

# Enabling Obedience: Exploring Qur'anic Norms in the Context of Obligations and Belief

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During the course of my academic engagement with the Qur'an and in light of my recent writings in particular, in which I continue to interrogate Qur'anic styles and norms, I came to appreciate how the Qur'an does not merely expect but rather seeks to encourage compliance and obedience amongst the faithful. Of the many tools in its arsenal is a feature I will highlight and showcase here, that of Qur'anic 'enablement'. This can easily be appreciated in the context of the Qur'an's primary function as 'guidebook' (*hudā*)<sup>1</sup> as opposed to 'lawbook'.<sup>2</sup> A selection of passages will illustrate how the Qur'an's enabling language facilitates obedience in arenas as distinct and diverse as religious financial obligations, ritual practice, and sexual morality.

In each of the illustrative examples below we will find a focal set of Qur'anic verses that extol God's attributes and explicate, in some manner, the individual's relationship with the Divine and His Book, thereby serving to remind its audience of its covenant with Him. Positioning a reminder in this manner reinforces one's relationship with God and reminds one of the gratitude and obedience due to Him, as such, these 'interruptions', or what may otherwise be termed 'suspensions', are essential to the 'enabling' outlined here.

## Personal Morality and Communal Relationships

The first example, one within the arena of personal morality and communal relationships, is from, Q. 24, *Sūrat al-Nūr* – a sura that has been treated to an extensive analysis in my recent article '*Sūrat al-Nūr* (Q. 24), "Light upon Light": Shedding New Light on the Light Verse'.<sup>3</sup> Q. 24 starts out with a very strong admonishment against and penalties for adultery and slander. Having started with these the sura proceeds to offer practical ways whereby one may avoid falling into these

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egregious sins and thus protect oneself. It does this by offering several means by which one safeguards the social fabric of a community: aya 27 advises people not to enter other people's houses without first seeking permission; ayas 30–31 instruct the Prophet to tell Muslim men to lower their glances and guard their private parts and Muslim women the same – with additional injunctions against overtly revealing their bodily charms, a comprehensive list of exceptions is laid out; aya 32 tasks the Muslim community with facilitating and bringing about marriages for its unmarried members and enjoins those who do not yet have the means to marry to remain chaste until God's grace opens a way for them. God confirms that He has sent clear verses for them (*āyātīn mubayyinātīn*), examples from earlier societies (*mathalan min alladhīna khalaw*), and advice for those who are God-conscious (*maw'idhatan li'l-muttaqīn*). Then comes the most striking enabler, the Light Verses (vv. 35–46) contrasting God's light with the impenetrable darkness upon darkness experienced by those who ignore or deny His teachings. It is clear that in this set of ayas the examples of enabling verses far exceed the original statement of the penalties, showing very clearly that the Qur'an wants people to follow right guidance, and it facilitates this by providing a framework that allows them to keep away from what is forbidden.

### Charity

A second example that illustrates this feature is the injunction to give in charity. In Q. 2:254 we find: 'You who believe, give in charity (*anfiqū*)' – one single word of request. The passage, up to v. 274, continues to enable its addressees to carry out this duty. It calls on Muslims testifying to their faith by deeming them 'you who believe', and reminding them that whatever they have, it was He, God Himself who gave it to them: and they should 'give some of what We have provided for you' urgently 'before a day comes when neither trading, friendship, nor intercession by others can help you.' This reminder that God is asking you to share from the bounty that He Himself bestowed upon you and that there will come a time when it will be too late, both serve as encouragement to fulfil the injunction to give in charity. This succinct command, however, is followed by the 'Throne Verse' (*āyat al-kursī*), Q. 2:255:

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous.

This is a remarkable verse that contrasts the positive attributes of God with the negatives of anything other than Him, reminding the believers of the nature of the Divine Being who is enjoining this charity and with whom they have made a covenant.

<b>Name of God - descriptor</b>	<b>Contrasting attribute – what He is not</b>
Allah / God	<i>la ilāha illā huwa</i>
<i>al-hayyu</i>	<i>lā ta'khudhuhu sinatun</i>
<i>al-qayyūm</i>	<i>wa-lā nawm</i>
All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him	Who can intercede with Him except with His permission?
He knows what is before them and what is behind them	they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills
His throne extends over the heavens and the earth	it does not weary Him to preserve them both.
He is the Most High, the Almighty	

Even so, having said this, the Qur'an asserts (v. 256) that there is no need for compulsion in faith (*lā ikrāha fi'l-dīn*), because everything has now been laid out plainly and the choice is clear.<sup>4</sup> Whoever denounces the false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest handhold (*al-<sup>c</sup>urwati'l-wuthqā lā'nfiṣāma la-hā*), there is a transactional slant: obey Him and you will be fine in return. Verses 258 to 260 confirm the resurrection, the Day mentioned in v. 254. Verse 261 gives a striking example where:

Those who spend their wealth in God's cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. God gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing.

This continues until v. 274<sup>5</sup> with an appeal to spend in God's way without condescension or taunts towards the recipients and encouraging people to give from the best they have as opposed to that which they would not like to receive themselves. All this is to enable the enforcing of the single-word injunction: 'spend' (*anfiqū*)!

### **Defensive Fighting**

Verses enjoining defensive fighting deploy a multitude of enablers in urging the believers to fight in self-defence. This is particularly significant since Muḥammad had no standing army to call up, he could only rely on people's good faith to answer the call to arms, indeed, individuals would have to provide their own mounts, provision, and equipment, and would leave their families behind while risking life and limb for the

struggle. Necessarily such an ask requires strong enablers, and this is what we find in *Sūrat al-Hajj*, Q. 22:39–41:

<sup>39</sup>Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged—God has the power to help them—<sup>40</sup>those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, ‘Our Lord is God.’ If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God’s name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help those who help His cause—God is strong and mighty—<sup>41</sup>those who, when We establish them in the land, keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, command what is right, and forbid what is wrong: God controls the outcome of all events.

Elsewhere the Qur’an gives examples of earlier believers who were required to defend themselves, Q. 2:246–251.<sup>6</sup> Q. 9 reminds them that the followers of past prophets were also commanded to fight, something they too struggled with, and God’s help was likewise promised to past prophets and their peoples, indicating that if you struggle with this, so did past believers. Note the transactional nature of the promise: reward of the heavenly gardens in exchange of fighting and risking life and limb.

<sup>111</sup>God has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden—they fight in God’s way: they kill and are killed—this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. Who could be more faithful to his promise than God? So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph. <sup>112</sup>[The believers are] those who turn to God in repentance; who worship and praise Him; who fast, bow down and prostrate themselves; who order what is good, forbid what is wrong and observe God’s limits. Give glad news to such believers.

## Divorce

Another arena is divorce, one that is often associated with acrimony and resentment, and thus the verses legislating on divorce (Q. 2:237) employ lots of enablers. After enjoining all parties to deal with each other with generosity and grace comes the advice:

<sup>238</sup>Take care to do your prayers, praying in the best way, and stand before God in devotion.

This prayer enables the disputing parties to calm down, it reminds them of their covenant with God – the One who sanctified the union and put love and mercy between

the two of them (Q. 30:21) – it encourages the husband and the wife to maintain faith in Him and leave their disputes behind. Likewise, in *Sūrat al-Ṭalāq* (Q. 65) requests are couched in enabling language and numerous ethical injunctions.<sup>7</sup>

## Repentance

As indicated the Qur'an recognises human weaknesses and shortcomings that lead to falling below the required standard, as such it does not merely seek to obtain obedience but rather enables it. One obvious means is opening the way to repentance (*tawba*), even for the most serious offences as seen in the last two verses (70–71) of this passage, Q. 25:63–71:

<sup>63</sup>The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, 'Peace'; <sup>64</sup>those who spend the night bowed down or standing, worshipping their Lord, <sup>65</sup>who plead, 'Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering of Hell, for it is a dreadful torment to suffer! <sup>66</sup>It is an evil home, a foul resting place!' <sup>67</sup>They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance; <sup>68</sup>those who never invoke any other deity beside God, nor take a life, which God has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery. (Whoever does these things will face the penalties): <sup>69</sup>their torment will be doubled on the Day of Resurrection, and they will remain in torment, disgraced, <sup>70</sup>except those who repent, believe, and do good deeds: God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones. He is most forgiving, most merciful. <sup>71</sup>People who repent and do good deeds truly return to God.

Another means is to multiply the reward for good and restrict the recompense for bad with exactness and justice, Q. 6:160:

Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times to his credit, but whoever has done a bad deed will be repaid only with its equivalent—they will not be wronged.

These examples illustrate how, being a book of guidance, facilitating compliance and obedience is an essential characteristic of the Qur'an.

## Fasting

Another means of enabling people to carry out its instructions is by virtue of grading these commandments in accordance with abilities, the fast of Ramadan is an excellent illustration of this, Q. 2:183.

<sup>183</sup>You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God. <sup>184</sup>Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill, or on a journey, then on other days later. For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to compensate—feed a needy person. But if anyone does good of his own accord, it is better for him, and fasting is better for you, if only you knew.

Moreover, the injunction begins, ‘You who believe’ (*yā ayyuhā’l-ladhīna āmanū*), a simple address which testifies to the belief of the fasting people – you believe so you will obey, it then issues the command in the perfect tense connecting it with prior peoples – others have fasted before you, it is not exclusively challenging for you – and outlining its objective ‘that you may be mindful of God’, whilst specifying that it is for a number of days only. Further, the Qur’an lists exceptions: the ill and the traveller can substitute with other days and those for whom fasting is a burden there is the option to compensate – with ethical justice – by feeding a needy person, i.e. the one who cannot fast must feed another person [who cannot feed himself].

This is followed by verses extolling the month of Ramadan, explaining that its importance derives from its relationship with the Qur’an, which was revealed in this month, and that the way to celebrate this is by fasting the month. However, once again the notion of ease is brought out ‘God wants ease for you, not hardship.’

<sup>185</sup>It was in the month of Ramadan that the Quran was revealed as guidance for mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong. So, any one of you who is present that month should fast, and anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later. God wants ease for you, not hardship. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him for having guided you, so that you may be thankful.

This is followed by, <sup>186</sup>[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided.’ A verse that might mistakenly be seen as somewhat of a departure – yet in it God is reminding, through Muḥammad, His servants that He responds to them when they call on Him, urging the believers that they, also, should respond to God’s injunction to fast when called to do so. Once again there is a transactional slant here.

The last verse in this series of verses dealing with the fast of Ramadan continues:

<sup>187</sup>You [believers] are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. God

was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them—seek what God has ordained for you—eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong.

In Q. 2:187, the Qur'an enables obedience by identifying a pitfall and granting – due to God's mercy and pardon – a concession which the believers are *enjoined* to exercise: they are told to 'seek what God has ordained for you' and explicit prohibitions are made clear, once again – the command is to avoid going near the bounds (*fa-lā taqrabūhā*), not breaking them, for 'God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong.' Other obligatory fasts cover those that are prescribed as penalties for major sins, once again the Qur'an enables obedience by virtue of grading these commandments in accordance with ability, see Q. 58:3–4.<sup>8</sup>

## Resurrection

It should be noted that these 'enabling tools' are not employed solely to guide toward obedience, but also to facilitate belief in those things that seem challenging. A striking example of this is belief in the resurrection of the dead, something considered impossible, even for God, *Sūrat al-Ra'ad*, Q. 13, which starts with a long list of God's powers of creation in the heavens and the earth, vv. 1–4.

<sup>1</sup>Alif Lam Mim Ra. These are the signs of the Scripture. What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe' <sup>2</sup>It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord; <sup>3</sup>it is He who spread out the earth, placed firm mountains and rivers on it, and made two of every kind of fruit; He draws the veil of night over the day. There truly are signs in this for people who reflect. <sup>4</sup>There are, in the land, neighbouring plots, gardens of vineyards, cornfields, palm trees in clusters or otherwise, all watered with the same water, yet We make the yield of some better than others: there truly are signs in this for people who reason.

After which, the Qur'an asserts that it is doubting resurrection that is in fact amazing:

<sup>5</sup>If anything can amaze you [Prophet], then you should surely be amazed at their asking, 'What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?' These are the ones who deny their Lord...

Q. 22:5–6, also referring to the resurrection of the dead, provides more proof for the doubtful, to enable them to heed its teachings:

<sup>5</sup>People, remember, if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped: We mean to make Our power clear to you. Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time, then We bring you forth as infants and then you grow and reach maturity. Some die young and some are left to live on to such an age that they forget all they once knew. You sometimes see the earth lifeless, yet when We send down water it stirs and swells and produces every kind of joyous growth: <sup>6</sup>this is because God is the Truth; He brings the dead back to life; and He has power over everything.

### Challenging belief in false idols

Q. 46 offers an excellent example of enabling obedience in a matter of belief, it does so by engaging its audience utilising numerous stylistic tools not least of which is its habit of posing questions via the statement '*qul*' addressed to the Prophet and requiring him to engage, question, and challenge the arguments of those who denied his message. This allows the Qur'an to confront their denial and rejection by posing direct challenges, for instance challenging them to produce proof of what their gods have created:

<sup>4</sup>Say [Prophet], 'Consider those you pray to other than God: show me which part of the earth they created or which share of the heavens they own; bring me a previous scripture or some vestige of divine knowledge—if what you say is true.'

What is critical in this particular passage is how the arguments of these challenges build one on top of the other, culminating in *istiṣḥā al-ḥujja* ('driving the argument to its logical end'):

<sup>5</sup>Who could be more wrong than someone who calls on gods that will not answer them until the day of Resurrection and are utterly unaware of their call, <sup>6</sup>those who, when all mankind is gathered, will become his enemies and disown his worship?



### Enabling Obedience through Persuasive and Dissuasive Language

Among the rhetorical devices used to enable obedience are *targhīb* and *tarhīb*, the use of persuasion and dissuasion, in order to induce desire and fear. Both are important features that create a lot of impact, an illustrative example for a passage with *tarhīb* is Q. 14:47–51, wherein a detailed description of the happenings in Hellfire serves to induce fear:

<sup>47</sup>...He is mighty, and capable of retribution. <sup>48</sup>One Day—when the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven, and people all appear before God, the One, the Overpowering—<sup>49</sup>you [Prophet] will see the guilty on that Day, bound together in fetters, <sup>50</sup>in garments of pitch, faces covered in fire. <sup>51</sup>[All will be judged] so that God rewards each soul as it deserves: God is swift in His reckoning.

In contrast, the beautiful descriptions of Paradise serve to induce desire, persuading people to vie for it (i.e. *targhīb*) e.g. Q. 14:23.

<sup>23</sup>but those who believed and did good deeds will be brought into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain with their Lord's permission: their greeting there is 'Peace'.

A passage containing both is Q. 78:17–36:

<sup>17</sup>A time has been appointed for the Day of Decision: <sup>18</sup>a Day when the Trumpet will sound and you will come forward in crowds, <sup>19</sup>when the sky will open up like wide portals, <sup>20</sup>when the mountains will vanish like a mirage. <sup>21</sup>Hell lies in wait, <sup>22</sup>a home for oppressors <sup>23</sup>to stay in for a long, long time, <sup>24</sup>where they will taste no coolness nor drink <sup>25</sup>only one that is scalding and dark—<sup>26</sup>a fitting requital, <sup>27</sup>for they did not fear a reckoning, <sup>28</sup>and they rejected Our messages as lies. <sup>29</sup>We have recorded everything in a Record. <sup>30</sup>Taste this: all you will get from Us is more torment.' <sup>31</sup>For those who were aware of God there is supreme fulfilment: <sup>32</sup>private gardens, vineyards, <sup>33</sup>maidens of matching age, <sup>34</sup>and an overflowing cup. <sup>35</sup>There they will hear no vain or lying talk: <sup>36</sup>a reward from your Lord, a fitting gift.

Related to *targhīb* and *tarhīb* are the contrasts the Qur'an presents between pairs of opposites: first life / afterlife, *janna* / *nār* (garden/ fire). This is illustrated with particular effect in passages where the people of Hell and Paradise see and attempt to communicate with each other such as Q. 7:44–51:

<sup>44</sup>The people of the Garden will cry out to the people of the Fire, 'We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what

your Lord promised you to be true?’ and they will answer, ‘Yes’. A voice will proclaim from their midst, ‘God’s rejection [hangs] over the evildoers: <sup>45</sup>those who turned others away from God’s path and tried to make it crooked, those who denied the Hereafter.’ <sup>46</sup>A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights recognising each group by their marks: they will call out to the people of the Garden, ‘Peace be with you!’—they will not have entered, but they will be hoping, <sup>47</sup>and when their glance falls upon the people of the Fire, they will say, ‘Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!’—<sup>48</sup>and the people of the heights will call out to certain men they recognise by their marks, ‘What use were your great numbers and your false pride? <sup>49</sup>And are these the people you swore God would never bless? [Now these people are being told], “Enter the Garden! No fear for you, nor shall you grieve.”’ <sup>50</sup>The people of the Fire will call to the people of Paradise, ‘Give us some water, or any of the sustenance God has granted you!’ and they will reply, ‘God has forbidden both to the disbelievers- <sup>51</sup>those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life.’ Today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our Revelations.

Another example is Q. 35:32–37:

<sup>32</sup>We gave the Scripture as a heritage to Our chosen servants: some of them wronged their own souls, some stayed between [right and wrong], and some, by God’s leave, were foremost in good deeds. That is the greatest favour: <sup>33</sup>they will enter lasting Gardens where they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, where they will wear silk garments. <sup>34</sup>They will say, ‘Praise be to God, who has separated us from all sorrow! Our Lord is truly most forgiving, most appreciative: <sup>35</sup>He has, in His bounty, settled us in the everlasting Home where no toil or fatigue will touch us.’ <sup>36</sup>But those who reject the truth will stay in Hellfire, where they will neither be finished off by death, nor be relieved from Hell’s torment: this is how We reward hardened disbelievers. <sup>37</sup>They will cry out loud in Hell, ‘Lord, let us out, and we will do righteous deeds, not what we did before!’- ‘Did We not give you a life long enough to take warning if you were going to? The warner came to you, now taste the punishment.’ The evildoers will have nobody to help them.

### Affirming God's attributes and actions

This includes reinforcing reminders of God's creative power, three indicators can be mentioned in this respect:

(i) *alladhi* ('who', in bold below) which occurs numerous times in the Qur'an, for example, Q. 2:21–23:

<sup>21</sup>People, worship your Lord, **who** created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him] <sup>22</sup>**who** spread out the earth for you and built the sky; **who** sent water down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to God.

(ii) *man* (who?, in bold below), Q. 27:60–64:

<sup>60</sup>**Who** created the heavens and earth? **Who** sends down water from the sky for you - with which We cause gardens of delight to grow: you have no power to make the trees grow in them - is it another god beside God? No! But they are people who take others to be equal with God. <sup>61</sup>**Who** is it that made the earth a stable place to live? **Who** made rivers flow through it? **Who** set immovable mountains on it and created a barrier between the fresh and salt water? Is it another god beside God? No! But most of them do not know. <sup>62</sup>**Who** is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? **Who** removes their suffering? **Who** makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god beside God? Little notice you take! <sup>63</sup>**Who** is it that guides you through the darkness on land and sea? **Who** sends the winds as heralds of good news before His mercy? Is it another god beside God? God is far above the partners they put beside him! <sup>64</sup>**Who** is it that creates life and reproduces it? **Who** is it that gives you provision from the heavens and earth? Is it another god beside God?' Say, 'Show me your evidence then, if what you say is true.'

(iii) *wa-min āyātihi* (these are [some] of His signs, in bold below), Q. 30:21–27:

<sup>21</sup>**Another of His signs** is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect. <sup>22</sup>**Another of His signs** is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know. <sup>23</sup>**Among His signs** are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty. There truly are signs in this for those who can hear. <sup>24</sup>**Among His signs, too**, are that He shows you the

lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason. <sup>25</sup>**Among His signs, too,** is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command. In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth. <sup>26</sup>Everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, and all are obedient to Him. <sup>27</sup>He is the One who originates creation and will do it again—this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise.

These verses serve to challenge the audience into using their observation skills, to seek and see with their own eyes the signs of God's power in His creative. Observation and knowledge obtained from it is at the heart of science. For example, Q. 88:17–20 'Do they not see ...'

<sup>17</sup>Do the disbelievers not see how rain clouds are formed, <sup>18</sup>how the heavens are lifted, <sup>19</sup>how the mountains are raised high, <sup>20</sup>how the earth is spread out?

However, these signs of the natural world are only beneficial to those who are graced with the inspiration to seek them and willing to concede belief in response to them, Q. 10:100–1:

<sup>100</sup>No soul can believe except by God's will, and He brings disgrace on those who do not use their reason. <sup>101</sup>Say, 'See what is in the heavens and on the earth.' But what use are signs and warnings to people who will not believe?

## Conclusion

As demonstrated from the above examples, in order to drive its point home, the Qur'an justifies its guidance and the statements it makes using logic, common sense, and reference to earlier religions. It employs the use of past peoples and their prophets, illustrating their salvific journeys (e.g. Q. 11). It guides people with persuasive language via a variety of rhetorical devices that serve to highlight the inimitability of the Qur'an. All these features combine to create impact and effect, inviting its audience to accept the guidance: *hudā* and *da'wa* and enabling them to follow its injunctions.

## NOTES

1 Q. 10:57, 'People, a teaching from your Lord has come to you, a healing for what is in [your] hearts, and guidance and mercy for the believers.' (*yā ayyuhā 'l-nāsu qad jā' atkum maw'idhatun min rabbikum wa-shifā'un li-mā fī 'l-ṣudūri, wa-hudan wa-raḥmatun li'l-mu'minīn*); Q. 14:1, 'Alif Lam Ra This is a Scripture which We have sent down to you [Prophet] so that, with their

Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light, to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy One' (*alif lām rāʾ*, *kitābun anzalnāhu ilayka li-tukhrija'l-nāsa min al-ẓulumāti ilā'l-nūri bi-idhni rabbihim ilā ẓirāṭi'l-ʿazīzi'l-ḥamīdi*); Q. 27:1–2, 'Ta Sin These are the verses of the Quran – a scripture that makes things clear, a guide and joyful news for the believers....' (*Ṭā sīn mīm, tilka āyātu'l-Qurʾāni wa-kitābin mubīnin, huda wa-bushrā li'l-muʾminīn...*).

2 Q. 45:18, 'Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a clear religious path, so follow it. Do not follow the desires of those who lack [true] knowledge-' (*thumma jaʿalnāka ʿalā sharīʿatin min al-amri fa'ttabiʿhā wa-lā tattabiʿ ahwāʾ alladhīna lā yaʿlamūn*); Q. 5:5, 'Today all good things have been made lawful for you...' (*al-yawma uḥilla la-kum al-ṭayyibātu...*).

3 Abdel Haleem, 'Sūrat al-Nūr (Q. 24), 'Light upon Light': Shedding New Light on the Light Verse' *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 26:1 (July 2024), pp. 125–139. <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/jqs.2024.0571>.

4 'There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest handhold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.' (Q. 2:256)

5 Q. 2:257–274:

God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.<sup>258</sup> [Prophet], have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, 'It is my Lord who gives life and death,' he said, 'I too give life and death.' So Abraham said, 'God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.' The disbeliever was dumbfounded: God does not guide those who do evil.<sup>259</sup> Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, 'How will God give this life when it has died?' So God made him die for a hundred years, and then raised him up, saying, 'How long did you stay like that?' He answered, 'A day, or part of a day.' God said, 'No, you stayed like that for a hundred years. Look at your food and drink: they have not gone bad. Look at your donkey- We will make you a sign for the people- look at the bones: see how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh!' When all became clear to him, he said, 'Now I know that God has power over everything.'<sup>260</sup> And when Abraham said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,' He said, 'Do you not believe, then?' 'Yes,' said Abraham, 'but just to put my heart at rest.' So God said, 'Take four birds and train them to come back to you. Then place them on separate hilltops, call them back, and they will come flying to you: know that God is all powerful and wise.'<sup>261</sup> Those who spend their wealth in God's cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. God gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing.<sup>262</sup> Those who spend their wealth in God's cause, and do not follow their spending with reminders of their benevolence or hurtful words, will have their rewards with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.<sup>263</sup> A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]: God is self-sufficient, forbearing.<sup>264</sup> You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day. Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their works: God does

not guide the disbelievers.<sup>265</sup> But those who spend their wealth in order to gain God's approval, and as an affirmation of their own faith, are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rain falls, it will still be watered by the dew. God sees all that you do.<sup>266</sup> Would any of you like to have a garden of palm trees and vines, graced with flowing streams and all kinds of produce, which, when you are afflicted with old age and feeble offspring, is struck by a fiery whirlwind and burnt down? In this way God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may reflect on them.<sup>267</sup> You who believe, give charitably from the good things you have acquired and that We have produced for you from the earth. Do not give away the bad things that you yourself would only accept with your eyes closed: remember that God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.<sup>268</sup> Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; God promises you His forgiveness and His abundance: God is limitless and all knowing,<sup>269</sup> and He gives wisdom to whoever He will. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in mind.<sup>270</sup> Whatever you may give, or vow to give, God knows it well, and those who do wrong will have no one to help them.<sup>271</sup> If you give charity openly, it is good, but if you keep it secret and give to the needy in private, that is better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds: God is well aware of all that you do.<sup>272</sup> It is not for you [Prophet] to guide them; it is God who guides whoever He will. Whatever charity you give benefits your own soul, provided you do it for the sake of God: whatever you give will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.<sup>273</sup> [Give] to those in need who are wholly occupied in God's way and cannot travel in the land [for trade]. The unknowing might think them rich because of their self-restraint, but you will recognize them by their characteristic of not begging persistently. God is well aware of any good you give.<sup>274</sup> Those who give, out of their own possessions, by night and by day, in private and in public, will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.

6 Q. 2:246–251:

<sup>246</sup>[Prophet], consider the leaders of the Children of Israel who came after Moses, when they said to one of their prophets, 'Set up a king for us and we shall fight in God's cause.' He said, 'But could it be that you would not fight, if it were ordained for you?' They said, 'How could we not fight in God's cause when we and our children have been driven out of our homeland?' Yet when they were commanded to fight, all but a few of them turned away: God has full knowledge of those who do wrong.<sup>247</sup> Their prophet said to them, 'God has now appointed Talut to be your king,' but they said, 'How can he be king over us when we have a greater right to rule than he? He does not even have great wealth.' He said, 'God has chosen him over you, and has given him great knowledge and stature. God grants His authority to whoever He pleases: God is magnanimous, all knowing.'<sup>248</sup> Their prophet said to them, 'The sign of his authority will be that the Ark [of the Covenant] will come to you. In it there will be [the gift of] tranquillity from your Lord and relics of the followers of Moses and Aaron, carried by the angels. There is a sign in this for you if you believe.'<sup>249</sup> When Talut set out with his forces, he said to them, 'God will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].' But they all drank

[deep] from it, except for a few. When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his warriors.' But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, 'How often a small force has defeated a large army with God's permission! God is with those who are steadfast.'<sup>250</sup> And when they met Goliath and his warriors, they said, 'Our Lord, pour patience on us, make us stand firm, and help us against the disbelievers,'<sup>251</sup> and so with God's permission they defeated them. David killed Goliath, and God gave him sovereignty and wisdom and taught him what He pleased. If God did not drive some back by means of others the earth would be completely corrupt, but God is bountiful to all.

7 In Q. 65:1–7 (bold indicates content enabling obedience and compliance, underlined text reminds the disputing parties of their ethical duties to each other)

... **be mindful of God, your Lord.** Do not drive them out of their homes—nor should they themselves leave—unless they commit a flagrant indecency. **These are the limits set by God— whoever oversteps God's limits wrongs his own soul—for you cannot know what new situation God may perhaps bring about.**<sup>2</sup> When they have completed their appointed term, either keep them honourably, or part with them honourably. Call two just witnesses from your people and establish witness for the sake of God. **Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should heed this: God will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him,**<sup>3</sup> **and will provide for them from an unexpected source; God will be enough for those who put their trust in Him. God achieves His purpose; God has set a due measure for everything.**<sup>4</sup> If you are in doubt, the period of waiting will be three months for those women who have ceased menstruating and for those who have not [yet] menstruated; the waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver their burden: **God makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him.**<sup>5</sup> **This is God's command, which He has sent down to you. God will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him.**<sup>6</sup> House the wives you are divorcing according to your means, wherever you house yourselves, and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult. If they are pregnant, maintain them until they are delivered of their burdens; if they suckle your infants, pay them for it. **Consult together in a good way—**if you make difficulties for one another, another woman may suckle the child for the father—<sup>7</sup> and let the wealthy man spend according to his wealth. But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what God has given him; God does not burden any soul with more than He has given it—after hardship, God will bring ease.'

8 Q. 58:3–4 outline the penalties for *zihār*

<sup>3</sup>Those of you who say such a thing to their wives, then go back on what they have said, must free a slave before the couple may touch one another again—this is what you are commanded to do, and God is fully aware of what you do—<sup>4</sup>but anyone who does not have the means should fast continuously for two months before they touch each other, and anyone unable to do this should feed sixty needy people. This is so that you may [truly] have faith in God and His Messenger. These are the bounds set by God: grievous torment awaits those who ignore them.

Q. 5:89 outlines the penalties for breaking an oath:

<sup>89</sup>God does not take you [to task] for what is thoughtless in your oaths, only for your binding oaths: the atonement for breaking an oath is to feed ten poor people with food equivalent to what you would normally give your own families, or to clothe them, or to set free a slave—if a person cannot find the means, he should fast for three days. This is the atonement for breaking your oaths—keep your oaths. In this way God makes clear His revelations to you, so that you may be thankful.