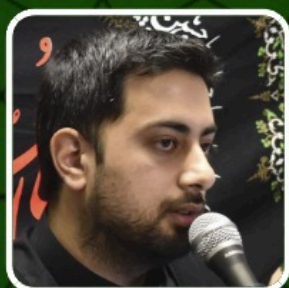


Commentary On Surah Al-Kawthar

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SHARES

Sub Title:

This text provides a concise but complete commentary on Surah Al-Kawthar (108).

It explores the significance of each Verse on various levels and depths; it gives an explanation for the choice of its name, the reasons for its revelation, its merits, and themes.

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Commentary On Surah Al-Kawthar

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Syed Ali Imran

This is a transcript of a commentary on Surah al-Kawthar given by Shaykh Haider Hobbollah over four lessons.

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Names, Reasons For Revelation

The chapter has been referred to in four ways in Islamic works:

1. *Surah al-Kawthar* – this is what is famous today and has been taken from the word *Kawthar* which appears in the first verse

2. Sharif Ar-Radhi would refer to it as *Surah allati dhukira fiha al-Kawthar*
3. In some of the traditions such as the Shi'i ones from the Ahl al-Bayt and the Sunni ones from the companions, it is referred to with the first verse: *Inna A'taynaka al-Kawthar*, or just *Inna A'taynak*
4. A very few scholars have also referred to it as *Surah al-Nahr*, although it was rare. The word *nahr* is taken from the second verse

This is the shortest chapter in the Qur'an in terms of number of letters and words, but it is not the shortest in terms of its verses, because *Surah al-Nasr* and *Surah al-Asr* also have three verses.

Merits Of The Chapter And Reasons For Revelation

عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ: مَنْ كَانَ قِرَاءَتُهُ إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ فِي فَرَائِضِهِ وَنَوَافِلِهِ سَقَاهُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكَوْثَرِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Abu Basir from Imam Sadiq ('a): One who recites *Inna A'taynaka al-Kawthar* in his obligatory and supererogatory prayers, Allah (swt) will quench him with *al-Kawthar* on the Day of Judgement.

The second tradition is from the Prophet (S):

عَنْهُ ص مَنْ قَرَأَهَا سَقَاهُ اللَّهُ مِنْ أَنْهَارِ الْجَنَّةِ

He (S) said: Whoever recites it, Allah (swt) will quench him from the rivers of paradise.

The reason why this chapter was revealed is important because it has a significant impact on our understanding of what the verses mean. The most famous understanding and that which exists in the books of the Muslims is that after the death of 'Abdullah – or in some traditions Qasim – the son of the Prophet (S), a disbeliever said the Prophet (S) is *abtar* (one whose lineage is cut off).

Lineage amongst the Arabs was recognized through a boy and hence the Prophet (S) not having sons implied his lineage will cease at him and he will not be remembered after he dies.

There are different opinions on who exactly said this, the most famous opinion is that it was 'As Ibn Wa'il al-Sahmi. 'As was well known amongst the Makkan disbelievers and in many reports where you find the

names of those who belittled, cursed or harmed the Prophet (S), you will see his name appearing. His enmity was well known.

Even though this is the famous opinion, there are some other traditions that mention it was Walid Ibn Mughirah, or Abu Jahl, or 'Uqba Ibn Abi Mu'ayyt, or Ka'b Ibn Ashraf, or Abu Lahab, or in some Shi'a works it says it was 'Amr Ibn As.

Another opinion says that this chapter was revealed for another reason altogether and that it was revealed in Medina. Therefore, it has nothing to do with the above individuals. The story is that it was the year of *Hudaybiyyah* and the Prophet (S) and the Muslims were not allowed to enter Makkah and *Masjid al-Haram*. The Muslims and the Prophet (S) were sad at the fact that after making a journey to Makkah, they had to return. *Surah al-Fath* was revealed to describe the event at *Hudaybiyyah* as a clear victory, and then *Surah al-Kawthar* was revealed to give the Prophet (S) comfort and support – that there is a lot of benefit in what occurred during *Hudaybiyyah*.

In other words, as per this opinion, what happened in the event of *Hudaybiyyah* was *Kawthar* itself, it was a lot of good. They cite the second verse as proof since it says to pray and slaughter – as it is done during the pilgrimage. This opinion was backed by a major scholar like Ibn 'Ashur.

When we contemplate a little over the traditions that exist in relation to the first opinion, we will see that majority of them are nothing but the personal opinions and conclusions of the *tabi'in*, they are not from the Prophet (S) or the Ahl al-Bayt. In fact, the reports are not even from the companions, except two, Anas Ibn Malik and Ibn 'Abbas – the former was very young and the latter was not even born if we say the chapter was revealed in Makkah.

As for the second opinion, there is absolutely no historical backing for it and it is just a personal conclusion arrived at by Ibn 'Ashur or some others, by adding a few pieces of evidence together – otherwise, there is no historical record, even a weak one, that alluded to this.

As for whether this chapter is *Makki* or a *Madani*, then the popular opinion is that it is Makki and this has been narrated from Ibn 'Abbas, al-Kalbi and many others. The traditions that speak about the reasons for its revelation and the reference to the person who slandered the Prophet (S) also back this point up.

The second opinion says it is a *Madani* and this is narrated from 'Ikrimah, ʔahhak and others. This opinion exists, but they do not clarify when exactly it was revealed in Medina, during the early period or during the year of *Hudaybiyyah*. This opinion is in line with the aforementioned opinion of Ibn 'Ashur and as well as the notion of *nahr* which is mentioned in the second verse.

A third opinion says it was revealed twice. Some scholars who come across contradicting reports like this, they end up concluding that the chapter was revealed twice.

It seems that the chapter was *Makki* as per whatever we have at our disposal. We do not have any

historical reason to assume it was *Madani*. It does not matter whether we interpret *abtar* as not having a lineage, or someone who has been cut off from their society, or that his message will cease to exist (we will expand on these meanings soon), as per all meanings a *Makki* revelation makes more sense.

The Theme Of The Chapter

The theme of the chapter can be deemed to be *shukr* – gratefulness and being thankful to Allah (swt), and to repay Allah (swt) back with servitude and worship. A second theme of the chapter can be Allah's (swt) hospitality towards the Prophet (S) and his (S) increase in rank. A third theme is that one who angers the Prophet (S) and belittles him will be doomed and destroyed.

These three themes will be discussed in detail later.

Verse 1: Inna 'Atayna-Ka Al-Kawthar

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ

Surely We have given you Kawthar (108:1).

The most important discussion in this verse concerns two words: *al-Kawthar* and *al-Abtar*. The first appears in the first verse and the second appears in the last verse. We will first investigate the meanings of these words independently and then return to the meaning of the actual verse through the lens of what we investigated so that we can understand the intended meaning of the chapter.

Kawthar

1) Linguistic meaning: what does the word mean in Arabic? It means abundant good or something which brings a lot of good for someone. It is on the paradigm of *faw'al* which indicates abundance. Sayyid Murtadha says that the use of *Kawthar* is indicative of the strong eloquence of the Qur'an since it is on a paradigm that is more difficult to pronounce, and it is being used in a place where it is conveying a strong meaning.

A similar word on this paradigm is *nawfal* which means someone who prays a lot of *nawafil*. Therefore, some grammarians have said *Kawthar* is used to characterize a person who is very hospitable and charitable. Interestingly, some grammarians have said *Kawthar* is a river in paradise, but it seems like they took this meaning from the traditions. Although there also exists the possibility that the word *Kawthar* was used by the Arabs to refer to a river, because a lot of good comes from it – people can drink from it, they can bathe in it and so on. Therefore, it is possible the word *Kawthar* was appropriately used for a river as well and then it was used by the Prophet (S) to describe a river in paradise.

2) Exegetical meaning: The exegetes – as it is their habit – mixed the conceptual meaning of *Kawthar*

with some instance of it in external reality, while thinking this is the instance the Qur'an is intending. Therefore, they have mentioned up to 26 different meanings of *Kawthar*, while the books of grammar and classical dictionaries do not mention almost any of these meanings. I will mention these meanings:

1. A river in paradise
2. A pond in paradise or on the Day of Judgement

These two meanings are the most famous. In the traditions, there are a lot of descriptions mentioned for this pond or river as well.

3. Intercession (*Shafa'ah*)
4. Children of the Prophet (S) and their lineage – not restricted to the Ahl al-Bayt as defined by the Imami Shi'a. Fakhr Ar-Razi says in v. 13 in his Tafsir al-Kabir: How many of the Ahl al-Bayt have been killed, yet the world is still populated with them (*kam qutila min ahl al-bayt thumma 'alim mumtaliun bihi...*)
5. The companions and followers of the Prophet (S) until the day of Judgement. In other words, all the Muslims
6. Scholars of the Prophet's nation
7. The Qur'an
8. The light of the heart of the Prophet (S)
9. Good moral conduct
10. The popularity of his mention amongst the people

11. Prophethood

12. The enlightenment of the *Shari'ah*

13. Islam

14. *Tawhid*

15. Merits of the Prophet (S)

16. *Maqam al-Mahmud*

17. Knowledge and wisdom Fatima al-Zahra' ('a)

When we look at the above, we realize that most of them are all real instances of the linguistic meaning of *Kawthar* (abundant good). However, so far, we have nothing by which we can restrict the meaning of *Kawthar* in this verse to mean only one of the instances above and claim that the verse only intended this one specific instance. Perhaps the general meaning was intended, including all its instances, or perhaps only one specific instance was intended. We will come back to this discussion later.

3) *Kawthar* in the Hadith literature: All the traditions that speak about this chapter, whether from the Prophet (S), the companions, or the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), only define the word *Kawthar* in two ways.

The first meaning is abundant good (*al-khayr al-kathir*). This is reported from Ibn 'Abbas and the traditions are little on this. The second set of traditions say *Kawthar* here means a pond or a river in paradise or on the Day of Judgement. Majority of the traditions – around thirty of them – say the second meaning and they are mostly Sunni, while others are Shi'i. These traditions also have descriptions of this pond and river.

There is absolutely no mention of a third meaning in any tradition or report in Shi'i or Sunni works, after my research and investigation. Of course, most average Shi'a today will be wondering about *Kawthar* meaning Fatima al-Zahra' ('a), and we will discuss later on how this interpretation came to be attributed to this verse and what were the arguments behind it – otherwise, in the hadith literature, there is no mention of her alongside this chapter.

Abtar

1) Linguistic meaning: Linguistically it means the cutting off something, especially before something has come to a completion. It is also used for someone who does not have any sons because it is presumed the person's lineage is cut off. In addition, it is also used for someone who has had a loss in business, or one who cuts ties with their blood relatives. It is also used to refer to anything from which no good comes forth.

Amongst the Arabs, someone who is not remembered by people and is forgotten is also called *abtar*. Perhaps the reason why someone who does not have a son is called *abtar* is due to this reason, as they will not have anyone to keep their memory alive.

There is a term called *al-salat al-batra*, which refers to sending a *salawat* on the Prophet (S) but not on his progeny, meaning his progeny has been cut off. The Arabs would call a sermon in which Allah (swt) is not praised or the Prophet (S) is not praised as *al-khutba al-batra*.

Finally, al-Butriyyah (not al-Batriyyah as it is commonly pronounced by people) were a Zaydi sect that would say 'Ali ('a) had the right to the caliphate, but after the first two caliphs usurped it, 'Ali ('a) himself was fine with it and approved of it. In conclusion, they would argue that we have no issue with the first two caliphs. However, they opined that 'Ali did not approve of 'Uthman's caliphate and so they were called al-Butriyyah by the Ahl al-Sunnah as they were accused of cutting off the line of the righteous caliphs at 'Ali and did not consider 'Uthman as part of the group.

2) Exegetical meaning: In the works of exegesis, the famous opinion is that it is someone who does not have a son and therefore no lineage. 'Allamah Tabataba'i strongly defends this meaning and we will discuss this opinion shortly.

A second opinion – to which Shahid al-Sadr al-Thani leans towards – says *abtar* means someone who is cut off from all goodness.

A third opinion is that it means someone whose memory is lost and they are not remembered after their death.

Sayyid Murtadha opined that *abtar* in this verse means someone who has no authority, no goodness, and no hope.

A final meaning which has also been mentioned by several scholars is that it means someone who is banished in their community and whose words and personality have no value.

After having observed the meanings of these two words linguistically, in the words of the exegetes, and in the hadith literature, we can begin to investigate what it means in this chapter. The reason why we approached the discussion in this manner is because other exegetes usually use one of these words as

an alibi to interpret the second word. Some arrived at the meaning of *abtar* first and then interpreted the meaning of *Kawthar* at the beginning of the chapter, while others arrived at the meaning of *Kawthar* and then interpreted the meaning of *abtar*. We wanted to lay out all these meanings in the beginning and then begin seeing what the most prominent, probable and reasonable interpretation of these verses are. Of course, we will not be covering interpretations whose weakness is way too clear.

If we contemplate over the interpretations of this chapter, what we will realize is that there are two overall approaches taken by scholars. One approach understands the absence of a relationship and connection between *Kawthar* and *abtar* in this chapter – as we will see. The second approach understands that there is a relationship between the two words, and amongst them is one group who takes the meaning of the word *Kawthar* to explain the meaning of *abtar*, and a second group who takes the meaning of *abtar* to explain the meaning of *Kawthar*.

As such, there are four possible interpretations given for this verse. We will not be mentioning the possibilities for which the proponents did not bring any evidence whatsoever:

1) The meaning is that *Kawthar* is a lot of good. Indeed, we have given you a lot of good, and hence, your enemy is deprived – *abtar* – of this good. This is all that the chapter intends on saying, nothing more or less.

The proponents of this interpretation – who are many, both Shi'i and Sunni – say that our argument is essentially to resort back to the very basic and original meaning of both the words *Kawthar* and *abtar*. Secondly, the proponents take the beginning of the chapter which employs the verse *Kawthar*, to explain the meaning of *abtar*. For example, Zayd has wealth, but 'Amr is *abtar* – meaning he does not have wealth.

Thirdly, as per this interpretation, this chapter is not saying anything special or unique rather it is conveying a concept that is reiterated numerous times all over the Qur'an. The Prophet (S) and the believers received the blessings of Allah (swt) and the disbelievers are cut off from it. The Qur'an itself speaks about many different blessings and favours Allah (swt) has bestowed upon the Prophet (S), and his enemies being accursed.

Lastly, this is the most general interpretation of the chapter and is inclusive of all other interpretations that are given for it. Whether you believe *Kawthar* means Prophethood, or the Qur'an, the ability to intercede, Fatima ('a), knowledge and wisdom, and so on, all of these are *Kawthar* and the enemies of the Prophet (S) are deprived of it.

If it were to be just us and this chapter, the above explanation is very justifiable and reasonable. There is only one way to discredit it and that is if we can establish some specific qualities for this word which would limit and restrict the general meaning of *Kawthar*. This is what the proponents of the next three interpretations have done – as we will see.

2) A group of scholars have said the meaning of *Kawthar* is knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, We have given you knowledge and wisdom – and your enemies have been deprived of it. Proponents say we agree *Kawthar* means abundant good, but we must look at the Qur'an to see what it has identified as abundant good. They bring two alibis:

...and he who is given wisdom, is certainly given an abundant good... (2:269)

... Allah has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is Allah's grace upon you. (4:113)

However, this interpretation does not nullify the first interpretation and in fact, this approach to restricting the meaning of a word in the Qur'an to a specific instance is incorrect. All that the two verses used as alibis prove is that wisdom is an instance of abundant good, not that abundant good is wisdom alone. This is similar to if someone says, "*akrim al-'alim*" (respect the scholar) and a few moments later says "Zayd *'alim*" (Zayd is a scholar) – does this mean that Zayd is the only instance of a scholar and other scholars are excluded from the first general phrase? No – there could be other scholars as well and the only thing the second phrase conveys is that Zayd is one instance of a scholar.

All that the two verses are saying is that wisdom and knowledge are some of those instances of abundant good. They would fit in perfectly fine under the general statement of *Surah al-Kawthar*. Therefore, this interpretation has not given us a strong enough argument for their position.

3) A group of scholars claim that *Kawthar* means a river or pond in heaven or a pond on the Day of Judgement – as per differences in traditions, we do not want to get into those details.

There is absolutely no Qur'anic or linguistic argument for this. The only argument for this is the traditions and the vast majority of the traditions regarding this chapter – in both Shi'i and Sunni works – all say that *Kawthar* is a pond or a river in the afterlife. Proponents say there are tens of traditions on this chapter and that is the best argument to restrict the meaning of *Kawthar* in this chapter to just a river or a pond. To read some of them one can refer to al-Amali of both Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Tusi, Tabrasi in his *Majma' al-Bayan*, Al-Qummi in al-Tafsir and other works. To access all of them collectively, one can either refer to Bihar al-Anwar if they are looking for a Shi'i author or Durr al-Manthur of Suyuti if they are looking for a Sunni author.

Generally speaking, proponents of this interpretation differentiate between *Kawthar* and *abtar* – they do not link the two together. As per their understanding, the chapter is essentially saying, indeed we have given you a river in heaven, and your enemies will be deprived of a progeny – there is no connection between the two verses.

As far as observations on this interpretation are concerned, we mentioned already we will not go into a detailed analysis of the traditions as that will become very lengthy. However, what we know is that this interpretation is solely based on these reports and does not have a Qur'anic or a linguistic argument. If

there were no traditions saying *Kawthar* is a pond or a river in paradise, it seems far-fetched for someone to have just arrived at that conclusion.

When we look at the traditions – be it in *Durr al-Manthur* or *Bihar al-Anwar* – we see that there is a set of traditions that speak about a river in heaven. This set has nothing to do with our discussion, because all they say is that there is a pond or river in heaven or that the Prophet (S) is given a pond in heaven, or that the believers and the nation of the Prophet (S) will drink from the pond, or that ‘Ali (‘a) will be your companion at the pond. The pond in these traditions is called *Kawthar*, but the mere resemblance of words does not mean that the Qur’anic verse is speaking about this pond.

The set of traditions relevant for our discussion are those that explicitly speak about *Surah al-Kawthar* and identify the word *Kawthar* to mean a pond in heaven. As far as these traditions are concerned, then an overwhelming amount of them have weak chains of transmissions, in both Sunni and Shi’i works – in fact, many of them have broken chains (*mursal*).

A number of reports which are not problematic from the perspective of their chains are in fact not *ahadith* attributed to the Prophet (S), instead they are attributed to the companions. Therefore, they could be from the personal opinions of the companion. These companions are primarily Ibn ‘Abbas, ‘Ayesha, ʿAḥḥak and Huzayfa – and their personal opinions are not binding on us.

What is strange in some of these reports is that Ibn ‘Abbas is describing the revelation of this chapter in Makkah and that the Prophet (S) was asked about its meaning. Ibn ‘Abbas was not even born during the Makkan period and even if we take the earliest date for his possible birth it would have been two or three years before the migration to Medina. In any case, a final point about these traditions is that most of them are Sunni – though I do not intend that just because that is the case, they are wrong, rather this is what their condition is.

Nevertheless, given there are a very small number of reports on this matter that can be authenticated, then a scholar must stick to the meaning conveyed in this tradition if they accept the probative force of an authentic solitary speculative tradition in matters of exegesis.

However, if a scholar – like ‘Allamah Tabataba’i – believes in the probative force of only those traditions where one attains conviction in their utterance, then with the condition of the reports we have at our disposal, it may be difficult to attain such conviction and assurance regarding these reports.

Nevertheless, whether one accepts this interpretation to a degree of certainty or not, it still acts as a speculative barrier in front of the previous two interpretations. One cannot easily discard it away.

4) These are essentially two different interpretations, but I am combining them since their argument is the same. Proponents say that *Kawthar* is a reference to the progeny of the Prophet (S) until the Day of Judgement. Or some say *Kawthar* is just a reference to Fatima (‘a), not all the progeny. Even though this opinion has absolutely no explicit tradition to back it up, it has become extremely popular to the extent

that it has become symbolic for Fatima (‘a). Proponents of this interpretation rely on four arguments – Two from the Qur’an and two from the traditions.

The first argument is that the word *abtar* in Arabic refers to someone who does not have a progeny. This is correct, the word *abtar* is used in this meaning as well. Proponents say that if you do not understand the word *Kawthar* to mean the progeny of the Prophet (S) or Fatima (‘a), then that would mean the chapter is talking about two different subject-matters. This is while the chapter is very short, and the presumption is that it is talking about one subject-matter. If the chapter had two subject matters, it would read like this:

Indeed, We have given you a lot of good, or a pond in heaven, or wisdom and knowledge, so pray to your Lord and sacrifice. Indeed, your enemy will be deprived of a progeny.

What does the last verse have to do with the first two verses of the chapter? Nothing – and it rather sounds absurd. However, if we understand the chapter to have one subject-matter, it will read like this:

Indeed, We have given you a large progeny, or Fatima (‘a) – who is the basis of your progeny, so pray to your Lord and sacrifice. Indeed, your enemy will be deprived of a progeny.

These scholars have first taken the meaning of *abtar* to then explain the meaning of *Kawthar*.

Their second argument relies on the combination of two words “*inna*” and “*huwa*” in the last verse. The composition of “*inna*” with “*huwa*” conveys that the verse is identifying someone or something in contrast to something that was said earlier. In other words, the chapter is saying, indeed we have given you X, and as a matter of fact, it is your enemy who is deprived of a progeny. X would only make reasonable sense if it means progeny.

The third argument which is from outside the Qur’an is also important, especially because ‘Allamah Tabataba’i is also a proponent of this view. The argument is that the traditions regarding the reasons for the chapter’s revelation back up the claim that the context of it was the progeny of the Prophet (S). When his (S) son Qasim died, the Prophet (S) was called *abtar* – what is understood from this is that the chapter had to do with progeny and children.

The last argument is the following tradition:

أرسل إليه عمرو بن العاص يعيبه بأشياء منها أنه يسمي حسنا و حسينا ولدي رسول الله ص فقال لرسوله قل
للشاني ابن الشاني لو لم يكونا ولديه لكان أبترا كما زعمه أبوك.

‘Amr Ibn al-As sent forth (someone to Imam ‘Ali) to denounce him on different matters. One of them was that he names Hasan and Husayn as the sons of the Messenger of Allah (S). He (‘a) said to the messenger (of ‘Amr), say to the hater son of the hater, if they were not his sons, he (S) would be *abtar*

just as his father had thought.[1](#)

The above tradition shows Imam ‘Ali (‘a) referencing the event that occurred when the Prophet (S) was called *abtar* in context of him not having any sons.

We will offer our observations on this interpretation and analysis, but before that, we want to mention that the word *Kawthar* in this chapter has been interpreted to mean the progeny of the Prophet (S) since the earliest centuries of Islamic scholarship and it is not something new. However, restricting the word to specifically mean Fatima (‘a), then this is a relatively new position perhaps dating back to around two centuries. Although in our current discussion whether an interpretation is old or new makes no difference, rather the evidence is what matters.

We will now offer our observations on the fourth and last exegesis which understands *Kawthar* to mean progeny of the Prophet (S), or specifically Fatima (‘a). We will divide the discussion into three parts. In the first part, we will evaluate the four arguments of the proponents and see whether their argument is strong enough to restrict the meaning of *Kawthar* to just progeny or Fatima (‘a). In the second part, we will present six major critiques against the fourth interpretation – offered by different scholars – and see whether they are valid or not. Thirdly, we will present the names of numerous Shi’i scholars who did not accept this interpretation.

Before we begin, we want to reiterate that the understanding of *Kawthar* in this chapter to mean progeny is an old opinion. However, its restriction to just Fatima (‘a) occurred around 200 years ago as per what I found during my research. Furthermore, even the opinion of it meaning progeny was not the most famous opinion in the past, rather, it was one of almost 20 different opinions. There was no consensus or even popularity regarding this specific interpretation, let alone on it being restricted to Fatima (‘a), even amongst the Shi’a.

Part One: Evaluating The Arguments Of The Fourth Interpretation

We will now evaluate the four arguments presented by the proponents of this view for restricting the meaning of the word to progeny or Fatima (‘a) and negating its general meaning of abundant good. Let us look at the fourth argument first, which was the following tradition:

‘Amr Ibn al-As sent forth (someone to Imam ‘Ali) to denounce him on different matters. One of them was that he names Hasan and Husayn as the sons of the Messenger of Allah (S). He (‘a) said to the messenger (of ‘Amr), say to the hater son of the hater, if they were not his sons, he (S) would be *abtar* just as his father had thought.[2](#)

This tradition does not exist in any source, no book of history, or biographies, or hadith or *tafsir* or anywhere. It only exists in the Sharh Nahj al-Balagha of Ibn Abi al-Hadidh who died in 7th century *hijri* and he did not mention any source for it, not even a chain of transmitters. To use this report as a strong alibi is very difficult. Furthermore, even if we were to accept this tradition, all it proves is that the Prophet

(S) will not be without a progeny since he is not *abtar*, but to make the claim that *Kawthar* subsequently means progeny or Fatima (‘a) depends on a second presumption which is that there has to be a relationship between the words *Kawthar* and *abtar*. We will later show that perhaps there can be an absence of a relationship between the two words.

The third argument they cited were the traditions on the reasons for the chapter’s revelation and ‘Allamah used these as his main argument. The traditions that mention the meaning of *abtar* in this verse are far fewer than the numerous traditions that talk about the meaning of *Kawthar* as a pond in heaven. In addition, most of them are all narrated by the *tabi’in*, not even the companions, let alone the Prophet (S) or the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Even the very few that are narrated by the companions return back to Ibn ‘Abbas. Furthermore, most of them are all found in the books of Ahl al-Sunnah, not Shi’i works – you will only find two or three traditions in Shi’i works that speak about the meaning of *abtar* in this verse in the context of its revelation. Also, there are numerous contradicting reports from both the companions and the *tabi’in* which interpret *abtar* to mean someone who is cut off from his nation or cut off from good. For those interested to further read these traditions they can refer to Jami’ al-Bayan of Tabari.

Furthermore, not all traditions even explain what *abtar* means. There is one set of traditions that says ‘As Ibn Wa’il is *abtar* – this does not tell us the meaning of *abtar*. The traditions that suggest the meaning of *abtar* is someone deprived of a progeny, in context of this very chapter, are extremely few.

Likewise, we want to reiterate the argument we made in our critique of the tradition cited from Ibn Abi al-Hadid, which is that all these traditions prove – if they do – is the meaning of *abtar*. They do not tell us the meaning of *Kawthar*, and to imply *Kawthar* means progeny is to presume that the two verses and words are related to one another.

Let us for argument’s sake accept everything for a moment – let us presume that there are traditions by which we can establish that *Kawthar* means progeny, or even Fatima (‘a). We still face a dilemma which is that on the one hand we have these very few traditions that say *Kawthar* means progeny, but a large number of traditions that say *Kawthar* means a pond in heaven. For what reason did ‘Allamah prefer the former set of traditions over the latter? If you say the latter are mostly Sunni traditions and hence, we prefer the former, well then, the former are also mostly Sunni. If you say the latter are mostly weak traditions, then the former are also mostly weak traditions. There is no reason to prefer the former set of traditions – which only speak about *abtar* and you have to derive the meaning of *Kawthar* indirectly through them – over the latter set of traditions which speak about the meaning of *Kawthar* directly, describe it as a pond, and are much more in number.

This is a very strange position held by ‘Allamah, especially when we know his general methodology when it comes to the traditions explaining the reasons for revelation is that he does not give them much value, to begin with. Why he gave these small number of traditions preference over traditions that describe *Kawthar* as a pond is strange. The traditions on the pond are not only much more in number, but they include more Shi’i traditions as well, and there are many more proponents of that view amongst

the scholars.

It would have been much more appropriate and befitting if ‘Allamah had stuck to the general meaning of *Kawthar* and argued that progeny or Fatima (‘a) are simply one instance of *Kawthar* – by applying the Principle of Movement and Application (*al-Jari wa al-Tatbiq*),³ like he does in many other places of his exegesis.

Now we move on to the last two internal alibis. The first argument was that if you do not understand the word *Kawthar* to mean progeny then that would mean the chapter is talking about two different subject-matters. The second argument was regarding the words “*inna*” and “*huwa*”. Let us offer our observations on these two arguments:

a) There is no doubt that *abtar* in the Arabic language has been used to mean someone deprived of a progeny. However, just because the Qur’an uses this word, it does not necessarily mean it has also been used in the same meaning. This is because *abtar* has been used to mean many other things as well. Essentially, the fallacious argument of the proponents is as follows:

- One of the meanings of a word in the Arabic language is X
- It is possible for the Qur’an to have used this word in X meaning
- Hence, the Qur’an has used this word in X meaning

This fallacious argument exists in many works of exegesis. For example, consider the word *thiyab* in Arabic, what does it mean? Clothes. However, in the Arabic language the word *thiyab* is also used to mean heart (*qalb*). So certain exegetes, especially those with mystical affinities, claimed that the verse (74:4) **وَنِيَابِكَ فَطَهِّرْ** meant it was an order to the Prophet (S) to purify his heart. This is very evidently fallacious.

Likewise, the word *abtar* in the Arabic language has been used to mean someone who is deprived of good, from progeny, from remembrance and fame and so on. There is nothing within the chapter itself that allows us to prefer the meaning of *abtar* to be someone deprived of a progeny – the only alibi for that are the traditions which are external evidence, and we have already discussed their condition.

b) Secondly, ‘Allamah says that if *Kawthar* does not mean progeny, then that would mean the chapter is talking about two different subject-matters, and that is a problem. This is a very good attempt to justify the claim, however some scholars have responded to this as follows:

i. Shahid Muhammad al-Sadr al-Thani says what is the problem if there are two subject-matters in one chapter? There are many chapters that speak about multiple subjects matters and that is not something strange, rather it is pretty common in the Qur'an. The chapter could be saying: Indeed, We have given you abundant good, so pray to your Lord, and sacrifice due to what Allah (swt) has blessed you with. On a completely different note, indeed it is your enemy who is without a progeny.

This is what al-Sadr has said. It an argument, though I believe it is not the strongest of arguments since the chapter is so short and so it still seems a little far-fetched for it to be speaking about two different subject-matters.

ii. This second explanation is also given by Shahid al-Sadr al-Thani, and this is a much stronger argument. He says, we agree that the last verse of the chapter is in opposition to what is being discussed in the first verse, hence both verses should be speaking about one thing. However, why are we presuming *abtar* means someone deprived of a progeny and not someone deprived of abundant good?

This is a valid argument. 'Allamah – apparently – seems to be influenced by the traditions and then goes to the end of the chapter to define what *abtar* means, and then concludes that *Kawthar* means progeny. However, why should we begin like that, and not from the beginning of the chapter where we take the meaning of *Kawthar* as abundant good, subsequently concluding that *abtar* means someone deprived of this abundant good.

c) As for the last argument regarding the words “*inna*” and “*huwa*” then even in this case if we take the meaning of *Kawthar* to mean abundant good and *abtar* to mean someone who is deprived of it, there would be no problem with the meaning of the chapter. It would simply mean: Indeed, We have given you abundant good, and as a matter of fact, it is your enemy who is deprived of this abundant good.

Overall, the fourth interpretation is standing on two fundamental arguments. One of them is the traditions which we showed were not only weak but very few in number and contradict a large number of traditions that speak of *Kawthar* as a pond. The second argument was the presumption that *abtar* necessarily means someone who is deprived of a progeny in this specific verse.

Part Two: Critiques On The Fourth Interpretation

The aforementioned discourse was all related to the first part of our discussion. The second part of our discussion expounds on the independent critiques offered against the fourth interpretation. Most of these critiques are focused on the claim that the word *Kawthar* is restricted to Fatima (‘a). There are six major critiques:

1) If *Kawthar* was specifically Fatima (‘a), then how is it possible for there to not even have been one single narration in the hadith corpus of the Muslims. This is extremely strange. Not one single tradition, not even a weak one or a later one. Someone did not even bother to fabricate such a tradition. This is

while we have so many traditions in our books – and even in Sunni books – that interpret verses upon verses of the Qur'an in light and praise of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). If this verse was indeed an explicit reference to Fatima ('a), this would have been one of the greatest merits of Fatima ('a) so how could it have been possible for there to not even be one single tradition on the matter? For me personally, this is extremely strange. I am not saying this critique invalidates the fourth interpretation completely, but it significantly weakens its probability.

On the contrary, we find many traditions that say *Kawthar* is a pond or a lake and one Shi'i tradition from Imam al-Sadiq ('a) even says it means intercession on the Day of Judgement.

2) If *abtar* means someone who is deprived of a progeny, there is a problem which Ibn 'Ashur points out in his exegesis. He says, if the verse is saying 'As Ibn Wa'il al-Sahmi is *abtar*, this contradicts the fact that he was not *abtar*. He had a son 'Amr Ibn al-As who is famous and well known, and even 'Amr had a son named 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr who is a famous narrator amongst the Ahl al-Sunnah. This is established and recorded in the works of history. This also weakens the traditions themselves.

Ibn 'Ashur says that if we were to accept these traditions, then it would be necessary to understand the last verse in what is termed as *Uslub al-Hakim* (the construct of speech by the wise) in the science of rhetoric. Meaning, the verse is saying, indeed we have given you a lot of good and guidance, and it is your enemy who is deprived – but not deprived of what he believes to be a deprivation in the sense of progeny, rather he will be afflicted with true deprivation. He will not be remembered, his mention will be erased from all good and righteous places, he will not enter heaven, he will be a forgotten person and so on. This is true deprivation – not the lack of progeny.

As I mentioned at the beginning of our lessons, there is a discrepancy in the traditions on who this individual was. I checked the names of all others to see whether there was anyone who did not have a progeny. Some traditions say it was Abu Lahab – he was not *abtar* since he had three children. Some traditions say it was Walid Ibn Mughirah – he was not *abtar* since his son was Khalid Ibn Walid who himself had children. Some traditions say it was 'Amr Ibn al-As and as we mentioned he had a son. Some traditions say it was Abu Jahl – he was not *abtar* since he had sons, some of them very well known. Some traditions say it was 'Uqba – he was not *abtar* since he had children, such as Walid Ibn 'Uqba and according to some traditions the verse of ***al-Naba'* (49:6)** was revealed for him. All these individuals were not *abtar* in the sense that they did not have a progeny. Hence, the critique of Ibn 'Ashur is strengthened.

However, our observation on Ibn 'Ashur's argument is that it is not necessary that when Allah (swt) calls someone *abtar* that they will not have any immediate progeny. It could be a general statement saying that their progeny will eventually cease to exist. Maybe someone could investigate the genealogy of these figures and conclude that their progeny was indeed cut off after 100 years or so – who knows – time does not allow us to get into such extensive research.

3) Ibn 'Ashur has a second critique and that is based on his opinion that the chapter was revealed in Medina. He says that the verse commanding the Prophet (S) to sacrifice, and this is in reference to what happened during *Hudaybiyyah*.

We have alluded to this already in the beginning of our lessons and we believe this is a very weak claim. As a matter of fact, we will explain what the word sacrifice (*nahr*) in this verse means shortly.

4) If the word *Kawthar* in this chapter means Fatima ('a) – which is what is popularly understood today, in fact, people even name their daughters *Kawthar* because they believe they are giving them one of the names of Fatima ('a) – then that would mean *Kawthar* is from one of her titles, epithets or from one of her names. When we look at the traditions and historical reports regarding Fatima ('a) – whether they are authentic or not – there is not one single report which mentions this as one of her titles or names.

What we find instead are the following names: Fatima, Siddiqah, Mubarakah, Shahidah, Tahirah, Zakiyyah, Ar-Radhiyyah, Ar-Radhiyyah, Mardhiyyah, Muhaddatha, Zahra', Batul, Badha', Sayyidah al-Nisa', Sayyidah Nisa' al-'Alamin, Hasan, Sayyidah, Umm al-A'imma, Umm Abiha, Hurrah, 'Adhara', Hawra', al-Hawra' al-Insiiyyah, Maryam al-Kubra, al-Siddiqah al-Kubrah, Nuriyyah, Mansurah and others.

All of these titles are mentioned – some of them in traditions, some in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), while others are mentioned in the words of scholars of the past or works of history and so on. Not one of these traditions or scholars refers to her as *Kawthar* and this shows that such a name was not attributed to her at all in the past.

5) This fifth argument is against those who took the meaning of *Kawthar* to mean progeny – it is not applicable to those who restrict the meaning to just Fatima ('a). It argues: is it really a Qur'anic theme to prefer someone over another due to the number of children they have and how large their progeny is? If the verse is saying, indeed We will give you a great progeny, and your enemy will be deprived of it, what merit does this have? Does the Qur'an not say ***Rivalry [and vainglory] distracted you? (102: 1)*** Preference of one over the other due to the number of children and progeny was an Arab culture, the very culture the Qur'an was trying to get rid of.

In addition, have there not been hundreds, if not thousands, of Prophets (S) whose progenies have ceased to exist, and we do not remember those Prophets (S) except through their histories, their stories, the struggles they went through and so on? Furthermore, does simply having a progeny really a good thing, or is it only a good thing if the progeny is righteous? Allah (swt) says to Nuh:

O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous. (11:46)

Or ***Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent. (42:50)***

Having a large progeny and lineage is simply in the hands of Allah (swt) and is it not something to be proud of or to feel conceited about.

6) The traditions say that the chapter was revealed when one of the sons of the Prophet (S) passed away, and 'As called him (S) *abtar*. The verse was revealed saying: Indeed, We have given you *al-Kawthar*. The verse uses the past tense "given you"; this is while Khadija ('a) had not even given birth to Fatima ('a) yet. Therefore, it has to be something that the Prophet (S) had already been given, such as knowledge, or wisdom, or faith, or even at that moment he (S) could have been given the pond in heaven. However, if you understand the word *Kawthar* to mean progeny, then you would have to understand this as a promise, rather than an informative statement. Understanding this past-tense as a promise is against the prima-facie of the verse.

We believe this is not a very strong argument and it is possible to respond to it. This is because in the Arabic language such use is not uncommon and hence it is not that difficult to understand the past tense verb as a promise in this verse.

Nevertheless, our conclusion after all these discussions is that the first interpretation is the most reasonable one. *Kawthar* means abundant good and it has many instances, such as belief, Prophethood, Qur'an, wisdom, Fatima ('a), righteous progeny, pond or lake in heaven and so on; whereas *abtar* is someone who is deprived of all of these.

Part Three: View Of Shi'i Scholars

In the third part of our discussion, we will mention the names of Shi'i scholars who – like myself – accepted the first interpretation:

Shaykh Tabrasi in *Majma' al-Bayan*

Shaykh Sadiqi Tehrani in *al-Furqan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*

Sayyid Ja'far Murtadha 'Amili in his *Tafsir Surah al-Kawthar*

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlullah in his *Tafsir*

Gonabadi in his *Bayan al-Sa'adah*

Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Maghniyyah in *Tafsir al-Kashif*

Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarresi in *Tafsir min Huda al-Qur'an*

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Shirazi in *Taqrib al-Qur'an ila al-Adhhan*

Sayyid 'Ali al-Ha'iri al-Tehrani in his *Muqtanayat al-Durar wa Multaqatat al-Thamar*

Sayyid ‘Abd al-Husayn al-Tayyib in his *Atyab al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an*

Sayyid ‘Ali Akbar al-Qurashi in his *Tafsir Ahsan al-Hadith*

Husayni Shah ‘Abd al-A‘ẓimi in his *Tafsir Ithna’ ‘Ashari*

Sayyid ‘Abdullah Shubbar in his *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*

Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani in his *Partoyi Az Qur’an*

‘Ali Ibn al-Husayn al-‘Amili in his *al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘Aziz*

Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khu’i in his work *al-Bayan* under the discussion of the miraculousness of the Qur’an

Mulla Fathullah al-Kashani in his *Zubdah al-Tafasir*

We have also previously mentioned the name of Shahid al-Sadr al-Thani who also holds this opinion. All of them are *Imamiyyah* Shi’a scholars and they accept that *Kawthar* means abundant good. They believe all things that are mentioned otherwise are simply instances of *Kawthar* and that the verse is not restricted to any one single instance.

Verse 2: Fa Salli Li Rabbika Wanhar

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحِرْ

Therefore, pray to your Lord and make a sacrifice. (108:2).

Due to the *fa* we know that that this verse is linked to the first verse. It signifies an exchange, that is, since We have given you a lot of good, you should return the favour by praying and sacrificing. The verse is teaching the Prophet (S), other Muslims and rest of humanity, that whatever Allah (swt) gives to you deserves gratefulness and thanks (*shukr*). This is something all humans acknowledge; when someone does something good for you, you feel you must thank them for their favour, even if the value of what you return the favour with is less in terms of quantity and quality than the original favour.

Shukr is of different types, one time you can thank someone verbally by simply saying, “thank you”, but there are practical ways to be thankful as well such as what is being mentioned in this verse. In this era mankind has forgotten the favours of Allah (swt) and has forgotten to thank Him for all His blessings. Instead, we have considered ourselves the criterion and we believe we are the ones who deserve thanks from others. Though such human rights do exist and thanks should be offered where relevant, but not at the cost of us forgetting the rights of Allah (swt).

Allah (swt) in the Qur'an says, ***If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]*** (14:7) – which establishes a further relationship between gratefulness and increase in our blessings and favour.

In the verse of *Surah al-Kawthar*, Allah (swt) commands the Prophet (S) to pray and to sacrifice. In other words, he (S) is being asked to thank Allah (swt) by engaging in an act of worship and by spending and giving to others through sacrifice (as we will discuss in detail shortly).

The relevance of the word *li-rabbika* should also be very clear, indicating that the prayers are only for your Lord, unlike what the polytheists of Makkah believed. Also note that the verse switches from first-person to third person – it says, ***“We gave you abundant good”***, so ***“pray to your Lord”*** instead of “pray to Us”. This switch magnifies the reason for why the Prophet (S) is being asked to thank Allah (swt) and that is due to His (swt) Lordship (*rububiyyah*). It is your Lord (swt) who cares about you, showers His (swt) grace upon you, assists you and grants you favours and blessings.

An important question to discuss now is what do the words *Salat* and *Nahr* mean in this verse. The difference of opinion is due to the traditions on the revelation of this verse, or due to certain analysis some exegetes have put forth, or simply due to other traditions that speak about these words independently. Let us look at these opinions:

1) *Fa-Salli* is simply a command to pray. *Wanhar* is a command to raise your hands during *takbir* during prayers up until your throat. Some Shi'i and Sunni traditions indicating these do exist and some jurists even concluded that this is not something you do just for the first *takbir*, but rather every *takbir* or anytime you raise your hands – which includes raising your hands for the recitation of the *qunut*.

2) *Fa-Salli* is a command to pray – just like the first interpretation above. *Wanhar* means that when you stand up from *ruku'* in prayers, stand up with a straight back, and do not slouch over. They argue that when we look at the word *Nahr* linguistically, we see that it is used for multiple meanings. One of its meaning is throat, but it also means to stand face to face. Proponents of this interpretation say that the verse is saying you should stand up straight looking directly towards the *Qiblah*.

3) *Fa-Salli* is a command to pray. *Wanhar* means that when you raise your hands for *takbir*, your palms should be facing the *Qiblah*.

Our observation on all three interpretations is that if there are reliable reports – as per one's view on the probative force of solitary reports – explaining and defining the word *Nahr* as above, then there is no issue and they have to abide by this understanding. However, if one rejects these traditions for whatever reason – and there is a lengthy discussion amongst the jurists over these traditions and one can refer to them to see the different arguments – then one must wonder if any of the three explanations above are strong. Here are a number of observations:

i. Some may say there is no relationship between being given *Kawthar* and being commanded to pray to offer thanks, with such a detailed act within that prayer – i.e. this is how you should raise your hands for

takbir, or this is how you should stand up after *ruku'*. The relationship of this detailed matter in respects to thanking Allah (swt) is not clear.

To further elaborate: we can understand if one says, Allah (swt) has given you a lot of favours, so thank Him (swt) by praying and giving charity, for example. But if someone says, Allah (swt) has given you a lot of favours, so thank him by praying, and make sure when you raise your hands in takbir your palms are facing towards the *Qiblah* (or raise them till your throat, or that when you stand up from *ruku'* make sure you stand up straight facing the Qibla). This is a little strange and its connection to being thankful and grateful to Allah (swt) alongside the general concept of praying is not clear.

This is on top of the fact that most jurists have not given a verdict on it being obligatory to raise your hands for *takbir* in *Salat* (except the first one), let alone a verdict on raising it till the throat or ensuring that the palms face the Qibla.

ii. Some exegetes have said the gap between *Fa-Salli* and *Wanhar* with the word *li-rabbika* further weakens these three explanations. This is because it appears that the concept of *Salat* ends with the word “for your Lord”, and the word *wa* after it is essentially indicating the mentioning of something different, rather than a small detail within the same prayers that was previously mentioned before the phrase “for your Lord”.

The above observation is not clear to me itself and I do not find it strong, but this is what they have said.

iii. The most important critique is that the word *Nahr* in Arabic is more popularly and famously used for the slaughtering of a camel. The Arabs did not know about such details about the prayers, particularly at the time of Makkah during the beginning stages of Islam. For the Qur'an to speak about such a detailed jurisprudential matter regarding *Salat* in the Makkan period, while the word *Nahr* was already popularly used to mean slaughtering a camel, is very far-fetched and weakens the possibility of the three interpretations.

All of these observations are under the presumption that there are no reliable traditions on the matter, but as we have already said, if there is a reliable and probative tradition explaining *Nahr* to mean one of these detailed matters, then one must stick to the traditions.

4) *Fa-Salli* is a command to pray, but *Wanhar* is a command to face the Qibla when sacrificing a camel.

This is simply wrong since the proponent has used two different meanings of *Nahr* – sacrificing a camel and facing the Qibla – to come up with this interpretation. Even if one were to say that it is possible for a word to be used in multiple meanings at one time, it would still be against the prima-facie of the word *Nahr*. In fact, the previous three interpretations are much more reasonable than this one.

5) Though *Nahr* means slaughtering a camel, but this slaughtering was closely related to the Hajj in the Arab culture. Hence, the Prophet (S) is being commanded to sacrifice a camel during Hajj on '*Id al-*

Adhha. This also then becomes an alibi that the command to pray (*Fa-Salli*) is a command to pray *Salat al-Id*. This is what Ibn ‘Ashur has mentioned and some traditions actually assist this interpretation – but those interested can look at the books of jurisprudence and see what the jurists have concluded there since some have used the verse to prove the obligation of *Salat al-Id*.

Ibn ‘Ashur showed a lot of attention to detail in this interpretation, but in any case, there are a number of problems with it. Firstly, we agree that Nahr was associated with the slaughtering of camels, however, the claim that this slaughtering was most popular and known to have occurred during Hajj is unknown – this needs evidence. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that the Arabs would sacrifice and slaughter a camel when they wanted to distribute a lot of food to people out of hospitality or out of charity. This is what was well-known in the Arab culture.

This is on top of the fact that there is no evidence to argue that this chapter had anything to do with *Hudaybiyyah*, or Hajj or that it was even revealed in Medina.

6) *Fa-Salli* is a general command to pray and *Wanhar* is a general command to sacrifice and slaughter a camel. Of course, the mere sacrifice is not what is intended, rather it is being used as a metonymy (*kinayah*) to distribute the food, feed people out of charity and hospitality. It is like when someone says, “slaughter a sheep for them”. This does not mean you slaughter a sheep for a group of people and then just throw the sheep away, rather it means you slaughter it and then serve it to them as food.

In our view, the last explanation is the most reasonable understanding of the verse.

Verse 3 – Inna Shani’aka Huwa Al-Abtar

إِنَّ شَانِيكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ

Surely your enemy is the one who shall be cut off [without posterity]. (108:3).

Shani’ is someone who possesses hate, but a type of hate that is worse than mere enmity. They possess the worse type of enmity and hate possible. Hence the verse is saying, your hater and enemy will be the deprived one, they will be the ones at loss.

Though this chapter is addressing the Prophet (S), it can be generalized to all. Those upon whom Allah (swt) bestows His favours and blessings, then they must thank Him for His Lordship by showing servitude to Him alone and as well as being charitable and hospitable to people around them.

As for those who trouble you out of their severe hate for you, they will be the ones deprived of Allah’s (swt) favours and they will be the ones at loss.

A Final Word Of Advice

We will conclude this exegesis by mentioning a few words of advice in regards to what was said about this chapter not being specifically restricted to Lady Fatima ('a) – as it appeared some students were a little shocked to learn about this matter. Perhaps the laymen and general laity have an excuse for associating this chapter or other matters of religion to things that are not necessarily valid or reliable. A speaker comes to them to their city or village, sits on the pulpit and says certain things – they have no reason not to believe him. They will accept his words as he is their source of knowledge and they learn from these speakers all the time.

However, there is no excuse for a student of the *Hawzah*, one who has entered the seminary, has opened the door to research and further investigation, to remain an imitator (*muqallid*). I do not mean an imitator in jurisprudence – do not confuse it with that. For a student of the seminary, it is necessary to look, research and investigate the different opinions, contemplate over them. They must enter this realm, and not remain like the local vegetable sellers – and I do not mean any offence to them – who do not have any idea about the detailed discussions of religion.

The laymen are excused as their sources of knowledge for these matters are whoever comes to them and recites from the pulpit, or what they hear from the radio or television and so on. Most do not have time to research into these matters, nor do they care – this is fine and that is their right. But for someone who enters the seminary, and has spent year after year, it is simply not appropriate for them to remain like a layman. This is extremely dangerous, particularly for the religion itself. You must get out of the robes of the laity and become a real student, even if you do not become a jurist in jurisprudence – I am not talking about jurisprudence.

Of course, all this needs to happen gradually, not that on the first day someone enters the seminary they think they are now the jurist of the century or the greatest scholar of their time – no. However, it needs to happen, and a student is not excused, especially because they carry a great responsibility on their shoulders. Personally, I can offer a simple piece of advice to students, so that when they are on this journey of learning they do not fall into shock and confusion when they come across opinions, they are not familiar with:

Study the history of the various sciences and issues. When you study the history of these issues, you will become immune to hearing differing opinions and the shock factor will slowly diminish. When you keep believing there is only one opinion on the matter, then even after spending 10 years in the seminary, you will fall into a state of shock and fear as soon as come across a second opinion. This is because you were ignorant of the history of the discussion and the differences of opinions that existed on it from the very beginning. This shock is a result of ignorance and the only way to cure it is to get out of that ignorance. Study the heritage, read the works of the scholars, continuously skim through their works, do not begin any discussion from scratch – rather know that for most matters there generally

exists a 1000-years of discussion. This will allow you to become a scholar and you will no longer remain a layman.

If you are a student, yet you still behave and think like a layman, then whenever you hear a new opinion, you will react in one of two ways. One way is that you will either block off the opinion and discard it without giving it any thought and attention. This is while, often, the opinion that you are discarding is not even a new opinion, rather only due to your ignorance of the history of the matter you believe it is new.

The second way you could possibly react is that the moment you hear a different opinion – especially if it comes from a relatively important scholar – it will feel as if lightning has struck you and you will lose all trust and certainty in your previously held beliefs and ideas. This is also dangerous and incorrect.

Both of these approaches are wrong and we must take the middle ground. This is something that needs to become part of our pedagogy – one must not fall into immediate doubt and skepticism, nor put a barrier between themselves and a different opinion. We must train ourselves to remain calm and collected when we hear a new opinion. We must allow ourselves to investigate it and contemplate over it, not dogmatically reject it, and nor become skeptical about all our previously held beliefs.

There is this story reported, that once Fakhr al-Din Ar-Razi was found weeping by some of his students and they asked him about it. He said he is weeping because for three decades he believed in a certain matter in one of the issues of logic, but he realized he had been incorrect this whole time. The students said to him that this should be a matter of joy since you have realized your error, hence there is no reason to cry. He replied, “I am not weeping because I have realized I was wrong on this specific matter, rather, I am weeping because it is possible, I could have been wrong on all other issues as well.”

We do not want to react dogmatically, but at the same time we do not want to react like Fakhr al-Din Ar-Razi either, who eventually became known as *Shaykh al-Mushakkikin* (the Leader of the Skeptics).

[1.](#) Sharh Nahj al-Balagha of Ibn Abi al-Hadid, v. 20, pg. 334

[2.](#) Sharh Nahj al-Balagha of Ibn Abi al-Hadid, v. 20, pg. 334

[3.](#) TN: This principle states that while a verse may have been revealed in a specific time for a specific person or situation, its intended message or aim is not limited to that case but can be applied out in further cases that are similar. The principle translates to movement and application; the message of the verse moves beyond its case and is applicable in other cases.

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