

## ***Al-Bayaan*** **(Explaining the True Meanings of Qur'an)**

The Ummah of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> believes that all the prophets and the books were sent down by Allah for the guidance (Hidaya) of mankind. It is believed that about 124,000 prophets were sent by Allah in different parts of the World and that some of them were Messengers who came with books and Shari'ah. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, being last in the chain of the prophets, was given a book – The Qur'an – that will remain as the most authentic source of guidance for Mankind until the end of this World. We also know from the Islamic history that the Qur'an was not revealed to the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup> at once, rather it was revealed over a span of 23 years. Some of the verses, such as the verse related to Riba (interest), came in the last days of Prophet-hood.

It would also be relevant to note that all the prophets and messengers were not sent for the whole of Mankind, rather they were sent at specific times for specific regions. However, it is Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> who was sent for the whole Mankind and his message is going to stay as the last message from God until the end of this World. For this reason, the message of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> and the teachings of Qur'an are much more universal and comprehensive. Though the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language, the Arabs were not able to fully comprehend the message of Qur'an. Allah has sent Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> as the best interpreter and the most perfect practical example for the Arabs, and by extension, all mankind, to follow. During the period of Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, the Qur'anic verses used to be recorded on parchments of paper or pieces of leather, but for the most part the verses were safeguarded through memorization by *Huffaz* and transmitted orally. It was during the period of *Khilafat*, after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> in 632H that Islam gained momentum and spread beyond the Arab peninsula. This necessitated compiling the Qur'an in book form. This task was very difficult and was undertaken with great care. During the *Khilafat* of Abu Bakr <sup>(RZ)</sup> (632-634H), all the verses were collected, authenticated and compiled under the leadership of Zaid bin Thabit <sup>(RZ)</sup>. The expansion of Islam into Syria, Iraq, Armenia, and Azerbaijan led to growing differences in recitation and pronunciation of Qur'anic verses, so a definitive, standardized text was required. During the *Khilafat* of Uthman <sup>(RZ)</sup> (653-656H), the third Caliph of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, one official copy of the Qur'an was released and sent to all the provinces of Islam. Uthman <sup>(RZ)</sup> ordered that all non-standardized copies of Qur'an be burned to avoid any confusion and duplication. The standardized text is the same Qur'an that is still in circulation today and Insha'Allah will continue to be there till the last day of this World. Allah has chosen these revered companions of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(S)</sup> for the compilation work. Historically, the period of Uthman <sup>(RZ)</sup> and the period following his martyrdom saw much bloodshed and rivalry among different groups of Muslim Ummah. Despite such an unstable era and infighting among Muslim stalwarts, Muslims had and have full faith in the authenticity of the Qur'anic content because Allah himself has taken the responsibility of protecting it from any kind of fabrication.

“Verily We: It is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Qur’an) and surely, We will guard It (from corruption). (Al-Qur’an, 15:9) <sup>2</sup>

So the Qur’an was revealed and then compiled in the form of a book. Now the question became whom Allah would select to explain the true meaning of the Qur’anic verses as bestowed upon mankind by Allah Himself. Though there was full agreement about the content of the Qur’an, there were plenty of differences regarding the interpretation and extraction of meaning from Qur’anic verses. These kind of differences in interpretation of Qur’an and hadith led to 4 different schools of Islamic jurisprudence within Ahle Sunnat Wal Jama’at. One clear example of such a difference lies with the doctrine of Nasikh Wa Mansukh (Abrogating and Abrogated) whereby the commands (*Ah’kaam*) of some Qur’anic verses are canceled or superseded by some other Qur’anic verses. This process of abrogation took place during the era of the companions of the Prophet <sup>(S)</sup>. Some scholars even claimed that about 500 Qur’anic verses are within the ambit of this doctrine. This will further be discussed in the later part of this article.

As we see today, there are numerous translations and commentaries of Holy Qur’an. These are all being done by individuals and organizations with their own knowledge and interpretation. These interpretations are based on the social and geographical context, and the mindset of the commentator. For instance, a commentary from a Bareilvi scholar would be different from one by a Deoband scholar. How does a reader know which commentary is closer to the true meaning of the Qur’an? Perhaps it is for this purpose Allah has taken the responsibility of providing a clear explanation of Qur’an as indicated in verse 19 of Surah Al-Qiyama:

***“Thumma inna Aaalayna bayanahu” (75:19)***

*(O Prophet,) do not move your tongue (during revelation) for (reciting) it (the Qur’an) to receive it in hurry. <sup>3</sup> (16) It is surely undertaken by Us to store it (in your heart), and to let it be recited (by you after revelation is completed). (17) Therefore, when it is recited by Us (through the angel), follow its recitation (by concentration of your heart). (18) Then, it is undertaken by Us to explain it. (19) <sup>3</sup>*

Verse 19 starts with the word “*Thumma*,” meaning “Later” or “Then.” In fact, Later is closer to the literal meaning of the word “*Thumma*.” According to several scholars, “*Thumma*” does not necessarily refer to the immediate future; it generally means “in the long-term.”

Of course, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> had pure knowledge, and he knew the deepest meanings of every Qur’anic verse. But he revealed these complete and comprehensive meanings only to a few companions. Some among them were Ibn Abbas <sup>(RZ)</sup> and Abu Huraira <sup>(RZ)</sup>. For the Ummah at large, a more in-depth teaching of Vilayat might have been beyond their comprehension at that time. This was the era when people in Arab Peninsula were to reject the idol worshipping and accept the oneness of God (*Tawheed*). Therefore, the teachings relating to Nabuwat were fully disseminated for the masses and as Allah Wills, the task of disseminating the teachings of Vilayat (*Vilayat-e-Muhammadiyah*) was given to the Guided one who was to come after the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup> with the status of the Caliph of Allah (*Khalifatullah*) since there was no prophet to come after

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>. The Prophet has himself described the status of this person as Caliph of Allah in one of the hadiths (commonly known as *Hadith e Thouban*).

Allah revealed the Qur'an (*Tanzeel*) to Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, who is free from any error (*Ma'sum*), to securely pass on the message to all mankind. Similarly, the explanation and broad dissemination of its deepest meanings (i.e. *Vilayat*) should also come through someone who is free from any error. Since the word "*Thumma*" in verse 19, does not necessarily mean immediately after revelation, this explanation (*Bayaan-e-Qur'an*) could come at any time in the future, even centuries after the initial revelation.

To fully understand who that person is, who can be entrusted to offer pure complete interpretation, we have to read and understand verse 19 of *Al-Qiyama* along with the first 4 verses of Surah *Al-Rahman* (55: 1-4). Let's study, think, and reflect on these verses and focus on their sequence:

1. (*Al-Rahman*). *The Most Gracious;*
2. (*Allamal Qur'an*). *Has imparted this Qur'an [unto man];*
3. (*Khalakhal Insaan*). *He has created man;*
4. (*Allamahul Bayaan*). *He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech.*

If we look at the sequence of the above verses, we see that the third verse "He has created man" came after the second verse "Has imparted this Qur'an." In other words, Allah (The Rahman) has taught the Qur'an, *then* He has created man, and *then* He has taught him the articulation of *Bayan*.

There are several alternative interpretations of the word "man" in these verses:

1. The word "man" in the above verses is in a general sense, referring to mankind as a whole;
2. The "man" meant is Adam <sup>(pbuh)</sup>;
3. The "man" meant is Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>;
4. The "man" in these verses is a specific person specially sent down by Allah for completing Allah's undertaking of explanation of the meaning of Qur'an (*Bayaan*).

Let's look at all the 4 points in greater detail:

1. The first interpretation may not be correct because the verses say that Allah has given the knowledge of Qur'an (verse 2), *then* He has created man (verse 3). In other words, this interpretation would mean that Allah has given the knowledge of Qur'an to mankind before sending us down to this earth. This obviously is not the case. Thus, the word "man" here is not in the general sense of the word, but refers to a specific person.
2. It cannot be Adam <sup>(pbuh)</sup> for two reasons. One, the verses talk specifically about imparting the knowledge of Qur'an (verse 2) so that the man can fulfill the task of explaining its meaning (verse 4). Though Adam <sup>(pbuh)</sup> was given guidance by Allah, the Qur'an itself was revealed only to Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>.
3. It is a fact that no person has more knowledge bestowed upon him by Allah than Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, therefore, some people take the word "man" here to mean the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup>. As mentioned earlier, if you read all the 4 verses in continuum, you notice that the man in these verses has a task, and that task is to explain the deepest meanings of Qur'an (*Bayan*),

and this has to happen far in the future after the Tanzeel, because “Thumma” generally refers to far in the future. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> definitely had this knowledge and entrusted it to some of his companions whom he thought capable. But, as the above close reading reveals, the task of imparting this knowledge (the knowledge of Vilayat) broadly to all people lies with a person in *the future* who will come *after* the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup>. This concept is confirmed by Isa <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has said “We prophets bring the revelation (Tanzeel), and it will be explained by Parakalitus (Farqaleet).” Thus, it is clear that the comprehensive Bayan of Qur’an has to be done by a specific person who is commissioned by Allah.

4. The sequence of verse 2 and 3 clearly shows that this person is to be imparted with knowledge, and then sent (created) by Allah. As Mahdavis, we are blessed with the knowledge of exactly who this person is: Mahdi Al-Ma’ud, the Promised Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup>. The word “Mahdi” literally means the “guided one.” Thus, Allah guided Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> and sent him as His Caliph to explain the deepest and most complete meaning of Qur’an. The Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> who is “Ma’sum,” and the task of explaining its meaning was also bestowed upon a person, Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, who is also “Ma’sum.” This was necessary to preserve the deeper message, and to disseminate it at the perfect time in Muslim history. Just as Prophet Muhammad’s message was to all mankind, and for all times, so was that of Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, as Allah wills (*Murad-ullah*). Allah knows best.

Mahdi, the promised <sup>(pbuh)</sup> is the only personality in the general Ummah who has the status of being Ma’sum. Shaik-e-Akbar, Ibn Arabi has presented a Hadith in which Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup> said that Mahdi is from him <sup>(pbuh)</sup> and he (Mahdi) will follow his <sup>(pbuh)</sup> footsteps and will not error. While explaining this Hadith, Ibn Arabi said that the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup> did not identify this trait (of being Ma’sum) in his Ummah for anyone except for Mahdi, the promised.

Here are the two examples of how our Imam Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has explained the Qur’an:

1. On the doctrine of Nasikh wa Mansukh, the Islamic scholars are of the view that some Qur’anic verses are abrogated/replaced by some other verses. Allah says in Qur’an “None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou that God has power over all things?” [Qur’an 2: 106]. (*translation from Minhajul Qur’an website*)

The scholars were of the view that there are about 500 Qur’anic verses subject to this doctrine. Historically, the replacement of one verse by a new Qur’anic verse happened, as Allah wills, throughout the period of revelation (23 years). Now that the Qur’an is completely revealed and the Prophet <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has departed this world, no other person has the authority to declare any verse of Qur’an as abrogated. One would wonder, if a verse of the Qur’an is meant to be abrogated, then why would it still be a part of the Qur’an? There is much debate on this doctrine in Islamic theology. Our Imam <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has clarified this point perfectly, saying that *no* verse of the Qur’an (in its final form) is abrogated or replaced, in terms of text or meaning. He <sup>(pbuh)</sup> also said that the Qur’an is so perfect that it does not have any extra or unnecessary letter (*Harf-e-Zayed*). Thus we, Mahdavis, believe in the Qur’an in its entirety, with text and meaning, and we believe that all the commandments of Qur’an are as applicable today as they were at the time of revelation, and that all the commandments will remain Applicable until the Last day.

2. Once our Imam, Mahdi Al-Ma'ud <sup>(pbuh)</sup> was explaining the meaning of the verse 92 of Surah Al-Imran. Here I present translation and commentary of the verse from different sources so that we can compare and contrast with how Mahdi Al-Ma'ud <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has explained its meaning:

**“Lan tanaloo albirra hatta turnfiqoo mimma tuhibboona wama tunfiqoo min shayin  
fainna Allaha bihi AAleemun” (3:92)**

Translations:

- a. “[But as for you, O believers,] never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend – verily, God has full knowledge (*translation by M. Asad*)
- b. By no means shall you attain *Al-Birr* (piety, righteousness – here it means Allah’s Reward, i.e., Paradise), unless you spend (in Allah’s cause) of that which you love; and whatever of good you spend, Allah knows it well. (*translation by Dr. Mohsin*)

Commentary:

After telling those who deliberately deny the truth that even their benevolent spending of efforts and possessions during their lifetime will be of no avail to them on the day of judgment, the Qur’an reminds the believers that, on the other hand, their faith in God cannot be considered complete unless it makes them conscious of the material needs of their fellow beings (*M. Asad in The Message of Qur’an, page 96*)

As we can see the above commentary, it talks about spending to meet the material needs of our fellow beings. Therefore, it is mostly construed as referring to charity and helping other human beings. Also the word “**Birr**” is translated above as piety (Neki or Khair in Urdu). Let’s see what Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> has said about this verse.

Once Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> was doing *Bayan-e-Qur’an* and explaining the above verse. Malik Burhanuddin <sup>(RZ)</sup>, who was attending the sermon, came to Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> and offered his horse and sword as a charity. Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup>, asked why do you want to give these things, Malik said because I love them very much; Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> again asked him why he loves these things, Malik responded that they are meant to protect his life. On hearing this, Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> said that it means that you love yourself (*Dhat*) and Allah wants your *Dhat*, and not your sword or horse. Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> also explained that the word “**Birr**” in this verse is for “*Zaat-e-Khuda*.”

Now the meaning of the verse is very clear in which Allah says that you cannot reach the Irfan (Gnosis) of Allah unless you surrender your *Dhat* (self) in love of Allah. Malik Burhanuddin, hearing this explanation, immediately presented himself, performed the *Tark-e-Dunya* (*Tark-e-Zaat w Hasti*) and joined the company of Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup>. He started a new spiritual journey towards seeking Allah’s vision.

This is just an example of Mahdi <sup>(pbuh)</sup> being the “man” as mentioned in Surah Rahman and his <sup>(pbuh)</sup> status as the *Mubaiyyin-e-Kalamullah*.

(May Allah forgive me for any error in this article, Ameen!).

Sources:

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