

Preface to the First Edition

Why Did I Undertake This Exegesis?

Since boyhood, I have been passionately fond of reciting the Exalted Book of God and exploring its ambiguities and sublime meanings. It behooves a true Muslim rather, every thinker—to apply himself to understanding the Qur'an, clarifying its mysteries, and acquiring its illuminations; for it is the Book that guarantees the establishment of peace, happiness, and order for human beings, and promotes their prosperity and helps them attain it. The Qur'an is, moreover, a reference book for the lexicographer, a guide for the grammarian, a competent authority for the jurist, a model for the man of letters, a goal of persistent search for the sage, an instructor for the preacher, and aspiration for the moralist. From it are derived the social sciences and public administration; on it are based the religious sciences; from its guidance are discovered the secrets of the universe and the laws of nature. The Qur'an is the eternal miracle of the everlasting religion. It is the exalted and lofty order for the equally exalted and lofty *Shari'a* (sacred law).

From my boyhood, I was very devoted to the Qur'an's recitation, seeking to understand its meaning clearly and to disclose its purpose. This passion became stronger whenever I was able to understand an aspect of its manifold meanings and to fathom one of its numerous mysteries. This passionate love became so compelling that it drove me to read the books of exegesis and explore their depth. It was here that I found what baffled and confused me.

I discovered the insignificance of human reasoning and thinking in comparison with the greatness of God in His Qur'an. I realized the deficiency of the creature in his finitude and subservience before the perfection of the Creator in His absolute beingness and majesty. I saw the Qur'an proudly soaring and those other books ignominiously diminishing. I also found that a human being strains to understand the Qur'an and uncovers one or two aspects; then he records these in a book which he calls an exegesis, implying that it clarifies the ambiguities of the Qur'an and unveils its mysteries. How can anyone believe that the imperfect can encompass the perfect? Nevertheless, these scholars deserve praise and recognition for their endeavors.

Undoubtedly, the Book of God has cast on their minds a ray of its light and clarity from its guidance. Indeed, it is unfair to expect anyone, however knowledgeable and thorough, to have an all-encompassing knowledge of the meanings of the exalted Book of God. Yet these exegetes may still be criticized for limiting themselves to the aspects of the Qur'an that are easily understandable and leaving aside its more exalted aspects. Hence, some of them explain the literary and grammatical aspects of the Qur'an; others discuss it from the philosophical point of view; still others analyze it on the basis of modern sciences—and so on; as if the Qur'an were revealed only to be understood from the perspective of a given exegete.

Some of the exegetes have written commentaries that contain very little exegesis. Others analyze the Qur'an either from their own point of view or according to the views of others whom God did not appoint as His proof among His creatures.

It is necessary for the exegete to proceed where the verse of the Qur'an leads him, and to bring to light its meaning wherever it points. He should be a philosopher when a passage contains philosophy, an ethicist when a passage deals with morality, a jurist when a passage deals with jurisprudence, a sociologist when a passage discusses society—and so on. Furthermore, the exegete should be able to expound on the literary technique of the verse and on the style of its vocabulary and phrasing. Indeed, to be an exegete, one should write a comprehensive work on Qur'anic sciences. The fact is that I have not found a single exegete who has succeeded in doing that.

In view of this, I decided to write this work of exegesis, in the hope that God will help me in what I intend and will forgive me where I fail. Consequently, I have taken it upon myself to gather in this book what I can of the Qur'anic sciences that pertain to the meaning of the text. As for the sciences of Qur'anic style, I shall in most cases avoid them, for they have been extensively treated by a great number of exegetes, such as al-Shaykh al-Tusi in his *al-Tibyan*, al-Tabarsi in his *Majma' al-Bayan*, and al-Zamakhshari in his *al-Kashshif*. However, I shall deal with these stylistic aspects when the discussion requires it or when I find that an important aspect was neglected by other exegetes. Occasionally, I shall turn my attention to some important aspect even when other scholars have not neglected it.

The reader will find that my exegesis shall not deviate from the literary meaning of the Qur'an and its precise verses, nor shall it depart from the uninterrupted and universally accepted traditions (*tawatur*),¹ which have been related through reliable chains of transmission from the inerrant Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (the progeny of the Prophet) (peace be upon him and his progeny). In addition, I shall abide by what would be independently accepted by innate reason, which God has made an internal proof, just as He has made [the teachings of] His Prophet and of those of his family who are divinely protected from error [the Imams] (peace be upon all of them) an external proof.² The reader will also find that I frequently explain one verse with the help of another and that I seek guidance from the Qur'an itself to understand its meanings; and, subsequently, I employ the related traditions to support this comprehension.

What follows are a number of topics closely related to the purpose of this work, which shed some light

on several of its aspects. I start with these because they will serve as an introduction to the exegesis of the Qur'an. They include academic topics related to the greatness and miraculous nature of the Qur'an; its immunity from alterations and freedom from contradictions; the principle of abrogation in its laws; and other such academic questions that need to be clarified as an introduction to understanding the Qur'an and exegeting it on a sound intellectual basis.

To God I turn humbly in supplication that He may grant me success and look upon my work with approval. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious.

The Excellence of the Qur'an

SYNOPSIS The inability of human beings to describe the Qur'an; those among human kind who are the persons best informed about its status; the Prophet's discourse on the excellence of the Qur'an; the Qur'an is divinely protected from alteration; it guards the community against dispute; it is eternal and comprehensive; merits of reciting the Qur'an; topical traditions regarding its recitation; reflections on the meanings of the Qur'an; knowledge of its exegesis; encouragement, from the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition (*sunna*), and the mind to reflect [on the meaning of] the Qur'an.

It is better for a human being to refrain from delving into this topic and to humble himself in front of the Qur'an's greatness. Indeed, an admission of inadequacy is better than proceeding with this discussion. What can a person say in describing the eminence of the Qur'an and its glory? What can he say to explain its excellence and sublimity? How can a contingent being perceive the greatness of the speech of the Absolute Being? What can an author write about this subject and what can a speaker say? Can a limited being describe anything that is unlimited?

It is sufficient greatness for the Qur'an, and sufficient eminence and glory, that it is the speech of the Almighty God, and the miracle of His noble Prophet, and that its verses are the guarantee for the guidance of human beings in all their concerns and circumstances and at all times. This is their guarantee to reach the final goal and the great happiness now and later on:

Lo! this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright (Qur'an 17:9). This is the Book which We have revealed to you [O Muhammad], that thereby you may bring forth human kind from darkness into light, by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the Mighty and Owner of Praise (Qur'an 14: 1). This is a declaration for humankind, a guidance and an admonition to those who ward off [evil] (Qur'an 3: 138).

It is related in a tradition that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) said: "The superiority of the Speech of God over other speeches is like the superiority of God over His creatures."³

Indeed, it is better for a human being to stop short at this topic and hand over the elucidation of the excellence of the Qur'an to those comparable to the Qur'an. They are the persons most knowledgeable

about its status, and the best able to point out its lofty prestige, and they are its peers in excellence and its associates in guidance. As for their honorable grandfather, he is the one who proclaimed the Qur'an and guided [them] to its principles and propagated its teachings. Regarding this, he said: "I leave among you two things of high estimation: the Book of God and my descendants, my Ahl al-Bayt. These two will never separate until they return to me by the Pond [of Kawthar]." [4](#)

The "descendants" in the tradition are the guide to the Qur'an, being knowledge able about its excellence. Accordingly, it is necessary that we should restrict ourselves to their sayings, and receive enlightenment from their instructions. Indeed, they have been compiled by 'Allama Majlisi in volume 19 of his multivolume work Bihar al-Anwar. Here, we shall limit ourselves to a few of these traditions.

Al-Harith al-Hamadani relates the following: [5](#)

I entered the mosque and some persons were in deep controversy about some Hadith traditions. I went to 'Ali [b. Abi Talib (A.S)] and said: "Are you aware that people at the mosque are in dispute over the Hadith?" He said: "So they have done it!" I said: "Yes." He said: "I have indeed heard the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) saying, 'There shall be sedition (*fitan*) after me.'" I asked: "How do we avoid that?" He [the Prophet] said: **"The Book of God, the Book of God. In it is the information about those who were before you and what will come after you, and it will be the judge among you. It is the final decision and not a jest [cf. Qur'an 86: 13-14].** It is that which not even the mighty could forsake without being shattered by God. **Whoever seeks guidance in anything other than it, God will lead him astray. It is the firm rope of God; it is the wise remembrance [Qur'an 3:58];** it is the straight path. With it, hearts will never deviate, nor will the tongues utter confusion. Scholars will never have their full of it; it will not wear out from constant use, nor will its wonders be exhausted. It is that which when the jinns heard it, they could not help saying: **'We heard a marvelous qur'an [recitation] [Qur'an 72: 1].'** Whoever utters it speaks the truth; whoever rules by it is just; whoever abides by it will receive his just reward; and whoever calls for it shall be guided to the straight path. Follow it, O A'war." [6](#)

There are several significant points in this tradition, the most important of which we would do well to explain. The Prophet's saying, "In it is the information about those who were before you and what will come after you" bears several meanings. First, it may be a reference to the second creation—the world of the Barzakh and the final reckoning and requital of one's actions. This is probably the most likely explanation, for it is corroborated by a passage in one of the Imam 'Ali's orations: "In it [the Book of God] is the information about those who were before you, the criterion of judgment among you, and the information about your final return for the day of reckoning (*ma 'ad*)." [7](#)

The second possibility is that it refers to the events of the unknown future that are mentioned in the Qur'an.

The third possibility is that it is an intimation that what happened to bygone nations will also happen exactly the same way to this nation [of Islam]. In other words, it would have the same meaning as God's

saying, "***That you shall journey on from plane to plane***" (*Qur'an 84: 19*), and as the prophetic tradition "You shall follow the practices (*sunah*) of those who came before you."[8](#)

As for the Prophet's saying, "It is that which not even the mighty could forsake without being shattered by God," it seems to contain a promise that the Qur'an is protected against tampering by tyrants. Since the Qur'an is divinely protected, the tyrants will stop reading it and acting on its injunctions, and they will seize it from the people, as happened in the case of the other heavenly books.[9](#) The phrase, accordingly, refers to the immunity of the Qur'an against alteration. This we shall discuss at greater length later. The same meaning is implied by the Prophet's saying, further on, "With it, hearts will never deviate" that is to say, that personal desires cannot change it, in the sense that to deviate from the meaning of the Qur'an would be to change it. This, again, will be discussed at length when we present an exegesis of the relevant verses.

The tradition also alludes to the fact that if the Muslim community turns to the Qur'an to resolve its disputes and all the things that are incomprehensible to it in regard to its beliefs and actions, the Qur'an will surely point the way for it. The people will find that it is a fair judgment among them and the criterion by which truth is distinguished from falsehood.

Indeed, if the Muslim community were to implement the limits of the Qur'an and to follow its suggestions and exhortations, it would certainly know the truth and its people, and would acknowledge the rights of the Prophet's descendants, whom the Prophet declared the peers of the Book. They are, indeed, the second vicegerent of the community after the Prophet.[10](#) If the community is to seek enlightenment from the Qur'anic sciences, it would certainly escape the painful doom and would not succumb to blindness, nor would it be overwhelmed by the darkness of ignorance. Not a single person would then deviate from the obligations ordained by God or slip off the straight path. But Muslims have stubbornly turned away from the Qur'an and followed their desires. They have rallied under the banner of falsehood, and matters have reached the point where Muslims accuse each other of disbelief and curry favor with God by killing other Muslims, violating the sanctity of their homes, and plundering their possessions. What greater proof could there be of the community's neglect of the Qur'an than this deep disunity?

The Commander of the Faithful [ʿAli b. Abi Talib (peace upon him and his progeny)] describes the Qur'an as follows:

Then God revealed to him [the Prophet] the Book. It is a light whose radiance shall not be extinguished; a lamp whose flame shall not die; an ocean whose depth shall not be fathomed; a path which shall not lead astray; a blaze whose brilliance shall not be darkened; a criterion whose evidence shall not be suppressed; an elucidation whose cornerstones shall not be demolished; a cure with which there is no fear of ailments; a power whose supporters cannot be defeated; a truth whose helpers will not be forsaken. Thus, it is the source of faith and its prosperity; it is the fountainhead of knowledge and its vastness; the meadow of justice and its flowing streams; the support of Islam and its foundation; the valleys of the truth and its fields; an ocean that shall not be drained by those who draw upon it; a spring

that shall not be exhausted by those who draw from it; a watering place that shall not be depleted by those who come to it; a station whose road the travelers do not miss; a signpost which the wayfarers will always see; the hilltops that cannot be bypassed by those who seek them. God has made it the quencher of the thirst of scholars, a vernal season for the hearts of the jurists, a destination for the path of the righteous, a cure after which there is no malady, a light which does not alternate with darkness, a rope whose knots are firm, a stronghold whose peak is impregnable. It is [a source of] power for whoever cultivates it, peace for whoever dwells on it, a guidance for whoever follows it, a laudable act for whoever embraces it, an argument for whoever speaks for it, a witness for whoever fights for it, a sharp instrument for whoever bases his arguments on it, a support for whoever supports it, a means of deliverance for whoever employs it, a sign for the discriminating, a shelter for whoever seeks healing, a source of knowledge for whoever has sense, and the best narrative for its transmitters, and a means for the one who sits in judgment. [11](#)

This brilliant oration reviews many important points which call for careful reflection. For instance, by saying that the Qur'an is "a lamp whose flame shall not die," the Imam 'Ali means, as he does in many other statements in this oration, that the Qur'an is a book whose significations shall not be exhausted. It will remain fresh and new until the Day of Resurrection. A verse may have come down regarding a specific occasion or person or community, yet its relevance is not limited to that occasion, person, or community; rather, its signification and applicability are general.

Regarding the verse "**For every people there is a guide**" (*Qur'an 13:7*), al-'Ayyashi reports the following discussion with Abu Ja'far [the Imam al-Baqir]:

The Imam said: "Ali is the guide, and the guide is always one of us." I said: "Then you—for whom may my life be a sacrifice are now the guide." "You are right," said the Imam. "The Qur'an lives and will not die; the verses [of the Qur'an] live and will not die. If a verse were to die with the death of the persons concerning whom it came down, then the Qur'an would have definitely died. Rather, such a verse would continue to apply to those who are alive as it did to those who died."

Another tradition reports that the Imam al-Sadiq said: "Certainly, the Qur'an lives, and has not died; and it is existent just as the day and the night and the sun and the moon are existent. And it will exist for the last among us as it has existed for the first."

[In volume 2 of his] *Usul al-Kafi*, al-Kulayni notes that the Imam al-Sadiq said, in response to 'Umar b. Yazid, who had asked him about the meaning of verse 13:21, [which reads:] "**Such as [the men of understanding (ulu al-albab)] unite that which God has commanded should be joined**": [The Imam said:] "This verse came down concerning the descendants of Muhammad—peace be upon him and his progeny. But it could also apply to your kinsmen. Be not one of those who say that the verse is related to only one thing."

The *Tafsir al-Furat* [as related by the Imam al-Sadiq]: "If a verse were to die with the death of the

people concerning whom it came down, undoubtedly nothing would remain of the Qur'an. But the beginning and the end of the Qur'an are in perfect harmony, and will remain thus as long as the heavens and the earth remain. For every people there is a verse which they recite; its good and its evil apply to them."[12](#)

In addition to this, there are other traditions which also speak about the same subject. [13](#)

[Returning to the Imam 'Ali's description of the Qur'an]

As for saying, "A path which shall not lead astray," the Imam 'Ali meant that the Qur'an is a road on which a person does not lose his way. This is because God revealed it as guidance for His creatures; therefore, He guards those who follow it from straying.

His saying that the Qur'an is "an elucidation whose cornerstones shall not be demolished" could mean one of two things. One is that the cornerstones of the Qur'an are its gnosis and teachings, and that all the truths that are in it are firm. They will not weaken or collapse. The second, is that no defect shall befall the text of the Qur'an, nor shall any loss. The phrase would accordingly imply that the Qur'an is divinely protected from alteration.

The phrase which says that the Qur'an is "the meadow of justice and its flowing streams" means that justice, in all its aspects of adhering to proper standards of belief, action, and morality, is contained in the Precious Book. It is the compendium of justice and the confluence of its different aspects.

"The support of Islam" means that the integrity of Islam and its firm stance through the Qur'an are like a pot which stands firm because of the props well placed under it. [14](#)

"The valleys of the truth and its fields" means that the Qur'an is the fountainhead of the truth. This sentence, in short, compares the Qur'an with the extensive earth of good hope and the truth with the vegetation which flourishes in it. In this, there is an indication that anyone who adheres to anything other than the Qur'an shall not attain the truth, for the Qur'an is the source of truth, and there is no truth except in the Qur'an. By "an ocean that shall not be drained by those who draw upon it" and the next few phrases, the Imam 'Ali (peace upon him and his progeny) means to say that those who apply themselves to understanding the message of the Qur'an cannot reach its end because it is endless in significance.

"The hilltops which cannot be bypassed by those who seek them" means that the seekers cannot attain the heights of the Book, and therefore cannot go beyond them. The phrase alludes to the fact that there are hidden meanings in the Qur'an that cannot be understood by those who have intellection. We shall clarify this point in later parts of this work, God willing. On the other hand, the phrase may mean that when a person reaches the peak, he stops there and seeks no more, because he feels that his aim is fully realized at that point.

The Merits of Reciting the Qur'an

The Qur'an is the divine law (*al-namus al-ilahi*) that assumes toward people the responsibility of reforming religion and worldly life, and guarantees their happiness in this life and the life to come. Each of its verses is an overflowing source of guidance and a mine of teaching and of mercy. Whoever desires eternal bliss and success in the ways of religion and the world should heed the Book of God day and night, and memorize its verses and blend them with his thoughts. Thereby, he would tread in the light of the "**wise remembrance**" [*Qur'an 3:58*] toward a success which has no end, and an "**imperishable gain**" [*Qur'an 35:29*].

Numerous traditions have been transmitted from the Imams of guidance and from their noble grandfather (peace be upon him and his progeny) on the merits of reciting the Qur'an. Among these are the following:

The Imam al-Baqir (A.S) said:

The Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny) said: "Whoever recites ten verses at night will not be recorded among those who are neglectful. Whoever recites fifty will be recorded among those who are mindful; whoever recites one hundred verses will be recorded among the obedient; whoever recites two hundred will be recorded among the humble; whoever recites three hundred will be recorded among the triumphant; whoever recites five hundred will be recorded among the diligent; and whoever recites a thousand, for him there will be quantities of gold nuggets." [15](#)

Another tradition reports that the Imam al-Sadiq (A.S) said:

The Qur'an is the covenant of God for his creation. Thus, it is necessary for every Muslim to look into His covenant and read, every day, fifty of its verses. [16](#)

The Imam also said:

What prevents a merchant among you who has been busy in the market, that, when he returns to his home, he would not sleep until he has recited a chapter from the Qur'an? For every verse he recites, ten good deeds would be recorded for him and ten bad deeds erased. [17](#)

He also said:

It is your duty to recite the Qur'an, because the stations of paradise are equal to the number of its verses. On the Day of Resurrection, whoever used to recite the Qur'an would be told, "Recite and ascend"—and for every verse he recites, he shall be raised a station. [18](#)

The compendiums of Shi'ite scholars contain many traditions similar to those quoted above. Whoever wishes to know about them may look them up in these compilations. Volume 19 of Bihar al-Anwar [by

al-Majlisi], in particular, includes many of them.

All these traditions refer to the excellence of reciting from the text of the Qur'an, rather than from memory. Among these traditions is the one reported by Ishaq b. 'Ammar from the Imam al-Sadiq (A.S):

[I asked the Imam:] "May my life be a sacrifice for you? I have memorized the Qur'an by heart. Is it more excellent that I recite by heart or should I look at the text (*al muhraf*)?" The Imam told me: "Rather, recite while looking at the text, for it is more excellent. Do you not know that looking at the text of the Qur'an is a form of worship?" [19](#)

The Imam also said: "Whoever reads the Qur'an from the text would enjoy good eyesight and would lighten the burden of his parents even if they were rejecters of faith." [20](#)

This urging to recite the Qur'an by sight involves a significant aim worthy of consideration—namely, to prevent the Qur'an from disappearing by ensuring that its copies will multiply. In other words, if recitation from memory had been accepted, there would have been less demand for copies of the written text. Therefore, there would have been few of them around, and eventually they might have disappeared altogether.

But aside from that, the numerous salutary effects of recitation that the traditions mention can result only from reciting by sight. Among these are the Imam's saying [that whoever recited by sight] "would enjoy good eyesight." This is a most comprehensive expression that could mean that reciting from the text protects the eyes from blindness and ophthalmia, or that reciting it makes the reader enjoy the important meanings and subtle points of the Qur'an. This would happen because when people look at an object which they appreciate, they will find joy in it, and both eyes and comprehension would be invigorated. The same happens to the reader of the Qur'an. When he lets his eyes wander over its words, and sets his mind free to dwell over its meanings and ponder its forms of knowledge and valuable teachings, he will discover the pleasure of understanding them and the joy of yearning for them, and will witness happiness from his spirit and aspiration from his heart.

The noble traditions call our attention to the merits of reciting the Qur'an at home. The underlying reason for this is the propagation of Islam and the spread of the recitation of the Qur'an. If the man of the house were to recite the Qur'an at home, the woman would recite it as well, and so would the child, and the message would thus spread. By contrast, if specific places were designated for the recitation, this opportunity would not be available for everyone, nor at all times. This is one of the most important ways for the propagation of Islam. In addition, it would seem that another essential reason for [the encouragement to recite the Qur'an at home] is to establish the divine sign when the voices rise in the recitation, morning and evening. Islam would thus become exalted in the minds of the listeners for the amazement they would experience when the voices of the reciters rose from every corner of the city.

Of the traditions which speak of the effects of reciting the Qur'an at home, the following may be cited:

Without doubt, a house in which the Qur'an is recited and God the Exalted is remembered, it is a house whose blessings will multiply. The angels will visit it, the devils will abandon it, and it will glow for the dwellers of the heavens as a bright star glows for the people of the earth. As for the house in which the Qur'an is not recited, nor God the Exalted remembered, its blessings will diminish. The angels would desert it and the devils would visit it.[21](#)

Indeed, what has been related in the traditions about the excellence of the Qur'an and the blessings God reserves for those who recite it is astonishing to the intellect and perplexing to the mind. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) has said:

Whoever recites a letter from the Qur'an, a good deed shall be recorded for him, and each of these good deeds will be equal to ten good deeds. I am not saying that *alif*, *lam*, *mim* constitute a letter; rather *alif* is a letter, *lam* is a letter, and *mim* is a letter.[22](#)

This tradition has also been reported by Sunni traditionists. Al-Qurtubi reported it from al-Tirmidhi, who had reported it from Ibn Mas'ud.[23](#) Al-Kulayni reported a similar tradition on the authority of the Imam al-Sadiq[24](#) (Peace be upon him and his progeny) Whoever investigates the books and compendiums of *hadith* literature will find numerous traditions on the merits of the Qur'an and its recitation, and of the special characteristics of each chapter and verse.

However, there is an infamous group of untruthful *Hadith* narrators who imagined that what was transmitted on these matters was not sufficient; therefore, they invented narratives regarding the merits of the Qur'an and its chapters about which there is neither revelation nor Prophetic tradition. These narrators included Abi 'Isma Faraj b. Abi Maryam al-Marwazi, Muhammad b. 'Ukasha al-Kirmani, and Ahmad b. 'Abd Allah al-Juwibari. Indeed, Abu 'Isma al-Marwazi confessed to these fabrications. When asked, "Where did you find the traditions reported by 'Ikrima on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, regarding the separate merits of the chapters of the Qur'an, each on its own?" he replied: "I saw that people were turning from the Qur'an to the jurisprudence of Abu Hanifa and the battle narratives of Muhammad b. Ishaq [al Waqidi]. So I made up this tradition only to please God."[25](#)

Abu 'Amr 'Uthman b. Salih, commenting about the tradition which was related on the authority of Ubayy b. Ka'b—who had reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) on the merits of the separate chapters of the Qur'an said: "A scholar searched the source of this tradition until he reached a person who confessed that he and a group of traditionalists had fabricated it. Indeed, al-Waihidī and other exegetes who have included it in their works of exegesis have committed an error."[26](#)

Look at these presumptuous traditionalists; how they attribute a false tradition to the Messenger of God! And not content with that, they claim that these falsehoods were for the sole reason of pleasing God.

"This is what they do, made [to seem] fair to the prodigal" (Qur'an 10: 12).

Contemplating the Qur'an and Understanding Its Meanings

The Qur'an and the authentic tradition strongly urge us to reflect on the meanings of the Qur'an and contemplate its purposes and goals. God says in this respect, **"Will they not meditate on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts?" (Qur'an 47:24)**. This verse is a stern rebuke for those who neglect to reflect on the Qur'an. A tradition reported from Ibn 'Abbas relates that he heard the Prophet say, "Understand the Qur'an and seek its marvels."

In another tradition, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami says:

We heard from those of the Prophet's companions, who used to teach us the Qur'an, that they used to receive from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) ten verses [at a time], and did not start on the next ten till they had learned what the previous ten taught and what deeds they required. [27](#)

In still another tradition, it is related on the authority of 'Uthman [b. 'Affan][28](#) and Ibn Mas'ud that the Prophet used to read for them ten verses, and would not pass on to the next ten until they had learned everything about [the first ten verses]. Thus he taught them the Qur'an and the deeds based on it together.[29](#)

It is related on the authority of the Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib, that he mentioned Jabir b. 'Abd Allah al-Ansari and described him as knowledgeable. A man told the Imam: "May my life be a sacrifice for you! You have described Jabir as knowledgeable, and you, you are what you are!" The Imam said: "He knew the interpretation of God's revelation, **'Lo, He who has given you the Qur'an for law will surely take you back to a place of homing'**" (Qur'an 28:85).

It has been said that 'Ali b. Abi Talib mentioned Jabir b. 'Abd Allah and described him as knowledgeable. One of those present [in the gathering] told him: "May I be your sacrifice! You attribute knowledge to Jabir, and you, you are what you are!"

'Ali replied: "He used to know the meaning of God's saying, **'He who has given you the Qur'an for law will surely take you back to a place of homing'**" (Qur'an 28:85).[30](#)

The traditions regarding the merits of contemplating the Qur'an are numerous. Volume 19 of Majlisi's Bihar al-Anwar includes a large number of these traditions. However, the merit of contemplating the Qur'an does not require research on the traditions. This is because the Qur'an is the Book which God revealed as a law for people to follow in their worldly affairs, and to illuminate, with its beacon, their path to their Hereafter. These results would not be attained without contemplating the Qur'an and pondering its meanings—and this is something which reason determines; and what is contained in the revealed text regarding it only points the way to it.

Kulayni's al-Kafi reports that al-Zuhri said:

I heard the Imam 'Ali [Zayn al-'Abidin], son of the Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon them both), say: "The verses of the Qur'an are stores of treasure. Thus, whenever you open one of them, it is necessary for you to see what is inside it.³¹

^{1.} Tawatur (successively, uninterruptedly) is a technical term connected with the transmission of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (Hadith). A mutawatir transmission is one that has been communicated by a large number of narrators whose agreement on a falsehood is inconceivable. This condition must be established in the entire chain of transmission (isnad), in every generation. In other words, it should have been reported uninterruptedly and successively. Once this condition is met, the authenticity of the transmission becomes generally acceptable. Hence, some scholars translate tawatur as "universally acceptable." – Trans.

^{2.} Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi: al-Usul wa al-Rawda*, ed. 'Ali Akbar al Ghaffari, 12 vols. (Tehran: Al-Maktabat al-Islamiyya, 1963–68) vol. I, pp. 102–5.

^{3.} Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 110 vols. (Tehran: Al-Maktabat al-Islamiyya, 1942–), vol. 92, *Kitab al-Qur'an*, p. 19; Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*, in Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Arabi al-Ahwazi, 'Aridat al-Ahwazi bi-Sharh Sahih al-Tirmidhi, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm Lil-Jami', [1972]), vol. 11, p. 47.

^{4.} Tirmidhi, *Sahih*, vol. 13, pp. 200–1. The hadith about the "two weighty things" has been related by major Sunni traditionists, including Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, (1958)) vol. 3, pp. 14, 17, 26, and 59, on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khuqari; in vol. 4, pp. 366 and 371, on the authority of Zayd b. Arqam; in vol. 5, pp. 182 and 189, on the authority of Zayd b. Thabit. See also, 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al Rahman al-Darimi, *Sunan al-Darimi*, ed. 'Abd Allah Hashim Yamani, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dar al Mahasin lil-Tiba'a, 1966), vol. 2, p. 431, in the section on the merits of the Qur'an. Further, Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, *Al-Jami' al-Saghir*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Alamiya, n.d.), relates and authenticates the tradition on the authority of al-'fabranl (going back to Zayd b. Thabit). Al-'Allama al-Manawi, in his commentary on Suyuti's *Jami'*, vol. 3, p. 15, says that, according to Haythami, all the persons mentioned in the chain of transmission of this tradition are reliable. The tradition has also been related by al-Hakim al Nisaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 109, on the authority of Zayd b. Arqam, and has been accredited. Although there are variations in its wording, there is agreement on its meaning among the traditionalists.

^{5.} Harith b. 'Abd Allah al-A'war al-Hamadani is, according to the consensus among the Imamite scholars, one of the most prominent associates of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him and his progeny), known for his piety, moral probity, and service to him. In biographical dictionaries, he has been regarded as reliable, and several Sunni scholars have mentioned him and praised him. Thus, Ahmad b. 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Tahdhib al-tahdhib*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), in his note on al-Harith, cites several authorities like al-Duri, 'Uthman al-Darimi, Ash'ab b. Sawar, and Ibn Abi Dawud, who have accredited him and have regarded his transmissions as reliable. Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an [Tafsir al-Qurtubi]* 20 vols., 3d ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1387/1967); in vol. 1, p. 5, he mentions that al-Sha'bi had tarnished the reliability of al-Harith by ascribing a falsehood to him, which was baseless since there was no evidence to support such an accusation. Apparently, al-Qurtubi says, it was his excessive love for 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him and his progeny), and his placing him above all other associates of the Prophet, that prompted al-Sha'bi to impute a falsehood to him. Also, Ibn Hajar has vindicated al-Harith's reliability and has regarded al-Sha'bi's charge against him as lacking evidence. There is little doubt that al-Harith was accused of a falsehood simply because of his love for 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him and his progeny). In that case, what should one say about those traditions—reported by all Muslim traditionists—in which the Prophet himself is engaged in relating the merits of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him and his progeny) and demonstrating his excellence? On one occasion, when Mu'awiya was reviling 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him and his progeny) in the presence of Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas, the latter objected, saying that how could anyone malign a person who shared the character of the Prophet. See: Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 108.

^{6.} Darimi, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 312–13; cf. variants in Tirmidhi, *Sahih*, vol. 11, pp. 30–31, and in Majlisi, *Bihar*, vol. 92, pp. 24–25, citing 'Ayyashi, *Tafsir*.

^{7.} Majlisi, *Bihar*, vol. 92, p. 27.

^{8.} Ali b. 'Abd al-Muttaqi, *Kanz al-'Ummalfi Sunan al-Aqwal wa al-A'fal*, ed. Hasan Razziq and Safwat al-Saqqa, 16 vols.

- (Aleppo, Syria: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, n.d.). The tradition is mentioned by Sahl b. Sa'd. It is also cited in Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 5, p. 218; Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Bukhari, Al-Jami' al-Sahih, edited, with an English trans., by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 8 vols. (n.p.: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 7, p. 151; Muslim Ibn al Hajjaj, Sahih, vol. 3, p. 74.
- [9.](#) Muhammad Jawad al-Balaghi, Al-Huda ila Din al-Mustafa, 2 vols. (Saida, Lebanon: n.p., 1911-12), vol. 1, pp. 19-34.
- [10.](#) See note 38 for a reference to the tradition about the "two weighty things." In some versions of this tradition, it is explicitly mentioned that the vicegerents of the Prophet are the Qur'an and the Prophet's descendants.
- [11.](#) 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace upon him and his progeny), Nahj al-Balagha, compiled by al-Sharif al-Radi Muhammad b. al Husayn, commentary by Muhammad 'Abdul, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz Sayyid al-Ahl, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar ul-Andalus lil-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr, 1963) vol. 3; pp. 390-92.
- [12.](#) Abu al-Qasim al-Furat b. Ibrahim b. al-Furat al-Kufi, Tafsir al-Furat al-Kufi, ed. Muhammad Karim Tihani (Tehran: Musassasat al-Bab al-Tab'a wa al-Nashr, 1990), p. 11.
- [13.](#) Abu al-Hasan al-'Amili al-Isfahani, Muqaddimat Tafsir Mirat al-Anwar wa Mishkat al-Asrar fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Tehran: Chapkhanah-i Aftab, 1954).
- [14.](#) Athafi (singular: uthfiya) are the stones (usually three) which are placed under a pot to steady it.
- [15.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, pp. 34-35; Muhammad b. Al Hasan al-Hurr al'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'a ila Tahsil al-Shari'a, ed. Mirza 'Abd al-Rahim al-Rabbani, 9 vols. (Tehran: Al Maktabat al-Islamiyya, 1956-1969) vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 33-35.
- [16.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 31; Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 849.
- [17.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 33; Hurr al'Amili, Wasa'il, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 851.
- [18.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 27; Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 840, 842.
- [19.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 37; Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 854.
- [20.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, pp. 36-37.
- [21.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 32.
- [22.](#) Unconnected letters occur at the beginning of some chapters of the Qur'an, e.g., 2:1 and 3: 1.-Trans
- [23.](#) Qurtubi, Jami', vol. I , p. 7.
- [24.](#) al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 34.
- [25.](#) Qurtubi, Jami', vol. I, p. 78.
- [26.](#) Qurtubi, Jami', pp. 79.
- [27.](#) Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 92, p. 106.
- [28.](#) He was the third caliph among the rashidun, who was murdered in the year 656c.e.- Trans.
- [29.](#) Qurtubi, Jami', vol. I , p. 39.
- [30.](#) Ibid., p. 26.
- [31.](#) Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 11, p. 31.

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