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The Qur'anic Studies

1. Grammar & Balaghah (Rhetoric)

1.1 Grammatical Shift For The Rhetorical Purposes: Iltifāt And Related Features In The Qur'ān

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In a study which has been described as pioneering, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*,^[1] Theodor Nöldeke 'discussed in detail the "Stylistische und syntaktische Eigentümlichkeiten der Sprache des Korans" (pp. 5-23) thereby collecting together everything that had occurred to him in this respect during his protracted and intensive study of the Holy Book of the Muslims.^[2] Among the examples Nöldeke discusses (pp. 13-14) are Q. 7 (not 77 which is clearly a misprint in his text): 55,^[3] 27:61; 35:27, 6:99, 20:55, 10:23, etc. where there is a sudden shift in the pronoun of the speaker or the person spoken about, known as **iltifāt** in **balāgha** (Arabic rhetoric), though Nöldeke does not refer to the term here. Introducing his discussion of this feature, Nöldeke remarks that 'the grammatical persons change from time to time in the Qur'ān in an unusual and not beautiful way (nicht schöner Weise)' (p. 13). This is a personal value judgement. Arab writers, in contrast see the matter differently. Ibn al-Athīr, for instance, after studying this stylistic feature, as we shall see below, classed it among the 'remarkable things and exquisite subtleties we have found in the Glorious Qur'ān.'^[4] It will be seen that the examples Nöldeke cites immediately following the statement quoted above do not occur haphazardly in the Qur'ān but follow a pattern. Examination of where exactly the shift occurs and why, will show how effective the technique is in these examples and why Muslim literary critics and exegetes greatly admire **iltifāt** and its related features. Nöldeke further remarks (p. 14) that in a few places the second and third person plural are exchanged abruptly: 30:38, 49:7, 10:23. Here again it will be seen that the changes are made according to an effective pattern and that the frequency of occurrences of this type is much greater than is indicated by Nöldeke.

The impression that the incidence of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān is low can also be gained from books on **balāgha** in Arabic.^[5] These tend to confine themselves to specific examples, including, for instance Q. 1:4, 36:22, 10:22, 35:9, 108:2, repeated with little variation,^[6] to represent the various types of **iltifāt** between 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons. That these only represented a small sample is made clear by reference to the books^[7] of Ibn al-Athīr (637/1239)^[8] who discusses some 20 examples, Suyūṭī (911/1505), who deals with about 35 examples^[9] of **iltifāt** and related features, and Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (794/1391) who provides the most extensive treatment of this phenomenon and includes about 50 examples.^[10] Still, it will be seen from our treatment below that the feature occurs much more extensively in the Qur'ān than even these figures suggest. Accordingly, the way it is treated in these works does not give an accurate picture. We are told there are six types of change in person, but for one of these (1st to 2nd person) they all give just one example - Q. 36:22 and indeed, as we shall see, even that is doubtful. The change from 2nd to 1st person does not occur in the Qur'ān. However, it will be seen that other types are used far more frequently; for instance the change from 3rd to 1st person is represented by well over a hundred examples. Identifying the precise extent to each type will help us to understand the nature and function of the feature under discussion.

It has, moreover, been argued that almost all examples of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān are to be found in the Makkan surās.^[11] This conclusion was perhaps based on surveying examples used in **balāgha** books. It will be seen that a survey of the Qur'ānic text itself gives a different picture.

Iltifāt has been called by rhetoricians **shajā'at al-'arabiyya**^[12] as it shows, in their opinion, the daring nature of the Arabic language. If any 'daring' is to be attached to it, it should above all be the daring of the language of the Qur'ān since, for reasons that will be shown below, it employs this feature far more extensively and in more variations than does Arabic poetry. It is, therefore, natural to find that **al-Mathal al-Sā'ir** of Ibn al-Athīr which deals with **adab al-katib wa'l-shā'ir**, uses mainly Qur'ānic references in discussing **iltifāt**. No one seems to quote references in prose other than from the Qur'ān: and indeed a sampling of hadīth material found not a single instance.^[13] It is hoped that our discussion will explain why this should be so.

Nöldeke treated the verses referred to above as peculiarities in the language of the Qur'ān. As will be seen below, it would not be correct to assume that this stylistic feature is exclusively Qur'ānic in Arabic, though it is an important feature of the style of the Qur'ān. As has been noted, Nöldeke in his discussion did not mention the term **iltifāt**. Nor did Wansbrough, who dedicated a section to 'Rhetoric and allegory'^[14] under the 'Principles of exegesis', list **iltifāt** in his 'Index of technical terms'.^[15] Likewise, Bell-Watt dedicates a section to 'Features of Qur'ānic style';^[16] the author of the article on 'Kor'an' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* has a section on 'language and style'^[17], and the author of the article on the 'Qur'ān I' in *The Cambridge history of Arabic literature* includes a section on 'language and style'.^[18] but none of these writers mentions the word **iltifāt**. It therefore seems necessary to deal with this important feature of Arabic literary and Qur'ānic style.

In this article I shall discuss the meaning of **iltifāt**, other terms used to describe the

phenomenon, the development of **iltifāt** in **balāgha** books, the conditions set for certain types of **iltifāt** and the types of **iltifāt** in general (giving the extent of each), and its place in **balāgha**. Along with **iltifāt** I shall discuss analogous features of this nature, involving grammatical shift for rhetorical purposes; though some of these were not generally labelled as **iltifāt**, they were none the less considered as related to it. In the discussion of specific examples I shall point out where these shifts occur and attempt to explain their effects. Finally I shall deal with the function of **iltifāt** and its related features in general. It is hoped that all this will help to clarify the nature of this stylistic feature and explain its use in the Qur'ān.

The Meaning Of Iltifāt

Lexically **iltifāt** means 'to turn/turn one's face to'. There is the famous line:

وَتَلَفَّتْ عَيْنِي فَمَذَّ حَفِيثٌ عَنِّي الطَّلُوعُ تَلَفَّتْ الْقَلْبُ

'my eye turned to the remains of (my beloved's) encampment; when they passed out of sight, my heart turned to them'.

The word came to be used for turning aside in speech to talk about something before continuing with the original subject. Al-Aṣma'ī (216/831) is said to have used it in this sense. Referring to the line by Jarīr.^[19]

أَتَنَسَى إِذْ تَوَدَّعْنَا سُلَيْمَى بَعُودَ بَشَامَةِ سُقَى الْبَشَامِ

'Do you forget (how it was) when Sulaima bid us farewell at the **bashām** (balsam). May the **bashām** be watered abundantly!'

Aṣma'ī commented: 'Instead of continuing to compose his verses the poet turned to (**iltifat ilā**) the **bashām** to wish it well.' From the above examples and others similar,^[20] one may assume that the name **iltifāt** may have owed its origin to the context of departure and turning back towards the encampment and memory of the beloved, thus attaching an additional emotive aspect to the word.

The word **iltifāt**, here still almost literal, was given a technical meaning as early as the time of Aṣma'ī. But already by the time of Ibn al-Mu'tazz (296/909) we find that the use of the term to denote, broadly, parenthesis, has become secondary; it now refers more frequently to what is defined as departure by the speaker from address to narration or from narration to address and the like (**wa-mā yushbih dhālik**). The phenomenon had been recognized and described by such earlier authors as al-Farrā' (207/822); Abū 'Ubayda (210/825); Ibn Qutayba (276/889) and al-Mubarrad (285/898). who discussed examples of transition in persons; but it was not until Ibn al-Mu'tazz. that it was given the name **iltifāt**.^[21]

The two meanings (parenthetical and transitional) co-existed (being sometimes juxtaposed as we see in Baqillanī's **i'jāz**) apparently for about two centuries. Qudama b. Ja'far (337/948) defines **iltifāt** thus:

while a poet expresses a meaning he may doubt or suspect that someone might reject what he is saying or ask him to explain the reason for it, so the poet returns to what he has said to emphasize it, give the reason, or resolve any doubt about it.^[22]

For Al-'Askarī (d. after 395/1005) this is the second type of **iltifāt**, while the first is that explained earlier by Aṣma'ī.^[23] By the time we come to Zamakhsharī (538/1143) we find him right from the beginning of his **tafsīr**^[24] using **iltifāt** only in the sense of transition in persons; he is, moreover credited with a lucid explanation of the rhetorical effects of this stylistic feature so that what he said sometimes repeated verbatim by many subsequent authors. Finally, when **balāgha** assumed its canonical form in the **Miftāḥ al-'ulūm** of Sakkākī (626/1228), the meaning of transition had clearly become the only one used and that of parenthesis relegated to the past. It may also be noted that Sakkākī added to transition in persons the further dimension of transition from perfect to imperfect verbs.^[25] However, for fuller definitions of **iltifāt** in this final sense, it is to Ibn al-Athīr (637/1239) and Zarkashī (794/1391) that we must turn. The former considered **iltifāt** part of the essence of **'ilm al-bayān** and the basis of **balāgha**. 'Its meaning (of turning) is taken from the turning of a person from his right to left as he turns his face once this way and once the other; such is this type of speech since one turns in it from one form to another. One would for instance turn from addressing a person to talking (about him) in the 3rd person; or - from 3rd to 2nd person; or turn from perfect to imperfect verb or vice versa; or turn in such other ways as will be detailed below.' '**Iltifāt**', he continues, 'is also called **shajā'at al-'arabiyya** (the daring of the Arabic language). 'A daring person', he explains, 'undertakes what others do not dare, and such is **iltifāt** in speech, which', he thinks, 'is peculiar to Arabic.'^[26] Al-Zarkashī for his part, defined **iltifāt** as:

the change of speech from one mode to another, For the sake of freshness and variety for the listener, to renew his interest, and to keep his mind from boredom and frustration, through having the one mode continuously at his ear.

He goes on in the following paragraph to say:

Each of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons has its appropriate context in which it is used. The general opinion is that **iltifāt** is 'transition' from one of them to another after using the first. Sakkākī said it is either this or it is using one in a place where another ought to have been used.^[27]

After dealing with all types of transition in persons Zarkashī concludes with a section on transition to other than persons under the heading **yaqrub min al-iltifāt naql al-kalām ilā ghayrih**, making these related to **iltifāt**. Of the two it is Ibn al-Athīr's definition that is the more precise and his explanation more lucid. Other accounts include those of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Ṭībī (743/1342)^[28] and al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (793/1395), both concise, and the rather more extensive but unoriginal one by Suyūṭī (911/1505). The treatment by Ibn al-Athīr as a writer on the rhetoric of prose and poetry and by Zarkashī as a writer on **'ulūm al-Qur'ān** have thus remained the best examples on the subject.

Other Terms Used To Describe Iltifāt

The phenomenon of transition has not surprisingly, also been designated by other technical terms. Ibn Wahb (312?/9247) called it **al-sarf**; Ibn Munqidh (584/ 1188) called it **al-insirāf**²⁹¹ (both of these meaning lexically 'to depart'); Al-San'ānī (1114/1702) called it **iltifāt** and referred also to its older name, **al-i'tiraḍ**³⁰¹ (parenthesis), while 'Izz al-Dīn b. `Abd al-Salām (660/1262) and Zamlakānī (727/1327) reported that it was called **al-talwīn** and **talwīn al-khitāb**³¹¹ (varying the address). Although **insirāf** did not gain popularity it is actually just as apt. We shall, however, retain here the more recognized term **iltifāt**, the others having now become obsolete.

Conditions Of Iltifāt

In discussing **iltifāt** as it has become well established in **balāgha**, all authors begin with types involving transition in persons and, indeed, some of them stop there. It is with this kind only that authors mentioned conditions of **iltifāt**. The first condition is that the pronoun in the person/thing one turns to should refer to the same person/thing from which one turned. Thus there is no **iltifāt** in: 'You are my friend' but there is **iltifāt** in Q. 108:2.

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ. فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ

'We have given you abundance, therefore pray to *your Lord*', since the reference here is to one and the same, i.e. God. Another suggested condition stipulates that the transition should be between two independent sentences. This perhaps resulted from the observation of a limited number of examples, and was thus rightly refuted by reference to many other examples that do not involve two independent sentences, for example Q. 25:17.³²¹

Types Of Iltifāt And Related Features

These can be of the following types:

- I. Change in person, between 1st, 2nd and 3rd person, which is the most common and is usually divided into six kinds.
- II. Change in number, between singular, dual and plural.
- III. Change in addressee.
- IV. Change in the tense of the verb.
- V. Change in case marker.
- VI. Using noun in place of pronoun.

No. I is the most commonly known and was called **iltifāt** before other types were labelled as such or as related to **iltifāt**.

Nos. I-IV were dealt with by Zarkashī and Suyūṭī, for instance, in a chapter entitled **al-iltifāt**, though some of the types were considered only as related to **iltifāt**. No. V was considered as **iltifāt** by some, according to Zarkashī. No. VI was dealt with along with **iltifāt**, by Qazwīnī, Subkī and Hāshimī for instance, under a general heading combining them both: **khurūj al-kalām 'alā muqtada'l- zāhir** (departure from what is normally expected). In fact, in all these

types we have a departure from the normally expected usage of language in a particular context for a particular rhetorical purpose.

I.

(1) Transition from 3rd to 1st person. This is the most common type - I have come across over 140 instances in the Qur'ān.

(2) From 1st to 3rd person is second with nearly 100 instances.

(3) From 3rd to 2nd person - nearly 60 instances.

(4) From 2nd to 3rd person - under 30 instances.

(5) From 1st to 2nd person - of which there is only one example which is quoted by every author, but which one could argue is not **iltifāt**.

(6) From 2nd to 3rd person, of which there is no example in the Qur'ān as Suyūfī himself pointed out (Itqan, III, 254).

Types 5 and 6 need only a brief mention here so that we may return to deal with the other more important cases. For no. 6 Imru' al-Qays's lines about his long sleepless night were quoted by Zamakhsharī:

تَطَاوَلَ لَيْلُكَ بِالْإِنْمِدِ وَنَامَ الْخَلِيُّ وَلَمْ تَزُقْ
وَبَاتَ وَبَاتَتْ لَهُ لَيْلَةٌ كَلِيلَةَ ذِي الْعَانِرِ الْأَزْمَدِ
وَذَلِكَ مِنْ نَبَأِ جَاءَنِي وَخُبْرَتُهُ عَنْ أَبِي الْأَسْوَدِ

The poet here talks *to* himself in the 2nd person, then *about* himself, then he returns to speak in the first person. It is noteworthy that these lines are always quoted to illustrate this type.

For no. 5 it is Q. 36:22 that is always quoted:

وَمَا لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

'why should *I* not worship Him who created me? and to Him *you* shall return'.

It was suggested that 'you' is in place of '*I* shall return'. This, however, does not have to be so, as Suyūfī indeed said (p. 253). The speaker could simply be warning his addressees that they shall return to God, in which case the condition of **iltifāt** does not obtain here. Suyūfī also quotes Q. 6:73 but this will be discussed under change in tense.

It will be observed for examples of other kinds of **iltifāt** that a great many of them involve God talking in the 1st person or about Himself in the 3rd person; but He does not talk *to*

himself in the 2nd person. Examples from poetry suggest that a poet talks to himself when he reproaches, pities or encourages himself, which clearly does not befit God as seen in the Qur'ān, where 'He has power over all things' (2:20); 'has knowledge of everything' (4: 176); He is 'Performer of what He desires' (85:16) and is 'the Creator of all things' (39:62). This may explain the lack of examples in the Qur'ān of types 5 and 6.

I shall now list occurrences of the four remaining sub-types of **iltifāt** in person. These lists are not meant to be final but to give what is hoped will be a fair picture of the use of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān. It should be pointed out that the word containing the pronoun from which the transition takes place does not necessarily immediately precede that to which the transition occurs; but in any case, nobody makes proximity a condition of **iltifāt**.

1. 3rd - 1st person

2:23, 47, 73, 83, 118, 160, 172; 3:25, 58, 168; 4:30, 33, 37, 41, 64, 74, 114, 174; 5:14, 15, 19, 32, 70, 86; 6:22, 92, 97, 98, 99, 107, 110, 114, 126; 7:37, 57; 8:9, 41; 10:7, 11, 21, 22, 23, 28; 11:8; 13:4; 14:13; 16:2, 40, 66, 75, 84; 17:1, 21, 33, 97; 18:7; 19:9, 21, 58; 20:53, 113; 21:29, 37; 22:57, 67; 24:55; 25:17, 32, 45, 48, 56; 26:198; 27:60, 81; 28:57, 61, 75; 29:4, 7, 23; 30:16, 28, 34, 47, 51, 58; 31:7, 10, 23; 32:12, 16, 27; 33:9, 31; 34:5, 9; 35:9, 27; 36:8, 37; 37:6; 39:2, 3, 16, 27, 49; 40:5, 70, 84; 41:12, 28, 39; 42:7, 13, 20, 23, 35, 38, 48; 45:31; 46:7, 15; 47:13; 48:25, 49:13; 52:21, 48; 53:29; 54:11; 55:31, 58:5; 59:21; 61:14; 65:8; 66:10; 67:5, 17; 68:15, 35; 69:11; 70:7; 72:16; 76:9; 80:25; 86:15; 87:6; 88:25; 89:29; 92:7; 96:15.

2. 1st - 3rd person

2:5, 23, 37, 161, 172; 3:57, 151; 4:30, 33, 69, 122; 6:90, 95, 111, 112, 127; 7:12, 58, 101, 142; 8:4; 10:22, 25; 14:46; 15:28, 96; 16:52; 17:1; 20:4; 21:19; 22:6; 23:14, 57, 78, 91, 116; 24:35, 46; 25:31, 47, 58; 26:5, 9, 213; 27:6; 28:13, 59, 62; 29:3, 40, 67, 69; 30:54, 59; 31:11, 23; 32:25; 33:9, 46, 50; 34:21; 35:31, 32, 38; 36:36, 74; 37:33; 38:26; 40:61, 85; 41:19, 28, 40, 45, 53; 44:6; 45:22, 30; 48:2; 51:58, 53:30; 54:55; 57:27; 60:3; 65:10; 66:12; 67:19; 68:48; 76:6, 24, 29; 87:6; 94:8; 95:8; 97:4; 108:2.

3. 3rd - 2nd person

1:5; 2:21, 25, 28, 60, 83, 214, 229, 233; 3:180; 4:11; 6:6; 8:7, 14; 9:19, 69; 10:3, 68; 11:14; 16:55, 68, 74; 19:89; 21:37; 23:15, 65; 27:90; 30:34; 31:33; 33:55; 34:37; 35:3; 36:59; 37:25; 38:59; 43:16, 47:22, 30; 50:24; 52:14, 19, 39; 55:13, 56:51, 91; 57:17, 20; 67:13; 75:34; 76:22, 30; 77:38, 43; 78:30, 36; 80:3; 87:16.

4. 2nd - 3rd person

2:54, 57, 85, 88, 187, 200, 216, 226, 229, 286; 4:9; 10:22; 16:69, 72; 24:63; 28:16; 30:38; 31:32; 32:10; 45:35; 47:23; 67:18; 75:31.

In the first kind (3rd - 1st) we notice that in the great majority of verses, God is involved in the speech. The transition in this type introduces two powerful elements that accord with the dramatic nature of the language of the Qur'ān, that is: the 1st person itself (which is more powerful than the 3rd as it brings God Himself to speak), and secondly, the element of plurality which expresses more power than does the singular. We may begin by considering the first example Nöldeke introduced after his remark that 'the grammatical persons change from time to time in the Qur'ān in an unusual and not beautiful way', Q. 27:61.

أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنْبَتْنَا بِهِ حَدَائِقَ ذَاتَ بَهْجَةٍ مَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُنْبِتُوا شَجَرَهَا أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ

'Who created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you water from the sky wherewith We caused to grow joyous gardens?'

The point of emphasis here is the great power which caused joyous gardens to grow, a contrast between the abstraction of creative power and the personal involvement of aesthetic creativity. This is not a matter of personal taste or opinion; it is clear from the rest of the verse which goes on to emphasize the point and describe the garden: 'whose trees you could never cause to grow'. Here God reserves for Himself the power to cause them to grow and hence the shift at this point from 3rd person singular to 1st person plural. As it comes suddenly, the shift makes the listener feel afresh the true meaning of the concepts of both 1st person and of plurality, so that the grammatical forms are here given much more weight than they normally carry.^[33] A longer statement in place of this concise, powerful one would have been required if 'normal' grammatical rules had been used without the change in person commented on by Nöldeke. The effect in this example is, moreover, achieved with no loss of clarity since it is obvious that the verse speaks about God before and after the transition. Interestingly, such a technique is also often used with other verses dealing with water, with the shift always occurring at a semantically important point as in Q: 6:99, 7:57, 13:4, 15:66, 20:53, 25:48, 31:10, 35:9, 41:39. In 13:4, for instance, the shift does not occur at making the plants grow but at making their produce different in taste, which is the point in context:

وهو الذي وفي الأرض قطع متجاورات وكنات من أعناب وزرع ونخيل صنوان وغير صنوان يُسقى بماء واحد ويُفضل بعضهم على بعض في الأكل إن في ذلك لآيات لقوم يعقلون.

'It is *He* that... In the land there are adjoining plots: vineyards and cornfields and groves of palms, the single and the clustered. Their fruits are nourished by the same water: yet *We* make the taste of some more favoured than the taste of others. Surely in this there are signs for men of understanding.'

In the first set of examples cited above as discussed by Nöldeke (7:55; 35:27; 6:99; 20:55; 10:23), all but the last deal with water (Nöldeke does not seem to have noticed this), and exhibit the same feature for the same effect. 10:23 also involves water but in a different context that will be explained later.

The shift to 1st person of majestic plural is also suitable for expressing might, e.g. 14:13:

فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ لَنُهْلِكَنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ

'Then their Lord revealed to them: We will surely destroy the evildoers.'

The effect of the particle of oath 'la' and that of emphasis, **nūn al-tawkīd**, is made much more powerful by the presence of God to announce (in direct speech) the punishment Himself in the plural; see also 32:16, 33:9. Abundant giving is also expressed in 1st person plural as if to emphasize a multiplicity of giving, e.g. 4:114:

لَا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّن نَّجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاةِ اللَّهِ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا .

'There is no good in much of their conferences except in his who enjoins charity, kindness, and peace-making among the people. He that does this to please *God*, *We* shall bestow on him a vast reward.'

See also 2:172; 32:1G; 42:38. Similarly, reassuring the Prophet who was anxious that he might forget the Qur'ān was suitably expressed by a shift to the first person divine plural

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى

'... *your Lord* who... *We* shall make you recite so that you shall not forget.'

Also 75:16 19.

It should be pointed out that in pre-Islamic literature, and during the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān, pronouns do not appear to have been used as indicative of status; they did not change with social status, and the plural of majesty, in particular, does not appear to have been used by, or for addressing or referring to, kings or chiefs. The Prophet and his early successors did not use it for themselves not - in their letters to address kings or governors.^[34] It was clearly in the Qur'ān that such usage was introduced, as has been shown, on the basis of a highly sophisticated application of the concept of plurality.

2. 1st - 3rd person

This category is second in number but it is still large compared to those remaining. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of a small number of cases, the person involved in **iltifāt** in categories 1 and 2 is God, while in 3 and 4 this is less commonly the case. Again with the exception of four cases, we find when God speaks in categories 1 and 2, He speaks in the first person plural; in the other part of the transition, He is in the 3rd person singular, referred to either as '**Allāh**', 'He', 'He it is who' or '**rabb**' in the form of 'Your/their/his Lord, Lord of. Two related questions should be discussed here:

1. Who speaks in the Qur'ān?
2. How is it that God, who is believed in Islam to be the author of the Qur'ān, speaks about Himself in the 3rd person?

While admitting that it is allowable for a speaker to refer to himself in the third person occasionally, Bell-Watt find that the extent to which the Prophet is being told about God as a third person is unusual.^[35] Although 'it will be found that much of the Qur'ān is thus placed in the mouth of God speaking in the plural of majesty' (p. 65) they consider that:

difficulties in many passages are removed by interpreting the 'We' of angels rather than of God Himself speaking in the plural of majesty. It is not easy to distinguish between the two and nice questions sometimes arise in places where there is a sudden change from God being spoken of in the third person to 'We' claiming to do things usually ascribed to God, e.g. 6:99b. 25, 45;7. (p. 67)

It is difficult to agree that the 'We', in the two examples Bell-Watt give, refers to the angels since the acts referred to (bringing forth the planets and bringing water down from the sky) are definitely ascribed to God in other parts of the Qur'ān (cf. 50:67, 16:65). Examination of the examples of **iltifāt** shows that it is difficult from the grammatical point of view to conclude - as Bell-Watt seem to do that a part of the statement is spoken by one person (God) and the rest by another (the angels). Bell-Watt concluded: 'In the later portions of the Qur'ān, it seems to be an almost invariable rule that the words are addressed by the angels or by Gabriel using the plural "We" to the Prophet.' No examples are given to substantiate this statement. Does it include a passage like 'O Messenger, We have sent you' (33:46)? But we have to understand this in conjunction with Q. 61:9, 'It is He Who sent His Messenger' - both verses are taken from 'the later portions of the Qur'ān'. Such a procedure should be applied to any passage that may be cited as spoken by the angels.

Commenting on Horovitz's observation that all of the Qur'ān must be regarded as the utterance of God,^[36] J. Wansbrough states:

Less dogmatic than Horovitz, Suyūṭī adduced five passages in Muslim scripture whose attribution to God was at least disputed: Q. 6:104, 114 were the words of the Arabian Prophet; 19:64 (but curiously, not 19:9, 21 and 51:30) were the words of Gabriel; 37:164-66 were ascribed to the angels; finally verse 4 of the **Fātiḥa** may have been uttered by the faithful (**'ibād**) or could by insertion (**taqdīr**) of the imperative **qulū** be attributed to God.^[37]

Suyūṭī, however, did not consider 6:104, 114 as 'the words of the Arabian Prophet'. He discussed the five passages at the end of a chapter entitled **fīmā unzil min al-Qur'ān 'alā lisān ba'd al-sahāba** ('on Qur'ānic passages that have been sent down (revealed), put in the mouth of some of the companions'). The examples include, for instance, passages introducing institutions such as the hijab for the Prophet's wives, which `Umar had wished the Prophet would adopt. Suyūṭī introduced the five passages referred to above by saying: **yaqrub min hādhā mā warad fī'l-qur'ān 'alā lisān ghayr'illah**, which again means they were revealed placed on the tongue of other than Allāh. Suyūṭī introduces 6:114 thus: '**kaqawlihi**' (i.e. 'as

His [God's] saying'), then comments '**fa-innahu awarad^uahā aydan 'alā lisānihi'** (i.e. 'He presented this verse also placed on his [the Prophet's] tongue'). The Verse of the Fātiha is an important example of **iltifāt** (3rd - 2nd), being the first in the Qur'ān and much quoted.

Before discussing this verse, we must deal with the question of why God is referred to, and so frequently, in the Qur'ān, in the 3rd person.

The first and most important reason for God's speaking about Himself in the 3rd person relates to the fundamental message of the Qur'ān, which is calling men to the religion of **tawhīd** according to which 'there is no god but Allāh'. The testimony begins with the negation of any other god, then moves on to except only one, who is named Allāh. No pronoun, even of the first person, will do here in place of the name.

فلاتدع مع الله إلها آخر فتكون من المعدبين

'Call not upon another god with Allāh, lest you incur punishment' - 26:213.

This is clear in verses that show the contrast between Allāh - in this particular name - and any other assumed deity. In successive verses, for instance (27:60-4) we have a structure such as:

أم من خلق السموات والأرض وأنزل لكم من السماء ماء فأنبتنا به حدائق ذات بهجة أإله مع الله بل هم قوم يعدلون .

' . . . Who created the heavens and the earth and brought down for you water from the sky. . . another god besides Allāh? Yet they make others equal (to Him).'

The sequence ends with 'Say: " No one in the heavens or on earth has knowledge of the unseen except Allāh".' The Qur'ānic message is meant to be communicated to men naming Allāh as the lord they should serve. Knowledge of the unseen, creation and Judgement are the prerogative of Allāh in the religion of **tawhīd** and as such frequently accompany His name which is considered in Arabic grammar **a'raf al-ma'āirf** (the most definite of all definite pro/nouns). Similarly, in the Qur'ān **ḥamd** truly belongs to Allāh and it occurs in the text forty odd times together with the name of Allāh or, if it is with His pronoun, comes very soon after the name: in a few cases it combines with **rabb** (cf. also **hudā**). The Qur'ān describes Allāh, in His particular name, to believers and non-believers: He does such and such, e.g. 16:65-81; it is He Who.... 16:10-20. Adjectival structures, ordinary or relative, require a noun before them - in this case, Allāh. Such combinations occur frequently in the Qur'ān (e.g. 1:1 4, 59:22 4). The name of Allāh is also used in verses (frequently at the end, commonly introduced by **kān**) indicating that such is His way, e.g.

سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَقْدُورًا

'That was Allāh's way with those who passed away of old - and the commandment of Allāh is certain destiny.' (33:38)

وَأَنْفَقُوا مَعًا رِزْقَنَا كَمَا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ . . . وَلَنْ يُوَخِّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهَا وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ .

'Give . . . before death comes to one of you and he says "Reprieve me, Lord a while". . . But Allāh reprieves no soul when its term comes: Allāh has knowledge of all your actions.' (63:10-1)

The Qur'ān, it should be remembered, is not an autobiography of Allāh which thus has to be cast wholly in the form of 'I' and 'me'; it is revealed for men who will speak in their prayers and to each other about Allāh. It urges the believers: 'Call, then unto Allāh, making your religion His sincerely, though the unbelievers be averse' (Q. 40:14). It teaches them how to call upon Him in this way: **Al-ḥamdu li'llāh rabbi'l-'ālamīn** (40:65). It is not surprising, then, that this comes at the beginning of the **Fātiḥa** to be repeated in the obligatory prayers at least 17 times a day.

It should also be noted that in some verses God is mentioned more than once, and is depicted from different perspectives so that we have a multiplicity of viewpoints:

إِنَّا كَفَيْنَاكَ الْمُسْتَهْزِئِينَ . الَّذِينَ يَجْعَلُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ . . . فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ . وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ .

'We suffice you against the mockers who serve another god with Allāh. Certainly they will soon know. We know you are distressed by what they say. Proclaim your Lord: praise and prostrate yourself and worship your Lord until the certain end comes to you.' (15:95-99)

Here God Himself speaks in the 1st person plural of majesty to assure the Prophet: from the point of view of the mockers, they serve another God beside Allāh; and from the point of view of the Prophet, he should serve his caring, reassuring Lord. 'All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Allāh' (57:1, 59: 1, 61: 1, 62:1, 64: 1). From God's point of view, He proclaims to all that this is the prerogative of Allāh, shared by no other deity, and believers read this from their point of view, which is that of glorifying Allāh. It is important, then, when discussing reference to God in the 3rd person in the Qur'ān to bear in mind two things: the principle of **tawḥīd** and the multiplicity of viewpoints observed in the language of the Muslim scripture.

In the following examples of the second category of **iltifāt** we see that there is a shift from the 1st person to the 3rd, in which God is referred to as Allāh or rabb, emphasizing **tawḥīd**, and showing the multiplicity of viewpoints: 'Eat of the good things wherewith *We* have provided you, and render thanks to Allāh if it is *He* whom you worship' (2:172). 'We shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, because they ascribe partners to Allāh' (3:151). 'David, *We* have appointed you a viceroy in the land; therefore judge between men justly and follow not caprice lest it leads you astray from the way of Allāh' (38:26). '*We* have given you a manifest victory, that Allāh may forgive you, . . . that Allāh may help you.' (48:1-3). (In this connexion we should remember that the Prophet used to repeat **astaghfir Allāh**.) (Cf. also Q. 4:106, 8:10). Finally: '*We* have given you abundance: Pray then to *your Lord* and sacrifice to

Him - it is he that hates you who is cut off.' (Q. 108).

3. 3rd-2nd person

The shift in most examples of this kind appears to be for the purpose of honouring, reproach, threat and sometimes request. The first example of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān, much quoted in **balāgha** books, is of this kind: verse 4 of the **Fātiha**, coming after praise in the 3rd person:

الحمد لله رب العالمين . الرحمن الرحيم . مالك يوم الدين . إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

'Praise belongs to *Allāh, the Lord of all Being, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate, the Master of the Day of Judgement. You only we serve, You alone we ask for help.*'

Zamakhsharī explains (and he is repeatedly quoted) that when the servant talks about Allāh Who is worthy of praise, and the great qualities mentioned, his mind thinks of this great God who is worthy of praise, of full submission to Him, and whose help should be sought in important matters. The servant then addresses this distinguished Lord, '*You alone do we worship*': after the introduction which demonstrates that He is truly worthy of being worshipped, direct address is more indicative of the fact that He is being worshipped for that distinction.^[38]

One may add that the shift to 2nd person is also important here because the servant is about to ask Him to: 'Guide us . . . !'. The 3rd person was suitable at the beginning to name the Lord Who should be praised and served at the beginning of the book of **tawhīd**. No pronoun of any kind would have served here, and as was said, in Islam praise most truly belongs to that particular name - Allāh. Honouring by addressing is observed in such examples as those speaking of the blessed in Paradise: 'Happy in what their Lord has given them . . . " Eat and drink in health as a reward for what you need to do "' (Q. 52:18 - 19). The address here is announced without an introduction such as 'it will be said to them' - a feature of Qur'ānic style known as **hadhf al-qawl** which gives a statement immediate and dramatic effect.^[39] Examples of this are found, particularly in the kind of **iltifāt** under discussion, to be used for various effects. Thus in '*Their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught: this is a reward for you and your striving is thanked*' (Q. 72:22), the address is honorific while 'They say: "The All-Merciful has taken unto Himself a son"; *you* have indeed advanced something hideous! . . .' (Q. 19:88 ff.), the address is a threat, as also in Q. 16:55, 36:59. In Q. 2:28. 10:3, 37:25 it is rebuke and scorn. The effect of **iltifāt** in such examples is that it makes God Himself appear in the midst of a situation to address a particular group at a crucial point.

Shift to 2nd person can be for request as in:

وَأَوْخَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ . ثُمَّ كُلِّي مِن كُلِّ النَّمْرَاتِ
فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ
يَتَفَكَّرُونَ .

'And your Lord inspired *the bees*: "Make *your* homes in the mountains, trees, and what men thatch. Feed on every kind of fruit and follow the ways of your Lord, easy to go upon." From *their* bellies comes forth a syrup of different hues wherein is healing for men. Surely in this is a sign for those who would give thought.' (Q. 16:68-69)

The switch back to 3rd person in 'from their bellies comes forth . . .' emphasizes to men the wondrous act. In Q. 80:1-3, we have an example of how the Qur'ān revitalizes grammatical forms by drawing attention to them afresh. The passage is clearly addressed to the Prophet as a reproach but it begins by talking about him.

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى . أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى . وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزْكِي . . . أَمَامِنِ اسْتَغْنَى . فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى .

'He frowned and turned away that the blind man came to him. How could *you* tell? He might have sought to purify himself. . . but to the one who reckons he is self-sufficient you pay attention?'

By merely using the 3rd person at the beginning, God is already expressing displeasure at what the Prophet did and upbraiding him before all listeners; turning to the 2nd person after that is in itself a reprimand; the shift is sudden and powerful. The grammatical concept of 2nd person is here given an added effect which is maintained in a number of the following verses.

4. 2nd-3rd Person

This is less frequent than the previous three kinds. We have had in 16:69 an example of how the use of 3rd person expresses wonder and in 80:1 displeasure, making listeners a witness to this. 16:72 shows a similar effect:

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ .

'Allāh has given *you* spouses from among *yourselves* and through them has given you sons and grandsons. He has provided *you* with good things: will *they* then believe in falsehood and deny Allāh's favours?'

In 47:23 we have:

'If you turned away, would *you* than haply work corruption in the land and break your bonds of kin? Those are *they* whom Allāh has cursed . . .!'

The indicative pronoun '**ulā'ika** (those) expresses **ib'ād li'l-tahqīr** (distancing for humiliation). But distancing can also be for honouring, as is recognized in virtually all **balāgha** books^[40] as a feature of Arabic rhetoric. Thus in 30:38 which was cited by Nöldeke, we have an example of honouring:

وما آتيتم من ربًا ليزبوا في أموال الناس فلا يربوا عند الله وما آتيتم من زكاة تريدون وجه الله فأولئك هم المضعفون.

'That which *you* give in usury, that it may increase upon the people's wealth, increases not with Allāh; but what *you* give in alms desiring Allāh's face, those [who do it for the face of God] - *they* receive recompense manifold!'

Nöldeke also cited 10:22. This reads:

هو الذي يسيركم في البر والبحر حتى إذا كنتم في الفلك وجرّين بهم بريح طيبة وفرحوا بها جاءتها ريح عاصف وجاءهم الموج من كل مكان وظنوا أنهم أحيط بهم دعوا الله مخلصين له الدين لئن أبجيتنا من هذه لتكونن من الشاكرين . فلما أنجاهم إذا هم يبغون في الأرض بغير الحق يا أيها الناس إنما بغيكم على أنفسكم .

'It is Allāh that conveys *you* by land and sea, and when *you* are in the ships - and the ships run with *them* rejoicing in a favouring wind, a raging tempest overtakes them. Billows surge upon them from every side and they fear they are encompassed by death. They pray to Allāh with all fervour: "Deliver us from this peril and we will be truly thankful." Yet when He does deliver *them*, they rebel in the earth wrongfully. O Men, *your* insolence is only against yourselves.'

Here, the shift to 3rd person adds another dimension, making the sea travellers seem truly helpless, far away, cut off from anyone to aid them except the Lord they feel they have to turn to. This would have been lost if the verse continued in the initial second person. Moreover, had the verse continued to address them in the 2nd person, then listeners to the Qur'ān who sit in the security of their homes, some never going to sea, would have been less convinced and less affected. He shifted to addressing them again only when the travellers had landed and began, in safety, 'to rebel wrongfully'. Moreover, as Arab writers of **tafsīr** and **balāgha** have observed, when He spoke of the travellers in the 3rd person, He made others witness how they behaved in their helplessness compared to their subsequent behaviour in safety.

In **tafsīr** and **balāgha** hooks writers are moved to high praise of *iltifāt* in this verse, which Nöldeke, clearly viewing it from a purely formal standpoint, failed to appreciate. Nor is this verse an exception in the Qur'ān: the same idea of seafarers is expressed in 31:31- 2 with **iltifāt** to 3rd person producing the same effect, and the theme of helplessness at sea is particularly emphasized in such verses as 17:69, 36:43. 42:32 - 4.

II. Change In Number

The shift here is between singular, dual and plural of which over fifty examples can be found: 2:34, 38, 40, 106, 123, 217: 7:24, 127, 14:31, 37; 15:49; 16:65; 17:36; 20:37, 40, 41, 81, 124; 22:45; 23:51, 66; 27:84; 29:8, 57; 31:15; 32:13; 34:12, 45; 35:40; 43:32, 69; 46:5; 50:30; 54:17, 22, 32, 40; 55:31; 65:11; 68:44; 69:44; 70:40; 73:12; 74:16, 31; 75:3; 77:39; 90:4; 98:8; 100:11.

In many of these examples it is God that is involved in **iltifāt**; the shift to the plural of majesty expresses power with remarkable effect, e.g.:

ولا أقسم بالنفس اللوامة . أياحسب الإنسان أن لن نجعم عظامه . بلى قادرين على أن نسوي بنانه .

'No! *I* swear by the reproachful soul! What, does man reckon *We* shall not gather his bones? Yes indeed; *We* are able to shape again his fingers.'(Q. 75:1 - 4)

It is the singular that is fitting for 'I swear'; the sudden shift to the plural expresses, as it were, multiplicity of power in answer to the pre-Islamic Arabs' incredulity at the idea of putting scattered bones together again at the resurrection. The sudden shift recharges the concept of plural as a grammatical form with its full sense of majesty (see also 55:31. 73:22, 2:40, 13:31, 43:32). The Qur'ān uses the singular pronoun for God particularly in such contexts as those expressing worship (**yā ib'ādī**), prohibition of shirk and wrath; the use of the singular is clearly important in such contexts, and when there is a sudden shift to the plural of majesty it sharpens the listener's sense of the contrast between the two grammatical forms, investing 'we' when it comes after 'I' with enhanced meaning. The Qur'ān thus revitalizes grammatical forms (2:32. 14:31, 20:71, 29:8, 31:15).

This type was regarded as **yaqrub min al-iltifāt** (related to **iltifāt**) by such writers as Zarkashī,^[41] and Suyūṭī.^[42]

III. Change Of Addressee

Various addressees within the same or adjacent verses are sometimes spoken to in the Qur'ān. **Iltifāt** in such verses has the original lexical meaning of actually turning from one direction/person to another. In these examples we normally find the first addressee addressed again with others when there is a request that applies to them all. Thus in 2:144:

فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُمَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ

'Turn your face towards the Holy Mosque; and wherever you (Muslims) are, turn your faces towards it.'

The Prophet, in answer to his personal prayer to be directed to a new **qibla**, is requested to turn his face to the mosque in Makka. Then he and all the Muslims are requested to do so wherever they may be. In 10:87 there is more than one shift:

وأوحينا إلى موسى وأخيه أن تبورا لقومكما بمصر بيوتا واجعلوا بيوتكم قبلة وأقيموا الصلاة وبشّر المؤمنين .

'We revealed to Moses and his brother: " Take *you* (dual) for your people in Egypt certain houses; and make *your* (pl.) houses a direction for prayer and perform the prayers; and do *thou* give good tidings to the believers.'"

The second addressee may not have been there at the moment the first was originally spoken to, but a shift is made as when, in the Qur'ān, God addresses Moses and his people. Thus Satan is addressed, when he requests a respite in order to tempt the children of Adam (who were not yet born). He is told:

إِذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاءُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا

'Depart (sing.)! Those of *them* that follow thee - surely Hell will be your (pl.) recompense.'

The shift has a powerful effect: anyone that follows Satan at any time or place is thus addressed directly by God with this strong warning, rather than merely being informed that any one of 'them' will meet with such a reward. Although **iltifāt** of this kind has its real lexical meaning, it has, in addition, a rhetorical effect, since a person in the second group of addressees can see that he is connected with what has been requested of the first addressee, be it favourable or otherwise. Since the person who is the first addressee is normally included in the second address, this type meets the condition of **iltifāt** mentioned earlier. God as seen in the Qur'ān has access to everybody and may address them whenever He wishes, as is seen in some examples of this type of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān. Since no distinction is shown in contemporary English between singular, dual and plural second person pronouns, in translations of such Qur'ānic passages the shift may go unobserved and its effect be lost.

Here is a list of over twenty examples of this type: 2:144, 148, 150; 4:109; 5:48; 6:133; 7:3; 10:87; 12:29; 16:2; 17:63; 27:93; 28:35; 29:46; 31:31; 33:4, 19, 51; 39:31; 42:13; 48:9; 58:2; 65:1; 69:18; 73:20.

This category was considered **yaqrub min al-iltifāt** by such writers as Suyūṭī,^[43] Zarkashī,^[44] Subkī.^[45] In fact the name **iltifāt** fits this category well, as it is a turning from one person to another.

IV. Change In Verb Tense/Mood

A shift to the imperfect tense serves a number of purposes. It may conjure up an important action to the mind as if it were happening in the present.

اذكروا نعمة الله عليكم إذ جاءتكم جنود فأرسلنا عليهم ريحا و جنودا لم تروها . . . إذ جاؤوكم من فوقكم
ومن أسفل منكم . . . وتظنون بالله الظنونا

'Remember Allāh's favour when there came against you hosts... from above you and below you, when eyes grew wild and hearts reached the throats and you *think* (**wa tazunnūn**) vain thoughts about Allāh. There *were* the believers sorely tried.' (33:10-11)

هو الذي خلقكم من تراب ثم من نطفة ثم من علقه ثم يخرجكم طفلا

'He it is Who *created* you from dust, then from a drop (of seed) then from a clot, then He *brings* you forth as a child.' (Q. 40:67)

The shift may take place because the second remarkable action continues to happen now:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً

'He *sent* down water from the sky . . . and then the earth *becomes* green upon the morrow.' (Q. 22:63)

سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْفَلَكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ

'Allāh *has made* all that is in the earth subservient to you and the ships *run* upon sea by His command.' (Q. 22:65)

A shift to the perfect tense has the effect of making the act appear already completed, hence its frequent use in talking about the hereafter:

وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ . . . وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ

'On the day when We *shall set* the mountains in motion... and We *mustered* them (**hasharnāhum**) . . .'. (Q. 18:47)

وَيَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَفَزِعَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

'When the trumpet *is blown* and all in heavens and earth *became* terrified (**fuzi'a**).!' (Q. 27:87)

A shift from the indicative to the imperative mood highlights a requested act:

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنَا وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلِّينَ

'We *appointed* the House to be a place of visitation for the people, and a sanctuary and: *Take* to yourselves Abraham's station for a place of prayer!' (Q. 2:125)

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ

'Say: "My Lord *has enjoined* justice, and *set* your faces upright (toward Him) at every place of worship!"' (Q. 7:29)

Prayer being a pillar of Islam, the imperative here is more effective than the indicative which gives a piece of information. Similarly, highlighting a good thing is sometimes effectively achieved by a shift from the indicative to the imperative mood:

فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ . وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

'... the fire which *has been prepared* for the disbelievers, whose fuel *is* men and stones; and give glad tidings to those who believe and do good works! ' (Q. 2:23-4)

The shift to the imperative **bashshir** is employed in such other instances as 36:11, 39:17, 61:13. In addition to these, there are more examples of category IV at: 2:25, 125; 7:29; 11:54; 16:11; 18:47; 22:25, 31, 63, 65; 27:87; 33:10; 35:9; 36:33; 39:68; 40:67.

The shift in the tense of the verb was considered **iltifāt** by Sakkākī, as mentioned earlier, and also by Ibn al-Athīr.^[46] It was considered related to **iltifāt** - (**yaqrub min al-iltifāt**) by other writers such as Qazwīnī,^[47] Zarkashī,^[48] Suyūṭī,^[49] and al-Hashimī.^[50] What is involved in this and in the earlier types of **iltifāt** is the same phenomenon, a grammatical shift for a rhetorical purpose.

V. Change In Case Marker

This category differs from other categories discussed here in three respects:

1. It involves only a very limited number of examples, two of which have been called **iltifāt** by some (2:177; 4:162). What is said of these two applies also to 5:69;
2. It was said to be **iltifāt** only according to one reading which involves a shift in the words concerned, but in each case there is another (if less common) reading that does not involve a shift;
3. According to the reading involving a shift, explanations of the shift have been advanced on other grammatical grounds; but explanation on the ground of **iltifāt** remains at least as strong as, if not stronger than other explanations.

In spite of these restrictions, examples of this type have been called **iltifāt** and, at the very least, we may legitimately recognize that such a construction has by its very nature the right to be considered in terms of **iltifāt**.

Zarkashī reports that 2:177 and 4:162 have been considered **iltifāt** according to some,^[51] and the claim appears to have justification as a shift is involved, and it appears to be employed for rhetorical effect. Q. 2:177 counts those who are truly pious, who believe, observe the prayers, give of their substance, however cherished:

ولكنَّ الَّيْرَ من آمن بالله . . . وآتى المال على حُبِّه . . . وأقام الصلاة وآتى الزكاة والموفون بعهدهم إذا
عاهدوا والصابرين في البأساء والضراء وحين البأس أولئك الذين صدقوا وأولئك هم المتقون .

'but the righteous. . . and those who fulfill their covenant (**al-mūfūn**) when they have one and endure with fortitude (**al-sābirīn**) misfortune hardship and peril (of conflict), those are they who are true in faith.'

Al-sābirīn is in parallel with **al-mūfūn**, which is a nominative, and should therefore be nominative (**al-sābirūn**), but there is a shift to the accusative case. How is this to be explained? According to the reports of Zarkashī, it is **iltifāt**. As will be seen below, departure from what is normally expected is done only for a special purpose. Here it can be seen to emphasize the importance of **al-sābirīn**. The need to emphasize the importance of this particular class of people is borne out by the fact that **al-sābirīn** is mentioned four times in the same **sūra**, being

associated particularly with misfortune, hardship, and the battlefield (2:153, 155, 177, 249). The verse following our example of **iltifāt** here speaks of retaliation in homicide, and fighting comes in the **sūra** soon after.

While emphasizing the importance of **al-sābirīn**, the shift in the case marker does not cause any confusion about the role of the word involved and its relationship to other parts of the sentence. The case marker is only one of many (stronger) indications of that relationship, including the order within a series of conjunctions, the adjectival form in the masculine plural.^[52]

Before we go any further, we would consider other opinions about the explanation of this type of shift. In this connexion, J. Burton^[53] quotes a **ḥadīth** that involves examples discussed here (4:162).^[54]

'Urwah questions: 'A'ishah about a number of verses:

4:162 **lākin al-rāsikhūna fi'l'ilm minhum
wa'l-mu'minūna yu'minūna bi-mā unzila ilaika
wa mā unzila min qablika wa'l-muqīmīna
al-Ṣālat wa'l-mu'tuūna al-zākat wa'l-mu'minūna
bi'llahi wa'l-yawm'l-ākhir ula'ika sanu'tihim
ajran 'aziman.**

5:69 **inna 'lladhīna āmanū wa 'lladhīna hādū
wa'l sabi'una**

20:63 **qālū: inna hādhāni la-sāḥirāni**

'A'ishah replied: 'That was the doing of the scribes. They wrote it out wrongly.'

Burton does not appear to question the refutation by Muslims of another report of `Uthmān that speaks of wrong writing, and concentrates on that of `A'isha, commenting, 'as the **isnāds** of `A'isha's reports are sound, the reports themselves could not just be spirited away'^[55] (p. 182). He does not give a source for the soundness of the **isnād**, nor for **isnāds** in general. He gives an account of what Suyūṭī said about the difficulties seen in such reports.^[56] But Suyūṭī speaks only of an **isnād** of 'A'isha's **ḥadīth** which he regards as sound.^[57] This, however is questionable. Suyūṭī gives the **isnād** as:^[58]

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو معاوية عن هشام بن عروة عن أبيه أنه سأل عائشة

Here we have Abū Mu'āwiya as a link in the **isnād**, and he has been weakened by such **ḥadīth** scholars as Tirmidhī, Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Ḥākim in a way that makes it difficult to consider the **ḥadīth** sound;^[59] it is moreover not included in any of the authoritative **al-kuttab al-sitta**.^[60]

In his article, Burton discusses three verses: 2:177; 4:162; 5:69. In the case of 2:177, he gives

a lengthy report on the various opinions of Muslim authors on **wa'l-sābirīn** (which, incidentally, does not occur in 'A'isha's **hadīth**, which he quotes). These opinions can be divided into the following categories.^[61]

1. There is another reading, **wa'l-sābirūn**, which does not involve a shift;
2. **Sābirīn** may be the direct object of 'give money to':
3. **Sābirīn** is made accusative in order to indicate praise;
4. Varying the inflection of one or more conjoined epithets for the specific purpose of drawing attention to their isolation intending to express praise or blame (in our case the former).

No. 4 amounts to the same thing as **iltifāt**: a grammatical shift for a rhetorical purpose. No. 3 has the same intention but 4 is preferable since it does not require implying such things as an omitted verb like **amdah**.

The second example given by Zarkashī as **iltifāt** in case marker is Q. 4 162.

لَكِنَّ الرَّاَسَخُوْنَ فِي الْعِلْمِ مِنْهُمُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ . . . وَالْمَقِيْمِيْنَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالْمُؤْتُوْنَ الزَّكَاةِ .

'But those of them that are firmly rooted in knowledge, and the believers . . . that perform the prayer and pay the alms. . . !

The shift (from nominative to accusative again) occurs here with those 'that perform the prayer' (**wa'l-muqīmīn**). Highlighting prayer here is understandable in the light of the fact that prayer is mentioned nine times in sūra 4, including a long passage about its importance in war, peculiar to this sūra, and how the hypocrites perform it languidly (43:77, 101-3, 142, 167). Here again Burton has detailed the views of Muslim scholars in connexion with the verse,^[62] which can be summarized as follows:

1. Some read **al-muqīmūn**, without a shift;
2. **Al-muqīmīn** describes **al-rāsikhūn**, but is an accusative of praise;
3. Abān b. `Uthmān describes the copying of the text: 'Having written the first part, the scribe asked: " What shall I write?" They replied: "Write **wa'l-muqīmīn** and he wrote down what he heard' - i.e. **wa'l-muqīmīn** which is the direct object of write'. This is rejected on the ground that it appears in the accusative in Ubayy's **mushaf** and in other copies of that of `Uthmān. The **isnād**, has, moreover, been considered weak.^[63]
4. **Al-muqīmīn** is a genitive governed either by: 'they believe in what has been revealed... and [in] those who maintain worship', i.e. the angels; or governed by **min** or **ila**, etc.

No. 4 is less likely to be the case as it requires **taqdīr** or separation of the noun from the preposition that governs it. No. 2 is the more plausible explanation and it has the same function as that suggested for **iltifāt**.

Zamakhsharī, whose views on this verse are not included in the account Burton gives of the views of Muslim authors, recognized the rhetorical effect, rejecting any claim that it was a case of grammatical error in the written text of the Qur'ān, a claim which, in his opinion, could be advanced only by someone who did not read through **al-kitāb**, and did not know the ways of the Arabs in their speech, particularly in their use of the accusative case for singling something out.^[64]

Similar to Q. 2:177 and 4:162, which Zarkashī reported were considered **iltifāt** by some, is Q. 5:69, which is the last of the three verses discussed by Burton.

إن الذين آمنوا والذين هادوا والصابئون والنصارى مَنْ آمَنَ بالله واليوم الآخر وعمل صالحا فلا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون

'Those who believe and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans and Christians - whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good work - there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve'

Ṣābi'ūn appears to be a coordinate with the accusative nouns before it and should accordingly have been accusative, but it is nominative. Here again there is another (if less common) reading **wa'l-ṣābi'in** making it accusative with no shift. Muslim scholars have expressed various views to explain the nominative **ṣābi'ūn**. Burton has given an extensive report of these grammatical views. Some, for instance, see the nominative as justifiable because when **inna** is followed by an invariable noun (here **al-ladhina**), a following noun in conjunction could either be accusative governed by **inna**, or nominative, canceling the government of **inna**.^[65] Rāzī prefers this view. Others see the nominative as marking a fresh sentence, with an unexpressed predicate, i.e.: **wa'l-ṣābi'ūn kadhālik** in the sense that those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good work shall not fear nor shall they grieve, and this also applies to the **ṣābi'ūn**. As Khalīl and Sibawaih put it (Burton p. 193).

The **ṣābi'ūn** have not been co-ordinated with the foregoing groups to bring out that, of all the groups mentioned, they are the most forward. The intended effect of the verse is something like: 'God will accept repentance from these groups, should they believe and do good works and He will wash away their sins, so that even the **ṣābi'ūn** will be treated in this manner if they too believe'.

Burton remarks that men who knew the Qur'ān by heart could make the mental comparison between this verse and Q. 2:62, and we may also add Q 22: 17 - in both of these, **ṣābi'in** is in the accusative in a sequence of accusatives, thus giving rise to no question such as we have in Q. 5:69.

Burton continues (p. 189):

There does not appear to be anything in the grammatical structure of the two contexts that would adequately explain the differing inflections assumed by the same word: **ṣābi'in/ūn**

Rāzī has, in fact, made the comparison between the three verses: Burton ends his article by remarking (p. 196) that:

placing Q. 5:69 alongside Q. 2:62 and Q. 22:17: . . . Rāzī argues that God Most High must have had His reasons for the distinctions between the inflections of the verses. Were we capable of fathoming those reasons, we should indeed have achieved perfection. When we admit that we are incapable of divining those reasons, we recognize the weakness of our human intellects, not any weakness in the Divine Word.

Rāzī's Arabic version is:

لما كان المتكلم أحكم الحاكمين فلا بد لهذه التغييرات من حكم وفوائد، فان أدركنا تلك الحكم فقد فزنا
بالكمال وإن عجزنا أحلنا القصور على عقولنا لا على كلام الحكيم والله اعلم.

It appears from Burton's translation that Rāzī is of the view that we are incapable of perceiving the reasons for these divine variations. In fact, Rāzī preferred the view of Farra' for justifying the nominative. This preference, however, is not specifically attributed to Rāzī in Burton's article (which would have made Rāzī's view clear), but is merely given as 'now seen to be preferable' (p. 194).^[66]

It was also Rāzī who refuted Zamakhsharī's view that a noun coordinated with **inna** and its **ism** could be made nominative only after the predicate had been expressed, but again this refutation was not clearly attributed to Rāzī in Burton's article. Rāzī, moreover, included the views of other Muslim authors which Burton also included. Thus Rāzī and other Muslims have produced explanations for the shift. In fact, closer reading of Rāzī's statement quoted above gives a different view from that presented by Burton:

Since the speaker has the most perfect judgement, these variations must have their sound reasons and benefits; if we are able to understand those reasons we will attain (the desired) perfection (in understanding these matters) but if we fail, we should attribute any failure to the shortcomings of our perception rather than blame them on the speech of the Most Wise.

Thus, it is not '*His* [God's] reasons' but '*their* sound reasons', the word **fawa'id** 'benefits' was left out in Burton's version and obviously these benefits are for men, not God, and it is not the hypothetical '*were we* capable of fathoming those reasons', but the open conditional '*if we are* able to understand' - the conditional particle Rāzī used is **in**, not **law**. He used **in** again, in '*if we fail*', not '*when*', implying that scholars try and some succeed in attaining the desired perfection of understanding. He himself has preferred one opinion Rāzī is simply being modest in not asserting categorically that his opinion is right - which is traditional in Islamic religious scholarship.

As regards Burton's statement that 'there does not appear to be anything in the grammatical structure of the . . . contexts that would adequately explain the differing inflections', if we look beyond the grammatical structure to the semantic context of the situation in 5:69, it is, in fact, different from those of 2:62 and 20:17. Before this verse we read:

O People of the Book: you do not stand on anything, until you perform the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to you from your Lord. (Q. 5:68)

In 5:65 after reporting grave misdeeds of the People of the Book, it goes on:

If the People of the Book would believe and be Godfearing, surely We should remit their sins and admit them to Gardens of Bliss.

Likewise Q. 5:73-3 reads:

They are unbelievers who say 'God is one of three in a trinity': for there is no god except one God. If they desist not from their word, verily a grievous penalty will befall the unbelievers. Will they not turn to God and seek his forgiveness, for God is all-forgiving, all-compassionate.

Thus, before and after 5:69 the importance of true belief and good deeds are stressed: in spite of any straying, even by the **ṣābi'ūn**, those who return to true belief and good work shall not fear or grieve. The context of 2:62 and 22:17 is quite different from this. Judging from the context of the situation, then, **ṣābi'ūn** in 5:69 could be said to require highlighting in the way suggested by Zamakhsharī, Khalīl and Sībawaih:^[67] even the **Ṣābi'ūn** will be forgiven if they believe. . . others will the more readily be forgiven, the **Ṣābi'ūn** being of all the categories listed the most clearly astray. According to this opinion, **ṣābi'ūn** has been singled out by a shift in the case marker for special effect. In this case it would not differ from 2:177 and 4:162, both of which had been understood as **iltifāt**.

VI. Using A Noun In Place Of A Pronoun

This is a substantial category of which I have recorded well over a hundred examples from the Qur'ān; in fact there are many more. Writers on **balāgha** place it along with **iltifāt** under the broader heading of **al-khurūj 'alā muqtadat'l-zāhir** (departure from what is normally expected).^[68] In both there is actually a departure of one kind or another, be it in person, number, addressee, case, reference (noun/pronoun), or tense/mood of a verb. There is no difference between replacing a pronoun by a noun for special effect and replacing 1st person by the 2nd, or singular by plural, for a similar effect. The condition of **iltifāt** obtains in the present category since the person is the same in the noun used and the pronoun it has replaced. To that extent, there is no reason to treat examples of this category in the Qur'ān differently from those treated under **iltifāt** and related features. In fact, when Zarkashī was discussing the reasons for **iltifāt** and giving examples to illustrate his point he included an example^[69] involving the use of a noun in place of a pronoun (Q. 44:4-6). This category comprises the following: 2:59, 60, 64, 105, 107, 109, 112, 115, 153, 157, 207; 3:5; 4:26, 27, 28, 32, 80, 81, 84, 87, 88, 92, 94, 95, 99, 100, 103, 104, 106, 110, 113, 176; 5:39, 40, 54, 83, 97, 98; 6:1, 21; 8:13; 12:87, 90; 13:2, 3; 14:1, 6, 11, 20, 21, 25, 27, 34, 47, 51; 16:18, 19, 84; 17:22; 19:19, 56, 69, 91, 92, 93; 20:130; 21:39; 22:31 58, 60, 61, 62, 72, 78, 23:27, 58, 59; 24:38. 62, 64; 25:17; 28:64, 56, 68, 70, 75, 87, 29:5, 10, 20, 45, 63; 32:3; 33:2, 13, 17, 25, 50; 35:3, 28; 38:4, 26, 27; 39:2, 3, 22; 40:6, 21, 44; 41:27; 42:5, 47, 49, 53; 46:11; 47:4; 57:9, 21, 29; 59:18; 60:1; 61:13; 63:1, 9; 67:11; 74:31; 110:3.

A large number of the examples involve substituting the name of Allāh (sometimes **rabb**) for His pronoun. Thus: 'To Allāh belongs the East and the West; whithersoever you turn there is the face of *Allāh*; *Allāh* is all-embracing, all-knowing' (1:115). Instead of 'His face' and 'He is' we have the name, which is more important than the pronoun; it makes the matter explicitly exclusive to Allāh. Stating the name of Allāh, moreover, in the three successive statements makes each of them absolute, independent and quotable. This is a common feature in the language of the Qur'ān appropriate to a book which asserts that it is the word of God for all times and places. A great many verses end with such absolute, independent, quotable statements as: 'Allāh has power over all things', 'Allāh is all-hearing, all-knowing'. 'Allāh is with the stead-fast', 'Allāh is merciful, compassionate', and the like. Such endings give the statements force and conclusiveness. There are moreover, certain words in the Qur'ān that tend to collocate specifically with the noun Allāh (and less frequently with **rabb**) rather than with the pronoun. We have already mentioned **al-hamd** (praise); other such words are: **fadl** (bounty), **rizq** (provision), **sabīl** (the way), **ajal** (the term set by Allāh), **ba'th** (resurrection) and, to a certain extent, **huda** (guidance). This collocation highlights exclusivity, and contrast with other than Allāh is normally implied.

When a derived (**mushtaqq**) noun is used instead of a pronoun, it indicates causality. Thus in Q. 38:27:

وما خلقنا السموات والأرض وما بينهما باطلاً ذلك ظنُّ الذين كفروا فويل للذين كفروا من النار.

'We have not created the heaven and earth and all that is between them in vain. That is the opinion of *those who disbelieve*, and woe to *those who disbelieve* from Hell-fire.'

Repeating the noun (**lilladhīna kafaru**), instead of using a pronoun (**lahum**) indicates that their disbelief is the cause of their opinion and their doom. Indication of causality in such cases is expressed in Islamic jurisprudence in the formula:

تعلیق الحکم بمسئق يؤذن بعلة مامنه الاشتقاق

'Linking the judgement/proposition to a derived noun (rather than to a pronoun) indicates the causality of the derivational origin.'

A frequently quoted example of the technique of using a noun in place of a pronoun is Q. 33:50:

يا أيها النبي إنا أحللتنا لك أزواجك . . . وامرأة مؤمنة إن وهبت نفسها للنبي إن أراد النبي أن يستنكحها خالصةً لك من دون المؤمنين .

'O Prophet, We have made lawful for you . . . and a believing woman, if she gives herself to *the Prophet*, if *the Prophet* desires to take her in marriage, this is for you only, not for the rest of the believers.'

'- if she gives herself "to the Prophet" rather than "to you".' This restricts the ordinance to the person of the Prophet, emphasized by the repetition of the Prophet'. Q. 110:2-3 gives us two examples of this technique.

إذا جاء نصر الله والفتح . ورأيت الناس يدخلون في دين الله أفواجا فسبح بحمد ربك

'When Allāh's help and victory come, and you see men entering the religion of *Allāh* in throngs, then proclaim the praise of *your Lord*. . . !

In 'the religion of Allāh' in place of 'His' there is emphasis and contrast with the religion of others, 'the praise of your Lord' instead of 'His' reminds the Prophet at the time of victory of the care of his Lord and echoes the request made repeatedly early in his career: 'Be thou patient under the judgement of your Lord' and 'proclaim the praise of your Lord'. (Q. 15:98, 52:48; 68:48).

Ittifāt And Related Features: A Characteristic Of The Style Of The Qur'ān

There are examples of **iltifāt** in pre-Islamic Arabic. Indeed nearly all authors on **iltifāt** as well as early writers on the Qur'ān, and Zamakhsharī in his **tafsīr** who was frequently quoted by subsequent authors, state that it is a well-known feature in Arabic, well established in pre-Islamic poetry. Yet even what these authors themselves say makes it clear that the extent and variety of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān goes far beyond what they have cited in poetry. Even Ibn al-Athīr, whose book was not on the Qur'ān but on **adab al-kātib wa'l-sha'ir**, recognized this:

If you examine the text of the Qur'ān you will find much **iltifāt (ashya' kathīra)**; something of this (**shay' min dhālik**) is also found in poetry.^[70]

The overwhelming majority of his examples are from the Qur'ān. The lists included above give a clear picture of the extent of the feature in the Qur'ān. As was said earlier, it has been suggested that almost all examples of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān are to be found in the Makkan **sūras**. This is not so. As is clear from the lists provided, **sūra 2** (which was revealed over a long period in Madina) contains many instances of **iltifāt** (see also **sūras 6 and 8**). Even in a very late, very short, Madinan **sūra (110)** we find **iltifāt**.

As God speaks in the Qur'ān, He is seen to have access to everybody present or absent, in time (past or future) and place. We have seen in examples of type I (**iltifāt** in person) how God addressed generations not yet born (to warn them against following Satan, for instance). Only limited kinds of **iltifāt** can be expected in poetry, as is observed in examples quoted in **balāgha** books: Imru' al-Qays's lines, for instance, are a form of monologue. This may be partly explained by the fact that, with a few exceptions, such as the poetry of 'Umbar b. Abī Rabī'a, there is very little dialogue in Arabic poetry. God also speaks about Himself in various ways:

كتاب أنزلناه إليك لتُخرج الناس من الظلمات إلى النور بإذن ربهم إلى صراط العزيز الحميد. الله الذي له ما في السموات والأرض.

'A book We have sent down to thee that thou mayst bring forth mankind from darkness to light by the leave of *their Lord* to the path of the *All-Might, the All-laudable, Allāh*, to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth.' (Q. 14:2)

Here we have various aspects, shown in italics each with a shift - either in number person or reference (noun in place of pronoun). In the Qur'ān Allāh speaks *to* the Prophet, the believers, the unbelievers, and sometimes to things; and He speaks *about* them, sometimes commenting on or addressing them at an important point with approval or disapproval. He informs, orders, prohibits, urges, reprimands, promises or warns, all with reference to this world and the next. The limits of a Qur'ānic verse are different from those of an ordinary sentence and many encompass a number of sentences, with different persons, with Allāh at the centre of the situation with access to all, speaking from the viewpoint of various aspects of His Godhead about the various persons/things or talking to them from their multiple viewpoints - this can hardly be expected in poetry. Qur'ānic material is complex and dense: in addition to **al-jumla'l-khabariyya** (declarative statements) there is an unusually high frequency of **al-jumla'l-inshā'iyya** (affective statements). All this facilitates the frequent use of **iltifāt** and its related features.

The use of direct speech is, moreover, an obvious feature of the style of the Qur'ān: so is the omission of the introductory 'he says'. Thus God addresses bees (16:68-9) and mountains (34:10) for instance. The use of the direct speech of the unbelievers in the Qur'ān is important as it records exactly what they utter so that they may be judged by what they themselves have professed rather than by what anybody has reported (see for instance 22:51-69, 26:16-31). Such techniques frequently give rise to the employment of **iltifāt**.

We have also seen how for various theological and rhetorical reasons, certain words collocate with others in the Qur'ān; and how the principle of **tawhīd** and the technique of contrast, the multiplicity of viewpoints, the use of independent, quotable statements, together all affect grammatical forms and give rise to shifts in these which could not be expected in other Arabic poetry or prose, not even the **ḥadīth** of the Prophet or **ḥadīth** Qudsi.^[71]

As can be attested by examining the Arabic text of the Qur'ān and books on **balāgha** and **tafsīr** such as those by `Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Zamakhsharī, for instance, there are two general features that mark the use of language in the Qur'ān conciseness of statement, and the loading of economical statement with maximum effect. These, together with the other factors mentioned, account for the high frequency of the employment of **iltifāt**, and its related features.

The Place Of Iltifāt And Related Features In Balāgha Books

In **balāgha** books, this phenomenon is normally discussed under **ilm al-mā`anī**, for instance, by Sakkākī and Qazwīnī and modern writers. Some classical authors, however, treated it under

`ilm al-badī', as did al-Ṭībī, placing it under **taḥsīn ma'nawī** (semantic refinement/enhancement), as opposed to **taḥsīn lafzī** (verbal embellishment). Sakkākī mentioned it briefly under **badī'** and referred to his earlier discussion under **mā'anī**. Suyūṭī treats **iltifāt** as a type of **badī'** in the Qur'ān. The former (**mā'anī** school) saw it as a departure from what is normally expected, a type of **khurūj al-kalām 'alā muqtada'l-zāhir**. This represents a formal viewpoint. The latter (**badī'** school), on the other hand, looked at it as the effect of rhetorical shift - that is, semantic enhancement - as observed in Ṭībī's analysis. This represents a functional viewpoint. The discussion of **iltifāt** is, however, the same in both schools, and the difference is merely one of a heading. Authors of **balāgha** books recognize that a speaker departs from what is normally expected only 'for considerations required by the situation in certain contexts', as Al-Hāshimī puts it:^[72]

ولكن قد يُعدّل عما يقتضيه الظاهر إلى خلافه مما تقتضيه الحال في بعض مقامات الكلام لاعتبارات يراها المتكلم.

Meeting this requirement of the context is the central issue in `ilm al-mā'anī. The 'semantic enhancement' as viewed in **badī'** is rather general; departure from what is normally expected for considerations seen by the speaker, as viewed in **mā'anī**, is more specific and to the point. In the final analysis, what various authors discuss under **fawā'id al-iltifāt**^[73] are detailed examples of semantic enhancement and the considerations seen by the speaker.

The Functions Of Iltifāt And Its Related Features

As we have seen, **iltifāt** and the related features discussed above involve a grammatical shift. They are discussed in **mā'anī**, under the general heading of **khurūj al-kalām 'alā muqtada'l-zāhir**. Departure from what is expected is done **li'qtida' al-ḥal lidhalik li-urūd i'tibār ākhar alṭaf min dhālik al-zāhir**^[74] (because the situation requires such departure, to meet a consideration more subtle than is normally expected). Departure from the normal without benefit is forbidden in **balāgha mumtani' fi bāb al-balāgha**.^[75] Ibn al-Athīr explains that the shift from one form to another is done only when it is required for some special reason: **al-'udūl 'an ṣiḡha min al-alfāz ilā ukhrā lā yakūn illā li-naw' khuṣūṣiyya iqtadat dhālik**.^[76] With every shift, then, it is natural to ask the reason for such a departure from the norm. Thus Muslim writers on **iltifāt** normally include a section on **asbāb/fawā'id al-iltifāt** (the reasons for/beneficial effects of **iltifāt**). Zamakhsharī^[77] who presents the material in his **tafsīr** mainly in a question and answer format introduced by 'If you said why? how? etc....', 'I would say ...', gives a threefold answer to explain **iltifāt**:

1. This is a technique of **balāgha** well known to scholars in the field, has a technical name, and is of many types.
2. It is a habit of speech of the Arabs, as in the three lines of Imru' al-Qays cited earlier where the shift occurs three times in accordance with the Arabs' way of varying their speech, and because when speech is changed from one style to another this is more likely to raise the interest of the listener than it would if it were all in a uniform style.
3. In specific contexts iltifāt has its own particular benefits.

This explanation was copied, nearly always verbatim, by subsequent authors. The general observation about the Arabs' habit of seeking to raise the interest of the listener made by Zamakhsharī in connexion with Imru' al-Qays's lines was taken unfairly by some authors as representing the reason given by writers of **balāgha** for **iltifāt**. Such authors then retorted that this could not be the reason, since there are long stretches of material without **iltifāt**.^[78] Zamakhsharī, was not of course, setting out to write a chapter on **iltifāt**, but dealing with examples as he met them in his **tafsīr**, and offering eloquent elucidation of the powerful effect of **iltifāt** in such examples.

Zarkashī presents a representative section on the **asbāb** of **iltifāt** (pp. 325- 33). After referring to the general benefit of raising interest and the objections levelled at this by some authors, he gives examples of specific benefits. There is, for instance, the intention to honour the addressee, as in Q. 1:4; adding a useful piece of information contained in a noun used in place of a pronoun (44:6); showing others by a change from 2nd to 3rd person how badly the original addressees have behaved, so that they are turned away from (10:22); the explicit indication by the speaker, through change from 1st singular to 1st plural, that the action is exclusively his (35:9); showing a particular interest in something at which the shift takes place (41: 12) and reproving by suddenly turning to address someone you have been talking about (19:99).

Muslim writers on **balāgha** and **tafsīr** and Arab literary critics who discussed examples of **iltifāt** in the Qur'ān (including those cited by Nöldeke and mentioned at the beginning of this article) showed the beneficial points and powerful effect of **iltifāt**. It should be pointed out that the finer points of certain types of **iltifāt** may not appear in the translation of the Qur'ān into a European language (like English or German) which naturally differs from Arabic in certain aspects of style. This, however, is a problem of translation for which solution should be sought. We are here concerned with Qur'ānic material in Arabic and a feature of style of the Arabic language in general. It was suggested earlier that Nöldeke viewed the examples he cited from a purely formal, grammatical standpoint. As has been observed, he did not mention the term **iltifāt** in discussing the examples he cited. Recognizing that the feature under discussion is very old in Arabic (and is still used in modern Arabic),^[79] has a technical name and countless examples, and recognizing further that a shift or departure from what is normally expected for no reason is inadmissible (**mumtani'**) in **balāgha**, Arab critics, rhetoricians and exegetes have, on the other hand, considered the rhetorical purpose and explained the powerful effect of the grammatical shift.

References

[1] Strassburg, Verlag von Karl J Trübner, 1910.

[2] R. Paret, *The Cambridge History Of Arabic Literature*, I (1983), 205.

[3] According to the numbering system used in the Egyptian edition of the Qur'ān which I follow, this is 7:57; similarly there is a slight difference in some other numbers; but as I include the Arabic version of citations there is no risk of confusion.

[4] *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr fī Sinā'at al-Manzūm min al-Kalām wa'l Manthūr*, (ed.) M. Jawād and J. Sa'īd (Iraq, 1956), 98.

[5] See for instance *al-Tibyān fī 'ilm al-Ma'ānī wa'l-badī' wa'l-bayān*, Husayn b. Muḥammad al-Ṭībī (743/1342), (Baghdad, 1987), 284-8; *al-Idāh fī'ulūm al-Balāgha*, by M. M. A. al-Qazwīnī (793/1338) (Cairo, 1971), 43-5.

[6] This was a general practice for centuries, in writing textbooks on various subjects in Arabic, and not just **balāgha** where some striking examples were simply copied by successive writers who found these age-old examples adequate and saw no need to depart from them.

[7] *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir fī adab al-Kātib wa'l shā'ir*, II (ed.) M. M. 'Abd al-Hamid (Cairo, 1933), 4-19; *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr fī Sinā'at al-Manzūm min al-Kalām wa'l Manthūr* (Baghdad, 1956), 98-105.

[8] A. Maṭlūb, *Muj'am al-Muṣṭalahat al-Balāghiyya wa-tatawwurha*, I (Baghdad, 1983), 302.

[9] *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, III (Cairo, 1967), 253-9.

[10] *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, III (Cairo, 1958), 314-37.

[11] Abū 'Alī, M: *Dirāsāt fī'l-Balāgha*, (Amman 1984), 127.

[12] See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, II, 4.

[13] The famous *al-Arba'īn* of Nawawī, for instance (Beirut 1976).

[14] *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources & Methods Of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford 1977), 227-46.

[15] op cit., 249-51.

[16] *Bell's Introduction To The Qur'ān: Completely Revised & Enlarged By W. Montgomery Watt*, Islamic Surveys, Edinburgh University Press, 1970, 79-85.

[17] *EI* (2nd ed.) V, 419-21.

[18] op cit., 196-20.

[19] Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī, *Kitab al-Sinā'atayn* (Cairo, 1952), 392.

- [20] See Al-Bāqillānī, M. b. T: *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, (ed.) S. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, n.d.), 149-51.
- [21] See *Ma'āni'l-Qur'ān*, I (Cairo, 1955) 60; *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, II (Cairo, 1954), 139; *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo, 1954), 223; *al-Kāmil*, II (Cairo, 1936), 729.
- [22] *Naqd al-shi'r* (Cairo, 1963), 167.
- [23] *al-Ṣinā'atayn* (Cairo, 1952), 392.
- [24] *Kashshāf*, I (Beirut, 1967), 62-5 *et passim*.
- [25] *Miftāh al-'ulūm* (Cairo, 1937), 95, 118.
- [26] *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, II (Cairo, 1939), 4.
- [27] *al-Burhān*, III, 314-15.
- [28] *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-Bayān* (Baghdad. 1967), 152.
- [29] *al-Badi' fī al-sā'ir* (Cairo, 1960), 200.
- [30] *al-Risāla al-'asjadiyya* (Tunis, 1976), 146.
- [31] *al-Fawā'id fī mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Kuwait, 1967), 16: *al-Kāshif 'an I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Baghdad, 1974) 100; see also Tibī, *op. cit.*, 287. In *A Tenth Century Document Of Arabic Literary Theory & Criticism* (1950, 140) C. V. Grünebaum observes: 'Goldziher registers **talawwun** as a synonym of **iltifāt**. **Talawwun** in later usage is however a form of verse which allows the verse to be read in accordance with various meters.' The treatment given above shows that Goldziher was correct.
- [32] See Zarkashī's *Burhān*, III, 31-2; al-Suyūfī, *Itqān*, III, 257.
- [33] If we compare the use of pronoun here to that in other types, we can observe the contrast between the use of the 3rd person - abstract power, the 1st person plural - aesthetic power, and the 1st person singular - personal feeling, the shift emphasizing the quality of each.
- [34] M. Sa'rān, *al-Lughā wa'l-mujtama'* (Cairo, 1963), 139-58.
- [35] *Bell's Introduction To The Qur'ān*, 66.
- [36] *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig, 1926), 5.
- [37] *Qur'ānic Studies*, 14.
- [38] Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, I (Beirut, Dar al-ma'rifa, n.d.), 64-5.

[39] Zarkashī, *Burhān*, III, 196; M, Abdel Haleem. 'Al-Sayyāb: a study of his poetry', in R C Ostle (ed.) *Studies In Modern Arabic Literature* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1975), 78-9.

[40] See for instance Qazwīnī, op cit., 26-7; A. al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir al-balāgha* (Beirut, 1986), 129.

[41] op cit., 234.

[42] op cit., 258.

[43] op cit., 258.

[44] op cit., 334-5.

[45] *Shurūh al-talkhīs* (Cairo: Al-Halabi & Co., 1937), 492.

[46] *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, II, 13-19.

[47] op cit., 46-7.

[48] op cit., 336.

[49] op cit., 258-9.

[50] op cit., 241-2.

[51] *al-Burhān*, III, 325.

[52] See Hassān, T., *al-Lughah'l- 'arabiyya mabanāhā wa-ma'nāhā* (Cairo, 1976), 233-40.

[53] 'Linguistic errors in the Qur'ān', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XXX, 2, 1988, 181-96.

[54] *ibid.*, 181. Burton quotes another ḥadīth: 'When the copies of the revelations which he had ordered to be made were submitted to him, `Uthmān noted several irregularities. "Do not change them", he ordered, the Arabs will change (or will correct them) as they recite".'

This, however does not involve any of our examples of **iltifāt** at all and Burton gives an account (p. 182) of what Suyūṭī said [Suyūṭī, op. cit., II, 270] about the difficulties seen in that reports. Suyūṭī then goes on to deal with the reports.

[55] The way Suyūṭī, Ṭabarī and other Muslim scholars dealt with such material testifies to their moral and academic integrity. There was no attempt to ignore, 'spirit away', suppress or restrict the circulation of any reports, however sound or fabricated, even when they were considered absurd and even when they questioned fundamental matters of the Qur'ān.

[56] We should add to that Ṭabarī's comment that 'Ubayy's mushaf, written by a different hand, in coinciding with the reading of our text shows what is in our mushaf to be correct.' *Tafsīr*, xi (ed.) M. M. Shākir (Cairo, n.d.), 394.

[57] op cit., 269, 272.

[58] op. cit, 395. See also Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, 9, 395.

[59] See Dhahabī: *Mīzān al-i'tidāl*, VI, (ed.) A. M. and F. A. Al-Bijāwī (Cairo, 1963), 249, Ibn Rajah, *Sharḥ 'ilal al-Tirmidhī* (Baghdad, 1369/1949), 347-9.

[60] See also criticism of the reports by M. A. Zarqānī: *Manāhīl al'irfān fī `ulūm al-Qur'ān* (3rd ed. Cairo n.d.), 386-96.

[61] art. cit., 183-6.

[62] art cit. 186-8.

[63] It includes Hammad b. Salama and Aban b. `Uthmān: see *Sharḥ 'ilal al-Tirmidhī*, (ed.) S. J Al-Ḥamīd (Baghdad, 1396/1976), 347-9; for a general discussion, see also Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, (ed.) M. M. Shāker (Cairo, n.d.) IX, 395-9.

[64] *Kashshāf*, I, 631-2.

[65] Or by reason of original grammatical structure before **inna** was introduced.

[66] *Tafsīr*, VI, part 12, 55.

[67] See Burton, 192-3.

[68] Qazwīnī, 42 6: Al-Hāshimī, 239-42.

[69] op. cit. 392.

[70] *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, II, 9.

[71] I have checked *Forty Ḥadith Qudsī*, selected and translated by E. Ibrahim and D. Johnson Davies (Damascus, 1980). Interestingly, God speaks throughout in the first person singular pronoun.

[72] op. cit., 239.

[73] See Zarkashī, 355 ff.

[74] Al-Maghribī's commentary on *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ*, see *Shurūḥ al-talkhīṣ*, I (Cairo Al-Halabi, 1937), 448.

[75] *ibid.*, II, 57.

[76] *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, II, 14.

[77] *Kashshāf*, I (Beirut Dār al-ma'rifa, n.d.), 62-4.

[78] See an example referred to in Zarkashī's *Burhān*, III, 326-8.

[79] Najib Mahfouz, the distinguished Arab novelist and winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1988 does so frequently in his novels written after his naturalistic phase, where he uses the 'stream of consciousness' technique. See H. El-Sakkout, *The Egyptian Novel & Its Main Trends 1913-1952*, (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1970), 115, 141.

1.2 Sudden Changes In Person & Number: Neal Robinson On Iltifāt

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The following material on iltifāt is taken from Neal Robinson's book *Discovering The Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach To A Veiled Text* (1996, SCM Press Ltd.). The chapter is "The Dynamics Of The Qur'ānic Discourse", [pp. 245-252]. This is not to be taken as if we approving his book *in toto*.

For European readers, one of the most disconcerting features of Qur'ānic style is the frequent occurrence of unexpected (and apparently unwarranted) shifts from one pronoun to another. Non-Muslim scholars have tended either to regard these changes as solecisms or simply to ignore them. Muslim specialists in Arabic rhetoric, on the other hand, refer to this phenomenon as **iltifāt** - literally 'conversion', or 'turning one's face to' - and define it as:

the change of speech from one mode to another, for the sake of freshness and variety for the listener, to renew his interest, and to keep his mind from boredom and frustration, through having the one mode continuously at his ear.

Far from dismissing it as a stylistic imperfection, they have prized it as **Shajā`at al-`Arabiyya** - 'the audacity of Arabic' - and have attempted to explain the purpose of the various types of shift. As this subject has recently been dealt with at length by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, I shall

limit my discussion to a few striking examples which occur within single ayahs or sequences of ayahs devoted to the same theme. In order to facilitate the task of the reader, first-person-plural discourse will be printed in bold type and first-person-singular discourse will be printed in bold italics.

Third Person Singular To First Person Plural

Consider the following extract from the revelation section in Surah 69. After the rebuttals of the accusations, the polemical asides, and the affirmation concerning the status of the message, there is a dramatic disclaimer in the first person plural:

It is not the statement of a poet - little do you believe! Nor is it the statement of a soothsayer - little do you remember! It is something sent down by the Lord of the Worlds. **And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand. Then We would certainly have cut his main artery and not one of you could have prevented it!** (69.41-47).

I have already drawn attention to the way in which this disclaimer achieves its effect by objectifying the Messenger, but that is only part of the story. In addition, there is the shock effect of the sudden shift from third-person discourse about 'the Lord of the Worlds', which makes Him seem distant and transcendent, to the immediacy with which He speaks in the first person. The fact that He employs the first person plural emphasizes His majesty and power.

A similar effect may be observed in the polemical section of Surah 96 in the transition from the first part of the lampoon to the menacing peroration:

Does he not know that Allah sees?
Of course not! Yet if he does not stop **We shall drag him by the forelock ...** (96:14f.)

Note that here, too, the first person plural is used when violent action is envisaged.

The sudden shift from the third person singular to the first person plural is also common in signs passages, where it invariably occurs at the point where the sending down of life-producing water is mentioned. The following example is typical:

And it is Allah who sends the winds so that they stir up the clouds, and **We drive them to a dead land and revive therewith the earth after its death. Such will be the resurrection** (35:9)

The reason why the shift occurs at this point is that God's revival of the land is seen as evidence of His power to raise the dead.

Third Person Singular To First Person Singular

Passages in which there is a sudden shift from the third person singular to the first person singular are much less common. In the following example, as with the first passage considered in the previous section, a shock effect is produced by the way in which language which stresses God's transcendence is followed by the irruption of first-person discourse:

The command of Allah comes; so seek not to hasten it. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that which they associate with Him. He sends down His angels with the Spirit on whomsoever He wills of His servants, *Warn that there is no deity but I. So fear Me!* (16:1f).

In this instance, the first person singular is obviously more appropriate than the the first person plural, because it is the unity of God which is in question, rather than His power. The first person singular is also required by the exigencies of rhyme.

A similar effect may be observed in the following passage, which is likewise polemical:

So worship what you like beside Him. Say: 'The losers are those who will lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Truly that will be a manifest loss!' They shall have sheets of fire above them and below them. That is how Allah frightens His servants. *O My servants, so fear Me!* (39:15f.).

Here, too, the unity of God is in question. Moreover, once again the first person singular is also necessitated by the rhyme.

My third example is somewhat different from the previous two, because the first-person discourse represents what God will say on the Day of Resurrection:

So on that day none will punish as He will punish and none will bind as He will bind. O tranquil soul, return to thy Lord well pleased and pleasing. *Enter among My servants, and enter My garden* (89:25-30).

Note, however, that although the unity of God is not mentioned explicitly, the words 'return to thy Lord' are a reminder of the primordial covenant with Adam's descendants (7:172f), in which they ascribed to the exclusive Lordship of Allah. Note too that the shift is highly effective because it occurs at the very end of a surah in which there is no other first-person discourse, but in which Allah is repeatedly referred to as 'thy Lord'.

First Person Plural Or Singular To Third Person Singular

A shift from the first person plural to the third person singular generally marks a transition from the expressive function to the cognitive function, as in the following example:

Thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān and We have turned about in it something of threats in order that they may be godfearing or it may arouse in them remembrance. Exalted be Allah the True King . . . (20:113f.).

In this instance, the shift not only ensures the presence of a message, by furnishing a statement which can be re-employed by believers, but also serves to efface the Messenger by making it clear that it is not he who is to be extolled.

The same process is at work where the shift is from the first person singular to the third person singular, as in the following two passages:

Their predecessors cried lies and how great was My horror! Have they not regarded the birds above them, spreading their wings and closing them? Nought holds them but the All-merciful. Surely He sees everything (67:18f.).

Therefore fear not humankind but fear Me and sell not My signs for a paltry price. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has sent down - they are the losers (5:44).

In both instances, the shift furnishes a message which can be repeated. It also affirms Allah's transcendence.

First Person Singular To First Person Plural

A shift from the first person singular to the first person plural often occurs in order to stress the power and majesty of the speaker, as in the following passage:

And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life, and We shall raise him on the day of resurrection, blind (20:124f.).

Shifts of this kind occur in four surahs which begin with oaths. The following is typical:

Nay I swear by the Day of Resurrection!

Nay I swear by the self-accusing soul!

Does Man think that We shall not gather his bones? (75:1-3).

Because the oaths are in the first person singular, they establish direct and immediate communication, but the shift to the first person plural is necessary in order to safeguard against the reader wrongly inferring that it is Muhammad who is swearing them.

First Person Plural To First Person Singular

A shift from the first person plural to the first person singular introduces a note of intimacy or immediacy. The context may concern the provision of guidance, as in God's words when expelling Adam from paradise:

We said: 'Get down all of you from this place. So surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve ...' (2:38).

Alternatively, the shift may mark the transition from instruction to threat, as in God's words to Noah:

And make the ark before Our eyes and [in accordance with] Our revelation, and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they shall be drowned. (11:37).

The following passage, in which God addresses Muhammad, is another example of this:

We know best what they say, and thou art not one to compel them; therefore remind by means of the Qur'ān him who fears *My threat*. (50:45).

In this instance, the shift to the first person singular is also necessitated by the rhyme. It is particularly effective, coming as it does at the very end of the surah.

From The Third Person To The Second Person

All the passages examined so far have involved a change in the person or number of the pronouns representing the speaker, but *iltifaat* also occurs with respect to the addressee. Most commonly this involves a shift from the third person to the second person, which I shall indicate by changing from roman to italic. The best-known example occurs in the *fatihah*, where it marks the worshippers' turning to God in request:

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds
The Most-merciful, the All-Merciful,
the Master of the Day of Recompense.
Thee only do we worship, thee only do we ask for help (1:2-5).

Usually, however, shifts of this kind occur when God is the speaker. Sometimes He turns to address those whom He has been speaking about, in order to threaten them:

They say the All-merciful has taken to Himself a son. *You have advanced something monstrous!* (19:88f.).

Sometimes, on the contrary, He turns to address them in order to honour them by His nearness:

Surely the godfearing shall be in gardens and bliss, rejoicing in what their Lord has given them. And their Lord will guard them against the punishment of Hell. *Eat and drink with wholesome appetite because of what you used to do (52:17-19).*

From The Second Person To The Third Person

More rarely, the shift may be from the second person to the third person. This has the effect of objectifying the addressees. It may be done in order to enable them to gain self-knowledge by seeing themselves externally, as in the following example:

And Allah has given you wives of your own kind, and has given you sons and grandchildren from your wives, and has bestowed good things on you. Do they then believe in falsehood and disbelieve in Allah's favour? (16:72).

Alternatively, the speaker may wish to distance himself from the addressees in order to humiliate them,

That is because you took Allah's signs for a jest and the life of the world deceived you. So on that day they shall not be brought forth from it, nor shall they be granted goodwill (45:35),

or in order to honour them,

Then give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarer; this is best for those who desire Allah's pleasure, and these it is who are successful (30:38).

More Complex Examples

There are in the Qur'ān a number of passages which contain two or more pronominal shifts in the space of a few ayahs. To the reader who is familiar with the different types of shift and their significance, these should not pose too many problems. My first example is relatively straightforward, despite the fact that the speaker shifts from the first person plural to the first person singular, and then to the third person singular, before finally reverting to the first person plural:

By no means! Surely We have created them of what they know. But nay! I swear by the Lord of the eastern places and of the western places **that We are certainly able to replace them by others better than them ... (70:39-41).**

The two pieces of first-person-plural discourse would be perfectly intelligible if read consecutively, ignoring the intervening material. God is the speaker, and His use of 'We' is entirely appropriate in this context where He speaks of His power to create human beings. The temporary adoption of the first person singular establishes the immediacy of the oath, while the reference to God as 'the Lord of the eastern places and of the western places' ensures that the cognitive function of the Qur'ānic discourse is not neglected.

My next example is the celebrated reference to the Night Journey, together with the two ayahs which follow it:

Glory be to Him who caused His servant to travel by night from the inviolable place of worship to the furthest place of worship, **the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him some of Our signs; surely He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance to the Children of Israel, 'Do not take a protector besides Me'. [They were] the offspring of those whom We bore with Noah; surely he was a grateful servant (17:1-3).**

The words in ordinary type, with which the surah opens, correspond to the language which human beings customarily employ when engaging in worship, but the reference to Muhammad as 'His servant' safeguards against the inference that these words are uttered by him. The sudden shift to the first person plural is appropriate in view of the fact that the Night Journey was an expression of God's majesty and power. This shift also makes clear that God is the speaker. The shift back to third-person discourse maintains the sense of worship and ensures the cognitive function of the communication. The resumption of the first person plural for the references to Moses and Noah serves to put what happened at the furthest place of worship on a par with two previous demonstrations of God's majesty and power: the revelation of the Torah and the preservation of Noah's family from the flood. Within this first-person-plural discourse, the brief quotation in which God speaks in the first person singular strikes a note of peculiar intimacy and draws attention to the central importance of the

exclusive claims of the One God. . Now let us examine three ayahs which begin with the singular imperative 'Say', but which include words spoken by God in the first person:

Say, 'If the sea were ink [for writing] the words of my Lord, surely the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were completed, **even if We brought another like it to replenish it'** (18:109).

*Say, 'If there were on the earth angels walking about in peace and security, **We would certainly have sent down for them from the sky an angel as a messenger'** (17:95).*

Say, '**O My servants who have transgressed against themselves**, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Truly Allah forgives sins He is the All-forgiving, All-merciful' (39:53).

In the first of these, a surprise effect is achieved by the sudden shift to the first person plural. God Himself intervenes in all His majesty to utter fresh words, thereby showing that (as stated) His words will never be complete. In the second, the intervention is again in the first person plural, but it coincides with a shift to the third person plural 'them' to refer to the addressees. Thus, at the moment when God intervenes to express His power and majesty, He also distances Himself from the unbelievers in order to humiliate them. The third ayah is more puzzling because the imperative 'Say' is immediately followed by God's speech in the first person singular. Although this strains the normal rules of syntax, it establishes intimate communication between God and the believers, thus making them more receptive to the cognitive element of the message which is to follow.

My final example is a passage which non-Muslim scholars have frequently treated with scorn:

*He it is who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze, and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the billows surge in on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience: 'If Thou dost deliver us from this, we shall most certainly be of the grateful ones.' But when He delivers them, lo! they are unjustly rebellious in the earth. **O humankind! your rebellion is against your own souls - provision of this world's life - then to Us shall be your return, so We shall inform you of what you did** (10:22f.).*

At first sight it may appear hopelessly garbled, but the three consecutive pronominal shifts are all perfectly logical. The shift from the second person plural to the third person plural objectifies the addressees and enables them to see themselves as God sees them, and to recognize how ridiculous and hypocritical their behaviour is. The shift back to the second person plural marks God's turning to admonish them. Finally the speaker's shift from the third person singular to the first person plural expresses His majesty and power, which is appropriate in view of the allusion to the resurrection and judgment.

1.3 Between Grammar And Rhetoric (Balāghah): A Look At Qur'ān 2:217

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I. The Problem

The Qur'ānic verse 2:217 raises a problem which has been exercising the minds of Muslim scholars. The problem has to do with the case-ending of the phrase *wa'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi* in the verse. As Abū Ḥayyān says: *wa qad khabata 'l-mu`ribūna fī i`rābi wa 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi.*^[1] Rudi Paret calls the verse "rough,"^[2] and, although he does not explain where the roughness lies, he probably has in mind the aforementioned problem and the attempts of earlier writers to come to grips with it. In this paper we shall argue first, that the traditional attempts to solve the problem have not been very successful, and, second, that a more satisfactory alternative explanation of the problem does exist. In doing so, it will be suggested that the traditional views on the above-mentioned verse are indicative of a general weakness of the traditional approach to Qur'ān interpretation.

II. Traditional Solutions

The problematic phrase occurs in the first part of the verse. For purposes of reference, we shall divide that part into the following units:

- A. *yas'alūnaka `ani 'l-shahri 'l-ḥarāmi qitālin fīhi*
- B. *qul qitālun fīhi kabīrun*
- C. *wa ṣaddun `an sabīli 'llāhi*
- D. *wa kufrun bihī*
- E. *wa'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi*
- F. *wa ikhrāju ahlihī minhu*
- G. *akbaru `inda 'llāhi*

The issue is: What is the genitive case-ending of *al-masjid* in E due to, or which is the same thing, to which preceding phrase is E joined by conjunction? We shall begin by reviewing some of the answers given by traditional scholars.^[3]

Ṭabarī: Ṭabarī solves the problem by supplying the preposition *`an* before *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, and gives the underlying construction (*ta'wīl al-kalām*) as: *wa ṣaddun `an sabīli 'llāhi wa kufrun bihī wa `ani 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi wa ikhrāju ahli 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi . . . akbaru `inda 'llāhi mina 'l-qitāli fī 'l-shahri 'l-ḥarāmi.*^[4] Simple as this explanation is, it raises a problem which Ṭabarī neither discusses nor alludes to. It makes *`ani 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi* the

ṣilah of *ṣadd*, a *maṣdar* (in C), *ʿan sabīli ʿllāhi* becoming the *mawṣūl*, with *wa kufrun bihī* interposed between the two. But this violates the well-known rule of grammar that nothing may come between a *ṣilah* and a *mawṣūl*. It may also be asked why, in the Qurʾānic construction itself, *al-masjid al-ḥarām* succeeds *wa kufrun bihī* instead of preceding it, for its precedence would have made the verse problem-free?

Zamakhsharī: As if sensing the objection that might be made to Ṭabarī's explanation, Zamakhsharī, in his paraphrase of the verse, transposes D and E: . . . *ya ʿni, wa kabā'iru qurayshin min ṣaddihim ʿan sabīli ʿllāhi wa ʿani ʿl-masjidi ʿl-ḥarāmi wa kufrihim bi ʿllāhi wa ikhrāji ahli ʿl-masjidi ʿl-ḥarāmi . . .*^[5] This, however, is not a fresh solution, for the received sequence of the phrase-units in the verse remains unexplained, as in Ṭabarī's.

Farrā': Farrā' holds that E (*wa ʿl-masjidi ʿl-ḥarāmi*) is joined by conjunction to *al-shahr al-ḥarām* in A. In other words, the question asked was about the Sacred Months and the Sacred Mosque both. Thus, the sequence of B-D could be explained in one of the two ways: (i) *Qitālun fīhi* in B is the *mubtada'*, whereas the *khobar* is made up of *kabīr* in B and of C and D.^[6] In other words, fighting during the Sacred Months is not only a great sin in itself, it is also equivalent to keeping people from the path of God and disbelieving in Him.^[7] (ii) *Qitālun fīhi kabīrun* (B) is a complete sentence, containing both the *mubtada'* and the *khobar*; *wa ṣaddun ʿan sabīli ʿllāhi* is a *mubtada'*, and so is *kufrun bihī*, the *khobar* of each (= *kabīr*) having been omitted since the context points to it. In other words:

qitālun fīhi kabīrun

wa ṣaddun ʿan sabīli ʿllāhi kabīrun

wa kufrun bihī kabīrun^[8]

Farrā's explanation of the syntax of the verse is open to several objections: (1) An ordinary reading of the verse suggests that the question asked was about fighting during the Sacred Months, not about fighting in the Sacred Mosque; (2) on (i), fighting during the Sacred Months would constitute disbelief in God, which is obviously wrong; and (3) on (ii), it would follow that expelling the believers from the Sacred Mosque would be a graver sin than disbelieving in God, another unacceptable conclusion.

Rāzī: Rāzī takes up the cudgels on Farrā's behalf, making three points. First, it is quite conceivable that people had asked the Prophet (peace be on him) about fighting in the Sacred Mosque as well. To fight in the Sacred Mosque was held to be as heinous as to fight during the Sacred Months, and so the question could pertain to both. Second, if (i) makes fighting during the Sacred Months tantamount to disbelief in God, then this, too, is understandable. For the word *qitāl* in *qul qitālun fīhi kabīrun*, being indefinite, is not the same as the indefinite *qitāl* in the preceding *yas'alūnaka ʿani ʿl-shahri ʿl-ḥarāmi qitālin fīhi*.^[9] This being so, it is conceivable that at least one kind of *qitāl* - that which aims at uprooting Islam - is kufr. Third, if, on (ii), it follows that expelling the believers from the Sacred Mosque is a graver sin than disbelief in God, then there is a sense in which this is true: to expel the Prophet (peace be on

him) and the Companions from the Ka`bah constitutes not only disbelief - for only disbelief could have motivated one to do so - but unwarranted persecution as well, and this double act of disbelief and persecution is surely graver than the single act of disbelief.^[10]

Rāzī, while showing great ingenuity in responding to the objections against the interpretation presented by Farrā', does not vindicate the syntax of the Qur'ān itself. With E taken to be *ma`ṭūf* on *al-shahr al-ḥarām* in A, the verse comes to have a highly convoluted structure. And Rāzī's attempt to equate fighting during the Sacred Months with disbelief in God, or to establish that the double act of disbelief and persecution is worse than the single act of disbelief, is a sleight of hand, and not a very good one at that.

Abū Ḥayyān: Abū Ḥayyān prefers to make *al-masjid al-ḥarām* the *ma`ṭūf* of the pronoun in *bihī*.^[11] The objection (made by Basran grammarians) that for the *`atf* on a genitive pronoun (*ḍamīr majrūr*) to be valid, the preposition should, as a rule, be repeated with the *ma`ṭūf* (that is, the wording should have been *wa bi 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi*) is refuted by Abū Ḥayyān on the strength of a number of illustrations from the Qur'ān and the classical Arabic poetry.^[12] But there remains the objection that the resulting notion of "disbelief in the Sacred Mosque" appears to make little sense,^[13] and that one has to resort to tortuous interpretation to make it meaningful.

None of the four writers discussed above - Tabarī, Zamakhsharī, Farrā', and Abū Ḥayyān - offer a completely satisfactory explanation of the problem raised by the Qur'ānic verse 2:217.^[14] The interpretations of Tabarī and Zamakhsharī make sense in themselves, but they ignore the sequence of the phrase-units in the verse. Farrā's explanation hardly makes a case for Qur'ānic eloquence; it is, to use Abū Ḥayyān's words: *mutakallafun jiddan wa yab`udu`anhu nazmu 'l-Qur'āni wa'l- tarkību 'l-fasīḥu*, and Rāzī goes to needless lengths to defend it. Abū Ḥayyān's own explanation, which requires one to swallow the phrase "disbelief in the Sacred Mosque," is no less *mutakallaf*. Of all these interpretations, the one by Zamakhsharī would make the most sense - if the Qur'ān had actually used the sequence of phrases suggested by Zamakhsharī. Is some other explanation possible?

III. An Alternative Solution

The real problem, thus, is not the case-ending of *masjid* in E, but phrase D (*wa kufrun bihī*), for no matter how one explains the case-ending of E, one still will have to explain the location of D in the verse. The task, therefore, is to explain why D has been placed between C and E. Is D an intrusion? It seems that D is not an intrusion, and that its peculiar location in the verse is quite significant. A brief general observation is offered before explaining the phenomenon.

The treatment of the Qur'ānic verse 2:217 shows that the traditional scholars regard the question of the relationship between A and B-G essentially as a question of grammar, whereas it is, in fact, a question of *balāghah*. They are concerned with establishing proper syntactic relationships between the various phrases of the verse - they try to identify antecedents, the two terms of a conjunctive phrase (*ma`ṭūf* and *ma`ṭūf`alayh*), and so on - but it does not occur to them to ask whether the apparently unusual construction of the verse is meant to highlight a

point which an ordinary, grammatically more acceptable construction would fail to highlight.^[15] In the paragraph that follows an attempt will be made to explain the role of D in the verse by highlighting four points. ^[16]

First, D (*wa kufrun bihī*) stands to C, E, and F to the relation of cause to effect. Thus the verse is saying that the acts of preventing people from taking the path of God (*ṣaddun `an sabīli 'llāhi*), preventing them from entering the Ka`bah (*wa'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi*), and expelling its residents^[17] (*wa ikhrāju ahlihī minhu*) can be committed only by those who have no faith in God. The word *kufṛ*, though it may be said to signify, in its present context, the disbelief that is opposed to belief in Islam, really is quite general and signifies the absence of any meaningful belief in God. The verse is thus saying that God-fearingness in any degree, and a belief in God that is genuine in any degree, would be sufficient to keep one from committing such acts, but that the Quraysh, in committing them, are providing evidence of their utter faithlessness, or rather of the utter meaninglessness of whatever belief they have in God. That D bears to the three acts, C, E and F, the relationship of cause to effect is borne out clearly in the case of C and E and implicitly in the case of F, by several other Qur'ānic verses. For example, the verse 8:36 says that those who disbelieve, spend their wealth to prevent people from taking the path of God: *inna 'lladhīna kafarū yunaḥḥūna amwālahum li-yaṣuddū `an sabīli 'llāhi*. The verse 48:25 reads: *humu 'lladhīna kafarū wa ṣaddūkum `ani 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi*. The verse 5:2, addressing those who believe - that is, those who have not committed *kufṛ* - says that their faith keeps them from stopping a rival people from visiting or entering the Ka`bah (*yā ayyuhā 'lladhīna āmanū . . . lā yajrimannakun shana'ānu qawmin an ṣaddūkum `ani 'l-masjidi 'l-ḥarāmi*).^[18] D is thus a key phrase in the verse.

Second, D is a parenthetic remark, which means that, essentially, the verse is supposed to be read as if D were not there. If we leave D out for the moment, the verse presents no problem. Besides, the omission of the preposition *`an* before *al-masjid al-ḥarām* becomes very meaningful. For it implies that keeping people from the Sacred Mosque (E) is so intimately connected with keeping people from the path of God (C - or, to put it differently, the latter act is such a clear instantiation of the former - that the same preposition which governs *sabīl Allāh* is considered still operative and thus governs *al-masjid al-ḥarām* as well.

Third, to recognize the intimate connection between C and E is to recognize the significance of the interposition of D between C and E. By first establishing a close connection between C and E, and then deliberately breaking that connection through the insertion of D between them, the Qur'ān accomplishes something that a more "regular" construction would not: it creates the right psychological moment for focussing the reader's attention on the root-cause of the three criminal acts mentioned in the verse (C, E, and F).

Fourth, the interposition of D is justified not only from the psychological, but also from another viewpoint. Unlike the other verses, cited above, in which the cause - disbelief - is cited first and the effect - preventing people from taking the path of God, and so on - later, in the verse 2:217 the cause is sandwiched between the several effects. The unusual arrangement is due to the fact that, of all the verses that deal with this theme in the Qur'ān, the verse 2:217 alone is satirical. "O yes," the verse says, addressing the Quraysh, "if you want to know why

you are led to commit these acts, then here is why: you have no faith in God!" We should think of the phrase as written in parentheses and punctuated with a sardonic exclamation mark:

They ask you about fighting during the Sacred Months.

Say: Fighting during them is a great sin. But keeping others from the path of God (and disbelieving in Him!) and the Sacred Mosque and expelling its residents from it is a much greater sin in the eyes of God.

Seen in this light, the placing of D between C and E no longer appears to be jarring or intrusive. Not only D seems to be appropriately located, any other sequence of the phrase-units in the verse - whether it is (with the necessary pronominal and other adjustments made) - B, D, C, E, F, or B, C, E, F, D, or B, C, E, D, F would fail to underscore effectively the importance of the root cause - disbelief - of the acts condemned in the verse, and would also fail to convey the force of the satire intended.

IV. Concluding Note

In the opening paragraph, a general weakness of the traditional approach to Qur'ān interpretation was referred to. The weakness was hinted at in Section III. Here are a few more words about it.

The yoke of grammar lies heavy on traditional Qur'ān interpretation. Knowledge of Arabic grammar is of course essential for interpreting the Qur'ān and its syntax, and an inability to follow discussions of the Qur'ānic grammatical issues in traditional works can be very costly. But in reading those works, for example, Abū Ḥayyān's *Al-Bahr al-Muḥīt*, one sometimes feels that the grammatical categories have become an end in themselves.^[19] I have tried to show, with reference to a single Qur'ānic verse and hence on a very small scale, that grammar has its limitations, and that there are situations where considerations of *balāghah* may override those of grammar, lending power to the discourse. Precisely where considerations of *balāghah* should take precedence over those of grammar is not easy to decide. In general, however, a seeming departure from the normal rules of grammar should alert one to the possibilities of *balāghah*. "This is the most unkindest cut of all," says Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play about the man. Irrespective of whether the use of the double superlative was or was not known in Shakespeare's time, Caesar's remark has, in the particular context in which it is uttered, a force and logic of its own, and even if Shakespeare were writing today, it is unlikely that one would wish his Caesar to use the grammatically correct single superlative. The question to be asked in connection with *wa kufrun bihī* in the verse 2:217 is: Does the position of D in the received arrangement of the verse carry any significance, and whether that significance would be lost if D were placed differently? To this question the answer is: yes.

Notes & References

[1] Abū `Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf, known as Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Nahr al-Mādd min al-Bahr*, on the margin of his *Al-Bahr al-Muḥīt*, 8 vols., (Riyadh: Maktabāt wa Maṭāba` al-Nashr al-Ḥadīthah, 1389/1969?), 2:146.

[2] Rudi Paret, "The Qur'ān - I," in A. F. L. Beeston *et al.*, eds., *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 205.

[3] It should be noted that the verse gives rise to a number of other problems also. While these do not have a direct bearing on our discussion, some of them will be mentioned and treated briefly later in the paper.

[4] Abū Ja`far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi` al-Bayān `an Ta'wil āy al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. in 12 (Cairo: 1373/1954), 1:347.

[5] Abu'l Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn `Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf `an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa `Uyun al-Aqāwīl*, 4 vols., (Beirut: Dār al-Ma`rifah, n.d.), 1:131.

[6] Or, the three (*kabīr* C, and D) make up *khabar ba`da khabar*. Fakhr al-Dīn Abū `Abd Allāh ibn `Umar al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols., (Cairo: 1353- t381/1934- 1962), 6:34.

[7] As for F and G, they make up a new sentence, F being the *mubtada'*, G the *khabar*. The pronoun in *minhu* in F in this case will have a specific referent: *qitālun fīhi* in B.

[8] *Ibid.* 6:34. As for F and G, they will again make up a new sentence (see previous note). But in this case the referent of the pronoun in *minhu* will be the entire combination of *qitālun fīhi* (in B), C, and D.

[9] The argument here is that, having occurred in the verse already, the word *qitāl* in its second occurrence (that is, in *qul qitālun fīhi kabīrun*) ought to have been definite. For more details, see Rāzī, 6:32-33.

[10] *Ibid.*, 3:35.

[11] Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Bahr al-Muḥīt*, 2:148. Abū Ḥayyān not only prefers this construction, he regards it to be the one intended, though the only support he offers for it is the rather subjective statement: *li-anna wasfa` l-kalāmi wa faṣāḥat al-tarkībi taqtadī dhālika* (*ibid.*).

[12] *Ibid.*, 2:147-48.

[13] Shihāb al-Dīn al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma`āni*, 30 vols. in 15, (Beirut, n.d.), 2:109.

[14] Many other scholars accept one or the other of the explanations given by these four commentators.

[15] We have noted above the problem of the separation of a *ṣilah* from its *mawṣūl*: those who take E to be governed by the preposition `an in C, have to explain why D stands wedged between C and E. Traditional writers do address this question, but their solutions to it continue to make grammatical heavy weather. Thus attempts have been made to explain the *wāw* between *ṣaddun `an sabīli 'llāhi and kufrun bihī* in such a manner as to make the two an integral unit, so that the issue of D's being an intrusion is avoided. The said *wāw* could, for example, be taken as the *wāw* of explication (*li 'l-tafsīr*) (cf. Rāzī, 6:34: . . . *anna 'l-ṣadda `an sabīli 'llāhi wa 'l-kufra bihī ka 'l-shay'i 'l-wāḥidi fī 'l-ma`nā fa ka'annahū lā faṣla*.) It has also been suggested (ibid.) that D, though it really belongs after E, has been placed before it because of the greater significance attached to it (*li faṭṭ al-`ināyah*). The problem with the first explanation is that it is an explanation of convenience. After all, why should C and D alone should be held to be identical? Why not E and F as well? The problem with the second explanation is that it is too vague and lacks substance. What, in the present context, does *faṭṭ al-`ināyah* consist in, and precisely why does it necessitate putting D between C and E?

[16] In making these points I shall devote too much attention to B (which is a preliminary and brief answer to the question asked in A), or to G (which is *khābar* of B-F).

[17] The word *ahl* has been used in two senses in the verse: (1) residents and (2) those to whom Ka`bah rightfully belongs, or who have a legitimate claim to it.

[18] See also the verses 4:167; 8:34, 36; 16:88; 22:25; 47:1, 32, 34.

[19] Of course, the traditional writers do not completely neglect *balāghah* in interpreting the Qur`ān; far from it. It is somewhat excessive pre-occupation with grammar to which I have tried to draw the attention.

2. Literary Aspects

2.1 The Qur'ān As Literature

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I

In the 1890s Richard Moulton, author of *The Literary Study Of The Bible*, was able to justify the need for his work by pointing out that 'Literature', as opposed to 'literatures' - Greek, Hebrew, and German - 'is a separate entity' which, with its 'foundation forms ... such as Epic, Lyric, Dramatic,' deserves to be studied in its own right, and that such a study would break new ground (iv-v). And in 1987 Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, editors of *The Literary Guide To The Bible*, spoke with satisfaction of the proven effectiveness of the literary approach to the Bible (2), adding that there is 'a need, felt by clerical and secular students alike, to achieve a new accommodation with the Bible as it is, which is to say, as literature of high importance and power' (4). The Qur'ān, like the Bible, is an acknowledged literary masterpiece. But, unfortunately, it has not yet received the kind of attention Moulton speaks of with reference to the Bible. And it will probably not be in the near future that one will be able to speak, as on the literary front regarding the Qur'ān. But, one might ask, does there not exist, at least in Arabic, a large number of works dealing with the literary qualities of the Qur'ān? Such works certainly exist. But most of them are, in respect of their orientation, premises, and structure, works of theology rather than of literary criticism, a typical example being *The Inimitability Of The Qur'ān* by the medieval scholar Abū Bakr Baqillanī (950-1013). This being the case, studying the Qur'ān as literature - and purely as literature - is not unlike setting foot on new territory.

A meaningful literary study of a discourse assumes that the discourse possesses a certain degree of unity and coherence. The Qur'ān is divided into 114 chapters (Arabic: sūrah), the obvious major units of the scripture. The chapters are of varying lengths, from three verses to 286. That these units possess any unity or coherence is a notion foreign to most of the traditional Muslim scholars, to whom each sūrah is composed of so many isolated verses or passages.^[1] This atomistic view of the Qur'ān, for which there are historical reasons,^[2] has been a great impediment to a study of the Qur'ān as literature. In traditional works, the Qur'ān is made out to be somewhat like the epitaph on the tomb of Midas the Phrygian: '[I]t makes no difference,' as Socrates explains to Phaedrus, 'what order the lines come in' (264c). This is not to disparage those works, for they have much to offer, and they must always serve as a starting point for the literary study of the Qur'ān. It is nevertheless true that the assumption of disjointedness has veiled much of the Qur'ān's literary excellence from view. An important

way in which twentieth-century Qur'ān exegesis differs from classical exegesis is that many Muslim scholars today regard the Qur'ān as possessing significant coherence. This development, which cannot be discussed here,^[3] makes a systematic literary study of the Qur'ān both possible and imperative. Such a study, if carried out with a properly developed methodology, will for all practical purposes be new in character.

A systematic literary study of the Qur'ān should be conducted in accordance with the principles of literary criticism and independently of theological considerations. The issue of the relationship between the theological and the literary aspects of a scripture is a difficult one. The two aspects are linked, but not integrally, which makes it possible, or even desirable, to study them independently of each other. That they are linked is obvious from the fact that the Qur'ān makes use of literary techniques and devices to present its message: it tells stories, cites parables, uses figures of speech, and draws character sketches, for example. That they are not linked integrally needs a little explanation.

The Qur'ān claims to be inimitable and challenges its opponents to produce a work like it (e.g. 2:23; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33-34). The inimitability later came to be constructed essentially in literary terms, and the theologians made belief in the matchlessness of the Qur'ān part of a Muslim's faith. In its historical exposition, the doctrine of inimitability made the literary study of the Qur'ān a handmaiden to the theological aspect of the scripture. But the doctrine overlooks a crucial fact. The Qur'ānic challenge was addressed not to the believers but to the unbelievers, and was not simply denunciation of the unbelievers, but constituted an invitation to them to carefully examine the Qur'ān and see if it could have been, as they claimed it was, the product of the mind of a man possessed. Irrespective of what conclusion one reaches on the question of the Qur'ān's origins, one must agree that the underlying assumption of the challenge was that the merit and beauty of the Qur'ān could be appreciated even by those outside the fold of the faith. And if that is the case, then it would be possible to dissociate the literary study of the Qur'ān from the theological study of it.^[4]

For certain purposes it may even be necessary to effect such a dissociation. Perhaps a basic difference between a literary and a theological-legal approach to scripture is that the former looks for continuities, the latter for discontinuities, in the text. Under the assumption of continuity, one looks for links and connections between verses and passages, and only upon failing to find any does one concede that the text is discontinuous. But a typical Muslim theologian or lawyer searches for theological or legal content in the Qur'ān, and, as soon as he finds such content, focuses on it, often in disregard of the context. But in so doing he runs the risk of making serious errors of interpretation. Consider 56:77-80:

This is a noble Qur'ān, [which originates] in a hidden [or well-protected] book, [and which] no one but the pure touch, [and which is] a revelation from the Lord of the universe.

Taken in context, these verses draw a distinction between the revelation of a prophet and the inspiration of a soothsayer. The Arabs believed that the soothsayers had control over genies (Arabic: *jinn*) who brought them reports from the heavens, and one of the charges against Muḥammad^(p) was that he was a soothsayer pretending to be a prophet. The Qur'ān here is

saying that Muḥammad's^(p) revelation, unlike the soothsayers' inspiration, is authentic. It makes two points, not at all unfamiliar to a student of the Qur'ān: (1) that the Qur'ān originates in a well-guarded book (in 43:4 and elsewhere called 'The Mother Book') that is with God - the implication being that the Qur'ān has an unimpeachable source; (2) that it is angels, 'the pure ones,' who bring down the Qur'ān - the implication being that the medium through which the revelation is conveyed to Muḥammad^(p) is an additional guarantee of the unadulterated nature of the revelation. The soothsayers' inspiration, on the other hand, is neither pure of origin nor secure against tampering by the wicked genies. The conclusion is obvious: Muḥammad's^(p) revelation is from God. This is the internal logic of the verses. But legal scholars offer a different interpretation. They single out the verse (80), 'None but the pure touch it,' disregard the immediate and wider contexts, and interpret 'the pure' to mean 'those who are ritually pure,' thus making the verse mean that only a person in a state of ritual purity may touch the Qur'ān. If asked what relationship verse 80 would bear to those preceding and following it, they would have no answer, but that is the least of their worries: the verse speaks of 'purity,' and that is sufficient warrant to write scores of pages in books of law expounding the need to be ritually pure before touching the Qur'ān. This may be an extreme example of the 'manhandling' of scripture by legalistically-minded scholars, but the point is clear; looking for continuity rather than discontinuity in the text could prevent some unwarranted interpretations. Moulton is right when he says: 'Historic and literary study are equal in importance; but for priority in order of time the literary treatment has the first claim' (viii-ix). For, as he adds, the text of scripture 'cannot be truly interpreted until it has been read in the light of its exact literary structure' (ix).^[5]

What should one expect to find in the Qur'ān by way of 'literature'? A brief comparison with the Bible seems inevitable. Because the Qur'ān is composed of Muḥammad's^(p) revelations only and the period of the compilation of the Qur'ān is rather short, the Qur'ān does not possess the literary variety of the Bible. There are, for example, no folk songs in the Qur'ān, no elegies and lamentations, no prophetic rhapsodies, no idyllic poems, and certainly no acrostic. On the other hand, the Qur'ān possesses a rich literary repertoire of its own. Besides making a masterful use of language on the level of words and phrases, it contains figures of speech, satire, and irony; employs a variety of narrative and dramatic techniques; and presents characters that, in spite of the sparse personal detail provided about them, come across as vivid figures. For those who can read the Qur'ān in Arabic, the all-pervading rhythm which, in conjunction with the sustained use of what may be called rhymed prose, creates in many sūrahs a spellbinding effect that is impossible to reproduce. There is the characteristic terseness of the Qur'ānic language which makes for some complex constructions, but which is difficult to convey in English without being awkward. The existing translations of the Qur'ān impose a further limitation, for they fall so far short of the highly nuanced original that a detailed study of the Qur'ānic language and style on their basis is well-nigh impossible.^[6]

The Qur'ān dealt with a variety of subjects over a period of more than two decades. It is natural that it should come to have considerable stylistic variety. Still, in a certain sense, the Qur'ān is marked by a unity of content and style that admits of taking a synchronic approach, especially in a study like the present. First, historically as well as theologically, the Qur'ānic revelation was mediated through a single individual, Muḥammad^(p). Second, it is generally

agreed that the compilation of the Qur'ānic text was finished, or nearly finished, in a short period of time - within Muḥammad's^(p) lifetime, according to some authorities. On these two counts, the Qur'ān comes to possess a unity that would justify taking the Qur'ān in its finished form as the starting point of a literary investigation. To the argument that the Makkan-Madinan division of the Qur'ānic sūrahs calls for a diachronic approach since the Makkan sūrahs (revealed from 610 to 622) are more poetical and rhetorical and the Madinan (622-632) more discursive and matter-of-fact, one could reply by saying that many literary devices (such as ellipsis) are as characteristic of the Madinan sūrahs as they are of the Makkan. It is true, however, that, in general, the Makkan sūrahs, with their greater narrative and dramatic element, are best suited for such a study.

II

Word Choice

The Qur'ān uses words with precision and subtlety, and often the text yields its full meaning only after a careful re-reading of it. For example, an impatient Jonah^(p) shakes the dust of Nineveh off his feet and, boarding a ship, departs. 37:140 reads:

When he fled to a laden ship.

The Arabic word used for 'fled' is *abaqa*, which is specifically used for a runaway slave. Jonah^(p) of course is no slave. But then he is one - a slave of God. This one word imparts a whole new meaning to the incident. Being in the service of God, Jonah^(p) ought not to have decided on his own to quit prophesying; he should have waited for God's command. His 'running away' is thus not simply a physical act that may be reported as a historical event; it is an act fraught with moral implications.

In 622 AD, Muḥammad^(p) and his followers emigrated from Makkah to Madinah. Madinah (literally, 'city'- short for 'city of the Prophet') was formerly known as Yathrib. In the Qur'ān, the city is invariably called 'Madinah' - except once, in 33:13, where it is called 'Yathrib'. The verse reports how, at a time of crisis, a certain group of people deserted the ranks of Muslims, appealing to their compatriots ('O people of Yathrib!') to give up Islam for lost. The use of 'Yathrib' instead of 'Madinah' graphically portrays the mentality of the deserters: they were convinced that Islam was about to be wiped out and that the city would no longer be the 'city of the Prophet' but would revert to its pagan status, becoming once again 'Yathrib' (Islāhī V:200).

In another example, 'To strengthen someone's back or arm' is an Arabic idiom that means 'to support someone'. In 20:31, Moses^(p) prays to God that He appoint Aaron^(p) as his assistant. The Arabic literally translates: 'Strengthen my back by means of him'. In 28:35, which is a reply to the prayer, God says: 'We shall strengthen your arm by means of him'. The difference between 'back' and 'arm' in the two expressions appears to be a slight one, but perhaps it is not. 'To strengthen one's back' is like providing 'backing', while 'to strengthen one's arm' is like providing 'muscle'. As such, the former suggests furnishing A with support through B in a

situation where the brunt of the task will be borne by A but B, who is standing close by - 'in back of him' - may be called upon to help when necessary. 'To strengthen one's arm', on the other hand, would suggest providing A with support through B in a situation where B will be an active partner to A throughout, or will be A's 'right arm'. If this analysis is correct, then the Qur'ānic use of each of the two idioms would be contextually significant: Moses^(p), conscious that the chief responsibility for carrying out the mission is his own, humbly prays: 'Strengthen my back by means of Aaron'. His prayer is more than answered with: We shall strengthen your arm by means of him.

The Pictorial Element

The Qur'ānic language is frequently picturesque, and among the several devices that account for it are the simile and the similitude. The similes bear reference to the natural phenomena and existential situation the Arab was most familiar with, but one does not have to be an Arab to feel their force. God punished a certain rebellious people by unleashing upon it a windblast that 'uprooted people as if they were stumps of hollow palm-trees' (54:20). On the Last Day, people will come out of their graves and will spread out in all directions 'as if they were locusts scattered all over' (54:7). Disbelievers shy away from the divine message 'as if they are frightened asses that run away from a lion' (74:50-51). The crescent moon passes through many phases and, after becoming a full moon, again 'becomes like an old twig' (36:39). The Arabs thought that the mountains were not subject to change, and called them 'the eternal ones'. When Muḥammad^(p) warned them of the Last Day, telling them that the world would be annihilated on that day, they sarcastically asked him, What about the mountains? Will they be destroyed too? The Qur'ān replied by saying that the seemingly immovable mountains will on that day float around 'like carded wool' (101:5).

24:35-40 contain a series of similitudes, contrasting the people of faith with the people of disbelief. The contrast is drawn in terms of light and darkness. Verse 35 makes the point that the light of divine guidance is given to one who has kept the natural goodness of his heart intact. Already possessing an inner light, such a person is prepared to receive 'the light of God'. His natural goodness reinforced by faith, he comes to possess 'light upon light'. The verse reads:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of his light is as if there is a niche, in which there is a lamp, the lamp in a glass; the glass looks as if it is a bright star. It [the lamp] is kindled from a blessed olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west, one whose oil all but lights up, even though no fire has touched it. Light upon light! God guides to His light whomever He likes. God strikes similitudes for people, and God has knowledge of all things.

The niche is the heart of the good man, and in that niche is a lamp that burns with the light of his innate goodness. The high degree of the purity and brightness of the light is emphasised. First, the lamp is enclosed in a glass, so that it has a steady and bright flame and is not put out by the wind. Second, the glass is not dirty but clear and shiny. It is like 'a bright star' so that it reflects the light well. Third, the lamp is fed with olive oil that has been extracted from a tree that was planted not on the fringe of the garden - 'neither of the east nor of the west' - but right in the middle of it, so that, being secure against the fury of the elements, it has yielded the

purest kind of oil. The oil, in fact, is so pure that it would catch fire before coming into contact with fire. And when the oil, or the inner goodness of a man, does come into contact with fire or divine guidance, the result is 'light upon light'. Possessing this 'double light', one sees the heavens and the earth lit up, acquiring the master key to all knowledge and understanding, for, as the opening part of the verse says, 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth.'

While verse 35 describes the state of the people of faith, verse 40 speaks of the condition of the people of disbelief. Here there is no light, only utter darkness:

or [their situation is] like layers of darkness out on a deep sea [the surface of] which is covered by a wave, on top of which there is another wave, on top of which there are clouds; layers of darkness piled one upon the other; when he [the disbeliever] puts out his hand he can hardly see it. And one who is not furnished with light by God has no light.

As in verse 35, so in verse 40 the details progressively heighten the effect. A sharper contrast between light and darkness could hardly be imagined.

Many other devices besides the simile and the similitude are used in the Qur'ān. There is, for example, anastrophe, in which the sequence of events is purposefully changed or inverted; zeugma, in which one verb does duty for two; anaphora, in which a series of verses begins with the same words, creating a crescendo effect and leading to a climactic point; epenthesis, in which the medial vowel of a word is lengthened; and parallelism, with its several types. Another is significant use of pairs of adjectives or participles^[7] in which relationships of several types are established between the adjectives or participles.

68:10 speaks of a person who is *Hallāf mahīn*. *Hallāf* is 'an inveterate swearer of oaths' and *mahīn* is 'base or despicable'. The use of the two words next to each other implies that one who swears oaths right and left does so because he lacks self-respect and fears that his word will lack credence unless he supports it with oaths. In other words, a cause-and-effect relationship is established between the two words: a person is *Hallāf* because he is *mahīn*.

Many verses speak of God as being *ʿAzīz* (powerful) and *Hakīm* (wise). A 'powerful' being often abuses his power. The word 'wise' in this construction provides assurance that God does not use His power indiscriminately. Conversely speaking, a wise being may be ineffectual if he lacks the power to enforce a wise plan. But God does not labour under this limitation, for, besides being wise, He is also powerful. It can be seen that a relationship of complementarity exists between *ʿAzīz* and *Hakīm*. Variations on this relationship, yielding further subtleties of meaning, are also found. 8:10, referring to one of the battles Muḥammad^(p) fought, says that victory comes from God alone, the verse ending with the statement that God is powerful and wise. The meaning is that God grants victory, but, if in the course of battle the believers suffer a setback, their faith in God's power should not be shaken; rather they should understand that some good will come out of that setback too, for God is not only powerful but also wise. 29:42 threatens the idolaters, saying that He is powerful and wise. The verse means that God, if He so desired, could punish the idolaters on the spot, for He is powerful; but that, if He is giving them respite, then it is in accordance with the principle which, being wise, He has established, namely, that men will be given an opportunity to mend their ways and thus avert punishment.

Humour, Satire & Irony

Is not humour out of place in a scripture? To be sure, there are not many instances of humour in the Qur'ān. Still, a touch of it is found here and there. During a voyage, Moses^(p), tired, asks his young companion to bring out the food they have brought with them. The food consists of fish, but, strangely enough, the fish some time ago jumped into the water and vanished. The youth is hesitant to tell Moses^(p) about it, for Moses^(p) is not likely to believe this story. Little does he know that the disappearance of the fish was a sign appointed by God: exactly at the spot where the fish disappeared, Moses^(p) was to meet a certain guide. But explain he must, and so he utters a long-drawn-out sentence (18:63) in which he spends more time apologising than explaining how the fish disappeared. The comical effect is increased when he notices that Moses^(p) completely disregards the apology and hastens back to the designed spot.

Some of the satire in the Qur'ān is blunt. The affluent wicked, when they receive punishment in the Hereafter, will be told: 'Taste it [boiling water]! It is you who were the noble dignitary [in the world]!' (44:49). On other occasions, the satire is pungent in tone, but no less pungent for that. Abraham^(p), finding his opportunity, is about to smash the idols in the temple. But, upon noticing the offering of food laid out before them, he decides to take his time. 'Won't you eat?' he asks them in mock seriousness (37:91). Receiving no response, he pretends to be angry: 'What is the matter with you that you are not speaking?' (verse 92). Humour and satire blend when, after destroying all but one of the idols in the temple, Abraham^(p), questioned by the temple custodians, denies that he destroyed the idols, saying: 'O no, it is their chief god over here [the one Abraham^(p) had spared] who did that; ask them [idols] if they can speak' (21:63). The point is driven home and the idolaters are put to shame.

The Qur'ān is quite rich in irony.^[8] In tempting Adam and Eve^(p) in the garden of Eden, Satan suggests to them that the fruit of the forbidden tree could transform them into angels, but that God would not like them to become angels, hence the prohibition to eat of the tree (7:20). Ironically, the angels have already bowed before man and acknowledged his supremacy, so that man's attempt to become an angel would constitute a descent, and not an ascent, for man.

In an incident from Abraham's^(p) life, he uses irony to confute his idolatrous people. According to the Qur'ān, Abraham's^(p) people worshipped the heavenly bodies. Worship of the heavenly bodies is predicated, among other things, on the view that their extraordinary brilliance entitles them to godhead. In 6:74-79, Abraham^(p) shows the untenability of this view by arguing that the heavenly bodies not only rise and dazzle but also set, thereby 'losing' their brilliance. But he chooses a novel method to make his point. The passage reads:

When night enveloped him, he saw a star. He said 'This is my Lord'. But when it set, he said 'I do not like the ones that set.' When he saw the moon shining, he said 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said 'If my Lord does not guide me, I shall become one of the misguided.' When he saw the sun shining, he said 'This is my Lord, this is the biggest [of them all].' But when it set, he said 'My people, I have nothing to do with your idolatry'.

Once can see how Abraham^(p) sets his people up, so to speak, using irony to systematically cut the ground from under the belief-system of his people.

Wordplay & Ambiguity

Wordplay is involved in the use of the word *Miṣr* in 2:61. As an indefinite noun, *Miṣr* means 'city'; as a diptote, 'Egypt'. The Israelites, just out of Egypt, are already tired of the austere existence of the desert and recall their life in Egypt. The verse says: 'Go into some city and you shall have what you have asked for.' In the verse, *Miṣr* is indefinite, but the pun is obvious: If you want to enjoy a life of ease and comfort, then go back to your life in Egypt (Islāhī, I:61). Also, 'What you have asked for' is quite ambiguous. What have the Israelites really asked for. The good food they used to eat in Egypt, or the life of slavery? They would not, of course, opt for slavery, but then they must remember that a life of hardship in a state of freedom is preferable to a comfortable existence in a state of servitude.

In another instance of ambiguity, the Makkan opponents of Muḥammad^(p) accused him of fabricating the Qur'ān and passing it off as divine speech. 11:13 challenges them to produce ten chapters like it, and then adds the word *Muḥtarayat*, which means 'fabricated'. In the context, the word gives two different but equally applicable meanings: (a) if you succeed in producing a discourse like the Qur'ān, you will have proved that Muḥammad^(p) has fabricated the Qur'ān, so go ahead and make your attempt; (b) it is the discourse produced by you that will be a fabrication, so go ahead and fabricate.

Narrative

To begin with, there is the graphic description. The theme of the Last Day occasions many passages that would fall in this category. Cataclysmic changes will take place on that fateful day (82:1-4):

When the heavens explode,

When the stars are scattered,

When the oceans are poured out,

When the graves are ransacked:

On that day one will find out the [value of] actions one has performed or failed to perform.

Again: 'The entire earth will be [no more than] His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, all rolled up, will be in His right hand' (39:67). And there is the haunting picture of the *Zaqqūm* (37:62), the 'accursed tree' (17:60) that will grow in hell: 'It is a tree that sprouts in the very core of Hell. Its spathes make it out to be like so many heads of devils' (37:64-65).

A reader of the Qur'ān will notice that the Qur'ān does not usually tell a complete story in one place but relates different parts of it different sūrahs. This may cause bewilderment. But if the ideas of the sūrah unity is accepted, the Qur'ānic narrative might appear in a new light. The Qur'ān never tells a story for its own sake, but rather uses it to drive home the point it happens to be making in a sūrah or in a section of it. As a rule, considerations of the thematic unity

determine which portion of a story will be narrated in which sūrah. In other words, the story told in a given sūrah is likely to be sūrah specific, the apparent disjointedness of the Qur'ān in this case concealing a carefully worked-out technique of storytelling.

Among the sūrahs that narrate the story of Abraham^(p) are 6, 21, 51, and 60.^[9] In each of these sūrahs, a different portion of the Abraham^(p) story is told. Sūrah 6 is mainly addressed to the idolaters of Makkah, and criticism of idolatry figures prominently in it. The opening verse of the sūrah, for example, reads: 'Grateful praise is due to God, Who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light; and yet the disbelievers set up partners To God'. Now the Makkan idolaters regarded Abraham^(p) as their ancestor. Sūrah 6, therefore, selects from Abraham's^(p) life (verse 74-83) that incident in which he is shown as refuting his idolatrous people. The connection between the incident and the sūrah's theme is obvious, the sūrah and the incident both making the point that the Makkans, if they wish to follow Abraham^(p), must abandon their idolatry and worship the one true God.

The thesis of sūrah 21 is that defeat of the Makkans at the hands of the Muslims is imminent. Verse 18, for example, says: 'Rather, We launch the truth at falsehood and it [the truth] crushes it [the falsehood], the latter taking flight'. Verse 44 is more explicit, as it refers to the steady advance of the Muslim faith, from its base in Madinah, toward Makkah: 'Do they not see that We are approaching the land [of Makkah], shrinking its borders? Is it they [idolaters] who are going to be victorious?'. The portion selected from Abraham's^(p) story (verses 51-70) for this chapter relates how Abraham^(p) breaks the idols worshipped by his people. The image-breaking signifies the defeat of idolatry, and it should be remembered that, upon conquering Makkah, Muḥammad^(p) ordered that all the images in the sanctuary of the Ka'bah be destroyed. In other words, Abraham's^(p) action in the sūrah prefigures Muḥammad's^(p) action in later history.

The theme of sūrah 51 is reward for the virtuous and punishment for the evil in the hereafter. Verse 6 announces the theme: 'Recompense is certainly going to take place'. The incident related from Abraham's^(p) (and Lot's^(p)) life (verses 24-34) illustrates the theme: Abraham^(p) will be rewarded with a son in old age, and the people of Lot^(p) will be destroyed for their evil; the reward-and-punishment system in this world thus serves as a pointer to the reward-and-punishment system that will operate in the hereafter.

Sūrah 60 stresses the need for the Muslims to make a break with the Makkans, in whose midst they had lived for so long. This theme is stated in the opening verse, which enjoins Muslims not to take 'My enemies and your enemies for friends', and in the concluding verse, which rephrases that thought. Abraham^(p) is mentioned in verses 4-6, which present him as a model for Muslims: he broke with his people when the latter turned hostile to him. The lesson is clear: the Muslims must likewise dissociate themselves from the Makkans. As in sūrahs 6, 21, and 51, the incident related in sūrah 60 is found to be sūrah-specific.

Although the Qur'ān usually describes only a portion of a story at a time, the portion given in any place is usually self-contained. The story of Adam^(p) told in 2:30-39, for example, is complete in itself, as is the story of Abraham^(p) and Lot^(p) in 11:69-83. Just as only that part of a

story will be told in a sūrah that contributes to the sūrah's overall theme, so if several stories contribute to that end, they will be combined in a single sūrah. Sūrahs 18, 21, and 25 contain some obvious examples. Despite what has been said about the narrative technique of the Qur'ān, one should not think that there is no sustained storytelling in the Qur'ān. Sūrah 12, 'Joseph', is the longest uninterrupted story in the Qur'ān. In a published study of it,^[10] I have tried to show that it has a unified plot, and that the plot is organised on (the analogy of the rhetorical device of 'involution and evolution': the first half of the story creates a series of tensions which are resolved in reverse order in the second half.

Dramatic Dialogue

One of the features of the Qur'ānic style that has received practically no attention is the dramatic dialogue. A close study of the Qur'ānic dialogue reveals that its usually simple text contains profound insights into the workings of the human mind and the motives behind human conduct. Abraham's^(p) dialogues are eminently suited for such a study. Here we shall confine ourselves to a few remarks about the dialogue of Moses^(p) and Pharaoh in 26:16 ff. This is a fast-paced dialogue in which the character of Moses^(p) is contrasted with that of Pharaoh. The cunning Pharaoh, initially on the offensive, soon finds himself beating a retreat before the relentless attack of a self-confident Moses^(p), his (Pharaoh's) mood changing from mock gentleness and condescension to that of satire and ridicule to that of utter frustration and indignation. An interesting feature of the dialogue is that while Pharaoh continually changes his stance, Moses^(p) sticks with the position he states in the beginning and only reinforces it with his subsequent remarks.

The dialogue opens with Moses^(p) declaration that he is a prophet sent by the 'Lord of the universe', and with his demand that Pharaoh allow the Israelites to go with him. Pharaoh condescendingly reminds Moses^(p) of the upbringing he received in Pharaoh's palace, and, by reminding Moses^(p) that he is guilty of killing a Copt, also makes an unambiguous threat (verse 19). Moses^(p) replies that his killing of the Copt was an accident. As for his upbringing in Pharaoh's house, he acknowledges it as a favour by Pharaoh, but curtly tells him that he cannot on that count enslave the Israelites (verses 20-21). Cornered by this trenchant reply, Pharaoh makes another move, asking Moses^(p) in an obviously satirical tone: 'Who is this 'Lord of the universe' you speak of?' (verse 24). Moses^(p) reply is brief but to the point: 'The Lord of the heavens and the earth.' Pharaoh, who claims to be the supreme lord, feels the blow of the answer. At the same time, he senses that some of his courtiers may have been unduly impressed with the boldness of Moses^(p), and so, in an attempt to laugh Moses^(p) off, he turns to his courtiers, saying: 'You hear that, don't you?' (verse 25). Undaunted, Moses^(p) presses the attack: 'Your Lord, and also the Lord of your ancestors of former times'. A powerful dent is made in the ancestral religion of Egypt, and Pharaoh, until now feigning self-control, shows visible signs of impatience. He suggests to his courtiers that Moses^(p) is insane (verse 27), hoping to put an abrupt end to the discussion. Moses^(p) refuses to let up: 'Lord of the East and the West', he adds. This is the last straw. Pharaoh threatens to imprison Moses^(p) (verse 30). 'Even if I should present a clear sign [miracle]' asks Moses^(p). Pharaoh has to consent, for his courtiers must have been intrigued by the offer of Moses^(p), and it would be imprudent of Pharaoh to disregard the mood of the court. It might also have occurred to him that if Moses^(p)

showed a miracle, then he (Pharaoh) might be able to explain it away as a cheap trick. At any rate, he consents, probably grudgingly. When Moses^(P) performs his miracles, Pharaoh is perplexed, but soon pulls himself together, observing that Moses^(P) is at best an accomplished sorcerer. But something must be done about this sorcerer if he is not to steal the show. The courtiers advise that the official magicians be summoned to compete with Moses^(P). It is not necessary to recount the rest of the story, for the above analysis should make it sufficiently clear that the Qur'ānic dialogue can be a rewarding field of study.

Characterization

Seen from a theological standpoint, the Qur'ānic characters would appear to be embodiments of abstract traits rather than real flesh-and-blood figures which I believe they are. Obvious candidates for a study of Qur'ānic characterisation would be like prophets, particularly figures like Abraham^(P) and Moses^(P). Here I will confine my remarks to the Qur'ānic technique of presenting memorable characters in a few lines - the vignettes. One such vignette is to be found in 74:18-25.^[11] The context presents before us a typical rich leader of Makkah who is worried by the spread of Muḥammad's^(P) message in the city. He is in danger of losing his following, unless he can convince his followers that the Qur'ān is Muḥammad's^(P) own speech falsely attributed to God. How does he accomplish his purpose? Finding himself in the company of his followers, who look up to him for a response to Muḥammad's^(P) message, he plays a game. His mind is of course made up, but he does not want to give the impression that he is rejecting that message without giving it a serious thought. So he reflects on the message, and appears to be making a careful assessment of it (verse 18). In a parenthetic remark (verses 19-20) the Qur'ān suggests that he is only going through the motions. But his followers, unable to see through his game, are impressed by the careful thought he is devoting to the whole matter. Then, serious thinker that he is, he looks up, as if weighing an idea that has just flashed into his mind. But no, he must give it more thought, and so he knits his brows, not forgetting to contort some of his facial features (verse 22). He is about to deliver his verdict and his followers await the moment anxiously. What does he do? Issue a statement rashly? That would not be prudent. He slowly turns around, takes a step backward, and gives his judgement: the Qur'ān is not divine in origin; it is at best an eloquent discourse that, like magic, has a spellbinding effect on its audience. This is a complete portrait, and it is presented in only a few short verses.

III

This brief survey has left out many literary features of the Qur'ān, some of which are symmetrical structures; ellipsis; implicit transitional links; parenthetic extension; use of motif words; use of passives to convey certain shades of meaning; periphrasis; and oaths. But I hope it has succeeded in suggesting that the Qur'ān is a vast quarry that awaits the attention of literary scholars.

This study is by no means the very first to be written on the subject of the Qur'ān as literature. A few, if not many, works dealing with some literary aspect of the Qur'ān exist in European languages. There is, however, a great need for developing a theory that is, on the one hand,

based on a recognition of the subject as an independent field, and that will, on the other hand, take an integrated view of the various literary aspects of the Qur'ān. Western scholars with their highly developed discipline of literary criticism can make a significant contribution in this regard. Should they undertake to do so, the 'Qur'ān as literature' might well become an important meeting-ground for Muslim and Orientalist scholars.

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Notes

[1] See M. A. Draz, *Initiation au Koran*, 89-90, where the author speaks of the failure of scholars in this regard, identifying some of the causes of the formation of such a view. It should be added that, in the West, as Hartwig Hirschfeld, John Merrill, and others have pointed out, a systematic study of the Qur'ān has been severely hindered by the view of the Qur'ān as a disjointed work.

[2] The Qur'ān is made up of revelations, small and large, that Muḥammad^(p) received over a period of about twenty-three years. As to the question of who compiled the revelations into the Qur'ān that we have, most Muslim scholars believe that Muḥammad^(p) was responsible at least for the arrangement of verses within individual chapters, if not for arranging the chapters themselves as well. But then the question arises whether the chapters thereby acquired, or were meant to acquire, any unity or coherence. The generality of Muslim scholars denied that they did or were meant to. Two of the reasons for this view are as follows. First, the Qur'ān does not have a chronological arrangement; in fact sometimes it does not seem to care about

such an arrangement. Second, while some of its chapters are obviously well structured, others seem to lack all structure. Unable to detect, in the latter category, patterns similar to those found in the former, the scholars, in the interest of holding a consistent viewpoint, declared that the Qur'ān as a rule lacks coherence. The objection of incoherence was met with the reply that the assumption of coherence is not essential to deriving guidance from the Qur'ān. Conceivably, however, one could have begun at the other end and, taking the well structured chapters as the starting point, made a determined effort to find method and structure in the rest of the chapters. Such attempts have been made in the present century.

[3] For arguments in support of the view that the Qur'ānic chapters and, in fact, the whole of the Qur'ān is marked by definite patterns of coherence, see my book, *Coherence In The Qur'ān*, especially pp. 30-31 and chs. 3-4.

[4] Whether this separation is made permanently (so that the Qur'ān is viewed simply as a work of literature) or temporarily (so that one returns to examine the relationship between the two aspects) is not crucial to the argument of this paper.

[5] Alter and Kermode echo the thought when they write: 'Indeed literary analysis must come first, for unless we have a sound understanding of what the text is doing or saying, it will not be of much value in other respects' (2).

[6] I have given my own translation of the Qur'ānic verses cited.

[7] Use of more than two adjectives or participles is not infrequent, but, for the sake of simplicity, the treatment here is restricted to their use in pairs.

[8] See 'Irony In The Qur'ān: A Study Of Sūrah 12' (forthcoming). *Journal Of The American Academy Of Religion*.

[9] The discussion of this example is adapted from *Islāhī*.

[10] See '**The Qur'ānic Story Of Joseph: Plot, Themes, And Characters**,' *The Muslim World*, 76 (1986) 1:15.

[11] The following treatment is adapted from *Islāhī* (8:51-53).

2.2. Is The Qur'ān A Shapeless Book?

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One of the long-standing objections levelled against the Qur'ān by its non-Muslim critics is that it appears to have no regular form or structure. It is said that its verses follow one another with little sense of interconnection and its sūrahs seem to have been arranged in a sequence based on the crude principle of diminishing length, the longest coming first and the shortest going to the end. Almost every sūrah, it is complained, is riddled with unsettling shifts of scene, address, and subject and one cannot with any amount of certainty predict what is going to come next. It is concluded that the Qur'ān is, at best, a remarkable compilation of unrelated passages, or a book of quotations. That though it is full of pearls, the pearls are lying in a promiscuous heap.

The actual words used by those who have raised this objection are much more stern and caustic. We will not quote them, partly because they may be found in any book written on the Qur'ān by any critic of Islam and partly because their pungency does not add to the gravity of the objection. We shall only note that new as well as old orientalists have made the point often and that for all the difference in their approaches to the Qur'ān, they are all agreed that the Qur'ān completely lacks anything of the kind of orderly arrangement. Some of them have actually tried to rearrange the Qur'ān either chronologically or according to some other self-devised principle.

The response of Muslim scholars to this objection has been, generally, concessive. They grant that the Qur'ān does not have the arrangement of a well-planned book, but then, they say, it was never meant to have one. The revelation of the Qur'ān, they point out, was completed in twenty-three years and during that period the Qur'ān dwelt on such a large number of diverse subjects that no act of compilation could have given it greater unity and coherence than that it now possesses. The Qur'ān, they say, dealt with the lives, activities, and problems of a whole nation for a long span of time and so any objection based on the concept of a research thesis is bound to be misplaced.

This reply, though it has almost always served to satisfy Muslims and at least silence non-Muslim critics, fails to take one very important fact into consideration, that of the arranging of the Qur'ān, by the Holy Prophet (sws). At the same time that it was being revealed, the Qur'ān was being rearranged in a certain form, under direct divine guidance, by the Holy Prophet (sws). The completion of the arrangement of the Qur'ān was conterminous in time with the completion of its revelation. In respect of order and sequence, therefore, the Qur'ān as it was compiled was different from the Qur'ān as it was revealed. In other words, the Qur'ān had two arrangements, one revelatory and the other compilatory. The question is, why was the revelatory arrangement abandoned in favour of a compilatory arrangement. Was the latter adopted without any special reason? If so, why was chronology not considered a sound enough basis for arranging the Qur'ān? And is one today at liberty to discover, if possible, the chronological arrangement of the Qur'ān and recite the Qur'ān according to that arrangement? Or, if chronology was not an acceptable guide, why was not some rule, that for example of dividing the Qur'ān into sūrahs of about equal length, employed. Nor does the principle of the progressive diminution of the size of sūrahs go very far because the diminution is not so

progressive: We frequently find that long sūrahs are followed by shorter sūrahs which are again followed by long sūrahs and so on. The question continues to stare one in the face: Why a different arrangement ?

Imām Hamīd al-dīn Farāhī (India, d: 1930) gives another answer to the objection. He maintains that the Qur'ān has a most superb structure. The verses and sūrahs of the Qur'ān, he says, are arranged in a magnificent and impeccable order and together form a whole which has remarkable integration and symmetry. And beautiful as that structure is, adds Imām Farāhī, it is not merely of incidental value; it is essential to the meaning of the Qur'ān, nay, it is the only key there is to the meaning of the Qur'ān.

The seminal ideas of Imām Farāhī have been expounded by his most eminent disciple, Mawlānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī. Taking his cue from the principles his great teacher had enunciated, Mawlānā Iṣlāhī has written a commentary (in Urdu) on the Qur'ān in which he has shown how the Qur'ān is the systematic book Imam Farāhī claimed it to be. Mawlānā Iṣlāhī modestly terms his work elaborative, but as anyone can see, it is highly original in any respect. In fact, he is not only the most authentic exponent of Imam Farāhī's thought, he can be said to have new-modelled that thought. Below is given a brief statement of his views on the structure of the Qur'ān. These views have been summarised from the 'Introduction' to '*Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*' (Reflection on the Qur'ān), which is the name of his commentary.

1. Each Qur'ānic sūrah has a dominant idea, called the axis of that sūrah, around which all the verses of that sūrah revolve. Thus no verse, or no group of verses, stands alone but has a direct relation with the axis of the sūrah and is part of the coherent scheme of the sūrah.
2. The sūrahs of the Qur'ān exist in pairs, the two sūrahs of any pair being complementary to each other and, together constituting a unit. There are a few exceptions, however. The first sūrah, Fātihah, does not have a complement, because it is a kind of a preface to the whole of the Qur'ān. All the other exceptions too are not exceptions in the real sense of the word since each one of them is an appendix to one or the other sūrah.
3. The 114 sūrahs of the Qur'ān fall into seven groups. The first group comes to an end at sūrah 5, the second at sūrah 9, the third at sūrah 24, the fourth at sūrah 33, the fifth at sūrah 49, the sixth at sūrah 66, and the seventh at sūrah 114. Each group contains one or more Makkān sūrahs followed by one or more Madīnan sūrahs of the same cast. Like individual sūrahs or each pair of sūrahs, each group has a central theme which runs through all its sūrahs, knitting them into a distinct body. In each group, the themes of the other groups also occur but as subsidiary themes.
4. Each group logically leads to the next, and thus all the groups become variations on the basic theme of the Qur'ān, which is: 'Allah's call to man to adopt the right path'.

While speaking of coherence in the structure of the Qur'ān, we must distinguish between connectedness and organic unity. A connection, howsoever weird and far-fetched, can be established between any two objects of the universe. But organic unity implies the presence of a harmonious interrelationship between the components of a body or entity which produces a

unified whole, a whole which is over and above the sum total or the components of and has worth and meaning in itself. The verses and sūrahs of the Qur'ān are not simply linked up with one another, they have their place, each one of them, in the total scheme of the Qur'ān and are related not only to one another but also to that total framework. The Qur'ān is an organism, of which its verses and sūrahs are organically coherent parts.

Another point to be taken note of is that, as hinted above, the methodicalness of the Qur'ān is not just an incidental matter in the study of the Qur'ān, it is integral to the meaning of the Qur'ān. In plain terms, since the Qur'ān has an organic structure, every verse or group of verses and every sūrah has a definitive context and interpretation of any portion of the Qur'ān must be based on a correct understanding of that context. The Qur'ān is also one of the most unfortunate books in the sense that too often its verses have been torn out of context to prove some particular juristical opinion or sectarian notion and too frequently its terms and phrases have been misconstrued by those who come to it seeking, in some odd verse, support for views they have already formed on other than Qur'ānic grounds. It is indeed a great irony that all heresies have been claimed by their propounders to have their basis in the Qur'ān. And if these heresies looked plausible to many, it was because the context of the verses constituting the so-called 'basis in the Qur'ān' was not properly understood. As Mawlānā Islāhī has shown, contextualisation gives to countless verses a construction different from the one usually placed on them; it throws new light not only on the doctrinal and creedal aspects of the Qur'ānic message but also on the methodological aspects of the message; it lends new significance not only to the moral and legal injunctions of the Qur'ān but also to the stories and parables narrated by the Qur'ān; and it affords a deep insight not only into the continually changing style and tone of the Qur'ān but also into the varied patterns of logic it employs.

2.3. The Qur'ānic Story Of Joseph: Plot, Themes, And Characters

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For its sheer readability, the Qur'ānic story of Joseph, told in S. 12, is perhaps unsurpassed in the whole of the Qur'ān. The less than one hundred verses of the narrative^[1] telescope many years, present an amazing variety of scenes and characters in a tightly-knit plot, and offer a dramatic illustration of some of the fundamental themes of the Qur'ān. The present article, as the title indicates, is a study of selected aspects of the sūrah. The study is mainly literary in character. As such it will not deal with that part of the sūrah (the concluding part, chiefly) in which the Qur'ān seeks to apply the story to the Meccan situation of Muḥammad's time.^[2] I have thus limited the scope of this inquiry in order to bring into relief, with reference to S. 12, a sorely neglected aspect of the Qur'ān, namely, the literary aspect. It is not necessary to

reproduce the story in detail or in outline any of the well-known translations of the Qur'ān can be used for purposes of reference. The translation of the Qur'ānic verses cited is my own.

I. Plot

Tensions and Their Resolution

A notable feature of the story is the way in which the plot thickens and is then brought to its resolution. Major tensions are created in roughly the first half of the story and may be catalogued as follows:

- a. Joseph's dream (4-6).
- b. The brothers' plot against Joseph (8-18).
- c. Potiphar's wife's attempt to seduce Joseph (23-29).
- d. A similar attempt by Egyptian ladies (30-31).^[3]
- e. Joseph's imprisonment (35).
- f. The king's dream (43-44).

After that the plot begins to unravel, but the tensions are resolved in reverse order. The king's dream is the first to be interpreted (45-49), followed by Joseph's release from prison (50; see below). Next come the confessions of the Egyptian ladies, followed by that of Potiphar's wife (51). The brothers learn their lesson (58ff.), and finally comes the fulfillment of Joseph's dream (100). Thus we have a lot that is neatly structured on the analogy of the literary-rhetorical device of *al-laff wa 'l-nashr `alā 'l-`aks* (involution and evolution in reverse).

Two critical questions must be faced with regard to this suggested structure. First what about the dreams of Joseph's two prison-mates (36-42) which have not been accounted for? The episode may be taken as an exception to the scheme suggested above. On the other hand it may be regarded either as an appendix to e. or as a prelude to f. For from the point of view of the plot it is like the caravan episode (19-20) and in spite of the role it plays in advancing the plot, it is, like that episode, of incidental importance in itself. The second question concerns the moment of Joseph's release: he is set free only after the confessions of the ladies and Potiphar's wife so how can his release be said to precede. and c.? I would argue that while Joseph actually comes out of prison **after** the confessions, the king orders his release **before** the confessions, and if Joseph takes his time leaving prison it is only because he would first have the truth about the scheming ladies revealed.^[4] When the king sends for him again he says (54): *i'tūnī bihi astakhliṣhu li nafsī*, "Bring him to me so that I may have him for my special companion." In other words Joseph who has already received his freedom now receives a special status as well.

Parallels

The plot has a number of parallels which might escape one at a cursory reading of the story but which come into relief upon a close study. Each of these parallels contains points of both similarity and dissimilarity. The following instances illustrate this structural parallelism.

- a. In Canaan Joseph is thrown into a pit in Egypt into prison each time for a crime he has not committed. The first incident is the result of the brothers' hatred of Joseph, the second of Potiphar's wife's love of Joseph. Upon coming out of the pit, Joseph is sold into slavery; upon release from prison he becomes the virtual ruler of Egypt.
- b. The brothers first take Joseph with them and return home without him. Then they take Joseph's real brother Benjamin and come back home without him. They take Joseph with them of their own accord and with an evil intention. It is apparently with good intentions that they take Benjamin with them without whom they would not be able to get grain.
- c. The brothers engage in a secret huddle twice, once in Canaan (8-10) and once in Egypt (80-81). The first time it is to dispose of Joseph; the second time to save their own lives.
- d. Having failed to win Joseph's attention, the Egyptian ladies sheepishly try to explain their failure by saying that it was an angel they were dealing with. The king's courtiers, unable to interpret his dream try to cover up their failure by declaring that the dream is devoid of meaning. The ladies meet with failure **after** having made their attempt, the courtiers give up **before** even trying.^[5]
- e. There are two attempts to win love. The brothers try to win their father's affections - a case of filial love; Potiphar's wife tries to win Joseph's heart - a case of sexual love.^[6] The brothers and Potiphar's wife both use intrigue to achieve their objectives.^[7]

Dramatic Element

The story contains a rich dramatic element. There are a large number of striking scenes and many intensely dramatic moments. The following are some of the ways in which the drama is created and intensified.

- a. The story opens on a dramatic note, setting a tone that is consistently maintained through a rapid succession of logically connected scenes. In the first part of the story Joseph has an unusual dream. The reader immediately senses that the dream is going to be significant, but is left guessing as to what it might mean. When Joseph relates the dream to his father, Jacob could be expected to interpret it, but his immediate response is to warn Joseph to keep it from his brothers. The suspense is heightened, and at the same time the reader is indirectly introduced to Joseph's brothers, who, evidently, are shady characters, in sharp contrast to Joseph as a very virtuous man. It is obvious that a conflict is in the making. The brothers soon appear on the scene, and although Jacob has talked about the possibility of their contriving a *kayd* against Joseph, the full force of that is driven home only when the nature of their plans becomes clear. Mischief is afoot. Jacob resists the brothers' persuasion to let Joseph go with them on a picnic,^[8] but, as one feels is going to happen, he gives in. The brothers return home with a bloody shirt. A caravan meanwhile comes along and their water-scout lifts Joseph out of the well. A shout of joy, for the lad should be worth some silver. But there is also a nervous attempt to hide the newly-found commodity lest a claimant should spring up in the vicinity.^[9] Joseph is off in Egypt, and the story moves with him, one event leading to another, with each new event adding to the total effect.

- b. In several instances events foreshadow one another. The foreshadowing, however, does not take place mechanically, with one event blandly hinting at the next, but in such a way as to maintain a delicate balance between the predictable and the unpredictable. To take an example, when Jacob hears Joseph's dream, he cautions him against the brothers' plot, and in the next few verses already we find the brothers busy scheming. What Jacob had feared has come to pass. But the element of surprise consists in this, that while Jacob thought that the brothers would resort to *kayd* only if they learnt about Joseph's dream, the brothers do so even though they do not know about the dream.
- c. On several occasions in the story something is referred to as if casually, but the reader soon realizes that the reference had a prophetic or ominous ring. The brothers agree on the suggestion that Joseph be cast into a well. The idea is that some caravan might come along and take Joseph out of the well, thus at least saving his life. But this is only a hope the brothers have, they do not know for sure that a caravan will arrive, and will arrive in time to save Joseph; all they are trying to do is to appease their troubled consciences. One gets the impression that the reference to the caravan was not casual after all. Likewise, Jacob fears that a wolf might devour Joseph, and the brothers assure Jacob that this will not happen. Though the brothers could have made up some other excuse, they told Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wolf - and the reference to the wolf proves to be more than casual.

In sum, the plot of the Joseph story is tightly-woven, there is a pattern to the events that make it up, and a strong dramatic element holds the reader's interest.

II. Themes

The sūra has a number of themes, but we can distinguish between one principal theme and several subsidiary ones, the latter bearing a close relationship to the former.

Principal Theme:

Inexorable Fulfillment of Divine Purposes

a. God as Ghālib

The story of Joseph is presented as a dramatic vindication of the thesis that God is dominant and His purposes are inevitably fulfilled. The thesis is presented in vs. 21: *wa 'llādhu ghālibun 'alā amrihi wa lākinna akthara 'l-nāsi lā ya 'lamūna*, "God is in complete control of His affairs, but most people have no awareness of it." This verse is central to the sūra's meaning, and the keyword in it is *ghālib* ("dominant").

Joseph is placed in the most hopeless situation that one can imagine. Severed from his family, he is sold into slavery in a foreign country with people none too friendly to the Hebrews, and then is cast in prison. The odds are stacked up against him and all hope is cut off. In these

utterly bleak circumstances comes into play divine power and, all of a sudden, Joseph finds himself at the pinnacle of fame and power. The dominance of God has been established.

That God is dominant and has complete control over everything is a theme that finds expression elsewhere in the Qur'ān, too. However, this is perhaps the only sūra in which that theme is consistently developed throughout. The word *ghālib* as a divine attribute has been used in the Qur'ān only once in this sūra. A verb from the root GhLB is used in S. 58:21: *la'aghlibanna anā wa rusulī*, "I and My messengers too shall triumph. But this verse speaks only of one kind of dominance, the victory of God and His messengers in their struggle against disbelievers. S. 12:21 on the other hand, gives to the word *ghālib* the widest possible application and the most comprehensive meaning: "God is in complete control of His affairs." The verse states a principle of universal and absolute validity.^[10]

b. God as Latīf

Besides stressing God's dominance, the sūra also highlights one of the ways in which that dominance is actually established. The relevant verse here is vs 100: *inna rabbī latīfun li mā yashā'u*, God uses subtle means to accomplish whatever He wants. The keyword is *latīf*, "subtle." As an attribute of God *latīf* has been used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. But a comparative look would reveal that in each of the other occurrences^[11] the word is limited in its application by the context in which it occurs,^[12] whereas in the Sūra of Joseph it is like *ghālib*, quite independent of its immediate context and is used in its widest possible sense.

But an important question arises here: If God is *ghālib*, are His purposes conceived arbitrarily and if He is *latīf*, are they accomplished through the use of arbitrary means? This leads to a brief consideration of two other attributes.

c. God as `Alīm and Hakīm

Two divine attributes that (in different forms) find frequent and hence conspicuous use in the sūra are: *`alīm* ("All-Knowing") and *hakīm*, ("All-Wise"). They are used together in the beginning, middle, and end of the story, thus holding the story together and furnishing the reader with the perspective in which the Qur'ān wants him to see the story. Their function is to show that divine purposes, as also the ways to achieve them are characterized by the profound *hikma* ("wisdom") of an omniscient Being. This is what Jacob means when in the beginning of the story he listens to Joseph's dream and predicting an illustrious future for him says that God is *`alīm* and *hakīm* (6). As all the important events are yet to take place Jacob's remark is a statement of hope. In the middle part of the story (83) Jacob repeats the remark which since the worst possible situations have already occurred, becomes a statement of trust. At the end of the story (100) Joseph makes the same remark, which, now that every problem has been resolved, becomes a statement of gratitude.

The attributes of *`alīm* and *hakīm* are thus meant to counterbalance those of *ghālib* and *latīf* and to prevent the drawing of the conclusion that God is capricious.^[13] The sūra's principal theme, which we have examined with reference to four divine attributes, is succinctly

summarized in vs. 100, which explicitly mentions three of the four attributes and clearly implies the fourth: *inna rabbī laṭīfun li mā yashā'u innahu huwa l-`alīmu 'l-ḥakīmu*. To offer an explanatory paraphrase of the verse: God, although He has control over everything and has His subtle ways of accomplishing whatever He wants, always acts in accordance with certain rules He himself has laid down (in the Qur'ānic terminology, *sunna*. "norm, law") in His infinite wisdom, for He alone is possessed of all knowledge and, as such, knows what course of action would be the most appropriate one in any situation.

Subsidiary Themes

Like the rest of the Qur'ān, the Sūra of Joseph is as anthropocentric as it is theocentric. Besides expounding certain divine attributes, therefore, it also explains how man should conduct himself toward a God possessing those attributes. This brings us to the sūra's subsidiary themes.

a. Working in Harmony with the Purposes of God: Requisite Qualities

The first of these themes is that man, instead of opposing God, should work in harmony with His purposes, or, what is the same thing, in harmony with the moral laws He has prescribed for man's guidance. In order to do so, man needs to have certain qualities, which, according to the sūra, are three: *`ilm* ("knowledge"), *tawakkul* ("trust [in God]"), and *iḥsān* ("good action").

To certain chosen individuals who are supposed to guide mankind - to prophets, that is - God gives a special understanding of His laws. Jacob and Joseph are such individuals. We are told about Jacob, for example, (68): *wa innahu laḏhū `ilmin li ma `allamnāhu*, "Indeed he possessed special knowledge, as a result of Our teaching of him" (also 86, 92). As for ordinary people, they must acquire this knowledge from those who have been blessed with it by God: it is this knowledge that Joseph tries to impart to his prison-mates and which, in a different context, Joseph's brothers refuse to acquire from Jacob. Vs. 86 explicitly indicates that while Jacob possesses such knowledge, the brothers do not.

The second quality is *tawakkul*. The word occurs in vs. 67: *`alayhi tawakkaltu wa `alayhi fa 'l-yatawakkali 'l-mutawakkilūna*, "I [Jacob] have placed my trust in Him. and those who have to place their trust should place it in Him alone." Although Jacob possesses the first quality par excellence, he still needs this second quality, for human *`ilm*, no matter how great, can never be complete or adequate (see 76, last part). *Tawakkul* thus supplies the deficiencies of human knowledge and serves as an emotional ballast in situations in which cognitive knowledge fails to complete solace. Joseph, too, possesses this quality. And, again, as borne out by the whole story (and hinted subtly but powerfully in 67), the brothers lack it.

Although Jacob certainly possesses the third quality, *iḥsān*, as far as the story is concerned, it is Joseph who possesses it in the highest degree, and the adjective *muḥsin* is used in the sūra with explicit or implicit reference to Joseph only. This is appropriate because *iḥsān* is an active virtue and it is Joseph, not Jacob, who bears the brunt of the action in the story and so has to display this quality in practice. A concise definition of *iḥsān* is provided in vs. 90:

innahu man yattaqi wa yasbir fa inna 'llāha lā yud`iu ajra 'l-muhsinīna, "Indeed those who practice *taqwā* (moral restraint) and *ṣabr* (perseverance), God does not set at naught the reward of those who do good actions." In other words, *ihsān* is a combination of *taqwā* and *ṣabr*. *Ṣabr* means "to remain steadfast in the face of difficulties"; *taqwā* means "to hold one's own in the face of temptations." The former helps people to overcome their tendency to shun danger and hardship, the latter helps people to overcome their inclination toward the glamorous and the alluring. The two are complementary opposites and together sum up all the trials and tribulations Joseph goes through successfully, the reason why he so eminently deserves the title of *muhsin*. And the brothers lack *ihsān*, too. In fact they possess the quality of *ẓulm*, "iniquity," which is an exact antithesis of *ihsān*, as evidenced by the following. When the brothers suggest to Joseph, whom they call *muhsin* (78), that he detain one of them in place of Benjamin, he replies (79): *innā idhan la mina 'l-zālimīna*, "In that case we shall prove to be iniquitous." And, in an ironical situation, they condemn themselves out of their mouths. Upon being asked how a thief should be punished, they reply that he should be made the slave of the person whose property he has stolen, and then add (75): *kadhālika najzī 'l-zālimīna*, "This is how we punish the iniquitous."

It is, then, with the aid of *ilm*, *tawakkul*, and *ihsān*, as exemplified in the persons of Jacob and Joseph, that one can hope to work in harmony with God's purposes.

b. Balanced View of the Relationship between Divine Decree and Human Freedom

To the theme of working in harmony with the purposes of God is related the theme of striking a proper balance between divine decree and human freedom. "Divine decree" and "human freedom" are generally denoted in Urdu by the convenient (Arabic) words *taqdīr* and *tadbīr*, respectively, and I will use these instead of the more technical theological terms.

One of the points the *sūra* makes is that while the scheme of existence is ultimately determined by God, this does not absolve man of the responsibility of taking moral initiative. Jacob has complete trust in God, and yet he realizes that he must make use of his judgment and discretion. When the brothers request him to send Benjamin with them to Egypt, he takes more than one precaution. First he makes them pledge that they will try their best to bring Benjamin back. Then he advises them to enter Egypt in several small groups, each from a different gate, for as a large group of possibly rich foreigners they could attract the unwelcome attention of lawless elements at a time when conditions of famine have probably resulted in an increased incidence of crime.^[14] The expedient, he is quick to point out, cannot protect them against a contrary divine decree if such a decree exists. Thus Jacob puts on the whole matter a perspective born of a balanced understanding of the relationship between *taqdīr* and *tadbīr* (66-67).^[15]

Like Jacob, Joseph, too, has struck an ideal balance between *taqdīr* and *tadbīr*. When he interprets the dreams of the two prison-mates, he asks one of them, the one he thinks will be released to mention him to the king. He rightly thinks that it is not irreligious or improper for him to think of ways and means of securing his release from a situation in which he has been placed through no fault of his own.

c. Trial, Recompense, and Repentance

The last subsidiary theme is composed of three subthemes, those of trial, recompense, and repentance.

Trial: The concept of trial is basic to Qur'ānic thought. The very purpose of human life is conceived in terms of trial (S. 67:2): *alladhī khalaqa 'l-mawta wa 'l-hayata li yabluwakum ayyukum aḥsanu `amalan*, "God, Who created death and life in order to put you to the test and determine who among you will perform better deeds." The particular aspect of the theme of trial that is highlighted in this sūra is that no one is exempt from trial, not even prophets. When the story opens, Joseph has yet to become a prophet, but he is made to go through a series of ordeals. Jacob is already a prophet, but he, too, is tried in several ways. Since no one is exempt from being tried, the Qur'ān would appear to be advising constant moral readiness.

Recompense: Recompense, too, is a major Qur'ānic theme, and there is a certain aspect of it that receives emphasis in this sūra. From the Islamic point of view, the present world is the world of trial and action (*dār al-`amal*) whereas it is the hereafter that is the world of recompense (*dār al-jazā*). But this does not mean that no recompense is given in this world at all, or that it is wrong to work and hope for worldly success (in accordance with the principles of religion and morality). Such success is presented as a positive good in the Sūra of Joseph. Vs. 90, quoted above, speaks of reward for good actions, and the reference is primarily, if not exclusively to success and prosperity in this life.

Repentance: The third subtheme is also related to the first. As long as a person lives, he remains subject to the *sunna* ("law") of trial and is put to one test after another. But failure on a test should not cause despair, for there is always hope: the door of repentance is open. The point is driven home in one of the final episodes of the story in which Joseph's brothers realize their mistake and sincerely repent, asking their father to pray for their forgiveness, Jacob agreeing to do so.

The distinction drawn here between the principal and the subsidiary themes is obviously not absolute. Ultimately, all these themes interpenetrate, and it is possible to lay greater stress on one of them rather than on the other. What one must insist on, though, is that all of them be considered in their relationship to each other so that a well-rounded conception of the sūra's thematic structure results.

III. Characters

General

A study of the characters of the Qur'ānic story of Joseph is a study in Qur'ānic realism. The Qur'ān draws a sharp distinction between good and bad characters, the former (model) characters to be imitated,^[16] the latter (evil) characters whose example is to be shunned. In spite of this crucial distinction, the humanity of the characters is never compromised: the Qur'ān draws its pictures in the authentic colors of real life. Not only the bad, but also the good

characters of the story are real. The latter in particular come alive with full force, facing the ups and downs of life like the rest of humanity.

The Sūra of Joseph is a dramatization of the Qur'ānic view of the relationship between character and action. As already noted, every individual must go through a series of trials. But success or failure in these trials is not predetermined in the sense that a good character will necessarily succeed, while an evil character will necessarily fail. Success or failure in a moral struggle is the result of independent choices made and executed **during** the struggle itself. Joseph does not succeed in the crises he finds himself in simply because he possesses innate goodness. In each situation he has to wage a struggle, acutely conscious that unless he calls forth all his moral strength, he might very well yield to the temptations that are being thrown his way. If it is true that a person succeeds in a moral struggle because he possesses a good character, the converse is equally true: a man comes to possess a good character because he faces the moral struggle with vision and resolution. This seems to be the Qur'ānic understanding of the relationship between character and action. As can be seen, it is a dynamic relationship in which nothing is taken for granted.

But while on the one hand a person might fail in a given situation because he has conducted himself poorly, there is, on the other hand, no reason why he should not succeed if he acquits himself in a satisfactory manner. The good characters of *Sūrat Yūsuf* are presented as ideal because they have convincingly proved in real life that they deserved to succeed. In the term Qur'ānic realism used above, "realism" does not mean or imply that every, individual necessarily has some serious failings, or at least a few blemishes. The point is that the characters are placed in situations involving a genuine test of their moral fiber and affording an equal opportunity of meeting with success and failure; success must be no less possible than failure.^[17]

Major Characters

a. Jacob

The starting point of the dramatic conflict in the story is Jacob's love for Joseph, or, more accurately, the brothers' perception of this love. But while the brothers think that Jacob's love for Joseph is senseless because it is they, not Joseph, who are an *ʿuṣba* ("strong group"), the Qur'ān seems to indicate that Jacob's partiality for Joseph is based on the former's recognition of Joseph's exceptional talents: Jacob already feels that, among all of his sons, Joseph alone is qualified to carry on the Abrahamic tradition after him, and he is confirmed in his view after he learns about Joseph's dream.

Jacob, then, is perceptive. He is extremely sensitive, too. He loses his eyesight from grief at the loss of Joseph. Another aspect of his sensitive nature is that he possesses what we may call telepathic powers: he is able to "smell" Joseph when Joseph's tunic is on its way to Canaan (94); he regains his eyesight when the tunic is put over him (96).

Jacob, as depicted by the Qur'ān, is anything but credulous. He refuses to believe the brothers' story about Joseph's death (18) actually, as vss. 5, 11, and 14 show, he is already suspicious of the brothers, and it is only reluctantly that he allows, first Joseph, and then Benjamin, to accompany them.

We have seen that Jacob represents an ideal combination of *taqdīr* and *tadbīr*: his boundless trust in God does not prevent him from taking precautions against impending danger. But when his precautions fail, he, bears the misfortune resolutely, crying his heart out, yes, but to God only (86). In the presence of people he exercises remarkable self-control, choking back his grief (*kaẓīm*, 84), his faith in God unshaken. He not only possesses *ṣabr*, he possesses it in its most praiseworthy form: *ṣabr jamīl* (18, 83).

b. Joseph

As a young boy, Joseph is shy, modest, and respectful. While telling his father about the dream, he uses the word *ra'aytu* (4) twice. This has dramatic significance^[18] and also gives a clue to his character. He knows the interpretation of the dream^[19] and is therefore hesitant to report the dream to his father because the latter might think he is being presumptuous. That is why, after having begun to relate it, he breaks off in the middle. And yet he realizes that he must go on, and so he repeats the word *ra'aytu*, completing the statement.^[20] Also noteworthy is the fact that he mentions the sun and the moon - his parents - after the stars - his brothers, out of respect delaying mentioning his parents.^[21]

As a grown man Joseph is humble and fully conscious of the power of the baser self to draw a person into sin and error (*wa mā ubarri'u nafsī inna 'l-nafsa la'ammāratun bi 'l-sū'i*, 53), That is why he not only prays to God for help against temptations (24, 33, 53), he himself stays morally alert, too.

During his prison term we observe a few other traits of his personality. First, we see him as a remarkable interpreter of dreams. Second, we see him as a person who takes his beliefs seriously and propagates the truth he believes in (35-40). When the prison-mates approach him for an interpretation of their dreams, he takes it as a good opportunity to acquaint them with the fundamentals of the Abrahamic faith.^[22] Third, the manner in which he presents his religious convictions to them testifies to his astute intelligence. Mealtimes must have been an exception to the otherwise unrelieved monotony of an Egyptian prison, and the prisoners, one can imagine, looked forward to them. Joseph assures the two young men that he will interpret their dreams before the next meal arrives. This must have convinced the two men that Joseph considers their dreams important enough to devote some time reflecting on them. At the same time, Joseph creates for himself an excellent opportunity to share his convictions with them.^[23] Fourth, Joseph must have distinguished himself in prison as a man of upright character: the two young men testify that he is a *muḥsin* (36), and when the butler comes back to Joseph for an interpretation of the king's dream, he calls him *ṣiddīq*, literally "very truthful," but really a compact word for a man who is virtuous in every sense.^[24] Fifth, prison life, instead of breaking him down, confirms him in his fierce sense of honor. He was thrown into prison because he put honor over immorality. After many years' imprisonment, his spirit remains

indomitable; he refuses to come out of prison without making sure that the plot of which he is an innocent victim is laid open. He would like to have his freedom, but not at the cost of honor.

Joseph is successful as a ruler and administrator. He proves his claim (55) that he is just, honest, and competent. And it is as a result of his benevolence that foreigners come to him for aid during the years of famine.

He seems far more clever than his brothers. The elder, and much more seasoned, brothers fail to identify him when they first see him in Egypt, but he has no difficulty in recognizing them (58). Also, the scheme he devises to detain Benjamin in Egypt (a scheme which is part of a larger scheme to bring a few truths home to the brothers) is skillfully executed and involves beautiful instances of wordplay.

And he is forgiving. At the very moment that he has his brothers in his power, he announces (92): *la tathrība `alaykumu 'l-yawma*. "No blame rests on you today," treating his brothers with kindness and honor.

c. The Brothers

At the bottom of the brothers' common dislike of Joseph^[25] is their view that status goes with physical might their self-confidence is based on their being a strong band (*`usba*, 14). The Qur'ān depicts them as people who lack "awareness" (15), awareness of divine purposes. This results in *jahl* on their part (89), *jahl* meaning not only "ignorance" but also (in fact primarily) "reckless conduct." This is all the more unfortunate because they belong to a prophet's family.

They are crafty fellows and resort to intrigue to achieve their objectives. But they do not seem to be highly imaginative. Seeing that Jacob is already apprehensive that Joseph might be devoured by a wolf, they do not bother to think up some other explanation for the missing Joseph; of course a wolf devoured him!^[26]

In the end the brothers admit their mistakes and errors, acknowledging Joseph's special and privileged position (91). Renouncing their pride and arrogance, and acknowledging that they had committed wrongs against Jacob and Joseph both, they admit their guilt before both (91, before Joseph; 97, before Jacob).

d. Potiphar's Wife

She is, first of all, lascivious. Frustration in satisfying her lust leads her to act aggressively, failing which she becomes vengeful. She is obviously a scheming woman: she not only plots to seduce Joseph, she also works out a scheme with the avowed aim of shaming her rival ladies, who have bragged about the power of their charms. The latter incident is an indication, perhaps, of the lengths to which the Egyptian nobility could go in flaunting their debauchery.

She is prepared to lie, blatantly, if necessary (25). But in the end she is willing to accept blame, although the reasons remain somewhat unclear; is it because the truth is about to be revealed,

or because, as has been suggested,^[27] Joseph, in his demand for an investigation of the scandal, leaves out her name, an act that finally convinces her of the nobility of his character.

She is a self-confident and strong-headed woman, a trait clearly reflected in her aggressive behavior toward Joseph and the ladies. And there are indications that she plays a dominating role also at home. When she fails to win Joseph, she boasts that she can have Joseph imprisoned. Joseph does go to prison, which means that Potiphar, who alone had the power to arrange this, listened to his wife, who had not boasted in vain.

Minor Characters

Because of the significant detail provided about them even the minor characters of the story become vivid and memorable. We will note only two examples.

a. The Caravaneers

The caravaneers are on the scene for a length of two verses only (19-20). They are described as people with an eye on the main chance. The water-scout cannot hide his delight at his discovery and exclaims with joy, which is shared by the rest of the party. The joy is tempered with discretion, and there is a hurried attempt to hide Joseph for fear someone might claim him. Once in Egypt, they quickly dispose of Joseph, probably to the first bidder.^[28]

b. Potiphar

Potiphar is a minor character from the viewpoint of the story. He himself speaks only on two occasions (in 21, 28-29), but the impression of a person with a keen mind is conveyed clearly. Upon buying Joseph, he perceives that Joseph belongs to a noble family and is the victim of misfortune, and so he asks his wife to take good care of Joseph, even suggesting that they might adopt him.^[29] And upon weighing evidence, he is quick to figure out that the attempt at seduction was made by his wife.

He is basically fair-minded and can rebuke his wife for her machinations. But he seems to be prone to making generalizations, for his criticism of his wife extends to cover all womankind (28).^[30] Or did he generalize on that occasion because it afforded him an opportunity to protest against her domineering attitude? In Zamakhsharī's language: his wife held him under a tight rein.^[31]

On the other hand, Potiphar is not above saving his reputation at the cost of the innocent Joseph and, if he was not directly instrumental in having Joseph imprisoned, must at least have condoned the idea. And yet the overall impression is that of a good man at heart, whose failings are mostly of a passive type - he does not initiate evil, but now and then he allows himself to be used by others, primarily by his wife.

In a sense, *Sūrat Yūsuf* is a story in which there are no losers. All the "villains" are reformed in the end. In spite of that, one continues to feel that the distinction between the good and the bad characters is not completely erased. Although the brothers repent and Potiphar's wife admits

her mistake (as do the noblewomen), the atmosphere remains charged with the conflict that took place between the good and the not-so-good characters, and the tensions created in the plot remain vividly in the reader's mind.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In this article I have attempted to show that the Qur'ānic story of Joseph effectively presents a set of interrelated themes using a tightly-knit plot and employing a variety of characters in a state of dynamic interaction. A systematic literary study of the Qur'ān is badly needed, and the story of Joseph could perhaps serve as a good starting point.

If the analysis presented in this article is basically correct, then we are faced with the question to what extent the Sūra of Joseph is typical or atypical of Qur'ānic composition in general. Is there a similar structure also in other parts of the Qur'ān? Is there in the Qur'ān, underlying all the differences, a definite pattern of composition which is then adapted to meet the specific needs of different sūras? In this context simply raising the question must suffice.

This study has focused on a few selected aspects of the story, though there are other dimensions (for example, that of irony) that call for an in-depth look. In analyzing the story I have confined myself largely to the data furnished by the Qur'ān, and have not made any explicit comparisons between the Qur'ānic and Biblical accounts of the story.^[32] Such a comparative study, if undertaken along the lines here followed, could well throw new light on some of the hitherto insufficiently explored aspects of the relationship between the two scriptures.

References

[1] The story proper (with which we are here concerned) begins with vs. 4 and ends with vs 101.

[2] Neither will I discuss some of the important, but from the viewpoint of the story peripheral, moral-theological issues the sūra raises, for example the issue of a prophet's "sinlessness" raised in connection with vss. 24, 53), or that of Joseph's "trick" to detain Benjamin in Egypt (vss. 70-76).

For a recent study of the Joseph's story "in the context of Muḥammad's prophetic mission" (Joseph as a "relevant and significant model for Muḥammad"), see M. S. Stern, "Muḥammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative," *JNES*, XLIV (1985), 193-204.

[3] The generally held view about the banquet scene is that the ladies, overwhelmed by Joseph's beauty, inadvertently cut their hands with the knives they are holding. In his Qur'ān commentary *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, 8 vols. (Lahore, 1967-1980), III, 454-56, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī has shown that this is not the case and I accept his view. According to Iṣlāhī, the ladies'

criticism of Potiphar's wife (30) contains the implicit boast that they themselves would fare much better with Joseph. Potiphar's wife challenges them to prove it. The ladies' scheme is to bring Joseph round by using one of the most potent of feminine weapons- threat of suicide-if he remains adamant. When Joseph appears before them at the banquet (31), they are awestruck at his beauty (*akbarnahū*), but, pulling themselves together, try their charms on him, failing which some of them cut their hands as a token of their seriousness in carrying out the threat of suicide (*wa qatta`na aydiyahunna*), finally acknowledging defeat but not without pleading that their charms did not work with Joseph because he is an angel and not a human being (*mā hādhā basharan in hādhā illa malakun karīmun*). (On the last point, see also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols. [Cairo, 1934-1962?], XVIII, 128.) All the unsavory details of the episode are thus disposed of in a few words. According to Islāhī, the Qur'ān itself supports this interpretation: the ladies' performance at the banquet is called *kayd* ("stratagem, intrigue") by Joseph (50). If the ladies had been so overwhelmed by Joseph's beauty that they accidentally cut their hands, it could hardly be termed *kayd*. Moreover, the king, when he questions the ladies, says (51): *mā khatbukunna idh rāwadtunna yūsufa`an nafsihi*, "What was the matter with you when you tried to tempt Joseph?," a question that would become meaningless if the incident took place as commonly conceived. Joseph also uses the word in vs. 33, another verse that lends support to Islāhī's contention. It may be noted that the problem which the word *kayd* raises for the traditional interpretation to the episode is practically ignored by Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr al-Tabarī*, ed. A.M. Shakir and M.M. Shakir, 16 vols. thus far published (Cairo, 1955-), XVI, 137, while the three explanations offered by Maḥmūd b. `Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf`an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa`Uyūn al-Aqāwīl*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1966), II, 326, are not very convincing, each raising more questions than it answers. Furthermore, the significance of the detail *wa ātat kulla wāḥidatin minhunna sikkīnan* has perhaps never been fully appreciated. It seems unlikely that the Qur'ān mentions the fact that Potiphar's wife provided knives to her guests just to indicate (sophisticated) Egyptians' use of knives and forks at the table. The knives, in my view, were provided in accordance with the preconceived plan of the ladies mentioned above. And it is too often forgotten that vs. 31 contains the word *qatta`na*, which is intensive and implies *takthīr* ("frequency") and *takrīr* ("repetition"), being thus completely unsuitable for an accidental cutting of hands. The suggestion, Tabarī, XVI, 77-79, Rāzī, SVIII, 127, that Joseph so bewitched the ladies that they did not realize they were cutting their hands and not fruit is, at best, amusing; hardly more convincing are the equally "interesting" explanations (especially the second of the two) offered by Zamakhsharī, II, 316 under *wa a`tadat ... sikkīnan* in that verse.

[4] See Rāzī, XVIII, 151-52.

[5] We know that Potiphar's wife was "avenged" when the ladies failed to impress Joseph(32). We can be reasonably certain that the king, too, was amused by the courtiers' helplessness, for it is with an undertone of sarcasm that he presents his dream before them in the first place (43): *yā ayyuhā`l-mala'u`ftūnī fī ru'yāya in kuntum li`l-ru'yā ta`burūna*, an expression whose tone is not brought out by a literal translation. In addition to the use of the elaborate form of address *yā ayyuhā`l-mala'u* (which, depending upon context, may connote genuine seriousness, or, as is the case here, irony), the object *ru'yā* has been proposed (*taqdīm*) and a

zā'ida ("adventitious") prefixed to it (for which see Zamakhsharī, II, 23; Rāzī, XVIII, 147), the whole structure thus acquiring an advisedly sluggish quality indicative of the king's amusement at the anticipated failure of the courtiers. The king is really saying: In case you pride yourselves on being experts at interpreting dreams, here is one that should prove a challenge. Cf. Islāhī, III, 467.

[6] It is a little different with the Egyptian ladies' attempt to seduce Joseph: they have accepted a challenge thrown by Potiphar's wife and their primary aim is to prove to **her** that they are better acquainted with love's ways.

[7] The structural parallelism in the story is frequently reflected in linguistic parallelism, some of which will be noted in the verses pertaining to the parallels cited. An obvious case is a., in which the brothers say *wa innā lahu lahāfizūna* when they take away Joseph (12) and also when they take away Benjamin (63). And, upon their return to Jacob in each instance, they try to assure him that they are telling the truth (17, 82).

[8] According to Islāhī, III, 443, the words *yarta` wa yal`ab* in vs. 11 are a beautiful description of a picnic, a favorite recreation of the Bedouins and one that Arab poets speak of with great interest. Cf. Ṭabarī, XV, 569-72; Rāzī, XVIII, 97.

[9] Islāhī, III, 446, Cf. Ṭabarī, XVI, 4-7.

[10] This is in addition to the fact that *ghālib* is an adjective denoting an enduring quality (*dawām* and *istimrār*), whereas *la'aghlibanna*, a verb, denotes a time-bound quality (*hudūth*).

[11] Barring S. 42:19, for which see the next note.

[12] S. 6:103 says that while human eyes cannot perceive God, God can perceive man, God being *latīf*. S. 22:63 says that God's help will change the apparently hopeless situation for the believers in the same way in which arid land, upon receiving rain, grows rich vegetation and changes its complexion; God can do this, for He is *latīf* (Islāhī, IV, 418). S. 31:16 says that God will one day resurrect all the dead, bringing forth everything, even if it were a hidden mustard seed, for He is "Subtle" (ibid., V, 129). S. 33:34 assures the Prophet's wives that if they discharge their duties within the confines of their homes, as they are being instructed to do, their services would not remain unnoticed by God, Who is **latīf** (ibid., V, 221-22). According to S. 67:13, God listens to everything and the next verse adds that He can do so because He is *latīf*. In S. 42:19, the only other verse in which it occurs, *latīf* means "kind, beneficent," and so does not pertain to our present discussion.

[13] But if God's ways are not arbitrary, are they inscrutable? For they may be inscrutable without being arbitrary. The Qur'ānic answer would seem to be in the negative, as I understand the category of "inscrutability." Cf., however, Gerhard von Rad's remark: "Obviously these striking narrative sections are meant to ... cause the reader to read the entire story of Jacob with respect to the inscrutability and freedom of God's ways." *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 31.

[14] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 486-87. For the traditional explanation of Jacob's advice, see *Ṭabarī*, XVI, 165-66; *Rāzī*, XVIII, 170-72.

[15] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 487. Cf. *Rāzī*, XVIII, 175. We have already noted Jacob's advice to Joseph to keep his dream from the brothers and his reluctance in sending Joseph with the brothers for fear he might come to harm.

[16] Cf. von Rad on the patriarchs in Genesis, Genesis, p. 36: "Above all, one must ask where and in what sense Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph are meant by the narrator to be understood as models, by virtue of their own actions or of divine providence...."

[17] Cf. von Rad, *ibid.*, "The figures of the patriarchs are presented with a matter-of-fact realism which by no means suppresses those things that move and concern mankind, and on some occasions weakness and failure are brought out with unrelieved harshness...." It would also appear that the following statement by Franz Delitzsch (quoted in von Rad, *ibid.*, p. 37, note) would not at all represent the Qur'ānic idea of realism: "By the yardstick of the Old Testament even Tamar, with all her going astray, is a saint because of her wisdom, her tenderness, her nobility."

[18] Zamakhsharī argues (II, 302) that there is no repetition because the second use of **ra'aytu** is a reply to an unexpressed question (*laysa bi takrārin innamā huwa kalāmun musta'nafun 'alā taqdīri su'ālin waqa`a jawāban lahu...*). This is grammatically correct (as most traditional explanations of such points are) but misses the dramatic element altogether (as most traditional explanations do).

[19] That he does is indicated by the fact that he uses masculine forms (pronoun *hum* and participle *sājidīn* in describing the heavenly bodies. Cf. *Ṭabarī*, XV, 556-57; Zamakhsharī, II, 302-303.

[20] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 436-37.

[21] Cf. Zamakhsharī, II, 302. The sequence given in Genesis (37:9) is: the sun, the moon, and the stars.

[22] Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, 6 vols. (Lahore, 1949-1972), II, 402-404; *Iṣlāhī*, III, 464.

[23] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 463-66. Also, Zamakhsharī, II, 320. Cf. *Rāzī*, XVIII, 136.

[24] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 463, 468; Mawdūdī, II, 400, 406. Also Zamakhsharī, III, 302.

[25] At least one of the brothers (Reuben, according to *Ṭabarī* [XVI, 207-208], Judah, according to Zamakhsharī [II, 305; but see *ibid.*, II, 336-37]) has a soft corner for Joseph and is instrumental in saving his life.

[26] *Iṣlāhī*, III, 445.

[27] Rāzī, XVIII, 152-53.

[28] Iṣlāhī, III, 446.

[29] Ibid., III, 447.

[30] Cf. ibid., III, 453-54.

[31] Zamakhsharī, II, 319, *zimāmuhu fi yadihā*.

[32] For two such attempts, radically different in nature, see John Macdonald, "Joseph in the Qur'ān," *MW*, XLVI (1956), 113-31 and 207-24, and Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," *MW*, LXXV (1985), 1-16.

2.4. Contrapuntal Harmony In The Thought, Mood And Structure Of Sūrah Fātiḥah

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The opening Sūrah of the Qur'ān is generally regarded as consisting of seven verses. There is, however, disagreement on whether the basmalah is part of the Sūrah and is to be counted as one of the seven verses (for details, see Abū `Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi` li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 20 vol. in 10 [Tehran reprint of Egyptian edition], 1:114-115). For our purposes, the Sūrah, when the basmalah is left out, consists of six verses. A close study of these six verses reveals that they are, in several ways, marked by harmony of point and counterpoint. The harmony is noticeable not only on the plane of thought, but also in respect of the structure and mood of the poem.

The Sūrah is divisible into two main parts, the first consisting of verse 1-3, the second, of verses 5-6, with verse 4 being the intermediary or link verse, as will be explained below. In order to facilitate reference to the text, the Sūrah is reproduced below in transliteration.

1. *Al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l`alamīn*
2. *Al-Raḥmāni r-Raḥīm*
3. *Māliki yawmi d-dīn*
4. *Iyyāka na`budu wa iyyāka nasta`in*
5. *Ihdina ṣ-ṣirāṭa 'l-mustaqīm*
6. *Ṣirāṭa 'lladhīna an`amta `alayhim, ḡhayri'l-maḡdhūbi `alayhim wa-la d-dā`illīn.*

Analysis

1. Nominal and Verbal Sentences

The first three verses make up a nominal sentence (*Jumlah Ismiyyah*), whereas the last two verses are a verbal sentence (*Jumlah Fi`liyyah*). The fourth verse, which is in between these two sets, partakes of the qualities of both types of sentences and may be called, in grammatical terms, *Jumaltun Dhatu Wajhayn* (literally: 'two-faced sentence'). Structurally speaking, this sentence facilitates the transition from the nominal to the verbal sentence (note that it begins with the noun-equivalent pronoun *Iyyāka*, which links it with the nominal sentence made up of the first three verses, and ends with the verbs *Na`budu* and *Nasta`in*, which connects it with the verbal sentence made up of the last two verses. In the following paragraphs, we shall refer to the first three verses as Part 1 and to the last two verses as Part 2. As for the intermediary verse 4, it stands independently, though for certain practical purposes it may be included in Part 2.

Grammatically, the nominal sentence signifies *Dawam* ('permanence' - or, in philosophical language: 'being'), whereas the verbal sentence signifies *Huduth* ('happening' - philosophically: 'becoming'). Part 1 describes the Divinity, the nominal sentence indicating the *Dawam*, or eternity, of His Being and Attributes. Part 2 (inclusive of verse 4) describes man's prayer to that God for help, the verbal sentence indicating, within a historical context of Part 1, man's call to God and, implicitly, the Divine response to that call.

2. Thought and Action

In Part 1 man reflects on the universe and breaks out in praise of an All-Compassionate God. In Part 2 he seeks help from this All-Compassionate God. In other words, perception and understanding lead to action and movement. Part 1 of the Sūrah represents the realm of contemplation, Part 2, the realm of action, the two being interconnected: in Part 1 man reflects, in Part 2 he is moved to action - by that reflection.

3. God-Man Interaction

According to this Sūrah, man needs Divine help and ought to seek it. On the other hand, God is not unconcerned with man's affairs, but intervenes in history by furnishing the help man needs. God and man thus interact, and the interaction is reflected in the structure of the Sūrah. Part 1 states how God relates to the world in general (note especially the phrase *rabbi l-`alamīn*) and to man in particular (the notion of judgement, stated in *Māliki yawmi d-dīn*, clearly indicates this), whereas Part 2 states how man ought to relate to his Creator-Lord. Each verse in the first set has a counterpart in the other. Thus:

Verse 1 speaks of God's *Rububiyyah* (providence), and verse 4 speaks of the homage that is due to God from man for guidance, this guidance being, as the Qur'ān explains in many places, a manifestation of God's mercy.

Verse 3 speaks of God's being the Master of the Day of Judgement, and verse 6 speaks of God's adjudging, on that day, of human beings as righteous or wicked.

4. Temporal and non-Temporal

As noted already, verses 1-3 are, grammatically, one sentence. This sentence, being nominal, has no tense - it represents non-temporality. If we leave verse 4 aside for the moment, the last two verses, 5-6, also make up a single sentence, which, being verbal, has tense - thus representing temporality. The difference is perhaps a symbolic representation, first, of the difference between the Divine realm, which is unconstrained by time, and the human realm, which is time-bound; and, secondly, of the God-man interaction (see above): God, who is beyond time and is infinite (verses 1-3), intervenes in the world of man, who is finite and time-bound. Verse 4, which links up the two sets of verses, is thus a declaration by the finite human being to submit to the Infinite, and also a prayer for the non-temporal to enter into the world of the temporal. But, even though verses 5-6 make up a verbal sentence, the verb used, *Ihdi* (guide) is imperative, which, being non-declarative (*Insha'*), implies that the guidance sought - and, hopefully, provided - is free from the limitations of time and is relevant to all ages.

5. Perception and Conception

The data reflected on in Part 1 are primarily sensory in character: the evidence of God's providence and mercy is found everywhere in the physical universe. The Straight Path of Part 2, as also the recompense, is primarily conceptual in nature. A transition or development from the material and physical to the conceptual and spiritual thus takes place in the Sūrah.

6. Emotion and Cognition

Part 1 is emotive: man, upon reflecting on the universe and his own situation, cannot help exclaiming how providential, compassionate, and just God is. Part 2, on the other hand, represents, first, a recognition of the fact that Divine providence, compassion, and justice demand in return submission from man, and, second, a translation of that understanding into a prayer for guidance so that submission may take a proper form. The affective element is not entirely absent from Part 2, though the cognitive and discursive elements predominate. In Part 1, on the other hand, the reflective aspect is not completely missing - in fact it is reflection that leads man to make the exclamatory pronouncement - but reflection is in the background, exclamation in the foreground.

7. Initiative and Response

Part 1 represents the initiative taken by God: being provident, merciful, and just, He showers His blessings on man. Part 2 represents the response made by man: he submits to God. From another point of view, this human response is also an initiative: man makes a conscious decision to worship God and mould his life in accordance with His decrees. To this initiative, the response of God, one can infer from the second half of the last verse (*Sirāta 'lladhīna*

an`amta `alayhim, ghayri'l-maghdūbi `alayhim wa-la d-dā`allīn), would be that he would bless those who follow the Straight Path and punish those who go astray and earn His wrath.

8. Privilege and Responsibility

Part 1 speaks of the privileges man enjoys in this world. Part 2 speaks of the responsibilities entailed by those privileges. The Sūrah indicates that there is, or ought to be, a causal connection between the blessings man receives and the gratitude he shows, or ought to show.

9. Dunyā and Ākhirah

While both Part 1 and Part 2 make reference to this world (*Dunyā*) and (*Ākhirah*) both, the primary focus in Part 1 is on the *Dunyā* (it is in the context of the *Dunyā* that man reflects on this universe), in Part 2, on the *Ākhirah* (it is in the context of the *Ākhirah* that salvation is sought). At the same time, Part 1 (God as Master of the Day of Judgement [verse 3]) refers to the Hereafter in explicit terms, whereas Part 2 (salvation and condemnation earned on the basis, respectively, of good and evil actions performed in this world) makes a definite, if implicit, to this world as the 'abode of action' (*Dāru 'l-`amal*). Another point, ancillary to the discussion of the *Ākhirah*, is that Part 1 (see verse 3) refers to the Day of Recompense in general terms, whereas Part 2 (see verses 5-6) speaks of recompense in the more specific terms of reward and punishment.

10. Individual and Society

Since the mood of Part 1 is predominantly exclamatory, the speaker in it, in all probability, arguably represents humanity); overwhelmed by the blessedness of the state of his existence, the speaker proclaims the praises of the Lord. On the other hand, the speaker in Part 2 is man as a member of society: man's commitment to serve God, as also his prayer for guidance, is made as a member of a collectivity, hence the use of plural forms in this part: we serve God and we seek His help; guide us in the Straight Path.

2.5. The Qur'ān Oaths : Farāhī's Interpretation

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I. Preliminary

Many of the early Qur'ānic surahs contain oaths, typical of which are the oaths sworn by the sun and the moon, day and night, and light and darkness. While both Muslim and Western scholars have noted the phenomenon, no satisfactory explanation exists. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064 CE), dissatisfied with the standard explanation and unable to present an alternative, declared that the Qur'ānic oaths, together with the 'broken letters,' make up the category of verses called in Qur'ān 3:7 *mutashabihāt* ('ambiguous').^[1] The only traditional writer known to have written a book on the subject is Ibn Qayyim (d. 1356 CE), who, in his *Al-Tibyān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*, sets out to explain all the Qur'ān oaths. Ibn Qayyim, however, neither aimed at nor succeeded in presenting a systematic theory of the oaths, and, in many ways, his book represents and reinforces the standard explanation. The view about the Qur'ānic oaths entertained by the generality of Western scholars, too, as we shall see, does not come to grips with the principal issue. A modern Indian Muslim writer, Ḥamīd al-Dīn `Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī^[2] (1863-1930), has offered a new interpretation of the Qur'ānic oaths which, this paper will suggest, merits serious consideration. After reviewing the traditional Muslim and modern Western views on the subject, we shall examine Farāhī's interpretation. Farāhī explained only a few of the Qur'ānic oaths in the light of his theory, and it was left to his student, Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī,^[3] to apply it to the rest of the oaths.

II. Traditional View

Basic Statement

Zarkashī (d. 1392 CE) defines an oath as *jumlatun yu'akkadu biha'l-khabaru*^[4] (a sentence that confirms a statement through emphasis). Suyūfī (d: 1505 AD.) describes it in similar terms: *al-qasdu bi'l-qasami tahaqiqu'l-khabari wa tawkiduhu*^[5] (The purpose of an oath is to confirm a statement and place emphasis upon it). In other words, the *muqsam bihi* (object of oath) serves to emphasise the point made in the *muqsam `alayh* (complement of oath).^[6] The notable thing, as will soon become clear, is the manner of achieving that emphasis: through identification of some kind of `azamah (glory, excellence, distinction) in the *muqsam bihi* (Hereafter: MB). By the sheer force of its `azamah, the MB bears out the *muqsam `alayh* (hereafter: MA). It is thus not necessary to establish a logical or causal connection between the MB and the MA in a given oath; all that is needed is to ascertain `azamah in the MB. That done, the truth of the MA can be taken for granted.

Examples

We shall now document this view of the Qur'ānic oaths by taking a few examples from three major Qur'ān exegetes, Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE). and Rāzī (d. 1230 CE).

According to Ṭabarī, 'Qatadah maintained that, when God swears by certain objects, he does so in view of the exalted status they have in His eyes.' Qatadah explains 92:2-3 by saying that night and day are 'two great signs God wraps around the creation'.^[7] Dahhak, commenting on 89:2-3, says that God has sworn by other days, and has singled out the day of sacrifice (*shaf'*) and the day of 'Arafah (*watr*) because of their known excellence over all the other nights.'^[8]

Zamak^hsharī makes the following remark about 68:1: 'He [God] has sworn by the pen in order to exalt it; for it points to the great wisdom that inheres in creating it and making it well, and because it carries countless benefits and advantages.'^[9] God has sworn by 'the piercing star,' Zamak^hsharī says in reference to 86:1-3, 'in order to glorify the extraordinary power and subtle wisdom it is known to represent.'^[10]

Rāzī, commenting upon 44:2, observes that the fact that God has sworn by the Qur'ān is proof of the excellence (*sharaf*) of the Qur'ān.^[11] He explains 89:1-5 as follows:

Know that these objects of oath, by which God has sworn, must represent either some kind of religious blessing (*fa'idah diniyyah*) or some kind of worldly good (*fa'idah dunyawīyyah*) that would necessitate the offering of gratitude, or a combination of both. Commentators have accordingly differed sharply in their interpretation of these things, each interpreting them in the light of his understanding of what is of the highest value in religion and of the greatest benefit in respect of worldly matters.^[12]

His comment on 90:1-2 is that the oath testifies to the great honour the town of Makkah possesses.^[13] Discussing 103:1, Rāzī cites four interpretations of the word *'asr*: 'time', 'the beginning or end of a day,' 'the *'asr* prayer,' and 'the era of Muḥammad'.^[14] The common denominator of all four interpretations, as is evident from Rāzī's discussion, is glorification of the MB.

More examples can easily be found in the three exegetes, and also in others.^[15] The unmistakable impression one gets from a study of traditional Qur'ān commentaries is that, in dealing with the oaths, the scholars are primarily interested in establishing the *'azamah* of the MB.

Comment

The major problem with the traditional interpretation is that it fails to address the question of the relationship between the MB and the MA. An oath, after all, is made up of an MB and an MA, and one cannot help asking how the two are related. What is the connection, one might ask in reference to 68:1-2, between the pen and the claim that Muḥammad is not a man possessed; or, in reference to 100:1-6, between swift horses and man's ingratitude; or, in reference to S. (=surah) 103, between time and the claim that a large number of human beings are losers in the end? If no definite relationship exists between the MB and the MA of an oath, then could one play a mix-and-match game with the Qur'ānic oaths, taking the MB of one surah and pairing it of with the MA of another, because the intended effect of *ta'zim* (glorification, exaltation) of the MB would be produced regardless?

To say that the traditional interpretation of the Qur'ānic oaths ignores the question of the relationship between the MB and the MA is to say that it fails to account for the use of the oath in pre-Islamic Arabic literature. For the Qur'ān was not the first to employ the oath. In pre-Islamic Arabic literature, two main types of oaths are to be found, the first in poetry, which may, therefore, be called the poetical oath, and the second in the utterances of kahins,

which may be called the kahin oath. The poetical oath is typified by such expressions as (i) *la 'amri* (by my life), *la 'armu abika* (by the life of your father), *bi rabbi'l-ka'bati* (by the Lord of the Ka'bah), and (ii) *wa farasi* (by my horse) and *wa rumhi* (by my spear). In such oaths, the speaker seems to be trying to establish a connection between the MB and the MA: he presents the MB in support of the MA, and as a rule does so by staking his honour on the statement he makes. Typical of the kahin oaths, on the other hand, are MB's that are often drawn from natural phenomena, but which seem to bear no connection to the MA's that follow; a lack of connection, in fact, seems to be one of the factors generating the mysterious aura that gives such an oath its power, and is, in all probability, consciously aimed at.

These two types of oaths, it is important to keep in mind, are distinct from each other. In interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, Muslim writers, quite understandably, attached no paradigmatic value to the kahin oath. But, while they cited the poetical oath in discussions of the Qur'ānic oaths, it seems surprising that they failed to entertain the possibility that the Qur'ānic oaths, like the poetical oaths, sought to establish a relationship between the MB and the MA. But perhaps it was not so much inadvertent failure as conscious disregard. The poetical oath, when taken as a model for interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, presented a theological problem. The thinking of Muslim writers probably went as follows. In swearing an oath one makes a solemn statement. In swearing an oath by a certain object, one presents that object as evidence supporting one's statement, staking one's honour on the statement made. That is what one finds in Arabic poetry. But the Qur'ān is God's very word, and God does not need to stake His honour on anything, and, consequently, does not need to cite anyone or anything in support of what He says. We should not, therefore, look at the objects He has sworn by as pieces of evidence for the statements made by Him, but should rather regard them as having been elevated in status for the simple reason that God has chosen to swear by them. But a difficulty arose at this point. If a poetical oath made a statement and supported it with evidence, while the Qur'ānic oath made a statement without corroborating it, then the former would, in a sense, be superior to the latter; and that would be unacceptable. There was, however, an easy way to vindicate the Qur'ān; by asserting that the poetical oath, too, did not provide evidence but simply lent rhetorical emphasis. In other words, not only was the poetical oath not taken as a model for interpreting the Qur'ānic oath, the poetical oath was reinterpreted in order to fit the model that had been created in order to solve a theological difficulty. It is in this vein that Rāzī says: 'The Qur'ān was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and it was customary for the Arabs to reinforce their statements by means of oaths.'¹⁶¹ Here Rāzī uses the word 'reinforcement' in the same sense in which Zarkashī and Suyūṭī have used the word *tawkid* in describing the function of an oath (see above).

The Traditional View: A Qualification

Farāhī, as we shall see, argues that the Qur'ānic oaths are argumentative in nature. Before we present his view; and in order to judge how original that view is; it is necessary to ask whether the idea of an oath furnishing evidence (as in the poetical oath) is completely alien to the traditional understanding. A review of the sources would suggest that the idea is not totally absent; on occasions at least, we find writers attempting to establish logical connections between the MB and the MA. Let us take a few examples.

Baydawī (d. 1286 CE) writes in reference to 43:2: 'It may be that the God's swearing of an oath by certain objects is a mode of presenting proofs; in view of the evidence those objects furnish for the MA.'^[17] Ibn Kathīr (d. 1398 CE) remarks on 92:1-4 as follows: Since the objects sworn by in the oath are characterised by contrariety (night and day, male and female), the MA ('Indeed your efforts are diverse') is characterised by contrariety as well.^[18] Nisaburī (d: 1446 AD) on several occasions tries to bring out the harmony between the MB and the MA. Discussing 84:16-19, he points out that a correspondence (*Mutabaqah*) exists between the MB (verses 16-18) and the MA (verse 19): the former speaks of the changes that take place in the heavens; the latter, of the changes that will take place in the Hereafter. Undoubtedly, Nisaburī concludes, if God can effect changes of the one type, He should be capable of effecting changes of the other types also.^[19] But perhaps the writer who more than any other seeks to establish such connections is Ibn Qayyim. For the moment one example from him will suffice. The point of the oath in 93:1-3, according to Ibn Qayyim, is that God, who does not allow the darkness of night to persist forever but dispels it by means of daylight, would, by renewing the process of sending revelation to Muḥammad, dispel the darkness caused by the interruption of revelation.^[20]

These examples do indicate a concern with establishing a meaningful relationship between the MB and the MA. But, first, they constitute an exception to the rule; the rule of discovering *'azamah* in the MB. Second, the relationships established in most of them are perhaps not truly logical. Baydawī, while he suggests that the MB may serve as evidence for the MA, does not explain how the evidence is presented in the oath in 43:2; and the suggestion he makes is quite vague and tentative. Ibn Kathīr, in regard to 92:1-4, does no more than point out that the MB and the MA have similar content; which hardly makes the MB a proof for the MA. Nisaburī's contention about God's ability to effect changes is theoretically sound, but it is difficult to see in what sense does it constitute a proof in 84:16-19. The weakness of Ibn Qayyim's interpretation of 93:1-3 is shown by the fact that it could easily be inverted to produce the opposite result: just as God does not allow daylight to persist forever but causes nocturnal darkness to overtake it, the unbelievers might have argued, so He would to let the daylight of revelation (if, at all, they were to concede the comparison) continue but would allow it to be overtaken by the 'darkness' by the interruption of revelation.

Here, then, we have yet another criticism of the traditional view: even when the scholars do make a deliberate attempt to establish a relationship between the MB, and the MA, they conceive that relationship in such generalised terms as to fail to explain in what specific way, in a given case, the MB provides evidence for the MA.^[21]

And so we reach essentially the same conclusion that we had reached earlier, namely, that it is the MB that receives, practically in isolation from the MA, the main attention of the traditional scholars.

III. Western View

Statement

Theodor Nöldeke in his *Geschichte des Qorans* discusses the phenomenon of the Qur'ānic oaths. Proposing a four-fold division of the Qur'ānic surahs, three Makkan and one Madinah, he describes the First Makkan Period as follows:

Die Rede ist grossartig, erhaben und voll kuhner Bilder, der rhetorische Schwung hat noch ganz poetische Färbung . Die Gefühle und ahnungen des Propheten äussern sich zuweilen in einer Dunkelheit des Sinnes, der überhaupt mehr angedeutet, als ausgeführt wird.^[22]

The Qur'ānic oaths are characteristic of this period: 'Eine eigentümliche, aber charakteristische Encheinung sind die in dieser Perioide sehr häufig . Vorkommenden Schwure, durch welche Muhammed besonders im Anfange der Suren die Wahrheit seiner Reden bekräftigt.'^[23] He compares the Qur'ānic oaths to the oaths sworn by the kahins of the Arabia:

Ebenso wie den Sag hat er [Muhammad] diesen Brauch den heidnischen Kahinen abgesehen, welche ihre Aussagen durch feierliche Schwure einzuleiten pflegten und hierbei weniger die Götter zu Zeugen anriefen als die verschiedensten Naturobjekte, wie Landschaften und Wegemale, Tiere und Vogel, Tag und Nacht, Licht und Finsternis, Sonne, Mond, und Sterne, Himmel und Erde.

The Qur'ān, however, has two other types of oaths as well, those in which an oath is sworn by the Last Day or Day of Judgement, and those; being the most difficult to explain; in which an oath is sworn by female beings.^[24]

Comment

This is what may be called the standard Western view of the Qur'ānic oaths.^[25] We have said above that pre-Islamic Arabic literature contains two types of oaths, the poetical and the kahin, that the traditional Muslim writers do not consider the kahin oath as having any paradigmatic value for interpreting the Qur'ānic oaths, and that, while explaining these oaths, they do cite the poetical oath, but not without reinterpreting it drastically, so as to avoid a possible theological problem. The Western view, on the other hand, disregards the poetical oath as a possible paradigm for the Qur'ānic oaths, and instead presents the kahin oath as the model. But in doing so, it too fails to take into account the Qur'ān's categorical refutation of the view that revelation belongs to the genre of soothsaying (see 52:29; 69:42). Furthermore, the Qur'ānic oaths, according to the Nöldeke, fall into three major categories, and it is only the first category; and that too only partially; that is represented by the kahin oaths.

In one respect, however, the Western view is similar to the traditional Muslim view: in both, the oath is essentially a rhetorical device: it is used 'to make the final assertion (MA) more impressive.'^[26]

IV. Farāhī's Theory

Anatomy of an Oath

Farāhī holds that the principal function of the oath is to provide *dalīl* (argument) and *shahadah* (evidence). The Qur'ānic oaths are of this type: the MB furnishes evidence for the MA. An interesting aspect of Farāhī's theory is his attempt to see the oaths in a historical-linguistic perspective. The oath originated in the social need to ratify pacts and agreements. The ratification took many forms: handshake, the practice from which the word *yamin* (right hand) came to mean 'oath';^[27] dipping hands into a bowl of water;^[28] rubbing perfume on hands;^[29] slaughtering an animal and sprinkling its blood on the parties involved in order to symbolise blood-relationship or, as in Exodus 24:5-8, to confirm a covenant;^[30] and joining chords.^[31] Now every such ratification took place in the presence of witnesses, who could testify to the occurrence of the event; in fact, to bear witness to an event is to declare that one was present at the scene of the event.^[32] And that is the crux of an oath: what was sworn by MB was meant to serve as a witness to the truth of what was sworn of (MA).

Linguistically, the particles of oath are *ba'*, *waw* and *ta'*. The first two obviously denote accompaniment (*ma'iyyah*) or the joining of one thing to another (*dammu'l-shay'i bi'l-shay'i*); the third is, like the *ta'* in *taqwa* and *tujah*, a changed form (*maqlub*) of *waw*. Thus in swearing an oath by a person or a thing, one wishes that person or thing to 'bear him company' or 'stand by him'. *Ta'zim* of the MB may coincidentally occur in an oath but is not essential to it.^[33]

This analysis is interesting in itself, but in offering it Farāhī makes two important points. First, he establishes a methodological base for his theory. We have noted above the importance that the traditional writers seem to attach to the theological perspective in arriving at an explanation of the Qur'ānic oaths. Farāhī is saying that the phenomenon of the oaths ought to be appraised from a literary and not a theological standpoint: the historical origins and linguistic understandings supply the framework within which the oaths must be studied. Second, Farāhī maintains that the MB, far from being the most important part of an oath, is only a means for validating the MA. For the oaths are an instrument of Qur'ānic logic and reasoning, and emphasis should be placed not on ascertaining the '*azamah*' of the MB; since the latter does not have to be illustrious or magnificent at all; but on establishing a cogent relationship between the MB and the MA. The MA is the end, the MB is the means. In narrative order the MB comes first, but the MA has logical priority.^[34]

Interpretation of the Oaths

We shall now look at Farāhī's explanation of some of the Qur'ānic oaths. The *Majmu'ah-i-Tafasir-i-Farāhī* consists of commentary on fourteen of the shorter Qur'ānic surahs, and six of them contain oaths: 51, 75, 77, 91, 95, and 103.^[35] We can divide these oaths into four categories. First, the phenomenal oath, in which individual or multiple phenomena of nature are sworn by. Second, the historical oath, which cites one or more events from the past. Third, the experiential oath, in which a certain facet of human experience is presented as evidence. Fourth, there is what, for want of a better word, may be called the conjugate oath, one in which a certain entity is shown to be a member of a pair and the existence of the other member is thus adduced.^[36]

Phenomenal Oath

Of the six oaths discussed by Farāhī, two (51:1-6 and 77:1-6) belong to this category. In S. 51, verses 5-6 (MA) assert that human actions shall be recompensed in the hereafter. Verses 1-4, 7 (MB) produce the requisite evidence. As agents of divine mercy, the winds and rains have wiped out many a rebellious nation. But the same elements of nature which destroyed Noah's opponents and Pharaoh's troops also delivered Noah and Moses and their followers. This shows that God is not indifferent to man's conduct on earth: He rewards and punishes in this world, and He will do so in the next life as well.^[37] S.77 is similar to S. 51, and what has been said about S. 51 will hold for it, too.^[38]

Historical Oath

Two oaths (95:1-6 and S. 103) fall in this category. In S. 95, the Qur'ān is not describing, as commentators generally believe it is,^[39] the uses of the fig and the olive; rather, it is presenting a well-knit argument. The surah seeks to establish the meting out of recompense in the next life. Verses 4-6 are the MA, and they imply that people who make proper use of their faculties and powers will be rewarded, but those who misuse them will be punished.^[40] Verse 7, by using the word *din* (recompense), elucidates the point further. The MA is supported with reference to four historic sites on earth.

Tin (fig) in verse 1 is not the fruit or tree known by that name, but, in accordance with the Arab custom of calling a place after its main produce, the name of a place. Nabighah speaks of the cold northerly winds that cause the light winter clouds to float around Mount Tin,^[41] and it is likely that he is referring to a mountain in the north, which could be either Mount Judi, which Arab poets associates with extreme cold, or some other nearby mountain.^[42] At Tin, the principle of divine reckoning was implemented on two historic occasions. The first occasion was when the disobedience of Adam and Eve cost them their celestial robes (7:27). The Torah tells us (Gen. 3-7) that it was with fig-leaves that they covered their nakedness. Adam and Even later repented and were forgiven and blessed with guidance. Mount Tin, thus, represents the principle in both its twin aspects to reward and punishment. The second occasion was when Noah's Ark stood atop Mount Judi (11-44) and Noah and his followers were saved and his opponents destroyed.^[43]

Zaytun (verse 2) is also the name of a place; it refers to the Mount of Olives, to which, according to the Gospels, Jesus repaired to worship and pray.^[44] Farāhī cites, first, Psalm 118:22-23, and then Matt. 21:43-44 in explication of it, concluding that, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus (Luke 22:39-53; Mark 14:33-42; Matt. 26:36-46 invoked the principle of reckoning, as a result of which the kingdom of heaven was taken from one Abrahamic line, the Israelites, and given to the other, the Ishmaelites. The Mount of Olives thus also became a landmark in the history of the enactment of that principle.

The same is true of Mount Sinai (verse 3). It was here that the persecuted Israelites were rewarded for their steadfastness and given the Torah, the Law being meant to establish divine sovereignty and thwart the foes of God.^[45]

It is not different with Makkah (verse 4). It was a result of Abraham's unqualified submission to Him that God rewarded him and granted his prayer that Makkah be made 'a land of peace' and a prophet raised in it. Also, Abraham was made 'a leader of the people', but was told that God's promise of leadership for his progeny would not extend to the iniquitous among them (2:124). Furthermore, Makkah was to be a land of peace, and those who tried to rob it of its peace (as did Abraham) would be punished. In this way Makkah, too, becomes a living testimony to the validity of the principle of reckoning.^[46]

As for S.103, the word *'asr* is usually translated as 'time', but its principal use in Arabic is for the time past. In citing *'asr* as evidence of the loss that is in store for all men except the type described, the Qur'ān presents past history as evidence. According to the Qur'ān, the rise and fall of nations is governed by a set of moral laws, and the word *'asr* constitutes a compact reference to all those momentous events of history which the Qur'ān elsewhere narrates in detail in order to vindicate those moral laws.^[47]

Experiential Oath

75:1-2. The MA, unexpressed, is that the Hereafter is a certainty. But that precisely is the MB also: in verse 1 the Resurrection is sworn by. According to Farāhī, sometimes a thing is so self-evident as to be its own proof, and this is the case here: the Hereafter is so certain and necessary, that it would suffice to swear by it to prove its occurrence. However, verse 2, another MB, provides proof as well: in miniature form, conscience represents the Grand Court that God will establish on the Last Day. Our intuitive experience of conscience gives evidence that God, who has planted this 'reproachful self' in our beings will bring about a day of recompense as well.^[48]

Conjugate Oath

91:1-10. The MA, again unexpressed, may be stated as follows: On the Last Day, God will judge human beings. The surah presents the argument from 'complementary opposites'. Things in this world exist in pairs whose members are apparently opposites but in reality necessary complements to each other. Examples are the sun and the moon, day and night, and the male and the female (verses 1-6). Like the physical world, the spiritual realm, too, with its categories of good and evil (verses 7-10), displays such opposition. And just as individual phenomena in the physical and spiritual realms have their complementary opposites, so the world, taken as a whole, has its complementary opposite, the next world, without which it would become inexplicable.^[49]

Analysis and Observations

The purpose of a Qur'ānic oath, according to Farāhī's theory, is not to reinforce the MA or make it sound impressive but to present an argument. The theory thus suggests the need to draw a distinction between the formal and the functional aspects of the oaths: formally the oaths may be peculiar to the Makkan period, but functionally they could be similar to other devices that are used in both Makkan and Madinah surahs to supply proof or evidence. In

other words, the oaths would be studied primarily under the head of 'Qur'ānic logic' rather than under the head of 'Qur'ānic rhetorical devices'.

Viewed thus, Farāhī's theory seeks, one might say, to integrate the arguments presented in the oaths with the arguments presented throughout the Qur'ān. For instance, past history is cited in numerous places in the Qur'ān as evidence of certain truths, and Farāhī's interpretation of S. 103 would appear to be a presentation of the same evidence in an abbreviated form. Similarly, the citing, in S. 51, of the winds and rains as proof of recompense in the hereafter is a reference, again abbreviated, to the principles of recompense that has been elaborated in many other places in the Qur'ān. On a larger scale, one might argue, the oaths, as interpreted by Farāhī, give us an insight into the relationship between the Makkan and the Madinah surahs: the same arguments that are presented with brevity in the Makkan surahs are presented in greater detail in the Madinah. A problem arises at this point, however. Unlike the 'detail' of the Madinah period, the 'brevity' of the Makkan period, as seen in the oaths, is not without ambiguity; or Ibn Ḥazm would not have classified the oaths as *mutashābihāt* and the traditional Muslim scholars would not have differed in their opinions about the referents of the MB's in the oaths. The question arises: how can one be sure, in the case of S. 51 for example, that the referents in the first four verses are the winds and no other thing; or being; or that tin, *zaytūn*, Mount Sinai (*tur sinīn*), and Makkah (*al-balad al-amīn*) in S. 95 stand only for the sites identified by Farāhī? While no completely satisfactory answer to this question can be given, it seems reasonable to hold that the interpretation of an oath should be evaluated not only for self-consistency but also for consistency with the context in which the oath occurs and, perhaps, with the thematic content of the Qur'ān as a whole. If this is a valid test, then Farāhī's explanations of the Qur'ānic oaths would seem to pass it with a comfortable margin.

Farāhī's theory seems to compare favourably, on several counts, with the traditional. First, Farāhī's basic contention seems to be correct, namely, that the key to the meaning of an oath is to be found in the relationship between the MB and the MA, for, as remarked earlier, an oath is composed of an MB and an MA. For all practical purposes the idea that the oath presents an argument is new, for the traditional scholars give it only marginal recognition; the thrust of their work on the subject being very different.

Second, Farāhī's theory is methodologically superior. Instead of viewing the oaths through theological lenses, Farāhī looks at them from a historical-linguistic perspective. Consequently, unlike the traditional scholars, whose inability; or was it reluctance? - to see the element of evidence in a Qur'ānic oath led them to deny the presence of evidence in the poetical oath (see section II, above) Farāhī has offered a theory that can be applied to the poetical (see below) as well as to the Qur'ānic oath.

Third, Farāhī's interpretations of the six oaths are plausible, coherent, and contextually meaningful. His account of 95:1-6, for example, not only establishes a definite connection between the MB and the MA, it gives the oath remarkable internal consistency: all four MB's (fig, olive, Sinai, Makkah) have a common MA, and each is directly and clearly connected to it. His attempt to draw on the Bible and Classical Arabic poetry adds to the richness of the interpretation. Farāhī also succeeds rather well in accounting for the specificity of the MB

of a given oath. The oaths in Ss. (Surahs) 51, 91, and 95, for example, have the same MA (recompense in the Hereafter), but the MB in each surah is different. And in each case Farāhī tries to bring out the specific relation the MB bears to the MA. His method is thus in marked contrast to, for example, Baydawī's, discussed above with reference to 51:1-6 and 52:1-8 (see n. 21, above). His explanation of 51:1-6 makes the oath fit the context of the whole surah. The surah cites the workings of the winds and rains as proof that God will bring about the Day of Judgement. This idea is supported in the surah itself with reference to several peoples in whose destruction the winds and rains were instrumental, and is brought out in greater detail in many other places in the Qur'ān. In S. 103 the word *'asr*, taken as a reference to history as viewed by the Qur'ān, becomes a rich and variegated mass of evidence compressed into a single word. The possibility of linking an oath ideationally with the broader segments of the Qur'ān obviously gives it considerable depth.

A few remarks need to be made about Farāhī's insistence that *ta'zim* is not essential to the oath. Farāhī holds this view for two reasons. First, there are oaths in Arabic poetry that are made up simply of words like *aqsama*, *ala*, and *halafa* (all three meaning 'to swear'), and contain no MB. Imru'l-Qays, for example, says: *wa alat halfatan lam tahallali* (And she swore an oath that remained unbroken).^[50] Second, poets sometimes swear by things that lack *'azamah*, or are even positively inglorious. Abu'l 'Uryan, praising Hātim's generosity, swears by cooking-pots and shining knives;^[51] Hijris, upon avenging his father, boasts of his horse, spear, and sword;^[52] and 'Urwah Ibn Murrah al-Hudhālī satirises a certain Abū Umamah's call to the tribe of Bakr for help, swearing by the Markhah tree, proverbial for weakness and hardly something to glorify; 'By the Markhah tree,' he says, 'what a dreadful call!'^[53] Farāhī contends that these poets, far from glorifying the objects they are swearing by, are presenting proofs for the statements they are making. Thus Abu'l 'Uryan is saying that people would testify to Hātim's generosity, and so would the cooking-pots and knives, if only they could speak. Hijris cites his horse, spear, and sword, arguing that, being capable of riding a horse and wielding spear and sword, he could not have let his father's killer go free;^[54] and 'Urwah Ibn Murrah likens the tribe of Bakr to the Markhah tree, the comparison allowing him to ridicule the idea of calling the Bakr for help.^[54]

Farāhī's reasons for denying *'azamah* to the MB are not very convincing: nor do they lend support to his own theory. Several points may be made. First, if an oath lacks an MB (as in the line from Imru'l-Qays), it might simply mean that the MB was actually uttered but the poet did not reproduce the oath in full. Second, in several of the Qur'ānic oaths the MA is left out. Does that mean that the MA is inessential to the oath? Third, the question as to what things possess *'azamah* and what things do not, is a relative one: in fact it is a question of how *'azamah* is to be defined. To an Arab, horses and swords and spears were certainly possessed of it, for they were associated with his honour, and if one could swear by one's honour, and could certainly swear by things associated with it. As for the Markhah tree, it may lack *'azamah*, but then the verse is satirical, and swearing by something inglorious suits the occasion. It seems that, in his concern to establish the argumentative character of the oath, Farāhī sets up a needless dichotomy between glorification and argument, for they do not have to be mutually exclusive.

In another sense also, the dichotomy is unwarranted. Farāhī holds that the Qur'ānic oaths are not rhetorical flourishes but pieces of reasoning. But the question is: Is the rhetorical element completely excluded? The oaths, after all, do not present syllogisms. Nor is the connection between the MB and the MA always very obvious. Plausible as Farāhī's interpretation of, for example 95:1-6 is, it is the result of considerable reflection on Farāhī's part, and does not tell us much about the impact the oath might have had on the first audience of the Qur'ān. Can it be denied that the immediate effect of the oath upon that audience was of a kind other than rhetorical? The very fact that most of the Qur'ānic oaths are composed of short, rhyming expressions and many have a highly referential style shows that the form was supposed to have persuasive force independently of the content. The form of the oaths is thus no less important than their content, it may even condition the nature of that content. The oaths do not make an appeal to the mind only; rather, with their rhymes, images, and staccato style, they also excite the imagination and stir the feelings. Their aim is not only to convince but also to move, and what they present, therefore, is not just cold reasoning but vibrant thought. This is not to say that the Qur'ānic oaths are not argumentative, only that they should not be viewed as material fit for cerebral exercises only.

V. Concluding Remarks

The question whether Farāhī's understanding of the Qur'ānic oaths corresponds to the understanding of the first audience of the Qur'ān is difficult to answer. But the main difficulty here stems not from a lack of historical evidence in support of Farāhī's view, but from a lack of such evidence in support of any view at all. For if the traditional theory of the Qur'ānic oaths seems to be so well entrenched, then it is not because the first addressees of the Qur'ānic are definitely known to have subscribed to it, but because no alternative theory of the oaths has been put forward. This being the case, Farāhī's theory should be compared with the traditional theory in respect of whether it offers a more cogent and meaningful explanation of the data and problems involved.

There is the question of extra-Qur'ānic parallels, Nöldeke likens the Qur'ānic oaths to the oaths sworn by the kahins of Arabia.^[56] But one could argue that oaths occurring in standard Arabic poetry rather than those occurring in the utterances of soothsayers ought to be taken as the model for the Qur'ānic oaths. For, if the Qur'ānic oaths are a form of reasoning, and the oaths in Arabic poetry can be interpreted similarly (see above Farāhī's interpretation of the verse of Abu'l 'Uryan, Hijris, and 'Urwah Ibn Murrah), then the two would be fundamentally different from the soothsayers' oath. One might even argue that, in the hands of the soothsayer, the oath degenerated into a form of tawdry embellishment.

Whether one accepts or rejects Farāhī's theory, in whole or in part, it can hardly be doubted that Farāhī's ideas are both important and challenging.

Works Cited

1. See Muḥammad Abū Zuhrah, Ibn Ḥazm: *Hayatuhu wa 'Asruhu, Fiqhuhu wa Ara'uhu* (Cairo: [Preface 1373/1954]), pp. 284-285.
2. For a brief life-sketch of Farāhī, see Mir, Mustansir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Islāhī's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*, (Indianapolis: 1986), pp. 6-8. Farāhī's views on the subject are found in two of his works: *Im'an fi Aqsam al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: 1349 A.H.) in which he states his theory, and *Majmu'ah-i-Tafasir-i-Farāhī*, (Urdu translation by Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī (Lahore: 1393/1973) which is a collection of his commentaries on a small number of the Qur'ānic surahs.
3. For a biographical note on Islāhī, see Mir, *op. Cit.*, pp. 8-9. Islāhī wrote a eight-volume Qur'ān commentary, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*, (Lahore: 1967-1980) according to the exegetical principles laid down by Farāhī.
4. Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn `Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Bahadur al-, *Al-Burhān fī `Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 4 vols. in 2, ed. Muḥammad Abu'l Fadl Ibrahīm (Cairo: 1376-1377/1957-1958), 3:40.
5. Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-, *Al-Itqān fī `Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1368, Lahore Reprint: 1394/1974), 2:133.
6. The *muqsam `alayh* may be stated or understood; in the latter case, it is to be inferred from the context.
7. Ṭabarī, Abu Ja`far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-, *Jami` al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. in 12 (Cairo: 1373/1954), 30:217.
8. *ibid.*, 30:170.
9. Zamakhsharī, Abu'l Qasim Maḥmūd Ibn `Umar al-, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqa'iq Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 1385/1966), 4:141.
10. *ibid.*, 4:241.
11. Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn Abū `Abd Allah Ibn `Umar al-, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32, vols., (Cairo: 1353-1381/1934-1962), 27:239.
12. *ibid.*, 31:162.
13. *ibid.*, 31:181.
14. *ibid.*, 32:84-86.
15. See, for example Qurṭubī, Abū `Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-, *Al-Jami` li Ahkam al-Qur'ān*, 20 vols. (Cairo: 1935-1960), 19:91 (Q. [=Qur'ān] 75:2); 19:189 (Q.79:1); 20:62 (Q.90:4), Baydawī, Abu'l Khayr `Abd Allah Ibn `Umar al-, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Tawil*, 2 vols., 2nd printing (Cairo: 1388/1968), 2:493 (Q.68:1); 2:574 (Q.103:1). Nisaburī,

Nizām al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Qummī al-, *Gharaib al-Qur'ān wa Raghaib al-Furqān*, 30 vols., ed. Ibrahīm 'Atwah 'Awad (Cairo: 1391-1390/1962-1970), 29:18 (Q. 68:1); 30:37 (Q. 81:15-16); 30:62 (Q. 85:1); 30:89 (Q.89:1-5); 30:98 (90:1-2); 30:105 (Q. 91:1); 30:114 (Q. 93:1); 30:172 (Q. 103:1). Abū Ḥayyān, (=Athīr al-Dīn Abū `Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf), *Al-Bahr al-Muhit*, 8 vols. (Riyadh: n.d.), 8:474 (Q. 90:1-2); 8:509 (Q. 103:1). Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Dīn Abu'l Fida Ismā'īl al-Qurayshi al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azim*, 4 vols. (Cairo: n.d.), 4:26 (Q. 38:1); 4:401 (Q. 68:1); 4:491 (Q. 85:1); 4:511 (Q. 90:1-2). Abu'l Su'ud, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imadi. *Tafsīr Abi'l Su'ud*, 5 vols., ed. `Abd al-Qadir Aḥmad `Atā. (Riyadh: n.d.), 5:369 (Q. 68:1); 5:513 (Q. 86:1-2); 3:527 (Q. 89:1-5). Shawkanī, Muḥammad Ibn `Alī al-, *Fath al-Qadir*, 5 vols., 2nd printing (Cairo: n.d.), 5:267 (Q. 68:1); 5:464 (95:1-2). Alūsī, Shihab al-Dīn al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-, *Ruh al-Ma`ani*, 30 vols. in 15, (Beirut: n.d.), 30:86 (Q. 85:3); 30:121 (Q. 89:4); 30:141-142 (Q. 91:2-4).

16. In Farāhī, *Im'an*, p.5.

17. Baydawī, 2:362.

18. Ibn Kathīr, 4:518.

19. Nisaburī, 30: 59-60.

20. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Abī Bakr, *Al-Tibyan fī Aqsam al-Qur'ān*, ed. Tāhā Yūsuf Shahin (Cairo: n.d.), p. 46.

21. The following example will illustrate the point further. 51:1-6 and 52: 1-8 are two Qur'ānic passages, each with a different MB; the winds in the first passage, Mount Sinai and a few other phenomena and objects in the second. Here is how Baydawī (2:419) explains the point of the first oath: '[It is] as if, by referring to His power over these extraordinary and unusual phenomena, God were providing proof that He has the power to bring about the Resurrection for the purpose of meting out the promised recompense.' And this is the comment he makes (2:424) on the second oath: 'These phenomena, by which an oath has been sworn, constitute evidence for it [MA] in that they point to the all-embracing power and perfect wisdom of God, to the complete accuracy of His statements [about the future], and to the fact that He is maintaining a record of human actions for the purpose of meting out recompense to human beings.' It is obvious that Baydawī offers more or less identical explanations of the two passages and does not distinguish between the MB's of the two oaths in their relationship to their MA's. The same problem is often met with in Ibn Qayyim. After stating in the beginning of his book (p. 4) that the Qur'ānic oaths constitute evidence for the 'fundamentals of the Islamic faith' (*Uṣūl al-Imān*), Ibn Qayyim, in discussing the oaths individually, is usually content to point out that the MB substantiates one or more of the fundamentals of Islam, but seldom tries to account for the specificness of a given MB (see, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 7 (Q. 100:1)). Furthermore, even Ibn Qayyim has not broken completely with the traditional view: on quite a few occasions, he speaks of the oath as constituting *ta'zim* for the MB (see, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 24 (Q. 90:1-2)), 28:29 (Q. 95:1-3), 49 (Q. 100:1), 89 (Q. 79:1-5)].

22. *Geschichte des Qorans*, 3 vols. in 1 Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally. Vols 1-2 (Leipzig: 1909-1919); G. Bergstrasser and Otto Pretzel. Vol. 3, (Leipzig: 1938, Hildesheim Reprint: 1981), 1:74-75.

23. *ibid.*, 1:75.

24. 'In seiner Eigenschaft als Gesandter Allah's schwort Muḥammad ausserdem bei der offenbarung (36. 38, 43, 44, 50, 52, 68), bei der Auferstehung (S. 75), beim jungsten Tag (S. 85) und beiz seinem Herrn. Am meisten Schwierigkeit bereitet, nicht nur den muslimischen Exegeten von je her, sondern auch noch uns, das Verstandnis einer dritten Kategorie von Formeln, in denen bei neiner Mehrheit weiblicher Gegenstände oder Wesen geschworen wird. Indessen hat auch diese Art ihre ausserqoranische Parallele.' *Geschichte*, 75-76.

25. See also Bell-Watt, Richard Bell. *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, rev. and enl. by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), *Islamic Surveys*, 8, pp. 76-78; and J. Pederson, 'Kasam', *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (Leiden: E.J. Brill, n.d.), p. 226.

26. Bell-Watt, p. 78.

27. *ibid.*, p. 15. Incidentally, Farāhī thinks that the Hebrew word *yamin* in Psalm 144:8, 11 is properly translated 'oath' and not 'right hand.' *ibid.*

28. According to a tradition, this was Muḥammad's method of taking the oath of allegiance from women. See Nūr al-Dīn `Alī Ibn Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawa'id wa Manba' al-Fawa'id*, 10 vols. (Cairo: 1352-1353), *Kitāb al-Maghāzī wa'l-Siyar, Bāb al-Bay'ah 'ala'l-Islām allati Tusamma Bay'at al-Nisa'*, 6:39.

29. Farāhī, *Im'an*, pp. 15-16. Farāhī cites (*ibid.*, p. 16) from Zuhayr's *mu'allaqah* the well-known verse about Manshim, the woman from whom allies in a war bought perfume, rubbing it on themselves to symbolise their commitment to fight to the bitter end. For the verse, see Tibrizi, al-Khatīb al-, (Abu Zakariyya Yaḥyā Ibn `Alī al-Shaybānī), *Sharh al-Qasa'id al-'Ashr*, ed. Muḥammad Muhyi al-Dīn `Abd al-Ḥamid (Cairo: 1388/1962), p. 215.

30. Farāhī, *Im'an*, p. 16.

31. *ibid.*, 16-17. Hence the expressions: *wasala hablahu bi hablihi* (to join one's chord to another's), to indicate mutual support, and *sarm al-habl* (to cut the chord), to indicate severance of relations.

32. *ibid.*, pp. 22, 23. Note here the twin meanings of *shahida*: 'to be present' and 'to bear witness.'

33. *ibid.*, pp. 23, 39. For a more detailed statement, and criticism, of Farāhī's view of *ta'zim* in oath, see the subsection 'Analysis and Observations,' below.

34. Farāhī, *Majmu'ah*, pp. 310, 313.

35. Farāhī's *Im'an* contains references to other Qur'ānic oaths, too, but they are not discussed here because they are too general. I have given my own translation of the Qur'ānic verses cited in the article. The Biblical citations are from the Revised Standard Version, *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, expanded edition, edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

36. There is some justification for using the word 'conjugate,' for the Qur'ān says that God created all things 'in pairs' (51:49), the Arabic word being *zawjayn*. For further details, see the explanation of 91:1-10 in this subsection, below.

37. Farāhī, *Majmu'ah*, pp. 104-105. See also *ibid.*, p. 230.

38 For Farāhī's discussion of the oath, see *ibid.*, pp. 230 ff.

39. See, for example, Tabarī, 30:238-239, and Zamakhsharī, 4:268-269.

40. Farāhī, *Majmu'ah*, pp. 305-306.

41. *ibid.*, pp. 311-312. For Nabighah's verse, see *Diwan al-Nabighah al-Dhubyani*, Ibn al-Sikkit's recession, edited by Shukri Faysal (Cairo: 1388/1968), Introduction, p. 107.

42. Farāhī, *Majmu'ah*, pp. 310-312.

43. *ibid.*, pp. 314-315. The fig tree, Farāhī adds, is symbolic of divine bounty and wrath: the bareness of this tree in Autumn and its luxuriance in Spring are constant reminders of the story of Adam and Eve. Jesus spoke of the bareness of the fig tree to symbolise his departure and the misfortune of his rejecters (Matt., 21:18-19; Mark 11:13-14), and compared its luxuriance to his arrival and the good fortune of his people (Matt. 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:25-31), *ibid.*, p. 326.

44. *ibid.*, pp. 312, 315-319. Farāhī adds that while the fig tree reminds one of the story of Adam and Eve, the olive tree symbolises a great blessing of God, for we read in the Torah (Gen. 8:11) that it was an olive-leaf that was brought back by the dove Noah dispatched from the Ark. *ibid.*, p. 327.

45. *ibid.*, pp. 319-321.

46. *ibid.*, pp. 321-323.

47. *ibid.*, pp. 339-342.

48. *ibid.*, pp. 200-204.

49. *ibid.*, pp. 286-290.

50. Farāhī, *Im'an*, p. 18. For the verse, see Tibrizi, p. 75.

51. *Diwan Shi'r Hatim Ibn `Abd Allah al-Ta'i*, ed. `Adil Sulayman Jamal (Cairo: [1975?]), pp. 168-169.

52. Farāhī, *Im'an*, p. 33.

53. *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

54. *ibid.*, p. 33.

55. *ibid.*, p. 35.

56. *Geschichte*, 1:75.

2.6. Study Of The Qur'ān

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2:251 makes reference to an important event in Jewish history - the Israelites' victory over the Philistines during the period of the Prophet Samuel. In this battle, the young Dāwūd (David) distinguished himself by killing the formidable Philistine warrior, Jālūt (Goliath), and his heroism had important consequences for later Israelite history. But 2:251 does not simply relate an event in Biblical history; it touches on a number of issues of religious significance, so that it can justifiably be cited as an instance of Qur'ānic i'jāz (terseness). A translation of the verse is followed by commentary.

Translation

And so they [Israelites] defeated them [Philistines] by Allah's will, and David killed Goliath and Allah gave him kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of that which He wishes. And were Allah not to repulse one people by means of another, the earth would be filled with corruption. Allah, however, is full of compassion for the world. (2:251)

Commentary

1. The verse begins with the particle '*fā*' ('And so'), which represents an omission. The preceding verse reports the prayer of the troops of Tālūt (Bible: Saul): 'Our Lord, pour

out steadfastness upon us, make us stand our ground, and give us victory over the disbelieving people.' The particle '*fa*' in verse 251 alludes to the suppressed detail: Allah accepted their prayer, and so they became victorious (see Ṭabarī, 2:396).

2. The Israelites' victory over the Philistines was a watershed in their history, and yet a single - and simple - Arabic word is used to describe it: *fa-hazamūhum*. The word brings into sharp focus the ease and speed with which the Israelites defeated the Philistines. The Israelites were afraid to take on the Philistines (see the Qur'ān 2:249; 1 Samuel 17:11, 24), and the odds were stacked against them. And yet the battle proved to be a walk-over for them; for when Dāwūd killed Jālūt, the Philistines fled. The one-word Qur'ānic description thus suggests that the Israelites made short work of the Philistines, so that no more than a brief reference to the event was called for.
3. The Arabic for 'by Allah's will' is *bi-idhni llāhi*. The word *idhn* represents the twin notions of command and facilitation. That is, Allah commanded that this happen, and He made it easy for the Israelites to achieve victory (see Daryābādī, 101). The victory, in other words, was the result not of any superior military ability or force on their part, but of Allah's favour. Ṭabarī explains the phrase *fa-hazamūhum bi-idhni llāhi* as follows: *fa-qatalūhum bi-qadā'i llāhi wa-qadarihi* (2:396).
4. The verse identifies the most important incident of the battle: Dāwūd's slaying of Jālūt. It was this incident which caused the Philistines to lose heart and filled the Israelites with courage and optimism.
5. In reading a text like the Qur'ān, proper intonation can be important. The phrase *wa-qatala dāwūdu jālūta* is a case in point. Read this phrase, placing the stress on Dāwūd and putting a mental exclamation mark at the end of the phrase. The translation now would be: 'And Dāwūd killed Jālūt!' Imagine, the verse would be saying, a young boy killing a gigantic warrior! Isn't that surprising? Not so surprising, the verse itself would seem to suggest, because that is how Allah willed it (*bi-idhn illāh* would be relevant here, too). And the verse would become suggestive in other ways too. Sayyid Quṭb writes: 'He [Allah] decided that this oppressive tyrant should fall at the hands of this youth so that people may realise that tyrants who terrorise them can be overpowered by youngsters when He wishes to kill them', (1:271).
6. The verse alludes to the significance of the incident in later Israelite history: Dāwūd's heroism was one of the factors that ultimately led to his election as king of the Israelites.
7. Dāwūd, the verse says, was given *al-Mulk wa al-Ḥikmah*. *Al-Mulk* stands for kingdom - or the kingdom, if the definite article in the word is taken to mean the kingdom of Tālūt, who preceded Dāwūd - while *al-Ḥikmah* stands for prophethood (Ṭabarī, 2:403; Zamakhsharī, 1:151), though it may be argued that it (*al-Ḥikmah*) represents wisdom in general, whose highest form, a gift from God, is prophethood (see Daryābādī, 100). The next phrase, 'And He taught him of that what He wishes' refers to the arts and crafts Dāwūd was known to be an expert at, such as making fine coats of mail (Ṭabarī, 2:403; see the Qur'ān 34:11, 21:80).
8. In saying that God gave Dāwūd both kingdom and wisdom, the verse is saying that kingship and prophethood, represented, before Dāwūd, in two different individuals - Samuel was the prophet, Tālūt was the king - were combined in Dāwūd. This double

honour, then, was a special distinction of Dāwūd's. By implication the verse is saying that Dāwūd was not only a great king out also a wise man, so that his rule was a blessing for the Israelites. It is, of course, also implied that power uninformed by wisdom can be a curse.

9. According to the verse, Allah taught Dāwūd what He wishes, not what He wished. The use of the *Mudāri* ('imperfect') instead of the expect *Mādī* ('perfect') imparts universal value to the statement: not only Dāwūd but all people like him receive their gift of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge from Allah (*Islāhī*, 1:537).
10. The verse underscores the fact that Dāwūd's kingdom and wisdom were both gifts from Allah, just as the Israelites' victory over the Philistines was due to Allah's will. In other words, Dāwūd as an individual, like the Israelites as a nation, owed gratitude to Allah.
11. It lays down the principle in accordance with which Allah governs the course of history: Allah does not allow evil to become dominant forever but keeps purging it, for otherwise endless misery for mankind would be the result. The implication is that a nation that becomes dominant - in this case the Israelites - must not suffer from the delusion that it has now risen above the said law. But there is another implication also: Jihād is an important means of eliminating evil, and the Israelites' fight against the Philistines was but one instance in the series of Jihād - struggles that have been made in the past or will be made in the future to combat evil (see *Islāhī*, 1:538).
12. An important question arises here: If God purges the evil perpetrated by one people by means of another, are we to suppose that this latter people is necessarily good? This is what *Tabarī* seems to think. Allah, he says, removes the evil and the wicked by means of the good and the pious, the disbelievers by means of the believers (2:403 [*cf.* Sayyid *Quṭb*, 1:269, who also seems to accept this view]). But while this is certainly possible - and in the present case, that of the Israelites and the Philistines, certainly true - it may not be true in each and every case. For sometimes, the people that is used as the instrument of purging may be evil, but not as evil as the people whose evil is purged. Nebuchadnezzar, who enslaved the Israelites, was not a particularly righteous person, and yet he and his people are called in 17:5 'Our servants, of great might', simply because the Israelites had, in comparison, sunk to a very low level of religious and moral existence, their punishment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar having been foretold in such verses in the Bible as Jeremiah 25:98-10. Note especially that in Jeremiah 25:9 Nebuchadnezzar is called 'my [God's] servant.' (see *Islāhī*, 3:724-26).
13. The verse has some importance for understanding the Islamic view of history, which, according to the verse, is essentially optimistic. The caravan of history, whenever it loses its way, is reoriented by Allah. The overall direction of history, therefore, is positive, and the message of history is one of hope, not one of despair.
14. The last part of the verse establishes a relationship between the said law and Divine mercy, saying that Allah has put that law in force because He is merciful: it is possible to generalise this statement: all Divine laws are expressions of Divine mercy.
15. This part of the verse also furnishes a valuable philosophical insight. It does not say that in establishing such a law Allah shows mercy to mankind, but that the law is a mercy for the whole universe. There is, in other words, a relationship between the

natural and moral worlds. Ultimately, the moral world is but part of the larger scheme of the universe. In the interest of maintaining balance and order in the universe at large, the verse is suggesting, it is necessary that balance and order be maintained in the moral world. It is with this aim in view, therefore, that Allah has established the moral law of history the verse speaks of.

16. The passage of Sūrah Baqarah of which the verse is a part (verses 249-251) was revealed before the battle of Badr. In fact the Qur'ānic description, in this passage, of the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines prefigures the battle of Badr. At Badr, too, a small number of Muslims would face a much larger army and defeat it. The passage thus prepares the Muslims for the battle, at the same time encouraging them. When the Battle of Badr took place, the People of the Book in Arabia could not have failed to notice the resemblance between this battle and the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines (see *Islāhī*, 1:533).
17. The verse in question is a good illustration of the Qur'ānic method of drawing a general rule from a particular incident. The incident is related in the first half of the verse, it may be added, has pedagogical value in that it teaches us to look for general rules in many other verses where only particular incidents are mentioned, the context leaving it to the reader to draw general rules.

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