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Qur'anic Themes in Minutes

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Abstract

This article presents excerpts from Muhsen Qara'ati's Qur'anic Themes in Minutes[1], a concise version of his renowned and award-winning Tafsir Noor – a 12-volume exegesis of the Qur'an. Qur'anic Themes in Minutes is a compilation of 200 subjects for readers to familiarize themselves with short-and-sweet subjects pertaining to morality in the Qur'an. The following topics were specially selected, some of which include subjects on sincerity (ikhlaas) and its signs; factors of peacefulness, anxiety, deviation; the hearts of the believer and unbeliever; arrogance and the arrogant; and humbleness.

What is Sincerity (Ikhlas)?

Sincerity (ikhlaas) is that which is done one hundred percent for God to the extent that if one percent or even less than that is for other than Him, his worship is either void or there is a problem with it. We are insincere if:

We choose a place for prayer for other than God; for instance, if we intentionally stand in a place in order to be seen by others or so cameras can display us.We choose to worship at a specific time for other than God. For instance, we pray at the prescribed time to attract people's attention.

If our form and countenance in prayer is for other than God. For example, slanting our necks downwards and changing our voices with a goal other than for the pleasure of God. In all these cases, prayer is void. We have also sinned for showing off.

In other words, ikhlaas is when we do not take our carnal desires, false deities, political inclinations, and other desires into consideration. Rather, our motive should be one thing: to obey God's commands and perform our duty.
Certainly, attaining ikhlaas is not possible without God's help. Verse 32 of the chapter Luqman, states:

When waves cover them like awnings, they invoke Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him. But when He delivers them towards land, [only] some of them remain unswerving. And no one will impugn Our signs except an ungrateful traitor.

Becoming Sincere (Mukhlis)

In order to be sincere we must:

Consider God's knowledge and power. If we know that all glories, strengths, and provisions are in His hands, we will never go toward other than Him to gain honor, strength, and provision.

If we take note of the fact that all beings are created according to God's will and through it, everything will perish, and if we know that He isthe cause, while at the same time He can stop any cause He chooses[2], we would not intercede to other than Him.

Hundreds of verses and stories in the Qur'an have invited people to God so that people might abandon other than Him and sincerely move toward Him.

Take note of the blessings of ikhlas. A person with ikhlas has only one goal: God's satisfaction. Someone whose goal is solely for God's satisfaction pays no attention to people's praises, is not afraid of rebukes, does not fear loneliness, does not retreat in his path, is never regretful, does not become preoccupied because of people's ridicule, does not despair, and has nothing to do with the most or least when traversing the right path.

The Qur'an says sincere warriors are not afraid of killing God's enemy or becoming martyred in God's way. Imam Husayn (a), in the threshold of his travel to Karbala, said, "We shall go to Karbala. Whether we become martyred or victorious, the goal is to fulfill our duty."

Take into consideration God's grace. Another approach that brings us closer to ikhlas is remembering God's favours. We should not forget that we did not exist. The embryo was created from earth and food and was positioned in the dark womb of the mother. It passed the stages of growth one after the other and came into this world in the form of a complete human being.

During that time, it did not know anything – it had only one faculty which was suckling its mother's milk – a complete nourishment that supplies all of the body's needs. What's more, it comes along with the mother's love – a mother who was at its service 24 hours a day. Why should we sell ourselves to others who neither have any right over us nor have been kind to us?

Take God's will into consideration. If we know that the hearts of the people are in God's hands and He is the 'Turner of hearts,' we will perform our deeds only for Him, and when we are in need of the people's protection, we ask God to protect us.

In the hot deserts of Hijaz, Prophet Abraham raised the base of the Kaa'ba and asked God to incline the hearts of the people toward his offspring. Thousands of years have passed and every year millions of passionate people, filled with excitement, circumambulate around the house.

How many of us burden ourselves in order to satisfy the people though they still do not like us or remain unimpressed; and how many of us who, without expectations from people, entrust our hearts to God and sincerely perform our duties and while simultaneously have a great and special dignity in the eyes of the people? Therefore, the goal must be to please God and to ask Him to help us attain the people's pleasure.

Take note of the remaining of deeds. Deeds that are done for God persist and remain. And if the deed is not for God, the date of its utilization will end sooner or later. The Qur'an says, ***"That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last."*** (***Nahl, 16:96***) And no reasonable person prefers lasting forever over mortality.

The signs of a sincere believer

"And most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him." (***Yusuf, 12:106***)

In charity: He does not expect reward or thanks from anyone: ***"We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks."***(***Insaan, 76:9***)

In worship: He does not worship anyone besides God: ***"And not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord."***(***Kahf, 18:110***)

In propagating: He does not want reward from anyone other than God: ***"My reward lies only with Allah."***(***Hud, 11:29***)

In marriage: He is not afraid of poverty and gets married trusting God's promise: ***"If they are poor, Allah will enrich them out of His grace."***(***Noor, 24:32***)

In meeting people: He puts everything aside except for God's pleasure: ***"Say, 'Allah!' Then leave them."***(***An'aam, 6:91***)

While encountering the enemy in war: He does not fear anyone but God: ***"And fear no one except Allah."***(***Ahzaab, 33:39***)

In kindness and love: He loves no one as much as Him: ***"A more ardent love for Allah."***(***Baqarah, 2:165***)

In business and trade: He is not negligent in remembering God: ***"Men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah."***(***Noor, 24:37***)

Humbleness

Do not turn your cheek disdainfully from the people, and do not walk exultantly on the earth. Indeed Allah does not like any swaggering braggart. (***Luqman, 31: 18***)

In this verse, Luqman says to his son,

"***Do not walk exultantly on the earth."***(***Luqman, 31:18***)

And in surah Furqan, humbleness is the first sign of the good servants of God:

"The servants of the All-beneficent are those who walk humbly on the earth."(***Furqaan, 25:63***)

One of the secrets to prayer, in which we place the highest point of our body on soil – every day at least 34 times in 17 rak'as of obligatory prayer – is staying away from arrogance and vanity, and being humble towards God.

Even though it is necessary for all of mankind to be humble, it is further necessary towards parents, teachers, and faithful Muslims. Humbleness toward faithful Muslims is one of the distinguishing signs of the people of faith:

"[***Who will be***] ***humble towards the faithful."***(***Maaida, 5:54***)

Unlike the demands of the arrogant who wanted to distance the poor from the Prophets, the people of faith would say, ***"But I will not drive away those who have faith."***(***Hud, 11:29***)

Why does a weak and impotent man who was created from earth and sperm and who will be nothing more than a corpse in the near future behave arrogantly?

Is not his limited knowledge vulnerable due to forgetfulness? Is not his beauty, strength, fame, and wealth likely to wane? Has he not seen illness, poverty, and death in society?

Are not his strengths perishable? Then why does he behave arrogantly? The Qur'an says,

"Do not walk exultantly on the earth. Indeed you will neither pierce the earth, nor reach the mountains in height."(***Israa, 17:37***)

Examples of the humbleness of the special friends of God

The Prophet would sit in a manner in which he did not have any privileges over others, and those who would enter the assembly (majlis) and not recognize the Prophet would ask, *"Which one of you is the Messenger of God*[3]*?"*

While on a trip, when it was time to prepare food, each person undertook a job. The Prophet also

undertook a job and said, *"I will take responsibility for collecting wood*[4]*."*

Just as the Prophet saw that there was no carpet for some to sit on, he gave his cloak for them to sit on[5].

Wearing plain clothing, riding a bare donkey, milking, sitting with and befriending the slaves, greeting children, patching shoes and clothes, accepting the peoples invitations, sweeping the house, giving a helping hand to all people, and not taking food lightly are of the conduct and lifestyle (sira) of the Prophet[6].

Some of the Shi'a wanted to evacuate the pubic bath for Imam Sadiq. The Imam did not allow them and said, *"There is no need; the life of a believer is simpler than these formalities*[7]*."*

No matter how much the people insisted that Imam Ridha's table be separate from the servants, the Imam would not accept[8].

A man in a public bathroom did not recognize Imam RidHa(a) and wanted help with washing the back of his shoulder and back. Without introducing himself, the Imam, with utmost dignity, accepted his request. When the man recognized the Imam, he began to apologize and the Imam comforted him[9].

Accepting other people's suggestions and criticisms and sitting somewhere lower than one's own status are among the signs of humbleness and humility.

Factors of serenity and assurance

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah.'

"Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!" (***Ra'ad, 13:28***)

There are many influences for attaining assurance and serenity, though awareness and knowledge stand at the head of them all and have a particular affect.

Someone who knows that an atom's weight of his deeds is accounted for (***"An atom's weight of good will see it"***) (***Zalzala, 99:7***) is confident in his works and efforts.

Someone who knows that he is created through God's mercy and grace (***"Except those on whom your Lord has mercy – and that is why He created them"***) (***Hud, 11:119***) is hopeful.

Someone who knows that God is in ambush of the oppressors (***"Indeed your Lord is in ambush"***)(***Fajr, 89:14***) is tranquil.

Someone who knows that God is All-wise and All-knowing and has not created anything in vain ("All-knowing, All-wise") is optimistic.

Someone who knows that his path is clear and his future is better than the past (***"While the Hereafter is better and more lasting"***) (***A'ala, 87: 17***) has assurance in his heart.

Someone who knows that his Imam and leader is a pure being chosen by God and is infallible from any error (***"I am making you the Imam of mankind"***) (***Baqarah, 2: 124***) is at peace.

Someone who knows that his good deed is rewarded 10 to 700 times, rather, infinitely more while with his bad deed, only one error will be taken into account, is contented.

(***"The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is that of a grain which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains."***) (***Baqarah, 2:261***)

Someone who knows that God loves the virtuous (***"Indeed Allah loves the virtuous"***) (***Baqarah, 2: 195***) becomes confident with his good deeds.

Someone who knows his good deeds are revealed and his ugly deeds remain hidden (*"O you who reveal beauty and conceal ugly things*[10]*"*) is happy.

Factors of anxiety and worry

One of the most prevalent illnesses in the present century is anxiety and depression. Many reasons for these illnesses – which include symptoms such as isolationism, excessive introversion, feeling inferior, and feeling worthless – have been mentioned, such as:

A person becomes depressed because he does not see everything according to his aspirations, whereas we should not stop and give up altogether merely because we have not arrived at everything we want.

A depressed person thinks to himself why no one likes him while this is not possible; he even considers God and Angel Gabriel as enemies. Therefore, one should not expect everyone to like him. A depressed person assumes everyone is bad, while it is not so and God answered the Angels who had this illusion. A depressed person assumes that everything unpleasant is external, while bitterness primarily comes as a result of one's own behaviour and conduct.

A person with anxiety is worried from the beginning in his endeavours and feels afraid and alone. In order to eliminate this state, Imam Ali (a) says, *"When you fear something involve yourself in it, because fearing anything is greater than that thing itself*[11]*."*

A person with anxiety is worried about his future. This can be cured by having trust in God and perseverance.

Because he has become disappointed with some undertakings, he is worried that maybe he will suffer this fate in all his affairs.

Because he relies on people and unstable powers, with their precariousness, he becomes insecure and restless.

In short, matters such as the failure to appreciate peoples' efforts, sin, fear, hasty judgments, aberrant expectations and misconceptions are all reasons for many depressions and anxieties. By remembering God and his strength, forgiveness, and kindness, this emotional state can be transformed into tranquillity and happiness.

Elements of deviation

On the day that He will muster them and those whom they worship besides Allah, He will say,

"Was it you who led astray these servants of Mine, or did they themselves stray from the way?" (***Furqaan, 25:17***)

The factors which cause misdirection and deviation have been introduced in the Qur'an in the following manner:

A bad friend: ***"Certainly he led me astray."*** (***Furqaan, 25:29***)

Desire: ***"And do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of Allah."*** (***Saad, 38:26***)

Deviated scholars: ***"***[***They***] ***write the Book with their hands and then say, 'This is from Allah."*** (***Baqarah, 2:79***)

Misguided leaders: ***"Pharaoh led his people astray."*** (***Taa-haa, 20:79***)

Satan: ***"Indeed he is an enemy, manifestly misguiding."*** (***Qasas, 28:15***)

The misdirection of the majority: ***"If you obey most of those on the earth, they will lead you astray from the way of Allah."*** (***An'aam, 6:116***)

Misguided parents: ***"We found our fathers and we are indeed following in their footsteps."*** (***Zukhruf, 43:23***)

The hearts of the believer and the unbeliever

(Musa) said, ***"My Lord! Open my breast for me. Make my affair easy for me. Remove the hitch from my tongue***[12], [***so that***] ***they may understand my discourse."*** (***Taa-haa, 25-28***)

The heart of a believer and unbeliever can be described as follows:

The Heart of the Believer	The Heart of the Unbeliever

Life: ***"Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life."*** (***An'aam, 6:122***)

Healing: ***"And heal the hearts of a faithful folk."*** (***Taw'ba, 9:14***)

Purity: ***"Whose hearts Allah has tested."*** (***Hujraat, 49:3***)

Tolerance: ***"My Lord! Open my breast for me"*** (***Taa-haa, 20:25***)

Guidance: ***"Whoever has faith in Allah, He guides his heart"*** (***Taghaabun, 64:11***)

Faith: ***"He has written faith into their hearts."*** (***Mujaadila, 58:22***)

Composure: ***"Composure into the hearts of the faithful"*** (***Fath, 48:4***)

Kindness: ***"And united their hearts."*** (***Anfaal, 8:63***)

Certainty of the heart: ***"The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance."*** (***Ra'ad, 13:28***)

Sick: ***There is a sickness in their hearts.*** (***Baqarah, 2:10***)

Ruthless: ***"(We) made their hearts hard."*** (***Maaida, 5:13***)

Rejection: ***"Allah made their hearts swerve."*** (***Saff, 61:5***)

Sealed: ***"The ones on whose hearts Allah has set a seal."*** (***Nahl, 16:108***)

Dark: ***"Their hearts have been sullied."*** (***Mutaffifin, 83:14***)

Veil: ***"We have cast veils on their faces."*** (***Kahf, 18:57***)

Locked: ***"Or are there locks on the hearts?"*** (***Muhammad, 47:14***)

Hard-heartedness: ***"Allah has set a seal on their hearts."*** (***Baqarah, 2:7***)

Return and lack of understanding: ***"Allah has turned aside their hearts."*** (***Tawba, 9:127***)

Arrogance and the arrogant

"He [Pharaoh] and his hosts acted arrogantly in the land unduly, and thought they would not be brought back to Us." (***Qasas, 28:39***)

Throughout history there have been proud and arrogant people who thought of themselves as the axis and center of everything. In this chapter, Pharaoh says,

"I do not know of any god that you may have other than me." (***Qasas: 28:38***)

And when the magicians believed in Musa, Pharaoh said,

"Do you profess faith in Him before I may permit you?" (***A'araaf, 7:123***)

Pharaoh expects that without his permission, no one should believe inanything. Today there are 'pharaohs' and superpowers who also want to consider themselves the axis of world politics and economics.

Sometimes, in order to show their power, the arrogant destroy or favour a person, group, or country. One such example is Nemrud who said to Prophet Abraham,

"I [too] give life and bring death." (***Baqarah, 2:258***)

The life and death of these people is in my hands. I kill whom I want and free whomever I want. At times the arrogant draw glamour and material manifestations to the people, just as Pharaoh would say,

"Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me and these rivers that run at my feet?" (***Zukhruf,***

43:51)

Sometimes the arrogant force people into submission through intimidation. Pharaoh said to the magicians who believed in Musa,

"Surely I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides." (***A'araaf, 7:124***)

Every so often, the arrogant attract the naïve through schemes and showing off. Korah[13] would walk in the alleys and markets in a way that the materialistic people would sigh and say, ***"We wish we had like what Korah has been given!"*** (***Qasas, 28:79***)

Sometimes the arrogant want to buy intelligence and ideas through bribery. Pharaoh said to the magicians,

"If you dishonor Musa, I will give you a great reward and will make you among those nearest to me." (***A'araaf, 7:114***)

At times the arrogant make the hearts unstable and insecure with their travels. The Qur'an says,

"Never be misled by the bustle of the faithless in the towns." (***Al-Imran, 3:196***)

Sometimes the arrogant wage a psychological war by humiliating others and call give uncalled for proportions with the supporters of prophets and call them hooligans[14].

Sometimes the arrogant try to draw the attention of people to themselves by creating tall buildings. Pharaoh said to his vizier Haman,

"Build me a tower so that I may reach the routes and take a look at the God of Moses." (***Ghaafir, 40:36***)

How alive the Qur'an truly is in how it paints a picture of the arrogant peoples' temperament and indecent behavior that can be applied to our time.

Faith tainted with polytheism

They desire honor from others: ***"Do they seek honor with them?"*** (***Nisaa, 4:139***)

In conduct: They combine good conduct with bad: ***"Having mixed up righteous conduct with other that was evil"*** (***Tawba, 9:102***)

In encountering others, he has group prejudice: ***"Each party exulting in what it had."*** (***Mu'minoon, 23:53***)

In worship, he is heedless and insincere: ***"Those who are heedless of their prayers, those who show***

off." (***Maa'un, 107:5-6***)

In war and battle, he is afraid of the people: ***"...were afraid of people as if fearing Allah."*** (***Nisaa, 4:77***)

In trade and worldly affairs, greediness and excessiveness occupies him: ***"Rivalry*** [***and vainglory***] ***distracted you."*** (***Takaathur, 102:1***)

In choosing between religion and the temporal world, they take the temporal world and abandon the Prophet:

"When they sight a deal or a diversion, they scatter off towards it and leave you standing!" (***Jumu'a, 62:11***)

Repentance in the Qur'an

"Barring those who repent, believe, and act righteously. Such will enter paradise, and they will not be wronged in the least." (***Maryam, 19:60***)

Usually, following the verses that deal with punishment, the Qur'an brings forth the sentence 'except such as repent' or 'excepting those who repent,' indicating that the path to reform is never closed to anyone.

Repentance is obligatory as it is God's command: ***"Repent to Allah."*** (***Tahrim, 66:8***)

The acceptance of true repentance is definite because one cannot believe that we repent by His command while He does not accept it:

"It is He who accepts the repentance of His servants." (***Shura, 42:25***)

He is the All-clement, the All-merciful." (***Baqarah, 2:37***)

God not only accepts repentance; he also likes those who repent a great deal: ***"Allah loves the penitent."*** (***Baqarah, 2:222***)

Repentance must be coupled with good conduct and compensation of sins:

"Repents and acts righteously," (***Furqaan, 25:71***)

"Repents after that and reforms," (***An'aam, 6:54***)

"Repent, make amends, and clarify." (***Baqarah, 2:160***)

Repentance is the code to salvation:

"Repent so that you may be felicitous." (***Noor, 24:31***)

Repentance is a means for turning bad deeds into good deeds:

"Excepting those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously. For such, Allah will replace their misdeeds with good deeds" (***Furqaan, 25:70***)

Repentance is the reason for rainfall: ***"Turn to Him penitently: He will send copious rains for you from the sky"*** (***Hud, 11:52***)

Repentance is the reason for favorable sustenance: ***"Turn to Him penitently. He will provide you with a good provision."*** (***Hud, 11:3***)

Repentance is not accepted at a time when one sees the effects of death and punishment: ***"When death approaches any of them, he says, 'I repent now."*** (***Nisaa, 4:18***)

In addition to accepting repentance, God also has a particular grace:

"He is the All-clement, the All-merciful." (***Baqarah, 2:37***)

"Repents after that and reforms." (**An'aam, 6:54**)

"Then He turned clemently to them –indeed He is most kind and merciful to them." (***Tawba, 9:117***)

Barring those who repent, believe, and act righteously.

"Such will enter paradise." (***Maryam, 19:60***)

"Then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed all- merciful, all-affectionate." (***Hud, 11:90***)

In these verses, God's mercy, clemency, and affection have been mentioned alongside repentance.

The Qur'an considers one who leaves repentance as oppression:

"And whoever is not penitent – such are the wrongdoers." (***Hujraat, 49:11***)

"And then do not repent, for them there is the punishment of the hell." (***Burooj, 85:10***)

1. Qara'ati, Muhsen. Qur'anic Themes in Minutes.Tehran: Farhangi Darsha'i az Qur'an Institute, 1390.
2. He caused a dry tree to produce fresh dates for Lady Mariam and transformed fire to a garden for Ibrahim.
3. Bihar, vol. 47, p. 47.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., vol. 16, p. 235.
6. Ibid., vol. 16, p. 155 and vol. 73, p. 208.
7. Ibid., vol. 47, p. 47.
8. Kudak, Falsafi, vol. 2, p. 457.
9. Bihar, vol. 49, p. 99.
10. From a well-known supplication
11. Bihar, vol. 71, p. 362.

12. That is, ‘Grant me clarity of speech.’
13. Qaroon
14. Shura, 111

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