



An
Introduction
to the
Principles of Tafsir



Shaikh-ul Islam
Ibn Taimiyyah

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مقدمة في أصول التفسير

**An Introduction to
the Principles of *Tafsir***

**Shaikh-ul-Islam
Ibn Taimiyyah**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

***In the Name of Allah
The Most Beneficent The Most Merciful***

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Preface

All praise is due to Allah, and peace and blessings upon His beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ¹.

“And We have not sent down the Book to you, except that you explain unto them those things in which they differ, and (as) a guidance and mercy for people who believe.”

“And no example or similitude do they bring, but We reveal to you the truth, and the better explanation thereof”.

What is “*Tafsir*”? It is an explanation; an elucidation of both what is clear and what is not clear in Al-Qur’an. “**An Introduction to the Principles of *Tafsir***” Highlights, in an easy yet concise style, the basic principles and procedures which must be carefully and diligently adhered to on the basis of true knowledge, in order to render oneself compliant and correct in the method and application of Al-Qur’an.

Furthermore, the work brings to the readers’ attention, examples of deviated thought, whether through misguidance or outright denial of the truth.

In our times, there exists the ever increasing disease of innovation – especially in Western-based “Democratic” societies, where innovation is upheld as one of the statutes of such systems.

¹ May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him.

Innovation in matters of Islamic thought, specifically in terms of *'ibaadah*, is not an option. This work helps the reader to understand the dangers of straying from the Straight Path.

May Allah reward Shaikh Salim Abdallah Ibn Morgan for his efforts in the translation of this scholarly work.

Author's Biography

- One of the foremost and most influential Muslim scholars of the 7th century AH (12th Century CE)
- He had a unique grasp of various disciplines, including *tafseer* (Qur'anic Exegesis), *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet), *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), theology, Arabic grammar
- He called for the people to abandon innovations and heretical beliefs, and to embrace Islam as practiced by the Prophet ﷺ² and the righteous predecessors
- He was the leading figure to call for, propagate and personally participate in *jihad* against the Tartars who invaded the Muslim land and ruled with their un-Islamic laws
- Ibn Taimiyyah's works numbered three hundred and fifty, the most important of which being his 37 Volume work: *majmoo' al-fataawa*
- His students included some of the most renowned scholars of Islam, such as Ibn Kathir and Ibn Al-Qayyim
- He replied to those who had deviated from the correct application of Islam, including the Sufis, Murji'ah, Khawaarij, Jahmiyyah and Ahl-ul Kalam

² May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him.

- He was relentless in speaking out the truth. This caused him to be imprisoned a number of times. He even spent his final days in prison
- His popularity was reflected in his funeral, where over 200,000 men and 15,000 women attended.

Introduction

My Lord, make my task easy and aid me by Your Mercy.

All praise is to Allah. We seek His aid and beg His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within us and from the wicked among our deeds. Whoever Allah guides none can send astray, and whosoever Allah sends astray none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah alone with no partner and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger, may the prayers and the peace of Allah be upon him.

After this opening: Some brothers requested me to write for them an introductory work containing general principles of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*). These principles would aid one in understanding the Qur'an, gaining knowledge of the correct exegesis of its meanings and in developing the ability to differentiate, when dealing with both the narrated and the conjectural *tafsir*, between the truth and the various types of falsehood. Furthermore, this work should draw attention to the source of evidence that is used to accomplish this differentiation.

The books that have been written in the area of *tafsir* are full of both the useless and the valuable, blatant falsehood and clear truth. True knowledge consists of either authenticated narration from an infallible source (i.e. Allah or His Messenger ﷺ) or an opinion supported by a known source of evidence. Anything

other than this is either rejected forgery or an unknown; neither known to be false nor worthy of criticism. The Muslim nation has a very pressing need to understand the Qur'an since the Qur'an is the Strong Rope of Allah and it is the Wise Reminder and the Straight Path with which whims and inclinations cannot go astray, and with which tongues cannot become confused. It never becomes tiresome no matter how many times it is read, and its wonders never diminish. The people of knowledge never become satiated with it. Whoever speaks with it speaks the truth, whoever practices what is in it is rewarded, whoever rules by it is just, and whoever calls to it is guided to the Straight Path. Allah breaks whoever turns away from it and Allah sends astray whoever seeks guidance from other than it. Allah said:

فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ
 وَلَا يَشْقَى ﴿١٢٣﴾ وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا
 وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى ﴿١٢٤﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ
 كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا ﴿١٢٥﴾ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَنتَ كَذَلِكَ أَنْتَ أَعْيَنَّا فنَسِينَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ نُنْسِي

And know that whenever guidance comes to you from Me then whoever follows My Guidance will not go astray, nor will he suffer hardship. As for the one who turns away from My Reminder (*dhikri*), for him is an oppressive life, and We will bring him back on the Day of Qiyaamah blind. He says, "My Lord, why have you brought me back blind, though I used to see?" He (Allah) says, "Likewise, My Verses came to you and you forgot them, and in the same way today, you are forgotten."³

³ Taha, 20: 123-126.

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾
يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم
مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

A Light and a clear Book have come to you from Allah with which He guides those who seek His pleasure on the roads to safety. He takes them out of the darkness into the light with His permission, and guides them to a Straight Path.⁴

الرَّ كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ
مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ
الْحَمِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

Alif Laam Raa. A book which we have sent down to you that you may take the people out of the darkneses into the light with the Permission of their Lord to the Path of the Mighty, the Praised. Allah is the One Who owns all that is in the heavens and that in the earth.⁵

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنتَ
تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِن جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي بِهِ
مَنْ نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ صِرَاطٍ
اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ

And thus, We communicated to you a spirit from Us. You had no idea what the Book was nor faith, but We made it a light with which We guide those whom we wish among our slaves. You surely guide to a straight path, the Path of Allah

⁴ Al-Ma'ida, 5: 15-16.

⁵ Ibrahim, 14: 1-2.

the One who owns all that is in the heavens and that in the earth. Verily, unto Allah is the conclusion of all affairs.⁶

I have written this introduction in condensed form as much as Allah made that easy for me and expanded my heart to the task. Allah alone is the One who can guide to the path of right.

⁶ *Ash-Shooraa*, 42: 52-53.

Regarding the Fact that the Prophet ﷺ Made the Meanings of the Qur'an Clear to his Companions (*raa*)⁷

It must be known that the Prophet ﷺ made the meanings of the Qur'an clear to his companions just as he made its recitation clear. The meaning of Allah's statement "...that you should make clear to the people that which has been sent down to them".⁸ includes both the latter and the former.

'Abdur-Rahmaan As-Sullamiy said, "It has been narrated to me by those who used to read the Qur'an, such as 'Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ood and others, that whenever they had learned ten verses from the Prophet ﷺ, they would not go beyond them to anything else until they had learned all that was in them both in terms of knowledge and practical application. They said: 'We used to learn the knowledge and the application together.' This is why they used to take a long time to learn a single *surah*."

Anas said: "A man who read Al-Baqarah and Aal 'Imraan was very great in our eyes." Ibn 'Umar spent a number of years, it is

⁷ *Radiya Allahu 'anhu / 'anha / 'anhum*: may Allah be pleased with him / her / them.

⁸ An-Nahl, 16:64

said to be eight years (Imaam Malik mentioned this figure), memorizing Al-Baqarah. This is because Allah said:

كُتِبَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

A Book which We have sent down to you blessed that they may ponder its verses and that people of sound intelligence may take heed.⁹

أَفَلَمْ يَدَّبَّرُوا الْقَوْلَ

Have they not pondered what is said...?¹⁰

To ponder statements or writings is not possible without understanding its meanings. Likewise, Allah said:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Verily We have sent it down an Arabic Qur'an (lit. "recitation") in order that you may comprehend.¹¹

Comprehension of statements also necessitates the understanding of their meanings. Moreover there is no doubt that the intention behind all statements and writings is that their meanings be understood, not merely the pronunciation of its sounds. This principle is even more clear in the case of the Qur'an.

Common sense rejects the idea of a group of people reading a book in any field of knowledge such as medicine or mathematics without seeking to understand its meanings. So how then, in the case of the Words of Allah which are our protection and the only

⁹ Saad, 38: 29.

¹⁰ Al-Mu'minoon, 23: 68

¹¹ Yusuf, 12: 2.

means to our success and felicity in the affairs of this life and in the Hereafter?

Thus, there was very little disagreement among the Companions about the exegesis of the Qur'an. Although there was somewhat more disagreement among the generation which followed the Companions (*At-Tabi'een*), it was still very little compared to those who came later. The more noble the generation, the greater the degree of agreement, harmony and knowledge. Among the *tabi'een* are those who received the *tafsir* of the whole Qur'an from the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Mujahid said: "I read the Qur'an to Ibn 'Abbas, (another version mentions three times) stopping him at every verse and asking him about it." This is why Ath-Thawri said: "If *tafsir* of the Qur'an comes to you from Mujahid, it is enough for you." Similarly Ash-Shafi'iy, Al-Bukhaari and other great scholars depended on the statements of Mujahid on the subject of the meanings of the Qur'an. Likewise, Imaam Ahmad and others who wrote books of *tafsir*, narrated its interpretation from Mujahid more than anyone else.

What should be understood here is that the *tabi'een* received the *tafsir* of the Qur'an from the Companions just as they received knowledge of the Sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet ﷺ. Nonetheless, they did speak about the meanings of the Qur'an with a certain amount of their own deduction and interpretation just as they spoke about what they learned of the Sunnah with some of their own deductions and interpretations.

The Differences of the Early Generations about *Tafsir* were Differences of Variety not of Contradiction

There was little difference of opinion over *tafsir* among the first generations of Muslims (*as-salaf*). They differed more extensively about rulings of the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) than they did over the interpretation of the Qur'an. Most of the differences between them which can be authenticated were differences of variety and not of contradiction. These differences of variety can be divided into two types:

The First Type

Sometimes, each of them used a different expression intending to talk about the same thing, each of the expressions indicating a particular meaning or quality different from the meaning or quality focused on by the other, even though they were all talking about the same general meaning. This is like the question of corresponding nouns that are both synonymous and contrastive. Thus a sword has been called both *as-saarim* (sharp, or that which cuts) and *al-muhannad* (derived from the word for India, indicating a sword made of Indian steel).

This issue (of nouns which are both synonymous and contrastive) is also like the question of Allah's glorious names, the names of

His Prophet ﷺ, and the names of the Qur'an. All of the names of Allah refer to the same reality, which is Allah, Most High. Praying to Him using any of His glorious Names is not in any way contradictory to praying to Him with any of the others. Rather, this issue is as Allah Himself said:

قُلْ أَدْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ

Say: Call "Allah" or call "Ar-Rahmaan". Whichever you call, His are the most sublime of names...¹²

Every single one of Allah's Names indicates one reality that is Allah Himself. It also indicates that attribute or characteristic which is entailed in the meaning of the Name itself. So Allah's Name *Al-'Aleem* (Knower) indicates Allah Himself and it also indicates the attribute of knowledge. His Name *Al-Qadeer* (Capable) indicates Allah Himself and it also indicates the attribute of power and capability. His Name *Ar-Raheem* (Merciful) indicates Allah Himself and it also indicates His attribute of mercy.

Those who reject that Allah's Names indicate His Attributes, even though they claim to be of those who accept the apparent meanings of the Texts (*Adh-Dhaahir*), have in reality said something akin to the heresies of the extremists of *al-Baatiniyah*¹³ and *al-Qaraamitah*.¹⁴ Those who say: "It must not be said about

¹² *Al-Israa'*, 17: 110.

¹³ *Al-Baatiniyah*: a term referring to those who arrive at rejection of clear meanings of Texts by claiming inner, hidden and esoteric meanings which are known only to themselves.

¹⁴ An extreme Shi'ah sect.

Allah that He is alive, nor should it be said that He is not alive.” They negate from Allah both of the opposites.¹⁵

Neither *al-Qaraamitah* nor *al-Baatiniyah* reject the Names of Allah as such, as mere proper nouns which denote Allah Most High. Rather, they reject the affirmative attributes found in His Glorious Names. Whoever does likewise, whatever they claim about themselves with regard to following the apparent meanings of the Texts, is in accordance with the heresy of the extremists among *al-Baatiniyah* in that regard. But this is not the place for going into these matters in detail.

The critical concept is that every Name of Allah indicates Allah Himself and it also indicates the Attribute contained in the Name’s meaning. Furthermore, it also indicates the Attributes contained in all of His other Names inherently because of their inseparability.

The same principle applies to the names of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ such as Muhammad, Ahmad, Al-Maahi, Al-Haashir, Al-’Aaqib, etc. Likewise the names of the Qur’an such as Al-Qur’an (The Reading), Al-Furqaan (The Criterion), Al-Hudaa (The Guidance), Ash-Shifaa’ (The Cure), Al-Bayaan (That Which Makes Clear), Al-Kitaab (The Book), etc.

If the intention of the questioner is merely to specify what or who is intended, we can express that with any one of the possible names as long as the person knows to what or to whom that name refers. The name used may be a simple proper noun, or it

¹⁵ Whereas one of Allah’s Names is *Al-Hayy*, the Living!

may be an adjective describing a particular feature or attribute of who or what is being referred to.

An example of this is one asking about Allah's statement in the Qur'an:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي

And as for the one who turns away from My Reminder (*dhikriy*)...¹⁶

What is "His Reminder"¹⁷? It may be said to this questioner that the meaning here is the Qur'an, or all of the communicated Books. The word *dhikr* is a verbal noun, and verbal nouns are sometimes tied by possessive pronouns to the doer (subject) of the corresponding verb and other times to the receiver (object) of the verb.

If the *dhikr* of Allah¹⁸ is taken in the second way above¹⁹ it would refer to the ways in which the worshippers mention Allah. These include saying *subhaana Allah* (Exalted is Allah), *al-hamdu lillah* (All praise is due to Allah's), *laa ilaha illa Allah* (There is no deity but Allah), and *Allahu akbar* (Allah is Greatest).

If, on the other hand, the *dhikr* of Allah is understood in the first way²⁰ then it refers to that with which He reminds or that which He mentions. In this case, then, the meaning is His Words. This

¹⁶ Taha: 124.

¹⁷ The word *dhikr* in Arabic could also translate as "remembrance", "reminder" or "mentioning".

¹⁸ Since Allah is the speaker who said *dhikri*, i.e. My *dhikr*.

¹⁹ Where the pronoun is the *object* of the corresponding verb.

²⁰ Where the pronoun is the *subject* of the corresponding verb.

is in fact what is intended in the verse mentioned above. We know that this is what was intended in this verse from its context since Allah said just previous to the above cited verse:

فَأَمَّا يَا نِينَكَم مِّنِّي هُدًى فَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَاىَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ

And know that whenever guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance will not go astray, nor will he suffer hardship.²¹

And His guidance is that *dhikr* (Reminder) which He sent down.

This interpretation of the meaning of the word *dhikr* is further proven by what follows its mention wherein Allah says:

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَىٰ وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا ﴿١٢٥﴾
قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَنتَ كَذَلِكِ ؕ آيَاتِنَا فَتْسِينَهَا ۖ وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ نُنَسِي

He says: “My Lord, why have you brought me back blind, though I used to see?” He says: “In this way My Verses came to you and you forgot them, and in the same way today, you are forgotten.”²²

In the above example, the thing that needs to be specified is that what is intended by “My Reminder” is the words which Allah sent down by communication and not the remembrance or mentioning of Allah which is done by His servants. This distinction is carried out in a number of ways. It does not matter whether it is said that My Reminder (*dhikri*) is My Book, or it is My Words or it is My Guidance, etc. All of these things indicate the same meaning, and any one of them accomplishes the

²¹ Taha, 20: 123.

²² Taha: 125-6.

necessary clarification as to which of the two possible meanings of the verbal noun (with possessive pronoun) is intended.

If, on the other hand, the questioner wishes to know about the content of a particular name in terms of particular attributes indicated by its meaning, then he must be supplied with more than just being told who or what is intended by the name in question. An example is one asking about *Al-Quddoos* or *As-Salaam* or *Al-Mu'min* knowing full well that these are all Names for Allah Most High. Such a person is really asking about the meaning of these attributes in relation to Allah and as they apply to Him.

Once this is clear, we find that *As-Salaf*²³ often expressed an intended meaning with expressions that indicated the intended meaning without doubt, but also contained attributes or additional information not found in other names. An example of this is one who says Ahmad is *Al-Haashir* and *Al-Maahi* and *Al-'aaqib* or *Al-Quddoos* is *Al-Ghafoor* and *Al-Rahim*²⁴. Here, the possessor of the names is the same in each case, and this is the sense of the statement, not that the attributes contained in each of the names are the same.

This is clearly not a difference of contradiction as some people think. An example of what I mean is the *tafsir* of the phrase "*As-Siraat Al-Mustaqeem*" (the Straight Path) in the Qur'an. Some said: It is **the Qur'an** i.e. the following of the Qur'an, based on the statement of the Prophet ﷺ found in a *hadith* narrated by

²³ *As-Salaf*: the righteous first few generations of this Muslim nation.

²⁴ The first are all names of the Prophet Muhammad (r), and the second are all Names of Allah Most High.

‘Ali and transmitted by At-Tirmidhi and by Abu Na’eem by various different chains of narration:

“It (i.e. the Qur’an) is the strong rope of Allah and it is the wise reminder, and it is the straight path.”

Others said: The meaning of the straight path is **Islam**, based on the statement of the Prophet ﷺ found in a *hadith* narrated by An-Nawaas ibn Sam’aan and transmitted by At-Tirmidhi and others:

“Allah puts forth an analogy: a straight path with walls along each side. In these walls are doors which open, and on the doors are curtains which are drawn back. There is a caller who calls from the path itself, and a caller who calls from the head of the path.” Then, the Prophet ﷺ said: “The straight path is Islam, the two walls are the boundaries (*hudood*) of Allah (i.e. the obligatory punishments for certain crimes), the opening doors are what Allah has forbidden, the caller at the head of the path is the Book of Allah, and the caller on the path itself is the admonitions of Allah found in the heart of every believer.”

So, you see that these two definitions of “the straight path” are really saying the same thing, since the meaning of Islam is the following of the Qur’an, but each of the opinions emphasised particular attributes not emphasized by the other. Just as the word “path” imparts yet another attribute to the meaning of the phrase. Likewise all of the other interpretations which the early scholars gave to this phrase such as: 1) the Sunnah and the body of the Muslims, 2) the road of worship of Allah, 3) obedience to Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, etc. All of these seemingly different

definitions point to the same ultimate meaning, though they emphasize different attributes of that ultimate meaning.

The Second Type

The second type of non-contradictory difference between statements about Qur'anic interpretation is where each interpreter mentions specific types or examples of something general. This is done by way of illustration and example, and to draw the listener's attention to the particular example, and not with the intention of describing the meaning with what was mentioned only no more no less. This is like a case where someone who didn't know the language asked about the meaning of the word "bread," upon which someone pointed to a particular type of loaf nearby and said: "That is bread." He means that this is in the category of bread, not that the whole meaning of the word bread is that loaf in particular or that type of bread in particular.

A good example of this is the various statements that have been recorded concerning the interpretation of the following verse:

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا
فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مُقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ

Then, We passed the book on to those whom We had selected from among Our slaves. Among them were those who oppressed themselves, and among them were those who were moderate, and among them were those foremost in good deeds.²⁵

²⁵ *Faatir*, 35: 32

It is well known that **“those who oppressed themselves”** include all those who neglect the obligations of Allah and commit what He has forbidden. **“Those who were moderate”** means those who fulfilled the obligations and avoided the forbidden, and the **“those foremost in good deeds”** are those who went ahead and sought to come close to Allah with the doing of good deeds above and beyond the obligations. **“Those who were moderate”** are the **“companions of the right hand”** and **“those foremost in good deeds”** are **“those brought near”** as they are described in the Qur’an.

In such a case, we may find each interpreter mentioning this concept in relation to some particular acts of obedience to Allah. Thus, one interpretation may say that the forerunners with good deeds are those who make each prayer near the beginning of its time period; those who are moderate are those who pray during the prescribed time period; and those who oppress themselves are those who delay the afternoon prayer until the sun begins changing color.

Another may say: these three have been mentioned in the last part of Surah Al-Baqarah wherein Allah mentioned the doer of good via voluntary *sadaqah* (charity), the unjust via the consumption of *riba* (interest), and the just who makes fair exchanges of sale. Thus people, in relation to wealth and property, are either doers of good, just, or unjust. So, the **“forerunners with good deeds”** are the doers of good who add some commendable voluntary acts to their obligations. Those who oppress (themselves and others) are those who consume interest or withhold the obligatory *zakat* (mandatory annual charity). **“Those who are moderate”** are those who pay the obligatory *zakat*, and do not deal in interest. Other similar

breakdowns could be made focusing on certain areas of human action.

Every one of these statements is contained in the meaning of the verse. They have only been mentioned specifically to draw the attention of the listener to the fact that the meaning of the verse includes them, thereby drawing his attention to all analogous situations. Explaining something with a specific example is often easier and more effective than explaining it with a theoretical, though accurate, definition. Sound intelligence understands the type or category being alluded to just as it understands that it is the general category which is intended when one asks what is “bread” and is directed to look at a particular loaf of bread.

Some of the most common statements of this type are for the interpreter to say: “This *ayah* (verse) was communicated about such-and-such.” This is especially so if what is mentioned is a particular individual. These are the *Asbaab An-Nuzool* (context of the communication of a verse) mentioned in the books of *tafsir*. The following are examples of this:

Their statement that the verse about *dhihaar*²⁶ was communicated about the wife of Aws ibn As-Saamit. [Al-Mujaadilah, 58: 2]

That the verse defining *Al-Li'aan*²⁷ was communicated about Uwaimir Al-'Ajaani or Hilaal ibn Umaiyah. [An-Noor, 24: 6-9]

²⁶ *Dhihaar*: the ancient Arab practice of complete separation from one's wife by swearing that she is to you like the back of your mother. It was forbidden by Allah in the Qur'an.

²⁷ *Li'aan*: the procedure for accusations of adultery between spouses.

That the verse of *Al-Kalaalah* (which dealt with inheritance law in certain situations) was communicated about the case of Jaabir ibn Abullah. [An-Nisaa', 4: 176]

That the "them" referred to in Allah's statement:

وَأَنِ احْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ

And judge between them with what Allah sent down.²⁸

are the Jewish tribes of Al-Madinah called Bani Quraydhah and An-Nadheer.

That Allah's statement:

وَمَنْ يُؤْمِرْ يَوْمَئِذٍ دُبُرَهُ

And whoever, on that day, turns his back on the enemy...²⁹

was communicated about the battle of Badr.

That Allah's statement:

شَهَادَةٌ بَيْنَكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ

An attestation among you when death approaches one of you...³⁰

was communicated about Tameem Ad-Daariy and Adiy ibn Badaa'.

The statement of Abi Ayoob that the Verse:

²⁸ *Al-Maa'idah*, 5: 49.

²⁹ *Al-Anfaal*, 8: 16

³⁰ *Al-Maa'idah*, 5: 106.

وَلَا تُقْفُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى الْتِهْلُكَةِ

And do not throw yourselves to destruction with your own hands³¹ ...³²

was communicated about us the *ansaar* (Muslims originally from Al-Madinah who received and aided the Muslims who migrated from Makkah).

There are many other such statements to be found in the books of *tafsir* saying that a particular verse was communicated about a group of pagans in Makkah, or a group among the Christians and Jews, or about a group among the believers. Those who made these statements never intended that the rulings contained in these verses are restricted to those who they mentioned alone. Such a conclusion cannot be drawn by any Muslim nor anyone of sound mind!

It is true that the scholars have differed somewhat about the precise scope of general expressions that have come in response to a particular context (e.g., to a particular individual's condition, to an event or to a question). Is its ruling restricted to that context, or does it apply as generally as the meaning of the words in the language used? Nonetheless, none of the scholars ever proposed that the general meanings found in the Qur'an could be restricted to a particular individual, and not applicable to other than them whether the context is similar or not. The most [restrictive approach] that any scholar ever proposed in this regard is that the ruling of such a verse may be restricted to the *type* of case indicated by the particular individual or context in

³¹ i.e. by not sacrificing and spending in the path of Allah.

³² *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 195.

response to which the verse was communicated. Thus the verse is applicable to all other cases of a similar nature although perhaps not applicable to all cases which fit under the meaning of the wording of the verse but which are dissimilar from the case in the context of its communication in some way.

Verses that are known to have been communicated about a particular case or individual and that contain orders or forbiddances, apply to that individual and to all others who are in a similar situation. If such a verse is praise or condemnation of a particular individual, it also applies to anyone who is of similar station to the one about whom the verse was communicated.

Knowledge of the context (lit. cause) of the communication helps one in the understanding of a verse in the Qur'an. This is because knowledge of the cause brings about knowledge of the effect.

Similarly, the best of the two opinions of the scholars about one whose precise intention behind an oath is unknown: one then looks to the causes which incited him to make the oath in the first place for clues about his real intention therein.

When it is narrated about a particular verse that "this verse was communicated regarding..." this can have one of two possible meanings. Either it means that the event or person mentioned was directly related to the communication of the verse, or it means that the thing or event mentioned falls under the meaning of the verse, although it may have nothing to do with the event of its communication. In other words, it would mean the same as saying: "... is what is meant by this verse."

Also, the scholars disagreed about the statement of a companion of the Prophet ﷺ: "This verse was communicated about..."

Should this be regarded as knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ since its intended meaning is to explain the context or reason for the communication of the verse in question? Or should it be regarded as this Companion's own intellectual efforts at interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an and not necessarily from the Prophet ﷺ? Imaam Bukhaari regarded such statements as being connected to and originating from the Prophet ﷺ, while most others did not regard them this way. Most of the books of *hadith* that are arranged by narrator (known as *masaanid*) follow this custom such as the Musnad of Ahmad and others.

It is a different question if the Companion mentions a context or reason (person, event, or question) followed by **“and then Allah revealed...”**. The scholars are unanimous that the knowledge contained in such narration is from the Prophet ﷺ, and is not the personal opinion of the Companion who said them.

From all this, we can understand that there is no difference of contradiction involved just because one Companion said “This verse was communicated about such-and-such”, while another one said that it was communicated “about” something else. There is no difference of contradiction here as long as both of those things are within the meaning of the words of the verse, just as we have mentioned earlier in the discussion of *tafsir* by means of example.

Furthermore, even if one of them said that the reason for the communication of this verse was such-and-such and someone else mentioned a different reason or context in the same way, it is nonetheless possible to accept both narrations. This is because the verse may have been communicated following both of the things mentioned and in response to both of them, or the verse

could have been communicated twice: once for each of the two reasons narrated.

These two types of apparent difference are really only a difference of variety and not of contradiction. They account for most of what seem to be different opinions of the Companions in the *tafsir* of the Qur'an. The two categories are:

- 1- Difference of names or attributes focused on when pointing to the same ultimate reality or meaning; and
- 2- The mention of some part or portion of the intended meaning by way of example, to make the meaning more easily understood, and possibly to draw attention to the importance of the example used.

Another type of discrepancy which occurs in the *tafsir* of the *salaf* is when a word in the Qur'an has more than one possible meaning in the Arabic language. This may be either because the word itself has multiple meanings, or because, even though the word has only one meaning, its actual meaning in context could be one of two things. Examples of the first type include the word *gaswara* which means both thrower (of a spear or arrow) and lion, and the verb *'As'asa* which means both the coming in of night, and its retreat at dawn.

Examples of the second type are as follows:

The pronouns in the following verse which speaks about Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ close encounter with the angel Jibreel in his natural form:

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى ﴿٨﴾ فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ

Then he came close and he came down, and he was as close as two bows length or even closer.³³

The ten nights in the verse:

وَالْفَجْرِ ① وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ ② وَالشَّفَعِ وَالْوَتْرِ

By the dawn, by the ten nights, by the even and the odd.³⁴

are they the last ten nights of Ramadhan or the first ten of Dhu Al-Hijja?

In such cases as these, it may be tenable that the intended meaning includes both or all of what the early Muslims reported, while in other cases that is not possible.

Accepting both statements in such cases may be based on several things. Perhaps the verse was communicated twice, once with this meaning in mind (e.g. the ten nights are the last ten in Ramadhan) and another time with the second meaning intended (e.g. the ten are the first ten nights of Dhu Al-Hijja). Or, it may be based on the theory that a word with more than one meaning may be used in the Qur'an with all of its meanings intended. This possibility is allowed by many of the scholars of the Maliki, Shafi'iy and Hanbaliy schools of thought as well as many of the Sophists (*Ahl Al-Kalaam*). Or it may be based on the reasoning that as long as all of the narrated meanings are within the meaning of the words then the expression is general, and should be taken generally as long as there is no evidence for any specification. This type of resolving an apparent difference, when both narrated

³³ *An-Najm*, 53: 8-9.

³⁴ *Al-Fajr*, 89: 1-3.

interpretations are from authenticated narration, falls under the second of the two categories explained above.

Another type of variation among the statements of the *salaf* about the *tafsir* of a particular verse, which some people imagine to be disagreement among them, is when they express particular meanings with words whose meanings are closely related though they are not perfect synonyms. Actually, synonymy is not very common in the language in general and, in the Qur'an, is either very rare or nonexistent. It is rarely possible to explain a word in the Qur'an with a single other word giving the entire meaning of the word being explained. The best it can do is to approximate the meaning of the word in the Qur'an. This is one aspect of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. If one were to say about the following verse:

يَوْمَ تَمُورُ السَّمَاءُ مَوْرًا

Yawma tamooru as-samaa'u mawran.

On the Day the heavens move a movement.³⁵

That the word *mawran* means *harakah* (movement), he would only be approximating the meaning of the word, since the meaning of the word is light, quick movement. Likewise one who said that the meaning of *al-wahy* (the communication) in the Qur'an is "the informing". Or that the meaning of "*awhainaa ilaika*" (the verb from the same root) is "We have communicated to you" this is also just an approximation of the meaning, since *al-wahy* means quick subtle informing of someone. And, if someone said about Allah's statement:

³⁵ *At-Tur*, 52: 9

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

Wa qadhainaa ilaa bani isra'il..

And we decreed to the sons of Israel...³⁶

That the meaning is “we informed” this only approximates the meaning. The expression “decreed to” (*qadhaina ilaa*) here is more specific than just informing since it entails the sending of Divine Ordinance to them.

The Arabs sometimes give a verb an extra implicit meaning, and then use **other than the usual prepositions** with it accordingly. In this regard those who say that prepositions are simply interchangeable and stand in each other's place are mistaken. Examples of this issue from the Qur'an are the following:

لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَجْمِكَ إِلَىٰ نَجْمِهِ^ط

la-qad dhalamaka bi su'aali na'jatika ilaa ni'aajihi

...he has oppressed you in asking your (one) sheep to his sheep...³⁷

Here the verbal noun *su'aal* (to ask) is used with the preposition *ilaa* (to or toward) – not a usual noun/preposition combination. About this they said: i.e. “along with his sheep” or “in addition to the sheep he already had”. And Allah's statement:

مَنْ أَنصَارِي إِلَىٰ اللَّهِ^ط

...man ansaary *ilaa* Allah...

...who are my helpers to (or toward) Allah...³⁸

³⁶ *Al-Israa'*, 17: 4.

³⁷ *Sad*, 38: 24.

³⁸ *Aal 'Imraan*, 3: 52.

The verbal noun *ansaary* (my helpers) is used with the preposition *ilaa* (to or toward). About this they said: “with Allah”.

The correct analysis of such questions is not that the Arabs just switch prepositions indiscriminately and that they can be interchanged. Rather, it is as the grammarians of the Basry School have said that they add an additional meaning or sense to the original meaning of the verb, and change the preposition accordingly such that it reveals the intended additional meaning. Thus, asking for the sheep in the above verse contains the meaning of adding it to and including it among his sheep. In Allah’s statement:

وَإِنْ كَادُوا لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ الَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ

And they very nearly enticed you away from that which we have communicated to you.³⁹

The verb *fatana* (to entice, beguile or deceive) is used here with the preposition ‘*an* (from). In this way it has been given the meaning of to mislead you *away from*, and to block you or prevent you from that which We have communicated to you. In Allah’s statement:

وَنَصَرْنَاهُ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا

And We aided him (Nooh) from the people who rejected Our signs.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Al-Israa’*, 17: 73.

⁴⁰ *Al-Anbiyaa’*, 21: 77.

The verb *nasara* (to aid) is used here with the preposition *min* (from). This unusual preposition points to the additional sense of the verb here meaning We saved him and We liberated him from the people who rejected our signs.

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا

A spring with which the slaves of Allah drink. They cause it to flow forth on their command.⁴¹

Here Allah used the preposition *bi* (with) with the verb *shariba* (drink) – i.e., “drink with” instead of “drink from”. Using this unusual preposition gives the meaning that they not only drink from the spring, but they drink such that no thirst remains i.e. they quench their thirst *with* it. There are many other examples like these.

Whoever says that “There is no doubt (*rayb*)” means simply “There is no uncertainty (*shakk*)” has only approximated the meaning. The first word denotes anxiety and movement, such as in the statement of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab: “Leave that which causes you doubt (*yureebuka*, from the same root as *ar-rayb*) for that which does not cause you doubt.” Also, in that *hadith* where the Prophet ﷺ came upon a small gazelle curled up in sleep and said to those with him: “Let none of you disturb him (*yureebuhu*).” Just as “*yaqeen*” i.e. surety of belief entails calm and peace of mind, likewise *ar-rayb*, its opposite entails anxiety and motion (disturbance). As for the other word (*shakk*), although it is said that anxiety and disturbance are a necessary corollary of its meaning, they are not an actual part of the meaning of the word.

⁴¹ *Al-Insaan*, 76: 6.

And when it is said about Allah's statement (in the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah) "That Book..." that the meaning is "this Qur'an" does nothing more than approximate the meaning. Though, indeed, it is the Qur'an that is referred to, there is a difference between the demonstrative of proximity "this" and the demonstrative of distance "that". Furthermore, the word "book" as opposed to the word Qur'an contains an additional meaning that the Qur'an is written and in a tangible and visible form. This sense is not to be found in the word Qur'an, which means "that which is read". These are some of the minor distinctions that arise in discussions of the Qur'an.

If one person said about the verse:

وَذَكِّرْ بِهِ أَنْ تُبْسَلَ نَفْسٌ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ

That a soul be held captive because of that which it had earned.⁴²

that the meaning of the verb *absala* is to be imprisoned while another one said that the meaning is to be held hostage, etc. These are not cases of differences of contradiction, even though there are differences between a prisoner and a hostage (a prisoner may be a hostage and he may not be), since both of these are just approximations of the meaning as we have explained.

Collecting all of the statements of the *salaf* about the *tafsir* of the Qur'an is nonetheless very beneficial, since the sum total of their ways of expressing these meanings more accurately points to the intended meanings than just one or two expressions used by some of them. This is not to say that there are absolutely no real

⁴² Al-An'am, 6: 70.

differences between them (i.e. differences of contradiction). Surely there are some, just as there are true differences between them in questions of the law.

Moreover, we know that most of those differences that are in areas vital to the people in general are well known and in fact attested to by huge numbers of people among the common people and among the scholars. Examples include the number of prescribed prayers, the number of *raka'at* (units) and time periods of each prayer, the obligations of *zakat* and the minimum balances for its obligation, the establishing of the beginning and the end of the month of Ramadhan, the *Tawaaf* (circumambulation) around the Ka'bah, standing at Arafat, stoning the devils and the boundaries from which one enters *Ihraam* for the pilgrimage, etc.

The difference of opinion among the companions of the Prophet ﷺ over the correct inheritance when the deceased is survived by brothers and a grandfather (the inheritance issue known as *al-musharraka*), and other such differences do not cast doubt or cause any anxiety about the many rulings of inheritance in which there is no dispute. In fact what most people really need is the inheritance in cases of ascendants and descendants i.e. parents and children and cases of *kalaalah* (i.e. survivors are brothers, sisters and spouses). Allah sent down three detailed verses about inheritance law. In the first He mentioned ascendant and descendants. In the second He mentioned non-direct relations who inherit by assigned portion such as spouses and half-siblings by one's mother. And in the third He mentioned non-direct relations who inherit by "taking what's left" or some portion

thereof who are brothers by both parents or by the father only.⁴³ The coming together of brothers and a grandfather (the issue about which the Companions differed) is not very common. In fact, it never occurred among the Muslims until after the death of the Prophet ﷺ.

Difference of opinion may also arise because of the disappearance of the evidence, its being overlooked, its not reaching the scholar giving his opinion, because of some mistake in understanding the evidence, or because of his belief in the existence of that which overrules the evidence used by others. The intention here is just to deal with this issue in general terms, not to make a detailed analysis.

⁴³ See *Surah An-Nisaa'*: 11, 12, 176.

The Two Types of Differences Which Occur in Qur'anic *Tafsir*

First Type: Differences Arising Out of the Narrations Themselves

There are two types of differences which occur in the *tafsir* of the Qur'an. Some of it goes back to and arises directly out of the information which has been narrated, while others are known from other than the narrations. **Knowledge, as we have said, is either authenticated narration or an opinion supported by a known source of evidence.** Further, narrations are either from an infallible source (Allah and His Prophet ﷺ only) or from a non-infallible source.

What is meant here by "narrations" is the general category whether from an infallible source or from other than that. They are the source of the first type of difference. Narrations can be divided into those for which it is possible to discern the invalid from the unauthenticated and those for which this is not possible.

Research into this second type of narration -those for which it is impossible to determine its validity- is a useless endeavor and discussions about them is a type of frivolous speech. As for that the knowledge of which is needed by the Muslims, Allah has set up and preserved evidence pointing to the truth. Examples of

those things whose discussion brings no benefit and for which there is no sound evidence one way or the other are as follows:

- The difference of opinion concerning various details about the story of the boys in the cave.
- Which portion of the cow did Musa (Moses) strike the murder victim's corpse with in Surah Al-Baqarah where Allah said that he struck it with a piece of it.
- The size of the ship (ark) built by Nuh (Noah).
- What kind of wood it was built from.
- The name of the "young man" who was killed by *Al-Khidhr*.

The only possible route to the knowledge of any of these questions is through narration from the Prophet ﷺ. Anything in these areas which has been narrated directly from the Prophet ﷺ with an authenticated chain of narration is known and accepted such as the fact that the name of the man who Musa went to meet in the story in Surah Al-Kahf was "Al-Khidhr". Anything that does not meet these qualifications is not a legitimate source of such knowledge. Worse yet is the statements taken from the Christians and the Jews - such as statements narrated from Ka'b Al-Ahbaar, Wahb ibn Manbah, Muhammad ibn Ishaq or others among those Muslims who used to take many narrations from the People of the Book (i.e. the Christians and the Jews). It is not permissible to believe in such narrations nor to call them lies except with some other proof (Qur'an or authentic Sunnah). The Prophet ﷺ has ordered us to treat them this way in a *sahih hadith* saying:

“When the People of the Book narrate something to you, do not believe it and do not reject it. Either they will tell you something true and you reject it, or they will tell you something false and you will believe it.”

Likewise, the statements of the *tabi'een* (the generation after the Companions) which have been recorded, even if they do not say that they got it from the People of the Book. When the *tabi'een* differ, none of their opinions can be used as a conclusive proof against the opinion of another. The heart is more at peace with those statements of theirs which have been attributed to some of the Companions with a *sahih* chain of narration than with that which is only narrated as the statement of one of the *tabi'een*. This is because there is a much greater chance that the Companion either heard it from the Prophet ﷺ or from someone else who heard it from the Prophet ﷺ. Also, because it was much more rare for the Companions to narrate anything which originated from the People of the Book than was the case with those who came after them. This is especially so if the Companion involved expresses certainty and lack of any doubt about what he says - how could it be said that he took it from the People of the Book when they had been forbidden to believe anything they narrate?

What is intended here is that differences about issues where it is not possible to know which is the correct and in which collecting the various narrations does not help are like the study of *hadith* for which there is no evidence of its validity, and other such useless pursuits.

As for the first category of narrations, those for which it is possible to establish their authenticity, such narrations, may Allah

Most High be praised, can be found in all areas of need. On the other hand, much of what is found in the books of *tafsir*, *hadith*, and history of the battles of the Muslims are attributed to our Prophet ﷺ or to other Prophets, but are disproved by authenticated narrations elsewhere. Nonetheless, all knowledge that is necessary and essential is present, and that is not just in narrated knowledge but even in areas known by means other than narration.

This means that Allah has established signs for all narrations needed by the Muslims in order to maintain their religion enabling them to clearly distinguish which of them are authentic. In the area of *tafsir*, however, it is well known that the state of most of what has been narrated therein is like that which has been narrated in the areas of history and the battles of the Muslims⁴⁴. This is why Imaam Ahmad said: “Three things lack connecting chains: *tafsir*, history of battles, and the history of the campaigns of the Muslims.” In another version of this statement, it is reported that he said, “Three things have no basis...” which has the same meaning. This is because most of these narrations are *maraseel* (unconnected to the Prophet). These include statements attributed to ‘Urwah ibn Az-Zubair, Ash-Sha’biy, Az-Zuhriy, Musa ibn ‘Uqba, Ibn Ishaq. Also, statements from those who came after them such as Yayha ibn Sa’eed Al-Amawiy, Al-Waleed ibn Muslim, Al-Waaqidiy and others like them who narrated things in the area of the history of the campaigns of the Muslims with the Prophet ﷺ.

The knowledgeable people with regard to this history were the people of Al-Madinah, followed by the people of Iraq. The

⁴⁴ i.e., much of it cannot be authenticated.

people of Al-Madinah were the most knowledgeable in this area since it is the history of their own area. The people of Iraq were fighters and people of the Jihad, and thus possessed knowledge of the history of the campaigns of the Muslims not possessed by others. This is why the early Muslims had the greatest respect, in the area of history and biography of the Prophet ﷺ for the books of Abi Ishaq Al-Fazaariy, and they viewed Imaam Al-Awzaa'iy as the most knowledgeable of the scholars in these disciplines.⁴⁵

As for *tafsir*, the most knowledgeable people in this area were the people of Makkah, because they were the companions of Ibn 'Abbas. These include Mujahid, 'Ata' ibn Rabaah, 'Ikrimah the freed slave of Ibn 'Abbas, along with other companions of Ibn 'Abbas such as Taawoos, Abi Ash-Sha'shaa, Sa'eed ibn Jubair, and others like them. Also among the most knowledgeable in this area were the people of Kufah, the companions of Ibn Mas'ood who excelled in some areas above scholars of other localities. There were also scholars of *tafsir* in Al-Madinah such as Zaid ibn Aslam from whom Imaam Malik took knowledge of *tafsir* as well as his son 'Abdur-Rahman. 'Abdullah ibn Wahb later studied under 'Abdur-Rahman.

When narrations which are *maraaseel*⁴⁶, are narrated via many different routes such that there is no possibility that the narrators either intentionally plotted to perpetrate a lie or even unintentionally agreed on wrong information without intent to lie, they are authentic without any doubt. All narration is either truth and in complete accordance with actual reality or lies whose

⁴⁵ Both of these scholars are from the area of Iraq.

⁴⁶ *Maraaseel* (plural of *mursal*): Narrations whose chains are not fully connected to the Prophet ﷺ.

author either perpetrated them intentionally or was mistaken. When any narration is proven free of both intentional lies and error, then it must surely be true.

Thus when a *hadith* comes to us through two or more different routes such that it can be known that the different people transmitting the same narration did not conspire to forge it and that it was not possible for them to unintentionally narrate this same information, it is thereby known to be *sahih* (authentic). This is just like a case where someone comes and tells the story of some incident which took place, going into great detail about what was said and done by those involved. Then another person comes about whom it is known that he did not conspire or confer with the first one, and relates the same story with all the details as in the version told by the first one. In such a case, it would be known without doubt that the event did indeed take place since, if they were both telling other than the truth, either intentionally or unintentionally, it would be almost impossible for their stories to match in all their details without any previous conspiracy or discussion. A man might write one line of poetry and find another independently wrote the same line, or two people may tell the same lie about a single thing. If, however, one wrote a lengthy sonnet organized in a particular way and with many sections, it is almost impossible and certainly not expected that someone else could independently come up with exactly the same in both word and meaning in spite of its great length. Rather, it would be known that one of them plagiarised it from the other.

Similarly, if one narrator reports a lengthy *hadith* containing many details and another narrator reports the same information, then there are only two possible cases: either they conspired to

promulgate the *hadith*, one of them taking it from the other, or the *hadith* is truth. In this way the authenticity of most information narrated by more than one route is established, even though no one of the narrations would be acceptable by itself either because the chain of narration was broken or incomplete, or because of some unreliability or weakness on the part of its narrator. It is important to note however, that this method of authenticating *hadith* does not necessarily establish the validity of every word and detail in the *hadith* unless those words and details are themselves repeated in the different versions of the *hadith*.⁴⁷ For example, the occurrence of the battle of Badr is established by *tawaatur*⁴⁸. In the same way, it is known that this battle was before the battle of Uhud, and that Hamzah, 'Ali and 'Ubaidah were the three who went out for the preliminary matches before the main battle in which they faced 'Utbah, Shaibah and Al-Waleed. It is also thus known that 'Ali killed Al-Waleed and that Hamzah killed his opponent. There is doubt, however, as to who his opponent was, either 'Ubaidah or Shaibah.

It is very important that this principle be understood. It is very beneficial in establishing the validity of much of the narrated information contained in books of *hadith*, *tafsir*, and history of battles, as well as those things which are transmitted about different people's statements and actions. In this way, when a *hadith* is found to be narrated about the Prophet ﷺ from two or more different chains of narration -and it can be established that neither narrator took it from the other- it is established as truth.

⁴⁷ i.e. the different versions might be basically the same, but with slight differences of wording or details.

⁴⁸ A narration which is *mutawaatir* means narration by so many people at every level of the chain that absolutely no doubt remains as to its validity. The Qur'an itself and a small number of *hadiths* were transmitted in this way.

This is especially so when it is known that the transmitters of the *hadith* are not among those who would intentionally lie. All that is feared is that they may forget or be mistaken in transmitting information.

Whoever becomes familiar with the Companions such as Ibn Mas'ood, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ibn 'Umar, Jabir, Abi Sa'eed, Abu Hurairah and others knows with certainty that none of them would intentionally lie about Allah's Messenger ﷺ much less so those above them in rank. Just as any man can become known to those who experience him and put his character to the test over long periods of time as an honest man who will not steal property, rob people along the road, or bear false witness.

It is the same in the case of the *tabi'een*, (the first generation after the generation of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ). Anyone who becomes familiar with those among them like Abi Salih As-Sammaan, Al-A'raj, Sulaiman ibn Yasaar, Zaid ibn Aslam and others like them, knows without doubt that they are not among those who would ever think of intentionally lying about the Prophet's *hadith*. Even more so those of higher rank among the *Tabi'een* such as Muhammad ibn Sireen, Al-Qaasim ibn Muhammad, Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib, 'Ubaidah As-Salmaaniy, 'Ulqumah, Al-Aswad and others like them. The only fear is that any of them could forget or be mistaken about what he narrates. Forgetting or remembering something incorrectly are normal and very commonly occur to people. Among the great transmitters of *hadith* are some who were widely known to be extremely free of either of these two shortcomings such as Ash-Sha'biy, Az-Zuhriy, 'Urwah, Qatadah, Ath-Thawriy and others. This is especially so for Az-Zuhriy in his time and Ath-Thawriy in his time. It can even be said that Az-Zuhriy is not known ever to

have made a mistake in narration despite the huge number of *hadith* that he memorised and transmitted.

The meaning here is that if a long *hadith* is found to have been narrated by two different sources who did not get together over this *hadith*, then it is not possible for it to be a mistake just as it is not possible for it to be an intentional lie. Mistakes do not occur in long involved stories; they only occur in some of its parts. So if this long involved and detailed story is narrated from one source and another one narrated the same long story without them having conspired or taken it from each other, the whole story could not possibly be a mistake just as it could not be a lie as long as they did not conspire. This is why mistakes only occur in such cases in some of the details of the story in question.

An example is the case in which the Prophet ﷺ purchased a camel from Jabir. Anyone who studies the various routes of narration of this information will come to the conclusion that it is definitely authentic, even though the narrators differed as to the price paid, as Imaam Bukhaari explained in his famous book of *hadith*. The vast majority of the contents of Sahih Bukhaari⁴⁹ and Sahih Muslim are judged with certainty to be truly of the words and/or an accurate account of the deeds of the Prophet ﷺ. This is because most of their *hadith* are of this type⁵⁰, and because the scholars of Islam have unanimously received it with acceptance of its complete validity.

⁴⁹ And *everything* for which a complete chain of narration is given.

⁵⁰ i.e. they have been narrated through multiple chains of transmission where there was no possibility of conspiracy or coincidence of error as previously explained.

This nation will never agree on something that is a mistake (as the Prophet ﷺ said in a correct *hadith*). So, if a *hadith* was in fact a lie but the nation of Muslims accepted it and believed what was in it they would all have united in accepting and believing something which was in actuality a lie or a mistake. This would be the uniting of all of the Muslims in something mistaken and that is impossible (since the Prophet ﷺ informed us that it will never happen.) Hence in cases where there is no *ijmaa'* (Islamic legal consensus), when we allow for the possibility of error or intentional lies in narrated information, it is like our allowing for that possibility, previous to our knowledge of the existence of an *ijmaa'* upon knowledge, which was arrived at via the apparent (though not certain) meaning of a Text or via speculative analogy. In these cases we allow for the possibility that the truth may in fact be at odds with our opinion in the issue. However, once the *ijmaa'* is established in this ruling, there is no longer any doubt. Thereupon we not only accept the ruling as apparently correct (as in the first case, and in which case it was nonetheless obligatory upon the Muslims) but attain absolute certainty⁵¹ that the ruling is correct and there is no possibility of error.

On this basis, the vast majority of scholars from all different schools of jurisprudence have agreed that even information that comes through only one chain -if it is accepted by all of the Muslims and believed as valid or acted upon as such- that in this case there is certain knowledge (*yaqeen*) and not just apparent knowledge of its validity. This principle has been mentioned by many authors in the area of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usool al-fiqh*). These include followers of Imaam

⁵¹ Because of the *hadith* about *ijmaa'* alluded to earlier.

Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ash-Shafi'iy and Ahmad. The only exception being a tiny group of latter day scholars who followed the traditions of one group among the Sophists who rejected this principle.

On the other hand, many or most of the Sophists do agree with the scholars of *fiqh*, the scholars of *hadith* and the early generations of Muslims on this point. It is also the opinion of most of the followers of the Ash'ariya sect such as Abu Is-haaq and Ibn Fawrak. Ibn Al-Baqlaaniy, however, rejected this principle and was followed in that by such people as Abu Al-Ma'aaly, Abu Hamid (i.e. Al-Ghazali), Ibn 'Aqeel, Ibn Al-Jawzi, Ibn Al-Khateeb, Al-Amidiy and others.

However, the first opinion⁵² is the one which has been mentioned by Abu Hamid, Abu At-Tayyib, Abu Is-haaq and others among the Imams of the Shafi'iy school. It has been mentioned by Al-Qadhi 'Abdul-Wahhab and others of the Maliki school, Shams Ud-Deen As-Sarkhasiy and others in the Hanifiy school, and Abu Ya'laa, Abu Al-Khattab, Abu Al-Hassan ibn Az-Zaghooni and others in the Hanbaliy school.

Once we know that *ijmaa'* about the acceptance of a *hadith* makes its authenticity a matter of certain knowledge, it is important to understand that the consensus that is relevant here is the consensus of those scholars knowledgeable of the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ. Just as in the question of *ijmaa'* about a ruling in

⁵² The "first opinion" referred to here is that opinion which says that even narrations which come through a single chain of transmission are authentic without doubt if they are accepted by all of the Muslims as valid or acted on as such. This is based on the statement of the Prophet (ﷺ) in a *sahih hadith* that this *ummah* will never agree on something false.

the law: what is relevant is the consensus of those scholars knowledgeable of orders, forbiddances and allowances. The main point here is that a *hadith*, being narrated from a variety of sources in such a way that its being transmitted among its various narrators or their conspiring to promulgate a lie is highly unlikely, gives absolute certainty as to the validity of its contents. Moreover, this principle is very useful in the study of the narrators themselves.

In this way, we can benefit from things narrated by an unknown individual, by those known to be poor in memory, by incomplete chains of narration, etc. This is why the scholars of Islam have always recorded such *hadith* saying: *Hadiths* that are not suitable to be used for other things (because of the impossibility of establishing the validity of the chain of narration) can be used as secondary evidence and indirect support of other narrations. Imaam Ahmad said, "I used to write the *hadith* of some just to use it as indirect evidence for considering other narrations." He went on to give the example of *hadith* narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Luhai'a, the Qadhi of Egypt in his time. He was one of the best Muslims and used to narrate a very large number of *hadiths*. Then, because of the destruction of his books by fire, *hadiths* reported by him late in his life contained many errors. Nonetheless, his later *hadiths* are still useful for the above-mentioned purpose of indirect evidence or support of another narration. Furthermore, one often finds the narrations of 'Abdullah ibn Luhai'a in perfect accord with Al-Laith ibn Saad, who was an *imaam* and very solid and accurate in his narration of *hadith*.

We have just seen how the scholars of *hadith* may use narrations in whose chains there are those known to have faulty memories

or other faults for certain types of corroboration. They may also reject information narrated by a trustworthy and reliable narrator when it becomes clear, through a number of analytical methods that the narrator was in error. This study is called the study of the *'ilal* (flaws) of *hadith*. It is the most difficult and the most sophisticated of all *hadith* studies wherein a *hadith* may be narrated by a reliable and accurate narrator, but who was in error. Then, the adept scholar versed in this type of analysis discovers this error. It may become known by tangible observed events, such as the knowledge that the Prophet ﷺ married Maimunah while in a state of *ihraam*, and that he prayed two *rak'aat* in the Ka'abah. The reports of Ibn 'Abbas that he married Maimunah not in *Ihraam* and that he didn't pray in the Ka'abah are therefore error on the part of the narrator. Likewise the known facts that he ﷺ made *'umrah* (minor pilgrimage) four times. The statement of Ibn 'Umar that the Prophet ﷺ made *'umrah* in the month of Rajab was in error. It is also known that the Prophet ﷺ made the Farewell Hajj in a state of security and lack of fear of attack, and from this the statement of 'Uthman to 'Ali that "We were in fear that day" is considered an error on his part. Also, the statement that is found in some of the routes of narration in Bukhaari that: "The Fire will not be filled until Allah brings about for it another creation." is another example of that about which the narrator was mistaken. There are many examples of this type.

Muslims in this area are of two extremes. One extreme is found among the Sophists and those who follow their ways, who are very far from the knowledge of the *hadith* and its scholars. They do not differentiate between authentic *hadith* and weak *hadith*. They doubt the possibility of the authenticity of *hadith* or of the possibility of certain knowledge of its validity even though they

And for every nation there is a guide.⁵⁶

That the “guide” for this nation is ‘Ali. The narration about Allah’s words:

وَتَعْبَهَا أُذُنٌ وَعَيْةٌ

And that comprehending ears may comprehend it.⁵⁷

That the meaning is: “Your ears O ‘Ali!”

Second Type: Differences Arising out of the Methodology Used in Deriving Meanings from the Narrations

The second reason for differences in *tafsir* is that which is known by means of the methodology used in arriving at meanings, not from the actual narrations. Most mistakes in this area come about in one of two ways, both of which only came about after the *tafsir* of the Companions, the next generation, and the next generation after that. The books of *tafsir* in which the statements of these first three generations are mentioned without adulteration rarely contain any of these two types of errors. Examples of such *tafsir* are those of ‘Abdul-Razzaq, Wakee’, ‘Abdun ibn Hamid, ‘Abdur-Rahman ibn Ibrahim Duhaim, Imaam Ahmad, Ishaq ibn Rahooyah, Baqiy ibn Mukhallad, Abi Bakr ibn Al-Mundhir, Sufyan ibn ‘Uyainah, Sunaid, Ibn Jarir (i.e. At-Tabariy), Ibn Abi Hatim, Abi Sa’eed Al-Ashajj, Abi ‘Abdullah Ibn Majah, and Ibn Mardaweih.

⁵⁶ *Ar-Ra’d*, 13: 7.

⁵⁷ *Al-Haaqqah*, 69: 12.

The first way in which people go wrong in this area is that they have preconceived ideas and meanings in mind, and then set about trying to make the words of the Qur'an fit onto these meanings.

The second way in which people go wrong in *tafsir* is when they attempt to interpret the Qur'an with anything which the Arabic words could mean if they were spoken by humans. They fail to bear in mind the actual Speaker of the words of the Qur'an (Allah, most High), the one to whom it was sent, and those being addressed.

The first group are most concerned with the meanings that they have already decided on without regard for the clearest meanings most appropriate to the expressions in the Qur'an from the standpoint of meaning and rhetoric.

The second group dwells on the mere words of the Qur'an and what they think these Words could mean if spoken by an Arab human being without regard for what befits the actual Speaker of these Words or the context in which it is spoken. What's more, they are frequently mistaken even in their application of particular meanings to particular words in the Arabic language just as the first group also errs in this area. They are frequently in error in the meanings they attribute to the Qur'an just as the first group is likewise frequently in error even though the first group looks first to the meaning (which they desire) while the second group looks first to the actual words.

The first of the two groups themselves fall into two categories. The first group strips words in the Qur'an of their intended and clearly indicated meanings. The second group ascribes to such

Words meanings which were not intended and which are not even indicated by the Words themselves. In both cases, it may be that they were in error in that which they sought to establish or to negate, and so their mistake is both in their methodology and in the resulting interpretation of the Qur'an. Or, what they end up saying may be true, and so their error was in their methodology only, and not in their results. Just as this has occurred in the interpretation of the Qur'an, so also has it occurred in the analysis of the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ.

Those who erred in both methodology and in result include various groups among the people of innovation. They believed in schools of thought that contradict the truth exemplified by the Best of Nations who never agrees on something that is astray. The Nation exemplified by the first generations of Muslims and the Imams of the Muslims.

They approached the Qur'an and distorted its meanings according to their own opinions. Sometimes they cite Verses to support their position but such Verses are not related in any way to their position. Other times they twist and distort the meanings of those Verses that clearly condemn their particular school of thought thereby distorting Words out of their proper context. There are many deviant sects which fall into this category: Al-Khawaarij, Ar-Rawaafidh, Al-Jahmiyah, Al-Mu'tazilah, Al-Qadariyah, Al-Murji'ah and others.

The Mu'tazilah, for example are among the most prolific of people in terms of talk and arguments. They have authored books of *tafsir* based on the principles of their school such as the *tafsir* of 'Abdur-Rahman ibn Keesaan Al-Asamm who was a teacher of Ibrahim ibn Ismail ibn Ulaiya who used to debate with Ash-

Shafi'iy. Also, the book of Abu 'Ali Al-Jibaa'iy, and *At-tafsir Al-Kabir* by the Qadhi 'Abdul-Jabbar ibn Ahmad Al-Hamadani, the *tafsir* of 'Ali ibn Isa Ar-Rummaani, and Al-Kash-shaaf by Abu Al-Qasim Az-Zamakhshariy. All of these and people like them, believe in the principles of the Ash'ariy ideology.

The ideology of the Mu'tazilah is based on five principles which they have named: *tawheed* (oneness), *'adl* (justice), *al-manzilah baina al-manzilatain* (the station in between two stations), *infaadh al-wa'eed* (the carrying out of threats), and *al-amr bi al-ma'roof wa an-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining right and forbidding wrong).

"*Tawheed*" in their ideology is the *tawheed* of Al-Jahmiya which entails negating Allah's attributes and other deviations. They said: Allah does not see and the Qur'an was created, that Allah is not above this world and that He does not possess the Attributes of Knowledge, Capability, Life, Hearing, Seeing, Speech, Will, nor any of His sublime Characteristics.

As for *'adl* (justice) in their ideology, it entails that Allah did not will all things which are, did not create all things, nor is He capable of all things. Rather in their belief, the actions of people are not part of the creation of Allah, neither their good actions nor the bad, and He willed none of that except for those things that He ordered in the law. Everything else occurs without His will! Latter day *Shi'ah* have agreed with them in these deviant beliefs such as Al-Mufeed and Abu Ja'far At-Toosiy and others like them. Abu Ja'far wrote a *tafsir* of the Qur'an based on this foundation but added to it the beliefs of the Twelve Imaam *Shi'ah*. As for the Mu'tazilah themselves, none of them took the position of the *Shi'ah* and none of them rejected the caliphates of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali.

One incorrect principle held by both the Mu'tazilah and the Khawaarij is the concept of the carrying out of threats in the Hereafter. They believe that Allah will not accept any intercession in the Hereafter on behalf of those who have committed major sins, and that He will never take any of them out of the fire. This position has been thoroughly refuted by groups among the sects of Al-Murji'ah, Al-Karaamiyah, Al-Kilaabiyah and their followers. They did well in answering the above falsehood, but went wrong elsewhere such that they went to the other extreme⁵⁸. This issue has been dealt with extensively elsewhere.

The important point here is that these groups held a particular belief and then attempted to assign those meanings to the words of the Qur'an. They had no precedent for their opinions and beliefs nor for their interpretations of the Qur'an neither from the Companions, nor those who followed them, nor the Imams of the Muslims.

The falsehood of every single one of their works of *tafsir* is clear in many different ways. It comes from two directions. Sometimes it is known through the falsehood of the opinion or belief which they are trying to ascribe to the Qur'an. Other times it is known by the non-validity of the way in which they have interpreted the words of the Qur'an which they have attempted to construe either as supporting evidence for their position or as a rebuttal of the opposing opinion.

⁵⁸ i.e. by saying that once one "believes" –by which they mean becomes Muslim by the testimony of faith- sins will do him no harm in the Hereafter since they will be forgiven. This "born again" type of Islam is quite widespread among Muslims today.

Some of these people, such as the author of *Al-Kash-shaaf*⁵⁹ are so eloquent and good at expressing themselves that they inject their deviations and innovations into their writing such that most people never recognize it. This has led to the promulgation of their corrupt interpretations among many people, as Allah decrees, who do not actually hold the false beliefs that are contained in these works. I have actually seen many scholars of *tafsir* and others mention in their books and their discussions things from the interpretations of those groups that are in accordance with their deviant beliefs and principles. This even though the author himself knows or at least believes these beliefs to be false and deviant but without realizing what they have done.

Then, because of the excesses and errors of these people, the *Shi'ah*, then the Philosophers, then the *Qaraamitah* and others came along with even more serious deviations. Things became much more serious with these last three groups who twisted the meanings of the Qur'an in ways which never cease to amaze a scholar.

Examples of Misleading *Shi'ah* Interpretations of the Qur'an

What follows are some examples from the interpretation of the *Shi'ah* of Allah's book:

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ

May the two hands of Abu Lahab be destroyed.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Az-Zamakhshariy.*

⁶⁰ *Al-Masad, 111: 1.*

The two hands are Abu Bakr and ‘Umar.

لَيْنَ أَشْرَكَتَ لِيَجْبَطَنَّ عَمَلَكَ وَلِتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

And if you associate partners, He will invalidate your actions.⁶¹

Between Abu Bakr and ‘Ali in the caliphate.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً

Verily Allah orders you to sacrifice a cow.⁶²

The cow is ‘A’isha⁶³.

فَقَاتِلُوا أَيْمَةَ الْكُفْرِ

...fight the leaders of disbelief...⁶⁴

Talha and Az-Zubair.

مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ

The two seas meet...⁶⁵

Fatimah and ‘Ali.

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَاتُ

...pearls and coral-stone.⁶⁶

Hassan and Hussein.

⁶¹ *Az-Zumar*, 39: 65.

⁶² *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 67

⁶³ I seek refuge in Allah from the abomination that they have spoken! Allah will surely defend the honor of his faithful servant and our Mother ‘A’isha.

⁶⁴ *At-Tawbah*, 9: 12.

⁶⁵ *Ar-Rahman*, 55: 19.

⁶⁶ *Ar-Rahman*, 55: 22.

وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

We have recorded everything in a clear *Imaam*^{67,68}.

‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.

عَمَّ يَسْأَلُونَ ﴿١﴾ عَنِ النَّبِ الْأَعْظَمِ

About what do they ask one another? About the great tiding.⁶⁹

About ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

Verily, your ally is none other than Allah, His Messenger, and those who believe, those who establish the prayer and give the *zakat*, bowing.⁷⁰

“Those who believe” refers to ‘Ali. Here they cite a *hadith* that is a forgery in the unanimous opinion of the people of knowledge that tells of ‘Ali giving his ring in charity while actually in the bowing of the prayer.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ

Upon such are the prayers of their lord and mercy.⁷¹

Refers to ‘Ali when he was afflicted with the death of Hamzah.

⁶⁷ the word *imaam* here means book.

⁶⁸ *Ya Sin*, 36: 12.

⁶⁹ *An-Naba'*, 78: 1-2.

⁷⁰ *Al-Maa'idah*, 5: 55.

⁷¹ *Al-Baqarah*: 157.

Similar Interpretations Which have no Justification

Very similar to this, at least in concept, are the following interpretations which are mentioned by many of the scholars of *tafsir*:

الصَّكِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

Those who are steadfast, those who are truthful, those who are obedient, those who give generously, and those who seek forgiveness in the last hours of the night.⁷²

The “steadfast” refers to the Prophet ﷺ, the “truthful” to Abu Bakr, the “obedient” to ‘Umar, “those who spend generously” to ‘Uthman, and “those who seek forgiveness” to ‘Ali.

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ
عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رَحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are harsh on the disbelievers, merciful among themselves, you see them bowing and in prostration.⁷³

“Those with him” means Abu Bakr. “harsh on the disbelievers” – ‘Umar, “merciful among themselves” – ‘Uthman, “you see them bowing and in prostration” ‘Ali.

Even more amazing than that is the statement of some about the interpretation of the beginning of Surah At-Teen:

وَالَّذِينَ وَالزَّيْتُونَ ﴿١﴾ وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ﴿٢﴾ وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ

⁷² Aal ‘Imraan: 17.

⁷³ Al-Fath, 48: 48.

By the fig and the olive. And the mountain of Sinai. And this peaceful city.⁷⁴

“By the fig...” – Abu Bakr, “and the olive” – ‘Umar, “And the mountain of Sinai” – ‘Uthman, “And this peaceful city” – ‘Ali.

Sometimes, such myths about the Qur’an involve interpreting Words as meaning things which are simply not indicated by the Words themselves. The Words and phrases in the above verses do not indicate the individuals mentioned. For example, Allah’s statement: **“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are harsh on the disbelievers, merciful among themselves, you see them bowing and in prostration.”** contains descriptions of those with the Prophet ﷺ. This construction is what the grammarians have called “a predicate after a predicate”. All of the phrases are describing a single subject that is **“those with him”**. It is not valid for each of the phrases to refer to different individuals.

Other times, what is involved is restricting a Word that has a broad general meaning to mean just one person, such as in the following:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

Verily, your ally is none other than Allah and those who believe...⁷⁵

They said that what was meant here was ‘Ali only.

وَالَّذِي جَاءَ بِالصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِ

⁷⁴ At-Teen, 95: 1-3.

⁷⁵ Al-Maa'idah, 5: 55.

And he who brings the truth and believes the truth...⁷⁶

They said the meaning is Abu Bakr.

لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَتْلًا

These are not equal among you: he who spent of his property from before the victory and fought.⁷⁷

They said that this means only Abu Bakr.

The *tafsir* of Ibn ‘Atiyah and those like him is closer to the Sunnah and mainstream Islam, and more free of deviant innovations than is the *tafsir* of Az-Zamakhshariy. If he had just mentioned the statements of the early Muslims which are preserved in the books of *tafsir* verbatim, it would have been better. In many instances, he takes things from the *tafsir* of Ibn Jarir At-Tabary, which is one of the greatest and most valuable books of *tafsir*, but he leaves that which Ibn Jarir has narrated from the early Muslims, never mentioning them. Then, he mentions what he imagines to be the opinion of the most authoritative scholars when in reality, the people he means are a group among the Sophists who similarly established their principles to the way in which the Mu’tazilah established theirs. Although they are closer to the Sunnah than the Mu’tazilah still, every one must be given their just due. It must be known that this is part of “*tafsir* according to a particular school of thought”.

Whenever the companions or those who followed them or the Imams of Muslims have made a statement about the meaning of a verse in the Qur’an and then someone else came along

⁷⁶ Az-Zumar, 39: 33.

⁷⁷ Al-Hadeed, 57: 10.

interpreting the Verse as meaning something else which is in accordance with their particular school - and that school is not one of the schools of the Companions or those who followed them - these people become like the Mu'tazilah and others among the people of deviant innovation in this regard.

In general, anyone who turns away from the schools of the Companions and those who followed them, and from their interpretations of the Qur'an, to something in opposition to it is in error, nay is an innovator! If he is honestly exerting his efforts thinking that he is doing what is right, his error may be forgiven. The objective here is to define the ways to knowledge and its proofs and the ways to what is correct. We know that the Companions, those who followed them and those who followed those who followed them read the Qur'an and were the most knowledgeable about the meanings of its contents, just as they were the most knowledgeable of the Truth with which Allah sent Muhammad ﷺ. Whoever opposes their analyses of the meanings of the Qur'an and interprets the Qur'an with something at odds with their interpretations has gone wrong in both methodology and result. Nevertheless, it is well known that everyone who commits this mistake has some type of rationalization and seemingly valid excuse, be it by means of "logic" and reason or by means of narrated knowledge. This issue is dealt with extensively elsewhere.

The intention here is to call attention to the causes of differences in *tafsir*, and that the greatest and most critical reason for it is deviant innovation that incites its people to distort the Words from their true contextual meaning. They assign meanings to the Words of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ which were never intended, and give them interpretations which have no basis.

The basis for attaining knowledge of this is for one to obtain knowledge of the [earlier] position, which they have gone in opposition to, and that it is the Truth. One must know that the *tafsir* of the first generations is in opposition to their *tafsir*, and that their *tafsir* is a later invention and is deviant innovation. Then, one must know the detailed analysis of the corrupt nature of their interpretations of the Qur'an⁷⁸ based on the evidences which Allah has established for making the Truth clear.

Similar things have come from those latter day scholars who wrote on the explanation and interpretation of the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ. They strayed into the same types of errors as those who wrote about the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'an.

As for those who are in error in terms of methodology but not in terms of results, examples of this are many of the *sufis*, preachers, scholars of *fiqh* and others. They interpret the Qur'an with meanings which are in and of themselves correct and sound, but are not indicated by those particular words of the Qur'an. Much of what Abu 'Abdur-Rahman As-Salmiy mentioned in his book "Haqaa'iq At-tafsir" (The Realities of *tafsir*) is of this nature. Furthermore, whenever there appears among their statements, arrived at in this way, that whose meaning is also incorrect, they enter the first category: those in error both in terms of methodology and results.

⁷⁸ This may involve studying the details of their deviations in belief and their political and/or ideological agendas which, as the author has already pointed out, is the motivation for their twisting the meanings of the Qur'an and attributing to it meanings unheard of in the righteous earlier generations.

Interpreting the Qur'an With the Qur'an, with the Sunnah and with Statements of the Companions

If one were to ask: What is the best method of interpreting the Qur'an? The answer is: The most correct method is to interpret the Qur'an with the Qur'an. That which is stated generally in one place in the Qur'an is explained in detail elsewhere, and that which is abridged in one place is dealt with at length elsewhere.

When you have exhausted these possibilities, you should turn to the Sunnah. It is the commentary of the Qur'an and its elucidation. In fact, Imaam Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Idrees Ash-Shafi'iy once said: "Everything in which Allah's Prophet ﷺ gave a ruling was part of what he had understood from the Qur'an." Allah said:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ
النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَبَكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ حَصِيمًا

It is We who have sent the Book down to you with the Truth so that you may judge between the people with what Allah has shown you, and do not be a disputant to the treacherous folk.⁷⁹

⁹ An-Nisaa', 4: 105.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And We sent down to you the Reminder so that you make clear to the people that which has been sent down to them and perchance that they may contemplate.⁸⁰

وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ
الَّذِي ائْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَهَدَىٰ وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

And We have not sent the Book down to you except that you may make clear to them that in which they differed and as a Guidance and a Mercy to a people who believe.⁸¹

This is why the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Verily, I have been given the Qur’an and its equivalent along with it.”

The meaning of “its equivalent along with it” is the Sunnah. The Sunnah also came down to him by means of communication just as the Qur’an did; it is just not recited as the Qur’an is recited. Imaam Ash-Shafi’iy and other Imams cited many proofs of this fact⁸², but this is not the place to go into that in detail.

The crucial thing here is that you should first seek the interpretation of the Qur’an from the Qur’an itself, and if you do not find it there you should seek it from the Sunnah. This is as the Prophet’s ﷺ statements to Mu’adh ibn Jabal when he sent him to Yemen as his governor there:

⁸⁰ *An-Nahl*, 16: 44

⁸¹ *An-Nahl*, 16: 64.

⁸² i.e. The fact that the Sunnah was communicated to Muhammad (ﷺ) from Allah just at the Qur’an was so communicated.

“With what will you rule?” Mu’adh said: “With the Book of Allah.” He ﷺ said: “And if you do not find what you need?” Mu’adh said: “Then with the Sunnah of His Prophet.” He said: “And if you do not find what you need?” Mu’adh said: “I will strive to do what is right with my understanding.” Then, the Prophet ﷺ struck him on the chest and said: “Praise be to Allah who has guided his Messenger’s messenger to that which pleases Allah.”

This *hadith* is reported in the minor books of *hadith* with acceptable chains of narration.

Interpreting the Qur’an with the Statements of the Companions

When we do not find the interpretation in the Qur’an itself or in the Sunnah, we go next to the statements of the Companions in the issue. They understood these things the most because of their being witnesses to the Qur’an and the circumstances around its Communication from Allah. Also because of their complete understanding and their correct knowledge. This is especially so for the scholars among the Companions and the leading figures such as the four Imams i.e. the rightly guided Caliphs, and the Imams of the first period of Islam. Among them is ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ood. Imaam Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir At-Tabary said: Abu Kuraib narrated to me, saying I was informed by Jabir ibn Nuh, who was informed by Al-A’mash on the authority of Abi Adh-Dhuhaa (Muslim ibn Subaih) on the authority of Masrooq that ‘Abdullah (i.e. ibn Mas’ood) said: “By the One other than Whom there is no deity, no Verse of the Qur’an came down but that I know about what it was communicated and where it was communicated. If I knew the location of anyone more

knowledgeable than myself about the Qur'an at a distance which could be reached with firm determination, I would go to him." Al-A'mash also said on the authority of Abi Wa'il (Shaqiq ibn Salamah) on the authority of Ibn Mas'ood who said: "A man among us who learned a few verses (of the Qur'an) would not go beyond them until he learned all that was in them both in terms of meanings and practical application".

Among them also was the great ocean of knowledge 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, the paternal cousin of the Prophet ﷺ. He was the interpreter of the Qur'an by the blessings of the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ who once prayed to Allah saying: "O Allah, give him understanding of the religion, and teach him interpretation."

Ibn Jarir (At-Tabariy) said: Muhammad ibn Bash-shaar narrated to me that Wakee' informed me that Sufyan informed me on the authority of Al-A'mash on the authority of Muslim on the authority of Masrooq that 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ood said: "Such a good interpreter of the Qur'an is Ibn 'Abbas!" This statement was also narrated by two other chains of narration connected all the way back to Ibn Mas'ood. The final analysis is a *sahih* (strongly authenticated) chain all the way to Ibn Mas'ood i.e. that he in fact did make this statement about Ibn 'Abbas. According to other authentic narrations, Ibn Mas'ood died in the year 33, and Ibn 'Abbas was granted 36 years of life after him. Imagine the additional knowledge that he achieved after the death of Ibn Mas'ood!

Al-A'mash said on the authority of Abi Waa'il: 'Ali appointed Ibn 'Abbas over the *hajj* (pilgrimage) He addressed the people and in his *khutbah* he read Surah Al-Baqarah (in another version it was said: Surah An-Nur) and interpreted it in such a way that if

the Romans, Turks and Ad-Dailam heard it, they would embrace Islam.”

This is why most of what Isma'il ibn 'Abdur-Rahman As-Suddiy Al-Kabeer narrates in his *tafsir* is from these two Companions: Ibn Mas'ood and Ibn 'Abbas. Sometimes, however, he narrates some of the sayings of the Christians and the Jews which those two Companions used to mention as the Prophet ﷺ had allowed them to do saying: “Transmit my teachings even if only a single verse. Transmit the narrations of the People of the Book without sin. And whoever intentionally lies about me should prepare for his seat in the fire.” Bukhaari narrates this *hadith* and the narrator (Companion) is 'Abullah ibn 'Amr (ibn Al-'Aas).

Thus, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr, after getting hold of two volumes from the books of the People of the Book, used to narrate to people from them based on the permission of the Prophet ﷺ which he had understood from the above *hadith*.

However, these narrations from the Christians and the Jews are only mentioned as indirect support, and not out of any belief in their validity. They can be divided into three categories:

- That whose authenticity we can determine based on what is in our hands and authentic (Qur'an and Sunnah) which attests to its truth. This type is *sahih* (authentic).
- That whose falsehood we can determine based on what is in our hands which contradicts it or proves it false.
- That about which no judgement can be passed. It can neither be proven to be of the first group or of the

second, so we neither believe in it nor assert that it is false.

It is allowed to discuss and transmit such narrations according to the above. Most of these narrations are about things in which there is no particular benefit to us in our *deen* (religion)⁸³.

Because of the trivial nature of much of what is in these narrations, the scholars of the People of the Book differed frequently. This resulted in corresponding differences among the scholars of *tafsir*. There are many examples of this. Such as the various things they mention regarding the names of the boys in the cave, the color of their dog and what provisions they took. Other examples include what kind of wood Musa's stick was made from, the names of the birds which Allah brought back to life for Ibrahim, and what part of the cow the murder victim was struck with in the story in Surah Al-Baqarah⁸⁴. Also, the type of tree from which Allah spoke to Musa and many other such examples of things which Allah chose to leave unclear in the Qur'an and whose determination would be of no benefit whatsoever to us in this life or the next.

It is, however, permissible to narrate these differences of opinion among them, as Allah said in the Qur'an (regarding their disputes about the boys in the cave):

⁸³ This should be obvious to all, since if there were any need for this information, then Allah would surely have included it in the communication sent to His final Messenger Muhammad ﷺ.

⁸⁴ Upon which Allah made him speak and say who his killer was.

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةً رَابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ
 خَمْسَةً سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةً
 وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُل رَّبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعَدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ
 فَلَا تُحَارِبْ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَهَرَ وَلَا تَسْتَفِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا

They will say three their dog being the fourth, and they will say five their dog being the sixth, guessing at the unseen. And, they will say seven the dog being the eighth. Say, my Lord knows best their number, none know of it but a few. So do not dispute with them except on the clear issues, and do not ask the opinion of any of them about them.⁸⁵

This verse includes the etiquette of these types of issues, and teaches us the proper approach to them. In this verse, Allah most High informed us of three different opinions among the People of the Book as to the number of the boys in the cave. He discredited the first two, and made no comment on the third. This indicates the validity of the third statement since if it were false, He would have rejected it as He rejected the first two. Then, He guided us to the fact that the number of the boys in the cave is something unimportant and of no consequence. Thus, it should be said in issues such as this one: “My Lord knows best their number”, for only very few people whom Allah has shown this have knowledge of it. This is why Allah said: “And so do not dispute with them except on the clear issues”. The meaning here is: do not exert yourself in those issues which are of no consequence, and do not ask them about it, for they have no knowledge of it except for their “guessing at the unseen”.

⁸⁵ Al-Kahf, 18: 22

This represents the best way of presenting an issue in which there is a difference of opinion. One should mention all of the different opinions in a particular issue, call attention to the correct one among them and reject the false, and then mention the benefit to be derived from the resolving of this difference (if any). This is to avoid lengthy discussions and debates about differences that are of no consequence which may take people's energies away from that which is more important.

If someone describes a difference of opinion in an issue, but fails to mention all of the opinions, there is a deficiency in his approach, since the correct opinion could very well be one of the ones he left out. Likewise, if one relates the various opinions but does not call attention to the correct one among them, his approach is also deficient. If he gives credibility to something false intentionally, he has lied, and if he does it unintentionally, he has made a mistake. Also, one who discusses at length a difference of opinion that is of no consequence. Or, one who mentions many different statements in an issue which are different in wording but which all go back to just one or two opinions in terms of meaning has wasted time. Or, one who mentions many of the incorrect opinions in an issue becomes like one who wears the garments of forgery.

Allah alone guides to that which is right.

Interpreting the Qur'an with the Statements of the *Tabi'een*

Upon not finding the interpretation of the Qur'an elsewhere in the Qur'an, in the Sunnah, or in the statements of the Companions, many of the Imams turned to the statements of the

generation which followed the Companions - the *tabi'een*. Mujahid ibn Jabr, one of the *tabi'een*, was a very reliable source of Qur'anic interpretation. Muhammad ibn Is-haaq narrates: Abaan ibn Salih narrated to me that Mujahid said: "I read the whole Qur'an to Ibn 'Abbas three times from its opening to its closing, stopping at every verse and asking him about it." At-Tirmidhi narrates: Al-Hussain ibn Mahdi Al-Basriy narrated to me, 'Abdur-Razzaaq narrated to me that Muammar narrated to me on the authority of Qatadah that Mujahid said: "There is no single verse in the Qur'an about which I have not heard something." Also in At-Tirmidhi: Ibn Abi 'Umar narrated to me that Sufyan ibn 'Uyainah narrated to me on the authority of Al-A'mash that Mujahid said: "If I had read the reading of Ibn Mas'ood, I would not have had to ask Ibn 'Abbas about much of the Qur'an about which I asked him." Ibn Jarir (At-Tabary) reports: Abu Kuraib narrated to me that Talq ibn Ghannaam narrated to me on the authority of 'Uthamn Al-Makkiy on the authority of Ibn Abi Maleeka who said: "I saw Mujahid asking Ibn 'Abbas about the interpretation of the Qur'an, and he had his tablets with him. Ibn 'Abbas would say "Write." This went on until he asked him the *tafsir* of the whole Qur'an."

This is why Sufyan Ath-Thawriy used to say: "When the interpretation comes to you on the authority of Mujahid, it is enough for you."

Other famous *Tabi'een* in the area of *tafsir* include: Sa'eed ibn Jubair, 'Ikramah the freed slave of Ibn 'Abbas, 'Ataa' ibn Abi Rabaah, Al-Hassan Al-Basriy, Masrooq ibn Al-Ajda', Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib, Abu Al-Aaliya, Ar-Rabee', Ibn Anas, Qatadah, Adh-Dhahhaak ibn Muzaahim, and others among the first generation after the Companions and those who followed them

and those after that. Their statements about a particular verse are mentioned, and they are expressed with different words and expressions. Many people without knowledge believe this to be differences in interpretation, citing them as different opinions about the meaning of the Verse, when this is not in fact the case. Rather, some of them may express something using its necessary consequence or by something comparable. Others may mention the intended meaning exactly. All of them however in many instances point to the same meaning. Let those possessed of sharp minds comprehend this well, and Allah alone is the Guide.

Shu'bah ibn Al-Hajjaaj and others said: "The statements of the *tabi'een* about details of the law are not authoritative, so how then could they be authoritative in the area of *tafsir*?" What it means to say that their statements are not authoritative is that one of their statements cannot be cited as proof of the incorrectness of the statement of another of them. With this meaning, the statement is correct. However, if they all agree on something, there must be no doubt about this being an authoritative source of evidence. If they differ, the opinion of one of them cannot be used as evidence to reject the opinion of another nor to reject the opinion of those who came after them. In such questions, one must resort to the meanings of the language of the Qur'an, the general meanings of the words in the language of the Arabs, or the opinions of the Companions in the issue if available.

Interpretation of the Qur'an by One's Own Judgement

As for the interpretation of the Qur'an based on one's own individual opinion or judgement, it is forbidden (*haram*). Mu'ammil narrated to us that Sufyan narrated to us that 'Abdul-A'laa narrated to us on the authority of Sa'eed ibn Jubair on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Whoever speaks about the Qur'an without knowledge should prepare himself for his seat in the fire!”

Wakee' narrated to us that Sufyan narrated to us on the authority of 'Abdul-A'laa Ath-Tha'labiy on the authority of Sa'eed ibn Jubair on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever speaks about the Qur'an without knowledge should prepare himself for his seat in the fire.” And from At-Tirmidhi who said: 'Abdun ibn Humaid narrated to us that Hibban ibn Hilaal narrated to us that Suhail the brother of Hizaam Al-Qat'iy said: Abu 'Imraan Al-Jooniy narrated to us on the authority of Jundub that the Prophet said: “Whoever speaks about the Qur'an from his own judgement (or understanding) and gets the correct meaning is in error.” At-Tirmidhi said: This *hadith* comes through only one route. Some scholars of *hadith* have questioned the reliability of Suhail ibn Abi Hazm.

In the same vein, various scholars have reported the strictness of the Companions and other early Muslims with regard to the interpretation of the Qur'an without knowledge. As for what is reported about Mujahid and Qatadah and others among the great scholars that they "interpreted the Qur'an", it is unacceptable to think of these people that they could have interpreted the Qur'an without knowledge, i.e. to interpret it based on their personal understanding. Furthermore, other narrations about them show the truth of this, that they never spoke about the Qur'an from their personal understanding without knowledge. Whoever speaks about the Qur'an based on his own understanding has entered into that of which he has no knowledge, and has committed that which he has not been ordered to commit. If he were to strike upon the correct meaning in so doing, he would still have committed a mistake, because he did not arrive at his correct results through the correct methodology. This is analogous to one who judges between people though he is ignorant of the law. He is in hell-fire, even though his ruling itself may be correct. He is however, lesser in sin than one who gave the incorrect ruling - and Allah knows best. This is why Allah referred to those who slander people as adulterers (and who are unable to produce four witnesses) as liars. Allah said:

فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِالشُّهَدَاءِ فَأُولَئِكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْكٰذِبُونَ

If they do not produce their witnesses, they are liars with Allah.⁸⁶

Thus, one who slanders is a liar even if he spoke about someone who did indeed commit adultery, since he has spoken of

⁸⁶ *An-Noor*, 24: 13.

something which is not *halal* (permissible) for him to speak about, and has entered into that of which he has no knowledge. And Allah knows best.

This is why many of the *salaf* refrained from interpreting that of which no knowledge had reached them. Shu'bah narrated on the authority of Sulaiman on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Marrah on the authority of Abi Mu'ammara that Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq said: "What earth will hold me up, and what sky will shield me if I say about the Book of Allah that of which I have no knowledge." Abu 'Ubaid Al-Qasim ibn Salaam said: Mahmood ibn Yazeed narrated to us on the authority of Al-'Awaam ibn Haushab on the authority of Ibrahim At-Taimiy that Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq was asked about Allah's statement:

وَفَاكِهَةٌ وَأَبَّانٌ

*Wa faakihatan wa abban.*⁸⁷

He said: "What sky will shield me and what earth will hold me up if I say about the Book of Allah that which I do not know." Its chain of narration is broken⁸⁸.

Abu 'Ubaid also narrated that Yazeed narrated to us on the authority of Humaid on the authority of Anas that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab read from the minbar "*Wa faakihatan wa abban*", and then said *fakihatan* (fruit) we understand, but what is this *Abban*? Then, he spoke to himself saying, "This is indeed unnecessary delving (*takalluf*) O 'Umar!"

⁸⁷ 'Abasa, 80: 31.

⁸⁸ Note: Ibrahim At-Taimiy is a reliable narrator, but he never met Abu Bakr, and did not give another source between himself and Abu Bakr.

‘Abdun ibn Humaid said: Sulaiman ibn Harb narrated to us that Hammad ibn Zaid narrated to us on the authority of Thabit on the authority of Anas who said: “We were in the presence of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab, and he had four patches on the back of his shirt. He read “*Wa faakihatan wa abban*” and then said: What is *abban*? After which he said: This is surely unnecessary delving, what is upon you if you do not know this?” These narrations about Abu Bakr and ‘Umar regarding the word *abban* must be taken to mean that they had been asking about the specific details of the plant called *abban*. As for its being some kind of beneficial plant that is in the earth, this is clear and easily understood from the words that precede the passage quoted:

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا ﴿٢٧﴾ وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا ﴿٢٨﴾ وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا ﴿٢٩﴾ وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا

Then We brought forth therein (the earth) grains, grapes, edible herbs, olives, date palms, and gardens thick and dense.⁸⁹

Ibn Jarir (At-Tabari) said: Ya’qoob ibn Ibrahim narrated to us that Ibn Ulayya narrated to us on the authority of Ayoob on the authority of Ibn Abi Maleeka who said: “Ibn ‘Abbas was asked about a verse of the Qur’an. If some of you were asked about it, you would speak out about its interpretation, but he refused to say anything about its interpretation.” This chain of narration is *sahih* (authenticated).

Abu ‘Ubaid said: Isma’il ibn Ibrahim narrated to us on the authority of Ayoob on the authority of Ibn Abi Maleeka who said: A man asked Ibn ‘Abbas about Allah’s statement:

⁸⁹ ‘Abasa, 80: 27-30.

فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

A day whose measure is one thousand years.⁹⁰

Ibn ‘Abbas answered with another verse from the Qur’an which says:

فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

A day whose measure is fifty thousand years.⁹¹

The man then said: “I only asked you that you might narrate something to me.” Ibn ‘Abbas said: “They are two days which Allah has mentioned in His Book, and He knows best about them.” Ibn ‘Abbas disdained to say about the Book of Allah anything of which he had no knowledge.

Ibn Jarir said: Ya’qoob i.e. ibn Ibrahim narrated to us that Ibn Ulaya narrated to us on the authority of Mahdiy ibn Maimoon on the authority of Al-Waleed ibn Muslim who said: Talq ibn Habib came to Jundub ibn ‘Abdullah and asked him about a Verse in the Qur’an. Jundub said to him: “It is difficult for me, if I am truly a Muslim, for you to sit with me.”

Malik said: On the authority of Yahya ibn Sa’eed ibn Al-Musayyib that he used to say when asked about the interpretation of the Qur’an: “We say nothing about the Qur’an.”

Al-Laith said: On the authority of Yahya ibn Sa’eed on the authority of Sa’eed ibn Al-Musayyib that he never spoke of the Qur’an except in that which was well known.

⁹⁰ *As-Sajdah*, 32: 5.

⁹¹ *Al-Ma’aarij*, 70: 4.

Shu'bah said: on the authority of 'Amr ibn Marrah who said: A man asked Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib about a verse of the Qur'an and he said: "Do not ask me about a verse of the Qur'an, but ask the one who thinks that none of that is hidden from him." He is referring to 'Ikrimah (one of the students of Ibn 'Abbas).

'Abdullah ibn Shaudhab said: Yazid ibn Abi Yazid narrated to us saying: We used to ask Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib about the permissible and the forbidden, and he was among the most knowledgeable of people. But when we asked him about the interpretation of a Verse from the Qur'an he remained silent as if he had not heard.

Ibn Jarir said: Ahmad narrated to me: I encountered the scholars of *fiqh* of Al-Madinah having a great awe and reverence for saying anything about the interpretation of the Qur'an. Among them were Salim ibn 'Abdullah, Al-Qasim ibn Muhammad, Sa'eed ibn Al-Musayyib and Nafi'.

Abu 'Ubaid said: 'Abdullah ibn Salih narrated to us on the authority of Al-Laith on the authority of Hisham ibn 'Urwah who said: "I never heard my father interpret a Verse of the Book of Allah ever."

On the authority of Ayoob, Ibn 'Awn and Hisham Ad-Distawaa'iy on the authority of Muhammad ibn Sireen who said: "I asked 'Ubaidah As-Salmaaniy about a verse of the Qur'an. He said: 'Those who used to know about in what the Qur'an was sent down have gone, so fear Allah and strive for appropriateness of your actions'."

Abu 'Ubaid said: Mu'adh narrated to us on the authority of Ibn 'Awn on the authority of 'Ubaidullah ibn Muslim ibn Yasaar on

the authority of his father who said: “Whenever you narrate about Allah, stop and look what is before it and what is after it.” Hasheem narrated to us on the authority of Mughirah on the authority of Ibrahim who said: “Our companions used to fear interpretation of the Qur’an, and have great reverence for it.”

Shu’bah said on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn Abi As-Safar who said: Ash-Sha’biy said: “By Allah, I have asked about every single verse, but it is narration about Allah!”

Abu ‘Ubaid said: Hasheem informed us that ‘Umar ibn abi Zaa’idah said Ash-Sha’biy said from Masrooq that: “Beware of *tafsir* for it is indeed narration about Allah!”

The meaning of all of these accounts and others like them from the *imams* of the early generations is that they abstained from giving any interpretation of the Qur’an in that of which no knowledge had reached them. As for those who speak about that of which they have knowledge in the area of *tafsir*, knowledge of the *shari’ah* or knowledge of the meanings of the Arabic language, there is no sin upon them in that.

Thus, interpretations of various verses of the Qur’an have been recorded from all of the speakers in the above accounts. There is no contradiction involved here because they spoke up about that which they knew, and were quiet about that in which no knowledge had reached them. This then is what is obligatory upon everyone. Just as it is obligatory to keep quiet about those things about which one has no knowledge, likewise it is obligatory to speak up when asked about those things of which one has knowledge. Allah said:

لُبَيْنَهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ

That you will explain it clearly to the people, and not conceal it.⁹²

This is also based on what the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said in a *hadith* which has been narrated by more than one route:

“Whoever is asked about some knowledge but conceals it will be bound on the Day of Qiyamah in harnesses of fire.”

Ibn Jarir said: Muhammad ibn Bashaar narrated to us that Mu’ammil narrated to us that Sufyan narrated to us on the authority of Abi Az-Zanaad that Ibn ‘Abbas said: “*tafsir* is of four types: a type that the Arabs know from their understanding of the language, a type which no one will be excused for not knowing, a type which the scholars understand, and a type known to no one except for Allah.”

And Allah Most High knows best!

⁹² *Aal ‘Imraan*, 3: 187.

Two Additional *Fatawa* (Legal Verdicts) by Ibn Taimiyah

Some published versions of Ibn Taimiyah's work included the following *fatawa* (legal verdicts) in this work, while others did not. They are included here for benefit.

Which Works of *Tafsir* are Closest to the Qur'an and the Sunnah?⁹³

Shaikhul-Islam Taqiy Ad-Deen Ahmad ibn Taimiyah, may Allah have mercy on him, was asked which works of *tafsir* are closest to the Qur'an and the Sunnah: Az-Zamakhshariy, Al-Qurtubiy, Al-Baghawiy, or others?

He answered, may Allah bless him with His mercy and acceptance:

All praise is due to Allah. As for the works of *tafsir* that are in the hands of the people, the most correct of them is the *tafsir* of Muhammad Ibn Jarir At-Tabariy. He mentions the statements of the *salaf* with well-established chains of narration. There is no

⁹³ It is important to note that a large number of works in *tafsir* were written after the era of Shaikh-ul-Islam Ibn Taimiyyah, such as *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir which is currently regarded as the most authentic and reliable work of *tafsir*.

bid'ah (deviant innovation) therein, and he does not transmit narrations from those whose integrity has been doubted such as Muqaatil ibn Bakeer and Al-Kalbiy.

Aside from this, there are many works of *tafsir* which do not include many narrations with chains of narrators such as the works of 'Abdur-Razzaq, 'Abdun ibn Humaid, Wakee', Ibn Abi Qutaibah, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and Is-haaq ibn Raahooya.

As for three works mentioned in the question, the one which is the most free of *bid'ah* and forged *hadiths* is the work of Al-Baghawiy. It is, however, an abridgement of the *tafsir* of Ath-Tha'labiy from which the forged *hadiths* have been removed. The *bid'ah* contained in the *tafsir* of Ath-Tha'labiy have been removed, and other things have also been removed in the Abridgement of Al-Baghawiy.

As for Az-Zamakhshariy, his work of *tafsir* is filled with *bid'ah*, and was written according to the path of *al-mu'tazilah* in terms of the negation of Allah's attributes, and denying His being seen by His slaves in the Hereafter as is clearly stated in the Qur'an. They also say that the Qur'an is a created thing, not the Speech of Allah as He has described it. They reject Allah's willing of everything which takes place and His being the Creator of the actions of His slaves, and other deviations in the principles of the *mu'tazilah* sect.

The principles of the *mu'tazilah* are five: oneness (*tawheed*), justice (*al-'adl*), the station between two stations (*al-maqaam baina al-maqaamain*), the carrying out of threats (*infaadh al-wa'eed*), and enjoining right and forbidding wrong (*al-amr bi al-mar'ooif wa an-nahy 'an al-munkar*). However, the meaning of

“oneness” to them includes the negation of Allah’s attributes. Thus they called Ibn At-Tamurat and his companions Al-Muwahhideen (people of Tawheed) when in reality this is nothing but deviation in Allah’s Names and His Signs.⁹⁴

The meaning of “justice” to them entails rejecting Allah’s Predestination of all things, and rejecting His having created the actions of His slaves, His willing of all things which are, and His complete Power and Control over all things. Some of them even reject Allah’s Prior Knowledge of all that occurs. Their leaders, however accept Allah’s Knowledge of all that will occur, but negate His full Power and Will. This is the foundation of Az-Zamakhshariy. His school of thought is the school of Al-Mughirah ibn ‘Ali, Abi Hashim, and their followers. The school of Abu Hussein -and the Mu’tazilah who are following his way- is of two groups: Mashaayikhah and Khashabiya.

As for the “station between two stations”, it is their belief that the sinner cannot be called a Muslim in any way, form or fashion, but he also cannot be called a *kafir* (disbeliever), so they assigned him to a station between the two.

The “carrying out of threats” means that the sinners of the Muslim nation will be in the fire forever. They can never be removed from it because of someone’s intervention or in any other way. This is the same as the deviation of the *Khawaarij*. “Enjoining right and forbidding wrong” in Mu’tazilah thinking entails the legalization of rebellion against the *imams* of the Muslims and fighting them physically.

⁹⁴ See: *Al-A’raaf*, 7: 180.

Az-Zamakhshariy stuffed his book of *tafsir* with these *mu'tazilah* principles in subtle ways which most people never really detect. Many people can read his book and never realize the real meanings of what he is saying. This is not to mention the forged *hadiths* which his book contains and the scarcity of anything narrated from the Companions and the *tabi'een*.

The *tafsir* of Al-Qurtubiy is much better than this, and much closer to the way of the people of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and farther removed from *bid'ah* (deviant innovation). Even though all of these books must of necessity contain something which is deserving of criticism, it is a requisite of justice to give each one what they deserve.

The *Tafsir* of Ibn 'Atiyah is better than that of Az-Zamakhshariy, more authentic in terms of both narration and analysis, and more free of *bid'ah*, though it does contain some. In fact, it is much better, and perhaps it is the strongest of these works, but the *Tafsir* of Ibn Jarir (At-Tabariy) is more authentic and more correct than all of these works.

There are many other works of *tafsir* which have not even been mentioned, such as the *Tafsir* of Ibn Al-Jawzi and Al-Maawardi.

Combining the Different Readings of the Qur'an in Recitation

Ibn Taimiyah, may Allah have mercy on him, was asked about combining the seven readings of the Qur'an: Is it Sunnah or is it *bid'ah*? Was this ever done in the time of the Prophet ﷺ or not? Does one who does so get a greater reward than one who reads the Qur'an according to only one of its readings?

He answered, may Allah have mercy on him:

All praise is to Allah. As for the knowledge of the different readings and their memorization, this is an authentic Sunnah which has been passed down, the later one taking it from those who preceded. Knowledge of the reading which the Prophet ﷺ used to employ or whose reading he acknowledged and approved, or which he permitted them to read is Sunnah. The scholar of the readings and the memorizer of the various readings have a degree of distinction over those who do not know that, and only know one reading.

On the other hand, as for combining multiple readings in the prayer or in recitation of the Qur'an, that is a detestable *bid'ah*. Combining them for the purpose of memorization and for educational purposes, however, is part of the *ijtihad* of various groups of readers of the Qur'an (and is allowed).

END (BY THE MERCY OF ALLAH)

Other Books by Ibn Taimiyyah Published by Islaam Publications International

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