

Exordium
to
Coherence in the Qur'ān

An English Translation of
Muqaddamah Nizām al-Qur'ān

Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī

Translated by
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Translator's Introduction

The Holy Qur'ān shapes and governs all aspects of the life of the Muslim community - individual and collective, religious and social, political and financial, legal and moral, national and international. It gives meaning to their lives. In Muslim perception, those who dedicate their life to understanding the Qur'ān and explaining it to others earn great respect in this world and everlasting reward in the Afterlife. It raises their religious as well as social status in the Muslim *ummah*. The Book has therefore attracted the best minds over the last fourteen centuries, who immersed themselves in deciphering its text, deriving legal commands from it, highlighting its social implications, discovering ethical principles and formulating religious dictates from it that govern the Muslims' individual as well as collective life. Such contributions have in turn further established its relevance to the Muslim's belief and practice in all ages.

The first generation of readers (or listeners) of the Qur'ān were the Companions of the Holy Prophet (sws). The Companions and their successors commented on the text spontaneously and directly. "This was because they knew what was revealed before their eyes, had full knowledge of the circumstances in which it was revealed and were characterized by a perfect understanding, correct knowledge and virtuous deeds."¹ It appears that a few of them developed a special taste for the study and understanding of the Qur'ānic sciences. This activity must have involved little research and more questioning from the Prophet (sws). The Companions must have asked the Prophet (sws) about the verses or *surāhs* of the Qur'ān to get an immediate answer which, coming from the Prophet (sws), would be fully satisfying for them.

The situation however must have changed immediately after the Holy Prophet (sws). With passing time and increasing distance from the first addressees of the Holy Qur'ān, as in other

1. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1999), 434.

disciplines, the art of interpreting the Book of God became more and more specialized. By the third century Hījah, it had evolved into a highly technical discipline which became dependent on input from a number of sophisticated disciplines like language, grammar, rhetoric and above all a methodology of interpretation.

During the first few centuries, remarkably brilliant exegeses were compiled by scholars from various schools. But the science of *uṣūl-i tafsīr* (Qur'ānic Hermeneutics) was still not conspicuous. Though the exegetes of the classical times did not comprehensively state the methodology and the principles they followed in interpreting it, yet, it was possible for the later scholars to study the works of their predecessors and explain the principles they had followed and which, they believed, provided an example for the subsequent generations. Immediately after the first generation, various principles of interpretation can be traced in the anecdotal material we have inherited from the first generation commentators. With the passage of time, Muslim scholars of the later generations gleaned the principles from earlier works and attempted comprehensive and scientific statements of the methodology of interpreting the holy text. This led to the evolution of the Muslim hermeneutics or *uṣūl-i tafsīr*. The works of Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328 AD), Jalāluddīn Suyūfī (c.1445-1505 AD) and Shah Waliullāh of Delhi (1703–1762 AD), based on retrospective analysis of the major *tafsīr* works, represent the models of *uṣūl-i tafsīr* that has been widely accepted and applied by the later exegetes.

A study of the *tafsīr* works from medieval times reveals that most of the exegetical literature was modeled on a line that can safely be termed as *tafsīr based on tradition* usually termed as *tafsīr ma'thūr*. This means that first, the exegetes of these times, with few exceptions, held the received interpretations as a dominant factor in deciding on their interpretations of the text. They show a pronounced preference for authority over rationality and tradition over originality. Furthermore, most of these scholars considered the verses as individual stand alone independent verses, in an atomistic manner, without giving any weight to the logical or textual coherence. Though references to the context and to the internal organization of the text are frequently found in the standard Muslim exegetical literature, but they mostly followed, what may be called, a “fragmentarian”

approach.

At the same time, another parallel tradition of interpretation of the Qur'ān can also be traced throughout the history. This mode of interpretation emphasized the text itself to the exclusion of or to the suppression of historical reports regarding the occasion of revelation of each verse. The independence from such historical reports was to be compensated by closer reading of the text and its thematic and structural coherence. It appears that being a lesser tradition, the exegetical works produced in this mode did not reach outstanding levels of scholarship and there are only few extant examples to be cited. This suppressed tradition in the *tafsīr* literature however was revived in the beginning of the last century by an Indian scholar, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (India, 1930)². Farāhī emphasized a seminally important approach

2. Born in 1863, in the village Phariāhah of A'zamgarh, UP India. Farāhī started his education by committing the Qur'ān to memory at the age of ten. He studied Arabic, Urdu and Persian while he was a young boy. He completed his traditional religious education under Shiblī Nu'mānī (1857-1914), a famous Muslim historian and scholar of the time. Later on, his pursuit of higher studies in Arabic language brought him to Luckna'ū (1881) and then to Lahore (1882-3). In Lahore, he had the opportunity to remain under the tutelage of Mawlānā Fayḍ al-Ḥassan Sahāranpūrī, an erudite scholar and a great Arabic poet. Farāhī joined MAO College Aligarh, to study English language and other disciplines in 1891.

He started his career as a teacher of Arabic language in the Madrasah al-Islām Karachī where he remained for over a decade (1897-1907). During his stay in Karachi (in about 1900) he was appointed an interpreter to Lord Curzon, the British Viceroy to India, during the latter's diplomatic visit to the Arabian Peninsula. On his return from the tour Farāhī joined MAO College Aligarh once again as Professor of Arabic (1907-8), where he came across the German Orientalist, Joseph Horovitz (1874-1931) and learnt Hebrew from him. In reciprocity Joseph Horovitz learnt Arabic from Farāhī. Later on Farāhī joined, as principal, Dār al-'Ulūm Haydarābād (1914-19). After a few years he resigned and went back to his home town A'zamgarh and devoted his time to developing Madrasah al-Islāh (School for Reform). He spent last six years of his life there during which time he was able to train many able students, Iṣlāhī being one of them, who would continue studying the Qur'ān in the light of the principles introduced by their great teacher. Farāhī died on November 12, 1930 in Mithra, India. (See

towards understanding the Qur'ān. Contesting the attitude taken by earlier scholars, who betrayed the belief that the Holy Qur'ān is devoid of apparent structure and coherence, he proposed that every *sūrah* of the book deals with a specific central theme and the book as a whole is also well structured. Through this approach, he makes the Holy Qur'ān the central and the most authoritative tool for its interpretation, vis-à-vis the Ḥadīth literature, the recorded opinions of the Companions and their successors, the *tafsīr* literature, and the narratives regarding the occasions of revelation and the instances of abrogation within the Holy Qur'ān.

Basing his *tafsīr* on a thorough understanding of the language of the Holy Qur'ān, instead of relying on the Ḥadīth narratives and received interpretations, and taking the *nazm* (coherence) as a guiding principle instead of the so called *fragmentarianism*, he offers a viable alternative to the approach of traditionalism and atomism of the traditional *tafsīr* model. He has forcefully challenged conventional methodologies that dominate Qur'ān *tafsīr* offering a new building block for understanding the Holy Qur'ān.

Though, unfortunately, he could not complete his commentary on the Book of God and many of his discussions on the principles of interpretation remained unfinished, yet he showed the scholars a well lit path for approaching the Holy Qur'ān which he argued, was more reliable. Farāhī's work was to be converted into a significant and enduring tradition by Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī and Jāwēd Aḥmad Ghāmidī. Direct guidance from Farāhī's works and remaining under his tutelage allowed Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī (1904 to 1997), one of his illustrious students, to pen a nine volume commentary of the Holy Qur'ān named *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*. As the tradition continued to flourish, Jāwēd Aḥmad Ghāmidī (Born: 1954), has been able to further develop the concept of Qur'ānic coherence as found in the works of Farāhī and Iṣlāhī. His marked contribution however is his attempt to explain the Sharī'ah of God contained in the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah in the light of textual coherence.

for details: Iṣlāhī, Sharaf al-Dīn, *Dhikr-i Farāhī*, 2000, and a biographical note by Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī prefacing his translation of the Farāhī's *Majmū'ah-i Tafāsīr*, 1991).

A number of introductory books, including one by Mustansir Mir, were instrumental in introducing Farāhī and Iṣlāhī to the English readers, which in turn created a demand for the books and articles written by the founder of the *Farāhī school of thought*, as it has come to be known in the Indian Subcontinent. In fact, now this school represents a powerful intellectual current in Pakistan. There is therefore enough justification to present the work of Farāhī in English so that the English speaking world can access these seminal texts.

A new Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

Farāhī could not complete these introductory prologues (*muqaddamah*) to his commentary on the Qur'ān titled *Nizām al-Qur'ān wa Ta'wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān* (Coherence in the Qur'ān and Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān) and these remained in the form of manuscripts which were compiled and published posthumously. These prolegomena constitute a set of tracts, independent but not unconnected fragments. Farāhī's works are marked by his conviction that the Holy Qur'ān is a univocal text. To access its univocal meaning, however, we have to be perfectly comfortable with the classical Arabic language and its usages. Then, a competent reader has to apply his linguistic skills to the revealed text, putting aside all preconceived notions. This will help grasp the thematic coherence as well as the structure of the *sūrahs* and of the Holy Qur'ān in a holistic manner.

Farāhī insists that the Holy Qur'ān is a well structured book. Its *sūrahs* are complete units of meaning. Thus, one should first enable himself to understand the language of the Holy Qur'ān through a close study of the Book of God in the backdrop of expertise in classical Arabic literature. Only then should a fruitful reading of the Holy Qur'ān become possible. This reading should focus the fundamental unit of the *sūrah*. A careful reading would lead him to learn that each *sūrah* deals with a single issue that is comprehensively treated by it. This issue can be called the central theme of the *sūrah*, the "*umūd*", as Farāhī calls it. Having identified and established the central theme, he will be able to properly deal with the other issues that were previously considered to have direct bearing on the interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān. Thus competence of language

of the Holy Qur'ān and understanding of its coherence is a key to the univocal interpretation of the Book.

Just as each *sūrah* of the Holy Qur'ān is a complete unit, the Book, as a whole, too exhibits structural and thematic coherence. The *sūrahs* have been arranged in the present order by the Prophet (sws) as guided by the Almighty himself and, therefore, are not without a compelling rationale. The *sūrahs* can be divided in nine groups, each dealing with a specific central theme. *Sūrahs* in each group are ordered in a way that mostly *Makkan sūrahs* follow *Madinan* ones.³ Each *sūrah*, with minor exceptions, corresponds to the previous one or to one or more succeeding ones.

Farāhī also deals with other important issues like historical resources of interpretation and the linguistic ones, as well as recorded reports of historical events about the prophetic career of Muhammad (sws) and circumstances generally believed to have spurred the revelation, the role of the *isrā'iliyyāt*,⁴ the common themes of the previous Scriptures, the role of Ḥadīth in understanding the Holy Qur'ān. All these resources, his view, have to be subjected to the primacy of the Qur'ānic language and coherence. Any Ḥadīth that contradicts the interpretation reached by an expert of the language of the Holy Qur'ān, in the light of the coherence in the book has to be abandoned. If the previous Scriptures, the so called *isrā'iliyyāt*, the narratives of occasion of revelation etc. corroborate our interpretation, that will surely add to our confidence. If, however, they contradict and negate the clear Qur'ānic stance, then they have to be reinterpreted and reconciled to the clear and obvious meaning of the Qur'ānic text.

Most of the issues taken up by Farāhī as short prologues are a further elaboration on and establishing the principle of *naẓm*. The others contain discussions to remove or reform the prevailing dominant trends in interpreting the Holy Qur'ān. Linguistic resources for example explain how the experts of the language can safely reach the intended meaning and the one and only legitimate explanation of the verses. It shows how obstructive it would be to chain oneself to the confines of

3. *Makkan sūrahs* are the ones revealed in Makkah and the *Madinan sūrahs* are the ones revealed in Madīnah during the Prophetic career of Muhammad (sws).

4. Ḥadīth reports based on the eastern folklore regarding the Jewish and Christian milieu.

Aristotelian rhetoric and to subject the Holy Qur'ān to the grammar rules, originally devised by medieval grammarians for ordinary non-Qur'ānic discourses of a mundane nature.

Yet another classification of these resources of interpretation is epistemological. There are two broad categories, conclusive and non-conclusive. Among the conclusive principles lie the Holy Qur'ān itself, its coherence and its language. The established historical facts, Ḥadīth, the previous scriptures, the received interpretations, the disciplines of grammar, *usūl al-fiqh*, *balāghah* etc form the secondary resources. Here again the coherence and the language of the Holy Qur'ān constitute the foundation of the Farāhī model of *tafsīr*. The distinction between conclusive and non-conclusive resources is the cornerstone of Farāhī's approach and marks a major departure from the popular mode of interpretation of Holy Qur'ān.

In his endeavor to raise the art of Qur'ān *tafsīr* to a science with a well defined methodology he penned down, besides the principles of interpretation in this exordium, the following booklets which illustrate these issues further or clarify a relevant discussion that has direct bearing on the *tafsīr* work:

- i) *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān* (Vocabulary of the Qur'ān)
- ii) *Jamharah al-Balāghah* (Manual of Rhetoric)
- iii) *Dalā'il al-Nizām* (Proofs for Coherence)
- iv) *'Asālīb al-Qur'ān* (Styles of the Qur'ān)
- v) *Al-Takmīl fī Usūl al-Ta'wīl* (Perfection in the Principles of Interpretation).

Most of these works remained as manuscripts or in forms of notes, and have been published without author's closure. However they provide immense help in developing insight into Farāhī's approach. Produced for the consumption of religious scholars, all of these works were written in Arabic and the demand for their English translation has been ever-increasing.

As I motioned earlier Iṣlāhī and Ghāmidī have further developed this model of Qur'ān *tafsīr*. It would therefore be useful to briefly explain their contributions. Iṣlāhī's understanding of the 'umūd of the *sūrahs* is identical to that of his teacher. He has however modified the overall structure of the Book as understood by his mentor. He holds that there are seven

groups of the *sūrahs* instead of nine. He believes that all *sūrahs*, with few exceptions, have been put in pairs. He has established the seven-fold division of the Holy Qur'ān by pleading to the Qur'ān itself. He holds that in each group the *Makkan* and *Madinan sūrahs* constitute distinct blocks, the former preceding the latter. Farāhī, however, did not stress on this aspect of internal arrangement of groups. Iṣlahī believes that each of the seven *sūrah* groups treats all the phases of the Islamic movement as led by Muhammad in Arabia, though emphasis in each groups is on different themes of the movement. Farāhī does not assign specific themes to each group of *sūrahs*.⁵

As to Ghāmidī's contribution to the concept of *nazm* he makes valuable additions to the elaborateness of the overall structure of the Holy Qur'ān while keeping alive emphasis on the internal *nazm* of the *sūrah*. Asif Ifikhār has summarized Ghāmidī's concept of Qur'ānic *nazm* in the following words. "The basic theme of the Qur'ān is a description of the Prophetic *indhār* (admonition) to his people, the Banū Ismā'īl—more specifically the Quraysh. Prophet Muḥammad, according to Ghāmidī, belonged to a specific category of the messengers of God who were sent to specific peoples as God's final judgment on them. The Qur'ānic term for such messengers is *rasūl* (plural: *rusul*). Unlike some other messengers, termed as *anbiyā'* (singular: *nabī*), whose basic purpose is to prophesize the coming of a *rasūl* and who are sometimes killed by their own people, the *rusul* always triumph. A *rasūl*'s people are always given Divine punishment on denial after a stipulated time period and rewarded with a special privilege in this world if they accept his message and the authority. In Prophet Muḥammad's case, his prophetic mission of doing *indhār* went through different phases, which can be categorized as general admonition (*indhār-I 'ām*), culmination of the conclusive argument (*itmām-i hujjat*), the abandonment and migration (*barā'at* and *hijrat*), and the reward and punishment (*jazā'* and *sazā'*). A depiction of these themes is given in the Qur'ān in seven distinct groups, each group consisting of a set of *Makkan* and *Madīnan sūrahs*. The *sūrahs*

5. See for detail: Mir, *The Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Iṣlāhī's Concept of Nizām in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986).

within each group occur in pairs. Each group of the Qur'ān possesses certain special features as a central theme of its own and arrangement of ideas. The order of the groups has a thematic significance too. For example, thematically, the second group is culmination of the themes gradually flowing backwards from the seventh group. The theme of the seventh group is admonition (*indhār*) to the polytheists of Mecca. This theme moves gradually towards the inner purification (*tazkiya*) and organization of those who paid heed to this admonition and became Muslims (from the seventh group to the second). Then, in the second group, after culmination of the conclusive argument (*itmām-i ḥujjat*), the Divine law of retribution is implemented on all the religious groups present in Arabia in the time of the Prophet (sws). From the first to the second group, the topical arrangement is also somewhat the same. While *indhār* is done to the People of the Book (the Israelites and the Nazarites), guidelines for the *tazkiya* and organization of the nascent Muslim community are also given, who are the *umma* that has now been given the responsibility of being witnesses of God over people (*shuhadā 'alā al-nās*).⁶

A study of these introductory prologues, it is hoped, will show how Farāhī seeks to change our approach to the Qur'ān *tafsīr*. His theory of *naẓm*, emphasis on univocity of the Qur'ān, reliance on the language of the Qur'ān and interpreting the Qur'ānic verses with their parallels are expanded and elaborated upon in his other works. His successors too made significant contributions in this movement. For a detailed study of the Farāhī School the readers may like to consult the following:

A'zamī, Akhtar Ḥusain, Mawlānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, Ḥayāt-o Afkār (Life and Thoughts of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī), Lahore, Nashriyāt, 2008.

Farāhī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn, Majmū'ah-i Tafāsīr-i Farāhī (Collection of Exegeses of Farāhī). Translated by Amīn

6. Asif Iftikhar, "Jihād and the Establishment of Islamic Global Order: A Comparative Study of the Interpretative Approaches and Worldviews of Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī and Jāwēd Aḥmad Ghāmīdī" Unpublished, Masters Dissertation submitted to McGill University, Montreal, 2004, p. 57.

- Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī. Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1991.
- Al-Ra'y al-Ṣaḥīḥ fī man huwa al-dhabīḥ, A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1968.
- Tafsīr Nizām al-Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 2000.
- Rasā'il al-Imām Farāhī fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, (Dalā'il al-Nizām, Al-Takmīl fī 'Usūl al-Ta'wīl and 'Asālib al-Qur'ān), A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 2005.
- Mufradāt al-Qur'ān (Vocabulary of the Qur'ān), A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 2004.
- Im'ān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān (Study of the Qur'ānic Oaths), A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1930.
- Jamharah al-Balāghah (Manual of Rhetoric), A'zamgarh: Maktabah al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1941.
- Ghāmīdī, Jāved Aḥmad. Burhān (An Evident Proof). Lahore: Dānish Sarā, 2000.
- Mīzān (Balance). Lahore: Dār al-Ishrāq, 2001.
- Al-Bayān (Elucidation). Lahore: Dār al-Ishrāq, 2001.
- Iṣlāḥī, Amīn Aḥsan. Da'wat-i Dīn awr us kā Ṭarīqa-i Kār (Invitation to Religion and its Method). Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1981.
- Tawḍīḥāt (Clarifications). 1956. Reprint, Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1985.
- Tadābbur-i Qur'ān. 9 vols. Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1985-1988.
- Mubādī-i Tadabbur-i Ḥadīth (The Foundations of Ḥadīth Analysis and Interpretation). Compiled and edited by Mājīd Khāwar. Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1989.
- Maqālāt-i Iṣlāḥī (Iṣlāḥī's Articles). Vol. 1. Compiled and edited by Khalīd Masūd. Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 2000.
- Iṣlāḥī, Sharaf al-Dīn. Dhikr-i Farāhī (Remembering Farāhī). Lahore: Dār al-Tadhkīr, 2002.
- Mir, Mustansir. Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Iṣlāḥī's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986.
- "Tafsīr." In The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World, 1995.
- "The Qur'ān as Literature." Renaissance 10 (May 2000).
- "The Qur'ān Oaths: Farāhī's Approach," Renaissance 10 (July 2000).

Robinson, Neal. *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*. London: SCM Press, 1996.

Aḥmad, Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

I wish to explain that while remaining true to the original Arabic work of Farāhī, I have, in the present translation, made free use of Iṣlāḥī's Urdu translation of the work, *Majmū'ah-i Tafāsīr-i Farāhī* (Collection of Exegeses of Farāhī). Farāhī, it should be noted tends to be terse and concise. There are places in his works where terseness overtakes required clarity. Therefore this translation draws heavily on Iṣlāḥī who having remained under the tutelage of Farāhī and being an erudite scholar and a prominent figure in the Farāhī School, is able to fully comprehend and explain Farāhī. Thus with the help of his Urdu translation, difficult passages of the book could be correctly rendered and properly explained. All the notes by Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī have been included in the translation. References have been added wherever required. Important concepts and terminology exclusive to the Farāhī School have been further explained by cross references from the author's other works. Arabic terms have been provided along with their English equivalents. It is hoped that the translation proves to be fairly proper and sufficiently faithful rendering of Farāhī's original work.

All my teachers and colleagues deserve my profound gratitude for their valuable help and guidance in accomplishing the translation. I am deeply indebted to Mr Talib Mohsin and Mr Sajid Hameed who, on more than one occasion, helped me make sense of several difficult passages of the original text in Arabic. Mr Nadir Aqueel Ansari and Mr Jhangeer Hanif made a number of valuable suggestions to help improve the quality of the translation. My thanks are therefore also due to them. I owe special thanks to Mr Manzoor ul-Hassan, under whose magnanimous supervision, the publication of the translation finally became possible. A note of thanks is also due to all the support staff of al-Mawrid, who contributed towards bringing the text into publishable form.

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Lahore.

2008

Preface

In the present work, I have, with the help of God and His blessings, tried to uncover the *naẓm*⁷ (coherence) in the Holy Qur'ān. I intend to write a simple and self explanatory commentary on the divine book free from the differences that have arisen among the Muslims after the Holy Prophet (sws). I have sought to clarify each verse in the light of its precedents in the Book and have endeavored to determine the coherence of the *sūrahs* through careful analysis of the text in the light of the context. Thus having reached an interpretation, I have attempted to corroborate it by rational and factual evidence.

a. Qur'ānic *Naẓm*

In order to uncover the *naẓm* I have examined the depths of the discourse with penetrating insight. In my effort to explain the divine verses I have held fast to the Book of God. My sole guide is only the God Almighty who blessed me with knowledge and understanding [of the coherence in the divine text]. I have not borrowed this approach from anyone. However, I am not the first person to have tried to uncover the Qur'ānic *naẓm*. Many

7. Farāhī uses the term *nizām*, in relation with the Holy *Qur'ān*, to mean both types of coherence - structural and thematic – in the book, unlike his predecessors, who use the word, either for relationship between the word and the intended meaning or a linear connection between the *sūrahs* and the verses in the *sūrahs*. We have however adopted the Arabic word *naẓm* for the concept only because Amīn Aḥṣan Iṣlāhī and his disciple Jāvēd Aḥmad Ghāmidī, who boast of achieving further developments in this field - the former applied the concept to the whole of the Qur'ān and the latter further refined it – both preferred this term for Farāhī's *nizām*. The English word coherence employed here does not cover the full signification of the concept yet it has been adopted for the sake of convenience. Scholars who have studied these works and presented their findings in English have used this word for the concept. For detail see: Mir, *The Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Iṣlāhī's Concept of Nizām in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986)

scholars in the past have directed their attention to the subject and some have even documented their findings. The polymath, Suyūfī, mentions in his treatise *al-Itqān*:

Mentor of Abu Ḥayyān, ‘Allāmah Abū Ja‘far Ibn Zubayr, compiled a book entitled *al-Burhān fī Munāsabat al-Suwar al-Qur’ān* (The Conclusive Proof Regarding the Correspondence in the *sūrah*s of the Holy Qur’ān)⁸ which exclusively deals with this subject. One of our contemporaries, Sheikh Burhān al-Dīn Baqā‘ī has also specifically considered the coherence in the Holy Qur’ān in his exegesis *Nazm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyi wa al-Suwar*

8. The word *munāsabah* means correspondence and interrelationship. Farāhī, however, is careful in his selection of the word *nizām*. In his work *Dalā’il al-Nizām* he explained the difference between *munāsabah* and *nizām* in the following words: “Some scholars have authored books on the issue of interrelationship of the verses and the *sūrah*s. They were however not aware of the *nizām al-Qur’ān* (coherence in the Qur’ān). The difference between the two is this. *Tanāsub* (interrelationship) is but a part of the *nizām* (coherence) for it can be found among verses. It does not reveal that the discourse [in a *sūrah*] is an independent unified whole. The seeker of the interrelationship between the verses may sometime remain content on any kind of interrelation (no matter how farfetched) and thus ignore the real interconnection between the components of the discourse which binds them into a unified whole. [...] By *nizām* we mean that each *sūrah* is a single well-knit composition. Moreover, a *sūrah* corresponds to the preceding as well as the following one or it may be related to the one preceding its predecessor/s or following its successor/s in the way verses are mutually arranged. Just as the verses are sometimes placed as digression so are the *sūrah*s. Considering this principle one can see that the whole Qur’ān is a single discourse with perfect correspondence between and proper arrangement of its parts, from the beginning to the end. This explains our point that the *nizām* is something much beyond and above the correspondence and the order of the parts. (Farāhī, *Dalā’il al-nizām*, 1st ed., (A‘zamgarh: al-Dā’irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1968), 74-5

(Arrangement of the Pearls regarding the Correspondence of the Verses and the Sūrahs).⁹

‘Allāmah Suyūfī also refers to one of his works, which, according to him, discusses the coherence in the verses and the *sūrahs* and other aspects of *i’jāz*¹⁰ of the Holy Qur’ān. In this connection, he says:

The knowledge of interrelationship is the most sublime science in rank. The exegetes have paid less attention to it only because of its difficulties. Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is one of those who have shown most interest in this science. He says: “The greater part of the Qur’ānic intricacies and wisdom is buried in the fine arrangement and correspondence of the [*sūrahs* and the verses of the] Qur’ān.”¹¹

I have found Imām Rāzī’s following remarks in his commentary on the Qur’ānic verse, “*wa law ja’alnāhu Qur’ānan a’jamiyyan*, (had We made it an ‘*Ajamī Qur’ān*,”) (41:44):

9. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1999), 216.

10. Miracle; Muslims believe that the Holy Qur’ān is inimitable word of God. This belief is presented as a proof of its divine origin. It is based on the Qur’ānic assertions that none can produce the like of it; it is inimitable. (2:23, 11:13, 17:88, 52:33-4) However, the scholars have differed over the nature of the inimitability of the Book of God. Various explanations have been offered including the claim that the Qur’ānic *I’jāz* consists in Qur’ānic *nizām*.

11. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 2, 216.

[The scholars] have reported that this verse was revealed when the Quraysh obstinately remarked that why the Qur'ān was not revealed in some non-Arab language. I believe assumptions of this kind expose the Holy Qur'ān to serious objections. It entails that the Holy Qur'ān contains disjointed verses lacking any possible logical coherence. Rather, this admits of even severer objections on the divine word, which, once validated destroy the status of the Holy Qur'ān as a coherent discourse, far from being miraculous word of God. I believe that this *sūrah* is a sustained discourse right from the beginning to the end.¹²

After dealing with the theme of the *sūrah* in a short and concise manner he comments:

Every fair person can see that if the verse is interpreted the way we have, it becomes clear that the *sūrah* is a coherent and well-knit discourse from the beginning to the end - a discourse leading to single objective. Such a commentary would naturally be better than what people have generally offered.¹³

This rounds off our survey of the viewpoints of the advocates of a case for some sort of coherence in the Holy Qur'ān. All along, there have been other scholars who believed that the Holy Qur'ān is devoid of any coherence. In this connection, Sheikh 'Izzuddīn al-Salām says:

12. Rāzi, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, (Ṭahrān: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah), 133.

13. *Ibid.*

The Holy Qur'ān came down piecemeal over a period of more than two decades, with different commandments issued for a variety of purposes. A book revealed in this fashion does not afford any correspondence in its components.¹⁴

We have seen that on the question of Qur'ānic *nazm* there exist two schools both of which have supporters. I acknowledge the former view and adhere to it.

Through aforementioned facts, I intend to highlight two important points.

First, the earlier scholars did not altogether neglect the question of Qur'ānic *nazm*. Rather a group has discussed the issue carefully.

Second, discovering *nazm* in the Holy Qur'ān is a difficult task which has scarcely been attempted. It is a treasure trove of which little has been discovered thus far.

In the beginning, God Almighty blessed me with an understanding of the internal coherence in *Sūrah Baqarah* and *Sūrah Qaṣaṣ* of the Holy Qur'ān. The text of the Holy Qur'ān itself guided me to this discovery and I did not resort to any resource external to it. By the grace of God, reciting the Holy Qur'ān, my favorite book, has always been my cherished engagement. I too, many times, confronted the famous dictum that the Book, being revealed piece by piece, is actually a disjointed, incoherent discourse. The discovery of coherence in two longer *sūrahs*, however, prompted me to expand the investigation to the rest of the Book. This dates back to early days of my life. I was, at that time, pursuing my academic career. This kept me from devoting enough time to this investigation and doing an exhaustive survey of the entire Book. After ten years of inactivity, God again blessed me with an opportunity to resume work on the Holy Qur'ān from this angle. Initial investigation lasted for about a year before I reached a definite conclusion. Later on, the idea to present the results of my investigation before the academic world struck my mind. This, however, I did not pursue realizing the importance of the task and its far-reaching consequences. Therefore, I continued

14. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 217.

repeatedly examining the Qur'ānic text from this perspective for a long time. During the course of this exercise, I continuously beseeched God's protection from ignorance and temptations of the self. Truth was there before me, clear and manifest, since long. It required urgent disclosure but I always desired to safely depart this world without rendering myself accountable for unveiling such a massive discovery. I wished to relieve myself of the responsibility for all the good or evil my work was bound to produce. However, the following considerations forced me to bear this huge responsibility in spite of my reservations.

1. I observed that most differences in understanding the Qur'ānic text owed themselves to the fact that the interpreters did not consider the Qur'ānic *nazm*. Had they been clear on the orderly arrangement of the text and were they exposed to the central themes of the *sūrahs*, all possibilities of difference would have been eliminated. All would have been jointly hoisting a common flag, holding fast to a single word— “a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into the heavens.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, the differences could not be checked despite the fact that we, the Muslims, have been required to hold fast to the word of God Almighty who commands:

And hold fast by the rope of Allah all together and be not disunited. (3:103)

How can one expect to find a way out of differences in fundamental matters in such a state of affairs? People have considered the well-knit rope of Allah – which “falsehood may not come at from before or behind,”¹⁶ – a pile of fragmented

15.

Do you not see how God compares a good word with a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heavens. (14:24)

16.

pieces. Each sect is interpreting the Holy Qur'ān bespectacled with presupposed views, deviating from the escort of the text; whereas the order and arrangement of the Qur'ān – the only guide to proper understanding of the text – is never resorted to. It is the only shield that keeps innovators from incorporating their whims in the text, prevents the strayed folk from grounding their waywardness in the word of God and safeguards the book from the onslaughts of the crooked people who wish to “remove the words from their context.”¹⁷ In the meantime such evil factions remain engaged in attacking the word of God, from its front and from its back, and are mixing their whimsical inclinations with the truth.

2. The heretics leveled objections against the Holy Qur'ān. They claimed that the Book lacks anything of the sort of orderly arrangement. Muslim scholarship was expected to deliver the word of God from such outrageous objections – concerning the like of which the Almighty says, “how grievous words come out of their mouths”¹⁸ and “never will Allah grant to the unbelievers a way over the believers”¹⁹ – and to unveil the truth. Quite unfortunately, their response has generally been concessive in this regard. This did not allow me to sit like an onlooker while the truth was subjected to suppression and falsehood hailed victory, especially when I was clear about the untenability of the objections raised by the heretics.

3. Moreover, it is an indisputable fact that coherence is the necessary characteristic of every discourse. Minus it, you will lose a significant part of the meaning and implications of the

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

17.

They remove the words from its context. (4:46)

18.

How grievous words come out of their mouths (18:05)

19.

And never will Allah grant the unbelievers a way over the believers (4:141)

discourse. A whole contains what we may call over and above of the sum total of its parts. Grapes and the wine are certainly different things. That is why we see that if someone fails to understand the connections in the parts of a discourse a great part of the meaning of the discourse is lost upon him. His state is not different than that of the People of the Book concerning whom God says:

Thus they lost a part of that through which they were reminded [of religious truths]. Consequently we stirred up enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Resurrection. (5:14)

I am afraid the enmity and antagonism that has broken out among the Muslims originates in our disregard for the greater part of the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān buried in its coherence. Given this, God forbid, the evil can hardly be curbed. The reason for this, as explained above, is that disputing over the meaning of the Word of God will necessarily lead us to cherish different goals. Consequently, we will share the fate of the People of the Book mentioned in the verse quoted above. They, however, after all this, could hope reform by believing in the Last Prophet (sws) and the Last Revelation of God, still awaited then, but we have no other way except for turning to the Qur'ān itself.

The Holy Qur'ān, considering human weakness, places the alleviatory verses after the initial commands. That weakness is inherent in all human beings is indicated in the following verse:

And We covenanted with Adam previously and he forgot [our command]. Thus We did not find him well committed. (20:115)

That the alleviatory verses have been revealed considering human weakness can also be gleaned from the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

Now God has lessened your burden [of responsibility] seeing that weakness has befallen you. (8:66)

This verse has been placed right after the original command it repeals. Similarly, there is a distance of many years between the period of revelation of the initial verses of *Sūrah Muzzammil*,²⁰ commanding the Muslims to observe the night vigil, and the last verse of the *sūrah*,²¹ which serves to repeal the command. Here, in spite of the difference in the period of revelation of both the commands, the verse repealing the earlier commands has been placed after the abrogated directive. The case of the verse regarding allowing sexual intercourse with one's wife during the nights of the month of *Ramaḍān* and the ones commanding the believers to make a testamentary provision to their wives can also be cited to prove this point.²² The latter verse, as I have discussed in my commentary of the *sūrah*, was put among the verses complementing the entire section. It was in fact very meticulously placed after the first complement in this regard. Such explanatory verses most often are followed by the statement:

Thus does God make His verses clear to people. (2:187)

I believe that such explanatory verses fulfilled the divine promise made in the following verse of the *Sūrah Qiyāmah*:

20. 73:1-6

21. 73:20

22. Reference is to the following two verses of the Holy Qur'ān:

It is permitted for you to lie with your wives on the night of the fast. (2:187)

And those of you who die leaving widows should bequeath a year's provisions for their widows without causing them to leave their homes. (2:240)

We shall Ourselves explain it. (75:19)

It also responds to the prayer taught to the Holy Prophet (sws) by the Almighty himself in the following verse:

Lord, increase my knowledge (20:114).

In the preceding paragraphs I have pleaded with these Qur'ānic facts in order to substantiate the theory of coherence in the Holy Qur'ān. The Ḥadīth narratives also corroborate this thesis. Many traditions lead us to the conclusion that whenever a part of the Holy Qur'ān was revealed, the Holy Prophet (sws) would determine its *sūrah* and also its place in that particular *sūrah* and would direct his Companions to put it there. It was thus put in its proper place under his direct supervision. Some other narratives tell us that once a *sūrah* would be completed Gabriel recited the whole *sūrah* before the Prophet (sws). In my opinion, this also constituted the fulfillment of the divine promise of *the jam'* (compilation) and *the Qur'ān* (recitation) mentioned in *Sūrah Qiyāmah*.²³ It was this *arrangement* and *recitation* which the Prophet (sws) was commanded to follow.

Order of the verses of the Qur'ānic *sūrahs* is recognized by the entire *ummah*.²⁴ All the Muslim sects and schools have the same

23. Reference is towards the following verse:

Verily upon us is to compile it and recite it (to you). (75:17)

For a detailed discussion of the meaning and implication of this verse see Farāhī, *Majmū'ah-i Tafāsīr-i Farāhi*, tr. Amīn Aḥsan Işlāḥī. 2nd ed., (Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1991), 210-13.

24. As regards the question of present arrangement and order of the Qur'ān it is exactly the same as it was during the lifetime of the Prophet (sws). This is acknowledged by all and is not doubted except by those ignorant to history. The *sūrahs*, during the Prophet's time, were recited in the prayer in their complete form. This fact has been reported through generality to generality. The Companions (rta) would recite the *sūrahs* in their prayer and would listen to the Prophet (sws) recite them. However, people have doubted the origin of the order of

text with the same order of the verses in the *sūrahs*.

Another thing that corroborates my thesis regarding the Qur'ānic *nāẓm* is the conviction of the people whose bosoms were opened by the Almighty to some of the fruits of the fine ordering of the Holy Qur'ān. These scholars have glimpsed into some of the realities buried in the fine structure of the Book of Allah. They appreciate that the Book of Allah is a treasure trove of wisdom and wonders which can only be accessed through an analysis of its order and arrangement. This intensifies their thirst for investigation, increases their satisfaction and improves their understanding. They are thus encouraged to try harder and harder to unearth this treasure. God fulfills their endeavors and they are able to get of it what is destined for them. They are grateful to God on what horizons open up for them in this regard. They attribute their failure to understand something to their own inabilities and lack of understanding. It is a known fact that the Book of God is an ocean of knowledge whose wonders and treasures may never exhaust. Who can claim to have gathered the sunlight and [to have obtained all the knowledge contained in the Book of God]? Who can claim immunity to error? Therefore, such limitations do not put off the flame of their enthusiasm and yearning to learn. Rather, they continue searching for the wealth of knowledge gratefully acknowledging whatever they can achieve through their efforts. Do not you see that those bestowed with some part of this knowledge have always thanked God for this unparalleled divine largesse? Writes Imām Suyūfī:

the *sūrahs*. Was the Qur'ān there in the present order in the lifetime of the Prophet (sws) or the people, who are believed to have compiled it after him, gave it the present arrangement? The correct and well established view is that the *sūrahs* were given the present order by the Almighty Allah. Gabriel taught this to the Prophet (sws) who taught the Companions what was communicated to him. (Farāhī, *Dalā'il al-nizām*, 1st ed., (A'zamgarh: al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1968), 12-3.)

The first person to highlight the study of correspondence (of the verses and the *sūrahs* of the Holy Qur'ān) is Sheikh Abū Bakr Nishābūrī. He was a great expert in Islamic law and literature. He would assume the chair, explain the Qur'ānic verses read out to him and point out the wisdom behind the placement of a certain verse next to the others and of a certain *sūrah* alongside the other. He would often disparage the scholars of Baghdād for their lack of knowledge of the correspondence.²⁵

Imām Suyūfī has recorded the following saying of Ibn 'Arabī:

The art of linking the Qur'ānic verses in a way that the whole text appears as a well arranged single composition is certainly a great knowledge. Only one scholar has engaged himself in such an enquiry. Working on this line of enquiry he showed the whole *Sūrah Baqarah* a coherent discourse. Then the Almighty opened this door for me by His grace and bounty but I found that people do not appreciate this knowledge. I see that the people lack insight. This compelled me to keep this door sealed and to refer this matter between the Almighty and me to Himself.²⁶

Imām Rāzī, too, in his commentary, invariably thanks God for such grand knowledge granted him. Makhdūm Mahā'imī's commentary on the Holy Qur'ān primarily deals with the explanation of the interrelationship of the verses. He thanks God for bestowing him with this understanding so profoundly, and expresses his sense of inability and infallibility in such a way that it cannot be lost upon any serious student of his

25. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 216.

26. Ibid.

commentary. He considers this knowledge merely his Lord's bounty upon him and completely negates worthiness of his contribution. I think it is because of this feeling of overwhelming gratitude and great humility that made him give his work the title of *Tabṣīr al-Raḥmān wa Tasyīr al-Mannān*.

The above discussion fully reveals the degree of respect attached to this knowledge by those blessed with insight into it. Obviously, these confessions have sprung from their hearts after they felt that the verses of the Qur'ān are ordered in a very remarkable fashion. As is attested by Sheikh Walī al-Dīn Malawī:

Those who say that one may not look for interconnection between the verses of the Holy Qur'ān because they were revealed in diverse circumstances are wrong. The fact is that these verses, though revealed in response to certain diverse circumstances, have been ordered (in the present arrangement of the Book) with perfect wisdom.²⁷

An individual who senses the fragrance of a fine ordering in the Holy Qur'ān, glimpses at its beauty and feels it, cannot deny the presence of this reality i.e. *nazm* (in the book of God). However, we may not blame those who hold that the Book is not coherent merely because they have been unable to grasp its *nazm*.

What I intend to bring to the eyes of the academic world does not call for this elaborate and lengthy discussion. Yet, I have gone this far in this preliminary discussion only because discovering the coherence in the Book demands great contemplation. If one fixes the view that the book does not contain any *nazm* at all on the mind, even before approaching it for interpretation, it would be impossible for him to tread a single step in this direction. Everything will look so strange and unfamiliar that it would be hard for him to immerse himself into such an endeavor.

One may, however, ask that if the Qur'ānic *nazm* is such sublime science yielding great benefits then why the Companions (rta) of

27. Ibid., 217.

the Holy Prophet (sws) maintained silence in this regard? Why did the Prophet (sws) himself not point towards this important tool of interpretation of the divine text? Our response to this question is this. The Companions (rta) of the Holy Prophet (sws) stood fully in light regarding the context of the verses. Most parts of the discourse addressed their issues and were revealed considering their circumstances. Had we lived in the same blessed time the coherence of the book would have been clear to us too. That is why we see that little exegetical narratives have been ascribed to the Companions (rta); for it spoke in their mother-tongue, applied their style of expression and discussed their issues and problems. Nothing of this triad is shared by us with them. This being true, how can one compare us with them with regards to the understanding of the coherence in the Qur'ān! Yet, despite the great difference of time between the Companions (rta) and us, we have in the text, in the repetition of the verses, decisive nature of the discourse, and presentation of the arguments, certain indicators which point beyond what we miss otherwise. These things continue to radiate light and help every keen and perceptive reader discern the *nazm*.

Here I conclude this discussion on the *nazm*, the fundamental principle of this exegesis. The introductions to the exegesis which follow this preface contain various other relevant facts which further explain our approach in this regard.

b. Explanation of the Verses with their Parallels

Now we turn to the second important principle of exegesis namely *tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt*. To begin with I quote 'Allāmah Suyūfī:

The scholars have said that, while embarking on the task of interpreting the divine text, a commentator has to refer to the Holy Qur'ān itself first of all because whatever part of the Book is ambiguous in one place has been made clear in another place. What is put with brevity here has been elaborated upon there. Ibn al-Jawzī has devoted a treatise to the discussion of the Qur'ānic themes briefly alluded to in one place and explained at another. I too have brought forth some examples of the kind under the discussion of *mujmal* (ambiguous). If it is not possible then the exegete needs to turn to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (sws) because the *Sunnah* explains and explicates the Holy Qur'ān. Imām Shāfi'ī has said that all the Prophetic commands were based on the Holy Qur'ān. The following verse of the Holy Qur'ān attests this:

We have sent down to you the Book with decisive truth that you may judge between men by what God has shown you. (4:105)

Many other verses of the Holy Qur'ān support this fact. The Prophet (sws) too has said:

I have been granted the Holy Qur'ān and with it something similar to it²⁸ i.e. the *Sunnah*.²⁹

28. *Sunan Abi Da'ūd*, No: 4604, *Musnad Ahmed*, No:17213

29. Here the author has put the following note:

If however, it is not possible for him (to interpret the verse in the light of the *Sunnah*) then he must consult the sayings of the Companions (rta). They best knew what was revealed before their eyes, had full knowledge of the circumstances in which it was revealed and were characterized by a perfect understanding, sound knowledge and pious deeds.³⁰

I fully appreciate that the first thing to be resorted to in the task of interpreting the Holy Qur'ān is the Qur'ān itself. The knowledge that we have received from the Holy Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta) follows it. God knows that, to me, the best interpretation of the Qur'ān is that validly ascribed to the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta).

Some of the scholars have conducted exegesis on the basis of traditions. The work of Ibn al-Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, often hailed as the unparalleled Tafṣīr work, represents this model. However, most of the narratives he employed in his commentary are not sound and reliable. Very few traditions are *marfū'*.³¹ Syūṭī has indeed collected the opinions of the earlier commentators on the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses, completely ignoring their mutual contradiction.

Imām Shāfi'ī took the phrase, "something like it" to mean the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (sws). We, however, believe that it refers to the prophetic understanding, wisdom and the light which illuminated his heart after he received the divine revelation. The following verse alludes to such an impact of the revelation on the person of the Prophet (sws), "Thus We have revealed the inspiration to you by Our command, while, previously you were not acquainted with the *Sharī'ah* and the faith. But We have made it (i.e. the Holy Qur'ān) a light with which We guide those of Our servants whom We will. Verily, you guide people to the straight path." (42:52)

30. Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 434

31. A *marfū'* Ḥadīth is a narrative directly traced back to the Prophet (sws).

Though, I believe that most of the *ṣaḥīḥ*³² narratives do not contradict the Holy Qur'ān yet I have refrained from basing my commentary on the Ḥadīth narratives. I have used them only in corroborating my opinions on the Qur'ānic verses concluded in the light of their parallels. To me, the status of categorical resource of exegesis is exclusive for the Qur'ān. The Ḥadīth narratives work only as explanatory and non-categorical resource which must accord with the foundational one and may never override it. This is because I intend to keep the door of difference and confrontation closed on the rejecters of the Book who have thrown the word of God on their backs and on the heretic who have attributed to the Muslims things that which are not based on the word of God. I have consciously adopted this approach in order that that the Book serves as the common guide for all and as the basic criterion and deciding force on the confronting views of sectarian groups.

I do not indeed intend to amass all that relates to the Holy Qur'ān for I believe that the book of God is a mine of treasure which does not exhaust no matter how great number of seekers approach it. Moreover there is already sufficient number of exegetical works. Whoever searches through them with the eyes of a researcher is rewarded with what is destined for him of knowledge. I have, on the contrary, intended to bring to surface that which works as the foundation, the source, the balance, and the wisdom. Therefore, I have abandoned anything other than the Holy Qur'ān without declaring it unacceptable, following Imām Bukhārī who recorded in his book only those *aḥādīth* which were sound to him and were accepted by all. He did not deem it fit to reject the other narratives which he could not include in his work. In the present work, I could not even discuss a tiny part of the wisdom and the realities buried in the Qur'ānic text itself what to say of the discussions external to it. If the Lord wills I will write a separate book in which, with His help, I will deal with all such pearls of the Qur'ānic wisdom.

Just as I have employed the Ḥadīth narratives in corroboration

32. A *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīth is transmitted through an unbroken chain of narrators all of whom are of sound character and memory. The narrative should not clash with a more reliable report and must not suffer from any other hidden defect.

of the conclusions reached at in the light of the Qur'ānic text I also use the Scriptures revealed to the earlier nations in the same capacity. The basic objective behind this exercise is to reveal and highlight the issues where the Qur'ānic and the Biblical verses are in agreement. This establishes the veracity of Islam over the Jews and the Christians with the help of their Scriptures. They too have been splitting hair on issues, they suppose, they have found in the Qur'ān in their favor.

The above discussion is enough for a preface. There are, however, other matters of fundamental import which call for detailed discussion for which I have dedicated the introductions to the present book. We can refer to them in the course of discussion of the exegesis to avoid disruption by frequent repetitions.

This work is divided in a hundred and fourteen chapters, a separate chapter for each *sūrah*. I thank God for whatever I have written correct. He is surely the source of all blessings. Thus whatever right conclusions I have reached are definitely owed to God. If, however, I have been wrong, God knows, I have only pursued a good desire in my mind like Jacob.³³

Occasion of Revelation

It is commonly held that the *shān-i nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) is narration of a particular incident or incidents, which spurred the revelation of a verse or a set of verses. I am afraid this is not correct. The *shān-i nuzūl* of a revelation, in fact, refers to the circumstances encompassing the addressees of the Holy Qur'ān at the moment. The Holy Qur'ān, in fact, deals with certain matter or a set of matters as the central theme of the *sūrahs*. The whole address revolves round that matter or a set of matters. Therefore, the best way to ascertain the *shān-i nuzūl* is to deliberate upon the contents of the *sūrah* because the *sūrahs*

33. This alludes to the following verses of the Qur'ān dealing with the story of the Prophet Jacob and the Prophet Joseph: When they entered in the manner their father had commanded them, Jacob's purpose was fulfilled but it could not avail them anything against Allah, except that there was a desire in Jacob's mind which he thus satisfied; and he was surely possessed of great knowledge we had taught him, but most men know not. (12:68)

are always addressed while keeping such circumstances in view. Just as an expert doctor identifies the ailment a patient is suffering from by simply analyzing the medicines mentioned in the prescription by another doctor, in precisely the same manner, one can identify the *shān-i nuzūl* of the Qur'ānic verses by examining the central theme of the *sūrah*. In a meaningful discourse, the discourse and its theme possess mutual affinity and relationship, just as a well-fitted dress corresponds to the body. It goes without saying that components of a meaningful discourse are closely knit. When a Ḥadīth narrative says that a certain verse was revealed regarding a particular incident it indicates the circumstances in which the audience were at the time of that particular revelation. Thus we come to know of the immediate reasons for the revelation of the *sūrah*. Suyūfī writes:

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Zarkashī writes in *Al-Burhān*: When the Companions (rta) and the Successors say that such and such verse was revealed about such and such incident they mean that the verse embodies a ruling about that issue. They do not mean that the verse was primarily prompted by that issue. This phenomenon, in fact, involves deducing a decree from the verse regarding the issue (referred to in the relevant *shān-i nuzūl* narrative). It does not always involve merely reporting the historical fact about the revelation of the verse. It is very important to appreciate that the revelation of the relevant verse and the referred to incident might not have co-occurred.³⁴

The above quoted saying of Zarkashī solves the problem faced by Rāzī while interpreting the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

34. Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 127.

When those who believe in our revelations come to you. (6:54)

Imām Rāzī writes:

I am quite mystified here. The scholars unanimously hold that the whole *sūrah* was revealed at one time. Then how could one say that every verse of the *sūrah* individually was prompted by a specific incident.³⁵

Therefore, in my opinion, as is obvious from the above discussion, all the *sūrahs* were revealed to deal with matters, which called for an explanation, while caring that text of the *sūrahs* remained coherent and free of ambiguities. We experience that an expert orator delivers a speech regarding conditions and requirements before him, in such a way that he does not mention a particular issue yet his speech covers all the pertinent issues. Likewise, sometimes he mentions a particular person or incident but his address is all embracing and universal in nature. Same is the case with the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān as can be discerned from the following verse:

If you ask about them during the time the Qur'ān is being revealed these will be shown to you. (5:101)

This verse testifies to the fact that the Holy Qur'ān, during the course of its revelation, would answer queries that arose in the minds of its addressees without disturbing the flow of the discourse. So when a *sūrah* would be completed while meeting the objectives of the discourse it did not lack any aspect of the clarification of the matter. Nor did it bear any thing in excess.

Sometimes this need would not be fully met and another *sūrah*

35. Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 13, 2-3.

would be revealed to clarify the issue. The 'occasion of revelation' would still be the same but the *sūrah* would be couched in a new style to avoid monotony and tiresomeness in the discourse. That is why the *sūrahs* revealed in the beginning commonly dealt with subjects like resurrection, monotheism, belief in the Messengers of Allah among others. In all the *sūrahs* which deal with similar topics different style was adopted. Sometimes it was felt that a particular thing in a *sūrah* required further explanation and an explanatory verse would be revealed and placed beside the verses to be clarified. This was in accordance with the promise Allah made in *Sūrah Qiyāmah* (75):

We shall Ourselves explain it. (75:19)

In such cases, the entire discourse would follow the context of the *sūrah* rather than its period of revelation. Usually such verses would be followed by an assertion that the part under question was a later insertion revealed in order to make something clear. Verses like the following one would be placed at the end of the clarifying directive:

In this manner Allah explains His verses to make people understand so that they may be fearful. (2: 187)

If we want to have a clear understanding of a certain part of the Holy Qur'ān, we should not let go of the context of the verses lest we become like a wanderer in a desert who gets to a crossway in the dark of night not knowing where to proceed. Thus the occasion of revelation of a *sūrah* should be determined from the text of the *sūrah*. Only those narratives should be considered in this regard as are in harmony with the context of the *sūrah* rather than those which disrupt its coherence. Therefore, the most well-grounded view is that the occasion of revelation is determined with the help of the context. One should cling to it fast. When a general decree is revealed on a certain occasion this (occasion and condition) alludes to the reason and wisdom behind that decree. For instance, the Holy Qur'ān

mentions both monogamy and polygamy [as allowable]. If we consider the *shān-i nuzūl* of the relevant verses in the light of the context, it becomes clear that polygamy can be adopted when just dealing of the orphans requires of it³⁶ whereas the practice of keeping one wife is followed for it protects just dealing of the wife. Justice with the weak underlies both directives. Circumstances of a person determine which of the two allowable practices is applicable in a particular situation. Similar is the case of pledging some item while taking collateral loan. To take some precious item from a brother in this way reflects obvious meanness on the part of the lender. Still however, the Almighty allowed us to resort to this practice when left with no other alternative. The Holy Qur'ān however clearly commands us to return the pledged items immediately after the need is fulfilled.³⁷

Historical Resources of Interpretation

There are two types of historical resources of interpretation, (a) foundational and absolutely authentic and (b) secondary and supportive. The Holy Qur'ān, alone is the basic and foundational resource while the sound *aḥādīth* (the prophetic traditions), established historical facts and the Scriptures of the earlier nations constitute the ancillary and secondary resource. Had it not been for the uncertainty involved in the authenticity of prophetic traditions, historical facts and earlier revelations, I would have considered them among foundational resources along side the Holy Qur'ān. In that case, all of these resources would have worked to corroborate each other without mutual contradiction. It is only the lack of authenticity of the Ḥadīth narratives that obliges students of the Holy Qur'ān like me not to rely on any such traditions as contradicting the Holy Qur'ān. Some of the narratives even negate the verses of the Holy Qur'ān and disrupt their interrelation unless their obvious implication is abandoned. Strangely enough, some commentators disregard the

36. Sometimes a man feels that he needs to marry more than one woman considering welfare of the orphans or to fulfill any other pressing social or moral responsibility. (Iṣlāḥi)

37. This has been briefly discussed in our commentary on Qur'ān 2:283. (Farāhī)

obvious meanings of the verses they seek to interpret and do not bother to reinterpret the relevant narratives in accordance with the verses. They leave the apparent contradiction between the two unresolved. Some scholars dare to take the narrative as it is without even bothering to interpret the verse accordingly. In so doing they put the *naẓm* of the discourse at stake. When the roots and branches come to threaten each other every rational being would cut out the branches, not the roots. As the poet says:

How many tall branches we have seen die out if not
nourished by the roots!

One wonders why the exegetes have freely employed the narratives which outright contradict the text they are supposed to interpret. Examples of such outrageous interpretations include the traditions ascribing lies to Abraham³⁸ and the narratives which tell that the Holy Prophet (sww) recited verses that were not revealed by God. We therefore, need to observe extreme care regarding such narratives. We may only consider the narratives which are in accordance with the Holy Qur'ān and which corroborate its statements. For example, the interpretations ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās do not often violate the *naẓm* of the Holy Qur'ān. We will refer to them as corroborative evidence in our attempt to interpret the Holy Qur'ān.

As regards the history of the People of the Book, what has been reported to us of the eastern folklore regarding the Jewish and Christian milieu (the so called *isrā'īliyyāt*) is not that authentic. What the Scriptures of the People of the Book contain is a safer and a surer source of the required information rather than the *isrā'īliyyāt*. The exegetes have indeed received the detailed *isrā'īliyyāt* from the Jewish converts among the common folk who had little or no knowledge of the history of Israel and the

38. Whereas the word *kadhība* (he lied) can be taken to mean 'tawriyah' (i.e. making use of ambiguity of meaning arising from language that lends itself to more than one interpretation). The word *kadhība* is conventionally used in this sense as well. This then clearly explains the narrative. (Iṣlāḥī)

Israelite Prophets. Therefore, it is only safer for us to resort to their reliable books instead of referring to the *isrā'īliyyāt*. It must however remain clear that the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures have to be used only as supportive and explanatory resource. If these books contradict the Holy Qur'ān at a certain point they have to be abandoned. We know that truth these books contained has been consciously concealed. God has said to their bearers, “are you more knowledgeable or Allah?”³⁹ The issue of offering of Ismā'īl is a clear example of such a manipulation as confirmed by the Holy Qur'ān, the undisputable foundation of religious truth. I want to make it clear that we, Muslims, have been taught not to differentiate between the revealed books. We must appreciate that the Holy Qur'ān is one of these divine books. However, when we find that these books, the sources of divine knowledge, differ over an issue, we should prefer the authentic over the corrupted. We have to measure the authenticity of the contradicting sources and consider only the more authentic. However when they are found in agreement, corroborating and strengthening each other, there is no harm in accepting even what is not historically authentic once we have critically reflected upon its contents. For example we may refer to the Psalms while discussing the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

We have written in the Psalms, following the reminder, that my righteous servants shall inherit the land. (21:105)

We may also refer to Torah in an effort to appreciate what has been alluded to in the following Qur'ānic verse:

...and indeed this is what found in the earlier revelation, the books of Abraham and Moses. (87:18-9)

While referring to the history of the earlier nations, the Almighty says:

39. The Holy Qur'ān 2:140

...and We conveyed to the Children of Israel in the Book, “You will surely create mischief in the land twice”. (17:04)

What matters most in this exercise is to appreciate that the Holy Qur'ān does not depend on anything external to it including the earlier Scriptures in making its purport clear. It indeed governs the earlier revelations. It is the only true source that can settle differences among the books of God. However, when one wishes to confirm what the Holy Qur'ān says they may turn to the secondary resources for corroboratory evidence. They are surely helpful in that they increase our faith in the Holy Qur'ān and affirm our belief in its teachings. I believe that the following Qur'ānic directive guides us to this quest:

Tell (them), “walk in the land and then observe what has been the end of the rejecters”. (6:11)

Studying the earlier revelations, therefore, has its reward. A sound understanding of their contents helps us appreciate the excellence of the Qur'ānic teachings over them. This also proves useful in learning how the Holy Qur'ān has refreshed the guidance that which People of the Book had lost from their books and has exposed the changes they had made in the divine texts.

We must, however, not lose the line of difference between what the Holy Qur'ān says and what these secondary sources offer. We need to keep a clear barrier and a demarcating wall between the two sources and may never confuse one for another. What has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān is absolutely authentic and whatever these resources add to it is always subject to doubt and uncertainty. Therefore, if somebody rejects these secondary resources, on valid grounds, he cannot be equated with the rejecters of the Holy Qur'ān.

Similarly one must also appreciate that the Ḥadīth narratives,

even if they are *mutawātir*,⁴⁰ cannot repeal the Holy Qur'ān. We will have to explain any apparent contradiction found between the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth in accord with the Qur'ānic stance on the issue or keep the narrative under consideration. This is the reason Imām Shāfi'ī, Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥambal and the majority scholars of the science of Ḥadīth never claimed that the Holy Qur'ān can be abrogated by the Ḥadīth narratives even if they were reported down by a large number of people supposed to be unable to unite over concocting a report. The owner of a house, they say, knows best what it contains and these great scholars of the past hold the status of the 'owner of the house' in this case. I am absolutely convinced of the untenability of the counter views offered by some of the jurists and the scholastics. I seek God's refuge from saying that the Messenger of God could cancel the words of God. Such narratives as contradicting the Holy Qur'ān must always be ascribed to the misunderstanding and confusedness of the narrators. A thorough analysis of both of these views along with the line of arguments they offer would surely help add to our commitment to and satisfaction in truth regarding this matter. We cannot however go into a detailed discussion over the issue here and will discuss it partly in the last introduction titled "Interpreting the Holy Qur'ān in the light of the Ḥadīth."

Linguistic Resources of Interpretation

Not only did the Almighty guarantee protection and security of the Qur'ān from being lost, He also promised to explain it. Both of these facts have been mentioned in the following verses respectively:

It is indeed We who have revealed the reminder and upon us is to protect it. (15:09)

40. When a historical narrative is transmitted by such a great number of people that cannot be conceived to have agreed upon fabricating the narrative it is called *mutawātir* report.

We shall Ourselves explain it. (75:19)

The fulfillment of this latter promise required that the Almighty guard Arabic, the language of the Qur'ān, from extinction. He has, therefore, sustained it and has given it eternal life. Similarly, He has guarded the meanings of the religious terms of the Holy Qur'ān like *ṣalāh* (the ritual prayer), *zakāh* (the obligatory alms), *Jihād* (the holy war), *ṣawm* (the fast), *ḥajj* (the annual pilgrimage), *masjid* (mosque), *ḥaram* (the inviolable precinct in Makkah), *ṣafa* and *marwah* (two hills in the vicinity of *Ka'bah*), the rites of *ḥajj* and the related practices. The meanings of all the religious terms have traveled through later generations from generality to generality. Minor differences over the method of observing these rites exist but they are negligible. An example would best explain my viewpoint. There is no denying the fact that the Arabic word '*asad*' denotes a lion in spite of the minor differences in the color and shape of lions of different geographical regions. Similarly the *ṣalāh* we are required to offer is the *ṣalāh* Muslims offer today in spite of the minor differences in its form and method. Whoever splits hairs in this regard in fact abandons the stance of the *firm religion* of the Lord. The Almighty says:

Neither their meat nor their blood reaches Allah: instead, it is your piety that reaches Him. (22:37)

The controversialists follow the footsteps of the Jews who severed their religion and succumbed to doubts. God has depicted their attitude in the Holy Qur'ān with reference to their response to the divine command to offer a cow. They kept on asking hairsplitting questions while their Prophet continually told them to "do what they were commanded to do."⁴¹ They were even not ready to follow the command after that much unreasonable questioning. It was only because of the blessing of the words "God willing",⁴² which they mechanically uttered

41. The Holy Qur'ān 2:70

42. *ibid.*

during this conversation, that they were led to obey their Messenger. This is evidenced by the words of the Almighty Allah, concerning their insistence, saying, “they were not to do [what they were commanded].⁴³”

When dealing with unqualified terms of the *Sharī'ah*, of which we do not find any clear definition and implication in the Holy Qur'ān, we may not blindly fall upon the *akhbār-i āḥād*.⁴⁴ This can cast us in uncertainty and we may end up in falsifying and negating other approaches and thus inflicting pain upon their upholders. None of us, the contesting parties, will have a criterion to resort to. In such cases it is advisable to content ourselves with what is agreed upon by the *ummah* and avoid condemning others concerning which we have no clear proof in the text of the Holy Qur'ān or agreed upon practice of the Holy Prophet (sws) handed down by the Muslim generations. To sum up, talking about the *Sharī'ah* terms in the Holy Qur'ān, we must follow the above mentioned highway and a clear understanding of the Holy Qur'ān ignoring minor differences.

The classical Arabic poetry and the text of the Holy Qur'ān are two resources which can be used as foundational reference in ascertaining the meaning and signification of the remaining literal and figurative diction of the Qur'ān and its style of expression. Arabic dictionaries and lexicons do not help much in this regard because they do not cover the all the words and their usage in the language. They discuss many issues quite inadequately and do not help us differentiate between the pure classical and the naturalized Arabic diction. Neither do they guide us to the root of the words enabling us to discern the foundation from the branch and the literal from the figurative. When a student, who is not fully groomed in classical Arabic poetry, consults these dictionaries he fails to ascertain the true meanings and real significations of the Qur'ānic words. Moreover the extant classical Arabic poetry also contains much manufacture. Many extinct words and rare usages (*shādh*) have crept into it. However, the difference between the unsound and the sound is not lost upon a connoisseur of the language. This forces us to avoid putting anything in service that is

43. The Holy Qur'ān 2:71

44. Traditions reported by a few or single narrator in each layer of the chain of transmission.

ready to hand while interpreting the Holy Qur'ān. We must only employ what is established as sound and abandon the rare usages. An example may explain what I want to bring to the fore. Some exegetes have interpreted the word “*tamannā*” in the following verse to mean recitation:

Whenever a Prophet of an Apostle, sent before you, wished (something) Satan tempered with his wishes. (22:52)

In order to escape explaining a complex theme the commentators have adopted rare meaning of the word (“*tamannā*”) abandoning its clear and obvious significance. This however, did not help. Contrarily, it opened door of disputation, disruption and difference in the *ummah*. Whoever deviates from the highway is destined to wander in the mazes of ignorance.

Books compiled in the fields of the remaining disciplines like grammar, logic, Islamic jurisprudence, rhetoric, *balāghah*, and meter, though many, also are not helpful in understanding the Holy Qur'ān.

Our present knowledge of the discipline of Arabic grammar needs a lot of improvement. Its role is limited to establishing rules for a discourse of mediocre quality. Therefore the exegete should not subject the word of God to these grammatical rules, changing the obvious meanings of the text and ignoring its basic style. Such analysis would make the Holy Qur'ān seem like a very strange kind of discourse not inline with the customary literary style of the Arabic language. On the contrary, the exegete's duty is to adduce Arabic poetry, so that those enthusiastically looking for grammatical and stylistic errors in the Book of God can get to know that it is a discourse of the highest literary order.

As for logic, it involves hairsplitting discussion over the techniques of reasoning and argumentation, and over the usage of the words generally used in definition, negation and exception. The exegetes employing this discipline in interpreting the Qur'ānic text find it difficult to grasp the meaningfulness of assertions like ‘*wa ‘allama ādama al-’asmā’a kullahā* ()⁴⁵ and ‘*wa mā mana’nā ’an nursila bil-āyāti ’illā ’an*

45. And He taught Adam all the names. (Qur'ān 2:31)

kadhhaba bihā al-awwalūn' (

).⁴⁶ They also fail to understand the Qur'ānic style of reasoning. This issue will be elaborated upon in a separate discussion.

'Im al-bayān (the science of rhetoric) also falls short as much as grammar does. Those who excel in this field remain unable to appraise and analyze the nuances of a discourse gushing forth from the arteries of a living heart. Such a science would therefore be utterly useless when applied to the text revealed by the Most High. Every Prophet who receives the divine revelation, rather every caller to the truth, spontaneously expresses his feelings, while considering the circumstances of his audience. He employs figurative language here and literal there. He strictly follows conventional style of expression and carefully considers the competence and level of understanding of his addressees. Therefore, we see that a divine prophet uses words like *'ab* (father) and *'ibn* (son); talks of his body being divided up in many; alludes to transferring his flesh and blood into someone else's. He uses words and expressions like *yad* (hand), *sāq* (shin) and *wajh* (face), *'arsh* (the throne) and *kursī* (chair), *bast* (expansion) and *qabz* (recession), *nashr* (dispersion) and *tayy* (folding), *hasrah* (pathos) and *intiḳām* (retribution), *ghazab* (wrath) and *ḥanān* (compassion). The addressees always grasp it all fully. However, whoever chains himself in the art of rhetoric walks clumsily on this path of understanding and explaining the divine text like an ant. He jolts like the blind and gets knocked off. Those acquainted with the style of expression of the Psalms and the other divine Books can best understand that the revealed Books heavily rely on figurative language.

As regards the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence the founder *'usūlis* did in fact render a laudable service. They did not borrow this discipline from the Romans, Indians or any other nation. They found this knowledge indispensable for their pursuit to understand the Holy Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Therefore, in order to enable themselves derive legal rulings from these sources in a systematic way they needed to form some guiding principles. This undoubtedly makes them the pioneers of the discipline and

46. Nothing hinders us from giving signs except that the ancients disbelieved them. (Qur'ān 7:59)

in this case others have emulated them. Unfortunately the scholars of the later generations did not develop this useful discipline. They failed to systematize it. Consequently the discipline remained inadequate and imperfect and was left short of becoming a science in the true sense of the term. This explains that the lack of uniformity of principles in this field leads the people to different conclusions concerning rulings of the Holy Qur'ān, something undesirable. This, however, is not the case with the other disciplines like grammar, logic and the like which can properly be called disciplines. In this short introduction I can only refer to some points of cardinal importance and cannot go into detail. However, I intend to work on this branch of Islamic sciences, for which I beseech help of God, in whose hands are all matters.⁴⁷

The science of *balāghah* has been constructed upon the Arabic poetry alone. Poetry, every one knows, only deals with fine sentence structure, nuances of words and phrases and also manipulation of *badī'*.⁴⁸ It leaves out a lot including, for example, many aspects of reasoning, relationship of words with the intended meaning, use of examples and parables, various ways of narratives yielding morals, '*awd 'ila al-bad'a*' (going back to the initial discussion), promise [of reward], admonition and stress produced by the overwhelming confidence of the speaker. It also does not cover other important techniques. For example sometime a self sufficient speaker consciously ignores the objections of the addressees. Sometimes he shows pathos like a concerned well-wishing teacher. These and some other techniques used by the eloquent speakers and the divine Books are not covered in this discipline. The scholars could not mention this greater part of styles of expression because they did not treat the speeches of the famous Arab orators. This is possibly because they did not find

47. Farāhī, however, could not accomplish this task. However, the manuscripts he has left contain some guidance around fundamental issues in this regard which, though resolve many knotty questions on the topic, yet do not suffice as a guide out of the problems highlighted here. (Iṣlāhī)

48. *Badī'* is a branch of *balāghah* which deals with the use of literary devices like *mubālaghah* (emphatic statement), *istiṭrād* (digression), *muṭābaqah* (contrasting parts), *tajnīs* (paronomasia) etc (For detail see Mir, *The Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Iṣlāhī's Concept of Niẓām in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986)

sufficient material from the oratory of the Arabs while they intentionally disregarded the oratory of the non-Arabs.

Therefore we see that 'Allāmah Bāqilānī, despite his utmost efforts to unearth the unparalleled Qur'ānic eloquence, [does not cite the oratory and] evokes only Arabic poetry as evidence. He has however recorded some famous speeches as specimen, so that one can see the difference between the two genres of speech, the poetry and the oratory. As regards those of the above mentioned aspects of language which ought to be treated under this discipline and which he did not deal with, they are ten in number. Five of them are intellectual or rational and five emotive or psychic. Since they are the common characteristics of all the languages of the world, we can evoke any language other than Arabic or rather merely allude to them. The Holy Qur'ān itself contains sufficient examples of such devices.

The discipline of *balāghah*, in its present form, does not help in understanding the styles of expression employed by the Holy Qur'ān. Most of the contributors in this discipline were non-Arabs, who found it difficult to study, analyze and understand the Arabic styles of expression. Therefore, it would not be fair to complaint over what they failed to accomplish. We should rather thankfully acknowledge that they successfully laid foundations of the science. They sometimes reached at the correct conclusion and at some other instance only referred to what they targeted at.

To further explain my point I will discuss some of the Arabic styles of expression in a separate introduction to this book. I will also discuss the meter and its use in a separate introduction.⁴⁹

Divine Books explain one another

This discussion is confined to the issues of styles of expression and the language of the divine books. The divine laws and rulings and the historical narratives and their use and purpose will be taken up in a separate section.

It is known that teachings of Jesus Christ, though recorded in Greek, were originally delivered in Hebrew. Both the Torah and

49. This however does not form part of these introductions. The author has discussed the topic in his book '*Jamharah al-Balāghah*' (*A Manual of Rhetoric*) (Al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, A'zamgarh, India).

the Gospels were delivered in the same language. This is also clear to all that Arabic and Hebrew, the languages of the divine revelations, share the same origin. They necessarily share many things and each one of them may be taken as a guide towards understanding the language of the other. The major themes discussed in these books are also common to all of them. All have sprouted from the pure stream of divine inspiration. It is only natural that they contain similarity. Another important fact to be considered is that the Holy Qur'ān promises that it will explain to us the issues left unclear to the People of the Book. This renders it useful to know what issues the Book targets to explain. Another worth considering point is that the Holy Qur'ān came confirming the previous revelations. Therefore, understanding similarity between the Holy Qur'ān and the Previous Scriptures, and their unity of purport strengthens our belief in them. The Holy Qur'ān targets removing the differences that arose among the People of the Book and settling their disputations. All other books are basically an inspired message coded in the words of the prophets and are in a kind of verse. This obliges the students of these books to study them in the light of the Holy Qur'ān. The earlier books have been abrogated and their language has died out. If someone intends to study them he should take help from the language of the Holy Qur'ān for understanding their language.

I have stressed these points because I believe that many things mentioned in the Torah and the Gospels have caused dispersion among the adherents of these books. Had they been acquainted with Arabic they would have been able to see the right course. Jesus Christ rightly said that, “man is cast in abyss by the words and is saved by reaching at its true meanings.”⁵⁰ They, on the contrary, fell upon the words and got lost. The case of Muslims is no much different. Some of the Muslims even dare to make a mock of verses of the Gospels. If only they could discover the affinity of such verses with that of the Qur'ān they would have appreciated that they are obliged to have faith in the facts, which they usually poke fun at, first of all. The Holy Qur'ān obliges us to believe in things we are not clear about. I do not see any reason why this directive is not applied to our attitude towards the previous scriptures. The Holy Qur'ān unequivocally states

50. Mathew 4:25

that rejecting a divine command merely because one cannot understand its real meaning incurs a great sin.

But they belied what they could not grasp and they have not yet seen its real manifestation. Likewise did those before them. But see what the end of the wrongdoers was. (10:39)

Similarly the Prophet (sws) said:

Do not confirm what the People of the Book report (from their sacred books for they have failed to preserve it) and do not reject it either (for its antecedent may not have yet manifested to you).⁵¹

It would be right to think that an attempt to interpret the Qur'ānic text in the light of the earlier divine books may cause us misconstrue the text because these books have been exposed to manipulation and have been changed and corrupted. I do not advocate the view that the Qur'ān should be interpreted in the light of these scriptures in the first place. What I maintain is that the verses of the Qur'ān should be pondered in the light of their parallels by an expert of its language. Then if he finds something in the Scriptures which is akin to the statement of the Holy Qur'ān in meaning and style of expression, or is closely related with a Qur'ānic assertion, then pondering over both and comparing their style of expression may help us understand the eloquence of the Holy Qur'ān. Apart from this, if, in a certain case we prefer one of the various meanings of a plurivocal Qur'ānic word or expression we may grow more confident in our interpretation once it is corroborated by the earlier revelations. We will also, then, become clear over the meaning and signification of certain things mentioned in the earlier books which have been unclear to us. This will also help the scholars among the followers of the earlier revelations understand the

51 *Bukhārī* No: 4215

veracity of the last revelation of God and will assist our scholars appreciate the veracity of their book. It will, in turn, create a positive relation between the followers of the Qur'ān and that of the other Scriptures and will eventually open the ways to guidance for the latter.

Quite the contrary, we find that many Muslims make a mock at the verses of the Gospels. One can only complain to God of such an unbecoming behavior. Muslims may not ignore the fact that they have been allowed to argue with others in a beautiful and decent manner. The Almighty has strictly forbidden using invective language for others. We see that this attitude from our side has only widened the gulf of difference between the adherents of the two faiths and has, as a result, made it much difficult for the People of the Book to submit to the truth. If the Holy Qur'ān contains clear and plain truth we need not worry. Truth always prevails. Light is bound to remove darkness. We cannot think of a more sound reasoning for us than to put both the sources before us equally and give the choice to the people to select what is evidently right and authentic. Those gifted with pure nature and sound understanding will not find it difficult to decide which one to choose. Concerning people with this quality the Holy Qur'ān says:

Those who hear a saying and follow the best of it. (39:18)

The above mentioned facts force me to find out what the Old and the New Testaments contain. I have pursued this course with pure and true intentions and I have complete faith in God. I resort to Him alone for help through the path of virtue.

A separate introduction will be devoted to the discussion over the factors which caused the Christians go astray and erroneously interpret their sacred texts. The whole edifice of the Christian theology has been founded on such erroneous interpretations. These issues include the meaning and explanation of the words 'ab' (father for God) and 'ibn' (son for Jesus), transformation of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus, Jesus' statement that God will make him sit at His right hand, that he will descend among the army of angels to judge the people on the Last Day, that he will send *parcletus* to

instruct them in details of the Sharī'ah and that the generation of his time will observe with their very eyes what he had threatened them with. The real meaning and manifestation of all these references, with the help of God, will be explained.⁵²

Univocity of the Qur'ānic Text

The Holy Qur'ān makes the intended meanings of its text absolutely clear. Every single verse gives a single definitive message. It is only the lack of research and study of a verse on the part of the exegetes that makes it seem subject to various interpretations. The commentators who have ascribed multiple interpretations to the earlier authorities have, in fact, tried to record everything that reached them from the preceding generations. They did not mean to say that the verse definitely allowed various interpretations. They have left upon us to choose from these various interpretations after careful analysis. It is, therefore, not allowable that we learn and commit to memory all that has been said in this regard, treating the sound and the weak equally, and let ourselves wander in the mazes of ignorance and doubt. Imām Razī has, in his commentary, recorded five significations of the word “*fitnah*” (persecution) occurring in the verse 191 of *Sūrah Baqarah*.⁵³ Obviously all of them could not have been intended by the author. Therefore, in my *tafsīr*, I have written only what I found right after due research. The great scholars of the past have always adopted this method. Variety of interpretations, in fact, leaves a serious student of the book of God wondering what to take as true and what to discard as spurious. Sometimes people do not even put the arguments in

52. The author was working on a separate booklet on the issue entitled “*al-iklīl fī sharḥ al-injīl*” (*The Garland of the Commentary on Injīl*) which has unfortunately been left unfinished. (Iṣlāḥī)

53. The referred to verse says: *fitnah* (persecution) is even worse than killing. (2:191) Imām Rāzī has mentioned five possible meanings of the word *fitnah* in the verse: disbelief in God, any kind of test and trial, the everlasting punishment destined for the disbelievers on account of their disbelief, subjection of the Muslims by the disbelievers, by denying them the right to visit the house of God and *irtidād* (apostasy). (Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, 142-3.)

favor of such interpretations and only heap up of the sayings what they can get to. I believe that no greater form of injustice to the interpreters of the past and their interpretations than this can be imagined. I have not straightforwardly borrowed the meanings and applications of the verses from the commentaries of the scholars of the past. Rather I have pondered over the verses in the light of the context taking help from their parallels in the Holy Qur'ān. Thus after being clear on the meanings of the verses I have looked for corroboration in the earlier exegetical works. Sometimes I found exactly similar interpretations ascribed to the earlier scholars and sometimes my understanding happened to be quite near to what they held. Many times I was forced to abandon my interpretation after research while at some other difficult instances I kept the matter under consideration for long. However, I ascribe these difficulties to lack of understanding and knowledge on my part and to my tendency to stick to the erroneous interpretations.

It sounds strange that one can get confused on the Holy Qur'ān, a book that claims to be a clear and manifest message. However, if we consider the multilayered darkness of heedlessness and defilement which has polluted our minds we may be able to see the reason of this confusion. Many a clear indubitable facts remain unnoticed if one approaches them being wrapped in intellectual darkness. That God exists, that He is one and unique, that mind rules over body, that there is going to be a Judgment Day, are indubitable facts to any rational person. Yet many doubt and deny even existence of God and the Last Day let alone less conspicuous realities. Soul too, like a body, can suffer from certain ailments. Once it is afflicted most obvious facts can get blurred. Facts are addressed and communicated to sound minds. An ailing mind cannot be expected to grasp them. That sun gives light and that sugar is sweet are empirical facts acknowledged by all sound minds. But a blind, squint and heavily fevered person cannot perceive them like a normal human being. The Almighty has, made it clear in the Holy Qur'ān that all men may not acknowledge the truth equally. While referring to the characteristics of the Holy Qur'ān the Almighty says:

At another place it has been said:

When you recite the Qur'ān (to them), We put a thick veil between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter. (17:45)

This theme has been referred to in some other places too. Socrates, in one of his remark, says that the human soul knows everything but it is only that, at times, forgetfulness overtakes it. Mawlānā Rūm has said, “do not interpret the Qur'ān according to your desire, rather accord your self with what the Holy Qur'ān says.” Khawājah Ḥāfiẓ says, “the greatest veil is your *nafs* (self); remove it.” It is every important to consider what these great sages meant by these sayings.

I believe that the Qur'ān has communicated its purport in most demonstrative and most appropriate style. Wherever, it departs from customary usage it does so in order to point towards a specific meaning. I will discuss this issue in a separate introduction to this book wherein I will try to elaborate the principles which, if properly applied, remove the possibility of multiple interpretation of a Qur'ānic verse.⁵⁴ I am also convinced of the fact that the *mutashābih* (allegorical verses) and the *hurūf al muqatta'āt* (the abbreviated letters) are no less clear. I will deal with them in a separate introduction.

Correspondence and Sequence

A military commander arranges his army in various orders that reflect wisdom. However, only the expert in the field can understand the strategic wisdom involved in such an ordering.

54. The author has treated the principles of interpretation in one of his unpublished work. (Iṣlāḥī) (This work has been published since long under the title: *at-Takmil fī Uṣūl al-Ta'wīl*, (A'zamgarh, India: Al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 1338/1968)

Commoners can only get to know the use of such meaningful ordering when the army set thus eventually emerges successful in a battle. Similarly, the Holy Qur'ān expresses a single theme in diverse ways employing diverse styles. It is only the experts in stylistics who can understand the beauty and wisdom behind these diverse styles and can grasp rhetorical purpose met in the process.

Some of the commentators of the Holy Qur'ān hold that this phenomenon serves to make the Qur'ān an inimitable and matchless discourse. We believe that inimitability is not the basic objective, the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to achieve. Rather it is a necessary element of the discourse. We believe that every creature of God in the universe, from an atom to the firmament encompassing us, is an irreproducible miracle. Yet none of these things has been created to demonstrate His miraculous power. Primarily they reveal profound wisdom of the Almighty. That none other than God can produce such miraculous speech as the Qur'ān is, is independently true. It proves that it is the word of God.

The Holy Qur'ān discusses an issue as '*umūd*⁵⁵ of a *sūrah* at one place and makes it a secondary reference at another. Here a matter is alluded to briefly and there it is fairly detailed. At one occasion something follows its pair and at another time precedes it; sometimes it comes alone and at another accompanies its opposite; at one time it is paired with one thing and at another with another. A single theme has been discussed in different *sūrahs* in an entirely different order. Obviously when a single theme is discussed in different ways it will no more be difficult for one to identify and fully grasp it. If it remains concealed at one instance it reveals itself at another. The Almighty has referred to these qualities of the Qur'ān in the following words:

55. '*Umūd* (literally pillar, column) has been used here as a term. Mustansir Mir, in his doctoral thesis, *the Coherence in the Qur'ān*, has defined the term, based on a thorough study of Farāhī's treatment of the word, as follows: "In a word, the '*umūd* is hermeneutically significant theme characterized by centrality, concreteness, distinctiveness, and universality." (Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān* p. 39).

See how We expound the verses in various ways that they may understand. (6:46)

Each type of arrangement reflects special wisdom. Here we will briefly discuss various ways of ordering schemes adopted in the Holy Qur'ān and will discuss four important aspects of the ordering of the themes and interconnection of the things mentioned in the Book.

First of all an exegete has to ponder over the 'umūd of the *sūrah*. Each *sūrah* has a single 'umūd. However, it may cover a number of issues. For example 'umūd of *Sūrah Ḥujurāt* (33) is condemnation of bad morals. It is a distinctly single theme permeating the entire *sūrah* though we may not point out a single word in the *sūrah* expressing this theme. The *sūrah* covers moral degradedness of thoughts, sayings and actions. The *sūrah*, therefore, forbids raising voice in front of the Prophet (sws), calling him the way common men call one another, disturbing him without reasonable excuses and without waiting for a proper time, and attacking some group or individuals on unfounded reports. Then the *sūrah* goes on to exhort the believers on making peace between two warring groups of Muslims, siding by the oppressed against the oppressor of the two, and deciding between them with justice. It stops Muslims from scoffing at, defaming and nicknaming each other, proscribes showing ill-will, mistrust and curiosity, and condemns backbiting, racial pride and self-righteousness. Finally it forbids Muslims from indicating to the Prophet (sws) that he should appreciate their conversion to Islam as a favor to him.

The above example makes it clear that a single theme has multiple facets. The beauty of the coherence in the *sūrah* will be discussed in the commentary.

'Umūd of a *sūrah* may not be the most conspicuous issue discussed in it. In other words central theme is not marked by its conspicuousness rather by its comprehensive treatment in the *sūrah*. It is a unifying thread in the *sūrah*. It, however, assumes the status of most clearly explained theme in the unit. Take for example *āyah nūr* (the verse of light) in *Sūrah Nūr* (24). Though the verse shines out like the sun in a clear day yet it does not form 'umūd of the *sūrah*. It has rather been discussed as a subjective and secondary theme. The 'umūd of the *sūrah* is

teaching best conduct to women in their social role. That is the reason the Holy Prophet (sws) commanded that women should be taught this *sūrah* so that they learn their duties and rights.

The above discussion deals with the *'umūd* of the *sūrahs*. Now we turn to themes which are discoursed in *sūrahs* at a secondary level. Such themes usually corroborate of an argument or provide an example. Sometimes both of these things jointly preface discussions following them. They may sometimes generalize the relevance of a theme or specify it to a certain group, answer a question arising out of the current discussion, serve as a preface to the forthcoming discussions, mention some point of wisdom, if suitable for the occasion, explain the preceding theme, exhort upon it through threats of retribution and promise of reward or by condemning or praising it, further detail it, or praise and exalt God on suitable occasions, the basic spirit of the Qur'ān.

The fifth of these issues requires further detail. We will see how a single theme is paired with one thing at one place and with another at a different place. When those who believe that the book of God contains unparalleled wisdom in its order observe that two different issues lie together they try to understand their mutual kinship. This quest surely leads them to some subtle points of wisdom which do not reveal usually themselves to those who are not used to critical and thorough analysis of a text. Everything has multiple aspects. It is related to one thing in one aspect and to another in another. We see that *ṣalāh* is related to *ḥajj* in many ways. Both of these rituals serve as a reminder of God; both are worship rituals involving physical exercise; both are related to the house of God. The Holy Prophet (sws) said, “*ṭawwāf* (circumambulation of the *Ka'bah*) is a form of *ṣalāh*.”

Keeping these various kinds of interrelationship of *ḥajj* and *ṣalāh* in mind, we turn to see how the latter is related to fasting. Both of these worship rituals are beyond spatial considerations in that both can be offered anywhere; both are based on perseverance. We see that in the *Sharī'ah* of the earlier Prophets (sws) staying silent was a necessary condition of the ritual of fasting. Seen in this perspective, *ṣalāh* is the inner and hidden fasting of *nafs* (the self).

Turning to the interrelationship of *ṣalāh* and *zakāh* we see that

both of them reflect contrast; complement each other; have similar roots in that *ṣalāh* is based on one's turning to God in love and fear and *zakāh* is the product of one's inclination towards human beings in love and affection. Leave any of the two, moral perfection cannot be attained. Both share the same spirit that is compassion. This leads us to the conclusion that the basis of religion is love and internal compassion. This, we believe, is the reason God declared that His first and all encompassing attribute is compassion. He says:

My mercy encompasses everything. (7:156)

Religion basically is to adopt a moral conduct imitating the attributes of God. God has made man His vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth. Thus a thorough reflection on the kinship of *ṣalāh* (the prayer) with other worship rituals led us to grasp the essence of the religion and the spirit of the *Sharī'ah*. This is also clear in the teachings of the Torah and the Gospels. (For detail go through the discussion: Principle Teachings of the Holy Qur'ān)

Now we take another example. In *Sūrah Mā'idah* (5) Almighty Allah explained what is allowable for us to eat. Next to this command, He told us who we can marry. Then He detailed and explained the ritual of ablution. We can divide these discussions in two different kinds, a) basic issues and b) necessary conditions. The conditions consist of the means of achieving purity. Slaughtering animals purifies them for us to eat, dower and protection purify women to be taken in marriage and *wuḍū* purifies the body of a believer for *ṣalāh*. God has himself guided us to the wisdom of these commands. In the Holy Qur'ān these commands have been followed by the saying:

God does not want to create any inconvenience for you. He, on the contrary, intends to purify you and to complete His favor upon you. (4:6)

As regards the basic issues, the Almighty has mentioned three things, edibles pure (and allowable for us), women which are

pure (and allowable for us) and the *ṣalāh*. This world is a world of existence and non-existence. An individual, his specie and his spirit are three distinct realms of existence which are protected from extinction by food, *nikāh* and *ṣalāh* respectively.

Food and *nikāh* are interrelated with each other in that the prohibitions concerning both of these matters have been specified. Consequently we find that the verses dealing with them follow common style of expression:

Forbidden to you are your mothers, your daughters. (4:23)

Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, and the flesh of swine. (5:3)

Ṣalāh and *nikāh* have another aspect of mutual affinity. *Nikāh* saves us from promiscuity while *ṣalāh* guards us against indecency and evil. God Almighty says:

Ṣalāh fends off lewdness and evil. (29:45)

At the heart of this interrelation between the two in this place is their position as tools of purification. There is still another interrelation between them as alluded to in *Sūrah Baqarah* (2). God has given certain allowances concerning both. God Almighty says:

.....

Guard strictly your prayers, [.....] If you are in danger, then offer your prayer on foot or while riding..... (2:238-9)

This alleviates the condition of offering the *ṣalāh* while standing. Same is the case of *nikāh* (marriage). We have been obliged to keep the marriage union working. In extreme cases of unease, however, the *Sharī'ah* allows separation. This is another manifestatoin of affinity between the two acts i.e. *ṣalāh* and *nikāh*. Thus we come to know that every order and arrangement

produces beautiful panorama.

***Sūrah* as a Unit**

By this discussion I aim to establish that each *sūrah* is a well-structured unit. It is only lack of consideration and analysis on our part that the *sūrahs* seem disjointed and incoherent. Every student of the Holy Qur'ān can notice that the Book contains short as well as long *sūrahs*. Each *sūrah* imparts a specific message as its central theme. The completion of this theme marks the end of the *sūrah*. If there were no such specific conclusion intended to be dealt with in each *sūrah* there would be no need to divide the Qur'ān in *sūrahs*. Rather the whole Qur'ān would be a single *sūrah*. We know that the *sūrahs* are not equal in length. There are longer *sūrahs* and shorter ones. Had God not intended dealing a specific issue in each *sūrah* in well-coherent fashion He would not have threaded the verses in a single unifying thread. He would have, on the contrary, scattered everything casually whereby some of the *surāhs* could have comprised of a single line.

We see that a set of verses has been placed together and named *sūrah* the way a city is built with a wall erected round it. A single wall must contain a single city in it. What is the use of a wall encompassing different cities? It needs to be appreciated that every *sūrah* does not discuss a distinct issue which no other *sūrah* touches upon. The contents of the last two *sūrahs* are remarkably similar yet they are not considered one *sūrah*. Both of these have always been considered independent and distinct units. Similarly, *Sūrah Takwīr* (the foldig up, 81), *Sūrah Inshiqāq* (The Rending, 84), *Sūrah Mursalāt* (Those that are sent forth, 77), *Sūrah Nazi'āt* (Those that snatch away, 79) and *Zāriyāt* (The Winds, 51) address similar issues. However, their structure as well as style of expression is completely different.

The Qur'ān chalednged the Quraysh to compose ten chapters of [the quality of] the Qur'ānic *sūrahs*. Quraysh were not able to meet this challenge. Later they were challenged to try composing at least one. They were, however, never asked to compose something less than a *sūrah*. This challenge implied all the *sūrahs*, longer or shorter, but it no way implied a given lenght of discourse lacking qualities of a *sūrah*. Some of the Muslim

exegetes have missed this fact. They thought that the Quraysh were challenged to compose a number of verses of the length of a *sūrah*. Having assumed this, they had to go a long way to see what aspect of inimitability was required of such a quantity of Qur'ānic verses. For example the verse (forbidden to you are your mothers, your daughters (4:23) is longer than *Sūrah Kawthar* (108). This made them wonder what aspect of inimitability was involved in this length of discourse which was more than a *sūrah* but not a *sūrah* in its form. In fact the Holy Qur'ān did not challenge them to carve a discourse equal to or more than a *sūrah* but a *sūrah* as a unit containing a meaningful well-ordered discourse. All the jinn and the humans can never succeed in composing a *sūrah* of the same grandeur even one smaller than *Sūrah Kawthar* (108). These facts lead us to conclude that by a *sūrah*, in the Qur'ānic challenge to the Quraysh, God meant a well-structured coherent discourse. The length of such a discourse was not relevant. Just as the common words like tree, plants and animals etc are applied to a class of things disregarding differences in the members of such a class, the word *sūrah* covers all *sūrahs*, shorter and longer. Some of the earlier scholars expressed similar views corroborating our thesis. 'Allāmah Suyūṭī writes:

Ju'ayrī has said, "A *sūrah* is defined as a set of Qur'ānic verses consisting of a preface and a conclusion. The least amount of verses in a *sūrah* is three."⁵⁶

I, however, define a *sūrah* as a set of verses which is a well-knit discourse dealing with a specific theme. This set of verses must contain a preface, a central theme and a conclusion. A *sūrah*, therefore, must contain at least three verses.

A little study of the shorter *sūrahs* reveals that they peer the longer ones in that they are equally well-knit coherent chapters. The shorter *sūrahs* contain all the elements of beautiful ordering and well-structuredness, the characteristics of the longer ones. Therefore, to hold that the shorter *sūrahs* like *Sūrah Kawthar* (108), *Sūrah Mā'ūn* (107) and *Sūrah 'Aṣr* (103) do not contain any

56. Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 192.

fine coherence would be wrong. Understanding innerconnectedness of the shorter *sūrahs* can greatly be helpful in deciphering the coherence in the longer *sūrahs*. Similarly some of the longer *sūrahs* contain passages which are obviously well-knit. Only a dull minded person can fail to notice it. For example first twenty verses of *Sūrah Baqarah* (2) are manifestly well-knit. When a student ponders over such passages and smaller *sūrahs* he develops the ability to discover finer points of interconnection in other *sūrahs*. I have come to understand the coherence in the Qur'ān in this very manner. I am sure that any person who intends to seriously ponder over the Holy Qur'ān in this manner should be able to understand the coherence in the Qur'ān. God “increases the guidance of those who adopt the right path.”⁵⁷

The Holy Qur'ān and the Previous Scriptures on the Divine Commands and Historical Narratives

A traveler does not need to turn to stars for direction in broad daylight. Similarly after the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān Muslims abandoned seeking guidance from the earlier Scriptures for these mix truth with falsehood. However, the Scriptures equal the Holy Qur'ān, in that the latter is one of God's revelations. The individual who brought it is a member of the community of the Prophets and Messengers of God. All Muslims, from Adam to us, inspite of the great number of the Prophets sent in different times and regions form a single *ummah* following the same religion. This makes it imperative for us to know the teachings of the earlier books. A study of these books can yield great benefits. It will help us appreciate the excellence of the Qur'ān over the previous Scriptures which, in turn, will lead us to thank God for blessing us with the unparalleled Book. It will also help us discern the points lost upon the commentators of the later generations of Muslims which made it impossible for them to get to the true purport of certain Qur'ānic passages. This will also avail us with sound arguments against the People of the

57.

Book. This last point independently yields great benefits.

With the earlier Scriptures already there, the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to serve two basic purposes.

First, parts of the divine religion which were not yet revealed were divulged.

Second, it clarified the religious issues which the followers of the earlier Scriptures had forgotten. Many matters were disputed among them and the Holy Qur'ān decided such differences. Some of the matters were no longer clear to them and they lost the right course. The Qur'ān revealed the true nature of such matters. Most importantly, they had manipulated and altered many parts of the divine revelation. The Holy Qur'ān corrected such manipulations. The Almighty says:

Woe be to those who write the book with their own hands and then claim that it is from God seeking to earn trivial benefits!
(2:79)

These are the basic things which called for a fresh divine revelation. Besides fulfilling these purposes the Holy Qur'ān helps us remember God, propagate His teachings and disseminate His message; a basic characteristic of all the divine Books.

Since the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to fulfill a specific purpose, it does not discuss but teachings of the highest value, leaving out the details of narratives, dispensable explanations of the divine commandments and events of micro-history. The general addressees of the Qur'ān were fully aware of these things. Repeating such things would have been futile and wearisome for such an audience. Therefore, the historical narratives the Holy Qur'ān discusses have been put very cogently either in order to provide precedence or a historical allusion (*talmīh*) or to unveil any hideous cheating by the People of the Book. Similarly it has also not dealt with the well-known religious practices the humans were obligated to carry out except for explicating those aspects which still needed to be completed and perfected.

Believers in the call of the Holy Prophet (sws), previously, were either the People of the Book or those who had intermingled with them. The latter kind too was, owing to their acquaintance with the former, aware of the teachings of the earlier books. They did not find it difficult to understand the Qur'ānic passages which alluded to the things mentioned in the earlier books leaving certain details. They noticed the gulf of difference between the Qur'ānic style of expression and that employed in the earlier books in spite of the unity of purport. It raised the status of the Holy Qur'ān in their eyes. Regarding such audience of the Holy Qur'ān the Almighty says:

When they listen to what has been revealed to the Apostle, you see their eyes fill with tears as they recognize its truth. They spontaneously say, "Lord, we believe. Count us among the witnesses." (5:83)

The above discussion leads to the following conclusions:

a) Errors in the earlier Scriptures should be determined in the light of the Holy Qur'ān. Difficulties in deciphering the meaning of the complex passages of the previous scriptures should also be explained in the light of the last revelation. The only way for the People of the Book to learn the truth is to follow the final revelation of God.

b) Since the Holy Qur'ān is a completely authentic and secure word of God it will serve as final decisive word where the earlier books differ with it on certain historical facts.

c) Those having full exposure to the history of the divine revelations, starting from the first Prophet to the last, and thus having a clear understanding of the gradual divulgence of the *Sharī'ah* of God to mankind, will certainly be able to see clearly excellence of the Muslim *ummah*.

d) The contradictory *isra'īliyyāt*, intermixing truth with falsehood, will be explained away. Those of us who have been on error because of such narratives will see light.

e) The People of the Book will be able to learn that the Holy Qur'ān does not draw upon these books rather it removes errors

they are replete with and guides their adherents out of the labyrinths of assumptions and conjectures to the highway leading to the truth.

f) Many of the Qur'ānic verses which refer to the Torah but the Muslim scholars take them to be referring to the Qur'ān will be correctly understood. The following two verses are examples:

Any verse which We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar one. (2:106)

Every Prophet or Messenger that We sent before you, whenever desired something Satan interpolated with his desires. But God cancels the whispers of Satan and establishes His commands firm. (22:52)

Before concluding this discussion, I want to discuss a point which the Christians usually put before Muslims in order to deceive them, dubbing it as the most manifest argument against Muslims' stance. They maintain that the Holy Qur'ān at one place clearly requires from the Muslims that they believe in the Gospels. Granted this, they say, the Qur'ān contradicts itself when, on any other occasion, it negates any of the evangelical statements, something it often commits. This, they assume, provides them with an opportunity to invite the Muslims to have faith in whatever falsehood they have inserted in their book. In this effort they usually present proofs from the Qur'ānic verses some of which are produced below.....⁵⁸

58. The author has left this discussion unattended. Perhaps he intended to discuss the verses which state that one of the characteristics of the Qur'ān is that it has come down confirming the Torah and the Gospels (*musaddiqallimā bayna yadayhī*). If the expression *muṣaddiqallimā bayna yadayhī* (confirming the earlier revelations), is interpreted the way most of the exegetes do, it validates the point raised by the Christians. We believe that the phrase whenever it refers to a characteristic of the Qur'ān does not mean that the Qur'ān confirms the earlier revelations

Length of *Sūrahs*

In one of the discussions above, I have mentioned that the shorter *sūrahs* of the Holy Qur'ān peer the longer ones in their grandeur, wisdom and beautiful structure. This brief point requires elaboration which is offered here.

Some of the earlier scholars of the *ummah* have maintained that some of the shorter *sūrahs* equal one third of the Holy Qur'ān. Some others they characterized as “the completing ones”. Sufyān bin ‘Uyaynah, for example, says that *Sūrah Fātiḥah* complements *ṣalāh* because it provides complete knowledge. Imām Shāfi‘ī has said that *Sūrah ‘Aṣr* alone would have sufficed for guidance. Those endowed with understanding do not fail to appreciate this fact regarding at least some of the shorter *sūrahs*. A full survey and deep appreciation of the entire Qur'ān would reveal that shorter a *sūrah* in content the more meaningful it is. In their small size they contain great wisdom such that to treat them justly would not be possible for any who sets upon himself such a task.

The Holy Qur'ān puts large wisdom in smaller *sūrahs* for the following reasons:

1. First and perhaps the most important factor behind this practice is that the overwhelming human need for the religious truths and its importance in human life demands that its fundamental principles are always kept alive and fresh in the minds of the believers. This in turn demands that such principles are put in such comprehensive and cogent expressions that they become part of one's language like proverbs. They must be easy to express by tongues in direct proportion to their weight and meaningfulness in the mind. Such principles, if expressed in lengthy discussions, are easily lost upon the audience.

2. In the early stages of propagation, any teachings do not appeal and attract people much. At this stage, minds are not

including the changes and innovations introduced into them by their adherents. It, on the contrary, means that it has been sent down as a confirmation of the prophecies regarding the advent of the last messenger of God contained in the earlier scriptures. Some of these prophecies have survived the interpolation of the Jews and the Christians. (Iṣlāḥī)

usually receptive for the minute details of the directives commanded them. Nor are they interested in elaborated discussions. This entails that at this early stage, they are taught only that which can be briefly expressed in cogent, compact wise sayings. Once these seeds of cogent and comprehensive expressions sprout up, they are watered by the required details for, by that time, hearts and minds of the audience grow tenacious and ready to assimilate more knowledge.

3. The Arabs were very fond of rhymed and rhythmical speech. To them, terseness and brevity were necessary characteristics of a fine discourse. Therefore, in the earlier phase, the Holy Qur'ān attracted them by employing their favorite style of expression.

4. The soothsayers of Arabia usually composed their cadences in terse rhythmical prose. Arabs would give attentive ears to beautiful speech of the soothsayers. They would consider this mastery of expression a supernatural phenomenon. To them such beautiful expressions really gushed forth from some supernatural source. The Qur'ān adopted similar style of expression in the beginning so that they did not find it strange.

As regards the greatness of the shorter *sūrah*s in terms of their being loaded and pregnant discourse⁵⁹

Fundamental Teachings of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ānic teachings can be divided into two major categories, beliefs and practices.

Practices are further divided in three sub-categories: personal, familial and social.

Similarly the beliefs can also be divided in three sub-categories: unicity of God, prophethood and accountability in the afterlife along with the line of arguments for each.

Practices include 1) *ṣalāh* (the prayer) and its cognate *hajj* (pilgrimage); 2) *zakāh* and its branch *ṣawm* (fasting); 3) good

59. This all important discussion too could not be completed by the author. However, a careful study of Farāhī's exegesis of the shorter *surāh*s reveals that even one of the shortest ones, *Al-Kawthar*, is an ocean of meaning. (Iṣlāhī)

moral behavior, which consists of doing pious acts, adhering to good norms and avoiding *munkar* (the evil), its opposite; 4) witnessing to the truth; 5) upholding justice and equity and 6) helping God and His cause. The first four practices are personal in nature even when they are carried out communally.

The issues of free will and predetermination, and *wahdat al-wujūd* (concept of unity of being or pantheism) are directly related to and come under *tawhīd* (unicity of God). Concept of intercession comes under *tawhīd* and prophethood. Belief in resurrection covers the concepts of reward and punishment, and Heaven and Hell.

Laws of inheritance, marriage contracts and the related issue and other social affairs fall under the heading of upholding justice and fairness.

Helping the cause of Allah includes establishing the institution of *khilāfah*, political cannon of Islam, and *Jihād*.

Another fact that needs to be mentioned is that all the practices are rooted in ethics. Love, commitment, perseverance, patience, God-consciousness, justice and fairness are values which engender good acts taught by Islam.

Many of the above mentioned beliefs and practices are mutually interwoven and rooted in one another. Some of these teachings of the Book of God require detail. I will explain my understanding of how the Holy Qur'ān treats them.

Jihād:

Many of the commentator of the Qur'ān among the earlier generations held that the verse of fighting repeals many Qur'ānic verses which enjoin wise counsel and exhortations to the non-believers and the polytheists.⁶⁰ Contrarily, some theologians of our time view that the verse did not abrogate the directives of good will. Islam only permits defensive war, they maintain. All the battles the Holy Prophet (sws) fought were defensive in nature. They were not initiated by the Messenger himself. The wars fought by the Successors of the Holy Prophet (sws) can therefore be best termed monarchical aggressions. They can no way be termed *Jihād*.

I believe that both of these views are untenable. The truth is

60. Reference is towards the Holy Qur'ān 2:190-94.

quite the contrary. God sent the Prophet Muhammad (sws) in fulfillment of the promise He contracted with Abraham. The Prophet Muhammad (sws) was thus burdened with the responsibility put on Abraham as mentioned in the following verse:

We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael to keep our House clean for those who circumambulate it, use it as a retreat, and kneel and prostrate themselves. (2:125)

It needs to be appreciated that the Prophet Muhammad (sws) was the last Prophet of God. The religion he taught had to reign supreme over all other religions. In order to fulfill this divine scheme, the Prophet was first directed to preach the religion of God to the people around him so that they might adopt his teachings and improve their religious and moral behavior. He was not allowed to wage war until he had explained his message fully and had established the veracity of the religion of God to the extent that no one was left with a valid excuse to reject it. It was only when the Prophet (sws) had fulfilled this duty of preaching and explaining the religion of God that he was commanded to liberate the house of God, the *Ka'bah* from the hold of the polytheists, and to revive the religion of Abraham in peninsular Arabia. He was allowed to use force if needed for the fulfillment of this objective. This permission of use of force, it must be noted, was granted after he had migrated to Madīnah. This point is important to consider, because, *Jihād*, before migration, unless it is in self-defense, undoubtedly becomes a form of coercion and nuisance in the land. *Jihād* was, therefore, not required only in self defense rather the Almighty commanded fighting for the cause of liberating the house of God from the polytheistic powers and reviving the religion of Abraham in Arabia.

This *Jihād*, as is obvious, was to be launched against the children of Ishmael. The other nations whom the Muslims fought were subjected to similar use of force in order to establish justice and uproot iniquity and oppression from the earth. The People of the Book and, with them, other nations were left with a choice to adopt any religion they wanted. They were free to follow any

other religion but they had to pay *jizyah* (tax). The Ismaelites were, however, not left with any such choice. They had to choose between embracing the religion of God and death. This, it should be reiterated, was enforced after the truth was unveiled to them in its ultimate form and they were left with no legitimate excuse to reject it. Truth was explained to them in this manner by an individual from among themselves. The Prophet (sws) was their own heart and tongue. He was not an alien imposed from the outside over them. He was a sound exuberant tree rising in the middle of their natural grove of palms. He was born among them; grown clean in the same environment. He assimilated all the good that which the environment offered and shunned all the evil it was marred with. He was like pure oil ready to burn even if not touched by the fire. He was hub of their qualities, a criterion for them to choose from good and evil, and a firm heart to help decide upon the serious affairs. By guiding him to the truth, the Almighty Allah in fact made the entire *ummah* of the Holy Prophet (sws) of which he was a miniature, and for which he occupied the stead of a heart, to submit before Him. Once the heart surrenders all the limbs of the body have to submit with it. This issue will further be elaborated upon under the discussion on prophethood.

Considering the issue in another approach brings us to the same conclusion i.e. Arabs of the time were required to accept his call. The Quraysh were the religious leaders of the Arabs. The family of Muṭṭalib held the seat of leadership among the Quraysh. The right then naturally accrued to the Prophet Muhammad (sws), a member of the family. Hence the Prophet's (sws) saying:

I am son of Abdul Muṭṭalib. I am a prophet not an imposter.⁶¹

He was calling the Arabs to the *millah* (religion) of Abraham, which they already acknowledged. He was calling people to fulfill the contract God had sworn to Abraham. They had no point to reject him. In this perspective whatever he preached was

61. Bukhārī, No: 2709

right. The rejecters and the opponents of this call were the ones who rebelled and who created nuisance in the land.

Jihād is basically launched against oppression and nuisance. Those who take up arms for this purpose must cleanse themselves of this evil first of all. They must not bear even a trace of such hideous crimes. Unless a ruler, who intends to launch *Jihād*, and his subject themselves, do not follow justice and fairness they have no right to force others observe these values. Islamic *Sharī'ah* does not allow us to wage war against our own rulers. If such an operation is deemed indispensable one has to first migrate to some other land and launch the offensive after having settled there. The story of Abraham and some other details regarding *hijrah* (migration in the cause of God) make this fact clear. This is further corroborated by the events of the life history of the Prophet Muhammad (sww). The reason for this is that *Jihād*, if not conducted by a sovereign power with full administrative control of the country on the offensive, is mere disruption and nuisance. It adds but to chaos and disorder in the land.

Jihād may not be waged until after this sovereign entity has acquired enough power to launch a successful offensive. The story of Prophet Shu'ayb in the Holy Qur'ān contains arguments for this.

If a party among you has believed in the message I have been sent with, while another has disbelieved, then be patient until God shall judge between us. (7:87)

With the above mentioned conditions, all three fulfilled, *Jihād* becomes an obligations on Muslims till the Day of Judgment. The religion of God does not allow coercing people in religious matters and creating disorder in the land. But testifying to the truth, propagating it and entering into a dialogue with the opponents in a wise and effective manner is a universal obligation.

The Qur'ānic term *ma'rūf* refers to what was welcomed as virtuous by the Arabs of the time of the Prophet (sws) and its opposite *munkar* signifies what they detested as evil. The Arabs of pre-Islamic age were not animals living in a jungle destitute of any sense of good and evil. Their literature outshines the literature produced by the Romans and the Indians in their most enlightened periods. To have an unbiased understanding of what good moral values the Arabs cherished one has to make an impartial study of their literature. We must discard the wrongs of those of the Muslim historians who have transgressed against history and have depicted a very cruel picture of the Arabs of the time. The importance the pre-Islamic Arabia attached to moral values and moral uprightness in a person, is best depicted in the fact that they gave 'Imr al-Qays, a king poet, owing to obvious elements of inciting drunkenness and lewdness in his poetry, the appellation of *al-malik al ḍalīl* (the errant king) in spite of his status as a great poet and chief of his tribe.

At this point I intend to present some specimen of their poetry in an appendix,⁶² to make it clear that they recognized as good and virtuous what is universally recognized as such. The Holy Qur'ān only complemented their moral values; it did not fundamentally change them. This is the reason the virtuous among them were immediately attracted to the Holy Qur'ān. The opponents of the Messenger were two kinds, evil, recalcitrant factions of the society and the ones who saw him threatening their political and religious leadership. Just as the Jews, owing to the obstinacy and envy for Jesus, opposed him, Umayyah bin Abī al-Ṣallaṭ and the like obstinately opposed the Prophet Muhammad (sws) even though they claimed that they followed the creed of Abraham.

Another source of determining *ma'rūf* and *munkar* is the pure soul of the person of the Prophet (sws) who, by the dint of his position as a divine guide, clarifies to the followers the status of the issues not dealt with in the divine revelation. This is part of his duty as a messenger and prophet. God commands him to

62. Imām Farāhī could not include the referred to discussion to these introductions. He has, however, alluded to some useful facts in some of his other works especially in *Jamharah al-Balāghah* (A Manual of Rhetoric), (al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, A'zamgarh, India). (Iṣlāḥī)

teach people the *ma'rūf* and to stop them from *munkar*. His *ummah* is required to follow whatever *ma'rūf* he commands them and refrain from whatever *munkar* he forbids them. Remnants of the earlier revelations also served as a guide. Examples of such remnants of the *Sharī'ah* of Abraham include *hajj*, ritual sacrifice and *ṣalāh*. These practices were not introduced by the People of the Book in the pre-Islamic Arabia.⁶³

Another worth considering point is that, in the beginning, the Almighty Allah did not reveal the specifics and details of the religious practices. Only well-known and established religious teachings were required to be followed for example *ṣalāh*, *zakāh*, remembering God, showing compassion to orphans and maintaining excellent moral behavior. However, once details of a prescribed matter were revealed, this fresh divine guidance assumed the status of original source in that particular matter and the previous concept of *ma'rūf* was abandoned.

Sometimes the Almighty commanded to follow *ma'rūf* in a particular matter. Later on some part of that particular matter was detailed in a fresh revelation. The part this divine explanation covered was then to be followed abandoning the previous concept of *ma'rūf* in that regard. The rest, which the revelation did not take up, was still governed by the previous concept of *ma'rūf*. The example of a matter partly qualified by the divine revelation and partly by the existing concept of *ma'rūf* is the case of bequeathing wealth to parents and other relations. The right to leave a will in favor of one's parents was later on abrogated, whereas one could still leave testamentary will in favor of the relations which have not been granted any share in the fresh ruling.

The principle guidance in this regard can be reduced to the fact that the details and applications of matters, which human intellect can penetrate and come to the right conclusion, have been left to the prevailing human concepts of *ma'rūf*. Had the

63. Seyed Aḥmad Khān has wrongly concluded that, prior to the advent of Islam, the Arabs borrowed their religious ideals from the Jews, and Islam itself, received most of the religious contents from them, for, he believes, the religion of Abraham did not survive till then except for concept of *Tawḥīd* and the practice of circumcision and leaving the beard grow. (Author)

Almighty revealed such cumbersome details where human intellect suffices as a guide it would have caused the God-consciousness and virtue of the people to fade and die out. Therefore, in many verses such matters have been left upon the human intellect to decide. Thus by establishing the existent concepts of *ma'rūf* and exhorting the adherents of the faith upon following it, the Holy Prophet (sws) has indeed added to the respect commanded by the national laws and good customs of the society. He did not aim at revolutionizing the society and toppling the existing setup. He, rather, adopted the method of gradual improvement, complementing the existing concepts of good and virtue. This is because he had to confirm the previous religious traditions in a specific way and to remove what wrong and unfounded things were mixed with them. He purified the religion of all human manipulations and got the people on the highway of God's guidance, initially implanted in human nature (*fiṭrah*).

***Naẓm* Adds to Meaning of the Text**

Arrangement of a discourse creates specific meaning which is over and above the sum total of the whole. If we disregard the arrangement of the text we can never reach to the intended conclusions. For example we see that Abū Bakr Siddīq, when he faced the crucial question of dealing with those who had refused to pay the *zakāh*, argued on the basis of the Qur'ān that the Almighty allowed fighting such rebels. He held that those who did not offer regular *ṣalāh* could not be, as per clear Qur'ānic assertion, considered part of the Muslim community and, on that account, the believers had been allowed to fight them. He drew the attention of the people to the fact that the Holy Qur'ān frequently mentions the obligation of paying the *zakāh* with the duty of offering the *ṣalāh*. Thus a mention of the *zakāh* in the Holy Qur'ān adjacent to the *ṣalāh*, reveals to us, he argued, its status in the divine law. This proves that if we do not consider the guidance provided by the given order and arrangement of the Book we will definitely lose many aspects of the meaning of the word of God. Another example of the kind may not be out of place here. God has guided us to the fact that *ribā* (usury) in its essence is just opposite to the *zakāh*. God has declared war on

those who devour *ribā*. Those, who refuse to pay the *zakāh*, by analogy, merit similar treatment.

Structure of the Qur'ān

Division of the Qur'ān in *rukū'* and thirty parts is an innovation. A little deliberation shows that the basic purpose of the *rukū'* division is to mark a thematic shift. Those who marked the *rukū'*s have indeed intended to highlight the thematic shifts in the text and have tried to mark such thematic shifts by putting the sign ξ . These people intended to guide the reader that, while reciting the Qur'ān, they should not pause at a place where the text should be read jointly. They were indeed been right in trying to determine such shifts. However, the need to highlight the knowledge of the arrangement is still demanding because the above mentioned division only helps the reader to ascertain a thematic shift. But we know that such shifts are not permanent in a single discourse. There has to be something that unifies the parts divided by the *rukū'*. In some cases the *rukū'* division brings the whole parts of the *sūrah* to a parallel status. Whereas we know that sometimes a unit, apparently standing apart from the preceding one, is indeed dependent on it and builds upon it. This is the reason people first divide their books in parts, then in chapters, then in sections and then in paragraphs. These subcategories are never supposed to be disjointed independent pieces of writing. Therefore, the role of *rukū'* is limited to highlighting the break. Thus the division of *rukū'* has, by highlighting the breaks, created the need to discover the interconnection between the divided parts. Therefore, this interconnection has to be made visible before one marks the shifts. This I stress because before being divided in *rukū'*, the text looked interconnected. In that shape it was easy to discover the coherence in the parts of the *sūrahs* for those who ponder over the text analytically. Contrarily once the *rukū'* division has been marked the divisions and breaks have been highlighted in the minds of the readers. This necessitates that such a division is carried out afresh dividing the parts in one respect and highlighting their interconnection in another.

The division in thirty parts, contrarily, has been done purely on

quantitative basis. Sometimes these marks break off the discussion completely. I, therefore, prefer disregarding it. I believe that even for the quantitative division the division of *manāzil* (singular *manzil*, literally: station) sufficiently serves the purpose. It does not rend asunder the *sūrahs*.

When I say that those who divided the *sūrahs* in the *rukū's* were right in determining the thematic shifts I do not mean that they have always got it right. Many of their judgments are obviously wrong. See for example their work on *Sūrah Qamar* (54). They have divided the *sūrah* into three *rukū's*. Thus they have not considered the style of expression nor the quantity. They should have divided it in six parts.

- 1) The Hour has approached.....(1-7)
- 2) Before them, people of Noah rejected....(8-17)
- 3) 'Ād rejected (their Messenger). Then how (strict) has been our recompense and warnings.... (18:22)
- 4) Thamūd rejected the warnings.... (23-32)
- 5) People of Lot rejected the warnings.... (33-40)
- 6) And warnings did come to the People of the Pharaoh.... (41-55)

The Qur'ānic text itself is the most reliable guide in this regard. It contains both explicit and implicit indications towards this coherent ordering. Examples of explicit textual indications are the expressions adopted in the beginnings of *sūrahs* like *yā ayyuha ladhīna* (O those who), *yā ayyuha al-nāsu* (O people), *'alam tara* (have you not seen), *'ara'ayta* (have you seen) and *qul* (declare, say) etc. The scholars who have introduced the *rukū'* division have used this kind of indicators. Other examples of explicit textual indicators include change in rhyme, length of the verses, similarity in style of expression, and kinship of meanings in different pieces of the text....⁶⁴

Names of the *Sūrahs* and their Central Themes

Though sometimes names reflect the meaning of things they symbolize yet many names do not even give a slightest hint to

64. This discussion too could not be completed by the author. (Iṣlāhī)

that effect. Four factors seem to have been considered in naming the *sūrahs* of the Holy Qur'ān.

1. Some of the *sūrahs* have been named using incipits. Imām Suyūfī has recorded that following *sūrahs* have been named this way: *Hamd* (the Praise 1), *Barā'ah* (the Acquittal, 9), *Subḥān* (Gloryfied, 17), *Tāhā* (20), *Ḥawāmīm* (collectively) (40-46), *Yāsīn* (36), *Iqtaraba* (It approached, 21), *Raḥmān* (the Merciful, 55), *Tabāraka* (Exalted, 67), *Sa'ala* (He enquired, 70), *'Ammā* (About what, 78), *Al-nāzi'āt* (Those that snatch away, 79), *'Ara'ayta* (Have you seen, 107), *Tabbat* (Perished, 111) and the like. Many books in the Hebrew Bible have been named in Hebrew using incipits.

2. Some *sūrahs* have been given names after some conspicuous words used in them, for example *Zukhruf* (Ornaments of Gold, 43), *Shu'arā'* (the Poets, 26), *Ḥadīd* (Iron, 57), *Mā'ūn* (Neighborly Needs, 107) etc. These words do not indicate the intended message of the *sūrahs*. They have been, however, conspicuously placed in the *sūrahs* as distinguishing marks. Arabs would sometimes name places and even people considering this element. Names like *Mutalammis* (the seeker) and *Tābbaṭa Sharran* (he carried a snake under his arm) have been given on this principle. Another analogical case is the practice of logicians. They sometimes relate the meaning of a thing to some of its specific condition which in fact has no bearing on its real meaning.

3. Some names of the *sūrahs* allude to a conspicuous theme discussed in them. *Sūrah Nūr* (light, 24), for example, has been named considering the verse of *Nūr* (24:35). *Sūrahs* like *'Āl-i-'Imrān* (Family of 'Imrān, 3), *Nisā'* (Women, 4), *Ibrāhīm* (Abraham, 14) and *Yūnus* (John, 10) have been named this way.

4. Names of some of the *sūrahs* however, reflect their *'umūd*. *Sūrah Fātiḥah* (the opening, 1) has also been named *Sūrah Ṣalāh*. Similarly, *Sūrah Barā'ah* (Acquittal, 9), *Sūrah Banī Israel* (Children of Israel, 17) and *Sūrah Muḥammad* (47) have all been referred to as *sūrahs* of war. The last two *sūrahs*, referred to as *Mu'awwadhatayn* (i.e. the two seeking refuge) (113-4) and *Sūrah Ikhlāṣ* (112) also provide an example of such names.

The last method of naming the *sūrahs* noticeably considers the basic theme of the *sūrahs*. Had all the *sūrahs* been named

following this principle the coherence in all of them would have been discernable to the readers. I do not, therefore, see any problem in naming all the *sūrahs* considering their *'amūd* so that their basic purpose is highlighted provided the *Sharī'ah* does not prohibit us. Now let us take this issue.....⁶⁵

Determining the Addressees and the Addressors

Muslims unanimously hold that the Holy Qur'ān is the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (sws). This, however, does not mean that all that has been discussed in the Book has been addressed by God alone. For example, the verse “You alone we worship; You alone we ask for help” (1:4) issues from a believer. Some scholars hold that the Almighty Allah has taught us this *sūrah* as though He started by saying, “say these words”. But we do not see the words ‘say etc’. How can, then, one establish this view?

The same question applies to the addressees of the Holy Qur'ān. One has to determine who a particular statement addresses because every discourse has an addressor and an addressee. Sometimes both the addressors and the addressees are general whereas address is directed at particular individuals. Similarly the addressors and the addressees may sometimes be specifically identified while the message is general in nature. Change in addressors and the addressees as well as taking the address as general or specific greatly affect the meaning. Therefore, we have to form some principles which can help us determine these things. Erroneous identification of the addressors and addressees, in the Holy Qur'ān, sometimes leads us to believe in things which border with polytheism. Imām Rūmī has been led to say that when God commanded the Holy Prophet to call people by saying:⁶⁶ He rendered the people worshippers of the Prophet (sws). I do not think that

65. This discussion too remained unfinished. Apparently the author intended to discuss the question of naming the *sūrahs* afresh keeping in consideration the fourth aspect discussed above and whether doing this would be in compliance with the *Sharī'ah* or not. (Iṣlāḥī)

66. (Communicate to them my following words), “My servants, you that have sinned against your souls.” (9:53)

by saying this Imām Rūmī intended committing to polytheistic beliefs but the view he has presented is identical to what a polytheist may believe. May Allah forgive him!

Coming to the explanation of the verse, we see that the statement, “My servants, you that have sinned against your souls” is directed to humans. It follows the omitted *qul* (say, tell, declare). God commands the Holy Prophet (sws) to communicate this divine statement to the people verbatim. The study of address, it should be appreciated, is the knowledge that enables us to interpret a discourse after discovering the specifically targeted members of the addressees from its general application. Whoever does not succeed in discerning who are the addressees and who is the addressor will not be able to get to the true interpretation of the text. This knowledge, therefore, is a key to correct interpretation of the text and proper understanding of its coherence. Lack of knowledge in this regard is one of the major causes of confused interpretations. People ignoring this principle may end up reaching at quite the opposite of the intended meanings of the words. One will identify A where B is meant and confuse D for E. Nothing can owe more to erroneous interpretations. I will devote a separate chapter in these preliminary discussions to the study of the general principles of interpretation. By the present discussion, I only intend to create familiarity with the discussion before we take it up. Correctly understanding the issue of address leads us to the proper course and brings us to the right conclusion regarding verses where our exegetes have committed mistakes. This, therefore, necessitates that we elaborate upon it separately.

One needs to appreciate the point that when a statement is liable to be ascribed or addressed to more than a single specific entity it becomes like a homonym (*mushtarak*). We have to identify that single intended implication and leave out the other possibilities. The rules devised for ascertaining the true implication of a general word begin with identification of all of its significations. Then we turn to see the context and the intended purpose of the statement and then identify the meaning. Similarly in the case of address we have to identify, first of all, the addressor and the addressees from various possible options.

All parts of the Qur'ānic text, as in any discourse, involve an addressor and an addressee.

- It either issues from God, Gabriel, the Prophet (sws) of God or the people.
- Similarly, it is either addressed to God or the Prophet (sws) or the people.
- People in the above include, Muslims, the hypocrites, the People of the Book, children of Ishmael or two or three or all of these entities.
- People of the Book include the Jews or the Christians or both.

All of these facts do not take much of research. They are quite obvious. However, there still remains the possibility that in a particular place any of the addressees are taken for another. This issue needs further detail which follows.

As regards the question of the source, mostly Allah, Gabriel, or the Prophet (sws) are confused with one another. A careless reader of the Holy Qur'ān may not be able to discern who the addressee is. The Prophet (sws) and Gabriel are two messengers of God who sometimes speak as though they are communicating someone else's message and sometimes they simply speak out the words of God without indication. Another problem in this case arises when we see that Gabriel is also a messenger of God to the Prophet (sws) and in this capacity he sometimes addresses the Prophet (sws), but, since he is also the teacher of the Prophet (sws), he, addresses him directly. God has made it clear in the Qur'ān that Gabriel is the teacher of the Prophet (sws) where he says:

⁶⁷ This problem is intensified when we see that all these positions of Gabriel frequently manifest themselves without indication. The context helps us properly identify the addressor and in which capacity he is addressing.

This difficulty is not peculiar to the Holy Qur'ān. The divine speech conveyed by the Prophets of God is inherently pregnant with such possibilities. See psalms 46:7-11, for example:

The Lord of hosts is with us.[.....] Let be then: learn I am

67. He is taught by one who is formidable in power and is of strong intellect and virtue. (53:5-6)

God. [.....] The Lord of hosts is with us.

The guiding principle in this regard is that when the speaker is God, the discourse, characterized by grandeur and power, inspires awe. This kind of speech is only brought to serve specific points of wisdom. The following examples will help understand what we want to make clear:

The early verses of *Sūrah 'Alaq* (96) have been addressed by Gabriel till the discourse reached a point where displeasure of God is reflected. From this point on it becomes obvious that God Almighty is the source:

Nay, if he does not desist We will surely drag him by the forelock. (96:14)

As for the question of addressees, the most common victims of confusion are the messenger and the Muslims. At occasions, apparently the addressee is the Messenger but actually it is the Muslims who are being addressed. Since the messenger is the representative of the *ummah* he becomes their tongue and their ears. Apparently when the Almighty intend to address the *ummah* He directs the verses to the Prophet (sws). Torah is replete with such examples where the messenger, Moses, in second person singular, is addressed but the actual intended recipients of the message are the believers. In the Holy Qur'ān the context helps us discern the actual addressees when the address is apparently at the Prophet Muhammad (sws). In *Sūrah Tawbah* it has been said:

If you meet with some good, it grieves them; but if a disaster befalls you, they say: "lucky us! We took our precautions timely." (9:50)

It seems that second person singular is the Prophet (sws) whereas it is in fact the believers as is clear from the response in the following verse.

Say, “nothing will befall *us* except what God has ordained. He is our guardian. In God let the faithful put trust.” (9:51)

Similarly, the Prophet (sws) seems to have been addressed in the following verse:

If either or both of them reach old age in your presence, do not say fie to them, nor rebuke them; but speak to them respectfully. (17:23)

Here the verse actually addresses the believers. Examples of general address put in the second person singular, apparently the Prophet (sws), abound in the Holy Qur'ān. For example the following verse addresses all the possible audience:

Do you not know that God alone has dominion over the heavens and the earth and besides God you have neither any friend nor any protector? (2:107)

I think that the following verse too should be interpreted in the light of the above principle.....⁶⁸

Mode of Revelation

The Holy Qur'ān itself testifies that it was not revealed in a single instance and that it came down piecemeal.

68. Unfortunately this all important discussion too has remained unfinished. (Iṣlāḥī)

The rejecters ask, “Why is the Qur’ān not revealed to him in a single instance?” We have revealed it this way so that We fortify your heart through it. We have recited it to you gradually. (25:32)

Parts of the Holy Qur’ān were revealed considering the circumstances of its addressees. Therefore, when some of the directives were relaxed in some aspect or some others were complemented by new revelations, the new addition was put next to the original command. Sometimes these later revelations were placed at the end of the discussions they complemented. Since the shifts in the discourse have been marked by the *rukū’* division, people find it difficult to understand the interrelation of such complementary passages with the preceding discussions. We can study this interrelation between the two by the help of the following facts.

God Himself has explained that such verses are explanatory verses, revealed in accordance with His promise to the Prophet (sws) that He would explain whatever called for an explanation and would arrange it in a set order where He says:

When We have recited it to you follow that recitation of Ours and then We shall Ourselves explain it. (75:8-9)

The complementary verses have been expressed in a different style. They do not follow the pattern of the verses that follow and precede them. This also serves as an indication to the fact that they are explanatory verses.

Some of the explanatory verses betray by their style that they respond to an implicit question. Many such verses clearly indicate that they are pointing out some matter undercurrent in the discourse.

It needs to be appreciated that some *sūrah*s have been put on the tongue of the Prophet (sws) and some on the tongue of the Gabriel and many more on the tongue of the Almighty himself, following the style of the earlier revelations. The Holy Qur’ān has clearly explained this fact:

It is not possible for any mortal man that God should speak to him (face to face) except (that he does so) by revelation, or from behind a veil, or through a messenger sent and authorized by Him to make known His will. (42:51)

At another place God Almighty says:

Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel (must know) that he [Gabriel] has revealed it to your heart by God's command." (2:97)

Yet another place the same has been put thus:

This is a word of a gracious and mighty messenger, held in honor by the Lord of the Throne, obeyed in heavens, faithful to his trust. No, your compatriot is not mad. He saw him on the clear horizon. He does not grudge the secrets of the unseen; nor is it the utterance of an accursed devil. (81:19-25)

Still at another place the Almighty says:

This is indeed the utterance of a noble messenger. It is no poet's speech: you seldom believe! It is no soothsayer's divinations: how little you reflect! It is a revelation from the Lord of the universe. (69:40-3)

This issue has been extensively discussed in my book *'Asātib al-Qur'ān (Styles of the Qur'ān)*.

The above discussion, it is hoped, has made it clear that the Holy Qur'ān contains verses which have been incorporated later

as required explanations or as complements to some earlier discussions. Many verses have been put in the mouth of Gabriel. Many others issue from the Prophet (sws). A major portion however is the direct speech of God. In order to understand the Holy Qur'ān and interpret it you have to make out which verse issues from whom and who it is addressing. Without successfully identifying the addressors and the addressees you will not be able to understand the coherence in the text. This can be explained through an example. In an allegorical story many characters are made to talk according to their role in the plot. If someone assumes that all these things have been told by a single character he will certainly fail to make out any connection between the parts of the whole story.

This example I have offered only in order to explain my point fully. The word of God, indeed, does not suffer from such limitations. His word is exalted and does not stand in need for such examples and analogies.

Interpreting the Qur'ān in the Light of Ḥadīth

In one of the discussions above I have written that in case the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth contradict each other the Book of God will be regarded as the final judge and the criterion. Now I intend to explain this point in detail.

I have been hesitant to write on this issue for fear of attacks from some of my coreligionists. But on the question of role of Ḥadīth in Qur'ān interpretation they have been led to believe that the Ḥadīth too comes under the divine promise of protection from error and corruption as is said in the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān.

Indeed it is We who have revealed the reminder and upon us is to guard it. (15:9)

Such exaggerations did not allow them to reflect over the far reaching consequences of their claim. This left no choice for me to hold back. It is now incumbent upon me to hoist the flag of truth without fearing for my life. I am therefore ready to risk my life in case if they decide to punish me on this.

We must remain clear on the fact that many traditionists have admitted to themselves the claim that what has been recorded in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī and *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim is not subject to doubt and therefore cannot be made subject to analysis. In order to ascertain the veracity of such claims I will present here some of the things mentioned in these books. By this, I intend to make it clear to the readers that God has forbidden to take the scholars as divine. Therefore, we must not believe in what they have adopted without critical thought.

Imām Bukhārī and Imām Muslim both have recorded the following narrative reported on the authority of Abū Dharr.

I asked the Holy Prophet (sws) about the implication of the divine words “and the Sun follows its destination”⁶⁹ and he replied, “its destination is under the throne of God.”⁷⁰

They have also reported another narrative on the authority of Abū Dharr again:

I was in the company of the Holy Prophet (sws) at sunset. He asked me, “Abū Dhar, do you know where does the sun set?” I said, “God and His Messenger know best.” Then he said, “It reaches beneath the throne of God and prostrates there. This is what is implied in the divine saying “Sun follows its set destination.”⁷¹-----⁷²

Now I cite examples from what have been ascribed to the Companions of the Prophet (sws). You will see that how outrageous contradictions have been ascribed to them without

69. The Holy Qur'ān 36:38

70. *Bukhārī* No: 4525, *Muslim* No: 159

71. *Bukhārī* No: 4524, *Muslim* No: 159

72. This discussion too could not be completed.

impunity.

Ibn Abī Shaybah, in his *Muṣannaḥ*, Imām Bukhārī, in his *Tārīkh*, Ibn Jarīr in his exegesis, Ibn. Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātam, Dāra Quṭnī in his *Ifrād*, Abū Sheikh, Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqī, in his *Sunan*, have ascribed the following narrative to ‘Alī Ibn. Abī Ṭālib (rta) which explains the meanings of the word *wanḥar* in the last verse of *Sūrah Kawthar* (108):

(In order to demonstrate what the verse implies), he placed his right hand on the middle of his left wrist and then put his hands on his chest in *ṣalāh*.

Abū Shaykh and Bayhaqī, in his *Sunan*, have ascribed this act to the Holy Prophet (sww) himself on the authority of Anas Ibn Mālik. Another narrative, recorded by Ibn Abī Ḥātam, Ibn Shāhīn, in his *Al-Sunnah*, Ibn Mardwayh and Bayhaqī, ascribes this act to Ibn ‘Abbās. Mere God-consciousness should guard us from accepting such interpretations. At the same time, assuming them to be authentic, a God-conscious person will not be able to doubt these interpretations. But we see that these compilers of the Ḥadīth works themselves have brought things which tumble the whole edifice.

Ibn Abī Ḥātam, Ibn Mardwayh and Bayhaqī have recorded that ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib said:

When the *Sūrah* “*innā a ‘ṭaynāka al-kawthar*”⁷³ was revealed, the Holy Prophet (sww) asked the angel Gabriel about the

73. Indeed we have granted you abundance. (the Holy Qur’ān 108:1)

nature of the *nahīrah*⁷⁴ he was commanded to offer? Gabriel explained to him that it did not require him to offer sacrifice, rather, God commanded him to raise his hands (to ear lobes) while saying first *takbīr*⁷⁵ and while going into *ruku*⁷⁶ and then standing straight again [in the prayer]. Gabriel told the Prophet (sws) that this form conforms to his (Gabriel's) *ṣalāh* and that of all of the angels in the seven heavens. Everything has certain traits which serve to embellish it, and the embellishment of the *ṣalāh* is raising hands to earlobes while uttering each *takbīr*. The Holy Prophet (sws) said that raising hands to earlobes exemplifies the *istikānah*⁷⁷ referred to in the following divine command:

They did not bow before their Lord neither do they humble themselves before him. (23:76)

Ibn Jarīr as well as Ibn Mardawayh has recorded this explanation of the word *nahr* in their commentary on the *sūrah*.

These people have also ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās what roots out these two interpretations. Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mundhir have recorded a saying ascribed to Ibn Abbas where he interprets it to mean the obligatory *ṣalāh* and offering an animal on the day of 'Īd al-*dḥā*⁷⁸. Bayhaqī has reported in his *Sunan* that Ibn 'Abbās interpreted the word *wanhar* in this *sūrah* as supplicating on the Day of 'Īd al-*dḥā*. Similar interpretations have been ascribed to Sa'īd Ibn Jubayr, 'Ikramah and Qattādah. Confusion over the interpretation of the word *kawther* is no less shocking. Also notice the contradictory interpretations of the word *falaq* occurring in the first verse of the *Sūrah Falaq* (113).

Such contradictory statements can no way provide satisfactory explanation of the Qur'ānic words and phrases. They only intensify the thirst of a seeker of truth and add to the confusion of those who approach them seeking clarity. If you seek the clear

74. Ritual sacrifice.

75. Saying *Allāhu akbar* which means God is great.

76. Bowing down in the *ṣalāh*.

77. To humble oneself before.

78. Festival of Offerings.

path you need to apply the exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge of the language of the Holy Qur'ān and to walk in perfect light acquired by pondering over the Holy Qur'ān. This can be the only guide to the accurate and satisfying interpretation of the word *naḥr*.
