

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

We seek forgiveness from Allah

We stand witness to Allah that there is no God but Him

That Muhammad (saww) is his slave and messenger

Interpretation of Some Verses of Surah Ali Imran

Surah Ali Imran 3:3 and 3:7

- In Surah Ali Imran 3:3, Allah swt has stated that:

نَزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنْزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ

"He has sent down upon thee the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it,
And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel."

- From this verse it is clear that any violation or insult of the Quran is not only a violation of the Quran alone, but also that of the other books which precede it (مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ), given that Quran confirms the revelation of all preceding books. Hence the desecration of Quran is not just the desecration of the Holy Book of the Muslims but it is also an insult to the Holy Books of Christians and Jews.

Muhkamat and Mutasyabihat

- In Surah Ali Imran 3:7, Allah swt has stated:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخْرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ

"It is He who sent down upon thee the Book,
Wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others are ambiguous."

- Here Allah swt has differentiated between the verses that are *muhkamat*, and those that are *mutasyabihat*.
- *Muhkamat* verses are those which are clear and decisive. They relate to the fundamentals of religion, such as the oneness of Allah swt. Any man of average intelligence can understand and follow these verses.
- On the other hand, *mutasyabihat* verses are those which can have several possible meanings. These verses have been composed in subtle and profound diction and style and carry implications other than the literal meanings.

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For example the *Hand of Allah* in **Surah Al Fath 48:10**:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

"Lo! Those who swear allegiance unto thee (Muhammad), swear allegiance only unto Allah. The *Hand of Allah* is above their hands ..."

And the *Wajh of Allah* in **Surah Ar Rahman 55:26-27**,

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ
وَيَبْقَى وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

"Everyone that is thereon will pass away;
There remaineth but the *Wajh* of thy Lord of Might and Glory."

Rasikhuuna fil 'Ilm

- In **Surah Ali Imran 3:7**, Allah swt has further elaborated on these *mutasyabihat* verses, and has stated:

فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ

"As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation. And none knows its interpretation, save only God and *those firmly rooted in knowledge* ..."

- This verse makes it clear that the interpretation of *mutasyabihat* verses is known only by Allah swt and by those firmly rooted in knowledge. Those *firmly rooted in knowledge* are none other than Rasulullah (saww) and his Ahlul Bait (as).
- Some people claim that only Allah swt knows the true meaning of *mutasyabihat* verses. However, this claim is incorrect for the verse clearly states that apart from Allah swt those who are *deeply rooted in knowledge* understand the meaning of these verses. Also it is hard to comprehend as to why Allah swt would reveal something, the meaning of which is known only to Him. Thus, it is only rational to assert that the immaculate ones close to Allah swt have been endowed with this knowledge by the Almighty.
- Note, the claim that '*Allah swt and those who are deeply rooted in knowledge*' know the true meaning of *mutasyabihat* is based on the reason that the *waqaf* is after the word of '*Ilm*'. While the claim that '*only Allah swt*' knows the true meaning of *mutasyabihat* is based on the reason that the *waqaf* is after the word of *Allah*.

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Following is the analysis of both claims. We try to explain that the claim to put *waqaf* after the word of *Ilm*, is more rational than after the word of *Allah*.

First analysis:

The verse is telling us about *Ilm*. In that verse, the word **يَعْلَمُ** has been used before *Rashikhuuna*, which makes sense if we put the *waqaf* after **في العلم**.

وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ
يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا

Second analysis:

If we put *waqaf* after the word of *Allah*, and then continue the verse from *Rashikhuuna*, then it should read *Rasikhuuna fil-Iimaan* rather than *Rasikhuuna fil-'Ilm*. This is because the following word is **آمَنَّا**, which is telling us about '*iimaan*'.

وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْإِيمَانِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا

However, that is not the case. The verse still uses *Rasikhuuna fil-'Ilm*, as follows:

وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا

Thus, if we put the *waqaf* after *Allah*, then we can see that it does not make sense, since the previous word is telling us about *Ilm*, while the following word uses *Iimaan*.

This fact is also emphasized by a hadith from Imam Ja'far Shadiq (as),

"We are the *Rasikhuuna fil 'Ilm* and we know the *ta'wil* (the explanation and interpretation of those verses)". [*Tafseer Nur Tsaqalain*]

Alif Laam Meem

- The first verse of *Surah Ali Imran* is: **الم**. These are letters of the Arabic alphabet known as *huruf muqatta-at*. The definite meaning of these letters is only known by Allah swt, His last Prophet and the household of the Prophet.
- There are six Surahs including *Ali Imran*, which begin with this verse. The others are *Al Baqarah*, *Al Ankabut*, *Ar Rum*, *Luqman*, and *Sajdah*. According to the Holy Imams, these letters are a means of reaching the higher realms of knowledge. According to some commentators, there is a strong bonding between the *huruf muqatta-at* and the Quran.
- Someone once asked Imam Ja'far Shadiq (as) about the *sifaat* or attributes and properties of Alif in the verse **الم**. The Imam said that the first property of *Alif* is *Al-ibtida*, which means 'origin' or the beginning. Note that *Alif* is also the first letter of the Arabic alphabet.
- The Imam then said that the second property of *Alif* is *Al-astiwa*. This means *Aadil*, i.e. not inclined to injustice. We know that one attribute of Allah swt is that he is *Aadil* and just.

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- The third property of *Alif* is *Al-infiraad*, which means unique or one. This property implies that Allah swt is *One and Unique*. It is also noteworthy that the numerical value of the letter *Alif* (ا) in Arabic is 1 (*one*).
- The fourth property of *Alif* is *Ittisal ul-Khalq billah*. This means that the creation of Allah swt depends on and is attached to Allah swt. The word *faqir* in Arabic means the one who depends on someone or something. Thus, the creation of Allah swt is in a sense the *faqir* of Allah swt since it depends on its Creator. On the other hand, Allah swt is *Ghani*, which means that he is not dependent on anyone. Instead his whole creation is dependent on Him.
- Finally it should be noted that the word *Allah* (الله) starts with *Alif*. Moreover, the letter *Alif* cannot be enjoined with other letters. However, other letters may be enjoined with *Alif*, for example in ب, if it is enjoined with *Alif*, becomes با but not the other way round.

Surah Tawheed

- *Surah Tawheed* is *Makiah* not *Madiniah* as it was revealed in Mecca, rather than Medina.
- According to Allamah Tabarsi in *Majma'ul Bayan*, this surah is called *Tawheed* because of its contents. The surah is all about monotheism or the Oneness of God. It is also called *Al-Ikhlaas* or *As-Samad*. It is said that whoever clings to it or upholds it, will be of strong faith and will be a *Mukmin Mukhlis*. Further it is stated in *Majma'ul Bayan*, that whoever recites this surah sincerely, will be freed from hellfire by Allah swt.
- This Surah and Surah Al Kafirun are also known as *Muqsyasyatani*, which means the 'The two healers of faith'.

Some Virtues of Surah Tawheed

- In *Tafseer Nur Tsaqalain* more than fifty virtues of this surah are stated. Because of the limitation of time, we will discuss a few of these virtues here.
- It is said that anyone who does not recite *Surah Tawheed* at least once in his or her daily prayers has effectively not offered his prayers of the day. Shias are therefore very particular about reciting this surah in their *salaat*.
- It is stated that whoever did not recite this surah for weeks and later died, then that person has died the death of Abu Lahab.

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- *Surah Tawheed* represents one-third of the Quran. Mufassirin argue that the Quran can be divided into three categories: *Ahkaam* (the guidance to mankind), *Aqeeda* (the fundamentals of deen) and *History*. *Surah Tawheed* succinctly represents the *Aqeeda* of Islam and thus in a sense it represents one-third of the Quran.
- It is said the Prophet once said to Imam Ali, "*O Ali you are like Qul huw-Allahu Ahad. Whoever loves you, has read one third of the Al-Quran. Whoever loves you and spreads your teaching, he indeed has read two thirds of Al-Quran. O Ali whoever loves you, spreads your teaching, and also helps you in his deeds, then that is tantamount to having read the whole of the Quran.*"
- It is said that whoever passes the graveyard and recites this Surah 11 times, and confers upon the thawab to the dead, then in return he will be rewarded with the thawab of the total number of the dead buried in that cemetery.
- Someone came to the Prophet and asked what he should do to increase his sustenance. The Prophet said that whenever you enter a house recite this Surah as it aids in sustenance.

Mind Blowing Story

The Four Questions

Imam Ali (as) was always available when the three caliphs sought his advice on religious matters. His position as the jurist was on the top of the list among the companions of the Holy Prophet (saww). Umar Ibn Khattab the 2nd Caliph had given clear instructions that when Ali (as) was present in the mosque of the Prophet no one should take precedence over him in answering questions on religious matters.

In one such encounter during the time of the 2nd Caliph, a group of Jewish scholars approached the caliph and said, "*We have a few questions. If we get the answers to these questions correctly, we will accept the Islamic faith.*"

"*Ask whatever you want to ask,*" said the caliph.

They asked the following questions:

1. What are the locks and keys of heaven?
2. Who was the messenger who was neither of the human nor of the Jinn and who warned his people?
3. Which are the 5 beings that were created without the aid of ovaries?
4. What are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven and twelve?

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The caliph thought over these questions for a time, and then said, *"I do not know the answers to these questions. I will take you to a man who is most knowledgeable in the commandments of Allah and the Holy Prophet and the greatest among us."*

The caliph then brought the Jewish scholars to Ali (as). They asked the same questions to him. Ali (as) answered thus:

1. The locks of the heavens are beliefs in more than one god and its keys are the letters of "La Ilaha Illallah, Muhammad-Ur-Rasulallah."
2. The messenger who warned his people is the ant who, when Solomon's army was passing by, said to his people, "Enter your houses so that the army may not stamp you out (without intention)". So Allah states in the Holy Qur'an, "Until they came to the valley of the Ants, said an ant (addressing the other ants of the valley) O" you ants' enter into your dwellings, so that Solomon and his hosts may not crush you while they know it not". (Sura An-Naml. V 18)
3. The five beings that were not born of ovaries are: Adam, Eve, the staff of Moses which used to change into a python, the camel of Saleh, and the sheep of Ibrahim (which was sent by Allah to become a ransom of the life of Ibrahim's son Ismael).

Insha Allah we will discuss the 4th question in the next class.

Disclaimer:

In this tafseer class, there might be shortcomings in imparting the knowledge of the tafseer. If there is any information that requires correction, please do not hesitate to let us know via e-mail : jaafari_tafseer_committee@yahoo.com.sg. Allah knows best.