

Sciences of the Qur'an ("Uloom al-Qur'an")

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Sheikh Leghaei explores the subject of Sciences of the Holy Quran in 12 condensed but comprehensive lessons that give the reader an overview of the ocean of knowledge and spirituality of the Word of God.

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Introduction: Definition, History and Main Topics

In the Name of the Almighty

The Holy Quran is the verbatim Words of God, the most authentic source in Islam and the one and only Book in the history of man that is divinely preserved against any distortion or perversion. It is the living miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the only literature that no man or jinn is ever able to produce something like unto it.

Definition

By 'science' here we don't mean natural sciences such as physics and chemistry. The 'science' here is an expression for methodological study and certain techniques for the understanding of the Quran. The Sciences of the Quran therefore are preliminary studies that are necessary to enable the correct understanding of the Quran. The sciences of the abrogating and abrogated Ayaat, the clear and the unclear Ayaat and the occasions of the revelation, etc. are some examples of the sciences of the Quran.

For instance, the Almighty Allah in Surah 4 states: "***Marry women that are pure for you, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one.***"(4:3)

And in the same Surah, He states: "***You will never be able to do justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire.***"(4: 129)

Are these two Ayaat contrary to each other? Or does the latter Ayah abrogate the former one? The correct understanding of these Ayaat requires acquaintance with the sciences of the Quran.

History

Although the Holy Quran is revealed in plain Arabic language (26:195), due to certain internal and external factors that will be discussed in this course, its best understanding requires certain prerequisite studies. At the time of the revelation of the Quran when Muslims faced any difficulty understanding the

Quran they would simply ask the Holy Prophet (S) to whom the Quran was revealed. With the demise of the Prophet (S) the need for classification of the techniques of understanding the Quran became more imperative.

According to Al-Soyouti, amongst the first Four Caliphs, Imam Ali (a.s) has narrated the most narrations about the techniques of understanding the Quran¹. However, the expression of the 'sciences of the Quran' was not used until the 5th century. Al-Zaraqani in his book *Manahelul-'Irfan* states: "*It is known among the writers of the sciences of the Quran that the advent of this expression was the seventh century. However, I found a book in the Egyptian Public Library, named 'Al-Borhan in the sciences of the Quran'. The book is compiled by Ali ibn Ibrahim ibn Sa'eed known as 'al-Houfi' died in 430 (A.H) in thirty volumes, which today only fifteen volumes of it are available.*"²

Types of literature in the sciences of the Quran

Muslim scholars have usually discussed the sciences of the Quran in one of three following styles:

1. Introduction to their exegesis of the Quran

As mentioned earlier, the sciences of the Quran are general techniques of understanding the Quran. Thus, many exegetists of the Quran have briefly discussed the main topics of the sciences of the Quran in the beginning of their exegesis such as al-Faydh al-Kashani, died in 1091 (A.H) in the beginning of his *Tafsir 'al-Safi'*, Seyyed Hashem al-Bahrani, died in 1109 (A.H) in the beginning of his *Tafsir 'al-Borhan'*, etc.

2. Separate books on the sciences of the Quran

Due to the significance of the sciences of the Quran many scholars have compiled separate books on the topic for more detailed discussions. The following are some of the most important references compiled on the sciences of the Quran.

- a) al-Borhan Fi 'Uloomel-Quran compiled by BadrudDin al-Zarkashi, died in 794 (A.H). al-Zarkashi was an Egyptian scholar following the Shaafei' school. His book is published in Arabic in four volumes and covers 47 sciences of the Quran.
- b) al-Etqaan Fi 'Uloomel-Quran compiled by JalaludDin al-Soyouti died in 911 (A.H). He was also from Egypt and followed the school of Shaafei'. His book is published in Arabic, two volumes and covers 80 sciences of the Quran.
- c) Al-Tamheed Fi 'Uloomel-Quran compiled by Ayatollah Muhammad Hadi Ma'refat one of the contemporary Shi'a scholars. His book is published in Arabic in three volumes.

3. A particular science of the Quran

The third category of the compilation on the sciences of the Quran is books that are dealing only with one particular branch of the sciences of the Quran. Obviously these works are more detailed and are only studied in the advanced level of Islamic education. An example of such works is 'E'jazul-Quran' (The miracles of the Quran) by al-Baaqellani, died in 403 (A.H). This book is published in two volumes and only deals with the linguistic miracles of the Quran.

The present course will be a concise version of the second category of the sciences of the Quran. The present course though briefly fits into the second category of the study of the sciences of the Quran. The main topics that will be discussed in this course include: a controversial discussion on the method of the revelation of the Quran, the history of the Quran, the myth of the distortion of the Quran, the science of the context of the Quran, clear and unclear Ayaat and many other useful issues about the Quran.

- [1.](#) Al-Etqaan Fi 'Uloomel-Quran, vol.2, p.87
- [2.](#) Manahelul-Irfan Fi Uloomel-Quran, vol. 1 p.35

Lesson 1: Revelation, its stages, the author of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is the Holy Scripture of Muslims and the verbatim Words of God. It is a miracle that from the 'Ba' of Bismillah to the 'Seen' of 'An-Nas' (the last Word of the Qur'an) is revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S) word by word. Since the time of its revelation to present time, the Holy Qur'an apart from its preserved written format, it has been memorised in the hearts of millions of Muslims. Thus, today we read it as it was revealed to its first recipient; i.e. Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Name and the Meaning of the Qur'an

Among all different names given to this Holy Scripture, 'the Qur'an' (al-Qur'an) is the most common and famous one. This is a name that the Almighty Allah has given to the Book, from the first years of the revelation. The revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S) was called 'the Qur'an' by the revelation itself. The term is repeated 68 times in the Qur'an and except on two occasions (17:78) it means the Holy Qur'an or part of it. In English it is written 'the Koran' or 'the Qur'an'.[1](#)

About the meaning of the term 'Qur'an' there are two famous opinions: 1) it is driven from al-Qar' meaning 'to collect'.2) It is driven from 'Qara' (to recite). Thus, it is called 'the Qur'an' for it is a Book to be recited (73:4) or because the revelation began by 'Read' (96:1). The second opinion seems more

accurate.

Revelation

The Holy Qur'an is a divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S). The term used in the Qur'an for revelation is 'al-Wahy'. Al-Wahy literally means a quick and mysterious way of communication. The term 'revelation' literally means to pull the cover away from something, thus it is not the best translation for 'al-Wahy'.

The term revelation in English includes the 'Speech of God' whether without the mediation of an angel (Samuel 3:1) or with the mediation of the angels (Hebrews 2:2). It also includes the visions of other than the Prophets such as the book of Revelation (the last book of the New Testament according to the Catholics). Thus, according to Catholicism the revelation is not limited to the Prophets nor has it ceased to continue.

Revelation in the Qur'an

The term 'revelation' is used in the Qur'an in its literal sense, i.e. 'a quick signal' (19:11) and is also used in its broad sense to mean communication of God to His creations. Thus, God reveals to the celestial bodies (41:12), to the bees (16:68), to His angels (8:12), to selected humans but not Prophets such as the mother of Moses (28:7), or to the disciples of Jesus (5:111) and finally in most instances the term is used to express God's communication to the Prophets (4:163).

In general, the revelation in the language of the Qur'an is "God's communication be it verbal or by action to His creation whether to nature, the plants, the animals, angels or humans." The revelation of God to nature forms 'the natural laws' as His revelation to the Prophets reveals 'the Canon laws'. Thus, the laws of the Qur'an are lawful phenomena similar to the natural laws.

'Revelation' in Islamic terminology is exclusively used for the communication of God with the Prophets. His communication with other creations is called 'inspiration' (Ilham) or 'vision' (Kashf) or 'instinctive guidance' (al-Hidayat 'ul-Ghariziya). Thus, 'revelation' in its specific sense ceased to continue by the last revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S).

Possibility of Revelation

Revelation in its specific meaning cannot be experienced by ordinary humans. Thus, questions about its possibility are raised. Nonetheless, once the existence of God is proven, the possibility of revelation is undeniable. God who has endowed man with means to communicate his thoughts to his fellow humans, by far is Able to communicate His Will and Knowledge to man for His guidance.

Types of God's Revelation to Man

The best description of God's revelation to man is explained in Surah 42:51–52. According to these Ayaat God; the Almighty only communicates with man in the following three methods.

1. Revelation without any Intermediate

This is the first type of revelation which is by 'casting to the heart' of the chosen person. The lowest degree of this revelation is called 'inspiration' (Ilham) which was given to the mother of Moses (28:7), to the disciples of Jesus (5: 111) and above all was cast directly to the heart of the Prophet Muhammad (S) in the Night of Ascension (53: 10).

2. Revelation by mediation of a Physical Obstacle

In this type of revelation, the Almighty God creates the voice and enrich it to a Prophet from behind and above a physical object such as a tree (28:30) or fire (20:11). Inscribing on the Tablets (7: 145) for Moses (S) is also an example of this type of revelation.

3. Revelation by mediation of an Angel

In this type the Almighty God created the "Words" and via His Messenger (angel) delivers it to His chosen Prophet. In most of the instances the angel appears to the Prophet in a handsome human body and delivers the Message of God to him (11:81, 81:19). According to one interpretation the Prophets have rarely seen the angel in his real appearance, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad (S) in his ascension (53:11).

Types of Revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S)

The Ayaat of the Qur'an and the various narrations confirm that Prophet Muhammad (S) has received revelations in all the above-mentioned types, although most of the time he has received the revelation via Archangel Gabriel. Prophet Muhammad (S) has received the 'Holy Narrations' (Hadith Qudsi) in the first type (al-Hakim2:4). Sometimes he has received the revelation of the Qur'an in the second form (al-Bukhari1). In most of the instances he has received the revelation in the third type. (al-Majlesi 18:268).

Time and Place of Revelation

Although the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S) occurred in the cave of Hira at Mount Noor, there was never any restrictions of the times or places for receiving revelations. Sometimes he was receiving revelations whilst he was eating, praying, on the pulpit, riding his horse, etc. The revelation was also sometimes foretelling the future (30:2,3) or it would reveal after occasions or incidents, like the revelation about the Battle of Uhud (3: 121–180) or the Battle of Bani-Nadheer (59:2–10). Sometimes he was asked

a question and instantly the answer would be revealed to him (48:1-4), but in some other occasions it took more than a month for an answer to be revealed to him.

The Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God

There are three hypothetical possibilities about the authors of the words of the Qur'an:

1. The Author of the Qur'an is the Almighty Allah, both for its Words and the Concepts. This means the Almighty God has created the Words of the Qur'an and his trustworthy Messenger (Gabriel) delivered it to His human trustworthy Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) to recite it for mankind and the jinn.
2. Gabriel has learned the concepts of the Qur'an from God expressed them in Arabic and delivered them to the Prophet (S). Thus, the concepts of the Qur'an are from God but the wordings would be from Gabriel.
3. Gabriel brings the concepts of the Qur'an from God to Prophet Muhammad (S) and the Prophet expressed them in the Arabic language for people. Thus, the words of the Qur'an would be from Prophet Muhammad (S).
4. Out of all the possibilities, the first is the only one that the Qur'an confirms. Thus, Muslims are unanimous that the Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God. The Qur'an explicitly states:

"And verily, you (O Muhammad) are given the Qur'an from the All-Wise, All-Knowing. " (27:6)[2](#)

The Proofs

Every single sentence of the Qur'an is a vivid proof that the Qur'an in its words and the concepts are but from God, hence God has named every sentence of this Book an 'Ayah' (Sign=Miracle). Nonetheless, the following are some evidences that the Qur'an is the actual Words of God created for the guidance of mankind.

1. The Miracles of the Qur'an: The Qur'an is the living miracle of the Prophet of Islam (S). None has even been able to produce or forge even a small verse like unto an Ayah of the Qur'an. Had the Qur'an been the words of Prophet Muhammad (S) it would have been possible to forge similar to it, as it has happened to his narrations (Hadith).[3](#)
2. Confirming the previous Scripture yet correcting their perversions: A big portion of the Qur'an deals with the stories of the previous Prophets. Unlike the Bible the Qur'an is free from all perversions which occurred in the Bible. The Qur'an clears the false accusations allegedly related to the Prophets. For instance, suppose your biological modest sister, who is an un-married teenager, informs you that she has become pregnant by the Leave of God without being touched by any man! Would you believe her?! But about six hundred years after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a man from among the unlettered

Arabs declared to be the Messenger of God. He not only acknowledged the claims of Mary on her immaculate birth, but he also declared explicitly that she is a pure and chosen lady by God. (3:42)

3. The style of its addresses: The style of the addresses in the Qur'an confirms that the Qur'an is direct Words of God. It is not the indirect narration of the Words of God. For instance, more than 300 times God says to Prophet Muhammad (S): "Say" (Qol). Had only the concept of the Qur'an been from God, none of these addresses should have been found in the Qur'an. Instead of '**Say, He is Allah, the Unique**' (**Surah 112**), it should have been 'He is Allah, the Unique.' Similarly, instead of "**So (Allah) revealed to His slave (Muhammad)**" (**53: 10**), it should have been 'So, He revealed to me.'

4. Gentle reproof: Another proof is that on some occasions the Almighty Allah though gently and friendly has reproved His Messenger. Amazingly, all these instances are precisely uttered and revealed to us by the holy Prophet (S). For instance, see 69:44, 9:43, 33:37. Bukhari and Muslim narrated from Ayesha that should the Prophet (S) have ever wanted to hide any Ayah he would have certainly hidden this Ayah:

"But you did hide in yourself that which Allah will make manifest, you were concerned about people whereas Allah had a better right that you should be concerned about Him." (33:37)

The Revelation, the Ilham, Hadith Qudsi and Prophetic Hadith

Technically speaking when we say 'Revelation' we mean the Qur'an which is the actual verbatim Words of God.

'Ilham' (inspiration) literally means to announce and cast to the heart. This is when a concept is found in the heart without learning it from anyone or even thinking about it. The gate of Ilham is possibly open for all humans. In Islamic mysticism 'Ilham' is referred to as 'Conceptive Vision' (Kashful-Ma'nawi).

The Hadith of Qudsi (the holy Narration) is mainly a collection of admonition and spiritual advices narrated from God via Prophet Muhammad (S). Its concepts – if authentic – is from God but the wordings are from Prophet Muhammad (S). The Hadith of Qudsi similar to other Hadiths whether they may or may not be authentic, are subject to scholarly investigations.

The Prophetic Hadith is again the words of the Prophet (S) in explanation of the Islamic laws. Similar to Hadith of Qudsi, their concepts are from God but their wordings are from the Prophet (S). They however, differ from Hadith of Qudsi in that they are the narrations from God.

Assignment

If the Qur'an is the verbatim Words of God why in Chapter 81 after three times taking an oath, it states: "**Verily, this (the Qur'an) is the Word of an honourable Messenger (Gabriel). "(81: 19)** ?

- [1.](#) For instance see: 85:21–22, 73:4 and 56:77
- [2.](#) Also see: 45:2 and 45:6.
- [3.](#) In Lesson 9 we will discuss the aspects of the miracle of the Qur'an.

Lesson 2: Was the Holy Quran sent down gradually and all at once?

One of the facts about the Qur'an is that its Ayaat were revealed gradually to the Prophet of Islam (S) in different places and at different times over a period of more than 20 years. Muslims are unanimous that the Qur'an—unlike the previous Scriptures did not come down from the heaven as a book. Thus, usually there are circumstances under which certain Ayaat or Chapters of the Qur'an are revealed.

The above fact, apart from the testimony of numerous witnesses at the time of the revelation, is supported by the following Ayaat:

- 1) ***"And (it is) a Qur'an which We have divided (into parts) in order that you might recite it to people at intervals. And We have revealed it by stages." (17: 106)***
- 2) ***"And those who disbelieve say: Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once? Thus (it is sent down in parts) that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually, in stages." (25: 32)***

The Holy Qur'an is a miracle and its gradual revelation was a demonstration of the miracle and the intervention of God when necessary. Surely, this would strengthen the hearts of the Prophet (S) as well as the Muslims.

The gradual revelation of the Qur'an formed the system of gradual transition from the Jahiliya (Ignorance) lifestyle to the noble Islamic way of life. The rules of daily prayers, fasting, paying Zakat, Hajj, etc. all came down in stages to make it more practical for early Muslims to get acquainted with its practices. Similarly, converting Arabs from the evil habits such as drinking alcohol which was deeply rooted in their culture it would not be possible unless the divine rules come down in stages.

Above all the reasons, gradual revelation of the Qur'an would keep Muslims in constant communication with God and would more explicitly prove the miraculous aspects of the Glorious Qur'an. Had the Qur'an been revealed to the Prophet (S) only at once in the beginning of his mission and he would have quoted its Ayaat when necessary, the disbelievers would have surely accused the Prophet (S) that his explanations were of his intelligence. For instance, a group of Jewish people asked the Prophet about the 'Spirit'. He then looked upon the heaven whereat the revelation came down to him say:

"And they ask you concerning the Spirit; it is from the Command of (or the things of) my Lord."
(17:85)

In another occasion he was asked what should they give as a charity? Then the revelation came down:

"And they ask you what they ought to spend. Say: Forgiveness (that which is beyond your needs)" (2:219)

Was the Qur'an revealed gradually and all at once?

In spite of the above evidences, some of the scholars –both from the Shi'a and the Sunni schools– claimed that the Qur'an addition to its gradual revelation has also come down all at once in the Night of Qadr (Decree) in the month of Ramadan.

As for the recipient of this type of revelation they are of three different opinions:

- 1) Those of Sunni school claimed that the entire Qur'an has come down in the Night of Qadr from God to the heaven of this world and from there it has come down to the Prophet (S) gradually over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is a Hadith narrated from Ibn Abbas.
- 2) Of the Shi'a scholars who merely rely on the Narrations and are known as (al-akhbariyoun: Traditionalists) they claim that the entire Qur'an has come down to al-Baytul-Ma'mour (in the fourth heaven) and from there has come down gradually to the Prophet of Islam (S) over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is also some Narrations.
- 3) The late Allama Tabatabai while believing in gradual as well as the revelation of the Qur'an all at once asserts that the recipient of the Qur'an in its entire revelation similar to its gradual revelation was the Prophet (S) himself. However, he claims that there is a different reality for the noble Qur'an beyond its present format. The Almighty Allah sent down that 'reality' to the Prophet (S) in the night of Qadr and then throughout twenty three years or so, the detailed Qur'an was gradually revealed to him. The main proof of his eminence is the claim that the Arabic term 'NAZAL' (sent down) if used in the category of 'Ef'al' such as 'Enzal' it means 'sending down all at once' whereas if it is used in the category of 'Taf'ee'l' it means 'sending down gradually'.

Most of the renown students of his eminent, whom I had the honour of studying under, such as Martyr Motahhari, Ayatollah Javadi, and Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi although sometimes with a slight modification have followed the view of their teacher.

Analysis of the above claims

One may wonder as to why those prominent scholars have come up with the idea of revelation of the Qur'an all at once, in spite of the clear statement of the Qur'an for its gradual revelation?

I suppose the followings are the main motivations of the above scholars for their claims:

1) The Almighty Allah in Sura 97 states: "**Verily, We sent it down in the Night of Qadr.**"(97:1) Similarly, in Sura 44 states: "**Verily, We sent it down in a Blessed Night.**"(44:3) Finally in Sura 2 the Almighty states: "**The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an.**"(2:185)

The conclusion of the three above Ayaat is that the Holy Qur'an is revealed in the Night of Qadr which is a Blessed Night and is in the month of Ramadan. Thus, the Qur'an is revealed in the night of Qadr. However, the Qur'an itself explicitly states (17:106, 25:32–33) that it was revealed in stages. In reconciliation between these two concepts, the idea of two types of revelation has emerged.

2) The second motivation which belongs to the Sunni scholars is the Ash'ari dogma of eternity of the Qur'an. They have supported their dogma by a narration from Ibn Abbas in which it states that the entire Qur'an has come down to the heaven of this world. Thus, the Ayaat of the Qur'an—according to them—are not created at the time of their gradual revelation.

3) The Shi'a scholars both the traditionalists as well as those such as the late Allama Tabatabai had faced another problem; i.e. the Narrations that indicate the Prophet of Islam (S) was appointed a prophet on 27th Rajab a lunar Islamic month which is two months prior to Ramadan. The Almighty Allah appointed Muhammad (S) as a prophet by sending the first revelation to him. If the first revelation was sent down to him on 27th Rajab, then why the Qur'an says that the Qur'an was sent down in the month of Ramadan. To resolve this dilemma, the late Tabatabai (may God elevate his soul) has suggested two types of revelation and supported his claim with a linguistic difference between 'Enzal' (as used in the Ayaat related to the Night of Qadr) and 'Tanzil' (as used for the gradual revelation of the Qur'an).

I acknowledge that the 27th of Rajab is the famous opinion amongst the Shi'a scholars for the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet of Islam (S), although there are some who suggested the month of Ramadan. Similarly, the month of Ramadan is the famous opinion for the commencement of the Prophetic mission among the Sunni scholars although there are some who believe it was 27th of Rajab.

Unfortunately, there are only a couple of Hadiths suggesting the 27th of Rajab for the beginning of the Prophet's mission narrated by Sheikh Al-Kolayni. The narrator of the first Hadith is 'Hasan Ibn Rashed' who has been weakened and hence his Hadith is weak. The second Hadith has a similar problem or worse. The narrator is 'Sahl Ibn Ziad' who is 'weak in his narration and unreliable' and also he is narrated from an anonymous person.

The above narrations have also another problem and that is they contradict another Hadith narrated by 'Fadl' from Imam Reda (a.s) in which the Imam indicates that the Prophet (S) was appointed in the month of Ramadan and hence fasting of Ramadan has been made obligatory. Amazingly, the late Majlesi in reconciliation between this Hadith and the other ones suggests that Imam Reda (a.s) may have announced that according to Taqiyya (Protection)!

Unfortunately, we cannot agree with the late Majlesi for firstly this is not an issue especially for Imam Reda (a.s) to practice Taqiya in it, secondly the narrator –Fadl Ibn Shazan– is one of the renowned Shi'a scholars from Neishapoor.

Over all, even if we close our eyes from the transmitters of those Narrations, still they are not more than Khabar Wahid (Single Narrations) which as stated by the late Sheikh Mofid 'do not provide any knowledge or practice'.

Is there any philological difference between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil'?

His eminence, Allama Tabatabai has claimed the term 'Enzal' in Arabic is used for sending down all at once, whereas 'Tanzil' is used for gradual sending. Let's examine the accuracy of this claim.

I believe his eminence has taken this idea from the famous philologist 'al-Raghib al-Isfahani (Husain Ibn Muhammad died in 502). Although al-Raghib is a very well respected philologist especially for the Qur'anic terms, here we cannot agree with him for the following reasons:

1) The opinions of the philologists are not valid unless that support their claim by quoting some ample evidences from the Arabic literature and famous poems. For they as Muslims belong to a certain school of thought and their opinions could be shaped by the school they are coming from.

Distinguishing between the usage of 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' by al-Raghib is one of the examples that al-Raghib is influenced by the school he belongs to. Al-Raghib was a follower of Shaafei' and his reason for the differences between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' is: "Allah mentions 'Enzal' not 'Tanzil' in 'Verily, We send it down (Anzalna= from Enzal) in the Night of Qadr' for what is narrated that the Qur'an is revealed all at once to the heaven of this world."

As you can see the source of his distinction between the two terms is the narration, not independent Arabic literatures. As we could not agree with the narrations we cannot agree with al-Raghib either.

Moreover, other philologists have confirmed that there is no difference between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil'. Ibn Manthour quoting from the well-known Arabic linguist; Seebwayh says: "Abu-Amr used to differentiate between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' but did not mention any reason for it. Abul-Hasan said: I do not see any difference between them..."

Above all, the usage of the terms under consideration in the Holy Qur'an leaves us without doubt that there is no difference between the terms. Consider the following examples:

1. The Qur'an is using the term 'Enzal' for sending down the rain. "***And He sent down water from the sky*** (2:22) undoubtedly, the rain does not fall all at once.
2. The term 'Tanzil' is used for sending down the 'Torah' (3:93). As mentioned earlier, many Narrations,

as well as some Ayaat of the Qur'an indicate that the Torah was revealed to Moses (S) all at once.

3. The term 'Enzal' is used very often in the Qur'an and it is not meant for the revelation of the Qur'an in the Night of Qadr. See for instance: 5:67, 12:2, 6:92

4. The term 'Enzal' is used for sending the Qur'an for people that obviously cannot mean sending it down to them all at once. (4:174)

5. The term 'Tanzil' is used for demanding why the Qur'an was not sent all at once: (25:32). You may claim that there is a context in the Ayah and hence it is not a valid evidence for our claim. In this case, we refer you to another example: (4:153)

Therefore, the distinction between 'Enzal' and 'Tanzil' has no basis in the Qur'an.

There still remains a question; what is the meaning of 'Verily We sent it down in the Night of Qadr'? If the Qur'an is not revealed all at once, then why is it that the Almighty Allah states: "The month of Ramadan in which We revealed the Qur'an"?

The answer is –and God knows best– because the first revelation has come to the Prophet (S) in the month of Ramadan, on the Night of Qadr, it is correct to say, the Qur'an– meaning the first part of the revelation of the Qur'an– is revealed in the month of Ramadan. For, as it is correct to refer to the entire Qur'an as 'the Qur'an', we can also refer to parts of it and calling it 'the Qur'an'.

Thus, the Almighty Allah referring to the part of the Qur'an in the beginning of the Chapter 12 states:

"Verily, We sent down the Qur'an in Arabic that you may reflect." (12:2) Surely, at the time of the revelation of Chapter 12 which was revealed to the Prophet (S) when he was still in Makka, the entire Qur'an was not revealed yet. Or when the Almighty is ordering the Prophet: **"And recite the Qur'an in a slow style." (73:4)** He is not asking the Prophet (S) to recite the entire Qur'an in part of the night that he wakes up for Prayers.

Lesson 3: Ayah, Surah, History of the Collection of the Qur'an

Introduction

All authors when compiling a book, they usually divide it into chapters. The chapters are also divided into paragraphs. Paragraphs are a combination of sound sentences. This classification makes the process of reading and understanding the book easier.

Classification of the Qur'an is based on 'Surah' and 'Ayah'. In the language of the Qur'an an Ayah is nearly similar to a sentence, although not exactly the same. For sometimes an Ayah is an incomplete sentence as I will explain.

Ayah

Ayah and its plural 'Ayaat' is used in the Qur'an in three seemingly different meanings:

Sign: The first meaning of the 'Ayah' which is its literal meaning is 'sign' or 'indication'. The road signs can be literally called Ayah. With reference to its literal meaning the Almighty in the Qur'an states: "***And their Prophet (Samuel) said to them: Verily the Sign (Ayah) of his (Saul) kingdom is that...***" ***(2:248)***

Miracle: The term Ayah is also used in the Qur'an to mean the miracles performed by the Prophets by the Leave of God. Allah the Almighty states: "***Ask the Children of Israel how many clear miracles (Ayaat) We gave them.***" ***(2:211)***

Evidence: the Ayah is used in the Qur'an in many instances to mean 'evidence' or 'proof' for the existence of God. Such as: 'And of His evidences (Ayaat) is the creation of the heaven and the earth.'

The Almighty has used the term 'Ayah' to refer to a collection of some words of the Qur'an which makes a sentence or even one word or sometimes even two letters! The Ayah is the smallest unit in the Qur'an. Allah states: "***And when We change an Ayah (of the Qur'an) in place of another...***" ***(16:101)***

It seems a sentence of the Qur'an is called an Ayah for it is a Sign for the truth of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and his Divine Mission. It is also a vivid evidence of the Words of God as it is also a miracle. Therefore, the translation of the Ayah to 'verse' is not an accurate translation and does not convey the message behind the term. I would therefore suggest to either use the Arabic term 'Ayah' or its literal translation 'Sign'.

Identification of the Ayah

If there is no grammatical structure governing the formation of an Ayah then how and who is supposed to decide which words/word/letters should be called an Ayah?

It is for this reason that we believe the identification of the Ayaat of the Qur'an are by divine confinement (al-Tauqifee), i.e. no human has any authority on it. The Almighty Allah states: "***Ta Seen. These are the Ayaat of the Qur'an, and a Clear Book.***" ***(27:1)***

Had the identification of the Ayaat been by humans they would have never been in the present order. For instance, "***Alef Lam Mim Sad***" ***(7:1)*** is one Ayah whereas a similar to it- in term of the number of letters- such as "***Alef Lam Mim Ra***" ***(13:1)*** is not an independent Ayah. Similarly, "***Ha Mim. Ayn Seen***

Qaf (42: 1-2) are two Ayaat, but similar to that is "**Kaf Ha Ya Ayn Sad**" (19: 1) which is one Ayah. **Why?**

Moreover, sometimes an incomplete sentence is part of an Ayah such as "**so announce the good news to My devotees**" (39: 17). Then the rest of the sentence is mentioned in the following Ayah: "**Those who listen to the Word and follow the best thereof.**" (39: 18).

The words and the letters that are making an Ayah are not always the same. The shortest Ayah in the Qur'an has only two letters, i.e. "**Ta Ha**" (20: 1) whereas the longest (2:82) has 128 words which is the combination of 540 letters.

Number of Ayaat

Although there are different opinions for the counting the Ayaat of the Qur'an, it seems the most accurate one is the counting of the Kufans that is narrated from Imam Ali (a.s) by Abdullah ibn Habib al Sullami. According to this counting, the Ayaat of the Qur'an are 6236. Today most of the copies of the Qur'an are according to this counting.

Surah

Surah literally means 'high position and elevated status'. Tall buildings are also called surah. Arabs used to call the fortresses surrounding cities in the ancient times 'sur'. The term Surah is used in the Qur'an 10 times referring to parts of the Qur'an which are nearly similar to chapters. The Almighty states, "**And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down to Our devotee then produce a Surah(chapter) of the like thereof.**" (2:23)

It however seems that the expression of 'Surah' as used in the Qur'an would sometimes include even an Ayah or few Ayaat.

Number of the Surahs

The number of the Surah of the Qur'an is 114. Although there are other narrations they are not reliable.

Names of the Surah

It is more likely that the names given to the Surahs of the Qur'an are also by divine confinement (al-Tauqifee). Thus, although no Prophet is mentioned so repeatedly in the Qur'an as that of Prophet Moses; no chapter is named after him. Had the naming of the Surahs were by the choice of mankind they would have naturally named either of chapter 28, chapter 20 or chapter 26 in which the story of Prophet Moses is mentioned much, Surah Moses. Similarly, no Surah is named after Jesus though there is a Surah named after his mother Mary (19). This is despite the fact that there are Surah in the Qur'an named after some Prophets whether lawmaking or not. Such as, Noah, Ibrahim, Hud, Lot, Yunus, Yusuf and Mohammad (S).

Longest and Shortest Surahs

The longest Surah of the Qur'an is the second Surah with 286 Ayat and 6221 Words. The shortest Surah is Surah 108 with three Ayat and only 10 words.

The First and the Last Surah

The most famous opinion is that Surah Al-Hamد is the first complete Surah which was revealed to the Prophet although the first few Ayaat of Chapter 96 are the first Ayaat revealed to the Prophet. There are also different opinions about the last Surah. Some suggest that it was Surah 5 others Surah 9 but most of the scholars of the Sciences of the Qur'an agree that it was Surah 110.

The Order of the Surahs

The discussion about whether the present order of the chapters of the Qur'an are by divine confinement or not depends on our opinion on the collection of the Qur'an as whether it is a man-made effort or it was by divine confinement. Therefore, I invite you to the following discussion which is the most controversial part of the Sciences of the Qur'an

The History of the Collection of the Qur'an

The science of the story of the collection of the Qur'an is surely one of the most controversial discussions of the Sciences of the Qur'an which has divided the scholars into two big groups:

- 1) Those who assert the Qur'an was compiled after the demise of the Prophet (S): This would include almost all Sunni scholars as well as some renowned Shia scholars such as the Late Allamah Tabatabai, some of his students and the late Allamah al-Balaghi.
- 2) Those who believe that the Qur'an was compiled prior to the demise of the Prophet (S) by the divine confinement and under the supervision of the holy Prophet (S). Some Shia scholars are the advocates of this opinion. The presenter of this course belongs to the second group.

The Meaning of Collection of the Qur'an (Jam')

Before analysing the reasons of which group we ought to clarify one common terminology. The scientists of the Qur'an have usually referred to this discussion as 'the history of the collection of the Qur'an' (Tarikh Jam' al- Qur'an). By the term collection they mean either of the following meanings:

Collection of the Qur'an in the sense of its memorisation in the heart: in the early years of Islam those who knew the Qur'an by heart were called Jumma'ul Qur'an (those who have collected the Qur'an in their hearts).

Collection in the sense of writing and compilation: Collection in this sense has two meanings: one – writing and compilation of the Ayaat without organising the order of the Surahs, the second the compilation and the order of the Ayaat as well as the Surahs of the Qur'an, to compile them as a complete book, as that of the present Qur'an

Collection in the sense of collecting all different accents and unifying the Qur'an based on one authorised accent.

There is no dispute that the collection in its first sense did exist in the time of the Prophet. Surely some of the companions of the Prophet knew the entire Qur'an by heart and their names are recorded in history. Collection in the third sense of it, is also unanimously agreed by all scholars. There is almost a consensus that during the reign of Othman the Qur'an was unified on the basis of the accent of Quraiyah which was the accent of Prophet Mohammad (S). The entire argument rotates around the second meaning of collection, i.e. whether the Ayaat or/and the Surahs of the Qur'an were collected as the present Book prior to the demise of the Prophet or after his demise?

Note: It should be noted that none of the above opinions would conclude any alteration or perversion in the Qur'an for indisputably there is only one Qur'an and all it contains are the revelation of God to the Prophet (S) with no addition or omission.

The Proofs of the First Opinion

The adherers to the theory that the Qur'an was compiled after the demise of the Prophet (S) and during the reign of Abu Bakr and somehow Omar, rely mainly on the following reasons:

1. The Hadith of Zaid ibn Thabit: nearly two years after the demise of the Prophet (S) and in the second year of the reign of Abu Bakr, a bloody war took place between the Muslim army and the army of Musaylameh al-Kathab. This battle is known as the Battle of Yamamah' during which many of the companions of the Prophet who knew the Qur'an by heart were killed. I shall narrate the rest of the story as quoted by Al-Bokhari in his Sahih from Zaid ibn Thabit:

"After the battle of Yamamah Abu Bakr sent after me. When I visited him Omar ibn Khattab was also with him. Abu Bakr said, 'Omar has informed me that during the battle of Yamamah the recitors of the Qur'an were killed and I am concerned that should this be repeated most of the Qur'an would be destroyed.' He asked me to order for the collection of the Qur'an. I said to Omar 'How can I do something that the Messenger of God did not do? ' Omar said, 'By Allah, this is a good deed.' Thus Omar repeatedly visited me until the Almighty expanded my heart and I agreed with Omar. Then Abu Bakr said to me, 'You are a young and intelligent man, there is no accusation towards you and you were the one who used to write the revelation for the Messenger of God. Thus, search for the Qur'an and collect it all.'

By Allah if I (Zaid) was ordered to move a mountain it would not be more difficult for me than the task of

the collection of the Qur'an.' I said to Abu Bakr 'How can you do something that the Messenger of God did not do? Abu Bakr replied 'this is a good deed.' Thus, Abu Bakr repeatedly called me until God expanded my heart insomuch as He had expanded the hearts of Abu Bakr and Omar. I agreed and began searching for the Qur'an and collected it from the leaves of the palms and white stones as well as from the chests of people. Finally, I found the last two Ayaat of Surah 9 with Abu- Khozaiymeh al-Ansari and I could not find them with anyone else. This collection of the Qur'an stayed (in hiding) with Abu Bakr until he died and then stayed with Omar until he died and then with Hafzeh the daughter of Omar."

The above narration which is in the most authentic Sunni books of Hadith is one of the main reasons for those who believe that the Qur'an was compiled after the demise of the Prophet (S). In this narration the good innovation of the collection of the Qur'an claimed to have been initiated by Omar and his persuasion.

Response

Unfortunately we cannot agree with the above narration for various reasons.

- a) The above narration contradicts many other historical narrations. For instance Ibn Sireen said "Omar was killed and he did not collect the Qur'an." The late Ayatollah Khoei after quoting 22 narrations that are the main narrations in this field, elaborates in analysing them and explains the contradictions among them. Thus, all of them are nullified. In addition you need to bear in mind that the above narration and its similar are only narrated by the Sunni scholars.
- b) It seems all these narrations aim at creating virtues for Abu Bakr and Omar to equalize their status with that of Othman during whose reign the unification of the Qur'an has taken place. Notice that in the above narration it is explicitly claimed that they are doing "something good that the Prophet did not do!" Isn't this similar to the accusation they gave to the holy Prophet that he did not appoint anyone as his caliph before he dies! Accepting the above narration means accepting that Omar and following him Abu Bakr were more concerned for the protection of the Qur'an than the holy Prophet of Islam (S)!
- c) If there is any truth in the above narration the motivation of Abu Bakr would not be more than having a copy of the Qur'an for himself as similar to some of the companions of the Prophet who historically compiled the entire Qur'an for themselves. It is for this reason that Abu Bakr hides the collection of Zaid in a box and so does Omar. Had they really been concerned for the loss of the Qur'an they would have made many copies of that original and spread it among the Muslims.

2. Various Shia and Sunni narrations have quoted that Imam Ali (a.s) committed himself to the collection of the Qur'an right after the demise of the Prophet (S). He had promised himself not to leave his home except on Fridays until he finishes his task. It is narrated that his Qur'an was according to the order of the periods of revelation (chronological order) and he had mentioned the abrogating and the abrogated Ayaat.

The Late Allamah Tabatabai who is one of the renowned Shia adherents of the theory of the collection of the Qur'an after the demise of the Prophet asserts: "The meaning of the above narration (the collection of Imam Ali a.s) is one of the indisputable facts among the Shia." He further argues that should the Qur'an have been compiled in the present order at the time of the Prophet, it would have been impossible for Imam Ali (a.s) to compile the Qur'an in a different format than that of the Prophet (S) which was based on divine confinement. His eminence therefore asserts: "the collection of the Qur'an in its present format must have certainly happened after the demise of the Prophet (S)."

Response

The collection of the Qur'an by Imam Ali (a.s) as quoted in the Shi'a books of Hadith was about the interpretation of the Qur'an not the collection of the Qur'an itself. Thus, the Imam (a.s) has mentioned the abrogating and the abrogated, the Makki and the Madani and all details related to any Ayah. The collection of the Imam is referred to in many Hadith as "Al-Jame'a" (the Comprehensive) or "Al Jaffr" (the Paper on which the Imam has written), or Mushaf Fatima (for the Prophet (S) had dictated it to the Imam mostly in the house of Fatima). These names indicate that the collection of the Imam was the Qur'an with its interpretation. For further study of the book of the Imam see Al-Kafi 1:39 and Al Wafi 1:63 and Beharul Anwar 1:140.

3. The third proof is the gradual revelation of the Qur'an and the continuation of the revelation until the end of the life of the Prophet (S). The late Alameh Al- Balaghi while mentioning this proof claims that this phenomenon could not make the collection of the Qur'an possible.

Response

The response to this claim is very obvious. We propose that as the Qur'an was being gradually revealed so would it be compiled. Many narrations suggest that Gabriel (a.s) used to descend to the Prophet and ask him where the exact place of the revealed Ayah shall be. For instance, it is quoted in many narrations that when the last Ayah was revealed to the Prophet saying, "And be afraid of the Day when you shall be brought back to Allah" Gabriel said to the Prophet to place it between Ayah 282 and 280 of chapter 2. Similarly, many narrations suggest that any time "Bismillahe Rahmene Raheem" was revealed the Prophet (S) knew that the previous Surah was finished and a new Surah was commencing.

The Proofs of the Second Opinion

The second opinion is the opinion of those Shi'a scholars who hold the Qur'an, as it is today, was collected at the time of the Prophet (S) and under his supervision by divine confinement. The following are some of the main reasons:

1. There are many contradictions between the narrations about the collection of the Qur'an after the Prophet (S) and hence are nullified.

2. The Hadith of Thaqualayn that is narrated by both Shi'a and Sunni in which the Prophet (S) leaves two precious things, i.e. The Book of Allah and Ahlul Bayt confirms that the Qur'an was a Book prior to the demise of the Prophet (S), not only a memory in the hearts of the believers.

3. The second famous name of the Qur'an as mentioned in the Qur'an is 'Book'. A book is something that is written and compiled. The first time the Qur'an was referred to as 'Book' was with the revelation of Surah Maryam (Chapter 19). In this Surah the Almighty refers to the Qur'an as 'Book' five times (19:16,41,51,54,56). This Surah was revealed to the Prophet (S) six years after his prophetic mission when he was still in Makka. We suggest that the Almighty has named the Qur'an a 'Book' for it must be compiled. As it was named 'the Qur'an' for it has to be recited.

In fact, with the exception of 'al-Mo'allaqatu-Sab' (The Seven Poems) that Arabs during the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyyah) had written and hanged them on the curtains of Ka'ba-if there is any truth in it- there hasn't been any written heritage for the Arabs of Jahiliyya. The Qur'an marks the first written Book in the history of Arabs. Thus, Islam divided the history of Arabs into two distinct periods of the era of Jahiliyyah and the Islamic era.

4. It is not possible that the Prophet (S) has left the Ummah without compiling the Revelation, insomuch as it was not possible for him to leave the Ummah without any leader. It seems the claim of Abu-Bakr that 'the Prophet (S) did not collect the Qur'an' is another side of his forged coin concerning the issue of caliphate after the Prophet (S). Is this not similar to his alleged claim that the Prophet (S) left this world without appointing any one as his caliph?

5. The Prophet (S) had Scribes of Revelation whose numbers varied from time to time from 23 to 43. Since he was in Makka he had appointed Scribes. The Prophet (S) was dictating the received revelation to them and would ask them to recite it for him to check if there were any mistakes in their writings.

6. Finally the most definite proof that the Qur'an was compiled during the time of the Prophet (S) and under his supervision is the order of the Ayaat and the Surahs of the Qur'an. As discussed earlier it is just impossible for any human no matter how intelligent or simple to have come up with the existing order of the Ayaat and the Surahs.

Imagine the entire Words of the Qur'an in a box. Then you give them to a group of well-versed Arab linguists to compile them as a book. It is impossible for them to compile it in the way it is. They would either compile it based on the chronological order, or according to different subjects, or the length of the Ayaat and the Surahs or the like. Guess what? The order of the Qur'an is none of the above.

This is the actualization of the Words of God Who states: "***Verily, We, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (the Qur'an) and surely We will guard it.***" (15:9) as He states: "***It is for Us to collect it and its recitation.***" (75:17)

Unification of the Accents of the Qur'an

The Arabic writing during the early time of Islam did not have any dots or signs. With the spread of Islam various Arabs and non-Arabs used to recite the Qur'an with their own accents. Gradually, people of various tribes assumed only their pronunciation is correct and the rest are wrong. This would sometimes cause to make slight changes in the meanings of the words. For instance, instead of reciting 'fatabayyano' (49:6), some had recited 'fatathabbato', or they had recited 'Nonsheroha' instead of 'Nonshezoha' (2:259)

Finally the issue was brought to the attention of Othman; the third Caliph. He appointed a group for unification of the accents of the Qur'an. He commanded them that should they disagree on any accent, the authorised accent shall only be the accent of Qoraysh for it was the accent of the Prophet(S).

When the task was fulfilled the unified Qur'an was presented to Imam Ali and by consulting some of the companions and with the endorsement of Imam Ali (a.s) it was spread across the then world. All other copies were destroyed.

Lesson 4: A Myth Called Distortion of the Qur'an

1

Introduction

The Qur'an is the last divine revelation to man and the most complete of all. It is the only divine Book that since its revelation has never been distorted or perverted. The Qur'an that is available to us today is exactly the same as the one revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S) fourteen hundred years ago. This is one of the basic facts in Islam.

Nonetheless, the Wahhabis and their blind followers have been accusing the Shi'a of having the belief that the Qur'an has been distorted. They claim that the Qur'an of the Shi'a is different from the present Qur'an.

The Shi'a scholars, on the other hand, have always denied this accusation. They have compiled many literatures proving the un-distortion of the Qur'an. In spite of that the Wahhabis reluctantly claim: "The Shi'a by the practice of Taqiyya (protection) pretend to believe in the same Qur'an, but in their hearts they don't believe in the same Qur'an!"

The science of the 'un-distortion of the Qur'an' aims at responding to two groups of people; 1) The non-

Muslims who claim that the Qur'an may be distorted. 2) Some Muslim groups such as Wahhabis and their blind followers who accuse the Shi'a for believing in a different Qur'an.

In this lesson we deal with the proofs for the impossibility of the distortion of the Qur'an as a response to the first group and in the next lesson the claim of the Wahhabis will be analysed. "***Verily, therein is indeed a reminder for him who has a heart or gives ear while he is heedful.***" (50:37)

Types of Distortion

The distortion of the Qur'an may be either verbally or conceptually. The distortion of the concept of the Qur'an may be also the distortion of the meaning of a term or distortion of the application of an Ayah. The first is like distorting the meaning of 'Wali' which means 'the one who has the authority over someone else' to another meaning such as 'friend'. Distorting the application of the Ayah is such as the unsuccessful attempts of Mo'wiyah who employed Samora ibn Jondab to forge a Hadith that the **Ayah "And of mankind there is he who would sell himself, seeking the Pleasure of Allah."** (2:207) is revealed concerning Ibn Moljam who had murdered Imam Ali (a.s)!

The verbal distortion of the Qur'an may be either by adding some words, an Ayah or surah to the Qur'an, or omitting some of the Qur'an or changing a word or an Ayah to another.

Conceptual distortion of the application

1. Distortion by adding
2. Verbal by omitting
3. by changing

Undoubtedly the concept and the meanings of the Qur'an have been distorted. Many people have interpreted the Qur'an according to their whim and desire. Nonetheless, as this type of distortion does not change the actual text of the Qur'an it cannot mislead all people and hence does not affect the guidance nature of the Qur'an.

As for the verbal distortion of the Qur'an all Muslims are unanimous that no words are added to the Qur'an. Thus, the verbal distortion of the Qur'an by adding did not even occur. The Ayaat of the Qur'an are like shining stars in a dark night. If the Qur'an is mixed with any other Arabic text, the utmost eloquence of the Qur'an will stand out as it is well above any other human literature that its Ayaat will be easily distinguished.

The argument is about whether any Word, Ayah or Surah of the Qur'an is omitted or changed?

Absolute majority of the Muslim scholars whether Shi'a or Sunni denote the distortion of the omitting of

the Qur'an as well. Although there are some narrations both from the Shi'a and the Sunni books that suggest that parts of the original Qur'an is omitted!

The analysis of those narrations is the theme of the next lesson. Here we shall mention the most important reasons for the un-distortion of the Qur'an.

The Proofs of the un-distortion of the Qur'an

1. God has promised to safeguard it

The Almighty Allah has promised that as He has sent down the Qur'an so is He protecting it. With three emphasis the Almighty states: "***Verily, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Qur'an) and surely We will guard it (from corruption).***" (15:9)

Similarly, in Surah Fussilat He states: "***And verily, it (the Qur'an) is an honourable well-fortified respected Book. Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it. (it is) sent down by the All-Wise, Worthy of all praise (Allah).***" (41:41-42)

The expression of 'falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it' means it is protected against any corruption in all aspects. This would surely include the protection of the Qur'an from being omitted.

Q. Is the proof of un-distortion of the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself not a vicious circle? For if it is then the above Ayaat are distorted!

A. The above argument is not a vicious circle. The reason being apart from the fact that there is a consensus that nothing is added to the Qur'an, the Qur'an in various occasions has called the jinn and the mankind to the challenge of producing something like unto the Qur'an even as short as the smallest Surah of the Qur'an (Surah 108). Man's failure in that challenge proves that nothing is added to the Qur'an. Thus, the above Ayaat are surely part of the Qur'an.

2. Authentic Narrations

The Prophet of Islam (S) and the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) in many authentic narrations have referred Muslims to the Qur'an in the matters of confusion.

Hadith of Thaqualayn narrated by numerous Sunni and Shi'a narrators is the first example of Prophetic strong recommendation to the Qur'an.

The Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) have instructed their followers to examine the authenticity of a narration by examining if it contradicts the Qur'an or not. It is quoted from Imam Sadiq (a.s): "Any Hadith that is in accordance with the Book of Allah then take it and what is contrary to the Book of Allah then reject it." It is also narrated from imam Sadiq (a.s): "Any Hadith that is not in accordance with the Book of Allah is

absurd."

Had the Qur'an been distorted they would have not referred their followers to the Qur'an as the standard of the truth.

3. Rational proof

Islam is the last religion and the Qur'an is the final divine guidance for mankind. Had this Book be similar to the previous Scriptures been distorted, the divine purpose of man's guidance would have not been fulfilled. Thus, the Qur'an must be protected against any distortion.

4. The history of Qur'an and its extra protection

In the previous lesson we learnt that according to majority of the Shi'a scholars the Qur'an was collected and compiled prior to the demise of the Prophet (S) under divine confinement.

Moreover, the following are some examples of the extra care of the Muslims for the protection of the Qur'an:

4/1: From the advent of Islam to this date many Muslims knew the Qur'an by heart. Today hundreds of thousands of Muslims across the globe know the Qur'an by heart. (Protection of the Qur'an in their hearts).

4/2: After the demise of the Prophet (S) Muslims were so responsive for the protection of the Qur'an that during the reign of the third Caliph they did not even allow different accents of the Qur'an to occur.

4/3: The style of the hand writing of the Qur'an sometimes is different from the standard Arabic writing. Yet, its unique style has been always preserved. For instance, twice in the Qur'an the 'Noon of Light Emphasis' is written with 'Alef': 1) "***Lanasfa'an BeNnasiya***" (96: 15), 2) "***Wa Leyakoonan Mena-Sagherin***" (12:32).

Also, the non-Arabic nouns in the Qur'an- different to the standard Arabic style- are written without any Alef. Thus, Ibrahim, Esma'il, Eshaq, Haroun, are all written in the Qur'an without the middle Alef.

The difference between the Qur'anic styles of writing with the standard Arabic is counted up to 7000 differences.

Most of the scholars of the sciences of the Qur'an agree that the writing style of the Qur'an is also by divine confinement. Thus, changing of it with the excuse of converting it to the modern Arabic – as it happens on the Bible- is not permissible.

The Qur'an in Surah 18 Ayah 77 in the story of Moses and Khidr mentions that "they came to the people of a town, they asked for food, but they refused (Arabic=ABOU) to entertain them." That town was

‘Antioch’ (Antakya) in today’s Turkey. With the spread of Islam people of that town who have converted to Islam endeavoured to change the term ‘ABOU’ in the Ayah under consideration to ‘ATOU’ (meaning they gave) but obviously to no avail.

4/4: The grammar of the Qur'an sometimes does not comply with the normal Arabic grammar. Nevertheless, Muslims never changed any Words of the Qur'an for the excuse of ‘grammatical correction’. Instead, they invented or expanded the grammatical rules in accordance with the Qur'an.

For instance, the Arabic term ‘al-Saabe’oun’ in Ayah 69 of the Surah 5 is mentioned with ‘Waw’ whereas the same term in a similar Ayah (2:62) is mentioned with ‘Ya’. In the standard Arabic it is supposed to be ‘al-Saabe’en’ to be the noun for ‘Enna’ as it is in Ayah 62 of Surah 2. Muslim scholars have however come up with some grammatical justification.

5. Miracles of the Qur'an

There are different aspects to the miracles of the Qur'an that we shall deal with them in the future.

Surely, the first aspect of the miracle of the Qur'an is its eloquence.

The miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an is in such way that adding to or omitting any word from it would disturb its eloquence.

The Qur'an is like a symphony that changing a single note would disturb the harmony of the entire composition. The Ayaat of the Qur'an have their own measure changing an Ayah, adding or omitting it would destroy its measure.

The Qur'an is the written Book of Creation. In the nature everything is perfect in its due place as they are created with measure (55:7). If Earth was further from the sun the carbon dioxide would begin to accumulate in the atmosphere. If it were closer, on the other hand, CO₂ levels would fall. The same ‘measure’ is found in the Qur'an as well.

6. Unique methods of the Qur'an for Its protection

6/1: The structure of the Qur'an is different from any other book. The division of the Ayaat and the Surahs, the variation of the subjects are all unique. Very often the Qur'an opens a subject to deal with, yet before finishing it goes to another subject and then again comes back to the previous subject. For instance, Ayah 121 of Surah 3 opens the topic of the Battle of Uhud. The story continues to the Ayah 128. Then from Ayah 129 to 138 the topic of usury is discussed and then again from Ayah 139 goes back to the story of the Battle of Uhud! The same phenomenon is sometimes observed even within an Ayah such as Ayah 33 Surah 33.

6/2: The Surahs that are revealed to the Prophet (S) In Mecca especially during the first few years after the advent of Islam are usually short and much rhymed. This would make the memorisation of the

Qur'an for the early Muslims who for the first time experience the Words of God much easier.

6/3: the gradual revelation of the Qur'an as discussed in the 2nd lesson coupled in many instances with the occasions under which the Ayaat were revealed would make it easier for the Muslims to memorise and remember the Ayaat of the Qur'an.

6/4: General rules: another unique style of the Qur'an- contrary to the Bible is that the Qur'an does not normally deal with the details of a story. For instance, the Qur'an in many instances has praised or reproached certain people for their deeds. Yet, it hardly ever specifies their names except in a few instances such as concerning Abu-Lahab and his wife (Surah 111) who enmity to Islam was well known, or in the story of Zaid and Zaynab (Surah 33) for the purpose of protecting the fame of the Messenger of God.

For example, Ayah 33 of Surah 33 and Ayah 61 of Surah 3 are about the Prophet (S), Imam Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain (peace be on them). Also Ayah 55 of Surah 5 is revealed praising the generous donation of Imam Ali (a.s) and introducing him as the leader (Wali). On the other hand, Surah 63 is revealed with reference to the chief of the hypocrites of Medina; i.e. Abdullah ibn Obay. Yet, none of these names are mentioned in the Qur'an. We only know about them from the numerous Hadith narrated by the Shi'a and the Sunni narrators from the Prophet (S).

Surely, should those names were explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, their foes (when people were praised) or friends (when people were reproached) would have deleted the names.

Abu-Basir in an authentic Hadith asked Imam Sadiq (a.s) concerning 'those of you who are in authority' in Surah 4: "***O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority.*** (4:59) The Imam replied: "It is meant for Imam Ali, Imam Hasan and Imam Husain (peace be on them)." Abu-Basir said: People ask as why the name of Ali and Ahulu-Bayt of the Prophet (S) is not mentioned in the Qur'an?

The Imam replied: "Tell them: Daily Prayers was prescribed to the Prophet (S), yet Allah did not mention the numbers of its Units, for He left it to His Messenger to explain it. Similarly, Allah prescribed Zakat, yet He did not mention to pay one silver for 40 Methqal of silver. He prescribed Hajj yet did not mention that the Tawaaf is seven times therefore He left the explanation of all of these to His Messenger."

7. Quoting the Qur'an

Another way to find out the Qur'an is not distorted is the fact that in numerous Hadith that are narrated for us today, the Imams (a.s) quote an Ayah of the Qur'an or interpret and Ayah. There has never been an authentic Hadith that an Ayah is quoted in it which does not exist in the present Qur'an or is different from the present Qur'an.

8. Numerous Narrations

Another proof for the un-distortion of the Qur'an is the fact that the contents of the Qur'an as it is have been narrated by numerous people from generation to generation.

9. One Qur'an, many schools!

Finally the last but not the least way to prove the un-distortion of the Qur'an is that despite many sectarianism that has occurred in Islam, all Muslims irrespective of the sect they belong to adhere to exactly the same Qur'an. Whereas the Old Testament of Christians is not the same as that of the Jewish people, neither the Bible of different Christian sects are the same.

Assignment

Is the proof of un-distortion of the Quran by the Quran itself not a vicious circle? For it is could be that the above Ayaat are distorted!

Lesson 5: A Myth Called Distortion of the Qur'an

2

Introduction

In the previous lesson we were acquainted with the reasons as why the Qur'an is not distorted. The Qur'an that is available today is exactly the same Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet (S) fourteen hundred years ago. No single word is added to or omitted from it, nor has any changes occurred in it.

Nonetheless, unfortunately, a particular group of the Sunni Muslims have fabricated the myth of distortion of the Qur'an and accused the Shi'a that they believe the original Qur'an is distorted. They claim the Qur'an of the Shi'a is different from the real Qur'an. They further that the Shi'a only claim in believing in the same Qur'an on the practice of al-Taqiyyah (self-protection)!

In this lesson I share some points for those ignorant Sunnis who blindly follow what is given to them. As we shall see the accusation of believing in distortion of the Qur'an—if at all—is more befitting in the Sunni sources than the Shi'a. The narrations of the distortion of the Qur'an are by far more narrated in the Sunni books of Hadith including their most authentic books than the Shi'a books of Hadith. Nonetheless, the Shi'a has never accused their Sunni brothers of believing in a different Qur'an. Surely, had it not been the necessity of repelling the accusation of the Wahhabis we would have not opened this chapter,

albeit for those who need to be educated about the true meanings of these narrations.

The late Mirza Husain Noori known as ‘al-Mohaddeth al-Noor’ died in 1320 (1902 AD) was one of the Shi'a scholars of al-Akhbari school. He has written a book called ‘Faslul-Khetab Fi Ethbat Tahrife Ketabe Rabbul-Arbab’ (Sound judgment in proving distortion of the Book of the Lord of the lords). In this book the author has relied on many narrations to prove his claim that many Ayaat or even Surahs are deleted from the original Qur'an or even something is added to the Qur'an.

Since its publication the book has equipped the Wahhabis with enough ammunition to attack the Shi'a. They have even kindly sponsored the republication of the book! Ironically most of the narrations that Noori has relied on are from the Sunni sources! To find out the truth about the contents of the book of Noori I would like to invite our fair readers to the study of the following pages.

We shall skim through the Sunni narrations about the distortion of the Qur'an. Then I will quote the testimony of some of the most outstanding Shi'a scholars concerning the distortion of the Qur'an. Then will skim similarly through the Shi'a narrations that seem to mean the distortion of the Qur'an. Finally I shall suggest some sound explanations about the meanings of those narrations which at the same time clarify most of the Sunni narrations on the subject.

Before we embark on the dissuasion I shall warn my dear readers that the best understanding of this lesson requires ability to read the Arabic text of the Qur'an, or else most of the discussions would sound meaningless. However, to simplify the discussion I have noted most of the quotes in English transliteration.

A) The Myth of Distortion of the Qur'an in the Sunni Narrations

Studying the sources of the narrations with regards to the distortion of the Qur'an leaves us with no doubt that the myth of the distortion of the Qur'an more than being a Shi'a issue is a Sunni phenomenon. Many Sunni books of Hadith including their authentic books whereat the beliefs of the Sunnis are driven contain many narrations that mean nothing other than distortion of the Qur'an. Keep your sound judgment on and follow me:

1. Companions had different Qur'ans!

Nearly all Sunni scholars agree that –based on their historical reports– the copy of the Qur'an of the Companions of the Prophet (S) were not the same. They mention many examples to show the Qur'an of Obbay Ibn Ka'b, for instance was different from that of Ibn Mas'oud or Zaid Ibn Thabet, etc.

The famous Sunni scholar ‘Ibn Abi-Sajestani has compiled a book named ‘Masaahet’ (The Qur'ans!) published by Darul-Kotobel-Elmeiyah’ in Beirut to show hundreds of differences between those copies of the so-called Qur'an. The followings are only a few examples:

1/1: Many Sunni narrations indicate that Omar Ibn Khattab was reciting the last Ayaat of the Surah al-Hamd (Chapter 1) like this: "***Serata Man An'amta Alayhem Ghayrel Maghdoube Alayhem Wa Ghayre-Dalleen.***"

1/2: In the recitation (the Qur'an of) Ibn Mas'oud it reads: "Wa Tazwwadu Wa Khayraz-Zadeh Taqwa." Whereas in the Qur'an it reads: "***Wa Tazawwadu Faenna Khayraz-Zadeh Taqwa.***" (2: 197)

Similarly, in the same Qur'an of Ibn Mas'oud, Surah 103 is so read: "***Wal-Asr. Ennal Ensana Lafi Khosr. Wa Ennahu Fihe Ela Aakhered-Dahr. Ellalatheena Aamanoo..***" the underlined section is not found in the Qur'an.

Are the different versions of the Qur'an of the Companions not an indication of distortion of the Qur'an?

Sunni scholars in response say the differences are in fact the interpretation of the Qur'an added amidst the Words of the Qur'an.

Firstly, we ask why then you don't suggest the same justification for the Shi'a narrations? Secondly, the justification does not apply to all examples. For instance, the Sunni narrators narrated that the Qur'an of Ibn Mas'oud lacked the last two Surahs of the Qur'an!

2. The Qur'an Was Compiled After the Prophet (S)

As we learned in lesson three, the absolute majority of the Sunni scholars believe that the Qur'an was compiled after the demise of the Prophet (S). Stories they have filled up their books with, clearly indicate that the Qur'an –according to their narrations– have been compiled by the testimony of only two people or sometimes even with the testimony of one person with the excuse that the Prophet (S) considered his testimony as the testimony of two people such as in the case of Khozaima. Thus, when Omar Ibn Khattab brought the so-called Ayah of Rajm (stoning to death) for Zaid (the compiler of the Qur'an!) he refused to accept it not because it was not part of the Qur'an, but merely because he did not have anyone else to support his claim. In other occasions we read in the Sunni sources that the Qur'an was sometimes registered by a threat.

As discussed in lesson three the story of the compilation of the Qur'an after the Prophet (S) is either a myth or it was meant for collection with the interpretation.

3. Abrogation of recitation

In the coming lessons we will learn about the science of abrogation of the Qur'an. Most of the Sunni scholars acknowledge a type of abrogation that they call "abrogation of recitation". The abrogation of recitation according to them is sometimes coupled with the abrogation of the rule or without it. The meaning of the abrogation of the recitation according to them is that some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an are deleted and are no longer recited and hence they don't exist any longer in the Qur'an. Sometimes the

rules of those deleted Ayaat are still in order such as the Ayaat of Rajm (stoning to death) and sometimes even the rules are abrogated such as many Ayaat that are possibly deleted along with the rules and we have no knowledge about them.

The reason because of which the Sunni scholars have come up with the myth of the abrogation of recitation is the numerous narrations they have in their books which indicate that many Ayaat of the Qur'an are deleted. In order for them to justify those narrations yet avoid the expression of the distortion of the Qur'an, they have come up with the innovated name of abrogation of recitation. It is obvious that change of the name does not solve any problem and in reality there is no difference between distortion of the Qur'an by omission and the abrogation of recitation. The followings are only a few examples of their so called abrogation of recitation;

3-1: The Surahs of Al-Hafd and Al-Khal': They narrate that the following two Surahs were existing in the version of the Qur'an of Obey Ibn Ka'b and Ibn Abbas as well as Zaid Ibn Thabet ;

- 1) "Bismillah Rahmane Raheem. Allahumma Eyyaka Na'bodo Wa Laka Nosalli Wa Nasjodo Wa Elayka Nas'a Wa Nahfad. Narjoo Rahmatak Wa Nakhsha Azabakal-Jad. Enna Azabaka Bel-Kafereena Molhaq".
- 2) Bimillah Rahmane Raheem. Enna Nasta'eenoka Wa Nastaghferoka Wa Nothnee Alaykal-Khayra Kollahoo Wa La Nokaferoka Wa Nakhla'o Wa Natroko Man Yafjorok.

Professor Al-Tijani in his book "With the truthful" page 204 asserted: "The Sunnis recite these two Surahs in the Qunoot of their morning prayers and I also used to recite it- prior to my conversion to Shi'ism- in my Qunoot as I knew it by heart."

3-2: Abu Harb Ibn Abilaswad narrated from his father that Abu Musa Al-Asha'ri called upon the reciters of Basra. Three hundred of the reciters of the Qur'an attended his court. Abu Musa said to them: "You are the righteous people of Basra and its reciters. Recite the Qur'an and avoid the long wishes or else your hearts will be hardened the same as the hearts of people before you. Verily we used to recite a Surah that in the sense of its length and severity was similar to the Surah Al-Bara'a (ch 9). I have forgotten it but I only remember this part; 'Lau Kana Libne Adam Wadian Min Maal Labtagha Wadian Thaalitha Wa La Yamlao Jofa Ibne Adam Ilaturab'. Similarly we used to recite a Surah that was similar to one of the Musabahat. I have forgotten it except I remember this part; Ya Ayuhaladhina Amanu Lima Taquluna Mala Taf'alun Fatuktab Shahadatun Fe A'naqakum Fatosaluna Anha Yomal Qiyama."

The above narration that is narrated in one of the most authentic Sunni books of Hadith clearly indicates that at least two Surahs from the Qur'an are deleted. One of them being as long as Surah Al-Bara'a which has 129 Aya and another one being as long as one of the Musabahat (ch 17, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64 and 87) which its shortest Surah has 11 Aya (ch 62) and the longest one has 111 Aya (ch 17).

It is really amazing that our Sunni brothers accuse the Shia' that they believe in a Surah such as the so

called Surat Al-Welayat or An-Nurain whilst in their most authentic books of Hadith such as Sahih Muslim they narrated deletion of long Surahs.

3-3: Malik narrated; "When the beginning of Surah Al-Bara'a (ch. 9) was deleted its Bismillah was also deleted for surely that Surah (ch. 9) was as long as Surah Al-Baqarah (ch. 2)!"

3-4: Numerous narrations in Sunni books of Hadith narrated that Omar Ibn Khattab said: "Had people not said that Omar added in the Book of God I would have included the Aya of the stoning to death (Aya of Rajm)".

Al-Bukhari in a long Hadith quoted from Omar that during his reign he ascended the pulpit and during his sermon said: "Verily Allah dispatched Muhammad (S) with truth and He revealed to him the Book. Then among what was revealed to him was Aya of Rajm. So we recited it, we understood it and we comprehended it. Thus the Messenger of God stoned to death and so we stoned to death after him. I am concerned now should the time prolong that someone may say by Allah we did not find Aya of Rajm in the Book of Allah."

The Aya for the stoning according to Omar is "al-sheikh wa al-sheikha itha zanaya farjumu homa al-batta Nakalan Min Allah"

Firstly, it is so obvious that the above sentence is not the word of God. Secondly, the ruling of stoning to death was not limited to the old man or old woman. It is for the married men and women whether young or old. Thirdly, nowhere in the Qur'an ever the term Al-Batta (of course) is mentioned.

Fourthly, the ruling of stoning to death is mentioned in the Old Testament in chapter 20 of the book of Leviticus. Thus, since the rule was not abrogated in Islam, it was executed at the time of the Prophet of Islam. Finally Imam Ali (a.s) executed the ruling of stoning to death against Shuraiha Al-Hamdaniya according to the tradition of Rajm not the Aya of Rajm. This means unlike Omar, Imam Ali was certain of the rule of stoning to death was the tradition of the Prophet not an Aya from the Qur'an. Ironically Ibn Maje narrated from Aishe: "The Aya of Rajm was revealed and it used to exist in my version of the Qur'an that I used to keep under my bed. However, after the demise of the Prophet (S) when we were busy with his funeral our pets ate it all!"

The so called Aya of stoning to death is so certain in the eyes of the Sunnis that the famous Sunni scientist of the sciences of the Qur'an; Al-Suyouti in justification of why the so called Aya is not in the Qur'an says: "A point has crossed my mind and that is because the ruling of stoning to death is a harsh rule its recitation is abrogated from the Qur'an."

This justification cannot be accepted for so far as the rule of stoning to death is in order there is no reduction of harshness by a mere abrogation of its recitation. In addition the Almighty God states in the Qur'an: "**Whatever an Aya do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it**" (2: 106). Thus, if the so called Aya of stoning to death was abrogated why it was not

replaced by another Aya?

Another way to prove that the ‘abrogation of the recitation’ is but an example of distortion of the Qur’ān by deletion is to say that the abrogation of recitation has either occurred during the time of the Prophet (S) and by his command or after his demise. Undoubtedly it did not occur at the time of the Prophet (S) for firstly there is no valid proof for that and secondly the Sunni narrations asserted that the deletion of the Ayaat as well their consumption by the pets! occurred after the demise of the Prophet (S). According to Al-Bukhari, Omar explicitly claimed that the Aya of Rajm was part of the Qur’ān at the time of the Prophet (S) yet Zaid refused to register it in the Qur’ān (during the so called compilation of the Qur’ān) only because Omar did not have anyone to second his testimony. Therefore, if the Sunni scholars acknowledge the abrogation of the recitation they in fact acknowledge the distortion of the Qur’ān without naming it.

B) The myth of distortion in the eyes of the Shi'a scholars

The outstanding Shi'a scholars from the early days till date explicitly and without any ambiguity have denied the claim of all different types of the verbal distortion of the Qur’ān. They have always asserted that the present Qur’ān is exactly the same as the Qur’ān of the time of the Prophet (S).

In the following I shall mention the name of some of the most outstanding Shi'a scholars who have affirmed that the Qur’ān was never distorted:

1. Fadl Ibn Shaathaa in his book (Al-Eidhah): He is one of the Shi'a scholars of the 3rd Century A.H. He has strongly reproached some of the Sunni sects (such as Al-Hashwiya) who believed in the distortion of the Qur’ān.
2. Al-Shaikh Al-Saduq (Muhammad Ibn Ali) died in 381 A.H. In his book Al-E'tiqadat (The Shi'a Beliefs) pages 92-93 he stated: "Our belief is that the Qur’ān that the Almighty God revealed to the Messenger (S) is what is between the covers and it is what is in our hands today (full stop). The end of its chapters is Surah Al-Naas (ch. 114)...and whoever relates to us that we believe the Qur’ān was more than that, he is a liar"
3. Al-Sheikh Al-Mufid died in 413 A.H. He said: "A group of the Shi'a said that no word or Aya or Surah is deleted from the Qur’ān. What is deleted is what was registered in the Qur’ān of Imam Ali (a.s) about the interpretation and explanation of its meanings and about whom it was revealed. In my opinion this is better than the claim of those who said some words are deleted from the actual Qur’ān not its interpretation."
4. Al-Sayyed Al-Mourtadha died in 436 A.H. According to al-Shaikh al-Tabrasi he has also stated that the Shi'a believe that the Qur’ān is not distorted.
5. Al-Shaikh Al-Tusi died in 461 A.H. In the introduction of his Tafsir named Al-Tebyan he denotes the

distortion of the Qur'an.

6. Al-Shaik Al-Tabrasi died in 548 A.H. In the introduction of his Tafsir named Majmau'l Bayaan he also denotes the myth.

7. Al Shaikh Abdul Jalil Al-Qazwini Al-Razi of the 6th Century the author of "Naqdh" has explicitly denoted the accusation of the distortion of the Qur'an. For instance he mentions if anyone believes that the word "Fe Ali" (Concerning Ali) is the middle of the Aya "O you the Messenger convey what is revealed to you (Concerning Ali) from your Lord" he has gone astray.

8. Sayyed Ibn Tawous died in 664 AH. In his book Sa'd As Saoud said: "The opinion of Imamiah (the Shia') is the non-distortion (of the Qur'an)."

9. Al-Allamah Al-Hilli who died in 726AH, said "The truth is that there is no change nor any bringing forward or backward in it (the Qur'an) and that nothing is added or omitted. We seek refuge with the Almighty Allah in believing in things like that (distortion of the Qur'an) for it would lead to denying the miracle of the Messenger (S) which is narrated to us by numerous narrators."

10. Al-Shaikh al-Bahaei who died in 1030 AH said, "And they disagreed whether there is any addition or omission in it (the Qur'an). The correct opinion is that the Glorious Qur'an is safeguarded from any addition or omission. The proof for that is the Word of the Almighty 'and surely, We will guard it.' Thus, what is known among people that the name of Imam Ali (a.s) is deleted in some parts such as in 'O you the Messenger convey what is revealed to you from your Lord (concerning Ali)' and similar places it is unacceptable by the scholars."

11. Mowla Mohsin al-Faydh al-Kashani who died in 1091 in the introduction of his Tafseer al-Safee and also in his book Al-Wafi asserted that the Qur'an was not distorted.

12. Al-Shaikh al-Hur al-Amili who died in 1104 has written a thesis proving that the Qur'an is not distorted. A part of his thesis reads, "And whoever has researched in history and the narrations as well as the opinion of the scholars should know with certainty that the Qur'an is registered with utmost numerous narrations and by quotations from thousands of the Companions and that the Qur'an was collected and compiled at the time of the Messenger of Allah (S)."

The abovementioned scholars are just some of the hundreds of the Shia' scholars who have asserted that the Qur'an is not distorted. Many Shia' scholars have compiled books concerning the non-distortion of the Qur'an such as contemporary Scholar Ayatullah Sayyed Ja'far Murtadha al-Amili in Haqa'iqun Hamma Howlal Qur'an (Important Realities Concerning the Qur'an) and my learned teacher Ayatullah Hasanzadeh (may God protect his life) in Fadhlul Khitab Fi Adame Tahrife Kitabeh Rabbul Arbab (The Preferred Talk in the Non-Distortion of the Book of the Lord of the Lords). This book is a critical commentary on the book of Nouri and hence the name sounds similar to it.

The contemporary researcher and historian Shaikh Rasool Ja'farian in his book *Okthubat Tahriful Qur'an* (Accusations of Distortion of the Qur'an) has compiled a concise yet very useful book in proving that the Qur'an is not distorted. Is it then not unfair to disregard the opinion of absolute majority of the Shi'a scholars and highlight and manoeuvre around the opinion of one scholar who in fact is one of the traditionalists and does not enjoy a highly regarded scholarly status in the eyes of the Shia' Scholars.

c) The Late Mohadeth Noori in his book 'Sound Reasoning' has categorised the narrations that he has relied on into 12 categories. Ironically, the narrations of 9 of the 12 categories are from Sunni sources. Before analysis of the narrations he has relied on, it is worthy to mention that Shaikh Noori is one of the Traditionalists (Akhbarioun) and what he has concluded in his book expresses solely his personal opinion not the belief of the Shi'a.

My learned teacher the Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi (may God protect his life) in his advanced lessons of 'the Principles of Jurisprudence' divided all the narrations of the book of Noori into 7 categories and responded to all of them. The following is a brief version of my notes from his lessons.

Category 1: Narrations that are undoubtedly fabricated

An example of such fabricated narrations are what Tabrasi in *Al-Ehtejaj* (The Argument) quoted that between the Word of God "Concerning the Orphans" and "Then marry them" (4:3) there has been many Ayaat and stories that contained one third of the Qur'an. They were all deleted by the hypocrites!

The fabrication of this Hadith is so obvious for surely if any one claims that any part of the Qur'an is deleted there must be a limit for the deletion not that only between a if-clause and the main clause two to three thousand Ayaat are deleted!

Narrations from Ahmad Ibn Mohammad AsSayyari.

Shaikh Noori has narrated more than 320 narrations from AsSayyari. Experts in *Ilmul Rejal* (The Science of Analytical Biography) have said with regards to AsSayyari: "His faith is wrong, he is an exaggerator and his opinion is far from the right path."

Category 2: Narrations in which the Qur'an is Mistaken with Holy Narrations (Hadith al-Qudsi)

For instance, Noori in his third category of narrations quoted from *Al-Mustadrak* (a well-known Sunni book of Hadith) that Abu Musa al Ash'ari said to the reciters of Basra "We used to recite at the time of the Prophet a Surah that in terms of its length and severity was similar to Surat al-Bara'a (chapter 9) and I have forgotten it. Yet I remember only this part 'Had there been for the children of Adam two valleys of wealth he would have surely sought a third one and nothing would fill the hollow inside man except soil.'" Noori also quotes from the Sunni sources the so-called Surah al-Hafid and al-Khal' as mentioned earlier. Obviously these so-called Ayaat and Surahs – if to be authentic– are no more than

Hadith al-Qudsi not the Qur'an.

Category 3: Mixing the Qur'an with the Interpretation of the Qur'an

There are many narrations in the both the Shia' and the Sunni books of Hadith that the interpretation of the Qur'an is mixed with the text of the Qur'an. For instance, Nouri narrated from As Sounan compiled by Al-Beyhaqqi (a famous Sunni scholar) who quoted from Hafsa: "***Guard strictly the Prayers especially the Middle Prayer and the Asr prayer and stand before God with obedience.***" (2:238) Hafsa said 'I bear witness that I so heard it from the Messenger of God.'

The expression of 'and the Asr prayers' is not part of the Qur'an and hence what Hafsa meant is that the Asr prayer was expressed by the Prophet (S) as an interpretation for the Middle Prayer. Similarly, the phrase "concerning Ali" in the Aya '***O you the Messenger convey what is revealed to you concerning Ali 'from your Lord:***' (5:67) in both the Shia and Sunni narrations is in fact the interpretation of the Ayah.

All the narrations concerning the differences between the Qur'an of Ibn Mas'oud and other companions mostly fits under this category of mixing the interpretation of the Qur'an with the actual Qur'an. The Qur'an of Imam Ali (S) that Abu Bakr and Omar refused to accept was also the Qur'an with its interpretation which was dictated by the Prophet (S) and written by Imam Ali (a.s). This type of interpretation of the Qur'an and any other text to mix the text with the explanation has been a common method among the scholars of the past and the present. Tafseer Al-shubbar and Tafseer Al-Asfa (of the Shia' scholars) and Tafseer Jalallain (of the Sunni Scholars) are examples of this type of mixing the explanation and the text.

Category 4: Narrations that Noori interpreted them to mean verbal distortion of the Qur'an

The fourth category are narrations that speak about the distortion of the Qur'an without specifying whether verbal or contextual distortion. Noori has interpreted all these narrations to mean the verbal distortion of the Qur'an. For instance, Al-Shaikh Al-Sadooq in his 'al-Khesal' (a Shi'a source) quoted via Jaber from the Prophet (S) that one the Day of Judgment the Qur'an will complain and will say: "O my Lord! They distorted me and tore me apart."

The above Hadith can only mean the contextual distortion of the Qur'an, or else it will contradict the divine promise of safeguarding the Qur'an. Moreover, al-Shaikh al-Sadooq as mentioned earlier is amongst many Shi'a scholars who denoted the verbal distortion of the Qur'an. Thus, he could not have narrated the above Hadith in his books unless he too understood the Hadith to mean contextual distortion.

Category 5: Narrations that indicate the Qur'an is of three or four sections:

Another proof of Noori is his reliance on the numbers of narrations that indicate a big portion of the Qur'an is revealed about the Ahlul Bayt (a.s) or their enemies. Al-Kolaini in al-Kaafi (a Shi'a source) narrated via Asbagh Ibn Nobate from Imam Ali (a.s): "The Qur'an is in three sections; one third of it is about us and our enemies, another third is about the traditions and the examples (of the previous nations) and the third part is about the obligations and statutes." Noori after quoting such narrations conclude that as we cannot find the third of the present Qur'an talking about Ahlul Bayt (a.s), then it must be deleted from the original Qur'an.

The answer to this claim is obvious. The above narration is a deep interpretation of the Qur'an (al-Ta'wil). Anywhere in the Qur'an that the believers are addressed or praised, it is firstly meant for Ahlul Bayt (a.s), for they are the best examples of the believers and the pious people. Thus, the above narration means that the deep interpretation of one third of the Qur'an applies to Ahlul Bayt (a.s).

Category 6: Different recitations

Shaikh Noori in his last category of his proofs has relied on the issue of different recitations of the Qur'an to prove his claim for verbal distortion of the Qur'an.

The answer is firstly there is a difference between the different recitations and that of verbal distortion. Secondly, as I shall explain in the next lesson the story of different recitations and revelation of the Qur'an according to seven or ten recitations is no more than a myth created by the Sunni scholars. The Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) have explicitly denied the myth.

Category 7: Rare Narrations

The last category is of the narrations that do not fit into any of the above categories. Such narrations are very few and at least for two reasons they must be rejected: firstly, they contradict the Qur'an and secondly the Shi'a scholars have disregarded them.

The Final Note

The unauthentic narrations concerning the distortion of the Qur'an have been a good excuse for the anti-Muslim writers to attack Islam in general and the Holy Qur'an in particular. For instance, Garcin de Tassy in 1842 after 18 years of hard work (as he claimed) published his collection of so called omitted Surahs in his article. His article was later translated into German language and in 1913 was translated into English by W. St. Clair Tisdall and published in "The Muslim World", vol. III July 1913, no. 3 pp.236

The main source of these works was the book of 'Dabestan Mazaheb' (The primary school of the sects) by an anonymous writer. This book is in Farsi language and was first printed in Bombay-India in 1262 A.H.. Sir John Milkom in 'the History of Iran' presumed that the book was compiled by 'Mohsen Keshmiri'

known as 'Fani'. He then assumed that the man was one of the tourists of the 11th century A.H. There are other possibilities about the author of the book. For further information you may refer to 'al-Thari'a' vol.8.p.48 by Agha Bozorg Tehrani.

In the recent years two Anti-Islamic American companies published a fake Qur'an called 'the true furqan' claiming that they are challenging the Qur'an after fourteen hundred years. Its 77 chapters begin with 'in the name of the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit!'J This so called Qur'an considers polygamy, fornication, divorce as being impermissible and that Jihad is Haram. Reading one sentence of this book is sufficient for anyone who is acquainted with the alphabets of the Qur'an to laugh at its contents and style.

Looking forwards for a day that Muslims whether Shi'a or Sunni do not accuse each other at the cost of providing ammunitions to the enemies of Islam, there we remain.

Lesson 6: The Science of the Signs of the Arabic Alphabets & Makki and Madani

The Science of the Signs of Arabic Alphabets Putting 'dots' and articulation

I do not know of any language other than Arabic that its correct reading and conversation requires that much of syntax. Sometimes a mistake in a Fatha sound () or Kasra () or Damma () would completely change the meaning of a sentence. Nonetheless, Arabic writing at the advent of Islam did not have any dots or any vowels. Muslims at the time of the Prophet (S), who were mainly Arabs, used to hear the Qur'an from the holy lips of the Prophet of Islam and hence in general they did not have much problem in correct recitation of the Qur'an.

With the expansion of Islam and the conversion of non-Arabs as well as Arabs who did not meet the Prophet (S) reading the text of the Qur'an was the only possible way for new Muslims to understand it. However because the Arabic writing then lacked any signs for sounds of vowels, a new phenomenon called different recitations emerged. For instance the term Tatloo *تاتلوا* in the Ayah "و اتبعوا ما تاتلوا الشياطين" (يتأتلا) if it is considered without the 'dots' could be possibly recited either Yatloo (علي ملك سليمان) 2:102 or Natloo (نبلو) or Nabloo (نبلا). To remove this problem the science of making dots and sounds of vowels of the Qur'an was created.

Putting dots on the words of the Qur'an

Today the Arabic alphabets are divided into two types; the ones without dots and the ones with dots. Some of the Arabic alphabets if their dots are disregarded they look exactly the same such as ba (ب), ta (ت), tha (ٿ) or such as dal (د), thal (ڌ). Obviously, reading the Arabic texts without any signs of 'dots' and vowels is extremely difficult.

The scientists of the sciences of the Qur'an disagree about the first person who created the symbols of dots for Arabic alphabets. They have suggested four different people; Abul-Aswad Doeli, Yahya Bin Ya'mar, Nasr Bin Asim and Hasan Al Basri. The most famous one that most of the scholars have agreed upon was Abul-Aswad Doeli who was the companion of Imam Ali (A.S). According to historians he was an Iranian farmer from around Basra. He invented the science of Arabic syntax and created the symbol of dots for the Qur'an.

The Science of Symbol of Vowels

Putting vowels on the Arabic words are essential for correct reading. Today the level of the literacy of an Arabic student is examined by how accurately he can pronounce the words. As mentioned earlier Arabic language at the time of the Prophet (S) was free from dots as well as the symbols of vowels. Thus, recitation of the Qur'an for non-Arabs as well as those who were not well acquainted with the Arabic language was extremely difficult. After invention of the dots for the letters Abul-Aswad invented the signs of Fatha (أ), Kasrah (ء) and Damma (ئ) for the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an. According to Qortobi the reason because of which Abul-Aswad created the signs for the Arabic alphabet was the following story:

"During the reign of Omar a Bedouin came to Medina seeking to hear the Qur'an. One of the Muslims recited Chapter 9 of the Qur'an to him during which instead of pronouncing Rasulohoo (رسوله) in Ayah 3 he pronounced it Rasulehee (رسوله). This mistake completely changed the meaning of the Ayah. Because if it was pronounced correctly it means "Verily Allah is free from all obligations to the disbelievers and so is His Messenger." Whereas the way that the Muslim man recited it meant wrongly: Verily Allah is free from all obligations to the disbelievers and His Messenger!" The story of the wrong recitation of the Muslim man reached Omar. He called the Bedouin and informed him about the mistake. He then announced that none other than the learned Muslims shall recite the Qur'an for people. He later appointed Abul-Aswad to create the science of Syntax."

The science of recitations of the Qur'an

Another science of the Qur'an that has earned much attention by the Sunni scholars is the science of the different recitations of the Qur'an. Most of the Sunni scholars assert that the Qur'an is revealed with seven different accents. The Shi'a on the contrary believes that the Qur'an is the Word of Unique God and was pronounced by the Prophet (S) by only one accent; i.e. the accent of Quraysh which was the

accent of the Prophet (S).

Zurara narrated in an authentic Hadith from Imam Baqir (A.S) "Surely the Qur'an is one, came down from the One but the different recitations comes from the narrators."

In another Hadith Fodhayl Ibn Yasar said to Imam Sadiq (a.s): People (the Sunnis) say: The Qur'an is revealed according to seven Letters (meaning seven recitations). Imam Sadiq (a.s): Said: "The enemies of God lied. Rather it was revealed in one Letter (recitation) from the One."

The Historical Stages of the Recitation of the Qur'an

We can divide the trend of the recitations of the Qur'an into seven stages:

1. Recitation of the Prophet (S) to the companions. This was the first stage of the recitation of the Qur'an in which the Prophet (S) was uttering the Qur'an to his companions as it was revealed to him.
2. Recitation of the companions to others: At this stage the companions recited the Qur'an to those who did not hear it from the Prophet (S). At this stage for the first time the problem of different recitations occurred. One of the main reasons for the occurrence of this problem was the fact that different Arab tribes had different accents and pronunciations. For instance, Al Mubarrad says: "the Arabs say: "Saeqa" and this is the accent of the people of Hijaz, whereas the tribe of Banu Tameem says: "Saqa".
3. Unification of the recitations at the time of Uthman: As mentioned in meeting three the problem of different recitations of the Qur'an was resolved by the unification of the recitations to the recitation of the Prophet (S) during the reign of Uthman under the auspicious guidance of Imam Ali (A.S).
4. Recitation of different cities such as Kufa, Basra, Damascus and Medina. Despite unification of recitations the problem of different recitations continued for the following reasons:
 - a. Lack of dots and the symbols for pronunciations in the then Arabic writing.
 - b. Lack of Alif (ا) for the words that the Alif would be pronounced in the middle of a word. For instance Yakhadioon (يَخْدِيُونَ) and Yakhdaoon (يَخْدَيُونَ) would be written the same. And therefore some of the reciters in the 2nd century did not tell any difference between the recitations of the two words.
 - c. Influencing personal opinions: Another reason for creation of different recitations was the fact that different reciters believed so much in the accent of their tribes and their own Arabic literacy and hence they preferred their opinion for the recitation of the Qur'an.
5. Recitation of the 'Seven Reciters': From the beginning of the 2nd Century among many reciters of the Qur'an seven became the most popular, they were Asim, Ibn Amer, Ibn Katheer, Abu Amr, Hamza, Naafe' and Kesaei. Among these reciters only Ibn Amer and Abu Amr were Arabs.

6. Compilation of different recitations of the Qur'an: From the middle of the 2nd Century the number of the reciters increased from seven to ten and from ten to fourteen to twenty and more.
7. Limitation of recitations to the recitation of the Seven Reciters: In the fourth century Ibn Mujahed wrote a book called Al-Saba' (The Seven) in which he limited the recitation of the Qur'an into the Seven Recitation according to the recitation of the Seven Reciters.

Therefore, the phenomenon of the Seven Recitations of the Qur'an is nothing other than the personal selection of Ibn Mujahed in order for him to stop multiplication of the recitations of the Qur'an and to limit them to the first seven known reciters. Some of the Sunni scholars mistakenly have claimed that the recitations of the Seven Reciters are numerously narrated from the Prophet (S). We believe all these claims are fabricated and are spread by the followers of those reciters for the purpose of sanctifying their reciters. In Reality the Prophet (S) pronounced the Qur'an only with one accent which was his.

Question and Answer

The Sunni and the Shi'a have narrated that the Almighty God commanded the Prophet of Islam (S) to recite the Qur'an in Seven Letters or that the Qur'an was revealed in Seven Letters. The Sunnis based on this Ahadith have concluded that the Qur'an was in fact revealed in seven different accents.

Our response in short is that these narrations in the Shia books are not authentic and in the Sunni books needless to comment on them. Most possibly these narrations are fabricated to sanctify the Seven Reciters. Moreover, even if these narrations are authentic they do not necessarily mean the seven recitations of the Qur'an. For, they could mean – as explicitly mentioned in some of these narrations – seven main subjects discussed in the Qur'an or seven layers and degrees of interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Present Recitation of the Qur'an

One of the best proofs that only one of the seven recitations is narrated from the Prophet (S) is the fact that the Holy Qur'an throughout the centuries till this date has been always written in one recitation. The recitation of the Qur'an from the advent of Islam until today has been always according to only one of the Seven Reciters. The recitation of the rest never had any existence in other than the books of the sciences of the Qur'an or the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The present and the ever recitation of the Qur'an is the recitation that is narrated to us from Hafs from his teacher Asem (one of the Seven Reciters) from his master Imam Ali (a.s) from the Prophet (S) from Gabriel from Allah. Hafs was one of the companions of Imam Sadiq (A.S). Asem; his teacher, was one of the companions of Imam Ali (A.S) and he was originally from Iran and was one of the eminent Shi'a scholars from Kufa.

Note

Although the correct and the authentic pronunciation of the Qur'an is only one, there are many narrations from the Imams of Ahlul Bayt that non Arabs or Arabs who are unable to pronounce the Qur'an correctly should not be despaired from the recitation of the Qur'an for the Merciful God will elevate their recitation with the real accent of the Qur'an. Imam Sadiq (A.S) from his pure ancestors, from the Prophet (S): "Surely a non-Arab person from my Ummah recites the Qur'an with his non Arabic accent but the angels take it up in accordance with the pure Arabic accent."

The Science of Makki & Madani

The Scholars of the Sciences of the Qur'an have suggested various classifications for the Ayaat of the Qur'an. The Prophet of Islam (S) lived the first 13 years of his mission in Makka and the last 10 years in Madina. Therefore, one of the famous classifications is division of the Qur'an into Makki and Madani.

Definition

Scholars have suggested three different meanings for the Makki and the Madani. The first meaning is based on the place of revelation. Any Ayah or Surah of the Qur'an that is revealed in Makka whether prior to the migration of the Prophet (S) or after the conquering of Makki would be classified as Makki. Similarly, any Ayah or Surah revealed in Madina would be Madani.

The second meaning is based on the time of revelation. Any Ayah or Surah that was revealed to the Prophet (S) prior to his migration to Madina would be Makki and the ones after his migration were called Madani even if they were revealed to him whilst he was temporarily in Makka.

The third meaning for Makki and Madani is based on the addressees of the Qur'an. If the addressees are the infidels the Surah would be Makki even if it was revealed in Madina whereas if the addresses were the believers or the People of the Book then the Surah would be classified as Madani.

Most of the scholars have accepted the second meaning for the definition of Makki and Madani. To them any Ayah or Surah that is revealed prior to his migration to Madina is Makki and the ones after his migration are Madani. Thus, Ayah 3 of Surah al-Ma'edah (Ch.5) is Madani although it was revealed in Hajjatul-Weda' (Farewell Hajj) in Arafa-Makka, and so is Ayah 58 of Surah Nisa' (Ch.4) although it was revealed in Ka'ba when Makka was conquered.

Problems of this classification

Some of the Surahs of the Qur'an are indisputably revealed completely in Makka (prior to migration) and some in Madina (after migration). The division of these Surahs into Makki and Madani is obvious.

The Problem occurs when one part of a Surah is revealed in Makka and the other part in Madina.

Should they be called Makki or Madani or something else? Scholars have not given any third name and hence they have named the Surahs based on two criteria: 1) We consider most of the Ayaat of the Surah in naming them Makki or Madani, 2) We consider the first Ayaat of every Surah. Therefore, if most of the Ayaat or the first Ayaat of a Surah were revealed, for instance, in Makka then it is Makki. For example, Surah Hajj (Ch.22) is Madani although the Ayaat 52–55 of it are revealed in Makka (prior to migration). Similarly, Surah al-Shoura (Ch.42) is Makki although the Ayaat from 23–26 are revealed in Madina. Surah al-Najm (53) is Makki but its 32nd Ayah is revealed in Madina. Surah al-Ahqaf is Makki but its 10th Ayah is revealed in Madina and the like. In all the above examples the majority of the Ayaat of a Surah are considered in naming them Makki or Madani.

On the other hand, Surah al-Nahl (Ch.16) is Makki although from Ayah 41 to the end of the Surah (more than 2/3rd of the Surah) was revealed in Madina. For, the first Ayaat of it were revealed in Makka. However, Surah al-Ankabout (Ch.29) is considered Makki although the first 11 Ayah of it were revealed in Madina!

Methods of Identification

There is no Prophetic narration to identify whether an Ayah or a Surah is Makki or Madani. The scholars of the Qur'an have identified the Makki and the Madani Surahs mainly by relying on the testimonies of the companions of the Prophet (S) or the companions of the companions. Moreover, they have suggested some signs by which the Ayaat of Makki are to be distinguished from the Madani.

For instance, any Surah that its addressees are 'O you mankind' is Makki and if the addressees are 'O you who believe' is Madani. However, Surah al-Nisa' (Ch. 4) is Madani yet it starts with "O you mankind". Similarly, Surah al-Hajj (Ch 22) is Madani, yet its Ayah 77 is addressed to the believers.

Another way to identify whether the Surah is Makki or Madani is by the length of the Surah and its Ayaat. In general, the Makki Surahs are short and so are their Ayaat, whereas the Madani are long. Nonetheless, Surah al-An'am (Ch.6) with 165 Ayah is Makki and the length of its Ayaat is also similar to the Madani Ayaat. On the other hand, Surah al-Nasr (110) is Madani but it is a very short Surah.

The main subjects of the Makki Surahs are dealing with the principles of Islam such as monotheism, the Day of Judgment, and the Prophecy of the Prophets, whereas most of the jurisprudential rules of Islam are mentioned in the Madani Surahs. For instance, no Ayah with regards to Jihad was revealed in Makka. The following charts clearly indicate the trend of the subjects of the Qur'an during the years of Prophetic mission.

Chart 1: Percentage of the subjects of the Qur'an

The total percentage is more than 100% and the number of Ayaat are more than the actual numbers as some of the Ayaat include more than one subject.

Chart 2: Trend of the subjects during the 23 years of revelation

Lesson 7: The Science of the Context of the Revelation (Asbabu-Nozoul)

One of the very useful sciences of the Qur'an which immensely helps the interpreters of the Qur'an is the 'science of the context of the revelation'. This science is directly related to the gradual revelation of the Qur'an and is in fact one of its wisdoms.

From the perspective of this science the Ayaat of the Qur'an are divided into two categories:

- 1) The Ayaat that are revealed without any particular circumstances. They aim primarily at guiding and educating mankind towards their salvation.
- 2) The Ayaat that although have the same aim and objective as the previous ones, they are revealed under certain circumstances or are in response to certain questions.

The circumstances under which the Ayaat are revealed hold the context of the Ayaat. Understanding such circumstances is called 'the science of the context of the revelation' ('Elme-Asbabu-Nozoul). For instance, it is narrated that the Jews of Madina who were upset with the unity of the Muslims made a mischief between the two Muslim tribes of 'Ous' and 'Khazraj'.

The people of the two tribes who were provoked by the Jews cried 'gun', 'gun' (meaning we shall fight). Upon that Ayah 100 and its following Ayaat of Surah Aale-Emran (ch.3) were revealed inviting the Muslims to unity. Similarly, the Prophet (S) was asked about Dhul-Qarnain and in response to that Ayaat 83-98 of Surah al-Kahf (ch.18) were revealed.

The Benefits of the Science of Asbabu-Nozoul

Context plays an important role in speech recognition. Thus, one of the key points of understanding a speech is to understand the circumstances under which the speech is delivered.

The Holy Qur'an is the text of the Words of God delivered to us after more than 1400 years. Undoubtedly, understanding the contexts of its sentences plays an important role in their understanding.

This science will become more vital when we consider the fact that the Qur'an –unlike the Bible– is not

compiled in chronological order. As we learned in the previous lessons sometimes an Ayah which is revealed in Madina is placed- by the Divine Order- amidst the Ayaat of a Surah which is Makki, such as the last Ayah of Surah al-Mozzammel (ch.73). In other occasions even the beginning and the end of a present Ayah are not revealed at the same time, such as Ayah 3 of Surah al-Ma'edah (ch.5) and Ayah 33 of Surah al-Ahzab (ch.33). Therefore, to have a correct understanding of these Ayaat we ought to know their contexts.

In the following I shall site some examples to demonstrate the significance of understating the contextual meaning of the Ayah.

1) The Almighty Allah in Ayah 115 Surah 2 states: "And to Allah belong the east and the west, so whatever you turn there is the Face of Allah. Surely, Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knowing."

The above Ayah seems to mean that facing the Qibla while praying is not a necessity. Any direction we face we are facing God and hence our prayers is on order. Nonetheless, Muslim scholars are unanimous that facing the Qibla is an obligatory condition.

The above misinterpretation of the Ayah will be disappeared when the context of the Ayah is understood. In one of the narrations, Ibn Abbas said: "The above Ayah is about changing of the Qibla. When the Almighty changed the Qibla of the Muslims from Baitul-Maqdes (Jerusalem) to Ka'ba, the Jews denied it and complained that it is not possible to change the direction of the Qibla. The above Ayah was revealed in response to them explaining that God can appoint any direction for His worship."

According to another narration the Ayah is about performing the Mustahab prayers whilst walking or riding (driving). In such situations the obligation of facing the Qibla is not a necessity.

2. The Almighty God in Surah al-Ma'edah states: "***Those who believe and do righteous good deeds, there is no sin on them for what they ate, if they fear Allah and believe and do righteous good deeds...***"(5:93)

Ignoring the context of the Ayah one may assume there is no diet restriction for a Muslim as long as he believes in God and does righteous deeds. This misinterpretation will soon disappear when the context of the Ayah is revealed.

When Ayah 90 of the same Surah was revealed in which all intoxications were strongly forbidden some of the companions of the Prophet (S) asked him: O Messenger of Allah! Some of us did believe in Allah and his Messenger and believed in the Hereafter. We even attended the battle of Badr and Uhud yet we used to drink alcohol for it was not then forbidden. Is there any reproach on us? Upon that the above Ayah was revealed declaring that the new law is not retrospective.

3. The Almighty in Surah al-An'am states: "***Say: I find not in that which has been revealed to me***

anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be a dead animal (Maitah) or blood poured forth or flesh of swine (pork); for that is surely impure or impious (unlawful) meat which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah. "(6: 145)

The phrase 'not...unless' grammatically indicates limitation of the rule of lawful and unlawful meat to what is specified. However, certainly the unlawful food is not limited to the above-mentioned categories. The meat of many wild animals as well as scaleless fish (according to the Shi'a) is unlawful.

The context of the Ayah is the solution to its correct understanding. To the pagans of Qoraysh the above four categories were all lawful. The Almighty Allah in response to their wrong belief states that nothing is forbidden but what you consider lawful. Thus, the limitation of the rule is relative not absolute for the context of the Ayah is not about listing all the forbidden foods.

4. The Almighty Allah in Surah al-Ma'edah states: ***"Lawful to you is (the pursuit of) water-game and its use for food-for the benefit of yourselves and those who travel, but forbidden is (the pursuit of) land-game as long as you are in the state of Ihram. "(5:96)***

Many narrations explain the context of the Ayah: In the year 6 A.H. the Prophet (S) along with his companions dressed their clothes of Ihram for Umrah. On their way to Makka they saw many preys suitable for hunting. The animals were so closed to them that they could easily hunt them with their spears. The above Ayah was revealed warning them that it is not lawful for them to hunt the land animal while they are in the state of Ihram.

Therefore, the aim of the Ayah is to announce that when the pilgrims are in the state of Ihram they can only hunt the sea animals. The Ayah does not aim to describe what type of sea food is permissible and what type is not. Thus, the deduction of the Sunni scholars from the Ayah to allow all types of sea animals is incompatible with the context of the Ayah.

Generic Term not a Specific Context

As important as the context of an Ayah is, in many instances it does not limit the rules to the people about whom an Ayah is revealed. For instance, the four Ayaat of Surah al-Mojadalah (ch.58) were revealed in relation to one of the Muslims of Madina (Ous) who had angrily divorced his wife (Khoulah) according to the Jahiliyyah culture of divorce. When the lady complained to the Prophet (S) about her husband the Ayah was revealed:

"Indeed Allah has heard the statement of her that disputes with you concerning her husband..." (58: 1)

Similarly, Ayah 6 to 9 of Surah al-Noor (ch.24) were revealed with reference to two Muslim men (Sa'd Ibn 'Obadah and Hilal Ibn Omayyah) who had seen their wives committing adultery.

Many Ayaat of the Qur'an are revealed with reference to certain people. However, the rules are general and are not obviously limited to them. Thus, the Almighty Allah instead of mentioning their names He has referred to them utilising general 'relative pronouns' (her, those, etc) to indicate that although those people were the excuse of revelation of the rules, the rules are not limited to them.

It is worth mentioning that the general terms are not always as general as they seem to be. For instance consider the meaning of 'people' in the following Ayah:

"Those unto whom the people said: Verily, the people have gathered against you (a great army)..." (3: 173)

Obviously 'the people' in the beginning and the end of the Ayah cannot be the same people otherwise it would have been said: 'the people said: Verily, we...' As usual the context of the Ayah is the key to the solution of the problem.

The above Ayah was revealed after the battle of Uhud when Muslims by the order of the Prophet (S) were mobilized to chase the pagans' army. Abu-Sofyan (the chief of the pagans) met with some of the men from the tribe of Abdul-Qays who were travelling to Madina to purchase some wheat. He requested them to scare Muslims and inform Muhammad (S) and his companions that Qoraysh has mobilized a big army to fight Muslims. When the men of Abdul-Qays conveyed the message the above Ayah was revealed.

Problems of indicating Asbabul-Nozoul

As important the science of the context of the revelation is, there are many problems in identifying the correct context of the Ayaat.

1. The first and the main problem is that unfortunately most of the narrations are Morsal (the chain of narrators are not mentioned). Moreover, very often the narrators of the stories are the companions of the companions of the Prophet (S) who were not the eye witnesses to the scenes. One of the reasons for this problem is the tragic fate of Hadith after the demise of the Prophet (S). As we know the Caliphs –particularly Abu-Bakr, Omar and Othman– had banned the narration of the Hadith.
2. Very often there are different and sometimes contradictory narrations for the context of an Ayah. The contradiction becomes more vivid on controversial issues such as the leadership after the Prophet (S).
3. Very often the authenticity and the reliability of the narrators are dismissed by a particular sect if the narration is against their doctrine. For instance, Husain Ibn Hasan al-Ashqari narrated that the Ayah 23 of Surah al-Shourah (ch.42) is about Ali, Fatima and their sons. Yet, Ibn Katheer the famous Syrian Sunni scholar rejects the narration with the only excuse that the narrator (Husain Ibn Hasan) is Shi'a!
4. Finally in many instances the narrators have mixed up the actual context of the revelation with an

application of the Ayah. For instance, al-Termethi in a narration that he considered it authentic narrated from Ibn Abbas: "A Jewish man said to the Prophet (S): O Abul-Qasem! Would it not be better had God created the heavens so and so and the earth so and so and the oceans so and so and mountains so and so and His other creation so and so? Upon that the following Ayah was revealed: **"They did not estimate Allah with estimation due to Him..." (6:91)**

Al-Soyouti after quoting the above narration comments: "It should be that the Prophet (S) has just recited the Ayah in response to the Jewish man, not that it was then revealed for the Ayah had been revealed in Makka.

Lesson 8: The Science of Abrogation

Introduction

The science of the abrogation of the Qur'an is undoubtedly one of the most significant sciences of the Qur'an. It is the only science of the Qur'an about which many books have been compiled. Ibn al-Nadeem (died in 380 or 385 A.H) in his book 'al-Fihrest' (the Index) has named 18 books that were compiled up to his time.

Amongst many books that are compiled on this subject the book of 'al-Nasikh and al-Mansoukh' written by Ibn Hazm died in 320 A.H. is the oldest book that is available. Among the contemporary scholars Dr. Mustapha Zaid has compiled a very useful book entitled 'al-Naskh Fil-Qur'an' (Abrogation in the Qur'an).

The science of the abrogation of the Qur'an is one of the discussions in Usulul-Fiqh (the Principles of Jurisprudence). The jurists have paid special attention to this science for the abrogation – as we shall learn – applies only on the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an. Thus, understanding the Ayaat, the abrogated and the abrogating Ayaat are essential in jurisprudential deduction.

Significance

The significance of understanding the abrogation is emphasised in many narrations. Imam Ali (a.s) entered a mosque wherein a man was preaching and warning people about the hereafter. The Imam asked who the man was. He is just reminding people about God, replied one of the audiences. The Imam said: "He is not a preacher. He is a selfish man whose intention is to introduce himself." The man was brought to the Imam. He asked the man: "Can you distinguish the abrogating Ayaat from the abrogated one?", "No", replied the man. The Imam said: "Then step out of our mosque and do not

preach here."

Al-Shaikh al-Sadooq narrated in his 'Elalu-Sharaye' that Imam Sadiq (a.s) asked Abu-Hanifah: Are you the jurist of the people of Iraq? Yes, he replied. The Imam asked: on which basis do you issue your verdict? On the basis of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet (S), replied Abu-Hanifah. The Imam added: Can you distinguish the abrogating from the abrogated ones? Yes, replied Abu-Hanifah. The Imam said: You have claimed a vast knowledge.

Definition

Naskh literally means to abolish, to annul, to change or replace something with something else by authority. Thus, Naskh is an official or legal abrogation and cancellation of an order.

In the Shari'a law (Islamic canon law) when a law is cancelled and replaced with another law the cancelled law is called 'Mansookh' (abrogated) and the new law is called 'Nasekh' (abrogating) and the action is called 'Naskh' (abrogation); naskh in jurisprudential law is similar to al-Bada' (changeable decree) in the creation.

We must however bear in mind that the expression of 'abrogation' in Ahadeeth as well as the words of the early scholars would include 'general and specific' 'absolute and limited' and even 'if clause'. It is due to this expression that the number of the abrogated Ayaat was much more in the eyes of the early scholars than the contemporary ones. For instance, the Almighty Allah states: ***"And divorced women shall wait (as regard to their marriage) for three menstrual periods" (2:228).***

On the other hand, in an authentic Hadith it is narrated that should a man divorce his wife prior to consummation of their marriage she does not need to wait for three menstrual periods before her remarriage.

The early scholars would consider the above example an abrogation of the Ayah by Hadith whereas the Ayah in fact is not abrogated. The general rule of the Ayah is limited by the Hadith to situations that marriage is consummated.

The Wisdom of Abrogation

Seeking perfecting and improvement is instinctive in man. Once upon a time travelling by horse or camel would be considered the best means of travelling. With the invention of the automobile travelling by horse was abrogated. Similarly, invention of the airplane abrogated land travelling especially for long trips. Abrogation is therefore a continuous phenomenon in human technology.

The same phenomenon is observed in human social laws. Every day we hear a new legislation abrogating the previous one. Abrogation is inevitable in human laws for the purpose of improving the law.

The wisdom behind abrogation in religious laws is similar to civil laws. The religious laws are also ordained to improve man's physical and spiritual life and to elevate him to his eternal prosperity. As man's improvement is naturally a gradual process the laws that are to be prescribed for him shall also be gradual. Thus, the Almighty has sent various prophets throughout history to gradually educate mankind at various stages of his life with required laws.

Educating of man about divine laws is similar to teaching mathematics to students. As the pupil grows mentally he will be taught more mathematical concepts. Thus, when a teacher teaches the second grade of mathematics it does not mean that he has changed his mind about the mathematic concepts taught in grade one. Abrogation in the Islamic laws is similar to different prescriptions of a skilful and kind physician who is treating his patients in a gradual fashion- to minimise the side effects- with different prescriptions.

The difference however, between abrogation in the civil law and that of the religious law is that man in the civil law discovers more advanced laws and hence changes his mind about the previous law whereas, in divine law the Almighty God is all knowing about all matters and the changes of the law are due to man's different requirements in different times. The Almighty Allah states:

"And when We change an Ayah in place of another – and Allah knows best what He sends down – they say: You are but a liar, nay but most of them know not. Say Gabriel has brought it down from your Lord with truth that it may make firm and strengthen those who believe and as a guidance and glad tidings to those who have submitted." (16: 101, 102)

Possibility of Abrogation in the Qur'an

Is there any abrogation in the Qur'an? Is it possible that there are two Ayahs in the Qur'an where one is abrogating the other?

Undoubtedly, some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an confirm the possibility of abrogation if not its occurrence in the Qur'an the following are the main references in the Qur'an with regards to its abrogation:

"Whatever an Ayah do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (or to be delayed) We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?" (2: 106)

"And when We change an Ayah in place of another – and Allah knows best what He sends down – they say: You are but a liar, nay but most of them know not. Say Gabriel has brought it down from your Lord with truth that it may make firm and strengthen those who believe and as a guidance and glad tidings to those who have submitted." (16: 101, 102)

"Allah blots out what He wills and confirms (what He wills). And with Him is the Source of the Book. (13:39)

The above Ayaat in general confirm the occurrence of abrogation in the Islamic laws. However, whether they mean the abrogation of the previous religious laws after the advent of Islam as it seems to be the meaning of the first Ayah or it is the abrogation of the Qur'an with another Ayah as it is the apparent meaning of the second Ayah, or it is abrogation in general as it seems in the third Ayah, all are issues that need further investigation.

Another possibility is to suggest that the meaning of the "Ayah" at least in the first one could be literal which means a sign or a guide or it could mean miracle. The advantage of this possibility is that in regards to some of the Ayaat such as the one for changing the direction of the Qibla (2:150) we do not need to falsely believe that the abrogated law (with regards to praying towards Jerusalem) has been an Ayah in the Qur'an and its recitation and rule has been abrogated, for we don't believe in the abrogation of recitation.

Conditions of Abrogation

In order for us to consider a law abrogated by another, any of the following five conditions must be met:

There must be a real contradiction between the two rules, for instance if an Ayah of the Qur'an says to do something and another one is asking not to do it then either of them is abrogated and another one is abrogating. The best example of this type of abrogation is Ayah 12 and 13 of Surah 58. It is due to the lack of this condition that the recommended law of giving charity is not abrogated by the law of compulsory Zakat. For, Muslims are ordered to give both the recommended charity well as paying Zakat. Thus, revelation of the Ayah of the obligation of Zakat (9:60) does not abrogate the many Ayaat that are encouraging Muslims to pay charity for the cause of God for, there is no real contradiction between them.

The disagreement between the two laws must be in all aspects not partially or in some aspects, therefore Ayah 31 of Surah 24 in which Muslim women are ordered to abide by the Islamic dress code is not abrogated with Ayah 60 of the same Surah in which the law of Islamic dress code is lenient about aged women. For Ayah 31 is general about all women whether young or old and Ayah 60 is specifically about aged women. In other words, Ayah 60 should be considered an interpretation of Ayah 31 to indicate that the latter does not include the aged women. Although, early scholars would refer to such phenomenon as abrogation it is no longer considered an abrogation.

The first law must not be temporary otherwise when the date expires the law naturally ends not that it is abrogated. Therefore, Ayah 15 of Surah 4 is not abrogated by the law of stoning for the law of the Ayah was temporary from the beginning as Allah says in that Ayah "Or Allah ordains for them some other way".

The subject of the two laws must be the same for instance, drinking intoxicants is forbidden but in the advent of an emergency- such as for medication- if the medication is limited to that one or if the person

is threatened – in the advent of an emergency it is permissible. Therefore, the last part of Ayah 173 of Surah 2 is not abrogating the first part of it as claimed by the abrogation lovers.

The abrogation only applies in the jurisprudential laws not in the advents of the external world, thus Ayah 13 of Surah 56 is not abrogating its Ayah 39 for they are talking about two different groups of people of paradise.

With consideration of the above five conditions we acknowledge that abrogation does not have many examples in the Qur'an. The number of the abrogated Ayaat in the view of the scholars depends on the number of the conditions that they agree upon for abrogation.

Types of Abrogation

The Sunni scholars have presumed three different types of abrogation in the Qur'an. Although we totally disagree with the first two types for educational purposes we shall discuss all of them.

Abrogation of rule and recitation: abrogation of rule and recitation means that an Ayah of the Qur'an is allegedly deleted along with its rule. Sunni scholars cite the following narration for this type of abrogation. Aisha said "Among what was revealed was the law of ten times confirmed breastfeeding which was abrogated by five times confirmed breastfeeding. When the Messenger of God passed away the abrogating Ayah (five times breastfeeding) was still recited in the Qur'an".

According to the Sunnis there has been an Ayah in the Qur'an indicating the law of being mahram to someone by ten times confirmed breastfeeding which the Ayah and its rule are all abrogated. This is despite the fact that there is no Ayah in the Qur'an indicating the number of breastfeeding whether five times or ten times, thus the Sunni scholars claim that the ten times breastfeeding is abrogated by the tradition.

The problem of this type of abrogation is that it leads to the false claim of distortion of the Qur'an on the one hand as well as the false claim of abrogation after the demise of the Prophet (S). For, surely no law can be abrogated after the demise of the Prophet (S).

Abrogation of recitation but not the law: by this type of abrogation the Sunni scholars mean that an Ayah of the Qur'an is allegedly deleted but its rule is in order. The famous example of this type of abrogation for them is Ayah Rajm as discussed in meeting five. We believe the abrogation of recitation is void for it is nothing other than the false claim of distortion of the Qur'an.

Abrogation of the rule without the recitation: the meaning of this type of abrogation is that the rule of an Ayah of the Qur'an is abrogated although the Ayah itself exists in the Qur'an most of the examples of abrogation are in fact this type of it. In general, Muslim scholars are unanimous that this type of abrogation has occurred in the Qur'an although they disagree about the number of abrogated Ayaat and its examples.

Abrogation of the rule without recitation can occur in one of the three following ways:

3/1: Abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an that means an Ayah of the Qur'an is abrogating another Ayah such as Ayah 13 of Surah 58, that it's abrogating its previous Ayah

3/2: Abrogation of the Qur'an by a narration that is repeatedly narrated. For the example of this type of narration it is claimed that the rule of Stoning which is repeatedly narrated from the Prophet (S) has abrogated Ayah 2 of Surah 24. However, we believe that Ayah 2 of Surah 24 is generally talking about the law of Adultery, which the adulterer and the adulteress ought to be whipped one hundred times if the crime is proven in the Islamic court. The Ayah is silent about whether the rule applies to a married person or a single person whereas the rule of Stoning applies only to the married adulterers whether male or female. Thus, they lack the second condition of the conditions of abrogation.

Similarly, it is claimed that the third Ayah of Surah 24 is abrogated with permissibility- though not recommended- of temporary marriage with an adulteress. However, this is firstly another example of specifying a general rule and secondly we disagree with the specification. Further discussion has to be sought in jurisprudence.

In general, abrogation of the Qur'an by a Prophetic narration that is repeatedly narrated is Islamically possible for the Messenger of Allah does not speak by his desire. However, it is very unlikely that such abrogation has occurred in the Qur'an.

3/3: Abrogation of the Qur'an by a Single narration: this type of abrogation is not permissible as the validity of a Single narration is not the same as the Qur'an.

Number of the Abrogated Ayaat

The scholars have different opinions on the number of abrogated Ayaat. The early scholars were counting the abrogated Ayaat to be up to five hundred. The reason for this big figure was their inclusive interpretation of the term abrogation as mentioned earlier.

The contemporary scholars also disagree about the number of the abrogated Ayaat. Souti asserts that the abrogated Ayaat in the Qur'an are not exceeding twenty one. He is still unsure about one of them. Ayatollah Ma'rafat considers the Ayaat to be only eight, the late Allamah Tabatabai counts them to be only six and finally the late Ayatollah Khoei asserted that there is only one abrogated Ayah in the Qur'an i.e.

Ayah 12 Surah 58. The author of this text can only agree with the opinion of Ayatollah Khoei.

Why Abrogated Ayaat are still in the Qur'an

As mentioned earlier, the wisdom of abrogation is legislation in accordance to different requirements. Thus, although a rule is abrogated for its circumstances have changed it shall still be kept in the scripture should its circumstances be repeated. In such a situation it is the duty of a qualified jurist to understand the circumstances and issue his verdicts in accordance to required Ayaat whether abrogated or abrogating. For instance, it is claimed that the Ayaat of forgiving the infidels (Ayah 14 of Surah 45 and 109 of Surah 2) are abrogated by the Ayaat that are commanding to fight the infidels such as Ayah 29 of Surah 9.

Nonetheless should Muslims of any age be in a similar socio-political situation of the early Muslims in Mecca and they live in a non-Islamic country as a minority their duty is to follow the rules of forgiving the infidels. This interpretation applies if we agree that the Ayaat of forgiving the infidels are abrogated. We however, suggest that the Ayaat are not abrogated for it is not permissible to fight all infidels.

The Only Abrogated Ayah in the Qur'an

As mentioned earlier it seems –as stated by the late Ayatollah Khoei– the only Ayah that is really abrogated is Ayah 12 of Surah 58 which is abrogated by its following Ayah. Ayah 12 of Surah 58 states:

"O you who believe! When you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That will be better and purer for you. But if you find not (the means of it), then verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (58: 12)

Numerous Sunni and Shi'a narrators narrated the context of the revelation of the Ayah as following:

Some of the rich Muslims– seemingly for the purpose of boasting to others– used to sit with the Prophet (S) for private consultation. As they did not have a serious matter to discuss, it was nothing more than a waste of time for the Messenger of Allah.

"Are you afraid of spending in charity before your private consultation (with him)? If then you do it not, and Allah has forgiven you, then (at least) perform Salat and give Zakat and obey Allah. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do."

Lesson 9: The Science of the Miracles of the

Qur'an

Definition of the miracle

Miracle is type of a speech or an action that man without the Leave of God is unable to perform. The Arabic term for miracle is 'Mo'jezah' which is driven from 'Ajz' meaning 'to be unable'. Thus, 'Ajooz' means a very old man and 'Ajooza' a very old woman.

In English, miracle is from Latin miráculum meaning to wonder. Any amazing or wonderful occurrence- although mostly unusual- is called miracle in English. Thus, the English term is more inclusive than its Islamic terminology. Mo'jizah in the Islamic theology is the violation of normal natural laws that a Messenger of God performs by the Leave of God to prove authenticity of his Prophetic claim. The common term used in the Qur'an as well as the bible for miracle is 'Ayah' (Sign) as it is a sign for truth of the Prophet as well as the sign of the Might of God.

The Holy Qur'an the best and the everlasting miracle of Muhammad (S)

Among the three thousand miracles recorded from the Prophet of Islam (S) the Holy Qur'an is his most vivid and living miracle. Thus, every sentence of the Qur'an is named 'Ayah' (Sign). As we learned earlier a miracle from the Islamic perspective is an occurrence than is impossible for any humans- or even the jinn- to perform without the Leave of God. To prove the miraculous aspect of the Qur'an the Almighty God has invited man and the jinn to the challenge of producing something similar to the Qur'an:

"Say: If the mankind and the jinn were together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another." (17:88)

"And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down (i.e. the Qur'an) to Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a Surah (Chapter) of the like thereof and call your witnesses (supporters) besides Allah, if you are truthful. But if you do it not, and you can never do it, then fear the Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers." (2:23,24) Similar to this Ayah is also mentioned in Surah 10 Ayah 28

"Or the say, "He (Muhammad (S)) forged it (the Qur'an). Say: Bring you hen ten forged Surahs like unto it, and call whomsoever you can, other than Allah (to your help), if you speak the truth. If then they answer you not, know then that it (the Qur'an) is sent down with the Knowledge of Allah and that none has the right to be worshipped but He! Will you then be Muslims " (11: 13,14)

"Or do they say: He has forged it (the Qur'an)? Nay! They believe not! Let them produce a recital

"like unto it if they are truthful." (52:33-34)

Some useful points in the above Ayaat

- Among the above Ayaat the first the most comprehensive for it is inviting the mankind and the jinn to the ever unsuccessful challenge of producing something similar to the Qur'an.
- The term 'Qur'an' in the Ayah does not necessarily mean the entire Qur'an for surely at the time of the revelation of the above Ayah the whole Qur'an was not revealed yet.
- The second Ayah is inviting the deniers of the Qur'an to produce even a Surah like unto the Qur'an. The shortest Surah of the Qur'an is Surah al-Kouthar (ch.108) which consists of only three short Ayah. Yet none has ever been able to produce anything similar to this Surah.
- Most of the 'Ayaat of the Challenge' are revealed when the Prophet (S) was still in Makka. This means although the challenge has been always on, there has not been any further efforts from the disbelievers and hence no need for further invitation to challenge the Qur'an has been necessary.

Unsuccessful Challenges

Since the time of the above revelations several attempts have been made from the enemies of Islam to challenge the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an but to no avail.

The first person who dared attending the challenge was 'Mosaylama' a man from Yamama who claimed to be a prophet in the year 11 A.H. to his own assumption he produced a chapter similar to Surah al-Fil (ch.105): "The elephant, what is the elephant. And what made you understand what the elephant is. For it there is a disastrous tail and a long trunk!"

Every Arab would only laugh at this production and hence Mosaylama did not succeed in his attempt.

In the recent years some evangelical anti-Muslim groups have produced a forged book called 'the True Furqan'. They claimed that they have been able for the first time after 1400 years to challenge the Qur'an. This book has been published in numerous copies in the North America by two American companies (Omega 2001 and Wine Press) for free distribution among Muslims!

In addition to its feigned Arabic style, the Christian dogma of Trinity is mentioned in it more than the Bible! They have even named one of its chapters 'The Triune God'! All its chapters begin with the name of god the father, god the son and the Holy Spirit! Jihad is forbidden in it (for obvious reasons!) and divorce is prohibited!

Dimensions of the Miracles of the Qur'an

A. Rhetorical Miracle

Rhetoric is the art of using language effectively and persuasively. The first apparent miracle of the Qur'an is related to its rhetorical styles. Although the original version of the previous Scriptures were also miraculous for they contain revealed prophecies. Nonetheless, their literal styles were not miraculous. Thus, they had never called anyone to the challenge of producing something like them.

Amazingly, however, some of the early Sunni scholars either denied the rhetorical aspects of the miracle of the Qur'an or limited its miracle to rhetoric. Among the Sunni scholars the Ash'aris limited the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an to its rhetoric whilst the Mo'tazelis denied the rhetorical miracle of the Qur'an claiming that its prophecies are the only miracles of the Qur'an. Al-Baqellani died in 403 A.H. is the most known Ash'ari linguist who limited the miracle of the Qur'an to its rhetorical aspects. Although al-Baqellani is wrong in limiting the miracle of the Qur'an to its rhetoric, his book 'E'jazul-Qur'an' (the Miracle of the Qur'an) is one of the best sources on the rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an. Al-Nazzam; the Mo'tazeli Sunni scholar died in 231 A.H., on the other hand, denied the rhetorical miracle of the Qur'an limiting the miracle of the Book of Allah only to its prophecies.

As a matter of fact, the dimensions of the miracles of the Qur'an are numerous. Although the rhetoric of the Qur'an is undoubtedly miraculous, its miracle is not limited to its rhetoric.

The miraculous rhetoric of the Qur'an coupled with its profound meanings has been the strongest magnet in attracting mankind- and even the jinn- to Islam.

In the early years of the advent of Islam, the chiefs of Quraysh had banned listening to the Qur'an. The Qur'an in narration of that event states:

"And those who disbelieve say: Listen not to this Qur'an, and make noise in the midst of its (recitation) that you may overcome." (41:26)

Ironically, however, the magnet of the Qur'an was so pleasant that the chiefs of Quraysh themselves could not but enjoy listening to it. Thus, they used to secretly listen to it. The story of Walid, Akhnas and Abu-Jahl is well known in the history. Similarly, the conversion of 'Umar Ibn Khattab six years after the advent of Islam by listening to some of the Ayaat of Surah TAHA (ch.20) is narrated by many historians.

The linguists have usually divided the human literatures into poetry and prose. The poetry and the prose have their own styles and literal frames. "The Qur'an –as accurately expressed by Taha Husain- is neither poetry nor a prose, it is rather the Qur'an. It is not poetry for it is not limited to the frames of poetry, as it is not a prose for it has its own unique styles of speech."

1. Examples of the rhetorical miracles of the Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an with reference to the law of equality in punishment (al-Qisas) states:

"And there is (a saving of) life for you in al-Qisas." (2:179)

Prior to the revelation of this Ayah the common Arabic proverb for the equality of punishment was 'killing is more banishing for (another) killing.'

Al-Soyouti; has listed twenty points whereby the Ayah of the Qur'an is more preferred than the Jahiliyyah expression.

"The Day when a Maula cannot avail a Maula in aught, and no help can they receive. Except him on whom Allah has Mercy." (44:41-42)

The message of the above Ayah is to deny any type of help for anyone from anyone- be it from his direct family, relatives, friends, solicitors, etc. on the Day of Judgment. The only exception however is for those on whom Allah has Mercy. The Arabic term 'Maula' has 27 different meanings. This is the best and the only word in Arabic to include any type of helper. Thus, the above message could not be possibly expressed in any better way.

"And it was said: O earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold (your rain. And the water was made to subside and the Decree (of Allah) was fulfilled. And it (the ship) rested on (Mount) Judi, and it was said: Away with the people who are wrong doers." (11:44)

Unfortunately, no matter how well the above Ayah is translated it can never be equal to its Arabic text. This is definitely the most eloquent Ayah in the Qur'an and in the Arabic literature. Arab linguists have discovered at least 30 different arts of eloquence that are utilized in the above Ayah. That means the arts used in the Ayah are far more than the number of the words used in the Ayah!

When the Qur'an invited the disbelievers to challenge the Qur'an some of the most eloquent idolaters request to have forty days to produce something similar to the Qur'an. During that time the above Ayah (11:44) was revealed. The rhetoric of the Ayah was so commanding that the idolaters were left with no doubt that those words cannot be possibly challenged by any humans.

2. Sublime Teachings and Educational Miracles of the Qur'an

The miracles of the Qur'an are not limited to its rhetoric; otherwise the Almighty Allah would have not asked the mankind and the jinn to challenge it. For, obviously not all humans are acquainted with Arabic language.

The sublime educational aspects of the miracles of the Qur'an; be it in theology, ethics, sociology,

psychology, politics, economic, etc. are so perfectly and miraculously described.

Monotheism, for instance, is the bedrock of all divine religions. Prior to the revelation of the Qur'an the most that mankind knew about this concept was not further than numerical unity of God (Tawheed 'Adadi). The Holy Qur'an is the first Book in the human history that educated man on the sublime concept of monotheism in uniqueness of God (Tawheed Ahadi).

Surah al-Ekhlas (ch.112) and the first six Ayaat of Surah al-Hadeed (ch.57) have the best expression on the uniqueness of God. Kolayni narrated in his Isnad from Imam Sajjad (a.s): "The Almighty God knew that there will be humans with profound understanding in the coming centuries, thus He revealed Surah al-Ekhlas and the beginning of Surah al-Hadeed to 'and He has full knowledge of whatsoever is in the breasts."

3. Unification and the Harmony of the Qur'an

Lack of discrepancies and a unique harmony of the Qur'an is another aspect of its miracle. The almighty Allah states: ***"Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah they would surely have found therein many a contradiction." (4:82)***

The present Bible is fragmentary in its literature style. For, it is the remains of a larger literature and it is compiled by various writers over centuries. On the contrary, the Qur'an has a unique style from its beginning to the end. Al-Baqellani; a well versed Arab linguist in his testimony on the harmonious style of the Qur'an asserts:

"The amazing order and marvellous compilation of the Qur'an is never subject to any changes, in spite of the variety of the subjects that the Qur'an deals with. These subjects include stories, admonitions, arguments, orders, excuses, warnings, promises, glad tidings, alarming, teachings sublime morals codes, the biography of the ancient people and many other subjects. We have examined the literature of the most rhetorical scholars, outstanding poets and the most eloquent orators on different subjects... Every poet excels only in one particular style; Emra'ul-Qays in description of horse riding, al-Naabegha in horror and fear, al-Zohair in love stories. The same difference can be observed in the styles of writers and orators." In further explanation about the harmonious style of the Qur'an he added:

"A skilful poet makes a mistake when he describes asceticism. An eloquent orator cannot be so eloquent in description of the permissible and not permissible statutes. But the order of the Qur'an never changes. The order and its eloquence is always the same (although the subjects differ. Nay, the best and the most sublime status always belongs to the Qur'an."

4. The Unseen News of the Qur'an

The fourth dimension of the miracles of the Qur'an is with regards to its unseen news of the past as well

as the future.

The Almighty Allah addressing the Prophet (S) states: "***This is of the news of the Unseen which We reveal unto you; neither you nor your people knew it before this.***" (11:49, and similarly in 3:44 and 12: 103)

The stories of some of the previous nations and the Prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an. Although in general the narrations of the Qur'an are quite similar with the Bible, there are ample differences. The narration of the Qur'an is free from any distortions that occurred in the text of the Bible. The narrations of the Qur'an are the narration of all-Knowing All-Seeing Witness; i.e. the Almighty God. The Qur'an sometimes so clearly narrates an event that it seems to us as if we are observing the scene.

Apart from the histories of the previous Prophets some useful and amazing events that had taken place after Jesus Christ (S) but some centuries prior to the advent of Islam are uniquely described in the Qur'an. The story of the People of the Cave as mentioned in Surah al-Kahf (ch. 18) is the best example of this category.

One of the miracles of the Qur'an concerning the stories of the ancient nations is the different titles the Qur'an is using for different chiefs of the ancient Egyptian monarch.

In the Old Testament, the Egyptian ruler during the period of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) and Prophet Yusuf (a.s) are named "Pharaoh." However, this title was actually employed after the eras in which these two Prophets lived.

While addressing the Egyptian ruler at the time of Prophet Yusuf (a.s), the word "Al-Malik" in Arabic is used in the Qur'an: It refers to a ruler, king or sultan: "***The King said, 'Bring him to me straight away.'***" (12:50)

The ruler of Egypt in the time of the Prophet Musa (as) is referred to as "Pharaoh." This distinction in the Qur'an is not made in the Old and New Testaments nor by Jewish historians. In the Bible, the word "Pharaoh" is used, in every reference to an Egyptian monarch. On the other hand, the Qur'an is far more concise and accurate in the terminology it employs.

The use of the word "Pharaoh" in Egyptian history belongs only to the late period. This particular title began to be employed in the 14th century B.C., during the reign of Amenhotep IV. The Prophet Yusuf (a.s) lived at least 200 years before that time. 216

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that the word "Pharaoh" was a title of respect used from the New Kingdom (beginning with the 18th dynasty; B.C. 1539–1292) until the 22nd dynasty (B.C. 945–730), after which this term of address became the title of the king. Further information on this subject comes from the Academic American Encyclopaedia, which states that the title of Pharaoh began to be used in the New Kingdom.

The Holy Qur'an also contains many prophecies for the future. Several events were foretold in the Qur'an prior to their occurrence.

An example of these prophecies is the foretelling of the victory of the Romans over the Persians after they were defeated from them. The prophecy is mentioned in the beginning of Surah al-Room (ch.30). The prophecy of the Qur'an took place about ten years after the revelation of the Ayah.

Promising the victories return of the Prophet (S) to Makka; his home town is another example of the prophecies of the Qur'an as stated in Ayah 85 of Surah al-Qasas (ch.28).

Amongst the prophecies of the Qur'an for the farther future is about the globalization of Islam and its superiority over all other religions. The Almighty Allah in three different Surahs of the Qur'an states that He has sent His Messenger (Muhammad) with guidance and the religion of truth (Islam), to make it superior over all religions even though the disbelievers hate it. (9:33, 48:28, 61:9)

Today even non-Islamic sources confirm that Islam is the fastest growing religion in our age in spite of all the propaganda against it.

5. The Scientific Miracles of the Qur'an

The Almighty God in nearly every page of the Qur'an invites man to reflect on the nature around and within him. The book of creation; is one of the frequently used books in the Qur'an to prove the existence of God in the Qur'an. From the view of the Qur'an the entire universe from the micro cells to the macro galaxies are all the signs of the Creators. The best and the most accurate description of the creation, therefore, can be cited by its Creator, i.e. Allah. The description of God about the nature is not based on man's limited and very often wrong knowledge, it's based on reality as it is. The precise deception of the Qur'an about the natural phenomena leaves us with no doubt that this Book is but a miraculous Words of God.

The 18th century Swedish biologist, Carolus Linnaeus discovered that the gender exists in the world of plants. He explained his new discovery in his book 'Spices Plantarum'. Many centuries before Carlous, the Almighty God referred to the plants as a pair of male and female. (13:3 and 31:10).

Sir Isaac Newton in 17th century discovered the universal gravity force. Gravity is a force that attracts all objects in the universe. In other words, it holds all the objects in their due place by unknown pillars called the force of gravity. This fact is also mentioned in the Qur'an (13:2 and 31:10).

Edwin Hubble in 1929 discovered that the universe is expanding. The concept of the expansion of the universe is vividly and without any ambiguity is mentioned in the Qur'an. The Almighty Allah in Surah Adha-Dhariyat states: ***"With power did We construct the heaven. Verily, We are extending the vastness of space thereof."*** (51:47)

How could possibly an unlettered man more than fourteen hundred years ago have lived in the barren deserts of the Arabian Peninsula know so precisely about the expansion of the universe? Glory be to Allah.

Many books and articles are compiled explaining the scientific miracles of the Qur'an. With the new discoveries in various scientific fields, more examples of the scientific miracles of the Qur'an will be discovered.

6. The Numerical Miracles of the Qur'an

Another aspect of the miracles of the Qur'an is a new numerical finding in the Qur'an. For instance, the term 'Duny'a (this world) is repeated 115 times in the Qur'an, and its opposite, i.e. 'Aakhirat' (the hereafter) is also repeated 115 times. 'Life' is used 145 times and 'death' is also used 115 times. 'Tongue' is used 25 times and so is 'sermon'. 'Man' is used 24 times and so is 'woman'.

One of the best works in this field is compiled by a Shi'a scholar Dr. Abu-Zahra al-Najdi 'Menal-E'jazel-Balaghi Wal-A'dadi Fil-Qur'an-Karim' (From the Rhetorical and Numerical Miracles of the Noble Qur'an). Similarly, Dr. Abdul-Razzaq Noufel in his book 'al-E'jazul-Adadi Fil-Qur'an al-Karim' has cited many examples of this aspect of the miracle of the Qur'an.

It is worthy to note that some authors are so much indulged in their calculations that they even altered the Qur'an to match their calculations! Rashad Khalifa; the Egyptian biochemist who came up with the mysterious number '19' is a clear example of this type of abusing the Qur'an. He deleted the last Ayah of Surah al-Touba (ch.9) simply because it did not match his calculations! The man later claimed to have experienced a heavenly ascension and his followers in the U.S. regarded him a prophet!

Lesson 10: The Science of the Clear and Unclear Ayaat

Lesson 10: The Science of the Clear and Unclear Ayaat (al-Mohkam & al-Motashabeh)

Significance

Of all the sciences of the Qur'an the science of understanding and distinguishing the clear from the unclear Ayaat is indisputably the most important science. All theological, mystical, and jurisprudential sects in Islam quote the Qur'an to prove their doctrines despite all the differences amongst them. Amazingly sometimes their doctrines contradict each other and yet the Qur'an is the reference for all of

them. What is more amazing is that sometimes even an Ayah is the reference for two opposite doctrines. Both the determinists and those who believe in free will refer to the Ayah 35 of Surah al-An'am (ch.6) to prove their doctrines.

The ground for such opposite recitations of the Qur'an is 'the phenomenon of ambiguity'.

Imam Sadiq (a.s) in expressing the significance of this science in understanding the Qur'an states: "Behold!–May the Mercy of Allah be upon you- surely, whoever does not know the abrogated from the abrogating Ayaat of the Book of the Almighty Allah, and the general from the specific and the Muhkam from Motashabeh... then he does not know the Qur'an nor is he from the people of the Qur'an."

Definition

The terms used in the Qur'an for this science is 'Muhkam and Mutashabeh'. The term 'Muhkam' is driven from 'Hakama' which literally means 'prevented'.

A Muhkam Ayah means an Ayah that there is no ambiguity in understanding of its words and their meanings. A Muhkam Ayah is an Ayah that its apparent can clearly reflect its meaning with no necessary interpretation. In other words, it has an established meaning which prevents any other meanings. Thus, we suggest that 'Muhkam' here means 'clear'.

An example of a clear Ayah from the Qur'an is the following Ayah which clearly states the compensation for breaching an oath:

"Allah will not punish you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He will punish for your deliberate oaths; for its expiation feed ten poor person, on a scale of the average of that with which you feed your own families, or clothe them or manumit a slave. But whosoever cannot afford (that), then he should fast for three days. That is the expiation for the oaths when you have sworn." (5:89)

The term 'Mutashabeh' literally means something that looks like other things and hence causes confusion. The Almighty Allah in the story of the cow of the Israelites quotes from them: "***Verily, to us the cows are alike (and hence we are confused).*** (2:70)

A 'Mutashabeh' Ayah is an Ayah that its meaning due to different possibilities is not clear, and it is open to different interpretations. In other words, its apparent meaning does not reflect its real one. Thus, we suggest that 'Mutashabeh' means 'unclear' or 'ambiguous'. In the coming pages we shall cite many examples of the unclear Ayaat of the Qur'an.

Divisions of the Qur'an into Muhkam and Mutashabeh

The division of the Qur'an into Muhkam and Mutashabeh is the only division that is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. All other divisions such as abrogated and abrogating, general and specific and etc are the expressions of the scholars.

The Almighty Allah states:

"It is He Who has sent down to you the Book The Qur'an). In it are Ayaat that are Muhkam (clear), they are the foundations of the Book; and others are Mutashabeh (unclear). So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation they follow that which is unclear thereof, seeking mischief and seeking for its hidden meaning (according to their desire), but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. (They) say: We believe in it; the whole of it are from our Lord, and none receive admonition except men of understanding." (3:7)

In the above Ayah the Almighty Allah is vividly dividing the Ayaat of the Qur'an into Muhkam and Mutashabeh. The Muhkams are the reference Ayaat which lay the foundation of the meanings of the Qur'an and to which one shall refer for understanding of the unclear Ayaat. However, those in whose hearts are deviation they abuse the ambiguous Ayaat to justify their false beliefs.

A historical example of such abuse is the mischief of Mo'awiyah who allured Samorah Bin Jondab to fabricate a Hadith that Ayah 204 and 205 of Surah al-Baqarah (ch.2) is with regards to Imam Ali (a.s) and the Ayah 207 is allegedly praising the murderer of Imam Ali (a.s)!

This is in spite of the fact that Ayah 204 and 205 are reproaching the hypocrites and Ayah 207 is about the sacrifice of Imam Ali (a.s) when he slept in the Prophet's bed for the protection of the Prophet of Islam (S) when he was secretly migrating from Makka to Madina.

Is there any Unclear Ayah in the Qur'an?

Although the Qur'an is quite explicit that there are clear and unclear Ayaat in the Qur'an, scholars disagree as whether there is any ambiguous Ayah in the Qur'an. The followings are the main views:

1. There is no unclear Ayah in the Qur'an

The first view is of those who deny any ambiguity in the Qur'an. They claim that the Almighty Allah states:

"This (the Qur'an) is a plain statement for mankind, a guidance." (3: 138)

Had the Qur'an been ambiguous it would have not been a plain statement and a guidance.

The Almighty Allah also states:

"(This is) a Book, the Ayaat whereof are well established." (11:1)

They further explain that the 'ambiguous Ayaat' as stated in the Ayah 7 of the third chapter of the Qur'an, are only for those in whose hearts there is a deviation. The Qur'an is like a dispensary of medicine in which **"there is a healing and a mercy to those who believe, but it increases the wrong doers nothing but loss." (Surah al-Esra', 17: 82)**.

2. The entire Qur'an is ambiguous

Contrary to the first opinion, the common view of the traditionalists (Akhbariyyoun) is that the entire Qur'an is ambiguous. The ordinary people have no access to its understanding save by referring to the Ahadeeth of the Ma'soomin.

The often base their view on Surah al-Zomar in which Allah states: **"Allah has sent down the Best Statement, a Book (this Qur'an that is) Mutashabeh oft-repeated." (39:23)**

They also refer to the Ahadeeth in which the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) stated: "Surely he knows the Qur'an to whom it was revealed."

3. There are clear and unclear Ayaat in the Qur'an

The soundest opinion is to suggest –as clearly mentioned in the Qur'an– that in fact there are Ayaat with clear meanings, as there are unclear Ayaat. Different views about the topic are one of the best proofs for the existence of the ambiguity in the Qur'an.

We disagree with the first view for the following reasons:

Ayah 7 of Surah 3 clearly divides the Ayaat of the Qur'an into two categories of 'clear' and 'unclear' Ayaat. It then explains further that those in whose hearts there is a deviation abuse the ambiguous Ayaat. Thus, the ambiguity is already there in the Qur'an. Had the Ayaat of the Qur'an been all clear with established meanings, none would have been able to abuse them.

We agree that the Qur'an is a 'clear statement' and 'guidance' for mankind, as stated in Surah 3 Ayah 138. However, this does not necessitate that all people have to understand the entire Qur'an. The reality is that majority of people do not understand the meanings of the whole Qur'an. Nonetheless, as long as they can refer to the experts who know the meaning of the Qur'an and learn from them, it is true to state that the Qur'an is a book of guidance for mankind.

We also agree that the Qur'an is a book which its Ayaat are well established as stated in the beginning of Surah 11. However, we suggest that it means the Qur'an in its essence and from the view of its Speaker is not ambiguous. Similarly, there is no ambiguity in the Qur'an for he to whom (S) the Qur'an

was revealed. Thus, we disagree with those scholars who suggest ‘there is an essential ambiguity in the Qur'an.’ Had the Qur'an been ambiguous in its very essence, none would have even been able to understand its true meaning including the Prophet of Islam (S).

Therefore, although the Qur'an is clear in its essence, some of its Ayaat are unclear for certain people due to their lack of knowledge. It is for this reason that the number of the ambiguity of the Ayaat varies from a person to another.

Similarly to suggest that all the Ayaat of the Qur'an are ambiguous contradicts the Qur'an (ch.3 Ayah 7). Ironically, they have even referred to the Qur'an (ch.39 Ayah 23) to prove their point! If the Qur'an is ambiguous how can they refer to it?! Although their understanding of the Ayah is undoubtedly wrong, otherwise the Ayah would be in conflict with the Ayah 7 of Surah 3. The meaning of ‘Ketaban Motashabehan’ (39:23) is that the Qur'an is a Book that all its parts resemble one another and they are all harmonious as stated in the previous lesson.

In conclusion, there is a way to reconcile between the first view and the third, i.e. the Qur'an in its essence is clear, although some of its Ayaat are ambiguous for majority of people due to their own ignorance.

The Number of the Unclear Ayaat

Some of the contemporary scholars of the Qur'an assert that the unclear Ayaat of the Qur'an in comparison to the clear ones are very few. He suggests that the unclear Ayaat do not exceed two hundreds in number. Moreover, many scholars of the Qur'an suggest there is no unclear Ayah in the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an.

Unfortunately, we cannot agree with any of the above claims. Surely, the definition of the scholars for the unclear Ayah applies to more than two hundred Ayaat. Similarly, some of the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an are also ambiguous, or else, there would not have been any jurisprudential differences among the Muslims. For instance, the method of performing Wudhu is described in Surah 5 Ayah 6. If the term ‘your feet’ is connected to the ‘your heads’ then the feet has to be rubbed on (as the Shi'a do), but if ‘your feet’ is connected to the ‘your forearms’ then the feet ought to be washed (as the Sunnis do).

The Most Ambiguous Ayaat of the Qur'an

As far as I know the most ambiguous and controversial Ayaat in the Qur'an are the followings:

1. al-Horoof al-Moqatta'a (the Separated Letters): Twenty-nine chapters of the Qur'an are prefixed with certain letters of the Arabic alphabet. Ever since the Qur'an was revealed more than 14 centuries ago, Muslim and orientalist scholars have been trying to decipher the meaning and possible significance of these mysterious Qur'anic initials, but to no avail. They remained a mystery to all. Even Rashad Khalifa

who claimed he had been able to decode those letters went astray by deleting the last two Ayah of Surah 9 to match the Qur'an with his calculations!

2. Ayah 102 of Surah al-Baqarah (ch.2): According to Allamah Tabatabai the possible meanings of this Ayah are $X \times 4$ which is over one million possibilities! It seems that there is no any other Ayah in the Qur'an with the many possible meanings.

3. Ayah 7 of Surah 3: Amazingly part of the Ayah that divides the Qur'an into clear and unclear Ayaat is also one of the most controversial unclear Ayaat. As the ambiguity in this Ayah is related to our discussion, I shall elaborate on it.

To understand the point of ambiguity in the Ayah I need to take you for a short detour. No doubt punctuations have delicate significance in understanding the text. Sometimes a comma would be necessary in a sentence because the sentence would be ambiguous without it. Consider the following pair of sentences:

Ahmad, said Ali, did not go to school yesterday.

Ahmad said, Ali did not go to school yesterday.

According to the first sentence, it is Ahmad who did not go to school, whereas according to the second, Ali did not go to school. The only way to understand the above meanings is by the aid of the punctuation sign (,).

The Almighty Allah in part of Ayah 7 Surah 3 states:

"and none knows its hidden meaning save Allah, and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (they) say: We believe in it." (3:7)

If there is a comma and hence we pause after 'Allah', then it means only Allah knows the meaning of the unclear Ayaat, whereas if there is no comma after Allah and the term 'and' after Allah is a coordinating conjunction, then it means Allah as well as those who are firmly grounded in knowledge know the meaning of the unclear Ayaat.

The scholars of the Qur'an hold three different views for recitation of the above Ayah.

1. Recitation of Pause

Majority of the Sunni scholars are of the view that there should be a comma after the Glorious term 'Allah'. Thus, they put the sign after Allah which means it is preferred to pause. Most of the Shi'a publications have unknowingly just reprinted the Qur'an with the same punctuation sign. Accordingly, many of the Shi'a English translators of the Qur'an have also translated the Ayah without realisation of the consequences of their translations.

2. Recitation of Conjunction

Majority of the Shi'a scholars preferred the conjunction of 'those who are firmly grounded in knowledge' to 'Allah'. Some of the outstanding Sunni scholars and linguists have also held the same opinion. For instance, amongst the Sunni scholars 'Mojahed', Nahhas, Akbari (the famous Arabic grammarian), Zamakhshari, Baydhawi, Zarkashi and Muhammad Abdo preferred this recitation. In many authentic narrations it is also narrated from the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) to have said: "We are those who are firmly grounded in knowledge, thus, we know its hidden meaning."

3. Both Recitations are correct

The third view is the opinion of those Shi'a and Sunni scholars who consider both of the above recitations correct. Sheikh Tousi, Allamah Tabatabai from the Shi'a scholars, and Ibn Katheer, Ragheb in al-Mofradaat and al-Darwish; the contemporary Arabic grammarian are the Sunni scholars who agreed with the both recitations.

Why the recitation of conjunction must be preferred?

We agree with the second view that the term 'and' in the Ayah is for coordinating conjunction. In addition to the Ahadeeth of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) we can suggest the following reasons for the preference of the second view:

- a. There are many Ayaat in the Qur'an that confirm 'people of knowledge' know the meanings of the unclear Ayaat. Consider the following examples:
 - "***Nay, but it (the Qur'an) is clear Ayaat in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge.***" (29:49)
 - "***So ask of those who know the Scripture if you know not.***" (16:43, 22:7)
- b. The Qur'an is the book of guidance, and hence it is sent down in the language of humans to be understood. Thus the Almighty Allah in various Ayaat is inviting man to reflect on it. (4:82, 23: 68, 38:29, 47:24) How could Allah command man to reflect on the Qur'an whilst he is unable to understand quite a big portion of it?!
- c. The expression of 'and those who are grounded in knowledge' obviously shows a preference for those learned people over others. That means they have obtained type of knowledge that others don't. If they only say 'we believe in it, it is all from our Lord' then there is no privilege for them over the rest of the believers who would have the same expression.
- c. The result of the first view is to suggest that even the Prophet (S) does not know the meaning of the unclear Ayaat! Would it be possible for a Muslim to hold this view?!

d. Throughout the Islamic history many Muslim scholars whether Shi'a or Sunni have interpreted the entire Qur'an. They have even endeavoured to suggest some meanings to the most secretive words of the Qur'an, i.e. the Separated Letters. If none other than Allah knows the meaning of the unclear Ayaat why do the scholars interpret the Qur'an?!

e. All of the above arguments was on the basis that the pronoun 'its' in 'and none knows its hidden meaning' refers to 'that which is unclear'. If we however, suggest- as it is possible- that the pronoun refers to the 'Qur'an' then the recitation of pause would be the most horrible suggestion. For it would conclude that none would know the meanings of and parts of the Qur'an including the Prophet (S)!!

Why there is ambiguity in the Qur'an?

The above question is one of the common questions asked by believers and non-believers. Many wonder how could a divine book which is for the guidance of man contains so many unclear statements. In fact, if all the Ayaat of the Qur'an had clear meanings would there be still many schools of thoughts in Islam?

In our course on 'Philosophy of Religion' we dealt with this question from the theological as well as linguistic views (lesson 25, 26). In short the followings are some of the main reasons for the phenomenon of ambiguity in the Qur'an.

1. Ambiguity and none restriction of a word to one particular meaning is part of the nature of human language. Very often words are not sufficient to transfer a concept from one's mind to another. How often after a verbal communication we complain to each other: "you didn't understand me." "That is not what I meant". The ambiguity of the text is even more severe for the speaker is not around to explain his words any further. An Arabic poem says:

A cloth that is sewed by twenty nine letters

Is too short for its highness

Religious texts are inevitably written in human language and hence they would suffer the same phenomenon.

2. The advantage of the Qur'an is that the above phenomenon is treated by revelation of clear Ayaat. As we shall see the key to understanding most of the unclear Ayaat is to refer to the clear Ayaat.

3. Very often the ambiguity is related to the lack of knowledge of the reader of the Qur'an not the text itself. The Almighty Allah in communicating man has utilized linguistic styles known to man including all arts of allegorical, figurative, proverbs and all other styles of conversation. Ignoring the arts of rhetoric is a common cause of assuming ambiguity in the Qur'an. For instance, the Almighty Allah with regards to the time of fasting states:

“...and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread.”

(2:187)

When the above Ayah was revealed one of the Muslims ('Oday Bin Hatam) kept a white and a black thread with him to find out the time of morning dawn! The Messenger of Allah (S) said to him: "The white thread and the black one is an expression for the morning light amidst the darkness of the night."

4. Many so called ambiguous Ayaat are in fact considered today ambiguous due to misinterpretations of the varies Islamic sects that emerged throughout history. The pioneers as well as the followers of those sects interpreted the Qur'an according to their whim and desire to suite their school of thought. Very often the sectarianism has been the cause of ambiguity in the Qur'an not the other way round.

For instance, the Almighty Allah in description of the Hereafter states:

“Some faces that Day shall be shining. Looking at their Lord.” (75:23)

Arabs at the time of the Prophet (S) whose mind was free from theological arguments of the second and the third century would never interpret the above Ayah to mean a physical look.

5. In linguistics there is a discussion as whether or not it is permissible for a speaker to mean more than one meaning for his statement. We discussed the topic in 'semantic issues' of our course on 'Principles of jurisprudence' and concluded that there is no problem to use a homonym and even mean all of them. For instance, when Romeo said to Juliet: "You ask for me tomorrow; and you shall find me a grave man." By the expression of 'grave man' he could mean a dignified man or a man buried in his grave. Both of the meanings are possible.

Similarly, if there are more than one million meanings for an Ayah of the Qur'an, there is no reason to limit its meaning to one as long as other meanings are not contradictory to the principles of the Qur'an. As a matter of fact, such expressions are one of the admired aspects of rhetoric which make a literature stand above the rest.

For instance, the passive and the active form of the Arabic verb 'Laa Yodharra' is the same. This verb is used in Surah 2 Ayah 282. If the verb be an active verb, then the phrase means: "a scribe and a witness shall not harm (the one who concludes a contract)." Whereas, if the verb be a passive verb it means: "let neither scribe nor witness suffer any harm." I suggest both of the meanings are correct as it is possible that the Almighty Allah means both of them. For, the general message of the Ayah is in a financial contract no one shall harm anyone neither shall be harmed.

Types of Unclear Ayaat in the Qur'an

Examples

Letters: The example of the unclear letters are the ‘Separated Letters’ (al-Horooful-Moqatta’).

Homonym: The examples of a word which has more than one meaning in the Qur'an are: "***Qaswarah***" (74:51) which means ‘hunter’ and ‘lion’. Both of the meanings in the Ayah could be meant. Similarly, ‘***As'as*** (81:17) means the arrival of the night as well as its departure.

One meaning, different applications: For example, the expression ‘by the Ten Nights’ (89:2) could mean the first ten nights of Muharram, or the last ten nights of Ramadhan or the first ten nights of Thol-Hajjah, etc.

Lesson 11: Analysis of Some of the Unclear Ayaat (Paradoxical Ayaat)

In this lesson we shall demonstrate some examples from the unclear Ayaat which seem paradoxical.[1](#)

1. Monotheism or Pluralism (the Paradox of I or We)

Islam is a monotheistic religion. Indisputably, monotheism is the bedrock of Islam. The most precise concept of monotheism is presented by Islam. The Glorious Name ‘Allah’ is so chosen to refer to His Majesty for- unlike ‘God’ in English- it cannot be even literally used in a plural or male or female form. Nonetheless, the Almighty Allah very often utilises the plural pronoun of ‘WE’ to refer to deity. For instance, the Qur'an uses this plural pronoun 22 times with reference to the creation. Consider the following examples:

"And indeed, We created man from dried clay.. " (15:26)

"And We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them except with truth." (15:85)

"Or did We create the angels female while they were witnesses?" (37:150)

"Is it you who create it, or are We the Creator?" (56:59)

The above and many such examples in the Qur'an have caused confusion for some non-Muslims as well as Muslims who are unaware of the rhetorical styles of human literature.

The followings are the main answers suggested by Muslim scholars:

'We' is an expression for God and His agents

The supporters of this theory suggest that the Divine Attributes of Essence belongs to God alone. Thus, the exalted term 'Allah' is always used in a singular form. The Divine Attributes of Action, on the other hand, are acts that the Almighty God fulfils via His agents. For instance, God sends the revelation to the Prophets, creates humans and sends rain and etc. by His angels. Thus He states:

- ***"And We send down pure water from the sky." (25:48)***
- ***"Surely, We have sent down to you the Book." (4:105)***

Problem

This suggestion is not compatible with the pure concept of monotheism. The agents of God are not equal to Him to refer to them as 'We'. Besides, the Almighty God has used the plural pronoun when describing the creation of the angels too.

"Or did We create the angels female while they were witnesses?" (37: 150)

Moreover, there are many contradictions to the above suggestion. Consider the following examples:

- a) The Almighty God with reference to the selection of Ibrahim for Prophecy states: ***"Truly We chose him in this world." (2: 130)***. Surely the selection of a human as a prophet does not need the interference of the angels. 'Selection' is purely a divine act. Thus, Allah states: ***"Allah chooses Messengers from angels and men." (22:75)***. Similarly, in His private conversation with Moses, the Almighty Allah states: ***"O Moses! I have chosen you above men by My Messages." (7: 144)***
- b) Several times the Almighty Allah uses the pronoun 'We' for referring to Himself to be worshipped. For instance, in praising His Messengers He states: ***"And of Us (alone) they were the worshippers." (21:73)***. Would it be possible to include the agents of God as part of those to be worshipped?! Or would it be possible for the prophets to worship the agents of God too?!

'WE' is an expression of Glorification

In the Arabic language similar to many other languages, the plural pronouns 'they', 'you' and 'we' are all to refer to more than one person. However, there is an essential difference between the pronoun 'We' and 'they' and 'You' in that We is not necessarily for a numerical plural. It is often used for glorification and exalting. This usage is commonly used by the kings and the heads of the states when issuing a statement. For instance, the Queen of England states, "We the Queen of England..." Obviously there is only one Queen in England thus 'We' in this context does not mean plurality.

The Almighty God in His conversation with man utilizes the linguistic styles that are known to man thus, nowhere in the Qur'an is ever referred to Him as They or You (in a plural sense). Neither does He ever – we suggest– use the term 'We' to refer to Himself and His agents. The expression of 'We' in the Qur'an is therefore exclusively for glorification of God. Ignoring this linguistic point most of the translators of the Qur'an Muslims and non-Muslims, Shia and Sunni alike have mistranslated Ayah 59 of Surah 56. Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Irving, Arberry and many other English translators of the Qur'an have incorrectly translated the Ayah as follows: "Is it ye who created or are We the Creators?" Although the term used in the Qur'an is al-Khaliquun it does not mean the creators. The correct translation is what Dr Al-Hillali and Mohsin Khan have suggested in their translations "Is it you who created, or are We the Creator (without s)?"

In support of this suggestion we can confirm that the pronouns 'they' and 'you' (plural) have never been used in the Qur'an with reference to God for instance, it is never said in the Qur'an 'They sent down water from the sky" rather Allah states, "**He sends down water.**" (13:17). Yet He states "**And We send down pure water from the sky.**" (25:48). Therefore, had the meaning of 'We sent down' was a numerical plural to mean God and His agents, He should have also used the plural pronoun of 'they' to refer to Himself and His agents, yet he has never used this expression.[2](#)

2. Determinism or Free Will

One of the most controversial discussions in the history of philosophy is the argument of fate of free will. From the perspective of the Qur'an is there any determinism or free will? While it appears from many Ayat of the Qur'an that Allah condones the concept of determinism many other Ayaat confirm free will. From the end of the second Islamic century two theological sects emerged in the Sunni School of Thought: i.e. the Ash'ari who were the advocates of Determinism and the Mo'tazeli who supported Free Will. Interestingly, both of them prove their doctrines from the Qur'an.

For instance, Imam Fakhr Razi (died 606AH) who was Ash'ari and believed in Determinism cites numerous examples throughout his interpretation of the Qur'an to prove the dogma of Determinism. On the other hand, Zamakhshari (died 538AH) who was Mo'tazeli and believed in Free Will cites many Ayaat in the Qur'an in his interpretation of the Qur'an 'Al-Kashaf' to prove Free Will. Amazingly, the two groups referred to Ayah 35 of Surah 6 to prove their doctrines. The Almighty God states, "**And had Allah willed, He would have gathered them together (all) on true guidance.**" (6:35)

Similar to this is also mentioned in Surah 19 Ayah 99. The Determinists refer to the Ayah to conclude that the reason that all mankind do not believe in God is because God did not so will. Thus all man cannot believe in God for it is against the will of God. On the other hand, the followers of Free Will refer to the same Ayah to conclude that had God willed He would have been able to make all men –like angels– to be guided and be obedient to Him without any Free Will of disobeying Him. But God did not so will and hence man has Free Will to choose good or evil. Further explanation and the correct answer should be sought in my article 'Einstein's Paradox'.

3. Who Guides Who Misleads – God, Man or Satan?

The concept of guidance and misleading is also one of the very paradoxical concepts in the Qur'an. The question is, whether or not man is in charge of his misguidance or is it the will of God or Satan is the cause of man's deviation from the right path?

An unprofessional approach to the Qur'an leaves us with nothing other than a plain paradox:

a- Some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an hold man responsible for his deviation:

- ***"And he who changes faith for disbelief, verily he has gone astray from the right way." (2: 108)***
- ***"These are they who have purchased error for guidance." (2: 16)***

b- Other Ayaat of the Qur'an hold some men the cause of misleading others:

- ***"And Pharaoh led his people astray." (20:79)***

c- Some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an introduces Satan as the cause of peoples misguidance:

- ***"And indeed he (Satan) did lead astray a great multitude of you." (36:62)***

d- Sometimes man and the jinn are the causes of misleading:

- ***"And those who disbelieve will say 'Our Lord show us those among jinn and man who led us astray.' (41:29)***

e- Many other Ayaat of the Qur'an introduces Allah as the cause of guidance and misguidance:

- ***"Do you want to guide him whom Allah has made to go astray? And he whom Allah has made to go astray, you will never find for him any way (of guidance)." (4:88)***

- ***"Verily Allah sends astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills." (35:8)***

What shall we do with all these paradoxical statements? What is the Islamic stand with regards to man's guidance and misguidance?

The argument of guidance and misguidance is one of the branches of fate and free will. Thus, the followers of fate in justification of their doctrine refer to the Ayaat in which guidance and misguidance are introduced as acts of God. On the other hand, the followers of free will quote the Ayaat that hold man responsible for his misguidance. The fact is we should not form any opinion based on some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an whilst ignoring the rest. The Almighty God in condemnation of this approach quotes from the disbelievers,

"They say we believe in some and reject others, and wish to adopt a way in-between." (4:150)

We suggest that there is no contradiction between the above Ayaat, man's guidance and misguidance are the effects of several causes some of which are internal and related to man's lust and desires while others are external and are introduced to him by Satanic Jinn and man. Thus, it is correct to relate misguidance to man as well as the Jinn as parts of the causes of misguidance. Similarly, relating guidance and misguidance to God is also correct in that it is He who provided the means of guidance and misguidance for mankind.

For instance, Allah has created a physical law in this world called gravity. When a suicidal person jumps off a cliff, he would not have died had the law of gravity not exist. Thus, in a sense God is the cause of his death although He is not responsible for he has misused the law of gravity. Similarly, the Almighty Allah has shown man what leads him to guidance and misguidance and has left the decision making to himself. It is Allah who has given the property of guidance and prosperity to piety and righteousness and it is Allah who has given the property of misguidance to oppression and disbelief. Therefore, although Allah guides whoever He wills and makes go astray who He wills, He never wills a pious man to go astray nor does He will to guide an oppressor for there are no such properties in their actions. Please reflect on the following Ayaat:

"And He misleads thereby only those who are the rebellious." (2:26)

"And Allah will cause to go astray those who are wrongdoers." (14:27)

"Thus Allah leaves astray him who is a musref (a criminal)." (40:34)

"Thus Allah leads astray the disbelievers." (40:74)

"Whoever follows My Guidance he shall neither go astray, nor shall be distressed." (20: 123)

Therefore, when a man abuses the facilities provided to him by God he will go astray. Allah states,

"So when they turned away, Allah turned their hearts away and Allah guides not the people who are Fasiqen (the rebellious)." (61:5)

4. Paradoxical Statement Due to Different Conditions

One of the aspects of the paradoxical statements in the Qur'an is due to different circumstances and conditions. For instance, the Almighty Allah sometimes invites His Messenger to agree on peace with the infidels:

"But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and trust in Allah." (8:61)

However, somewhere else He clearly prohibits calling for peace:

"So be not weak and ask not for peace while you are having the upper hand." (47:35)

The Almighty Allah sometimes invites the believers to forgive the disbeliever and tolerate their mistakes:

"Say to the believers to forgive those who hope not for the Days of Allah." (45:14)

But somewhere else in the Qur'an He is commanding the believers to fight the disbelievers whenever they find them:

"Then kill the disbelievers wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them." (9:5)

The solution of such paradoxical statements rests with the consideration of different circumstances and people. For instance, Ayah 14 of Surah 45 was revealed to the Prophet (S) when he was in Makka wherein the Muslims were in minority. The Ayah also applies to those Kuffar who insult Muslims ignorantly. In such circumstances, it is the duty of Muslims to forgive the wrong doers. The Ayah 5 of Surah 9, on the other hand, is a military command that is issued during a battlefield. Similarly, the recommendation to peace is for a situation wherein making peace would be beneficial for Muslims, but if calling for peace is a military trick then it is the application for Ayah 35 of Surah 47 in which making peace with the enemies is prohibited.

5. Paradoxical Statements Due to Variety of Aspects of a Narration

Sometimes the narrations of the Qur'an concerning an event seem paradoxical. The stories of the Prophets are narrated in various parts of the Qur'an. These narrations sometimes seem a little different from each other. For instance, the conversation of Moses to his family on the way to Egypt (a.s) when he saw the fire is narrated quite different in three different chapters of the Qur'an:

a. ***"When Moses said to his household: Verily, I have seen a fire; I will bring you from there some information, or I will bring you a burning brand, that you may warm yourselves." (27:7)***

b. ***"when he saw a fire, he said to his family: Wait! Verily, I have seen a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire." (20:10)***

c. ***"Then, when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his family, he saw a fire in the direction of Tur (mountain). He said to his family: Wait, I have seen a fire; perhaps I may bring you from there some information, or a burning fire-brand that you may warm yourselves. (28:29)***

Although the message of all of the above narrations is the same, the quotations of the words of Moses are not exactly the same.

This minor variety is due to a linguistic art. Very often the Qur'an conveys its teachings through narration of the stories of the previous nations and Prophets. As such sometimes it is necessary to repeat a story for different concepts it contains. However, to avoid verbal repetition at every narration one aspect of the

story is mentioned. For verbal repetition reduces the eloquence of the narration.

6. Paradox Due to the Arts of Rhetoric

Sometimes the Ayaat of the Qur'an seem paradoxical if the reader is not familiar with the Arabic rules and the arts of rhetoric. The followings are some examples of such paradoxical statements.

6/1: The Almighty Allah has states in five different parts of the Qur'an that the heavens and the earth are created in six periods. (6:54, 10:3, 25:59, 32:4 and 50:38)

On the other hand, according to the description of Surah al-Fosel (ch.41) the total periods of the creation of heavens and the earth seem to be eight periods:

"Say: Do you verily disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two Days? And you set up rivals with Him? That is the Lord of the worlds. He placed therein firm mountains from above it, and He blessed it, and measured therein its sustenance in four Days equal for all those who ask. Then He rose over towards the heaven... then He completed and finished from their creation (as) seven heavens in two Days and He made in each heaven its affair." (41:9-12)

The solution of the above paradox is that in the above Ayah the art of 'deletion' (Hazf)³ is utilised. In the Ayah "and measured therein its sustenance in four Days", the phrase 'in the rest of' or 'all of which was' is deleted. Thus, the Ayah has been like this: "and measure therein its substance in (the rest of) four Days." Or "and measured therein its sustenance (all of which was) in four Days."⁴ Thus, according to the above Ayaat the earth and all its details are created in four periods and the heavens in two periods the total of which will be six periods.

6/2: Another paradox in the above Ayaat appears about the order of creation of heaven and the earth. The Almighty Allah in the Ayah 12 of the above Surah after description of the creation of the earth and its inhabitant states: "***then He completed and finished from their creation (as) seven heavens in two Days.***" (41:12). The term 'then' would suggest that heaven were created after the earth!

Scientific discoveries have confirmed that the creation of the earth is after the creation of the heavens and all other galaxies. This fact is also confirmed in the Qur'an:

"Are you more difficult to create or is the heaven that He constructed? He raised its height, and has perfected it. Its night He covers with darkness and its forenoon He brings out (with light). And after that He spread the earth." (79:27-33)

The solution of this paradox is that the Arabic term 'Thumma' (then) is used to express a proceeding action or description. The term 'then' in the Ayah under consideration is used for proceeding description. That means the Almighty Allah describes the creation of heaven after the description of the creation of the earth, although the creation of the heaven occurred prior to the earth, the purpose of this type of

description is to introduce to man the creation of the world around him and then the world above him.

- [1.](#) A paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true.
- [2.](#) For further discussion on this paradox see chapter 16 of 'Philosophy of Religion'
- [3.](#) Hazf or Tajrid is one of the rhetoric arts related to the meaning of the sentence. This art is very often used in poetry and rhetoric literature. Another example of 'Hazf' in the Qur'an is mentioned in the story of Yusuf: "And ask the town where we have been." (12:82). The meaning of 'ask the town' is 'ask the people of the town', the deletion of 'the people of' is an art of Hazf. For further explanation about the art of deletion see: al-Taftazani, Sharh al-Mokhtasar, p. 166
- [4.](#) Zamakhshari, al-Kashaf.

Lesson 12: The Science of the Tafsir

'Tafsir' is the main science of the Qur'an. All other sciences of the Qur'an are in fact parts of the science of the Tafsir of the Qur'an. In this lesson we will learn about the science of the Tafsir and its difference with the 'Ta'wil'. We will also have glance at the most important books on the Tafsir of the Qur'an. We shall also touch on the rather new science of hermeneutics of the Qur'an, and finally we will bring to your attention some of the gems of the Ayaat of the Qur'an that must be always remembered.

Etymology of Tafsir

Arab philologists have suggested two possible roots for the term 'Tafsir':

- 1) Ibn Manzour says: Tafsir is literally from FASARA which means to make things clear. The Almighty Allah states: ***"And no example or similitude do they bring, but We reveal to you the truth, and the better Tafsir (explanation) thereof."*** (25:33) FASARA is the action of a physician when diagnosing a disease by looking into urine. TAFSERA is the sample of urine that physicians examine to identify a disease. MOFASSER is the physician who examines the sample. Thus, Tafsir literally means symptomatology.[1](#)
- 2) Jorjani suggested that Tafsir is from SAFARA which means to disclose and unveil something. Travelling is called 'Safar' for it unveils the manners of the travellers. An unveiled woman is called 'Saaferah'.[2](#)

Whether 'Tafsir' is driven from SAFARA or FASARA it means to unveil and reveal the unknown. Thus, the science of Tafsir is defined "to endeavour in understanding the meanings of the Ayaat of the Qur'an as far as possible for man."[3](#) In short Tafsir is the 'interpretation' of the Qur'an.

Why does the Qur'an need interpretation?

The Holy Qur'an is the Book of "guidance for all mankind". It is in "plain Arabic" and in the "language of people". The question, however, is why does a book which is presumably in a plain language require interpretation and explanation?

The holy Qur'an is a Book compiled for mankind and hence contains the linguistic styles known to man. Any human language- and particularly Arabic- contain variety of rhetoric arts such as figure of speech, metaphor, and metonymy, etc. Moreover, the words and the phrases of the Qur'an although they have been clear for the people of the time of its revelation, as people are farther away from the time of its revelation, its true meaning has naturally become more obscure. Thus, the Qur'an as an ancient text like any other old text requires interpretation and explanation.

The forbidden Tafsir: Self-Opinion Interpretation

Many Prophetic narrations denounce the interpretation of the Qur'an based on self-opinion (Tafsir Ber-Ra'y). The followings are two examples of Prophetic prohibition on self-opinion interpretation:

"Whoever talks about the Qur'an without any knowledge, his sit shall be in Fire."

"Much of my concern about my Ummah after myself will be concerning a man who holds the Qur'an and places it (interprets it) in a wrong place."

The scholars have suggested different interpretations to the meaning of self-opinion interpretation. In short, every group condemns any interpretation of the Qur'an suggested by their opponents labelling it as self-opinion interpretation of the Qur'an. Surely every scholar interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion and understanding. Does it mean no one is allowed to interpret the Qur'an? Surely not.

The prohibited self-opinion interpretation of the Qur'an can mean one of the following types of interpretation:

- 1) An interpretation of the Qur'an without any scholarly support. For instance, if someone interprets the Qur'an without being acquainted with the basic sciences necessary for understanding the Qur'an, he would interpret the Qur'an according to his own assumption.
- 2) An interpretation of the Qur'an which aims at supporting and justifying a wrong doctrine be it jurisprudential, theological, philosophical, mystical etc. A wrong doctrine is the one which is contrary to the basic teachings of Islam.

Ta'wil and its Meaning

Ta'wil is one of the key terms in the Qur'an. It is driven from 'AWALA' which means to return. The term

Ta'wil is used seventeen times in the Qur'an. Seven times for the interpretation of the Qur'an- in the story of Prophet Yusuf (a.s)- and twice it is used to mean 'unveiling the wisdom behind the events'- in the story of Moses (a.s) and Khedhr (a.s) in Chapter 18. It is also used three times for the in-depth interpretation of the Qur'an.

Ta'wil according to the ancient scholars was quite synonym to the Tafsir of the Qur'an. Tabari (died in 310 A.H.) for instance called his book on the interpretation of the Qur'an "*Jaame'ul-Bayaan An Ta'wil al-Qur'an.*"

Considering the usage of the term in the Qur'an, one can quite confidently suggest that the Ta'wil of the Qur'an is the exploration of the more in-depth meaning of the Qur'an whereas the Tafsir is understanding the apparent meaning of the Qur'an. The interpretation of dreams is called Ta'wil of the dreams for it unveils a hidden meaning that is not apparent in the dream. For instance, Prophet Yusuf (a.s) in his childhood saw in a dream that eleven stars and the sun and the moon are prostrating themselves to him. More than thirty years later when his parents and brothers prostrated themselves before him in humbleness he said:

"O my father! This is the interpretation (Ta'wil) of my dream aforetime." (12:100)

There are many examples of Ta'wil of the Qur'an in the Hadiths of Ahlul Bayt (a.s). For instance, the two seas in the Ayah "***He has let loose the two seas meeting together***" (55:19) has been mentioned to mean Imam Ali (a.s) and Fatima (s.a). Also the pearl and coral coming out of them (55:22) is interpreted by Ahlul Bayt (a.s) to mean Imam Hasan (a.s) and Imam Husain (a.s).

Another example is in the Ayah 205 of Surah al-Baqarah: "***And when he turns away his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle, and Allah likes not mischief.***"(2:205)

It is narrated from Ahlul Bayt (a.s) that the above Ayah is about Mo'awiyah.

The mystical interpretation of the Qur'an is also more of the Ta'wil of the Qur'an; an interpretation that does not match with the apparent text of the Qur'an. For instance, in the Tafsir presumably related to Ibn Arabi (died in 638 AH) even the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an are mystically interpreted. Ayah 6 of Surah al-Ma'idah (ch.5) which teaches the Islamic law of Wudhu and Tayammum is so interpreted: "O you who have scholarly faith! When you wake up from the dream of heedlessness and intend for the presence (of God) and real whispering and attend the Truth (God), then wash the faces of your hearts with the water of useful knowledge which is pure and purifies; the knowledge of jurisprudences, ethics and transactions which removes the obstacles of filth from the soul."

Is Ta'wil the prohibited self-opinion Interpretation of the Qur'an?

There is a profound scholarly debate as whether such hidden interpretations of the Qur'an are permissible or they are the examples of the forbidden self-interpretation of the Qur'an.

Majority of the Sunni scholars denounce such interpretation considering them the most vivid examples of interpretation of the Qur'an based on the persons whim and assumptions.

The Shi'a on the other hand believe that firstly the Ta'wil of the Qur'an –for those firmly grounded in knowledge– based on our understanding of Ayah seven in Surah Al-Imran (ch.3) is permissible. Surely, the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet (S) are the best examples of those firmly grounded in knowledge of the Qur'an and hence if the narration from them is authentic, their Ta'wil is valid and will never be the example of prohibited self-opinion interpretation of the Qur'an.

In fact, the in-depth interpretation (Ta'wil) of Ahul-Bayt (a.s) is either introducing a valid example for an Ayah (such as the application of Ayah 205 of Surah 2 on Mo'awiyah), or it is unveiling the hidden meanings of an Ayah without denying its apparent meaning.

There is a consensus amongst the scholars–be it Shi'a or Sunni– that although many Ayaat of the Qur'an were revealed concerning certain people, their applications are not limited to those people. For instance, the first addressee of 'O you who believe' in the Qur'an were the companions of the Prophet (S), yet surely it is not limited to them. Therefore, Imam Sadiq (a.s) said to Abu-Baseer: "Any Ayah in the Qur'an concerning Heaven and the people of Heaven is about us and our followers. Similarly, any Ayah in the Qur'an describing Hell and the Hell-bound people is for our opponents."

The Prophet (S) is one of the Ahul-Bayt (a.s) and hence the meaning of 'us' is the Prophet and his pure family (a.s). Surely they are the first and the best inhabitants of Heaven and so will be their followers. Thus, this is not the prohibited self-interpretation of the Qur'an.

In general, the permissibility of the Ta'wil of the Qur'an is based on two principles:

Using a term and meaning more than one meaning from it, is possible. As mentioned in the previous lesson we believe it is well possible for a speaker to use a homonym term and mean more than one meaning of it. For instance, it was possible for Romeo to mean both of the meanings of 'grave' in his words: "Tomorrow you shall find me a grave man." The hidden interpretation (Ta'wil) shall not contradict the firmly established Islamic principles.

Examples

1) The Almighty Allah states: "***Then let man look at his food.***" (80:24)

The first meaning of the Ayah is to look at our food whilst eating. It could also mean to have an Islamic

look as whether it is Halal or not. The term 'food' could also include a spiritual food; i.e. knowledge. Imam Sadiq (a.s) with regards to this hidden interpretation of the Ayah said: "It (also) means: let man look at his knowledge from whom he takes it."

2) The Almighty Allah states: ***"If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or to spread mischief in the land- it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind."*** (5:32)

Imam Sadiq (a.s) on the Ta'wil of the Ayah said: "whoever guides a person it is as if he has brought him to life and whoever misleads a person it is as if he has killed him."

The above interpretations are in fact the permissible Ta'wil of the Qur'an without denying its Tafsir. Thus, when Fodayl Ibn Yasaar presented the above Ta'wil of Ayah 32 of Surah 5 to Imam Baqir (a.s), the Imam said: "This is the best Ta'wil of the Ayah."

The Basic Sciences necessary for the Tafsir of the Qur'an

The science of Tafsir is one of the most sensitive Islamic sciences, for the Mofassir (the interpreter) claims to have understood the meaning of the Words of God. It is for this reason that the ancient scholars would only allow the understanding the Qur'an based on the Prophetic narrations.

Nonetheless, most of the scholars agree with the scholarly interpretation of the Qur'an so far as the interpreter is well acquainted at least with the following fifteen sciences.

1. Philology (Fiqhul-Loghah)

Philology is the linguistic science of studying the origin and the meanings of words. The Ayaat of the Qur'an are combination of words. The first science necessary for the interpretation of the Qur'an is the science of the origin and the root and development of Arabic words. For instance, he should be aware of the difference between the term 'Sadda' سد' (with Saad), and Sadda سد' (with Seen) or else he would fall into the common mistake of mixing the two terms.

Sadda سد' (with Saad) in Arabic means to hinder or turn away; to disorder, whereas Sadda سد' (with Seen) means to block. Satan and his followers can never block (Sadd with Seen) the Right Path though they may hinder (Sadd with Saad) the Path. The Almighty Allah states: ***"Verily, those who disbelieve and hinder (Saddu- with Saad) from the Path of Allah; they have certainly strayed far away."*** (4: 167).

2. Syntax (al-Nahw)

Syntax is studying the grammar of the sentence. Syntax plays a grave role in Arabic language. A sign of Fatha () or Kasra () or Damma () can completely change the meaning of a sentence. In lesson six we

mentioned a story about the significance of Arabic syntax in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an.

3. Morphology (Tasrif)

Morphology is the study of the structure and form of words, including inflection, derivation, and the formation of compounds. For instance, the past tense 'Sadda' سَدَ (with Saad) has two different present tense; i.e. Yasoddo (to hinder), and Yaseddo (cry aloud). The first is used many times in the Qur'an and the latter is used in Ayah 57 Surah 43.

4. Etymology (Eshteqaq)

Etymology deals with the origin and the historical development of words. For instance, the meaning of the appellation of 'Maseeh' for Prophet Jesus (a.s) would be different depending on whether it is driven from 'Seeyaha' (travelling), or 'Masaha' (to touch).

5,6,7. Rhetoric (al-Ma'ani, al-Bayan and al-Badee')

The Qur'an is the most eloquent Arabic text. To understand the rhetoric of the Qur'an one must be well acquainted with the Arabic science of rhetoric.

8. The Science of Recitations

Although mainly the Sunni scholars have paid a special attention to the science of recitations of the Qur'an, we learned in lesson six that the current recitation of the Qur'an is the only real recitation of the Qur'an. Thus, at least according to the Shi'a the science of recitation is not of much significance in understanding the Qur'an.

9. Principles of Islam

The Holy Qur'an greatly deals with the divine attributes and issues that form the foundation of Islam. The best understanding of those Ayaat depends largely on acquaintance with the principles of Islam.

10. Principles of Jurisprudence

The science of Principles of Jurisprudence is a very useful Islamic science both for understanding the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an. The semantic issues discussed in the Principles of Jurisprudence are very useful tools for understanding the Qur'an.

11. Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

About five hundred Ayaat of the Qur'an deal with jurisprudential issues. The best understanding of those Ayaat requires a good knowledge of Fiqh.

12. The Science of the context of revelation (Asbabu-Nozoul)

In lesson seven we learned about the significance of this science in understanding the Ayaat of the Qur'an.

13. The Science of Abrogation (Naskh)

The science of abrogation, especially in its ancient meaning which includes the science of clear and unclear, general and specific etc., is another necessary basic science for understanding the Qur'an. In the previous lessons we learned about their significance.

14. The science of Hadith

Many narrations are narrated on the interpretation of the Ayaat of the Qur'an. In the ancient time, the interpretation of the Qur'an was mainly based on the narrations. Thus, it is imperative for the interpreter of the Qur'an to have a good knowledge of understanding the narrations and the methodology of analysing their meanings and authenticities.

15. A Gifted Knowledge (Elmul-Moheba)

Soyouti in definition of this type of knowledge says: "This is a knowledge that Allah grants to those who practice what they learn." The Qur'an is the book of guidance for the pious people. Thus, to understand the Qur'an one must be pious. Allah the Almighty states: "***So be pious and Allah teaches you. And Allah is the All-Knower of each and everything.***" (2:282)

In addition to the above basic sciences, natural scientific, historic, and philosophical and many other types of knowledge help better understanding of the Qur'an. Although one must always be careful not to impose his scientific views on the Qur'an.

A Glance at the most important books of Tafsir

a. Narrative Tafsir

Early literatures on interpretations of the Qur'an were mainly based on narrations from the Prophet (S) or the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) or the companions of the Prophet (S). The followings are some of the most famous narrative interpretation of the Qur'an:

1. Jame'ul-Bayan An Ta'wil(17) al-Qur'an (Complete Explanation on Ta'wil of the Qur'an); known as Tafsir Tabari; written by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (died in 310 A.H).

Tafsir Tabari is one of the most ancient and comprehensive books of Tafsir. It is mainly based on the narrations. Although the book is one of the very important sources on the Tafsir of the Qur'an, it contains

many Israeli and fabricated narrations. For instance, on the interpretation of the first Ayah of Surah al-Nisa' (ch.4) Tabari like many other Sunni narrators narrated the Isra'eli narrations indicating that Eve was allegedly created from the left rib of Adam. The narrations of the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet (S), however, have explicitly and without any ambiguity denounce the myth.

Tabari believed in the Ash'ari school in theology. His Tafsir is compiled in thirty volumes in Arabic and some of its volumes are translated into English by brother Yahya (former John) Cooper. Another famous work of Tabari is his book on history.

2. al-Dorrul-Manthour Fil-Tafsir al-Ma'thour (Dispersed Pearls in interpretation of the Qur'an); written by Jalalu-Din Soyouti (died in 911 A.H.).

Soyouti is one of the renowned Hanafi scholars. He was from Egypt and his Tafsir is solely based on narrations. This book is published in eight volumes in Arabic.

3. Tafsir Forat al-Koufi; by Forat Ibn Ibrahim Koufi. He was the contemporary of al-Kolayni died in 329 A.H.

Tafsir al-Forat is one of the most ancient Shi'a narrative books of Tafsir. It is published in one volume.

4. al-Borhan Fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (the Proof in interpretation of the Qur'an); by Sayyed Hashim al-Bahrani (died in 1107 A.H.)

Al-Borhan is a Shi'a narrative Tafsir. The book is published in nine volumes; the first being an introduction to his Tafsir and the eight volumes his complete Tafsir of the Qur'an.

5. Tafsir Noor al-Thaqlayn (The Light of Two Precious Things); by Abd Ali Ibn Jom'a al-Howayzi al-Shirazi (died in 1112 A.H.). This book is published in 5 volumes.

b. Theological Interpretation of the Qur'an

The best example of theological interpretation of the Qur'an is the work of Imam Fakhr al-Razi (died in 606 A.H.). His Tafsir is called "Mafatihul-Ghayb" (the keys of the unseen) or "al-Tafsir al-Kabir" (the Great Tafsir).

Razi strongly adhered to the Ash'ari school in theology and Shafe'i in jurisprudence. He is one of the renowned Sunni theologians and is well known as 'Imamul-Moshakkekin' (the leader of sceptics). His arguments are rather dialectic. Throughout his comprehensive Tafsir he takes advantage of any opportunity to prove the Ash'ari school of determinism. Although his Tafsir is a useful scholarly source, it is not a recommended text for the general public. His Tafsir is published in 32 volumes in Arabic.

c. Rhetorical Tafsir

An example of a rhetoric Tafsir is the works of al-Zamakhshari (died in 538 A.H). Al-Zamakhshari is one of the leading figures in Arabic linguistics. He named his book "al-Kashaaf An Haqaequ-Tanzil Wa Oyounel-Aqawil Fi Vojoohe-Ta'wil" (the Guide on the Realities of the Revelation and the Springs of opinions in Aspects of Ta'wil).

Al-Zamakhshari belonged to the school of Mo'tazeli and practiced the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. His Tafsir is one of the best sources on rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an. This book is published in four volumes in Arabic.

d. Mystical Tafsir

1. Kashful-Asrar (Disclosure of Secretes) by Rashidu-Din Maybodi. (lived in the 6th century).

Kashful-Asrar is one of the most ancient mystical interpretations of the Qur'an in Farsi language. The origin of this text was the work of Khaje Abdullah al-Ansari (died in 481 A.H). Maybodi endeavoured to develop and elaborate on the work of Khaje in the same rhymed prose style. This book is published in 10 volumes in Farsi.

2. Bayanu-Sa'ada Fi Maqamatel-E'bada (Description of Prosperity in the Status of Worshipping); by Soltan Muhammad Janabazi (died in 1327 A.H).

Sultan Muhammad was one of the Shi'a Sufis of Ne'matullahi order. His work is published in four big volumes in Arabic.

e. The Most Important Shi'a Tafsir

We will conclude this discussion with introducing the most important Shi'a books on the interpretation of the Qur'an. The following books are not limited to any particular field and their authors have dealt with the interpretation of the Qur'an from various aspects.

1. al-Tebyaan Fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (An Explanation on the Interpretation of the Qur'an) by al-Shaikh al-Tousi (died in 460 A.H).

Al-Tebyan is one of the most ancient complete interpretations of the Qur'an. The author who is one of the most renowned Shi'a scholars explains the meanings of the Ayaat from the linguistic, narrative and theological aspects. Although he benefits from the narrations in his Tafsir, unlike Tabari he analyses the authenticity of the narrations. His Tafsir also contains theological discussions when necessary, although unlike al-Razi does not indulge himself in unnecessary theological arguments. On the interpretation of the ayah 22 of Surah al-Baqarah (ch.2) he clearly disagrees with al-joba'ei and confirms that the earth is not flat.

Al-Tebyan is published in 10 volumes in Arabic.

2. Majma'ul-Bayan (Confluence of Explanation) by Fadhl Ibn Hasan al-Tabresi.

Al-tabresi was one of the great Shi'a scholars of the sixth century. His Tafsir is one of the best celebrated books on the interpretations of the Qur'an. The author was well acquainted with all necessary sciences for the interpretation of the Qur'an. He has compiled his work in 10 volumes in a very systematic and well organised order.

Majma'ul-Bayan has been a text book in the Shi'a seminaries for many years. My learned teacher Ayatollah Hasan Zadeh (may God prolong his life for the service of Islam) had studied the entire book under his teacher the late Ayatollah Sha'rani.

3. al-Mizan (the Scales); by the late Allamah Tabatabai (died in 1402 A.H)

Al-Mizan is one of the most creditable Shi'a interpretations of the Qur'an in the modern time. The late Tabatabai was the most celebrated Muslim philosopher of the 20th century. Although he interpreted the Qur'an from various aspects, the most remarkable style of his work is the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. He asserted that he learned this style of interpretation from his teacher the late Allamah Qadhi. The interpretation of an Ayah of the Qur'an by the aid of another Ayah is the methodology of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) in interpretation of the Qur'an. For instance, the Almighty Allah states:

"It is those who believe and confuse not their belief with Zulm, for them (only) there is security and they are the guided." (6:82)

In order for us to understand the meaning of 'Zulm' in the above Ayah we shall refer to another Ayah in which Zulm is defined:

"And when Luqman said to his son when he was advising him: O my son! Join not in worship others with Allah. Verily, joining others in worship with Allah is a great Zulm." (31:13)

Although the late Tabatabai was a great philosopher, he does not indulge his readers in lengthy philosophical discussions. Nonetheless, he deals with theological and philosophical issues when necessary. In many instances he aims at rebuking the dialectic arguments posed by al-Razi. In one occasion, al-Razi puts a theological argument and claims that should the jinn and mankind get together to answer his argument they would not be able to do so.

The late Tabatabai in response to that states: There is no need for the aid of the jinn and the mankind. I can refuse your argument by myself by the Grace of the Almighty.

Al-Mizan is published in 20 volumes in Arabic. So far 12 volumes of the English translation of this work are published.

4. Tafsir Nemoune (The Exemplary Tafsir); under the auspicious supervision of Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi. (May God prolong his life)

Tafsir Nemoune is one of the most commonly read interpretations of the Qur'an. the book is compiled by ten scholars under the supervision of Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi; one of the best celebrated contemporary high jurists. The style of the book is easy to read and understand, and hence it is very useful reference for the general public as well as the scholars. It meets the needs of the modern time and attempts in responding to all the questions posed on the Qur'an.

Tafsir Nemoune is published in 27 volumes and an index in Farsi language. It is translated into Arabic and Urdu. A concise version of the book is also translated into English.

A Word from Imam Khomeini (r.a)

The late Imam Khomeini, in his introduction to his 'Explanation on the Hosts of Intellect and Ignorance', whilst appreciating the efforts of all the scholars on the interpretation of the Qur'an, asserted that the most of the interpreters of the Qur'an strayed from the main purpose of the revelation of the Qur'an. According to his eminence, indulgent in rhetorical, philosophical and historical analysis of the Qur'an will turn the readers away from the main purpose of the Qur'an. He vividly states: "What we mean is that the purpose of the Qur'an and the Hadith is purification of the intellects and the souls to obtain the highest level of monotheism. However, most of the interpreters of the Qur'an and the Hadith have paid any attention to this point, although this is a fundamental principle in the Qur'an and the Hadith."

Hermeneutics of the Qur'an

Hermeneutics is a new approach to the study of the Scriptures. It is originally a Greek name which means to translate and interpret. Peri Mermeneias meaning 'on the interpretation' is the name of one of the chapters of Aristotle's famous book 'Organon'.

The modern Hermeneutics was founded by Friedrich Schleiermacher (died in 1834); a German Protestant theologian.

Hermeneutics is defined as the methodology of interpretation of a scriptural text. Hermeneutics attempts at discovering the principles of understanding a holy text which needs interpretation.

Muslim scholars have discussed some of the issues of hermeneutics in the semantic issues of the principles of jurisprudence. Also, some of the interpreters have discussed it in the introduction of their works under the methods of understanding the Qur'an.

The controversial discussion in the hermeneutics of the Qur'an is whether the text of the Qur'an is silent and hence open to any understanding and interpretation, or the Speaker (Allah) has meant a particular meaning.

Religious pluralists insist that the Qur'an is silent and hence any understanding of the Qur'an could be valid.

There are ample examples in the Qur'an to refute the above claim. We have dealt with this claim in 'Philosophy of Religion' under the heading of 'the Grammar of Religious Language'.

Ten Selected Gems from the Holy Qur'an

To end this lesson I would like to share with you some of the most important Ayaat of the Qur'an. In my humble opinion memorising and practicing these Ayaat are the secrete keys to our prosperity both in here and in the hereafter. Although all the Ayaat of the Qur'an are unique gems, I have called them the Gems of the Qur'an.

1. Surah al-Hamd

The first chapter of the Qur'an is the best Surah of this Holy Book according to a Prophetic narration. It is a concise version of the entire Qur'an. It is enough for the significance of this Surah that no Salaat can be every recited without it.

2. Surah Touhid (al-Ikhlas)

Chapter 112 of the Qur'an is the article of monotheism in Islam. After Surah al-Hamd, it is the most important Surah of the Qur'an. Many Prophetic narrations asserted that the recitation of this Surah equals the rewards of the recitation of the one third of the entire Qur'an.

3. Bismillah Rahman Raheem

The bismillah is the most honourable and greatest Ayah of the Qur'an. It is closer to the Greatest Name of Allah than the pupil of the eye to its white. It is enough for its significance that any action initiated without it will be defective.

4. Ayatul-Kursi

Ayah 255 of Surah al-Baqarah (ch.2) is known as Ayatul-Kursi (Kursi literally means footstool). Numerous narrations emphasise on its extra significance. The Prophet (S) said to Abu-Thar that it is the best Ayah of the Qur'an. The Greatest Name of Allah is part of this Ayah and its recitation provides miraculous protection.

5. Ayah for Monotheism in Actions

Ayah 78 of Surah al-Nisa (ch.4) specially the phrase "say: All things from Allah" is the most profound Ayah in Monotheism in Actions. Faithful attention to it is the best practical solution to many challenges of

life.

6. Ayah for Taqwa

Taqwa means being dutiful and protect the self against whim and desire. Taqwa is one of the fundamental purposes of the revelation of the Qur'an. Although many Ayaat in the Qur'an emphasis on its significance, the most important one- in my opinion- is Ayaat 71 and 72 of Surah Maryam (ch. 19). In these two Ayah, the Almighty Allah emphatically declares that all mankind shall pass over the Hell, but He will only save the Mottaqin (those who have gained Taqwa) from the Fire.

7. Ayah for Noble Character

Remembering and practising Ayah 34 and 35 of Surah Fosselat (ch.41) will guarantee and solve most of our family and social conflicts.

8. Ayah for Shame

The Almighty Allah in Ayah 14 of Surah al-Alaq states: "***Knows he not that Allah does see?!***"(96: 14)

Remembering this Ayah with faith is the best prevention from the sins. It will cause man to be shameful of committing any sin in the presence of God.

9. The key to seeing hell and heaven

"Nay, had you had known with certainty, you would have surely seen the Blazing Fair."(102:5-6)

10. The most hope-giving Ayah of the Qur'an

The Almighty Allah states: "***And verily, your Lord will give you so that you shall be well-pleased.***"(93:5).

The Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) asserted that the above Ayah is about the right of great intercession that will be granted to the holy Prophet of Islam (S) and hence it is the most hope-giving Ayah of the Qur'an.

May Allah include us in their intercession.

1. Ibn Manzour, Lesanul-Arab, vol.10, p.261

2. Kashaf Estelahatul-Fonoun, vol.2 p.1115

3. Al-Zarqani, Manahelul-Irfan 1:470, Dezfouli; Qanoon Tafsir, p.46

The Final Word

Dear reader!

All the previous lessons were no more than introduction for sailing in the eternal ocean of the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an is the verbatim Words of the Almighty. It is His manifestation and trust in our hands. Let's be grateful to this unique blessing and bring it more to our daily lives.

The Arabic text of the Qur'an is not more than 600 pages. That means if you only learn one page of the Qur'an you can learn the meaning of the entire Qur'an in less than two years!

I would like to conclude this course with painful yet sincere confessions of two renowned scholars whose contribution to humanity and servitude to Islam is beyond doubt.

1. Mulla Sadra (died in 1050 A.H); the leading figure in the Islamic philosophy for the last four century, in the introduction of his *Tafsir of Surah al-Waqe'a* (ch.56) states:

"...I spent a great deal of my life studying the works of the philosophers until I assumed I am somebody! However, when my insight was opened I found myself empty from real knowledge. At the end of my life, I began reflecting on the Qur'an and the Hadith of Muhammad and his pure progeny (S). I then became certain that all my previous works have been baseless. For in my entire life I was standing under the shade instead of light. The agony of this realisation burnt my heart and inflamed my soul, until the Divine Mercy took my hand and introduced me to the secrets of the Qur'an. I began the interpretation of the Qur'an and reflecting on its Ayaat. I saw the angels telling me: **"Salamun Alaykum! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein forever. "(39:73)**

I have now attended writing the secrets of the Qur'an, yet I confess that the Qur'an is a profound ocean that unless by the Grace of the Almighty it is not possible to enter it. Alas! My life is finished, my body is unable, my heart is broken, my capital (life) is so little, my tools are incomplete and my soul is small."

2. Imam Khomeini (died in 1989). Indisputably, Imam Khomeini (may God elevate his status in Paradise) was the reviver of Islam in our modern time. Millions of people across the globe including the author of these words are indebted their guidance to him. Nonetheless, in the last few years of his life in his address to the youth stated:

"I hereby sincerely, not for formality, announce that I regret my passed life. You the prolific Muslim youth! Direct the Islamic seminaries and the universities to the various aspects of the Noble Qur'an. Teaching the Qur'an shall be the priority in every field. Let it not be –may God forbid– when the aging and weakness attack, you, like this author, regret your lost youth."[1](#)

And our last call is

All praises belong to the Lord of the Worlds.

[1.](#) Sahife Noor, vol.20, p.20

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