A Glimpse into the Melodiousness of the Qur'an

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Ever wondered why the holy Qur'an is recited the way it is? What purpose and aim such a recitation is? Whether the Qur'an is considered prose or poetry? If you have ever pondered about the above issues this article will provide you with the explanations and examples made to demonstrate the melodiousness and the miracleness of the holy Qur'an.

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Abstract

One of the most important features of the Qur'an's miraculous eloquence is the harmony of the rhythm and melodious nature that one finds within it. In so far as musical and melodious sounds play an effective role in the transformation of the human soul, it is no wonder that Allah has infused the verses of His Book with a music that is both extraordinary and miraculous.

This article attempts to explore the divine melodious nature of the Qur'an, as well as the factors and foundations underlying this melody.

Keywords: art, music, melodiousness of the Qur'an, miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an, rhythm of the Qur'an, *tartīl*, forbidden (*haram*) music.

Introduction

Man and art have evolved together since the dawn of time. Whereas, the origins of human disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics and experimental sciences are often traced back to a particular period within recorded history, the same is not the case for art. Defining art has not been an easy task and a number of differing opinions have been suggested by various scholars.

According to a French philosopher, "Art is the attempt to create beauty or to create the ideal."1

Tolstoy, a Russian writer, comments, "When a person consciously and through external means converts his sentiments obtained through experience in such a way that those sentiments are transmitted and causes the recipient to experience the same feelings that he had experienced, this act is called art, and the person, an artist."2

Herbert Reid remarks, "Art is the expression of every desire that the artist can infuse in an embodied form; art is the human attempt to create delightful forms."3

As for Sayyid Quthub, he remarks "Art is the attempt to portray the sensory effects resulting from the reality of existence in a beautiful, vibrant and effective manner."4

Much has been said and written about art and its role in the life of man, but in reality, these observations have been limited to a particular historical manifestation of the art of man. The true reality of art—as well as its role in relation to the different facets of man—has yet to be uncovered. Uncovering this hidden reality can only be carried out by religion and man's spiritual knowledge of the transcendence.

From ancient history until today, religion has traversed the labyrinth of man's life and existence in the same way that art has, and in fact, even deeper. It has polished the human soul with clarity and luster, made smooth the rutted road of life, and has drawn out man from his terrestrial soil towards higher levels of existence.

During the span of history, art and religion have been so interwoven that separating them from each other is next to impossible. Perhaps this is due to the fact that both religion and art are rooted and concealed in the depths of man's existence and with them can be heard:

فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind Qur'an 30:30.

In the same way that religion is sacred and sublime, art too has its roots in the sacred and uplifting aspects of man. Moreover, just as faith is prone to straying without the assistance of the prophets, artistry too, if it does not fall under the guidance of the Creator of art (and existence in general), can easily swerve off its track. It is for this reason that the mutual relationship between art and religion must be maintained till the end of time, and man—being decadent and helpless—should seek refuge in its light to find a way towards human perfection.

From another angle, God the Almighty, Who is the Creator of mankind and all things beautiful, revealed the Qur'an for the guidance and bliss of humanity and for developing his splendour and perfection.

The Qur'an is a book that has a deep interior, a beautiful exterior and a sweet expression.5 It is a glowing torch which will never extinguish and its rays will remain throughout the ages. Its novelty does not fade with age; in fact, as time passes, its core concepts and understanding become more evident. How many a deep concept and hidden intellectual secret has been revealed simply by the passage of time. The Qur'an is an endless miracle that contains several extraordinary and wondrous aspects. Former and contemporary scholars have elaborated extensively as to the different facets of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, and today, we can summarized these into three important and essential components:

* **Miracle of expression**

* **Miracle of knowledge**

* **Miracle of guidance** (**through the *shari'ah***)

Since the topic of the present article is about the Qur'an and artistry, we shall describe and explain the miracle of Qur'anic eloquence, concentrating on its melodious nature.

Miracle of Expression

The miracle of the Qur'an's expressive nature can be divided into three sections:

1) The Qur'an's Selection of Terminology

From a grammatical point of view, Arab rhetoricians consider the Qur'an's miracle to lie in its incredible fluency and eloquence. The clarity of its message, the fluidity of its phrases, the precision in the selection of its terminology and order, and the arrangement of its verses are such that when it comes to interpreting and transcribing the words of the Qur'an, it is as if they have been woven and knit by the same thread in such a way that an inseparable unity is apparent throughout its verses and chapters. All of this attests to the fact that the Qur'an is the word of God.

The terms in the Qur'an have been selected so that:

The proportion of sounds of equal level is adhered to, such that the last letter of each preceding word is in vocal harmony with the first letter of the following word.

The meanings of the words are in accordance with each other such that, in terms of understanding, there is harmony between them.

The eloquence of the words selected are coherent with the conditions set forth in the science of oration and rhetoric, such that each word is placed in such a way that it is not possible to replace it with another.

Ibn 'Athiyyah in his exegesis writes, "If a word of the Qur'an is removed and the entire Arabic language is searched for a replacement, such a term will not be found."6

On the same point, Ibu Sulayman Basti writes:

Know that the underlying pillar of the eloquence of the Qur'an is based on the fact that each word has, in its essence, a peculiarity that qualifies it for a specific place appropriate to it, such that if another word is used in its place, either the overall meaning would change causing the intent of the verse to become corrupt, or it would give up its beauty and thereby lose its eloquence.7

Shaykh 'abd al-Qahir Jurjani regarding this says:

The scholars of grammar and eloquence were completely fascinated by the precision and selection of the words of the Qur'an, since they were unable to find a case of a word that was inappropriately placed or a word uselessly placed, nor could they find a word more worthy than what was used. Instead, they found it so precise that it dumbfounded the wise and bewildered the masses.8

This type of emphasis with regards to the selection and placement of the Qur'anic words, points not only to the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, but also to the fact that such attention and skill is beyond the capability of man. This is due to the fact that the precision in the selection of words and sentences, the complete proficiency and expansive knowledge of vocabulary, and the acute attentiveness required in such an endeavour, is usually not possible for the common person.

In this regard, the words of Walid ibn Maghirah Makhzumi, who is counted as one of the most famous orators and distinguished Arab leaders, and who also was one of the staunch opponents of Prophet Muhammad (*S*), is worth noting. Upon passing by the Prophet (*S*) in the state of prayers and hearing him recite several Qur'anic verses from the chapter of Believers (*Mu'min*), he took towards the Makhzum tribe and regarding the Qur'an, remarked:

I swear by God, I heard speech from Muhammad (*S*) that is neither similar to that of man nor that of *jinn*. I swear on God that his speech had a special sweetness, beauty and freshness, just like a fertile tree with branches full of fruits and roots deep and extensive. Verily, this speech has superiority over others

and there will never be a speech superior to it.[9]

Regarding the beauty and attractiveness of the Qur'an he also said, "That which the child of *Abu Kabshah*[10] says, by God, it is neither poetry nor magic nor exaggeration; without a doubt his speech is the speech of God..."

Similar confessions regarding the attraction and effectiveness of the Qur'an, from amongst the opponents of Islam have been vastly reported, and this itself denotes the unmatched miraculous nature of the Qur'an.

2) The Qur'an's Method and Style of Expression

Even though the expressive style of the Qur'an was attractive to the Arabs, its style was not similar to any of those that were prevalent at the time. The Qur'an gave way to a new method of expression that was unprecedented and could never be replicated afterwards. Even though the order and writing of the Qur'an was completely new, it was not outside the confines of Arabic speech. This is one of the wonders of oration where the orator creates a style in such a way that it is accepted and liked by the listener despite it being unconventional. What is more miraculous is that it gains superiority over all other styles without containing even a trace of them within itself.

The types of speech, in general, that were present amongst the articulate Arabs at the time were poetry, prose and rhymed prose, each of which had its own virtues and flaws.

The Qur'anic style contains the attraction and eloquence of poetry, the total freedom of prose, and the elegance found in rhymed prose, without becoming dependent on rhythm or rhyme, nor becoming fragmented, nor putting itself into difficulty or arduousness. This fundamental matter astounded the Arab rhetoricians since they found themselves faced with speech that although new and peculiar, had a certain attraction and elegance that was not found in any other formal discourse of that time.

Kashif al-Ghitha, a learned jurist and famous grammarian, remarks:

The outstanding order and exotic manner of the Qur'an—which is unlike the style used by the Arabs in their poetry or prose—had no parallel neither before them nor after them, and no one had the aptitude to compose something similar. Instead, they were astonished and left bewildered, not knowing how to approach it—whether to consider it as poetry, or as prose, or as rhymed prose, or as epic verses that were in fashion at that time ... and so it was that the Arab elite and their foremost rhetoricians fell to their knees in the face of the Qur'an.[11]

Nasir ibn Harith ibn Kaldah—considered one of the leaders of the Quraysh and known for his cleverness and wit amongst the Arabs—displayed an open enmity towards the Prophet of Islam (*S*). In a gathering amid the heads of Quraysh, while discussing the problem that the Prophet (*S*) posed for them, he said:

I swear by God, an event occurred when Muhammad (*S*) was a proper young man amongst you, likable by all, but you did not search for a resolution. In his speech, he was the most honest, and in his safekeeping, the most trustworthy ... until white hair became apparent on the two sides of his face and he brought that which he brought. At that time you said, "He is a magician". No, By God! In no way is he similar to a magician. You said, "He is a soothsayer". No, By God! His speech is not that of a soothsayer. You said, "He is a poet". No, By God! In no way is his speech on the pattern of poetry. You said, "He is crazy". No, By God! He is in no way similar to a crazy person. Therefore you realized, and correctly so, that a great event happened and this cannot be underestimated".12

3) The Qur'an's Rhythm and Music

One of the most important aspects that contributes to the miraculous eloquence found in the Qur'an is its rhythm and music. In his definition of muslic, Ibn Khaldun states:

Music is defined as infusing a tune into rhythmic poetry through the separation of sounds into proportionate segments. Each of these sounds, when paused upon, brings about a complete "seal"13 which, in turn, forms a tune (a pleasing sound). This tune, thereafter, is combined with others in accordance with specific relationships, and it is for this reason that the equilibrium that comes about from these sounds becomes pleasing to the ear.14

As musical and melodious sounds play an effective role in the transformation of the human soul, Allah has interlaced the verses of His Book with a music that is both extraordinary and miraculous. The rhythm and tune of the words are not only in harmony with the meaning and intent of the verses, but also help create an atmosphere of sanctity, purity, passion, enthusiasm, and lure in the human soul, such that having been caught in the clutches of the Qur'an, the soul inevitably becomes intoxicated in traversing the path (*sayr wa suluk*) within the celestial ambience of the verses.

The rhythm that lies in the words of the Qur'an produces a heart-warming melody and a heart-rendering cry that excites the soul and infatuates it with the Qur'an. The beauty that lies in the resonance of the Qur'an stirs the hearts of all who hear it, including those who are not Arabs. While listening to the uplifting tone of the Qur'an, the first thing that attracts a person is the novel audible structure and style. In this structure, the punctuation and pauses have been adorned in such a way that it affects the soul of the listener. This impressive effect starts with the proper pronunciation of the characters and words, and continues when an expressive tune is adhered to; the climax of it is achieved when it is recited in a sombre ambience according to the particular tone along with its precise high and low pitches.

The fluency of the words and expression, the eloquence and miraculous precision in the selection of these words, and the harmony the Qur'an displays in relation to its content and context, arouses a tornado in the human soul and takes him out of the state of sluggishness and sleep. It is no wonder that in the traditions found within the school of the *Ahl al-bayt* (*'a*), reciting the Qur'an in its Arabic tone (*lahn-e-'arabi*) has been emphasised.

As an example, the Prophet of Islam (*S*) has said, “Everything has a decor, and the decor of the Qur’an is its beautiful recital.”[15] He also said, “Adorn the Qur’an with your pleasant recitals.”[16] It is no surprise, then that the Arabs called the Qur’an magic:

فَقَالَ إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْثَرُ

Saying, ‘It is nothing but magic handed down.’ (***Quran 74:24***).

Dr. Darraz, regarding the musical effects of the Qur’an remarks:

When a person observes that from cinder ducts (of the larynx), glittering gems come out in the form of ordered letters as if decorations on a street, he would reach a state of endless rapture and attain an everlasting source of energy. It is as if, the first letter is playing, the second is reverberating, the third is a whisper, the fourth is a cry, the fifth shakes the breath, while the sixth closes its passage, and you find the beauty of its rhythm within your reach. It is a composite and harmonized compilation that is neither repetitive nor redundant, neither mellow nor harsh, and there is no decay in its letters or sounds.

In this manner, the Qur’an is neither the harsh speech of the Bedouins nor the soft speech of the urban dwellers; rather it is contains the firmness of the first and the delicateness of the second. It is as if there is a blending of both languages and the result is an intermingling of the two dialects.

Indeed, the Qur’an has both novelty and beauty and this combination is like a shell which contains valuable pearls and precious gems within itself. So if the beauty of the crust does not prevent you from seeing the buried treasure held within, and if its novelty does not become a curtain between you and the hidden secrets that lie beyond it, and if you remove the crust from the pith and separate the shell from the pearl, and if you reach the order and adornment of its words in the splendour of its meaning ... it is then that a more wonderful and magnificent essence will manifest itself to you and you will find the clarity in its meaning.

It is here that lies the soul and depth of the Qur’an, where the flame that pulled Prophet Musa (*‘a*) to the burning tree in the blessed mausoleum on the shores of the valley of faith, and where the breeze of the Holy Spirit says, “Indeed I am Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!”[17]

Regarding the music of Qur’an, Sayyid Quthub also adds:

This melody has come about as a result of a particular structure, the harmony between the letters in a word, and the concordance between the words in a section. It is from this perspective, that the Qur’an has both the special characteristics of prose and the particularities of poetry, with this distinguishing factor, that the meaning and expression of the Qur’an has been freed from the restrictions and limitations of rhyme, while at the same time, containing within it both prose and poetry.

During the recitation of the Qur'an, the inner rhythm can be completely perceived. This rhythm, displays itself more within the short chapters—where the "spacing"[18] is closer together, and in general, within its illustrations and sketches—and less so within the long chapters. In both cases, though, the rhythmic order is always present. For instance, in *Surah Najm*, we read:

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ {1}

مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ {2}

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ {3}

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ {4}

عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ {5}

ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ {6}

وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ {7}

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ {8}

فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ {9}

فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ {10}

مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ {11}

أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ {12}

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ {13}

عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ {14}

عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ {15}

إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ {16}

مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ {17}

لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ {18}

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ {19}

وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ {20}

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنْثَىٰ {21}

تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ {22}

I swear by the star when it goes down.
Your companion does not err, nor does he go astray;
Nor does he speak out of desire.
It is naught but revelation that is revealed,
The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him,
The Lord of Strength; so he attained completion, And he is in the highest part of the horizon.
Then he drew near, then he bowed
So he was the measure of two bows or closer still.
And He revealed to His servant what He revealed.
The heart was not untrue in (making him see) what he saw.
What! do you then dispute with him as to what he saw?
And certainly he saw him in another descent,
At the farthest lote-tree;
Near which is the garden, the place to be resorted to.
When that which covers covered the lote-tree;
The eye did not turn aside, nor did it exceed the limit.
Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.
Have you then considered the Lat and the Uzza,
And Manat, the third, the last?
What! for you the males and for Him the females!
This indeed is an unjust division!

Qur'an 53:1-22

These "spacings" have approximately the same beat although they are not based on the prosodic order of the Arabs, and the rhyme has also been adhered to, and both of these make up another distinctiveness of the Qur'an, which unlike rhyme and beat, may not be apparent. By the synchronization of the letters in the words and the coordination of the words within the sentences, a melodious rhythm has been created. Due to an internal sense and musical understanding, this latter distinctiveness is the

reason that between the rhythm of the Qur'an and other rhythms—even though the "spacing" and beat may be the same—a difference exists.

In accordance with the science of music, the rhythm of its sentences is neither short nor long but of a moderate length, and by relying on the *ruwwi*19 character, it produces a rhythmic chain. All of these characteristics are perceivable, in some "spacings" more so than others. For example, consider the above mentioned chapter of Qur'an:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ {19}

وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ {20}

If it would have said:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ

the rhyming effect would have been lost and the tune disturbed. Alternatively, if it would have read:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ وَمَنَاةَ الأخرى

The beat would have been disrupted. Similarly, consider the next line in the divine speech:

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنْثَىٰ {21}

تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ {22}

If it was said:

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنْثَىٰ تِلْكَ قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ

the tune which was made consistent by the word إِذًا would be disrupted. This does not mean however that words such as الأُخْرَى or الثَّالِثَةَ or إِذًا are redundant or extra and that they only appear to preserve the pattern or to adhere to the rhyme. Rather these words have a more important role which is to collaborate in conveying the meaning which is yet another special characteristic of the art of the Qur'an: that a word can both convey meaning as well as preserve a particular tune or beat, and it does both such that neither has preference over the other.

As was stated, in verses and in "spacings," there is a rhythm that is apparent throughout the Qur'an. The proof for this is that if a word appears in a particular way, and it was replaced with a synonym or relocated in the sentence, disorder would arise.

Below, a few examples will be demonstrated:

First type

قَالَ أَفَرَأَيْتُم مَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ

أَنتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمُ الْأَقْدَمُونَ

فَإِنَّهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِّي إِلاَّ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ

الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ

وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ

وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ

وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ

وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَن يَغْفِرَ لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

In these verses, the first-person pronoun "ي" has been omitted in the words يَهْدِينِ , يَسْقِينِ, يَشْفِينِ , يُحْيِينِ for the preservation of the rhyming effect with words like الدِّينِ , الأَقْدَمُونَ , تَعْبُدُونَ. Similarly in the verse:

وَالْفَجْرِ {1}

وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ {2}

وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ {3}

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ {4}

هَلْ فِي ذَٰلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِذِي حِجْرٍ {5}

the original "ي" of يَسْرِ has been omitted so as to be in harmony with حِجْرٍ ,وَتْرٍ , عَشْرٍ, فَجْرٍ . Or in the verses:

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ ۘ يَوْمَ يَدْعُ الدَّاعِ إِلَىٰ شَيْءٍ نُكُرٍ {6}

خُشَّعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ {7}

مُهْطِعِينَ إِلَى الدَّاعِ ۖ يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَٰذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِرٌ {8}

if the "ي" of the word الدَّاع was not omitted the pattern would be broken. Likewise, if in the verse:

قَالَ ذَٰلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ ۖ فَارْتَدَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا

we prolong the "ي" of نَبْغ—to correspond to analogy—the pattern would be disturbed. This same state would occur if a هْ was added to the first-person pronoun "ي" in the following verses:

أُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ {9}

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَهْ {10}

نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ {11}

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَيَقُولُ هَاؤُمُ اقْرَءُوا كِتَابِيَهْ {19}

إِنِّي ظَنَنْتُ أَنِّي مُلَاقٍ حِسَابِيَهْ {20}

فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ {21}

Second type

Unlike the first type where we consider changing a particular word, in this type, we look at the order of the words where if they were rearranged, the musical rhythm of the verses would be disrupted. For example, consider the verses:

ذِكْرُ رَحْمَتِ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ زَكَرِيَّا {2}

إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ نِدَاءً خَفِيًّا {3}

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا {4}

If the word مِنِّي was to precede الْعَظْمُ and therefore the phrase would be: قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِي وَهَنَ مِنِي الْعَظمُ it would feel like the pattern was disturbed.

Therefore as was mentioned, a type of inner melody within the Qur'an exists which is perceivable but difficult to describe. This melody is the warp and weft of the words, and is hidden within the internal structure of the sentence, which is only perceived by a subconscious faculty or through the power of the Almighty. In this way the internal music of the Qur'an accompanies it, and with these rhythmic words, raises the sensations such that the slightest change would cause it to fall into disorder. This is despite the fact that these words are not poetry and do not have the limitations associated with many poems—which not only limit the freedom of expression, but also prevent man from attaining his goals.[22]

Mustafa Raf'i, regarding this, states:

The Arabs used to compete and revel with each other in writing poetry and reciting prose, but the style of their words was always based on one form. They were free with their speech and had mastered the art of oration. On the one hand, however, their eloquence was instinctual, and on the other, it received its inspiration from nature. But when the Qur'an was sent down, they noticed that a new style had appeared. The letters were the same as what they knew, but they noticed that this new style was free-flowing, and its order, coordination and harmony were at a peak. As a result, they were astonished by its splendour and eminence and they realized the weakness of their own abilities and the emptiness of their own intelligence. Moreover, the eloquent amongst the Arabs saw a type of expression that they had never seen until then. In the letters and words and sentences of this new speech, they witnessed a

wonderful tune. All of these words were so appropriately arranged next to each other that it seemed as if it was one piece. The Arabs clearly saw that a rhythmic order flowed within the depths of these words, and it was this that conveyed to them their own weakness and inability in this domain.

All who have experienced the secret of the music and the philosophy of the fluency of the Qur'an, are firmly of the belief that no skill can compete or even compare with the natural arrangement of the words of the Qur'an and the sounds of its letters, and no one can find fault in even a single of its letters. From another point of view, the Qur'an is much greater than music, and this particularity affirms the fact that the Qur'an is essentially not music.

In musical songs, the factors that contribute to the excitement of the soul include a variety of sounds, flows, echoes, soft and hard tunes, and the various vowel sounds that it includes, as well as the high and low pitches and treble, which is all referred to as 'eloquence of sound' in musical terms.

When we consider this aspect of reciting the Qur'an, we realize that there is no language more eloquent than the language of the Qur'an, and it is this very aspect, which uplifts human emotions of both Arab and non-Arab. Keeping this understanding in mind, the philosophy of encouraging the recitation of the Qur'an in a audible manner becomes clear.

These "spacings" with which the verses of the Qur'an end, is a complete image of the dimensions which the melodious sentences end with. The "spacing"—in its own essence—is deeply connected to sound, and by the type of sound and the manner in which it is pronounce, it has a uniqueness like no other. From one perspective, most of these "spacings" end with the two characters, *nun* and *m*□*m* (both of which are customary in music), or with the prolonged vowel (*harf-e-madd*)—all of which is inherent in the Qur'an.23

Some experts have said:

In the Qur'an, many of the "spacings" end with the characters *madd* and *l*□*n*, and the addition of the letter *nun*, and the wisdom of using these characters is to create a type of tune. However, even if the "spacing" does not end with one of the aforementioned characters—for example, if it ends with an un-vocalized (*sakin*) character—there is still no doubt that its selection is still the most appropriate.

Of course, most of the aforementioned characters appear in short phrases and consist of *qalqalah* letters (letters that resonate in the ear) or other letters that maintain the musical tune. The effect of this method of inciting the heart by means of the tongue is natural in all people. In the Holy Qur'an, a wondrous rhythmic pattern presents itself to the listener, whether he understands Arabic or not.

Therefore, the words of the noble Qur'an are composed of letters which, if removed or replaced or added to, will create disruption in the pattern. In the process, the beat, the resonance and the tune will appear weak, and it will make itself audibly apparent; ultimately, it will appear to be in error with regard to its unity of structure, anthology of sounds and position of letters, and when listening to it, it will give way to

discordance.[24]

The miraculous speech of the Qur'an is the apex in terms of creating an indescribable feeling in the heart of the recitor and the listener. In other words, characters come together next to each other in an unprecedented way such that without any musical instrument and without the presence of rhyme or pattern, a splendid tune resonates in the ear. This miracle can be clearly seen in these samples:

1. Prophet Zakariyya's (*'a*) speech to Allah:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا

2. Prophet Isa's (*'a*) speech from the cradle:

وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا

3. The verse regarding the obedience of the prophets:

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا ۚ إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَٰنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا

4. The verse describing seeing Allah on the Day of Judgment:

وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ ۖ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ حَمَلَ ظُلْمًا

5. The verse in which Allah the Merciful speaks to the Prophet (*S*) in a sweet and heart pleasing manner:

{1} طه

{2} مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَىٰ

إِلَّا تَذْكِرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَىٰ {3}

تَنْزِيلًا مِمَّنْ خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ الْعُلَى {4}

الرَّحْمَٰنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَىٰ {5}

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَىٰ {6}

وَإِنْ تَجْهَرْ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى {7}

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ {8}

The verse regarding those who commit crimes and their promised punishment. In this verse the tone changes into a harsh one, reverberating in the ears:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمِ نَحْسٍ مُسْتَمِرٍّ {19}

تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُنْقَعِرٍ {20}

The verse that talks about the Day of Resurrection. In this verse, cut-phrases and alerting words are used:

وَأَنْذِرْهُمْ يَوْمَ الْآزِفَةِ إِذِ الْقُلُوبُ لَدَى الْحَنَاجِرِ كَاظِمِينَ ۚ مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ

وَلَا شَفِيعٍ يُطَاعُ

In the chapter of *al-Nas*, in which the beat, tune and repetition of the character *sīn* and the physical form of it (س), brings to light the hidden whisperings to man:

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ {1}

مَلِكِ النَّاسِ {2}

إِلَٰهِ النَّاسِ {3}

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ {4}

الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ {5}

In the following verse:

وَالضُّحَىٰ {1}

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ {2}

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ {3}25

This verse may be lacking in rhyme, rhythm and the prevalent half-verse stanzas, but it is overflowing with music and each character has a heart-rending cry. This is what is meant by the "inner Qur'anic music" referred to previously.

This inner rhythm or Qur'anic music is one of the structural secrets of the Qur'an. No other grammatical structure is parallel to it. This structural rhythm has not had and will not have any parallel in Arabic literature. Amongst Arabic texts, the Qur'an is in its own class as an ineffable phenomenon.

Factors of the beauty and divine music of Qur'an

The Arabic pronunciation of the letters and words, their tone, the order of the verses, the voice of the recitor, his spiritual piety and his inner purity are four important factors that contribute to the celestial music of the Qur'an. The most important of these factors, which causes a psychological and spiritual transformation in the soul, is the fourth one: the reverential fear exhibited by the recitor.

Regarding this, it is said of Imam Sajjad (*'a*), "He (*'a*) was the most pleasing of the recitors of the Qur'an, such that the water-carriers—who used to pass by his house—would pause by his door and listen to his recitation."[25]

At times, the effect of the Imam's (*'a*) heavenly voice was so profound that it would cause his audience to collapse into a swoon. It has been narrated that a man went to Abu al-Hasan and reminisced about the recitation of the Qur'an.

The Imam (*'a*) said, "Certainly, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ('a) used to recite the Qur'an, and many a times a person would pass by him and fall into a swoon due to the pleasantness of his voice; truly, if the Imam (*'a*) revealed even a single secret regarding his pleasant voice, people would not be able to endure it."[26]

The Foundation of the Qur'an's Celestial Music

The Qur'an is a book of seriousness:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ {13}

وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ {14}

It is indeed a decisive word and it is not a jest.[27]

It is also a reminder of mankind's grave responsibility and a forewarning of the ill fortune awaiting those

who carry false beliefs or have corrupt souls, and who don't pay attention to the realities of this world and the hereafter. From this point of view, the revelation of Qur'an is mixed with sorrow and grief.

The Infallibles (*'a*) have recommended the recitation of Qur'an in a state of sorrow. Regarding this, Imam Sadiq (*'a*) says, "Surely, the Qur'an has been revealed for grief (in the impression it imprints on the human soul); therefore recite it in a grievous tone."[28]

In another tradition, it has been narrated, "Allah revealed to prophet Musa (*'a*): 'Whenever you stand before me, stand like a destitute and whenever you recite the Torah, let me hear it in a sorrowful voice'."[29]

This sorrow stems from knowing oneself, one's weakness and one's lack of means, and understanding the station of the Lord's essence (*dhat-e-rububi*). It is mixed with fear, self-restraint, struggle and perseverance in the path towards the Divine.

The Difference between Forbidden Music and the Music of the Qur'an

It is evident that recitation in a state of deep affliction and sorrow—which is based on the idea of a sense of responsibility towards the Divine and in accordance with the principles of recitation—is different than music of debauchery and libertinism.

The Prophet of Islam (*S*) regarding this has said:

Recite the Qur'an with the sound and style of the Arabs and keep away from music of those who are immoral and who perform major sins. Without doubt, a group of people will appear after me who will churn the Qur'an in their throats like the churning of covetous sounds and hymns of monks which don't go beyond their throats. Their hearts and the hearts of those who are amazed by their work are, in reality, inverted.[30]

The criterion used in this *hadith* to differentiate Qur'anic music from the decadent form of music that the Prophet (*S*) alluded to is precise and worth noting:

It should not be similar to sinful music. Immoral music instigates animalistic instincts, slackness, pitilessness, and languidness in carrying out divine commands. It creates a lack of vivacity in worship and spirituality, and transforms one away from a state of seriousness and sorrow.

Qur'anic music has a goal of spiritual transformation in terms of guidance and growth in human values and responsibilities, whereas immoral music not only inhibits positive spiritual transformations, but also eliminates the sacred drive and vivacity.

If a person is pious and vivacious in his worship, the music that emanates from his throat is of a divine

nature, whereas for one who is uninterested in worship and piety, his music is an instigator of corruption.

From all angles, the noble Qur'an is an interpretation of human nature (*fithrah*) and its music is in line with its orderly content. It speaks with the language of the soul and the divine nature, satisfying man's needs. For this reason, every person—even a stranger to the Qur'an—can indirectly benefit from its meaning through its very music.[31] In the words of Arberry[32] and Pikthal, the Qur'an is, "an inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy."[33]

Reciting the Qur'an with a Pleasant Voice

After a brief examination of the inner music and the beautiful rhythm of the Qur'an, it is worth noting that in the traditions, it has been highly recommended that the Qur'an be recited with a pleasant voice. Moreover, the reciter has been encouraged to pay attention to the slightest details, including prolonging various sounds, and adhering to their high and low pitches. Some examples of traditions in this regard are:

"And resonate your voice in your throat during the recitation of the Qur'an; for Allah (Glorified and Exalted) loves beautiful voices that resonate in the throats.[34]

"Indeed, the adornment of the Qur'an lies in the beauty of its recital."[35]

"Recite the Qur'an and weep; and if you cannot weep, make as if you are weeping, for he who does not recite the Qur'an with its particular melody and with a pleasant voice is not of us."[36]

Regarding the following verse:

أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا

and recite the Qur'an in *tartil* [37]

Imam Sadiq (*'a*) has said, "What is meant by *tartil* is to recite the Qur'an in a measured tone, and to make your voices beautiful."[38]

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1. Muhadathi, p. 63.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Kulayni, vol. 4 p. 399.
6. Ma'arifat, al-Tamhid, 1396 A.H., p. 21.
7. Ma'arifat, 'Ulum-e Qurani, p. 375.
8. Ibid.
9. Tabari, 1392 A.H., p. 98 and Ibn Hisham, 1355 A.H., p. 288.
10. The unbelievers used to refer to Prophet Muhammad (S) by this name, referring to the Prophet's maternal grandfather, who opposed the Quraysh in matters of religion.
11. Kashif al-Ghitha, p. 107.

12. Ibn Hisham, 1355 A.H., p. 320–321; Suyuthi, 1377 A.H., p. 180.
13. “Seal” (tawqi’ or irtiqa’) is the beginning of the “stride” in musical terms which means to tune or pitch sounds.
14. Ibn Khaldun, 1997, p. 844.
15. Kulayni, p. 420.
16. Majlisi, p. 90.
17. Ma’arifat, p. 381–382.
18. What is meant by “spacing” is the last word of each verse, similar to the rhyming pattern in poetry or the symmetry within rhyming prose.
19. The technical definition of Ruwwi in the science of prosody is the principal rhyming word which sets the basis for the rhyming scheme.
20. Qur’an 101:9–11.
21. Qur’an 69:19–21.
22. Sayyid Quthub, 198, p. 80–83.
23. Rafi’i, 1393 A.H., p. 188–216.
24. Ma’rifat, ‘Ulum Qur’an, p. 386–387.
25. Kulayni, p. 420.
26. Ibid., p. 419.
27. Qur’an 86:13–14.
28. Kulayni, p. 418.
29. Ibid p. 419–420.
30. Kulayni, p 419.
31. Naqi pur, 1993, p. 413.
32. Marmaduke Pickthall and Arthur John Arberry separately translated the Qur’an into English. In his translation, Arberry has attempted to highlight certain aspects of the music of the Qur’an.
33. Ibid.
34. Kulayni, p. 421.
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