

Educational Implications Deduced from the Usage of Rhetorical Devices in the Qur'an:
The Story of Prophet Zakariyyā in the Chapter of Āl 'Imrān as a Case Study

Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)
Volume 12, Issue 10, October 2021: 289-319

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Abstract

The present research explores how each verse of the Qur'an is replete with educational implications. Through the rhetorical devices employed in the Qur'an, these implications are presented using linguistic structures of the most lofty style. The story of Āl 'Imrān is one of the most sublime passages of the Qur'an, in which a myriad of educational meanings are wonderfully and innovatively presented. The eloquence of the Qur'anic style allows these meanings to brilliantly shine without any confusion. The Qur'anic story of Zakariyyā presents a glorious example replete with meanings, which shall always increase. The way that Zakariyyā invokes Allah the Almighty offers many educational lessons through the sublime and eloquent style of the Qur'an. In addition, this paper presents a description of the believer's response to what Allah destines for him or her, as the story stresses several sublime educational etiquettes, which the Qur'an teaches us through the response of the wife of 'Imrān, when she was satisfied with what Allah decreed for her. This has been expressed through a number of rhetorical devices that fully communicate these meanings. Through an investigation of the verses that narrate the story, this paper highlights the perfection of the Qur'anic expressions. In each scene of the story of Prophet Zakariyyā, the Qur'an employs different, precise expressions in narrating the event. This is because each word has its specific meanings and essential purposes. In this way, the educational aspects and rhetorical devices are mixed in a harmonious structure. The most sublime level of rhetoric and best educational implications are conveyed in this story. This paper attempts to unveil the educational implications by way of exploring the rhetorical devices. These are the main aims of this paper. If anything in this research is of benefit, then it is only out of Allah's grace, and if I commit errors, then they are from my ill soul and Satan. All praise is due to Allah the Almighty in the beginning of this research and its end, as it is Him, glory be to Him, who gave me help and support.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

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Introduction

All praise is due to Allah. We worship Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evils within ourselves and from our ill deeds. Whoever is guided by Allah cannot be led astray, and whoever goes astray cannot be guided. We testify that there is no god but Allah, without any partners, and that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), is His servant and His messenger. With him (PBUH), Allah perfected His religion and completed His favor on the believers. He (PBUH) delivered his Lord's message, advised his nation, and struggled in the cause of Allah until the very end of his life. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, his blessed family and companions, and those who follow in their footsteps until the Day of Judgment.

The Glorious Qur'an is the miraculous book revealed by Allah, glory be to Him; its recitation is an act of worship. Allah revealed it as a guidance to humankind, a reference for the rulings of Islam, and a guide to whoever seeks to follow the straight path. Muslims have devoted themselves to it, by committing it to their hearts, interpreting it, deducing rulings from it, and expounding the marvels of its inimitability, style, and rhetoric. This last aspect of the Qur'an has been a field of inquiry and focus for many scholars. Many books and papers have been written investigating the secrets of Qur'anic style and rhetorical devices, which the masters among the Arab poets and orators failed to challenge.

The Book of Allah, the Qur'an, attains the highest level of rhetorical genius; it surpassed and challenged the linguistic competence of the Arabs at the time of its revelation. Authorities in the Arabic language were extremely surprised and overwhelmed upon hearing the Qur'an.

Yet this level of eloquence was not initially intended to be a source of surprise and challenge. Rather, the Qur'an has the highest and most sublime purpose: that the meanings, higher objectives, rulings, and Allah's will for this Book be delivered in the most eloquent and concise wording and structure, so that no one could challenge it and so that it could be a comprehensive guidance for humankind and touch ears and hearts alike.

The following sections explain the role of Qur'anic eloquence in delivering educational implications to the hearts of the audience. They also unveil the role of the marvelous rhetorical style in completing the picture and conveying the purpose of the Qur'anic verses.

Rationale of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the following aspects:

1. It unveils the ability of Qur'anic eloquence to fully convey educational implications clearly, instilling them in the recipients' consciousness and realization. Having fully comprehended the meanings, the receiver can express them in the most sublime style.
2. It proves that the eloquence of the Qur'an helped in elevating the level of Arabic rhetoric, as the Qur'an employs it in an excellent and innovative way throughout its verses.

3. It describes some of the higher objectives for which rhetoric is employed in the Book of Allah, the Most High, and for the sake of these objectives, the Qur'an is replete with figures of speech and stylistic and rhetorical devices.

Study Objectives

The present research aims at the following objectives:

1. Proving the excellence of the rhetoric of the Qur'an in expounding educational implications
2. Presenting practical applications, through the story of Āl 'Imrān, to highlight educational implications deduced from the usage of the rhetorical devices
3. Investigating the educational purposes of the Qur'anic verses through the rhetorical style of the Qur'an

Key Themes of the Study

The Definition of *al-Balāghah*

Al-Balāghah is one of the sciences of Arabic. It is concerned with wordings and meanings and the ways in which wordings and meanings are conveyed to recipients to be grasped precisely and effectively. In other words, it is concerned with conveying numerous meanings using few words and a variety of devices. The Arabs mastered this science in an unparalleled manner. Yet they were unable to challenge the perfect structures of the Qur'an. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an has added many new aspects to Arabic. In fact, the Arabic language increased in brilliancy after the revelation of the Qur'an with the addition of new expressions and meanings.

Al-Balāghah: The Linguistic Meaning

According to *Lisān al-'Arab*, *al-balāghah* means "the reaching, attaining and arrival at a thing, as it said, '*balagha al-shay' bulūghan,*' when one reaches or arrives at a thing, or is said, '*balaghtu al-ghāyah,*' when you arrive at your destination, and '*ballaghtuha ghayrī,*' when you caused another person to arrive at his destination. *Mablagh al-shay'* is its end. *Mubālaghah* in something means exerting oneself in doing it." According to *Lisān al-'Arab*, "*Al-Balāghah* means eloquence. *Al-Balaghu* and *al-balghu* refer to an eloquent man. When someone is described as *balīgh*, *balgh* or *bilgh*, it signifies that he is an eloquent man who attains, by his speech, the utmost scope of his mind and desire."¹

Al-Balāghah: The Technical Meaning

There are numerous definitions for *al-balāghah* according to classical scholars. For al-Jāhiz, it means "*al-khaṭābah*, or oratory, which he used interchangeably with *al-balāghah*." According to al-Sakkākī, it means that "the speaker reaches, in conveying meanings, a level that enables him to compose perfect constructions and to use similes, metaphors, and allegories according to their due manners."²

¹ Muḥammad ibn Makram ibn Manẓur, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣadir, 1997), 8:419.

² Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Īdāh fī 'ulūm al-balāghah*, ed. Bahj Ghazzāwī (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-'Ulūm, 1419 AH), 1:16.

Ibn al-Athīr stated: “The essence of *al-balāghah* is to cause the opponent to surrender, as good and innovative ideas and precise meanings are not beneficial if they do not help in fulfilling your purpose with the addressee.”³

Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, a prominent scholar, defined *al-balāghah* in his two books: *al-Talkhīs* (A summary) and *al-Īdāh* (The clarification). He stated, “*Al-Balāghah* is an attribute only of speech and the speaker. In speech, it refers to the compatibility of the discourse to the context, along with the maintenance of its eloquence. This differs from one case to another, as the occasions of speech and contexts differ. The level of the elegance of the discourse is elevated when it is compatible with the suitable consideration (*al-‘itibār al-munāsib*), and vice versa. Accordingly, the occasion of speech or context is the suitable consideration.”⁴

In his *Dalā’il al-‘ijāz*, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī notes the close relationship between words and meanings. He states that rhetoric, or elegance of speech, is not attributed to words and meanings but rather to the structures or the connections that are formed between words in different phrases and to the subsequent meanings. Al-Jurjānī called these relationships *al-naẓm* (a system of order).

Accordingly, *al-balāghah* technically means the compatibility of discourse to the context, or using eloquent speech according to the context and in consideration of different situations.⁵

The Educational Implications Deduced from the Usage of Rhetorical Devices in the Story of Āl ‘Imrān

Every single verse of the Book of Allah is replete with educational meanings, which are clearly presented in the linguistic structures and figures of speech that the Qur’an employs. The story of Āl ‘Imrān is one of the Qur’anic stories that communicates a collection of important educational implications that are presented with the highest level of euphony. The Qur’anic rhetorical style embellishes these implications so that their signification is complete and without imperfection.

In the following examples selected from the story of Āl ‘Imrān, we show the educational implications communicated through the usage of rhetorical devices.

First: The Etiquettes of *Du ‘ā’* (Supplicating the Almighty)

Allah, glorified is He, says: “[Remember] when the wife of ‘Imrān said, “My Lord! I dedicate, entirely to Your service, what is in my womb, so accept it from me. You [alone] are truly the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”⁶

The story begins with a supplication to Almighty Allah, which has been recorded by the Qur’an, so that people can recall it until the end of time. It has been offered as an example of a supplication that

³ Abū al-Faṭḥ Diyā’ al-Dīn Naṣrullah ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Mawṣilī ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sā’ir fī adab al-kātib wa-al-shā’ir*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥiy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 1995), 2:64.

⁴ Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Īdāh fī ‘ulūm al-balāghah*, ed. Bahīj Ghazzāwī (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā’ al-‘Ulūm, 1419 AH), 1:13.

⁵ Sa‘ad al-Dīn Mas‘ūd ibn ‘Umar al-Taftāzānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-ma‘ānī* (City: Dār al-Fikr, 1411 AH), 17.

⁶ Qur’an, Āl ‘Imran:35.

communicates several eternal meanings. This supplication contains many important educational implications that are conveyed through the eloquent style of the Qur'an. These implications follow.

1- Using the Relative Pronoun

Allah, exalted is He, tells us about the selection of Āl 'Imrān above the people of their time by referring, first, to the wife of 'Imrān, who dedicated what was in her womb entirely to Allah's service. Here, the wife of 'Imrān used the relative pronoun *mā* to indicate that she did not know the sex of her fetus.⁷ But her usage of this relative pronoun was, in fact, an invocation to Allah to have a son. It was as if she implied that "O my Lord, let this fetus be a boy so that he can serve Bayt al-Maqdis⁸ (the masjid in Jerusalem)." Using the relative pronoun *mā* in this context revealed her hope and unveiled to us her inner feelings and wishes.⁹ It also showed that she hoped to be given a son only to dedicate him to the service of Bayt al-Maqdis. The Qur'an's rhetorical usage of the relative pronoun here conveys to us her great and noble hope. While the wife of 'Imrān wished and hoped for a male child, she entrusted the affair to the Will of Allah. So she said, "You [alone] are truly the All-Hearing, All-Knowing," the one Who truly knows the truthfulness of my intention.

2- *Al-Taqdīm wa-al-Ta'khīr* (Foregrounding and Backgrounding)

Al-Taqdīm wa-al-ta'khīr is a rhetorical device used by the Qur'an to communicate significant meanings. The use of this device in the Qur'anic verse at hand communicates an educational implication. As the wife of 'Imrān supplicated the Almighty, "My Lord! I dedicate, entirely to Your service, what is in my womb," we notice that she stated the intention behind her dedication first,¹⁰ saying "*laka*" or "entirely to Your service." This is a conclusive proof of the truthfulness of her purpose and of her hope that her good intention might be helpful, especially as she was older and had lost hope in having more children.¹¹

⁷ See al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-maṣūn fī 'ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Kharrāṭ (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1987), 346. Al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī says, "In Allah's saying, '*mā fī baṭnī* (what is in my womb),' *mā*, which is a relative noun used to refer to inanimate objects, is used because the gender of what is in her womb is unknown. Such unknown objects may be referred to using *mā*. A case in point here is when you see something moving far away and you do not know whether it is a human or not, then you ask: "*Mā hadhā* (what is that)?" The same also applies when you become certain that it is a human being, but you do not know whether it is a male or female. That is the opinion of those who believe that *mā* refers only to inanimate objects. But for those who believe that it may refer to both rational and inanimate objects, their opinion needs no justification here. It is also said that as what is in the womb had no discretion or mind, then it can be referred to using *mā*, which is used to refer to nonrational objects.

⁸ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:498; Author, *Rūḥ al-bayān* (City: Publisher, year) 2:26. Qāḍī Abū Ya'la said, "Such a vow is allowable in our legislation. When one vows to raise his little child to be a virtuous person and help him to memorize the Qur'an and learn Islamic jurisprudence as well as all Islamic sciences, then it is considered a valid vow." Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 8:127.

⁹ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:114.

¹⁰ Al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-Qadīr*, ed. Firyal 'Ulwān (Riyadh: al-Rushd Library, year), 1:299.

¹¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn al-'Arabī al-Ma'āfirī al-Ishbīlī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 3rd ed., ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭṭā, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 1:354. Ibn 'Ādil al-Ḥanbalī said, "One desires a son to be a source for pleasure and support to oneself. And this woman asked Allah for a son for such

Intention is the best vehicle by which one may attain one's purpose. Therefore, the wife of 'Imrān stated her intention first, even before making her vow, in order to prove her sincerity and express her hope that Allah would grant her wish as a reward for her good intention.

3- Using a Present Tense Verb

The supplication is expressed in a way that implies that it shall be accepted and realized by Allah, as the wife of 'Imrān did not make it conditional by saying, "if You will." She expressed her hope while showing confidence that it would be fulfilled by Allah. That is why she followed it up with "so accept it from me." It is as if she was very confident that the newborn would be a boy, and, therefore, she supplicated Allah to accept and reward her for her vow.¹² This is one of the etiquettes of making *du'ā'* that communicates a positive belief in Allah, exalted be He, and an absolute certainty in His will. All these great meanings are communicated by the rhetorical device of using a present tense verb.

Accordingly, we find that the wife of 'Imrān took all measures to ensure that her *du'ā'* would be accepted; she supplicated Allah with the name *al-Rabb*, or the Lord, who takes care of His slaves, and she stated her intention for her vow before making it.¹³ She also described her fetus as "*muḥarrara*" (entirely for Your service).¹⁴ This is an honorary designation that indicates that when he is dedicated to the service of Bayt al-Maqdis, then it is as if he is freed from the shackles of this world to be only a

purposes. But when Allah, the Almighty, granted her a baby, she dedicated him entirely to the service of Allah (i.e., not to be preoccupied with any worldly affair). This is the vow of the righteous people." Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn 'Adil al-Ḥanbalī Abū Ḥafṣ, *al-Lubāb fī 'ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. 'Adil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Ali Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 4:39.

¹² Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:477.

¹³ Abū al-Su'ūd said, "If anyone wants Allah to respond to their invocation, then they should supplicate the Almighty while mentioning the most sublime names of Allah that are suitable to one's invocation, use devices of emphasis in their sentences of supplication to show their dire need, and foreground the sentence of the preposition and the noun following it to show complete emphasis on it." Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:27.

¹⁴ See Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:232.

servant to Allah. As this work pleases Allah,¹⁵ she asks Him to grant her something that He loves and is pleased with.¹⁶

Then she said, “*fataqabbal minnī*” (so accept it from me). In Arabic, *taqabbal* signifies taking something while being satisfied.¹⁷ This is, in fact, a request for a son, as it is inconceivable that the supplication would be accepted without giving the supplicant what she asked for.¹⁸ Furthermore, the verb used here is not “*iqbal*,” which means “accept,” but “*taqqabal*,” which signifies a more affirmative manner of requesting. This is because of a feature of Arabic wherein an emphasis of meaning increases along with an increase in the letters of an Arabic word.

4- *Al-Ta'kīd* (Emphasis)

The wife of 'Imrān then concluded her supplication, saying, “*Innaka anta al-Samī' al-'Alīm*” (You [alone] are truly the All-Hearing, All-Knowing). In this passage, there are three methods of emphasis: “*inna*,”¹⁹ the detached pronoun “*anta*,” and the definite article in “*al-Samī'*,” or “the All-Hearing.” All these devices of emphasis are used for confirming the request and the urgency of its acceptance by Allah.²⁰

The two most sublime names of Allah mentioned in this supplication have many meanings: You are the All-Knowing of that which I conceal and the All-Hearing of all that can be heard. You are the All-Knowing of that which has happened and what is happening, and, therefore, You know my intention.²¹ All this is stated so that Allah may fulfill her request for her, as His, exalted be He, knowledge of the truthfulness of her intention and sincerity would make her eligible to receive Allah's bounty and benevolence. The emphasis of this sentence in this way shows the firm belief of the wife of 'Imrān

¹⁵ “*Al-Muḥarrar* is the one who is made entirely free. It is said ‘*I ḥarrartu* a slave’ when you set him free from bondage, and it is also said ‘*I ḥarrartu* the book’ when you have edited it. A man is said to be *hurr*, when he is entirely free with no authority on him. The *ḥīn* (mud) is described as *ḥurr* when it is pure and not mixed with any other material such as sand and pebbles. As for its meaning in this Qur’anic verse, it means, according to al-Sha‘bī, ‘one who is dedicated entirely to worshipping Allah.’ It is also said that it means ‘a servant of the pledge,’ or ‘freed from all worldly affairs to be dedicated to the worship of Allah alone.’ It is stated also that it means ‘a servant to those who teach the scripture at synagogues. The meaning here is that she made a vow that her newborn boy would be dedicated to the service of Allah. Al-Aṣam says, “War booty and the spoils of war were prohibited to the Children of Israel, so setting slaves free for them was in the form of dedicating their children in this way. Their custom was that when a son grew to the extent that he could work, then he should serve his parents. But parents used to give up their right and dedicate their boys to serve at churches until they reached puberty. At this age, they were given the choice either to remain at the church or to leave. All prophets had, from among their progeny, boys who were dedicated to serve Bayt al-Maqdis.” Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:184.

¹⁶ See Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:115.

¹⁷ Al-Qāsimī, *Maḥasin al-ta’wīl*, 2nd ed., ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 4:89.

¹⁸ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 2:477.

¹⁹ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-‘Imādī Abū al-Su‘ūd, *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 2:28.

²⁰ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 4:350.

²¹ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-‘Imādī Abū al-Su‘ūd, *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 2:28.

that her supplication will be accepted. Restricting the two designations of hearing and knowing to Allah, glory be to Him, shows that she seeks Him alone and has no hope in any but Him, out of her complete submission to Him.

The story of the wife of ‘Imrān’s vow unveils to us her firm belief and her determination to dedicate the most beloved thing to her to Allah. Having touched upon the issue of motherhood here, the Qur’an presents the highest level a mother can attain. This is what the Qur’an wants to affirm with regards to motherhood and its role in life. It presents us with a mother who gets pregnant and delivers only for a higher purpose: namely, that her offspring be dedicated for the sake of Allah and be a seed that yields goodness and righteousness.

The Qur’an wants mothers to aspire to this lofty model. This model asks mothers to exchange natural, thoughtless actions for thoughtful actions of a higher purpose. This model has recurred throughout Muslim history and the lives of the righteous predecessors, whose mothers were sources of goodness who prepared future leaders to carry the message of Islam to the world.

This is the first general educational indication that the verse aims at communicating to the recipients’ hearts and minds in a lofty rhetorical style and a miraculously ordered system.

Second: The Believers’ Stance Regarding Allah’s Decrees

Allah, the Almighty says, “When she delivered, she said, ‘My Lord! I have given birth to a girl,’—and Allah fully knew what she had delivered—‘and the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I seek Your protection for her and her offspring from Satan, the accursed.’”²²

This noble verse depicts the scene in which the wife of ‘Imrān repeatedly prayed to Allah to grant her a child who would serve Bayt al-Maqdis. She was hoping that she would give birth to a son so that her hope and vow would be fulfilled. The verse at hand describes her state upon giving birth to a daughter. She was afraid that her vow might not have been accepted. So in a state of apology,²³ she said, “My Lord! I have given birth to a girl.” She said this sentence in a regretful tone,²⁴ prefacing it with an attribute of benevolence, “My Lord!,” in order to invoke Allah’s bounty.²⁵

The following points enumerate the educational implications that have been elucidated in this noble passage through the rhetorical devices that convey the meanings intended by Allah.

1. The Modes of Recitation and Their Significance

²² Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān:36.

²³ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:23.

²⁴ The pronoun in the word “*waḍa’at’ha*” has two meanings. First, it is a device of emphasis, if we consider that it explains the relative noun “*mā*.” Second, it is explanatory, if we assume that it refers to the newborn. Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Adil al-Ḥanbalī Abū Ḥafṣ, *al-Lubāb fī ‘ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. ‘Adil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Ali Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 4:239.

²⁵ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 4:350.

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There are two modes of recitation in the noble verse, “*Wa-Allahu a'lamu bima waḍa'at* (and Allah fully knew what she had delivered).”²⁶

The first way is to recite the letter *tā'* of the word *waḍa'at* with a rounded vowel (*ḍammah*) to show that the wife of 'Imrān is the subject of the verb and that she is speaking about herself. Usually, this kind of statement would be made to inform someone who does not know the news, but she wanted to say that Allah knows everything. The purpose of her statement was not to communicate the news, but to convey something closely associated to it (i.e., to show regret). In addition, she used the name of Allah instead of the pronoun “You” to express her hope that Allah would bless her child with His attributes of perfection and majesty.²⁷

Al-Ḥarālī states the following:

Her statement in this context denotes that she was afraid that what she had delivered might not be sufficient to fulfill her vow, as she came to know that the newborn was a daughter. But Allah made her child superior to her original dedication of a male, which she used to think would be superior. After clearly stating her purpose for this vow, Mary, may Allah's peace be upon her, was superior to her original vow, out of Allah's bounty and grace on her.²⁸

The second mode of recitation is to recite the letter *tā'* of the word *waḍa'at* with a zero vowel (*sukūn*).²⁹ The meaning, therefore, is that Allah is more knowledgeable than she is about the superiority of what she delivered and that this newborn girl is superior to the male she asked for. Allah is more knowledgeable than she is about the great matters associated with this newborn girl, and He would make her and her son a miracle for all humankind, even while the wife of 'Imrān remained ignorant of these facts and showed regret. The meaning here is that you do not really know the status of this child granted to you, and it is Allah alone who knows all the wonders and miracles as well as the esteem and

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī says, “Scholars of qira'āt (modes of recitations) differed regarding the recitation of “*waḍa'at* (gave birth).” The majority of the scholars recited it as Allah the Almighty, is telling by Himself as (*waḍa'at*). Yet, some early scholars recited it to mean that the mother of Mary is the one who is speaking (*waḍa'tu*). The preponderant recitation is that which had been recited by a large group of authorities who acknowledged its correctness. This is the first mode of recitation. The odd (*shādh*) recitation should not be cited here as a counterargument.” Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:334.

²⁷ See Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:117.

²⁸ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 5:336.

²⁹ *Waḍa'at* in the first person shows a shift in the mode of the discourse from reporting to informing to show a higher level of esteem. Thus, this is considered an apology on her part to Allah the Almighty because she gave birth to a child who is not suitable for service at the synagogue, or to console herself by signifying that Allah might have a wisdom in that He, the Most High, might let this girl be better than a male baby. Thus, the justification in the case of such a shift would be apparent. Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:28; Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:233.

rank that will be associated with her.³⁰ The point here is that the male child she wanted to have, as was then the custom in relation to that specific vow, would not have been equal to the granted daughter. Rather, she is superior. This is because the most superior vowed male cannot surpass the rank of their prophets, who were sent to confirm the legislations of the Torah. Yet this female child would not only be of high rank, but she would also be the means of delivering one of their greatest prophets, who would receive a special legislation and would confirm the greatest legislation.³¹ The discourse here is intended to educate people: whoever entrusts all their affairs to Allah should not inquire about Allah's decrees.³²

Although Mary is a female child, she is allowed to attain the rank of men with regard to perfection, so that she is considered amongst those women who attained perfection. Therefore, this newborn girl, whom Allah alone knew her gender, was a divine gift who would have no equal in human history. All this can be understood from Allah's grace in responding to the blessed *du'ā'* of her mother. This verse demonstrates the power of entrusting all matters to Allah, submitting oneself to Him, and relying on the One of great bounty in managing all one's affairs.

2. The Rhetorical Meanings of *Alif Lām*

Allah the Almighty says, “*Wa-laysa al-dhakarū ka-al-unthá* (and the male is not like the female).” The meaning is that the male requested by the wife of ‘Imrān is not equal to the female that she was given. The presence of the definite article (*alif lām*) in the two words (*al-dhakarū*, or the male, and *al-unthá*, or the female) has two implications:

1. The letter *lām* is for *al-‘ahd*.³³ Accordingly, the meaning is that the male you requested and consider suitable as a guardian is not like the female that was given, as the limits of her knowledge preclude her from the great affairs that surround her.³⁴ This statement by the wife of ‘Imrān may show that this woman had firm belief in Allah's majesty and knew that everything Allah decrees for a person is better than what they want themselves.³⁵

³⁰ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:23; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-‘Imādī Abū al-Su‘ūd, *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilá mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 2:28.

³¹ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:23.

³² Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma‘ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr ‘aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:232.

³³ The word ‘*ahd*’ means “knowledge” or “recognition.” This *lām* is used when the addressee is aware of the particular noun that is referenced.

³⁴ Quoting al-Zamakhsharī, the author of *al-Durr al-maṣūn* said, “If you said, ‘What is the meaning of her saying: ‘And the male is not like female,’” I would say, ‘It is an explanation of the relative pronoun “*mā*” to signify the greatness of the issue. The meaning then is “The male I asked for is not like the female I have been given.”’ The initial letters *alif* and *lām* here are for *al-‘ahd*.” Al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-maṣūn fī ‘ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Kharrāṭ (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1987), 3:349.

³⁵ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:182. See also Abū Zayd al-Tha‘ālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān* (Beirut: Mu‘ssasat al-‘Alamī for Publications, year), 1:260; Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālīb al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī al-Ḥafīz al-Qāḍī Ibn ‘Atṭīyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), 3:64.

2. The letter *lām* is for *al-jins*.³⁶ Accordingly, she wanted to say that the male gender is not like the female gender with regard to superiority and rank. Therefore, Allah told her that He knows better than her of the superiority of her newborn girl and that she is superior to the male she requested.³⁷ In this example, Almighty Allah directs people to an aspect relating to *du 'ā'*: that He, glory be to Him, responds to invocations with better than what was asked for.

This verse negates similarity in this respect, just as it negates the similitude of the less virtuous to the more virtuous one. The less virtuous here is the male and the more virtuous is the female. Please add complete name.³⁸ This is like Allah's saying, "Can those who know and those who do not know be equal?"³⁹ This verse communicates a second educational implication: Allah wants to teach people about their perceptions about women. He, exalted be He, states that the gifted woman is, in the sight of Allah, better than the requested and anticipated man. This denotes the lofty rank and higher status Islam grants to women. Glory be to Him who elevated the status of women and corrected people's perceptions of them.

3. Using a Present Tense Verb

In Allah's saying, "*wa-innī sammaytuha Maryam wa-innī u 'īdhuha bika*" (I have named her Mary, and I seek Your protection for her), the present tense is used to signify continuity and emphasis.⁴⁰ The state of the wife of 'Imrān is such that she might abandon this newborn girl, but she here shows that she is content with Allah's decree and that she would not nullify her vow, even if the baby was a girl.

³⁶ The word *jins* denotes a class of subjects. When this *lām* is joined to a noun, the entire class is intended, without intending that it is true of every individual of the class nor a specific individual.

³⁷ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:332. Quoting al-Zamakhsarī, the author of *al-Durr al-maṣūn* says, "The context of the discourse should have necessitated that the negation would precede her statement that the gender that was given to her was not suitable for the purpose she dedicated it to. Accordingly, the construction of the phrase would be 'the female is not like the male.' But this was departed from because she started with what was most important to her. Because her heart was overwhelmed with a male newborn and her thoughts were preoccupied with him, her tongue began with him. It is as if she wanted to say, 'The male gender is not like the female gender due to the differences which exist between them.'" Al-Samīn al-Ḥalabi, *al-Durr al-maṣūn fī 'ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Kharrāt (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1987), 3:349.

³⁸ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:332. "Her statement here connotes her fear that what she had delivered might not be sufficient for fulfilling her vow, since she discovered that she had given birth to a girl. Yet Allah, the Most High, granted her a baby more perfect than the male newborn she was asking for. Hence, Mary was more perfect than her original vow, out of Allah's bounty for her." Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:37.

³⁹ Qur'an, al-Zumar:9.

⁴⁰ See Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:132. "The phrase '*wa innī u 'īdhuha bika*' is joined to the phrase '*wa innī sammaytuha*.' The predicate of the article '*inna*' here is a present tense verb, which denotes that she wanted the protection to be continual, with no interruption. This differs from the two verbs '*waḍa'at'ha*' (delivered her) and '*sammaytuha*' (I named her), which are in the past tense, since the events of giving birth and naming had ended already. The One sought for refuge and protection is mentioned before the joined name in order to emphasize that He is more important." Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn 'Adil al-Ḥanbalī Abū Ḥafṣ, *al-Lubāb fī 'ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. 'Adil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Ali Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 4:44.

In addition, she prays for her daughter, a sign that shows contentment and, even more, love. Moreover, she uses the article of emphasis “inna” in her supplication, even though a supplication does not require an emphasis: “*Wa-innī u ṭdhuha bika*” (and I seek Your protection for her).⁴¹

Ibn ‘Āshūr said, “The phrase ‘*wa-innī u ṭdhuha bika*’ is joined to the phrase ‘*wa-innī sammaytuha Maryam.*’” The predicate of the article “inna” is a present tense verb, which denotes that she wants the protection to be continual, with no interruption. This differs from the two verbs “*waḍa ‘at’ha*” (delivered her) and “*sammaytuha*” (I named her), which are in the past tense, as the events of giving birth and naming had already ended. The One sought for refuge and protection is mentioned before the joined name in order to emphasize that He is more important.

This shall be the position of the believer in receiving and responding to Allah’s decrees, and this is how to surrender oneself to Allah’s will and entrust all one’s affairs to Him. That is what this verse teaches us.

4. *Takrār al-Ta’kīd (Emphasis by Repetition)*

The emphasis is repeated in Almighty Allah’s saying, on the tongue of the wife of ‘Imrān: “*wa innī sammaytuha Maryam wa innī u ṭdhuha bika* (I have named her Mary, and I seek Your protection for her).” Because her dislike of her newborn’s gender may convey her desire to abandon her, she says this to confirm the predicate and to show her complete satisfaction with Allah’s decree.⁴²

5. *Al-Taqdīm wa-al-Ta’khīr*

The One sought for refuge and protection, as implied in “*bika*,” is mentioned before the joined name in order to emphasize that He is more important. As the newborn girl was dedicated entirely to Allah the Almighty, He states that she is protected by words just as she is materially protected.⁴³ She is in Allah’s protection, and no one can harm anyone under the King’s protection.⁴⁴

With this supplication for her refuge in Allah, this mother entrusted her daughter to her Lord and left her under His protection and custody. She sought refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan for Mary and her progeny. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Every newborn baby is touched by Shaytan [Satan] when it is born, and the baby starts crying because of this touch, except Maryam [Mary] and her son.” This means that Shaytan attempts to seduce every newborn baby in order to have

⁴¹ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma‘ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr ‘aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:334. See also Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī al-Ḥafīz al-Qāḍī Ibn ‘Atṭīyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), 3:64; Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:117.

⁴² Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī al-Ḥafīz al-Qāḍī Ibn ‘Atṭīyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), 3:64. See also Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:117.

⁴³ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:119.

⁴⁴ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:38.

influence over him or her, except for Mary and her son, as Allah protected them with the blessing of this refuge in Him.

This kind of invocation is an intimate discourse, in which the speaker feels as if they are in direct and private contact with their Lord, and that they can tell God their inner feelings and their issues and can dedicate what they own to the service of Allah. This is the state of the chosen servants with their Lord: a state of courtesy, intimacy, and direct contact, where they feel that they are speaking directly to the Most Loving, the All-Hearing, and the Responsive.

The second passage is concluded with a description of how a believer should deal with Allah the Almighty. It teaches us this etiquette through the response of the wife of 'Imrān and how she accepted Allah's disposal of her affairs. This lesson is conveyed to us through different rhetorical devices.

Third: Allah's Treatment of His Beloved Ones

Allah, the Most High says, "So her Lord accepted her graciously and blessed her with a pleasant upbringing."⁴⁵

In the passage, the meaning of the phrase "When Allah gives, you will be astonished by His bounty" becomes crystal clear. In it, we find Allah's response to an invocation by a truthful heart and His acceptance of sincere dedication to His service. The following points explain this idea.

1. Using the Form *Tafa 'ala*

Allah the Almighty tells us that she invoked Him and that he responded to this invocation, saying, "*fataqabbalahā*" (so He accepted her). The expression of *qabūl* (acceptance) here is in the *tafa 'ala* form, which is an Arabic form that has two meanings.⁴⁶

First, it has the meaning of progress and multiplicity. This form indicates that Allah granted Mary new provision in each stage of her life. Therefore, the verb *faqabilahā* is not used, which would have indicated that Allah would grant her bounty once. *Fataqabbalahā* is used, which implies the continuity of giving and blessing. This is implied in the Arabic form *tafa 'ala*.⁴⁷

Second, words in the *tafa 'ala* form indicate a special keenness by the doer of the action to manifest it, as in *taṣabbur* and *tajallud*. The former means the highest degree of showing patience and the latter means to exert oneself in enduring difficulties. Accordingly, the verb *taqabbala* emphasizes the

⁴⁵ Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān:37.

⁴⁶ "*Qubūl* is the verbal noun of *qabila*. Here the noun does not appear according to the form of its verb. Arabs used to frequently do this . . . This applies also to the verb *anbata*, *inbāta* (let her grow). It is narrated from Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' that he said, 'We did not hear the Arab saying the word *qabul* with an initial rounded vowel (*ḍammah*), although regular rules of Arabic require this, such as the words *dukhūl* (entry) and *khurūj* (exit).' I do not know any other noun that violates the rules as this noun does." Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:344.

⁴⁷ Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:37.

showing of acceptance. This indicates that Allah shows a level of care for this girl that has not been offered to anyone before.⁴⁸

Accordingly, this passage has two meanings. First, acceptance here means that He, glory be to Him, made a special case for her: He accepted her mother's dedication of her, even though the dedicated one is a female child, a matter that never happened before. Second, He, glory be to Him, accepted her immediately after her delivery, even before she grew up and became qualified for service.⁴⁹

Then the verse shows Allah's benevolence to the girl in the phrase, "*rabbuha*, her Lord," which shows that it is Allah who cares for her, and this is the highest level of benevolence and bounty.

2. Using the Verb Form *Af'ala*

Allah's saying, "*bi-qabūl ḥasan* (accepted her graciously),"⁵⁰ connotes the secret of acceptance, which is that Allah accepted her intention and her good dedication and so He responded to her with benevolence and bounty. This acceptance indicates the hidden blessing and satisfaction of Allah with her; the "*inbāt*" (pleasant upbringing) refers to Allah's physical bounties on her.⁵¹ The use of the *af'ala* form of the verb (*anbata*) and its verbal noun (*nabata*) offers the meaning that Allah made her grow in a good manner. So her pleasant upbringing is likened to taking care of small shoots by way of metaphor.⁵²

This signifies completeness from two aspects:

1. Absolute completeness of the inner aspect, as Allah bestowed upon her hidden blessings and divine bounty, which people cannot grasp
2. Absolute completeness of the outer aspect, just like the growth of plants, which people can see during the different beautiful stages of blooming

In this way, she both had good influences and made an impact, as Allah made her grow in a good manner out of His considerable care in response to her mother's invocation.⁵³

All this was the outcome of the sincerity of the mother and her complete devotion in her vow. It was also a preparation for this little girl to be qualified to receive the breath of the spirit and the word of

⁴⁸ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 8:29.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilá mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:29.

⁵⁰ The letter *bā'* is an added letter and the word *qabūl* is a verbal noun that emphasizes the previous verb, and thus, the passage means that He graciously accepted her. He left the apparent as a sign that acceptance is dependent on complete satisfaction with Allah's decrees and conducive to divine care.

⁵¹ Her Lord made her grow in a good manner using His provision until she became a fully grown woman. Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year).

⁵² Allah made her grow in a good manner with regard to both her physical and inner aspects. Her pleasant upbringing is likened to taking care of small shoots by way of metaphor. Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:92.

⁵³ Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:219.

Allah, and to give birth to Prophet Jesus (may Allah's peace be upon him), who has no other human equal.

Al-Ḥarālī said:

In this special chapter of the Qur'an, Allah the Almighty tells us the story of Mary (may Allah's peace be upon her) and that He, the Almighty, accepted her, made her grow in a good manner, and elevated her morals in order to negate ill thoughts about her and her son. This chapter is intended to dispel the doubts that led the Christians astray. In each chapter [of the Qur'an], the part of the story that is most relevant to the general purpose of the chapter as a whole is the one that is related. In this way, one scene of a story is related in one chapter, while another scene or scenes are related in another chapter, as chapters have different purposes. This applies to the stories of the prophets that are repeated in the Qur'an, and which have different purposes, such as encouraging people to worship Allah, instilling belief in their hearts, warning them, etc.⁵⁴

Accordingly, this statement is a response by Allah to the doubts that people raised about her. Thus, those who slandered her have gone astray, and those who claimed divinity in her son have disbelieved.⁵⁵

Fourth: The Absoluteness of the Divine Power

Allah the Most High said, “[Her Lord] entrusted her to the charge of Zakariyyā. Whenever Zakariyyā visited her in the sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions. He exclaimed, ‘O Mary! Where did this come from?’ She replied, ‘It is from Allah. Surely Allah provides for whoever He wills without limit.’”⁵⁶

This verse reveals the absoluteness of the divine power, the beauty of Allah's generosity, and His great bounties for the chosen ones among His servants as follows:

1. Almighty Allah says, “[Her Lord] entrusted her to the charge of Zakariyyā.”⁵⁷ It is Allah who

⁵⁴ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:219.

⁵⁵ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:220.

⁵⁶ Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān:37.

⁵⁷ There are different *qira'āt* (modes of recitation) in Allah's saying “وكفلها.” The majority of reciters in Hijaz, Medina, and Basrah pronounced it as “*kafalaha*” with one *fā'* (literally meaning “Zakariyyā took her into his guardianship”), taking into account the meaning of Allah's statement [in a subsequent verse]: “They cast lots to decide who would be Mary's guardian.” The reciters of Kufa pronounced it “*kaffalaha*,” meaning that Allah entrusted her into the care of Zakariyyā. I think that the most preferred recitation is *kaffalaha*—that is, “Allah entrusted her to the guardianship of Zakariyyā.” Allah entrusted her into the care of Zakariyyā by His will. It was reported that Zakariyyā and his peers differed about who would take Mary into his custody. They cast their lots in the Jordan River. Some scholars said that Zakariyyā's pen resisted the current while the others' pens flew with the current. Thus, it was Allah who made Zakariyyā win. Others said: Zakariyyā's pen floated while the others' pens sank. Whatever the case was, it was undoubted that

provided this baby with the best guardian (i.e., Zakariyyā). Allah made Zakariyyā the guardian of this baby and the one responsible to take care of all her affairs, not through a direct revelation but as a kind of guidance from Allah to Zakariyyā. Zakariyyā's desire to do so and the fact that his pen flew when they threw their pens to see who the guardian of Mary would be are both indications of Allah's power and His care for those whom he supports.⁵⁸

2. "Whenever Zakariyyā went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions. He said, 'Where did this come from?' She replied, 'It is from Allah. Surely Allah provides for whoever He wills without measure.'" In this verse, the Glorious Qur'an uses several rhetorical devices to reveal the greatness of the divine power through the following methods:
 1. The adverb of time is mentioned before the subject in the sentence to show the utmost care and attention for her affair. It means, "Every time he visited her, he would find her supplied with provisions."⁵⁹
 2. The indefinite form of the word *ḥisāb* (measure) is used, meaning "without measure." This means that provisions were given without measuring their great amount or that they were given as a pure grace and not as compensation for a good deed or as a reward that she deserved.
 3. The expression "*annā*" is used, which means from where did this provision come to you? Her answer, "It is from Allah," indicates that it was not brought by any human being.
 4. The use of the indefinite form of the word "provision" in Allah's saying, "found her supplied with provision," indicates how great this provision was. The use of the indefinite form makes it great, bountiful, wonderful, and unexpected provision.⁶⁰ Thus, before the miracle of Jesus's birth, Allah gave graces and miracles to Mary, as He said in another verse, "making her and her son a sign for all peoples." This implies her high status, dignity, and unique blessings with these merits.⁶¹

"It is a form of support for Mary that Allah did not entrust all her affairs to Zakariyyā (PBUH). Thus, whenever Zakariyyā visited her to check if she wanted food, he would find her supplied with provision. This is to teach that Allah does not burden the people with the affairs of His close servants, and that those who serve His close servants are not burdened by their affairs."⁶²

As for the revelation of the presence of this provision, Mary was showered with blessed provision of all types, to the extent that her guardian, who was a prophet, was surprised by the bounty of this

Allah decreed that Zakariyyā would be the guardian of Mary. So Zakariyyā's guardianship of Mary was decreed when Allah gave victory to Zakariyyā over his peers who disagreed about who should take care of Mary. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:384.

⁵⁸ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:212.

⁵⁹ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 1:272.

⁶⁰ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:493.

⁶¹ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:493.

⁶² 'Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Hawāzin ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, 3rd ed., ed. Ibrahīm al-Basyūnī (City: Egyptian General Book Authority, year), 1:305.

provision. He asked her: how and from where do you get all this? Her answer was nothing but a faithful woman's submission, recognition of Allah's graces, and complete reliance upon Allah: "It is from Allah. Surely Allah provides for whoever He wills without measure." It is an answer that reveals the status of this believer with her Lord and her desire to keep a secret between her and her Lord, as well as her humbleness in speaking about this secret without boasting. This unusual event surprised Prophet Zakariyyā and was the prelude to the wonders of the births of Yahya and Jesus.⁶³

Fifth: Divine Grace (*Karāmah*) as a Reason to Have Hope in Allah's Mercy

Almighty Allah says, "Then and there Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord, saying, 'My Lord! Grant me—from Your own [power]—good progeny. You are certainly the Hearer of prayers.'"⁶⁴

The Glorious Qur'an teaches us in this verse that witnessing a divine grace drives the believer's heart to expect goodness from Allah and that the presence of the divine bounty and support arouses hope in Allah's great blessings. This is what happened with Zakariyyā (PBUH). When he saw the miraculous provisions of Mary and Allah's bountiful generosity, he felt a desire for a child.

In this verse, one notices the accuracy of Qur'anic expressions. In the supplication of Zakariyyā, we find the Qur'an using subtle expressions because every single word in the Qur'an has special meanings and purposes. In the following points, we elaborate on Zakariyyā's hope in Allah's Mercy in the context of his witnessing Allah's generosity to Mary.

1. Using a Demonstrative Pronoun for Distant Objects

The Arabic demonstrative pronoun used is *hunālika* (lit., there) which means in that place where he was sitting with Mary (at the mihrab) or at that time.⁶⁵ The word *hunālika* can be used to refer to both place and time.⁶⁶ It also implies the meanings of highness, distance, and elevation. Thus, it indicates the high rank of Mary (PBUH).

2. *Al-Taqdīm wa-al-Ta'khīr*

The demonstrative pronoun at the beginning of the verse indicates that Zakariyyā instantly invoked his

⁶³ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* (City: Publisher, year), 1:364.

⁶⁴ Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān:38

⁶⁵ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 1:361.

⁶⁶ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:494.

Lord without delay because of the divine grace he saw with Mary.⁶⁷

When Zakariyyā saw the miraculous provisions Allah gave to Mary, including out-of-season fruits, he felt a strong desire to have a child, even though he was an old man and his wife was infertile. He hoped that Allah would grant him and his wife a child despite their old age, just as Allah, glory be to Him, granted Mary the fruits of summer in winter, and the fruits of winter in summer. What happened with Mary was unusual, just as it is unusual for people to find an infertile woman giving birth. Zakariyyā hoped that the Almighty Allah would grant him a child, so he asked Him for a good offspring.⁶⁸

At that time, Zakariyyā—the old man who had never had a child—felt a strong natural desire for a child and for the continuity of his lineage. It is a desire that does not fade even in the souls of ascetic servants who devote themselves to worshiping Allah and serving the temple. This is the nature upon which Allah has created people in His supreme and divine wisdom, so that life may continue.⁶⁹

In Allah's use of *hunālika*, it can be understood that one should look for blessed places and times for the invocation of Allah.⁷⁰

Wisdom is the treasure that believers seek. People with pure souls pay heed to whatever they see and hear. Therefore, Zakariyyā instantly asked Allah for a child, even though he lacked the natural ability to father a child. Zakariyyā was suffering without a child, as Allah says about him in Sūrat Maryam. However, in the context described in the verse, Zakariyyā was present in a time and place that allowed him to witness a divine grace. The people of goodness choose blessed places and times to witness blessed events. Places and times resemble righteous people in that they are objects for the manifestation of God's pleasure.⁷¹

He asked Allah for a good progeny because it is a good progeny that is the means for goodness in this world and the Hereafter, through their good beneficial deeds. Witnessing a miracle drove Zakariyyā to ask Allah for something that was beyond his ability, because he found himself close to the care of Allah at a time and a place of divine grace. Thus, his invocation did not exceed the limits of politeness with Allah as stated by al-Qarāfī when he differentiated between things that are permissible to ask

⁶⁷ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī* (City: Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 3:14.

⁶⁸ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālīb Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:360.

⁶⁹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* (City: Publisher, year), 1:365.

⁷⁰ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:214.

⁷¹ Muḥammad al-Ṭahīr ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahīr Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:238.

Allah for and those that are impermissible. The word "Hearer" in his saying, "You are certainly the Hearer of prayer," means the One who answers people's supplications.⁷²

3. Using the Word "Rabb" (Lord) and "Grant" in His Invocation

"Saying 'My Lord! Grant me—from Your own [power]—good offspring,'" Zakariyyā asked Allah using the Arabic word "Rabb" (Lord) because it has the implication of taking good care of others and managing their affairs. When Zakariyyā asked Allah, he used the verb "hab lī" (lit., grant me). *Hab* is a derivative of *hibah*, meaning a grant or a gift and implying pure benevolence, which is done for no return. Zakariyyā was an old man and his wife was infertile; being granted a child in this case would be a gift without the appropriate means. Thus, this gift is a pure benevolence from Allah, and this was why Zakariyyā said "from Your own [power]" (i.e., purely through Your power that requires no means).⁷³

Al-Ḥarālī said:

When Almighty Allah allowed Zakariyyā to witness how He causes things to happen without their prerequisites for whomever He wills, as happened with Mary (who was under his guardianship although in essence she was his guardian), Zakariyyā asked his Lord, the always Benevolent, to grant him a child against all norms, just as He granted Mary provision without its appropriate means. Therefore, it was necessary for Zakariyyā to ask Allah at that time.⁷⁴

The fact that he said "grant me" indicates that he asked Allah for a righteous child, as this is the practice of the prophets and the righteous.⁷⁵

4. Using the Expression "Min Ladunka" (From Your Own)

The Arabic word *ladun* (lit., by, at, near) is a preposition used to refer to something close, while 'inda (synonymous with *ladun*) can refer to something close or far. 'Inda is more precise than *ladun*, and that is why it is used in answering "where" questions, as opposed to *ladun*. The preposition *min* (lit., by or from) metaphorically signifies the origin of something. Thus, the expression "min ladunka"

⁷² Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:238.

⁷³ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:463.

⁷⁴ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsūb al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:41.

⁷⁵ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 2:463.

means grant me, my Lord, purely by Your own power, without the customary conditions.⁷⁶ The expression “*min ladunka*” is associated with the verb “grant me.”⁷⁷

The point here is that having a child in normal cases requires certain conditions, but as Zakariyyā lacked these conditions, his speech meant that: I want you, my Lord, to stop requiring these conditions in this case and grant me a child through Your own power.⁷⁸ Al-Ḥarālī said, “He asked Allah to grant him, as Allah is the source of power,” as Allah says in other verses: “whom We gave knowledge, a knowledge from Our own” and “compassion from Us.” The word *ladun* is more indicative of this meaning than ‘*inda*’.⁷⁹

The giving of Allah is a gift, not a right. So even if a person owns the appropriate means, he cannot claim this right. One must know that Allah’s giving to him remains a grant. Do not think that having the full means and being young are sufficient to have a baby. Almighty Allah directs our attention to this and warns us not to be deceived by the possession of the means. Allah says, “To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He blesses whoever He wills with daughters, and blesses whoever He wills with sons, or grants both, sons and daughters, and leaves whoever He wills infertile. He is indeed All-Knowing, Most Capable.”

This is a clear remark and a direct warning not to be deceived by having the appropriate means. Every gift from Allah is a grant, as the means themselves are not capable of granting.

5. Using the Expression “Good” to Describe Progeny Instead of “Righteous”

“Good” means with perfect manners and righteous. It also means obedient.⁸⁰ Al-Rāghib said, “Good means something valid, but it has more meanings than valid. It was said that ‘good progeny’ means to

⁷⁶ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 3:14.

⁷⁷ It was said: it is an adverb describing “progeny,” because if it was after “progeny,” then it would have been an adjective for it. “Progeny” may refer to one child or more. Al-Ṭabarī, however, said, “By progeny here he meant ‘one’ because he described the child in another verse as ‘a successor.’” Ibn ‘Aṭṭīyah said, “What al-Ṭabarī said is accurate. ‘Progeny’ and ‘successor’ both indicate genus. Thus, it may mean one individual or more.” Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 2:463.

⁷⁸ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:192.

⁷⁹ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:42.

⁸⁰ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:42.

reach the status of prophethood. Zakariyyā's invocation may indicate that he meant one child or children."⁸¹

Sixth: Ways of Invoking Allah's Mercy

Allah, glorified is He, says: "So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary."⁸² This noble verse indicates the way one should invoke Allah's mercy. Among the rhetorical features of the verse are the following.

1. Using the Letter *Fā'* in "*Fanādat'hu*" (So the Angels Called Him)

The explicit meaning of the word "*fanādat'hu*" indicates that it was the angels who called him, which is an honor to the one being called. The omitted part of the sentence is inferred to read as: "So Allah accepted his supplication, gave him Yaḥyā (John), and sent the angel (or angels) to him to deliver the good news."⁸³

The usage of the letter *fā'* in "*fanādat'hu*" and "*fastajabnā*" (we answered his supplication), as well as the explicit meaning of "*innā nubashshiruka*" (we give you glad tidings), suggests that it was a single supplication by Zakariyyā followed by a prompt response and good tidings.

Since Allah, glorified is He, does as His servant expects, He heard Zakariyyā's supplication, and then the angels immediately came to give the good news. Out of Allah's grace, he was fully qualified to receive his call, as is the case with the most noble messengers.⁸⁴

2. Using the Circumstantial Clause "While He Was Standing"

It is used in the verse to indicate how speedy the response was. That is, his supplication was accepted, and the good news was delivered before he even finished his prayer.

3. Using the Word "*al-Miḥrāb*" (Sanctuary)

The word "*al-miḥrāb*" (sanctuary) metaphorically refers to the battlefield where a worshipper combats Satan; hence, it is a very honorable place. Al-Ḥarālī said that the use of this word "implies the speedy response, as does Zakariyyā's remaining in the place of worship, supplicating while standing, and prolonging this part of the prayer particularly, since it was referred to in the verse instead of other parts (such as prostration and kneeling), which suggests that standing was the longest part of his prayer."

Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim reported on the authority of Thābit that he said, "Prayer is the service you offer to Allah on earth, and if there were anything better than prayer, Allah would have

⁸¹ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 2:464.

⁸² Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān:39

⁸³ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī al-Ḥafīz al-Qādī Ibn 'Aṭṭīyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993), 1:427.

⁸⁴ Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsuh al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:45.

mentioned it instead, but He says: ‘the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary.’”⁸⁵

Zakariyyā’s supplication was answered in a way that runs counter to and is unhindered by familiar universal laws, which human beings take as an unchanging norm. But human beings think that Allah’s will is bound by natural laws! Everything that a person observes and considers a law does not go beyond the scope of relativity, which is neither absolute nor final. Thus, with a limited age, knowledge, and mind and confined by human nature, human beings cannot arrive at a final law nor realize absolute truth. Rather, they should show humbleness and humility before Allah.

Seventh: The Nature of a Divine Grant

“Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John, confirming a word from Allah and [who will be] honorable, abstaining [from women], and a prophet from among the righteous.”

The noble verses relating the story of Zakariyyā depict the nature of divine gifts, with scenes of great generosity expressed by the most eloquent and accurate diction. In the following points, an explanation of the rhetorical description of divine gifts in the verse is attempted, along with the inferred educational values.

1. Allah’s Saying: “Indeed, Allah Gives You Good Tidings of Yaḥyā (John)”

This statement does not merely convey the good news that a male son is to be born.⁸⁶ The import of this verse is more about the name he goes by, for the name Yaḥyā has dignified denotations and connotations.⁸⁷ The base name of Yaḥyā matches the verb pattern *yaf‘alu*, which implies bringing one to life.⁸⁸ The name was therefore given to him to suggest the idea of reviving him by faith. In his explanation of the verse, Qatādah said, “a servant of Allah revived by faith.”

⁸⁵ Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr al-ma’thūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, year), 2:188.

⁸⁶ In the verse “Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John,” the preposition *bā* is omitted from the emphasis device *anna* (indeed), and therefore the following sentence occurs either in the accusative or genitive case. The former is the opinion of Sībawayh, whereas the latter is that of al-Khalīl. Further, Nāfi’ and Ibn ‘Āmir maintain that the *hamza* of *anna* should have a *kasra* / ◌ / and thus be articulated *inna*. In doing so, they assume an ellipted statement, which is the Baṣrī School’s view, or a vocative particle, which is the Kūfī School’s view. Ḥamzah and al-Kisā’i recite the word *yubashshiruka* with double emphasis and also with lightened emphasis as *yubshiruka*. “Reciting it in the manner of double emphasis indicates good tidings, whereas the manner of lightened emphasis indicates pleasure. Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr al-ma’thūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, year), 2:188.

⁸⁷ According to the most authentic view in this respect, Yaḥyā is a non-Arabic name. It is also said to be an Arabic name conjugated from the verb. However, it is a diptote noun in both cases, either as a foreign name, in the first case, or for following the pattern of a verb, in the second case. Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baḡhdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma’ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 2:141.

⁸⁸ Many interpretations have been proposed in this regard: “First, Zakariyyā had previously received a revelation of a forthcoming prophet of eminence and progeny called Yaḥyā, then was informed later of having a boy called by the same name to indicate that it was one and the same person. Second, Allah gives you glad tidings of a son named Yaḥyā.” Another issue is that Ibn ‘Āmir and Ḥamzah maintain that the

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Some hold the view that he was given this name because he was a means of healing that revived his mother's body from the state of barrenness, whereas some believe that it is because Allah revived his heart by faith. The reason was also thought to be that Allah knows that he had been destined to martyrdom, and martyrs are alive with their Lord, receiving provision. It was also said to be due to the fact that he would live by the knowledge and wisdom given to him. Another opinion is that it is because Allah would revive people's hearts with the guidance he would bring. Al-Qurṭubī said, "His name was *Haya* in the First Book."

2. The Circumstantial Clause "Confirming a Word from Allah"

This clause has the following meaning: Allah gives you the good news, Zakariyyā, that Yaḥyā will be your son, confirming a word from Allah (i.e., Jesus, the son of Mary). The word "*muṣaddiqan*" (confirming) is in the accusative case of "Yaḥyā."⁸⁹

In addition to the good news of having a son, Zakariyyā was also informed about his goodness, for which he had hoped, as stated in the verse: "confirming a word from Allah." The word "*muṣaddiqan*" (confirming) is a circumstantial adverb affirming the condition of Yaḥyā: that is, his perfection and lack of hesitation in regard to his belief in divine revelation. The news that his son will be supported by a messenger (namely, Jesus, peace be upon him) was foretold to Zakariyyā.⁹⁰

hamza of *anna* should be vowelised with a *kasra* / ِ / diacritic and is thus articulated as *inna*, whereas the rest of the reciters read it with a *fatha* diacritic / َ /, so that it is read as *anna*. In doing so, they assume an ellipted statement in the case of the *kasra* and a vocative particle in the case of the *fatha*. Furthermore, the word *yubashshiruka* has three different ways of recitation. First, it is read as *yabshurka* with the diacritic marks *fatha* / َ /, *sukūn* / ْ /, and *damma* / ُ / used respectively on the first three letters of the word. Second, it is read as *yubshiruka*. Third, it is recited as *yubashshiruka*. Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 8:31. Both ways of recitation, *inna* and *anna*, affirm the extraordinary news as if the receiver would be in a state of uncertainty. Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Tahrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 8:2143. As suggested by the verses, "gives you good tidings of Yaḥyā," and "We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be Yaḥyā (John)," the word Yaḥyā is identified as a noun due to the fact that it occurs in the genitive case. In addition, Yaḥyā is a non-Arabic name derived from the Hebrew John, and therefore cannot be an originally Arabic name following the pattern of the verb *hayaya* in the present tense form. Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Tahrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 8:2143.

⁸⁹ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:372. "The phrase 'a word from Allah' alludes to the fact that Jesus was created by Allah, through the power of the divine command 'be,' without a father. Therefore, he is called the 'word' in the same way that a creature is called "creation," which is the result of an Arabic morphological rule that renders an object noun into a verbal noun without a change in meaning. However, Jesus, peace be upon him, was called the 'word' because he was brought into existence by the divine word 'be.' It is claimed that Yaḥyā was the first person to believe in him as Allah's word and spirit." Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:194. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:372.

⁹⁰ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Tahrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 1:751.

There is no doubt that believing in Allah's messengers firmly, without hesitation, is a great guidance from Allah, for it shows sincerity in seeking the truth. This trait was embodied by Yaḥyā, and later by Khadījah and Abū Bakr, as stated in the verse: "and the one who has brought the truth and [they who] believed in it."⁹¹

3. Designating Him as "Sayyid" (Honorable)

The designation "sayyid" (honorable) is used to describe Yaḥyā as a believing, godly person, who attains a higher level in worship, forbearance, knowledge, and piety, according to a narration from Qatādah.⁹² Mujāhid maintained that the word *sayyid* in the verse signifies a person who is honored by Allah.

Linguistically, the word *sayyid* refers to someone who prevails over and surpasses their people in honor and integrity. In this light, the word is an accurate description for Yaḥyā, who was a role model and did not commit a sin.⁹³

Al-Qādī said, "The word *sayyid* signifies an authority figure, to whom people refer for religious matters and who represents a role model for people to follow, embodying the aforementioned attributes of knowledge, forbearance, generosity, chastity, asceticism, and piety."⁹⁴

During the pre-Islamic era, Arabs would give the label *sayyid* to the person on whom the entire tribe depended for satisfying all their needs, the one who undertook all responsibilities, made sacrifices, and exhausted himself for the comfort of others. These requirements, which were expected of a *sayyid*, were manifested by perfectly pleasing people, generously providing for them, refraining from harming them and preventing harm from reaching them, enduring their misfortunes with them, and attaining wisdom and eloquence.

Owing to the fact that Yaḥyā would acquire religious authority in his early years, thereby gaining people's respect, Allah describes him as a *sayyid*, as stated in another verse, "and We granted him wisdom while yet a boy, and affection from Us and purity."⁹⁵

4. Use of the Adjective "Ḥaṣūr" (Chaste)

⁹¹ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 1:751.

⁹² Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:372.

⁹³ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shāker (City: al-Risālah Foundation, 2000), 6:372.

⁹⁴ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:195.

⁹⁵ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 2144.

Educational Implications Deduced from the Usage of Rhetorical Devices in the Qur'an:
The Story of Prophet Zakariyyā in the Chapter of Āl 'Imrān as a Case Study

The word *ḥaṣūr* (chaste) is used to refer to a person who abstains from women and avoids sexual desires. Some said that it denotes avoiding gambling, or amusement and diversion generally.⁹⁶

With regard to the designation “*ḥaṣūr*,” there are two issues. First, *ḥaṣūr* is a verbal noun from the root *ḥaṣura*, which means imprisonment. It is used to describe a person in a state of constipation, a person who keeps secrets, and a stingy person who withholds money. Some exegetes of the Qur'an assume that the word denotes Yaḥyā's inability to have intimacy with women, either because of the size of his genital organ, the impossibility of ejaculation, or general impotence. As such, the word *ḥaṣūr* is a hyperbole acting as an object noun. However, this view is erroneous because it suggests him having a flaw, which cannot be the case, especially when it is mentioned in the context of commendation and his reputation as a source of reward and glorification.

Second, commentators maintain that the word *ḥaṣūr* implies abstinence from women out of chastity and asceticism, rather than impotence. This is based on the inferred meaning of the root word, which signifies the practice of withholding oneself unceasingly, a hyperbole indicating the frequency of the action. Accordingly, the drive and potency must be present, otherwise he would not have to resist it regularly and would not have been commended for doing so. The intensity of the urges is the cause for resistance and withholding, which is the intended meaning of the word. In this case, the word *ḥaṣūr* is a subject noun acting as a hyperbole.⁹⁷

5. Using the Word “*Ghulām*” (A Boy)

Using the word *ghulām* (a boy) in the context of withholding oneself is a sign that he will have reached the prime of health and strength that intensely call for marriage, and he nevertheless prevents himself from it excessively, resisting passionate desires, wholly embracing worship, and shunning all distractions, especially marriage. In doing so, one may think that he is stripped of such desires. This explanation corresponds to the lexical meaning of the word, which should not be overlooked for another, because it is a hyperbolic term derived from a transitive verb, as well as a commendable attribute for Yaḥyā, peace be upon him, who is worthy of every attribute of perfection, as is the case with all other prophets.⁹⁸

6. Using the Word “a Prophet”

The word “a Prophet” is used to conclude the aforementioned attributes with perfection. That is, *siyādah* (the state of being an authority figure) stands for two virtues: managing people's affairs (religious matters) and governing their affairs with discipline, enjoining what is right and forbidding

⁹⁶ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 1:273.

⁹⁷ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:195.

⁹⁸ Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:43.

what is wrong. In addition, the attribute *ḥaṣūr* (chaste) is a sign of piety. These noble traits cannot be perfected any further except by the honor of prophethood.⁹⁹

7. The Meaning of “Righteousness” in the Verse “Indeed, He Is in the Hereafter among the Righteous”

This refers to the highest status of righteousness, which only a prophet can attain. It is conspicuously maintained in Sulaymān’s (Solomon) supplication, “And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants.”

It may be argued that the rank of prophethood is higher than that of righteousness, and, therefore, what is the point of describing him as righteous when prophethood is already established? In response, it is sufficient to say that Sulaymān, peace be upon him, after being a prophet, said: “And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants.”

Nonetheless, a further explanation is that there is a minimum level of righteousness below which the status of prophethood is invalidated. Committing to that level in the case of the prophets parallels committing to the obligations rather than the supererogatory acts in the case of their followers. The lowest rank of righteousness is thus shared by all prophets, as it is the minimum level, but their ranks vary according to one’s share of it, and Allah knows best.¹⁰⁰

Eighth: The Believers between Human Nature and Divine Teaching

Allah the Almighty says, “He said, ‘My Lord, how will I have a boy when old age has already come upon me, and my wife is barren?’ The angel said, ‘Even thus does Allah what He pleases.’”¹⁰¹

In this verse, Zakariyyā, peace be upon him, turns to Allah with a legitimate question that is dictated by human nature and his observation of the natural laws of the world. He is surprised that his supplication is about to come true and that a world of miracles that he had only imagined is approaching him smoothly and calmly, so he poses this question in the firm belief in His omnipotence accompanied by his curiosity as to how it will be. Accordingly, the answer is most eloquently given, for the purpose of teaching him and all those who come after him and conveying many moral and educational values.

1. Using the Exclamation Form

The word “*annā*” is used in Arabic for exclamation. It is used in this context in the sense of “in what way?” or “at what place?” Old age and infertility hinder the natural process by which a child could be conceived,¹⁰² so Zakariyyā expresses wonder and gratefulness that it should happen in such an

⁹⁹ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:195.

¹⁰⁰ Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:196.

¹⁰¹ Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān:40.

¹⁰² “Linguists have stated that the word *‘āqir* (barren) refers to a man or a woman incapable of producing offspring. The word is used only in the masculine form and is essentially a descriptive term for females and is employed metaphorically for males, as is the case with the term “*ṭāliq*” (divorced) and “*ḥā’iq*” (menstruating), according to al-Farrā’. However, al-Ālūsī suggests that ‘the term “barren” signifies female infertility and is derived from the base verb which means “to sever” in the sense that she cannot reproduce. Also, it conveys the meaning of an object noun while being in the subject noun form, and is thereby stripped

extraordinary manner. It also implies that his barren wife is the one to give birth to his son, without needing to marry anyone else, which is a special gift for the wife of Zakariyyā.¹⁰³ The implications inferred from the exclamatory form show the unparalleled level of the eloquence of the Qur'an.

2. Using Metaphor

The question posed by Zakariyyā, "How will I have a boy?"¹⁰⁴ implies improbability according to the normal ways of the world.¹⁰⁵ A cause for incredulity is given in the form of a metaphor: "when old age has already come upon me." It is as if to say that time is a path where events chase one another; whenever two events run across each other, they catch one another. However, by the law of moving bodies, an object should reach its target. The clause, "when old age has already come upon me" is beautifully phrased: the passive participle is used instead of the active to show feebleness.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the "coming" is attributed to "old age" metaphorically as if old age is a seeker chasing him.¹⁰⁷ With this metaphorical style, Zakariyyā depicts his feelings of weakness and frailty as overwhelming him.

3. Using the Circumstantial Clause and Swapping Forms

The phrase "old age" acts as a circumstantial clause of the first-person object pronoun *yā'* (me) in "old age has already come upon me." It suggests that old age has befallen and affected him, and it is also an indication that old age is one of the early stages of death, thereby pursuing humans unceasingly.¹⁰⁸ The swapping technique is obvious in "old age has already come upon me," since it should read "I have reached old age." Yet this rhetorical style is used to show that old age has caught and consumed

of the feminine *tā*, which is Abū al-Baqā's view. Additionally, the sentence "old age has already come upon me" appears in the verbal sentence form to indicate the gradual process of aging, whereas "my wife is barren" is a nominal sentence because "infertility" is a permanent description." Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Alī ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*, ed. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1422 AH), 1:282.

¹⁰³ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:239.

¹⁰⁴ "This is an answer to an underlying, follow-up question assumed to be, 'So what was Zakariyyā's response?' As stated in the verse, his response started with 'My Lord,' which shows that he did not address the angel delivering the news, in spite of being the means of communication between him and Allah. Rather, he followed the same approach; he supplicated with tremendous humbleness, humility, and devotion." Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:33.

¹⁰⁵ "Al-Qāḍī stated, 'The words of the angels cannot be confused with the words of Satan when a revelation is delivered to prophets, or else there would be a lack of trust in all revelation. It can also be argued that since miracles prove the authenticity of revelation as regards religious matters, it must be trusted that it came from Allah through the angels without Satan having any access to it. As for what is related to worldly affairs, a miracle may not have been established, and thus remains the possibility that it came from Satan. As such, there is no harm if Allah does not remove this confusion from his mind.'" Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 8:34.

¹⁰⁶ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālīb al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī al-Ḥafīz al-Qāḍī Ibn 'Aṭṭīyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993), 1:431.

¹⁰⁷ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn al-Andalusī Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420 AH), 3:222.

¹⁰⁸ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:33.

him, as stated in another verse, “Wherever you are, death will overtake you.” As such, the general meaning is that old age has affected and weakened him.¹⁰⁹ With that expression, Zakariyyā explains the reasons that prevent him from having a child, and through it, we glimpse both a deep sense of feebleness and his firmly established confidence in Allah’s omnipotence.

4. Using the Demonstrative Pronoun for Distant Objects

The demonstrative pronoun *kadhālika* (‘that’; in the verse, ‘even thus’) refers to the extraordinary act, meaning that Allah does what He wills of marvelous deeds, such as bestowing a child on a barren, old man. Alternatively, the “*kadhālika Allāh*” clause could be a nominal sentence of a subject and predicate, in which case it would mean: in that manner, Allah does what He wills of supernatural and extraordinary actions. Hence, the demonstrative pronoun unveils the belief of Zakariyyā, peace be upon him, that his request could only be a figment of his imagination were it not for Allah’s omnipotence, by which impossible hopes can easily come true.

Further, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah and others hold the view that Zakariyyā was only inquiring about the way the boy would be conceived given his wife’s infertility and his old age (i.e., he wanted to know whether his wife would be healed in a certain manner). Some scholars, including al-Ḥasan, Ibn al-Anbārī, and Ibn Kaysān maintain that the intended meaning of his inquiry is the following: In what manner should I have a child? Will it be by healing the sterility of my wife and returning to my youth? Or will it occur while we are in our current state of health? Accordingly, his exclamatory response was for the purpose of inquiry about the manner in which it would occur rather than to express doubt.¹¹⁰

Hence, Zakariyyā’s inquiry is concerned with vigor and perfection, not creation. Therefore, the explanation given to him discusses the act (“even thus does Allah what He pleases”), as Allah the Glorified is the Omnipotent and the All-Knowing, and He destined for it to be and provided the required means.¹¹¹ In the story of Mary, however, the explanation touches upon creation, as the natural means were lacking for the creation of Jesus.¹¹²

5. The Significance of *Taqdīm* and *Ta’khr*

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma‘ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr ‘aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 3:240.

¹¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrahīm ibn ‘Umar al-Shīḥī Khāzin al-Baghdādī, *Lubāb al-ta’wīl fī ma‘ānī al-tanzīl*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Shahīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1415 AH), 1:243. “It was also said that when the angels gave him the good news of having a son called Yaḥyā, he did not know whether he would be an adopted child or one of his own, and he was thereby inquiring to remove any doubt about the possibility of adoption. It is also stated that when a servant is longing for something and is then promised to get it, he may be following a thread of conversation that prompts the same answer again to please and reassure himself of fulfillment. Accordingly, it is possible that this was the intended meaning of Zakariyyā’s inquiry.” Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 3:149.

¹¹¹ Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-ayāt wa-al-suwar*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 2:46.

¹¹² Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma‘ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr ‘aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 8:2146.

In the verse “even thus does Allah what He pleases,” the demonstrative pronoun “*kadhālika*” alludes to the verbal noun of the verb “*yaf'al*” (does) to say that Allah does whatever wondrous and supernatural actions He wills. On this basis, the word “Allah” is the subject and the verb “*yaf'al*” acts as the predicate sentence, whereas the letter *kāf* in “*kadhālika*” is in the accusative case, as it is an adjective describing an omitted verbal noun, so that the assumed sentence is the following: Allah does whatever He wills to do, such as this miraculous creation of a child through an aging, feeble man and a barren, old woman. Therefore, the pronoun was advanced to be before the verb to indicate the inclusivity of other less supernatural actions. The letter *kāf* was added to amplify the eloquence of the demonstrative pronoun.¹¹³

As such, the pronoun “*kadhālika*” is employed to mean the following: When Allah does what He wills with such ease and smoothness, why should it be extraordinary for Him to give Zakariyyā a son when he is aging and his wife is barren? Surely, these natural laws only apply to humans, who use them to make their plans and establish their theories. As for Allah the Almighty, nothing is out of the ordinary, for everything is contingent on His will, which is beyond all limits!¹¹⁴

Ninth: Asking for Proof Does Not Negate Faith

“He said: My Lord! appoint a sign for me. Said He: Your sign is that you should not speak to men for three days except by signs; and remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and the morning.”¹¹⁵

Zakariyyā asked for “a sign” that he would recognize when his wife became pregnant, so that he could show gratefulness for the blessing bestowed upon him. He needed a sign because the earliest stages of pregnancy do not show on the female body, and Allah the Almighty wanted to inform him of the great blessing once it occurred so that Zakariyyā would immediately express gratitude. Perhaps this request was made long after the delivery of the glad tidings, which explains the six-month age gap between Yaḥyā and Jesus, peace be upon them.¹¹⁶

The sign was needed because Zakariyyā was extremely eager to embrace happiness and offer acts of gratitude and thanks, for offering thanks is a duty that allows divine gifts to endure.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Zakariyyā did not want to miss the moment in which a divine gift was bestowed on him. News of the pregnancy would confirm that his supplication had been answered.

The word *āyah* (sign) in the verse refers to an indication that his wife is pregnant, so that he could increase his acts of worship and show his gratitude.

The following are some interpretations related to the manifestation of the sign.

¹¹³ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:33.

¹¹⁴ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* (City: Publisher, year), 1:367.

¹¹⁵ Qur'an, Āl-'Imran:41.

¹¹⁶ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-'Imādī Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 2:33.

¹¹⁷ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 3:149.

First, his tongue was tied for three days so that he was not able to speak to people except by gesturing, which is the view held by most exegetes. There are two interpretations for this. One is that he would be tongue-tied as a sign of the embryo's attachment. The second is that he would be tongue-tied to prevent him from discussing worldly matters to give him more time and energy for remembering, glorifying, and praising Allah, so that during that period he would be preoccupied with the remembrance of and with obedience to Allah and expression of thanks and gratitude for his blessings.¹¹⁸

In the verse, there are two possible cases for the verb “*ij‘al*” (appoint). First, it is used in the sense of rendering, as a transitive verb with two objects: the first of which is “*āyah*” (sign) and the second is “*lī*” (to me), which has to come first to allow for the word “*āyah*” to act as a predicate. Second, it is used in the sense of creating; it is a transitive verb with a single object, which is “*āyah*,” making “*lī*” a circumstantial accusative modified by it. If the circumstantial “*lī*” had been preceded by “*āyah*,” it would have acted as an adjective instead. It may also be related to what he has and therefore be moved forward to indicate its significance and to create suspense.¹¹⁹

He was tongue-tied “for three days,” preventing him from speaking with people, but he was able to speak words of the remembrance of Allah.¹²⁰

It may be asked, why was he tongue-tied from speaking with people?¹²¹ The answer is so that he could dedicate his time to the remembrance of Allah and use his tongue solely for this purpose. In doing so, Zakariyyā strived to show enough gratitude for that great blessing and offer thanks and praise, since it was for this aim that he asked for a sign and thereby was decreed not to move his tongue except with words of praise and remembrance of Allah. Obviously, from the question itself, the best answer is derived.¹²²

Consequently, the tying of his tongue was a sign of the attachment of the embryo to the uterus wall, so that he could devote himself during this period to the remembrance of Allah the Almighty and could attempt to show enough gratitude for such a blessing. It is as if he was told that the sign for obtaining that blessing was having his tongue tied except with words of praise and thanks.¹²³ Thus, he was

¹¹⁸ Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Adil al-Ḥanbalī Abū Ḥafṣ, *al-Lubāb fī ‘ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. ‘Adil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 4:66.

¹¹⁹ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafṣīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 3:149.

¹²⁰ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 1:237.

¹²¹ “By way of gesture, since the base verb *irtamaza* refers in essence to an act of moving and is thus used in the adjective form *ramūz* to describe a rough sea. Moreover, al-Ṭastī reports in his *Masā’il* and Ibn al-Anbārī in *al-Waqf wa-al-ibtidā’* on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas that he was asked by Nāfi‘ ibn al-Azraq about the meaning of ‘except by signs,’ and he answered, ‘hand gestures and nodding.’ Then Ibn al-Azraq asked, ‘Is it a common meaning among Arabs?’ to which Ibn ‘Abbas replied, ‘Yes.’” Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafṣīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 3:150.

¹²² Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 1:237.

¹²³ Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Baghdādī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafṣīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa-al-sab‘ al-mathānī* (City: Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, year), 3:150.

ordered to refrain from speaking with people for three days with the aim of saving his energy for procreation, after which pregnancy develops.¹²⁴

It should be noted that this event is miraculous in several ways. First, he lacked the ability to speak about worldly matters while being able to speak words of praise and glorification of Allah, which is among the greatest miracles. Second, the fact that the pregnancy occurred during those predetermined days, along with Zakariyyā's gaining of strength and a peaceful state of mind, is an apparent miracle. Third, everything happened in exactly the manner it had been foretold to him.¹²⁵

Another magnificent miracle is the order directed at him while he was tongue-tied: "And remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and the morning."¹²⁶

Here, Allah the Almighty guides him to the path of true reassurance by bringing about in himself an inexplicable event: that is, by tying his tongue for three days and preventing him from talking with people, while allowing him to articulate words of remembrance and praise of Allah, as stated in the verse, "Said He: Your sign is that you should not speak to men for three days except by signs, and remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and the morning." The verse does not say more than that, yet we know that the prophecy came true the same way it was foretold. Meanwhile, Zakariyyā, as well as those around him, witnessed unusual events befalling him, such as his becoming tongue-tied.

Which universal law can explain such a supernatural phenomenon? It is the law of the absolute power of Allah's will, which explains the inexplicable and through which Yaḥyā was born of an aging father and a barren mother.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭahir Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-ma'ana al-sadīd wa tanwīr 'aql al-jadīd min tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunusiyyah li-al-Nashr, year), 8:2148.

¹²⁵ Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn 'Adīl al-Ḥanbalī Abū Ḥafṣ, *al-Lubāb fī 'ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. 'Adīl Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 4:66.

¹²⁶ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Khwārizmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, year), 1:273.

¹²⁷ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* (City: Publisher, year).