

USUL UT-TAFSIR-THE PRINCIPLES OF HERMENEUTICS

SESSION #2

In our first lesson, we covered the importance of learning hermeneutics and the use of it in practical every day circumstances. We also attempted to explain that misinterpretation of the Qur'an and not taking recourse to its' verses in the most correct manner would result in Divine Judgement.

Finally, we attempted to give examples of two types of verses that we would encounter when reading the Revelation of Allah. This lesson is to focus on the next two types of texts, those two being haqiqah and majaaz.

PASSAGES ON HAQIQAH

This type of ayaat have to do with a meaning that is present only on the surface without recourse to another meaning. This is actually the reality of the thing.

Imaam Khatib al-Baghdaadi ^{RH} ¹ stated:

The haqiqah is the foundation, source or root in the language and its' limit is any term employed without extension or transfer of the meaning.

[Al-Faqih wal-Mutafaqqih, V. 1, p. 64]

Imaam Ibn Badraan ^{RH} ² defined it as:

This is where the thing is named by its' form, so this is the form of the affair or the thing present, meaning its' (reality) haqiqah...

[Al-Madkhal, p.176]

¹ 392-462 AH/1002-1070 AD. The great scholars of Baghdaad, he wrote numerous texts, one of his famous being, the Book of the Jurist and the One studying to be a jurist. This is of great importance as it showed the great source text analysis of the early Islamic community. He was famous for his memory, having learned over 100,000 ahaadith by heart.

² d. 1346 AH/1927 AD. One of the Hanbali scholars of the age, he came to the madhhab while in Syria studying Shaafi`ii fiqh. He learned much of his Islamic knowledge through the ancient kuttaab system of teaching and his family still carry on this tradition. His fame is mostly due to the fact of his writing small but easily accessible books for the students of knowledge, facilitating their easy understanding of more complex areas of the Islamic sciences.

PASSAGES ON MAJAAZ

These are passages that are classified as figurative, indicating a meaning other than that on the surface. This is usually a meaning, extension of a phrase or word in Arabic for use in a wider, figurative sense.

Imaam Khatib al-Baghdaadi ^{RH} stated,

The majaaz is any term employed which can have an extended meaning to it...majaaz is in the Arabic language and its' customs, for something is named as something else when it has a majaaz for it or it has a reason and some of the speech has been deleted in order to facilitate abbreviation when the evidence remains clear. Mujaahid said that Ibn `Abbas was named 'al-Bahr (the Ocean),' due to the abundance of his knowledge.

[Al-Faqih wal-Mutafaqqih, V. 1, p. 65-66]

Shaikh ul-Islam Muwaffaq ud-Din Ibn Qudaamah ^{RH} stated majaaz as,

It is the expression used in other than its' original meaning in a sound manner or way.

[Rawdat un-Naadhir wa Junnat ul-Munaazir, V. 1, p. 206]

But even in spite of these passages, there have been some who would deny the existence of majaaz in the Qur'an.

Shaikh ul-Islam Muwaffaq ud-Din ^{RH}, however, puts things in perspective:

And all of that is majaaz, for it is the use of the term in other than its' subjected meaning or place. Those that hinder and prevent that are arrogant and stubborn. And those who were safer would say, 'I do not call it majaaz.' So they tend to dispute about the use of an expression, not the benefit of the use of and the elucidation of the meaning of it.

[Rawdat un-Naadhir wa Junnat ul-Munaazir, V. 1, p. 206]

Imaam Ibn Badraan al-Hanbali ^{RH}, draws our attention to the following point,

The Qur'an does contain passages that are haqiqah and majaaz, in clear contradiction to those people-those being the Zaahiriyyah and the Rawaafid-who forbid and hinder from the possibility of majaaz taking place in the Qur'an.

[Al-Madkhal, p. 197]

Insha'allah, In future lessons we will explain more about why majaaz is denied by some people. We will discuss this in our follow up series entitled, '*Pitfalls in Hermeneutics-Where do errors occur?*'

But for now, we will focus on some examples of the two aforementioned categories of ayaat.

PASSAGES THAT ARE CLASSIFIED AS HAQIQAH

The passages that are haqiqah are of course many, but the aim in this session is not to quote all of them, but rather to quote a sample of them so that the reader may commit themselves to research in his or her own time. Here are some examples of haqiqah ayaat,

The Possessor of the Majestic Throne.³

[Surat ul-Buruj (85), ayah 15]

Thus we know that Allah has a Throne, in fact it is a true and real throne. We know this due to these other passages,

And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, from all around, giving glory to the praise of their Lord.

[Surat uz-Zumar (39), ayah 75]

Those who bear the Throne and those around it glorify and praise their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe.

[Surah Ghaafir (40), ayah 7]

When looking at these passages, it is clear that the Throne is a created object, also known as a concrete noun. If it was not a concrete noun, there would be nothing for the angels to bear, nor to be gathered around on the Day of Resurrection. Thus these passages establish something that exists, is real and can only be held upon the meaning that appears for that thing. Thus no one could declare this haqiqah ayah to be a majaan, or metaphor. The only way to declare an ayah as majaan that for all intents and purposes appears to be a haqiqah would be to fulfil one or all of the following conditions,

1. There are other ayaat or texts that support and render the expression necessary to be held in a metaphorical sense.
2. There is a custom in the language for such usage and the ayah is clearly in the context of that.
3. The haqiqah (reality) can be known by the validity of the majaan (figurative) use of its' expression. Thus an example would be that it is valid to use the expression, 'lion' for the brave man, in knowing that the expression, 'lion,' has a haqiqah (reality) in referring to the predatory animal and a majaan (metaphor) in the brave man.^{4 5}

³ Sometimes the word `Arsh in Arabic is also translated canopy or crown, both of which are valid meanings. However, we have chosen to keep the word Throne in English, not for any particular correctness, but for the familiarity that English speaking Muslims have with this word being used in the manner above.

⁴ These conditions have been lifted from al-Madkhal, by Imaam Ibn Badraan al-Hanbali RH, pp. 170-183

PASSAGES THAT ARE CLASSIFIED AS MAJAAZ

There are many passages that could be classified as majaaz ⁶, but we would like to suffice with just a few of them, so that the reader and researcher may feel inspired to embark upon a greater odyssey in reading the Qur'an.

And spread out the wing of humility towards them.

[Surat ul-Israa' (17), ayah 24]

Imaam Najm ud-Din at-Tufi ^{RH} ⁷ said of this ayah,

The wing is a reality for the bird and things having bodies. But the meanings and inorganic bodies cannot be described with that.

[Sharh ul-Mukhtasar Rawdah, V. 2, p. 28]

And enquire of the town where we were as well as the caravan in which we came.

[Surah Yusuf (12), ayah 82]

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas ^{RAA} comments,

...(enquire of the town) means, ask the people of the town.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 256]

Imaam at-Tabari ^{RH} concurs,

It is saying, ask the people who are present there.

[Jaami` ul-Bayaan]

⁵ What is this telling us is that the haqiqah (reality) and the majaaaz (metaphor) have to have a connection that is supported by the language and consistent, or a metaphor cannot be proclaimed. Also, Imaam Ibn Badraan ^{RH} gave an important point, that being that every haqiqah does not necessarily have a metaphor but every metaphor most certainly has a reality that it has derived from, for without the reality, there could have been no metaphor made from it and brought into the language.

⁶ The majaaaz passages themselves have many types and subdivisions, some `ulama counting as many as 24 different subcategories of majaaaz. Perhaps in looking at this, one can truly appreciate the magnificence of the Qur'an and the Lord who revealed it to humanity so that they might take heed.

⁷ D. 716 AH/1316 AD. One of the premier Hanbali professors of law in his age and an enemy to cults and doctrinal errors, he was one of the chief judges on the tribunals designed to root out major doctrinal errors in Damascus as well as greater Syria. He was one of the towering personalities in fiqh as well as hermeneutics of legal judgement, theory and practice.

Imaam al-Qurtubi ^{RH} stated,

...(Enquire of the town) means the people...

[Jaami`u Li-Ahkaam il-Qur'an]

Imaam Najm ud-Din at-Tufi ^{RH} stated,

...(the town) means, the people, for inanimate objects do not comprehend, nor do they answer.

[Sharh ul-Mukhtasar Rawdah, V. 2, p. 28-29]

Then he found a wall that wanted to fall down, so he set it straight.

[Surat ul-Kahf (18), ayah 77]

Again, if we look at the import of the ayah, the words *yuridu an yanqadda* mean, 'it wanted to fall down.' Thus the wall would be held to have a will of its' own or an ability to cause itself to fall or move or sway. But is there another meaning that exists?

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas ^{RAA} thinks so when he explains the ayah as,

...(it wanted to fall) means that it was falling down.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 316]

Imaam al-Qurtubi ^{RH} ⁸ agreed when he said,

It means it was close to falling. This is majaaz.

[Jaami`u Li-Ahkaam il-Qur'an]

Imaam Najm ud-Din at-Tufi ^{RH} said about this desiring wall,

The wall does not have a will of its' own, for the fact is that will is a reality from the specific characteristics of the animal or the human being. This statement is only an indirect expression that it was close to toppling down.

[Sharh ul-Mukhtasar Rawdah, V. 2, p. 28]

Imaams Jalaal ud-Din as-Suyuti ⁹, Jalaal ud-Din al-Mahalli and Ahmad as-Saawi ¹⁰ ^{RHM} state that the passage means,

⁸ d. 671 AH/1273 AD. A major Maaliki jurist and champion of the Orthodox creed, his commentary and linguistic approach to rulings in the Qur'an have made his Jaami`u Li-Ahkaam il-Qur'an a classic among the students of knowledge and a legend amongst the ranks of the scholars. He is part of the rich Islamic legacy that once existed in Spain.

⁹ 849-911 AH/1445-1505 AD. A major Shaafi`ii scholar of hadith and a Shaikh ul-Islam of his time, he wrote more than 600 books. He lived a life of piety and avoiding the people, focusing on writing and

It was close to falling down.

[Haashiyah `alaa Jalalayn, V. 3, p. 27]

...Or if any one of you comes from *al-ghaa`it*...

[Surat un-Nisaa (4), ayah 43]

In its' original linguistic sense, the word *ghaa`it* suggests a low part of the earth or a depression made in the Earth. Thus the ayah would seem on its' import to suggest that whenever someone comes from a lower place, be it a valley, a pit as in mining or some other depression or low elevation of land, it would be necessary to renew wudu. But is there another sense that this word represents besides what is immediately apparent? We shall attempt to answer this question through going to the words of the Orthodox theologians and masters.

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas RAA¹¹ said that this ayah means:

From a place where one does excretion.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 93]

Imaam al-Qurtubi RH said about this passage:

The origin of the word *ghaa`it* is a depression made in the earth...the Arabs intended by this designation the places where people relieve themselves, hidden from the eyes of people. Thus the excretion that comes from the human being was named this by association.

[Jaami` u Li-Ahkaam il-Qur'an, V. 1]

Imaam Abu Ja`far at-Tabari RH¹² stated the following:

perfecting scholarly works. His books span areas of medicine and astronomy to issues dealing with differences of opinion between the scholars of his own madhhab and others.

¹⁰ d. 1241 AH/1847 AD. Erudite and precise Maaliki commentator on the Qur'an from the fold of al-Azhar Academy.

¹¹ 68 AH/687 AD. A commentator on the Qur'an and a major linguist in the Arabic language, this noble scholar studied the meanings of the Qur'an 3 times over with the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his first cousin, verse by verse. His explanation of the Qur'an is seen as one of the most authentic from the first century of the Islamic calendar.

¹² 280 AH/922 AD. A theologian and master of hermeneutics, he wrote the largest extent commentary on the Qur'an, Jaami` ul-Bayaan Fi Tafsir il-Qur'an, which swelled to 40 volumes. Modern additions, using smaller print, have been able to bring it down to 30 volumes. Some have also printed two volumes at a time in one book, bringing it to 15 volumes. It is filled with history, linguistic analysis as well as ahaadith that explain verse by verse many of the passages in the Qur'an.

...So and so has come from al-Ghaa'it, meaning by that that he relieved himself in the depression made in the Earth.

[Jaami` ul-Bayaan, V. 1]

And the recompense of a sin is a sin like it.

[Surat ush-Shuraa (42), ayah 40]

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas ^{RAA} said that this passage means,

The recompense of an injury is an injury like it.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 515]

Imaams ash-Shaafi`ii, Abu Hanifa and Sufyaan ath-Thawri ^{RHM} stated that this ayah means,

In regards to injuries where the injured could seek equity from the offender.

[Jaami` u Li-Ahkaam il-Qur'an]

Imaam Abu Ja`far at-Tabari ^{RH} said,

The recompense of the one who did the sin is to be punished by what Allah had made mandatory in that affair. And even though the punishment is from Allah who had made it compulsory for him, to the offender it is bad or evil.

[Jaami` ul-Bayaan]

Imaam Najm ud-Din at-Tufi ^{RH} gives us the following point to keep in mind,

The second use of the word sin in the ayah is a metaphorical one.

[Sharh ul-Mukhtasar Rawdah, V. 2, p. 28-29]

Whosoever transgresses against you, likewise transgress against him in the same way.

[Surat ul-Baqarah (2), ayah 194]

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas ^{RAA}, in explanation of the ayah, said that the meaning is:

Whoever initiated against you with fighting in the Sacred Precincts, then begin to fight them back.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 33]

Imaam at-Tabari ^{RH} says that this ayah means,

Whoever transgresses against you in the Sacred Precinct and they initiate the fighting with you, then fight them...O believers, whoever of the idol worshippers violates against you in My Sacred Precinct, then you are to commit the likeness of what they did therein...¹³

[Jaami` ul-Bayaan, V. 1]

Indeed those who annoy Allah and His Messenger, Allah has cursed them in this life and the Hereafter.

[Surat ul-Ahzaab (3), ayah 57]

Shaikh ul-Islam Muwaffaq ud-Din states the ayah to mean,

...(Indeed those who annoy Allah) means His Friends and Saints...

[Rawdat un-Naazir wa Junnat ul-Munaazir, V. 1, p. 206]

Imaam Ahmad as-Saawi^{RH} says,

...(Indeed those who annoy Allah and His Messenger) in regards to Allah has the meaning of transgressing His boundaries and in regards to His Messenger it is to be taken on its' outward import.

[Haashiyah `alaa Jalalayn, V. 3, p. 355]

And Yusuf said to the one of the two whom he considered would be saved, mention me in the presence of your Lord. But Shaitan made him forget to mention Yusuf in the presence of his Lord, then Yusuf stayed in prison for a number of years.

[Surah Yusuf (12), ayah 42]

Sayyiduna Ibn `Abbas^{RAA} says about the passage under discussion,

...(Mention me in the presence of your Lord) means, mention me in the presence of your master, the King.

[Tanwir ul-Maqbaas, p. 251]

Thus lord, in this context, did not mean Allah^{SWT}, but it was an angelic messenger delivering His message or proclaiming. It was also used with regard to a King, namely the ruler of Egypt. There are a few other passages as well that convey the same use of the word Lord,

He said, O my Lord! How will I have a son when old age has come to me and my wife is barren. He said, Likewise Allah does what he wills. So he said, My Lord! Make a sign for me. He said, your token is that you will not speak to people for three days but with signals, and remember your Lord much and praise Him at all times.

¹³ The Imaam is drawing us to the point that the ayah is in regards to those that are attacked in the Sacred Precinct. If the initiation of the combat begins there, even though it is sacred and hallowed land, the believers are told to defend themselves and move against them only with the amount of force that would be needed to subdue them. This conversation is from the issues of battlefield combat and is not the main focus of this discussion. For further details, one can look under the Books of Combat or the Rules of Engagement in the ancient texts of fiqh.

[Surah Aali `Imraan (3), ayaat 40-41]

She said, O my Lord! How will I have a son when no man has touched me? He said, Allah creates what he wills...

[Surah Aali `Imraan (3), ayah 47]

In these passages, the lord referred to was none other than the Angel Jibril ^{as}. Not for one moment would anyone think that the Angel Jibril ^{as} had divinity or some likeness with Allah, but the majaan was used in this passage to refer to him in that sense. In closing, we would like to say that the Qur'an is a revelation that has an ocean of meanings and shades of reality and perception. Those who would try to limit it or somehow weaken its' profound discourse have to rediscover their love for the Revelation of Allah and the Message therein to humanity.

Indeed the Praise is for Allah who has made this endeavour of ours a labour of love and the research in it that which is a delight for the heart and the eye and a tranquillity of the soul.

Contact Details:

SOCSS Organisation can be contacted at: Our Website: www.htspub.com or Our E-Mail: htspub@yahoo.co.uk

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