# Structural and Thematic Coherence in Qur'ānic Sūrahs (Taswīr): A New Domain in Qur'ānic inimitability (*Sūrat Al-Nisā'* as a model*)

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**Abstract:**

**Objectives:** This study seeks to provide evidence for new aspects of the Qur'ānic eternal challenge, so as to offer humanity new insights unto the contemplation (*tadabbur*) of the structure and the meaning of the Qur'ān through introducing the concept of structural coherence (*taswīr*) of the Qur'ān; which is a pioneering and promising research area within the broader field of Qur'ānic studies.

**Methodology:** The study employs the descriptive inductive approach which traces the relationships between the verses within the *sūrah*s, in addition to making use of the analytical and deductive approach in exploring new semantic areas that constitute the thematic dimensions of the entire Qur'ānic *sūrah* and its sub-sections.

**Findings:** The study reached the following main results:

1. The domain of structural and thematic coherence (*taswīr*) of the Qur'ānic *sūrah*s constitutes an innovative arena that amplifies the overall interpretation of the *sūrah*. The concept (*taswīr*) itself is derived from the Arabic label given to the Qur'ān chapters. It stresses the coherence between the Qur'ānic sentences and verses as it is not only based on rhetorical or stylistic relationships but there is also some kind of geometrical structure that shows an amazing coherence among the verses, the *sūrah*s, the parts, and the sub-parts. As the Qur'ān is a book for life, such structural and thematic coherence should be reflected in the structuring of the different aspects of human life.

2. The Core theme of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* is: "Dispersing the human life, the divine regulation of human rights, and protecting the weak, especially women and children, from any type of oppression." This is a holistic perspective that the Muslim Ummah can present as a civilized contribution to the United Nations as well as the entire humanity in regulating human rights.

**Originality:** This study introduces and lays the foundations for the innovative concept of Qur'ānic *taswīr*, applies it to *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*, and reveals some uncovered treasures of the Qur'ānic meanings. By doing so, the study furthermore provides implications for guiding humanity and rescuing it from sufferings through employing this aspect of the Qur'ān in reinforcing international communication.

**Keywords:** Qur'ānic Structural and Thematic Coherence (*Taswīr*); Thematic dimensions of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*; Qur'ānic inimitability

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# تسويرُ السُّورةِ القرآنيةِ.. إعجازٌ متجدِّدٌ
# (دراسةٌ تطبيقيةٌ على سورةِ النساءِ)

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## ملخص البحث

**أهداف البحث:** الكشف عن جوانب متجددة من البينة القرآنية؛ لتنير العالم ببصائر القرآن المجيد بما يُظهره من نمطٍ تجديديٍ في علم التدبر القرآني يتمثل في (علم تسوير السور القرآنية) الذي يعد أفقًا بحثيًا رائدًا وواعدًا في حقل الدراسات القرآنية.

**منهج الدراسة:** استخدمت المنهج الوصفي الاستقرائي التتبعي لرصد علاقات الآيات في السور معملًا المنهج التحليلي والاستنباطي في استنطاق النص القرآني في سورة النساء، وما اكتنزه من وجوه ودلالات تشكِّل بتمايزها محاورَ السورة الكليةَ والأقسامَ المتفرعةَ عنها.

**نتائج البحث:** أولًا: (علم تسوير السور القرآنية) يعد فتحًا تجديديًا يُظهر التفسير الكلي للسورة، ويجعل المصطلح المناسب لذلك قرآنيًا، ويظهر أن الاتصال بين الجمل والآيات القرآنية ليس قائمًا على العلاقات البلاغية أو البيانية فحسب بل ترى بينها ترتيبًا رقميًا يريك البناء القرآني بعضه فوق بعضٍ في منطقية مدهشة لآياته وسوره وأجزائه وأقسامه، ومن خلال ذلك يظهر تشييد القرآن للحياة البشرية في المجالات المتعددة.

ثانيًا: عمود سورة النساء، وهو الموضوع الكلي لها: «بث الحياة الإنسانية، والتنظيم الإلهي الحقوقي لها، وحماية المستضعفين وخاصة النساء والأطفال من الاضطهاد»، وهو موضوع يمكن أن تقدمه الأمة الإسلامية هدية للأمم المتحدة والمتفرقة، والعالم المتخبط في البحث عن حقوق الإنسانية.

**أصالة البحث:** يحاول البحث التقعيد لعلم (التسوير المعنوي)، ويوظف ذلك بصورة فيها بعض التجديد في سورة النساء، حيث يُظهر كنوزًا قرآنية مخبوءة تبني الحياة، وتبين للبشرية لئلا تضل وتشقى، وتوظف ذلك في التواصل الحضاري مع العالم للقيام بوظيفة البلاغ.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تسوير السورة، محاور سورة النساء، الإعجاز القرآني

**Introduction**

As the Holy Qur'ān states "*to Allah [alone] belong the best names, so invoke Him by them. And leave [the company of] those who practice deviation concerning His names*" (07:180), the Word of God (the Qur'ān) is thus the best of speech. A Qur'ānic verse is a treasure of unreachable depths, overflowing with rich meanings for everyone who seeks understanding. This attribute is exclusive to the inimitable Qur'ān alone. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyah explains, "The more people contemplate the Qur'ān with insightful reflection, the more guidance and clarity of perspective it will bestow on them, leading them to tread untouchable areas of wisdom."[1]

The science of Qur'ānic structural and thematic coherence (henceforth *taswīr*) is a revolutionary breakthrough in the field of Qur'ānic studies for the following justifications:

- It aims to reveal new aspects of the structure of the inimitable Qur'ān to enlighten the world with its lights.

- It shows a new pattern in the science of Qur'ānic contemplation (*tadabbur*) which leads to a comprehensive interpretation of the verses, yields new knowledge, and reveals universal human principles applicable in human life. The Qur'ān affirms: *"There has come to you enlightenment from your Lord. So, whoever will see does so for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever is blind [does harm] against it"* [Q. 06:104].

- Qur'ānic *taswīr* can also be considered the realistic application of the concepts of perfection (*iḥkām*) and expounding (*tafṣīl*) mentioned in the verse: "*Alif, Lam, Ra. [This is] a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from [one who is] Wise and Acquainted.* [Q. 11: 1]. Perfection of verses thus refers to no defects in wordings or the meanings, while expounding refers to the exemplary elaboration of them. Each verse transits to the next in a wondrous order, and in a straight pattern that shows the thematic coherence in the *sūrah*s and contributes to the universal proof of the Qur'ān's inimitability. That's why it is important to be patient in exploring the Qur'ānic structure and the dimensions and themes that form its *sūrah*s. Doing this may lead to guidance for our way in life, and to organizing human communities based on these guidelines. As the study reveals the perfection in the structure of the *sūrah*s of the Holy Qur'ān, this new domain (*taswīr*) is thus a basic aspect of the wider science of Qur'ānic cohesion (*naẓm*).

Based on this concept, in the introduction I draw a general background of the structure of this study using following headlines:

**Significance of the study**

This study is an attempt to uncover innovative aspects of Qur'ānic inimitability, as it shows new relationships between sentences and verses within the framework of the single *sūrah*. It is not just the usual rhetorical relationships, such as the meanings conveyed by conjunctions for example. Rather, it includes a geometric arrangement that shows the Qur'ānic structure in an amazing logic for the verses, *sūrah*s and parts.

**Objectives of the study**

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

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1  Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Madārij al-Sālikīn, edited by Muḥammad al-Mu'tasim Billah al-Baghdadī, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1416 AH-1996 AD), 3rd ed., part 1, p.27.

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- Highlighting the methodology of Qur'ānic *taswīr* as a domain of study, that shows manifestation of the grace and beauty of the Qur'ānic text.

- Showing a distinct inimitable aspect of the Qur'ān that highlights the successive linear numeral relationship of the concepts presented by the verses of *Sūrat* Al-Nisā' when applying *taswīr*.

- Highlighting the wisdom and precision in the structure of verses of *Sūrat* Al-Nisā' according to the circular relationship that connects the beginning of the *sūrah* to its end, so as to reach **the core of the sūrah** (its main theme). The study proved that such structural coherence represents a gift to humanity and contributes to solving its most persistent problems.

**Methodology**

The study employs the descriptive inductive approach which traces the relationships between verses within the *sūrah*s, in addition to making use of the analytical and deductive approach in exploring new semantic areas that constitute the thematic dimensions of the entire Qur'ānic *sūrah* and its sub-sections. This process involves several stages, as follows:

**Stage 1:** Preliminarily contemplation: This is done through a reflective reading of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*, verse by verse, and dividing it into dimensions and sections.

**Stage 2:** Identifying the core of the *sūrah*: After reading the first sixty verses, recalling the onset of the *sūrah* formulates its main theme (the core of the *sūrah*). A tentative title is suggested at this stage.

**Stage 3:** Logical reconstruction: After the preliminary contemplation, and identifying its core, dimensions and sections in a logical sequence, a new reading is undertaken from the beginning to reexamine and edit the remarks.

**Stage 4:** Final decision: This stage is achieved by repeated readings and reviews. At this point, ideas become clearer, and similar dimensions and sections start to merge.

**Stage 5:** Predecessors' contributions: This is done by referring to eight of the grand exegesis scholars whose books are landmarks in the history of Qur'ān exegesis, representing different schools. They are Muḥammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), Maḥmūd bin 'Umar Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), Muḥammad bin 'Umar Al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH), 'Imād Al-Dīn Isma'īl bin Kathīr Al-Dimashqī (d. 774 AH), Ibrahīm bin 'Umar Al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa Al-Ḥussaynī (d. 1354 AH), Al-Ṭahirbin 'Ashūr (d. 1393 AH), and Muḥammad Mitwallī Al-Sha'rāwī (d. 1419 AH).

I preferred to keep this stage to the last lest I become affected by their attitudes before undertaking my own enterprise in contemplation of the Glorious Qur'ān, as that might prevent me from reaching the hidden treasures of the Qur'ān.

**Literature Review**

Studies that dealt with the term *taswīr* are rare, as this domain is still untreated and needs research and scientific studies before implementing it soundly in the area of Qur'ān exegesis. This domain was hardly the object of an independent study. Rather, it was referred to in some exegetical writings when introducing different *sūrah*s[1]. Some of the contemporary writings that slightly referred to this area include the following:

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1 More details are in section one of the study.

1. *'Im'ān al-Naẓar fi nizām al-Āī was-suwar* by Dr. Muḥammad 'Ināyahtullah Asad Subḥanī.

2. *Al-Naẓm al-Qur'ānī fī Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī* by Dr. Darwīsh Al-Jindī.

3. *Al-I'jāz fī Naẓm al-Qur'ān* by Dr. Maḥmūd El-Sayyid Shaykhūn.

4. *Al-Naẓm al-Qur'ānī fī Sūrat al-Ra'd* by Muḥammad bin Sa'ad Al-Dabal.

These four sources, however, used the versification theory through either analytical or applied methodologies, or both. What makes the present study distinctive, therefore, is my attempt to show the amazing and perfect cohesion between the Qur'ānic verses that form one dimension of the Qur'ānic *sūrah* encircled in one thematic and structural fence (*taswīr*), whereby each verse and each dimension is placed in its perfect place.

In addition, the reviewed studies focused on the theory of Qur'ānic versification (*naẓm*) to demonstrate the rhetorical aspects of the *sūrah* as a whole and to emphasize its thematic unity. The present study, however, seeks to identify the thematic purposes for which the *sūrah* was singled out as a surrounded Qur'ānic unit of inimitability. Furthermore, the study standardizes the term *taswīr*, and applies it – as an example on *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*.

**Structure of the Study**

The study consists of an introduction, two sections, and a conclusion, as follows:

**The introduction** includes the significance, objectives, methodology, reviewed studies, and organization of the study.

**Section I.** Qur'ānic *taswīr*: a unique verbal and thematic inimitability

   **I.**      Claims against Qur'ānic thematic unity, discussion and refutation.

   **II.**     Qur'ānic *taswīr* is a Qur'ānic system imitated by the People of the Book.

   **III.**    The two dimensions of Qur'ānic *taswīr*: āyahs and *sūrah*s.

   **IV.**     Innovative inimitability in Qur'ānic *taswīr*.

   **V.**      Reviewing early instances of the concept of Qur'ānic *taswīr*.

   **VI.**     Logical construction of the *sūrah*.

   **VII.**    The symbolism of the title of the *sūrah*.

   **VIII.**   The Core of the *sūrah* between its distinct character and its general theme.

**Section II:** The six principles for defining the Core of the *sūrah* (an applied study on *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*):

   **Principle I.** The historical context of its revelation.

   **Principle II.** Order of the *sūrah* in the *muṣḥaf*.

   **Principle III.** Tile of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* and its relevance to its overall theme.

   **Principle IV.** The most important topics in the *sūrah*.

   **Principle V.** Contributions of the predecessors in identifying the theme of the *sūrah*.

   **Principle VI.** The illustrative outline of the *sūrah* which forms its overall picture.

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**The Conclusion** included the salient results and recommendations. This is followed by the references and resources used.

### Section I: Qur'ānic *taswīr*: a unique verbal and thematic inimitability

In this section, I address the theoretical background related to the concept of *taswīr* and its significance in presenting a unique approach to Qur'ānic inimitability. I also review the efforts of the predecessors in tracing the origins of this concept, and its relevance to the core, dimensions and title of *sūrahs*.

### I. Claims against Qur'ānic thematic unity: discussion and refutation

The revelation of the Holy Qur'ān changed the face of the world. However, due to the failure to show the distinction and uniqueness in the division of the Qur'ān into units, each called a *surah*, surrounded with a figurative wall [*taswīr*], some non-Muslims complained that they find it difficult to understand the Qur'ān. This difficulty was reinforced by the defective translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān, and by the claim that 'the Qur'ān was written by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).'

Thomas Carlyle, for example, despite his admiration of the personality of the Prophet (PBUH), stated: "the translation [of the meanings of the Qur'ān] negatively affects the beauty and the perfect phrasing [of the source]. Therefore, it is not surprising that Europeans find the Qur'ān a toilsome reading since they read it the way they read newspapers; wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite."[1] It appears that he was the victim of a poor translation.

Montgomery Watt recklessly describes the Glorious Qur'ān as "unsystematic", that it lacks "sustained composition at any great length"[2]. Jacques Burke, one of the French thinkers specializing in the study of the Qur'ān in the twentieth century, says: "Those who approach the Qur'ān without prior preparation will find themselves confused by its verbiage, as it moves from one topic to another with no consistency or completion; the same main themes and ideas are repeated here and there without noticeable regularity"[3].

Perhaps one of the most important reasons for these negative views is the lack of awareness of the relationships between the verses of the Qur'ān 'whose themes seem to lack any apparent logic or consistency.' Some of them may wonder: why was the story of Adam scattered in the *sūwar* of *Al-Baqarah, Al-A'rāf, Al-Ḥijr, Al-'Isra', Al-Kahf and Ṣād*? Why is the story repeated with similar phrasing and meanings, while scattered in different parts of the Qur'ān? Could it not have been collected in one place in a thematic unity? Similar questions are posed concerning other stories and accounts.

It is hoped that the explanation of the concept of *taswīr* may provide answers to these disturbing questions. We expect that once freed from any prejudice, non-Muslims would reach the conclusion that the Englishman Arthur Arberry reached when he felt the power of precision in the Qur'ānic *sūrah*s. His English translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān was issued in 1955, and Dr. Muḥammad Abdel Haleem studied his approach to translation and stated that he was modest and unprejudiced as he chose the expressive title for his translation "*The Koran Interpreted*".

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1 Thomas Carlyle, *Muhammad The Hero as Prophet*. Translated by Muḥammad Al-Sibā'ī, introduced by Dr. Maḥmūd Al-Najīrī, (Egypt: Dar Tībah, 2008), 1, p.103.

2 Mustansir Mir, "The Coherence of the Quran" (Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1986), p.2.

3 Michel Kuipers, *Fī naẓm sūrat al-Mā'idah* (On the versification of Sūrat Al-Mā'idah): Versification of the verses of the Quran in the light of the rhetorical analysis approach, translated by 'Amr Abdul-'Āṭī Sāliḥ, (Beirut: Dar Al-Mashriq, 2014), p.12. The author makes a remarkable attempt to show the connection and coherence in the Holy Quran. However, it is different from the pattern we present in the current study.

Dr. Abdel Haleem believes that Arberry approached the Qur'ān free from many ready-made stereotypes and prejudices that looked at the Qur'ān as accumulated fragments and overlapping passages with no thematic, nor a logical link. So, he strived to understand its linguistic and stylistic characteristics and rhetorical discourse, to prove that each *sūrah* was an "integrated piece of literature," and that what appeared as discordant parts constituted "a rich and beautiful pattern"[1].

Inquiries such as the above deserve to be carefully considered and their intentional or unintentional accusations concerning the coherence of the Qur'ānic text, its precise verbal and thematic structure, and the powerful precision of its context; all should be examined and refuted. The science of *taswīr* as a field of study may be the right approach to discuss these ideas and refute the accusations on the one hand, and to highlight the greatness of the inimitability of the Qur'ānic text and the precision of its construction on the other.

## II. *Taswīr* is a Qur'ānic system imitated by the People of the Book

Allah Almighty used the term "*sūrah*s" rather than "chapters", "parts" or "sections", to describe the constituent components of the Glorious Qur'ān. This is a unique division that has no precedence in human civilization that God chose for His final book, the Glorious Qur'ān, in one hundred and fourteen *sūrah*s, each *sūrah* consisting of a group of verses. There is no similar division in the previous scriptures. The People of the Book did not use the term "*sūrah* = walled entity" nor the term "āyah = miraculous verse" while God describes the previous scriptures, including the Torah and the *Injīl* using the term *Āyāt*. The people of the Book had great difficulty locating certain phrases in their scriptures, so were they influenced by the Qur'ānic divine system that divided the Glorious Qur'ān into *āyahs* and *sūrahs*?

We claim that when the People of the Book beheld the glory in naming a particular phrase (an *āyah* = a miracle), they used this Qur'ānic term recently, then they organized their scriptures into "*iṣḥāḥ* (= chapters) similar to the Qur'ānic *sūrah*s. The English priest Stephen Langton, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, was the one who divided the Bible into chapters at the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D. when he was a professor at the University of Paris, in France[2]. Santos Panino, the Dominican monk, devoted 25 years of his life to translating the Bible. In the year 1527 A.D. the translation was issued with the first organization of the text into numbered verses[3]. In 1551 A.D., the French scholar Robert Etienne organized the statements in the chapters into present-day numbers[4].

What draws the attention, however, is that an illiterate man, Muḥammad (PBUH) appeared in seventh-century Arabia, declared himself a prophet, acknowledged that he was not learnt, and claimed that he received the last message**.** This man told us precisely about the organization of this scripture into one hundred and fourteen *sūrah*s. He showed to his companions who transmitted that to the world- the location

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1 Muhammad al-Mīsāwī, "Muraja't istikshāf al- Qur'ān: al-Siyāq wal-Ta'thīr," (Review of the Qu'ran Exploration: Context and Impact, *Journal of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies*, Qatar University 1440 AH/2019 AD, Vol. 36, Issue 2, p.156.

2 Ramzī Ba'labakī, *Al-Mawrid Dictionary of Historical Figures*, (Beirut: Dar El-'Ilm lilmalayīn, 1992 AD), 1, p.386.

3 An article published online (*who arranged the Bible into chapters and verses?*), Catholic Press Union-Lebanon, Retrieved on: 1/4/2016 AD, Available: www.ucipliban.org.

4 Ibid.

and the number of each of the *āyahs* of each *sūrah*[1].

## III: The two dimensions of Qur'ānic *taswīr*: *āyahs (Āyāt)* and *sūrah*s

### *Āyāt*

The word "Āyāt" is the plural of "*āyah*."[2] Allah Almighty used the word "Āyāt" to describe what He revealed in the Qur'ān, the Torah, the *Injīl*, and all other scriptures. This word has a number of features that distinguish the words of God, as shown below:

1. The word "*āyah*" signifies a prominent **sign** that indicates the truthfulness of the Prophet (PBUH) and the wisdom of God in the organization of human life. Thus an "āyah" signifies a clear sign. Pre-Islamic poets[3] such as al-Nābighah[4] and 'Amr ibn Al-Ṣa'q[5] used it in this sense.

   An *āyah* is also an evident and obvious landmark. In that context, the word "āyah" may be used to describe a high building, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, "*Do you construct on every elevation a landmark (āyah) to amuse yourselves?*" [Q. 26: 128].

2. The word "**āyah**" signifies [a piece of] **proof** of the truthfulness of the Prophet **(**PBUH**)**. The Messenger's miracles are called "**Āyāt**" (miracles) as in the Qur'ānic verse: *"In nine (āyahs) tokens to Pharaoh and his people"* [Q. 27: 12]. Examples of poetic use are in al-Ḥārith bin Ḥilzah's poetry[6].

3. An *āyah* signifies **a group** of items or people; whereby one āyah can denote a group of miracles and proofs of the prophethood. In the poetry of Baj ibn Mushīr[7], there are instances of its use in this sense.

4. The word *āyah* signifies **a lesson or admonition** that reminds individuals and nations of the guidance that they must follow before they go astray. The word is used in this sense in the following verse: "*Verily in Yūsuf and his brothers are āyahs (lessons) for those who ask [Q.* 12: 7]. Here, "āyah" is used to refer to warnings and learnt lessons.

### Technical definition of *Āyah* [in the sciences of the Qur'ān]

An *āyah* is the smallest unit of the Qur'ān that consists of a sentence or more (complete or elliptic)[8].

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1  In the Bible, there is reference to that illiterate Prophet (PBUH) who does not read or write. In the book of Isaiah 29:12, "Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate." Of all the prophets, this story happened only with the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), when Angel Gabriel came to him in the cave of Ḥira' and said to him: Read. He replied, "I can't read".

2  Aḥmad bin Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyyīs al-Lughah*, edited by Abdul Salām Mūḥammad Hārūn, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1399 AH-1979 AD), vol. 1, p.168, al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Al-Mufradātfī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, edited by Ṣafwān'Ad-nān Al-Dāwūdī, (Damascus, Dār Al-Qalam, Beirut, Al-Dar Al-Shāmiyyah, 1412 AH), ed. 1 p.102, Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Murtada Al-Zubaidī, *Taj Al 'Arūs Min Jawahīr Al Qāmūs*, edited by a group of editors, (Dar Al-Hidayah), vol. 37, p.122. Muḥammad Al-Ṭahir Bin 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Tunisian Publishing House, 1984 AD) vol. 1. p.463.

3  Arabic text of the original lines of poetry are dropped in this translation of the study. References to the lines are however maintained in the footnotes [translation note].

4  Al-Ḥasan Bin 'Abdullah, Al-'Askarī, *Al-Ṣinā'atayn*, edited by 'Ali Muḥammad Al-Bajāwī, and Muḥammad Abu Al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Beirut: Al-'Asriyyah Bookshop, 1419 AH), p.48.

5  Emīl Badī' Ya'qūb, *al-Muʿjam al-mufaṣṣalfī-shawāhid al-lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, 1417 AH-1996 AD), 1st Ed., Part: 7, p.42.

6  Ḥussein bin Aḥmad bin Ḥussein Al-Zawzanī, *Sharḥ Al Mu'allaqāt Al Sab'*, (Dar Iḥya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1423 AH-2002 AD), 1st ed., p.269.

7  Aḥmad bin 'Abdullah Al-Ma'arrī, *Sharḥ Diwān Al-Mutanabbī*, edited by Muḥammad Sa'īd Al-Mawlawī, (Saudi Arabia: King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 1429 AH-2008AD), 1st Ed., p.613.

8  Muḥammad bin 'Abdullah Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Abu Al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Cairo: Dar iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, 'Issa Al-Babī Al-Ḥalabī and Partners, 1376 AH-195: 7 AD) 1, part: 1, p.266, and 'Abd al-Raḥman bin Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Abu al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1394 AH / 1974 CE), vol: 1, p.230.

Elliptic here refers to instances like the single-word āyah "*Mudhāmatān*" [Q. 55: 64]; as the deep structure is "*Humā mudhāmatān* = the two gardens are dark green."

## Suwar

The word *suwar* [henceforth *sūrah*s] is the Arabic plural of "*sūrah*"[1] just as the plural of *ghurfa* (room) is *ghuraf* (rooms). The term "*sūrah*" was chosen to describe a group of verses because of the several features it signifies:

**1.** A sura denotes **high status**. Al-Nābighah used it in this sense in his poetry[2] to refer to glory and honor. Likewise, the verb "*sāra*" (present "*yasūr*") means to get angry (elevated anger). 'Umar ibn Al-Khattāb is reported to have said "*Fa kidtu 'usāwirhu fī al-salat,*" meaning I was about to catch hold of him or jump on him during the prayer,[3]" as "his anger reached its peak."

**2.** It signifies a **comprehensive encircling of the verses it contains.** This meaning is derived from the word "*sūr*" (fence or wall) used to describe the wall that surrounds a city. Allah says: "*And a (sūr) wall will be placed between them*" [Q. 57: 13]. Based on that, it can be said that a *sūrah* is a fence surrounding the verses therein.

**3.** The word signifies levels of construction; namely, the Glorious Qur'ān. Poets like Al-'Ajjaj[4] and Jarīr[5] used it in this sense in their poetry. Therefore, the word "*sūrah*" is a level followed and preceded by other levels. Each level is distinct from the other. Their sum constitutes the Great Qur'ān. Although God revealed the āyahs and the *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān over 23 years, they are nevertheless organized in an amazing way so that there is no confusion or overlapping between the āyahs. The Companions consequently transmitted the āyahs of each *sūrah*, i.e., from the opening *sūrah* to *Sūrat al-Nās*; each *sūrah* is walled, surrounded and distinguished from the other *sūrah*s by its beginning and conclusion.

**4.** The word can also refer to **a stage** in the journey of approaching the Qur'ān. This sense relates to the meaning of elevation and lofty constructions.

## Technical definition of *Sūrah* [in the sciences of the Qur'ān]

Al-Zarkashī defined a *sūrah* as: "a unit of the Qur'ān which includes *āyahs* with an opening and a conclusion, the least of which are three *āyahs* in number."[6]

## IV: Innovative Inimitability in Qur'ānic *taswīr*

The process of Qur'ānic *taswīr* can achieve the following goals:

### 1. **Highlighting the overall themes of a *surah* through contemplation (Semantic *taswīr*(**

*Taswīr* in this sense refers to the particular themes contained within a *sūrah* that distinguish it from

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1  Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, Part: 3, p.115, Al-Asfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt fi Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, p.434, Al-Zubaidī, *Taj al-'Arūs*, Part: 12, p.101.

2  Al-'Askarī, *Al-ṣinā'atayn*, p.75, Al-Ḥassan bin 'Abdullah Al-'Askarī, Diwān Al-Ma'ānī, (Lebanon: Beirut, Dar Al-Jīl), Part 1, p.16.

3  Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥiḥ Al-Bukhārī. vol.6, p.227, No. 4992.

4  Muḥammad bin Yazīd al-Mubbarīd, *al-Ta'āzī*, introduced and edited by Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ḥassan al-Jamāl, revised by Maḥmūd Sālim, (Cairo: Nahdit Misr for Printing, Publishing and Distribution) p.133, 'Abdullah bin Muslim bin Qutaybah al-Daynūrī, *Al-Ma'ānī al-Kabīr fī abyāt al-Ma'ānī*, edited by Orientalist Dr. Sālim Al-Karnkawī, 'Abdul Raḥman bin Yaḥya Al-Yamanī, (Hyderabad al-Dakan, Ottoman Encyclopedia Press, ١٣٦٨ AH, ١٩٤٩ AD), ١st ed., vol. 1, p.475.

5  Muḥammad bin Yazid al-Mabarad, *Al-Kamel fi al-Lughah wa al-Adab*, edited by Muhammad Abu al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1417 AH-1997 CE), ed. 3, part: 2, p: 105, Yusūf bin Abi Sa'īd al-ṣirāfī, Sharh, *Abyāt Sibawayh*, edited by Dr. Muḥammad'Ali Al-Rīḥ Hāshim, reviewed by Taha 'Abdul-Ra'ūf Sa'd.

6  Al-Zarkashī, Al-Burhān, part.1, p.264, Al-Suyūṭī, Al-Itqān, vol. 1, p.186.

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others. It also confers a special status on particular verses mentioned in the *sūrah*. If such verses are repeated in other *sūrah*s, they would not achieve the goal they do in other *sūrah*s as they are connected to the purposes of the core of the *sūrah*s. Focusing on the concept of *taswīr* then leads to unfolding one of the surprising semantic miraculous features of the *sūrah*s.

Exegesis scholars identified various types of Qur'ānic inimitability, and many of them were interested mainly in rhetorical inimitability. However, inimitability should not be limited to rhetorical aspects only. Some scholars discussed semantic inimitability, in which they included legislative, educational, social, and scientific inimitability. However, the semantic inimitability which emanates from *taswīr* has not been appropriately covered, even by those who wrote about the science of *munāsabāt* (verse interrelationships). Imam al-Tayyibī argued that among the aspects of inimitability is the search for the cause of *taswīr* (semantic and structural encircling) of the *sūrah*. He said: "**This seems to be the secret behind the eternal challenge with the *sūrah*s -however short they are-, not the āyahs however lengthy they are**"[1].

*Taswīr* is thus an innovative concept that shows the partial as well the holistic interrelations between the āyahs within one [walled] *sūrah*. It explores the overall outline and the overall theme of the *sūrah*s. The term also directs attention to coherence of the systems and consistency of the internal and external contexts. Hence, each *sūrah* appears as a single cohesive construction of a particular personality with complete and integrated features. The review of literature shows that Imam Al-Zarkashī used the term *taswīr* when saying: "**in walling (*taswīr*) each *sūrah* is proof for its inimitability as a miracle of God; as *sūrah*s of different length have been identified as independent units of challenge. This shows that length is not a prerequisite for inimitability**"[2].

Based on this, we suggest that the term "*taswīr*" is an innovative development in the applications of the science of Qur'ānic coherent structure (*naẓm*).

## 2. **Producing several levels of comprehension of the text**

One of the distinctive features of the Qur'ānic text is that it is easy to comprehend [for Arabs] at different levels by people of different educational backgrounds, whether illiterates or established scholars. Each derives from the text the principles and concepts that help in leading life, by using the human mind to contemplate the word of God. The levels of the Qur'ānic statement appear in its verses as well as its *sūrah*s. Walyy Al-Dīn Al-Malawī says: "the verses of the Qur'ān are revealed based on the occasions but were arranged based on a [secret] wisdom"[3]. Ibn Taymiyyah explains: "Whoever contemplates the Qur'ān looking at the contexts of the āyahs, would be guided to the purpose of the message, and will mark the difference between deviation and righteousness"[4].

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1  Al-Ḥussain bin 'Abdullah Al-Tayyibī, *Futūḥ Al-Ghaybfī al-Kashf 'ann Qinā' al-Rayb*, edited by Iyad Muḥammad Al-Ghūj et al., (Dubai: Dubai International Prize for the Holy Qur'ān, 1434 AH-2013 CE), ed1, part: 7, p: 54.

2  Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p.264, Al-Zarkashī cited Al-Suyūṭī in *Al-Itqān*, Ibn 'Aqīlah Al-Makkī in *Al-Ziadah wa Al-Iḥsān*, Al-Zarqānī in *Manāhil fī 'Ulūm al- Qur'ān*, Abu Shuhbah in *An Introduction to the Study of the Noble Qur'ān*, and Fahd Al-Rūmī in *Studies in the Sciences of the Noble Qur'ān* (Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p.229, Muḥammad Abdul-Azīm Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān 'Ulūm al- Qur'ān*, ('Issa Al-Bābī Al-Ḥalabī and Co.), ed. 3, vol. 1, p.351, Muḥammad Abu Shahba, *An Introduction to the Study of the Noble Qur'ān*, (Cairo: al-Sunnah Bookshop, 1423 AH-2003 AD), ed. 2, p.318, Fahd bin Abdul Rahman Al-Rūmī, *Studies in the Sciences of the Noble Qur'ān*, (1424 AH-2003 CE), ed 12, p.113.

3  Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p.37, Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān*, part 1, p.370.

4  Aḥmad bin 'Abdul Ḥalīm bin Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, ed. by: 'Abdul Rahman bin Muḥammad bin Qasīm (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Noble Qur'ān, Medina, 1416 AH / 1995 AD), PART: 15, p: 94.

This unique system provides us with multiple levels of comprehension of the Qur'ānic text according to the methodology of the principles of interpretation. Indeed, this is one of the most important aspects of the Qur'ānic inimitability; for the Qur'ānic words are limited, but they are arranged in a special order to accommodate meanings that are not within the capacity of human beings[1]. This is further assured in the Qur'ānic statement: "*And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims*." [Q. 16:89].

## V. Reviewing early instances of the concept of Qur'ānic *Taswīr*

Scholars who dealt with Qur'ānic coherence were mainly concerned with the area of verse interrelationships (*munāsabāt*) not the structural and thematic coherence. Most prominent among these scholars are:

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH)[2], Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (d. 365 AH)- who was described by Al-Razi as: "well-versed in Qur'ān interpretation, meticulous in analyzing words and phrases," Abdul Qāhir Al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH) who is famous for his theory in Qur'ānic cohesion (*naẓm*), Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), and Ibn Al-'Arābī (d. 543 AH). After these came Al-Fakhr al-Razī (d. 606 AH) who was one of the greatest scholars of the science of Qur'ānic cohesion,[3] and who had a huge impact on his successors of researchers. For example, Muḥammad 'Abdullah Dirāz followed the style of Al-Razi in his amazing book *Al-Nab' Al-'Aẓīm*. Al-Razi says: Whoever meditates on the organization of the *sūrah*, would recognize that the Qur'ān is not only miraculous because of the eloquence of its words and the honor of its meanings, but also because of its arrangement, and the organization of its verses. Perhaps those who focused on the Qur'ān's inimitability based on its style noticed that. However, I found the majority of exegetists not paying attention to these secrets."[4] After Al-Razī, Abu Ja'far Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm bin Al-Zubayr (d. 708 AH) wrote two books-(*Al-Burhān fī tanāsub suwar Al-Qur'ān)* and (*Milāk al-ta'wīl al-qāṭi' bi-zawī al-ilḥād wa al-ta'ṭīl fī tawjīh al-mutashābih al-lafẓ min al-tanzīl)*.

Then the creative effort of Imam Al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH) appeared, as he explored multiple types of cohesion such as: linear cohesion, circular cohesion, and maqāsidī (principles of Sharia) coherence through the variation of topics in one *sūrah*, in addition to the impact of the title of the *sūrah* on its multiple themes. In this area, he wrote his book: "*Maṣa'id al-Nazarlil-ishrāf 'ala maqāsid al-swar*. Another name for this book is "*Al-Maqsid al—Asmā fī muṭabaqat ism kul sūrah lli-Musamā*" in which he established a great rule in the scientific, practical and civilizational connotations inferred by the titles of the *sūrah*. He said: "Whoever realizes the purposes of the title of the *sūrah*, would recognize its main goal, and whoever recognizes the goal, will observe the cohesion of its verses, stories and all scattered parts." He also wrote the book "*Naẓm al-Durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wal-suwar*,"[5] in which he chose to link the word (*Lammā* = since .. so that) between the words of the verse and the verses of the *sūrah* until his book was known as the book of (*Lammā*). The present study, however, does not regard this constraint. Rather it explores the

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1 'Abdul al-Qāhīr al-Jurjānī referred to this in a wonderful manner. See: Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'īl al-I'jāz*, p.40.

2 Ref, for example: Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jami` al-Bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, edited by: Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1420 AH - 2000 AD), i 1, Part: 9, p.225.

3 Ref, his commentary on [Q. 22: 73-78], Muḥammad bin 'Umar Al-Razī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, (Beirut: House of Revival of Arab Heritage, 1420 AH), 3rd ed., vol. 23, p.253.

4 Ibid. vol. 7, p.107.

5 Ibrāhīm bin 'Umar al-Bīqā'ī, *Maṣā'id al-Naẓarlil-Ishrāf 'ala maqāṣid al-swar*, called also: *Al-Maqṣid al-Asmā fī Muṭabaqat ism kul suraht lil-musamā,* Riyadh": maktabat al-Ma'ārif: 1408 -01987, 1st ed., vol. 1, p.149.

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Qur'ānic cohesion between the sections of the dimensions and the dimensions of the *sūrah*s through a logical connection between the contexts of the verses and the *sūrah*s.

In his abridgement of *Naẓm Al-Durar*, Al-Biqā'ī felt that it should be called "the science of Qur'ānic cohesion" or "the science of structural coherence = *taswīr*,"to make it distinct from the science of "verse interrelationships"; as he said: "The science that is broader than the verse interrelationships is a science by which the reasons for the arrangement are explored. Its subject is the cohesion of the various parts in terms of arrangement. The fruit of this science is to see the adornment that the section displays because of its position in its context like the bond of lineage"[1].

Reflecting on the standards of accuracy in this science, he said: "the sign of accuracy in this science is that its results are logically accepted and are opposed by nothing of the authentic narrations[2]". Showing the significance of this science, he said: "to the science of exegesis, this science is like the science of eloquence (*Bayān*) to Arabic grammar (*Naḥw*), because it is the secret of rhetoric that achieves the conformity of speech to the situation. It is for speech like the soul in relation to the body, as it establishes faith in the heart, penetrates to the core, and reveals the miracles of the Qur'ān in two ways: the first is the cohesion of each sentence according to its composition, and the second is the arrangement of the sentences in context"[3].

After Al-Biqā'ī, came Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa (1354 AH), Al-Farāhī (d. 1349 AH)-the author of "Nizām al-Qur'ān", Sayyid Quṭub (1385 AH), and Muḥammad Al-Ṭahir bin 'Ashūr the Tunisian (d. 1393 AH), in addition to the authors who focused on the thematic interpretation and the thematic cohesion in the Qur'ān without focusing on the term "*taswīr*", despite its close relevance.

Many of the mentioned scholars were inclined to the science of partial cohesion, which is the connection of vocabulary and sentences in one verse, or the connection of one verse to another. Only Al-Razī referred to the science of thematic coherence within a group of verses interrelated with another group of verses, laying the foundations for "*taswīr*." Riḍa added more light on the topic, then the matter began to be settled with Al-Farāhī, but he died before he could complete the implications of this science. This science approached maturity with Sayyid Quṭub. In addition, there are the efforts of Aḥmad Al-Witārī, and the research by Muḥammad Al-Majālī published in the Malaysian journal *Al-Bayān* focusing on the word *Al-Raḥman* in the Qur'ān[4].

**The difference between the science of *tawsīr* of the *sūrah* and the science of the thematic cohesion of the *sūrah***

*Taswīr* shares with thematic cohesion the objective of identifying the comprehensive idea of the various topics scattered in the folds of verses of *sūrah*s, and the search for overall theme. However, *taswīr* is distinguished by derivation from the Qur'ānic term "*sūrah*". In addition, most of the writings focus on substantive unity of the Qur'ānic *sūrah* and tend to generalize the umbrella theme for it that represents the Qur'ānic *sūrah*, while *taswīr* is based on reading the dimensions of *sūrah* which are essential to identifying

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1 Ibrāhīm bin 'Umar Al-Biqā'ī, *Dalālat al-Burhān al-qawīm 'ala tanāsub āī al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, p.2a from the copy of the Sulay-maniyah manuscript No. 77, which is under investigation by Dr. Abdullah Al-Khatib, in personal communication.

2 Ibid., p.2a.

3 Ibid., p.2a.

4 Muḥammad Al-Majālī, the name (Al-Rahman) in the Qur'ān, significance and context: a thematic study, *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'ān and Hadith Studies,* 23 Oct 2020, vol. 18, Issue 2, Pages: 201–226, https://brill.com/view/journals/jqhs/18/2/arti-cle-p201_5.xml.

the Core of the *sūrah*, through many stages of analysis that lead to answering the basic questions: Why was the *sūrah* structured (walled) in this way? And why did the linear and circular cohesion in the *sūrah* follow this order in the verses?

**The relationship between *taswīr* and the science of verse interrelationships**

*Taswīr* is considered a natural development of the science of verse interrelationships and an advanced stage in order to crystallize and stabilize its features. An exegetist refers to both sciences to reach the best decision in interpretation. Recognizing the Core of the *sūrah* can be achieved after several stages of analysis including knowing about the verse interrelationships. Such analysis will help identify the basic dimensions of the *sūrah*, and the subunits incorporating one verse or more, and the connection between the dimensions that guides to the overall theme that combines them. Al-Farāhī called the main themes *the pillar of the sūrah*. Once the Core (pillar or main theme) is identified, it is applied backwards on words, verses and dimensions. Contributions by early scholars are not ignored in these conclusions about the *sūrah*.

**VI. Logical construction of the *sūrah*, and its abundant meanings**

The Glorious Qur'ān consists of 114 *sūrah*s, all of which are woven in one orbit that sums up the purpose of the Qur'ān such as: introducing the Creator, the universe, the life of trial in this earthly world and the life of reward in the Hereafter. It can also be said that the Qur'ān deals with Ontology (God, His Attributes and Actions) Prophecies, Resurrection, Legislation, and the paths of people. I decided to mark the overall *Purposes of the Qur'ān* as the first of the Qur'ān sciences in my book *Al-Asās fī Uṣūl Al-Tafsīr*[1]; as the Qur'ān catered for the interests of people in this life and the Hereafter (*We have neglected nothing in the Book*) [Q. 06: 38]. These purposes are also summed by Al-Razī (d. 606 AH) as *Divinity, Prophethood, Eschatology and Destiny*[2]. *Badī' al-Zamān Al-Nūrsī* (d.1379 AH) mentioned the same purposes replacing *Destiny* with *Justice*[3]. Al-Shawkānī (d. 1250 AH) said they are three purposes: proving monotheism, proving resurrection, proving prophethood[4].

Nevertheless, this does not mean that every *sūrah* does not have its own distinct character for which the *sūrah* was enclosed (= *taswīr*), and became a sign of a domain of great knowledge. Each *sūrah* has a distinct character and is divided into sections and dimensions preceded with an introduction – which may be one **āyah** or more- and followed by a conclusion. The introduction may be long as in *Sūrat Al-Baqarah*, and may be as short as part of one **āyah** as in *Sūrat Al-Mā'idah* following the Kufic method of numbering. At the conclusion, the logical consistency between the introduction, the dimensions and the conclusion emerges in a way that produces multiple levels of understanding, and yields a world of meanings. The abundance and intensity of meanings do not prevent the logical sequence, just as the logical sequence does not prevent the various aspects of meanings, which makes it difficult for the translator of the meanings of the Qur'ān to display these layers of meanings in another language.

It may seem that the *sūrah*, with its various themes, lacks a unifying link that holds them, but the

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1  'Abdul-Salām Muqbil al-Majīdī, *Al-Asās fī Uṣūl Al-Tafsīr*, 3rd ed., p.64.

2  Muḥammad bin 'Umar Al-Razī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 2: p.259.

3  Badī' al-Zamān Sa'īd al-Nūrsī, *Isharāt al-I'jāz fī mīzān al-ījāz*, ed. by: Iḥsan Qāssim Al-ṣāliḥī, (Cairo: Sözler Publishing Company, 2002 AD), 3rd ed., p.53.

4 Muḥammad bin 'Alī Al-Shawkānī, *Irshād al-thiqāt*, edited by a group of scholars, (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, 1404 AH-1984 AD), vol. 1, p.4.

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more contemplating analysis on the arrangement shows an impressive character of harmony, consistency, compassion and amazing accuracy through which each part leads to the other. A *sūrah* in this respect is like a tree that consists of roots, stems, leaves and fruits, whereby every part does not look like the other. However, once assembled, it appears in a captivating scene with admiration to its beauty and perfection. Likewise, a *sūrah* has an introduction, sections and a conclusion.

Meditating carefully on the distinguished character of the *sūrah* clarifies the flow of ideas from its introduction, sections and conclusion, and arouses admiration for the beauty of its scenes. Some scholars explained this as: "[by such contemplation], new horizons of cohesion and coherence are uncovered, such as: eloquent phrasing, sweet narration, coherent meaning, sequential arrangement, expressive utterance, pictorial expression, personalized expression, vivid imagination, tonal music, coherent parts, harmony in the frame, harmony in music, and fascination in closure. With all of this, creativity and inimitability are achieved[1]".

Because of the surprising flow of meanings in the verses, a number of topics appear to be dealt with separately in the *sūrah*. Due to that, the opinions of the readers differ in determining the main theme that distinguishes each *sūrah*, but this does not mean that there is no distinct character for the *sūrah*. On the contrary, the different sections integrate in an amazing harmony with logical and disciplined transitions from one section to another, and from one dimension to another. Sayyid Quṭub explained that as : "a *sūrah* is like a living being that is distinctive in its features despite the fact that it is one of its kind in general. We almost feel that a *sūrah* is a living being that has a specific purpose which it strives to achieve by various means. The verses, phrases and words in the *sūrah* are the means by which it tries to convey what it seeks! This is what arouses in us a feeling of sympathy and response to this living being, of distinct characteristics and features, that has a purpose, a life and motion, and that conveys senses and feelings!"[2].

**VII. The symbolism in the titles of the *sūrah*s**

**Were *sūrah* titles revealed or suggested?**

This is a well-known issue that has been dealt with by those who have written about the sciences of the Qur'ān, and the controversy over it can be summed in three stands:

**The first stand**: the titles of *sūrah*s are not based on divine revelation. Al-Zarkashī mentioned this stand but did not attribute it to anyone, even though he excluded it. Al-Suyūṭī said it is a weak opinion, while some contemporary writers embraced it[3]. Their proofs for this stand are:

1. There is no authentic narrated text about naming each *sūrah* of the Qur'ān with a specific title. Rather, there are many hadiths about naming some of the *sūrah*s, such as *Al-Fatiḥah, Al-Baqarah, Āl-'Imrān*, but this is not preserved in all *sūrah*s.

2. It has been reported that some of the companions and the followers have named some of the *sūrah*s with suggested titles.

**The second stand:** Only the *sūrah*s whose titles have been authentically reported are named based on revelation. Others that have not been reported are not[4].

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1 Sayyid Quṭub, *AlTaṣwīr al-fanī fī al- Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Dār Al-Shurūk, 1980 AD), 6th ed., p.116.

2 Sayyid Quṭub, *Fī ẓilāl Al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūk, 1425 AH - 2004 AD), 34th ed., vol: 1, p.555.

3 'Abdullah Al-Juday', *Basic Introductions in the Sciences of the Qur'ān*, (Britain: Leeds Islamic Research Center, 1422 AH - 2001 AD), 1st ed., p.136.

4 A group of specialized professors and scholars, *Al-Mawsū'ah al-Quraniyyah Al-Mutakhaṣiṣah*, (Cairo, The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, 1423 AH - 2002 AD), vol. 1, p.222, and Musā'id Al-Tayyar, *Al-Muhararfī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, (Saudi Arabia: Center for Qur'ānic Studies and Information at Imam Shaṭibī Institute, 1429 AH - 2008 AD), 2nd ed., p.169.

**The third stand**: What most scholars agree on is that the titles of the Qurʾān's *sūrah*s are all revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) and transmitted from him by the companions. Some of the *sūrah*s have been reported by title such as *Al-Fātiḥah, Al-Baqarah, Āl-ʿImrān, Al-Nisāʾ, Al-Kahf, al-muʿawiẓat, al-mursalāt, al-sajdah, banī Isrāʾīl, Maryam,Taha, and Al-Anbīyāʾ*. That is why Imam Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī said: "The Messenger of Allah dictated the titles of the *sūrah*s."[1] Al-Zarkashī said: It is important to research whether the many titles for one *sūrah* is also a revelation or not. If they are, then we should explore the many meanings from each *sūrah* that necessitate the derivation of its names."[2] Al-Suyūṭī said: "All the names of the *sūrah*s have been proven to be narrated by [authentic] hadiths and traditions"[3].

Sulaymān Al-Bajīiramī said: "The titles of the *sūrah*s, their arrangement, and the order of the verses, each of these three have been dedicated by the Prophet (PBUH) as Jibrīl the Archangel told him of them as they are inscribed in *The Preserved Tablet*[4]. Al-Ṭahir ibn ʿAshūr said: "the names of the *sūrah*s were given to them from the era of revelation."[5] Some contemporaries however disagreed claiming that there is no evidence for the revelation of naming[6]. They are mistaken because they didn't consider the details of the evidence in this issue.

**When looking at the titles of the Qurʾānic *sūrah*s, we find that many of them have not been named according to themes. The vital aspects of Sharia do not appear in the names of the *sūrah*s except in a limited way. For example, there are no *sūrah*s called (worships, transactions, prayer, *zakat*, politics, economics, or cosmic laws...) etc., except in specific *sūrah*s such as *Sūrat Al-Tawbah*, and the *sūrah*s that are named after the Day of Resurrection such as *Al-Ḥāqqah* and *Al-Qāriʿah*.**

Many of the *sūrah*s did not follow historical names, so we do not find, for example, the *sūrah* of the beginning of history like the Book of Genesis, nor the beginning of Islam, nor the migration, or any other historical temporal sequence of events except in specific places such as *Sūrat Al-Fatḥ* or *Sūrat Al-Naṣr*. Even *Sūrat Al-Anfāl* was not named after the Battle of *Badr*, although this is its main topic from the first verse.

Furthermore, the titles of the *sūrah*s were not named after Islamic figures, such as: the names of the Prophet's household, or the names of the rest of his companions except for the names of some prophets. We find "*Āl-ʿImrān*" for example in the third *sūrah* but not "*Āl-Muḥammad.*"

All of this arouses a broader and deeper contemplation on this aspect, as the *sūrah* may be called by the name of a prophet like *Sūrat Hūd* although his story is one of the shortest stories in this *sūrah* when compared to the story of *Shuʿaib* or Noaḥ. This makes us suggest that the names of the *sūrah*s followed a symbolic method as explained below:

Most of the titles of the *sūrah*s represent clear symbols that enclose prominent and multiple issues within one *sūrah*, or constitute the core of the issues tackled in the *sūrah*. Perhaps the reasons for this are the following:

1**.** The spiritual uniqueness that characterizes the word of God, as it does not follow the usual human styles of composition. People usually start a topic, end it then move on to another topic. However,

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1 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʾ Al-Bayān,* vol: 1, p.100.

2 Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*, vol: 1, p.270.

3 Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān*, vol: 1, pg.: 186.

4 Sulaymān bin Muḥammad al-Bujayramī, *Tuḥfat al-Ḥabīb ʿala Sharḥ al-Khatīb*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1415 AH - 1995 AD), Part 2: p.24.

5 Ibn ʿAshūr, *Al-Taḥrīrwa Al-Tanwīr*, vol: 1, p.90.

6 Aḥmad Al-Biyalī, *Min Balāghat al-Qurʾān*, (Cairo: Nahdit Misr, 2005 A.D.), p.175.

Structural and Thematic Coherence in Qur'ānic Sūrahs (Taswīr): A New
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the Qur'ān connects various topics within a well-woven, coherent, but unusual structure; "*Alif, Lām, Ra. [This is] a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from [one who is] Wise and Acquainted*" [Q. 11:01].

2. The Qur'ān is a book that combines five integrated purposes: guidance, education, exhortation, legislation, and miracles. All of these are extracted through the implementation of human *ijtihad* according to the observed sources of interpretation and through contemplation and prudence. In order for the Qur'ān to combine these great purposes, it was necessary that its *sūrah*s be unusual when compared to the human writings and styles. The construction that combines all these purposes is the structure shown in the Qur'ānic *sūrah*s' arrangement and titles. The symbols embedded in the titles arouse in the attentive reader an overwhelming desire for exploration, and fondness for discovery.

3. The title of the *sūrah* opens up great horizons in understanding the overall theme of the *sūrah*, and it is possible that there are multiple themes. Al-Biqāʿī laid down a great rule concerning the scientific, practical and civilizational connotations raised by the name of the *sūrah*, as he says: "Whoever realizes what is meant by the title of the *sūrah* recognizes its purpose, and whoever recognizes its intended purpose, marks the appropriateness of the arrangement of its verses, stories, and sections… The *sūrah*, thus, will be like a tall, bright tree, and a joyful, elegant garden, decorated with different types of adornments and arranged in elegant leaves on the branches, whereby the branches represent overlapping sections like circles. Each circle has a branch connected to what precedes it, and a branch fused with what follows it. The end of the *sūrah* accordingly echoes its onset, just as its end transits smoothly to the following *sūrah*, and its onset embraces what precedes it. Each *sūrah* thus becomes a great circle, comprising circles of wonderous verses in a marvelous system interwoven within its branches, and the hanging fruits."[1]

## VIII. The Core of the *sūrah* between its distinct character and its general theme

When examining the specific character of the *sūrah* (the Core of the *sūrah*), one should avoid the temptations of general headings. I noticed that some of the reviewed scholars assigned general headings to the themes of the *sūrah*s which do not identify the theme of one particular *sūrah* and do not provide a clear justification for the presence of those meanings. Sometimes the same words are used in describing a number of *sūrah*s. For example, when I had completed one stage of reflection on *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*, I referred to the book of *Al-Tafsīr Al-Mawḍūʿī*, which was written by scholars at the University of Sharjah with the involvement of a large team of specialists in exegesis. The editor of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* was inclined to give credence to the fact that the core of the *sūrah* was "*True Monotheism and its Components*."[2] His observation is undoubtedly right, but this is definitely a generalized heading as it is suitable for many other *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān. In the present study, I am not inclined to make this general heading the core theme that distinguishes the *sūrah* after it has been structured and walled coherently.

General contemplation followed by analytical interpretation leads to divine guidance to the Core of the *sūrah*. Different readers of the Holy Qur'ān have different contemplations and different results in identifying the "Core of the *surah*." While this is acceptable- as this is one of the most difficult areas related to the contemplation of the Holy Qur'ān, a reader may fall prey to generalizing one topic as the Core of the *sūrah*, unless he pays great attention and seeks help and support from God.

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1 Al-Biqāʿī, *Maṣāʿid al-Nazar*. vol. 1, p.149.

2 Muṣṭafa Muslim et al., *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī li-Suwar Al-Qurʾān Al-Karīm*, (Emirates: University of Sharjah, 1431 AH - 2010 AD), i 1, vol. 2, p.2.

In order to identify the "Core of the *sūrah*," it is necessary to be persistent and to learn the interpretation of the *sūrah* letter by letter and word by word. After that, the overall outline of the *sūrah* should be drawn in an accurate and systematic manner that stems from strong mental and psychological qualities rather than from initial superficial contemplation. Al-Biqāʿī says: "Proficiency in this field depends on understanding the meaning of the purposes of the *sūrah*, which can be achieved by encompassing its entire interpretation with the help of strong intuition, a sharp mind, enlightened thought, and accurate thinking. Therefore, [masters in] this field of study are extremely rare[1]".

Al-Farāhī rightly noticed, "the identification of the "Core of the *sūrah*" is a means to knowing its structure, but it is [one of] the most difficult branches of knowledge and requires intense contemplation and scrutiny. Similar themes and dimensions of the *sūrah* should be explored until the Core of the *sūrah* flashes like dawn, lightening up the whole *sūrah* and clarifying its structure. At that point, each verse is fixed coherently at its own place, and the most likely interpretations are determined"[2].

Deep analytical interpretation is a suitable pathway to identifying the specific Core of the *sūrah* not the general heading. That's why I quite disagree with Imam Abī al-Faḍl al-Mishdālī who relied solely on *munāsabāt* (verse interrelationships) to determine the purpose of the *surah*[3]. What I suggest is that a reader first recognizes the features of the "Core", then interprets the whole *sūrah* according to the stages mentioned at the beginning of this research, after which its core emerges like a full moon denoting the difference between the wording of God and the wording of people.

In my attempt to identify the Core for which the *sūrah* was structured, I relied on the following six criteria; i) the historical context; i.e. when was the *sūrah* revealed?; ii) the Qurʾānic order; its location in terms of the Qurʾānic order; iii) the title of the *sūrah*; iv) the main topics in the *sūrah*, v) the contributions of preceding scholars in identifying the theme of the *sūrah*; and vi) the illustrative outline of the *sūrah* which represents its overall picture [see Figure 1].
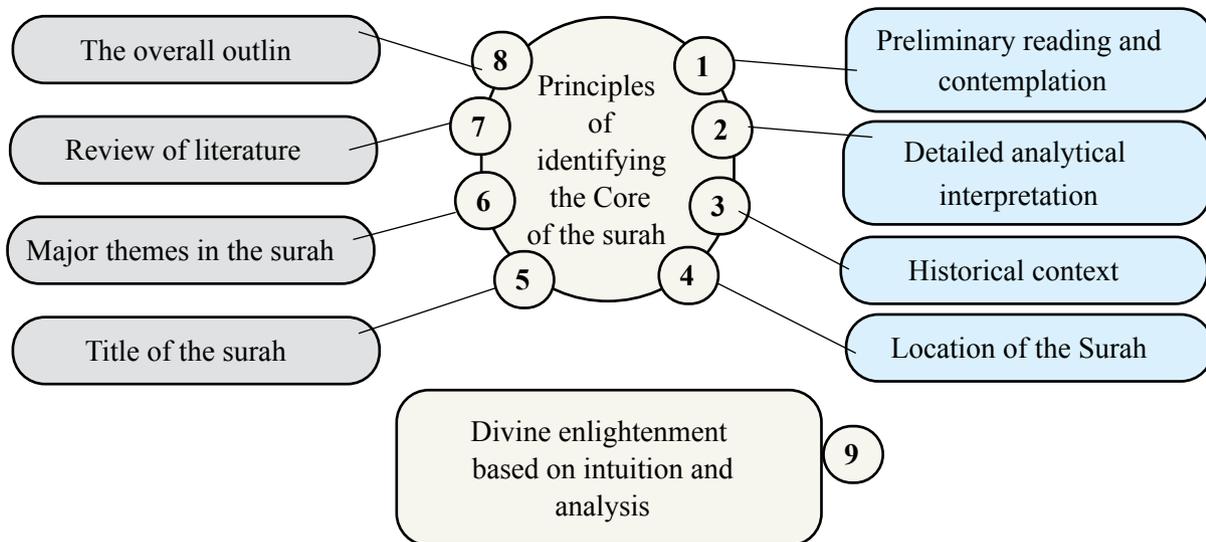


**Figure (1)**: The suggested procedure for *taswīr*.

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1 Al-Biqāʿī, *Dalālat al-Burhān al-Qawīm*, Manuscript, p.2a.

2 ʿAbd Al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī, *Dalāʾl al-Niẓām*, (India: The Ḥamidiyah Circle, 1388 AH), p.77.

3  Al-Biqāʿī, *Dalālat al-Burhān al-Qawīm*, Manuscript, p.2b.

Structural and Thematic Coherence in Qur'ānic Sūrahs (Taswīr): A New
Domain in Qur'ānic inimitability (Sūrat Al-Nisā' as a model)

Abdul-Salām M. Al-Majīdī

## Section II: The six principles for identifying the Core of the *Sūrah*
## (A case study on *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*)

### I. The historical context of revelation

*Sūrat Al-Nisā'* was revealed in Medina, as stated by 'Āishah who said: "I moved to the Prophet's house [as a wife] by the time *Sūrat Al-Baqarah* and *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* were revealed"[1]. By 'revealed', she meant the revelation of the beginning of the *sūrah*, since the remaining verses were revealed later. Some of the verses of the *sūrah* were even revealed near the end of the prophetic mission.

Some scholars argue that the *sūrah* was the ninety-third in order of revelation; as there is weak but famous narration of Ibn 'Abbās concerning the order of the revelation of the *sūrah*s. It stated that the first *sūrah*s that were revealed in Madinah were *Al-Baqarah*, followed by *Al-Anfāl*, *Āl-*'Imrān, *Al-Aḥzāb*, Al-*Mumtaḥinah*, and then *Al-Nisā'*, respectively.

Caution should however, be exercised before accepting this narration, due to the weakness of its chain of transmission on the one hand,[2] and to the contradiction between some of its contents and the historical events on the other. Thus, this narration is not sufficient to bring us closer to the historical order of the revelation of the *sūrah*. The difficulty of determining the exact historical detail of the revelation of the *sūrah* does not mean that there is no aggregate knowledge of the time of the revelation of this *sūrah*. This aggregate knowledge is very useful, and the relative ambiguity of the detailed historical knowledge is even more useful. It forces us to ponder over the Qur'ān, sometimes free from historical circumstances, to think of the message of the Glorious Qur'ān as transcendental without temporal or personal boundaries. This does not mean at all that there is no benefit from the historical event of the revelation of the *sūrah*, since it is one of the greatest aids to understanding its phrases and verses.

The revelation of this *sūrah* began by the end of the third year, or perhaps at the beginning of the fourth year, shortly after the battle of *Uḥud*; as Sa'd bin al-Rabī''s wife came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Those are the two daughters of Sa'd bin al-Rabī', who was killed with you in the battle of *Uḥud*. Their uncle took over all their money and inheritance and left them nothing. What do you see, O Messenger of God? By God, they will never be able to get married unless they have money. He said: (God will judge that case). Accordingly, *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* was revealed, including the verse: "*Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance)*" [Q. 04:11][3].

The *sūrah* thus supports the material rights of orphans and women within the Islamic inheritance system according to an amazingly fair system that integrates with the other areas of life, a system that exceeds in fairness all human systems to this day. Simultaneously, or shortly after its revelation, the verses of family planning were revealed, then the verses of migration from the land of oppression, followed by the verses of

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1 Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, edited by Muḥammad Zuhair bin Nāṣir Al-Nāṣir, (Dar Ṭawq Al-Najah, 1422 AH), 1st ed., vol. 6, p.228.

2  Muḥammad bin Ayūb bin Al-Darīs, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān wa ma 'unzila min al-Qur'ān bi-Makkah wa ma 'unzil bi-al-Madīnah*", edited by Ghazwah Bidair, (Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, 1408 AH - 1987 AD), 1st ed., p.33, Aḥmad bin Al-Ḥussain Al-Baihaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwah wa ma'rifat 'aḥwāl sāḥib al sharī'h*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, 1405 AH), 1st ed., vol. 7, p.144.

3 'Alī bin 'Umar Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan Al-Dāraquṭnī,* edited by Shu'aib Al-Arna'ūṭ et al. (Beirut: Al-Risālah Foundation, 1424 AH - 2004 AD),1st ed., part 5, p.137). The origin of the hadith is in the book of Muḥammad bin 'Issa Al-Tirmidhī, edited and commented on by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir et al., (Cairo: Muṣtafah Al-Bābī Al-Ḥalābī Bookshop and Press Company - Egypt, 1395 AH-1975 AD), 2nd ed., vol. 4, p.414, authenticated by Al-Tirmidhī and declared *ḥasan* by Al-'Albānī. Muḥammad Nāṣir Al-Din Al-'Albānī, *Saḥīḥ wa Da'īf Sunan Al-Tirmidhī*, (Cairo: Hadith corpus Program), vol. 5, p.92.

the rescue of the weak. During that period also, the verses of the dialogue with the People of the Book, Jews and Christians were revealed. This dialogue revolves around aspects of coexistence and a discussion of religious, social, and intellectual issues, including reference to the grave mistakes and violations committed by those who changed and distorted the previous scriptures, in the hope that the new nation will not repeat the same mistakes. The revelation of the *sūrah* continued until some of its verses were among the last verses of the Qur'ān to be revealed, such as the second verse of al-*Kalalah* (distant heirs). Al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib narrated: "the last verse revealed was the conclusion of *Sūrat Al-Nisā', "They request from you a [legal] ruling. Say, "Allah gives you a ruling concerning one having neither descendants nor ascendants [as heirs]*[1]. [Q. 04:176].

## II. Location of the sūrah in the Qur'ān

*Sūrat Al-Nisā'* is the fourth *sūrah* in the order of the Qur'ān corpus (the *muṣḥaf*) after *Al-Fatiḥah, Al-Baqarah and Āl-'Imrān*. The order of the *sūrah*s in the *muṣḥaf* is surprisingly harmonious. The Qur'ān starts with **Al-Fatiḥah** that presents an astonishing brief definition of Islam to the whole world, summarizing extensively the purpose of the Holy Qur'ān, and combined with the Islamic constitutional principles and the necessary provisions that every Muslim should know.

*Sūrat **Al-Baqarah*** is the second in order. It shows the luminous impact of the Islamic civilization on the world, and uses the children of Israeli experience, in its positive and negative sides, as the focus to correct the paths of human succession on earth.

*Sūrat **Āl-'Imrān*** addresses the divine laws in the establishment of goodness in the world, and this requires interaction with the Christian civilization, which represents the second Biblical civilization. In the *sūrah*, Allah highlighted the natural laws for life and established the correct account about the beginning of Christianity. These aspects are intended for the last *Ummah* to benefit from in order to rightly become the best *ummah* brought out to mankind.

The second and the third *sūrah*s (called Al-*Zahrāwān*) thus detailed the integration of religious minorities into society on the one hand, and the interaction with the two most important and influential civilizations on the other.

***Sūrat Al-Nisā'* then seeks to highlight the bright, civilized aspect of the Qur'ānic culture by handling the dispersion of human life and the rights of women at a time where ignorance was at large. This entailed talking about human rights and duties with equity, as women are the means for dispersing humanity, and this necessitated the protection of other oppressed groups in the world.** The *sūrah* specified the individual and the collective rights and duties, and highlighted the rights of orphans, women, and the weak against the whims of persecution and exploitation.

These three issues: minorities, dialogue with the rest of the world, and women are the most important issues that many global powers use to demonstrate their intellectual superiority. While they did not care about these issues until the end of the twentieth century, the Qur'ān cared for them one thousand four hundred years ago. Those issues were fairly dealt with by the Qur'ān, while they are addressed nowadays by the present-day powers through the racist (veto) system, and according to whims of exploitation.

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1  Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, p.190.

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### III. The title of Sūrat Al-Nisā' and its relationship to its overall topic

Why was the *sūrah* entitled "*Al-Nisā'*" although it is one of the seven lengthy *sūrah*s? The answer is that "Women are the sisters of men", as the Prophet (PBUH) says[1]. Neither spouse can dispense without the other in the "spreading of humanity." If this is the case, then women must take their logical and honorable place in human interaction. Nevertheless, ignorance, both ancient and modern, deprived women of their rights, and they were treated in many civilizations as outcasts, enslaved gender. The situation did not change until a women demonstration took place in New York in 1856 AD to protest against the inhumane way in which they were treated. On March 8, 1908, women protested again in New York carrying pieces of dry bread and bundles of roses, and demanded a reduction in working hours and a prohibition on using children in work. In 1977, the United Nations designated March 8th as the International Women's Day, but they ignored the fact that the Glorious Qur'ān was the only constitutional book that supported the rights of women more than 1400 years ago.

Thus, the title of the *sūrah* gains its high status from empowering women and granting them fair treatment in an unprecedented manner, the like of which cannot be found in history.

### IV. The most significant topics in the sūrah

*Sūrat Al-Nisā'* addresses many other issues including piety and the rights of the weak, such as orphans, women, oppressed men and the mentally disqualified. The issue of fairness is also prominent with the organization of the judicial authority, which details the provisions of wealth, and the division of inheritance. The *sūrah* also addresses family and social organization in several places. The presence of the Biblical powers is also there, comparable to their presentence in *Sūrat Al-Baqarah* and *Āl-'Imrān*. In addition, the *sūrah* deals with the conspiracies of the hypocrites who were part of the satanic plot that is detailed in the *sūrah*. The *sūrah* provides even the smallest details about sustaining security in military strategies, in addition to the issues of prayer and the pillars of faith which appear in various instances.

### V. Contributions of the predecessors in identifying the theme of the sūrah

Ibn Al-Zubair Al-Ghirnāī argued that this *sūrah* was based on communication, solidarity, and nurturing the rights of kinship and relatives[2]. However, he did not attempt to employ a specific methodology to expound his theme. He only reviewed the contents generally, and therefore could not specify one core theme accurately.

Al-Biqā'ī argued that the theme of the *sūrah* was: to reach a consensus on monotheism. He added that the *sūrah* was called "*Sūrat Al-Nisā*" because the greatest cause of communication and continuity is usually the women (wombs)[3]. However, *Tawḥīd* (monotheism) is a very general topic and is one which almost all *sūrah*s address, so it is not an appropriate core theme for *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* with its many and varied topics.

The editor of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* in *"Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī* - Sharjah" argued that the theme of the *sūrah* was

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1 Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, edited by Shu'aib Al-Arnā'ūṭ et al, supervised by: 'Abdullah Muḥsin Al-Turkī, (Al-Risālah Foundation, 1421 AH - 2001 AD), 1st ed., vol. 6, p.256, No. 26238. Al-'Arnā'ūṭ assessed the hadith as *ḥassan* based on other narrations.

2 Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm Al-Thaqafī, *Al-Burhān fī tanasub suwar al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Sha'bānī, (Morocco: Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, 1410 AH-1990 AD) p.198

3 Al-Biqā'ī, *Maṣā'id al-nazar*, vol. 2. p.88.

true monotheism and its components,[1] which is similar to the preceding suggestion.

Sayyid Quṭub suggested that the theme of the *sūrah* is partly connected to the effort made by Islam in raising the Muslim character, establishing the Islamic community, and protecting that community[2]. However, most *sūrah*s address such topics. Sayyid Quṭub surveyed the topics and objectives of the *sūrah*, and in doing so he mentioned the general goals of: organizing the Muslim community on the basis of solidarity, mercy, advice, tolerance, honesty, justice, purity, erasing ignorance, and establishing and fixing the new and sublime features. The main goal, according to him is defining the meaning of religion, and linking to it all the systems and legislations that govern the life of the individual and the life of society[3].

Al-Ṭahir bin ʿAshūr does not follow a methodology in his interpretation for identifying a specific theme of each *sūrah*. Rather he mentions the most important purposes of the *sūrah* in his introduction. He says, "This *sūrah* contains many purposes and provisions, most of which are concerned with legislations and rights of relatives and kinship"[4].

Muṣṭafa Muslim, one of the main contributors to *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī* referred in his book "*Miracle and the Messenger in the Light of Sūrat Al-Furqan*" to the Core of *Sūrat Al-Nisāʾ* – which he calls its axis, stating: "*Sūrat Al-Nisāʾ* is one of the *sūrah*s whose name has been fixed by revelation. No great effort is needed to recognize the relationship between the name and the focus of the *sūrah*. Women are one inseparable part of the Islamic community that need special care and attention .. the focus of *Sūrat Al-Nisāʾ* then is: the care for the rights of the weak –i.e, women and orphans – in Islamic community."[5]

The contributions of these predecessors have provided me with food for thought concerning the evaluation of the theme I have chosen to be the Core of the *sūrah*.

## VI. The illustrative outline of the sūrah which forms its overall picture

The *sūrah* does not collect scattered verses and topics without a clear link between them. Rather, each verse leads to the next and transits from the preceding ones according to a linear and circular connection. After reflection, I concluded that the Core of the *sūrah* is: *Dispersing of the human life, the divine legal regulation, and the protection of the weak, especially women and children, from persecution.*

This is the reason for which the *sūrah* is identified as a seperate entity surrounded by a wall (*taswīr*). Due to its distinct character, understanding the *taswīr* of this *sūrah* requires perseverance. In recognition of this, Allah invites us to ponder over the Qurʾān in this *sūrah*, *"Do they not then consider the Qurʾān carefully? Had it been from someone other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions."* *[Q. 05: 82].*

After reaching the last verse in the *sūrah*, I realized that *Sūrat Al-Nisāʾ* is organized by one clear core that links its verses according to an elaborate, precise outline, displaying all aspects of the integrated picture in a linear and circular integration. Refer to Figure (2) for summary of this outline that I reached after about six years of contemplation[6].

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1 Muṣṭafa Muslim, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī*, vol. 2, p.2.
2  Sayyid Quṭub, *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2, p.350.
3 Ibid., vol. 2, p.358.
4 Ibn ʿAshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 4, p.264.
5 Muṣṭafa Muslim, The Miracle and the Messenger through Sūrat Al-Furqan, (Damascus: Dar Al-Qalam, 1427 AH-2006).
6  These figures were published in the book: Dispersing Human Life (*Al-Wajīz fī baṣāʾir Sūrat An-Nisaʾ*), (Qatar: Lūsail House, 2019).

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| Knowledge Insights from Surat Al-Nisā' | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Core theme**: Dispersing human life, Divine legislation, protecting the rights of the weak (women and children). | | | | | | |
| **Introduction**: The legislative rights that sustain the dispersion of human life. [05:01] | | | | | | |
| **Subtheme 7** | **Subtheme 6** | **Subtheme 5** | **Subtheme 4** | **Subtheme 3** | **Subtheme 2** | **Subtheme 1** |
| Types of those who tamper with the dispersion of human life, prevent justice, and spread injustice and extremism in the world [05: 137-173] | Legal Rights [05:105-136] | Dispersing the human life requires stability by preserving internal security and world peace [05:71-104] | Guided administration and the organization of human rights [05:44-70] | Fortifying of the stability of the central family through its relations with the intermediate and extended families in order to disperse human life [05: 26-43] | Emergence of the central family [05:15-25] | The beginning of the human life - women and children. [05:02-14] |
| **Conclusion**: The right of the world to know the true book that establishes the structure of human life and solves its problems, combining reason and emotion, with no bias towards either, and emphasizing the rights of the intermediate family to protect humanity from misguidance. [05: 174-176]. | | | | | | |

**Figure (2)**: Application of *Taswīr* on *Sūrat Al-Nisā'*.

Figure (2) is an illustrative outline that shows the summary of applying the process of *taswīr*. The chart shows the general theme of the *sūrah* (its core) at the top, and below it the division of the *sūrah* into an introduction, seven topics and a conclusion.

**The introduction** is summarized in one verse (verse 1) but efficiently includes the foundations that ensure the dispersion of human life according to the principle of equity.

After understanding the most important legislative foundations that guarantee the dispersion of human life, then we come to the details that shadow the human existence. Here we see the topics of the *sūrah*, which start with logical transition from the introduction to beginning of the human life.

**Subtheme 1** (**the beginning of the human life - women and children**. Here, we find a detailed treatment of the financial rights of weak groups in societies, i.e. children (especially orphans), women, and the mentally disqualified. We can also notice that their integration into society is based on a fair basis that is strongly related to the first source of wealth, which is inheritance. This topic is elaborated in verses [2-14] as it is divided into five mutually supportive sections that follow a linear pattern.

**Subtheme 2 (emergence of the central family).** The central family consists of the spouses and children. This topic details the most important marriage laws which build the family unit and preserve

humanity's right to stability and growth. This is discussed through verses [15-25].

**Subtheme 3 (fortifying of the stability of the central family through its relations with the intermediate and extended families in order to disperse human life).** By intermediate family I mean the relatives and kinship, while by the extended family I mean the remaining members of humanity. This topic presents the divine organization of three human families (central, intermediate and extended) and the legislation of financial and psychological bases to maintain family cohesion [verses 26-43].

**Subtheme 4 (guided administration and the organization of human rights).** After the establishment of the three types of families, the organization of their lives must be established. In this topic, we read about the protection of humanity by forming the rightly guided administration that ensures that everyone gets their rights and attacks the misguided people who tamper with the rights of others and prevent the establishment of the righteous administration. The topic is discussed in verses [44-70].

**Subtheme 5 (dispersing the human life requires stability by preserving internal security and world peace).** A righteous and guided administration must be based on building a civil human rights society to ensure the dispersion of the human life by maintaining societal security and global peace. This requires protecting the society by applying the strategy of exercising caution against various evils, supporting the weak, and sustaining justice and dignity. The topic is discussed through verses [71-104].

After the establishment of the three types of families, the righteous administration, and the emphasis on protection of security and peace according to the strategy of taking caution, it is necessary to look for a specific mechanism to deal with conflicts between members of the three types of families or between all previous groups. For that purpose, the sixth topic emerges.

**Subtheme 6 (Legal Rights).** This topic addresses the role of earthly authority in protecting justice and conveying rights to their owners [105-136]. It begins by dealing with litigation and ends with the famous verse of justice.

Thus, the six topics present an elaborate and precise framework for dispersion of human life. To complete the picture, we still have to examine the types of people who tamper with dispersion of human life. So, it is the right time to introduce the seventh subtheme.

**Subtheme 7 (types of those who tamper with the dispersion of human life, prevent justice, and spread injustice and extremism in the world)** [137-173].

The intensive review of this great *sūrah* reveals an integrated framework for dispersing human life which is unprecedented by any of the modern human systems that claim the protection of human rights. Therefore, it is logical for that subtheme to come at the end of the *sūrah*.

**The Conclusion of the *Sūrah*.** The conclusion highlights the right of the whole world to come to know the true book that establishes the structure of human life and solves its problems, combining reason and emotion, with no bias towards either, and emphasizing the rights of the intermediate family to protect humanity from misguidance [174-176].

The application and employment of *taswīr* as a field of study helps to define the strength of the link between each subtheme and the others, as well as between the conclusion of the *sūrah* and its introduction. This formulates a circular connection between the verses of the *sūrah*, the subthemes, the introduction and the conclusion. This can be called the transition bridge within the circular connection.

Each point of this outline can be elaborated in more detail. We may support this argument with a single

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example, i.e. Figure (3) that demonstrates why I identified the Core of the *sūrah* to be based on this golden phrase (Dispersion of human life).
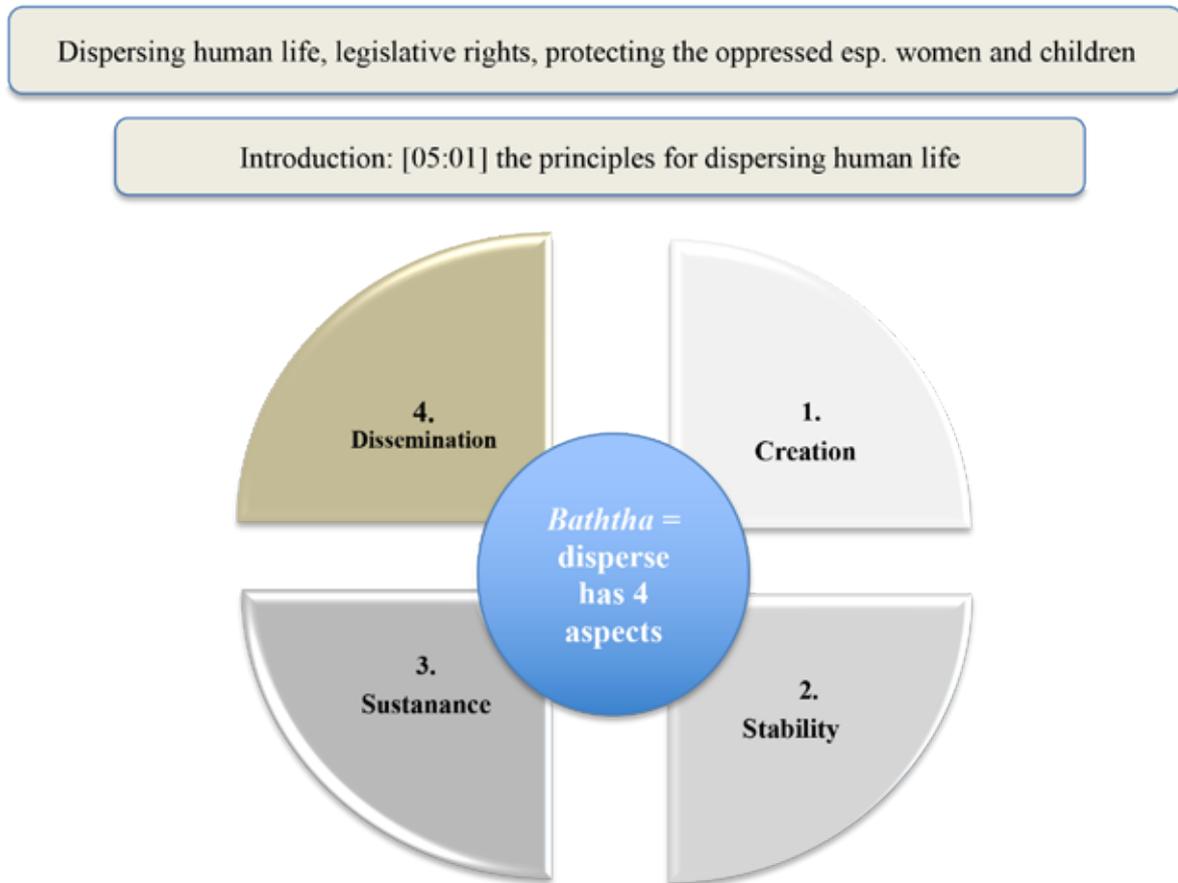


**Figure (3):** Meanings of *baththa* (disperse) as a keyword in the *Sūrah.*

Figure (3) shows that the word "*baththa = disperse*" implies four senses: i) **creation**, as dispersion entails the existence of the thing to be dispersed; ii) **stability** through marriage; iii) **sustenance** through the presence of a legal system that guarantees the establishment of justice; and (iv) **dissemination**, which is the original meaning of the word "*baththa.*"

**Conclusion**

**Results of the study**

1. *Taswīr* of Qur'ānic *sūrah*s as a field of study is a breakthrough in the field of Qur'ānic studies.

2. The connection between Qur'ānic sentences and verses is not based on the usual rhetorical relationships only. Rather, there is a numerical arrangement that shows the Qur'ānic construction of verses, *sūrah*s, parts and sections in an amazingly logical manner.

3. *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* is organized into one clear Core theme that links its verses according to an elaborate and detailed outline forming an integrated picture. In this *sūrah*, Allah Almighty shows us His greatest favor; i.e. "dispersing the human life" and regulating the rights of its members with justice. The *sūrah* highlights the bright, civilized aspect of the Qur'ānic culture by addressing the rights of the weak, especially women and children.

4. The Core of the *sūrah* brings the jurisprudence and main topics of *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* closer to people in a modern and attractive manner through elaborating on the intellectual, legislative, legal, and jurisprudential details, taking into account the optimal contemporary style that people in the present day understand.

5. This Core theme highlights the Qur'ānic structural inimitability in its legislative and educational aspects, through its transcendentality and timelessness.

**Recommendations**

1. Implementing the taswir methodology to elucidate the civilizational and human values embedded in the *sūrah*s of the Holy Qur'ān, and to draw inspiration from their insights. This then can be applied in civilizational communication with the world to carry out the message of Islam.

2. Adopting the "Qur'ānic Insights" project and implementing it through models in multiple formats targeting different groups in society.

3. Holding scientific conferences to refine and improve the research methods involved in the "Qur'ānic Insights Project" and employing the innovative tool of *taswīr* with its methodological procedures and principles.

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