

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

DOES THE QURAN ASSERT IN VERSE 4:82 THAT IT CONTAINS NO CONTRADICTIONS?

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It is a common understanding amongst Muslims that verse 4:82 provides evidence of the Quran's claim that it has no contradictions within its text.

One rendition in support of such a claim is noted below:

"Do they not consider the Koran with care. If it had been from anyone other than God, it would contain many (Kathirun) contradictions (Ikhtelaafun-). Koran 4:82" [1]

What the Quran actually claims is often lost in translation and the above rendition arguably alters the nuance of the verse. The possible understanding that results from the above translation is that the Quran has no contradictions or that it may contain 'some' contradictions as opposed to 'many' (kathiran). The verse arguably makes neither claim.

Furthermore, the rendition 'it would contain' is arguably a mistranslation of the Arabic expression 'la'wajadu' which reads 'surely they (would have) found'. The problematic rendition arguably lends to the popular understanding of the verse, though it shifts the focus of the verse from the interpreter to the Quran itself without warrant.

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا ۝

ikh'tilafan

Illustration - Joseph Islam

An arguably closer rendition of the above verse would be:

004:082

"Then do they not ponder consider / meditate upon / research intently / study the Quran? And if it had been from other than God, surely **they** (would have) found in it much causes for disagreement / dispute (**'ikh'tilafan'**)"

The source of the Quran (i.e. God) is indisputably infallible and remains perfect. Arguably then, whatever this perfect source parts with is ipso facto without fault. However, verse 4:82 simply expresses a condition of the fallible 'interpreters' (i.e. humans) when interpreting the Quran and not the 'source' (God) or the Quran itself.

Arabic readers will note that at the heart of the claim of the Quran is the condition of **'ikh'tilafan'** which can mean **'a cause for disagreement'**, **'causes of dispute'**, **'where one differs'** or is at **'variance'**.

Expressed in alternative manner, the Quran claims that if it was from a source other than from God, then **'they'** (a reference to a 3rd party given by the pronoun) would find **'many'** (**katheeran**) causes for disagreement within its narratives (**ikthilaf**).

What is remarkable is that the Quran does not make a claim that there will be **'no causes of dispute'** (**ikh'tilaf**).

If the Quran had made such a claim, then this assertion would be immediately **falsified** by pointing at many exegetics from various theological perspectives that at times cannot agree on a specific Quranic interpretation and find reasons for dispute. Apart from orthodox interpretations, intra-variances amongst the Quran-centric movement also find **many reasons for 'ikh'tilaf'** when studying purely from a Quranic perspective.

Even the earliest, ancient classical Quranic interpreters could potentially disagree on 'Quranic interpretation' and today there is no one **indisputable consensus** on the interpretation of **all the Quran's narratives**. This fact remains noteworthy.

However, if the very source is 'fallible' (other than from God), then the problem of 'disagreements' (**ikthilaf**) is **only accentuated**, hence the use of the phrase **'ikthalafan kathiran'** (many causes for disagreement).

No matter how accurate a source **and indeed the source of the Quran remains 'perfect' (i.e. God)**, it is the **fallible mind** which interprets the source which causes the variance. Therefore, verse 4:82 remains more of a function of the 'interpreter' than the Quran itself.

For any words to have meanings, they must be first filtered through the minds of fallible humans. It is the mind that becomes the source of the 'ikh'tilaf' which often lends to a nuanced and at times, erroneous understanding. This is not a reflection of the Divine words itself.

Acknowledging the fallibility of the human mind, we note verses which take this into account when believers seek guidance from the Quran, limiting one's scope merely to best endeavours.

064:016

“So keep your duty to God as **best you can / what you are able (* Arabic: ma is'tata'tum)**, and listen, and obey, and spend; that is better for your souls. And whoso is saved from his own greed, such are the successful”

* The Arabic word 'istata'a' means to be able, can or to be capable of. Therefore, given the above verse, one is only expected to the best they can whilst striving in the way of God.

039:018

"Those who listen to the Word (the Quran) and follow the **best meaning in it / best of it (Arabic: fayattabi'una ahsanahu)** those are the ones whom God has guided and those are the one's endowed with understanding (Arabic: Albabi)

039.055

"And follow **the best of what is revealed to you from your Lord, before the penalty comes to you suddenly while you do not perceive!**"

Having noted the above verses, one begs the question do these verses imply that there exist vestiges of knowledge in the Quran which are not 'hasan' (good / best), in order for one to choose the best?

Such an erroneous deduction would be seemingly preposterous and quite rightly so from a Quran's perspective. What it arguably implies is that as fallible humans, believers need to take the best meaning / interpretation from the Quran in what they best comprehend.

This sentiment is similarly resonated in verse 3:7 in the form of a rebuke where those with perversity in their hearts are likened to seeking discord (**ibtigha l'fitna**), once again confirming the **fallibility of the interpreter** in many guises.

Therefore, the Quran remains factually 'correct' when it makes use of the word '**ikh'tilaf**' when expressing a 'potential' of the human condition when it seeks to interpret the Quran.

Indeed, if the Quran was not a Divine source, then people would have found 'even more' to disagree with which is clear when one notes the disagreements the **Islamic secondary sources** often incite and the incredulous beliefs that at times emanate from them.

This view is supported by two other verses. For example, with the Book of Moses, 'ikh'tilaf' resulted:

011:110 (part)

“And verily we gave Moses the Book, but differences (ikh'tulifa) arose therein ...”

041:045 (part)

“And verily we gave Moses the Book, but differences (ikh'tulifa) arose therein ...”

To reiterate, this does not imply that the Book given to Moses was 'imperfect'. Like the Quran, the perfection of the source of the revelation, God, is assumed and remains indisputable. Rather, it was the fallible minds of the interpreters that were the cause of the dispute / disagreements (ikh'tilaf).

THE UNDERLYING MESSAGE OF VERSE 4:82

The Quranic verse appeals to the enquirer to consider an obvious reality. If the Quran was from a source other than God, one would have indeed found after much scrutiny, much to disagree with on multifaceted levels of the Quranic discourse.

The Quran's appeal to one's faculties, nature, the unseen, diverse histories of old, its incredible familiarity with its environment and the beliefs of its primary audience as well as those from yore, human psychology, human physiology, social sciences, general sciences, geology, oceans, cosmos, time and space, the animal kingdom, evolution etc **all fit perfectly together into a consistent, harmonious whole.**

Neither the veracity nor the integrity of the discourse of the Quran is ever compromised. This is indeed remarkable.

How was an Arab man, a product of a particular society, a construct of a particular sectarian milieu in which he grew, able to conceive such a dialogue without Divine inspiration?

Arguably, a more explicit example of a verse which makes a claim of the Quran's airtight internal consistency and underlying perfection is verse 39:23.

039:23 (part)

"God has revealed the best statement (in the form of) a Book, consistent with itself / resembling each other ..."

FINAL THOUGHTS

Divine words are ipso facto 'perfect' as they emanate from a 'perfect' source. The Quran is no

exception. However, the Quran like any other source of knowledge will always remain interpreted and thus 'refracted' through the 'prisms' of fallible human minds given cultural, socio-political and the intellectual context of the interpreters.

It is the latter sentiment which will always give rise to at least some causes for disagreement (ikh'tilaf). Once again, the Quran remains no exception.

"...even an object of numinous knowledge can be refracted through the prism of a sufficiently insidious interpretation. "The color of the water," as Junayd once said of those who know Allah, "is the color of its vessel." [2]

REFERENCES

[1] ASADI. M, *The Unifying Theory of Everything: Koran and Nature's Testimony*, Writers Club Press, Self Reference Koran & Kurt Godel, page 33

[2] Truth, Other Religions, and Mysticism - Shaykh Nuh Keller [online] <http://seekersguidance.org/blog/2010/09/truth-other-religions-and-mysticism-shaykh-nuh-keller/> [accessed] 5th May 2013.

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