

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

3

The Qur'an and the Sunnah: The Time-Space Factor

Ṭāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī
'Imād al Dīn Khalīl

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC
PUBLISHING HOUSE
AND

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT



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THE OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES

The publication program of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has already addressed important issues in the field of Islamic thought and the Islamization of knowledge. In this respect a number of books have already appeared in several languages under fifteen main series: *Academic Dissertations*; *Accessing the Islamic Intellectual Heritage*; *Concepts and Terminology*; *Human Development*; *Indices*; *Islamic Methodology*; *Islamization of Culture*; *Islamization of Knowledge*; *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*; *Lectures*; *Occasional Papers*; *Perspectives on Islamic Thought*; *Reform Movements and Methodologies of Change*; *Research Monographs* and *Rasa'il Islamiyat al Ma'rifah* (Studies in the Islamization of Knowledge).

The *Occasional Papers* series, published by the Institute's London Office, covers a number of research papers, articles and lectures from the Institute's worldwide program as well as from Muslim scholars willing to make contributions. These are presented individually in the form of booklets that can be easily read or referred to. It is hoped that the booklets will reach students, scholars, and specialists as well as major sections of the world's Muslims alike in order to generate a fruitful debate on the vital issue of Islamization, and to create an awareness of the intellectual crisis in its various shapes and forms, while encouraging an active role in the proposed course of action and solution. This series is also translated into other languages.

The third work in this series, *The Qur'an and the Sunnah: The Time-Space Factor* includes three papers originally written in Arabic: "The Qur'an: The Primary Source of Knowledge;" "Toward a Proper Reading of the Sunnah," which is an adaptation of Dr. al 'Alwāni's introduction to Dr. Yūsūf al Qaradāwi's *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al Sunnah al Nabawiyyah* (Methods of Understanding the Sunnah) and "The Qur'an and Modern Science: Observations on Methodology." A different English edition of the last appeared in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1991. The English editions of the three papers were prepared by the Department of Translation/IIIT. We

also acknowledge the contribution of Huda Khattab and Yūsuf Budd.

The use of Islamic terminology in transliteration is a policy of the IIIT. Some of the terms used defy adequate translation, while others are so essential that the Institute feels that familiarity with them is necessary for a better understanding of Islamic issues. These terms are routinely footnoted once or sometimes explained briefly between brackets. All those which have not yet been accepted in Anglo-Saxon dictionaries are in italics. As many of these occur more than once, readers are advised to refer to the relevant footnotes whenever necessary.

When citing dates the Islamic one is mentioned first, separated from the Gregorian date by a slash. When an Islamic date occurs alone, it is followed by AH.

English translations from the Qur'an used in this series come from 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an* (Amana Corporation, revised, 1989) with occasional modifications for further clarity.

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Editors' Note

For too long now, the Qur'an and the Sunnah,¹ great sources of strength, purity, knowledge and inspiration for the Ummah,² have not been adequately tapped. Skirting their peripheries or overdwelling on one or two of their multifarious facets and tributaries has done a disservice to the immense potential of the fountainhead, while denying the Ummah—indeed the whole world—innumerable benefits from them.

Now that the Ummah is becoming increasingly aware of its own problems as well as latent powers, and yearns to revive its leading role in the forging of history and civilization, the issue of drawing on the wellspring becomes more relevant and urgent. Revisiting these two sources is no longer a scholastic, academic, nostalgic, or escapist indulgence, but a great journey of discovery that promises untold rewards.

Like all great journeys of discovery, this one too may be beset by many challenges and possible setbacks. Nevertheless, once the will has steeled itself to the task ahead, and the Great Guide and light of all travellers has bestowed His blessings and grace, there should be no going back empty-handed, empty-souled.

The rewards are indeed immeasurable: the better discernment of human potential and God's plan; the recovery of a balanced, active, and purposeful life; the restoration of dignity, peace and harmony, not only to the Ummah, but also to the world at

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1. Sunnah: Literally, a clear path or beaten track. Refers to whatever the Prophet said, did, agreed to, or condemned. The Sunnah is a source of the Shari'ah and a legal proof next to the Qur'an. As a source of the Shari'ah, the Sunnah may corroborate a ruling which originates in the Qur'an. Secondly, the Sunnah may consist of an explanation or clarification of the Qur'an. Thirdly, the Sunnah may also consist of rulings on which the Qur'an is silent. It is generally used in the plural *sunan* to mean the cosmic laws governing life, the universe.
 2. Ummah (pl. *umam*): Community, nation. Specifically, the community of believers or the universal Muslim community.

large—a world that has suffered long from bogus ideologies and precepts.

Paradoxically, the journey through the resplendent pages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah to a time and place in the past should yield a more mature awareness of the dynamics of social and historical change and of humankind's role on earth, honing and sharpening the Muslims' capacity to deal with the demands of the present moment and the challenges of the future. The human and relative dimensions of the quest should bring us not only closer to our fellow Muslims and human beings, but also, at a higher plane—indeed, the highest—nearer to the Creator of all life and all endeavor.

In the first paper of this book, Dr. Tāhā J. al 'Alwanī explains how the Qur'an—revealed and protected from corruption by Allah (SWT)³—is a source of knowledge: a source which reveals its benefits only if read properly. Dr. al 'Alwānī argues that there are two levels of reading the Qur'an: the first level consists in cultivating spiritual upliftment; the second urges humankind, as *khalīfah*,⁴ to study the cosmos for the purpose of positive action on earth. Performing the two readings together and keeping a balance between them are prerequisites for well-being in this world and in the Hereafter.

Earlier generations focused essentially on the formal aspects of the Qur'an and the hereafter, and the Revelation came to be seen only as a source of fiqh⁵ and legislation. Such restrictive reading of the Qur'an curbed for long the enthusiasm to investigate its validity in time and space. This is why Dr. al 'Alwānī advocates

3. SWT—*Subhānahu wa Ta'āla*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to Allah.

4. *khalīfah*: See footnote no. 40.

5. fiqh: Literally, understanding. Knowledge of Islam through its laws: science of the law of Islam. The term "fiqh" is sometimes used synonymously with Shari'ah. However, while fiqh is to a large extent the product of human endeavor, the Shari'ah is closely related to divine revelation and knowledge which is only obtained from the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

the need for a new approach that tackles the comprehension of the Qur'an in a holistic way.

Similarly, a proper reading of the Sunnah—the subject of Dr. al 'Alwānī's second paper—will be conducive to a better understanding of the aims of Muhammad's prophethood and, accordingly, to a rational implementation of the spirit of his Sunnah, in accordance with those sensible requirements of the time in which we live and the space to which we belong.

For his part Dr. 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl tackles the relation between the Qur'an and science, arguing that the Qur'an is not a science textbook, but that science-oriented data abound in it in the form of outright scientific facts or pointers. In his view, the Qur'an expounds a flexible and comprehensive methodology for dealing with these science-oriented data—a methodology that is not subject to the fluctuations of time and space and remains valid in every age and environment.

Suggestions for a new reading of the Qur'an and the Sunnah have been put forward from Islamic and other angles in the recent years. In this book Dr. al 'Alwānī and Dr. Khalīl, two well-known Muslim thinkers, put forward their views for a proper approach to these sources from within the Islamic framework.

This second edition includes a few additional matters in the way of *aḥādīth*, editing and other specifications which give greater cogency to the argument. In the meantime, the Publications List has been upgraded to include the latest publications of the Institute.

**THE QUR'AN: THE PRIMARY
SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE**

Dr. Ṭāhā J. al 'Alwānī

Islam, the Final Message, is a statement of mercy, light, guidance and healing for all creatures. Allah says: "We sent you not, but as a mercy for all created beings" (Qur'an 21:107). This Message and its Book, the Qur'an, will always guide humanity and remain inviolate against distortion and deviation. Allah has assured that:

No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise. (Qur'an 41:42)

The Qur'an is the Book of Allah the Eternal, and was revealed to humankind through Muhammad (SAAS),⁶ the Seal of the prophets, to be an admonition to all beings. Indeed there is no prophet after Muhammad, nor any revelation after the Qur'an.

There was a succession of prophetic missions in the times before Muhammad. Every nation was sent its own special messenger to address it in its own tongue and in the manner befitting it. Invariably, prophets responded to the needs of humans in the way that was most appropriate to humans:

And there never was a people without a warner having lived among them [in the past]. (Qur'an 35:24)

We sent not a messenger except [to teach] in the language of his [own] people, in order to make [things] clear to them. (Qur'an 14:4)

The earlier prophetic missions were accompanied by cosmic signs and physical miracles which aimed to astound people and induce them to accept the message. One prophet, for example, would raise a mountain above his people's heads to shade them, divide the sea so that people could walk along a dry passage between its two halves, cast his stick and it would change into a serpent, or put his hand in his pocket, then draw it out and it would be white but unharmed. Another prophet was sent a

6. SAAS—*Salla Allāhu 'Alayhi was Sallam*: May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. This prayer is said by Muslims whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, or whenever he is referred to as the Prophet of Allah.

wondrous she-camel as a sign and a symbol. A third prophet would bring the dead to life and heal the blind and the lepers. And when the people rejected their prophets after seeing the signs and miracles, they were afflicted with punishment and ruination. However, Allah has honored the Muslim Ummah and preserved it from doom and destruction.

When the pagans of Makkah asked the Prophet to cause springs to gush forth for them, or mount a ladder right up to the sky, or have a house adorned with gold, while condemning him for being human, God did not respond to their demands:

And they say: "What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him?" or "[why] has not a treasure been bestowed on him," or "why has he [not] a garden for enjoyment?" The wicked say: "You follow none other than a man bewitched." (Qur'an 25:7-8)

In another verse, He says:

And We have explained to man, in this Qur'an, every kind of similitude: yet the greater part of men refuse [to receive it] except with ingratitude! (17:89)

In yet another one, He says:

They say: "We shall not believe in you, until you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth. Or [until] you have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water. Or you cause the sky to fall in pieces, as you say [will happen] against us; or you bring Allah and the angels before [us] face to face. Or you have a house adorned with gold, or you mount a ladder right into the skies. No, we shall not even believe in your mounting until you send down to us a book that we could read." Say: "Glory to my Lord! Am I aught but a man—a messenger?" What kept men back from belief when Guidance came to them was nothing but this—they said, "Has Allah sent a man [like us] to be [His] messenger?" (17:90-4)

In the same *sūrah*⁷ (*al Isrā'*) Allah demonstrates His wisdom in not responding to the pagans' demands:

And We refrain from sending the Signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false. We sent the she-camel to the Thamud to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully. We only send the Signs as warnings [from evil]. (17:59)

God also makes it clear to Muhammad that the pagans' rejection of the message is not the result of a lack of clear signs and miracles but the influence of other factors. The Pharaoh of Egypt and his people were shown indubitable signs and miracles through the Prophet Mūsā (AS)⁸ yet they responded in the same way as the pagans of Makkah:

To Mūsā we did give nine clear signs. Ask the Children of Israel: When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: "O Mūsā, I consider you, indeed, to have been worked upon by sorcery." (Qur'an 17:101)

And Allah confirmed to Prophet Muhammad that the message did not need either a prophet other than him, or a sign and a Book other than the Qur'an:

And We have distributed the [water] amongst them, in order that they may celebrate [Our] praises, but most men are averse [to aught] but [rank] ingratitude; If We so wished, We could have sent a warner to every center of population. Therefore listen not to the unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness, with the [Qur'an]. (Qur'an 25:50-2)

This Final Message sought to convince people by asking them to read, listen to and understand the Qur'an so that they can believe its message. This would be enough to achieve the desired transformation in the hearts and minds of those who are willing to

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7. *sūrah*: a unit (chapter) of the Qur'an. Each *sūrah* is divided into a number of verses (*āyāt*) and the *sūwar* are characterized, according to the place of their revelation, as those of either Makkah or Madīnah.
 8. AS—'*alayhi al salām* or '*alayhim al salām*: Upon him/them be the blessings of Allah. Said whenever a prophet other than Muhammad is mentioned by name.

listen earnestly and witness the Truth. However, the response of the diehards was one of characteristic arrogance and shallowness:

Yet they say: "Why are not signs sent down to him from his Lord?" Say: "The signs are indeed with Allah; and I am indeed a clear Warner." And is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book which is rehearsed to them? Verily, in it is Mercy and a Reminder to those who believe. (Qur'an 29:50-1)

In His wisdom Allah has made reading the pivot of this Ummah's life. The first word revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Jibrīl was *iqra'* (read), to which the unlettered Prophet replied: "I cannot read." Then the angel gave him Allah's command:

Read in the name of your Lord Who created; created man out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood. Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught [the use of] the pen. Taught man that which he knew not. (Qur'an 96:1-5)

These *āyāt*⁹ which began the process whereby the Prophet received Revelation, contain two commands, each of which has both a Divine and a human aspect.

The first command is to read, that is, to receive, understand and proclaim the Revealed Message. In this command the Divine aspect is manifest in the sense that the Qur'an is the Word and Revelation of Allah and that it is for Him to reveal it to His Prophet so that it can be communicated in complete and accessible form to humankind who is expected to reflect, remember, understand and continually learn:

Be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to you is completed, but say: "O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge." (20:114)

The Qur'an goes on:

9. *āyah* (pl. *āyāt*): Literally, sign, indication, message; an aspect of God's creation; a section of the Qur'anic text often referred to as a "verse."

And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand and to remember. Then is there any that will receive admonition? (54:17)

Move not your tongue concerning [the Qur'an] to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to promulgate it. (75:16-17)

Thus it is for Allah to reveal, send down, collect and safeguard; and for humankind to read, learn and teach so that souls can become purified and cleansed. Only then will they become qualified to fulfill their appointed roles as vicegerents and apply the tools put at their disposal for the purpose of building civilization and producing the finest peoples ever evolved for humankind:

It is He Who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs. (62:2)

The second exhortation to read urges humankind to study the cosmos and decipher its affinities and its multifarious components, all ruled by Allah and intimating His Oneness. Indeed the Divine aspect is evident in all creation, including the creation of humankind itself: "[Who] created man out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood" (96:2). The relationships and stages from the clot to human, and between life and death, have their equivalents in all the other signs of the Divine Power at work in the orderly universe. The purpose behind them all is to prepare humans to acquire learning and promote civilization. This is clear evidence of the Mercy of Allah, whose glory is declared by all voices and tongues: "There is not a thing but that celebrates His praise" (17:44). Another purpose is the realization of the aim of existence and the wisdom of creation:

He it is Who has produced you from the earth and settled you therein. (Qur'an 11:61)

I have only created *jinn* and men that they may worship me. (Qur'an 51:56)

The two readings are interconnected and must occur simultaneously, and be in the name of Allah. Moreover, their interconnection will create a correspondence between Allah and

humans and ensures that He accompanies them in their endeavor as vicegerents and in the Hereafter: "And He is with you wheresoever you may be" (57:4). Allah is too Bountiful to leave humans alone in either of the two situations. Rather, He guides humans through their reading:

Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful, He Who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not. (Qur'an 96:3-5)

He knows humankind's weakness, the limits of its potential, the paucity of its knowledge and the relativism of its thought:

Should He not know—He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries [and is] well acquainted with them. (Qur'an 67:14)

For man was created weak [in flesh]. (Qur'an 4:28)

Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, [o men]. (Qur'an 17:85)

Thus Allah taught Adam all the names, He taught with the pen and He taught human beings that which they did not know, in order to enable them to fulfill the first reading. And He made everything subject to them, ordered them to travel through the earth, provided them with all the necessary faculties for observation, contemplation and understanding, and disposed the signs for them so that they may undertake the second reading.

Performing the two readings together is a prerequisite for well-being in this world and in the next. Abandoning or neglecting either of the two readings—or upsetting the balance between them—is a turning away from the Message of Allah. The unfortunate consequences of such an attitude are such as to render this life difficult and hard to live and the Hereafter an abode of dire constraint:

But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. (Qur'an 20:124)

In such a situation, humankind will thus be dethroned from its position as vicegerent and witness and placed in a state of subjection and disgrace:

While those who reject God will enjoy [this world] and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode. (Qur'an 47:12)

They are like cattle,—nay more misguided: for they are heedless [of warning]. (Qur'an 7:179)

Excessive preoccupation with the first reading without paying sufficient attention to the second may result in readers acquiring a mass of interpretations and reflections which may well be highly beneficial to their perceptions and feelings. On the other hand, however, it may lead to a sort of spiritual coma and an absorption in matters unrelated to the needs and functions of the human as *khaltfah* and builder of civilization. This may be tolerable, even understandable, in a limited, personal context, but it is extremely perilous if it occurs at the broader level of the Ummah or becomes accepted as part of its way of life, since this will lead to the neglect and rejection of the idea of the value of human endeavor. If such a behavior were to happen, it would lead people to adopt a distorted view of the meaning of life and the meaning and role of humans in their worldly existence—to the extent that they may come to see their very existence here on earth as a burden and strive to be relieved of it with the utmost dispatch, so that they can proceed to the Hereafter.

Some Qur'anic Features

The Qur'an was revealed in separate installments. Most of these were connected with specific situations and events, in order to prepare people's hearts, minds and souls to accept, understand and meditate on it at the time of its revelation. People would then be able to understand it and fix its words, meanings, guidelines and directives permanently in their consciousness. Then their hearts would be opened to receive it, their minds would comprehend it and their souls would be uplifted by it. The whole of life would

respond to it and be transformed into one of contentment and rectitude.

The Qur'an could thus be a guide, a proof and an authoritative source to the first generation and all later generations:

[They] say: "Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once? [It is revealed] in this manner that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and we have rehearsed it to you in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually. (25:32)

[It is] a Qur'an which We have divided [into parts from time to time], in order that you might recite it to men at intervals: We have revealed it by stages. (17:106)

The Qur'an was revealed as a challenge and a miracle that would overwhelm people's hearts and cause their souls to marvel, thus paving the way for them to accept the message and respond to it with all their being.

The Qur'an contains basic conceptions and general rules, guidance and advice valid for all human beings in every place and time and every realm of life. If it had dealt with minor details and issues relevant to the period of Revelation, it would not have acquired this unique quality of time-space universality, and later generations would have found in it a great many contradictions and inconsistencies. The specific issues that are dealt with in fine details are essentially the same objectives and rules applicable in every time-space situation and relevant to *'ibādah* (worship), inheritance and histories of earlier peoples and nations. And the Creator pledged to safeguard the Qur'an when He said:

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]. (Qur'an 15:9)

The purpose behind the command to preserve the Qur'an in its original language (and the prohibition of transmitting it in Arabic according to meaning or by paraphrase) was to ensure that the Book remained able to establish the way of life that Allah wished for humankind. There is a profound wisdom in the fact that millions of Muslims read and recite it in its exact original words

and in the form in which it was revealed, since this enables it to remain the foundation on which all Muslims agree at all times and in all places—however much their paths and inclinations might diverge. Hence the Prophet and the leading *fuqahā*¹⁰ who followed him were determined that every letter of the Qur'an should be first fixed in people's minds and hearts, and then transcribed. This same wisdom may have been behind the many traditions from the Companions of the Prophet reported by the *tābi'un* (the generation after the Companions) which prohibited the transcription of anything other than (or with) the Qur'an. All other things are related to it in a practical application—and understanding at the highest level—of its teachings. This is a situation that has never occurred with any other text, religious or otherwise.

As for the meanings of the Qur'an, the Prophet had the knowledge to give *tafsīr* (exegesis) of every *āyah*. However, he did not do so. It is narrated that 'Aisha (RAA)¹¹ said: "The Prophet of Allah only gave interpretations of the few *āyāt* from the Qur'an, which were taught to him by Jibrīl." These *āyāt* deal with matters related to *al ghayb* (the Unseen), together with some other questions that can be understood only through Revelation. Consequently schools of *tafsīr* proliferated and over the centuries Muslim intellectuals roamed through the Qur'an along many different routes. Some were successful, others were not. Concerning the Prophet's Companions who witnessed the Revelation while it was being sent down and knew the reasons for revealing abrogating and abrogated (*al nāsikh*)¹² *āyāt* as well as the factors linking these *āyāt* to real events, so much has been said that Imam al Ghazālī and Imam al Qurtubi remarked:

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10. *faqīh* (pl. *fuqahā'*): A specialist in fiqh (see note 5). Also can be a synonym for *'ālim* (pl. *ulama*) meaning Islamic scholar.
 11. RAA—*Rāḍiya Allāhu 'Anhu/'Anha* (or *'Anhum*): May Allah be pleased with him/her (or with them). Said whenever a Companion of the Prophet is mentioned by name.
 12. *al nāsikh* (abrogating): Those verses of the Qur'an whose contents have revoked a meaning in another verse, which is therefore called *al mansūkh* (abrogated).

It would be incorrect to assume that everything said about *tafsīr* by the Companions actually came from the Prophet for two reasons. One is that it is only established that the Prophet gave *tafsīr* of a few *āyāt*... This was also 'Aisha's view. The other is that they themselves differ in their *tafsīr* on various points that cannot be reconciled and cannot all have come from the Prophet of Allah—even though some may have done so.¹³

Implied here is the contention that the intellect should not be constrained by a limited understanding of the Qur'an that "imprisons" its meanings in a particular period or ties it to a given generation. Indeed, one of the most effective ways of bringing Muslims nearer to their Lord is for them to read the Qur'an and contemplate constantly on its *āyāt* and their meanings. Conversely, reading or contemplation without understanding is not permissible. The *fuqahā'* are agreed that understanding and contemplation with little reading is better than much recitation without thinking or contemplation. And by contemplation we mean here reciting the *āyah*, reviewing it, dwelling on its meanings in an attempt to know all the possible meanings it contains, and allowing one's thought to wander freely and unhampered through it in order to arrive at the hidden meanings that Allah reveals to certain people of intellect and understanding.

As a heavenly Revelation, the Qur'an is the most reliable source for all kinds of knowledge and an authentic guide for scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. It contains general scientific pointers and indicators that awaken and guide a person's scientific instincts. Unfortunately, however, many Muslims have long been under the impression that the Qur'an is primarily a source for past histories of nations, whose stories were told for the purposes of admonition and warning, in addition to being a repository of information about the Hereafter and its Unseen aspects as well as a fount of *fiqh* rulings.

Moreover, they have concentrated only on its miraculous quality of the inimitability of its poetic language, style, and literary

13. Shaikh Muhammad al Tāhar Ibn 'Ashūr, *Tafsīr al Taḥrīr wa al Tanwīr* (Tunis: al Dār al Tūnisīyah, 1984), 28-9.

elegance, representing the highest possible peak that Arabic is capable of attaining—a brilliant treatment of language in a manner previously unknown in Arabic style, while remaining within the bounds of expression permitted by the Arabic language. Indeed, studies of the Qur'an's miraculous qualities by the earlier generations were confined to almost these three aspects, as works by al Rumani, al Baqillani, al Jurjani, al Qaḍi Ayyad and other scholars show. The Qur'an came to be seen only as a source of fiqh and legislation, which restricted it to between 200 and 500 *āyāt* only. The rest were regarded as being included solely for the purpose of admonition and warning as well as edification. However, such restrictions, in addition to confining the miracle of the Qur'an purely to the level of rhetoric, curbs the enthusiasm to seek those aspects which are renewable and applicable to every time and place, and which testify to the Qur'an's miraculous nature.

Since we are seeking the path to a decent, contemporary Islamic life, to bring about a revival of Islam, we must be aware that the fiqh rulings account for only a very small part of the area covered by the Qur'an. We must further realize that Muslims need to use their intellect to understand and meditate on all the *āyāt* of the Qur'an, making it the primary source and basis of all knowledge in the areas of human *fiṭrah* (innate nature) and of social and applied sciences. Indeed, all Muslims with specialist qualifications in any field of knowledge must turn to the Qur'an for inspiration and guidance. A conscious and contemplative reading of the Book of Allah will enable them to amend, add to and reshape their store of knowledge. This will enable Muslims to rebuild the true Ummah of the Qur'an. However, before we can reach this stage we must first achieve a number of things:

To begin with, studies of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an need to be reviewed, seeking additional characteristics that the modern Muslim can add to those aspects of the Qur'an that are commonly regarded as miraculous. Areas of particular interest may include the effect of the Qur'an on human *fiṭrah*, its ability to create the finest form of human being and the finest form of family in any time or place, and its effect on society and the

establishment of nations. Muslim psychologists and sociologists would find this a profitable area to investigate. Likewise, Muslim applied scientists and other scholars can find valuable material in the Qur'an. Muslim thinkers and ulama¹⁴ can investigate its miraculous nature in areas of *ahkām* (rulings) and legislation capable of forming a sound basis for a decent human life, as well as systems that are just and easy to understand and to put into practice.

In the second stage, the aims behind the reading and interpretation of the Qur'an need to be reconsidered. This should go beyond the three aims of acquiring knowledge about earlier peoples and nations, the Hereafter and fiqh rulings. There are indeed also other essential aims, the most important of which may be:

1. To obtain general guidance on human affairs and the sciences that deal with individual and social behavior as well as with *fiṭrah*.
2. To acquire knowledge of the basic rules and guidelines for reforming society as well as its political system—in a manner consistent with its view of both human and social nature—and to endeavor to discover how this can be achieved.

We can classify all the social sciences under these two aims. Thus the Qur'an becomes the reliable reference and moral yardstick for all types of scientists and scholars, a reference whose contents will never become outdated. Specialists in the social and applied sciences, literature, etc. will find it a valuable source to consult on a daily basis. This means that Muslims must treat the Qur'an differently from the way they do at present, that is, merely

14. *'alim* (pl. *ulama*): Islamic scholar. One who knows, a scholar, a scientist. Commonly used for someone who has a thorough knowledge of Islam and its sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah. An important characteristic of an *'alim*, according to the Qur'an, is that he is deeply conscious of God and stands in awe of Him.

a book that they read when they wish to acquire Allah's blessing or find out about certain rulings.

Here we must tackle an important question regarding two forms of interpretation: *al tafstr bi al ma'thūr* (exegesis by means of traditions received from the Prophet and his Companions) and *al tafstr bi al ra'i* (exegesis by means of free exercise of the mind). This issue deserves attention because today's ulama and scholars will not find most of the time practices and traditions from the Prophet and the early Companions to support their conclusions and interpretations. Thus their pronouncements will be based on nothing more substantial than personal opinion. These authentic *ahādīth*¹⁵ state:

whoever interprets the Qur'an on the basis of his opinion, will have his place in the hell-fire¹⁶

whoever interprets the Qur'an without knowledge, will have his place in the hell-fire¹⁷

whoever interprets the Qur'an on the basis of his opinion is wrong even if his interpretation is right¹⁸

Now the question is: how can *al tafstr bi al ra'i* be resorted to when there exist *ahādīth* that clearly prohibit interpreting the Qur'an on the basis of personal opinion. Indeed, many of the Companions and the *ṭābi'ūn* would abstain from making interpretative pronouncements unless these were supported by the Sunnah. How, then, should we expect a committed Muslim researcher in any discipline today to apply his/her reason to interpret the *āyat* of the Qur'an? Although this is a big and

15. hadith (pl. *ahādīth*): The verbalized form of tradition of the Prophet Muhammad constitutive of his Sunnah. Also a collective term for all the *ahādīth*. A hadith narrative is divided into two parts: the *isnād* (chain of transmission) and the *matn* (content of the narrative). With capital H it applies to the sciences dealing with the Prophet's tradition in all its aspects. The scholars of hadith are called *muḥaddīthūn*.

16. Reported by Tirmidhi.

17. Reported by Tirmidhi.

18. Reported by Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud.

delicate question, its answer will become clear if one notes the following.

We have stated that there is a limited volume of *al tafstr bi al ma'thūr* from the Prophet. Wisdom would therefore seem to suggest that the Muslim intellect should be allowed to continue with its efforts of contemplation, reflection and deductions in order to understand the *āyāt* of the Qur'an.

Numerous books of interpretation have appeared throughout the ages and interpreters have adopted a wide variety of approaches to their deductions of the meanings of the Qur'an—in the *āyāt* containing rulings as well as others. Fakhr al Din al Razi (d. 606 AH) stated that if he wished to produce a camel-load of interpretations of *Sūrat al Fātiḥah* he would be able to do so. In fact, his *tafstr* of this *sūrah* that has come down to us comprises one large volume. Many ulama—like Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, al Qurṭubī, Ibn al Ṣabbagh and others—could have deduced a meaning from an *āyah* or created tens, even hundreds, of questions for examination on it. In such cases the new questions raised and examined issues related to cosmic laws, civilization patterns, etc.—which make the Qur'an unique among other revelations—would not have been mentioned earlier or explained by the Prophet himself. Nevertheless, other ulama and exegetes did not reject this approach to the Qur'an as long as the right conditions for exegesis were met. Under these conditions, interpretation, in the words of al Ṭayyibi,

should be in conformity with the actual words [of the text] and be free from artificiality, affectation, verbosity and prolixity.¹⁹

Therefore the interpretation that was considered *bid'a* (unacceptable innovation)—in the sense intended by the narrated *aḥādīth* prohibiting interpretation by personal opinion—could belong to one of the following categories:

19. Ibn 'Ashūr, op. cit., 12.

1. Interpretation based on personal opinion without a serious consideration for the genius of the Arabic language, its styles, the aims of the Shari'ah,²⁰ the question of abrogating and abrogated *āyāt* and without due attention to the reasons underlying the revelation of a specific *āyah* or *āyāt*. This kind of casual interpretation is pure guesswork and contributes nothing to the advancement of Truth.
2. Interpretation which includes thought and contemplation, but of a defective kind because of the failure by the aspiring interpreter to take into account all the factors connected with the *āyah*. In this case the exegete draws his/her conclusions from the apparent meaning of the words—or even an aspect of this meaning—and takes this to be the only meaning intended.
3. The last category is when the interpreters are followers of a particular school of thought, schism, or tendency which causes them to interpret certain *āyāt* of the Qur'an to suit the views of their trend without taking linguistic meanings and/or the circumstances of revelation into consideration. For example the Bayaniah group interpret the *āyah* "this is a *bayān* [a plain statement] to men" (3:138) as referring to their leader Bayan bin Sam'an al Timimi who was killed in 119 AH. The Qadyaniyah interpret "giving glad tidings of an apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad" (61:6) as referring to Ghulam Ahmad Qadyani. The Batiniya claim that the Qur'an has an outward and a hidden meaning, the outward meaning being the one understood by Muslims, while the hidden one provides support for their own collected superstitions derived from bygone philosophies, ancient religious beliefs, or the delusions of their various leaders. To prevent anyone from refuting them they attribute all their nonsensical claims to "hidden meanings" in the Qur'an. Leading scholars of the Ummah have nevertheless been able to refute this tendency and expose its evil aims.

20. Shari'ah: The collective name for all the laws of Islam, including Islam's whole religious and liturgical, ethical and jurisprudential systems.

Then there exist what are called "signs"—also known today as "symbolism." For example, an *ayah* might be understood as having a symbolic meaning, that is, representing something which does not spring immediately to mind and which is not directly conveyed by the language. Let us consider the following:

And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in the *masājid* of Allah, Allah's name should be celebrated?—whose zeal is [in fact] to ruin them? (Qur'an 2:114)

Here some might claim that *masājid*²¹ might be interpreted as meaning "hearts" since hearts are the locations of subjection to Allah. This is a kind of interpretation by opinion in which the meaning is totally unsupported by linguistic factors. However, there are three methods of interpretation which may be considered acceptable:

1. Restricting it to the understanding of the obvious meanings of the words.
2. Deducing concepts implied by the obvious meanings of the words. These would be reached by capable interpreters after careful thinking, and would be based on linguistic considerations in conjunction with usage, and would not be estranged from the aims and purpose of the Qur'an.
3. When the interpreter makes use of the intellectual, scientific and cultural resources of his own time and applies them to the *āyāt* to see how compatible they are with the pointers of the Qur'an. He can then decide how these disciplines can be rectified in the light of the meanings indicated in the *ayah*: "And he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the Message but men of understanding" (Qur'an 2:269).

When a modern Muslim economist considers the words of Allah: "In order that it may not make a circuit between the

21. *masjid* (pl. *masājid*): Place for worship usually meaning mosques.

wealthy among you" (Qur'an 59:7), and then puts forward an idea never previously raised by Muslim scholars regarding the formation and distribution of wealth, and the way in which this can be best done for the public good, he/she should not be opposed on the grounds that such a statement has never been made before and does not have the backing of Hadith. However, the *uṣūliyyūn*²² would maintain that it is not permissible to deduce a meaning outside the original (hence *aṣli*) comprehension of the Arabs at the time of Revelation. Their position, too, is based on much thought but is open to discussion.

Al Shatibi says:

When something from the "illiterate's Shari'ah" (*ummiyyat al shari'ah*)²³ is accepted as applying to its people—the Arabs that is—rules are built on it. One consequence of this is that many people have gone too far in invoking the Qur'an in that they have extended its scope to include all the natural sciences, known to contemporary and earlier generations in addition to linguistics, logic, semantics etc. But this does not tally with earlier practices. The venerable forefathers were the best versed in the Qur'an, its sciences and contents; yet they were never heard to pronounce on anything apart from proven commandments and precepts related to the Hereafter. Yes, the Qur'an encompasses sciences which the Arabs knew and were familiar with, though in a manner which astounds men of understanding and cannot be grasped by the more powerful intellects.²⁴

Al Shatibi's remarks are based on the assumption that the Qur'an is no more than a source of legislation and that it is a Message to an illiterate nation—the Arabs. Hence Qur'anic concepts and style are determined by the Arabs' own ability to understand. Many people consider this attitude to be one of this venerable *uṣūli*'s most serious errors, since the Qur'an was revealed as a Book of Guidance to the whole world in every time and place. The Arabic language, with its breadth and richness, is an apt vehicle for

22. *Uṣūliyyūn*: Derogatorily rendered as "fundamentalists" and wrongly as "puritans," the correct word is "purists" as it refers to those who insist on adhering to the traditional interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and thus are not prone to engage in *ijtihād* (see footnote no. 27).

23. *ummiyyat al shari'ah*: Designed for and can be understood by illiterate people.

24. Ibn 'Ashūr, op. cit., 44.

carrying its meanings. This does not mean, however, that the Arab mind is the sole authority on all these meanings, linguistic or otherwise. In addition, the Qur'an contains much that the Arabs did not previously know or understand and would not be possible to list in such a short study. Allah says:

Such are the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto thee: Before this, neither you nor your people knew them. (11:49)

The Arabs at the time of Revelation were addressed in a way that they were able to understand. Later, understanding broadened and new circumstances and influences revealed in the text a number of additional meanings which were not constrained by language limitations. This, in fact, is an important aspect of the Qur'an's miraculous nature; namely, that through the ages a single text—properly understood and containing the same words and letters—should be able to respond to different needs. A hadith narrated by al Tirmidhi on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib states: "The wonders of the Qur'an never cease." To say that it is not permissible to go beyond the linguistic meanings conveyed by the text is tantamount to asserting that the Qur'an's wonders are finite and thus bound by time and space. The fact that the forebears did not mention a particular thing with regard to a certain *ayah* or *ayāt* does not mean that it is forbidden to interpret them; this simply means that their interpretation focused on areas in which they were experts and in which interpretation was needed. It clearly does not mean that others are forbidden to explore areas that they themselves did not explore.

The statements and assertions on this issue point to the fact that the relationship between the Qur'an and the various sciences exists at different levels:

1. There are sciences which are taken from the Qur'an. These include *tawḥīd*,²⁵ *tashrī'* (legislation) and *uṣūl* (sources of jurisprudence).
2. There are other sciences that are dependent on it, such as language sciences and *balāghah* (rhetoric).
3. There exist sciences indicated in the Qur'an, which help in understanding it and increasing one's faith in it. This category would include many of the humanities and social sciences as well as some astronomical and applied sciences.
4. Finally, there are sciences that bear no relation to it whatsoever.

It is imperative, therefore, that energies be galvanized to reform the methodologies of Islamic thought and rebuild the Islamic cultural system by the establishment of up-to-date Islamic social sciences and humanities. Throughout, the aim should be to find the best possible way of relating such disciplines to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet in accordance with a specific plan that could be based on four principles.

The first and most important of these principles should be to restore the Qur'an to the Islamic cultural scene, end the division between it and the Muslim mind, and make it the contemporary Muslim's prime source of knowledge—just as it was in the past when our ancestors used to consult it to obtain sound, precise knowledge about life, humankind and human institutions.

25. *tawḥīd*: Unization of God. The act of affirming that Allah is the One, the absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord and Master of all that is. Traditionally and simply expressed, *tawḥīd* is the conviction and witnessing that "there is no God but God." *Tawḥīd* is the essence of Islam. It is also that which gives Islamic civilization its identity, which binds all its constituents together and thus makes of them an integral, organic body which we call civilization.

The second principle should be to establish a methodology for understanding the Prophet's Sunnah and using it to build a modern Islamic culture and civilization.

The third consists in drawing on the Islamic legacy by applying sound methodologies for understanding it, using it to build our modern culture and learning the necessary lessons from it.

The fourth principle is to address contemporary Arab thought by examining ways of understanding, using and benefiting from it.

The strategy to adopt should give appropriate priority to the methodologies for understanding and applying the Qur'an. In the course of this task, a Qur'an File will need to be created to concentrate on research and studies in:

1. Ways of understanding the Qur'an and making it the modern Muslim's primary source of culture, knowledge, science and guidance.
2. Issues related to *tafsir*, *ta'wil* (interpretation of implied meanings), classification and indexation of the Qur'an, its relationship to the earlier and modern Muslim sciences and the latter's affiliation to it.
3. Other issues which aim to (a) restore the Muslim intellectual's ability to apply the Qur'an in a sound manner and (b) reinstate the Qur'an in its rightful position at the center of modern Muslim culture, knowledge and civilization. Then the Muslim intellect will be reformed and the Qur'an will reassume its role of enlightening it.

The envisaged Qur'an File has been inaugurated by Shaikh Muhammad al Ghazālī's book *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al Qur'an*,²⁶ to be followed by seminars and other studies covering the different aspects of the subject. Denoting a new awareness, the book endeavors to bring the Qur'an into the realistic context of a

26. See the Publications List at the end of the book.

changing world. Of course, no one should labor under the supposition that the book—one in a series of studies and papers which seek to correct a great many misconceptions about ways of approaching the Qur'an and Islamic subjects—answers all the questions and presents solutions to all the problems. Yet, it is the first step towards establishing a modern Islamic methodological awareness. The thrust should be towards reviewing and evaluating our Islamic legacy from its human perspective.

This study, as well as future works on the subject, does not seek to produce a break with the prevailing inherited elements of Islamic thought. On the contrary, it accepts those parts of the legacy that can be authenticated and respond positively to all Islamic trends and schools of thought, particularly those which developed before the ages of decadence, backwardness and intellectual stagnation.

This should work towards satisfying the Islamic obligation of making the Qur'an more accessible to intelligent, rational-minded people. The book consists of a number of critical introductions—reflecting the number of different subjects covered—whereas the questions and answers attempt to establish a Qur'anic awareness consistent with the principles of a methodology that does not blindly accept every prevailing notion without criticism or analysis.

Already the Qur'an is a source from which scholars have been able to add to their own specialist fields of knowledge. Equally, it has provided the basis for their comprehension of the world, while their ways of applying it have varied according to the historical development of human thought. A person who reads the Qur'an as an organic whole differs from the selective reader who isolates individual *āyāt* from their respective contexts. Similarly, a person who regards it as a collection of stories, laws, inducements and threats differs from the reader who sees it as a comprehensive encyclopedia covering cosmic and dynamic existence, the means by which he or she can acquire an objective perception of the universe, its movements and its relationships across the continuous, ever-changing spectrum of time and space.

The Qur'an defines its own specific qualities and explains that it embodies a complete Revelation which responds to all situations throughout all the ages—past, present and future:

That which We have revealed to thee of the Book is the Truth, confirming what was [revealed] before it: for Allah is assuredly—with respect to His servants—Well Acquainted and Fully Observant. Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong their own souls; some who follow a middle course; and some who are, by Allah's leave, foremost in good deeds; that is the highest Grace. (35:31-2)

These *āyat* clearly show that the Qur'an constantly responds to the situations and needs that arise through the ages in a self-renewing process:

Furthermore I call to witness the setting of the Stars. And that is indeed a mighty adjuration if you but knew. That this is indeed a Qur'an most honourable. In a Book well-guarded. Which none shall touch but those who are clean. (56:75-9)

The Qur'an, through which Allah has related stories of our forefathers, has another unique quality: it is infallible and a sacrosanct Divine book:

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]. (15:9)

It is thus an authoritative record for future generations to whose affairs it will be relevant:

And before you also the apostles We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration. If you realize this not, ask of those who possess the message. [We sent them] with clear signs and Books; and We have sent unto you [also] the Message; that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought. (16:43-4)

It is a Book that holds sway against the distortions and corruptions of the earlier books:

We certainly gave Mūsā the book aforetime; but disputes arose therein. Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from your Lord, [their

differences] would have been settled between them; but they remained in suspicious disquieting doubt thereon. (41:45)

Furthermore, the Qur'an has many other qualities. We can discern them in its organic, methodological unity, particularly after the Book was arranged so that the sequence of its *āyāt* was no longer dictated by the period of Revelation (a time when they were fragmented and limited by the specific occasions on which they were revealed). These qualities can also be discerned in the fact that the Qur'an is divinely preserved, and that it renews its contribution to human affairs by uncovering its treasures according to the requirements of time: it is the master of time, place and change since it provides a total awareness of the universe, its movements and its relationships. It also contains an awareness of the whole of existence, including knowledge of the words of Allah. Hence the past, present, and future generations are not in any way capable of attaining a comprehensive understanding of the Revelation. Instead, they each take from it as required by the civilizational, social and historical conditions as well as the modes of thinking of their own time.

The importance of Shaikh al Ghazālī's book is not in providing a new interpretation but in its attempt to free contemporary Islamic thought from a multitude of deficiencies and shortcomings before directing it towards the pursuit of knowledge and sound methodology. This is to be achieved in an Islamic society which we do not claim has already absorbed all the new changes and developments that are taking place in the world, but which has begun to do so. In any case, the concept of universalism in thought and aim is an Islamic quality. It was Islam that established the first worldwide religious movement when it described the Prophet as the Seal of the prophets and the Qur'an as the Seal and Master of the Divine books. Moreover, by extending its realm from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the Indian Ocean in the East, Islamic civilization became the first civilization to overcome the dichotomy between East and West and unite civilizations and races across the central part of the ancient world.

Universalism is deeply ingrained in our Islamic structure; hence it is incumbent upon us to consider the crises of world civilization

and the solutions offered by Islam, with a methodological awareness which puts the achievements of contemporary human thought into a single context and demonstrates Islam's supremacy over the whole of humankind's history, despite the fact that the text of the Qur'an has never been altered or modernized.

Here it is worthwhile to touch upon the requirements of a contemporary methodological awareness. This cannot be achieved by simply belonging to a certain age or time while neglecting or ignoring the physical surroundings. Growth and development are not just the accumulation of contemporary achievements and the grafting of large numbers of the latest innovations to the structure of the old social system, but are a qualitative change in a society's economic, social and ideational structure. This requires a new approach to the Qur'an and a fresh awareness to meet the new reality. The concept of a contemporary society does not mean the continuation of the old society and its thought in the context of future times. On the contrary, it refers to the historical changes that a society must have undergone in order to qualify for the designation contemporary. These changes will enable society to rediscover itself, which for us also means rediscovering the Qur'an within the framework of this changing world.

Considered from this angle it will be clear that many of our Arab and Islamic societies see themselves as contemporary in the sense that they are here in the present time. However, they do not actually live in a contemporary situation; they do not possess the present worldwide cultural awareness with its critical, analytical mentality and its aspirations to acquire methodical knowledge and solve today's problems. Arab and Islamic societies have a tendency to cling to their past and their traditional thought while concurrently existing in the modern international age. This dichotomy has given them a feeling of contemporaneity combined with an inability to respond to the situation that would enable them to attain contemporary universal awareness. Hence we find that some intellectual leaders in these societies are still producing material based on traditional thought and are attempting to recreate the past within the present without exploring the nature of historical and social change worldwide. They are content to

develop the themes of our righteous forebears in terms of the *ijtihad*²⁷ that the latter practiced in their age and applied to their issues. At the same time, such intellectual leaders ignore the historical difference between the two periods and fail to see the need for *ijtihad* in and for the modern age. Instead of being models of *ijtihad*, the righteous forebears have become models to be imitated.

We need to break this mold, and attempt to identify the historical developments that have obstructed the advancement of *fiqh* in its wide sense which covers political and constitutional laws as well as that of economic and international relations. We need to define the way in which these historical developments have affected the positions of the *a'imma*²⁸ and their commitment to the branches of *fiqh* as the *muḥaddithūn*²⁹ were committed to the Sunnah issues in matters relating to *sanad*³⁰ and the transmission of *aḥādīth*.

Such historical overview may help restore *fiqh* to its rightful position from which history has excluded it, while exposing the conflicts, such as the dichotomy between the authority and the *ulama*, *fiqh* and Sufism, as well as between those who studied the Qur'an without any reference to the Sunnah and those who studied the Sunnah without any reference to the Qur'an. Such conflicts should not have occurred under the Islamic system since there already exists—by Allah's grace—a single focal point for all the

27. *ijtihad*: Considering that the accepted juridical sources of Islam are valid for all times and places, *ijtihad* may be described as a creative but disciplined intellectual effort to derive legal rulings from those sources while taking into consideration the variables imposed by the fluctuating circumstances of Muslim society.

28. *imām* (pl. *a'imma*): Community leader in religious as well as in lay matters, deriving his legitimacy from commitment to and knowledge of Islam. Also interpreter of Islamic law. In a restrictive sense the term refers to anyone leading the faithful in *ṣalāh* in a mosque or elsewhere.

29. *muḥaddithūn*: See footnote no. 15.

30. *sanad*: (pl. *asānīd*): Chain of reporters who transmitted a specific hadith or tradition. *Al Musnad*: Any collection of *aḥādīth* in which they are arranged according to the reporters who related them—e.g., *Musnad Abu Dāwūd*.

Ummah's Islamic activities and trends, namely one supreme, contradiction-free Qur'an. This should make possible a meeting of Divine Will and human effort for the Qur'an to assume fully its role of creating a complete and balanced civilization whose benefits will be shared by Muslims and all beings:

And We have sent down to you the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy and glad tidings [to believers]. (Qur'an 16:89)

**TOWARD A PROPER READING
OF THE SUNNAH**

Dr. Ṭāhā J. al ‘Alwānī

From the beginning of Islam, the Sunnah has been invoked and interpreted in accordance with a framework of rules known to scholars and *mujtahidūn*.³¹ Its authority has been second to that of the Qur'an. In fact both are inseparable as the Sunnah explains and clarifies the Qur'an and, most importantly, applies its teachings and methodology.

Hence the authority of the Sunnah is an essential part of Islam—a fact never disputed by any of the early Muslims. Among later generations, however, there were people with little knowledge and understanding who could not differentiate between the Prophet's Sunnah, as preserved in authentic and reliable *ahādīth*, and chronicles and anecdotes about earlier times. They did not know to what extent such historical or anecdotal reports could be regarded as authoritative; how valuable they were as a means of increasing humankind's knowledge; or whether they were still to be regarded as authoritative even when they were contradicted by rational thought or tangible evidence. These ill-informed people imagined that the discussion of this methodological and philosophical matter was a dispute concerning the Sunnah itself. They considered the *sunan*³² (norms and practices) to be related accounts, and the accounts to be mere reports, and therefore most of the dispute centered on the reports. They failed to see the tremendous difference between the Sunnah as examples and guidelines set by the Prophet, and the ways in which it was transmitted. Furthermore, they did not see the differences between the methods of reporting the Prophet's actions, deeds, and sayings on the one hand, and the reporting about other people on the other.

The result of this lamentable confusion is that the dispute turned into one concerning the authority of the Sunnah itself—a contention which occupied inordinate space in books devoted to the studies of *uṣūl* and Hadith. The energy so used could have been invested in the study of the correct methodology for understanding the Sunnah, interpreting it and deriving lessons

31. *mujtahidūn*: One who exercises *ijtihād*.

32. *sunan*: See footnote no. 1.

from it, thus enabling Muslims in every place and age to organize their thinking and way of life on the basis of its teachings.

Those unnecessary and deliberate quibbles regarding the authority of the reports in general—and *ahād*³³ in particular—had other negative, very serious and damaging effects: they deepened the differences and polemics between Muslims, and cast their shadow on research and Islamic studies in this field, which reduced many works to abstract discussions that had no positive, intellectual, or practical impact. Controversies, like those concerning the status of the Sunnah in relation to the Qur'an and the Sunnah's abrogation of the latter and vice versa, raged on to absorb Muslims in unnecessary lengthy and repetitive criticism and checking of the authenticity of historical reports, narrators and chains of authority. If one were to look at the limited number of works devoted to the methodologies of studying, analyzing and understanding the texts, and of presenting the *ahādith* in relation to time-space, environment and reality, then compare them with the stupendous efforts and numerous volumes devoted to the study of *asānid*, one would realize the origin and nature of subsequent problems and confusion.

Likewise, a great deal of energy went into producing undoubtedly valuable works in the field of legislation. Such works could have met the Ummah's needs more adequately had they covered all aspects of the Sunnah and not dealt only with the legislative aspects.

Because the Sunnah as a whole represents the stage of guidance through the implementation of the Qur'an's methodology in a historical and geographical context characterized by particular ideological, economic and social circumstances, the study of methodologies of understanding the Sunnah is considered to be one of the most important and necessary aspects of the studies of *uṣūl* and Hadith. This was the period when Islam was comprehensively put into practice, when the Qur'an itself played a leading role in translating the ideals of Islam into reality and in making this

33. *ahād*: Those *ahādith* based on the testimony of one narrator only.

period of history an era which posterity could refer to and strive to emulate. Thus, the Sunnah represents the highest, most precise, best and truest form of implementing Allah's Message. It is a realistic, learned, and all-rounded embodiment of the Qur'an's methodology. This was probably behind the Creator's wisdom to preserve the Qur'an in the form in which it was revealed and safeguard it against any corruption. The Prophet himself showed a strong determination to preserve every single letter of the Qur'an and adhere to every single one of its vowels and pauses. Hence the continual warning that every letter of the Qur'an should be transmitted in the form in which it was revealed, and the prohibition that any *āyāt* should be transmitted in a paraphrased form.

This was not true of the Sunnah. Although the Sunnah was preserved, the aforementioned restrictions were not imposed on it. Moreover, the Prophet did not have it written down as was the case with the Qur'an. Nor did he review it with Jibrīl as he reviewed the Qur'an with him. The reason for this difference of approach was to enable the Sunnah to remain a practical experience at the highest level of human capability as practiced by the Prophet who responded to the Qur'an in a comprehensive and all-embracing manner. Indeed, he applied and embodied its methodology in all matters of daily life and worldly activity: when preaching, teaching, making changes around him, prohibiting, enjoining, advising, counseling, guiding, judging, giving *fatāwā*³⁴, instructing, disciplining, fighting, peacemaking, concluding treaties, trading, exchanging messages, marrying, divorcing, building, demolishing, traveling...

The Quran's methodology followed and monitored the Prophet's actions. Many of its *āyāt* evaluated the manner in which this methodology was applied, and, when necessary, criticized, analyzed, corrected and directed it. This was because its application is bound and conditioned by human limitations as well

34. *fatwah* (pl. *fatāwā*): A juristic opinion given by a *'ālim*, *mufīi*, or *mujtahid* on any matter pertinent to Islamic law.

as by the time-space factor. Hence Allah said: "Remain, then, as conscious of Allah as you can."

When someone other than the Prophet applies the Quran's methodology, there is a greater need for the application to be evaluated in comparison with that of the Prophet, because people other than the Prophet himself are more susceptible to subjective personal impulse and spontaneous influences. Thus, in the case of worship, for instance, people used to follow the Prophet's example only. They were required to follow his example rather than imitate him, because following an example is a conscious activity using the intellect, which requires a general awareness of all factors surrounding the example to be followed.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought has always considered the understanding of the Sunnah, its comprehensive, exhaustive analysis and the proper approach to using it as a source of Islamic knowledge and culture to be among the most important matters of concern to Muslim scholars today. This is especially so since defining and explaining the bases and sources of Islam—as well as methods of understanding them—are among the fundamental prerequisites for the reconstruction of the Ummah's knowledge, culture and civilization. To achieve this goal, the Institute decided to undertake several actions:

Firstly, it aimed to shift the focus of *uṣūl* and Hadith studies from matters which have already been conclusively dealt with to those which are still unresolved and in need of solutions. In this respect the Institute considers the question of the authority of the Sunnah to have been conclusively dealt with, as no Muslim who believes in Allah and His Messenger can afford to deny this authority. The Institute has published *Hujjiyat al Sunnah* (The Legal Authoritativeness of the Sunnah) by the leading contemporary *uṣūl* specialist Shaikh 'Abd al Ghani Abd al Khaliq. It is a valuable academic study on this subject, one of the most important and comprehensive works in the field, and one which the Institute regards as the final word on the matter.

In the meantime, the Institute has endeavored to draw the attention of researchers in this field to the use of information technology in making the Sunnah more accessible to scholars and researchers in various subjects. The Institute has already lent its support to many scholars working towards this aim.

Furthermore, the Institute concerned itself with the classification of the Sunnah according to subject, using any appropriate scientific methodologies likely to help us to achieve our aim of making the Sunnah a source of knowledge in the social sciences, instead of it being a source limited to fiqh alone.

Finally, the Institute initiated action to invite prominent scholars to write works concerning various aspects of the Sunnah and its major role in reconstructing Islamic civilization. The eminent scholar Shaikh Muhammad al Ghazālī already made a well-received contribution: *Al Sunnah bayna Ahl al Fiqh wa Ahl al Hadith* (The Sunnah between Fiqh Experts and Hadith Specialists).³⁵ The book suggests methods of understanding the Sunnah and shows the differences between those who are concerned with the structure of the *asānīd* and reports, and those whose interest lies in understanding the Sunnah and deriving lessons from it. This distinguished scholar is, in the opinion of the Institute, too experienced and knowledgeable for anyone to dictate to him how to write his books or check their publication. However, much criticism was made about some of the details he gave and examples he used in his book; so much so that the main message of the book was almost drowned by the clamor about these minor details.

The book was aimed primarily at those people who do not have a basic knowledge of Shari'ah and research methodology, and whose knowledge of history, *sīrah*,³⁶ fiqh and Arabic is not adequate to enable them to understand the Hadith correctly. Many people do come across Hadith literature and read through it without understanding its nature or the reasons behind the

35. Cairo and Beirut: Dar al Shurūq, 1989.

36. *sīrah*: Biography of the Prophet.

Prophet's words or deeds reported in it, or without grasping the general context of the *aḥādīth*. Their understanding is therefore deficient and confused, and leads them to develop and adopt a distorted knowledge of Hadith which they pass on to people at large. Such people go as far as claiming that the Sunnah takes precedence over the Qur'an and can abrogate it. Moreover, if they are confronted with more authentic *aḥādīth* which contradict the ones they invoke in their argument, they do not understand the nature of the contradiction, the ways of evaluating such *aḥādīth* or even the correct methods and rules of understanding the *aḥādīth* put before them.

The book was also aimed at scholars and researchers concerned with the study of the Sunnah, advising them to devote at least some of their attention to proper methods of understanding it; for there is no Sunnah without proper understanding, and there can be no fiqh, Islamic civilization or true knowledge without Sunnah.

When the Institute became aware of the confusion surrounding the message of Shaikh al Ghazālī's book, it requested Dr. Yūsuf al Qaradāwī to prepare two detailed books, one on the methods of understanding the Sunnah and the other on the Sunnah as a source of knowledge. The first has already been published by the Institute under the title: *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al Sunnah al Nabawiyah* (Methods of Understanding the Sunnah); and the second will come out in the future—insha'Allah.³⁷

In the endeavor to restore the Sunnah to its positive and active role in shaping contemporary Islamic life, the greatest need seems to be for Islamic higher education to include the methodological

37. Within its policy of directing research on the Sunnah towards a correct understanding of it, the Institute held an international seminar in cooperation with the Royal Society for the Study of Islamic Civilization, based in Amman. **The Prophet's Sunnah: Its Methods for Building Knowledge and Civilization**, was held in November 1989 during the seventh General Conference of the Society and was attended by 126 scholars, professors and researchers. Among the most important items discussed in the seminar were Shaikh al Ghazālī's and Dr. al Qaradāwī's two published books on the Sunnah (mentioned earlier) as well as other papers written for the seminar.

approach to the Sunnah in their syllabi of Hadith studies, instead of teaching topics which have already been dealt with conclusively.

It is hoped that Muslims will increasingly take a greater interest in understanding the Sunnah. They need to attain and disseminate a better appreciation of the rules and conditions of such understanding, and to develop a keen interest in knowing the reasons why misunderstanding over the Sunnah has arisen. They need to appreciate why overlapping issues have led to a crisis in understanding and how this crisis helped to include *'ilm al kalām* (scholastic theology) in the debate on the authority of the Sunnah.

Three questions require in-depth research if a comprehensive, methodological approach to the understanding of the Sunnah is to be established:

1. The Conditions of Understanding

If the problem with the Sunnah is a question of understanding it correctly, then what are the factors of disagreement and confusion over it at different times in history? What are the qualities and qualifications required for its proper study and understanding? Is commitment to Islam a prerequisite for understanding? How can one overcome one's lack of comprehensive insight? How can we deal with the crisis decisively and conclusively? How can we resolve the question of overlapping issues, which generated confusion and which, in turn, in the opinion of many researchers, led to the debate on the authority of part—if not all—of the Sunnah? A debate which became an excuse for arguments and bragging, although Islamic history shows this had never been an issue among earlier Muslims!

2. Differences and Divisions

How and why did the Ummah become divided into different sects and groups? How have differences in the interpretation, understanding and transmission of the Sunnah and over its authority contributed to the emergence of these various groups?

How has the Sunnah been used as a weapon between the various Islamic sects and groups? How did the phenomena of Hadith fabrication, incomplete understanding and the use of the Sunnah for deriving legislation only arise? What effect did these phenomena have on the emergence of various groups and what is their connection with the appearance of specialized technical questions in the study of *ahādīth* and analysis of their chains of narrators? How did all these matters become part of the Sunnah studies discussed earlier by *uṣūl* scholars and *kalām* theologians? Such matters include the authority of the Sunnah, its status in relation to the Qur'an, its abrogation of certain *āyāt*, its explanation and delimitation of a general statement in the Qur'an, the Prophet's *ijtihād*, the argument over it as well as the appraisal of the "spoken Sunnah" and certain passages of the Qur'an dealing with many of these issues.

What effect have these phenomena had on the Muslim mind from the intellectual and educational points of view? What is the historical context which brought about these issues? What is their intellectual significance, and what impact have they had hitherto? What are the best ways to deal with them in modern Sunnah studies and to draw up syllabi for such studies? How can lessons be drawn from these issues so as to attain the best vision likely to unite the Muslims and motivate the Ummah to rebuild its civilization?

3. The Time-Space Factor in Understanding the Sunnah

The *uṣūliyyūn*, like the first generation of Muslims, recognized the particular historical and geographical context of the Prophet's deeds and words, the human nature of his experience. They therefore set rules for taking these factors into account. Is it possible for the specialists to draw up some guidelines to help others take these factors into account when reading various types of *ahādīth*? In that case, what is the procedure to be followed and the role of modern Hadith studies in defining these guidelines?

Knowledge of the essential differences between the minor matters dealt with by the *faqh*, the intellectual matters dealt with

by the thinker, the philosopher and the *mutakallim* on the one hand, and the social phenomena dealt with by the social scientist on the other hand, requires a variety of ways as well as a range of methodologies for understanding and dealing with the Sunnah. A hadith dealing with a minor issue which is part of the *faqh*'s field is different from a hadith dealing with a general social phenomenon, the interpretation of which must take into account all the aspects of that phenomenon which social scientists would examine in their analysis of it. How can we rid ourselves of the chronic division of the Ummah which misuses the same hadith to support opposing ideas and how can we do away with the fanatical adherence of each group to its own beliefs? How can we restore the bases of a holistic view of Islamic thought and thus escape from this vicious circle, especially now that it has become easier to collect the Sunnah and invite scholars to carry out academic research, hold debates and establish joint institutions for this purpose?

The Role of the Sunnah in Tackling the Problems of the Ummah

The Islamic world in general, and the Arab world in particular, suffer many shortcomings which have contributed to the contemporary crisis of Islamic thought. This crisis manifests itself in different forms, the most important of which are:

1. The disintegration of ties between the various sections of the Ummah; the prevalence of the spirit of conflict in the intellectual, social and sectarian, as well as political aspects; the revival of ideologies which divide the Ummah, or the invention of such ideologies when they do not exist.
2. The collapse of other social and regional stabilizing factors; the prevalence of selfish, partisan and factional attitudes, of anxiety about the future and hopelessness concerning the present, of apathy and lack of enthusiasm for any positive action and the predominance of attitudes based on reaction to events—an

attitude which precludes debate in favor of conflict, while leaving the initiative to others.

3. The lack of objective awareness of the real nature of the Ummah's social problems and their connection with history. The rise of the shallow, narrow, emotional and impulsive opinions over the holistic, analytical viewpoints; and the Muslim mind's readiness at this time in history to accept anything, without scrutiny or for the wrong reasons. There exist also a host of other negative phenomena.

So how can we employ the Sunnah so that it will once again help govern the Ummah's affairs and promote the soundness of mind and the clarity of vision necessary to produce a convincing answer for the Ummah's problems? How can it be used to motivate the Muslims to act and to mobilize and rally their social reserves around the Islamic aims which will bring life and hope to the Ummah, while inspiring the latter to seek the cultural alternative and practical, social and intellectual program which will restore its identity and strengthen its feeling of belonging to a deeply rooted and noble civilization and history?

The Danger of Too Literal an Interpretation of the Sunnah

At the time of the Prophet, people implemented the Sunnah in their daily life in all its aspects, and by doing so they understood the Qur'an clearly and completely. The influence of this Qur'anic miracle became apparent in the creation of an *ummatah wasatan* (community of the middle way), that is a witness and a guide to others, one endowed with perfect goodness and the ability to meet and overcome any challenge. With the passage of time, however, the people's proper understanding of the Sunnah declined, whereas the dictionary-based culture began to take precedence over the other tools of interpretation until it became, for some, the only means possible. This gave rise to a literal approach which relied heavily on dictionary-oriented interpretation, so much so that this dictionary-based trend did not take into account the time-space factor, thus lending strength to the factors which impeded the

renaissance of the Ummah by contributing to the confusion, argumentation and conflict. They also were instrumental in reducing Islam to a collection of antiquated images, forming many of their conclusions on unlikely foundations, and thinking that the exact circumstances which brought about a hadith could be repeated many times—which is impossible in real life. How then can modern Sunnah specialists deal with these matters and protect the Muslim mind from their dangers? How can the Muslim mind be rescued from the effects of those who nearly succeeded in emptying the Islamic message of its content and doing away with the all-embracing cultural and civilizational role? Admittedly, such people reduced Islam to no more than an individual and behavioral matter, and restricted its vision and frame of reference to minor, superficial concepts, and ritualistic adherence to the letter of the religion. Such an approach is not conducive to the advent of a truly Islamic society, the unity of the people, or the building of civilization.

The Role of the Sunnah in the Ummah's Revival

Undoubtedly, our Ummah is today in acute need of a comprehensive plan for renaissance which will restore it to its position of a community of the middle way as a vanguard for humanity. This cannot be achieved unless Muslim societies meet the necessary prerequisites, the first of which is the establishment of an intellectual and cultural blueprint for Islamic renaissance.

The Ummah today draws on two cultures: the inherited culture which bears the characteristics of the historical era and environment in which it was formed, and an alien imported culture. The Muslim mind is passive towards these two cultures—content to consume their products and unable to make any original contribution of its own.

Connecting the aims and means of social change to the Ummah's Islamic way of life will greatly help to mobilize the Muslim world's energies so as to bring about the cultural and intellectual transformation it needs, and will assist the Ummah to

shoulder this heavy burden. To emerge from the current crisis of Islamic thought and attain the awareness and vigor necessary for meeting contemporary challenges and restoring the Ummah's cultural and intellectual position of yore, we must revisit the immutable sources of Islam, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah, and study them again in detail, carefully, and with a contemporary Islamic outlook. Such an outlook needs to be clear-sighted and comprehensive enough to take into account all the influencing factors and dimensions; it has to define goals, explain the basic principles and devise the methods capable of meeting pressing demands and reconstructing the constituents on which the Ummah is founded.

The Qur'an provided our forefathers with an excellent intellectual framework which enabled them to understand, interpret and analyze the rise of nations and the laws governing the emergence and decline of civilizations. It helped them to examine facts in depth in a wholly objective fashion. It was a rational approach that consistently and indisputably dealt with realities—as opposed to fantasies; an approach which took into account the dynamics of history, elucidating the internal tensions in societies, how and why they came about, how events can be interpreted, how lessons can be learnt from them and how they can provide pointers to the future and enable appropriate action to be taken before anticipated events should occur.

Conclusion

The Prophet's Sunnah, his way of life as well as that of his close Companions represent the objective, practical embodiment of that intellectual framework. It is only when contemporary Islamic thought addresses the Qur'an with a sound, rational frame of mind in touch with the requirements of our time, seeking a comprehensive methodology capable of organizing and guiding people's lives in harmony with the rest of creation, that the solution to the great intellectual crisis will be within reach.

By the same token, a correct reading of the Sunnah and the aims of the Prophet's implementation of the message of the Qur'an as well as his making it a vivid reality in the lives of people, will put an end to the darkness of ignorance, hatred, conflict and wasted energies in our Ummah. Only then will contemporary Muslims be able to overcome their self-inflicted disabilities, see through all the intellectual and cultural intricacies of the modern man and woman, and offer humanity true guidance and welfare based on a correct and comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings. Such understanding should be able to distinguish the immutable principles from the adaptable rules and pinpoint the aims and the means of humankind as Allah's vicegerent on earth.

**THE QUR'AN AND MODERN
SCIENCE: OBSERVATIONS
ON METHODOLOGY**

Dr. 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl

Anyone who reads the Qur'an carefully and endeavors to attain a proper understanding of its attitude to science will find a great number of *āyāt* which cover many aspects of science. They fall into four categories which correspond to four fields of scientific knowledge. The first category deals with matters related to the reality of science, its scope and aims, which are known as the philosophy of science. The second deals with the methodology of discovering scientific facts. The third concerns the laws that apply in the various fields of science, particularly the natural sciences. The fourth permits those laws discovered through experimental methodology to be applied by humans, in their capacity as vicegerents of Allah on earth, to the task of developing and improving life. These are known as applied sciences.

There is no doubt that there is a very close relationship between each of these categories. Philosophy of science analyzes the aims of science, while methodology provides a *modus operandi* for discovering facts: that is, the *sunan* and laws that govern the cosmos, the world and life, and organize their movements in time. In their turn, these laws and systems provide people with the formulae which enable them to explore the wondrous structure of creation. Thus, these become the means of which people make use for the progress and welfare of humankind, means to free themselves from the drudgery of day-to-day earthly existence, and become more able to satisfy those spiritual needs which distinguish them from all other creatures. They can thus perform more of the duties required of them in their capacity as vicegerents, and fulfill their role of bringing civilization and well-being to the world.

It is a truism that the Qur'an was not revealed as a science book or any other kind of textbook. It is equally true that some modern thinkers insist on ascribing to its *āyāt* certain scientific meanings and interpretations which were never intended by their Author. In reaction, other thinkers have gone to the other extreme and insist that the Qur'an has no connection whatsoever with any scientific fact. What is undeniable, on the other hand, is that when the Qur'an deals with the scientific message, it applies all the four categories mentioned in a manner that leaves no scope for discussion.

It is self-evident that Qur'anic and scientific data should correspond—in their general sense, and outside the realm of relativities and variables—and it is obvious that there should be no contradictions or barriers between them. After all, they come from the same source—Allah, the Originator of the universe and its cosmic laws and systems. Moreover, the human race is a concerned party in the law-making and Qur'an-revealing process in his capacity as Allah's vicegerent on earth, and as the hand that endeavors to build civilization for the sake of Allah. The Qur'an emphasizes the essential nature of the link between the Qur'anic message and the cosmic laws. For how can the human race perform its role on earth within the framework of the teachings of the Qur'an unless it begins by trying to understand the world and find out about its laws and systems.

Here we should point out that modern science does not reject or cast doubt on religious truth, as was the case in past centuries. It recognizes that it does not have the last word on a subject that is far greater than it appears to be. Having done so, it also affirms—within its limited scope—that human life has no *raison d'être* if it is stripped of that major dimension which extends beyond the bounds of matter and motion. Science has now returned to the situation in which it functions in harmony with religion. This is the great revolution that has taken place in the philosophy of science as a result of recent discoveries, particularly in the natural and nuclear sciences, and in people's understanding of the way the human brain operates. In this respect research has broken—while exploring the core of the atom—the "material barrier" and revealed the spiritual dimensions underlying the structure and composition of the physical world. Here science and religion meet—afresh—in numerous instances.³⁸ So what do we find if we take a necessarily brief look at the relationship between the four aspects of science and the data contained in the Qur'an?³⁹

38. Refer to my book *Al 'Ilm fi Muwājahat al Mādīyah* [Science Face to Face with Materialism] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al Risalah, 1986).

39. For further details, refer to my book *Madkhal ilā Mawqif al Qur'an al Karīm min al 'Ilm* [Introduction to the Qur'an's Attitude towards Science] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al Risalah, 1983). Here the reader will also find full Qur'anic

1. The Philosophy of Science, Its Aims, and Islam's Basic Principles

The philosophy of science is concerned with examining and analyzing the objectives science aims to achieve and their relationship, firstly, with people's civilizational endeavors, and secondly, with their vision of the cosmos, life and the world in which they live.

It appears that scientific research and the experimental methodology it adopts are necessities of Islamic life, not luxuries or secondary factors. This is because they are intimately linked to the activities of the Ummah, the nature of its mission on earth and its overall beliefs about the cosmos, life, the world and the human race.

Here, it would perhaps be useful to mention some basic principles of the Islamic life and world view which dictate the use of scientific methodologies, the laws and systems uncovered by established scientific truths and the ways in which they are applied. Such an approach plays an important role in strengthening these principles, asserting the fundamental elements of the global Islamic world view, linking them more practically to the real world and enabling them to make an active contribution to civilization. There are, in our opinion, four basic principles calling for scientific activity:

a) *Istikhlaḥ* or *khilāfah*⁴⁰

Humankind's carrying of the Divine trust (*amanah*) constitutes its *khilāfah* or vicegerency to God on earth. The principle of *khilāfah* put forward in the Qur'an and the Sunnah is one of those

textual evidence subject by subject.

40. *khilāfah*: The institution of man as vicegerent of Allah; the institution of government as continuation of the worldly government of the Prophet. *Khilāfah* (pl. *khulafā'*): Vicegerent of Allah in space-time.

principles which science upholds and enables to become a reality. Muslims are Allah's vicegerents or *khulafā'* on earth so that they can develop it, bring civilization to it, meet its challenges, create the conditions for a want-free, secure life which is more conducive to higher achievements—that is, aspiring towards the Creator.

People cannot carry out their functions as vicegerents, or obtain sufficient guarantees and assistance to enable them to achieve their objectives of uninterrupted progress, unless they use scientific research methodologies in order to discover the *sunan*. Only then can they "plug in" to their reserves of energy and achieve a greater harmony between themselves and their environment. Without this, the principle of *khilāfah* is no more than a theory or dogma operating in a vacuum.

b) *Tawāzun* (balance)

Tawāzun or balance between humankind's spiritual and material needs is one of the basic principles of Islamic life and thought. It is an issue that is deeply ingrained in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, where we find that it takes on a number of aspects and forms.

We have long ignored one of the most self-evident facts in this area, namely that Allah subjected the earth to humans in a manner compatible with their role in it. It is a blatant contradiction—totally rejected by Islam—that although Allah created humans in a particular form and subjected the earth to them in order for them to satisfy the requirements of their makeup, other heavenly religions proclaim the separation between the spiritual and the material. In so doing, they deviate towards the latter, with the result that barriers are erected between the demands of the humans' makeup and the fruits and benefits of the earth that have been subjected to them.

The fact is that there can be no Islamic life as such without a proper balance between the two sides of a person's make-up. However, Islam's objective is to operate within the realm of the real and create a balanced human being capable of action, change

and motion; free from tension, deviation, or repression. Yet, this balanced vision—which no other school or religion in the world accepts with the same degree of universality and commitment—cannot be implemented in the absence of scientific methodologies, facts and applications.

c) *Taskhtr* (subservience)

This is another basic characteristic of the Islamic vision of the cosmos and life. Here, too, without a shadow of doubt, science is needed before this vision can become reality and realize its noble potential. According to the Islamic view, nature and the universe have been made subservient to humans. Allah has laid down the laws, systems and capacities in a manner befitting the basic function of humans as vicegerents on earth and in accordance with their ability to interact positively and effectively with nature.

In connection with this interaction, Islam's aim is to propose a "middle way" methodology. It informs humankind of the principle that nature is subject to the service of human ends. At the same time, however, it lays down the parameters of interaction between the two sides of a person's makeup by the establishment of values, principles and conventions. These are designed to produce the greatest possible degree of innovation and to instill such civilizational qualities as are most compatible with humankind's ambitions, ethics and status in the cosmos.

If it fails to make use of science's potential—that is, the methodologies, facts and applications of science—no Islamic society can ever implement the principle of *taskhtr* and transform it into a historical reality.

d) The Necessary Link Between Creation and the Creator

Finally, science must be used to establish one of the most important principles of the Islamic world view in particular and that of religion in general. This is the necessary link between the

wondrous system of creation and the existence of the Creator. Science is the tool that reveals and clarifies this link. Many have written about the miracle of creation and many scientists and scholars have spent their lives seeking to arrive at one of the main incontestable truths in the history of science: that is, that creation must have a Creator. This issue has been decisively resolved and there is no scope left for questioning. Since the cosmos is governed in its functioning by organization, precision, harmonious motion and constructive interlinkage, it must originate from a supernatural, all-powerful and directing Will.

Scientific research, therefore, is a necessity of Islamic life as long as it continues to perform the critical function of exploring the secrets of the cosmos, the world and life. Moreover, it leads to the Maker of the universe in the most convincing manner, and, as it turns to the Creator, it coincides with the act of worship itself.

2. The Methodology

In this context the Qur'an expounds a methodology for the discovery of the laws of the universe. It is flexible and comprehensive and is not subject to the fluctuations of time and space, since it is strictly a method or a tool for research and exploration. It thus transcends relative changes and remains valid in every age and every environment. The Qur'an exhorts people to have an insight into the reality of their existence and their place in the cosmos. To do this, they are invited to use their senses so as to observe their surroundings from the ground on which they stand to the horizons of the psyche and the cosmos: what a good attitude for humankind to reach the higher spheres of *imān*!⁴¹ The Qur'an also assigns the senses a basic responsibility for every step taken by the Muslim in the fields of research, contemplation, knowledge and experience.

41. *imān*: The conviction, or certainty, that Allah is indeed the One and only God and that Muhammad is His last Prophet.

The Qur'an has gone a step further, telling humans to make use of all their senses to receive unlimited data so that their perceptive power can register, discriminate, accept, or reject them with a view to reaching the Truth which underlies the unity of the laws of the cosmos.

The intellect and the senses are all jointly responsible for exploration, examination, inductive reasoning and decision-making. Human beings will be put to the test on the basis of this responsibility, because they are essentially different from other living creatures. There are numerous *āyāt* in the Qur'an which stress time and again that it is the hearing, the sight and the feeling-in-the-heart (*al fu'ad*) that jointly give human life its value and its uniqueness. If people activate these powers extensively and make full use of them, they will reach the peak of their scientific and religious superiority; such elevation will make them masters of the universe, thus deserving their status as vicegerents of Allah on earth. On the other hand, if they deactivate these powers, they will have chosen the meanest status for themselves—an inferior status that Allah did not predestine for them when He endowed them with hearing, sight and the feeling-in-the-heart.

There are also about fifty other *āyāt* which urge human beings to activate their intellect. The intellect is the Allah-given key for them to penetrate the realm of faith in Him. Further *āyāt* invite human beings to ponder deeply, perceptively and responsibly upon all the phenomena in the world around them.

Whatever is said about contemplation also applies to acquiring knowledge, which is an intellectual step beyond contemplation and its outcome. Acquiring knowledge gives people a greater awareness of their surroundings and a deeper perception of the dimensions of their being and relationship with the cosmos. It sharpens their perceptions at all times and ensures their readiness to tackle, in a responsible manner, every issue, phenomenon, or problem that presents itself to them.

The Qur'an stresses the methods to be followed—proof, argument, intelligent debate—in order for a person to arrive at

valid results founded on induction, comparison, balance and examination, and supported by the basis of agreed external data as well as the strength of the intellectual and logical powers of those people who have greater competence in this field.

It is highly significant that the Qur'an uses the word *'ilm* (knowledge/science) to indicate (a) the *dīn*⁴² that Allah taught to His prophets; (b) the *sunan* with which Allah enables the universe to function harmoniously; and (c) the great truths which are contained in its *āyāt*. *'Ilm* also occurs as an indication of the revealed religious values. Thus *'ilm* and *dīn* acquire identical connotations in Qur'anic language. The words of Allah teach us this fact and enable us to perceive the broad, interlinked senses which He wishes *'ilm* and *dīn* to convey rather than the meanings derived from the uninformed opinions and prejudices of the positivists. The various declensions and derivatives of the word *'ilm* occur in more than 750 *āyāt*.

The Qur'an stresses that a completely scientific approach must be adopted in studying the physical and metaphysical phenomena, and declares its categorical rejection of everything that has a negative effect on such an approach: prejudices, uninformed opinions, magic and superstition. Such unscientific practices are all forms of deviation from the true way which the *dīn* requires humankind to follow, along the straight path, in order to reach its goals. As we all know, the straight path is the shortest distance between two points; thus any deviation from it will increase the distance and hardship, and could deflect travellers to the extent that they may never reach their goals. The Qur'an repeatedly asserts a clear and obvious fact, namely that nothing can come of prejudice but worthlessness and blindness, and that the only alternative to truth is error.

3. Facts

The third dimension offered by the Qur'an consists of a mass of

42. *dīn*: The normative or perfect religion which Allah ordained for humankind and which includes faith, ethics, law, devotion, institutions and judgment.

facts and systems in the various fields of science: astronomy, geography, botany, biology, human physiology. In this respect, many modern thinkers and/or exegetes adopt one of two conflicting positions. The first position relies entirely on the use of modern scientific data to interpret the Qur'an's *āyat*, with the resulting methodological errors whereby partial data is applied to produce a general ruling, variable data is used to produce an invariable ruling and relative data is used to produce an absolute ruling. The weakness of this approach is that, if these partial and relative scientific data should change—and this, as the scientists themselves will confirm, is their natural propensity—then the proponent of this position would suffer a form of mental anguish. While attempting to avoid such a fate, the second position also falls into the trap of erroneous thinking by totally rejecting scientific data.

The nearest attitude to a sound methodology is a middle position which the Qur'an teaches us to adopt in every area of life. We should not allow ourselves to become fully committed to science with its variable data; yet at the same time we should not totally reject every interpretation in which science plays a part.

Capable contemporary exegetes of the Qur'an must be able to use their intellect and experience in their own field of specialization in order to understand the nature of the relationship between the two sides of the equation: the Qur'anic *āyah* and the scientific thesis. In addition, they must make use of certain modern trends in Qur'anic interpretation that have recently been developed. These trends use Qur'anic terminology and imagery to understand its meaning and content—an approach known as *al tafstr al bayani li al Qur'an*. This method contains objective guarantees which protect interpreters from exaggeration or error in their attempts to obtain the intended meanings of words and phrases. This balance between scientific specialization and *al tafstr al bayani* enables exegetes to strive towards revealing the intended meanings of the scientific *āyat* in the Qur'an.

There are some scientific facts that have become definitive laws or indisputable, self-evident truths: for example, the role of the

winds in producing rain; the role of gravity in the movements of the solar system; the anatomical stages of the foetus, or changes in the ratios of gaseous substances as their distance from the earth's surface increases or decreases. Apart from these, there are also many other facts the scientific nature of which the Arabs were not familiar with at the time of the Revelation of the Qur'an. Interpretation of the Qur'anic *āyāt* which deal with and confirm these facts has relied—at least in recent centuries—on self-evident scientific facts and, in doing so, has revealed one of the Qur'an's many miraculous aspects.

There are scientific facts that convey more than one aspect of reality. However, all these aspects exist within a single, flexible framework and it is sometimes useful to cross-reference them to other Qur'anic *āyāt* in order to understand their significance in relation, for example, to other *āyāt* which confirm that the miraculous structure of the heavens is held together and protected from disintegration by a system.

However, theories which are still at the discussion and evaluation stages and—unlike the "proven" laws and self-evident truths—have not yet been established, should therefore be treated with great caution and not be applied by the exegete to throw light on any aspect of a given *āyah*. Where constantly changing scientific data are concerned, it is essential to proceed with care and avoid the possible errors of (a) a complete commitment to, and (b) a complete rejection of the scientific interpretation. A complete commitment to the scientific interpretation will impair proper understanding, awareness, and further investigation at all levels. On the other hand, complete rejection will undermine the ability to understand and will erect barriers between modern humankind and an aspect of the information contained in the Qur'an.

Scientifically-oriented data—devised as proofs to lead humankind to attain belief in Allah—are to be found in abundance throughout the Qur'an. Here it is worth noting that not everything propounded by the Qur'an on a scientific topic is intended to be a miracle for the coming generations. Nor was it necessarily

unknown at the time of Revelation. There are two types of *āyāt*: One type conveys information and directs attention to the excellence of Allah's creation—the cosmos, the world and life. This type presents facts and phenomena that were as well known at the time of Revelation as they have been in every other age. The other type consists of pointers to scientific facts, systems and *sunan* not known at the time of Revelation, but which science has revealed through the ages. This is the type that is usually called the scientific miracle and wondrous nature of the Qur'an.

One should also note that the Qur'an does not contain all scientific facts since it is not a science textbook. However, it reveals some facts and provide pointers to a host of others. It creates a psychological climate for researchers, thus leaving people the freedom to discover a far greater mass of facts for themselves. But the Qur'an does underline that one can follow these discoveries only through religious faith and commitment.

4. Application

When considering the fourth aspect of the relation between the Qur'an and science, one observes that the Qur'an frequently urges one to make use of scientific facts and discoveries in order to improve life and raise the quality of human civilization at every level. This is a broad, flexible and constant position which calls on people to benefit from the scientific data available everywhere in time and space, and apply them to the civilization of the age in which they live. If this happens, and if there are developments in the known scientific facts and the state of civilization, then the Qur'an can be seen to appeal effectively to every generation and inspire it to bring about further changes on the basis of new facts and new situations.

Thus, however one looks at this fourth dimension of the relationship between the Qur'an and science, one finds that the Qur'an constantly—and unconditionally—calls upon the community of believers to make more and better use of scientific facts, discoveries and formulae. Does the Qur'an not call upon the

Muslims to prepare for their enemies the strength with which they can defend themselves and protect their role on earth (Qur'an 6:80)? And does this call not reflect a broad, flexible attitude that can be applied in every time and place, combining immediacy with universality and the temporary with the permanent?

The Qur'anic chapter "The Iron" also stresses the need to make use of this mineral which is so crucial in the arenas of both peace and war, specifying, however, how it should be used or processed (Qur'an 57:25). Could there be any greater proof of the Muslim's link with the earth than the naming of a whole *sūrah* after one of its most important and crucial minerals? What could be a more convincing indication of approval than the above *āyah* for applying science and technology, and developing the creative and civilizing tendencies that Islam decrees is an essential component of the behavior and ethics derived from faith, which a scientist must possess in his heart? Furthermore, this *āyah* presents iron as a great blessing bestowed by Allah upon His servants. Yet at the same time it points to the two possible applications of iron: "material for mighty war" (when iron is used for making arms and military preparations), and "benefits" (which people can derive from this mineral in every area of their peaceful, constructive activities). What further need can there be to stress the growing importance of iron through the ages in matters of both peace and war? In our own age it has become one of the most important instruments for welfare or destructive purposes at the service of humankind.

While dealing with iron, and as we have just come across a whole *sūrah* named after it, let us remember the *āyāt* from *Sūrat Saba* which mention Allah's blessing upon prophet Da'ud when He taught him how to soften iron. This was in the context of civilizational endeavor. Dhu al Qarnain is another example: addressing the oppressed, and seeking to protect them from a forthcoming invasion, he said:

"[The power] in which my Lord had established me is better [than tribute]: help me therefore with strength [and labor] I will erect a stronger barrier between you and them: Bring me blocks of iron." At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, he said: "Blow

[with your bellows]." Then, when he had made it into a [red] fire, he said: "Bring me, that I may pour over it, molten copper." Thus were they made powerless to scale it or to dig through it. (Qur'an 18:95-7)

The Qur'an draws a unique picture of the harmony between man, nature and the supernatural. It portrays the balance between the subjection—and conversion—of material forces to the service of humans and the worship of Allah. It shows the extraordinary contrast between the aesthetic, and practical aspects of nature. It also shows a clear counterpoise between the strength and practical potential of people on the one hand, and their position in relation to the rest of existence, their weakness and their perpetual need for Allah on the other. There is a constant Qur'anic reminder of the need to guard people's capability against the tendency to stray from the fulfillment of their material and natural needs:

We bestowed Grace aforetime on Da'ud from Ourselves: "O you Mountains! Sing you back the praises of Allah with him! And you birds [also]!" And We made the iron soft for him, [commanding], "Make you coats of mail, balancing well the rings of chain armour, and work you righteousness; for be sure I see [clearly] all that you do." And to Sulayman We made the wind [obedient]; Its early morning [stride] was a month's [journey], and its evening [stride] was a month's [journey]; and We made a font of molten brass to flow for him; and there were Jinns that worked in front of him, by the leave of his Lord, and if any of them turned aside from Our command, We made him taste of the penalty of the blazing fire. They worked for him as he desired, [making] arches, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and [cooking] cauldrons fixed [in their places]: "Work you, Sons of Da'ud, with thanks! But few of My servants are grateful!" Then, when We decreed [Sulayman's] death, nothing showed them his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept [slowly] gnawing away at his staff: So when he fell down, the Jinns saw plainly that if they had known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in the humiliating Penalty [of their task]. (34:10-14)

In another *sūrah* one reads:

He said: "O my Lord! Forgive me and grant me a Kingdom which, [it may be], suits not another after me: For You are the Grantor of Bounties [without measure]." Then We subjected the wind to his power, to flow gently to his order, whithersoever he willed,—as also the evil ones, [including] every kind of builder and diver—, as also others bound together in fetters. "Such are Our Bounties: Whether you bestow them [on others] or withhold them, no account will be asked." (38:35-9)

The Qur'an goes on to state:

To each We gave Judgment and Knowledge; it was Our power that made the hills and the birds celebrate Our praises with Da'ud. It was We Who did [all these things]. It was We Who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful? [It was Our power that made] the violent, [unruly] Wind flow [tamely] for Sulayman, to his order, to the land which We had blessed; for We do know all things. And of the evil ones were some who dived for him, and did other work besides; and it was We Who guarded them. (21:79-82).

These *āyāt* are but a few among many examples which demonstrate the supreme civilizational integration between humans, nature and the powers of the Unseen, as they interact creatively in response to Allah's will. Here the cosmic energies operate in ordained harmony for the service of human beings who turn to Allah in all their actions in worship, praise and gratitude for all these bounties so that they deserve the status for the sake of which life on earth was brought into existence:

I have only created Jinn and men, that they may serve Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. (Qur'an 51:56-7).

Here we meet two of the chosen servants of Allah: Prophets Da'ud and Sulayman. The vast powers of nature were made subservient to them, as were the energies of the Unseen which no time limit or physical-barrier can confine, and before which science ultimately shows impotence. All these powers—iron, the wind, molten brass, the jinn—were made subservient so that they could function at the command of the responsible, God-conscious people and help them fulfill their civilizational purpose by developing industry and the arts. We can see in these Qur'anic stories clear references to iron and brass that are manifestly applicable to us today, in the twentieth century, and are vital for modern civilization, or indeed any civilization wishing to build, industrialize and excel in everything. We can also see that Allah did not merely give prophet Da'ud iron; He also taught him how to soften it and make its use possible. Moreover, one should not forget the reference to the wind, which geographical research has

shown to be a crucial factor in developing and destroying life on earth.

These *āyāt*, among many others, provide us with a decisive answer to those who allege that the only function of the Divine religions is to lead their followers into a state of isolation and passivity, and persuade them that the world is an archway to be merely passed through rather than developed. For these people religion is "the antithesis of civilization" and faith is "an obstacle to creativity, invention and innovation." They contend that the relationship between humankind and its Creator leads to inertia, and claim that only the positivist schools have a dynamic role in developing and improving life. This concept is totally unacceptable.

In this study, only a few of the hundreds of examples were given which prove that the Qur'an totally rejects defeatism and passivity, a behavior conducive to making religion and progress implacable enemies. Indeed, to be God-conscious does not mean to withdraw from the usual processes of life, nor to perform deeds which are utterly devoid of utilitarian value. The whole matter of religion from the Islamic point of view is to enhance the very quality of the practices of living. On this account, Islam remains embedded in the very processes of life and history.

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ON THIS BOOK

For too long now, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, great sources of strength, purity, knowledge and inspiration for the Ummah, have not been adequately tapped. Skirting their peripheries or overdwelling on one or two of their multifarious facets and tributaries has done a disservice to the immense potential of the fountainhead, while denying the Ummah—indeed the whole world—innumerable benefits from them.

Now that the Ummah is becoming increasingly aware of its own problems as well as latent powers, and yearns to revive its leading role in the forging of history and civilization, the issue of drawing on the wellspring becomes more relevant and urgent. Revisiting these two sources is no longer a scholastic, academic, nostalgic, or escapist indulgence, but a great journey of discovery that promises untold rewards.

Paradoxically, the journey through the resplendent pages of the Qur'an and the Sunnah to a time and place in the past should yield a more mature awareness of the dynamics of social and historical change and a human being's role on earth, honing and sharpening the Muslims' capacity to deal with the demands of the present moment and the challenges of the future.

Suggestions for a new reading of the Qur'an and the Sunnah have been put forward from Islamic and other angles in the recent years. In this book Dr. al 'Alwānī and Dr. Khalīl, two well-known Muslim thinkers, contribute their views for a proper approach to these sources from within the Islamic framework.

