

Knowledge of Ta'weel of Qur'anic verses

Learning Objectives

- To become familiar with the meaning of verse 3:7
- To understand the importance of the Ma'sumin (A) as the possessors of the knowledge of the interpretation (*ta'weel*) of the Qur'an

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ
 مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ ۖ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ
 وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ۗ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۗ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا
 بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا ۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

“It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical. As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is metaphorical in it, seeking dissension, and seeking to misinterpret it. But no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, ‘We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.’ And none takes admonition except those who possess intellect.” (3:7)

Fundamentals and ambiguous verses:

This verse discloses one of the important qualifications of Qur'an which may give us an important clue to the interpretation of our Holy Book: Allah has sent down to you a Book, the verses of which have either established meaning or metaphorical.

These metaphorical verses which might be figurative, ambiguous or allegorical can be used as a criterion to separate the truthful Scholars who are firmly rooted in knowledge, from the obstinate seditious people who pretend to be wise and learned: “Those in whose hearts is perversity, follow the ambiguous part seeking dissensions by misinterpreting the verses.”

But those learned ones with correct understanding and deep knowledge say: “We believe in the Book and all its verses whether fundamental or ambiguous are from our Lord.”

The verse implies that some of the verses are so clear and established in meaning that leaves no room for any sort of doubt or to waver. These verses cannot be misused or misapplied. Literally these verses are named the mother of Qur'an or the foundation. Some other of the verses, due to their high level, many shades and phases of meaning, seem to be figurative, metaphorical or equivocal, which are capable of being understood in several possible senses.

Perverted people with mental disease, seek to misinterpret and misapply such verses, in order to seduce and attract people to them.

Most of the verses of the Qur'an are clear and decisive. There is no ambiguity in them. They are known as the 'Muhkamat'. They relate to the fundamentals of faith, such as oneness of Allah, the directions pertaining to the practice of faith and the laws governing the day to day life of the faithful. These laws can neither be changed nor modified. Any person of average intelligence can understand and follow them.

The ambiguous verses are known as 'Mutashabihat'. These are the verses which have been composed in subtle and profound diction and style. They carry implications other than literal meanings, and therefore, are capable of giving different significations, like:

يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

"The hand of Allah is above their hands" (48:10).

This phrase refers to the fact that Allah (SWT) regards His Messenger's hand like that of His Own. In other words, the holy Prophet's hand at the time of pledging allegiance with him is actually His Hand, since the holy Prophet's hand symbolises that of Allah (SWT).

Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge:

"...But no one knows the hidden meaning except Allah and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge..."

Those firmly rooted in knowledge are those whom Allah Himself gives the knowledge, as verse 49 of sura Al-Ankabut says:

بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ ۚ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَّا
الظَّالِمُونَ

Nay! these are clear communications in the breasts of those who are granted knowledge; and none deny Our communications except the unjust. (29:49)

It is clearly disclosed that besides Allah (SWT), only those endowed with divine knowledge, know the true meanings of the ambiguous verses. The firmly rooted in knowledge are the holy Prophet (SAW) and his Ahlulbayt, the thoroughly purified ones who possess the desired purity of the heart and soul, essential for receiving and holding the truth in order to use it, to do good to themselves and to others.

In reply to Anas bin Malik's query about "those firmly rooted in knowledge", the holy Prophet (SAW) said:

"They are those whose hands do not do anything but that which is just, righteous and good; whose tongues do not utter anything but that which is true; whose hearts and minds are enlightened and rational; whose stomachs are free from that which is forbidden."

The verse of 'Tathir' (33:33) confirms that only the thoroughly purified, the holy Prophet (SAW) and his Ahlulbayt (AS) are the firmly rooted in knowledge. They are the ones who were free from impurity of polytheism right from the day they were born.

The Ahlulbayt as the possessors of the knowledge of the ta'weel of the Qur'an

The argument for the necessity of *ma'sūm* Imāms to succeed the Holy Prophet (S) is similar to the argument for the necessity of prophethood itself. Human beings required prophets to convey and explain to them Allāh (SWT)'s message, as well as live among the people and guide them in their day to day lives. This same requirement is also necessary following the end of prophethood.

Historically, during the 23 years of the Holy Prophet (S) prophetic mission, he had to deal with many difficult problems establishing and protecting the Islamic state, which afforded him very limited time in order to explain all religious teachings in their depths. In the beginning of his mission, the Holy Prophet (S) and the small group of Muslims faced great persecution from the idolaters of Quraysh simply for choosing to become Muslims. Some Muslims even had to immigrate to Abyssinia in order to survive.

The Muslims were then socially and financially boycotted and had to live in confinement in the small valley of Abū Ṭālib for three years. With the death of Abū Ṭālib (A), the Holy Prophet (S)'s life was now also in danger and the Muslim were forced to migrate from Makkah to Medina. In the ten years of the Holy Prophet (S)'s life in Medina, the Muslims were occupied with multiple battles, including the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khaybar and Ḥunayn.

Analysing the 23 years of the prophetic mission of our Holy Prophet (S), it is very clear that the majority of his time went in struggling to establish and defend the religion of Islam, as well as convey the entire revelation in the form of the Qur'ān. He was not afforded enough time to explain the depths and correct interpretation of the whole revelation. However, this was not a problem, because this would be the duty of the Imāms who would succeed him, starting from Imām 'Alī (A). For this reason, both Sunnī and Shī'ah Muslims report that the Holy Prophet (S) said regarding Imām 'Alī (A):

إِنَّ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُقَاتِلُ عَلَى تَأْوِيلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ كَمَا قَاتَلْتُ عَلَى تَنْزِيلِهِ

There is one among you who will fight to establish the (correct) interpretation (ta'wīl) of this Qur'ān, just like I fought to establish it as a true revelation.