

2. Erroneous Impressions concerning the Miraculous Inimitability of the Qur'an

Synopsis: The Qur'an and Arabic grammar; the manner by which a miracle is established for all humanity; al-Naam's doctrine of morphology; contrariety in the Qur'anic narratives from the two Testaments; the inconsistencies of the Gospel; negation of free will and delegation of authority [to humankind]; the establishment of the middle position between the two extremes in the Qur'an; the compilation of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet; the method of the Qur'an in connecting separate subjects [in different parts of the Qur'an]; an absurd and futile attempt to counter two Surahs of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an has challenged all humanity to produce a chapter like one of its chapters, and, so far, no one has been able to take up the challenge. Since for its obstinate enemies it was intolerable that the Qur'an should defeat its adversaries, they attempted to lower its prestige by casting doubts that their imaginations fabricated about the greatness of the Qur'an, and [expressing] support of their corrupt beliefs. It would be appropriate to turn here to those unfounded doubts, for which they exerted themselves, and to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge and the way their whims swayed them willy-nilly and cast them into a deep abyss. They maintained the following.

1. There are matters in the Qur'an that are inconsistent with eloquence because they are not in compliance with Arabic grammar. A book like that cannot be a miracle.

This opinion is false on two grounds. First, the Qur'an was revealed among the skilled masters of the Arabic language. It challenged them to counter it, even by producing a single sura, and reminded them that created beings did not have the ability to do so ***"though they were helpers one of another"*** (***Qur'an 17:88***). Had the Qur'an contained passages that did not conform with the rules of Arabic, those skilled masters of the language, who knew its modes and characteristics, would have used these passages as an argument against the Qur'an, and would have criticized it for them. Indeed, they would have been spared the trouble of countering it with words and lances. Moreover, had such a thing

happened, history would have recorded it, and the story would have been narrated frequently among the enemies of Islam. How, then, could this be true when not a single narrative has been transmitted concerning it?

Second, the Qur'an was revealed at a time when the rules of Arabic grammar had not taken a definitive form. These rules were derived only afterward, by investigating the usage and structure employed by the masters of Arabic style. If the Qur'an were not a divine revelation [and] its opponents assert [that it is not], there is still no question that it would [represent] an eloquent Arabic speech, and therefore one of the sources of Arabic grammar. It would not be of a lower standard than the eloquent speech of other skilled masters of the language who were contemporaries of the Prophet of Islam. In other words, if subsequent trends in Arabic grammar were inconsistent with the language of the Qur'an, this would be an invalidation of those trends, not an argument against the Qur'an. This is not to mention that this argument against the Qur'an could stand only if the various readings of the Qur'an were identical. But we shall demonstrate in due course that the prevalent readings are based on the personal reasoning of the readers themselves, and not on an uninterrupted and universally accepted transmission from the Prophet. Thus, if an objection were raised against a given reading, this would be a proof of the invalidity of that particular reading, and would not affect the greatness of the Qur'an and its prestige.

2. They also say that an eloquent speech cannot be regarded as miraculous even if human beings are unable to match it. This is because its eloquence is appreciated by some people [but not by] others. A miracle, in contrast, must be recognized as a miracle by all human beings, for every individual among them is obligated to believe in the prophethood of the person who has worked this miracle.

The response to this objection is as follows. This doubt [about the Qur'an] is as weak and as analogically inconsistent as the preceding one, for it is not an essential requirement that a miracle should be acknowledged by all humanity, and if we were to stipulate that as a requirement, we would be left with no miracles at all. This is because a miracle is recognized by a particular group, and it would be proven to others by an uninterrupted transmission (*mutawatir*). ¹ We have already mentioned that the Qur'an is distinguished from other miracles in that the transmission of a reported [tradition] may be interrupted with the passage of time. As for the Qur'an, it is a miracle which will last forever, along with the lasting of the Arab nation or even of those who know the characteristics of the Arabic language, even though they may not be Arabs.

3. They say that whoever has a full understanding of Arabic would be able to bring forth a word like the words of the Qur'an; and since [such a person] can do that, he will also be able to produce the like of the Qur'an. This is because the rules regarding the possible and the impossible similarities are one and the same.

The response is as follows. This doubt does not deserve mentioning, for the ability to bring forth the like of a word of the Qur'an, or even of one of its sentences, does not entail the ability to bring forth the like of the [entire] Qur'an, or even of one of its suras. This is because the ability to produce one element of a

structure does not entail the ability to produce the whole. For this reason, it is not correct to say that every person on earth has the ability to create magnificent castles and huge palaces simply because he is able to make a brick in the structure. Nor is it correct to say that every Arab is able to write speeches and compose panegyrics because he knows all the words and vocabularies that [are used] in them.

It was probably this mistaken view that led al-Nazzam and his associates to argue that the inimitability of the Qur'an was in its being 'kept away' [from other human beings]. This view is very difficult to sustain because of the following points.

First, if by 'keeping away' they mean that God is able to empower a human being to bring forth the like of the Qur'an, but that God has kept this ability away from [the rest of] mankind, this would be correct, but it would apply to all miracles, not only to the Qur'an. However, if it means that people possess the ability to bring forth the like of the Qur'an, but God has kept them away from countering it, then this would be wrong because many people have attempted to match the Qur'an, but failed, and have admitted their failure.

Second, if the inimitability of the Qur'an rested in 'keeping away,' then something like it would have existed in pre-Islamic Arabic literature before the Prophet had challenged mankind to do that. Had such a thing existed, it would have been reported by an uninterrupted transmission, for there were many good reasons for it to be reported. However, since it neither existed nor was narrated, this proves that the Qur'an is by itself a divine miracle, beyond human capacity [for achievement].

4. They also say that even if the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an is conceded, this does not establish the truthfulness of the prophecy of the person who brought it forth, for the Qur'anic stories contradict the stories of the two Testaments, whose divine origin has been proven by uninterrupted transmission.

The response to this is that the Qur'an, by contradicting the mythical stories of the two Testaments, has put an end to all doubts about its being a divine revelation, for it contains no myths or absurdities or anything that is not rationally attributable to God, the Exalted, and to His prophets. Consequently, the Qur'an's contradiction of the two Testaments is itself a proof of its being a divine revelation. We have already alluded to this, and to a number of fallacies in the two Testaments.

5. They say that the Qur'an contains inconsistencies and that, as such, it cannot be regarded as a divine revelation. They claim that the inconsistencies occur in two places: first in God's saying [to Zechariah]: **"Your [divine] sign is that you will not speak to the people for three days except through intimation" (Qur'an 3:41)**. This, they maintain, contradicts God's saying that **"your sign is that you will not speak to the people for three nights together" (Qur'an 19: 10)**.

The response to this is that the word "day" (*yawm*) may apply to daylight only, as in the following:

And He subjected them to it on seven nights and eight grueling days (Qur'an 69:7).

Or [it may apply] to daylight and the following night, as in God's saying:

Enjoy life in your homes for three days (Qur'an 11:65)!

Likewise, the word "night" (*layl*) may apply to the period between sunset and sunrise, as in God's saying:

By the night when it conceals (Qur'an 92: 1).

Seven nights and eight grueling days (Qur'an 69:7).

Or it may apply to nighttime and the following daylight, as in God's saying: ***"And We promised Moses forty nights" (Qur'an 2:51).***

The use of the words "night" and "day" in these two senses is frequent. Indeed, the two words have been used in those two noble verses [Qur'an 69:7 and 2:51] in the second sense of daylight and nighttime combined. As such, there is no inconsistency. The suspicion of inconsistency is based on the words "day" and "night" as they are used in the first sense. What we have explained is clear, without any ambiguity in it. However, the person who raises this suspicion deliberately overlooks the truth in order to detract from the prestige of the Qur'an. Moreover, he is oblivious to, or perhaps deliberately overlooks, the obvious contradiction in the New Testament when it uses these two words. For, chapter 12 of Matthew reports that Christ said that he shall remain buried in the earth for three days or three nights. Yet both Matthew and the other three gospels are in agreement that Christ did not remain buried except from just before sunset on Friday, through the night of Friday, the daylight of Saturday, and the night of Saturday, till before the dawn of Sunday. Look at the variations in the gospels, and then say to the author of the Gospel of Matthew and to all those who believe that is a divine revelation: How do the three days and three nights add up? And, it is indeed strange that Western scholars and intellectuals believe in the two Testaments, which are so replete with myths and contradictions, and not in the Qur'an, which is the Book committed to the guidance of humanity, and to leading them toward their happiness in this and the next world. However, prejudice is an incurable disease, and the seekers of truth are few, as we have pointed out earlier.

The second Qur'anic inconsistency noted is that the Qur'an sometimes attributes an act to the decision of the creature. Thus, it says:

Thus, the one who wishes will believe and the one who wishes will disbelieve (Qur'an 18:29).

There are many other verses that say this, and they establish that the human being is free in his actions. However, the Qur'an at times also attributes the decision regarding actions to God, the Exalted. Thus, it says:

You do not will, except what God wills (Qur'an 76:30).

Accordingly, they [these critics] assert that this last verse indicates that human beings are coerced in

their actions. Thus, they maintain that this is an evident contradiction, and that the interpretation of the verses is against their general sense, an opinion without proof.

The response is that each human being is able to perceive, through his innate disposition, that he is capable of a number of actions. Thus, it is possible for him to perform or not perform them. This is an instinctive judgment that no one can doubt except if the doubt is introduced from without. All rational persons are unanimous in censuring evildoers and praising the good. This is one proof that human beings are free in their actions, and not compelled when they perform them. Every rational person can observe that his movement when he walks on the ground is different from that when he falls from a high place to the ground. Thus, he will observe that he is free in the former case and coerced in the latter. Moreover, every rational person is able to perceive, through his innate disposition, that, although he is free to do or not to do certain things, most of the rudiments of these actions are, in many cases, outside his choice. This is because among the rudiments of performing an act is the existence of the human being, his perception of the act, his desire for it, the appropriateness of the act for one of his capacities, and his ability to perform it. It is clear that these kinds of rudiments are beyond human free will, and the one who creates these things in human beings is the Creator of the human being himself.

It has been established in its proper place that the Creator of these elements in mankind did not detach Himself from His creatures after the creation, and that the survival of created things and their continuity need its mover at every moment. The relationship of the Creator to the things He creates is not the same as the relation between the mason and a wall he has built. The wall thereafter does not need its builder. It will remain even if he dies. Nor does it resemble an author whom the book needs until it has been written, but does not need in the stages of its survival and continuation. Rather, the relationship of the Creator, **"to whom belongs the loftiest likeness"** [Qur'an 16:60], to the things created resembles the effect of electrical power on light. Undoubtedly, the light does not turn on except when it is connected with an electric current, and it will remain in need for this supply of power at all times. But if its wire is disconnected from its source of power for any period of time, the light will be extinguished for that period of time, as if it never existed. Thus do all things and all existents draw on their First Creator for their existence, as long as they exist. They are ever in need of His support, bound to His mercy, which **"embraces all things"** [Qur'an 7: 156]. Accordingly, human actions fall in between free will and predetermination; yet this power and all other elements during the act are conferred by God. Hence, in one respect, the action depends on the human being, and in another, it depends on God. The verses of the Qur'an point to this sense, and a person's freedom to act does not hinder the effect of God's power and authority. We shall give here an example that approximates what we said and would clarify the principle of the "proposition [that is] between the two propositions," which Imams of the Imamite Shi'ites have proclaimed, and to which the Qur'an has alluded.

Let us imagine a person with a paralyzed hand that he cannot move by himself. However, a physician is able to give it temporary willful movement by means of electrical power, so that the person is able to move his hand by himself when the physician connects it to an electrical current. But if he is separated

from the source of power, he is unable to move it at all. Thus, if the physician were to connect the current as an experiment, and if the sick man began to move his hand and use it in his actions, and if, further, the physician continued to provide him with power all the time, this would be a clear example of the "proposition between the two propositions" [of complete freedom and complete predetermination]. [In other words], the movements of the hand cannot be attributed to the man independently, because he is dependent on the supply of power provided by the physician. Nor can that be attributed independently to the physician, because the movements have proceeded from the man of his own will.

Accordingly, the doer is not compelled in his actions, for he himself had willed them; nor are the actions fully delegated to him, because the means come from someone else. All actions that are freely chosen by the doer are of this type. The action originates in the will of the creature, and the creature does not will anything, but with God's leave. All the verses of the Qur'an allude to this end. As such, they invalidate predestination, which is maintained by the majority of Sunnis, for they advance the notion of free will. On the other hand, the verses invalidate complete free will, which is maintained by a few Sunnis, for they attribute the act to God. We shall deal with this subject at length, God willing, when we comment on the relevant verses, and shall refute both these views.

This discussion . . . is derived from the declarations of the Ahl al-Bayt [i.e., from the Imams], and their knowledge. They are those from whom God has removed all pollution, and has purified thoroughly. Here are some of their sayings on this subject.

A man reported the following discussion with the Imam al-Sadiq:

I said, "Has God coerced His servants to commit disobedience?" He said, "No." I said, "Has He delegated to them the matter?" He said, "No." I said, "Then, what is the truth?" He said, "The benevolence of your Lord is between these two [extremes]."²

In another tradition from the Imam al-Sadiq, he is reported as saying, "There is neither predetermination nor free will; rather, it is a position between the two."³

The Shi'ite compendiums of traditions contain numerous traditions to this effect.

[Returning to the arguments against the inimitability of the Qur'an]:

They say that if producing an inimitable book is a miracle, then the Elements of Euclid and the Almagest [of Ptolemy] are miracles. This hypothesis is invalid, however; therefore, the preceding hypothesis is also invalid.

The answer to this is as follows. First, these two books are not inimitable, and no claim to this effect is valid for them. How could they be inimitable when later scholars have produced even better works in these two sciences, and without any difficulty? Furthermore, the later works are superior for other reasons, such as containing new material not broached by the earlier two. Second, we have already

mentioned certain prerequisites for miracles. One of these is that they are performed as a challenge to demonstrate the truthfulness [of the claim] to the divine office [of prophethood]. Another prerequisite is that a miracle should be beyond the laws of nature. Both these prerequisites are absent in the case of the two books [cited above]. We explained this completely in the beginning of our discussion about miraculous inimitability.

They also say that the Arabs did not counter the Qur'an, not because it was a miracle and thus beyond human capacity to imitate but because of other reasons that have nothing to do with inimitability. Those who were contemporary with the Prophet's mission, and those who came a little later, were prevented from challenging the Qur'an by the hegemony of the Muslims. They refrained from countering the Qur'an for fear for their lives and goods from those who were in power. When the power of the first four caliphs came to an end and authority passed on to the Umayyads, who did not base their caliphate on the Islamic call, the Qur'an had become comfortingly familiar to all minds because of the elegance of its words and the strength of its meanings. It had become a treasure, inherited from generation to generation; thus, they refrained from countering it.

The response to this is as follows.

First, the challenge with the Qur'an, and the demand to counter it by matching one of its chapters, were made by the Prophet in Mecca, before the power of Islam had prevailed and the Muslims had consolidated their authority. In spite of that, none of the masters of Arabic style were able to meet this challenge.

Second, fear of Muslim power during the reign of the first caliphs did not prevent the rejecters of faith from manifesting their rejection of the religion of Islam. Indeed, the people of the Book lived among Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, and other places, in perfect happiness and good fortune. They had the same rights as the Muslims and the same obligations. This was so especially during the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful [ʿAli b. Abi Talib], whose commitment to justice and copious knowledge were acknowledged by Muslims and non-Muslims. Had any of these people of the Book [i.e., the Jews and the Christians] been able to produce the like of the Qur'an, they would have certainly brought it forth in their argument [against the Muslims].

Third, fear, if it did exist, would have merely prevented an open attempt at countering the Qur'an. But what was it that stopped the people of the Book or others from trying to counter it in the secrecy of their homes and gatherings? And if such an attempt had succeeded, would not the people of the Book have preserved it until the fear had passed and they could disclose it, as they did with the myths of the two Testaments and all other things related to their religions?

Fourth, due to well-observed human characteristics, even works of high stylistic merit will lose their effectiveness with repetition. It is for this reason that a beautiful ode, frequently heard, becomes boring and irritating to the listener. If he were to hear another ode, he might at first think it more eloquent than

the first. But if the second ode is also frequently repeated, the relative merits of the two will become apparent. This applies to all things that human beings delight in and enjoy—whatever they eat, wear, hear, and so on. If the Qur'an had not been a miracle, then it, too, would have been subject to the same rule, and would have lost its effectiveness on the souls of its hearers due to repetition and the passage of time. Thus, countering it would have become easier. Yet we find that the more the Qur'an is recited and repeated, the more it gains in beauty and resplendence, the more it gives of its gnosis and certainty, and the more faith and belief it inspires. In this distinctive characteristic, the Qur'an is the opposite of customary literature. Consequently, this aspect, contrary to what the opponent suspects, confirms its miraculous inimitability.

Fifth, even if we were to concede that repeated recitations of the Qur'an lead to pleasing familiarity, and therefore forestall attempts to match it, this would apply only to Muslims who believe in it and listen to it with desire and yearning whenever it is recited. Then, why should non-Muslim Arabs who are skilled in the language refrain from countering it? They could have been sure that, if successful, the ability to match it would have been convincing, even if only to non-Muslims.

They also say that history mentions that when Abu Bakr decided to compile the Qur'an, he asked 'Umar [b. al-Khattab] and Zayd b. Thabit to sit at the entrance of the mosque and write down whatever was attested by two witnesses to be part of the Book of God. This proves that the Qur'an does not exceed the laws of nature, for, had this been the case, it would not have required the testimony of others, but would have borne witness for itself.

The response to this is as follows.

First, the Qur'an is a miracle in its eloquence and its style, not in each of its words taken separately. Therefore, doubt may arise that a word here and there might have been altered, added, or omitted. The testimony of the witnesses, if they provide accurate information, is to remove the errors arising from the inadvertent or intentional mistakes of the reciters. On the other hand, the inability of a human being to produce a Sura like that of the Qur'an does not negate his ability to produce a verse or what resembles a verse. This is quite possible, and Muslims have never claimed that it is impossible, nor did the Qur'an mention it when it challenged humanity to match it.

Second, all the traditions that speak about the compilation of the Qur'an during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, on the basis of the testimony of two witnesses among the Prophet's Companions, are traditions with a single chain of transmission, and therefore do not qualify as proof in such matters.

Third, these traditions have, moreover, been contradicted by numerous traditions that state that the Qur'an was compiled [at a time] during the Prophet's life when many of his Companions knew the entire Qur'an by heart. As for those who had memorized only some of its suras or parts, only God knows their number. This is not to mention that a simple rational analysis would reveal the falsehood of the reports used as evidence by the opponent. Undoubtedly, the Qur'an was the principal means of guiding the

believers and bringing them from the darkness of misfortune and ignorance to the light of happiness and knowledge. Indeed, the Muslims went to the greatest length in heeding and guarding the Qur'an. They recited its verses day and night, took pride in memorizing and mastering it, and sought blessings from its suras and verses; and the Prophet used to encourage them to do that. Is it then possible, after all this, that they should entertain doubts about it to the extent of requiring double attestations to establish its text? We shall establish, God willing, in subsequent chapters of this book, that the Qur'an was compiled during the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny).

9. They also say that the Qur'an has a style which is at variance with the styles of the masters of the Arabic language. It mixes together several subjects. While it is speaking about history, it shifts to the topic of "the promise [of reward] and the threat [of punishment]," then to axioms and proverbs, and then on to something else. If the Qur'an were to be classified by subject, [thereby] bringing under each subject the verses related to it, its benefit would have been greater, and perusing it would have been easier.

The response to this is as follows. The Qur'an was revealed for the guidance of man kind and to lead them toward their happiness in this world and the next. It is not a book of history or jurisprudence, or ethics, or anything else that requires that it devote a separate section to each of these subjects. There is indeed no doubt that the Qur'an is the best-suited mode to achieve the desired goal. This is because the reader of some suras of the Qur'an would be able to cover many of its purposes and objectives in the shortest time possible and with the least trouble. He can thus turn his attention to the creation and the final return for judgment, and be informed about the bygone nations and take warning from them. Moreover, he can benefit from the excellent virtues and the lofty branches of knowledge, and learn aspects of injunctions concerning the forms of worship and the rules of transactions. All this is achieved while preserving the sequence of the discourse, and doing justice to its clarity, and observing the requirements of the situation. These benefits could not be derived from the Qur'an if it had been divided into topical sections and chapters, because the reader would not have been able to encompass the goals of the Qur'an except by reading it in its entirety. And if an obstacle were to prevent him from completing it, he would not benefit except from a sura or two.

Indeed, this is one of the excellent [aspects] of the Qur'anic style, a style which gives it beauty and value. For, although it shifts from subject to subject, it has preserved a perfect cohesion between them, as if each sentence is a pearl in a matched necklace. But hatred of Islam has blinded and deafened this critic to the extent that he imagines the Qur'an's beauty to be ugliness, and its virtue to be a vice.

Moreover, the Qur'an repeats some of its stories in different wordings, according to the appropriate occasions for the repetition. If these stories, with their different wordings, were to be gathered in one section, that would weaken this obvious benefit and this repetition would be without tangible benefit for the reader.

Myths and Absurdities

The author of the pamphlet *Husn al-ijaz* [The Beauty of Conciseness], mentions that it is possible to counter the Qur'an with its like.⁴ He lists a number of sentences from the Qur'an and alters some of their wordings, and asserts that he has countered the Qur'an with them. In doing this, he merely demonstrated the limits of his knowledge and his poor expertise in the art of eloquence. Here, we shall mention these sentences to the reader, and explain to him the errors of this illusory matching. We have dealt with these at length in our book *Nafahat al-I'jaz* [The Fragrance of Miracle].

In countering the Opening (*al-Fatiha*) Sura, this deluded person tries to match it by saying:

Praise be to the Merciful, Lord of existences (*akwan*), the Judging King. For You alone is the worship, and from You alone is the help. Show us the path of the faith.

Having written this, he deluded himself [into thinking] that it meets fully all the significations of the Opening Sura, though he actually encompasses far less.

I am at a loss as to what to say to the author of these sentences, when he has such a limited ability to distinguish between meager and stout speech. If only he had presented these words to Christian scholars knowledgeable about the style of speech, and the skills of eloquence, before disgracing himself with this claim. Was he not aware that in countering a speech with its like, the author or poet must produce a speech that would be in harmony with the contested speech in some of its aspects or goals? Instead, he produces a speech independent in words, phrases, and style? A contest does not mean imitating the contested speech in its structure and style, and freely altering and replacing some of its words with others; otherwise, it would be possible to counter any speech in this manner. Such a thing would have been very easy for the Arab contemporaries of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny). However, because they were fully aware of the true meaning of imitation, and because of their knowledge of the eloquence of the Qur'an, they were unable to counter it, and forthwith admitted their inability. Those who wanted to believe in it did so, while those who wanted to strive against it did so:

Then he said, **"This is nothing else than magic from of old" (Qur'an 74:24).**

Aside from that, how can a comparison be made between these sentences—for which [their author] has exerted himself so much—and the Opening (*al-Fatiha*) of the Qur'an, such that he may delude himself [into thinking] that his sentences fully cover the Qur'anic verses? Was it not enough for that writer to be ignorant of the art of style; did he have to go further and display this to the public? How can we compare what he says, "Praise be to al-Rahman (the Merciful)," with what God says, **"Praise be to Allah (God)" (Qur'an 1:2)**, when his sentence fails to grasp the intended meaning of God's words? Clearly, the word "Allah" is a proper name for the Sacred Being that embraces all His perfect attributes. Divine mercy, which is mentioned in the *basmala* [the declaration: In the name of God, the Merciful (*al-Rahman*), the Compassionate (*al-Rahim*)], is only one of God's perfect attributes. Hence, using it

instead of "God" fails to point to the other perfect attributes of the Sacred Being, which are as much a cause of praising Him as His mercy.

Similarly, substituting "the Lord of the existences" (*al-akwan*) for what God says, "The Lord of the Worlds (*al-amin*), the Merciful (*al-Rahman*), the Compassionate (*al-Rahim*), again fails to express the meaning of these two verses. This is because the two Qur'anic verses refer to the numerous small and large worlds, and affirm that God is Master and Lord of all of them, and that His mercy encompasses all these worlds continuously, without disruption, as the words "the Compassionate," following the words "the Merciful," demonstrate. We shall expound on this in our commentary on the opening verse of the Qur'an.

None of these meanings can be found in the words "the Lord of the existences" (*al-akwan*). The word *al-Akwan* means "occurrence," "creation," "development," and "sustenance." In all these synonyms, it conveys the sense of the infinitive, to which it is incorrect to add the word *al-Rabb*, as the latter means the Lord, the Nurturer. However, it is proper to add to it the word *al-Khaliq* ("the Creator"). Thus, one can say, "The Creator of the existences." However, the plural form "existences" neither points to the numerous existing worlds to which the word *al-amin* alludes, nor to the other aspects that the noble verse suggests.

Likewise, substituting "the Judging King" for God's saying, "Master of the Day of Judgment," does not convey the sense that there exists another world—the world to come—where deeds are recompensed, nor [the sense] that God, the Exalted, is the Master of that day, on which no one else shall act or decide. Nor does it convey the meaning implied by God's words—namely, that on that Day all people shall be subject to His judgment, and that His command concerning their affairs shall come to pass. Thus, some will go to paradise while others will be damned to the Fire. In contrast, the most that the sentence by the writer [cited above] conveys is that God is a King who recompenses for deeds done. But where is this signification in the noble verse?

As for God's saying: "You (alone) we worship, and You (alone) we ask for help," all that that writer has understood is that worship is necessarily only for God, and that help is to be sought only from Him. Hence, he substituted the following sentence for this verse: "For You alone is the worship, and from You alone is the help." What escaped him is the purpose of the verse—namely, instructing the believer that his act of worship should express his faith in the Oneness of God; and that he is in need of the help of God, the Almighty and Glorious, in his forms of worship and his other activities; and that he should acknowledge that he and all other believers do not worship [anyone] except God, and do not turn for help except to God; rather, they worship Him alone and turn for help to Him alone. And where is any of this conveyed in the writer's sentence, which clearly falls short of the meaning implied in the noble verse?

God's saying "Show us the straight path" indicates that the worshiper seeks guidance to the shortest path to his goals—namely, his affairs, his natural disposition, and his beliefs. As such, it does not limit him [in this seeking] only to the path of the faith. This [comprehensive meaning of the verse] is not adequately

covered by what the writer substitutes: "Show us the path of the faith." This is not to mention that this sentence seeks guidance to the path of the faith, with nothing in it to indicate that this path is straight and will not lead its seeker astray.

With this sentence, the author of these alterations feels no need to go on and deal with the rest of this blessed sura of the Qur'an. He claims that his sentence does not need the rest. In this, he only betrays his inability to understand the meaning of the rest of the Qur'anic sura. God's saying "The path of those whom You have favored; not of those who earn Your anger, nor of those who go astray" reveals the existence of a straight path treaded by those favored by God: the prophets, the veracious, the witnesses to His existence, and the righteous; as well as the existence of other paths that are not straight, and that were treaded by those who had earned God's anger: the obstinate opponents of the truth, those who rejected it after it had become manifest, and those who went astray, losing the path of guidance through their ignorance, and by failing to make the effort necessary to find it—those, in short, who were content with the ways of their forebears and were willing to follow them in blind imitation, without guidance from God or rational thought [cf. Qur'an 7:28, 10:78, 31:21, 43:22–23]. Whoever reflects on these verses will remember this and will become aware of the necessity of following the example of the friends of God, who were brought near to Him by all their deeds, virtues, beliefs, and by avoiding the paths of the disobedient, who had earned God's wrath with their deeds: They are the ones who strayed from the path after it had become manifest. Are those to be regarded as unimportant meanings, as the author [cited] has assumed?

In countering "Surat al-Kawthar" (the Abundance), [which reads]:

[Lo! We have given you Abundance; so pray to Your Lord and sacrifice. Lo! It is your insulter [and not you], who is without posterity (Qur'an 108: 1-3)],

this same writer has produced the following:

Lo! We have given you jewels; so pray to your Lord and proclaim. And, do not rely upon the words of a magician.

Witness the manner in which he imitates the style and phraseology of the Qur'an. He changes some of its words and deludes people [into thinking] that he has matched it. He, moreover, plagiarizes one of the sayings of Musaylima, the false prophet, who says:

Lo! We have given you multitudes, so pray to your Lord and proclaim. And, lo! The one who hates you is a rejecter of faith.⁵

What is strange is that the writer assumes that the similarity of rhymed prose between the two verses makes them equally eloquent. He does not take into consideration that a gift of jewels does not result in offering the prayer and proclaiming it, and that God has bestowed greater and more noble blessings on His servant than wealth, such as the blessings of life, intellect, and faith. How, then, can wealth, rather

than these other great blessings, be the reason for praying to God? Still, for a person who is bribed to carry out missionary activity, wealth does become the direction toward which he offers his prayer, and the goal for which he strives, and the aim he puts ahead of all aims, for "each vessel effuses with whatever it contains."

It is within our right to ask this writer [for] the meaning of the word *al-jawahir* (jewels), which he uses with the definite article *al* (the). If he means a particular gem, the rest of his words contain no evidence of what gems he means. And if he means all kinds of known gems—in the sense that when the definite article is appended to the plural of the noun, it indicates totality—then it is an evident falsehood. Moreover, in what way are the first two sentences relevant to the last—namely, "And, do not rely upon the words of a magician"? What does he mean by a magician or by a magician's unreliable words? If he has in mind a specific magician and specific words, then he should have provided a clue to that. But there is nothing in his sentence that lends itself to determining this. If, on the other hand, he means everything that magicians say since both words are in the indefinite form and used in a negative context—then he would be talking nonsense, for there is no good reason to doubt the reliability of everything that magicians say, even when this statement, in ordinary circumstances, is accompanied by confidence in what he says. And, if he means that one should not rely upon the word of a magician simply because he is a magician, this would be incorrect, because the magician, as a magician, does not have anything to say by virtue of his being a conjurer. Rather, he mesmerizes people and causes them harm by his tricks and his actions.

As for "Surat al-Kawthar," it was revealed about someone who hated the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny), and who said about him that he is without children and that he will die and that his name and his religion will end. It is to this fact that the following words of God, the Exalted, refer:

Or they say: "[He] **is a poet, for whom we may expect the accident of time**"? (*Qur'an 52:30*)

Then God, the Blessed and Exalted, revealed ["Surat al-Kawthar"]: "**Lo! We have given you Abundance**" (*Qur'an 108:1*).

Al-Kawthar means "abundant good" in every respect. In this world, God gave the Prophet the honor of prophethood, the [role of] guidance of humankind, leadership of the Muslims, numerous Helpers, and victory over the enemy. Moreover, God also gave him numerous offspring through his veracious daughter Fatima (peace be upon her), who will make his name remain as long as the world remains. In the next world, God endowed him with the power of intercession, the lofty gardens, the spring [of al-Kawthar], from which none except his friends shall drink, and all the other blessings which God bestowed on him. "**So pray to your Lord and sacrifice**" (*Qur'an 108:2*) in gratitude to Him for all these blessings. The word *nahr* (sacrifice) could refer to a number of things, such as the sacrifice at Mina; the sacrificial offerings on the occasion of al-Adha;⁶ the raising of the hands to the upper part of the chest, while proclaiming the greatness of God (*takbir*) during the prayers;⁷ the turning toward the direction of prayer (*al-qibla*) while raising the hands and standing upright in prayer. All these things befit the context

because they are an expression of gratitude for those blessings. God, the Glorified, says:

Lo! It is your insulter [and not you] who is without posterity (Qur'an 108:3).

No name or good mention shall remain of the insulter. The outcome for those insulters was exactly what God said about them. No name or good mention remained of them in the world, not to mention the painful doom and everlasting ignominy that was their recompense in the hereafter. Is there any comparison between the lofty meanings and perfect eloquence of this blessed sura, with those inferior sentences which the writer [cited previously] exerted himself to compose? He imitates the Qur'an in its phraseology, and takes from Musaylima the Liar his words and style, and comes up with whatever his obstinacy or, rather, his ignorance dictates; and with this he counters the Qur'an with all its greatness of eloquence and its inimitability!

1. For a definition of this term, see note 1 to the author's preface to the first edition. — Trans

2. Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 31.

3. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 36

4. This was a pamphlet published by the Anglo-American Press at Bulaq, Egypt, in 1912.

5. This is one of the verses that Musaylima produced to support his false claim to the prophethood after the death of the Prophet of Islam. The lines are, likewise, in imitation of "Surat al-Kawthar." — Trans.

6. This is the feast of 10 Dhu al-Hijja, marking the end of the hajj pilgrimage. — Trans.

7. This is the proclamation allahu akbar (Greater is God). — Trans

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