

180621 - There are no secret meanings in the Quran that were taught to some people to the exclusion of others

the question

Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explain all the meanings of the Holy Quran to his Companions, whether the apparent or hidden meaning? Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explain all the meanings of the verses of the Holy Quran to his Companions? For example, Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): “He is Allah, (the) One” [al-Ikhlaas 112:1]. Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explain all the possible meanings of the word “One (Ahad)? Do you believe that there are many meanings of the Holy Quran that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not explain to his Companions? Or that the meanings are only those that were explained by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to his Companions? Is it permissible for a researcher to research the meanings of the Holy Quran and come up with new meanings for it, as there are undoubtedly meanings that are in accordance with the teachings of Islam? Do you believe that because the story of Aasif ibn Barkhiya was not narrated from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), we should not believe in it? In other words, is there no benefit in the Quran apart from reciting it, and should we not ponder it and derive some thoughts and ideas from its verses?

Detailed answer

I.

Allah sent down the Quran to guide people and bring them forth thereby from the depths of darkness to light, and to guide them to the path of the Almighty, Most Praiseworthy. Allah sent it down to explain all things, and as a guidance, a healing and a mercy to the believers.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has commanded us to ponder over its verses, as He, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Do they not then consider the Quran carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much contradictions”

[an-Nisa’ 4:82]

“Have they not pondered over the Word (of Allah, i.e. what is sent down to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), or has there come to them what had not come to their fathers of old?”

[al-Mu’minoon 23:68]

“(This is) a Book (the Quran) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember”

[Saad 38:29].

What is meant by considering or pondering over the verses or revelations of Allah is to reflect upon their meanings and think deeply about it and the principles and beliefs that are mentioned therein. Reflecting upon the Book of Allah is the key to knowledge, and by contemplating the Quran one may learn about everything that is good and all types of knowledge may be derived from it. Faith in the heart is increased thereby and becomes more firmly rooted, for it teaches one about the Lord Who is to be worshipped, and the attributes of perfection that He possesses, and the shortcomings that we should declare Him to be far above. It also teaches us the path that leads to Him and describes the characteristics of those who follow that path and what awaits them when they come to Him. It teaches us about who our true enemy is, and describes the path that leads to punishment, the characteristics of those who follow it, and what awaits them when the punishment is incurred.

The more a person reflects upon (the Quran), the more he will increase in knowledge, good deeds and understanding. Therefore Allah has enjoined this and urges us to do it, and He has told us that this is the purpose of sending down the Quran.

One of the benefits of reflecting upon the Book of Allah is that it enables a person to reach the level of certain faith and knowledge that it is the words of Allah, because he will see that its

parts confirm one another and are in harmony with one another.

Tafseer as-Sa'di (p. 189)

The kind of pondering and reflection that is enjoined does not mean giving free rein to one's intellect and thinking in understanding the verses of the book of Allah on the basis of far-fetched ideas, weird notions and claims, lies and fabrications, attributing to Allah things that He did not say on the basis that this is one of the conclusions of pondering and thinking about the revelations of Allah.

That includes the far-fetched and weird interpretations of the Sufis, the thoughts and claims of the followers of innovation, and the lies of the philosophers.

It is not right to rely on thoughts or the first thing that comes to mind; that is the wrong way of pondering the meaning of the Holy Quran. There are numerous reports from the early generations that warn against interpreting the Quran on the basis of one's opinion.

II.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And We have also sent down unto you (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) the reminder and the advice (the Quran), that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought”

[an-Nahl 16:44].

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

That is, because you have knowledge of the meaning of what is revealed to you, and you are very keen about it and follow it, and because We know that you are the best of creation and the leader of the sons of Adam, you will explain to them in detail what is mentioned in brief, and you will explain to them what they cannot understand.

“and that they may give thought” means: so that they may think about themselves and be guided, and thus attain salvation in both realms [this world and the Hereafter].

End quote from Tafseer Ibn Katheer (4/574)

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

One of the manifestations of affirming that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah is venerating his Sunnah, calling people to it, putting it into practice, warning lest anyone go against it, and interpreting the Quran by the Sunnah with regard to those of its verses that may not be clear. So the Quran may be interpreted by the Sunnah and made clear by the Sunnah. The Sunnah explains the Quran, clarifies it, refers to it and discusses ideas that the Quran has already discussed, as Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And We have also sent down unto you (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) the reminder and the advice (the Quran), that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought”

[an-Nahl 16:44].

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn Baaz (1/248).

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explained the Quran to them, taught them its rulings and explained to them what they could not understand. At-Tabaraani narrated in al-Kabeer (1647) from Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “There is nothing left that could bring one closer to Paradise and move one further away from Hell but it has been explained to you.”

Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Saheehah (1803)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

Allah, may He be glorified, explained on the lips of His Messenger, through His words and the words of His Messenger, all that He enjoined, all that He forbade, all that He permitted, all that

He prohibited and all that He overlooked. Thus His religion was perfected as He, may He be exalted, said (interpretation of the meaning):

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you”

[al-Maa'idah 5:3].

End quote from I'laam al-Muwaqqi'een (1/250).

Please see also the answers to questions no. [2110](#) and [93111](#)

But it is essential to understand that the Sahaabah were eloquent people who spoke proper Arabic, and the Quran was revealed in a plain Arabic tongue, so it was not too difficult for any of the Sahaabah to grasp the meanings of many of its verses. In many cases, the meanings of many verses were grasped instinctively (because they were clear) and there was no need for any interpretation or commentary. Hence Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: There are four layers of tafseer (interpretation or commentary): that which the Arabs know from their language; interpretation for which no one has any excuse for not knowing; interpretation that is known to the scholars only; and interpretation which no one knows except Allah, may He be exalted – i.e., the ambiguous verses.

End quote from Tafseer at-Tabari (1/75)

III.

The meaning of the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): "He is Allah, (the) One” [al-Ikhlaas 112:1] is not hidden from people even if they are of lower standing than the Sahaabah in terms of knowledge and understanding. It is an affirmation of the Oneness of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, in His divinity, Lordship, names and attributes.

This belief is what the entire religion is based on, so it is not possible that it could be beyond any of the Sahaabah to understand it and act upon it. There is no need to think that the Prophet

(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) must have made a special gathering for them to discuss the meaning of this verse with them.

The words of the questioner, “Did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explain all the possible meanings of the word “One (Ahad)?”, are very odd and are explained by what he said before that: “whether the apparent or hidden meaning”. This indicates that the questioner thinks that there are apparent meanings of the Quran and other, hidden, meanings.

This idea is something that has been introduced into the religion of Allah and was not known to the earlier generations of this ummah. It is not known from any of its imams and scholars that they said such a thing, because there is nothing in Islam or in the Quran of hidden or secret meanings that Allah discloses exclusively to whomever He will of His slaves. This is what the Sufi groups call “al-‘ilm al-ladunni” (knowledge acquired directly from Allah).

Al-Bukhaari (1870), Muslim (1370) and Ahmad (957) narrated: ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked: Did the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) tell you anything that was only for you? He said: He did not tell us anything that was only for us without telling all other people, except that which is in the sheath of this sword of mine. He brought out a document on which it was written: “May Allah curse the one who slaughters in the name of something other than Allah, may Allah curse the one who steals the boundary markers, may Allah curse the one who curses his father and may Allah curse the one who gives refuge to an offender.”

An-Nasaa’i (4422) narrated it as follows: A man asked ‘Ali: Did the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) tell you anything in secret to the exclusion of other people? ‘Ali got so angry that his face turned red, and he said: He did not tell me anything in secret to the exclusion of other people, except that he told me four words when he and I were alone in the house, and he said: “May Allah curse the one who curses his father; may Allah curse the one who slaughters in the name of anything other than Allah; may Allah curse the one who gives refuge to an offender; and may Allah curse the one who changes the boundary markers.”

As for what the followers of deviation among the Sufis and the Shi'ah claim about verses of the Quran having apparent and hidden meanings, hence they use the way of mystical experiences, dreams and passing thoughts to interpret the Holy Quran, that is a false notion and an innovation for which there is no evidence; rather the evidence points to the contrary. Hence when they followed this way of interpreting the Quran, they spoke about Allah without knowledge, and they spoke about the Book of Allah on the basis of their whims and desires, so they made disastrous errors.

This does not mean that there are not various possible ways of interpreting some verses of the Holy Quran, because that is indeed the case, but that is in a manner whereby all the possible meanings may be put together to give one integrated picture of the meaning. This is differences in shades of meaning, not contradicting interpretations. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

For example, with regard to interpreting the meaning of the phrase (interpretation of the meaning): "the Straight Way" [al-Faatihah 1:6], one scholar may say that this refers to Islam. Another may say that it refers to the Quran, i.e., following the Quran. Others may say that it refers to the Sunnah and the main body of the Muslims (as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah), or the path of true servitude to Allah ('uboodiyyah), or obedience to Allah and His Messenger. It is well-known that the straight path may be described in all these ways and may be called by all these names, but each meaning will give the reader or listener a description by which he may recognise the path and benefit by knowing that description.

End quote from Majmoo' al-Fataawa (5/160).

Undoubtedly the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explained to his Companions what was meant in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): 'He is Allah, (the) One' [al-Ikhlaas 112:1] in a perfect manner, by explaining the meaning in word and deed, for his entire life with them was based on Tawheed. "Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): 'Verily, my Salat (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the 'Alameen (mankind, jinns and all that exists)'." [an-

An'aam 6:162]. Hence none of the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) fell into shirk – Allah forbid – for Allah, may He be exalted, protected them from shirk just as He protected them from bid'ah (innovation), because they were lights of guidance and leaders of piety. Those who went astray only did so when they differed from them and abandoned their practices and the way that they were following, namely Tawheed. This is the meaning of the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Say (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)): "He is Allah, (the) One" [al-Ikhlaas 112:1].

As for imagining that there are hidden meanings in this verse that not many of the Sahaabah were aware of and that are not known to the leading scholars and people of knowledge and tafseer, this is an incorrect and false notion, because it would imply that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) concealed knowledge from his Companions and did not convey the message of his Lord completely. This is something that no one who believes in Allah and the Last Day would believe.

Everything that people need of explanations of the Book of Allah in such a way that they will not go astray after that or deviate from the straight path of Allah has been explained by the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and by his Companions after him.

IV.

What we have said above does not mean that Allah does not exclusively bless some of His creation with sound understanding of His Book. In fact there are people whom Allah has blessed with sound understanding of meanings that may be derived from a verse, that may be concealed from others.

An example of that is what was narrated by al-Bukhaari (4294) from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: 'Umar used to allow me to enter with some of the senior figures who had been present at Badr. One of them said: Why do you allow this young man to enter with us, when we have sons like him? He said: Because he is one of those whose virtue you are aware of. One day he called them and he called me with them, and I think he only called them

that day to show them some of what I had (of knowledge). He said: What do you say about the soorah (interpretation of the meaning): “When comes the Help of Allah (to you, O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) against your enemies) and the conquest (of Makkah), And you see that the people enter Allah’s religion (Islam) in crowds...” [an-Nasr 110:1-2]? And he completed the soorah. Some of them said: We were commanded to praise Allah and ask for His forgiveness when He granted us help and conquest. Others said: We do not know. And some of them did not say anything. He said to me: O Ibn ‘Abbaas, is that what you think? I said: No. He said: What do you say? I said: It is foretelling the death of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Allah informed him that when the help of Allah came, and the conquest is the conquest of Makkah – that was the sign that the end of his life was approaching: so glorify the praises of your Lord and ask for His forgiveness, for verily He is the One Who accepts repentance and forgives. ‘Umar said: I do not know of it except what you know.

Al-Bukhaari (143) and Ahmad (2393) narrated from Ibn ‘Abbaas that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) placed his hand on my shoulder, then he said: “O Allah, give him deep understanding of the faith and teach him understanding of Quran.”.

Another example of that is what ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) quoted as evidence for regarding the minimum length of pregnancy as being six months, when he took together the verses in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“The mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling”

[al-Baqarah 2:233]

“and his weaning is in two years”

[Luqmaan 31:14]

“and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty (30) months”

[al-Ahqaaf 46:15].

‘Uthmaan and a number of the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) agreed with him.

Tafseer Ibn Katheer (6/336)

Another example is when Imam ash-Shaafa‘i and others quoted as evidence the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers way. We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell - what an evil destination” [an-Nisa’ 4:115] to prove that scholarly consensus counts as binding evidence, as it says in Irshaad al-Fuhool (1/198). And there are many similar and well-known examples.

This only applies in the case of the scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah who are people of virtue and knowledge. As for those who follow whims and desires, and falsely attribute things to Allah and His Messenger, they have no share in that.

The guideline to establish whether this understanding is correct is to measure it against the Quran and Sunnah; if it is in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah, then it is a correct understanding, but if it goes against them, then it is an incorrect understanding.

V.

Undoubtedly there are many verses of the Holy Quran that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not explain. We have stated above that there are some parts of the Quran that will be understood by those who have a good command of the Arabic language, and some parts that no one has any excuse for not knowing, because the meaning is very clear. In such cases, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would not ordinarily discuss the interpretation, because his Companions had grasped it.

Undoubtedly the Sahaabah knew the meaning of the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Verily, those who have believed, and those who have emigrated (for Allah’s Religion) and have striven hard in the Way of Allah, all these hope for Allah’s Mercy. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful” [al-Baqarah 2:218].

With regard to such verses, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would not discuss the interpretation, because the meaning was clear and they understood it readily.

But with regard to verses such as that in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And those who give that (their charity) which they give (and also do other good deeds) with their hearts full of fear (whether their alms and charities, etc., have been accepted or not), because they are sure to return to their Lord (for reckoning)” [al-Mu’minoos 23:60], the meaning may have been unclear to some of them, so there was a need for the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to explain it. At-Tirmidhi (3175) narrated that ‘Aa’ishah, the wife of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: I asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about this verse: “And those who give that (their charity) which they give (and also do other good deeds) with their hearts full of fear (whether their alms and charities, etc., have been accepted or not), because they are sure to return to their Lord (for reckoning)” [al-Mu’minoos 23:60]. ‘Aa’ishah said: Are they the ones who drink alcohol and steal? He said: “No, O daughter of as-Siddeeq; rather they are the ones who fast and pray and give charity, but they are afraid that it will not be accepted from them. They are the ones who hasten to do good deeds.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Saheehah, no. 162

VI.

If someone were to ask: is it permissible for a researcher into the meanings of the Holy Quran to come up with new meanings for it? We would say: Yes, but that is subject to certain conditions, one of which is that this researcher should be a seeker of knowledge (taalib ‘ilm) and should be well versed in the sciences of Quran, Sunnah and the Arabic language. Another condition is that the conclusions he reaches should not be contrary to the known interpretation of the verses of the Holy Quran, in such a way that it is introducing a new opinion and an innovated meaning for the interpretation of the verse.

This is like the conclusion reached by some researchers, that honey may heal many diseases, by Allah’s leave, including such and such, and that it is efficacious for such and such, and they quote the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“wherein is healing for men” [an-Nahl 16:69]. This comes under the heading of reflecting upon and pondering over the signs of Allah. Hence Allah says after that: “Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think” [an-Nahl 16:69]. Some of them reached a conclusion concerning the kinds of harm that are caused by having intercourse during menses, when discussing the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “They ask you concerning menstruation. Say: that is an Adha (a harmful thing for a husband to have a sexual intercourse with his wife while she is having her menses), therefore keep away from women during menses” [al-Baqarah 2:222].

Some of them also spoke of the harmful effects of extravagance in food and drink, and quoted new findings in medicine, when discussing the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “and eat and drink but waste not by extravagance” [al-A‘raaf 7:31].

And there are other similar examples. There is nothing wrong with this; rather this is what is required and encouraged.

As for the far-fetched and weird interpretations of the Sufis, the claims of the followers of innovation and the exaggerations of many of those who speak about the scientific miracle of the Quran without knowledge, many of these – if not most of them – come under the heading of that which is wrong and false.

VII.

With regard to the story of Aasif ibn Barkhiya and other stories from the People of the Book, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) granted a concession allowing us to narrate from the People of the Book, when he said: “Narrate from the Children of Israel, and there is no problem, for wonders occurred among them.” Narrated by Imam Ahmad in az-Zuhd (p. 16); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Saheehah (2926).

This is among the stories that may be true; as for those which definitely cannot be true because they are contrary to what we know or they are contrary to common sense, there is no concession concerning such reports. Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The Lawgiver permitted us to narrate from them in the hadith: “Narrate from the Children of Israel, and there is no problem” but that only applies to that which is acceptable according to common sense. As for that which common sense would reject and deem to be false, or it is thought most likely that it is a lie, that does not come under this heading.

Many of the earlier commentators, and some of the later commentators, went too far in narrating from the books of the People of the book when commenting on the meanings of the Holy Quran, when there was no need for these reports from them.

End quote from Tafseer Ibn Katheer (7/394)

He also said:

There is a saheeh hadith from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) according to which he said: “If the People of the Book narrate something to you, then do not believe them and do not disbelieve them.” Moreover, their reports fall into three categories: some of them we know to be true because of evidence to that effect from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Messenger; some we know to be false, because of evidence to the contrary from the Quran and Sunnah; and for some of it there is no evidence either way, and this is what permission has been given to narrate, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Narrate from the Children of Israel, and no problem”; but there is no reason either to believe it or disbelieve it, because he said: “then do not believe them and do not disbelieve them.”

End quote from Tafseer Ibn Katheer (3/528)

With regard to stories such as this that are narrated from the People of the Book, if they do not contradict Islamic teachings or common sense, there is nothing wrong with narrating them, but they should not be believed or disbelieved unless they were narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), in which case they are to be believed.

Conclusion:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not die until he had conveyed the message of his Lord in the most perfect manner and explained to people what had been sent down to them from their Lord. He did not omit anything that would bring them closer to Paradise but he enjoined it upon them and encouraged and urged them to do it; and he did not omit anything that would bring them closer to Hell but he forbade them to do it and warned them against it.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has made the Quran easy for His slaves, as He, may He be glorified, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember, then is there any that will remember (or receive admonition)?” [al-Qamar 54:17]. Whoever seeks its goodness will attain it, and whoever learns it Allah will raise him in status thereby. There is nothing in it that is mysterious in nature or has hidden meanings that Allah has disclosed to one group to the exclusion of others, except what Allah may enable some of its people to attain of correct understanding and right opinions that are not contrary to any religious teachings at all, whether minor or major.

Allah did not send the Holy Quran down to the heart of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to be recited only; rather He sent it down so that people may reflect upon it and ponder over its verses, and thus increase in faith, as He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And whenever there comes down a Soorah (chapter from the Quran), some of them (hypocrites) say: "Which of you has had his Faith increased by it?" As for those who believe, it has increased their Faith, and they rejoice.

But as for those in whose hearts is a disease (of doubt, disbelief and hypocrisy), it will add suspicion and doubt to their suspicion, disbelief and doubt, and they die while they are disbelievers”

[at-Tawbah 9:124, 125].

The Muslim should be devoted to Allah and follow His guidance, and he should not divert from the straight path of Allah. He should follow and not innovate, and he should not imitate any

innovator; he should adhere to the main body of the Muslims (jamaa‘ah) and not learn from anyone except the people of knowledge whom Allah has singled out for His favour and has protected their path from error, for they are the heirs of the Prophets.

And Allah knows best.