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METHODOLOGY OF INTERACTION WITH AND REFLECTION ON THE QUR'AN

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Abstract: The Qur'an came down from on high to inspire the entire humanity to find the right way of life, to serve as self-evident proofs that it was from Allah, and to act as a criterion to differentiate between the right and the wrong¹. It is then quite natural for every human being to understand the message of the Qur'an. Muslim scholars have played their role to facilitate this task to access to the Qur'an's messages. As it appears, the great Muslim scholars did not pinpointedly outline the principles/methodology/rules of Qur'anic interpretation. Practically, they devoted their efforts to interpret the Qur'an through the Qur'an, Sunnah of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), views of the Companions and their Disciples, historical backgrounds, and linguistic dimensions of classical Arabic. These ways represent sources of interpretation of the Qur'an rather than methodology of interpretation of the Qur'an. Merely using sources to understand the Qur'an does not necessarily indicate to how to use the sources. The present paper represents a humble attempt to identify and explain new rules/methodology/principles to interpret the Qur'an. The methodology applied to this task is critical analysis. The conclusion reached is that application of new proposed methodology makes the task to interpret the Qur'an easy.

Keywords: The Qur'an, Interpretation, New Rules, Companions, Entire Humanity.

INTRODUCTION

Allah as the Creator, the Provider, the Sustainer, the Controller of the entire universe knows very well what His creations, including humans want. Allah Himself expresses humans' natural desire in the first *Surah*: "*Guide us to the right path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those upon whom Your wrath incurs, and nor of those who go astray*"². Thereafter, Allah responds to this invocation of humanity in the very beginning of the 2nd *Surah* (*al-Baqarah*): "*That Book (code of life, showing the right path) is here which is undoubtedly source of guidance to those who wish to be guided*"³. The entire Qur'an thus serves as the source of understanding what the right path in life is and how to walk on it. The Qur'an was revealed around fifteen centuries ago, yet it is still relevant for the entire mankind who wish to lead a successful life. The messages of the Qur'an have been understood and interpreted in various ways, including the methodology of focusing on the imports of the Qur'anic words. There is a pressing need to develop new and appropriate methodology of interaction with the Qur'an. This paper represents a humble attempt to propose and explain new methodology of reflection on the Qur'an.

FIVE FUNDAMENTAL FACTS VIS-À-VIS THE QUR'AN

To do justice with one's interaction with the Qur'an some basic facts in respect to the Qur'an are necessarily to be taken into consideration: (1) the Qur'an belongs to the entire mankind, (2) the Qur'an can in no way be understood without application of reason, (3) the Qur'an is a supernatural discourse, (4) the Qur'an is the most eloquent speech, and (5) the Qur'an is easy to grasp as to its message.

The Qur'an belongs to the entire mankind. All the addressees in the Qur'an hail from mankind. The address "O mankind" (*Ya Ayyuha al-Nas*), "O human" (*Ya Ayyuha al-Insan*) and only "human being" (*al-Insan*) altogether occurs in the Qur'an around 89 times, and so is the case with the address "O believers" (*Ya Ayyuha al-Ladhina Amanu*) which is mentioned in the Qur'an exactly 89 times. Apart from these two addresses, the Qur'an addresses "O the people of Scripture" (*Ya Ahl al-Kitab*), "O children of Israel" (*Ya Bani Israel*), "Christians" (*al-Nasara*), "the Jews" (*al-Yahud*), "polytheists" (*Mushrikun*), "hypocrites" (*al-Munafiqun*), "the opposition" (*al-Kafirun*), "Sabians" (*al-Sabi'un*), and "Bedouins" (*al-A'rab*). They are all human beings. A verse clearly declares the Qur'an as the source of guidance for the entire mankind: "*Ramadhan is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to the entire mankind, also self-evident proofs for guidance and as the Criterion for right and wrong*"⁴. Another verse stresses the fact that the subject matter of the entire Qur'an is entire mankind: "*We have bestowed upon you all a Book that contains your description. Do you not then apply your reason?*"⁵. This verse says in an unequivocal manner that the Qur'an talks about origin of mankind, habits of mankind at both individual and social level, their needs,

social, economic, political, cultural, educational, and devotional, their variegated problems, and most appropriate solutions to those problems. It is then clear the Qur'an is a universal Scripture for all time and all people.

The understanding of the Qur'an entails application of reason. The Qur'an invites mankind to reflect on its messages: "*Do they not reflect on the Qur'an? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found therein Much discrepancy*"⁶; "*Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an, or have they locked out their hearts?*" (47:24); and "*This is a Scripture that We have revealed unto thee, full of blessing, that they may reflect on its messages, and that intellectuals may bear in mind*"⁷. These verses call upon mankind specially intellectuals to reflect on the messages of the Qur'an. Reflection is indeed made by intellectual power or in other word reason. That is why the Qur'an motivates mankind to apply reason to get to the messages of the Qur'an more than 50 times. Only one such example may suffice to bring the idea home: "*Do ye enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget yourselves, and although you read the Scripture? Do you not then apply your reason?*"⁸. The Qur'an rather condemns those who do not apply their reason to understand the right and the wrong: "*Indeed the worst creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb, who do not apply their reason*"⁹.

The Qur'an is revelation from on high: "*It is We Who have sent down the Qur'an to you in gradual manner*"¹⁰. The intactness of the Qur'an's originality despite it having been revealed 15 centuries ago is indeed a conclusive proof that its origin is any human mind, but it came down from on high. At the turn of the 20th century, Munich university, Germany proved through a highly ambitious project on the In Surah al-Qamar the statement- "*We have indeed simplified the Qur'an for comprehension. Is there any who is interested in its comprehension?*"¹¹. This statement have been made in respect to four records of history concerning the people of Noah, Ad, Thamud, and those of Lot. The immediate context of the statement is historical facts about the four communities and the comprehensive context is the messages in the Qur'an. What is the core of these messages? The chief message of the Qur'an is that Allah is the Creator of the entire universe hence submission to Him is the key to blissful life. The Qur'an shows the people react in two ways: (1) acceptance, and (2) rejection and informs that acceptance leads to bliss and rejection to condemnation in the hereafter where the sole authority will be Allah. This message is so simple and free from complications.

The four nations were doomed to destruction because of their rebellious attitude to the message concerning the life hereafter preached by their respective prophets. They had blatantly declared their message as false. In nutshell, the entire Qur'an invites mankind to accept that the Creator of the universe is Only One; that He raised His Messengers to convey the message about the Truth; and that there will be another life after destruction of the

present worldly life, where the righteous will be grandly rewarded, and the evildoers will be accordingly requited. Does any part of these messages appear unintelligible? Of course, not even an iota of the Qur'anic message is hard to understand.

The style of the Qur'anic speech is inimitable, full of eloquence. And people in general love to listen to what is eloquent. The Qur'an sheds light on its eloquence:

- (1) "Say: *"Obey Allah and obey the Messenger: but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be on the right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the message clearly and eloquently"*¹². The Prophet's duty was to convey the message in a way that could reach the people's hearts. This is eloquence which enables message influence mind and heart of the mankind.
- (2) "*These are the messages of the Clear Book*"¹³. The Qur'an is Clear Book which means the Qur'an is eloquent because without eloquence no speech could ever be clear i.e., intelligible

Basic elements of an eloquent speech are four: (1) preface, (2) contextual flow, (3) central theme, and (4) conclusion. All the Qur'anic Surahs contain these four components, except small Surahs which serve as announcement of one single theme.

At the turn of the previous century, Munich University, Germany embarked upon an ambitious project to verify the authenticity of the Qur'an. For that matter 42000 copies of the Qur'an were collected for comparison. The finding of this research was that the Qur'an is still original ([http://www.askislampedia.com-history of preservation of the Qur'an](http://www.askislampedia.com-history-of-preservation-of-the-Qur'an)). The originality of the Qur'an means that Allah made extraordinary arrangement for its preservation: "*We have, without doubt, sent down the Scripture (the Qur'an); and We have indeed continuously been safeguarding it*"¹⁴.

JUSTIFICATION OF NEW RULES TO UNDERSTAND THE QUR'AN

Muslim scholars did their best to facilitate the task of interaction with the Qur'an by producing voluminous compendia called *tafsir*. One can see that these *tafsir* works use one and the same approach/methodology to understand the original message of the Qur'an, yet, at times, come up with different interpretation. There are two main reasons for the differences in the interpretation of the Qur'an: (1) *Mufasssirun* are not unanimous over the uniformity of methodology to interpret the Qur'anic words and verses, and (2) They had preset the goal of their sacred task of interpretation of the Qur'an hence the emergence of various categories of *tafsir* works, such as traditional, rational, jurisprudential, doctrinal etc.

To resolve this problem Muslim scholars like Abdul Hamid al-Farahi (1863-1930) and Amin Ahsan Islahi (1904-1997) proposed new methodology

known as *nazm al-Qur'an* (coherence in the Qur'an). Al-Farahi outlined it and Islahi implemented it in his *tafsir* work, *Tadabbur-E-Qur'an*. These two contributions are of great nature but only experts and specialists in Qur'anic Studies can benefit from them. The author of this paper has humbly endeavored to pinpointedly identify various components of *nazm al-Qur'an* and explain them with relevant examples with a view to making the task of interaction with the Qur'an easy for all those who are sincerely interested in understanding the message of the Qur'an.

THE PROPOSED NEW RULES/METHODOLOGY OF QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

It is well-known and unanimously agreed by experts of the Qur'an that the Book of Allah is extraordinarily eloquent hence impossibly imitable by any, including humans and jinn ¹⁵. Eloquence (*balaghah*) of any speech/book/epistle requires to be based on (1) preface (*tamhid*), (2) central theme (*mihwar*), (3) contextual flow (*siyaq*), and conclusion (*khatimah*). A speech may hardly be deemed eloquent, if it is devoid of any of these four or any subsequent components. The entire humanity needs access to the Qur'anic message in the best way possible. The proposed rules to understand and interpret the Qur'an are identified and explained here with examples.

The proposed ten rules/principles are:

- 1) DISCOVERING PREFACE IN EACH SURAH
- 2) DIVIDING SURAH INTO SUB-THEMES
- 3) CONNECTING SUB-THEMES TO THE UNITY OF THEME
- 4) IDENTIFYING CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH
- 5) UNDERSTANDING PHENOMENON OF ELLIPSIS AND BREVITY IN SURAH
- 6) DETERMINING ORIGINAL IMPORT OF WORDS IN SURAH
- 7) REFLECTING ON THE ADDRESSEES IN THE SURAH
- 8) READING SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN THE SURAH
- 9) ESTABLISHING COHERENCE AMONG A SURAH, ITS PRECEDING AND SUCCEEDING SURAHS
- 10) RECOGNIZING CONCLUSION IN SURAH

1-READING PREFACE IN THE SELECTED SURAH

Out of 114 chapters (*suwar*) in the Qur'an around twenty (20) small chapters recorded in the end of the Qur'an constitute mere announcement of one single message/theme; and the remaining number of chapters comprise several themes and sub-themes. It is these chapters where one must identify the preface therein. The rule of identifying preface in a chapter is that the first sub-theme in the surah, whether it consists of one or more than one verse, be selected as preface in the chapter. With an understanding of the preface one can easily understand the entire chapter. A few examples may suffice to bring the idea home.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-BAQARAH: The first five verses of *Surah al-Baqarah*—“*Alif lam Mim. That book is undoubtedly source of guidance for muttaqin who believe in the unseen, consistent in prayers, and spend out of what We have provided, and believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and believe in the life hereafter. They are under true guidance from their Sustainer, and such are truly successful*”¹⁶. This preface makes unequivocally clear that the true success is for a particular category of people called *muttaqin* (God-conscious). If one reads the entire *Surah al-Baqarah*, one can find description of and observations on five categories of human beings, believers, non-believers, hypocrites, Jews, and the people in general. The preface signifies advice to believers that they must avoid the ways and manners opted for by people in general, Jews, non-believers, and hypocrites, and must follow the instructions from Allah meant exclusively for them.

PREFACE IN SURAH AALI IMRAN: The first six verses in *Surah Ali 'Imran* speak about one single theme. Let us read the translation of the said verses: “*Alif, Lam, Mim. Allah, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting, Who sustains the entire order of the universe - there is no God but He. He has revealed this Book to you, setting forth the truth and confirming the earlier Books, and earlier He revealed the Torah and Gospel for the guidance of mankind; and He has also revealed the Criterion. A severe chastisement lies in store for those who deny the messages of Allah. Allah is All-Mighty; He is the Rabb of Retribution. Nothing on the earth and in the heavens is hidden from Allah. It is He Who fashions you in the wombs as He wills. There is no God but He; the All-Mighty, the All-Wise*”¹⁷. This is the preface in *Surah Ali 'Imran*. It emphasizes that Allah is the Creator and the Sustainer of the entire universe, Who as He is All-Powerful, All-Wise sent down Scriptures, including the Torah and the Gospel and in the end the Qur'an for the guidance of the humanity to the discern between the right and the wrong. The most significant message given in this preface is that the Qur'an holds the position of the Criterion (*al-Furqan*), which means that previous Scriptures are no longer the Criterion. It is the Last Scripture, the Qur'an which serves as the Criterion. *Surah Ali 'Imran* addresses basically two people, the people of Scriptures, especially followers of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), who digressed from the principles of life given to them, and the followers of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) who were advised to invariably remain sincere to Allah and His Messenger and firm demonstrate endurance and patience in all situations, including military invasion by the opposition. The link between the preface and the other messages in the *Surah Ali 'Imran* is that both followers of Jesus (peace be upon him) and those of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) are advised to be conscious of Allah with all His Attributes.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-NISA': The first theme in *Surah al-Nisa'* could be read in the first verse: "*O mankind! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever Watchful over you*"¹⁸. In this first verse one can read the preface in *Surah al-Nisa'* which declares that men and women are equally important in the sight of Allah and no discrimination between the two sexes is considered valid. *Surah al-Nisa'* deals with issues concerning prosperous human society, such as just and equitable treatment of orphans and their property, validity of four marriages, specific law of property (the inherited one) distribution among the lawful heirs, family system, role of women in a family, prohibition of wedlock with certain female relatives, excellent social interaction with members of society, financial succor to the needy in society, especially the next of the kin etc. In nutshell, *Surah al-Nisa'* draws a complete picture of an ideal human society. The clear relationship between the preface and the entire *Surah al-Nisa'* is that both men and women must treat one another justly and equitably.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-MA'IDAH: The first part of the first verse constitutes preface in *Surah al-Ma'idah*: "*O believers! Fulfil contracts*"¹⁹. This is a serious command of Allah. Believers have been exhorted that the life of faith connotes fulfilling obligations concerning all exhortations from Allah, such as lawful edible items, sincere cooperation in valid social matters, warning to so-called followers of Jesus and Moses (peace be upon them), condemnation of unjust homicide, admiration of valid testimony in any dispute etc. The main addressees of *Surah al-Ma'idah* are followers of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) and the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him). The preface calls for the mankind, including believers and the people of Scriptures to be sincere in acting upon all agreements, whether between Allah and mankind or among mankind.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-AN'AM: Reflection on the first part of *Surah al-An'am* leads to the fact that its first three verses constitute its preface: "*The praise is exclusively for Allah alone, Who created the heavens and the earth, and brought into being light and darkness, and yet those who have rejected the call of the Truth ascribe others to be equals to their Rabb. He it is Who has created you out of clay, and then decreed a term of life, and has also appointed another term, a term determined by Him. Yet you are in doubt! And He it is Who is One True God in the heavens and on the earth. He knows your deeds - both secret and open - and knows fully whatever you earn*"²⁰. By going through the contents of *Surah al-An'am*, it is clear that the main addressee therein is the opposition which seemed adamant on denying the veracity of the message of Allah. For that matter the opposition was vehemently warned of the dire consequences of their rejection of the Truth. To convince them their

ancestor Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) subscribed to the same Truth i.e., the Creator, the Controller of the universe is Allah hence humans must submit to Him alone. Four facts have been reemphasized in the preface: (1) Allah is the Creator of everything, (2) life span of every human on the earth is bound to end, (3) after this life there is schedule of the occurrence of the Day of Judgment which is known to Allah alone, and (4) authority of Allah dominates in the entire universe, so nothing is hidden from Him and knows very well what the people are doing.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-A'RAF: The first three verses constitute preface in *Surah al-A'raf*: “*Alif-Lam-Mim-Sad. This is a Book revealed to you. Let there be no impediment in your heart about it so that you may thereby warn, and that it may be a reminder to the believers. Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and follow no authorities other than Him. Little are you admonished*”²¹. It seems that the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) felt extremely anxious over the continuous rejection of his message by the people. Allah advised him to hold on to his mission and ignore the worrying reaction of most of the citizens of Makkah. The entire *Surah al-A'raf* invites the people to be rational as they have hearts to think, they have eyes to observe, and they have ears to hear what is conveyed to them. They, due to their incessant denial of the Truth, become worse than animals which do not have intellectual power and are lost in total error. The preface in *Surah al-A'raf* says that the Qur'an seeks to open the eyes, ears, and hearts of the opposition and submit to Allah alone, leaving aside their false deities.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-ANFAL: The first verse constitutes preface in *Surah al-Anfal*: “*They ask thee concerning spoils of war. Say: spoils are at the disposal of Allah and the Messenger: So, fear Allah, and keep straight the relations among yourselves: Obey Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe*”²². The contents of *Surah al-Anfal* clearly appear comments on some battle (Badr) and the ensuing problems related the etiquettes of war and distribution of bounties of war because the believers had yet to be oriented to opt for Islamic etiquettes of war which were essentially different from those of the ignorant period. The preface invites the believers to pay serious attention to the commands of Allah and leadership of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) and not to fight among themselves over spoils of war.

PREFACE IN SURAH AL-TAWBAH: It appears that the first verse in *Surah al-Tawbah* constitutes its preface: “*This is a declaration of disassociation, from Allah and His Messenger to those with whom you had made a treaty among the polytheists*”²³. Significance of this preface will be very clear, when we look at the entire *Surah al-Tawbah* which draws a vivid picture of powerful emergence and comprehensive domination of a new civilization based on new rules and principles of individual and social behavior, and free from chaos and mischief where people bond themselves with so many objects

and persons, detaching their thoughts and practices from total submission to the All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Wise Entity Allah. This preface is cohesively interconnected with the four categories of mankind, the hardcore opposition, the hypocrites among the new Islamic society, the foreign powers like Roman and Persian empires, and the sincere followers of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). Three of these sections, the opposition, the hypocrites, and the foreign monarchies were the upholders of tyranny, oppression, and human subjugation by humans. The earth was therefore repleted with chaos and injustice. But the new civilization championed by the sincere followers of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) sought to make the earth dominated by justice, peace, and development. The Leader of the new civilization, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) wanted the people to live in peace. He, therefore, declared the sources and forces of injustice and mischief unwanted elements bent upon maintaining chaotic oligarchy.

PREFACE IN SURAH YUNUS: Its preface based on the very first verse is very brief: “*Alif. Lam. Ra. These are the messages of the Book overflowing with wisdom*”²⁴. Wise Book must be containing wise messages which the entire humankind needs for its life and activities. The main addressees of *Surah Yunus* are the people in general, children of Israel, and the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The people in general are invited to heed the messages in this Book as these messages are for their own benefit. Children of Israel were not in the arena, yet they due to their political alliance with Arabs were warned to rectify their approach in the light of the Wise messages of the Wise Book. The Last Prophet (s.a.w.) was advised to keep patient as the revelation to him from Allah served as advice, source of guidance, and cure for the moral problems people have been facing.

2- DIVIDING THE SURAH INTO SUB-THEMES

As is well-known, most of the Qur'anic *Surahs* comprise several subject matters (sub-themes). One sub-theme at times covers more than one verse. It is then highly advisable to divide the selected *Surah* into its sub-themes, one by one. For example, *Surah al-Baqarah* comprises around fifty (50) sub-themes, including significance of belief in the Unseen, Revealed Scriptures, virtues of life, character of hypocrites, enmity of the opposition, creation of the first human being, role of Satanic forces, dialogue with children of Israel, change of direction in *Solah*, *Haji*, fasting, prohibition on usury transaction, condemnation of wine and gambling, marriage, divorce, menstruation, waiting period, alimony, emphasis on establishing *Solah* etc. With this division of the *Surah*, the reader of the Qur'an will get a clear picture of various messages in the *Surah*. The number of sub-themes may vary from *Surah* to *Surah*, ranging from 5-50. If one reads *Surah al-Jumu'ah* (62), which has only eleven (11) verses, one may identify around six sub-themes: (1) reason for the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) having been raised among Arabs, (2) mission of the Last

Prophet (s.a.w.), (3) discretion of Allah to honor a certain people, (4) chargesheet against followers of Moses, (5) significance of Friday congregational *Solah*, and (6) historical reference to an incident showing people's preference of involvement in marketing to Friday sermon being delivered by the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The same effort is needed to be made when reading one *Surah* or another.

3-CONNECTING SUB-THEMES TO THE UNITY OF THEME OF THE SURAH

Advisably, we may begin connecting all the fifty sub-themes in *Surah al-Baqarah*. But it is not desirable in a short paper. We may select one or two such examples from *Surah al-Baqarah* for discovering the connection among the selected sub-themes. Its verses from one to twenty-nine form one sub-theme which addresses three people, the God-conscious, the opposition, and the hypocrites, communicating to them who they are, and what they are required to do in their life. The second sub-theme in *Surah al-Baqarah* spreads over ten verses²⁵. Its subject matter is creation of the first man, Adam and the ensuing episode. Apparently, there seems to be no connection between these two sub-themes in *Surah al-Baqarah*. A well-known commentator of the Qur'an, Amin Ahsan Islahi describes the connection between the two sub-themes in *Surah al-Baqarah*²⁶ as a mirror in which the three people, the God conscious, the opposition, and the hypocrites could look into and identify whether they are with angels who submitted to the command of Allah or with me Devil who refused to submit to Allah (Tadabbur-e-Qur'an {e book}, volume 1, p.77).

Another relevant example from *Surah al-Baqarah* verses 221-242. These verses deal with principles and etiquettes of some social issues, marriage, divorce, waiting period, menstruation etc. The discussion on these social issues continues from 221 to 237 and suddenly occurs significance of five times daily *Solahs* in 238-239. After that the remaining three verses go back to the main issues. One wonders as to what the connection between the two themes, social issues and observance of obligatory *Solahs* could be. Generally, scholars are of the view that social issues were worldly matters which entailed diversion of attention to the hereafter and *Solah* is rewarding in the hereafter. This is an extremely affectation approach. One may ask here a question if the Qur'anic principles on social matters are not rewarding in the hereafter. So, what might be the wisdom of the occurrence of *Solahs* in between social issues. If one reads the verses 221-237, one can see mention of four attributes of the God-conscious, Repentance, purity, deep conviction in Allah, and excellence. The objective of mentioning these four qualities of people is to assert that the rules of social matters could be followed only by those equipped with these four qualities. And the verse 238 mentions another quality, devotion (*qunut*) which is generated through consistency in

observance of Solahs. The reminder of Solahs means one must develop in oneself the quality of devotion and it is this quality which will generate and strengthen further the other four desirable attributes.

It will not be out of place if we reflect on six sub-themes in Surah al-Jumu'ah. The first four sub-themes²⁷ which deal with the obnoxious observations and comments of the followers of Moses (peace be upon him) are (1) Allah is Authority to appoint His Messengers and the Last one, (2) Allah raised the Last Prophet from among Arabs due to His Knowledge and Wisdom for Arabs, (3) charge sheet against followers of Moses, and (4) followers of Moses were deeply in love with the worldly life. And the remaining two sub-themes²⁸, significance of Friday congregational Solah, and incident of some Muslims leaving the mosque while the Last Prophet was delivering Friday sermon appear linked to the followers of the Last Prophet. The coherence between the two groups of sub-themes is that the followers of the Last Prophet were warned against imitating the practices of the followers of Moses who preferred remaining clung to material profits, leaving behind their religious obligations. Thus, in *Surah al-Jumu'ah* believers were invited to the task of comprehensive orientation supervised by the Last Prophet.

4-IDENTIFYING CENTRAL THEME IN THE SURAH

As has been seen earlier, no speech could ever be deemed as eloquent without a central theme therein. It is the central theme of a Surah around which all the sub-themes in the Surah revolve, and the whole Surah becomes a thematic unity. A few examples are cited here below.

1) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-BAQARAH: *Surah al-Baqarah* comprising 286 verses addresses five categories from among the mankind: (1) the God conscious, (2) the opposition, (3) the hypocrites, (4) the children of Israel, and (5) people in general. The verses in the *Surah* serve as a caution to the God conscious that they must keep away from copycatting the opposition, the hypocrites, the children of Israel, and the people in general. *Surah al-Baqarah* exhorts the God conscious to sincerely and wholeheartedly obey the Last Prophet who symbolizes leadership. Thus, the central theme of *Surah al-Baqarah* is change of leadership from the progeny of Issac and Jacob (peace be upon them) to the followers of the Last Prophet who is from the line of Issac's elder brother, Ishmael (peace be upon him).

2) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH ALE 'IMRAN: The main addressees in this *Surah*, besides believers, are the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him). The message conveyed in the *Surah* to all addressees is to follow the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). It means that leadership is no more in the hands of Christians and has been passed on to followers of the Last Prophet.

3) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-NISA': The entire *Surah al-Nisa'* deals with various social issues, such as just dealing with orphans' properties, marriage, distribution of property among lawful heirs, excellent treatment of

all members of a society including parents, relatives, neighbors, and those in need. Thus, all the discussions in *Surah al-Nisa'* rotate around its central theme i.e., establishing ideal human society on the earth.

4) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-MA'IDAH: By going through *Surah al-Ma'idah* one can see that it is extension of its preceding *Surah* which focuses on various social dimensions and in *Surah al-Ma'idah* the emphasis is on lawful and unlawful nature of edible items and livelihood. In that case, the central theme in *Surah al-Ma'idah* is development of comprehensive social situations that are free from anything unlawful.

5) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-AN'AM: This *Surah* discusses the humiliating consequences of rejection of submission to Only One Allah, persistence in practicing the ignorant period customs, such as killing innocent female children, and derisive denial of the occurrence of the Day of Judgment. So, the central theme of *Surah al-An'am* is warning to the opposition of excruciating punishment on the Day of Judgment for their persistent rejection of the Truth.

6) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-A'RAF: This *Surah* discusses another aspect of the opposition's rebellious attitude i.e., treatment of the Qur'anic messages with derision which is consequent upon their disbelief in the hereafter. The central theme in *Surah al-A'raf* is solace to the Last Prophet that he need not to feel extremely anxious due to the continued opposition to his mission by the people.

7) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-ANFAL: As has been seen earlier that this *Surah* serves as an advice to believers to remain steadfast in all situations, including war imposed by enemies. So, the central theme in this *Surah* is that believers must focus on their sincere obedience to Allah and His Messenger instead of being fascinated by material gains, including bounties of war.

8) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH AL-TAWBAH: By looking at the entire contents of *Surah al-Tawbah* what comes to the mind is emergence of Islamic civilization. So, this is the central theme in *Surah al-Tawbah*.

9) CENTRAL THEME IN SURAH YUNUS: This *Surah* inspires mankind to receive guidance and cure for their moral problems from the Qur'an. So, inspiration to entire mankind to benefit from the Qur'an is the central theme in *Surah Yunus*.

5-DISCOVERING PHENOMENON OF ELLIPSIS AND BREVITY

Brevity is a marked style of human speech. One example of such brevity may suffice to bring the idea home. Father asks his son/daughter to go to market and buy some items and names those items. Later, when the son/daughter comes back and reports to his/her father that he/she did what the father wanted him/her to do. Here neither the father asks his son/daughter detail of the things purchased by him/her, nor the son/daughter provides

details of the items purchased. It is because both father and son/daughter know what the omitted details are hence no need of repetition. The Qur'an uses the same style of speech. A few examples are given here below.

Surah al-Baqarah verse 62: It reads: “*Whether they are the ones who believe or whether they are Jews, Christians or Sabians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – their reward is surely secure with their Rabb; they need have no fear, nor shall they grieve.*” Here three conditions are placed for success in the hereafter: (1) faith in Allah, (2) faith in the hereafter, and (3) doing good deeds. That is why some quarters claim that faith in Messenger of Allah and faith in the revealed Books are not prerequisites for success. In that case, one may put forward a question as to how to know the true concept of Allah, the life hereafter, and good deeds. Answer to this question cannot be obtained without a Messenger of Allah and revealed Book. Aside from that, in the four addressees named in the beginning, believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians, faith in a Messenger and a Book are already mentioned. Believers are those who believe in Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah and in the Qur'an as revelation from Allah; Jews are those who believe in Moses as Messenger of Allah and in Torah as the revelation from Allah; Christians are those who believe in Jesus as Messenger of Allah and in the Gospel as revelation from Allah; and Sabians are those who believe in Zoroaster as Messenger of Allah and in Avesta as revelation from Allah. Since faith in Messengers of Allah and Revealed Books from Allah were mentioned earlier in the verse²⁹, they were not repeated along with the faith in Allah and the Last Day. A question may arise here as to why even these two articles of faith were mentioned because believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians did believe in Allah, Yahwe, God, and Yazdan and in the occurrence of the Day of Judgment. The answer is very simple. These people were required to refresh and rejuvenate their belief in the true concept of Allah and in the true concept of the Day of Judgment. As a matter of fact, strong belief in Allah and in the Day of Judgment lead nowhere but to the virtuous life which in turn climaxes in eternal blissful life.

Another spectacular example of the phenomenon of ellipsis and brevity could be seen in the early verses of *Surah Luqman*: “*Alif. Lam. Mim. These are the messages of the Wise Book. It serves as guidance and mercy for the excellently virtuous who establish Solah and pay Zakah and have firm faith in the Hereafter*”³⁰. In this verse three qualities of the excellently virtuous have been enumerated: (1) they establish Solah, (2) they pay Zakah, and (3) they firmly believe in the life hereafter. One can see only one article of faith is mentioned here and other articles of faith, faith in Allah, in Messengers, and in revealed Books appear omitted. In the above verse (31:4) faith in the hereafter does not mean at all that faith in the hereafter suffices alone for one being virtuous. The mention of faith in the hereafter alone in the verse³¹ signifies

that it is the faith in the life hereafter which keeps one's faith in Allah, His Messenger, and the Qur'an truly strengthened. Indeed, if one's faith in hereafter becomes feeble, one's faith in other articles and doing good deeds will all become imperfect.

Ellipsis occurs in the Qur'an in various forms. At times, only a small phrase is omitted from a statement. For instance, in *Surah al-A'raf* verse 179 reads: "And certainly We have created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind; they have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - indeed, even far worse. Such are utterly heedless." As it appears from the initial wording of the above verse³², most of the jinn and humans are predestined to be consigned to hellfire. But then the later part of the statement (7:179) renders meaningless. The fact is that one single word "because (*lianna*)" is omitted before the reason of entry into the hellfire. The complete statement is like this: "And certainly We have created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind, (***because***) they have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - indeed, even far worse. Such are utterly heedless." Another known example of this sort of ellipses is what is called *Ayat al-Kursiyy*: "Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His sovereignty extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great"³³. The first statement— "Allah-there is no deity except Him."—is a declaration and the statements thereafter serve as reasons for Allah as the Only One worthy of submission. Thus, the word because is omitted before the reasons.

6-DETERMINING ORIGINAL IMPORT OF WORDS IN SURAH

The language of the Qur'an is Arabic, but not the modern Arabic prevalent in Saudia, Syria, Egypt, and other parts of the Middle East. Qur'anic Arabic is classical used by the 6th century (after *hijrah*) Arabian Peninsula. It is to be born in mind that the Language of the Qur'an is that of classical Arab poets and orators, such as Imru' al-Qays (501-544 CE), Tarafah ibn Al-Abd (501-600 CE), Zuhayr ibn Abi Salma (520-609 CE), Labid ibn Rabi'ah (560-661 CE), 'Amr ibn Kulthum (526-584 CE), 'Antarah ibn Shaddad (525-608 CE), and al-Harith ibn Hillizah (...-580 CE). The first thing to be taken into consideration in understanding original import of the words in the Qur'an is the classical Arabic during or pre-Qur'anic times. In the available Arabic lexicons the most reliable one is *Lisan al-'Arab* by Ibn Manzur (1232-1311

CE). As it is quite natural, one can find in this lexicon several imports of a word. That is why one must see the contextual flow of the statement in which words occur. By taking into consideration both *Lisan al-'Arab* and the Qur'anic context one can resolve the tangle about the meaning of Qur'anic word/s. Here are a few examples to elucidate the point.

- 1) The word *Bayan* as occurred in *Surah al-Rahman* (verse 4) and in *Surah al-Qiyamah* (verse 19) is variously looked at. *Bayan* in 55:4 is translated as speech (*nutq*), but in 75:19 as interpretation (*tawdih, tafheem, bayan al-ma'ani*). Why does this difference occur? If read the word *Bayan* in 55:4 in the light of the whole context: “*The Merciful One has taught the Qur'an, has created man, and has taught him interpretation*” (55:1-5), the meaning of *Bayan* as speech will hardly be valid. It is because the Qur'an and *Bayan* are both connected with each other. Thus, *Bayan* here (55:4) will surely mean interpretation of the Qur'an as it happens in 75:19.
- 2) In *Surah al-Rahman* the word *Aala'* (آلاء) occurs 31 times. Generally, it is translated as blessings, favors (النعمة). The complete sentence (viz. 55:13) in which the word *Aala'* occurs is: “*So which of the favors of your Rabb would you deny?*” Ibn Manzur gives its meaning *Al-Ni'am* i.e., favors (<http://wiki.dorar.aliraq.net-Aala'>). Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari in his *tafsir Jami' al-Bayan (Surah al-Rahman)* records view of a great scholar Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam (647-798 CE) who says: *Aala'* signifies power (*al-Qudrah*) {<http://quran.ksu.edu.sa-tabari>}. The entire *Surah al-Rahman* indeed talks about the unlimited power of Allah. It is said that so many blessings on the earth and favors in the hereafter must be rendered as favors. Can one ask a question as to why *Aala'* must be translated as favor even for things that may never be considered favor, such as creation of human out of clay of pottery, creation of jinn out of fire flame, Allah as the Rabb of the East and the Rabb of the West, confluence of two waters, inability of jinn and humans escaping the authority of Allah, defenselessness of jinn and humans in front of punishment with flames of fire, the heaven's rending asunder, seizure of criminals by their forelocks on the Day of Judgment, scene of the Hell etc. If the meaning of *Aala'* is taken as power, non-blessings as well as blessings could easily be adjusted together, making the translation of the repeated sentence as “*So which of the powers of your Rabb would you deny?*” It is to be remembered that Allah's blessings do represent His limitless power. This rendering is supported by two of the verses of *Surah al-Rahman*: (1) “*And there will remain the Countenance of your Rabb, Owner of Majesty and Honor*”³⁴; and (2) “*Blessed is the Name of your Rabb, Owner of Majesty and Honor*”³⁵. These two verses highlight the

attribute of Allah as Owner of Majesty and Honor which is very much akin to His Power.

- 3) The word *Zikr* has occurred in the Qur'an so many times, which is generally translated as reminder and fame. For example, the verse 15:9 reads: "*Indeed, it is We who sent down the Reminder and indeed, We are its guardian.*" And 21:10 reads: "*We have bestowed upon you a Book in which is your fame. Do you not then apply your reason?*" Translation of *al-Zikr* in 15:9 as Reminder seems correct, but it may not be correct in 21:10 where *Zikr* means mention and description. The complete phrase: "in which there is your description" means the Qur'an contains messages and information about humans' origin, nature, habits, problems, and their solution etc.
- 4) The word *al-Falaq* in *surah* number 113 is translated as daybreak. It is one of the imports of the word *al-Falaq*, but contextually it does not fit in the *Surah*. The original meaning of *al-Falaq* is splitting (*al-Shaqq*). In the *Surah* one can see reference to four items against which one seeks refuge with Allah. The four items are *khalaq* (creation), *Ghasiq* (utterly dark night), *al-Naffathat fi al-'Uqad* (blowing on knots), *hasad* (envy). In all these four objects there is a sense of splitting process (process of creation). It is noteworthy that one of the stages in creation of something is splitting. Creation of humans/any animate being, utterly dark night, blowing knots, and impact of envy on someone involves splitting process. Thus, the translation of *Surah al-Falaq* should be: "*Say: I seek refuge with Rabb of the process of creation (viz. splitting) from the evil of what He has created, and from the evil of the utterly dark night when it comes, and from the evil of those blowing the knots, and from the evil of the envious when he envies*"³⁶.
- 5) The word *Qadama Sidqin* in *Surah Yunus* verse 2 seems a bit controversial. Let us read the sentence in which this word occurs: "*And give glad tidings to the believers that they have Qadama Sidqin with their Rabb.*" Here the term *Qadama Sidqin* signifies lofty rewards, true honor, honorable position (<http://quran.ksu.edu.sa-tabary>).
- 6) The word *'Ibadah* is generally rendered into English as worship. The original meaning of this word is slavery which is representative of total submission.

7-REFLECTING ON THE ADDRESSEES IN THE SURAH: The Qur'an addresses the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), believers, people of Scriptures, the enemies, the hypocrites, the Bedouin, and people in general. At times, the addressee is named i.e., "*O Messenger, convey in full what is revealed to you from your Rabb*"³⁷. But at times, there is no mention of the addressee i.e., "*We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it. Do you not know that Allah is the*

competent Authority over all things"³⁸. Here the addressee is not clear. Muslim scholars are of the view that believers are addressed in the verse³⁹. It is to be borne in mind that in the verses 40-150 in *Surah al-Baqarah* the addressees are children of Israel and the Last Prophet. The verse 2:106 originally addresses children of Israel who would raise objection to any Qur'anic revelation which opposed the revelation in Torah. Their argument was that if the Qur'an was from Allah, how it could contrast with certain message in Torah which is also from Allah. One such controversial issue was change of direction in *Solah* from Jerusalem to Makkah. Allah responded in the verse 2:106 that it was His prerogative maintain previous revelation in Torah or change it in the Qur'an.

8-READING SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN THE SURAH:

Around 99.99% of information about reason of revelation (*Asbab al-Nuzul*) in the Qur'an are of interpretative nature, having nothing to do with original historical reason. Sources entitled "*Asbab al-Nuzul*" by 'Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi (d.468 A.H.) and that by Jalal al-Suyuti (d.911 A.H.) are not reliable sources on reasons of revelation. The most reliable way to understand the socio-historical background of the *Surah* concerned is the *Surah* itself. Repeated readings of the *Surah* will reveal the nature of the situation in which it was revealed.

9-ESTABLISHING COHERENCE AMONG A SURAH, ITS PRECEDING AND SUCCEEDING SURAHS:

The arrangement of the Qur'anic *Surahs* in a particular order has its wisdom. *Surah al-Fatihah* serves as a preface in the whole Qur'an and the last two *Surahs* (*al-Falq* and *al-Nas*) as conclusion. In the Qur'anic preface is given the entire Islamic scheme of life, recognizing Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Provider, the Caretaker, the Controller of the universe through His Attributes, especially *Rabb al-'Alamin*, *al-Rahman*, *al-Rahim*, and *Malik Yawm al-Din*, visualizing the occurrence of the Day of Reward and Punishment when the Authority will be only in the Hands of Allah, realizing that Allah is the Only One to Whom mankind must submit, and seeking help of Allah to know the True system of life that could lead to eternal bliss in paradise and protect from the perennial torment. In the Qur'anic conclusion composed of two *Surahs* (*al-Falaq* and *al-Nas*) mankind seeks consistent help of Allah to protect them from all categories of Evil which are likely to hamper the Islamic scheme of life shown and explained in the remaining 111 *Surahs* from *Surah al-Baqarah* to *Surah al-Ikhlās*. The relationship among these *Surahs* could easily be determined based on their central themes. These *Surahs* deal with all the stages of the Last Prophet's mission and movement, preaching, training the followers, defending against opposition, struggling to survive, identifying some safe ground, establishing Islamic society, fighting the invaders, and declaring dominance of

Islamic civilization. If one reads the Qur'anic *Surahs* from these angles, one can understand close relationships among them.

10-RECOGNIZING CONCLUSION IN SURAH: Each *Surah* (except the short ones) contains conclusion in its end. The last sub-theme is to be considered as conclusion in the *Surah*. A few examples are given here below to elucidate the matter.

- 1) **CONCLUSION IN SURAH AL-BAQARAH:** The last verse⁴⁰ (“*Allah does not charge a soul except as per its capacity. It will have what it has obtained, and it will bear what evil it has earned. "Our Rabb, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Rabb, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Rabb, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our Protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people"*”) serves as conclusion in *Surah al-Baqarah* in which two things have been highlighted: (1) every human must perform his/her responsibility in accomplishing Islamic life according to his/her capacity; and (2) the God conscious need to continuously seek help of Allah in completing Islamic mission, either in normal situation or in a state of war imposed by enemies, the opposition, the hypocrites, the children of Israel, the Bedouin, and the people in general.
- 2) **CONCLUSION IN SURAH ALE-‘IMRAN:** Its last verse reads: “*O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain steadfast and fear Allah that you may be successful*”⁴¹. It is conclusion in *Surah Ale-‘Imran*. This *Surah* sketches a situation in which believers are faced with the opposition who are bent upon exterminating Islamic society, on the one hand, and with the people of Scriptures, especially Christians who are if approached gently will join Islamic forces. The *Surah* inspires believers to continue the mission of inviting the people to the Message of Allah. In both situations, preaching Islamic message, and fighting the invaders in the battlefields, believers are required to remain patient, steadfast, and inspire each other to endure.
- 3) **CONCLUSION IN SURAH AL-NISA’:** Its last three verses⁴² constitute its conclusion: “*O men! A proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down unto you a clear light. Allah will surely admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him to His mercy and bounty and will guide them on to a straight way to Himself. People ask you to pronounce a ruling concerning inheritance from those who have left behind no lineal heirs (kalalah). Say: 'Allah pronounces for you the ruling: should a man die childless but have a sister, she shall have one half of what he has left behind; and should the sister die childless, his brother shall inherit her. And if the heirs are two sisters, they shall*

have two-thirds of what he has left behind. And if the heirs are sisters and brothers, then the male shall have the share of two females. Allah makes (His commandments) clear to you lest you go astray. Allah has full knowledge of everything." This is a long conclusion which addresses both people in general and believers. One might find the verse 176 irrelevant as conclusion. It is relevant. Verses 11-14 deal with property distribution as instructed by Allah, and end with a warning that any mishandling of the law of property distribution will lead to permanent condemnation. The last part of the conclusion, which also explains the issue of property distribution, reemphasizes the significance of property distribution law. It is to be borne in mind that the main theme of *Surah al-Nisa'* is the development of human society based on justice. The mention of an issue related to property distribution in the conclusion serves as a reminder to the society that any lacunae in property distribution process may create discomfort among the members of society.

- 4) **CONCLUSION IN SURAH AL-MA'IDAH:** Its last verse⁴³ reads: *"To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is within them. And He is Authority over all things."* This is conclusion in *Surah al-Ma'idah*. The conclusion says that Allah is Authority over all things. Its significance could be clear when we take into consideration the main thrust of the *Surah* i.e., lawful and unlawful in edible items as well as in social interaction. It is Allah who determines what is lawful and what is unlawful and how the criminals need to be sternly dealt with.

CONCLUSION

The Qur'an is the most eloquent speech, revealed from Allah, meant for the entire mankind, and easy to grasp its messages. There must be some rules to understand its messages. It was revealed almost 15 centuries ago. It is then quite desirable to develop appropriate methodology to interact with the Qur'an. In the above discussion, ten rules have been enumerated and elaborated. The main among them are PREFACE, CENTRAL THEME, PHENOMENON OF ELLIPSIS AND BREVITY, and CONCLUSION. There is need to introduce a course on methodology of interaction with the Qur'an at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in universities with a view to facilitating the task of understanding the Qur'an. Inclusion of this course in educational institutions will help remove all confusions in the minds over the Qur'anic messages.

REFERENCES & NOTES

¹ Al Quran 2:185

² Al Quran 1:6-7

- ³ Al Quran 2:2
- ⁴ Al Quran 2:185
- ⁵ Al Quran 21:10
- ⁶ Al Quran 4:82
- ⁷ Al Quran 38:29
- ⁸ Al Quran 2:44
- ⁹ Al Quran 8:22
- ¹⁰ Al Quran 76:23
- ¹¹ Al Quran 54:17, 22, 32, 40
- ¹² Al Quran 24:54
- ¹³ Al Quran 26:2; 28:2
- ¹⁴ Al Quran 15:9
- ¹⁵ Al Quran 2:23-24; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88
- ¹⁶ Al Quran 2:1-5
- ¹⁷ Al Quran 3:1-6
- ¹⁸ Al Quran 4:1
- ¹⁹ Al Quran 5:1
- ²⁰ Al Quran 6:1-3
- ²¹ Al Quran 7:1-3
- ²² Al Quran 8:1
- ²³ Al Quran 9:1
- ²⁴ Al Quran 10:1
- ²⁵ Al Quran 30-39
- ²⁶ Al Quran 1-29 & 30-39
- ²⁷ Al Quran 62:1-8
- ²⁸ Al Quran 62:9-11
- ²⁹ Al Quran 2:62
- ³⁰ Al Quran 31:1-4
- ³¹ Al Quran 31:4
- ³² Al Quran 7:179
- ³³ Al Quran 2:255
- ³⁴ Al Quran 55:27
- ³⁵ Al Quran 55:78
- ³⁶ Al Quran 113:1-5
- ³⁷ Al Quran 5:67
- ³⁸ Al Quran 2:106
- ³⁹ Al Quran 2:106
- ⁴⁰ Al Quran 2: 286
- ⁴¹ Al Quran 3:200
- ⁴² Al Quran 4:174-176
- ⁴³ Al Quran 5:120