

Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ

**An Introductory Exegesis of the Meanings and Messages
Contained Within**

Al-Shaykh Haidar Hobbollah

Translated by Ali Jabbar

General Introduction

Before entering our humble series of lessons on exegesis, and before embarking on exegesis of Sūrat Al-Inshirāḥ, it is necessary to draw attention to two foundational topics:

1) Why do exegesis of the Holy Quran?

Perhaps a questioner, in a religious establishment or a seminary, especially an Arabic one, may ask about the reason or motivation behind initiating weekly classes for exegesis. It is customary for lessons in the seminary to be in fiqh and uṣūl, so what is the necessity that calls for these lessons?

The aim of these lessons, which calls us to engage in these Quranic studies, is the necessity for students to develop an exegetical mindset. We must contribute to solidifying this education, which is an essential pillar of our religious awareness. We have been accustomed to looking over the Quran through the lens of fiqh and uṣūl, and we may think - incorrectly - that these lenses are the only windows through which we can understand this holy book and its exalted meanings. Whereas the truth is otherwise; there may exist other portals through which we can understand the Quran. Chief amongst those is the general exegetical lens which attempts to discover the Quran by attempting to know its method and style. It attempts to move between its concepts via a rigorous understanding of the Quranic rhetoric and its mode of presentation.

The aim of these lessons is not merely for the student to pick up general information, but rather that we create a type of discourse that may be different to what he is accustomed to in the seminary. The customary way has a fiqhī and uṣūlī imprint – in understanding the Quran. This type [of discourse] sets off from the terminological, linguistic and rhetorical constitution of the Quran to arrive at results that accord with this constitution, and are consistent with it, whilst also setting off from a reading that investigates the purposes intended by the verses and chapters.

This does not intend to diminish other methods by which we read the Quran. Precisely the opposite, we want there to be a variety of methods for inspecting the Quran and multiple approaches for looking at the book of Allah. We discourage the disregard of alternative exegetical approaches and the restricting of methods. The exegetical picture of the Quran cannot reach its maturity and perfection except by adding these kinds of methods, which we shall discuss

2) Our approach to exegesis in these lessons

a) The lessons will adopt a style that attempts to be clear and lucid without delving into topics that require expertise. It is an attempt to harmonise between expertise and more simplified studies, distancing itself as much as possible from very detailed argumentation and complex objections. We may possibly present some of the aforementioned in passing, but the purpose of these lessons is to analyse the Quran in a general and introductory manner. The aim of this is to discover the kinds of rhetoric employed by the Quran whilst also exploring its different concepts, themes and purposes.

b) The purpose of these studies is not to arrive at definitive and final convictions that do not allow room for discussion. Such an outcome, according to some scholars, is considered to be a form of tafsir bil ra'i, which is a denigrated method by which to approach the Quran. Rather, we hope to present keys by which to contemplate and meditate the Quran.

Our belief is that any intellectual venture to understand Quranic texts or ḥadīth must present itself humbly. It must avoid any claims to exclusive possession of the truth in its conclusions. Moreover, it is necessary for any person who wishes to present an exegesis of the Quranic verses to end their attempt by saying: "this is what I understood from the text, and perhaps there may exist other meanings that I am not aware of... perhaps, I may even be wrong as a result of the limits of my knowledge and understanding."

c) The method of topical exegesis, in any of its forms, will not be used except in passing or when necessary. Rather, we shall use the segmented style of exegesis whereby we look at small chapters of the Quran. This may occasionally draw us towards looking at other stories and verses in the Quran and study them for a specific reason. Occasionally, a particular analysis may require us to assess a Quranic concept in the Quran as a whole.

d) We do not intend to present a complete representation of all the outlooks and exegetical views and subsequently deal with them affirmatively or negatively. Rather, we wish to present the most prominent outlooks and exegetical views of Muslim scholars with some comparison and analysis. For this reason, these studies must be considered as introductions to Quranic exegesis, rather than offering a comprehensive and detailed exegesis.

As these four introductory points have been made clear, it is important to explain the general map of our work and our methodology for the exegesis through the following points:

- 1) A primary linguistic breakdown of the Quran verses at the level of individual terms and their composition within a sentence.
- 2) Analysing the objections raised from oriental and contemporary thinkers towards the Quran. These can include objections raised about certain verses standing in contradiction to historical truths, or that some verses are invalid or contradictory in themselves. We will try in these lessons to analyse these objections as well as critique and comment on them. Defending the Quran, in times where objections against it have increased, is a necessary and essential matter. It is not possible to ignore, belittle them, or to turn a blind eye to them. We must go about critiquing these objections from the foundations of knowledge, linguistics and rhetoric, rather than defending against these objections from ideological or dogmatic grounds that are placed on the Quranic text in an ad-hoc manner, often ignoring the rhetorical laws of the Quran and its way mode of expression. If it is then possible to answer [such objections through these foundations], then all is well and good, and if not it, then it better to remain silent and admit one's inability.
- 3) To compare and contrast the verses when necessary, ensuring that verses are not discussed in isolation, independent of the immediate context connected to it and the wider context.
- 4) An attempt will be made to obtain some of the Quranic teachings and concepts, be they educational, societal, ethical, cultural, organisational and political. Additionally, we shall focus briefly on the concepts through which the Quran wanted to organise the movement of the Islamic society, whether that be spiritually, educationally or socially, and occasionally we shall explore these ideas in more detail. Our first choice will be Sūrat Al-Inshirāḥ which is considered one of the short chapters of the Quran. We shall stop to examine what it conveys in concepts and messages, as well as viewing the educational, practical and social aims that the chapter carries.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (١) وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢) الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣) وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤) فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٦) فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ (٧) وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ (٨)

“Did We not expand your breast for you and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? And Did We not exalt your name? For indeed, ease accompanies hardship. indeed, ease accompanies hardship. So when you are finished, exert yourself and turn eagerly to your Lord.”

(94:1-8)

Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ: Is it a Meccan or Medinan Chapter? (The criteria for distinguishing between Meccan or Medinan chapters)

It appears as though the Muslims have unanimously agreed that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ, which is composed of 8 verses not including the *basmalah*, is Meccan. And the first question that raises itself as follows: How did Islamic scholars discover that this chapter is Meccan and not Medinan? This further opens up to a general question which is: what are the followed means by which to discover whether a chapter is Meccan or Medinan?

Scholars have relied on two ways by which to prove that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is Meccan:

The first method: Historical documents

Commonly, exegetes, when attempting to know whether a chapter is Meccan or Medinan, have based their views on the sayings of the Prophet, Ahl al-Bayt, the companions or the tābi‘īn. This method is also used to determine whether a chapter in the entirety of verses or only part of it came down in Mecca or Medina. Based on this method, scholars assigned the place where the chapters of the Quran came down. Such a method can be appropriately termed as the method of historical documents. In this regard, the narrated historical documents have shown that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is Meccan.

The second method: Basing it on Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā

One exegetical view that is held sees that the Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ and Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā were one chapter in reality and not two distinct chapters. Given this, knowing the place where Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā came down will determine the place where Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ to come down; because these two chapters are actually one based on this view.

And given that Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā was revealed in Mecca after the revelation had stopped for a period of time, as the historians and scholars of the Quran have attested, and therefore Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ must also be Meccan.

Analysis of these two reasons

We can assess the reasons presented to prove that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is Meccan by saying:

1) Despite the usefulness of first method (that of historical documentation), proving the authenticity of these narrated texts attributed to the Prophet or his Ahl al-Bayt or his companions is a major obstacle for this method. The majority of these texts lack authentic chains by which one can be assured of their content. Despite this obstacle, exegetes have accepted this method, with the results of these narrations written in the Qurans of today, based on narrations from Ibn Abbas, other companions and the tābi'īn.

It is possible, however, to present another way to determine whether a chapter or verse is Meccan or Medinan. This way relies on an analytic, ijtihādī exegetical method which is as follows: A researcher observes a chapter or a verse and contemplates its content, context, rhetoric and subject-matter. Subsequently, they can – in many instances – determine the place where it was revealed, and know that Chapter A, for example, was revealed in Mecca and that Chapter B was revealed in Medina or vice versa. For these factors, such as context, subject-matter, mode of expression etc., can be Meccan or it can be Medinan. This analytical method which relies on observing the content – as opposed to the historical way of looking at narrations and their chains – is not purely a matter of faith, but rather it deals with such content in an investigative and ijtihādī manner.

Through this method with all its tools, we discover whether a chapter is Meccan or Medinan with certainty, with a degree of assurance, or with a degree of probability. There remains, however,

some chapters and verses where doubt remains due to the presence of a narration that contradicts the analysis and ijtihād of the researcher who arrived at his conclusion via a study of the verses of the chapter, their subject-matter, context, way of presentation and expression. If a researcher arrives at conclusion that a chapter is Meccan or Medinan through this method, but finds a narration that contradicts the hypothesis they arrived at, they may conclude that such a narration does not stand as an obstacle against the result arrived at through the analytic ijtihādi efforts due to unreliability and weakness of the narration. Such a view was adopted with regards to Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ by the likes of ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, despite the fact that we mentioned there was unanimity – if such a term is correctly applied here – on the fact that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ was Meccan. Ṭabāṭabā’ī in his exegesis arrived at the conclusion that the chapter is Medinan, basing this on the context of the chapter, where he writes: “the chapter can possibly be Meccan or Medinan, and the context of the verses are more suitable to being Medinan.”¹

Perhaps the words of Ṭabāṭabā’ī are closer to the truth, for when we contemplate the content of this chapter, we sense that its speech was in Medina. Firstly, the hypothesis that it came down in the early day of Mecca or the final days when the Prophet (s) planned to migrate to Medina, conflicts with background that the verses speak about with the Prophet; these verses speak of the expansion and the lifting of the tightness in the breast of the Prophet, as well as speaking of alleviating the heavy load that was on his back, and lastly, the chapter tells him of the great importance that has come to him among the people, and thus the ending of the difficult times, and the beginning of a period of ease. After all the tests the Prophet (s) endured, the Quran came to inform him about a new stage, the end of a period, and the beginning of a new and different time.

These contextual indications, alongside the style of presentation and the expressions used make the possibility that the chapter is a Medinan chapter, or even that it came down after the battle of Badr at the very least, a preponderant possibility; for this is when the Islamic message entered a new stage in terms of power, influence and publicity, and it is not possible after all these indications to consider it Meccan.

¹ *Al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qurān*, ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Volume 20, pg. 336.

As such, given the fact that the historical indications are inconclusive in this regard, one must return to the content of the chapter and its context to determine decisively one's position in this regard. It may be that – as we have indicated – that position of Ṭabāṭabā'ī in this topic is more likely, namely, the view that this chapter is Medinan.

2. We mentioned previously – when discussing the second method of proving that Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is Meccan – that there has been a reliance on the view that this chapter is not independent in itself, but rather that it (al-Inshirāḥ) and Sūrat al-Ḍuḥa form one chapter, and that this view is perhaps the prominent view between Muslims. In fact, there is also perhaps unanimity on this view among early Imami scholars, though in the last current period there is a digression from this unanimity and a reinvestigation of the basis from which this unanimity occurred.

Those who argued for the unity of the Sūrat al-Inshira and Sūrat al-Ḍuḥa have said that what lead them to such a position is the contemplation of these two chapters and looking at the narrations also. As such, there are two components which are claimed to support the view these two chapters are one:

The first component: If we compare the middle part of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥa and the beginning of Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ, we found that they have one form, for the following verses from Sūrat al-Ḍuḥa:

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ (٦) وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ (٧) وَوَجَدَكَ عَابِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ (٨)

“Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you? Did He not find you astray, and guide you? Did He not find you needy, and enrich you?” (93:6-8) are harmonious and consistent with these verses from

Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ:

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (١) وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢) أَلَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣) وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤)

“Did We not expand your breast for you and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? And Did We not exalt your name?” (94:1-4) for they are all suited to a unified context of God being a benefactor, and they appear as sentences that follow from each other, one after the other, speaking of a single topic, and that is the blessings bestowed upon the Prophet.

The second component: Some narrations narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt have mentioned the unity of these two chapters, like the narration al-Ṣadūq narrated from Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq (a): “It is

permissible to read any chapter in your obligatory prayers expect four chapters, and these are al-Ḍuḥā and al-Inshirāḥ, for all these are one chapter...”²

And it can be noted against this second method, namely, the supposition that there is a harmony between the middle verses of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā and the beginning of Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is not sufficient to favour the view that it is one chapter, especially as the verse *أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ* “*Did We not expand your breast for you...*” (94:1) is not preceded by the *conjunctive and* (واو العاطفة) so that we can claim that this verse is part of the verses of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā which preceded it and thus came in one unified context, consequently determining that it is one chapter. The mere similarity in its expression is insufficient to favour their unity when the *conjunctive and* (واو العاطفة) is missing.

As for the narrations that proponents of this view relied on, these have been studied by jurists and the later jurists have discussed their chains and sources. We find that al-Sayyid al-Khū’ī in some of his works has described these narrations as a group of disconnected and weak narrations that cannot be relied on. Based on this, several contemporary scholars, such as al-Sayyid al-Sistānī, al-Shaykh Bahjat, al-Shaykh al-Fayyāḍ and al-Sayyid al-Ḥakīm, adopted the view that there is no proof for their unity. This is despite the fact that some of them maintained the view that it is not sufficient to read only one of these chapters in prayer, and that it is necessary to unite them both in prayer. This is because this is a legal submissive (*ta’abuddī*) ruling specific to prayer, and for this reason, though it is detested (*makrūh*) to read two sūrahs after al-Fātiḥa, this is not the case when reading Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā and Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ together.

Moreover, even if we say that they are one chapter, this does not prove that the verses of al-Inshirāḥ are Meccan, because in one chapter it is possible that some of its verses were revealed in Mecca and others were revealed in al-Medina. This is quite a common phenomenon in the Quran. As such, the unity of these two chapters in the Quran in terms of their being one chapter in the Quranic compilation does not equal their unity in terms of the time they were revealed. The possibility that they were revealed at different times, however, does diminish the smaller a chapter is with regards to its size and the number of verses it contains.

This is what we wished to explain about the way to distinguish whether a chapter and its verses are Meccan or Medinan, and it appears as if the analytical *ijtihādī* way is more useful and accurate

² *Biḥār al-Anwār*, al-Majlisī, volume 84, p45, narrating from *Kitāb al-Hidāyah fi al-Uṣūl wa al-Furū’* of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq.

than the first method in determining this issue for a considerable number of chapters and verses. And it is natural that the conclusions obtained [via this method] may be deemed certain in some cases, or confidence-granting in other cases, or very probable in further cases.

The need to distinguish between the Meccan and Medinan chapters and verses?

We may ask of the intended benefit behind distinguishing the chapters and verses of the Quran between their revelation in Mecca and their revelation in Medina when the entirety of the Quran aims at guiding and purifying mankind? Further, what benefit is accrued from solving the topic of whether Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ is Meccan or Medinan?

The answer: The matter of whether a chapter or verse is Meccan or Medinan is of major importance in relation to Quranic studies and it has a role to play in various areas of which some will be mentioned:

1. The field of jurisprudential *ijtihād*, given that the Meccan/Medinan distinction helps one to know the later verses from the earlier verses, and this helps distinguish the abrogating from the abrogated and to not confuse them. Through this, the Meccan/Medinan distinction contributes to the topic of abrogating and abrogated verses. So rather than repealing the abrogating verse with the abrogated, we can – through the help of the Meccan/Medinan distinction – abrogate the abrogated verse with the abrogating verse.
2. The field of historical awareness as regards to the Quran, for as we understand the sequence of verses historically, we understand the method utilised by the Quran in explicating things and the stages it takes in monitoring and analysing those things, as has been stated for example in the matter of forbidding alcohol in Islam. Historical awareness about the Quran helps us to understand the structure of this generous book. The Quran is not isolated from the historical reality in which it was revealed in, especially if one adopts the position that the Quran is created and not eternal, as is the view of the Shi'a and Mu'tazilites as opposed to the Ash'arites.
3. The field of understanding the history of the Islamic message, for when we categorise verses of the Quran as Meccan or Medinan and divide those categories into periods and stages, we can use the Quranic text as a helper to understand the developments within the Islamic message, because of the Quran's connection to it. As such, for anyone who believes in the principle of making the

Quran the most trusted source for studying the Prophetic *sīrah*, he must deal with Quran texts in terms of its gradual historical revelation, and place the verses into different periods, so that he can understand what came earlier and what came later and the temporal developments.

4. The study of the Meccan/Medinan distinction helps also to respond to the objections that some critics placed against the Quran. This is especially the case with orientalist critics, given that they claimed that the link to its surrounding environment proves it is manmade. From here, one can study the Meccan verses and their variety, as well as the Medinan verses and their variety, in order to invalidate such a claim. When it is claimed that the Meccan chapters are short given that those addressed by them were Quraysh and the Arabs and not the people of the book; and that the Prophet had lost his Arabian culture when he left to Medina and came into contact with people of the book; here we the study of the Meccan/Medinan verses can help us find verses and chapters that are Medinan that have these particular Meccan traits³ for example and vice versa.⁴ This becomes a helpful component in identifying the use of long chapters in Mecca, the place where he lived with the illiterate Bedouin Arabs, and vice versa, displaying that the Quranic phenomenon of detailed exposition is not Medinan only.

For this reason, many of the indications that a text is Meccan or Medinan are probabilistic indications, rather than certain ones, because they can be shared between Meccan and Medinan verses. What can be said is that, generally, a Meccan verse will contain a certain sign, whereas, generally, a Medinan verse will contain another sign. These matters are not determined like mathematical affairs, but rather these are signs that are generally applicable in the majority of cases.

5. The field of Quranic exegesis and evaluating the narrations regarding what is called *asbāb al-nuzūl*⁵, for the study of the Meccan/Medinan topic helps to authenticate narrations regarding revelation, or vice versa, to invalidate those narrations. If a verse is proven to be Meccan, this consequently invalidates an exegesis which is not suitable to its revelation in Mecca or even contradicts it, or it means that we can prefer one narration regarding the why it was revealed over another narration. Here, one must balance the results of the exegetical process and the historical

³ The trait of being a short chapter.

⁴ The claim is that in Medina, the Prophet encountered new cultures, stories and ideas and hence the Quranic texts became more detailed in contrast to Mecca, where the Prophet only engaged with the Arabs.

⁵ These are narrations that tell us the reason why a specific chapter or verse was revealed.

documents to decide whether a chapter or verse is Meccan or Medinan. A great deal of discussion has occurred between exegetes over these matters, whereby an exegete will refuse a particular exegesis by pointing to the fact that a verse was revealed in Mecca, and not Medina for example. Examples of this can be found in the works of exegetes.

Perhaps it is for these reasons and others that we find in the narrations of companions, tābi‘īn and the Ahl al-Bayt, that one would boast of his knowledge of the Meccan and the Medinan verses, and where exactly a particular verse was revealed. This gives the impression that knowing the circumstances behind the revelation and the place it was revealed and the surrounding context to the verse, will allow the exegete to have a greater awareness of the verse and its relation to other verses.

Alongside the aforementioned, there are many other benefits from studying the topic of the Meccan/Medinan. This matter is an application of the topic of historical awareness that assists in understanding the book of Allah.

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (١)

“Did We not expand your breast for you” (94:1)

This verse carries several key points that we must reflect on and these are:

1. What kind of question does this verse contain?

It is possible for the question that this verse carries to be a condemnatory one.⁶ It is also possible for it to be framed as a question that seeks acknowledgement⁷ of the favour bestowed by God.

Both and these two forms both return to a central point. As such, regardless of the type of question possible in this verse, the meaning is undisputedly one. Scholars did differ regarding what type of question it is, and they said: If it is a condemning question, it means the idea that God didn't open and expand His Prophet's breast is condemned, and thus emphasizing its occurrence. If, however,

⁶ Istifhām istinkārī is a form of rhetorical questioning, whereby the question carries implicit condemnation of some sort. This condemnation can be of the person asked, or an action carried out or inaction itself. In this case, if this verse is an instance of it, it would condemn the idea that God didn't expand his Prophet's breast. All footnotes from the translator like this one will be indicated by [TN] at the end of the footnote. If [TN] is missing, the footnote is from the original work. [TN]

⁷ It is termed istifhām taqrīrī. [TN]

the question is one of acknowledgement, then this means the questioner asks: 'Was it not us that expanded your breast?' It's as if the one being addressed will respond: 'Yes you expanded my breast This explanation also means that the expansion occurred. In clearer terms, regardless of what type of question this is, they both lead to confirmation of the expansion of the breast. The proof for this is the subsequent verses which say:

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢) الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣) وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤)

"and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? And Did We not exalt your name?"
(94:2-4)

These verses give a positive affirmative meaning, so they show that what was intended from the first question was also of a similar nature, namely, confirming the expansion of the Prophet's breast.

2. Expansion of the breast between the dimension of knowledge and the dimension of action and spirituality

الشرح (al-Sharḥ) linguistically means opening something and expanding it. One says, شَرَحْتُ اللحم (I cut the meat) meaning I cut it, so it opened and expanded. And one says, شرحت الدرس (I explained the class) as if it was closed so I expanded it and as though its parts were knotted, and I broke down its parts and expanded it. It appears as if the term al-Sharḥ always carries the meaning of expansion and it thus stands in opposition to constriction, containment, closure and tightness.⁸

Considering this linguistic exegesis, the expansion of the breast in this verse will have two possible meanings:

The first meaning relates to knowledge: It is as if the verse says: "We have expanded your breast and now it is open, so it now has a greater capacity to understand." This interpretation was chosen by some exegetes who said that the heart of the Prophet is now ready for the revelation, knowledge, wisdom, emanation and gnosis. They, therefore, proposed that the expansion of the breast is linked to the area of knowledge and gnosis, or the existential capacity and the potentiality of the receiver as the mystics and philosophers would say.

⁸ *Al-'Ayn*, Al-Farāhidī, Volume 3, Page 93; *al-Muḥīṭ fi al-Lughā*, Ibn 'Abbād, Volume 2, Page 425; *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, Ibn Fāris, Volume 3, Page 269.

And this means that the verse wants to tell the Prophet about the expansion that has occurred in his breast that enables him to withstand more knowledge, truths and cognitions, and based on this exegesis, it is possible for it to mean the expansion that occurred in his breast at the beginning of his prophethood, that is to say, that God prepared his heart to accept the sciences and gnostic truths and the revelation, and this matter cannot be at the end of his prophethood. We will explain the result that is based on this exegesis, later, God-willing.

2. The second meaning relates to the dimension of action, psychology and spirituality: This view claims the verse intends to say: we have expanded your breast, we have made it open, big and hopeful rather than constrained. This meaning relates to a practical dimension and has no relation to knowledge. Feeling at ease, the removal of worries and sadness are concepts that enter in the framework of psychology, spirituality and action, in contrast to the first exegesis which was framed in terms of knowledge. It is as if the verse wishes to tell the noble prophet that you have suffered from constriction and tightness in your psychological and spiritual state and we have granted you an opening and hope so that you exit from your state of despair, worry and tightness.

To summarise, the verse signifies the occurrence of the breast being expanded and this can be understood in two ways:

Either it is understood as an expansion related to the dimension of thought and knowledge, so it is more suitable for the beginning of his message, whereby the expansion and enlargement of the Prophet's heart occurred, in order that it comprehends knowledge and revelation and this by its nature is an expansion that is continuous that encompasses the present and the past at the same time.

Or it is to be understood as a practical expansion related to the dimension of action and psychology, so it is more suitable with the latter stages of his message, as if to say to the Prophet: You have lived a long period with difficulty, worry, sadness, tiredness and tightness and now is the time for you to be cheerful and hopeful with your heart at peace.

3. Contemplating the Prophetic experience in light of the twofold dimension of expanding the breast and its tightness

If we cast a general glance over the Quranic verses that deal with the concept of expanding the breast and its tightness, we will see that they sometimes speak of expanding the breast concerning one's own self, and other times concerning the relationship with others:

a) Concerning one's own self, we observe a verse that states:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ

"Whomever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for Islam." (6:125)

This means that Allah expands the breast – so that it becomes without any barriers – to receive Islam and submit to it and accept it.

And we find in opposition to this expansion, a tightness and a constriction that the same verse speaks about:

وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا كَأَنَّمَا يَصَّعْدُ فِي السَّمَاءِ

"And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted as if he were climbing to the sky." (6:125)

Thus, tightness of the breast leads to deviation because the possessor of such a breast cannot open himself to receive Islam. This matter is related directly to the topic that deviation in this world can be punishment for an act committed. With this, many objections can be lifted that are posed to the Quran regarding the problem of God deviating people, a notion that is present in many texts, and regarding the comparison of God's deviating work with that of Satan. We may discuss this topic in later studies.

b) Concerning the relationship with others, we notice many verses that speak of the Prophet's psychological state when he dealt with the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and these verses speak many times of the tightness in his heart and breast. God says:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ

"And certainly We know that your breast is straitened by what they say." (15:97)

The lies, allegations, slander and social pressure against his message made the Prophet feel sadness and tightness in his breast, but God informs him that the cure for this condition is with

Him. The cure begins through worship, the glorification of God, and returning spiritually to Him, for God says after that:

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ (٩٨) وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

“So hymn the praise of your Lord and be among those who prostrate. And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you.” (15:98-99)

It is as though the verse is saying, ‘Yes O’ Muḥammad, the return to God and worshipping Him will expand your breast, enabling you to complete this path.’ Perhaps this cure is one of the applications of *أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ* “*Did We not expand your breast for you*” (94:1). The Prophet faced many challenges during this path; the Quran tells us of the extreme trouble that he faced for his message to the point that he nearly lost himself due to the difficulty. This is the case with all those who carry a Godly mission for their objectives are not achieved eased except with continuous effort and enduring struggles.

The Prophet cared very strongly about guiding people, feeling pain and anguish at their aversion to the message carried by him. We notice on many occasions how the Quran would teach the Prophet how to deal with such aversion to the Prophetic message. The solution was to try and not experience anguish and loss of personal energy due to the hurt and sadness. One has to perform his duties and not be neglectful in his responsibilities, following which, they must persistently return to God spiritually for Whom guidance of mankind is in His Hands. For this reason, Allah God to His messenger saying:

فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ

“So let not your soul be expended in sorrow over them” (35:8)

The duty of the Prophet is to warn his people, and all the other matters are to be left in the hands of the Creator.

From this standpoint, an educational principle comes forth from the Quran, utilised by God with His messenger, whereby He counselled him repeatedly – when the burdens of the message had constricted his breast – to not tire and destroy himself so long as he had performed his duties as best as possible, as though saying, ‘you should not, O’ Muḥammad, destroy yourself in sorrow due to their lack of faith, for the performance of your duties is sufficient, and all matters beyond that

return to them and to Allah. If they wish to believe then all is well, and if they do not wish to, this is their choice.’ God in the Quran says:

لَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَفْسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

“Perhaps you will fret yourself to death with grief because they do not believe.” (26:3)

This kind of Quranic education we had termed “The principle of the middle way between carrying religious concern and inviting others.”⁹

This principle reminds us of a problem that some of those who have projects suffer from, whereby they have not paid attention to this principle whilst carrying out their work. When their project is not well received, they suffer from psychological pressures, as if the changing of society and the acceptance of such a project is a necessary matter. This, however, is not what is required. The person who carries a project must perform their duties with competence and skill, using all the means that are available and legitimate and beyond that, there is no need for despondency.

There are multiple verses in the Quran aimed at showing this clear principle other than the aforementioned verses, Examples of this include:

مَا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

“In no way are you responsible for their reckoning in anything” (6:52)

and

قُلْ لَسْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِوَكِيلٍ

“Say, I am not a guardian over you”. (6:66)

Undoubtedly, this educational Quranic method will lead to the expansion of the breast in whosoever is a caller, worker, struggler, reformer and guide in his society.

Returning to the original topic, we find that the Quran also speaks about factors that cause the expansion of the breast – other than returning to God through worship – through discussing the role of revelation, by virtue of it describing the experiences of others. God says:

وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ

⁹ See, Haidar Hobbollah, *Fiqh al-amr bil ma'ruf wal nahī 'an al-munkar*, pg. 95-98.

“All these stories of the prior messengers that We relate to you are to make your heart firm.” (11:120)

and it's obvious that making the heart firm and stable is a kind of expansion when contrasted to an unstable and moving heart which can result in one breaking down.

In light of this, we find that the gradual descent of revelation played a role in affirming the heart of the Prophet and the believers around him. God says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَّاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ

“The disbelievers ask: ‘Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all in a single revelation?’ It is so that We make your heart firm.” (25:32)

The Prophet, who propagates the message faithfully, finds in the revelation that which comforts and strengthens him. If, however, those actions were to last for a long period – twenty years for example – without finding anything to comfort and strengthen the heart, then undoubtedly, one will feel despair and hopelessness which will be reflected on the entirety of the project itself. This is what the victories in our daily lives represent; the person who lives the entirety of his life without any victories – regardless of their nature and extent – will suffer from despondency and despair. The topic of making the heart firm is akin to a critical battle that takes place, and the resistant leader emerges to give a speech which calms the people and gives strength to the fighters.

The need for a prophet and caller to have the spiritual and psychological state of an expanded breast is a very huge one. This is because it enables them to control their affairs, actions and responses. We notice, in the experience of Prophet Moses, a Quranic example which helps us understand this idea, as he carried both substantial responsibilities in facing Pharaoh.

To understand the substantial nature of this responsibility, we must understand it in its complete context. Suppose that the request to speak with Pharaoh is directed to an ordinary person who does not hold a noteworthy status in society that allows him to face the highest ruling leader, to denounce his actions in front of him and in his palace. Such a task is truly difficult and substantial. To stand in the palace of the king, and subsequently criticise the most important elements of his kingdom and dominion is extremely difficult with very considerable psychological pressures. We

see that when Moses recognised the colossal nature of the tasks and its enormity, he requested from God:

رَبِّ اسْرُخْ لِي صَدْرِي

“My Lord! Expand for me my breast” (20:25) for the nature of such tasks cause constriction to one’s breast, and such constriction causes the project to fail. At the same time, he also asked:

وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي

“And make my affair easy for me” (20:26) which is a request from God to provide the necessary means by which the project can succeed and to remove the difficulties that can result in failure. Moreover, he requested:

وَأَحْلِلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي (٢٧) يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

“and untie a knot from my tongue, that they may understand my speech” (20:27-28) so that they do not claim that he speaks in riddles that cannot be understood rendering his proof over them incomplete. Moses did not stop there, he also requested:

وَأَجْعَلْ لِي وَزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي

“and grant me a minister from my family” (20:29) as though saying ‘I am in need of a helper in this dangerous path.’

And as examples of applications to the Quranic expansion, some narrations presented the topic of appointing Imam Ali as an application of the expansion of the breast that is suitable for this chapter being Medinan. The Prophet’s heart settled and his breast expanded by this appointment because the Prophetic path that he fought for was going to be placed in trustworthy hands.

In summary: the first principle required of big projects require is an expanded breast. This is why the Prophet was bestowed with it, and the Quran educated the Prophet to exit from the state of being constricted to the state of expansion through the revelation itself, worship and constant interaction with God.

4. How is a bodily breast expanded? The dichotomy between matter and spirit

It has become clear that the expansion mentioned in the verse has a spiritual dimension, regardless if we understand it as being related to knowledge or related to action. This may lead to a question being raised, which serve as an objection against the Quran, given that it conflicts with reasoned proofs from philosophical studies. For God says:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبَ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

“Have they not travelled through the land that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.”

(22:46) and He says in the verse of Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ that the breast is expanded. However, the heart that is blinded and the thing expanded are not entities present in the human breast in the upper part of his body. How is it suitable to use such terms that have been invalidated by philosophical studies, which prove that the spirit is immaterial, and that comprehension also is immaterial?

The hearts that comprehend information are immaterial, whilst the Quran states that the blindness does not afflict the eyes, but the hearts in the breasts. The heart that is in the breast is bodily and thus incapable of matters like blindness, sight, nor comprehension, and this means that such a verse conflicts with what philosophers have arrived at by reason.

In order to respond to this objection, we must remember an important matter, which we consider essential and influential in the general fields of exegesis, and this is the necessity of being aware of the Arabic language when performing exegesis. Without such awareness of the Arabic language, we will undoubtedly fall into big problems. And in light of tackling the aforementioned matter, two attempts can be mentioned in dealing with this topic:

The first attempt: The word breast (صدر) in the language is used to mean the essence of a human. It as though the verse wishes to say: ‘What is blinded is the intellects that are within you and that forms part of your existence.’ It only used the term breast in opposition to the eyes. When it negated the blindness of the eyes, it wished to affirm a different kind of blindness, and that is the blindness of judgement, so it used such a term, to distance the blindness from its usual dimension that is linked to the face and eyes. It used the term breast to refer to the inner dimension of the human, for the breast in the body, so the meaning becomes: ‘Though your eyes may be capable of

physical sight, your hearts your essence and your intellects do not understand, nor comprehend, rather, they are blind, with an internal blindness that resides deep within you, and this depth is referred to by the word breast.

Similarly, in the verse of al-Inshirāḥ, what is intended by the expansion of the breast, is the expansion of the internal structure of man, his hidden feelings and what is in his depths. What is intended by the term is not its outward meaning, but rather, this metaphorical dimension, whereby the breast stands in opposition to the external, and transports us to the internal existential element of man. Such usage is completely normal in the Arabic language.

The second attempt: This attempts to move beyond the meaning of the singular term, to its meaning as a composite phrase. Therefore, rather than searching for the meaning of the word breast, and that it means the internal and depths of man, rather than the external, we go directly to the meaning of the composite phrase شرح الصدر (expansion of the breast) which means in the language to exit the state of tightness and enter the state of openness, psychological ease and hopefulness. And through this way, we don't find for the singular term of breast a place in the sentence, but rather, the place is for the composite phrase that is explained as if it is a singular term. This is commonplace in the Arabic language, where we say: كشفت الحرب عن ساقها (literally: the war revealed her leg), meaning that the war intensified, so the phrase revealing the leg does not carry the meaning of the individual terms, but rather the meaning is embedded in the phrase itself, and it means for a matter to intensify.

I think that either of these two attempts is more acceptable than the narration – regardless of its historical value – which attempted to explain this matter by claiming that the Prophet underwent a divine surgical operation, and his material breast was opened, and his heart was taken and cleaned and returned to its place. This famous incident is known as حادثة شق الصدر 'the incident of ripping of the breast.' Both these two attempts are more acceptable, regardless of whether the meaning of this story is real or merely symbolic. One can question what it means to purify a heart from its blood when its very job is to pump blood. Such a matter lends more support to the story being allegorical or one can say that the true meaning of this narration is with Allah.

5. Expanding the breast: Does it have an independent meaning or is it explained by the subsequent verses?

Some exegetes have proposed that the second and fourth verses of this same chapter have explained the meaning of expanding the breast in the first verse. These verses state:

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ ... وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ

“and relieve you of your burden...And Did We not exalt your name?” (94:2/4)

As such, the meaning of expanding the breast means to remove the heavy load on the one hand, and on other, to exalt one’s name. There is, therefore, no need to burden ourselves with interpretations that have been offered about the meaning of expanding the breast. This view was adopted by Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyah.¹⁰

This scholar’s view, however, is not binding, for it does not rely on conclusive linguistic proof. It is possible that the expansion of the breast is a preliminary step for action, and alternatively, it may be the result of achieving certain accomplishments of which these two verses refer to, as we explained previously, or it may result specifically from the lifting of the heavy load and exalting one’s name. It also may be that such verses displayed some reasons for why his breast was expanded but did not mention all the reasons. Undoubtedly, the second and fourth verses are examples of the reasons for the occurrence of breast expansion. This is not something disputable, but they are not, in themselves, the expansion of the breast, as is obvious.

6. What is the reason behind adding the words **لك** (for you) and **عنك** (from you) in these verses?

A question may arise as to the structural composition of this verse and the verses that succeed it. What are the reasons for adding the pronouns **لك** (for you), **عنك** (from you), **لك** (for you), in the 1st, 2nd and 4th verse, given that the verses use the terms **صدرك** (your breast), **وزرك** (your burden), **ذكرك** (your name). The meaning remains clear without the addition of such pronounces due to the addition of the connected pronoun (indicated by the letter **ك** **ك**) at the end of this words: **صدرك** (your breast), **وزرك** (your heavy load), **ذكرك** (your name). What technical and linguistic point is this addition trying to convey?

Many possible answers have been given in the writings of the exegetes to show the reason behind this. We shall, however, only mention two which serve as the most important of what has been said:

¹⁰ Mughniyah, Muḥammad Jawād, *al-Kāshif*, volume 7, pg. 581.

There is a question which may enter the reader's mind and that is: why does the verse use the term (نشرح) in its plural form and not use the term (أشرح) which is in a singular form when it is supposed that the speaker is one and that is God?

There are answers that have been given and are well known that rely on the Arabic language, and that is, that the usage of the plural form in the Arabic language for exaltation is a common phenomenon so that the (ن) here is for exaltation, similar to the God saying:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

“Truly it is We Who have sent down the Reminder, and surely We are its preservers.” (15:9) and it is clear in this verse that the speaker is God, and there is no surprise in God exalting and praising Himself.¹³¹⁴

However, some exegetes proposed that the plural form used here refers to the fact that the process of expansion was not performed by God alone, but rather the angels or others contributed. Given this, there is no trouble in such usage¹⁵, and based on this, some contemporary thinkers in the field of Quranic studies lean towards the idea of transforming such an understanding into a general methodology to understand the plural forms used in the Quran and attributed to God. They claim that when plural forms are used, what is intended is not God alone, but encompasses Him and the directors of affairs (المديرات) which are the angels and other beings.

This view, however, can only be correct, if it accords with the general Quranic style and its incompatibility is quite clear. This is because the general Quranic message is one that emphasises God acting alone and with no others contributing to His acts, without this leading to the negating of the acts of others. The Quran is careful to not intimate that anyone is a partner with God in any action because such a notion can cause a great deal of confusion and because it is part of the general beliefs of the Arabs at the time that God wished to break. Our current topic is an example of this; we ought not to think that the Quranic style when intending to show the action of God towards his Prophet or someone else, is to show this by intimating that others joined God in this

¹³ *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, v. 32, pg. 3.

¹⁴ This is also present in other languages and is known as the ‘royal we’. According to Wikipedia, “the royal we, or majestic plural (*pluralis maiestatis*), is the use of a plural pronoun (or corresponding plural-inflected verb forms) to refer to a single person who is a monarch” or a person of high status. [TN]

¹⁵ *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, vol. 4, pg. 3.

action. When God wishes to convey such an action, the message being conveyed is that no one co-participates with God.

As such, given that the Arabic language permits usage of the plural form for exaltation, and God is deserving of such usage, we need not make such a supposition. A supposition such as this, places with God a partner, even if only as an immediate impression.

Moreover, even if we claim that such participation is a vertical one, the usage of the plural form without any hint to this can lead to the risk of falling into polytheism. This case is also different from cases where actions were directly attributed to others, like the act of death to the angels or revelation to them. In these cases, a clarification was made that the attribution to the angels was in a vertical relationship to the attribution to God. In our case, however, there is no such clarification, and thus this leads us to preponderate the interpretation that understood exaltation from the plural form. This does not mean that we deny that, in reality, things other than God act, in the form of vertical causation, to cause such effects, because our discussion is not about reality itself. Rather, our discussion is on how to speak of such a reality in a way that does not harm the concept of monotheism and how sensitive it is, especially during that period.

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢) الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣)

and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? (94:2-3)

This verse seeks to show the second favour, mentioned by God, bestowed upon the Prophet as one of the blessings granted to him. This favour is the lifting of the heavy load from the Prophet's back, and to clarify the meanings carried by this verse, we can pause to reflect on several points, the most important of which are:

1. The initial meanings carried by this verse

Lifting something and laying it down from one's back means to alleviate someone. The word وضع, when added to عن, gives the meaning of lifting, as opposed to وضع عليه which means to place something on someone. So one can say وضعت عنه which means I lifted something from him, which gives the meaning of alleviation and reduction. However, if it is added to على it gives the meaning of carrying something. So one may say: وضعت على ظهري meaning I carried over my back

something, and in such cases, it gives the meaning of an increased amount of enduring and hardship.

The verse demonstrates another favour bestowed upon the Prophet, as though wanting to say: ‘O Muḥammad, you have endured many burdens and huge responsibilities during the previous period, and it is as if your back groans from this, so we favoured you by reducing this load from you.’

2. The real meaning of al-wizr and the dispute surrounded this verse. Does this verse relate to the infallibility of the Prophet?

Based on what was said previously, we observe no real difficulty in understanding the verse. However, the problem of interpreting this verse began to steadily grow when the exegetes deliberated what the meaning of al-wizr is in the verse. As a result, many topics of philosophy and kalam entered into the works of exegesis, which caused this topic to increase in confusion and ambiguity. This was entirely unnecessary in the first place, as we will show later on.

I will present six views found in the works of scholars of exegesis regarding the meaning of the word al-wizr in this verse. We will see, following this presentation, the reason that caused them to hold such views. There existed no necessity or real need – in our humble opinion – to form such views as noted previously.

2.1 Al-wizr and heavy forms of worship

The first meaning given to explain this word is that it denotes forms of worship that are heavy and difficult which were ordained on the Prophet at the beginning of his prophethood, which God reduced thereafter. This idea was stated in some narrations regarding the number of raka’at of prayers; these were of a large quantity causing the Prophet to request from God their reduction and God accepted the request. This would be similar to what this verse mentioned:

وَبَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ

“...and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them...” (7:157).¹⁶

The meaning of the verse of al-Inshirāḥ would be that God, after ordaining certain rituals of worship, has now alleviated and reduced these commandments.¹⁷

What is noticeable, however, is that not a single piece of evidence is offered for this possibility, so how could the rituals of worship be offered as an exegesis for the heavy burden mentioned in this chapter, especially as the context differs entirely. The context is linked to a person withstanding great difficulties in calling others to God and as a result has suffered much pain, as other verses indicated, some of which we have mentioned and others we will mention subsequently.

It is possible that such an exegesis was an analysis offered by some early exegetes from the tābiʿīn, for this was common for some of them, and subsequently, later exegetes followed them in this regard. Such an interpretation, however, remains a mere possibility which requires something to preponderate it.

2.2 Al-wizr meaning a sin

The second meaning given for this word is a sin. The basis for those who chose such an interpretation was their claim that al-wizr in the language of Arabs means a sin and that the Quran had used it with such a meaning in several of its verses. These awzār (plural of wizr) are the sins people carry on the day of judgement, and so the verse *“and relieve you of your burden”* (94:2) will have a similar meaning to the opening verses of Sūrat al-Faḥ: *“Truly We have granted you a manifest victory that God may forgive your sins that went before and that which is to come”* (48:1-2).

إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُّبِينًا (١) لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ

“Truly We have granted you a manifest victory that God may forgive your sins that went before and that which is to come” (48:1-2).

¹⁶ An interpretation of this passage is that the Prophet relieves his follows of “some of the difficult and onerous commands and prohibitions in the Torah.” See Nasr, S.H., Dagli, C.K., Dakake, M.M., Lumbard, J.E. and Rustom, M., 2015. *The Study Quran. A new Translation and Commentary. New York*, p461.

¹⁷ *Al-Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, pg. 533.

It is as if the verse is saying: ‘O Muḥammad, after all the struggles and all the difficulties endured, we have rewarded you by reducing the sins you have committed.’

And what is noticeable about this particular interpretation is that the inclusion of the term “sin” into the fray of discussion gave rise to a long polemical theological debate about the infallibility of the noble prophet. The concept of infallibility was thus part of the discussion offered by exegetes surrounding this verse and the verse of Sūrat al-Faḥ previously mentioned. They claimed that such an interpretation is false, for it conflicts with the infallibility of the Prophet, given that if the heavy burden [wizr] that has been lifted is a major sin, then it means the Prophet has committed such a sin which almost broke his back as the Quran describes and such a view cannot be acceptable theologically.

We will comment on this possibility after presenting the subsequent interpretations of this verse that all revolve around this possibility in similar ways, and we will show then that interpreting al-wizr as being a sin is to confuse the intensional meaning of a concept with its extension.

2.3 Al-wizr meaning small sins which do not negate infallibility

The third interpretation is to posit that the meaning of al-wizr is the small sins which do not negate infallibility. Proponents of this view wished to improve on the previous view, by maintaining that al-wizr means a sin, whilst at the same time not conflicting with the theological viewpoint of infallibility. As such, they said that al-wizr means the small sins which can be considered as leaving that which is more important for that which is of less importance, termed in theology as ترك الأولي. What is intended is not sins that encompass the major and moderate sins, and via this interpretation, the linguistic denotation of the word is maintained, and we do not encounter any theological problems.

Perhaps someone may inquire as to how proponents of this view explain the succeeding verse which says: الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ “which [almost] broke your back” (94:3). For on this view, it means that it was the small sins which broke the back of the Prophet. Do these two meanings appear suitable together?

In response, proponents of this view claim that the issue of the broken back does not relate to the nature of the sins, which in this case, are sins of leaving that which is more important for something lesser, but rather it is because Prophets will burden themselves by intensely thinking about this small sins, which is akin to the famous statement that says: *حسنات الأولياء سيئات المقربين* (the good deeds of the righteous are the sins of people very close to God). This verse revealed to him that this burden has been lifted from him. Advocates of this view believed they managed to harmonise between the supposed linguistic denotation of the word *al-wizr* to mean a sin, and the theory of infallibility. A critique of this view shall be made later.

2.4 *Al-wizr*: Major sins and linguistic metaphors

The fourth view is that *al-wizr* denotes a major sin, but it is used in a metaphorical way. This view was proposed by some Mu‘tazalites and some Imamis also. They asserted that whilst *al-wizr* does indeed mean a major sin, the proven theological creed that Prophets do not commit major sins means we ought to reinterpret the verse in a metaphorical way, As such, what’s intended by the verse are the huge responsibilities and burdens placed upon on the Prophet.

As evidence for such metaphorical usage, they cited the subsequent verses,

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“For indeed, ease accompanies hardship. Indeed, ease accompanies hardship” (94:5-6), reasoning that a sin is not a hardship such that it can exist with ease. This serves as an indication that what was intended by the previous verse was carrying something which was extremely difficult to achieve, and subsequently a period of ease comes to lighten the burden.

Through this method, the exegetes managed to preserve the linguistic denotation of the term “*al-wizr*” which meant for them a major sin, whilst utilising a theological principle which declares that it is impossible for Prophets to commit major sins. Given these two factors, they were forced to adopt a metaphorical interpretation of the verse and say that *al-wizr* was used metaphorically to mean a heavy load which are not sins. Such a usage, according to them, is permitted given the

similarity between sins and a heavy load. The evidence for this interpretation is the subsequent verse which says

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“For indeed, ease accompanies hardship. Indeed, ease accompanies hardship” (94:5-6) for such a verse doesn’t accord well with the supposition that al-wizr is a sin. This rejected view would treat the verses as saying: ‘Muḥammad you have committed a sin and now we have reduced that sin, and indeed after hardship there is ease.’ Such a meaning does not appear coherent unless we propose that the meaning al-wizr is not its real meaning of sin, but rather a heavy load.

What we realise with this exegetical view is the usage of two principles to interpret the verse. The first principle comes from outside the laws of the text, from the science of theology; a principle which states that it is impossible for Prophets to commit major sins, whilst the second principle comes the general laws of language and relates to the laws of metaphors and the linguistic reasons to use it. As will be clear further on, using these two principles to investigate this verse is completely unnecessary.

2.5 The lifting of al-wizr means proving infallibility

The fifth view takes a position that is the exact opposite of the second, third and fourth view which is that this verse proves infallibility rather than posing a problem to it which requires solving. The reason is that the lifting of al-wizr means that he is protected from sins. It is as though the verse wishes to say: ‘O Muḥammad, we have protected you from sins and thus there is no burden of sins on your back, meaning you are infallible.’¹⁸

Undoubtedly, such an interpretation is in blatant conflict with the apparent meaning of the verse, which is the natural way to understand the Arabic used here. Nor does it accord with the context of the rest of the verses either. How are we to explain the past test of the declarative sentence in

¹⁸ *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fi al-Tafsīr*, Al-Andulūsī, Abū Ḥayyān, vol. 10, pg. 500.

the subsequent verse الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ “which [almost] broke your back” (94:3), if we do not attribute sins to the prophet, based on the claim that al-wizr means a sin?

2.6 al-Wizr which means any kind of load (the neutrality of the verse towards the topic of infallibility)

For us to understand this interpretation, we must refer to two important exegetical principles which are as follows:

1. The primacy of the early language of Arabic.
2. The principle of distinguishing between the linguistic sense of a term and its referent.

The sixth meaning proposed is that al-wizr means a load, without reference to the topic of infallibility, and proponents of this view believe that the correct method to understand the term al-wizr in the verse is to return to the language itself, not giving recourse to the meanings commonly thought by the religious mind. By returning to language books and how the Arabs used the term al-wizr, it's clear we do not need to utilise any theological principles to understand this verse. This will prevent the incorporation of theological disputes in matters of exegesis which subsequently affects the view of the exegete. The verse does not prove nor disprove infallibility, nor, in fact, does it refer to this topic at all. Rather, what is intended by al-wizr is a heavy load as the dictionaries indicate, and this is why a وزير (vizier) was named as such because he carries some of the responsibilities of the king and thus bears the responsibility for certain tasks and he is a carrier of these tasks.¹⁹

The reason some exegetes interpreted the term al-wizr as meaning a sin were certain Quranic usages of the word in this way, hence they supposed that al-wizr is a sin in the language of the Arabs. As a result, an association was formed between al-wizr and a sin in their minds, and every qur'anic verse which used this term was also interpreted in this way. However, this is an erroneous confusion between the sense (*mafhūm*) of a term and its referent (*miṣdāq*). When the Quran

¹⁹ *Al-'Ayn*, Al-Farāhidī, vol. 7, pg. 381.

applied the concept of al-wizr to a sin it did not intend to limit the concept of al-wizr solely to the referent of a sin, so that any we are to understand from al-wizr in the Quran a sin. Rather, al-wizr maintains its linguistic denotation which is a load, whilst a sin is one Quranic example of such a load. The evidence for this is the Quran itself has used al-wizr to mean something other than a sin, where the Quran states:

حَتَّى تَضَعَ الْحَرْبُ أَوْزَارَهَا

“Till the war lays down its burden” (47:4). If we suppose that al-wizr here means a sin, does war have sins for us to wait for them to be lifted? What this verse means is that the fighters who wear armour and carry swords and spears whilst fighting will take them off at the end of the war.²⁰

This is why we – and all researchers- ought to focus on the method of Ibn Fāris in his book *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lugha*, whereby we first return to the original meaning of a term and then we discover how the original meaning is used for multiple referents resulting in multiple meanings in usage but not in the original designation of the word. This does not mean that the use of a term for one of these referents is a proper usage whilst for other referents the use is metaphorical. Rather, it is a proper usage in all the cases, and its purpose is discovered by contextual indications, the subject matter and the reasons for it, which give the real meaning of the term the suitable nuance that accords with it.

This leads us to another matter which is critical in exegetical studies, and it is something that is widely applicable in Quranic studies; it is not proper for an exegete – especially if he is an Arab – to rely on the meanings that immediately come to the forefront of his mind, without further study, justifying this by being Arabic. Many meanings which do appear to one’s mind appear because of one’s repeated familiarity with them, whilst the true meaning of a term can be the precise opposite. Given this, a scholar must not be deceived with the meaning a term suggests to him in the first instance. He ought to return to discern the meaning to the language, its sources and how the term is derived and used, whilst also distinguishing in his analysis between the meaning of a word in its designation and its meaning in usage, and between the sense of a word and its referents.

²⁰ Ibn Fāris, Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad, *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lugha*, vol. 6, pg. 108.

Based on this, the correct view about the meaning of the term al-wizr in this verse is that the verse addresses Muḥammad wanting to say to him: 'O Muḥammad, you have withstood great burdens, difficulties, trials, tribulations and many responsibilities in this problematic path, and now the time has come to remove some of this heavy load that has been placed on your back by virtue of the blessings of Allah Who has granted you victory and comfort at the end.' There is, therefore, no need to include any theological discussions about infallibility in this topic and this is an error that advocates of the five views above fell into.

We thus come out with two exegetical principles which are:

The first principle: The primacy of the Arabic language in its early sources and to not be deceived by what comes to the mind of an exegete because he says he is an Arab or that he knows the language well. For there are many instances where one is surprised by the linguistic results he has arrived at that were previously absent to him due to the claim that he knows the language well. Language requires one to constantly revisit it.

The second principle: Distinguishing the linguistic meanings of a term as given to us by dictionaries and other sources, and thus the sense and concept of a term, from its referents, so that we do not consider the referent of a term to be its actual sense and treat other applications of the term as metaphorical. Details of these two principles would need to be explicated in another place.

An exegetical principle: The principle that the Quran is self-explicative and the impact that this principle has on rational and other sciences

In this regard, we must establish another exegetical principle which is necessary for a scholar to bear in mind whilst carrying out any exegetical work. This principle is that if we accept the premise – and not all do – that the Quran is بيان (exposition), مبین (clear), نور (light) and a تبيان (clarification), then necessarily the Quran should explicate its intentions by itself. More precisely, the Quran wouldn't encrypt its messages and transform itself into an obstacle in understanding it,

because such a notion conflicts with the Quran being an elucidation and a clear exposition. We have elsewhere shown that the term العربية (Arabic) used in the Quran, like:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا

“Truly We sent it down as an Arabic Quran” (12:2) does not refer to the Arabic language as opposed to other languages like Persian or English, but rather it refers to the capacity of expressing and explicating its content, meaning that this term is an adjective.²¹ It is said in Arabic that a person *أعرب عما في نفسه* to mean that he revealed and made clear what was inside him and it is for this reason that the Arabic language was called Arabic, because the Arabs saw that the language revealed what was inside them, whilst for them, foreign (عجم) languages did not because they could not understand it. This is why they called these languages *طنين*²² because these languages were musical sounds whose meanings could not be understood. ‘Ajam (foreign) languages were so-called because it could not be understood nor comprehended. Based on this meaning, the Persian language for a Persian is Arabic, and the English language is Arabic for an Englishman because the term Arabic is a descriptive term, not a proper name.

As such, the Quran has the ability to explicate itself. The descriptive term of al-‘Arabiyya used in the Quran can be added to other verses that indicate the expository nature of the Quran and we hope to further establish this topic in this series God willing.

Building on from what has been previously said, one must ascertain the intended meaning of the Quran based on the composition of the verses, and any evidence which is connected or disconnected from the text, be it in form of a speech or circumstantial evidence. One may raise a question as to if the latest philosophical, theological or scientific research can divert the clear meaning of the verse, assuming this new research contradicted the explicit meaning of a verse. Would such a theory and discovery, which came centuries after the Quran was revealed to the Prophet, be sufficient to divert the clear meaning of the Quranic verse to accord with the discovery?

²¹ For other verses using the Arabic Quran see 20:113; 39:28; 41:3, 42:7; 43:3.

²² A type of sound like the sound a bell makes. [TN]

Undoubtedly, research from theological, philosophical and natural sciences cannot act as evidence which diverts the certain and clear meaning of the verses, because such a matter fails to conform with the linguistic convention, nor is it sensible. When we suppose that the Quranic text is self-explicative and clear, it's not comprehensible that it speaks about a topic and makes the evidence that confirms or diverts it from its apparent meaning a matter which awaits the development of the philosophical, theological or natural sciences centuries after it to determine the meaning that it intends. The words of another person are not suitable to be evidence for what the first person intends based on the linguistic system of meanings.

The conclusion that we wish to arrive at is that research within theology, philosophy and the natural sciences cannot act as evidence for what the Quranic texts intend in such a way that it diverts the text from its apparent meanings. As for rational proofs - and we do not mean those which are self-evident or analytic truths – then these act as reasons for us to look for other indications to divert the meaning of the verse from its apparent meaning if it is supposed that the apparent meaning is in contradiction with rational proofs. I make this point to comment on the aforementioned scholars who brought forth an external theological principle related to the infallibility of the Prophet and that it is impossible for him to commit a sin. The rational proofs that such discussions brought forth are not suitable to act as evidence based on what we have said. Rather, they can act as indication that we ought to search within the verse or other verses to divert it from its apparent meaning and bring it in harmony with the philosophical and theological proofs, just as how the following verse:

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ

“Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision” (6:103), acts as evidence to deny the indication that some verses give which suggest Allah has a body or a place or can be seen.

3. Breaking one's back and the monumental responsibilities of calling to Truth

The subsequent verse – as we have seen – presents an important description of the magnitude of responsibilities that are carried by Prophets, awliyā' and those who work in the way of God. The

verse describes the responsibilities as back-breaking. النقص in the Arabic language meanings dissolution and untying, the opposite of which is to tie and make strong. This word when added to the back means that the bones of one's back, from the sheer weight being carried, begin to come apart and weaken, which is a metaphor to indicate a great load being carried. It can be said in the Arabic language that the roof of a house ينقضّ to means that it is falling apart and creaking which indicates that its foundations and stones are weakening, and this is the preliminary step to its subsequent crash and its inability to keep carrying the weight.²³

So, the phrase أنقض ظهرك is a great symbolic and metaphorical expression that the responsibilities were so heavy that his back almost broke as if a sound of creaking and cracking is heard. This demonstrates that his responsibilities were indeed extremely difficult and weighty and that he would expend all that he valued for his duties to be successful to the extent that his back could have come apart.

This is the best reminder to those who carry a message and wish to follow in the Prophet's steps that they ought to be prepared to carry very heavy duties in order for their message to spread, just like the Prophet, whose back began to come apart; they ought not suffice themselves with a few hours here and there that achieve very little. Of course, the extent of anyone's responsibility is according to his own capacity.

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤)

And Did We not exalt your name? (94:4)

1. Exalting a name: Between two methodologies to understand this verse

Before we mention the linguistic meaning of the term الذكر, we ought to note some of the difficulties that the exegetes faced in understanding terms like this across the Quran. There are two methodologies which we shall term the referential method and the conceptual method:

²³ *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, vol. 5, pg. 50. Al-Azharī, Abū Maṣṣūr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Tahdhīb al-Lughā*, vol. 8, pg. 344-345, Taḥqīq: al-Ustādh 'Abd al-Āthim Maḥmūd, al-Murāja: al-Ustādh Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār, al-Dār al-Miṣriyya lil-ta'lif wa al-tarjamah, matabi sijil al-'arab.

1.1 As for the referential method, its advocates attempted to deal with the term رفع الذكر by virtue of searching for external referents and states whereby the name of the Prophet is exalted:

1.1.1 Some said that the intended meaning of الذكر in this verse is the fact that bearing witness to prophecy accompanies the testimony that there is no God but God, in the call to prayer.. Perhaps such an idea was proposed because it was one of the first referents that came to mind when thinking about God exalting the Prophet's name, or because the call to prayer is an instrument to make something public which causes increased popularity.

1.1.2 Others said that the exalting of his name lies in the fact that obedience to the Prophet was linked to the obedience of God,²⁴ as in the verse:

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ

“Obey Allah and obey the messenger” (5:92).

This approach to exegesis, whereby terms are explained by external referents, was taken up by many books of exegesis, particularly the earlier ones. The exegete looks to explain a general term through the first instantiation that comes to his mind. Exegetes tied themselves up by looking for referents and limited the general meaning of a verse through a specific referent found to be most prominent. This is the crisis of focusing solely on the referents.

1.2 As for the conceptual approach, its advocates said that the meaning of رفع الذكر in this verse is the increase in popularity and prominence. The Prophet was exalted and known positively amongst people. As for examples of this, it could be in the fact that people entered

دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا

“Allah’s religion in throngs” (110:2), or that people came toward his message and felt impacted by it. It could also be the fact that the Quran became widespread, the call to prayer or the sending of prayers on the Prophet and his family. These can all be examples and manifestations exalting his

²⁴ *Tafsīr al-Kāshif*, 7:581 and many of the early works of exegesis make the same point.

name. There is no need, in so far as I am an exegete, to drown myself in these examples, causing myself to forget the key universal message that the verse is presenting. This message is saying something akin to this: 'Allah has greatly blessed and honoured you, Muḥammad, and exalted your repute amongst people after you were an unknown and neglected person whom no one was familiar with. As for now, tongues across many countries and times delight in your name.' Specific examples are detailed studies that an exegete does not need except on certain occasions whereby he needs to examine these examples in order to understand the extent of the general concept. This is not done, however, to limit the concept to a specific example, unless there is something in the verse, language, history or something else that necessitates that.

An exegetical principle – The primacy of the concept in exegesis

Here, we arrive at another exegetical principle which necessitates that the exegete does not limit the general concepts to a specific referent, thereby killing the universality and encompassing nature of the verse. Of course, one must have previously concluded the verse to have such a nature based on the structure of the text, its context and indicators. This is what many exegetes, like 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, have discussed, and they called it قاعدة الجري والانطباق and thus they freed the verse from being limited to a specific referent.²⁵ This approach, whilst giving importance to a referent in so far as it points to it, does not destroy the generality and encompassing nature of the verse. The verse thus bestows favour on a referent by encompassing it; it is not the case that the referent forces the verse to be limited to it unless specific evidence is provided that indicates the specificity of the verse to a particular referent.

2. Exalting of the name and the position one should have vis-à-vis fame and prominence

It is worth mentioning, whilst we are discussing this verse, the topic of fame given that some consider the issue of fame and popularity as something condemned which ought not to be sought after. This is part of the common ethical education; to be neglected is better for you – on a

²⁵ This principle states that whilst a verse may have been revealed in a specific time for a specific person or situation, its intended message or aim is not limited to that case but can be applied out in further cases that are similar. The principle translates to movement and application; the message of the verse moves beyond its case and is applicable in other cases. [TN]

spiritual level – then it is for you to be famous. This is a view that is espoused by many ethical scholars from different schools of thought.

This view, however, does not appear to me to be correct. The Quranic speech generally does not consider fame to be something undesirable and ugly. Rather, it considers it to be a positive attribute, something beautiful and blessed for a human. Being famous and well-considered is not pure evil as is commonly proposed in our religious education. They can be means by which the godly principles that a person believes in can be spread for undoubtedly, having a status amongst people will aid that objective. Moreover, it is possible that the fame mentioned in this verse is a kind of reward that Allah grants to a person who has withstood difficulties and problems for the sake of the message.

There is no doubt that it is undesired and ugly to seek fame for the love of this world and its adornments; the religious texts and ethicists have criticised such a venture. But if fame is used to enact good projects and to help and positively influence others then there is no problem with it. In fact, it could be a required matter, but man has to always be cautious of the dangers and pitfalls of such a position and it is a thin thread, between its positive outcomes and negative ones, and Satan is always present and waiting in such moments.

Fame, like wealth and intellect, and any other gift granted by Allah to a person, is a power that can be used for good and can be used for evil. In of itself, it is not evil and thus ought not to be feared nor should we ask to be neglected and secluded. Rather, what is necessary on a social level is to obtain wealth, knowledge, fame and a powerful body in order that we can use all those things to serve religion, the human, goodness and all the godly principles of the heavens. And as it is known, the stronger believer is better than the weak believer.

This is not merely a theoretical matter in the Quran. The Quran presented practical examples as evidence for this. In the case of Prophet Joseph, he says to the King of Egypt:

اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ

“Put me in charge of the country’s granaries. I am indeed fastidious [and] well-informed.” (12:55)

Nobody considered such an act to be blameworthy even though Prophet Joseph asked for a position of power which necessarily accompanies fame. This is because his intention was to solve the problem of starvation that Egypt was set to face, in addition to his plans for the return of his family and brothers as the events of the story reveal to us subsequently. Moreover, Prophet Solomon is another example in the Quran for he asks from his lord:

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَهَبْ لِي مَلْكَاً لَا يَتَّبِعِي لِأَحَدٍ مِّنْ بَعْدِي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

“My Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom that does not befit anyone except me.” (38:35)

Prophet Solomon’s request for kingdom over the jinn, mankind, animals, the winds, mountains and other things is not problematic as long as there are noble and legitimate goals behind such a request.

It is in this context that we ought to understand the narrations that condemned seeking authority. Either they mean to condemn it in specific cases or to condemn seeking authority for authority’s sake, such that it becomes the end and not the legitimate means to achieving goals. Or they mean that the obtainment of it may result in religious and ethical drawbacks.

Based on the aforementioned, fame is either a means or a goal. If it a means for noble intentions like serving religion and people, then undoubtedly it is a good thing. If, on the other hand, it is a means for evil and corruption, then undoubtedly, it is reprehensible. Outside of this division, there is nothing in the Quranic texts which indicate that fame is blameworthy or reprehensible. Perhaps it is for this reason that the majority of jurists did not regard as impermissible the seeking of fame and authority, which in of itself is permissible and does not necessitate something impermissible or reprehensible alongside it.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٦)

For indeed, ease accompanies hardship. Indeed, ease accompanies hardship (94:5-6)

These two verses set forth to maximise the state of hope, expectation and optimism that one has for the future, taking these ideas as its motto, which contrasts with hopelessness, despondency

and pessimism about the future. To shed more light on the exegesis of these two verses, we will attempt to answer some actual and hypothetical questions.

1. What does مع (to accompany) mean and what does ease accompanying hardship mean?

Many exegetes discussed the meaning of مع in these verses and they presented different possibilities, of which, we shall only mention three

The first possibility: It means that in a person's life, the state of hardship is not a permanent state. Rather, one's life is a mixture of hardship and ease. There are times where a human's life is full of pain, bitter experiences and pessimism, and there are times where it is full of happiness, pleasure and hope. Given this, a person must be cognizant that alongside any difficulty that he faces in his life, there are also other matters which are at ease for him. If he, for example, is in financial difficulty, he may be at ease in terms of his marital relations. If he has problems with his friends, he may be at ease in terms of his health etc. He ought not to view life as being only full of difficulties, problems and afflictions. Man ought to be balanced in their outlook towards life, on both a personal and societal level.

This interpretation of what accompany means in these verses is a possible one. It also accords with what it means to accompany in the same moment and timeframe as is the philosophical meaning. There is hardship in certain affairs and ease in certain other affairs in the same moment and timeframe. It is as if the verse wishes to say: 'All moments of life are a combination of ease and hardship and one ought to read it realistically to discover the laws that operate in life.'

The second possibility: Advocates of this view do not wish to look at life in its totality and then classify it as being a combination of hardship and ease as proposed by the first view. Rather, they wished to point out the necessity of overcoming the difficulties a person is experiencing through searching in one's life for causes of ease that exist. The causes of ease and solutions to the difficulties may rest in the very difficult reality that one faces, It is as if the verse is trying to declare that one ought not be troubled when faced by difficulties, and one must search for the solutions

that lie in the very problems and difficulties that one faces, and that this will lead to a final breakthrough.

Perhaps the overwhelming state experienced by most people, when faced by problems is that of pessimism. They fail to consider that a solution may be possible; a consideration that would help them feel optimistic. This kind of approach to life is precisely what these verses rejected. A person ought to search for the breakthroughs to be guided to ease. The meaning of the verse is that within every hardship are the very causes of ease and escape from the hardship itself.

Undoubtedly, these two possibilities can be considered principles by which to live our individual and social lives.

The third possibility: To accompany does not mean the precise philosophical meaning, but rather it means to follow and succession. Thus, after every hardship, one will find ease and after every darkness, light springs forth. This meaning accords with the context of the verse based on the explanation we gave for the previous verses. It is as if the verse is trying to say: 'O Muḥammad, you have withstood a great burden in the past which was the responsibility of the message and calling people to it. You were neglected, fought and attacked by everyone. Now the time of ease and hope has come. Indeed, ease accompanies hardship, and after every difficulty, there is a breakthrough.' This is what we intend when we say accompany here means to follow.

A researcher ought not to read the Arabic language strictly through a philosophical lens, reflected the technical meanings of those terms on the language and consequently, understanding "to accompany" in its philosophical sense. Arabs used this term when speaking about problems, difficulties and darkness that are followed by solutions and light. The law of life is based on the fact that after every difficulty there is a solution, after every sunset is sunrise and after every darkness there is light. This is a historical and social law. The duration of difficulty is short, and it will end, and one must always expect the ease which follows it, but of course, this necessitates patience and fortitude.

This third possibility is considered to be the most likely by most exegetes. Based on this interpretation, the meaning of the verses will be akin to another verse where it says:

سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا

“Allah will bring ease after hardship.” (65:7) What is understood commonly of the verses of al-Inshirāḥ is the third possibility.²⁶ There is no issue with this verse encompassing both the first and third explanation, but we think that the second possibility is far from the apparent meaning of the verse.

2. Is ease following hardship a special or general law?

After the supposition that ease following hardship is a law of this life, a psychological principle and a historical, social law, another question arises: Is this law specific to the prophetic life or is it a general law that encompasses all humans regardless of whether they have divine or human projects? In other words, was the verse directed to give a causal explanation for a trans-historic law that governs humans generally or was it specific to religious affairs and the Prophetic experience, thus describing a particular event or something akin to a particular?

It would be possible for someone to argue that the law of ease following hardship is a special law that is specific to the Prophet and to whomsoever has similar prophetic aims for the following reasons:

Firstly: Based on the prefixed conjunction *fā'* (فاء التفریع)²⁷ which came at the start of verse five, which indicates that the ease which came was specifically for the Prophet after the hardship he faced. After Allah expanded his breast, raised his remembrance and removed the burden from his back, ease came after the hardship. So, the ease which came to him succeeded the hardship he faced.

²⁶ What I have termed common understanding is the translation of عرف (*urf*) which refers to the apparent and commonplace understanding that a standard user of the language will glean when hearing a sentence. [TN]

²⁷ The prefix *Fā'* when it conjoins onto different words can have different meanings. This type of *fa* shows that the second clause is the result of the first clause. In this context it would mean that given God gave the Prophet many blessings and the result was that hardship followed ease. [TN]

Secondly: The *Alif and Lām* (ال) in the word عهدية is العسر عهدية (الف لام عهدية);²⁸ so it is the specific hardship that the Prophet faced which was eased by the expansion of the Prophet's breast, the lifting of his name and extinguished by removing the burden from him. All these matters are specific to the Prophet.

To summarise, advocates of this view consider the meaning of the verses to be: 'O Muḥammad, after all the hardships you faced, your problems were eased. Did you see how this happened after all that you encountered?' As such, the verse, according to them, carries no absoluteness that can be applied to all aspects of life and if we wish to apply it, this application must be in cases very similar to the Prophetic experience.

However, there are others who consider the law that ease follows hardship to be a general law of history and society important in governing a human's life. It can act as a pedagogical and inspirational reference for humans. Their reasons are as follows:

Firstly: The Prophetic experience mentioned in this chapter is nothing but an application of this universal human law, and the ease that the Prophet experienced is an instantiation of the law that ease follows hardship. Of course, the Prophet is an extremely clear instance of this general law. The law mentioned in this verse encompasses all individual and social cases. After every personal or social hardship, there is ease. The prefix *fā* was used to link what happened to the Prophet to a general law of life. It's as though the verse is saying what happened to you²⁹ is because after hardship there is ease. The prefix *fā* is thus not to show what the outcome was (hence not فاء التفریع) but rather it is to show the cause of the previous clause, and this is the apparent meaning of the verse.³⁰

²⁸ *Alif and Lām* (ال) in the Arabic language attaches onto a noun to make it definite, thus it functions similarly to "the" in the English language as a definite article. However, in Arabic, this definite article has various types and the Alif and Lām can mean different things when conjoined to a noun in different contexts. Alif and Lām 'Ahdīyya, mentioned above, is a definite article which refers to a thing that is known in the mind of the speaker and the listener without necessarily being specified previously, though it can be. For example, if I say to my friend, "I saw the teacher", though I don't mention the precise details of the teacher, there is an implicit understanding as to whom I'm referring to. [TN]

²⁹ Namely, the things mentioned in the verses preceding this one. [TN]

³⁰ This is فاء التعليل which states that what comes after it is the cause of what preceded it. [TN]

Secondly: The repetition that follows it in the sixth verse is perhaps to support the idea that this is a general principle and not a personal one. Repetition using the same words seeks to establish an independent matter, and this doesn't support the idea that the previous verse refers to a personal matter applicable only to the Prophet. The repetition emphasizes the generality of the previous verse.

Thirdly: The apparent meaning of ال in the word اليسر is to refer to the genus of hardship, rather than to a specifically known hardship. In other words, hardship, in general, is followed by ease regardless of the person experiencing it.³¹

Based on this we can summarise as follows: The context of these two verses show that hardship follows ease and that this is a historical and social law in the life of man, who faces constant difficulties. This was also the case with the Prophet Muḥammad, who is one of the clearest examples for this principle. One must not give up when faced with hardships but rather, one must stand up and face them

What's the secret behind the repetition in these two verses?

After the Quran declared in the 5th verse:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

"For indeed, ease accompanies hardship" (94:5), we see that the Quran repeats it a second time in the subsequent verse, though this time omitting the prefix *fā* that preceded *inna*. What is the reason behind this and couldn't the first time have sufficed?

Exegetes have been divided in their understanding of the secret behind this repetition:

a) A group of exegetes held the view that there is no repetition of meaning between the two verses, even though the same terms are used. Therefore, "*indeed, ease accompanies hardship*" in the sixth verse does not seek to emphasize the fifth verse, "*For indeed, ease accompanies hardship*". Rather, the latter verse seeks to add a different and new topic element that the fifth one didn't

³¹ This is known as ال الجنسية. [TN]

mention. This is akin to the *basmalah* at the start of the chapters of the Quran. Advocates of this view believe that the *basmalah* at the start of Sūrat al-Baqara will indicate a different meaning to the *basmalah* at the start of any other surah. This is because each *basmalah* is part of a distinct composition that is exclusive to each chapter. Such a view is of course very different from what is commonly believed.

To explain the difference in meaning between the two verses, despite the similarity in terms, they note that العسر (the hardship) in the two verses is singular and definite, whilst يسر (ease) is singular and indefinite and based on this they said: If Arabs mention a name in the definite form and they repeat that name, this repetition serves to emphasize. However, if they mention a name in the indefinite form and then the name is repeated, it is not the same thing being referred to, and this repetition must indicate something new. The nunation (تنوين) at the end of both words is a type of nunation which shows different kinds (تنوين التنويع) which indicates their difference. This demonstrates that the two are different in contrast to العسر (the hardship) which is singular and known. Furthermore, they used a narration as evidence for this idea. The narration states that: مع كل عسر يسران "Accompanying every hardship is two eases" and that two eases overcome the single difficulty.

There remained a dispute, among advocates of this view, over the reality of the two types of eases in these verses:

Some said that these two eases are worldly matters which accompany the worldly difficulty.

Others said that one ease is worldly, whereas the other pertains to the afterlife; with every hardship a person faces, he finds ease in this world and ease in the afterlife. Analysis proceeded by trying to determine exactly what is the referent for these two eases.

b) In contrast to the first view, this group considered it unnecessary to go to these difficult lengths. Rather, repetition for emphasis amongst Arabs is something acceptable. As such, the second verse wished to emphasize the law that ease accompanies hardship. A person who faces a hardship must not cease thinking overcome by despondency and overwhelmed by anxiety, because the Lord will place an ease to accompany this hardship. The nunation (تنوين) in these two verses is thus for magnification (تفخيم) which is added to make a word indefinite so that it is not limited to

any particular scope. This matter forces one's imagination and mind to picture it as something extremely big, which also occurred within the first view. This makes the emphasis far stronger and stresses the grandeur of this law.

The Quran is full of examples of such kind of emphasis. An instance of this is the 6th verse of Sūrat al-Maida, which talks about tayammum:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُم مِّنَ الْغَايِطِ أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا
بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَأُيُوسُكُمْ مِنْهُ

But if you are sick, or on a journey, or any of you has come from the toilet, or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then make tayammum with clean ground and wipe a part of your faces and your hands with it.” (5:6) The same verse has come in the 43rd verse of Sūrat al-Nisaa', except omitting the word منه (with it) from the end: *“But if you are sick or on a journey, or any of you has come from the toilet, or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then make your ablution on clean ground and wipe a part of your faces and your hands.”* (4:43) It is not possible to interpret this repetition as containing a new point as there is no evidence for such a claim.

There is a view amongst some exegetes that repetition is useless and futile. They went as far as to say that such futility is impossible for a wise being such as God, even if the words are completely identical. If the meaning was completed in the first text, what need would the second text be trying to fulfil? This is what caused some contemporary exegetes to refuse the idea of repetition for the purposes of emphasis like in these verses and other verses in the Quran. As such, *“indeed, with hardship comes ease”* in the sixth verse must give a different meaning to the fifth verse *“for indeed, with hardship comes ease”*. This way, the Quran is placed – according to them – in its lofty position and we do not attribute pointless repetition to God.

To answer this attempt at understanding the topic, we must refer to an important point which is integral in understanding the book of God. This point revolves around the division between moral training and education in the religious texts generally and more specifically, in the Quranic text. This is also the division between the intellect and the spirit, and knowledge and praxis.

A Principle of Exegesis: Is the Quran a book of information or does it have another identity?

There is a question raised in the Quranic sciences, and the answer to it is a starting point that will distinguish the exegetical methodology that a scholar chooses. This question is whether the Quran is only a book of information or a book of moral training and guidance also?

To clarify the first part of the question, let's give an example. Suppose you visited a jurist to ask them for a ruling on a jurisprudential matter that concerns you, as you were unsure whether it was permissible or not. A jurist, in so far as he is a jurist, doesn't have a responsibility beyond answering you with a yes or no based on his expert opinion on the matter. The jurist will not usually involve himself in the development of the person and his moral training in order that the person stays away from what is impermissible. Similarly, a mathematician who presents mathematical theories will explain his ideas so that others understand it but is not concerned with anything more than that.

As for the second part of the question, let's also give an example. Suppose you visited a psychiatrist and complained to them of a problem you are suffering from. The psychiatrist will not just suffice themselves with writing a prescription to help cure you. Rather, they will sit you down and have a discussion with you that seeks not to give you information per se, but in order that the very discussion itself acts as a positive help for your situation and improves your psychological state.

After these two examples, let us present the question once again: Does the Quran play the same role as a jurist, philosopher, physicist or chemist in presenting ideas purely without thinking about a mechanism of ingraining them ideologically within the person's mind and self thereby acting as a channel for knowledge that doesn't have a responsibility beyond delivering information to the other person, or is the Quran – in addition to being a channel for knowledge – a book of moral and spiritual training that seeks to convince its listeners of the ideas it presents, and furthermore seeks through various means to develop a person and deepen their ideas, removing unclarity from them, and thus through itself acting as a cause for human reform and to emphasize ideas that they may have previously known?

Undoubtedly, the second option is the correct one. If the Quran was merely a book of information, what was the need to bring it down in such disparate stages? It would have been possible for Allah to give it all at once to His Prophet and the Prophet can subsequently explain this divine

information, whilst comparing all its verses, without the need for to bring it down in divided stages.

The Quran, however, plays an important role in building and reforming the Islamic society. One is mistaken if he expects answers akin to the jurists and scientists or considers it similar to a book which presents scientific theories in a dry mechanical style. The Quran, in addition to being a book with information, is a book of moral guidance and spiritual refinement, through its style, mode of presentation and its artistic way. It can be compared to a tragic story – even if fictional – which you read or watch as a film which forces you to cry and be affected. The Quran aims through its eloquence, the arrangement of its words, its musical effect and its psychological impact to affect its listeners and to enter deeply inside their hearts, not merely to present them with some information. It is thus akin to an ethical scholar who seeks not to merely to place information in the mind of his students, but rather act as a moral guide and exemplar for the information he has given them. If we restricted the role of an ethical scholar to just giving ethical information, the value of such scholars would be diminished.

Based on this, what would be the problem with repeating Quranic stories³² or other concepts, if this repetition represents a way to emphasize the moral training present in the Quran and if this repetition increases the importance of these concepts in the mind and soul of the listener? This is akin to you repeating a concept dozens of times in front of your children. Your purpose is not merely that they know the concept; this is achieved with you mentioning it once, but that the concept is emphasized in their minds and so that they consider it a priority. This way, they can act accordingly. This is one of the main differences between books of information and books of moral training, especially those which use various rhetorical means and tools of influence like the Quran.

Perhaps for this and other reasons, many narrations state that when a believer reads the Quran, he makes himself sad through it and he lives a state of fear, hope and is impacted spiritually and emotionally. This is because the Quran is not merely a book of information that has no ability to ability to impact through its content and style. It's a book of knowledge that uses all the means of influence that purposeful and upright media would use.

³² The methodology of considering the Quran a book of information led some contemporary thinkers, after seeing the repetition of the story of Moses – to say that that Moses in the Quran is not one person!

There is, therefore, no issue in the hypothesis that the sixth verse, “*indeed, ease comes with hardship*” wanted to repeat the message of the previous verse to impact upon the listeners and to make further ingrain this principle within their souls. As we have stated, this is because the Quran is not merely a book of information, but it carries an aspect of moral training through its style, repetition and eloquence. This is what we call the “principle of combining knowledge and moral training in the Quran.” Considering this, repetition is not something futile that we should avoid ascribing God, but it is, in fact, a very wise act for a moral trainer, reformer and guide for the souls.

Moreover, in the Arabic language – as well as other languages – emphasis is not seen as something futile. The exact opposite is the case. Rational and wise people, when they want to stress an idea so that it has an impact on other people’s lives, will emphasize the idea even if using the same words and images.

The law of ease after hardship and exceptions to the rule

We mentioned previously that the law of ease after hardship is a general law of life applicable across different times and circumstances. Naturally, an objection will arise as to why we observe many cases which undermines this principle. Many hardships are not followed by any ease. Many civilisations, nations, societies and movements ended in hardship that was not followed by any ease. This kind of objection could be raised against the verse given that the verse indicates the principle is true universally in all times and situations and hence there is a weakness in the Quran, especially if we believe – as many scholars do – that the *Alif and Lām* (ال) of the word العسر (hardship) refers to the genus of hardship.

To deepen this objection, some expand it to other universal statements which are abundantly present in the Quran. For example, the 34th verse of Sūrat Luqmān says:

وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ

“No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die.” (31:34) Such a verse dictates that no person will know what they will earn the next day, nor will they know the time of their death. However, many traders, for example, know with certainty how much they will earn. Alongside that, a suicide bomber who has his hand on the explosive button will know about

the time of his death also. In light of such objections, how can we maintain that the verse is universal and unlimited? Does the text not conflict with reality?

It's obvious that such a topic could be addressed from different angles. We will only focus on one angle which can act as a principle that benefits us greatly in dissolving certain objections that are raised against religious texts.

Dealing with the religious texts with a mindset that thinks solely in terms of logic, like for example, that of the four relations³³ and making it the final standard for understanding the text is a mistake that will result in many problems for a scholar. The lens by which we look at the texts must not only be the logical Greek lens that transforms the text into a rigid formula-like structure. This is because the moment we have one undermining case to a universal, we will consider such a universal to be invalid, based on the logic we have studied which tells us that a predicate must be predicated of a subject all the time and any time it is not, the universal proposition is false.

Such thinking extends not only to philosophy and the rational sciences but encompasses the natural sciences too, whereby many of its matters operate in such a specified way. We ought not to deal with the Quran using these logical fences, such that one exception to a general description results in the negation of such a description even if it is true of most cases.

When the Quran states that ease always follows hardship, this principle is not undermined by finding one exception to it. We ought not to deal with it as we deal with a proposition in Aristotelian logic, whereby one exception is enough to undermine a universal. This is because language often speaks in a universal and unrestricted way whilst intending most cases and sees no harm when there is an exception or two. This is because it was already aware of such exceptions and that these caused no harm to the meaning intended.

To help clarify this idea with a practical example, let's observe the proverbs widely shared by nations which some may call the "Quran of the people"³⁴, whereby they are applicable in a

³³ These are logical notions studying in tradition logic books studied in the seminaries. The four relations (النسب الأربعة) are the relations that two concepts can have with respect to each other. These are that of equivalence, non-equivalence, more general and more particular without exception, and more general and more specific from a perspective. [TN]

³⁴ This name came because such proverbs contain an exceptional amount of wisdom and are abundant in meaning, accumulated from a huge amount of experiences in the social, political, economic, family and wellbeing realms.

considerable amount of cases and these proverbs cannot be considered invalidated by the presence of a few exceptions. These very proverbs, from the outset, were not intended in the same Aristotelian sense, whereby its inapplicability to a few cases in certain times renders it false or illogical. Nations which gave these proverbs undoubtedly did not intend universality in the Aristotelian sense, but rather the majority of cases, without feeling any contradiction when an exception appeared. This is thus a natural way of speaking regardless of the language being used, where it is Arabic, French, Turkish, English etc.

The same can be said of the verse in discussion. When the Quran notes the importance of being optimistic when facing difficulties, because ease will undoubtedly follow, it does not wish to present it as something eternal for all times and circumstances. It is fully cognizant that there will be some exceptions that do not undermine this principle. Because we are bound to thinking in logical terms, distant from the rules of language and dialogue, that we deal with religious texts in a way that is distant from the truth of the matter.

As such, it is enough to justify the Quranic principle carried in this verse by noting that generally, it is the case that ease follows hardship. Similarly, the verse which states, "*and no soul knows in what land it will die,*" (31:34) is not attempting to show a scientific law, like a law of physics or chemistry, such that we consider it invalid if there is one exception to it. Rather, it intends to show the weakness of man's knowledge in comparison to God's knowledge. It is thus contrasting man's knowledge with the unlimited knowledge and power of God. The presence of a few exceptions does not harm the idea that the verse carries. The language of religious texts – and the Quran is the clearest example – is an 'urfī (عرفي) language.³⁵ This is especially the case in the Arabic language, which uses universal languages, in many cases, to mean the majority of cases to achieve certain ends. It also uses universal discourse to mean an affirmative universal proposition or a negative universal proposition, especially if there are indications that this is what is intended.

To summarise, the absoluteness of the verse can be maintained without the need to interpret the verse as meaning ease which comes in the afterlife. The verse intends to show what occurs most of the time in the life of humans. The hardship that humans face – whether individually or in a

³⁵ See footnote 21. [TN]

society – is followed usually by ease. A human ought to be optimistic due to this principle which has exceptions like all other laws of life do.

The message this verse wants to send is one of hope and optimism. Its purpose is to give hope and willpower to those who strive in the way of God, in order that they withstand the difficulties in this burdensome path so that they reach the expected ease. We ought to distinguish between the language of the Quran which we must return to its Arabic and ‘urfi place, and the language of science and its specifics, which Muslims became acquainted with subsequently, regardless whether it was the science of philosophy or jurisprudence and its principles or other sciences.

Indeed, reading the Quran through this Arabic and ‘urfi lens will open for us a very wide path to disentangle many of the objections that are raised against the Quranic text, objections which are often a result of a Greek, Aristotelian lens in understanding the Quran. This lens, whilst being helpful in comprehending the text, is not the sole key to understanding it.

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ (٧) وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ (٨)

So when you are finished, exert yourself and turn eagerly to your Lord.” (94:1-8)

1. The role of the prefix fā (ف) at the beginning of the verse and connecting the parts of this chapter

There was a dispute between exegetes as to whether the ف at the beginning of the verse is استئنافية meaning that what follows the letter ف is not linked grammatically to what came prior to the ف. This is in contrast to it being conjunctive (عاطفة) where it follows on from what came previously. The first option is unlikely given how the Arabic language normally operates. This is because this chapter is part of a unified context whereby the first part of the chapter is linked to the last part of the chapter and the latter is built on the former. As such, it is much more likely to be conjunctive and it means: ‘Given that it is certain that ease follows hardship, you, O Messenger of God, must not stop in this path and in your efforts, and you must fulfil another duty after fulfilling this one. Your new efforts and exertions will grant you new ease and comfort also based on this law.’ This explanation makes the last part of the chapter accord with the first part. The first explanation is

not possible given how short the chapter is and how the language operates and hence, what we mentioned appears to be more suitable.

2. What is the meaning of **فَرَّغْتَ** (being free) and **فَانْصَبْ** (exert) in these verses?

It can be said that these verses are possibly part of what is called *Jawāmi' al-Kalim*, speech which is very concise yet carries an abundance of meaning. It is akin proverbs that are shared by civilisations. Whilst being very small, it carries a great amount of meaning and this is the secret as to why many listeners of the Quran are amazed, especially as the verse appears to be giving a general message.

We must first analyse what the exegetes have said about these two terms and subsequently choose the interpretation we consider to be most likely. There have been over ten possible meanings given and this, of course, is to be expected given what we previously mentioned about their methods in attempting to determine the referent of a concept without determining its sense. They are as follows:

1.1 Being finished with divine obligations and exerting himself for worship

Some scholars considered that **فَرَّغْتَ** (being finished/being free) related to the divine obligations and the big responsibilities that the Prophet had carried up to this point. Now that he had completed these tasks optimally and Islam had spread and the Muslims were victorious in Mecca and other regions, he must exert himself in worship and prayer.

This view faces an objection insofar as the prophecy is the final and universal one. The objection would be that such a view makes it seem that the Prophet's job extends only to the Arabian world and that as soon as he completes this task, he ought to now exert himself for prayer and worship. This makes it appear as though his prophecy does not extend beyond this geographical location. Such a view cannot be accepted considering the general beliefs in Islamic thought.

1.2 Being finished with the prophecy and exerting himself to ask for intercession

Some exegetes believed that this verse asks the Prophet, once he completed his prophetic responsibilities, to exert himself in asking for intercession. We don't know the reason used to

determine that it was intercession that the Prophet was asked to exert himself in seeking once he was done with the responsibility of prophecy. This appears to be another example of confusing the concept with its referents. Moreover, it faces the same objection faced in the first view mentioned previously.

1.3 Being finished with obligatory duties and exerting himself for the supererogatory

Proponents of this view go further in their attempt to specify the referent of these concepts. This time, it's a jurisprudential view which states that what the verse intends by being finished is being finished with the obligatory prayers and the required exertion is in the supererogatory prayers which follow from it; the Prophet is required to strive hard in this matter.

We mentioned in the beginning that we will forego mentioning some critiques so that we get accustomed to a certain way of understanding the Quran, a way in which its methods come from within the Quran itself. Some of these views may be based on a narration but we treat these kinds of narrations as examples of the aforementioned principle Qā'ida al-Jarī wa al-Intibāq (قاعدة الجري (والانطباق) and that these narrations do not explain the verse so much as they attempt to give a referent to a general concept offered by the verse. Our discussion is thus based on whether being finished with the obligatory is something that can be obtained from the text itself. We accept that this explanation could be an application offered by some authentic narrations but that this, as an exegetical explanation, is not something supported by the different parts of the chapter as we shall see.

1.4 Being finished with prayer and exerting himself for supplication

Proponents of this view chose an explanation of this verse that stated that when the Prophet is finished with the prayers, he ought to exert himself for the supplication that follows the prayer. Thus, the verse becomes a champion for the supplications that are usually mentioned in the books of jurisprudence. This exegesis also offers no support to make it likely. Even if some authentic narrations mention it, it's an example of mentioning a referent of the verse.

1.5 Being finished with jihad and exerting himself for worship

This view considers the verse to mean that once you, the Prophet, are finished with jihad and fighting the enemies, you ought to exert yourself for worship. This view is similar to the first view in saying that the responsibilities of the Prophet extended only to Arabia and that he had no other responsibilities with regards to the Roman or Persian empires or other countries. There is also no proof to make such a view certain, even if this view appears to be better than the others in terms of its proximity to the general meaning of the verse.

1.6 Being finished with the smaller jihād and exerting himself for the greater jihād

Some exegetes, who were Sufi-inclined, attempted to explain this verse in an ethical manner. They said that what being finished with related to was war, which is the smaller jihad, and what he had to exert himself with is the jihād of the soul, which is the greater jihād. The response to this view is similar to the general response given to the other views, which is that one ought not to limit the meaning of a verse to a specific referent when the context of the verse doesn't assist in that regard. We shall see what meaning the context of this verse gives us.

1.7 Being finished with worldly affairs and exerting himself for the otherworldly affairs

Some exegetes attempted to give a different meaning to this verse compared to the previous attempts. Instead of delving into specific referents, they attempted to give a general principle gleaned from this verse, which says that once you are done with your worldly affairs, you must prepare for the afterlife. It's not clear, however, how they arrived at this.

It's obvious that the Quranic logic contradicts this kind of interpretation and it's also in conflict with how most religious people think, given that otherworldly affairs are given priority over the affairs of this world. A famous saying states: "Do not say to your prayers that you have work, rather say to your work that you have prayer." This interpretation, however, gives priority to worldly affairs. The only way out of this would be to suppose that the exegete meant something different to the apparent meaning of his claim, akin to being finished with fighting the enemies and now needing to fight one's own soul.

1.8 Being finished with his responsibilities and exerting himself to inaugurate Ali as his vicegerent

In some works of exegesis, the meaning given to this verse was that: ‘O Prophet of God, once you are finished with your responsibilities and duties, exert yourself in placing ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib for the position of Imamate.’³⁶

This exegesis raised several linguistic objections, some coming from theological discussions. If it is claimed that what is meant by فانصب is to inaugurate Imam ‘Alī and it is decided that there is no difference between فانصب whether it has a fatḥa or kasra on the ص, then it would be possible for a Nasibi³⁷ – as Zamakhsarī says – to interpret this verse in such a way: “If you are finished with your duties then establish enmity towards to Ahl al-Bayt.”³⁸

Some Shi’i scholars contended that the term فانصب has one meaning regardless if it was with a fatḥa or kasra. But such a view was not accepted by most exegetes and scholars of language, who said that فانصب (with a fatḥa) differs from فانصب (with a kasra). The former comes from the root النَّصَب which means exertion and tiredness, whilst the meaning of the latter comes from النَّصْب meaning establishing and placing, though it is possible that the original meaning of the word is the second.³⁹

1.9 Being finished with the call to Islam which necessitates exertion to worship and thank Allah

Some scholars said that the meaning of the verse is that being done with the call to religion necessitates that the Prophet exerts himself in worship towards Allah. This interpretation, and some of the previous ones are probably the most common ones in the Islamic literature across the different schools of thought. What is noticeable is that most sufficed themselves with placing what they believed to be a synonymous word with فانصب and فرغت. The exegete thus felt they could complete what was a very short sentence which required some further considerations. As such, the attempts of the exegetes were to hypothesise what these further considerations were and most of these attempts were influenced by the intellectual, and perhaps sectarian, spheres that guided

³⁶ Al-Qummī, ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, pg. 428.

³⁷ This is a term given for one who has enmity and hatred for the Prophet’s family. [TN]

³⁸ There is some degree of unclarity in this text. What Zamakhsarī says is that if the Shia claim that it فانصب is read with a kasra, meaning to establish, and hence interpret it as establishing Imam ‘Alī as the successor, the Nasibi is also entitled to read it with a kasra and interpret it as establishing enmity towards Ali. [TN]

³⁹ Al-Jawāhirī, *al-Sihāh*, vol. 1, pg. 224 and Ibn Fāris, *Mu’jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, vol. 5, pg. 424.

the exegete, which resulted in the attempts that we have seen. Thus, the problem was not giving an explanation to these two terms only, namely **فرغت** and **فانصب**, but rather the problem revolved around determining precisely what these two terms related to.

2.10 Being finished with duties and preparing for others – The general meaning of these verses

If we wish to attempt an exegesis with regards to these verses, we can say the following: The lack of mention of what these two terms relate to specifically indicates the generality of the speech. Any attempt to limit this generality would have to rely on the context. In Arabic, **فراغ** (root of **فرغت**) means something is empty or being emptied of, and perhaps the root relates to a cup being emptied. In Arabic it is said: **فرغ الرجل من شيء**: 'a man is free from something', similar to how a cup is emptied of its contents. As such, it is as though the Prophet had something from which he was subsequently free. He thus had some freedom in his affairs. When we place this meaning in the general context that it came in, we understand that it is as though the Prophet had grave responsibilities which were placed on his shoulders. The time had come to relieve the Prophet from these duties which were numerous and varied. This relieving also came with the expanding of the breast and lifting of the burdens. An exegete does not need to specify a precise referent for these responsibilities given that the verse doesn't.

The verse thus wants to say: 'O Muḥammad, given that you are finished, through our blessings, with these duties which were burdensome upon you, given that you achieved your aims, you must exert yourself with new duties that will tire you, so that the procession of life continues.' Hardship will follow after ease and after being patient, a subsequent ease to follow from hardship. As such, there is no retirement from one's general Islamic duties. This is why we see nothing mentioned after the word **فانصب**; this gives the verse a general meaning and thus it can apply to most of the aforementioned interpretations like the first, second, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth if we overlook some of the specific problems that they may carry.

2. Al-Nasb between the meanings of establishment and exertion

One can mention two possibilities for the meaning of the term **النصب**:

The first possibility: The meaning of *فانصّب* is the original meaning of the word which means exertion, so the verse would mean that once you have finished with your responsibilities exert yourself and strive hard. Not specifying what he has to exert himself in indicates clearly that it is intended to be a general matter. The aim is to invalidate the notion of being idle in one's religious obligations. There is no retirement age for the one who works in the way of Allah and calls to the religion. As such, if one finishes with a certain duty, he must occupy himself with another responsibility within the same purpose. If one faces difficulties in this dangerous path, he must know that the general rule of this life of ease following hardship will accompany him and it will grant him hope for a brighter future, akin to how God has lifted difficulties from him in the past.

The verse is thus internally coordinated, giving a unified meaning, especially if one notices the *conditional if* (فإذا) that precedes being finished (فرغت) and the *conjunctive fa* (ف) which precedes *انصّب*. Exertion being conditional upon being free indicates their relationship. There is continuous work to be done and this is the nature of working for the sake of God.

This possibility grants a good meaning and establishes a general principle whereby we need not delve into the specifics of what being finished, and exertion relates to. It is possible that it relates to being finished with war and exerting oneself with worship, or from the smaller jihad to the greater jihad, or from the obligatory prayers to the supererogatory to other aforementioned possibilities. All these meanings are possible considering this explanation without the need to limit ourselves to a specific one.

The second possibility: The meaning behind the term *فانصّب* comes from *النصب* which means to establish something and raise it, similar to how one places a flag or a rock for example. And as previously mentioned, some linguists took this to be the root meaning behind this term. Based on this possibility, we can formulate the meaning of the verse in two ways.

1. The first way is very similar to the first possibility. The meaning would be that if you are finished with your current affairs, establish for yourself new responsibilities.
2. The second way is similar to the eighth possibility mentioned above, which we mentioned Zamakhsrī's objection to. The meaning would be that if you are finished with your responsibilities, establish someone in your place to continue this path.

In summary, we are faced with two possibilities for the meaning of this term. Undoubtedly, the second possibility would require a lot of linguistic work, and here is not the place of it. The first possibility appears to be the most likely explanation. The verse thus appears to establish a brilliant principle with regards to one's Islamic work which is that there is no retirement and no end-point. A person working in the way of God ought not to put an end to his efforts, regardless of the nature of these efforts, as long as these efforts fall under the noble principles of the religion. Moreover, those who are in their old age must not live off and cling to what they achieved in their youth, regardless if they are individuals, political parties, countries or societies. This verse gives us a general picture of what the Islamic principle that we ought to strive for is.

Some exegetes considered it possible that *فانصب* was explained by the subsequent verse, which says: *وإلى ربك فارغب*: “and turn eagerly to your Lord” (94:8). The meaning would be that you must exert yourself in pleasing God and turning eagerly towards him through thankfulness and prayer. Such an explanation is not far-fetched, but there is nothing that indicates it decisively from within the verse itself.

3. The Quran and limiting one's desire to Allah alone (al-Tawḥīd in praxis)

When we look at the composition of the final verse of this chapter, we notice that preposition phrase, (*jār wa majrūr*) which is *إلى ربك* (to your Lord) is prior to the imperative, *فارغب*. It is very likely that this ordering is done to indicate that one's desire ought to be solely for God and that one's outlook and hopes must be exclusively for Him. You must desire to be away from that which is other than God. There is no one worthy of desiring except Him. Anything possessed by others comes from Him, so it is not suitable for one to return to anyone but Him alone.

And how beautiful is the expression of your Lord (*ربك*) in this verse, which indicates the providence and care that God provides. Traversing with eagerness to God means going on the path of He who plans all affairs in a manner which is not purposeless or random. Your outlook and compass should always be towards God, and if it is, it is in the correct and logical state.

4. Desiring God after every success and the two concepts of thankfulness and refuge

What is the link between this final verse and the verses that preceded it? To answer this, we can present two possibilities:

The first possibility: It is as though the verses are saying: “If you, the Prophet of God, are finished with your great duties that weighed heavily on your back, which God eased for you, you must exert yourself in other difficult duties. You must point your compass towards God so that He can ease the hardships in your new affairs, just as your compass previously was towards Him. Thus, your desire must always be in God so that He solves your problems just as He solved your previous problems.”

This is what the concepts of returning constantly and seeking refuge in God entail, given that He is the real hope. God in the Quran says:

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ وَيُخَوِّفُونَكَ بِالَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ

“Does not Allah suffice [to defend] His servant? They would frighten you of others than Him.” (39:36)

It is God who suffices for His Prophet and all His servants who carry the burden of his message and strive in His way. God will expand his breast and raise his remembrance, discard his burdens and ease his affairs. One must strive every single time, in every single affair, and Allah will be his helper and guide.

The second possibility: Perhaps, thankfulness can be presented as a duty required of every person after their achievements and responsibilities are performed. Unfortunately, what is common amongst people is to forget and neglect such a concept at the moment in which they are successful and victorious. In every instance that a human’s feeling of grandeur increases, he becomes more forgetful of God. This phenomenon was pointed at in these verses:

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ (٦) أَنْ رَأَاهُ اسْتَعْزَىٰ

“Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself without need.” (96:6-7) It was also discussed in the verses relating to the battle of Hunayn.

It is for this reason that the final verse of this chapter called for thanking Allah after every success, be it personal, social, military, political or any other form. This is the meaning of *“and turn eagerly to your Lord”* (94:8), after the chapter displayed the achievements made and the subsequent ease after difficulty. The meaning becomes akin to that of Sūrat al-Naṣr where Allah says:

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ (١) وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا (٢) فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

“When Allah’s help and victory comes, and you see the people entering Allah’s religion in throngs, then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and plead to Him for forgiveness. Indeed, He is All-clement.”
(110:1-3)

One ought to always be humble towards their Creator after every victory and achievement, grateful and thankful, for all these are His blessings and favours.

The verse wants a human to direct his attention to God in every moment, with no difference between a moment of strength or a moment of weakness. One ought to remember Allah when they are strong just as they remember Him when they in a state of weakness and poverty. We ought to visit our mosques to thank Allah after every victory and achievement, just like we would before these. By doing this, we will be granted the promise of this verse:

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

“If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing]” (14:7) and we will not fall in what some of the Muslims fell during the battle of Ḥunayn.

Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ

A summary

Having given a concise overall picture to the content of this chapter, it is worthwhile to summarise with two important points; the first relates to the key messages carried by this chapter for those who strive in the way of God, whilst the second relates to the main exegetical principles that our study carried.

1. Sūrat al-Inshirāḥ: Its Messages and Aims

We arrived at several messages and aims that this chapter intends to present us, the main ones being as follows:

1.1 The principle of having hope and a good opinion of God

The first principle that anyone striving in the way of God ought to place before themselves in all their activities is having hope in God and a good opinion of Him. It's unfortunate that many of those who call towards religion lose hope the moment that their difficulties increase, and they become blighted with despair. As a result, they cease to act to alleviate the difficult situation that our ummah is facing.

It's worthwhile to distinguish between two types of despair that a person can face:

The first type which is intellectual despair. This occurs when we observe our reality in its actual state and we see objectively the degree of hardships, without belittling or neglecting the problems and mistakes being faced.

The second type which is psychological despair. This is a form of internal collapse that paralyses one's energy and prevents him from acting. A person is thereafter incapable of reforming or solving any of the problems recognised by the intellect. Intellectual despair is an awareness of the problem whilst psychological despair is succumbing to it.

It is in such circumstances that the chapter comes to remind us of the prophetic experience and its difficulties. The prophet suffered immensely with his surroundings and had anyone else been in his place, he would have despaired. Despite this, he endured the impossible, resisted and fought for the noble principles of his message at every stage he encountered, be it in Mecca or Medina. He faced betrayal, military losses, economic and political difficulties, as well as regional pressures from the neighbouring empires. We find that the moral training provided by the Quran for the Prophet did not allow for despair to grab a foothold over him. Hope would continuously grow and spread in the depths of his heart day after day. Indeed, this is the principle of ease after hardship, which the chapter informs us of as a general principle of humanity. An awareness of this law of life restructures our psychological state in such a way that makes us receptive to hope, whilst preventing us from enclosing ourselves in despair and giving up.

1.2 The principle of returning to God in times of strength before times of weakness

This chapter informs us that returning to God ought to be a principle manifest in us, both in times of difficulty and in times of ease. God is the sole spiritual reference for us and we must not make material entities our spiritual reference at any point in time.

Of course, material things have a part to play, but this does not exclude the parts that spiritual affairs and the principle of returning to God have to play. For this reason, when the Quran wished to compare the army of the disbelievers with the army of the Muslims, it did not solely observe the materially relevant matters, like the quantity of each army, whilst making the comparison. Rather, it also considered the spiritual states of their souls and compared them. Whenever the power of faith and the centrality of God weakens in our souls, the less likely it is that we arrive at a solution to our affairs.

1.3 The principle of suffering for noble goals

Some of us may think – perhaps due to inexperience – that achieving change with our religious or social projects is something easily obtained, as though we have a magic wand. Given such a belief, the moment one encounters problems and difficulties, one isolates himself in despair. In this regard, the chapter and the external circumstances surrounding it teach those who carry reformist projects in their societies; it informs them that such a path is beleaguered with challenges

and pitfalls and one ought to take caution and expect such things, whilst preparing adequately to solve them, for they are treading the first few steps of a very long path. The prophetic experiences narrated to us are but one piece of evidence for this truth. Change, regardless of how big or small it is, cannot be achieved without sacrifice, forbearance and suffering.

1.4 The principle of no retirement from Islamic duties

This chapter informs us – as we explained previously – that religious projects have no end-point which we can term the point at which we retire. Those who embark on such projects and attempt to enact societal change know this very well. For this reason, they exert new efforts once they complete a stage and begin a new project suitable to their capacities. As such, there is no end to their hopes of changing for the better.

There are also other messages carried by this chapter that we mentioned previously, like the moral neutrality of fame and status, whereby moral value results from one's goals and actions whilst in such a position.

2. Exegetical principles to ponder the book of God

We presented with extreme brevity, whilst attempting to understand this chapter, some exegetical principles which are suitable to be used generally in all exegetical studies, We shall present them once again as follows:

The first principle: The principle of exercising analytical *ijtihad* to distinguish between the Meccan and the Medinan verses, which can be used in addition the historical method of verification.

The second principle: The principle that the Quran is self-explicative and the impact this has on its relationship with external sciences.

The third principle: The principle of performing a general conceptual exegesis, which contrasts with the referential type of exegesis.

The fourth principle: The duality of knowledge and moral training within the Quranic text.

The fifth principle: The necessity of understanding the Arabic language separately from a Greek lens and its associated systems of logic, without being antithetical to it.

The sixth principle: The primary standing of the language and the early sources and to not be deceived by one's own beliefs about the language.

The seventh principle: The principle of distinguishing between the conceptual meanings of words and their external references.

And all praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.