



# THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AN

A Classical Treatise Explaining the Literary Miracle of Allah's Book



Abū Sulaymān Hamd ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khattābī

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of Allah's Book

*Bayān Ijāz al-Qur'ān*

Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭṭābī

Translated by Wordsmiths



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## In the Name of Allah, Lord of Mercy, Giver of Mercy

Abū Sulaymān said:

Throughout the ages, people have spoken abundantly on this topic and have offered an array of views. However, I have not yet been able to find anyone who has spoken satisfactorily on this, as many have assumed that the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is knowledge that words cannot express. They add that there is no need to accommodate any such knowledge since the miraculous nature of the Qur'an leaves a lasting impact on the soul, and that the creation is unable to produce anything like it.

They claim that the matter is so self-evident that we are in no need of demonstrating its inimitability with anything more than the perennial and recurring fact of life: The Prophet ﷺ challenged all Arabs to produce a *sūrah* like it; they were unable to do so and fell miserably short. The Prophet ﷺ continuously demanded this of them for two whole decades, all the while condemning them, slating their religions, and putting their opinions and dreams to waste. They ended up disassociating themselves from him and engaging in military hostilities against him. As a result, people were killed, souls were lost, families were broken up, and wealth was destroyed.

Had it been within their capabilities and power, they would have neither bothered to go to such dangerous lengths nor committed to such a treacherous path. They would not have substituted a statement of ease in exchange for action laden with bumps and despair – no person of intellect or any level of sense would ever choose to do this. In particular, the Prophet's people – the Quraysh – were considered to be people of sobriety, possessing an abundance of intellect. They had the most eloquent speakers and the most innovative poets. Allah, Most High, describes them as being argumentative and adversarial. He, Most Exalted, states, 'They cite him only to argue. In fact, they are a people prone to dispute'<sup>1</sup> and '...and warn those who are contentious.'<sup>2</sup>

If not for their utter incapacity, how could it have been plausible that they would turn a blind eye to the Qur'an, fail to exploit their golden chance to discredit and

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Zukhruf*, 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Maryam*, 97.

disregard it, and not rise up to score a victory against it? In addition to the inescapable and pressing need, such a course of action would have indeed been most logical according to the oral tradition of the Arabs and their customs. Imagine a sane man becomes so thirsty he fears he would die. He has water in front of him but still does not drink it, and he eventually dies out of thirst. Any person with any degree of intellect would rule that he was somehow impeded from being able to drink it. This is obvious and cannot be a point of any contention.

Of all the points that have ever been ascribed to the Qur'an vis-à-vis its miraculous nature, this is the most demonstrable and simplest to comprehend. It is sufficient for anyone whose heart seeks to understand the manner in which the Qur'an is miraculous.

One group of scholars are of the view that the reason for its inimitability is that the ambitions of all humanity have been – by divine decree – demoralised to the point that they no longer can challenge it, even though humans are able to do so. Given that this external impediment is uncustomary, their lack of rising up to its challenge would therefore be treated like any other miracle.

They offer this as an example: Imagine Allah ﷻ sent a Prophet during the prophethood era and assigned to him the miracle of being able to move his hand and stretch his leg as he sat in front of his people. If he is asked, 'What is your sign (i.e., miracle)?', he says, 'My sign is that I can move my hand and stretch my leg – none of you can do as I do.' Their bodily limbs are sound and without fault. He moves his hand and stretches his leg; they try to do the same but are unable to do so. This would be evidence for the accuracy in his claim to prophethood. In other words, it is not the magnitude or the spectacle of a Prophet's miracle that is the key factor; rather, the propriety of its inimitability is based on the notion that it falls beyond the realm of custom and goes against the grain. Given that this is its description, it would be a demonstrative sign of the truthfulness of the person who presented that book.

This postulation could have been considered plausible were it not for the Qur'anic verse that suggests otherwise. He, Most Exalted, states, 'Say, O Prophet, "If all humans and demons were to come together to produce the equivalent of this Qur'an, they could not produce its equal, no matter how they supported each other."<sup>3</sup> This alludes to something that is acquired through graft, exerting effort,

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<sup>3</sup> *Al-Isrā'*, 88.

preparedness, and the convergence of humans. The element of *demoralisation by divine decree* does not match up with the description set out in the verse. This suggests that when the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is discussed, something other than this is the reason. And Allah knows better.

One group of scholars is of the view that the Qur'an's inimitability is because of the information it offers on future events. Examples of this are the statements of Allah, Most Exalted, '*Alif-Lām-Mīm*. The Romans have been defeated in a nearby land. Yet following their defeat, they will triumph within three to nine years'<sup>4</sup>, 'Say to nomadic Arabs, who stayed behind, "You will be called to fight against a people of great might..."'<sup>5</sup>, and other such verses where the information contained therein has been proven to be true in the real world.

There is little doubt that these and other such verses constitute one form of the Qur'an's inimitability; however, this is not something that can be found across every single *sūrah* of the Qur'an. We know that Allah has described every single *sūrah* to be a miracle in and of itself, and that nobody in the creation can produce anything like it. Allah said, '...then produce a *sūrah* like it and call your helpers other than Allah, if what you say is true.'<sup>6</sup> This does not denote that the miracle of the Qur'an is somehow specific to some *sūrahs*. Rather, when the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is pointed out, something else is intended.

Some scholars believe that its miracle is from the perspective of its rhetorical eloquence. This is the view of most theorists. The problem for them – which they cannot aptly resolve – lies in describing how exactly this manifests. I have found most of its proponents accept this angle as being the primary factor in the Qur'an's inimitability, but they do so out of what can only be described as blind following and speculation. Never have they offered any concrete research or knowledge to support this hypothesis. This is why when they are asked about delineating the type of superior rhetorical eloquence and meanings that make the Qur'an stand out from all other eloquent speech, they say, 'We cannot depict it or put it down to anything that is apparent that would allow us to understand how the Qur'an is distinct from all other speech. But those who know about it would be able to identify this when listening to it, but they would not be able to put it down to anything specific.' They refer to all

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<sup>4</sup> *Al-Rūm*, 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Fath*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 23.

forms of competitive rhetorical speech: Scholars would instinctively appreciate their eloquence upon hearing it, just as how their perceptions would be able to appreciate how a superior piece of speech stands out from all other inferior instances.

These scholars would further argue that the cause of something might be obscure, yet its impact is felt in the soul such that people of knowledge would not confuse it with anything else. Some speech delivers a sweetness to the ears and joy to the heart in a manner that no one else can replicate, yet both sets of speeches are considered eloquent. Even then, the reason for the disparity cannot be pinpointed.

In response, I say that – for this class of knowledge (i.e., the inimitability of the Qur'an) – this answer is wholly unsatisfactory and does nothing to alleviate ignorance. It is a problem that they averted only through accepting ambiguity. An example of their response has been offered in the form of some couplets of poetry by Jarīr, which were plagiarised by Dhū al-Rummah. The narrators mention that Jarīr passed by Dhū al-Rummah, who had prepared his ode. It begins as follows:

*‘Your eyes denied the dew at Huzwā. It was dissipated by the wind and demanded rain.’*

Jarīr replied, ‘Do you not want to be availed of more lines, which you can add to this?’ Dhū al-Rummah replied in the affirmative. Jarīr said:

*‘Genealogists of Banū Tamīm number the houses of prestige to be four great families,*

*They list Rabāb, Āl Taym, Sa‘d, and Hanḏalah to be the superior houses.*

*But those from the family of Imru’ al-Qays are nothing, just like how the child of a she-camel is counted for nothing when it comes to settling blood money.’*

Dhū al-Rummah added this to his ode. Later, Farazdaq passed by him and asked if he had any new poetry at hand. Dhū al-Rummah related the ode to him. When he reached these lines, Farazdaq retorted, ‘These are not from you. The one responsible for this has a thicker beard than yours.’ Farazdaq was able to set the record straight just by his intuition, and he picked up on this thanks to his nuanced understanding.

There are those content with stating obvious knowledge, and – upon scrutiny – the propositions of logic that are employed to demonstrate veracity. Then there are those who wish to investigate deeper to access the knowledge of the real underlying

causes. They say, ‘There must be a cause for this speech exuding a sweetness to the ears, joy to the heart, and a lustre and splendour that makes it stand out from all other forms of speech. There must be a cause for this speech to have such an impact on hearts and souls, thereby leading people to designate it as irreplicable and unchallengeable no matter what the ambitions of people may be.’

The Qur’an is indeed worthy of this description because it possesses these qualities. We have conducted investigations on its external attributes and the causes arising from it – we have not found anything that aligns with theory and analogy or is consistent with the standards. It therefore follows that the element of the Qur’an’s miraculous nature must be something found within itself, which then must be studied as an independent subject.

Analysis and examination reveal that the cause for the Qur’an’s inimitability is that the genres of speech therein contrast with each other, their levels in relation to explanation vary, and the stages of their rhetorical eloquence diverge – they are not always the same. Some of the Qur’an is solid and direct in its articulation and composition; other parts of it are lucid, accessible, and simple; other passages come across as relaxed and gentle. All these categories of speech are praiseworthy and irreproachable. This is in contrast to the type of speech that is excoriated and criticised, none of which is found in the Qur’an.

The first category is the highest of stations for any speech; the second category is the middle and astutely moderate speech; and the third category is the most accessible speech. The rhetorical brilliance of the Qur’an comprises of all these categories, containing a portion of each. As all these attributes converge, the Qur’an is able to produce a speech that marries grandeur with sweetness, even though they may appear to be opposites to each other when taken individually. Rhetorical sweetness is the product of ease; skilful and robust speech contend with a type of directness. That both of them come together in the composition of the Qur’an and effortlessly bounce off each other is a virtue that is specific to the Qur’an. This is something that Allah facilitated through His subtle power so that the Qur’an would be a clear sign for His Prophet and an indication to the accuracy of the religion to which he was inviting.

There are a number of reasons for why mankind has been unable to produce anything like it. One is that their knowledge cannot encompass all the words of the Arabic language, which are the bearers of meanings and the carriers of concepts. Their



minds cannot comprehend all the meanings carried by those words. They have an incomplete understanding of all the forms of literary composition that coalesce and tie into each other. As thus, they cannot select the *outright superior* from the *very good* form of literary mastery long enough to produce speech even similar to it.

Speech is comprised of these three components, i.e., meaning-bearing words, meanings that subsist within words, and a composition that combines the two. If you contemplate the Qur'an, you notice that these points assume the most admirable and worthy form – one cannot find any form of words more elegant, eloquent, or sweeter than its composition. As for its meanings, it is an open fact: All intellectuals would readily testify in favour of their superiority, and that they belong to the loftiest stations of nobility. These three areas of literary virtue are scattered across various types of speech. However, for them to be simultaneously present in a single body of speech is something that has been found only in the word of the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, and the One Who has encompassed all things in His knowledge and keeps account of everything. So now you understand how the miracle of the Qur'an takes shape.

Note that the Qur'an is a miracle because it produced the most eloquent of words in the best of compositions while carrying the most precise meanings. This includes His monotheism, affirming His transcendence vis-à-vis His Attributes, inviting people to His obedience, and explaining how He is to be worshipped with rules on lawfulness, unlawfulness, prohibition, and permissibility. It also includes admonishment, rectification, enjoining good, forbidding evil, instructing people to uphold good morals, and dissuasion from bad morals. It situates everything in its rightful place – no other thing would have better occupied that place nor could any mind have found anything else to be more apt for it. It contains information from centuries prior, and the punishments of Allah that befell those who stubbornly remained on their disobedience. It prophesies future events. It offers proofs and highlights that of which they are indicative. This is done to emphasise the necessity of what it calls towards and the mandatory nature of following its commands and prohibitions.

Producing all these points and bringing these elements together – despite their disparity – to become a harmonious composition is something that incapacitates the combined strength of mankind from being able to produce anything like it. Their powers cannot come even close to it. The entirety of the creation is impotent in the

face of the Qur'an, as it cannot face it down with anything like it, nor could it mount a challenge with anything of that mould.

The only thing left for the obstinate disbelievers was that when they saw it was a rhythmic composition, they claimed, 'It is poetry.' On another occasion, when they saw it was insurmountable, they claimed, 'It is magic.' They themselves found it had a profound impact on their hearts and souls, leaving them doubtful and confused about their preconceptions – they could not help but lend some credibility to it. This is why one of them said, 'It has a sweetness to it, and it has a splendour about it.' Out of their ignorance and confusion, they used to sometimes say, 'These revelations are only ancient fables which he has had written down, and they are rehearsed to him morning and evening.'<sup>7</sup> This is despite them knowing that their companion – the Prophet ﷺ – was unlettered and had nobody to dictate to him or write for him. There were other similar stories about them that all possess the common factor of ignorance and incapacity on their part.

Allah ﷻ relates the story of one of their recalcitrant devils by the name of Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī. After having thought long and hard about the Qur'an, his weariness reached its tipping point. He tried everything to replicate it but in the end could not produce anything beyond the sentence: 'This is no more than the word of a man.'<sup>8</sup> This was the result of his refusal to accept the truth, his ignorance, his avoidance of the evidence, and his incapability of responding to it. Allah describes Walīd's utter bewilderment: 'For he contemplated and determined a degrading label for the Qur'an. May he be condemned! How evil was what he determined! May he be condemned even more! How evil was what he determined! Then he re-contemplated in frustration, then frowned and scowled, then turned his back on the truth and acted arrogantly, saying, "This Qur'an is nothing but magic from the ancients. This is no more than the word of a man."<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the case and however the story went, it is a fact that the Qur'an is indeed inimitable, thanks to their verbal acknowledgement and their practical inability to challenge it. And therein lies a confirmation of the proof – and the miracle. All praise is for Allah.

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<sup>7</sup> *Al-Furqān*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Al-Muddaththir*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Muddaththir*, 18-25.

One should also assess the fact that the firmament of this rhetorical eloquence – unto which these characteristics come together – is that every type of word that makes up the components of speech is situated in the place for which it is specifically designated. The specificity is such that had any word been substituted for another, it would result in either a shift in the meaning that renders the speech defective, or the removal of the literary lustre that leads to the collapse of its eloquence. In the language, there are plesionyms that most people think are synonyms. Such words include *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifah* (knowledge), *ḥamd* and *shukr* (praise and thanks), *bukhl* and *shuḥḥ* (miserliness), *na‘t* and *ṣifah* (description), or for example: *uq‘ud* and *ijlis* (sit), *balā* and *na‘am* (yes; answering a question in the affirmative), *dhālika* and *dhāka* (that), *min* and *‘an* (from), and other nouns, verbs, particles, and descriptive phrases that we shall discuss in detail later. The reality of these words and their positioning is not synonymous, as most people assume. For the lexicographers, every word has a distinctive feature that separates it from its plesionym, though they do share some common elements.

For example, you may say either ‘*Araftu al-shay‘a*’ or ‘*Alimtu al-shay‘a*’ (I know something) when you want to convey knowledge that removes ignorance. However, *‘araftu* requires a single object, e.g., ‘*Araftu zaydan*’ (I know Zayd), whereas *‘alimtu* requires two objects, e.g., ‘*Alimtu zaydan ‘āqilan*’ (I know that Zayd is intelligent). This is why only the term *ma‘rifah* is used when speaking on the monotheism of Allah, Most High, and affirming His essence – one would say, ‘*Araftu Allāha*’ (I know Allah), not ‘*Alimtu Allāha*’, unless you add a second descriptive phrase and say, ‘*Alimtu Allāha ‘adlan*’ (I know Allah is just) or ‘*Alimtuḥū qādiran*’ (I know He is powerful), and so on. This is linked to the fact that the antonym of *‘ilm* is *jahl* (ignorance), whereas the antonym of *ma‘rifah* is *nukrah* (obliviousness).

*Ḥamd* and *shukr* can also be used as synonyms. The phrase ‘*Al-ḥamdu lillāhi ‘alā ni‘matin*’ means to thank (*shukr*) Allah for the bounty. But *shukr* becomes distinct from *ḥamd* in some contexts. For example, *ḥamd* can be used as a conversation initialiser to denote praise, whereas *shukr* is only expressed in receipt of something. You would say ‘*Ḥamidtu zaydan*’ when you praise him for his morals and general demeanour, even if he has not previously extended any good to you. You would say ‘*Shakartu zaydan*’ when you extend your appreciation to some good he did for you. Furthermore, *shukr* can be verbal like *ḥamd*, but it can also be physical like in the statement of Allah ﷻ, ‘We ordered: “Work gratefully (*shukran*), O family of

Dāwūd!”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, *ḥamd* can be for things that are either desired or undesirable, whereas *shukr* is reserved only for things that are desirable. If you really want to identify the difference between the two, then take into consideration their antonyms. The opposite of *ḥamd* is *dhamm* (disparaging), whereas the opposite of *shukr* is *kufrān* (ungratefulness).

As for *shuḥḥ* and *bukhl*, some believe that the latter denotes the prevention of rights, which is oppression, whereas the former is the bitter feeling a miserly person feels within himself when fulfilling someone’s right and when that right (typically wealth) leaves his control. This is why it is said, ‘The miserly person (*shahīḥ*) is more excusable than the oppressor.’

However, I have found the meanings of the two reversed. Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Mālīk related to us: ‘Umar ibn Ḥafṣ al-Sadūsī related to us: Mas‘ūdī related to us: From Jāmi‘ ibn Shaddād: From Abū al-Sha‘thā’ – he said, ‘I said to ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd, “O Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, I fear that I have perished.” He said, “And why is that?” I said, “Because I hear Allah saying, ‘And whoever is saved from the selfishness (*shuḥḥ*) of their own souls, it is they who are truly successful.’<sup>11</sup> I am a selfish (*shahīḥ*) man – almost nothing leaves my hands.” He said, “That is not the selfishness (*shuḥḥ*) that Allah mentioned in the Qur’an. Selfishness (*shuḥḥ*) is when you unjustly devour the wealth of your brother. That would be miserliness (*bukhl*), which is very bad indeed.”

As for *na‘t* and *ṣifah* (description), the latter is broader and the former is more specific. You may say, ‘*Zaydun ‘āqilun wa-ḥalīmun*’ (Zayd is intelligent and forbearing) and ‘*Amrun jābilun wa-safīhun*’ (‘Amr is ignorant and stupid). In these cases, the descriptions would be both *ṣifah* and *na‘t*. *Na‘t*, however, is almost always exclusive to descriptions that do not change or disappear, such as height, colour, and so on.

On a person saying ‘*Uq‘ud*’ or ‘*Ijlis*’ (sit) to another, it has been reported to us that Naḍr ibn Shumayl approached Ma’mūn when he came to Merv. He stood in front of him and offered his greetings. Ma’mūn told him, ‘*Ijlis*.’ He replied, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, I am not lying down – I therefore cannot *sit up* (*julūs*).’ He said, ‘So how would you say it?’ He said, ‘Say, “*Uq‘ud* (sit down).”’ Ma’mūn ordered for a reward to be presented to him.

<sup>10</sup> *Saba*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Ḥashr*, 9.

Naḍr ibn Shumayl's distinction can be better appreciated when each word is contrasted with its opposite. So you use the words *qiyām* and *qu'ūd* (standing and sitting), just as you would use *ḥarakah* and *sukūn* (motion and motionlessness). We have not heard the Arabs use *qiyām* and *julūs* as opposites; rather, they say: '*Qa'ada al-rajulu 'an qiyāmin*' (The man *sat down* from his standing position), and '*Jalasa 'an daj'atin wa-stilqā'in*' (He *sat up* from lying down), and so on.

As for *balā* and *na'am* (yes), the former is an affirmative answer to a negative question, e.g., 'Didn't you do this?', to which the answer would be '*Balā*' (Yes, I did do this). Allah ﷻ states, 'Allah asked, "Am I not your Lord?" They replied, "Yes, You are (*balā*)!"'<sup>12</sup> As for *na'am*, that is an affirmative answer to a positive question posed with particles such as *hal*, e.g., Allah ﷻ says, "'Have (*hal*) you too found your Lord's promise to be true?" They will reply, "Yes, we have (*na'am*)!"'<sup>13</sup> Farrā' said, '*Balā* is only to be used as an answer when the question carries an element of denial.' It has also been reported from him that he said, 'Had Adam's progeny – instead of *balā* – said *na'am* in response to the question "Am I not your Lord?", they would have all committed disbelief.'

As for *dhāka* and *dhālika* (that – i.e., a demonstrative pronoun), the latter is used for something that is relatively closer to you; the former is used for things that are relatively farther from you.

As for *min* and *'an* (generally: from), they diverge in a number of places, e.g., '*Akbadhtu minhu mālan*' (I took wealth from him) and '*Akbadhtu 'anhu ilman*' (I took knowledge from him). So when you say, '*Sami'tu minhu kalāman*' (I heard some speech from him), it would mean that you heard it from his mouth. But when you say, '*Sami'tu 'anhu ḥadīthan*' (I heard a hadith from him), that would denote it was conveyed to you. This convention is according to the apparent and the idiomatic usage of the two particles, though they are interchangeable in some areas of the language.

Connected to this is what Muhammad ibn Sa'dawayh related to me: Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh ibn al-Junayd related to me: Muhammad ibn al-Naḍr ibn Musāwir related to me: Ja'far ibn Sulaymān related to me: From Mālik ibn Dīnār – he said, 'Abū al-Āliyah al-Riyāhī, Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim al-Laythī, 'Āṣim al-Jahḍarī, and I were brought

<sup>12</sup> *Al-A'raf*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-A'raf*, 44.

together by Ḥasan to compare copies of the Qur'an. A man said, "Abū al-ʿĀliyah, on the statement of Allah, Most High, in His Book: 'So woe to those hypocrites who pray yet are unmindful (*ṣābūna*, from *sabw*) of their prayers'<sup>14</sup> – what does this mindlessness (*sabw*) denote?" He replied, "One who does not know after how many units of prayer – whether an odd or an even number – he can conclude." Ḥasan said, "No, it is not this, but rather it is those who forget their timings until they miss the prayer. Do you not see the statement of Allah ﷻ, '...*ʿan ṣalātibim*' (...of their prayers)?"

A similar story was related to us by Abū Rajā' al-Ghanawī: Muhammad ibn al-Jahm al-Sijzī related to us: Haytham ibn Khālid al-Minqarī related to us: From Abū ʿIkrimah: From Jaʿfar ibn Sulaymān: From Mālik ibn Dīnār:

Abū al-ʿĀliyah was confronted with this because he had not differentiated between the *ʿan* (from) and *fī* (in) particles. Ḥasan picked up on this point and said, "Do you not see the statement of Allah ﷻ, "...*ʿan ṣalātibim*"?" His point was that the mindlessness that pertains to forgetting the number of units offered in prayer only overcomes a person once he has actually started offering the prayer. In other words, had this been the interpretation of the verse, it would have read: '*fī ṣalātibim ṣābūna*' (unmindful *in* their prayers). Given that He said, '*ʿan ṣalātibim*', it suggests that the meaning is the expiry of the prayer time.

Similar to this is what Ibn Qutaybah said with regard to the statement of Allah, Most High, 'And whoever turns a blind eye to (*ʿan*) the Reminder of the Most Compassionate, We place at the disposal of each a devilish one as their close associate.'<sup>15</sup> He assumed that this is from the phrase: '*Ashawtu ilā al-nāri aʿshū*', meaning when one looks *at* (*ilā*) fire. Other scholars have deemed he was wrong and said, 'What it actually means is: "Whoever looks *away from* the remembrance of the Most Compassionate..."' Ibn Qutaybah failed to differentiate between '*Ashawtu ilā...*' (to look at) and '*Ashawtu ʿan...*' (to look away from). As a result, he failed to properly understand and contextualise the verse. This is quite a delicate subject area where errors can creep in. In the ancient era, those of pure Arab ancestry were the target audience of these phrases.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Māʿūn*, 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Zukhruf*, 36.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Muhammad al-Maskanī related to me: Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm related to me: Suwayd related to me: Ibn al-Mubārak related to us: From ‘Īsā ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān: Ṭalḥah al-Yāmī related to me: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awsajah related to me: From Barā’ ibn ‘Āzib: ‘A Bedouin came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “Teach me a deed that will take me to Paradise.” He said, “*A’tiq al-nasamata wa-fukka al-raqabata*” (two plesionyms to denote: Emancipate the slave). He asked, “Are they not the same thing?” He said, “No – *itq al-nasamah* is when you directly emancipate the slave, whereas *fakk al-raqabah* is when you assist the slave to purchase his freedom.” Observe at how the Prophet ﷺ sequenced the two phrases and intended a specific meaning from each.

On the authority of his teachers, ‘Abdullāh ibn Asbāṭ related to me that Hārūn al-Rashīd called Sībawayh and Kisā’ī. Sībawayh put an issue to Kisā’ī: ‘Is it proper to say, “*Kāda al-zunbūru yakūna al-‘aqra ba fa-ka’annahū iyyāhā*” or “*ka’annahū iyyāhu*” (A hornet is almost like a scorpion – it is as if it is just like it)?’ Kisā’ī allowed it on the basis that it is similar to the phrases ‘*Ka’annahū hiya*’ or ‘*Ka’annahū huwa*’; Sībawayh refused to accept this. Rashīd called a group of eloquent Bedouins who resided in the doors of his palace and asked them. They declared Sībawayh’s position the correct one and did not permit what Kisā’ī said. It has been said that this is because the *iyyā-* prefix is used only in the grammatical position of *naṣb*, whereas the sentence here has the word in the grammatical position of *rafʿ*, thus rendering it impermissible. There are many other examples of this – covering them all would be time consuming.

Due to the above, many of the ancient scholars – despite being masters of the language and religious jurists themselves – were highly apprehensive of interpreting the Qur’an. They refrained from speaking on it for the fear of slipping up and missing the intended meaning. Aṣma’ī was a leading linguist, yet he would not offer any interpretation on the esoteric words of the Qur’an. It is related of him that when he was asked about the statement of Allah, Most Exalted: ‘*Qad shaghafahā ḥubban*’ (Love for him has plagued her heart)<sup>16</sup>, he fell silent. All he could say was: ‘This is in the Qur’an.’ He then mentioned a phrase from an Arab speaking about a female slave whose owners wanted to sell her: ‘*A-tabī’ūnahā wa-hiya lakum shaghāfun*’ (Will you sell her in spite of her attachment to you?), and did not add anything to this. This was the essence of what he said.

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<sup>16</sup> *Yūsuf*, 30.

This is the reason why the Prophet ﷺ encouraged people to learn the grammatical structure of the Qur'an and seek the knowledge of its esoteric words. On this, Ismā'īl ibn Muhammad al-Ṣaffār related to us: Muhammad ibn Wahb al-Thaqafī related to me: Muhammad ibn Sahl al-ʿAskarī related to me: Ibn Abī Zā'idah related to me: From ʿAbdullāh ibn Sa'īd al-Maqbarī: From his father: From Abū Hurayrah ﷺ – he said, ‘The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Learn the language structure (*i'rāb*) of the Qur'an and seek out its esoteric words (*gharā'ib*).”

When you understand these principles, you will notice that people were too afraid and cowardly to challenge the Qur'an because it was far too difficult for them. They instinctively knew every instance where it had demonstrated its superiority. They recognised what was required to stand up to the challenge – and how to assume the responsibility of taking up that challenge. Yet they also knew they had no hope of meeting the challenge of the Qur'an. As thus, they refused to challenge the Qur'an due to their incapacity; instead, as a result of their ignorance, they waged war. By rushing to war, they acquired exactly what they were running from: sheer humiliation and moral defeat. Allah says, ‘So they were defeated right there and put to shame.’<sup>17</sup> And all praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

A question arises at this juncture. When we recite the Qur'an and contemplate it, we find that most of its speech is composed from words commonly used within the usual discussions among Arabs. Compared to its exoteric words, the share of esoteric and obscure words therein is small. Relative to its common expressions, the number of standout phrases and preeminent verses is just a few. As such, how could it be envisaged that they were unable to challenge it and produce something like it? They were the most eloquent of Arabs who could forge speech however they liked. They were acutely familiar with the methods of speech composition in all its formats: odes, prosody, rhymes, and every other type of speech. Had they really wanted to do this and convince themselves in order to soothe their hearts, it would have been quite straightforward for them.

The only thing that prevented them from doing so was the alternate course of action they employed that they felt – in their heart and minds – was more decisive and beneficial: waging war against the Prophet and landing a killer blow so that they could

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<sup>17</sup> Translator's note: This is taken from *al-A'rāf*, 119, though the verse itself is speaking about the magicians of Pharaoh, who were defeated at the hands of Mūsā ﷺ.



be free of him. They did not want to partake in an arduous verbal tit for tat, nor did they want to entertain the challenge that would have attracted a response, thus protracting the saga through analysis and critique. In such an instance, claims and counterclaims would have increased exponentially, leaving the points of rhetorical superiority on their side concealed in the fog of dispute. Therefore, they resorted to the view that he should be eliminated and wiped off the face of the Earth, especially given that they saw themselves to have had the upper hand and sufficient might against him.

To answer this, we have already explained the description of the Qur'an's eloquence and the mandatory components that make up its rhetorical brilliance in such terms that frankly renders the responsibility of answering such an objection futile. We have argued that the Qur'an has elements that cannot come together for any human. They are beyond his powers, even if that person is the most eloquent and the most knowledgeable of speech styles and the methods of addressing others. We have already mentioned the reason for this and we explained the elements within the Qur'an that symbolise this reason. In our claim for the rhetorical superiority of the Qur'an, we did not suffice with individual words that make up its speech, but we also took into account the meanings deposited in those words as well as the contexts of the Qur'an that make up its literary composition.

One scholar said that the words of a language are one of three items that can be fully encompassed only by a Prophet. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ, who was at the pinnacle of eloquence, used to read the statement of Allah ﷻ, '*Wa-fākihātan wa-abbān*' (translated as: fruit and fodder)<sup>18</sup>, and he did not understand it. He would ask himself, 'What is *abb*?' He would then say, 'This is affectatious behaviour on your part, O son of Khaṭṭāb.' Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, the Interpreter of the Qur'an and the heir to its vast knowledge, used to say, 'I do not know what *ḥanān*, *ghislīn*, or *raqīm* mean. And is *tafath* even from the language of the Arabs?' Regarding these words, scholars took their meanings from the exegetes based on how they understood the context they came in.

As for the meanings of the Qur'an carried by these words, then engaging with them is even tougher, as they are the result of contemplation, understanding, and thought. And as for the composition of the Qur'an, the requirements of being

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<sup>18</sup> 'Abasa, 31.

cultured and possessing skill are even greater. It is the harness of words and the rein of meanings. It brings order to the components of speech, thus bringing a mutual harmony between all its elements. It conjures up an image in the heart, which the recitation then brings to life.

Given that the Qur'an is how we have described it, then one ought to know that being gifted with sharpness and fluency of the tongue is insufficient to rise up to the Qur'anic challenge. Not anyone who possesses some intuition and audacity can assume its responsibility so long as all the other prerequisites – which we have highlighted – are not met by him. Indeed, how can anyone ever hope to achieve all that? 'If all humans and demons were to come together to produce the equivalent of this Qur'an, they could not produce its equal, no matter how they supported each other.'<sup>19</sup>

As for their objection to the few number of esoteric words in the Qur'an in relation to the exoteric, it should be noted that esotericism was never a condition for rhetorical eloquence. Wildly esoteric words can be frequently found among the uncultured, rude, and rough Arabs who imbibe every form of harshness without balancing, suitably applying, or carefully choosing their speech. Speech like this would not be considered to be one of its superior forms. Rather, the choicest form would be the moderate format that the Qur'an produced. It is the type that marries eloquence and grandeur with sweetness and accessibility.

There are around sixty esoteric words in the lexicon. All of them denote tallness, many of which are ugly on the tongue and distasteful to the ears, such as *'ashannaq*, *'ashannaṭ*, *'aṭannaṭ*, *shawqab*, *shawdhab*, *salhab*, *qūq*, *qāq*, *ṭawṭ*, and *ṭāṭ*. The rhetoricians are in agreement that their usage in common parlance is to be abandoned; instead, one should stick to using the term *ṭawīl*. This suggests that eloquence does not care about esotericism, and that esotericism has nothing to offer in terms of eloquence.

There is another potential objection here. It is possible that some may not accept the claim that the phrases of the Qur'an are of the best and most eloquent format, because they find things that go against this description as per what the linguists would say. An example of this is: *'Fa-akalahū al-dhi'bu'* (...and a wolf devoured him!).<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>19</sup> *Al-Isrā'*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> *Yūsuf*, 17.

these sorts of contexts, i.e., predators, the term *iftarasa* is used – one would say ‘*Iftarasahū al-sabu‘u*’ (It was hunted down by the predator). This would have been the preferred choice for the meaning here. As for *akl* (eating; devouring), then this is a generic term that is not specific to any particular type of animal.

Another example is: ‘*Dhālika kaylun yasīrun*’ (That measurement volume is easy).<sup>21</sup> Their objection is: How can *yasīr* (easy) – or ‘*asīr* (difficult) for that matter – be used in relation to measuring? What was the reason why *yasīr* specifically was used to describe *kayl* in the Qur’an when in fact nobody has heard an eloquent person ever say, ‘*Kiltu li-zaydin kaylan yasīran*’ (intended translation: ‘I took out an easy measure for Zayd’), unless the speaker intends that the measured amount is of paltry quantity?

Another example is: ‘The chiefs among them went forth, saying, “Carry on and stand firm (*imshū wa-ṣbirū*) in devotion to your gods...”’<sup>22</sup> *Mashy* is not the most eloquent of words that could have been used. Instead, if *imḍū wa-nṭaliqū* was used, it would have been better and more eloquent.

Another example is: ‘My authority has been stripped (lit. destroyed; *halaka*) from me.’<sup>23</sup> The point here is that *halāk* is used for tangible items and people, e.g., ‘*Halaka zaydun*’ (Zayd was subject to destruction), ‘*Halaka mālu ‘amrin*’ (‘Amr’s wealth was destroyed), and so on. As for intangibles, the Arabs never tend to use *halāk* for those. If someone says, ‘*Halaka ‘an fulānin ‘ilmihū*’ (So-and-so’s knowledge was destroyed) or ‘*Halaka jāhubū*’ (His reputation was destroyed), and by that he meant: ‘*Dhahaba ‘ilmuhu wa-jāhubū*’ (His knowledge and his reputation were finished), it would be quite a displeasing expression in Arabic.

Another example is: ‘...and they are truly extreme (*shadīd*) in their love of worldly gains (*li-ḥubbi al-khayri*).’<sup>24</sup> Yet nobody hears any person of eloquence ever say, ‘*Ana li-ḥubbi zaydin shadīdun*’ (I am extreme in my love of Zayd). The correct phrasing is: ‘*Ana shadīdu al-ḥubbi li-zaydin*’ (I love Zayd a lot), and so on.

Another example is: ‘...those who do alms... (*li al-zakāti fā‘ilūna*)’<sup>25</sup> – nobody ever says ‘*Fa‘ala zaydun al-zakāta*’ (Zayd did alms). Rather, what is said is: ‘*Zakkā al-*

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<sup>21</sup> *Yūsuf*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> *Ṣād*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Hāqqah*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-‘Ādiyāt*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Al-Mu‘minūn*, 4.

*rajulu mālahū*’ or ‘*Addā zakāta mālihi*’ (The man offered the *zakāh* of his wealth), and so on.

Another example is: ‘As for those who believe and do good, the Most Compassionate will certainly bless them with genuine love (*sa-yaj’alu labum al-raḥmānu wuddan*).’<sup>26</sup> Who even says, ‘*Ja’altu li-fulānin wuddan wa-ḥubban*’ (literally: I made love for So-and-so)? What one would say is: ‘*Wadidtuhū wa-aḥbabtuhū*’ (I love him), or ‘*Badhaltu labū wuddī*’ (I have dedicated my love to him), and so on.

Another example is: ‘Say, O Prophet, “Perhaps some of what you seek to hasten is close at hand (*radifa lakum*).”’<sup>27</sup> It is actually *radifahū yardafuhū* – without the *lām*.

Other examples are: ‘Whoever intends to deviate (*bi-ilḥādin*) by doing wrong in it...’<sup>28</sup>, and: ‘Do they not realise that Allah, Who created the heavens and the Earth and did not tire in creating them, is able (*bi-qādirin*)...’<sup>29</sup> – there is a *bā*’ in the words *bi-ilḥādin* and *bi-qādirin*, which have no place here. If ‘*Wa-man yurid fīhi ilḥadan bi-ḡulmin*’ and ‘...*qādirun ‘alā an yuḥyiya al-mawtā*’ were said, it would have been proper with no problem or confusion to the meaning. Conversely, if introducing a *bā*’ in *bi-qādirin* was proper, it would have also been permitted to say ‘*Zanantu anna zaydan bi-khārijin*’ (intended translation: ‘I thought Zayd was coming out’), which is absolutely not allowed.

They claim there is another instance of poor composition that is unworthy of what is supposed to be eloquent speech. That would be the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Like (*ka-mā*) when your Lord brought you, O Prophet, out of your home for a just cause, though a group of believers was totally against it.’<sup>30</sup> This follows His statement, ‘It is they who are the true believers. They will have elevated ranks, forgiveness, and an honourable provision from their Lord.’<sup>31</sup> The term *ka-mā* is used to denote similitude between two things. Here, there is nothing in the initial verse to which similitude has been offered in the latter verse. Other examples of this are: ‘And say, “I am truly sent with a clear warning” – similar (*ka-mā*) to what We sent to those

<sup>26</sup> *Maryam*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> *Al-Naml*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Al-Hajj*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Al-Aḥqāf*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 4.

who divided the Scriptures, who now accept parts of the Qur'an, rejecting others'<sup>32</sup>, and the verse: 'Similarly (*ka-mā*), We have sent you a Messenger from among yourselves...'<sup>33</sup>

They also claim that the Qur'an possesses a great deal of omission and concision, obscuring the meaning of the speech. Take, for example, the following verse: 'If there were a recitation that could cause mountains to move, or the Earth to split, or the dead to speak.'<sup>34</sup> There is no mention of its consequence, which suggests that the speech is truncated, rendering it fruitless. Another example is this verse: 'When they arrive and its gates are opened...'<sup>35</sup> Conversely, they say the Qur'an contains a great deal of repetition, such as: 'Then which of your Lord's favours will you humans and demons both deny?'<sup>36</sup> in *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*, and: 'Woe on that Day to the deniers!'<sup>37</sup> in *Sūrah al-Mursalāt*. Language natives would not consider either approach to be praiseworthy or a superior form of elocution.

Another one of their objections is that two parts of a single passage are interrupted by completely unrelated sentences, like: 'In fact, people will testify against their own souls, despite the excuses they come up with. *Do not rush your tongue trying to memorise a revelation of the Qur'an. It is certainly upon Us to make you memorise and recite it. So once We have recited a revelation through Gabriel.* But no! In fact, you love this fleeting world, and neglect the Hereafter.'<sup>38</sup> This is considered neither good nor something chosen by rhetoricians and the masters of elocution. It would have been better if the speech was sectioned by topic, and that each topic had its own place, such that it would not be interrupted by another.

They also say that had the chapters of the Qur'an been set out in orderly fashion – i.e., stories of the previous nations in one *sūrah*, admonishment and reflections in one *sūrah*, and laws in one *sūrah* – that would have been a better sequencing format, more helpful for memorisation purposes, and more impactful in meaning. There are many other issues like this in the Qur'an that are too numerous to mention, they say.

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<sup>32</sup> *Al-Hijr*, 89-91.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 151.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Ra'd*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Al-Zumar*, 73.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Raḥmān*, 13 onwards.

<sup>37</sup> *Al-Mursalāt*, 15 onwards.

<sup>38</sup> *Al-Qiyāmah*, 14-21. The relevant verses (16-19) have been italicised.

In answer to all of the above, what we have said – which we now reemphasise – about the words of the Qur’an and their eloquence was absolutely accurate; only an ignorant or an obstinate person can deny this. When it comes to the aforementioned verses, their interpretation is not what those who have objected to them have understood.

On the statement of Allah, Most High, ‘*Fa-akalabū al-dhi’bu*’ (...and a wolf devoured him!)<sup>39</sup>, the term *iftirās* means a predator’s act of killing, nothing more. Its root word, *fars*, denotes striking the neck. Yūsuf’s brothers had claimed that the wolf had actually devoured all his body parts and limbs, not even leaving a joint or a bone. This is because they feared that their father would have otherwise demanded a trace of him that would support the accuracy of their claim. To avoid this, they claimed he was completely devoured. The term *fars* does not convey this meaning. Therefore, the only appropriate term to express the meaning here was *akl*. Furthermore, the term *akl* is widely used for wolves and other predators. Ibn al-Sikkīt related that the Arabs say, ‘The wolf devoured (*akala*) the sheep and did not leave any semblance of life in it.’

One poet said:

*‘A youngster who is not a cousin is like a wolf. If on some day he sees blood on his companion, he will devour him (ākiluhū).’*

Another poet said:

*‘Abū Khurāshah, even though you have many in your tribe, my people were not devoured (lam ta’kulhum) by the hyena (i.e., the years of drought).’*

In the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ supplicating against ‘Utbah ibn Abī Lahab, it reads: ‘O Allah, unleash one of Your dogs on him.’ ‘Utbah travelled to Syria for business and he stayed for the night at some house. A lion came and began circling the house in which his group was staying. ‘Utbah started saying, ‘The predator has devoured me (*akalanī al-sabu’u*)!’ At some point during the night, it attacked him and smashed his head.

The term *akl* can be used even more liberally. Words like stabbing, biting, and stinging can all be referred to as *akl*. On this, Abū ‘Umar told us: Abū al-‘Abbās told us: From Ibn al-A‘rābī: From Abū al-Makārim – he said, ‘I passed by an area of water. At the banks of it was a small child, in whose hands was a scorpion. I said to his mother,

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<sup>39</sup> Yūsuf, 17.

“Get the child, lest the insect eats it (*lā ta'kuluhū*)”, i.e., stings it.’ It is also related that a Bedouin said, ‘*Akalūnī al-barāghīthu*’ (I was eaten up – i.e., bitten – by fleas). So he referred to flea bites as *akl*. This usage occurs frequently across the language.

On the verse ‘...and obtain an extra donkey’s worth of grain. That measurement volume (*kayl*) is easy’<sup>40</sup>, the meaning of *kayl* when mentioned alongside donkey is the actual item that is measured. Verbal nouns can substitute common nouns, e.g., ‘*Hādhā dirhamun ḍarbu al-amīri*’ (This is a dirham forged in the name of the ruler) and ‘*Hādhā thawbun nasju al-yamani*’ (This is a shirt woven in Yemen), i.e., ‘*maḍrūbu al-amīri*’ and ‘*nasīju al-yamani*’. It therefore means: ‘We can gain another donkey’s load from the rations if our brother joins us.’ Every head was able to take one load, but not anymore due to the lack of food. This event was during the seven years of famine. They could only gain access to water through Yūsuf □, and their needs could only be fulfilled through him. On this basis, the phrase ‘That measurement is easy (*yasīr*)’<sup>41</sup> was said, i.e., easy if our brother accompanies us. The term *yasīr* is very commonly used for all easy things, just like the term ‘*asīr*’ is used for all difficult matters. This is why ‘*Yussira al-rajulu*’ is said when a person’s livestock gives offspring in large numbers. The poet says:

*‘A poor person considers himself to be in riches during any evening when he is hosted by a friend who has livestock in abundance (muyassarī).’*

Another poet said:

*‘Those two have assumed leadership over us. They only lead us because their livestock is abundant (yassarat).’*

One view on the ‘*kaylun yasīrun*’ phrase is that it means a swift transfer of food without any stoppage in the process. When people were held up at the gates, Yūsuf □□ would place his brothers ahead of everyone. Another view is that the meaning of *kayl* here is price. On this, Abū ‘Umar told me: From Abū al-‘Abbās – he said, ‘*Kayl* means price. One says, “*Kayfa al-kaylu ‘indakum* (How is the price near you?).”’ ‘Amr ibn Abī ‘Amr al-Shaybānī relates the following poetry from his father:

*‘If the price of Yamāmah is high, then the price of Meyafarikîn (Silvan) is no higher.’*

<sup>40</sup> Yūsuf, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Yūsuf, 65.

On the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Carry on and stand firm (*imshū wa-ṣbirū*) in devotion to your gods’<sup>42</sup>, and on the claim vis-à-vis those who say that ‘*imḍū wa-nṭaliqū*’ would have been more eloquent, the fact is that the matter is not as they claimed. Rather, using the term *masby* in this place is the most appropriate in conveying the meaning. The point here is to convey their persistence with their ongoing customs and adherence to the behaviours that were known to them without consternation. They had no desire to switch away from the status quo. This is therefore more aligned with the meanings of holding fast and standing firm – or patience (*ṣabr*) – which they exhorted each other to uphold: ‘...and stand firm (*wa-ṣbirū*) in devotion to your gods.’<sup>43</sup> It is as if they were saying, ‘Carry on as you are, right to the precipice of your affairs. Pay no attention to what he is saying. Do not be bothered by it.’ On the other hand, ‘*imḍū wa-nṭaliqū*’ carries an element of consternation that is not found in the word ‘*imshū*’, which they neither wanted nor desired. Another view is that *masby* here actually means making up the numbers and coming together to score a victory against the Prophet, not the *masby* that is conventionally used to denote the movement of the legs (i.e., walking). Based on this, the term *masby* would be like when the Arabs say, ‘*Mashā al-rajulu*’, in the case of a man who has plenty of children. They say:

‘*A sheep cannot produce many offspring (lā tamshī) in the presence of a wolf.*’

As for the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘My authority has been stripped (lit. destroyed; from *halaka*) from me’<sup>44</sup>, and their assumption that the term *halāk* is used only for the destruction of tangible items, the only thing they did was to criticise the most eloquent and elegant of all speech. In some instances, borrowing a word from elsewhere in the language (*isti‘ārah*) conveys the meaning in a more impactful manner than using the designated word. For example, in the verse ‘There is also a sign for them in the night: We strip (*naslakhu*) daylight from it...’<sup>45</sup>, *salkh* is a borrowed term that is far more impactful than: ‘...*nukhriju minhu al-nahāra* (We take daylight out of it)’, even though this is what happens in actuality.

Similarly, the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘So do (*fa-ṣda*) what you have been commanded...’<sup>46</sup>, is rhetorically more impactful than saying, ‘*Fa-mal bi-mā*

<sup>42</sup> *Ṣād*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ṣād*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Hāqqah*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Yā-Sīn*, 37.

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Hijr*, 94.



*tu'maru'*, even though this wording represents actuality. The term *ṣad'* is borrowed – it is originally used for breaking glass and similar brittle materials with metal. The verse means to carry out the command of conveying the true religion to the nth degree until it impacts hearts and souls just like the impact striking has on glass and similar materials. Similar to this is the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, 'My authority has been stripped (lit. *halaka*; destroyed) from me.'<sup>47</sup> Using the term *dhahāb* instead would have left open the possibility of its restitution; in *halāk*, there is no chance of anything remaining or the return of whatever was destroyed. In another view, the meaning of authority here is evidence and proof.

On the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, '...and they are truly *shadīd* ('severe' is the translation by those who raise the objection here) in their love of worldly gains (*li-ḥubbi al-khayri la-shadīdun*)'<sup>48</sup>, the term *shadīdun* here actually means miserly. The phrase '*Rajulun shadīdun*' or '*mutashaddidun*' is used with this meaning. Ṭarafah said:

*'I see that death picks souls off and takes all the wealth of the vulgar and the miserly (al-mutashaddidi) away.'*

The *lām* in *li-ḥubbi al-khayri* is for justification. Ultimately, the verse means: 'He is truly miserly *because* of his love for wealth.'

On the statement of Allah ﷻ, '...those who do alms...'<sup>49</sup>, their objection is that words like *adā'*, *itā'* and *iṭā'* (which all denote 'giving') are normally used when giving alms. For example, you would say, '*Addā fulānun zakāta mālihī*', '*Ātāhā*', '*Aṭāhā*', or '*Zakkā mālahū*' (translation of all: 'He *gave* the alms of his wealth'). In other words, you do not say, '*Fa'ala fulānun al-zakāta*' (So-and-so *did* alms), which is unheard of. The answer is that these alternative phrases are not equal to the meaning expressed by the wording used in the verse. These alternative expressions only convey the meaning of the term *zakāh* (alms) and do not add any meaning of benefit beyond its payment. The point of the verse is to convey a sense of emphasis in discharging the obligation of alms and the continuity of this practice to the extent that it becomes a perennial description of almsgivers. In this case, the offering of alms becomes a deed (*fi'l*) that is strongly associated with them, like one of their permanent features. Such a meaning could only have been achieved through the expression used in the Qur'an,

<sup>47</sup> *Al-Hāqqah*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Ādiyāt*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Mu'minūn*, 4.

and is therefore the most appropriate and rhetorically superior. Another view states that the meaning of *zakāh* here is actually good and untarnished deeds. As thus, the verse – and Allah knows better – would mean, ‘...and those who do good deeds and pure acts.’

As for the statement of Allah ﷻ, ‘...the Most Compassionate will certainly bless them with genuine love’<sup>50</sup>, and their rejection of the expression ‘*Ja‘altu li-fulānin wuddan*’ to denote ‘*Wadidtubū*’ (translation of both: I love him), then they have again strayed away from the intended meaning, erring in the interpretation of the verse. The meaning here is actually that Allah shall *place* and *implant* love in the hearts of the believers. This would be similar to the statement of Allah ﷻ, ‘And Allah has made for you spouses of your own kind...’<sup>51</sup>

Regarding the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘...what you seek to hasten (...*radifa lakum*)...’<sup>52</sup>, then both ‘*Radiftubū*’ and ‘*Radiftu labū*’ are acceptable dialects, similar to ‘*Naṣaḥtubū*’ and ‘*Naṣaḥtu labū*’ (I counselled him).

On the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Whoever intends to deviate (*bi-ilḥādīn*) by doing wrong in it...’<sup>53</sup> with the *bā*, one should be cognizant that this particle appears frequently in the speech of the first Arabs, in whose language the Qur’an was revealed, though it is sparingly used in the speech of later Arabs. On this, Ḥasan ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm told me: From Abū Khalīfah: From Muhammad ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī: Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ said, ‘The language in which the Qur’an was revealed and with which the Arabs spoke during the time of the Prophet ﷺ is a different Arabic from what we currently speak.’ Some incorrectly assume that the speaking style of the Arabs has remained the same since the times when the language was first spoken in its most ancient style until the era of the Umayyads, after which fault crept in it and aspects of language usage became defective. This is why when Abū ‘Amr related the poetry of Imru’ al-Qays:

*‘Naṭ‘anubum sulkā wa-makhlūjatan | Karraka la’mayni ‘alā nābilī’ (We injure them with both straight and curved arrows, but a shooter would be a target of two return shots)*

<sup>50</sup> *Maryam*, 96.

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Nahl*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> *Al-Naml*, 72.

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Ḥajj*, 25.

he retorted, ‘Those who are good at making up this sort of speech have long gone.’

Abū ‘Umar told me: From Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Abbās: From someone he named: Abū ‘Amr mentioned the couplet of Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah:

*Za‘amū anna kulla man ḍaraba al-‘ay... | ...ra muwālin lanā wa-annā al-walā’u*  
(They thought that everyone who closes an eyelid (or) hits the Wā’il leader, Kulayb (other meanings also posited) is our ally, and we owe allegiance to them.)

and remarked, ‘Those who are good at making up this sort of speech have long gone.’

This is why scholars of the language consider the poetry of later poets to be neither admissible nor usable as precedent – only the poets of the *jāhiliyyah* age, those who lived in both the *jāhiliyyah* and post-*jāhiliyyah* periods (i.e., *mukhadrams*), and the third generation of poets that met the second class are admissible as authorities. This is because scholars understood the interpolations into the Arabic language in later times and its shift from its original style. Examples of later poets include Bashshār ibn Burd, Ḥasan ibn Hāni’, Da‘bal, ‘Attābī, and other proficient poets of their class who were experts in the matter and styles of poetry.

Those unaware of these circumstances consider later poetry to be of the same standard as the poetry corpus of the ancients; they benchmark it against the compositions of later poets and would thus quickly become tired with a large portion of the ancients’ poetry, most likely rejecting their poetry altogether. As for those proficient in the language of the Arabs, cognisant of the vast array of its applications, and aware of its ancient styles, they would not rush to condemn it or ascribe it to error, even if they found something therein that goes against what is considered normative for the language of their time and era.

Abū ‘Umar told us: From Abū al-‘Abbās: Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, ‘The greatest grammarian is the one who does not ascribe error unto someone else.’

I heard Ibn Abī Hurayrah relate from Abū al-‘Abbās Ibn Surayj: ‘A man asked a scholar about the statement of Allah ﷻ, “I do not<sup>54</sup> swear (*lā uqsimu*) by this city...”<sup>55</sup> He said that Allah says He will not swear by it, but then He does swear by it: “By the fig and the olive, and Mount Sinai, and this secure city, indeed, We created...”<sup>56</sup> Ibn

<sup>54</sup> Translator’s note: Translated according to the erroneous understanding of the questioner.

<sup>55</sup> *Al-Balad*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Al-Tīn*, 1-4.

Surayj said, ‘Do you prefer that I dismantle your question first and then give you the answer, or vice versa?’ He replied, ‘You may dismantle my question first, and then answer.’ He told him, ‘You should know that this Qur’an was revealed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in the presence of people who were the keenest on finding any blemish therein, which they could publicly hoist up as a fault. Had this been a point with which they could discredit the Qur’an, they would have run with it and hastened to leverage it in order to refute the Qur’an. Yet they knew this would not work. But you do not. They did not censure it in the way you are seemingly censuring it.’ Then he said, ‘Sometimes, Arabs bring a redundant *lā* particle in their conversations. The poet says:

“*Fī bi‘rin lā ḥūrin sarā wa-mā sha‘ar*” (He fell into a deadly well from which there is no return – he did not even notice it). That is to say: ‘*Fī bi‘rin ḥūrin.*’

Abū ‘Umar told me: From Abū al-‘Abbās: From Ibn al-A‘rābī – he said, ‘Arabs mention *lā* as a redundant word; they also conceal *lā* and intend it in the meaning.’ For the first, he offered the aforementioned line of poetry as precedent. For the latter, he said:

‘*Ūṣīka an taḥmadaka al-aqāribū | Aw yarji‘a al-miskīnu wa-huwa khā‘ibū*’ (I advise you to be such that relatives praise you, and that no destitute person leaves you emptyhanded). That is to say: ‘*Lā yarji‘a.*’

This demonstrates the addition of redundant particles in some instances of speech, and the omission of meaningful particles in other instances. This was the first style of the language before corruption crept into it. Later people in their language abandoned the usage of these rhetorical styles. Understanding this area properly will allow a person to unlock a vast amount of knowledge. It will alleviate people from a great burden of ignorance and the doubts of their hearts can be expelled. This can help people cut through the noise of those who are objecting against the Qur’an. Indeed, power is only with Allah.

Returning to the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Whoever intends to deviate (*bi-ilḥādīn*) by doing wrong in it...’<sup>57</sup>, we submit the opinion that the *bā*’ here is a superfluous rhetorical addition. The meaning is: ‘*Wa-man yurid fīhi ilḥadan bi-ḥulmin.*’ The particle *bā*’ can be superfluously added to speech without any change to

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<sup>57</sup> *Al-Hajj*, 25.

the meaning, like: ‘*Akadhtu al-shay’a*’ and ‘*Akhadhtu bihi*’ (I took the item), and like what the poet said:

‘*Nadribu bi al-sayfi wa-narjū bi al-faraji*’ (*We strike with the sword and hope for victory/cessation of hostilities (bi al-faraji)*).

One can say, ‘*Qara’tu al-baqarata*’ or ‘*Qara’tu bi al-baqarati*’ (I recited Sūrah al-Baqarah). A number of reciters including Ibn Kathīr and Abū ‘Amr read: ‘*Tunbitu bi al-dubni*’<sup>58</sup>; some believe that it means: ‘*Tunbitu al-dubna*’ (It grows oil). Others have said its meaning is: ‘*Tanbutu wa-fīhā dubnun*’ (It grows while having oil), like when one says, ‘*Jā’a zaydun bi al-sayfi*’, i.e., ‘*Jā’a zaydun wa-ma’ahū al-sayfu*’ (Zayd came with a sword).

Similar to this is the statement of Allah, Most Exalted: ‘Do they not realise that Allah, Who created the heavens and the Earth and did not tire in creating them, is able (*bi-qādirin*)...’<sup>59</sup> It means ‘*qādirun ‘alā an yuḥyiya al-mawtā*’. The linguists say that the *bā*’ here is introduced only in association with the negative interrogative particle (*A-wa-lam*), like in, ‘Is such a Creator not (*A-laysa*) able to bring the dead back to life?’<sup>60</sup> The negative interrogative particle of *a-lam* is the same as *a-laysa*, and thus it assumes the same ability of being able to introduce a redundant *bā*’. The introduction of ‘*anna*’ is to infuse emphasis into the sentence. Farrā’ has poetry with a *bā*’ similar to the above:

‘*Fa-mā raja’at bi-khā’ibatin rikābun | Ḥakīmu ibnu al-musayyabi muntahāhā*’  
(*No caravan whose journey ends at Ḥakīm ibn al-Musayyab returns with nothing (bi-khā’ibatin)*).

One may also say, ‘*Mā aẓunnuka bi-qā’imin*’ (I do not think you are standing). If you remove the *bā*’, the verb will make the subsequent noun take the grammatical status of *naṣb*.

On the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘...similar to what We sent to those who divided the Scriptures...’<sup>61</sup>, it has an omission that the context of the sentence alludes to: ‘*I am truly sent with a clear warning of punishment, similar to what We sent to those who divided the Scriptures.*’

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Mu’minūn*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Aḥqāf*, 33.

<sup>60</sup> *Al-Qiyāmah*, 40.

<sup>61</sup> *Al-Ḥijr*, 90.

On the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Like (*ka-mā*) when your Lord brought you, O Prophet, out of your home...’<sup>62</sup>, there are a number of views adopted by exegetes and hermeneuts, all of which are plausible. Assuming the *kāf* to be any of these options would result in the sentence being proper.

Some say that Allah, Most Exalted, commanded His Messenger to execute His order on the spoils of Badr, even though some Companions were not greatly pleased with this. A similar occurrence took place when some were not pleased when he was ordered to pursue the disbelievers’ caravan. After Badr, the Companions differed about the spoils of war. Some argued and even disputed with the Prophet ﷺ. Many disliked the share afforded to the Messenger ﷺ. On this, Allah, Most High, revealed the first verse of Sūrah al-Anfāl. He executed His command and ordered them to fear Allah, to obey him, and to not raise objection to anything he would do from there on – if indeed they were believers. The interim verses speak on how the believers should be. Allah then says, ‘Like when your Lord brought you, O Prophet, out of your home for a just cause, though a group of believers was totally against it.’<sup>63</sup> By this, Allah is alluding to their displeasure at the Prophet’s distribution of the spoils of war, just like their previous displeasure at being told to go out with him. In the latter case, they ultimately noted that it resulted in a desired outcome. As such, Allah commanded them to be patient in the issue of the spoils of war as well and accept it as it was, for they would find that the final conclusion of this episode was also desirable.

In another view, the meaning of this verse is similar to the statement of Allah, ‘Then by the Lord of heaven and Earth, all this is certainly as true as the fact that you can speak!’<sup>64</sup>, i.e., ‘They are truly the believers, just as truly as your Lord brought you out from your home.’

In another view, *ka-mā* is a descriptive phrase for a concealed verb, i.e., ‘You should do with the spoils of war just as you did when you left for Badr, even if the people disliked it.’ This would be similar to the verse: ‘Just as We sent you a Messenger from among yourselves...’<sup>65</sup>, i.e., ‘Just as We bestowed our favour on you by sending to you a Messenger from among yourselves, *I shall likewise complete my favour to you.*’

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<sup>62</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Al-Dhāriyāt*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 151.

A potential objection can be raised here. It states that even though the interpretation provided is plausible and the verse ‘Like when your Lord brought you, O Prophet, out of your home...’<sup>66</sup> reads correctly as per what was mentioned above, there is still a problem of disarray in the sentence components, with the connected wordings being remote from each other. This renders the verse to be beyond what is considered to be the realm of expert composition, which is what it has been described.

This objection is incorrect. There is nothing unrelated between the first part and the last part of the subject. Allah said after the opening of Sūrah al-Anfāl: ‘...and obey Allah and His Messenger if you are true believers.’<sup>67</sup> Then He described this *īmān* (belief) and its essence, because the distribution of the spoils occurs to a class of people – believers – who are made up of various parts and are of different levels in faith. Those with the lowest degree of faith are required to uphold the obligation that is set for those with the highest degree of faith. Had Allah not mentioned the intermediate verses – which carry a description comprehensive enough to be inclusive of all the people included in the term ‘believers’ – the point of making mention of ‘believers’ in the first verse would have been unclear. It is only after this that Allah brings the *ka-mā* conjunction, and connects the opening of the discussion to the next part: ‘Like when your Lord brought you, O Prophet, out of your home for a just cause, though a group of believers were totally against it.’<sup>68</sup> In other words, He likened their displeasure on the issue of distributing the spoils to the issue of going out of their homes to pursue the caravan of the disbelievers. Any description or sentence without which the speech is not complete would be treated as a core component of the address.

There is another objection that can be levelled at the meaning of Allah’s statement, ‘In fact, people will testify against their own souls, despite the excuses they come up with. *Do not rush your tongue trying to memorise a revelation of the Qur’an. It is certainly upon Us to make you memorise and recite it. So once We have recited a revelation through Gabriel. But no! In fact, you love this fleeting world, and neglect the Hereafter.*’<sup>69</sup> The objection is that there is no harmonious continuity (*munāsabah*) with either the preceding or the following sentence.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Al-Qiyāmah*, 14-21.

<sup>70</sup> Translator’s note: The relevant verses (*al-Qiyāmah*, 16-19) that are alleged to be a discontinuation have been italicised.

That was a situation that required its mention (i.e., *al-Qiyāmah*, 16-19) – it could not have been omitted or deferred to another time. It is akin to speaking to a man about something and he changes the topic and speaks about something else – you say, ‘Pay attention to me’, ‘Listen to what I am saying’, or ‘Are you getting me?’, and so on. You would then continue with what you were speaking about. This would not be considered a discontinuation; rather, it would be a request of returning to, and continuing with, the first topic of discussion.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was unlettered – he could neither read nor write. When revelation would come to him and he listened to the Qur’an, he would move his tongue in haste to commit it to memory. He was told, ‘Understand well what is being revealed to you – do not move your tongue around, for We shall gather it for you and preserve it in your memory.’

On this, Aṣamm told us: Abū Umayyah al-Ṭurtūsī related to us: ‘Ubaydullāh ibn Mūsā related to me: Isrā’īl related to me: From Abū Ishāq: From Sa’īd ibn Jubayr: From Ibn ‘Abbās on the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘Do not rush your tongue trying to memorise a revelation of the Qur’an’<sup>71</sup> – he said, ‘He used to move his tongue out of the fear that the freshly revealed verses would escape him.’

On finding fault in the omission and truncation in the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘If there were a recitation that could cause mountains to move, or the Earth to split, or the dead to speak’<sup>72</sup>, the truncation has in fact been correctly applied. Omitting parts of speech that can be done without is one application of Arabic rhetoric. The reason why it was allowed – considered good even – to omit the consequence here is because what was mentioned already alludes to the truncated sentence. This is because the implicit message in an address is tantamount to it being spoken – for those who can understand this style of language. The meaning therefore is: ‘If there were a recitation that could cause mountains to move, or the Earth to split, or the dead to speak, *it would be this Qur’an.*’

In another view, omission here was rhetorically superior to its explicit mention because the imagination runs in every direction in the case of omission, whereas had the consequence been spelled out, it would have been restricted to what is mentioned. As thus, the consequence was omitted. Another example of this would be: ‘If you had

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<sup>71</sup> *Al-Qiyāmah*, 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Al-Ra’d*, 31.



seen ‘Alī between the two armies!’ (*Law ra’ayta ‘aliyyan bayna al-ṣaffayni*).<sup>73</sup> Another example is the statement of Allah, Most Exalted, ‘And those who were mindful of their Lord will be led to Paradise in successive groups. When they arrive and its gates are opened...’<sup>74</sup> – the meaning is: ‘When they enter Paradise, *they will have everlasting bounties that will neither cease nor become tarnished.*’

On finding fault in repetition, it should be noted that repetition is of two types. The first is rhetorically blameworthy and can be done without if it does not offer any additional meaning to the first instance where those words were said. It would be superfluous repetition. There is no case of such repetition in the Qur’an.

The other form of repetition is unlike the first. Omitting repetition in a place that is in need of it is akin to purposefully adding words where omission and truncation are required. Repetition is both required and considered good in matters of significance that require one’s careful consideration, without which there is a potential of error, forgetfulness, or its value being underestimated. When encouraging another person, an individual may say, ‘Be quick! Be quick!’, or ‘Throw! Throw!’ Another example is when ‘Important – Important – Important’ is written on a book. The poet said:

*‘Why did you not ask the armies of Kindah on the day they fled, “Whither? Whither? (ayna aynā)”’*

Another said:

*‘Help me, Banū Bakr! Revive (i.e., avenge) Kulayb for me! Help me, Banū Bakr! Where oh where (ayna ayna) is there to run off?’*

Allah ﷻ informed us of the reason why He repeated the mention of stories and events in the Qur’an. He, Most Exalted, said, ‘Indeed, We have steadily delivered the Word of Allah to the people so they may be mindful’<sup>75</sup>, and, ‘...and varied the warnings in it, so perhaps they will shun evil or it may cause them to be mindful.’<sup>76</sup>

As for Sūrah al-Raḥmān, Allah addresses humankind and demonkind in it. In this *sūrah*, He lists a variety of bounties He made for them – in every instance where He

<sup>73</sup> Translator’s note: i.e., ‘If you had seen ‘Alī between the two armies [during the pre-battle showdown (*mubārazah*)], you would have seen something great.’

<sup>74</sup> *Al-Zumar*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> *Al-Qaṣaṣ*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> *Tā-Hā*, 113.

mentions a type of bounty, He renews His mandate that they should acknowledge it and express their gratitude. Bounties are of different types – and this should be corresponded with the appropriate gratitude. It is a similar case in Sūrah al-Mursalāt: He mentions the events and terrors of the Day of Judgement by stating the punishment first. Then He repeats this verse after every instance of mentioning an event of the Day of Judgement, so that it drives the message home and firmly establishes the evidence, leaving no room for excuse. Instances where such rhetorical eloquence (i.e., repetition) is required are a valid point of consideration.

An objection can be raised on the repetition of ‘Then which of your Lord’s favours will you humans and demons both deny?’<sup>77</sup> The objection is that if its repeated mention was for the bounties mentioned in the *sūrah* and the requirement of expressing gratitude, then what is the meaning of the verse: ‘Flames of fire and molten copper will be sent against you, and you will not be able to defend one another?’<sup>78</sup> And why was that followed up with: ‘Then which of your Lord’s favours will you humans and demons both deny?’<sup>79</sup> In other words, what is the bounty here? Instead, Allah is issuing a threat of raging fire and engulfing smoke. In reply to this contention, it is submitted that the bounty of Allah, Most High, in the form of His warning against His punishment triggered by sins – so that people may avoid them and cease perpetrating them – is no less than His promise of reward for obedience, which encourages people to commit to and seek out good deeds.

The definition of any concept can be identified when it is contrasted with its opposite. Even though they are essentially opposites, both the promise of reward and the threat of punishment are also bounties in that they edify reciters on where their actions will lead to and explain the ultimate outcome of their deeds. It is based on this that one of the sage poets said:

*‘Even though the calamities of events may hit you, they also apprise you on how good bounties can be.’*

Now to their next objection: Had the topics of the Qur’an been revealed separately, with each having its own place, it would have worked better for its composition and been more beneficial. The answer to this is that the Qur’an was purposefully revealed in this fashion – i.e., aggregating various topics in one *sūrah*, or

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<sup>77</sup> *Al-Raḥmān*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Al-Raḥmān*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> *Al-Raḥmān*, 36.

a few issues in a single verse, so that its benefit would be greater. Had every topic been compartmentalised, and every subject was designated to its own *sūrah*, the Qur'an's spiritual benefit would have been drastically limited. It would have also meant that when a stubborn disbeliever who is in denial of its truth listened to the Qur'an, it would not have constituted decisive evidence for him – save for the single topic that a single *sūrah* was focused on. For this reason, the aggregation of multiple topics into a single *sūrah* was far better suited to the purpose of the Qur'an and more beneficial compared to the compartmentalisation of its topics. And Allah knows better.

Another point to be made here is that Allah ﷻ wanted to assess His servants and test their obedience. He also wanted their scholarly class to exert efforts by aggregating its themes, whether scattered by their chronological revelation or by the existing sequence of the Qur'an. This is so Allah elevates those who are faithful and raise those gifted with knowledge in rank.<sup>80</sup>

The next potential objection is as follows: The first disbelievers may have already challenged it successfully. Unfortunately, it has not been transmitted down to us. Any mention of it has been redacted. Any information about it was kept under wraps when Islam spread and supporters of those challenges feared for themselves. As thus, any sign or trace of it was eradicated.

This is a palpably false accusation. The matter of the Qur'an's miraculous nature emanates from the conventional norms upheld by people, whether they represent the elite or are part of the commonfolk. This is in the form of relating information of events or speaking on issues of significance that people are attached to and have an impact on. How could this accusation therefore be even plausible when the Qur'an represents such a huge matter that perplexed hearts and minds, and whose mention has spread to both the east and west? If this was even plausible for this matter – notwithstanding the immense jeopardy and the momentous value it brought about – it could also then be plausible to suggest that there was another prophet during that era – nay, multiple prophets, all of whom were given heavenly scriptures and a body of laws that were not the same as those of our Shariah – but their good was kept concealed and never came to light. Such a proposition would never be considered natural or customary; their accusation is likewise.

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<sup>80</sup> Translator's note: This is an allusion to *al-Mujādilah*, 11.

Another objection can be raised, which is this: There is no denial that the Qur’anic challenge has been met by some people to the extent that they produced a small portion similar to the Qur’an, equalling the number of verses in a small *sūrah*. An example of this is reported from Musaylimah – he said, ‘*Yā dīfda’u niqqī kam taniqqīna, lā al-mā’a tukaddirīna wa-lā al-wārida tunaffirīna*’ (O frog, croak as much as you can croak. Neither do you muddy the water nor do you repel any comer). Some have reported him saying, ‘*A-lam tara ilā rabbika kayfa fa’ala bi al-ḥublā, akhrajā minhā nasamatan tas’ā min bayni sharāsīfa wa-ḥashā*’ (Have you not seen what your Lord did with the pregnant woman? He brought out from her – from between the ribcage and bowels – a person that moves). Another relates from him: ‘*Al-fīlu mā al-fīlu wa-mā adrāka mā al-fīlu, labū mishafṛun ṭawīlun wa-dhanabun athīlun, wa-mā dhāka min khalqī rabbīnā bi-qalīlin*’ (The elephant! What is the elephant? And what will make you realise what the elephant is? It has a long trunk and a unique tail. Because of the creation of our Lord, they are not a few in number).

To answer Musaylimah’s utterance on frogs, it is obvious that this composition is empty of any benefit. Neither is its wording correct nor is its meaning straight. It does not possess any of the three prerequisites that are the cornerstones of rhetorical superiority. The only reason he came up with this scanty composition was because it rhymes. A person who makes rhymes usually subjugates the meanings and makes them follow the rhyming scheme. He does not care about what he is uttering so long as his rhymes are smooth and consistent. Because his words are void of any benefit, Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه – when he first heard them – said, ‘I bear witness that this speech did not emanate from any seriousness.’

Ibn al-Fārisī Muhammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn al-Ḥakam told me: My father told me: Ibrāhīm ibn Hāni’ told me: Yaḥyā ibn Bukayr told me: Layth ibn Sa’d told me: From Khālīd ibn Yazīd: From Sa’īd ibn Abī Hilāl: From Sa’īd ibn Nashīṭ – he said, ‘The Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ to the Bahrain region. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ died while ‘Amr was there. ‘Amr said, “I was coming back and I passed by Musaylimah. He offered me security. He then said, ‘Muhammad was sent for big matters; I have been sent for petit issues.’ I said, ‘Present to me what you say.’ He said, ‘*Yā dīfda’u niqqī fa-innaki ni’ma mā taniqqīna, lā wāridan tunaffirīna wa-lā mā’an tukaddirīna, yā wabru yā wabru, yadāni wa-ṣadrun, wa-sā’iruka ḥaqrūn naqrūn*’ (O frog, croak for you croak very well indeed. Neither do you repel any comer nor do you muddy any water. O hyrax, O hyrax, two hands and a chest. The entirety

of you is downtrodden). Then some people came arguing over a date palm tree, with one alleging that another cut it down. Musaylimah concealed himself in a cloth; then he exposed his head and uttered, ‘*Wa al-layli al-adhāmi wa al-dhi’bi al-aṣḥami, mā jā’a banū abī muslimin min maḥramin*’ (By the dark night and the black wolf, the children of Abū Muslim did not emerge from a forbidden act). Then he concealed himself again, and afterwards he said, ‘*Wa al-layli al-dāmisi wa al-dhi’bi al-hāmisi, mā ḥurmatubū raṭban illā ka-ḥurmatihī yābis*<sup>81</sup>, *qūmū fa-lā arā ‘alaykum fī-mā ṣana’tum shay’an*’ (By the pitch-black night and the barely audible wolf, its sanctity when moist as the same as its sanctity when dry. Leave, for I do not see anything wrong in what you did).” ‘Amr pronounced, “I said, ‘Well, by Allah, you know as well as we do that you are a liar.’ So he threatened me.”

‘Amr was absolutely right. Can anybody have any doubt about how deviated this person was, and how unacceptable his evidence is? What sort of rhetorical eloquence was this anyway? What meanings lie beneath its words? What wisdom does it impart anyway, so that one can even dare to think this is a challenge to the Qur’an – or that it is competitive in even some aspects? That wretched person was perhaps more acutely familiar with himself than anybody else – he said, ‘...and I have been sent for petit matters.’ There is nothing lowlier or ignoble than what he produced.

Perhaps some of the nonsense produced by Abū al-Yanbu’ī, Abū al-‘Abr, Ṭarmī, and their ilk is slightly more transpicuous and lighter on the ears. It is just like what has been reported to us about Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’. Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Āṣim related to me: Muhammad ibn al-Ṣabāḥ al-Māzinī related to me: ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Haytham related to me: Aṣma’ī related to us: ‘A man said some bad poetry to Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’. Abu ‘Amr retorted, “This is just like another man’s poetry:

‘*Ḥadārijā ḥadārijā | Sabīna farkhan dārijā*’ (Get me the ropes, get me the ropes. I see seventy hatchlings on the move<sup>82</sup>).”

Another man delivered some bad and underwhelming poetry – he retorted, ‘This is like the poetry of Bashshār:

‘*Ḥubābatu rabbatu al-bayti | Taṣubbu al-khalla fī al-zayti*

<sup>81</sup> Translator’s note: This is a type of grammatical error by Musaylimah just to make it rhyme. It should be *yābisan*.

<sup>82</sup> Translator’s note: This was a famous song that was sung by children in ancient Arabia. The next couplet reads: ‘*Dakhalna baytan muḥlimā | Sharibna mā’an bāridā*’ (They entered a dark house | They drank cold water).

*Labā sab‘u dajājātin | Wa-dikun ḥasanu al-ṣawti.”*

(Ḥubābah is the housewife. She adds vinegar to oil.

She has seven chickens; she has another with a beautiful voice).’

As for the statements, ‘*Al-fīlu mā al-fīlu wa-mā adrāka mā al-fīlu...*’ (The elephant! What is the elephant? And what will make you realise what the elephant is?) and ‘*A-lam tara ilā rabbika kayfa fa‘ala bi al-ḥublā*’ (Have you not seen what your Lord did with the pregnant woman?), then both of these – notwithstanding their short wording and limited meanings – are void of any of the attributes or the prerequisites that would make them a direct challenge to the Qur’an. These are just instances of wanton plagiarism by using snippets from the Qur’an and adopting some examples of its rhythmic sentences. Neither can reach the level of the Qur’an or match up to it in any of those elements.

The proper method to compete (*mu‘āradah*) with another’s speech or poetry would be by conjuring up a fresh composition of original substance, through which one can challenge his interlocutor in literary composition and substance. The two sets of compositions can then be compared and the one who overcomes the other can be declared the victor. It is surely not by taking bits and pieces from a competitor’s words, mincing them together, changing a word here and there, and then patching the words up to pretend it has stood up as a successful challenge to the competitor.

A successful challenge can be achieved through one of the following modes. One is that the two poets compete in poetry, speech, or discussion. Each produces something original to describe what they are debating. One should outperform the other, or at the very least produce something equal. Only then would a verdict be issued on whether the two sets of compositions are equal to one another, or whether one is superior.

An example of this is the competition of Imru’ al-Qays and ‘Alqamah ibn ‘Abadah on the description of horses, in their respective famous elegies on the topic. Imru’ al-Qays starts off his elegy by saying:

*‘My dearest friends, take me to Umm Jundab...’*

When he got round to mentioning horses and how they gallop, he said:

*‘Scolding causes it to run faster; the shin has a whip in it; the whip causes it to run even faster as it moves its head to pick up speed.’*

‘Alqamah initiated his elegy by saying:

*‘Severing relations, you went in some other direction...’*

When he got round to mentioning horses and how they gallop, he said:

*‘Their tracks were removed thanks to the scorching dust-blowing wind and the lack of rainfall,*

*So it reached them a second time round by assuming control of its reins – it moved serenely like oozing fragrance.’*

The pair had appointed the wife of Imru’ al-Qays as the arbiter. She said to her husband, ‘Alqamah is better at poetry than you are.’ He asked, ‘How so?’ She said, ‘Because he described the horse as having caught up to the game without making it exert too much effort or fatiguing it. You, on the other hand, depicted your horse as having moved with a beating and through force.’ Imru’ al-Qays became angry and divorced her.<sup>83</sup>

Another example of this is the improvised couplet completion challenge (*ijāzah al-abyāt*) between Ḥārith ibn al-Taw’am al-Yashkurī and Imru’ al-Qays. Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Āṣim told me: Muhammad al-Ṣabāḥ al-Māzinī told me: ‘Ubaydullāh ibn Muhammad al-Ḥanafī told me: Muhammad ibn Sallām told me: From Abū ‘Ubaydah: From Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ – he said, ‘Imru’ al-Qays used to compete with anyone who was said to speak poetry. He competed with Ḥārith ibn al-Taw’am:

Imru’ al-Qays: *“O Ḥārith, did you see a brief lightning strike?”*

Ḥārith: *“Like the Magian fire, which burns fiercely.”*

Imru’ al-Qays: *“I stayed up for it but Abū Shurayḥ went to sleep.”*

Ḥārith: *“When I say, ‘It has calmed down’, it will flare up again.”*

Imru’ al-Qays: *“It passed by the voluptuous ladies there,”*

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<sup>83</sup> Translator’s note: The story goes on to say that she married ‘Alqamah. Thenceforth, ‘Alqamah was called ‘Alqamah al-Fahl, i.e., ‘Alqamah the Sire.

Ḥārith: “*And the hills started digging into the ground for safety.*”

Imru’ al-Qays: “*It did not leave a single gazelle in the Valley of Siyy (Baṭn al-Siyy)<sup>84</sup>,*”

Ḥārith: “*And it did not leave a single donkey on its plains.*”

Imru’ al-Qays: “*It is as if its rumbling emerges from the unseen,*”

Ḥārith: “*Like infatuated full-term she-camels meeting their like.*”

Imru’ al-Qays: “*But when it came to Uḍākh<sup>85</sup>,*”

Ḥārith: “*The tail end of his vibrancy came to an end and it became weak.*”

Imru’ al-Qays: “*You have not seen a brave king like us,*”

Ḥārith: “*Nor have you seen a neighbour like this one.*”

‘Upon this, Imru’ al-Qays swore that he would never compete with another poet again.’

In another narration, Muhammad ibn Sallām said, ‘No other poet had ever stood toe to toe with Imru’ al-Qays prior to this. But when he saw that Ḥārith did exactly that, he swore he would never compete over poetry with anybody after him again.’

That was a real competition. It was the perfect and most complete challenge – topic by topic, and line by line. Ḥārith was victorious because the couplet initialiser – Imru’ al-Qays – had full choice over which direction he wanted the poetry to go in, whereas the couplet finisher – Ḥārith – had his hands tied and could only go in the direction dictated to him. This is why Ḥārith was victorious over him, as he was able to produce the type of similes that the words of Imru’ al-Qays were devoid of. As a result, Imru’ al-Qays swore never to challenge another poet again.

It has been narrated to us that Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and his brother Maslamah competed over describing the night and its length. Walīd preferred the couplets of Nābighah; Maslamah preferred the couplets of Imru’ al-Qays. Sha‘bī arbitrated between the pair – he said, ‘Relate the couplets to me and I will listen.’ The lines of Nābighah were read:

<sup>84</sup> Translator’s note: Name of a place – the corresponding modern-day location is unknown.

<sup>85</sup> Translator’s note: Name of a place – the corresponding modern-day location is unknown.



*‘Umaymah, let me be with a draining sorrow and with a night I endure as slowly as the stars move,*

*A night so long that I will say that it will never cease, and that the one who looks after the stars is not coming back,*

*And with a heart whose remote sorrows were returned by the night, in which grief enveloped me from every side.’*

Then the lines of Imru’ al-Qays were read:

*‘By the God of a night like a swarming sea that draped its curtains over me, laden with sorrows, to test me,*

*So I said to the night, when it stretched out its loins, followed by its buttocks and heaved off its heavy breast,*

*Well now, tedious night, will you not clear yourself off and give way to morning? Yet even morning is no better than you.*

*Oh, what a night you indeed are, as if the stars were tied to Mount Yadhbul with tightly twisted ropes.’*

Upon reaching this point, Walīd stomped on the floor. Sha‘bi said, ‘I think the matter is clear.’

The opening of Nābighah’s ode: *‘Umaymah, let me be with a draining sorrow...’*, is extremely beautiful and skilfully conveys the description of his complaint of his sorrow and long nights. It is said that no poet has an opening more beautiful than this. His statement, *‘And with a heart whose remote sorrows were returned by the night...’* is taken from a herder putting camels down for a night’s rest. It is a natural and accessible composition that combines both rhetorical proficiency and sweetness. However, the couplets of Imru’ al-Qays possess the craftsmanship, beautiful analogous comparisons, and innovative usage of meanings that are not found in the lines of Nābighah. Imru’ al-Qays ascribes the metaphors of loins, buttocks, and breast to the night. He compares the accumulation of the night’s darkness to the constant overlapping of sea waves. He describes the stars as if they are tied by strong ropes, and thus seem to be static and immovable. He did not stop at this, but rather he adds that this is an affliction and points to the meaning of this. He begins to yearn for the end of the night and the return of the morning for the lively spirit it brings. He then

retracts what he said and amends what he previously stated – he asserts that the affliction is far greater than being expellable by the light of any time of day, and that the tribulation is so severe that its sickness has no medicament or cure for it. Such a package of meanings can only come together in the speech of individuals like Imru’ al-Qays, who were the outstanding leading poets. This is why Walīd stomped and could not help but acknowledge the superiority of Imru’ al-Qays.

So this is the type of elegy by which a literary challenge can be considered as such. Only then would a decision be made on which of the two sets of compositions is to be considered the superior and which is to be relegated to second place, or if indeed the two are equal.

Occasionally, two poets may contest a single meaning. One may rise to the pinnacle of expression and suppress the other’s ability to match it. An example of this is when A’shā and Akhṭal contested the description of wine, such that one gained victory over the other.

Abū Rajā’ al-Ghanawī told me: My father told me: ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Sa’d told me: Abū Ghassān Mālik ibn Ghassān al-Misma’ī related to me: Hishām ibn Adham al-Māzinī – who was extremely knowledgeable – related to me: ‘Sha’bī came to Akhṭal. He found him in a state of drunkenness, with perfumes and jasmine around him. He said, “O Sha’bī, Akhṭal has done over...” – and he listed the top poets. Sha’bī said, “With what, Abū Mālik?” He replied, “With:

*‘The townswoman served us therein – her chalice infused with its patchwork.*

*When the hands pass around the glass vessel, it spreads its fragrance – the catarrhal gains its whiffs.’”*

‘Sha’bī replied, “A poet greater than you says:

*‘I drank an honourable drink by morning from an old and dark wine vessel*

*From those carried on water-carrying camels, like the fragrance of musk getting rid of catarrh.’”*

‘Akhṭal said to him, “Sha’bī, who said this?” He replied, “A’shā.” He said, “Pristine it is indeed, pristine. A’shā has done over...” And he then listed the top poets.’

Look at their status in relation to one another. When he got his wits about him and boasted about how great a poet he was, Akhṭal did not say anything beyond

mentioning that the wine's odour assists in one's sense of self-clarity – it seeps into one's head, so even one who has a cold can sense it. On the other hand, A'shā treated wine as something that actually expels and repels the cold, due to its sharpness and its rapid assistance in helping one gain self-clarity. It is as if it is a medicament for one's ailment, and it stays with a person until he is cured.

An even more wondrous format of literary challenge that pushes the boundaries of poetry competition is to build something up and shore it up, only to dismantle, debase, and break it. An example of this is the statement of Ḥassān ibn Thābit.

Abū Rajā' told me: My father related to me: 'Umar ibn Shabbah related to me: Hārūn ibn 'Abdullāh al-Zubayrī related to me: Yūsuf ibn 'Abdullāh al-Mājashūn related to me: From his father: Ḥassān said, 'I came to Jabalah ibn al-Ayham al-Ghassānī. I had praised him previously. He said to me, "Abū al-Walīd, I am obsessed with wine. So go ahead and disparage it – perhaps I can stop drinking it." I said:

*"Were it not for three things in the chalice, it would not have commanded any price over any drinker when he drinks from it.*

*It triggers a recklessness like madness; it causes a minor death, such that the senses leave and disappear.*

He said, 'So you have poured scorn on it – now beautify it.' So I said:

*Were it not for three things in the chalice, it would be like the most precious form of wealth that can be gained and sought.*

*It offers hope; the soul's cheerfulness comes to the fore even if it is drowning in sorrow; and that grief is comforted and goes away."*

'He retorted, "Well, by Allah, I will never abandon it."

There is also another angle of discussion in this topic, which is not just about direct poetry competition. Rather, it is a type of comparative analysis.<sup>86</sup> Out of two poets, one would have his own style of poetry and would typically focus on a particular theme. He would be more proficient in describing his innermost thoughts on that theme than the other, who would be describing something else. Such a comparative analysis would be done by looking at Abū Du'ād al-Iyādī and Nābighah al-Ja'dī's poetry on horses, A'shā and Akhṭal's poetry on wine, Shammākh's poetry on

<sup>86</sup> Translator's note: This is analogous to boxers across different weight classes, and from different eras.

donkeys, and Dhū al-Rummah’s poetry on ruins and the desert. Each one of them proficiently describes what is commonly attributed to him as being his area of expertise. It is said, ‘Poet X is greater in his subject area and poetry method than poet Y in the method he had adopted for his poetry.’ You can observe the style any poet has in his area of expertise. You can note the descriptions and adjectives he employs therein. What the comparative method entails is that you believe one of the two poets under analysis covers his subject area better, and that he is more of an expert in extracting its subtle meanings and more accurate in describing his topic of choice. In this situation, you would rule that his poetry is the better of the two – no consideration is given to the dissimilarity in their chosen subject areas and how different their poetry methods are.

When you understand the conditions and the customs of poetry showdowns and ascertain their methods and the tactics employed therein, you will for sure know that those people were neither able to do anything to rival the Qur’an nor did they produce anything that resembles a challenge to the Qur’an. This point is absolutely clear to anyone who has a shred of intellect. And all praise is for Allah.

Now we come back to the one who concocted a chapter about elephants. We say to him, ‘You espouse a view that has gone horribly wrong. In the utterances you came forth with, where are the conditions we laid out for the parameters of rhetorical eloquence? In the blather you have produced out of your sheer ignorance and deviance, where have you upheld the customs of literary challenge? You initiate your utterance with: *‘Al-fīlu mā al-fīlu wa-mā adrāka mā al-fīlu’* (The elephant! What is the elephant? And what will make you realise what the elephant is?). You pretend to bring forth a grandiose statement. You attempt to surmount this challenge and portray yourself to be correct. But you do not live up to your promise. When you stopped, you had fallen terribly short in what you concocted. You ended it with the mention of ‘tail’ and ‘trunk’. If you knew anything about the regulations and customs of speech and where words are to be situated, you would neither let your utterance to be at such a loss nor would you have placed these words in the improper place. You are such an incompetent fool. Do you not know that such an opening statement format is used only for a significant matter that is beyond description, and whose meaning is of immense consequence? For example, Allah says, “The Inevitable Hour! What is the Inevitable Hour? And what will make you realise what the Inevitable

Hour is?”<sup>87</sup> and “The Striking Disaster! What is the Striking Disaster? And what will make you realise what the Striking Disaster is?”<sup>88</sup> Allah mentions the Day of Judgement and follows it up by mentioning its descriptive adjectives and its horrors that are appropriate follow-ons to the aforementioned introductions of those *sūrah*s. He starts off by mentioning its description with the statement, “It is the Day people will be like scattered moths, and the mountains will be like carded wool...”<sup>89</sup> and it goes on as thus until the end of the *sūrah*. You, on the other hand, have applied this literary format to an animal that any person can recognise instantaneously and can understand the elements and meanings associated with it simply through a moment’s thought. Even then, you sufficed in your description of what is indeed a grand animal with just its trunk and tail. The only thing that comes to mind when looking at your utterance is what one of our teachers tartly quipped to someone just like you:

*“Wa-innī wa-innī thumma innī wa-innanī | Idhā inqāṭa‘at na‘lī ja‘altu lahā shis‘ā.”* (lit. Verily I and verily I, then verily I and verily I, when my shoe tears, I walk in it with my toes clinging onto it)

‘What you offer in the second half of your concoction is petit compared to the grandiose introduction you offered it. The flimsy wording you offer at the tail end of your utterance does not match up to the great burden of expectation you invested at its beginning. Your failed approach and terrible choice led you to challenge the Qur’an – by mentioning the elephant and its description. But even then, why could you not offer anything satisfactory, meaningful, and something that would have better put together its specific characteristics in a more wholesome manner? You could have mentioned this beast’s cleverness, such that it understands what its rearer wants to do with it. Why could you not express any amazement at its wonderful conformity and obedience to its rearer when he spurs it on, or how quickly it desists when he rebukes and chides it? Why – in addition to mentioning its trunk – did you not also speak about the tusks it uses when it mounts a charge, the sharp ends of which are used to impale and injure? How could you have forgotten about its wide ears that cover its entire face, whose flapping repels bugs and flies, and which are used to fan and cool its head? Why did you not pick up on how its neck and nape have been strategically designed to be short and compact? Had this been any longer, it could not have been

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<sup>87</sup> *Al-Hāqqah*, 1-3.

<sup>88</sup> *Al-Qāri‘ah*, 1-3.

<sup>89</sup> *Al-Qāri‘ah*, 4-5.

able to carry its head, and its weight would have severely weakened it. Given that it was prevented from having a long neck, it was compensated with a drooping trunk so that it could pick up the food, grass, and water it needs from the Earth below. It can also fill it up like a water can, and it can spray water onto its limbs when it wishes to do so. Moreover, it cannot kneel down as it does not have joints that allow it to stand up: It does not have a neck it can extend its body with. This is unlike the case of camels, which can use their neck to reach lower, pick up speech, and launch an attack. These are just some of the things that describe the elephant and are part of its wondrous build.'

It can also be put to him: 'How would you feel if some imbecile like you challenged your elephant with the mosquito, which is completely the opposite? Having seen your words on the elephant's appearance in terms of its high temple, compact cheekbones, and hanging trunk that can be used during an attack, he concocts the following: "*Al-ba'ūdu mā al-ba'ūdu wa-mā adrāka mā al-ba'ūdu, lahū mishfarun 'aḍūḍun, fī al-dimā'i yakhūḍū, fa-huwa li al-fīli 'arūḍun*" (The mosquito! What is the mosquito? And what will make you realise what the mosquito is? It has a biting lip. It plunges itself in blood, and is thus a rival to the elephant). Is his stupidity not the same as your ignorance? If one claims that the mosquito is not a rival to the elephant because there is a huge size and strength difference between the two, there is a reply to that as well. That reply is this: Concepts are the pivot around which assimilative analogies are made, not tangibles or physical bodies. The mosquito has many great similarities with the elephant. It collects its own diet. It protects itself from death, which is why it stays hidden by day and comes out at night. Its creation resembles that of the elephant with its head, trunk, and the other things we have said about the elephant. On top of this, it has two wings, which compensate for its small body size. As thus, both creatures are the same in the concepts that are common to both.'

As for his other statement and the description he brought for the *ḥublā* (pregnant woman), the first error of this unenlightened individual is that he placed a word denoting vengeance in the place where a word denoting bounty should have been used. He said, '*A-lam tara ilā rabbika kayfa fa'ala bi al-ḥublā*' (Have you not seen what your Lord did with the pregnant woman?). Such an expression is used only in places of punishment, like: 'Have you not seen, O Prophet, how your Lord dealt with

the Army of the Elephant?’<sup>90</sup>, ‘What shall Allah do by punishing you...’<sup>91</sup>, ‘It was made clear to you how We dealt with them, and We gave you many examples.’<sup>92</sup> A person says ‘*Fa‘ala Allāhu bi-fulānin wa-fa‘ala*’ (May Allah do this and that to so-and-so person) when one supplicates against him. What he should have said, if he wanted the desired meaning, was: ‘*A-lam tara ilā rabbika kayfa laṭafa bi al-ḥublā*’ (Have you not seen how your Lord was kind to the pregnant woman?), or ‘...*kayfa an‘ama ‘alayhā*’ (...how He bestowed His favour on her?).

As for his statement, ‘*Akbraja minhā nasamatan tas‘ā min bayni sharāsīfa wa-ḥashā*’ (He brought out from her – from between the ribcage and bowels – a person that moves), then this is blatantly plagiarised from the statement of Allah, Most High, ‘They were created from a spurting fluid, stemming from between the backbone and the ribcage.’<sup>93</sup> In this verse, Allah ﷻ speaks about the first stage of foetal development. In another verse, He mentioned the stages of its evolution in the womb – from sperm, to a clinging clot, to a lump of flesh, to a fully formed being, after which it is fashioned into a whole new being that brings together its shape and its soul, which is breathed into it. This all denotes His great power, His subtle wisdom, and His encompassing mercy. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators.<sup>94</sup>

After it is desposited in the womb, these stages come one after another. There is a distance and a barrier between the womb and the ribcage. Anatomists say that the womb is between the bladder and the rectum. This sorry excuse of a person did not know what he was saying when he situated the foetus as coming out from between the ribcage and the bowels, in an attempt to copy the statement of Allah ﷻ, ‘...stemming from between the backbone and the ribcage.’<sup>95</sup> He got the description completely wrong, erred in the meaning, and lodged a demonstrably false claim.

These types of assertions are made by those who are affectatious. It is the final act of the claims made by wrongdoers.

Other than the Qur’an, one does not hear any composition – whether poetry or prose – that brings such sweetness to the heart and strikes such awe. Souls are ever-willing to embrace it and hearts gain contentment through it.

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<sup>90</sup> *Al-Fīl*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Al-Nisā*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibrāhīm*, 45.

<sup>93</sup> *Al-Tāriq*, 6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Translator’s note: This paragraph is an allusion to *al-Mu‘minūn*, 14.

<sup>95</sup> *Al-Tāriq*, 7.

There is also another angle to the inimitability of the Qur'an which escapes many people and is only recognised by a few: its impact on hearts and souls. As a person takes from the Qur'an, he finds that his soul is consumed by awe. It causes the skin to tremble and agitates the heart. It comes between man and his firmly held preconceived notions. Indeed, how many vicious enemies of the Messenger ﷺ went out to assassinate him, but when they heard the verses of the Qur'an, they could not but help change their view, incline to making peace with him, and enter into his faith. They substituted their enmity with affinity, and their disbelief with faith.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb □ went out looking for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with the intention of assassinating him. He went to his sister's house – she was reciting Sūrah Ṭā-Hā. As soon as he heard it he became a believer.

The Quraysh sent ‘Utbaḥ ibn Rabī'ah to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so that they could come to an arrangement over some of the issues that they had passed on to him through ‘Utbaḥ. In response, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited verses of Sūrah Ḥā-Mīm al-Sajdah to him. When ‘Utbaḥ returned and the Quraysh saw him, they said, ‘He has come back with a face that is different from the one he left with.’

During the Hajj season in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited the Qur'an to a group of the Anṣār who had visited him, they became believers. They returned to Madinah and showcased the religion there. Soon after, there was not a single house of the Anṣār without the Qur'an. One scholar is reported to have said, ‘Other cities were conquered through the sword; Madinah was conquered through the Qur'an.’

When the demons heard it, they could not help themselves but say, ‘Indeed, we have heard a wondrous recitation. It leads to Right Guidance so we believed in it...’<sup>96</sup>

Corroboration of the description we have set out in relation to the Qur'an can be found in the following statements of Allah, Most High, ‘Had We sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have certainly seen it humbled and torn apart in awe of Allah’<sup>97</sup>; ‘It is Allah Who has sent down the best message – a Book of perfect consistency and repeated lessons – which causes the skin and hearts of those who fear their Lord to tremble, then their skin and hearts soften at the mention of the mercy of Allah’<sup>98</sup>; ‘Is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book, which is

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<sup>96</sup> *Al-Jinn*, 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> *Al-Hashr*, 21.

<sup>98</sup> *Al-Zumar*, 23.



recited to them?’<sup>99</sup>; ‘...whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them...’<sup>100</sup>; ‘When they listen to what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears for recognising the truth’<sup>101</sup>; *et alia*.

The Qur’an is for the one who has a mindful heart and lends an attentive ear.<sup>102</sup> It is from the Prophet’s great signs and his demonstrative miracles.

All praise is for Allah Who has revealed the Book to His servant, allowing no crookedness in it, making it perfectly upright. Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it many inconsistencies. May Allah send blessings on Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, the source of anger of the disbelievers and the death knell of deviants, the one sent with the religion of truth, making it prevail over all others, even to the dismay of the polytheists. Allah alone is sufficient as an aid for us and He is the best Protector.

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<sup>99</sup> *Al-Ankabūt*, 51.

<sup>100</sup> *Al-Anfāl*, 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Al-Mā'idah*, 83.

<sup>102</sup> Translator’s note: This paragraph is an allusion to *Qāf*, 37.