

How are we Obligated to Interpret the Qur'aan?

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Question: How are we obligated to interpret the noble Qur'aan?

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said: Allaah, Blessed and Exalted, sent the Qur'aan down to the heart of His Messenger Muhammad in order to bring mankind from out of the darkness of disbelief and ignorance to the light of Islaam. Allaah says: **“Alif-Laam-Raa. This is a Book which We have revealed unto you (O Muhammad) in order that you may lead mankind from out of the darkness (of disbelief) into the light (of Islaam), by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the All-Mighty, the Most Praiseworthy.”**¹

And He placed His Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) to clarify, interpret and explain what is in the Qur'aan. Allaah says: **“And We revealed to you (O Muhammad), the Reminder (i.e. the Sunnah), in order for you to explain to mankind what was (already) revealed to them, and so that they may reflect.”**²

So the Sunnah came in order to explain and clarify what is found in the noble Qur'aan, and it is (also) a revelation sent by Allaah, as He says: **“And he (i.e. Muhammad) does not speak from his own desire. Rather, it is just revelation that is revealed to him.”**³

Furthermore, the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said: **“I was indeed given the Qur'aan and something similar to it along with it. It is imminent that there will come a time where a man who has eaten to his full will recline on his couch and say: ‘Stick to the Qur'aan. Whatever you find in it that is Halaal (lawful), then declare it lawful. And whatever you find in it that is Haraam (unlawful), then declare it unlawful!’ Whereas, whatever Allaah's Messenger made unlawful is just like what Allaah made unlawful.”**

So the first source that must be used to interpret the noble Qur'aan is the Qur'aan (itself) along with the Sunnah, which consists of the Prophet's statements, actions and silent approvals. Then after that, it must be interpreted using the interpretations (Tafseer) of the people of knowledge, at the head of whom are the Companions of the Prophet (sallallaahu

¹ [Soorah Ibraaheem: 1]

² [Soorah An-Nahl: 44]

³ [Soorah An-Najm: 3-4]

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'alayhi wa sallam). And the foremost amongst the Companions with regard to this subject (Tafseer) is 'Abdullaah bin Mas'ood (radyallaahu 'anhu). This is due to several factors, one being that he was one of the first to accompany the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) (i.e. accept Islaam), and another being that he (radyallaahu 'anhu) would give strong emphasis to asking about, understanding, and interpreting the Qur'aan. Then after him comes 'Abdullaah bin 'Abbaas (radyallaahu 'anhu), about whom 'Abdullaah bin Mas'ood (radyallaahu 'anhu) said: "He is the interpreter (turjumaan) of the Qur'aan."

Then after them, any Companion whose interpretation (tafseer) of an ayah can be authentically confirmed – and there exists no difference of opinion amongst the Companions regarding it, we accept this interpretation (tafseer) from him with full contentment, submission and reliance. And if no such tafseer can be found (from the Companions) regarding a particular ayah, then we take its tafseer from the Taabi'een, particularly those who specialised in studying tafseer under the Companions of Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam), such as Sa'eed bin Jubair, Taawoos and others who are well known for their studying of tafseer under some of the Companions, particularly Ibn 'Abbaas (radyallaahu 'anhu), as we mentioned previously.

Unfortunately, there are some ayaat that are interpreted according to a certain opinion or madh-hab (school of Jurisprudence), and for which no direct explanation from the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) can be found. So because of this, some latter-day individuals relied solely on applying such ayahs according to their madh-hab in order to interpret them. And this is an extremely dangerous matter – where ayaat are interpreted in order to support one's madh-hab and (personal) views – whereas the scholars of tafseer have interpreted these verses in a different way than the adherents of these madhaahib have interpreted them.

Perhaps, we should mention an example of this, which is Allaah's statement: **"So recite what is easy from the Qur'aan."**⁴ Some of the adherents of certain madhaahib have interpreted this ayah to refer to just the recitation itself, meaning: What is obligatory to recite from the Qur'aan in all of the prayers is just one long ayah or three short ayaat. They said this in spite of there being reported the authentic hadeeth from the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam): **"There is no prayer for the one who doesn't recite the opening chapter (Faatihah) of the Book (Qur'aan)."**⁵ And in another hadeeth, the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said: **"Whoever performs a prayer in which he doesn't recite the opening chapter of the Book, then it is deficient, deficient, deficient, and not complete."**⁶

The basis of proof indicated in these two hadeeths is rejected by the afore-mentioned interpretation of the above ayah, which is that the ayah refers to the recitation of the

⁴ [Soorah Al-Muzammil: 20]

⁵ [Narrated by al-Bukhaaree, 714]

⁶ [Saheeh Muslim, The Book of Prayers]

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Qur'aan in general. And according to them, it is not permissible to interpret the Qur'aan except with the Sunnah that came in mutawaatir⁷ form – meaning it is not permitted to interpret the mutawaatir except with the mutawaatir. So because of this, they rejected the two previously mentioned hadeeth due to their relying on their opinion or madh-hab for the interpretation of this ayah.

In spite of this, all of the scholars of tafseer, past and present, have explained that the meaning of the noble ayah **“So recite what is easy from the Qur'aan”** is: **“So pray what is easy for you from the Night Prayer (Tahajjud).”** This is since Allaah mentioned this part of the ayah in connection to His saying (i.e. the complete ayah): **“Verily, your Lord knows that you stand (to pray at night) a little less than two thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night, and also a party of those with you. And Allaah measures the night and the day. He knows that you are unable to pray the entire night, so He has turned to you (in mercy). So recite what is easy from the Qur'aan.”**⁸

The last part means: **“So pray what is easy for you from the Night Prayer (Tahajjud).”** Therefore, the ayah is not in reference to what a person is obligated to recite specifically during the night prayer. Rather, (in this ayah), Allaah facilitates for the Muslims to pray what they are able to perform from the Night Prayer. This means that they are not obligated to pray what the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to pray, which was eleven rak'at, as you are aware of.

So this is the meaning of the ayah. It is phrased in an Arabic style of “applying a portion, by which the whole is intended.” Thus, Allaah’s statement: **“So recite”** means **“So pray.”** The prayer is the whole, while the recitation (in prayer) is the portion. The purpose of this phrasing is to clarify the importance of this portion with respect to that whole. Another example of this is Allaah’s statement: **“Perform the prayer from midday until the darkness of the night (Dhuhr, 'Asr, Maghrib, 'Ishaa), and (also) the (recitation of the) Qur'aan of Fajr (dawn).”**⁹

The meaning of “the Qur'aan of Fajr” is “the Fajr Prayer.” So in this situation also, the portion is applied but the whole is intended. This is a style in the Arabic Language that is well known.

So therefore, after showing the interpretation of this ayah from the scholars of tafseer, without there being any difference of opinion amongst the past and present from them, it is not permissible to reject the first and second hadeeths (mentioned previously), claiming that they are ahaad, and that it is not permissible to interpret the Qur'aan with ahaad hadeeth! This is since the afore-mentioned ayah was interpreted by the statements of the

⁷ A Mutawaatir hadeeth is a narration that has been reported by a group of people that is so large that it is impossible to conceive that they conspired to lie regarding it.

⁸ [Soorah Al-Muzammil: 20]

⁹ [Soorah Al-Israa: 78]

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scholars who are knowledgeable of the language of the Qur'aan. This is first, and secondly, it is because the hadeeth of the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) does not contradict the Qur'aan, but rather, it explains and clarifies it, as we explained in the beginning of this discussion. How can this be when this ayah has no relation to the subject of what a Muslim is obligated to recite during prayer, regardless of whether it is an obligatory or recommended prayer.

But as for the two afore-mentioned hadeeths, then it is clear that they both are on the subject of a person's prayer not being valid unless he recites Soorah Al-Faatihah in it: **“There is no prayer for the one who doesn't recite the opening chapter (Faatihah) of the Book (Qur'aan)”** and **“Whoever performs a prayer in which he doesn't recite the opening chapter of the Book, then it is deficient, deficient, deficient, and not complete.”**

This means that the prayer is defective. So whoever finishes his prayer while it is deficient, then he in fact didn't pray at all. And his prayer at this point becomes invalid, as is apparent in the first hadeeth.

So if this reality becomes clear to us, we must therefore feel secure with the ahaadeeth that come to us from the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam), which are reported in the books of Sunnah, firstly, and with their authentic chains of narration, secondly. And we must have no doubts or uncertainties about them due to some philosophical approach to the ahaadeeth, which we hear about in current times, such as:

“We only accept the ahaad ahaadeeth on issues regarding rulings, and not for issues regarding creed. This is since matters of creed cannot be established based on ahaad ahaadeeth.”¹⁰

This is what they claim! Yet we know for a fact that the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) sent Mu'aadh (radyallaahu 'anhu) to call the People of the Scripture to believe in Tawheed, and he was just one individual.

This brief discussion is sufficient with regard to this topic that I wanted to clarify, which is related to: How are we obligated to interpret the Noble Qur'aan?

May Allaah send His Peace and Blessings on our Prophet, Muhammad, his family, Companions and those who follow them in goodness until the Day of Recompense, and all praise is for Allaah, Lord of all that exists.

¹⁰ An Ahaad hadeeth is a narration reported by just one narrator. It is the opposite of Mutawaatir. A Mutawaatir hadeeth is a narration that has been reported by a group of people that is so large that it is impossible to conceive that they conspired to lie regarding it.