

Tafsir

Isbrāq Al-Ma`āni

Vol. I

(Surah Al-Fātiḥah, Al-Baqarah, Āl -Imrān)

(Surah no. 1-3)

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Preface to the Second Edition

The format in which this volume appeared in its first print, did not prove to be a popular one. Hence a new size and a new format was chosen for the thirtieth part which appeared next. That was well received. Accordingly, when a re-print of this volume was ordered, it was decided to follow the same size and format as that of the thirtieth part. The occasion has also been used to revise and improve the work. The most notable change is the dropping of the “Summary fo Interpretations,” about which this author had neverfelt very comfortable, although some people had expressed their appreciation. The lenth was another factor. Already, some people have begun to complain about the volume.

The indexing method has also been altered. It is hoped that this new system will make searching easier. It should especially prove its usefulness when a full index covering the entire work will be presented in the last volume.

The author has never had the luxury of his works being edited by professionally editors. Far from that, even for proof-reading he had to depend on the computer, which didn’t prove to be an adequate tool. Yet he must acknowledge with gratitude he efforts of many. Thanks are specially due to the American sister Umm Muhammad Asami (presently in Jeddah) who read the first edition of this volume from cover to cover. She is responsible in no small measure for the improvements that can be noticed between the two prints. I am also grateful to brother Muhammad Abdul Aziz (KFUPM, Dhahran) for reading out almost one half of this revised edition and suggesting some very useful changes. There are others who have helped in various ways. Hafizullah Baig, Afzaal Ahmed, Kamal Zaheer and my children have all made useful contributions in the preparation of this work. Syed Bilal Zaheer deserves special mention. It is his wide experience, large contacts and patient pursual that have made possible the appearance of this work in this format and in such a short time. Without exaggeration, his efforts have cut down years to months.

Only Allah can reward them in the fullest measure.

Syed Iqbal Zaheer
Feb 7, 1996

Preface to the Third Edition

It is nothing but Allah's grace that this humble work has been received well. This is the third edition fo this volume.

Despite the efforts fo several people. I felt that the work was still far from being free of defects. Accordingly, when the need for a fresh print arose, I decided to re-read the whole work. It couldn't be done in one stretch. Yet, it brought in corrections and improvements. Several passages have been reworded to allow for clarity of meaning. Some material has also been added here and there. A notable additon is the map showing the "Mawāqīt" and "Haram Boundaries." Some of my readings on women's menstruations however, came late. The knowledge about extra release of hormones by the pituitary glands during the "periods" is not new. But the physical and mental disturbances that it leads to are not as well understood. Women are not exactly sick during this period, rather, disturbed. But, the disturbance can sometimes border on sickness. Hence the apt Qur'ānic Term "*adha*." Hopefully, the next edition will find some details incorporated in this work.

After having written "summareis" on the Qur'ānic passages for this first volume, I subsequently withdrew on grounds that the work was getting voluminous. But suggestions has been coming in from various quarters that they be reintroduced. I could have, but for the fact that i discontinued writing them from the second volume onwards. However, the suggestion for their inclusion comes from very serious circles. Therefore, there is every likelihood that they will be reintroduced in the forthcoming reprints. But that however, only if i feel confident that the other volumes - of which three have already appeared, covering up to *Surah al-Anfāl* - will also have them.

Syed Iqbal Zaheer
Aug. 16, 1999

Prefac to the Fourth Edition

This work was started somewhere in the 1980's. It was not a few years when this writer received a message from a scholar in the UK which said that "the author may be told that he should complete this work as soon as it is possible."

Clogged by various other activities, I could not cut down on any activity but could and did increase my pace with this work. At that time, I felt quite often that, not the text, but the language will need revision. But by the time I finished it, it was around 2500 pages, and I was busier than ever, with newer and newer tasks. The burden to revise it remained pending.

By Allah's grace it was somewhat lightened, mainly by two persons. One, Noor Muhammad Khalid, then in Riyadh, and another Danyal Qazi, of Bangalore. Both were diligently reading this work and regularly sending me errors that they noticed. I have no words to thank them. Allah alone can reward them.

The need for a fresh edition has arisen because a strong observation was that those wishing to take material out of this work, for their lectures, Friday sermons, etc., are often discouraged by the fact that Arabic texts of the *ahadīth* used in it are missing. I took the deficiency as a serious matter and have now added Arabic texts not only of the *ahadīth* but some of the *akhbar* as well – all in all about 2310 quotes.

Syed Iqbal Zaheer
June 10, 2020
Dammam

PREPARATORY

What is the Qur'ān About?

The Qur'ān is the Word of Allah and a Book of Guidance. It can be asked, guidance to what? The answer is: “Guidance to Allah Most High, to His Attributes, His Will, and the way in which one may conduct oneself to obtain that approval (*rida*) of Allah after which there is no anger.” Imam Shafē`i perhaps had the first part of this statement in mind when he said:

“All that (the scholars of) the *Ummah* have to say is nothing but the exposition of the *Sunnah*. All that is in the *Sunnah* is the exposition of the Qur'ān. And the whole of the Qur'ān is nothing but the exposition of the Names and Attributes of Allah” (Zarkashi: *Al Burhan Fi `Ulum al Qur'ān*).

This guidance to Allah, the knowledge of His Attributes and Will, and the guidance to right conduct cannot be obtained to full satisfaction by any means other than the Qur'ān and its complementary, the *Sunnah*, (the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him).

The Qur'ān then is the certain source of guidance. Someone who is unaware of its existence, but is a seeker of Truth, (on account of his innate faith in God and disillusionment with the world), will be led to this Book, one way or the other. The Qur'ān says (29: 69): “*Those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them unto Our paths.*”

What is Guidance?

From another angle, it might be said that being on the guidance is to know, acknowledge, and, live by the Truth. In the context of this life, it is

- a) the knowledge of what one is required to do, in the right measure, at any particular moment of life, and
- b) the will to live by that knowledge.

In one sense, then, Guidance is knowledge, and in another, the will to act by it. The 'will to act' is not the same as the 'power to act.' That is because man has been granted will (or the freedom of choice) in a limited framework, while all power is Allah's. The power, or ability to act referred to as *tawfiq* in Islamic terminology is granted when willingness is demonstrated.

Further, since there is no such thing as half guidance, both are essential for salvation: knowledge without the will to act is only an evidence against one's self (*hujjah*), and deeds (however pretty their appearance), are grains thrown in the sand if they go without the acknowledgement of the Truth.

The Qur'an guides in both the senses. It bestows knowledge (or *'ilm wa 'irfan*), giving the seeker the proper concept of the truth, as well as the will power and the moral courage to produce a living model of that concept in his own person, overcoming the obstacles he might encounter from within or without.

No other book, writing, philosophy, or person can achieve this. There should be no doubt about it; for any ambiguity in this regard can deprive one of the fruits of study and application.

The above definition illustrates and emphasizes the external, physical, and ephemeral aspect. Guidance has an esoteric, transcendent, and eternal meaning also, which is the fruit and essence of the external aspect. It is that state of mind and soul in which the other world becomes dearer than this one, in which, one eagerly awaits to be transported to the other world in order to heal that pain in the heart, and quench that thirst of the soul, which only the company of those on High can heal and quench.

It is when one begins to 'wait for the next *salah* after the last one,' when one 'remembers Allah in his seclusion and the remembrance brings tears to his eyes,' when Allah becomes so dear that one begins to 'love for Allah and hate for Allah,' and, when 'the state of *sabr* and *shukr* become one and the same,' then it is that a person can said to be, in the words of the Qur'an, "*on a guidance from his Lord.*"

The Path of Knowledge

A *hadith* of the Prophet (*saws*) says: “I am leaving behind me two things. So long as you hold fast unto them, you will not be misguided: they are Allah’s Book and my practices.” Nevertheless, this oft quoted *hadith* is rarely treated seriously. People apply themselves with great fervor to books, writings, speeches and ideologies presented by the scholars of Islam, but not as often do they leave them and their influences aside to turn directly to the Qur’ān in complete seriousness. They do not seem to realize that they are not guided by those books and writings but to the extent that they themselves contain the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* in their pure form and unadulterated meaning.

Further, even when the Qur’ān is studied, it is mostly done through the eyes, minds, and explanations of the scholars. The knowledge derived is, therefore, at best second hand, vicarious, and not wholly trustworthy. Again, a study of the Qur’ān after a lot of other literature has been read has the disadvantage of the earlier readings embossing on the mind impressions that do not allow for the new ones to take place in their pristine form. The result is a jumble of concepts, true, half true, and false.

Alternatively, the Qur’ān is read with pre conceived ideas. Human ideas are then taken for Divine ideas with citation of Qur’ānic verses as evidences.

There are a few other characteristics that distinguish the Qur’ān from all other kinds of writings. Firstly, the knowledge that the Qur’ān imparts is the true and infallible knowledge. Secondly, the Qur’ān succeeds in communicating the ideas it holds. That is, the reader cannot miss the meaning that it intends to communicate. Provided one is sincere, no one can miss its guidance, or, led to a meaning and understanding not intended. That happens with writings other than the Divine; humans say one thing, and the audience understands another thing. Moreover, through its intricate sequencing of the texts, the Qur’ān answers to the doubts that arise, so to say, on the spot, and registers its meaning and message without adulteration of doubts menacing the mind, or skeptical notes lying beneath like snakes in the grass.

Therefore, to obtain true knowledge and right guidance from the Qur'an the requirement is to do away with preconceived ideas and study it with the firm intention to live by the meaning as it unfolds itself. With that kind of intention, the student is qualified to receive the true meaning. The meaning obtained is also accompanied by an urge to live by it, which then is the next requirement. That accomplished, that is, the meaning translated into action, the reader demonstrates purity of intention. In consequence, he qualifies to receive a fresh set of true meaning which unfold themselves with further study of the Book. This goes on until the student reaches that state which has been described in a *hadith* by Allah (*swt*) Himself in words, "I become the hands of the slave with which he grips, the feet of the slave with which he walks ... (to the end of the *hadith*)." But if he fails, that is, he is not true to himself at any given phase, or discontinues the process, then, the *tawfiq* is held back until he amends his ways. The Qur'an has said (7: 146):

{ سَأَصْرِفُ عَنْ آيَاتِيَ الَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَإِنْ يَرَوْا كُلَّ آيَةٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ الرُّشْدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ الْعِغْيِ يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ } [الأعراف: ١٤٦]

"I shall turn away from My signs those who wax proud in the land without cause. If they witnessed all the signs, they will not believe in them, and, if they see the path of righteousness, they will not accept it as a path. But if they see the deviated path, they will accept it as a path. That, because they gave a lie to Our signs and were heedless of them."

How to Obtain the Right Verbal Meaning?

Intention

It is to seek guidance, in the sense delineated above, that one should read the Qur'an. That should be the intention in every session with it.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal's father well illustrated this point when he asked his son, who was reciting the Qur'an, as to what was he reading. The young son, knowing that the father was aware what he was reading, responded with an indifferent answer. "Who was it revealed to?" was the next question. The embarrassed son replied that it was revealed to Proph-

et Muhammad. “This way, my son,” said the father, “you will never profit from the Qur’ān. You will only if you read with the belief that the Revelation has just come down, that it has been sent down specifically for you, and that it is you who has been addressed. It is only then that this Book will open itself to you.”

In other words, one should take it as a message unto himself, and allow each verse of the Qur’ān free and unhindered access to the mind and heart with the will to be led where it will lead.

Language

In contrast to other revealed Books and religious literatures, in whatever form and language they may exist, the Qur’ān should not only be read by oneself, directly, but also in its own language Arabic. No commentary, however comprehensive, and no exegete, however erudite, can impart what the Qur’ān itself can. The following reasons will illustrate the point.

The Miraculous nature of the Qur’ān

It is well known that the Qur’ān is a miracle. In fact, it is a living miracle; although the true nature of the miracle is not always understood. We cannot elaborate on this point extensively at this juncture. But it might be pointed out that the miracle expresses itself both in its form as well in its content. Both are powerful, unique to the Qur’ān, which defy translation. The Prophet said: “Every prophet before me was given a miracle. I have been given the Qur’ān. And I hope to have a greater following by its virtue than any prophet of the past.”

Consequently, thousands of people from all over the globe are led to Islam every year through their study of the Qur’ān. When a non Muslim asks a Muslim about Islam, all that he does in most cases is to hand him over a copy of the Qur’ān. Invariably, even that mangled thing called ‘the translation of the Qur’ān’ leads the person to Islam. That is the miracle of the Qur’ān. And of course, miracles cannot be translated.

Let us look into a few reasons that make impossible to communicate what the Qur’ān itself communicates.

Translations

The Qur'ān is in Arabic. It is neither in prose nor in verse but a unique combination of both, unsurpassed in its effect on the mind and soul by any other writing. In the words of John Alden Williams:

“...the Arabic of the Qur'ān is by turns striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender, and breathtaking ... It is meaningless to apply adjectives such as ‘beautiful’ or ‘persuasive’ to the Qur'ān; its flashing images and inexorable measures go directly to the brain and intoxicate it.

It is not surprising, then, that a skilled reciter of the Qur'ān can reduce an Arabic speaking audience to helpless tears” (*Islam* : p.2, Washington Square Press ‘69).

In the words of Arberry:

“... to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran, I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which apart from the message itself constitute the Koran’s undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind” (*The Koran Interpreted*, Intr. p. x, Oxford Univ. Press ‘64).

It is this inimitable beauty that challenges mankind to produce its equivalent: in sublimity of language, its instructions, and its sublime effect on the mind and soul. The Qur'ānic challenge has remained unanswered by the humans (2: 23, 24):

“People! If you are in any doubt concerning what We have sent down on Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a piece similar to it (in all its merits). And call (to your aid) your witnesses apart from Allah, if you are true (in your allegation that it is the work of Muhammad). But if you cannot do it and you can never do it then beware of the Fire whose fuel is human beings and rocks: prepared for the unbelievers.”

The Qur'ān then is inimitable and, therefore, untranslatable. Any translation, however accurately done, and however close to the original, cannot reproduce the sense and beauty of the original. Therefore, when one is

reading a translation, he is not reading the *Qur'ān per se*. No surprise then that the best effects are lost. No wonder also that the scholars of old would not allow translation of the Qur'ān. This is also Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion. In fact there is a consensus of opinion among the scholars that the Qur'ān should not be quoted in 'sense' or 'meaning' but always in its original textual words. How can then one be allowed to translate the Qur'ān and call it *the Qur'ān*?

Accordingly, if permission to translate the Qur'ān has been granted due to modern exigencies, it is on condition that sufficient notes are supplied to overcome the deficiencies arising out of the translation. Further, it is required that the new work be called "interpretative translation of the Qur'ān" (*tarjumah tafsiyyah*), or, "the translation of the meaning of the Qur'ān," rather than "the translation of the Qur'ān" or, what would be more audacious, "the meaning of the Qur'ān," since none of these are within human power (*Manahil al 'Irfan*, Zarqani).

Linguistic Difficulties

There are many linguistic difficulties that make the Qur'ān untranslatable. In Arabic one expresses sense rather than meaning. A beautiful Arabic sentence that can enrapture the mind and touch the soul becomes insipid in another language. Not only sentences or words, even single consonant letters are hard to translate. For example, the "fi" of Arabic has a depth that is lacking in the "in" of English. One needs a whole ugly, terse, and unmusical word in English to translate mere letters such as: و
ف إن

Obviously, the complications with the words are far greater than those with the letters. Arabic is a language in which words are based on consonantal roots, from which are derived scores of words in various forms giving out various meanings but remaining, even if loosely and distantly, connected in sense and letter content to the root. 'Ayn for instance can mean: an eye, a spring, a spy, a group of people, an evil eye, honor, a flag, a girl, etc. 'Afw stands for effacement, obliteration, elimination, forgiveness, amnesty, boon, kindness, favor, surplus, and others. The translated word must on the one hand give out the basic meaning and, on the other,

convey several nuances the original carries. Obviously, to achieve that is well nigh impossible.

Let us take an example (4: 4):

وَأْتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً [النساء : ٤]

“Give the women their dowries (as a gift) spontaneous,”

In this example, the word *saduqat* is derived from the root *sadaqa* (صَدَقَ) which means, with the addition of various suffixes or prefixes: ‘to speak the truth, to be sincere, to prove to be true, to come true, to fulfill one’s promise,’ and so on. Now, a true translation of the derived term *saduqa*, (plural: *saduqat* صَدُقَات), should carry in its overtones the sense of truth and sincerity. That is, ‘a gift that is offered (by the groom to the bride), as an expression of his sincerity toward her and the relationship he is proposing.’ To render it as dowry, with the connotation that the language and culture of the readers carry, is to mutilate it.

In addition to the problem of words that yield several meanings, the complex structure of the Qur’anic verses admit of many interpretations (well described by Muhammad Asad as unfolding of “layer upon layer of meaning”) from which the translator can choose but one, without necessarily being right in his choice. This means that, granted the translator did not err, the translation conveyed only one meaning out of the several contained in the text.

As another example, the following is speaking of the unbelievers (11: 20):

يُضَاعَفُ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مَا كَانُوا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ السَّمْعَ وَمَا كَانُوا يُبْصِرُونَ [هود : ٢٠]

“For them the chastisement shall be doubled; (for) they could not hear, neither did they see.”

It can be translated in at least six different ways, three of them depending on how the letter “*maa*” is treated: whether of the same meaning as “*lamu kayy*,” (لَامٌ كَيٌّ); as a synonym of “*ila*,” (إِلَى); or as a negative “*maa*”. Obviously such possibilities, which occur quite often, can leave the translator baffled as to his own choice during translation.

Another linguistic difficulty is that many Arabic and Qur'ānic terms do not have proper equivalents in other languages, especially the languages of the occident. Allah, *al Rahman, al Rahim, jihad, salah, zakah, sadaqah, `ibadah, al ghayb, kufir, nur, fisq, taghut, nabiyy, rasul, ghaniyy*, are a few examples from a long list.

If, to the above are added the difficulties of *`ijaz* (ellipticism), rhetoric, alliteration, resonance and rhythm (all of them present in the Qur'ān in their most excellent forms and in the highest degree of expression), then the job of translation becomes a hopeless task.

But the impaired meaning is not the only casualty. The loss in terms of beauty, charm, appeal, elation and the ecstasy that a reader feels on reading the Qur'ān in its original is immeasurable.

Therefore, it can be safely said of a person who has always read the Qur'ān through translations alone, that he did not read *the Qur'ān* once.

Commentaries

Trying to understand the Qur'ān with the help of commentaries is no less hazardous. Some reasons are as follows.

Essentially, commentaries are of two kinds. Those that are based on the Qur'ān itself, supported by the *hadīth* and opinions of the Companions, or their next generation Followers (*Taba' iyyun*). These are known as *al Tafsir bi 'l Ma'thur* (التفسير بالمأثور) i.e., interpretation based on report or tradition.

The other category is that in which the commentator offers an interpretation, based not on a specific accepted source a Qur'ānic verse, a *hadīth*, or a remark of a Companion or one of their Followers but his personal opinion based on his intellect, knowledge or intuition. This kind of commentary is known as *al tafsir bi 'l ra'yi* (التفسير بالرأي). (*Al Tafsir 'l Ishari* [التفسير الإشاري] falls under the same category).

As for the first kind of *tafsir*, i.e., *al Tafsir bi 'l Ma'thur*, it can be fully appreciated only when read in Arabic. Many concepts and ideas of the Qur'ān are closely tied up with the Arabic language. Further, those con-

cepts and ideas are so subtle that their explanations fall flat and lose their import in another language. The commentaries of Ibn Jarir or Ibn Kathir, for example (which are good examples of the *al Tafsir bi 'l Ma'thur*) fail to have their good impact on the reader in their translated version. Besides, some basic knowledge of *hadith* classification, *fiqh* and other disciplines, which in turn require knowledge of Arabic, is necessary to appreciate this kind of commentary.

In short, *al-Tafsir bi 'l Ma'thur* does not help much in understanding the core meanings of the Qur'anic texts. The profound part is often missed.

On the other hand, if one tries to understand the Qur'an with the help of the other kind of *tafsir*, viz. *al tafsir bi 'l ra'yi*, he faces the following hazards.

Firstly, to be able to correctly comment on the Qur'an, one has to have, in addition to the Revealed texts, a thorough knowledge of all the physical and metaphysical sciences and disciplines that have been developed by the humans. The Qur'an deals with history, law, social affairs, morality, worship, economy, psychology, state affairs, spiritual development, eschatology, divinity, and many other disciplines all in one go. Obviously, since it is beyond man's capacity to master so many disciplines in a single life time, it is beyond him also to write a commentary of the Qur'an that conveys the complete and true intent of the Qur'an.

Further, every commentator is a product of his own age, genre, intellectual atmosphere, and cultural background. His problems are the problems of his time not necessarily of all times. His view of life is from a certain angle not necessarily the ecumenical and transcendental view of the Qur'an. (So, we often hear from such commentators that "the Qur'an lays down the way of life": which immediately reduces its message to mundane level. Had they said it lays down the ways to moral and spiritual life, they would have been closer to truth). Such commentators are led, and cannot help but be led, by their personal predispositions and bent of mind, appealing to those of similar dispositions, and not necessarily reaching out to all the inquisitive minds and thirsty souls. Finally, whatever a commentator's caliber, he remains subjective. True objectivity is not the share of man.

For example, if he is of a *Sufi* bent of mind he detects suggestions that may or may not exist. If he subscribes to a certain philosophy, he may emphasize a certain point, which might be there in the text, but might not be its focal point. Thereby he distorts the overall view. Or, if his interpretation of life is materialistic and earthly, he is quite likely to rush through verses that are, so to say, *mawarid al zam'an* (watering places for the thirsty), and the hovering grounds of the restless soul, concentrating instead on the wonderful capabilities of Islam to promote material growth and development on earth and bring back to the Muslim *Ummah* its lost glory! An idea which actually stinks.

In short, he is a human dealing with the Word of Allah. To do justice to it is not in his power.

Finally, it is agreed by the scholars of Islam that there are two aspects to the meaning of the Qur'an: the external and the internal. The external or the obvious meaning is that which has come down from the authorities: the *hadith*, the opinions of the Companions, their next generation Followers and the meaning unanimously accepted by the scholars of Islam through the ages. The internal, hidden or the secret meaning of the Qur'an comes from deep reflection and a sustained exercise of the mind and soul coupled with righteous living. To take an example, it is reported that the verse (5: 3): "*This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion: al Islam,*" brought tears into the eyes of `Umar ibn al-Khattab. The Prophet asked him the reason. He replied: "So far we were witnessing a continuous rise of Islam. Now that it has been completed (i.e. it has reached its zenith), it can only follow a downward direction, as it happens with anything that has achieved its zenith." The Prophet (*saws*) agreed with him.

Imam Ghazali writes in his eighth book of *Ihya' `Ulum `l Din*:

"The truth is that to everything pertaining to reflective and intellectual matters, which have become ambiguous to men of reflection, and in which people have differed, there are indications and implications in the Qur'an which can be observed by men of understanding. How can these indications and implications be

completely conveyed by translations of its outward meanings and its (outward) exegesis?”

Further down he writes:

“The man who imagines that the Qur’ān has no meaning except that which the outward exegesis has translated (and described), is acknowledging his own limitations; he is right in his acknowledgement (because he knows only this measure and is not aware of that which lies beyond this), but is wrong in his judgment which places all other people on the same footing as himself.” (The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur’ān: Al-Ghazali’s Theory, by Muhammad Abdul Quasem, p. 87, 88).

Nevertheless, the scholars are also in agreement that the internal meaning can be attained only after a complete mastery of the external has been achieved. Zarkashi writes:

“The Book of Allah: it is the bottomless sea, whose meaning cannot be unfathomed but by the well-versed in (religious) knowledge; he who fears Allah in open and secret, and gives due esteem to Him in places where he comes across the ambiguous. Its subtleties and truths cannot be grasped but by one who (as the Qur’ān said) ‘lends his ear and is attentive...’”

He adds a little further,

“All knowledge can be summed up as that of the ‘Acts’ and ‘Attributes’ of Allah. The Qur’ān contains the knowledge of the Acts, Attributes, and the Essence of the Supreme Being. This fact leads us to another, viz., the field of knowledge is immensely vast. There is room for much more than what is obvious to the mind. The exegesis therefore, that has been passed on to us (by the authorities) do not lay down limits for the attainment of knowledge. Yet, it is not possible to jump over to the hidden without mastery of the obvious. Indeed, the knowledge of the external is absolutely essential to step into the internal and the hidden. Whoever claims to have knowledge of the secret part of the Qur’ān while lacking

a proper understanding of the external and the obvious, is like he who claims manhood at the threshold of his house (to which he has just crawled) although he has not yet stepped out of the door.”

In brief, the Qur’ān has two levels of meaning: the external and the internal. It should be obvious, therefore, how difficult it can be for a person to get to the second level, while his first level of understanding is suspect due to his ignorance of the language which leads him to take the words of men for the words of God.

These are some of the reasons why neither a translation nor a commentary can be substituted for the original.

It should not be surprising therefore to note that according to Imam Shafe’i, learning of the Arabic language is obligatory on every Muslim. Imam Abu Yusuf and Zufar, both students of Imam Abu Hanifah, went a step further. They maintained that it is *makruh* (undesirable) for two Muslims who can manage some Arabic, to speak with each other in another language. Ibn Taymiyyah is also of the opinion that learning Arabic is a religious requirement since what is necessary to realize an obligation (*wajib*) is itself obligatory (*wajib*).

Pre conceived Ideas

In contrast, neglect of the language and study and reliance upon a single commentary of the *tafsir bi ‘l ra’yi* type, can lead a student of the Qur’ān to hold questionable opinions despite long study and painful application. Many of those who could become connoisseurs ended up dilettantes. Imam Ghazali writes about this class of people:

“The *Sufis* have said that knowledge (*‘ilm*) is a veil (between man and God), and by this knowledge they have meant those beliefs (*‘aqa’id*) which most people have been firmly holding either by dogmatically following an authority or by mere reliance on casuistic sentences written by zealots of schools of thought and delivered to them. As for the real knowledge which is the uncovering of the actual condition of the thing known and which is a vision by the light of spiritual insight, how can it be a veil, seeing that it is the ultimate object of desire?

Pure dogmatic following of an authority is sometimes false (in itself) and is, therefore, an obstacle to the understanding of the meaning (of the Qur'ān). An example of this is a man who has a (purely dogmatic) belief in Allah's *istawa'* on the Throne as His being settled on it physically. Then in the case of (the divine name) 'the Holy One' (*al-Quddus*), for example, there comes to his mind the meaning that He is pure from all that is ascribable to His creation: but that purely dogmatic belief of his does not make it possible for this meaning to be firmly implanted in his mind. Had it become strengthened in his mind it would have led to a second meaning and a third, which could be inter-connected. But he hastens to drive this meaning away from his mind, because it contradicts his false belief which is held purely dogmatically.

Sometimes purely dogmatic following of an authority is true (in itself), but it too becomes an obstacle to understanding (the meaning of the Qur'ān) and to unveiling of them. The truth in which man is obliged to believe has stages and grades, and it has an external beginning and an internal end. Concentration of man's nature on the external aspect prevents him from reading the internal end" (source cited above, p.70, 71).

Finally, every commentator is influenced by the ideas of his time that seem to be so powerful to him, and therefore of great consequence, which could be so during a particular epoch, but prove not to be so with the passage of time. Moved by those ideas or forces, a commentator might try to give the verses of the Qur'ān a new meaning, sometimes at the expense of certain basic and universal truths. This can seriously affect the way in which his readers understand the Qur'ān.

The conclusion therefore is that anyone who has not done a course of study in the *tafsir* of the approved type, but, instead, applies himself to the other type the *tafsir bi 'l ra'yi* runs the great risk of ending up with ideas that might not be true, but rather, half true or altogether wrong.

Therefore, every serious student of the Qur'ān must learn enough Arabic to be able to read the Qur'ān himself, directly, and without dependence on a translation to an extraordinary degree. It is only after he has spent sufficient time with the Qur'ān (and, in addition, the *Sunnah*), that he

can turn his attention to the translations and commentaries as further aids. It is only those for whom it is beyond their capacity to learn the language that might resort to dependence on translations and commentaries alone, although, to remain in consultation with the scholars is a necessary requirement for not getting misled on concepts.

Interpretations

Tafsir bi 'l Ma'thur

The safest way to derive the right meaning of any part of the Qur'ān is to seek its explanation within the Qur'ān itself. What is stated in brief at one place is detailed at another, and what is ambiguous at one point is supplemented with elaborations elsewhere. Also, the Qur'ān deals with a subject in a variety of ways, at different points, and with emphasis on different aspects in different contexts. The complete meaning can only be obtained by collecting together, either on paper or in the mind, all relevant verses, seeking connections that become apparent with contemplation. The Qur'ān then should be understood in the first instance with the Qur'ān itself.

The Hadīth

Next, one should turn to the *hadīth*. The *ahadīth* are in reality a commentary on the Qur'ān. Allah (*swt*) not only revealed the Word to the Prophet but also its meaning. A verse (4:105) says, “Surely We have sent down a Book to you (O Muhammad) with Truth so that you may judge between the people by what Allah shows you (as its true meaning).”

But it is not only the meaning as expressed in the words of the Prophet (*saws*) that has to be learnt. It is also the meaning as expressed in his actions that should be applied to one's own life, to gain an understanding of the Qur'ān. The Prophet lived according to the Message he received, not deviating from it in the least. In other words his life was the Qur'ān interpreted: “Have you not read the Qur'ān?!” was the answer given by 'A'isha (*ra*) when asked about the Prophet's conduct in everyday life.

An example will illustrate how well the Prophet understood and lived by the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān uses the term *rih* (in the sense of 'winds') in two ways. In some places in the singular form as *rih*, and in others in the plural form as *riyah*. In all, it has used these terms on 29 occasions. Now a careful study reveals that when the occasion is the announcement of a punishment or chastisement from Allah, the word is used in its singular form (*rih*). In contrast, when the context is announcement of a glad tiding, it is the plural form that is chosen (*riyah*). [The odd deviation from the rule can be explained].

Now, keep the Qur'ānic rule in mind and consider the prayer words of the Prophet, who, with every stormy weather supplicated in the words:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْهَا رِيَّاحًا وَلَا تَجْعَلْهَا رِيحًا

“O Lord! Make it winds (*riyah*) for us and not wind (*rih*).”

Another example can be cited. The Qur'ān said (9: 103): “Accept (O Muhammad) of their wealth a free-will offering, to purify them and to cleanse them.” This direction came after the declaration that the free-will offering of the hypocrites was not acceptable; and the reference is to the *zakah* on wealth. The free-will offering, of course, is collected by the State and is distributed following another injunction (9: 60) that cites eight categories of people as the deserving recipients.

However, following the clue that *zakah* (and *sadaqat* by implication) purify and cleanse the people (“to purify them and cleanse them”), and, reasoning that the purifying agent cannot itself be clean after its purifying operation (another example is ablution water dropping down the limbs), the Prophet declared his kinsfolk as undeserving of a share in the *zakah* (and *sadaqat*) funds. He told them that the *zakah* funds were a dirt of the hand and hence unsuitable for them.

The above stray examples demonstrate not only how well the Prophet understood the Qur'ān and the extent to which he applied it to himself, but also, how important it is for a reader to gain mastery over the two: the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* texts, to understand either.

The Companions and their Followers

Any clarification required after the first two sources have been exhausted, should be sought in the opinions of the Prophet's Companions; especially those who were close to him, received his special attention, and specialized in the Qur'ān during his life time: such as the four *khulafa'*, Ibn 'Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Ubayy b. Ka'ab, 'A'isha and others, or those of the Followers who became students of these Companions, such as: Mujahid, 'Ikrimah, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Masruq, 'Ata' ibn Rabah, Hassan al Basri, Sa'id ibn al Musayyib, Qatadah, Dahhak, Abu al 'Aliyyah and others.

The differences in their opinions, however, should not disturb a student. For, as Ibn Taymiyyah has pointed out in his *Muqaddimah fi Usul al Tafsir*, in most cases they express the same meaning in different words. The word "*hafadah*" for instance, has been explained as "daughters" by Ibn Mas'ud and Sa'id b. Jubayr; as "grandsons" by Ibn 'Abbas; as "in laws" by Ibn Mas'ud; while 'Ikrimah, Mujahid, and Hasan al Basri say it stands for "servants." They are all of course expressing one or the other aspect of the meaning of the word. For "*hafadah*" is plural of "*hafid*" and in its singular form it means "he who is made to serve." At the time the verse was revealed, the word was used in all those senses in which it was adopted by different authorities.

Tafsir bi l Ma'thur derives its basis from apart from others a *hadith* which says that when the Prophet was deputing Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen he asked him how was he going to judge between the people. "With the Book of Allah," replied Mu'adh. "But what if you do not find (a lead) therein?" the Prophet asked. "With the *Sunnah* of Allah's Messenger," he replied. "But if you do not find (a lead) therein also?" he asked him. "Then," Mu'adh replied, "I will work out my own opinion." The Prophet expressed his approval (*Muqaddimah*, Ibn Taymiyyah).

A word of caution however, about this kind of *tafsir* should be in place. What is recommended is the methodology as enumerated above, and not the entire content of the books of *tafsir* that have followed this methodology. In some of these works, massive amount of Jewish material and

comments of the early exegetes have been included without verifications of their authenticity. If not read critically, these can have their own pitfalls. Naivety, for instance, can be perceived in those who rely on these alone and have failed to step into the modern age in intellectual terms.

Tafsir bi al Ra'yi (Personal Opinions)

As stated above, sometimes a commentator uses his intelligence, knowledge, intuition or inspiration to bring out a point in language, history, law, etc. Some of such comments are acceptable, while others are not. Take for example verse (2: 102): “*Sulayman blasphemed not, but the Satans blasphemed.*” A question arises. We know that a prophet does not blaspheme. Why then did the Qur’ān have to say that Sulayman (*asws*) did not blaspheme? For an explanation we have to look into the *Bible* which alleges that Solomon became an idolater during the last days of his life (Majid). Though not based on an *athar*, it is a valid explanation and also corroborates with what details classical commentators (such as Ibn Kathir) have recorded as coming from Suddi and Sa`id b. Jubayr.

To take another example, the Qur’ān says (2: 273): “*(Alms are) for the poor who are restrained in the way of Allah, who can not journey in the land (for trade). The ignorant supposes them rich because of their restraint. You will know them by their mark. They do not beg of people with importunity. And whatsoever of good things that you spend, surely, Allah will know it.*”

Commenting on the verse, Thanwi says that the words, ‘*(Alms are) for the poor who are restrained in the way of Allah,*’ are telling us that those who are working in the way of Allah deserve to receive first priority in aid. Further, the clause ‘*who cannot journey in the land*’ signifies that it is desirable for those engaged in the path of Allah that they suspend their efforts at earning livelihood, if need be, although there is no contradiction between the two (i.e. engagement in the path of Allah, and search for livelihood). Finally, the words ‘*the ignorant supposes them rich,*’ implies that it is undesirable to put on appearances that distinguish a man from the common people.

This is the kind of *Tafsir bi l ra'yi* that is acceptable since such statements can be corroborated in other ways also. What can be proved as valid ei-

ther directly through deductions from the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, opinions of the Companions, their immediate Followers, or that which, in the least, does not contradict any of the above, in word or spirit, is valid and acceptable.

The permission for this kind of interpretation is based on the supplication (*du`a*) which the Prophet made for Ibn `Abbas. He said:

اللَّهُمَّ فَمِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ وَعَلِّمَهُ التَّأْوِيلَ

“O Allah, grant him knowledge of the Qur'ān and teach him the true interpretation.”

Contrary to this is the unprincipled interpretation that has its basis neither in the sources cited above, nor does it agree with the spirit of Islam as understood by the scholars at large; they must be ignored.

To explain, any opinion with reference to a Qur'ānic text that contradicts with that of the *Salaf*, in matters involving the *Shari`ah*, values, morals, or spiritual matters, is *Tafsir bi al-Ra`yi*, and stands rejected outright. It is about such an interpretation that the Prophet remarked: “Whoever spoke about the Qur'ān without knowledge, may seek his abode in the Fire.”

The Companions and their Followers were quite careful about offering an interpretation that did not have a Qur'ānic verse or *hadīth* in its support. Abu Bakr (*ra*) used to say: “Which heaven will shelter me, and which earth will support me, if I said about Allah’s Book, that which I have no knowledge of.” Abu Yezid said: “We used to ask Sa`id ibn al Musayyib about the ‘lawful’ and the ‘unlawful’ and would find him the most knowledgeable of men. But when we asked him about a verse of the Qur'ān as to how it was to be understood, he would be quiet, turning a deaf ear to us.”

***Tafsir 'Ishari* (Allegorical Interpretation)**

By nature, man is awed by the mysterious. It is the inexplicable, the symbolical, and the mysterious that engage his attention. The obvious and the clear cut escape him. To seek a solution to a riddle or the meaning of an allegory is a task he undertakes with enthusiasm. The allegorical

verses of the Qur'ān have provided grist to the minds of its scholars and there have been several interpretations proffered to explain them. Some of these are not readily acceptable and raise controversies. The best course of action about them when they are authentically quoted, by authoritative people, but which seemingly contradict ideas of the *Salaf*, is to make no judgment about their acceptance or rejection.

In this work the use of *Tafsir 'l Ishari* has been restricted. It is inadvisable to read them without the guidance of a specialist. Thanwi's *Masa'il al Suluk* as footnotes to his Urdu *Bayan al Qur'ān*, is of this class. So are Alusi's notes under this heading. Qushayri is matchless.

Nevertheless, it should also be borne in mind that every passage whose meaning is not obvious is not necessarily of the allegorical type, nor is the Qur'ān entirely without them. There are some portions of the Qur'ān whose true meaning the human mind might never be able to unravel. Ibn 'Abbas has said: "There are four kinds of meanings: a) that which is apparent to the Arabs because it is in their language, b) that whose meaning no one can deny on the pretext of ignorance, c) the meaning that is the share of the scholars alone, and, d) the meaning that no one knows save Allah and His Messenger."

Further, one may note that there are Qur'ānic texts whose meanings would be understood at the time of death, or subsequent to that event.

Application

Following the Qur'ānic method, we might end with what we started with. Application is part of the study. One will not travel much on the road if he failed to live by the instructions and inspirations that he received with the study. The Qur'ān is the Word of Allah. It has been sent to guide the people. But it guides only those who are willing to be guided. As Rumi has said, the Qur'ān is a closed book except for the true ardent seeker; to which we might add, 'those who would care to apply.'

A further condition is to avoid sins of all kinds. The following is reported to have been said by Imam Shafe'i:

شكوت إلى وكيع سوء حفظي * فأرشدني إلى ترك المعاصي
وأخبرني بأن العلم نور * ونور الله لا يهدي لعاصي

*I complained to Waki` of my forgetfulness
He instructed me to give up sins
And informed me that knowledge is Light
And Allah's Light is not shown to the sinner*

The student of the Qur`ān will have to develop his mind in such a way as to be skeptical of everything that the senses report, doubt every opinion that is formed by the intellect, and question any information that comes from non revealed sources. In the next step, he will have to test all of them against the Qur`ān and reject any that contradicts it in word or spirit. Ibn Mas`ud (ra) said: "During the life-time of the Prophet, we used to take ten verses of the Qur`ān for study and would not move on to the next ten until we had lived by those ten." It is reported of `Umar ibn al Khat-tab (ra) that he finished *Surah al Baqarah* in seven years. According to a report he was so happy at its completion that he slaughtered a camel and invited his friends to a feast.

We can conclude with Zarkashi's remarks. He writes in *Al Burhan fi `Ulum al Qur`ān*:

"In the final analysis, the derivation of the meaning of the Qur`ān is largely dependent on a man's own thoughts and reflections. Let it be known, therefore, that the true meaning of the revelation and the secrets of the veiled knowledge will never be the share of a man whose heart is filled with innovations, or who insists on a sin, or in whose heart resides pride or base desires or love of the world, or that he be of an uncertain faith, or poor of discernment, or dependent on the opinions of a *mufassir* who has knowledge only of the externals (*`ilm al-ẓāhir*), or gives precedence to his own thoughts and ideas (during the process of thinking). All these are veils and obstacles, some of which are of greater impedance than others.

“(In contrast), if the man pays full attention to the words of His Lord, is receptive to the meaning that the Attributes of the One addressing him unfold themselves, is always aware of His powers, abandons his own self-established conclusions based on reason and intellect, renounces his own powers and abilities, is ever mindful of the greatness of the Speaker, beseeching Him the grant of the meaning: and all this from a personal state of integrity, a good-natured heart, with the power of knowledge, of a calm disposition to gather the meaning, and to wait for the missed meaning seeking (Divine) help through Prayers and Supplications, (the supplications themselves) presented with the weakness (of the human against Powers of the Divine), and observing patience while waiting for the mind to be opened by Him who is the Opener, the Knowing; and he who strengthens these qualities with a recitation during which his mind is fully attentive to the verbal meaning and bears witness to the Attributes of the One addressing him by anxiously waiting for the promises (of the opening of the heart coming true), and fearing the calamities (that may befall him for his failings), and who warns forcefully .. such is the one who has a good voice for the Qur’ān and it is about him that Allah Most High has said (2:121): *‘Those to whom we have given the Book, read it in the manner it should be read. It is these who believe in it’*” (p. 180-81, vol.2).

The Methodology in this Work

It has been this writer’s endeavor to present in this work, principally, the meaning of the Qur’ān as understood by the classical scholars. That is, in the light of the Qur’ān itself, traditions of the Prophet and statements of the Companions and their followers. To achieve this, the author first consulted Ibn Jarir Tabari. Since Ibn Jarir was a *Muhaddith* himself, he did not cite sources to the *hadith*, or to statements of the Companions that he quoted. Citing the sources was done by Ibn Kathir. Therefore, Ibn Kathir was next consulted. However, Ibn Kathir did not cite sources to the statements of the *Salaf*. This was done, to some degree, by Shawkani.

So, he was consulted next. Although Ibn Kathir cited *hadith* sources, he did not state the authenticity-status of *ahadith*. In such cases, this author tried to search the opinion of *Hadith* Doctors, to add a note about their reliability. Further, if there were differences in opinions over the meaning of a certain verse, Ibn Kathir preferred to adopt the opinion of Ibn Jarir, which, this author indicated. Thus, a meaning emerged as of the *Salaf*. The translation of the verses reflects this meaning. The author suppressed his own opinions, for whose credibility he lacks the qualification, unless it was a scientific issue, historical, geographical or the like.

Thereunto, the author added the opinions of various other commentators, taking care of course, that such opinions did not clash with the opinions of the *Salaf*, for in matters of Law, morals (*Akhlaq*), and spiritual matters, the *Salaf* were the true authority. The way the first three generations understood the Qur'ān, was never understood by any after them. It is they who changed the world, the way no generation could. If a headstrong person thinks that someone's understanding of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, was, or is, as good as that of the *Salaf*, and as accurate, he might need a course on how *'ilm* is defined in Islam. Ibn Sirin, a prominent *Tabē'i* said, "Knowledge is gone. What's left of it is bits and pieces, scattered among the scholars." Hasan al-Basri, his contemporary, was told by someone that the "Fuqaha' say so and so." He corrected him, "Have you ever seen a *Faqih*?"

An additional note about the commentaries made by the Companions and their followers might be in order. The Prophet has said: "The best of epochs is my epoch, then that of the Followers, and then that of the Followers." He was referring to the epoch followed by his own, and that of the Companions and the *Tabē'iyyun*. There were many Companions of the Prophet who received his special attention and specialized in the Qur'ān during his life time. In turn they tutored many among the *Tabē'iyyun*. The term *Salaf* applies mainly to these: i.e., the Companions and the two succeeding generations, plus the third (because of some reports). Their opinion is the approved opinion. If they agree over the meaning of a particular word, or a verse, and the issue is purely of a religious nature as

indicated above, then any other opinion that contradicts it and cannot be reconciled with it, stands rejected. Of course, there is no such restriction when the subject concerned is of historical, geographical or scientific nature, for, these disciplines were developed after them. Some contemporary commentaries tend to give new meanings to some Qur'ānic terms. If they clash with those of the *Salaf*, they must be ignored; for, the *Salaf* knew the 'Arabic of the Qur'an,' and not the Arabic of those who refer to dictionaries and literary works developed after them to argue their case. 'Umar used to say, "If you are in doubt, refer to the *Jahiliyy* poetry. The Qur'an was revealed in that language."

The opinions of the *Salaf* might sometimes surprise the reader. Sometimes, he might consider them as entirely out of context. But, it is the failure to understand the context that creates the confusion. "Jump the line" is a sentence in English that conveys different meanings to different people in different situations. To a sportsman it has one meaning. When spoken by a motorist complaining of the erratic behavior of another motorist it has another meaning. In contrast, to an electrician working on the power grid, the sentence carries a different sense altogether. What we have to realize about the Companions is that they did not merely understand the context; they were themselves the context, and often spoke from the transcendental level; not from the stand point of the misleading cliché of modern times: 'reason and logic.'

If the reader wishes to make the most of this work, he or she should allocate an area in his mind wherein he stores information obtained from the *Salaf*, in this work. This is the principal, the most reliable meaning, and the basis on which he can build on further. He might highlight such passages for ease of later reference.

Nonetheless, in order to keep alive interest and help increase knowledge, we have also included material that has so far been the prerogative of the Arabic speaking readers: material without which the Qur'ānic spectrum of legitimate meaning loses some of its color.

To the above I have added some useful material from commentaries in Urdu and English. But of course, while selecting material from contem-

porary works, a critical eye has been kept open for errors of the conceptual type and, to the extent possible, those that contradict with a meaning accepted by the *Jumhur al Ummah* (the great majority). *Jumhur al Ummah* is of course not the same thing as the *Ijma` al Ummah* (the consensus of opinion – the research of which is a difficult task, well beyond the scope of this work). The opinions of the *Jumhur* give us some idea of how the Qur`ān has been understood through the ages. When Ibn Jarir, Zamakhshari, Razi, Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Thanwi or others consider a point from the previous exegetes as worth quoting, then surely that adds up to the weight of the comment.

I have not reproduced from, or cited reference to, the contemporary commentators if they have discussed those matters that the ancients have already done. In most cases the contemporary scholars have changed the form, picking out from the ancients what would suit them. I have quoted them only if they have a new idea or a fresh point, with the condition, once again, that such ideas do not, in my limited knowledge, contradict a proven opinion held by the *Salaf* or *Jumhu al-Ummah*. Anecdotes, poetry, *fiqh* points, and comparative study material have been added to break the monotony.

A word about quotations from the *Sufiya`* would be in order. We all know that an unclean person in dirty clothes would hardly improve himself by applying perfume. He first needs to cleanse himself. How can it be any different in matters pertaining to the soul? A heart filled with pride or preferential love of this world will hardly improve through wisdom-words or supererogatory exercises. Something needs to be done first to remove the impurities. *Sufism* is all about this removal of impurities. This centrist position however, lies between two extremes. It should not be imagined that by quoting the *Sufiya`* we are approving the extreme positions, practices, or the so called “ways of the Gnostic” that have no basis in the *Shari`ah*.

***Hadīth* Authenticity**

The most difficult task has been to present only those *ahadīth* or reports from the Companions or others that are authentic, since no noteworthy work has been done by the *hadīth* experts on Qur'ānic commentaries. Mahmud Shakir's attempt at Tabari has remained incomplete. Hussain b. Ibrahim and Sayyid Ibrahim have done some useful, although not exhaustive work on Ibn Kathir and Shawkani. Occasionally, I have either traced the *ahadīth* to their sources, and when not in the *Sahih* works, have depended on works on the topic by *Hadīth* experts. I have tried not to quote anything less than *Hasan* in status. If I have quoted some weak reports, it is only those that are not very weak or are strengthened by other, although weak, *ahadīth*, or personal opinions of the Companion or others.

Ideological Interpretations

Some readers might be surprised to note the lack of a single string of thought in this work, as it is also lacking in classical commentaries: one strand, so to say, that weaves into itself the “philosophy of the whole of the Qur'ān.” This is a naive idea. To speak of the Qur'ān in such terms is to presume a certain meaning, a certain philosophy, a certain ideology, and reduce the Word of Allah to human definitions.

It is common knowledge that this terrestrial existence is too complex to be interpreted in terms of a single philosophy. Life cannot be reduced to equations. Even the inorganic does not render itself to such simplification. At this very moment, scientists at a billion dollar apiece Accelerators (commonly known as atom smashers) are at their wit's end trying to determine if the building blocks of an atom (which were once thought to be electrons, protons, neutrons and a few other elementary particles) are quarks, those 300 subatomic particles visible for a fraction of a second when the nucleus is smashed with highly accelerated protons, or there is more to it. No one can say for sure if there will be an end to it!! The wave and particle function at the quantum level, is another intriguing issue. If solid matter is proving so complex, what should one think of the uncreated 'Word' of Allah?

Moreover, such a demand betrays the failure to understand the very basics of life in terms of human fears, hopes, aspirations, creativity and interactions. At every moment of his existence a man has several options before him, only one of which is the optimum best for him. What can guide him to the right choice but a criterion backed by a vast set of concepts, data and ideas that have their own quality to fuse themselves, in a flash of a second, into one homogenized whole and present a single, synchronized, workable idea or a suggestion that the man may accept or reject!?

Again, the Qur'ān is, from one angle, a long essay in the education of concepts: the divisions are for human convenience. No detail can be missed in any area but at the loss of a concept; sometimes it might be the most valuable concept acting as the central link to a maze of ideas, and, a powerful magnet to iron flakes flying by in every direction. Hence the presentation in the style we have adopted. The reader will have to pick up bits and pieces, and put them together into a homogenous meaningful whole that is pertinent to his situation, and would be useful perhaps to him alone.

Acknowledgment

Rarely has a work of such dimensions and a task so demanding been attempted by a man as poorly qualified as this author. Yet, no efforts were spared to locate material necessary to produce the “aid for understanding the Qur'ān” that he has aimed at producing. Although, it must be admitted, that efforts are no substitute for abilities.

The author's dependence, therefore, on those who are pioneers in similar efforts should be quite evident. In the rendering of the Qur'ānic text into English for instance, A.J. Arberry's influence can be easily detected. Yusuf `Ali, Asad and Pickthall have been in constant reference. N.J. Dawood and several others have also been consulted. To make it easier for the beginners and non Muslims (and following the recommendation of the *fūqaha'*), words and phrases have been added in parenthesis while rendering the text into English. Such interpolations are, nonetheless, based on an accepted interpretation.

Without trying to be humble, it can be said, with a fair amount of accuracy, that for all that is good and useful in this work, the credit is due to one of the predecessors, while shortcomings are the contributions of this author who seeks Allah's forgiveness, and the reader's help in overcoming them.

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Syed Iqbal Zaheer

26th September 2018

Dammam

References, abbreviations, and technical Terms

Clue to References

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'*Awn al-Ma'bud* : *Sharh Sunan Abi Da'ud*, Muhammad Shams al-Haq al-'Azimabadi.

'*Ayni*, '*Umdatul-Qari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, Badruddin '*Ayni*, Ihya al-Turath al-Islami, Beirut.

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- Hussain: *Tafsir ibn Kathir*, Hussain b. Ibrahim Zahran, ed.
- Ibn Is-haq: *Sirah Rasulullah*, by Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 151 A.H.).
- Ibn Jarir/Tabari: *Jami` al Bayan Fi Tafsir al Qur`an* by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d.310 A.H.)
- Ibn Kathir: *Tafsir al Qur`an al `Azim* by `Imad al Din Abul Fida Isma`il ibn `Amr ibn Kathir (d.774 A.H.)
- Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, Muhammad b. Yazid al-Qazwini, Maktabah al-`Ilmiyyah, Beirut.
- Ibn Qayyim: *Al-Tafsir Al-Qayyim*, by Shamsuddin Muhammad b. Abi Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d.751 A.H.) collected by Muhammad Uways Al-Nadwi.
- Jami` Saghir: Fayd al-Qadir Sharh Jami` Saghir* (of Jalaluddin Suyuti) by Muhammad `Abdul Ra`uf al-Munawi.
- Kabir al: Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, *tafsir* notes of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728 A.H) collected by Dr. `Abdul Rahman `Umayrah.
- Kanz: Kanz al-`Ummal*, by Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi.
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- Lughat: Lughat al-Qur`an* (Urdu) by Mawlana Abdul Rashid No`mani & Mawlana Sayyid Abdud-Da`im Al-Jalali.
- Ma`arif /Shafi` : Ma`arif al Qur`an* by Mufti Muhammad Shafi` Deobandi (d. 1396 A.H.).
- Majid: *Holy Qur`an Translation and Commentary* (English) by `Abdul Majid Daryabadi (1397).
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Razi: *Tafsir al Fakhr al Razi* by Muhammad al-Razi Fakhr al Din ibn Dia al Din 'Umar (d.604 A.H.)

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Shabbir/'Uthmani: *Al-Qur'ān al-Karim*, Commentary by Shabbir Ahmed 'Uthmani (d. 1370 A.H.).

Shanqiti: *Adwa' al-Bayan, Fi Idahi Al-Qur'ān bi 'l-Qur'ān* by Muhammad Al-Amin b. Muhammad Al-Mukhtar Al-Jakani Al-Shanqiti.

Se`di: *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman, fir Tafsir al-Mannan*, `Abdul Rahman b. Nasir Se`id.

Shawkani: *Al-Fut-h al-Qadir* by Muhammad ibn `Ali Shawkani (d.1255 A.H.)

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Zamakhshari/Kashshaf: *Haqa`iq al- Tanzil Wa `Uyun al-Aqawil Fi Wujuh at-Ta`wil* by Abu al-Qasim Jarallah Mahmood b.`Umar al-Zamakhshari (d.538 A.H.).

Zarkashi: *Al-Burhan Fi `Ulum al-Qur`an* by Badruddin Muhammad bin `Abdullah al-Zarkashi (d. 794 A.H.), Dar al-Ma`rifa, Beirut.

Note: The list above is not a bibliography, but rather books often referred to.

**Abbreviations as in
Abdul Majid Daryabadi's English Commentary**

(1) BOOKS OF THE *BIBLE*

Ac. = Acts of the Apostles.

Am. = Amos.

1. Ch. = The First Book of the Chronicles.

2. Ch. = The Second Book of the Chronicles.

1. Cor. = Paul's First Epistle of the Apostles.

1. Ch. = The First Book of the Chronicles.

2. Ch. = The Second Book of the Chronicles.

1. Cor. = Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.

2. Cor. = Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

Dn. = The Book of Daniel.

Dt. = Deuteronomy: The Fifth Book of Moses.

Ex. = Exodus: The Second Book of Moses.

Ez. = Ezra.

Ezek. = The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Ga. = Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Ge. = Genesis: The First Book of Moses.

He. = Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews.

Ho. = Hosea.

Is. = Isaiah.

Ja. = The General Epistle of James.

Jn. = Gospel according to St. John.

Jo. = Joel.

Job. = The Book of Job.
Jon. = The Book of Jonah.
Josh. = The Book of Joshua.
Judg. = The Book of Judges.
Je. = The Book of Jeremiah.
1. Ki. = The First Book of the Kings.
2. Ki. = The Second Book of the Kings.
La. The Lamentations of Jeremiah.
Lk. = The Gospel according to St. Luke.
Le. = Leviticus: The Third Book of Moses.
Mi. = Micah.
Mk. = Gospel according to St. Mark.
Mt. = Gospel according to St. Matthew.
Na. = Nahum.
Ne. = The Book of Nehemiah.
Nu. = Numbers: The Fourth Book of Moses.
1. Pe. = The First Epistle General of Peter.
2. Pe. = The Second Epistle General of Peter.
Ph. = Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.
Pr. = The Proverbs.
Ps. = The Book of Psalms.
Re. = The Revelation of St. John.
Ro. = Paul's Epistle to the Romans
1. Sa. = The First Book of Samuel.
2. Sa. = The Second Book of Samuel.
So. = The Song of Solomon.

1. Thes. = Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians.
2. Thes. = Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.
1. Ti. = Paul's First Epistle to Timothy.
2. Ti. = Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy.
- Tt. = Paul's Epistle to Titus.
- Ze. = Zechariah.

(2) GENERAL

- "Ant." = Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews.*' (Routledge London).
- Aq. = Shah Abdul Qadir Dehlavi (D. 1241 A.H./1826 C.E.). Urdu translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'ān.
- ASB. = Asad's English Translation of *Sahih al-Bukhari.*
- AV. = Authorized Version of the *Bible.*
- AYA. = `Abdullah Yusuf `Ali. English translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'ān.
- Bdh. = Nasir-ud-Din `Abdullah Baidhavi (D. 685 A.H./1282 C.E.). Commentator of the Holy Qur'ān.
- BK. = '*Book of Knowledge,*' 4 Vols. (Educational Book Co., London)
- CD. = Pallen and Wynne's '*New Catholic Dictionary.*' (New York).
- CE. = McDannell's '*Concise Encyclopedia,*' 8 Vols. (New York).
- C.E. = Christian Era.
- DB. = Hastings' '*Dictionary of the Bible,*' 5 Vols. (Clarke, London).
- DCA. = Smith and Cheetham's '*Dictionary of Christian Antiquities,*' 2 Vols. (Murray, London).
- DV. = Douay Version of the *Bible.*
- EBi. = Cheyne and Black's '*Encyclopedia Biblica,*' 4 Vols. (Black, London).
- EBr. = '*Encyclopedia Britannica,*' 29 Vols. 11th Edition. (London).

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EI. = Houtsma and Wensink's '*Encyclopedia of Islam*,' 5 Vols. (Luzac, London).

EMK. = Hammerton's '*Encyclopedia of Modern Knowledge*,' 5 Vols. (Waverly, New York).

ERE. = Hastings' '*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*,' 13 Vols. (Clarke, London).

ESS. = Seligman's '*Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*,' 15 Vols. (Macmillan, London).

FWN = Frazer's '*Worship of Nature*,' 2 Vols. (Macmillan, London).

GB. = Ragg's '*The Gospel of Barnabas*.' (Oxford).

GRE. = Gibbon's '*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,' 7 Vols. (Methuen, London).

HHW. = 'Historians' '*History of the World*,' 25 Vols. (The Times, London).

HJ. = '*The Hibbert Journal*.' (Constable, London).

IA. = Hadhrat `Abdullah Ibn-i-`Abbas. (D. 68 A.H./688 C.E.) (A companion and cousin of the Holy Prophet).

IQ. = Ibn-i-Qutaiba. (D. 276 A.H./890 C.E.) Author of 'Arabic Glossary of the Holy Qur`ān.

JE. = '*The Jewish Encyclopedia*,' 12 Vols. (Funk and Wagnalls, New York).

LL. = Lane's '*Arabic-English Lexicon*,' 8 Vols. (Williams and Norgate, London).

LSK. = Lane and Lane-Poole's '*Selections from the Kuran*.' (Trubner, London).

M.A. = Maulana Mohammad `Ali: (D. 1349 A.H./1931 C.E.) Indian Muslim leader. (Not to be confused with his namesake of Lahore and a translator of the Qur`ān). The references are to his unpublished work, '*Islam: The Kingdom of God*' (since published as 'My Life – A Fragment')

by Sh. M. Ashraf, Lahore).

NSD. = 'New Standard Dictionary of the English Language,' 4 Vols. (Funk and Wagnalls, New York).

NT. = *The New Testament*.

OT. = *The Old Testament*.

PC. = Tyler's 'Primitive Culture,' 2 Vols. (Murray, London).

RV. = Revised Version of the *Bible*.

RZ. = Imam Fakhruddin Razi. (D. 659 A.H./1209 C.E.). Well-known commentator of the Holy Qur'ān.

SOED. = 'Shorter Oxford English Dictionary,' 2 Vols. (Oxford).

SPD. = Sale's 'Preliminary Discourse to the Translation of the Kuran,' prefixed as Introduction to Wherry's 'Commentary on the Kuran,' 4 Vols. (Trubner, London)

Th. = Maulana Ashraf `Ali Thanvi. (B. 1280 A.H./1864 C.E.). Translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'ān

UHW. = Hammerton's 'Universal History of the World,' 8 Vols. (New York).

VJE. = Vallentine's 'One Volume Jewish Encyclopedia.' (London).

WGAL. = Wright's 'Grammar of the Arabic Language,' 2 Vols. (Cambridge).

Zm. = Jar-ul-lah Zamakhsari (D. 538 A.H./1144 C.E.). Commentator of the Holy Qur'ān.

Abbreviations (General)

asws: `Alayhi al Salat wa al Salam (on him be peace and blessing).

Ra: Radi Allahu `anhul` anha (may Allah be pleased with him/her).

Au.: Author.

Sahihayn: Bukhari and Muslim.

Saws: Sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam (May Allah send peace and blessing upon him).

Swt: Subhanahu wa Ta`ala (glorified be He, the Exalted).

Technical Terms

Da`if: A weak report but not a fabricated one nor entirely untrustworthy. It has some weakness in its text or in its *isnad*. A kind of *hadith*, therefore, before which one can place a question mark.

Gharib: That report in which the *isnad* has a single narrator after the Companion.

Hasan: A *da`if* report but above in strength over the one classified as *da`if*. Several *da`if* versions (unless too weak) render a *hadith hasan*.

Isnad: Chain of narrators.

Mawquf: A report whose chain of narration stops at a Companion.

Munkar: A kind of *da`if hadith* that has no other report through any other chain of narrators for a double check.

Mursal: A *hadith* which has been transmitted directly from the Prophet (*saws*) by a *tabe`I*, without a Companion in between *Mutawatir*: A report by such a large number of narrators whose agreement upon a lie is inconceivable.

Sahih: A trustworthy report.

Transliteration

The transliteration method used in this work neither conforms to the international standards, nor it has been applied extensively. It is only where it was thought that some confusion might occur that a few marks have been added. However, the method is as follows:

(ث) is transliterated as “*tha*”; (ح) as “*ha*”; (ذ) as “*dhal*”; (ز) and (ظ) both as “*za*”; (ص) as “*sad*”; (ض) as “*dad*”; (ع) as “*`Ayn*”; and (ء) as in e.g. Jibra'il.

Vowels

Vowels have been expressed in the following manner

(ا) is expressed as “a”, so that (باب) is written as “*bab*”; (و) is expressed with “u”, as for example (نون) is written as “*nun*”; (ي) is expressed with “i”, as in the word (سين) which is written as “*sin*”.

