

An Introduction to

UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN

WITH EXAMPLES

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ASSOCIATION FOR QUR'ANIC UNDERSTANDING

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CONTENTS

Preface	iv
CERTAIN POINTS RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN	1
SOME QUR'ANIC TERMS AND CONCEPTS.....	17
Sūrah Al-'Alaq (96)	35
Sūrah Al-'Asr (103)	40
Sūrah Al-Mā'ūn (107)	43
Sūrah Al-Kauthar (108)	47
Surah Al-Kāfirūn (109)	51
Sūrah Al-Ikhlās (112).....	55
Glossary	58

PREFACE

In the Qur'an, it is God, the Lord of Humankind, Who is talking to God's servants. It is an open book which invites each human to its reading. We are supposed to listen to the Divine Words attentively and strive to understand it. We can help each other in understanding the Book better and correct each other's mistakes. But no one has the ability to communicate with us like God. According to me, interpreters and commentators do not have to remain standing between God and God's servants.

I believe that understanding the Book is a continuing process – as the Prophet exclaimed: 'its treasures will never be exhausted'. We learn from earlier readers and keep moving. We understand our Text, in changing human situations and with our growing abilities and skills - as the progress in human knowledge and technology continues. The Prophet has a special status. But he emphasized believer's direct relationship with the Book and placed his *Sunnah* (words and deeds) next to the Divine Book.

In a plural world where we have readers of other scriptures one should know how to respect each other, how to learn from each other, and how to work together in this global village for our common good. The Qur'an itself claims to be the last edition of the Book, given to Moses, Jesus, and other messengers of God. We will request even the non-believers to give it a trial. Maybe they can see the possibility of its Divine origin!

As I request the Qur'anic scholars to correct me where ever they see any mistake, I present my own exercise in understanding the Qur'an with the expectations that I may succeed in motivating my readers even to a better understanding of our Book.

Irfan Ahmad Khan

May 22, 2011

Association for Qur'anic Understanding

1

CERTAIN POINTS RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN

1. WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND WHEN WE CONSIDER WE UNDERSTAND THE QUR'AN? HOW IS 'UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN' DIFFERENT FROM 'UNDERSTANDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUR'AN'?

In the following pages, which contain six short surahs of the Qur'an, **my interest basically lies in helping my readers in understanding the Qur'anic text with their own minds.** Just 'delivering my own understanding of the Qur'an to the audience' is not the purpose.

I underline the difference between 'a teacher's delivering his or her understanding of the Text to the students' and 'his or her making these students understand the Text with their own minds'. According to me, it is only in the latter case that one is doing his or her duty as a *teacher of the Text*. And in this book I am trying to do my duty as a teacher of the Text.

What is important: According to us, one's **act of understanding a text involves that one is striving to develop an insight into its meanings through building one's own direct relationship with its verbal content.**

However, I have noticed that while serious students of the Divine Book are expected to *keep* their focus on the Divine Text, quite a few students show a tendency to lose this focus while receiving benefit from a helping person or a helping book. When they listen to an understanding of the Text by their teacher or read a commentary of the Text, a secondary text would come into existence and, unknowingly, they develop a tendency to make this secondary text their sole *object of understanding*. As soon as they would have grasped the meanings of this secondary text, they are fully (though falsely) satisfied that they have done their job of understanding the Text. They have this false satisfaction even

though they have lost their direct connection with the Text, and actually they did not make *any effort* to understand the *Text itself*. Obviously, in such a case, the focus of their act of understanding is only 'an understanding of their Text by their teacher or commentator'

We are not against receiving external help for a better understanding of the Divine Text. It will be very unfortunate if today's students of the Qur'an deprive themselves (e.g.) from the great treasures of classical commentaries (*tafāsir*) of the Qur'an. However, we must understand the difference between the teacher and the text and we must treat these great students of the Qur'an as our teachers - always keeping our *focus on the Divine Text* which they can help us in understanding if we succeed in building right kind of relationship with their commentaries.

In the Qur'anic perspective, a **believer's reading of the Qur'an**, as well as a **believer's listening to another person's reading of the Qur'an**, is virtually his or her listening to what God is saying to the believer. As we know, even when Divine address, in the Qur'anic text, is to some other persons, *God wants the believer to listen to what God is saying*. And we should listen to God with full attention and understand the Divine Speech with an open heart and open mind (7: 204).

Never deprive your faculty of understanding (i.e. your '*aql*') of God's beautiful speech which is full of meanings. And remember: God will not appreciate if *other people's understanding of the Divine Text* is, all the time, standing between you and the Divine Speech (*Kalām-Allāh*) which God wants you to listen with your own ears and understand with your own '*aql*' (faculty of understanding). While it is interesting to learn 'how different people understand The Divine Speech (*Kalām-Allāh*)' and while we appreciate various people's effort to help us understand The Divine Speech (*Kalām-Allāh*), it is quite obvious that *no one possesses that ability to communicate with us which God possesses*.

[Developing communication with God is a matter of personal experience. It is true of prayer or *salāh* in which case, mostly, God is the listener and it is true of our own listening to the Divine Speech (*Kalām-Allāh*) - as in our reading of the Qur'an or someone else's reading of the Book to us. In the above

discussion we only wanted to underline that while for a believer who is developing his or her personal communication with God through the Qur'an, seeking external help is quite often both necessary and useful, seeking external help sometimes spoils one's own personal/direct relationship with the Divine Text - in case the reader loses his or her own focus on the Divine Text.]

However, before we proceed further, we must understand that *the Qur'an is not one long Divine speech*. It is composed of one hundred fourteen (written) Divine discourses or *suwar* (plural of *sūrah*, i.e. a Divine discourse as it is named in the Book). **We must know that in understanding the Qur'an, we understand it *sūrah* by *sūrah*.**

2. WHAT IS A *SŪRAH* AND WHAT IS INVOLVED IN UNDERSTANDING A *SŪRAH*?

As stated above, **the Qur'anic Text consists of one hundred fourteen *suwar***. Through the following study, I am trying to do some help to my readers in their understanding of the last thirty *suwar* of the Qur'an. These are relatively smaller Divine discourses that are placed at the end of the Divine Book.

The way 'chapter' is used in the English language, mainly in academic circles, translating '*sūrah*' as 'chapter' creates a great misunderstanding. A *sūrah* is more like a *complete* sermon or lecture or even a book or an essay, rather than a chapter of a book. 'Chapter', being a *division* of (e.g.) a book, conveys a sense of incompleteness, while ***sūrah* is a complete discourse**.

The Qur'an has given an open challenge to those who have any doubt concerning the Divine Authorship of the Book, to just try to compose one *sūrah* like the Qur'anic *suwar* (2: 23). This clearly shows that a *sūrah* is more than a bundle of (some illuminating but) scattered ideas - as an uninitiated reader is, quite often, inclined to think. Every ***sūrah* has its own unique style of elaborating its central theme** which runs like an invisible thread from the beginning of the *sūrah* to the end of the *sūrah*. In fact, it is this central theme of the *sūrah* which gives the *sūrah* its unity.

While striving to understand a Qur'anic *sūrah*, one should keep going through the whole *sūrah* repeatedly (doing what the Qur'an would call '*tadabbur*' or

‘contemplation’ over the *sūrah*) till one is able to see clearly ‘**how various themes of the *sūrah* are united**, through this invisible thread, **into a systematic whole**’. Thus according to us, understanding a *sūrah* involves one’s developing an insight into the *sūrah* as a whole *and only those who fully comprehend the thematic structure of a *sūrah*, understand the *sūrah*.*

3. WHAT IS AN *ĀYAH* AND WHAT IS INVOLVED IN UNDERSTANDING AN *ĀYAH* OF THE QUR’AN?

A Qur’anic *sūrah* is composed of *verses* which are called *āyāt* (singular *āyah*, i.e. a sign). An *āyah* is a point which is marked, in the Revealed Text, as such by the Divine Author.

As we explained in the above, a Qur’anic *sūrah* is a complete discourse. However, this discourse is composed of *clearly marked units*, that is, *āyāt* which are points that the Author makes during a *sūrah*. Thus *āyah* is an important Qur’anic unit and *āyah-consciousness* is a necessary condition for the understanding of a Qur’anic text. We do not deny that sometimes an *āyah* consists of a whole bunch of points each of which has its own significance. However, in such cases our *āyah* consciousness would involve that we are able to see the **one composite point** which this whole bunch of points makes and which was underlined when – referring to this composite point - the Author, implicitly, marked ‘*here is another point!*’.

An *āyah* is, by definition, ***something which calls for its own understanding***. Thus in its very nature, an *āyah* is *something meaningful*. This is why the Qur’an speaks repeatedly of ‘**reflection (*tafakkur*) upon Divine signs (*āyāt*)**’, i.e., deliberating over their meanings.

Only when the meanings of all these points (*āyāt*), which compose a *sūrah*, have been investigated, a reader’s striving to understand the discourse (*sūrah*) as a whole would make sense.

Even in understanding a Qur’anic text which is part of an *āyah*, we should give due consideration to its being part of that *āyah* and its having that specific place in the *āyah* which it does have. We should understand how this part of *āyah* helps the *āyah* in making the point which it does make.

Our *āyah* consciousness involves our understanding boundaries of individual *āyāt*. If we do not have a clear understanding, about some individual *āyāt* concerning 'where does their linguistic expression start?' and 'where does it end?' then we are liable to miss something in the meanings of those *āyāt*. Likewise we can miss something in the meanings of any group of *āyāt* whose boundaries we do not understand very well. This will create confusion and misunderstanding of the whole text .

However, in the **understanding of an *āyah***, its literary context, and therefore **its place in the *sūrah* matters**. This is the reason why reciting the Qur'an or listening to its recitation over and over again, is expected to yield better and better understanding of the meaning of the Qur'anic Text. For example, in the first reading of a *sūrah* a preliminary understanding of the *āyāt* of the *sūrah* yields a preliminary understanding of the *sūrah* as a whole. However, in the second reading a better understanding of individual *āyāt* emerges in the perspective of a preliminary overall understanding of the *sūrah*, which is followed by a better overall understanding of the *sūrah* as a whole, at the end of the second reading. And likewise, subsequent readings of the *sūrah* will further raise the quality of our understanding on *āyātic* as well as *sūratic* level. Later, we may further elaborate this point.

4. AYAT OF A SŪRAH AND THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE SŪRAH:

Thematic structure of a *sūrah* containing three *āyāt*: The smallest number of *āyāt* that a *sūrah* contains is three. This is the case with *Sūrah al-'Asr* (103), *Sūrah al-Kauthar* (108) and *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110). While these *suwar* are full of meanings, the understanding of their thematic structure is not problematic. One may try to see how the first *āyah* introduces the subject and how the second *āyah* proceeds further in that light. Hopefully, after taking these two initial steps, it will not be difficult to see how the third or the final *āyah* gives its concluding remarks.

Consider the case of *Sūrah al-'Asr*. It is the third *āyah* that contains the four point formula which shows to humankind the way for the attainment of *Falāh* (Ultimate Success and Happiness). This is the *sūrah's* point of positive concern which it deals at the full length. As we explain in our chapter on

qasam, the first *āyah* calls our attention to the Qur'anic review of the past history of human civilizations. Thus *qasam* in *āyah* 103: 1 presents evidence from history to show how again and again the people who transgressed against God, created corruption, oppression and injustice in human society. When they did not repent, in spite of the warnings of the prophets and messengers of God, they were punished and God wiped them off from the surface of the Earth. These corrupt and unjust people who had inherited the earth after the downfall of earlier civilizations, faced Divine Punishment of humiliation in this life and in the Hereafter, eternal punishment of Hell will be their share. In the above light, the second *āyah*, which is concerned with the present situation of human society, observes: the way the people are conducting themselves **today**, it seems the humanity is again proceeding toward self-destruction. Thus the *āyah* one and two together prepare the minds of the addressees for the understanding of the last *āyah* which contains the main point of Divine concern i.e. 'how will humankind be saved?' The *sūrah* gives this question a positive twist: 'how will humans attain *Falāh*?' The reply to this question is elaborated in *āyah* (103: 3).

Sūrah al-Kauthar (108): The first *āyah* introduces the greatest Divine Gift to the Prophet whose blessings will go on increasing. The following *āyah* works out the practical demands of this Great Gift. The final *āyah* concludes: ultimately all hatred will wither away and the whole world will become friendly.

The *sūrah*, as a whole, makes the following point:

The Prophet is the most blessed person. He should continue his striving, investing all his resources in the way of God - always seeking God's Help and presenting through his own life a model of what he is teaching. The opponents who see him as a helpless and *deprived person* will soon be disillusioned.

Sūrah al-Nasr (110) is mainly concerned with the question 'what the Prophet should do when the Divine Help and thereby Victory (110: 1) arrives and this brings hosts of people into the fold of Islam (110: 2)?' The detailed answer is developed in the third *āyah* (110: 3).

Thematic structure of a small *sūrah* which contains more than three *āyāt*: However, to understand the thematic structure of other smaller

suwar the reader should view the *sūrah* as a brief sermon which contains (e.g.) three or more points – on the pattern of three or more paragraphs in a brief essay - and then try to see how these *āyāt* can be grouped accordingly. Each paragraph should have at least one *āyah* or more and an *āyah* should not be further broken.

[For illustration, please see in this book, our present exercises in unveiling the thematic structure of the remaining twenty seven *suwar*.]

Thematic structure of a large *sūrah*: the example of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2). *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2) is the longest *sūrah* of the Qur'an. It contains two hundred and eighty six *āyāt*. It is much like a course of study. As we have suggested in the following, the first four *suwar* after *Sūrah al-Fātihah*, look like four courses of study for individuals belonging the present community of believers. *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2), which is the first course of study for the members of the Qur'anic Community, has four sections:

- I. *Āyāt* 2: 1-39 address to human beings, in general
- II *Āyāt* 2: 40-123 address to the Children of Israel
- III *Āyāt* 2: 124-152 the legacy of Abraham
- IV *Āyāt* 2: 153-286 address to the believing community

In my "Reflections on the Qur'an", these sections are further divided into subsections. See Irfan Ahmad Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'an* (Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 2005) p. 53-59.

For example, Part I which is given the name "To the Children of Adam" is divided into three subsections:

- (a) 2: 1-20 studies three different attitudes toward the Book that help or hinder people's receiving guidance
- (b) 2: 21-29 present the essential message of the Book
- (c) 2: 30-39 Divine expectations from Man's descent to earth

In the above book, I have further analyzed (a) as follows:

2: 1-5 discuss those who will increase in guidance

2: 6-7 those who rejected the Qur'anic invitation to believe

2: 8-20 the people who are playing a double role

It is due to the above structure that I see *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2) as a course of study and similar is the case with, *Ala 'Imrān*, *al-Nisā'*, *al-Māidah* and some other large *suwar*.

Thematic structure of other *suwar*: I hope our readers can imagine 'how the thematic structure of a medium size *sūrah* would look like?' Obviously it will have an in-between shape.

5. THE ORDER OF THE ARRANGEMENT OF *SUWAR* IN THE QUR'AN

The order in which the Qur'anic *suwar* were sent down: According to the Qur'an, in Divine creative activity (7: 54/10: 3/11: 7/25: 59/32: 4/50: 38/57: 4) as well as in Divine act of guiding, God chooses a step by step procedure. It is generally believed that the process of 'Qur'anic revelation', started with the *āyāt* 96: 1-5 and ended with "*al-yawma akmalu lakum..*" in *āyah* (5: 3), Thus it extended over a period of twenty three years. *Sūrah al-Furqān* (25: 32) explains that this gradual process was better suited to prepare the heart (and the mind) of the Prophet to do his job. Whenever the time was ripe for the sending down (or *tanzil*, i.e. revelation in installments) of a piece of the Qur'anic Text, to guide the Prophet and his believers in the concrete human situation that they were facing, God would select that relevant portion of the Divine Guidance, i.e. **a *sūrah* or part of a *sūrah***, and reveal it to the Prophet. It was a gradual process of educating the believers through The Divine Text Book assigned to the community of the believers. It was expected that, under the leadership of the Prophet, the believing community, as a whole, as well as each of its individuals, will try to assimilate – both intellectually as well as spiritually - each new installment of Divine Guidance. The believers own lives would be transformed, as they would strive - both individually as well as collectively - to set things right, manipulating, under these installments of Divine Guidance, the human situation, they faced.

The order in which we recite the Qur'an today: However, the officially appointed scribes of the Prophet were directed to place these separately revealed pieces of the Book according to the permanent system, as determined by the Divine Author, for all future generations. This was the order of the Qur'anic *suwar* in the Divine Book before its being revealed to the Prophet and this is the order in which Global Muslim Community (the Muslim *Ummah*) reads the Book today. We believe that this systematic **arrangement of one hundred fourteen Qur'anic *suwar* keeps their central themes in view. In the following we will have a brief look at the order in which the first nine *suwar*, which cover almost one third of the Book, have been arranged.**

THE SYSTEM IN THE FIRST NINE *SUWAR*

***Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (1): 'The Preface to the Divine Book'**

Who will doubt that *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (1) is rightly placed in the very beginning of the Qur'an? We praise Merciful Lord of Humankind, Who is the Master of the Day of Judgment. We revive our covenant with God and pray for guidance. Through following one hundred thirteen *suwar*, God answers to our prayer.

However, after *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (1), we pass through three stages, before we cover first one third of the Qur'an by the end of *Sūrah at-Tawbah* (9).

THE FIRST STAGE

Four courses studying step by step growth & development of *Ummah Muslimah* in concrete life situation - as the process of Qur'anic guidance continues, in matters related with religion, ethics, law and governance.

[*Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2), *Sūrah Alā 'Imrān* (3), *Sūrah an-Nisā'* (4) and *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (5) study "Identity Consciousness of *this* newly formed community of believers" and "Their Relationship with others".]

Sūrah al-Baqarah (2) is very naturally the first course to be taught to the people who are born in believing families as well as those new-Muslims who join this community of *traditional* Muslims. This course of study is a Divine

Gift to them: it contains both, the philosophical basis as well as the historical foundation, required to strengthen and enrich their pride as a *Community of God's Obedient Servants i.e. Muslims*. As these *traditional* Muslims will contemplate the *āyāt* of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2), they will be slowly transformed into *real Muslims i.e. persons who have submitted to God, as God's obedient servants*. Through this course of Qur'anic Study, they will understand (e.g.): 'what is the purpose of human creation?', 'what are Divine expectations from the *present* community of believers?' The *sūrah* clarifies 'the meaning of being chosen' and 'the Divine expectations from those who are chosen' mainly in the context of the Children of Israel as well as the present believing community. This course studies, in a concrete perspective, basic principles of Islamic Ethics and Islamic Law and examines in detail, problems that usually arise within believers' family life.

Ala 'Imrān (3), which builds upon *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2), is the second course of study to be taught to the Children of the Muslim Community. The *āyāt* of *Sūrah Ala 'Imrān* make a *fresh* and more forceful restatement of the basic principles on which the Qur'anic Movement is based. **It deals with some of those issues, which were discussed in *al-Baqarah*, on a still higher intellectual, moral and spiritual plane. This brings conceptual clarity, concerning issues of utmost importance for the future progress of Qur'anic Movement.** However, all this is done in the concrete situation of conflict with the opponents of the Qur'anic Movement in general, and the People of the Book in particular.

In *al-Baqarah* the Children of Israel were reminded of the Divine expectations from them and their actual performance was critically examined in the light of their covenant. In *Ala 'Imrān*, the focus turns on the life and mission of Jesus and the Qur'anic Community initiates a dialogue with the Christians.

During Makkan Period, the dominant forces inside and around the city considered the growth of the Qur'anic Movement a threat to their unjust system and this is why they had been trying to silence this new voice which demanded a radical change in their corrupt ways of thinking and doing. During *al-Baqarah* Stage which starts with believers' being settled in Madinah, their

new *Home of Peace*, after their having successfully migrated from Makkah, these aggressors initiated military operations against the believing community. The believing community, which was, earlier, repeatedly advised to observe tolerance, forgiveness and non-violence - in spite of their right to retaliate - was now permitted to raise arms against these aggressors. *Sūrah al-Baqarah* justified, through rational arguments, why in the new situation created by these opponents of the Qur'anic Movement, this change in policy became essential. In view of the *increasing enmity* of these unjust opponents, *Sūrah Ala 'Imrān* makes the solidarity of the believing community its primary concern. It guides the believing community, at each step, during its clash with the outside enemies as well as the inside enemies. The latter were the people who apparently belonged to the believing community, but they were working as enemy agents. However, the Qur'an wants the believers to be realistic and suggests that they act wisely.

It is interesting to note that *Sūrah Ala 'Imrān* further explains the wisdom (*hikmah*) behind the Qur'anic laws formulated in the earlier *sūrah* without formulating additional laws.

However, *Sūrah an-Nisā'* (4) which is at this stage the third course of study for the believing community, represents the continuing progress of the Qur'anic Movement in its concrete perspective. It discusses almost all the issues, *Sūrah al-Baqarah* dealt with, on a more advanced level. *Sūrah an-Nisā'* explicates **the theological and ethical foundations of the social system which the Qur'an builds and further works out its practical details.** Unlike *Ala 'Imrān*, *Sūrah an-Nisā'* also deals with Divine guidance in the domain of law, working out further details of those laws that were introduced in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2). *Sūrah an-Nisā'* (4) also guides the domain of **governance and discipline.** However, **protection of the weak and marginalized** sections of society remains its main concern in all these issues.

Sūrah al-Nisā' is followed by *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (5), which is, at this stage, the concluding course of study for the Qur'anic Community. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (5), therefore, gives **finishing touches to the matters that were discussed in the preceding three *suwar* and this includes the domain of law.** While **reviewing the Divine blessings to the Qur'anic Community** throughout this whole period, the present believers are advised to learn lessons from the

shortcomings of their predecessors who quite often failed to be truthful to their covenant.

THE SECOND STAGE

Following two more advanced courses deal with 'how the Qur'anic Community should deliver its message to the world'.

[*Sūrah al-An'ām* (6) and *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7) initiate the Qur'anic mission in the human world. The Qur'anic discussions clarify its basic concepts for the benefit of all.]

It is not difficult to see that through the above four *suwar* the Qur'an was preparing the community of its readers to take the Qur'anic message to the rest of the human world. This is the task, which is the focus of the following two Qur'anic courses of study, i.e. in *Sūrah al-An'ām* (6) and in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7). Here also, *Sūrah al-An'ām* lays down the foundation and the following higher course of study, i.e. *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, builds further upon that foundation. When the Qur'an clarifies its basic concepts to the human world, the believing community, receives all the educational benefits for its own intellectual, moral and spiritual development and growth and thus prepares itself for taking the Qur'anic message to the rest of humanity.

Due to the primacy of Qur'anic concern with humankind in general, one may consider that these two Divine discourses should have been placed before *al-Baqarah*, *Ala 'Imrān*, *an-Nisā'* and *al-Mā'idah*. Only when some humans have responded positively to the Qur'anic call and thereby a believing community has come into existence, it would be a right time for the sending down (*tanzil*) of the *suwar* like *al-Baqarah*, *Ala 'Imrān*, *an-Nisā'* and *al-Mā'idah*.

As we noticed in the above, this consideration was actually part of the Divine Policy concerning the chronology of revelation to the Prophet. Historically *Sūrah al-An'ām* and *Sūrah al-A'rāf* as well as other Makkan *suwar* were revealed to the Prophet before *al-Baqarah*, *Ala 'Imrān*, *an-Nisā'*, *al-Mā'idah* and other Madani *suwar*. However, now when a Qur'anic community is already in existence, the Divine Wisdom demands that this community of

believers should first be educated through the above four courses of study before it comes to the human world to do its assignment under the guidance of *al-An'ām* and *al-A'rāf*.

Given the reality that *Sūrah al-An'ām* (6) and *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7) are two Qur'anic encounters with humanity in general, the question does arise: 'who will do this encounter?' I mean, 'where are the readers who will do the encounter on behalf of the Divine Book and who should be educated through these two courses for this assignment from the Qur'anic Movement?' In contemporary educational system one needs a bachelor degree before one qualifies for post graduate classes. It seems, in order to perform their educational role, *Sūrah al-An'ām*(6) and *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7), as two post graduate courses of study, are looking for Qur'anic graduates who have already completed the study of *al-Baqarah*, *Al'Imrān*, *an-Nisā'* and *al-Mā'idah*.

A comprehensive study of these first four courses in the Qur'anic Studies will prepare the Children of the Qur'anic Community to do the job of leading a *Qur'anic Movement in the human world*. These two new and higher courses of study are designed to cultivate among Qur'anic students quite a different frame of mind. Earlier, these believing students of the Qur'anic studies considered themselves as primarily members of a chosen community and their belonging to the human family or their being servants of God (*'ibād-Allāh*), in general, was not so important to them. Unfortunately, it was the case in spite of the repeated Qur'anic reminding that the believing community's being chosen is basically a responsibility from God which involves a duty toward **servants of God, in general**.

Through these two courses of studies, they would learn how to *transcend their communal being* - coming back to the level of *'ibādullāh* in general, becoming part of a wider human world. Now, in *Sūrah al-An'ām* (6) and *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7), the focus is on learning 'how to share, with the human world outside their own community, what they were so much proud of?'

THE THIRD STAGE

This deals with the Promised Punishment of God

[According to *Sūrah al-Anfāl* (8) and *Sūrah at-Tawbah* (9), the situation of war and panic is another opportunity for believers' repentance (*tawbah*) and purification (*tazkiyah*).]

It is not difficult to see why the following two Divine discourses (i.e. in *Sūrah al-Anfāl* and *Sūrah at-Tawbah*) have their place and time right after *Sūrah al-An 'ām* (6) and *Sūrah al-A 'rāf* (7). *Sūrah al-Anfāl* (8) and *Sūrah at-Tawbah* (9) together bring the Punishment of God to the criminals and it is what *Sūrah al-An 'ām* (6) and *Sūrah al-A 'rāf* (7) have been repeatedly promising. However, from believers' perspective, it is only an occasion for their own *tazkiyah* (self-purification as well as their spiritual and moral development) and *tawbah* (returning to God or repentance). *Sūrah al-Anfāl* (8) and *Sūrah at-Tawbah* (9) explain how believers' truthfulness to their covenant is tested in panic and at the times of war.

THERE MUST BE A SYSTEM UNDERLYING THE REMAINING ONE HUNDRED FIVE QUR'ANIC SUWAR.

Through the above discussion, we made an attempt to work out, tentatively, an outline of the system that underlies the first one third of the Divine Book. Later, in the last chapter of this book, again we will have a brief review, of the system that underlies the last thirty *suwar* of the Qur'an. But what about the system, if any, that underlies the remaining eighty four *suwar*? And what is important: does there actually underlies a system within one hundred fourteen *suwar* of the Qur'an, as a whole?

We believe that all one hundred fourteen *suwar* of the Qur'an are arranged according to a systematic scheme. According to us, the *suwar* in the first one third of the Qur'an as well as the last thirty *suwar* of the Book appear to us as systematically arranged only because all the **one hundred fourteen *suwar* of the Qur'an themselves are arranged according to a system.**

6. 'HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND?'

We have come a long way from our discussion of 'building a direct relationship' with the Divine Text *afresh* to seeing that our text is a **'book'** which comprises of one hundred fourteen systematically arranged *suwar*, of which each ***sūrah***

is a complete and well-organized discourse, composed of units called *āyāt*. This discussion was related with the question 'what do we understand?' In the following, we will only briefly touch the important question 'how do we understand?' For this purpose we will mention four Qur'anic suggestions and request our readers to reflect how these suggestions help the understanding of their text.

(i) **"We have sent it down as a *qur'an* (a reader) in Arabic so that you understand" (12:2).** It is expected that both Arabs and non-Arabs will learn how to understand a book which is in Arabic language. The meaning of a word (e.g.) lies in its usage. Likewise, in the understanding of grammar, literary styles, and figures of speech, etc. – our familiarity with the linguistic tradition will help.

(ii) **"...If the Qur'an were not from God, you would have found in it a lot of contradictions..." (4:82).** The *āyah* emphasizes that the believers must ponder over Qur'anic *āyāt*; and gives a method of understanding the Qur'an. It suggests: 'whenever our understanding of the Qur'an contradicts an obvious fact then something is wrong with our understanding of the Qur'an'. Likewise, when there is an inner contradiction within our Qur'anic understanding of various *āyāt*, something is wrong somewhere! We should revise our understandings!!

(iii) **The word '*tadabbur*' itself suggests that for a better understanding of our text we should keep going through it over and over again.** One advantage is already discussed in the above discussion. In understanding the meanings of a linguistic expression, our familiarity with the linguistic tradition counts. It is true of the Qur'an too. However, the Qur'an helps its readers in miraculous ways. If you **keep reading the Qur'an again and again**, better and better understanding will grow. To understand the Qur'an, we proceed *sūrah* by *sūrah*; and to understand a *sūrah* we proceed *āyah* by *āyah*; and to understand an *āyah*, we proceed word (or phrase) by word (or phrase). The understanding of parts help the understanding of the whole and the understanding of the whole helps in understanding of the parts. As we keep reading better and better, understanding grows.

(iv) (They) explain quotations from the Divine Book out of context and neglect a great deal of the Divine Book (5: 13). The Qur'an strongly recommends that an understanding of linguistic expression we must consider its literary context. If it is part of an *āyah* or part of a *sūrah*, we must give due consideration to it. And we should understand a part of the Qur'an in a perspective of the whole Qur'an.



إِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا

يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَّسْتُورًا^٧

And when you recite the Qur'an, We put between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter a concealed partition. [17/45]



2

SOME QUR'ANIC TERMS AND CONCEPTS

1. '*Abd-Rabb* (Servant - Lord) Relationship

'Ibādah, Mukhlis, Hanif, Shirk and Mushrik

Man-God relationship is the most important Qur'anic concern. The Qur'an uses '*abd-Rabb*' ('servant-Lord') to denote 'Man-God' relationship.

The Religion is, basically, interested in straightening our relationship with God as God's servants alone. In *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98) 'being sincere (or being ***mukhlis***) in the Religion or 'purifying the religion' means 'being '***abd*** (servant) only of God' or 'having God alone as one's ***Rabb*** (Lord)'. When you fail to do so, you are committing ***shirk***, that is, you are associating partners with God or giving someone else status of a god. You are saying: someone other than God also shares divinity while God is the Only One Divine Being Thus you are making your religion impure. ***Mushrik*** is the person who adopted ***shirk*** as his/her way of life and who thus failed to be a sincere servant of One God alone. According to the Qur'an a **sincere believer in One God** does not mix up impurities in Man-God relationship.

In explaining 'Man-God relationship' *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98: 6) also underlines that God wants God's servants to be ***hanif***, that is, God wants **undivided loyalty** from God's servants.

[However, it seems to us that in the context of *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98) "***mushrik***" is being used as a proper name for a specific group. *Sūrah Al-Bayyinah* is dealing with three parties: The Believers, The People of the Book and The Pagans of Mecca and its neighborhood. If we understand this context, then we will be able to see that here the '***mushriks***' denotes the third party. Therefore, in this context, even if some People of the Book commit ***shirk***, they are still excluded from the membership of the group of '***mushriks***' or 'Pagans.']

In the light of the above, it should not be difficult to see that when *Sūrah Quraysh* (106) asserts “Therefore, Quraysh should worship (do ‘*ibādah* to) the Lord of this House (of God),” it means that the Quraysh must abandon their paganism and stand for the *tawhidic* mission for which Abraham built this House of God.

However, it is *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* (109) which makes it clear that **the dividing line between the believers and the disbelievers is: whether you are or you are not a worshipper of One God alone.** *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* makes it clear that there can be no compromise in this matter.

[The *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* emphasizes: in spite of this radical difference in religious beliefs, the two parties must tolerate each other. And each party must give the other party freedom to practice what the other party holds as true. We give to others their right of freedom of faith and demand for ourselves the same right.]

However, *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* (109) makes it clear that **religion** is basically concerned with Man-God relationship and the same is the case with **the Religion**.

‘*Ibadah* (worship or service) is an activity. It is what a servant (‘*abd*) of God would do as part of one’s fulfillment of one’s servitude (‘*ubūdiyyah*) to God. Likewise, those who worship (do ‘*bādah* to) other than God build similar relationship with their gods or goddesses. For example, the servant expresses his/her devotion by repeating God’s name (or doing God’s remembrance or *dhikr*) or through bowing down or prostrating before God or praying (making *du‘ā*) to God. However, ‘*ibādah* is used in the Qur’an in a wider sense to include whatever a servant does, as God’s obedient servant, with the intention to please God. It may be a duty assigned from God or an additional good action, which is supposed to bring Divine pleasure. Thus, in fact, the whole life of a servant of God is ‘*ibādah* – as long as one is consciousness of being God’s servant, always trying to seek God’s pleasure, conducting in the human world the way God wants one to do and remembering God as much as possible.

1. Dhikr: Tasbih, Hamd, Istighfār and Salāh

Dhikr• (remembering God or repeating God's Name) is used as a general term for remembrance of God. Obviously having remembrance of God in your heart is the essence of *'ibādah*.

However, in **making dhikr** you may choose to make *tasbih* i.e. say "*subhanAllāh*" (or "Glory be to God" – meaning 'God is free of all imperfections.' It is, perhaps, the first proposition, a servant of God asserts as he/she thinks of God. When we see wonderful creations of God, we exclaim, 'Glory be to God!' or 'God is free of all imperfections!' It is apparently a negative assertion. However, our intention is to say something positive. But when we try, we find ourselves helpless!! Whatever we say always falls short of God's Beauty and Goodness. So we just exclaim: "God is free of all imperfections!" 'God is beyond our praise!' so to say, God transcends all our conceptions to visualize God's Greatness, Beauty and Goodness.

Or you may choose to say *hamd* (praise by way of thanks) to God. The next proposition which occurs in our Religious consciousness is '*alhamdulillah*' ('All Praise is due to God!'). In fact, this is what we say by way of thanksgiving to God. However, **thanksgiving is more than saying something** with feeling of gratitude. We also need to **do something** by way of thanksgiving. However, when we think, God has done all this for us, we immediately exclaim: "*alhamdulillah!*" As we know, the first *āyah* of the Qur'an says 'All Praise (by the way of thanks) is due to God, Who is Lord of all human beings*.' (1: 1). Here we are thanking God for His favors to the human world of which we are a member; as if, we are thanking God on behalf of human family.

Sūrah an-Nasr (110) recommends that we combine the above two religious propositions to say, "We glorify God and (we do so as) we praise God by way of

*For a detailed discussion on various measures of *dhikr*, see Irfan Ahmad Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'an* (Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 2005) p. 88-92

Reciting the Qur'an or listening to its recitation and reflecting over Qur'anic *Ayat* will also be included in the category of *dhikrAllah*.

* The literal translation is "Lord of all the Worlds". However, the grammar of the Arabic word for 'all the worlds' suggests these are worlds of human beings or worlds of persons.

thanksgiving,” which is very similar to, “We thank God, as we glorify Him.” However, *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110) also adds “and seek God’s forgiveness” (make *istighfar*) saying “He is Ever Re-Returning, i.e. always ready to accept our repentance.” When *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110) adds “Verily, God is Oft-Returning,” it is understood that (not only seek His forgiveness) also make **tawbah**, (that is, repent). “God accepts the repentance of His servants”. That is, when the servant returns to God – God also immediately returns to His servant. In this light, the *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110) is recommending us to say, “*SubhānAllāhi wa bihamdihi astaghfirullāha wa atūbu ilayh.*” (I glorify God with His Praise; I seek God’s forgiveness and return to God). Thus *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110) has suggested a compound form of *dhikr* – a remembrance formula which is composed of three or four elementary propositions for doing *dhikr*.

2. *Īmān and Kufr, Tasdiq and Takdhib:*

In the perspective of the Qur’anic Movement

Īmān: The Qur’an is inviting the people to come out of the servitude of other than One God and become *One Family of the servants of One God alone*. See, for example, 2: 21-22 and 4: 36. Also consider 2: 83 and 2: 256 which further explain the meaning of these *āyāt*. Now if one says ‘yes’ to the Qur’anic call, makes *shahada* (witnesses), that no one is worthy of worship but One God and joins the community of believers, it is *imān* or believing.

Thus, in the light of the Qur’an, *imān* (believing) is *responding* to the call of God which God is making through the Prophet and through his believers (2: 185; 3: 193).

Of course, believing involves that we understand the message of the call, agree with it and **commit** to it. This commitment involves our *testifying* the above call. We **do** it by our heart and **say** it with our tongue. This commitment does include our belonging to, or our **becoming part of, the community** of the believers. Those who responded to the call of Muhammad, the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), organized themselves in the form of a community and are now calling the rest of the world to join them (41: 33). As we explained in the above, *the Qur’an itself is the call*. Consider, *āyah* 2: 41 in which the Qur’an, which

itself testifies to the revealed truth that is given to them, is inviting the Children of Israel to join the Qur'anic Community.

The Messenger of God explains the above Divine Call in his own words and **strives** (makes *jihād*) in the way of this call, through the human situation, he faces. In this striving (*jihād*) all sincere believers are behind the Prophet. They all follow his guidance. In the light of the above, it should not be difficult to see why the Qur'an repeatedly uses *imān* (believing) for *jihād* (striving) in the Way of God (57: 7-8 / 61: 10-11)

The Qur'an underlines that the members of the Community of Believers, believe in God, angels of God, books of God, messengers of God – without making any discrimination among them i.e. believing in some and disbelieving in others (2: 285). They also believe in the return to God.

***Kufr* (disbelief):** On the other hand, if one rejects the Qur'anic Call, the Prophet is making, one disbelieves i.e. commits '*kufr*.' Thus, in its Qur'anic perspective, both *imān* as well as *kufr*, involve one's **taking a positive or a negative step in response to the call which the Qur'an is making**. Believing as well as **disbelieving is an action** (2: 256) that essentially a person's heart does.

[The above explains what *kufr* means, primarily. However, sometimes the Qur'an gives (e.g.) a legal opinion (*fatwā*) about persons conducting in a certain way, that they are, in fact, committing *kufr* – meaning their **action amounts to or is as evil as committing *kufr*, i.e., thanklessly endorsing their rejection of the Divine call, the prophets of God and the Divine Book have been making.** For this secondary meanings of *kufr*, consider 5: 17, 72, and 73.]

Now '*takdhib*' means accusing someone of lying or saying concerning something 'it is a lie'. You do not only say "I do not agree with you" you say violently "**It is all a lie!**" and you stand in opposition to it. We do it when someone is really acting criminally and as a conscientious person we see that it is our duty to stand against this lie. If someone **says, to a truthful person who is working for a noble cause "you are a liar!" it is criminal!** This is what the Qur'an says against people who do *takdhib*!

Therefore, in the Qur'anic contexts, *takdhib* is more than just a rejection (*kufr*) of the Qur'anic call. It is a violent opposition to the Qur'anic Movement.

Likewise **tasdiq** (testifying) involves that you say, 'Yes, it is true' and stand in support of this mission.

Tasdiq and *takdhib* are two important Qur'anic terms. Consider *Sūrah al-Burūj* (85) where some people's *kuf*r (disbelief) is turning into *takdhib* and thus situation is going from bad to worse. This state of affairs is inviting Divine Punishment. God can take action against them, the way God did with some earlier people.

For repeated occurrence of *takdhib* consider *Sūrah ash-Shams* (91) which points out that it is due to Thamud's *tughyān* (rebellious tendency) that these people committed *takdhib*. (For the meaning of *tughyān* see the following note.) This tendency developed in them due to the neglect of their *tazkiyah* i.e. their own moral and spiritual development, as suggested by preceding *āyāt*. When such a rotten leadership developed in this nation, they did not care in spite of the repeated warnings of their messenger. At the end Punishment of God eliminated the whole nation.

For another repeated occurrence of *takdhib* consider *Sūrah al-Layl* (92). Consider the suggestion (see 92: 5-10), those who care for their social obligations and have a responsible attitude in life, will testify (do *tasdiq*) *al-~~usnā~~* i.e. the Qur'anic Message which is all Good and Beautiful. On the other hand, selfish and socially irresponsible persons will stand against it in opposition (do *takdhib*). The *āyah* (92: 15) underlines, only such wretched persons will enter into Hell.

Consider both *Sūrah at-Tin* (95: 7) and *Sūrah al-Mā'un* (107: 1) where the locution '**takdhib bid-Din**' is used to denote (violent) 'opposition to the Qur'anic movement which is striving to revive the Religion.' After presenting all the evidence, *Sūrah at-Tin* (95) wonders 'Is there still any justification for *takdhib bid-Din*? The *Sūrah al-Mā'un* (107) on the other hand, initiates its discussion with the remark: 'Did you notice, who are the persons that are doing *takdhib bid-Din*?' As though it is asking "do you know: 'who are the real opponents of the Religion?'" The *sūrah* explains that these are the same people who disrespect alienated and marginalized sections of human society and who are unconcerned with feeding the hungry.....

3. What is *ad-Din*?

The Qur'an uses '*din*' for 'religion'. However, the way 'religion' is conceived, quite a few other meanings also offshoot from the same root (*d,y,n*). However, 'The Religion' is used in the Qur'an for the common core of the teachings of the prophets of God. Thus while **religions are many, the Religion is one.**

The Religion emphasizes that ultimately good people will be rewarded and evil-doers will be punished. This is why '*din*' also stands for '**reward or punishment, due on virtuous or evil deeds.**' The other equally important teaching of the Religion is **God creates as well as guides, that is, how we live our lives.**

Religion is concerned, essentially, with *Man's relationship with God*. When this relationship is distorted, the life as a whole goes wrong. *Sūrah Al-Bayyinah* (98) uses 'purifying the religion' or 'being sincere in religion' for straightening this relationship (98: 5). The same *āyah* also uses 'the Religion of the straight (nature of Man)' for 'the Religion'. *Sūrah al-Kafirūn* (109) makes it clear what is important in religion: 'how you build your relationship with God'. As explained above both *Sūrah at-Tin* (95) and *Sūrah al-Mā'un* (107) use *takdhib bid-Din* for violent opposition of the Religion to which the Qur'an is calling. The *Sūrah an-Nasr* (110) calls it 'Religion of God' because it invites that people worship One God alone.

In *Sūrah al-Fātihah* (1), 'the Master of the Day of *ad-Din*', is translated as 'the Master of the Day of' is the proper name in the English language for that day. Otherwise, 'the Master of the Day of *ad-Din*' means: "Master of the Day of Reward and Punishment, due on our actions", or even 'Master of the day when the most important religious truth would manifest, that is, when the good people are forgiven and rewarded and the evil-doers are punished.'

4. *Khalq (Creation) and 'Amr (Command or Rule), Hudā /Hidāyah (Guidance) and the meaning of Qadr*

Khalq and 'Amr: According to the Qur'an, God Who has given every being its existence is also the Being Who *manages all the affairs* of His creatures (7: 54). '***Amr (Command)*** denotes this governance or ***running of the affairs***. God alone is the Ruler, the Sovereign of the whole universe (Lord of the Throne or *Rabbul 'Arsh*). **Not only *khalq*, 'Amr also belongs to God alone.**

The Qur'an also emphasizes that both creation (*khalq*) as well as guidance (*hudā* or *hidāyah*) belong to God (20: 50). Thus *hidāyah* (*huda* or guidance) is a part of 'amr (God's controlling or running the affairs). Or one can say '*hidāyah* and '*amr* are the same'. In the latter case, we say: God created sun and moon, various plants and animals and continues to guide (or govern) the passage of their journey of life (36: 38-40).

Sūrah al-A'la (87:2-3) underlines, God creates **perfectly**. That is, God gives all the finishing touches to the Divine *creative activity*. *Sūrah al-A'la* adds, **God plans and then guides**. This planning is called (***Qadr***).

Please note, the root (*q,d,r*) has both the dimensions:

1. 'having power or ability to do something'. The Qur'an repeatedly mentions: "God is *Qadir* (*i.e.* God has power) over everything."
2. 'forming estimates', 'having calculations' 'evaluating' or 'judging' something. The *āyah* 6: 91 remarks: 'those who say, "God has not sent down anything" esteem not God with estimation due to God'. That is, holding the view that God will leave people without any Divine Guidance, is according to the Qur'an, an insolent belief.

Please note the repeated occurrence of '***al-Qadr***' in ***Sūrah al-Qadr (97)***. This *sūrah* is concerned with the blessed event of sending down the Qur'an - a very significant item in Divine Planning. Consider the following:

God created Man with immense possibility of intellectual and spiritual progress. God gave human beings the ability to make moral judgments. And God sent prophets and messengers according to **a systematic planning**. **At the very end, God sent down the last edition** of the Divine Book to the Final Messenger of God. The night when this very significant event occurred, has been given the name '**The Night of *Qadr***'.

Later, it is God Who has been guiding all the progress in art, literature, philosophy, science and technology – all the progress in human knowledge and understanding that continues in spite of cycles of moral and spiritual degradation. God continues to guide God's sincere servants in their efforts to authenticate their understanding of the Qur'an with their growing abilities and in changing human situations. No more any *wahy* will be coming. Still the Qur'anic community's intellectual endeavors will keep unveiling immense

treasures of meanings in the Divine Words – as the Prophet himself indicated. Likewise, the practical endeavors of the Qur'anic community in the light of these discoveries will open new blessings to the human world.

Sūrah al-Qadr has given to the 'Night of *al-Qadr*' the status of a recurring event. Although humankind has received the whole of the Divine Text, the Night of *Qadr* still continues to occur every lunar year.

[Please note: *Sūrah al-Qadr*'s (97) usage of the Qur'anic term '*amr*' (97:4) is also very meaningful!]

5. *Nafs and Rūh*

The Qur'an uses '*nafs*' for 'self' - designating a human being or a person. We know how living beings i.e. beings on botanical or zoological level - are different from non-living beings. However, even all the beings, which we study in zoological sciences, do not possess the same higher form of life. Human beings in particular, possess a form of life which is higher than that of (other) animals. It will be more in conformity with the Qur'anic classification, not to treat human beings as a sub-class of animals rather we should place Man with angels and jinn. **For this higher class of persons alone, religious beliefs which guide people's moral conduct, make sense.** 'Persons' constitute a class that is higher and altogether different from that of animals.

According to the Qur'an, God blew His spirit (*rūh*) into the body of Adam (32: 9/15: 29/38: 72) to raise Man to a higher level of existence.

It is the addition of *rūh* or spirit, to a living body, which otherwise existed on animal level, that would create this higher form of life that human beings possess. Take away the *rūh* from the human body and it will be an animal at par with other living beings at zoological level. The Qur'an would call such a person (spiritually) dead (6: 122).

However, the Revelation (of the Qur'an) would revive such a (spiritually) dead person to this higher form of life again – in case he/she has not totally lost one's potential to receive (the message of) life from the Divine Book.

In the light of the above explanation, it should be clear why '*ar-Rūh*' is also used in the Qur'an for 'Revelation' to the prophets and messengers of God (40:

15; 42: 52). Due to the same reason, *al-Rūh* is also used for 'the archangel Gabriel' who brought the Revelation (19: 17; 78: 38).

6. *Taswiyh (perfection) of Nafs, Tazkiyah (purification) of Nafs, 'Itmi'nān (satisfaction) of Nafs*

Taswiyah (accomplishment) of Nafs denotes God's giving finishing touches to His creative activity related with self. *Sūrah ash-Shams* (91: 7-8), suggests that God's granting moral consciousness to human beings is part of God's giving human self (*nafs*) its perfection. Likewise, *Sūrah as-Sajdah* (32: 9) explains God's blowing God's *Rūh* (Spirit) in human body was instrumental in *taswiyah* of *nafs*. That is, due to it human beings acquired the ability to listen to God's Signs (*āyāt*), ability to see Divine Signs, as well as ability to reflect over Divine Signs. They acquired moral consciousness and could believe in the Hidden Realities (*Ghayb*).

Tazkiyah (spiritual and moral development) of Nafs denotes taking care of one's own self-purification. Consider how the *suwar* 87, 91 and 92 deal with *tazkiyah*. The *Sūrah al-Fajr* (89) deals with *tazkiyah* at length without employing this term. *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98) uses the word '*zakāh*' which involves spending part of one's wealth while seeking self-purification. *Tazkiyah* is also mentioned in *suwar* 79 and 80 which are not included in the present study of Qur'anic *suwar*.

At four places in the Qur'an, God mentions that the Prophet who recites the Divine *Ayāt* (Qur'anic verses) to his believers, performs a number of educational functions. Among these, taking care of the *tazkiyah* of his believers has a special place (2: 129 / 2: 159 / 3: 164 / 62: 2).

'Itmi'nān of Nafs (person's being fully satisfied): The *Sūrah al-Fajr* (89) concludes (89: 27-30) with its address to **the person (*an-nafsul mutmai'nnah*) who enjoys perfect peace of mind and inner satisfaction**. Apparently, this is the same person who made the best use of some calm and quiet moments (89: 1-4) for the remembrance of God and for pondering over Divine *Ayāt*. Throughout his life, he had an inner satisfaction and peace of mind unlike the people mentioned in 89: 6-12. On the Day of Judgment also, this person has peace of

mind and he is satisfied with his performance in this life as well as with the Divine reward to him. He is pleased with God and God is pleased with him.

[For the meaning of the word ‘*itmi'nān*’, we recommend that our readers have a look at *āyāt* 22: 11 / 4: 103 / 10: 7 / 16: 106.]

Sūrah ar-Ra'd (13:28) mentions ‘*itmi'nān* of *qalb*’ (satisfaction of heart/mind) or inner satisfaction. It underlines that only those ‘who believe and whose hearts derive inner satisfaction through remembrance of God (and from listening to the Qur’anic *āyāt*), receive guidance from God. The *āyah* concludes: it is only through remembrance of God that ‘*itmi'nān* of *qalb* is acquired’.

In *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2:260) Abraham is looking for the satisfaction of his heart/mind, and presents his problem to God*. Apparently, Abraham is facing a problem of philosophical nature which is resolved by Divine response. I mean, Abraham is actually seeking an intellectual satisfaction and not **satisfaction of heart**, as understood in its narrow sense.

[However, one can still argue that the solution of Abraham’s intellectual problem will bring more of inner peace and satisfaction of heart to Abraham. But that is a different issue.]

It is interesting to note that in the above two cases, instead of ‘*itmi'nān an-nafs*’ (a person’s inner peace and satisfaction) the word ‘*itmi'nān al-qalb*’ or satisfaction of heart is used. However, it seems to us that the purpose is not much different.

7. *Tughyān, Fasād, Fitnah, ‘Amal Sālīh*

***Tughyān* (Transgression):** *Tughyān* or transgression is people’s failure to behave as servants of God. *Tughyān* involves arrogance and lack of submission.

However, human beings are one family of the servants of One God Who is Lord of all human beings. The members of this family are mutually concerned. They

* For more details, please consider, Irfan Ahmad Khan, *Reflections of the Qur’an* (Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 2005) p. 690

have mutual respect and share their resources with each other. God has assigned mutual duties. It is the **right (haq)** of the down-trodden and alienated people that those servants of God who are well-off should honor them and care for them. They should help them improve their condition. Likewise, neighbors and relatives have their rights.

Fasād (corruption) in human life: The Qur'an underlines that *fasād* in human life occurs when the people do not care for their social obligations that are duties assigned to them from the Lord of humankind. This would explain the nature of **relationship between transgression (tughyān) and corruption (fasād)**. According to *Sūrah al-Fajr* (89: 11-12), it is people's transgression against God which causes corruption in the human world.

'Amal Sālih (virtuous action): If we understand, that *sālih* is antonym of *fāsid* (corrupt), it will not be difficult to see why **'amal sālih** is so called. The Qur'anic Movement is calling the people to stop their transgression against God which has created *fasād* (corruption) in the human society. Those who join the believing community will start doing their social obligations that are *sālih* actions. When people will start caring for each other, doing their mutual duties it will counteract the prevailing corruption in society. This will create a state of **islāh (reform)** as the Qur'an calls it. This is why at many places in the Qur'an the prophetic movement is introduced as a 'movement for *islāh*'. The prophets of God were setting things right at a time when society was full of mischief and corruption and injustice. Consider (e.g.) *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7: 35, 56, 85, 142, and 170) to see how God had been sending the prophets one after another when the society again got filled with *fasad* after the *islāh* by earlier prophetic movement.

Fitnah: However, when the above movement for *islāh* (reform) is raised, **the transgressors try to meddle with it (22: 52-53)**. In various way, they give believers a hard time. They torture them so that they withdraw their movement of reform (*islāh*). They may try to totally crush this movement. They even burn the believers alive, as in *Sūrah al-Burūj* (85: 4-10). The forces of evil quite often work from within the community of believers to corrupt and even distort the movement of reform (*islāh*) itself. They may try to create divisions within the believing community to create confusions concerning the message of the movement of *islāh*. **All this creates a test situation for the believing community and is, therefore, called *fitnah*.**

From the above, the difference between *fasād* and *fitnah* should be clear. *Fitnah* is directed against the movement of *islāh*. Satanic powers use diplomacy to achieve their goals (e.g.) they even try to create corruption within the believing community. Quite often they provoke sentiments of the believers. They want the believers to **act fanatically** so that it is easy for them to arouse public opinion against their movement. The believers are advised to seek God's refuge from Satan who plays with their sentiments. In order to eliminate *fitnah*, wisdom is required. Sometimes, if you wrestle with it, you only flare it and thus lose the battle. The Qur'an emphasizes returning good in response to evil (13: 22 / 28: 54-55 / 41: 34 / 25: 63). The believers, who keep remembering God and keep seeking God's forgiveness, are blessed with *sakinah* (inner peace) which is according to the Qur'an key to victory (48: 4, 18, 26).

8. *Yatim (Orphan), Miskin (Poor) and Raqabah (Neck e.g. of a Slave or a Prisoner)*

Yatim (orphan): When the Qur'an emphasizes that we **honor orphan**, the purpose is that we **take care of all the alienated or marginalized sections of human society**.

Miskin (poor): Likewise, the Qur'anic concern with the poor, aims at reducing the big gap which exists between those who have and those who do not have. The Qur'an uses various styles in emphasizing rich peoples' sharing their wealth with the poor.

Raqabah literally means neck: freeing a neck means freeing a slave or a prisoner: The Qur'an advocates that all human beings deserve freedom. If some people have been, unjustly, captivated or turned into slaves, it is our duty to work for their freedom and help them regain their dignity. Consider how *Sūrah al-Balad* (90), among other virtuous actions, gives priority to 'freeing the slaves'.

The above can be extended to helping all those individuals and groups whose freedom has been unjustly restricted. We can extend it to include financial slavery - in the form of loans or dues which very often paralyzes the freedom of individuals and groups. Otherwise, the Qur'an uses '*ghārimin*' for financial slavery.

9. *Taqwā* (Piety) and '*Istighnā* (Being free of any obligation/Carelessness); *Taqwā* and *Fujūr* (Lewdness); *Atqā* (Most Pious) and *Ashqā* (Most Hapless Wretch);

In this note, we will study '*Taqwā*' and its three antonyms used within these thirty suwar. The first antonym is '*istighnā*'. While '*taqwā*' stands for 'a responsible attitude in life' '*istighnā*' signifies 'feeling no need to be concerned with one's responsibilities'. *Muttaqis* (or the people, who observe *taqwā*) are those who fear God and who are concerned they should not fail to do their duty to God and their duty to God's servants as assigned by God. However, *Sūrah al-Layl* mentions (92: 5 and 8), there are, basically, two attitudes in social life. Some people share in the needs of others and maintain a responsible conduct throughout their lives. There are others who do not care. They have *istighnā*, (i.e. they are care free). They do *not feel any need* to be concerned with their duties. They do not think they have any.

The Qur'an also uses *fujūr* (lewdness) as an antonym of *taqwā*. According to *Sūrah al-Shams* (91: 8), God has inspired human beings with moral consciousness. Man can distinguish licentious behavior from moral and spiritual excellence.

However, 87: 11 and 92: 15 underline the contrast of *atqā* (most pious) with *ashqā* (most hapless wretched) - one who has become so stone hearted due to his/her morally and spiritually corrupt behavior that the Qur'anic reminding by the Prophet (87: 9-11) does not do any benefit to him/her and he/she violently rejects the most virtuous message of the Qur'an (92: 9).

10. *Falāh* and *Khusrān*

"Salvation", "*mukti*" or "*moksha*" and such other terms are used in religious literature to designate ultimate happiness or ultimate success (in the eternal life), as a result of the pious and virtuous life in this world. The Qur'an introduces the word '*al-Falāh*' (Ultimate Success or Happiness), at the very beginning of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2: 5). The same is repeated at the end of *Sūrah Al-'Imrān* (3: 200). The *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn* (23) relates the qualities of the believers who will achieve *al-Falāh*. (23: 1-11), and then affirms that *al-Falāh* lies in the

inheritance of Paradise. *Sūrah Tāhā* (20: 118-119), suggests that in the Garden (*al-Jannah*) there is complete freedom from all kinds of pain and suffering. *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2) makes it clear that the ultimate abode of God's faithful servants is a place where there **is no fear, no sorrow or grief, and no worries**. This theme is repeated in *al-Baqarah* seven times.

Falāh is a positive concept. Faithful servant's return to **God's Garden** is their entering into the company of the pious people (89: 28-30), in the close neighborhood of God (54: 54-55). This brings immense aesthetic and spiritual pleasure (83: 23, 35 / 75: 23).

Sūrah al-A'lā (87: 14) proclaims: the person who takes care of one's own *tazkiyah* achieves *Falāh*. *Sūrah ash-Shams* (91: 9-10) state the same truth and adds: one who neglects one's self fails (using *khāba* as *Falāh*'s antonym). ***Sūrah al-Asr* (103) which has "path to *Falāh*" as its central theme** does not use the word "*Falāh*" but makes an explicit warning that unless the humanity changes its path it is proceeding toward loss (using *khusr* as antonym of *Falāh*). ***Khusrān*** stands for doom or total loss.

[The following two notes deal with four common words of Arabic language which are used by the Divine text in a very meaningful style that is important for the students of the Qur'an to understand. These are not Qur'anic terms.]

11. Al-Insān (Man) and An-Nās (the people)

Al-Insān, in its dictionary meanings, stands for humankind or Man. However, quite often the Qur'an uses '*al-insān*' to denote 'the dominant current in the today's human world.' It is a **literary style**. For example, consider 89: 15 which criticizes *the way human beings are mostly conducting today*. Obviously, there are exceptions to what is stated in 89: 15 and the following *āyāt*. This description of human conduct continues from 89: 15 to 89: 20. Then in 89: 21-24 a scene from the Hereafter is presented. Occurrence of '*al-insān*' is again repeated in 89: 23. If you understand the *āyah* in isolation, you will say, here it can be very well understood in its original meaning - denoting the whole species of Man or the humankind. But it is not a good idea to neglect the literary context in which the human society was being criticized for going the wrong way and its people would not listen to the Qur'anic reminding. It is the same *insān* - a representative of the same rotten society - who immediately gets the reminded when Hell is brought on the Day of Judgment (89: 6-12).

However, in the present selection of Qur'anic *suwar*, *Sūrah al-'Alaq* (96) is the most important *sūrah* to understand Qur'anic usage of *al-insān*. Consider the first two occurrences in 96: 2 and 96: 5. *The first five āyāt are talking about human species*. The Prophet is being taught the Book, to read it to humankind. God, who created Man out of clot, is teaching Man – through the Qur'an – what Man could have never known without Revelation. However, when you consider the third occurrence of '*al-insān*' (96: 6), it is very clear that here the target of the Qur'anic criticism is the human society which the Qur'an addresses. This society as a whole, is acting as a transgressor against God. *Al-insān* is its representative.

Also consider *Sūrah at-Tin* (95).

Āyah 95: 4 points to the *goodness of human nature*. Man is born with most excellent potential - morally and spiritually. Here, there is no problem with the original meaning of *al-insān*. But then, what does '*al-insān*' denote when the Qur'an mentions *al-insān's* being degenerated to the lowest of the low in 95: 5. Consider 'him' which goes back to *al-insān*. Obviously, the *Qur'an* is *attacking the dominant current* in the human society which is *conducting itself like beasts or even worse*. Consider *āyah* 95: 6 which would highlight the blessed part of human species which was excluded when '*al-insān*' denoted only the dominant current of human society.

Now consider the occurrence of '*al-insān*' in *Sūrah al-'Asr* (103).

It should be obvious that although in *Sūrah al-'Asr* the Qur'an, apparently, affirms that humankind is at a loss, it only means that the way most people are behaving is leading them to loss.

We hope, now our readers will not have any problems in understanding the Qur'anic complaint in *Sūrah al-'ādiyāt* (100: 6). The *sūrah* is, in fact, saying that *most human beings today are acting ungratefully*. The literary style to say this is: "Surely Man (*al-insān*) is ungrateful to his Lord"

An-Nās: 'The people' is a very good translation of '*an-nās*.' The Qur'an is **not** concerned with any **special section** of human society. It is concerned with all members of human society. It is *concerned with human beings in general*, though quite often it may have to address special groups. **God wants to speak to the masses!**

Consider 7: 158 where it becomes clear that all human beings are the addressees of the Prophet. Consider also 2: 21-22. This is the first occasion when the Qur'an gives its essential message. It is very meaningful that before addressing the believers (2: 104), the Children of Israel (2: 40), or the People of the Book (3: 64)), the Qur'an addresses humankind (2: 21-22).

[Consider how earlier prophets in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* (7: 59, 65, 73, 80, and 85) and *Sūrah Yūnus* (10: 71 and 84) use the address, "O my people" (or *Ya Qawmi!*). Also notice, the Qur'an sometimes introduces a prophet as their people's brother (7: 65, 73 and 85). The purpose is to underline the feeling of brotherhood which they all shared. This also confirms that the prophets of God, *essentially*, address people in general and not any special group.]

12. Al-Kitāb (The Book) and Al-Qur'ān (The Reader)

In this selection of the Qur'anic *suwar*, we have three occurrences of '*al-Kitāb*,' (the Book), all in *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* (98), and there is no occurrence of '*al-Qur'ān*' (the Qur'an). However, there is one occurrence of '*a qur'an*' in 85: 21.

It is very interesting to note that the Qur'an uses '*al-Kitāb*' (the Book, in singular), for earlier Divine Book like Torah as well as for the Qur'an itself - as if it is a different edition of the same Divine Book.

There are a very large number of occurrences of '*al-Kitāb*' (the Book) in the Qur'an. Only three times (2: 285 / 4: 136 / 66: 12), the Qur'an uses *kutub* or books (in plural) for revealed books. The purpose is to underline many different occurrences of the revelation to different messengers.



وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ
النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“And We (Allah) have not sent you (O Muhammad (SAW)) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner (against sin) to all mankind. But most of people know not” 34:28

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

“Verily, We (Allah) have sent it down as an Arabic Quran in order that you may learn wisdom”. [12/2]

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ

مِّنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ

“Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong)”. [2/185]



SŪRAH AL-'ALAQ (96)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ١ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ

عَلَقٍ ٢ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ٣ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ٤ عَلَّمَ

الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ٥ كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَيْطَغَى ٦

إِنْ رَأَاهُ اسْتَغْنَى ٧ إِنْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرَّجْعَى ٨ أَرَأَيْتَ

الَّذِي يَنْهَى ٩ عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى ١٠ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ

الْهُدَى ١١ أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى ١٢ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَ

تَوَلَّى ١٣ أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ بِآثِ اللَّهِ يَرَى ١٤ كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَّمْ يَنْتَهُ ١٥

لَنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ ١٦ نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ ١٧ فليدع

نَادِيَهُ ١٨ سَدُّوا زُبَانِيَّةَ ١٩ كَلَّا لَا تُطْعَمُهُ وَاَسْجُدْ وَ

اقْتَرِبْ ٢٠

Al-'Alaq (The Clot)**Sūrah No. 96**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

اقْرَأْ	بِ	اسْمِ	رَبِّ	كَ	الَّذِي	خَلَقَ
Read	with	name	Lord	your	who	created

1. Read with the name of your Lord Who created.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

خَلَقَ	الْإِنْسَانَ	مِنْ	عَلَقٍ	اقْرَأْ	وَ	رَبُّ	كَ	الْأَكْرَمُ
created	Man	from	clot	Read	and	Lord	your	(is) Most Generous

2. Created Man from a clot. 3. Read and your Lord is the Most Generous.

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

الَّذِي	عَلَّمَ	بِ	الْقَلَمِ	عَلَّمَ	الْإِنْسَانَ	مَا	لَمْ	يَعْلَمْ
who	taught	with	the pen	taught	Man	what	did not	he know

4. Who taught with the pen. 5. Taught Man what he did not know

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّا شَاكِرٌ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كُنَّا شَاكِرِينَ

كَلَّا	إِنَّ	الْإِنْسَانَ	لِرَبِّهِ	لَكَنَّا	شَاكِرٌ	أَرَأَيْتَ	إِنْ	كُنَّا	شَاكِرِينَ
Nay	verily	man	in	transgression	that	see	him	independent	him

6. Nay, verily Man is (for sure) in transgression;

7. That he finds himself independent. (well-to-do/having no need)

إِنِّي أَرَىٰ رَبِّي أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ

إِنِّي	أَرَىٰ	رَبِّي	كَ	الرُّجْعَىٰ	أَرَأَيْتَ	الَّذِي	يَنْهَىٰ
verily	toward	Lord	your	the return	Did	who	forbids

8. Verily, toward your Lord is the return! 9. Did you see the person who forbids

عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى ١٠ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى ١١

عَبْدًا	إِذَا	صَلَّى	أَ	رَأَيْتَ	تَ	أَنْ	كَانَ	عَلَى	الْهُدَى
Servant	when	he prays	Did	see	you	that	they were	on	the guidance

10. A servant when he prays (offers his *salāh*) 11. Did you see (think) if he were guided,

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى ١٢ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى ١٣

أَوْ	أَمَرَ	بِ	التَّقْوَى	أَ	رَأَيْتَ	تَ	أَنْ	كَذَّبَ	وَ	تَوَلَّى
Or	he enjoins	with	piety	Did	see	you	that	he denies	and	turn away

12. Or if he enjoins piety, 13. Did you see, if in spite of it, he gives lies and turns away;

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى ١٤

أَ	لَمْ	يَعْلَمَ	بِ	أَنَّ	اللَّهُ	يَرَى
Did	not	he know	that	verily	Allah	sees

14. Did he not know that God sees?

كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لَنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ ١٥

كَلَّا	لَ	يَنْ	لَمْ	يَنْتَ	هَ	لَ	نَسْفَعًا	بِ	النَّاصِيَةِ
Nay	surely	if	not	stop	he	surely	will drag	with	forelock

15. Nay, if he does not stop, we shall surely drag him by his forelock!

نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ ١٦ فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ ١٧

نَاصِيَةٍ	كَاذِبَةٍ	خَاطِئَةٍ	فَ	لَ	يَدْعُ	نَادِيَهُ	هَ
forelock	a liar	criminal	So	let	him call	his	henchmen

16. Forelock, which is a liar, criminal!! 17. So let him call his henchmen.

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ ١٨ كَلَّا لَا تَطْعُهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ١٩

سَ	نَدْعُ	الزَّبَانِيَّةَ	كَلَّا	لَا	تُطْعَ	هُ	وَ	اسْجُدْ	وَ	اقْتَرِبْ
soon	We shall call	angels of Hell	Nay	not	obey	him	and	prostrate yourself	and	draw near

18. We shall also call the angels of Hell. 19. Nay, obey him not, and prostrate yourself and draw near (to God).

Outline Structure of *Sūrah al-'Alaq* (96)

The *sūrah* makes its point in five stages:

- A. **[Ayāt 1-5] "Read in the name of your Lord**
Who created Man from a clot."
God, The Most Generous, taught Man to read and write.
The Divine Book will teach Man
What Man couldn't have learned by himself?
- B. **[Ayāt 6-8] The human situation**
Transgression in the human world:
No sense of accountability.
Those who are well-off act arrogantly.
Tell them: "To your Lord is the Return".
- C. **[Ayāt 9-14] Reading of the Book creates a reaction**
The Divine review on the reaction
'Just see: how immoral and irrational it is!
(This transgressor) would not even let a *servant* pray!! Did he not
even consider: maybe the reader is on the right path, calling people to
piety? If it was the case, and even then,
this opponent turns away and gives him a lie,
does he not know that God is watching?
- D. **[Ayāt 15-18] Warning to the transgressor,**
to embolden the Reader
If he does not stop, God will take an action and then
none will be able to help him.
- E. **[Ayah 19] The concluding remark**
No compromise in delivering the *Tawhidic* message.
The reading aims at bringing the servant nearer to his Lord: 'Prostrate
and get nearness to God'.

An Understanding and Interpretation **of Surah al-'Alaq (96).**

The previous *sūrah* had already introduced the prophetic missions of *Abraham, Moses and Jesus*. In the same perspective, *Sūrah al-'Alaq* **initiated a qur'anic movement, calling the Prophet to "read"** (the Book that will be sent down in installments over twenty three years). The reading takes place in the context of well-to-do people who are acting as transgressors in forgetfulness of their accountability to the Lord of Humankind.

[As the Qur'anic Movement proceeds further, *readers of the Book submit to their Lord, offer their prayer, get more and more involved in the doing of their own duties from God to their fellow humans and in reminding others of their duties.*]

There is violence against **the Reader** to stop him from offering his *salāh* (prayer). The Book uses it as an *opportunity to awaken the public conscience*. There is a severe warning to the criminals in order to embolden the Reader. **God will take care of the enemy, the Prophet should not worry at all!**

The Qur'anic Movement should *continue disregarding all external pressures*. **"Do not submit to any pressure; prostrate to get closer to your Lord"**

SŪRAH AL-‘ASR (103)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْعَصْرِ ۝١ اِنَّ الْاِنْسَانَ لِفِيْ خُسْرٍ ۝٢ اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَّ

عَمِلُوْا الصّٰلِحٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ۝٣

Al-‘Asr (The Passage of Time)

Sūrah No.103

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

وَالْعَصْرِ ۝١ اِنَّ الْاِنْسَانَ لِفِيْ خُسْرٍ ۝٢

و	العصر	اِنَّ	الانسان	لَ	فِيْ	خُسْرٍ
By	the passing of time	Verily	man	surely	in	(is) loss

1. By the passage of time, 2. Verily, Man is in loss!

اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوْا الصّٰلِحٰتِ

اِلَّا	الَّذِيْنَ	اٰمَنُوْا	وَّ	عَمِلُوْا	الصّٰلِحٰتِ
except	who	believe	and	did	virtuous deeds

3. But it will be an altogether different situation, if the people believed, did virtuous deeds,

وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ۝٣

و	تَوَاصَوْا	بِ	الْحَقِّ	وَّ	تَوَاصَوْا	بِ	الصَّبْرِ
and	each other mutual duty	with	the truth	and	each other mutual duty	with	Steadfast

exhorting each other to do their mutual duties and to stand with Truth and exhorting each other to be steadfast. (These people will achieve *Falāh*).

Outline Structure **of Sūrah al-'Asr (103)**

The *sūrah* makes its point in three stages:

A. [Āyah 1] reminds that we learn a lesson from past history. The time allotted to humankind is running out: The *qasam* reminds us how Divine Punishment eliminated earlier civilizations which, in spite of their material progress and technological advancement, became spiritually and morally bankrupt. They transgressed against God, created corruption, social and economic injustice and did not correct themselves in spite of the warnings of the prophets of God.

B. [Āyah 2] Present Human Situation

"Surely, today (also) humankind is rushing toward utter loss (*khusrān*)".

C. [Āyah 3] Possibility of a glorious future for humanity!

Third *āyah* shows the path of *Falāh*, True Happiness or Ultimate Success. It lays down four points.

1. Join the *Tawhidic* Movement of the prophets of God that Muhammad is leading today.
(Stop all corruption and exploitation and)
2. Start doing virtuous (*sālih*) deeds
3. Exhort each other to follow the Truth (*ḥaqq*) and to do mutual duties (*huqūq*)
4. Encourage each other to be steadfast and persevering.

An Understanding and Interpretation **of *Sūrah al-‘Asr* (103)**

The Qur'an is concerned that the purpose of Man's creation is fulfilled and human beings achieve *al-Falah* (Ultimate Success & Happiness). To attain this objective, the *sūrah* **starts with a warning, by way of reminding, but ends up with good news which is tied with a clear-cut program of action.** The *sūrah* describes in a nutshell what the Book discusses in full details at various places. The lesson is drawn from the history of earlier human civilizations as reviewed in the Qur'an.

Today again, there is transgression against God. There is corruption everywhere on earth. The message of the prophets of God is totally neglected. **Humanity is (again) heading toward self-destruction!**

However, if the people follow the **four-point program of action, which the *sūrah* recommends,** this situation will change:

Believing is 'coming out of the servitude of other than God and joining the community of believers'. Doing of *sālihāt* (virtuous actions as against *fāsīdāt* corrupt ones) is just fulfilling the practical implications of our *imān* (belief).

Believing and doing virtuous actions is necessary but not sufficient to save humankind. A movement is to be launched to encourage each other to do (e.g.) our social obligations and to give moral support to each other when we are tested and when we face difficulties

It is interesting to note that the major part of the *sūrah* deals with the positive aspect. It systematically deals with the practical question: **How we can attain Ultimate Happiness and Success (*al-Falāh*)?**

SŪRAH AL-MĀ'ŪN (107)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ ۚ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ ۚ

وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ۚ

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ۚ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ ۚ

وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ ۚ

Al-Ma'ūn (The Small Favor)

Sūrah No.107

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ ۚ

أَ	رَأَيْتَ	الَّذِي	يُكَذِّبُ	بِ	الْإِيمَانِ
Did	you see	who	reject	to	the religion
1. Did you see the person who gives lie (violently rejects it, saying 'it is all a lie') to the Religion?					

فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ ۚ

فَ	ذَلِكَ	الَّذِي	يَدُعُّ	الْيَتِيمَ
So	that	who	repulses	the orphans
2. So, that is the one who repulses the orphan!				

وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ ﴿٣﴾

وَلَا	يَحْضُ	عَلَى	طَعَامِ	الْمُسْكِينِ
and	urges	to	feeding	(of) the poor

3. And urges not the feeding of the poor!

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤﴾

فَوَيْلٌ	لِلْمُصَلِّينَ
So	who pray

4. So, woe to, (those) people who pray (offer *salāh*)

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ﴿٥﴾

الَّذِينَ	هُمْ	عَنْ	صَلَاتِهِمْ	سَاهُونَ
who	they	of	worship	heedless

5. (But) who are heedless of their worship (unaware of their *salāh* i.e. do not know what *salāh* is?),

الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ ﴿٦﴾

الَّذِينَ	هُمْ	يُرَاءُونَ
who	they	would be seen

6. Who would be seen (at worship).
(Whose *salāh* is just a show!)

وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ ﴿٧﴾

وَيَمْنَعُونَ	الْمَاعُونَ
will refuse	small favor

7. And will refuse, if asked for a small favor!

Outline Structure of *Sūrah al-Ma'ūn* (107)

The *sūrah* makes its point in four stages:

- A. **[*Ayah* 1] introduces the subject:** Who are the opponents?
If you know who the people are, that stands in the way of the Qur'anic Movement, then you can understand why they are doing so.
- B. **[*Ayah* 2 & *āyah* 3] together provide the answer:**
These are the same people who are unconcerned with the plight of the alienated or marginalized sections of human society. They would not care for the establishment of a system that would eliminate poverty and hunger.

[They may look like very religious people. They became enemies of the Religion because it emphasizes their duty to the deprived and marginalized people.]
- C. **[*Ayāt* 4-6] remove the misunderstanding of the simple-minded who wonder why some traditionally religious people are standing in the way of the Religion.**

[These central *āyāt* underline: False religiosity is doomed. Worship is not a cultural function. If hearts are devoid of the presence of God, the traditional prayer is of no value, however impressive it may look from the outside!]
- D. **[*Ayah* 7] concludes:**
What good is their religion if they would not help the needy even with a small act of kindness!

An Understanding and Interpretation of *Sūrah al-Mā'ūn* (107)

The *sūrah* repudiates *pseudo-religiosity*. It differentiates the true religiosity from the *false religiosity*.

The first *āyah* of the *sūrah* raises the question: **who are the opponents** of the Religion? Why do they feel so threatened? It is a very meaningful question because quite a few of them look like *very religious people*!

The *sūrah* answers these are the people who do not believe that they have any duty toward the down-trodden or alienated sections of society which is the Religion's main concern. One should not be deceived by their worship (*ṣalāh*) of God which is merely a public show; otherwise, their hearts are devoid of any real consciousness of God. **Such worshippers are doomed!!**

The Religion straightens a person's relationship with God The Most Merciful, Who is *Rabb al-'Alamin* (Lord/Sustainer of the whole world). Quite naturally, as a servant of God comes closer and closer to his/her Lord, consciousness of one's social obligations that are duties from God, also grows more and more.

SŪRAH AL-KAUTHAR (108)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّا آَعَطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ۝ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ۝

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ۝

Al-Kauthar (The Abundance of Good)

Sūrah No.108

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

إِنَّا آَعَطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ۝

إِنَّا	آَعَطَيْنَاكَ	الْكَوْثَرَ	ك	نَا	أَعْطَيْنَا	نَا	إِنَّ
al-Kauthar	you	we	given	we	Verily		

1. Verily, we have given you (O Prophet,) al-Kauthar (The Abundance of Good)

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ۝

فَ	صَلِّ	لِ	رَبِّ	كَ	وَ	انْحَرْ
therefore	pray	for	Lord	your	and	sacrifice

2. Therefore, pray (offer *salāh*) to your Lord and sacrifice.

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ۝

إِنَّ	شَانِئَكَ	هُوَ	الْأَبْتَرُ
Surely	one who hate	you	(is) lopped off

3. Surely, one who hates you is the one that is lopped off.

Outline Structure of *Sūrah al-Kauthar* (108)

The *sūrah* makes its point in three stages:

A. [Āyah 1] Proclamation from the Divine Authority:

“We have granted you (O Prophet!) the *Kauthar*,

i.e. something whose blessings will go on increasing!”

[The understanding of the Quran will grow with the progress in human knowledge. As humanity will strive to follow its guidance, the whole world will be filled with blessings: peace, justice and happiness.]

B. [Āyah 2] The central āyah explains what the Recipient should, therefore, do:

- i) make *salah* (a statement full of meaning!),
- ii) make sacrifice (a statement full of meaning!).

C. [Āyah 3] The concluding āyah tells the Recipient of the *Kauthar* not to worry about the opposition of the Qur’anic Movement: As the movement shall proceed further, gradually all the opposition will wither away.

An Understanding and interpretation **of Sūrah al-Kauthar (108)**

[The previous *sūrah* pointed out that false religiosity is doomed. The present *sūrah* underlines that the blessings of true religiosity will go on increasing! By 'the Religion' in the Qur'anic perspective, we mean the core of the teachings of all prophets of God who stood for true religiosity.]

The Qur'an, which has been given to the Prophet, is an unending source of Divine Blessings. It is the greatest gift from the Creator to the human world at the end of the prophetic movement. As the believing community will continue its reflections on Divine Signs (Qur'anic *āyāt*), in changing human situations; the growth in human knowledge will help further progress in the understanding of the Divine Words. And as the believing community continues to follow the Qur'anic guidance, more and more, justice, peace, prosperity, and progress will prevail in the human world.

[Therefore, it is required that the Qur'anic Community maintains a living relationship with the Divine Words.]

At the same time the *sūrah* underlines the following *items for action*:

1. establish prayer (which includes recitation of the Qur'an and thereby submission to Divine commandments which are underlined in the Divine text)
2. offer sacrifice (continuing the striving in its path of action with perseverance and steadfastness)

Offering of *salāh* (prayer) is also by way of thanksgiving for this great gift of God to the humanity.

As marked above, saying a "yes" to the Qur'anic call (i.e. a positive response to *al-Kauthar*) involves that the human life should be transformed in its light. In the wider sense, establishment of *salāh* symbolizes establishment of the Qur'anic system of life.

Then, ***prayer is not sufficient. Sacrifice is also a must.*** As the Qur'anic movement passes through difficult situations, it will *need that the believers sacrifice their resources* in God's Way - material resources as well as human resources - and keep moving steadfastly, along the way, in spite of all the problems.

The *sūrah* concludes with the good news:

The Qur'anic Movement will prosper more and more!

The hatred and enmity against the Qur'anic Movement will go on decreasing... until it **withers away completely!!**



SURAH AL-KĀFIRŪN (109)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ١

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ٢

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ٣

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ٤

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ٥

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ٦

Al-kāfirūn (The Disbelievers)**Sūrah No.109**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ۝ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ۝

قُلْ	يَا أَيُّهَا	الْكَافِرُونَ	لَا	أَعْبُدُ	مَا	تَعْبُدُونَ
Say	O	Disbelievers	do not	I worship	what	you worship

1. Tell (them): "O Disbelievers!" (People who rejected my call)

2. "I do not worship what you worship."

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ۝

وَلَا	أَنْتُمْ	عِبُدُونَ	مَا	أَعْبُدُ
and	you	(are) worship	what	I worship

3. "Nor, are you going to worship what I worship."

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ۝

وَلَا	أَنَا	عَابِدٌ	مَا	عَبَدْتُمْ
and	I	worship	what	you worship

4. Again! "Neither am I going to worship what you have been worshipping."

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ۝

وَلَا	أَنْتُمْ	عِبُدُونَ	مَا	أَعْبُدُ
and	you	(are) worship	what	I worship

5. "Nor, are you going to worship what I worship."

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ۝

لَكُمْ	دِينُكُمْ	وَلِيَ	دِينِ
your	religion	for	me

6. "(So,) for you, your religion; and for me, my religion."

Outline Structure **of *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* (109)**

The *sūrah* makes its point in three stages:

A. [Āyah–1] The very first āyah introduces the subject:

What to say to those who rejected our message and who are putting pressure upon us to leave our *Tawhidic* mission altogether or make some adjustment in our stand.

[In fact, they have already rejected our message; but they are eager to talk to us in order to make a bargain!]

B. [Āyāt 2–5] Tell them: no good shall come out of our trying to convert each other:

Āyah 2 and *āyah* 3 state: **we have fundamental religious differences.** ‘(When I, i.e., the Prophet, received the Divine Guidance that God and **God alone is to be worshiped**), as your well-wisher, I invited you to it, but now it is quite clear that you are not going to change your religious position’.

Āyah 4 and *āyah* 5 repeat, it is quite clear that each of the two parties is quite firm in its stand. No one is going to change, however, hard you try that I change my religion or I try that you change your religion.

C. [Āyah 6] Peaceful co-existence is possible:

The present conflict can be resolved, if we agree that every individual is free to choose his/her religion and that we should not put any kind of pressure on anyone to change one’s religion.

An Understanding and Interpretation **of *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* (109)**

There should be no compromise in the fundamental principles of the Religion. If it becomes clear that the addressees have in fact already decided that they are not going to believe, then there is no use in continuing the argument with them.

However, everyone is free to follow ones own religion and there should be no coercion of any kind.

Calling to believe is, in fact, an invitation to thinking; however, if it is degenerating into an unfriendly discussion or if some kind of pressure is being applied by any party, then it is better to discontinue this dialogue. Say to the other party: **"You follow your way. I will follow my way. In spite of differences in our approaches, we can live peacefully in the same society.** Freedom of religion is essential! We want it for ourselves. And we give it to others".

The disagreement is between two ways of thinking. They are so radically different!! However, the Qur'an says these are 'two ways of worshipping'.

The Qur'an divides humankind into two camps:

1. Worshippers of One God. Who believe that God alone is the Lord of Humankind and that there should be no lordship of Man over Man.
2. Those who have other masters - other gods (*ilāh*) or lords. In one form or the other, they support lordship of Man over Man.

SŪRAH AL-IKHLĀS (112)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝

Al-Ikhlās (Purity of Faith)

Sūrah No.112

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.)

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝

قُلْ	هُوَ	اللَّهُ	أَحَدٌ	اللَّهُ	الصَّمَدُ
Say	He	Allah	one	Allah	(is) the Eternal, Absolute
1. Say: "He is God, The Only One. 2. God is the <i>Samad</i> (The Being on Whom every being is dependant and He is independent of every being).					

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝

لَمْ	يَلِدْ	وَلَمْ	يُولَدْ
Neither	He begets	and	He born
3. (God) never had (or will have) a son or a daughter nor (God) had a father or a mother.			

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝

وَلَمْ	يَكُنْ	لَهُ	كُفُوًا	أَحَدٌ
And	is	to Him	like/equivalent	one
4. No one, at all, is like (God)." (No one can be a match to God)				

Outline Structure of *Sūrah al-Ikhlās* (112)

The *sūrah* makes its points in four stages:

- A. **[*Ayah* 1]** The introductory *āyah* states in clear terms that God is *just one*. Any effort to bring plurality or duality in the Being of God is not permitted at all.
- B. **[*Ayah* 2]** states the essential point explaining the nature of the Being of God: **God is the *Samad* - the Being upon Whom all beings depend and Who does not depend upon anyone else.**
- C. **[*Ayah* 3]** clarifies that it is confusing to use, in connection with God, a language that we use to designate human relations. God is not father or mother of someone; nor is God, son or daughter of someone.
- D. **[*Ayah* 4]** Concludes: **No being is like (matching) God!**

An Understanding and Interpretation **of *Sūrah al-Ikhlās* (112)**

The Qur'an has been calling the people to join the community of *Allāh's* (God's) loyal (sincere) servants. However, the people are confused about the Being of God. It is required that this confusion is removed through a simple, brief and fool-proof statement in the Arabic language.

The *sūrah* explains that God is the Being on whom all other beings depend and God does not depend on any other being.

Therefore, the first and the foremost truth about God is that God does not have any duality or plurality in God's Being. There is One and only One God.

The second is a warning concerning the use of anthropomorphic language, which designates relations between and among human beings, which should not be used in God's relationship with *any being whatsoever*. That is, we can not say that God is father or mother of any one or God is son or daughter of any one. Likewise, you can not say God is spouse of anyone. Such propositions will not make any sense, and the use of such a language is the most serious crime against God (Glory be to God)!

In a nutshell, God is a Unique Being: No one is like God.



GLOSSARY

The Book	The Qur'an uses "the Book" for various Divine books revealed to the messengers of God - treating them as different editions of the same Divine Book. The Qur'an is the final edition.
The Guidance	Unlike "guidance", "the Guidance" is used for Revealed Guidance in Divine Words or "the Book".
The Messenger	Unlike "the messenger" or "the prophet" which is general,
The Prophet	"the Prophet" or "the Messenger" is used for Muhammad, the last and the final Prophet and Messenger of God.
The Religion	"The Religion" stands for Qur'anic "ad-Din" or the religion of the prophets of God - including Muhammad. Abraham was the first person to name it "al-Islām". Thus the Religion is one; the religions are many.
The Revelation	I am concerned with the content of what is revealed; and not with the metaphysical or psychological nature of the process of revelation. "The Revelation" stands for Revealed Guidance in Divine Words (RGDW) or the Qur'an. I distinguish RGDW from 'revealed guidance in human words'.
<i>Tawhid</i>	Coming out of all servitude and conducting oneself as a servant of One God alone
<i>Sūrah</i>	The Qur'an is composed of 114 discourses or <i>suwar</i> ;
(plural, <i>suwar</i>)	'chapter' is not a good translation of ' <i>sūrah</i> '