



Virtues of Surah al-Baqara: Healing and Protection in the Quran's Longest Chapter

SULEIMAN HANI

Author Biography

Sh. Suleiman Hani is the Dean of Academic Affairs at AlMaghrib Institute, a research scholar for Yaqeen Institute, and a resident scholar in Michigan, and an international lecturer on Islam, philosophy, leadership, and human rights. From a young age, Suleiman earned traditional certifications in Qur'an memorization, hadith, and other disciplines. He holds a master's degree from the University of Jordan's College of Shari'ah, and a second master's degree from Harvard University. Over the past decade, he has served as a community leader in Michigan, a leadership consultant and adviser to national organizations, lectured in over fifty countries, and published numerous books and articles. Imam Suleiman is currently pursuing his doctorate at NYU in leadership.

***Disclaimer:** The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in these papers and articles are strictly those of the authors. Furthermore, Yaqeen does not endorse any of the personal views of the authors on any platform. Our team is diverse on all fronts, allowing for constant, enriching dialogue that helps us produce high-quality research.*

Copyright © 2025. Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

Introduction

One night, standing underneath the vast stretch of the starry sky, Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr found himself reciting Surah al-Baqara. His horse, tied beside him, suddenly grew agitated. When Ibn Ḥuḍayr paused his recitation, the horse fell silent. He resumed his recitation, only for the horse to again become visibly distressed. He stopped, and again so did his horse's agitation. For one final time he tried to continue his recitation, but to no avail—his horse was unsettled and worked up, and his son, Yahya, was too close for comfort. Ibn Ḥuḍayr, fearing that the horse might trample his son, bent down and scooped him up. When he stood and looked up towards the sky, his eyes fell upon an unfathomable sight. He blinked, stared, and blinked again. He couldn't see the sky.

The next morning, Ibn Ḥuḍayr informed the Prophet ﷺ of the strange incident. “Recite, O Ibn Ḥuḍayr!” declared the Prophet ﷺ. “Recite, O Ibn Ḥuḍayr!”

He replied, “O Allah's Messenger ﷺ! My son, Yahya, was near the horse and I was afraid that it might trample him, so I looked towards the sky, and went to him. When I looked at the sky, I saw something like a cloud containing what looked like lamps, so I went out in order not to see it.”

The Prophet ﷺ asked, “Do you know what that was?”

“No,” replied Ibn Ḥuḍayr.

“Those were angels who came near to you for your voice,” said the Prophet ﷺ. “If you had kept on reciting till dawn, it would have remained there till morning when people would have seen it, as it would not have disappeared.”¹

Few terrestrial beings are worthy of such celestial visitation. It is those who recite the speech of God, who partake of its blessings and wrap themselves in its protections, who enjoy this honor. This is the power of Allah's speech—it joins heaven and earth, such that the inhabitants of the former become the guests of the latter.

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5018.

Ibn Ḥuḍayr's encounter highlights both the spiritual impact and theological significance of reciting the Qur'an, and so it perfectly exemplifies the objective of this series of papers on the virtues of the Qur'an. The recitation of the Qur'an carries immense everyday benefit, in ways we can perceive and ways we cannot. While we will not always be graced with the visible presence of angels whenever we recite, our recitation will always bring us into contact with the unseen world. The profound impact of the Qur'an is such that it touches not just the human heart, but every level of reality. The angels could hear Ibn Ḥuḍayr's recitation and were drawn to its beauty, manifesting as a celestial presence, described as lamps in a cloud.

This story helps demonstrate why one of the most uplifting and motivational branches of the sciences of the Qur'an (*'ulum al-Qur'an*) is the *fada'il* (virtues) of specific chapters (sing. *surah*) and verses (sing. *ayah*), as well as the general virtues of the entire Qur'an. Many Muslims may know about the verses that should be recited for spiritual healing (*ruqya*), or the *surah* that will serve as a protection in the grave, or the *surahs* that offer shade on the Day of Resurrection.² These examples, however, hardly cover the inexhaustible virtues of Allah's Word.

For a comprehensive introduction to the virtues (fada'il) of Qur'anic chapters and verses, readers are encouraged to consult the [first paper in this series](#), on Surah al-Fatiha.

Through understanding these virtues, believers deepen their connection with Allah's Word and transform the Qur'an into a trusted companion for both the worldly life and the Hereafter. This paper examines the authenticated virtues of Surah al-Baqara, drawing from the compilation *Special Virtues of the Qur'an's Chapters and Verses* (*al-Jāmi' al-mukhtaṣar li-faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar*).³ A

² This ties into the broader discussion on whether some Qur'anic verses have greater merit than others, a topic explored in depth in Yusef Wahn's article, "Are Some Qur'anic Verses More Meritorious than Others?" (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, June 7, 2024).

³ The new compilation, titled in English *Special Virtues of the Qur'an's Chapters and Verses*, is published on sunnah.com/virtues (accessed September 10, 2024). In compiling the virtues of certain verses and chapters of the Qur'an, I have adhered to a methodology that primarily relies on rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and fairly authentic (*ḥasan*) prophetic reports. The authentication of these reports is based on the evaluations of leading hadith scholars such as the compilers themselves, Imam al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Nasa'i, among others. When citing narrations from collections that are not inherently *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan*, the verdicts of diverse hadith

virtue here refers to any special trait mentioned in authentic reports, whether a unique reward for recitation, protection from harm, or the Prophet's ﷺ particular attachment to or frequent recitation of specific passages.

Surah al-Baqara

Surah al-Baqara is the longest chapter of the Qur'an. The one who takes this *surah* as a companion will find increased blessings (*baraka*) in life, protection from evil, a healing and a cure, increased acceptance of one's supplicatory prayers (*du'a*), tranquility and peace, a source of protection and intercession in the afterlife, and a pathway to Paradise.

Surah al-Baqara, which was revealed in Medina, contains the greatest and most powerful verse to be revealed,⁴ the longest verse of the Qur'an,⁵ two verses that were revealed from beneath the Throne during the Prophet's night journey and ascension to heaven (al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj),⁶ likely the final verse to be revealed,⁷ references to Allah the Almighty in over one hundred verses, numerous historical

scholars were relied upon depending on the narration, such as al-Albani, Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūt, and Ahmad Shakir, who have rigorously authenticated individual hadiths. Additionally, I have consulted and cross-referenced works dedicated to the topic of *faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (virtues of the verses and chapters) to ensure comprehensive coverage. Among the dozens of key works referenced are: Muḥammad ibn Rizq ibn Tarhūnī, *Mawsū'at faḍā'il suwar wa āyāt al-Qur'ān* (Encyclopedia of the virtues of the chapters and verses of the Qur'an) (Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 2006); Fakhr al-Dīn ibn al-Zubayr ibn 'Alī al-Muḥasī, *al-Durar min ṣaḥīḥ faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Ministry of Information and Culture, 2004); and Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Saqqāf, *al-Kitāb al-jāmi' li-faḍā'il suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: al-Aḥādīth allatī waradat fī faḍā'il al-suwar wa-l-āyāt* (Aal al-Bayt Royal Foundation for Islamic Thought, 2007).

In cases where hadith authenticity has been disputed, I have personally conducted *isnād* analysis, with the support and review of scholars and researchers. This has allowed me to clarify the status of some narrations that may have been the subject of debate, particularly those that could be classified as *ḥasan li-ghayrih* (strengthened by other reports). While the overwhelming majority of narrations included in this work are directly attributed to the Prophet ﷺ (*marfū'*), I have also included a small number of reports from the companions (*mawqūf*). These reports are deemed reliable and beneficial, especially in the context of their understanding of Qur'anic virtues.

⁴ Qur'an 2:255.

⁵ Qur'an 2:282.

⁶ Qur'an 2:285–86.

⁷ Qur'an 2:281. There are various opinions regarding the last verse to be revealed. Al-Suyuti references several narrations, including Surah al-Baqara, 2:281 and 2:282. The only report mentioning a specific timeframe is related to Qur'an 2:281, where it was narrated that the Prophet ﷺ lived for nine nights after its revelation before passing away. See: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya, 7 vols. (Mujamma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2005), 101–3. Ibn Hajar also states, "The most correct of opinions regarding the final revelation is [2:281]." Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 8:317.

incidents and stories of the prophets,⁸ the verse to be recited when starting the first of seven circuits for minor or major pilgrimage (*‘umrah* or Hajj) at the mountains of al-Safa and al-Marwa,⁹ explicit references to the tenets of faith (*iman*),¹⁰ and laws (*ahkam*) utilized in everyday life on an individual, family, and societal level. It is no surprise, then, that companion ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud (d. 32/652, rA) reportedly said, “Everything has a peak and the peak of the Qur’an is al-Baqara.”¹¹

Names of Surah al-Baqara

In his seminal work *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, where he articulates the overarching aims (*maqasid*) of each chapter of the Qur’an,¹² eminent exegete Ibn ‘Ashur (d. 1393/1973) foregrounds the famous description of Surah al-Baqara as “the canopy of the Qur’an” (*fusṭāṭ al-Qur’an*), a title that captures its extensive range of themes and styles, its remarkable comprehensiveness, and diversity of content.¹³ Al-Qurtubi similarly cites the saying of the hadith narrator Khalid ibn Ma‘dān (d. 103/721) that Surah al-Baqara is the “canopy” (*fusṭāṭ*) of the Qur’an due to its magnificence, beauty, and abundance of rulings and admonitions.¹⁴ Al-Shawkani (d. 1250/1834) adds that this reputation stems from the *surah*’s extensive legal rulings (*ahkam*) and its distinction as the longest chapter of the Qur’an, thus encompassing a broad spectrum of guidance.¹⁵ A few scholars believed the *surah* was given this name by the Prophet ﷺ himself.

“Fusṭāṭ al-Qur’an” is just one of at least four names bestowed upon this *surah*:

1. Surah al-Baqara (The Chapter of the Cow): The most well-known name of the *surah*, derived from the narrative of the cow (*al-baqara*) and the Israelites in

⁸ Such as Prophets Adam, Abraham (Ibrahim), Ishmael (Isma‘il), Isaac (Ishaq), Jacob (Ya‘qub), Moses (Musa), Aaron (Harun), David (Dawud), Solomon (Sulayman), and Jesus (‘Isa), peace be upon them all.

⁹ Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah reported: “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went out to al-Safa and said, ‘We will start with that with which Allah started.’ Then he recited the verse: ‘Verily, [the hills of] al-Safa and al-Marwa are of the symbols of Allah...’ (Qur’an 2:158).” See *Sunan an-Nasā’i*, no. 2970; graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic); see footnote 3 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

¹⁰ Belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the afterlife, and divine decree (*qadr*).

¹¹ *Sunan al-Dārimī*, no. 2179; *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, no. 786.

¹² Muḥammad al-Tāhir ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr* (Dār Saḥnūn, 1997).

¹³ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 201.

¹⁴ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-ahkām al-Qur’ān*, 148.

¹⁵ See: Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *Tuḥfat al-dhākirīn bi‘iddat al-ḥiṣn wa-l-ḥaṣīn* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 399.

verses 67–73. This name reflects the *surah*'s emphasis on moral lessons and the importance of obedience to divine commands.

2. Fustāṭ al-Qur'an (The Canopy of the Qur'an): This term signifies the *surah*'s comprehensive treatment of articles of creed (*'aqida*), legal rulings (*ahkam*), and spiritual guidance (*huda*).

3. Sanām al-Qur'an (The Peak of the Qur'an): This title—taken from the famous saying of Ibn Mas'ud—emphasizes the *surah*'s elevated status and comprehensive guidance.¹⁶

4. Al-Zahra' (The Radiant): This name is shared with Surah Aal 'Imran. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Recite the two radiant ones: al-Baqara and Aal 'Imran...”¹⁷

While these names honor the virtues of Surah al-Baqara, some scholars view certain titles, such as al-Zahra' and Sanām al-Qur'an, as descriptive attributes rather than formal names. Still, like the multiple names given to Surah al-Fatiha, these appellations highlight the central place of Surah al-Baqara within the Islamic tradition, its role as a doctrinal canopy—a concept that will be explained later in this paper—and its enduring impact on the spiritual life of the Muslim community.

Themes and objectives of Surah al-Baqara

Ibn 'Ashur notes that Surah al-Baqara categorizes humanity into groups—believers, disbelievers, hypocrites, and the People of the Book—thereby illustrating the varied responses to divine guidance.¹⁸ Per jurist and theologian Ibn Taymiyya, this classification reflects the conditions in Medina, where believers, overt disbelievers, and hypocrites all coexisted after the Prophet's ﷺ migration.

19

¹⁶ *Sunan al-Dārimī*, no. 2179.

¹⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 804.

¹⁸ Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 201.

¹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, 37 vols. (Dār al-Wafā', n.d.), 28:433. It is for this reason that Allah referenced these groups in the beginning of the *surah*, with four verses about believers, two about disbelievers, and thirteen about the hypocrites, mirroring the reality on the ground and emphasizing the importance of understanding these distinct spiritual states.

It is within this context of contestation that Surah al-Baqara affirms the foundational truths of Islam—what Ibn Taymiyya identifies as the *surah*'s establishment of three core tenets of faith (*usul al-din*): the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*), the truth of the Prophetic message, and the reality of the hereafter.²⁰ Surah al-Baqara pairs this overarching theological framework with comprehensive rulings (*ahkam*) on worship, social conduct, family relations, financial transactions, and criminal law.²¹ It thus establishes the sound creed of submission while showing how faith is to be translated into practice—and in so doing prepares the Muslim community for carrying the divine trust, following the way of Prophet Ibrahim (as).

Given that Surah al-Baqara is rigorously historical and comparative in its approach, one of its central narrative motifs is the history of the Children of Israel. By recounting their errors and resistance to prophetic guidance, the *surah* warns the Muslim community against similar pitfalls. Ibn Taymiyya comments that because the Prophet ﷺ encountered Jewish tribes in Medina, Surah al-Baqara references Jews more frequently (as opposed to Surah Aal 'Imran, which more often references Christians).²² This historical engagement also models the Prophet's ﷺ approach to *da'wah* (inviting others to Islam), beginning with those closest to him—first the pagans who were closest to him in Mecca, then the Jews who were closest in Medina, and later the Christians addressed in Surah Aal 'Imran.²³

Moreover, the *surah* challenges objections from various opponents—disbelievers, the People of the Book, and idolaters—to the newly established Islamic law, the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*), and the claim that Islam continues the pure monotheism of Ibrahim. Surah al-Baqara thus situates the Muslim community within a divine narrative of guidance and transformation, culminating in a concluding supplication that summarizes its central teachings and earnestly seeks Allah's mercy and guidance.²⁴ From its first verse to the last, the *surah* retains a resolute focus on the true nature of belief (*iman*).²⁵

²⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 27:274.

²¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 201–2.

²² Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥman 'Umayra, 7 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2014), 130.

²³ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, 131.

²⁴ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 201–2.

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, 146.

Having introduced the themes and objectives of Surah al-Baqara as outlined by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Ashur, we can now better appreciate why the virtues (*fada'il*) of Surah al-Baqara are emphasized in various narrations.

Virtues of Surah al-Baqara

Abu Umāma said he heard Allah's Messenger ﷺ say, "Recite the Qur'an, for on the Day of Resurrection it will come as an intercessor for those who recite it. Recite the two bright ones, al-Baqara and Surah Aal 'Imran, for on the Day of Resurrection they will come as two clouds or two shades, or two flocks of birds in ranks, pleading for those who recite them. Recite Surah al-Baqara, for to take recourse to it is a blessing and to give it up is a cause of grief, and magicians cannot confront it."²⁶

This narration presents the Qur'an as an active intercessor on the Day of Judgment. Within the great symphony of divine words, Surah al-Baqara and Aal 'Imran are singled out as "the two bright ones." Their imagery as clouds or birdlike formations in ordered ranks conjures a sense of both refuge and advocacy. These metaphors invoke Surah al-Baqara's exalted status as the "canopy of the Qur'an." Just as a canopy provides shelter and shade, the *surah* provides moral, legal, and doctrinal guidance, serving as a sanctuary for the believer in a chaotic world. On the Day of Resurrection, these verses that once shaped ethical behavior and fortified faith will become pleas on the believer's behalf, reflecting the *surah*'s core ethos: those who embrace divine guidance find that guidance testifies for them when they are most in need.

Al-Nawwās ibn Sam'ān (d. 50/670, rA) reported: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'The Qur'an will be brought on the Day of Resurrection, along with its companions who used to act by it, at the front being Surah al-Baqara and Aal-'Imran.' He [the Messenger ﷺ] likened them [the two *surahs*] to three things which I did not forget. He said they will be like two clouds, or two black

²⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 804.

canopies with light between them, or like two flocks of birds in ranks pleading for one who recited them.”²⁷

This second narration reinforces the eschatological dimension of the *surah*. Surah al-Baqara and Aal ‘Imran lead the Qur’an’s “companions”—those who not only recited but acted upon it—on the Day of Judgment. This emphasizes a critical interplay between mere familiarity with the text and transformative adherence to its teachings. Both Surah al-Baqara and Aal ‘Imran lay out foundational aspects of faith, law, and moral rectitude, and al-Baqara, in particular, affirms Allah’s Oneness, authenticates the Prophetic mission, and establishes criteria for navigating life’s ethical complexities. To truly engage with Surah al-Baqara, one must move beyond passive recitation. Engagement demands wrestling with its exhortations, absorbing its legal provisions, and reorienting one’s heart toward divine unity and sincere obedience. Those who do so discover that the *surah* becomes their advocate, a living companion that rises to defend them, symbolizing the internalization of divine guidance.

Moreover, Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not turn your households into graveyards. Indeed, the devils flee from a household that has Surah al-Baqara recited in it.”²⁸ Here, the recitation of Surah al-Baqara is not depicted as a shield in the distant future, but as one now, in the present. The Qur’an sanctifies the immediate environment of the believer—a home without it is without life, dead in its silence, just as a home resuscitated by its recitation is released from the devils. The *surah*’s comprehensive guidance—its laws governing worship, family life, economic transactions, and ethical behavior—translates into a tangible spiritual atmosphere. When the *surah* is regularly recited, its words shape the tenor of everyday existence, infusing living spaces with spiritual vitality and moral clarity.

Weaving these three narrations with the themes of Surah al-Baqara reveals a cohesive spiritual, moral, and social guidance under one great canopy. This chapter asserts fundamental theological convictions by affirming Allah’s singular

²⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 805.

²⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 780.

sovereignty and the truth of the Prophetic message (Qur'an 2:23–24), and it highlights the Qur'an's role as guidance for the righteous (2:2). It addresses human relationships and ethical norms, encouraging kindness to parents, orphans, and the needy (2:83), as well as justice and mercy in interpersonal dealings (2:177). The *surah* also revisits the experiences of earlier communities, notably the Children of Israel, to warn against heedlessness and the dire consequences of rejecting divine guidance (2:40–61). Its comprehensive scope encompasses devotional acts such as prayer (2:3) and fasting (2:183), lawful commerce and the prohibition of interest (2:275), and governance of personal and family affairs (2:180–182, 2:221–242). Internalizing these teachings, as suggested by the narrations that extol the virtues of reciting and living by Surah al-Baqara, not only enriches one's spiritual life but also shapes a believer's social environment and eternal prospects, firmly grounding the individual and the community in divine guidance.

Surah al-Baqara, for its companion—i.e., the one who acts upon it and habitually recites it—is a source of *baraka*. *Baraka*, in the Islamic worldview, is a type of divine blessing in someone or something that increases its goodness. It can transform a small quantity into something sufficient and beneficial beyond expectation. A modest home infused with *baraka* may feel both ample and comforting for its inhabitants, while a more spacious home devoid of *baraka* could feel cramped and unsatisfying. Similarly, a vessel partially filled with water might, through the grace of *baraka*, quench the thirst of multiple individuals, whereas an entire container lacking such blessings might fail to meet even a single person's needs.

Time with blessings, likewise, may yield far more meaningful work and spiritual growth than longer periods devoid of it. It may seem paradoxical that Surah al-Baqara—renowned for being the lengthiest chapter of the Qur'an—is synonymous with amplifying blessings, including the enrichment of time. From a purely empirical standpoint, the notion of *baraka* defies measurement, elusive to scientific examination or rational metrics. Yet, choosing not to recite Surah al-Baqara, despite the ability to do so, can lead to a loss and regret reminiscent of the hadith's warning. In another version of the first narration presented in this section, Mu'awiya (rA) explains that the term *baṭala* is used as a description of

magicians who engage with deceit and falsehood (*bāṭil*).²⁹ Yet, *baṭala* also alludes to those ensnared by laziness and unwilling to invest sincere effort for this *surah*'s virtues.³⁰ Thus, the *surah* stands as a fortress, not only against spiritual corruption but also against the laziness that prevents one from seeking divine bounty.

In a world where individuals often invest heavily in quick fixes and productivity shortcuts, the profound blessings Allah grants for sincere acts of worship can go unnoticed. Reflecting on the virtues of Surah al-Baqara reveals its profound significance: it is a reservoir of *baraka*, a shield of protection, and a fountain of divine reward. Two elements, in particular, underscore its elevated status: the inclusion of Ayat al-Kursi and the *surah*'s final two verses. Together, these passages exemplify the spiritual power and transformative potential that lie at the heart of Surah al-Baqara.

Ayat al-Kursi (The Verse of the Footstool)³¹

The verse (*ayah*) described by the Prophet ﷺ as the greatest *ayah* of the Qur'an, Ayat al-Kursi (the Verse of the Footstool), references the power of Allah, His names and attributes, His perfection, and His status as the One Lord deserving of all worship. This *ayah* is a powerful remedy for any human with an inkling of pride, reminding us of the fragility of mankind and our constant need for relief, rest, and reliance upon the Everlasting, the Ever-Living.

Ubayy ibn Ka'b said: "Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: 'O Abu al-Mundhir, which verse from the Book of Allah is the greatest, according to you?' I said: 'Allah and His Messenger ﷺ know best.' He again said: 'Abu al-Mundhir, which verse from the Book of Allah is the greatest, according to you?' I said: '*Allah, there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal*' [i.e., Ayat al-Kursi]. Thereupon he touched me on my chest and said: 'Rejoice in your knowledge, O Abu al-Mundhir!'"³²

Commenting on this narration, Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676/1277) writes: "Scholars have stated that Ayat al-Kursi is distinguished as the greatest [verse] because it

²⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 804.

³⁰ Mūsa Shahīn Lashīn, *Faṭḥ al-mun'im sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Dār al-Shurūq, 2002).

³¹ This refers to Surah al-Baqara, verse 255 (Qur'an 2:255).

³² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 810.

encompasses the fundamental principles of the divine names and attributes [of Allah]: divinity (*uluhiyya*), oneness (*wahdaniyya*), life (*haya*), knowledge (*ilm*), dominion (*mulk*), power (*qudra*), and will (*irāda*). These seven are the foundational principles of the divine names and attributes.”³³

Abu Hurayra reported: “Allah’s Messenger ﷺ assigned me to guard the charity funds of Ramadan. Then, someone began stealing from the supplies. I caught him and said, ‘I will take you to Allah’s Messenger!’... That person said [to me], ‘Please don’t take me to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ, and I will tell you some words by which Allah will benefit you. When you go to bed, recite Ayat al-Kursi, and a guardian from Allah will be [with you], protecting you throughout the night. Satan will not come near you until dawn.’ When the Prophet ﷺ heard about the incident he said to me, ‘He told you the truth, though he is a liar. It was a devil.’”³⁴

One of the many reasons that the Prophet ﷺ refers to this verse as the greatest *ayah* in the Qur’an may be found in the use of specific names and attributes of Allah the Almighty, since the Prophet ﷺ said: “Allah’s most magnificent name, which when used to implore Him, He responds, is found in three *surahs*: al-Baqara, Aal ‘Imran, and Taha (meaning [Allah’s name] al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm).”³⁵ As Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) writes, these paired names are the ultimate expression of majesty, for “the meaning of al-Qayyūm is the One who exists by Himself and sustains everything else. His existence does not depend on anything, whereas the existence of all things depends on Him.”³⁶

Just as al-Fatiha, the greatest *surah*, must be recited in every prayer, it is recommended that the greatest verse, Ayat al-Kursi, be recited after every mandatory prayer. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Whoever reads Ayat

³³ Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn wa-qaṣriḥā, bāb faḍl Sūrat al-Kahf wa Āyat al-Kursī*.

³⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5010.

³⁵ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3856; *al-Ṭabarānī*, no. 7925; *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa*, no. 746. This hadith has been graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic); see footnote 3 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

³⁶ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 3rd ed., ed. Muḥammad al-Qabbānī (Dār Iḥyā’ al-‘Ulūm, 1990), 74.

al-Kursi at the end of [i.e., after] each mandatory prayer, nothing prevents him from entering Paradise except death.”³⁷

This powerful *ayah* combines for its frequent reciter a fortress and protection against evil and harm, a source of spiritual renewal upon mindful recitation, a reward of Paradise, and accepted prayers.

A brief reflection on the *Kursi* and the Throne (‘*Arsh*)

The Throne (‘*Arsh*) holds a central place in Islamic theology, symbolizing Allah’s supreme authority, majesty, and sovereignty. In a hadith, the Prophet ﷺ was asked about the origins of existence. He replied: “There was Allah, and nothing existed before Him, and His Throne was on the water. Then He created the heavens and the earth, and He wrote all things in the Preserved Tablet.”³⁸ The Throne predates the creation of the seven heavens and sits above them, surpassing them all in vastness and magnificence.

In an authentic narration, the Prophet ﷺ said: “I have been permitted to tell you about one of the angels who carry the Throne: The distance between the lobe of his ear and his shoulder is like that of seven hundred years of travel.”³⁹ This hadith not only conveys the colossal size of the Throne but also highlights the extraordinary might of the angels bearing it. These angels are entirely devoted to the worship and obedience of Allah, demonstrating their unique role in the divine order.

The significance of the Throne is further emphasized in another narration from the Prophet ﷺ, who said: “In Paradise, there are one hundred levels that Allah has prepared for the fighters who strive for the sake of Allah (*mujahidin*). [The distance] between each two levels is like the distance between the heavens and the earth. When you ask of Allah, ask Him for al-Firdaws, for it is in the central part of Paradise and is the highest part of Paradise. Above it is the Throne of the Most Merciful, and from it spring forth the rivers of Paradise.”⁴⁰

³⁷ *Sunan an-Nasā’ī al-kubrā*, no. 9848; *al-Ṭabarānī*, no. 7532; graded *ḥasan* (fairly authentic). See footnote 3 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

³⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7418.

³⁹ *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, no. 4727. See also *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 193.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2790.

The Throne's proximity to al-Firdaws, the highest and most honored level of Paradise, is what inspired Ibn al-Qayyim's statement, "The Throne is the roof of creation."⁴¹ In his work,⁴² Ibn Abi al-'Izz al-Hanafi (d. 792/1390) discusses the 'Arsh as the most significant created entity indicating Allah's ultimate dominion. According to al-Tabari,⁴³ the 'Arsh is situated above the heavens and the Kursi, establishing a hierarchical cosmology in which the 'Arsh represents the most exalted level of Allah's power over His creation.

Thus, the 'Arsh (Throne) is referenced in many verses of the Qur'an, as in "And He is the Lord of the Great 'Arsh (Throne)"⁴⁴ and other verses,⁴⁵ whereas the Kursi is a distinct creation.

According to eminent exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), the Kursi is a vast creation that demonstrates Allah's sovereignty and control over the entire universe.⁴⁶ He also reports that Ibn 'Abbas narrates: "The Kursi is the place of the Feet, and [as for] the 'Arsh (Throne)—no one knows its size except Allah, the Most High."⁴⁷ It was also reported from Ibn 'Abbas: "The Kursi is the footstool, and no one can comprehend how great it is except Allah. The heavens and the earth in comparison to the Kursi are like seven coins set in a shield."⁴⁸ This saying of Ibn 'Abbas aligns with the verse of the Kursi itself, since Allah says, "His (Allah's) Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth."⁴⁹ Similarly, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (rA) said: "The

⁴¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-ma'ād*, 4:203.

⁴² Ibn Abi al-'Izz, *Sharḥ al-'aqīdat al-Taḥāwīyya*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1997).

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*.

⁴⁴ Qur'an 9:129.

⁴⁵ See: Qur'an 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 13:2, 23:86, 23:116, 27:26, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4, 39:75, 40:15, 57:4, 69:17, 85:15.

⁴⁶ See his commentary on 2:255 in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, 1:310.

⁴⁷ Narrated by Ibn Khuzayma in *al-Tawḥīd*, no. 154. It was also narrated by Ibn Abi Shayba in *al-'Arsh*, 21, al-Dārimī in *al-Radd 'alā al-Marīsī*, 'Abdullah b. Ahmad in *al-Sunnah*, and al-Ḥākim in *al-Mustadrak* (2/282). Al-Ḥākim graded it as *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim, and al-Dhahabi agreed. It was also classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Albani in *Mukhtaṣar al-'Ulū*, 102, and Ahmad Shakir in *Umdat al-tafsīr* (2/163). See: Ibn Khuzayma, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Muḥammad Khālid al-Sayyid (Maktabat al-Rushd, 1983); 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dārimī, *Al-Radd 'alā al-Marīsī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Duwaysh (Dār al-Minhāj, 2004); 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Sunnah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd al-Qaḥṭānī (Dār al-Rāyah, 1986); Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-'Ulū lil-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Maktabat al-Islāmī, 1991); Aḥmad Shākir, *Umdat al-tafsīr 'an al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr*, ed. Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī (Dār al-Wafā', 1993).

⁴⁸ Reported by Ibn Abi Shayba, *Kitāb al-'Arsh*, (Jāmi' al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya), 20. Also reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, no. 361.

⁴⁹ Qur'an 2:255.

Kursi is the place for the two Feet, and it creaks as a saddle creaks.”⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, these statements are expressed and accepted in a manner befitting Allah’s majesty, as “nothing resembles Him.”⁵¹

On the other hand, Imam al-Tabari leans towards the interpretation that the *Kursi* represents Allah’s knowledge, citing a conflicting narration of Ibn ‘Abbas, where he states:

It [the *Kursi*] is His knowledge. This is indicated by the statement of Allah, Exalted is He: “And its preservation does not tire Him” (Qur’an 2:255). This affirms that it refers to His knowledge, as Allah informs us that preserving what He knows and encompasses of what is in the heavens and the earth does not burden Him. Similarly, He mentions His angels who say in their supplication: “Our Lord, You have encompassed all things in mercy and knowledge” (Qur’an 40:7). Allah, Exalted is He, thus informs us that His knowledge encompasses all things. Likewise, His statement: “His *Kursi* extends over the heavens and the earth” (Qur’an 2:255) aligns with this meaning.⁵²

Furthermore, al-Tabari opines that the root meaning of *Kursi* is knowledge, and that it is for this reason that a paper containing written knowledge is called a “*kurrāsa*” (notebook). Similarly, scholars are referred to as “*al-karāsī*” because they are relied upon for knowledge and understanding.⁵³

The scholars who hold the view that the *Kursi* is a physical entity rather than Allah’s knowledge argue that the evidence used for the figurative position—the statement of ‘Ibn Abbas that the *Kursi* is knowledge—is weak and contradicts the many narrations that are authentic, both by Ibn ‘Abbas and other companions.

⁵⁰ Narrated by Ibn Abi Shayba in *al-‘Arsh* (no. 60), and its *isnād* was classified as rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) in Ibn Hajar’s *Fath* (8:47) and by al-Albani in *Mukhtaṣar al-‘uluw*, p. 123–24.

⁵¹ Qur’an 42:11. According to the Athari school, which emphasizes a literal affirmation of scriptural descriptions of divine attributes while firmly upholding divine transcendence, statements such as “The *Kursi* is the place for the two Feet” are accepted as part of the revealed tradition without inquiry into their modality (*bilā kayf*). Atharis caution against excessive allegorization, maintaining that while such expressions may appear anthropomorphic, they do not imply spatial limitation or corporeality. Instead, these texts are affirmed as they appear, with the understanding that Allah’s essence remains beyond human comprehension and is not confined to any physical locus. Meanwhile, Ash‘ari theologians—though employing a different hermeneutical approach—similarly uphold divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and reject any literalist anthropomorphic interpretation, often allowing for figurative readings as a means of emphasizing Allah’s majesty.

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān* (Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:16.

⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 2:16.

Moreover, they assert, Allah the Exalted refers to physical characteristics of the ‘*Arsh*. For instance, Allah says: “And eight [angels] will bear the ‘*Arsh* (Throne) of your Lord on the Day of Resurrection,”⁵⁴ and He says, “the Possessor or the Owner of the Throne.”⁵⁵ Going back to a hadith mentioned previously in this paper, there is also the famous Prophetic command, “So if you ask Allah for Paradise, then ask Him for the highest degree of Paradise [al-Firdaws] because it is the central part of Paradise and the highest part of Paradise, and above it is the Throne (‘*Arsh*) of the Most Merciful.”⁵⁶

It is also reported that the Prophet ﷺ himself said: “The seven heavens compared to the *Kursi* are just like a ring thrown into a desert, and the size of the Throne (‘*Arsh*) compared to the *Kursi* is like the size of that desert compared to the size of that ring.”⁵⁷ Finally, the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have mentioned that people will be resurrected for Judgment Day after being unconscious, and that they, upon gaining consciousness, will see Musa (as) standing and holding the side of the Throne.⁵⁸

These narrations indicate that the Throne is a physical reality, though we are unable to comprehend its essence. As such, many scholars find it difficult to reinterpret the Throne (‘*Arsh*) or the *Kursi* to indicate knowledge or sovereignty. For instance, Ibn Taymiyya held that both the *Kursi* and the ‘*Arsh* are real entities, with the ‘*Arsh* being among the greatest of Allah’s creations.⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyya opposed allegorizing

⁵⁴ Qur’an 69:17.

⁵⁵ Qur’an 85:15.

⁵⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2790.

⁵⁷ *Al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa*, no. 109. Graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic); see footnote 3 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

⁵⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2411.

⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 6:584. In the cited passage, Ibn Taymiyya elucidates, “The Throne (‘*Arsh*) is affirmed by the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of the early generations of the *ummah* and its scholars. Similarly, the Footstool (*Kursi*) is established by the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of the majority of the early generations. It has been reported from some of them that ‘His *Kursi*’ refers to His knowledge. However, this is a weak opinion, because Allah’s knowledge encompasses everything, as He said: ‘Our Lord! You have encompassed everything in mercy and knowledge’ [Qur’an 40:7]... So, if it were said that His knowledge encompasses the heavens and the earth, this meaning would not be correct, especially since Allah says: ‘And their preservation does not exhaust Him’ [Qur’an 2:255], meaning that it does not weigh Him down nor burden Him. This is more befitting and suitable [to say] about Allah’s power, not His knowledge. The transmitted reports indicate this, but the verses and hadith regarding the ‘*Arsh* are even more numerous, clear, and mass-transmitted [*mutawātir*]. And some of them [i.e., scholars] have stated: ‘The *Kursi* is the [same as the] ‘*Arsh*,’ but the majority hold that they are two distinct entities.”

these terms, advocating for an understanding in line with the literal meanings unless there is strong evidence to interpret otherwise. He emphasized the distinction between the two, stating that the *Kursi* is beneath the *‘Arsh* and that both are part of Allah’s created universe, but Allah Himself is above His creation in a manner that befits His majesty. Ultimately, for both groups of scholars, the understanding of these concepts is “without how” (*bilā kayf*): we accept these concepts without understanding the “how” of their reality because our minds cannot truly grasp them.⁶⁰

From theology to action

Understanding the divine Throne (*Kursi*) and the Footstool (*‘Arsh*) as two of Allah’s powerful creations adds profound depth to the recitation of Ayat al-Kursi. When the believer contemplates these majestic creations, it reinforces an awareness of Allah’s immense power, sovereignty, and knowledge, which are central themes in the verse itself. This theological understanding enriches the reciter’s spiritual experience in several ways.

1. The verse states, “To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth” (*lahu mā fī al-samāwāti wa mā fī al-ard*).⁶¹ By recognizing that both the *Kursi*, which extends over the heavens and the earth, and the *‘Arsh*, the greatest of all creations, fall under Allah’s dominion, the believer is reminded of Allah’s ultimate authority over all things. This realization helps the reciter internalize the meaning of Allah’s sovereignty in their personal life. They are not just reciting abstract words, but affirming their submission to the One who controls the entire universe, including these awe-inspiring creations.

2. The fact that Allah is beyond His creation, not confined by the limits of the *Kursi* or even the *‘Arsh*, underscores the concept of *tanzīh*—declaring Allah free from imperfection and beyond any resemblance to His creation. Reflecting on the

⁶⁰ Imam al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892) said: “More than one of the people of knowledge said about this hadith and other similar hadiths that discuss the attributes of Allah and the descending of the Lord, Glorified be He, every night to the lowest heaven; they said: ‘The narrations are confirmed, believed in, not imagined, and it is not to be said: How?’ Malik, Sufyan ibn ‘Uyayna, and ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak have been reported as saying: ‘Take these hadiths as they are “without how” (*bilā kayf*).’ This is the view of the people of knowledge from the Sunni orthodoxy (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘a*).” See: *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 662.

⁶¹ Qur’an 2:255.

immensity of the *Kursi* and *‘Arsh* should evoke in the believer a sense of profound humility and reverence, much as contemplating the vastness of the heavens and earth humbles one in the face of their Creator. This reflection fosters not only awe but also a deeper trust in Allah (*tawakkul*), reassuring the believer that nothing in the created world can rival His power or authority. All the while he maintains an attitude of “without how” (*bila kayf*), affirming these realities without delving into the “how.”

3. In numerous hadiths, the Prophet ﷺ mentioned the mercy of Allah in connection to the *‘Arsh*, as in: “When Allah completed the creation, He wrote in His book with Him upon the Throne: Verily, My mercy prevails over My wrath.”⁶² Allah’s mercy encompasses all creation, including the *Kursi* and the *‘Arsh*, and reflecting on this reality through the recitation of Ayat al-Kursi allows the reciter to feel more connected to Allah’s encompassing mercy, knowing that just as His *Kursi* and *‘Arsh* symbolize power and authority, they also represent His limitless mercy available to the believer.

The last two verses of Surah al-Baqara

Al-Nu‘man ibn Bashir (d. 65/684, rA) reported that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Allah inscribed a book two thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, from which the last two verses of Surah al-Baqara were revealed. If they are recited for three nights in a home, no devil will come near it.”⁶³

During the Prophet’s ﷺ Night Journey (Mi‘raj), it was reported by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was given three things: “He was given the five daily prayers, he was given the concluding verses of Surah al-Baqara [i.e., Qur’an 2:285–286], and [he was given] forgiveness of serious sins for those among his *ummah* who do not associate partners with Allah.”⁶⁴ Some scholars interpret “he was given” to mean that the Prophet ﷺ directly received these verses without the mediation of Angel Gabriel (Jibril), treating it as an exceptional event.

⁶² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3194, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2751.

⁶³ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2882; graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic); see footnote 3 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

⁶⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 173.

⁶⁵ Others maintain that “he was given” in this hadith refers to the glad tidings and news of these forthcoming verses, but that the revelation (*wahy*) actually came down in Medina based on authentic reports.⁶⁶

Recited by countless Muslims worldwide every day, these concluding verses of al-Baqara are so important in Islam, that ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (rA) said, “I did not think that any reasonable person could sleep without reciting the last verses of Surah al-Baqara, and they are indeed treasures from beneath the Throne.”⁶⁷ About this nighttime practice, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever reads the last two verses from Surah al-Baqara at night, they will be sufficient for him.”⁶⁸ Interpreting the term “sufficient,” Imam al-Nawawi suggested that these verses suffice as a substitute for lengthy night prayers.⁶⁹ Others said the verses protect against devils, and still others said they protect against harmful animals. Imam al-Nawawi concludes that these verses likely encompass all these benefits (and more).⁷⁰ Likewise, Imam Ibn al-Qayyim opined that the verses sufficed as a protection against all forms of harm.⁷¹

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals the breadth of these verses’ power: spiritual elevation, protection, and sufficiency in worship. One can readily understand why ‘Ali (rA) admonished anyone who neglected to recite them before sleeping.

The story behind the final verses

Abu Hurayra reported an incident after the following verse (Qur’an 2:284) was revealed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “To Allah [alone] belongs whatever is in

⁶⁵ This is the opinion attributed to some of the second generation of Muslims, known as “successors” (*tabi’in*), including al-Hasan al-Basri, Ibn Sirin, and Mujahid; See: al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mālikī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 3 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.).

⁶⁶ This opinion is attributed to many scholars; See: Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Sindī, *Ḥāshiyat al-Sindī ‘alā Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (Dār al-Ma‘rifā, n.d.), 224; and al-Qārī, *Mirqāt*, 9:3772.

⁶⁷ *Sunan al-Dārimī*, no. 3289; see also al-Nawawī in *al-Adhkār*, 220. He attributed it to the report of Abu Bakr ibn Abi Dawud and said that this report is sound, according to the conditions of Imam al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁶⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5009.

⁶⁹ Similarly, Ibn Hajar states: “[It] was explicitly reported by ‘Asim from ‘Alqama from Ibn Mas‘ud, ‘Whoever recites [the two verses at] the end of Surah al-Baqara, it will be sufficient for him instead of standing in prayer for one night.’” See Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 8:672.

⁷⁰ Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 11 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 6:92.

⁷¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 3rd ed., ed. Sayyid Ibrahim (Dar al-Hadith, 1991), 91.

the heavens and whatever is on the Earth. Whether you reveal what is in your hearts or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it. He forgives whoever He wills, and punishes whoever He wills. And Allah is Most Capable of everything.”

The companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ considered the verses heavy (because of the indication that the believers will be accountable for what is in their hearts). They came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and sat down on their knees and said: “Messenger of Allah, we were assigned some duties which were within our power to perform, such as prayer, fasting, struggling [in the cause of Allah], charity. Then this [the above-mentioned] verse was revealed to you and it is beyond our power to live up to it.”

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Do you intend to say what the people of [the] two books [i.e., Jews and Christians] said before you: ‘We hear and disobey?’ You should rather say: ‘We hear and we obey, [we seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the return.’”

And they said: “We hear and we obey, [we seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord! And to You is the return.” When the people recited it and it became easy on their tongues, then Allah revealed:

The Messenger [firmly] believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They [all] believe in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers. [They proclaim,] “We make no distinction between any of His messengers.” And they say, “We hear and obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord! And to You [alone] is the final return.”⁷²

When they did that, Allah abrogated⁷³ this verse (in terms of the ruling that one is accountable for what is in their hearts), and He revealed:

Allah does not burden a soul with more than it can bear. All good will be for its own benefit, and all evil will be to its own loss. [The believers pray,] “Our Lord! Do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake...

⁷² See Qur'an 2:285.

⁷³ Abrogation, or *naskh*, refers to the abrogation of a verse in terms of its recitation or ruling, where the latter is the predominant type in the opinions of most scholars of Qur'anic sciences. In this case, the hadith is referring to an abrogation of the initial ruling that people will be held accountable for what is in their hearts. For more on the topic of abrogation, see Yaqeen's article, [Abrogated Rulings in the Qur'an: Discerning their Divine Wisdom](#).

Our Lord! Do not place a burden on us like the one You placed on those before us...

Our Lord! Do not burden us with what we cannot bear...

Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our [only] Guardian. So grant us victory over the disbelieving people.”⁷⁴

In the story cited above, the narration ends with an indication of Allah's acceptance of these pleas. The acceptance of the supplicatory prayer (*du'a*) at the end of this powerful *surah* has two potential meanings. The first is that it specifically pertains to the believers specifically referenced in the passage. Ibn Taymiyya notes a second interpretation: that this is a universally accepted *du'a* for the entire *ummah*, although it does not guarantee that every individual is included in it.⁷⁵ Some people may not overcome the burdens they carry, others may not be forgiven due to their turning away from Allah and Islam, and yet others may not achieve victory over the oppressors among the disbelievers. This reality does not diminish the importance of praying for one's personal acceptance and for the general welfare of the *ummah* worldwide.

As Ibn Taymiyya notes, the request “do not give us a burden we cannot bear” in these verses can be understood in two ways.⁷⁶ Some interpret it as referring to divine decree (*qadr*), implying that a person is not tested beyond their capacity, whether it be with unbearable poverty, illness, or emotional challenges like fear or love. This does not imply a lack of trials, but that the individual has the potential to pass those tests with the means that Allah has commanded them to seek in moments of hardship.

Other scholars interpret this burden in a legislative context, such as a commandment that may be too difficult for the *ummah* to implement. This latter concept is known as assigning obligations that cannot be fulfilled (*taklīf bi mā lā yuṭāq*), a theological and legal concept centered on whether Allah imposes duties beyond human ability.

⁷⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 125; Qur'an 2:286.

⁷⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 232.

⁷⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 236.

Rooted in both Qur'anic injunctions and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and theology, the dominant position across mainstream Sunni, Shi'i, and rationalist (e.g., Mu'tazili) schools is that Allah does not demand the impossible from His creation, with this verse above (2:286) serving as the foundational guarantee. It is generally concluded that while Allah's power is absolute, His perfection includes not enacting *taklīf bi mā lā yutāq*, thereby ensuring that moral responsibility remains coherent, attainable, and reflective of divine justice and mercy. In sum, the refusal of Islam's classical tradition to accept any notion of impossible moral demands affirms a fundamental theological principle: divine law is always commensurate with human capacity.

As for the *du'a* in the verse, “do not give us a burden we cannot bear,” that particular supplication is clearly accepted by Allah, and the validity of this latter interpretation as a *du'a* is supported by other verses where Allah states His intent for ease (*yusr*) rather than hardship (*'usr*) in His legislation, such as in the context of rulings for Ramadan.⁷⁷ Ultimately, in the realm of Islamic jurisprudence, the principle that divine law should be within human reach supports various legal maxims related to hardship and dispensation (*rukhsa*).⁷⁸

These two verses conclude with powerful phrases of *du'a* that combine the best of this life and the next. The one looking for protection throughout the night, as well as for a vast reward, cannot afford to neglect the recitation of these verses in prayer, or one's bed, before sleeping, as well as teaching one's family and children this precious habit, particularly at an early age. The practice of reciting these verses daily helps the believer to exemplify the mantra, “We hear and we obey.”

⁷⁷ Such as in the context of Ramadan and those for whom fasting is waived due to travel or illness: “Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.” Qur'an 2:185.

⁷⁸ When a particular command becomes unreasonably difficult or impossible due to circumstances beyond human control, legal scholars generally hold that the obligation is either lifted or modified to a bearable form. For instance, if standing in prayer becomes impossible due to illness, the obligation adjusts to sitting or lying down. This practical application further illustrates the centrality of human capacity in determining the scope of divine law.

Conclusion

Ultimately, these narrations emphasize that engagement with Surah al-Baqara is not to be confined to intellectual comprehension or ritualistic recitation. Rather, it demands spiritual internalization and practical implementation. Approaching this *surah* is akin to stepping under a grand, all-encompassing canopy. Within this shelter, one finds mercy, guidance, and moral order. Over time, the *surah* becomes a companion—interceding when human deeds stand vulnerable to divine scrutiny—and a guardian, repelling evil forces in the here and now. Rooted in Allah's eternal speech, Surah al-Baqara's multifaceted guidance thus becomes both a source of immediate protection and a blueprint for eternal success, embodying the Qur'an's transformative power in the believer's journey toward Allah's pleasure.