

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

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Please see related article: [How to Study the Quran](#)

These principles are not intended to form a comprehensive list but merely to act as a guide to enable a student of the Quran a consistent approach.

(1) FIRST PRINCIPLE

Any sincere attempt at Quranic 'Tafsir' or interpretation should be performed in light of the Quran itself. This self reliant interpretation and cogent technique of analysis of the **Quran by the Quran** is the highest source of Tafsir. There is no second. Any [secondary source narrative](#) or practice must be considered in light of the scripture and not vice versa.

This has always been the foremost duty and approach of any renowned Mufassir (Quranic exegetic). Many of the questions which arise out of certain passages of the Quran can be found explained by other parts of the Quran and there is no need to turn to any source other than the word of God which in itself contains its own Tafsir.

025.033

And they shall not bring to you any argument but We bring to you the truth and the best explanation (Arabic: Ahsana Tafsiran)"

Any astute Quranic exegetic will note that the Quran is a collection of narratives which is consistently repeated in multifaceted ways to leave the reader in no doubt of its authenticity and to drive the crux of the message. There are internal relationships within the scripture which also drive key concepts.

039:023

"God has revealed the most **beautiful** message in the form of a Book **consistent** with itself yet repeating (its teaching in various aspects); the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble from it; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the celebration of God's praises. Such is the guidance of God: He guides with it whom He pleases but such as God leaves to stray can have none to guide"

Sometimes themes are paired, sometimes different narratives from different time periods are pooled together to drive an underlying core message. At other times the narratives are short, sharp and succinct; and in others, they extend to a more descriptive form.

This is the first **key principle** of understanding the scripture, an approach for any serious student that wants to embark upon an understanding of the message of the Quran in truth. Different parts of the scripture explain each other.

(2) SECOND PRINCIPLE

Unqualified verses or narratives must be understood in the context and light of qualified verses or narratives.

One should not make use of 'perceived' unqualified verses as an exit door or opportunity to authenticate ideologies which are not supported by the Quran. After all, the scripture claims to be **fully** consistent with itself.

025.032

"And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Quran not revealed to him all at once? (It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart there with; and We have arranged it in right order (**Arabic: Ratalnahu tartila**)"

لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلاً

Ratalnahu tartila

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The phrase 'rattalnahu tartilan' in Arabic consists not only of 'putting the parts of a thing together and arranging them in a well ordered manner', but also to 'endow it with a complete internal consistency'.

As to why some isolated verses 'may' have a seemingly ambiguous import or be left in that way, there is much depth and wisdom from verse 3:7

003:007

"He it is Who has revealed to you the Scripture wherein are **clear revelations (Arabic: Muhkamatun)** - They are the **substance** of the Book, others are unspecific / allegorical (**Arabic: Mutashabihaat**). But those in whose hearts is perversity pursue that which is unspecific (**Arabic: Mutashabihaat**) seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knows its explanation save God. (and) those who are of sound instruction say: We believe in it; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really take heed"

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ

Mutashabihaat

Muhkamatun

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The term 'Mutashabihat' can also be possibly best understood as those passages of the Quran which are expressed in a figurative manner or of a metaphorical import. The term 'Muhkamat' is best understood as the 'substance and true essence of the scripture' as they consist of fundamental principles which form the **foundations** of the book and its underlying message, teachings and themes.

Unfortunately, some interpret the 'Mutashabihaat' as verses which support themes outside the Quran claiming that they cannot be elucidated from within the Quran. This is akin to reverse engineer the true purport of the verse. The 'mutashabihaat' should be reconciled with the **central** theme from within the Quran and not from [Islamic secondary sources](#).

(3) THIRD PRINCIPLE

There are some verses and narratives which do not provide full intricate details of a given narrative nor is it the intention. This does not mean however, that one makes use of the 'seeming' lack of detail as an exit door to find answers and intricate details from other sources which are contradictory and not contemporaneous to the Quran. One should remain committed to understanding these narratives in as much as they have been elucidated. Much of the Quran remains subtle in its narrative underscoring a central wisdom.

There is much wisdom from Surah Kahf regarding God's instruction regarding the affairs of the sleepers in the cave.

018.022

"(Some) say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; (others) say they were five, the dog being the sixth,- doubtfully guessing at the unknown; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog

being the eighth. Say thou: "My Lord knows best their number; It is but few that know their (real case)." **Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about (the affair of) the Sleepers"**

[Much literature](#) has found its genesis from these supposedly 'perceived gaps' and has given rise to much spurious information.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We noted three guiding principles:

- (1) Any serious attempt at Quranic 'Tafsir' or interpretation should be performed primarily in light of the Quran itself.
- (2) Unqualified verses or narratives must be understood in the context and light of qualified verses or narratives.
- (3) Lack of 'perceived' details of an event does not require one to source other material with a view to arbitrarily 'fill them in'. Many verses have subtle nuances and are complete in that they make clear the general purport of the message and wisdom they intend to impart. Intricate details are not of its concern. God does not run out of words (31:27).

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