



## The Holy Quran as Interpreted by Imam al-Ḥusayn: Insights, Relationships, and Lessons



Muhammad-Reza Fakh-Rohani<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The Islamic religion benefits from the Holy Quran and the lives of the fourteen infallibles in its history. The life and martyrdom fate of Imam al-Ḥusayn prove that he was a most faithful observant of Quranic lessons and injunctions. His interpretations of Quranic verses and his life as the manifestation of the Quranic lifestyle remain beyond doubt. A highly characteristic trait of his, this aspect is barely treated and observed in Western scholarship on the Holy Quran and on his life and martyrdom.

**Keywords:** Imam al-Ḥusayn, the Holy Quran, hadith-based Quran exegesis, Ashura.

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1 . Associate Professor of English Language, University of Qom, Iran, Abumahdi1061@gmail.com (corresponding author).



The Holy Quran is the sacred Divine text of the Islamic religion. Although revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad and has since been the most sacred book for Muslims, its addressees are by no means only Muslims. Its intended audience has been the whole of humanity throughout the ages. This is confirmed by its frequent reference to "people", not exclusively Muslims. Another reason in support of this view is that the Islamic religion is the final Divine religion, hence it must address all humanity from its inception down to the end of the world.

One of the various types of Quran elucidations concerns those interpretations and exegeses made by the Infallibles. Throughout Islamic history, there have been many examples of this type of Quran exegesis. This is because there are certain references to other extra-textual conditions and contexts in the Quran that certainly require Infallible-based, God-granted knowledge that can decipher and construe the true meanings of such apparently obscure references. The earliest types of such references were made by the Prophet Muḥammad in many contexts. An obvious example is the Ghadīr Khumm sermon of the Prophet in and his immediate declaration of the imamate of the first Infallible Imam 'Alī 10 AH/ 632. In line with this tradition, there have been many Quranic references and interpretations made by the third Infallible Imam al-Ḥusayn.

Imam al-Ḥusayn offered various kinds of interpretations and exegeses of the Holy Quran in many contexts. These interpretations of the Quranic fragments as produced by Imam al-Ḥusayn are available in diverse sources. Throughout Islamic history, those Quran-oriented scholars who were zealous to record such references collected them in their works. Although a great majority of Shii Quran exegeses and interpretations make frequent references to authentic hadiths, some of them are most famous for being based entirely on hadiths. An example of such hadith-based exegeses of the Holy Quran is *al-Burhān* of Sayyid Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Bahrānī (d. ca. 1108 AH/ 1696). Certainly, they make references to Imam al-Ḥusayn's exegetical explanations, too.



For the present study, our focus is the mutual relationship between Imam al-Ḥusayn and the Holy Quran. As the third Infallible Imam, he was certainly a reliable and markworthy interpreter and exegete of the Quran. Out of various references made to him, his life, movement, and martyrdom were all in perfect association with the Holy Quran. Not only did Imam al-Ḥusayn make frequent references to Quranic verses, but he also offered explanations of certain Quranic verses that would remain uninterpretable if he had not offered his exegetical guidelines. A case in point is the following Quranic verse: "These two contenders contend concerning their Lord" (Quran 22: 19). It was the explanation offered by Imam al-Ḥusayn that deciphered it in that "These two contenders" refer to the Umayyads and the Ahl al-Bayt, as the latter is represented by Imam al-Ḥusayn himself. While the Ahl al-Bayt confirmed the Divine instructions and guidance, the Umayyads disbelieved it altogether. (Ref. to the Karbala interpretation of the verse).

Based on the above evidence, it becomes clear that the insightful views of Imam al-Ḥusayn necessitate that there is no way out to get an authoritative view of the Holy Quran save by reference to the insights provided by an Infallible Imam, and in this case, by reference to Imam al-Ḥusayn.

An initial observation suggests that various approaches have been adopted: from verse-based to topic-based orientations. In some works, one finds that the Quranic verses that have certain relevance to Imam al-Ḥusayn are arranged from the beginning of the Quran and move sequentially on. There are at least two works that have adopted such an approach: *Tafsīr al-Imam al-Ḥusayn: al-Tafsīr al-atharī al-taṭbīqī* of Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ḥilū and *al-Husayn fī al-Qur’ān* of Sayyid Muḥammad al-Wāḥidī. They first quote the Quranic verse and then render what has been quoted from Imam al-Ḥusayn on the subject in question. It deserves attention that not all interpretations are those made by Imam al-Ḥusayn, for in some cases he quoted an interpretation from his predecessors, e.g., the Prophet, Imam ‘Alī, or Imam al-Ḥasan.



Another approach concerns the actual cases wherein there was a real case where the role of Imam al-Ḥusayn became evident. With this approach, *Qur'ān va Imam Ḥusayn; Imam Ḥusayn va Qur'ān* of Riḍāyī-Isfahānī is a markworthy contribution to the field. Divided into two major sections, the first one deals with Imam al-Ḥusayn and the Holy Quran. From this perspective, the following main topics are dealt with: the status of the Holy Quran from the viewpoint of Imam al-Ḥusayn, the role of the Holy Quran in the life and times of Imam al-Ḥusayn, the services Imam al-Ḥusayn rendered to the Holy Quran, the Quranic foundations of the Ashura movement, his interpretations of the Quranic verses, and Imam al-Ḥusayn's references to the Holy Quran. The second section deals with the Holy Quran and Imam al-Ḥusayn. In this connection, the author refers to certain verses that make (indirect) references to Imam al-Ḥusayn as "the Imam al-Ḥusayn verses" (*Āyāt al-Ḥusayn*). Here a sequential order has been adopted in that it starts from the earliest suras of the Holy Quran and moves onward.

Whatever method may be utilized, the results are almost the same. The aim is to show the close relationship between the Holy Quran and Imam al-Ḥusayn. In such studies, the authors are chiefly Shii scholars. There is no trace of non-Shii researchers. An important aspect of such studies is that it is proved that Imam al-Ḥusayn was a close and faithful follower of the Holy Quran. He never left Quranic injunctions in the harshest situations in his lifetime, particularly on Ashura.

Apart from the above observations, Imam al-Ḥusayn recited many Quranic verses in a number of situations and contexts. Both contextually and co-textually, they show Imam al-Ḥusayn's Quran-based attitudes and outlooks.

Based on the above premises, one can conclude that Imam al-Ḥusayn's words and practices were all in full conformity with the Holy Quran. He was indeed an embodiment of the Holy Quran. This feature in the life and martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn indicates that he was truly the most reliable guide and leader.



Non-Muslims seem to be neglectful of the Quran-oriented role of Imam al-Ḥusayn in their studies. What seems strange is that in the typical works of non-Muslim, and chiefly Western, scholars, they rarely refer to this Quran-based aspect of the life and times of Imam al-Ḥusayn. From this particular view, it becomes evident why he was the rightful Infallible Imam, and why he never tolerated the whims and forces of the Umayyad camp. The influence of such Quranic assertions as "neither harming others, nor suffering harm" (Quran 2:279) can be felt and witnessed in his life and exemplary martyrdom.

In conclusion, it can be maintained that the lives of all the fourteen infallibles were mapped on the models sketched by and in the Holy Quran. From this viewpoint, one may deduce that to find practical applications and manifestations of the Holy Quran, their lives are good evidence. To disseminate sublime Quranic instructions, it is a good practice to cite examples from their lives.



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