

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

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The *Message of Thaqaalayn* feels responsible to present the teachings of Islam in general and the School of the Ahlul Bayt (a) in particular with complete honesty and accuracy and at the same time to emphasise the common ground that binds all Muslims together. Strengthening ties of brotherhood amongst all Muslims, whatever school of Islam they may adhere to, and establishing genuine, enduring and intimate friendship between all those who believe in God are two of the main aims and tasks of the *Message of Thaqaalayn* and indeed, any responsible media.

Editor-in-Chief

THE GLOBE BEFORE AND AFTER THE ADVENT OF IMAM MAHDI, PART III¹

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: The ‘End of Times’ – a period studied in the eschatologies of the dominant world religions – refers to the world’s state of affairs before and after the coming of Imam Mahdi, when worldwide justice and peace will be established. The previous articles in this series presented an outline of the concept from the viewpoint of the major world religions. The Islamic perspective is also given, using the Qur’an and hadith as sources to visualize future events, and with the purpose of increasing our knowledge on the advent of Imam Mahdi to establish a positive relationship with the Imam, and preparing for his return. Topics such as the quality of the people during this time, including their intellectual condition and scientific and technological advancements were explained. This part includes the people’s cultural, moral, and religious condition during the End of Times, explaining what will arise concerning family relationships, youth, women, mosques, Islamic law, and the general representation of Islam.

¹ This series of papers is based on parts five and six of a series of lectures delivered by the author in Muharram 1428/January 2007 in London.

Cultural, moral, and religious condition

These three areas cannot be separated from each other, and therefore we will discuss them together. In the period of the end of time, there will be many disagreements and controversies as far as the area of beliefs, ideas, and concepts is concerned, as mentioned in an array of hadiths. For instance, on one occasion Prophet Muhammad said:

ابشركم بالمهدي يبعث في امتي على اختلاف من الناس و زلازل فيملا
الارض قسطا و عدلا كما ملئت جورا و ظلما، يرضى عنه ساكن السماء
و ساكن الارض

I give you the good tidings of Mahdi. He will be commissioned in my *ummah* at a time when people disagree with each other and there will be many quakes. He will fill the earth with justice just as it was filled with injustice. All the inhabitants of the heaven and earth will be pleased with him.²

The following points are worthy of note:

Point One: It seems that Imam Mahdi (aj) will not be readily accepted by all Muslims; his challenges will be similar to the ones faced by Prophet Muhammad when he wanted to call the pagans of his time to the unity of God, which was an immensely difficult and demanding task.

Point Two: There is a mention of quakes. This could mean that in that time there will be many physical earthquakes, or it could refer metaphorically to the shaking in people's thinking.

² *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 51, Page 81

Point Three: Uniquely, Imam Mahdi (aj) will be able to please the people en masse, something that the prophets, all of whom had opponents, could not do. The prophets were favoured by the people of heaven, and yet not of the entire earth. Imam Mahdi (aj) however, will be able to please all of humanity because he will improve the situation to a large extent, and because the general level of people's understanding will be conducive to his approach and stance. Therefore, two things will ensure his success:

- I. His faultless action will be met with a thorough understanding of the people. Although Prophet Muhammad also acted faultlessly, he was in the company of people who sometimes did not understand and appreciate his actions. Imam Mahdi (aj), as he leads the entire world, will behave in a way that not only the people who live on earth will be happy, but also every being on the earth and in the heavens. Perhaps this involves his care for the nature; he will be so caring for the environment that even animals and birds will be pleased with him. This is compatible with the literal sense of the hadith.
- II. The hadith describes people's disagreements with one another as quakes, and because Imam Mahdi (aj) will fill the earth with justice, the inhabitants of earth and the heavens will be pleased. It seems therefore that he will bring an end to all the disagreements. In fact, it seems that he himself will be the matter upon which all humans can agree and achieve unity. As Qur'an says:

Hold fast, all together, to God's cord, and do not be divided [into sects]. And remember God's blessing

upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing. And you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, whereat He saved you from it. Thus does God clarify His signs for you so that you may be guided. (3:103)

Fitnah

The hadiths also include much reference to the occurrence of *fitnah* – a kind of severe trial or test – at the end of time. The term is normally used when the situation is rather ambiguous, and when one finds it difficult to discern right from wrong. In such cases, even people with good character may make mistakes, because the truth is not clear and it needs special insight to be able to find out the truth involved in the subject at issue.

Hadith literature states that *fitnah* will occur in the end of time. This does not mean that the events predicted for the end of time are all going to happen at the same time. They may happen at different times, after death of Prophet Muhammad, or immediately before the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj). Imam Baqir has stated:

لا يظهر المهدي إلا على خوف شديد من الناس وزلزال وفتنة وبلاء يصيب
الناس

Mahdi will not appear except when people have great fear and they quake [i.e. they internally shake] and there is *fitnah*.³

³ *Iq'd ud-Durar*, Page 64

If we observe the situation today, we see that there is much fitnah when it comes to the Muslim world. Some Muslims are killing other Muslims. Some of these people cannot be bribed or bought, and they are very committed to what they perceive to be their mission, but they are confused. They are prepared to go into mosques and kill themselves and others, and they believe that by doing this they will go to heaven. For them the truth is not clear and they are confused. This is fitnah. It is important for us to know what the real truth is. Imam Sadiq (a) says in a supplication:

اللهم أرني الحق حقا فأتبعه والباطل باطلا فأجتنبه ولا تجعله علي
متشابهاً فأتبع هواي بغير هدى منك

O God! Show me truth as the truth so I follow it, and falsehood as falsehood so I stay away from it, and let them not seem similar to me, for if this happens then I will follow my own desires.⁴

Prophet Muhammad says:

تجيء فتنة غبراء مظلمة، ثم يتبع الفتن بعضها بعضاً، حتى يخرج رجل من أهل بيتي يقال له: المهدي، فإن أدركته فاتبعه وكن من المهتدين

A fitnah will come which is very dark and will cause everything to become dark, and you will not be able to see clearly. It will follow other fitnah until a man from my progeny will come, called Mahdi, and if you can meet him and witness that time, follow him and you will be guided.⁵

⁴ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 86, Page 120

⁵ *Kanz ul-Ummal*, Vol. 11, Page 183

In another saying from Imam Mahdi (aj) himself, he says:

علامة ظهور امرى كثرة الهرج و المرج و الفتن

The sign of my reappearance is the great amount of anarchy, chaos, and *fitnah*.⁶

The hadith literature contains many hadiths that mention there will be much disagreement and debate that will have no end, including much *fitnah* and quaking, which will come to an end when Imam Mahdi (aj) reappears.

Carnal Desires and lusts

Another feature of the end of time is that many people will follow their own lower desires, lusts, and selfish ideas in the name of religion and guidance. People will impose their ideas on the Qur'an and introduce them as Qur'anic ideas. Imam Ali says:

يعطف الهدي على الهوي إذا عطفوا الهوي على الهدي و يعطف الرأي على القرآن إذا عطفوا القرآن على الرأي

[At the time] when people force guidance to follow their desires, Mahdi will make their desires follow guidance. When people use the Qur'an to conform to their ideas, Mahdi will make their ideas conform to the Qur'an.⁷

To remain a genuine believer at the end of time will be challenging. The hadiths both warn and give good tidings: they warn believers to be careful, and give good tidings for those who have remained

⁶ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 51, Page 320

⁷ *Nahj ul-Balaghah*, Sermon 138

faithful. Indeed, there are important practical lessons to be taken. Prophet Muhammad says to his companions:

سَيَأْتِي قَوْمٌ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمُ الرَّجُلُ الْوَاحِدُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ أَجْرُ خَمْسِينَ مِنْكُمْ

There will come a group of people that every single of them will be rewarded as fifty of you.

They said:

يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ نَحْنُ كُنَّا مَعَكَ بِبَدْرٍ وَاحِدٍ وَحَنِينٍ وَ نَزَلَ فِيْنَا الْقُرْآنُ

But, O Messenger of God, we have been with you in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Hunayn, and the Qur'an has been revealed among us?

He said:

إِنْكُمْ لَوْ تَحْمِلُوا لَمَّا حَمَلُوا لَمْ تَصْبِرُوا صَبْرَهُمْ

Surely, if you were required to go through what they are going to go through, you would not be strong enough.⁸

To be a faithful believer in Medina under the leadership of the Prophet (s) and surrounded by the likes of Salman, Miqdad, and Abu Dharr would have been easier than the current challenges. The end of time is full of challenges, temptations, and poisons. The Prophet was not hesitant to bluntly tell the companions of this. Nevertheless, we are to appreciate that this is a general statement and does not apply to every individual of both these times.

In another hadith, we read the following in reference to the plant *qatād*, a plant full of spikes and thorns:

⁸ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 130

ان لصاحب هذا الامر غيبة المتمسك فيها بدينه كالخارط لشوك القتاد
بيده ان لصاحب هذا الامر غيبة فليثق الله عبد عند غيبته و ليتمسك
بدينه

To keep your faith in the end of time is more difficult than removing the spikes and thorns of the *qatāb* plant with your soft fingers. You must be pious and ask God to help you and to keep you on the right path.⁹

Prophet Muhammad was with a group of his companions and said twice:

اللهم لقنى اخوانى

O God! Let me meet my brothers.

Those that were with him said: “Are we not your brothers?” He said:

لا انكم اصحابى و اخوانى قوم فى اخر الزمان امنوا و لم يرونى لقد عرفنيهم
الله باسمائهم و اسماء ابائهم من قبل ان يخرجهم من اصلااب ابائهم و
ارحام امهاتهم، لاحدهم اشد بقية على دينه من خرط القتاد فى الليلة
الظلماء او كالتقايض على جمر الغضا، اولئك مصاييح الدجى ينجيهم الله
من كل فتنة غبراء مظلمة

No. You are my companions, but my brothers are a group of people in the end of time who believes in me whilst having not seen me. God has introduced me to them by their names and the names of their fathers before they were born. These people are careful and capable of protecting the religion; they are like the person who is able to remove the spikes from that

⁹ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 135

plant (*qatād*). And God will help them and save them from any fitnah that is darkening and confusing.¹⁰

Islam will become estranged

Another point that becomes clear from a few hadiths is that in the end of time Islam somehow becomes lonely or estranged (*gharib*). For example, Imam Baqir says:

إن قائمنا إذا قام دعا الناس إلى امر جديد كما دعا إليه رسول الله و إن
الاسلام بدا غريبا و سيعود غريبا

When our Qa'im rises up he will call people to something new, like the Prophet did. Indeed Islam started *gharib* and will again become *gharib*.¹¹

This will not be a new religion, nor will it be based on a new revelation. The Islam that Imam Mahdi (aj) introduces is described as *gharib* (estranged) in the end of time. Many will observe this religion and claim that it is not the Islam they are familiar with, and not the one they have been taught about in their places of worship. Various aspects of the Islam in which Imam Mahdi (aj) will call people towards will seem strange.

Yahya ibn 'Afif narrates that his father was in Mecca with Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib and witnessed a man, a boy and a woman, whom all stood, bowed, and prostrated. When he asked who they were, the people of the Quraysh told him that these people were Muhammad, Ali, and Khadija, and that they were following a new religion that

¹⁰ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 123

¹¹ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 366

Muhammad had brought.¹² This shows that in the beginning of the Islamic movement Islam was *gharib*, lonely and not supported. After some years God asked the Prophet to invite his close relatives to Islam.

Hence, this hadith of Imam Baqir suggests that Islam will become *gharib* again. Perhaps it refers to the current situation where, despite having a population of 1.5 billion Muslims, it is the most misunderstood and misrepresented religion. Prophet Muhammad and the Ahlul Bayt are misunderstood and misrepresented. If Imam Mahdi (aj) reappears and invites people back to what the Prophet brought in the first place then it is doubtful that all Muslims will agree with this religion. Certainly some would call it a disbelief

¹² Sheikh Mufid quotes the story in *al-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 30 as follows:

عن يحيى بن عفيف عن أبيه قال كنت جالسا مع العباس بن عبد المطلب رضي الله عنه بمكة قبل أن يظهر أمر النبي ص فجاء شاب فنظر إلى السماء حين تحلقت الشمس ثم استقبل الكعبة فقام يصلي ثم جاء غلام فقام عن يمينه ثم جاءت امرأة فقامت خلفهما فركع الشاب فركع الغلام والمرأة ثم رفع الشاب فرفعا ثم سجد الشاب فسجدا فقلت يا عباس أمر عظيم فقال العباس أمر عظيم أ تدري من هذا الشاب هذا محمد بن عبد الله ابن أخي أ تدري من هذا الغلام هذا علي بن أبي طالب ابن أخي أ تدري من هذه المرأة هذه خديجة بنت خويلد ابن أخي هذا حدثني أن ربه رب السموات والأرض أمره بهذا الدين الذي هو عليه ولا والله ما على ظهر الأرض على هذا الدين غير هؤلاء الثلاثة

I was sitting with al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, may Allāh be pleased with him, in Mecca, before the affairs of the Prophet became known to the public. A man came and looked up towards the sky where the sun hovered above. He turned in the direction of the Ka'ba and stood to pray. Then a youth came and stood at his right and a woman came and stood behind them both. The man bowed, and the youth and the woman bowed. The man raised his hands and the youth and the woman raised their hands. Then he prostrated and they both prostrated. "‘Abbās!" I exclaimed, "it is a fantastic affair!" "Indeed, it is a fantastic affair," replied al-'Abbās. "Do you know who that man is? He is Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, my cousin. Do you know who that youth is? He is 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, my cousin. Do you know who that woman is? She is Khadija, daughter of Khuwaylid. This cousin of mine (i.e. Muḥammad) has told me that his Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who has ordered him to carry out this religion (dīn) which he is practising. No, by Allāh, there are not any on the face of the earth, who practise this religion except these three."

(*kufr*), an innovation (*bid'ah*), or polytheism (*shirk*), because they do not recognise it.

Imam Baqir then says:

فطوبى للغرباء

And good tidings to those who are gharib!¹³

From this last statement, it would be wrong for us to lament of our small numbers, or our unfavourable position. As Imam Ali says:

لا تستوحشوا في طريق الهدي لقله اياه

On the right path, do not feel lonely if your numbers are few.¹⁴

The important thing for us is to be sure that we are on the right path.

A person went to Imam Sadiq and asked him to explain the meaning of the hadith that said Islam will again become gharib. He said:

إذا قام القائم استأنف دعاء جديدا كما دعا رسول الله

When the Qa'im comes he will start a new invitation [to Islam] as the Prophet did [facing all the challenges that the Prophet faced].

The man who had asked him the question gained some understanding and narrates: "I stood up and kissed the head of

¹³ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 366

¹⁴ *Nahj ul-Balaghah*, Sermon 86

Imam Sadiq, saying: 'I bear witness that you are my Imam.' Imam Sadiq then prayed for him, saying: 'May God have mercy on you.'"¹⁵

Here we are not indicating the destruction or disappearance of Islam before Imam will come. Islam will certainly be there, but perhaps it would not be looked upon favourably. And most certainly, true Islam will not be readily accepted. Those that choose to follow true Islam will feel lonely and unsupported, but this will indeed be good for them, because the more difficult it will become to practice Islam the more reward it entails.¹⁶

The situation of women

Despite the immense fitnah during the end of time, with many facing challenges with regards to remaining loyal to their faith, there will be believers who are nonetheless firm in their beliefs. We find references to pious and committed women who will be amongst the close associates of Imam Mahdi (aj). On the other hand, the situation of women apart from those pious believers is concerning. Imam Ali says:

يظهر في آخر الزمان و اقتراب الساعة و هو شرّ الازمنة نسوة كاشفات
عاريات متبرجات خارجات من الدين، داخلات في الفتن، مائلات الى
الشهوات، مسرعات الى اللذات، مستحلات للمحرمات في جهنم خالداات

In the end of time and near the resurrection, the situation will be the most severe. There will be women

¹⁵ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 367

¹⁶ It is not difficult to adhere to one's religion, if everyone praises the adherent for following it with massive, and supports him. The real challenge and indeed achievement is for a person who, for example, is ridiculed for to praying in his workplace somewhere and be ridiculed for praying and yet while he patiently perseveres in his prayers, this is a real achievement.

who bare their private parts, they will wear all kinds of adornments and they will go out of the bounds of religion and enter into fitnah. They quickly obey their desires, and what God has declared as unlawful they consider as lawful; they will be in hell forever.¹⁷

Within Sunni hadith in *Sahih* of Muslim, we find an expression that states that women will be 'clothed but naked' perhaps meaning despite their clothing, it does not actually *cover* the contours of the body.¹⁸ In another hadith we read:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى تظهر ثياب تلبسها نساء كاسيات عاريات

The Day of Resurrection will not come about until [you see] some manner of dress that some women will wear, but their dress will not cover them.¹⁹

In another hadith from Imam Ali, quoting the Prophet, we see a reference to the quality of *hayā* (dignity). The Imam narrates the Prophet:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى يذهب الحياء من الصبيان و النساء

The final hour will not come until [you see] a great number of women and children lose their *haya*.²⁰

¹⁷ *Muntakhab ul-Athar*, Page 426

¹⁸ *Sahih* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Libās wa al-Zinah, Bāb al-Nisā al-Kāsiyāt al-‘Āriyāt al-Mā’ilāt al-Mumilāt. The hadith is as follows:

عن أبي هريرة قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم صنفان من أهل النار لم أرهما قوم معهم سياط كأذناب البقر يضربون بها الناس ونساء كاسيات عاريات مميلات مائلات رءوسهن كأسنمة البخت المائلة لا يدخلن الجنة ولا يجدن ريحها وإن ريحها ليوجد من مسيرة كذا وكذا

¹⁹ *Yawm al-Khalās fi Zill al-Qā’im*, Page 456

²⁰ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 63, Page 15

I deduce this to be the result of the secular material culture to which even children from a young age are subjected, and e.g. they become aware of – and involved in – sexual relations.

The Prophet asked his people:

كيف بكم إذا فسدت نساؤكم، وفسق شبابكم، ولم تأمرو بالمعروف، ولم تنه
عن المنكر

How will your situation be when your women will be corrupt and your youths do not observe the shari'a, and you keep silent [i.e. you do not promote good and forbid bad]?

It was said: 'Is this possible O Prophet of God?' The Prophet continued:

نعم وأشر من ذلك، فكيف بكم إذا أمرتم بالمنكر ونهيتم عن المعروف

Yes, and even worse will happen – you will promote bad and prohibit good.

Again they said: 'Is this possible?' The Prophet continued:

نعم، وأشر من ذلك، فكيف بكم إذا رأيتم المعروف منكراً والمنكر معروفاً

Yes, and even worse than this – you will consider goodness as evil, and evil as goodness.

Even Muslims will be affected by this absence of hayā amongst their women and young people. And the worst situation is when people possess a distorted understanding of good and bad.

This should serve as a warning of the events at the end of time, and we must take great care regarding the way we perform our duties of

promoting the good and forbidding the bad, especially with regards to our families and children.

Misrepresentation of Islam

We previously clarified that at the end of time Islam will remain, although in many cases true Islam will be confused with the many misrepresentations of Islam. Imam Ali quotes the Prophet as saying:

سَيَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ لَا يَبْقَى مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ إِلَّا رِسْمُهُ وَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ إِلَّا
اسْمُهُ يُسَمَّوْنَ بِهِ وَ هُمْ أَبْعَدُ النَّاسِ مِنْهُ مَسَاجِدُهُمْ عَامِرَةٌ وَ هِيَ خَرَابٌ مِنَ
الْهُدَى

A time will come when nothing will remain from the Qur'an except its letters and nothing will be left from Islam but its name. People will be called, "Muslims," but they are farthest from Islam. Their Mosques building are developed but they lack guidance.²¹

From this saying we may conclude that the practice of true Islam and application of the Qur'an will in large stop and that there will be no effect of Islam on many Muslims' business, behaviour, etc; they will be Muslims merely by their names and outward appearances, whereas a true Muslim is one who is recognised by his impeccable conduct.

²¹ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 308.

The youths' reaction to Imam Mahdi (aj)

From Islamic sources we find reference to faithful and pious young adults who will respond to the call of Imam Mahdi (aj) without delay. Imam Sadiq says:

بيننا شباب الشيعة على ظهور سطوحهم نيامٌ إذا توافوا إلى صاحبهم في ليلةٍ واحدةٍ على غير ميعاد فيُصبحون بمكة

When the Shi'a youths are sleeping on the roofs of their houses [as is the practice in the Middle East] and then Mahdi (aj) comes, he will call them and all these youths, without any pre-arranged time, will be in Mecca on the morning of the next day.²²

These young adults will be prepared and willing to unhesitatingly answer the call of Imam Mahdi (aj) and are eager to meet him. It also demonstrates a facility available to them to travel quickly to reach Mecca. The hadith specifically refers to their fast journey to Mecca which could be a hint at advancement in transportation or an extraordinary way of travelling. This is an element found in all religious movements, i.e. that youths are usually the first to respond to prophets and god causes due to their clean hearts that are not (or not yet) strongly attached to worldly elements, and because they have committed less sins. Hence, youths should remain aware of this and be ever ready to join Imam Mahdi (aj).

In brief, an examination of the hadiths about the role of youths during the time of Imam Mahdi (aj) shows that the number of older people among the helpers of Imam Mahdi (aj) is low, although

²² *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 370

significantly valuable. The elders are likened to salt in food.²³ One only needs a small amount to give the rest good taste; likewise, the elders give the group its taste. Furthermore, Imam Mahdi (aj) himself will have the appearance of a young man in his thirties.²⁴

The condition of Islamic law

References are found regarding those who do not implement shari'a or Islamic law. One hadith states:

عطل الكتاب و احكامه

The Qur'an and its rulings will be suspended.²⁵

This is a state that we seem to be currently experiencing. I think we can safely say that in some aspects implementing the Shari'a has improved around three decades ago. However, the situation is still not satisfactory and more problems are arising. There are some Muslims who question some basics of the Shari'a.

Family relationships

The end of time will be a period in which social bonds, especially family relationships, will be weak and loose. For example, many young people and even children will not respect their elders:

و رايـت الصغـير يستحقـر بالكـبير و رايـت الجار يؤذـى جاره

²³ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 52, pp. 333 & 334. The hadith is as follows:

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ع قَالَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَهْدِيِّ شَبَابٌ لَا كُهُولَ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِثْلُ كُحْلِ الْغَيْنِ وَالْمِلْحُ فِي الزَّادِ وَالْزَادُ الْمِلْحُ

²⁴ For example, Sheikh Saduq in *Kamāla al-Din*, vol. 1, p. 315 quotes Imam Hasan (a) as saying:

يَطِيلُ اللَّهُ عَمْرَهُ فِي غَيْبَتِهِ ثُمَّ يَظْهَرُهُ بِقُدْرَتِهِ فِي صُورَةِ شَابٍ دُونَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً ذَلِكَ لِیَعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

²⁵ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 256

You will see a young one disrespect an elder, and you will see a neighbour upset another neighbour.²⁶

In a hadith from Imam Husayn we read:

لا يكون الأمر الذي تنتظرونه حتى يبرأ بعضكم من بعض و يتفل بعضكم في وجوه بعض و يشهد بعضكم على بعض بالكفر و يلعن بعضكم بعضاً

The advent you are awaiting will not happen until [a time comes when] you will detach [i.e. fight and disassociate] yourselves from one another. Some may spit in the face of others, and you will call each other *kāfir* and be a witness of that, and you will curse one another.

Someone asked: “If this is the case then does it mean there is no goodness in that time?” The Imam replied:

الخير كله في ذلك الزمان، يقوم قائمنا و يدفع ذلك كله

Indeed goodness in totality is in that time. At this time our Qa'im will come and remove all these problems.²⁷

In the same respect we have hadiths stating that many children will displease and irritate their parents, and many people will not observe ties of kinship (*silat al-rahim*), but instead will harbour hatred and enmity in their hearts whilst showing an outward fake display of love in their words.

Mosques

Hadiths make mention of mosques with tall minarets and adorned with gold and expensive adornments, and that the copies of the

²⁶ *Bihar ul-Anwar*, Vol. 52, Page 256

²⁷ *Kitab ul-Ghaybah*, Page 205

Qur'an will be beautifully decorated. The lines of prayers (*salah*) will be long and plenty, but the hearts of those that pray will not be united.²⁸ If we glance at the state of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina today we see lots of physical manifestations of unity, but unfortunately there seems to be no real sense of unity in the hearts of the people. True Islamic unity is achieved when Muslims become like parts and cells of the same body and bricks of the same building.²⁹

Usury (*riba*)

At the end of time usury will be normalised and will not be considered by many to be wrong, and people will not be rebuked for this.³⁰

Trustworthiness

Prophet Muhammad has said:

أقل ما يكون في آخر الزمان أخ يوثق به أو درهم من حلال

The thing that is the rarest in the end of time is a brother [i.e. a believer or a friend] whom you can trust, or a dirham that is earned by lawful means.³¹

²⁸ *Al-Durr ul-Manthur*, Vol. 6, Page 53:

وتحلى المصاحف بالذهب، وتتسمن ذكور أمتي ويخطب على المنابر الصبيان
فعند ذلك تزخرف المساجد كما تزخرف الكنائس والبيع، وتطول المنائر وتكثر
الصفوف مع قلوب متباغضة وألسن مختلفة

²⁹ For example, in *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 58, p. 150, Prophet Muhammad (s) is quoted as saying:

مَثَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِ فِي تَوَادِهِمْ وَ تَرَاحُمِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ الْجَسَدِ إِذَا اشْتَكَى بَعْضُهُ تَدَاعَى سَائِرُهُ
بِالسَّهْرِ وَالْحُمَى
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ مُتَجِدُونَ مُتَآزِرُونَ مُتَضَائِفُونَ كَأَنَّهُمْ نَفْسٌ وَاحِدَةٌ
الْمُؤْمِنُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْبَنِيَانِ يَشُدُّ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِذِي وَاحِدَةٍ عَلَى مَنْ سِوَاهُمْ

³⁰ For example, in *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 13, p. 333, Prophet Muhammad (s) is quoted as saying:

يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ لَا يَبْقَى أَحَدٌ إِلَّا أَكَلَ الرَّبَا فَإِنْ لَمْ يَأْكُلْهُ أَصَابَهُ مِنْ غُبَارِهِ

This hadith refers to two common problems in the end of time: 1) there will be few trustworthy people in whom one can comfortably confide in, and 2) earning halal income and being unaffected by haram transactions of others would become a challenge.

³¹ *Tuhaf ul-Uqul*, Saying 141

QUR'ANIC STRATEGY IN ITS OWN PRESERVATION

FATEMAH MEGHJI

ABSTRACT: For Muslims, the Qur'an is the unchallengeable word of God. Its inimitability, eloquence, outstanding use of the Arabic language, and scientific accuracies has been the subject of many discussions among Muslims and non-Muslim scholars alike. And given the issue of alteration in other divine scriptures, the discussion of *tahrif* (alteration) has also been examined. Has the Qur'an been changed like other divine books? Moreover, how is God a preserver over the Qur'an? As God challenges human beings to bring forth a text that resembles the Qur'an, is this due to its magnificent nature, or that humans are incapable due to God's divine intervention at every endeavour? This paper explores the practical measures taken to ensure the Qur'an's survival as an unadulterated text, exploring the following areas to display these strategic stylistic methods, namely 1. The odd placement of controversial verses, and 2. The omission of names of contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad. Part two of this paper will explore the Qur'an's easy and accurate memorization, omission of details, and scientific ambiguity.

Preamble

The miraculous nature of the Qur'an has been a topic that has captured the minds of Muslims for the past fourteen centuries. Its

inimitability, eloquence, magnificent use of the Arabic language, and scientific accuracies have been the subject of many discussions of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. For most Muslims, there is no doubt that it is the immutable word of God, the peak of eloquence, and in the words of Ayatullah Muhammad Hadi Ma'rifat, it "has the splendour of poetry, the freedom of prose, and the beauty of rhyming prose. These astonishing features have been obvious to Arab rhetoricians and verbalists from the very beginning."¹

Of the many aspects of its miraculous nature, is that it is inimitable, and this is proven through its challenge to mankind to bring something forth resembling it. No human is capable of bringing forth a chapter like it, and as such, nothing can be added to the Qur'an. Save for a few exceptions, the vast majority of Muslims and their scholars agree that the Qur'an, in its current form, is the preserved and precise word of God. God has protected the Qur'an from the distortions and alterations that plagued the Old and New Testaments, and this is a source of pride for many Muslims. Unlike previous divine books, the Qur'an is universal and for all time; it is the protected word of God: indisputable and miraculous on many levels. However, due to a precedence of alteration in other divine scriptures, the discussion of *tahrif* (alteration) is a discussion that has taken place in Qur'anic sciences over the centuries and amongst Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. Has the Qur'an been altered and tampered with like the other divine books of its Abrahamic predecessors? Do differences in *qira'at* (recitation) substantiate the

¹ Muhammad Hadi Ma'rifat, trans. Salim Rossier & Mansoor Limba, *Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an, Volume 2* (Tehran: Samt Publications, 2014), 232-233.

existence of *tahrīf*? This question has been explored time and time again, and is certainly a question worth exploring. Of the many reasons postulated over the absence and/or unlikelihood of *tahrīf* are historical reasons or observations. For example, the Muslims were incredibly sensitive towards the idea that their divine book may be altered and as such, were over-protective over it. With this extra care and precision, it was not likely that the Qur'an could have been altered. Several other reasons are also given that describe the historical context and situation as one that was conducive towards preserving the Qur'an.²

The Qur'an also speaks of God's protection over it, in Surah al-Hijr:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it. [15:9]

This begs the question: how is God a preserver over the Qur'an? There is another interesting discussion with regards to the inimitability of the Qur'an and that is whether the concept of *I'jaz*, (the idea that humans are incapable of imitating the Qur'an), means that human beings are incapable of bringing forth a piece of literature that resembles the Qur'an due to its magnificent nature, or whether humans are capable of such a feat, but have just been rendered incapable due to God's divine intervention at every attempt.³ This poses the question: is the inimitability of the Qur'an a tangible feat due to its lofty eloquence or is its inimitability intangible, due to

² For a more in-depth discussion on the alteration of the Qur'an, see *Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an, Volume 2*.

³ Ibid, 228.

God's intervention in the material world? Scholars, like Ayatullah Hadi Ma'rifat have concluded that it is not that God renders individuals incapable, but rather it is that humans themselves are incapable of bringing forth something that can match the Qur'an.⁴

A parallel can be drawn here as to how the Qur'an has been protected from *tahrif* by God. Has he miraculously protected the Qur'an from alteration through divine intervention at attempts to alter it, or have there also been practical measures that have been taken, ensuring its protection? In traditional discussions on *tahrif*, practical measures taken by human beings, i.e. the Muslims, have been explored in depth. Their precision and struggles in writing the Qur'an and preserving every word of it has been noted in history, such that arguments ensued between the companions of the Prophet over a few words.⁵ But what of the practical measures taken by God (or the writer of the Qur'an if we are to take this from the perspective of a non-believer) to ensure its survival as an unadulterated text? This is the topic that I would like to explore in this paper and these are the methods by which the Qur'an has been strategically written in a way that has ensured, in a very tangible and believable way that it would not be altered by the hands of people. These observations and thoughts necessitate the belief that the Qur'an has not been altered; the absence of significant *tahrif* is a premise to the proposals being

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ More on this discussion can be found in Ayatullah Sayyid Abu Al-Qasim Al-Musawi Al-Khu'i trans. Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'an*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

brought forth.⁶ Further, we will be approaching this study from the perspective of a Twelver Shi'i, and as such will be accepting their general opinions with regards to various verses and the authority that they believe is vested in the family of the Prophet.

The reason that we have chosen to come from this perspective is by applying a characteristic of God that is often spoken about in the Qur'an, and that is His perfection in planning and measuring: *makara* and *qadara*. These two concepts are usually spoken of in a way that describes the path that humanity is treading on: everything has been created in a perfect way, and God's planning is so precise that He even turns the plots of His enemies in ways that it will ultimately benefit Him and His religion, rendering their efforts useless.

وَمَكَرُوا وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ

Then they plotted, and Allah also devised, and Allah is the best of devisers. [3:54]

This does not necessitate that humans lack free-will, rather it necessitates that God, with all of His knowledge is capable of using human free-will to His advantage and decreeing perfectly whilst taking into consideration the free-will of humans. He is the perfect measurer; the one who calculates destiny and decree.⁷ However, what of this precision and planning in light of the book that He has

⁶ Even if one were to entertain the idea that minor alterations and omissions were made, as some have, it would not be far-fetched to say that God implemented these strategies in order to limit the amount of tampering to an insignificant amount.

⁷ The discussion of *qadr* and *qadha* has been discussed by Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, trans. Mirza Muhammad Abbas Reza, *Theological Instructions*, (Qom: Imam Khomeini Institute for Education and Research, 2009).

written? Beyond its Arabic grammar (an area that has been explored considerably in depth) and linguistic excellence, what strategies have been used to ensure that nobody would be able to alter the Qur'an, to preserve it in its current form? After all, if He creates with precision and measure, and is the best of planners, should this not reflect itself in His book, the Qur'an?

Of course, God has not explained his strategy in words that are so clear, but there is no denying that it exists. For this discussion, we are simply making observations and postulating possible strategies that seem to have been implemented in the Qur'an and seem to have decreased reasons to tamper with the Qur'an. One of ways in which we have hypothesized how it could have been altered, is by comparing it with previously altered texts, namely, the Old Testament. By comparing the literary structure of these texts to the Qur'an, we may be able to conjecture how the Qur'an has strategically been written in a way that ensured that people would not be tempted to alter it as they did previously.

As a lot of work has not been done in this specific area, the references used in this piece are far fewer than would have been ideal, and a lot of these thoughts are simply my own observations, and what I would hope are educated guesses. Some of the ideas were brought forth by the professor for my class, Agha Javan Arasteh, and they inspired further thought process on the subject. The stylistic methods of the Qur'an are such that it has removed any possible inclination towards alteration, either due to the whims or the forgetfulness of mankind. I have chosen to explore the following areas in order to show these strategic stylistic methods:

1. Odd placement of controversial verses

2. Omission of names of contemporaries of the Prophet
3. Easy and accurate memorization
4. Omission of details
5. Scientific Ambiguity

These strategies are very tangible and pragmatic, and support the idea that God has strategically written the Qur'an in a way that has removed any possible reason that a person would have to tamper with the Qur'an. Some proponents of *tahrif* have claimed that the Qur'an has been tampered with due to the omission of names like Ali's, due to vested political interests. However, would not God, the all-Knowing know when, where, and why people would tamper with the Qur'an? With all of His foresight and knowledge of the human race, could He not write a scripture in the most strategic of ways, such that nobody would be led or tempted to tamper with it? From this angle, it could be argued that He implemented practical strategies to ensure that nobody would attempt to tamper with the Qur'an. He removed their reasons to tamper as He knew what their reasons would be.

1. Odd Placement of Controversial Verses

The first group of verses seem to suggest a strategic placing of verses to avoid future tampering with the Qur'an, or the intentional misplacement of verses so as to serve certain political interests. Before entering this discussion however, it is important to note the difference of opinion with regards to the placement of verses in the Qur'an and whether or not this was divinely sanctioned. There are two opinions in this regard: 1. That the Prophet ordered the placement of the verses by divine command or 2. That the Muslims, after the death of the Prophet, generally placed verses within a

chapter in the order of the revelation but with exceptions. Most scholars have come to accept that generally speaking, verses within a chapter are ordered chronologically, even if the chapters themselves are not chronologically ordered by revelation. However, there are exceptions to this, and some verses do not exist in their order of revelation. Ayatullah Hadi Ma'rifat has gone through these purported exceptions in his work *al-Tamhid*. Taking this into consideration, either God, by directly commanding His Prophet, ordered certain verses to be strategically placed, or the Muslims placed them there, leading to what could be argued as a strategic placement of the verse, i.e. it worked in the favour of the preservation of the Qur'an. There are hadith to the effect of both and different scholars have supported both views throughout history.

Two verses that could be argued to have a strategic placement, (adopting a Twelver Shi'i perspective) would be Q5:3 and Q33:33, known as the verse of *Ghadir* (also known as *ikmal al-din*) and the verse of *Tathir*. The first verse appears as follows:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ
وَالْمُوفُودَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى
النُّصَبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلامِ ذَلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ الْيَوْمَ يَكْفُرُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ
دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنَ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتِمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي
وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرَ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

You are prohibited carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than Allah, and the animal strangled or beaten to death, and that which dies by falling or is gored to death, and that which is

*mangled by a beast of prey—barring that which you may purify —and what is sacrificed on stone altars [to idols], and that you should divide by raffling with arrows. All that is transgression. **Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.** But should anyone be compelled by hunger, without inclining to sin, then Allah is indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful. [5:3]*

It is reported through different narrations that the bolded section of this verse (*Today, the faithless...*) was revealed on the day of *Ghadir*, where the Prophet informed the Muslims that Ali was to be his successor and leader after his death. This was a matter of controversy after the death of the Prophet, where other companions of the Prophet ended up taking control of the Muslim nation. If the verse was indeed revealed on the day of *Ghadir*, then the placement of this sentence, which is grammatically and contextually very different to what surrounds it, is very strange. It seems odd to insinuate that the perfection of religion lied with the eating of lawful of meat. Further, the verse switches from speaking about meat to speaking about the completion of religion and then returns to the topic of meat. It is a peculiar verse, and many commentators have commented on its distinctiveness. The split of the Muslim nation with regards to who should have led it after the death of the Prophet continues to be a matter of contention. It is a verse of sectarian significance, and it is not far-fetched to suggest that it may have been removed due to sectarian interest if it were obvious that the verse was speaking about

the day of Ghadir and the appointment of Ali. Had the context of the verse been a little more conspicuous, many may have more easily noticed its significance with relation to the leadership of 'Ali. To support the idea that the placement of the verse was strategic, Allamah Tabatabai in *Tafsir al-Mizan* notes a hadith that has been narrated in *al-Durru 'l-manthūr*. This narration seems to indicate that the verse was placed in its current location by the Prophet himself. The hadith is narrated from 'Abd ibn Hamīd from al-Sha'bī who said "The verse: *This day I have perfected for you your religion* . . . , was revealed to the Prophet while he was in 'Arafāt; and when any verses much pleased him, he used to put them in the beginning of the chapter.' He also said, 'And Jibrāil used to teach him how to do it.'"⁸

The second verse that can be argued to have a strategic placement is the verse of *tathīr*, which has been attributed to denoting the purification of the household of the Prophet, namely five individuals, the esteemed *Ahl al-Kisā* (Muhammad, 'Alī, Faṭimah, Hasan, and Husayn). The occasion of revelation which is the famous *Hadith al-Kisā* indicates that it was revealed with regards to these five individuals. The verse reads as follows (note the bolded portion as the verse of *tathīr*):

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ
الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ
الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا وَادْكُرْنَ مَا يُثَلَّى فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ
وَالْحِكْمَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا

⁸ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabatabai trans. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *Tafsir al-Mizan*, Volume 9, (Tehran: WOFIS, 2000), 230.

*Stay in your houses and do not flaunt your finery like the former [days of pagan] ignorance. Maintain the prayer and pay the zakat, and obey Allah and His Apostle. **Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.** And remember what is recited in your homes of the signs of Allah and wisdom. Indeed Allah is all-attentive, all-aware. [33:33-34]*

If the verse was revealed about these five individuals, then again, the placement of the bolded portion of the verse is odd given that the beginning of the verse is speaking about the wives of the Prophet—none of whom are contended to be of these *Ahl al-Kisā*. The beginning of the verse uses the imperative form of the female plural (*kunna*). However, the verse (and the section that is attributed to be speaking of the *Ahlul Bayt*) switches to the second-person general plural (*kum*) which indicates that it is either a completely male audience, or a mixed-gender audience. After this sentence, it again switches to the imperative female plural. This denotes a change in topic and in who is being addressed. However, the placement of the verse makes the context more obscure. If it were clear that the verse were speaking of only these five individuals, and was placed somewhere else in the Qur'an, it may have been less obscure and more likely to have been removed by those with other vested political interests against the family of the Prophet. After all, all of them played important and controversial political roles after the death of the Prophet. Nevertheless, the verse lies unsuspectingly amongst verses speaking of the Prophet's wives, women who the Muslim nation held in high regard.

With regards to the placement of this verse, some have postulated that it was put here, either by companions who thought this was an appropriate place for it, or that it was done intentionally, as it may have benefited certain companions on a political front to have it surrounded by verses that seemingly have little to do with it. This idea is brought forth by Allamah Majlisi in *Bihar al-Anwar*:

فلعل آية التطهير أيضا وضعوها في موضع زعموا أنها تناسبه أو أدخلوها
في سياق مخاطبة الزوجات لبعض مصالحهم الدنيوية و قد ظهر من
الأخبار عدم ارتباطها بقصتهن فالاعتماد في هذا الباب على النظم و
الترتيب ظاهر البطلان.

And likewise, perhaps, the location of the verse of tathīr in its place was intentional as it seemed appropriate, or it was put in the context of the addressees being the wives, due to certain worldly benefits. Certainly, it is apparent from the narrations that there is a lack of connection to the story, so it can be ascertained that the organization and order of this is incorrect.⁹

However, like the previous verse of ghadir, it can also be argued that this ended up working in the Qur'an's favour and that it was actually strategic for the preservation of this verse in the Qur'an. It lies protected through its obscurity and can only be distinguished if one pays close and careful attention in order to realize the subtleties of its misplacement.

⁹ Translation rendered by myself. Allamah Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Volume 35, 234, accessed February 17th, 2015, <http://www.noorlib.ir/view/fa/book/bookview/text/13531/1/1>.

2. Omission of Names of People Contemporary to the Prophet

Although the Qur'an mentions the names of several individuals from previous nations, it does not mention the exact identity of those it speaks about with as much detail compared to its Abrahamic predecessors. A quick perusal through the Old Testament makes this point clear, there are passages of names and genealogies in detail, including the names of the children of various Prophets even if they have an insignificant part to play in the history being narrated. The Qur'an on the other hand, although it mentions names of Prophets and other individuals, it also narrates several stories where names have been omitted. The identity of several individuals has not been made clear, and in several instances, these individuals have been named through the *ahadith* literature or through similar stories in the Old Testament. More interestingly is that with regards to individuals contemporary to the Prophet, besides the Prophet himself, only two individuals are mentioned by name: Abu Lahab and Zayd. These two are the exception to the general pattern of the Qur'an in refraining from mentioning names of those contemporary to the Prophet. The hypocrites of Medina, Abu Sufyan, and other antagonists were never mentioned by name or revealed publically. Further, neither were the names of any of the companions, the *Ahlul Bayt*, the names of the daughters of the Prophet or 'Ali ibn Ali Talib. When the Qur'an describes the migration to Medina, it does not bring the name of Abu Bakr who is narrated to have accompanied him, rather, the Qur'an says:

إِلَّا تَنْصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ اللَّهُ إِذْ أَخْرَجَهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثَانِيَ اثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا فِي
الْغَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَاحِبِهِ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا

[9:40] If you do not help him, then Allah certainly helped him when the faithless expelled him, as one of two [refugees], when the two of them were in the cave, he said to his companion, 'Do not grieve; Allah is indeed with us.'

It simply notes him as a 'companion'. This is true of many occasions in the Qur'an, and who is being spoken of can usually be determined by the context or revelation of the verse. The verse of *wilayah* is a cornerstone of Shi'i beliefs and it does not mention Ali ibn Abi Talib by name. It reads:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ
وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

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

With regards to this verse, according to many scholars, it was revealed after Ali ibn Abi Talib gave charity to a beggar while he was bowing down in prayer. Several other verses that are clearly in reference to the actions of Ali ibn Abi Talib do not include his name, for example, when he slept in the Prophet's bed as the Prophet escaped to Medina. Stories about the daughter of the Prophet, Fatimah, also do not mention her name. This is despite the fact that the majority of commentators, Sunni and Shia alike, mention many of these incidents in relation to these individuals as the *asbab al-nuzul* (reason for revelation). With regards to the omission of their names, especially the likes of Imam Ali and his status in the eyes of the Shi'a as an Imam, people have reacted in different ways. Some *akhbari*

scholars, in response to questions about the omission of these names, decided that there must have been a type of *tahrif* in the Qur'an where words or verses were deleted. The infamous book *Faṣl al-Khitāb*, by Muhaddith Nūrī, alleging that *tahrif* had occurred, was actually written in response to a query from India as to why the names of the *Ahlul Bayt* did not exist in the Qur'an.¹⁰ Other scholars, like Ayatullah Khu'i, responded by narrating hadith from the Imams that responded to the same type of query. In *The Prolegomena to the Qur'an (Al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurān)*, Ayatullah Khui narrates a hadith which he believes to be authentic that responds to the inquiry of a companion. It is narrated from Shaykh al-Kulayni by Abu al-Basir and says: "How come 'Ali and his family are not [specifically] named in the Book of God?' He [Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq] said "... tell them that the prayer was revealed to the Prophet, and in it there was no [specific] mention of three or four [units] until the Prophet was the one who explained that to them."¹¹

There is no doubt that the authority and *wilayat* that was vested to the *Ahlul Bayt* was a matter of controversy and was a sensitive, politically-charged issue. Because of this, some scholars have claimed that their names were later dropped off due to political interests. However, Ayatullah Khu'i makes an interesting point and this is that if the names were there in the initial revelation, why didn't the Imams use this as an argument to prove their authority? Going a step further, if this were the case, that individuals omitted their names to serve certain political interests, would not God, the all-Knowing, have

¹⁰ Ma'rifat, 331.

¹¹ Al-Khu'i, 159.

had knowledge of their future actions and intentions to alter the Qur'an? Muhaddith Nuri also mentions the idea that the names of the *Ahlul Bayt* "would have been mentioned in the Old and New Testaments."¹² We also know from the Qur'an itself that words were changed in the previous scriptures. Knowing that they would try to alter the Qur'an, as people did to the previous scriptures, why would God choose to include them again? If He were writing a Qur'an in a way that would ensure that it remained safe from alteration, why would he, the all-Wise, choose to include names that would later be removed due to the whims of mankind? If He had included their names, they would have attempted to remove them regardless. The point here is that perhaps it was strategic to omit the names to begin with; knowing that this was a politically sensitive issue and that people were not going to be inclined to follow it, he removed their reason to alter the Qur'an, and in effect, the omission of their names was actually a strategy in the long-term preservation of the Qur'an.

¹² Ma'rifat, 331.

INTERCESSION AND INTERMEDIATION

TAWUS RAJA

ABSTRACT: *Shafā'ah* (intercession) and *tawassul* (intermediation, instrumentation, solicitation) are two Qur'anic concepts that pertain to the practical implications of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). In both cases there is an involvement of a being other than God in the achievement of some request, the fulfilment of some need, or the endowment of some bounty. They pose a challenge to the Qur'anic and monotheistic idea that God is the only source of power, blessing and impact in the universe. As this article will show, the main problem lies in independence. Intercession and intermediation would only be extensions of monotheism, not contrary to it, given two conditions: (1) the intermediaries should be selected and indicated by God, not based on one's opinion; and (2) one should refer to these means not as independent sources of impact, but only as reflections of God's power, mercy and will.

Background

Shafā'ah is from the root *shafā'a*, which is 'to join two things together.' *Shafā'ah* specifically means the addition of something or

someone as an aid and assistance.¹ The Qur'an has used this term and its verbal derivatives mostly in description of the Hereafter in verses with an overall theme and context of *tawḥīd* (monotheism), where God is identified as the only source of hope and help.

Tawassul is defined as 'seeking the aid of an intermediary to achieve one's objective.'² More technically, it is used for advancing and seeking proximity to God through some means and instrument. For instance, one's acts of worship can be a means that brings us closer to God. Resorting to these acts to advance toward God is an example of *tawassul*. Another example would be God's Names, as the Qur'an instructs us: "*To Allah belong the Best Names, so call Him by them*" (7:180). More generally the Qur'an says, "*O Believers! Be God-wary and seek a means of approach towards Him*" (5:35).

Conflict with monotheism

The Qur'an describes God as the Creator of all things (39:62), the One Who gives life and death (9:116), and the One Who is responsible for the provision (*rizq*) of all creatures (10:31). He is the One Who sends down the rain (42:28), Who brings day and night in sequence (10:67), and Who splits the seeds and the morning (6:95-96, 113:1). In short, He is the Director of the entire universe and all beings. Thus we say in every prayer: "*All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all nations*" (1:2). The Qur'an categorically refutes any claim to partnership or association (*shirk*) in the lordship, worship,

¹ Rāghib, under *sh-f*.

² Rāghib, under *w-s-l*.

and authority of God, and associating partners with Him is an unpardonable crime (4:48, 4:116).

Meanwhile, the Qur'an also includes the order in creation. God invests heavily in describing various systems and processes that He has placed in the universe as signs of His power, wisdom, and mercy. The ordered occurrence and connection of events in the universe implies the involvement of certain factors and causes in the world as means and intermediaries.

A matter of independence

The Qur'an says:

"Have they taken intercessors besides Allah? Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?!' Say, 'All intercession rests with Allah. To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; then you will be brought back to Him.'" (39:43-44).

There are also many other verses that deny any intercessors but God, especially on the Day of Judgement (2:48, 2:123, 2:254, 6:51, 6:70, 6:94, 7:53, 26:100, 30:13, 32:4, 40:18). Meanwhile, there are many verses that establish and talk about some intercession by other than God (2:255, 10:3, 19:87, 20:109, 21:28, 34:23, 43:86, 53:26, 74:48). These verses bear the key to reconciliation between the two sets of verses: *"Intercession will not avail that day except from him whom the All-beneficent allows and approves of his word"* (20:109); *"How many an angel there is in the heavens whose intercession is of no avail in any way except after Allah grants permission to whomever He wishes and approves of!"* (53:26). This means that God is the only Intercessor; all intercession belongs to Him

primarily, essentially and independently. Then, according to His infinite wisdom and power, God may carry out His intercession through some of His creatures as means and instruments.

This is but one example of a universal Qur'anic principle that every existential perfection or quality rests exclusively with God, and if it is found anywhere else, then it is only a reflection and manifestation of God. The Qur'an claims that all might, creation, power, sustenance, kingdom and judgement belong to Him. Yet, in other verses it has attributed the very same qualities to other beings. The solution again is that they primarily and essentially belong to God, and if they are found in any other being it is only by God's bestowal, and that being is not independent in its possession of that quality.

An existential reality

In fact, the entire universe is based on intercession, intermediation and the involvement of instruments. Not only is this no contradiction to monotheism, but it is actually a sign and confirmation of God's unity. For example, God has created us and the world such that we need to drink water when we become thirsty. When we seek water to quench our thirst, through our action we are 'asking' water to satisfy our need. This can be an illustration of both polytheism and monotheism, depending on our mentality and intention. If we resort to water as an independent source and force of quenching thirst—that is, an entity that stands on its own in the universe and has its own impact—that would be polytheism. However, if we view water as a means that God has placed and created with this impact, and has given it the property of quenching

thirst, then water becomes a mirror that reflects God's power, impact, creation and fulfilment of needs.

A key concept in understanding the necessity of means and instruments in the world is a metaphysical principle called the principle of unity (*qā'idat al-wahid*). According to this principle, if something is absolutely one—that is, it has a pure and simple reality, without any mix or plurality in it—then what emanates from it will also be one. It is impossible to get multiplicity and variety out of something that is absolutely one and entirely unadulterated. What emanates from it will, of course, have the same reality, except that it will also have an aspect of independence, emanation or contingency to it. What emanates from that in turn will have another aspect of plurality to it, and thus multiplicity emanates from unity. The existence and perfection of the Necessary Being—Who is Absolutely One—is too pure, sublime and overwhelming to be tainted by the various delimitations and determinations of contingent beings. Thus, His existential effusions and perfections should be diluted through different stages, layers and levels of funnels and channels—only due to the limited receptive capacity of the recipients, like a small lamp that is incapable of receiving the high voltage that is directly generated at the power plant.

This is exactly why we need instruments, intermediaries, and intercessors in order to approach God, because our very *existence* entails duality, separation and difference from God. Those who deny the intercession and intermediation of some beings—such as the Imams—fail to realise that even prayer and supplications are means and instruments of seeking proximity to God. Even if we decide to not do or say anything but to simply turn our attention toward God

and connect to Him through our heart, then this very act of turning one's heart and attention to God is a means other-than-God that is being used to connect with Him. Therefore, there is no alternative to having some means and instruments between us and God, as He has commanded us: *"O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of recourse to Him"* (5:35).

A fine line

The difference between monotheism and polytheism in this regard lies in two points:

1. The means and instruments adopted by the polytheists were out of their own opinion and conjecture, not something that God has set and introduced. This is while intermediation is an existential reality, and the authenticity of any intermediary in terms of having a genuine role in the universe is only and fully known to God. That is why He must show us the ways and means that bring us closer to Him; it is not up to us to decide, for it is not a conventional matter.

These are but names which you have coined—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority. They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of the [lower] soul, while there has already come to them the guidance from their Lord (53:23); They worship besides Allah that for which He has not sent down any authority, and of which they have no knowledge. And the wrongdoers shall have no helper (22:71).

The Qur'an describes the polytheists as follows: *"Those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so they*

may bring us near to Allah” (39:3). God then refutes their claim concisely and implicitly: *“Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate”* (39:3). This is seen more elaborately in the following verse: *“They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, ‘These are our intercessors with Allah’”* (10:18). Here God’s answer is: *“Say, ‘Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?’ Immaculate is He and exalted above [having] any partners that they ascribe [to Him]!”* (10:18). In other words, intercessors with God should be appointed and approved by Him, as emphasised in several verses about intercession (2:255, 10:3, 19:87, 20:109, 21:28, 34:23, 53:26, 78:39).

2. Regardless of what or who the intermediaries are, monotheism entails that they cannot be viewed and adopted as independent entities that have any impact of their own. Rather, these intermediaries and intercessors should be viewed as God’s signs, symbols and sacraments (*āyāt, sha‘ā’ir*). They are valuable, desirable and sacred to the extent of their relation to God, inasmuch as they reflect God, and as long as they take us closer to God. The Qur’an honours Mounts Ṣafā and Marwah, the sacrificial camels, and even the signs that mark sacrificial animals as God’s sacraments (2:158, 5:2, 22:32, 22:36). Yet, the same things can become idols—and thus called abominations, *rijs* (5:90, 22:30)—if they become an ends instead of means, if they veil one from God, and if they block a servant from advancing toward His Lord. This should be an important caution to all Muslims because it is a subtle point and a common place of slip, as the Qur’an says: *“But most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him”* (12:106).

No free riding

One objection that is sometimes raised against *shafā'ah* and *tawassul* is that belief in such sources of help and deliverance in the Hereafter would promote negligence in carrying one's duty, for the person would rely on these 'shortcuts' to amend his faults. The key thing that this objection fails to recognise is that *shafā'ah* and *tawassul* are not conventional matters. They are real connections between two beings based on an existential congruity and affinity (*sinkhiyyah*) between them. This is seen most clearly in the Qur'anic verses that emphasise that intercession will only be beneficial to those with whom God is pleased: "*They do not intercede except for someone He approves of*" (21:28; also see 20:109 and 53:26, quoted above). Imam al-Riḍā narrated from his fathers up to the Messenger of God: "If one does not believe in my pool [in the hereafter] God will not bring him to it, and if one does not believe in my intercession God will not let him reach it." He then said, "My intercession is only for the committers of major sins among my nation. As for the good-doers, there is no way [of blame] against them." The Imam was then asked, "O son of God's Messenger! Then what does it mean when God, the Mighty and Majestic, says: '*And they do not intercede except for someone He approves of* (21:28)?'" He replied: "They do not intercede except for him *whose religion* God approves."³

Therefore, to qualify for the intercession of the Prophet and the Imams, one needs to establish and maintain some level of real

³ 'Uyūn, 1/136-137, ḥ 35. Rawḍat al-Wā'iḍīn, 2/500-501. A similar narration is reported from Imam al-Kāẓim (A.S): Tawḥīd, 407-408, ḥ 6. Ṭabrisī, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 328-329.

affinity and spiritual connection with them. Otherwise, all conventional ties will be severed on the Day of Resurrection:

When the Trumpet is blown, there will be no ties between them on that day, nor will they ask [about] each other” (23:101); Certainly you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and left behind whatever We had bestowed on you. We do not see your intercessors with you—those whom you claimed to be [Our] partners in [deciding] you[r] [fate]. Certainly all links between you have been cut, and what you used to claim has forsaken you! (6:94); All their means of recourse will be cut off (2:166).

Hence, the belief in intercession and intermediation is not only no impediment to righteousness, but it is a propelling force towards it.

Examples from hadith

There is a famous narration where Imam al-Şādiq says:

God refrains from running things except through their means. So He has set a means for everything, an elaboration [in terms of conditions and definitions] for every means, a knowledge [or an emblem] for every elaboration, and a speaking expressive gate for every knowledge [or emblem]. One who recognizes the gate has recognized the means, and one who is ignorant of the gate is ignorant of the means. That [gate] is the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his family) and us.’⁴

⁴ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/183. Şaffār al-Qummī, *Başā’ir al-darajāt*, 26

It is narrated that once a blind man went to the Prophet and said, “Ask God to heal me.” The Prophet replied, “If you are patient it will be better for you, but if you want I will ask God to heal you.” The man repeated his request, and so the Prophet instructed him to make ablution (*wuḍū*), pray two units of prayers and then say:

O God! I beseech Thee and turn to Thee in the name of Thy Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet of Mercy. O Muḥammad! I have turned to my Lord through you to restore my eyesight. Restore it for me, O my Lord!⁵

This account is also found in other books. It shows that such intermediation was common and practiced at the time of the Prophet. The Prophet did not forbid it, but he actually taught the person how to place the Prophet between himself and God.

Similarly, it is narrated that the second caliph used to ask God by ‘Abbās to send rain: “O God! We ask you for rain by the sake of ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (the Prophet’s uncle)...”⁶ This narration shows that using someone other than the Prophet but with a legitimate connection to him was also an acceptable practice in early Islam.

These can be extensions and applications of many Qur’anic verses such as:

We did not send any messenger but to be obeyed by Allah’s leave. Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to Allah for forgiveness, and the Messenger had pleaded for

⁵ Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 5302.

⁶ Bukhārī, *Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1/350.

forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah All-clement, All-merciful (4:64); Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby, and bless them. Indeed your blessing is a comfort to them, and Allah is all-hearing, all-knowing (9:103); Indeed the faithful are those who have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and when they are with him in a collective affair, they do not leave until they have sought his permission. Indeed those who seek your permission – it is they who have faith in Allah and His Messenger. So when they seek your permission for some work of theirs, give permission to whomever of them you wish and plead with Allah to forgive them. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful (24:62).

Summary

Shafā'ah and *tawassul* can be compared to the links, connections and networks that people use in this life to acquire what they seek. The lack and ineffectiveness of such links is one of the main differences between the Hereafter and this world: “Beware of the day when no soul shall compensate for another, neither any intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any ransom shall be received from it, nor will they be helped” (2:48; also see 2:123, 2:254). It is true that God’s hands are wide open (5:64) and He can bless, forgive and show mercy to anyone that He wants. However, He has willed, according to His infinite wisdom, that there be a system of means, causes and effects through which His blessing diffuses and descends. The need for intercessors and intermediaries is not because of any

shortcoming on God's part or any limits on the breadth of His mercy, but it is to complete the receiver's deficiency and limitation in receptivity. These means and intermediaries should be approved, set and introduced by God, and one should not take them as any *independent* source of impact, for there is no independence whatsoever for anyone other than God, whether in this world or the next.

Say, 'My Lord has only forbidden indecencies...and that you should attribute to Allah what you do not know' (7:33). We shall cast terror into the hearts of the faithless because of their ascribing to Allah partners, for which He has not sent down any authority, and their refuge shall be the Fire, and evil is the [final] abode of the wrongdoers (3:151).

THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE INSTITUTION OF IMAMATE

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TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

ABSTRACT: Imamate is a divine institution, and the Imam is responsible for administering the affairs of society through being linked to the main source of guidance – Allah. The acquisition of understanding what does or does not contribute to believers' religion and their world are important issues that necessitate the existence of a divine guide (*hujjah*) in society. On the other hand, man's constant need for guidance further raises the question of existence of a guide. The role of Imamate in safeguarding against faults and errors is another function that manages the relationship between believers, and guides their beliefs and divine religion. This paper investigates the existence and impact of Imamate.

Introduction

Without a doubt, the concept of Imamate is a challenging issue in the Islamic theology (*kalam*), and the Ahlul Bayt¹ underlined the importance of deepening our beliefs in it. On the other hand, there are differences of opinions about it between different schools of Islam. This is considered the first disagreement among Muslims.² When debate over the issue of Imamate extends to the issue of government and political administration of society, it is so extensive that authors of Islamic sects claim that throughout the history, there have not been as many fights on any other issue as there were on Imamate.³ The Shi'a doctrine introduces Imamate as an institution with various aspects that influence our lives. The inaccurate definition of this institution and incorrect understanding of its functions cause mistaken recognition and identification of the Imam. Sunnis regard this institution as an issue only contingent upon the interests of society, the choice of Ummah, and requirements of human society.⁴ On the other hand, the Shi'a view the fulfilment of divine promises as contingent on knowing the Hujjah⁵ and consider the Imam as an element to which this institution continues to guide man to salvation.

Imam Ali introduced the Imam as follows: "On behalf of God, the Imams manage people's affairs."⁶ This refers to running the society

¹ The household of Prophet Muhammad, namely Imams Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, Lady Fatimah, and the Prophet himself.

² Maqalat-ul-Islamiyyain wal Ikhtilaf al-Musallin, p 2.

³ Al-Milal wa a-Nihal. vol. 1, p. 24.

⁴ See Ibn Khaldun: p. 203 and Al-Imamah wa Al-RRad ala-Rafidah, p. 24.

⁵ Nahj-ul-Balaghah: p. 264, sermon 189.

⁶ ibid. p. 198, sermon 152.

as God's vicegerent who brings divine rules into force in society. Based on this design, non-Shi'a definitions and identifications of Imamate are challenged, and classifying Imamate as a secondary issue (*far'*), and not as a principal doctrine, cannot logically justify their mistake in pinpointing the roots and instances of Imamate. Irrespective of the extensive issue of identification of the Imam and its historical aspects, this article reviews the social functions of Imamate and its assumptions. If the five major functions mentioned in this article are institutionalized, they not only enhance the understanding of people and constantly guide them, but also protect the Shi'a and their beliefs through controlling their faults and managing their relationships.

1. Hujjah: the means of attaining knowledge and understanding

The first step to perfection and salvation is the acquisition of knowledge. This is emphasized so much that Islam is summarized in two things: the knowledge of God and action based on divine satisfaction.⁷ Divine knowledge is tied up with Hujjah.⁸ On the other hand, a goal of divine Messengers is considered to be the improvement of man's understanding and wisdom.⁹ Deeply linked to society, the Ahlul Bayt are the means of acquiring teachings and enhancing man's understanding. An excerpt from Ziyarah Jami'a al-Kabirah points to this important function:

⁷ Al-Kafi, vol. 9, p. 429, the section a-Dua' ila al-Islam qabl al-Qital, H. 1.

⁸ ibid. vol.2, section fi Ghaybah meaning "On Occultation", p.148, H. 11.

⁹ ibid. vol.1, the book al-'Aql wa al-Jahl, p.30, H. 11.

Through your Wilayah, God has taught us doctrines
of our religion, and restored all that of our world that
has been ruined.¹⁰

Attention to the intermediary function is complemented with friendship and obedience. In one of his sermons, Imam Ali referred to the function of obedience. Citing verse 71 of the Qur'anic chapter *al-Ahzab*, he introduced Prophet Muhammad as the means of being delivered from error and ignorance.¹¹ Nevertheless, the term Hujjah, unlike other common terms to refer to different positions, is first introduced by the Shi'a. In a unique initiative, when classifying hadiths in *al-Kafi*, Sheikh Kulayni (d. 349 A.H) classified hadiths on imamah in a section, entitled, "Kitab al-Hujjah."

On the basis of the literal meaning of Hujjah, there lie two issues in this term: one is discussing and inquiring about the Imam, and the other is proving ones' claims and preparing for refutation.¹² On the other hand, the fact that Hujjah is an intermediary between God and His creatures is evident. The corollary of observing this link is the existence of two fundamental and important aspects in defining the wide-ranging essence of the Imam: one is to clarify divine knowledge for those who need it, and seek divine guidance to understand it. Otherwise, they may suffer confusion. The other aspect is related to people's daily affairs and due to the Imam's link to the main source of guidance, he defines their interests. This is observable in the words of Imam Sadiq to an atheist:

¹⁰ Tahdhib-ul-Ahkam, vol. 6, p.100; Man la Yahduruhul-Faqih, vol. 2, p. 616.

¹¹ Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 348, section Jawami' al-Tawhid, H-7.

¹² See Investigation of the Holy Qur'an Words, vol. 2, p. 169.

When we prove that there is the all-Wise, all-Mighty God, it is proved that He has sent His creatures some messengers who introduce Him to His servants and guide them to their interests and benefits, as well as what revives them spiritually and what ruins their spirituality.¹³

These teachings are reflected in two sections, namely "The Urgent Need for Hujjah" and "The Necessity of Obeying the Imams."¹⁴ The narration reported by Mansur ibn Hazim, who was trained in the school of the Ahlul Bayt, defines Shi'a beliefs and reflects on the Ahlul Bayt's method of training their students. Mansur ibn Hazim regarded the knowledge of divine satisfaction and anger as the fruits of knowledge of Hujjah and viewed gaining God's satisfaction and avoiding His anger as necessary as a rational requirement. He says:

I have pondered on the Qur'an and concluded that Murji'ites, Qadarites and even Heretics who do not believe in it argue on the basis of it in order to overcome their opponents. So I have understood that the Qur'an is not Hujjah except through a guardian who knows its secrets.¹⁵

¹³ Al-Kafi: section al-Iztirar ila Hujjah, pp. 409-410, H-1.

¹⁴ The noteworthy point in the title of this section is that the need for Hujjah is urgent, and unlike the theological discussions which start talking about the Imam with favor which has a descending relationship with servants, the urgent need for Hujjah which has an ascending relationship with servants can be found in Hadiths. Careful investigation of Hadiths in this section shows that Imam's words confirm his companions' beliefs, and they should talk of their own understanding of this issue. Ahl-ul-Bayt's teachings in this regard indicate Shi'as' ability to defend and elaborate on Imamate as well as to rationally define it.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 411, H-2, p. 462, H-15.

As he pointed out, the Qur'an has some inner aspects and teachings, and lack of knowledge of its interpretation and commentary leads to different and even contradictory understandings. A clear example of these understandings is the issues of determinism and free will, and each opposing stance refers to Qur'anic verses. If we accept that it is the role of Imams to interpret and comment on the Qur'an, their absolute scientific and theological authority in every society and era is proved.

2. Hujjah, the linked guidance

Guidance is the gist and the outcome of efforts by all Imams in leading the society and its members. This goal has its roots in the Qur'anic guidance and is also understood through the intellect. The Qur'an considers God as responsible for guidance.¹⁶ Accordingly, guidance is not a covert issue, but revealed to people along with clear signs.¹⁷ The infallibles' guidance is also adopted from the Qur'an and the divine guidance, complementing this process, manifesting, and perfecting numerous forms of this issue. In a narration, Abu Basir asked Imam Sadiq about the interpretation of verse 7 of the Qur'anic chapter *al-Ra'd*. After conforming "Warner" (*mundhir*) to the Prophet and Guide (*hād*) to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the 6th Imam asked him, "O' Aba Muhammad! Is there a Guide today?"¹⁸ His answer emphasized the continuation of guidance, and he stressed that the Imam is the present manifestation of guidance for mankind. Referring to the hereditary quality of guidance in

¹⁶ Surely Ours is it to guide (Layl/ 12); Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the one who is guided (Araf / 178); Surely the[true] guidance is the guidance of Allah (Ale-Imran / 73).

¹⁷ Qur'anic chapter Baqarah/ 159, Qur'anic chapter Nisa / 115.

¹⁸ The Imam's questioning him is noteworthy.

Imams, the 6th Imam emphasized the eternity of the Qur'an and its verses as well as its existence in all eras.¹⁹

The impact of this guidance is so significant and deep that anyone who troubles himself with worshipping God to a great extent and yet does not accept any Imam as the leader, in the words of Imam Baqir, such a person resembles a sheep without a shepherd which wanders at night – the time when it needs its owner's protection and supervision – which joins other herds, or is hunted by wolves. The man separated from the divine guidance is driven left and right with a gentle breeze and is drowned in the whirlpool of attacks to beliefs.²⁰

The Ahlul Bayt are depicted in hadiths as being guides and signs of the Truth and lights. Using these key words, Kulayni has mentioned six hadiths²¹ in the section: "Surely the Imams are Light of Allah the Glorious, the Majestic" and three hadiths²² in the section "Knowledge of the Imam and Rejection of Him." Imam Sadiq said:

Listening and obeying are the doors to the good; the obedient listener is by no means rebuked, and the sinful listener cannot give any reason for his acts; on the Day of Judgment in which God referred to as "*the day when We will call every people with their Imam,*" the Imam of Muslims will complete the argument on everybody.²³

¹⁹ Al-Kafi, vol. 1, section "surely Imams are guidance," pp. 471-472, H-3.

²⁰ ibid. section "the knowledge of the Imam and rejecting him", pp. 448-449, H-8.

²¹ Al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp. 477-482.

²² ibid. vol. 1, pp. 441-454.

²³ ibid.: the section "obedience to Imams is obligatory", pp. 465, H-17.

The notion that guidance accompanies and is eternally linked to the creation of mankind doubles the significance of this function. If there were only two people on the earth, one would definitely be a divine Hujjah,²⁴ and after the Hujjah of God departs this life, the dwellers of the earth will be sunken into it.²⁵ These are reasons for the divine Sunnah to guide man and to place this guidance in the household of Prophet Muhammad. This guidance has a divine basis and belongs to the servants who have enough capacity to enjoy it and for whom God has ordained good. Thus, the Imams' companions have been forbidden from urging the opponents to accept the Imamate.²⁶

3. Hujjah and controlling the faults

Hujjah is the link between the material world and divine guidance through revelation. Among the Qur'anic functions of this link are education, guidance, and an explanation of Islamic teachings and injunctions. Considering that Prophet Muhammad is the seal of prophethood, these elements have been perfected in him, and the firm and constant connection between the Qur'an and Hujjah necessitates the transfer and continuation of this link in Imamate. According to the Qur'anic verses, following this trend negates the possible incorrect use of the Qur'an and leads to correct

²⁴ Kulayni allocated a section to this topic. (See *ibid.* vol. 1, p. 439).

²⁵ *ibid.* vol. 2, p. 703, H-17.

²⁶ See the section "surely guidance is from God", p. 400, H-1, and p. 404, H-3, p. 405, H-4.

interpretation of its unclear or inexplicit verses (*mutashābihāt*) and immunity from disagreement and error.²⁷

This Qur'anic description can also be found in hadiths. Defining this function of the constant presence of Hujjah among people, Imam Sadiq said:

كَمَا ان زَادَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ شَيْئًا رَدَّاهُمْ، وَإِنْ نَقَصُوا شَيْئًا أَمَّاهُمْ

So that if believers hold onto some additional beliefs, the Imam denies them, and if the believers lack some beliefs, the Imam will provide them with these beliefs.²⁸

This hadith found in the section "Surely the Earth Is Not Left Void of a Hujjah" emphasizes that believers are under constant supervision. According to the verse 6:153, merely by knowing the true path, it is possible to be steadfast in its path and avoid error. Due to the believers' exposure to struggles in the right path and invariant temptations of the falsehood front, they are constantly in danger of making slips and going to extremes in Islamic teachings and obligations. This brief explanation introduces the Imam as Hujjah, with his incessant and nonstop presence on the earth in order to directly train the believers. Like a compassionate mother who accompanies her toddler, the Imam protects believers against being diverted from the path of salvation and helps them reach their purpose, making them accompany the followers of the divine

²⁷ For more information on related Qur'anic verses and an analysis of this relationship see: "Imamate and Seal of Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith", pp. 111-114.

²⁸ al-Kafi, the section "verily the earth is not left void of Hujjah", pp. 433-434, H-2.

revelation. The excerpt from *Ziyarah al-Jamia al-Kabirah* reflects this function in society:

فالراغب عنكم مارق ولازم لكم لاحق²⁹

The one who turns away from you is also separated from Islam, and the one who accompanies you attains the truth.

An example of this function is found in the debate between Hisham ibn Hakam and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd.³⁰ Likening the Imam to the heart, Hisham refers to this function in society and among believers in order to remove doubt. The crucial point is that in this hadith, the primary function of human organs and limbs are not dispensed with; rather, they are only supervised by a careful and deep critique when there is a doubt. Regarding this important function, every individual is personally responsible to know his religion in both saying and action. If there is a doubt or fault, the Imam will lead him to certainty and restore equilibrium in him.

The emphasis on "believers" in this phrase implies the crucial role of this function in the Imam's embarking on constantly monitoring the society and finding out its problems. The basic guidance is clearly distinct from this function. Called the factor that distinguishes truth from the falsehood, this function is implemented in society through the Imam's two qualities, namely knowledge and infallibility. The perpetuation of this controlling tool in society is considered as

²⁹ Tahdhib-ul-Ahkam, vol. 6, p.100; Man la Yahduruhul-Faqih, vol. 2, p. 616.

³⁰ al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp. 413-416, H-3.

divine Sunnah. In addition, it is stressed that this rectifying function works only for the believers.³¹ Abu Basir, a truthful companion, said:

Verily God has not left the earth without a religious scholar because if this were the case, the truth could not be distinguished from the falsehood.³²

This element is the locus of Hisham's discussion with Imam al-Kazim in order to know the successor to Imam Sadiq. According to this account, recounted in numerous sources, including *al-Kafi*, *Basa'ir*, *Irshad*, and *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal*,³³ the prevalence of Fatahiyyah doubt led to various inclinations on the part of some Shi'a and even the chiefs of Imamiyyah sect. This doubt was so extensive that it perplexed well-known people such as Hisham ibn Salim and Mu'min Taq. In three phases of attracting, processing, and consequencing guidance when interacting with Hisham to guide him from confusion to recognition of the rightful Imam, Imam al-Sadiq had a delicate position. Soon flocked to Imam al-Kazim, and only very few did remain loyal to Abdullah.

4. Hujjah: the Manager of Relationships

On the basis of Shi'a beliefs, the main function of Imam is to regulate the society and introduce it as the venue for implementing the religious model of government. In Shi'a culture, Imamate is a divine position, and benefiting from the two powerful wings of

³¹ See *Mir'at-ul-Oqul*, vol. 2, p. 295, Commentary on *Osul al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 479.

³² Commentary on *Osul al-Kafi*: p. 435, H-5.

³³ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, section "What distinguishes between the rightful and the false claimer in Imamate", p. 191, H-7, *Basa'ir-u-Darajat*, p. 251, the section "Imams informed their Shi'a of what was going in their minds and their internal conversations", H-4, *Ikhtiyar al-Ma'rifah a-Rijal*, vol. 2, p. 556, No. 502.

knowledge and infallibility, the Imam guarantees people's interests in all political, economic and social aspects.

The reason why Imamate is more effective than other models of leadership is that in this institution relationships are managed on the basis of the divine model. Ayyub ibn Hurr quoted Imam al-Sadiq as saying:

By God, you act upon the religion of God, His Prophet, and Ali ibn Abi Talib. These [teachings] only result from Prophet's teachings which are safe with us.³⁴

In contrast, the currents derived from Taghut lack such a liberating model. In the first serious criticism of error after the demise of the Prophet, Lady Zahra emphasized this point, implying the divine and theoretical clarification of Imamate. Unlike other currents which had been theorized about after several events, Shi'ism demonstrated that it had based its principles on the divine revelation.

Delineating the philosophy of the religious obligations, Lady Zahra said,

Allah, the Almighty has made faith obligatory so that you are cleansed of polytheism..., so has He made obedience to us obligatory to establish order in the

³⁴This concept received attention in numerous collections of narratives. For example, in Basa'ir-u-Darajat there are sections such as "Imams have the knowledge which is received from Prophet, and they do not speak based on their own ideas" including 14 hadiths and "The Prophet gave Imam Ali the Greater Name of Allah, the Prophetic heritage, and the knowledge heritage on his deathbed" including 4 hadiths emphasize that the Imams' knowledge is connected to divine revelation, inherited and protected. (See Basa'ir-u-Darajat, pp. 229 and 468).

Islamic Ummah. The same applies to Imamate in order to save people from disunity,³⁵ and this is also the case with love for us in order to keep Islam revered.³⁶

Besides other important religious obligations such as faith, prayer, and Hajj, there is an emphasis on obedience, Imamate, and love as three distinct fields in relation to the Ahlul Bayt in this sentence. As the most important legislative principle of Islam, this strand was pursued by Imam al-Rida in the hadith in section *On the Merits of the Imam and His Qualities*.

Among the Shi'a narrations on the Imam's aspects and functions, the above hadith has the most comprehensive authority and covers various dimensions of this realm, including the Imam's status, his relation with the Qur'an and the Prophet, the way to recognize the Imam, and so forth. Elaborating on the Imam's status, Imam al-Rida also said,

Verily Imamate safeguards religion, establishes order in Muslim society, makes believers' world prosperous and themselves honorable.³⁷

The words by Lady Zahra refer to a divine religious obligation on servants in the field of social teachings, resorting to which leads to the establishment of order in society and deliverance from disunity. In Imam al-Rida's hadiths, the reality forms the basis of his word,

³⁵ Allama Majlisi used the word "ل" instead of "امنا". Bihar al-Anwar al-Jami'ah Li Durar A'imah al-Athar, vol 29, p 241.

³⁶ Balaghat-a-Nisa: p.16.

³⁷ Al-Kafi, the section "On Merits of the Imam and his qualities," p. 492.

and there is an emphasis on social outcomes of this institution in his word.

This function is even applied to the link between God and His servants. In one hadith, Imam Sadiq defined the existential scope of the Imam and introduced an act of worship in harmony with the role models chosen by God as the true act of worship. Treading any path other than this clear path is also considered misguidance and diversion from the right path.

Imam Kazim quoted Imam Sadiq as saying, "God the Glorious, the Majestic created and formed us well and has made us the guards of His sky and earth. [In order to attest to our great high status,] a tree started to talk. Thanks to our acts of worship, God the Glorious, the Majestic is worshipped. If it were not for the sake of us, Ahl-ul-Bayt, God would not be worshiped."³⁸

5. Hujjah, the guard of Shi'ism and Shi'a Beliefs

Among the functions of the Imam are to protect the Shi'as and safeguard Shi'a beliefs and the doctrine of Imamate.

Delineating the efforts of the Ahlul Bayt's enemies to rule them out and their adversaries' use of any plot and deceit to distance them from society, Imam Ali pointed to the divine will and ordinance as related to their role in safeguarding the religion, saying, "Allah has willed that we safeguard His religion and off their evil."³⁹

³⁸ ibid. the section "Surely Imams are guardians of His affairs and treasures of His knowledge", p. 476, H-6.

³⁹ Nahj al-Balaghah, letter 9, p. 368.

The institution of Imamate regulates Muslims and religion, and the Imam has been introduced as a guard who is immune from weakness and fear.⁴⁰ In short, the Imam is the guard of God's religion⁴¹ and the guardian of His servants.⁴²

Addressing Yazid ibn Salit, Imam al-Kazim referred to this significant function in Imam al-Rida:

Through him, Allah will prevent from bloodshed,
make peace between people, gather dispersed people,
and fill the gap (i.e., remove innovations in religion as
well as misguidance).⁴³

Imam al-Sadiq's word on Zurarah is the clear example of defense of the Shi'a. This defense was so strong that it led to others' finding fault with this prominent companion. In a word indicating the opposing atmosphere, Imam al-Sadiq stressed that opposition and adversaries would quickly put persecution of whoever was praised by the Ahlul Bayt. In that time, due to opposition to Ahlul Bayt, it was customary to praise those rebuked by the Ahlul Bayt and to rebuke those praised by them.⁴⁴

The Last Word

There are two prerequisites for the fulfillment of these functions in society: one concerns God's servants and the other is related to God Himself.

⁴⁰ Al-Kafi, section "On Merits of the Imam and his qualities," p. 489, H-1.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 503, H-2.

⁴³ *ibid.* vol. 2, section on designation of Imam Rida, p. 78, H-14.

⁴⁴ See *Ikhtiyar al-Ma'rifah a-Rijal*: vol. 1, pp. 138, no. 221.

To benefit from the functions of the Imam in society, God's servants need three elements: 1) submission to the Imam, 2) recognition of him, and 3) knowledge about him. Undoubtedly, the fulfillment of these elements as a cycle is in people's individual and social interests.

According to Imam al-Sadiq, if this cycle lacks perfection, and misguidance and bewilderment are certain to emerge, and on the other hand, the good deed is derived from submission to – and confirmation of – the Imam, this is accepted by God. He also emphasized that God accepts fulfilling conditions and keeping promises.⁴⁵

In the narrations of the section *The divine argument is not complete except through the Imam*,⁴⁶ what stipulated in the phrase “حتى يعرف” is regarded as the condition for fulfillment of divine Hujjah for people. On the possible interpretation of this phrase, Allamah Majlisi wrote,

It is possible to regard “حتى يعرف” as an active voice; meaning until people know what they need. This way our claim is proved. Another possibility is to consider it as a passive voice with an accent (*shiddah*) or without. This way, the verb refers to God, religion, or the truth ... The same possibility applies to some copies in which there is *hayy* meaning alive instead of *hattā* meaning unless or until, but the verb refers to the Imam.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Al-Kafi, vol. 1, the section “Knowledge of the Imam and rejection of him”, p. 445, H-6.

⁴⁶ باب ان الحججه لاتقوم لله على خلقه الا بامام

⁴⁷ Mir'at-ul-Oqul, vol. 2, p. 293.

As mentioned above, every Imam, including the prominent companions, used to introduce the next Imam who was not responsible for introducing himself.

The intensity of the above-mentioned functions in the presence of the Imam or during his occultation is an important issue worthy of investigation. The mechanism of each function differs from the period of Imam's presence to his occultation; however, their basis is the same. No doubt, these two characteristics, namely being the means of divine bounty and spiritual guidance go beyond time and place by their very nature. However, controlling faults, managing social relationships, and safeguarding Shi'as and their beliefs are issues that depend on the direct, immediate presence of the Imam in society. Although instances of these functions can be reported, the complete fulfilment of these functions is contingent upon presence of the Imam and is considered a great divine blessing on His servants.

Conclusion

The mechanism of administering society is rooted in its intellectual and educational elevation. The need for Hujjah and his interpretative role in understanding the Qur'an is also an undeniable element that leads society to accept and follow the Imam. Guidance and its related terms in the Qur'an and hadith firstly are attributed to God and then to the prophets and their successors. The impact of the Imam's guidance on our lives is direct and deep in individual and social life. Establishing order in society and introducing a criterion for relationships among rulers and society are other functions of this institution that are to guarantee people's real

interests which are tainted with carnal desires in the alternative versions to Imamate. The great impact of Imamate and its central element, the Imam, is portrayed in how he rectifies the relationship between a servant and his Lord as the underlying building block of society. Safeguarding God's religion, protecting its realm, and preventing disagreements and disunity among Shi'a all imply the comprehensive functions of this institution.

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UNCLEAR (*MUTASHABIH*) VERSES
ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF LADY
FATIMA AL-ZAHRA¹

SAYYID JAWAD HUSSAINI
TRANSLATED BY MAHBOOBEH MORSHEDIAN

ABSTRACT: One of the mandatory and sometimes recommended actions in Islam is writing a will – where a person puts forth a legal document expressing a number of purposes – how his or her property is to be distributed, for socio-political reasons, offering moral recommendations and advice for others to heed, especially for the testator’s beloved ones. Historically, religious leaders have left their wills; Prophet Muhammad wrote his for his Ahlul Bayt, and Imam Ali left his for his son, Imam al-Hasan. Lady Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet, renowned for her flawless character and well-educated on Qur’anic instructions, also left a will for generations to come. This article examines the personal requests and counsel in her will, and offers an analysis of the events that revolved around socio-political issues.

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Introduction

Among the obligatory and sometimes recommended and desirable actions is to write a will. Throughout history, religious leaders have left their wills. For example, Prophet Muhammad wrote his will for Imam Ali, Lady Zahra, his companions, and his Ummah. Imam Ali left his will – found in *Nahj ul-Balaghah* – to his children, his Shi'a, and to whomever seeks to benefit from it. The wills of Imam Hassan, Imam Husayn, and a few other Imams are also available.

Sometimes wills are personal for the purpose of giving beneficial advice and moral lessons to others, and the testator wants his inheritors to perform their obligations, good actions, and/or pay his debts on his behalf. The testator may also give extra advice to his offspring, relatives, and followers. A will may also have political and social aspects, for example, Imam Husayn's will to his brother, Muhammad Hanafiyyah, in which he referred to objectives of his uprising as the reform of the Islamic Ummah, enjoining the good, forbidding evil, and the revival of his grandfather and father's conduct; or Imam Khomeini's politico-religious will written a few decades ago.

As Lady Zahra was trained in the house of revelation and was familiar with Qur'anic instructions profoundly, she also wrote a will, divided into three parts:

- A) Her personal will and her request to do good deeds on her behalf.
- B) Her will regarding her offspring and others.
- C) Her socio-political will.

A. Her personal will

1. Her call for recitation of the Qur'an and supplication on the first night after her burial.

Indeed, the first night after one's death when being transferred from this world to the realm of the grave and Barzakh is a very crucial night. A person is transferred from a world where good deeds can be performed to a world where he or she is unable to do so. Upon entering Barzakh, a person is alone with his or her deeds in the heaven or hell of Barzakh, and it is only the good deeds of relatives and inheritors that can add to the deceased's good deeds, alleviate her fear, and increase her joy.

Lady Zahra, who was infallible and whose soul was not contaminated with any sins, beseechingly asked Imam Ali to stay by her grave and recite the Qur'an and pray for her that first night. Indeed, where Lady Zahra with numerous acts of worship and good deeds considered herself needy and helpless, how are we—thoroughly sinful— not destitute of everything? During her moments of death, Lady Zahra made a will, telling Imam Ali:

When I die, perform my funeral ghusl, enshroud me, perform funeral prayer on me, place me in the grave, put the *lahad* stone on me, throw soil on it, and flatten it. Then sit beside my grave facing me, recite the Qur'an a lot and pray [for me] because at this

moment the dead one needs to company of the alive. I
entrust you to God, the Almighty.²

2. A reminder

A right of the dead is that their relatives do not forget them by performing good deeds and giving charities and alms on her behalf. For example, regarding doing good to parents after their death, the Prophet was asked: “Yes, [performing] prayer for them, seeking God’s forgiveness for them, fulfilling their commitments, visiting those who become your blood kin through your parents, and respecting your parents’ friends.”³ Also, Imam Baqir said,

A servant of Allah may do good to his parents when they are alive, but after their death he does not pay their debts and does not seek Allah’s forgiveness for them, so Allah considers him disowned by his parents. Likewise, somebody may be disowned by his parents during their lifetime, not doing good to them then, but after their death he pays their debts and seeks Allah’s forgiveness for them, so Allah considers him righteous.⁴

² *Bihar-al-Anwar*, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Beirut, Dar-ul-Ihya a-Turath al-Arabi, vol. 79, p.27.

إذا أنا ميت فتقول أنت غسلي و جهنزي و صلي علي و أنزلني قبري و الجدي و سو الثراب علي
و اجلس عند رأسي قبالة وجهي فأكثر من تلاوه والدعاء فإنها ساعة يحتاج الميت فيها إلى أس
الأحياء و أنا أستودعك الله تعالى

³ *Mustadrak-ul-Wasa'il*, Mirza Hussain Noori, Al-al-Bait, Qum, 1408 A.H., vol. 2, p. 114, section 2.

نعم ، الصلاة عليهما ، والاستغفار لهما ، وإنفاذ عهدهما من بعدهما ، وإكرام صديقيهما ، وصلة
الرحم التي لا رحم لك إلا من قبلهما ، فهذا الذي بقي عليك

⁴ Kulaini, researched by Ali Akbar Ghaffari, Dar-e Sa'b and Dar-a-Ta'aruf, Beirut, the fourth edition, 1401 A.H., vol. 2, p. 159, no. 9, p. 348, no. 1:

According to Shaikh Abbas Qummi, Imam Sadiq used to perform a two-Rak'at prayer for his children at nights and for his parents on days, reciting the chapter *al-Qadr* in the first Rak'at and the chapter *al-Kawthar* in the second Rak'at.⁵

Considering that the dead one is unable to do any good deed, though the living ones can do so on his behalf to benefit him, Lady Zahra enjoined Imam Ali not to forget her:

O' Abal-Hasan! My life is going to end in just a few seconds, and it is the time of leave-taking. Listen to me because you will never hear the voice of Fatimah anymore. O' Abal-Hassan! I want you not to forget me [and to do good deeds on my behalf].⁶

3. Visiting their graves is recommended.

Another recommended act regarding the dead, particularly the prophets, imams, and the Awliya' (friends of God) is to visit their graves. There are many narrations on visiting the graves and its impacts in both Shi'a and Sunni sources. In what follows, a few examples are referred to:

إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ لَيَكُونُ بَارًا بِوَالِدَيْهِ فِي حَيَاتِهِمَا، ثُمَّ يَمُوتَانِ فَلَا يَقْضِي عَنْهُمَا دُيُونَهُمَا وَلَا يَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُمَا
فَيَكْتُبُهُ اللَّهُ عَاقًا. وَاتَّهَ لَيَكُونُ عَاقًا لَهُمَا فِي حَيَاتِهِمَا غَيْرَ بَارٍ بِهِمَا، فَإِذَا مَاتَا قَضَىٰ ذُنُوبَهُمَا وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمَا
فَيَكْتُبُهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ بَارًا

⁵ *Manazil-al-Akhirah*, Sahikh Abbas Qummi, Islamiyyah bookstore, no date, p.32; *Kowkab a-Durri*, vol. 1, p. 253; *Zuhra-a-Riyadh*, recounted from Fatimah Zahra encyclopedia; *Nahj-al-Hayat*, Muhammad Dashti, Mashhur Publications, Qum, the first edition, 1380 solar, p. 229.

⁶ *Zuhra-a-Riyadh*, Kowkab a-Durri, no publications, no date, vol. 1, p. 253.

يَا أَبَا الْخَسَنِ لَمْ يَبْقَ لِي إِلَّا رَمَقٌ مِنَ الْخِيَاهِ وَ حَانَ زَمَانُ الرَّجُلِ وَالْوَدَاعَ فَاسْتَمِعْ كَلَامِي فَإِنَّكَ لَا
تَسْمَعُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ صَوْتَ فَاطِمَةَ ابْنَتِي، يَا أَبَا الْخَسَنِ أَنْ لَا تُنْسَانِي

1. Ibn Majah quoted Prophet Muhammad as saying, “I had forbidden you from visiting the graves before, but right now I say: Visit the graves because this leads to asceticism and remembrance of the hereafter.”⁷

The reason for the beginning sentence of the hadith referring to the Prophet’s forbidding visiting the graves may be that:

- a) It was forged because it cannot be found in Shi’a sources.
- b) During the early prophetic mission, people had just distanced themselves from idol-worship and were forbidden from visiting the graves temporarily so that idol-worship might not emerge again in another form. However, later when people had forgotten idol-worship completely, the Prophet emphasized visiting the graves.

2. Kulayni reported from Imam Sadiq who quoted Imam Ali as saying, “Visit the departed; indeed, they become delighted by your visit. And you should pray to Allah, making your request to Him at your parents’ graves.”⁸

Taking her father and Imam Ali’s words into account and having deep awareness of the doctrine of revelation, Lady Zahra emphatically enjoined all to visit her grave frequently so that both she would be elevated to a higher spiritual rank, and it would have

⁷ *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Dar-al-Fikr, Beirut, the first edition, p. 501, no.1571; *Jami a-Saqir*, Soyuti, Beirut, Dar-al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1401 A.H., vol. 2, p.279, no.6430; *Kanz-ul-Ummal*, Muttaqi Hindi, Beirut, a-Risalah Publications, vol. 15, no 42555.

كُنْتُ نَبِيَّتُكُمْ عَنْ زِيَارَةِ الْقُبُورِ ، أَلَا فَرُّوْهُهَا ، فَلَيْسَ تَذَكُّرُ الْآخِرَةِ

⁸ *Kafi*, ibid, vol. 3, p.229, no. 1; *Wasa'il-a-Shi'a*, Hurr Amili, Ahlu Bayt, Qum, 1412 A.H., vol. 3, p.233, section 54, in the sections on burial, no. 5.

زُورُوا مَوْتَانَا فَمِنْهُمْ يَفْرَحُونَ بِزِيَارَتِكُمْ ، وَ لِيُطْلَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ حَاجَتُهُ عِنْدَ قَبْرِ أَبِيهِ وَ عِنْدَ قَبْرِ أُمِّهِ بِمَا يَدْعُو لَهُمَا

profound impacts on the visitors to her grave. Hence her request, “O’ Abal-Hassan! I want you not to forget me and always visit me after my death.”⁹

4. Only Imam Ali and Asma’ should perform her ghusl.

Lady Zahra strongly emphasised that Imam Ali perform her Ghusl and shrouding with the help of Asma: “O’ Asma’! When I pass away, you and Ali ibn Abi-Talib perform my ghusl and do not allow anybody to enter my house while my body is still in it.”¹⁰

B. Her wills about her offspring and others

1. Her offspring

An affectionate and exemplary mother is not inattentive to or ignorant of her children, and Lady Zahra was the kindest mother to her children. Whenever Imam Hassan and Imam Husayn gave their *salam* (greetings of peace) to her, in response she affectionately and whole-heartedly said, “Greetings to you, O’ the apple of my eyes!”¹¹

It is not possible that such a mother does not advise about her children. Thus, one sentence of her will reads as follows: “I entrust you to Allah and recommend that you do good to my children.”¹²

⁹ *Nahj-ul-Hayat*, encyclopedia of Fatimah Zahra’s words, p.229.

أوصيك يا أبا الحسن أن لا تنساني و تزورني بعد مماتي

¹⁰ *al-Isti’ab, ibn Abd-al-Birr*, Dar al-Jibal, Beirut, 1412 A.H., vol.4, p. 1897; *al-Sunan-al-Kubra*, vol. 3, p.396; *Awn-al-Ma’bud*, Adim-Abadi, Dar-ul-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1415 A.H., vol. 8, p. 337.

يا أسماء إذا مت فاعبيليني أنت و علي بن أبي طالب (ع) و لا تدخلي علي أخداً

¹¹ Addendum to *Mafatih-al-Jinan*, Hadith al-Kisa.

عليك السلام يا فرة عيني و ثمرة فؤادي

¹² *Bihar-al-Anwar*, ibid, vol.43, p.217; *Ilalu-Sharayi*, vol.1, p.188.

Elsewhere, she addressed Imam Ali, saying:

“O’ the company of Batul [a name of Lay Zahra]! I enjoin you to do good to my children; Who are accustomed to [my] eagerness and affection. Those separated will start a day while they are perplexed orphans, wandering; They choose Allah [over anybody else]; that day is the time of separation.”¹³

2. Her advice about Imam Husayn

In addition to her general advice about her children, Lady Zahra gave advice about Imam Husayn because she knew about his martyrdom. In a poem, she gave this news as follows:

My children spent last night hungry;
The youngest will be killed in a battlefield;
In Karbala, he will be martyred through deceit and guile;
Woe to his killers! And painful punishment, abasement and degradation be upon them!
Those who will enter the lowest ranks of Hell by this crime;
And their downfall and abasement will increase constantly.¹⁴

Thus, addressing Imam Ali, she advised about Imam Husayn as follows:

O’ the best guide! If you want to weep, weep for me;
And shed tears because today is the time of separation;

أَسْتَوْدِعُكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى وَأَوْصِيكَ فِي وَلَدِي خَيْرًا

¹³ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol. 43, pp. 174, 178.

¹⁴ يا قرين البتول اوصيك باللسل- فقد اصبحا حليف اشتياق- فارقوا فاصبحوا يتامى حيارى- يخلف الله فهو يوم الفراق
Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.35, p.239, on the revelation of the Qur’anic chapter a-Dahr, section 6.
امسوا جيعا و هم اشبالى -اصغرهم يقتل فى القتال -بكرلاء يقتل باغتتيال -لقاتليه الويل مع
وبال -يهوى به النار الى سفال -كبوله زادت على الاكبال

Weep for me and my orphans; And do not forget the one who will be killed out of hostility in Iraq (i.e., Imam Husayn).¹⁵

Shedding tears on Imam Husayn is an issue which the Prophet and Imams recommended strongly, and it needs to be dealt with in another discussion. Regarding this recommendation, Imam Rida is said, "O' Ibn Shabib! If you want to weep for something, shed tears for Husayn because he was beheaded as a sheep is."¹⁶

3. Her greetings to all of her offspring (*Sadats*)

The affection of Lady Fatima, the exemplary mother, does not limit to her immediate children or at most to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She is the Prophet's *Kawthar*, and *Sayyids*, an honorific title denoted to the Prophet's descendants, are her progeny. Lady Zahra sent her regards to all her offspring who would be born from then on to the Day of Judgment. And in her will, she gave her special Salam to them:

"O' Ali! I am Fatimah...Give my regards to all my offspring who will be born from now on to the Day of Judgment."¹⁷

4. Enjoining Imam Ali to marry Amamah after her demise

¹⁵ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol. 43 , pp. 174, 178.

ابكى ان بكيت يا خير هادٍ- واسيل الدمع فهو يوم الفراق- ابكى وابكى لليتامى
ولاتنس قتيلا العدا بطف العراق

¹⁶ *Wasa'il a-Shi'a*, vol.14, p.502.

يا ابن شبيب ان كنت بايها لشيء فابك للحسين بن علي، فانه ذبح كما يذبح الكباش

¹⁷ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, p.214; *Wasa'il a-Shi'a*, vol.13, p.311; *Dala'il al-A'immah*, p.42.

يا علي انا فاطمةاستودعك الله و اقراء علي ولدي السلام الى يوم القيامة

A reasonable woman eliminates her jealousy and takes the family's interests into account. She takes into consideration that a man needs to marry after the demise of his wife given that this is a necessity of life. It may occur that some men do not dare to remarry after their wife's death due to their children's sensitivity or their wife's advice. Adopting the motto "We cannot tolerate anybody replacing our mother," they deprive their father of this blessing, causing him to face an array of challenges. Similarly, a woman does not dare to remarry after her husband's death.

But Lady Zahra, a pure and far-sighted infallible was exempt from inadvisable conventional limitations. She explicitly talked of Imam Ali's remarriage after her demise and its necessity:

O' Prophet's cousin! May Allah give you a good reward! I enjoin you to remarry because men need to marry. After my death, get married to my sister's daughter, Amamah, because she is as kind to my children as I am.¹⁸

C. Her political and social will

Lady Zahra considered an array of socio-political issues, the main issue being lack of regard for Imam Ali and lack of recognition for his right as the successor of the Prophet.

¹⁸ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, pp. 191, 217; *Ilalu-Sharayi'*, vol.1, p. 188.

جَزَاكَ اللَّهُ عَنِّي خَيْرَ الْجَزَاءِ نَائِنَ عَمَّ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أَوْصِيكَ أَوَّلًا أَنْ تَتَزَوَّجَ بَعْدِي بِابْنَتِهِ أُخْتِي أَمَامَةَ
فَلَيْتَهَا تَكُونُ لَوَلِيِّي وَمِثْلِي فَلَنْ الرِّجَالُ لَا يَنْدُ لَهُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ

1. Her burial was in secret.

She strongly advised that her ghusl, shrouding, and burial be hidden and nobody but a few particular people be informed of it. She tells Imam Ali:

1. "I want nobody but you to perform my ghusl and shrouding. When I pass away, bury me at night and do not inform anybody of my death."¹⁹
2. "Perform the funeral prayer on me, bury me at night, and do not inform anybody."²⁰
3. "When I die, do not inform anybody of my death, and do not show my grave to anybody [so that it remains hidden]."²¹

2. Some were not allowed to attend her burial.

In order to have usurpers and oppressors disgraced and to show her disapproval of them, she wanted Imam Ali not to permit her oppressive enemies to attend her burial:

I want none of those who oppressed me and usurped my rights to attend my burial because they are enemies of mine and the Prophet. Do not permit any of them or their followers to recite the funeral prayer on me. Bury me at night when everybody is asleep.²²

¹⁹ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, p. 159, vol.78, p.255; *Kashf-ul-Qummah*, vol. 2, p.68.

²⁰ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, p. 214; *Wasa'il-a-Shi'a*, vol.13, p.311; *Dala'il al-A'immah*, p.42.

²¹ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.78, p. 310; *Dala'il al-A'immah*, p.44; *Sahih Bukhari*, vol.5, p. 139.

²² *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, p.209; *Ilalu-Sharayi'*, vol.1, p.188; *Ihtijaj Tabarsi*, p.59.

3. Some were not supposed to be informed and recite the funeral prayer on her body.

In order to provide a clear historical account, Lady Zahra sometimes had to explicitly name these oppressors who were not supposed to be informed of her burial or to attend it, "When I die, bury me at night and do not inform Abu-Bakr and 'Umar. By Prophet Muhammad, do not allow them to perform funeral prayer on me."²³

4. Only specific people were permitted to attend her burial.

In another part of her will, she specifically referred to those who were entitled to attend her burial. She also commanded that her death was not announced publicly, and her grave had to be hidden. According to Imam Sadiq, Lady Zahra addressed Imam Ali, saying in the last moments of her life:

When I die, inform nobody but Umm Salamah, Umm Ayman, Fiddah [from among people], and from among men my two sons [Imam Hassan and Imam Husayn], Abbas, Salman, Ammar, Miqdad, Aba Dharr, and Hudhayfah. Bury me at night and do not show my grave to anybody [so that it remains hidden].²⁴

أوصيك أن لا يشهد أحد جنازتي من هؤلاء الذين ظلموني وأخذوا حتى قلوبهم غدوى و غدو رسول الله ولا تترك أن يصلي على أحد منهم ولا من أتباعهم وأدفعني في الليل إذا هدأت العيون و نامت الأبصار

²³ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.43, p. 159, vol.78, p.255; *Kashf-ul-Qummah*, vol. 2, p.68.

و إذا أنا ميت فادفني ليلاً و لا تؤذنن بي أحداً، و لا تؤذنن بي أبابكر و عمر و بحق محمدي رسول الله(ص) أن لا يصلي على أبوبكر و لا عمر؛

²⁴ *Bihar-al-Anwar*, vol.78, p.310.

Indeed, through her will, Lady Zahra planted two questions in the minds of those who visited Medina: Why was she buried at night and why is her grave hidden?

Her written will

In the name of Allah. This is the will of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. I make a will while I testify that there is no god but Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. Heaven and Hell are certain to exist, and no doubt the Day of Judgment will occur. Allah will revive the dead [and will make them enter gathering the plane of Resurrection. O' Ali! I am Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, Messenger of Allah. He gave my hand to you in marriage so that I am yours in both this world and the hereafter. You are more deserving of me than others. At night perform my Ghusl and shrouding, say funeral prayer on me, and bury me. Do not inform anybody of my demise. I entrust you to Allah. Give my Salam to my all offspring who will be born until the Day of Judgment.²⁵

إِذَا تَوَفَّيْتُ لَا تُعَلِّمُ إِلَّا أُمَّ سَلَمَةَ وَ أُمَّ أَيْمَنَ وَ فِصَّةَ وَ مِنْ الرِّجَالِ أَبْنَى وَ الْعَبَّاسَ وَ سَلْمَانَ وَ عَمَّاراً وَ الْمُثَدَّادَ وَ أَبَا ذَرٍّ وَ حَذِيقَةَ وَ لَا تُدْفِنِي إِلَّا لَيْلًا وَ لَا تُعَلِّمُ قَبْرِي أَحَدًا

²⁵ ibid., vol. 43, p.214; *Wasa'il-a-Shi'a*, ibid., vol. 13, p.311; *Dala'il al-A'immah*, p.42.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. هَذَا مَا أَوْصَتْ بِهِ فَاطِمَةُ بِنْتُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ، أَوْصَتْ وَ هِيَ تَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَ رَسُولُهُ وَ أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ حَقٌّ وَ النَّارَ حَقٌّ وَ أَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ، يَا عَلِيُّ أَنَا فَاطِمَةُ بِنْتُ مُحَمَّدٍ (ص) زَوْجَتِي اللَّهُ مَنَّكَ لَأَكُونَ لَكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ الْآخِرَةِ، أَنْتَ أَوَّلِي مِنْ عَتَرِي، حَظَّنِي وَ غَشَّيْنِي وَ كَفَّنِي بِاللَّيْلِ وَ صَلِّ عَلَيَّ وَ ادْفِنِي بِاللَّيْلِ وَ لَا تُعَلِّمُ أَحَدًا وَ اسْتَزِدْكَ اللَّهُ وَ اقْرَأْ عَلَيَّ وَ لِي السَّلَامُ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

Two important points indicated in her will:

1. She acknowledged the main principles of core Islamic beliefs, namely Unity of God, prophethood of Prophet Muhammad, and the Day of Judgment.
2. She pointed out that she was the only match for Imam Ali in both this world and the hereafter.
3. She assigned Imam Ali the task of her ghusl, shrouding and embalmment.
4. She wanted her burial to be hidden so that usurpers and oppressors would not attend it.
5. She conveyed her *salam* to all her offspring from then to the Day of Judgment.

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN ISLAM, PART III¹

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI

ABSTRACT: It is crucial for a community to have a shared identity and to work towards a joint cause. Regardless of whether it is on a worldwide or lesser scale, establishing a community is currently becoming more crucial, and successful community involves specific requirements and qualities. This series of papers studies the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to implement it. Prioritized qualities such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, unity, persistence, moderation, humbleness, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter were expounded on. This part further builds upon the concept of truthfulness in Islamic theology and its moral system; of Allah as the true being, revelation as the truth, the prophets' mission to serve the truth, and the importance of communities striving to become truthful.

¹ This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

Thus far we have listed some of the major characteristics of an Islamic Community, a community which is pleasing to Allah (swt), such as being balanced and moderate, calling towards good and in particular enjoining good and prohibiting bad. In what follows, we will refer to some other characteristics of an Islamic community.

Commitment to the truth

This is an immensely important quality both for individuals and for communities. The subject of truth is so important from the Qur'anic perspective that firstly we will expand on it a little and then focus on the role of truth in the community.

One of the notions on which great emphasis has been put in the Qur'an is the notion of truth and the True (*al-Haqq*).

Qur'an describes Allah as the True

In the Qur'an, Allah describes Himself as being 'the True' or the 'the Truth' (*al-haqq*). The Qur'an tells us that the reason why God should be followed, worshipped and obeyed is that '*Allah is the True*.' Thus, we can understand that for Allah, to be *the True* is more important than to be, for example, *Self-Sufficient*, *Self-Existent*, etc. For example, the verse 22:62 reads as follows:

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ
اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ

That is because Allah is the True, and what they invoke besides Him is nullity, and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great.

Indeed, this is a sound argument for the necessity of worshipping Allah and not worshipping idols and false gods. Allah says that the reason for asking us to worship Him only is because He is *al-Haqq*, *the True* and *the Real*; and what they call on other than Him is false. The major deciding factor is whether something is true or false and so we worship Allah and follow Him because He is *the True*. Two verses that expand on the meaning of being true are as follows:

1. The chapter *al-Hajj*, verse 6, Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

That is because Allah is the True and it is He Who revives the dead and He has power over all things.

2. The chapter *Yunus*, verse 32:

فَذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ الْحَقُّ فَإِذَا بَعَدَ الْحَقُّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ فَأَنَّى تُصْرَفُونَ

That, then, is Allah, your true Lord. So what is there after the truth except error? Then where are you being led away?

Allah is the True and real basis of everything

So Allah is *al-Haqq*, the True and the Real. However, we may say that we are also true and real and that everything which exists is also true and real. For example, we could say that everyone and everything we know and everything in this world is *haqq*. For example, in Ziyarah Ale Yaseen we read “Heaven is true, hell is true, reward and punishment are true.” So if these are also true, then what is the difference between them and Allah being True? The difference is clear. There are uncountable real things that are all created. Allah is *al-Haqq* in the sense that not only is He True and

Real but He is also the Source and the Origin of everything else that is true and real. So '*al-Haqq*' means the 'True One' Who is the Origin and the Source of everything else.²

Allah alone is the True

Allah alone is *al-Haqq*; we cannot say 'I am *al-haqq*' or 'you are *al-haqq*.' Of course, some mystics like Hallāj said: 'ana al haqq' (انا الحق). Although they meant something else e.g. being a manifestation of God Which is *al-Haqq*, personally I think we should refrain from calling anyone '*al haqq*,' since this might be misleading. It is only Allah Who in reality is the One who is absolutely True in the fullest sense of this concept. Everything else in existence, including ourselves, are only true as far as we are related to Allah. This is similar to the concept of light. Allah is al-Noor, the real and original Light and the basis of every light such that every other light that is not Allah comes from Him.³

The truth observed in the creation of the world

The creation of the world also takes place observing the Truth. For example, out of many verses dealing with this subject, in Surah An'am, verse 73, Allah says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ

² In Islamic terminology we find something similar to this when, if we want to reach the core and the depth of an idea, we say that we want to reach the *hāqq*, meaning the foundation and the very real basis of the thing.

³ For further explanation, one may refer to the paper: "The Supreme Light and Created Lights: A Qur'anic Perspective" in *Message of Thaqalayn*, vol. 14, no 4.

It is He Who created the heavens and the earth with the truth...

Allah has created the heavens and the earth with Truth, truthfully, or observing the Truth. There is no falsity in the creation of the skies and of the earth.

Revelation, divine books, and prophets are true

Revelation

For example, in Surah Baqarah, verse 147, Allah says:

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

This is the truth from your Lord; so do not be among the sceptics.

Similarly, in Surah Ale Imran, verse 60, we read:

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be among the sceptics.

Thus the Truth *comes from* our Lord, or the Truth *is* from our Lord, so we should not have doubts and should not be one of those who doubt. What is this Truth that has come from our Lord? It is the Revelation, the Message, and because it comes from Allah it is True.

Then again in verse 62 of the same Surah we read:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

This is indeed the true account, for sure. There is no god but Allah, and indeed Allah is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

The Qur'an

This idea is expounded upon in the Qur'an, and in particular regarding its own revelation, the carrying of the Revelation by Angel Gabriel, and the reception of the Revelation by Prophet Muhammad, describing them as all true and truthful. For example, Allah says in Surah Israa, verse 105:

وَيَا حَقِّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ وَيَا حَقِّ نَزَّلَ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا

With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend, and We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and as a warner.

Thus, since the Qur'an comes from Allah, and when it is issued by and originates from Allah then it is complete Truth, containing no falsity (*bātil*) because it is initiated by Allah.

The Prophet

So when it reaches the Prophet it is still pure and true because Gabriel does not do any mischief nor does he make any mistake in between the truth being issued by Allah and received by the Prophet. So everything comes down in a pure and truthful form: “*With the truth did We send it down and with the truth did it descend...* (17:105).”

Often it happens that a person sends a message and on the way the message is lost or distorted so that even if and when people receive the message it differs from the original. However, this is certainly not the case with Allah. When Allah sends a message, the message is also received with purity and truthfully.

In Surah Nahl, verse 102, Allah says:

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُدًى
وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

*Say, the Spirit has brought it down duly from your
Lord.....*

So Allah sent down the Qur'an, Gabriel brought it down and the Prophet received it, all these things being done truthfully. Furthermore, in verses 41: 41 and 42, Allah says:

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ
تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

*Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot
approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a
[gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise,
all-laudable.*

Mission of Prophet to serve the Truth

In the Qur'an, Allah talks about the mission of the Prophet. What was that mission? We find that the mission of the Prophet was again to serve the truth.

In Surah al-Baqarah, verse 119, we read:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ

Indeed We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and you will not be questioned concerning the inmates of hell.

Thus, Allah explains that He has commissioned, dispatched, and sent the Prophet to give good tidings and warnings and has reassured him that he is not responsible for the dwellers of Hell who will bear the consequences of their own deeds. The Prophet then conveyed and delivered the message of Allah truthfully, without adding or hiding a single word to the message.

Furthermore, in Surah Haqqah, verses 44 to 46 Allah says: “*Had he faked any sayings in Our Name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta.*”

Though the verse is specifically regarding the Prophet, it is indeed a warning to us; certainly the Prophet did not do this. This must be a warning to all of us; if the Prophet had fabricated something from himself, adding or deleting a few words and attributing that to Allah, then Allah would have seized him by force and cut the artery of his heart. From this we understand that He would have destroyed him. Thus it is certain that not a single word was added by the Prophet, nor was it hidden by him.

Implementation of the divine message in a truthful manner

Implementation of the Qur'an in particular, or of the divine message in general, must be done in a truthful manner. In Surah Saad, verse 26, we find the example of David, a prophet who was then raised to the level of being the vicegerent of Allah (*khalifatullah*):

O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between people with justice and do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of Allah...

Allah is telling Prophet David that He has appointed him a vicegerent, a deputy-like guardian on the earth. Prophet David is then advised to judge and rule truthfully amongst the people and avoid following his lower desires, lusts and appetites because as this would lead him away from the path of Allah. So he must endeavour to discover who is in the right; that is, whose claim is justified and whose claim is not. Thus we must not be biased and consider the claims of the people in our favour to be right because of our love for them whether they be brothers, friends, relatives, or people of same city or country. The only criterion that must be observed is the truth. Follow our desires and feelings will mislead us, taking us far from the path of Allah. We should also take care to hear both sides of a story, to gather evidence from all parties in a dispute so that we can judge truthfully in full knowledge of the facts.

This contrast between observing the truth and following one's desires is of utmost importance. The history of mankind is a history of conflict between the truth and peoples' desires, whereby either people have been following and observing the truth, and humbled when confronting it, or they were following their personal desires.

Disregarding the truth leads to destruction of creation

In Surah Mu'minoon, verse 71, Allah states an important principle that could have far-reaching and devastating consequences:

وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ

Had the Truth followed their desires, the heavens and the earth would have surely fallen apart (along) with those who are in them.

Allah says that the whole creation – the heavens, earth, and whoever lives in them – would be damaged and corrupted if the Truth were to depend on people's desires. If it were the case that in reality there was no absolute Truth and people's desires became the only criteria, then the entire creation would be destroyed.

This is why we mentioned that the whole of history is the history of the conflict between the Truth on the one hand and the desires, lusts, and appetites of people on the other. The history of mankind is nothing other than this, whether it be in personal, social, national, or international sphere.

Individuals and communities must strive to be truthful

If Allah is indeed the True, the Book was revealed truthfully, the Prophet delivered the message truthfully, his words and actions was in compliance with the Truth, and every judgement is to be made observing the Truth, what should we do as individuals and as communities?

We are to try our utmost to be truthful – to observe and commit ourselves to the Truth, which is not merely telling the truth. That is only one aspect of it. Truthfulness must become a quality of the heart and soul, rather than mere truthfulness as a quality of our speech.

What is a true or false statement? According to the commonly held view called the correspondence theory, this means that either the

statement corresponds to an independent reality which exists outside the statement or it does not correspond. So, for example, if someone says that the weather is presently warm, the truth of that statement depends on a reality which is independent from the statement; therefore, we can compare what has been said with that independent reality to see whether it corresponds to that reality or not. If the statement corresponds to the independent reality, it is true. If not, it is false.

However, relatively speaking, this kind of truthfulness is very trivial. Being truthful in every sense of the word is actually much more than this. It is quite possible that sometimes people make a true statement but in fact they are still liars. The Qur'an gives an example of this when Allah talks about the hypocrites (*munafiqeen*):

When the hypocrites come to you they say, 'We bear witness that you are indeed the apostle of God.' God knows that you are indeed His Apostle, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars. (63:1)

When the hypocrites visited the Prophet, they told him that they bore witness that he was sent by Allah as the Apostle of Allah. But then Allah says: *"And surely Allah knows that you are His Apostle. But Allah bears witness that these people are liars."* Allah called them liars because although what they said was indeed true, they did not actually believe in what they were saying as they did not say it with honesty.

Thus, sometimes truth or truthfulness is the quality of the statement and sometimes it is the quality of the speaker. If we say something we believe, the statement may be correct although we are not being

honest because we are deceiving others by telling them something we do not accept. This is not honesty because true honesty is to say what we actually believe and to say what we ourselves accept.

Therefore, truthfulness is not only about factual statements about, for example, the weather, the natural world, or about what others have said and done. It also concerns the advice that we give people and the way we preach. It is a true statement when we say it is good to be humble; however, if we do not believe that being humble is good, then we are not being honest, and even if we believe so without practise, then we are not being honest. Truthfulness is not a matter of making true statements or a matter of saying what we believe; it is most importantly a matter of saying what we ourselves are whole-heartedly and sincerely committed to. As the English saying goes: "Practise what you preach".

Examples of the most truthful people

Thus an honest person is not only someone who does not lie; his words, beliefs, and actions all confirm and conform to the truth, called 'siddeeq' or 'most truthful' in Qur'anic terminology, and is deeper than 'sadiq' or 'truthful'. It is such a high position that Allah praises Prophet Abraham for being 'Siddeeq' and both Lady Fatimah and Lady Mary as 'Siddeeqah', because everything that they believe, say, or do, is in compliance with the Truth. There is not an instance when they say something and act differently to their statements. Neither will they say something whilst in actual fact they believe something else. Indeed these people would not even say they intended to do something while intending something else but were prevented by circumstances from carrying out their intended action.

Their entire reality, soul, and spirit is in compliance with – and committed to – the Truth.

Why be entirely committed and in compliance with Truth?

We should be entirely committed and in compliance with the Truth because Truth is nothing other than Allah, and all that is created or legislated by Him. So anything True is either created by Allah or legislated by Him. True servants of Allah are those who are truly committed to the Truth. Servitude to Allah is nothing other than commitment to the Truth which in the first place is Allah Himself and in the second place is whatever is created or legislated by Allah.

Having said this, it now becomes clear why a mu'min must be truthful. It is not simply a matter of how much we pray or fast although these are important duties as Allah asks us to do so. However, what is of utmost importance is how committed we are in giving up our own ideas, and ways of thinking and living to adapt ourselves to the Truth. If we are servants of Allah then no matter who tells us something true, we would accept it without hesitation. For example, if we have said something wrong and someone tells us this, then we should accept it, no matter who is telling us, even if it is a child. Truth does not belong to the person who mentions that Truth. Truth comes from Allah Alone. We should not think that if we accept something true from someone that it means that we are somehow doing a service to that person. On the contrary, we are in fact doing a service to ourselves because, wherever it may be found, Truth is from Allah. In fact, even if our enemies tell us something true we must be able to recognise and decide whether it is true or not; and if it is true, we must accept it. This is the true mu'min.

The true mu'min searches for and welcomes truth and wisdom

A real mu'min is constantly in search for true ideas and wisdom. They do not wait for others to approach them with the true; they search for it. Some people simply continue with their daily lives and if someone comes along and tells them something, then finally think about whether to accept it or not. However, the mu'min is constantly searching for the Truth, looking for people to come and correct him. They want to find people who can present their mistakes and errors to them to improve themselves.

Imam Sadiq said: "My best brothers are those who offer to me, who present to me as gift, my faults, my mistakes, my deficiencies." Of course, the Imam himself is a ma'soom; this for our benefit.

So we must ask every brother, sister, or child to inform us if they observe any mistake in us or know anything about us that can assist in our self-improvement. Then, if someone for any reason mentions a negative trait, we are to appreciate it.

A long time ago I once read an interesting and informative story which I have not found in any other book. Apparently, in the early days of Islam, when people were sitting in the masjid in rows, before or after congregational prayers, one of the things some people did was walk up and down the rows, just as people do so today with a collection bag for donations. However, in those days, they did not ask for money; rather they asked everyone to tell them if they knew anything about them. This was the way they were tried to improve themselves.

However we are usually far from behaving in a similar manner. Often we become angry even if someone very nicely and politely

comes and tells something in private. In fact, even if we do not become angry, we may not take their words seriously.

One of my teachers gave a very beautiful example. He asked us what we would do if someone came and told us that we had a spot of mud or something similar on our face. Of course, we would immediately go and check in the mirror, try to remove it and thank that person for telling us. We would not think about things such as whether that person was our friend or not, whether they were young or old, rich or poor. We would appreciate and thank whoever had told us this, go in front of a mirror and try to remove that mud. So what is it that prevents us from accepting and appreciating what people tell us about any bad quality or bad habit that they have seen in us, which is like a black spot on our heart? Indeed we should be more thankful for that information.

Real servitude is to give priority to Allah and the Truth that comes from Him

We cannot judge or measure whether someone is a good servant of Allah simply by seeing how much they pray, fast, or recite the Qur'an, although of course these are all very important. Real servitude is to give priority to Allah, to give priority to the Truth which comes from Allah and to be always ready to change oneself for the better, giving up our own ways of thinking or doing things for the sake of Allah. This is the real test and challenge. Furthermore, we should endeavour to cultivate this habit when we are young because as one becomes older, and perhaps acquires more, whether it is talent, fame, wealth, and so forth, it becomes more difficult to do so.

Truthfulness and the community

It is obvious that a community must also implement truthfulness in the full sense of the word. Two verses from the Qur'an that were mentioned previously can now be reflected on:

1) Verse 159 of Surah A'raf reads: *"Among the people of Moses is a group who guide (the people) by the truth and do justice thereby."*

Allah is saying that amongst the nation of Musa there are people, a group or a community, who invite and guide people truthfully; they also rule, judge and make decisions truthfully.

In this verse, 'bihi' means 'bil haqq' so the phrase means *"yaduna bil haqq wa bil haqqi yadiloon."* 'Yadiloon' means 'to judge' or 'to rule' but mostly it is interpreted as 'to judge'.

When they judge, such people judge by observing the truth, and when they talk to and invite people they also observe the truth. They do not, for example, consider what they would like or what better serves their own selfish interests. Neither do they consider what would please their superiors, their group leaders, and so on. They only consider the Truth. Actually, this is one of the beauties of the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains no sense of rivalry in its words. If it merely consisted of the words of a human being, then we would not expect to find passages where one religion gives credit to and praises another religion or the followers of another religion. However, the Qur'an is the divine Word of Allah; so in it Allah praises a group of followers of Prophet Musa for observing the truth.

In Surah A'raf, verse 181, Allah makes this into a general principle which is no longer only about a group of Jewish people. Now we

find something more general: “Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and act justly thereby.”

Allah is saying that amongst the people He has created, amongst His creation, there is such a group of people to be found. They can be found in various different religious communities and throughout the ages. So there have always been some people who ‘yaduna bil haqq wa bihi adiloon’, who guide truthfully and judge truthfully.

Who are these people?

The great Allamah Tabatabai prefers the view that this group or community who guides and judges truthfully are the *Ma’sumeen*, that is, the Prophets and Imams. Another view is that of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi, which maybe seems to be more acceptable, that such people are not necessarily only the Prophets and Imams; they could also be their true followers. Therefore, even amongst non *ma’sumeen*, amongst people who are not infallible, there can always be true followers of the *Ma’sumeen* who try to observe the truth when they guide and judge.

Conclusion

So truthfulness must be our standard; and those who are the most truthful must be our role models. It is irrelevant whether we are a mere group of 5-10 members; or a larger organisation such as an Islamic centre or an Islamic party; or if we are citizens of an Islamic state or are a Muslim community living as a minority in a non-Muslim country. Whatever our circumstances, we must continuously give priority to being truthful and to committing ourselves to

following the truth in its fullest sense by following only what is really created and legislated by Allah.

Insha-Allah we can reach the state that every one of us and our communities would be so very truthful that when other people hear us, listen to us, and observe our judgements, they would have full trust in us. This is what a Muslim individual and community must be like. When people hear something from a Muslim, they must be able to be 100% sure and certain that that Muslim is speaking truthfully to the best of his or her knowledge. Of course, we are not infallible, but at least other people should be assured that to the best of our knowledge, we are speaking with full honesty. We cannot – and should not – accept being called Muslim if we are dishonest, or indeed if we do not have a full commitment to the Truth. This is not something which we can call Islamic.

BOOK REVIEW

SCRIPTURE, POETRY AND THE MAKING OF A COMMUNITY: READING THE QUR'AN AS A LITERARY TEXT

REVIEWED BY MUHAMMAD LEGENHAUSEN¹

This book, by Angelika Neuwirth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) published by OUP in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, contains forty pages of front material, 430 pages of text, including notes at the end of each chapter, and another forty pages divided among the bibliography, index of Qur'anic citations, index of Biblical and Post-Biblical citations, and a general index. The text is a collection of articles that were written between 1990 and 2012, some of which have been substantially revised for this collection, and many of which are translations of German publications. The author, who has been acclaimed with honorary doctorates and academic prizes, including the Iranian book of the year award for her *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, and, most recently, the prestigious Leopold-Lucas prize, holds a chair for Arabic philology as professor at the Freie Universität in Berlin, and is director of the Corpus Coranicum project.²

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² <http://www.corpuscoranicum.de>

It is not without reason that Muslims often view the writings of non-Muslims about Islam with suspicion. Orientalists are sometimes agents of a neocolonialist political agenda whose, and some of their writings, are bald attacks on Muslim faith. Because of this, many Muslims have misgivings about secular academic writing about Islam, and as a result, this book by Angelika Neuwirth may not receive the attention and concentrated study it deserves. However, even a cursory skimming of the text will suffice to alert Muslims to the polemical value of Prof. Neuwirth's work, at least, for she has used her consummate mastery of the methods of the historical, rhetorical, and exegetical sciences to prove that the most important claims made by Orientalists against the authenticity of the Qur'an are completely untenable. Be that as it may, it would be a shame if Muslims limited their appreciation of Prof. Neuwirth's work to its value for Islamic apologetics, for its greatest worth lies in demonstrating how our understanding of the Qur'an is enriched beyond measure when due attention is given to both: (1) the cultural background of the Hijaz in the wider landscape of late antiquity, especially to the religious and literary lore that gives context to the divine revelation of the Qur'an, and (2) the manner in which the Qur'an was gradually revealed, and was recited by Muslims as they formed a community whose knowledge of what had been revealed earlier further contributed to the context in which subsequent revelations were given by Allah to his final prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ).

The collection introduces itself as a European reading of the Qur'an. It is an academic rather than a devotional reading of the Qur'an that displays unusual sensitivity to the social function of the text and its recitation in the formation of Muslim communities. The academic

character of the text is marked by the fact that its arguments make no use of the kind of religious assumptions that are common in Islamic *tafsīr*. The methodological naturalism that is de rigueur for historical studies is taken for granted. Another difference from works of *tafsīr* is that there is an especially heavy reliance on knowledge of the literary styles that were in use in the area at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, and the texts that were current then among Christian, Jewish and pagan Arabs. A central premise of Prof. Neuwirth's reading is that our understanding of the Qur'an is deepened by increased awareness of the literary and religious context of late antiquity. Factors such as the importance of *sīra* (biography of the Prophet), *sha'n al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of the sending down of verses), and the literary qualities of the Qur'an, have also been recognized and discussed by non-European Muslim exegetes. Prof. Neuwirth proves the value of attending to a broader background of non-Islamic sources in the course of her analyses. Prof. Neuwirth's essays are also a *European* reading of the Qur'an because of her attention to and criticism of other Western studies of the Qur'an, especially those that are keen to find "sources" for the Qur'an in Jewish and Christian literature. These studies view the Qur'an as having various hidden "subtexts" that originate in the Bible and other Christian and Jewish writings. Prof. Neuwirth rejects the idea of a subtext, and observes that the Qur'anic allusions to earlier written and oral religious traditions are comparable to the allusions made to contested interpretations of earlier religious claims in Biblical and other texts in late antiquity. This intertextual dialectic in no way detracts from the religious value of the Bible or the Qur'an; and to present such parallels with the Qur'an as

undermining its claims to divine origin is not only a logical error, but displays historical naivety and philological obliviousness. The Qur'an addresses the issues current in the society of its first listeners, and what it proclaims about these issues initiates a social, theological, and cultural transformation, the effects of which continue to shape history.

The Qur'an not only comments on religious ideas current among Christians, Jews, and pagans, but its later *āyāt* often serve as comments on earlier ones, which is neglected by studies that fail to consider the historical progression of the prophetic revelation. So, if the view of the Qur'an presented here is European, it is one that is very critical of the tendencies that dominate much if not most Western Qur'anic research. It is tempting, therefore, to say that what emerges is as much *anti-European* as *European*, for it painstakingly questions, undermines, and exposes the unwarranted presumptions of much that characterizes studies of the Qur'an by European and American orientalist; however, it remains a European reading because it is grounded in critical methods and a scholarly tradition from which the tendencies she rejects also arise, and in this way, her criticism becomes all the more penetrating and effective.

The historical progression of the revelation and reception of the Qur'an provide the grounds in which those who listened to the revelation from the Prophet (ﷺ) underwent an educational process in which Muslim identity emerged. A diachronic reading of the Qur'an is requisite for a full analysis of how this process shaped the community and its theology. Allusions to the beliefs and lore of one's listeners is by no means unique to the Qur'an; even some of the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry introduced some new ethical concepts

into its cultural milieu, including elements consonant with the Greek *epimeleia heautou* (cultivation or care of the self). The Qur'an, however, goes far beyond this by subsuming some such elements in a comprehensive new ethic of *rahmat*. The transformation is brought about through the powerful rhetoric of the Qur'an that juxtaposes a variety of literary genres in such a way as to provoke the listener to question moral and theological assumptions as it redirects the various streams of thought that were current in late antiquity. A central example of this redirection is the challenge to the Christian theology of the *logos*, whereby the divine word is made incarnate in the person of Christ, by presenting the idea of divine speech and writing that not only becomes incarnate in a single person, but provides the means through which all of creation takes place, and revelation is given through the Prophet so that the community of believers may be unified and guided.

During the process of formation that took place as the Qur'an was revealed and then collected and recited, the Qur'an transformed itself from recited fragments to a revealed book, and it transformed its listeners into a new people united by its recitation, transcription, and study, by the theology of *tawhīd*, the ethos of *rahmat*, the charismatic leadership of the Prophet (*ṣ*), and a new understanding of Biblical history and the divine plan for humanity. Beyond this transformation of the Qur'an and its people in the supplementation of recitation by writing, Neuwirth speaks of a further stage of the transformation of the Qur'an by which it becomes, "a medium of divine empowerment enabling mankind in general to decode the world according to the signs (*āyāt*) displayed in the text." (xxvii) At this point the academic "outsider" stance from which historical

works about the Qur'an are written is threatened by the confession to the extraordinary, if not explicitly supernatural, power of the revelation. It is here, too, that Prof. Neuwirth's text manifests itself as appropriate for devotional reading, even if it is not written with this intention.

The fourteen essays of the book are divided into three sections:

I. Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks

II. The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community

III. Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an.

The first section, "Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks" contains four essays, all of which are concerned with literary features of the Qur'an: the "unexpected leap in development" in the literary form of the Qur'an, which defies historicist explanations; the social transformation instituted by the Qur'an from the primacy of tribal bonds to the centrality of scripture; the descriptions of paradise in the Qur'an, which introduce a new view of time and eschatology; and the Qur'anic oaths of the early Meccan suras, that emphasize and affirm the prophetic mission and the immanence of the Day of Judgment.

The second section, "The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community" contains five essays that treat various ways in which social cohesion was generated in the early Muslim community through its relation to the Qur'an, including the recitation of the Qur'an, the establishment of the prayer, and the twin roles of the *Fātiḥah* as opening of the canon of the scripture and in the

recitation of the formal prayer; the setting up of the *qibla* and its shift from Jerusalem to Mecca, the allusions to the Decalogue in *Sura Isrā'*, and the overturning of the Arabian ethos of tribal accountability in favour of an ethos of *rahmat* and individual responsibility before God to help others in need.

The third section, "Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an" also contains five essays that focus on narratives in the Qur'an for which there are also versions in the Bible: There is a chapter on Moses (‘a), followed by one on the golden calf. Then there are two chapters on Jesus (‘a) and Mary (‘a) pertaining to the Meccan and Medinan suras, respectively. Finally, there is a chapter in which the various stories found in both the Bible and Qur'an are classified according to literary criteria.

In all of her discussions, Prof. Neuwirth is guided by several important hermeneutic principles:

- The Qur'an is to be read diachronically, that is, to the extent possible, the temporal order of revelation is to be respected as an important element of the nature of the revelation.
- The *āyāt* of the Qur'an are to be understood in the context of the suras in which they occur. The meaning of an individual *āyah* is to be understood as it contributes to the meaning of the sura as a whole.
- The changing social and ideological situation of the early community of Muslims (*Sitz im Leben*) must be appreciated for a proper understanding of the revealed text.

- Literary form and linguistic guise contribute to the meaning of the text, and are clues to its chronology.
- Later additions to earlier narratives, identified as stylistic interruptions, are signals of interpretive expansions occasioned by different reactions and questions that arose within the community, so that the gradual revelation of the Qur'an may be seen as a kind of conversation between Allah and those who first heard the Qur'an, "a persistent divine-human communication." (xxxvi)

In what follows I will cull a few points from each of the essays in order to give prospective readers a taste of their contents and as it were to whet the appetite, for the essays are often too complex to be summarized in a few sentences.

I – 1. Neither of the East nor of the West (*lā sharqiyya wa lā gharbiyya*, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship

Prof. Neuwirth takes the *āyah* mentioned in the title of this essay to have a lesson for researchers: attempts to limit the Qur'an by finding "origins" for its contents are bound to fail. Although the Qur'an is understood by Muslims to transcend history, its relation to the historical circumstances of its revelation must not be ignored. Western scholars have attempted to come up with alternatives to the origins of the Qur'an as found in Muslim traditions, but all such attempts have failed miserably. Nevertheless, the historical-critical and literary approaches on which these scholars have relied make it possible to recognize how the Qur'an provides answers to the core

problems people faced at the time of its revelation. This chapter contains a brief but valuable critical review of research about the origins of the Qur'an. Although Prof. Neuwirth rejects the views of "revisionists" who offer alternative accounts of the Qur'an to those found in the Islamic tradition, she does not do so dismissively. In addition to historical considerations, such as attention to the sequence of revelation insofar as this can be determined, techniques of literary analysis are also applied to the Qur'an. We are to consider an exterior level of communication from God and an interior level that takes place between the Prophet (ﷺ) and his listeners. A microstructural analysis of the Qur'an is also employed, which is based on methods of biblical scholarship, to show that the various structures exemplified by the suras of the Qur'an reflect a historical development. Throughout relevant comparisons are made with Biblical and apocryphal Christian and Jewish literature.

I – 2. From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur'anic Reconfigurations of Pagan Arab Ideals based on Biblical Models

One of the central messages found in the early Meccan suras of the Qur'an is that genealogical loyalties are to be superseded by religious ones. In this essay, Prof. Neuwirth shows how the Qur'an systematically disempowered the Arab clan system and replaced it by a consciousness of individual responsibility before God by propounding an ethic of "care of the self" whose themes are also discernible in other late antique literature. Believers are encouraged to take the steep way of moral endeavour by freeing slaves, feeding the hungry, and caring for those in need. In the middle Meccan period, the idea of the divine covenant is given emphasis in the

example of the story of Abraham (‘a). In the Medinan period Jewish claims to genealogical entitlements are rejected. In the transformation brought by Islam, earlier conceptions of sacrifice are displaced as the sacrificial alter gives way to the sacred space of the sanctuary, and the message of the Qur’an teaches: “It is not their flesh or their blood that reaches Allah, Rather it is your *taqwā* that reaches Him.” (22:37)

I – 3. Glimpses of Paradise in the World and Lost Aspects of the World in the Hereafter: Two Qur’anic Re-readings of Biblical Psalms

The eschatological theology of the Qur’an provided hope in a pagan environment in which pessimism was predominant. References to divine rewards in the Qur’an and the Psalms are compared to show that while the Psalms made use of nature imagery to evoke admiration for divine majesty, in the Qur’an this imagery is used to remind believers of the gifts of God and the need for human gratitude. Although striking similarities are found between some of the Psalms and portions of the Qur’an, a conspicuous difference is that anthropomorphic descriptions of God are eliminated in the Qur’anic texts: for example, where the Psalms (136:5) refer to the divine reason, the Qur’an (55:7) introduces the image of God setting up a balance. While the Psalms seek evidence for God in divine salvific acts through history, the Qur’an point to the balanced order of nature as a wonder to give cause to praise of God. Prof. Neuwirth ends this essay with another example of how the devotional study of the Qur’an manifests itself from behind the cloak of academic reserve: “With this new paradigm [of revelation, *waḥy*] the Qur’an

offers its listeners a promise: not of divine loyalty exemplified by divine interventions in salvation history but of God's liberation of man from his cultural and ontological bereavement — his being cut off from a meaningful history — and his being prisoner to the irreversible elapsing of time." (98)

I – 4. Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Early Meccan Suras

If we consider the suras that begin with oath clusters (e.g., "By the dawn and the ten nights (89:1-2), we find that there is a dynamic in which a rhythm is established and an enigma that require some fulfilment or culmination that is usually found later in the sura. Different types of oath clusters are examined and charted. Many of the oath clusters appear to allude to nocturnal devotions. Through the course of the revelation of the Qur'an, there is a movement from functional uses of the oaths to highlight themes that will be treated in their suras to a more abstract use in which the oath indicates the revelation itself. In addition to the complex oaths of some early suras, the types of oaths of the Qur'an considered are those alluding to sacred localities, those referring to cosmic phenomena, especially the phases of day and night, and, finally, those referring to the revelation.

II – 5. From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution during the Development of Islamic Ritual

The Qur'an provides two important services in religious life: its recitation is itself a religious ritual, especially in the formal prayers;

and it serves as a source of religious teaching. Religious services in Judaism and Christianity are much more complex than the formal prayers of Islam. In this essay Prof. Neuwirth speculates on the evolution of the formal prayer and how this is related to the canonization of the Qur'an. The course of the development of the Muslim community parallel to the gradual revelation of the suras of the Qur'an explain, at least in part, the simplicity of the Islamic ritual.

II – 6. *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service?

The themes introduced in the previous essay are explored further in this one with particular attention to the *Fātiḥa*. Five issues are explored: the numbering of the *āyāt*; its position at the start of the Qur'an; its name; its uniqueness in classifications of the suras; and its relation to the *basmala*. Prof. Neuwirth contends that it is possible to use *genre criticism*, that is, attention to the function of the *Fātiḥa* as a prayer, to understand how it was received by Muslims prior to the collection of the Qur'an. To this purpose, the *Fātiḥa* is compared with St. John Chrysostom's *Enarxis*. Both begin with a hymnal part praising God, followed by reference to the divine kingdom, an acknowledgment of divine sovereignty, and finally a supplication with several parts. Prof. Neuwirth rejects the idea that this means that the *Fātiḥa* is in any way derivative from Christian rituals. The point is that the ritual function makes its own demands that apply to prayers used in rituals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: as the opening of a ceremony of worship, the text to be recited should have solemnity and incorporate topics needed to

establish communication between the worshippers and God. Prof. Neuwirth concludes that not only does the *Fātiḥa* fulfill the conditions needed for it to serve its ritual function: “indeed, by virtue of its brevity and its climax with the triple petition for true guidance, it even exceeds them.” (179)

II – 7. Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15): Observations on the Qur’anic ‘Canonical Process’ and the Emergence of a Community

Contrary to sceptical views about the canonization of the Qur’an, Prof. Neuwirth argues that the picture based on reports in the hadith literature that the Qur’an was canonized from an early stage of its revelation is not at all implausible. Under this assumption, the sura may be studied as a literary genre, that is, “as a stage in a communicational process.” (188) This communication process is not simply that of God addressing the Prophet, but a complex phenomenon through which various believers and unbelievers, angels and demons, are addressed by God and His prophets, who respond in accordance with the manner in which the divine mission is received, and all of this is revealed in the course of the emergence of the Muslim *Ummah* with its own sense of identity. These themes are explored through an examination of the pivotal sura, *al-Ḥijr*. The sura is pivotal in the sense that it marks the beginning of the self-awareness of the Muslims as a distinct religious community, for the believers are addressed for the first time in this sura as *muslimūn* to whom God refers collectively as His community (*‘ibādī*, my worshippers). The text of the sura is divided into five parts on the basis of their *dramatis personae*. On the basis of the analysis of the

sura, several prominent features are observed. First, those hearing the sura are presented with an either/or choice: to accept the revealed truth, or reject it with ingratitude and rebelliously. Second, the choice presented is coupled with the summons to reflect upon the signs that have been revealed, so that what has been revealed are to be considered as signs some of which, self-reflectively, demand the application of reason to consideration of the signs. *Al-Hijr* concerns itself with the emergence of the Muslim community at three levels: (1) through cosmic and salvation historical themes; (2) through its structure as a text for ritual recitation; and (3) through its intertextual allusions to *al-Fātiḥa*.

II – 8. From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17), between Text and Commentary

This essay, more than the others in this volume, can be expected to provoke the criticism of traditional scholars, for in it Prof. Neuwirth argues that the hadiths about the *mir'āj* are incompatible with *sūrat al-Isrā'*, but before we come to this controversy, we are presented with a discussion of the *qibatayn*, and an ingenious explanation of why al-Quds is considered the first *qibla* even if prayers were conducted facing the Ka'aba prior to its recognition as *qibla*. Then, an extended discussion is devoted to the first *āyah* of the sura, and why it does not fit the rhyme scheme of the rest of the sura. It is concluded that the first *āyah* was revealed before the rest of the sura, which was subsequently revealed to address issues that arose with regard to the first *āyah*. The first *āyah* reports that God carried the Prophet (ﷺ) in a miraculous journey by night. When this report was met by ridicule and even apostasy, the rest of the sura was revealed

with the reminder that the previous prophets were also ridiculed and rejected. In response to demands for miracles, God assures the believers that the Qur'an itself is the greatest miracle. Prof. Neuwirth contends that the entire cast of the experience as reported in the Qur'an seems entirely different from the reports that have been narrated about it:

In the Qur'an we witness a communication process in which divine prerogatives (guardianship, providence, etc), and human attitudes and perceptions (gratitude, reason, etc.) as links between the speaker and the audience never fade, while leaving the modalities of the transcendent experience undisclosed, whereas the Hadith version has taken the form of a narration that unfolds particular elements in a fantastic way to satisfy an audience requesting a narrative closure for some of their most cherished Qur'anic images and an aetiological explanation for the core elements of their rituals.
(233)

For further reason to question the authenticity of the hadiths of the *mi'rāj*, Prof. Neuwirth appeals to research on the topic conducted by Josef van Ess, who has argued that the interpretation of *isrā'* as an ascension through the heavens resulted from theological debates about whether one could physically approach God.

Although we might venture that the relevant hadiths and the account presented in the Qur'an might be interpreted in such a manner as to remove the apparent inconsistencies between them,

serious work on the topic will have to take into account the strong reasons Profs. Neuwirth and van Ess give to the contrary.

II – 9. A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity

There are three passages of the Qur'an that are comparable with the ten commandments as presented in the Torah. In order of revelation, they are: (17:22-39); (6:151-153); and (2:83-85). The first, from the middle Meccan period, reads like a manifesto. The second, from the late Meccan period, functions as a reminder of what was already revealed. The third, a Medinan text, employs the theme of the Decalogue to address the conflict that had arisen with the Medinan Jewish tribes. In this essay, all three versions are subject to meticulous analysis and comparison, both with the Biblical account and with one another. These comparisons yield insights into the different notions of sin and evil that are found in Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions. Transgression of the commandments is not explicitly referred to as *sin* in the Qur'an, although observance of the commandments is idealized and violations require penitence. Another prominent feature of the discussions in the Qur'an is the emphasis on mercy (*rahma*). The commending of mercy or kindness toward others, especially towards parents, and toward those in need, directs believers to introspection and a cultivation of qualities of the heart characteristic of the ethic of "care of the self", which the Greeks called *epimeleia heautou*.

III – 10. Narrative as Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an

In this essay the Qur'anic narratives about Moses (‘a) are examined in order to address the dispute between traditional scholars and revisionists about the emergence of the Qur'an. Revisionists hold that the Qur'an was fabricated by Muslims with a particular religious and social agenda. Prof. Neuwirth shows that a careful analysis of the references to Moses (‘a) considered in the order of revelation shows that the Qur'an is best explained as the result of a process of gradual revelation, as the Islamic tradition has always maintained. Because the stories related in the Qur'an are scattered and do not provide a continuous treatment of each of their figures in succession, Westerners have often considered the Qur'an to be ahistorical. Prof. Neuwirth shows that this view is mistaken because the events related about the prophets in the Qur'an are appropriate to the conditions of those who heard it at the time of its revelation. In particular, Prophet Moses (‘a) acts as a kind of mirror to Prophet Muhammad (s). His exodus from Egypt mirrors the prophets' nocturnal journey to al-Quds and later it mirrors the *hijra*. The victory at Badr was also seen as similar to Moses' delivery of his people from the Pharaoh, for in both cases divine intervention saves the followers of a prophet from annihilation at the hands of an oppressive enemy. In the early Meccan period the parallel is drawn between the two prophets as having been given divine authority. In the middle Meccan period the shared theme is perseverance in the face of oppression. As a result of such observations, we find that the Qur'an is historical in that it reflects on various aspects of the careers of the prophets and salvation history as appropriate to the

divine guidance needed by the *Ummah* in the circumstances of revelation.

III – 11. Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur’anic Story of the Golden Calf and its Position between Narrative, Cult and Inter-communal Debate

Many Western scholars have assumed that the inclusion in the Qur’an of Biblical stories means that the Qur’an is the result of a process of commentary on Biblical sources. In this essay, Prof. Neuwirth refutes this assumption by giving detailed attention to the example of the story of the Golden Calf as it appears in the Bible and in several places in the Qur’an. An analysis of the literary qualities of the text of the Qur’an demonstrates that it does not have the form of a commentary, but of orally delivered prophetic speech. The Medinan texts include direct addresses to the Jews of Medina. This suggests that instead of a commentary on a Biblical text, the revelation of the Qur’an addresses a controversy that was taking place in Medina between Jews and Muslims. The theme of atonement is highlighted in the Medinan texts in a manner significantly different from the Torah and its commentaries at a time when the Jews there were being asked to repent for their rejection of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). While Jewish texts describe the divine wrath as extending over the course of several generations, the Qur’an promises immediate divine forgiveness for the sincerely repentant. Prof. Neuwirth concludes this essay with the admission that its themes require further investigation. Why is it that communal rituals of atonement are found in Judaism and Christianity, but not in Sunni Islam? How is it that the Shi’a have

been able to recover expression of repentance enacted by Jews on the Day of Atonement, the tenth or Tishri, in the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to Āshūra in the Muslim calendar? There is evidence that some of the *tawwabūn* who were martyred at Ra's al-'Ayn when they revolted against the Umayyads believed that some of the Bani Israel gave up their lives to atone for worshipping the calf.

III – 12. Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur'anic Communication Process

Compared with the Qur'anic depictions of Moses (ʿa), those of Jesus (ʿa) seem sketchy. In the case of Moses (ʿa) we can put together a career; while in the case of Jesus (ʿa), there are only a few incidents. By examining the texts of the Qur'an in which Mary (ʿa) or Jesus (ʿa) appear, Prof. Neuwirth contends that traces of an intense theological exchange with Christian believers can be found, and that this exchange is evidenced in a polemical fashion in later Medinan revelations, particularly in *Sūrat al-Nisā'*. All of the Qur'anic texts are given minute attention in this essay, with attention to the order of revelation, and are compared with Biblical texts and with the Protevangelium of James. In comparison with the Christian texts, the Qur'an gives a de-allegorized version of the events such as the mission of John the Baptist (ʿa), who is admitted to be a prophet, but not the precursor to Christ (ʿa), and, likewise, the virgin birth, which is admitted but is not taken to signify that Jesus (ʿa) is the Son of God. The issue is complicated by the fact that the denials that God has offspring are directed against pagan beliefs rather than

Christian ones. The pagans claimed that their deities were better offspring of God than Jesus (‘a), to which the response of the Qur’an is the clear statement that God does not take offspring. Jesus (‘a) is likened to Muhammad (s) in that the missions of both were to bring about unity; yet both missions led to disagreement and conflict. “Whatever thing you differ about, its judgment is with Allah.” (42:10).

III – 13. Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Q. 3)

This essay continues to address issues of Christology that were mentioned in the previous essay; but it also demonstrates one of the core claims of the volume: that echoes of earlier suras can be heard in later ones, and that by comparing them, we learn something of the development of the Qur’anic revelation. As we learned in essay 2 of this collection, one of the dominant themes of the Qur’an is the replacement of clan loyalties by those based on piety. It is in terms of this agenda that we are to understand how *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* upsets the patriarchal system of genealogy by describing the lineage of Jesus (‘a) from his mother, and she from her mother, so that Jesus (‘a) is given the matronymic *nasab: ibn Maryam*. Prof. Neuwirth shows how this and other references to the feminine and to multiplicity of meaning, polysemy, are employed to overturn the established pagan order. Those who reject the divine message seek to abuse ambiguity to cause *fitna*, while the believers accept all that is revealed, even the ambiguous, as related to the “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*). Likewise, Mary (‘a) is an unambiguous sign of faith for the believers,

but causes disputation among the disbelievers. Jesus (‘a) and Mary (‘a) together are considered a sign from God; but they are presented in the Qur’an without any hint at the divinization of Jesus that was to cause so much division and heresy in the Christian church.

III – 14. Myths and Legends in the Qur’an? An Itinerary through its Narrative Landscape

The final essay of this fascinating volume begins by distinguishing *myths* (“narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by laying bare its archetypal patterns”) from *legends* (narratives of pious imagination celebrating an exemplary figure or groups of figures). The Qur’an, like other scriptures, makes use of myths and legends in this sense; but Prof. Neuwirth argues that the message of the Qur’an is one that systematically rejects the pagan notion of the mythic as that which is due to various occult powers of anthropomorphic deities and legends of demigod heroes. In order to illustrate the Qur’anic stance on the mythic, comparative analyses are given of the transgression of Adam, the story of Noah and the flood, David and Solomon, the Exodus, and the lessons of past nations (*al-umam al-khāliya*), Joseph and Zulaykha, and Abraham. In each instance, it is seen that elements of the pagan worldview of heroism and anthropomorphic divine powers are subdued in favour of injunctions to piety and morality and recognition of the exclusive sovereignty of Allah. So, for example, the importance of Abraham is not that of a forefather, but of an *imam*, a paradigm of simple submission to God. In each case, the Qur’an challenges its listeners to rethink and revise their views of what had been narrated before. Prof. Neuwirth succeeds admirably in her task of showing how our

understanding of the Qur'an is profoundly enriched through the employment of the methods she illustrates so effectively in this volume of essays.