



# **The Frequency of "Interrogation" in the Narrations of the Impeccable Imams (AS) and an Analysis of Its Meaning and Scope Based on the Views of Martyr Şadr**

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## **Abstract**

There is no doubt among Islamic scholars about the universality and eternity of the Holy Quran. There is also no doubt about the comprehensiveness of the Quran, although scholars do not universally agree on its types and scope.<sup>1</sup> What can guarantee the presence of this sacred text across all times, societies, and aspects is the Quran's responsiveness and its ability to solve human problems and concerns, since anything that does not benefit humanity will undoubtedly be

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1. The author simplifies these three important principles of the Qur'an with the word "Three Jims": Universality, Immortality, and Comprehensiveness of the Holy Qur'an.

discarded. Given this importance, the significance of "Interrogation" becomes clear, as it is considered the only way to answer human questions and address contemporary concerns. So, the Impeccable Imams (AS) frequently spoke about interrogation. According to the view of Martyr Şadr, which aligns with the narrations, interrogation has three stages: 1) Understanding the societal concern and question, which he refers to as the "Subject," 2) Presenting the question and concern to the Quran, 3) Extracting and elevating the response from the Quran. The present study aims to explain this scope and method based on the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) through an analytical-descriptive approach and to clarify the differences between this important method and others, such as the method of interpreting the Quran with the Quran and thematic interpretation methods. It will also demonstrate the significant difference between the method of interrogation and "Interpretation by opinion," which some have mistakenly believed to be the same, and address the doubt of "Limiting interrogation to the Impeccable Imams". It seems that the endless capacity of the Quran is its most significant miraculous aspect because it is a legislative book, and like the book of creation, its secrets are inexhaustible.

**Keywords:** Interrogation Narrations, Comprehensiveness, Understanding the Quran, *I'jāz* of the Quran, Exegesis Methods, Martyr Şadr.

## Introduction

Muslims believe that the Quran is the last book, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last divine messenger; thus, no other book

or prophet will come from God thereafter. They also believe that the Quran is the word of the Lord, a steadfast and valuable text, revealed through the angel of revelation for the guidance of humanity until the Day of Judgment. Such a prior belief regarding the purposes and effectiveness of the Quran must necessarily have subsequent implications; that is, the Quran must possess the capability and power to establish its presence until the Day of Judgment and respond to human needs. Based on this:

Firstly, the Quran must be understandable, a subject that has been extensively discussed and proven in its own right; the statements of those who believe that understanding the Quran is impossible for humans can be refuted with Quranic, narrative, and rational evidence.

Secondly, the Quran must have something relevant to say for every age, and it should be able to penetrate and permeate human life. In other words, humans should be able to resolve the problems and challenges that arise daily in various eras and generations with the help of the Quran, which claims to guide them, whether these problems are individual or social. If the Quran cannot play a role in solving the concerns of people today and cannot alleviate any current pain, and if only an interpretation relevant to 14 centuries ago can be extracted, merely serving a performative function, then its claim of guidance is called into question, and its claims of universality, timelessness, and comprehensiveness become mere assertions. Therefore, the necessity of addressing such a fundamental and significant issue is clear to everyone.

Since the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (AS) are the unrivaled

interpreters of the Quran and the infallible guides alongside it, the aforementioned important topic will be examined based on their statements to find out how it can respond to the questions of modern humanity through a text that belongs to centuries past.

### 1. Background

It is evident that the commentators on *Nahj al-Balāghah* and those interpreting Shi‘a narrations related to the topic of interrogation have addressed this issue while explaining the hadiths, presenting their viewpoints. Sometimes, they have limited the scope of interrogation and at other times expanded it. However, since Martyr *Şadr's* perspective is contemporary, it is natural that it does not find a place in previous research. In books related to the principles and methods of interpretation, there are occasionally brief references to interrogation in discussions concerning "Understanding the Quran," but not in a separate and comprehensive manner. However, the articles written about interrogation that may relate to the present research include:

- 1) "The Necessity, Nature, and Method of Interrogation from the Perspective of the Narrations of Ahl al-Bayt (AS)" by Mahdi Izadi et al., published in (2013 AD/1392 SH) in no.12 of the Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies, and as the title suggests, it focuses on the relevant narrations;
- 2) "Exploring the Conceptual Elements of "Interrogating the Quran" in Martyr *Şadr's* Interpretive Method" by Omid Qurbankhani, published in (2022 AD/1401 SH) in no.102 of the Journal of Quranic Research, which has a semantic focus;

3) "A Critical Reading of Interrogation and Its Application in Martyr *Şadr's* Theory about the Historical Traditions in the Quran" by Saeed Bahmani, published in (2020 AD/1399) in no.95 of the Journal of Quranic Research, which, as its title suggests, does not focus on interrogation narrations and is written with a specific instance in mind.

## 2. Research Method

The present study aims to use a "Descriptive-Analytical" method to explore the narrations of the impeccable Imams in the realm of interrogation and to demonstrate that they have plans, methods, and recommendations for the permanence of the Quran, ensuring the book of God is beneficial in every age and time. It will then compare the benefits derived from the narrations with the views of Martyr *Şadr* using a "Comparative Approach." Martyr *Şadr* is a pioneer in this field, holding the concern for the Quran's valuable presence in human societies. After the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), the words of Martyr *Şadr* will form the other side of the balance to support the claims of this article.

## 3. "Interrogation" and the Root "N Ṭ Q" in Linguistics

Interrogation (*Istinṭāq*) is a gerund form from the root "N Ṭ Q" meaning "To ask for speech." "*Nuṭq*" means speech, as opposed to "*Şumt*." "*Minṭabiq*" is someone who is eloquent and articulate. "*Manṭiq*" refers to speech, and *Anṭaqahū* means "*Kallamahū* and *Nāṭaqahū*." (Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 10, 354; Ṭurayhī, 1955

AD/1375 AH: 5, 238) Speech can sometimes be applied to "Books" as well, but in the sense of elucidation and description (Fayyūmī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 611). *Ibn Manzūr* also equates *Kitābun Nāṭiq* (a speaking book) with *Kitābun Bayyanun* (an explicit book). Thus, anything made clear seems as though it has spoken, even if it has not said anything verbally: *Ka'annahū Yanṭiqu*.

*Ibn Fāris* added that speech includes discourse and is similar; it is not necessary for us to comprehend it, such as the speech of birds, which only Prophet Solomon understood (Ibn Fāris, 1985 AD/1404 AH: 5, 353). A careful examination of the statements of Arab lexicographers reveals that the term "Speech" should not be limited to spoken words and phrases. Rather, anything in the domain of expression and appearance can be referred to with the term "Speech." Based on this, interrogation means inquiry, questioning, insistence in inquiry, and obtaining answers. It seems that the questioned person is silent and does not speak easily, and therefore, important questions must be asked insistently to elicit responses from them (Ibn Fāris, 1985 AD/1404 AH: 5, 353).

#### 4. "Interrogation" in the Terminology of Tafsir and Quranic Sciences

To articulate the words of God, which is itself a silent book, is referred to in the science of Tafsir as "Interrogation." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 1, 65) Quranic linguists express that the lexical meaning of "Speech" should be understood broadly, taking a correct approach in this regard. This perspective—broadening the meaning of "Speech," particularly in the context of the current discussion—seems

accurate and can contradict the view of those who consider "Speech" to be only the vocalization using sounds and letters that can be heard by the ear (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 518). A contemporary researcher who analyzes Quranic terms in light of various lexicological works posits that speech, in essence, is the revelation of what is within through what is apparent, whether it be in words, sounds, states, or whether it pertains to humans, animals, or the material world (Muṣṭafawī, 1981 AD/1360 SH: 12, 162). Therefore, "Interrogation" of the Quran means that the Quran is silent and must be brought to speech through the formulation of essential questions and insistence on seeking answers. There is no dispute about this meaning; however, scholars do not agree on the distinction between it and "Extraction" and "Interpretation" (both thematic and sequential), nor on who can bring the Quran to speech.

### **5. The Necessity of Interrogating and Bringing the Quran to Speech**

To prove any matter, various kinds of evidence can be utilized, such as rational evidence or textual evidence.

The rational argument for the necessity of interrogation is that, if it does not occur, as previously stated, the finality of the Prophet (PBUH)—which, according to a verse in the Quran, implies that no other Prophet or book will come (al-Aḥzāb/40)—would be unjustified. Therefore, to ensure the continuity of divine guidance, it is rationally expected that both a "Guide" exists among the community and that the book of God continues. The continuance of guidance is based on "Imamate," while the continuity of the book is contingent upon

"Interrogation." The Messenger of God emphasized these two critical elements in the Hadith of *Thaqalayn*. If the Quran does not articulate answers to the challenges, problems, and questions of every era and generation, it will no longer serve as a book of guidance; rather, it will remain a collection of texts that must merely be read without any benefit, with its readers only relying on its sanctity, and nothing more.

From the perspective of transmission, the necessity of interrogation can also be demonstrated, as there is no doubt that, according to various narrations, the Quran possesses multiple layers of meaning, and one of the ways to reveal the underlying essence of the Quran is through "Interrogation," based on which the Quran can respond to the questions of each era.

If the capacities and potentials of the Quran are not taken into account and we only rely on the understanding of our predecessors, it is as if we have left the Quran in a bygone era; while the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), according to the noble Hadith of *Thaqalayn*, commanded us to "Cling to the Quran" (and, of course, alongside it, to the Ahl al-Bayt). Furthermore, the Prophet (PBUH) stated in another hadith: "When the trials envelop you like the darkness of night, you should adhere to the Quran." (Kāfi: 2, 459) 'Does this mean that we should merely kiss the Quran? Or just read it? Or prostrate upon it, for instance? Or show other forms of respect?' Certainly not; rather, the intent of the Prophet is to refer to the Quran and to benefit from it in order to resolve those trials and problems. There are numerous narrations that include a directive for interrogation in the narrative texts. It should be noted that the textual foundations of interrogation are of two types: The first group consists of hadiths that include the word for "*Nuṭq*"



and its derivatives, or are, in terms of their content, related to the topic of interrogation and deriving benefits from the Quran. The second group includes narrations that somehow refer to the perpetuity of the Quran, its comprehensiveness, and its explanatory nature (Akhavan Moqaddam, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 160). Although such narrations do not specifically mention the word "Interrogation" or its derivatives, they are closely related to this subject. This matter will be elaborated upon in the section on narrations.

## 6. The Importance of Interrogation

Based on the eternal nature of the Quran, which is affirmed by the universally accepted and authentic Hadith of *Thaqalayn* (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 275) and is one of the implications of finality, it is essential that the Quran not be confined to a specific time or specific individuals, but be able to respond to the questions of human societies throughout all eras. This is supported by the saying of Imam *Bāqir* (AS): "If a verse descends upon a people and then those people die, if the verse were to perish, nothing would remain of the Quran. However, the Quran flows from its beginning to its end as long as the heavens and the earth exist, and for every nation, there is a verse that they recite containing good or evil." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 2, 628; ‘Ayyāshī, 1960 AD/1380 SH: 1, 110)

A questioner also asked the eighth Imam why the Quran never becomes obsolete. Imam *Riḍā* (AS) responded that the perpetual freshness and novelty of the Quran is regarding the fact that it is not confined to a specific time and will remain fresh and new until the Day of Judgment: "Why does the Quran not increase in freshness

when it is recited and studied?’ He replied: Because Allah did not reveal it for a specific time or for specific people; rather, it is new in every age and remains fresh for every nation until the Day of Resurrection." (Şadūq, 1958 AD/1378 AH: 2, 87; Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 580)

One of the characteristics of the Quran is its miraculous nature and its "Inimitability," meaning that according to numerous verses, no one can produce anything like the Quran. The *I'jāz* aspects of the Quran are manifold and will be discussed in due course; however, Motahhari points out an important matter relevant to this research. He considers the Quran's endless capacity for deriving various issues to be the most miraculous aspect of it and believes that, regardless of how masterfully human books are written, they have a limited and finite capacity for study, and the work of a few specialists is enough to clarify all their points. In contrast, despite the vast number of specialists who have worked on the Quran over fourteen centuries, it remains inexhaustible. He likens the Quran's limitless nature to that of nature itself, where deeper insights and broader studies reveal new secrets from it (Motahhari, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 72).

Based on the comprehensiveness of the Quran, which is also a requirement of finality, and which has been referenced numerous times in the Quran (al-Naḥl/89; Yūsuf/11; al-An'ām/38) and in narrations (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 68; Şadūq, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 1, 248; Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 60; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 56), everything is contained in the Quran, and limiting everything to matters related to guidance contradicts the

apparent meaning of the verses and narrations.

On this basis, Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) says, "I know the knowledge of everything that is in the heavens and the earth, and all that has been in the past and will be in the future;" and when he sees the astonishment of his listener, he clarifies, "All of this is in the Quran, and I learned it from it." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 261) Therefore, Allah the Almighty has sent down a book that is a clear explanation of everything, relevant at all times. It is the duty of Muslims that, on the one hand, through interrogation from the Quran, they resolve all their problems, and on the other hand, through adherence to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), they remain safe from error in their interrogations and interpretations.

### **7. The Quranic Term Rooted in "N Ṭ Q" and Interrogation**

The source of the term "Interrogation" and other forms in this context do not appear in the Quran, but the causative form (*Iaf'āl*) derived from the root "N Ṭ Q" and its simple trilateral form are used in twelve verses. For example, when God speaks about the Day of Judgment, He specifies that the ears, eyes, and members of the body, which normally do not have the ability to speak or articulate, will speak up and, in response to the protest of their owners, will say, "God has made us speak." This is highlighted in the verse: "And they will say to their skins, 'Why have you testified against us?' They will say: We were made to speak by Allah, who makes all things speak." (al-Fuṣṣilat/21) This verse indicates that the verb "*Anṭaqa*" is used for something that is silent, which supports the validity of the linguistic interpretations discussed earlier.

## **8. Interrogation and the Root "N T Q" in the Narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)**

The root "N T Q" and its derivatives are more extensively found in narrations, where the previously mentioned literal meaning is considered and is broader than the discussion of this research. To clarify the meaning of the term "Interrogation," we can refer to several examples:

### **8.1. "Interrogation of the Intellect" in the Narrations**

It is evident that the intellect does not have a tongue to speak, yet it is interrogated, and it is asked to express itself. A narration from Imam *Bāqir* (AS) states that "When Allah created the intellect, He made it speak" and then said to it, "Come forth," and it came forth. Then He said to it, "Go back," and it did so. Then He addressed the intellect and said: "By My honor and glory, I have not created a creature that is more beloved to Me than you, nor have I perfected you except among those I love." (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 1, 192; Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 10; Ṣadūq, 1956 AD/1376 AH: 418) This means that when God created the intellect, He made it speak, and then commanded it to move forward, and it did. He commanded it to retreat, and it complied. Then He addressed the intellect...

### **8.2. The Interrogation of *Khiḍr* by Prophet Musa and the Necessity of Inquiring from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)**

Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) mentions that the example of Amir al-Mu'minin and his descendants (AS) among the community is akin to that of Prophet Musa, who sought knowledge from *Khiḍr* (al-Kahf/78). The Imam

states: "Indeed, the example of Ali and our successors from this community is like that of Prophet Musa when he met him and sought to interrogate him and requested his company." (‘Ayyāshī, 1960 AD/1380 AH: 2, 331; Ḥuwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 273; Mashhadī Qummī, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 8, 11) This means that the example of Amir al-Mu’minin and the Imams after him is like Musa with *Khiḍr*, who, upon meeting *Khiḍr*, sought to gain knowledge from him and requested to accompany him.

We know that the interrogation of Musa by *Khiḍr* was a demand for the hidden meaning behind the three actions of *Khiḍr*, which appeared to be unacceptable at first. However, once *Khiḍr* explained, Musa understood the secret behind those actions. Imam *Ṣādiq* made this analogy so that people would recognize their own position. The implication seems to be: O! People! We, the Ahl al-Bayt, are aware of the hidden truths of all matters (including the inner meanings of the Quran), but you must ask us so we can tell you.

### **8.3. Interrogation of the Members of Polytheists' Bodies on the Day of Resurrection**

Another instance where something seemingly silent is interrogated pertains to the members of the human body. In the narrations, it is explicitly stated that hands, feet, and skin will be interrogated, and all of these will speak up and confess their sins (Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 2, 207; Baḥrānī, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 4, 784).

### **8.4. Interrogation of Animals**

Numerous reports indicate that one of the miracles of the Prophet and

the Imams (AS) was the ability to interrogate animals and converse with them. The abundance of these hadiths is such that in the book "*Biḥār al-Anwār*," there is a chapter titled: "What has appeared of His miracles in the interrogation of animals and their submission to Him" dedicated solely to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 41, 230).

## **9. Narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) on the Interrogation of the Quran**

Beyond the narrations discussed in the previous section to familiarize oneself with the concept of interrogation, this section addresses narrations that directly discuss the interrogation of the Quran.

### **9.1. A Definitive Command Regarding "Making the Quran Speak"**

The most important narrations in this area are reported from Amir al-Mu'minin. In one narration, it is stated: "O! people, indeed Allah, Blessed and Exalted, has sent the Messenger (PBUH) to you and has revealed the Book to him in truth while you were unlettered regarding the Book... This is the Quran; therefore, make it speak." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 158; Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 60) This means, "O! people, Allah sent the Messenger to you and revealed the Quran to him in truth while you were unlettered and ignorant... This is the Quran, so (benefit from it and) bring it to speech." It should be noted that before this statement, the Imam explained the situation of society at that time and then discussed the bounties of the Lord, namely the Prophet and the Book, and thereafter, he issued the command for interrogation.

## 9.2. Explicit Reference to the "Written Nature" and "Speechlessness" of the Quran

After the Battle of *Ṣiffīn* and the incident of the two arbiters, Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) said: "And this Quran is merely a written text between two covers that does not speak with a tongue, and it requires a translator; indeed, it is men who speak on its behalf." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 125; Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 8, 103) It is evident that this statement from Amir al-Mu'minin explicitly commands the interrogation of the Quran. Studying the history of the Battle of *Ṣiffīn* and the dispute that arose over the verse "There is no judgment except for Allah" as well as a thorough study of this sermon shows that the Imam's intention is for believers to draw from the Quran in every incident, turmoil, and situation, seeking correct answers from it in accordance with new challenges (Jawadi Amoli, 2007 AD/1386 SH (a): 60). Another important point in this narration is the lack of limitation for the interrogator and that it is not restricted to a specific person or persons.

## 9.3. Emphasis on the Quran's Lack of Speech and the Need for "A Speaker"

In some instances, the impeccable Imam gives a command to interrogate the Quran, but the content of the speech suggests certain exclusivity. This is the case when the infallible seeks to articulate the special status of the Ahl al-Bayt concerning the Quran. For example, Imam *Jawād* (AS) relates from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) from his father, *Bāqir* (AS), who said: "Indeed, the Quran does not speak to issue commands or prohibitions; rather, there are people who are the 'people of the Quran' who speak on its behalf and issue commands

and prohibitions." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 246; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 25, 77) This means that the Quran does not speak in a way that it can command or prohibit; instead, there are those who are "People of the Quran" who speak instead of the Quran and issue commands and prohibitions. The main story is that near the Kaaba, an individual asks Imam *Bāqir* (AS) about "Knowledge without Disagreement" and who possesses such knowledge. It is here that the fifth Imam speaks of the true owners of the Quran. The same questioner asks again: If an objector claims that only the Quran is a proof, what should I say? The Imam replied: "The Quran does not speak, so as to articulate commands or prohibitions; rather, it has patrons who [make it speak and] issue commands and prohibitions."

#### **9.4. The Quran as a Silent Book and the Impeccable Imams (AS) as the Speaking Book**

Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) stated in a similar expression: "I am the Speaking Book of Allah, I am the Speaking Quran, I am the Supreme Word of Allah" and "This is the Silent Book of Allah, and I am the Speaking Book of Allah." This means that this Book of God is silent, and I am the Speaking Book of God. This implies how it is impossible for you to neglect my position and instead focus on the Quran alone.

Ali (AS) further clarifies that there is no one other than him who can unveil and explain the Quran: "This is the Silent Book of Allah, and I am the one who interprets it. So take the Speaking Book of Allah and abandon the judgments of the Silent Book of Allah, for there is no one who can interpret it other than me." (Ḥurr 'Āmilī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 27, 24; Burūjirdī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 1, 277; 2, 123)



This means that this Book, which is silent, is interpreted and explained by me. Therefore, abandon the judgments of others, for no one besides me has comprehensive knowledge of the Quran.

## **10. The Nature of "Interrogation" from the Perspective of Islamic Thinkers**

Engagement with the Quran is not uniform; it encompasses multiple forms. What can be understood from the surface of the Quran is its spoken and written word; however, interrogation of the Quran is a level higher than mere speech. Regarding the lack of attention to the difference between these two levels in understanding the meaning of interrogation, confusion has arisen between interrogation and other methods of engagement with the Quran. Now, I will present four well-known theories, followed by the perspective of *Ṣadr*, and finally, the "Preferred Opinion" on the nature of interrogation, emphasizing the words of the Ahl al-Bayt.

### **10.1. Interrogation as Equivalent to Interpretation of the Quran by the Quran**

Some scholars refer to the juxtaposition of verses and understanding their meanings through the Quran itself as interrogation. The author of *Tafsir al-Mīzān* holds this view, stating: "Interpretation of the Quran by the Quran is the unique approach that should not be overlooked in the interrogation of the Holy Quran ... and the interpreter must engage some verses to understand others." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 7, 166) It is clear that in this model, interrogation is considered synonymous with interpretation of the Quran by the Quran.

### **10.2. Interrogation as Equivalent to Interpretation and Esoteric Meanings**

According to some contemporary scholars, interrogation is the same

as interpretation, which does not derive from the words of the Quran, but goes beyond it (Jawadi Amoli, 2007 AD/1386 SH (a): 115). This means that interpretation arises from the apparent meaning of the Quran, but the Quran must be interrogated to access its esoteric meanings and underlying layers.

### **10.3. Interrogation as Equivalent to Extraction**

Another group considers interrogation to be synonymous with extraction. Extraction linguistically means drawing water from a well and, in legal terminology, refers to the deriving of legal rulings from jurisprudential sources. This group interprets the statement of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) when he says "So interrogate it," as a call to contemplate and deeply engage with the Quran and strive to extract its meanings, because the Quran has an apparent meaning that is limited by its descent, but its essence is as expansive as the horizons (Ma'rifat, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 1, 16).

### **10.4. Interrogation as Equivalent to Thematic Interpretation**

Most scholars define thematic interpretation as gathering and interpreting verses around a specific word or subject. It is worth mentioning that they refer to another type of interpretation called "Contemporary Interpretation," which pertains to every era and its challenges and the presentation of these issues to the Quran (Shakir, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 67). From the viewpoint of this group of scholars, interrogation means thematic interpretation.

## **11. *Şadr's* Unique Perspective on Defining "Thematic Interpretation"**

**154** In the previous section, the commonly understood meaning of

thematic interpretation was mentioned. However, *Şadr* introduces thematic interpretation in a different manner. He believes that what others have called thematic interpretation can only be termed "Interpretation of verses with a common theme," as in that case, the interpreter has no pressing concerns or questions. Therefore, thematic interpretation is not merely the collection of verses related to a single issue. Thematic interpretation must begin with a subject, meaning a question or a problem that the interpretation seeks to address. According to *Şadr*, that subject or question should arise from the essence of society and from engagement with various sciences.

What *Şadr* refers to as thematic interpretation is equivalent to the previously mentioned contemporary interpretation that relates to the questions and concerns of each era. By closely examining *Şadr*'s words, it becomes clear that his understanding of thematic interpretation differs from the conventional meaning. He considers interpretation to be possible through two general methods, asserting that "interrogation" is a "method of interpretation," which he describes as "the method of monotheistic or thematic interpretation." To support this method, he references the saying of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS), who commanded, "So interrogate it."

*Şadr* finds the term "Dialogue with the Quran" beautiful and expressive for posing questions and seeking answers from the Quran. In contrast to the "Monotheistic or thematic interpretation method," he mentions a method called "Analytical or sequential interpretation," where the interpreter often has a passive role, merely being a listener seeking understanding, while the verses of the Quran play the role of

the speaker. However, in the thematic method, the interpreter is primarily an active agent, not passive; and he does not start his work from the text of the Quran but begins from the realities of life and the issues and problems of society, seeking solutions from the Quran to fill its gaps.

Therefore, he does not merely play the role of a listener, but rather occupies the position of an inquisitor who engages in dialogue with the Book of God through contemplation and reflection. Here, the interpreter raises a topic that arises from human thoughts and positions, which is new, and presents it to the Quran to uncover the Quran's perspective on this matter (Şadr, n.d: 26). According to Şadr's view, the correct interpretation of interrogation is equivalent to thematic interpretation, which Şadr supports by stating: "By interrogation, I mean the thematic interpretation of the Quran in such a way that, by studying the circumstances of societies in every era, various issues and topics are understood, and then presented to the Quran in the form of questions to receive answers." (Şadr, 2007 AD/1428 AH: 26)

## **12. Evaluation of Theories Based on the Sayings of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)**

Each of the four aforementioned opinions, as well as the view of Şadr, may have support in hadiths. For instance, according to the narration "Some of it speaks of some," interpreting the Quran with the Quran is, in itself, a form of bringing the word of God into speech. Interpretation is also a type of understanding and deriving meaning, and it can be similar to interrogation. However, careful consideration

of these opinions and all hadiths shows that the intent of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is something other than mere interpretation or explanation, and they had a specific purpose in using the term "Interrogation."

Evidence for this claim is found in the first narration, where Amir al-Mu'minin (AS), after commanding interrogation, speaks of the knowledge of the past and future present in the Quran. This statement of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) supports *Şadr*'s position that for new topics and questions, one must seek answers from the Quran based on the sciences that arise in each era, and bring it into articulation. According to one contemporary researcher, the Quran is a "Book of Codification" and a mirror that reflects the "Book of Creation." Just as interrogating the book of creation is beneficial, and by utilizing various materials and solving some within others or combining those leads to inventions and the creation of new things, interrogating the "Book of Codification" is also beneficial. By combining its elements or relating verses to one another based on certain rules, it becomes as if "New Texts" emerge, and thus there is a phenomenon for which one cannot fail to find a verse in support or refutation (Baḥrānī, 1999: 358-320).

What is meant by new texts are the new interpretations that are drawn from the heart of the Quran through interrogation, and ample evidence for this can be found in numerous hadiths from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), which indicate the comprehensiveness of the Quran.

### **13. The Relationship Between the Concept of "Interrogation of the Quran" and the Discussion of "The Comprehensiveness of the Quran"**

In the narrations regarding comprehensiveness, it has often been emphasized that there is nothing in the world that does not have a place in the Book of God, and it has also been stated explicitly that everything exists in the Quran. The reliance of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) in these statements is based on the verses about comprehensiveness, the most important of which may be the verse from Surah al-Nahl/89. The phrase "Everything" in this verse is absolute, and without decisive evidence, one cannot restrict its generality and absoluteness to a condition or limit it to guidance-related matters (Akhavan Moghaddam, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 17). Therefore, if the Quran is comprehensive and contains a wealth of knowledge and topics, there is no way to benefit from all this knowledge except through interrogation. In interrogation, the person who interrogates is not passive but active, as they are the questioner and initiator. Then, through effort, they extract new meanings from the text.

The basis of interrogation is that a text may face new questions that were not raised at the time of its creation due to the passage of time and the emergence of new cultural and social conditions. These types of questions are not explicitly posed in the text, but the text may potentially have answers for them (Bagheri, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 91).

#### **14. Distinction of "Interrogation" from Other Types of Interpretation**

It has been understood that the movement of the interpreter in thematic interpretation, according to *Şadr*, does not stem from the text of the Quran but from the text of society and the realities of life. Accordingly, interrogation cannot be considered as sequential interpretation, *Ta'wīl* (Interpretation), or interpreting the Quran

through the Quran in the conventional sense, because in these three cases, the movement of the interpreter begins from the Quran itself and within the Quran, among the verses themselves. However, in interrogation, the starting point for the interpreter is external to the Quran, and then, with questioning and concern, they compassionately enter, explore, examine, delve into the Quran, strive, and find the answer. Of course, the interpreter in this process requires the sequential interpretation of the verses related to their problem, as well as the conventional thematic interpretation, and the *Ta'wīl* of those verses. They utilize all these tools to articulate the Quran in response to that initial question. Therefore, interrogation is none of these three, and it transcends them, even though it benefits from them and sits at their table.

### **15. Response to the Doubt Regarding "The Exclusivity of Interrogation to the Impeccable Imams (AS)"**

The present study, after proving the necessity of interrogation and its meaning, seeks to respond to the doubt that, although interrogation is necessary, it is not for everyone. Some scholars consider the interrogation mentioned in the above Hadiths to pertain solely to the impeccable Imams and do not believe that others are capable of performing it. However, in some traditions, the necessity of interrogation from the Quran is mentioned without creating exclusivity for the interrogator, rather allowing for general applicability, such as in the phrase *Innamā Yanṭiqu 'anhu al-Rijāl* (Indeed, it is only men who speak on his behalf). In other traditions, after noting the necessity of interrogation, it seems there is an

implication of exclusivity regarding its agent, as in the saying of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS): "This Quran, so interrogate it; it will not speak for you. I will inform you about it, for it contains knowledge of what has passed and knowledge of what will come until the Day of Resurrection, and it contains judgments on what you dispute among yourselves. If you were to ask me about it, I would inform you." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 158; Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 60)

Some scholars, in explaining the above sentence, say that the "*Wa*" (and) of resumption indicates that the Imam is the only one who brings the Quran to speech, and the phrase "*Ukhbirukum*" (I will inform you) confirms this view (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 1, 208). One of the commentators on *Nahj al-Balāghah* has also chosen this opinion, stating: "The Imam has said that you should ask the Quran to speak, and then the Imam interprets his statement by saying that the words of the Quran must be heard from him, as he is the voice of the Book of God and the Sunnah." (Baḥrānī, 1989 AD/1401 AH: 3, 273; Nawwab Lahiji, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 147)

One contemporary Quran scholar also believes in exclusivity, saying: "The Quran is like a wise human being who has various secrets within, and only the possessors of those secrets know that it carries mysteries; therefore, they repeatedly ask it to disclose what is inside. Thus, this task can only be performed by the impeccable Imams considering the intensity of the illumination of the Quran." (Jawadi Amoli, 2007 AD/1386 SH (a): 115) However, the same researcher, in another place, considers a level of interrogation to be possible for everyone and believes that through interrogation and



inquiries from religious texts [of which the Quran is the most important], the ground for the flourishing of hidden intellects is provided (Jawadi Amoli, 2007 AD/1386 SH (b): 53).

Allamah Jafari, another commentator on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, states that understanding all truths in each verse, as well as their totality, is beyond the capacity of an ordinary person and is the responsibility of the Prophet and the impeccable Imams (AS). He adds: "Just as the Prophet's household cannot fully fulfill their mission without the Quran, the Book of God cannot be fully interpreted without them." (Jafari, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 26, 81 and 96)

In response to the aforementioned doubt, the following points can be made:

**First Response:** The intense illumination of the Quran and the existence of multiple layers and depths are undeniable; however, this does not imply exclusivity. Rather, according to the spiritual purity of individuals, there is a ranking of accessibility to different levels of understanding. Hence, some levels of Quranic knowledge are also accessible to non-impeccable, although it is undoubtedly true that complete and comprehensive understanding is exclusive to the pure, namely the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) (cf. Akhavan Moqaddam, 2010 AD/1389 SH: The principle of the exclusivity of complete knowledge of the Quran to the Ahl al-Bayt).

**Second Response:** Those who support the idea of exclusivity refer to the word (*Lan*) and believe that with this eternal negation, no one can ever bring the Quran to speech. If the presence of *Lan* in the Imam's statement is meant for eternal negation and signifies an

inability, then his command to ask questions at the beginning of his speech would contradict this and create an unbearable obligation, which is inappropriate for a wise person. Therefore, what is being negated is not the understanding of the Quran but rather relates to the Quran's own nature. In other words, this book is indeed silent and never speaks unless you ask it.

**Third Response:** Proponents of exclusivity argue that when the Imam stated, "I will inform you," he meant that others cannot. However, it should be said that the subject of the verb "*Akhbiru*" (I inform) can be the following sentence; thus, there is no exclusivity regarding interrogation. That is, I am informing you that the Quran contains knowledge of the past and the future, not that you cannot interrogate and I will inform you.

**Fourth Response:** The Imam's description of the Quran, stating that "It contains knowledge of the future," implicitly indicates that "People in the future, following the command of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS), must interrogate the Quran to obtain that knowledge." 'How could the people of that time question the sciences and events of the future?' Supporting this interpretation is the Imam's final statement, where he uses *Law* (if): if you ask me, I will teach you. This implies that they will not ask, and it confirms that the Master of the God-fearing has complete knowledge of all those sciences.

**Fifth Response:** In the science of "Fiqh al-Hadith," there is a term called "The family of Hadith," meaning that if you want to find the Ahl al-Bayt's perspective on a topic, you must gather all the narrations pertaining to that subject and consider them all together as a

"Complete System." Even if one narration suggests exclusivity of interrogation for the impeccable Imams, examining other narrations clarifies that the narration pertains to one aspect of the issue, while other dimensions must be inferred from other narrations. In other words, just as the Quran contains general and specific elements, the narrations are similar. Therefore, in one of the narrations, it is said that the Quran does not speak, and *Rijāl* (men) must bring it to speech.

Paying attention to this narration is also helpful. A person asks the Imam: "After you, whom should we ask and to whom should we trust?" The Imam replied: "Open the Book of Allah, for it is a compassionate guide, a directing leader, a wise counselor, and a guide that leads to the Paradise of Allah, the Mighty and Majestic." (Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 2, 300) This means to open the Book of God, for it is a gentle guide, a nurturing guide, a beneficial advisor, and a guide that leads you to Paradise. Thus, the Imam teaches the people not to neglect referring to the Quran and benefiting from this guiding book by adhering to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS).

**Sixth Response:** Limiting the ability to interrogate the Quran to the impeccable Imams calls into question the eternal vitality and dynamism of the Quran. Certainly, there is no doubt that the true interrogators of the Quran are the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), and their interpretations are always correct, definitive, and complete; however, they have never approved of people abandoning the Quran and not benefiting from it for their issues and contemporary topics. Their predictions for the time of the Occultation of Imam *Mahdī* (may Allah hasten his reappearance) also indicate this. Therefore, the statement

that "Interrogating the Quran can only be done by the impeccable Imams" makes this issue more serious, since the infallible does not need to ask questions to receive answers. The impeccable Imam is knowledgeable about the Quran and has no unknowns, especially in knowledge of the Book of God; the texts proclaiming the impeccable' comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the Quran are numerous. For example, Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) said: "I swear by God, I am the most knowledgeable person about the Quran from the beginning to the end, as if it is in the palm of my hand. In the Quran, there is news about the heavens and the earth and everything that will happen in the future and everything that has been decreed in the past, and I know it all." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 229; Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 1, 194; Ḥuwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 76)

It is important to emphasize that "The non-exclusivity of interrogating the Quran for the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) does not contradict their scientific authority, and some Islamic teachings should be referred to them for clarification." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 80)

## 16. Determining the Difference between Interrogation and Personal Interpretation

Since interrogation represents a level distinct from both the literal text and the recitation of the Quran, providing new answers to new questions, some have considered it a form of personal interpretation (*Tafsīr bil Ra'y*). Commentators have differing opinions regarding the meaning of personal interpretation (cf. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 3, 77). The author of *al-Mīzān* believes that it refers to

interpreting the words of God using the methods of human discourse and relying on sources other than the Quran for the interpretation of the Quran (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 78). Based on this, he equates any method other than interpreting the Quran by the Quran itself with personal interpretation. However, this view contradicts the perspectives of great scholars such as *Ṣadr*, who have presented a different understanding of interrogation.

It must be noted that personal interpretation fundamentally differs from interrogation in nature. In personal interpretation, the commentator has a specific opinion regarding a topic from the beginning and interprets and explains the verses according to their desires and whims to prove their claims. In contrast, in interrogation, the questioner presents their sincere inquiry before the Quran, seeking to uncover the message of the Book of God without having a personal opinion, and is not aiming to prove a specific objective. The fact that an interpreter approaches the Quran with a premise does not imply that their interpretation is influenced by personal opinion or desire, as every interpreter necessarily enters the realm of interpretation with certain foundational understandings, such as awareness of Arab literature, the reasons for revelation, history, and other preliminary sciences. Therefore, the mere existence of a premise does not lead to personal interpretation.

## **Conclusion**

"Interrogating the Quran" is a highly significant topic in Quranic studies, with various opinions regarding its essence, manner, and

permissibility, as well as its subject. Interrogation means "Requesting Speech." Its root fundamentally connotes "The manifestation of what is concealed through what is apparent," and thus it is not limited to speaking with voice and letters. The rational basis for Quranic interrogation is founded on the finality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as if he is to be the last divine messenger and the Quran the final heavenly guidance, then it must be able to address humanity's problems and hold the responsibility of guiding human society until the Day of Resurrection.

The narrative basis for interrogation stems from two types of narrations: Some indirectly imply interrogation and refer to the perpetuity of the Quran, its comprehensiveness, and its function as a clarifier for all matters. The other group includes terms related to speech and its derivatives, which directly pertain to "What we are discussing." In this type, there are sometimes explicit commands regarding the necessity of bringing forth the speech of the Quran, while at other times, there are references to the silence and inexpressiveness of the Quran, or it emphasizes that the Quran requires knowledgeable individuals to articulate its meanings. In some narrations, the impeccable Imams (AS) are introduced as the ones who bring forth the speech of the Quran.

Interrogating the Quran represents a level beyond its apparent meaning and articulation, and a lack of attention to the distinction between these two levels has led to a conflation of interrogation with other forms of interaction with the Quran. As a result, it is sometimes equated with interpretation and inner meanings, sometimes with

thematic interpretation as commonly understood, or even with inference. According to the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), it becomes clear that their concept of interrogation is distinct from the aforementioned cases. The impeccable Imams (AS) have sought to emphasize that in every era, one should present their concerns to the Quran and seek responses by bringing these concerns into articulation; for this text, with the passage of time and the emergence of new cultural and social conditions, can bear new meanings. Thus, interrogation of the Quran is related to its comprehensiveness but is distinct from interpretations, sequential explanations, and the methodology of interpreting the Quran through the Quran itself.

There have been challenges regarding interrogation: Some accept its premise but restrict the interrogators to the infallible figures, arguing that this limitation can be rejected with six counter-arguments. Others do not accept the premise of interrogation at all, claiming that it has no boundary with personal interpretation. The rebuttal to this challenge is clear, as these two concepts differ fundamentally.

In the preferred view, interrogation is akin to contemporary interpretation; where in each age the interpreter receives questions and concerns from the social context and presents them to the Quran, seeking its responses. These concerns, which are referred to as "Topics" by *Ṣadr*, are not preconceived notions of the interpreter so that they can label their interpretation as personal; rather, they are merely a starting point. This understanding has led this esteemed martyr to equate thematic interpretation with interrogation, viewing what is currently known as thematic interpretation as nothing but the

interpretation of "Verses on a unified subject."

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