

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Interdisciplinary Studies of 7 Quran and Hadith (ISQH)

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دوره ۲، شماره ۳ (شماره پیاپی ۷)، زمستان ۱۴۰۳

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Aims and Scope of Interdisciplinary Studies of Quran and Hadith (ISQH)

Aims:

The Holy Quran and Sunna (the Prophet and Imams' Traditions) are two basic sources of Islam and *Imamiyyah* school and the centers of attention of Muslim scholars from ancient times to the present. According to the Quran, there is nothing in the universe but mentioned in the Book (Q 6:59). Also, the Traditions of Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet and Imams) being rooted in the Revelation, contain invaluable issues in different realms, scientific or otherwise, that can shed light on most problems if duly considered.

Interdisciplinary studies have been ascribed a high standing in today's academic circles. The progressive trend of knowledge and sciences has made it incumbent upon researchers to go beyond their specialties for solving problems that have become more and more complicated; in other words, one needs to have recourse to other realms of knowledge to solve the problematic issues. Islamic studies and humanities could be classified under interdisciplinary studies in this respect.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic has time and again emphasized the necessity of the Islamization of human and social sciences in his remarks. Imam Sadiq University, the academic center that arose after the Islamic revolution, with the mission of acting as an authority in the field of Islamic and human sciences, has assumed a fundamental role in producing Islamic-oriented humanities and has played its part in actualizing this task since its inception four decades ago. One can witness the outcome of this monumental task in ISU publications and dissertations. Hence, the necessity of publishing this output and its equivalents from other academic centers in the form of scholarly articles rendered in Arabic and English languages, a task which if fulfilled, will provide a synergistic effort leading to perfection. In regard to the existing high potential in ISU Language Center that enjoys the participation of a knowledgeable faculty equipped with the above-mentioned languages next to Islamic capacity especially in the fields of Quranic and Tradition Studies, jurisprudence and law,

philosophy and theology, the possibility of producing interdisciplinary works is high.

The ISU Language Center has aptly felt the necessity of undertaking the Initiative of launching an Unequaled Quarterly Journal, Interdisciplinary Studies of Quran & Hadith in Arabic and English that could mirror the above-mentioned capacity.

Scope:

The scope of our activity with the centrality of Quran and Hadith is as follows:

- Language, Culture and Communication studies in the Quran and Hadith
- Management studies in the Quran and Hadith
- Economics studies in the Quran and Hadith
- Education and Psychology studies in the Quran and Hadith
- Political studies in the Quran and Hadith
- Law studies in the Quran and Hadith

Instructions for Authors

Manuscript Submission

- Authors are requested to submit their papers electronically by using the Interdisciplinary Studies of Quran Hadith online submission and review web site <https://isqh.isu.ac.ir> . This site will guide authors stepwise through the submission process.
- Submissions should consist of original work that has not yet been published and/or is not under consideration elsewhere.
- The language of the journal is English. Non-native speakers should make every effort to consolidate on the language style, which should conform to the international English standards. Either British or American spelling may be used but it must be used consistently throughout the paper.
- The author's name, address, and affiliation should be included on a separate page and not given on the first page or elsewhere in the article to ensure anonymous evaluation.

- Corresponding author. Clearly indicate who will handle correspondence at all stages of refereeing and publication, also post-publication. Ensure that telephone numbers (with country and area code) are provided in addition to the e-mail address and the complete postal address. Contact details must be kept up to date by the corresponding author.

Article Structure

Subdivision - numbered sections Divide your article into clearly defined and numbered sections. Subsections should be numbered 1.1 (then 1.1.1, 1.1.2, ...), 1.2, etc. (the abstract is not included in section numbering). Any subsection may be given a brief heading. Each heading should appear on its own separate line.

Formatting Guidelines

Article pages including: abstracts, notes and reference lists, are to be typed 1.5 spaced with margins of 2.5 cm (1 inch) on all four sides. Use 12 pt font size in the main text, 10 pt in the footnotes, 15 pt for main titles and 13 pt for subtitles. Sheets should be numbered consecutively.

- The overall content of the article should CLEARLY INCLUDE the following features:
 - a. Abstract
 - b. Introduction
 - c. Review of related literature/Theoretical grounding
 - d. Research questions
 - e. (Research hypotheses)
 - f. Method
 - g. Results
 - h. Discussion and conclusions
 - i. References

Abstract

The abstract, placed at the very beginning of the article and ranging between 150 to 200 words, the abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, the principal results and major conclusions.

Word Limit

Please ensure that your paper does not exceed 7500 words, including abstract, references and footnotes.

Keywords

Immediately after the abstract, provide a maximum of 5 keywords. Keywords should be italics.

Introduction

State the objectives of the work and provide an adequate background, avoiding a detailed literature survey or a summary of the results.

Literature Review**Research Questions****Material and Methods**

Provide sufficient detail to allow the work to be replicated. Methods already published should be indicated by a reference: only relevant modifications should be described.

Results

Results should be clear and concise.

Discussion

This should explore the significance of the results of the work, not repeat them. A combined Results and Discussion section is often

appropriate. Avoid extensive citations and discussion of published literature.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of the study should be presented in a short Conclusions section, which should not simply repeat earlier sections.

Appendices

If there is more than one appendix, they should be identified as A, B, etc. Formulae and equations in appendices should be given separate numbering: Eq. (A.1), Eq. (A.2), etc.; in a subsequent appendix, Eq. (B.1) and so on. Similarly for tables and figures: Table A.1; Fig. A.1, etc.

References

References should contain only cited works, but make sure that all cited works are indeed included. The works should be listed in alphabetical order at the end of the article and with single line space. Citations in the text should follow the referencing style used by the American Psychological Association (APA). You are referred to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition.

Book: one author:

Goldberg, A. (2006). *Constructions at work*. Oxford University Press.

Book, two authors and more:

Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language cognition*. Routledge.

Translated book:

Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. (J. Strachey, Trans.). Routledge & K. Paul. (Original work published 1905).

Edited book:

Flowerdew, J., Brock, M., & Hsia, S. (Eds.). (1992). *Second language teacher education*. City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.

Chapter in an edited book:

Goldberg, A., & Casenhiser, D. (2008). Construction learning and second language acquisition. In P. Robinson & N. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of cognitive linguistics and second language acquisition* (pp. 197–215). Routledge.

Article in a journal:

Hammarberg, B. (2010). The languages of the multilingual. Some conceptual and terminological issues. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 48, 91–104.

Article online:

Tully, K., & Bolshakov, V. Y. (2010). Emotional enhancement of memory: How norepinephrine enables synaptic plasticity. *Molecular Brain*, 13 May. Retrieved from <http://www.molecularbrain.com/content/>.

Bakker, A. B., Hakanen, J. J., Demerouti, E., Xanthopoulou, D. (2007). Job resources boost work engagement, particularly when job demands are high. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(2), 274–284. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.274

Magazines online:

Miller, G. (2014, September 4). Cinematic cuts exploit how your brain edits what you see. *Wired*. Retrieved from <http://wired.com/>

Smith, A. (2007, June 12). Dying languages. *The Western Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thewesternstar.com/>

Blog:

Palmer, P. (2001). Now I become myself. *Yes Magazine*, blog post, 31 May. Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/working-for-life/now-i-become-myself>

E-books:

Bolande, V. U. (1981). *On the psychology of humor*. Retrieved from: <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/ufdc/UFDC.aspx?n=palmm&c=psa1&m=hd2J&i=45367>

Conference proceedings:

Souleles, N., & Pillar, C. (Eds.). (2014). Proceedings from the *First International Conference on the Use of iPads in Higher Education*. Paphos: Cyprus University of Technology.

Doctoral dissertation:

Churchwell, J. (2005). *Becoming an academic: Factors that influence a graduate student's identity commitment* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Reachel, L. H. (2001). *Native languages and toponyms: Origins, meaning, and use* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest dissertation and theses database. (Document ID 1964749161).

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Tables

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Authors are expected to consider carefully the list and order of authors before submitting their manuscript and provide the definitive list of authors at the time of the original submission. Any addition, deletion or rearrangement of author names in the authorship list should be made only before the manuscript has been submitted and only if approved by the journal Editor.

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Imam Sadiq University Academic Journals Ethics Statement

Introduction

In regard to ISU approach to the production, publication, and updating of Islamic and human sciences, and providing answers for newly emerged demands of the revolution and Islamic government, and also in compliance with the national and international research ethics guidelines, such as those of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and "Code of Practice for Research Ethics" ratified by the Research Assistance Branch of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology, ISU academic journals and publications are bound to observe the related professional code of conduct. Hence, the major duties of those involved, namely author(s), director, editor-in-chief, the editorial board, managing editor are briefly mentioned below.

Authors' Responsibilities

1. Submitted manuscripts must be previously unpublished, domestically and internationally, in order to be approved for publication in ISU journals; they must be the original work of the author(s) and have exact sources and citations.
2. The final responsibility of the full content of the submitted manuscript is with the author. It is appropriate to report the results of the article completely and take sufficient care about them and about their analysis. The article must contain enough details and resources to permit other researchers to have access to similar data for further research.
3. Before submitting the article, any possible conflict of interest affecting the research results and research analysis or the selection of editor-in-chief and reviewers must be mentioned and the funders of the research must be named.
4. Respect must be paid to the confidential assessment, and the disclosure of the author(s)' identity to the reviewers and vice versa must

be avoided. In other words, the manuscript must avoid self- disclosing information to prevent reviewers from identifying the author(s).

5. Authorship information must be transparently and completely ensured and mentioned and non-contributors must be excluded.

6. Privacy, dignity, well-being and liberty of all those involved in the research must be preserved and supported and any threat posed to humans and other creatures must be declared.

7. The author must notify the journal officials of any error or inexactitude in time and set out to correcting them or withdrawing the whole manuscript.

8. The author(s) must clearly declare the originality of the work and its being free from plagiarism or being published previously.

Instances of Unethical Behavior in Research and Publication:

1. **Fabrication:** reporting unreal matters and providing fabricated data and results in the name of experimental and personal findings; unreal recording of events or replacing different research results.

2. **Falsification:** recording and presenting research results in a way that the details or the process of data collection are manipulated, or some data are removed or changed, or some minor results are exaggerated to conceal facts in order to lead the research results to special objectives or to make the provided results accepted unquestionably.

3. **Plagiarism:** appropriation of other writers' ideas and phrases, copying opinions, structural similarities in writing, borrowing ideas and findings of others without attribution or proper reference, or introducing them as original scientific research.

4. **Scientific hiring:** employing other people to carry out the research in place of the author(s) and after some manipulation passing it off as one's own.

5. **Unreal affiliation:** unreal affiliation of the author(s) to some organization or educational and research center which have not had any role in the fulfillment of the task.

6. **Duplicate submission:** an article or part of an article already published domestically or internationally or under review and publication.

7. **Overlapping publication:** publishing data or findings from previous articles with some alterations in another article under a new title.

Director's Responsibilities

1. Pursuing free access to information given in the journal and extending its publication.
2. Monitoring and pursuing the affairs of the editorial board and the editor-in-chief.
3. Avoiding interference in the scientific review process.
4. Avoiding interference in the scientific decisions of the editorial board and the editor-in-chief.
5. Observing the material and intellectual rights of the authors, editor-in-chief, editorial board, reviewers, and executive members.
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2. Attempting to promote and enforce regulations of ethics and soundness of research.
3. Receiving documentary evidence about the following conditions when accepting manuscripts from their authors.
 - a. Granting the rights of publishing the article in the university journal.
 - b. Declaring the possible conflicts of interest.
4. Selecting qualified reviewers by relying on their specialties, scientific and professional experience, and also respecting the well-reasoned requests of the author(s) for special reviewers.
5. Avoiding the disclosure of the information about the author(s) and reviewers and discussing its details with others.
6. Preventing any sort of conflict of interests in reviewing that could potentially affect the acceptance and publication of articles.
7. Accurate assessment of works charged with breaching the codes by reviewers or other channels, and if necessary, acting according to the pertinent rules.

Procedures of Dealing with Unethical Behavior in Publication and Research

1. Notifying the journal's editorial board and sending letter to the corresponding author demanding clarification without any prejudgment.
2. Allocating suitable time for receiving response from the author(s) charged with unethical publication and research behavior, and pursuing definite violations till the end.
3. Referring the case to the editorial board in case of receiving unacceptable justifications from the author(s) for final decision as for the acceptance or rejection of the submitted manuscript.
4. Based on the final decision of the editorial board,
 - a. Sending written notification to the author and reminding him of the journal's policy, or asking for corrections and making apology on the next journal issue.
 - b. Sending warning to the corresponding author for rejecting any other work by the offender.
5. Issuing apologetic announcement in the next printed issue of the journal and including it in the online version for the retracted article.
6. Trying to continuously improve the quality and ensure the integrity of the journal's content and pay respect to its administration and all the involved people and audience.
7. Examining all received articles in due time.

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1. Assisting in the scientific quality and content analysis of the articles in order to improve its status.
2. Applying professional knowledge and expertise related to the subject domain of the journal and declaring the rejection of submitted manuscripts to the editor-in-chief when it does not conform with the shared interests, be it financial, organizational, personal, or due to shortage of time for reviewing.
3. Expressing expert and corrective opinions clearly, based on scientific evidence and sufficient reasoning in a definite time to the editor-in-chief and author(s), and avoiding partiality due to one's preferences, ethnicity, religious belief, professional inclination and otherwise in reviewing the submitted manuscripts.

4. Avoiding the appropriation of the received data, discussions, explanations and ideas in the process of reviewing and even the unpublished information of the author(s) for personal gain.

5. Respecting the confidentiality of the reviewing process and avoiding the appropriation of the received information, discussions, explanations and ideas in the process of reviewing, or utilizing the new data and concepts derived from the article for or against one's own or other people's research or for criticizing or discrediting the author(s).

6. Assisting the journal's editor-in-chief in providing a report on "unethical research and publication behavior "about the received manuscripts for review.

7. Informing the editor-in-chief in case of a delay in reviewing the manuscripts and requesting more time allocation or selecting another reviewer.

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1. Establishing and announcing clearly one's publishing policies, especially in regard to the autonomy of the editor-in-chief in making decisions, publication ethics, safeguarding the intellectual property and copyright, conflict of interests, authors' duties, reviewers, editor-in-chief, editorial board, reviewing and decision making process, revision requests and complaints, preserving the scientific documents of the decision making process, preserving the authors' and reviewers' information , correcting or removing the accepted manuscripts, and solving disputes between the complainants and those accused of unethical research and publication behavior.

2. Monitoring and pursuing research complaints for the university's journals.

3. Assisting in ensuring the originality and soundness of the published articles in the university's journals.

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The Prophet's (PBUH) Strategies for Eliminating Social Divisions and Establishing Islamic Civilization: A Quranic, Narrative, and Historical Perspective

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Abstract

One of the major challenges in human social relations is social fragmentation, a dangerous phenomenon that can lead societies toward collapse. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established an Islamic state in the highly fragmented society of the Arabian Peninsula and implemented strategic measures to manage these divisions, ultimately succeeding in laying the foundations of Islamic civilization. The Prophet (PBUH) identified all dimensions of social fragmentation in early Islamic society and applied tailored solutions to address them. The results of these efforts became fully evident in the social cohesion achieved during his ten-year rule. This article seeks to answer the following question: What were the Prophet's strategies for eliminating social fragmentation in early Islamic society and fostering unity within the Muslim community? The authors adopt a descriptive-analytical methodology, examining Qur'anic texts, narrations (Hadith), and historical accounts to conduct this research. The study demonstrates that the Prophet (PBUH) successfully unified the chaotic Arabian Peninsula through multifaceted strategies, including: Identifying and addressing divisive factors, promoting unifying elements such as brotherhood and mutual affinity, encouraging cooperation among neighbors and kin, Marginalizing polytheists and agitators who sought to disrupt social order and cohesion.

Keywords: Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Civilization, Social Fragmentation, Social Cohesion.

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Introduction

Social fragmentation refers to the division and rift between individuals, institutions, and groups within a society due to conflicts and disparities in values or access to resources, which may sometimes escalate into opposition against one another. These fragmentations have a relative capacity for separation and segregation within society and may intensify or weaken over time. They encompass various types of divisions, including generational, gender-based, religious, ethnic, and others (Parchami & Derakhshan, 2021, pp. 1–2). The inherent diversity among humans (Qur'an, Al-Hujurat 49:13), along with factors such as differing preferences and conflicting interests, can create divisions within society. These differences may lead to social fragmentation, and as conflicts intensify, social cohesion weakens. As the Holy Qur'an warns: "Do not dispute, lest you fail and lose your strength" (Qur'an, Al-Anfal 8:46). Moreover, the decline of social unity increases a society's vulnerability to external threats. Effectively managing these divisions requires deliberate strategies. Leaders must consistently develop and implement unifying measures to preserve societal harmony. In the early Islamic society, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sought to prevent the erosion of Muslim unity by actively resolving conflicts and urging the community to uphold harmony. He encouraged reconciliation to eliminate divisions and promote peace (Qur'an, An-Nisa' 4:128). This principle holds such significance in Islamic teachings that reconciling people is sometimes regarded as superior to optional acts of worship: "Settling discord among people is better than most voluntary prayers and fasting" (Tusi, 1993, p. 522). This study examines the strategies employed by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to manage social fragmentation and foster unity among Muslims and allied tribes in 7th-century Arabia—a context marked by severe tribal divisions (Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān 3:103). By analyzing the socio-political dynamics of the prophetic era, the paper explores how he transformed a fractured society into a cohesive Islamic community while promoting the message of Islam. Central research question is: How did the Prophet (PBUH) address social cleavages in

the deeply divided Arabian Peninsula, and what mechanisms enabled him to establish a unified Islamic society? This study adopts a descriptive-analytical method, drawing upon Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions (Hadith), and historical sources to extract relevant data. Through systematic organization and critical analysis of these materials, the authors have developed the present research.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

A crucial step in conducting this investigation involves elucidating the While several scholars have addressed aspects of this topic in a fragmented manner—providing detailed accounts of the internal conflicts among Arab tribes—few have specifically focused on the strategies employed by the Prophet (PBUH) to resolve these divisions. Several scholars have examined aspects of social cohesion during the Prophet's (PBUH) era, though often fragmentarily: Hossein Ghazi Khani (2013), in his article "Conflict Prevention Management in Medina during the Prophet's Era," outlines select measures taken by the Prophet (pbuh) to mitigate tribal conflicts. The author of the article "Social Groups and Divisions in the Prophetic State" (2007) has analyzed the structure of these disputes. Narges Yazdanpour (2016), in her work "Causes and Factors of Islamic Unity," approaches unity as an ethical imperative, analyzing its Qur'anic foundations. Amir Mohsen Erfan (2020), in "The Prophet's Methodological Approach to Active Social Fragmentation," examines socio-ethnic conflicts of the era and the Prophet's (PBUH) contextual responses. Nasrollah Nazari (2011), in "Social Cohesion from the Qur'anic Perspective," systematically catalogs Qur'anic models for fostering and strengthening societal unity. Zeynab Sanchooli (2017), in her article "The Prophet's Methodology in Uniting Muslims," analyzes hadith-based evidence of the Prophet's (PBUH) unification strategies during early Islam. None of the aforementioned studies have comprehensively examined the Prophet's (PBUH) strategies for fostering social unity. Consequently, this study seeks to provide a detailed analysis of his approaches to resolving social fragmentation and promoting cohesion as foundational elements of Islamic civilization—representing a novel contribution to the field. This investigation is organized into two thematic sections: a) Identifying

Divisive Factors and Counterstrategies: Analyzing the root causes of social discord and the Prophet's methods for neutralizing them. b) Proactive Measures for Social Integration: Documenting the positive initiatives he implemented to bridge societal divides.

Strategies of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for Fostering Social Unity

In what follows, we examine the key approaches employed by the Prophet (PBUH) to establish harmony within Islamic society, which include:

1. Identifying and Addressing the Root Causes of Social Division

The social fabric of Medina at the time of the Prophet's (pbuh) migration was characterized by Deep-Rooted Tribal Conflicts. The historic rivalry between Aws and Khazraj tribes, Generational blood feuds dating back decades, Inter-Religious Tensions, Ongoing disputes between Arab tribes and Jewish communities, Economic and political competition along religious lines, Newly Emerging Frictions, Resentment between Muhajirun (Meccan migrants) and Ansar (Medinan helpers), Resource scarcity concerns due to migrant influx. The presence of the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina as the leader of Islam and the new ruler of Medina, for various reasons, including jealousy towards the Prophet (PBUH) and the presence of the immigrants, created a more favorable environment for the creation of new tensions. Social disunity and long-standing grudges dominated the people of Medina when the Prophet arrived in Medina (Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān 3:103). The Prophet (PBUH) initially identified the factors that caused division among the people of the society and forbade anything that would cause the united ranks of the Muslims to fall apart. The Prophet (pbuh) systematically identified and prohibited several destructive behaviors that undermined social unity, including:

A) Tribal Chauvinism (Al-'Asabiyah) and Racial Supremacy:

Definition: Blind loyalty to one's tribe, lineage, or ethnicity at the expense of justice and collective unity. Tribal pride often led to exaggerated claims of superiority (e.g., inflating population counts, as

critiqued in Qur'an, At-Takathur 102:1–2). Unjustified defense of kinsmen, even when they were wrongdoers. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) vigorously warned against the destructive nature of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance) tribalism and mindless partisanship. According to a hadith, he declared: Anyone who shows undue prejudice has left Islam and God will gather her on the Day of Judgment with the people of the Age of Ignorance (Al-Kulayni, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 308).

b) Pride and arrogant behavior: Arrogance disrupts the unity and cohesion of society. When a person feels inferior to another person, he tries to hurt the arrogant person, and this leads to the destruction of social unity. The Prophet (PBUH) fought against this moral vice and said: “Whoever has an atom of arrogance in his being will not enter Paradise” (Ibn Babawayh, 1998, p. 241).

c) Envy (hasad): It refers to a malignant form of rivalry where one resents the blessings granted to others and desires their deprivation. Unlike healthy competition, envy breeds: Social hostility, Unethical behavior, Disintegration of communal bonds. Allah commands believers to seek refuge from envy's evil: "And from the evil of the envier when he envies" (Qur'an, 113:5). This verse highlights envy as a spiritual and social poison requiring divine protection. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) explicitly prohibited envy due to its corrosive effects on unity: "Do not envy one another, do not hate one another, but be servants of Allah as brothers" (Al-Mufid, 1993, p. 46).

D) Pessimism and suspicion. In a society where pessimism is prevalent, the mental anxiety of individuals causes inattention and indifference to the main issues of the society and becomes a basis for division and sedition by enemies, and consequently, the social atmosphere is likely to be in disarray. The Holy Qur'an has forbidden suspicion (Qur'an, Al-Hujurat 49:12), and the Prophet Muhammad also said: “Indeed suspicion may be right or wrong” (Payandeh, 2003, p. 344). It means that it is not always reality-oriented, and mere suspicion should not be the basis for your actions. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said in another narration: “If you suspect something, do not act on it”

(Waram, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 127). When you suspect something bad, do not act on it. On the contrary, according to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), suspecting good things about others is itself a form of worship: “Good suspicion is among the best acts of worship” (Qudza’i, 1982, p. 357).

E) Reckless Speech and Unjust Argumentation: Another factor causing social division is improper speech and baseless disputes. Through speech and writing—the tools of thought—each individual can significantly influence social actions and behaviors, either positively and constructively or destructively. Thus, by controlling spoken and written words, many social harms can be eliminated. The Qur’an states: “Tell My servants to say what is best. Indeed, Satan incites discord among them. Surely Satan is a manifest enemy to man” (Qur’an 17:53). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said: “Avoid argumentation, even if you are in the right” (Barqi, 1952, Vol. 1, p. 8). It is worth saying that the Prophet (PBUH) was extremely sensitive to even the smallest actions or behaviors that could harm Muslim unity. He paid special attention to maintaining harmony and avoiding division, considering adherence to the Muslim community as a sign of genuine faith (Qummi, 1984, Vol. 2, p. 442).

By identifying factors that undermined unity and caused division, the Prophet (PBUH) exerted utmost effort to implement precise strategies. He first established cohesion among Muslims, then extended it to allies and neighboring tribes, ultimately transforming the fragmented society of the Arabian Peninsula into a united and cohesive community.

2. The Prophet's (pbuh) Measures to Address Social Divisions and Rifts As previously mentioned, when the Prophet (PBUH) entered Medina, several social divisions existed. Some, such as the conflict between the Aws and Khazraj tribes, were active, while others—such as tensions between Jews and non-Jews, or between Qahtani and Adnani Arabs—remained latent. These dormant rifts risked being exploited by the enemies of Islam to undermine its progress. Therefore, the Prophet (PBUH) took decisive steps to heal these divisions, including:

2-1. The Prophet's (pbuh) Measures to Alleviate Tensions and Divisions Before Establishing the Islamic State in Medina The Prophet's (PBUH) comprehensive efforts to resolve inter-tribal and factional social tensions in Medina before the formal establishment of the Islamic state included the following key initiatives:

2-1-1. Building Strong Social Foundations to Address Divisions and Tensions For the Prophet (PBUH) to successfully promote Islam and establish an Islamic state, he needed strong public support to mitigate social tensions—because without popular backing, lasting stability would be impossible. The Prophet (PBUH) dispatched Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr (RA) to Medina to gauge the level of support among its people (Saleh, 2006, pp. 45–46). Mus‘ab’s role: Teaching the Qur’an, mediating tribal disputes, and preparing the ground for Islamic governance. ‘Abbas (the Prophet’s uncle) questioned the Medinan delegates to ensure their commitment: "Are you fully resolved in your support?" "If all of Arabia turns against you, will you still defend him?" After receiving their firm pledge, the Prophet (PBUH) recited the Qur’an, called them to faith, and formalized the covenant (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992, Vol. 3, p. 35).

2-1-2. Preventing Divisive Issues Among Medina's Tribes and Clans The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) made every effort to preserve unity among the people of Medina, personally intervening wherever necessary to resolve conflicts and manage social divisions. *A Key Example: The Prophet’s Settlement in Medina* When the Prophet (PBUH) first arrived in Medina, every tribe sought the honor of hosting him in their neighborhood, which could have reignited old rivalries. To prevent tensions, the Prophet (PBUH) employed a wise and impartial approach: "Let my camel roam freely; wherever it kneels, I will settle there" (Ya‘qubi, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 41).

When Sa‘d ibn Zurarah, the chief of the Banu Najjar clan, passed away, his tribe approached the Prophet (PBUH) to appoint a new leader (naqib) from among them. Recognizing that selecting one candidate over others could rekindle old rivalries, the Prophet (PBUH) skillfully

resolved the potential conflict by declaring: "You are my maternal uncles—I share kinship with you. From now on, I myself will be your naqib" (Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 3, p. 930). With this wise intervention, their potential dispute was resolved, and they wholeheartedly accepted the Prophet's (PBUH) leadership and guardianship over them.

2-1-3. Drafting the Medina Charter to Manage Social Tensions and Foster Unity Upon his arrival in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) meticulously formulated the groundbreaking Constitution of Medina to address the deep social divisions among the Muhajirun (migrants), Ansar (local supporters), and other resident tribes (Ibn Hisham, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 501). This visionary charter served dual purposes: preventing Jewish-enemy alliances and securing a stable environment for Islamic propagation. By blocking potential political coordination between Medina's Jewish tribes and the Quraysh-led polytheists, the Prophet (PBUH) averted active opposition against Islam while fostering internal cohesion.

The Constitution of Medina introduced transformative principles, such as defining collective responsibilities for each group and establishing the "One Ummah" concept. By declaring all signatories—Muslims, Jews, and allies—as "a single community" (*ummatun wāḥidah*) (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 224), the Prophet (PBUH) replaced tribal fragmentation with social unity, emphasizing shared obligations over narrow loyalties. Recognizing the potential opposition from Jewish tribes like Banu Qurayzah, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qaynuqa, the charter proactively integrated them into a binding social contract. It granted them rights as protected citizens (*ahl al-dhimmah*) while imposing shared defense duties, ensuring their participation in Medina's collective security (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225).

Despite eventual rebellions by some Jewish tribes, these occurred only after Islamic authority had solidified in Medina. Acknowledging the inevitability of conflicts in a diverse society like Yathrib (Medina), the Prophet (PBUH) established a central judicial authority, appointing himself as the ultimate arbitrator to resolve disputes impartially (Ibn

Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225). This approach aligned with Qur'anic guidance: "Judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their desires, but beware lest they turn you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you" (Qur'an 5:49). Furthermore, the Qur'an outlines a clear protocol for conflict resolution among believers: "If two groups of believers fight each other, then make peace between them. But if one group oppressively attacks the other, then fight the aggressors until they submit to Allah's command" (Qur'an 49:9). Through these measures, the Prophet (PBUH) laid the foundation for a cohesive, just, and resilient society.

2-1-4. Preventing the Cultural and Political Influence of Non-Muslims One of the clauses in the treaty of the Prophet (PBUH) with the people of Medina states: "Muslims must not shelter criminals or innovators; rather, they must firmly combat their heresies" (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225). This clause demonstrates the exceptional emphasis the Prophet (PBUH) placed on the intellectual integrity and the cultural and ideological preservation of Muslims. Moreover, the enforcement of this clause ensured that foreign ideological storms threatening the foundations of Islamic thought would be neutralized by the Muslim community before gaining momentum. Additionally, this clause served as a restraint against the Jews residing in Medina or the polytheists who intended to enter the city. By preventing polytheists from entering Medina, the opportunity for them to sow discord and division among Muslims was eliminated, and their cultural and social influence on Muslims was curtailed. The Quran has repeatedly warned against the infiltration of foreign individuals and ideas into Islamic society: "O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves, for they will not fail to corrupt you. They wish to see you suffer. Hatred has already shown itself from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. We have made clear to you the signs, if you will use reason" (Qur'an 3:118). However, later, when Muslims gained strength and Islamic culture became dominant—eliminating any sense of vulnerability against polytheists and disbelievers—this ruling was lifted, as evidenced by the Prophet (PBUH) permitting the Thaqif tribe to enter Medina. It is important to note that Muslims must remain

perpetually vigilant, for the enemies will not settle for anything less than turning Muslims away from Islam (Qur'an 2:217; 3:100; 3:149).

2-1-5. Preventing Tribal and Jewish Socio-Political Claims The prevailing tribal mentality in the Arabian Peninsula led to social division. In tribal thinking, the political and physical security of a tribe's members was prioritized, while the killing and plundering of other tribes was of no concern. In the treaty, the Prophet (PBUH) assigned social responsibility to all, stipulating that if anyone committed a crime or murder, everyone was obligated to pursue and apprehend the perpetrator—regardless of their status—and nullify all tribal privileges and leadership positions that hindered justice (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225). On the other hand, among the citizens of Medina, the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir, Banu Qurayza, and Banu Qaynuqa were considered the most prominent. However, the treaty stripped them of this superiority (Ameli, 2011, Vol. 2, p. 291).

Before the Prophet's (PBUH) arrival in Medina, the Jewish tribes considered themselves entitled to all privileges, insisting that every decision and treaty be structured to serve their interests. Following their Talmudic beliefs, they regarded themselves as rulers over people, believing others were created to serve them. The Prophet (PBUH) dismantled this Jewish dominance in Medina's governance by including the clause: "No individual from the Jews shall participate in war except with Muhammad's permission" (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225). Moreover, this clause had profound psychological and social repercussions in the society of that time and across neighboring regions under Islamic rule. By establishing a unified governance, it significantly diminished the potential for discord and division.

2-1-6. Restricting the Rights of Polytheists in Medina In the internal covenant of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) granted polytheists no rights beyond the freedom to accept or reject Islam. Instead, he imposed restrictions on them, including prohibiting Muslims from sheltering polytheists or safeguarding their possessions. The treaty also stipulated that the residents of Medina must not prevent

any believer from exerting authority over polytheists, thereby placing psychological pressure on them to prevent Muslims from developing any inclination toward them. Furthermore, the privileges granted to believers in society served as an incentive for polytheists to embrace Islam (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 225). This clause effectively curtailed the ability of polytheists to interfere and sow discord within Medina.

2-2. Tension-Reducing Measures by the Prophet (PBUH) After Establishing the Government in Medina After forming and consolidating the Islamic government in Medina, the Prophet (PBUH) undertook several measures to stabilize it and reduce social tensions. Some of these measures include:

2-2-1. Addressing Tension-Inducing Tribal Customs During the pre-Islamic era of ignorance (Jahiliyya), the murder of an individual from one tribe would trigger prolonged wars of vengeance (*tha'r*) against the killer's tribe, resulting in numerous casualties (Mas'udi, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 484). The Prophet (PBUH) eliminated many potential social tensions arising from such killings by prohibiting the heinous act of murder and recognizing the payment of blood money (*diyya*) (Qur'an 4:92; see also Ibn Qutaybah, 1992, p. 604). Furthermore, he outlawed the killing of the murderer's relatives under the pretext of revenge, permitting only the retribution (*qisas*) against the actual killer (Qur'an 17:33).

2-2-2. Establishing an Accountable Government for Its Actions One of the strategies the Prophet (PBUH) employed to reduce social tensions was ensuring his government remained accountable for the conduct of its officials and representatives. This stemmed from his divine mandate to establish justice: "I have been commanded to judge justly between you" (Qur'an 42:15).

For instance, after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet (PBUH) dispatched Khalid ibn al-Walid to the Banu Jadhaima tribe to invite them to Islam. However, Khalid acted arbitrarily, unsheathing his sword and massacring a number of them in the region of Ghumaysa.

When the Prophet (PBUH) learned of this, he condemned Khalid's actions and dissociated himself from them. He then sent Imam Ali (AS) to console the Banu Jadhaima, compensating the victims' blood money (*diyya*) from the public treasury (*Bayt al-Mal*). Imam Ali (AS) not only fulfilled this duty but also paid an additional amount beyond the blood money and reimbursed the tribe for the loss of property and belongings destroyed during the conflict (Tabari, 1967, Vol. 3, p. 67).

Furthermore, the Prophet (PBUH) made it clear to all officials that every authority figure must be held accountable for their actions within the Islamic government. Even in cases where killings occurred unintentionally by Muslims, the Prophet (PBUH) ordered the payment of blood money (*diyyah*). For example, after the Treaty of Medina, one of his companions named 'Amr ibn Umayyah al-Damri unintentionally killed two individuals from the Banu 'Amir tribe. The Prophet (PBUH) compensated their blood money (Ibn Shu'bah al-Harrani, 1984, p. 342; Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 20, p. 158). These justice-oriented actions of the Prophet (PBUH) expanded his social influence and significantly reduced societal tensions.

2-2-3. Firm Handling of Criminals and Disturbers of Public Security One of the key factors in establishing social unity and ensuring public safety is taking decisive action against criminals. The Prophet (PBUH) dealt with such matters uncompromisingly. A clear example of the Prophet's approach can be seen in the following incident: A group from the tribe of 'Uraynah (or Banu Dabyah) came to Medina and embraced Islam. They were extremely pale and physically weak. The Prophet (PBUH) sent them to a fertile area near Medina, allowing them to consume the milk of charity camels (*zakat* livestock) to regain their strength. However, they killed the shepherds guarding the public livestock, stole the *zakat* sheep and camels, and fled with them. This caused widespread fear among the people. When the Prophet (PBUH) learned of the incident, he dispatched a group of his companions to apprehend the criminals. To eliminate public fear and punish the murderers for disrupting social security, he ordered their execution

(Baladhuri, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 378). Regarding this incident, Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 33 was revealed (Huwayzi, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 662).

2-2-4. Enforcement of Legal Punishments to Maintain Social Order

The Qur'anic injunctions on retribution (*qisas*) for intentional murder (Qur'an 2:179), amputation for theft (Qur'an 5:38), and public flogging for adulterers (Qur'an 24:2) were rigorously enforced by the Prophet (PBUH) as essential deterrents to maintain societal security and justice. His unwavering commitment to these divine laws ensured that no individual, regardless of status or influence, could evade accountability. A striking example of this principle occurred during the Conquest of Mecca when the Prophet (PBUH) refused to pardon a female thief from a prominent and wealthy family, despite the intercession of Usama ibn Zayd. Emphasizing the absolute nature of divine justice, he declared: "*By Allah, if Fatima [my daughter] were to steal, I would cut off her hand*" (Muslim, 1991, Vol. 3, p. 1315). This resolute stance underscored that justice in Islam is blind to privilege, kinship, or social standing, reinforcing the sanctity of divine law above all human considerations. Through such firm yet fair enforcement, the Prophet (PBUH) established a society where security, deterrence, and moral integrity prevailed.

2-2-5. Strict Stance on Apostasy and Prevention of Social Collapse

One of the causes of social disintegration is the constant shifting of societal values and norms, a tactic often exploited by enemies of nations and ideologies through psychological operations. During the Prophet's (PBUH) time, certain Jews plotted to undermine and dismantle the nascent Islamic system through such schemes. The Qur'an explicitly references this Jewish conspiracy (Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:72). On the other hand, the Prophet (PBUH) took decisive measures against apostasy to safeguard the integrity of the Islamic community. A notable example was the case of 'Abdullāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ, whose apostasy was met with divine condemnation in Sūrah al-An'ām (Qur'an 6:93), and the Prophet (PBUH) subsequently ordered his execution during the Conquest of Mecca (Kulaynī, 1986, Vol. 8, p. 201; Huwayzī, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 745). This firm stance was rooted in the understanding

that unchecked apostasy could have far-reaching consequences for the stability of the nascent Muslim society. In an Islamic framework, frequent religious deviation poses significant risks, including the erosion of ideological authority and the destabilization of communal cohesion. Left unaddressed, apostasy could lead to broader societal repercussions, such as weakening the moral and spiritual foundation of the community, influencing vulnerable individuals to abandon their faith, and providing hostile forces with opportunities to exploit internal divisions for subversive purposes. The Prophet's (PBUH) strict approach to apostasy was thus not merely punitive but served as a protective measure to preserve the unity and ideological integrity of the Muslim ummah.

2-2-6. Decisive Action Against the Jews to Establish Social Peace As previously mentioned, the Prophet (PBUH) established a treaty with the various tribes residing in Medina to foster social cohesion. Among the Jewish tribes that signed this treaty were the Banu Qaynuqa'. However, it did not take long for them to begin undermining the agreement and conspiring against the Muslims. They made insulting Muslims part of their agenda, and on one occasion, they harassed a Muslim woman and killed a Muslim man who came to her defense. The Banu Qaynuqa' were considered the wealthiest and most powerful Jewish tribe in Medina, leading them to believe they could ultimately defeat the Prophet (PBUH). Arrogantly confident in their superiority, they were certain of their eventual victory. However, the Prophet (PBUH) had to act decisively to restore internal peace in Medina and prevent social chaos. Following this conspiracy and act of aggression, the Prophet (PBUH) took disciplinary action and expelled them from Medina (Baladhuri, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 309). Another tactic employed by the Jews during the Prophet's (PBUH) era was to create division among Muslims. They sought to disrupt the social peace of Islamic society by inciting groups of Muslims and provoking tensions. However, the Prophet (PBUH) effectively countered and neutralized their provocative actions. For example, Shas ibn Qays, an elderly Jewish man who harbored deep resentment toward Muslims, once exploited past grievances by reminding a group of Muslim allies from the Aws and

Khazraj tribes about the Battle of Bu'ath, a pre-Islamic conflict between them. His words stirred emotions and reignited old hostilities, leading some Muslims to threaten each other with renewed fighting. When the Prophet (PBUH) learned of this, he immediately intervened. Addressing them, he said: "Have you returned to the ways of Jahiliyyah (ignorance) while Allah has honored you with Islam and faith?" Through his wise and measured words, the Prophet (PBUH) restored peace among them. His psychological approach was so profound that not only did they abandon thoughts of fighting, but they embraced one another in remorse and wept (Ibn Athir, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 175).

2-2-7. Prevention of Divisive Social Rhetoric The Prophet (PBUH) implemented careful measures to regulate speech and social interactions in ways that would preserve communal harmony and prevent discord. During critical moments like the digging of the Trench (Khandaq), he demonstrated this wisdom by prohibiting Hassan ibn Thabit and Ka'b ibn Malik from reciting boastful tribal poetry (*rajaz*), recognizing how such competitive verses could reignite old rivalries and fracture the fragile unity of Medina's diverse community (Ibn Sa'd, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 447). This intervention reflected his profound understanding of how words could either strengthen or undermine social cohesion. The Prophet's approach to maintaining social order extended to economic spaces as well. He advised the Muslims of Thaqif to conduct their trade in controlled environments like their own courtyards and public squares rather than the chaotic 'Ukaz marketplace, which had become notorious for its corrupting influences. This strategic decision addressed multiple social ills simultaneously—it prevented exposure to the marketplace's toxic culture where tribal poets traded insults, women were verbally harassed through lewd verses, and divisive rhetoric flourished (Ameli, 2011, Vol. 9, p. 402). By redirecting economic activity to more wholesome spaces, the Prophet (PBUH) created conditions conducive to both ethical commerce and social harmony. These examples reveal the Prophet's comprehensive strategy for building a stable society. Rather than simply reacting to conflicts, he proactively shaped social environments and norms to minimize opportunities for discord. His interventions in

both cultural expression (poetry) and economic spaces (marketplaces) demonstrate how Islamic leadership carefully considers the social impact of all human interactions, from artistic expression to commercial exchanges. The wisdom behind these measures continues to offer relevant insights for maintaining social cohesion in diverse communities today.

2-2-8. Preventing Societal Polarization The Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated meticulous care in preventing polarization within Islamic society. A notable example occurred when Muslims were en route to the Battle of Banu Mustaliq. A minor dispute arose between a servant of Umar (RA) and a servant of Abdullah ibn Ubayy (the leader of Medina's hypocrites) over drawing water from a well. Abdullah, who constantly sought to sow discord among Muslims, attempted to create a "Muhajirun vs. Ansar" divide. The Prophet (PBUH) faced a complex challenge: while preparing for battle, his army was showing signs of division. With strategic wisdom, he ordered the army to march during extreme heat, kept them moving continuously for a full day/night cycle, and only permitted stops for obligatory prayers. This deliberate exhaustion made soldiers forget their disputes completely (Tabirsi, 1993, Vol. 10, p. 44). Simultaneously, he prevented the erosion of Muslim unity and strength through such subversive tactics. Through this intervention, all divisive tensions were eliminated from the Muslim forces.

2-2-9. Purifying the Islamic Army of Weak Elements In difficult wartime conditions, one of the factors leading to social disintegration and defeat is the infiltration of weak-willed individuals who, motivated by material gains, demoralize the fighters. Such individuals may easily be influenced by enemy threats, rumors, or propaganda. The Prophet (PBUH) made efforts to purify his army of such elements to prevent them from weakening the morale of the Muslim forces. This strategic approach by the Prophet (PBUH) eliminated potential fractures among Muslim combatants and strengthened their resolve for battle. For example, in the battles of Badr and Uhud, some Muslims wanted to seek help from their polytheist allies, but the Prophet (PBUH) declared: "We

do not seek help from polytheists against polytheists" (Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1983, Vol. 14, p. 227). In the Battle of Khaybar, the Prophet (PBUH) barred those who had refused to join him during the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah from participating (Maqrizi, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 306). In the Battle of Tabuk, the Qur'an explicitly states that the absence of hypocrites (*munafiqun*) in battle was insignificant, as their presence would have caused division and defeat among Muslims (Qur'an 9:45–48). Through these measures, the Prophet (PBUH) ensured that only steadfast believers remained in the ranks, reinforcing unity and combat effectiveness.

2-2-10. Severing Cultural Ties Between Muslims and Their Allies with Non-Muslims

Individuals who maintain frequent interactions—whether commercial, cultural, political, or otherwise—inevitably influence each other's behavior and conduct, regardless of whether such influence is positive or negative. Islamic society is no exception to this rule, especially during the early days of Islam when the faith of many believers was not yet deeply rooted. The Qur'an explicitly prohibits close alliances with disbelievers for this very reason: "O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves, for they will not fail to corrupt you" (Qur'an 3:118). "O you who have believed, do not take My enemy and your enemy as allies..." (Quran 60:1). These verses emphasize the necessity of safeguarding the ideological and cultural integrity of the Muslim community by limiting deep social and political ties with non-Muslims who may undermine Islamic values.

2-2-11. The Prophet's Policy of Severing Ties with Polytheists

During the advent of Islam, the Prophet (PBUH) instructed Muslims and their allies to cut off relations with polytheists. The following were among the most frequently used phrases in his letters and treaties: "Separate yourselves from the polytheists" (Ibn Sa'd, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 205), "Fight the polytheists" (Ibn Sa'd, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 205), "Distance yourselves from the polytheists" (Ibn Athir, 1989, Vol. 4, p. 233), "Oppose the polytheists" (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 1994, Vol. 4, p. 523). Through this strategy, the Prophet (PBUH) successfully prevented polytheists from infiltrating Muslim ranks and disrupting the unity of

Islamic society. The objectives behind this policy were: Preventing Muslim assimilation of polytheistic influences – shielding believers from adopting pagan customs and beliefs. Applying pressure on polytheists – by cutting social and commercial ties, Muslims economically isolated them. Encouraging conversion to Islam – the hardship imposed by this boycott was meant to motivate polytheists to reconsider Islam. This approach proved effective in both preserving Muslim identity and gradually weakening pagan opposition.

2-2-12. Practical Approaches of the Prophet (PBUH) for Establishing Unity and Avoiding Division Islam is a social religion, and its strength lies in the unity of the Muslim community. As the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Allah's hand is with the jama'ah (community)" (Payandeh, 2003, p. 45). To prevent fragmentation and disunity, he also warned: "Whoever separates from the Muslim community by even a handspan has effectively removed the bond of Islam from his neck" (Ibn Babawayh, 1979, p. 333). Such hadiths demonstrate the Prophet's (PBUH) emphasis on social cohesion, as intellectual growth and unity flourish within a collective framework. While differences in thought, preferences, ethnicity, or tribal affiliations are natural (Qur'an 49:13), conflicts arising from selfishness, jealousy, oppression, or personal desires are unacceptable. Such negative disputes destroy psychological peace, create insecurity and arrogance, and lead to social fractures. The Qur'an condemns these divisive conflicts (Qur'an 3:19), as they undermine societal harmony through disunity in thought and action, disruption of collective security, and promotion of superiority complexes. The Prophet (PBUH) also distinguished between healthy diversity (like geographical/cultural variations) and toxic discord (stemming from ego/hostility). Disagreements rooted in ignorance and personal desires lead to behavioral deviance in society. This is why all civilized communities establish legal norms to safeguard social rights. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) expertly managed social norms through Islamic legislation, uniting scattered hearts under the principle of "ukhuwwah" (brotherhood). This social cohesion became a powerful attraction for many to embrace Islam. These legal principles are detailed in hadith literature and Islamic jurisprudential texts.

2-2-13. Establishing Social Cohesion Through the Bond of Brotherhood While the gathering of Muslims in Medina strengthened the Islamic community in terms of manpower and created a large population ready for action, the deep cultural, social, tribal, psychological, and emotional differences between the Muhajirun (migrants) and the Ansar (helpers) posed a serious risk of social fragmentation. Additionally, the newly arrived Muslims in Medina faced numerous challenges like economic hardships – many migrants had abandoned their wealth in Mecca, emotional distress – they suffered from homesickness and alienation, environmental struggles – some struggled to adapt to Medina’s climate. To address these dual challenges, the Prophet (PBUH) instituted the "Mu'ākhāt Pact" (Brotherhood Covenant) as his first strategic measure. In the early years of Hijrah, he even decreed inheritance rights between paired brothers (Tabatabai, 1996, Vol. 9, p. 142). The transformational impacts of the pact were profound and multifaceted. Spiritually and socially, it strengthened bonds between the Muhajirun and Ansar, fostering deep emotional connections that transcended tribal affiliations and replaced them with a sense of Islamic brotherhood. It also served as a psychological sanctuary, eliminating the migrants' isolation by establishing new support systems and creating "emotional shelters" for displaced Muslims. Structurally, the pact promoted unity by forming interdependent social networks (Saleh, 2006, p. 70), which enhanced collective power as these bonds grew stronger. Ideologically, it reinforced commitment to Islam by demonstrating practical solidarity and embodying the principles of social justice, thereby deepening the believers' attachment to their faith.

2-2-14. Utilizing Kinship Ties to Bridge Social Divides The reduction of social divisions and divisive factors fosters greater unity and cohesion, with kinship ties being among the most powerful elements in bringing hearts together. A striking example of this is the Prophet’s (PBUH) strategic use of kinship during the Battle of Hunayn. Facing a crisis when the Banu Sulaym tribe—leading the Muslim vanguard—suddenly retreated, causing widespread panic (Qummi, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 287), some Muslims reacted with condemnation, shouting, "Where are

you fleeing?" and even throwing dust at them. Recognizing the dangers of unjust collective blame, demoralization of a key allied tribe, and lasting tribal fractures, the Prophet (PBUH) intervened with a profound declaration: "I am the son of the 'Atikas' (descendant of the 'Atikas')." This statement carried deep symbolic weight, as three of his grandmothers bore the name 'Atika—'Atika bint Hilal (mother of Abd Manaf), 'Atika bint Murra ibn Hilal (mother of Hashim), and 'Atika bint Awqas (mother of Wahb) (Ibn Kathir, 1987, Vol. 4, p. 328)—and historical records note twelve 'Atikas among his ancestors, linking him to major tribes like Banu Sulaym, Quraysh, Kinana, Asad, Quda'a, and Azd (Baladhuri, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 533). By emphasizing this shared lineage, particularly with Banu Sulaym, the Prophet (PBUH) averted tribal discord and reinforced solidarity. This intervention was critical, as the aftermath of Hunayn saw the Meccans mocking Muslim disarray, claiming they were "in love with defeat" (Ameli, 2011, Vol. 8, p. 195). His measured response not only restored morale but also demonstrated how strategic kinship ties could transcend immediate conflicts to uphold Islamic unity.

2-2-15. Preventing Grudges and Resentment in Islamic Society In pre-Islamic Arab society, where conflicts could erupt over the smallest matters, effective solutions were needed to resolve disputes and remove grudges from people's hearts. One such solution was addressing estrangement between individuals. Unfortunately, cutting off ties often leads to the weakening or even termination of relationships. Estrangement occurs for various reasons—sometimes due to misunderstandings between friends, while other times, it stems from manipulative intentions, as some individuals use silence as a tactic to pressure others, gain attention, or simply due to personal preoccupations. To preserve friendships, the best approach when estrangement occurs is open dialogue, allowing grievances and misunderstandings to be resolved. The Prophet (PBUH) proactively addressed even the slightest issues that could fracture social cohesion, ensuring that unity did not dissolve into discord. He placed such high value on harmony among Muslims that he declared: "If two Muslims refuse to speak to each other for more than three days, they are no longer

considered within the fold of Islam." He encouraged reconciliation, stating: "When two Muslims cut ties for three days without making peace, they step outside Islam, and no bond remains between them. The one who initiates reconciliation first will be the first to enter Paradise on Judgment Day" (Al-Kulayni, 1407 AH, Vol. 2, pp. 344–345). Another narration emphasizes: "No estrangement should last beyond three days" (Al-Kulayni, 1407 AH, Vol. 2, p. 345). The Prophet's (PBUH) emphasis on reconciliation and avoiding resentment was rooted in the danger that lingering hatred could weaken a united community, leaving it vulnerable to external threats and endangering Islam itself (Al-Sharif al-Radi, 1379 AH, Vol. 5, p. 979). The importance of peace and friendship in society is so great that the Prophet (PBUH) considered it superior to fasting and prayer (Al-Tusi, 1414 AH, p. 522). Moreover, reconciling disputes (*Islah Dhat al-Bayn*) is sometimes an obligatory religious duty—even requiring financial support from public funds—while in other cases, it is strongly recommended, unless it concerns matters critical to the fate of Muslims (Alidoust Khorasani & Pishvaei, 2018, p. 96)

2-2-16. Neighborhood Ethics: A Prophetic Model for Social Cohesion The Prophet (PBUH) established neighborly relations as a cornerstone of Islamic society, emphasizing that strong neighborhoods build strong communities, mutual respect reduces social divisions, and collective welfare enhances religious outreach. The Qur'an commands: "Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and do good to parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the distant neighbor..." (Qur'an 4:36). The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) further defined true faith through neighborhood ethics, stating, "He who sleeps full while his neighbor is hungry is not a believer," and "Whoever harms their neighbor is not of us" (Al-Kulayni, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 668). These teachings highlight the deep connection between faith, social responsibility, and harmonious coexistence.

2-2-17. The Social Tradition of Honoring and Feeding Fellow Believers One of Islam's key directives for fostering social unity is the emphasis on honoring and feeding fellow Muslims. Islamic tradition

teaches that mere generosity is insufficient—Muslims must actively encourage one another to uphold this practice so that it becomes widespread in society (Qur'an 69:34; 89:18). The Qur'an repeatedly highlights feeding others as an act of charity (*infaq*) and kindness (*ihsan*), urging the wealthy to allocate a portion of their wealth for the needy to preserve human dignity and maintain economic balance: "And in their wealth was a rightful share for the beggar and the deprived" (Qur'an 51:19). Neglecting the poor carries severe consequences—it is described as a sign of disbelief: "Indeed, he did not believe in Allah the Almighty, nor did he encourage the feeding of the poor" (Qur'an 69:33–34), and a cause of social instability, as the Qur'an warns: "Spend in the way of Allah and do not cast yourselves into destruction by your own hands. And do good" (Qur'an 2:195). These teachings underscore the vital link between faith, charity, and societal harmony.

2-2-18. Charity as a Safeguard Against Social Collapse The absence of charity (*infaq*) in society—where wealth accumulates among a privileged few while the majority struggle in poverty—leads to dangerous consequences:

- **Social explosion**, marked by violent upheavals where accumulated wealth is destroyed in revolt
- **Economic implosion**, as extreme inequality destabilizes the entire community

Thus, *infaq* serves a dual purpose: ensuring wealth redistribution (economic balance) and wealth preservation (social stability). Beyond aiding the needy, the Prophet (PBUH) expanded the concept of generosity by encouraging Muslims to honor and feed even non-needy believers. This practice strengthened communal bonds: "The believer who feeds another believer will be shaded by Allah on Judgment Day" (Al-Kulayni, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 200), and normalized generosity as a consistent cultural value: "The most beloved deeds to Allah are those done consistently, even if small" (Ibn Babawayh, 1979, p. 283). Through the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings, this noble practice

flourished, resolving social issues, uniting hearts, and fostering greater social cohesion among Muslims.

Research Findings

Facing the social chaos and discord prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) employed the most effective strategies to restore social cohesion, resolve conflicts, and instill a spirit of unity and brotherhood among members of society:

1. **Identifying Divisive Factors:** Before implementing cohesive measures, the Prophet (PBUH) first identified the root causes of division and discord.
2. **Promoting Unity Over Division:** In the second stage, the Prophet (PBUH) rejected any factor that fostered disunity among Muslims, while actively encouraging whatever strengthened solidarity, brotherhood, and friendship.
3. **Marginalizing Agitators:** One of the Prophet's key strategies in preserving Muslim unity was expelling polytheists and divisive elements, such as hypocrites, to prevent their conspiracies from undermining the community.
4. **Firmness Against Disruptors:** Despite the Prophet's efforts to counter division, some opponents still sought to disrupt social order and cohesion. He dealt with them decisively to maintain stability.
5. **Building Unity from the Ground Up:** The Prophet (PBUH) began fostering social cohesion by addressing divisions within the smallest social unit—the family—then gradually expanding this effort to relatives, neighbors, and the entire Muslim community.

Through these strategies, the Prophet (PBUH) successfully healed many social rifts, strengthened the faith of new Muslims, and attracted numerous people to Islam. Within just ten years of his leadership, his approach significantly contributed to the spread and consolidation of Islam.

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A Multi-Register Semiotics of Yūnus: Saussure, Greimas, and Peirce in Qur'ānic Narratology

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Abstract

This article offers a semiotic reading of the Qur'ānic dossier on Yūnus (Jonah), arguing that the narrative functions as a coherent sign system that produces theological and civic orientations toward repentance and communal responsibility. Integrating Saussurean lexical relations, Greimasian actantial mapping, and Peircean sign typology, the study tracks how marine and meteorological tokens (storm, ship, sea), the fish, and the prophet's penitential cry are organized into indexical and symbolic chains that move the story from crisis to reintegration. Close attention to Arabic lexemes and verse-level syntagms shows that stochastic exposure ("casting lots") and natural peril index sovereign adjudication, while confession ("I was wrong") and vegetal shelter figure mercy and recommissioning. The uniquely positive outcome of Yūnus's people—belief that suspends "disgrace in this life"—is read as the model case that the sura addresses to later audiences. By pairing philology with a reproducible narratological frame, the article reframes Yūnus not as episodic miracle but as systemic pedagogy: a script by which communities convert recognized signs into public repentance and present-tense relief.

Keywords: Qur'an; Yūnus/Jonah; Semiotics; Greimas; Peirce; Actantial analysis; Repentance.

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Introduction

The Yūnus (Jonah) episode hurtles ahead with a pressure that is almost breathless—flight, the lot, the plunge, the prayer, the deliverance, the reluctant return. Yet the tale will not be reduced to plot. Its gestures are emblems. Read as a chain of signs, the sura stages judgment, repentance, and the burden a community bears for its own fate. The sea and wind do not decorate; they pronounce. Even the silence between movements has force (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

So the criticism—not accidentally—has learned to read Jonah semiotically. Oancea (2018) hears in the sailors’ straining at the oars (Jonah 1:13) a liturgy of inward change, a purposeful hesitation that rehearses the communal turn to repentance (p. 73). Frolov (1999) refuses the easy indictment and sees Jonah not as a failed emissary but as one who declines to become a sacrificial go-between; the story then becomes a protest against the price exacted by divine justice from the just themselves (pp. 105–108). Barrett (2012) presses further: Jonah’s self-implication, matched by God’s oblique mercy, exposes a prophet’s unseeing heart and converts the narrative into a mirror held up to the reader (p. 240). Peters (2018) restores the old, cosmic theater (God, sea, wind) and reads the plunge as a ritual re-enactment of divine conflict, with Israel (Jonah) chastened rather than spared (p. 160). In Qur’ānic studies specifically, narratological work treats such episodes as structured sign-systems rather than loose marvels (Salamat, 2017, pp. 50–52).

Take these together and the point hardens: Yūnus is not a sequence but a sign-system. Its figures and motions instruct by symbol, directing the reader toward moral and communal transformation. The story judges, but it also schools (see also “Analyzing the Educational Teachings of Sūrah Yūnus...,” 2022).

Crucially, the text marks moral orientation through meteorological and maritime indices (storm, ship, sea) and through a single, charged cry that sutures confession to deliverance: “There is no God but You, glory

be to You, I was wrong” (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). That utterance, condensed and declarative, functions both as a lexical sign of acknowledgment and as a pragmatic cue for turning, for the verse immediately frames his plea as efficacious response: “We answered him and saved him from distress: this is how We save the faithful” (Q 21:88, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The pairing of confession and rescue motivates a reading in which semiotic relations between sign and effect are constitutive of the narrative’s ethical and theological grammar; within Sūrah Yūnus, this moral grammar is bound up with monotheistic acknowledgement and responsibility (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70).

Much Qur’ānic narratology along with the tidier semiotic treatments has either moralized Yūnus into exemplum or miniaturized it into marvel, and in both cases the poem of signs is lost. What drops out is the sura’s own internal economy: a system of signals directed at an audience and calibrated to elicit uptake, not passive edification. The dossier speaks pragmatics (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

Recent work corrects the flattening. Elewa (2022) shows that symbolic tokens in the Qur’ān, color above all, operate within a culturally inflected semiotic grid that exceeds the literal, communicating dense theological and affective charges to the listener (pp. 118–120). This is not ornament but instrument. Likewise, Bahri et al. (2024) argue that prophetic narratives function as interpretive models: characters and events stand as operative symbols of communal and ethical ideals, training perception even as they instruct behavior. Their corpus centers on father–son episodes, but the method holds for Yūnus, where divine–human exchange is mediated by signs rather than by bare imperatives; a narratological lens clarifies how these signs are sequenced and read (Salamat, 2017, pp. 50–52).

Read this way, the Yūnus narrative discloses a layered architecture that obliges interpretation. Its images work, its actions signify, and its address aims to reorient the reader toward repentance, mercy, and

communal moral responsibility. Not a lesson merely, nor a wonder merely, but a system that teaches by making the audience read (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

The flight motif, introduced with ruthless compression, “He fled to the overloaded ship”, is not a mere narrative expedient but a marked token of improper agency whose consequences are immediately indexed by chance and sea: “They cast lots, and he suffered defeat,” and “a great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy [acts]” (Q 37:140–142, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). These compressed actions encode an interpretable logic: elective evasion entails stochastic exposure (lots), and stochastic exposure yields naturalized judgment (the sea’s peril and the fish’s swallowing). When Yūnus later re-enters the social order by divine preservation, the text does not mystify that return; it delineates a pedagogy of recovery in signs, casting him “out, sick, on to a barren shore,” and “caus[ing] a gourd plant to grow over him,” before recommissioning him to a people who actually heed the call (Q 37:145–147, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The vegetal shelter and the bodily weakness are not ornamental after-effects; they are legible markers of liminality and re-initiation, signifying both vulnerability and provision as preconditions of mission (Younesi & Yousefzādi, 2011, pp. 54–55).

The argument advanced here is that the Yūnus materials operate as a coherent sign system that yields theological, ethical, and existential orientations toward repentance and communal responsibility. The sea and the lot function indexically, binding moral evasion to environmental peril; the fish’s act and the prophet’s cry function symbolically, aggregating a recognizable code of confession and mercy; the subsequent plant and mission function syntagmatically, confirming that restoration is never private but ordered toward community. This systemic account is not speculative: the Qur’ānic text explicitly registers the communal telos by distinguishing the singular case in which a people’s repentance changes their historical trajectory, “Only Jonah’s people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them

of the punishment of disgrace in this world, and let them enjoy life for a time” (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The pedagogy embedded in the narrative is thus double: it models the tested agency of a prophet whose evasion is redirected toward obedience, and it dramatizes a collectivity whose fate is transfigured by recognition and return (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70).

The contribution of this reading is fourfold. First, it integrates Saussurean attention to sign relations (paradigmatic contrasts between flight and return; syntagmatic sequencing from crisis to reintegration) with Greimasian actantial analysis (the prophet as subject, the sea and fish as helpers/opponents, the community as receiver), while acknowledging Peircean typology in which storm and casting of lots are indexical signs linking moral cause to situational effect. Second, it insists on Arabic lexical precision, taking seriously how a compact confession can orient the reader’s stance and expectation, “There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong”, as a performative model of turning (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). Third, it treats the vegetal and meteorological imagery not as decoration but as semiotic operators that move the narrative: the “gourd tree” that shades the convalescent prophet is a sign of provisional care and recommissioning, after which “We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more” (Q 37:147, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005), with exegetical and scientific-literature support for the plant’s aptness during convalescence (Younesi & Yousefzādi, 2011, pp. 54–55).

Finally, it frames its claims in a reception-aware key, since the only city to benefit from collective repentance becomes an interpretive hinge for subsequent communities: the exception marked by “Only Jonah’s people did so” fixes a pattern of address and response that later readers are implicitly invited to emulate (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

The section proceeds by mapping how the narrative’s crisis markers (storm, lots, sea) function as indices of divine sovereignty; how confession and deliverance operate symbolically to reset agency; and

how vegetal shelter and recommissioning articulate reintegration as civic, not private, good. Evidence is drawn exclusively from Abdel Haleem's translation of the Qur'ān to ensure textual accuracy and citational transparency; each analytical step is paired with the relevant verse-level quotation to keep inference continuously tethered to the primary text. The evidentiary strategy is cumulative and non-redundant: rather than repeating any single proof-text, it tracks the sequence from evasion to mission through distinct signs at each stage: flight and lots ("He fled to the overloaded ship... They cast lots," Q 37:140–141), descent and confinement ("then the great fish swallowed him," Q 37:142), confession and rescue ("We answered him and saved him from distress," Q 21:88), convalescence and shade ("We cast him out, sick... and caused a gourd plant to grow over him," Q 37:145–146), and collective transformation ("Only Jonah's people did so...," Q 10:98), all trans. Abdel Haleem (2005). Within Sūrah Yūnus, these dynamics align with its larger instructional aims regarding belief, repentance, and divine lordship (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70; "Analyzing the Educational Teachings...," Afrasiabi et al. 2022, pp. 54-55).

Corpus scope

→ Q 10; Q 21:87–88; Q 37:139–148; Q 68:48–50

↓

Text prep

- Arabic Unicode normalization (NFKC)
- Tokenization (whitespace + punctuation split)
- Lemmatization (root-aware where possible)
- Stoplist (particles/prepositions; configurable)

↓

Collocation analysis

- Window: ±5 tokens around anchor lemma

- Counts: co-occurrence frequency
- (Optional) Association: MI or log-likelihood

↓

Mapping layers

- Saussure (lexeme–sense clusters)
- Greimas (actants & modal shifts)
- Peirce (index → icon → symbol)

↓

Reporting

- Verse-level evidence + English gloss (Abdel Haleem, 2005)
- Tables/figures for reproducibility

Table 1

Anchor lemma (translit)	Arabic form(s) (verse)	Scope (sūra/ayāt)	Frequent collocates (lemma-level, ±5)	Evidence snippet (Abdel Haleem, 2005)	Semiotic function
ḥūt	الْحُوتِ/ <i>al-ḥūt</i> (37:142); “Ṣāḥib al-Ḥūt” (68:48)	Q 37:140–146; 68:48–50	<i>fa-ltaqamahū</i> (swallowed), <i>al-fulk</i> (ship), <i>al-‘arā’</i> (barren shore), <i>saqīm</i> (sick), <i>yaqīn</i> (gourd)	“Then the great fish swallowed him ... We cast him out on the barren shore ... and caused a gourd to grow over him.” (Q 37:142,145–146)	Index of arrest → icon of enclosure → symbol of admonition/mercy
sāhama	فَسَاهَمَ/ <i>fa-sāhama</i> ; مِنْ الْمُدْحَضِينَ	Q 37:141	<i>al-fulk mashhūn</i> (overloaded ship), <i>ulqiya</i> (cast),	“They cast lots and he lost; then the great fish swallowed him.” (Q 37:141–142)	Index of communal procedure deciding fate; triggers correction arc

Anchor lemma (translit)	Arabic form(s) (verse)	Scope (sūra/ayāt)	Frequent collocates (lemma-level, ±5)	Evidence snippet (Abdel Haleem, 2005)	Semiotic function
	(37:141–142)		<i>mudḥaḍīn</i> (defeated)		

Figure/Table 1. Methods snapshot. The pipeline specifies corpus bounds, text prep, and a fixed ±5 window for collocations around anchor lemmas. The miniature table demonstrates how **ḥūt** and **sāhama** concentrate co-occurring nautical and evaluative lexemes (e.g., *al-fulk*, *al-‘arā’*, *yaqtīn*, *mudḥaḍīn*), which the analysis then escalates across layers: Saussurean clustering (lexeme–sense stability), Greimasian programmatics (from lot to sanction), and Peircean sign typing (index → icon → symbol). Verse-level evidence is paired with a single translation reference (Abdel Haleem, 2005) to keep the workflow transparent and reproducible.

2. Methods and Theoretical Toolkit

This study adopts a multi-register semiotic method to capture how the Qur’anic sura(s) featuring Yunus (Jonah) generate layered theological, ethical, and existential orientations. At the micro level, a Saussurean lens tracks recurrent Arabic lexemes and their sign relations; at the meso level, a Greimasian narratology maps actantial roles and syntagmatic progressions; at the macro level, a Peircean typology classifies tokens (index/icon/symbol) to argue that meteorological and marine motifs operate as signs of divine sovereignty. Throughout, I integrate philological attention to Arabic with reception-aware gestures to classical tafsīr, grounding claims in a reproducible coding workflow (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994).

Saussurean layer (lexical sign relations).

Operationally, I treat signifier/signified pairs in Arabic as the core units linking lexis to ethical and theological orientation i.e., a Saussurean synchrony that models meaning as relations within a system rather than

as isolated words (cf. the Qur'ān's own self-presentation of *āyāt* as "signs"). As Saussure famously puts it, "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image," and once established the sign is "indivisible," like the two sides of a sheet of paper (Saussure, 1916/2011).

Accordingly, signifiers are selected by three criteria: (1) recurrence above a threshold of ≥ 3 tokens across the six-passage corpus; (2) clustered co-occurrence within ± 5 -word collocation windows around verbs of divine agency (e.g., *'arsala*, *raḥima*, *najjā*); and (3) distribution across at least two *sūras* to ensure cross-textual salience. The coding rubric distinguishes base forms (e.g., *bahr* "sea," *hūt* "fish," *qawm* "people," *tawba* "repentance") from morphological variants, tagging each token for lemma, stem, affixal morphology, and syntactic function. For each candidate signifier, I annotate the immediate clause for deictic anchoring (person/tense/mood) and for pragmatic addressivity (vocatives, imperatives). I then record signifieds as reading-hypotheses emergent from intratextual usage and controlled comparison with the authoritative English translation used as a concordance aid (Abdel Haleem, 2005, pp. 128–136). For example, in Qur'ān 10:98 the cluster "believed / punishment removed / mercy" cues a sign relation linking communal repentance to the suspension of chastisement, "When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in this life, and let them enjoy life for a time" (Qur'ān 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). This line serves as an anchor lemma for the repentance node in the lexical network and matches Rahman's argument that Qur'ānic *āyāt* function to form an ethical disposition capable of recognizing signs in both text and nature (Rahman, 1994).

To make the Saussurean layer operational within Qur'ānic discourse, I treat *āya* as a structural hinge between linguistic and cosmological semiosis: as Neuwirth shows, early Islamic usage keeps textual sign and sensory sign in active relation, which justifies mapping paradigms

(lexical oppositions like flight/return) and syntagms (crisis → penitence → reintegration) across both domains (Neuwirth, 2019).

Practically, this underwrites my decision to compute collocations around verbs of divine agency (indices of sovereignty) and to weight tokens that recur across distinct *sūras* (structural salience > incidental usage). Because Qur'ānic rhetoric is “dynamic and engaging,” shifting person and mood to move hearers from stance to act (Abdel Haleem, 2010), I explicitly tag vocatives and imperatives as pragmatic cues that help convert sign-recognition into ethical uptake.

Finally, Rahman's account of reading signs that natural phenomena and verbal *āyāt* mutually authorize each other and require a receptive orientation, supports my classification of tokens like *tawba* as performative signs whose efficacy is a function of timing and address, not merely denotation (Rahman, 1994).

Greimasian narratology layer (actantial and syntagmatic sequencing).

At the meso level, I model the Yūnus sequence through Greimas's actantial schema (Subject/Object; Sender/Receiver; Helper/Opponent) and narrative programs (performance → sanction). I first segment each passage into minimal narrative units (MNs) delimited by finite-verb transitions and discourse markers (e.g., *idh*, *thumma*). Each MN is assigned an actantial configuration and a modal value (want, know, can, must), then sequenced to trace modal shifts from crisis to reintegration. This procedure aligns with the Qur'ān's own “dynamic and engaging” rhetoric where shifts of person and mood (“Say...,” imperatives) have a functional role in moving hearers from stance to action, so that formal segmentation is not merely stylistic but paraenetic (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 204–205, 212–213). In Qur'ān 37:139–148, the Subject (Jonah) undergoes a transformation marked by flight and casting lots, indexed by marine motifs that function as both Opponent (peril) and Helper (vehicle of return): “Jonah was one of Our messengers—he fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots, and he suffered defeat; then the

great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy acts” (Qur’ān 37:139–142, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The subsequent reintegration program culminates in communal responsiveness: “We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more and they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time” (Qur’ān 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). Read actantially, these syntagmatic pivots (defeat → supplication → re-mission) materialize as modal shifts (from can’t/won’t to must/can) that structure the ethical pedagogy of repentance and responsibility. As Greimas notes of narrative programs, “the consequence is then the *sanction* of that contract... the proof of its realization” (Greimas, 1984).

In the same spirit, he urges “an actantial formulation and not a functional one,” so that content presents itself as a “drama... and no longer as a series of events” (Greimas, 1984).

Abdel Haleem likewise underscores that such sequencing aims at conclusiveness not merely recounting, but guiding readers toward uptake via affective, second-person address (2010, pp. 189–191, 212–213). Neuwirth’s account of late-antique “punishment narratives” shows the Qur’ān reconfiguring inherited plots into didactic exempla, where the positive counter-image (salvation/mercy) becomes a template for later communities (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). In this frame, Helper roles are not only characters (fish/plant) but also speech-acts and temporal assurances embedded in discourse; Opponents include not only peril and chance (lots, sea) but also haste and misreading of signs, elements the text repeatedly corrects by repositioning the Subject under divine timing and by directing the audience through imperatives and exempla (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 204–205, 212–213; Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Finally, Greimas’s contrast between “constitutional” and “modal” models supports treating these shifts as transformational (Greimas, 1984).

Peircean typology layer (index/icon/symbol).

At the macro level, tokens are classified as indexical, iconic, or symbolic according to Peircean criteria adapted to scriptural discourse. A token is indexical when it stands in causal or existential contiguity with divine agency (e.g., storm, sea, swallowing), iconic when it resembles by figural mapping (e.g., darkness as an image of inward constriction), and symbolic when its meaning is conventionalized within Qur'ānic pedagogy (e.g., repentance formulas, communal belief). Classification proceeds in two steps: (1) derive candidate tokens from the Saussurean layer; (2) test them against narrative functions from the Greimasian layer. Marine meteorology exemplifies indexicality: storm, sea, and the casting of lots mediate a causal chain that links the prophet's flight to corrective mercy, a linkage the text frames as divine initiative. In the same pericope, the fish's act functions as an index of chastening presence, "then the great fish swallowed him" (Qur'ān 37:142), while the subsequent communal turn consolidates a symbolic pedagogy of mercy: "they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time" (Qur'ān 37:148; see also the civic formulation in Qur'ān 10:98). On this reading, indexicality underwrites the theological claim that natural signs are not decorative but evidentiary of sovereignty, a point consonant with Rahman's account of Qur'ānic signs as ethically directive rather than merely descriptive (Rahman, 1994, pp. 3–8). By contrast, symbolic constellations notably the fish and the recommissioned return, bind orientation to communal repentance, aligning with Neuwirth's description of punishment narratives repurposed as didactic exempla that instruct later communities in timely turning (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 112–113). Together, the index (event-order and material remainders), icon (formal resemblance of constriction and relief), and symbol (conventionalized tokens of mercy and recommission) articulate how the Yūnus dossier moves from crisis to pedagogical restoration through a layered semiotic grammar (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994). As Peirce himself emphasizes the operational role of likeness in reasoning, "the diagram,

or icon, capable of being manipulated and experimented upon, is all-important” (Peirce, 1890–1892/2009, p. 24), which supports treating Qur’ānic iconic tokens as functional models that help move readers from recognition to uptake.

Data and corpus.

The corpus comprises six Qur’ānic loci conventionally associated with Yūnus: (1) Q 10:98 (communal repentance and removal of punishment) (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 135). (2) Q 21:87–88 (Dhu ’l-Nūn’s supplication and deliverance); (3) Q 37:139–148 (flight, fish, and communal belief) (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 253). (4) Q 68:48–50 (admonition vis-à-vis “Companion of the Fish”); (5) Q 4:163 (prophetic listing including Yūnus); and (6) Q 6:86–87 (prophetic cohort including Yūnus). Selection balances narrative density (Q 37), theological summation (Q 10), and allusive frames (Q 68; Q 4; Q 6) to model how distributed references cohere as a sign system. Classical reception is sampled via representative excerpts (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī) as triangulation for address and pedagogy (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 207–208, on formulaic conclusiveness).

Reproducibility and analytic workflow.

Reproducibility is ensured through an explicit pipeline. First, I prepare aligned Arabic–English text segments using Abdel Haleem’s translation as a concordance index (Abdel Haleem, 2005, “Contents” and sūra headers). Tokenization is performed at the Arabic lemma level; each token receives tags for lemma, part of speech, and discourse function. Annotation conventions mark quotations, transliteration, and glossing; for instance, repentance tokens are labeled as <REPENTANCE:{tāba, tawba}>, and marine tokens as <MARINE:{baḥr, safīna, ḥūt}>. Collocations are computed in ±5-word windows around verbs of divine agency, then filtered by a recurrence threshold (≥ 3) across passages. Narrative units are segmented by finite verbs and connective operators; each MN is coded for actantial roles and modal values (*vouloir, pouvoir, savoir, devoir*). A Peircean column

labels tokens as index/icon/symbol with justifications recorded in memo fields, enabling audit. Limitations include translation-driven bias (mitigated by constant checks against Arabic), the sparsity of explicit weather lexemes (addressed by including metaphorical tokens), and the necessary selectivity in tafsīr sampling (balanced by cross-school representation). To illustrate the annotation-claim link, I cite directly from the translation when anchoring a code to text, as in Q 10:98's causal frame: "When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in this life," which operationalizes the <REPENTANCE> → <MERCY> transition in our codebook (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 135).

These layered procedures aim to demonstrate how lexical recurrences (Saussure), narrative programs (Greimas), and sign typologies (Peirce) converge upon the same theological-ethical *telos*: repentance reorders crisis toward communal reintegration. The method's value lies not in multiplying jargon but in stabilizing replicable inferences from text to claim. By the time we turn to close readings, the reader will see why motifs like the sea/ship/lots and the fish act not as ornament but as semiotic operators whose indexical force and symbolic consolidation render divine forbearance experientially legible, "they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time" (Qur'ān 37:148; cf. sea/lot/fish sequence Qur'ān 37:140–142; confession/deliverance Qur'ān 21:87–88; recovery under the gourd on the barren shore Qur'ān 37:145–146).

3. Close Lexical Readings in Arabic

This cluster of close readings argues that the Qur'ānic account of Yūnus (Jonah) orchestrates a chain from lexeme to syntagm to pragmatics that positions the reader toward repentance and communal responsibility. Key Arabic lexemes such as *al-baḥr* (sea), *al-ḥūt* (fish), verbs of flight, and the performatives of repentance, gain semantic contour within verse-level syntagms and, crucially, those syntagms acquire pragmatic force when framed by addressivity ("you," "people") and narrated outcomes. Throughout, quotations from Abdel Haleem's translation

anchor the analysis while brief Arabic phrases clarify the lexical core. On a Saussurean plane, signifier–signified pairings stabilize semantic fields; on a Peircean plane, meteorological and marine tokens operate indexically or symbolically; and in Greimasian terms, these tokens propel the modal passage from crisis to reintegration. The upshot is that the text’s semiotic procedures invite the reader to inhabit Yūnus’s tested agency and his people’s collective turn.

The sea scene condenses a cluster of high-energy lexemes (overload, lots, swallowing) that cultivate a semantic prosody of unavoidable crisis: “He fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots and he lost; then the great fish swallowed him; he deserved blame” (Q 37:140–142, trans. Abdel Haleem). The signifier chain *fulk mashhūn* → *sāhama* → *iltaqamahū* sequences causal pressure: excessive weight precipitates the lot; the lot precipitates the fall; the fall precipitates ingestion. In Saussurean terms, the paradigmatic field (escape/safety vs. exposure/drowning) yields to a syntagmatic inevitability that moves the plot from avoidance to reckoning. Narratively, the casting of lots is a communal act that repositions the prophet from subject-of-escape to object-of-judgment (Q 37:141), a Greimasian transformation in which the Subject’s program (“flight”) collides with an anti-program (weight/lot/destiny) that strips him of agency and prepares a penitential reconstitution. Read Peirceanly, sea and storm function as indices physically caused phenomena that point to sovereign adjudication without collapsing into allegory. The Qur’ān elsewhere makes this indexical logic explicit: “Today We shall save only your corpse as a sign to all posterity” (Q 10:90–92, trans. Abdel Haleem). The material remainder anchors judgment in history; in Yūnus’s case, the overloaded ship and the lot are likewise evidential indices through which sovereignty addresses an errant subject (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134).

The fish intensifies this logic while inverting its telos. The verb *iltaqamahū* (“swallowed him”) carries an engulfing connotation, yet the narrative frames the act within moral pedagogy: “then the great fish

swallowed him; he deserved blame” (Q 37:142, trans. Abdel Haleem). Collocating with *sāhama* (casting lots) and, later, with convalescence and vegetal shelter, the *hūt* traces a semantic arc from ingestion to incubation to return: “We cast him out upon the barren shore, and he was sick” (Q 37:145). Symbolically, the fish is less a monster of annihilation than a mediator of mercy; its “swallowing” suspends destruction so a transformed mission can be released, culminating in recommission and collective faith: “We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more; they believed, so We let them live out their lives” (Q 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem). This aligns with Khalil’s account of *tawba* as a process of turning with communal implications, tethered to divine mercy and moral reconstitution (2023). In short, the fish marks a threshold where crisis becomes pedagogy and where the prophet’s agency is reoriented toward public mercy rather than private avoidance.

Flight language cinches the ethical stakes. The description of Yūnus as *Dhu’l-Nūn* who “went off angrily” (Q 21:87) contrasts with the normative dignity of *hijra* in Islamic memory; here, *dhahaba muḡāḏiban* and the cognate *abaqa* index an untimely, unmandated exit. That improper motion is immediately reversed by a performative confession whose first-person pronoun and acknowledgment of culpability restructure agency: “There is no god but You, glory be to You, I was wrong” (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem). The divine uptake, “We answered him and saved him from distress” (Q 21:88, trans. Abdel Haleem)—renders audible a relational grammar in which agency becomes responsive rather than evasive. For the reader, the episode recalibrates stance: to flee is to misread the temporal address; to confess is to re-enter time correctly. As Neuwirth notes, Qur’ānic “punishment stories” culminate in exemplary steadfastness, inscribing tested agents into communal remembrance to cultivate *ṣabr* (2019, pp. 133–134).

Taken together, these layers yield an integrated semiotic account. Sea and lot function indexically, binding moral evasion to environmental peril; the fish and the prophet’s cry function symbolically, aggregating a recognizable code of confession and mercy; the subsequent plant and

recommission function syntagmatically, confirming that restoration is civic rather than private. The model is explicitly communal: “Only Jonah’s people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this world, and let them enjoy life for a time” (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). The narrative thus teaches by making the audience read its signs—lexical, syntagmatic, and pragmatic so that Yūnus’s tested agency and his people’s collective turn become the reader’s own horizon of action.

D. Repentance and Return (*tawbah*; *inābah*; *qawl*): micro-reading 4

The confession *lā ilāha illā anta subḥānaka innī kuntu mina l-zālimīn* (“There is no god but You, glory be to You, I was wrong”) functions as a performative pivot that becomes the template for collective return. The Qur’ān marks the singularity of this scaling from prophetic penitence to public repentance: “If only a single town had believed and benefited from its belief! Only Jonah’s people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and let them enjoy life for a time” (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). The clause “Only Jonah’s people did so” semantically isolates an exception and pragmatically addresses the audience: repentance works at scale. In this cycle, verbs of repentance (*tāba*, *ānā*, *istaghfara*) co-occur with speech acts that alter social reality; the shift from *qawl* (saying) to shared belief marks not sentiment but a public return with juridical relief, “relieved them of the punishment of disgrace”, binding ethical and political stakes (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). Abdel Haleem’s broader account of Qur’ānic rhetoric underscores how such performative shifts are carried by grammatical movement and person-change to produce real transformation (2010, pp. 189–191).

Syntagmatically, the sequence crisis → penitence → reintegration is completed in *al-Ṣāffāt*’s coda: “We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more; they believed, so We let them live out their lives” (Q 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem). The earlier “barren shore” (Q 37:145) is a liminal stage turned into a platform of recommissioning;

the prophet's restored speech becomes civic address, and the people's uptake becomes policy. Theologically, Neuwirth reads such narratives as inscribed into liturgical memory to turn patience (*ṣabr*) into communal practice (2019, pp. 133–134). Conceptually, Rahman cautions that “deliverance” here is not the survival of a tribal remnant but the emergence of an ethical constituency constituted by repentance (1994, p. 38), which clarifies why Yūnus's people stand as the Qur'ān's lone city whose collective turning suspends worldly disgrace.

Reader-orientation cues make this pedagogy explicit. The direct-address imperatives that bracket the Jonah sura, “Say, ‘People, the Truth has come to you ... Whoever follows the right path follows it for his own good’” (Q 10:108, trans. Abdel Haleem), stylize reception as decision, and the Jonah exception (Q 10:98) is placed so the reader sees what “following the right path” entails: not private piety but public repentance with visible social consequence. The semiotic lesson thus closes where it began: marine indices and a symbolic fish discipline a fleeing subject into a penitent agent whose recommissioned speech catalyzes communal return. Agency may err; repentance re-aligns signs, time, and community and the reader is addressed to stand within that alignment.

4. Narrative Structure and Actantial Dynamics

Mapped through a Greimasian lens, the Qur'anic articulation of the Yunus complex (with Sūrat Yūnus as its argumentative hub) distributes functions across a compact actantial network: God as Sender and ultimate Source of sanction; the Prophet as Subject charged with proclaiming; the Object as communal repentance culminating in divine mercy; Helpers as revealed speech-acts (“Say...,” promises, and temporal assurances); and Opponents as disbelief, haste, and the community's resistance to signs. This network is not static. It undergoes modal recalibration—necessity (*duty to proclaim*), possibility (*window before the term expires*), volition (*steadfastness vs. flight*)—that stages pedagogy as transformation, moving a public from threatened ruin

toward the uniquely affirmed case of the “people of Jonah” whose belief suspends punishment (Q 10:98).

In the Yunus sequence, God frames the entire program both as Sender and as Judge who times events; the sura’s proem underscores that the Prophet cannot compel belief and must endure while judgement is deferred—“The Prophet is encouraged to be patient and reminded of the fact that he cannot force people to believe,” the placement note to Sūrat Yūnus summarizes, focalizing divine sovereignty and human reception (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The Subject is the Messenger, repeatedly positioned as obedient but bounded by a non-coercive mandate: “I cannot control any harm or benefit that comes to me, except as God wills,” a confession that collapses prophetic agency into delegated servanthood and thereby dislodges any heroic-epic subjectivity (Q 10:49). The Object is not private vindication but public ethical transformation: the lone exemplary community, “Only Jonah’s people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world”, redefines success as communal repentance rather than spectacular deliverance (Q 10:98). Helpers are discourse-internal imperatives and rhetorical turns that move addressees affectively toward assent: the cascade of “Say...” formulas and second-person engagement constitutes an actantial aid that grips hearers in the moment of decision (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). Opponents appear as temporal impatience and epistemic obduracy, “They ask, ‘When will this promise be fulfilled...?’”, which the text counters by re-centering the divinely fixed *term* of each community (Q 10:48–50). In prose description, the schema reads: Sender (God) → Object (communal repentance/mercy) ← Subject (Prophet) aided by Helpers (imperatives, promises, signs) , opposed by Opponents (denial, haste, misreading of signs) under the Sanction of God’s judgement at the appointed term. That distribution explains why the narrative’s “pivot” is the people’s response, not the Prophet’s capacities.

The primary program initializes with *necessity* (the Prophet must proclaim) and *prohibition* (he cannot coerce belief), then advances through *possibility* (a respite period before the appointed *ajal*), and culminates in *volition* (steadfastness in waiting and turning). The text encodes necessity and prohibition in the same breath, “There is an appointed term for every community... [you] can neither delay nor hasten it”, shifting the action horizon from prophetic management to divine timing and communal choice (Q 10:49). The Prophet’s volition is disciplined by a final injunction that seals the program’s success conditions: “follow what is being revealed to you, and be steadfast until God gives His judgement” (Q 10:109). Ethically, this choreography creates a didactic vector: the audience is pushed from seeking proofs on their schedule to recognizing that delay itself is mercy, a recurrent Late Antique “punishment legend” topology where the positive counter-image is “the salvation of the messengers,” repurposed here toward the salvation of a people who actually believe (Neuwirth, 2019). The modal pressure on addressees is intensified by affective, second-person rhetoric (“Say...Think...”) that Abdel Haleem catalogs as core to Qur’anic dynamism; such affective sentences, rather than indicative report, involve the hearer in the very doing of turning, making rhetorical form a Helper in the program (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). These shifts correlate with Greimas’s transformational syntax: Contract (divine commissioning) → Performance (public proclamation under refusal) → Sanction (belief averts disgrace). The unique historical case, “Only Jonah’s people”, is not an anecdotal exception but a structural proof that the program’s Object is attainable when volition aligns with the Sender’s timing (Q 10:98).

A scene-by-scene map clarifies how lexical clusters feed actantial shifts and reader-positioning. *Scene 1: Authorization and cosmological frame* (10:1–6). The proem establishes God’s agency and signs in nature, foregrounding the Sender’s competence and introducing the Object implicitly: heed to signs (cf. the sura’s prefatory note emphasizing patience and non-coercion). *Scene 2: Public dispute and deferred*

judgement (10:43–56). The community’s interrogation, “When will this promise be fulfilled...?”, indexes an Opponent built from haste; the Prophet’s constrained agency and the fixity of the *term* reconfigure the Subject as witness, not enforcer (10:48–50). *Scene 3: Exhortation through affective address* (10:57–61). The rhetoric tightens into second-person summons, “a teaching...a healing... guidance and mercy”, operationalizing Helper-functions that Abdel Haleem identifies as central to Qur’anic style: the affective sentence engages, corners, and moves the addressee from stance to action (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213; cf. *iltifāt* shifts). *Scene 4: Paradigmatic exception and communal transformation* (10:98). The “people of Jonah” episode appears as a compressed aetiology: belief triggers mercy within the historical horizon (“in the life of this world”), narratively validating repentance as the true Object that reorients the entire prior disputation. *Scene 5: Prophetic endurance and closure* (10:104–109). The Prophet’s self-positioning (pure worship, refusal of associationism, and steadfast waiting) performs the Subject’s modal stability as a pedagogical model, while the imperative “Say” recurs as a rhythmic Helper that keeps the audience inside the argumentative now (10:104–109; see also Abdel Haleem on imperative “Say” as rhetorically decisive). The result resembles what Neuwirth calls paraenetic structuring in late Meccan discourse: narrative recollection and homiletic exhortation interleave so that stories no longer climax in catastrophe but frontload their educational point, the audience is taught to inhabit the span before sanction as the decisive site of agency (Neuwirth, 2019).

Read actantially, the Yunus complex dramatizes pedagogy as trial and reintegration. God, as Sender, constrains time and speech; the Prophet, as Subject, models non-coercive fidelity; the community, as potential recipient, becomes the decisive site where the Object (repentance unto mercy) either fails under haste or succeeds in belief. The unique historical marker (“Only Jonah’s people...”) is therefore not a narrative curiosity but a structural theorem: when Helper-forms of address meet

volitional assent within the divinely appointed span, catastrophe yields to reprieve, and the story proves its own lesson by transforming actants into participants in mercy (Q 10:98; cf. the sura's closing call to steadfastness).

5. Peircean Layers: Indexicality, Iconicity, Symbolism

Peirce's triad clarifies how the Qur'anic Yunus complex "means" through layered sign relations. Indexical signs point to their objects by causal or existential contiguity; iconic signs resemble their objects via form, image, or pattern; symbolic signs depend on convention and communal uptake. Read theologically, these categories help distinguish when the text appeals to lived phenomena as evidentiary traces of sovereignty (index), when it crafts sound-image-pattern correspondences to stage states like confinement or emergence (icon), and when it stabilizes narrative tokens (e.g., the fish, the return) as culturally portable symbols of mercy and restoration across interpretive communities (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994).

Indexical readings: meteorological and marine phenomena as evidentiary pointers

The sura's natural scenes repeatedly function as **indices**, phenomena that point beyond themselves to divine agency by contiguity. Sūrat Yūnus frames worldly life with agrarian meteorology: "*The life of this world is like water We send down from the sky, and the earth's vegetation absorbs it, but then it becomes dry stubble scattered by the wind*" (Q 10:24, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The sequence rain → growth → withering is not allegory in the first instance; it is event-order that anchors an argument about ephemerality and judgement. Indexical force intensifies where storm and sea intersect with ethical stakes. When Yūnus "*fled to the overloaded ship,*" and lots were cast (Q 37:140–141), the overburdened vessel and stochastic lot operate as procedures in the world that precipitate his exposure to the deep; nature, crowd practice, and consequence align as pointers to a higher adjudication (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Elsewhere in the same argumentative field, the text cites a spectacular forensic sign: Pharaoh's body preserved after drowning "*as a sign for those who come after you*" (Q 10:92, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The index here is anatomical and historical, the corpse survives as material remainder that evidences sovereignty in time. Within the Yunus cycle, the indexical grammar is more intimate: darkneses, belly, and shoreline track a prophet's passage through correction and reprieve, "*had he not been one of those who glorify God, he would have stayed in its belly until the Day they are raised*" (Q 37:143–144), followed by casting him out "*on the barren shore*" (Q 37:145) and causing a gourd to grow (Q 37:146, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The text's pragmatic addressivity then recruits readers: after narrating the exception of Yūnus's people ("*Only Jonah's people... when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life,*" Q 10:98), the sura pivots to direct instruction with vocatives and imperatives, "*Say, 'People, the truth has come to you...'*" (Q 10:108), turning indices in nature and history into decision-cues for the audience (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

Iconicity and metaphor: form–meaning correspondences of liminality

Iconicity arises where form mirrors state. The Yunus pericope layers auditory and imagistic cues to resemble enclosure and release. The triad of "darkneses" (*fi l-ẓulumāt*) and the rhythm of curt clauses around the swallowing (*fa-ltaqamahū l-hūt*) stage an acoustic and imagistic narrowing that resembles constriction (Q 37:142–144, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The abrupt connective *fa-* moves like a trapdoor: lot → loss → swallow. That tight coupling, as a surface pattern, iconizes entrapment. The subsequent "barren shore" (*al-'arā'*) and the single plant named (*yaqtīn*, gourd) reverse the image-field: the shore's exposure and the leaf canopy resemble convalescence and provisioning (Q 37:145–146). The movement from compact, breathless syntax in the crisis to more descriptive expanse in recovery rhetorically re-pictures the passage from confinement to relief (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

In Neuwirth's account of paraenetic Qur'anic storytelling, such formal iconicity is not ornament but pedagogy: sound and scene collaborate to "make present" the moral span within which listeners reorient (Neuwirth, 2019).

Symbolism: fish and return as cultural-symbolic mediators of mercy

If indices evidence and icons resemble, symbols carry the story beyond the page by convention and reception. In this dossier the fish becomes a portable symbol of merciful containment: it arrests destructive descent without erasing consequence, transforming punishment into pedagogy (Q 37:142, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The symbol stabilizes across Qur'anic intertexts by admonitory recall, "*So be patient with your Lord's judgement; do not be like the Companion of the Fish*" (Q 68:48–50), where "Companion of the Fish" functions as a shorthand emblem that the audience already "knows" (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The return likewise hardens into a symbol of recommissioned agency: after shade and recovery, "*We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more, and they believed*" (Q 37:147–148). The community in Sūrat Yūnus becomes the only named instance where belief suspends disgrace "*in this life*" (Q 10:98), turning repentance-from-words into a civic symbol of relief and enjoyment "*for a time*" (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Rahman's thematic mapping helps clarify why these tokens endure symbolically: Qur'anic "deliverance" is less about biological survival (a "remnant") than about ethical constituency, a people formed by turning (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). Hence fish and return mediate a recognized script (flight → correction → recommission) that exegetes and communities deploy liturgically and pedagogically. The symbol-set is capacious enough to cross late antique and Islamic horizons: as Neuwirth argues, punishment stories are reconfigured into didactic exempla in which the "salvation" motif is re-inscribed to educate later communities (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Finally, the sura's closing imperative, "*Follow what is revealed to you and be steadfast until God*

gives His judgement” (Q 10:109), codifies symbolism into practice: the symbol of return is not merely narrativized; it is commanded as a posture for the Prophet and, by extension, for the listeners situated by the text’s direct address (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

The Yūnus dossier culminates, in Q 68:48–50, as a Peircean symbol that instructs beyond the historical episode. The address, “So be patient for the decision of your Lord, and do not be like the Companion of the Fish ...” (Q 68:48), recasts Yūnus from narrative agent into admonitory template for the Prophet and, by extension, the community. In Peircean terms, this is a legisign: a general rule or norm whose meaning is learned and habit-forming (symbolic because it functions by conventioned association and instruction, not resemblance or immediate causality). The immediate interpretant is the prohibition against haste; the dynamical interpretant is the Prophet’s and community’s practiced *ṣabr* under trial; the final interpretant is a stabilized ethical habitus wherein vocation is safeguarded from flight, despair, or precipitate judgment¹.

This symbolic codification presupposes the earlier semiotic arc. The fish’s index of arrest (Q 37:142; Q 21:87) and its iconic liminal interval (*barzakh*) of suspended agency (Q 37:142–145) become the symbolic admonition that governs future prophetic comportment (Q 68:48–50). Likewise, the rehabilitative cycle, expulsion “sick onto a barren shore” and shelter under the *yaqtīn* (Q 37:145–146), plus divine uptake “We answered him” (Q 21:88), grounds the rule that repentance and patience, not panic or desertion, structure legitimate agency. When read with Q 10:98 (the only community whose repentance secured worldly reprieve), the symbolic layer extends from prophetic etiquette (*adab al-nubuwwa*) to civic ethics: patient, collective turning forestalls

¹ **al-Ṭabarī** (tafsīr on 68:48) glosses the address as an admonition against haste and despondency, urging steadfastness in God’s decree; **Ibn Kathīr** frames the comparison as a caution not to abandon the charge nor grow impatient in supplication; **al-Qurṭubī** binds the verse to the ethics of *ṣabr* under trial and to the rehabilitative arc evident in the Yūnus pericopes. Use these as reception supports while keeping the **symbolic** claim grounded in the text itself.

destruction. Thus Q 68:48–50 functions as the normative seal on the Yūnus complex, translating a once-occurrent trial into a repeatable law of conduct.

This reading so far has emphasized the fish (al-ḥūt) as index, a causal sign of arrest that redirects agency through penitence (Q 21:87–88; 37:142–145). To complete the semiotic arc, we mark its iconic function: the fish *resembles* an interval (*barzakh*), an inward threshold where speech, time, and embodiment are held between states. Qur’ānically, *barzakh* names a liminal partition or isthmus that both separates and relates (e.g., between two bodies of water in Q 25:53; 55:19–20; and between death and resurrection in Q 23:100). Without collapsing eschatological and maritime scenes, Yūnus’s enclosure iconically images such an interval: not annihilation, but suspended passage in which utterance is re-formed. The narrative choreography, ingestion (Q 37:142), inward recognition and confession (Q 21:87), expulsion “sick onto a barren shore” (Q 37:145), and shelter under the *yaqtīn* (Q 37:146), stages a liminal cycle whose “birthing” profile (noted above, p. 13) culminates in symbolic uptake: “We answered him” (Q 21:88). Thus, alongside “merciful containment” (index), the fish functions iconically as *barzakh*: a patterned interval that *resembles* a threshold of re-entry, mediating the shift from errant flight to recommissioned speech and communal deliverance.²

6. Reader-Positioning, Reception, and Pedagogical Function

Taken together, the Saussurean, Greimasian, and Peircean layers describe a single reader-orientation: the text moves the audience from observing signs to acting within their force-field. At the Saussurean level, recurrent lexemes (sea, fish, belief/repentance) form signifier/signified pairings that stabilize a semantic map in which

² or *barzakh* as threshold/partition, see Q 23:100; 25:53; 55:19–20. For classical anchors, see Ibn Kathīr on Q 21:87–88 (belly as “prison,” not consumption) and al-Qurṭubī on *barzakh* loci and on *yaqtīn* at Q 37:146 (as *dubbā*’/creeper). For modern discussions of Qur’ānic thresholding/liminality and semantic fields of *barzakh*/*ḥijāb*, see standard studies in Qur’ān poetics/semantics; align translation with Abdel Haleem for Q 37:145.

repentance reliably co-occurs with removal of disgrace, “*Only Jonah’s people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life*” (Q 10:98; Abdel Haleem, 2005). Greimasian mapping then casts God as Sender, the Prophet as Subject, the Object as communal repentance/mercy, Helpers as imperatives and paraenetic address, and Opponents as haste and misreading (Q 10:48–50). Finally, Peircean indexicality turns meteorology and marine scenes into evidentiary pointers that collapse description into summons; this culminates in direct address, “*Say, ‘People, the Truth has come to you...’*” (Q 10:108), which recruits readers to adopt the Prophet’s stance of steadfast, non-coercive fidelity (Q 10:109; Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010). In effect, the text positions the audience inside the program whose success condition it narrates: belief enacted within the divinely appointed span averts disgrace in the present world (Q 10:98).

Classical and medieval reception note

Although classical tafsīr is diverse, a through-line is clear: commentators frame Yūnus’s episode as a discipline of timing and turning. While our corpus does not reproduce al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, or al-Qurṭubī directly, two features of their reception history are reflected (and synthesized) in modern handbooks we do have. First, exegetes regularly read the fish’s “swallowing” not as annihilation but as containment unto instruction, a point echoed in thematic syntheses that distinguish Qur’ānic deliverance from any “remnant” ideology, emphasizing instead the emergence of an ethical constituency (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). Second, medieval commentaries repeatedly gloss the Yūnus cycle as paraenetic: it instructs later communities by re-presenting punishment narratives as calls to steadfastness and timely repentance, “salvation” motifs are repurposed to educate addressees living before sanction (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). The arrangement of Sūrat Yūnus already mirrors such reception: editorial notes emphasize that the Prophet is reminded he “cannot force people to believe,” while patience and the fixed term govern divine judgement

(sūra placement summary; Abdel Haleem, 2005). In that light, the classical insistence on God's decree, the exemplary re-commissioning of a tested prophet, and the singularity of a repentant city converge with our semiotic inference: signs in nature and narrative are not neutral; they are instruments of pedagogy that the audience must read into action.

By systemic pedagogy I mean a textual design that (1) stages a trial, (2) mediates the trial through signs recognizable across registers (lexical, narrative, experiential), and (3) prescribes reenactment/identification protocols whereby readers take up the narrated stance. The Yunus complex satisfies all three criteria. (1) Staged trial: the crisis sequence compresses flight, overload, lots, and swallowing, "*He fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots and he lost; then the great fish swallowed him*" (Q 37:140–142; Abdel Haleem, 2005), as a stepwise ordeal that strips, instructs, and then restores. (2) Mediating signs: marine/meteorological tokens act indexically (event-order as evidence), while the fish and the return consolidate symbolic meanings of mercy and recommission, "*We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more, and they believed*" (Q 37:147–148; Abdel Haleem, 2005). (3) Reenactment/identification: the text instructs through direct imperatives and affective sentences (the "Say..." formulas and second-person appeals), a rhetorical mode Abdel Haleem identifies as a core Helper that moves hearers from stance to response (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). The systemic character is clinched by the historical theorem placed in 10:98: repentance works at scale, with worldly relief as verification, "*We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life*" (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

A canonical micro-reenactment is the prophet's penitential formula, "*There is no God but You, glory be to You! I was indeed wrong*", whose performative force the text immediately ratifies: "*We answered him and saved him from distress*" (Q 21:87–88; Abdel Haleem, 2005). By echoing that confession, the hearer rehearses the very hinge that converts index (crisis) into symbol (mercy). A macro-reenactment is

civic: the “people of Jonah” become a paradigm for public turning that suspends disgrace (Q 10:98).

Contemporary implications

For modern readers, the Yunus complex reframes ethical action as timely orientation amid systemic crisis: catastrophe is not a spectacle to consume; it is a deadline within which communities decide. The text’s closing instruction, “*Follow what is revealed to you and be steadfast until God gives His judgement*” (Q 10:109), universalizes that horizon as a stance rather than a plot detail (Abdel Haleem, 2005). Neuwirth’s late-antique contextualization helps scholarship track how punishment legends became didactic infrastructures, intended to educate publics who live before verdict (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Rahman’s insistence that “deliverance” marks the formation of an ethical constituency rather than a biological remnant offers a norm for reading repentance as public pedagogy (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). For contemporary Qur’anic studies, then, the semiotic composite (lexical recurrences, actantial programs, and index-icon-symbol dynamics) justifies treating Yūnus not as an edifying vignette but as a replicable model: a script in which communities are positioned to convert recognized signs into shared repentance, and shared repentance into present-tense mercy.

7. Conclusion

This study has shown that the Qur’anic dossier on Yūnus generates theological and ethical meaning through a layered semiotic machinery. At the lexical level, recurrent tokens (sea, fish, flight/return, repentance) form stable Saussurean sign-relations that cue a movement from crisis to mercy. At the narrative level, Greimasian actantial mapping clarifies God as Sender, the Prophet as Subject, communal repentance as Object, and imperatives/paraenetic address as Helpers contending with haste and denial as Opponents. At the typological level, Peircean indexicality (storm/sea), iconicity (formal mirroring of constriction and release), and symbolism (fish/return as mediators of mercy) converge to produce

a reader-positioning that is both paraenetic and civic: belief enacted within the appointed span averts disgrace. Taken together, Yūnus emerges not as an episodic miracle but as a staged pedagogy, a trial mediated by signs, culminating in recommissioned agency and communal transformation.

Theoretical implications.

A multi-register semiotics contributes three advances to Qur'anic narratology and religious textual studies. First, it bridges philology and form by tying Arabic lexemes to syntagms and pragmatic address, demonstrating how small linguistic choices scale to public ethics. Second, it re-centers narrative as program rather than plot: actantial roles and modal shifts disclose success conditions (steadfast proclamation, timely repentance) that are structurally encoded, not merely thematized. Third, it reframes “signs” as operational rather than decorative: indexical phenomena, iconic textures, and symbolic tokens collectively do theological work, converting perception into obligation. Methodologically, this triangulation provides a replicable template for reading other prophetic dossiers, showing how scriptural stories function as instructional infrastructures that align description, exhortation, and communal action.

Limitations and avenues for future research.

The analysis prioritized six loci and relied on a single modern English translation alongside Arabic lexical prompts; wider corpus sampling (e.g., integrating Q 68:48–50 in full with multiple commentarial strata) would refine the typology. Comparative studies could test the model across other prophetic complexes (Nūḥ, Mūsā) to explore whether fish/sea-like indices and symbolic returns recur with similar pedagogical force. Finally, empirical reception work (liturgical use, school curricula, sermon corpora) could assess how contemporary communities actually internalize Yūnus's systemic pedagogy, thus linking semiotic inference to lived religious practice.

By pairing fine-grained lexical analysis with actantial and typological lenses, this study shows how Yūnus operates as a reproducible script for ethical orientation in time. The approach invites interdisciplinary dialogue between philology, narratology, semiotics, and religious ethics, around a shared claim: that scriptural narratives teach by **structuring attention**, and that such structure can be mapped, tested, and enacted.

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An Analysis of Surah Al-Fil Through the Lens of Russian Formalism

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Abstract

The Holy Quran, as an eternal miracle, has been extensively studied from various literary perspectives. Russian Formalism, a prominent text-centered theory, examines how internal textual elements create conflict, tension, and ultimately achieve unity and coherence through "defamiliarization." This process elevates language from everyday usage to literary art. While Formalist principles have been applied to other Quranic surahs, a comprehensive analysis focusing on the interplay of tension, defamiliarization, and form-content harmony in Surah Al-Fil remains underexplored. This article bridges this gap by exploring these aspects in Surah Al-Fil (The Elephant). Utilizing a descriptive-analytical method, involving close textual reading and interpretation of formal devices, the study concludes that, despite its conciseness, the Surah employs various defamiliarization techniques. These include the rhetorical questioning in "أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ" which compels reflection, an unconventional narrative structure beginning with the outcome to emphasize divine agency, and vivid linguistic imagery like "فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ" that viscerally depicts annihilation. The striking contrast between Abraha's overwhelming army and the seemingly weak birds, culminating in divine triumph, demonstrates how formal elements profoundly amplify the core theological message, indicating a profound harmony between form and content.

Keywords: Holy Quran, Surah Al-Fil, Russian Formalism, Defamiliarization, Tension and contrast, Form and content.

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1. Introduction

The 20th century marked the beginning of various theories regarding the examination and analysis of literary texts. With the onset of this century, Formalism emerged as an independent school in the realm of Russian literary research. Its foundational principles, articulated by figures like Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, emphasized the autonomy of literary studies and the distinct nature of literary language. Formalists asserted that for analyzing literary texts, what should be at the center of researchers' attention is the text itself, while other matters outside the text fall outside the realm of literary studies (Makaryk, 2009: 199). Consequently, they focused on studying literary devices and techniques to such an extent that they regarded literature as a special use of language, distinguishing it from practical (everyday) language through deviation from standard language and its disruption (Selden Widdowson, 2021: 57). Thus, formalist criticism falls under text-centered criticism, where literary researchers concentrate their investigations on the text itself (Shamisa, 2022: 184).

According to formalist perspectives, a literary text consists of scattered and unrelated thoughts, ideas, images, and linguistic expressions that the author has arranged together to create an organic unity among these initially disjointed elements. Therefore, a literary text is a cohesive whole composed of components that may initially seem incoherent (Payandeh, 2022: 34). Consequently, content is one of the elements forming the overall structure of a text; thus, "form" in formalist theory encompasses content as well since form is a system resulting from the intertwining of all elements used in the text. As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental elements of a text is its content (Moran, 2023: 194-195).

A core tenet of Russian Formalism is the concept of "defamiliarization" (also known as "estrangement" or "ostranenie"). This principle posits that the function of literature is to make everyday linguistic matters—which have become repetitive due to habit—strange and unfamiliar for their audiences through artistic creativity (Shafiei Kadkani, 2019: 72; Moghadadi, 2019: 340). Russian Formalists believe that literature distinguishes its language from non-literary language by extensively utilizing estranging devices and employing various forms of defamiliarization, thereby forcing the reader to perceive objects and ideas anew.

This study seeks to apply these foundational principles of Russian Formalism to Surah Al-Fil (The Elephant). Despite its brevity, Surah Al-Fil presents a narrative rich in literary devices that merit a formalist examination. This analysis aims to demonstrate how the Surah's linguistic choices, narrative

structure, and inherent tensions contribute to its literary effectiveness and profound theological message, viewed through the lens of defamiliarization and the harmony of form and content.

2. Research Methodology and Questions

The Holy Quran, as the miracle of the final Prophet, has always been the focus of various scholars in different dimensions, including linguistic and literary aspects. In this study, we aim to analyze a Surah from the Quran based on the fundamental components of Russian Formalism using a descriptive-analytical method. This method involves a close textual reading of Surah Al-Fil, identifying its formal devices, and interpreting their effect on meaning and reader perception, all within the theoretical framework of Russian Formalism. For this purpose, we have selected Surah Al-Fil to examine whether this Surah can be analyzed through the principles of Russian Formalism. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do specific Formalist concepts, such as defamiliarization, tension, and the interplay of form and content, manifest within the linguistic and narrative structure of Surah Al-Fil?
2. What tensions and contrasts can be observed in this Surah, and how do these contrasts lead to unity and coherence?
3. How is defamiliarization achieved in the text of the Surah, and through what specific methods and examples?

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs Russian Formalism as its primary theoretical lens to analyze Surah Al-Fil. Emerging in the early 20th century, Russian Formalism, spearheaded by figures such as Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, championed the autonomy of literary studies and emphasized the distinct nature of literary language. Formalists asserted that the literary text itself should be the central focus of analysis, rather than external factors such as the author's biography or historical context. A cornerstone of Russian Formalism is the concept of "defamiliarization" (also known as "estrangement" or "ostranenie"). This principle, famously articulated by Viktor Shklovsky, posits that the function of art is to make familiar things strange, thereby disrupting automatic perception and compelling a conscious, renewed engagement with objects and their contexts. In literature, this involves "resurrecting words" that have become automatized in everyday language, forcing the reader to perceive them anew through altered vocabulary, meaning, and form. Literature distinguishes its language from non-literary

language by extensively utilizing these estranging devices. Formalism also views a literary text as a cohesive whole, where initially disparate thoughts, ideas, images, and linguistic expressions are meticulously arranged by the author to achieve an organic unity. In this framework, "form" is not merely superficial but encompasses content, as it is a system resulting from the intertwining of all textual elements. Furthermore, "tension" and "conflict" are central to formalist critique. Formalists argue that the literary quality of a text is a product of the artistic balance achieved among these conflicting elements, which ultimately resolve into unity and harmony. A primary task for a formalist critic is to identify these internal tensions and clarify how such divergences contribute to the overall organic unity and structure of the text. This study will specifically explore how defamiliarization, tension, and the interplay of form and content manifest within the linguistic and narrative structure of Surah Al-Fil.

4. Literature Review

Literary readings of the verses of the Holy Quran using contemporary literary criticism theories have gained momentum in recent years, with Russian Formalism being one of these theories upon which various studies have been conducted. While these studies affirm the applicability of Formalist approaches to the Quran, a detailed and comprehensive Formalist analysis specifically of Surah Al-Fil, focusing on its unique narrative tension and defamiliarization techniques, remains underexplored. Below are some of these studies, and how the current research builds upon them:

Nazemian, in his article "The Link Between Form and Structure with Content in Surah Al-Takwir," aimed to analyze the form and structure of Surah Al-Takwir and examine their relationship with the content and theme of the Surah. He analyzed the verbal and musical structures of this Surah and illustrated them in linear and columnar diagrams, concluding that the topics discussed in the Surah are presented according to coherent and consistent principles, with noticeable emphasis on phonetic, lexical, and syntactic features. This study, while focusing on a different Surah, demonstrates the value of analyzing the interplay between formal elements and content in Quranic texts, a principle that this current paper extends to Surah Al-Fil by examining how its specific structure and linguistic choices convey its unique message (Nazemian, 2013).

In another article titled "Defamiliarization and Foregrounding in Surah Al-Waqi'a," Nazemian explored two fundamental principles of Formalism—defamiliarization and foregrounding—in Surah Al-Waqi'a, demonstrating various instances of defamiliarization and foregrounding within this Surah

(Nazemian, 2014). This work is foundational in establishing the presence of defamiliarization in Quranic discourse. Our study builds on this by providing a focused and in-depth analysis of how defamiliarization functions within the concise narrative of Surah Al-Fil, linking specific linguistic choices to the overall defamiliarizing effect.

Babazadeh Aghdam and his colleagues, in their article "A Formalist Analysis of Surah Al-Qamar," applied the principles of Formalism to analyze Surah Al-Qamar, concluding that since the prevailing atmosphere of this Surah is entirely about the confrontation between the camp of truth and that of falsehood, it necessitates using elements such as power, speed, continuity, repetition, emphasis, and similar concepts to depict this atmosphere effectively. Therefore, the words and sentences in this Surah are constructed in a way that conveys these concepts well (Babazadeh Aghdam et al., 2018). This study's emphasis on conflict and its formal manifestation resonates with our analysis of the tension between opposing forces in Surah Al-Fil and how linguistic choices amplify this conflict.

Hasan Majidi and Zahra Golmohammadi, in their article "Foregrounding in Surah Al-Nur from a Formalist Perspective," extracted various forms of "foregrounding" present in Surah Al-Nur (Majidi & Golmohammadi, 2021). Similarly, Dena Talebpour also examined aspects of foregrounding in Surah Al-Mu'minun based on norm-breaking and norm-enhancing techniques used by Formalists in her article "Foregrounding Techniques in Surah Al-Mu'minun." She aimed to display the harmonies between form and meaning within this Surah. According to her, foregrounding in this Surah causes deviations in letters and words from their original forms, and this deviation not only does not harm the meaning of the phrases but also enhances the beauty of the verses (Talebpour, 2021). These studies highlight the importance of foregrounding in enhancing meaning and aesthetics in Quranic texts. Our paper contributes by meticulously detailing how specific foregrounding techniques in Surah Al-Fil (like rhetorical questions and unusual imagery) achieve defamiliarization, thereby deepening the reader's engagement with the Surah's core message.

Rouhollah Sayadi Nejad and his colleagues analyzed Surah Al-Fil based on structuralist thought (Sayadi et al., 2022). While structuralism shares some roots with Formalism (particularly through Roman Jakobson), it fundamentally differs in its emphasis on underlying systems and codes rather than the process of defamiliarization or the effect of formal devices on perception. Our article specifically applies Russian Formalism to Surah Al-Fil, providing a distinct perspective by focusing on how the Surah's linguistic

and narrative "form" makes the familiar historical event "strange" and compels a new way of perceiving divine power, a focus not explicitly central to structuralist analysis. This study, therefore, offers a novel and direct Formalist reading of Surah Al-Fil.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. The Narrative of Surah Al-Fil

Surah Al-Fil is one of the Meccan surahs of the Quran that narrates the event of Abraha's attack on Mecca with the intention of destroying the Kaaba in five verses, with great brevity and conciseness. After Abraha and his elephant-riding troops entered Mecca, small birds attacked them in groups, dropping pebbles made of baked clay (sijjil) from their beaks and claws upon them. The massive elephants and soldiers of Abraha were crushed as if they were fodder being ground beneath the teeth of livestock (see: Razi, 1396: 220/400-441; Tabarsi, 2005: 10/442-446; Kashani, 1363: 10/345-354; Tabatabai, 1379: 20/509-512). This narrative, while historically known, is presented in a highly condensed and impactful manner that lends itself well to Formalist analysis.

5.2. Defamiliarization in Surah Al-Fil

Defamiliarization, a concept first articulated by Viktor Shklovsky, is central to understanding the artistic essence of literary texts. Shklovsky posited that art exists to make things strange, to present objects and their contexts in a new and unexpected way, thereby preventing automatic perception and compelling a conscious experience (Makarik, 1388: 13). In literature, this involves "resurrecting words" that have become automatized in everyday language, forcing the reader to engage with them anew through altered vocabulary, meaning, and form (Shafiei Kadkani, 1399: 5). Russian Formalists viewed defamiliarization as the essence of literature, focusing on how literary texts achieve this goal (Moran, 1402: 208-209).

In Surah Al-Fil, several instances of defamiliarization draw the audience's attention to the text and its profound themes:

One prominent example of verbal defamiliarization, evident throughout the Quran, including this surah, is the strategic use of rhymed words at the end of verses (faṣīlah), which imparts a distinct musicality to the discourse. The words "فِيل" (elephant), "تَضَلِيل" (misguidance), "أَبَائِيل" (flocks), "سِجِّيل" (baked clay), and "مَأْكُول" (eaten), precisely placed at the end of each verse, create a rhythmic pattern that elevates the language from mere narration to a poetic and memorable experience. This consistent phonetic arrangement, beyond its semantic function, serves to foreground the text, drawing attention to its linguistic artistry and distinguishing it from ordinary prose.

The surah begins with a highly defamiliarizing rhetorical question: "أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ" ("Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?"). The essence of interrogative sentences is to seek information. However, here, the question is not posed to elicit an answer, but to emphasize the certainty and undeniable nature of the event. This rhetorical function compels the listener or reader to acknowledge a self-evident truth, shifting the focus from the act of 'seeing' to the profound significance of 'what has been seen'. The address, directed at the Prophet (peace be upon him), and by extension to all humanity, uses the verb "رَأَى" (to see), which here implies a metaphorical "seeing" – a deep knowledge and certainty regarding God's decisive action against the companions of the elephant (Ibn Ashur, 1984: 30/544).

Furthermore, the choice of the interrogative adverb "كَيْفَ" (how) instead of a more common interrogative or relative pronoun like "مَا" (what) or "الَّذِي" (which/that) further enhances the defamiliarization. By asking "how" rather than "what," the Surah subtly directs attention not just to the outcome of the event, but to the manner of its occurrence – its astonishing and miraculous nature (Ibn Ashur, 1984: 30/545). This linguistic deviation from ordinary usage to describe the event of the companions of the elephant constitutes a significant instance of defamiliarization. It forces the audience to ponder the unconventional way God dealt with the army, thereby drawing greater attention to the wonder and significance of what occurred and making the strange and astonishing details of the story more tangible and comprehensible.

In subsequent verses, the Surah employs vivid and unusual imagery, further serving as instances of defamiliarization. The depiction of small birds ("طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ") carrying pebbles ("حِجَارَةً مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ") and attacking Abrahah's formidable elephant-riding troops in organized flocks is inherently astonishing and defies natural expectations. This image presents a divine miracle intended to protect the Kaaba, but within the text, its sheer unexpectedness and visual incongruity serve as a powerful defamiliarizing device, compelling the audience to perceive divine power operating through seemingly insignificant means.

Finally, the concluding verse provides a stark and impactful image of the defeated soldiers: "فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ" (turning them into chewed-up straw). This comparison transforms the mighty army into something utterly worthless and easily discarded, akin to fodder chewed and spit out by livestock. This unconventional and visceral imagery completes the process of defamiliarization, turning a historical event into a vivid, memorable, and

profoundly unsettling depiction of divine retribution. It recontextualizes the familiar concept of defeat into a newly perceived, humiliating annihilation.

5.3. Tension and Conflict Present in the Surah's Narrative

Formalists consider the literary quality of a text to be the result of an artistic balance established by the author among disparate elements, so that these elements ultimately reach a form of unity and harmony. The richer a text is in literary terms, the more internal tensions it possesses. The ambiguity and complexity of a literary text stem from the tension-filled relationships among its elements and components (Payandeh, 2022: 1/47). For this reason, "tension" and "conflict" are among the most central concepts in the formalist critique of literary texts. According to formalists, the author of a literary text can express the truth he intends in the most resonant way by employing the contrasts that arise within the text. One of the main efforts of a formalist critic when engaging with a literary text is to identify the parties involved in the conflict and clarify how these divergences come together into a structured whole that has an organic unity (see Payandeh, 2009: 46-49). Therefore, to achieve a complete formalist reading of Surah Al-Fil, we must explore the tension, conflict, and how unity is achieved within this Surah.

In the narrative presented by Surah Al-Fil, there are two opposing points where the main tension occurs. On one side of this conflict stands a group riding on a colossal animal, confidently relying on their numbers and equipment to attack the House of God; the elephant-riding troops of Abraha, referred to as "the companions of the elephant" (أَصْحَابُ الْفِيلِ), convey the grandeur and apparent majesty of this army to the audience. This force represents overwhelming material power, human arrogance, and a perceived invincibility. However, on the other side, there are weak birds tasked with protecting the Kaaba; flocks of birds ("طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ") armed with small pieces of baked clay ("سِجِّيلٍ") in their claws and beaks. The stark contrast between these "small birds" and the "elephant army" effectively displays dramatic tension; indeed, small birds with seemingly insignificant means of defense stand against enormous elephants and well-equipped soldiers.

The elephant army set out under Abraha's command to destroy God's House in Mecca, while God sent birds to protect His House, and what ultimately came to pass was God's will and decree. Thus, the tension and conflict among the elements conclude with the defeat of the elephant army and the manifestation of divine will, leading to balance and tranquility. Therefore, we can point out a profound contrast in this Surah between apparent material power (the formidable army of Abraha) and inner spiritual power (divine will manifested through weak means), as well as between the

formidable weapons of Abraha's troops and the small stones used by the birds. What ultimately occurs defies natural expectations from this conflict; the powerful army of Abraha fails to achieve its goal and cannot destroy the Kaaba; instead, it suffers a humiliating defeat and is annihilated. This contradiction highlights divine power in this Surah, as it shows that God can achieve monumental results even with the weakest means. Thus, a key aspect of this conflict is the subversion of audience expectations, which based on material logic would deem Abraha's victory certain; yet, the final outcome is his defeat and destruction.

In Surah Al-Fil's narrative, the main conflict occurs between two opposing forces: "the companions of the elephant," who embody apparent glory and reliance on material power, symbolizing human arrogance and tyranny, and "طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ" (the flocking birds), who rise up against them with "سَجِيلٍ." This clear contrast between "apparent grandeur" and "the simplicity of divine tools" creates dramatic tension: small birds with seemingly insignificant weapons arrayed against gigantic elephants and a well-equipped army. The resolution of this tension underscores the absolute sovereignty of divine will.

This pattern of tension and contrast—where a seemingly powerful material element faces an apparently weak element executing divine will—along with the balance achieved at the end of this conflict through divine decree, is echoed throughout other verses of the Quran and in Islamic narratives (see Meybodi, 2014: 10/621). For example, according to Islamic traditions, Nimrod's death—who compared himself to God (see Al-Baqarah, 258)—occurred due to a weak mosquito. A narration from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) states that God humiliated a tyrant like Nimrod, who denied God's lordship, by sending a tiny mosquito to him (Majlisi, 1983: 12/37). Where the weakest of His creatures, namely the mosquito, was made to prevail over him to demonstrate His power and greatness. It entered through his nostrils and reached his brain, killing him (Majlisi, 1983: 12/37). Likewise, the Pharaoh, who arrogantly proclaimed, "I am your lord, the Most High" (An-Nazi'at, 24), introduced himself as the superior lord of the people, was drowned in water (Yunus, 90), and God subjected him to punishment in this world and the Hereafter (Ibid, 25). These parallels reinforce the consistent thematic tension resolved by divine intervention that is powerfully manifested in Surah Al-Fil.

5.4. Narratology of Surah Al-Fil

Surah Al-Fil, with its five short verses, succinctly and cohesively narrates the story of the army of Abraha's attack on the Kaaba and their destruction by groups of stone-throwing birds. This narrative brevity enhances the focus on the main message of the Surah, which is divine power and miraculous support

for sacred things. In this narrative, classic story elements are observable. The story has a narrator and characters and occurs in a specific time and place.

The narrator of the story of the companions of the elephant can be seen as a third-person omniscient narrator who recounts events from an unlimited perspective; that is, he is aware of events and their consequences simultaneously. The narrative begins with a questioning tone and artistically illustrates the contrast between material power (the army of elephants) and spiritual power (the small birds), ultimately indicating the defeat of material power by seemingly weak means. This brevity in narration, despite the astonishing nature of the events, places the dominance and supremacy of divine will and power at the center of the audience's attention. The characters in the story are as follows:

1. "The army of elephants" (أَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ), which symbolizes the arrogant apparent human power of Abraha, who intended to destroy the Kaaba relying on military strength and material tools. The army of elephants and its commander act as the main opposition in this narrative and seek to challenge divine will.
2. "The birds" ("طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ"), which symbolize divine will, manifest God's power through their existence, as He sends them to confront the army of elephants. These champions, entrusted with executing divine will, face the elephant army with an unexpected and incredible tool: small pieces of dried clay ("سِجِّيلٍ"). They miraculously achieve victory over the elephant army.
3. "God," the absolute power and wisdom who nullifies the enemy's schemes and does not allow them to fulfill their intentions. God destroys His enemies through natural means without direct intervention. He is the sender of the small birds to confront the army of elephants, thereby establishing His will through them using "سِجِّيلٍ."

In this narrative, character development is not present; rather, the focus is intently on the confrontation between two opposing groups (the army of elephants and the birds) as a demonstration of divine omnipotence. Surah Al-Fil recounts a historical event that occurred before Islam and is known among historians as "the Year of the Elephant." However, the narration strategically begins with stating the outcome of the events: "أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضَلُّيلٍ * أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ" ("Have you (O Muhammad) not seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant? * Did He not make their plan go astray?" (Al-Fil, 1-2). It then refers to the sending of the birds and the destruction of the elephant army (cf. Al-Fil, 3-5). This non-linear narrative, starting with the rhetorical question about the outcome, further enhances the defamiliarization, forcing the reader to engage

with the how and why rather than simply the what of the event. The setting of the narration is in the land of Hijaz and around the Kaaba.

5.5. The Correspondence of Form and Content in Surah Al-Fil

In literary studies, the set of elements that constitute the main structure and texture of a text is referred to as "form." Therefore, consonants, vowels, syllables, elements that create the musicality of speech, figures of speech, literary devices, plot, point of view, character development, etc., are all components that form the work's structure (Shamisa, 2022: 183-184). This definition may create the illusion that there is a dichotomy and opposition between form and content; however, it should be noted that today, according to modern formalists, there is no dichotomy between form and content. Thus, form is defined as a system resulting from the interconnection and intertwining of all elements used in the text (Moran, 2023: 194). Consequently, semantic and content elements also play a role in shaping the work's form. This harmony and correspondence between form and content is clearly observable in Surah Al-Fil.

Surah Al-Fil, with its compact structure and dynamic imagery, exemplifies the perfect harmony of form and content. This concise Surah presents the historical event of the elephant army's attack on the Kaaba in an artistic expression through five verses, where form and content serve each other.

Defamiliarization, as a central tenet of Russian Formalism, begins in this Surah with the interrogative phrase "أَلَمْ تَرَ" ("Have you not seen?"). This rhetorical question immediately takes the audience out of their ordinary state of passive reception and compels them to actively reflect on an event known to them, thereby foregrounding the narrative's significance. The unconventional narrative structure, starting with the rhetorical questions about the outcome (verses 1-2) before detailing the means (verses 3-4), further defamiliarizes the historical account. Instead of a linear progression, the Surah first establishes the undeniable divine intervention and then proceeds to explain how it happened, creating suspense and emphasizing the miraculous nature of the event rather than simply recounting facts. The comparison of the destroyed army of elephants to "كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ" (chewed grass) also profoundly completes the defamiliarization of this historical narrative by creating an unconventional, visceral, and humiliating image that permanently alters the perception of the vanquished army. Thus, Surah Al-Fil reinterprets a well-known event within a strange narrative framework, forcing a new way of perceiving divine power.

The prominence of language, or foregrounding, is achieved through dynamic verbs like "فَعَلَ" (did), "جَعَلَ" (made), and "أَرْسَلَ" (sent), which imbue

the text with a powerful and heroic rhythm, emphasizing divine action and agency. The semantic contrast between "the companions of the elephant" (أَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ), representing immense material might, and "birds in flocks" (طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ) along with "stones of baked clay" (حِجَارَةً مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ), representing seemingly insignificant divine instruments, creates a powerful linguistic and thematic opposition. These stark contrasts elevate the content of the Surah from merely reporting a historical event to a level of profound literary and aesthetic expression, where the form actively underlines the message of divine supremacy over human arrogance.

Thus, the dominant theme of the Surah, which revolves around "the denial of material power and the affirmation of divine power," is perfectly manifested in the rhetorical and structural arrangement of the Surah as follows: the introductory rhetorical interrogative that completely focuses the audience's attention on the fate of "the army of the elephant" (verse 1), establishing a sense of awe and inevitability; the statement regarding the nullification of the enemy's plot in the form of a second rhetorical interrogative that slightly reduces the ambiguity of the first sentence but still does not clearly state their fate, building suspense (verse 2); the precise reference to the sending of "the flock of birds" accompanied by "pebbles" that are instruments of divine punishment, detailing the unconventional means (verses 3-4); and finally, the decisive outcome that reflects the triumph of divine will and the complete destruction of the elephant army (verse 5). This linear arrangement of rhetorical questions, narrative detail, and conclusive imagery presents the content in a highly cohesive form where the beginning and end are intricately interconnected, creating a powerful rhetorical arc.

The musicality of the text in Surah Al-Fil is significantly enhanced through phonetic combinations such as the pervasive repetition of consonants like "ل" (l) and "م" (m), alongside the consistent rhymed endings of verses. These phonetic features, far from being incidental, actively contribute to the Surah's distinct aesthetic, elevating the text beyond mere reporting. They create a rhythmic impetus that subtly but powerfully reinforces the inevitability and dramatic nature of the divine intervention. Surah Al-Fil, by transforming a historical narrative into a condensed poetic structure, not only emphasizes auditory rhythm but also reproduces divine content through carefully crafted linguistic patterns. From the perspective of foregrounding, the language of the Surah draws the audience's attention to its linguistic mechanisms by creating semantic suspense in the first verse and by presenting contrasting, almost paradoxical images (the enormous elephants and small birds), thereby making the reader actively engage with the text's form.

The structure of Surah Al-Fil demonstrates how linguistic economy (conciseness) can be accompanied by profound semantic density. This Surah, by creating an "aesthetic distance" from ordinary language through its rhetorical questions, unexpected imagery, and rhythmic precision, has become a text whose primary function is not merely to convey information but to create an immersive experience of the event referenced in the Surah for the audience through its carefully chosen syllables, words, and sentences. The text actively defamiliarizes the familiar historical event, forcing a new perception of divine power and human impotence.

Therefore, regarding the form and content of Surah Al-Fil, it can be said that the text of this Surah, utilizing techniques such as defamiliarization, foregrounding, and norm deviation, has transformed a historical event into an artistic expression where form and content are in a dialectical relationship with each other. The dominant theme intended by the Surah—that is, the supremacy of divine will over other wills—is best articulated and amplified through its specific wording and structural choices. These characteristics make Surah Al-Fil a prominent example of harmony between structure and meaning within the framework of Russian Formalism theory.

6. Conclusion

Surah Al-Fil, through the strategic application of literary techniques rooted in Russian Formalism—specifically defamiliarization, foregrounding, and norm deviation—constructs a cohesive and impactful narrative where form and content are in perfect harmony. The meticulous use of devices such as consistent rhyme and intrinsic musicality not only enhances the aesthetic dimensions of the text but also, through a powerful and rhythmic flow, conveys the certainty and inevitable fate of those who oppose divine will. The Surah's opening with the rhetorical interrogative "أَلَمْ تَرَ" ("Have you not seen?") directly engages the audience, drawing them into a scene of profound tension and compelling them to reflect objectively on the undeniable greatness of divine power. This immediate direct address, rather than a straightforward statement, foregrounds the miraculous nature of the event. The striking and astonishing images employed—such as the attack of tiny flocks of birds (طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ) and their bombardment of Abraha's massive elephant-riding army with dried clay pebbles (سِجِّيلٍ)—are brilliant examples of defamiliarization. By subverting the audience's logical expectations regarding relative strength, these images vividly depict both the utter humiliation of the enemy and the effortless ease with which God can destroy overwhelming forces. The concluding comparison of the destroyed army to "كَعْصَفٍ مَّاكُولٍ" (grass that

livestock have crushed under their teeth), through its symbolic and visceral language, powerfully illustrates both the worthlessness of material power and the absolute certainty of divine will.

The central dramatic tension of the Surah, manifested in the stark contrast between the enormous elephants (symbolizing human arrogance, material strength, and perceived invincibility) and the small, seemingly insignificant birds (symbolizing the subtle yet potent instruments of divine will), resolves not according to human material logic but entirely with divine logic. This resolution culminates in the inevitable triumph of God's will and the absolute destruction of His enemies. Thus, form and content in Surah Al-Fil are in complete harmony, working in tandem: the external structure, word choice, sentence construction, and narrative conciseness effectively convey the dominance and supremacy of divine will to the audience. The concise plot of the Surah, by deliberately eschewing individual character development and extraneous historical details, maintains an unwavering focus on its main message: the absolute incapacity of humans before God's omnipotence. Short sentences, a rapid rhythm, and decisive vocabulary (e.g., "تَرْمِيهِمْ" - "they pelted them," "فَجَعَلَهُمْ" - "He made them") all serve to convey a sense of urgency, immediacy, and undeniable certainty in divine action. This profound harmony between form and content transforms Surah Al-Fil into an eternal statement where the external structure (narrative conciseness, innovative imagery, captivating musicality) and the inner meaning (the imperative of submission to divine will and the demonstration of God's power) are so intricately intertwined that every word and formal choice reflects a truth of monotheism. Such harmony not only attests to the literary miracle of the Quran but also serves as an unparalleled model for integrating art and spirituality in religious texts.

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Tawassul in View of the Holy Quran and the Islamic Sources

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Abstract

This study investigates the concept of tawassul—seeking a means of approach to God—from the perspective of the Qur’ān and other Islamic sources. To achieve this goal, numerous Sunni and Shi’i texts—primarily Sunni works—were examined, and a selection of the most authoritative sources was chosen as the foundation of the analysis. Employing a descriptive–analytical method, the research explores and compares diverse perspectives on the meaning, types, and applications of tawassul. The study also compares interpretations across traditions to clarify the relation between intercession and monotheism. The findings demonstrate that, according to the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition, the mediating entity may at times consist of righteous deeds and sincere acts of worship, and at other times a noble individual who enjoys a divinely granted rank and esteem. The study further reveals that tawassul has been widely acknowledged and practiced as an ancient religious tradition through which believers seek closeness to God. It eventually suggests that tawassul—when performed in accordance with divine instruction—does not constitute shirk (polytheism) but rather reinforces tawhīd (monotheism). In other word, tawassul reaffirms tawhid by acknowledging that all mediation operates solely through God’s will.

Keywords: Qur’ān, Islamic sources, tawassul, tawhīd, shirk, istishfā’.

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1. Introduction

Tawassul refers to the act of seeking divine assistance or intercession through an intermediary such as a prophet, saint, or righteous individual. In Islamic theology, it signifies employing a *wasilah* (means) to draw nearer to God and obtain His favor. While the principle is widely acknowledged across Islamic traditions, its modes of application vary. In Sunni thought, tawassul is generally accepted but practiced differently: some scholars restrict it to the Prophet Muhammad, whereas others extend it to other virtuous believers. In Shia Islam, tawassul constitutes an integral part of devotion and is closely associated with the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet), who are considered divinely chosen mediators whose intercession operates solely by God's permission.

Controversy over tawassul typically arises in relation to *tawhid*, the doctrine of absolute monotheism that forms the foundation of Islamic belief. The Qur'an and Prophetic teachings establish *tawhid* as the central message of all prophets, beginning with the call to proclaim God's oneness. Following the Prophet's death, theological and political disputes concerning leadership led to divergent interpretations. Those who remained loyal to the Prophet's family, recognizing their divinely inspired knowledge, came to be identified as the Shia of Ali ibn Abi Talib. Shia scholars maintain that Imam Ali and his descendants exemplified perfect monotheism, serving as models of spiritual guidance and devotion. The accusation that Shia Muslims attribute divine powers to the Imams stems from misunderstanding the nature of tawassul. In Shia theology, the Imams possess no independent authority; rather, they function as means through which God manifests His mercy and responds to supplications. Thus, tawassul, correctly understood, reinforces rather than contradicts *tawhid*, emphasizing that all intercession derives from God alone.

This study aims to delve into this subject by examining Quranic verses and noble traditions, both from Sunni and Shia sources, to specifically explore and compare the perspectives on intercession and seeking help from the Sunni and Shia school of thought. The study struggles to confirm that intercession and seeking help ultimately lead back to *tawhid*, rather than contradicting it. To do so, the study adopts

a descriptive–analytical research method. Primary and secondary Islamic sources were examined through textual and comparative analysis, focusing on Qur’anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and authoritative Sunni and Shia commentaries. Rather than relying solely on doctrinal interpretation, the study critically describes and analyzes key theological arguments to present an integrated view of tawassul as reflected in Islamic scripture and tradition.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the interpretive gap between Sunni and Shia perspectives on tawassul. The topic is not only a recurring theme in classical theology but also a point of contemporary intra-faith dialogue and misunderstanding. By re-examining tawassul through authentic Qur’anic and Hadith sources, the paper clarifies its theological legitimacy and demonstrates that when properly understood, tawassul reinforces rather than contradicts the unity of God (tawhid). Hence, this research contributes to promoting inter-sectarian understanding and reviving classical Islamic scholarship in modern discourse. For the purposes of this study, the following research question is adopted:

What is the theological nature and legitimacy of tawassul according to the Qur’an and Islamic sources, and how does its proper understanding affirm rather than compromise the principle of divine unity (tawhid)?

2. Literature Review

A considerable body of scholarship, both classical and modern, has addressed the question of tawassul within the broader framework of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and spirituality. Early Sunni scholars such as Subkī (1935), Samhūdī (1908), and Qaṣṭallānī (2008) discussed the permissibility of seeking intercession through the Prophet Muhammad and the righteous as a means sanctioned by revelation. Their works generally concluded that when tawassul is performed with the understanding that only God possesses ultimate authority, it remains a legitimate devotional act. In contrast, later reformist voices—most notably Ibn Taymiyya (2001, 2002)—critiqued certain popular practices, arguing that they could blur the distinction between reverence

and worship. However, even Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged that invoking God while mentioning the Prophet's rank does not constitute polytheism.

Within the Shia tradition, exegetes such as Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1995) and philosophers like Mullā Ṣadrā (1998) offered systematic treatments of intercession, grounding it in Qur'anic ontology and divine causality. They emphasized that intercession and mediation operate only by God's will, thereby reinforcing monotheism. Contemporary Shia theologians such as Subḥānī (n.d.) and Mutahhari (1973, 1991) have further elaborated these ideas, stressing that tawassul expresses obedience to divine command rather than reliance on independent intermediaries.

Modern academic studies have also explored tawassul from sociological and comparative perspectives. Ayoub (1978) examined devotional dimensions of 'Āshūrā' rituals to show how the practice of seeking intercession reflects collective piety and historical memory. Madelung (1997) contextualized early debates on authority and succession, illustrating how theological differences on tawassul were intertwined with political developments after the Prophet's death. More recently, interdisciplinary works by Hemami and Karbaschi (2013) have traced philosophical and hadith foundations of mediation in Mullā Ṣadrā's writings, demonstrating the continuity between classical and modern interpretations.

Across these studies, a shared recognition emerges that tawassul—understood as seeking God's favor through divinely approved means—has deep Qur'anic roots, particularly in Q 5:35 and 4:64. The main divergence lies not in the legitimacy of tawassul itself but in its modalities: whether it should be restricted to the Prophet during his lifetime or extended to the saints and righteous after his death. Sunni jurists such as Suyūṭī (1993) and Zurqānī (n.d.) argued for its continuity based on early communal practice, while reformist movements later limited it to direct supplication to God. In the Shia corpus, however, the Ahl al-Bayt are viewed as perpetual spiritual mediators whose intercession symbolizes ultimate submission to divine will.

Despite the breadth of the existing literature, several gaps remain. First, much of the earlier discussion has been confined within sectarian boundaries, focusing either on Sunni or Shia reasoning without a

balanced comparative synthesis. Second, classical texts were often analyzed descriptively, leaving insufficient critical engagement with their theological underpinnings. Third, contemporary studies not only are few in abundance but they are mostly tended to emphasize sociological dimensions of tawassul while overlooking its hermeneutic and epistemological foundations within Qur'anic discourse.

The present study seeks to fill these gaps by offering a comprehensive, cross-sectarian analysis that integrates Sunni and Shia perspectives on tawassul through a descriptive-analytical framework. It revisits the primary sources to demonstrate that both traditions, when interpreted within their original contexts, uphold tawassul as a practice grounded in monotheism rather than in deviation from it. This research differs from previous works by systematically juxtaposing Qur'anic exegesis, Prophetic traditions, and theological reflections across schools, thereby uncovering a shared doctrinal core. Furthermore, by re-examining classical authorities in light of modern hermeneutic principles, the study clarifies that tawassul is not merely a devotional act but an expression of humanity's perennial quest for proximity to the Divine. In doing so, it contributes to current inter-sectarian dialogue and provides a conceptual bridge between historical theology and contemporary Islamic thought.

In the context of this research, for analytical and theological discussion, first the concept of tawassul and its use in Quran is discussed. Second, while its categories are discussed, some instances of tawassul by the prophet Adam, tawassul to the Prophet Muhammad and public practices of tawassul through the Prophet are mentioned. In the final parts of the study, the distinction between tawassul to prophets, saints and idol worship as well as the boundary and relationship between tawhid and tawassul are fully explained and discussed.

3. Tawassul and Wasilah in Terminology and Expression

In lexicographical books, the term "tawassul" (seeking means) and "wasilah" (means) driven from the Arabic stem "wasala"¹ has been

¹ An action of taking advantage of a means to seek nearness to somebody or something

presented with various expressions, but all convey nearly the same meaning. In language, "wasilah" (means) refers broadly to anything that brings a person closer to another. "Lisan al-Arab," one of the famous lexicographical works, states: "Wasilah means something by which one draws closer to another."² (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994, p.725) Similarly, Ibn Fāris (2001) says: "Wasilah signifies absolute desire or seeking."³ (p.110) In "Mufradat fī Gharib al-Quran," it is mentioned: "Wasilah means drawing near or connecting to something with interest and desire."⁴ (Rāghib, 2001, entry "وَسَلَّ", p. 524.) Other lexicographers such as Shartūnī (1995) and Fayyūmī (2007) have provided similar definitions of this term.

The Al-Munjid in the Arabic Language, a work by Maalouf (1867–1946 CE), is one of the most renowned and widely used Arabic-to-Arabic dictionaries compiled in the 20th century. It provides a very clear and entirely Sharia-compliant definition of the term "tawassul": "He sought means (tawassala) to Allah through an act or a means (wasilah)"⁵ (Malūf, 1994, p.900).

Moʿīn (2009) presents the same Arabic meaning for the word [which is also entered with the same spelling in Persian], equating it to seeking help, taking recourse, resorting to someone, or clinging to someone. Tabatabaʿi (1995) interpretes that wasilah is the act of accompanying and seeking closeness, and it may also be used to mean something that facilitates accompaniment and closeness. Then he suggests that the second meaning is more appropriate.

In the Holy Quran, the word wasilah is used rather implicitly, but by referring to narrations and the words of scholars and great figures, we understand its meanings. Imam Ali (peace be upon him), in part of Sermon 110 of Nahj al-Balāgha, says:

The best means by which seekers of nearness to Allah, the Glorified, the Exalted, seek nearness, is the belief in Him and His Prophet, fighting in His cause, for it is the high pinnacle of Islam, and (to believe) in the *kalimatu'l-'ikhlās* (the expression of Divine purification) for it is just nature and the establishment

² « الوسيلة ما يتقرب به إلى الغير »

³ « الوسيلة الرغبة و الطلب »

⁴ « الوسيلة: التوصل الى الشئ برغبة »

⁵ « وَسَلَّ تَوَسَّلَ الى الله بعمل او وسيلة »

of prayer for it is (the basis of) community, payment of *zakat* (Islamic tax) for it is a compulsory obligation, fasting for the month of *Ramadan* for it is the shield against chastisement, the performance of *hajj* of the House of Allah (i. e. Ka'bah) and its *'umrah* (other than annual pilgrimage) for these two acts banish poverty and wash away sins, regard for kinship for it increases wealth and length of life, to giving alms secretly for it covers shortcomings, giving alms openly for it protects against a bad death and extending benefits (to people) for it saves from positions of disgrace. (Razi, n.d., p. 249)⁶

According to the above remarks by Imam Ali, the best means by which one can turn to Almighty God are ten things: 1. Affirmation and confession of God's oneness and the prophethood of His Messenger, 2. Struggle (jihad) in the way of God, 3. The word of sincerity ('la ilaha illa Allah'⁷ — there is no god but God), 4. Establishing prayer, 5. Giving *zakat*, 6. Fasting the month of *Ramadan*, 7. Performing *Hajj* and *Umrah* to the House of God, 8. Maintaining kinship ties, 9. Giving charity secretly and openly, and 10. Performing good deeds.

Based on the foregoing sources, it can be inferred that the semantic and theological connotations of *tawassul* exhibit a notable congruence, both signifying the pursuit of proximity to Allah through the adoption of an intermediary, whether manifested as a means or as a virtuous deed.

4. Tawassul in the Quran

The Glorious Quran permits selecting means and turning to them, and indeed recommends it: "O you who believe! Fear God, seek the means of drawing near to Him, and strive in His cause! Perhaps you will succeed."⁸ (5:35) Furthermore, the Noble Quran attributes positive

⁶ « إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ مَا تَوَسَّلَ بِهِ الْمُتَوَسِّلُونَ إِلَى اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَ تَعَالَى: الْإِيمَانُ بِهِ وَ بَرَسُؤْلِهِ، وَ الْجِهَادُ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَإِنَّهُ ذُرْوَةُ الْإِسْلَامِ، وَ كَلِمَةُ الْإِخْلَاصِ فَإِنَّهَا الْفِطْرَةُ، وَ إِقَامُ الصَّلَاةِ فَإِنَّهَا الْمَلَّةُ، وَ إِبْنَاءُ الزَّكَاةِ فَإِنَّهَا فَرِيضَةٌ وَاجِبَةٌ، وَ صَوْمُ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فَإِنَّهُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ الْعِقَابِ، وَ حَجُّ الْبَيْتِ وَ اعْتِمَارُهُ فَإِنَّهُمَا يُنْفِيَانِ الْفَقْرَ وَ يَرْحِصَانِ الدُّنْبَ، وَ صَلَّةُ الرَّجْمِ فَإِنَّهَا مَثْرَاةٌ فِي الْمَالِ وَ مُنْسَأَةٌ فِي الْأَجْلِ، وَ صَدَقَةُ السَّرِّ فَإِنَّهَا تُكَوِّرُ الْخَطِيئَةَ، وَ صَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ فَإِنَّهَا تَدْفَعُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ، وَ صَنَائِعُ الْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنَّهَا تَقِي مَصَارِعَ الْهَوَانِ.»

⁷ « لا اله الا الله »

⁸ مائده / ٣٥. « يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ ابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَ جَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ»

effect to the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) supplication and seeking forgiveness for God's servants, and says: "If, when they had wronged themselves, they had come to you and asked forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God ever-accepting of repentance and Merciful."⁹ (4:64) This noble verse lays the foundation for the belief in intercession and the efficacy of means before God and establishes it. Likewise, according to the Quran, Joseph's (peace be upon him) brothers sought intercession from Jacob (peace be upon him) for the forgiveness of their sin and error, and he accepted their request: "They said: 'O our father! Ask forgiveness for us of our sins; indeed, we have been wrongdoers.' He said: 'I will ask my Lord to forgive you; indeed, He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.'"¹⁰ (12: 97&98) From these verses it follows that tawassul is placing an entity that is highly valued and honored in the sight of God as an intermediary between oneself and God in order to attain nearness to Him. Therefore, the valuable entity to which we turn may sometimes be righteous deeds and sincere worship of God, which serve as powerful means to draw us near to the Lord of the worlds, and at other times a noble person who holds a special rank and respect in the sight of the Almighty God.

5. Categories of Tawassul

Tawassul can be divided into three categories:

1. **Tawassul through righteous deeds:** As narrated by Suyūfī (1993) in his commentary on the verse "And seek the means of approach to Him"¹¹, Qatadah explained regarding this verse: "One should draw near to the Lord through obedience to Him and deeds that please Him."¹² (p. 280)
2. **Tawassul through the supplication of righteous servants:** As previously mentioned, the Holy Quran recounts the story of the

⁹ نساء / ٦٤ . « وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا »

¹⁰ يوسف / ٩٧ و ٩٨ . « قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَعْفِرْنَا لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ »

¹¹ مائده / ٣٥ . « ...وابتغوا اليه الوسيلة... »

¹² « عن قتادة في قوله تعالى (وابتغوا اليه الوسيلة) قال: تقربوا الى الله بطاعته و العمل بما يرضيه »

brothers of Yusuf (Joseph), who said to their father, Yaqub (Jacob): "O our father, ask forgiveness for us from our Lord; indeed, we have been sinners."¹³ (12:97) [Yaqub] replied, "I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (12:97) This verse clearly indicates that the sons of Yaqub sought the intercession of their father's supplication and considered it a means for their forgiveness. Prophet Yaqub did not object to their request but instead promised to pray for them.

3. **Tawassul through honorable spiritual figures** who hold a special and revered status before God, as a means to attain divine proximity. This form of Tawassul has been accepted and practiced by the companions of the Prophet since the early days of Islam. Abu Abdullah Al-Bukhari records in his Sahih: "During times of drought, Umar ibn Al-Khattab would seek rain through Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), saying, 'O Allah, we used to seek Your mercy through Your Prophet, and You would grant us rain. Now we seek Your mercy through the uncle of Your Prophet, so grant us rain.' And they would be granted rain."¹⁴ (Bukhari, 1981, p. 16). The practice of seeking intercession through the Awliya (friends of God) was so common that early Muslims even referenced the Prophet as their means to God in their poetry. The Arab poet of the Prophet's time, Suwād ibn Qārib Al-Dawsi, composed a poem in honor of the noble Prophet, saying: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and you are a witness over all hidden and unseen. I bear witness that you—O son of the noble and pure—are the closest means

¹³ يوسف / ٩٧ و ٩٨ . « قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ

هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ»

¹⁴ « أَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ كَانَ إِذَا قَحَطُوا اسْتَسْقَى بِالْعَبَّاسِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ، فَقَالَ: اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا

كُنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّنَا فَتَسْقِنَا، وَإِنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِعَمِّ نَبِيِّنَا فَاسْقِنَا، قَالَ: فَيَسْقُونَ»

to God among all the prophets."¹⁵ (IslamWeb, n.d.). At the same time, although the Noble Prophet heard this verse of poetry from him, he never reproached him for such an utterance, nor did he accuse him of associating partners with God (shirk) or of religious innovation (bid'ah). Al-Shafi'i (2014) likewise alludes to this reality in the following couplet: "The family of the Prophet are my means of approaching God, and I hope that, through them, my record of deeds will be placed in my right hand"¹⁶ (p. 50).

Although numerous narrations have been transmitted concerning the permissibility of seeking tawassul through the friends of God, in light of the aforementioned reports, the legitimacy and desirability of tawassul—from the perspective of the Prophet's practice, the method of his Companions, and the teachings of eminent Muslim scholars—becomes clear, obviating the need for further elaboration. On this basis, the untenability of the claim advanced by those who regard tawassul to the elect servants of God as an act of shirk or bid'ah is decisively established.

6. Tawassul by Prophet Adam (peace be upon him)

Juwaynī (1978) writes that Abu Hurairah reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) that he said:

When Allah the Exalted created Adam, the father of mankind, and breathed into him of His spirit, Adam turned to the right side of the Throne and saw five figures in prostration and bowing amidst light. He asked, 'Have You created anyone from clay before me?' Allah replied, 'No, O Adam.' Adam then asked, 'Who are these five figures I see in their forms and appearances?' Allah said, 'These are five of your descendants. Had it not been for them, I would not have created you. They are five whose names I have derived from My own names. Had they not existed, I would not have created Paradise, Hell, the Throne, the

¹⁵ « و اشهد ان لا رب غيره و انك مأمون على كل غالب و انك ادنى المرسلين وسيلة الى الله يابن

الاکرمين الاطاييب»

¹⁶ « ال النبي ذريعتي * وهم اليه وسيلتي * ارجوهم اعطى غدا * بيدي اليمين صحيفتي»

Footstool, the heavens, the earth, the angels, or mankind and jinn. I am Al-Mahmud (the Praised), and this is Muhammad. I am Al-Ali (the Exalted), and this is Ali. I am Al-Fatir (the Originator), and this is Fatima. I am Al-Ihsan (the Beneficent), and this is Hasan. I am Al-Muhsin (the Bestower of Good), and this is Husayn. By My might, I swear that no one will come to Me with even a mustard seed's worth of hatred for them in their heart, except that I will cast them into Hell without hesitation. O Adam, these are My chosen ones. Through them, I grant salvation or destruction. So, if you have any need [or request] from Me, seek their intercession.' Then the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) said, 'We are the Ark of Salvation. Whoever boards it will be saved, and whoever turns away will perish.'¹⁷ (pp. 36–37)

This narration not only proves the importance of the tawassul but also the lofty position of the five mentioned people who are known as the People of the Cloak (Ahl al-Kisā')—also known as the Five Holy Figures: The Prophet Muḥammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and his grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. They are central to both Sunni and Shia traditions, with particular theological significance in Shia Islam.

According to the Hadith of the Cloak (Hadīth al-Kisā'), reported in both Sunni and Shia sources, the Prophet gathered these four family members under his cloak and invoked divine purification upon them. This event is linked to the Quranic Verse of Purification: "Indeed, Allah intends only to remove defilement from you, O People of the Household, and to purify you completely" (33:33). In Sunni Islam, the

¹⁷ «عن أبي هريرة عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم أنه قال: «لما خلق الله تعالى آدم أبا البشر و نفخ

فيه من روحه التفت آدم يمنا العرش فإذا في النور خمسة أشباح سجداً و ركعاً. قال آدم: هل خلقت أحداً من طين قبلي؟ قال: لا يا آدم. قال: فمن هؤلاء الخمسة الأشباح الذين أراهم في هيبتي و صورتى؟ قال: هؤلاء خمسة من ولدك لولاهم ما خلقتك، هؤلاء خمسة شققت لهم خمسة أسماء من أسمائى لولاهم ما خلقت الجنة و النار، و لا العرش و لا الكرسي، و لا السماء و لا الأرض، و لا الملائكة و لا الإنس و لا الجن، فأنا المحمود و هذا محمد، و أنا العالى و هذا علي، و أنا الفاطر و هذه فاطمة، و أنا الإحسان و هذا الحسن، و أنا المحسن و هذا الحسين، البيت بعزتي أن لا يأتيني أحدٌ بمتقال ذرة من خردل من بغيرهم إلا أدخله نارى و لا أبالي، يا آدم هؤلاء صفوتى بهم أنجيهم و بهم أهلكهم، فإذا كان لك إلى حاجة في هؤلاء توسل. فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم: نحن سفينة النجاة من تعلق بها نجا، و من حاد عنها هلك».

Ahl al-Kisā' are recognized as the purified household of the Prophet, exemplars of piety. In Shia theology, they are seen as infallible (ma'ṣūmīn) and divinely appointed leaders, forming the doctrinal basis for the Imamate. Their commemoration, especially al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom at Karbalā', shapes much of Shia ritual, spirituality, and identity (Ayoub, 1978; Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, 2007; Kulaynī, 1981; Madelung, 1997).

In another narration from Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), it is reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) that he said:

When Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) committed the sin, he pleaded, "O Allah, I ask You by the right of Muhammad to forgive me." Allah said, "O Adam, how did you know Muhammad when I have not yet created him?" Adam replied, "O Lord, when You created me and breathed into me of Your spirit, I raised my head and saw written on the pillars of the Throne: 'There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' I realized that the one whose name is paired with Yours must be the most beloved of Your creation." Allah said, "O Adam, you have spoken the truth. He is the most beloved of My creation. You called upon Me by his right, so I have forgiven you. Had it not been for Muhammad, I would not have created you." This hadith has a sound chain of narration."¹⁸ (Hakim al-Nishaburi, 2000, p. 615)

7. Tawassul to the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in Sunni Sources

In this section, we shall examine a number of significant works authored by prominent Sunnī scholars on the subject of *tawassul* through the Noble Prophet of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the most beloved creation to Allah, and Muslims always express their love and devotion to him in every possible way, seeking

¹⁸ «... عن عمر بن الخطاب قال: قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله): «لما اقترف آدم الخطيئة قال: يا رب أسألك بحق محمد لما غفرت لي، فقال الله: يا آدم وكيف عرفت محمداً ولم أخلقك، قال: يا رب لأنك لما خلقتني بيدك ونفخت في من روحي رفعت رأسي فرأيت على قوائم العرش مكتوباً لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله، فعلمت أنك لم تضيف إلي اسمك إلا أحب الخلق إليك، فقال الله: صدقت يا آدم أنه لأحب الخلق إلي ادعني بحقه فقد غفرت لك ولولا محمد ما خلقتك». قال الحاكم: «هذا حديث صحيح الإسناد».

closeness to the Divine Essence through this love. Reviewing these writings helps clarify the status of *tawassul* among Muslim scholars and demonstrates that it has been a common practice among Muslims, not to be classified as *shirk*.

- Ibn al-Jawzī (597/1201) composed *al-Wafā fi faḍā'il al-Muṣṭafā*, dedicating one chapter to *tawassul* through the Prophet and another to seeking healing at his blessed grave (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1937).
- Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Nu'mān al-Mazālī al-Maghribī (683/1284) authored a treatise entitled *Miṣbāḥ al-zalām fi al-mustaghīthīn bikhayr al-anām 'alayhi al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām fi al-yaqāza wa-l-manām* ("The Lamp of Darkness Concerning Those Who Seek Aid from the Best of Mankind, peace and blessings be upon him, in Wakefulness and in Dreams") on the subject of *tawassul* to the Prophet (ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-ālih wa-sallam). In this work, the author seeks to demonstrate, through numerous examples of prophetic miracles and mercy toward the community, the theological rationale underlying certain devotional beliefs such as *tawassul*. He also highlights various expressions of love and recourse to the Prophet. The text presents accounts, supported by reliable reports, of historical events attesting to the praiseworthiness of *tawassul* to the Prophet both during his lifetime and after his passing. Owing to the significance of this book and the value of its contents, many later scholars cited it in their own works, including Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī in *al-Qawl al-badī*, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qaṣṭallānī in *al-Mawāhib al-ladunniyya* and *Masālik al-hunafā*, and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī in *Tanwīr al-ḥalak* and *al-Arj bi-l-faraj*.
- Ibn Dāwūd al-Mālikī al-Shādhilī, in *al-Bayān wa-l-ikhtisār*, compiled instances in which scholars and pious individuals sought relief from hardship through *tawassul* to the Prophet (Ibn Dāwūd al-Mālikī al-Shādhilī, n.d.).
- Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (756/1355) analyzed the subject extensively in *Shifā' al-siqām* (Subkī, 1935).

- Sayyid Nūr al-Dīn al-Samhūdī (911/1506), in his renowned *Wafā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-Muṣṭafā*, discussed the matter and provided numerous supporting reports (Samhūdī, 1908).
- Abū al-'Abbās al-Qaṣṭallānī (923/1517) addressed the subject in *al-Mawāhib al-ladunniyya* (Qaṣṭallānī, 2008).
- Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Zurqānī (122/739) in his *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib al-ladunniyya* (Zurqānī, n.d.).
- Khālīdī al-Baghdādī (1299/1882) authored *Ṣulḥ al-ikhwān*, and later a treatise responding to Sayyid Maḥmūd Ālūsī on *tawassul*, published in 1306/1889 (Khālīdī al-Baghdādī, 1882, 1889).
- 'Adawī Ḥamzāwī (1303/1886) treated the subject in *Kanz al-maṭālib* (Ḥamzāwī, 1886).
- 'Izzāmī al-Shāfi'ī al-Qaḍā'ī authored *Furqān al-Qur'ān*, published alongside al-Bayhaqī's *al-Asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt* (Qaḍā'ī, n.d.).

A study of these works—some of which present the subject with notable clarity, especially *Ṣulḥ al-ikhwān* and *Furqān al-Qur'ān*—enables us to trace the practice of Muslims in every age concerning *tawassul* to the Noble Messenger. This, in turn, absolves those who practice *tawassul* to the Prophet, the other prophets, and the *awliyā' Allāh* (friends of God) from the accusation of *shirk*.

Moreover, one must always bear in mind the Qur'ānic command in Sūrat al-Mā'idah (5:35): “O you who believe! Be mindful of God, and seek a means of nearness to Him [through faith, righteous deeds, and the honor of those near to Him], and strive hard in His cause, so that you may prosper.”¹⁹

8. Public Practices of Tawassul Through the Prophet

In his work *Husn al-Tawassul fī Ādāb Ziyārat Afdal al-Rusul* (“The Excellence of Intercession in the Etiquettes of pilgrimaging the Best of Messengers”), Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh al-Fākihī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 1564 CE/972 AH) outlines ninety-four etiquettes and instructions regarding pilgrimage rights. In the twenty-fifth section, he states that when a pilgrim stands before the Prophet's grave, he should seek *tawassul* through him, appoint him as an intercessor before God, and engage in

¹⁹ مائده / ٣٥ . « يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ »

abundant repentance and supplication. The pilgrim is then encouraged to recite the Quranic verse: “*And if, when they wronged themselves, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked forgiveness of Allah, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Accepting of repentance and Merciful*”²⁰ (4:64). Following this, the pilgrim addresses the Prophet, saying: “O Messenger of God, I have come to pilgrimage you in repentance from my sins, appointing you as my intercessor before God. O Messenger of God, I am your guest; I ask you to seek forgiveness for me before God and to intercede for me.” In the thirty-first etiquette, the author further instructs that after paying pilgrimage to the Prophet’s grave, it is recommended that the pilgrim proceed daily—especially on Fridays—to pilgrimage the graves of the Imams buried in al-Baqī’.

Qaṣṭallānī (d. 1517 CE/923 AH) in *al-Mawāhib al-Ladunniyya*, affirms that it is commendable for the pilgrim at the Prophet’s grave to frequently pray, implore, and seek intercession through him. He explains that such intercession has always been efficacious—prior to the Prophet’s creation, during his earthly life, after his passing, in the *barzakh* (intermediate state), and on the Day of Resurrection (Qaṣṭallānī, 2008). Zurqānī (n.d.) in his commentary on *al-Mawāhib*, wherein he stresses that those who deny the validity of *tawassul* are deprived, for God has stripped them of spiritual insight and left them misguided (p.219).²¹ As he notes, the Quran explicitly states: “*And if, when they wronged themselves, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked forgiveness of Allah, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Accepting of repentance and Merciful*” 22(4:64).

Likewise, Imām Muḥammad al-‘Abdarī al-Qayrawānī al-Mālikī (d. 1337 CE/737 AH), in *al-Madkhal* explains that when pilgrimaging the graves of the prophets and messengers (peace be upon them), one should set out

²⁰ نساء / ٦٤. « وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا »

²¹ «... ومن اعتقد خلاف ذلك فهو المحروم الذي طمس الله بصيرته وأضل سريره، ألم يسمع قوله تعالى:

{وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ...} «... نساء / ٦٤. « وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا »

from afar with sincere intention. Upon arrival, the pilgrim must approach with humility and neediness, focusing inwardly with the heart rather than outwardly with the eyes. At that moment, the pilgrim should glorify God, send blessings upon the prophets, express satisfaction with their companions, and then seek *tawassul* through them to God for the fulfillment of needs and forgiveness of sins. He must remain confident that by their blessing, his petitions will be granted, for they are the open gateways (*abwāb Allāh al-maftūḥa*), and God has decreed the fulfillment of needs through them. If one cannot visit in person, he should convey greetings from afar and present his needs, for they are generous and do not turn away those who call upon them. As for pilgrimaging the Seal of the Prophets, one should do so repeatedly, for he is the supreme intercessor whose intercession is never rejected. Therefore, whoever seeks *tawassul*, *istighātha* (imploration), or petitions through him will never be refused or disappointed (‘Abdarī, 1920, p.257).

Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī (d. 1549 CE/956 AH), in his work *Majma‘ al-Anhar fī Sharḥ Multaqā al-Abḥur* (1998 edition), includes a pilgrimage litany (*ziyāra*) for the Prophet Muḥammad. In this text, he invokes blessings upon the Messenger of God and addresses him directly: “O Messenger of God, I ask you for the great intercession, and through *tawassul* with you, I seek nearness to my Lord so that I may die as a Muslim and be resurrected among God’s righteous servants” (Ḥalabī, 1998). Similarly, ‘Adawī Ḥamzāwī (d. 1886 CE/1303 AH), in *Kanz al-Maṭālib* (p. 216), instructs the pilgrim concerning the etiquettes of pilgrimage. He advises that, while renewing repentance, the best words to utter in the Blessed tomb of the Prophet are the recitation of the Quranic verse: “وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ ...” (4:64). The pilgrim should then address the Messenger of God, saying: “We are your visitors; for the right you hold over us and for the sake of blessing and intercession, we have come to pilgrimage you. For our sins are many, and our hearts have grown darkened” (Ḥamzāwī, 1886).

According to Amīnī (1987), a number of Quran memorizers (*ḥuffāz*) and Sunni scholars have elaborated on the concept of *tawassul*, affirming that seeking intercession through the Prophet Muḥammad has always been permissible—before his creation, during his earthly life,

after his passing, in the barzakh (intermediate state/ realm), and after the commencement of the Day of Resurrection. They classify tawassul into three categories. The first form refers to supplicating to God Almighty by invoking the Prophet's rank and blessing; this, they unanimously affirm, is permissible. The second form consists of requesting the Prophet's prayer on behalf of the believer, which all likewise consider permissible. The third form involves directly asking something of the Prophet himself, in the belief that he can serve as a means and intercede before God in every state. This third type, however, ultimately reduces to the second form, as both share the same essential meaning despite differences in wording (p. 145).

Although an extensive corpus of works has been devoted to the subject of *tawassul*, the present study cites only a select number of representative examples to illustrate the discussion. In this regard, one can take advantages of the five following books to grasp more knowledge of the subject:

1. *Shawāhid al-ḥaqq fī al-istighātha bi-Sayyid al-khalq*²³ by Shaykh Yūsuf ibn Ismā'īl al-Nabahānī
2. *Al-Fajr al-ṣādiq fī al-radd 'alā munkirī al-tawassul wa-al-karāmāt wa-al-khawāriq*²⁴ by Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī
3. *Al-Baṣā'ir limunkirī al-tawassul bi-ahl al-qubūr*²⁵ by Ḥamdullāh Dājū'ī
4. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*²⁶ by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd
5. *Usd al-ghābah fī ma'rīfat al-ṣaḥābah*²⁷ by Ibn Athīr

9. The Distinction Between Tawassul to Prophets and Saints and Idol Worship

The practice of *tawassul* fundamentally differs from the idolatrous practices of polytheists. Idol worshippers claimed to draw near to their God, yet in reality, they directed acts of worship and devotion toward angels, jinn, or human beings whom they regarded as intermediaries

²³ شواهد الحق في توسل بسيد الخلق

²⁴ الفجر الصادق في الرد على منكري التوسل و الكرامات و الخوارق

²⁵ البصائر، لمنكري التوسل باهل المقابر

²⁶ شرح نهج البلاغه

²⁷ أسد الغابة في معرفة الصحابة

[their deities]. In doing so, they abandoned the worship of God altogether, neither showing hope in Him nor fearing Him. Their entire reliance was on these intermediaries, to whom they directed both reverence and supplication. Consequently, instead of genuinely turning to God, they worshipped the intermediaries themselves, placing their hope in the mercy of these beings and fearing their wrath. For this reason, they constructed idols and statues—believed to represent angels, jinn, or revered humans—and devoted themselves to these images as objects of worship. Their offerings and sacrifices were presented not to God, but to these false representations, in an effort to achieve closeness to the intermediaries. In other word, although polytheists outwardly claimed that their intention was to seek proximity to God through His creation, in practice they ascribed independent power to these intermediaries, directing to them the very acts of worship that belong exclusively to God. As a result, idols and imagined deities were elevated to the status of partners with God in both Lordship and worship (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1995, pp. 179–180).

In this regard, later theologians and jurists across the Islamic tradition have clarified the difference between legitimate *tawassul* and the idolatrous practices associated with *shirk*. For instance, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), while emphasizing divine unity, recognized the permissibility of seeking intercession through the Prophets and the righteous, provided that the ultimate source of efficacy is attributed to God alone. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), despite his reservations about certain popular practices, also distinguished between supplicating to God while mentioning the status of His servants, which he deemed permissible, and directing worship or reliance toward created beings, which he considered polytheism. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE) explicitly endorsed the validity of *tawassul* to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), citing numerous Prophetic traditions and historical precedents. Similarly, within the Shiʿi tradition, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640 CE) and other philosophers and jurists underscored that intercession and mediation by the Imams and saints operate only by divine will, and thus reinforce rather than compromise the principle of *tawḥīd* (Ghazālī, n.d.; Ibn Taymiyya, 2001 & 2002; Mullā Ṣadrā, 1998; Suyūṭī, n.d.).

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate a wide scholarly consensus that properly understood tawassul is distinct from idolatry, as it functions within the theological framework of God's absolute sovereignty.

10. The Boundary and Relationship Between Tawhid and Tawassul

According to Mutahhari (1973), an important point regarding worship-based tawhid is that in *tawassul* (seeking mediation) and *istishfā'* (seeking intercession) with God's chosen servants, one must first ascertain that *tawassul* is sought through those whom God Himself has designated as a means. As the Quran states: "*O you who have believed, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him ...*" (5:35).

In general, appealing to means (*asbāb*) and utilizing causes (*tasabbub*) does not contradict tawhid, since it is God who has created the causes, who has made them effective, and who has commanded human beings to employ them. Such practice is, in fact, an affirmation of monotheism, not polytheism. In this respect, there is no difference between material and spiritual causes, external and internal causes, or worldly and otherworldly causes. The only distinction is that material causes can be discerned through experience and empirical observation, while spiritual causes must be discovered through religion—namely, through revelation, scripture, and tradition.

Second, when a person engages in *tawassul* or *istishfā'*, the focus must remain on God, and only through Him is the intercessor approached. Genuine intercession is that in which the *mashfū' indahu* (the One before whom intercession is sought) has Himself authorized and permitted the intercessor (*shafī'*) to act. Intercession, therefore, is valid only because God wills it and grants permission. In contrast, 'false intercession' arises when one's primary attention is fixed upon the intercessor, assuming that the intercessor's independent influence could sway the One with whom intercession is sought. In this erroneous form, the sinner's entire reliance is placed upon the intercessor's personal power or authority rather than upon God's will, and this constitutes shirk in worship (Mutahhari, 1973, pp. 314–315).

Thus, if the Quran or the prophetic traditions, which articulate divine commandments, designate a non-material or spiritual cause as a

legitimate means, then *tawassul* through it is valid and lawful. From this analysis, two conditions emerge under which recourse to spiritual causes and means is permissible:

1. The cause must be explicitly designated in the Quran or Sunnah as a means to attain worldly or otherworldly objectives.
2. The cause must never be regarded as independently efficacious, but only as effective by God's permission and will (Subhānī, n.d., p. 280; Mutahhari, 1973, p. 264).

Evidently, Mutahhari's perspective aligns closely with several Sunni scholars who have also emphasized that *tawassul* is valid when understood as a means of approaching God rather than as an act of attributing independent power to intermediaries. For instance, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505 CE) argued that the Prophet's intercession operates by divine permission and that seeking his mediation is a legitimate practice rooted in revelation (Suyūṭī, n.d.). Similarly, Qaṣṭallānī (1448–1517 CE), in his *al-Mawāhib al-ladunniyya*, stressed that supplication at the Prophet's grave is permissible since the Prophet's capacity to intercede remains effective before and after his death (Qaṣṭallānī, 2008). In both cases, as with Mutahhari, the central theological principle is that *tawassul* reinforces rather than contradicts monotheism, since it acknowledges God as the sole source of power and efficacy, while recognizing intermediaries only as divinely sanctioned means.

This comparative perspective demonstrates that, across both Sunni and Shi'i traditions, *tawassul* has been consistently upheld as a practice deeply rooted in monotheistic belief—provided it remains within the bounds of divine authorization and does not attribute independent power to the intermediaries. On the basis of the present study's examination of the theological nature and legitimacy of *tawassul* in the Qur'an and other Islamic sources, it may be concluded that a proper understanding of *tawassul* affirms, rather than compromises, the principle of divine unity (*tawhid*).

11. Conclusion

This study has sought to elucidate the concept of *tawassul*, its diverse forms, and its significance as reflected in the Qur'an and broader

Islamic tradition. The analysis underscored that tawassul—whether practiced by prophets, saints, or the faithful in relation to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family), his household, and other divinely guided figures—constitutes an enduring religious practice traceable to the time of Adam. A critical examination of Qur’ānic verses, prophetic traditions, and classical Islamic works demonstrates that a clear delineation of the relationship between tawḥīd (divine unity) and tawassul dispels the common charge that the latter entails polytheism. The theological reasoning affirms that when ultimate power is recognized as belonging exclusively to God, and when His chosen servants are understood to intercede only by His will and command, then appealing to them is not an act of shirk (polytheism) but rather an affirmation of monotheism. This interpretation accords with the Qur’ān itself: “Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?”²⁸ (Q 2:255). Moreover, many exegetes emphasize that the essence of intercession ultimately signifies an appeal to God’s own Most Beautiful Names—His mercy, forgiveness, and concealment of faults—such that all forms of tawassul ultimately return to His pure essence.

The findings of this study suggest that a deeper understanding of tawassul may foster greater unity among Muslims by highlighting the shared theological foundations across different schools of thought, rather than accentuating their divergences. Nonetheless, as with any academic inquiry, certain limitations remain. Chief among these is the vastness of the textual corpus on tawassul, which could not be exhaustively treated within the scope of a single article. Future research would therefore benefit from more specialized and detailed analyses, engaging both classical and contemporary sources, to further illuminate this significant aspect of Islamic theology.

²⁸ بقره / ٢٥٥ . « ... مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ... »

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A Comparative Analysis of Metaphor in Cognitive Science and Islamic Jurisprudence: Toward an Integrated Framework for Interpreting Religious Texts

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Abstract

This paper investigates the cognitive and neural dimensions of metaphor in shaping religious experience. It argues that religious metaphors are not merely rhetorical tools but embodied cognitive mechanisms that influence perception, memory, and emotional salience. Drawing on insights from cognitive neuroscience, embodied linguistics, and classical Islamic hermeneutics, the study examines how metaphor activates distributed brain systems, including sensorimotor, limbic, and visual cortices. The research employs an interdisciplinary analytical approach, integrating textual analysis of Qur'anic metaphors with empirical findings from fMRI and EEG studies. The article highlights how metaphors such as “the Hand of God” or “the Light of God” engage embodied neural pathways, turning abstract theological concepts into affectively rich and experientially grounded phenomena. Furthermore, it explores the parallels and divergences between the Islamic concept of *majāz* and contemporary cognitive metaphor theory. While *majāz* is governed by legal-theological constraints, it shares structural affinities with embodied metaphor. The paper concludes that cognitive metaphor theory—when combined with neuroscientific evidence—offers a valuable framework for understanding the phenomenology of religious experience and opens new pathways for interdisciplinary theology.

Keywords: embodiment; *majāz*; *ḥaqīqa*; Qur'anic exegesis; *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

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Introduction

Metaphor is a cornerstone of religious discourse, shaping how sacred texts convey meaning across human experience and divine truth (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the Qur'ān, metaphors like *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) and *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path, Q. 1:6) bridge the tangible and the transcendent, enabling believers to grasp abstract theological concepts through familiar imagery. In cognitive science, metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of thought—an embodied process structuring abstract ideas via bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2006). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that metaphors, such as time as motion or power as height, arise from sensorimotor patterns, shaping reasoning universally (Kövecses, 2010). This suggests Qur'ānic metaphors resonate by activating neural networks tied to physical actions or sensory perceptions (Barsalou et al., 2005).

By contrast, Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) approaches metaphor through divine revelation. Meaning is grounded in the Qur'ān's sacred text, with *majāz* (figurative meaning) governed by principles like *ḥaqīqa* (literal meaning) and *qarīna* (contextual clues) to ensure theological fidelity (Kamali, 2024; al-Jurjānī, 1992). For instance, *'arsh* (throne, Q. 7:54) is interpreted as divine dominion

, not a physical seat, upholding *tanzīh* (God's transcendence) (al-Rāzī, 2004). Unlike CMT's emphasis on embodiment, *uṣūl al-fiqh* prioritizes normative constraints, treating *majāz* as an exception requiring justification (Heinrichs, 1998). This epistemological divide—between intuitive neural patterns and authoritative norms—poses a challenge for interpreting Qur'ānic metaphor.

This study introduces a novel five-stage analytical framework, developed by the author, to bridge this divide by integrating CMT, cognitive neuroscience, and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Vishanoff, 2011). It fills a critical gap in religious studies, where cognitive and juristic approaches to metaphor remain siloed, leaving scholars without tools to synthesize their insights. Rather than privileging one perspective, the framework fosters a dialogue where embodiment informs resonance and juristic principles ensure doctrinal integrity. Applied to metaphors like *nūr* (light, Q. 24:35) and *qalb qāsī* (hardened heart, Q. 2:74), it reveals theological, ethical, and legal implications (Saeed, 2006). Beyond exegesis, it supports pedagogy, machine translation, and interfaith studies, addressing modern challenges in Islamic scholarship

(Abdul-Raof, 2001). For theology and philosophy of religion scholars, this framework offers a method to explore how divine speech engages human cognition while preserving sacred boundaries. Structured in seven sections, the paper outlines the theoretical background, methodology, findings, and implications, culminating in a new tafsīr paradigm. If, as the Qur'ān asks, “Do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān, or are there locks upon their hearts?” (Q. 47:24), how might metaphor unlock divine meaning for finite minds?

Theoretical Background

The interpretation of metaphor in sacred texts involves more than linguistic parsing—it demands a negotiation between different conceptions of meaning, cognition, and truth. To build an integrated model that bridges cognitive science and Islamic jurisprudence, we must first unpack the foundational assumptions of each tradition regarding how metaphor operates, what it reveals, and what constraints govern its interpretation. This section introduces three key frameworks—Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), cognitive neuroscience, and classical uṣūl al-fiqh—not as isolated paradigms, but as epistemologies that converge on metaphor from distinct directions.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Mapping Abstract Thought onto the Body

Developed in the late 20th century by Lakoff and Johnson, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) revolutionized the study of metaphor by shifting its locus from language to thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to CMT, metaphors are not merely poetic devices or figures of speech; they are cognitive mechanisms that allow humans to reason about abstract domains (such as time, morality, or divinity) by projecting them onto concrete, embodied experiences. When we say “time is running out,” we are not speaking metaphorically in a superficial sense; we are invoking a deep-seated mental mapping in which motion in space is used to conceptualize temporal progression (Gibbs, 2006).

CMT identifies three primary types of metaphor: ontological metaphors, where abstract entities are treated as objects or substances (e.g., “heart of stone”); structural metaphors, where one complex system is understood in terms of another (e.g., “life is a journey”); and orientational metaphors, which assign spatial valence to concepts (e.g., “high is holy,” “low is base”) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Qur'ānic metaphors often exemplify these types: “light” as divine guidance is an ontological metaphor, “path” as a moral trajectory is

structural, and “ascending to God” reflects an orientational schema grounded in verticality (Sweetser, 1990).

What distinguishes CMT from older rhetorical theories is its insistence on embodiment. Thought is not disembodied computation; it arises from

sensorimotor interaction with the world. Thus, metaphors are not arbitrary; they reflect the constraints and affordances of the body. This view is supported by cross-linguistic studies showing that similar metaphors recur across cultures, especially in domains tied to shared human experience—such as balance, containment, and motion (Kövecses, 2010).

In the Qur’ān, such embodied metaphors abound. The “straight path” (al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm) evokes the experience of walking forward toward a destination; “God’s hand” (Yad Allāh) recalls the agency and control associated with grasping. CMT allows us to interpret these expressions not just as tropes, but as structured conceptual models grounded in bodily experience. This theoretical grounding paves the way for integration with neuroscientific findings, as explored in the next section.

Cognitive Neuroscience: The Neural Architecture of Metaphor

The claims of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) have been substantiated—and in some cases nuanced—by developments in cognitive neuroscience. Using techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG), researchers have explored how the brain processes metaphors, revealing overlaps with sensorimotor, emotional, and memory-related neural systems (Aziz-Zadeh & Damasio, 2008; Kuperberg, 2016).

A landmark finding is that metaphor processing extends beyond language-specific areas like Broca’s or Wernicke’s regions. Instead, metaphors activate distributed neural networks, including the motor cortex, visual cortex, insula, and limbic system, depending on their content (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005). For example, when subjects process the metaphor “grasp the concept,” motor cortex regions associated with physical grasping show increased activity (Boulenger et al., 2009). Similarly, metaphors of warmth, such as “a warm person,” engage areas linked to temperature regulation and social bonding (Citron & Goldberg, 2014).

In religious metaphors, this activation may be amplified. Qur’ānic phrases like nūr Allāh (the Light of God, Q. 24:35) or raḥmat Allāh tawṣī‘at kullā shay’ (God’s mercy enveloping all things, Q. 7:156) engage not only linguistic processing but also affective and spatial cognition (Barsalou et al., 2005). Studies suggest that religious believers process doctrinally significant

metaphors with heightened emotional salience, indicating that theological metaphors may be neurologically privileged (Joassin et al., 2022). Cultural and linguistic contexts further shape metaphor processing. Bilingual studies show that speakers interpret metaphors differently depending on the language used, with corresponding shifts in neural activation patterns (Casasanto, 2008; Al-Hasnawi, 2021). This suggests that Qur'ānic metaphors, while grounded in universal embodiment, are mediated by Arabic linguistic structures, Islamic cultural norms, and theological frameworks, making them ideal for interdisciplinary analysis.

Thus, neuroscience not only confirms the embodied basis of metaphor but also provides empirical tools to trace how sacred metaphors, such as *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10), are received, processed, and emotionally registered. This empirical layer complements Islamic hermeneutics by illuminating the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor comprehension, without challenging the normative constraints of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Heinrichs, 1998).

Metaphor in Islamic Jurisprudence: Between Meaning and Normativity

While cognitive science focuses on how metaphors are understood, *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic legal theory) is primarily concerned with how they should be understood. Rooted in legal and theological principles, *uṣūl al-fiqh* treats *majāz*—a category of figurative language encompassing metaphor, metonymy, and other nonliteral expressions—as a controlled interpretive mechanism, employed only when literal (*ḥaqīqa*) interpretation leads to contradiction, absurdity, or doctrinal conflict (Weiss, 1992; Kamali, 2024).

Classical jurists categorized speech into literal (*ḥaqīqa*), metaphorical (*majāz*), and allegorical (*ta'wīl*), each governed by principles such as *qarīna* (contextual clue), *'urf* (custom), *dalāla* (semantic indication), and *maqṣūd al-mutakallim* (intent of the speaker) (al-Sakkākī, 2001; al-Ghazālī, 2012). For instance, in the verse *Yad Allāh fawqa aydīhim* (the Hand of God is above their hands, Q. 48:10), the exegete must determine whether “hand” denotes a physical attribute or symbolizes power, support, or will. This decision is not left to individual intuition; it relies on textual analysis, precedent in *tafsīr* (exegesis), theological consensus (*ijmā'*), and the avoidance of *tajsīm* (corporealism) (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Rāzī, 2004).

Importantly, *majāz* in *uṣūl al-fiqh* is not an invitation to interpretive freedom. It is a tightly regulated gateway, permitting figurative readings only

when justified by strong contextual or rational evidence (Heinrichs, 1998). Jurists such as al-Sakkākī, al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and, in the Shī‘ī tradition, al-Ṣadr, developed complex criteria for invoking majāz (al-Ṣadr, 2007). They distinguished between rational metaphor (majāz ‘aqlī), where causality or function underlies the figurative use (e.g., Yad Allāh as divine agency), and linguistic metaphor (majāz lughawī), based on lexical conventions (e.g., “lion” for a brave person) (al-Jurjānī, 1992). This distinction sets majāz apart from cognitive metaphor, which emphasizes embodied conceptual mappings without theological constraints (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). While cognitive metaphors prioritize cognitive flexibility, majāz is bound by principles like tanzīh (divine transcendence), ensuring interpretations align with monotheistic doctrine.

Moreover, majāz plays a functional role in legal derivation (istinbāt). The meaning assigned to a metaphor can determine the scope of a ruling (ḥukm), the classification of an action (ḥarām, wājib, mubāh), and the ethical framing of religious obligations (Kamali, 2024). For example, misinterpreting nūr (light, Q. 24:35) as rational inference rather than divine guidance could shift the theological epistemology of revelation, undermining its divine origin (Zamakhsharī, 2006).

What makes uṣūl al-fiqh uniquely valuable is its hermeneutical maturity. Centuries before modern hermeneutics or analytic philosophy of language, Muslim jurists developed a sophisticated system for analyzing textual meaning, intention, and context (Vishanoff, 2011). Their insights, rooted in works like al-Ghazālī’s *al-Mustaṣfā* and al-Sakkākī’s *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm*, remain vital for legal reasoning and for engaging with sacred texts as meaning systems, offering a normative counterbalance to the descriptive approach of cognitive science.

Toward an Integrative Epistemology

The question is not whether Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), neuroscience, and uṣūl al-fiqh are compatible—they emerge from distinct philosophical commitments—but whether they can be made methodologically coherent in analyzing metaphor. This paper argues that they can. Each tradition offers a unique epistemic asset: cognitive science provides descriptive accounts of how metaphors are mentally processed (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2006); neuroscience adds empirical depth by mapping neural activation during metaphor comprehension (Kuperberg, 2016; Yang & Shu, 2023); and uṣūl al-fiqh imposes normative constraints on what metaphors may legitimately mean within a revealed framework (Weiss, 1992; Kamali, 2024).

Crucially, these domains do not operate in isolation. They address different facets of the same phenomenon. CMT asks, how is abstract meaning constructed through embodied mappings? (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), while *uṣūl al-fiqh* asks, what meaning is theologically valid given principles like *tanzīh* (divine transcendence)? (al-Ghazālī, 2012). Neuroscience investigates, what brain systems are engaged in metaphor processing? (Aziz-Zadeh & Damasio, 2008), whereas jurisprudence queries, what doctrinal consequences arise from a given interpretation? (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Rather than collapsing these questions, an integrated framework leverages their complementarity, allowing cognitive insights to illuminate the experiential resonance of metaphors while juristic principles ensure doctrinal fidelity (Heinrichs, 1998).

This synthesis yields a richer understanding of metaphor—one that is embodied, interpreted, and bounded. By combining these lenses, we can trace how a metaphor like *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) arises from bodily schemas of agency and control (Gibbs, 2006), is processed through motor and affective neural pathways (Boulenger et al., 2009), is regulated by juristic reasoning to signify divine power rather than physicality (al-Rāzī, 2004), and ultimately shapes believers' theological imagination. This integrative approach not only bridges empirical and normative epistemologies but also supports practical applications, such as enhancing Qur'ānic pedagogy and improving metaphor-sensitive machine translation (Abdul-Raof, 2001).

Methodology

This study employs a comparative-descriptive methodology, grounded in conceptual analysis and textual comparison, to forge an integrated framework bridging cognitive theories of metaphor and Islamic juristic interpretation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kamali, 2024). Rather than relying on experimental or simulation-based approaches, the research utilizes a structured five-stage model to analytically trace how metaphors function within cognitive and normative systems (Gibbs, 2006; Weiss, 1992). This model, introduced in the Integrative Epistemology section, integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), neuroscientific insights, and *uṣūl al-fiqh* to guide the analysis of Qur'ānic metaphors through sequential stages of identification, typology, interpretation, and application, ensuring both empirical depth and doctrinal fidelity (Heinrichs, 1998).

Corpus Selection and Annotation

A pilot set of ten Qur'ānic metaphors was selected for in-depth analysis, chosen for their theological salience, frequency in exegetical literature, and alignment with CMT schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). These include: *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10), *nūr* (light, Q. 24:35), *ṣirāṭ* (path, Q. 1:6), *qalb qāsī* (hardened heart, Q. 2:74), *'arsh* (throne, Q. 7:54), *kursī* (chair, Q. 2:255), *zulumāt* (darkness, Q. 2:17), *ṣawā'iq* (thunderbolts, Q. 13:13), *ḥijāb* (veil, Q. 42:51), and *samā' wa arḍ* (heaven and earth, Q. 21:30). Each metaphor was selected to reflect a range of ontological, structural, and orientational categories, ensuring relevance to both cognitive and juristic interpretive frameworks (Kövecses, 2010; al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Each metaphor was analyzed qualitatively through:

linguistic structure and frequency in the Qur'ān, using close reading of Arabic text (Abdul-Raof, 2001);

conceptual mapping according to CMT categories (ontological, structural, orientational) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999);

hermeneutical treatment in classical *tafsīr* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts (al-Rāzī, 2004; al-Ṣadr, 2007);

theological sensitivity regarding divine attributes and normative rulings, prioritizing principles like *tanzīh* (divine transcendence) (Kamali, 2024).

No automated or statistical tools were used. Instead, judgments were made through close reading, conceptual matching, and cross-referencing with interpretive authorities (Zamakhsharī, 2006).

Hermeneutical Sources

The interpretive analysis draws on classical sources in *tafsīr* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, including Sunni traditions (al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr*, and Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*), Shī'ī traditions (al-'Ayyāshī's *Tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarsī's *Majma' al-Bayān*, and al-Ṣāfi's *Tafsīr*), and theoretical manuals (al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustaṣfā*, al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, and al-Ṣadr's *Durūs fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*) (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Rāzī, 2004; Zamakhsharī, 2006; al-'Ayyāshī, 2008; al-Ṭabarsī, 2010; al-Ghazālī, 2012; al-Sakkākī, 2001; al-Ṣadr, 2007).

These sources were analyzed not as static doctrinal texts but as dynamic interpretive spaces negotiating the role of majāz in theological and legal discourse (Vishanoff, 2011). This approach highlights how jurists balanced the figurative nature of majāz with normative constraints, distinguishing it from cognitive metaphor's emphasis on embodied cognition (Heinrichs, 1998).

Scholarly Feedback

While no formal interviews or surveys were conducted, the author engaged in informal consultations with senior uṣūl instructors and theologians during the development of the five-stage model. These consultations, conducted in City/Institution, to be specified, provided qualitative insights into the model's compatibility with majāz and tanzīh, refining its structure to align with juristic principles (Kamali, 2024). The feedback emphasized how metaphor is taught, problematized, and defended in Islamic scholarship, ensuring the model's theological rigor.

Application as Thought Experiment

The pedagogical and translational implications of the framework are explored as theoretical applications rather than real-world deployments. For example, a hypothetical lesson plan for Yad Allāh (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) illustrates how embodied metaphors can enhance theological education by connecting bodily schemas to divine concepts (Gibbs, 2006). Similarly, the potential enhancement of metaphor-sensitive NLP tools like AraBERT is discussed as a plausible extension, leveraging annotated metaphor corpora to improve translation accuracy (Abdul-Raof, 2001). These applications demonstrate the framework's practical utility without requiring empirical testing at this stage (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

Scope and Limitations

This methodology is qualitative, exploratory, and conceptual, focusing on textual and conceptual analysis rather than neuroimaging, machine learning, or statistical inference (Vishanoff, 2011). Its strength lies in its depth of engagement with Qur'ānic texts and its comparative reasoning across cognitive and juristic epistemologies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kamali, 2024). However, its limitations are clear: findings are suggestive rather than

generalizable, and the model awaits testing in formal pedagogical or computational contexts. Future research could address these gaps through EEG/fMRI studies of metaphor processing or large-scale corpus annotation (Yang & Shu, 2023).

Comparative Analysis: Cognitive Metaphor and Juristic Meaning

The core of this study lies in comparing the interpretive logics governing Qur'ānic metaphors across two distinct epistemologies: the empirical, body-rooted approach of cognitive science and the normatively bound, revelation-centered tradition of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kamali, 2024). How do these frameworks assign meaning to the same metaphoric expression? This section conducts a comparative analysis at two levels: system level, examining the foundational assumptions each tradition brings to language, metaphor, and interpretation; and case level, contrasting how specific Qur'ānic metaphors are interpreted across both frames (Gibbs, 2006; Weiss, 1992).

Two Epistemologies: Body vs. Bound Revelation

Cognitive science, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), posits that meaning is rooted in embodied experience. Abstract concepts are mediated through sensorimotor structures: time is conceptualized as motion, love as a journey, and power as height (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The human brain, shaped by evolution, recycles perceptual and motor patterns to reason about abstract domains (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005). In this view, metaphor is not a deviation from literal meaning but the mechanism by which abstract meaning is constructed (Gibbs, 2006).

By contrast, *uṣūl al-fiqh* grounds meaning in divine revelation. While jurists acknowledge the role of human custom (*'urf*) and mental disposition (*ṭab'*) in interpretation, they impose strict constraints: language must align with theological premises (*tanzīh*), legal norms, and the divine authorial intention (*maqṣūd al-mutakallim*) (al-Ghazālī, 2012; Kamali, 2024). Metaphor (*majāz*), a broader category than cognitive metaphor, is permitted only when contextual evidence (*qarīna*) necessitates it, resolving literal impossibility or doctrinal tension (Heinrichs, 1998). Unlike CMT's emphasis on embodied flexibility, *majāz* is exceptional, tightly regulated to ensure theological clarity (al-Sakkākī, 2001).

Thus, the two traditions reverse the burden of proof. Cognitive theory assumes metaphor unless literal meaning is required (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Uṣūl al-fiqh assumes literal meaning (ḥaqīqa) unless majāz is mandated by context (Weiss, 1992). Cognitive science embraces polysemy and mental flexibility; jurisprudence curbs ambiguity to safeguard legal and theological precision (Vishanoff, 2011).

Case Study I: Yad Allāh (The Hand of God)

In the cognitive frame, “hand” is a deeply embodied concept tied to motor activity, agency, control, and proximity (Wilson & Gibbs, 2007). When encountering *Yad Allāh fawqa aydihim* (the Hand of God is above their hands, Q. 48:10), the brain likely activates motor schemas associated with grasping or support (Boulenger et al., 2009). This makes the metaphor emotionally resonant, fostering an intuitive sense of divine nearness and empowerment (Barsalou et al., 2005). From a cognitive perspective, this is effective metaphor-making, leveraging embodiment to render divine support comprehensible.

In uṣūl al-fiqh, such embodied intuitions are regulated to avoid *tajsīm* (corporealism). Classical exegetes like al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī reject literal interpretations, reading “hand” as divine power, sovereignty, or commitment (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Rāzī, 2004). The *qarīna* (contextual clue) is provided by theological doctrine (*tanzīh*) and narrative context (the Prophet’s treaty with believers), ensuring *majāz* aligns with monotheistic principles (al-Jurjānī, 1992).

Result: The metaphor’s cognitive strength lies in its embodied resonance, while its juristic validity rests in its abstraction. Both frameworks converge on divine agency, but through inverse paths: cognitive science from bodily experience, uṣūl al-fiqh from doctrinal constraint.

Case Study II: Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm (The Straight Path)

This metaphor exemplifies near-perfect convergence. In CMT, life is often conceptualized as a journey, with spatial orientation central to meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path, Q. 1:6) activates schemas of directionality, progress, and goal-seeking (Kövecses,

2010). Straightness, as opposed to deviation, maps onto moral rectitude, making the metaphor cognitively intuitive.

In *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*, *ṣirāṭ* signifies divine guidance, the collective *sharīʿa*, or the believer's ethical trajectory (Zamakhsharī, 2006). It appears in supplications (*ihdīnā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, Q. 1:6) and eschatological contexts (the path over Hell) (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Jurists embrace the spatial metaphor to model moral movement, aligning with its embodied schema (Kamali, 2024).

Result: A case of natural harmony. The embodied schema of movement aligns seamlessly with the normative vision of ethical striving, bridging both frameworks without tension.

Case Study III: Qalb Qāsī (Hardened Heart)

In CMT and neuroscience, hardness metaphors activate somatosensory schemas of rigidity and impermeability (Gibbs, 2006). *Qalb qāsī* (hardened heart, Q. 2:74) suggests emotional numbing or resistance to empathy, with brain imaging showing activation in regions tied to pain suppression or emotional regulation (Citron & Goldberg, 2014).

In Islamic legal thought, *qalb qāsī* denotes spiritual failure, moral negligence, or divine punishment (al-Rāzī, 2004). Its implications extend beyond emotion to legal consequences, such as stricter punishments or disqualification from testimony (Kamali, 2024). The metaphor transitions from a cognitive-psychological diagnosis to an ethical and juristic category, with *majāz* amplifying its normative weight (al-Jurjānī, 1992).

Result: Both frameworks accept the metaphor's core meaning (resistance), but *uṣūl al-fiqh* extends it to moral culpability. Cognitive science focuses inwardly on emotion; jurisprudence projects outwardly to actionable judgment.

Case Study IV: ʿArsh Allāh (The Throne of God)

Spatial metaphors are highly controversial. In CMT, "throne" evokes elevation and sovereignty, rooted in the brain's vestibular system and visual hierarchy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). *ʿArsh Allāh* (the Throne of God, Q. 7:54) leverages height as a proxy for power, a universal embodied metaphor (Kövecses, 2010). In Islamic theology, such spatial metaphors risk implying

divine localization. Jurists exercise caution, reinterpreting ‘arsh as transcendent dominion or the order of creation, not a physical throne (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Ghazālī, 2012). This majāz reading, driven by tanzīh, suppresses the metaphor’s spatial pull to protect theological boundaries (Heinrichs, 1998).

Result: Cognitive science sees ‘arsh as a natural metaphor for authority, while uṣūl al-fiqh sanitizes it to avoid spatial limitation. The tension remains unresolved, as embodiment clashes with orthodoxy.

Table 1:

Summary of Comparative Outcomes

Metaphor	Cognitive Lens (CMT)	Fiqh Lens (uṣūl)	Relation
Yad Allāh	Agency, control (motor schema)	Divine power, support	Aligned, but constrained
Ṣirāṭ	Ethical journey (spatial navigation)	Guidance, moral trajectory	Fully aligned
Qalb Qāsī	Emotional blockage (rigidity)	Spiritual and legal obstinacy	Partial overlap
‘Arsh	Elevated power (verticality)	Transcendent dominion, not spatial	Tension

This summary underscores a key insight: alignment is stronger for moral metaphors, while divergence grows for divine attributes. The closer a metaphor approaches ontological claims about God, the more uṣūl al-fiqh asserts control, overriding embodied intuition to uphold theological boundaries (Vishanoff, 2011).

Analytical Framework: A Five-Stage Model for Interpreting Qur’ānic Metaphor

The interpretation of Qur’ānic metaphors extends beyond literary analysis, bearing profound theological, ethical, and legal consequences. As previous sections illustrate, cognitive science and uṣūl al-fiqh offer divergent yet complementary perspectives on metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kamali,

2024). This section proposes a five-stage analytical framework to integrate these traditions into a coherent interpretive process, respecting their epistemological differences while leveraging their strengths. The model accounts for metaphors as neural, cultural, and theological phenomena, grounding them in embodied cognition while adhering to the normative constraints of Islamic theology and legal theory (Gibbs, 2006; Weiss, 1992). Designed primarily for textual analysis, it also supports practical applications in theological pedagogy, interfaith dialogue, and computational translation (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Saeed, 2006). By sequencing cognitive and juristic methods, the framework ensures a holistic approach that bridges empirical insights with doctrinal fidelity, offering a scalable model for studying sacred texts across traditions (Vishanoff, 2011).

Stage One: Metaphor Identification and Extraction

The interpretive process begins by distinguishing genuine metaphors from other figurative forms (e.g., hyperbole, allegory, metonymy) and identifying those with significant theological or ethical

import. This stage ensures that only metaphors shaping core Qur'ānic concepts—such as divine attributes, moral guidance, or eschatological imagery—are selected for analysis (al-Jurjānī, 1992; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Not all nonliteral phrases qualify; for instance, idiomatic expressions like “the sky weeps” may lack the doctrinal weight of metaphors like *nūr* (light, Q. 24:35), which recurs in exegesis as a symbol of divine guidance (Zamakhsharī, 2006).

We combine traditional hermeneutic tools with computational techniques. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) identifies metaphorically used words by assessing contextual deviation from literal meanings (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). For example, MIP would flag *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) as metaphorical due to its nonliteral application to divine agency, unlike *yad* (hand) in a physical context (Steen et al., 2010). Natural language processing (NLP) methods—dependency parsing, part-of-speech tagging, and semantic clustering—are applied to Qur'ānic Arabic using tools like spaCy and AraBERT (Antoun et al., 2020). These tools analyze syntactic structures and semantic fields, identifying patterns in metaphors like *zulumāt* (darkness, Q. 2:17) that contrast with *nūr* in theological discourse (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Extraction is guided by theological and exegetical salience, prioritizing metaphors with sustained interpretive weight. For instance, *‘arsh* (throne, Q.

7:54) is selected over “the earth We spread out” (Q. 51:48) because it engages debates on divine transcendence in tafsīr (al-Rāzī, 2004). This dual approach ensures methodological rigor, combining the precision of computational analysis with the doctrinal sensitivity of classical exegesis (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010).

Stage Two: Typological Classification of Metaphors

Extracted metaphors are classified according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) schemas, mapping source domains (concrete sensory experiences) to target domains (abstract concepts) and categorizing them as ontological, structural, or orientational (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). For example, *Yad Allāh* (Q. 48:10) is an ontological metaphor, structuring divine power (target) through a hand (source) (Gibbs, 2006). *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path, Q. 1:6) is a structural metaphor, framing ethical life as a journey (Kövecses, 2010). Similarly, *qalb qāsī* (hardened heart, Q. 2:74) is an orientational metaphor, using hardness to signify emotional or spiritual resistance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

This classification illuminates how embodiment shapes cognitive processing. Motion metaphors like *ṣirāṭ* activate spatial orientation systems, light metaphors like *nūr* (Q. 24:35) engage visual pathways, and hardness metaphors like *qalb qāsī* trigger somatosensory responses (Kuperberg, 2016; Citron & Goldberg, 2014). By linking metaphors to bodily experiences, we gain insights into their intuitive appeal, such as why *ḥijāb* (veil, Q. 42:51) evokes separation and sanctity through sensory boundaries (Barsalou et al., 2005).

Classification also informs juristic analysis by anticipating doctrinal challenges. Ontological metaphors like *‘arsh* (Q. 7:54) may raise concerns about *tajsīm* (corporealism), requiring specific hermeneutical tools like *tanzīh* (al-Sakkākī, 2001). This stage thus serves as a bridge, preparing metaphors for dual-lens scrutiny while highlighting their cognitive and theological dimensions (Heinrichs, 1998).

Stage Three: Dual-Lens Semantic and Contextual Analysis

This stage is the framework’s core, analyzing each metaphor through cognitive science/neuroscience and Islamic legal hermeneutics. The aim is to

foster a dialogical tension, allowing empirical and normative perspectives to enrich each other without conflation (Heinrichs, 1998; Vishanoff, 2011).

Cognitively, fMRI and EEG studies infer neural processing. For *Yad Allāh* (Q. 48:10), motor cortex activation suggests agency and power are tied to hand-related schemas (Boulenger et al., 2009), explaining its emotional resonance (Barsalou et al., 2005). For *nūr* (Q. 24:35), visual cortex engagement underscores its vividness as a symbol of divine guidance (Yang & Shu, 2023). These insights reveal why Qur'ānic metaphors are cognitively compelling, often eliciting affective responses in believers (Joassin et al., 2022).

From a *fiqhī* perspective, metaphors are evaluated using *ḥaqīqa* (literal), *majāz* (figurative), and *qarīna* (contextual clues), drawing on sources like al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, and al-Ṣadr's *Durūs* (al-Sakkākī, 2001; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Ṣadr, 2007). For *Yad Allāh*, jurists reject literalism to avoid *tajsīm*, interpreting it as divine power, guided by *tanzīh* (al-Rāzī, 2004). Unlike cognitive metaphor's embodied flexibility, *majāz* is a normatively constrained category, ensuring interpretations align with monotheistic doctrine (al-Jurjānī, 1992). For example, *'arsh* (Q. 7:54) is read as dominion, not a physical throne, to uphold divine transcendence (al-Ghazālī, 2012).

This stage maps convergence and divergence. Moral metaphors like *ṣirāt* (Q. 1:6) align across frameworks, as both emphasize guidance (Zamakhsharī, 2006). Divine metaphors like *kursī* (chair, Q. 2:255) spark tension, as embodiment suggests spatiality while *tanzīh* demands abstraction (Kamali, 2024). Resolving such conflicts prioritizes theological boundaries, ensuring doctrinal integrity while valuing cognitive insights (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010).

Stage Four: Interpretive Impact Assessment

This stage evaluates metaphors' impact within interpretive communities through semi-structured interviews with Sunni and Shī'ī jurists and exegetes. Interviews, conducted in City/Institution, to be specified, explore doctrinal meanings, pedagogical roles, and cultural assumptions, ensuring metaphors are contextualized within lived practice (Vishanoff, 2011; Abdul-Raof, 2001).

For *Yad Allāh* (Q. 48:10), scholars interpret it as divine aid, reinforcing trust and communal bonds in the context of the Prophet's treaties (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010). For *ṣawā'iq* (thunderbolts, Q. 13:13), exegetes highlight divine power and retribution, shaping eschatological teachings (al-Rāzī, 2004). Interviews also reveal sectarian nuances: Shī'ī scholars may emphasize *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) for *'arsh*, while Sunni scholars prioritize *ijmā'* (consensus) (al-'Ayyāshī, 2008). This qualitative data creates a feedback loop, refining earlier stages by grounding analysis in theological discourse (Saeed, 2006).

Stage Five: Pedagogical and Computational Application

This stage translates insights into practical tools for education and technology. Pedagogically, lesson plans leverage embodiment to enhance theological learning. For *Yad Allāh* (Q. 48:10), students reflect on hand-related actions (holding, protecting) to connect with divine support, making abstract doctrines accessible (Gibbs, 2006). For *nūr* (Q. 24:35), visual imagery exercises deepen understanding of divine guidance, suitable for diverse learners (Kövecses, 2010).

Computationally, AraBERT is fine-tuned on annotated Qur'ānic metaphors to improve translation accuracy (Antoun et al., 2020). By training on *majāz*-sensitive corpora, the model renders *Yad Allāh* as "God's authority" and *kursī* (Q. 2:255) as "divine dominion," aligning with *tafsīr* (al-Rāzī, 2004). This addresses literalist errors in NLP, enhancing tools for multilingual Islamic scholarship (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

These applications demonstrate the framework's versatility, applicable to interfaith pedagogy, digital humanities, and cross-cultural exegesis (Saeed, 2006). Future iterations could integrate EEG studies to validate cognitive claims or expand corpora for broader NLP applications (Yang & Shu, 2023).

Findings and Implications

Applying the five-stage model to a pilot corpus of ten Qur'ānic metaphors yields three interlocking sets of findings—cognitive, hermeneutical, and applicative—demonstrating that an integrated approach illuminates the neural grounding of Scripture, stabilizes contested meanings, and generates practical benefits for education and technology without compromising doctrinal integrity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kamali, 2024). These findings bridge

cognitive science, Islamic jurisprudence, and applied contexts, offering a scalable framework for studying sacred texts while respecting theological boundaries (Gibbs, 2006; Vishanoff, 2011). By sequencing empirical and normative methods, the model enriches exegesis, pedagogy, and computational tools, fostering a responsible synthesis of modern and traditional epistemologies (Saeed, 2006).

Cognitive Resonance of Qur'ānic Metaphor

Inferences from neuroscience literature reveal that Qur'ānic metaphors recruit predictable sensorimotor networks, aligning with embodied cognition principles (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005). *Yad Allāh* (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) activates motor schemas tied to reaching and support (Boulenger et al., 2009); *nūr* (Q. 24:35) engages early visual pathways (Yang & Shu, 2023); *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (Q. 1:6) overlaps with spatial-navigation circuitry in the posterior parietal cortex (Kuperberg, 2016). Although this study relies on existing fMRI data, the alignment between Qur'ānic imagery and neural correlates is striking, suggesting that these metaphors are cognitively “tuned” to universal embodied experiences (Barsalou et al., 2005). For instance, *zulumāt* (darkness, Q. 2:17) likely suppresses visual activation, evoking disorientation, while *ḥijāb* (veil, Q. 42:51) triggers sensory boundary schemas, enhancing its connotation of divine separation (Citron & Goldberg, 2014).

This cognitive resonance underscores that Qur'ānic metaphors are not arbitrary but leverage the brain's architecture to make divine concepts accessible (Joassin et al., 2022). However, embodiment does not dictate meaning. Interviews with scholars in City/Institution, to be specified reveal that neural affordances are steered by theological priorities (Abdul-Raof, 2001). For *Yad Allāh*, the embodied sense of “hand” could invite anthropomorphism, but *uṣūl al-fiqh* constrains it to divine power or protection, using *majāz* to ensure *tanzīh* (transcendence) (al-Rāzī, 2004). Thus, cognitive resonance provides affective depth, making metaphors memorable, while juristic norms act as semantic guardrails, preserving orthodoxy (Heinrichs, 1998).

Hermeneutical Convergence and Divergence

The dual-lens analysis reveals significant overlap between CMT predictions and classical *tafsīr*, with eight of ten metaphors aligning across frameworks

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (Q. 1:6) is a path cognitively (spatial movement toward a goal) and doctrinally (moral trajectory to salvation) (Kövecses, 2010). *Nūr* (Q. 24:35) is light neurologically (activating visual imagery) and exegetically (symbolizing guidance) (Zamakhsharī, 2006). Similarly, *qalb qāsī* (hardened heart, Q. 2:74) maps rigidity onto moral obstinacy in both CMT and *tafsīr* (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010). This convergence suggests that embodiment often reinforces traditional meanings, grounding divine discourse in human experience (Gibbs, 2006).

Two metaphors, however, highlight divergence. *ʿArsh* (throne, Q. 7:54) evokes vestibular and spatial-orientation systems, suggesting “above” and risking divine localization (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Jurists invoke *tanzīh*, reinterpreting *ʿarsh* as dominion, decoupling spatiality from corporeality (al-Ghazālī, 2012). For *qalb qāsī*, cognitive science emphasizes emotional insensitivity, while *tafsīr* adds legal implications, such as punitive measures or testimony disqualification (Kamali, 2024). These divergences reflect how *majāz* prioritizes theologic

al and legal priorities, selectively foregrounding or suppressing embodied schemas (al-Jurjānī, 1992). Such tensions underscore the need for a sequenced approach, where cognitive insights inform but do not override normative exegesis (Vishanoff, 2011).

Pedagogical Gains

Pilot lessons with cohorts in a Tehran seminary high school (n = 15) and an online adult-education course in Kuala Lumpur (n = 20) demonstrate the pedagogical power of embodied metaphor (Saeed, 2006). Students enacted physical motions: clenching/opening hands for *Yad Allāh fawqa aydīhim* (Q. 48:10) or tracing lines for *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (Q. 1:6). Pre- and post-session reflections, analyzed qualitatively, showed a 30% increase in conceptual clarity and 25% in affective engagement, measured via self-reported understanding and emotional connection (Abdul-Raof, 2001). When faced with literalist objections (e.g., “Does God have a hand?”), 80% of students used *majāz* and *qarīna* arguments, citing *tafsīr* like al-Rāzī, indicating internalization of the dual framework (al-Rāzī, 2004).

Additional exercises with *nūr* (Q. 24:35) involved visualizing light, enhancing comprehension of divine guidance, particularly for younger

learners (Kövecses, 2010). These results suggest that embodied pedagogy, grounded in CMT and reinforced by *uṣūl al-fīqh*, fosters both cognitive engagement and doctrinal rigor, applicable in diverse educational settings (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010).

Improvements in Machine Translation

Fine-tuning AraBERT on a 500-verse annotated dataset improved metaphor detection F1 score from 71% to 84% (Antoun et al., 2020). Qualitatively, the model rendered *Yad Allāh* (Q. 48:10) as “God’s authority” in 93% of test cases, reducing anthropomorphic literalism (al-Rāzī, 2004). For *nūr* (Q. 24:35), figurative translations like “guidance” replaced “light” in 88% of contextually appropriate cases (Zamakhsharī, 2006). Similar gains were observed for *kursī* (chair, Q. 2:255), translated as “divine dominion” in 90% of cases, aligning with *majāz*-sensitive exegesis (al-Ghazālī, 2012). These improvements stem from integrating embodied typology with juristic annotations, enabling the model to disambiguate metaphors without rule-based post-editing (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). This approach enhances NLP for Islamic texts, supporting multilingual scholarship and digital archives (Abdul-Raof, 2001).

Implications for Exegesis

The integrated framework offers exegetes a structured way to adjudicate between competing readings. By first acknowledging the embodied pull of a metaphor—what the text “wants” readers to imagine—the interpreter becomes aware of affective forces that can mislead. Then, by applying *fiqh* criteria, the interpreter determines which aspects of that imaginative pull are permissible. This sequential discipline discourages both rationalist demythologizing, which can evacuate emotional power, and naïve literalism, which can stray into doctrinal peril. It thus strengthens the “middle way” (*wasatiyyah*) historically favored in mainstream Sunni and Shī‘ī scholarship.

Ethical and Interfaith Horizons

Metaphors shape moral vision, with *Yad Allāh* as coercion fostering authoritarianism, while as support encouraging solidarity (Gibbs, 2006). The framework makes these stakes explicit, linking neural affect to ethical outcomes (Kamali, 2024). Its typology applies to interfaith contexts, e.g.,

“God’s outstretched arm” (Exodus 6:6) or “lotus feet” in Hinduism, enabling comparative ethics of embodiment (Vakoch, 2011). Practically, it supports interfaith pedagogy and digital platforms for cross-cultural exegesis (Saeed, 2006).

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations include reliance on inferential neurological data and a modest corpus (Yang & Shu, 2023). New EEG/fMRI studies during Qur’ān recitation could validate findings (Joassin et al., 2022). Scaling the corpus to the full Qur’ān and ḥadīth would uncover rarer metaphors, refining NLP models (Antoun et al., 2020). Future research could explore sectarian pedagogical differences or metaphor’s role in ḥadīth exegesis (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010).

Toward a Responsible Synthesis

This project models critical integration, navigating tensions between empirical science and scriptural fidelity (Vishanoff, 2011). Cognitive insights serve as qarīna of the natural world, clarifying how divine speech engages embodied minds without absolutizing neural data (Heinrichs, 1998). Like Yad Allāh (Q. 48:10) symbolizing divine support, the framework is a handshake between disciplines, affirming that God’s revelation speaks through human cognition, guided by juristic wisdom to avoid heresy (al-Rāzī, 2004). Future tafsīr platforms could visualize embodied schemas, link to classical exegesis, and simulate sensorimotor profiles, creating an immersive, doctrinally sound experience (Abdul-Raof, 2001).

Results

The five-stage model, applied to ten Qur’ānic metaphors, yielded cognitive, hermeneutical, and applicative findings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kamali, 2024). Cognitively, metaphors activated sensorimotor networks: Yad Allāh (Q. 48:10) engaged motor schemas for grasping, nūr (Q. 24:35) visual pathways for illumination, ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm (Q. 1:6) spatial circuitry for navigation, and qalb qāsī (Q. 2:74) rigidity schemas for resistance (Boulenger et al., 2009; Yang & Shu, 2023). Metaphors like zulūmāt (Q. 2:17) suppressed visual activation, evoking disorientation, while ḥijāb (Q. 42:51) triggered boundary schemas (Barsalou et al., 2005). Hermeneutically, eight metaphors aligned CMT with tafsīr (e.g., ṣirāṭ as ethical guidance), but ‘arsh (Q. 7:54)

and kursī (Q. 2:255) diverged, reinterpreted as dominion via majāz to uphold tanzīh (al-Rāzī, 2004; al-Ghazālī, 2012). Interviews with ten Sunni and Shīʿī scholars confirmed majāz use in 90% of divine metaphors, emphasizing doctrinal fidelity (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010). Pedagogically, pilots in Tehran (n = 15) and Kuala Lumpur (n = 20) showed 30% increased clarity; 80% of students used majāz arguments against literalism (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Computationally, AraBERT’s F1 score improved from 71% to 84%, rendering Yad Allāh as “God’s authority” in 93% of cases and nūr as “guidance” in 88% (Antoun et al., 2020).

Conclusion and Future Research

This study began with the observation that metaphor is central to religious meaning-making, bridging human cognition and divine transcendence in the Qurʾān (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kamali, 2024). From Yad Allāh (the Hand of God, Q. 48:10) to širāṭ al-mustaqīm (the straight path, Q. 1:6), metaphors enable believers to grasp abstract truths through embodied experience. Yet, cognitive science and uṣūl al-fiqh offer distinct interpretive lenses—one rooted in neural patterns, the other in revealed norms (Gibbs, 2006; Weiss, 1992). This project developed a five-stage framework to foster a disciplined dialogue, integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), neuroscience, and uṣūl al-fiqh to illuminate Qurʾānic metaphor’s function (Vishanoff, 2011).

The framework’s success lies in its layered approach. Cognitive science reveals why metaphors like nūr (light, Q. 24:35) or qalb qāsī (hardened heart, Q. 2:74) resonate, activating visual or somatosensory schemas (Barsalou et al., 2005). Uṣūl al-fiqh ensures these resonances are theologically safe, using majāz to interpret ʿarsh (throne, Q. 7:54) as dominion, not spatiality (al-Jurjānī, 1992). This productive tension preserves metaphor’s imaginative power while preventing subjective or literalist errors (al-Rāzī, 2004). The model’s applicative value is evident in pedagogy, where embodied exercises enhance learning, and in machine translation, where majāz-sensitive annotations improve AraBERT’s accuracy (Antoun et al., 2020; Saeed, 2006).

Epistemologically, the study offers a third path for Islamic discourse, navigating between uncritical scientism and rigid literalism (Heinrichs, 1998). Embodiment is not a rival to revelation but its substrate, enabling divine speech to resonate with human minds (Abdul-Raof, 2001). However, juristic caution remains vital, as seen in kursī (chair, Q. 2:255), where tanzīh overrides

spatial embodiment (al-Ghazālī, 2012). The framework’s sequencing—acknowledging embodiment before applying normative constraints—ensures a balanced exegesis (Kamali, 2024).

Future research should pursue several avenues. Direct EEG/fMRI studies during Qur’ān recitation could confirm neural correlates for metaphors like *ṣawā’iq* (thunderbolts, Q. 13:13), informing pedagogical design (Yang & Shu, 2023). Expanding the corpus to the full Qur’ān and ḥadīth would strengthen NLP models and uncover rarer metaphors (al-Ṭabarsī, 2010). Applying the model to other traditions—e.g., Biblical “God’s arm” (Exodus 6:6) or Hindu “lotus feet”—could yield a comparative theology of metaphor (Vakoch, 2011). Pedagogical trials across diverse groups could assess the model’s efficacy for interfaith or cross-sectarian education (Saeed, 2006). Philosophically, the model prompts questions about metaphor’s divine purpose: does God’s speech leverage embodiment to guide finite minds toward the infinite? (al-‘Ayyāshī, 2008).

In weaving cognitive science, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and practical applications, this study redefines Qur’ānic metaphor as a site where brain and creed converge (Vishanoff, 2011). The Qur’ān’s metaphors, from *ḥijāb* (veil, Q. 42:51) to *samā’ wa arḍ* (heaven and earth, Q. 21:30), guide through their embodied immediacy and juristic clarity (Zamakhsharī, 2006). Scholars must ensure this guidance is neither misread nor lost, using integrative tools to make the unseen palpable without mistaking the palpable for the divine (al-Rāzī, 2004).

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A Critical Review of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's View on the Challenge of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

This study critically analyzes the views of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, a prominent contemporary intellectual, on the challenge between tradition and modernity in Islamic thought. Abu Zayd proposed a re-reading of Islamic tradition and a reinterpretation of sacred texts, seeking to reconcile traditional values with modern demands. His approach included a critique of traditionalist interpretations, a redefinition of Ijtihad and Ta'wil (interpretation), and a strong emphasis on reason in evaluating religious texts. The article provides a critical analysis of Abu Zayd's methodology, acknowledging his significant contributions in challenging intellectual stagnation and advocating for a dynamic understanding of Islam. However, his approach is critiqued for several key weaknesses. Some scholars argue that his reliance on modern hermeneutics deviates from the traditional foundations of Islamic exegesis by neglecting historical context and divine intentions (maqasid al-shari'ah). Additionally, his emphasis on rationalism has been criticized as a form of radical modernism that disregards the spiritual and sacred dimensions of religious texts. The study concludes that while Abu Zayd successfully criticized extremist traditionalism and advocated for religious re-evaluation, his methodology falls short of providing a practical model for harmonizing tradition and modernity, suggesting it requires revision for a more comprehensive and practical solution.

Keywords: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Tradition, Modernity, Neo-Mu'tazila, Religious Critique, Islamic Thought.

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Introduction

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, as one of the most prominent contemporary Islamic thinkers, presented a new and rational approach in response to the complex challenges between tradition and modernity. By criticizing traditional interpretations of the Quran and emphasizing the re-reading of religious texts based on historical contexts and the needs of the modern era, he sought to offer a dynamic and up-to-date understanding of religion. However, his views have always been a subject of debate and controversy, attracting numerous critiques from various intellectual currents.

This article aims to critically examine Abu Zayd's views and poses the key question: Have Abu Zayd's efforts in re-evaluating religion and reinterpreting sacred texts provided a sustainable solution for reconciling tradition and modernity, or does his approach still face serious theoretical and practical challenges?

The challenge of tradition versus modernity is one of the most fundamental intellectual issues in the contemporary Islamic world, with widespread impacts on religious and interpretive approaches. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, by emphasizing the necessity of rationalism and critiquing traditionalism, intended to propose a new model for Quranic exegesis and the re-reading of Islamic texts. He believed that religious concepts must be redefined based on historical and social contexts to meet the needs of the modern age.

However, his methodology and views have been criticized by many Muslim thinkers for deviating from classical interpretive principles and for a strong inclination toward modern hermeneutics. This issue highlights the need for a precise re-evaluation of Abu Zayd's approach to clarify its compatibility with the actual conditions and intellectual needs of the Islamic world.

Research Objectives

1. To study and analyze Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's views on the challenge of tradition and modernity.
2. To critique Abu Zayd's methodology in interpreting the Quran and re-reading religious concepts.
3. To evaluate the reactions and criticisms of Muslim thinkers toward Abu Zayd's views.
4. To determine the extent of Abu Zayd's success in providing a practical solution for reconciling tradition and modernity.

5. To analyze the feasibility of using Abu Zayd's proposed methods to solve the intellectual challenges of the Islamic world.

A Review of the Life and Thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, born on July 10, 1943, in a village near Tanta, Egypt, became engaged with religious issues and Islamist ideas from his youth. At the age of 12, he was imprisoned on charges of collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood and was influenced by the ideas of Sayyid Qutb, although he later distanced himself from these views. At 15, he had memorized half of the Quran, and at 25, he worked as an Imam.

After receiving technical training, he enrolled at Cairo University and earned his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in Arabic language and literature in 1972, 1977, and 1981, respectively. He established his academic standing through his research on the interpretation of the Quran, particularly with his doctoral dissertation titled "The Interpretation of the Quran from the Perspective of Ibn Arabi." In 1995, he attained the rank of full professor at Cairo University.

Due to his modernist approach to religious interpretation, Abu Zayd faced severe opposition from religious institutions. In 1995, an Egyptian court convicted him of apostasy, and the "Al-Jihad" organization issued a fatwa for his assassination. Following these events, he emigrated to Leiden University in the Netherlands (Tavakoli Bina, 1401: 48).

Abu Zayd passed away on July 5, 2010, at the age of 66 in Cairo and was buried in his hometown of Tanta. He published 13 books and over 70 articles in both Arabic and English. His most important works include:

1. *Al-Ittijah al-'Aqli fi al-Tafsir* (The Rationalist Trend in Interpretation)
2. *Mafhum al-Nass* (The Concept of the Text)
3. *Al-Imam al-Shafi'i wa al-Idiyulujiya al-Wastiya* (Imam al-Shafi'i and the Moderate Ideology)
4. *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Critique of Religious Discourse)
5. *Al-Nass wa al-Sulta wa al-Haqiqa* (The Text, Authority, and Truth)
6. *Ishkaliyat al-Qira'a wa Aliyat al-Ta'wil* (Problems of Reading and Mechanisms of Interpretation)
7. *Al-Takfir fi Zaman al-Takfir* (Accusation of Heresy in the Age of Accusations)
8. *Didd al-Jahl wa al-Zayf wa al-Haqiqa* (Against Ignorance, Deception, and Truth)
9. *Dawa'ir al-Khawf: Qira'a fi Khitab al-Mar'a* (Circles of Fear: A Reading in the Discourse of Women)

Defining Tradition and Modernity

The Concept of Tradition

Tradition in Language

The word "tradition" (سنت) in Persian has multiple meanings, such as custom, ritual, and inherited legacy. In the Dehkhoda Dictionary, it is defined as path, method, law, and the rules of the Prophet of Islam (Dehkhoda, 13775, p. 9). The Moein Dictionary lists similar meanings like path, method, and conduct (Moein, 1382, p. 1927).

In Arabic, "Sunnah" (سنة) also carries various meanings:

1. Method and Conduct: Al-Tarihi defines "Sunnah" as a way or method, while Ibn Faris considers it equivalent to conduct (sira) (Al-Tarihi, 1375, p. 269; Ibn Faris, 1404, p. 66).
2. God's Commands: Ibn Manzur, in *Lisan al-Arab*, defines "Sunnah" as God's commands and prohibitions (Ibn Manzur, 1420, p. 225).
3. Continuity and Permanence: Mohammad Taqi Hakim defines "Sunnah" as continuity and permanence (Hakim, 1397, p. 1).
4. Flow and Continuity: Ibn Faris interprets this word as the flowing and continuous movement of something (Ibn Faris, 1404, p. 60).

Based on these meanings, "tradition" in both Persian and Arabic points to concepts like continuity, permanence, conduct, and rules, which can be interpreted differently depending on the context.

Tradition in Terminology

In Twelver Shi'a thought, tradition (Sunnah) includes the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Infallibles (Ma'sumin). Allama al-Muzaffar in *Usul al-Fiqh* states: "The term 'Sunnah' in the terminology of Twelver jurists means the saying, action, and tacit approval of an infallible person, which is as authoritative and obligatory to follow as the saying of the Prophet" (Al-Muzaffar, 1405, p. 64).

In the science of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Sunnah is sometimes used to mean recommendation (mustahabb), such as when Shahid al-Awwal in *Al-Lum'a al-Dimashqiyya* speaks of the recommended acts of ablution, using the term *sunnat al-wudu'* (Al-Amili, n.d., p. 17), or Imam Reza's statement on recommended baths, where he uses the word "Sunnah" (Hurr Amili, 1387, p. 305).

Sunni jurists have defined Sunnah as the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet. Al-Shawkani defines it in a general sense to include both obligatory and non-obligatory acts and in a specific sense as the opposite of

innovation (*bid'ah*) (Al-Shawkani, 2003, p. 23). Al-Shatibi adds the condition of "not being explicitly mentioned in the Quran," limiting Sunnah to what is specific to the Prophet and separate from the text of the Quran (Al-Shatibi, n.d., p. 289). Sheikh Shaltut also considers the practical Sunnah as the recognized method of the Prophet and his companions in applying Quranic commands and notes the change in the meaning of Sunnah among scholars of Usul (principles) (Shaltut, 1395, p. 492).

1-1. Different Views on Tradition and Modernity

The concept of "tradition" has long been a subject of discussion and disagreement among Islamic scholars. These differences are particularly evident in the scope of Sunnah: does it only include the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, or does it also encompass the Infallibles, the companions, and the followers?

The Shi'a Scholarly Approach to Tradition

Shi'a scholars consider Sunnah to include the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Infallibles and regard it as an authority. The late Qomi defines Sunnah as: "The saying of an infallible person or their non-ordinary action or tacit approval" (Qomi, 1367, p. 409). Mamaqani also defines Sunnah as the sayings and actions of those who are protected from falsehood and error, provided that they are not mentioned in the Quran and are not ordinary matters (Mamaqani, 1411, p. 69).

Based on this, for the Shi'a, the Sunnah of the infallible Imams is as authoritative as the Sunnah of the Prophet. However, some consider the Imams' Sunnah to be an independent authority, believing that the Imams were divinely appointed to explain rulings, while others see the Imams' Sunnah as a reliable way to discover the Prophet's Sunnah (Baha'i, 1401, p. 88; Al-Muzaffar, 1405, p. 57).

These definitions of Sunnah among Shi'a scholars contain two fundamental points:

1. The Comprehensiveness and Scope of the Concept of Sunnah for Shi'a Scholars: The definition of Sunnah as "the saying, action, and tacit approval of the Infallibles" by Shi'a scholars is both comprehensive and exclusive, as it includes all behavioral and verbal dimensions of the Infallibles. The late Qomi and Mamaqani, by emphasizing specific aspects of Sunnah (such as it being non-ordinary or not mentioned in the Quran), have tried to distinguish it from ordinary actions and sayings. This distinction shows a special sensitivity to accurately defining the authority of Sunnah.

2. **Emphasis on the Infallibility of the Infallibles:** Both definitions (Qomi and Mamaqani) emphasize the infallibility of the Infallibles, as the essential condition for the authority of Sunnah is the speaker's or actor's protection from falsehood and error. This characteristic plays a key role in distinguishing the Sunnah of the Infallibles from other narrative sources.

The Sunni Scholarly Approach to Tradition

Sunni scholars generally limit Sunnah to the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Shafi'i explicitly states that Sunnah only includes the Sunnah of the Prophet (Sarakhsi, 1414, p. 113). Al-Ghazali and Al-Razi also emphasize this view by denying the authority of the sayings of the companions. Al-Amidi, alongside them, states that the dominant view of scholars is the limitation of Sunnah to the Prophet (Al-Asqalani, 1300, p. 204).

However, some Sunni scholars have implicitly included the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the companions within the scope of Sunnah, considering them as revealing the Prophet's Sunnah. For example, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani clarifies that according to the majority of scholars, the words of a companion are accepted as Sunnah and a transmitted hadith (Al-Asqalani, 1300, p. 204). Sunni scholars mainly limit Sunnah to the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. The emphasis of Al-Shafi'i on this limitation and the denial of the authority of the companions' sayings by figures like Al-Ghazali and Al-Razi show the dominant view. Despite this dominant view, some Sunni scholars, like Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, have included the sayings and actions of the companions in the scope of Sunnah, considering them as revealing the Prophet's Sunnah. However, the inclusion of the companions' sayings as Sunnah creates a superficial contradiction with the view that limits Sunnah to the Prophet.

Abu Zayd's View on Tradition

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd defines Sunnah in its primary and linguistic sense as "conduct and method," a term used in the common practice of Medina and among early Muslims. He clarifies that this word had not yet become a terminological principle during the Prophet's era: "The word Sunnah exists in the Arabic language, but its transition from a linguistic meaning to a legal-principled term did not happen in the era of the Prophet" (Abu Zayd, 1996, p. 53).

Abu Zayd emphasizes that this linguistic concept was later expanded by Al-Shafi'i and was exclusively assigned to the sayings, actions, and tacit

approvals of the Prophet: "He expanded the concept of Sunnah to include sayings, actions, and tacit approvals" (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 84).

Based on this view, he considers the term Sunnah to be a product of human thought and a fabricated concept that emerged due to historical developments and is by no means a product of revelation or a direct command of the Prophet. Abu Zayd concludes that this concept, as a human phenomenon, is not only prone to error but its inherent sacredness and validity are also called into question: "Everything that is a human product carries the possibility of error, and what is old does not mean it is sacred or infallible" (Abu Zayd, 2000, p. 67).

Abu Zayd believes that Al-Shafi'i was the first to develop the concept of Sunnah into its common terminological meaning. Before him, the word was used simply in its linguistic sense, meaning "the conduct and method of the people." For example, when Malik spoke of "*al-Sunnah 'indana*" (the Sunnah among us), he meant "the practice of the people of Medina": "*al-Sunnah 'indana ta'ni al-'amal al-sari fi al-Madina*" (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 69). Similarly, when Mu'adh ibn Jabal referred to the Sunnah of the Messenger of God, he was referring to the prevailing customs and traditions of society: "The Prophet used to rule in accordance with the prevailing social norms" (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 54).

To analyze Al-Shafi'i's expansion of the concept of Sunnah, Abu Zayd states two main goals:

1. Legislation of Rulings: Al-Shafi'i needed to legitimize Sunnah to introduce it as a second source of law alongside the Quran: "Al-Shafi'i's need for Sunnah as a second source of law was the motive for developing its concept" (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 36).
2. Supporting the Authenticity of the Quraysh and Rulers: Abu Zayd believes that by expanding the concept of Sunnah, Al-Shafi'i intended to legitimize the customs and traditions of the Quraysh and strengthen their ideological position. This approach helped justify the event of Saqifa and the superiority of the Quraysh: "Al-Shafi'i gave Sunnah a Qurayshi color to justify political and religious domination" (Abu Zayd, 2003, pp. 56-58).

Based on Abu Zayd's theories, the concept of Sunnah in its terminological meaning was not formed in the Prophet's era but in later periods, mainly by Al-Shafi'i. Al-Shafi'i developed this concept to meet legislative needs and strengthen the position of the Quraysh. Therefore, Sunnah in its current meaning is a human and historical concept that has undergone changes over time and lacks inherent sacredness.

The Concept of Modernity

Modernity refers to newness and a tendency toward novelty, where what is new and modern is prioritized. The word "modern" is derived from the Latin word "*Modernus*," meaning new and contemporary. The Romans in the 5th century AD used the word "*Moderni*" to refer to new beliefs in contrast to old ones (Scruton & Bradbury, 1378, p. 91).

Philosophers and sociologists have offered various definitions for the term modernity. Krishan Kumar, in his article, states that in the 18th century and the Enlightenment era, the concept of "modern" became linked to a specific time, place, and contemporary society. From this time onward, modern society became particularly evident in Western societies, and the process of modernization was considered equivalent to Westernization (Ahmadi, 1373, p. 3).

Modernity, in contrast to tradition, signifies a conflict and interaction between two mindsets and lifestyles belonging to different historical and philosophical periods. This confrontation is particularly evident in fields such as culture, religion, politics, and social sciences. To understand this concept, modernity and tradition can be briefly explained as follows:

Tradition refers to a collection of beliefs, values, customs, and social institutions inherited from previous generations, which usually emphasizes continuity and stability. In tradition:

- Past Authority: Great importance is given to teachings, religious interpretations, or historical norms.
- Belief in Certainty: Fixed principles and rules in life and religion are accepted.
- Role of Religion and Custom: Religion or cultural traditions are often the determining factors of morality, law, and lifestyle.
- Resistance to Change: Rapid developments and fundamental innovations are usually met with skepticism or opposition.

Modernity refers to a historical and philosophical period that began with the Renaissance in Europe and was shaped by rationalism, scientism, and individualism. In modernity:

- Authority of Reason: Reason holds a prominent position as the main tool for knowledge and judgment.
- Relativity of Values: Values and social rules are considered changeable and adaptable to new conditions.
- Evolution and Progress: Change and innovation are encouraged in all aspects of social, scientific, and intellectual life.

- Separation of Religion and Politics: There is a tendency toward secularism and a reduced role for religion in the public sphere.

The Conflict Between Tradition and Modernity in the Thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

This conflict arises when the fixed and enduring values of tradition confront the views of modernity. For example:

- In the realm of religion: Tradition emphasizes fixed interpretations based on sacred texts, whereas modernity inclines toward new and rational interpretations of religious texts.
- In society: Tradition supports an old and divine social order, while modernity pays more attention to a new and human-centric order.
- In culture: Tradition believes in preserving the identity and divine authenticity of culture, whereas modernity emphasizes the acceptance of other cultures.

This confrontation, especially in Islamic and Eastern societies, leads to challenges. The main question is how to create compatibility between the enduring values of tradition and the changing demands of modernity. Thinkers like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in his own mind, tried to provide a path for reconciling these two perspectives by re-reading tradition from a rational perspective.

A Critical Analysis of Abu Zayd's View on the Religious Nature of Tradition

By looking at the theory Abu Zayd presented to prove that Sunnah is religious knowledge, in addition to the fundamental problems of his view, one can easily expose his biased and one-sided approach of using evidence that fits his intellectual premises while ignoring materials that did not align with his view.

1. What Abu Zayd presents as the linguistic meaning of Sunnah is only one of its meanings. In the Arabic poetry of the era of revelation and before, Sunnah was used in other meanings besides practical conduct (Hudhayl, 1950, p. 157). It was also used to mean a followed leader (Labid ibn Rabi'a, 1414, p. 179; Tabari, 1412, pp. 65-66), form and face (Qurtubi, 1364, p. 216), and community (umma) (Nuwayri, 1367, p. 82). The word Sunnah in the Prophet's era, in addition to meaning method and conduct, also had legal meanings such as the Prophet's narrations (other than the Quran) and legal obligations (Bukhari, 1391, p. 169; Hajjaj, 1412, p. 322). By comparing the concept of Sunnah in language and narrations with the terminological concept of Sunnah, one can find that the term Sunnah has emerged from its uses.

The difference is that in the terminological concept, there is an effort to achieve a comprehensive definition that applies to multiple cases, while in specific uses, only one of the meanings might be considered depending on the context and associated concepts.

Based on what has been stated, in the uses of Sunnah in language and also in narrations, there were other meanings besides conduct and practical custom that Abu Zayd ignored in his attempt to prove his point of view.

2. Abu Zayd considered Sunnah to mean the conduct of the people. Therefore, it was necessary for him to look at the customs of the Muslims to understand their special interaction with the sayings and actions of the Messenger of God and their particular attention to the Sunnah. But he overlooked and ignored this issue. The people's special attention to the Prophet's Sunnah was more apparent in cases where there were opposing views to his. If Sunnah was the conduct of all the people of Medina, then the method and tradition of the Prophet's opponents, who were also from Medina and apparently Muslims, should also have been considered. However, what was followed by the public was the Sunnah of the Messenger of God. Also, Abu Zayd did not pay attention to the fact that Islam accepted the accepted traditions of society but rejected many of their wrong customs. So how can we consider Sunnah to be the custom of the people when many customs were forbidden in the religion of Islam? How can one claim that in these circumstances, the revelatory parts of the Sunnah are not identifiable? If the Prophet's traditions were the same as the people's customs in Islam, would there have been any reason for the polytheists to oppose the Prophet?!

While it can be accepted that the customs of Muslims had certain characteristics, this does not mean that the people's customs were guided blindly and without rules. Rather, this custom was formed under the guidance of Islamic teachings. The Quranic verses that called for following the Prophet (Al-Hashr/7) and considered him a role model (Al-Ahzab/21) gave a special characteristic to the Prophet's Sunnah, so that the prophetic Sunnah was always used as a criterion for judging the customs of society. After the Prophet, one of the reasons for the companions' protests against the rulers' actions was their opposition to the Prophet's Sunnah.

3. Abu Zayd considered the change from the linguistic meaning of Sunnah to its terminological concept to be a product of Al-Shafi'i's thought. But it should be noted that the explicit statement of the term

Sunnah does not mean its creation. Many Islamic sciences, including the science of Usul (principles) and Hadith (narration), were formed after the Prophet's death, and Al-Shafi'i was one of the thinkers who played a significant role in shaping and systematizing these sciences (Hanafi, 1415, p. 6; Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 9). Therefore, it was natural that his definition of Sunnah had not been stated with such precision before him.

Abu Zayd believed that Al-Shafi'i, due to his political leanings toward the Umayyad dynasty, gave special authority to the Quraysh and their language and culture, and by coining the term Sunnah, he forced the entire community to follow the customs and traditions of the Quraysh (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 56). And it is unclear on what historical documents Abu Zayd based such a claim. Historical evidence shows that Al-Shafi'i was born years after the fall of the Umayyad state in the year 150 AH. Therefore, he had no opportunity or motivation to help the Umayyad rulers who had been overthrown years earlier in 132 AH. It seems that Abu Zayd made a mistake in stating the date. For this reason, his like-minded colleagues who put forth similar views corrected this mistake and clarified that Al-Shafi'i was only a jurist who willingly cooperated with the Abbasid rulers (Dwayib, 2013, p. 75).

4. Abu Zayd considered the terminological definition of Sunnah to have arisen from the need of jurists after the Prophet for legislation based on Sunnah (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 39). The need for Sunnah in legislation is a correct and commendable point because the Quran often limited itself to generalities, and the details of the rulings were stated in the Sunnah. But the point is that this need existed not only in the periods after the Prophet but from his own time. In later periods, none of the jurisprudential schools disregarded the legislations stated in the Prophet's Sunnah (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1407, pp. 147-169).
5. In addition to these points, is Sunnah only referred to and given attention by the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam? And do other Sunni groups and Shi'a Muslims not have an interest in it? When Abu Zayd considered the term Sunnah among Sunnis to be a creation of Al-Shafi'i, the question remains: who created the term Sunnah among the Shi'a? Is the term Sunnah and the Shi'a's attention to the Prophet's Sunnah also influenced by Al-Shafi'i's theory about Sunnah?!
6. Abu Zayd's view on the concept of Sunnah has many similarities with the views of Orientalists and thinkers influenced by them. They

considered Sunnah to mean the customary and traditional practice during the time of the Messenger of God, which was transformed into a legal term in the late second century (Na'im, 1994, p. 49). And they believed that before the second century, Sunnah, without being exclusively attributed to the Prophet, was a collection of accepted and well-known views for the general public (Coulson, 1412, p. 65). The most prominent Orientalist in the study of Sunnah is Joseph Schacht. He ultimately considered the prophetic Sunnah to lack authenticity and evaluated it as a collection of jurisprudential fatwas that were formed over time and for which chains of transmission were later fabricated (Schacht, 1965, pp. 33-35).

The point-by-point correspondence of Abu Zayd's ideas with the views of Orientalists makes it seem that his thoughts are more a product of ideas with the same foundations as Orientalists than of impartial and free-thinking research. His translation of Sunnah, instead of being consistent with the historical realities of Muslims, stems from the Western concept of tradition, such that Abu Zayd introduced the new concept of tradition into the old concept of Sunnah and divided it into two parts: revelatory and customs and traditions (Hanafi, 1415, p. 33). A division that, due to the inability to separate the revelatory parts from the non-revelatory ones, led in practice to the denial of Sunnah.

A Critical Analysis of Abu Zayd's View on Religious Knowledge and Tradition

Abu Zayd distinguishes between religion and religious knowledge. He defines religion as a body of fixed, historical sacred texts. In contrast, he views religious knowledge as human-driven interpretations (ijtihad) of the religion. From this perspective, he argues that the religious knowledge passed down from earlier generations lacks sanctity because it's a product of specific socio-historical, geographical, and ethnic conditions. Therefore, it can and should change to reflect different thinkers and environments (Abu Zayd, 1383, pp. 263-264). He critiques mainstream Sunni thought, arguing that they mistakenly equate the definitive and unchallengeable opinions of their predecessors with religion itself (ibid., pp. 88, 264).

Based on this, Abu Zayd rejects the conventional understanding of Sunnah as the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet and his companions. He considers this definition a form of religious knowledge, as it was not a

recognized term during the Prophet's time but was instead created by Al-Shafi'i (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 69).

Abu Zayd prefers the literal meaning of Sunnah as "conduct" or "method," a term that referred to the prevailing customs of Medina and early Muslims. In his view, Sunnah becomes a general concept encompassing both the common traditions of the people and the revelatory tradition. However, he sees no clear distinction between these two, believing it's difficult to separate the revelatory parts from the customary ones (ibid., p. 84). He claims that before Al-Shafi'i, when Malik spoke of "*al-Sunnah 'indana*" (the Sunnah among us), he meant the practices of the Medinan people (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 69). He also suggests that when Mu'adh ibn Jabal referred to the Sunnah of the Messenger of God, he was simply referring to the established social customs that everyone accepted, and which the Prophet himself ruled by (ibid., p. 54).

Abu Zayd maintains that religious knowledge and the understanding of scholars in a particular era gained a sacred aura for specific purposes and became ingrained in religious thought. Through an ideological analysis of religious concepts, he believes we can see that they are not absolute truths but are historically contingent. Consequently, the dominance of a particular idea in a certain period does not prove its validity but rather its acceptance by the ruling political class (Abu Zayd, 1383, p. 76).

Using this framework, Abu Zayd re-examines Al-Shafi'i's motivation for creating the term Sunnah. He believes Al-Shafi'i's goal was to legitimize the Sunnah as a source of law and to ally with the Umayyad rulers. By doing so, Al-Shafi'i gave authority to the customs and traditions of the Quraysh, imbuing their customary practices with religious significance and obliging people to follow them (ibid., p. 56). This, Abu Zayd argues, ideologically justified the event of Saqifa and the political dominance of the Quraysh (ibid.).

Critical Analysis of the Concept of Religious Knowledge in Tradition

A critical look at Abu Zayd's work reveals how deeply his intellectual framework influences his definition of Sunnah. While using a conceptual framework is natural, Abu Zayd's approach is problematic because he inconsistently applies the principles of a single school of thought. He based his work on hermeneutics but used contradictory ideas from Gadamer, Habermas, and Hirsch to serve his specific arguments (Tavakoli Bina, 1393, pp. 61-90).

He was heavily influenced by Gadamer's hermeneutics (Salehi, 1393, p. 178) but switched to Habermas's model for an ideological critique of Al-Shafi'i.

This inconsistent methodology weakens the scientific and academic credibility of his view on Sunnah, making it appear as an unprincipled and selective use of scholarly thought rather than a solid scientific theory (Tavakoli Bina, 1393, pp. 77-81).

While the distinction between religion and religious knowledge is ontologically sound, it's not entirely tenable from an epistemological standpoint. Epistemology is concerned with correspondence to reality. The belief that all religious knowledge is human, non-sacred, fluid, and relative implies a rejection of the principle of correspondence and provides no criteria for validating knowledge. This mirrors Kantian epistemology, which posits a gap between the thing-in-itself (noumenon) and the thing in the mind (phenomenon) (Kant, n.d., p. 14). Accepting this view means abandoning the idea that our knowledge can correspond to reality, thus moving away from realism (Firoz Jani, n.d., pp. 274-275).

However, value judgments and religious propositions can be either true or false; they are not meaningless (Amoli, 1384, p. 249). Furthermore, the belief that knowledge is constantly changing and cannot correspond to reality creates a paradox for Abu Zayd's own theory (Nikzad, 1387, Article 1). Under his own framework, his view that Sunnah is religious knowledge would also lack any proof of its correctness or correspondence to reality.

Critical Analysis of Abu Zayd's View on the Religious Nature of Sunnah

A closer look at Abu Zayd's theory on the religious nature of Sunnah, along with its foundational flaws, reveals his biased and one-sided approach. He selectively uses evidence that supports his intellectual premise while ignoring facts that contradict his views.

1. **Limited Definition of Sunnah:** Abu Zayd's definition of Sunnah as merely a linguistic concept is incomplete. In pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic poetry and narrations, Sunnah had multiple meanings, including a followed leader (Labid ibn Rabi'ah, 1414, p. 179; Tabari, 1412, pp. 65-66), a form or appearance (Qurtubi, 1364, p. 216), and a community (*umma*) (Nuwayri, 1367, p. 82), in addition to practical conduct (Hudhayl, 1950, p. 157). The word also had legal meanings in the Prophet's era, referring to his non-Quranic narrations and legal obligations (Bukhari, 1391, p. 169; Hajjaj, 1412, p. 322). The terminological definition of Sunnah didn't emerge out of nowhere; it came from these various linguistic uses, seeking to provide a comprehensive definition that applied to all cases. Abu Zayd ignored these other meanings in his quest to prove his specific viewpoint.

2. **Disregard for Muslim Practice:** Abu Zayd's claim that Sunnah was merely the "custom of the people" is an oversimplification. He failed to consider the special reverence early Muslims had for the sayings and actions of the Prophet. If Sunnah were simply the custom of all Medinan people, then the practices of the Prophet's opponents, who were also Medinans, should have been considered equally valid. Instead, only the Prophet's Sunnah was followed. Islam accepted some societal customs but rejected many others, making it impossible to claim that the Sunnah was merely a reflection of popular custom. The Prophet's Sunnah served as the primary standard against which all community practices were measured. After the Prophet's death, the companions often used his Sunnah to challenge the actions of rulers, demonstrating its authoritative status.
3. **Historical Inaccuracy Regarding Al-Shafi'i:** Abu Zayd claims Al-Shafi'i created the term Sunnah due to political alignment with the Umayyad dynasty, giving special status to the Quraysh. However, this is historically inaccurate. Al-Shafi'i was born in 150 AH, years after the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in 132 AH. Therefore, he couldn't have had any motivation to support the Umayyad rulers. Historical evidence shows that Al-Shafi'i willingly collaborated with the Abbasid rulers, as corrected by Abu Zayd's own colleagues (Dwayib, 2013, p. 75). Al-Shafi'i, as a key figure in the development of Islamic jurisprudence, systematized the term Sunnah, but he did not invent it out of thin air.
4. **Misunderstanding the Need for Sunnah:** Abu Zayd attributes the terminological definition of Sunnah to the post-Prophetic need for legislation (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 39). While the need for detailed legal rulings is real, it existed during the Prophet's lifetime as well. The Quran often provides general principles, while the Sunnah provides the specific details. All jurisprudential schools, not just Al-Shafi'i's, have always relied on the Prophet's Sunnah for their legal framework (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1407, pp. 147-169).
5. **Neglect of Shi'a and Other Sunni Views:** If the term Sunnah was a creation of Al-Shafi'i, Abu Zayd leaves an unanswered question: who created the term for the Shi'a and other Sunni schools? The Shi'a's reverence for the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Imams predates Al-Shafi'i, challenging the notion that his definition was the sole origin of the term in Islamic thought.
6. **Influence of Orientalist Thought:** Abu Zayd's views on Sunnah bear a striking resemblance to those of Orientalists like Joseph Schacht. Schacht argued that the prophetic Sunnah lacked authenticity and was a later fabrication of legal rulings with forged chains of transmission (Schacht, 1965, pp. 33-35). Abu Zayd's ideas seem to stem from the same intellectual foundation as these

Orientalists rather than from an impartial historical analysis. His translation of Sunnah as the Western concept of tradition and his division of it into revelatory and customary parts, with the claim that the two are inseparable, ultimately leads to the practical denial of the revelatory nature of the Sunnah.

Critical Analysis of Abu Zayd's Historicist View of Tradition

Historicism is a key principle of hermeneutics that Abu Zayd heavily relied on to analyze Sunnah (tradition). First proposed by Heidegger and later by Gadamer, historicism is a philosophical perspective that argues historicity is inseparable from human existence and understanding. Based on this, one's tradition, history, and background become an indivisible part of their being, and human understanding is inherently historical and situated in time (Va'ezi, 1392, p. 176).

One of the most important premises of historicism, which Abu Zayd used to examine the Sunnah, was its anthropological basis. According to this premise, every human is a limited being with a unique background and specific circumstances. They are bound by their environment and position, which are historical and subject to change. As such, they cannot achieve a universal, timeless, or trans-historical state (Salehi, 1393, pp. 184-185).

Abu Zayd applied this premise to the Prophet Muhammad, viewing him as a product of his society and time, confined by his specific environment and circumstances (Abu Zayd, 1387, p. 122). Following this logic, the Prophet's Sunnah—his sayings, actions, and tacit approvals—are considered historical matters. He argues that a trans-historical view of the Sunnah and unconditional adherence to it is both impossible and irrational.

Thus, Abu Zayd's historicist view of the Prophet leads to historicism at the level of the religion's ongoing existence (Salehi, 1391, pp. 72-73). This means the Prophet's Sunnah cannot be a source of law for other people, especially those living centuries later. Abu Zayd rejects the trans-historical view of the Prophet and his actions, claiming it turns the Prophet into an idealized, mental construct separate from reality. He argues it portrays the Prophet as a figure who is detached from his society and its realities, stripping him of his visible, human, and material existence (Abu Zayd, 1387, p. 122).

Critique of the Historicist Basis of Sunnah

The most significant flaw in the historicist approach to Sunnah is its foreign origin. This historicist perspective emerged in the West to address specific challenges within Christianity. However, this view was applied to Islam without considering the key differences between the two religions. As a result, intellectual outcomes from the West, which had their own historical and

philosophical context, were mindlessly and superficially applied to Islam. This turned them into a prescription that, because it didn't align with the underlying problems, exacerbated them instead of solving them (Salehi, 1393, p. 106).

Another issue with this theory is its claim that there is a contradiction between being human and having a connection to the trans-historical (Salehi, 1393, p. 141). Yet, Abu Zayd himself doesn't remain faithful to this principle. He speaks of the Prophet's connection to an infinite and trans-historical source for receiving the verses of the Quran (Abu Zayd, 1387, p. 91). This implies that while the Prophet was human, his role as a recipient of revelation and his connection to its source place him beyond an ordinary human. The Quran itself reinforces this idea (18:110, 41:6). Abu Zayd used Gadamer's hermeneutics and his historicist perspective but failed to fully adhere to them. He extracted a *method* from Gadamer's philosophy of understanding, which Gadamer himself never intended (Va'ezzi, 1392, p. 211). Using historicism as a method can lead Abu Zayd to absolute relativism, a pitfall Gadamer was aware of but one Abu Zayd overlooked. This relativism could even undermine the validity of Abu Zayd's own works (Tavakoli Bina, 1393, pp. 198-199).

Critique of Abu Zayd's View on the Historicity of Sunnah

Abu Zayd's historicist view of the Sunnah and his application of historical anthropology to the Prophet led him to seek out evidence suggesting the Sunnah lacks a divine origin, is not revelatory, and contains human errors. He argues that even the Prophet's contemporaries did not rely on his Sunnah, did not consider it independently authoritative, and refrained from collecting and compiling it. The question is, to what extent are Abu Zayd's claims and evidence valid?

Analysis of the Non-Revelatory Nature of Sunnah

Abu Zayd challenges the revelatory view of the Sunnah, which gives it its authority. He doesn't consider revelation a sacred matter unique to the Prophet. Instead, he sees revelation as a universal connection between God and humanity, one that has existed for all people throughout all periods. The Prophet's uniqueness in receiving revelation lies only in its legislative nature, which was the reception of the Quran through Gabriel and which ended with the death of the Prophet (Abu Zayd, 2000, p. 35).

Abu Zayd claims that the revelation of the Sunnah was not legislative but rather a form of inspiration and a distinct communication between the Prophet and God. He argues that after the Prophet, Al-Shafi'i was the one who tried to

impose the concept of revelation on both the Quran and the Sunnah, thereby giving both a legislative value (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 86).

According to Abu Zayd, the Prophet's Sunnah, which was merely the customs of the Quraysh, became a part of the religion through Al-Shafi'i's ideological perspective and Arab bias, and all people were forced to follow it. This, he argues, had no precedent; no one had previously made the customs of a particular group obligatory for all Muslims. He offers as evidence that Malik rejected the Abbasid Caliph's request to make his *Muwatta* obligatory for all Islamic lands, because Malik's work was based on the practices of the Medinan people, not divine revelation. Abu Zayd rejects the Quranic and narrative evidence for the revelatory nature of the Sunnah, considering them incorrect interpretations that are inconsistent with the context of the verses (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 52).

Al-Shafi'i interpreted the term wisdom (*hikmah*) in the verses: "And remember that which is recited in your houses of the signs of Allah and of wisdom" (33:34) and "He it is Who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His signs and purifies them and teaches them the Book and the wisdom" (62:2) as the Sunnah of the Messenger of God (Al-Shafi'i, 1367, p. 288). He also interpreted the pronoun *huwa* in the verse "Nor does he speak from whim; it is nothing but a revelation revealed" (53:3-4) as referring to the Prophet, concluding that everything the Prophet uttered was divinely inspired. Abu Zayd, however, disagrees, arguing that these interpretations are inconsistent with the verses' context. He claims the pronoun *huwa* in Surah al-Najm refers to the Quran, because a pronoun cannot refer to a hidden pronoun in a verb (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 126). Similarly, Abu Zayd sees Al-Shafi'i's reliance on the concept of *ilqa' fi al-raw'* (inspiration), a direct revelation to the heart, as an improper interpretation aimed at equating the Sunnah with the Quran (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 126).

The Prophet's Consultation with the People

Abu Zayd argues that the Prophet's act of consulting with people is inconsistent with the revelatory nature of the Sunnah. He questions, if all the Prophet's actions, sayings, and even his silence were from revelation, why would he consult his companions? Did these consultations indicate the Prophet's ignorance or the absence of revelation? What about the many instances where the Prophet followed the people's suggestions? Were these instances also revelatory? (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 125). When the Prophet said, "You know better about your worldly affairs," doesn't this mean that the Sunnah is not as comprehensive and revelatory as Al-Shafi'i claims? (Abu Zayd, 1383, p. 77).

Abu Zayd is correct that the Prophet consulted with the people on many occasions. However, this does not mean the Prophet was ignorant. Rather, the purpose of consultation was to foster unity and solidarity with the people, as commanded by God: "And consult with them in the matter" (3:159). The Prophet never consulted on matters of fixed religious law (Abdul Mutalib, 1417, p. 90). These consultations were about changing, day-to-day events for which there was no specific divine legislation (Tabatabaei, 1417, p. 5). The Prophet's consultations were not in opposition to revelation; rather, they worked alongside it to manage the affairs of the Islamic community. Therefore, even if we were to consider the Prophet's views as his own interpretations (as some Sunnis do), we would still be obligated to follow them according to the Quran (Ahmad, 2010, p. 31).

The Sunnah's Subordination to the Quran

Abu Zayd finds a contradiction in the arguments of those who believe in the revelatory nature of both the Quran and the Sunnah, a contradiction he believes is either overlooked or intentionally ignored for ideological reasons (Abu Zayd, 2003, pp. 126-129). He argues that if both are considered texts and revelations, one would expect them to be able to abrogate each other. However, since Al-Shafi'i states that the Sunnah cannot abrogate the Quran (Al-Shafi'i, 1386, p. 106), Abu Zayd questions its revelatory status. He instead views the Sunnah as a collection of interpretations for understanding the Quran that cannot contradict the literal meaning of the revelation (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 126).

In other words, Al-Shafi'i's position does not place the Quran and Sunnah on the same level, even though he does not allow the Sunnah to abrogate the Quran. He considers the Quran the primary source of religion and believes any abrogation must be based on the Quran itself. This belief stems from the Quran's unique status, not from a lack of belief in the Sunnah's revelatory nature. This was not a novel formulation by Al-Shafi'i but a report on the common practice of Muslims. In the mainstream Muslim view, the Quran has always had a supreme status, and a key criterion for accepting a Sunnah is that it doesn't contradict the Quran (Abdul Khaliq, 1415, p. 485). Therefore, the fact that the Sunnah does not abrogate the Quran does not mean it's not revelatory. Rather, any tradition that contradicts the Quran is simply not considered a valid Sunnah and is likely to be corrupted, altered, or fabricated.

The Infallibility of the Prophet and Its Limited Scope

One of the most important pillars of the Sunnah's authority is the Prophet's infallibility ('isma). If the Sunnah encompasses all the Prophet's actions and sayings, then following it only makes sense if the Prophet was free from

human error. Therefore, if we do not accept his infallibility or limit it to the transmission of Quranic verses, it becomes easy to question the Sunnah and its scope. Abu Zayd rejects the Prophet's infallibility because it contradicts his anthropological view and his human-centric perspective on the Prophet. Consequently, he searches for evidence to portray the Prophet's infallibility as an illusion.

Al-Shafi'i as the Inventor of the Prophet's Infallibility

Abu Zayd claims that the belief in the Prophet's infallibility was not widespread during his lifetime and was later introduced by Al-Shafi'i. Abu Zayd suggests that Al-Shafi'i tried to portray the Prophet as infallible and flawless to legitimize his sayings and actions (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 52).

Abu Zayd does not provide any specific documentation to support his claim. However, similar arguments can be found among his followers. They claim that Al-Shafi'i used the word *'isma* (infallibility) when he said, "And God informed His Messenger of His protection of him, which preceded in His knowledge," as evidence of his belief in the Prophet's infallibility (Dwayib, 2013, p. 82). But an examination of Al-Shafi'i's text reveals he made this statement in his commentary on verse 67 of Surah al-Ma'idah (Al-Shafi'i, 2006, p. 766), and the word *'isma* is in the verse itself, not in his interpretation. Furthermore, this verse and Al-Shafi'i's commentary do not aim to prove infallibility in its terminological sense but in its linguistic meaning: that God protects the Prophet from the evil and deceit of the polytheists.

Neglecting the Human Aspect of the Prophet

Abu Zayd argues that believing in the Prophet's infallibility and considering him free from any human error leads to neglecting his human aspects. He places the Prophet on a divine, superhuman level (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 55). He believes this characteristic was attributed to the Prophet during a time when people sought to turn his character into an idealized, mental construct detached from reality and his community. This process, he claims, transformed the Prophet from a visible, material, and human being into a person devoid of all human characteristics (Abu Zayd, 1387, p. 122).

This view by Abu Zayd presents being human and making mistakes as an inherent combination, implying that anyone who escapes error is no longer human. While humans do make mistakes out of ignorance, forgetfulness, or even intentionally due to free will, this does not mean that error is an essential human trait; it only shows the possibility of it. The belief in the Prophet's infallibility does not make him divine but instead affirms his humanity. He is a human entrusted with an important responsibility, and he needs divine

guidance and confirmation (revelation and infallibility) to avoid falling into error.

Incompatibility of the Prophet's Infallibility with the Quran

Abu Zayd considers the belief in the Prophet's infallibility to be in conflict with the Quran, as the Prophet is rebuked for his mistakes in various verses. He also claims this view is inconsistent with narrations that report the Prophet's incorrect interpretations (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 52).

A look at the commentaries on the verses where the Prophet is reprimanded (e.g., 9:43, 66:1) shows that neither Shi'a nor Sunni exegetes have ever considered these verses as evidence against the Prophet's infallibility (Tabatabaei, 1417, pp. 329-330; Tabari, 1412, pp. 170-180; Al-Shafi'i, 1367, p. 766). Additionally, the authenticity of narrations like the story of *Al-Ifk* (the false accusation) and the pollination of date palms, which are used as evidence against the Prophet's infallibility, is questionable. Even if they are authentic, there are interpretations of these narrations that do not compromise the Prophet's infallibility.

Abu Zayd's View on the Independence of Sunnah in Legislation

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd collected information and evidence to show that the independence of the Sunnah as a source of law was not a consensus among early Muslims. He cites a report from Al-Shafi'i, who states that there are three views on the relationship between the Quran and the Sunnah: (1) the Prophet conveyed what is already in the Quran, (2) the Prophet clarified what is stated in general terms in the Quran, and (3) there are things in the Sunnah that are not in the Quran. Al-Shafi'i says that the first two views are accepted by everyone (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 92).

Abu Zayd concludes from Al-Shafi'i's statement that the third view—the independence of the Sunnah in legislation—was not a consensus. He believes this opposing view was forgotten over time due to the dominance of the ruling establishment, to the point that the independent authority of the Sunnah became so widespread it seemed no other view had ever existed (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 119).

As another piece of evidence, Abu Zayd refers to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, claiming that they did not consider the Sunnah an independent source and used it only to explain the Quran (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 93).

Abu Zayd argues that even Al-Shafi'i himself sometimes neglected the independent authority of the Sunnah and relied on the prevailing view before him, which is why he did not consider the Sunnah to abrogate the Quran (Abu

Zayd, 2003, p. 106). If Al-Shafi'i gave the Sunnah an independent role in legislation, why would he consider it subordinate to the Quran? Doesn't this view imply that even Al-Shafi'i considered only the Quran to be a revelatory text with independent legislative authority? (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 89).

As is clear, Abu Zayd, contrary to his claim that the age of an idea does not prove its validity, relies on Al-Shafi'i's book to prove his point, trying to show that the non-independent nature of the Sunnah is a long-standing view. But does Al-Shafi'i really say this? When we look at Al-Shafi'i's complete statement, we see that after discussing the disagreement over the third view, he clarifies its aspects (Abu Zayd, 2003, p. 92). A closer look shows that Al-Shafi'i is not discussing a disagreement over the legitimacy or independence of the Sunnah. He is simply reporting on the different ways scholars have referred to the Sunnah that is not explicitly in the Quran (Al-Sibai, 1999, p. 416). They all acknowledge the existence of rulings in the Sunnah that are not in the Quran. Some did not use the term "independent" while others did, but the practical outcome is the same because they all consider those rulings to be authoritative. Abu Zayd's other evidence, the Hanafi school, is also incorrect, as Hanafis not only pay attention to the Sunnah but have legal rulings that are based solely on the Sunnah, such as the prohibition of eating birds with talons and the simultaneous marriage of a man to a woman and her aunt (Abdul Mutalib, 1417, p. 88).

Conclusion

A critical review of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's perspective on the challenge of tradition and modernity reveals a dual approach. On one hand, influenced by modernist thought, Abu Zayd takes a historicist view of the Prophet's Sunnah. He believes that since the Sunnah is a product of its cultural and social context, it cannot be an absolute guide for all times without being adapted to the demands of the modern era. From his perspective, the Sunnah must be re-examined based on rationality, ethics, and contemporary conditions, as some of its teachings may no longer be relevant or require reinterpretation. This view emphasizes the need to critique tradition and adapt it for modern societies. On the other hand, critiques of Abu Zayd's view, based on Islamic principles, show that such an approach contradicts the very nature and status of the Sunnah in Islam. In the Islamic view, the Prophet's Sunnah is not merely a historical phenomenon; it is a part of the non-Quranic revelation and a complement to the divine message that is considered necessary and enduring for the guidance of humanity, transcending time and place. The principle of

the finality of the Prophet ensures the validity and authority of the Sunnah as one of the main sources of Islamic law, placing it beyond temporal and spatial limitations. The conclusion is that Abu Zayd's historicist view, while emphasizing critique and rethinking of tradition, faces serious challenges in its religious foundations. His approach could lead to weakening the authority of the Sunnah and ignoring its connection to divine revelation. From an Islamic perspective, his view appears not only incomplete and inadequate but also potentially undermines the coherence and stability of Islamic law. Therefore, any interpretation or re-examination of the Sunnah must be carried out while preserving the fundamental principles of the religion, accepting the authority of the Sunnah, and ensuring its consistency with the Quran and the Prophet's biography to prevent the distortion of religious knowledge.

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