to others.¹

Thus, *tanzīl* in this context does not merely mean sending something down as it is to a lower place. It means that a thing exists in a very high rank of existence and in perfection, and is something that has so much greatness that *dunyā* cannot contain it. It needs to be simplified, and Allah (swt) makes a suitable presentation and manifestation of it in a form that suits the lower world.

For example, in the Qur'an, Allah (swt) sometimes says things that are very difficult to understand. He will say, for example, that '*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.*'² This is a very difficult concept for us to understand. To make it simple, he mentions a parable, '*The parable of His Light is a niche.*'³ This is done in order to simplify this idea. Or, for example, Allah (swt) wants to explain the relationship between truth (*ḥaqq*) and falsehood (*batīl*), and so He gives the example of rain falling, and then carrying away with itself lots of

¹In the discussion about revelation we mentioned some of the conditions of the one who receives *wahy*, among which was to have a very large heart and great capacity.

² Qur'an 24:35. The Arabic text is as follows:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

³ Qur'an 24:35. The Arabic text is as follows:

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ

impurities such as dirt. Then He mentions the formation of bubbles and froth, and how those bubbles will cover the surface of the water, but will gradually go away.¹

In this way, an example can simplify a very difficult concept, such as an abstract idea that requires an example to simplify it. Or, at times, we can use stories or paintings to teach children very important principles.

Hence, *tanzil* is somehow like this: there is a very great reality and people cannot understand it, but it is simplified in a way they can try to understand; they may not fully understand it, but they can try.

¹ This refers to the following verse:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَابِيًا وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِي النَّارِ ابْتِغَاءَ حُلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَاعٍ زَبَدٌ مِثْلَهُ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَالْبَاطِلَ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً وَأَمَّا مَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ

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 the truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people remains in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons. (13:17)

It does not depart

Another important point is that when something from that world is sent down to this world, it is not sent down in the sense that it departs that world and comes down here. It is not that it used to be there and now it is here, and is no longer there. It is a matter of being there, remaining there, but having a representation and manifestation also in this lower level of creation.

For example, when we have a very difficult idea, and we simplify it by mentioning an example, then does it mean that the idea ceases to be, or is it still there? Of course, it is still there. So, when Allah (swt) gives us a little knowledge, or *rizq*, or *thawāb*, or any other thing, it does not mean that whatever He has sent down no longer exists in the other world. He gives without losing anything, and nothing goes missing there. Rather, it remains as it is. The change happens here, and not there. There is no decrease or increase in that world, and all the changes occur here.

Chapter 13

The status of the Qur'an in the Qur'an



Introduction

In the previous chapter, as an introduction we talked about two different worlds, the physical world (*dunyā*) and the spiritual world, in particular, *‘ālam al-‘indīyyah*, and the way the interaction between these two worlds takes place. We also discussed the meaning of ‘sending down’ from *‘ālam al-‘indīyyah* to *dunyā*. We now refer to the Qur'an itself, and discover the status of the Qur'an according to the Qur'an, which is the word of Allah (swt).

Origin of the book

It is important to note that the book comes from an origin – Allah (swt). This explains the real place of that book. Among the things of the universe of *‘indīyyah* are the divine scriptures; they are from that universe and they originate there. For example, Allah (swt) says:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ

And when there came to them a Book from Allah.... (2:89)

This verse talks about a Book coming to people which is not an ordinary book like the millions of books which are produced in this world. It is not a book of this world but rather is ‘from Allah’ (*min ‘indillah*), meaning from that universe which is with Allah (swt), close to Allah (swt).¹ And although we can reflect on them in *dunyā*, we must realise that they are really from that world.

Regarding the Qur’an specifically, Allah (swt) states:

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَلْقَى الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ

Indeed you receive the Qur’an from One who is all-wise, all-knowing. (27:6)

The term *ladun* is very much like the term ‘*ind*’. They are very close in meaning. This is why regarding ‘knowledge’ (*‘ilm*), the Qur’an also says:

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

Its knowledge is only with Allah (67:26)

And:

¹ There are also verses that confirm divine signs including miracles and the verses of the scripture are from Allah (swt) and not from *dunyā*. The Qur’ans says:

إِنَّمَا الْآيَاتُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

The signs are only with Allah (6:109, 29:50)

وَعَلَّمَنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا

and taught him a knowledge from Our own. (18:65)

In any case, both these terms refer to a place very close to Allah (swt). Therefore, the Qur'an is given to the Prophet Muhammad (s) from Allah (swt). But He is not giving it to the Prophet Muhammad (s) in the sense of a worldly type of giving; rather, He is giving it from a place that is the closest to Him to the Prophet Muhammad (s). Therefore, the Qur'an is not from *dunyā*.

The Qur'an says:

فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ

Rather it is a glorious Qur'an, in a preserved tablet. (85:21-22)

Thus, this noble and glorious Qur'an is in the *lawḥ maḥfūz*, meaning in a protected tablet. This *lawḥ maḥfūz* is not really a tablet made from a material like wood or stone. The *lawḥ maḥfūz* (preserved tablet) is a level of Allah's knowledge that contains information about all facts, realities, and events, even those that so far have not happened in this world; everything is in the *lawḥ maḥfūz*. The *lawḥ maḥfūz* has the final decisive information. Other than *lawḥ maḥfūz*, there are lower tablets known as *alwāḥ maḥw wa ithbāt*, which contain information that is subject to change and is conditional, and therefore may or may not happen, since these things can be prevented from occurring. For example, a person may be scheduled to die in

a car accident, but the deadline may not be fixed. Then, before this happens, the person pays *ṣadaqah* (charity). This payment of *ṣadaqah* may change the situation, and so the person does not actually die at the time which was initially written in *alwāḥ maḥw wa ithbāt*.

In a hadith, Imam Bāqir (a) says:

من الأمور أمور محتومة كائنة لا محالة، و من الأمور أمور موقوفة

عند الله، يقدم فيها ما يشاء و يمحو ما يشاء، و يثبت منها ما يشاء

There are certain matters which are definitely going to happen and are not going to change. And there are certain things which are in suspension and are conditional, and the decision regarding them lies with Allah. Allah can make them happen earlier or can stop them or can allow them to happen.¹

So, some things like the Day of Resurrection are definitely going to happen, and even if we all wanted to avoid them, we could not. However, many events can be stopped, hastened, or postponed – or will happen if things are left as they are.

The reason these tablets are called *maḥw wa ithbāt* is due to the following verse of the Qur'an in Surah al-Ra'd, verse 39, in which Allah (swt) says:

¹ 'Ayyāshī, Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, p. 217.

يَمْحُو اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُثَبِّتُ وَعِنْدَهُ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ

*Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes
and with Him is the Mother Book. (13:39)*

The ‘mother of the book’ refers to the main book that contains all decisive information.

وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلَىٰ حَكِيمٍ

*and indeed it [the Qur’an] is with Us in the
Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and
wise. (43:4)*

So, there is a level of knowledge that has information in a decisive and final way about everything, and that is *lawḥ maḥfūz*, *umm al-kitāb*, or *kitāb makhnūn* (the hidden book) and this is the origin of the Qur’an.

Therefore, we understand from this that the Qur’an is not a book on a shelf, and we must not think of it in this way. The book on the shelf is a representation of the Qur’an, an image of the Qur’an. However, the true Qur’an is not on the shelf; rather, it is in the *lawḥ maḥfūz*. As a comparison, when we take many pictures of a person, those pictures are not that person. Similarly, we can print millions of copies of the Qur’an and put one in every room, but those Qur’ans are not the original. It will be an image or copy of the original Qur’an. The Qur’an is only one, and Allah (swt) has that with Him.

A manifestation of that Qur'an, after simplification, has been given to Prophet Muhammad (s). And that manifestation is what can cause mountains to crumble. But what we have on paper is not even that; it is after many levels of simplification. It is put onto paper and is sacred and cannot be touched without *wuḍū*, and we cannot understand it fully even after fourteen centuries! There is still so much to understand. But it is not still the real Qur'an; it is an image or representation of the real Qur'an.

In another verse, Allah (swt) says:

لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ فِي كِتَابٍ مَّكْنُونٍ إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ

This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a covered Book; no one touches it except the pure ones.
(56:77-79)

The Qur'an is noble and honourable (*karīm*). That *karīm* Qur'an is in a hidden book which is *lawḥ mahfūz* or *umm al-kitāb*; no one touches it except those who are purified. This means either that no one touches *kitāb makhnūn*, or else that no one touches the Qur'an which is in the *kitāb makhnūn*. Whichever meaning is preferred will not make much difference to our discussion, as both will mean that the Qur'an cannot be touched except by those who are *muṭaḥḥarūn* (purified). The *muṭaḥḥarūn* are those who have no impurity, and Allah (swt) has purified them thoroughly:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

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

These are the people who can just touch the Qur'an, not own it or grasp it. We can try to access the Qur'an by purifying ourselves as much as possible, in order for us to understand something of it. Otherwise, the people who really enjoy the Qur'an are the infallibles because they have been purified. They can touch the Qur'an, and anyone who is lower than them can access it from a distance.

There is a big difference between touching something and seeing it from a distance. Imagine you are in the midst of a freezing cold winter day and you see a heater from a distance. Up to certain distance you would still benefit from the heat but after some limit you will not have any benefit!

Two dimensions or faces of the Qur'an

There is another very important passage of the Qur'an in which Allah (swt) refers to two dimensions or faces of the Qur'an:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you may understand (43:3)

The Qur'an is something that can be read. The reference to 'Arabic' in this verse either means 'clear' or the actual Arabic language. The only verse in which it definitely means the language of Arabic is the following verse:

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

In a clear Arabic language (26:195)

This is because the term *mubīn* itself means 'clear', and so in the verse above, it would not make sense for the verse to mean 'clear clear'. But in the verse 43:3, it can mean either 'clear' or the actual Arabic language. This is because the Arabic language has the potential to clarify things very well. So Arabic as a language is clear, and that is one reason why Allah (swt) chose Arabic as the language of the Qur'an.

In any case, Allah (swt) says: '*Surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you may understand.* (43:3)' He is telling us that He made it a text that is clear, so that we can understand. Then in the next verse Allah (swt) says that the Qur'an is *with Us*:

وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلَىٰ حَكِيمٌ

*And indeed, it is with Us in the Mother Book
[and it is] surely sublime and wise. (43:4)*

This verse does not say that the Qur'an is from the sublime and wise, but rather it itself is sublime and wise. Allah is 'Alīy

(High) and the Qur'an is also high. Allah is *Ḥakīm* and the Qur'an is also *ḥakīm* because it is the word of Allah.

Therefore, Allah (swt) says that the Qur'an is with Him, meaning it is very close to Him, in *lawḥ maḥfūz*, and it is *‘alīyyun ḥakīm*. But He has also made it into a text so that we can understand it. For example, we cannot understand Allah (swt) as He is. When a scholar writes a few lines about Allah (swt), these few lines are just talking about Allah (swt) so that the reader can understand, but Allah (swt) is different from this. Allah (swt) can never be described by any text. Indeed no one has the right and capacity to describe Allah (swt) apart from the *mukhlaṣīn*:

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

Clear is Allah of whatever they allege [about Him], [all] except Allah's purified servants.
(37:159-160)

And Imam Ali (a) says in *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

كَمَالُ الْإِخْلَاصِ لَهُ نَفْيُ الصِّفَاتِ عَنْهُ

And the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes.¹

Hence, we cannot describe Allah (swt), nor should we ever think that we can grasp Him. Yes, there are some qualities of

¹ Imām Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Ṣubḥī Ṣālīḥ, p. 39.

His that are somewhat like the qualities that we understand, and that are accidental to our essence.

In any case, Allah (swt) says there are two faces of the Qur'an. The first is the real Qur'an which is with Allah (swt) in *umm al-kitāb* and is '*alīyun ḥakīm*'. That has no linguistic expression, no chapters, and no verses; it does not have 114 chapters. But there is another face of the Qur'an which is available to us, and that is the Qur'an as a text that we read and ponder on in order to understand.

Therefore, the meaning of *inzāl* is now clear, i.e. that the Qur'an is with Allah (swt) and is very high. *Inzāl* is when that high reality that is very close to Allah (swt) in *lawḥ maḥfūz* is represented to us in the form of a text. However, the Qur'an remains with Allah (swt); at no point does He say that it used to be with Him and is no longer. It is still there. And in that world, there is no past, present, or future, and nothing departs from there. So, the Qur'an has at the same time two faces, or you can say that the Qur'an exists at the same time in the both domains, here and there. But when it is with us, it has a worldly appearance, and when it is there, it has another appearance.

For example, when Lady Mary saw Gabriel (or the Holy Spirit),¹ she saw a human being:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

and he became incarnate for her as a well-proportioned human. (19:17)

That angel or holy spirit took the form of a complete human being. ‘*Sawīyyan*’ means ‘complete’. It is not that something was missing. It had all the human parts, such as eyes, ears, and a nose. The question is: did that angel – supposing it was Gabriel – by taking the form of a human being, stop being an angel? Or did it remain an angel? Of course, it still remained an angel. It just took the form of a human being but did not become a human being. It cannot be treated as a human being, just because it looks like one.

If Gabriel comes to us in the form of a human being, we should not reduce our respect for him and say, ‘You are a human being like any other human being, so we will treat you like any other human being.’ No, we should remember that this is the archangel Gabriel. It is just that he has been kind to us and has taken the form of a human being so that we can see him and talk to him, because if he had remained in the

¹ Either interpretation is possible, since the Qur’anic text refers to a ‘spirit’ (*rūḥ*) that came to Lady Mary. This could either refer to the angel Gabriel (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) or else the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*), although some hadith refer to the *rūḥ* here as the angel Gabriel.

form of an angel then we would not have been able to experience him, see him, and talk to him. He has just taken a form that is familiar to us.

Now, if the word of Allah (swt), the knowledge of Allah (swt), and the wisdom of Allah (swt) take the form of a book and come to us so that we can understand it, then we should not treat it like other books. It looks like a book and has taken the form of a text, but this is not what it really is. It has been made to appear that way for us to understand. As we mentioned the verse says: *‘Surely We have made it an Arabic Qur’an that you may understand’* (43:3) but *‘And indeed, it is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise.’* (43:4)

The Qur’an is so high that hadith say that it is higher than believers, martyrs, prophets, and angels.¹ We have it in the form of a book, and so we should not underestimate it or treat it like any other book. The Qur’an exists at the same time in both the domains and does not depart.

The Qur’an has the maximum capacity for guidance

Allah (swt), in order to guide us and help us with our upliftment – and this upliftment is very important – has sent down the Qur’an to us in the sense that He has made His knowledge and His wisdom available to us in this world in a form that we can try to understand. However, we still do not

¹ See Chapter 11.

understand this text; it is a deep ocean which we can never reach the bottom of, and we can never exhaust all its beautiful treasures.¹ But at least we have access to it and we can try, but the real Qur'an is with Allah (swt).

One of the functions of the Qur'an is that it helps us with our journey upwards to achieve closeness to Allah (swt). If we want to rise and get closer to Allah (swt) then the Qur'an can help us to do this by first of all being a book of guidance. If a person wishes to rise towards Allah (swt) then he needs guidance. When you want to go from one location to another location in your town, you need a navigator. And when you want to go from the material world to the spiritual world, obviously you need guidance. In this world, even if you have been to a place few times, you may still not remember how to get there and may need guidance. And that world is a place which you have never been to, so you definitely need guidance.

The Qur'an is in the closest position to Allah (swt), and if you travel with the Qur'an, it can take you to the closest position to Allah (swt). This is the beauty of the Qur'an. It is not as if it says 'I cannot go any further' and stops somewhere in the road because it has reached its limit. The Qur'an has no limit,

¹ Imām Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubhī Şālīh, sermon 198, p. 315.

because the Qur'an is with Allah (swt).¹ It is very close to Allah (swt). The Qur'an can take you to the highest position.

The Qur'an is a rope

One of the beautiful ideas of the Qur'an is that Allah (swt) has made the Qur'an as a rope:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Hold fast, all together to Allah's rope, and do not be divided. (3:103)

This rope (*habl*) which we should hold onto, according to some hadith, is the Qur'an. For example, in one version of the hadith of *Thaqalayn*, it quoted from Imam Riḍā (a), from his forefathers, that the Prophet (s) said:

كَأَنِّي قَدْ دُعِيتُ فَأَجَبْتُ وَإِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ أَحَدُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ
مِنَ الْآخَرِ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى حَبْلٌ مَمْدُودٌ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى
الْأَرْضِ وَعِترَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ تَخْلَفُونِي فِيهِمَا

It is as if I am called [for departure from this world] and I have accepted [my death is near]. And indeed, I am leaving among you two valuable things: one of them is greater than the other. The book of Allah – a rope that extends from heaven to earth, and my family – my Ahl

¹ 'And indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise.' (Qur'an 43:4)

al-Bayt. Be careful how you treat them after
me. Be careful how you treat them after me.¹

The link that connects the earth with the heaven, the rope that extends from heaven to earth is the Qur'an.

The hadith does not say 'a rope which is sent down or dropped'; rather, it says 'a rope that extends (*ḥablun mamdūd*) from heaven to earth.' If the hadith had said 'a rope which is sent down or dropped' then it would have been a rope sent down from a higher place to a lower place: a rope in the heavens dropped down so we could hold onto it. But *mamdūd* means 'extended from there to here with one side still at the point of origin', held by Allah (swt). In a helicopter, when you want to rescue people from a fire, you send down the ladder while holding the top; you do not drop it. Instead, what should happen is one end should be held firmly, and the other end should be sent down, so they can climb to safety. Allah (swt) has not dropped the Qur'an; He has extended the rope to us and says: '*Hold fast, altogether, to Allah's rope*' (3:103).

The Prophet is quoted as saying:

¹ Imam Ali ibn Musā (a), *Ṣaḥīfah al-Imām al-Riḍā (a)*, p. 59. This hadith is also mentioned in Sunni sources. For example, Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū 'Abdillāh, *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, vol. 17, p. 169-170, no. 11104.

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ هُوَ النُّورُ الْمُبِينُ، وَ الْحَبْلُ الْمَتِينُ، وَ الْعُرْوَةُ الْوُثْقَى،
وَ الدَّرَجَةُ الْعُلْيَا، وَ الشِّفَاءُ الْأَشْفَى، وَ الْفَضِيلَةُ الْكُبْرَى، وَ السَّعَادَةُ

Truly this Qur'an is the manifest light and the firm rope, the strongest handhold, and the highest rank, and the best healing, and the grates merit and felicity.¹

In another hadith, Imam Ali (a) says:

عَلَيْكُمْ بِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهُ الْحَبْلُ الْمَتِينُ وَ النُّورُ الْمُبِينُ وَ الشِّفَاءُ النَّافِعُ
وَ الرِّىُّ النَّاقِعُ وَ الْعِصْمَةُ لِلْمُتَمَسِّكِ وَ النِّجَاةُ لِلْمُتَعَلِّقِ

You should adhere to the Book of Allah because it is the strong rope, a clear light, a benefiting cure, a quenching for thirst, protection for the adherent, and deliverance for those who hold on to it.²

How much we act upon the Qur'an and rise determines how close we become to Allah (swt), and the same thing is reflected in heaven. It will be said to people 'read and rise.' One hadith states that the number of ranks in heaven is equal to the number of verses of the Qur'an.³ So, in heaven you will be told 'read and rise,' meaning that the amount a person was

¹ Imam Ḥasan b. Ali (a), *al-Tafsīr al-Mansūb ilā al-Imam al-Ḥasan al-Askarī (a)*, p. 449.

² Imām Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, p. 219.

³ Ḥuwayzī, 'Abd Ali, *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thqalayn*, vol. 3, p. 171. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

فان درجات الجنة على عدد آيات القرآن. يقال له: اقرء و ارق

able to rise to Allah (swt) in the world will be reflected in how much he can rise in heaven. This is the position of the Qur'an.

However, there is another connection that we have when we want to be connected to the heaven and rise. We have the Qur'an – 'a rope extended from heaven to the earth' – but maybe if you have just one rope it will be difficult and you might still fall. You still will not know how to rise. Allah (swt) has provided us with a second connection, but this one is from earth to heaven, and this is *hujjah* of Allah (swt) on the earth. We read in Du'a' Nudbah:

أَيْنَ السَّبَبُ الْمُتَّصِلُ بَيْنَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَاءِ

Where is the means of access that connects the
earth and the heavens?

The Qur'an is a connection from heaven to earth, but the Imam is a connection from earth to heaven. So the Qur'an connects Allah (swt) and heaven to us. Imam Mahdi connects us to Allah (swt). Therefore, if you have two ropes, two connections like these, and you hold on to them, you do not go astray. We read in another version of the hadith of *Thaqalayn*:

إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ مَا إِنِ تَمَسَّكْتُمُ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي كِتَابَ
اللَّهِ وَعِتْرَتِي

Verily, I am leaving among you two precious things. If you adhere to them both, you will never go astray after me.¹

Now the question may be raised as to whether a person who only holds on to one of them can go wrong. On the surface the answer is yes. If someone says ‘I do not want Ahl al-Bayt (a)’ or ‘I do not want the Qur’an’, he may go astray. However, the reality is that we cannot actually hold onto one of them without holding on the other. We cannot be a true follower of the Imam (a) if we abandon the Qur’an, and on the other hand we cannot be a true follower the Qur’an if we abandon the Imam (a). Therefore, when we say we have to hold on to both of them, it does not mean that there is a way to hold on to only one of these because these are the book and the teacher. We cannot say we want the book but not the teacher, for the teacher is not saying anything other than what is in the book. Therefore, if someone does not want the teacher, it means he does not want the book; it is the same if someone says ‘I want the teacher but not the book’. The teacher is just teaching this book. In the time of the Prophet (s), no one could make a distinction and say ‘I love the Prophet (s) but not the Qur’an’ or vice versa. The same is true for Imam (a), for the Imam (a) is continuing the same job. Of course, he does not receive revelation; he is not bringing anything new

¹ Ṭabarsī, Aḥmad ibn Ali, *al-Iḥtijāj ‘alā Ahl al-Lijāj*, vol. 2, p. 380.

to the Qur'an. So no one can say 'I love the Imam (a), not the Qur'an' or 'I love the Qur'an, not the Imam (a).'

The important point here is that we have only one source of guidance as the scripture. For us Muslims, this is the Qur'an, which is final and the most complete message of Allah (swt). Nothing comes next to the Qur'an. The collections of hadith are very important, but they do not come next to the Qur'an; rather, they come under the Qur'an. Hadith are explanations and exemplifications of the Qur'an. Hadith are the words of the Prophet (s), and the Prophet (s) is the teacher of the book. Allah says in the Qur'an:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

As We sent to you an Apostle from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know. (2:151)

The Sunnah of the Prophet (s) is like lectures that the Prophet (s) has given in teaching the Qur'an. Thus, we only have one source, but we cannot understand the Qur'an without using the explanations of the Prophet (s) or teachers of the Qur'an, so there is no way to make a distinction.

Hence, we have been given by Allah two ways to connect ourselves to Him: the Qur'an and the *hujjah* of Allah (swt).

These two, throughout the year, are with us, but when it comes to the night of *Qadr*, something extraordinary happens, which we will discuss later.

Chapter 14

The Qur'an is alive



Introduction

In the previous section, we spoke about some characteristics of the Qur'an according to the Qur'an which explain the status of the Qur'an. We said that the Qur'an has been sent to us after a process of simplification. We said that the Qur'an has come to us without departing from the place where it was originally situated, which is near Allah (swt) and in the Mother of the Book. Also we talked about the Qur'an being a rope to elevate us towards Allah (swt). In this chapter we will discuss some other characteristics, like the Qur'an being alive and fresh, and that it has been sent to all of us.

The freshness of the Qur'an

Another important point to discuss regarding the reality of the Qur'an is the freshness of the Qur'an. Imam Muhammad Bāqir (a) is quoted as saying:

لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ رَّيْبٌ وَ رَّيْبُ الْقُرْآنِ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ

Everything has a spring, and the spring season
for the Qur'an is the month of Ramaḍān.¹

Ramaḍān being the 'spring of the Qur'an' can be explained as being because people read the Qur'an more in this month, and it receives more attention. Therefore, the month of Ramaḍān is a hot season for the Qur'an. However, there is a deeper way of understanding this hadith.

Let us consider what types of things have a spring. For example, metal does not have a spring. Only a thing that possesses life can be described as having a spring, such as a tree – it has a spring in which it gains a new lease of life and freshness. In spring, we see nice green leaves come back to the tree, and the tree and the land are revived. Winter is like death, and spring is the new life. In the Qur'an, Allah (swt) compares and likens this to resurrection. We read in the Qur'an:

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَيُسْقَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأُحْيِيْنَا
بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا كَذَٰلِكَ النُّشُورُ

*It is Allah who sends the winds and they raise
a cloud; then We drive them toward a dead
land and with it revive the earth after its death.
Likewise will be the resurrection [of the dead].
(35:9)*

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 630.

In spring, we normally have a sense of wellbeing and goodness due to the weather becoming more pleasant, and due to the changes in nature. So, spring is a time of refreshment and energy, and it is when things become more vital and more vibrant.

Imam Muhammad Bāqir (a) says that everything has a spring, meaning everything that possesses life, and for the Qur'an, the month of Ramaḍān is the time of spring. To have a better understanding of this hadith, we can put it next to another hadith in which Imam Ṣādiq (a) was asked by one of his companions about constant newness of the Qur'an:

مَا بَالُ الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَزْدَادُ عِنْدَ النَّشْرِ وَالْدِّرَاسَةِ إِلَّا غَضَاضَةً

What is with the Qur'an in that teaching and studying do not add except to its freshness?

Imam Ṣādiq (a) replied:

فَقَالَ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَجْعَلْهُ لَزَمَانٍ دُونَ زَمَانٍ وَلَا لِنَاسٍ دُونَ نَاسٍ
فَهُوَ فِي كُلِّ زَمَانٍ جَدِيدٌ وَعِنْدَ كُلِّ قَوْمٍ غَضٌّ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

It is because Allah (swt) did not make it for one particular time over another, or for one particular group of people over another. It is new for every age, and for every group of

people there is a freshness in it until the Day of Judgement.¹

Hence, we can understand that, in a sense, Allah (swt) is re-introducing the Qur'an to us in every month of Ramaḍān, and once again emphasising the revelation of the Qur'an. Allah (swt) is refreshing the blessings which come through the Qur'an in the month of Ramaḍān. Every month of Ramaḍān is a source of new life for the Muslim community and a new opportunity to benefit from this ongoing river of revelation.

The Qur'an is not like a normal book. When we buy a book, it feels very new for the first time. On the second reading, it may still feel new. But then on the third reading, it becomes boring. Similarly, when we go to a new place, it seems very interesting, but then if we go there few times, it becomes very boring. The same can apply to a new car and many other things. But the Qur'an is always new and fresh.

We can draw some conclusions from these hadith.

¹ Ṭūsī, Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan, *Amālī (Ṭūsī)*, p. 580. Another version of this hadith is narrated in Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 87. The Arabic text is as follows:

إِنَّ رَجُلًا سَأَلَ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) مَا بَالُ الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَزْدَادُ عِنْدَ النَّشْرِ وَالدِّرَاسَةِ إِلَّا غَضَاضَةً؟ فَقَالَ: لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يُنْزِلْهُ لَزَمَانَ دُونَ زَمَانٍ وَلَا لِنَاسٍ دُونَ نَاسٍ فَهُوَ فِي كُلِّ زَمَانٍ جَدِيدٌ وَعِنْدَ كُلِّ قَوْمٍ غَضٌّ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ.

I. The Qur'an has been given to all of us

Allah (swt) did not only consider the people in the time of the advent of Islam as the recipients of the Qur'an. It is not the case that only the people of that age and time were addressed, and that the Qur'an was only given to them. The Qur'an was given to them and us.

Normally, we think that the Qur'an was given to the people of that time but that it is also valid for us. We think that Allah (swt) gave it to them but that we can also benefit from it because this message is universal and eternal. But according to the hadith, we have an equal share. Those people who are present in this age and time are just as important recipients of the Qur'an as any other. And the Qur'an addresses us as equally as it does those people at the advent of Islam. Of course, we do not mean by the people of that time the Prophet Muhammad (s) and the Imams, but, rather, as people in general, Allah (swt) intended the Qur'an for us too.

For example, if I give my child a book, I might tell him to keep it to himself. At other times, I might tell him to share it with other people. And sometimes I might give a book to all the children including my child. If I give it to my child, then others will not be the first to receive it. We are honoured that Allah (swt) has given the Qur'an to all of us.

II. The Qur'an is alive

If we agree that Allah (swt), right from the beginning, has given the Qur'an to all people, then another question may arise: has Allah (swt) given it to all generations in that time, or has He given the Qur'an to every generation in their own time? This requires a big change in attitude.

If we say that Allah (swt) has given the Qur'an to all generations in that time, then it means we are somehow limited in how we can benefit from it due to the way that the Qur'an has been revealed. But if we say that Allah (swt), from the outset, meant the Qur'an to be for all generations in their own time, then it means that this book is a living book, and this book visits every generation in their own time and context.

For instance, take the example of an *'ālim* who lived one thousand years ago but was somehow able to speak to us. This is something very good, but it is very different from an *'ālim* who has lived with all generations and now speaks to us in the current time. If the Qur'an is for all people and all times and ages, then it means that the Qur'an is living with us and that it is alive. Now, we can add this concept to the idea of the freshness of the Qur'an.

In another hadith, Imam Riḍā (a) says:

لَا يَخْلُقُ عَلَى الْأَزْمَنَةِ وَلَا يَغْتُ عَلَى الْأَلْسِنَةِ لِأَنَّهُ لَمْ يُجْعَلْ لَزَمَانٍ
 دُونَ زَمَانٍ بَلْ جُعِلَ دَلِيلَ الْبُرْهَانِ وَالْحُجَّةِ عَلَى كُلِّ إِنْسَانٍ لَا يَأْتِيهِ
 الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

With the passage of time, the Qur'an does not become outdated or worn out, and it is not affected by many tongues reciting it. This is because it has not been made for only one time and not other times; rather, it has been made to be a guide and a proof for all people: *'falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, sent down from One all-Wise, all-Laudable.'*¹

When an idea or thought gets affected by time, it means it is no longer as true as it used to be. It means falsehood can come into it.

Now the last piece of evidence is regarding the relationship between the Qur'an and the night of *Qadr*. Someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) regarding the night of *Qadr* and said, 'Please inform me whether it was a one-time event or if it happens every year.' Imam Ṣādiq (a) replied:

لَوْ رُفِعَتْ لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ لُرْفِعَ الْقُرْآنُ

If the night of *Qadr* is removed, then the Qur'an would be taken back [by Allah].²

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 130.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 158.

This is a very important hadith. It means that every year the night of *Qadr* signals the beginning of the year, and the new year starts from that blessed night. However, this new year is not only for us, and it is not only that the affairs for the next twelve months are decided in the night of *Qadr*—indeed they are, but there is more happening than that – even for the Qur'an, the night of *Qadr* is the beginning of a new year. The time of Ramaḍān is the spring for the Qur'an, and the night of *Qadr* is the time in which Allah (swt) in a sense is giving us the Qur'an again. In a sense, the Qur'an is being revealed again, the light and energy of the Qur'an is being given to us again, so there is a sense of continuity in the revelation of the Qur'an. Of course, there are no new chapters or verses revealed, and we are not adding anything to the Qur'an. The Qur'an is fixed as it is, but this book of Allah that we have is refreshed every year.

To make this clearer, we can give an example. Sometimes, you have a picture of your father or mother, and whenever you miss your father or mother, you can look at the picture. But perhaps the picture was taken twenty or thirty years ago. In that picture, you see the condition of your father or mother as they were twenty or thirty years ago. It could be that by now they have become very old. Perhaps in the photo they had black hair and now it is grey; maybe they are now ill or even dead. Hence, you have a picture of your father or mother, but as they were twenty or thirty years ago.

Now, when we say that the Qur'an is a manifestation of Allah (swt) and the book of Allah (swt), then it does not mean that the Qur'an shows the way Allah (swt) spoke to the people of that time and according to their condition. The Qur'an is speaking today so it is like a live picture, like a picture that is updated all the time; as soon as there is a change it is reflected, and the picture is always fresh. When we see someone in the mirror, it is very different from seeing them in a printed picture.

Allah's (swt) book is not like a book written by an ordinary author. After twenty or thirty years, an ordinary author's ideas may change because, as you know, a book shows the ideas of the author at the time of writing. After a book is written, it almost totally loses its connection with the author. If the author becomes a better or worse person, or more or less knowledgeable, then the book is still there and will not reflect these changes. But, imagine a book that someone writes, and which remains with that person and always reflects that person. You can understand the difference between these two scenarios.

Therefore, every year Allah (swt) is again talking to us and sending light to us through the Qur'an. Therefore, if we understand new things from the Qur'an, it is not because we are becoming cleverer or because we are just benefitting from the scholarship of other *'ulama*. No, Qur'anic studies is not like the study of biology, physics, or chemistry, fields that are

evolving because we benefit from the experience of other people and their experience and study, and then we build upon it. In the case of the Qur'an, Allah (swt) is revealing more and more to us. Allah (swt) is guiding us every year, and guiding humanity when they go through new challenges. It is a connection or a rope that is always held by Allah (swt), and this rope – depending on our situation – keeps guiding us. This is very important.

Therefore, every generation should go back to the Qur'an and be 100% sure that they have the answers to their current problems. It is not the case that we try and find the answers to the problems of fourteen centuries ago and we try to bring those answers to fit the needs of today. We want to try and understand the solutions that the Qur'an is giving us right now because the Qur'an is a living book and not a dead book. If we become more pious and honest, then the Qur'an can speak to us in a way it has not spoken to anyone else. This is possible. We will mention some hadith that indicate that the Qur'an contains everything we need and we should ask it to speak to us, but it does not because we are not qualified. This is why we refer to the Ahl al-Bayt (a). However, if we purify ourselves and approach the Qur'an in a proper manner then it can guide us.

There is an important hadith from Imam Muhammad Bāqir (a) in which a person called 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qasīr says:

One day I was in the company of Imam Bāqir (a), and he said: ‘O ‘Abd al-Raḥīm!’

I said: ‘Here I am!’

He said: ‘Allah said, “*You are only a warner, and there is a guide for every people,*” and the Messenger of Allah said: “I am the warner, and Ali is the guide.” Who is the guide today?’

I remained quiet for a long time. Then I raised my head and said: ‘May I be your ransom, this is something that is among you, one after the other, you inherit from one another, until it has reached you. So you are the guide today, may I be your ransom.’

Imam Muhammad Bāqir (a) said: ‘You are right.’

When the Prophet Muhammad (s) said that Ali (a) is the guide, or when this verse was revealed, the guide at that particular time of the revelation of the Qur’an was Imam Ali (a), but what the Imam is saying is that the application of this verse carries on. It was applied to Imam Ali (a) at one point, but in another time it applies to another Imam. This is a point which we have to reflect upon.

The Imam goes on to explain:

Surely, the Qur’an is living and never dies. And this verse is alive and never dies. Had the verse been revealed only about people who died, then it would have meant that the Qur’an would also have died. But the Qur’an is

continuous in the current generation just as it was relevant to the previous generations.

‘Abd al-Raḥīm then says that Imam Bāqir (a) said:

Surely the Qur’an is alive and has not died, and in the same way that day and night continue the Qur’an is also continuing, and in the same way the sun and moon are moving. And it [the Qur’an] continues to apply to those of us who have come later just as it was applicable to those of us who came earlier.¹

In another important hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

لِلْقُرْآنِ تَأْوِيلٌ يَجْرِي كَمَا يَجْرِي اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَكَمَا تَجْرِي
الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ فَإِذَا جَاءَ تَأْوِيلُ شَيْءٍ مِنْهُ وَقَعَ فَمِنْهُ مَا قَدْ جَاءَ وَ
مِنْهُ مَا لَمْ يَجِئْ

¹ ‘Ayyāshī, Muhammad b. Mas‘ūd, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, p. 203. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عن عبد الرحيم القصير قال: كنت يوما من الأيام عند أبي جعفر (ع) فقال: «يا عبد الرحيم» قلت: «ليبيك» قال: قول الله «إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ» إذ قال رسول الله (ص): «أنا المنذر و على الهاد» و من الهاد اليوم؟ قال: «فسكت طويلا ثم رفعت رأسي فقلت: جعلت فداك هي فيكم، توارثونها رجل فرجل حتى انتهت إليك، فأنت جعلت فداك الهاد» قال: «صدقت يا عبد الرحيم، إن القرآن حي لا يموت، و الآية حية لا تموت، فلو كانت الآية إذا نزلت في الأقوام ماتوا فمات القرآن، و لكن هي جارية في الباقيين، كما جرت في الماضين» و قال عبد الرحيم: قال أبو عبد الله (ع): «إن القرآن حي لم يموت، و أنه يجري كما يجري الليل و النهار، و كما تجرى الشمس و القمر، و يجري على آخرنا كما يجري على أولنا»

The Qur'an has interpretations that occur as the day and the night, and they run like the sun and the moon. If an interpretation of something comes, it will occur. Some interpretations have come, and some have not come yet.¹

Ta'wīl is a term that has many different meanings. Even in the Qur'anic sciences, *ta'wīl* has been used in different senses. Here it means 'what the Qur'an is applied to'; this hadith is good evidence for that meaning. *Ta'wīl* comes from the root word: *a-w-l* meaning 'to return'. Therefore, when Allah (swt) gives us an idea or concept, then the case to which the verse can be applied is known as its *ta'wīl*. This is the meaning of *ta'wīl* that is meant here.

Thus, the content of the Qur'an can be regarding things that have already happened and also those things that will happen in the future. We should not think that if a verse of the Qur'an is revealed about a particular incident, then that incident is the only thing for which that verse was revealed. That incident was one instance, and there will be further similar incidents to which that verse can be applied. Therefore, the Qur'an remains relevant with the passing of time, generation after generation.

¹ Ibn Abī Zaynab, Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm, *al-Ghaybah li al-Nu'mānī*, p. 134.

The Qur'an speaks

Another piece of evidence we can present for this idea of the Qur'an being alive is that our hadith mention how the Qur'an speaks; it is not silent. To elaborate on this, first we have to see what things can be called silent. For example, we can say a living person is 'silent', but not a dead person. In order to be called 'silent', the person needs to have the possibility of speaking. Or for example, we do not say that a stone is 'blind'; the qualities of being blind or seeing are not applied to a stone. We cannot call something blind which simply does not have the ability to see or the potential of sight. Therefore, anything that has the potential to speak but does not speak can be called silent, and so we cannot say that something that is dead, or something like a rock, is silent.

When it comes to the Qur'an, we do not say that the Qur'an is silent; rather, we say that it is speaking. Even to say it is not silent means it is alive. But we believe that it speaks.

In this regard, Imam Ali (a) is quoted as saying:

ذَلِكَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَنْطِقُوهُ وَلَنْ يَنْطِقَ لَكُمْ أَخْبَرَكُمْ عَنْهُ إِنَّ فِيهِ عِلْمٌ
مَا مَضَىٰ وَعِلْمٌ مَا يَأْتِي إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَحُكْمٌ مَا بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيَانٌ
مَا أَصْبَحْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ فَلَوْ سَأَلْتُمُونِي عَنْهُ لَعَلَّمْتُكُمْ.

That is the Qur'an. Ask it to speak to you; it never will. I inform you on behalf of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an there is knowledge of

what has passed and what is to come, until the Day of Judgment. [It contains] judgment [about things that happened] between you, and an explanation of what you have come to disagree over. If you asked me about it, I would teach you [the solutions for your daily problems].¹

The Qur'an will not speak to ordinary people. For this, we need people like Imam Ali (a) to inform us on behalf of the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains immense knowledge of what happened in the past and what is yet to happen up to the Day of Judgement, and also contains judgements about things that happen between people. But we must ask Imam Ali (a) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) to teach this to us.²

If the Qur'an were dead, then it would not make sense for Imam Ali (a) to advise us to ask the Qur'an to speak to us. The Qur'an can speak, and can help us with any problem that we may have and can offer us guidance. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, it can speak and give us answers, but we cannot get answers directly from the Qur'an because we are not people to whom the Qur'an speaks. We are not people that are sufficiently acquainted with the Qur'an and trusted with

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 61.

² In Arabic the term *dhālik* is used to point to something that is at a distance. Because the Qur'an has a very high position, it has been referred to as *dhālik al-kitāb*.

the Qur'an. We do not understand the Qur'an, and so it does not speak to us.

Imam Ali (a) advises us to ask the Qur'an to speak to us. But it will not, and so he will speak on its behalf. It is not that the Qur'an does not speak. Indeed, it speaks, but it speaks to Imam Ali (a), and so he interprets it for us. Imam Ali (a) is ready to show us how the Qur'an gives us solutions for our problems. It addresses contemporary needs and it speaks, but we need an interpreter.

In another hadith in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Imam Ali (a) says:

كِتَابُ اللَّهِ تَبْصُرُونَ بِهِ وَتَنْطِقُونَ بِهِ وَتَسْمَعُونَ بِهِ وَيَنْطِقُ بَعْضُهُ
بِبَعْضٍ وَيشهد بعضه على بعض

This is the book of Allah by which you see and you speak and you hear. Part of it speaks for the other, and one part testifies to the other.¹

If a person can master all the cross-references in the Qur'an, where one verse in one chapter may be the key to understanding another verse in another chapter, and one of them may be in the beginning of the Qur'an and the other one at the end of the Qur'an, then if a person knows this skill and

¹ Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubhī Şālīh, p. 192.

how to bring them together, then many meanings of the Qur'an can become clear.¹

In another hadith Mu'allā ibn Khunays narrates from Imam Ṣādiq (a):

مَا مِنْ أَمْرٍ يَخْتَلِفُ فِيهِ اثْنَانِ إِلَّا وَلَهُ أَصْلٌ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ
جَلَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَبْلُغُهُ عُقُولُ الرِّجَالِ.

There is no issue in which two people disagree, except there is a principle for it in the Qur'an. But the intellects of people cannot reach that principle.²

If, for example, two members of the same sect have a discussion between themselves, or it could be two colleagues, or a husband and wife, or any disagreement between people, then Imam Ṣādiq (a) says that there is something in the Qur'an that can solve the problem. The answer is there, but we cannot get the answer.

It is as if we have a very clear book, but written in a language that we do not understand. For example, there may be a book that is very clear, perhaps written for young children, but if a person does not know the language in which the book is written then he will not understand any of it. When we read

¹ This method is known as *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, which is the method we talked about. 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī was a master of this method.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 60.

the Qur'an, unfortunately we only see the surface and we do not get into the deeper layers of it. At times, some people read the Qur'an and claim that they do not find anything in it that is relevant to their lives. They claim that it merely talks about the Prophet Moses, Jesus, Abraham, and Prophet Muhammad (s), and that it is old and contains nothing about today's issues such as technology or cloning.

However, there are others whose hearts and minds are attuned to the Qur'an. They find Qur'anic guidance for everything – not just the big events and issues in their life, but for everything that happens to them throughout the day. They find guidance in the Qur'an that tells them what to do when they are faced with any problem. Hence, the same book for some people can be irrelevant, while for others it can be very meaningful; it depends on the approach of the people towards it.

Imagine that you have a radio that is only tuned to FM. It will be able to play a few stations. However, if it is tuned to medium-wave then it can play perhaps one hundred stations, and if it is short-wave then perhaps it can play one thousand. Hence, depending on the sensitivity of the reception, you can receive more or less. However, some radios are switched off and so they do not receive anything! Such hearts think there are no stations out there, whereas in reality they are switched off and so they do not receive anything. People are all very different.

It is even the case for our own senses. There are many colours we cannot see and smells we cannot smell, whereas some animals can only see black and white. But if you ask them about colours, then those animals will admit that they do not know anything about them, but because they are fair, they will not deny them. However, human beings are not always fair, and that is why we may deny the existence of something if we do not understand it. The Qur'an is a book that offers answers for all problems.

Two aspects of the Qur'an being alive

Now, if we put all these hadith together with what we mentioned and explained previously, then we can conclude that the Qur'an is alive in two senses:

I. The Qur'an can be applied to new cases and is alive in this sense. This is what clearly is understandable from the hadith and it has been said by many scholars about those hadith.

II. The other sense in which the Qur'an is alive is what we said regarding Allah (swt) guiding us through the Qur'an, and that this guidance is fresh. This guidance can be broadened and expanded generation after generation. Furthermore, the Qur'an is something that belongs to the other world. Something belonging to that world is full of life, and so even if it is presented to us in a form of a text, it is still not worldly and still remains alive.

If an angel comes to us in the form of a human being, we will acknowledge this is an angel even though it has the shape and form of a human being. And of course, when the angel takes the form of a human being, it will take the form of a living human being, not a dead human being because an angel has understanding and knowledge so it cannot be in the form of a dead human.¹

Therefore, the Qur'an is close to Allah (swt), '*And indeed it is with Us.*'² Now it has taken the form of a book, and that book has to be a living book and not a dead book. This is very important.

The Qur'an as a manifestation of Allah (swt)

Now that we have discussed how the Qur'an is alive, we will embark upon a discussion of how the Qur'an is a manifestation of Allah (swt), and this relates to the concept of the Qur'an being alive, because *tajallī* is also living.

Regarding the Qur'an, we use the word *tajallī*. It means 'manifestation' and comes from the root word: *jalā* means 'clarity' and 'polishing'. Hence, *tajallī* refers to when

¹ Previously we talked about this. '*We sent to her Our Spirit and he became incarnate for her as a well-proportioned human.*' (Qur'an 19:17)

² Qur'an 43:4.

something becomes clear, and it shows itself in something else.

Consider this hadith in which Imam Ali (a) says:

فَتَجَلَّى لَهُمْ سُبْحَانَهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ مِنْ غَيْرِ أَنْ يَكُونُوا رَأَوْهُ

He – glory be to Him - manifested Himself for people in His book, without people seeing Him.¹

This hadith explains that we cannot see Allah (swt), but He has made a manifestation for us in His book.

There is another hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a), in which the narrator asked Imam about *ghashyah*, the condition of the Prophet Muhammad (s) when he was overwhelmed and almost unconscious at the time of receiving *wahy*. The Imam (a) replied:

ذَٰكَ إِذَا لَمْ يَكُنْ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ ذَٰكَ إِذَا تَجَلَّى اللَّهُ لَهُ

That [state of *ghashyah* was happening to Prophet Muhammad (s)] when Allah manifested Himself without anyone being between him [Prophet Muhammad (s)] and Allah.²

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 387.

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *al-Tawḥīd (lī al-Ṣadūq)*, p. 115. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

The Imam says that was happening to the Prophet (s) when Allah was manifesting Himself to him without anyone being between Him and the Prophet (s), it was not through Gabriel. In another hadith the Imam (a) says:

إِنَّمَا ذَلِكَ عِنْدَ مُخَاطَبَةِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِيَّاهُ بِغَيْرِ تَرْجُمَانٍ وَوَاسِطَةٍ
Indeed, this [condition of *ghashyah* would happen to the Prophet] when he was addressed by Allah – the Mighty and Glorious – without any interpreter or intermediary.¹

To understand the concept of manifestation better, we have to refer to the verse regarding Prophet Moses and Children of Israel, when they asked him to show them Allah (swt). The Children of Israel were very interested in empirical knowledge, and they wanted to see and touch their Lord. This is why, right after they crossed the river or sea, they saw a group of people worshiping idols and they commented that

عَنْ عُبَيْدِ بْنِ زُرَّارَةَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): «جَعَلْتَ فِدَاكَ الْغَشِيَّةُ
الَّتِي كَانَتْ تُصِيبُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص) إِذَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْوَحْيُ» فَقَالَ: «ذَلِكَ إِذَا لَمْ
يَكُنْ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ ذَاكَ إِذَا تَجَلَّى اللَّهُ لَهُ»

¹ Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad b. Ali, *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, vol. 1, pp. 85-86. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

فَسُئِلَ الصَّادِقُ (ع) عَنِ الْغَشِيَّةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ تَأْخُذُ النَّبِيَّ (ص) أَكَانَتْ تَكُونُ عِنْدَ
هَبْوَ جِبْرِئِيلَ (ع) فَقَالَ: «لَا إِنَّ جِبْرِئِيلَ كَانَ إِذَا أَتَى النَّبِيَّ (ص) لَمْ يَدْخُلْ
عَلَيْهِ حَتَّى يَسْتَأْذِنَهُ وَإِذَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ قَعَدَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ قَعْدَةُ الْعَبْدِ وَإِنَّمَا ذَلِكَ عِنْدَ
مُخَاطَبَةِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِيَّاهُ بِغَيْرِ تَرْجُمَانٍ وَوَاسِطَةٍ.»

those people were very fortunate that they are able to see their god. They said to Prophet Moses:

يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ

O Moses, make for us a god like the gods that they have. (7:138)

It is like they said: ‘We are very content so give us just one idol; they have so many but we only want one!’ This is one of the things which they used to ask Prophet Moses – that he should show them Allah (swt) in a way that they can see Him with their eyes.¹ Of course Prophet Moses knew this was not possible, and actually a god that can be seen is not God, and would be a very limited being. Nevertheless, he still conveyed this to Allah (swt):

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ تَرَانِي وَلَكِنْ أَنْظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَى صَعِقًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

When Moses arrived at Our tryst and his Lord spoke to him, he said, ‘My Lord, show [Yourself] to me, that I may look at You!’ He said, ‘You shall not see Me. But look at the mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.’ So when his Lord disclosed Himself

¹ ‘Show us Allah visibly’ (Qur’an 4:153).

to the mountain, He levelled it, and Moses fell down swooning. And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! I turn to You in penitence, and I am the first of the faithful.'
(7:143)

Now, if the Prophet Moses was not able to see Allah (swt) then, for sure other people should not even think about it being possible for them. If anyone was able to see Allah (swt) then it would have been the Prophet Moses. Note that he did not say 'show [Yourself] to us' but rather 'show [Yourself] to me.'

Allah (swt) replied with the word *lan* which signifies 'never.' However, Allah (swt) is a teacher.¹ A teacher does not just say 'yes' or 'no', but also explains. Allah (swt) proved to the angels why He chose Adam as His representative. He did not just tell them not to ask questions; He explained for them.² With Prophet Moses, again Allah (swt) is a teacher and an educator. He wants people to understand, and so he made a

¹ Surah al-Rahmān, verses 1-2:

الرَّحْمَانُ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ

The All-beneficent, has taught the Qur'an.

² Surah Baqarah, verse 31:

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

And He taught Adam the Names, all of them; then presented them to the angels and said, 'Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.'

demonstration for him and told him to look at the mountain. The mountain could not take even the manifestation of Allah (swt). It was enough to make it explode, and Prophet Moses fell down in a swoon.

This verse shows that in addition to the fact that we cannot see Allah (swt), we cannot cope with the manifestation of Allah (swt). Prophet Muhammad (s) had such a heart and capacity that was expansive enough for him to cope with the manifestation of Allah (swt), but he became overwhelmed. The Holy Prophet (s) was overwhelmed but he was able to survive. Therefore, the Qur'an is not less than the manifestation of what happened to the mountain at the time of Prophet Moses. The Qur'an itself says:

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ
اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have surely 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)

Therefore, the Qur'an is a manifestation of Allah (swt) which even a mountain cannot contain or handle. The Prophet Muhammad (s) received that manifestation. We have not had that manifestation directly. We are hearing about it, just like we are hearing about the mountain in the time of Prophet

Moses. We are sitting comfortably while we hear about Moses falling down. Nothing is happening to us.

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (s) experienced *ghashyah*, whereas we do not. This is not because we are very strong, but rather it is because we are just hearing. Our experience with the Qur'an is very limited and distant, like a person who sees a fire from afar will not feel its warmth.

How to Encounter the Qur'an

Chapter 15

Our response to the Qur'an



Introduction

Having studied the status and reality of the Qur'an, we are now going to discuss our attitude and responsibilities towards the Qur'an. In what follows, we will study some aspects of an adequate encounter with this great blessing of Allah (swt) for humanity.

1. Belief in the Qur'an

The first response that we have to give is faith in the Qur'an. We have to believe in the Qur'an and declare that it was revealed by Allah (swt). However, having faith in the Qur'an has another level and deeper meaning, which is something greater than just to say as a kind of declaration of faith that we believe in the Qur'an.

After careful examination we will come to realise that even some Muslims may not believe in the Qur'an in its true sense. The Qur'an mentions:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ
وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ
إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ
هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the God wary, Who believe in the Unseen, and maintain the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them. And who believe in what has been sent down to you and what was sent down before you, and are certain of the Hereafter. These are the ones who follow their Lord's guidance, and it is they who are the felicitous. (2:3-5)

This is a description of the people who are pious (*muttaqīn*). They believe in the hidden world and in the hidden realities, they have faith in the unseen, they establish prayer, they give charity, they believe in what has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s) and what was revealed before him, and they believe in the Hereafter. As you can see, one of the characteristics of the *muttaqīn* and those who are guided is: *'[They] believe in what has been sent down to you and what was sent down before you.'* Therefore, to believe in the Qur'an is the main thing. In what follows, we will explain what this means.

In another place, Allah (swt) says:

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ
 وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ

The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] ‘We make no distinction between any of His apostles.’ (2:285)

Now, if having faith (*īmān*) were something easily achieved, for example by just declaring one’s faith in the Qur’an, then the Qur’an would not have said: ‘*The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord.*’ In fact, having faith in the Qur’an is so important that Allah (swt) even praises the Holy Prophet (s) for having this faith in the Qur’an. It is faith of a very high level.

To believe in something means different things depending on what the purpose of that thing is, and what the function of that thing is. For example, if a doctor prescribes medicine and the patient says he believes in it, that means that he believes that the prescription will serve the purpose and the function for which it was intended; therefore, he will use it wholeheartedly and benefit from it.

Therefore, mere declaration of our faith is not sufficient with regards to the Qur’an, which is a book of guidance, and which shows us the path towards perfection and the ways of peace. Belief regarding the Qur’an means that we believe that this is

what is to be followed and that it must be implemented as our way of life. This is the meaning of believing in the Qur'an.

With this in mind, now we can understand this hadith better. The Holy Prophet (s) has said:

مَا آمَنَ بِالْقُرْآنِ مَنْ اسْتَحْلَّ مَحَارِمَهُ

One who regards the Qur'an's prohibitions as permissible has not believed in it.¹

Therefore, if the Qur'an says that we should not do certain things and we do them, we have not believed in it. If the Qur'an says we have to avoid injustice, and if we then practice injustice, it means we have not believed in the Qur'an, no matter whether we pray, fast, or not. If the Qur'an says that we have to be kind to our parents and if we are not, then it means we have not believed in the Qur'an.

To believe in the Qur'an means to follow the guidance given by the Qur'an. This is not just as an article of faith that we count in the list of beliefs – we as Muslims say that we believe in the unity of Allah (swt), and in Prophet Muhammad (s), and in the Qur'an, and so on. We mean that it is a belief that one's life can conform to and can be based upon. This is true belief in the Qur'an. However, if a person's life is not based on the Qur'an, then that person does not believe in the Qur'an.

¹ Karājākī, Muhammad, *Kanz al-Fawā'id*, vol. 1, p. 350.

2. Looking at the Qur'an

Looking at the Qur'an is very important, and it is one way of benefitting from the Qur'an. Reciting the Qur'an is another stage. We have regarded them as two different things because sometimes we may just look at the Qur'an without reading it. It could be that a person is unable to read it. So, just looking at the Qur'an is important.

Of course, reading the Qur'an is also very important. It can be read by heart, but reading the Qur'an from the text is even more important. Even if a person knows a passage or chapter by heart, it is still better to look at the Book and read the Qur'an. Hence, looking and reading can be considered as two different things.

Regarding looking at the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (s) has said:

وَالنَّظْرُ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ مِنْ غَيْرِ قِرَاءَةٍ عِبَادَةٌ

Looking at the Qur'an, even without reading,
is an act of worship (*'ibādah*).¹

Just looking at the Qur'an shows your love and respect for it, and this will benefit you.

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, vol. 2, p. 205.

Imam Zayn al-Ābidīn (a) has said:

آيَاتُ الْقُرْآنِ خَزَائِنٌ فَكُلَّمَا فَتَحْتَ خَزَائِنَهُ يَنْبَغِي لَكَ أَنْ تَنْظُرَ مَا فِيهَا.

The verses of the Qur'an are treasures. If these treasures are open, then you should look into it.¹

Normally, a treasure is something that is closed, and its doors are only opened for someone who is trusted. The Qur'an is such that once it is opened, we should look at its treasures. We must not underestimate this pleasure and this blessing of being able to look at the Qur'an. It is sad that sometimes people have the Qur'an without the Arabic, and they use just a translation. A translation of the Qur'an is not the Qur'an. The Qur'an has to be the same words that Allah (swt) revealed. Even if you rewrite the Qur'an in Arabic without exactly the same words and order of words, it will not be the Qur'an.

In another hadith from, Prophet Muhammad (s) said:

مَنْ أَدَامَ النَّظَرَ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ مَتَعَهُ اللَّهُ بِبَصَرِهِ مَا بَقِيَ فِي الدُّنْيَا

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 609.

One who continuously looks at the Qur'an (*muṣḥaf*) will benefit from his sight as long as he lives in this world.¹

This means that this person's sight will be blessed, and he will truly benefit from it. Many times, we have something, but we do not benefit from it. It is not just a matter of not being blind. There are people who have eyes and are not blind, but they do not benefit from their sight because they have never learned anything good, they do not read anything good, and they do not use their eyes for good things.

3. Reading the Qur'an

Reading the Qur'an is the next thing we should do with respect to the Qur'an. Allah (swt) very clearly says:

فَاقْرَأُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ

So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible.
(73:20)

We must read as much as we can. In a hadith it has been said to recite at least fifty verses a day.² But there is no limit. If we

¹ Al-Rāzī, Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān wa Tilāwatiḥī*, vol. 1, p. 145, no. 114.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 609:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: الْقُرْآنُ عَهْدُ اللَّهِ إِلَى خَلْقِهِ فَقَدْ يَنْبَغِي لِلْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ فِي عَهْدِهِ وَأَنْ يَقْرَأَ مِنْهُ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ خَمْسِينَ آيَةً.

can read more than we should. Reading the Qur'an is one of the things we have to observe.

The following hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a) is very special. Normally, a person cannot benefit from another person's actions unless he played a role in it. For example, if your parents send you to learn Qur'an, they will benefit, as they played a role. They encouraged you, they paid your fees, and they helped you to go and learn. For this reason, your parents will be rewarded. But what about the parents who do not believe in the Qur'an, but whose children learn the Qur'an and read the Qur'an? We may not expect such parents to benefit from it because they were not encouraging it, and maybe they were not even happy with it. But this hadith says that somehow even they can benefit:

مَنْ قَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ مُتَعِبًا بَصَرَهُ وَخَفَّفَ عَنْ وَالِدَيْهِ وَإِنْ
كَانَا كَافِرَيْنِ.

One who reads the Qur'an from the *muṣḥaf* will benefit in his vision, and the Judgement will be made easier for his parents even if they were *kāfir*.¹

Imam Ṣādiq (a) said: 'The Qur'an is the trust of Allah [given] to His creation, therefore it is desirable for every Muslim to look at this trust and to recite [a minimum of] fifty verses of the Qur'an every day.'

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 613.

A *kāfir* normally is not just one who does not believe in Islam. A *kāfir* often is the one who deliberately rejects the truth. So, when someone who has been against Islam and against the truth has a child who reads the Qur'an, because of that child who recites the Qur'an, Allah (swt) will make their questioning easier.¹

Reciting the Qur'an at home

We have also been advised to ensure that part of our recitation is done at home. It is not enough to read it in a mosque or shrine, although we should try to read it wherever possible, including in our offices, shops, and so on. But part of the recitation should be done at home, because the light of the Qur'an will affect our household. This is very important.

Prophet Muhammad (s) says:

نُورُوا بُيُوتَكُمْ بِتِلَاوَةِ الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوهَا قُبُورًا

Illuminate your houses with the recitation of the Qur'an. And do not make them [your houses] graveyards.

¹ Another hadith, again from Imam Ṣādiq (a), is similar to this. He says:

قِرَاءَةُ الْقُرْآنِ فِي الْمَصْحَفِ تُخَفِّفُ الْعَذَابَ عَنِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ وَلَوْ كَانَا كَافِرَيْنِ.

Reading the Qur'an from the *muṣḥaf* reduces the punishment for the parents, even if they are *kāfir*.

Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 613.

This means that the Qur'an brings life to our homes. This has blessings, *barakah*, for the home. In the continuation of the hadith, the Prophet (s) says:

فَإِنَّ الْبَيْتَ إِذَا كُثِرَ فِيهِ تِلَاوَةُ الْقُرْآنِ كَثُرَ خَيْرُهُ وَاتَّسَعَ أَهْلُهُ وَأَضَاءَ
لَأَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ كَمَا تُضِيءُ نُجُومُ السَّمَاءِ لِأَهْلِ الدُّنْيَا.

When the Qur'an is recited in a house more often, the goodness in that house increases. The house in which the Qur'an is recited frequently will shine for the inhabitants of the skies as stars shine for the people of the earth.¹

When our children hear the recitation of the Qur'an, they will also learn and benefit. When the Qur'an is recited in a house more often, the goodness in that house increases. It leads to more openness, perhaps in terms of blessings, and bounties for the people of that home, and they will be in a better situation. If angels from the sky look at the earth, they will see lights coming from the places where the Qur'an is recited.

Similar to this hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s), is a hadith from Imam Ali (a):

الْبَيْتُ الَّذِي يُقْرَأُ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ وَيُذَكَّرُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فِيهِ تَكَثَّرَ بَرَكَتُهُ
وَتَحَضَّرَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَتَهْجَرُهُ الشَّيَاطِينُ وَيُضِيءُ لِأَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ كَمَا
تُضِيءُ الْكَوَاكِبُ لِأَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّ الْبَيْتَ الَّذِي لَا يُقْرَأُ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 610.

وَلَا يَذْكُرُ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فِيهِ تَقَلُّ بَرَكَتُهُ وَتَهْجُرُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَتَحْضُرُهُ
الشَّيَاطِينُ.

When the Qur'an is recited and Allah is remembered in a house, the blessings in that house are increased, angels come to it, and satans go away from it. It will shine for the inhabitants of heaven just as stars shine for the people of the earth. But the house in which the Qur'an is not recited and in which Allah is not remembered will have less blessings. Angels will go away from it, and satans will come to it.¹

This applies even to a physical house. If ever you have the opportunity to buy a house from a *mu'min*, this is better. When *mu'min* men and women have been praying in a house, that house is blessed. It is better to go to a house in which people have already been worshipping, compared to a house in which people were doing forbidden (*ḥarām*) acts. The blessings in that house are more. Angels and satans do not come together. Where there are angels, satans flee. And when angels go away, satans arrive. It is up to us to invite angels or satans.

Therefore, reciting the Qur'an, especially at home – and I am not saying we should not recite it outside the home, but that

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 610.

all of our recitation should not be done outside it – is very important.

4. Pondering (*tadabbur*) on the Qur'an

To be able to benefit from this fresh and alive communication of Allah (swt) to us and understand the message He has sent to us, reading the Qur'an is not enough. Although recitation of the Qur'an by itself is very important and has its own effects, it has to be an introduction to reflection and pondering on the verses of the Qur'an in order to understand its teachings. Imam Ali (a) said:

أَلَا لَأَخِيرَ فِي قِرَاءَةِ لَيْسَ فِيهَا تَدَبُّرٌ

Beware! There will be no gain in recitation of the Holy Qur'an if it is not read with contemplation.¹

There is a deepness in the meaning of the Qur'an and there are different layers of meaning; therefore, we need to reflect on it and contemplate its words to understand and get the maximum benefit from this ocean of knowledge.

In the Qur'an, Allah (swt) has strongly emphasised contemplating the verses of the Qur'an, among which we can refer to the usage of different derivatives of *tadabbur*. *Tadabbur*, which means 'contemplation and pondering', has

¹Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 36.

been mentioned four times only for the Qur'an including the following verse:¹

أَنزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِّيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

[It is] a blessed Book that We have sent down to you, so that they may contemplate its verses, and that those who possess intellect may take admonition. (38:29)

We will later explain different stages and requirements for understanding the Qur'an.

5. Taking advice (*tadhakkur*)

Something very important to remember about the Qur'an is that the Qur'an is not just a book that gives us new information about theology, ethics, or other subjects. The Qur'an reminds us of ourselves and of our creator and our relationship with Him, our moral values and our destiny. In other words, in addition to giving new information, the Qur'an is trying to awaken or activate or unearth the hidden, passive knowledge that every human being has about Allah (swt) but because of their involvement in the physical life they might have overlooked or failed to appreciate. The Qur'an many times talks about the Qur'an being a reminder:

إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ

¹ The other three verses are 4:82, 47:24 and 23:68.

This is just a reminder and a manifest Qur'an.
(36:69)

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

Yet it is just a reminder for all the nations.
(68:52)

Thus, many times the Qur'an is related to remembrance and reminding. Therefore, when we read a book which is designed to serve as a reminder, we must try to be reflective and let this reminder work on our conscience, and that can only happen if our mind and heart are both open. It is not just a book that gives us new information so that we engage our mind with that book. We have to open our mind and heart and let the Qur'an remind us. For example, if we go to a gathering, and there is a preacher who is giving advice (*maw'izah*), his peaching cannot have any impact on us if we do not listen, or if we listen but our heart does not get engaged. Similarly, sometimes we listen to someone just to debate him afterwards or to pass a test. But we should listen with our mind and heart so there is a chance that the words of that preacher may have a positive impact on us. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِيَذَكَّرُوا

*Certainly, We have paraphrased this Qur'an so
that they may take admonition. (17:41)*

The Qur'an is written advice, a form of preaching (*maw'izah*) and is a reminder, and many times even people without much

formal education about the Qur'an or the sciences which are required for understanding the Qur'an can benefit from this aspect of the Qur'an. Allah (swt) says:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

Certainly, We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished? (54:17, 22, 32, 40)

There is a question here. Should we try to understand the Qur'an and reflect for ourselves, or there is a chance that we might be misinterpreting the Qur'an and that the warning about not interpreting the Qur'an according to our own opinion¹ might apply to us? The answer is that when it comes to the advice side and to the function of Qur'an as a reminder, reflection on the Qur'an can be useful for everyone because the Qur'an is meant to awaken in us a sense of morality, a sense of a virtuous life, and a sense of relation to Allah (swt), and this is something that is not a new idea which we could make a mistake in. It is not that we are imposing a new understanding upon the Qur'an; rather, we are trying to see what we knew but have forgotten or what we knew but did not take seriously. Therefore, often we can benefit from the

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *Awālī al-La'ālī, al-'Azīzīyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīnīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 104.

The Prophet (s): One who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion has secured his seat in the fire [of hell].

Qur'an from this perspective even if we are not able to have a scholarly engagement with the Qur'an. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِهِمْ أَنَّا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ
لِرَحْمَةٍ وَدَكْرَىٰ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Does it not suffice them that We have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them? There is indeed a mercy and admonition in that for a people who have faith. (29:51)

Elsewhere Allah (swt) talks about mankind taking admonition from the Qur'an:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ
Certainly, We have drawn for mankind in this Qur'an every kind of example, so that they may take admonition. (39:27)

6. Respecting the Qur'an

The other point that we find in hadith regarding what our attitude should be towards the Qur'an is showing respect to the Qur'an. In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad (s) says:

فَضْلُ الْقُرْآنِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْكَلَامِ كَفَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ

The position of the Qur'an with respect to other books [words, scriptures, and all the

other texts] is like the position of Allah with respect to His creation.¹

If you want to know the value of the Qur'an, this hadith is very clear. The amount that Allah (swt) is higher than His creation is the amount that the word of Allah is higher than other words. The following hadith also is very important to show the position of the Qur'an and is somewhat shocking. The Prophet (s) has said:

فَمَنْ وَقَرَ الْقُرْآنَ فَقَدْ وَقَرَ اللَّهَ وَمَنْ لَمْ يُوقِرِ الْقُرْآنَ فَقَدْ اسْتَخَفَّ
بِحُرْمَةِ اللَّهِ

Whosoever respects the Qur'an has respected Allah. If someone does not respect the Qur'an, then he has underestimated the respect of Allah.

Therefore, if we want to do something for Allah (swt), and if we want to respect Him, then we should respect the Qur'an, do something for the Qur'an, and show our service to the Qur'an, which is the word of Allah (swt).

For example, imagine you have a book, and the author of that book comes to your home and sees that the book is full of dust and is on the floor. The author will be very sad, and his heart will be broken. He will say: 'I have put all my knowledge and life experience into this book, and look how you have

¹ Shu'ayrī, Muhammad ibn Muhammad, *Jāmi' al-Akhhbār*, p. 40.

treated it!’ You cannot turn around and say that you have paid for it and so it is yours to do with as you please. Yes, you have paid for it, but that is a different issue. It still remains his product even if you have paid for it. If you want to show respect to the author, you have to show respect to his book. If you do not show respect to the book, this means you have no respect for the author. You should not deceive yourself and profess your love for the author and praise him, but then not love his book, and instead criticise it. Doing this does not make sense. A person who does this with the Qur’an has underestimated the love of the author, i.e. Allah (swt).

The next part of the hadith is also shocking. It is regarding the amount of respect that Allah (swt) has for the Qur’an. It says:

وَحُرْمَةُ الْقُرْآنِ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَحُرْمَةِ الْوَالِدِ عَلَى وَلَدِهِ

The respect Allah has for the Qur’an is like the respect a child has for his parent.¹

We respect all human beings, we respect our friends, and we respect people who are older than us. But if you have a father, your respect for him is more than what you have for ordinary people. Your respect for your father is very high.

Of course, Allah (swt) has no father or mother, but just for us to understand, this hadith uses some relationships that we can

¹ Shu‘ayrī, Muhammad ibn Muhammad, *Jāmi‘ al-Akhbār*, p. 40.

relate to. One of the greatest examples of respect is the respect we have for our father and mother. In Islam, we have to be very respectful to our father and mother, even if they have wronged us, and even if they have been unjust to us. The honour that Allah (swt) has for the Qur'an is like the honour a child has for his father. This is very shocking!

Therefore, one of the things we have to do is to have the highest level of respect for the Qur'an. We should give the Qur'an priority, and we should treat the Qur'an with maximum love and respect. The respect we should have for the Qur'an means that anything related to the Qur'an, any service related to the Qur'an, and any activities related to the Qur'an have to be given priority. So, if in our community the priority is to teach the Qur'an, to learn the Qur'an, to act upon the Qur'an, to honour the teachers of the Qur'an, or to honour the reciters of the Qur'an, or anything that gives the Qur'an a prime position in our community, this is good. If the Qur'an becomes marginal, or, forgotten, then that is a big problem.

In another hadith regarding people who do not have enough respect for the Qur'an, Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

ثَلَاثَةٌ يَشْكُونُ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ مَسْجِدٌ خَرَابٌ لَا يُصَلَّى فِيهِ أَهْلُهُ
وَعَالَمٌ بَيْنَ جُهَالٍ وَمُصْحَفٌ مُعَلَّقٌ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْهِ الْغُبَارُ لَا يُقْرَأُ فِيهِ.

Three things will complain to Allah: a ruined mosque, a scholar in the midst of ignorant

ones, and a Qur'an that is left hanging,
gathering dust, and unread.¹

These three things will complain of the bad treatment of people towards them. With respect to the first, according to the Qur'an, a mosque becomes 'ruined' (*kharāb*) not when its roof is leaking or the paint is peeling, but rather when people do not pray in it. Allah (swt) says:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَأَتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ
الْمُهْتَدِينَ

Only those shall maintain Allah's mosques who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and maintain the prayer and give the zakāt, and fear no one except Allah. They, hopefully, will be among the guided. (9:18)

The only people who can maintain and develop the mosques of Allah are those that believe in Allah and say their prayers. It is not the builders or painters that can repair mosques. It is the *mu'minīn* who come to offer *ṣalāḥ*. A hospital functions when there are doctors and nurses; otherwise, it is a very large building with lots of equipment but in which no treatment is possible. So, if you have a very large and very luxurious

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 613.

mosque but there are no *mu'minīn* to be seen inside, this mosque is not in order.

Of course, when *mu'minīn* go to a mosque, they make sure it is clean and tidy and in good order, because it is the house of Allah (swt). How much do we want our own houses to be clean? We should have more concern for the house of Allah (swt). We must do our best in this regard.

Therefore, if the people around that mosque do not say their *ṣalāh* in it, it will complain about them on the Day of Judgement.

The second thing that will complain to Allah (swt) is an *ʿālim* surrounded by ignorant people. These ignorant people do not learn from the *ʿālim*. An *ʿālim* is one from whom you learn, and then act upon his advice. So, one of the things that makes an *ʿālim* suffer is when people do not appreciate him, and his time is wasted and not used properly.

The Qur'an that will complain is one that is left aside, gathering dust, not being read. People do not have interest in it, they do not want to learn and benefit from its guidance,

In the book *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il*, which is a collection of hadith,¹ there is a chapter by the title

¹ *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il* is a collection of hadith compiled by Ḥājj Ḥusayn Nūrī who was a teacher of Shaykh 'Abbās

‘It is obligatory to honour the Qur’an and it is prohibited to humiliate or be disrespectful to it’. The first hadith is from Imam Ali (a), in which he says:

مَنْ قَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ ثُمَّ دَخَلَ النَّارَ فَهُوَ مِنْ مَنْ كَانَ يَتَّخِذُ
آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوءًا.

If someone from this *ummah* (a Muslim) recites the Qur’an and then goes to hell, he is one of the people who took the verses of Allah in derision.¹

This is very much in line with what we said about believing in the Qur’an. This person is a Muslim, he believes in the Qur’an, but he has done something that has now put him in hell. If he were a real believer in the Qur’an, and if he truly took the Qur’an seriously, then he would not have ended up in hell. So, it is not just a matter of saying that we believe in the Qur’an and just admitting that the Qur’an is our holy book.

Qummī. Technically, *Mustadrak* is the title of a book that tries to bring together what is missing in another book. In this case, there is the book *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah* by Shaykh Ḥurr Āmilī, and then there is *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, in which Ḥājj Nūrī has presented hadith on the same subjects but which are not in *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*. They are not there because, perhaps, he did not have access to them, or because he had some criteria that did not allow him to bring those hadith. At times, he was determined to bring certain hadith from certain books. Other books that have *mustadrak* works include *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in the Sunni world.

¹ Nūrī, Ḥusayn, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il wa Mustanbaṭ al-Masā’il*, vol, 4, p. 235, no. 1.

Thus, the Qur'an has to be treated with a very high degree of respect, and this respect has different aspects. One aspect is that we should want to learn from it. Another is that we should want to teach it to others. Another is that we should follow it. We must try to do everything we can for it to become known and recognised and respected by everyone, so that everyone can benefit from it.

7. Carrying the Qur'an (*ḥaml al-Qur'ān*)

Another way we should respond to the Qur'an is to carry it. This does not mean that we take a pocket-sized Qur'an and put it into our pocket and carry it. It is not this easy. To carry the Qur'an is very difficult. The Qur'an says regarding the Torah:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ
أَسْفَارًا يَسْ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ
الظَّالِمِينَ

The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books. Evil is the example of the people who deny Allah's signs, and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot. (62:5)

Tahmil – the infinitive of the verb *ḥummilū* - in Arabic is used to refer to loading someone with something. In the case of the scriptures, it is not simply done by carrying the copies of

the scriptures. It is a matter of the spirit carrying the reality of the scriptures.

Verse 62:5 refers to some of those who were asked to carry the Torah, but did not manage to carry it. Of course, this same sentiment is not only for the people of Torah; it is true about the people who failed to carry the Gospel and the Qur'an. This means that the people of these books were asked to carry the divine book, but some of them failed to carry it. The Qur'an likens this to a donkey that carries something. This means that in one aspect they are carrying the books but, in another aspect, they are not. Now, regarding animals such as a horse, or a donkey, for them to carry something has only one meaning. We put something on them, and they take it from one place to another place; we can say it carried that item, and if they do not want to carry it then they can throw it off. There is no other sense that carrying can have for them. They are like a car. When you put something in the car, either the car will move and carry the load, or it will not move.

However, when it comes to human beings, to carry something is not just a matter of physically carrying it. Hence, if someone carries the Qur'an physically, this is not enough. There are different levels of carrying the book. If you carry a very good book on *akhlāq*, it does not mean that your *akhlāq* has become better. If you carry the Qur'an, it does not mean that you have benefitted from the light of the Qur'an. It is just physical carrying. Even if you believe in the Qur'an in the sense that

you are a Muslim, and you believe it is a revelation from Allah (swt), but you do not take it to your heart, this is not carrying. The Qur'an talks about those who were believers in Torah, who carried the Torah, but the Qur'an still describes them as those who did not truly carry it.

Therefore, a person may be a Muslim who carries the Qur'an physically, or may even believe in the Qur'an on a superficial level, and yet he may still be classified as a person who has not truly carried the Qur'an. To truly carry the Qur'an is a very high position.

These hadith show how important it is to be a carrier of the Qur'an.

The Holy Prophet (s) stated:

حَمَلَةُ الْقُرْآنِ عُرَفَاءُ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ

The carriers of the Qur'an are the famous ones ('*urafā*) of heaven.¹

The term '*urafā*' here does not mean 'mystics', but rather 'representatives.' It means that these are the people who are representatives or supervisors of heaven. They have a high status, and the people of heaven look up to them with great respect, like senior members. In every class there are always a few students who are the best and who represent the others.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 606.

Whenever there is a need for discussion or consultation, it is these students who are consulted, and people look at them with respect.

If we would like to determine which people in heaven are the select, and which represent the others in heaven, and which are the senior inhabitants of heaven, it would be the carriers of the Qur'an.

Another hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s) reads:

إِنَّ مِنْ تَعْظِيمِ الْجَلَالِ اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ كَرَامَةَ ذِي الشَّيْبَةِ وَ حَامِلِ
الْقُرْآنِ وَ الْإِمَامِ الْعَادِلِ

From among the ways to honour the glory of Allah is to honour the white-haired person [elderly], a carrier of the Qur'an, and a just leader.¹

There are perhaps other ways, but these are three ways to honour the glory of Allah (swt).

Respecting an elderly person is respecting Allah (swt). A *mu'min* who has spent his or her life with *īmān* and with *taqwā* has great value. Just the fact that this person has been

¹ Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, 'Alā al-Dīn, *Kanz al-'Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl*, vol. 9, p. 157, no. 25507.

a *mu'min* for many years adds to his or her value. This shows there is a stability, continuity, and close connection between that person and faith. To honour such a person with white hair is to honour Allah (swt).

Respecting a carrier of the Qur'an is also respecting Allah (swt) and honouring the glory of Him.

When there is a just leader and if one respects him, then it means he has respected Allah (swt). A just leader is very important.

There is also a very famous hadith in which Prophet Muhammad (s) says:

أَشْرَافُ أُمَّتِي حَمَلَةُ الْقُرْآنِ وَأَصْحَابُ اللَّيْلِ

The most honourable ones of my nation are the carriers of the Qur'an, and the companions of the night [prayer, i.e. those who do *tahajjud*].¹

Imam Bāqir (a) quotes the Holy Prophet (s):

يَا مَعَاشِرَ قُرَاءِ الْقُرْآنِ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فِيمَا حَمَلَكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابِهِ
فَإِنِّي مَسْئُولٌ وَإِنَّكُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ إِنِّي مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ تَبْلِغِ الرِّسَالَةِ وَ
أَمَّا أَنْتُمْ فَتَسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا حَمَلْتُمْ مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَ سُنَّتِي.

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Alī, *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 234.

O reciters of the Qur'an, be wary of Allah with respect to what He has given you to carry of His book, for surely, I will be questioned and indeed you will be questioned; indeed, I will be questioned about delivering the message, and you will be questioned about what you have been asked to carry with of the book of Allah and my *sunnah*.¹

As you can see, the concept of *haml* is very important, and it does not just refer to the physical carrying of the Qur'an or just believing in the Qur'an. *Ḥaml al-Qur'ān* is not when, say, some people are given the gift of the Qur'an, and only carry it physically; they believe in it but do not try to understand it, and they do not try to derive knowledge from it. If you ask them what the Qur'an says about any particular subject, and whether they have reflected on the Qur'an or not, they will reply negatively, as they see their role as simply believing in it, respecting it, kissing it, and keeping it in their pocket. This is not acceptable. This is similar to what the verse explains: 'The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it' (62:5).

There is a second group, who are higher in their rank but are still not carriers of the Qur'an. These people, in addition to believing in the book, respecting the book, carrying the book, and kissing the book, also try to understand it. They make

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 606.

their minds busy with the Qur'an, they try to understand the Qur'anic sciences, they try to understand *tafsīr*, they try to learn Arabic, and they really want to learn the Qur'an. Unfortunately, these are people who still do not follow the Qur'an. They have learned some of the Qur'anic teachings, their minds are full of verses of the Qur'an and Qur'anic ideas, they could even be reciters, and they could even be good memorisers or commentators, but they are still not classified as carriers of the Qur'an.

Carriers of the Qur'an are those that have taken the Qur'an and carried the Qur'an with their body, mind, and heart. They are completely at the service of the Qur'an. They have taken the Qur'an on board, not only in mind, but also in heart. If you are a person who just takes a torch then this is not enough; if you switch on the torch and you benefit from the light of the torch and you show other people this light, this is also not enough. The carriers of the Qur'an are people who have been acting according to the Qur'an, and now the light of the Qur'an is coming from them, from their tongues, their actions, and their behaviour. The Qur'an is reflected in them. These are carriers of the Qur'an. Such people's eyes, tongues, hands, and ears all carry the Qur'an. The Qur'an has penetrated into all aspects of their being, whether it is body or soul. This is the level of carrying the Qur'an that we need to possess.

We can explain different levels of carrying the Qur'an in this way.

To hold on to the Qur'an. One type of carrying the Qur'an is to keep it, and not to cast the Qur'an aside (literally or metaphorically), because the Qur'an talks about some people that throw it behind their backs:

نَبَذَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ

*A party of the People of the Book threw away
the Book of Allah behind their backs. (2:101)*

For example, imagine you are moving and there are some obstacles in front of you, and you take them and throw them aside. Some people do this with the book of Allah, because the book of Allah is stopping them and is like a barrier for them, so they take it and throw it behind themselves. Thus, carrying the Qur'an on this level means that when you are faced with the Qur'an, you hold on to it. It is the same with all the divine books such as the Torah or the Gospel. All the believers in the course of history, when they were given a message by Allah, were supposed to hold onto it and not to cast it aside.

To protect the Qur'an. There are two ways to hold something; sometimes I hold something in my hand to protect me. For instance, say I have a debate with someone such as my wife, or friend, or colleague. I can hold the Qur'an so that in our discussion I can bring it forth in order to protect myself. But

the carriers of the Qur'an try to protect it and are at the service of the Qur'an.

Not to place anything next to it. When you have something as valuable as the Qur'an to carry, you should not carry something else at the same time. For example, it would look ridiculous if someone carried a king's throne in one hand and a watermelon in the other. Or, for example, if someone has the Qur'an and then next to it has some books written by human beings, maybe philosophers or poets; again, this is not carrying the Qur'an. You have to hold the Qur'an and serve the Qur'an, and be 100% at the service of the Qur'an. You must be fully dedicated to the Qur'an. And therefore, you cannot carry two things in this sense. This means you must dedicate your life to the Qur'an, and let nothing else come next to it. Yes, you may need to learn something in order to understand the Qur'an; that is another issue. But your life should not be dedicated to anything other than the Qur'an. You must view yourself as a servant of Allah and of His word. This task is a full-time job. It does not necessarily mean such a person is teaching the Qur'an all the time, but it means that he or she is always at the service of the Qur'an.

This is my understanding of the concept of carrying the Qur'an, *ḥaml al-Qur'ān*, and I think it is such understanding that can explain great position of the carriers of the Qur'an in Islamic hadith. Prophet Muhammad (s) is quoted as saying:

لَا يَنْبَغِي لِحَامِلِ الْقُرْآنِ أَنْ يَظُنَّ أَنَّ أَحَدًا أُعْطِيَ أَفْضَلَ مِمَّا أُعْطِيَ
لَأَنَّهُ لَوْ مَلَكَ الدُّنْيَا بِأَسْرِهَا لَكَانَ الْقُرْآنُ أَفْضَلَ مِمَّا مَلَكَهُ.

It does not befit a carrier of the Qur'an to think someone else has been given greater than what he has been given. Even if he possessed the whole world, it is not like possessing the Qur'an.¹

A person who really understands the gift of the Qur'an should not think that anyone has been given something greater. If you see people who have been given wealth, power, or position, and you think you have somehow not been given something as good as what they have been given, you have not understood the greatness of the Qur'an.

8. Learning and teaching the Qur'an

Teaching the Qur'an comes after learning, but because many of the hadith mention learning and teaching together, they will be discussed together.

By 'learning the Qur'an', we mean acquiring the knowledge and sciences necessary in order to read, reflect upon, understand and practise the Qur'an.

¹ 'Alam al-Hudā, Ali b. Ḥusayn, *Amālī Murtaḍā*, vol. 1, p. 31.

Here we will mention some hadith that emphasise and encourage people to learn and teach the Qur'an in different ways.

Regarding learning the Qur'an, there is a hadith narrated by 'Uqbat b. 'Āmir in which he says that once the Prophet (s) asked his companions which of them would like to go out in the morning to the hills outside Mecca and be given two very nice beautiful camels as gift, and which he could then bring to his family. They all replied that they would indeed like that. Then Prophet Muhammad (s) said:

لَأَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَسْجِدَ فَيَتَعَلَّمَ آيَةً خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ نَاقَةٍ (أَوْ اثْنَتَيْنِ)
خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ نَاقَتَيْنِ وَثَلَاثٌ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ ثَلَاثِ

If one of you goes out to the mosque and learns one verse, it is better for him than one she-camel, and two verses is better for him than two she-camels, and three verses is better for him than three she-camels.¹

¹ Nūrī, Ḥusayn, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il*, vol. 4, p. 234, no. 4576. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عَقْبَةَ بْنِ عَامِرٍ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص) قَالَ: أَيُّكُمْ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَخْدُوَ إِلَى الْعَقِيقِ
أَوْ إِلَى بَطْحَاءِ مَكَّةَ فَيُؤْتَى بِنَاقَتَيْنِ كَوْمَاوَيْنِ حَسَنَتَيْنِ فَيَدْعُو بِهِمَا إِلَى أَهْلِهِ مِنْ
غَيْرِ مَأْثَمٍ وَلَا قَطِيعَةٍ رَحِمَ؟ قَالُوا: كُلُّنَا نَحِبُّ ذَلِكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. قَالَ: لَأَنْ يَأْتِيَ
أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَسْجِدَ فَيَتَعَلَّمَ آيَةً خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ نَاقَةٍ (أَوْ اثْنَتَيْنِ) خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ نَاقَتَيْنِ وَ
ثَلَاثٌ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ ثَلَاثِ.

It is sad that many people do not become that happy when they learn a verse, and it is not as if they have been given a camel! Today, what would we do if we were given the choice between a car and the opportunity to learn one verse?

The Prophet (s) also is quoted as saying:

مَا مِنْ مُؤْمِنٍ ذَكَرَ أَوْ أَتَى حُرًّا أَوْ مَمْلُوكًا إِلَّا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِ حَقٌّ وَاجِبٌ
أَنْ يَتَعَلَّمَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ وَيَتَفَقَّهُ فِيهِ

There is no believer, man or woman, a free person or a slave, except that Allah has a right over that person which has to be observed: that he must learn the Qur'an and be deeply informed of it.¹

The right of Allah (swt) is necessary and obligatory, and has to be observed. It is not sufficient to say that we know how to recite the Qur'an. This is not enough. We must have a deep understanding of it.

A hadith says that once Abū Dharr went to the Prophet (s) and said: 'I fear that I may learn the Qur'an but then not act upon it.' The Prophet (s) replied:

لَا يَعْذِبُ اللَّهُ قَلْبًا أَسْكَنَهُ الْقُرْآنَ

¹ Ibid. p. 232, no. 4571.

Allah will not punish a heart which the Qur'an resides in.¹

This means that if you really learn the Qur'an, you would certainly benefit. The problem is that we do not allow the Qur'an to enter our heart; otherwise, if out of love and honesty we go to learn the Qur'an, we would be safe.

It is also narrated by Aṣḡagh b. Nubātah, a companion of Imam Ali, that Imam Ali (a) said: 'When Allah looks at the crimes and sins taking place by the people, then He would find them deserving of punishment. But there are some people, because of whom, Allah (swt) will not punish all the people on the earth. When He looks at all the people with white hair, going with difficulty to the mosque for prayer, and young children going to learn the Qur'an, Allah (swt) will delay the punishment.'²

¹ Ibid. p. 233, no. 4572.

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Thawāb al-A'māl wa 'Iqāb al-A'māl*, p. 39. The Arabic text is as follows:

عَنِ الْأَصْغَغِ بْنِ نُبَاتَةَ قَالَ قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (ع): إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَهُمْ بِعَذَابِ
أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً حَتَّى لَا يُحَاشَى مِنْهُمْ أَحَدٌ إِذَا عَمِلُوا بِالْمَعَاصِي وَاجْتَرَحُوا
السَّيِّئَاتِ فَإِذَا نَظَرَ إِلَى الشَّيْبِ نَاقِلِي أَقْدَامِهِمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ وَالْوُلْدَانِ يَتَعَلَّمُونَ
الْقُرْآنَ رَحِمَهُمْ فَأَخَّرَ ذَلِكَ عَنْهُمْ.

Therefore, the old people who go for prayers and the young children who go to learn the Qur'an are bringing mercy and safety for the rest of the people.

Another hadith says that Mu'adh ibn Jabal, one of the Prophet's companions, asked him to speak about something which we could benefit from. Prophet Muhammad (s) answered:

إِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ عَيْشَ السُّعْدَاءِ وَ مَوْتَ الشُّهَدَاءِ وَ النَّجَاةَ يَوْمَ الْحَشْرِ وَ
الظِّلَّ يَوْمَ الْحَرُورِ وَ الْهُدَى يَوْمَ الضَّلَالَةِ فَادْرُسُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَإِنَّهُ كَلَامُ
الرَّحْمَنِ وَ حِرْزٌ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَ رُجْحَانٌ فِي الْمِيزَانِ

If you desire the life of happy people, and the death of martyrs, salvation on the Day of Resurrection, and a shade on the Day of Judgement when it is very hot, and guidance on the day people to the wrong direction go astray, then learn the Qur'an. This is the word of Allah and a protection from Satan, and it will put weight on your scale.¹

Hence, if we want to have something weighty on our scales on the Day of Judgement, we must learn the Qur'an.

In regard to learning and teaching the Qur'an, Imam Šādiq (a) said:

¹ Nūrī, Ḥusayn, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il*, vol. 4, p. 232, no. 4570.

يَنْبَغِي لِلْمُؤْمِنِ أَنْ لَا يَمُوتَ حَتَّى يَتَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ أَوْ يَكُونَ فِي تَعْلِيمِهِ.

A believer is not expected to die unless he has been learning the Qur'an or has been teaching it.¹

During our lifetime we should either be increasing our own knowledge or increasing other people's knowledge of the Qur'an. Our life must be at the service of learning and teaching the Qur'an.

Prophet Muhammad (s) also has said:

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ.

The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it.²

The teacher of the Qur'an follows the example of Allah (swt), because the first teacher of the Qur'an is Allah (swt) (55:1-2), and the Holy Prophet is the first learner of the Qur'an.

Ibn 'Abbās narrates that the Prophet (s) said:

مَعَلِّمِ الْقُرْآنِ وَ مُتَعَلِّمِهِ يَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّى الْحُوتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 607.

² Ibid. p. 233, no. 4574.

Everything asks for forgiveness [from Allah]
for the learner of the Qur'an and the teacher of
the Qur'an, even the fish in the sea.¹

Note how the hadith says that everything, and not everyone, asks for forgiveness. If a person obeys Allah, then the whole world appreciates this. And if a person disobeys, then the whole world is angry and upset. So if you learn the Qur'an or if you teach the Qur'an, then everything will ask forgiveness for you, even the fish in the sea. It means the whole of creation will appreciate you.

The Prophet (s) has also said that when someone teaches a student one verse of the Qur'an, that teacher will have a reward as long as this verse is recited by the student, that students' students, and all those people who have learned from him.²

9. Practicing the Qur'an

A very common theme occurring in the hadith about the Qur'an is that believers need to act upon the Qur'an and implement the teaching of the Qur'an. For example, Imam Ali (a) says in his will:

¹ Nūrī, Ḥusayn, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa Mustanbat al-Masā'il*, vol. 4, p. 235, no. 4580.

² Ibid. no. 4581. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

مَنْ عَلَّمَ آيَةً فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى كَانَ لَهُ أَجْرُهَا مَا تَلَيْتُ.

اللَّهُ اللَّهُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ فَلَا يَسْبِقَنَّكُمْ إِلَى الْعَمَلِ بِهِ غَيْرُكُمْ

[Fear] Allah [and] keep Allah in view in the matter of the Qur'an. No one should excel you in acting upon it.¹

We have already discussed above about believing in the Qur'an, respecting the Qur'an and carrying the Qur'an, which are different expressions about acting upon the Qur'an. Therefore, there is not much need to expand on this, but basically the idea is that the Qur'an has to be taken as a book of advice (*maw'izah*) that should work on us and as a prescription so long as we work on implementing it. If a doctor or a physician prescribes us some medicine, we should not just take the prescription or take the medicine and keep it somewhere or just look at it or just read what is written on it. We have to take it at the time and in the condition in which is most effective. Sometimes the doctor says to take it before food or after food or when fasting, with water or without water.

So we should reflect on the Qur'an in the time which is more effective and also try to implement it as prescribed with all the details, and carefully; and we should not stop acting upon it till the healing is complete. It can be for personal life, family life, or social life – the economy, politics, or something else.

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Man lā Yahḍuru al-Faqih*, vol. 4, p. 190.

So we should wholeheartedly implement this book of Allah and treat it as a prescription.

10. Calling upon the Qur'an (*tawassul*)

Another concept that we can find about the Qur'an is to call upon the Qur'an (*tawassul*). For example, according to a hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a), on the night of Qadr in the month of Ramaḍān, we ask Allah (swt) to forgive us and grant us our requests because of the Qur'an:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِكِتَابِكَ الْمُنَزَّلِ وَمَا فِيهِ وَفِيهِ اسْمُكَ الْأَعْظَمُ
الْأَكْبَرُ وَأَسْمَاؤُكَ الْحُسْنَى وَمَا يُخَافُ وَيُرْجَى أَنْ تَجْعَلَنِي مِنْ
عَتَقَاتِكَ مِنَ النَّارِ

O Allah, in the name of this Holy Book sent by You, and whatever be in the Book – and it includes Your greatest name and Your best names and the things to be dreaded and hoped for – include me among those who are freed by You from the fire of Hell.¹

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 629, no. 9.

Chapter 16

The etiquette of the recitation of the Qur'an

Part 1: Outward etiquette



Introduction

In the last chapter, we talked about the significance of the recitation of the Holy Qur'an. Here, we will discuss the etiquette and right manners of the recitation of the Qur'an. Prior to that, we will reflect on some hadith in this regard.

Hadith on the etiquette of recitation of the Qur'an

In *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah*, Imam Ṣādiq (a) describes some of the important manners of recitation of the Qur'an. At beginning, the Imam (a) says:

مَنْ قَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَمْ يَخْضَعْ لِلَّهِ وَلَمْ يَرِقَّ قَلْبُهُ وَلَا يُنْشِئْ حَزَنًا وَ
وَجَلًا فِي سِرِّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَهَانَ بِعَظَمِ شَأْنِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَخَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا
مُبِينًا

Whoever recites the Qur'an and does not humble himself before Allah, does not have a softened heart, and does not feel sadness or

fear provoked within him undervalues the immensity of Allah's greatness and is in a clear state of loss.

Then Imam mentions three requirements that a reciter of the Qur'an should observe:

فَقَارِئُ الْقُرْآنِ مُحْتَاجٌ إِلَى ثَلَاثَةِ أَشْيَاءَ: قَلْبٍ خَاشِعٍ وَبَدَنٍ فَارِغٍ
وَمَوْضِعٍ خَالٍ

A person who recites the Qur'an needs three things: a fearful heart, a tranquil and receptive body, and an appropriate place to recite.

Then he explains further three requirements:

فَإِذَا خَشَعَ لِلَّهِ قَلْبُهُ فَرَّ مِنْهُ الشَّيْطَانُ الرَّجِيمُ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى «فَإِذَا
قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ» فَإِذَا تَفَرَّغَ نَفْسُهُ
مِنَ الْأَسْبَابِ تَجَرَّدَ قَلْبُهُ لِلْقِرَاءَةِ وَ لَا يَعْتَرِضُهُ عَارِضٌ فَيَحْرِمُهُ بَرَكَهَ
نُورِ الْقُرْآنِ وَ فَوَائِدُهُ فَإِذَا اتَّخَذَ مَجْلِسًا خَالِيًا وَ اعْتَزَلَ عَنِ الْخَلْقِ
بَعْدَ أَنْ أَتَى بِالْخَصْلَتَيْنِ خُضُوعِ الْقَلْبِ وَ فَرَاغِ الْبَدَنِ اسْتَأْنَسَ رُوحُهُ
وَ سِرُّهُ بِاللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ وَ وَجَدَ حَلَاوَةَ مُخَاطَبَاتِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى عَزَّ وَ
جَلَّ عِبَادَهُ الصَّالِحِينَ وَ عَلِمَ لُطْفَهُ بِهِمْ وَ مَقَامَ اخْتِصَاصِهِ لَهُمْ بِفُتُونِ
كَرَامَاتِهِ وَ بَدَائِعِ إِشَارَاتِهِ فَإِنْ شَرِبَ كَأْسًا مِنْ هَذَا الْمَشْرَبِ لَا يَخْتَارُ
عَلَى ذَلِكَ الْحَالِ حَالًا وَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ الْوَقْتِ وَقْتًا بَلْ يُؤَثِّرُهُ عَلَى
كُلِّ طَاعَةٍ وَ عِبَادَةٍ لِأَنَّ فِيهِ الْمُنَاجَاةَ مَعَ الرَّبِّ بِلَاوِاسِطَةٍ

When his heart fears Allah, the accursed Satan flees from him. As Allah said, ‘*When you recite the Qur’an, seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan*’ (16:98). When he frees himself of all attachments, his heart is devoted to recitation, and nothing impedes him from obtaining the blessing of the light of the Qur’an and its benefits. When he finds an empty place and withdraws from people, having acquired the two qualities of humility of heart and tranquillity of body, then his soul and his innermost being will feel communion with Allah, and he will discover the sweetness of how Allah speaks to His right-acting bondsmen, how He shows His gentleness to them and singles them out for all the varieties of His marks of honour and wondrous signs. If he drinks a cup of this drink, he will never prefer any other state to this nor any other moment to this. He will prefer this to every act of obedience and devotion, since it contains intimate conversation with the Lord, without any intermediary.

Then the Imam adds:

فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ تَقْرَأُ كِتَابَ رَبِّكَ وَ مَشُورَ وَلَايَتِكَ وَ كَيْفَ تُجِيبُ
 أَوْامِرَهُ وَ تَجْتَنِبُ نَوَاهِيَهُ وَ كَيْفَ تَتَمَثَّلُ حُدُودَهُ فَإِنَّهُ كِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ
 لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَ لَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ «تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ
 حَمِيدٍ» فَتَلَّهُ تَرْتِيلًا وَ قَفَّ عِنْدَ وَعْدِهِ وَ وَعِيدِهِ وَ تَفَكَّرَ فِي أَمثَالِهِ
 وَ مَوَاعِظِهِ وَ احْذَرِ أَنْ تَقَعَ مِنْ إِقَامَتِكَ حُرُوفُهُ فِي إِضَاعَةِ حُدُودِهِ

So beware of how you read the Book of your Lord, the guardian to whom you aspire, how you respond to His commands and avoid His prohibitions, and how you observe His limits, for it is a mighty Book: falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it, ‘*a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One*’ (41:42). Therefore, recite it in an orderly manner and contemplatively, and adhere to the limits of His promise and His threat. Reflect on its examples and warnings. Beware of paying undue respect to the recitation of its letters while failing to observe its legal limits.¹

There is also a hadith from Imam Ali (a) about how to recite the Qur’an. This is a famous hadith in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, recording the answer the Imam (a) gave to Hammām when he asked the Imam (a) to describe the pious people for him. One of the things that the Imam (a) mentioned was about how they spend their nights reciting the Qur’an:

أَمَّا اللَّيْلُ فَصَافُونَ أَقْدَامَهُمْ تَالِينَ لِأَجْزَاءِ الْقُرْآنِ يُرْتَلُونَهَا تَرْتِيلًا
يَحْزَنُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَيَسْتَشِيرُونَ بِهِ دَوَاءَ دَائِهِمْ فَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِآيَةٍ فِيهَا
تَشْوِيقٌ رَكَنُوا إِلَيْهَا طَمَعًا وَتَطَلَّعَتْ نَفُوسُهُمْ إِلَيْهَا شَوْقًا وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهَا
نُصِبَ أَعْيُنُهُمْ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِآيَةٍ فِيهَا تَخْوِيفٌ أَصْغَوْا إِلَيْهَا مَسَامِعَ
قُلُوبِهِمْ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّ زَفِيرَ جَهَنَّمَ وَشَهيقَهَا فِي أُصُولِ آذَانِهِمْ.

¹ Imam Ṣādiq, *Miṣbah al-Sharī‘ah*, pp. 28-29.

During the night, they are up standing on their feet reading portions of the Holy Qur'an and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments. If they come across a verse which creates eagerness (for Paradise), they pursue it avidly, and their spirits turn towards it eagerly, and they feel as if it is in front of them. And when they come across a verse which inspires fear (of Hell), they bend the ears of their hearts towards it and feel as though the sound of Hell and its cries are reaching their ears.¹

Normally, scholars discuss the etiquette of recitation of the Qur'an in two categories. There are outward or external manners and forms of etiquette, known as *al-ādāb al-zāhiriyyah*, and there are some inward or internal manners and etiquette, known as *al-ādāb al-bāṭiniyyah*.

In this chapter we will discuss the outward or external manners, and in the next chapter we will study the inward or internal manners.

¹ Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon on the pious people, p. 304.

Part 1: Outward etiquette

1. Purity (*tahārah*)

One of the manners that we should observe is to be with *tahārah*, i.e. to be with ablution (*wuḍūʿ*). A hadith from Imam Ali (a) says:

لَا يَقْرَأُ الْعَبْدُ الْقُرْآنَ إِذَا كَانَ عَلَى غَيْرِ طَهْوٍ حَتَّى يَتَطَهَّرَ

The servant of Allah does not recite the Qur'an if he is not in *tahārah*, unless he or she makes *tahārah*.¹

If you are in a condition whereby you can say your *ṣalāh* or do *ṭawāf*, then it is also a good condition to recite the Qur'an.

We should also be physically clean as far as the body and dress are concerned. Even cleaning the mouth and teeth is considered part of the outward *tahārah*. For example, there is a hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s) in which he said to his companions:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): نَظَّفُوا طَرِيقَ الْقُرْآنِ! قِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ: وَ مَا طَرِيقُ الْقُرْآنِ؟ قَالَ: أَفْوَاهُكُمْ. قِيلَ بِمَاذَا؟ قَالَ: بِالسَّوَاكِ.

The Prophet (s) said: 'Clean the path of the Qur'an!' He was asked: 'What is the path of the Qur'an?' He replied: 'Your mouth.' They said:

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 627.

‘How can we do that?’ He replied: ‘Brush your teeth.’¹

2. Facing *qiblah*

If possible, it is good to face *qiblah*. At times you may be a passenger in a car, and want to recite the Qur’an; in such a situation you cannot observe *qiblah*. But, whenever you can observe it, and supposing you are in a place where you have the ability to face *qiblah*, you should do so.

If you cannot, then this does not mean you should stop reciting the Qur’an. By all means you should read the Qur’an, but when possible, facing *qiblah* is an important piece of etiquette.

3. Sitting respectfully

We must bear in mind that this is not an ordinary book. One should sit respectfully, and either hold the Qur’an with his hands, or place the Qur’an on a stand (*rahl*) or something similar.

Nothing should be put on top of the Qur’an, unless it is another Qur’an. No book, even if it is a book of supplications, or a book which has some parts of the Qur’an in it but it is not the complete Qur’an, should be put on top of the Qur’an. And if there are two Qur’ans, and one is only Arabic and the

¹ Barqī, Aḥmad, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 2, p. 558.

other is Arabic with translation, then the one that is only Arabic should be put on top. This is because the one that contains the translation has something in it other than Qur'an, and so that should not be put on top of the Qur'an.

Sometimes, people recite the Qur'an and then *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* starts, so they put the Qur'an on the floor next to the feet of the person in the row in front of them. This is not good. You should put the Qur'an back on the shelf. If you want to read it again, go and get it again, but do not put it on the floor. These are important things that we have to observe.

4. Starting with *bismillāh* and end with *du'ā'*

We should start reciting with *bismillāh*, and end with *du'ā'*. There are different prayers that are recommended to be recited after reciting the Qur'an, among which we can refer to the following prayer:

اللَّهُمَّ ارحمني بالقرآن واجعله لى إماما و نورا و هدى و رحمة،
اللَّهُمَّ ذكّرني منه ما نسيت، و علّمني منه ما جهلت، و ارزقني
تلاوته آناء الليل و النهار، و اجعله حجة لى يا رب العالمين

O Allah, have mercy on us because of the Qur'an, and make it for us a guide and light and guidance and mercy. O Allah, make us remember that of it which we have forgotten, make us know of it that which we have become ignorant of, and make us recite it in the hours

of the night and day, and make it a proof for us.¹

5. Performing *sajdah*

We are ordered to do *sajdah* after reciting or hearing four verses:

- verse 15 of Surah Sajdah
- verse 37 of Surah Fuṣṣilāt
- verse 62 of Surah Najm
- verse 19 of Surah ‘Alaq.

In addition to these four verses, there are 11 other places that performing *sajdah* is recommended; therefore, in a proper recitation, we should perform *sajdah* after them even though it is not obligatory. These eleven places are as follows:

- verse 206 of Surah A‘rāf, which is the last verse of the *surah*,
- verse 15 of Surah Ra‘d,
- verses 49 and 50 of Surah Naḥl (at the end of verse 50)
- verses 107-109 of Surah Isrā’ (at the end of verse 109)
- verse 58 of Surah Maryam
- verses 18 and 77 of Surah Ḥajj
- verse 60 of Surah Furqān
- verses 25-26 of Surah Naml (at the end of verse 26)
- verse 24 of Surah Ṣād
- verse 21 of Surah Inshiqāq.

¹ Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muhammad Muḥsin, *al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā*, vol. 2, p. 227.

6. Looking at the Qur'an

Looking at the Qur'an by itself is considered as an act of worship. A hadith relates that a person asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) that, since he had memorised the Qur'an, should he recite from memory or look at the text? The Imam (a) replied:

أَقْرَأْهُ وَانْظُرْ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ فَهُوَ أَفْضَلُ أَمَا عَلِمْتَ أَنَّ النَّظَرَ فِي
الْمُصْحَفِ عِبَادَةٌ

Read it and look at the *muṣḥaf* (the Qur'an).
Do you not know that looking at the Qur'an is
an act of worship?¹

Another hadith relates that the Prophet (s) said to his companions: 'Give your eyes their share of the worship.' They asked: 'What is their share of the worship?' The Prophet (s) replied:

النَّظَرُ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ وَالتَّفَكُّرُ فِيهِ وَالْإِعْتِبَارُ عِنْدَ عَجَائِبِهِ

Looking into the Qur'an and pondering in it,
and then taking a lesson at its wonders.²

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, pp. 613-614. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) قَالَ: قُلْتُ لَهُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ إِنِّي أَحْفَظُ الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى ظَهْرِ قَلْبِي فَأَقْرَأُهُ عَلَى ظَهْرِ قَلْبِي أَفْضَلُ أَوْ أَنْظُرُ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ؟ قَالَ: فَقَالَ لِي: بَلْ أَقْرَأْهُ وَانْظُرْ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ فَهُوَ أَفْضَلُ. أَمَا عَلِمْتَ أَنَّ النَّظَرَ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ عِبَادَةٌ.

² Warām ibn Abī Farās, Mas'ūd, *Majmū'ah Warām*, vol. 1, p. 250. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

This means even when we read the Qur'an to reflect on its verses, our eyes also benefit in addition to the value of the action.

7. Reciting correctly

In another hadith from the Prophet (s), he says:

أَعْرَبُوا الْقُرْآنَ

Read the Qur'an with correct recitation.¹

This means in our recitation all the vowels (*harakāt*) and all the *wuqūf* and other markings should be observed. In another hadith regarding the verse '*and recite the Qur'an in a measured tone*' (73:4), Imam Ali (a) explains it as reading at a speed that allows one to observe the *wuqūf* and pronounce each letter correctly.²

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): أُعْطُوا أُعَيْنُكُمْ حَظَّهَا مِنَ الْعِبَادَةِ! فَقَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (ص): وَمَا حَظُّهَا مِنَ الْعِبَادَةِ؟ قَالَ: النَّظَرُ فِي الْمُصْحَفِ وَالتَّفَكُّرُ فِيهِ وَالْإِعْتِبَارُ عِنْدَ عَجَائِبِهِ.

¹ Shahīd Thānī, Zayn al-Dīn, *Munyat al-Murīd*, p. 368.

² Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Muḥsin, *al-Wāfī*, vol. 8, p. 837. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

قال أمير المؤمنين (ع) في قوله تعالى «وَرَتَّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا»: إنه حفظ الوقوف وبيان الحروف.

8. Reciting at a measured pace

Another aspect of the outward manners for the recitation is neither to recite the Qur'an at a very fast pace, nor very slowly. There are several hadith about this. For example, once a person asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) about the verse '*and recite the Qur'an in a measured tone*' (73:4). In response, Imam Ṣādiq (a) quoted Imam Ali (a) as saying:

Read it in a way that it is clear. And do not read it quickly like a poem, and do not place too many gaps in between like sand which are scattered around. But soften your heart which may have become hard with it. And let it not be the concern of any of you to just finish the *surah*.¹

When you read the Qur'an, you should think that you are going through a museum or a library. When you see beautiful art or beautiful books, take them, look at them, and reflect on them. Do not just rush through quickly to reach the end of the museum or library.

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 614. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ سَلِيمَانَ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) عَنْ قَوْلِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
«وَرَتَّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا». قَالَ: قَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (ع): بَيْنَهُ تَبَيُّانٌ وَ لَا تَهْذِهِ هَذَّ
الشَّعْرِ وَ لَا تَنْتَرَهُ نَثْرَ الرَّمْلِ وَ لَكِنْ أَفْرِغُوا قُلُوبَكُمْ الْقَاسِيَةَ وَ لَا يَكُنْ هُمْ أَحَدُكُمْ
آخِرَ السُّورَةِ.

Surely, no one has forced you to come to the museum; you have come out of your own interest to enjoy the museum. Sometimes, we go to museums, but we do not have sufficient time. We just go to the first hall and the last hall so that we can say we saw the museum, and so that we can say yes if someone asks us if we have been to it. This is not good. There is a hadith from the Prophet (s) in which he says:

قَفُّوا عِنْدَ عَجَائِبِهِ حَرِّكُوا بِهِ الْقُلُوبَ وَلَا يَكُنْ هُمْ أَحَدُكُمْ آخِرَ
السُّورَةِ

When there is mention of some wonders, you have to pause and think, and allow your heart to be moved; and your concern must not be reaching the end of the *surah*.¹

9. Adopt a moderate tone

The Qur'an should be recited with a moderate tone. It should not be too loud like shouting and should not be too low. Rather, it should be moderate in the way that one can hear one's self, unless the voice will cause a disturbance, in which case it is acceptable to recite it very quietly.

10. Make your recitation beautiful

Together with the correct speed, we must also try to recite beautifully. The Prophet (s) has said:

¹ Ibn Ash'ath, Muhammad, *al-Ja'farīyāt*, p. 180.

حَسِّنُوا الْقُرْآنَ بِأَصْوَاتِكُمْ فَإِنَّ الصَّوْتَ الْحَسَنَ يَزِيدُ الْقُرْآنَ حُسْنًا

Beautify the Qur'an with your voices. Verily, excellent recitations will increase the Qur'an in beauty.¹

The Qur'an is beautiful, but a beautiful voice adds to its beauty. If the Qur'an is recited with a beautiful voice, then it shines more and is more attractive.

In another hadith, Imam Sadiq (a) quotes the Prophet (s) as saying:

لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَلِيَّةٌ وَحَلِيَّةُ الْقُرْآنِ الصَّوْتُ الْحَسَنُ

For everything there is a decoration, and the decoration of the Qur'an is a beautiful voice.²

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 2, p. 69, no. 322.

² Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 615.

Chapter 17

The etiquette of the recitation of the Qur'an

Part 2: Inward etiquette



Introduction

In the previous chapter, we talked about some of the outward etiquette. This chapter will explore the etiquette which relates to our heart and mind especially when it comes to the method of reflection.

These, in part, answer the question of how we can make sure that we understand the Qur'an better, and relate to it with both our hearts and minds. Some of what is said here is applicable to both the Qur'an and other texts. Therefore, for example, in order to understand a hadith collection, or – on another level – a work by a philosopher or theologian, it is necessary to observe these practices; they may help with understanding other texts better.

From the outset, it is obvious that a person must master the techniques of reading and understanding so that he can actually read the text properly and understand it. Hence, things such as focus, and concentration must be observed

whenever a person wants to read any written text, let alone a divine scripture. If a person does not have concentration, then he could read a text many times, but will still not understand it. However, when he is faced with an exam, he will read and review the books and notes properly, and he knows that if he does not, then he will not take in the information and will not be able to recall anything for the exam. He will not be able to understand any of the material let alone come up with new ideas.

Therefore, there are methods of reading and comprehension that are beneficial for all texts, including the Qur'an. However, certain aspects of the Qur'an are special. Hence, we need to work even harder when it comes to the Qur'an. So, even more efforts should be put into understanding the word of Allah (swt) than, say, the words of a philosopher.

People pursue research in order to understand the writings of philosophers. Many people have done their PhDs on Kant and Hegel, because they assume these men were men of thinking, and in every sentence they may have some idea that needs attention. When it comes to the word of Allah (swt), the matter is completely different: not only every sentence, but even every word and every letter is significant! Although the Arabic language is powerful, what makes the Qur'an very special is not just the Arabic text, but the selection of the words by Allah (swt). Sometimes, the ingredients are the same, but it is the artistry of the cook that makes the food

taste different. Similarly, to unlock a safe, it is not only important that one use numbers; rather, it is the combination of numbers which is important. Allah (swt) has used the same words that Arabic people use, but what makes the Qur'an very special is not only that it is in Arabic. Rather, the way that these words are combined by Allah (swt) is very special, and this can unlock the heart and the mind, provided we open ourselves to the Qur'an.

Following are some aspects of the inward etiquette of reading the Qur'an.

1. Continually reminding ourselves of the value of the Qur'an

When reading the Qur'an, always remember that this is the word of Allah (*kalāmullāh*). The greatness of Allah (swt) and the greatness of the word of Allah should be kept in mind. And we always need to remind ourselves this because we can easily take things for granted. Say, for example, there is a shrine that you would love to go to, and it is located in another city or country. If you go there and stay for one month, or two months, or six months, and go every day to the shrine, gradually you may lose that longing and attraction. This is unfortunately a major issue, unless people work intensely on their *ma'rifah*. Otherwise, the first few days, you will find that you have great interest in it, but then gradually your interest may wane.

Similarly, if there is a knowledgeable scholar, and we know that we can see him every day, we will not have an extremely high level of interest in him. But if we are told that we only have one opportunity in our life to see him, then everyone will form a queue! Many people are like this, unfortunately.

If something is available to us, we may not appreciate it much. When it becomes rare, then we become more interested. This is our nature (*ṭabīʿah*), but we can train ourselves to be different. And, those people who do these things out of *maʿrifah* will become more interested the more they see a scholar. If it is based on *maʿrifah*, then one will benefit from the knowledge of the scholar. Even someone who has studied with him for ten years will still want to study with him for another ten years.

Unfortunately, because of this tendency in us, we underestimate the value of the Qurʾan. Imagine if the Qurʾan were missing, just as many other divine scriptures are not available. If the Qurʾan were missing and then we were told that scientists, after lots of work, had managed to find one page of the Qurʾan in a cave in Jordan, for example, we would all be struggling and trying our utmost either to go there, or to at least get hold of a video or picture of that page. Why? Because it is the word of Allah. People usually do this kind of thing for the words of human beings.

For example, say one of Aristotle's works were just discovered. People might die to get their hands on it. Or, one of Shakespeare's works. How much research has been done on the works of Shakespeare? Perhaps thousands or tens of thousands of papers have been written on it. So, if we were able to find one page of the Qur'an in any part of the world, we would do our best to either go there, or to see a video of it, or to have a picture of it. But, because we are born into a faith in which we have the Holy Qur'an in every house, we do not appreciate it enough. We need to train ourselves in order to appreciate it. But if we leave it to our *ṭabrāh*, then we will not value it enough.¹

Hence, we have to train ourselves and remind ourselves that this is the word of Allah (swt).

2. Purity of the heart

In addition to the purity (*tahārah*) of the body and clothes discussed in the previous chapter, another type of purity is also required, and that is purity of the heart.

With respect to purity, this does not mean that if a person has no purity then he will not understand at all; rather, if a person is pure, then he will certainly understand. If you are not pure, you may still understand something but there is no guarantee

¹ By *ṭabrāh* we mean man's disposition and tendency, and this is not the *fiṭrah*.

that you will understand everything. So, it could be that a very bad person may still understand something from the Qur'an, because the Qur'an is book of guidance and it is intended to change people, but someone who wants to understand the depths of the Qur'an has to be pure:

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ ۖ فِي كِتَابٍ مَّكْنُونٍ ۚ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a guarded Book; no one touches it save the purified ones.
(56:77-79)

Therefore, someone who wants to touch the Qur'an – that is, understand the Qur'an – must be purified. The closer we get to that level of being purified, the more of a chance we have of not only understanding the meanings of the words, but also the reality of the Qur'an. If we can understand the reality of the Qur'an, we will be in the best position.

If you want to understand the Qur'an, then not only is purity of intention in regard to the Qur'an important, but more important than this is having purity in other areas of our life. If, in our work, our family life, our business life, and our study life, we are not pure, then we are not really able to encounter the Qur'an. One's heart should be pure. This is something that needs constant struggle.

3. A condition of *huzn*

Another form of etiquette is to have a condition of sadness (*huzn*). It seems that sadness in this context refers to a kind

of seriousness. Imam Ali (a), in his sermon on the pious, says: 'During the night they are up standing on their feet, reading portions of the Qur'an and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves.'¹

This *huzn* is a kind of seriousness, or positive sadness. It is not depression. If you are not serious, then you will not learn. When you read a book, you have to read it with seriousness, especially the Qur'an.

4. Seeking refuge (*isti'ādah*)

Those who have achieved complete purity of the heart will be safe and secure from Satan's deception. These people are called *mukhlāṣ*.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

He said, 'By Your might, surely I will lead them all astray except Your exclusive servants (mukhlāṣīn) among them.' (38:82-83)

Before we have achieved this complete purity, Satan tries to lead us astray in any circumstances, but the following verse

¹ Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon on the pious people, p. 304.

suggests that it is especially important for those who want to recite the Qur'an:

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ

When you recite the Qur'an, seek the protection of Allah against the outcast Satan.
(16:98)

This shows that Satan has a special plan against those who recite the Qur'an because the Qur'an is a source of light and guidance. However, by seeking refuge to Allah (swt) and trusting in Him then we will be in His protection, for Allah (swt) continues:

إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَهُ سُلْطَانٌ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

Indeed, he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord. (16:99)

It should be noted that seeking refuge in Allah (swt) is not merely saying *a'ūdhu bi Allāh min al-Shayṭān al-rajīm*. It starts by saying this, but it should be deep in the heart and be a real request for Allah (swt) to give us refuge.

5. *Khuḍū'* and *khushū'*

After seeking purity and asking Allah for refuge, we should observe *khuḍū'* and *khushū'*. *Khuḍū'* is humbleness that appears on the body, and *khushū'* is humbleness of the heart. Sometimes, some people may sit in a very humble way, but

this does not mean that they are humble in their hearts. Yes, it starts with the body, but it should reach the heart.

Sometimes, for example, there is a great scholar, and in front of him we may sit very respectfully. However, it could be that one of the people sitting in front of him is, within his own heart, making a mockery of this scholar. In this case, there is humbleness in body but not in heart. There must be humbleness of body and heart when we read the Qur'an, because when a person is faced with something as great as the word of Allah (swt), nothing is more natural than humbleness. When you stand before great personalities, you become humble. Even when, for example, you stand before great oceans and mountains, you feel humble. When you see the stars at night, you feel humble. The Qur'an is greater than any of these things, and so we should be very humble before it.

6. Deep reflections (*tadabbur*)

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an:

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

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

This means that if you do not reflect on the Qur'an, it is because your heart is locked and sealed. Otherwise, you will want to reflect on it. When there is a beautiful flower and someone does not want to look at it, then it really means his

eyes are closed. Otherwise, a person would want to look at it. If there is a very nice perfume and someone does not want to smell it, then it means that person has a problem.

Hence, we should reflect on the Qur'an, and we need to find the best methods of reflection on the Qur'an. One of the important points in reflecting on the Qur'an is that we should engage the mind and heart together. Therefore, the methodology we use should bring these two together so that we can improve our understanding of the Qur'an and our encounter with it.

7. Deep silence

One of the requirements of a successful reflection is silence. I do not say merely 'silence' but 'deep silence' because sometimes we may be verbally silent and not say any words, but still be talking. We are internally speaking in our hearts and minds even though the mouth is closed.

When we want to read the Qur'an, we have to have deep silence, because we believe that the Qur'an is not a silent text. It is a text which speaks. If we want to allow the Qur'an to speak, then we should be silent. If a person wants to speak all the time, this will not allow the Qur'an to talk to him. If a person is merely verbally silent but then allows his thoughts to run wild, then his ideas are his actual words. The Qur'an does not have a chance in such a situation.

We may often not speak verbally, but we are very busy and we enjoy our own words, ideas, and opinions so much that even when we are listening to someone or reading a text, we are not really letting that person speak or text to us. Hence, deep silence is very important, and also difficult.

It is an art to master silence. There are many things about silence that we have to observe. Sometimes, we do not speak, and our heart speaks. Sometimes even our heart does not speak, but we do not empty ourselves to let other people speak to us. When I speak to you, I should empty myself from any prejudice or presuppositions. The way our minds work is that we try to get only what is new, and we do not spend energy on analysing everything. Therefore, when you speak to me, because I have a history with you, based on that history I try to pay attention to only that which I think might be new. Therefore, to some people we only pay 5% attention and to others 10%.

Silence is not easy, especially when it comes to emptying yourself. We must allow people to speak, and then we should analyse what they say. People have the right to be listened to carefully from the beginning to the end.

When it comes to the Qur'an, we have to increase our capacity. Even normal openness is not enough; we have to expand ourselves to a great extent so that we can get as much as possible from it.

8. Concentration

With silence comes concentration. This is also very difficult. Unfortunately, we do not usually have good levels of concentration. On the other hand, there are some people who have strong concentration but have difficulty in day-to-day affairs of life. They are very focused, but then they do not pay due attention to what is happening around them. Imagine a leader of the community who has to remember thousands of items all the time; remaining focused is difficult. It is very difficult to balance when to focus and when not to focus. We have to master these skills.

Often when we recite the Qur'an or *du'ā's*, we do not have focus, and our mind jumps over words. This especially happens to people who know the language. One of the mistakes that happens even when we read ordinary books is that sometimes we just make sure that we understand every word, but we do not make sure we understand the whole idea. If there is a word that we do not know, then it makes us stop, but if all the words are familiar, then we do not stop. For example, because the words of Du'ā' Kumail are familiar, we do not reflect on them. We have to train ourselves to read with focus and concentration, and not let our minds jump.

One of things that can help us in this regard – and this is not restricted to the Qur'an and can be applied to other texts as well – is that when we read the Qur'an, after reading one verse, or depending on the size of the verse, perhaps just one

line or two lines, we should stop and review in our minds what we have read, and ask ourselves whether we have grasped the idea or not. If we have been reading carefully and with concentration, we should be able to recall and understand at least 60% or 70% of what we have read. However, if we read and nothing remains in our minds, this is a problem. Hence, if, after reading, we can stop and then review what we have read, and if the idea is clear, it shows we have a little grasp of it. If not, then we should go back to it. If we train ourselves to do this, then after some time, it will become a habit.

9. Prayer when reading the Qur'an

We understand another inward practice with respect to reading the Qur'an in this hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a):

إِذَا مَرَرْتَ بِآيَةٍ فِيهَا ذِكْرُ النَّارِ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَإِذَا مَرَرْتَ
بِآيَةٍ فِيهَا ذِكْرُ الْجَنَّةِ فَاسْأَلِ الْجَنَّةَ

When you come across a verse in which there is a mention of the fire, then seek refuge in Allah from the fire, and if you come across a verse in which there is mention of heaven, then ask Allah for heaven.¹

We spoke before of trying to understand the Qur'an, but now we also want to have a more active participation with it. We

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muḥammad, *‘Awālī al-La’ālī al-‘Azīziyyah fī Aḥādīth al-Dīniyyah*, vol. 2, p. 50.

should make a prayer (*duʿāʾ*) that is inspired by the verse that we read. And because the Qurʾan refers to everything that we need, if we take this approach to the entire Qurʾan, then we will have asked Allah (swt) for everything that we need. For example, when we read a verse about sustenance (*rizq*) and we want to increase it, then we can pray for that. Or for example, if we come across a verse about good and righteous people (*ṣāliḥīn*), then we should ask Allah (swt) to place us in their category. And if we read Allah's (swt) praise for someone's patience or truthfulness, then we should ask Allah (swt) to give us that same quality, and of course we should work hard to gain that quality. And if there is a mention of bad people, for example, '*Perish the hands of Abī Lahab, and perish he!*' (111:1), we should ask ourselves why Abī Lahab is cursed, and what he did. It could be that we are doing the same thing and have the same problems, either now or in the future. If we are not careful now, then it could develop. We must therefore ask Allah (swt) for His help.

Or for example, if there is a verse about asking forgiveness (*istighfār*), then we should immediately ask for forgiveness and perform repentance (*tawbah*). That verse should motivate us to compensate for any wrongs we have done.

Hence, we should take every verse very seriously, and apply it to ourselves and make a prayer, based on it. This means we must be very alert and keep thinking about hell and heaven, and about opportunities and threats.

The Qur'an is a book and also a manual. It is a prescription in which there is medicine and cures for our illnesses. We quoted earlier Imam Ali (a) as saying in his sermon on the pious that, at night, when the pious people recite the Qur'an, they are 'reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments.'¹

What is important is that the Qur'an is not just a prescription; when a doctor gives us a prescription, it is a piece of paper, and that in itself is not going to make any difference. It is just a reference to the medicine. The Qur'an is not just a manual, but it is itself the solution. The Qur'an is a medicine and a cure. Allah (swt) has put in the Qur'an not only a reference to tell us the solution, but it is the solution as well. For example, if we suffer from darkness, we need light. The Qur'an is light and is not only a piece of paper on which the location and address for light is written. It is the light, and it is a cure for problems and illnesses.

10. Read the Qur'an as if Allah (swt) is speaking to you.

The final point is that we should try to read the Qur'an as if Allah (swt) is speaking to us. It makes a big difference when we read a text of an author whom we know. It is one thing when we read something by someone whom we don't know – whom we may know of, like a famous philosopher – but

¹ Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon on the pious people, p. 304.

not know personally, and whose work was written for the general public. When we read this type of work, it has nothing to do with us personally. But, when there is something written by a person with whom we have a personal relationship, then it becomes much more meaningful for us, especially if we know that it was written for us.

Therefore, it is different when we have an acquaintance and special understanding (*ma'rifah*) of that person, such as a relative. Imagine that your great-grandfather was a great scholar, and he wrote a book, which you pick up and read. You have some connection with this book that I do not have because you know this is your great-grandfather's book. Now, imagine that at the beginning of the book he wrote that it has been written for you. This shows that he knew you – the author knew you and has written this for you. Either for you alone, or for his descendants in general. Say, for example, he had ten children and ten grandchildren and he has written it for all of them – it does not make much of a difference; the main thing is that you were meant by this writing and you are addressed by it. So, when you know the author personally, and you know that the book was written for you and that you are intended by it, then when you read it, it will offer you a different experience altogether, compared to someone who does not have this background and connection.

When we read the Qur'an, we should have this kind of understanding. We should realise that it is from Allah (swt), a

being with whom I have a personal relationship. He is my master, He is my Lord, He is my beloved, and He has intended me. The Qur'an is not only talking to the first generation of Muslims. It is talking to all people who are to come, and to all of humanity. We all have the same rights to and the same share of the Qur'an's address as the earlier Muslims. There are some things in the Qur'an that Allah (swt) has kept for people who are to come in the end times (*ākhir al-zamān*).¹ If we have this kind of understanding that this is from Allah (swt), from our Lord, from our beloved who has also meant us, then we should have a different feeling and experience with the Qur'an.

Going beyond the text

Consider the following hadith in which Imam Sajjād (a) has said:

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 91, no. 3:

سُئِلَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) عَنِ التَّوْحِيدِ: فَقَالَ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَلِمَ أَنَّهُ يَكُونُ فِي آخِرِ الزَّمَانِ أَقْوَامٌ مُتَعَمِّقُونَ فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى «قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ» وَالْآيَاتِ مِنْ سُورَةِ الْحَدِيدِ إِلَى قَوْلِهِ «وَهُوَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ»

Ali b. al-Husayn (a) was asked about unity of Allah (*tawhīd*) and said: 'Allah (swt) knew that there would be deep-thinking and intellectual peoples in the end times, so Allah (swt) revealed Surah Tawhīd and the verses from Surah Ḥadīd up until: "And He has full knowledge of the secrets of all hearts" (57:6).'

لَوْ مَاتَ مَنْ بَيْنَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَمَا اسْتَوْحِشْتُ بَعْدَ أَنْ يَكُونَ
الْقُرْآنُ مَعِيَ

If all the people from east to west were to die,
I would not feel lonely as long as the Qur'an
was with me.¹

This means that the Qur'an connects the Imam (a) to Allah (swt), and thus he would not feel lonely. The narration continues:

وَكَانَ (ع) إِذَا قَرَأَ «مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ» يُكْرِّرُهَا حَتَّى كَادَ أَنْ يَمُوتَ.

And when he (a) would recite *mālik-i yawm al-dīn*, he would repeat it [outside *ṣalāh*] until the point where it was as if he was going to die.

The reason they were so impressed by the Qur'an and enjoyed the Qur'an to such an extent was that they were able to go beyond the text. We should try to generate this feeling in our hearts and try to see with our hearts that Allah (swt) is speaking to us; then, somehow, the text connects us and disappears. It is like, for example, when we are speaking on the phone with someone who is very important to us, someone we have been missing and now we have managed to speak with over the phone. Gradually our attention becomes focussed on the other person. The phone and line and anything in between become insignificant, although they are

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 602.

all involved. The only time we bother again is if the line is not good. If we cannot keep hearing properly, then we may say ‘the line is bad’; otherwise, we forget about the line. Or, for example, a person who wears eyeglasses does not think about the eyeglasses every time they read. The glasses become insignificant.

When we read the Qur’an, we should reach the point that the text either becomes marginal, or even disappears. We should feel that Allah (swt) is speaking to us.

Chapter 18

The stages of contemplating on the Qur'an (*tadabbur*)



Introduction

In this final chapter, we discuss what steps are required to reflect on and understand the Qur'an. We examine the different levels of understanding the Qur'an and how we should proceed step-by-step in our understanding.

1. Acquire familiarity with the language of the Qur'an

The first stage is that we should acquire familiarity with the language of the Qur'an. This means we should gain a good knowledge of Arabic. Someone who does not know Arabic can refer to translations and should try to use more than one, because each translation may have something that another one has not offered. Or, there may be a misunderstanding that can be cross-checked. Therefore, using at least two translations is important, so that by comparison, the mind becomes sensitive to the terms and words. After that, we can try to understand why there are these differences, and this makes the mind sharper and more attentive.

However, there is nothing like knowing Arabic and knowing the same language that Allah (swt) has used. The Arabic used in the Qur'an is different to the spoken Arabic of today, so even Arabic-speaking people need to familiarise themselves with the Qur'anic Arabic which is a kind of standard Arabic.

If we spend time on familiarising ourselves with Qur'anic Arabic, then we will be able to directly listen to the words of Allah (swt) and improve our understanding of the Qur'an. Unfortunately, we miss many things in translation, and no translation is able to give an accurate reflection of the Arabic. If we want to delve into deeper layers of meaning, a translation is not sufficient. Yes, for a very basic understanding it is useful to some extent, but translations will not allow us to go deeper.

To acquire familiarity with the Arabic, we need to learn the sciences related to the language. The main sciences required in learning the Arabic language that are related to understanding the meaning are syntax, morphology and rhetoric.

Morphology (*'ilm al-sarf*)

In morphology, we study the structure of a word by itself. So, either the word is a derivative (*mushtaqq*) or not (*jāmid*). If it is a derivative, there are tens of different possibilities of deriving a word from one root. And if it is *jāmid*, then it is not derived from any other thing.

Syntax (*‘ilm al-naḥw*)

Learning syntax enables us to analyse sentences, find out the structure of a sentence and to recognize the role of each word in that sentence. In Arabic, there are more than twenty different roles that a word may have in a sentence such as subject (*fā‘il*), object (*maf‘ūl*), and preposition (*ẓarf*).

We must be so well-informed and well-acquainted with the rules of *‘ilm al-ṣarf* and *‘ilm al-naḥw* that when we are in the process of analysing the text, we do not need to go and open a book and find out what the role of a word is, or what the structure of a sentence is.

Rhetoric (*balāghah*)

In addition to *‘ilm al-ṣarf* and *‘ilm al-naḥw*, we also must learn *balāghah* (rhetoric). There are different ways of saying the same thing, and depending on all the subtle points of language, it is necessary to choose which is the best for a particular case.

For example, imagine a politician who wants to speak in the parliament. He must know the language of the listeners, but additionally, he should be able to use words in a way that impresses people. There are some people whose speech has no impact upon the listeners. They speak and perhaps people hate what they say or feel offended. It is a very important skill to know which words to use and in which combinations, where to place emphasis and where not to. These subtle

points can make an immense amount of difference. This can be learned in *balāghah*. A sentence may be correct from an *‘ilm al-ṣarf* and *‘ilm al-naḥw* point of view, but *balāghah* will judge whether it was right for a particular context or not.

2. Delving to the deeper level of apparent meaning

The next stage in understanding the Qur’an is to try to understand the meaning beyond the level of *‘ilm al-ṣarf*, *‘ilm al-naḥw* and *balāghah*, and that is what actually meant by Allah (swt). The following are some other sciences that we need to learn at this level.

The principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)

One of the sciences that has an important role in understanding the Qur’an is the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* is to *fiqh* (jurisprudence) like logic is to philosophy, but it is not only used for *fiqh*. Any science that is based on scripture requires *uṣūl al-fiqh*. It contains the linguistic principles one should apply in order to analyse and understand a text.

For example, the Qur’an contains general (*‘āmm*) and specific (*khāṣṣ*) verses, and in this regard, sometimes there is a general rule, but there are also some exceptions. Also, there is the issue of absolute (*muṭlaq*) and modified (*muqayyad*) verses, and if we do not know these things, then we cannot understand what is actually meant.

Qur'anic sciences

In addition to *usūl al-fiqh*, to have a better understanding of the Qur'an, we need to be familiar with the Qur'anic sciences (*‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*). *‘Ulūm al-qur’ān* helps towards a better understanding of the Qur'anic message by providing information on its setting, framework and circumstances. It consists of information about things such as the reasons and occasions of revelation (*sha’n nuzūl*), which verses were revealed in Mecca and which in Medina, the abrogating and abrogated verses (*nāsikh* and *mansūkh*), and the ambiguous and unambiguous (*muḥkam* and *mutashābih*) verses.

3. Understanding the Qur'anic teachings systematically

After making sure we understand what the ultimate meaning is that Allah (swt) wants to convey to us in a particular verse, there is another step, and this is to put the meanings and messages from different verses together to come up with a system. Therefore, the third stage involves putting Qur'anic verses which relate to the same subject together, because some parts of the Qur'an explain and testify to other parts.

For example, to understand when the Qur'an was revealed, we put the verse *‘We sent it down in the night of Qadr’* (97:1) together with the verse *‘We sent it down on a blessed night, and indeed We have been warning [mankind]’* (44:3) to conclude that it was revealed in a blessed night. Adding the verse *‘the month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur’an was*

sent down' (2:185), we can conclude that the night of Qadr occurs in the month of Ramaḍān. So, if a person were not familiar with this, and was not able to establish when the night of Qadr occurs, then by putting these two together, he could conclude that it occurs in the month of Ramaḍān.

Or, for example in the verses:

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
*Guide us on the straight path. The path of
 those whom You have blessed. (1:6-7)*

To understand who are 'those whom You have blessed', we can use the following verse:

وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ
 النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصَّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا
*Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle – they
 are with those whom Allah has blessed,
 including the prophets and the truthful, the
 martyrs and the righteous, and excellent
 companions are they! (4:69)*

Hence, all the terms of the Qur'an are used in a way whereby they provide a network of notions. If someone is familiar with this network, then whenever that person runs into a problem with the text, he or she can try to find a solution or guidance in the light of other verses. Therefore, we should try to master this system of cross-referencing. The important point is that

this is not something that can be done just by indexing, because sometimes the words do not come from the same roots; instead, they have a conceptual connection. Therefore, a strong familiarity with the whole Qur'an is necessary.

This is with respect to understanding concepts. However, sometimes, in a broader sense, we want to discover different systems that are in the Qur'an; for example, the Qur'anic system of education, or the Qur'anic system of economics, or of politics, or of social welfare. The Qur'an has something to offer regarding all these different areas of life. So we should be able to bring all related verses together and shed complete light on the subject, in order to give a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

In this case, at the same time as being very familiar with the Qur'an, we have to also be very familiar with the actual subject, and be involved with the topic because if we are not, then we will not be able to understand the Qur'an's coverage of it. Someone who has never thought about education and has no experience in education will not be able to understand the Qur'anic model of education.

So, familiarity with the Qur'an is important, so that the very subtle points can be noticed, as these will only be discovered by someone who is very careful and very insightful. At times, one verse may look irrelevant, because the verses are not labelled clearly as to what they are about.

Therefore, we should not be satisfied unless we reach the point that, at least for our own personal life, we know what the Qur'an teaches, as a package. We should know what the Qur'anic package is for our businesses, our family relations, and for our community relations. No one should be satisfied unless he can understand this much from the Qur'an. And if someone is a scholar, then he has to go even further, and find answers from the Qur'an for humanity, with all the new issues that come up. We have to always go back to the Qur'an and find a solution. Allah is not going to send any new revelation, so whatever guidance we need is in the Qur'an.

4. Going to the Qur'an with questions

One of the very important points that helps us in understanding the Qur'an is that we must go to the Qur'an with questions in mind. A person must not impose his or her ideas on the Qur'an, and also they should not approach the Qur'an with an empty mind. There is an important distinction between these two. Sometimes, we may have questions, and for the sake of understanding the truth we go to the Qur'an; this is very good. But sometimes, in addition to having questions, we have already made up our mind and have come up with ready-made answers; then we go to the Qur'an and want to find support for our own preconceived answers. This can lead to – even on an unconscious level – the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an in a way whereby we make it conform to our own understanding. This is not good at all.

We have to be open and ready to learn from it. On the other hand, it is also not good to be totally empty-minded when we approach it. If we do not know anything about education and we have not studied any book on education, and we have not been involved in teaching or learning, then if we go to the Qur'an to discover its stance on education and we do not understand anything or we understand very little, it will be because we do not have any queries and questions in mind.

Here is an example. If I invite you to my home for a meal and I want to prepare a banquet for you, how should you come? If you bring your own food, it will not be respectful to me (unless, for example, there is no formality between us, or I have told you that this is acceptable). But, normally, if you go to a banquet, you do not take your own food with you. In addition to not bringing your own food, I would also appreciate if you come without having eaten already. If you arrive at my home while your stomach is already full, and you cannot eat the food that I have prepared, this also is not good.

The Qur'an is the banquet of Allah (swt). As a hadith says:

أَنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَادِبَةُ اللَّهِ فَتَعَلَّمُوا مَادِبَتَهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

This Qur'an is the banquet of Allah. Learn as much as you can from His banquet.¹

¹ 'Alam al-Hudā, Ali b. Ḥusayn, *Amālī al-Murtaḍā*, vol. 1, p. 354.

Therefore, when we go to it, we must go in a state where we are hungry for the truth. We must not be people who say: 'I have a master's degree or doctorate, and have studied under this or that person.' Of course, there is no problem with having formal qualifications, and a person is free to learn from whomsoever they wish, but when we go to the Qur'an, we must not bring all of these things with us. We must go with a thirst for and a true search for the truth. We must not make our minds full. This is the difference; we must not take our own ideas with us; rather, we must be thirsty and hungry.

When it comes to knowledge, what makes us hungry and thirsty? We know that we become physically hungry and thirsty for food and drink, but how do we become hungry and thirsty for knowledge? It is through questions. Questions are like keys that open your appetite.

Hence, when a person approaches the Qur'an, if they are a person of thinking and they have questions, they will understand more. Allah (swt) says:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

*As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely
guide them in Our ways (29:69)*

If a person studies and thinks, and then goes to the Qur'an with an open mind and with purity of heart, there is no chance that the Qur'an will not teach him. Even a non-Muslim who is searching for truth and has moral commitment can go to

the Qur'an and will benefit from it. The Qur'an helps people to come to faith, and it also helps those with faith ascend to even higher levels. Everyone can benefit from the Qur'an, if they have the right approach. Hence, it is very important to have good questions.

5. Investigating the esoteric meanings of the Qur'an

The final stage is to investigate the hidden or esoteric meanings of the Qur'an. Hadiths say that the Qur'an has an apparent and a hidden side. And its hidden side has a further hidden side and the underlying side has an even deeper underlying layer; hadith mention up to seven such layers.¹ Of course, numbers in this case are not meant to be taken literally but are metaphorical for 'many'.

This stage is a stage that is very much based on a spiritual connection to the Qur'an, and requires great purity of the heart. In this way, we can become inspired to understand things that other people do not understand.

The foremost special people whose hearts that have this connection with and level of benefit from the Qur'an are Prophet (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a), and we can learn from their commentaries on the Qur'an.

¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Muhammad, *ʿAwālī al-Laʾālī, al-ʿAzīzīyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīnīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 107, no. 159. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

إِنَّ لِلْقُرْآنِ ظَهْرًا وَبَطْنًا وَلِبْطُنُهُ بَطْنٌ إِلَى سَبْعَةِ أَبْطُنٍ

A pious scholar or a mystic also may be able to understand the esoteric meanings of the Qur'an to some extent. There are many technical issues here, such as the difference between a mystical experience and a person's interpretation of his or her mystical experience. Some claimants have no mystical experiences at all and are merely liars. But some people have mystical experiences but are not able to interpret them properly, and so they make mistakes in their interpretation. So, for us to be safe, we do not follow anyone's ideas about the Qur'an, unless that person is infallible, or unless there is a way to verify how their idea has been understood from the Qur'an. We must enquire as to their methodology, and the minimum requirement at the very least is that their interpretation must be compatible with the literal meaning of the Qur'an. We say 'at the least' because among different interpretations that are compatible with the literal meaning, some of them may need extra evidence, because it is possible for ten people to give ten different interpretations of a verse that is esoteric (*bāṭinī*), with all of them being compatible with the literal meaning, but without any evidence to show how the esoteric meaning arises from the literal meaning.

Incompatibility with the literal meaning is enough reason to reject an esoteric meaning. However, being compatible with the literal meaning is not enough to accept it; we need evidence.

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