



# ALI 584: Quran Tafāsīr by Shi'i Muslims

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# Course Description

## **ALI-584: Quran Tafasir by Shi'a Muslims in English**

Having referred to Quran translations in English, we go for an in-depth study of the contents of the Quran to appreciate the Divine Message and implement it in our lives. This course will introduce available Quran tafāsīr in English which can be of use to those who follow the path of the Ahlul Bayt (a). We will also discuss the main features of the tafāsīr by Shi'i Quran exegetes and a brief history of Quran tafāsīr. We plan to look at select passages the Holy Quran and compare how these have been explained by various Mufasssirūn.

## Get closer to the Holy Quran

فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكَرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ \* كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُّسْتَنْفِرَةٌ \* فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ

Q 74: 49 – 51. *What is the matter with them that they evade the Reminder as if they were terrified donkeys fleeing from a lion?*

The Quran introduces itself as a “Reminder” (تَذْكَرَةٌ) and a way through which we can be informed (of previous nations, scriptures and events that have transpired). In addition, we see that those who refrain from hearing the Quran and pondering upon the meaning of its verses have been severely reprimanded... it is necessary for us to exhibit reliable commentaries of the Quran so that those who have an ardent desire to understand the meanings and teachings of the Quran may be able to make the best use of this Book.

# Topics we plan to cover today

1. Why is referring to Tafsir important? It provides cross references, verses that explain or clarify ambiguity, and the cause of revelation
2. Richness of Quran Tafsir Literature
3. History of Tafsir
4. Renown tafāsīr by Shi'i Muslims
5. Classical Shi'a tafāsīr in translation

# Understanding the Quran through itself

وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تَبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ

Q 16: 89 *And We have sent down the Book upon you as a clarifier of all things*

Explaining *tafsir* of one Quranic verse by another verse is a certain and unfailing method; it was the practice of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a) and it is used by some renown exegete (Mufasssirūn) of the Quran. The commentary *al-Mīzān fī Tafsir al-Quran* by ‘Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā’ī is a prominent example of this methodology (Subhānī). Also see Q 16:44 & 64

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نَزَلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Scholars often invoke & believe it is a Hadith: القرآن يفسر بعضه بعضا

# The Quran is a Manifest Book

***Al-kitāb al-mubīn*** (manifest book) appearing in verses 51:15, 12:1, 26:2, 27:1, 28:2, 43:2 and 44:2. ***Bayān*** (exposition) in verse 3:138. ***Mubīn*** (manifest) - وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُّبِينٌ -

36:69 *And We have not taught him poetry, nor does it behove him; it is nothing but a reminder and a plain Quran*

***Bayyinah*** is a crystal-clear evidence after which no doubt at all remains of the truth. So whenever in doubt, all we need to do is look in the Quran. It is not just a message; it is evidence by itself

(<https://understandquran.com/20-beautiful-names-attributes-quran/>)

In verses 98:1 & 4, *bayyinah* could refer to the Prophet himself or to the Quran or to both. In the *Enlightening Commentary* under Q 98:1 it says: the meaning of /*bayyinah*/, here is 'Clear Evidence' and whose example, according to the second verse, is the Messenger of Allah (S), himself, who had at his disposal the Holy Quran for his teachings.

The root word بَانَ (*bāna* = distinct, obvious) in different form occurs 523 times in the Quran

## Referring to the cause of revelation is helpful

وَعَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خُلِّفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَّتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَن  
لَا مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ

9:118 (He turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind; (they felt guilty) to such a degree that the Earth seemed constrained to them for all its spaciousness, and their souls seemed straitened to them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah (and no refuge), but to Him. Then He turned to them that they might repent, for Allah is Oft-Returning, the Most Merciful

1. Who are the three people referred to in this verse? 2. Why were they left behind? 3. How did the Earth become constrained for them? 4. How did their chests become straitened relating to the life of this world and how did their souls face pressure? 5. How did they realize that other than Allah 'azza wajall, there is no other source of refuge? 6. What is the meaning of the ability or opportunity given by Allah to humans (Tawfiq) in relation to these people?

The answers to above questions can easily be achieved by referring to the cause of revelation (sabab al-nuzul) of this verse.

# Richness of Tafsir Literature

Info on many tafāsīr can be found online. For e.g., see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_tafsir\\_works](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tafsir_works)

There are 46 complete tafāsīr listed in Arabic by Sunni exegetes. Additionally, there are tafāsīr in other languages.

It lists 11 classical and 9 modern Shi'i tafāsīr in Arabic and 15 tafāsīr in Persian/Farsi. And the list is not exhaustive.

Let us look at *Tafsir al-Basā'ir* by Ya'sub al-Din Rastighar not mentioned on the internet. But it is work of 60 volumes. A few from my library show:

Vol 1: Fatihtu'l-kitab, 491 pages

Vol 43: Al-Rahman and al-Waqi'ah, 460 pages

Vol 57: al-Tin, al-'Alaq, al-Qadr and al-Bayyinah, 1088 pages



# History of Quran Tafsir

Quranic verses say that one of the roles of the Holy Prophet (s) was to teach the Quran (2:151, 3:164, 62:2).

The first examples of tafsir can be traced back to Prophet Muhammad (s). When the Quran was revealed to him, he recited the verses to his companions, usually explaining their meanings to teach them, as it was one of his responsibilities.

Sayyida Fatima (a) invoked Quranic verses to claim Fadak

Numerous Hadiths and Du'ās from the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a) explain Quranic verses so that the believers can implement these teachings in their life. See *Sahīfa* 20:10 where Imam al-Sajjad (a) prays *وَأَلْبِسْنِي زِينَةَ الْمُتَّقِينَ* and then defines taqwa – central Quranic teaching – in a beautiful passage.

# Great favor from Allah *'azza wajall*

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

**Q 3:164** *Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His communications and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error*

The Holy Prophet was a teacher, interpreter and expounder of the religion of Allah. Before him the people, all over the world, were steeped in evil, idolatry and slavery. It was a great favor of Allah that He sent the Holy Prophet to show them the right path. As has been made clear in verse 17 of al-Hujurat those who became Muslims (submitted to Allah) should not deem it a favor to the Holy Prophet. It is Allah who conferred a favor on them, inasmuch as He has led them to the faith. (S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali)

# Renown Tafāsīr by Shi'i Muslims - 1

**Al-Qummi**, Ali ibn Ibrahim (d. 328 AH). *Tafsir al-Qummi*. It is based on Hadith, oldest and important Shi'i tafsir. He lived during the lives of 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Imams (a) and was a teacher of al-Kulayni.

**al-'Ayyashi**, Muhammad b. Mas'ud (d. 320 AH). *Tafsir al-'Ayyashi*. It is a Hadith based commentary. The author was great Hadith scholar, contemporary of al-Kulayni, during minor occultation. Only half of it is extant and has recently been translated and published in English.

**Al-Tusi**, Sh. Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Ali b. al-Hasan (d. 460 AH). *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. He also compiled two of the four main books of Hadith – *Tahdhib* and *al-Ibtisar*. It is the first comprehensive Shi'i Arabic tafsir of the Quran, covering all aspects of Quranic sciences as we know it. He was a student of Shaykh al-Mufid and Sharif al-Murtadhā.

# References

Subhānī, Āyatullāh Ja‘far. *Introduction to the Science of Tafseer of the Qur’an*, Tr. S. Bhimji Islamic Education Board of KSIMC, Stanmore: 2006.

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<https://www.al-islam.org/introduction-science-tafsir-quran-jafar-subhani>

[https://en.wikishia.net/view/Main\\_Page](https://en.wikishia.net/view/Main_Page)