

الكتاب المبين

The Crystal Clear Book

*An Examination of the Qur'ān as a Book
with Perfect Clarity*

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Translation by Dr. Abu Zayd

سلسلة إملاء خاطر | Imlā al-Khāṭir Series



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جميع الحقوق محفوظة

Imlā al-Khāṭir Series

In this series, which he names *Imlā al-Khāṭir* (literally, “dictation of thoughts”), Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi follows in the tradition of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* and shares with the world his reflections on a variety of topics ranging from theology to law, history to heart softeners, philosophy, education and more. Composed in a casual, conversational style consisting of questions followed by their brief answers (each portion predicated by *qālū/qultu*, “they said”/“I responded”), he utilizes therein the highest level of Arabic, reflecting his love of the language and his extensive expertise in Arabic grammar and rhetoric. These short but poignant reflections are part of the *balāghah* genre and tradition of Arabic literature. It should be noted that these translations, done by his senior students, serve as a guide and can never fully match the style, tone and eloquence of the original Arabic. Also note that Dr. Akram does not necessarily review each translation and is not responsible for any errors, improper word choices, or the likes, that are an inevitable part of the translation process.

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi is a world-renowned scholar of Indian origin who has resided in England for an extensive time. After receiving in-depth training to an advanced level in the traditional Islamic disciplines at the famous Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ seminary in Lucknow, India, and receiving a PhD in Arabic literature from Lucknow University, he became a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, where he conducted research for a number of years on a variety of topics, including Ḥadīth and Sufi orders in India. He has published widely in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English, including translations (like his work on Shāh Waliullah, *Bustan al-Muhaddithin*), editions of Arabic texts (such as a renowned critical edition of *Usul al-Shāshī* in Ḥanafī jurisprudence), and original monographs on Islamic law, female ḥadīth narrators and such figures as Abū Ḥanīfah and Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi. His groundbreaking work, yet to be published, is an encyclopedic 40-volume documentation of the legacy of female scholarship in the Islamic tradition. He co-founded the Al-Salam Institute in 2006 where he continues to serve as Principal and Senior Lecturer.

Introduction

In this monograph, Dr. Akram shares his personal reflections on the Qur'ān, in this case, on the idea of the Qur'ān as a clear and lucid Book that is independent and free of the need for extensive external commentaries, which can often become distractions to its real message.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الكتاب المبين

بقلم: محمد أكرم الندوي

أو كسفورد

قالوا: حَدِّثْنَا عَنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّنَا. قلت: هو الكتاب الذي أنزله الله تعالى على نبينا محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم، ولم يجعل له عوجاً، يخرج الناس من الظلمات إلى النور، كتاباً متشابهاً مثاني تقشعر منه جلود الذين يخشون ربهم ثم تلين جلودهم وقلوبهم إلى ذكر الله، ذلك هدى الله يهدي به من يشاء، ومن يضلل الله فما له من هاد. قلت: فعن أي شأن من شؤونه تستنبؤون؟ قالوا: لقد كثرت كتب التفسير كثرة هائلة رابية على العد والإحصاء، فلا ندري على ما نعتمد منها، وإلى ما نرجع، وبم نثق ونستند، مضطربين اضطراباً شديداً، وقلقين قلقاً عظيماً، غير راكبين إلى أمر ولا ثابتين عليه ثباتاً.

قلت: هل أنزل ربنا كتابه إلى خلقه ليفسروه؟ وهل كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يقرأه على الناس فيفسره لهم تفسيركم هذا؟ لقد أسأتم بركم الظن إن خيل لكم ذلك أو توهمتم منه شيئاً؟ إنه كتاب غني منزل

من عند ربنا الغني عن العالمين، وانظروا إلى كثير من كتب التفسير فقد امتلأت بالإسرائيليات والقصص الخرافية والآراء الفلسفية والكلامية والتأويلات الغريبة والمحمل البعيدة، فمثلا ذكر الإمام فخر الدين الرازي في تفسير الفتح من سورة النصر أنه فتح مكة، أو فتح خيبر، أو فتح الطائف، أو الفتح مطلقا، أو فتح العلوم، ولا يخفى على من له أدنى مناسبة لكتاب الله تعالى أن الفتح لم يرد فيه إلا بمعنى فتح مكة.

قالوا: ما دليلك على كون القرآن الكريم غنيا عن التفسير؟

قلت: قوله تعالى: "تلك آيات القرآن وكتاب مبين"، وقوله "الر، تلك آيات الكتاب المبين" (يوسف 1)، وقوله "قد جاءكم من الله نور وكتاب مبين" (المائدة 15)، وقوله "ولقد أنزلنا إليكم آيات بينات" (النور 34)، وقوله: "بلسان عربي مبين"، أي إنه كتاب ناصع معناه جلي مرماه ساطع تبيانه وقاطع برهانه، قرآن عربي غير ذي عوج، أعجز الفصحاء البلغاء من العرب العرباء عن الإتيان بمثل أقصر سورة من سورته في تحد صارخ ما زال ولا يزال قائما.

قالوا: اشرح لنا كونه مبينا، قلت: الفلاسفة والعلماء إذا نطقوا

بكلمة أو كتبوا جملة كانت مجرد دعوى حتى يصحبها دليل أو برهان أو شهادة، وقد يحتاج ادلتهم إلى أدلة، وبراهينهم إلى براهين، وشهاداتهم إلى شهادات. والأمر لا ينتهي إلى حد، ولكن كتاب الله مبين في نفسه، فإنه إفصاح عن الفطرة التي خلق الناس عليها وربط بينها وبين آيات الله في

الخلق مع انسجام بينها وتوافق، مؤيدة لها الحواس والعقول والألباب في تناغم وتناسق، وكذلك اللسان الذي اختاره لكتابه لسان عربي مبين دخل قلوب العرب الأولين من دون إذن ولا طلب منهم، ولم يتهموا القرآن بتعقيد في اللفظ أو المعنى، ولم يتنافروا منه للكثرة فيه أو عجمة، فبيان معنى القرآن وبيان لسانه لا يشاركه فيها كتاب ولا كلام. ولن يهتدي إلى ذلك إلا من تدبره واتقى الله، اللهم لك الحمد على ما أنزلته إلينا هدى وبيانا ونورا وشفاء.

قالوا: أو لم يقل الله تعالى للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في سورة النحل 44: "وأُنزِلنا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ ما نَزَلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ"؟ قلت: بلى، قالوا: فما معناه؟ قلت: بيان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لكتاب الله تعالى له ثلاثة معان، قالوا: ما هي؟ قلت:

الأول هو بيانه للقرآن الكريم بعضه ببعض، وهو قوله تعالى "ثم إن علينا بيانه"، وقد يردف الله الآيات البيانية بقوله "كذلك يبين الله آياته للناس" وما أشبهه، وما أكثر ما كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يبين بعضه ببعض، فإن القرآن يجمل مرة ويفصل أخرى، فمثلا قال: "فسبح بحمد ربك بالعشي والإبكار"، وقال: "فسبح بحمد ربك قبل طلوع الشمس وقبل الغروب ومن الليل فسبحه وإدبار السجود"، وقال: "فسبح بحمد ربك حين تقوم ومن الليل فسبحه وإدبار النجوم"، وقال: "فسبحان الله حين تمسون وحين تصبحون، وله الحمد في السماوات

والأرض وعشيا وحين تظهرون" وقال: "فاصبر على ما يقولون وسبح بحمد ربك قبل طلوع الشمس وقبل غروبها، ومن آناء الليل فسبح وأطراف النهار لعلك ترضى"، وقال: "وأتم الصلاة طرفي النهار وزلفا من الليل إن الحسنات يذهبن السيئات"، وقال: "أتم الصلاة لدلوك الشمس إلى غسق الليل وقرآن الفجر إن قرآن الفجر كان مشهودا ومن الليل فتجد به نافلة لك عسى أن يبعثك ربك مقاما محمودا."

الثاني هو تطبيقه لأحكامه، فوضوؤه وصلاته وصيامه وزكاته ووجهه وسائر سننه بيان للقرآن الكريم، وهو تأويله، أخرج البخاري عن عائشة رضي الله عنها أنها قالت كان النبي صلوسلم يكثر أن يقول في ركوعه وسجوده سبحانك اللهم ربنا وبحمدك اللهم اغفر لي، يتأول القرآن، أي إن تسبيحه هذا تأويل قوله تعالى "فسبح بحمد ربك واستغفره"، وقال ابن عيينة: السنة تأويل الأمر والنهي، وهذا هو مراد الشافعي وغيره إذ قالوا: إن السنة بيان للقرآن الكريم.

والثالث استنباطه من كتاب الله تعالى، فكم من سننه هي فهمه لكتاب الله تعالى، واستنباطه منها، فقوله "خير القرون قرني ثم الذين يلونهم" مستنبط من قوله تعالى "والسابقون الأولون من المهاجرين والأنصار والذين اتبعوهم بإحسان رضي الله عنهم ورضوا عنه"، وكفارة مفطر صيام رمضان استنبطها من كفارة الظهر، لأن الظهر تحريم ما أحل الله تعالى، وتعمد الإفطار في نهار رمضان تحليل لما حرم الله تعالى،

والتحليل والتحرير كلاهما مختص بالله تعالى، فسوى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بينهما في الكفارة، ولا شك أن التسوية بين המתأملين من أفضل الرأي والاجتهاد، وهو معنى قوله تعالى في سورة النساء الآية 105: "إنا أنزلنا إليك الكتاب بالحق لتحكم بين الناس بما أراك الله."

قالوا: أو لم يناقض قولك في شرح بيان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قولك الأول الذي أكدت فيه أن القرآن كتاب مبين بلسان عربي مبين لا يحتاج إلى تفسير الناس؟ قلت: لا تناقض بين الأمرين:

فإن كل كلام بين يعضد بعضه بعضاً، والناس ما زالوا يحملون كلام العقلاء بعضه على بعض، موفقين بينه، ومبغضين عنه الاختلاف والتجافي، فكذلك القرآن الكريم.

وكل تعليم يعتمد على تطبيق، وكذلك القرآن، فالكلام مهما كان بيناً، يحتاج إلى تأويل، والتطبيق والتأويل أمران خارجان عن الكلام، فإنك إذا ألقت قواعد السياقة بأعين لغة لن تتكفل بتعليم الناس السياقة، بل إنهم يحتاجون معه إلى دروس تطبيقية، ولا أرى الأمر يخفى على أحد.

وكل كلام بين ينطقه العقلاء يتضمن معاني كثيرة جلية وخفية، وجميلة ودقيقة، ومدلولات شتى من عبارة وإشارة واقتضاء، تتكشف

للمتدبر فيها، وهذا لا ينافي البيان، والقرآن الكريم بحر للمعاني لا ساحل له، وحاوٍ لحقائق ظاهرة وباطنة لا نهاية لها.

قالوا: قد استوعبنا ما ألقىت إلينا من التنقيب عن بيان كتاب الله عز وجل شاكرين لك وداعين لك بمزيد من العلم والفقه، فما توصينا به؟ قلت: أوصيكم بتلاوة آيات الله تعالى ناظرين فيها ومتدبرين إياها تدبرا، قال تعالى: كتاب أنزلنا إليك مبارك ليدبروا آياته وليتذكر أولو الألباب"، وقال: أفلا يتدبرون القرآن أم على قلوب أقفالها"، وقال: "أفلا يتدبرون القرآن ولو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلافا كثيرا"، واعلموا أن التدبر مع التقوى هو الكفيل بالمنع عن التفسير بالرأي، ولم تتطرق التفسيرات الزائغة والتأويلات الفاسدة إلى المسلمين إلا من أجل الإعراض عن كتاب الله تعالى أو قلة التدبر فيه

A Crystal Clear Book

An Examination of the Qur'ān as a Book with Perfect Clarity

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi
Oxford, UK

They asked: Tell us about the Book of our Lord.

I replied:

It is the Book which God the Exalted revealed onto our Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, devoid of all aberration, which brings mankind from darkness into light; a self-consistent Book which repeats its contents in manifold forms from which shiver the skins of those that hold their Lord in awe; and then their skins and their hearts soften for God's remembrance. It is the guidance of God through which He guides those whom He wills, and the one who is led astray has no guide at all.

I asked: Which of its many dimensions do you seek to be informed about?

They replied: The sheer number of the books of tafsīr¹ are formidable and beyond delineation, and we do not know which ones to rely upon, refer to, and consider authoritative. We are greatly confused and bewildered about this and unable to arrive at a decisive and conclusive stance.

I replied:

Did our Lord reveal His Book to human beings in order for them to provide commentary on it? Did the Prophet recite it to the people and provide such commentary for them? You would have a bad opinion of God if you believed that to be the case in any way.

In fact, it is an independent and self-sufficient Book revealed from our Lord, the One Who is independent from all creation. Look at many books of tafsīr,

¹ Qur'ānic commentary or exegesis.

filled as they are with Israelite narrations, fanciful tales, philosophical and speculative views, strange interpretations and remote possibilities. For instance, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī in his commentary of the word *fath* (victory) in sūrah al-Nasr (“When comes the help of God and His victory”) states that it can refer to the conquest of Makkah, Khaybar, Ṭā’if, a generic victory, or the opening of the sciences. However, it is not hidden from anyone who has a basic connection with God’s Book that the victory here refers to the opening of Makkah.

They asked: What is the proof for your claim that the Noble Qur’ān does not need commentary?

I replied:

The following statements of God:

“There are the verses of the Qur’ān and a clear Book.” [27:1]

“Alif Lam Rā. These are the verses of the clear Book.” [12:1]

“There has come to you from God light and a clear Book.” [5:15]

“Indeed We have sent down to you signs that make things clear.” [24:34]

“A clear Arabic language.” [16:103 and 26:195]

This all means that it is a Book whose meanings are clear, whose goals are obvious, whose explanations are clear, and proofs decisive. It is an Arabic Qur’ān free of all aberration. It has frustrated the most eloquent experts of Arabic from bringing the likes of even the shortest of its sūrahs, despite the issuing of an open challenge to do so, which hasn’t been retracted and remains standing to this day.

They said: Explain to us the exact meaning of it being clear.

I replied:

Generally, when scholars and philosophers utter any word or write any statement, it remains a mere claim until it is accompanied by proof, evidence or support. And then their evidences themselves require

evidences, while their proofs require proofs, and their support requires more support, without end.

But God's Book is intrinsically clear. It uncovers the innate nature that mankind was created upon and the connection between that nature and God's signs in creation, all in complete harmony and accord, and aided by the faculties of the senses, intellect and reason in complete balance and order. Similarly, the language that He chose for His Book was a clear Arabic which had entered the hearts of the early Arabs without their permission and without their request. The Qur'ān was never accused of confusion in wordings or meanings, and no one ever became averse to it due to improper pronunciation or foreign, non-Arabic elements. This clarity of the meanings of the Qur'ān and its language is shared by no other book or speech. And no one can be guided to that except the one who ponders over it and fears God. O Allah, to you is all praise for revealing it to us as guidance, clear expression, radiant light and healing!

They asked: Doesn't God say to the Prophet in sūrah al-Naḥl verse 44: "We have also sent down onto you the reminder so that you may explain clearly to mankind what has been sent down to them so that they may reflect"?

I replied: Of course.

They asked: What does that mean?

I replied:

The Prophet's explanation of the Book of God has three meanings.

They asked: What are they?

I replied:

The first is his explanation of the Noble Qur'ān using one portion to explain another, based on God's statement: "Then it is for Us to make it clear to you."² And God has immediately followed many explanatory verses with statements of the likes of: "Thus God explains His verses to mankind." So the Prophet quite frequently explained one portion of the Qur'ān through

² Qur'ān 75:19.

another, for the Qur'ān is general in some portions and more specific in others.

As an example, He says: "And glorify the praises of your Lord in the night and day."³ And He says: "And glorify the praises of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting; And in the night, too, extol His glory and at every prayer's end."⁴ He also says: "And glorify the praises of your Lord whenever you wake up, and praise Him at night, and at the time the stars retreat."⁵ He also says: "Glory belongs to God when you come to the evening and when you enter the morning; And His is all the praise in the heavens and the earth, in the afternoon as well, and when you enter upon the hour of noon."⁶ He also says: "So bear patiently what they say, and glorify the praises of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and during some of the hours of the night, and the sides of the day, so you may attain happiness."⁷ He also says: "And establish the prayers at the beginning and end of the day, and during the early watches of the night, for verily, good deeds drive away the evil ones."⁸ He also says: "Establish Prayer from the declining of the sun to the darkness of the night; and hold fast to the recitation of the Qur'an at dawn, for the recitation of the Qur'an at dawn is witnessed; And rise from your sleep and pray during the night, as a free offering from you, and your Lord may well raise you to a praiseworthy station."⁹

The second meaning of the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'ān is his implementation of its directives. And so, his ablution, prayers, fasting, charity, Ḥajj and all of his acts of worship are in fact an elucidation of the Noble Qur'ān, i.e. his application of it. Bukhārī relates from 'Ā'ishah who said: The Prophet would frequently mention in his bowing and prostration, "Glory belongs to you, our Lord, and all praise. O God, do forgive me." He was simply applying (ta'wīl) the Qur'ān.¹⁰ What this means is that his

³ Qur'ān 40:55.

⁴ Qur'ān 50:39-40.

⁵ Qur'ān 52:48-9.

⁶ Qur'ān 30:17-8.

⁷ Qur'ān 20:130.

⁸ Qur'ān 11:114.

⁹ Qur'ān 17:78-9.

¹⁰ Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ādhān, Bāb al-Tasbīḥ wa al-Du'ā' fī al-Sujūd

glorification (tasbīḥ) was the application¹¹ of the verse: “And glorify the praises of your Lord and seek His forgiveness.”¹² Ibn ‘Uyaynah says: The sunnah (Prophetic practice) is simply the application of the commands and prohibitions, and this is the intent of Shāfi‘ī and others who said that the sunnah is an explanation of the Noble Qur’ān.

The third meaning of the Prophet’s explanation of the Qur’ān is his own extractions from God’s Book. So many of his personal practices reflected his understanding of the Book of God, and his own extrapolations. For instance, his statement: “The best of generations is my generation and then those that followed them,” is his own extrapolation from God’s statement: “And the first and foremost from the Emigrants and Helpers, and those that followed them in excellence, God is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with God.”¹³ Also, the expiation for the one who breaks a fast of Ramadan is extrapolated from the Qur’ānic expiation for the separation of Zihār,¹⁴ because this practice involved forbidding what God made lawful (and the one who deliberately breaks his fast makes lawful what God made unlawful). Lawfulness and unlawfulness are exclusive rights of God. So the Prophet made the both of them equivalent in expiation. There is no doubt that equivalency of likes is one of the best types of reasoning and ijtihād. This is the meaning of the verse: “Verily We have revealed to you the Book in truth so that you may judge between people in accordance with what God has taught you.”¹⁵

They asked: Doesn’t your explanation of the Prophet’s clarification of the Qur’ān contradict your earlier assertions that the Qur’ān is a clear Book in a

¹¹ Ta’wīl is a rich Arabic word which is used broadly for a variety of meanings, including the interpretation or explanation of something (tafsīr), the true reality of any matter (ḥaqīqah), the true application of a command (imthāl al-amr), or interpreting something away from its apparent or literal sense (the predominant usage in the discipline of kalām or theology). Here Shaykh Akram is using it in the third sense, consistent with Ibn Taymiyyah’s usage, as the real application of commands.

¹² Qur’ān 110:3.

¹³ Qur’ān 9:100.

¹⁴ An unlawful pagan form of divorce in which the husband said to his wife, “You are to me like my mother’s back.”

¹⁵ Qur’ān 4:105.

clear Arabic language which does not need the commentaries of human beings?

I replied:

There is no contradiction between these two matters:

Every type of clear speech that exists is composed of portions, all of which support one another. Yet this fact still does not prevent people from taking the statements of their wisest people, one against the other, agreeing with some and disagreeing with others, and the Qur'ān is no different.

Every instruction must rely on practical demonstration, and the Qur'ān is no different. So any speech, despite its clarity, is always in need of interpretation, and interpretation and application are two matters extrinsic to speech itself. If you were to compile the principles of driving in the clearest of language, for instance, it would still not guarantee that people will learn driving from that alone, but rather, they would require in addition the element of practical instruction, and I don't think this matter is hidden from anyone.

Every clear statements uttered by the wise ones encompass many different meanings, open or hidden, overtly apparent or more minute. They also possess various connotations and senses, in their expressions, through their allusions, or through those things that they necessitate. This becomes apparent for the one who ponders deeply over these, and none of this contradicts the clarity of the speech. The Qur'ān is an ocean of meaning with no shore and it holds within it realities, open and hidden, with no end.

They asked: We have comprehended what you have explained for us in terms of exploring the clarity of the Book of God. We are grateful to you and pray for you increase in knowledge and understanding, so what would you advise us?

I replied:

I advise you to recite the verses of God, looking into them and pondering over them deeply. God says: "A Book We have revealed to you which is blessed, so that you may ponder over its verses and those endowed with

insight may take them to heart.”¹⁶ He also says: “Do they not ponder over the Qur’ān, or are there locks over their hearts?”¹⁷ He also says: “Do they not consider the Qur’ān carefully? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much contradiction.”¹⁸

Know that pondering (tadabbur) with reverence for God (taqwā) is the guarantee to prevent interpretations based on mere personal opinion. Distorted commentaries and corrupt interpretations have reached the Muslims only because of turning away from the Book of God or not pondering deeply over it.

¹⁶ Qur’ān 38:29.

¹⁷ Qur’ān 47:24.

¹⁸ Qur’ān 4:82.