

IBN ASHUR'S VIEWS ON MAQOSID AL-QUR'AN: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research deals with Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur's (1879-1973 C.E.) views of *Objectives (Maqasid) of the Quran*. As one of the pioneers of the theory of *maqasid al-Shariah*, he pays a significant attention to this subject. Unlike other contributors to this subject, he identifies eight basic objectives of the Quran and implicates them to the Quranic exegesis. According to him, bringing *objectives of the Quran* perspective to the interpretation of the Quran is extremely necessary. This study is a library research in which the data were collected from Ibn Ashur's writings as well as some other relevant literature. Dealing with the collected materials, the researcher made a discourse analysis of Ibn Ashur's views on the mater. After each 'objective' is discussed, a brief focus is made on the methodological basis of his identification of *Objectives of (Maqasid) the Quran* instead of outlining the issues that he has identified as the main *objectives (Maqasid)*.

Keywords: Quran, Objectives of the Quran, Maqasid al-Quran, Ibn Ashur.

Introduction

Ibn Ashur, in his *tafsir "al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir"*, mainly focuses on illustrating the aspects of the inimitability of the Quran through the usage and style of Arabic rhetoric within its text and the harmony within the correspondence between the verses. He, however, did not let any *sirah* go without explaining the *objectives (Maqasid)* it comprises. Therefore, according to him, the *tafsir* is not completely limited within its terms and sentences.¹ If the *tafsir* is confined within the illustration of Quran's semantics, it will be insignificant and limited.² To him, an exegete must possess the knowledge of *objectives (Maqasid)* of which the Quran was sent for. He asserts that possession of knowledge of *objectives (Maqasid)* enables a reader of *tafsir* to distinguish between the interpretation that illustrates *objectives (Maqasid)* and the one which elaborates the meanings of the text.³

Ibn Ashur's emphasis on *objectives (Maqasid)* of the Quran and its relation with *tafsir* encourage readers to look into his identification of *objectives (Maqasid)*. His identification seems diversified as happened in different places in his *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*. However, his identification of Quran's *objectives (Maqasid)* in the introduction of his *tafsir* and their theoretical implications seem relatively comprehensive and well-defined. His views of *objectives (Maqasid) al-Quran* is as follows:

Firstly, the author claims that *Surah al-Fatiha* comprises three objectives of the Quran: (a) extolment of Allah SWT, (b) His commands and (3) prohibitions, reward and punishment. The other issues in the Quran are complementary to them. Secondly, in the same *surah*, he further claims that the intent of the Quran is to deliver its fundamental objectives (*objectives (Maqasid)*) which are to bring about goodness in this world and in the Hereafter which can be achieved through actualizing Allah's commands and abstaining from His prohibitions. This matter depends on knowing that He Who commands and prohibits is Allah SWT who is the Creator of every being.⁴ Thirdly, he points out that Allah SWT categorizes mankind into two types; believers and non-believers and calls upon them to ponder upon His signs, Oneness and guidance to achieve causes of belief and refutations of disbelief which can be done through guidance to consideration and reference about man and conditions of existing beings and their movements indicative to His Oneness. These signs include, for example, mystery of the planets' cycle on the orbit,

¹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1: 8.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.1: 133.

conditions of light and darkness, wind, clouds and rain, seas and hills. The author considers that guiding people to ponder and contemplate on the His creatures is one of the *Objectives (Maqasid)* of the Quran.⁵ Forth, in a further identification, he considers that the higher objective of the Quran is reforming the *ummah* by calling upon disbelievers to refuse disbelief and to adopt belief instead, and reforming believers through rectifying their morals and consolidating them in their right path, and guiding them to the ways of success and purifying their minds.⁶ Fifth, again in another place, he points out that the objectives of the Quran are command, prohibition, tiding, warning, advice, conveyance, guidance and others.⁷ Having corroborated with the verse below, he asserts that the Quran is sent by Allah SWT as a book of reformation of all public affairs.

“One day We shall raise from all Peoples a witness against them, from amongst themselves: and We shall bring thee as a witness against these (thy people): and We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy, and Glad Tidings to Muslims.” (Al-Quran, 16: 89)

According to the above mentioned verse, Ibn Ashur concludes that the Quran's highest objective (*al-Maqasad al-'Ala*) is to reform the individual, society, and civilization. In a further explanation, however, he points out that the reform of an individual depends on purifying and disciplining the mind, and this is contingent upon reform of belief. It is because the belief is the source of morals and thought, and thereupon the reform of man's inner-self (*sarirah*) comes. This includes the external worship such as the prescribed prayers, and inward worship, such as acquiring good morals through giving up pride, enmity, and carnal desires. Then, on social reform, he argues that the reform of the society could be accomplished firstly through reforming the individuals, as the individuals are the components of society, and the whole society could be reformed only when its parts are perfectly reformed. In addition, regulating people's symbiotic relations through limiting their ambition as well as carnal desires should be taken into account. This is the science of human relations (*mu'amalat*) which the scholars call it civil politics or government. For the civilizational reform, he considers it as a large scale of reformation which concerns the maintenance of the order of the Islamic world, the regulation of relations between communities, collective benefits, and the universal welfare of Islam.⁸

Despite these varieties in identification, Ibn Ashur's thesis of Objectives (*Maqasid*) al-Quran mainly focuses on the eight Objectives (*Maqasid*) which are, according to him, implicated to *tafsir*. He asserts that it is necessary to look into the objectives of the Quran when one intends to interpret the verses. He clearly makes it as principle of *tafsir*.

Objectives of the Quran in Ibn Ashur's Views

Having conducted an induction on basic objectives of the Quran, Ibn Ashur discovered eight objectives of which he mentions in the fourth introduction of his book of *tafsir*. The eight objectives of the Quran are as follows:

The first objective (*maqsad*) of the Quran, according to Ibn Ashur, is 'reformation (*Islah*) of belief and educating the correct dealing (*aqd*)'. These are the supreme causes of reforming the morals because they purify mind and soul from all kinds of illusions and false convictions developed by paganism, atheism and alike."⁹ *Islah* (reform) signifies making thing upright of which the opposite meaning is corruption (*fasad*).¹⁰ The question of reform usually comes in the context where something is corrupted and deformed. The Quranic concern of the reform of beliefs proves that the prevailing dogmas and beliefs before the revelation of the Quran were not in upright and correct form. In pre-Islamic era, the major distortions and false beliefs occurred in regard to ideas about Allah SWT the Creator, His Self, Attributes and Functions;¹¹ worldly life and Hereafter; Prophethood and Angels; the interrelation

⁵ Ibid., vol.11: 295.

⁶ Ibid., vol.1: 81.

⁷ Ibid., vol.8: 19.

⁸ Ibid., vol.1: 36.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 1: 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 2: 337.

¹¹ In the corrupted Torah, for instance, a story has been fabricated in which God is depicted as a being who was defeated in a wrestling bout with Prophet Jacob. It is claimed that having created the world in six days, God became weary and rested on the seventh day. However, God, being exalted far above any imperfections, cannot become weary or in need of rest. This is related in the Qur'an as follows: *We created the heavens and the earth, and everything between them, in six days and We were not affected by fatigue. (Surah Qaf: 38) Do they not see that God—He Who created the heavens and the earth and was not wearied by creating them—has the power to bring the dead to life? Yes indeed! He has power over all things. (Surah al-Hiqaf: 33)* This reveals that the adherents of these books have swerved from the straight path, and have not had an accurate understanding of God and His attributes.

between Creator, creature, worldly life and Hereafter; and other issues. The Quran itself asserts that it aims to correct the defective beliefs about these issues. This is evidently seen in the following verses:

"All praise is due to God, who has bestowed this divine writ from on high upon His servant, and has not allowed any deviousness to obscure its meaning: '(1) [a divine writ] unerringly straight, meant to warn [the godless] of a severe punishment from Him, and to give unto the believers who do good works the glad tidings that theirs shall be a goodly reward (2)" (Al-Quran, 18: 1-5)

These verses categorically mention three causes (*ta'lil*) of revelation of the Quran: firstly, warning of severe punishment; secondly, glad tidings for the believers in Allah SWT; and finally warning of those who believe that Allah SWT has a begotten son.¹² Having mentioned the third cause, the statement ends by marking that the belief of the Christians, the Jews¹³ and the pagan Arabs who assigned offspring to Allah SWT¹⁴ was an utter false. Purging faith of alien concepts is determined at the outset of Sūrah al-Kahf which opens by ensuring that the Quran remains free of distortion and is unerringly straight. It seeks to establish correct and accurate thought and reasoning as well as establish values that are sound according to the criterion of the Islamic faith.¹⁵ Allah SWT is One and High above any ideas of physical reproduction. The attribution of a son "begotten" to Allah has no basis in fact or in reason. It is not even a dogma that is reasoned out or can be explained in any way that is consistent with the sublime attributes of Allah SWT.¹⁶

In the pre-Islamic era, pagan Arabs, except for a few known as *hunafa'* in Hijaz, were not used to believing in divine messengership (*risalah*). The Quran quotes their disbeliefs as follows:

Their Messengers said: "What! Can there be a doubt about Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth? ... They said: "You are no more than human beings like us! You wish to turn us away from what our fathers used to worship. Then bring us a clear authority i.e. a clear proof of what you say. (Al-Quran, 14: 10)

But the chiefs of those who disbelieved among his people said: "He is no more than a human being like you, he seeks to make himself superior to you. Had Allah willed, He surely could have sent down angels; never did we hear such a thing among our fathers of old. He is only a man in whom is madness, so wait for him a while. (Al-Quran, 23: 24-25)

The Jews did not recognize that Allah SWT could bless anybody with the revelation except *Bani Israil* because they used to believe that they were the only chosen people of Allah SWT. There are many such other defective beliefs such as assuming that the Angels are females,¹⁷ the universe is an aimless vain creation, there is no afterlife and human beings will not be resurrected, etc.¹⁸ To counter these false notions, and many others not mentioned here, God gives His sublime attributes to us in the Quran. This is in order to, not only answer these erroneous claims, but also to guide those guilty of them to the true religion of God.

Ibn Ashur sets the reformation of belief in the chain of three major reforms – individual, societal and civilizational - that Islam aims to. Reformation of an individual depends on the purification and disciplining of his mind. In doing so, the first and foremost prerequisite is to reform his belief because it is the seedbed of his morals and thoughts.¹⁹ Thus, reform of belief is the first and foremost issue that Islam deals with in a colossal multitude because reform of belief is the introduction to all other reforms. While the belief is upright, the rest would turn to be

¹² Ibn 'Ashur, Muhammad al-Tahir, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 15: 250.

¹³ The Qur'an refers to the erroneous beliefs adopted by Christians and Jews, and makes known the correct belief. For instance, their saying, "God has a son (Jesus)," which is one of the tenets of Christianity, is said to be merely an irrational belief and a lie said against God: They say, "God has a son." Glory be to Him! No, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him. Everything is obedient to Him, the Originator of the heavens and earth. When He decides on something, He just says to it, "Be!" and it is. (Surah al-Baqara: 116-117) People of the Book! Do not go to excess in your religion. Say nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God and His Word, which He cast into Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers. Do not say, "Three." It is better that you stop. God is only One God. He is too Glorious to have a son! Everything in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. God suffices as a Guardian. (Surah An-Nisa': 171), He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He has no wife? He created all things and He has knowledge of all things. (Sura al-An'am: 101)

¹⁴ Mawduidi, Abul Ala, *Tafhim al-Quran*, Surah al-Kahf, verse: 4.

¹⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, translated by M.A Salahi, Surah al-Kahf, vol. 11: 182.

¹⁶ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Quran* (U.S.A: Maryland, Amana Corporation, 1992), 708.

¹⁷ See *Al-Quran*, 43: 19.

¹⁸ See *Al-Quran*, 44:34-39; 2: 80; 45: 24.

¹⁹ . Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*vol. 1: 36.

upright, because human beings consisting of body and mind. Since the Islamic belief produces dignity, sagacity and prudence, freedom of reason and equality of human kind, the reform attempted by Islam is the key to success in mundane life and in the hereafter.²⁰

“It is established that the general purpose of the *shari'ah* is to achieve righteousness and goodness (*salah*) in the world and remove corruption from it. This can happen only by setting mankind's affairs to right and removing the corruption. That is, since human beings are the predominant creatures in this world, its righteousness and orderly functioning of its affairs depends on the righteousness and virtue of human beings. Accordingly, Islam has dealt with setting to right the condition of humankind by tackling the affairs of both the individual and the community. Likewise, it started its call by reforming matters pertaining to faith and belief, for it is right belief that constitutes the foundation of sound and correct human thinking that leads the mind to proper reflection on the affairs of the world.”²¹

‘Belief’ was historically the first and the most important of all the theological concepts in Islam.²² It marked the starting point of all theological thinking among early Muslims.²³ However, according to Ibn Ashur, belief is the function of heart and it exerts outward effects through words and deeds.²⁴ It is, by nature, a personal existential phenomenon.²⁵ The constituents of it are ‘assent’ (*tasdiq*) i.e. inner conviction, ‘verbal attestation or confession’ (*iqrar*) and ‘work’ (*amal*) or what we might call the ‘pillars’ (*arkan*) of belief.²⁶ In the whole structure of Islamic beliefs, the first and fundamental thing is “belief in God.” All other remaining beliefs are the offshoots of this root and all ethical instructions and civic laws derive strength from this central source. Belief in angels is necessary because they belong to God, belief in the Holy Books is necessary because they are sent down by Him, while belief in the Day of Judgment is required because this is the day of His Judgment. In short, whatever comprises in Islam is based on the belief in God. If this foundation is removed, the whole structure of the Islamic system will fall down.²⁷

The true belief, according to Ibn Ashur, is neither to go deep into such a degree of disaffirmation that eventually leads to the denial of His attributes (*ta'til*²⁸) nor to delve into such degree of affirmation that reaches to the level of equalization and likening human attributes to Allah's attributes (*tashbih*, *tamthil*). Rather, it is a straight dividing line between *ta'til* and *tashbih*.²⁹ Every belief which is not established by irrefutable evidence is a false belief. Thus, the Quran introduces a lot of referential arguments and calls upon holders of divergent beliefs to introduce evidence in favor of their beliefs.³⁰

Or have they chosen other gods beside Him? say: Bring your proof (of their godhead). This is the Reminder of those with me and those before me, but most of them know not the Truth and so they are averse. (Al-Quran, 24: 21)

Ibn Ashur identifies the main reasons for corruption of belief is one of the two things; polytheism or atheism.³¹ Polytheism signifies belief in many gods³² and worshiping of others along with Allah SWT. It also implies attributing divine attributes to any other besides Allah SWT. It particularly implies associating partners in worship

²⁰ . Ibid., vol. 3: 51.

²¹ Muhammad al-Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, translated form Arabic by Muhammad El-Tahir El-Mesawi (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 90.

²² Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Iman and Islam* (Malaysia: Petaling Jaya, 2006), ix.

²³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology... 1*.

²⁴ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*vol. 8: 121.

²⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology... x*.

²⁶ Ibid., 182.

²⁷ Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Understanding Islamic Civilization*, Translated and Edited by Muhammad Khalid Farooqi (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2002), 91.

²⁸ *Ta'til* literally signifies abandonment and discharge. (Ibn Sayyiduh, al-Mukhaḥḥāḥ, vol. 2: 174.) *Ta'til* is classified into two: total and partial. The total *ta'til* is denial of Allah SWT as a Creator, His speech (*kalam*), *Din*, Laws and worship. Thus, it is in fact atheism. (Ightha al-Lahfan, vol. 2: 256) The partial *ta'til* is denial of Allah's attributes. *Tashbih* is equalization of Allah SWT attributes with human being, for example, believing that Allah's Hand is like the hands of human beings.

²⁹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 25: 251

³⁰ Ibid., vol. 1: 656.

³¹ Ibid., vol. 21: 101.

³² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/469156/polytheism>. Retrieved on 6 December, 2010.

with Allah SWT or to believe that the source of power, harm or blessings is from others besides Allah. Polytheism and idolatry might be described as institutionalized *shirk*.³³ Indicating to the polytheists' denial of Allah's Attributes, the Quran mentions, "And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny (or utter impious speech against) His Names. They will be requited for what they used to do." (Al-Quran, 7: 180) This verse was revealed in the context of polytheists' disregard of Allah's attributes. There are many Attributes of Allah SWT that they denied such as *al-Rahman*, *al-Ba'ith*, *al-Hasib*, *al-Mu'id*, etc.³⁴ There are some sects like Ismailite who believe that Allah SWT is neither existent, knowledgeable and capable nor nonexistent, ignorant and incapable. The same is their belief in regard to all His Attributes because the real affirmation requires co-partnership between Him and the existing beings which is called *tashbih*. The absolute denial requires His partnership as non-existent which is called *ta'til*. He is in fact the Grantor of these Attributes.³⁵

Furthermore, atheism is the renouncement of the truth of Allah's Attributes, their realities and meanings. Atheism in Allah's Attributes can be categorized as follows: deriving idols' name from Allah's Attributes such as *Lat* from *Ilahiyyah*, *al-'Uzza* from *al-'Aziz*, etc; naming Him with names that are not suitable with His Majesty, such as the Christians name Him as father; characterizing Him with something inferior or inappropriate while the Jews describe Him as "poor" (*faqir*), that He took leisure after creating the universe and that His hand is shackled. The followers of *Jahamiyyah* also believe that Allah's names are mere words and free from meaning and attribute, that while Allah is *al-Sami'*, *al-Basir*, *al-Hayyu*, *al-Rahim*, *al-Mutakallim* and *al-Murid* He does not possess life, auditory, verbal and visual sense, will, etc; equalizing His attributes with His creatures such as He has hands like human beings.

This deviation from the correct belief results from the corruption of thinking, absence of distinction between correct evidence and analogous (*mutashabihah*) evidence, and the lack of absolute knowledge.³⁶ The Quran describes these facts in the following verse:

When it is said to them, "Follow the Commands that Allah has sent down," they reply, "We will follow only what we found our forefathers practicing. Well, will they go on following their forefathers even though they did not use common sense and did not find the right way (Al-Quran, 2: 170)

Blind imitation is an obstacle to exercise free thinking and a cause for intellectual stagnation, and mere assumption cannot lead to absolute knowledge. Therefore, the Qur'an equivocally condemns blind imitation of the practices of the forefathers and commands to follow what He has revealed with obvious evidence which would open the mind to investigation for the Truth.

Ibn Ashur introduces some approaches for reformation of the belief. He asserts that Islam binds reformation of belief and its continuous uprightness with two things; *al-Tafsil* and *al-Ta'lil*. *Al-Tafsil* includes three things; complete illustration of the belief system to all Muslims, publicizing erroneous beliefs of perverted people and taking a tough stand against deviated people, and eliminating all the means of a polytheist.³⁷ *Al-Ta'lil* encourages human minds to think about Allah's existence and His attributes.³⁸ It could be an incentive to find the ultimate truth through inductive reasoning on the signs of Allah SWT and the phenomena. Thus, the first is concerned with finding the essence of the Truth and the second is the elaboration of how to deal with it in detail. After having knowledge of the Truth and the required approaches, *hikmah* (wisdom) can be a guiding force to make the way forward because it is, according to Ibn Ashur, an all-inclusive name of every discourse or knowledge that stands in perpetual reformation of human affairs and their beliefs.³⁹ Then, for the outreach of belief to the pinnacle, righteousness (*istiqamah*) is attributable.⁴⁰ The word *istiqamah* is metaphorically used for denoting good deeds and being steadfast on the true and right path. *Istiqamah* is the excrescence or outgrowth in the degree of affirmation of *tawhid* because it comprehends adherence to it and performs what it demands. It comprehends the meaning of fulfillment of what duties mankind is entrusted with. Being steadfast on the doctrine of *tawhîd* is the first and foremost of them.⁴¹

³³ Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (U.S.A: Albany, University of New York Press, 1985), 56.

³⁴ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 8: 360.

³⁵ Al- Jurjani, *al-Ta'rifat*...42.

³⁶ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 25: 42.

³⁷ Muhammad al-Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *Usul al-Nizam al-'Ijtima'i fi al-Islam* (Al-Jazair: Al-Mu'assasah al-Wataniyyah li al-Kitab, N.D), 49-50.

³⁸ Muhammad al-Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *Usul al-Nizam al-'Ijtima'i fi al-Islam* .49-50.

³⁹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 13: 263.

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 25: 251.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 25: 50.

Ibn Ashur divides the first objective into two; reformation of belief and teaching correct dealings. The meaning of “reformation of belief” is obvious and elaborated by him but “teaching correct dealings (‘*aqd*)” is not well-defined in his writings. Yet, the relationship between these two might be found when he relates *istiqamah* with the completeness of belief. The scope of *istiqamah* bridges the gap between them because it includes both belief and deed as explained above. Thus, “teaching correct contract (‘*aqd*)” would mean the functional obligations that come after beliefs. As Allah SWT says:

O ye who believe! Fulfill (all) obligations (Al-Quran, 5: 1)

Ibn Ashur states that the word ‘*Uqud* (plural form of ‘*aqd*) denotes actualization of *shari’ah*, the Law of Allah.⁴² The intended reform of Lawgiver is not confined within the reform of belief and acts of ritual worship. Rather, reform of people’s worldly condition and social affairs is intended.⁴³

Since reformation of belief is the preamble or foundation for all other reformations, placing it as the first objective of the Quran seems logical and appropriate. Ibn Ashur did not mention any clear-cut arguments in favor of his consideration of “reformation of belief and teaching correct contract (‘*aqd*)” as the first *Maqsad* but his overall view on the issue gives two logical clues that support his choice. Firstly, the first and foremost issue that the Quran focuses on is the belief system. Almost all Of the *makkan* chapter of revelation deals with this subject, either introducing the correct beliefs or pinpointing their corruption. Thus, with this overwhelming focus and bulky coverage, it being the first *Maqsad* is logically persuasive. Secondly, most of the interpreters of the Quran agree that *Surah al-Fatihah* represents the higher intents of the *Quran* and for that reason its name ‘*Umm al-Quran* is the best match. One of the issues that this *sirah* comprises is supplication (verses 4-5) to the Creator that ensures inerrancy of *ta’til*, atheism and polytheism.⁴⁴ These issues occupy Ibn Ashur’s whole concept of reform of belief. Thus, it can be argued that this issue is competent as one of the higher objectives of the Quran.

The Second Objective (*maqsad*) of the Quran is to rectify the morals.⁴⁵ The Quran widely demonstrates moral virtues and good characters. According to Ibn Ashur, the Quran comprises four sciences⁴⁶ and rectification of morals is included in the first category which consists other issues like the stories of the prophets and past nations, jurisprudence and legislation, belief system and Arabic rhetoric.⁴⁷ This statement shows that the author considers the rectification of morals as a key issue in the Quran and it has a deep correlation with the mission of Prophet Muhammad SAW. The Quran says:

Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own, who shall rehearse Thy Signs to them and instruct them in scripture and wisdom, and sanctify them: For Thou art the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (Al-Quran, 2: 129)

In explaining this verse, the author says that it refers entirely to the objectives of the Quran, especially to the very objective of rectification of the morals. To him, “*yuzakkihim*” means purifying the mind by dint of Islamic guidance. It is obvious that good mental disposition is an indicator of good character. The term “*yu’allimuhum*” illustrates the objectives of the Quran and teaching its rulings. Moreover, the term “teaching *Ikamah*” refers to rectification of morals and compliance with regulation.⁴⁸ Most of the exegetes of the Quran agree that one of the salient features of this verse is “purification of soul”. Yet, there is no clear indication of its implication with *objectives (Maqasid)* of the Quran because the context of this verse refers to the functions and virtues of a prophet expected to come after Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail AS. The words of this verse are supplication of prophet *Ibrahim* and *Ismail*, peace be on them, for the Final Prophet from among Ibrahim’s progeny. The response to this supplication⁴⁹ is reflected in the following verse:

It is He Who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, to recite to them His verses, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, although they had been, before, in manifest error (Al-Quran, 62: 2).

In both the verses, the following have been mentioned as the functions of Prophet SAW:

⁴² Ibid., vol. 5: 10.

⁴³ Ibn ‘Ashur, *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari’ah*, ..89.

⁴⁴ Ibn ‘Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1: 151.

⁴⁵ Ibid., vol.1: 38

⁴⁶ The other categories of sciences that the *Quran* includes are sciences that increase the knowledge of an exegete of the *Quran* such as wisdom (*Ikamah*) and particularities of creatures; sciences related to cosmology, medicine and logic.

⁴⁷ Ibn ‘Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol.1: 43.

⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 1: 704.

⁴⁹ Mawdudi, *Tafhim*..Surah al-Baqarah, verse: 129.

1. Recitation of the verses.
2. Teaching the Book and wisdom.
3. Purification (*tazkiyah*) of souls.

The term *tazkiyah* (purification) in Arabic means both purification and growth or development. It involves aspects that are intellectual as well as practical, external as well as internal, material and physical as well as mental and spiritual. At the same time, it has individual as well as social and collective dimensions. The most important requisite of *tazkiyah* is that the minds, actions and morals of people are thoroughly scrutinized and cleansed of all moral and spiritual ills, while implanting in them virtues to shape and improve their moral and spiritual condition and to civilize their attitudes and habits. *Tazkiyah* requires that people are trained in such a manner that virtues are firmly implanted in their minds and hearts while creating in them an abiding aversion to all forms of evil.⁵⁰

This above dimension of *tazkiyah* (purification) shows that people's minds require a living example of a purified mind with sublime attributes who will be imitated by others to purify their morals. Therefore, the Prophet SAW was sent as a model who possesses the best morals and best examples of a virtuous life. Allah SWT says:

And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character. (Al-Quran, 68: 4)

“*Khuluqun 'azim*” denotes all the virtues that are mentioned in the Quran which are the highest morals that mankind should possess such as piety, patience, justice, gravity, politeness, perseverance, forgiveness, shyness, courage, passion, good conduct, etc.⁵¹ 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet SAW was once questioned about the character of the Prophet and she replied, “the Quran was his character”. It is also narrated that the Prophet said “I was sent to complete the noble morals.”⁵² This shows a clear synthesis between the theory and application of Islamic morals.

Ibn Ashur presents this prophetic mission as supportive evidence to prove that rectification of morals is one of the universal purposes of the Quran. He further argues that during the time of the Prophet SAW this *maqsad* was generally understood by the Arabs, particularly by his Companions⁵³ because they witnessed the moral transition of the Arabs from their previous state of immorality. In pre-Islamic era, the morals were mixed with good and evil. When Islam came, it removed the evil morals⁵⁴ and completed the noble ones.⁵⁵

Ibn Ashur again relates rectification of morals with social reformation. According to him, sublime morals are the foundations of the Islamic social system. He divides the Islamic social system into two parts: the first includes noble morals like justice, unity and equity while the second includes freedom, quality, solidarity, jihad and tread in enemies' territory, rights, asset of the Muslim *ummah* and abundance of wealth. A society cannot be completely organized and no nation would be safe from schism until the sublime morals become dominant upon its masses in their affairs and dealings because the effect of the sublime morals is purification of the human mind. In other words, they accustom the mind to attain the virtues and their distinctions from vices.⁵⁶ The aim of rectification of morals is to transform the human mind to a sublime stage and to habituate it in a perpetual observance of advice and exercise in all deeds and situations.⁵⁷ Consequently, the mind becomes welcomes good deeds and shuns the evil deeds.⁵⁸

However, “mere teachings and commands of do's and don'ts do not form the foundation of good moral character in a society because these things are not sufficient for developing good qualities in humans. The teaching of good conduct which is fruitful requires long training and constant watchfulness. The training cannot be on the right line if the example before the society is not one that commands full confidence, because a person having a bad moral character cannot leave a good impression on others. The best training can be expected only from a man whose personality, by the force of his morality, creates a scene of admiration in the beholders. They would sing praises of his nobility and feel the irresistible urge to benefit from the example of his life. The world would spontaneously feel the urge to follow his footsteps. To nourish and develop an excellent character among his followers, it is necessary

⁵⁰ Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Pondering over The Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Petaling Jaya, Islamic Book Trust, 2006), vol. 1: 366-69.

⁵¹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 29: 61.

⁵² MALik bin Anas, *Muwatta' Malik*, 3357.

⁵³ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1: 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 26: 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 18: 143.

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Ashur, *Usul al-Nizam al-'Ijtima'i fi al-Islam*,...123.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,...124.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,...124.

that the leader possesses higher and noble character and attributes than his followers. The Prophet SAW himself was the best example of a good moral character to emulate as he called upon to his followers.⁵⁹

In light of the above reality, it is suitable to introduce the issue of “purification of morals” as one of the purposes of the Prophethood rather than a purpose of the Quran. The following verses support this idea:

Even as We have sent unto you an apostle from among yourselves to convey unto you Our messages, and to cause you to grow in purity, and to impart unto you revelation and wisdom, and to teach you that which you knew not. (Al-Quran, 2: 151)

Indeed, God bestowed a favour upon the believers when he raised up in their midst an apostle from among themselves, to convey His messages unto them, and to cause them to grow in purity, and to impart unto them the divine writ as well as wisdom - whereas before that they were indeed, most obviously, lost in error. (Al-Quran, 3: 164)

These and other similar verses clearly show that purification of morals was one of the functions of the Prophet SAW. It should be mentioned that there is a synthesis between the purposes of Prophethood and the purposes of the Quran but both are distinctive in mission, vision and objectives. Due to their distinctions, they should not be confused.

The third objective (maqсад) of the Quran is legislation that consists of general and specific rulings. Muslim scholars unanimously agree that the Quran is the first source of Islamic legislation. The other sources are considered subordinate. The Quran repeatedly stresses that believers must judge by what is revealed to them.⁶⁰ Allah SWT says:

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Hence, judge between the followers of earlier revelation for, behold, a great many people are iniquitous indeed. (Al-Quran, 5: 48-)

These verses mark the beginning of substantive legislation in the Quran, i.e., legislation above and beyond matters of ritual performance of the prayer and pilgrimage. In other words, the bulk of the substantive legislation seems to have been revealed after the year 5/626 when a distinct body of law exclusive to the *‘ummah*, the Muslim community, was first conceived.⁶¹ The Quranic command “Obey God and His Prophet” (Al-Quran, 3: 32) lays the supreme innovation introduced by Islam into the social structure of Arabia; the establishment of a noble political authority possessing legislative power.⁶² Prior to the advent of Islam the unit of society was the tribe. The tribe was bound by a body of unwritten rules. Neither the tribal *shaykh* nor any representative assembly had legislative power to interfere with this system.⁶³ In the absence of proper legislative authority, lawlessness and chaos filled the Arabian lifestyle. Under these circumstances, as law is essential for the maintenance and development of a healthy and peaceful civilized life of any society,⁶⁴ the Prophet SAW gradually developed an Islamic model of legal sovereignty and superseded the tribal custom in various respects.

However, since in the evolution of a society the technical process of legislation is a secondary stage,⁶⁵ the Quran turns its attention to legislation after a long primary focus on the Islamic belief system (*‘aqidah*). The Quranic legislation is predominantly ethical in quality, so the quantity is not great by any standard. It amounts in all some 600 verses,⁶⁶ and the vast majority of these are concerned with religious duties, ritual practices and state mechanism.⁶⁷

According to Ibn Ashur, from the legal perspective, *Objectives (Maqasid) al-Quran* is classified into two: firstly, introducing the Quran as a permanent *shari’ah* which requires opening its texts to various inventions; secondly, habituating the bearers of this *shari’ah* and the scholars of this *‘ummah* to explore research and invent the

⁵⁹ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Muslim’s Character*, translated from Arabic by A. Karim Shaikh (India: Hindustan Publications, 1993), 17-18.

⁶⁰ The same notion could be found in the following verses: 2: 213; 3: 23; 4: 58, 105; 5: 44-45, 47; 7: 87; 10: 109; 24: 48.

⁶¹ Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21.

⁶² N.J Coulson M.A, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁶⁴ Afazlur Rahman, *Islam: Ideology and Way of Life*.....347.

⁶⁵ N.J Coulson M.A, *A History of Islamic Law*11.

⁶⁶ According to al-Suyuti, there are five hundred verses with legal connotation in the *Quran*. Some other scholars feel that the number may be more than this.

⁶⁷ N.J Coulson M.A, *A History of Islamic Law* .. 12.

objectives (Maqasid) so that they can be competent and able to understand the laws of the Law-Giver and their *objectives (Maqasid)*.⁶⁸ As *Objectives (Maqasid) al-Quran* is seen as a criterion of *tafsir*, Ibn Ashur asserts that an exegete should give proper importance on expounding the principles of the law which appears as a science in Islamic studies.⁶⁹

However, Ibn Ashur presents evidence from the Quran to prove the reality of legislation for being objectives of the Quran. The verses are as follows:

We have sent down to thee the Book in truth, that thou mightiest judge between men, as guided by Allah: so be not (used) as an advocate by those who betray their trust. (Al-Quran, 4: 105)

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it (Al-Quran, 5: 48)

The *raison d'être (ta'wil)* behind the revelation of the Quran mentioned in the above verses is linked with judging or ruling (*hukm*). Legislation and judgment are not the same. Legislation (or [statutory law](#)) is law which has been promulgated (or enacted) by a legislature or other governing body, or the process of making it. Legislation is regarded as one of the main functions of government, which are often distinguished under the doctrine of the separation of powers. Those who have the formal power to create legislation are known as legislators. It aims to illustrate the legal reality⁷⁰ of any issue. It is in fact a complementary element to judgment and its prerequisite. The nature and function indicate that legislation is a means rather than an objective.

The fourth objectives (*maqasid*) of the Quran is to maintain the 'ummatic polity which aims to reform the 'ummah and preserve its regulations. Ibn Ashur classifies the policies of 'ummah into two; the first covers rules that regulate people's conduct in their dealings such as noble morals, justice, unity and condolence. The second includes rules that lead the 'ummah toward excellence such as equality, freedom, rights, justice, property management, security, solidarity and spread of Islam.⁷¹ According to Ibn Ashur, these issues are concerned with Islamic *shari'ah* which was represented as regulation after the formation of the institution of 'ummah in Madinah. After migration, Prophet Muhammad SAW united his Makkan followers to *Yathrib* and the Helpers (*Ansar*) of *Yathrib* into a single and unified community, distinct from the communities of the non-believers⁷² thereby, the body-politic of the 'ummah was born. It is the Quran which provides fundamental guidelines for the politics of the 'ummah. Ibn Ashur quotes the following verses as instances of Quranic root of 'ummatic polity:

And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah, and do not separate. And remember Allah's favor unto you: How ye were enemies and He made friendship between your hearts so that ye became as brothers by His grace; and (how) ye were upon the brink of an abyss of fire, and He did save you from it. Thus Allah maketh clear His revelations unto you, that haply ye may be guided. (Al-Quran, 3: 103)

As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least: their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did. (Al-Quran, 6: 159)

And obey Allah and His messenger, and dispute not one with another lest ye falter and your strength depart from you; but be steadfast! Lo! Allah is with the steadfast. (Al-Quran, 7: 46)

And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish worship, and whose affairs are a matter of counsel, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them. (Al-Quran, 42: 38)

This *maqasid* widely represents *Objectives (Maqasid) al-shari'ah* but with a different title. It demonstrates a close internal harmony with the previous *maqasid* which highlights Islamic legislation. Here, Ibn Ashur focuses on the effects and objectives of legislation. He claims that "a comprehensive thematic analysis of the textual sources of *shari'ah* pertaining to the objectives of legislation, its general rules and specific proofs indicate that the all-purpose principle (*objectives (Maqasid) 'ammh*) of Islamic legislation is to preserve the social order of the community and insure its healthy progress by promoting the well-being and righteousness (*Salah*) of that which prevails in it."⁷³ Ibn Ashur also maintains that the "objective of the *shari'ah* is to establish a strong community with a stable social system and promote the orderly functioning of its affairs by achieving its welfare and preventing evil. Allah has reminded

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 3: 158.

⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 1: 13.

⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 2: 384.

⁷¹ Ibn 'Ashur, *U'Ûl al-NiðÉm al- TjimÉÑÊ fÊ al-IslÉm ...*122.

⁷² Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, *The concepts of Islamic Ummah and shariah* (Malaysia: Selangor, Pelanduk Publications Sdn Bhd, 1992), 27.

⁷³ Ibn 'Ashur, *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari'ah*..... 87.

Muslims as well as other righteous communities of the favors that He bestows upon them by establishing them on earth and making their conditions good."⁷⁴ He says:

Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion - the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me. 'If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked. (Al-Quran, 24: 55)

In fact, ummatic polity is a means to preserve the well-being and order of the world, not an objective. The *shari'ah* surrounds the vital and invariable interests of human beings with permanent means of protection.⁷⁵ The Quran equivocally reveals that bringing well-being is its purpose:

And this, too, is a divine writ which We have bestowed from on high, a blessed one: follow it, then, and be conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy. (Al-Quran, 6: 155)

Or lest you say, If a divine writ had been bestowed from on high upon us. (Al-Quran, 6: 157)

The fifth objective (*maqsad*) of the Quran is the stories and information of past nations which contain lofty purposes of encouraging their successors to emulate their righteous affairs and warning of their evil deeds.⁷⁶

We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to thee this (portion of the) Quran: before this, thou too was among those who knew it not received. (Al-Quran, 12: 03)

Ibn Ashur points out that the Quran does not present stories of the past nations for any limited purposes. They carry many lessons and provisions for the *'ummah*. For this reason, we see the Quran does not narrate those stories according to a chronological order as a conventional history book, or the whole story in the same place, or the story as a whole, but it narrates the most important portion of them.⁷⁷ Consequently, Ibn Ashur mentions the benefits and lessons that can be derived from the Quranic stories as follows:

- a. Knowledge about the People of the Book and other past nations allows Muslims to know about God's sanctions unto them. The knowledge of previous nations enables the bearers of the Quran to refute the claims of Jews and others who characterize Muslims as an illiterate (*ummiyyah*) or ignorant (*jahiliyyah*) nation.
- b. Knowledge of the *shari'ah* of the previous prophets and nations provides a scope of justification of the uniqueness of Islamic *shari'ah* in comparison to others.
- c. Knowledge of the principles of the cause and effect in good and evil, construction and destruction allows the *'ummah* to follow the right way and be aware of the wrong and harmful deeds.
- d. Lessons from the consequences of rejecting the Divine messages and confronting the prophets and their followers can be learnt; also how Allah SWT empowered and established the righteous people.
- e. Knowledge of the world, the big and powerful nations and their characteristics provides the *ummah* with beneficial provisions for a better life.
- f. Encouraging the Muslim nations to make an effort in holding positions of global leadership.
- g. Knowledge that Allah's power is superior over all powers and He helps those who help Him. Any nation which adopts the proper cause of sustainability will be safe from the domination of other nations.
- h. The history of legislation as well as civilization could benefit and open up the Muslims' minds to move towards civilization.⁷⁸

These lessons hold some key precepts of the Quran that are generally described as its purposes such as belief, prophethood, *targhib* and *tarhib*, legislation, taking lessons, etc. In Ibn Ashur's views, all these issues are also regarded as *objectives (Maqasid)* of the Quran. It therefore appears that the universal purposes of the Quran are distributed in the stories it contains. In fact, the stories of the Quran are not distinctive entities as they are not isolated narratives of events. Rather, they always come in conjunction with Quranic precepts in order to give a tangible connotation for them. Moreover, stories of the Quran occur following its universal purposes. Some instances are:

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁶ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*,...vol. 1: 38-39.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol.1: 63.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol.1: 64-66.

The Unity of Allah: Calling to the Unity of Allah was a common mission of all prophets in human history. This truth is exemplified by quoting their direct speech in this regard:

Indeed, We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people and he said: "O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Ilah (God) but Him. (Al-Quran, 7: 59)

The Prophethood: Quranic stories establish that the mission of all the prophets is the same. All of them called their people towards the *Tawhid* of Allah SWT as found in the above mentioned verses. There are numerous examples of this in the Quran such as in Surah Hud:

And all that We relate unto thee of the story of the messengers is in order that thereby We may make firm thy heart. And herein hath come unto thee the Truth and an exhortation and a reminder for believers. (Al-Quran, 11: 94)

Giving exhortation of punishment: Allah SWT has narrated in the Quran the stories of past nations, the severe punishments that were sent upon them and their excruciating doom, including how they were destroyed, and what their recompense was for belying their prophets because of their arrogance and resistance to the Truth.

And the (awful) Cry overtook those who did wrong, so that morning found them prostrate in their dwellings. (Al-Quran, 11: 67)

Likewise, other stories could be found that refer to other purposes. In this connection, Sayyid Qutb asserts that the stories of the Quran comprise almost all of its purposes⁷⁹ but they are not represented as a purpose the Quran. Rather, they are the means leading to its purposes.⁸⁰ This claim seems logical because the subject contains several purposes and constitutes a common place for them that should not be presented as a purpose.

The sixth objective (*maqsad*) of the Quran is to educate (*ta'lim*) people according to their time so that they could be able to conceive the teachings of *shari'ah* and play the role to spread it.⁸¹ The Quran attaches overwhelming importance to have knowledge and considers it the basis of human development and the key to the growth of culture and civilization.⁸² This can be seen from the fact that the first Revelation begins with the subject of learning:

Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has- (1) created man out of a germ-cell (2) Read for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One (3) who has taught [man] the use of the pen (4) taught man what he did not know! (5) (Al-Quran, 96: 1-5)

These verses clearly show that man, who is created from a very low and humble origin, can rise to great heights, even higher than angels, through learning and acquiring knowledge.

The Quran shows that the object of all the Messengers of Allah SWT was to impart knowledge of right and wrong to the people in order that they might be able to follow the path of righteousness and establish a system of justice and goodness on earth.⁸³

Prophet Muhammad SAW was also sent with the same objective:

He it is who has sent unto the unlettered people an apostle from among themselves, to convey unto them His messages, and to cause them to grow in purity, and to impart unto them the divine writ as well as wisdom - whereas before that they were indeed, most obviously, lost in error (Al-Quran, 62: 2)

The Quran adds teaching wisdom, balanced use of intellect and the correct method of reasoning with the teaching of the Book. This is a wide chapter from which multiple aspects of knowledge and scholarships are effused. However, teaching *shari'ah* is one of the functions of prophethood. Therefore, it is best suited to be introduced as a purpose of prophethood rather than a purpose of the Quran.

The seventh objective (*maqsad*) of the Quran includes admonitions (*mawa'izd*), warnings (*tahzir*) and glad tidings (*tabshir*). These are collectively known as *al-w'ad* and *al-wa'id* or *al-tarhib* and *al-tarhib*.⁸⁴ They are probably the most dominating topics in the Quran. Rarely can a page of the Quran be found without mentioning them. They are tagged with almost all of the Quranic concepts regardless of beliefs, ethics and morality, stories of

⁷⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni*, 144.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁸¹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1: 39.

⁸² Afzalur Rahman, *Islam: Ideology and the Way of Life*....216.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁸⁴ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*,... 39.

past nations, the hereafter, righteous deeds, religious rituals, natural phenomena and others. However, the Quran is presented as an admonition and the function of prophethood is also implicated with admonition which could be found in the following verses:

This is a plain exposition for men, and a guidance and admonition for the God-fearing. (Al-Quran, 3:138)

We have sent down to you Revelations giving clear guidance and cited examples of the peoples who went before you to serve as warning and We have imparted admonitions for the God-fearing. (Al-Quran, 24: 34)

Similarly, giving glad tidings to the believers and warnings to the evil-doers are also presented as a purpose of the Quran as well as a prophetic mission. Some verses are as follows:

(This is the) Book (the Qur'an) sent down unto you (O Muhammad SAW), so let not your breast be narrow therefrom, that you warn thereby, and a reminder unto the believers. (Al-Quran, 7: 02)

Due to the availability of enough persuasive methodological evidence, the concept of retribution (reward and requital) could be regarded as a universal purpose of the Quran. This purpose is concerned with the belief in the Hereafter. The whole idea is that a man should know that whatever he does in this world shall be judged and he will be rewarded and punished accordingly in full.⁸⁵

The eighth objective (*maqсад*) of the Quran is the exposition of the Quran's inimitability (*I'jaz al-Quran*), so that it could be an indicative sign of the authenticity for the prophethood of Muhammad SAW. The authenticity of prophethood requires miraculous signs and poses challenge to the opponents who deny it. The Quran maintains its miraculous entity in its lexical expression (*lafz*) and simultaneously remains as a challenger in order to save its inimitability within its meanings.⁸⁶

The Arabic word *I'jaz* is derived from the verb '*ajaza* which means, among other things, to render unable. '*I'jaz al-Quran* (The inimitability of the Quran) is the central miraculous quality attributed by Muslim dogma to the Quran. No human speech and particularly no Arabic speech can match the divine speech, of which the Quran consists in form and content. The term itself does not occur in the Quran but the concept of inimitability finds its Quranic basis in a number of verses that challenge and defy the opponents of the Prophet to produce something like the Quran.⁸⁷

Say: Verily, though mankind and the jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another." (Al-Quran, 17: 88)

Such verses were called by Muslim exegesis, 'Verses of Challenge'. The Quran's inimitability is supported by the fact that no Arab was ever able to meet these challenges, despite their general reputation as masters of Arabic expressions.⁸⁸ The inability of any person to produce anything like the Quran, due to its unique literary form, is the essence of the Quranic miracle.

Ibn Ashur does not delve into detailed discussions on the doctrine of inimitability of the Quran. His main focus remains on how inimitability of the Quran authenticates the prophethood of Muhammad SAW. Yet, he briefly indicates the aspect of the Quran which comprises inimitability. According to him, the inimitability of the Quran is attributed to the Quran-specific syntactic structures, stylistic features and lexical expressions. He claims that the Quran comprises a number of Arabic linguistic styles, some of which were familiar to the Arabs while some were new styles unfamiliar to them. The new distinctive styles of the Quran mostly happen in its coherence (*nazm*) with an exclusive style that focuses on two purposes; preachment (*maw'izah*) and legislation (*tashri'i*).⁸⁹ However, they have failed to employ the same words in stylistically effective linguistic constructions.⁹⁰ Thus, for him, Quran's inimitability basically lies in its linguistic constructions.

Ibn Ashur introduces *I'jaz al-Quran* as a universal purpose of the Quran on the ground that it certifies the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad SAW. Thus, his prophethood is grounded on the miracle of the Quran

⁸⁵ Shibli Nomani, *The Last Prophet and His Teaching* (India: Delhi, Noor Publishing House, 1988), 426.

⁸⁶ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol.1: 39

⁸⁷ Stefan Wild, *Inimitability, The Quran: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Oliver Leaman (USA: New York, Routledge, 2006), 255.

⁸⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *the Quran: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 52.

⁸⁹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1:113

⁹⁰ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: a Pragmatic Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 50.

which is his biggest and eternal miracle due to the fact that its challenges are there till the end of the time.⁹¹ The relationship between the Quran's inimitability and Muhammad's prophethood is clearly manifested in the Quran.

They said, "If only miracles could come down to him from his Lord!" Say, "All miracles come only from GOD; I am no more than a manifest warner. Is it not sufficient for them that We have sent down to you the Book (the Qur'an) which is recited to them? Verily, herein is mercy and a reminder (or an admonition) for a people who believe. (Al-Quran, 29: 50-51)

These verses reveal that the unbelievers demanded the Prophet SAW to bring physical miracles⁹² like those of past Prophets so that they could be convincing proofs⁹³ for the authenticity of his prophethood. Ironically, the unbelievers demanded the Prophet SAW to miraculously make the *Safa* a golden mountain and create a river within Makkah.⁹⁴ In response to these demands, the Quran was presented as a great miracle which was ever present in front of them and was being recited before them; they can witness it as and when they like. Thus, this miracle was enough to convince the people of the Prophethood of Muhammad SAW.⁹⁵

The Prophet SAW himself declared the Quran as his miracle:

Abu Hurayrah narrated: the Prophet SAW said, "Every Prophet was gifted with miracles because of which people believed, but what I have been given is the waĪĒ (the divine revelation), which Allah has revealed to me so I hope that my followers will outnumber the followers of the other prophets on the Day of Resurrection." (Al-Bukhari)

Falsification of the prophethood and demanding miracles in favor to it was not a new phenomenon to the Prophet SAW. His forerunners encountered the same as he did. The Arabs tried to falsify the authenticity of Muhammad's prophethood and did not want to follow him unless their desired miracles happen. The Prophet then resorted to the Quran to establish his authenticity arguing that it is from Allah SWT and thus they were unable to challenge it.⁹⁶

Miracles naturally occur in favor of the claim of prophethood.⁹⁷ All prophets throughout history had to provide miracles as divine proof to their audiences that they were true prophets; Moses, in confrontation with the Pharaoh, changed his staff into a serpent and parted the Red Sea while Jesus raised the dead. Prophet Muhammad's proof of his prophethood was the inimitable Quran. The logical grounds for the Quran of being inimitable in order to authenticate the Prophethood of Muhammad SAW are discussed further.

It is unbelievable that a man, who was unlettered and uneducated in the modern sense of the word, could produce a book of supreme eloquence which reduced even his harshest critics to awestruck silence.⁹⁸ Some of them candidly recognized that its high literary standard was unsurpassable by any human being. For example, Walid bin Mughirah who was among the leading staunch opponents of Islam and a nephew of the leader of the pagans, Abu Jahal, happened to listen to the Quran and at once said, "By God, the words which he i.e., Muhammad SAW says, have a high degree of sweetness and brightness. This (Quran) will always dominate and will never be dominated." This inimitability proves that it is the word of Allah SWT and His words are conveyed to mankind through His Prophet Muhammad SAW. A corollary of the tenet of the inimitability of the Quran is that to attempt to challenge, imitate, or match the linguistic beauty is tantamount to challenging Muhammad's prophethood. The Quran's unsurpassable rhetorical beauty and eloquence are incontrovertible proofs of Muhammad's prophethood.⁹⁹ The inimitability of the Quran was a probative miracle (*m'ujiza*), absolute proof of the Quran's divine origins and simultaneously, and perhaps more pointedly in the circumstances, of Muhammad's SAW genuine prophethood. The inimitability of the Quran thus plays an authenticating role.¹⁰⁰

The inimitability of the Quran authenticates the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad SAW because the miracles of other prophets such as Moses' turning a rod into a snake to defeat Pharaoh's magicians or Jesus'

⁹¹ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 1: 100.

⁹² Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 7: 140.

⁹³ Al-ĪabarĒ, *TafsĒr Al-ĪabarĒ*, ...vol. 20: 53.

⁹⁴ Al-Mawaridi, *al-Nukat*...see verse. 21: 5.

⁹⁵ Al-Mawdudi, *Tafhim*...see verse. 21: 5.

⁹⁶ Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol.1: 340.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 6: 110.

⁹⁸ Colin Turner, *Islam: the Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

⁹⁹ Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *the Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (U.S.A.: Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2010), 123.

¹⁰⁰ F. E. Peters, *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (New Jersey: Princeton, 2003), 115.

raising the dead, which occurred historically, are now done and gone. The Quran, by contrast, remains an eternal miracle, permanently operative and efficacious. This immortal effectiveness of the miracle and the recognition of forerunner prophets and messengers, their miracles and divine scriptures such as the Torah and the Gospel prove that the revealed religions in the past have been replaced or abrogated by the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad, with his eternal miracle, the Quran.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Ibn Ashur is one of the few Muslim scholars who argue for *Objectives (Maqasid) al-Quran* to be a criterion or a principle of *tafsir*. He states that the aim of a commentator of the Quran is to explain his understanding of God's intention in His Book and introduce the meaning and semantic connotation in pursuit of finding the *Objectives (Maqasid) al-Quran*. He should have knowledge about the general *objectives (Maqasid)* of the Quran.¹⁰² Ibn Ashur then classifies the approaches of commentators into three; firstly, being narrow, superficial and outward meanings of the texts; secondly, inventing indirect meanings that the context and indication of the words demand but would not be contradictory to the *maqasid* of the Quran; and thirdly, explains derived issues. For the second category, the scholars expound *ahkam* and delve into deep study as they deliberate over minute details of ethics.¹⁰³ Ibn Ashur views the *objectives (Maqasid)* as highly significant in his *tafsir, al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*. In the beginning of all *surahs*, he gives a brief outline of the *objectives (Maqasid)* of each *surah* and then he interprets the verses in light of the demands of those defined *objectives (Maqasid)*. Regardless of *surahs*, most of the time, he pays attention to find out the *maqasid* of the verses. For example, *Surah al-A'raf*, for which he identifies the following *objectives (Maqasid)*: Prohibition from adopting partners except Allah SWT; warning pagans of the consequence of paganism in this world and the hereafter; describing that pagans and those who falsify the Prophets face the wrath of Allah SWT even in this world; reminding people in general of the favors of Allah SWT they are enjoying; helping people to stay away from satanic deviation; portraying the plight of criminals and the honors for righteous people on the Day of Judgment; reemphasizing the fact of revival after death with proofs; prohibiting corruption on earth which Allah SWT has made for the welfare of mankind; referring the means He has created to reform earth; and stressing what Allah SWT has instilled in humans - a tendency to accept the call of the prophets to righteousness and reform.¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰¹Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *the Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad*..125.

¹⁰² Ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol.1: 39.

¹⁰³ Ibid., vol.1: 40.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., vol.8: 8.

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