

Amin Ahsan Islahi: An Introduction to His *Tafsīr* Methodology

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Abstract

Amin Ahsan Islahi (1903-97), an illustrious Islamic scholar from India, is the author of the Urdu-language *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*, the first *tafsīr* of its kind. In it, he has applied a unique method of interpreting the revealed words that, he rightly claims, he actually borrowed from his great teacher `Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi (1861-1930). According to him, this methodology leads to the unity of meaning and hence to the unity of thought. Its salient feature is what he refers to as “coherence in the Qur’an” (*na`m al-Qur`Ēn*). Identifying the coherence between the Qur’an’s verses enables the commentator to establish cohesion among apparently conflicting passages within a *s`rah*. Coherence is not merely an academic witticism (*la`fah`ilmīyah*); rather, it is an intellectual endeavor (*al-sa`y`al-`ilmī*) based on the Qur’anic principle of deliberation (*al-tadabbur*) to apply certain rules to the text in order to unfold the truth enshrined in the divine statements. Islahi’s work is a methodological and practical example of *na`m al-Qur`Ēn*. This paper seeks to introduce his methodology in detail as applied in his work with a view to formulating its system of practical application in *tafsīr*.

Introduction

Amin Ahsan Islahi was born in 1903 in a small village of Azamgarh district in Uttar Pradesh (India). After completing his primary school education at his birth place, he entered the town of Sarai Mir’s highly prestigious Islamic university, Madrasah al-Islah, where he studied Arabic, *tafsīr*, hadith, *fiqh*, Islamic philosophy, and logic. After he graduated at the age of nineteen, he

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joined the editorial board of several Urdu weeklies, including *Sidq Jadid* (Lucknow), which was under the charge of `Abd al-Majid Daryabadi, a great Indian Muslim scholar. He remained active in journalism for around three years. In 1925, he returned to his alma mater as a lecturer and remained there until 1943, when he joined Syed Abu al-A`la Mawdudi's Islamic movement. After the formation of Pakistan, he migrated there in 1947 and wrote a number of books on several issues, including *da`wah*.

His magnum opus is, however, *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*. For the cause of Islam, he suffered at the hands of Pakistani government in many ways, including imprisonment. He died in 1997 in Lahore, Pakistan. His surname Islahi is derived from the name of his alma mater: Islah.¹ His *tafsihr* teacher at his alma mater was `Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi (d. 1930), who devoted vital parts of his life to further the "coherence in the Qur'an" cause initiated and developed by such great *mufasssir* in the past as Qadi `Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamdani (d. 415 AH), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 AH), `Ali ibn Ahmad al-Haralliyi (d. 637 AH), Ibn al-Naqib al-Maqdisi (d. 698 AH), and Ibrahim ibn `Umar al-Biqai (d. 885 AH). Al-Farahi could not go beyond defining the theory of "coherence," outlining its methodological pattern and applying it to *S`rat al-Baqarah* and other short *s`rahs*. It seems that al-Islahi took this theory seriously and completed his teacher's undertaking by applying it in his deliberations on the Qur'an and his resulting *tafsihr*. In this work, the methodology applied, which the author claims to be *na`m al-Qur`En*, seems to be relatively different from that in other exegeses. This paper represents a humble reflection on the *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*'s methodological pattern with a view to introducing this great work to the academia outside the Urdu-speaking world.

Islahi and His *Muqaddimah*

Islahi's *muqaddimah* to his *tafsihr* may be considered a treatise on his principles of and approach to *tafsihr*. Here, he classifies all the means of *tafsihr* into two categories: internal and external. Under the first one he mentions the language of the Qur'an, coherence (*na`m*), and the Qur'an itself. As for the external ones, he refers to *al-sunnah al-mutaw`tirah*, authentic *ah`adith*, views of the Sahabah, *asb`ab al-nuz`l*, previous *tafsihr* works, earlier revealed scriptures, and Arab history. His introduction contains an extremely novel concept: that the arrangement of the Qur'anic *s`rahs* has a two-dimensional system, one external and the other internal. His view is summarized in the following pages.

External Dimension of the S'rahs' Arrangement

All of the chapters constitute seven groups, each of which begins with a Makkan *s'rah* and ends with a Madinan *s'rah*:

- **GROUP 1:** From *al-F'etiúah* (Makkan) to *al-M'É'idah* (5 [Madinan]).
- **GROUP 2:** From *al-An`Ém* (6) and *al-A`rÉf* (7) (both Makkan) to *al-AnfÉl* (8) and *al-TawbÉ* (9) (both Madinan).
- **GROUP 3:** From *Y`nus* (10) to *al-Mu`minun* (23 [all Makkan]) and on to *al-Nur* (24 [Madinan]).
- **GROUP 4:** From *al-FurqÉn* (25) to *al-Sajdah* (32 [all Makkan]) and on to *al-AúzÉb* (33 [Madinan]).
- **GROUP 5:** From *SabÉ'* (34 [Makkan]) *al-HujurÉt* (49 [Madinan]). Altogether there are sixteen *s'rahs* in this group, thirteen Makkan and three Madinan.
- **GROUP 6:** From *QÉf* (50 [Makkan]) to *al-Taú`Ém* (66 [Madinan]). This group consists of seven Makkan *s'rahs* followed by ten Madinan *s'rahs*.
- **GROUP 7:** From *al-Mulk* (67 [Makkan]) to *al-NÉs* (114 [Madinan]).²

The Internal Dimension

Under this heading, Islahi refers to seven wisdoms behind the *s'rahs'* arrangement:

- 1) Each group has a common central theme, just as every *s'rah* has a central theme around which all of its verses rotate: the promulgation of Islamic law, the history of the Abrahamic faith, the struggle between truth and falsehood, specifications of prophethood, the unity of God, the life hereafter, and warnings to the unbelievers.
- 2) The Madinan *s'rahs* in each group are in complete harmony, in terms of contents, with the Makkan *s'rahs* in the same group.
- 3) Each *s'rah* is paired with another one and the relationship between them is like that between wife and husband. For instance, *al-Baqarah* and *Ál-i`ImrÉn* constitute one pair, and *al-Falaq* and *al-NÉs* are another pair.
- 4) *Al-F'etiúah* is an exception to this rule, for it is actually a preface to the group to which it belongs as well as an introduction to the whole Qur'an.

- 5) Certain *s'rahs* seem to have been revealed simply as addenda to their previous chapters. One spectacular example of this is *al-î ujur* (49), which is the extended form of verse 29 in the preceding *s'rah* (*al-Fatû*).
- 6) Each group mentions all of the Islamic movement's stages.
- 7) The groups dealing with the promulgation of Islamic laws precede the groups with other themes. The group based on warning has been placed at the end of the Qur'an.³

What Islahi proposes may not easily be welcomed, as it is something totally new. It is not appropriate, however, to reject this view outright. Rather, it should be weighed and pondered over again and again, for there might be some truth in it. Apparently, it has a certain value in developing a *tafsir* methodology. Islahi considers these internal and external dimensions as the fine elaboration of 15:87: "And We have bestowed upon you seven oft-repeated [*sab`an min al-math*] revelations and the Grand Qur'an".⁴ One may not agree with this approach, but before making any judgment it is pertinent to look at his argument, as summarized below:

As for the meaning of the seven oft-repeated revelations (*sab` math*), there are three different views: (1) the first seven chapters, (2) *S'rat al-Fatiûah*, which comprises seven *ay*, including *bism All*, and (3) the entire Qur'an.⁵ I could not lay my hands on the argument in favor of the first view. The second view is quite popular. The argument is that *al-Fatiûah* contains seven *ay* and is repeatedly recited in the obligatory prayer. The position of *bism All* in *al-Fatiûah* is controversial, for scholars have not agreed that it is part of *al-Fatiûah*. Apart from that, why is *bism All* part of the first *s'rah* and not of all other *s'rahs*? The word *math* does not mean "oft-repeated thing." It is the plural of *muthann*, which means "double" or "two." The third view, to us, seems to be significant. The Qur'an itself has declared that the entire revelation is *math*. 39:23 reads: "Allah has revealed the best of all speech in the form of a Book that is *mutashbih* and *math*. *Mutashbih* signifies the harmony among all of its verses and *s'rahs*; *math* denotes the pairing system of all the *s'rahs*.⁶

The *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an's* Methodological Pattern

Islahi's nine-volume *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*, published in both India and Pakistan, is one of the most widely circulated and studied Urdu-language *tafsirs*. In Muslim academia, this work is considered highly authentic and

extraordinarily original in terms of its methodology. Islahi spent fifty-five years working on it, including twenty-three years devoted to its review and documentation. As he claims, his work spreads over approximately 6,236 pages, which is actually in consonance with the total number of the Qur'anic verses. Interestingly, the period of its documentation and review is more or less the same as that of the revelation of the Qur'an. He believes that "it is the decree of the exalted in Might, the All-Knowing" (6:96, 36:38, and 41:12).⁷

This work integrates the contributions of Islahi and his teacher al-Farahi. Islahi acknowledges that his own approach is precisely that of his teacher.⁸ Al-Farahi could not fulfill his dream of writing a complete *tafsīr*; he never got beyond some short *s'rahs* like *al-Ikhlls* and only one long *s'rah* (*al-Baqarah*). But as regards the methodology he followed in his scattered works and that he wanted to apply in his Qur'anic exegesis, he had defined and documented it in such treatises as *Dalīl al-Ni`em*.⁹ One who reads the works of these two scholars can see the similarity of approach between them. Some might suggest that al-Islahi's novel methodology was a reaction to the situation in which he found himself. But this claim may not be substantiated by valid arguments. Others might argue that he had been inspired by Syed Mawdudi. Undoubtedly, he received inspiration from Mawdudi but only in terms of the Islamic movement. His *tafsīr* speaks volumes of al-Farahi's influence upon him.

Islahi's methodology contains eleven distinctive features: (1) identifying the *s'rah's* central theme, (2) condensing the *s'rah's* contents, (3) perceiving a link between a *s'rah* and its preceding chapter, (4) deliberating over the semantic dimension of words and phrases, (5) reflecting upon the coherence between a verse and its succeeding and preceding verse, (6) applying the principle "the Qur'an interprets the Qur'an," (7) substantiating his ideas by *al-sunnah al-mutawfīrah*, highly authentic *ahadith*, and views of the Sahabah, (8) re-examining the value of the reports concerning *asbab al-nuzul*, (9) utilizing some selected *tafsīr* works, (10) providing illustrations from Judeo-Christian sources, and (11) paying attention to Arab history. In all of these aspects he does not appear to be imitative; rather, he seems to be reasonably critical and carefully rational. An introduction to and analysis of these various methodological components are given below.

Identifying the S'rah's Central Theme

Islahi begins his interpretation of every *s'rah* by identifying its central theme (*am`d*). It seems that he concurs with his teacher that every *s'rah*

has a central theme around which all of its statements revolve, either closely or remotely.¹⁰ Only a few *mufasssir* have paid attention to this dimension. Al-Biqā'i (d. 885 AH) appears to be the first *mufasssir* to talk about each *s'rah*'s main theme (*maqṣad*).¹¹ Only a few twentieth-century commentators followed his example, among them al-Farahi, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), Syed Mawdudi (d. 1979), and, of course, Islahi.

Al-Farahi opines that identifying the central theme is very difficult, for it requires a deep and consistent deliberation upon all of the verses of the *s'rah* concerned.¹² Islahi not only gives the *s'rah*'s central theme at the beginning of its *tafsīr*, but also justifies it by providing internal evidence from the *s'rah*. The idea of a central theme seems to be quite logical. A meaningful human work is invariably composed of various elements, such as the introduction, context, central theme, and conclusion, all of which are complementary to one another. If any of these elements, particularly the central theme, were missing, the speech would certainly become meaningless. Is it, then, imaginable that a divine speech would lack these components? The Qur'an, which is full of wisdom, corroborates the belief that each of its *s'rahs* has a central message with which all of its verses are connected. As a corollary, every single verse in the *s'rah* needs to be looked at in the light of the central theme, for interpreting a verse in isolation from the central theme may not reflect the original message.

In the case of the short *s'rahs*, the central idea may be relatively easy to discern; however, that of such longer *s'rahs* as *al-Baqarah*, *Āl-i 'Imrān*, *al-Nisā'*, *al-Mā'idah*, *al-An'ām*, *al-A'rāf*, *al-Anfāl*, *al-Tawb*, and *Y'nus* may not be easily grasped. Understanding the Qur'an entails deliberation (*tadabbur*), and thus a sincere and deep reflection upon it is the key to revealing its truth (47:24). Although Islahi does not explain how to reach the central theme, his *tafsīr* does provide a satisfactory answer. The second element of his *tafsīr* is the summarized analysis of all the verses contained in a *s'rah*. By reading this analysis, one sees that classifying all of a *s'rah*'s messages under certain headings will help one understand its central message.

Islahi suggests that *al-Baqarah*'s central theme is inviting people to faith (*iman*). *Al-Fatihah*, he further elaborates, speaks of faith in Allah, and *al-Baqarah* teaches about having faith in prophethood.¹³ Here he is clearly following his mentor al-Farahi who says: "*S'rat al-Baqarah* is actually *S'rat al-jmā' al-Madīb*, meaning faith in the Last Prophet (saw), where all relevant evidence has been put together."¹⁴ There may not be any controversy over this suggestion, for *al-Baqarah* does emphasize that particular dimension. But faith in prophethood may be considered a general theme of the

entire Qur'an, including *al-Baqarah*. A *s'rah's* central theme should be specific. It may be suggested that *al-Baqarah's* central theme is the change of leadership from the People of the Book (particularly the Jews) to the Muslims. Islahi himself stated that this *s'rah* ends with an invocation, indicating that this great responsibility, which the Jews could not carry out, is now being placed on the Muslims.¹⁵ If this is the case, he should have identified its central theme as the change of leadership, not as faith in prophethood.

According to Islahi, *Āl-i 'Imrān's* central theme is the same as that of *al-Baqarah*, namely, substantiating Muhammad's (saw) position as the Last Prophet.¹⁶ But in his detailed analysis, he refers to *al-Baqarah* as *S'rat al-jmān* and to *Āl-i 'Imrān* as *S'rat al-Islām*.¹⁷ This statement reflects his love for his teacher, who considers Islam to be *Āl-i 'Imrān's* central theme.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, there is a kind of similarity in the messages contained in these two *s'rahs*: as the first one mainly addresses the Jews, the second one focuses on the Christians, conveying to them that their time of leadership is over and that they must accept Muhammad's (saw) leadership.

The central theme of *S'rah al-Nisā'*, as Islahi puts it, is organizing Islamic society upon certain social, economic, cultural, political, and devotional principles.¹⁹ If each verse of this *s'rah* is read in light of this central theme, the message of Allah will be crystal clear.

Condensing the S'rah's Contents

Islahi does not start his discourse on any *s'rah* without providing a systematic synopsis of its messages. He divides the whole *s'rah* into certain parts, under which he gathers a certain number of verses and emphasizes the common message that emerges. Only a few *mufasssirin*, among them Sayyid Qutb, Ibn 'Ashur, and Sayyid Mawdudi, summarize every *s'rah* in the *tafsīr's* beginning. Such a summary is of immense value, for it helps readers understand the coherence between the verses. For instance, his condensation of *S'rat al-Nisā'* gives an idea of his approach.

He divides this *s'rah* into thirty-one parts, placing certain verses under each of them. The summary of that summary is given below.

- 1) Commanding Muslims to be conscious of Allah and to be honest in managing the orphans' property (1-6);
- 2) legislating property distribution laws (7-14);
- 3) advising Muslims to keep society pure of abominable acts and clarifying the principle of repentance (15-18);

- 4) prohibiting the father's wives from becoming distributable property and slandering women to extort financial favor from them (19-21);
- 5) condemning marriage between a father's wife and his son, and simplifying the marriage system so that society will remain pure (22-25);
- 6) strengthening the Muslims' position by providing them with clear guidelines (26-28);
- 7) forbidding irregularities in financial transactions as well as killing a human being (29-31);
- 8) specifying the rights and duties of men and women (32-33);
- 9) recognition of man's status in a family as guardian and leader (34-35);
- 10) instructing people to take care of Allah's rights and those of people (36-40);
- 11) expressing regret over those who revolt against Allah and His Prophet (41-42);
- 12) describing certain conditions of the obligatory prayer (43-45);
- 13) inviting the Jews to repent for their hostile plans (46-47);
- 14) highlighting Allah's decision to reward the *ummah* for its steadfastness despite the combined endeavors of the Jews and the [pagan] Arabs (48-57);
- 15) reminding Muslims to uphold justice, Allah's sovereignty, and the Prophet's leadership (58-59);
- 16) castigating the Hypocrites for colluding with the enemies of Islam (60-70);
- 17) emphasizing the spirit of jihad to help others (71-76);
- 18) telling the Prophet (saw) that he should not be disheartened because of the Hypocrites' conspiracies (77-80);
- 19) exposing the Hypocrites (81-85);
- 20) enjoining Muslims to refrain from publicly humiliating the Hypocrites (86-87);
- 21) ordering Muslims not to continue their links with those in other lands who claim to be Muslims but are not prepared to emigrate; (88-91);
- 22) mentioning certain rules concerning sincere Muslims living outside Islamic territory (92-94);
- 23) calling upon those Muslims to migrate to the Islamic land (95-100);

- 24) postulating a special method of prayer on the battlefield (101-04);
- 25) warning Muslims against being friends with known Hypocrites (105-26);
- 26) answering certain questions concerning orphans and their mothers (127-30);
- 27) ordering Muslims to obey Allah's commands wholeheartedly (131-47);
- 28) advising Muslims not to use humiliating words for Hypocrites (148-49);
- 29) denouncing Jewish tactics and answering their observations (150-62);
- 30) presenting the historical continuity and thus authenticity of the divine message revealed through previous messengers and the Last Messenger (163-75), and
- 31) clarifying a matter related to the property of a childless person (176).

Perceiving a Link between a S´rah and Its Preceding S´rah

Such scholars as Ahmad ibn Ibrahim ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708 AH), Muhammad ibn Yusuf Abu Hayyan (d. 745 AH), and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) wrote special treatises on the relationship between a *s´rah* and its preceding *s´rah*. The essential difference here between Islahi and others is that the former shows the link in detail between the *s´rah*'s overall message and that of its preceding *s´rah*, whereas the above-mentioned scholars describe the relationship between two *s´rahs* in a very general manner. Al-Biqā'i (d. 885 AH) represents this method. While referring to the link between *Āl-i `ImrĒn* and *al-NisĒ'*, he says that when *al-Baqarah* and *Āl-i `ImrĒn* concentrated on *tawūĒd* (God's unity), *al-NisĒ'* came down, inviting humanity to build a social environment based on cooperation, kindness, and generosity.²⁰ Islahi puts the link between these two *s´rahs* in a slightly different way:

Al-NisĒ' begins with the theme with which *S´rah Āl-i `ImrĒn* ends. The last verse of the third *s´rah* invites the Muslims to remain steadfast individually as well as collectively, fearing Allah, and demonstrating courage before enemies. The fourth *s´rah* begins with the command to be conscious of God and proceeds with the details of how to maintain collectivity and social strength and protect the Islamic society from all that may harm it.²¹

It may be easy to grasp the link between those *s´rahs* having almost similar contents. It may not be so easy, however, to discern the relationship between two *s´rahs* placed one after another, which appear to have some-

what dissimilar subject matters. *Al-î ad#d* (Makkan; 57) and *al-Muj#dilah* (Madinan; 58), for instance, have no apparent connection between them. *Al-î ad#d* is composed of three subject matters, namely, God's unity, the role of the revelation in human life, and the occurrence of the Day of Judgment; *Al-Muj#dilah* consists of two main issues: *ih#l* (a pre-Islamic system of divorce) and the traits of sincere Muslims and the Hypocrites. Islahi shows the link between them in a highly appreciable way, as summarized below.

S'rat al-î ad#d ends with a response to the propaganda launched by the People of the Book against the concept of jihad. *S'rat al-Muj#dilah* censures the Hypocrites for their secret campaign against jihad and Islam through whispering and gossip. Due to the tie between the Hypocrites and the Jews, there was a possibility that the former would pick up the hostile observation of the latter and spread it among the Muslims. In order to end such an inimical approach of both the Jews and the Hypocrites, Allah advised the Muslims in *S'rat al-Muj#dilah* to share their problems sincerely with the Prophet (saw) so as to receive his wise advice. Both *s'rahs* send the message that the Muslims are destined to prevail in the struggle.²²

It is obvious from this that one *s'rah's* concluding remark and the introductory statement in the succeeding one speaks volumes of the link between them. The central themes of two neighboring *s'rahs* might also serve as the basis to trace the link between them. For example, in order to find relationship between *S'rat al-Nis#f* and the previous two *s'rahs*, their central themes may be looked at. The central theme of the second and third *s'rahs* is the change of leadership. *Al-Baqarah* declares that the Jews are unworthy of the leadership position; *Al-i 'Imr#n* considers Christians unsuitable for universal supremacy. These two *s'rahs* place the reins in the Muslims' hands. The central theme of *S'rat al-Nis#f* is establishing an ideal Islamic society based on the revealed principles. In the light of these central themes, the link between them becomes very clear: *S'rat al-Nis#f* provides the practical form of an Islamic society free from the evils and corruptions that had penetrated Judeo-Christian settings. It is this very reason that Islahi generally sheds light on the central theme of a *s'rah* and its link with its preceding *s'rah* together.

Deliberating over the Semantic Dimension of Words and Phrases

Islahi believes that the language of the Qur'an is not the Arabic used in the Arab world or the one used in old and new Arabic literature. He rightly remarks that Qur'anic Arabic is the Arabic of such great Arab poets as Imru'

al-Qays, `Amr ibn Kulthum, Zuhayr, and Labid. That is why, he feels, that understanding the Qur'an depends very much on understanding pre-Islamic classical Arabic literature.²³

Throughout his *tafsīr*, Islahi tries to discuss at length the original meaning of words as understood in the *j̄hīlī* period. In the beginning of his interpretation of each section of a *s̄rah*, he puts the following heading: "Deliberation over the Semantic Dimension of Words and Interpretation of Verses." It seems that he does not consider it proper to interpret the Qur'an without being clear on the meaning of its words. He has paid attention to all of the important Qur'anic terms, among them *ib̄lāḥ*, *ḥm̄l*, *taqwā*, *iūṣl̄n*, *isl̄m*, *ūaqq*, *d̄h̄n*, *kuf̄r*, *shirk*, and *nifl̄q*. Whenever he touches upon semantics, he brings information based on classical *j̄hīlī*-era Arab poetry as well as from the Qur'an itself. He hardly quotes classical Arabic literature to prove his case. He made it clear in his *Muqaddimah* that he based his understanding of the Qur'anic language on the classical Arab poets. Therefore, whatever he says about the meaning of words is supported by classical Arabic literature. His semantic approach is not polemical; rather, he tries to simplify the meaning of the words. Some examples are given below.

Qur'an 4:11 begins with "Allah makes *waṣṣyah* for you concerning your children." Islahi picks up *waṣṣyah* and explains its meaning first. This word, he argues, applies to a situation in which someone delegates a responsibility to someone else, explaining what to do, when, and how. He maintains that it also implies love, concern, generosity, warning on the part of the one who makes a will as well as a mutual agreement and responsibility on the part of both parties concerned.²⁴

The opening statement of 4:171 is: "O people of the Book! Do not make *ghul'w* in your religion." Islahi explains the meaning of *ghul'w* as

... increasing, growing, and overstepping the bounds. When this word is associated with religion, it denotes increasing the weight and value of something beyond its specified position, assigning to it something more than what it deserves, placing the permissible under obligatory, declaring a *faqḥ* or a great scholar or a *sahabi* as infallible imam, and worshipping prophets as associates of God. Negligence in religion is an offence; overstepping the bounds of religion is, likewise, a serious crime.²⁵

While elaborating upon 2:54, "And when Moses said unto his people: 'O my people, verily, you have sinned against your selves by worshipping the calf. Turn, then, in repentance to your Maker'...", Islahi stops at *b'eri'un* and explains it: "At one place in the Qur'an, three of Allah's attributes have

been mentioned together: *al-Khaliq*, *al-Bari'*, *al-Muṣawwir* (59:24). *Khalq* signifies designing, *bara'a* denotes evolving the matter already designed, and *taṣwīr* means completing the task. Literally, both *Khaliq* (Creator) and *Bari'* (Evolver) slightly vary from each other in meaning. But in general usage, both are used as synonyms for each other.²⁶

Al-Zamakhshari has a slightly different explanation: "*Al-Khaliq* means the Assessor of what He is creating (*al-muqaddir li mā yujiduhu*); *al-bari'* refers to the One who has the power to distinguish between various shapes (*al-mumayyiz ba'duhu min ba'di bi al-ashkāl al-mukhtalifah*), and *al-muṣawwir* signifies the Presenter (*al-mumaththil*).²⁷ As to the import of the first two attributes, *al-khalq* and *al-bar'*, al-Islahi appears to be very close to Sayyid Qutb, who identifies their meaning as planning and assessment (*al-tasmīm wa al-taqdīr*) and execution and production (*al-tanfīdh wa al-ikhrāj*), respectively. The meaning of the third attribute, *taswīr*, as given by al-Islahi is quite general, whereas Sayyid Qutb suggests a very specific meaning: *taṣwīr* denotes providing distinct characteristic features to every person.²⁸

Reflecting upon the Coherence among Verses

There is no denying that the arrangement of the Qur'an's *sūrah*s and verses in the currently available order is not chronological. The Prophet (saw) himself stated that the verses revealed on different occasions and with different messages were to be placed in accordance with the divine command. In most cases, however, they appear to be disconnected with one another. But are they really incoherent? Muslim scholars opine that there is no disconnection between one verse and those around it. For that matter, they developed the theory of coherence. Some called it *munṣibāt bayn al-āyāt*; others referred to it as *na`m al-Qur`ān*. Al-Biqā'i (d. 885 AH) defines coherence in the Qur'an as a "knowledge through which are recognized the reasons for mutual connection among various parts of the Qur'an."²⁹ Al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) believes that the Qur'an is inimitable not only due to the eloquence of its words and the nobility of its messages, but also because of its organization and the coherence among its verses (*na`m āyātihī*).³⁰

Whether there is any coherence between a *sūrah*'s verses is still controversial. Among those who believe in coherence, some consider it mere an academic witticism (*laḥāḥ ilmiyyah*) while others do not find a way to identify it. Those who assign it no significance in the *tafsīr* brush it aside as unnecessary, arguing that the majority of the *mufasssīrīn* did not pay atten-

tion to it and that if it was of any value, it would not have been so difficult to trace it among the verses. Islahi's response is as follows:

Coherence is an intrinsic part of a speech, without which a fine speech is unimaginable. The Qur'an is considered a miracle in terms of eloquence and rhetoric. Yet many people find it devoid of coherence. To them, there is neither any link between *s'rahs* nor any cohesion among the *s'rah's* verses; different verses have been put together in different chapters without any coherence among them. It is surprising as to how such an untenable notion was developed in the minds about the Great Book, which, friends and foes acknowledged, stirred the world, transformed minds and hearts, laid a new foundation for thought and life, and provided a new light for humanity.³¹

He feels that tracing the coherence in the Qur'an is too heavy a task, requiring a life-long devotion to the Qur'an, and that it cannot be carried out by just anyone. He also thinks that those who have made some contribution toward that end, such as Makhdum Maha'mi (*Tabṣīr al-Ra'ūmīn wa Taysīr al-Mannīn*) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (*Mafṭūḥ al-Ghayb*) could not do justice to this task, as the coherence they came up with can be applied to any two unrelated things.³² This observation of Islahi may be controversial, because he has not given any concrete examples to prove his claim concerning the coherence among verses of a *s'rah* in other scholars' works, including al-Razi's.

Applying the principle of coherence in *tafsīr* is so significant to Islahi that he views it as the only viable way to usher the divided *ummah* into a new era of unity. He is convinced that the *fiqhī* and sectarian differences among the *ummah* are due to interpreting the Qur'anic verses in isolation of one another.

By going through his *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*, one may find it totally different from other works. Islahi has interpreted all the verses of a *s'rah* in a way that the reader may feel that he/she is reading a coherent and cohesive sermon, with all of its components closely connected to one another. Applying the coherence theory has made this possible.

On the question how to determine the coherence between verses, he refers to two linguistic dimensions: *ūadhf* (ellipsis) and *ḥjz* (brevity). Arabs of the pre-Islamic era, he argues, considered the above two elements as intrinsic parts of the most eloquent discourse. They would, he maintains, generally omit certain words in their speech due to the belief that the audience would automatically perceive the omission and thus understand the original meaning of the statement. When we, he suggests, do not find the

omitted link among verses, we take each and every single statement in the Qur'an as a complete message.³³

As indicated earlier, Islahi divides every *s'rah* into certain sections. At the beginning of every section he explains the link between this and the succeeding section. It is noteworthy that he mainly concentrates on tracing the coherence among verses of a *s'rah*, and not between each single verse and its succeeding and preceding verse, as others like al-Razi and al-Biqā'ī have done. An example is given here with a view to elucidating Islahi's method of establishing coherence.

He divides *S'rat al-Sajdah* (32) into three sections, 1-14, 15-22, and 23-30, which seem to be disconnected. He establishes a connection among them by referring to the basis of connection. The first section comprises verses that convey the message concerning Allah's creative power and the unbelievers' approach toward Him. The second section speaks about behavioral pattern of believers and unbelievers and the end result. While establishing a link between these two sections of verses, Islahi says: "It is clear from verses (1-14) as to why the unbelievers rejected the faith in the Qur'an. And the succeeding verses (15-22) mention the believers' and the unbelievers' traits and the reward and punishment reserved for them."³⁴ The third section begins with the statement "We have indeed vouchsafed the Book to Moses, so do not be in doubt about meeting Him," which does not appear to be connected with the above sections, particularly the last verse of the second section: "And who could be more wicked than he to whom his Lord's messages are conveyed and who thereupon turns away from them? Verily, We shall inflict Our retribution on those who are lost in sin." Qur'an 32:22 is a warning to the unbelievers, whereas 32:23 refers to the revelation given to Moses.

What is the link? Islahi traces it: "In the above paragraph (20-22) the Quraysh have been warned that if they did not believe in the revealed guidance, they would certainly face divine punishment in this life as well as in the hereafter. And now in the succeeding verse, the same truth has been substantiated in the light of the history."³⁵ Undoubtedly, the revelation given to Moses and his people's treatment of it are historical facts through which the addressees of the Qur'an are being reminded of the consequences of their rejection of the Qur'an.

This method of tracing coherence seems to be result-oriented. In each *s'rah*, certain verses clearly appear to be connected with one another and so there is no point in unfolding the coherence among them. The exercise of coherence should be carried out only among those sets of verses that appear to be disconnected. Dividing a *s'rah* into certain sections seems to be a wise step toward identifying the coherence. It is Islahi's unique contribution.

The term *na`m al-Qur`Ēn*, as used by *mufasssir`n* (including Islahi), is not new. Such experts of Arabic rhetoric (*ballĒghy`n*) as al-Jahiz (d. 255 AH), al-Rummani (d. 384 AH), al-Khattabi (d. 388 AH), al-Baqillani (d. 403 AH), and al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH) had already coined this term. The *mufasssir`n* take this term in the sense of coherence, and the *ballĒghy`n* apply it in the sense of sequence. According to the rhetoricians, every sentence of the Qur`an has a particular sequence of words and their meaning. To them, this connection between one word and another, and also that between their meanings, is a uniquely miraculous feature of the Qur`an, which they call *na`m al-Qur`Ēn*. They claim that the inimitability of the Qur`an lies, among other things, in the *na`m* (sequence) of the Qur`anic words and their imports.³⁶ As for the exegetes, they use this term as a methodology of exegesis. To them, the verses of a particular *s`rah*, and also those of the entire Qur`an, are interconnected and constitute an integral whole. This feature of the Qur`an, to them, is *na`m al-Qur`Ēn*.

It may be asked why the classical *mufasssir`n* did not pay attention to this feature. The answer is very simple: the objective of a task determines its method. One may find various objectives behind the commentary of the Qur`an. Such traditionalists as al-Tabari (d. 310 AH), al-Samarqandi (d. 373 AH), al-Tha`labi (d. 427 AH), al-Baghawi (d. 510 AH), Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH), and al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) wrote their *tafsi`r* works in order to collect the *tafsi`r* views of the previous generation scholars. Such rationalists as al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH), al-Razi (d. 606 AH), al-Baydawi (d. 685 AH), Ibn Hayyan (d. 745 AH), and al-Alusi (d. 1270 AH) paid attention to the Qur`an`s message from philosophical, philological, and rational angles so as to rebut others` views and substantiate their own. Such jurists as al-Jassas (d. 370 AH), al-Kiya al-Harrasi (d. 504 AH), Ibn al-`Arabi (d. 543 AH), and al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH) supported Hanafi, Shafi`i, and Maliki schools of jurisprudence, respectively. These objectives did not allow commentators of the Qur`an to spend their time on identifying the coherence among various components of a *s`rah*.

Applying the Principle of “the Qur`an Interprets the Qur`an”

The Qur`an defines itself as “*kitĒb mutashĒbih mathĒn*” (the Book fully consistent within itself, repeating each statement in manifold forms).³⁷ Being aware of this, Islahi suggests that the Qur`an should be interpreted with the help of the Qur`an itself,³⁸ since it has presented its messages in repeated form. He has applied the method of understanding the Qur`an by the Qur`an

throughout his *tafsīr*, saying: “The difficult places of the Qur’an have become clear to me through the Qur’an, more than anything else.”³⁹ When he quotes a verse in his interpretation of another verse, he does not do so merely in a bid to refer to the same statement elsewhere; rather, he brings Qur’anic evidences to unfold the truth. He quotes the Qur’anic evidences for two purposes: to make the message clear and unfold the truth, and to establish the original meaning of words.

Qur’an 2:7 reads: “Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and awesome suffering awaits them.” One may possibly derive from this the idea that Allah has predetermined the guidance and misguidance of people. Islahi helps the reader get true understanding of the divine rule of guidance and misguidance with the help of other relevant verses. He refutes the idea of humanity’s innate misguidance. His arguments are all Qur’anic. What he says is summarized here below.

Sealing the heart does not mean Allah has created people incapable of receiving guidance from the womb of their mother. It rather denotes that people have disfigured themselves through their evil deeds to the extent that their hearts have lost the capability to listen and understand the message of the Prophet (saw). The Qur’an reiterated in several places that people’s hearts are sealed as a result of their wrong doings. For example, 7:100 (“... If We so willed, We could smite them by means of their sins, sealing their hearts so that they cannot hear the truth”), 7:101-02 (“There had indeed come apostles of their own with all evidence of the truth; but they would not believe in anything to which they had once given the lie: thus it is that Allah seals the hearts of those who deny the truth; and in most of them We found no bond with anything that is right – and most of them We found to be iniquitous indeed”), and 4:155 (“And so for the breaking of their pledge, and their refusal to acknowledge Allah’s messages, and their slaying of their prophets against all right, and their boast – Our hearts are already full of knowledge – nay, but Allah has sealed their hearts in result of their denial of the truth”). These verses spell out the rule that Allah seals the hearts only when the people, despite their freedom of choice and action, turn ingrate and iniquitous.⁴⁰

Fuqahā’ and *mufasssīrīn* have debated over the exact definition of *faqīr* (poor) and *miskīn* (indigent).⁴¹ Islahi, while interpreting the eight categories of those who deserve charity (9:60) tries to define *faqīr* in the light of the Qur’an. He says:

These two words are synonymous in the sense of poor. The Qur’an has used them synonymously as well as in different senses. *Faqīr* is the opposite of *ghanī* (rich). For example, 4:135 reads: “Whether the person con-

cerned be *faqīr* or *ghanī*, Allah's claim takes precedence over either of them." It means everyone who is not *ghanī* is *faqīr*, irrespective of whether the person concerned begs or keeps away from begging out of dignity.⁴²

Substantiating His Ideas with Authentic Sources

Islahi is aware of the significance of *al-sunnah al-mutawattirah* (the historically continued traditions of the Prophet), *al-ūlūdīyah ṣaūīyah* (authentic sayings of the Prophet), and *athar āūlīyah* (views and practices of the Prophet's Companions) in understanding the messages of the Qur'an. His treatment of these materials places him in the category of those scholars who neither reject the validity of the above-mentioned legacy nor accept blindly everything bearing the mark of *sunnah*, hadith and *athar*. He is extra careful in borrowing the reports on these three matters. In order to fully grasp his approach to *sunnah* and hadith, one has to see what he himself says on the matter. His view on these three sources is summarized here.

As regards the Qur'anic terms such as *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, *ṣawm*, *hajj*, *umrah*, *nahr*, *al-Masjid al-ī arḥm*, *Safī*, *Marwah*, *sa'ye*, *awḥ*, etc., I have interpreted them only in the light of *al-sunnah al-mutawattirah*. It is because the right to interpret the Qur'anic and *shar'i* terms is invested only in the hands of the Prophet (saw). He was not simply the receiver of the Book, but also its interpreter and teacher. The only thing to be taken care of is the certainty of the reports on the Prophet's interpretation. As for the well-known Islamic terms, their original meaning is preserved in practical form through *al-sunnah al-mutawattirah*. Its authenticity is established through the same certain sources that have preserved the Qur'an in a definitely precise manner. Anti-hadith movement scholars dare interpret the Qur'anic terms of their own accord in the light of lexicon. It amounts to the rejection of the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an and Sunnah have both come down to us through the same continuity (*tawattur*). If they do not accept *sunnah* and hadith, there is no point in accepting the Qur'an.

Among the theoretical sources of *tafsīr*, the *al-ūlūdīyah* and *athar* constitute the most respectable treasure. Had there not been any problem in hadith literature as to its authenticity, the *al-ūlūdīyah* and *athar* would have been of the same value as *al-sunnah al-mutawattirah*. Those who attach significance to the *al-ūlūdīyah* and *athar* to the extent of making them judge over the Qur'an neither recognize the position of the Qur'an nor understand the place of hadith.

I consider the *al-ūlūdīyah* as the material fully derived from the Qur'an. That is why I have concerned myself not only with those *al-ūlūdīyah* that are directly related to one or the other verse, but I have also tried to benefit

from the entire hadith literature as much as possible. If I found a hadith apparently in conflict with the Qur'an, I did not reject it until I became convinced that it runs counter to the Qur'an.⁴³

The commentary upon 24:2, "As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes," is one of the lengthiest sections of Islahi's work. There, he examines the authenticity and reliability of certain reports as recorded in such highly authentic source as Al-Bukhari and Muslim. This discussion spreads over thirteen pages. Its summary may suffice to give an idea of how Islahi keeps the supremacy of the Qur'an over the hadith literature.

As it appears from the words of this verse, the provision applies to all categories of adulteress and adulterer. But our *fuqahā* have restricted it to certain categories, specifying conditions for them. Some of these conditions are right, but some others are wrong. Those conditions are: 1) its implementation requires the existence of an Islamic government, 2) it is applicable only to adult and intellectually mature people, 3) adulterers from the slave category will be subjected to only half of the punishment, 4) it is applicable to only Muslims, [as] non-Muslims are exempted from this punishment, and 5) it is applicable only to the unmarried actor; married adulterers will be stoned to death. Why is stoning to death reserved for married criminals? *Fuqahā* use for this purpose the practice of the Prophet (saw) and the Pious Caliphs. This restriction of the applicability of the above verse seems to be untenable. The traditions on the basis of which the *fuqahā* have restricted the applicability of the punishment of flogging is what is reported on the authority of `Ubadah ibn Samit: "The Prophet (saw) said: 'Take from me what I tell you. Allah has revealed what He had promised concerning the women. So, for the unmarried male and female actors a hundred lashes each and one year banishment; and for the married actors a hundred lashes each and stoning to death.'"⁴⁴ On the basis of this report, the ruling of *S'rat al-N'ar* was abrogated, although nothing can abrogate the Qur'an except the Qur'an itself. Due to some problem in the above report, the *fuqahā* resorted to another report on the authority of `Abd Allah ibn `Abbas: "'Umar said: I fear a time will come when the people will say that they did not find the verse of *rajm* in the Book of Allah. Thus by abandoning an obligation Allah had revealed, they will go astray. We had, indeed, read 'the old man and the old woman, if they commit adultery, stone them both to death.'"⁴⁵

This tradition is undoubtedly a fabrication of some hypocrite. The purpose of this concoction is to cast doubt about the Qur'an the while it is enough and still practically applicable. It does not make any sense to

remove the verse of the Qur'an and create in the unsuspecting hearts the misgiving that certain verses have been dropped from the Qur'an. Linguistically, the above verse about *rajm* cannot be the Qur'an. If that verse was once available in the Qur'an, who, then, removed it from there and retained its practical viability? In case the removal occurred, it means its application was cancelled. Apart from that, the alleged verse does not mention "married man and married woman"; it mentions "old man and old woman." Is it necessary that every old man or woman is married? So where is the conformity between the claim and the evidence?

It is, however, a totally fabricated report. Ironically, it has been attributed to `Umar ibn al-Khattab. If anyone dared narrate this tradition during his caliphate, he would, I believe, never be able to save himself from his scourge. It is one of the serious weaknesses of our *fuqahā'* that when they enter a debate with their rivals, they strike them with whatever stones and bricks they lay their hands on, and do not care if their approach hits the religion itself.⁴⁶

Reexamining the Value of Reports on Asbāb al-Nuzūl

Generally, the *mufasssīrīn* quote as many reports on the socio-historical background of the particular revelation as possible, regardless of their authenticity. Islahi, on the contrary, seems to be extraordinarily careful in using *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports and takes a slightly different stand on their contents. In this matter he follows al-Farahi, whose stand on this issue he quoted in his *tafsīr*'s introduction. It is summarized here.

Sabab al-Nuzūl, as is generally misunderstood, does not mean the reason for the revelation of a *sūrah* or a verse; rather, it denotes the general situation and condition that are covered in the revelation. Every *sūrah* deals with a certain particular issue or issues that rotates around its central theme. That is why *sabab al-nuzūl* can be traced from the *sūrah* concerned itself. As for the reports, which clearly state that this or that verse came down in response to this or that particular event, these merely refer to the general situation of the time of revelation. Al-Zarkashi is of the view that when the Sahabah and the Tabi'un referred to an event as the reason for the revelation of a particular verse, they actually meant that the verse contained a solution to that problem; they never assumed that it was the exact reason for the revelation.⁴⁷

Islahi has adopted the same approach, and thus there are very few reports on *asbab al-nuzul* in his work. He does quote certain events as socio-

historical background, but only if he finds such a quotation helpful in clarifying the message. Moreover, when he quotes historical events, he purifies them of all unnecessary details and puts them in a concise form. An example from his work will substantiate this suggestion.

Qur'an 58:1 reads: "Allah has indeed heard the words of the one who pleaded with you concerning her husband and complained unto Allah." Islahi refers to the event related to this verse's revelation in a different way. He says: "The lady to whom the verse refers is, according to traditions, Khawlah bint Tha`labah. Her husband, Aws ibn Samit al-Ansari once, out of anger, uttered the words "you are just like my mother," because of which, as per the pre-Islamic custom, the divorce took effect. This situation put her in trouble, not knowing where to resort to along with her children. At last she approached the Prophet (saw) and pleaded with him to resolve the problem. Since he had no clear instruction on the matter, he could not help her. That is why she presented her case time and again to the Prophet (saw)."⁴⁸

When he uses an authentic report in order to explain the background of certain revelation, he carefully recasts it and mentions only its synopsis, leaving aside any element that may cause some misgiving. For instance, almost all of the *mufasssir* 'n, including al-Bukhari and Muslim, have described a particular event as being a reason for the revelation of *S'rat al-Taûr#m* (66):

`A'ishah reports: "The Prophet (saw) liked desert and honey. It was his habit to visit all of his wives one by one after `a\$#r prayer. One day he remained in Hafsa's apartment for a longer period of time. Upon inquiry, I was told that Hafsa had received a gift of honey from someone in her family and had given it to the Prophet to drink. I, then, made up my mind to employ a trick against him and asked Sawdah and Safiyyah to express their dislike of the foul smell from the Prophet's mouth by asking him whether he ate *maghlfir*, a honey made of a bad-smelling flower. They colluded with one another and played the trick on the Prophet (saw) who, as a result, vowed not to touch the honey."⁴⁹

This narration gives an impression that `A'ishah felt jealous of Hafsa and sought to deceive the Prophet (saw) so that he would not spend more time with Hafsa. This report certainly smears the image of the Prophet's beloved `A'ishah. Islahi, who seems to disagree with this color of the report, presents it in a way that it does not adversely affect the Prophet's wives. He says:

Once the Prophet (saw) took honey in the house of some of his wives. The

honey caused a particular foul smell, which was disliked by some of his wives. Certain kinds of honey give off a foul smell. Even if there is no foul smell, some sensitive people, particularly women, do not like all kinds of smell. People differ in their taste and disposition. Some of the Prophet's wives did not like that particular honey, which gives the smell of *maghḷfir*. When they expressed their aversion to it, the Prophet (saw), who had a fine taste and was very sensitive to women's feelings, vowed never to take honey.⁵⁰

Utilizing Some Selected Tafsiḥ Works

One may hardly contest the suggestion that al-Tabari's *Jḷmi` al-Bayḷn* and al-Zamakhshari's *Al-Kashshḷf* are original *tafsiḥ* works in terms of methodology, approach, objective, and information. Later commentators based their endeavors on the previous sources, particularly the above two. Another *tafsiḥ* that influenced later generations of *mufasssir`n* is al-Razi's *Mafḷḷū al-Ghayb*. In the modern age, many Qur'anic commentaries have been written in various languages. There is hardly any *tafsiḥ* work, however, that bypasses previous works. Islahi is no exception to this phenomenon. He has benefited from al-Tabari's, al-Zamakhshari's, and al-Razi's *tafsiḥ*s. In fact, he says:

Among the *tafsiḥ* books, three works, *Tafsiḥ ibn Jarḥr*, *Tafsiḥ al-Zamakhsharḷ*, and *Tafsiḥ al-Rḷzḷ*, have generally been in my study ever since I began my academic life. *Tafsiḥ ibn Jarḥr* is the compilation of early scholars' views, *Tafsiḥ al-Rḷzḷ* comprises theological and intellectual debates, and *Tafsiḥ al-Zamakhsharḷ* is helpful for grammatical and philological problems. I have certainly consulted these three works in my *tafsiḥ*s.⁵¹

He does not borrow the ideas from these works blindly; rather, he weighs them against the principle of coherence. If he finds them useful, he follows them wholeheartedly. His approach toward other *tafsiḥ*s, including the above three, is highly critical. He explains how he treats *tafsiḥ* works:

We deliberate over every *s`rah* and every verse in light of their context, coherence, and Qur'anic evidence. For further satisfaction over what we thus achieve, we look at other *tafsiḥ*s. In the case of conformity, our stand gets strengthened. If the *tafsiḥ*s do not conform to our thought, we continue pondering over the matter until the error either on our part or on the part of other *tafsiḥ*s becomes evident.⁵²

The nature of the relationship between Islahi and other *mufasssir`n* is not that of shaykh (mentor) and *murḷd* (disciple), but that of a teacher and a stu-

dent who invariably tries to remain conscious of the psychological fact that “the teacher’s stand may and may not be right.” While al-Islahi followed in al-Farahi’s footsteps, it should be borne in mind that his teacher provided the principles of *tafsīr* about which he became convinced as the most viable and extraordinarily effective methodology.

Providing Illustrations from Judeo-Christian Sources

In several places, the Qur’an refers to the previous scriptures: the Torah, the Zabur (the Psalms), and the Injil. It also narrates the historical accounts of the prophets of Israel and criticizes the deviations of the Jews and the Christians. On these issues, Islahi has not relied on the traditions available in *tafsīr* sources, but has used the existing Torah and Bible as the basis for his discussion. He tries to show, by quoting them, the extent of the conformity between the Qur’an and the corrupted previous scriptures. *S’rāt al-Baqarah* and *S’rāt Āl-i`Imrān* are mainly devoted to enumerating the blunders and deviations of both groups at the time of the Qur’anic revelation (or before the Qur’anic revelation). It seems quite reasonable to use information from the Judeo-Christian sources.

For example, Qur’an 2:57 refers to two great blessings that Allah bestowed upon the Jews during Moses’ time: *al-mann* and *al-salwā*. These were undoubtedly some edible and potable items. Generally, the *mufasssīr* interpret them in the light of traditions on the authority of scholars among the Sahabah and the Tabi’un.⁵³ Islahi consults the existing Torah and Bible, quoting from Exodus 1-13 and 13-21 to bring the concept of *al-mann* and *al-salwā* home. According to these quotations, *al-mann* was something like a frozen dew of stark white color that gradually melted, and so the Jews would collect it before sunrise and preserve it as a drink; *al-salwā* was a bird-like quail that was plentiful in the locality.⁵⁴

Paying Attention to Arab History

Given that the Qur’an was revealed in Arabia and that its first target was the Arabs, one must understand their history in order to understand it. At times, the Qur’an presents these Arabs’ psyche. But we live at a distance of fifteen centuries from that time, and history has not preserved much information about the pre-Islamic Arabs. Such information is of great significance in unfolding the Qur’anic message; speculation may not serve the purpose. Islahi is fully aware of this. According to him, there could possibly be three sources for such information: the previous scriptures, pre-Islamic Arabic poetic literature, and the Qur’an itself. The Torah and the Bible, he main-

tains, have lost their credibility because a great deal of corruption has crept into them over the centuries. These sources, he suggests, have entirely modified the history of Isma`il's settlement in Arabia and the construction of the Ka`bah. Islahi does find valuable information in classical Arabic poetry, but these are, to him, quite insufficient to draw a complete picture of the culture, norms, customs, traditions, lifestyle, habits, faith, religious rites, and rituals in order to explain the verses in question. He claims that he has laid his hands on certain valuable information about the Arabs through *j hil * poetry. These references and those in the Qur'an to one or another Arab tradition have helped him understand the Qur'an.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Islahi's *tafs r* may be considered a pioneer work based on the coherence theory. Others have preceded him in this field, but they used this theory as an academic witticism and not, as he does, as a full-fledged methodology. This methodology seems to have the potential to lead to the unity of thought, the most lacking element in the Muslim *ummah*. All of his methodology's eleven features, as discussed above, are closely linked with the coherence theory. His effort merits appreciation as well as further communication to others. His proof that the entire Qur'an forms an integral whole is certainly a great service to academia.

No one, however, can claim any work to be perfect, and the *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an* is no exception to this rule. Much needs to be done to further develop and render the theory of coherence intelligible to both students and scholars of the Qur'an. Since this *tafs r* is in Urdu, there is an urgent need to translate it into Arabic and English. This work may be adopted as a major source for a university-level course entitled "Coherence in the Qur'an." At the present, such a course does not exist; introducing it might lead to a desirable change in some scholars' approach toward Qur'anic *tafs r*. Islahi has done his part; now it is the turn of others to make the new methodology viable.

Endnotes

1. These biographical details have been collected from the records of Madrasah al-Islah, Sarair Mir, India, and from those associated with him in India and Pakistan.
2. Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an* (Delhi: Taj Company, 1997), 1:24-25.
3. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

4. Ibid., 27.
5. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari has given in detail the scholars' views on this matter. The first and second views are attributed to Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Umar, Ibn 'Abbas and others. The third view is also attributed to Ibn 'Abbas and others. See al-Tabari, *Jlmi` al-Bay`n* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 7:533-42.
6. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 4:376-77.
7. Ibid., preface, 1:8.
8. Ibid., 7.
9. Such works of al-Farahi have now been published under the title *Ras'el al-Im'm al-Farahi*, which comprises three different treatises, *Dal'el al-Ni`m*, *As'el al-Qur'an*, and *Al-Takmil f' U's l al-Ta'w'el*, by al-Da'irah al-Hamidiyah, Sarai Mir, India.
10. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi, *Ras'el* (Sarai Mir, India: Al-Da'irah al-Hamidiyyah, 1991), 88-89.
11. Burhan al-Din Ibrahim ibn 'Umar al-Biqai is a great *mufasssir* of the ninth century AH. His *Na`m al-Durar f' Tan'el sub al-Ay'el wa al-Suwar* is a widely recognized *tafsir* based on the theory of *na`m al-Qur'an*.
12. Al-Farahi, *Ras'el*, 89.
13. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 1:75.
14. Al-Farahi, *Ras'el*, 105.
15. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 1:80.
16. Ibid., 1:9.
17. Ibid., 1:10.
18. Al-Farahi, *Ras'el*, 105.
19. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 2:237-38.
20. Ibrahim ibn 'Umar al-Biqai, *Na`m al-Durar* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 2:204-05.
21. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 2:237.
22. Ibid., 8:243.
23. Ibid., 1:15.
24. Ibid., 2:260.
25. Ibid., 434-35.
26. Ibid., 1:213.
27. Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 4:497.
28. Sayyid Qutb, *F' il'el al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1996), 6:3533.
29. Al-Biqai, *Na`m al-Durar*, "Muqaddimah," 1:5.
30. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), 3:106.
31. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 2:17.
32. Ibid., 19.
33. Ibid., 24.

34. Ibid., 6:164.
35. Ibid., 169-70.
36. This is the gist of the ideas scattered in sources. See `Amr ibn Bahr Al-Jahiz, *Al-î ayawæn*, ed. `Abd al-Salam (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, n.d.), part 4, p. 89; Hamd ibn Muhammad al-Khattabi, *Bayæn Ijæz al-Qur'æn*, eds. Muhammad Khalf Allah and Muhammad Zaghlaul; part of the edited work *Thalæthu RasÆ'il fæ Ijæz al-Qur'æn*, 4th ed. (Egypt: Dar al-Ma`arif, n.d.), 27; `Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, *DalÆ'il al-Ijæz*, ed. Mahmud Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanji, 1983), 49-50; Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *Ijæz al-Qur'æn*, 5th ed., ed. Ahmad Saqr (Egypt: Dar al-Ma`arif, n.d.), 276-77; Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (USA: American Trust Publications, 1986), 10-16.
37. Qur'an 39:23.
38. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 1:27.
39. Ibid., 28.
40. Ibid., 110-12.
41. See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsîr al-Qur'æn al-`A`m* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, 2000), 2:364-65.
42. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 3:591.
43. Ibid., 1:29-30.
44. Muslim, *æaúú* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma`rifah, 1997), vol. 6, "Kitæb al-î ud´d," hadith no. 4392.
45. This has been recorded in almost all of the hadith collections, including al-Bukhari's and Muslim's. The alleged verse concerning *rajm*, however, is not found in *æaúú al-Bukhæf* and *æaúú Muslim*. See al-Bukhari, *Sahæh* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, 1400 AH), Vol. 4, "Kitæb al-î ud´d," hadith no. 6830; and Muslim, *æaúú*, vol. 6, "Kitæb al-î ud´d," hadith no. 4394. The alleged verse is found in other sources, such as Malik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta'* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, 1985), vol. 2, "Kitæb al-î ud´d," hadith no. 10.
46. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 5:361-74.
47. Ibid., 1:31-32.
48. Ibid., 8:247.
49. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsîr*, 5:378-79.
50. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 8:457-58.
51. Ibid., 1:32.
52. Ibid.
53. See for example, Ibn Kathir, *Tafsîr*, 1:110-13.
54. Islahi, *Tadabbur*, 1:217-18.
55. Ibid., 33-34.