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Part 2: The Teachings of the Qur'an

The Universal Import of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is not directed towards any one particular nation, such as the Arabs, or to a particular sect of Muslims, but to non-Islamic societies as well as the Muslim nation as a whole. There are numerous references to non-believers and idol-worshippers, to the People of the Book (namely, the Jews, or the Tribe of Israel, and the Christians), exhorting each one to strive towards a true understanding of the Qur'an and of Islam.

The Qur'an calls each group to Islam by providing proofs and never stipulates that they be of Arab stock. Referring to idol-worshippers, God says,

"if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due then they are your brothers in religion" (9:11).

Likewise, God talks about the People of the Book, (Jews, Christians and we include here the Zoroastrians), without referring to them as Arabs:

Say O People of the Book come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God and that we shall ascribe no partners to Him and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God (3:64).

It is true that before Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula, Qur'anic injunctions were obviously directed to- wards the Arab nation. From the sixth year after the hijrah (the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina), when the din of Islam was being propagated beyond the peninsula, there are references which demonstrate that the Qur'an is addressing itself to mankind in general; for example:

"this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn you and whomever it may reach," (6: 19)

and in 68:52 God says, ***"it is nothing else but a reminder to the worlds."***

We read too in 74:35–36, "***In truth this is one of the greatest signs, being a warning unto men.*** "

History has amply demonstrated that Islam has been embraced by a number of leading members of other religions, including the idol-worshippers of Mecca, Jews, and Christians and by people from diverse communities, such as Salman of Persia, Suhayb from the Roman people, and Bilal of Ethiopia.

The Perfection of the Qur'an

The Qur'an shows man the way to a realization of his goal on earth; it describes this path in the most complete terms. It is a way of correctly viewing the reality of things; a vision – personal, social and cosmic– based on a correct manner of behavior and a precise method of interaction between men.

In 46:30 we read that the Qur'an "***guides to the truth and a right road,***" meaning the road of right belief and correct action.

On another occasion, mentioning the Torah and the New Testament, God says, "***We have revealed this Book to you with the Truth, confirming whatever Book was before it, and We keep watch over it***" (5:48).

The Qur'an thus affirms the truth of the ways of guidance taught by the earlier prophets. In chapter 42: 13, "***He has ordained for you that religion which He commended to Noah and that which We reveal to you (Muhammad) and that We commended to Abraham, Moses and Jesus,*** " and in chapter 16:89, "***And We revealed the book to you as an exposition of all things.***"

Thus we understand from these verses that the Qur'an not only encompasses the meanings and teachings of all divine books revealed before it, but also adds to and completes them. Everything which a man needs, both in terms of his spiritual and his social life, is contained and explained in the Qur'an.

The Eternal Quality of the Qur'an

The perfection and completeness of the Qur'an prove that its validity is not restricted to a particular time or place, since anything perfect is in need of nothing to complete it.

In chapter 86: 13–14 God confirms that the Qur'an is "***a conclusive word***" and not a mere "***pleasantry.***" It contains the purest of teachings concerning belief in life–after–death, together with an exposition of the realities of existence, while, at the same time, encompassing the fundamentals of correct human behavior.

Since laws governing transactions between men are directly linked to their beliefs, such a book can obviously not be annulled or changed with the passage of time. As He says in 17: 105, "***We have revealed the Qur'an with Truth and it has descended with the Truth,***" meaning that the revelations and their ongoing validity are inseparable from the Truth.

Thus in 10:32, "***After the Truth what is there except error,***" and in 41:41–42, "***In truth it is an impenetrable book, error may not enter in it from before it or behind it.***"

In other words the Qur'an repulses, by its own perfection and completeness, any attempt to alter it; and neither now nor later can it be annulled or superseded. Many studies have been made of the permanence of the validity of the laws given in the Qur'an.

The reader is advised to consult them if he requires additional knowledge of the subject; to pursue the matter here, (namely, the position of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims and the manner in which it demonstrates this), would be outside the scope of this book.

The Qur'an as a Self-Contained Proof

The Qur'an, being composed of words and meanings like any other book, explains itself. It does not remain silent when the situation of the text demands proof. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Qur'anic terms mean anything other than the actual words being used.

This means that every man, possessing certain knowledge of the Arabic language, may clearly understand the meaning of the Qur'an just as he understands any other words written in Arabic.

There are many verses which are directed towards a specific group, such as the Tribe of Israel, or the Believers, or the non-believers and, sometimes, man in general; (they are addressed in phrases such as "***O you who disbelieve***" or "***O people of the Book***" or "***O tribe of Israel***" or "***O Mankind***") The Qur'an discourses with them, offering them proof of its validity or challenging them to produce a book similar to it if they doubt it to be the Word of God.

Obviously it makes no sense to address people in terms which they do not understand or to demand that they produce something similar to that which has no meaning for them. In chapter XLVII–24 we read, "***Why do they not reflect upon the Qur'an,***" implying that if it was from other than God, people would have found in it many inconsistencies.

It is clearly indicated in the Qur'an that verses which have a subtlety or particularity of meaning demand that the reader reflect upon them to remove any seeming differences of interpretation or incongruities that may appear at first inspection.

It also follows that if the verses themselves contained no apparent meaning, there would be no point in reflecting upon them in order to clarify the apparent problem of their interpretation. There are no indications from other sources, (such as the traditions of the Prophet), that demand a rejection of the outwardly manifest meaning of the Qur'an.

Some have argued that one should only refer to the commentaries of the Prophet in elucidating the meanings of the Qur'an. This argument is unacceptable, however, since the basis of the Prophet's

commentary and of the Imams of his family must be sought for in the Qur'an.

It is difficult to imagine that the validity of the Qur'an is dependent on the commentaries of the Prophet or the Imams of his family. Rather, affirmation of prophecy and imamate must be contained in the Qur'an, which itself is the authentic proof and document of prophecy.

This does not, however, contradict the fact that the Prophet and the Imams of his family were responsible for clarifying those details of the shari'ah law (Divinely revealed law) which were not apparent from the actual text of the Qur'an.

They were, likewise, entrusted with teaching the knowledge contained in the Book, as seen in the following verse: ***And We have revealed to you the Remembrance so that you may explain to mankind that which has been revealed for them*** (16:44).

A similar reflection occurs in chapter 59:7 where, in reference to the code of practice and law brought by the Prophet to mankind, it states, ***And take whatever the messenger gives you. And abstain from whatever he forbids.***"

In chapter 4:64 it says, ***We sent no messenger saw that he should be obeyed by God's leave***" and, again, in chapter 62:2, ***He it is who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite to them His revelations and to make them grow and to teach them the Book and Wisdom.***" According to these verses, the Prophet is the appointed explainer of the details of the shari'ah law as well as the teacher of the Qur'an.

Moreover, according to the tradition known as *thaqalayn*, which was authenticated by an uninterrupted chain of narrators, the Prophet has appointed the Imams of his own family as his successors. This is not to deny that others also, by correctly applying the learning of sincere teachers, may understand the meaning of the Qur'an.

The Inner and Outer Dimensions of the Qur'an

In chapter 4:36 God says, ***And serve God and ascribe nothing as a partner to Him.***" The verse prohibits pre-Islamic Arabs from their worship of idols, just as chapter 22:30 urges them to ***shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech.***" On reflection it becomes clear that an idol may exist in any form; therefore, idol-worship is forbidden because it involves submission to an entity other than God.

In chapter 36:60 God treats the devil as an idol when He says, ***Did I did not charge you, O you sons of Adam, that you do not worship the devil.***" It also becomes clear that another form of idol-worship is submission to one's desires or to the will of others, over and above the will of God; this is indicated in 45:23 which refers to ***him who makes his desire his God.***"

Thus it becomes apparent that one should turn to none other for help than God Himself and not forget

Him in any circumstances, since to do otherwise would be to direct one's attention away from God. To submit to others is to belittle Him and this is the very essence of idol-worship.

Thus, in chapter 7: 179 God says of those who refused to worship Him, "***Already We have urged into hell many of the jinn and humankind, These are the neglectful.***" The verse, "ascribe nothing to Him," clearly forbids worships of idols; that is to say, man may not, without God's permission, submit himself to others including his own desires, since any such submission would render him neglectful of God.

In this way, the simple, apparent text of the verse unfolds multiple meanings and exemplifies a feature to be found throughout the Qur'an. Thus the saying of the Prophet, (related in the books of hadith and commentary), become clear: *In truth the Qur'an possesses an inner and outer, and the inner contains Seven dimensions.*

The Wisdom Contained in the Two Facets of the Qur'an: The Inner and the Outer

Man's primary life, namely, the temporal life of this world, is as a bubble on the immense sea of the material; and since all his transactions concern the material, he is throughout his life, at the mercy of the moving waves.

All his senses are occupied with the material and his thoughts influenced by sensory information. Eating, drinking, standing, speaking, listening, like all other human actions, take place in the sphere of the material and not in the sphere of thought.

Moreover, in reflecting upon such concepts as love, enmity, ambition and nobility, one comes to better understand them by translating them into language derived from the senses or from actual material objects; for example, the magnetic attraction of lovers, a burning ambition, or a man's being a mine of wisdom.

Capacity to comprehend the world of meaning, which is vaster than that of the material, varies from man to man. For one person it may be almost impossible to imagine the world of meanings; another may perceive it only in the most superficial terms and, yet another, may comprehend with ease the most profound of spiritual concepts.

One may say that the greater a man's capacity to understand meanings, the lesser he is attached to the world of the material and its alluring, deceiving appearance. By his very nature, each person possesses a potential for understanding meanings and, provided that he does not deny this capacity, it may be cultivated and increased further.

It is not a simple matter to reduce meaning from one level of understanding to another without losing its sense. This is particularly true for meanings possessing great subtlety which cannot be transmitted,

especially to ordinary people, without adequate explanation.

As one example, we may mention the Hindu religion: anyone reflecting deeply upon the Vedic scriptures of India and studying the different aspects of its message will ultimately see that its basic aim is the worship of one God.

Unfortunately this aim is explained in such a complicated manner that the concept of oneness reaches the minds of ordinary people in the form of idol-worship and the recognition of many gods. To avoid such problems, it becomes necessary to communicate meanings hidden beyond the material world in a language which is rooted in the material and readily comprehensible world.

Indeed some religions deprive their adherents of rights accorded to them by the religion itself: women, for example, in Hinduism; Jews and Christians who, in general, are denied access to knowledge of their holy books. Islam does not deprive anyone of their rights in the din, and both man and woman, scholar and layman, black and white are equal in being accorded access to their religion.

God affirms this in chapter 3: 195, "***Indeed I do not allow the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost,***"

And, again, in chapter 49: 13, "***O mankind! Truly we have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the best in conduct.***"

In this manner the Qur'an addresses its teachings to mankind at large and affirms that every man may increase himself in knowledge and, thereby, perfect his own behavior.

In fact, the Qur'an addresses its teachings specifically to the world of man. Since, as mentioned earlier, each man has a different capacity of understanding and since the expounding of subtle knowledge is not without danger of misinterpretation, the Qur'an directs its teachings primarily at the level of the common man.

In this manner, the subtlest of meanings can be explained and multiple meanings and ideas expressed, to the ordinary person, by co-relating them to concrete sensory meanings; meaning, therefore, is always inherent in the letter of the words.

The Qur'an reveals itself in a way suitable for different levels of comprehension so that each benefits according to his own capacity. In chapter 43:34 God emphasizes this idea: ***Truly We have appointed it a lecture in Arabic so that you may perhaps understand and indeed in the source of the Book, which We possess, it is sublime, decisive.***

God describes the different capacities of man's comprehension in the following metaphor in chapter 13:17 ***He sends down water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure;***

And the Prophet, in a famous tradition says: *"We prophets talk to the people according to the capacity of their intellects."*

Another result of the multiple meanings within the Qur'an is that the verses take on significance beyond their immediate text. Certain verses contain metaphors which indicate divine gnosis far beyond the common man's understanding but which, nevertheless, become comprehensible through their metaphorical form.

God says in chapter 17:89, ***"And indeed We have displayed for mankind in this Qur'an all kind of similitude, but most of mankind refuse everything except disbelief."*** And again in chapter 29:43 God talks of metaphors as a means of expression, ***"As for these similitude, We coin them for mankind, but none will grasp their meanings except the wise."***

Consequently, we must conclude that all Qur'anic teachings which deal with subtle profound knowledge are in the form of similitude.

The Two Kinds of Qur'anic Verses: The Explicit and the Implicit

In chapter 11:1 God says of the Qur'an, ***"This is a book whose meanings are secure."*** From this we may draw the meaning to read ***"whose meanings are perfected, expanded, firm and strong."*** In chapter 39:23, it reads, ***God has revealed the fairest of statements (consistent with and in relation to each other) and arranged in pairs (according to meaning) which cause the flesh of those who fear their Lord to creep.***

In chapter 3:7 He says, ***"He it is who has revealed to you the Book in which are clear revelations, (that is, verses whose meaning is immediately clear and which Muslims use for guidance). They are the substance of the Book and others which are allegorical. But those in whose heart is doubt indeed follow the allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knowest its explanation except God and those who are of sound instruction say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord.***

The first of the verses describes those sections of the Qur'an whose meaning is explicit, clear and unambiguous, and safe from misinterpretation. The second verse refers to all those verses whose meanings are implicit, and which are considered allegorical.

It then proceeds to indicate that both types of verses, (the explicit, or clear and the implicit, or allegorical), share certain common qualities: beauty and sweetness of language, and a miraculous power of expression which are present in the entire Qur'an.

The third verse under consideration divides the Qur'an into two parts: the explicit and the implicit, the clear and the allegorical, or, in Qur'anic terms, the muhkam and the mustashabih.

The muhkam and those verses which are explicit, clear and immediate in their message and, therefore, incapable of being misinterpreted; the *mutashabih* verses are not of this nature. It is the duty of every firm believer to believe in and act according to the verses which are *mahkam*.

It is also his duty to believe in the verses which are *mutashabih*, but he must abstain from acting upon them; this injunction is based on the premise that only those whose heart is corrupt and whose belief is false follow the implicit, mutashibih, verses, fabricating interpretations and, thereby, deceiving common people.

The meanings of the Explicit and the Implicit Verses, according to the Commentators and Scholars

There is much difference of opinion amongst the Islamic scholars concerning the meaning of explicit and implicit verses, with almost twenty different views on the matter. We can, however, conclude from the views of commentators, ranging from the time of the Prophet to the present day, that the explicit verses are clear and unambiguous, and that one is obliged to believe in and act according to them.

The implicit verses, on the other hand, are those which outwardly seem to express a meaning, but which contain a further truer meaning whose interpretation is known only to God; man has no access to it. However, he is enjoined to believe in them but to avoid acting upon them.

This view is held amongst the Sunni scholars. It is also maintained by the Shi'ite scholars except they believe that the Prophet and the Imams of his family also understood the hidden meanings. They also maintain that the ordinary man must seek knowledge of the implicit verses from God, the Prophet and the Imams.

This view, although held by most commentators, is in several aspects not in accord with the text of the verse beginning, ***He it is who has revealed to you the Book in which are explicit verses (whose meanings are immediately clear) ...***

The Method of Guidance and Explanation used in the Rest of the Qur'an

This we may attribute, firstly, to the fact that there is no verse whose meaning is totally obscure since the Qur'an describes itself as a light, as a guidance and as an explanation. Thus it is not befitting that there be verses which fail to reveal their meaning, or to illuminate the Qur'an as a whole.

We should examine again the verse, ***Will they not ponder on the Qur'an. If it had been from other than God they would have found much inconsistency in it*** (4:82).

Thus reflection on the Qur'an would remove all kinds of seeming inconsistencies making it unacceptable

to say, as do most of the scholars, that the implicit verses cannot be totally understood and that apparent inconsistencies cannot be resolved.

Other scholars say that what is meant by the implicit verses are the letters found at the beginning of certain chapters.

(These are known as the muqatta'ah-letters, like Alif, Lam, Mim, Alif, Lam Ra', Ha, Mim, whose real meaning is unknown).

We must, however remember that the implicit verses are so-called when read in relation to the explicit verses. This denotes that, accompanying the hidden meaning of the implicit, there is a surface (or literal) meaning whereby the real and the apparent meanings come together in intricate relationship with one another.

It should be understood that the letters at the opening of certain chapters do not have any literal meaning. It seems that a group of misguided men use the implicit verses to mislead people, but never in Islam has one heard of anyone trying to use the muqatta'ah-letters to do so.

Some commentators say that the meaning of the word *mutashabih*, (in the verse), refers to the famous story of the Jews who wanted to find an indication of the duration of Islam within the order of the letters, but the Prophet used to read the letters one after the other and so confuse their calculations.

This view is also without substance since, even if the story is true, it is not of sufficient impact nor conviction to be considered as an interpretation of the implicit verses. Whatever the Jews talked, it contained no malice because, even if the religion, din, of Islam was for a limited period of time (and, thus, subject to abrogation), their remarks would in no way be a criticism of the purity and reality of Islam considering that all religions revealed by God prior to Islam were for a specific period and open to abrogation.

Secondly, this view implies that the word *ta'wil* (which may be translated as "interpretation") in the verse refers to a meaning other than the apparent literal meaning and that it is used only as a reference to the implicit verses.

This is incorrect, as we shall see in a later chapter dealing with exegesis *ta'wil* and revelation, tanzil (the actual text or letter of the verse) how exegesis in Qur'anic terminology does not refer to one meaning but to several, encompassing such terms as realization, fulfilment, interpretation and explanation.

We shall also discuss how all Qur'anic verses have a specific interpretation, *ta'wil* and not just their explicit and implicit definitions. On examination, the words of the explicit verses (ayat muhkamah), are seen to describe the phrase "They are the source of the Book," meaning that the explicit verses include the most important subjects of the Book, and the theme of the rest of the verses is secondary and dependent upon them.

This implies that the real point intended to be conveyed by the implicit verses refers back to the explicit verses. Thus, the meanings of the implicit are illuminated by referring back to the source (or explicit) verses.

Thus we are left with no verses which have no obvious indication as to their true meaning; they are either immediately clear by virtue of their being in the class of explicit verses or, in the case of the implicit, made clear by the other explicit verses.

As for the muqatta'ah-letters at the beginning of the chapters, they do not have any apparent meaning since they are not words in the normal sense and possess no meaning comprehensible to man; thus, they are outside of the classification of explicit and the implicit.

Again, we would refer the reader to an examination of the following verse in order to emphasize the truth of our view: ***And so why do they not reflect upon the Qur'an or are there locks upon their hearts. "And, likewise, the verse, "and why do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, if it were from other than God they would have found much inconsistency in it."***

The Commentary of the Imams of the Prophet's Family concerning the Explicit and the Implicit Verses

It is made clear from the different commentaries of the Imams that there is always a way to discover the real meaning and aim of the implicit verses. Each verse, even if its meaning is not apparent, can be explained by reference to other verses.

Thus the real meaning of the implicit verses can be found in relation to the explicit verses.

For instance, the verse "***The Beneficent, One who is established on the throne,***" (20:5) and again the verse, "***And your Lord came,***" (89:22) appear to ascribe bodily characteristics to God, but when compared with the verse, "***Nothing is as His likeness,***" (42:11) it becomes clear that the "***sitting***" on the throne or the "***coming***" of God has a meaning other than a physical one.

The Prophet, describing the Qur'an, says: *In truth the Qur'an was not revealed so that one part may contradict the other but rather was revealed so that one part may verify the other. So that what you understand of it then act accordingly and that which is unclear for you then simply believe in it.*

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, said that one part of the Qur'an bears witness to another and one part clarifies the other. The sixth Imam said the explicit verse is that which one acts in accordance with, and the implicit is that which is unclear only for the man who is ignorant of its real meaning.

From these narrations, we may conclude that the question of explicit and implicit is relative; it is possible that a verse may seem explicit to one person and implicit to another. It is said of the eighth Imam that he considered, "the person who refers to the implicit *mutashabih*, verses in the Qur'an to the corresponding

clarifying explicit verses", as having "found guidance to the right path."

He is also reported to have said that, *In truth in our traditions are recorded implicit verses like the explicit of the Qur'an, so refer the implicit to its corresponding explicit verse. or tradition, and do not follow the implicit and go astray.*

Thus it is clear from the traditions and, in particular, the last tradition, that the implicit verse is one which does not contain a clear meaning without reference to the explicit verse, and not that there exists no means to understand it.

The Qur'an Possesses Revelation and Exegesis

We shall discuss the word, exegesis, *ta'wil*, in relation to three Qur'anic verses. Firstly, in the verses concerning the implicit *mutashabih* and the explicit verses: ***But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, in truth, that which is allegorical talking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knows its explanation except God.*** (3:7)

Secondly, the verses, ***In truth we have brought them a scripture which we expound with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. Do they await anything but the fulfillment of it.***

(Here the word *ta'wil* is used connoting the appearance or clarification of meaning). ***On the day when the fulfillment of it comes, those who are forgetful of it will say: the messenger of our Lord brought the truth*** (7:52–53).

Thirdly, the verse, ***And this Qur'an is not such as could ever be invented ... but they denied that, the knowledge of which they could not encompass and the interpretation (ta'wil) of which had not yet come to them. Even so it was that those before them deny. Then see what was the consequence in the wrongdoers.*** (10:37–39).

In conclusion, we should note that the word exegesis *ta'wil* comes from the word *awl*, meaning a return. As such, *ta'wil* indicates that particular meaning towards which the verse is directed. The meaning of revelation *tanzil*, as opposed to *ta'wil*, is clear or according to the obvious meaning of the words as they were revealed.

The Meaning of Exegesis, According to the Commentators and Scholars

There is considerable disagreement as to the meaning of exegesis, *ta'wil*, and it is possible to count more than ten different views. There are, however, two views which have gained general acceptance. The first is that of the early generation of scholars who used the word exegesis, *ta'wil*, as a synonym for

commentary, or tafsir.

According to this view, all Qur'anic verses are open to *ta'wil* although according to the verse, "**nobody knows its interpretation (ta'wil) except God,**" it is the implicit verses whose interpretation (*ta'wil*) is known only to God.

For this reason, a number of the early scholars said that the implicit verses are those with muqatta'ah-letters at the beginning of the chapter since they are the only verses in the Qur'an whose meaning is not known to everyone.

This interpretation has been demonstrated in the previous section as being incorrect, a view which is shared by certain of the late scholars. They argued that since there is a way of finding out the meaning of any verse, particularly since the muqattah-letters are obviously not in the same classification as the implicit verses then the distinction between the two (muqatta'ah and implicit, *mutashabih*) is clear.

Secondly, the view of the later scholars is that exegesis refers to the meaning of a verse beyond its literal meaning and that not all verses have exegesis; rather only the implicit, whose ultimate meaning is known only to God.

The verses in question here are those which refer to the human qualities of coming, going, sitting, satisfaction, anger and sorrow apparently attributed to God and, also, those verses which apparently ascribe faults to the messengers and Prophets of God (when in reality they are infallible).

The view that the word exegesis refers to a meaning other than the apparent one has become quite accepted. Moreover, within the divergence of opinion amongst scholars, exegesis has come to mean "**to transfer**" the apparent meaning of a verse to a different meaning by means of a proof called *ta'wil*; this method is not without obvious inconsistencies.

Although this view has gained considerable acceptance, it is incorrect and cannot be applied to the Qur'anic verses for the following reasons. Firstly, the verses, ***Do they await anything but the fulfillment of it*** (7:53)

and, ***but they denied that, the knowledge of which they could not encompass and the interpretation of which had not yet come to them*** (10:39) indicate that the whole Qur'an has exegesis, not just the implicit verses as claimed by this group of scholars.

Secondly, implied in this view is that there are Qur'anic verses whose real meaning is ambiguous and hidden from the people, only God knowing their real meaning. However, a book which declares itself as challenging and excelling in its linguistic brilliance could hardly be described as eloquent if it failed to transmit the meaning of its own words.

Thirdly, if we accept this view, then the validity of the Qur'an comes under question since, according to the verse, ***Why do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, if it were from other than God they would have***

found in it many inconsistencies.

One of the proofs that the Qur'an is not the speech of man is that, despite having been revealed in widely varying and difficult circumstances, there is no inconsistency in it, neither in its literal meaning nor in its inner meaning, and any initial inconsistency disappears upon reflection.

If it is believed that a number of the implicit verses disagree with the sound, or muhkam, or explicit, verses this disagreement may be resolved by explaining that what is intended is not the literal meaning but rather another meaning known only to God.

However, this explanation will never prove that the Qur'an is "not the speech of man." If by exegesis we change any inconsistency in the explicit, or sound (muhkam), verses to another meaning beyond the literal, it is clear that we may also do this for the speech and writing of man.

Fourthly, there is no proof that exegesis indicates a meaning other than the literal one and that, in the Qur'anic verses which mention the word exegesis, the literal meaning is not intended.

On three occasions in the story of Joseph, the interpretation of his dream is called *ta'wil* (exegesis). It is clear that the interpretation of a dream is not fundamentally different from the actual appearance of the dream; rather, it is the interpretation of what is portrayed in a particular form in the dream. Thus Joseph saw his father, mother and brother falling to the ground in the form of the sun, the moon and the stars.

Likewise, the king of Egypt saw the seven-year drought in the form of seven lean cows eating the seven fat cows and also, the seven green ears of corn and the seven dry ears.

Similarly, the dreams of Joseph's two fellow-inmates in the prison: one saw himself pouring wine for the king (in the form of the first pressing of wine), while the second saw himself crucified (in the form of birds eating from the bread basket on his head).

The dream of the king of Egypt is related in the same chapter, verse 43 and its interpretation, from Joseph, in verses 47–49 when he says, ***you will sow seven years as usual, but whatever you reap leave it in the ear, all except a little which you will eat. Then after that will come a year when people will have plenteous crops and then they will press (meaning wine and oil).***

The dream of Joseph's fellow-inmates in the prison occurs in verse 36 of the same chapter. One of the two young men says to Joseph, ***"I dreamt that I was carrying upon my head bread which the birds were eating."***

The interpretation of the dream is related by Joseph in verse 41 ***O my two fellow-prisoners! As for one of you he will pour out wine for his Lord to drink and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head.***

In a similar fashion, God relates the story of Moses and Khidr in the chapter "The Cave" (18:71–82).

Khidr made a hole in the boats; thereafter, killed a boy and, finally, straightened a leaning wall. After each event, Moses protested and Khidr explained the meaning and reality of each action which he had carried out on the orders of God; this he referred to as *ta'wil*.

Thus it is clear that the reality of the event and the dream-picture which portrayed the event-to-be are basically the same: the *ta'wil*, or interpretation, does not have a meaning other than the apparent one.

Likewise God says, talking about weights and measures, **"Fill the measure when you measure and weigh with a right balance, that is proper and better in the end,"** (that is, more fitting in the final determination of the Day of Reckoning) (17:35).

It is clear that the word *ta'wil* used here in respect to the measuring and weighing refers to fair dealing in business practices. Thus the *ta'wil* used in this way is not different from the literal meaning of the words "measuring" and "weighing"; it merely deepens and extends the significance of the mundane to include a spiritual dimension.

This spiritual dimension is of significance for the believer who has in mind the reckoning of the final day together with his own day-to-day reckoning in the affairs of trade.

In another verse God again uses the word *ta'wil*, **and if you have any dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the messenger ... that is better and more fitting in the end** (4:59).

It is clear that the meaning of *ta'wil* and the referring of the dispute to God and His messenger is to establish the unity of Society and to show how each action or event in a community has a spiritual significance.

Thus, the *ta'wil* refers to a tangible ordinary reality and is not in opposition to the actual text in the verses which refers to the dispute.

In all, there are sixteen occasions in the Qur'an in which the word *ta'wil* is used but on no occasion does it have a meaning other than the literal text. We may say, therefore, that the word *ta'wil* is used to extend the idea expressed to include a further meaning which, (as will be made clear in the next section), is still in accordance with the actual word *ta'wil* occurring in the verse.

Thus, in the light of these examples, there is no reason why we should take the word *ta'wil* in the verse about the explicit muhkam, and implicit, *mutashabih*, meanings to indicate "a meaning basically other than the apparent meaning."

The Meaning of Exegesis in the Tradition of the Qur'anic

Sciences

What is apparent from the verses in which the word *ta'wil* occurs is that *ta'wil* does not indicate a literal meaning. It is clear that the actual words of the dream described in chapter 12, "Joseph", do not in themselves contain the literal interpretation of the dream; the meaning of the dream becomes clear from the interpretation.

Andy likewise, in the story of Moses and Khidr, the actual words of the story are not the same as the interpretation which Khidr gave Moses. Moreover, in the verse, ***fill the measure when you measure and weigh with a right balance***, the language does not in itself indicate the particular economic conditions which we are intended to understand.

Again, in the verse ***And if you have a dispute concerning any matter then refer it to God and the messenger***, there is no immediate literal indication that what is meant is the Unity of Islam.

Thus, although the words indicate something not essentially different from their literal meaning, there is, nevertheless, in all the verses the same shifting of perspective, namely, from the actual words to the intended meaning.

Moreover, all the meanings are based on a real situation, an actual physical event. In the case of the dream, the interpretation has an external reality which appears before its actual occurrence in a special form to the dreamer. Likewise, in the story of Moses and Khidr, the interpretation that the latter gives is, in fact, a reality which is to take place as a result of his action.

Therefore, the interpretation of the event is rooted in the event. In the verse which orders man to fair dealing and measuring, the aspect of the verse is a reality which appears as a social benefit. Thus the order is connected to the effect it is supposed to have in the raising up of society and, in particular, of trade. In the verse concerning referral of the dispute to God and His messenger, the meaning is again fixed to reality, namely, the spiritualization of the life of the community.

To conclude, we may say that interpretation of each verse springs from a reality; the interpretation looks forward to or, in a subtle way, actually brings into being the reality it is talking about. Thus its meaning both contains and springs from a future or ulterior event. Just as the interpreter makes the interpretation meaningful, so the manifestation of the interpretation is already a reality for the interpreter.

The idea is also present in the form of the Qur'an since this sacred book has as its source realities and meanings other than the material and physical or, we may say, beyond the sensory level. Thus it expresses meanings which are more expansive than those contained in the words and phrases used by man in the material world.

Although these realities and meanings are not contained in the literal explanation of man, the Qur'an uses the same language to inform man of the unseen and to produce correct belief and good action.

Thus, through belief in the unseen, in the last day and in the meeting with God, man adopts a system of morals and a quality of character which allows him to achieve happiness and well-being. In this way the Qur'an produces a spiritual effect which, in turn, produces a physical social change, the importance of which will become clear on the Day of Resurrection and the meeting with God.

There is further reference to this same theme when God says in chapter 43:2-4, ***By the Book which makes plain. Take heed, we have appointed it a lecture in Arabic that perhaps you will understand. And indeed the source of the Book which we possess, it is indeed sublime, decisive.***

It is sublime, in that the ordinary understanding cannot fully comprehend it, and decisive in that it cannot be faulted.

The relationship of the last part of the verse to the meaning of exegesis *ta'wil*, (as we have discussed above) is clear. It says, in particular, that "perhaps you will understand," implying that one may or may not understand it; it does not imply that one will understand the book fully, merely by studying it.

As we have seen in the verse concerning the explicit *mahkam* and the implicit *mutashabih*, knowledge of exegesis *ta'wil*, is particular to God; moreover, when in this same verse corrupt men are blamed for following the implicit *mutashabih*, verses and for intending to sow dissension and conflict by searching for an exegesis, *ta'wil*, or special interpretation, it does not state that they necessarily find it.

The exegesis of the Qur'an is a reality, or several realities, which are to be found in the Source Book, the Book of Decrees with God; the Source Book is part of the unseen and far from the reach of corrupters. The same idea is treated again in chapter 56:75-80 when God says, ***Indeed I swear by the places of the Stars - And truly that is surely a tremendous oath if you but knew - that this is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a book kept hidden, which none touch except the purified, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds.***

It is clear that these verses establish for the Qur'an two aspects, namely the position of the hidden book protected from being touched and the aspect of revelation which is understandable by the people. What is of particular interest to us in this verse is the phrase of exception, "***except the purified.***" According to this phrase, we can arrive at an understanding of the reality of the exegesis of the Qur'an.

This positive view of man's capability to understand the Qur'an does not conflict with the negation of the verse, "And no one knows its *ta'wil* except God." Since the comparison of the two verses produces a whole which is independent and harmonious. Thus we understand that God is alone in understanding these realities, yet one may come to know these truths by His leave and teaching.

Knowledge of the unseen is, according to many verses, the special domain of God but in chapter 72:26-27, those who are worthy are excepted from this: ***He is the knower of the unseen and He reveals to no one His secret, except to every messenger whom He has chosen.*** Again we conclude that knowledge of the unseen is particular to God and that it is fitting for no one except

Him and for those he gives leave to.

Thus the purified amongst men take the verse concerning the "***purified ones***" as leave to enter into contact with the reality of the Qur'an. In a similar way we read in chapter 33:33, "***God's wish is but to remove uncleanness from you, O people of the Household, and clean you with a thorough cleaning.***" This verse was revealed, (according to a sound tradition with an unbroken chain of transmission), specifically with regard to the family of the Prophet.

The Existence of Abrogating and Abrogated Verses in the Qur'an

Among the verses in the Qur'an containing orders or laws, there are verses that abrogate verses previously revealed and acted upon. These abrogating verses are called *nasikh* and those whose validity they terminate are called *mansukh*.

For example, at the beginning of the Prophet's mission, Muslims were ordered to cultivate peace and friendship with the people of the Book, "***Forgive and be indulgent (towards them) until God gives command,***" (2:109).

Sometime later, fighting was allowed and the order to establish peace was abrogated: "***Fight against such as those who have been given the Book but who believe not in God nor the last day, and do not forbid that which God has forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth ...***" (11:29)

The common notion of abrogation, that is, a cancelling of one law or code by another, is based on the idea that a new law is needed because of a mistake or shortcoming in the previous one. It is clearly inappropriate to ascribe a mistake in law-making to God, Who is perfect, and whose creation admits of no flaws.

However, in the Qur'an, the abrogating verses mark the end of the validity of the abrogated verses because their heed and effect was of a temporary or limited nature. In time the new law appears and announces the end of the validity of the earlier law. Considering that the Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-three years in ever-changing circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine the necessity of such laws.

It is in this light that we should regard the wisdom of abrogation within the Qur'an: "***And when We put a revelation in place of (another) revelation and God knows best what He reveals – they say: you are just inventing it. Most of them do not know. Say: The Holy Spirit (Gabriel) has revealed it from your hand with truth and as a guidance and good news for those who have surrendered (to God)***" (16:101–102)..

Applicability and Validity of the Qur'an

Bearing in mind that the Qur'an is valid for all times, the verses revealed in special circumstances informing Muslims of their specific duties are also valid for those who, in future, experience the same circumstances.

Similarly, those verses which praise or reproach certain qualities, and promise reward or threaten punishment accordingly, are applicable to all ages and places. Thus the meaning of a verse is not limited to the circumstances or the times of its revelation. Similar circumstances occurring subsequent to the revelation of a verse are to be followed; this is known in Qur'anic Science as *jury*, or *applicability*.

The fifth Imam said, "were a verse after its revelation to pass away with the passing away of that people, then nothing would have remained of the Qur'an." As long as the heavens and the earth exist, there are verses for every people, wherever they be, which they may read and act upon for the benefit or reject at their loss.

Qur'anic Commentary: Its Advent and Development

Commentary on the words and expressions used in the Qur'an began at the time of the first revelation. The Prophet himself undertook the teaching of the Qur'an and the explanation of its meanings and intent.

Thus, in chapter 16:44 God says, "***And we have revealed to you the Remembrance that you may explain to mankind that which has been revealed for them.***" And He says in 62:2, "***He it is Who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own to recite to them His revelations and to make them grow and to teach them the Scriptures and wisdom.***"

At the time of the Prophet a group of men, on his orders, were instructed to read record and learn the Qur'an by heart. When the Prophet's companions passed away, other Muslims took over the responsibility of learning and teaching the Qur'an; and so it has continued until the present day.

The Science of Qur'anic Commentary and the Different Groups of Commentators

After the death of the Prophet a group of his companions, including Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, Anas, Abu Hurayrah, Abu Musa, and, above all, the famous 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, were occupied with the Science of Commentary. Just as they had heard the Prophet explaining the meanings of the verses, they would transmit it orally to other trustworthy persons.

The traditions specifically concerned with the subject of Qur'anic verses number over two hundred and

forty; many were transmitted through weak chains of transmission and the texts of some have been rejected as incorrect or forged. Sometimes the transmission would include commentaries based on personal judgments rather than on a narration of the actual sayings, hadiths, from the Prophet.

The later Sunni commentators considered this kind of commentary as part of the body of Sayings of The Prophet, since the companions were learned in the science of Qur'anic commentary. They argued that these companions had acquired their knowledge of this science from the Prophet himself and that it was unlikely they would say anything which they themselves had invented.

There is, however, no absolute proof for their reasoning. A large proportion of these sayings, or traditions, about the reasons and historical circumstances of the revelation of verses do not possess an acceptable chain of narration. It should be noted that many of the narrators like Ka'b al-Akhbar, were learned companions who had belonged to the Jewish faith before accepting Islam.

Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Ibn Abbas usually expressed the meanings of verses in poetry. In one of his narrations over two hundred questions of Nafi' ibn al-Azraq are replied to in the form of poetry; al-Suyuti in his book, al-Itqan, related one hundred and ninety of these questions.

It is evident, therefore, that many of the narrations made by the commentators amongst the companions cannot be counted as actual narrations from the Prophet himself; therefore, such additional material related by the companions must be rejected.

The second group of commentators were the companions of the followers (tabi'un), who were the students of the companions. Amongst them we find Mujahid, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, 'Ikrimah and Dahhak. Also from this group were Hasan al-Basri, 'Ata' ibn Abi Rabah, 'Ata' ibn Abi Muslim, Abu al-'Aliyah, Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi, Qatadah, 'Atiyah, Zayd ibn Aslam, Ta'us al-Yamani.

The third group was comprised of the students of the second group, namely, Rabi ibn Anas, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam, Abu Salih al-Kalbi and others. The tabi'un sometimes narrated the commentary on a verse as a tradition of the Prophet or of the companions and, sometimes, they explained its meaning without attributing a narrator to the source, this they did especially when there was any doubt as to the identity of the narrator.

The later commentators treat these narrations as traditions of the Prophet, but count them as mawquf in their science of the levels of hadiths (that is as a tradition whose chain of narration does not reach back to the Prophet) .

The fourth group comprised the first compilers of commentaries, like Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah, Waki' ibn al-Jarrah, Shu'bah al-Hajjaj and 'Abd ibn Humayd; others from this group include Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the author of the famous Qur'anic Commentary.'

This group recorded the sayings of the companions and the followers of the companions with a chain of

narrators in their works of commentary; they avoided expressing personal opinions except, perhaps, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari who sometimes expressed his views by indicating his preference when discussing two similar traditions. The basis of the work of later groups may be traced to this group.

The fifth group omitted the chain of narrators in their writings and contented themselves with a simple relation of the text of the traditions. Some scholars regard these commentators as the source of varying views in the commentaries by connecting many traditions to a companion or a follower without verifying their validity or mentioning their chain of narration.

Consequently, confusion has arisen allowing many false traditions to enter the body of traditions, thus undermining the reputation of this section of hadith literature.

Careful examination of the chains of transmission of the traditions leaves one in doubt as to the extent of the deceitful additions and false testimonies. Many conflicting traditions can be traced to one companion or follower and many traditions, which are complete fabrications, may be found amongst this body of narrations.

Thus reasons for the revelation of a particular verse, including the abrogating and abrogated verses, do not seem to accord with the actual order of the verses. No more than one or two of the traditions are found to be acceptable when submitted to such an examination.

It is for this reason that Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who himself was born before this generation of narrators, said, *"Three things have no sound basis: military virtues, bloody battles and the traditions pertaining to Qur'anic commentary."* Imam al-Shafi'i relates that only about one hundred traditions from Ibn 'Abbas have been confirmed as valid.

The sixth group consists of those commentators who appeared after the growth and development of the various Islamic Sciences and each undertook the study of Qur'anic commentary according to his specialization: al-Zajaj studied the subject from the grammatical point of view; al-Wahidi and Abu Hayyan' investigated the verses by studying the inflection of the verbs, the vowels and the diacritical points.

There is also commentary on the rhetoric and eloquence of the verses by al-Zamakhshari in his work entitled al-Kashshaf. There is a theological discussion in the "Grand Commentary" of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. The gnosis of Ibn al-'Arabi and 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani treated in their commentaries. Other narrators, like al-Tha'labi, record the history of transmission of the traditions. Some commentators, among them al-Qurtubi, concentrate on aspects of fiqh (jurisprudence).

There also exists a number of commentaries composed of many of these sciences, such as Ruh al-bayan by Shaykh Isma'il Haqqi, Ruh al-ma'ani by Shihab al-Din Mahmud al-Alusi al-Baghdadi Gharalib al-Qur'an by Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi.

This group rendered a great service to the Science of Qur'anic commentary in that it brought the Science out of a state of stagnation (characteristic of the fifth group before it), and developed it into a Science of precise investigation and theory.

However, if one was to examine closely the precision of this group's research, one would see that much of its Qur'anic commentary imposes its theories onto the Qur'an rather than allowing the content of the verses to speak for themselves.

The Methods Used by the Shi'ite Commentators and their Different Groupings

All the groups mentioned above are Sunni commentators. Their method, used in the earliest commentaries of this period, was based on *ijtihad*, that is, the reports of the companions and the followers of the companions were examined according to certain rules in order to reach an acceptable understanding of the text.

This resulted in varying opinions amongst those making *ijtihad* and caused disorder, contradiction and, even, fabrication to enter into the body of the traditions.

The method employed by the Shi'ite commentators, however, was different, with the result that the patterning of the groups was also different. The Shi'ite commentators in their study of a verse of the Qur'an, viewed the explanation given by the Prophet as proof of the meaning of the verse, they did not accept the saying of the companions, or the followers, as indisputable proof that the tradition was from the Prophet.

The Shi'ite commentators only recognized as valid an unbroken chain of narration from the Prophet and through members of his family. Accordingly, in using and transmitting the verses concerning Qur'anic commentary, they restricted themselves to the use of traditions transmitted by the Prophet and by the Imams of the Prophet's family. This has given rise to the following groups:

The first group comprises those who have learned these traditions from the Prophet and from the Imams of the Prophet's family, studying and recording them according to their own method but not in any particular order. Among them we may mention such scholars as Zararah, Muhammad ibn Muslim, Ma'ruf and Jarir who were companions of the fifth and sixth Imams.

The second group comprises the first compilers of the commentaries, like Furat ibn Ibrahim al-Kufi, Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, Muhammad al-'Ayyashi, 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi and al-Nu'man who lived between the second and fourth centuries after Hijrah. The method of this group was similar to that of the fourth Sunni group of Commentators.

Thus, they avoided any kind of *ijtihad* or passing of judgment. We should remember that the Imams of

the Prophet's family were living amongst Muslims and available for questioning (on matters of commentary, for example) for a period of almost three hundred years. Thus the first groups were not divided chronologically but rather according to their relationship with the Imams.

There are very few who recorded the tradition without a chain of transmission. As an example, we should mention one of the students of al-'Ayyashi who omitted to record the chains of transmission. It was his work, instead of the original of al-'Ayyashi which came into common use.

The third group comprises masters of various sciences, like al-Sharif al-Radi who provided a commentary concerned with Qur'anic language and Shaykh al-Tusi who wrote a commentary and analysis on metaphysical matters.

Included, too, is Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi's philosophic work, al-Maybudi al-Kunabadi's gnostic commentary and 'Abd 'Ali al-Huwayzi's commentary Nur al-thaqalayn. Hashim al-Bahram composed the commentary al-Burhan and al-Fayd al-Kashani compiled the work known as al-Safi.

There were others who brought together many different themes to their commentaries, like Shaykh al-Tabarsi who in his Majma' al-bayan researches different fields of language, grammar, Qur'an recitation, gnosis of death, after-life and paradise, and knowledge of the traditions.

How Does the Qur'an Lend Itself to Interpretation?

The answer to this question is contained in the previous section where we discussed the eternal validity of the Qur'an: it speaks to, instructs and guides man now as it did in the past.

As we have seen, the whole text of the Qur'an is a challenge to mankind and particularly to the enemies of Islam in that the Qur'an itself is proof of its own argument; it announces itself as a light, an illumination and an explanation of all things.

Thus a document which states and demonstrates that it is self-illuminating, hardly needs others to illuminate it. As proof that it is not the speech of man, the Qur'an says that it is a harmonious speech, without the slightest inconsistency and any seeming inconsistency may be removed through reflection on the Qur'an itself. If it were not the word of God, the Qur'an would not be as clear as it is.

Moreover, if such speed needed something or someone else to explain its meaning and purpose, it would neither be the proof nor the absolute authority that it is so obviously is. This clarity is absolute, even if a seemingly contradictory passage becomes the object of dispute; it could be understood by cross-reference to the text of the Qur'an.

For instance, at the time of the Prophet, such matters could be referred to him since his knowledge of the Qur'an was perfect and he did not need to refer to other verses for clarification. Those who insisted on disagreeing, or disbelieving in the Prophet's fallibility, were not satisfied.

Therefore, commentaries which solve problems of interpretation by quoting the commentaries of the Prophet, without giving proofs from other Qur'anic verses, are useful only for those who believe in Prophethood and the Prophet's infallibility.

These people do not go unmentioned in the Qur'an; we are familiar with the following verse, ***if it had been from other than God then they would have found many inconsistencies in it.***

This is a clear argument against those who would seek for inconsistencies in the Qur'an and find fault with the Prophet. The Qur'an itself declares that the commentary and explanation of the Prophet is valid while the Prophet himself has confirmed the validity of the Qur'anic commentary of the Imams.

We may summarize this by saying that in the Qur'an some verses may be explained by comparison with other verses and some by using the instructions and teachings of the Prophet and the Imams. The latter commentaries are not, of course, different from the explanation which is produced by comparing and analyzing different verses.

Conclusion

There are three roads open to us when making commentary upon the Qur'an. Firstly, by using knowledge that one already possesses. Secondly, with the help of the sayings of the Prophet or Imams.

Thirdly, by using a combination of methods: by reflection and analysis, or by allowing the verse to become clarified by comparing it to other verses, or by use of the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, whenever possible.

The third way is the one which we have outlined in the last section and it is this way which the Prophet himself and the Imams of his family indicate in their teachings. As we have seen, the Prophet said that, "The verses were revealed to confirm each other," and Imam 'Ali said that "One part of the Qur'an explains another and one part witnesses to the other."

It is, moreover, clear that this method of commentary is other than that warned against by the Prophet when he said, "Whoever makes a commentary upon the Qur'an according to his own opinion prepares for himself a place in the Fire." This method uses the Qur'an to explain itself and is not based merely on explanation arising from whim or fancy.

The first method is unacceptable and exemplifies commentary based on opinion, except in cases where it agrees with the third method.

The second method is the one used by the early scholars and for many centuries afterwards, and is still in use amongst both Sunni and Shi'ite scholars of the traditions of the Prophet. This method is limited, considering the vast nature of the subject and the countless number of questions, (both general and particular), arising from over six thousand verses.

Where, one asks, is the answer to such questions? Where is the solution to so many intricate and perplexing questions? Or, should we refer to the body of tradition concerning the verses?

Let us not forget that the total number of traditions of the Prophet accepted and transmitted by the Sunni scholars number no more than two hundred and fifty; we should also remember that many of them are weak and some even totally unacceptable. It is true that the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams transmitted by the Shi'ite scholars number a thousand and that amongst them are to be found a considerable number which are fully trustworthy.

Consideration of these traditions is not enough, however, given the countless questions which arise and the many Qur'anic verses that are not even mentioned in this body of traditions. Should one refer in such matters to the appropriate verses?

As we have explained, this is not acceptable according to the method under consideration here. Should one simply abstain from investigation and imagine that the need for knowledge is non-existent? In this case, what is one to understand by the verse, ***And we reveal the Book to you as an exposition of all things***, (16:89) which is clear proof that the Qur'an itself is not a mystery but rather explains, among other things, itself, by its own light.

Chapter 4:82 contains the injunction, "***Will they not ponder on the Qur'an.***" Similarly, in chapters 47:24 and 38:29 "***(This book) is a Book that we have revealed to you, full of blessing, that you may ponder its revelation and the men of understanding may reflect.***" Likewise in Chapter 23:68, "***Have they not pondered the word, or has something come to them which did not come to their forefathers.***"

What are we intended to understand by these verses? How are we to act in the light of the totally trustworthy traditions of the Prophet and the Imams in which they advise us to refer to the Qur'an itself in case of problems of interpretation and discordance of opinion?

According to many well known traditions of the Prophet, transmitted in unbroken chains of transmission, one is obliged to refer the tradition to the Book of God; if the tradition is in accordance with the Book, then it is accepted and used in commentary and, if in disagreement, it is rejected.

It is clear that the meaning of these traditions is applicable when one discovers through the Science of Commentary that the inner meaning of one verse is contrary to what is contained in another verse. In this case, one must reject what one has discovered through the study of commentaries.

These traditions are the best proof that the Qur'an, like speech or writing in general, has meaning and will always have meaning, even when studied independently of the traditions. Thus it is the duty of the commentators to take into account and reflect upon the traditions of the Prophet and Imams concerning Qur'anic verses but only use those traditions which are in accordance with the verse under scrutiny.

An Example of Commentary on the Qur'an with the Aid of the Qur'an

On four occasions in the Qur'an God says **"Allah is the creator all beings,"** (39:62). The meaning is clear on each occasion; God is stating that everything man may possibly imagine in the world has been created by him and is sustained by Him. However, one should not ignore the fact that in hundreds of verses the Qur'an affirms the existence of cause and effect and attributes the action of every doer to the immediate cause.

Thus the effect of the burning of fire is a direct result of the fire itself, the growing of plants, the action of the plants, the falling rain caused by the state of the sky; the actions which man chooses to undertake are, according to the Qur'an, the result (and consequent responsibility) of man. We may also say that the doer of any action is the one responsible for that action, but God is the giver of existence, the Creator of deeds and the owner of deeds.

Keeping in mind this general relationship between the Creator and His creation, we may read in chapter 32:7 **"Who made all things beautiful and good which We created."** When we join this verse to the previous one we see that beauty and goodness necessarily accompany His creation and so anything which has existence in the cosmos is also good and beautiful.

We should not forget, however, that in many verses, the Qur'an affirms the existence of good and its opposite, evil, useful things and harmful things, beauty and ugliness; and it enumerates many bad actions, wrong doers and bad events.

These are all, however, negative aspects of the human character and are mentioned as a measure of man; they are relative and not intended as proof that the creation of man is basically bad. For example, the snake or the serpent is harmful but only to man and an animal that suffer the effects of its sting; to stones and earth it is harmless.

Bitter taste and foul smell are unpleasant, but only to the human sense of taste and smell, not to all animals. Certain behavior may at times appear wrong but this is often the result of observing human behavior in relation to one particular society of men; in another society or circumstance it may not be considered wrong.

Indeed, if we dispense for a moment with those negative aspects of man's character which are secondary or relative to the miracle and perfection of His creation, we witness only the beautiful symmetry and proportion of the cosmos in its entirety and the amazing beneficence of the Creator. Words are not able to describe this beauty since they themselves are part of this world of beauty.

In reality the above-mentioned verses awake man to an awareness of the relative nature of beauty and ugliness; they invite him to a comprehension of absolute beauty and prepare him for an understanding of

creation as a whole.

In fact, there are Qur'anic verses which explain or comment upon the different aspects of creation in the universe, either as isolated individual examples or as groupings and classes. Each creation, whether a single manifestation or joined to a larger structure and patterning, is a sign and indication of God.

Whichever way we regard creation, it all points to the existence of God.

This way of understanding or seeing the universe and its signs, leads to an appreciation of the stupendous beauty which encircles the whole world and allows us to realize that it is His beauty, emanating from the domain of His power, and made visible in the signs of the skies and the earth. Each aspect of the cosmos lends beauty and dimension to everything surrounding it, yet at the same time it is insignificant in relation to the whole.

The Qur'an affirms in other verses that perfection and beauty manifest themselves from the domain of his power; thus He says in chapter 40:65 "**He is the Living One, there is no god save Him,**" and in 2: 165 "... **power belongs completely to God,**" and in 4:139, "**Truly all power belongs to God, " and "He is the knower, the All-Powerful.**" On another occasion we read "**And He is the Hearer, the Seer,**" and in 20:8, "**Allah! There is no god save Him. His are the most beautiful names.**"

We realize from these verses that the beauty which manifests itself in the visible world has its reality in the domain of His power and grandeur. All other beauty, all other power, is illusory or metaphorical of His power.

In affirmation of this explanation, the Qur'an states that the beauty and perfection created by man is limited and temporal but that of God boundless and eternal. God emphasizes that all creation is from Him and under His power. In chapter 54:49, "**Truly we have created everything by measure**" and in the chapter 15:21, "**And there is not a thing with us but there are stores of it. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure.**"

Careful observation reveals that the Book itself declares its own perfection and beauty, that it encompasses all aspects of creation and the Creator, and that there is no fault or shortcoming in it. Such is the perfection of the Qur'an, which itself is one of the signs of God, that it makes the reader forget himself in rapturous appreciation of its beauty.

This we read in 2: 165 "**Those who believe are stauncher in their love of God.**" Love, of its very nature, demands the self and the giving over of the self to God. It demands the handing over of one's affairs completely to Him and allowing Him to be one's Lord: "**And Allah is the protecting Friend of the believers**" (3:68) .

This idea is also contained in 2:257 which declares, "**God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light,**" and also in 6:122, "**Is he who was dead and We**

have raised him to life and set for him a light in which he walks among men ..." Likewise, we read in 58:22, ***"As for such, He has written faith upon their hearts and has strengthened them with a spirit from Him."***

This spirit, this new life and light, is given by God to the man who perceives reality and truth and who understands the path of happiness and well-being in society. In another verse in 57:28, He explains the effect of such light: ***"O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty to God and put faith in His messenger. He will give you two fold of His mercy and will appoint for you a light in which you shall walk."***

Again, in another verse, He makes a commentary on "faith in the Prophet" by explaining it as submission and obedience to Him; chapter 3:31, ***"Say (O Muhammad, to mankind): If you love God follow me; God will love you."***

The nature of this path is explained in chapter 7: 157, ***Those who follow the messenger the Prophet, who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospels (which are) with them. He will rejoin in that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and He will relieve them of their burden and the fetters they used to wear.***

Still more vividly, the path is explained in another verse which is also a commentary on the previous verse (30:30), ***So let your purpose (O Muhammad) for the din (of Islam) as a man by nature upright-the nature of (God on which he has created man. There is no altering God 's creation. That is the right way of life, but most men do not know ..."***

The right way of life or din refers to the correct path for society to follow for its well-being and happiness. According to this verse, the way of Islam is also the way desired by the Creator for man.

In other words, the legislative framework given to man by God is the very framework which is appropriate for the creature man. This divine law is in complete harmony with the nature of man, living a life of piety and obedience.

God says in another verse IXCI:7-81, ***"And a soul and Him who perfected it. And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right."*** The Qur'an is the only revealed book which equates the happiness and well-being of man with a pure and sincere way of life.

Moreover, unlike other religions, Islam does not separate worship of God from the actual program of living; it establishes the word din to mean not only religion but also life in general as well, the actual day to day routine of man, both on a personal and social level.

The Qur'an establishes a program of living which is in accord with the functioning and the reality of the cosmos, and the Qur'an mentions many of the benefits and virtues to be expected by the man of God

and the lovers of Truth, including a certainty of faith and tranquility of the heart.

The Validity of the Commentary of the Prophet and the Imams

From an indication in the Qur'an itself, the commentary of the Prophet and the Imams, (as discussed in the previous sections), is established as being absolutely true. Authentication of the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams is clearly established by the existence of fully trustworthy chains of transmissions. A tradition may not, however, be recognized as totally acceptable if it has been transmitted by one chain of narration only.

The validity of the tradition may be disputed amongst the Muslim Scholars of Commentary: amongst the Sunni's a tradition of a single chain of transmission, classified in their terms as sahih (sound), must be accepted and acted upon; among the Shi'ite scholars a tradition with a single undisputed chain of transmission is also accepted as a proof.

However, in the laws of the shari'ah it is not valid and must be investigated and checked before use as a proof.

Author's Note: The previous section has been specifically about the use of commentary or explanation in order to arrive at the true meaning of a verse. This includes study of the literal meanings and those hidden in metaphor. It does not include an explanation or a discussion of the linguistic and literal aspects or the science of Qur'an recitation since these do not affect the meaning.

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