INTRODUCTION TO TAFSEER

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(daamat barkaatuhu)
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The Qur-ān Shareef was sent down to Rasulullah ﷺ through wahy ‘revelation’. Therefore it is imperative to know what it means and why it is necessary for humankind to receive it. Allah Ta’ala has sent man to this world to test him as to how he lives in this world and how he makes use of all the Divine bounties spread all over the universe. The foremost requisite for a man to pass this test is to have the correct ‘knowledge’. He must know the nature and traits of the things he needs; the method of their use to his benefit and the way he can please his Creator to pass the rest of his life. In order to equip him with this knowledge, Allah Ta’ala has provided him with three sources through which he may acquire it.

1st Allah Ta’ala has given us 5 senses: Eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, tongue to taste and limbs to touch and feel. Each one of these senses gives us knowledge in its own sphere of work. We know many things by seeing them with our eyes, many
others by touching them with our limbs, and still others by smelling or tasting them or listening to their sounds.

2\textsuperscript{nd} intellect: There are numerous things, however, that cannot be known merely through these senses. We can neither see them with our eyes, nor touch them with our limbs, or hear their voice or feel them through their smell or taste. In order to acquire knowledge of such things Allah Ta’ala has blessed us with another source of knowledge, that is, our reason and intellect. It is our intellect that leads us to the realities that are beyond the reach of our physical senses.

But, just as our senses can work only within their domain, beyond which they are unable to provide any information to us, our intellect too has its own limits beyond which it can either not work or may lead to confusing information. It is this area in which Allah Ta’ala has granted to us a third source of knowledge which is called Wahy (revelation).

Let us take a practical example. If I have a gun in my hand, I can acquire the knowledge of its size, design and its colour as soon as I see it with my eyes. By touching it, I may know that it is made of a solid metal, that is, iron. By triggering it with my finger, I may know that it throws a bullet forcefully to a certain distance. By smelling the bullet, I may know that it contains ammunition. All this information is given to me by my senses. But if I try to know
how this gun came into existence, my outer senses will not be able to give me any answer about it, because I did not see the process of its manufacturing. Here, my intellect will comes forward and tells me that this sophisticated weapon cannot come into existence on its own or only by chance. There was certainly a skillful person who has designed and produced it. Although the person is not before my eyes, nor can I hear his voice, I still know for sure that he really exists or existed some time before. This information is given to me by my reason and intellect.

Now, there comes another question. Which use of this weapon is allowed by Allah Ta’ala, the creator of the entire universe? Here again, my reason can help me to a certain extent. Since Allah Ta’ala dislikes injustice, my intellect can tell me that killing an innocent person with this gun should not be allowed. But who is really innocent and who is really guilty? These are the questions in which my intellect leaves me confused. For example, if a person had murdered an innocent person, there may be two arguments in two different directions. The first argument may contend that the murderer has committed a heinous offence; he has deprived the deceased of his life without any just reason, and has brought immeasurable misery to his family, therefore, he deserves to be subjected to the same fate, so that it may deter others from committing the same offence. The opposite argument, however,
is that if we kill the murderer, it will neither bring the deceased back, nor will it remove the misery of his family; rather it will bring another misery to the family of the murderer who was by no means a party to the offence. Both arguments are based on pure reason, which is unable to produce an absolute answer acceptable to all. It is such questions in which we need decisive guidance from our Creator, and He provides it through the third source of knowledge, that is Wahy.

3rd Wahy: In order to bless humankind with the guidance of Wahy, Allah Ta’ala selects some pious persons as prophets, sends down His guidance to them and directs them to convey it to others. All the prophets (alayhimus salaam) right from Aadam (alayhis salaam) up to the last prophet Sayyiduna Muhammad ﷺ were sent to this world for this purpose. The Wahy revealed to Sayyiduna Muhammad ﷺ as a book is called the Qur-aan Shareef, which is the last Divine book revealed for the benefit of the mankind for all times to come.
Rasulullah ﷺ received the first revelation when he was forty years old and was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hira, a part of a mount in Makkah, known today as Jabalun Nur (The Mount of Light). Averse from idolatry that prevailed in the entire Arabia in those days, he used to seclude himself in this cave to worship Allah Ta’ala alone. It was a night of the month of Ramadhaan in the state of such seclusion that the angel Jibraa-eel (alayhis salaam) came to him in the cave, and revealed the first five verses of Surah Al-’Alaq (Surah 96). This was the beginning of the gradual revelation of the Qur-aan Shareef that continued for twenty three years after that.

Once, Haarith Ibn Hisham ﺔ، a noble Sahaabi of Rasulullah ﷺ asked him how revelation came to him. He answered, “At times it comes to me like the chiming of a bell, and this mode of revelation is the hardest on me. Then it comes to an end when I fully comprehend the words of the angel, committing them to my
memory. And at other times, the angel comes to me in the form of a man who talks to me, and I comprehend and memorize what he says.” Sayyidah Aa’ishah who has reported this saying of Rasulullah ﷺ, tells us that even in the coldest days of winter, when he received wahy, his forehead used to be full of sweat due to the stress he felt during the experience (Bukhari).

Sayyiduna Zaid bin Thaabit narrates that once Rasulullah ﷺ had his head resting on Zaid’s thigh when Wahy started descending on him. He felt such a pressure on his thigh that it seemed as though his thigh will be crushed by the pressure. (Bukhaari)

When the angel came to Rasulullah ﷺ in human form he usually took a form resembling Sayyiduna Dihyah Al-Kalbi, who was famous for his masculine beauty and handsomeness. (Musnad of Ahmad 2:107)

**MAKKI AND MADANI SURAHS**

Surah is a chapter of the Qur-aan Shareef. Each one of them has a title, which is usually taken from a word used in that Surah. Rasulullah ﷺ lived in Makkah for thirteen years after the first Wahy was revealed to him. Then he migrated to Madinah,
where he lived for ten years. The verses revealed before Hijrah (migration) are called Makki and those revealed after migration are termed as Madani. It is not necessary that the Makki verses are revealed in the city of Makkah. Instead, all the verses revealed before Hijrah migration are called Makki even though they are revealed somewhere out of the city of Makkah. Similarly, all the verses revealed after Hijrah (migration) are called Madani even though they are revealed when Rasulullah ﷺ travelled outside Madinah. So much so, that some verses like 4:58 and 48:1 were revealed when he was in Makkah or in its vicinity during the conquest of Makkah or on the expedition of Hudaibiyyah; still they are categorized as Madani because they were revealed after Hijrah.

The Surahs of the Qur-aan Shareef that mostly comprise of Makki verses are called Makki, and those comprising mostly of Madani verses are termed as Madani. Most of the Surahs are either totally Makki or totally Madani. For instance, Surah Al-Muddassir is totally Makki and Surah ‘Al-’Imraan is totally Madani. But there are some Makki Surahs in which some Madani verses have found place. Conversely, there are some Madani Surahs that have a few Makki verses. Every Surah is thus called Makki or Madani according to the majority of its verses.
The subjects discussed in Makki Surahs are mostly the basic articles of faith and their proofs spread all over the universe, refutation of idolatry, its wrong beliefs and rituals, the objections raised by the pagans against Rasulullah ﷺ and the Qur-aan Shareef, narration of the stories of earlier prophets (alayhimus salaam), description of the horrible events of the Qiyaamah (Day of Judgment), the pleasures and bounties in Jannah (Paradise) and horrors of Jahannam (Hell). Since in the Makkan period, Rasulullah ﷺ and the Muslims were passing through merciless persecution at the hands of the pagans of Makkah, the Makki Surahs have a good number of verses that were originally meant for consoling them on such hardships, nevertheless containing messages of universal application for all times to come.

Madani verses, on the contrary, were revealed at a time when Rasulullah ﷺ had established an Islamic state in Madinah. The subjects discussed in these Surahs are therefore mostly related to the issues arising in the Madani period, like argumentation with Jews and Christians, armed struggles against enemies of Islam for which detailed rules of Jihaad are laid down. Moreover, detailed laws of social, economic and political life are mostly found in Madani Surahs, while Makki Surahs contain very few such laws.
Many verses of the Qur-aan Shareef were revealed in the background of certain events. In the terminology of the Tafseer of the Qur-aan Shareef, these events are called Asbaab-un-Nuzool or ‘Causes of revelation’. In the Urdu commentaries of the Qur-aan Shareef, these are named as ‘Shaan-e-Nuzool. The details of Asbaab-un-Nuzool are reported by the Sahaabah  of Rasulullah صلٰلله علیه وسلّم in narrations, some of which are reliable and some others are weak. Hence, the scholars have critically appraised their authenticity in a meticulous manner. The authentic reports of Asbaab-un-Nuzool are very helpful for the study of the relevant verses in their true perspective; rather it is very difficult to understand many of them correctly without the help of their Asbaab-un-Nuzool. Nevertheless, all Mufassireen and Jurists are unanimous on the point that if the words of a verse are general, the ruling established in the relevant verse is not restricted to the particular event reported as its cause of revelation.

For example, the verse ‘(Do not marry polytheist women unless they bring Imaan. 2:221)’ was revealed
when a pagan woman offered herself for marriage to Marthad , a Sahaabi of Rasulullah . The verse prohibited him from marrying her. Although it was revealed in that particular event, its general words extend the prohibition to all Muslims and thus the principle laid down by the verse has universal application. Therefore, authentic Asbaab-un-Nuzool should be taken as a source of correct interpretation of a verse, but the principle established by it should never be restricted to any particular event if the words of the verse are general.

**How the Qur-aan Shareef Was Preserved**

As stated earlier, the Qur-aan Shareef was not revealed in the form of a book sent down in a single revelation. It was rather revealed in a gradual process that continued for twenty three years. Whenever a verse or a number of verses was revealed to Rasulullah , he committed it to his memory. Since he was unlettered, he could not write the verses himself, therefore, he had appointed a number of his Sahabah  as scribes of the Qur-aan Shareef. As soon as he received a revelation, he would call one of them and dictate the verses he received in the
fresh revelation. Once they wrote them, he would order them to read whatever they had just written, so that any shortcoming might be corrected instantly. Due to shortage of paper, the verses were mostly written on pieces of palm-leaves, bones, skins of animals and on stones. Rasulullah ﷺ used to direct the scribes where to place the new verses in a particular Surah. Once they were dictated by Rasulullah ﷺ in this way, the other Sahaabah ﷺ used to read and learn them by heart and prepare their copies for their own benefit. A large number of the noble Sahaabah ﷺ of Rasulullah ﷺ had thus memorized the Qur-aan Shareef and committed it to writing as well. Rasulullah ﷺ used to teach them how to recite the verses, and how to pronounce its words. On the basis of this education, an independent science was developed by the scholars, which is called the Science of Tajweed and Qiraat. He ﷺ also taught them the correct interpretation of the Qur-aan Shareef, on the basis of which the ‘Science of Tafseer’ has been developed as a separate branch of knowledge.

Although the Qur-aan Shareef was memorized and written by a large number of the Sahaabah ﷺ of Rasulullah ﷺ, it was generally in the form of verses and Surahs written on aforementioned objects, and was not compiled in a standard book form. However, soon after the demise of Rasulullah
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...his first noble Caliph Abu Bakr appointed a committee, headed by the noble Sahaabi, Zaid bin Thaabit, to compile the Qur-aan Shareef in a complete book form. Zaid bin Thaabit was already one of the scribes of Rasulullah who used to write the verses of the Qur-aan Shareef when they were revealed, and was also one of those who had learnt the Qur-aan by heart. He invited all the Muslims who had the Qur-aan Shareef or some of its parts with them in written form. After consulting all such material and confirming it with his own memory coupled with the testimony of many witnesses, he compiled the first standard script of the Qur-aan Shareef in a book form.

When Persia and Syria were conquered by the Muslims and Islam spread outside Arabia, Sayyiduna Uthmaan bin Affaan, the third Caliph of Rasulullah, once again appointed Zaid bin Thaabit for preparing seven standard copies of the Qur-aan Shareef. Zaid bin Thaabit repeated the same procedure as he had adopted for the first time when compiling the first standard script. Sayyiduna Uthmaan Ibn ‘Affaan also arranged the surahs of the Qur-aan Shareef in their present order. These seven standard copies were sent to seven main cities of the Muslim world, so that they might be a point of reference whenever needed. The script adopted in these seven copies is...
called Rasmu-Uthmaani (the script of ‘Uthmaan ) which, by
the consensus of the ‘Ummah, is held as the recognized script of
the Glorious Book, and it is not permissible to write the Arabic
text of the Qur-aan Shareef in any other script.

**DIFFERENT QIRAAT**

Although the Qur-aan Shareef is a Divine book of guidance for the
whole mankind, and its true benefit can be drawn by understanding its message and following its directives, yet mere
recitation of its verses is an act of worship in its own way. So
much so, that Rasulullah ﷺ has declared that the
recitation of one letter from the Qur-aan Shareef carries the
reward of ten virtuous acts. That is why the recitation of its verses
has been mentioned by the Qur-aan Shareef, at a number of
places, as an independent function of Rasulullah ﷺ, separate from its explanation and education (see 2:129, 2:151,
3:164 and 62:2). Since the Qur-aan Shareef has to be preserved in
its exact form for all times to come, its recitation and
memorization — even without understanding its meaning — has
been an important subject of learning in educational institutes
throughout Muslim history. As mentioned earlier, Rasulullah
ﷺ himself used to teach the Sahaabah  how to
recite it. As the Arabic language in which the Qur-an Shareef was revealed had many dialects prevalent in different tribes of Arabia, it was allowed to recite it in different dialects, so that every tribe might feel at ease when reciting the Qur-an Shareef. These different ways of reading it are termed as Qiraat. The script adopted by Sayyiduna Uthmaan bin Affaan  for the copies prepared by him accommodates all these qiraat within the scope of its way of writing. The scholars of the Ummah have not only preserved the text of the Qur-an Shareef and its meanings, but also all the qiraat allowed by Rasulullah . A special science of qiraat is developed for that purpose. The way of pronunciation of each and every letter of the Qur-an Shareef has been standardized, and its rules are explained in the books of a separate science, known as Tajweed, in such details that even a non-Arab may understand how to pronounce correctly a particular letter or word. Since the recitation of some verses of the Qur-an Shareef is one of the compulsory components of every Salaah, it is incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman to learn the basic rules of Tajweed, at least to the extent necessary for correct pronunciation of the letters as well as the words of the Qur-an Shareef, so that they may recite the required verses in Salaah according to their correct pronunciation.
Even a slight mistake in pronouncing a particular word may change the meaning of a verse altogether.

**DIVISIONS IN THE QUR-AAN SHAREEF**

**Juz**

The Glorious Qur-aan is divided today into thirty parts that are almost equal in size, which are called Ajzaa (plural of Juz) in Arabic and paras in Urdu and Persian. This division is not based on subjects or meanings of the Qur-aan Shareef. That is why some parts end with an unfinished statement. Some contemporary scholars are of the view that Sayyiduna Uthmaan bin Affaan  had prepared the copies of the Qur-aan Shareef in thirty equal parts but I could not find any authentic report to that effect. It seems that this division was made at a later stage to facilitate gradual teaching of its text to the children.

**Ruku**

Another division found in many editions of the Qur-aan Shareef in a number of Muslim countries, especially in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan is that of “Ruku” translated in English as ‘sections’. These are marked on the margins of every passage
with the Arabic letter ع. The basic purpose of these signs — as is clear from the term ‘ruku’ which means ‘to bow’ and which is one of the obligatory acts in every Salaah — is to mark an average portion of a Surah that may be recited in one rakaat of Salaah, after which one can bow in ruku.

This division is based on the meanings of the text, identifying a certain passage that can reasonably be separated from the previous and subsequent passages. It has been the practice of the Ummah to recite the entire Qur-aan in the nights of the month of Ramadaan during the Taraaweeh Salaah that consists of twenty rakaats every night. The total number of Rukus in the Qur-aan Shareef is 540. If one ruku is recited in every rakaat of Taraweeh, recitation of the entire Qur-aan may be completed on the 27th night of Ramadan (Al-Fataawa Al Hindiyyah V:1 Pg. 94). It is not known with certainty as to who has made this division of ruku’s and in which period.

It should be noted that the text of the Qur-aan Shareef in its original form does not have signs of ruku’s.

**Manzil**

Another division made at some later stage is that of Hizbs or Manzils. This division was made to identify a certain portion of the Qur-aan Shareef that should be preferably recited every day.
Some elders of early days had divided the Qur-aan Shareef into seven hizbs, so that recitation of the Qur-aan Shareef might be completed once in a week. Others used to recite one part every day to complete the recitation every month. In some countries like Saudi Arabia, however, daily recitation was restricted to one half of one part, completing the recitation in sixty days. Thus, every one half of a part is marked in those editions as one Hizb.

**Rumuzul-Awqaaf (Stop Signs)**

Many editions of the Qur-aan Shareef, especially those published in our subcontinent, have some signs in the form of Arabic letters inserted at certain places in the text. These signs are called Rumuz-ul-Awqaaf. The purpose of these signs is similar to that of the punctuation signs in modern writings. These signs are particularly helpful for those who recite the Qur-aan Shareef as an act of worship, though without understanding the Arabic text. These signs are to tell the reader where to stop in the sequence of verses and where to continue reading without any pause. Here is an explanation of these signs:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ط</td>
<td>This sign indicates that a statement stands completed here, and it is better to stop for a breath at this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ج</td>
<td>This sign means that a part of a statement is completed at this point, and therefore one can stop here also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ص</td>
<td>This is an indication that the statement is not yet completed, but since the statement has become too long, one can stop here for taking a breath instead of any other place in the statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>م</td>
<td>This sign warns the reader that there is a chance of a grave error in the meaning if one does not stop here and connects the marked word with the subsequent one. It is therefore highly recommended that the reader should stop at this point, and commence the coming sentence with a fresh breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>م</td>
<td>This sign denotes that it is recommended not to stop here, and if someone stops at this point it is better to repeat the preceding word or sentence before continuing further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مع</td>
<td>This sign is placed where the sentence may be interpreted in two different ways. According to one interpretation, one should stop at one place, while the other interpretation requires a pause at another place. At both such places, a sign of three dots is available to direct the reader that he may stop at either of the two places, but not at both of them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>❞ ❝</th>
<th>This sign indicates that the reader should pause here a little without breaking the breath, because reading without pause may lead to a wrong impression about the meaning of the sentence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❞ ❝</td>
<td>This sign is similar to ❞ ❝ but the pause required here is a little longer, still without breaking the breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❞ ❝</td>
<td>This means that some scholars recommend to stop here, while some others do not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❞ ❝</td>
<td>This signifies that there is no harm in pausing here, even though a layman may wrongly presume that a stop at this point may change the meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❞ ❝</td>
<td>This sign means that it is better to continue reading without any pause on this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❞ ❝</td>
<td>This is similar to the preceding sign ❞ ❝ according to some scholars only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**THE SCIENCE OF TAFSEER**

Tafseer is an Arabic word which means “to open” or “to explain”. Technically, the science of Tafseer is a branch of knowledge meant to interpret and explain the verses of the Qur-aan Shareef.
Introduction to Tafseer

It has been the consistent practice of Allah Ta’ala that He never sent a Divine book without a prophet, whose basic objective was to explain the contents of the book and to teach the people how they should mould their lives according to the guidance provided by that Divine book. The Qur-an Shareef itself makes it clear that the major function entrusted to Rasulullah Muhammad ﷺ was “to teach the Book” (see 2:129, 151, 3:164, 62:2) and “to explain to the people what is revealed to them.” (See 16:44).

Accordingly, Rasulullah ﷺ has not only conveyed the words of the Qur-an Shareef accurately, but has also explained to his noble Sahaabah ﷺ how to recite it and how to understand its correct meanings.

It is on the basis of the explanations given by Rasulullah ﷺ and his blessed Sahaabah ﷺ, who learnt the Qur-an Shareef directly from the Prophet ﷺ, that the Muslim scholars have developed the science of Tafseer as a branch of knowledge, which not only explains the meanings of the Glorious text, but also lays down the principles of its interpretation, so that its true essence is fully preserved and protected against all sorts of distortions.

The science of Tafseer has its own fascinating history, which cannot be described in this short introduction. Nevertheless, it
will be pertinent here to summarize the basic sources on which this science has placed its reliance while interpreting the Qur-aan Shareef.

**Sources of Tafseer**

The Qur-aan Shareef itself

The first source of Tafseer is the Qur-aan Shareef itself, because one verse of the Qur-aan Shareef is very often explained by another verse. For example, there is a dua in the very first Surah of the Qur-aan Shareef:

"Take us on to the straight path _the path of those on whom you have bestowed Your grace" (1:5)

This verse refers to those who are blessed with Allah’s grace, but it does not identify them in detail. However, there is another verse that identifies different categories of these people in clear terms. It says:

"وَمَنْ يَطِعُ الْلَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولِيَّةٌ مَعَ الَّذِينَ آنَعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ حَسَنٌ وَالصَّدِّيقِينَ وَالشَّهِدَاءِ وَالصَّلِيحِينَ"
“Those who obey Allah and the Messenger are with those whom Allah has blessed, namely, the prophets, the Siddiqueen, the Shuhadaa and the righteous” (4:69)

In this way, the latter verse has explained the former one. Since there are numerous such examples in the Qur-aan Shareef, the Mufassireen place their foremost reliance on this source of Tafseer.

**The Ahaadith**

Hadith, an Arabic word, is defined as “the words spoken or the acts done by Rasulullah ﷺ”. Since the major function entrusted to Rasulullah ﷺ was to interpret and teach the meanings of the Qur-aan Shareef, as explained earlier, it goes without saying that his explanations are the most reliable source of interpretation of the Qur-aan Shareef. These explanations were at times given verbally, and at other times by his acts and practices. It will be wrong to presume that all the explanations given by the Prophet ﷺ were based only on his personal opinion or understanding. In fact, the Divine revelation received by him was of two kinds: one in the form of the text of the Qur-aan Shareef, and the other in the form of non-textual revelations that he at times received from an angel sent by Allah Ta’ala, and
at other times through the ideas put into his blessed heart directly from Allah Ta’ala. This is because, while revealing the Qur-aan Shareef to him, Allah Ta’ala Himself gave him a promise in the following verse:

“Then (after getting the Qur-aan Shareef recited to you) it is upon Us to explain it.” (75:19)

It is evident from this verse that Allah Ta’ala Himself has explained the Qur-aan Shareef to the Prophet صلی الله علیه و سلم through some non-textual revelations. It is, therefore, of utmost importance for correct understanding of the Qur-aan Shareef to know how Rasulullah صلی الله علیه و سلم has expounded its rulings and how he put them into practice. To quote a simple example: the Qur-aan Shareef has ordered us “to establish Salaah and pay Zakaah”. But it is nowhere mentioned in the Glorious Book how Salaah should be established, what is the detailed manner in which it has to be performed, what are the prescribed times of it performance, which acts are prohibited during Salaah, and so on. Likewise, the Qur-aan Shareef has not described the detailed rules of paying Zakaah. All such details are given by none but Rasulullah صلی الله علیه و سلم through his words and acts.
It is for this reason that Ahaadith have a vital role in correct understanding of the Qur-aan Shareef. Any attempt to interpret it against the explanations given by authentic Ahaadith cannot but mislead the reader.

In order to check the authenticity of Ahaadith, the scholars have developed unique sciences of Isnaad and Usool-ul-Ahaadith whereby the status of every narration can be checked by a systematic criticism. It is imperative, therefore, for a reliable interpretation of the Qur-aan Shareef that the interpreter is well-versed not only in the relevant Ahaadith, but also in these sciences, so that he may distinguish the authentic reports from non-authentic ones. Hence, it is not correct to interpret the Qur-aan Shareef on the basis of a report found somewhere without checking its authenticity and without ensuring that no other stronger report goes against it.

**The explanations of the Sahaabah**

The third source of Tafseer is the statements of the blessed companions of Rasulullah صلی الله علیه و سلم. Since they received their education directly from him and had the first-hand knowledge of all the circumstances behind the revelation of a particular verse of the Qur-aan Shareef, they are naturally the most authentic source of knowledge of Tafseer after Rasulullah صلی الله علیه و سلم himself.
there is a consensus of Sahaabah on the interpretation of a verse, the Mufassireen just follow that and discard any other interpretation offered by someone else. However, if their interpretations are conflicting, the Mufassireen prefer one of them according to the principles laid down in the relevant sciences of Usool–ut-Tafseer, Usool-ul-Fiqh and Usool-ul-Hadith.

The explanations of the Taabi’een

Taabi’een are the pupils of the Sahaabah. Since they learnt the Qur-aan Shareef from the Sahaabah of Rasulullah ﷺ, the importance of their explanatory statements can never be ignored. Hence the Mufassireen have taken them as the fourth source of Tafseer. Their explanations are sometimes based on what they learnt from the Sahaabah but at other times they reflect their own opinion. Therefore, many Mufassireen do not take their statements as strongly as those of the Sahaabah. The fact, however, is that these statements are of great value while determining the correct meaning of a verse of the Qur-aan Shareef.

The Arabic Language

Since the Qur-aan Shareef was revealed in Arabic, a complete command over this language is necessary for anyone who intends
to interpret it. Particularly in the case of the verses in which an explanation is not reported from the aforementioned sources, we have no other means to interpret it except the language itself. Moreover, where two different interpretations are reported, the one more conforming to the Arabic grammar and usage is normally preferred. Here again, one needs to have a thorough knowledge of Arabic vocabulary and its grammar, which are frequently used by the Mufassireen as an important source of Tafseer.

**Deliberation / Reflection**

The Qur-aan Shareef invites people to deliberate over its verses for acquiring guidance from it. The miraculous Qur-aanic style is such that every person can benefit from it according to his or her level of understanding. A layman can easily receive guidance in general religious matters, while a competent scholar may deduce the rulings of Shariah through a deeper study of its text coupled with Ahaadith of Rasulullah ﷺ and other relevant material. Besides, the more one gives deep consideration to the expressions of the Glorious Text, the ‘wider’ is the scope of the subtle points of wisdom embedded in it. Such discoveries of its miraculous expressions can never end. But two points are necessary here to note.
Firstly, all the necessary articles of Islamic faith and all matters relating to the rulings of Shariah are fully laid down by the Qur-an Shareef and Rasulullah ﷺ in a way that Islam has emerged as a perfect religion. The Qur-an Shareef itself says:

全能的真主已為你們制定了各種宗教，故你們當敬畏全能的真主，以便你們蒙恩?

Today, I have perfected your religion for you (5:3)

It is therefore impossible that a new idea is injected by such deliberations in the basic articles of Islamic faith or the overall structure of Islamic injunctions established by the sources of Shariah and recognized by the Ummah throughout centuries.

Secondly, this exercise requires vast knowledge and correct perception. Any incompetent exercise based merely on one’s assumptions may be dangerous and misleading. It is this type of exercise against which Rasulullah ﷺ has warned us in the following words:

من قال في القرآن يغيب علم فليتبعد مفتعدا من النار

Whoever interprets the Qur-an Shareef without proper knowledge should seek his abode in the Fire (of Hell)

One of the criteria that may distinguish between right and wrong conclusions drawn by independent deliberations is that if the
conclusion drawn is against other clear statements of the Qur-an Shareef or the explanations given by the Prophet ﷺ through his words or acts, or against the consensus of the scholars of the Ummah, who have devoted their lives to understand the Glorious Qur-an and the Sunnah in their true perspective, it is certainly wrong. However, new points of guidance that are not against the aforementioned principles may well be inferred by competent study of the Glorious Text.

**Few Words About Israeeli Riwaayaat**

The narratives that reached us by Jewish or Christian sources are called Israa-eeliyaat in Arabic and ‘Israelite Traditions’ in English. Many narratives of the past prophets and communities are common between the Qur-an Shareef and the Biblical or Talmudic resources. But very often the narratives given by the Qur-an Shareef are more brief and concise than the stories given by Israelite Traditions. When many Jews and Christians, who were well aware of these traditions, embraced Islam in the days of Rasulullah ﷺ or after his demise, they narrated Israelite traditions before Muslims, which gave details of the brief stories
narrated by the Qur-aan Shareef. Thus the Israelite traditions found their way into the books of Tafseer. The true status of such narrations is that neither all of them are correct, nor are all of them false. Hafiz Ibn Kathir, the well-known Mufassir, has categorized them into three different kinds:

- There are traditions the truth of which is confirmed either by the Qur-aan Shareef or by authentic Ahaadith. Obviously, those are to be believed as true.
- Contrarily, there are some Israelite traditions the truth of which is denied by the Qur-aan Shareef or Sunnah of Rasulullah ﷺ or they are clearly against the basic principles voiced by them. For instance, it is mentioned in the Bible that Sayyiduna Sulaymaan ﷺ (Solomon) had taken to idolatry in his later years. This description is expressly denied by the Qur-aan Shareef in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:102). Similarly, it is mentioned in the bible that Rasulullah Nooh ﷺ (Noah) committed adultery with his own daughter. This is totally against the well-established principle in Islam that the prophets of Allah are protected against all sorts of sinful acts, let alone committing adultery with one’s own daughter. Such Israelite traditions have to be rejected and believed as false.
The third are those traditions about which Islamic resources are silent. Regarding such traditions, Rasulullah ﷺ has directed us to remain silent too. We are neither supposed to reject them nor to hold them as true. Since we have no authentic source to verify their truth, it is better to avoid such narratives.

**AN IMPORTANT WORD OF CAUTION**

Before ending with this introduction, it is necessary to note an important point about Tafseer. The Qur-aan Shareef was revealed for two basic objectives: 1st, it reminds mankind of the realities that must form part of one’s belief, like the Oneness of Allah Ta’ala, the Messenger-ship of Nabi Muhammad ﷺ and the Life after Death. In order to embed these realities in our hearts, the Qur-aan Shareef invites our attention to the signs of Allah’s supremacy spread all over the universe; it gives us general advices about our behaviour in regard to these realities. It narrates to us the history of previous communities who obeyed or disobeyed the Divine commands and advices, and gives an account of how they were rewarded or punished. It reminds us of the temporary nature of this world and the eternity of the Life Hereafter. It depicts to us the scenes of Jannah and Jahannam, so that we may
be aware of the fate we have to face in that life according to our
good or bad acts in this world; and above all, it creates a sense of
responsibility in the minds of those who read it in search of
guidance. Reading the Qur-aan Shareef for this purpose is open to
every person, regardless of his academic qualification. The only
requisite for such a study is to have an honest and unbiased quest
for guidance. Therefore, this objective may be achieved by simple
reading of the text in Arabic, if one knows the Arabic language, or
its translation if he does not know Arabic. It is about this objective
that the Qur-aan Shareef declares itself to be easy for seeking
advice:

Surely, We have made this Qur-aan easy for seeking advice. So, is
there anyone who seeks advice? (54:17)

The 2nd objective of the Qur-aan Shareef is to explain the laws that
govern the individual and collective life of the Muslims, and to lay
down the principles under which detailed rules and sub-rules of
those laws may be inferred and deduced. These laws relate not
only to the ways of worship, but also to the social, economic and
political affairs of the Ummah (Muslim community); rather they
extend to the international relations as well. It is this field of
Tafseer that requires a real competent knowledge of all relevant
sciences that have been referred to above while discussing the sources of Tafseer.

Unfortunately, a superficial trend is being developed today by some people that the Qur-aan Shareef being an easy book of guidance, every layman can interpret the delicate articles of faith and the complex laws mentioned or indicated by it. The idea is stretched to the extent that even the knowledge of Arabic language is not held necessary for such an interpretation. It is deemed sufficient to study the Glorious Book with the help of a translation, and to form an independent opinion about the laws of Shariah. Such people often argue that the Qur-aan Shareef itself declares that it is easy for every reader, and therefore no specialized knowledge is required for understanding any of its verses.

This is an irrational and dangerous attitude towards the Qur-aan Shareef, which is based on confusing its different subjects and objectives. The Qur-aan Shareef is, no doubt, easy for every reader in so far as its first objective is concerned. The very verse that declares the easy nature of the Qur-aan Shareef makes this point very clear when it says:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلْدُّكَرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مَدَكِكِرٍ
Surely, We have made this Qur-aan easy for seeking advice. So, is there anyone who seeks advice? (54:17)

As for ‘seeking advice’ in matters of general guidance, as mentioned in the first objective of the Qur-aan Shareef, it is undoubtedly easy, and this is the meaning of this verse. But it does not mean that the complex issues of the Qur-aanic Laws and beliefs are also open for every person without adequate knowledge of the sources of Tafseer mentioned above. Had it been so, Rasulullah ﷺ would not have been entrusted with the task of ‘teaching of the Book’, because none of his Sahaabah ﷺ needed a teacher to understand the meaning of the Arabic words used in the Qur-aan Shareef. All of them were well-equipped with the knowledge of the Arabic language and usage. Still, they spent years in learning the Glorious Book from Rasulullah ﷺ. It is thus evident that even the knowledge of Arabic language is not sufficient for having proper access to the second objective of the Qur-aan Shareef, for, it requires a thorough knowledge of how the Prophet ﷺ had interpreted a particular verse, how he had acted upon it and which of the Ahaadith reporting his words and acts are authentic upon which one can place his reliance in these matters. That is why the Sahaabah ﷺ of Rasulullah ﷺ and their followers devoted their entire lives for learning this aspect of the
Glorious Book and developed the science of Tafseer as explained above. Unless one has equipped himself with this science by learning it from competent Mufassireen, he is not eligible to form or express an opinion in the matters pertaining to the second objective of the Qur-aan Shareef.

Every branch of knowledge in this world requires specialized knowledge that cannot be acquired by self-study alone. If a person claims to be a doctor after self-study of the medical science without learning it from a competent professor, no one can accept his claim, nor can he be allowed to play with the lives of the patients on the basis of his self-study. If such disorder is not acceptable in any branch of knowledge, how can it be tolerated for the science of Tafseer, on which depends the eternal life of the Hereafter? It is pertinent to quote once again the Hadith in this regard:

Мَنْ قَالَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمِ فَلْيَتْبِعْوَا مُقَعَّدَةً مِّنَ النَّارِ

*Whoever interprets the Qur-aan Shareef without proper knowledge should seek his abode in the Fire (of Jahannam)*

Author