

Question 16: Do the Shi'ah believe in the tahrif {distortion} of the Qur'an?

Reply: Renowned Shi'ah scholars are of the opinion that the Holy Qur'an is free from any kind of *tahrif* {distortion}, and the version of the Qur'an which is in our hands today is the same as the heavenly book which was revealed to the Holy Prophet (S) and it has been subject to no deletion or addition. In order to clarify this point, let us consider pieces of evidence that follow:

1. The Lord of the worlds has guaranteed the Muslims to preserve and protect the heavenly scripture, i.e. the Qur'an, saying:

"إنا نحن نزلنا الذكر وإنا له لحافظون"

"Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it."^{[1](#)}

It is obvious that when the Shi'ah in the world take the Qur'an as the reliable basis of their thinking and action, they recognize the value of this noble verse and believe in the message it conveys regarding God's protection and preservation of the Book of Allah.

2. The great Imam followed by the Shi'ah, 'Ali (a), who was always in the company of the Holy Prophet (S) and one of the scribes of the revelation, has called people on various occasions to abide by this very Qur'an. Below are some of what he has said in this regard:

"واعلموا أن هذا القرآن هو الناصح الذي لا يغش والهادي الذي لا يضل"

"Know that this Qur'an is the adviser that never deceives and the guide that never misleads."^{[2](#)}

"إن الله سبحانه لم يعظ أحداً بمثل هذا القرآن فإنه حبل الله والتين سببه المبين"

“Allah, the Glorified, has not admonished anyone as He has done through lines of this Qur’an; it is Allah’s strong cord and His trustworthy means.”³

"ثم أنزل عليه الكتاب نوراً لا تطفأ مصابيحُه وسراجاً لا يخبوا توقّده ومنهاجاً لا يضلّ نهجه وفرقاناً لا يحمد برهانه"

Then, Allah sent to him the Book as a light whose flames cannot be extinguished, a lamp whose gleam does not die, a way whose direction does not mislead, and a separator (of good from evil) whose arguments do not weaken.⁴

The magnificent words of the great leader of the Shi‘ah make it clear that the Holy Qur’an is like a radiant light which always illuminates the path of the human beings who abide by it and it is subject to no change that causes its flames to extinguish or human beings to get lost.

3. The Shi‘ah scholars have consensus of opinion that the Holy Prophet (S) has said: “Verily, I am leaving among you Two Weighty Things: the first is the Book of Allah (Qur’an) and the other is my progeny, the members of my Household {*Ahl al-Bayt*}. If you hold fast to them, you will never go astray.”

This *hadith* is among the *mutawatir hadiths*, which has been narrated by both the Shi‘ah and the Sunni. From the aforementioned statement, it is obvious that the Shi‘ah believe that the Book of Allah (the Qur’an) will undergo no alteration; for, if it undergoes any *tahrif* {distortion}, holding fast to it will neither guarantee guidance nor eliminate misguidance, and this does not accord with what has been confirmed by the text {*nass*} of this *mutawatir hadith*.

4. The traditions of the Imams followed by the Shi‘ah, which have been narrated by all our scholars and jurists confirm that the Qur’an is the criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood and the standard by which good is separated from evil in the sense that any statement, including the “*hadiths*” that came down to us should be judged according to the Qur’an. If it is in agreement with its verses, it is correct and authentic; otherwise, it is deemed a fabrication and incorrect.

The Shi‘ah books of jurisprudence and *hadith* include a lot of narrations in this regard. We shall only quote one of them:

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says:

"ما لم يُوافق من الحديث القرآن فهو زُخرف"

“Any statement that is not in accord with the Qur’an is futile and false.”⁵

It is also clear from these *hadiths* that alteration has no place in the Qur’an, and thus, this sacred book can forever be a criterion for recognizing the difference between truth and falsehood.

5. Great Shi'ah scholars, who have always been the forerunners of the Islamic and Shi'i culture acknowledge that the Holy Qur'an will never be altered. These great figures are too many to enumerate, therefore we shall point to only some of them:

a. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Husayn Babawayh al-Qummi, known as "Saduq" (d. 381 AH), says:

Our belief regarding the Qur'an is that it is God's Word and revelation; it is a book which is free from falsehood and incorrectness and it has been sent down by God, the All-wise, and He is its guardian.⁶

b. Sayyid Murtada 'Ali ibn Husayn Musawi 'Alawi, known as 'Alam al-Huda (d. 436 AH), says:
A group of the Prophet's Companions such as 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and others recited the Qur'an from the beginning to the end to the Holy Prophet (S) many times and all of them confirm that the Qur'an has been compiled and well arranged, and it is free from any deletion and dispersion.⁷

c. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Hasan at-Tusi, known as "Shaykh at-Ta'ifah" (d. 460 AH), says:
As for the talk about the imperfection and addition in the Qur'an, it cannot be covered in this book; for, all Muslims have consensus of opinion that nothing has been added to the Qur'an, and regarding the supposition of imperfection, it is rejected by Muslims. The idea of the absence of addition is more concordant with our school.

This idea has been acknowledged and approved by Sayyid Murtada and the outward meaning of *hadiths* also confirms this fact. A small number of Shi'ah and Sunni narrators points to the narrations which talk about the imperfection and alteration in the Qur'anic verses. These narrations which have been transmitted by Shi'ah and Sunni are among the 'solitary reports'⁸ which need not to be known or abided by, and they had better be discarded.⁹

d. Abu 'Ali at-Tabarsi, the author of an exegesis named *Majma' al-Bayan*, says:
Regarding the idea of addition in the Qur'an, the entire Islamic *ummah* has consensus of opinion that it is groundless, and regarding the mutilation of its verses, a small number of our companions and a group of the Hashawiyah sect of the Ahl as-Sunnah have transmitted narrations which assume that there is addition in the Qur'an, but the thing which our school accepts and regards as correct is the opposite.¹⁰

e. 'Ali ibn Tawus al-Hilli, known as "Sayyid Ibn Tawus" (d. 664 AH), says: "The Shi'ah view is that no alteration has taken place in the Qur'an."¹¹

f. Shaykh Zayn ad-Din al-'Amili (d. 877 AH) explains the following verse,

"إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ"

"Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it"¹²

and says it means: "We (Allah) shall protect and keep the Qur'an from any alteration, change and addition." [13](#)

g. Qadi Sayyid Nur ad-Din Tustari, the author of the book, *Ihqaq al-Haqq* (d. 1019 AH), says: What some say about the Imamiyyah Shi'ah that they believe in the alteration of the Qur'an is not accepted by all the Shi'ah. Only very few of them have such a belief to which the Shi'ah give no attention. [14](#)

h. Muhammad ibn al-Husayn, known as "Baha'uddin al-'Amili" (d. 1030 AH), says: The correct view is that the Magnificent Qur'an is immune from any form of addition or imperfection and the claim that the name of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) has been omitted from the Qur'an is not accepted by learned scholars.

Anyone who delves into history and traditions knows that on account of the *tawatur* [15](#) of the traditions and narration transmitted by thousands of the Companions, the Qur'an is intact and fixed and the entirety of it has been compiled in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (S). [16](#)

i. Fayd al-Kashani, the author of the book, *Al-Wafi* (d. 1091 AH), who mentions the verse,

"إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ"

"Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it," [17](#)

in addition to other Qur'anic verses which verify that the Qur'an has been preserved from any kind of alteration, says:

At this point, how is it possible that *tahrif* {distortion} and alteration will take place in the Qur'an? Besides, what has been related about the existence of *tahrif* contradicts what the Book of Allah says. So, such traditions must be regarded as groundless. [18](#)

j. Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1104 AH), says:

A researcher of history and *hadith* knows well that on account of the *tawatur* of traditions and narrations of thousands of the Companions, the Qur'an is intact and fixed and has been compiled with utter accuracy and arranged in the lifetime of the Prophet (S). [19](#)

k. The great researcher, Kashif al-Ghita', in his renowned book, *Kashf al-Ghita'*, says:

No doubt the Qur'an, owing to the divine protection and preservation, has been preserved from any deletion (and alteration). This fact has been verified by the Qur'an and scholars' consensus of opinion of all periods. And the opposition of a small group is not worth considering.

l. Also, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Hadrat Ayatullah al-'Uzma Imam Khomeini (q) has a statement in this regard. This statement which we shall quote below is another clear proof: Anyone, who is aware of the great care taken by the Muslims in compiling, preserving, recording,

reciting, and writing the Qur'an will testify to the groundlessness of the notion of "distortion of the Qur'an", and consider it unbelievable.

Also, the accounts that have been transmitted in this regard will be found either so 'weak' *{da'if}* that they lack soundness of judgment, or so 'unknown' *{majhul}* that they seem obviously fabricated, or are narrations of other sorts, the explication of which needs writing a comprehensive book.

And were it not for the fear of deviating from the point in question, we would explain the course of history of the Qur'an over the past centuries and make clear that the Glorious Qur'an is exactly the same version of heavenly book which is in our hands, and concerning the difference of opinion among the reciters of the Qur'an, it is something new, which has nothing to do with what Jibra'il al-Amin (Archangel Gabriel the Trustworthy) has brought down onto the pure heart of the Holy Prophet (S).[20](#)

Conclusion

The Muslims, both Shi'ah and Sunni, are of the opinion that the present version of this heavenly book is the same as the original version of the Qur'an which was sent down onto the Holy Prophet (S), and that it is safe from any form of distortion, alteration, addition, and deletion.

This is solid evidence to the groundlessness of the unfair accusation against the Shi'ah, and if the transmission of pertinent 'weak' narrations has led to this accusation, it is worth noticing that such narrations have not been transmitted only by a small faction of the Shi'ah but also by a group of Sunni exegetes *{mufasssirun}*. Below are some examples:

1. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi in his exegesis narrates on the authority of Abubakr al-Anbazi from Ubayy ibn Ka'b, that in the lifetime of the Prophet (S) *Surah al-Ahzab* (with 73 verses) was the same size as *Surah al-Baqarah* (with 286 verses) and the 'verse of stoning' *{ayah ar-rajam}* was in that *Surah*. Now, such alleged verse is not found in *Surah al-Ahzab*![21](#)

And it is stated in the same book that 'A'ishah is reported to have said:

"In the lifetime of the Prophet (S) *Surah al-Ahzab* had 200 verses. Then, after the *mushaf* was written, we do not find more than that which the present version has!"[22](#)

2. The author of the book, *Al-Itqan* narrates that the number of *surahs* in Ubayy ibn Ka'b's *mushaf* was 116 because two other *surahs* called *Hafd* and *Khal'* were included therein.[23](#)

What we all know is that the Holy Qur'an has 114 *surahs* and there is no trace of such two *surahs* like *Hafd* and *Khal'* in the Qur'an.

3. Hibat Allah ibn Salamah, in his book, *An-Nasikh wa'l-Mansukh*, narrates that Anas ibn Malik is reported to have said:

In the lifetime of the Prophet (S), when we recited the Qur'an we used to read a *surah* which was similar

in size to *Surah at-Tawbah (Bara'ah)* in length, and all that I remember of it is only one verse, and that is:

لو أن لابن آدم واديان من الذهب لابتغى إليهما ثالثاً ولو أن له ثالثاً لبتغى إليهما رابعاً لأيملاء و جوف ابن آدم إلا
التراب و يتوب الله على من تاب."

“Should the Children of Adam have two valleys of gold, he would ask for a third and should he have three he would ask for a fourth. Nothing can fill the bellies of the Children of Adam except dust. God accepts the repentance of those who repent.”

This is while we know that there is no such a verse in the Qur'an, and when we consider its eloquence {*balaghah*} we find that it is essentially inharmonious.

4. Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti, in his exegesis, *Al-Durr al-Manthur*, reports on the authority of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab that *Surah al-Ahzab* was similar in length to *Surah al-Baqarah* and the verse of stoning was part of the former *surah*.²⁴

A small group of both the Shi'ah and the Sunni schools have narrated 'weak' {*da'if*} and untenable traditions on “the occurrence of alteration in the Qur'an”. According to the vast majority of the Muslims—both Shi'ah and Sunni—these weak narrations are not acceptable.

According to the Qur'anic verses, authentic {*sahih*} and *mutawatir* traditions, consensus {*ijma'*} and unanimity of thousands of the Companions of the Prophet (S) and consensus of opinion of the Muslims of the world no such *tahrif*, alteration, addition, or deletion has taken place and it will never take place.

¹. Surah al-Hijr 15:9.

². Nahj al-Balaghah (Subhi as-Salih), Sermon 176.

³. Ibid.

⁴. Ibid., Sermon 198.

⁵. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, “Kitab Fadl al-'Ilm,” “Bab al-Akhdh bi's-Sunnah wa Shawahid al-Kitab,” hadith 4.

⁶. Al-I'tiqadat, p. 93.

⁷. Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 10 as quoted from the reply to Al-Masa'il at-Tarabusiyyat by Sayyid Murtada.

⁸. Khabar al-wahid or ahad: Although termed 'solitary report', this refers to any report that is not mutawatir. {Trans.}

⁹. At-Tibyan, vol. 1, p. 3.

¹⁰. Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 10.

¹¹. Sa'd as-Su'ud, p. 144.

¹². Surah al-Hijr 15:9.

¹³. Izhar al-Haqq, vol. 2, p. 130.

¹⁴. Ala' ar-Rahman, p. 25.

¹⁵. By tawatur is meant the multiplicity of the sources of a certain report that leads to certitude in the listener that the report is indeed true. A mutawatir hadith is one which has been reported by so many different chains of transmission and such a number of narrators in every generation as normally could not agree to fabricate a tradition without the fact of its fabrication becoming known. {Trans.}

¹⁶. Ala' ar-Rahman, p. 25.

- [17.](#) Surah al-Hijr 15:9.
- [18.](#) Tafsir as-Safi, vol. 1, p. 51.
- [19.](#) Ala' ar-Rahman, p. 25.
- [20.](#) Tahdhib al-Usul, "Accounts of Imam Khomeini's Lectures", vol. 2, p. 96 {written by Professor Ja'far Subhani}.
- [21.](#) Tafsir al-Qurtubi, vol. 14, p. 113, the beginning of the commentary on Surah al-Ahzab.
- [22.](#) Ibid.
- [23.](#) Al-Itqan, vol. 1, p. 67.
- [24.](#) Ad-Durr al-Manthur, vol. 5, p. 180, the beginning of the commentary on Surah al-Ahzab.

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