



Criticism of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's View on the Non-Revelation of Quranic Words by Focusing on the Quranic Thoughts of Imam Khamenei



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Abstract

Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd is a prominent contemporary thinker from Egypt whose controversial and unconventional views led to his apostasy. One of his most important views is the theory of the Non-Revelatory of Quranic Words. The desacralization of Quranic words, the possibility of fault in Quranic words, the possibility of distortion of the Quran, the denial of the linguistic miracle of the Quran, and the denial of the religious authority of the Quran are among the important results of his views. On the other hand, the supreme leader has excellent perspectives on interpreting and understanding the Quran as a comprehensive jurist, scholar, and exegete of the Quran. Therefore, the present article is organized so that, in addition to criticizing the arguments of the Abu Zayd, it also studies the view of Ayatollah Khamenei in this regard. This research shows that Abu Zayd relies on some evidence such as Quranic verses, the diversity of recitations, the hadith of the seven letters, and historical evidence to prove his claim, while all of his evidence is completely weak and incomplete. Verses of the Quran have been selectively chosen and historical narrations are questionable in terms of authenticity. However, the supreme leader always stresses the divine nature of the Quran. Through his exegetical statements and Quranic speeches, evidence supporting this can be found. In Imam Khamenei's perspective, the challenge of the Quran, the miraculous nature of the words and meanings, wisdom in the arrangement of verses, and authority of Quranic appearances, all point to its divine essence.

Keywords: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Imam Khamenei, Non-Revelation of Quranic Words, Quranic thoughts.

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Introduction

Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd is a prominent contemporary thinker from Egypt whose controversial and unconventional views have led to authentic Islamic currents confronting him to the extent that he was declared an apostate by scholars at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. In his works, he has presented various perspectives on the Quran, among which two stand out: the theory of the Non-Revelatory of Quranic Words and the theory of the historicity of the Quran, as his notable and prominent viewpoints. Restricting religion and its teachings to the early days of Islam and the time of revelation, the inefficacy of religion for today's society, and the relativism in understanding the Quran are among the significant outcomes of his viewpoints. Criticism of Abu Zayd's evidence on the historicity of the Quran has been discussed in another article (Sālāriān 2023, pp. 68-71). Therefore, the present article critically examines Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's perspectives on the non-divine nature of Quranic words .

The detrimental consequences and repercussions of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's viewpoints, alongside the growth and dissemination of his ideas, particularly among educated youth and the intellectual strata of society, underscore the necessity for a heightened understanding and critique of his perspectives. Additionally, familiarizing oneself with the foundations and viewpoints of the esteemed leader's stance against these theories can serve as a basis for a proper and authentic Quranic and Islamic perspective.

Several articles have been written on some of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's perspectives along with general critiques. Among these, one can refer to the article "An Examination and Critique of the Concept of Revelation from the Perspective of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd" by Ali Askari Yazdi Published in Vol. 16, Issue. 4 Of *Philosophy of Religion*. In this article, Abu Zayd's theories regarding the nature of revelation are examined, critiqued, and shown to be flawed. Another work in this regard is the article "A Comparison of the Views of Martyr Morteza Motahhari and Nasr



Hamid Abu Zayd on Revelation” by Mohammad Sadegh Zahedi Published in Vol. 4, Issue. 12 of *Philosophical Meditations*. In this paper, an attempt is made to compare and analyze the viewpoints of Martyr Motahhari and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd on issues such as the nature of revelation, the role of the Prophet in the process of revelation, the relationship between revelation and contemporary culture, as well as the similarities and differences in their perspectives. Additionally, the article, “Analysis and Critique of the Theology of Revelation by Dr. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd from the Perspective of Allameh Tabatabai” by Soghra Khairjoui Published in Vol. 7, Issue. 2 Of *Jostarha-ye Falsafe-ye Din* is another contribution in this regard. This article addresses the issue of the nature of revelation from the perspective of Allameh Tabatabai (a traditional Quranic scholar) and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (a modern Quranic scholar) to identify similarities and differences between the opinions of these two thinkers and critique Abu Zayd’s views from the perspective of Allameh Tabatabai. However, no research has critiqued and compared Abu Zayd’s perspective on the non-revelation of the Holy Quran’s words with the views of the Supreme Leader. This article aims to analyze and compare the evidence supporting the non-revelation view in Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd’s works with the Quranic beliefs of the Supreme Leader.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd was an Egyptian thinker born in a village near Tanta in western Egypt. He memorized half of the Quran at the age of fifteen and became the prayer leader of the Qahafa village at the age of twenty. He completed his bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees in Arabic language and literature at Cairo University. His doctoral thesis was also on “The Interpretation of the Quran from the Perspective of Ibn Arabi.” His unconventional views and joining the Muslim Brotherhood led to opposition, with some Al-Azhar University professors considering him an

apostate due to his views and demanding his separation from his wife. Ultimately, in 1995, a Cairo court issued a ruling of apostasy against him, and the Jihad Organization, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, issued a fatwa for his killing. As a result, he went to the Netherlands and lived there until the end of his life. He taught at the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, as well as at American universities in Cairo, Osaka, Khartoum, and Pennsylvania. In 2010, he passed away in Cairo, Egypt, due to an unknown illness (Shepard 2022, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0919>).

Several works by Abu Zayd have been published, some of which include: Rationalism in Exegesis (*Al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsah fī Qaḍīyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'ind al-Mu'tazilah*) (1982), The Concept of the Text (*Maḥmūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*) (1991), Critique of Religious Discourse (*Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī*) (1998), Women in the Discourse of Crisis (*al-Mar'ah fī Khiṭāb al-Azmah*) (1995), Text, Authority, Truth (*al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭah, al-Haqīqah*) (1995), Circles of Fear: Reading the Discourse about Women (*Dawā'ir al-Khawf: Qirā'ah fī Khiṭāb al-Mar'ah*) (1999), and so on.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd had various perspectives and theories on different Quranic subjects. Some of his viewpoints include the theory of the Non-Revelatory of Quranic Words, the historicity of the Quran, Quranic justice, secularism, interpretation and hermeneutics, and the differences in recitations. In this article, one of his important viewpoints, namely the theory of the Non-Revelatory of Quranic Words, will be critiqued and examined.

Theory of Non-Revelation of the Quranic Words

The theory of non-revelation of the Quranic words is one of the important contemporary Quranic theories. The followers of this view believe that the words of the Quran are not revelation. Revelation is only what was revealed to the heart of the Prophet. Abu Zayd clearly mentions this matter in his



works and emphasizes the separation between meaning and text. He says: “Revelation is other than words. In fact, the revelation is the same meaning of the Quran that was revealed to the Prophet’s heart and the Prophet himself expressed them with earthly words. The prophet’s freedom in choosing words and phrases from the Quran has led Muslims to also be flexible in terms of recitations and interpretations of Quranic revelations, both in terms of grammar and vocabulary” (Abuzayd 2001: 11).

He considers the words of the Quran to be the human words of the Prophet and says:

For believers, even the paper of this book (Quran) is sacred. But for me as a researcher, this is a book that some people have contributed to. I have not witnessed Muhammad receiving any word from God. As a Muslim, I only witness Muhammad’s account of his encounter with God. Muslims can be convinced that this is Muhammad’s book. Quran is the word of Muhammad, a man like us. The one who claimed to receive revelation from God and we believed in him. But we only have Muhammad’s words at our disposal, and therefore we are dealing with a human issue. (Abouzid, 2006, http://zamaaneh.com/idea/2009/01/post_474.html)

Elsewhere, he considered the Qur’ān to be the spiritual experience of the Prophet and emphasizing the separation between experience and interpretation of experience, he says: “The Prophet saw something in his experience and called it God’s revelation. That is, God spoke to us through another messenger, who is called Gabriel. This experience had many reasons. That experience gradually grew and became a system called Islam. Every human being can experience, but the interpretation of experience and the experience itself are two different things” (ibid).

Evidence of Abu Zayd's View and Its Criticism

1. Quranic Verses

To prove this claim, Abu Zayd mentions some verses of the Quran (26: 193-194) and (2:97):

﴿ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ ﴾ (الشعرا/ ١٩٣)

“Brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit.” (Quran 26:193)

﴿ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ ﴾ (الشعرا/ ١٩٤)

“Upon your heart (so that you may be one of the warners).” (Quran 26:194)

﴿ قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴾ (بقره/ ٩٧)

“Say, ‘Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel [should know that] it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of Allah, confirming what has been [revealed] before it, and as a guidance and good news to the faithful.’” (Quran 2:97)

Based on these verses, Abu Zayd opines that God revealed the Quran to the heart of the Prophet. Abu Zaid argues that the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet's heart means the revelation of meaning. Because the descent of the heart is different from the descent of words. Therefore, the Quran itself is a revelation, but its words were created by the Prophet (Abu Zayd 2001, 517).

Critique

In criticizing this reason, it should be said that Abu Zayd's way of reasoning is obviously an example of arbitrary interpretation and personal perception of the verses of the Quran. The verses of the Quran interpret



each other (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 133)³, so it is not possible to judge by considering one verse without considering other verses of the Holy Quran. Many verses in the Quran clearly indicate the revelation of the words of the Quran, such as (12: 2; 26: 195):

﴿إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾ (يوسف / ٢)

“Indeed, we have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you may apply reason.” (Quran 12:2)

﴿بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ﴾ (الشعرا / ١٩٥)

“In a clear Arabic language.” (Quran 26:195)

In these verses, it is stated that the Quran was revealed in Arabic, and this indicates the revelation of the words of the Holy Quran; Because Arabic cannot be an adjective or adverb for meaning. Also, some exegetes of the Quran clarified that the meaning of descent in these verses is both word and meaning (Javādī 2010, 5: 596).

Furthermore, numerous verses in the Quran indicate that what the Prophet received from revelation and conveyed to the people is completely consistent in terms of both wording and meaning with what he received, and the Prophet had no influence over it. Among these verses, one can refer to the following verses:

﴿وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ﴾ (نجم / ٥)

“Nor does he speak out of [his own] desire” (Quran 53:3)

3. قال علي-أمير المؤمنين (عليه السلام): «وكتاب الله بين أظهركم ناطق لا يعيسى لسانه، وبيت لا تهدم أركانه، وعز لا تهزم أعوانه... كتاب الله تبصرون به، وتنطقون به، وتسمعون به، وينطق بعضه ببعض، ويشهد بعضه على بعض، ولا يختلف في الله ولا يخالف بصاحبه عن الله...».

Imam Ali (a): “The Book of Allah is among you. It speaks and its tongue does not falter. It is a house whose pillars do not fall down, and a power whose supporters are never routed...The Book of Allah is that through which you see, you speak and you hear. Its one part speaks for the other part, and one part testifies to the other. It does not create differences about Allah nor does it mislead its own follower from (the path of) Allah...”



﴿إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَى﴾ (نجم/ ٤)

“It is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]” (Quran 53:4)

﴿وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾ (النحل/ ٤٤)

“We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect.”
(Quran 16:44)

﴿وَإِنَّكَ لَتَلَقَّى الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ﴾ (النمل/ ٦)

“Indeed, you receive the Quran from One who is all-wise, all-knowing.”
(Quran 27:6)

﴿وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضُ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ﴾ (الحاقة/ ٤٤-٤٦)

“Had he faked any sayings in our name, we would have surely seized him by the right hand. And then cut off his aorta” (Quran 69:44-46)

2. Multiplicity of readings (*ta'addud-i qirā'āt*)

The multiplicity of readings is another argument that Abu Zayd uses to support his claim. He argues that the multiple readings are not consistent with the divine nature of the Quranic words. Readings such as “كالعهن” (*kal'ihn al-manfūsh*) and “كالصوف المنفوش” (*kaṣṣawf al-manfūsh*), assuming the divine nature of both readings, necessitates a distortion in the divine speech itself. Therefore, if we consider the words of the Quran to be the exact words of God, then we must accept that deviation has occurred in the divine speech (Abu Zayd 2001, 517).

Critique

In critiquing Abu Zayd's second argument, it should be noted that firstly, the principle of the multiplicity of readings is accepted by both Shia and Sunni Muslims. However, there is disagreement regarding the “*tawātur*”⁴ (broadly authenticated or accepted) or lack of “*tawātur*” of the

4. Transmitted in uninterrupted succession from one generation to the other.



transmission of these readings during the time of the Prophet. Some Sunni scholars consider certain readings to be “*mutawātir*” (mass transmitted), while in Shia Islam, there is less emphasis on this concept. Some scholars from both Shia and Sunni traditions deny the *mutawātir* transmission of multiple readings during the Prophet’s time to the extent that al-Najafī referred to them as “*khalq-i kathūr*” (many people) (Najafī 1994, 295). Therefore, Abu Zayd’s theory is built on a fundamentally contradictory basis and lacks a solid foundation.

Secondly, even if we were to accept the multiplicity of readings, this does not necessarily contradict the divine nature of the Quranic words. The factors that have been mentioned as causing differences in readings, such as dialectical variations, pronunciation differences among different tribes, calligraphy, and the *ijtihād*⁵ of the reciters, have no direct relation to the multiple verbal revelations of the Quran. These factors are attributed to differences in dialects, calligraphy, and the reciters’ *ijtihād*. It should be noted that these *ijtihāds* were strongly scrutinized by scholars and experts from the beginning, and during the time of compiling the *Muṣḥaf* (scriptures), none of these factors were taken into consideration. It is clear that two other factors, namely dialectical differences and calligraphy, cannot indicate anything about the non-divine nature of the Quranic words.

The viewpoint of the esteemed Leader Ayatullah Khamenei regarding the multiplicity of readings is in line with this perspective. He divides the readings into two categories: *mutawātir* and non-*mutawātir* readings. He does not consider the non-*mutawātir* readings as authoritative and emphasizes not using them in analyzing Quranic teachings. However, he accepts the readings of the Seven Reciters (*qurrā’-i sab‘ah*), which are famous (*mashhūr*) and *mutawātir*, as authoritative, to the extent that he believes they can be used in interpreting the Quran (Khamenei 2018, 58).

5. Independent reasoning and judgment.



3. Hadith of the Seven Letters (*sab'atu ahraf*)

Another piece of evidence to prove this theory is the famous hadith of “Seven Letters.” The requirement for the revelation of the Quran is that the words of the Quran have been revealed in one form, while according to the hadith of Seven Letters, the Quran has been revealed in seven letters (Abu Zayd 2001: 518).

Critique

The first problem with the hadiths of the seven letters is the existence of conflicting narrations on this matter. In a hadith from Imam Sadiq (a), it is stated: “Fuḍayl ibn Yasar says: I mentioned to Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him): People say: Has the Quran been revealed in seven letters? He said: Enemies of God speak lies. The Quran has been revealed in one letter and from one source”⁶ (Kulaynī 1984, 2: 630).

The second problem with the hadiths of the seven letters is the implication of these narrations. Various viewpoints have been raised about the implication of the narrations of the seven letters. Many exegetes such as Fayḍ Kāshānī and Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī consider the hadiths of the seven letters to be in line with the deep concepts (*buṭūn-i Qur'ān*) of the Quran (Fayḍ Kāshānī 1994, 1:60; Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1972, 3:74).

Ayatullah Aghā Riḍā Hamidānī, in his book *Miṣbāḥ al-Faqīh*, says that it has not been proven that the Prophet recited a part of the Quran in several ways, but the opposite has been proven⁷ (Hamidānī 2004, 12:11). Ayatullah Ma'rifat, also, does not consider the hadiths of the Seven Letters to be related to the words of the Quran. He considers some of these hadiths

6. علي بن إبراهيم عن أبيه عن ابن أبي عمير عن عمار بن أذينة عن الفضيل بن يسار قال: قلت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام: «إن الناس يقولون إن القرآن نزل على سبعة أحرف فقال كذبوا أعداء الله وكتبه نزل على حرف واحد من عند الواحد».

7. «والحق أنه لم يتحقق أن النبي ﷺ قرأ شيئاً من القرآن بكيفيات مختلفة، بل ثبت خلافه فيما كان الاختلاف في المادة أو الصورة النوعية التي يؤثر تغييرها في انقلاب ماهية الكلام عرفاً».



to have defects and weaknesses in authenticity, while others, which do not have a problem in terms of authenticity, are related to the deep concept (*batn*) of the Quran, and some are related to differences in dialects (Ma'rifat 2007, 2: 92-106).

4. Historical evidence

Abu Zayd refers to historical evidence to prove his claim that the words of the Holy Quran are not revelation. He mentions the story of 'Abdullāh ibn Abi al-Sarḥ and says the following:

We have many narrations that sometimes a scribe among the scribes of revelation would write the final sentence of a verse before the Prophet completed it, and the Prophet would confirm it. Even once, one of the scribes of revelation made fun of and mocked the Quran. and his actions led him to apostasy. You must surely know the story of 'Abdullāh ibn Abi al-Sarḥ. (Abu Zayd 2001: 517)

Critique

Two major objections are raised about the story of 'Abdullāh ibn Abi al-Sarḥ narrated by Abu Zayd. The first objection is that this narrative, in addition to its chain of transmission issues, contains conflicting narratives. For example, in another narration of this story, it is reported as follows: "When the verse 'Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise'⁸ (Quran 2:220) was revealed, he ('Abdullāh ibn Abi al-Sarḥ) wrote: 'Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, all-wise,'⁹ At that moment, the Prophet told him: 'Leave it as it is'" (Āmulī 2007, 63).

8. ﴿...إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾ (البقره/ ٢٢٠).

9. إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ.



The second problem also opposes Abu Zayd's interpretation of this story with Islamic principles and traditions. The Quran introduces the prophets as the guardians of the Quran and revelation in numerous verses. Some verses also explicitly interpret the Quran as the "word of God" (*Kalām Allah*), which is evidence of the revelatory nature of the Quranic words:

﴿وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (التوبه/ ٤)

"If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of Allah. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know" (Quran 27:6)

﴿يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُبَدِّلُوا كَلَامَ اللَّهِ﴾ (الفتح/ ١٥)

"They desire to change the word of Allah." (Quran 48:15)

In numerous hadiths, the Quran is referenced as the «كلام الله» (Word of God) (Şadūq 1997, 6; Şadūq 2019, 68). Even in some hadiths, besides interpreting the Quran as the "Word of God," the explicitly human nature of Quranic words has also been negated¹⁰ (Majlisī 1982, 90:137). Also, some verses of the Quran explicitly attribute the recitation of the Quran to God:

﴿إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ﴾ (القيامه/ ١٧)

"Indeed it is up to us to put it together and to recite it. And when we have recited it, follow its recitation." (Quran 75:17-18)

Solid and conclusive evidence of the non-distortion of the Quran is another point that is not compatible with Abu Zayd's claim and what he reports. Therefore, it becomes clear that the narration of 'Abdullāh ibn Abi al-Sarḥ, which Abu Zayd has quoted and based his claim on, is ultimately weak and has no compatibility with the definitive and authentic principles of the Quran.

10. «وَهُوَ كَلَامُ اللَّهِ وَتَأْوِيلُهُ لَا يُشْبِهُهُ كَلَامُ الْبَشَرِ».



The Revelation of Quranic Words from the Perspective of Imam Khamenei

Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei is considered a prominent jurist and Quranic scholar of the present era, as he was also a disciple of Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī. In 1968, he started teaching Quran interpretation in the Mashhad (biography of Ayatollah Khamenei, <https://khl.ink/f/26142>). Various topics on individual and social aspects of tafsir of the Quran can be found in his lectures. Most of his statements are based on Quranic verses, and he always emphasizes understanding and practicing Quranic teachings. Numerous Quranic works have been published by him, among which we can mention the book *Ṭarḥ- Kullī-ye Andīsha-ye Islāmī* [General Outline of Islamic Thought] (1392Sh/2013) published by Jihād Publications, the book *Qur'ān, Kitāb-i zindigī* [Quran, the Book of Life] (1399Sh/2020), and *Akhlāq va Ma'nawiyat dar Ā'īnah-ye Nigāh-i Maqām-i Mu'āṣam-i Rahbarī* [Ethics and Spirituality in the Mirror of the Supreme Leader's View] (1382AH/2003) by the Cultural Institute of Qadr and Wilāyat, *Murūrī bar Mabānī, Rawish wa Qawā'id-i Tafsīrī-ye Ayatullah Khamenei dar Tafsīr* [An Overview of the Foundations, Methods, and Rules of Interpretation by Ayatullah Khamenei in Interpretation] (1393SH/2014) by the Nasīm-i Inqilāb Institute, and some published interpretations including interpretations of *Sūrah al-Hamd*, *al-Mumtaḥinah*, *al-Ḥashr*, and *al-Jumu'ah*.

Ayatullah Khamenei believes that the words and meanings of the Quran are completely divine and heavenly, and he has emphasized this point in his speeches many times. He strongly opposes the idea of the Quranic words being of human origin. In general, there are four reasons in Imam Khamenei's Quranic thought that can be mentioned to prove the divine nature of the Quranic words: The challenge of the Quran (*tahaddī*), the miraculous nature of the words and meanings of the Quran, the wisdom in the arrangement of the Quranic verses, and the authority of the Quran's outward meanings (*hujjiyyat-i zawāhir*) are some of the indications of the divine nature of the Quranic words and the rejection of their human origin.

1. The challenge of the Quran

The Supreme Leader considers the challenge of the Quran as evidence of the divine nature of the words and meanings of the Quran, which indicates the non-human nature of the words of the Quran. He states:

Of course, in the next verse (Quran 2:24), it says, (وَلَنْ تَعْلَمُوا) meaning that you will never be able to. This statement in the Quran is truly a historical reality and a remarkable miracle, that if you could, we would retract our claim and you would not believe. But if they cannot bring such a thing, then accept that this statement with this special order and structure, with this word and meaning, is the word of God and understand that it is beyond human capabilities. (Khamenei's statements in the twenty-third session of the interpretation of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 1371/2/2, <https://khl.ink/f/17178>)

Elsewhere, he states that human incapacity in responding to the challenge of the Quran vividly demonstrates the divine nature of the Quranic words. He says:

If a person is truly plagued by doubt and uncertainty when he cannot produce something similar to the Quran, he will understand that this statement is true and these words are the words of God. (Khamenei's statements in the twenty-third session of the interpretation of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 1371/2/2, <https://khl.ink/f/17178>).

The knowledge and teachings of the Quran are so rich in content and responsive to human needs that their issuance is only possible through revelation. Therefore, understanding the path of guidance and reaching human happiness is not achievable except through divine revelation. The Supreme Leader says in this regard:

In my opinion, if we entrust our hearts to spirituality and to the Holy Quran, we can understand the miracle of Quranic teachings and the miracle of the Holy Quran better than those who lived a thousand years ago: "There



is indeed an admonition in that for one who has a heart, or gives ear, being attentive” (Quran 50:37). In this complicated and stormy world, in this world that is full of complications – because of the existence of powers and scientific progress – when the Holy Quran enters the arena and when it speaks to us, then “Indeed this Quran guides to what is most upright...” (Quran 17: 9). We feel that it really “...Guides to that which is most upright and gives good news to the believers...” (Quran 17:9). (Khamenei’s statements in the annual Ramadan Quranic meeting, 1395/3/18, <https://khl.ink/f/33309>)

2. The Linguistic Miracle of The Quran

The linguistic miracle of the Quran is another evidence of the invalidity of the claim of the non-divine nature of the words of the Quran in the Quranic thought of Imam Khamenei. He emphasizes the linguistic miracle of the Quran, considering it at the pinnacle of beauty, accuracy, and precision. This contradicts the weak claim of the non-divine nature of the words of the Quran. He states in this regard:

The final point regarding the miraculous nature of the Quran in terms of wording ... the words of the Quran are the most beautiful words. All the eloquent and skilled Arab linguists who wrote about various literary sciences in Arabic refer to the Quran in different places. That is, whenever they want to demonstrate the beauty of a sentence or phrase, they cite a verse from the Quran and say, ‘The Quran has expressed it in this way.’ This means that the Quran is the criterion and standard of the Arabic language, and no one doubts that when something is in the Quran, it is at the pinnacle of beauty, accuracy, and precision. (Khamenei’s statements in the twenty-fifth session of the interpretation of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 1371/2/16, <https://khl.ink/f/17179>).

3. Wisdom in the Arrangement of the Quranic Verses

Ayatullah Khamenei views the arrangement of the verses and the structure of the sūras, as profoundly wise. This aspect has been recognized as a fundamental principle in his method of interpretation (Khamenei 1393, 30). This foundation is only compatible with the revelatory nature of the Quranic words. He also invites orientalists such as Abu Zayd, who used the lack of conformity of some verses of the Quran as an excuse to raise the claim of the non-divine nature of the words of the Quran, to further reflection:

The speech of the wise [God], its organization and arrangement is not without reason and wisdom. Therefore, in verses that may not seem to correspond with previous and subsequent verses at a glance, further attention and contemplation are needed to discover the wise arrangement and their correspondence. (Khamenei 2014, 31)

He has repeatedly delved into explaining the logic and structure governing the verses of the Quran and elucidating the relationship between them in his exegetical writings. Examples of this can be seen in his interpretation of the verses of *Sūrat al-Tawbah*. Some of these include elucidating and interpreting the relationship between verses 25 and 24, verses 29 and 30, the relationship of verses 38, 39, and 40, the coherence of verses 97 to 99, verses 111 and 112, and many other instances (Khamenei 2014, 31-35).

4. The Authority of the Apparent Meanings of the Quran (*ḥujjiyyat-i zawāhir-i Qur'ān*)

One of the most important and fundamental principles of interpreting the Holy Quran is the authority of its apparent meanings. The revelatory nature of the words of the Quran is also the main basis for the authority of its apparent meanings so that interpreting the Quran without believing in it is meaningless. This issue is also very important in the Quranic thought of the Supreme Leader and is considered one of his exegetical principles (Khamenei 2014, 31).



In interpreting verse 60 of *Sūrat al-Tawbah*, he emphasizes the authority of the apparent meanings of the Quran. In the interpretation of verse 64 of the same Surah, he critiques other viewpoints using the outward appearance of the verse. He also emphasizes that we should respect the outward aspects (appearances) of God's speech and not add our own interpretations based on our preferences (Khamenei 2014, 29-30).

Belief in the authority of the apparent meanings of the Quran is necessary for interpreting and explaining its verses. Therefore, adhering to the apparent meaning of the Quran where there is no evidence to the contrary will lead to a systematic interpretation. While based on the claim that the words of the Quran are non-revelation, interpreting the Quran will be of no benefit. Because there will be no validity for the apparent meanings of the Quran that would require interpretation.

Conclusion

Abu Zayd considers the words of the Holy Quran to be human and non-divine. He cites Quranic verses, the multiplicity of readings, the Hadith of the Seven Letters, and some historical evidence to support his claim. However, not only do the verses he cites lack sufficient evidence of his claim of the non-divine nature of the Quranic words, but he also overlooks many verses that indicate the divine nature of the Quranic words. The multiplicity of readings not only does not contradict the divine nature of the Quranic words but careful consideration of the factors contributing to the multiplicity of readings shows that it cannot be considered as evidence of the non-divine nature of the Quranic words.

The hadiths of the Seven Letters, according to exegetes, pertain to the inner aspect of the Quran despite their weaknesses in the chain of transmission and indication. Abu Zayd's historical evidence for his claim also has numerous problems in their chain of transmission, inconsistencies with definitive Quranic verses and hadiths, and conflicting narrations, which, contrary to his claim, point towards the divine nature of the Quranic words.



On the other hand, in the Quranic thoughts of Ayatullah Khamenei, the words and meanings of the Quran are considered divine and revelatory, and emphasis has been placed on this. Alongside his exegetical discussions, evidence and proofs have been mentioned that indicate the revelatory nature of the Quranic words. The challenge of the Quran and the miraculous nature of its words can be regarded as some of the most important evidence of the revelatory nature of the Quranic words in Ayatullah Khamenei's Quranic thought. Additionally, the authority of the Quran's apparent meanings and wisdom in the arrangement and organization of verses are among other pieces of evidence in Imam Khamenei's statements that indicate the revelatory nature of the Quranic words.



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