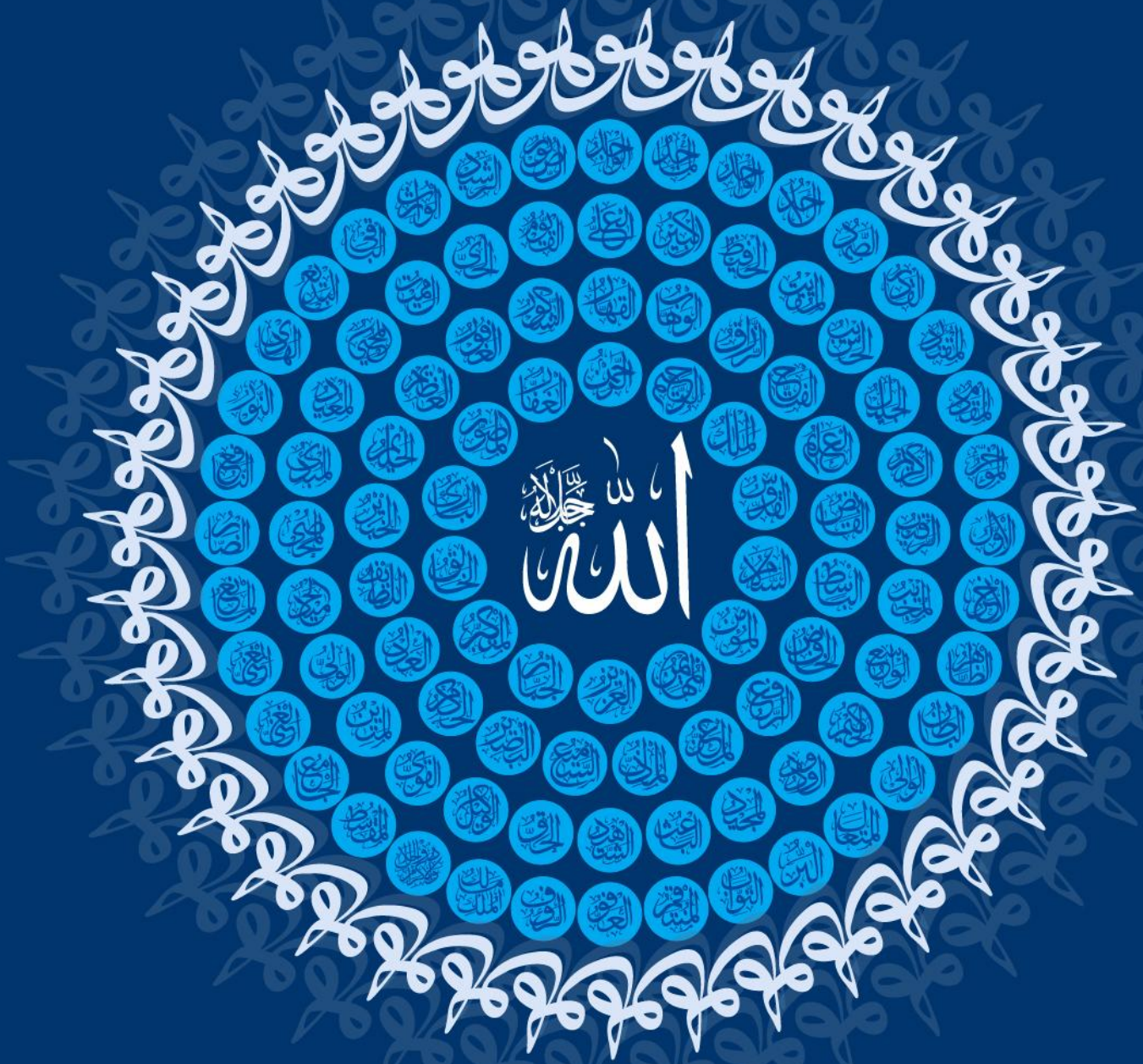




# Understanding the Qur'an Through the Names and Attributes of Allah

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## Author Biography

**Dr. Jinan Yousef** has been an author for over a decade, and most recently published the book, *Reflecting on the Names of Allah* (Al-Buruj Press, 2020). She has been a student of Sheikh Akram Nadwi for many years, and currently studies *tafsīr* and *hadith* at Al-Salām Institute. Jinan teaches classes on the names of Allah for SWISS online. She is passionate about helping Muslims connect to Allah through knowing Him by His names.

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## Introduction

When approaching the Qur'an, many of us bring our expectations and assumptions. While this is natural, failing to understand that we do so can lead us to unknowingly projecting our presuppositions upon the divine text, which is likely to prevent us from appreciating the Qur'an on its own terms. Particularly when reading a translation, which is inevitably an interpretation, the modern reader may be unable to understand why Allah mentions the destruction of previous peoples, or the torment of the Hellfire, and might feel unsure of how to connect to the mercy of God in light of these verses. Hence, some people distance themselves from the Qur'an.

But the Prophet ﷺ said, “The people of the Qur'an are the people of Allah and His chosen ones,”<sup>1</sup> and this should make us want to know what we are missing. Ibn al-Qayyim laments the state of those who turn away from the Qur'an, and hence miss out on that which gives life to the heart and light to the eyes.<sup>2</sup>

The Qur'an has been sent by God to His creation. It has a purpose. Yet, our experience of the Qur'an is directly linked to how we view Allah, as our ‘God image’ impacts our relationship with Him, ourselves, and the world.<sup>3</sup> If we have a negative image of Allah, we may simply view the Qur'an as a harsh book of dos and don'ts. Conversely, if we rightly see Allah as merciful, just, majestic and nurturing—as He describes Himself—we can read the Qur'an's verses in a completely different light. We find affection, strength, mercy, and wisdom, where previously we may not have.

Consider this: If you were in trouble, or lost with no idea how to find your way, and you received a message from someone you have no doubt cares about you, is incredibly smart, and is aware of your situation, you would be attentive when

<sup>1</sup> *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 215, *ṣaḥīḥ* according to al-Albānī.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn bayna manāzil iyyāka na 'budu wa iyyāka nasta 'in* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1416 AH, 1996 CE), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Hassan Elwan and Osman Umarji, “The Alchemy of Divine Love: How Our View of God Affects Our Faith and Happiness,” *Yaqeen*, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-alchemy-of-divine-love-how-our-view-of-god-affects-our-faith-and-happiness>.

reading their letter. You probably would not want this person to sugarcoat the issues causing you problems—you need them to be direct with you, so that you can make it out of your predicament. Even if there are points you do not comprehend fully, you would try to figure them out rather than dismiss them, as you know that whatever is in the letter is for your benefit. You need help, and you trust this person to help you.

Your reading of this letter would be very different from that of a person who does not know the author of the letter (“Why should I trust this letter?”), doesn’t realize they need help or is too proud to admit it (“I know better”), or is unaware of why the letter was sent to begin with (“Why is this person talking like this?”). They may be offended, confused or unable to realize the importance of the letter—consequently, they likely will not benefit.

Allah is far above any analogy, but this is similar to our relationship with the Qur’an. When we know who Allah is and know the purpose of His book, we can find solace in it and benefit in this life and the next. When we do not, we may be completely unmoved and even resentful. As Ibn al-Qayyim notes, Allah has given us two ways to know Him: through His signs in the external world (i.e., the creation of the heavens and the earth), and the second by reflecting on His verses in the Qur’an and contemplating them.<sup>4</sup> When we know His names and who He is, this becomes the lens by which we interpret His signs in the universe and His signs in His book.

Thus, one of the first things we should do—and this is accessible to everyone—is to learn who Allah is in relation to the Qur’an. Once we do, it becomes much easier to love the Qur’an and to want to understand its messages deeply. Indeed, one of the keys to *tadabbur*—deep reflection—is approaching the Qur’an with the right mindset.<sup>5</sup> If our mindset is that the Qur’an is from the One who wants the best for us, who wants to guide us, and is the most knowledgeable, we are more likely to be actively looking for how we can benefit from every verse.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Fawā'id* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah, 1973), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Yousef Wahb and Mohammed Elshinawy, “Keys to Taddabur: How to Reflect Deeply on the Qur’an,” *Yaqeen*, 2021, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/keys-to-tadabbur-how-to-reflect-deeply-on-the-quran>.

This paper will explore approaching the Qur'an through Allah's names, and how that impacts the way we receive its message. Since Allah Himself highlights specific names when He talks about the revelation of His book, the paper contextualizes the messages of the Qur'an through the names that Allah mentions, in order to help the reader connect to Allah through the Qur'an.

## Understanding the Qur'an by knowing Allah first

To understand the Qur'an, we must connect to the One who sent it. As Jeffrey Lang states,

The Qur'an's "most beautiful names" of God imply an intense involvement in the human venture. These names, such as The Merciful, The Compassionate, The Forgiving, The Giving, The Loving, The Creator, etc., reveal a God that creates men and women in order to relate to them on an intensely personal level, on a level higher than with the other creatures known to mankind, not out of a psychological or emotional need but because this is the very essence of His nature. Therefore, we find that the relationship between the sincere believer and God is characterized consistently as a bond of love. God loves the good-doers (2:195; 3:134, 3:148, 5:13, 5:93), the repentant (2:222), those that purify themselves (2:222; 9:108), the God-conscious (3:76; 9:4; 9:7), the patient (3:146), those that put their trust in Him (3:159), the just (5:42; 49:9; 60:8), and those who fight in His cause (61:4). And they, in turn, love God.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the Qur'an, Allah reminds us that the revelation is 'a sending down'—*tanzīl*—from Him, drawing on particular names and attributes to emphasize who He is.<sup>7</sup> The use of the word *tanzīl* is important, as it reminds the reader that the Qur'an is coming from above, from the Most High Himself, delivered by Jibrīl to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.<sup>8</sup> There is no earthly influence, nor deficiency; it is from divine perfection.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Lang, *Even Angels Ask* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2021), 28. Jeffrey Lang is an American professor of mathematics. He converted to Islam in the 1980s, and is the author of several books on Islam.

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an 39:1, 40:2, 41:2, 46:2, and others.

<sup>8</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, <https://tafsir.app/alrazi/39/1>.

Allah tells us that the Qur'an is *tanzīl* from the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the Most-Wise, the Praiseworthy, and the Lord of the Worlds. It is perhaps akin to saying “This letter is from your loving father” or “This guide is from the expert explorer.” The simple addition of the attributes of the author completely changes how we receive the message.

Similarly, connecting the Qur'an to our Lord, Creator, and Sustainer makes it personal, and the names chosen in turn reassure us. If one were to give you medicine, you may be suspicious until you are informed that the medicine is from a knowledgeable doctor. If that brilliant doctor was also your affectionate father, you would be even more comforted and confident in the medicine you are being given. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states,

People in this world are like the sick, chronically ill, and the needy. The Qur'an contains all the medicine that unwell people need and all the nutrition that healthy people need. The greatest blessings of God Almighty upon the people of this world was the revelation of the Qur'an to them.<sup>9</sup>

## Who is Allah? The names (and attributes) of Allah in the Qur'an?

### Mercy

Prior to telling us the message of the Qur'an—the purpose of life, how to live our lives, the nature of heaven and hell—Allah tells us who He is. Before we begin reading the Book, we are informed of some essential facts about who has sent it to us. This brief yet deeply profound introduction sets the tone for the whole Book. Allah tells us:

In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.<sup>10</sup>

[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*, <https://tafsir.app/alrazi/41/2>.

<sup>10</sup> There are different ways to translate these names. They will be translated here as the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful for consistency, but it is important to keep in mind the vast meanings (Qur'an 41:2).

## The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.

### Sovereign of the Day of Recompense.<sup>11</sup>

First impressions are usually the most important, and Allah could have chosen any of His many names to introduce Himself to us: those related to His omnipotence and majesty, or His creation of the heavens and the earth. Yet in the first three verses of the Qur'an, He mentions these names twice:

*Al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*—the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.

Sūrat al-Fātiḥah begins with the declaration, “In the name of Allah.” One might ask, “Well, who is Allah?” The following verses answer that. He is *al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*. Not only does the opening chapter start with these names, we begin any recitation of the Book with these names in particular,<sup>12</sup> and not any others.

The root of both *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* is *raḥmah*, which is translated as mercy—compassion, sympathy, and kindness.<sup>13</sup> If we want to know what mercy looks like in action, the Prophet ﷺ showed this to the companions through a scene that was happening before them. After one of the battles—there were women and children left behind—a woman began to nurse her child. The Prophet ﷺ pointed this out to the companions and asked, “Do you think this woman would throw her child into the fire?” The companions answered in the negative. He said, “Allah is more merciful to His servants than this mother is to her child.”<sup>14</sup>

In combination, these two names tell us that Allah is consistently the most intensely caring, compassionate and clement. *Al-Raḥmān*—in this morphological form—tells us that His mercy is overflowing, limitless, and incomparable.<sup>15</sup> Al-Ghazālī states that His mercy “is all-inclusive in that it includes the worthy and the unworthy, this life and that which is to come and encompasses the essentials,

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, 1:1–4.

<sup>12</sup> Except for Sūrat al-Tawbah.

<sup>13</sup> *Hans Wehr* (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1993), 384.

<sup>14</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5999; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2754.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*, <https://tafsir.app/zad-almaseer/1/1>.

needs, and advantages which go beyond them.”<sup>16</sup> In practical terms, this reminds us that whatever kindness we have felt from any human being, Allah’s kindness is infinitely greater than that. This is further emphasized in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ that, “Allah made mercy into one hundred parts. He kept ninety-nine parts with Himself and sent down one part to the earth. From that one part, the creation is merciful to each other, such that a horse raises its hoof over its child for fear of trampling it.”<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim states beautifully that Allah being *al-Raḥmān* means He does not neglect His servants.<sup>18</sup> He further mentions that whoever knows *al-Raḥmān* knows that His mercy in sending prophets and revelation is even greater than His mercy in sending down rain because the former gives life to the hearts and soul, not just the bodies.<sup>19</sup>

And *al-Raḥīm* confirms that this attribute is permanent and constant. God is not erratic or ‘moody,’ and thus there is stability and certainty in His attributes and His all-encompassing mercy. Allah has a special mercy for those who believe, as He says, “And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.”<sup>20</sup> No one is forcing Him to be merciful (as no one can). Allah tells us, “Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy.”<sup>21</sup> He Himself has chosen to decree this divine, extraordinary care for His servants.

Since Allah is the Most Merciful towards His servants, He reminds us that He has sent this Book out of His mercy and affection, so that we may come out of darkness to the light, and that we may know Him, worship Him, and submit to Him. This Qur’an is an expression of mercy that connects us to the All-Merciful and that guides us to the abode of His mercy.<sup>22</sup> Everything in the Qur’an is from the *raḥmah*—the intense, overwhelming care—that Allah has for us. This attribute is emphasized throughout the Qur’an, and when we are instructed to begin its

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<sup>16</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God: Al-Maqṣad Al-Asnā Fī Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh Al-Ḥusnā*, trans. David Burrell and Nazih Daher, The Ghazali Series (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 52.

<sup>17</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6000; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2752.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Qur’an 33:43.

<sup>21</sup> Qur’an 6:54.

<sup>22</sup> *Tafsīr al-Sa’dī*, <https://tafsir.app/saadi/36/5>.

recitation with these names, we understand that every letter in this Book is infused with divine mercy. Hence, the stories told are out of concern for us. The rulings proscribed are for our benefit. The warnings and admonishments are so that we do not suffer eternal pain. Out of His mercy, He sends the Qur'an to reveal the truth, to bring closer those who are far, and to comfort those who seek Allah with glad tidings and something to look forward to.<sup>23</sup> The Qur'an is a letter of care for those who reflect.

Some might still pause. The Qur'an may be from the One who is most merciful, loving, and kind towards us, but some things perhaps do not make sense to us. Thus Allah reminds us that not only is the Qur'an from the Most Merciful, but from the All-Knowing, the Most-Wise.

### Knowledge and Wisdom

In five places in the Qur'an, Allah mentions that the *tanzīl* is from *al-ʿAlīm* or *al-Ḥakīm*—the All-Knowing or the Most Wise—coupled with His name *al-ʿAzīz*. He says, for example:

The revelation of this Book is from Allah—the Almighty, All-Knowing.<sup>24</sup>

The revelation of this Book is from Allah—the Almighty, All-Wise.<sup>25</sup>

*Al-ʿAlīm* (the All-Knowing) is He who has all-encompassing knowledge. The root is *ʿayn-lām-mīm*, which encompasses knowledge, awareness, and certainty. Allah *al-ʿAlīm* knows what is and what could be, what was and what could have been, the inner and the outer. What is hidden to people, to Him is manifest.<sup>26</sup> Yet, in our day-to-day interactions, we may be familiar with people who 'know a lot,' but are not the most perceptive or discerning. Allah is also *al-Ḥakīm*—the Most Wise. One of the meanings of *ḥikmah* is to put things in their appropriate place.<sup>27</sup> Because

<sup>23</sup> Ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-tanwīr*, <https://tafsir.app/ibn-aashoor/36/5>.

<sup>24</sup> Qur'an 40:2.

<sup>25</sup> Qur'an 46:2.

<sup>26</sup> Maher Muqaddim, *Asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā: Jalālahā wa laṭāʾif iqtirānīhā wa thamarātihā fī ḍawʾ al-kitāb wa-l-sunnah*, 3rd ed. (Kuwait: al-Imam al-Thahabi, 2014), 191–92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifāʾ al-ʿalīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1398 AH, 1978 CE), 181.

Allah is *al-Hakīm*, He never engages in what is ugly,<sup>28</sup> and His actions are always measured and purposeful. Al-Rāzī states that these names are combined here as Allah is telling us that He sent down the Qur'an with His might and knowledge, and this can be seen in what it contains of benefits and miracles.<sup>29</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr adds that because the Qur'an is the speech of the Almighty, the All-Knowing, no one but Allah has the ability and knowledge to come up with something similar.<sup>30</sup>

When Allah informs us that this Qur'an is from the One who knows every detail—the past and future, the physical and metaphysical—and that He is the most wise and knowledgeable, He tells us that everything in this Book is beneficial for us in this life and the next. If we were to receive a book from someone who cares for us, the contents may satisfy us emotionally. But if we were told that the foremost authority on a particular topic had authored the book, we would naturally take it more seriously at an intellectual level as well. We would trust the advice given therein because we have faith in the knowledge and expertise of that human being (who is still fallible!).

When we internalize the fact of Allah's knowledge and wisdom as the 'author' of the Qur'an—when we truly comprehend that the Qur'an is literally the word of God—we truly understand reality. *The more we reflect on the Qur'an, the clearer our priorities become.* We have certainty that what He has ordained for us benefits us, and that what He has prohibited is harmful. When facing trouble, we know that the answer can be found in His Words. Since we know these verses are from the All-Knowing, the Most Wise, we trust in Him, and so when there are matters that we do not comprehend, we take the time to understand them as opposed to dismissing what we do not know. Allah tells us clearly that, “You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not.”<sup>31</sup>

When Yūsuf (as), in the Qur'an, is finally reunited with his family, he says, “... My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He wills; He is the All Knowing, the Truly

<sup>28</sup> Muqaddim, *Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*, <https://tafsir.app/alrazi/40/2>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-tanwīr*, <https://tafsir.app/ibn-aashoor/40/3>.

<sup>31</sup> Qur'an 2:216.

Wise.”<sup>32</sup> Yūsuf could see that everything that had happened in his life was purposeful and indeed necessary for him to be where he was in that moment. One may have questioned the mercy and wisdom in a child being separated from his family by jealous siblings, being sold into slavery, and then being falsely accused and thrown into jail for several years. Yet all those events led to Yūsuf becoming a trusted and beloved person of authority and stature. Allah elevated him because of his patience and God-consciousness. There was both wisdom and mercy in every single twist of his life.

While in Yūsuf’s case the wisdom of Allah became apparent in the final earthly outcome, wisdom is not confined to what is seen in this realm *or even what is valued according to worldly standards*. One who has a profitable business selling alcohol, for example, might decide to mend his or her ways and change careers. They may suffer materially as a result. Perhaps their standard of living declines. They start losing business contacts. If their family opposes this change, their relationships may even break down. These are all tangible losses. But no one knows the spiritual blessings descending upon this person because of what they gave up for God. No one knows the harms that were avoided at a personal and communal level because this person did the right thing. And no one will ever know what Allah has kept hidden for this person in Paradise as a result of their devotion to God and their steadfastness in the face of difficulty and temptation. Allah reminds us of all of this when He tells us that the Qur’an is sent from the All-Knowing, the Most Wise.

## Power and Care

Of course, in this world, the attributes of mercy and knowledge may be highly regarded, yet the person who possesses them may also be weak. A weak person can be easily overpowered, and their advice unrealistic. Hence, Allah emphasizes that this Book is also from *al-‘Azīz* and *Rabb al-‘Ālamīn*.

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<sup>32</sup> Qur’an 12:100.

Allah reminds the reciters of the Qur'an that, "This is a revelation from the Almighty, Most Merciful,"<sup>33</sup> and "The revelation of this Book is from Allah—the Almighty, All-Wise."<sup>34</sup> Allah frequently mentions His *'izzah* when referring to the *tanzīl* of the Qur'an,<sup>35</sup> and the Qur'an itself is described as being *'azīz*.<sup>36</sup>

*'Izzah* is a combination of might, nobility, invincibility, venerability, and uniqueness.<sup>37</sup> *Al-'Azīz* is the one who overpowers and cannot be overpowered, who is untouchable and all-powerful, completely unique, possessed of all glory and honor, and who grants strength and honor to whom He wills.<sup>38</sup>

During the Battle of Badr, the Muslims were greatly outnumbered. Allah tells the believers that He sent them angels as reinforcements, and the Muslims were victorious during the battle. But Allah reminds us all: "And Allah only made it as a glad tidings, and so that your hearts should become serene thereby, for support is only from Allah; indeed, Allah is Almighty (*'Azīz*), All-Wise (*Hakīm*)."<sup>39</sup> Might and victory are not from the angels; rather they are from Allah.

When Allah tells us that this Book is from *al-'Azīz*, He is telling us that He has protected the Qur'an from change or alteration.<sup>40</sup> This should inspire confidence in its eternal message.<sup>41</sup> It urges people to walk the path of truth and guidance without weakness, and it issues warnings and threats against disobedience and disbelief.<sup>42</sup> When we see injustice in the world around us, when we ourselves feel weak, the Qur'an reminds us that it is from *al-'Azīz*, and thus we can draw strength and comfort from it.<sup>43</sup> The Qur'an shows us the fate of those who transgress and do harm; they will not be left to their ways indefinitely. Allah is *al-'Azīz*—when He warns, He is able to follow through.

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<sup>33</sup> Qur'an 36:5.

<sup>34</sup> Qur'an 39:1.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Qur'an 40:2, 42:2, 45:2.

<sup>36</sup> Qur'an 41:41.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Wehr, 713.

<sup>38</sup> Muqaddim, *Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 64–65.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'an, 8:10

<sup>40</sup> *Tafsīr al-Sa'dī*, <https://tafsir.app/saadi/36/5>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wal-tanwīr*, <https://tafsir.app/ibn-aashoor/39/1>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wal-tanwīr*, <https://tafsir.app/ibn-aashoor/36/5>.

<sup>43</sup> *Tafsīr al-Sa'dī*, <https://tafsir.app/saadi/39/1>.

Furthermore, His might is not like human might. People who have overpowering strength may express it rashly or cruelly, oppressing others, but Allah is the Most Wise, the Most Merciful. His might is measured in its expression, just in its outcome, for the best reasons, and with utmost mercy.

Allah also reminds us that the Qur'an is *tanzīl* from *Rabb al-‘ālamīn*, the Lord of the worlds, stating “[This is] the revelation of the Book about which there is no doubt from the Lord of the worlds.”<sup>44</sup> Allah being *Rabb al-‘ālamīn* means that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all, caretaker of all affairs, the Nurturer, who brings into existence and takes out of existence; it means He alone is God, worthy of worship, the true refuge, and the sanctuary during calamity; indeed, there is no lord but Him, and no god but Him.<sup>45</sup> The word *tarbiyah*, from the same root, is about nurturing, and Allah *al-Rabb* is He who gently moves one from one condition to another until the fulfillment of the end goal.<sup>46</sup>

Telling us that the *tanzīl* is from *Rabb al-‘ālamīn* reminds us that Allah is nurturing us through the Qur'an. We are given this “revelation from the One who created the earth and the high heaven,”<sup>47</sup> and He is teaching us how best to be in this world and how best to be with Him to attain our final goal: Paradise with Him. Our purpose in this world is elaborated upon, the nature of tests as well as good and evil explained. We are exhorted to overcome our base desires and pursue loftier goals, and most importantly, we are told who He is.

Moreover, He is *Rabb al-‘ālamīn*—the Lord of *all the worlds*—not just the Lord of a certain race, nationality, language, gender, or social class. He sustains and raises everyone, and what is contained in this Book is guidance that is not only relevant but crucial for all of us.

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<sup>44</sup> Qur'an 32:2; also 56:80; 69:43.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Badā'i 'al-fawā'id* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 701 AH), 2:247; *Tafsīr al-Sa'dī*, <https://tafsir.app/saadi/1/2>.

<sup>46</sup> Muqaddim, *Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Qur'an 20:4.

## The Praiseworthy

Finally, we are told about the Qur'an that "Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it; [it is] a revelation from a [Lord who is] Wise (*Ḥakīm*) and Praiseworthy (*Ḥamīd*)."<sup>48</sup>

*Ḥamd* is the opposite of blame (*dhamm*). *Al-Ḥamīd* is the One who is praised for His essence, His names and attributes, and His actions.<sup>49</sup> Every single thing that emanates from Him is deserving of praise. In practical terms, this means that everything from *al-Ḥamīd* is not only good, but of an utter perfection that gives rise to a sense of awe. Allah reminds us in the Qur'an: 'Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him; God alone is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise (*al-Ḥamīd*).'<sup>50</sup> We say, "All praise (*alḥamd*) is to Allah," which is more comprehensive than saying words of *shukr* (thanks), as the latter is expressed for a specific deed or favor. *Ḥamd*, on the other hand, encompasses thankfulness *and* praise, not only for specific favors, but for the inherent qualities of the praiseworthy one. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ made a beautiful supplication when he stood for the *tahajjud* (late night) prayer:

O Allah! For You is all praise (*laka al-ḥamd*). You are the sustainer of the heavens and the Earth and all that they contain. And for You is all praise. Yours is the dominion of the heavens and the Earth and all that they contain. And for You is all praise. You are the light of the heavens and the Earth and all that they contain. And for You is all praise. You are the king of the heavens and the Earth. And for You is all praise. You are the Truth. Your promise is true. The meeting with You is true. Your word is true. Paradise is true and the Fire is true. The prophets are true. Muhammad is true. The Hour is true...<sup>51</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was in constant in gratitude, awe, and reverence for Allah—and this is encompassed in the supplication that he made.

<sup>48</sup> Qur'an 41:42.

<sup>49</sup> Muqaddim, *Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 93.

<sup>50</sup> Qur'an, 22:64.

<sup>51</sup> Part of a longer supplication in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1120.

This revelation is *tanzīl* from the All-Wise as He directs us to what is in our interests, and He is Praiseworthy in the favors that He blesses us with.<sup>52</sup> Because Allah is Praiseworthy (*ḥamīd*) in His perfection and majesty, and for His justice and benevolence, His book necessarily provides the means to attain good and ward off evil.<sup>53</sup> When we recite the Qur'an, we have to remind ourselves that since Allah is *al-Ḥamīd*, everything in the Qur'an must be so essentially good that we cannot help but praise Him when we reflect upon its verses. If it does not cause us to praise Him, we have to ask ourselves, what are we missing? What are we not understanding?

## Conclusion

Allah, who created us and fashioned us, sent us a book to guide us to Him. This act in and of itself demonstrates His care for His creation. But, as human beings, we can forget who the Qur'an is from, and therefore interact with it in a manner that fails to consider Allah's mercy, wisdom, and majesty.

The next time we recite the Qur'an, we should keep certain matters in mind: How is this a mercy for me? What wisdom is there for me to learn from? How is Allah guiding and caring for me through this verse or chapter? These questions apply as much to verses describing heaven as they do to verses describing hell, and as much to the stories and parables as to the direct commands and prohibitions.

For example, considering His names when reading a verse concerning a prohibition, such as the one on alcohol, can help us to see that it is not simply a robotic command. Rather, it is coming from a place of mercy, concern, nurturing, and divine wisdom. Remembering His names helps inculcate certainty that there is wisdom in the prohibition, because it comes from the All-Knowing, the Most-Wise, and that indeed, this prohibition is something to be grateful to Allah for because He is the Praiseworthy. When we read verses that frighten us, such as those concerning Hellfire, we can remind ourselves that even those verses are from

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<sup>52</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, <https://tafsir.app/tabari/41/42>.

<sup>53</sup> *Tafsīr al-Sa'dī*, <https://tafsir.app/saadi/41/42>.

the mercy of Allah, because their descriptions help to guide us away from the Hellfire—after all, in order for us to move away from something harmful, we have to know it exists and that it *is* indeed bad for us.

In telling us that the Qur'an is something sent down—*tanzīl*—from Him, we are reminded that the Qur'an has been sent to us from the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*), the All-Knowing (*al-ʿAlīm*), the Most Wise (*al-Ḥakīm*), the Almighty (*al-ʿAzīz*), the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb al-ʿālamīn*), the Praiseworthy (*al-Ḥamīd*). Keeping these seven names in mind when we recite the Qur'an should help us read the verses in light of who Allah is. It enables us to understand the messages contained therein through the lenses of love, mercy, care, strength, and wisdom, and thus comforts us when we are overwhelmed.

The Qur'an is Allah's everlasting gift to creation, and a mercy for those who believe in and follow it. When we approach the Qur'an knowing who sent it, we can begin to realize how truly precious it is, how much we stand to gain from it, and savor our time with it and its meanings.