

Towards the Sacred Text: The Importance and Value of the Qur'an in the Life of a Believer

Tafsīr al-Şāfi is an exegesis (tafsīr) of the Qur'an, written in the 11th/17th century by Mulla Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679). Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī was a prolific Shī'ī scholar who was an expert in many of the Islamic sciences. A student and son-in-law of Mulla Sadra, the renowned Shī'ī mystic-philosopher of the Safavid period, he made broad and important contributions to the fields of Islamic mysticism, hadith, and exegesis. Below is the first of twelve introductory discussions that al-Kāshānī prefaced to his tafsīr. This first section is on the value of the Qur'an in the life and practice of a believer. The excerpt focuses on the obligation of a believer to connect with its meanings and apply its teachings. As some of the traditions reveal, the Qur'an is introduced as a nuanced text whose ability to guide depends partly upon the commitment, sincerity, and spiritual readiness of the reader. While it certainly calls the whole of humanity to guidance, those who approach the text insincerely may actually be misguided and harmed by its words. However, those who earnestly seek truth and strive for piety will be able to receive its life-giving guidance.

Note that this nuanced role presented by the Qur'an itself and Prophetic traditions is distinct from the role of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), who was sent as a "mercy to all the realms," (raḥmah li-l-‘ālamīn) and who the Qur'an describes as providing compassion and inspiration to all. The complementary yet distinct roles of both the Prophet and the Qur'an provide comprehensive guidance to humankind, serving to attract and inspire while also remaining committed to truth and justice.

This excerpt was translated by Azhar Sheraze of the Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Seminary.

The First Introduction: On the Commandment to Adhere Closely to the Qur'an, and A Brief Note on its Virtue((Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Şāfi*, vol. 1 (Qum: Dhawi al-Qurbā, 1436 A.H.), 8.))

Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī in *al-Kaḥfī*, through his chain, and Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī in his *tafsīr*, through his chain, both narrate from Imam al-Şādiq, who in turn narrates from his father, that the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) once said:

"O people! You all reside in the Abode of *Hudnah* ("The Abode of *Hudnah*" literally refers to a land governed by a state of truce.) and you are near the end of your travels. Your journey will be over soon. You have seen the night and the day, and the sun and the moon: they make old all that is young. They bring close all that is far. And they will bring you to all that is promised. Prepare your supplies for the long passage." Al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of Allah, what is the Abode of *Hudnah*?" The Prophet responded, "It is the place of attainment and endeavors, and will soon come to

an end. When, like a dark night, trials confound you, refer to the Qur'an. It is an intercessor for those needing intercession, and a stratagem (*māḥil*) for the truthful. Whoever follows the Qur'an and puts it before him, it will lead him to the Garden. Whoever precedes the Qur'ān, it will steer him into the Fire. It is the guide that leads to the best path. It is a book within which are details, explanations, and an attaining (*taḥṣīl*). It is decisive and not jest. It contains an Inward and an Outward dimension. Its Outward (dimension) is a decree, while its Inward is knowledge. Its Outward is wondrously beautiful (*anīq*), and its Inward has profound depth. It has horizons (*tukhūm*), and its horizons have further horizons, whose wonders cannot be enumerated, and whose marvels cannot be worn away. Within it are lanterns of guidance and lamps of wisdom. It is a guidebook of cognizance for he who recognizes 'the quality' (*al-ṣifah*).'' ((*Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, vol 2, tradition 1))

Another narration of the above report continues: "Let a person adorn their eye by it, and let "the quality" (*al-ṣifah*) reach his gaze. It saves the one who has been destroyed ('*Aṭb*). It purifies the one who clings (*nashb*) to it. Deep contemplation (*tafakkur*) is the lifeblood of the insightful (lit. the life of the heart), just as a person seeking illumination traverses the darkness by light. So avail yourself of a good escape (*التخلص*) and short stay [in the world]." ((*al-Kāfī*, vol 2, tradition 598))

The author, al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, explains the following words that appear in the above traditions: The meaning of the word *māḥil* ("stratagem") is that by which one devises a plan for his companion to convince him of his mistake due to his not following the Qur'an, meaning that he denies that the Qur'an is from God. Others have said that the meaning of *māḥil* is an opponent in a dispute. The meaning of the word *anīq* is "beauty which is wondrous." *Tukhūm*, the plural of *takhm*, is "the utmost limit of something." The phrase "...for the one who understands its quality" means to know the description of its essence and the method of its derivation. '*Aṭb* means "destruction". The word *nashb* means "falling into that which there is no escape."

Al-ʿAyyāshī, through his chain, narrates the following from al-Hārith al-Aʿwar: "I came to the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ʿAlī ('a), and said, 'O Commander of the Faithful, whenever we are with you, we hear that through which we fortify our religion. But when we leave your company, we hear varying, confusing matters which we do not understand.' The Imam replied, 'And did they do these things?' Hārith replied, 'Yes.' The Imam said he had heard the following from the Messenger of Allah: "Jabraʿīl had come to me, saying, "O Muḥammad (ṣ)! Dissension will exist among your community." So, the Prophet asked, "What is the way out of this dissension?" Jabraʿīl replied: "The Book of Allah. In it are explanations of that which came before you and news of that which will come. It is a decree for that which is among you. It is decisive and not jest. Allah will shatter whoever turns arrogantly away and acts without it. Allah will delude whoever seeks guidance through any other. It is the firm rope of God. It is the Judicious Reminder. It is the Straight Path. The winds do not bend it, nor can the tongue obscure it. It never gets old, and its wonders never cease. The knowledgeable are not satiated by it. This is what amazed the *jinn*, such that they said, "We heard an amazing recitation, ((*al-Qur'an*, chapter 72, verse 1)) guiding to righteousness. Whoever believes in it is truthful. Whoever acts by it is rewarded. Whoever protects himself with it is guided to the Straight Path. It is the Esteemed Book which "Falsehood cannot approach from ahead nor from behind, a revelation gradually revealed from One all-wise, all-laudable.'" ((*al-ʿAyyāshī*, vol 1, tradition 3))

The Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) has also said: “The Qur’an guides away from error, giving clarity after blindness and staying one’s feet from stumbling. It lights the darkness, brightens one’s grave, safeguards from destruction, guides one from straying, and exposes sedition. Within the Qur’an is the perfection of your religion. No one turns away from the Qur’an without also moving towards the Fire.” ((al-Kāfī, vol 2, tradition 600))

Imam Sadiq (‘a) has said, “Your responsibility is to the Qur’an. Whatever sign you find that has saved those before you, then act upon that. Whatever you find that destroyed those before you, avoid it.” ((al-‘Ayyāshī, vol 1, tradition 5))

It is narrated from the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ): “This Qur’an is the clarifying light, the firm rope, the firmest handle, the loftiest station, the most potent cure, the greatest excellence, and the grandest felicity. Whoever seeks enlightenment by it, Allah illuminates him. Whoever ties his affairs to it, Allah shields him. Whoever grasps on to it, Allah delivers him. Whoever does not part with its commandments, Allah raises him. Whoever seeks cure through it, Allah will cure him. Whoever chooses it above all else, Allah guides him. Whoever seeks guidance in other than it, Allah deludes him. Whoever makes it his emblem and his shield, Allah will assist him. Whoever makes it his leader which he follows and makes it his trust to which he takes his burdens, Allah will shelter him within blessed gardens and a tranquil life.” ((*Tafṣīr al-‘Askarī*, page 449))

The Prophet has also said “O reciters of the Qur’an! Be mindful of Allah regarding that which He has burdened you of His book! For I will be questioned and you will be questioned. I will be questioned about the conveyance of the message. As for you, you will be questioned about my practice (*sunnah*) and the book you carry.” ((al-Kāfī, vol 2, tradition 606))

The Prophet has also said: “I will be the first to arrive in front of the Almighty, the Omnipotent, as will His Book and my Family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). Thereafter will be my *Ummah*. I will ask them what they did with the Book of Allah and my Family.” ((al-Kāfī, vol 2, tradition 600))

The Prophet has also said: “I was given the *Ṭuwal* chapters in place of the Torah (*Tawrāt*). I was given the *Mi‘īn* chapters in place of the Gospels (*Injīl*). I was given the *Mathānī* chapters in place of the Psalms (*Zabūr*). I was given an exclusive honor by being given the *Mufassal* chapters, which are sixty-eight chapters that are a witness to the rest of the Quran. The *Tawrāt* was for Moses (‘a), the *Injīl* for Jesus (‘a), and the *Zabūr* for David (‘a).” ((al-Kāfī, vol 2, tradition 601))

al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī provides some brief explanatory remarks, suggesting that opinions differ regarding the explanation of the previous tradition from the Prophet (ﷺ). He says: The most appropriate and precautionary opinion is that the Prophet (ﷺ) is speaking about the chapters of the Qur’an. Therefore, the *Ṭuwal* would refer to the long chapters which are the first seven chapters after the first chapter “*al-Fātiḥa*.” However, this would imply that the chapters *Anfāl* and *Barā’ah* are counted as a single chapter. This would be because both were revealed in their entirety during military expeditions and are entitled the “paired ones.”

Mi'īn refers to the chapters between chapter ten "*Banī Isrā'īl*" and chapter seventeen "*Isrā'*" (inclusive). These seven chapters of the Qur'an are given this name because all such chapters have about one hundred verses.

Mufaṣṣal, which linguistically means "separated" or "segmented," corresponds to the chapters from the chapter "Muḥammad" until the end of the Qur'an. They are given this name because of the large number of shorter chapters towards the end of the Qur'an.

Mathānī refers to the other chapters of Qur'an not included in the above categories. They are those which are shorter than *Mi'īn* chapters and lengthier than the *Mufaṣṣal* chapters, as if the *Ṭuwal* chapters were made as the 'fundamentals' [of the Qur'an] and their *Mathānī* are the chapters that follow them; then the *Mi'īn* are made 'fundamentals' and the *Mathānī* follow them.