

# A Comparative Study of Methods Used in the Exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible

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## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners, or Middlesex University.

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## Contents

Islamic Solar and Lunar Calendar Dates .....	8
Qur'anic Verses.....	8
Transliteration .....	9
Summary .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2 Background and Professional Context.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3 Personal Perspectives .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.1 Terms of Reference .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1.1 Aims .....	17
2.1.2 Intended Outcome.....	17
2.1.3 Objectives .....	18
2.1.4 Research Questions .....	19
2.1.5 Dissemination .....	19
<b>2.2 Review of Literature.....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.2.1 Qur'an .....	21
2.2.1.1 Exegetical Methods and Approaches.....	21
2.2.1.2 Qur'anic Exegesis .....	23
2.2.1.3 Tradition.....	23
2.2.1.4 Islamic Feminist.....	24
2.2.1.5 Qur'anic Sciences .....	25
2.2.1.6 Other Qur'anic Sources .....	25
2.2.2 Biblical Exegetical Methods and Approaches .....	26
2.2.3 Methods and Methodology .....	27
2.2.4 Other Sources .....	29
2.2.5 Reflection .....	29
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>3.2 Ontology .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>3.3 Epistemology .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3.4 Methodology .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>3.5 Qur'anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches, and the Role of 'Aql .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.5.1 The Perspective of Traditional Shi'i Scholars on the Role of 'Aql in Qur'anic Exegesis.....	38
3.5.2 The Perspective of Critical Rationalists on the Role of 'Aql in Qur'anic Exegesis .....	42
<b>3.6 Methods .....</b>	<b>44</b>
3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	45
3.6.2 Questionnaire Surveys .....	46

3.6.3 Hermeneutics.....	47
3.6.3.1 Hermeneutical Methods and Approaches to Interpreting the Qur'an .....	49
3.6.3.2 The Contextualist Approach .....	50
3.6.3.3 A Critique of the Contextualist Approach .....	52
3.6.3.4 The Textualist Approach .....	54
<b>3.7 Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>57</b>
3.7.1 Interviews .....	58
3.7.2 Questionnaire Surveys .....	58
3.7.3 Testing My Research Findings.....	59
3.7.4 The Use of Critical Rationalism .....	59
3.7.5 Ethical Implications of My Epistemology .....	61
3.7.6 Using Non-Islamic Sources for Improving Qur'anic Interpretation.....	61
<b>3.8 Assumptions About the Qur'an and the Sunna .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: PROJECT ACTIVITY .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>4.2 Library Research .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews.....</b>	<b>71</b>
4.3.1 Interview Questions.....	72
4.3.2 Summary and Analysis of Interviews .....	73
4.3.2.1 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī – First Interview.....	73
4.3.2.2 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī – Second Interview.....	85
4.3.2.3 Dr Ḥusayn 'Alawī-Mihr .....	86
4.3.2.4 Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī .....	92
<b>4.4 Classroom Presentations.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>4.5 Conference Presentations .....</b>	<b>100</b>
4.5.1 Paper: 'Is <i>tafsīr 'aqlī</i> a method in Qur'anic exegesis?' (Objectives 4 and 6) .....	100
4.5.2 Paper: 'A comparative study of Biblical and Qur'anic methods of exegesis' (Objectives 1 and 2) .....	102
4.5.3 Paper: 'Classifications of methods used in Qur'anic exegesis' (Objectives 3 and 4) .....	103
4.5.4 Paper: 'A Comparative Study of Islamic Feminist and Traditional Shī'ī Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis' (Objective 1 – Qur'an part only). .....	104
<b>4.6 Lectures and Questionnaire Surveys .....</b>	<b>106</b>
4.6.1 Background .....	106
4.6.2 Lead Organiser's message to those selected to do the survey.....	107
4.6.3 My message at the beginning of each survey.....	107
<b>4.7 Questionnaire Survey Analysis.....</b>	<b>108</b>
4.7.1 Analysis of Individual Surveys .....	109
4.7.1.1 Survey on Step 1.....	109
4.7.1.2 Survey on Step 2.....	114
4.7.1.3 Survey on Step 3.....	116
4.7.1.4 Survey on the Application of Steps 1-3, and on Step 4 .....	119
4.7.1.5 Survey on Step 5.....	121
4.7.1.6 Survey on Steps 6 and 7 .....	123
4.7.1.7 Survey on Step 8.....	126
4.7.2 Consolidated Analysis of Surveys.....	128
4.7.2.1 The Respondents.....	128
4.7.2.2 Reception to the Model .....	128



4.7.2.3 My Presentation.....	129
<b>CHAPTER 5: PROJECT FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>5.2 Part 1: Classification of Methods and Approaches Used in Qur’anic Exegesis .....</b>	<b>132</b>
5.2.1 Importance of Classifications and Their Relevance to This Project .....	132
5.2.2 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Bible .....	134
5.2.3 Qur’anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches: Introduction .....	142
5.2.4 Historical Overview of the Development of Exegetical Approaches .....	143
5.2.5 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur’an.....	145
5.2.5.1 Intratextual ( <i>tafsīr al-qur’ān bil-qur’ān</i> ) .....	146
5.2.5.2 Tradition-based ( <i>tafsīr bil-riwāyah</i> ) .....	146
5.2.5.3 Scientific ( <i>‘ilmī</i> ) .....	146
5.2.5.4 Interpretive reasoning ( <i>‘aqlī</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.5 Allegorical ( <i>ishārī</i> ).....	147
5.2.5.6 Comprehensive ( <i>jāmi’</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.7 Exegesis based on speculative opinion ( <i>tafsīr bil-ra’y</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.8 Juristic ( <i>fiqhī</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.9 Theological ( <i>kalāmī</i> ).....	148
5.2.5.10 Philosophical ( <i>falsafī</i> ) .....	148
5.2.5.11 Lexicological ( <i>lughawī</i> ) .....	148
5.2.5.12 Sociological ( <i>ijtimā’ī</i> ) .....	148
5.2.6 Four Classifications .....	148
5.2.6.1 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-İşfahānī.....	149
5.2.6.2 Ayatollah ‘Abbas‘alī ‘Amīd Zanjānī .....	150
5.2.6.3 Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Ma‘rifat .....	153
5.2.6.4 ‘Alī ‘Akbar Bābā’ī .....	154
5.2.7 An Alternative Classification .....	155
5.2.8 Implications for My Professional Practice.....	159
<b>5.3 Part 2: A Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding and Using the Qur’an .....</b>	<b>161</b>
5.3.1 Introduction .....	161
5.3.2 Draft Introduction to the Guide .....	162
5.3.3 Step 1: Gathering General Information About the Text .....	164
5.3.3.1 1. What are the key elements of the first step?.....	164
5.3.3.2 2. Why is it important to know the names of the text and the reason behind those names? .....	165
5.3.3.3 3. What does an investigation into the status and rewards of the text reveal? .....	167
5.3.3.4 4. What are the benefits of knowing whether a Qur’anic text is Makkī or Madanī? .....	168
5.3.4 Step 2: Knowing the Context .....	170
5.3.4.1 1. Which types of context does this step seek to investigate, and why is this step important? ..	170
5.3.4.2 2. What two things can help us understand the circumstances in which the text was revealed? ..	170
5.3.4.3 3. How does the literary context help us to better understand the text? .....	172
5.3.5 Step 3: Finding out the Meaning of Words.....	175
5.3.5.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	175
5.3.5.2 2. What role does morphology play in helping us to understand the meaning of words?.....	176
5.3.5.3 3. How does knowledge of homonyms help us to understand the meaning of words?.....	177
5.3.5.4 4. How does comparing and contrasting synonyms help us to understand the meaning of words? .....	178
5.3.5.5 5. What benefit is there in knowing the etymology of words?.....	179
5.3.6 Step 4: Examining Sentences and Style.....	181
5.3.6.1 1. How does syntax enhance our understanding of the text? .....	181
5.3.6.2 2. How does rhetoric help us to understand the text? .....	183
5.3.6.3 3. What method can we use to discover structural relationships in the text? .....	185
5.3.7 Step 5: Investigating Structure.....	188

5.3.7.1 1. Why is it important to investigate the structure of the text? .....	188
5.3.7.2 2. How may Step 5 be applied to <i>some</i> verses? .....	188
5.3.7.3 3. How may Step 5 be applied to <i>one</i> verse? .....	189
5.3.7.4 4. How may the method of ‘outlining’ help us to discern and express the text’s structure? .....	192
5.3.8 Step 6: Evaluating Opinions .....	194
5.3.8.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	194
5.3.8.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	194
5.3.8.3 3. What practical tips can we use to help us with this step? .....	197
5.3.9 Step 7: Examining Traditions.....	198
5.3.9.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	198
5.3.9.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	200
5.3.10 Step 8: Applying the Text to Our Lives .....	201
5.3.10.1 1. Why is this important? .....	201
5.3.10.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	201
5.3.10.3 3. Which principle can be used to help us apply the text to our lives?.....	204
<b>5.4 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>6.2 Objective 1.....</b>	<b>213</b>
6.2.1 Reflection .....	216
<b>6.3 Objective 2.....</b>	<b>217</b>
6.3.1 Reflection .....	221
<b>6.4 Objective 3.....</b>	<b>222</b>
6.4.1 Classification 1: Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī .....	222
6.4.2 Classification 2: Ayatollah ‘Abbas‘alī ‘Amīd Zanjānī.....	223
6.3.3 Classification 3: Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Ma‘rifat .....	224
6.4.4 Classification 4: ‘Alī ‘Akbar Bābā’ī .....	224
6.4.5 Reflection .....	224
<b>6.5 Objective 4.....</b>	<b>225</b>
6.5.1 Key Features of the Classification .....	226
<b>6.6 Objective 5.....</b>	<b>228</b>
6.6.1 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī .....	228
6.6.2 Dr Ḥusayn ‘Alawī-Mihr .....	229
6.6.3 Sayyid Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī.....	230
<b>6.7 Objective 6.....</b>	<b>231</b>
6.7.1 Classroom Presentations .....	231
6.7.2 Conference Presentation .....	232
<b>6.8 Objective 7.....</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>6.9 Objective 8.....</b>	<b>237</b>
6.9.1 Questionnaire Survey Conclusions .....	237
6.9.2 Recommendations .....	238
<b>CHAPTER 7: REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT .....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>7.1 My Choice of Research Subject .....</b>	<b>243</b>

<b>7.2 Biblical Works .....</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>7.3 Turn in Direction .....</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>7.4 Responsibility.....</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>7.5 Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>7.6 Concluding Thoughts.....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Appendix A: Research Ethics Form.....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>Appendix B: Letter to Interviewees.....</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>Appendix C: Questionnaire Surveys .....</b>	<b>261</b>
Survey 1 .....	261
Survey 2 .....	276
Survey 3 .....	293
Survey 4 .....	311
Survey 5 .....	329
Survey 6 .....	343
Survey 7 .....	365
<b>Appendix D: Analysis of Individual Surveys.....</b>	<b>381</b>
<b>Appendix E: Consolidated Analysis of Surveys .....</b>	<b>386</b>

## Islamic Solar and Lunar Calendar Dates

For Arabic and Persian works, the *hijrī* calendar dates have been given followed by an approximation of the Gregorian calendar equivalent. The *hijrī* lunar calendar dates have been denoted by the abbreviation ‘AH (lunar)’; for example, ‘(1417 AH (lunar)/1996)’. The *hijrī* solar calendar dates (commonly used in Iran) have been denoted by the abbreviation ‘AH (solar)’; for example, ‘(1390 AH (solar)/2011)’.

## Qur’anic Verses

The translation of nearly all the Qur’anic verses are from Ali Quli Qara’i’s (2005) *The Qur’an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*. London: ICAS Press.

Qur’anic references have been cited in the format ‘chapter name chapter number:verse number’; for example, ‘Yusūf 12:33’, where ‘Yusūf’ is the chapter name, ‘12’ is the chapter number, and ‘33’ is the verse number.

## Transliteration

Arabic and Persian terms that do not have standard spellings in English are transliterated according to the following system:

ء	a, i, or u (initial form)	ل	l
ء	' (medial or final form)	م	m
ا	a	ن	n
ب	b	ه	h
پ	p	و	w
ت	t	ي	y
ث	th	ة	h
ج	j	ة	t
چ	ch		
ح	ḥ	ال	al-
خ	kh		
د	d	ا	a
ذ	dh	ا	i
ر	r	ا	u
ز	z		
ژ	zh	ا / ا / ا	ā
س	s	ي	ī
ش	sh	و	ū
ص	ṣ	ا	'ā (medial form)
ض	ḍ		
ط	ṭ	ي	ay
ظ	ẓ	ي	ayy
ع	'	ي	iyy (medial form)
غ	gh	ي	ī (final form)
ف	f	و	aw
ق	q	و	aww
ك	k	و	uww
گ	g		

## Summary

In this project, I have investigated the most commonly used methods in Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis. My research has produced a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur'an, and a new classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches. I used Biblical works instrumentally to facilitate the discovery of ideas for the step-by-step model and classification. I intend to publish my findings as a handbook for students, teachers, imams, and others who wish to study and use the Qur'an in an effective and rewarding way.

My project is the first of its kind, as currently no such resource exists in the English language from a Shi'i Muslim perspective. I believe my research makes a significant contribution to my community of practice. Once published, the handbook will be a much-needed point of reference for learning how to comprehend and apply the text of the Qur'an. It will also provide students with an easy-to-follow, comprehensive guide that will facilitate their learning and empower them to create original, well-explored pieces of work. Early indications of the impact my research is having have been very encouraging. I am hopeful that as my research becomes better known, it will continue having a positive and meaningful impact in communities across the world.

I conducted my research using the methodological framework of critical rationalism. The methods I used in my project were semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an, questionnaire surveys on a series of lectures I delivered, hermeneutical methods, and library research. Preliminary tests through classroom and conference presentations have indicated that the critical rationalist approach is effective, and survey feedback has shown that my step-by-step model is important, relevant, innovative, and useful.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	12
1.2 BACKGROUND AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT.....	13
1.3 PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES .....	14

## 1.1 Introduction

My project investigates the most commonly used methods in Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis. The result of my comparative study is a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur'an, and a new classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches. I intend to publish my findings as a handbook for students, teachers, imams, and other individuals who wish to know what the Qur'anic text means and how it affects their lives.

This project is the first of its kind, as currently no such handbook exists in the English language from a Shi'i Muslim perspective. The step-by-step guide and the classification complement each other, providing a balance that facilitates the transition from exegetical theory to exegetical practice and vice versa. Users of the handbook will be able to see how the exegetical methods and approaches in the classification are applied to verses of the Qur'an and the impact one's choice of method and approach has on their interpretation of the verses. And, in the course of following the step-by-step model, the classification of the methods and approaches that are used in the model will help them to situate the interpretive processes and procedures within the context of the Qur'anic exegetical framework.

The step-by-step model is suitable for use at several levels. The concepts and methods are understandable to beginners, and the structured approach to studying and using the Qur'an may give more advanced students, teachers, and imams something they have not found elsewhere. The classification of methods and approaches which I offer is uncomplicated, precise, and built on a rigorous theoretical foundation.

I have used Biblical works instrumentally, i.e. as a means to an end to facilitate the discovery of ideas for the step-by-step guide and classification. The large quantity of works on Biblical hermeneutics has provided me with a rich source of knowledge which I have utilised to make significant improvements in the field of Qur'anic interpretation.

Early indications of the impact my research is having have been very encouraging. I am hopeful that as my research becomes better known, it will continue having a positive and meaningful impact on my community of practice.



## 1.2 Background and Professional Context

I believe this project makes a significant contribution to my professional practice as an imam and a senior lecturer in Islamic studies. Firstly, as an imam: I am regularly invited to lecture in mosques and centres around the world. I have been doing this for the past nineteen years. My specialisation is Qur'an and Hadith studies. My lectures and sermons tend to be heavily based on the Qur'anic text and emphasise the need to apply the text for spiritual and intellectual development. After my lectures and sermons, I am sometimes asked about how one can better understand the Qur'an and use it for everyday issues. Naturally, I try to answer as well as I can, but I am unable to point people to a resource for further reference. I know from discussions with my colleagues that they also recognise the need for such a resource. And, as Naṣīrī (2016), an expert on Qur'anic studies, points out, most works of Qur'anic exegesis are not easy to understand:

A look at the approach taken by exegetes in the process of understanding the Qur'an and conducting exegesis shows that, except in a few cases, the majority of exegetes do not commit themselves to observing any particular model, whether that be at the stage of understanding [the verses] or at the stage of explaining [them]. Having understood the meanings and teachings of the Qur'an in a non-methodical manner, they then present their understanding at the next stage to their readership in the same manner... Adopting this approach, in addition to the adverse effect it has on the process of understanding [the verses], makes the process of explaining [them] difficult as well, and it confuses readers of the Qur'an when it comes to accessing the messages of this heavenly book (p. 26).

Secondly, my research also makes a major contribution to my professional practice as a senior lecturer at The Islamic College. To date, I have taught the undergraduate module *Qur'anic Sciences and Approaches to Exegesis* (module code HSC 117) three times,<sup>1</sup> and I have taught the subject as part of the postgraduate module *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* (module code MI 403) once.<sup>2</sup> My students sometimes struggle to write well-

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<sup>1</sup> BA (Honours) Hawza Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020.

<sup>2</sup> MA Islamic Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020.

structured, original pieces of work on Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*); they will completely leave out, or give insufficient attention to, important aspects of the verses, and they will seldom attempt to discover new insights. I have often longed for an easy-to-follow, comprehensive set of guidelines that I could use in my teaching and to which I could refer my students for their assignments.

In 2013, I was exposed to a wide variety of methods and methodological perspectives when I attended all the classes of the MA module *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* at The Islamic College. It was here that I first became acquainted with critical rationalism and began to see how effective it could be as a methodological framework in Qur'anic interpretation. I elaborate further on the use of critical rationalism as my chosen methodology in 3.4.

### 1.3 Personal Perspectives

This project means a great deal to me personally and professionally. The Qur'an is a source of inspiration and guidance for me and for hundreds of millions of other Muslims around the world who believe it to be the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad for the salvation of mankind. In my professional capacity as an imam and a senior lecturer at The Islamic College, I refer to the Qur'an, or studies on the Qur'an, almost daily. To find and present more effective ways to understand and use this sacred book, therefore, has been hugely rewarding on a personal as well as a professional level.

The Bible too, of course, is one of the world's most important spiritual texts, and it also inspires hundreds of millions of people worldwide. In my capacity as an imam, I have had several inter-faith meetings with Christian priests. Moreover, as part of my work as Director of Research and Publications at The Islamic College, I sometimes meet scholars of the Bible to discuss potential areas of research collaboration. My investigation into Biblical interpretation has led me to better appreciate the commonalities between the two faiths,<sup>3</sup> and it has helped me in my professional practice when I engage with Christians, whether that

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<sup>3</sup> For a useful comparative commentary that highlights the connections between the Qur'an and the Bible, see Reynolds' *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (2018).

be at a scholarly or community level.<sup>4</sup> The Abrahamic faiths have common historical and theological roots, and I hope my research will facilitate deeper, more meaningful dialogue between the traditions.<sup>5</sup>

The belief held by Muslims and Christians that their Holy Book is the ‘Word of God’ was crucial for the choice of my research subject and project title, as being the ‘Word of God’ is the all-important premise that is shared by the authors whose works I investigated. I am not, however, an expert on Biblical exegetical methods and approaches, and I have tried to approach my comparative study with sensitivity and humility. To help me in my Biblical research, I sought advice from Dr Martin Whittingham, Academic Director at The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford, which I visited in 2016. Dr Whittingham pointed me to some of the literature on Biblical exegetical methods and approaches mentioned in the next chapter.

Unfortunately, sacred texts such as the Qur’an and the Bible are sometimes misused to further prejudices and incite hatred and division. This can be curtailed, however, through a correct understanding of the texts, which in turn requires an appreciation of the methods and approaches that are employed in interpreting them.

My research into Biblical methods and approaches has been of immense benefit. I gained many new ideas, learnt many new techniques, became acquainted with important terminology, and deepened my understanding about the skills required to correctly and responsibly interpret a sacred text. The result of my comparative study has been a classification and guide and that I believe is important, relevant, innovative, and useful.

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<sup>4</sup> One of the best examples of common values and perspectives that I came across during my research was an entire section on spiritual factors in the perceptual process written by Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 27-29). Although they were writing in the context of Biblical interpretation, the core principles expounded by them could just as well have been written by a Twelver Shi’i Muslim scholar of the Qur’an. I refer to this further in 4.3.2.4.

<sup>5</sup> On the religious history and shared wisdom and spirituality of the world’s major scriptures, see Karen Armstrong’s *The Lost Art of Scripture* (2019).

# Chapter 2: Terms of Reference and Review of Literature

<b>2.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1.1 Aims.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1.2 Intended Outcome .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1.3 Objectives .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.1.4 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1.5 Dissemination .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.2.1 Qur'an.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.2.1.1 Exegetical Methods and Approaches.....	21
2.2.1.2 Qur'anic Exegesis .....	23
2.2.1.3 Tradition.....	23
2.2.1.4 Islamic Feminist .....	24
2.2.1.5 Qur'anic Sciences .....	25
2.2.1.6 Other Qur'anic Sources.....	25
<b>2.2.2 Biblical Exegetical Methods and Approaches .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.2.3 Methods and Methodology.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.2.4 Other Sources .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.2.5 Reflection.....</b>	<b>29</b>

## 2.1 Terms of Reference

### 2.1.1 Aims

1. To present a new, accurate, and easy-to-understand classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis.
2. To design a systematic model for understanding and using the Qur'an that draws on the works of scholars of Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis as well as my own professional practice.

The Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches that I will be investigating are those used by traditional Shi'i scholars of the Qur'an. By 'traditional Shi'i' scholars, I mean those who adopt a classical rationalist (*uṣūlī*)<sup>6</sup> hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an. The word '*uṣūlī*' here refers to a scholar of the Islamic science known as the 'principles of jurisprudence' (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which discusses Islamic legal hermeneutics and theory.

### 2.1.2 Intended Outcome

My intended outcome is a handbook that will be based on the project findings in this report. This handbook will be in two parts: a) the new classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches; and b) the practical step-by-step guide to understanding and using the Qur'an. The handbook will be aimed at students, teachers, imams, and others who wish to study and apply the teachings of the Qur'an in an effective and rewarding way.

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<sup>6</sup> '*Uṣūlī*' here is used in contrast to '*akhbārī*' (traditionist). For an overview of the *uṣūlī* and *akhbārī* positions, see Gleave (2013, pp. 26-29 and 184-186).

### 2.1.3 Objectives

In order to realise the aims stated above, my project seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.
2. To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.
3. To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.
4. To present an alternative classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.
5. To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis, and to analyse the data.
6. To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.
7. To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur'an.
8. To present the guide in a series of lectures and conduct a questionnaire survey on each step, and to analyse the data from the surveys.

With regard to the objectives that involve Biblical methods and approaches (Objectives 1, 2, and 7), I would like to highlight the fact that the Bible is not an area of my expertise. I have sought mostly to discuss methods and approaches to Qur'anic exegeses for the aims stated in 2.1.1. Biblical works have been used instrumentally, as a means to an end to facilitate the discovery of ideas to help me achieve those aims.

#### 2.1.4 Research Questions

My substantive research questions have been:

1. What are the most important methods and approaches used in the Qur'anic and Biblical traditions of exegesis?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions?
3. How are Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?
4. How may Biblical exegetical methods and approaches be used to help produce a practical step-by-step guide to interpreting and applying the Qur'an?
5. What would be the impact of introducing the critical rationalist approach to the field of Qur'anic exegesis?
6. What would be the impact of introducing a practical step-by-step guide to interpreting and applying the Qur'an?

#### 2.1.5 Dissemination

I intend to publish my research as a practical handbook. My intended audience will be university and Islamic seminary students, teachers, imams, and others wishing to study and use the verses of the Qur'an in their lives more effectively.

In addition, I have already used, and will continue using, aspects of my research on the *Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis* course that I teach at The Islamic College, as well as in my lectures and sermons in mosques and Islamic centres.

And finally, I intend to continue developing my research through academic papers. To date, I have presented four papers in conferences on this area. The following is a list of these papers; the fourth one has been published.

1. 'Is *tafsīr 'aqlī* a method in Qur'anic exegesis?'

This paper was presented at the Fifth Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in April 2019 at The Islamic College in London.

2. 'A comparative study of Biblical and Qur'anic methods of exegesis'

This paper was presented at the Fourth Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in May 2018 at The Islamic College in London.

3. 'Classifications of methods used in Qur'anic exegesis'

This paper was presented at the Third Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in May 2017 at The Islamic College in London.

4. 'A Comparative Study of Islamic Feminist and Traditional Shi'i Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis', published in the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, (9)2 (Spring 2016). London: ICAS Press.

This paper was presented at the Second Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in May 2016 at The Islamic College in London.

## 2.2 Review of Literature

The review in the following sections focuses on the most important sources of knowledge and information I have used for my project. These have been arranged under the headings below:

- ❖ Qur'an
  - Exegetical Methods and Approaches
  - Qur'anic Exegesis
  - Tradition
  - Islamic Feminist
  - Qur'anic Sciences
  - Other Qur'anic Sources
- ❖ Biblical Exegetical Methods and Approaches
- ❖ Methods and Methodology
- ❖ Other Sources



## 2.2.1 Qur'an

### 2.2.1.1 Exegetical Methods and Approaches

'Alawī-Mihr was one of the eminent scholars of the Qur'an I interviewed (4.3.2.3). His *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Tafsīrī* (1381 AH (solar)/2002) is a popular textbook about Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches. I have critically discussed his opinions in this report (3.5.1 and 6.6.2). His article 'Jaryānshināsī-yi Tafāsīr-i 'Aqlī-yi Mu'āṣir' (1394 AH (solar)/2015) explains his opinion on the two types of philosophical approaches (4.3.2.3).

Bābā'ī, 'Azīzī-Kiyā, and Rūḥānī-Rād's *Rawish Shanāsī-yi Tafsīr-i Qur'ān* (1388 AH (solar)/2009) was useful for the three types of literary context: of words, sentences, and verses, which I used in Step 2 of the step-by-step guide (5.3.4.3). Burton's article (1988) provides an in-depth analysis and assessment of the views of different jurisprudential schools on the 'Verse of Wuḍū', while Gleave in *Islam and Literalism* (2013) summarises the discussion in less technical language (5.3.6.1). Goldziher's pioneering book, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung*, which has been translated into Arabic (1944 and 1955), Persian (1383 AH (solar)/2004), and English (2006), is thought to have been the first work written specifically on the area of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches (5.2.5).

Mutahhari's *Understanding Islamic Sciences* (2019) was very important for Paya's (editor) discussion on the two distinct cognitive faculties of 'aql, which are represented in English by the terms 'reason' and 'intellect' (3.5.2). This provided me with the platform on which to build my examination of the role of 'aql in Qur'anic exegesis.

I found Naṣīrī's *Rawish-Shanāsī-yi Tafsīr-i Qur'ān* (1395 AH (solar)/2016) useful for its systematic approach to conducting exegesis. However, the book is written for a Persian-speaking audience, uses a lot of technical language, and is too detailed and complex for most people to use on a regular basis. I also found myself having to sift through a lot of material that felt more suited to a book on Qur'anic Sciences (2.2.1.4) than a guide to exegesis. Furthermore, the sheer number of stages Naṣīrī proposes (twenty) over-complicates matters.

The works of Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī deserve a special mention. Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī is a leading contemporary Shi'i Muslim scholar of the Qur'an. He is the author of numerous works on Qur'anic interpretation, including a twenty-two-volume commentary on the Qur'an. His

*Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Tafsīrī* (1390 AH (solar)/2011) – which is volume two of his five volume series, *Manṭiq-i Tafsīr-i Qurʾān* – is considered in the Shiʿi academic world to be one of the leading texts, if not *the* leading text, on the subject, and it has become a standard textbook on Qurʾanic exegesis courses in Shiʿi seminaries. For my project, I interviewed Riḍāyī-İşfahānī twice (4.3.2.1 and 4.3.2.2), and in this report I have critically discussed his classification of Qurʾanic exegetical methods and approaches (5.2.6.1) and some of his other opinions (4.3.2.1 and 6.6.1). Two of his other books were useful for my project as well: firstly, his *Mabānī wa Qawāʿid-i Tafsīr-i Qurʾān* (1387 AH (solar)/2008), which is volume one of his aforementioned *Manṭiq-i Tafsīr-i Qurʾān* series, was useful for the ‘inner dimension’ method (5.3.10.3) and for what he terms ‘essential assumptions’ (4.3.2.2); and secondly, his *Sabk-i Zindagī-yi Qurʾānī* (1396 AH (solar)/2017) was helpful for the analysis on the ‘immutable’ and ‘mutable’ principles in the Qurʾan (5.3.10.3).

In this report, I have critically assessed three other classifications of Qurʾanic exegetical methods and approaches: by Ayatollah Zanjānī in *Mabānī wa Ravish-hā-yi Tafsīrī-yi Qurʾān* (1387 AH (solar)/2008) (5.2.6.2); by Ayatollah Maʿrifat in his well-known work, *Al-Tamhīd fī ʿUlūm Qurʾān* (1385 AH (solar)/2006) (5.2.6.3); and by Bābāʾī in *Makātib-i Tafsīrī* (1388 AH (solar)/2009) (5.2.6.4).

Duke’s online *Quranic Arabic Corpus* (2009-2017) provides a syntactical analysis of the Qurʾanic text, which is useful for Step 4 (5.3.6.1).

I used the works of Ayatollah Jawādī-Āmulī extensively in my project. Many Shiʿi scholars consider him the leading authority on the Qurʾan today. His *Tasnīm* is a multi-volume work and perhaps the most in-depth Qurʾanic exegesis ever produced by a Shiʿi author. The first volume of this work (1999) provides an overview of the traditional Shiʿi perspective on the main exegetical methods, including the two roles played by ‘*aql*’ in exegesis (3.5.1). Volume 18 (2013) includes his juristic-lexicological analysis of the verse I used to explain structural relationships (5.3.6.3). Jawādī-Āmulī’s *Qurʾān dar Qurʾān* (1388 AH (solar)/2009a) provides a detailed analysis of the ‘double-revelation’ theory of the Qurʾan, which I used in Step 6 (5.3.8.2). Furthermore, three of his online lectures on the *Commentary on Al-Kahf* (no date) provided interesting insights into why God may have used the word ‘*fatāʾ*’ (chivalrous) to describe Prophet Abraham and the Companions of the Cave (5.3.5.4).

### 2.2.1.2 Qur'anic Exegesis

I have used several prominent works on Qur'anic exegesis to discover the opinions of leading experts on the verses that I cited in this report. For example, al-Quṭb in *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* (1387 AH (lunar)/1967) maintains that the Qur'an's revelation started on the Night of Qadr (5.3.8.2); al-Shīrāzī in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (1366 AH (solar)/1987) writes about the importance of understanding the chapter 'al-Ḥamd', asserting that someone who does not understand it "... is not a spiritually learned individual and has not been guided by its interpretation" (5.3.3.2); al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1375 AH (solar)/1996) and Jawādī-Āmulī (2009a) explore the possibility of a double-layered meaning in the word "touch" in al-Wāqī'ah 56:79, i.e. touching the Qur'an physically and spiritually (3.3); al-Ṭūsī in *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1413 AH (lunar)/1992) presents an interesting etymology of the word 'munāfiq' (hypocrite) (5.3.5.5); and Ayatollah Makārim-Shīrāzī, in his hugely popular *Tafsīr-i Namūnih* (1371 AH (solar)/1992), suggests that in al-Dukhān 44:49, God is punishing the wrongdoers psychologically having already punished them physically (5.3.4.3). I also used the latter work to offer an explanation for the curious order of the verses in al-Raḥmān 55:1-4 (5.3.7.2); the meaning of al-Nisā' 4:34 (5.3.6.3); and the Reason for Revelation of al-Mā'idah 5:55 (5.3.4.2). Al-Ḥuwayzī's *Nūr al-Thaqalayn* (1415 AH (lunar)/1994), which I used in 5.3.3.2 and 5.3.3.3, is one of the best examples of a tradition-based exegesis.

### 2.2.1.3 Tradition

I have referred to several primary hadith sources. In 5.3.3.3, I quote traditions from the following: *al-Maḥāsīn* (1371 AH (solar)/1992) of al-Barqī, one of the earliest extant collection of Shī'ī hadith; al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* (1407 (lunar)/1986), one of the four most authentic Shī'ī books of traditions; *Thawāb al-A'māl wa 'Iqāb al-A'māl* (1368 AH (solar)/1989), compiled by the renowned scholar of traditions, Ibn Bābawayh (commonly known as 'Shaykh al-Ṣadūq'); al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī's (1367 (solar)/1988) celebrated work *Tafṣīl Wasā'il al-Shī'ah ilā Taḥṣīl Masā'il al-Sharī'ah*, which is comprised of mainly jurisprudence-related traditions; and al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-Anwār* (1403 AH (lunar)/1982), which at 110 volumes is the largest of all the Shī'ī hadith collections.

From among the primary Sunni hadith sources, I used ‘Īsā’s (no date) *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī* as an example of a foremost Sunni hadith collection that includes the ‘Tradition of the Two Weighty Things’ (Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn) (5.3.9.1).

In different places of this report, I have used the *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Al-Raḍī (compiler) (1377 AH (solar)/1993), a collection of Imam ‘Alī’s sermons, letters, and aphorisms. The work is highly revered by Shi‘i Muslims.

Al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, referred to earlier, has been translated into English a few times. The best translation, by Arastu (*Al-Kāfī, Volume 1: Intellect and Foolishness* (2012), and *Al-Kāfī, Volume 3: God and His Oneness* (2019)), is accompanied by a helpful commentary, which I used in two places: in 3.5.1, to present the traditional Shi‘i view on ‘*aqī*’ being ‘a piece of evidence’; and in 5.3.5.1, to explain the meaning of ‘*wajhahu*’ in al-Qaṣaṣ 28:88.

#### 2.2.1.4 Islamic Feminist

In 3.6.3.1, I explain the background to my investigations into Islamic feminist exegetical methods and approaches and how they helped me to appreciate some of the diverse perspectives in Qur’anic hermeneutics today. My research was published (Ismail, 2016), and I have used the article in various parts of this report (3.6.3.2 – 3.6.3.4 and 4.5.4).

Among the advocates of the Islamic feminist approach whose works I used were Ali (*Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (2016)) and Wadud (*Qur’an and Woman* (1999)). The interpretations of both authors on al-Nisā’ 4:34 were used to explain structural relationships in Step 4 (5.3.6.3). Articles by Mir-Hosseini (2012) and Shaikh (1997) provided helpful definitions of the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist hermeneutics’ (3.6.3.1). For an understanding of the contextualist position, I mainly referred to Rahman’s *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982), Abu Zayd’s article, ‘The ‘others’ in the Qur’an: A hermeneutical approach’ (2016), and Saeed’s *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (2014) (3.6.3.2).

In contrast to the Islamic feminist and contextualist perspectives lies the textualist / literal position, which I presented mostly through articles by Elmi (1385 AH (solar)/2007 and 2014), al-Muḥaffar’s classical work, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (1374 AH (solar)/1994), and two works by al-

Ṭabāṭabā'ī: *The Qur'an in Islam* (1987), and his seminal *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1375 AH (solar)/1996) (3.6.3.3 – 3.6.3.4).

#### 2.2.1.5 Qur'anic Sciences

'Qur'anic Sciences' refers to the collection of scholarly disciplines that are studied *about* the Qur'an, as opposed to information *from* the Qur'an, which is the realm of *tafsīr* (Qur'anic interpretation). These disciplines include the revelation of the Qur'an, its compilation, and structure. Among the most useful works I found for my project on this subject were Jaffer and Jaffer's *Quranic Sciences* (2009), particularly for their discussion on the traditions that corroborate the double-revelation theory (5.3.8.2), and their analysis on the criteria used to classify the Qur'anic text into Makkī and Madanī (5.3.3.4). The works of Jawān-Ārāstīh (*Darsnāmih-yi 'Ulūm-i Qur'ānī*, 1379 AH (solar)/2000) and Ma'rifat (*Al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm Qur'ān*, no date) are highly respected in Shi'i seminaries; I used the former for information on the number of Makkī and Madanī chapters (5.3.3.4), and the latter for the discussion on when the Qur'an was revealed (5.3.8.2).

#### 2.2.1.6 Other Qur'anic Sources

Two lexicons in particular have been of tremendous help throughout my project. Muṣṭafawī's *Al-Ṭaḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (1368 AH (solar)/1989) is a comprehensive and authoritative lexicon of words used in the Qur'an (5.3.5.2 and 5.3.5.4). And although not exclusive to Qur'anic words, Taal's *Arabic Almanac* (2011-2015) is an excellent online resource that allows searches across several major root-based dictionaries and lexicons in various languages. I have recommended this site in Step 3 of the step-by-guide (5.3.5.1).

## 2.2.2 Biblical Exegetical Methods and Approaches

The 'Interpretation and Hermeneutics' bibliography by Oxford Bibliographies (2010) was a highly valuable source of information on important works that have been written on the subject. The Encyclopaedia Britannica's entries for *Hermeneutics* (2017) and *Biblical literature* (2018) were often good starting points for information on the main methods and approaches.

One of the most useful works I found on Biblical exegetical methods and approaches was Gorman's *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (2010). Unlike the other Biblical works I examined, Gorman presents a three-fold classification of exegetical approaches: 'synchronic', 'diachronic', and 'existential', with each of these approaches incorporating a constellation of methods (5.2.2). Very helpfully, Gorman illustrates how each of these approaches could be applied to the 'Sermon on the Mount'. His separation of 'literary and rhetorical analysis' and 'linguistic analysis', and his practical tips for evaluating opinions, were particularly useful for Step 6 (5.3.8.3).

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard's *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (2004) is a voluminous, comprehensive introduction to the subject. One of its strengths is its examination of conflicting positions, but large sections of it deal with special genres of Old and New Testament, which were not particularly useful for my project. I discuss the main Biblical methods and approaches they examine in 5.2.2. The authors suggest a four-step process for 'legitimate application'; I found these consistent with the 'inner dimension' and 'principlizing' methods, which I explain in Step 8 (5.3.10). The first two steps proposed by them for discovering structural relationships were very useful for Step 4 (5.3.6). What they call 'contextualizing' is the same as the 'contextualist' approach advocated by authors such as Saeed (2014) (3.6.3.2). The other side of the argument, i.e. the 'literal-contextual' approach, however, is dealt with far too briefly.

In their superb *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (2007), Virkler and Ayayo cover all the main methods in an easy-to-understand style. They present a five-step guide to Biblical interpretation: historical-cultural and contextual analysis, lexical-syntactical analysis, theological analysis, genre analysis, and application (5.2.2). I adapted their insightful explanation of hermeneutics to suit my project (3.6.3). Several things they say resonate with traditional Shi'i hermeneutical perspectives; for example, they too argue for an

author-centred hermeneutic that has the potential for multiple applications (3.6.3), and they give importance to spiritual factors in the perceptual process (4.3.2.4). I adopted two of their suggestions in my step-by-step guide: firstly, on looking for points of comparison as well as contrast when studying synonyms (Step 3 - 5.3.5); and secondly, on 'principlizing' (Step 8 - 5.3.10).

I took up Duvall's *Grasping God's Word* (2012) suggestion on 'outlining' in Step 5 of the guide (5.3.7.4). Masters' *Not Like Any Other Book* (2012) provided the inspiration for my recommendation to start each step with a prayer (5.3.2). And Warren's *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* (2006), which is structured around twelve methods, is in effect a simplified version of some of the methods and approaches discussed by other authors (5.2.2).

### 2.2.3 Methods and Methodology

For the theory and application of my chosen methodology, namely critical rationalism, the works of its founder Karl Popper are indispensable. In particular, *Conjectures and Refutations* (2002) discusses various aspects of critical rationalism, especially its contrast with justificationist epistemologies, its rejection of induction, its theory of falsification, and its chosen theory of truth, i.e. truth as correspondence to reality (3.4). *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (1979) is particularly notable for its discussion on 'knowledge without a knowing subject' (3.4) and the 'Three Worlds', which I used to explain my ontology (3.2). *Myth of the Framework* (1994) discusses, among other things, the notion of 'instructions from within, corrections from without' (3.5.2 and 5.3.10.2).

The works of David Miller, who was Popper's closest colleague and is considered his best living commentator, are also important for understanding the critical rationalist perspective. I found his *Out of Error* (2006) particularly useful for his examination of 'certainty': he maintains that certainty belongs to the realm of personal psychology and therefore only confirms what one already knows (3.7.4).

The works of Ali Paya have been of immense value. Paya is one of only a few authors writing on Islamic studies from a critical rationalist perspective, and hence his works feature heavily in this report. His article, 'The Misguided Conception of Objectivity in Humanities and

Social Sciences' (2011) was useful for its discussion on three matters: firstly, on the development of conjectures from their emergence through to becoming objective knowledge (3.3); secondly, on the need for knowledge claims to be objective, i.e. publicly accessible and publicly assessable (3.4); and thirdly, on the meaning of 'method', i.e. tools for obtaining data and testing the claims of theories (4.3.2.1). Paya's pioneering work, *Islam, Modernity and a New Millennium: Themes from a Critical Rationalist Reading of Islam* (2018), emphasises the need for an epistemic attitude that tries to falsify conjectures, not justify or confirm them (3.6). It also discusses why critical rationalists reject the notion of the 'literal meaning' or 'apparent meaning' of a text: as opinions are theory-laden, each reader's 'network of meaning' of the phenomenon in question is different. From this discussion, I took up the suggestion to use the term 'prima facie meaning' instead of 'literal meaning' or 'apparent meaning', as 'prima facie meaning' does not imply the existence of a commonly-accepted meaning (3.7.4). I also found the work useful for its analysis of the role played by two contexts in producing knowledge: the 'context of discovery' and the 'context of assessment' (3.3 and 4.3.2.3). Furthermore, I benefitted from the discussion on the three ways the Qur'an helps us to solve problems, which I applied in Step 8 (5.3.10.2). Paya's article, 'Justice and Ethics as Totipotent Emergent Properties: A Critical Rationalist Perspective' (2019) helped me to understand the role played by 'reason' and 'intellect' in Qur'anic exegesis (4.5.1). And I was grateful to Professor Paya for sharing with me his diagram illustrating 'Reality and some of its realms' from his forthcoming work, *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* (2020) (3.2).

Other works on methods and methodology that I found important for my project were Costley and Armsby's 'Research influences on a professional doctorate' (2007), which highlights the influence of the practitioner-researcher's positionality and their reflexivity about their research. *Doing work-based research – approaches to enquiry for insider researchers* (2010) by Costley, Elliot, and Gibbs was a valuable all-round guide to insider-researcher theory and practice. Maguire's 'Methodology as Personal and Professional Integrity: Research Designing for Practitioner Doctorates' (2019) was particularly helpful for her explanation of 'triangulation' (3.6.1). Crotty's *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (1998) provided clarity on the role of 'methods' (4.3.2.1 and 5.2.7). Thiselton's *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (2009) provided a comprehensive, philosophical overview of major hermeneutical approaches. And Trochim *Survey Research* (2006) helped me to design my questionnaire surveys (3.7.2 and 4.6).



## 2.2.4 Other Sources

Armstrong's *The Lost Art of Scripture* (2019) is an excellent work on the religious history and shared wisdom and spirituality of the world's major scriptures. Reynolds' *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (2018) is notable for its comparative commentary that highlights the connections between the Qur'an and the Bible. Azami examines important differences between the sacred texts of the two traditions in *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (2003).

The handbooks I have used in my professional practice as a senior lecturer at The Islamic College contain the module narratives for the courses I refer to in 1.2 and 4.4. The module narrative for the *Qur'anic Sciences and Approaches to Exegesis* module (HSC 117) I have been teaching at the College is in *BA (Honours) Hawza Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020*. And the narrative for the postgraduate module *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* (MI 403) is in *MA Islamic Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020*. Furthermore, in 5.2.1, I refer to my position as Programme Leader for the Hawza (Shi'i Seminary) Programme at the College and the new undergraduate programme in Hawza Studies I designed, which was validated by Middlesex University in 2012. The handbook that I helped create for that programme was *BA (Honours) Hawza Studies Student Programme Handbook 2012/13*.

Al-Şadr's *Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence* (2003) has been well translated from Arabic by Roy Parviz Mottahedeh. The glossary created by Mottahedeh is particularly useful; I used entries from it to explain some technical jurisprudential concepts in 4.3.2.3.

As I stated in the preliminary matter of this report, I have used Ali Quli Qara'i's *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (2005) for the translation of nearly all the Qur'anic verses. I made amendments in a few important places where I felt the translation did not render the original text accurately.

## 2.2.5 Reflection

My Review of Literature has been guided by the pragmatic requirements of my work and professional context as well as the output I am aiming to produce, namely a handbook on

understanding and using the Qur'an. In my position as Director of Research and senior lecturer at The Islamic College, and as an imam, I am continuously preparing for my classes and sermons and researching into various fields of Islamic studies, especially Qur'anic studies. I have been engaged with Islamic studies for more than two decades, and so it was easier and quicker for me to pinpoint and use the resources I needed for the Qur'anic aspects of my project.

The much bigger challenge was the Biblical side as it was a new area for me. As I explain in 4.2, I received guidance on the key resources I needed to examine from Dr Martin Whittingham, Academic Director at The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford. With his help and a lot of online research, I managed to find excellent resources.

Since starting my DProf, I have spent a lot of time questioning, researching, and reflecting on the methodological framework of critical rationalism. For this aspect of my project, my colleague at The Islamic College, Professor Ali Paya, has been the key source of information and help. And finally, my adviser Dr Mehmet Dikerdem has provided me with valuable advice and support on methods and methodologies for practice research.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	32
3.2 ONTOLOGY .....	32
3.3 EPISTEMOLOGY .....	33
3.4 METHODOLOGY.....	36
3.5 QUR’ANIC EXEGETICAL METHODS AND APPROACHES, AND THE ROLE OF ‘AQL.....	38
3.5.1 The Perspective of Traditional Shi’i Scholars on the Role of ‘Aql in Qur’anic Exegesis .....	38
3.5.2 The Perspective of Critical Rationalists on the Role of ‘Aql in Qur’anic Exegesis.....	42
3.6 METHODS.....	44
3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews.....	45
3.6.2 Questionnaire Surveys .....	46
3.6.3 Hermeneutics.....	47
3.6.3.1 Hermeneutical Methods and Approaches to Interpreting the Qur’an .....	49
3.6.3.2 The Contextualist Approach.....	50
3.6.3.3 A Critique of the Contextualist Approach .....	52
3.6.3.4 The Textualist Approach .....	54
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	57
3.7.1 Interviews .....	58
3.7.2 Questionnaire Surveys .....	58
3.7.3 Testing My Research Findings .....	59
3.7.4 The Use of Critical Rationalism.....	59
3.7.5 Ethical Implications of My Epistemology.....	61
3.7.6 Using Non-Islamic Sources for Improving Qur’anic Interpretation .....	61
3.8 ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE QUR’AN AND THE SUNNA .....	62

### 3.1 Introduction

In the sections that follow, I explain and critically reflect on my ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods with respect to my project.

### 3.2 Ontology

I shall explain my ontology using the critical rationalist model of the realms of reality, which was first introduced by Karl Popper during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Popper presented a view of reality in terms of three different but interacting ‘worlds’ (1979). The first of these, ‘World 1’ (W1), consists of physical bodies. ‘World 2’ (W2) is the subjective mental or psychological world of our feelings, thoughts, decisions, and perceptions. And ‘World 3’ (W3) contains all the products of the human mind, such as languages, tales and stories, conjectures, and ideas of paintings, aeroplanes, and democracies. The entities in W3 are all publicly available and are the products of human interaction with reality. Some of them are realised in one or more W1 physical object. All three worlds are related through the mediatory role of W2.

Challenges presented to people in their World 2s, either through what happens in W1 or by what appears in W3, may prompt them to come up with solutions. The conceptual contents of these solutions belong to W3. Similarly, ideas deposited in W3 could prompt people to make changes in W1 (Popper, [1994] 2012, Chapter 1).

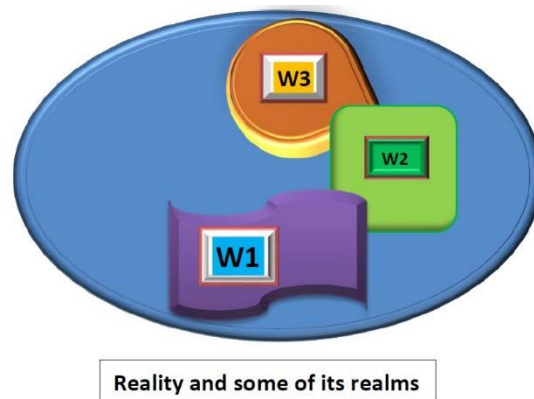
Being a Twelver Shi’i Muslim, my ontological perspective is also shaped by the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunna.<sup>7</sup> As such, reality consists of other realms as well.<sup>8</sup> There exists, for example, the realm of God’s Throne, the realm of angels, and the realm of the

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<sup>7</sup> In the Twelver Shi’i context, the Sunna is what the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, and the Twelve Imams said, did, and tacitly consented to.

<sup>8</sup> Popper himself did not reject the possibility of other realms existing: “We might, especially, distinguish more than three worlds” (1979, p. 107). And: “I will propose a view of the universe that recognizes *at least* three different but interacting sub-universes” (my emphasis) (1978, p. 1).

Intermediate World (*barzakh*). These ‘other realms’ are represented by the blue area in the diagram below (Paya, 2020 (forthcoming)).



With respect to my project, I formulate my ontological perspective as follows. The Qur’an is a reality. According to Islamic doctrines, the Qur’an in its original form, as created by God, exists in a realm which is metaphorically referred to as the ‘Mother Book’.<sup>9</sup> God sent it down in a form which could be accessed by people. In this form, it existed in the Prophet Muhammad’s W2. Once the Prophet read the verses of the Qur’an as revealed to him to the people, the Qur’an’s content gained existence in W3. Our subjective thoughts and feelings about the Qur’an also exist in W2. All physical manifestations of the content of the Qur’an, in the form of written scripts and sound waves (spoken words), reside in W1. The content of Qur’anic and Biblical exegeses and their methods and approaches also exist in W2 and W3, while their physical manifestations belong to W1. It is the ‘content’ of these sources that I intend to explore in my project.

### 3.3 Epistemology

My epistemology is formulated as follows. I possess certain cognitive and emotive faculties and a degree of autonomy as an inquirer who pursues knowledge about a particular aspect of reality, namely certain features of certain exegetical methods and approaches. This highlights the fact that I am not wholly at the beck and call of external factors. I also assume

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<sup>9</sup> “We have made it an Arabic Qur’an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise” (Al-Zukhruf 43:3-4).

that I possess a rational faculty by which I reason and produce arguments. But being imperfect, the arguments I produce are imperfect, and hence I must strive to expose the defects in my arguments and replace them with better ones.

My understanding of the Qur'an, the Bible, and exegetical methods and approaches, is part of my W2. This is a purely personal, subjective understanding. However, this is not the aim of my research. The aim of my research is to acquire knowledge about the subject matter of my project, knowledge that belongs to W3. From a critical rationalist point of view, the way to know entities, in whose existence I am interested, is by producing conjectures about specific problems (which deal with specific conjectured aspects) concerning those entities. My conjectures must be about 'specific problems' as reality can present, in principle, an infinite number of problems for any inquirer. For example, as I am not interested in the discipline of reciting the Qur'an correctly (*tajwīd*), I will not produce conjectures about problems relating to that discipline of the Qur'an. I am cognisant of the fact that if I am to have any flashes of insight into possible solutions for these problems, I must be properly equipped. The following conditions are all necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, which I must meet for success in developing suitable solutions for a specific problem: I must have relevant background knowledge about the problem I am trying to tackle; I must be methodical and systematic in my approach; I must be in an environment that is conducive to finding solutions to my problems; I must have some luck, or as Muslims often put it, '*tawfīq* from God', i.e. divine grace by which success is achieved; and I must be spiritually prepared as well.

The need to be spiritually prepared was emphasised by Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī in an interview I conducted with him (4.3.2.4). There are numerous traditions and verses of the Qur'an that corroborate this theory. For example, Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib points to spiritual factors that enhance one's understanding of the Qur'an when he says:

[God] has divided His Speech [i.e. the Qur'an] into three parts: He has made [one] part of it known to [both] the knowledgeable and the ignorant; one part known only to he who possesses a clear mind, gentle feelings, and correct discernment from among those whom God has opened their breast to Islam; and one part is not known [by anyone] except God, His trustees, and those firmly rooted in knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Al-Tabrisī (1983, v. 1, p. 253).

As for the Qur'an, verses such as al-Wāqī'ah 56:79 may provide further endorsement:

Only the purified ones are able to touch it.

Some exegetes explore the possibility of the word “touch” in this verse having a double-layered meaning;<sup>11</sup> that is, touching the Qur'an physically *and* spiritually, or in other words, having both physical and spiritual contact with the Qur'an. So, just as *outer purity* in the form of ablution, dry ablution, or ritual bathing (*wuḍū'*, *tayammum*, or *ghusl*) is necessary for a Muslim to have contact with the outer aspects of the Qur'an, which are its printed letters and words, so too *inner purity* in the form of purification of the soul is necessary for having contact with the inner aspects of the Qur'an, which are its deeper meanings.<sup>12</sup>

From a critical rationalist perspective, one's spirituality or moral attitude would only show its effect in one particular context, and that is the 'context of discovery', i.e. the arena of 'personal knowledge'. Critical rationalists maintain that there are two important contexts when acquiring knowledge. They play different but complimentary roles in producing knowledge. The first of these, the 'context of discovery', belongs to the realm of personal psychology and therefore to one's W2. Here, the 'solution' poses itself as a transitory experience or vision, which needs to be reconstructed afterwards as best one can by means of the memory, concepts, and language available to the individual. This reconstruction is then presented to the second context, the 'context of assessment'. This is the public arena where it must be assessed critically to expose its faults. Here, the argument is 'objective knowledge' as it is publicly accessible and assessable (Paya, 2011 and 2018, pp. 34-35).

The diagram below illustrates the development of conjectures from their emergence through to becoming objective knowledge from a critical rationalist perspective. Every conjecture begins as an 'intuition' in a pure existential (pre-epistemological) and non-propositional state. Next, the intellect develops the intuition into a thought by reconstructing it by means of the individual's memory and the concepts and language; it now becomes the individual's personal 'understanding'. At the third stage, the intellect employs reason to

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<sup>11</sup> See for example al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1996, v. 19, pp. 137-138); and Jawādī-Āmulī (2009a, p. 371).

<sup>12</sup> Ismail (2013, p. 26).

formulate the thought into a publicly accessible and assessable argument; this is ‘explanation’ (Paya, 2011, p. 165).

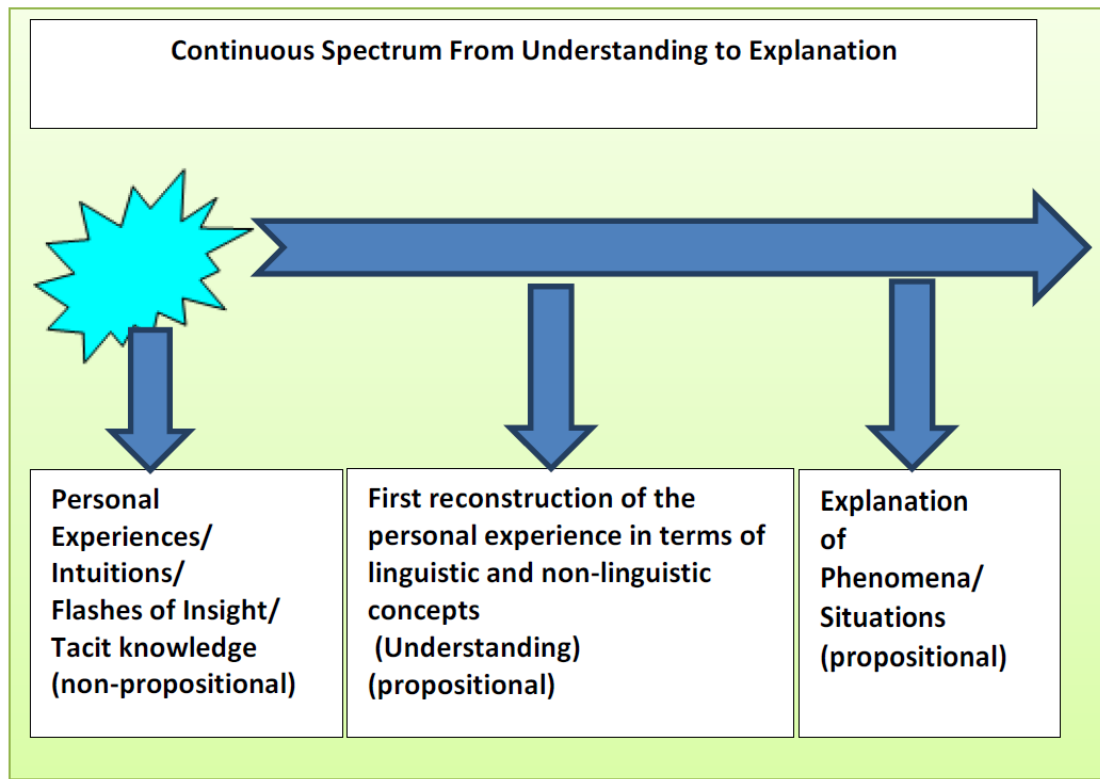


Diagram 1- Intuition/Understanding/Explanation

### 3.4 Methodology

In 2013, I attended all the classes of the MA module, *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* at The Islamic College. From these classes, I learnt about many different methods and methodologies and their application to the field of Islamic Studies. It was here that I first became acquainted with critical rationalism and began to appreciate how effective it was as a methodological approach. I believe that conducting my research within the framework of critical rationalism since then has had several advantages. I see there is a need to improve the way Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches have been defined, categorised, and used, and I maintain that the methodology of critical rationalism has helped me make important contributions in the area of my research, as I shall now explain.



Significantly for my study of Qur'anic and Biblical exegetical methods and approaches, critical rationalists maintain that pluralism, i.e. diversity of ideas and views, is immensely important for the growth of knowledge: the chances of coming across a conjecture which is on the right track is much higher if what we have at our disposal is a set whose members are a large number of diverse and varied conjectures rather than a set with only one or a few members. Furthermore, critical rationalism emphasises the need for knowledge claims to be objective, i.e. they must be publicly accessible and publicly assessable (Paya, 2011).

Moreover, critical rationalism rejects all justificatory approaches: whatever people suggest as a justification for their claim needs further justification; hence, the demand for justification would lead to infinite regress. With regard to induction, critical rationalists not only regard it as an invalid method of logical inference but also as a misguided way for achieving an impossible task; that is to say, as a method for discovering solutions to problems. Critical rationalism aims for the growth of knowledge about reality, and not knowledge *per se*, as knowledge only grows through the elimination of the errors of our proposed conjectural solutions (Popper, 1979 and 1994).

I believe critical rationalism has also enabled me to dispose of the dogmatic stance taken by scholars of the Qur'an in the past. Through the process of conjecture and refutation, critical rationalism constantly warns researchers that they must not dogmatically consider their own interpretations as the final word; the Qur'an, as is the case with all reality, is indefinitely richer than our best understanding of it. As we are finite beings, our understanding of the Qur'an (and of larger reality for that matter) will always remain incomplete.

As a direct consequence of the reason mentioned above, critical rationalism encourages openness to other possible methods and approaches. This has been an essential aspect of my project, as I have aimed to improve the methods and approaches used in Qur'anic interpretation by drawing upon Biblical models. The attitude I have tried to maintain throughout my research is summed up in the Popperian motto, "I may be wrong and you may right, and by an effort we get nearer to the truth" (Popper 1994, p. 12; originally in Popper 1945).

And finally, by adopting a critical rationalist approach to my project, I believe I have been able to introduce new insights and perspectives to the field of Qur'anic interpretation. With its adherence to the thesis that all observations and understanding are theory-laden, and its focus on 'reality' rather than, for example, merely on 'the meaning buried or hidden in the

text' (in hermeneutical approaches), or 'essences of phenomena' (in phenomenological approaches), or the apparent/literal meaning (in literalist approaches), critical rationalism assists researchers to uncover layers of reality in all its types and to express what they have discovered in an objective (i.e. publicly accessible and publicly assessable) manner.

### 3.5 Qur'anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches, and the Role of 'Aql

One of the most important implications of using the critical rationalist methodology in my project has concerned the classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches and the role played by 'aql ('reason' or 'intellect') in interpreting the Qur'an. I discovered there are significant differences in how traditional Shi'i scholars of the Qur'an and critical rationalists view its role, as I shall explain in the sections that follow.

#### 3.5.1 The Perspective of Traditional Shi'i Scholars on the Role of 'Aql in Qur'anic Exegesis

Traditional Shi'i<sup>13</sup> scholars of the Qur'an consider 'aql to be a valid 'source' like the Qur'an and Sunna. Consequently, they assume it possesses religious authority (*ḥujjiyah shar'iyyah*) and consider 'interpretive reasoning' (*tafsīr 'aqlī*) to be a valid and important method in Qur'anic exegesis. These and some of the other opinions that follow, were expressed to me by eminent scholars of the Qur'an when I interviewed them (4.3.2.1 – 4.3.2.4). I have since expanded my knowledge on the traditional Shi'i position through library research.

One of the most commonly cited pieces of evidence that these scholars present to corroborate their view is a tradition from the seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi'as, Mūsā ibn Ja'far al-Kāzīm. In this hadith, the Imam addresses his companion Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam with the following words:

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<sup>13</sup> See 2.1.2 for an explanation of what I mean by 'traditional Shi'i'.

O Hishām! God has two pieces of evidence (*hujjatayn*) for people: [one is] manifest, and [the other is] hidden. That which is manifest is his messengers, prophets, and imams. That which is hidden is the [people's] 'aql.<sup>14</sup>

Traditional Shi'ī scholars argue that 'aql being 'a piece of evidence' means that we must act according to its dictates (Arastu in al-Kulayni (2012), p. 78). If the hidden intellect is indeed a piece of evidence for people, then it follows that if it passes a definitive judgement on some issue, they must act according to it; otherwise, to regard it as a piece of evidence from God for the people would be meaningless (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 2011, p. 156).

These scholars identify different types of 'aql and argue that it is the 'demonstrative 'aql' ('aql-i burhānī) that has this status, not the 'lantern 'aql' ('aql-i miṣbāḥ). In its capacity as the lantern 'aql, 'aql understands the meaning of verses by putting together verses, traditions, lexical definitions etc. But in its capacity as the demonstrative 'aql, it is a source for understanding; it possesses an inherent ability to understand the meaning of verses and can prove or refute things. Ayatollah Jawādī-Āmulī, one of the most prominent Shi'ī exegetes today, explains this concept as follows:

'Aqlī exegesis is done [in two ways:] either by the intellection of internal and external evidence, in that an intelligent and sharp 'aql understands the meaning of verses by putting verses and traditions together. In such a case, 'aql only plays the role of a lantern, nothing more. As this type of rational endeavour, reason-based (*ijtihādī-'aqlī*) exegesis is done by using transmitted sources, it [actually] comes under [the category of] 'tradition-based exegesis', not interpretive reasoning.

Or, ['aqlī exegesis is done] by inferring certain conceptual (*taṣawwūrī*) and affirmational (*taṣdīqī*) principles from the inherent source of the demonstrative 'aql and self-evident axioms. Here, 'aql plays the role of a source (*manba'*), not a mere lantern, [and this is what is really meant by 'aqlī exegesis'] (1999, p. 170).

In his definition of interpretive reasoning, 'Alawī-Mihr, another contemporary Shi'ī author on the Qur'an, draws heavily on the work of Jawādī-Āmulī:

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Kulaynī (1429 AH (lunar)/2008, v. 1, p. 35).

It is exegesis that discovers religious rulings, and the teachings and truths of verses of the Qur'an, by using the demonstrative 'aql and rational indicators (*qarā'in-i 'aqlī*) as a source rather than merely as a lantern or tool (2015, p. 252).

'Alawī-Mihr's conclusion is that interpretive reasoning can be divided into two types:

1. Specific (*khāṣṣ*): this is exegesis by means of the demonstrative 'aql and is exegesis in its proper sense.
2. General (*'āmm*): this is exegesis by means of the lantern 'aql (p. 262).

A third leading traditional Shi'i scholar, Ayatollah Makārim-Shīrāzī, writes the following about what interpretive reasoning is and how it is used to interpret verses of the Qur'an:

The meaning of exegesis by 'aql is that we seek the support of evident rational indicators, which are acceptable to all rational minds, in understanding the meaning of words and sentences in texts like the Qur'an and hadith. For example, when it is stated, "The hand of God is over their hands",<sup>15</sup> 'aql says that certainly "the hand of God" does not refer to the particular limb that has five fingers, because God definitely does not have a body as every body is limited and destined to perish, and God is not limited nor destined to die; He is pre-eternal (*azalī*) and post-eternal (*abadī*). Rather, what is meant is the 'power of God', which is above the power of all others. The metaphorical use of hand for power is based on the notion that an individual's power is manifested in action by the hand... Wherever there is mention of exegesis by 'aql, what is meant is this sort of exegesis, not the imposition [of one's opinions], personal preferences, poor arguments, or baseless opinions (1378 AH (solar)/1988, pp. 38-39).

And fourthly, we turn to the opinion of the contemporary scholar of the Qur'an, Riḍāyī-İşfahānī. After comparing and critically appraising the views of various Muslim authors, Riḍāyī-İşfahānī concludes that the method of interpretive reasoning is:

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Faḥ 48:10.

One: The use of demonstrative proof (*burhān*) and rational indicators (*qarā'in-i 'aqlī*) in exegesis as a means to clarify the concepts and purport of verses of the Qur'an. Here, the intellect is a source and tool for exegesis of the Qur'an, and rulings (*aḥkām*) and demonstrative proofs become indicators (*qarā'in*) for exegesis. This type of intellect is variously called the 'acquired intellect' (*'aql-i iktisābī*); 'decisive rational rulings' (*aḥkām-i 'aqlī-yi qaṭ'ī*); and 'demonstrative 'aql' (*'aql-i burhānī*).

Two: The use of the faculty of thinking to gather verses (while considering traditions, lexicons etc.) and to make inferences from them to clarify the concepts and purport of verses. The product of this endeavour is 'rational endeavour interpretation' (*tafsīr-i ijtihādī*) of the Qur'an. In this case, 'aql is a lantern and discoverer. This type of intellect is called the 'inherent intellect' (*'aql-i fiṭrī*); the 'faculty of thinking'; and the 'faculty of perception' (2011, pp. 154-155).

Riḍāyī-İşfahānī goes on to explain that according to the popular view, both types are considered part of the method of 'aqlī exegesis. However, he asserts that "what is stated in the second definition is known as 'aqlī exegesis with a degree of inaccuracy, and in truth, 'aqlī exegesis is what is stated in the first definition" (p. 155).

Riḍāyī-İşfahānī's opinion on the use of 'aql in Qur'anic exegesis can be summarised as follows:

1. 'Aql is a source. It is a source because it is *ḥujjah*, i.e. authoritative evidence or proof, as is the case with the Qur'an and Sunna. Being an authority means that we must base our actions on definitive judgements made by 'aql.
2. We have proof that 'aql is an authority, such as the tradition from Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far al-Kāẓim.
3. Although 'aql is a source, it is not at the same level as the other two sources (Qur'an and Sunna). Rather, the position of 'aql as a source is below that of the Qur'an and Sunna. 'Aql makes discoveries from the Qur'an and Sunna and so a human being will always need divine revelation (p. 156).

### 3.5.2 The Perspective of Critical Rationalists on the Role of 'Aql in Qur'anic Exegesis

Critical rationalists view the nature and role of 'aql very differently to traditional Shi'i scholars. Paya (in Mutahhari, 2019) explains that the word 'aql refers to two distinct cognitive faculties, which are represented in English by two different terms: 'reason' and 'intellect'. 'Aql in the meaning of 'reason' distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones; and 'aql in the meaning of 'intellect' seeks to understand reality by developing, formulating, and assessing conjectures.

The task of reason is just reasoning: i.e. distinguishing valid/sound arguments/claims from non-valid/unsound ones. The task of intellect, however, from an epistemological point of view, is intellection, which signifies the activity of thinking and understanding of reality by means of producing [i.e. formulating] conjectures (p. 39).

Reason, critical rationalists conjecturally suggest, is a tool for assessing the logical soundness of the form (as opposed to the content) of arguments, distinguishing valid arguments from non-valid ones. 'Aql as reason, therefore, is employed as a method in *all* approaches and should not be considered a distinct category on its own. The role of the intellect, on the other hand, is to formulate conjectures and apply them to reality. The content of conjectures can be assessed in two ways: firstly, for conjectures that have empirical content or deal with empirically accessible aspects of reality, assessment is done by means of empirical testing and analytical (i.e. rational, logical, and philosophical) evaluation. And secondly, for conjectures that do not have empirically testable content or are about those aspects of reality which are not empirically accessible – such as the existence of angels – and are neither empty truisms nor tautologies, assessment is done by analytical means. Such claims can also be assessed in an indirect way by evaluating the empirical or practical consequences that may result from them.

Content cannot, critical rationalists say, be assessed by any inherent truths stored in 'aql as traditional Shi'i assert. Reality provides us with evidence, and our epistemic attitude must always be to use the evidence to challenge our conjectures. Being the final arbiter, reality will either corroborate or refute our conjectures, enabling us to have a better understanding of

the reality in question. This process continues perpetually as we are never able to reach a point of definitive truth; even if we were able to, we would not be able to conclusively ascertain it. This is because of our limited cognitive ability on the one hand and the indefinite richness and complexity of reality on the other.

Furthermore, critical rationalists conjecturally suggest that unlike the Qur'an and Sunna, 'aql as reason does not make any knowledge-claims and cannot, therefore, be a 'source', as sources are reservoirs of knowledge claims. 'Aql as intellect does make knowledge-claims but it does so in the form of formulating conjectures; *formulating* conjectural knowledge claims is different from being a *source* of knowledge. A fundamental difference exists between the knowledge-claims made by the intellect and those of the Qur'an and authentic Sunna: while the former are assumed to be fallible, the latter are assumed to be true and infallible. Understanding their true content requires a great deal of intellectual ability in interpreting texts and a very rich and relevant background knowledge. And even then, our understanding of their contents will be conjectural.

As for the traditions about 'aql being *hujjah*, critical rationalists interpret them very differently to traditional Shi'i scholars. Critical rationalists conjecturally suggest that Prophets, Imams, and the Qur'an are *hujjah* as they are authorities that provide us with valuable information which, on the basis of our best conjectural understanding of their wisdoms, we can rely upon and test our conjectures against. But 'aql is *hujjah* in a different sense: in its function as reason, it is a tool which authoritatively enables us to assess the form of knowledge-claims. 'Aql does indeed guide us like the Prophets, Imams, and the Qur'an, but whereas these are guidance for us in that they give us reliable information and correct our incorrect conjectures, 'aql is guidance for us in that, as reason, it assesses whether our arguments are correct or incorrect by looking at the formal structure of the argument to see whether or not it has followed logical and rational principles; and as intellect, it develops, formulates, and assesses our conjectures.

Therefore, although the traditional Shi'i scholars and critical rationalists agree that 'aql is used as a tool and method to interpret the Qur'an, they differ considerably as to how this happens and the role 'aql plays. Whereas traditional Shi'i scholars see 'aql as a source and therefore a distinct method like the other sources, critical rationalists consider 'aql, in its capacity as reason, a method that is employed in *all* approaches as it assesses the form of arguments. The implications of these different perspectives are highly significant for a) the

way traditional Shi'i and critical rationalists classify exegetical methods and approaches; and b) my professional practice. I shall further discuss both implications in 5.2.7 and 5.2.8.

## 3.6 Methods

As per the aims stated in 2.1.1, my research project is divided into two parts:

1. To present a new, accurate, and easy-to-understand classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis.
2. To design a systematic model for understanding and using the Qur'an that draws on works of scholars of Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis.

Part one of my project (classifications) is more theoretical in nature than part two (step-by-step guide). With this and some other reasons in mind, which I will elaborate on further below, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an to assist me in part one, and I conducted questionnaire surveys and used hermeneutical methods for part two. I also tested my research findings in a classroom environment and in an academic conference setting. I have used library research for both parts of my project (4.2).

Throughout my project, my epistemic attitude has been to try to falsify my conjectures, not to justify or confirm them. As explained earlier, critical rationalism rejects all justificatory approaches to knowledge claims. In place of dogmatically-held beliefs, it urges students of the Qur'an to constantly subject their interpretations of the text to critical assessment. Confirming our claims only provides us with psychological assurance; it does not add to our knowledge (Paya, 2018, p. 68).

From a critical rationalist perspective, each new piece of information we get, such as the dictionary meaning of a word, is a new piece of data that sheds some light and helps us to remove a defect. We must keep going on like this, removing more and more defects and getting ever closer to the truth, which, in the context of Qur'anic interpretation, is the meaning intended by God.



### 3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted these interviews with the aim of achieving the first part of the fifth objective in 2.1.3: “To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur’an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur’anic exegesis...” The questions I asked are listed in 4.3.1. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with three experts on the Qur’an (4.3.2 and 6.6).

I chose semi-structured interviews for this part of my project as this method encourages fluid conversation, allowing “more open verbal answers” and giving “participants more latitude in responding in their own words” (Costley, Elliot, and Gibbs, 2010, p. 93). I felt that the areas I wanted to discuss were such that both myself and the interviewees would need the flexibility to express our thoughts freely and easily in our own terms, while I also needed to make sure that we did not stray too far from the topic at hand. I suspected I would sometimes need to interject with a question or comment, either because the topic itself was complex, or because certain Persian terms may be used with which I was unfamiliar, or because new insights may emerge which could require further exploration with the interviewees. Additionally, taking into account the culture of the seminary and the student-teacher relationship that existed between myself and two of the interviewees, I felt the conversational and relaxed tone of a semi-structured interview would work well.

The three scholars I interviewed were chosen by me not only because of their expertise in the field of Qur’anic exegesis, but also because I wanted to triangulate my findings through a diverse range of perspectives and opinions; as Maguire (2019, p. 103) asserts, with triangulation “... the quality of data is strengthened by cross-referencing the results from each of the different data sources.” I knew from having studied the works of two of the scholars that they disagreed on their definition and classification of some of the methods and approaches, and I wanted to investigate their conflicting views further. Furthermore, I felt it important to select interviewees with different academic backgrounds. As two of them had both a university and a seminary background, I wanted to interview an expert on the Qur’an with only a classical seminary background, as was the case with the third scholar.

### 3.6.2 Questionnaire Surveys

The questionnaire surveys aimed to meet the middle part of the eighth objective stated in 2.1.3: “To... conduct a questionnaire survey on each step...” A copy of all the questionnaire surveys are in Appendix C.

I conducted seven questionnaire surveys between 1 – 6 September 2019. The surveys were on the step-by-step model for understanding and using the Qur’an, which I presented in a series of seven lectures at the Ahl Albait Islamic Centre in Sydney, Australia. Each lecture covered one of the eight steps in the guide, except for lecture six, which covered both Steps 6 and 7 (4.6).

The key things I wanted to find out were:

1. How effective was my model?
2. How may it be improved?
3. What was the attitude of the congregation towards the model? In particular:
  - a. Did they like it?
  - b. Did they consider it important?
  - c. Did they feel it was unique?
  - d. Did they think it was realistic to achieve?
  - e. Was it relevant to their lives?
  - f. Would they use it?

The surveys I conducted were in the form of questionnaires. These enabled me to gather a lot of quantitative and qualitative data from a typical user group in a short period of time. I had kept in touch with the organisers of the programme during the months leading up to my trip and had asked them several questions about the community I would be addressing, the type of programme they had in mind, and logistical matters. I benefitted from the information presented by Trochim (2006) on designing surveys, and I found out from the organisers, in approximate terms, the number of people they were expecting, the age of the attendees, their gender, and their level of education.

In my questionnaire surveys, I avoided asking dichotomous questions as I wanted to gain a more nuanced understanding of the respondents' opinions. Most of my questions used semantic differentials, such as:

❖ Overall, how much do you like the step?

- Liked it a lot
- Liked it a little
- Neither liked nor disliked it
- Disliked it a little
- Disliked it a lot

Questions of this sort are easy to understand and answer, making the information collected more reliable. They can also be answered quickly; this was an important consideration as I planned to do seven surveys in a row and did not want the respondents to quickly tire of doing them. Following a consistent style and format throughout the surveys made it easier to compare and analyse the results (4.7 and 6.9.1). I also solicited unstructured responses by encouraging respondents to add comments after they had given their structured responses.

### 3.6.3 Hermeneutics

I found Virkler and Ayayo's (2007, p. 15) assertion that "hermeneutics is often defined as *the science and art of biblical interpretation*" insightful.<sup>16</sup> I have amended their analysis of this statement to suit my project as follows. My step-by-step model is essentially about *the science and art of Qur'anic interpretation (tafsīr)*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'science' as "a systematically organized body of knowledge on a particular subject". *Tafsīr* is a *science*

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<sup>16</sup> On the origin and meaning of the word 'hermeneutics', they state it is "said to have its origin in the name Hermes, the Greek god who served as messenger for the gods transmitting and interpreting their communications to their fortunate, or often unfortunate, recipients. By the first century, the verb form *hermeneuo* was used to mean "explain," "interpret," "translate"" (p. 15). As for 'exegesis', "The prefix *ex* ("out of" or "from") refers to the idea that the interpreter is attempting to derive understanding *from* the text rather than reading meaning *into* the text (eisegesis)" (p. 17).

because it has rules, and these rules can be organised in an orderly system. But *tafsīr* is also an *art* because it concerns communication, and communication is flexible and fluid. Rigid rules cannot always be applied to communication in a mechanical way, otherwise the meaning may be distorted. Therefore, good *tafsīr* requires one to know the rules of interpretation *and* the art of applying those rules. My step-by-step guide aims to provide users with this knowledge and skill.

As for hermeneutical methods, although these deal with various ways in which the ‘meaning’ of a text can be understood, I have used them in the way a critical rationalist would use them, i.e. by focusing on reality and the truth about reality, not on meaning alone. Meaning, as a human-made product, may not necessarily lead us to the truth about the problems we are investigating. Of course, since we communicate our findings about reality by means of language, meaning, as part of any linguistic machinery, can help us get closer to the truth about the reality we are exploring. Ascertaining the meaning of words is important, but it is only a step toward the ultimate aim, not the ultimate aim itself.

Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 23-24) argue for an author-centred hermeneutic<sup>17</sup> that has the potential for multiple applications:

In the study of Scripture, the task of the exegete is to determine as closely as possible what God meant in a particular passage rather than “what it means to me.” By accepting the view that the meaning of a text is what it means to me, God’s Word can have as many meanings as it does readers. Such a position provides no basis for concluding that an orthodox interpretation of a passage is more valid than a heretical one: indeed, the distinction between orthodox and heretical interpretations is no longer meaningful.

To say that a text has one interpretation (the *author’s* intended meaning) is not to say that his writing has only one possible application (significance for a reader in any given situation).

Critical rationalists also aim to ascertain the author’s meaning rather than “what it means to me”, but they do so with the understanding that whatever of the author’s meaning we

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<sup>17</sup> As opposed to a reader-centred hermeneutic. A radical form of this hermeneutic is advocated by Stanley Fish, who declares that the “reader’s response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning” (1980, p. 3, quoted in Thiselton, 2009, p. 31).

claim to have ascertained is our conjecture about his or her meaning; we must not arrogantly claim we have captured the author's meaning for sure.

### 3.6.3.1 Hermeneutical Methods and Approaches to Interpreting the Qur'an

To get a deeper understanding of the methods and approaches used in Qur'anic hermeneutics, I revisited an area of research I had first explored in 2013 when I conducted a short course on Islamic Family Ethics for adults in the Shi'i Muslim community in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. One of the topics I covered on this course was 'Islamic Rights and Duties of a Husband and Wife'. For this topic, I had presented, among other things, various interpretations of al-Nisā' 4:34, which is sometimes referred to as the 'wife-beating verse'. For centuries, this verse has been the subject of intense debate and controversy,<sup>18</sup> and it is something that I am asked about from time to time in my role as an imam. I felt it would be useful for my project to build on the earlier research I had done on this verse and to critically examine the mechanism for interpreting it. I believed this would help me understand Qur'anic hermeneutical methods and approaches more effectively, especially as I am much better at grasping abstract concepts when I apply them to something that is meaningful to me, such as a verse of the Qur'an.

But, in addition to investigating the traditional Shi'i Muslim perspective on the verse, I felt it was important to explore other opinions on it as well, so that I could better understand and appreciate the different perspectives in the debate and be more likely to come across a conjecture which was on the right track. During my initial research in 2013, I had come across some views on the verse from Islamic feminist scholars of the Qur'an, and I felt this perspective would provide me with the diversity I was after and make for a useful comparative study.

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<sup>18</sup> In the words of Zainah Anwar and Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2012), "It is no exaggeration to say that the entire edifice of family law in Muslim legal tradition is built on the ways in which classical jurists understood this verse and translated it into legal rulings."

The study proved to be extremely rewarding in that not only did I attain an in-depth understanding of Shi'i *uṣūlī*<sup>19</sup> hermeneutical and Islamic feminist<sup>20</sup> approaches to interpreting the Qur'an, but I also learnt a lot about textualist and contextualist perspectives on Qur'anic exegesis. I have used this learning in Step 2 of my step-by-step guide ('Knowing the Context') (5.3.4); in Step 3 ('Finding out the Meaning of Words') (5.3.5); Step 4 ('Examining Sentences and Style') (5.3.6); and in Step 8 ('Applying the Text to Our Lives') (5.3.10). I also found the research very useful for illustrating how these methods and approaches fit into the overall Qur'anic exegetical framework (6.5.1).

I have subsequently written and published an article on my research (4.5.4), and I have used my findings in my *Qur'anic Sciences and Approaches to Exegesis* class which I teach at The Islamic College. In the sections that follow, I shall explain and critically assess the contextualist and textualist approaches to Qur'anic exegesis, a discussion that has helped me design my step-by-step guide and my classification as mentioned above.

### 3.6.3.2 The Contextualist Approach

Contextualists maintain that Qur'anic teachings, especially those that concern ethical, social, or legal matters,<sup>21</sup> are context-specific. They advocate a reinterpretation of Qur'anic injunctions to make them applicable to the present day. Qur'anic rulings are based on certain principles and ideals, such as justice, equality, and public interest, but a ruling which was just, equitable, or in the public interest at the time of the Prophet Muhammad might not be so today.

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<sup>19</sup> This term was explained in 3.5.

<sup>20</sup> In order to clarify what is meant by 'feminism' and 'feminist hermeneutics', I have found it helpful to refer to the definitions presented by two prominent feminist authors on the Qur'an. Ziba Mir-Hosseini's (2012) understanding of the term 'feminism' is particularly noteworthy for its inclusion of the epistemological dimension of feminist ideology: "I understand 'feminism' in the widest sense: it includes a general concern with women's issues, an awareness that women suffer discrimination at work, in the home and in society because of their gender, and action aimed at improving their lives and changing the situation. There is also an epistemological side to feminism; it is a knowledge project, in the sense that it sheds light on how we know what we know about women, family and religious tradition, including laws and practices that take their legitimacy from religion; this knowledge enables us to challenge, from within, the patriarchy that is institutionalized in a legal tradition." As for the term 'feminist hermeneutics', Sa'diyya Shaikh (1997, p. 53) draws on the work of Fiorenza (1995, p. x) on feminist Biblical interpretation to formulate her definition of the term: "A 'theory, method or perspective for understanding and interpretation' which is sensitive to and critical of sexism."

<sup>21</sup> Saeed (2014, p. 6) calls this category 'ethico-legal texts'.

According to Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), perhaps the most well-known advocate of the contextualist approach, a double movement is required if the Qur'an is to be relevant today: first, Muslim scholars must analyse the Qur'an to establish the ideals of Islam; then, they must present these ideals in a new form that is suitable for the present time:

In building any genuine and viable Islamic set of laws and institutions, there has to be a twofold movement. First one must move from the concrete case treatments of the Quran—taking the necessary and relevant social conditions of that time into account—to the general principles upon which the entire teaching converges. Second, from this general level there must be a movement back to specific legislation, taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions now obtaining (1982, p. 5).

In his book *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, Abdullah Saeed asserts that a contextualist approach was employed as early as the first century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad:

Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 23/664), the second caliph, interpreted a range of Qur'anic texts in a manner that could be considered "contextualist". Umar understood Qur'anic revelations in terms of their fundamental principles or objectives and, critically, his understanding was highly contextual (Saeed, 2014, p. 4).<sup>22</sup>

Saeed describes 'context' as a broad concept, which may include the 'sequence of speech', or 'passage' (*siyāq*)<sup>23</sup> – i.e. the way a particular phrase or short text is situated within a larger text. Usually, the sequence of speech will be what immediately precedes or follows the text under consideration. Although contextualists consider the sequence of speech to be important, they place more emphasis on the 'macro context', i.e. the 'social, political, economic, cultural, and intellectual settings of the Qur'anic text under consideration'. Saeed uses the terms 'macro context 1' and 'macro context 2' to further explain the contextualist approach: 'macro context 1' is the setting in which the original Qur'anic text was revealed,

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<sup>22</sup> Later in his book, Saeed examines several examples of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's approach, such as the caliph's interpretation of 9:60 concerning the recipients of zakat, and his treatment of 8:1-2 and 59:7 concerning the distribution of war booty (Saeed, 2014, pp. 26-37).

<sup>23</sup> Mottahedeh in his glossary in al-Sadr (2003, p. 190) says the following about *siyāq*: "Sequence of speech, passage. "Context" in the ordinary English sense."

whereas 'macro context 2' is the setting of the present period. Both macro contexts must be carefully compared; then, the meaning of the Qur'anic text is translated from macro context 1 to macro context 2 while bearing in mind the context of the intervening periods, or the 'connector context'. The connector context "demonstrates how successive generations of Muslims have applied the Qur'anic text and its norms to their lives" (p. 5).

Like Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010) was also a strong advocate of the contextualist approach, although Abu Zayd developed his ideas on the view that the Qur'an should be analysed as a historical text. He asserted that even though the Qur'an is the speech of God, it was spoken and written down in a specific historical situation, and therefore, only on the basis of comprehensive historical knowledge can one interpret the Qur'an correctly. Once the core message, which transcends its historical context, is attained, Muslims can determine what the Qur'an means for them today:

One cannot find the meaning of a religion in the text but in the interaction between the text and the historical process, in the interaction between the believer(s)/the communities with their holy texts. Of course that does not mean that one cannot speak of religion in a normative sense. But this normative sense is historically determined, and is, thus, changeable. It is normative according to the specific milieu paradigm; any paradigm-change leads to norms-change (2016, pp. 99-100).

### 3.6.3.3 A Critique of the Contextualist Approach

In support of their views, both Rahman and Abu Zayd adopt the Mu'tazilī view on the non-eternal (*ḥādīth*) nature of the Qur'an. The discussion about whether the Qur'an is eternal (*qadīm*) or not was hotly debated by the two Sunni theological schools – the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilītes – in the second century AH/eighth century CE. The Ash'arites, like the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, held that the Qur'an is eternal, basing their view on the belief that speech (*kalām*) is one of the attributes of the divine essence, which is eternal. The Mu'tazilītes, on the other hand, maintained that the Qur'an is originated (*muḥdath*) and non-eternal because in their opinion, speech is an attribute of divine action and non-eternal. According to Rahman and Abu Zayd, because the Qur'an is non-eternal, its laws are historical and not fixed.



However, as Mohammad Jafar Elmi points out, there is no connection between the Qur'an being eternal or temporal on the one hand, and its injunctions being universal or historical on the other:

One can accept the views of the Asha'irah and also be a contextualist, or one can accept the temporality of the attributes of speech and be a universalist. For the eternity or temporality is about the ontological aspect of the Qur'an and how it had come to existence and not the content of the Qur'an. It is quite possible that the content of the Qur'an may be universal or contextual while the Qur'an itself may be eternal or temporal. Therefore, it can be seen that while Shi'a scholars assert the temporality of the attribute of speech, they maintain the universality of the Qur'anic rulings (Elmi, 2014, p. 278).

Elsewhere, Elmi (2007) suggests that the mistake of linking the two sides of the discussion has its origin in the opinions of some early Sunni jurists, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), on the issue of whether the Qur'an can be abrogated by the Sunna or not. These jurists maintained that it could not, and it seems that one of their reasons for holding this opinion was their belief in the Qur'an being eternal. This reasoning continued being adopted over the centuries and has been employed by modernists such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (p. 103).

Moreover, although Rahman aims to modernise the method of jurisprudence for the social laws that are mentioned in the Qur'an, Elmi argues that Rahman's proposed method would have general applicability and not be limited to social laws. For example, his method could just as well be applied to the law requiring Muslims to perform prayers in Arabic; in this case, why could it not be argued that this requirement is also a product of the society in which the Prophet Muhammad lived? If the Prophet had been sent to a different society, he would have performed prayers in the language of that people, and therefore, the law that requires Muslims to perform their prayers in Arabic should also be regarded as being historical and temporary; and as there are practicing Muslims all over the world today, it should not be necessary for them all to perform their prayers in Arabic as the aim of performing religious acts of worship is to express one's servitude to God, which can be done in any language. The same argument could be applied to other Islamic laws, and consequently, all Islamic laws

would become historical. Not only would this not rejuvenate Islamic jurisprudence, it would reduce it to a set of rational or human-nature laws (pp. 107-108).

#### 3.6.3.4 The Textualist Approach

The vast majority of traditional Shi'a scholars today take an *uṣūlī* hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of sacred texts. Uṣūlīs – i.e. scholars of the Islamic science known as the 'principles of jurisprudence' (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which discusses Islamic legal hermeneutics and theory – give primary importance to the 'literal meaning' or 'apparent meaning' (*ẓāhir*) of the Qur'an.<sup>24</sup> The textualist approach, therefore, is often referred to as the 'literalist' approach.<sup>25</sup> Robert Gleave (2013, p. 1) writes that the literal meaning is "the meaning the text is believed to have 'in itself' solely by virtue of the words used and the rules of the language in which the text is written." It is regarded by Uṣūlīs as having a higher level of certainty and epistemological security than other interpretations.<sup>26</sup> This is a major point of contention between contextualists and textualists.

The meaning of a word is treated as being static. This approach is based on the idea that the fixed meanings allow the reader to remain faithful to the text and eschew any subjectivity that they may otherwise bring into the interpretation of the text [...]. However, a dictionary may not fully explain how the words are used in each and every context. Furthermore, language and the meaning of words are highly fluid, ahead of the codifying practices of lexicography (Saeed, 2014, p. 20).

Traditional Shi'a scholars maintain that there is congruence between the language of the Qur'an and commonly accepted modes of human communication; when people seek to understand each other, the approach they usually take is to rely upon the apparent meaning

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<sup>24</sup> In 3.7.4, I present a critical rationalist critique of the notion of a 'literal'/'apparent' meaning.

<sup>25</sup> Saeed (2010, p. 3) asserts that there are different types of textualism, depending on the degree of reliance on the literal meaning of the text: "Textualism ranges on a continuum from approaches that place an almost exclusive reliance on the literal meaning of the Quranic text ("hard textualism") to perspectives that take some contextual elements into account and so provide a degree of interpretive flexibility ("soft textualism")."

<sup>26</sup> In 3.7.4, I explain why critical rationalists reject the claim that 'certainty' is the goal of knowledge.

of what is being said or written. As Muḥammad Riḍā al-Muẓaffar, a contemporary Shi'a Uṣūlī scholar, explains:

The Holy Legislator [God] has definitely not used in his communication and usage of words to explain his aims, any other method than the one being used by the wise. This is because He is one of the wise and moreover is the Chief of All the Wise (*ra'īs al-'uqalā'*). Consequently, His method is the same as theirs [in communication]. There is no obstacle to this conception, nor is there is any evidence from Him against it (1994, p. 136).

These scholars present several arguments in support of their position on the authority (*ḥujjah*) of the literal meaning of verses. Firstly, they argue that the Qur'an itself implies this when it engages in discourse with different groups of people or with humankind in general. For example, the Qur'an challenges those who doubt in its being the word of God to produce something similar to it.<sup>27</sup> Here, they posit that if people could not fathom in ordinary ways what the Qur'an was actually saying, it would be pointless to challenge non-believers to bring something like something that they could not even understand (al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1987, p. 27). The Qur'an also invites people to contemplate its meaning,<sup>28</sup> and describes itself as 'guidance' and 'advice'.<sup>29</sup> Something can only be reflected upon, or considered guidance and advice, if that thing could be understood in ordinary ways in the first place.

Traditional Shi'i scholars advocate the universality and trans-historicity of Qur'anic teachings. They maintain that the meaning of a verse is valid for every time and place unless proven otherwise; although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabia fourteen centuries ago, its teachings have absolute authority in different circumstances from the time of the Prophet,

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Isrā' 17:88: "Say, 'Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.'"

Al-Baqarah 2:23: "And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a chapter like it, and invoke your helpers besides God, should you be truthful."

Hūd 11:13: "Do they say, 'He has fabricated it?' Say, 'Then bring ten chapters like it, fabricated, and invoke whomever you can, besides God, should you be truthful.'"

<sup>28</sup> Al-Nisā' 4:82: "Do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from [someone] other than God, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it."

Muḥammad 47:24: "Do they not contemplate the Qur'an, or are there locks on the hearts?"

Ṣād 38:29: "[It is] a blessed Book that We have sent down to you, so that they may contemplate its signs, and that those who possess intellect may take admonition."

<sup>29</sup> Āli 'Imrān 3:138: "This is an explanation for mankind, and a guidance and advice for the Godway."

and all the Qur'anic decrees are universal. Whenever it is unclear whether a ruling is context-specific or universal, the 'primary principle' (*al-aṣl al-awwaliyyah*) is that the ruling must be presumed to be universal (Elmi, 2014, p. 271).

In support of their view, traditional Shi'i scholars refer to both verses of the Qur'an and traditions. With regard to the former, they point to verses that begin with the invocation "O believers" or "O people". Such statements, they argue, are general and universal, and include all people in different places and times. Furthermore, in al-An'ām 6:19, God instructs the Prophet to declare: "This Qur'an has been revealed to me, that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches." Here, the traditional Shi'i scholars argue, the present tense is used (*li-undhirakum* – "that I may warn you") to address the absent because they are the same in kind to those present; i.e. the Qur'an's message is a universal one, whether people hear it from the Prophet directly or from others after him (al-Ṭabāṭabā'i, 1996, v. 14, p. 339). Furthermore, if God intends for any injunction in the Qur'an to be context-specific, He expresses it as such. If He uses a word in a general sense, it is universally applicable to all times, places, and situations.

Therefore, to restrict the verses of the Qur'an to a particular time or place, we need some extra evidence; and in the absence of such evidence, there would be no choice except to understand Qur'anic statements as they are and with their universal implications (Elmi, 2014, p. 272).

Additionally, traditional Shi'i scholars maintain, there are a number of traditions that corroborate their position on the universality of legal injunctions; two such hadiths, both from the sixth Shi'a Imam, Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, are quoted below:

The lawful [*ḥalāl*] of Muhammad is lawful forever until the Day of Resurrection, and the unlawful [*ḥarām*] of him is unlawful forever until the Day of Resurrection. It [i.e. the truth of religion] is nothing but this and nothing can replace it. [As Imam] 'Alī said, "Nobody invented an [unlawful religious] innovation except by abandoning a sunna" (al-Kulaynī, 1429 AH (lunar)/2008, v. 1, p. 147-148).

The law of God, Mighty and Majestic is He, is the same for the first and last generations, as are His obligations upon them, unless there is some reason [to hold

otherwise] or some extenuating circumstance. The first and last generations are also partnered in terms of the prohibition of certain actions. The obligations on them are one [and the same]. The last generation will be questioned about the performance of those obligations that the first generation will be questioned about, and they [the last generation] will be accounted for those things that the first generation will be accounted for (al-Kulaynī, 1429 AH (lunar)/2008, v. 9, p. 388).

It is worth pointing out here an important and distinctive feature of the Shi'a *uṣūlī* method of Qur'anic exegesis, and that is its approach to verses which deal with legal matters. According to the Shi'a *uṣūlī* tenet of *taqlīd* (following a jurist in matters of Islamic law), someone who is not a jurist is not permitted in Islamic law to act according to his or her personal interpretation of legal texts.<sup>30</sup> This is because the sources of jurisprudence are not limited to the Qur'an, and other evidence can have a bearing on one's understanding of the law; for instance, a tradition may qualify the generality of the apparent meaning of a verse. Therefore, if, for example, someone is a scholar of the Qur'an but not a jurist, he would have to follow a jurist in legal matters even if those matters were derived from verses of the Qur'an. The jurisprudence of *taqlīd*, then, places limits on how far a non-jurist can take their own understanding of legal verses; ultimately, when it comes to action and practice, they would be duty-bound to follow a jurist's understanding of the law. I have incorporated this point in Step 8 of my guide (5.3.10).

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

In Appendix A, I have attached the Research Ethics Form that was approved by the Research Ethics Sub Committee when I submitted it for the *Planning a Practitioner Research Programme* module (ICL 4541).

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Al-Sistani (2017, p. 3).

### 3.7.1 Interviews

When I first contacted my interviewees, I briefed them about my project and explained to them the purpose of the interview. I also made sure that I received informed consent from them to a) record the interviews; b) mention them by their name in my report; and c) attribute the views they expressed to me in the interview to them. I have attached my letter to the interviewees in Appendix B. I have kept all the recorded material safe and will only use it for this project.

### 3.7.2 Questionnaire Surveys

Well in advance of the Sydney lecture series, I informed the organisers that the questionnaire surveys would be anonymous and that they should convey this to the participants each time they send out the survey link to them. In my lectures, I explained the aim of the surveys and how the information would be used, and I emphasised that all responses would be anonymous and confidential.

This is the Lead Organiser's message to all the participants when he sent them the links of the survey:

Salam. Our guest speaker this Muharram, Shaykh Mohammed Ali Ismail, is doing his doctorate in the field of Tafsir. He has requested that you complete this quick survey (it only takes a few minutes) on last night's lecture. This will be very helpful for him and will form part of his research findings. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Please try to complete this today. There will be a survey for each lecture.

Thanks.

[link to the survey]

### 3.7.3 Testing My Research Findings

I tested two parts of my project in class: my new classification and the critical rationalist approach to using the Qur'an to solve problems (4.4 and 5.3.10.2). I also tested my research findings with my peers at academic conferences (4.5). None of the students in my class, nor any of my peers who gave me feedback at the conferences, have been named in my project. My step-by-step model was tested by the anonymous questionnaire surveys after each of my seven lectures, as explained above.

### 3.7.4 The Use of Critical Rationalism

As I mentioned earlier, I chose to conduct my research within the methodological framework of critical rationalism. Critical rationalists do not accept certain epistemological claims that Muslims scholars have held for centuries. For example, critical rationalists reject the claim that 'certainty' is the ultimate goal of knowledge. According to critical rationalism, certainty is not a goal of knowledge at all as it is not an epistemological category. It belongs instead to the realm of personal psychology. Psychology deals with causes whereas epistemology deals with reasons and arguments (Miller, 2006; and Paya, 2011).

Another point of contention between the traditional scholars of the Qur'an and critical rationalist perspectives concerns the notion of the 'literal meaning' or 'apparent meaning' of a text. As stated earlier, the traditional scholars give primary importance to this notion, arguing that it provides greater epistemological security than other interpretations. Critical rationalists, however, reject this, maintaining that as all opinions are theory-laden, the idea of a literal meaning is a misnomer. Each reader's 'network of meaning' of the phenomenon in question is different:

Networks of meaning of any phenomenon or entity are dynamic entities which may change from person to person and culture to culture. What identifies these 'networks' as networks of certain entities / phenomena is that each of them provides meanings for various aspects / features / functions, etc. of the entities / phenomena in question, only those who share (at least parts of) the network of meaning of a certain

phenomenon or entity can enter into meaningful dialogues with regard to the phenomenon or entity in question. Any other individual who wants to join such dialogues needs to acquire a knowledge of the networks of meaning in question (Paya 2018, p. 160).

Using the terminology of Wittgenstein,<sup>31</sup> it is not just a matter of 'seeing', which may be common to all viewers of the phenomenon in question, but 'seeing as', which will be different to everyone. To help resolve this issue, I have taken Paya's suggestion to use the term 'prima facie meaning' instead of 'literal meaning' or 'apparent meaning'. 'Prima facie meaning' does not imply the existence of a commonly-accepted meaning.

Prima facie meaning of a text is the meaning each reader understands when he / she encounters a text. It should be noted that the 'prima facie' meaning may be different from individuals to individuals due to their different background knowledge (which amounts to differences in their guiding theories) and different 'problem situations' which results in their focusing on various aspects of the text with different degrees of emphasis (Paya, 2018, p. 175).

Having gone through the same training as traditional Shi'i scholars, I can understand why some of them may be concerned about conducting this type of project within a critical rationalist methodological framework. At first sight, critical rationalism may appear to be at odds with traditional Islamic teachings. I myself was very unsure about using critical rationalism to start with. However, over the years, after a lot of questioning, researching, and reflecting, I have come to realise that it is a methodology and philosophical outlook that once properly understood, can be used very effectively in this field of study without any need to compromise on one's Islamic beliefs and values, as I have demonstrated in my research project.

I believe the concerns over the use of critical rationalism in such studies are largely because critical rationalism is unfamiliar to most traditional Shi'i scholars and has not had the benefit of a long historical engagement with Qur'anic exegesis. Critical rationalism is relatively new even in the West, and it has only recently been introduced to the Islamic seminaries. I

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<sup>31</sup> [1953] 2009, in Paya, 2018, p. 70.



believe projects like this one will help bring about a much-needed awareness about critical rationalism among traditional Shi'i scholars and show how effective it can be in the field of Islamic studies. It was heartening to hear the eminent scholars of the Qur'an whom I interviewed express an open-minded attitude towards critical rationalism (4.3.2).

### 3.7.5 Ethical Implications of My Epistemology

In 3.2, I formulated my epistemology and drew attention to being a moral agent. This has a number of important ethical implications, all closely related to my task as a researcher. For instance, as a moral agent, I strive to be honest about my conjectures, and so I do not, for example, formulate them in a way that they cannot be refuted; I do not resort to ad-hoc manoeuvres, i.e. tactics that would make the task of critical assessment of knowledge claims less effective (Popper, 2002); I do not use obscure language in order to confuse others or to appear cleverer; and I treat those with whom I enter into dialogue as equal to myself: I regard them as a source of knowledge as they have access to reality from a position that no one else has, and they can bring to my attention my own epistemic blind-spots.

### 3.7.6 Using Non-Islamic Sources for Improving Qur'anic Interpretation

By carrying out a comparative study of Qur'anic and Biblical exegetical methods and approaches, I have sought to learn new ways of doing things and to produce innovative ideas that will help people to understand and use the Qur'an more effectively. However, I can understand why some conservative scholars may be hesitant to use non-Islamic sources in Islamic fields of study, and so my use of Biblical studies in this project may not be something that they would be entirely comfortable with.

In response, I maintain that firstly, the focus of my research, i.e. hermeneutical methods and approaches, is largely on universal knowledge claims, which, by their very nature, are

neither Islamic nor non-Islamic.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, while there are clear and important differences between the sacred texts of the two traditions,<sup>33</sup> I have not blindly accepted anything from the Biblical tradition; rather, I have critically and carefully assessed the viability of applying certain Biblical methods and approaches to the study of the Qur'an. I was encouraged by Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī's comment on this matter when I interviewed him: he said not only was there no problem in using the works of Biblical hermeneuticians for improving Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches, it was very good to learn from other traditions (4.3.2.4).

### 3.8 Assumptions About the Qur'an and the Sunna

I end this chapter by listing the assumptions I have held about the Qur'an and the Sunna during my research:

1. The Qur'an that we have today is the same inerrant Word of God that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.
2. Both the Qur'an and the Sunna are required for guidance and salvation.
3. The Sunna is what the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the Twelve Imams said, did, and tacitly consented to.

Generally speaking, the first two assumptions are beliefs held by Sunni and Shi'i Muslims alike, whereas the last one is held by Shi'i Muslims only. Sunni Muslims talk only of the 'Sunna of the Prophet' and exclude all others from it.

These assumptions have played a critical role in my project. How I think about the Qur'an and the ways to understand it, and what I have written in this report, would have been very

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<sup>32</sup> The Sunna points to the same thing: there are traditions that say knowledge ought to be sought by Muslims even if it is in the remotest part of the globe and taught by non-Muslims. For example, there is a famous tradition from the Prophet Muhammad in which he is reported to have said, "Seek knowledge even if it be in China" (al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, 1988, v. 27, p. 27).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Azami's (2003) *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*.

different if I did not hold these assumptions. Being an imam who tries to live his life, and guide others in theirs, according to the teachings of the Qur'an, was the main reason why I did this project in the first place, as I wanted to make a meaningful contribution to my community of practice. I am very cognisant of the fact that I have been blessed with the opportunity to do just that.

I do not, therefore, look upon the Qur'an as 'just another book' but rather as a sacred text that has originated from God and has been sent to humankind for its salvation. My assumption that the Qur'an is the 'Word of God' was crucial for the choice of my research subject and project title, as being the 'Word of God' is the all-important premise that is shared by scholars of the Qur'an and the Bible.

# Chapter 4: Project Activity

4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	68
4.2 LIBRARY RESEARCH .....	69
4.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....	71
4.3.1 Interview Questions.....	72
4.3.2 Summary and Analysis of Interviews.....	73
4.3.2.1 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Isfahānī – First Interview .....	73
4.3.2.2 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Isfahānī – Second Interview.....	85
4.3.2.3 Dr Ḥusayn ‘Alawī-Mihr .....	86
4.3.2.4 Sayyid Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī.....	92
4.4 CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS.....	98
4.5 CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS .....	100
4.5.1 Paper: ‘Is <i>tafsīr ‘aqlī</i> a method in Qur’anic exegesis?’ (Objectives 4 and 6) .....	100
4.5.2 Paper: ‘A comparative study of Biblical and Qur’anic methods of exegesis’ (Objectives 1 and 2) .....	102
4.5.3 Paper: ‘Classifications of methods used in Qur’anic exegesis’ (Objectives 3 and 4) .....	103
4.5.4 Paper: ‘A Comparative Study of Islamic Feminist and Traditional Shi’i Approaches to Qur’anic Exegesis’ (Objective 1 – Qur’an part only).....	104
4.6 LECTURES AND QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS .....	106
4.6.1 Background .....	106
4.6.2 Lead Organiser’s message to those selected to do the survey.....	107
4.6.3 My message at the beginning of each survey .....	107
4.7 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY ANALYSIS .....	108
4.7.1 Analysis of Individual Surveys .....	109
4.7.1.1 Survey on Step 1 .....	109
4.7.1.1.1 Text at the beginning of the survey .....	109
4.7.1.1.2 Analysis of Responses .....	109
Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 1? .....	109
Q2 How important is Step 1? .....	110
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 1?.....	111
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 1? .....	111
Q5 For Step 1, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	111

Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 1? .....	112
Q7 How clear was Step 1 for you? .....	112
Q8 What did you like the most about Step 1? .....	112
Q9 What did you like the least about Step 1?.....	112
Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 1? .....	113
Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	113
Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	113
4.7.1.2 Survey on Step 2 .....	114
4.7.1.2.1 Text at the beginning of the survey .....	114
4.7.1.2.2 Analysis of Responses .....	114
Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 2? .....	114
Q2 How important is Step 2? .....	114
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 2?.....	114
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 2? .....	115
Q5 For Step 2, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	115
Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 2? .....	115
Q7 How clear was Step 2? .....	115
Q8 How valuable is it to know the 'Reason for Revelation' and the 'Occasion of Revelation'? .....	115
Q9 How useful is the 'Principle of Flow and Application'? .....	115
Q10 What did you like the most about Step 2? .....	115
Q11 What did you like the least about Step 2? .....	115
Q12 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 2? .....	116
Q13 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	116
Q14 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	116
4.7.1.3 Survey on Step 3 .....	116
4.7.1.3.1 Text at the beginning of the survey .....	116
4.7.1.3.2 Analysis of Responses .....	117
Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 3? .....	117
Q2 How important is Step 3? .....	117
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 3?.....	117
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 3? .....	117
Q5 For Step 3, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	118
Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 3? .....	118
Q7 How clear was Step 3? .....	118
Q8 How important is the role played by morphology when it comes to understanding the meaning of words? .....	118
Q9 How helpful is it to know the meaning of homonyms in the Qur'anic text? .....	118
Q10 How much does etymology enhance our understanding of the meaning of words? .....	118
Q11 What did you like the most about Step 3? .....	119
Q12 What did you like the least about Step 3? .....	119
Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 3? .....	119
Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	119
Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	119
4.7.1.4 Survey on the Application of Steps 1-3, and on Step 4.....	119
4.7.1.4.1 Text at the beginning of the survey .....	119
4.7.1.4.2 Analysis of Responses .....	120
Q1 Overall, how much did you like the application of Steps 1-3? .....	120
Q2 Overall, how much do you like Step 4? .....	120
Q3 How important is Step 4? .....	120
Q4 How unique was the material presented in Step 4?.....	120
Q5 How realistic is it to achieve Step 4? .....	120
Q6 For Step 4, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	120
Q7 How likely is it that you would use Step 4? .....	120
Q8 How clear was the application of Steps 1-3? .....	120
Q9 How clear was Step 4? .....	121
Q10 How important is Arabic Syntax and Arabic Rhetoric when it comes to understanding the Qur'anic text? .....	121

Q11 What did you like the most about the lecture? .....	121
Q12 What did you like the least about the lecture? .....	121
Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 4? .....	121
Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	121
Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	121
4.7.1.5 Survey on Step 5 .....	121
4.7.1.5.1 Text at the beginning of the survey .....	121
4.7.1.5.2 Analysis of Responses .....	122
Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 5? .....	122
Q2 How important is Step 5? .....	122
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 5?.....	122
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 5? .....	122
Q5 For Step 5, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	122
Q6 How clear was Step 5? .....	122
Q7 What did you like the most about Step 5? .....	123
Q8 What did you like the least about Step 5?.....	123
Q9 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 5? .....	123
Q10 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	123
Q11 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	123
4.7.1.6 Survey on Steps 6 and 7 .....	123
Text at the beginning of the survey .....	123
Analysis of Responses .....	124
Q1 Overall, how much did you like Step 6?.....	124
Q2 How important is Step 6? .....	124
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 6?.....	124
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 6? .....	124
Q5 For Step 6, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	124
Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 6? .....	124
Q7 How clear was Step 6? .....	124
Q8 Overall, how much did you like Step 7?.....	124
Q9 How important is Step 7? .....	124
Q10 How unique was the material presented in Step 7?.....	125
Q11 How realistic is it to achieve Step 7? .....	125
Q12 For Step 7, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	125
Q13 How likely is it that you would use Step 7? .....	125
Q14 How clear was Step 7? .....	125
Q15 What did you like the most about the lecture?.....	125
Q16 What did you like the least about the lecture? .....	125
Q17 What suggestions do you have for improving Steps 6 and 7?.....	125
Q18 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	125
Q19 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	126
4.7.1.7 Survey on Step 8 .....	126
Text at the beginning of the survey .....	126
Analysis of Responses .....	126
Q1 Overall, how much did you like Step 8?.....	126
Q2 How important is Step 8? .....	126
Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 8?.....	126
Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 8? .....	126
Q5 How effectively were the lessons on gratitude derived from the story of Prophet Sulayman and the ant?.....	127
Q6 For Step 8, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information? .....	127
Q7 How clear was Step 8? .....	127
Q8 What did you like the most about Step 8? .....	127
Q9 What did you like the least about Step 8?.....	127
Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 8? .....	127
Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?.....	127
Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you? .....	127

Q13 Overall, how can the Step-by-Step Model be improved?.....	127
<b>4.7.2 Consolidated Analysis of Surveys .....</b>	<b>128</b>
4.7.2.1 The Respondents .....	128
4.7.2.2 Reception to the Model .....	128
4.7.2.3 My Presentation .....	129

## 4.1 Introduction

The table below matches my Project Objectives with my activities. In the rest of this chapter, I explain and critically reflect on these activities.

Objective	Activity
<b>1. To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Library Research and Conference Presentations</p>
<b>2. To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.</b>	
<b>3. To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.</b>	
<b>4. To present an alternative classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.</b>	
<b>5. To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis, and to analyse the data.</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Semi-Structured Interviews</p>
<b>6. To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Library Research, Classroom Presentations, and Conference Presentations</p>



through classroom and conference presentations.	
<b>7. To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur’anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur’an.</b>	Library Research
<b>8. To present the guide in a series of lectures and conduct a questionnaire survey on each step.</b>	Lectures and Questionnaire Surveys

## 4.2 Library Research

The Objectives I sought to achieve by means of this activity were:

1. *To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur’an and the Bible.*
2. *To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.*
3. *To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches.*
4. *To present an alternative classification of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches.*
6. *To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur’an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.*
7. *To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur’anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur’an.*

For the Biblical part of my project, I had planned to have an expert on Biblical exegesis as a consultant. I asked my advisor and my colleagues for recommendations and several names were suggested. I found a few more names myself through internet searches. I wrote to these scholars, introducing myself and my research and asking them if they would consider being a consultant for my project. Unfortunately, not all of them replied, and the ones that did declined. This was not only extremely disappointing and frustrating but worrying as well, as an important part of my project concerned Biblical methods and approaches – a new area for me. I had to therefore look for another solution. I decided that I was going to try and learn as much as I could on my own by studying key texts on the subject. I would see how that went and reassess the situation afterwards.

So now the question was, ‘Which were the key texts on the subject?’ To help me here, I sought the assistance of Dr Martin Whittingham, Academic Director at The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford. I had first met Dr Whittingham when, in my capacity as Director of Research and Publications at The Islamic College, I visited his centre in 2016. We had kept in touch since then, and it was he who directed me to some of the literature on Biblical exegetical methods and approaches mentioned in Chapter 2. With his suggestions and a lot of online research, I managed to find excellent resources. For the most part, I was able to study them without much difficulty. I believe my knowledge of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches helped me a great deal as there are notable similarities in the interpretative processes and methods used by both traditions.

For the Qur’anic aspects of my project, I was able to draw upon more than two decades of experience; first as a seminary student, then as a lecturer and imam. I will say more about my experiences as a lecturer and imam later in the chapter. As a seminary student of ten years in Qum, Iran, one of the subjects I studied, and enjoyed the most, was *Methods and Approaches to Qur’anic Exegesis*. The text that I studied on that module was Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Tafsīrī (Qur’anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches)* (2011), and I went back to it as the starting point for my research project. In the process of attaining the first of my qualifications in Qum (a BA in Qur’an and Hadith Studies), I completed several other courses on Qur’anic exegesis; this learning helped me enormously in my project. While in Qum, I gradually built up my personal library of resources on the Qur’an, and I have been adding to it ever since. Every time I go to Qum, I bring back as many books and software

programmes as my luggage allowance permits! Additionally, I have benefitted hugely from the vast collection of resources on the Qur'an at The Islamic College Library.

With most of the resources on Qur'anic exegesis from a Shi'i perspective available only in Persian and Arabic, I have had to do a tremendous amount of translating for my project. This has been time consuming. I have experience in translating from Persian and Arabic to English,<sup>34</sup> but, as my strongest language is English, it is naturally easier and more enjoyable for me to read English works, especially ones that are originally written in English as opposed to translations. In fact, one of the benefits of doing this comparative study has been learning the English terminology used in the field of exegesis in general; after all, I nearly always address my congregation and students in English, and so being able to use these terms has given me a lot of confidence in my professional practice. Hopefully, the handbook I intend to publish after my DProf will help fill the gap in the literature in English on the subject.

My colleague at The Islamic College, Professor Ali Paya, has been a tremendous source of help and support throughout my project. He has directed me to important resources on critical rationalism, methods, and methodologies. I have consulted him regularly on all aspects of my project. I found it extremely beneficial to 'bounce ideas off' him, and I am very grateful to him for being such a willing and critical interlocutor (his office being on the same floor as mine certainly made it easier to exchange views in person!). Dr Mehmet Dikerdem, my advisor, has also been an excellent source of advice and support, pointing me to resources on methods and methodologies in addition to guiding me on the procedural and regulatory aspects of my project.

### 4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The Objective I sought to achieve by means of this activity was:

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<sup>34</sup> My three published translation works are: 1) *Islamic Laws (an annotated translation of the Tawdih al-Masa'il of al-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani)* (2017). London: The World Federation; 2) 'The Spiritual Aspects of Hajj: A Translation of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin's (A) Discourse on Hajj with al-Shibli', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, (7)3 (Summer 2014). London: ICAS Press; and 3) *Faith and Reason* (2006). London: The World Federation (Co-translator).

5. *To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis, and to analyse the data.*

I conducted four semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an; two of these interviews were with the same scholar. The scholars I interviewed were:

1. Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, Principal of the School of Advanced Qur'an and Hadith Studies at Al-Mustafa International University, Qum, Iran. Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī has authored numerous books on Qur'anic interpretation, including the twenty-two volume *Tafsīr-i Qur'ān-i Mihr*. His *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Tafsīrī* is the standard textbook on Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches in Shi'i seminaries.
2. Dr Ḥusayn 'Alawī-Mihr, Professor and Academic Board Member of Al-Mustafa International University, Qum. Among his many publications is *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Tafsīrī*, a popular textbook on the subject.
3. Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī, Director of Education and Research at the Foundation for Jurisprudence and Teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt in Qum and a Professor at the Qum Seminaries.

The first two scholars were my teachers twelve years ago when I was a seminary student in Qum. I have used their works extensively in my professional practice as a senior lecturer and imam. The third scholar was recommended to me by a close friend who studied Qur'anic exegesis under him and knows him for several years. All the interviews were conducted during a trip I made to Qum in the summer of 2017. As the interviewees do not speak English, the interviews were conducted in Persian.

#### 4.3.1 Interview Questions

The full set of questions I had prepared before the interviews are listed below. However, I adopted a flexible approach to my questioning, allowing the conversation to flow naturally while ensuring it did not veer too far off track. Moreover, there was no need to ask all the

questions on my list to all three interviewees. For example, I did not ask Ẓiyā'ī-Raḍawī questions 1 and 3 as he is not an author of a book on Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.

1. What criteria have you used to select the various methods and approaches to Qur'anic exegesis for inclusion and assessment in your book?
2. What would you say are the flaws or limitations of existing methods and approaches to Qur'anic exegesis?
3. [Having presented my critique of the interviewee's classification:] What do you think of my critique of your classification?
4. [Having explained my own classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches to the interviewee:] What shortcomings do you see in this classification?
5. How familiar are you with critical rationalism?
6. What do you think would be the impact of introducing the critical rationalist approach to Qur'anic exegesis?
7. Would you say there are any issues in using the works of Biblical hermeneuticians as a means for improving Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches?

### 4.3.2 Summary and Analysis of Interviews

#### 4.3.2.1 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī – First Interview

This interview was conducted on 24 July 2017 in Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's office at the Imam Khomeini International University in Qum, Iran.

I asked Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī about the criteria he used to select the methods and approaches in his book. He replied that for the methods, the criterion was 'being based on a source'. He explained that there are four sources:<sup>35</sup> the Qur'an, Tradition, 'aql (which is rendered in English as 'reason' or 'intellect'), and science. Science, he said, includes both the natural and

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<sup>35</sup> Or five if 'intuition' (*shuhūd*) is included. The allegorical method is related to intuition. There are different types of the allegorical method, however, and in his book Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī maintains that only some types of the allegorical method are valid (1390 AH (solar)/2011, p. 265).

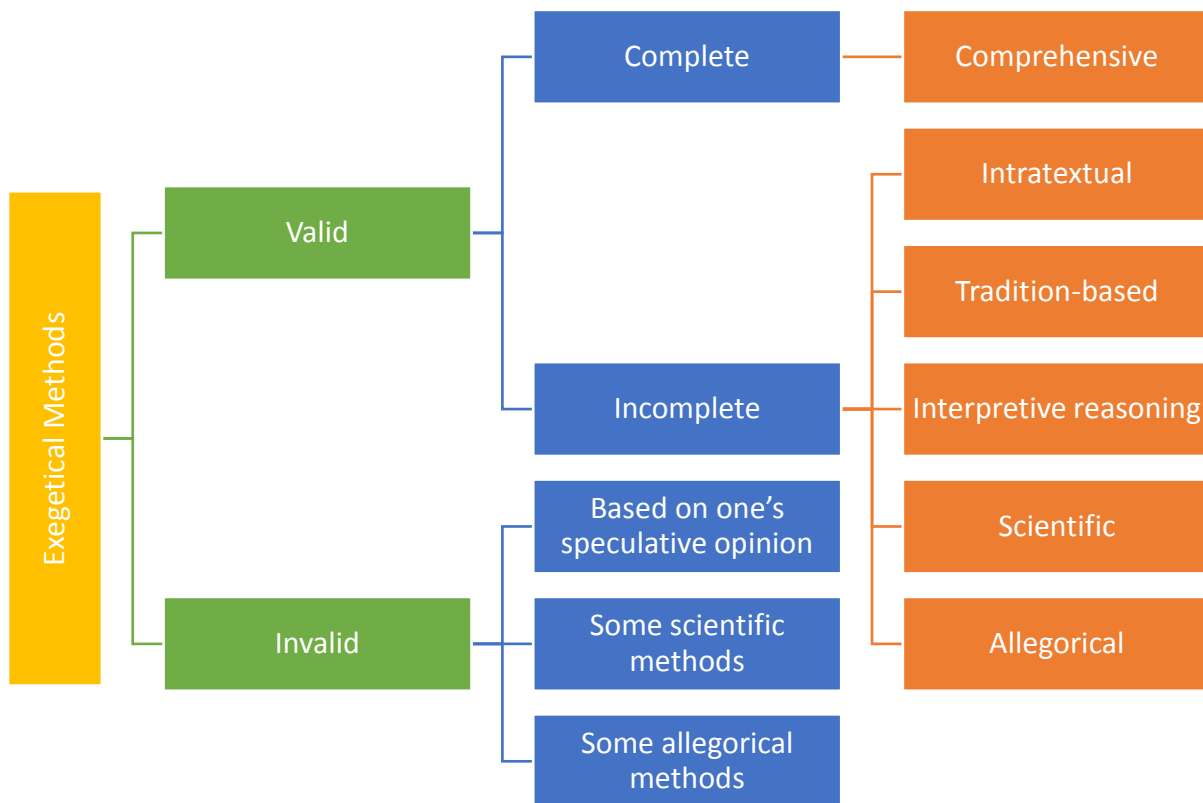
human sciences, but only those findings from these sciences that are definitive and give us certainty are considered ‘sources’. The sources form the base for the following methods: ‘intratextual’, ‘tradition-based’, ‘interpretive reasoning’, ‘scientific’, ‘allegorical’, and ‘comprehensive’ (the last one being a method that combines all the others). As for approaches, he continued, these are ‘fields of study’. The approaches he discusses in his book, he said, are the main ones used in Qur’anic exegesis.

#### Comment

Riḍāyī-İşfahānī’s assertion that ‘methods’ are ‘*based on a source*’ and not ‘*a source*’ in its own right as stated in his book was a very important clarification – I will say more about this under point 3 below. As for scientific findings that are “definitive and give us certainty”, as I have explained in 3.7.4, critical rationalists do not consider ‘certainty’ a goal of knowledge at all as it is not an epistemological category. Instead, it belongs to the realm of personal psychology.

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I then discussed with him his classification of exegetical methods, which is illustrated below:



I presented to Riḍāyī-İşfahānī the following critique of his classification:

1. In the classification, two of the 'invalid' methods are 'some scientific' and 'some allegorical' methods. In his book, he outlines the criteria for determining whether a scientific or allegorical method is valid or invalid (1390 AH (solar)/2011, pp. 232-234 and pp. 264-265). However, it is not clear why he chooses to single out these two methods in this way; *any* method that is not used correctly can just as well be deemed invalid. For example, if an exegete who sought to employ the tradition-based method were to use fabricated reports to interpret verses of the Qur'an, or, if an exegete claimed to be using the interpretive reasoning method but his or her arguments were not logically sound, then both of these methods would also be invalid. Why, then, should there not be categories called 'some tradition-based' and 'some interpretive reasoning' methods as well?

Riḍāyī-İşfahānī replied that this was a valid criticism. There was no reason to single out these two methods except for the fact that they have been subject to 'exegesis

based on speculative opinion' (*tafsīr bil-ra'y*) more than any of the other methods. He agreed that if other methods were not used correctly, they would be invalid as well.

2. Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī maintains that by employing the 'comprehensive' (*jāmi'*) method, "the exegete makes all the dimensions of the meaning and intent of a verse distinct and reaches a complete conclusion" (p. 323). I expressed my disagreement here: as there is an indefinitely large number of meanings and interpretations of the verses, the best exegetes can do is to try and understand the verses as deeply and as comprehensively as they can while acknowledging the fact that, ultimately, due to their limitations, they will never understand all aspects of the verses.

To this, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī replied that the word 'complete' here is opposed to 'incomplete *on its own*'; i.e. a method *on its own* is incomplete. For example, doing exegesis by *only* the intratextual method would be an incomplete exegesis; the same is true of all the other methods. But, when they are all used together, then the exegesis is 'complete' in that sense. He did not mean that one would understand *all* the layers of meaning and the innermost depths of the verses.

#### Comment

On the issue of what the comprehensive method can unveil, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī clarified what he had meant, which was different to what I had understood he meant. I suggested to him that this part of his book be reworded in the next edition.

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3. I pointed out to Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī that his classification does not include several important methods, such as 'juristic', 'linguistic', 'theological', and 'philosophical'. Instead, he regards these as exegetical 'approaches' rather than 'methods'. But, I argued, the distinction between the two is unclear as his definitions of these terms are extremely wide-ranging: exegetical approaches (*girāyish*), he writes in his book, are "... the influence of religious and doctrinal beliefs and trends in the exegete's era, and the exegete's style of *tafsīr*, which is shaped by his beliefs, objectives, tastes,



preferences, and academic specialisation” (p. 23). As for an exegetical ‘method’ (*rawish*), this is “... the use of specific tools or sources in the interpretation of the Qur’an to clarify the meaning and purport of its verses and to arrive at distinct conclusions. In other words, how an exegete discovers and extracts the meanings and purport from the verses” (p. 22).

Here, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī reiterated that in Qur’anic exegesis, a ‘method’ is based on a particular source; this is what distinguishes them from ‘approaches’. The term ‘method’ in this field of study has a special meaning; it is a homonym. Just as the word ‘Shaykh’ in philosophy refers to ‘Ibn Sīnā’ (Avicenna) but in jurisprudence it refers to ‘al-Ṭūsī’ (Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī), so too ‘method’ has different meanings in different contexts. In the context of Qur’anic interpretation, it has a specific meaning given to it by experts in the subject.

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī went on to explain that for every source, we must have evidence for its authority. We have evidence for the four sources: for the Qur’an, the evidence is Āli Imrān 3:7;<sup>36</sup> for traditions, it is al-Naḥl 16:44;<sup>37</sup> for ‘*aql*’, it is all the verses that praise ‘*aql*’ and urge us to use it; and for science, it giving us certainty is its evidence. All other sources are invalid unless their authoritativeness (*ḥujjiyyah*) is established.

### Comment

Methods are indeed ‘tools’, and so the inclusion of this word in Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s definition of method is correct. But, in his book he adds the words “*or sources*” and does not say “*based on sources*” as mentioned above. “*Or sources*” had been a very confusing phrase for me to grasp over the years. It was widening the scope of methods too far. ‘Tools’ and ‘sources’ are two quite different things. Methods extract information *from* sources, just as a miner uses his methods and tools to extract coal from a mine. One could not correctly claim that the miner’s methods –

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<sup>36</sup> “Parts of it [the Qur’an] are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book”. The point that Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī was making was that the “definitive verses” mentioned in this verse interpret other verses.

<sup>37</sup> “We have sent down the reminder to you [Prophet Muḥammad] so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect.”

such as the way he uses his pickaxe – and the mine belong to the same category.

As I explained in 3.5.2, sources are reservoirs of knowledge claims. As such, only the Qur'an and Sunna should be considered 'sources'. 'Aql as reason does not make any knowledge-claims and cannot, therefore, be a 'source'. And although 'aql as intellect does make knowledge-claims, it does so in the form of formulating conjectures; *formulating* conjectural knowledge claims is different from being a *source* of knowledge. There is a fundamental difference between the knowledge-claims made by the intellect and those of the Qur'an and authentic Sunna: while the former are assumed to be fallible, the latter are assumed to be true and infallible.

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4. With regard to the 'interpretive reasoning' method, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī asserts that this refers to using rational proofs and evidence in exegesis (pp. 154-155). I asked him why then he classifies 'philosophical' as an exegetical 'approach', seeing that the philosophical way is to use "rational proofs and evidence in exegesis".

To this, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī again reiterated his opinion that a method is based on a source, and as 'aql is a source, 'interpretive reasoning' is a method. Philosophy, on the other hand, is a field of study, not a source. All fields of study have a source; it would be correct to say that philosophy *has* a source, which is 'aql, but it would not be correct to say it *is* a source itself. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) uses philosophy to interpret verses, not 'aql in this meaning, and so his exegesis is one that uses a philosophical approach, not the interpretive reasoning method.

#### Comment

Apart from the contentious issue of what is and is not a method, there are important epistemological differences in how scholars such as Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī and critical rationalists view the nature and role of 'aql, as I have discussed in 3.5. And, as I have argued in 5.2.7, reason (as distinct from

intellect) is employed as a method in *all* approaches as it distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones. It should not, therefore, be considered a distinct category on its own/the base of one particular method.

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5. I explained to Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī that I have added the ‘historical’ method to my classification, which is not something others have done in their classifications. Most exegetes, I continued, employ the methods of historical investigation to determine the historical context of a text and other matters of historical significance. Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī in his *al-Mīzān*, for example, includes several sections titled ‘A Historical Discussion’ in which he analysis the verses entirely from a historical perspective.

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī responded by saying ‘historical’ would not be a method based on the specific meaning given to the term ‘method’ by experts in the field of Qur’anic exegesis. But, if by ‘historical method’ it is meant basing exegeses on ‘historical facts’, then this would come under ‘science’, as science includes both natural and human sciences.

I quoted to him the definition I prefer to use for ‘method’, i.e. “tools for obtaining data and testing the claims of theories” (Paya, 2011, p. 152). ‘Tools’ here, I explained, means ‘procedures’ and ‘techniques’.<sup>38</sup>

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī said if I were to take the Persian word ‘*rawish*’ to mean what experts in the field of Qur’anic interpretation have taken it to mean, i.e. ‘based on a source’, then it would not be correct to say ‘historical’ is a ‘*rawish*’; rather, it would be an ‘approach’. But, if I were to take ‘*rawish*’ to mean what I have said, then ‘historical’ would be a ‘*rawish*’. The word ‘*rawish*’ means different things in different contexts.

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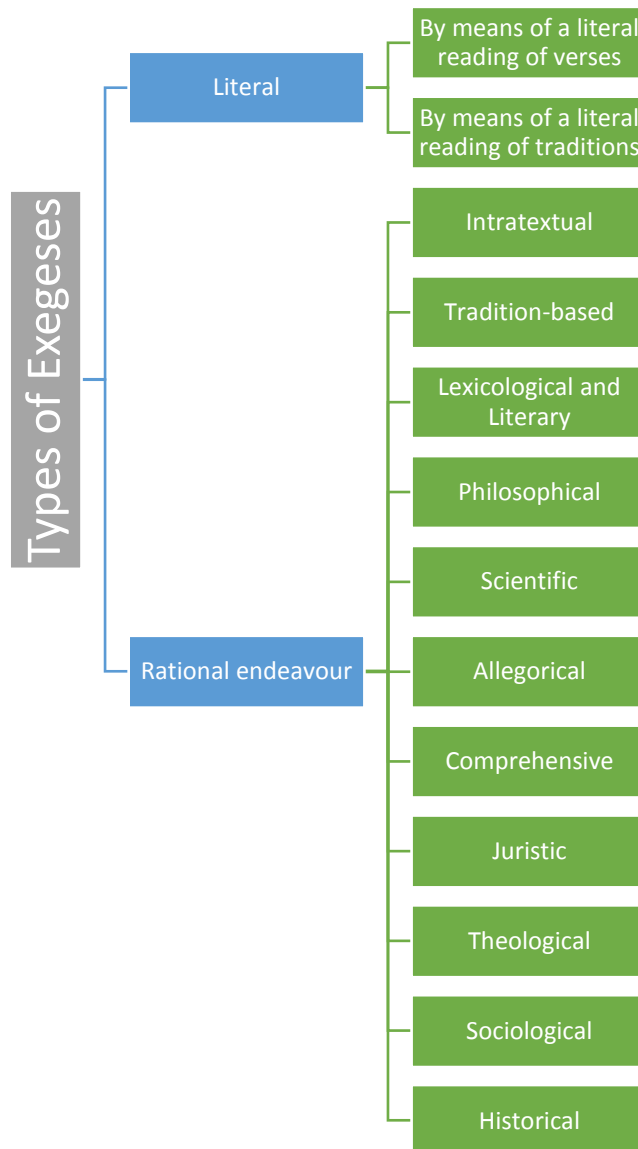
<sup>38</sup> This was taken from Crotty, who defines methods as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (1998, p. 3).

## Comment

I was encouraged by Riḍāyī-İşfahānī's acknowledgement that an alternative definition of 'method' could potentially be used to classify exegetical methods.

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I then presented my alternative classification (below) to him. This was my first proper attempt at a classification. It resulted from the research I did for the paper titled '*Classifications of methods used in Qur'anic exegesis*' (4.5.3).



This classification, I explained, is of ‘types of exegeses’, i.e. it aims to capture a snapshot of the main types of exegetical works that exist. I first divided these works into two general categories: ‘literal’ (*ẓāhir*) and ‘rational endeavour’ (*ijtihādī*). By ‘literal’, I meant the same thing as claimants of the literal approach mean by it, i.e. “the meaning the text is believed to have “in itself” solely by virtue of the words used and the rules of the language in which the text is written” (Gleave, 2013, p. 1). However, as *all* exegesis involves at least some degree of rational endeavour, the term ‘literal’ in this model was relative to ‘rational endeavour’, which refers to exegetical works in which their authors demonstrate a greater degree of critical analysis and evaluation and present their own reasoned opinions, rather than merely quoting the opinions of others. The *Tafsīr* of Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 722) would be an example of a ‘literal’ exegetical work.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, *Jawāmi‘ al-Jāmi‘* by Faḍl ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153) would be an example of a ‘rational endeavour’ work. Finally, I added the ‘historical’ method, which as I mentioned earlier is omitted by others.

Riḍāyī-İşfahānī had the following to say about my classification:

1. ‘Literal’ and ‘rational endeavour’ cannot be placed opposite each other, as every exegesis uses some degree of rational endeavour, even if it is only at the level of selecting the best dictionary meaning for a word. What could be said, however, is that the ‘rational endeavour’ method has two meanings: a narrow meaning (*akhaṣṣ*) and a wide meaning (*a‘amm*). The narrow meaning would refer to rational endeavour when all methods and approaches are combined and used together; this could be called the ‘comprehensive rational endeavour’ method (*rawish-i ijtihādī-yi kāmil*); whereas the wide meaning would simply refer to the rational endeavour that takes place when each of the methods and approaches are employed separately.

#### Comment

Although I had been aware of the problem of placing ‘literal’ opposite ‘interpretative reasoning’, I had not considered it significant. But, after

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<sup>39</sup> For more on Mujāhid’s approach and the literal exegetical method, see Gleave (2013, pp. 75-93).

listening to and reflecting over Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s comments, I realised this was a major flaw and I would need to address it.

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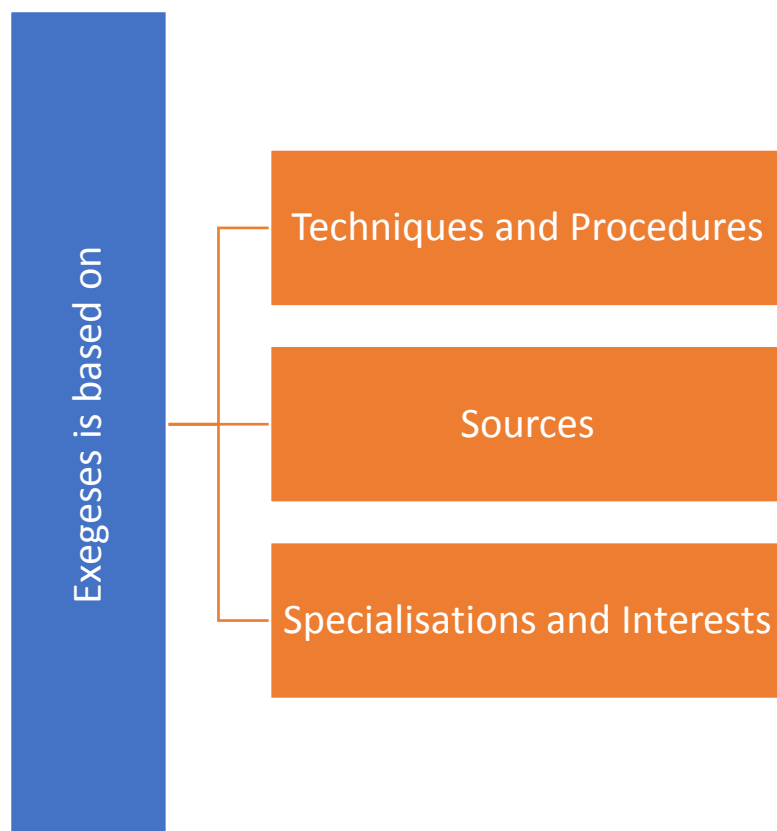
2. I should separate the ones that are based on sources and the ones that are fields of study.

Comment

This could only happen if I were to adopt Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s definition of ‘method’, which I was reluctant to do at that stage due to the problems associated with it.

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Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī then suggested two alternative classifications. The first was as follows:



The above classification identifies the three things that Qur’anic exegesis is based on:

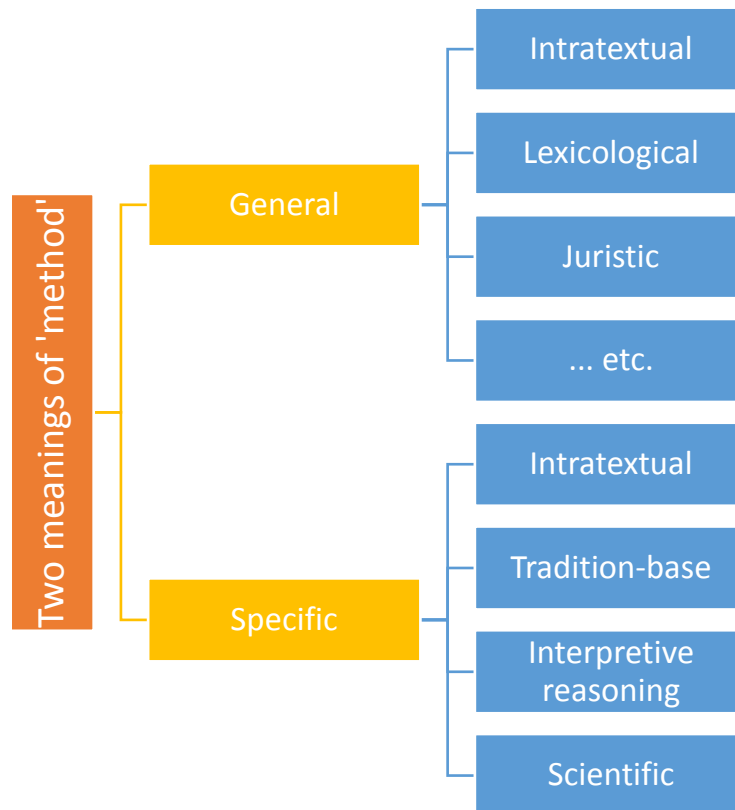
1. Techniques and procedures (i.e. the definition of ‘methods’ I had suggested)
2. Sources (i.e. the definition of ‘methods’ Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī subscribes to)
3. Specialisations and interests (i.e. ‘fields of study’; these are ‘approaches’ according to Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī)

#### Comment

I found this classification useful. It succinctly depicts the different opinions on what constitutes an exegetical method and approach. In the classification I present in 5.2.7 as my final opinion (held of course, from a critical rationalist perspective, conjecturally until it is falsified), I have developed the ‘Techniques and Procedures’ (methods) versus ‘Specialisations and Interests’ (approaches) idea by placing ‘approaches’ at the first level and the ‘methods’ used by each approach at the second.

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The second alternative classification Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī suggested was this one:



Here, 'general' (*'āmm*) refers to the definition I had suggested earlier, i.e. techniques and procedures, as it applies to all the fields of study; whereas 'specific' (*khāṣṣ*) refers to the definition he prefers, as it is specific to the four sources. In the illustration above, I have shown only three methods under 'general' so as not to clutter up the diagram.

#### Comment

Although not very easy to understand, this classification does incorporate the two different definitions of 'method'.

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Our time for the interview came to an end before I could ask Riḍāyī-İşfahānī about his opinions on critical rationalism and its use in Qur'anic exegesis, and so we arranged to meet again the following day.



#### 4.3.2.2 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī – Second Interview

The second of my interviews with Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī took place on 25 July 2017 at the same place as the first.

This interview was much shorter than the previous one and focused on the use of critical rationalism in Qur’anic exegesis. As Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī was not familiar with critical rationalism, I first explained its main theses to him and how it could be used in interpreting the Qur’an. He said it was a new and interesting opinion and deserved appreciation. He added that he would need to investigate it further before he could give a full and proper response, but for now he would share some initial thoughts with me.

He said we would not be able to level the same type of critique to Prophet Muhammad as we would to an exegete, as Prophet Muhammad is infallible and he simply transmitted God’s Word to the people exactly as God intended. In the Qur’an, God talks about this fact; for example, He says in al-Hāqqah 69:44-46:

Had he faked any sayings in Our name,  
We would have surely seized him by the right hand  
and then cut off his aorta.

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī agreed with the critical rationalist rejection of all justificatory approaches. He also agreed with the critical rationalist thesis that all observations and understanding are theory-laden. He added that there are some assumptions which are essential and some which are not. Assumptions which are not essential are personal ones which have not been proven to be correct. Essential assumptions, on the other hand, are those which have been proven to be correct. These include the assumption that the Qur’an is the Word of God as revealed to Prophet Muhammad; that the Qur’an has not been distorted in any way; and that the Qur’an and Sunna go together. He told me he had written about these and other essential assumptions in his book.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī (1387 AH (solar)/2008, v. 1, pp. 125-173).

## Comment

I was glad to hear that Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī agreed with the critical rationalist theses on justificatory approaches and observations being theory-laden. As I have mentioned in 3.7.4, critical rationalism is relatively new and some traditional scholars may not be comfortable with using some of its tenets in Islamic fields of study, and so his views here were heartening. His comments about essential assumptions were important, and they led me to write section 3.8: ‘Assumptions About the Qur’an and the Sunna’.

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### 4.3.2.3 Dr Ḥusayn ‘Alawī-Mihr

This interview was conducted on 24 July 2017 in ‘Alawī-Mihr’s office at the Imam Khomeini International University in Qum, Iran.

I explained to ‘Alawī-Mihr how I preferred to view exegetical ‘methods. He responded by saying there was no problem in me defining ‘methods’ in a way that is more in line with Western definitions. As for his own opinion on what constitutes a ‘method’, it was essentially the same as Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s, but he reiterated that it was not necessary for me to go by their opinions.

## Comment

It was encouraging to hear that ‘Alawī-Mihr thought it was fine to use such a fundamentally different definition of method to his own.

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In his book,<sup>41</sup> he refers to the ‘interpretive reasoning method’ and the ‘philosophical approach’. I questioned him about the difference between them. He referred to his article on the subject, where he explains there are two types of philosophical approaches:

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Alawī-Mihr (1381 AH (solar)/2002).

1. Imposing philosophical opinions on the Qur'an and not observing correct exegetical principles; this is an instance of 'exegesis based on speculative opinion' (*tafsīr bil-ra'y*).
2. Using philosophical evidence without imposing philosophical opinions on the Qur'an while observing correct exegetical principles; this is an instance of the interpretive reasoning method.<sup>42</sup>

### Comment

The second type of philosophical approach that 'Alawī-Mihr described corroborated my theory that there was a problem in the way 'interpretive reasoning' and 'philosophical' are defined by him and Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī. 'Alawī-Mihr writes that the second type is an instance of the interpretive reasoning method. There is therefore an overlap between 'interpretive reasoning' and 'philosophical', and this makes the distinction between them unclear.

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I questioned 'Alawī-Mihr about *'aql* being a source. He replied that Ayatollah 'Abdullāh Jawādī-Āmulī<sup>43</sup> in the Introduction to his exegetical work *Tasnīm* also says it is a source. I pointed out that it seems the Ayatollah has changed his opinion on this – I read that he says there are only two sources: the Qur'an and Tradition. He replied that he had not seen that, but in any case, such an opinion could be rebutted.<sup>44</sup> Sources are methods because the religion regards them as credible and authoritative (*ḥujjah*). He quoted a famous tradition from the seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi'as, Mūsā ibn Ja'far al-Kāẓim, in which the Imam addresses his companion Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam with the following words:

O Hishām! God has two pieces of evidence (*ḥujjatayn*) for people: [one is] manifest, and [the other is] hidden. That which is manifest is his messengers, prophets, and imams. That which is hidden is the [people's] *'aql*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 'Alawī-Mihr (1394 AH (solar)/2015, pp. 256-257).

<sup>43</sup> He is regarded by many Shi'i scholars as the foremost authority on the Qur'an today.

<sup>44</sup> Jawādī-Āmulī (1394 AH (solar)/2015).

<sup>45</sup> Al-Kulaynī (1429 AH (lunar)/2008, v. 1, p. 35).

## Comment

Afterwards, I sent ‘Alawī-Mihr the link of the website where I read Jawādī-Āmulī’s revised opinion. I subsequently corresponded with ‘Alawī-Mihr by email on this issue. ‘Alawī-Mihr maintained that when Jawādī-Āmulī said there were only two sources and did not count ‘*aql*’ as one of them, he meant not *every* ‘*aql*’ is a source – only the ‘demonstrative ‘*aql*’ (‘*aql-i burhānī*’) is a source. I have discussed this further in 3.5.1; and in 3.5.2, and I have offered a critical rationalist interpretation of what ‘*ḥujjah*’ may mean in traditions such as the one cited above.

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‘Alawī-Mihr asserted that the religious authority (*ḥujjiyat-i shar‘ī*) of a source makes it a method. Therefore, the Qur’an, Tradition, and ‘*aql*’ are all authoritative evidence (*ḥujjah*) and are sources and methods, whereas mysticism (*irfān*), theology, philosophy, and lexicology are not, as the religion does not recognise them as such. These are ‘approaches’, not ‘methods’. When authoritative sources are used to interpret the Qur’an, they become methods. A method should not be called ‘tools’. A method is “the use of a source that has religious authority”.

As for science being a source, he said Jawādī-Āmulī also holds that if something in science is certain, it is authoritative. Therefore, when Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī regards ‘scientific’ a method, he means science that is certainly correct.

## Comment

The main difference between ‘Alawī-Mihr’s views here and Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s views mentioned earlier is that the former does not consider intuition a source. The critical rationalist view on ‘certain science’ was explained earlier.

On intuition, critical rationalists do not regard it a source but a tool (faculty) which helps the inquirer to tap into the source, which is reality at large. The faculty of intuition can only be actualised and further developed if the inquirer applies it to problems and takes on board all those pre-conditions – i.e. relevant background knowledge, methodical and systematic approach, conducive environment, luck/*tawfīq*, and spiritual preparedness – which help the inquirer in the ‘context of discovery’ (3.3).

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Having examined my classification, ‘Alawī-Mihr explained that he disagrees with authors such as Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī on the meaning of ‘rational endeavour’ (*ijtihādī*): others have equated *ijtihādī* with interpretive reasoning, but he separates the two. ‘*Ijtihād*’ in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) means using all the sources to derive rulings; ‘Alawī-Mihr uses the same meaning in the field of Qur’anic interpretation, i.e. using all the sources to derive the meaning of verses. He accepted my view that *ijtihādī* could be separated into ‘juristic’, ‘philosophical’ etc., adding that we could call the categories ‘incomplete rational endeavour’ (*ijtihādī-yi nāqīṣ*) and ‘complete rational endeavour’ (*ijtihādī-yi kāmil*), the latter being the combination of all methods and approaches.

#### Comment

‘Alawī-Mihr’s suggestion on dividing rational endeavour into two types, ‘incomplete rational endeavour’ and ‘complete rational endeavour’, is similar to Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s suggestion mentioned earlier.

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Regarding Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s opinion that with the comprehensive method “the exegete makes all the dimensions of the meaning and intent of a verse distinct and reaches a complete conclusion”, he agreed with me that the wording should be changed. He suggested it would be better to say, “according to the understanding of the exegete by his own endeavours”. This understanding may or may not be in line with reality.

He recommended I add the interpretive reasoning method to my classification. This is different from rational endeavour; he and some other authors on the Qur'an such as Jawādī-Āmulī, Mu'addab, and Bābā'ī have all recently said the same thing, and he has written about this in his book.<sup>46</sup>

### Comment

The problem with 'Alawī-Mihr's suggestion that I include the interpretive reasoning method in my classification is that interpretive reasoning would then be seen as a distinct category on its own, not as a method that is employed in *all* approaches.

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When I asked 'Alawī-Mihr for his opinion on using critical rationalism in Qur'anic exegesis, he said there are differences in understanding in all fields; this is natural and healthy. But, when it comes to religion, because we want to attain salvation, we cannot suffice with suppositions and conjectures. We do not have access to reality, but we do have access to tools and sources that we are certain about, and these help us to get to the best opinion about reality. We accept differences in understanding, but we also say there is such a thing as a 'better' or 'more complete' and 'poorer' or 'less complete' understanding.

The field of religion, he continued, is different to the field of science. We have certain tools and sources in religion, such as 'prevalence among jurists' (*shuhrah*) and the 'conduct of religiously observant people' (*sīrah mutasharri'ah*), as well as verses of the Qur'an and the Sunna, which have led to us to certainty about certain things, such as the midday (*ẓuhr*) prayer consisting of four units (*rak'ah*). These beliefs and practices that we are certain about are the red lines that we do not cross. In religion, we are not after inculpatoriness (*munajizziyat*); rather, we are after exculpatoriness (*muadhiriyyat*);<sup>47</sup> i.e. that we have an answer on Day of

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<sup>46</sup> 'Alawī-Mihr (1394 AH (solar)/2015, pp. 254-255).

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ṣadr (2003) explains the terms 'inculpatoriness' and 'exculpatoriness' as follows: "There are two reasons why assurance must be taken to have evidential bearing on the derivation of the ruling. (1) Acting against orders in [mistaken] good faith is a valid defence against a charge of disobedience, and (2) acting in acknowledged bad faith merits punishment. These two situations are referred to as exculpatoriness and inculpatoriness respectively" (p. 150). The translator of this work, Roy Mottahedeh, explains the terms in his own words in the Glossary as follows: "Exculpatoriness (*mu'adhiriyya*): The rational view that a legal agent who believes with assurance that he is complying with a ruling of the lawgiver – even though he is in fact mistaken – may not be

Resurrection. We should be able to say, 'I tried my best and this was the conclusion I reached.' Indications (*amārāt*)<sup>48</sup> do not lead us to certainty, yet they have been endorsed by the Legislator for us to use as religious authority. Because we are talking about Heaven and Hell, we must have a religious authority for our opinions; this is not the case with other fields, and hence the two must be differentiated. Some things, even if they are not true in reality, will be authoritative evidence (*ḥujjah*) for us on the Day of Resurrection. When it comes to religion, we must follow religious authority. It is different when it comes to fields of study.

### Comment

Critical rationalists maintain that the aim is to get as close to the truth as possible, and the method of conjectures and refutations is a *means* to that end, not the end itself. Certainty is only a psychological comfort. It is not authoritative evidence (*ḥujjah*) in all cases: for example, a delusional state that has resulted not because of hard and serious work to get close to the truth but out of laziness can also produce certainty; but this certainty would not be a good excuse on the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, certainty could arise from possessing a valid argument, i.e. one which has remained corroborated despite our best and most sincere efforts to expose its defects. This would be *ḥujjah* for us.

Critical rationalists conjecturally suggest that reality is indefinitely many times richer than our best understanding of it. They would agree with 'Alawī-Mihr that conjectures can be 'better' or 'more complete' just as they can be 'poorer' or 'less complete'. They would say we must strive to get as close as we possibly can to the truth. Only when we have tried our best will we be deemed exculpable on the Day of Resurrection, i.e. we will have a valid excuse only if we had done our best and we had not

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blamed or punished" (p. 179). "Inculpativeness (*munajjiziyya*): The view of reason that a legal agent cannot be excused for acting contrary to a ruling of the lawgiver when he knows it with assurance" (p. 181).

<sup>48</sup> In the aforementioned work, Roy Mottahedeh explains this term as follows: "Indications (*amārat*) are arguments that are presumptive, but valid" (Al-Ṣadr, 2003, p. 182).

been able to refute the view we had adopted. God Himself has told us that He does not expect of people more than they are capable to offer.<sup>49</sup> The criterion for getting to the truth is no different in religious matters than it is in scientific ones. God, who is an objective Judge, only judges according to the arguments which are presented to Him. If the arguments are valid (in the sense which was explained above), then our excuse that we could do no better would be acceptable, otherwise not.

The standard of 'proof' in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which is a technology, is much lower than the standard of 'proof' in science/knowledge.<sup>50</sup> In the former, if the jurist (*faqīh*) exhausted all practical possibilities and concluded that the solution he is offering is the one which satisfies all the legal (*shar'ī*) criteria known to him, then he can claim (of course provisionally) that he has the required excuse. His proposed solution, assuming that he has exhausted all the possibilities to the best of his ability, remains valid as long as the situation in which the solution is to be applied remains the same. In practical issues such as Islamic law, pragmatic norms play a great role. But in the case of knowledge claims, pragmatic norms should not play any role at all. Here, the most stringent criteria of correspondence to reality, and not the best practical fix, should be applied.

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#### 4.3.2.4 Sayyid Bahā' al-Dīn Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī

This interview was conducted on 20 July 2017 at Dār al-Zahrā', an educational and cultural centre in Qum, Iran.

I asked Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī if he saw any issues with using the works of Biblical hermeneuticians for improving Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches. He replied no, he did not. In fact,

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<sup>49</sup> "Allah does not task a soul beyond its capacity" (Al-Baqarah 286).

<sup>50</sup> I have explained the critical rationalist view of technologies in 5.2.7.



he said, it is very good to learn from other traditions. He then quoted the Quran in support of his view:

So give good news to My servants  
who listen to the word and follow the best of it. They are the ones whom God has  
guided, and it is they who possess intellect.<sup>51</sup>

He explained that we can only follow the best of what is said if we listen to what is being said by others in the first place.

#### Comment

Critical rationalists would agree with Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī's response (see 3.4). Critical rationalism encourages openness to other possible methods and approaches. As Karl Popper famously put it, "I may be wrong and you may right, and by an effort we get nearer to the truth" (1994, p. 12; originally in Popper 1945).

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I showed Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī my classification. He commented that there were overlaps between 'literal' and 'rational endeavour'. For example, the exegesis *Kanz al-Daqā'iq* is both a literal and rational endeavour work. Every rational endeavour exegesis is also literal, but not vice versa; the relationship is one of 'partial inclusion' [as logicians would call it].

#### Comment

This was pointed out by the other two scholars as well. It was a valid criticism and one that I resolved to address.

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On the use of critical rationalism in the exegesis of the Qur'an, he said rationality is supported by the Qur'an. He again quoted some verses:

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Zumar 39:17-18.

So do you not apply reason?<sup>52</sup>

So do you not reflect?<sup>53</sup>

So do they not contemplate on the Qur'an?<sup>54</sup>

'*Aql*, he continued, is something that is common in all human beings, unlike traditions which are constantly disputed by Sunnis and Shias. But, the key question is 'Which '*aql*?' It must be '*aql* that has been purified:

It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error.<sup>55</sup>

'*Aql* is a compass that shows us the path; but, if it is imprisoned by carnal desires, then it leads us astray, just like a compass goes astray if a metal object is placed next to it.

#### Comment

I have critically discussed the traditional Shi'i and critical rationalist perspectives on '*aql* in 3.5. Here and later in the interview, *Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī* made important points about the impact of one's spirituality on understanding. I have discussed the critical rationalist perspective on how one's spirituality or moral attitude shows its effect in the 'context of discovery' (3.3 and 4.3.2.3).

At the time of this interview, I had not discussed the spiritual factor in my section on epistemology (3.3). This interview provided the inspiration to add the discussion there. Interestingly, some authors on Biblical exegesis talk about this as well. For instance, Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 27-29) examine spiritual factors in the perceptual process. The

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<sup>52</sup> Al-Baqarah 2:44.

<sup>53</sup> Al-An'ām 6:50.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Nisā' 4:82.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Jumu'ah 62:2.

essence of what they write in that part of their work could just as well have been written in the context of Qur’anic hermeneutics.

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On the critical rationalist view that all observations are theory-laden, Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī agreed. Even the word ‘Allah’, he said, is understood differently by Muslims. Therefore, it is essential that we understand words as they were understood at the time of revelation – what the Qur’an terms “the language of his people” (*bi-lisāni qawmihi*):

We did not send any apostle except with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our messages] clear to them.<sup>56</sup>

#### Comment

Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī pointed to an important hermeneutical principle, i.e. to find out the meaning of words as they were understood when they were originally communicated. I have subsequently added this point to Step 3 of the step-by-step guide (5.3.5.1).

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Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī asserted that we must begin our investigation by finding out the meaning of words. I asked him if it were possible for one to put aside their knowledge and understand objectively? He replied that knowledge influences our interpretations but ultimately it is the individual who makes the final choice, not their knowledge. The individual governs knowledge, not vice versa. This is even more the case when one’s *‘aql* has been purified.

Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī then told me about an incident that took place in the life of ‘Allāmah Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan, commonly known as ‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī’ (d. 726 AH). In Islamic jurisprudence, there is a discussion known as ‘what is scooped out of a well’ (*manzūḥāt al-bi’r*). This discussion concerns how many scoops of water must be taken out of a well to make the water pure again after something has fallen into the well and made the water impure. The number of scoops varies according to what falls in. For example, if a human being were to fall into a well and die there, thus rendering the water impure, the number of scoops would be more

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<sup>56</sup> Ibrāhīm 14:4.

than if, say, a sheep was to fall in and die there, and so on. ‘Allāmah happened to own a well. When he wanted to issue his fatwa on the subject, he first made arrangements for his well to be blocked up so that it could not be used. This was because he wanted to issue his fatwa with complete sincerity and not be influenced by the fact that he owned a well, for then he may have made his fatwa more favourable to well owners.

Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī went on to explain that people who are like this never say the meaning of a verse is *definitely* this or that; rather, they say it is *possible* it means this or that. The Qur’an tells us that it is guidance for four groups of people: at the basic level, it is guidance “for mankind”;<sup>57</sup> at a higher level, it is guidance “for Muslims”;<sup>58</sup> then, at a higher level still, “for believers”;<sup>59</sup> and at the highest level, “for the Godway.”<sup>60</sup> This tells us that the level of our purity determines how much guidance from the Qur’an we a) receive; and b) accept. He quoted other verses as well to corroborate his point:

God enhances in guidance those who accept guidance.<sup>61</sup>

As for those who accept guidance, He enhances their guidance and invests them with their Godwariness.<sup>62</sup>

Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī went on to say that the Qur’an talks about people who, even though they were present at the time of Prophet Muhammad, did not understand the revelation he had brought because they did not have faith:

Indeed, God is not ashamed to draw a parable whether it is that of a gnat or something above it. As for those who have faith, they know it is the truth from their Lord; and as for the faithless, they say, ‘What did God mean by this parable?’<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Al-Baqarah 2:185.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Naḥl 16:89.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Naml 27:77.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Baqarah 2:2.

<sup>61</sup> Maryam 19:76.

<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad 47:17.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Baqarah 2:26.

Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī also quoted a famous tradition in which the sixth Imam of the Twelver Shi'as, Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, is reported to have said the following to someone called 'Unwān al-Baṣrī, who had come to him seeking knowledge:

Knowledge is not acquired through [conventional] learning; rather, it is but a light which enters the heart of one whom God, Bounteous and Exalted is He, wishes to guide. So, if you want knowledge, then first seek in your heart true servitude, and seek knowledge by putting it into use, and seek understanding from God, [and if you do this] He will make you understand.<sup>64</sup>

Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī commented that Satan knew God well;<sup>65</sup> i.e. he had excellent 'conventional' knowledge about God. But crucially, he did not have purity.

Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī concluded by saying the Qur'an is alive. It responds to our needs. There are inner and outer ways of understanding it. The outer way is through lexicology, syntax, rhetoric etc. The inner way is through purity of the soul. The closer you are to the speaker, the more you will hear him or her.

### Comment

The interview with Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī was quite different to the previous ones. This was not totally unexpected; unlike the other two scholars I interviewed, Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī is not an author on exegetical methods and his educational background is grounded in classical seminary studies. His expertise is in the exegesis of the Qur'an, and I was particularly grateful to him for sharing his thoughts on the inner, spiritual path for understanding the Qur'an. I have subsequently refined 3.3 and the draft introduction to the step-by-step guide (5.3.2) to incorporate this.

Furthermore, I benefitted from his continual referencing of the Qur'an

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<sup>64</sup> Al-Majlisī (1403 AH (lunar)/1982, v. 1, pp. 224-226).

<sup>65</sup> "He [Satan] said, 'My Lord! Respite me till the day they will be resurrected.' Said He, 'You are indeed among the reprieved until the day of the known time.' He said, 'By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them'" (Ṣād 38:79-83). In this dialogue with God, Satan acknowledges the following: 1) God is his Lord; 2) there will be a day of resurrection; 3) God is Mighty; 4) God has special servants; 5) he will not be able to pervert God's special servants.

and Tradition; in my role as an imam, I advise people on spirituality and when I do, I try my best to use the Qur'an and Sunna as much as I can. Ḍiyā'ī-Raḍawī gave me new ideas and insights, which I have since used in my professional practice.

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#### 4.4 Classroom Presentations

The Objective I sought to achieve by means of this activity was:

6. *To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.*

To date I have taught the undergraduate module *Qur'anic Sciences and Approaches to Exegesis* at The Islamic College three times, and the Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches part of the postgraduate module, *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies*, once.<sup>66</sup> Earlier this year on the undergraduate course, I presented some of my research findings from this project to my class of eight students.

In my class, I introduced the critical rationalist approach over the course of two lessons. In the first, I explained some of the main tenets of critical rationalism and presented my new classification, which is based on a critical rationalist perspective of exegetical methods and approaches (5.2.7).<sup>67</sup> And in the second, I introduced the critical rationalist approach to understanding the Qur'an by first using the example in Paya's work of Prophet Abraham's quest to acquire knowledge about God (2018, pp. 61-62); and then, by going through the three ways by which the Qur'an helps us to solve problems and applying those ways to an example about resisting temptations (5.3.10.2).<sup>68</sup>

I asked my students to think of flaws in the arguments, to compare the new classification with the one in Riḍā'ī-İṣfihānī's textbook, and to consider which classification they preferred and why. In summary, the feedback I received was as follows:

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<sup>66</sup> Module codes HSC 117 and MI 403 respectively. *BA (Honours) Hawza Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020* and *MA Islamic Studies Student Handbook 2019 – 2020*.

<sup>67</sup> This lesson was on 21 February 2019.

<sup>68</sup> This lesson was on 28 February 2019.

- They had not heard of critical rationalism before.
- Most of the students (88%) said they preferred the new classification. The remainder were not sure.
- The reasons given by those who preferred the new classification came down to three things: it was based on stronger arguments; it was easier to understand; and it made more sense.
- I was asked where the ‘contextualist’ and ‘textualist’ approaches would fit in. We had discussed these approaches a week earlier in the context of feminist and traditional Shi’i approaches, but I had forgotten to include the contextualist and textualist approaches on my diagram.<sup>69</sup>
- Most of the students (75%) felt the critical rationalist approach was effective for solving problems. The remainder were unsure.
- From among those who felt it was an effective approach:
  - Some of them (33%) felt the first way (the Qur’an acts as a judge for assessing our conjectures) was tricky to understand.
  - Most of them (67%) said they could relate to the second and third ways (the Qur’an helps us to discover new ideas for solving our problems; and the Qur’an assists us to expand our knowledge base in new areas). They had experience of this happening to them.
  - All of them said they would use the approach.

The classroom experience was useful, but it was only a preliminary test. I knew I needed to subject my ideas to scrutiny by a larger and more academic audience. I shall say more about this in the next section.

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<sup>69</sup> I have since added them.

## 4.5 Conference Presentations

The Objectives I sought to achieve by means of this activity were:

1. *To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.*
2. *To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.*
3. *To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.*
4. *To present an alternative classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.*
6. *To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.*

### 4.5.1 Paper: 'Is *tafsīr 'aqlī* a method in Qur'anic exegesis?' (Objectives 4 and 6)

Naturally for a conference paper, I had to be very selective about which area of my research project to present on. I decided to focus on the classification part and the role of *'aql* in Qur'anic interpretation. This, I felt, would be more appropriate for an academic conference, and it would push me to thoroughly explore all the potential flaws and defects in my new classification. I took on board the feedback from my students, strengthened the research I had done already, and brought in some new ideas. I presented my research at the Fifth Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in April 2019 at The Islamic College in London.<sup>70</sup>

In this paper, I compared and critically assessed the perspectives of traditional Shi'i scholars of the Qur'an and critical rationalists on the role of *'aql* in Qur'anic exegesis. I have since expanded and refined my research on this area (3.5).

An important part of this paper was the inclusion and analysis of the opinions that were expressed to me by the scholars I interviewed in Qum. These and other traditional Shi'i

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<sup>70</sup> For more information about this conference, see <https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/publications/shiistudies/fifth-shii-conference/>.



scholars of the Qur'an consider *'aql* a valid 'source' like the Qur'an and Sunna and therefore assume it possesses religious authority (*ḥujjiyah shar'iyyah*). In their opinion, an exegetical method is the use of an authoritative source in exegesis, and therefore interpretive reasoning (*tafsīr 'aqlī*) is a valid and important method in Qur'anic exegesis. These scholars identify different types of *'aql* and argue that it is the 'demonstrative *'aql*' (*'aql-i burhānī*) that has this status, not the 'lantern *'aql*' (*'aql-i miṣbāḥ*).

I then explained the very different perspective of critical rationalists. They maintain that *'aql* refers to two distinct cognitive faculties, which are represented in English by two different terms: *'aql* in the meaning of 'reason' distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones; and *'aql* in the meaning of 'intellect' seeks to understand reality by formulating conjectures (Paya, 2019, p. 223). The difference between the knowledge-claims made by *'aql* and those of the Qur'an and authentic Sunna is that while the former are assumed to be fallible, the latter are deemed to be true and infallible. The traditional scholars, critical rationalists conjecturally suggest, have mistakenly ascribed a capacity to *'aql* which it does not possess; i.e. they have assumed it to be a source for actual truths.

Finally, I examined the effects these differences have on the way exegetical works are classified and the implications this has on the study of Qur'anic exegetical methods today.

The research and findings of this paper were instrumental in shaping my final classification model on exegetical methods and approaches, which I discuss fully in 5.2.6. The paper drew on and developed several different things I had done during my DProf, especially the Qum interviews, my previous papers, the ICL 4541 *Planning a Practitioner Research Programme* module, and the ICL 4000 *Methods and Perspectives in Islamic Studies* module.

Following my presentation, members of the audience had the opportunity to ask questions. Several very good questions were asked, and some of them have led me to make improvements to my research project. In particular:

- A question about how a 'source' could be considered a 'method' made me realise I needed to formulate my thoughts about this more clearly; I have subsequently revised and expanded the relevant section of this report (3.5.2).
- A question / comment about the suitability of critical rationalism for interpreting the Qur'an made me revisit and eventually strengthen my arguments in 3.7.4.

- A question on the epistemologically different perspectives held by traditional Shi'i and critical rationalist scholars on the nature and role of 'aql led me to search deeper into these differences and consequently improve 3.5 and 5.2.8.

In the coffee break that followed my presentation and during the lunch break, I received further feedback on my paper. The overall feeling was that my research was a new and important contribution to the field of Qur'anic exegesis. None of the feedback I received suggested there were any major flaws in my research.

In general, I have found the process of preparing and presenting conference papers on important areas of my research project to be very productive. It helps me to explore diverse opinions, think deeply about the issues, organise my thoughts, and find out about the defects in my research. For these reasons, I have presented conference papers at various other stages of my project as well, as I shall explain in the following sections.

#### 4.5.2 Paper: 'A comparative study of Biblical and Qur'anic methods of exegesis' (Objectives 1 and 2)

This paper was presented at the Fourth Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in May 2018 at The Islamic College in London.<sup>71</sup>

I wrote this paper at a time when I was heavily engaged in learning about the main methods and approaches used in Biblical exegesis. My paper examined a diverse range of ideas from some of the leading authors in the field of Biblical hermeneutics (I elaborate on these in 5.2.2). For instance, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard (2004) critically discuss a wide range of methods under the following headings: recent literary and social-scientific approaches, general rules of hermeneutics (prose and poetry are dealt with separately), genres of the old and new testament, and application. Porter and Stovell (2012) focus their analysis on five different approaches, namely historical-critical/grammatical, literary/postmodern, philosophical/theological, redemptive-historical, and canonical. Virkler

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<sup>71</sup> For more information about this conference, see <https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/publications/shiistudies/fourth-conference/>.

and Ayayo (2007) concentrate their hermeneutical approach on historical-cultural and contextual analysis, lexical-syntactical analysis, theological analysis, genre analysis, and application. And Gorman (2010) argues that there are three basic approaches to exegesis today: synchronic, diachronic, and existential.

I then examined Qur'anic exegetical methods, particularly those presented in the works of prominent Shi'i scholars such as Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, Ma'rifat, and Bābā'ī. I went on to assess whether existing methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis could be improved by drawing upon Biblical models, and concluded by saying there was a need to do three things:

1. Rethink the definition of exegetical 'methods' and make the distinction between 'methods', 'sources', and 'approaches' clearer.
2. Review the classification of these methods.
3. Design step-by-step guidelines on understanding the Qur'an.

Since that time, my research project has gone on to address all three issues.

During the question and answer session that followed my presentation, a Christian priest in the audience asked a question about using Biblical studies in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. We continued our conversation during the lunch break for a short while. An important idea that came from our dialogue was the need to highlight the fact that a large part of my research focuses on universal knowledge claims about hermeneutical methods and approaches, which, by their very nature, are neither Islamic nor non-Islamic. I added this point in 3.7.6.

#### 4.5.3 Paper: 'Classifications of methods used in Qur'anic exegesis' (Objectives 3 and 4)

This paper was presented at the Third Annual Conference on Shi'i Studies in May 2017 at The Islamic College in London.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For more information about this conference, see <https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/publications/shiistudies/third-conference/>.

In this paper, I first explained how in the last twenty years, a large number of works by Shi'ī scholars have been published on the methods used in Qur'anic exegesis. However, the approaches taken by the authors to categorise exegetical works according to these methods vary considerably, as does the terminology used to refer to the different categories. For example, exegetical 'foundations', 'methods', 'methodologies', 'schools', 'orientations', 'styles', and 'approaches' are all used. Furthermore, there is little or no agreement on the definition of these terms and how they apply to the practice of Qur'anic exegesis. In my paper, I argued that the variety of classifications of exegetical methods, and the absence of a consistent terminology to label the different categories, have resulted in a confusing state of affairs.

I then charted the historical development of exegetical methods and briefly examined the key factors that led to their formation. Following brief descriptions of the most commonly used methods in Qur'anic exegesis, I discussed the importance of classifications of exegetical works. I followed this with a critical evaluation of the classifications adopted by four leading Shi'ī authors in the field, namely Riḍāyī-İşfahānī, Zanjānī, Ma'rifat, and Bābā'ī. I concluded by presenting an alternative classification of methods used in the exegesis of the Qur'an.

The research that went into this paper laid the foundation for all my future investigations into the classification of exegetical methods and approaches. The classification I presented to the eminent scholars in my interviews with them (4.3.2) came from this paper.

#### 4.5.4 Paper: 'A Comparative Study of Islamic Feminist and Traditional Shi'ī Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis' (Objective 1 – Qur'an part only).

This paper was presented at the Second Annual Conference on Shi'ī Studies in May 2016 at The Islamic College in London.<sup>73</sup>

In 3.6.4, I explained how I came to study Qur'anic hermeneutics and Islamic feminist perspectives on al-Nisā' 4:34. From an early stage, it became clear to me that an in-depth understanding of Islamic feminist exegetical approaches would not be possible without

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<sup>73</sup> For more information about this conference, see <https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/publications/shiistudies/second-conference/>.

examining the ideas of contextualists such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and how these ideas have influenced modern Islamic feminist scholars of the Qur'an.

In this paper, I first examined the main concepts of contextualist theory. I then the discussed the Islamic feminist approach with particular reference to two fundamental Islamic feminist exegetical methods: the historical contextualisation method and the intratextual method. This was followed by a critique of contextualist theory in general. The paper next turned its focus to textualist theory; here, I reviewed traditional Shi'i Uṣūlī thought. Finally, I presented a comparative analysis of the Islamic feminist and traditional Shi'i approaches within the framework of the 'mega-method', as I had called it at that time. I have since then given it a simpler name: the 'comprehensive' method.

Throughout the paper, I used al-Nisā' 4:34 as the common reference point for illustrating how the methods and approaches are applied by their advocates.

I found that both groups of scholars use the intratextual method extensively, and although the social and historical context is important to both, the use of the historical contextualisation method is only used by feminist writers in the interpretation of al-Nisā' 4:34. Linguistic, juristic, and theological approaches feature in the works of both. In Shi'i exegetical works, the tradition-based approach (at that time, I called it 'exegesis by the Sunna') is used more extensively and consistently.

The table below summarises the methods and approaches used by both groups of scholars.

Method/Approach	Traditional Shi'i	Feminist	Notes
Intratextual method	✓	✓	Used extensively by both
Historical contextualisation	✗	✓	Social and historical context important to both
Linguistic	✓	✓	
Juristic	✓	✓	

Theological	✓	✓	
Tradition-based	✓	✓	Used more extensively and consistently in Shi'i exegetical works

As I pointed out in 3.6.3.1, this study proved to be hugely beneficial for my research project, and I have drawn on my findings from this paper at various places in this report.

## 4.6 Lectures and Questionnaire Surveys

The Objective I sought to achieve by means of this activity was:

8. *To present the guide in a series of lectures and conduct a questionnaire survey on each step.*

### 4.6.1 Background

I conducted 7 surveys between 1-6 September 2019. I received a total of 60 responses. The surveys were on the step-by-step guide to understanding and using the Qur'an, which I presented at the Ahl Albait Islamic Centre in Sydney, Australia over the course of 7 lectures. Each lecture covered one of the 8 steps in the guide, except for lecture 6, which covered both Steps 6 and 7. At the beginning of each survey, I provided a summary of what was covered in the lecture as a reminder for those who needed it.

I created and managed all the surveys electronically using a paid subscription with SurveyMonkey. The links to the surveys were sent out by the Lead Organiser via WhatsApp to selected members of the audience after getting their consent. To facilitate the sending out of links after each lecture, the Lead Organiser created a WhatsApp group for the male respondents, and his sister did the same for the female respondents. A total of 25 men and 15 women were in these groups. I had asked the organisers to select a diverse range of

educated adults who would reflect a typical cross-section of the educated adult Shi'i Muslim community; in other words, the type of people whom I would be addressing with my book.

The organisers estimated that on average between 120 - 200 men, and 80 - 100 women, attended each lecture. As is normal with Muharram programmes, the size of the audience became larger the closer we got to the tenth of Muharram.<sup>74</sup>

I began each survey with a short message of thanks (copied below) and added an explanation about the aims and benefits of the survey as well as links to the previous surveys in case they had not done them. I mentioned all of this in some of my lectures as well, adding that all responses would be anonymous and confidential.

Before sending out the link to each survey, the Lead Organiser explained the above points in his message as well (copied below).

#### 4.6.2 Lead Organiser's message to those selected to do the survey

Salam. Our guest speaker this Muharram, Shaykh Mohammed Ali Ismail, is doing his doctorate in the field of Tafsir. He has requested that you complete this quick survey (it only takes a few minutes) on last night's lecture. This will be very helpful for him and will form part of his research findings. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Please try to complete this today. There will be a survey for each lecture. Thanks.

[link to the survey]

#### 4.6.3 My message at the beginning of each survey

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<sup>74</sup> Muḥarram is the first month in the Islamic calendar. The tenth of Muharram is known as 'Ashura'. On this day in the year 61 AH, Imam Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, and approximately 72 others from his family and companions, were mercilessly killed on the plains of Karbala, Iraq. The massacre is commemorated by Shi'i Muslims worldwide, most notably during the first ten days of Muḥarram. Attendance in centres during these ten days is among the highest in the year. This was my eleventh consecutive year of delivering lectures in Muḥarram.

Thank you for agreeing to do this survey! I'm collecting feedback on the 'Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding and Using the Qur'an', which I'm presenting at the Ahl Albait Islamic Centre this Muharram. Your feedback will really help me shape and improve the model further.

The 'Comment' box after the multiple-choice options can be left blank, but if you could write a few words in them, I would be very grateful!

In case you haven't done the previous surveys and would like to, here are the links to them:

[links to all the previous surveys]

Mohammed Ali Ismail

## 4.7 Questionnaire Survey Analysis

I have presented my analysis in two parts:

- ❖ Analysis of Individual Surveys
- ❖ Consolidated Analysis of Surveys

I shall present my conclusions in 6.9.1.



## 4.7.1 Analysis of Individual Surveys

### Notes:

1. The full results of all seven individual surveys can be found in Appendix D.
2. I have not corrected the spelling or grammatical errors in the comments provided by the respondents in order to maintain the integrity of the data.

### 4.7.1.1 Survey on Step 1

#### 4.7.1.1.1 *Text at the beginning of the survey*

Last night, we looked at ‘Step 1: Gathering general information about the text we wish to understand’. In this step, I suggested we gather three types of information:

1. The names of the chapter we wish to understand and the reason behind those names
2. The number of verses in the chapter
3. The status and rewards of the text we are seeking to understand

#### 4.7.1.1.2 *Analysis of Responses*

##### Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 1?

82% of the respondents said they liked it, with most of them (64%) saying they liked it a lot. One of the respondents commented: “The shiek have spoken about surah fatiha but how do we go about the second surah bakara.” This person may have wanted to know how Step 1 could be applied to Sūrat al-Baqarah *specifically*, or how Step 1 could be applied to the longer chapters of the Qur’an *such as* Sūrat al-Baqarah (which is the longest chapter in the Qur’an). I believe the latter to be more probable as it would not be reasonable to want a specific chapter to be used as an example in the lecture, whereas it would be reasonable to want to know how the step could be applied to one of the many lengthy chapters of the Qur’an. In

any case, I will take this feedback on board and will add a few lines in the Introduction to the model explaining that the methods in Step 1, and indeed all the steps, can be applied to *all* chapters of the Qur'an, whatever their length.

The other comment made under this question was "I'd like it to be more about ashura and less about the Quran E.G. the stories of the imam and there lessons". This comment, in fact, alluded to one of the biggest worries I had about the series; that is, the audience may not warm to the idea of a series of lectures on Qur'anic interpretation during the month of Muḥarram. After the lecture, a man came to me and expressed the same sentiment. When he did so, the Lead Organiser of the programme happened to be standing nearby and overheard what he said. The next morning, I spoke to the Lead Organiser about the man's comments. He told me that I should "take them with a pinch of salt" as he is notoriously difficult to please and critical about almost everything the centre does! He went on to say my topic was good and I should continue with it, although I may want to include some points and examples that would be spiritually uplifting and practical to implement in daily life as well, just so that there is something there for everyone. I thought this was sound advice and implemented his suggestion as much as I could in the remaining lectures.

The opinion expressed by that man and by the respondent quoted above are not uncommon; on average, I come across this type of mind set two or three times on every trip. They serve to highlight some of the real impediments in promoting a rationally refined approach to religious teachings. The whole movement of Imam Ḥusayn was, in essence, nothing but a practical lesson in upholding the core values and messages of the Qur'an, which was precisely what my lectures sought to convey. The programme at the centre where I was delivering these lectures was the first of its kind; previously, the centre had only held traditional Arabic lectures in Muḥarram. It was not surprising, therefore, that some members of the audience expected more of the same, only in the English language. I was hopeful that by making the amendments mentioned earlier, I would be able to continue with the original plan while accommodating, to some extent, members of audience who had such expectations.

## Q2 How important is Step 1?

73% felt Step 1 was important. One of the respondents commented: "I'm not sure how much the number of verses can help us to better understand the holy Quran". Another person

expressed the same thought to me in person. This got me thinking about the relevance of the discussion on the number of verses. Today, there is little or no disagreement among scholars of the Qur'an about the number of verses, and it does not play a significant role in understanding the Qur'an. I had included the discussion because traditionally, exegetes of the Qur'an mention the number of verses at the start of their exegesis of each chapter. I have decided that insofar as the number of verses gives the reader an idea of the size of the chapter in question, it is worth mentioning; but anything more than that is not required.

#### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 1?

86% felt that the material was unique. This corroborated my conjecture that the material I had prepared had not been heard by the English-speaking Shi'i community before, and that I was making a new contribution to the field of interpreting and using the Qur'an.

#### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 1?

95% said it was realistic to achieve Step 1. One person commented: "Some surahs are easier than others." While this is an obvious point, I believe it is worth mentioning in the Introduction to the model just to make it absolutely clear that the model will be easier to use with some verses and chapters than others.

#### Q5 For Step 1, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

Most of the respondents (59%) felt I provided the right amount of information. One person said: "Majority of the audience is children and struggle to understand". According to the organisers and my own observations, the majority were adults and youths, not children, although some children were also present. With any lecture series, there is always an issue when a separate children's programme is not held while the main lecture is going on. The Lead Organiser told me that their centre does not arrange separate programmes for children and that I should not worry about it as such lectures are always aimed at youths and adults, not children. Nevertheless, we both felt it would be better to mention a few things that would be beneficial for the small number of children in the audience as well, and so to this end, from the next lecture onwards, I tried to include some stories and simpler examples.

#### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 1?

91% said it was likely they would use Step 1. This was very heartening as the aim of my project is to provide a practical guide to help members of the community understand and use the Qur'an more.

#### Q7 How clear was Step 1 for you?

The highest percentage of responses (41%) gave this question the full 5 stars, and 32% gave it 4 stars. This was also encouraging as I had been a little apprehensive about the topic being too complex to understand.

#### Q8 What did you like the most about Step 1?

From the comments made under this question, I have derived the following points:

- Step 1 is simple and effective.
- Step 1 is important for understanding the Qur'an.
- Knowing the names of chapters and the reason behind those names act as an introduction to understanding the content of the chapters.
- The example of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah worked well.

I was delighted to have been given a new insight by one of the respondents who commented: "Giving each part of Quran a purpose rather than the whole Quran as a book". I will incorporate this comment in my work to explain how Step 1 helps one to understand the purpose of each chapter, which in turn helps to understand how that chapter contributes to the overall purpose of the Qur'an. In general, Muslims know that the Qur'an's overarching purpose is to guide humankind; but, what is less well known to them is how each chapter contributes towards that purpose.

#### Q9 What did you like the least about Step 1?

The main learning for me from the comments here is that for the purposes of this model, the part on the number of verses is not as important as I had originally thought, as mentioned earlier.

#### Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 1?

The main suggestion that came through under this question was for more examples to be given. Naturally, there is only so much that can be presented in a 45-minute lecture. But, as the suggestions in this section indicate, there is a need to show how the parts of Step 1 are applied to more verses and chapters, and so I will address this in the book version of the guide.

#### Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Nearly everyone (95%) said the model was unique.

The following comment was particularly encouraging: “It is essential and if a framework or guideline system created, it will be very useful for all Muslim communities, Shia Sunni, young or old, it can be taught in schools, and it is very good to see this process being worked on and developed.”

#### Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Nearly everyone (95%) said the model was relevant. This was very pleasing to know, as the purpose of the model is to help members of the Muslim community understand the Qur'an better. One of the respondents commented: “It's so great to see someone has finally made a difference in their lectures during Muharram. This time of the year people tend to attend mosques a lot more and understanding the Quran is the best way to learn about our religion better and be able to apply it in to our daily lives. Thank you for your great work”. This countered the view I quoted earlier under Q1 (“I'd like it to be more about ashura and less about the Quran E.G. the stories of the imam and there lessons”) and corroborated the Lead Organiser's opinion that it was a good topic for Muḥarram.

## 4.7.1.2 Survey on Step 2

### 4.7.1.2.1 Text at the beginning of the survey

My second lecture was on ‘Step 2: Knowing the circumstances in which the text was revealed’ – i.e. finding out the historical, socio-political, and cultural situation when the text was revealed.

We examined:

1. Why this step is important
2. How the *sabab al-nuzūl* (Reason for Revelation) and the *sha’n al-nuzūl* (Occasion of Revelation) can help us understand the circumstances in which the Qur’anic text was revealed
3. How the principle of *’jary wa taṭbīq’* (Flow and Application) can help us apply the words of the Qur’an to new instances

### 4.7.1.2.2 Analysis of Responses

Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 2?

Everyone said they liked it. The majority (88%) said they liked it a lot.

Q2 How important is Step 2?

Everyone felt Step 2 was important, and the majority of those (75%) said it was extremely important. This was summed up by the comment I received under this question: “Context and insight into revelation maybe allow for avenues to strengthen spirituality and understanding or the beauty of Islam and its divinity”.

Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 2?

38% said the material was very unique, 50% somewhat unique, and 13% not so unique. I can see why the scores here were not as high as I would have liked them to be: the examples I

used are very well known in the community. I will look into bringing in some examples that are not so well known.

#### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 2?

Everyone felt it was realistic to achieve Step 2, with half of them saying it was very realistic. The comment I received here was: “Maybe difficult for some people to navigate and find reliable sources for this information”. In fact, there are plenty of resources on this area, but I realised that I had not said anything about this matter. This was an oversight which I resolved to rectify. The matter is especially important as I am aiming to create a *practical* step-by-step guide.

#### Q5 For Step 2, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

The vast majority of respondents (88%) said I provided the right amount of information.

#### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 2?

Very encouragingly, all of the respondents said it was extremely or very likely that they would use this step.

#### Q7 How clear was Step 2?

All the respondents gave this question either 4 or 5 stars.

#### Q8 How valuable is it to know the 'Reason for Revelation' and the 'Occasion of Revelation'?

All the respondents said it was either extremely or very valuable.

#### Q9 How useful is the 'Principle of Flow and Application'?

Everyone felt the principle was useful, with half of them saying it was extremely useful.

#### Q10 What did you like the most about Step 2?

#### Q11 What did you like the least about Step 2?

Two respondents provided diametrically opposing comments: one said there was too much information about the principle of flow and application, whereas the other said there was not

enough. Based on the evidence of Q5 where the vast majority of respondents (88%) said I provided the right amount of information, I believe more information is not required if I am presenting this in the form of a lecture, but for the book version I will provide further examples.

Q12 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 2?

One person commented: "Giving charity while in rukoo. It almost seems too simple because we already have a brief background on this particular subject. How practical/easy is it to arrive at a deep understanding using these steps when you come across any random ayah? Maybe a live demo of this whilst applying these steps would be great." With regard to the first part of the comment, I agree that the example is well known. As I wrote under Q3, I will look into changing this. As for the second part, I took this on board in the fourth lecture where I demonstrated how the first three steps are applied.

Q13 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Everyone felt the model was very or somewhat unique.

Q14 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Everyone said the model was extremely or very relevant to them.

#### 4.7.1.3 Survey on Step 3

##### 4.7.1.3.1 Text at the beginning of the survey

My third lecture was on 'Step 3: Finding out the meaning of words'.

We examined:

1. Why this step is important
2. The role morphology plays in helping us to understand the meaning of the words (e.g. '*raḥmān*' and '*raḥīm*')



3. How knowledge of homonyms helps us to understand the Qur'anic text better (e.g. 'jah')
4. How etymology enhances our understanding of the words (e.g. 'munāfiq' and 'aq')

#### 4.7.1.3.2 Analysis of Responses

##### Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 3?

Everyone liked it, with more than half of the respondents (57%) saying they liked it a lot.

##### Q2 How important is Step 3?

Everyone felt the step was important, with more than half of them (57%) saying it was extremely important.

##### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 3?

43% said the material was very unique, but an equal number said it was not so unique. According to the verbal feedback I got about the homonyms example I used, it was something they had not heard before. I can understand, however, that the morphology example would not have been so unique for many, especially as the *basmalah* occupies a prominent place in the Qur'an and is recited all the time by Muslims. I will therefore seek to either replace it with a different example or add another example alongside it to illustrate the importance of morphology.

##### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 3?

43% said it was very realistic to achieve Step 3, and an equal number said it was somewhat realistic. One of the respondents commented: "Rather than being only somewhat realistic, it really just depends on the individual. As someone who speaks more English and broken dari, it becomes difficult to truly understand certain words. It's is realistic, however takes a lot more time and effort in understanding the Arabic language."

This is understandable; by its nature, Step 3 is about the original language of the Qur'an, and those who do not know Arabic will find the step difficult. Having reflected on this matter, I have decided on the following plan of action: firstly, I will explain from the outset that this step is about the Arabic language and those who know Arabic will find it easier to achieve. But, I will also explain that although this step facilitates a greater depth of understanding about the words used in the Qur'an, one should not feel that if they do not know Arabic they cannot use the step at all; there are resources in English that provide information about the words and Step 3 can be achieved by referring to them. And finally, I will introduce some useful English resources.

Q5 For Step 3, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

71% said I provided the right amount of information.

Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 3?

A minority (14 %) did not think it likely they would use it. Comment: "Again only somewhat likely due to my lack of understanding arabic." I am hopeful that by putting into action the plan outlined under Q4, this issue will be resolved.

Q7 How clear was Step 3?

The highest (43%) score for this question was the full 5 stars, 29% gave it 4 stars, and 29% 3 stars.

Q8 How important is the role played by morphology when it comes to understanding the meaning of words?

Everyone felt it was important. More than half of those (57%) felt it was very important.

Q9 How helpful is it to know the meaning of homonyms in the Qur'anic text?

Everyone felt it was helpful. Most of them (71%) expressed it was extremely helpful.

Q10 How much does etymology enhance our understanding of the meaning of words?

Only a minority (14%) felt it does not enhance it much.

Q11 What did you like the most about Step 3?

'Understanding the Qur'anic text' and the 'explanation of homonyms' were the two comments stated here.

Q12 What did you like the least about Step 3?

One person commented: "While it's obvious and can't be helped, the complete understanding of the Arabic language is necessary for further understanding. This makes it much more difficult for people who don't have this skill." I explained under Q4 how I plan to address this issue and assist those who do not know Arabic.

Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 3?

Based on the responses under this question, I will add a few more examples.

Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Most (86%) felt the model was unique.

Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

The majority (83%) felt the model was relevant.

#### 4.7.1.4 Survey on the Application of Steps 1-3, and on Step 4

##### 4.7.1.4.1 Text at the beginning of the survey

The fourth lecture was on 'The Application of Steps 1-3, and Step 4'.

We examined:

1. Whether we can still benefit from the Qur'an if we miss out some or even all the steps in this model

2. As an example, how we can better understand and derive spiritual guidance if we were to apply the model to Al-Anbiya: 87
3. What Step 4 is and how it enhances our understanding of the Qur'anic text

#### *4.7.1.4.2 Analysis of Responses*

Q1 Overall, how much did you like the application of Steps 1-3?

Everyone liked it, with two-thirds of the respondents (67%) saying they liked it a lot.

Q2 Overall, how much do you like Step 4?

All respondents said they liked Step 4 a lot.

Q3 How important is Step 4?

Everyone felt the step was important, with two-thirds (67%) saying it is extremely important.

Q4 How unique was the material presented in Step 4?

Two-thirds (67%) felt the material was somewhat unique, and the other third felt it was very unique.

Q5 How realistic is it to achieve Step 4?

All the respondents felt it was realistic to achieve Step 4.

Q6 For Step 4, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

There was an even distribution of responses here across the three choices.

Q7 How likely is it that you would use Step 4?

Everyone said that it was very likely they would use Step 4.

Q8 How clear was the application of Steps 1-3?

This received 4 stars from all the respondents.

Q9 How clear was Step 4?

Two-thirds (67%) gave it 4 stars, and the other third 5 stars.

Q10 How important is Arabic Syntax and Arabic Rhetoric when it comes to understanding the Qur'anic text?

Everyone felt it was important, with two-thirds (67%) saying it was very important and the other third saying it was extremely important.

Q11 What did you like the most about the lecture?

Q12 What did you like the least about the lecture?

I was unable to discern anything conclusive from the comments here.

Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 4?

There was a suggestion for more verses and examples, which I will take on board.

Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

All the respondents felt the model was unique. Two-thirds (67%) said it was very unique and the other third said it was extremely unique.

Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

As above, everyone felt the model was relevant, with two-thirds (67%) saying it was very relevant and the other third saying it was extremely relevant.

#### 4.7.1.5 Survey on Step 5

##### *4.7.1.5.1 Text at the beginning of the survey*

This lecture examined 'Step 5: Investigating the structure of the text'.

We looked at:

1. What Step 5 is and why it's important
2. How Step 5 may be applied to a chapter
3. How Step 5 may be applied to some verses
4. How Step 5 may be applied to a verse

#### *4.7.1.5.2 Analysis of Responses*

##### Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 5?

Most of the respondents (67%) said they liked it a lot. The rest were divided between liking it a little and neither liking nor disliking it.

##### Q2 How important is Step 5?

Everyone felt Step 5 was important, with one-third (33%) saying it was very important and two-thirds saying it was extremely important.

##### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 5?

Only a minority (17%) felt the material was not so unique.

##### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 5?

Most of the respondents felt it was realistic to achieve Step 5. One person felt it was not so realistic. He commented: "This aspect is quite academic and really only practical for speakers of Arabic." Having reviewed the lecture, I do not think this respondent makes a valid point, as knowledge of Arabic is not required to successfully complete this step; using a translation of the Qur'an would suffice.

##### Q5 For Step 5, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

The vast majority (83%) felt I provided the right amount of information.

##### Q6 How clear was Step 5?

Everyone gave this question either 5 (67%) or 4 (33%) stars.

Q7 What did you like the most about Step 5?

The examples I used seem to have been well received.

Q8 What did you like the least about Step 5?

Q9 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 5?

No constructive comments were made here.

Q10 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Only a minority (14%) felt the model was not so unique.

Q11 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

All the respondents felt the model was relevant.

#### 4.7.1.6 Survey on Steps 6 and 7

##### *Text at the beginning of the survey*

In my sixth lecture, I covered 'Step 6: Evaluation of Opinions', and 'Step 7: Examination of Traditions'.

We examined:

1. What Step 6 is and why it is important
2. How Step 6 may help us better understand verses that talk about when the Qur'an was revealed
3. What Step 7 is and why it is important
4. How Step 7 may help us better understand how Prophet Jesus describes himself in Maryam 19:31

## *Analysis of Responses*

Q1 Overall, how much did you like Step 6?

All the respondents said they liked it.

Q2 How important is Step 6?

All the respondents felt Step 6 was important.

Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 6?

The majority felt the material was unique. 25% felt it was not so unique. Unfortunately, no comments were left, and so it is not possible to know what it was that this minority had heard or knew already.

Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 6?

Everyone felt it was realistic to achieve Step 6.

Q5 For Step 6, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

Everyone said I provided the right amount of information.

Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 6?

All the respondents felt it was likely that they would use Step 6.

Q7 How clear was Step 6?

Everyone scored this 4 stars.

Q8 Overall, how much did you like Step 7?

Everyone liked it.

Q9 How important is Step 7?

Everyone felt Step 7 was important.



Q10 How unique was the material presented in Step 7?

Everyone felt the material was unique.

Q11 How realistic is it to achieve Step 7?

Everyone felt it was realistic to achieve Step 7.

Q12 For Step 7, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

Two-thirds said I provided the right amount of information. The other third said I provided too little.

Q13 How likely is it that you would use Step 7?

Everyone felt it was likely they would use Step 7.

Q14 How clear was Step 7?

Everyone gave this 4 stars.

Q15 What did you like the most about the lecture?

One respondent encouragingly commented: "The information was delivered clearly and articulately with relevant examples."

Q16 What did you like the least about the lecture?

As mentioned earlier, one of the ways I strived to keep the younger members of the audience engaged was to present a story with a morale at the end of the lecture. A useful suggestion received here was that I should blend in the story with the rest of the lecture so that the transition between the main part of the lecture and the story is smooth.

Q17 What suggestions do you have for improving Steps 6 and 7?

Nothing constructive was suggested here.

Q18 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Everyone felt the model was unique.

Q19 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Everyone felt the model was relevant.

#### 4.7.1.7 Survey on Step 8

*Text at the beginning of the survey*

The final lecture on the Step-by-Step Model was on 'Step 8: Deriving points and messages'.

We discussed:

1. What the eighth and final step is and why it is important
2. How Step 8 may help us derive lessons on being grateful from the story of Prophet Solomon and the ant

*Analysis of Responses*

Q1 Overall, how much did you like Step 8?

Everyone liked Step 8.

Q2 How important is Step 8?

78% said the step was extremely important. The rest said it was very important.

Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 8?

Only a minority (11%) felt the material was not so unique.

Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 8?

Everyone felt it was realistic to achieve Step 8.

Q5 How effectively were the lessons on gratitude derived from the story of Prophet Sulayman and the ant?

All the respondents felt this was done effectively.

Q6 For Step 8, did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?

Only a minority (13%) felt I provided too little information. The rest said I provided the right amount.

Q7 How clear was Step 8?

Everyone gave this either 5 stars (71%) or 4 stars (29%).

Q8 What did you like the most about Step 8?

It appears from the responses here that the examples were well liked.

Q9 What did you like the least about Step 8?

No comments were made here.

Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 8?

One person suggested I give more information on how to combat *riyā'* (ostentatiousness). I will strive to do this.

Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Everyone felt the model was unique.

Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Everyone felt the model was relevant. One person encouragingly commented: "Something that is definitely needed and lacking within our community."

Q13 Overall, how can the Step-by-Step Model be improved?

Being the last lecture on the model, I thought I would ask for suggestions on how it could be improved. I only received one comment (about it being an enjoyable series).

## 4.7.2 Consolidated Analysis of Surveys

I calculated the average scores for each question and copied the results of the most important questions onto a separate spreadsheet, which can be found in Appendix E.

### 4.7.2.1 The Respondents

Most of the respondents (73%) were male. Most of them (90%) were well educated, holding either a bachelor's degree (34%), a master's degree (43%), or a doctorate (13%). The respondents were of diverse ages, ranging from 17 to 59. The two largest age groups were 30-39 (31%) and 21-29 (27%).

I would have liked to have had more female respondents, but given the fact that at that centre more men attend such programmes than women, it is not surprising that almost three-quarters of the respondents were men. Nevertheless, the aim of garnering feedback from a cross-section of the educated adult Shi'i Muslim community was achieved. The respondents were the type of people I would be addressing with my book.

### 4.7.2.2 Reception to the Model

The model was extremely well received. The overwhelming majority (94%) liked the model; most of those (71%) liked it a lot.

The overwhelming majority (90%) felt the model was important. Most (54%) felt it was extremely important.

Most (85%) felt the material presented was unique.

The overwhelming majority (96%) felt the model was realistic to achieve.

The overwhelming majority (96%) felt it was likely they would use the model.

The overwhelming majority (95%) felt the model was unique.

The overwhelming majority (97%) felt the model was relevant to them.

#### 4.7.2.3 My Presentation

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (93%) felt the model was clear for them.

Most of the respondents (74%) felt I provided the right amount of information.

# Chapter 5: Project Findings

5.1 INTRODUCTION .....	132
5.2 PART 1: CLASSIFICATION OF METHODS AND APPROACHES USED IN QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS .....	132
5.2.1 Importance of Classifications and Their Relevance to This Project .....	132
5.2.2 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Bible .....	134
5.2.3 Qur'anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches: Introduction.....	142
5.2.4 Historical Overview of the Development of Exegetical Approaches .....	143
5.2.5 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an .....	145
5.2.5.1 Intratextual ( <i>tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān</i> ).....	146
5.2.5.2 Tradition-based ( <i>tafsīr bil-riwāyah</i> ) .....	146
5.2.5.3 Scientific ( <i>'ilmī</i> ).....	146
5.2.5.4 Interpretive reasoning ( <i>'aqlī</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.5 Allegorical ( <i>ishārī</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.6 Comprehensive ( <i>jāmi'</i> ).....	147
5.2.5.7 Exegesis based on speculative opinion ( <i>tafsīr bil-ra'y</i> ) .....	147
5.2.5.8 Juristic ( <i>fiqhī</i> ).....	147
5.2.5.9 Theological ( <i>kalāmī</i> ).....	148
5.2.5.10 Philosophical ( <i>falsafī</i> ).....	148
5.2.5.11 Lexicological ( <i>lughawī</i> ).....	148
5.2.5.12 Sociological ( <i>ijtimā'ī</i> ).....	148
5.2.6 Four Classifications .....	148
5.2.6.1 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-İşfahānī .....	149
5.2.6.2 Ayatollah 'Abbas'alī 'Amīd Zanjānī .....	150
5.2.6.3 Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Ma'rifat .....	153
5.2.6.4 'Alī 'Akbar Bābā'ī .....	154
5.2.7 An Alternative Classification .....	155
5.2.8 Implications for My Professional Practice .....	159
5.3 PART 2: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND USING THE QUR'AN .....	161
5.3.1 Introduction .....	161
5.3.2 Draft Introduction to the Guide .....	162
5.3.3 Step 1: Gathering General Information About the Text .....	164
5.3.3.1 1. What are the key elements of the first step? .....	164
5.3.3.2 2. Why is it important to know the names of the text and the reason behind those names? .....	165
5.3.3.3 3. What does an investigation into the status and rewards of the text reveal? .....	167
5.3.3.4 4. What are the benefits of knowing whether a Qur'anic text is Makkī or Madanī?.....	168

<b>5.3.4 Step 2: Knowing the Context</b> .....	<b>170</b>
5.3.4.1 1. Which types of context does this step seek to investigate, and why is this step important? .....	170
5.3.4.2 2. What two things can help us understand the circumstances in which the text was revealed? ....	170
5.3.4.3 3. How does the literary context help us to better understand the text? .....	172
Literary context of words .....	172
Literary context of sentences.....	172
Literary context of verses.....	173
<b>5.3.5 Step 3: Finding out the Meaning of Words</b> .....	<b>175</b>
5.3.5.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	175
5.3.5.2 2. What role does morphology play in helping us to understand the meaning of words? .....	176
5.3.5.3 3. How does knowledge of homonyms help us to understand the meaning of words? .....	177
5.3.5.4 4. How does comparing and contrasting synonyms help us to understand the meaning of words? 178	
5.3.5.5 5. What benefit is there in knowing the etymology of words? .....	179
<b>5.3.6 Step 4: Examining Sentences and Style</b> .....	<b>181</b>
5.3.6.1 1. How does syntax enhance our understanding of the text? .....	181
5.3.6.2 2. How does rhetoric help us to understand the text? .....	183
5.3.6.3 3. What method can we use to discover structural relationships in the text? .....	185
<b>5.3.7 Step 5: Investigating Structure</b> .....	<b>188</b>
5.3.7.1 1. Why is it important to investigate the structure of the text? .....	188
5.3.7.2 2. How may Step 5 be applied to <i>some</i> verses?.....	188
5.3.7.3 3. How may Step 5 be applied to <i>one</i> verse?.....	189
5.3.7.4 4. How may the method of ‘outlining’ help us to discern and express the text’s structure? .....	192
<b>5.3.8 Step 6: Evaluating Opinions</b> .....	<b>194</b>
5.3.8.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	194
5.3.8.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	194
Evaluation .....	195
5.3.8.3 3. What practical tips can we use to help us with this step? .....	197
<b>5.3.9 Step 7: Examining Traditions</b> .....	<b>198</b>
5.3.9.1 1. Why is this step important? .....	198
5.3.9.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	200
<b>5.3.10 Step 8: Applying the Text to Our Lives</b> .....	<b>201</b>
5.3.10.1 1. Why is this important? .....	201
5.3.10.2 2. How may this step be applied? .....	201
1. The Qur’an acts as a judge for assessing our conjectures.....	202
2. The Qur’an helps us to discover new ideas for solving our problems .....	202
3. The Qur’an assists us to expand our knowledge base in new areas .....	202
An example .....	202
5.3.10.3 3. Which principle can be used to help us apply the text to our lives? .....	204
<b>5.4 CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>207</b>

## 5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in 2.1.1, the aims of my project are twofold:

1. To present a new, accurate, and easy-to-understand classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis.
2. To design a systematic model for understanding and using the Qur'an that draws on the works of scholars of Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis.

I have therefore presented my project findings in two parts:

- ❖ Part 1: Classification of Methods and Approaches Used in Qur'anic Exegesis
- ❖ Part 2: Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding and Using the Qur'an

## 5.2 Part 1: Classification of Methods and Approaches Used in Qur'anic Exegesis

### 5.2.1 Importance of Classifications and Their Relevance to This Project

Classifications of exegetical methods and approaches help us to identify the type of exegesis we are examining, and they make it easier for us to compare and contrast different exegetical works with each other. Additionally, the process of classifying works requires us to make judgements about them; we critically assess and debate why we think the labels we have used to classify the works are appropriate. Should al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mīzān*, for example, be regarded a *philosophical exegetical work* since it employs philosophical methods? Or, is it more accurate to say that *al-Mīzān* adopts a *philosophical approach*? Or, is it that al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī sometimes presents philosophical arguments *under the umbrella of the*



'comprehensive method'? This 'evaluatory' element of classifications serves to further our understanding of exegetical works and the methods and approaches used by their authors.

Furthermore, Shi'i Islamic courses and texts on exegetical methods and approaches tend to be structured around a particular classification. I first experienced this when I was a seminary student in Qum, Iran. Among the subjects I studied there was *Methods and Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis*, and, as is the case with many seminary courses, the entire module revolved around the in-depth study of a single text. The work in question was Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's (1390 AH (solar)/2011) *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Taf̄sīrī-yi Qur'ān (Qur'anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches)*. A decade later in 2012, when I was Programme Leader for the Hawza (Shi'i Seminary) Programme at The Islamic College, I was charged with the responsibility of creating a new undergraduate programme in Hawza Studies. This programme was validated by Middlesex University in May 2012. One of the modules I introduced was *Qur'anic Sciences and Approaches to Exegesis*, and I too structured a large part of the module around Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's classification.<sup>75</sup> It was only when I did this DProf and subsequently became acquainted with critical rationalism that I saw the flaws in his classification.

Classifications of exegetical methods and approaches have a considerable influence on one's comprehension of exegetical works and the process of exegesis. For many years, I was under the impression that Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's classification was precise, clear, and logical. I would view exegetical works in terms of where they fitted in in his model. I have taught the same classification to my students. Moreover, his book has been translated into English by ICAS Press, the publication division of The Islamic College, and the work is now used as the main textbook for the module. From the work produced by my students, it is evident that Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's classification impacts significantly on their understanding of the subject. The reason for this is clear: as the methods and approaches part of the course is based entirely on his textbook, his classification and those methods and approaches he examines receive the most teaching, discussion, and study time. And, unfortunately, there are no suitable alternative resources available in English to refer students to.

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<sup>75</sup> BA (Honours) Hawza Studies Student Programme Handbook 2012/13.

## 5.2.2 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Bible

In this section, I seek to meet the Objectives and answer the Research Questions below (only the Biblical parts of Objective 1 and Research Question 1):

### *Objectives:*

- 1. To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.*
- 2. To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.*

### *Research Questions:*

- 1. What are the most important methods and approaches used in the Qur'anic and Biblical traditions of exegesis?*
- 2. What are the similarities and differences in the exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions?*

In this section, I will present an overview of some of the most important methods and approaches used in Biblical exegesis. I will also explain how they are classified and arranged by authors writing in this field. Furthermore, I will show how I have used the knowledge I gained from studying Biblical exegetical methods and approaches to help me achieve the aims of my project.

With the exception of Gorman (2010), whose classification I will discuss soon, I found that authors on Biblical interpretation and hermeneutics examine exegetical methods and approaches in a few different ways rather than present distinct classifications *per se*. For example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard (2004)<sup>76</sup> critically discuss a wide range of methods and approaches in different parts of their work under various chapter headings. The main ones, with brief descriptions of each, are presented in the table below:

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<sup>76</sup> This was the most important resource I discovered from the 'Interpretation and Hermeneutics' bibliography in Oxford Bibliographies (2010).

Chapter	Method/Approach
<b>3. Recent Literary and Social-Scientific Approaches</b>	Literary Criticism: a) studying the Bible as literature, analysing plot, theme, characterisation, style etc. (this is known as ‘Narrative Criticism’); and b) considering meanings residing in individual readers (this is called ‘Poststructuralism’).
	Social-Scientific Approaches: investigating the social history of the biblical world and the application of modern theories of human behaviour to the text.
<b>7. General Rules of Hermeneutics: Prose</b>	Literary Contextual Analysis: examines consistency of the proposed interpretation with the material that comes immediately before and after the text.
	Historical-Cultural: examines consistency of the proposed interpretation with the historical and cultural background of the text.
	Contextualizing: focuses on expressing the text’s message accurately in today’s world.
	Lexicological: examines word meanings.
	Grammatical-Structural: examines the combination and relationship of words and word-groups in the communication.
<b>8. General Rules of Hermeneutics: Biblical Poetry</b>	Techniques of interpreting poetic language.
<b>9. Genres of the Old Testament</b>	Techniques of interpreting Narrative, Law, Poetry, Prophecy, and Wisdom.
<b>10. Genres of the New Testament</b>	Techniques of interpreting the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation.

## 12. Application

Techniques of:

- a) avoiding mistakes in application; and
- b) legitimate application.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard explain and analyse these methods in detail. As it will be seen in the step-by-step guide, many of the approaches and methods are, or could be with some modification, applicable to the interpretation of the Qur'an as well. A few of these methods and approaches have been developed specifically for Biblical interpretation, namely 'Biblical poetry', 'genres of the Old Testament' and 'genres of the New Testament'. Some aspects of the four-step process for 'legitimate application' (pp. 482-503) that the authors propose are consistent with the 'inner dimension' (*baṭn*) and 'principlizing' methods, which I explain in Step 8 (5.3.10.3). I found the first two steps proposed by the authors for discovering structural relationships in a text under the 'grammatical-structural' approach very useful (pp. 264-267); I have incorporated these in Step 4 (5.3.6.3).

As I had mentioned in 4.3.2.1 (point 5), I had already added 'historical' to my classification. But, realising the importance of the 'cultural' dimension that Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard point out in their work, I decided to add 'cultural' as well.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard use the term 'contextualizing' to describe what authors such as Saeed (2014) call the 'contextualist' approach (3.6.3.2). Whereas Saeed explains the approach in terms of the 'macro context 1', 'macro context 2', and 'connector context', Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard use the effective analogy of bifocal glasses:

Contextualizing biblical truth requires interpretive bifocals. First, we need a lens to look back into the background of the biblical world to learn the intended meaning. Then, we need another lens to see the foreground to determine how to best express-contextualize-that sense for today's world. We stress this dimension given our conviction that biblical interpretation must never remain an exercise in the ancient world. The Bible is God's Word to us (p. 231).

They emphasise, however, the need to anchor interpretations to the historical context:

We wish to welcome and employ literary that enable us to understand and appreciate the Bible’s literary dimensions. But in using literary methods we cannot abandon the texts’ historical moorings. We insist that the “historical” focus provides the best avenue to a legitimate “literary” reading. We do not want an either-or approach. We reject any preunderstandings that replace the historical meaning of a text with a modern “reading” of it (p. 162).

In the course of charting the history of Biblical interpretation, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard refer to the ‘literal-contextual’ approach. They describe this as interpreting “according to the normal meaning within their original contexts”<sup>77</sup> (p. 33).

Warren (2006) takes a very different approach, structuring his entire work around the twelve methods below. He does not classify these but presents them in order of simplicity and use of reference tools:

<b>Method</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>The Devotional Method</b>	Prayerfully meditating on a short passage until the Holy Spirit gives direction; then writing out a personal application.
<b>The Chapter Summary Method</b>	Reading a chapter at least five times and writing a summary of its central thoughts.
<b>The Character Quality Method</b>	Choosing a character quality you would like to work on in your life and studying what the Bible says about it.
<b>The Thematic Method</b>	Thinking of 3-5 questions you would like answered about a Bible theme and then researching and recording the answers.
<b>The Biographical Method</b>	Researching verses about a Bible character, noting their attitudes, strengths, and

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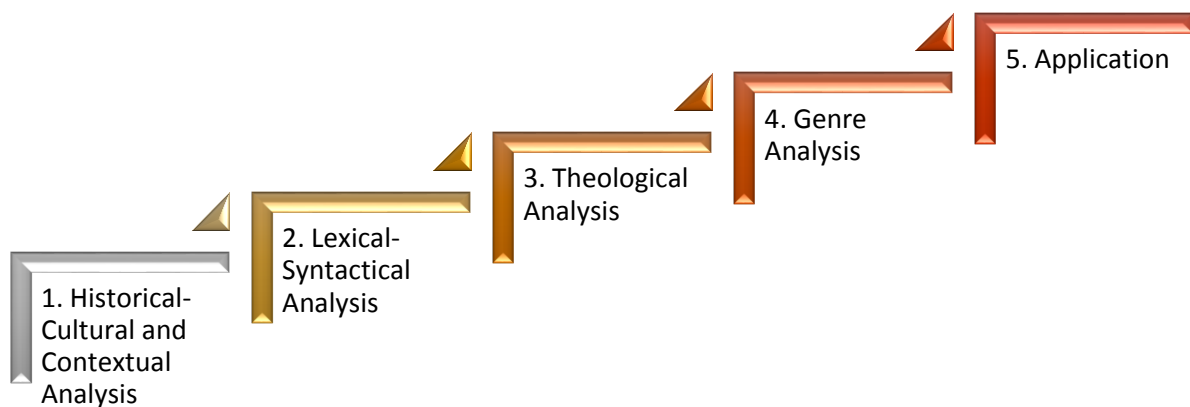
<sup>77</sup> Works on Biblical exegetical methods and approaches often use the term ‘literal’ (and, on rare occasions, ‘textual’ as well) to describe a grammatical-historical approach. The literal approach “asserts that a biblical text is to be interpreted according to the “plain meaning” conveyed by its grammatical construction and historical context” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017).

	weaknesses, and applying your learning to your own life.
<b>The Topical Method</b>	Collecting and comparing all the verses you can find on a particular topic and then organising your conclusions into an outline that you can share with someone.
<b>The Word Study Method</b>	Studying the important words of the Bible – their origin, the number of times they occur, and how they are used.
<b>The Book Background Method</b>	Studying how history, geography, culture, science, and politics affected what happened in Bible times.
<b>The Book Survey Method</b>	Surveying an entire book of the Bible by reading it through several times to get a general overview of its subject matter, and making notes on its background and contents.
<b>The Chapter Analysis Method</b>	Examining each verse in a chapter in-depth.
<b>The Book Synthesis Method</b>	Reading a book of the Bible several times, summarising its contents and main themes, and making an outline of the book.
<b>The Verse-by-Verse Analysis Method</b>	Examining a text in detail by asking questions, finding cross-references, paraphrasing each verse, and recording a possible application of each verse.

On closer inspection, Warren’s approach to studying, interpreting, and applying the Bible is a simplified version of some of the methods and approaches discussed by other authors in their works. For example, ‘The Word Study Method’ closely resembles what other authors term the ‘lexicological’ method; and the ‘The Book Background Method’ is very similar to

‘historical-cultural’ method. The Qur’an does not have ‘Books’ like the Bible, but the three ‘Book’-related methods could still be applied with some modifications; for example, by applying the techniques to ‘chapters’ of the Qur’an instead. All the other methods have useful techniques that could be applied to Qur’anic interpretation.

Other authors discuss Biblical methods and approaches as ‘steps’ or ‘stages’ in the hermeneutical process. Virkler and Ayayo (2007), for example, present the following five-step guide to Biblical interpretation:

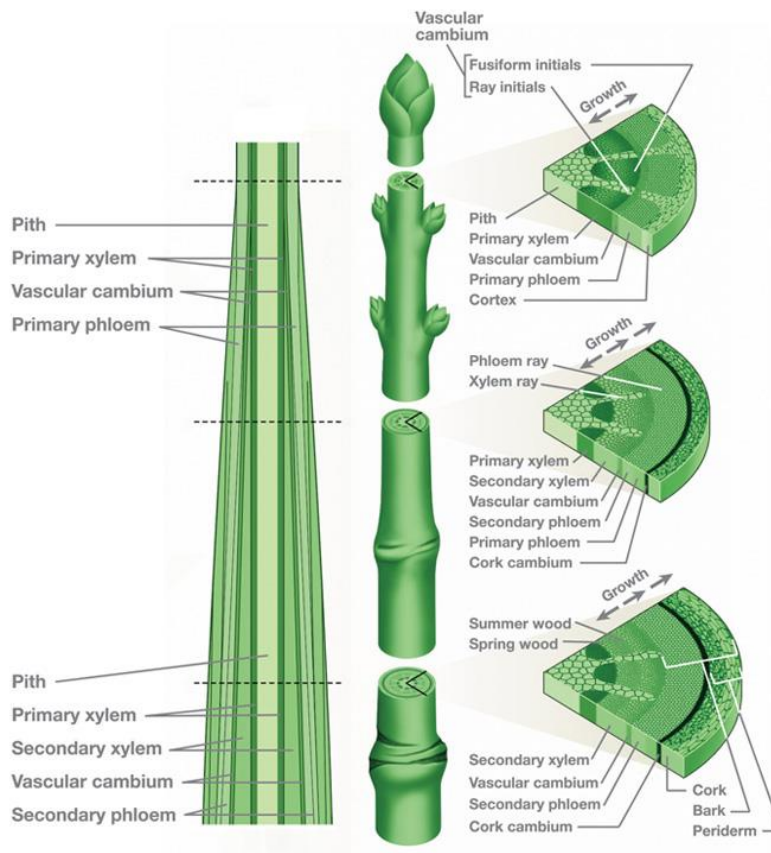


Using these five-steps as a general framework, Virkler and Ayayo cover all the main methods in an easy-to-understand style. ‘Genre Analysis’, or ‘Special Literary Forms’, is very broad in scope, covering similes, metaphors, proverbs, parables, allegories, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, and types. The definition they present for allegorism is “the search for secondary and hidden meanings underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a historical narrative” (p. 182). This is similar to the meaning given by traditional Shi’i scholars to the ‘allegorical approach’ except traditional Shi’i scholars do not restrict the approach to historical narratives (5.2.5.5). Most of Virkler and Ayayo’s ‘theological analysis’ is specific to the Bible.

I have adopted two of Virkler and Ayayo’s suggestions in my step-by-step guide: firstly, on studying synonyms and looking for points of comparison as well as contrast between them to help one understand the meaning of words (p. 103), which I have used in Step 3 (5.3.5.4). And secondly, their suggestions on ‘principlizing’ (p. 195), which I have used in Step 8 (5.3.10.3).

Gorman’s (2010) approach is different to the other authors. He presents a three-fold classification, positing that there are three basic approaches to exegesis today: ‘synchronic’, ‘diachronic’, and ‘existential’ (pp. 13-23). Each of these approaches incorporates a

constellation of methods. To explain the synchronic and diachronic approaches further, I have elaborated on his analogy of a plant stem.



If somebody wanted to study a plant stem, they would normally dissect it in one of two ways: either horizontally (known as a 'cross section'), as illustrated on the right half of the diagram; or vertically (known as a 'vertical section'), as illustrated on the left half. The synchronic ('same time') approach is like a cross section of a plant stem in that it analyses only the final form of the text as it appears in the Bible today. Gorman places the main synchronic methods into three categories: 'literary and rhetorical analysis', 'linguistic analysis', and 'social-scientific criticism' (pp. 234-236).

On the other hand, the diachronic ('across time') approach, which some other authors call 'historical-critical', is like a vertical section of a plant stem. It focuses on the origin and development of a text, or the text's formation; it takes the 'long view' of a text.

As for the 'existential' or 'transformative' approach, this focuses on the text as a means to an end, not an end in itself; i.e. as something that will affect one's life, not as a literary or



historical artefact. This approach examines knowledge and education in terms of ‘embodied knowing’ rather than the acquisition of information (p. 19).

Very helpfully, Gorman illustrates how each of these approaches could be applied to the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (pp. 15-16 and 19-20). The table below shows the questions that exegetes using these approaches might ask when investigating this sermon.

Synchronic	Diachronic	Existential
What are the various sections of the Sermon, and how do they fit together to make a literary whole?	What written or oral sources did the gospel-writer adopt, adapt, and combine to compose this Sermon?	To what kind of contemporary faith and practice does the Sermon call contemporary readers?
What is the function of the Sermon in the gospel’s portrayal of Jesus and of discipleship?	What is the origin and development of the various components of the Sermon?	How might the text about “turning the other cheek” be a potential source of difficulty or even oppression for the politically or socially downtrodden?
How would a first-century reader/hearer understand and be affected by this Sermon?	To what degree do these teachings represent the words or ideas of the historical Jesus?	What spiritual practices are necessary for individuals and churches to live the message of the Sermon today?

As the text of the Bible was compiled in a very different manner to the text of the Qur’an – i.e. by many authors over the course of centuries in contrast to the Prophet Muhammad receiving revelations from God over a period of 23 years – some of the diachronic methods presented by Gorman, such as ‘source criticism’, ‘textual criticism’, ‘tradition criticism’, and ‘redaction criticism’, would not be applicable to Qur’anic exegesis. The same is true of some of the existential methods, such as ‘canonical criticism’ and ‘missional hermeneutic’.

With the Biblical Canon being comprised of multiple books, in contrast to the single book that is the Qur’an, it is not surprising that authors of Biblical works discuss ‘intertextuality’

even more than they do ‘intratextuality’ (which authors on the Qur’an discuss). In describing intertextuality, Gorman maintains that “texts contain echoes of other texts, as well as reverberations of additional non-linguistic items from the cultural environment”<sup>78</sup> (p. 119).

I found Gorman’s ideas useful for my research project on three counts:

1. The classification of approaches and methods. Although Gordon does not explicitly explain the difference between exegetical ‘approaches’ and ‘methods’, he refers to an approach being “a constellation of methods” (p. 15). This is how I see Qur’anic exegetical approaches and methods as well, as I have explained in 5.2.7.
2. The separation of ‘literary and rhetorical analysis’ and ‘linguistic analysis’. My initial idea was to place all the language-related methods under one category, which I had thought of naming the ‘linguistic approach’. However, I found Gorman’s separation of the language-related methods into those two categories much more useful for readers, as there is a distinct difference between them: literary and rhetorical analysis deals with the creative and artistic body of language and employs methods such as ‘literary criticism’, ‘genre and form analysis’, ‘narrative criticism’, and ‘rhetorical criticism’. Linguistic analysis, on the other hand, is a scientific study of the structure and elements of language and uses methods such as ‘lexical, grammatical, and syntactical analysis’ and ‘semantic or discourse analysis’.
3. Practical tips to help us evaluate opinions (p. 171), which I used in Step 6 (5.3.8.3).

### 5.2.3 Qur’anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches: Introduction

In the sections that follow, I will first present an overview of the historical development of exegetical approaches, examining the key factors that led to their formation. I will then briefly

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<sup>78</sup> Scott Spencer (in Porter and Stovell (eds.), 2012, pp. 51-52) uses an effective analogy to describe intertextuality: “All texts – indeed, all language and communication – are influenced by other texts and voices they answer, both directly and tacitly. The traffic does not run on a one-way racetrack, where new texts, as it were, simply load up cargo and baggage from prior texts and hurtle toward their destinations. Relationships between texts truly function *intertextually* or *dialogically*, mutually addressing and responding to each other. In the process, a welter of changes can occur: the traffic can cruise, race, skid, spin, bump or jam around the intertextual, interpretive oval.” In the same work, Wall presents a useful analysis of the inter/intratextual dynamic (pp. 127-128).

describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an. Following this, I will critically evaluate the classifications adopted by four leading Shi'i authors in the field, namely Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, Zanjānī, Ma'rifat, and Bābā'ī. I will then present an alternative classification of methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and discuss its implications with reference to my professional practice.

#### 5.2.4 Historical Overview of the Development of Exegetical Approaches

Given that the interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsīr*) started at the time of revelation, it is fair to say that Qur'anic exegesis was one of the earliest intellectual activities in Islam.<sup>79</sup> The Qur'an itself describes the Prophet Muhammad as an exegete:

We have sent down the reminder to you [Prophet Muhammad] so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect (Al-Naḥl 16:44).

With respect to verses on ritual acts of worship such as prayer and ablution, the Prophet Muhammad would practically demonstrate the correct way of performing these acts.<sup>80</sup> Most of the Prophet Muhammad's exegesis, however, was communicated verbally, and he would do this by either referring to other verses of the Qur'an or by directly explaining the verses himself. The former was the earliest example of what has come to be known as the 'intratextual' approach (*tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān*). The Prophet's words would in turn be quoted by his family and companions when they explained the meaning of verses, and over the course of time, exegetes would use the elucidations of the Prophet, his family, and his companions in their exegetical works. This approach became known as 'tradition-based exegesis' (*tafsīr bil-riwāyah*).

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<sup>79</sup> The definition of *tafsīr* that is most commonly quoted by contemporary Shi'i scholars is the one formulated by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his *magnum opus*, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*: Qur'anic exegesis, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī states, is "an explanation of the meanings of the Qur'anic verses and the disclosure of their intent and indication" (1375 AH (solar)/1996, v. 1, p. 4). This is consistent with the meaning of *tafsīr* in al-Furqān 25:33, which is the only verse in the Qur'an that mentions the word: "They do not bring you any poser but that We bring you the truth [in reply to them] and the best exposition (*tafsīr*)."  
*Tafsīr* is also translated as 'exegesis'.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (1982, p. 423) concerning the canonical prayer.

Some scholars of the Qur'an have said the Prophet Muhammad also taught his companions the 'interpretive reasoning' method.<sup>81</sup> These scholars maintain that this started to become a distinct way of doing exegesis of the Qur'an at the time of the Followers (*tābi'ūn*) and flourished in subsequent centuries, particularly through the efforts of Mu'tazilite scholars (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011, p. 145). The 'lexicological' (*luḡhawī*)<sup>82</sup> approach was adopted at a very early stage by both Sunni and Shi'i interpreters, and it quickly became the dominant method of exegesis and "the hermeneutical paradigm" (Saleh, 2015, p. 1651). With the eventual emergence of jurisprudential sects such as the Shāfi'i, Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Ḥanbalī, and Ja'farī, the methods employed by jurists belonging to these sects to interpret verses on Islamic law led to the development of the 'juristic' (*fiqhī*) exegetical approach.

Following the translation of Greek and Persian works into Arabic from the eighth century, and the spread of new theories and ideas among Muslims, other approaches gradually came to light. The Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and a variety of other theological schools interpreted verses of the Qur'an in line with their beliefs, leading to the emergence of theological (*kalāmī*) approaches. The development of various schools of philosophy, and the relating of philosophical questions to the Qur'an – such as the eternity or newness of the world, and the epistemological meaning of revelation – led to the philosophical (*falsafī*) exegetical approach.

The use of science to better understand verses that talk about the natural world can be traced as far back as the eighth century. 'Scientific' (*'ilmī*) exegesis, as this type of interpretation came to be known, gained impetus with the writings of prominent scholars such as al-Ghazālī (c. 1056-1111) who claimed that all science is contained in the Qur'an (al-Ghazālī, 1988, pp. 32-33). But it was not until the eighteenth century, when the modern empirical method thrived in the Western world and books on subjects such as physics, chemistry, medicine, and astronomy were translated into Arabic, that the scientific approach flourished. Muslim scholars correlated verses of the Qur'an with empirical science and provided "a certain degree of legitimacy to the enterprise of modern science in the Muslim world" (Iqbal, 2015, p. 1682). Moreover, they sought to show that not only was there no contradiction between science and the Qur'an, but in fact, scientific discoveries further

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Ma'rifat (1385 AH (solar)/2006), v. 2, p. 349) and al-'Akk (1985, p. 176).

<sup>82</sup> This term is used by some authors to refer to other language-related fields of study, such as philology and linguistics.

demonstrated the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, as the Qur'an had spoken about such subjects many centuries earlier (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011, p. 191).

From the ninth century onwards, Sufis developed their own methods for interpreting the Qur'an, paving the way for the formation of various types of 'allegorical' (*ishārī*) exegetical methods. The 'comprehensive approach' (*jāmi'*) became established in the eleventh century with works such *al-Tibyān fī al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), and it remains popular to this day. The last one hundred and fifty years has seen the publication of many exegetical works that adopt a 'sociological' (*ijtimā'ī*) approach to Qur'anic exegesis, the works of Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) being a prime example.

### 5.2.5 Some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an

In this section, I seek to meet the Objective and answer the Research Question below (only the Qur'anic parts):

#### *Objective:*

1. *To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.*

#### *Research Question:*

1. *What are the most important methods and approaches used in the Qur'anic and Biblical traditions of exegesis?*

As it will be seen later, authors on Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches use different terms to refer to the different categories. This is not wholly surprising, given that this is a relatively new field of study. Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921) is credited with being the first person to have written specifically on this area; his *Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* was

first published in 1920 but was not translated into Arabic until 1944 and into Persian until 2004.<sup>83</sup>

The following are some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an. The descriptions under each approach express how traditional Shi'i scholars describe them.

#### 5.2.5.1 Intratextual (*tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān*)

With this approach, verses of the Qur'an are used to interpret other verses.<sup>84</sup>

#### 5.2.5.2 Tradition-based (*tafsīr bil-riwāyah*)

Here, traditions – i.e. reports of the Sunna, which incorporates the words, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the Twelve Imams – are used to interpret verses of the Qur'an.<sup>85</sup>

#### 5.2.5.3 Scientific (*'ilmī*)

This refers to the use of empirical science to better understand the scientific aspects in the verses. In other words, the exegete acts as a lay-scientist in the process of interpreting verses of the Qur'an.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Zadeh (2015, p. 329).

<sup>84</sup> Some notable works that adopt the intratextual approach are *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067); *Ālā' al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Jawād al-Balāghī (d. 1933); *Tafsīr Aḍwā' al-Bayān fī Ṭdāḥ al-Qur'ān bil-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Amīn al-Mukhtār (d. 1973); *Tafsīr al-Mizān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981); *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī lil-Qur'ān* by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb (d. 1985); and *Tasnīm* by 'Abd Allāh Jawādī-Āmulī.

<sup>85</sup> Some notable works that adopt the tradition-based approach are *Tafsīr al-Qummī* by 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. c. 919); *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923); *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* by Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr (d. 1372); *al-Durur al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bil-Ma'thūr* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505); *al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Baḥrānī (d. 1695/1696); and *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn* by 'Abd 'Alī ibn Jum'ah al-Huwayzī (d. 1700/1701).

<sup>86</sup> Some notable works that adopt the scientific approach are *Kashf al-Asrār al-Nūrāniyyah al-Qur'āniyyah* by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī (d. c. 1898); *Ṭabāyī' al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri' al-Istib'ād* by Sayyid 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (d. 1902); *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by Ṭanṭāwī al-Jawharī (d. 1940); and *Partuwī az Qur'ān* by Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī (d. 1979).

#### 5.2.5.4 Interpretive reasoning (*'aqlī*)

With this method, the exegete strives to understand and clarify the meaning of verses based on rational argument and logical reasoning.<sup>87</sup>

#### 5.2.5.5 Allegorical (*ishārī*)

With this approach, the exegete explains the hidden points of verses by going beyond their apparent meaning and focusing on their inner meaning.<sup>88</sup>

#### 5.2.5.6 Comprehensive (*jāmi'*)

This approach acts like an umbrella under which several approaches are used together; the choice of these approaches depends on the verse being investigated.<sup>89</sup>

#### 5.2.5.7 Exegesis based on speculative opinion (*tafsīr bil-ra'y*)

This is when an exegete imposes his or her speculative opinion – i.e. one that is not based on rational or reported evidence – onto the verses.<sup>90</sup>

#### 5.2.5.8 Juristic (*fiqhī*)

With this approach, verses concerning Islamic law are examined and legal rulings are derived from them.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Some notable works that are said to have adopted this method are: *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067); *Majma' al-Bayān* by Faḍl ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153); *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209); *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1853); and *Tafsīr al-Mizān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981).

<sup>88</sup> Some notable works that adopt the allegorical approach are *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896/897); *Tafsīr* of Khwājih 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī (d. 1088); *'Arā'is al-Bayān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* by Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209/1210); *Bayān al-Sa'ādah* by Sulṭān Muḥammad Gunābādī (d. 1909); *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* by 'Abd al-Karīm Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1072/1073); *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021); *Kashf al-Asrār wa 'Uddat al-Abrār* by Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (thirteenth century); and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, by 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1335/1336).

<sup>89</sup> Some notable exegetical works that employ the comprehensive approach are *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209); *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273); *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1853); *Tafsīr al-Mizān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981); *Tafsīr-i Namūnih* by Nāṣir Makārim-Shīrāzī; and *Tasnīm* by 'Abd Allāh Jawādī-Āmulī.

<sup>90</sup> Although authors of works on exegetical methods and approaches give plenty of examples of exegetes using this approach, they tend not to give this label to entire works. An exception is 'Alawī-Mihr (1381 AH (solar)/2002, pp. 190-191) who asserts that *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Huwa al-Hudā wa al-Furqān* by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān Hindī (d. 1898) is a work that adopts the speculative opinion approach.

<sup>91</sup> Some notable works that adopt the juristic approach are the following: Shī'i: *Tafsīr Āyāt al-Aḥkām* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī Yazdī (d. 1919); Shāfi'i: *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, a work attributed to Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'i (d. 819); Mālikī: *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273);

#### 5.2.5.9 Theological (*kalāmī*)

The theological approach is used to interpret verses relating to beliefs such as the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), imamology (*imāmah*), and eschatology (*ma'ād*). The exegete aims to prove his beliefs and to disprove the beliefs of others.<sup>92</sup>

#### 5.2.5.10 Philosophical (*falsafī*)

With this approach, verses mainly relating to existence, God, and His attributes are examined from a particular philosophical viewpoint.<sup>93</sup>

#### 5.2.5.11 Lexicological (*lughawī*)

This approach is used to examine the form, meaning, and behaviour of words in the Qur'an.<sup>94</sup>

#### 5.2.5.12 Sociological (*ijtimā'ī*)

Verses relating to society are examined using this approach with the aim of finding solutions to problems being faced by Muslims today.<sup>95</sup>

### 5.2.6 Four Classifications

In this section, I seek to meet the Objective and answer the Research Question below:

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Ḥanafī: *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 980); and Ḥanbalī: *Āyāt al-Aḥkām* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 1065).

<sup>92</sup> Some notable works that adopt the theological approach are the following: Mu'tazilite: *al-Kashshāf* by Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143); Ash'arite: *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209); and Shi'i: *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981).

<sup>93</sup> Some notable works that adopt the philosophical approach are the following: Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*): *Tafsīr* of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037); Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*): Exegesis of verses in the works of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191); and Transcendent Theosophy (*al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah*): *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by Ṣadrā al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1640).

<sup>94</sup> Some notable works that adopt the lexicological approach are *al-Kashshāf* by Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143); *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Faḍl ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153); and *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by Athīr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥayyānī al-Andalusī al-Naḥwī (d. 1344).

<sup>95</sup> Some notable works that adopt the sociological approach are *Tafsīr Juz' 'Ammā* by Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905); *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966); *Tafsīr-i Namūnih* by Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī; and *Tafsīr-i Nūr* by Muḥsin Qarā'atī.



*Objective:*

- 3. To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.*

*Research Question:*

- 3. How are Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?*

The discussions that follow concern the classifications adopted by four leading Shi'ī authors in the field of exegetical methods and approaches. The books in which their classifications appear are widely used in Shi'ī centres of learning and are among the best-known works on the subject.

#### 5.2.6.1 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī

Dr Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's book, *Rawish-hā wa Girāyish-hā-yi Taf̄sīrī-yi Qur'ān (Qur'anic Exegetical Methods and Approaches)* (1390 AH (solar)/2011) – which is volume two of his five volume series, *Manṭiq-i Taf̄sīr-i Qur'ān (The Logic of Exegesis of the Qur'an)* – is considered in the Shi'ī academic world to be one of the leading texts, if not *the* leading text, on the subject, and it has become a standard textbook on Qur'anic exegesis courses in Shi'ī seminaries.

As I have already critically evaluated Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī's classification in my account of the interview I had with him (4.3.2.1), I shall only summarise here my main criticisms about his classification.

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī maintains that 'methods' are 'based on a source'. A 'source' is something that possesses religious authority (*ḥujjiyah shar'iyyah*), which are four things: the Qur'an, Tradition, 'aql, and science. However, the problem with this is that 'sources' are reservoirs of knowledge claims. As such, only the Qur'an and Tradition should be considered sources. 'Aql as 'reason' does not make any knowledge-claims and cannot, therefore, be a source. And although 'aql as 'intellect' does make knowledge-claims, it does so in the form of formulating conjectures; *formulating* conjectural knowledge claims is different from being a *source* of knowledge.

Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī asserts that ‘science’ is only a source when its findings are definitive and give us certainty. However, critical rationalists maintain that certainty does not help us get to the truth as it is a psychological state rather an epistemological category, and so it does not advance our knowledge at all.

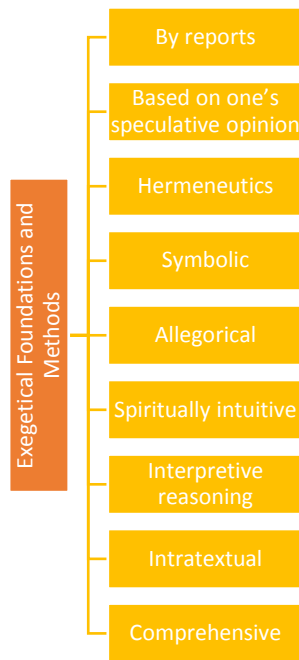
In Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s classification, two of the ‘invalid’ methods are ‘some scientific’ and ‘some allegorical’ methods; and in his book, he outlines the criteria for determining whether a scientific or allegorical method is valid or invalid. Unfortunately, however, it is not clear why he chooses to single out these two methods in this way; *any* method that is not used correctly can just as well be deemed invalid.

The distinction between an exegetical ‘approach’ and an exegetical ‘method’ is unclear as his definitions of these terms are extremely broad.

With regard to the ‘interpretive reasoning’ method, Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī asserts that this refers to using rational proofs and evidence in exegesis. However, there does not then appear to be any credible argument as to why he classifies ‘philosophical’ as an exegetical ‘approach’, seeing that the philosophical way is to use “rational proofs and evidence in exegesis”. Furthermore, ‘*aql*’ as ‘reason’ is employed as a method in *all* approaches as it distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones. It should not, therefore, be considered a distinct category on its own/the base of one particular method.

#### 5.2.6.2 Ayatollah ‘Abbas‘alī ‘Amīd Zanjānī

In *Mabānī wa Rawish-hā-yi Tafsīr-i Qur‘ān (Foundations and Methods of Exegesis of the Qur‘an)* (1387 AH (solar)/2008, pp. 216, 267, 327), Ayatollah Zanjānī maintains that that the major ‘exegetical foundations and methods’ fall under the following categories:



Zanjānī explains that the ‘symbolic’ (*ramzī*) foundation and method is employed when the apparent meaning of the verse is put aside, and verses are interpreted based on examples, metonymies, and allusions contained in the verses (p. 315). The ‘spiritually intuitive’ (*shuhūdī*) foundation and method refers to the interpretation of verses based on certain realities and truths that are disclosed to the interpreter while he or she is in an elevated spiritual state (p. 327). As for the ‘comprehensive’ (*jāmi’*) foundation and method, Zanjānī defines this differently to the other scholars: he asserts that it is a foundation and method that is based on the Qur’an, Tradition, consensus (*ijmā’*), and ‘*aql*’ (p. 216).

According to Zanjānī, an ‘exegetical foundation and method’ is the evidence upon which an exegete basis his interpretation of the Qur’an and which he regards as being the only way for completely ascertaining the meaning and intent of the verses (p. 215). Exegetical foundations and methods, he argues, must be distinguished from exegetical ‘styles’ (*shīwih-hā*), ‘orientations’ (*ruykard-hā*), and ‘approaches’ (*girāyish-hā*), which are the basis of juristic, theological, philosophical, historical, sociological, and scientific exegeses. All of these approaches can be based on an exegetical foundation, such as exegesis ‘by reports’ (*bil-ma’tūr*) or ‘interpretive reasoning’ (p. 6). Differences between such exegetical approaches are not fundamental and are not related to the way the meaning and intent of the Qur’an are extracted and disclosed. Exegetical foundations and methods are those which have a hand in

how the meaning and intent of the verses are disclosed; they are the base and foundation for exegesis and provide the infrastructure for extracting the meanings of the Qur'an (p. 204).

I will focus my critique of Zanjānī's classification on four areas. Firstly, he mentions the terms '*mabnā*' (foundations) and '*rawish-hā*' (methods) together, without pointing out the differences between them. These terms mean different things and should not be used synonymously. In fact, it is not clear whether Zanjānī is referring to 'methods' or 'methodologies'. On the one hand, he uses the word '*rawish*' (method) and not '*rawish-shanās*' (methodology). But, in his introduction, he uses the Persian transliterated form for 'methodology' to refer to the same thing as *rawish* (p. 6).

Secondly, Zanjānī does not regard the role of what he terms exegetical "styles, orientations, and approaches" as being of much significance. I maintain that, contrary to Zanjānī's opinion, they *do* in fact relate "to the way the meaning and intent of the Qur'an is extracted and disclosed" and *do* "have a hand in how the meaning and intent of the verses and the Qur'an is disclosed". For example, when scholars belonging to different jurisprudential sects apply their juristic methods to verses on legal matters, they can and do arrive at different interpretations and even issue different legal rulings as a result.<sup>96</sup>

Thirdly, Zanjānī includes 'hermeneutics' in his classification. He defines hermeneutics broadly as "the interpretation and exegesis of a text in order to acquire its meaning". 'Hermeneutics' and 'exegesis' are different things.<sup>97</sup> And it is not clear why he chooses to place hermeneutics as a separate category at the same level as the others. He then asserts that hermeneutics cannot be used for interpreting the Qur'an because it requires one to interpret beliefs as though they are relative and changeable according to the conditions of time and place (p. 296). Here, it appears that he is confusing hermeneutics with something else, such as the 'contextualism versus textualism' debate.<sup>98</sup>

And finally, Zanjānī's classification has the same problem as Riḍāyī-İşfahānī's in that he also considers 'interpretive reasoning' a separate foundation/method.

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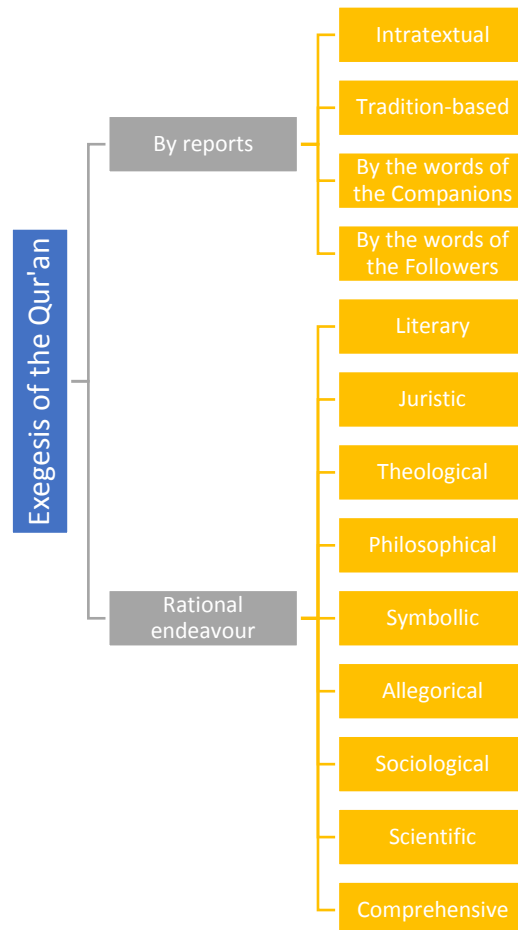
<sup>96</sup> See, for example, the analysis of the '*wuḍū*' verse' in 5.3.6.1.

<sup>97</sup> The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2018) defines them as follows: "Hermeneutics, the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation." "Exegesis, the critical interpretation of the biblical text to discover its intended meaning."

<sup>98</sup> I discuss this debate in 3.6.3.2 – 3.6.3.4.

### 5.2.6.3 Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Maʿrifat

The third classification I will examine is presented by Ayatollah Maʿrifat in *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn (Exegesis and Exegetes)* (1385 AH (solar)/2006, v. 2, pp. 803-804).<sup>99</sup>



This classification is the only one that includes ‘by the words of the Companions’ (of the Prophet Muhammad) and ‘by the words of the Followers’ (i.e. the generation after the Companions). It is true that technically speaking, the words of these two groups fall under the category of ‘transmitted’ (*naqlī*) evidence, as do the Qur’an and Sunna, and so exegesis that is done by relying on these could be said to be exegesis ‘by reports’ (*bil-maʿthūr*). However, there is a fundamental difference between the evidence of the Qur’an and Sunna on the one hand, and reports of the Companions and Followers on the other; and that is, while the former

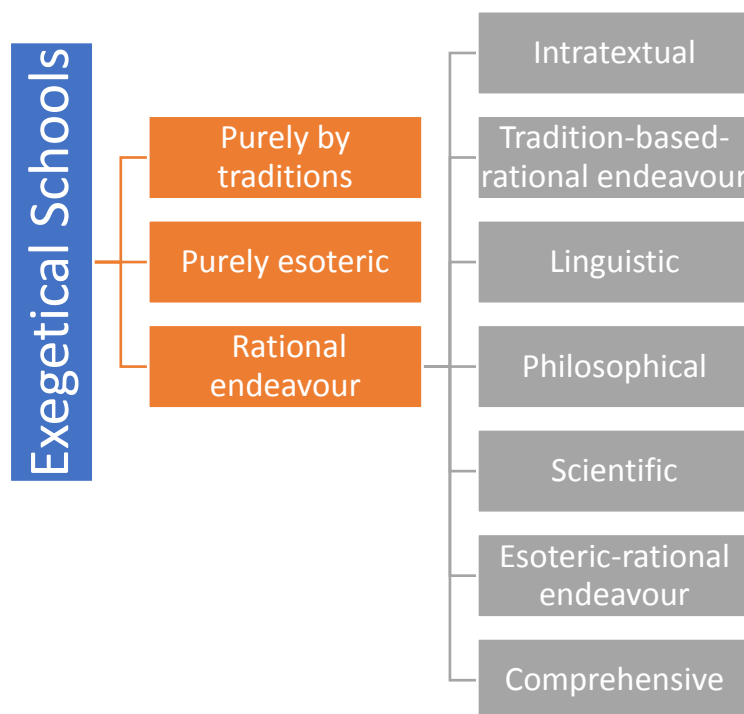
<sup>99</sup> Out of the four works I examine in this chapter, this is the only one written in Arabic; the other three are Persian works.

are assumed to possess religious authority (*hujjiyah shar'iyah*), the latter are not. Therefore, placing all four of them at the same level as a group on their own could give the wrong impression that all four are considered valid and authoritative sources on which to base exegesis. If Ma'rifat had first divided them into 'possessing religious authority' and 'not possessing religious authority', for instance, then this problem would have been avoided.

Ma'rifat regards 'literary' (*adabi*) exegeses as those that focus on syntax, rhetoric, and other sciences of language (v. 2, p. 901). 'Lexicological' (*lughawi*) exegeses, on the other hand, deal with those words in the Qur'an which are known and used by only one tribe (*gharib al-lughah*) (v.2, p. 925). This definition of the term *lughawi*, however, is significantly different to that of other scholars.

Furthermore, this classification suffers from placing 'by reports' and 'rational endeavour' opposite each other. In doing so, the classification gives the wrong idea that there is no rational endeavour in doing exegesis by reports. This is the same mistake I had made with my initial classification (4.3.2.1). As I realised later, *all* exegesis involves at least some degree of rational endeavour.

#### 5.2.6.4 'Alī 'Akbar Bābā'ī



In *Makātib-i Tafsīrī (Exegetical Schools)* (1388 AH (solar)/2009), Shaykh Bābā'ī argues that an 'exegetical school' (*maktab-i tafsīrī*) is different to an 'exegetical method' (*rawish-i tafsīrī*). Exegetical schools refer to "the different views of exegetes as to how to do exegesis of the Qur'an". An exegetical method, on the other hand, is "how an exegete does exegesis in practice. An exegetical school is essentially about theory, whereas an exegetical method is essentially about practice" (v. 3, p. 1). According to Bābā'ī, 'rational endeavour' (*ijtihādī*) means the exegete strives to understand and clarify the meaning of verses based on valid evidence (v. 2, p. 108). By 'purely by traditions' (*riwā'i-yi maḥḍ*), he means the exegete only mentions narrations that are related to each verse; they do not engage in rational endeavour in order to better understand and clarify their meaning, nor do they express any opinion. An example is *al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107 H) (v. 1, p. 24). Bābā'ī maintains that this contrasts with the 'tradition-based-rational endeavour' method, an example of which is *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī* by Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680-1681).

As for the 'purely esoteric' (*bāṭinī-yi maḥḍ*) method, this means that the exegete only or mainly does exegesis of the esoteric dimension of the verses, not of their exoteric dimension (v. 1, p. 25). An example of an exegetical work that employs this method is *'Arā'is al-Bayān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* by Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209/1210). In contrast, an example of an exegetical work that employs 'esoteric-rational endeavour' is *Kashf al-Asrār wa 'Uddat al-Abrār* by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. sixth century).

Bābā'ī's classification is overcomplicated and uses unfamiliar terms. His use of the word 'purely' in his labelling of two categories, and his placing of these two categories opposite 'rational endeavour', is inaccurate, as there is an element of rational endeavour in every type of exegesis. For example, in the case of 'purely by traditions', the exegete will need to choose the traditions he or she thinks explains the verses under investigation – this choosing requires some degree of rational endeavour. Moreover, Bābā'ī's model does not represent some important types of exegesis, such as juristic, theological, and sociological.

## 5.2.7 An Alternative Classification

In this section, I seek to meet the Objective and answer the Research Question below:

*Objective:*

- 4. To present an alternative classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.*

*Research Question:*

- 3. How are Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?*

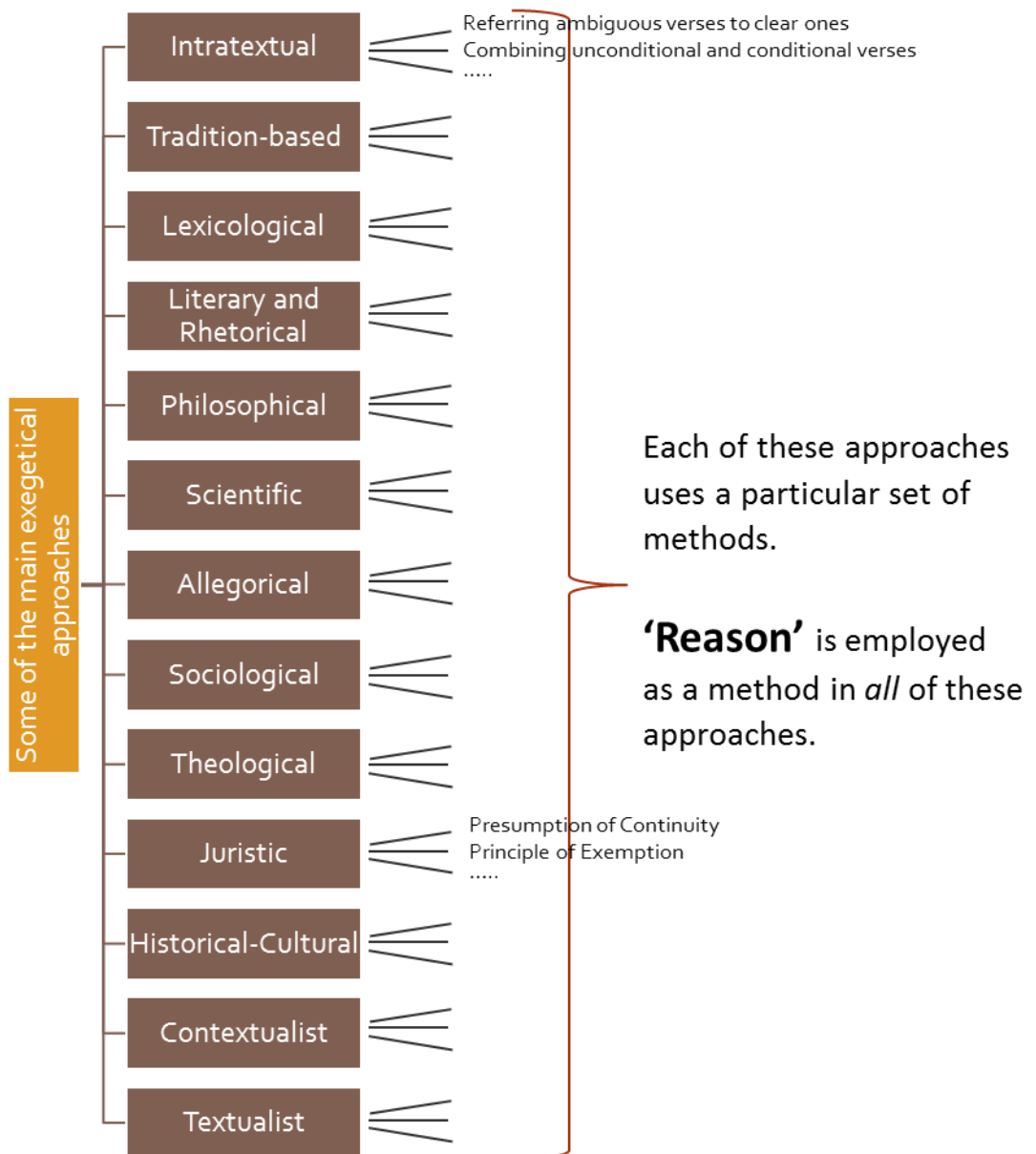
From a critical rationalist perspective, 'methods' are "tools for obtaining data and testing the claims of theories" (Paya, 2011, p. 152). 'Tools' here means 'procedures' and 'techniques' (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Methods are technologies, and so they a) serve our non-cognitive needs; and b) serve as tools to facilitate our cognitive/knowledge pursuits. As such, they are not knowledge themselves but tools for obtaining data and assessing conjectures, which, in the field of exegesis, are expressed in the form of explanations for interpreting verses.

To adopt Gorman's (2010, p.15) terminology, each approach uses a constellation of methods. An 'approach' in this context can be said to be the particular paradigm and perspective that an exegete adopts in his or her interpretation. And as we are talking about interpretation, 'approach' is appropriate for the particular paradigm and perspective that the exegete adopts, not 'method', because methods do not play a role in the interpretative process. Neither are methods susceptible to our intuitions, whereas interpretation is. Each approach uses its own terminology, concepts, principles, basic assumptions, and axioms. For example, 'cause and effect' would be used in the philosophical approach but not in the lexicological approach.

The approach an exegete chooses will depend on their academic specialisation, interests, and aims. Exegetical approaches may not be mutually exclusive; an exegetical work may use more than one approach.

The diagram below represents my alternative classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.





As an example, the methods that would be used by the 'intratextual' approach (*tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān*) include the following (due to a lack of space, I have only shown the first two on the diagram):

1. Referring ambiguous/metaphorical (*mutashābih*) verses to precise/clear (*muḥkam*) ones
2. Combining unconditional/absolute (*muṭlaq*) and conditional/delimited (*muqayyad*) verses
3. Combining general (*'āmm*) and limiting/specific (*khāṣṣ*) verses

4. Explaining abstract/ambiguous (*mujmal*) verses by elucidating/elucidated (*mubayyan*) verses
5. Determining the applicability (*miṣdāq*) of a verse by examining other verses
6. Making use of the verse's sequence of speech (*siyāq*)
7. Collating similar verses (similar, that is, in words or content)
8. Considering conflicting verses and resolving the apparent contradictions between them
9. Determining the meaning of Qur'anic terms with the assistance of other verses
10. Giving preference to the meaning of a verse with the assistance of other verses
11. Combining the abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) verses<sup>100</sup>

As another example, from among the many methods that are used in the 'juristic' approach are four which help determine one's legal duty in cases of doubt (again due to a lack of space, I have only shown the first two on the diagram):

1. The Presumption of Continuity (*istiṣhāb*)
2. The Principle of Exemption (*barā'ah*)
3. The Principle of Caution (*iḥtiyāt*)
4. The Principle of Option (*takhyīr*)

A major difference between all the previous classifications and this one concerns the role of 'aql in the exegetical process. Further to my analysis in 3.5.2, I maintain that 'aql as 'reason' distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones by assessing the form of our conjectures; and in the context of Qur'anic exegesis, these conjectures play the role of interpretations. 'Aql is therefore employed as a method in *all* approaches and should not be considered a distinct category on its own. Neither would it make sense to regard 'aql a method in its meaning of 'intellect', as the intellect seeks to understand reality by formulating conjectures.

Initially, I was going to include a category called the 'linguistic' approach to incorporate all the language-related fields of study. However, as a result of my investigations into Biblical exegetical methods and approaches, I realised that 'linguistic' would have been too broad,

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<sup>100</sup> Riḍāyī-İşfahānī (1390 AH (solar)/2011, pp.72-82. The author describes these as 'sub-types' of the intratextual method whereas I regard them as methods used by the intratextual approach.

and it would not have done justice to the variety of language-related methods to simply group them all under one umbrella. This realisation impacted my step-by-step guide as well, as I saw the need to separate Steps 3 and 4 so that one dealt with lexicography (Step 3), and the other with syntax and rhetoric (Step 4) (5.3.5 and 5.3.6). Now, the classification above and the eight-step model are much better synchronised.

I have added the ‘historical’ approach, which is omitted by all the other classifications examined in this chapter. Most exegetes draw upon historical works and records and employ the methods of historical investigation in the course of their works; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī in his *al-Mīzān*, for example, includes several sections titled ‘A Historical Discussion’ where he devotes his attention entirely to a historical analysis of the verses.

I have also added ‘contextualist’ and ‘textualist’ approaches. As discussed in 3.6.3.2 and 3.6.3.4, these approaches have a tremendous impact on the way verses of the Qur’an are interpreted. A case in point, which I have examined in those sections and in 5.3.6.3 as well, is the way Islamic feminist scholars of the Qur’an who adopt a contextualist approach interpret Al-Nisā’ 4:34, compared with how traditional Shi’i scholars who favour a textualist approach see the same verse.

### 5.2.8 Implications for My Professional Practice

As we have seen, traditional Shi’i scholars and critical rationalists present different perspectives on what exegetical methods and approaches are and how they should be classified. The implications of the two different positions for students studying this subject, and for teachers like myself who teach it, are highly significant. Not only do the two groups of scholars use different terms (‘demonstrative *‘aql*’ and ‘lantern *‘aql*’ versus ‘reason’ and ‘intellect’ – see 3.5.1 and 3.5.2), but much more importantly, the epistemological principles on which they base their views are very different as well.

The traditional Shi’i scholars argue that as *‘aql* is *ḥujjah*, it is a source for understanding; and, as exegetical methods are the use of a source, ‘interpretive reasoning’ is a method in exegesis. Critical rationalists agree that *‘aql* is a method in Qur’anic exegesis, but they analyse

the issue very differently: they maintain that in its capacity as reason, *'aql* is a tool for assessing the logical soundness of the form (as opposed to the content) of arguments.

All this affects the way we identify a particular method or approach; how we label exegetical works; how we compare and contrast different exegetical works with each other; and how we design, teach, and study courses on the subject. Considering these implications has made me all the more determined to publish my book, which, with its balance of exegetical theory and practice, will hopefully make an important contribution to my community of practice.

## 5.3 Part 2: A Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding and Using the Qur'an

In this part, I seek to meet the Objective and answer the Research Question below:

*Objective:*

- 7. To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur'an.*

*Research Question:*

- 4. How may Biblical exegetical methods and approaches be used to help produce a practical step-by-step guide to interpreting and applying the Qur'an?*

### 5.3.1 Introduction

I thought the best way to present my findings on the step-by-step guide would be in a manner that would resemble, to some extent, the look and feel of the handbook I intend to publish. I felt this would help those who read this report to get an idea of the vision I have in mind for this part of the handbook, and it would also make it easier to pinpoint exactly what and where changes need to be made before it is published. Some of the footnotes in the remaining sections would not appear in the final product but are important for the purposes of this report – I have marked them “DProf -”.

I have tried to keep the sections that follow as succinct as possible. For instance, I have usually mentioned only one or two examples to illustrate the main points, and I have refrained from lengthy discussions and explanations. This is because firstly, the guide is meant to be brief, practical, and suitable for all levels. And secondly, for this DProf Report, there is naturally a limit on the word count. In my recommendations in 6.9.2, I have outlined my plans to expand and enhance the final book version.

Unlike many authors who have written on this area, I have not used technical terms to label the steps. For example, I have called Step 2 'Knowing the Context' instead of 'Historical-

Literary Context Analysis’, and Step 3 ‘Finding Out the Meaning of Words’ rather than ‘Lexical Analysis’; this is in keeping with the easy-to-understand aim of the guide. For the benefit of more advanced users, I have placed technical terms in footnotes. I adopted this policy based on the feedback I received in Sydney where I presented the eight-step model in a series of lectures (4.6). I have also incorporated most of the other recommendations that arose from the questionnaire surveys I conducted after each lecture; the recommendations I have implemented have been pointed out in the footnotes. As for the recommendations I have not implemented, these are discussed in 6.9.2.

### 5.3.2 Draft Introduction to the Guide

For millions of Muslims around the world, the Qur’an is the foremost source of guidance for their lives. It is one of the most read and studied books in the world. And yet, how many people who read the Qur’an know *how* to understand and use it properly? This guide aims to provide that knowledge by means of a structured and systematic model. It is a ‘how-to’ manual on Qur’an study. The model presented in this guide is suitable for use at several levels: the concepts and methods are understandable to beginners, and the structured approach to studying and using the Qur’an may give more advanced students, teachers, and imams something they have they have not come across before.

There are eight steps in this model. Each step begins with a set of questions, which help focus the mind on the objectives the step is aiming to achieve. The answers given to the questions draw on examples from the Qur’an itself so that you get an idea of how the guidelines are applied in practice. All the steps can be applied to all sentences and chapters of the Qur’an, whatever their length.<sup>101</sup> Naturally, some parts of the model will be easier to apply to some texts of the Qur’an than to others.<sup>102</sup>

There may be parts in this guide which you find challenging due to their technical nature; but see these instances as opportunities to learn new things which will serve you well in your

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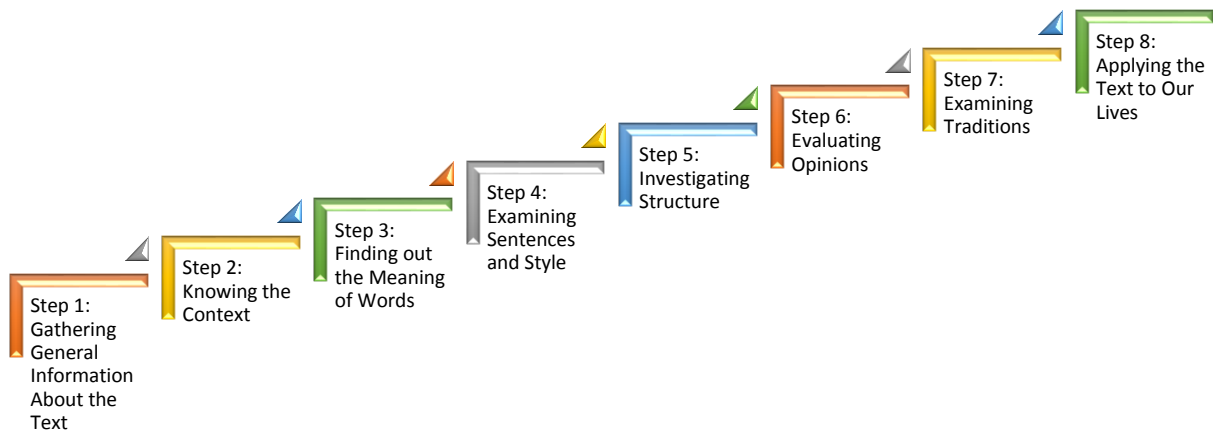
<sup>101</sup> DProf - I added this sentence as per Recommendation 1 of the Sydney Surveys: “To explain in the Introduction to the model that the methods in Step 1, and indeed all the steps, can be applied to all sentences and chapters of the Qur’an, whatever their length.”

<sup>102</sup> DProf - I added this sentence as per Recommendation 3 of the Sydney Surveys: “To clarify in the Introduction to the model that some parts of the model will be easier to apply to some texts of the Qur’an than to others.”

journey to understanding God’s Word! When you come across something difficult, seek assistance – you may be pleasantly surprised with the help you get!<sup>103</sup> Alternatively, from the outset, you may wish to go through one or more of the steps with a friend, teacher, or with a few people in a study circle.

Before starting each step, say a prayer. Ultimately, it is God who teaches us His Book: “The All-Beneficent. He taught the Qur’an.”<sup>104</sup> There are many traditions that urge us to begin our reading of the Qur’an with a supplication.<sup>105</sup> We must remember that our spiritual preparedness plays an important role in our understanding.

The eight steps are shown below. I hope you find the journey enjoyable and rewarding!



<sup>103</sup> “And those who strive for Our sake, We shall definitely guide them in Our ways, and God is indeed with the virtuous” (al-Ankabūt 29:69).

<sup>104</sup> Al-Raḥmān 55:1-2

<sup>105</sup> A useful website that has these supplications in different formats is <http://www.duas.org/kquran.htm> (Ahulul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project, 1995-2019).

### 5.3.3 Step 1: Gathering General Information About the Text

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the key elements of the first step?
2. Why is it important to know the names of the text and the reason behind those names?
3. What does an investigation into the status and rewards of the text reveal?
4. What are the benefits of knowing whether a Qur’anic text is Makkī or Madanī?

#### 5.3.3.1 1. What are the key elements of the first step?

The first thing we should aim to do when we are seeking to understand any text of the Qur’an is to gather some general information about it. By ‘text’, I mean the part of the Qur’an we wish to understand; it could be a sentence, a verse, some verses, or a whole chapter.

We should try to find out three things:

- a) the names by which the text is called and the reason behind those names;
- b) the status and rewards of the text; and
- c) whether it is Makkī or Madanī.

It has also been suggested that, if the text in question is a chapter, we should also find out the number of verses in it.<sup>106</sup> Historically, the number of verses had, at times, been a contentious matter, not because scholars disagreed on the wording in the chapters but because of the different criteria used for counting the verses. However, this discussion is a lot less relevant now, as the publication of the Qur’an that is widely used today – i.e. with the number of verses at 6236 – has become the standard.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Naṣīrī (1395 AH (solar)/2016, p. 119).

<sup>107</sup> DProf - I added this sentence as per Recommendation 2 of the Sydney Surveys: “To state in Step 1 that insofar as the number of verses gives the reader an idea of the size of the chapter in question, it is worth mentioning; but anything more than this is not required.”



If the text in question is a whole chapter, then finding out the information listed above should not be difficult, as many exegetical works mention this information at the beginning of each chapter. If, on the other hand, we are examining only a sentence, a verse, or some verses, then, in most cases, a) and b) will not apply. There are, however, a few texts in the Qur'an, other than whole chapters, which have been given a name and for which a special status and reward has been mentioned. An example is the 'Verse of The Throne'.<sup>108</sup>

### 5.3.3.2 2. Why is it important to know the names of the text and the reason behind those names?

Investigating why a text has been given a particular name can unveil important insights about that text. For example, Chapter 1, al-Ḥamd (All Praise), is known by several different names. We will explore some of these.

- a) Among the names of al-Ḥamd are '*umm al-kitāb*' (Mother of the Book) and '*umm al-qur'ān*' (Mother of the Qur'an). The reason for this is because al-Ḥamd summarises the essence of the Qur'an. The Qur'an's core teachings can be categorised under three headings: The Origin (*al-mabda'*), The Return (*al-ma'ād*), and The Message (*al-risālah*). As the table below shows, al-Ḥamd incorporates all three categories.<sup>109</sup>

Core Qur'anic Teaching	Verses About this Teaching	Explanation
The Origin	1:1 In the Name of God, the All-Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful. 1:2 All praise belongs to God, Lord of all the worlds, 1:3 the All-Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful.	These three verses talk about God's Absolute Lordship over all the worlds and his attributes of Comprehensive Mercy and Special Mercy.

<sup>108</sup> 'Āyat al-Kursī', which is verse 255 of al-Baqarah (Chapter 2). This verse is discussed in some detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>109</sup> Jawādī-Āmulī (1999, p. 260).

<b>The Return</b>	1:4 Master of the Day of Retribution.	This verse refers to God The Adjudicator on the Day of Judgement, when everyone shall be returned to Him.
<b>The Message</b>	1:5 You [alone] do we worship, and from You [alone] do we seek assistance. 1:6 Guide us on the straight path, 1:7 the path of those whom You have blessed—such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray.	At the heart of the Qur’an’s message is servitude, guidance, and the qualities of those considered blessed and those considered wretched.

- b) Al-Ḥamd being a summary of the Qur’an’s essential teachings helps us to understand why it is also called ‘al-Fātiḥah’ (The Opening). As the chapter plays a role similar to that of an introduction to a book, its position as the first chapter of the Qur’an is entirely appropriate.
- c) Al-Ḥamd is also called ‘al-Shifā’ (The Cure). Traditions state that al-Ḥamd is a cure for illnesses.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, in al-Isrā’ 17:82, the Qur’an describes itself as a cure.<sup>111</sup> It is for this reason that Muslims recite this chapter for people who are ill.

Therefore, knowing the names of the text we are seeking to understand and the reason why it is called those names gives us a greater depth of knowledge about, and heightens our admiration and respect for, the text. It prepares us to better understand it as we have already gained useful insights into what it is all about. And if the text happens to be a chapter, then

<sup>110</sup> For example, Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said, “The one who is not healed by al-Ḥamd will not be healed by anything” (Al-Ḥuwayzī, 1415 AH (lunar)/1994, v. 1, p. 4).

<sup>111</sup> “We send down in the Qur’an that which is a cure and mercy for the faithful”. In his exegetical work, Ṣadrā al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī states, “If someone does not understand this chapter in a way that they can derive the major secrets of the divine sciences and spiritual direction from it – such as the various states of The Origin, and The Return, and knowledge about the soul... – then such a person is not a spiritually learned individual and has not been guided by its interpretation” (1366 AH (solar)/1987, v. 1, p. 164).

the information also helps us to better understand the aims of the chapter, which in turn enables us to better understand how the chapter contributes to the overall purpose of the Qur'an, which is the "guidance of humankind" (Al-Baqarah 2:185).<sup>112</sup> For example, by knowing that al-Ḥamd is called '*umm al-kitāb*' and '*umm al-qur'ān*' because it summarises the essence of the Qur'an, we start to see how it contributes to the purpose of the Qur'an's revelation; in other words, we begin to appreciate that the chapter's teachings on The Origin, The Return, and The Message are essential for our guidance on the path to prosperity.

### 5.3.3.3 3. What does an investigation into the status and rewards of the text reveal?

Finding out the status and rewards of the Qur'anic text from traditions can make reading it more significant and inspiring. By 'status', I mean the text's value and position in relation to the Qur'an. For example, traditions tell us that:

- Al-Fātiḥah (Chapter 1) is equal to the whole of the Qur'an.<sup>113</sup>
- Al-Ikhlāṣ (Chapter 112) is equal to a third of the Qur'an.<sup>114</sup>
- Al-Kāfirūn (Chapter 109) is equal to a quarter of the Qur'an.<sup>115</sup>
- Yāsin (Chapter 36) is the heart of the Qur'an.<sup>116</sup>

As for 'rewards', these refer to the material and/or spiritual effects and outcomes of reading the text. For example, as we saw earlier, traditions say that al-Fātiḥah is a cure for illnesses. Another tradition states that whoever recites al-Mā'idah (Chapter 5) every Thursday, their faith will not be tarnished with injustice and they will never be a polytheist.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> DProf - I added this sentence as per Recommendation 4 of the Sydney Surveys: "To explain how Step 1 helps one to understand the purpose of each chapter, which in turn helps to understand how that chapter contributes to the overall purpose of the Qur'an."

<sup>113</sup> Al-Ṭabarsī (1372 AH (solar)/1993, v. 1, p. 47).

<sup>114</sup> Al-Barqī (1371 AH (solar)/1992, v. 1, p. 53).

<sup>115</sup> Al-Kulaynī (1407 (lunar)/1986, v. 2, p. 621).

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Bābawayh (1368 AH (solar)/1989, p. 111); and al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī (1367 (solar)/1988, v. 6, p. 247).

<sup>117</sup> Al-Ḥuwayzī (1415 AH (lunar)/1994, v. 1, p. 582).

We can point to the '*basmalah*'<sup>118</sup> as an example of a Qur'anic text that is not a whole chapter but for which a status and reward have been mentioned in the traditions. With regard to its status, we are told it is "the greatest verse in the Qur'an".<sup>119</sup> As for the rewards of reciting it, a well-known Prophetic hadith reported in both Sunni and Shi'i sources states, "Anything of importance in which the name of God is not mentioned is futile."<sup>120</sup> In another tradition, Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is asked about the interpretation of the *basmalah*, to which he replies, "When a servant [of God] wants to read [something] or do [something], he should say '*bismillāhir raḥmānir raḥīm*', for surely his work will [then] be blessed for him."<sup>121</sup>

There are of course other conditions for attaining the rewards mentioned in traditions for reading certain parts of the Qur'an; it is not that if we simply read the text, we automatically and unreservedly qualify for those rewards. One's faith, sincerity of intention, and conduct are important conditions that need to be met as well. In short, if somebody truly embodies and lives the text's teachings, they will have elevated themselves in the eyes of God and thus merit the rewards mentioned in the traditions.

#### 5.3.3.4 4. What are the benefits of knowing whether a Qur'anic text is Makkī or Madanī?

Most scholars of the Qur'an are of the opinion that any verse or chapter revealed prior to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina is classified as 'Makkī', and any verse or chapter revealed after the migration is classified as 'Madanī'.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, the verses revealed at the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH, or at the farewell pilgrimage in 10 AH, are considered Madanī according to this definition because these verses were revealed after the migration, even though the actual place of revelation was Mecca. 'Entering Medina' is the

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<sup>118</sup> The *basmalah* refers to the verse "*bismillāhir raḥmānir raḥīm*". This means "In the name of God, the All-Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful". The *basmalah* is mentioned 114 times in the Qur'an, being the first verse of each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an with the exception of al-Tawbah (Chapter 9). It is mentioned twice in al-Naml (Chapter 27).

<sup>119</sup> Al-Majlisī (1403 AH (lunar)/1982, v. 82, p. 21; v. 89, p. 238).

<sup>120</sup> Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (1367 (solar)/1988, v.7, p.170).

<sup>121</sup> Al-Majlisī (1403 AH (lunar)/1982, v. 89, p. 242).

<sup>122</sup> This classification of Makkī and Madanī verses and chapters is based on what is known as 'the criterion of time.' A minority of scholars use other criteria to classify the Qur'anic text into Makkī and Madanī, foremost of which are 'the criterion of place' and 'the criterion of addressee'. The criterion of time appears to be the most correct because it was the time factor that changed the content and style of the verses of the Qur'an as the Muslims grew in strength and faith (Jaffer and Jaffer, 2009, pp. 98-101).

point in time for distinguishing between the two; hence, the verses that were revealed during Prophet Muhammad's migration, such as al-Qaṣaṣ 28:85, are considered Makkī.<sup>123</sup>

Knowing whether a verse or chapter is Makkī or Madanī places it in context and helps one to better appreciate the history of the Muslim community's progress; the development of Islamic legislations; and the way Prophet Muhammad dealt with different groups such as polytheists, Christians, and Jews. Furthermore, some Qur'anic issues can only be resolved by knowing whether the verse or chapter is Makkī or Madanī. For example, in order to correctly determine whether certain verses have been abrogated by other verses, one must know that the abrogated verse (*mansūkh*) was revealed before the abrogating verse (*nāsikh*), and this can be determined by knowing their Makkī/Madanī status.

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<sup>123</sup> There is a difference of opinion among scholars of the Qur'an regarding the exact number of Makkī and Madanī chapters. According to Jawān-Ārāstih in his highly popular textbook, 86 chapters of the Qur'an are Makkī and 28 are Madanī (1379 AH (solar)/2000, pp. 133-136).

### 5.3.4 Step 2: Knowing the Context

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Which types of context does this step seek to investigate, and why is this step important?
2. What two things can help us understand the circumstances in which the text was revealed?
3. How does the literary context help us to better understand the text?

5.3.4.1 1. Which types of context does this step seek to investigate, and why is this step important?

This step seeks to investigate two types of context: a) the historical, socio-political, and cultural situation in which the Qur'anic text was revealed; and b) the literary context.<sup>124</sup> It has been said that "A text without a context is a pretext" (author unknown). This statement summarises the importance of this step, as without knowing the context in which a text originated, we are often unable to ascertain its meaning accurately.

5.3.4.2 2. What two things can help us understand the circumstances in which the text was revealed?

The two things are a) the 'Reason for Revelation' (*sabab al-nuzūl*); and b) the 'Occasion of Revelation' (*sha'n al-nuzūl*).

The Reason for Revelation is the event that prompted the revelation of a verse, verses, or a chapter of the Qur'an. The text must be revealed within a relatively short period of time after the event such that the connection between the event and the verse is maintained. For example, al-Mā'idah 5:55 tells us:

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<sup>124</sup> The term that is sometimes used to describe this type of investigation is 'historical-literary context analysis'.

Your guardian is only God, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat [alms tax] while bowing down.

The last part, "... and give the zakat while bowing down", is clearly something out of the ordinary and raises questions for us. We could know the meaning of all the words in the verse very well, but without referring to reports that tell us what the Reason for Revelation of this verse was, we would not be able to correctly understand its meaning. From the reports, we learn that while Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was performing prayers in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, a beggar came into the mosque asking for charity. Not wishing to turn the beggar down but at the same time ensuring his prayer would not be broken, 'Alī, who was in the bowing position of the prayer (*rukū'*) at the time, held out a finger on which he was wearing a ring as a gesture of charity to the beggar, who proceeded to take it. Immediately after this incident, the verse quoted above was revealed.<sup>125</sup>

The Occasion of Revelation, on the other hand, is an event, or a characteristic of a particular person, or some other specific thing, about which a verse, verses, or a chapter of the Qur'an was revealed. Unlike the Reason for Revelation, it is not necessary for the verse in question to be revealed within a relatively short period of time after the event. Therefore, the story of the Christian Yemenite governor Abrahah attacking the Ka'bah is the Occasion of Revelation of *Sūrat al-Fīl* (Chapter 105), not its Reason for Revelation, as the event took place in the year of *Fīl*, which was the year of the birth of the Prophet and hence long before the revelation of the Qur'an.

The Reason for Revelation and Occasion of Revelation, then, are a valuable resource to help us understand the context of a Qur'anic text. Unfortunately, relatively few Qur'anic texts have a Reason for Revelation/Occasion of Revelation.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, many of the reports that do exist are contradictory and unreliable.<sup>127</sup> But, by referring to works of Qur'anic exegesis that mention and assess these reports, and through some diligent investigation, the context of the text can often become much clearer for us and provide us with vital insights into its meaning.

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<sup>125</sup> Makārim-Shīrāzī (1371 AH (solar)/1992, v. 4, pp. 423-432).

<sup>126</sup> Riḍāyī-İşfahānī (1387 AH (solar)/2008), p. 179) writes that more than 1,000 verses have a Reason for Revelation/Occasion of Revelation. The total number of verses in the Qur'an is 6,236.

<sup>127</sup> Naṣīrī (1395 AH (solar)/2016, pp. 160-161).

### 5.3.4.3 3. How does the literary context help us to better understand the text?

The 'literary context', or 'sequence of speech' (*siyāq*),<sup>128</sup> is the preceding or following part of a text that affects the text's meaning. Bābā'ī, 'Azīzī-Kiyā, and Rūḥānī-Rād (1388 AH (solar)/2009, pp. 124-129) maintain that there are three types of literary context: of words, sentences, and verses.<sup>129</sup>

#### *Literary context of words*

This refers to the meaning acquired by words when they are placed next to each other in a sentence. For example, the word '*al-dīn*' in verse 4 of al-Fātiḥah (Chapter 1) is annexed to the word '*yawm*' (day), which in turn is annexed to the word '*mālik*' (Master). By considering the context of these words, '*al-dīn*' takes on the meaning of 'retribution'. Consequently, the sentence in which this phrase is placed is describing God as 'Master of the Day of Retribution' (*māliki yawmid dīn*). In other compositions, *al-dīn* means something quite different. For example, its placement in al-Tawbah 9:33 gives it the meaning of 'religion', and in al-Bayyinah 98:5 the meaning of 'obedience'.

#### *Literary context of sentences*

Here, a sentence provides the context for interpreting another sentence in the same verse. For example, Āli Imrān 3:36 states:

Say, 'O God, Master of all sovereignty! You give sovereignty to whomever You wish, and strip of sovereignty whomever You wish. You make mighty whomever You wish, and You abase whomever You wish. All good is in Your hand. Indeed, You have power over all things.

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<sup>128</sup> Mottahedeh in al-Ṣadr (2003, p. 190).

<sup>129</sup> DProf - This third question, and the sections on the three types of literary context, were not covered in my Sydney lectures. I have brought them in here in response to Recommendation 5 of the Sydney Surveys: "For Step 2, to use different, less well-known examples." The examples I have used here are less well known than the ones I used in the lecture series.



Using the literary context of the sentences in the verse, Raḍī (no date, pp. 65-66) argues that the sentence, “You give sovereignty to whomever You wish, and strip of sovereignty whomever You wish” refers to what God does in this world, not in the Hereafter. This is because of the context provided by the next sentence, “You make mighty whomever You wish, and You abase whomever You wish”, which refers to God’s actions in this world. The literary context of sentences, he concludes, tells us that the entire verse is about what happens in this world.

#### *Literary context of verses*

This means that a verse or some verses provide the context for interpreting another verse in the same passage. For example, al-Dukhān 44:49 says, “Taste! Indeed, you are the mighty and noble!” Reading this sentence on its own, one may think the addressee is being praised and honoured. However, when we place it in the context of the rest of the passage, we come to a very different understanding.

44:43 Indeed, the tree of Zaqqūm  
44:44 will be the food of the sinful.  
44:45 Like molten copper it will boil in the bellies,  
44:46 boiling like boiling water.  
44:47 ‘Seize him and drag him to the middle of hell,  
44:48 then pour over his head the punishment of boiling water.’  
44:49 ‘Taste! Indeed, you are the mighty and noble!  
44:50 This is indeed what you used to doubt!’

As al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1996, v. 18, p. 148) says in his exegesis of the verse, God wants to punish the sinners more severely than He has already by addressing them with derision. When they were in this world, they considered themselves mighty and noble and were not prepared to change their evil ways; hence, God addresses them rebukingly with the same qualities they imagined they possessed. In the words of Makārim-Shīrāzī (1371 AH (solar)/1992, v. 21, p.

206), God is punishing the wrongdoers psychologically having already punished them physically.<sup>130</sup> The effect on the reader is very powerful.

Gorman (2010, p. 75) uses the term 'rhetorical context' to describe the type of analysis mentioned above. He explains:

Rhetoric is the art of effective (and therefore often persuasive) speaking and writing... Analyzing the literary context means asking *where* a text is located; analysing the rhetorical context means asking *why* a text is located where it is. The fundamental question is what *effect* the text has, or might have, on readers by virtue of its situation within a larger discourse.

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<sup>130</sup> In his translation of this verse, Qara'i (2005) helpfully adds an explanatory phrase in square brackets: "Taste! Indeed, you are the [self-styled] mighty and noble!"

### 5.3.5 Step 3: Finding out the Meaning of Words

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this step important?
2. What role does morphology play in helping us to understand the meaning of words?
3. How does knowledge of homonyms help us to understand the meaning of words?
4. How does comparing and contrasting synonyms help us to understand the meaning of words?
5. What benefit is there in knowing the etymology of words?

#### 5.3.5.1 1. Why is this step important?

More than anything else, it is the meaning of words that determine our understanding of a text.<sup>131</sup> The biggest factor in the emergence of different opinions about the meaning of verses over the centuries has been different understandings about the words.<sup>132</sup> It is essential that we understand words as they were understood at the time of revelation; this is an important hermeneutical principle which the Qur'an itself alludes to:

We did not send any apostle except with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our messages] clear to them.<sup>133</sup>

Finding out the correct meaning of words used in Qur'anic texts becomes all the more important when we consider that on the one hand, the Qur'an uses common words and phrases that people are familiar with; but on the other, a large part of its content relates to

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<sup>131</sup> Technically speaking, this step concerns 'lexicology', the study of the form, meaning, and behaviour of words.

<sup>132</sup> Writing in the context of Biblical interpretation, Virkler and Ayayo (2007, p. 99) assert, "Lexical-syntactical analysis is necessary because without it we have no valid assurance that our interpretation is the meaning God intended to convey through the words of the biblical author, nor do we have grounds for saying that our interpretations of Scripture are more valid than those of heretical groups."

<sup>133</sup> Ibrāhīm 14:4.

profound spiritual and metaphysical concepts, the meanings of which cannot be fully conveyed by ordinary language.

To help illustrate the type of issue that can arise if one does not correctly understand the meaning of words, consider al-Qaṣaṣ 28:88: “Everything will perish except His countenance.” It is clear that “His countenance” (*wajhahu*) in this sentence is a metonym for God Himself, as it is impossible for God to have physical attributes.<sup>134</sup> And so in effect, the sentence means ‘Everything besides God will perish’. But, if someone were to take “*wajhahu*” here at its prima facie meaning, they would be making the mistake of anthropomorphizing and corporealizing God, which has been strongly denounced in traditions.<sup>135</sup>

This and the next step are about the Arabic language, and naturally those who know Arabic will find it easier to accomplish them. Having said that, there are resources in English that provide information about Arabic words,<sup>136</sup> and these two steps can still be accomplished by referring to those resources.<sup>137</sup>

#### 5.3.5.2 2. What role does morphology play in helping us to understand the meaning of words?

Morphology (*ṣarf*) studies the structure of words and the changes that occur in them. It plays a crucial role in understanding the meaning of words. Take, for example, the words ‘*al-rahmān*’ (the All-Beneficent) and ‘*al-rahīm*’ (the Ever-Merciful) – two well-known attributes of God. They sound similar and are from the same root ‘*rahmah*’ (mercy) – so what exactly is the difference between them? This is where morphology really helps. ‘*Rahmān*’ is the intensive grammatical form of the noun<sup>138</sup> and signifies God’s ‘extensive mercy’; God as *al-rahmān* is merciful to all His creation, whether they are believers or not.<sup>139</sup> ‘*Rahīm*’ on the

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<sup>134</sup> Another example is al-Faṭḥ 48:10: “The hand of God is above their hands.” In this case, ‘hand’ denotes God’s absolute ‘power’ and ‘authority’.

<sup>135</sup> Arastu in al-Kulayni (2019, pp. 547-551).

<sup>136</sup> An excellent online resource that allows searches across several major dictionaries in one go is Taal’s *Arabic Almanac* (2011-2015).

<sup>137</sup> DProf - I added this paragraph as per Recommendation 9 of the Sydney Surveys: “For Step 3, to explain from the outset that this step is about the Arabic language and those who know Arabic will find it easier to accomplish. Having said that, although this step facilitates a greater depth of understanding about the words used in the Qur’an, one should not feel that if they do not know Arabic they cannot use the step at all; there are resources in English that provide information about the words, and Step 3 can be accomplished by referring to them.”

<sup>138</sup> This is known as an ‘intensive noun’ (*ṣiġḥah mubālighah*) (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2019, p. 89).

<sup>139</sup> This meaning is conveyed in al-A’rāf 7:156: “My mercy embraces everything.”

other hand, is the grammatical form that denotes permanency,<sup>140</sup> signifying God's 'permanent mercy'; God as *al-rahīm* is merciful only to the believers as He showers them with His mercy in this world and in the Hereafter.<sup>141</sup>

Another example is the word '*qawwām*' in al-Nisā' 4:34.<sup>142</sup> Jawādī-Āmulī (2014, pp. 318-319) argues that, based on a particular linguistic quality that the word *qawwām* has, God attaches great importance to the role of husbands in relation to their wives. That is, God does not simply describe husbands as '*qā'im*' (present participle) but as '*qawwām*', which is the intensive grammatical form and which God uses only for very important and sensitive matters, such as maintaining justice.<sup>143</sup> Jawādī-Āmulī quotes a well-known Qur'anic lexicon to corroborate his theory:

*Qawwām* is an intensive noun (*ṣīghah mubālighah*) [...]. It refers to someone who does his utmost in being independent and in standing on his own feet in what he does, without relying on anyone else; and he oversees the management of his wife's affairs and meets her needs. The noble verse points to a distinction he has over her from this perspective; that is, from the perspective of him being heedful of her affairs and overseeing and managing them, in addition to him giving from his wealth and her maintenance being in his hands. This necessitates that the overseeing and management be in his hands (Muṣṭafawī, 2008, v. 9, p. 383).

### 5.3.5.3 3. How does knowledge of homonyms help us to understand the meaning of words?

Homonyms (*mushtarak lafzī*) are words that have the same form but different meanings. For example, the term '*jahl*' can mean 'foolishness' or 'ignorance' – it depends on what it is used opposite to. If it is used to mean the opposite of 'intellect', then it means 'foolishness'; whereas if it is used to mean the opposite of 'knowledge', it means 'ignorance'.

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<sup>140</sup> This is known as an 'assimilated / stative adjective' (*ṣifah mushabbahah*) (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2019, p. 88).

<sup>141</sup> This meaning is conveyed in al-Aḥzāb 33:43: "And he is unto the believers, Ever-Merciful."

<sup>142</sup> I added this sentence as per Recommendation 8 of the Sydney Surveys: "For Step 3, to either replace the *basmalah* example or add another example alongside it to illustrate the importance of morphology."

<sup>143</sup> In al-Nisā' 4:135: 'O you who have faith! Be maintainers (*qawwām*) of justice and witnesses for the sake of God...'; and in al-Mā'idah 5:8: 'O you who have faith! Be maintainers (*qawwām*), as witnesses for the sake of God, of justice....'

In most verses of the Qur'an, *jahl* is used to mean foolishness; i.e. a state which occurs when carnal desires reign over the intellect.<sup>144</sup> For example, in Yusūf 12:33, Prophet Joseph prays to his Lord:

He said, "My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them and become one of the foolish (*al-jāhilīn*)."

*Jahl* here means foolishness as Prophet Joseph is praying for his carnal desires to not overcome his intellect and thus incline him towards the transgressors.

In contrast, al-Ḥujarāt 49:6 tells us:

O you who have faith! If a sinful person should bring you some news, verify it lest you harm some people out of ignorance (*jihālah*) and then become regretful for what you have done.

Here, *jahl* means ignorance, not foolishness, as it is used to mean the opposite of 'knowledge', not 'intellect'.

Knowledge of homonyms, therefore, helps us to identify the correct meaning of words based on the context in which they were spoken.

5.3.5.4 4. How does comparing and contrasting synonyms help us to understand the meaning of words?

Virkler and Ayayo (2007, p. 103) maintain that one method to discover the meaning of words is to study synonyms and look for points of comparison and contrast between them.<sup>145</sup> For example, we can apply this method to the word used to describe Prophet Abraham in the famous Qur'anic story in which he smashes the idols that were being worshipped by the

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<sup>144</sup> Naṣīrī (1395 AH (solar)/2016, p. 357).

<sup>145</sup> To illustrate this method, Virkler and Ayayo cite an interesting example concerning the two Greek words for 'love': *agapaō* and *phileō*. Many scholars, they explain, have used the subtle differences in meaning between the two words to interpret John 21:15-17.

people of his town. In this story, he is described as '*fatā*'.<sup>146</sup> This word is often translated as 'young man' or 'youth', but this raises the question: 'Why did God not use a word like '*shābb*', which is a much more common word for 'young man'/'youth', to describe him?'

According to some lexicographers such as Muṣṭafawī (1368 AH (solar)/1989, v. 9, pp. 28-29), at its core, the word *fatā* has the meaning of 'reaching complete maturity'. Hence, a 'fatwa', which is from the same root, is a completely mature, thoroughly considered opinion, whereas '*nazar*' is an 'opinion' in general. There is no exact equivalent in English for '*futuwwah*', from which *fatā* is derived, but perhaps the nearest is 'chivalry'. Chivalry is a combination of several characteristics, such as courage, honour, loyalty, consideration for others, and a desire for upholding the truth. Seen in this light, then, a *fatā* is not merely a youth but a chivalrous person. This perfectly matches what we know of Prophet Abraham.<sup>147</sup> This analysis would not have been possible without investigating the points of comparison and contrast between the words '*fatā*' and '*shābb*'.

#### 5.3.5.5 5. What benefit is there in knowing the etymology of words?

Knowing the etymology and origin of words can enhance our understanding of their present-day meaning and usage. For example, a hypocrite in Arabic is called '*munāfiq*'. This word is derived from the root word '*nafaq*', which means 'underground passageway'. A desert mouse is called '*nāfiqā' al-yarbū'*' as it digs two tunnels for its den: one evident and the other hidden. It uses the evident tunnel to come and go normally, whereas it uses the hidden one when it needs to escape quickly. We can see the connection between the behaviour of a desert mouse and a hypocrite, the latter being someone who presents a certain outward appearance in public while secretly maintaining another in private.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> "They [the people of the town] said, 'We heard a young man speaking ill of them [the idols they worshipped]. He is called "Abraham"' (Al-Anbiyā' 21:60).

<sup>147</sup> The same could be said of the Companions of the Cave (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*), who are described as '*fityah*', the plural of *fatā*, in two places: al-Kahf 18:10 and 13. In his commentary on these verses, Jawādī-Āmulī (no date, Sessions 6, 7, and 9) posits that their chivalry (*futuwwah*) was instrumental in their stance against the disbelievers.

<sup>148</sup> See for example al-Ṭūsī (1413 AH (lunar)/1992, v. 5, p. 250). Other explanations about the connection between the terms *munāfiq* and *nāfiqā' al-yarbū'* have been given as well.

With this in mind, when we come to verses such as al-Nisā' 4:143-144,<sup>149</sup> we do so with a greater depth of knowledge of the term '*munāfiq*'.

Not only does etymology make investigating the meanings of words interesting, it also a) increases our comprehension of their nuances and connotations; b) helps us to differentiate between words that have similar uses or are closely related to each other; and c) enables us to understand how words were used in the past.

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<sup>149</sup> "The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive God, but it is He who outwits them. When they stand up for prayer, they stand up lazily, showing off to the people and not remembering God except a little, wavering in between: neither with these nor with those. And whomever God leads astray, you will never find any way for him."



### 5.3.6 Step 4: Examining Sentences and Style

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How does syntax enhance our understanding of the text?
2. How does rhetoric help us to understand the text?
3. What method can we use to discover structural relationships in the text?

Syntax (*naḥw*) investigates the arrangements of words and phrases in sentences.<sup>150</sup> Rhetoric (*balāghah*) examines the literary style and eloquence of the text.

#### 5.3.6.1 1. How does syntax enhance our understanding of the text?

A verse that can be used to illustrate the important role syntax plays and how it enhances our understanding is al-Ra'd 13:28:

[Those who turn to God are] those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Behold! Only through the remembrance of God is tranquillity of the hearts attained.

Here, we are told that *only* the remembrance of God will bring about a state of serenity and tranquillity. This exclusivity is understood by observing the syntactical structure of the sentence, “Behold! Only through the remembrance of God is tranquillity of the hearts attained”. In this sentence, the more usual structure is reversed in order to restrict the cause of tranquillity to the ‘remembrance of Allah’ (hence the word ‘only’ in the translation).

Nearly all exegetes of the Qur’an use syntactical analysis. Often, they will use it alongside other approaches and methods. For example, for the interpretation of ‘the verse of *wuḍū’*’,<sup>151</sup> many exegetes use both juristic and syntactical methods. This verse has been the subject of

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<sup>150</sup> An excellent online resource for syntactical analysis of the Qur’anic text is Duke’s *The Quranic Arabic Corpus* (2009-2017).

<sup>151</sup> Al-Mā'idah 5:6.

debate for centuries, and sectarian bias can be seen even in the rendering of the verse into English. For example, the following translation is by Ali Quli Qara'i, a Shi'i Muslim (I have underlined the key part in this and the next translation):

O you who have faith! When you stand up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet, up to the ankles.

In contrast, the translation of the same verse by Sahih International, a Sunni Muslim group of translators is:

O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles.

Although the original Arabic does not mention the verb “wash” before the words “your feet”, the Sahih International group has added it in their translation without even placing it in square brackets, which would have alerted the reader to the fact that it is an addition from the translators and is not present in the original text. As a result, their translation gives the distinct impression that God intends Muslims to *wash* their feet when performing ablution, which is what Sunni Muslims do, whereas Shi'i Muslims *wipe* their feet.<sup>152</sup>

The main point of contention about the ablution verse is summarised well by Gleave (2013, p. 157):

The dispute [is] over... whether the ‘wipe’ governs both ‘your heads’ and ‘your feet’, or only the former, with ‘your feet’ being governed by a verb earlier in the sentence (namely, *igsilū* - wash). The resultant divergence of opinion over the object(s) of ‘wash’ and ‘wipe’ contributes to the conflicting justifications of the ritual ablution for purification purposes known as *wuḍūʿ*, with the broad split being between Sunni (who argue that one should wash one’s feet) and Shi’a (who say one should wipe).

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<sup>152</sup> For a grammatically technical analysis of the arguments, see Burton (1988, p.26).

### 5.3.6.2 2. How does rhetoric help us to understand the text?

To demonstrate the role played by rhetoric in understanding a text, we will take a deeper look at al-Zumar 39:53. In the words of Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, “There is not a verse more expansive [in its coverage] than this one.”<sup>153</sup>

Say [to the people, O Prophet, that God declares,] “O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls; do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins, all of them. Indeed, He is the All-Forgiving, the Ever-Merciful.”

This verse is replete with subtle rhetorical connotations that convey the extensiveness of God’s mercy and His absolute readiness to forgive *all* the sins of those who repent sincerely to Him:

Text	Rhetorical connotation
<b><i>My servants</i></b>	The people God is instructing His prophet to address are the disbelievers. Yet, instead of addressing them with words like “O people”, God reaches out to them with the words “My servants”; the tone from the outset is soft and embracing.
<b><i>who have committed excesses</i></b>	Being disbelievers, God could have used harsher words, such as “who have committed sins” or “who have transgressed”. Instead, He continues with the gentle, caring tone.  Furthermore, God addresses the disbelievers in the third person. The ‘grammatical shifting’ ( <i>iltifāt</i> ) <sup>154</sup> seen here,

<sup>153</sup> Al-Ṭabarsī (1372 AH (solar)/1993, v. 8, pp. 784-785).

<sup>154</sup> Abdel Haleem (1992, v. 55, part 3).

	from the first person to the third, conveys a feeling of respect for the addressee, as God intentionally avoids addressing them directly for their wrongful actions.
<b><i>against their own souls</i></b>	God points out in a caring tone that their sins are harmful to themselves; this is similar to how a loving father may rebuke his child by telling him or her, “You have only harmed yourself by doing that.”
<b><i>do not despair of the mercy of God</i></b>	Instead of “My mercy”, the expression “mercy of God” is used; perhaps this is because the word ‘God’ is the most comprehensive name of the Lord, incorporating all His Divine Attributes.
<b><i>Indeed</i></b>	This word is used to convey emphasis.
<b><i>all sins</i></b>	The Arabic word here is ‘ <i>al-dhunūb</i> ’. This is a broken plural with <i>alif</i> and <i>lām</i> , which denotes comprehensiveness, i.e. “ <i>all sins</i> ”.
<b><i>all of them</i></b>	Despite the previous word already meaning “ <i>all sins</i> ”, this is added for even more emphasis.
<b><i>Indeed</i></b>	Again, this word is used to convey emphasis.
<b><i>He is the All-Forgiving, the Ever-Merciful</i></b>	From among all the attributes of God, these two are mentioned as a reminder to the sinners of His absolute forgiveness and mercy.

### 5.3.6.3 3. What method can we use to discover structural relationships in the text?

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard (2004, pp. 264-267) propose that the first two steps we should take to discover structural relationships in a text are to a) identify the natural divisions of the text; and b) examine the flow of thought of the text. The first step entails dividing the text into smaller elements, while the second looks at how the text has been logically developed.

To help understand the basic structure of a passage, they suggest the following method: first, identify the main statement(s) in each sentence; then, identify the subordinate clause(s) in the sentence; and finally, determine how each clause modifies or qualifies the ideas expressed in the main statement(s).

If we apply this method to the first part of al-Nisā' 4:34, we get the following:<sup>155</sup>

Text	Type of clause
<b><i>Men are the managers of women</i></b>	Main statement
<b><i>because of the advantage God has granted some of them over others</i></b>	Reason clause 1
<b><i>and by virtue of their spending out of their wealth</i></b>	Reason clause 2

It is interesting to note how these three clauses have been interpreted by different scholars of the Qur'an. We will look at the interpretations of two groups of scholars: traditional Shi'i and Islamic feminist.<sup>156</sup> I have marked their interpretations of the clauses in bold typeface.

Firstly, from a traditional Shi'i perspective: in his interpretation of this verse, Jawādī-Āmulī (2013, p. 553) combines a juristic approach with a lexicological one,<sup>157</sup> maintaining that there are two reasons why husbands are considered the managers of their wives. Firstly, "because of the advantage God has granted some of them over others". Here, he argues, the first "some" refers to men, and the second to women. Crucially, God did not say "because of the advantage God has granted them [male plural pronoun] over them [female plural pronoun]",

<sup>155</sup> For a diverse range of possible English renditions of this verse, see Bauer (2015, p. 169).

<sup>156</sup> For a more detailed analysis of how these two groups of scholars interpret the verse, see Ismail (2016).

<sup>157</sup> DProf – Explained in 5.2.5.8 and 5.2.5.11.

as it is not true of all men and of all women [= **interpretation of reason clause 1**]. The ‘*bā*’ (in “*bimā*” – “because of” and “by”) is of the type that assigns a reason (*ta’līyyah*); i.e. as long as the reason holds true, the statement applies. Therefore, if a wife manages the home better than her husband [= **interpretation of reason clause 1**], then the husband would not be regarded as the manager of his wife [= **interpretation of the main statement**]; as a result, he would not be legally obliged to maintain her financially [= **interpretation of the main statement**]. The second reason is “by virtue of their spending out of their wealth”. The same logic applies here as well; i.e. if a wife has greater economic power than her husband [= **interpretation of reason clause 2**], then again there would be no reason for the husband to be her manager [= **interpretation of the main statement**].

Makārim-Shīrāzī (1371 AH (solar)/1992, v. 3, p. 370) also acknowledges the possibility of women being in a better position than men to support the family [= **interpretation of the two reason clauses**], but he maintains that rules are not specific to each and every individual; rather, they are made with the general and most common situation in mind, and that is why the verse is formulated in a general way [= **interpretation of the main statement**].

From an Islamic feminist perspective, Ali (2016, p. 153) argues the same point:

If men are *qawwamun* [managers] in part “because of what”[...] they spend on women, then their role is dependent on their exercise of financial responsibility [= **interpretation of the two reason clauses**]. If men no longer support women [= **interpretation of the two reason clauses**], then they lose any resultant authority [= **interpretation of the main statement**]. Thus, in a family where both husband and wife contribute to the household expenses [= **interpretation of the two reason clauses**], the husband would not be the wife’s *qawwam* [= **interpretation of the main statement**].

Wadud (1999, pp. 72-74), another Islamic feminist scholar, interprets the verse a little differently. She maintains that this verse is limited to a particular, not universal, situation; i.e. the verse is saying that the husband is the financial provider for his family [= **interpretation of the main statement**] on two conditions: 1) God has preferred him with regard to financial inheritance; i.e. he has benefitted from the double inheritance that men receive [= **interpretation of reason clause 1**]; and 2) he financially supports his family from his earnings

[= **interpretation of reason clause 2**]. Wadud further argues that the use of the word “some” in this verse is another indication that it is not an absolute, generalised statement about all men and women [= **interpretation of the main statement**]. She goes on to posit that a contextually relevant reading of the verse today would involve broadening the male responsibility of *qiwāmah*<sup>158</sup> to a social one of supporting child-bearing women, not only materially but in everything needed by them to fulfil their primary responsibility [= **interpretation of the main statement**].

As we can see from the above examples, once the verse’s main statement and the subordinate clauses have been identified, we can use them to pinpoint the different interpretations that have been presented by exegetes. And, if we wanted to compare and contrast their opinions, we could do so more effectively.

In conclusion, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard suggest a very useful method for discovering the structural relationships in a text. This method helps us to understand the text’s flow of thought and to break down the text into its key elements. Furthermore, it facilitates our examination of the opinions of exegetes about these key elements.

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<sup>158</sup> *Qiwāmah* has been translated in a number of ways, some of the most common being ‘management’, ‘maintenance’, ‘protection’, ‘guardianship’, ‘having charge’, and ‘taking good care’.

### 5.3.7 Step 5: Investigating Structure

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why is it important to investigate the structure of the text?
2. How may Step 5 be applied to *some* verses?
3. How may Step 5 be applied to *one* verse?
4. How may the method of 'outlining' help us to discern and express the text's structure?

#### 5.3.7.1 1. Why is it important to investigate the structure of the text?

By 'structure', I mean the relationship that the parts of the text have with each other. This step investigates how the content is arranged and why the order of verses, sentences, and words is as it is. Knowing the structure enables us to better appreciate the wisdom behind the text's arrangement and its extraordinary precision.

#### 5.3.7.2 2. How may Step 5 be applied to *some* verses?

In al-Raḥmān 55:1-4, God says:

The All-Beneficent (1). He taught the Qur'an (2). He created man (3). He taught him articulate speech (4).

The above text raises questions about the order of the verses. Why does God start the chapter with one of His names? And why are the next three verses not placed in a natural order? The natural order would have been to first mention verse 3 (as it concerns the act of creation), then verse 4 (teaching articulate speech), then verse 2 (teaching the Qur'an). Before the Qur'an can be taught, there must first be creation, followed by the ability to articulate.



In his exegetical work, Makārim-Shīrāzī (1371 AH (solar)/1992, v. 23, p. 96) writes that as this chapter presents a description of many different divine gifts and blessings, it is befitting that God begins it with his name ‘The All-Beneficent’. This is because this name signifies God’s extensive mercy,<sup>159</sup> without which there would be no blessings at all. As for the order of the other verses, Makārim-Shīrāzī suggests that God is highlighting the importance of teaching the Qur’an: the Qur’an is the foremost of all blessings, as it is the source of all divine gifts and the means for reaching every other blessing. Therefore, God has mentioned these verses in this order to first draw our curiosity to their order, and then to draw our attention to the importance of teaching the Qur’an.

### 5.3.7.3 3. How may Step 5 be applied to *one* verse?

The following verse, known as the ‘Verse of the Throne’ (*āyat al-kursī* - al-Baqarah 2:255) has been described in traditions as the greatest verse in the Qur’an.<sup>160</sup>

God, there is no god but He, is the All-Living, the All-Sustainer. Neither drowsiness befalls Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes. His throne embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not wearied by their preservation, and He is the All-Exalted, the All-Supreme.

This verse presents an entire course on ‘knowing God’ (*maʿrifat allāh*) by means of a profound hierarchical structure. This only becomes evident when we analyse the arrangement of the words.

The verse starts with God’s name, signifying His position at the apex of all existence, the Originator of everything. Next, the verse says, “There is no god but He”. This points to His oneness (*tawḥīd*) and refutes divinity for any other being. The verse then talks about the three

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<sup>159</sup> See 5.3.5.2.

<sup>160</sup> Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1375 AH (solar)/1996, v. 2, pp. 336-337).

divine attributes, which, in the words of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, all the other divine attributes go back to.<sup>161</sup> These are 'life' (*ḥayāt*), 'knowledge' (*'ilm*), and 'power' (*qudrah*). These attributes, in the order just mentioned, are generally considered by theologians to be the most fundamental attributes of God.

The part, "Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge" refers to His sustenance of all things.

And the part, "He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes" refers to His knowledge.

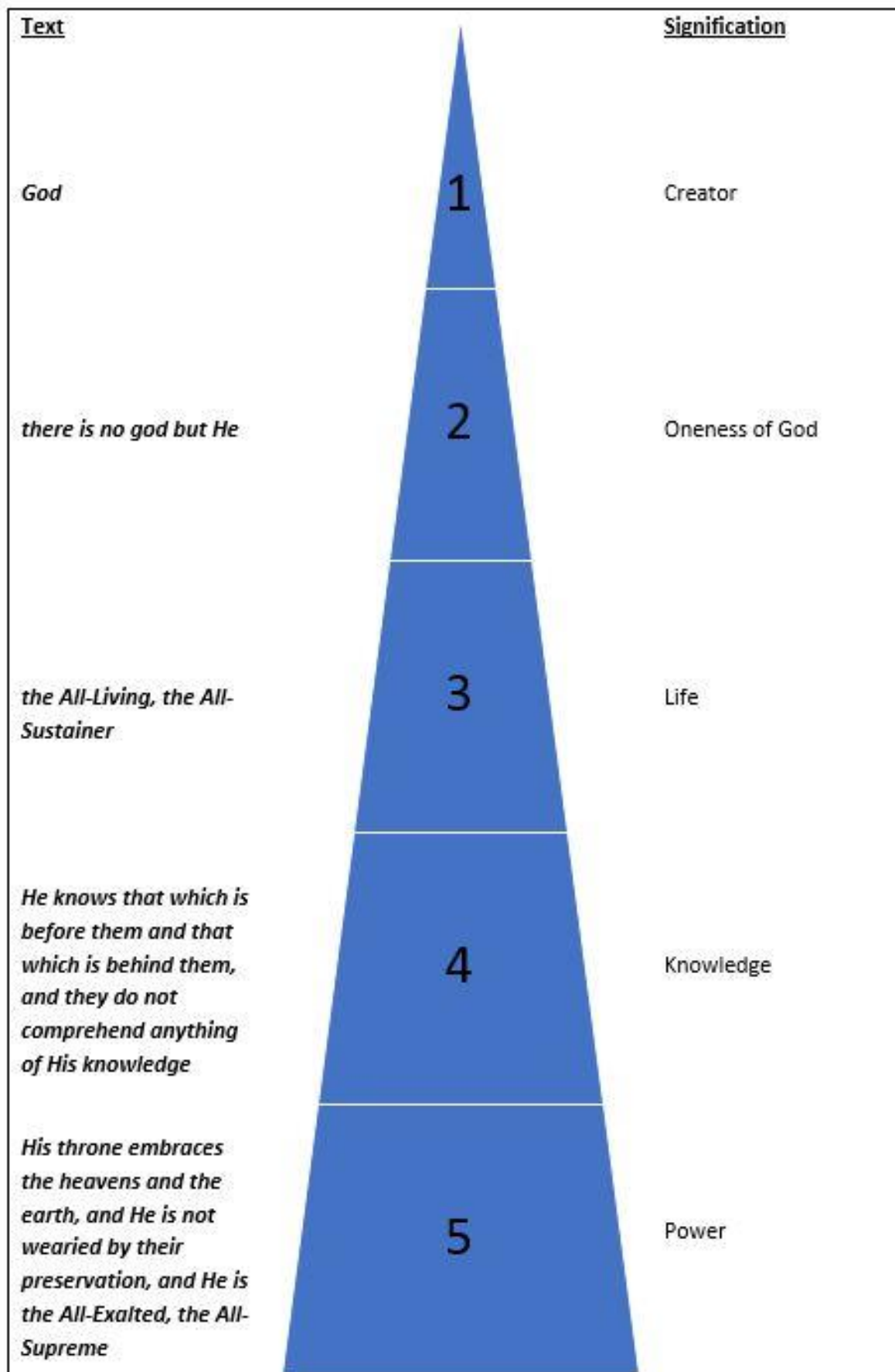
And the part, "His throne embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not wearied by their preservation, and He is the All-Exalted, the All-Supreme" refers to His power.

Next, we see that when the verse says, "the All-Living, the All-Sustainer", the name 'All-Sustainer' comes after 'All-Living', indicating that God's life comes from His own essence - not that He gets it from some other being. This is because He sustains everything, and it would be impossible for a being that sustains everything to be sustained by another being.

The following diagram represents the hierarchical structure described above.

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<sup>161</sup> Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1375 AH (solar)/1996, v. 2, p. 238).



#### 5.3.7.4 4. How may the method of ‘outlining’ help us to discern and express the text’s structure?

To help us in this task, we can employ a method which scholars of Biblical exegetical methods advocate. This method is called ‘outlining’. Duvall (2012, pp. 455-456) explains how to outline a passage:

... summarize the main idea of the passage in one sentence. Next present a full outline of your passage, showing how the main idea unfolds. For each main point of your outline, show in parentheses that main verses correspond. All of the verses of your passage should be included in the main points of your outline.

If we were to apply this method to Şād 38:21-26,<sup>162</sup> we would get an outline similar to the one below:

1. The incident is introduced in the form of a question to Prophet Muhammad (21).
2. Two contenders address Prophet David.
  - a. Two men suddenly appear in front of Prophet David (21).
  - b. They seek a fair judgement and guidance from Prophet David (22).
  - c. A seemingly convincing account is presented by one of the contenders (23).

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<sup>162</sup> 21: Has there not come to you the account of the contenders, when they scaled the wall into the sanctuary?  
22: When they entered into the presence of David, he was alarmed by them. They said, ‘Do not be afraid. [We are only] two contenders: one of us has bullied the other. So judge justly between us, and do not exceed [the bounds of justice], and show us the right path.’

23: ‘Indeed this brother of mine has ninety-nine ewes [female sheep], while I have only a single ewe, and [yet] he says, ‘Commit it to my care,’ and he browbeats [intimidates] me in speech.’

24: He said, ‘He has certainly wronged you by asking your ewe in addition to his ewes, and indeed many partners bully one another, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and few are they.’ Then David knew that We had indeed tested him, whereat he pleaded with his Lord for forgiveness, and fell down prostrate and repented.

25: So We forgave him that and indeed he has [a station of] nearness with Us and a good destination.

26: ‘O David! Indeed, We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between people with justice, and do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of God. Indeed, those who stray from the way of God—there is a severe punishment for them because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning.’

3. Prophet David makes a judgement, realises his mistake, and pleads for forgiveness.
  - a. Prophet David jumps to a conclusion (24).
  - b. God informs him of the reality of the situation – he was just being tested (24).
  - c. Prophet David pleads for forgiveness and repents for not investigating both sides of the story (24).
  
4. God shows Prophet David His mercy.
  - a. God forgives Prophet David (25).
  - b. God raises Prophet David to an even higher station (25).
  - c. God makes Prophet David a vicegerent on the earth (26).
  
5. God advises Prophet David.
  - a. Judgement must be fair and just (26).
  - b. Carnal desires must not be followed (26).
  - c. A severe punishment awaits those who stray because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning (26).

Once an outline like this has been created, the structure of the text can be seen more clearly, and important relationships between the parts of the text can be identified more effectively.

### 5.3.8 Step 6: Evaluating Opinions

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this step important?
2. How may this step be applied?
3. What practical tips can we use to help us with this step?

#### 5.3.8.1 1. Why is this step important?

All the previous steps have prepared the ground for this one. In this step, we investigate the opinions of scholars about the text. Of course, it would not be realistic to investigate *all* the opinions of *every* scholar who has said something about it; rather, the idea is to refer to at least some of the major works. We can benefit immensely from the incredible amount of scholarly work that has been done over the centuries on interpreting the Qur'an. We should try to assess the strengths and weaknesses of opinions that have been presented in the past as well as our own conjectures and hunches.

To find out the opinions of scholars, there are lots of books, articles, and resources in hardcopy and softcopy formats. For those who know Arabic or Persian, I would highly recommend the software programme *Jāmi' Tafāsīr*,<sup>163</sup> which contains over 200 works of exegesis. The programme enables you to quickly search through exegetical works, find related traditions, refer to built-in dictionaries, and analyse verses grammatically. It also includes ten different English translations, and as translation is a type of interpretation, this is an extremely useful tool for understanding the text as well.

#### 5.3.8.2 2. How may this step be applied?

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<sup>163</sup> Produced by the Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences.

For centuries, the interpretation of al-Qadr 97:1 has been subject to intense debate. In this verse, God says, “Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Qadr.”<sup>164</sup> There is consensus among the scholars that the pronoun “it” refers to the Qur’an; but which night is the “Night of Qadr”? Furthermore, if the Qur’an was revealed on one night, then how do we reconcile this with historical reports that tell us verses of the Qur’an were revealed at different times over the course of twenty-three years? In short, when exactly was the Qur’an revealed?

Various opinions have been put forward in response to these questions. For example, some scholars posit that the verse means a *part* of the Qur’an was revealed on the Night of Qadr every year – the part that was necessary for that year.<sup>165</sup> Another opinion is that it means the Qur’an’s revelation *started* on the Night of Qadr.<sup>166</sup> And a third opinion is that the Qur’an had two types of revelation: an instantaneous revelation (*daf’ī*) and a gradual revelation (*tadrījī*).<sup>167</sup> Scholars who hold this third opinion<sup>167</sup> argue that the verse in question refers to the Qur’an’s instantaneous revelation: it was revealed in its entirety in a compacted form to Prophet Muhammad on the Night of Qadr. Then, over the period of his prophethood, which lasted twenty-three years, the same Qur’an was revealed to him again but in an uncompact form.<sup>168</sup> This last opinion is now the most prevalent one among scholars of the Qur’an.

### *Evaluation*

One of the main arguments that is presented against the first two opinions is that the pronoun “it” in al-Qadr 97:1 appears to be referring to the *whole* of the Qur’an, not *part* of it (contrary to the claim in the first opinion). Consequently, this would imply that the revelation of the Qur’an did not just *start* on the Night of Qadr but *finished* on that night as well (contrary to the claim in the second opinion).

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<sup>164</sup> ‘Qadr’ is translated in different ways, some of the most common being ‘decree’, ‘ordainment’, ‘destiny’, and ‘power’.

<sup>165</sup> Ibn Jurayj (d. 150 H); see Berg (2000, p. 153).

<sup>166</sup> See, for example, al-Quṭb (1387 AH (lunar)/1967) v. 6, p. 3944; and Ma’rifat (no date, v. 1, p. 81-82).

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1375 AH (solar)/1996, v. 20, p. 330); Jawādī-Āmulī (1388 AH (solar)/2009a, pp. 69-71); and al-Ṣuyūṭī (quoted in Jaffer and Jaffer 2009, p.53).

<sup>168</sup> The first type of revelation can be likened to a zipped computer folder and the second to the folder’s unzipped, separated files.

Adopting intratextual and lexicological approaches,<sup>169</sup> scholars who hold the third opinion argue that a careful examination of the verses which refer to the revelation of the Qur'an on the Night of Qadr reveals that God uses the words '*anzalnā*' and '*unzila*'.<sup>170</sup> These words are from the verbal noun '*inzāl*', which indicates an all-at-once revelation. However, in other places, God uses the words '*nazzalnā*' and '*nuzzila*', which are derived from the verbal noun '*tanzīl*' and give the meaning of a gradual (*tadrījī*) revelation.<sup>171</sup>

Other verses, they argue, corroborate this opinion as well. For example, Hūd 11:1 states:

Alif, Lam Ra. [This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One [who is] All-Wise, All-Aware.

In this verse, the words "made definitive" refer to the revelation of the entire Qur'an on the Night of Qadr, and the words "then elaborated" refer to its gradual revelation in its separated form. Furthermore, verses tell us that Prophet Muhammad was instructed not to divulge the contents of the verses before their revelation to him had been completed; these verses, the scholars argue, indicate that he must have had prior knowledge of the Qur'an's content:

And hasten not [in reading] the Qur'an before its revelation to you has been completed (Ṭāhā 20:114).

Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it. Indeed, it is up to Us to put it together and to recite it (Al-Qiyāmah 75:16-17).

And finally, the authors who hold the third opinion point to various traditions to corroborate their double-revelation theory further.<sup>172</sup>

Through such evaluation, we learn a great deal about the text in question as well as the different methods and approaches used by scholars to reach their conclusions. This helps us to assess our conjectures and revise them wherever necessary. As a result of this process, we move closer to discovering the truth about the meaning of the text.

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<sup>169</sup> DProf - see 5.2.5.1 and 5.2.5.11.

<sup>170</sup> Al-Qadr 97:1, al-Baqarah 2:185, and al-Dukhān 44:1-3.

<sup>171</sup> Al-Isrā' 17:106 and al-Furqān 25:32.

<sup>172</sup> See, for example, Jaffer and Jaffer (2009, pp. 51-53).



### 5.3.8.3 3. What practical tips can we use to help us with this step?

Gorman (2010, p. 171) offers very useful tips to help us accomplish this step, which I have adapted to formulate the guidelines below:

1. Find the right resources by consulting teachers and advanced students and by doing library and online searches.
2. Begin to organise diverse opinions into various major groups.
3. Evaluate, with the help of others if required, the merits of each option as presented by the proponents of that view. Ask yourself: Are the arguments valid or questionable? Are they strong or weak? Are the perspectives offered valuable or extraneous?

### 5.3.9 Step 7: Examining Traditions

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this step important?
2. How may this step be applied?

#### 5.3.9.1 1. Why is this step important?

Traditions (*aḥādīth*) are reports of the Sunna. In the Twelver Shi'ī context, the Sunna is what Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the Twelve Imams said, did, and tacitly consented to.

The Qur'an itself tells us about the important role traditions play in clarifying the meaning of its verses. In al-Naḥl 16:44, God describes Prophet Muhammad's exegetical duty:

We have sent down The Reminder to you [Prophet Muhammad] so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect.

Many verses point to the authority of the Sunna for Muslims. For example, al-Ḥashr 59:7 tells us:

Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and relinquish whatever he forbids you, and be wary of God. Indeed, God is severe in retribution.

In the verse above, the broad meaning conveyed by the words "Take whatever" and "relinquish whatever" incorporates all aspects of the Sunna, including explanations about the Qur'anic text. If these explanations were not authoritative, then the instructions from God in the verse would be pointless. Perhaps the last part of the verse, "and be wary of God. Indeed, God is severe in retribution" is there to further emphasise the need to adhere to the Sunna. And although the verse mentions "Apostle", Shi'ī scholars present theological arguments as to why such texts apply to the Infallible members of Prophet Muhammad's household as well.

One such argument centres around the verse known as the ‘Verse of Purification’ (*āyat al-taḥhīrī* - Al-Aḥzāb 33:33), which mentions the Prophet’s household (Ahl al-Bayt), and their infallible status:

Indeed, God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household (*ahl al-bayt*), and to purify you with a thorough purification.

With respect to verses on ritual acts of worship such as prayer and ablution, Prophet Muhammad would practically demonstrate the correct way of performing these acts.<sup>173</sup> Most of Prophet Muhammad’s exegesis, however, was communicated verbally. His words would be quoted by his family and companions when they explained the meaning of verses, and over the course of time, exegetes came to use the elucidations of the Prophet, his family, and his companions in their exegetical works. This method of *tafsīr* came to be known as ‘tradition-based exegesis’ (*tafsīr bi al-riwāyah*).

The inseparability of the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad’s infallible household is stated clearly in the famous tradition known as the ‘Tradition of the Two Weighty Things’ (Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn).

Verily I leave behind for you two weighty [very important] things. As long as you hold fast to them, you will never go astray: The Book of God and my progeny, my Ahl al-Bayt [members of my household]. They will never separate until they meet me at the pool in Paradise.<sup>174</sup>

This tradition, quoted in both Shi’i and Sunni sources in various ways, is known as a ‘wide-scale transmission’ (*ḥadīth mutawātir*), which is the highest designation that can be given to a tradition to denote its authenticity. In this tradition, the Ahl al-Bayt are placed on a par with the Qur’an. Hence, Shi’i scholars argue that it is necessary to refer to their traditions for guidance in all matters, including the interpretation of the Qur’an.

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<sup>173</sup> See, for example, al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (1982, p. 423) concerning the canonical prayer.

<sup>174</sup> See, for example, ‘Īsā (no date, v. 5, traditions 3786 and 3788); and al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (1988, v. 27, p. 33).

### 5.3.9.2 2. How may this step be applied?

To give us an idea of how traditions help us to better understand the Qur'an, let us consider Maryam 19:31 in which Prophet Jesus says:

He has made me blessed wherever I may be.

The word "blessed" (*mubārakan*) here may prompt the question, 'Blessed in what way?' When we look at traditions on this verse, we find that Imam Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said that the word "blessed" in this verse means "very beneficial to others" (*naffā'an*). Perhaps, we may conjecture, the Imam was referring to, among other things, Prophet Jesus' ability to heal people: the Qur'an tells us that he would heal the blind, cure the leprosy, and revive the dead.<sup>175</sup>

Naturally, we should investigate all the reports we come across for their reliability and signification. Exegetical works such as al-Ṭabāṭabā'i's *al-Mīzān* and Jawādī-Āmulī's *Tasnīm* have very useful sections in which they analyse and assess traditions that have been reported about the verses.

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<sup>175</sup> "And [he will be] an apostle to the Children of Israel, [and he will declare,] 'I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord: I will create for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind and the leper and I revive the dead by God's leave. And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful" (Āli Imrān 3:49).

### 5.3.10 Step 8: Applying the Text to Our Lives

In this section, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this step important?
2. How may this step be applied?
3. Which principle can be used to help us apply the text to our lives?

#### 5.3.10.1 1. Why is this important?

This step takes us from meaning to application. After we have gone through the previous seven steps and have attained a sound understanding of the text, we are in a position to use that understanding in our lives. Some exegetical works have sections titled ‘Points’, ‘Subtleties’, or ‘Messages’, which are very useful starting points for advice on applying the verses.

The Qur’an is the speech of God (*kalām allāh*)<sup>176</sup> and a manifestation of God The Absolute.<sup>177</sup> As such, the Qur’an contains endless messages for the guidance of humankind. Guiding us is its aim.<sup>178</sup> So we must seek guidance from it for the problems we wish to resolve and assess our conjectures against it in our quest for the truth.

#### 5.3.10.2 2. How may this step be applied?

In answer to this question, a very effective way would be to see what critical rationalists say about how the Qur’an helps us to solve problems.<sup>179</sup> Paya (2018, pp. 58-59) presents the following three ways:

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<sup>176</sup> “...and the word of God is the highest; and God is All-Mighty, All-Wise” (Al-Tawbah 9:40).

<sup>177</sup> In the words of Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, “He, The Glorified, manifested Himself to them in His Book without them seeing Him” (Al-Raḍī (compiler), 1993, Sermon 145).

<sup>178</sup> “... [it is a] guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs of guidance and the Criterion” (Al-Baqarah 2:185).

<sup>179</sup> “Critical rationalism is a way of life and a philosophical outlook. It was first introduced by Karl Popper... and was further developed by his students and colleagues” (Paya, 2018, p. 30).

1. The Qur'an acts as a judge for assessing our conjectures.
2. The Qur'an helps us to discover new ideas for solving our problems.
3. The Qur'an assists us to expand our knowledge base in new areas.<sup>180</sup>

### *1. The Qur'an acts as a judge for assessing our conjectures*

Conjectures are produced by us. We project our conjectures onto reality, in this case, the Qur'an. As we do so, we must strive to falsify our conjectures, not to confirm them.<sup>181</sup> The Qur'an either exposes the defects in our conjectures or corroborates them; but either way, we learn. If the Qur'an exposes the defects in our conjectures, we learn *via negativa*; i.e. we come to know that our conjectures are off track. And if the Qur'an corroborates our conjectures, we learn *via positiva*; i.e. we come to know that our conjectures are currently on track.

### *2. The Qur'an helps us to discover new ideas for solving our problems*

In the course of assessing our conjectures against the Qur'an – in other words, as we use the Qur'an in # 1 above – the Qur'an may inspire us to investigate other ways of solving our problem, leading us to formulate new conjectures.

### *3. The Qur'an assists us to expand our knowledge base in new areas*

As we engage with the Qur'an, we may develop an urge to investigate new areas.

### *An example*

Let us say the problem you are facing is that you are unable to resist temptations, and this is leading you to sinful behaviour; so, essentially, you would like to know how to resist temptation. You have heard that at such times, you should take refuge in God (*isti'ādah*). So now let us say you conjecture that this could be the solution. You consult the Qur'an and enter into a critical dialogue with it. You strive to find evidence which refutes your conjecture;

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, pp. 58-59.

<sup>181</sup> Just as Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "Suspect your opinions [if they are] contrary to the Qur'an's" (Al-Raḍī (compiler), 1993, Sermon 176).

i.e. you try to see if there is anything in it that says you can resist temptation by *not* taking refuge in God. If there is such an evidence, you must revise your conjecture.

Let us say that in the course of your search you come across the story of Prophet Joseph and Zalīkhā, which is mentioned in Yūsuf 12:23-25:

The woman in whose house he was solicited him. She closed the doors and said, 'Come!' He said, 'Refuge in God! Indeed, He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed, the wrongdoers are not felicitous' (23).

She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her [too] had he not beheld the proof of his Lord. So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants (24).

They raced to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind, and they ran into her husband at the door. She said, "What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful punishment?" (25)

When you read these verses, you find that Prophet Joseph does indeed resist temptation by taking refuge in God, for inverse 23, he says, "Refuge in God!" So far, then, and only temporarily, your conjecture is corroborated *via positiva*. **This is use # 1.** The Qur'an has acted as arbiter for your theory and so far has judged it to be sound. So now you would be rationally entitled to put your theory into practice.

You also find in these verses that Prophet Joseph does four other things to help him resist the advances of Zalīkhā:

1. He acknowledges that God is his Nourisher and Sustainer: "Indeed, He is my Lord".
2. He is grateful to God for the bounties he has been provided with: "He has given me a good abode".
3. He remembers the accounting that will be done in the Hereafter: "Indeed, the wrongdoers are not felicitous".
4. He takes decisive action by moving away from the temptation: "They raced to the door" (i.e. Prophet Joseph ran towards the door and Zalīkhā ran after him).

**This is use # 2.** You have discovered four new ideas for solving your problem!

But now, you have an urge to know about some other things. For example, you would like to know more about taking refuge in God; or how the word “Lord” (*rabb*) differs in its meaning to the word “God” (*allāh*); or how Prophet Joseph ended up in Zalīkhā’s house in the first place; or what happened after this incident; or what the psychological effects of resisting temptations are... and so on. **This is use # 3.**

5.3.10.3 3. Which principle can be used to help us apply the text to our lives?

A method advocated by some Biblical scholars for applying Scripture to one’s life is ‘principlizing’.<sup>182</sup> Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 194-195) describe ‘principlizing’ as follows:

Principlizing is an attempt to discover in a narrative the spiritual, moral, and/or theological principles that have relevance for the contemporary believer. It is based on the assumption that the Holy Spirit chose those historical incidents recorded in Scripture for a purpose: to give information, to make a point, to illustrate an important truth, and so on. Principlizing attempts to understand a biblical account in such a way that we can recognize the original reason it was included in Scripture, the principles it was meant to teach.

They go on to mention some guidelines for principlizing (p. 200), which include:

1. The principles must be applicable across times and cultures.
2. The meaning must be the author’s intended one, which is ascertained through the methods described in the previous steps.
3. The meaning and principles derived must be consistent with all other teachings of the Book.

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<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 194-201 and 206-209); and Duvall (2012, pp. 43-45).



Several Muslim scholars have presented a similar principle for applying Qur’anic text to one’s life.<sup>183</sup> For example, Riḍāyī-İşfahānī (1387 AH (solar)/2008, pp. 440) describes a method known as the ‘inner dimension’ (*baṭn*):

Taking a general principle from a verse, after nullifying the original specificity (*ilghā’ al-khuṣūṣiyyah*) of the verse, and applying that principle to new instances.

“Nullifying the original specificity of the verse” refers to removing particulars mentioned in the verse that are not significant to the meaning of the principle. As a result, the scope of the verse is widened.

An excellent place to apply this method is the stories of the prophets. God says in Yūsuf 12:111, “There is certainly a moral in their accounts for those who possess intellect.” Wise people do not consider these stories as mere historical reports but take lessons from them and apply those lessons to their lives. I will use the story of Prophet Jethro (Shu‘ayb in Arabic) as an example of how this method can be applied.

Prophet Jethro was the father-in-law and teacher of Prophet Moses. He was sent to the people of Madyan, in present-day Saudi Arabia, and to the people of nearby Aykah. The people in both cities were idol worshippers. Those in Madyan were financially well to do but they would not trade fairly. For example, they would cheat in weighing and measuring goods. Hūd 11:85 tells us that Prophet Jethro admonished them for this practice, telling them:

O my people! Observe fully the measure and the balance with justice, and do not wrong people of their things.

Reading this verse today, we may ask ourselves, ‘Is this a purely historical report, or does it have significance for me today?’ If we apply the inner dimension method, we would remove the particulars of time, place, person, and object, extract a general principle from the verse, and apply that principle to our lives.

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<sup>183</sup> Riḍāyī-İşfahānī (1387 AH (solar)/2008, pp. 222-229) mentions seven prominent scholars along with their descriptions of the principle.

Nullified Particularity	Result
<b>Time</b>	The verse is not only applicable to the time of Prophet Jethro but to all times.
<b>Place</b>	The verse is not only applicable to the city of Madyan but to all places.
<b>People</b>	The verse is not only applicable to the people of Madyan but to all people.
<b>Object</b>	The verse is not only applicable to acting unfairly with weights and measures but with all things.

The conclusion we come to is that we must always be fair and just, at all times, in all places, with all people, and in all things. In this way, we do not see Prophet Jethro’s instruction as a purely historical account but a relevant piece of guidance that is applicable to us today, just as it was for the people of Madyan at that time.<sup>184</sup>

As we saw earlier, Virkler and Ayayo have suggested guidelines for using principlizing. In addition to the three mentioned by them, I would add a fourth guideline for using the inner dimension method with Qur’anic texts, and that is, the principle must not be used for deriving jurisprudential rulings. The derivation of Islamic law is a highly specialist field and has its own methods which take many years to learn and master.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> The eternal and universal message of the Qur’an is summed up well in the following tradition. It is reported that a man once asked Imam Ja’far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, “Why is it that the Qur’an, however much it is disseminated and studied, just gets fresher?” The Imam replied, “Because God did not reveal it for only one time or one people, and so it is new in every time and fresh with every people until the Day of Resurrection” (Ibn Bābawayh (1378 AH (solar)/1999, v. 2, p. 87).

<sup>185</sup> In addition, the Qur’an contains ‘immutable’ (*thābit*) principles and ‘mutable’ (*mutaghayyir*) principles, which are important to consider as well. The former are those principles that do not change with the conditions of time and place, an example being the principle of leading a God-centric life. The latter, on the other hand, are those principles which can and do change in different times and places, an example being when we should have a positive opinion about people and when we should suspect their motives. For more information on these principles, see Riḍāyī-İşfahānī (1396 AH (solar)/2017, pp. 198 and 200-222).

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how:

- ❖ Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 were achieved; and how
- ❖ Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were answered.

As for the achievement of Objectives 5, 6, and 8, and the answering of Research Questions 5 and 6, these were shown in Chapter 4.

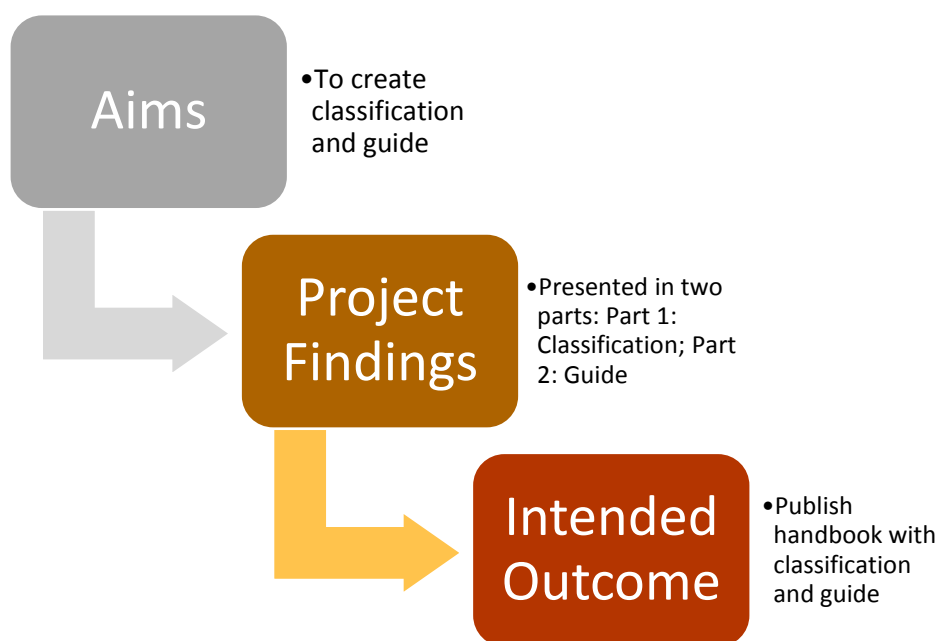
The table below puts all of the above together. It shows which section in this / the previous chapter discusses which Objective / Research Question. The column on the far right shows where in the next chapter my conclusions and recommendations on each of the Objectives can be found.

Objective	Research Question	Section in Current / Previous Chapter	Section in Next Chapter
<b>1. To identify and describe some of the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.</b>	1. What are the most important methods and approaches used in the Qur'anic and Biblical traditions of exegesis?	5.2.2 5.2.5	6.2
<b>2. To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.</b>	2. What are the similarities and differences in the exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions?	5.2.2	6.3

<p><b>3. To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches.</b></p>	<p>3. How are Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?</p>	<p>5.2.6</p>	<p>6.4</p>
<p><b>4. To present an alternative classification of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches.</b></p>	<p>3. How are Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?</p>	<p>5.2.7</p>	<p>6.5</p>
<p><b>5. To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur’an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur’anic exegesis, and to analyse the data.</b></p>	<p>3. How are Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches currently classified, and is there a better way to classify them?</p>	<p>4.3</p>	<p>6.6</p>
<p><b>6. To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur’an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.</b></p>	<p>5. What would be the impact of introducing the critical rationalist approach to the field of Qur’anic exegesis?</p>	<p>4.4 and 4.5.1</p>	<p>6.7</p>

<p><b>7. To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur’anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur’an.</b></p>	<p>4. How may Biblical exegetical methods and approaches be used to help produce a practical step-by-step guide to interpreting and applying the Qur’an?</p>	<p>5.3</p>	<p>6.8</p>
<p><b>8. To present the guide in a series of lectures and conduct a questionnaire survey on each step, and to analyse the data from the surveys.</b></p>	<p>6. What would be the impact of introducing a practical step-by-step guide to interpreting and applying the Qur’an?</p>	<p>4.6 and 4.7</p>	<p>6.9</p>

As mentioned in 2.1.1, my aims have been to create a new classification of methods and approaches used in Qur’anic exegesis, and a systematic model for understanding and using the Qur’an. Therefore, in this chapter, I presented my project findings in two parts: Part 1 was on the classification, and Part 2 was on the guide. In 2.1.2, I stated that my intended outcome is a handbook that will be in two parts: a) the classification; and b) the guide. The handbook will be based on the findings presented in this chapter. The diagram below graphically depicts this explanation.



The two parts of my project findings complement each other, and I am hopeful that together, they will make the handbook more complete. Part 1 is more theoretical than practical, and Part 2 is the reverse. I have found through my lecturing and teaching experience that both are necessary to help learners make the transition from exegetical theory to exegetical practice and vice versa. Having learnt about exegetical methods and approaches and how they are classified, it is important that learners know how they are applied to verses of the Qur'an and where other methods and approaches might come into the exegetical process. And, in the course of following the eight-step guide, the classification of the methods and approaches that are used in the model will help them to situate the interpretive processes and procedures within the context of the Qur'anic exegetical framework.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 INTRODUCTION .....	213
6.2 OBJECTIVE 1 .....	213
6.2.1 Reflection.....	216
6.3 OBJECTIVE 2 .....	217
6.3.1 Reflection.....	221
6.4 OBJECTIVE 3 .....	222
6.4.1 Classification 1: Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī .....	222
6.4.2 Classification 2: Ayatollah ‘Abbas‘alī ‘Amīd Zanjānī.....	223
6.4.3 Classification 3: Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Ma‘rifat .....	224
6.4.4 Classification 4: ‘Alī ‘Akbar Bābā‘ī.....	224
6.4.5 Reflection.....	224
6.5 OBJECTIVE 4 .....	225
6.5.1 Key Features of the Classification.....	226
6.6 OBJECTIVE 5 .....	228
6.6.1 Dr Muḥammad ‘Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī.....	228
6.6.2 Dr Ḥusayn ‘Alawī-Mihr .....	229
6.6.3 Sayyid Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḍiyā‘ī-Raḍawī .....	230
6.7 OBJECTIVE 6 .....	231
6.7.1 Classroom Presentations.....	231
6.7.2 Conference Presentation.....	232
6.8 OBJECTIVE 7 .....	232

<b>6.9 OBJECTIVE 8 .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>6.9.1 Questionnaire Survey Conclusions .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>6.9.2 Recommendations .....</b>	<b>238</b>



## 6.1 Introduction

I shall structure my conclusions around the objectives that I set out to achieve at the beginning of this project. My recommendations will be presented at the end of the chapter.

## 6.2 Objective 1

*To identify and describe the most important methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible.*

The most important Qur'anic and Biblical exegetical methods and approaches according to some of the leading authors in the field are as follows:

<b>Qur'anic</b>	<b>Biblical</b>
Contextualist: advocates a reinterpretation of Qur'anic injunctions to make them applicable to the present day (Saeed, 2014).	Contextualizing: focuses on expressing the text's message accurately in today's world (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).
Textualist/Literal: primary importance is given to the prima facie meaning (Elmi, 2014).	Literal: according to the 'plain meaning' conveyed by its grammatical construction and historical context (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).
Intratextual ( <i>tafsīr al-qur'ān bil-qur'ān</i> ): verses of the Qur'an are used to interpret other verses (al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1375 AH (solar)/1996).	Intertextual: examines how texts of the Canon contain echoes of other texts, as well as reverberations of additional non-linguistic items from the cultural environment (Gorman, 2010).

<p>Scientific (<i>'ilmī</i>): using experimental science (both the natural and human sciences) to interpret verses that have scientific content (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	<p>Social-Scientific Approaches: investigating the social history of the biblical world and the application of modern theories of human behaviour to the text (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>
<p>Allegorical (<i>ishārī</i>): explaining the hidden points of verses by going beyond their apparent meaning and focusing on their inner meaning (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	<p>Allegorical: searching for secondary and hidden meanings underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a historical narrative (Virkler and Ayayo, 2007).</p>
<p>Theological (<i>kalāmī</i>): interpreting verses relating to beliefs such as the oneness of God (<i>tawḥīd</i>), prophethood (<i>nubuwwah</i>), imamology (<i>imāmah</i>), and eschatology (<i>ma'ād</i>), aiming to prove one's beliefs and disprove the beliefs of others (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	<p>Theological Analysis: examines how the passage fits into the total pattern of God's revelation (Virkler and Ayayo, 2007).</p>
<p>Lexicological (<i>lughawī</i>): examines the form, meaning, and behaviour of words in the Qur'an (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	<p>Lexicological: examines word meanings (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>
<p>Literary and Rhetorical Analysis: deals with the creative and artistic body of language (Bābā'ī, 'Azīzī-Kiyā, and Rūḥānī-Rād, 1388 AH (solar)/2009).</p>	<p>Grammatical-Structural: examines the combination and relationship of words and word-groups in the communication (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>
	<p>Literary Contextual Analysis: examines consistency of the proposed interpretation with the material that comes immediately before and after the text (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>

<p>Inner Dimension (<i>baṭn</i>) Method: Taking a general principle from a verse, after nullifying the original specificity of the verse, and applying that principle to new instances (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1387 AH (solar)/2008).</p>	<p>Techniques of Correct Application: ensuring legitimate application of the text (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>
<p>Comprehensive (<i>jāmi'</i>): an umbrella approach under which several approaches are used together (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	<p>Techniques of interpreting special literary forms, such as Biblical poetry, Genres of the Old Testament (Narrative, Law, Poetry, Prophecy, and Wisdom), and Genres of the New Testament (the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation) (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 2004).</p>
<p>Tradition-based (<i>tafsīr bil-riwāyah</i>): traditions – i.e. reports of the Sunna, which incorporates the words, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the Twelve Imams – are used to interpret verses of the Qur'an (Jawādī-Āmulī, 1378 (solar)/1999).</p>	
<p>Interpretive reasoning (<i>'aqlī</i>): striving to understand and clarify the meaning of verses based on rational argument and logical reasoning (Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī, 1390 AH (solar)/2011).</p>	
<p>Exegesis based on speculative opinion (<i>tafsīr bil-ra'y</i>): imposing one's speculative opinion – i.e. one that is not based on rational or reported evidence – onto the verses ('Alawī-Mihr, 1381 AH (solar)/2002).</p>	

Juristic ( <i>fiqhī</i> ): examining verses concerning Islamic law and deriving legal rulings from them (Ma'rifat, 1385 AH (solar)/2006).	
Philosophical ( <i>falsafī</i> ): examining verses mainly relating to existence, God, and His attributes from a particular philosophical viewpoint ('Alawī-Mihr, 1381 AH (solar)/2002).	
Sociological ( <i>ijtimā'ī</i> ): examining verses relating to society with the aim of finding solutions to problems being faced by Muslims today ('Alawī-Mihr, 1381 AH (solar)/2002).	

### 6.2.1 Reflection

Authors on Qur'anic interpretation tend to organise the methods and approaches they discuss around a classification. In contrast, most of the works on Biblical interpretation which I studied examine exegetical methods and approaches in a few different ways rather than around a distinct classification (5.2.2). Authors on Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches use various terms to refer to the different categories: exegetical 'foundations', 'methods', 'methodologies', 'schools', 'orientations', 'styles', and 'approaches' are all used (5.2.6). I did not find major differences in the way the Biblical scholars defined the most important methods/approaches, whereas there were some noticeable differences among the Qur'anic authors. Differences in terminology and definitions among the Qur'anic scholars are not wholly surprising, given that this is a relatively new field of study in the Qur'anic tradition.

## 6.3 Objective 2

*To explain the similarities and differences in the most important exegetical methods and approaches used by the two traditions.*

The table below shows the main methods and approaches used in the exegesis of the Qur'an and the Bible according to some of the leading authors in the field.

Method/Approach	Qur'an	Bible	Comment
Intratextual	✓	✓	The authors of the Biblical works did not discuss this as a distinct approach, perhaps, one may conjecture, because it is a commonsensical approach to the study of any text. Traditional Shi'i scholars, on the other hand, with their assertion that methods are based on sources and the Qur'an being the greatest of all sources, discuss this method extensively and give it precedence over all other methods.
Textualist / Literal	✓	✓	These approaches are usually used in conjunction with other approaches.
Allegorical	✓	✓	Both traditions use this but with one major difference: in Biblical exegesis, allegorism is restricted to historical narratives whereas there is no such restriction in Qur'anic exegesis.

Theological / Theological Analysis	✓	✓	Used extensively in both traditions.
Lexicological	✓	✓	Used extensively in both traditions.
Literary and Rhetorical Analysis / Grammatical-Structural / Literary Contextual Analysis	✓	✓	Definitions and terminology vary among the Qur'anic and Biblical scholars regarding these approaches, but essentially both traditions use them extensively.
Inner Dimension Method / Techniques of Correct Application	✓	✓	An example of a technique used in Biblical exegesis for correct application is 'principlizing'.
Comprehensive	✓	✓	Although the Biblical scholars did not mention terms like 'comprehensive', they did advocate the use of several approaches/methods, often in the form of 'steps' or 'stages'.
Scientific	✓	✗	Although the 'scientific' approach that is used in Qur'anic exegesis incorporates both the natural and human sciences, it is still very different to the 'social-sciences approaches' used in Biblical exegesis.
Social-Scientific Approaches	✗	✓	

Historical-Cultural	✘	✓	Somewhat surprisingly, this is not discussed as a distinct approach in the works of the traditional Shi'i authors. These scholars do, however, give huge importance to the historical and cultural contexts, which they discuss under other approaches, such as literary and rhetorical analysis.
Contextualist / Contextualizing	✘	✓	Although the names are slightly different, the approach is essentially the same. Traditional Shi'i authors do not use the contextualist approach in the way that is advocated by authors such as Saeed (2014).
Tradition-based	✓	N/A	The Sunna is exclusive to the Islamic faith.
Interpretive reasoning	✓	✘	Only the Qur'anic scholars talked about reason being a method.
Exegesis based on speculative opinion	✓	✘	The Biblical scholars did not discuss this as a distinct approach.

Juristic	✓	✗	Derivation of shariah law is a highly specialised field, but the Qur’anic scholars discuss this approach nevertheless. One of the reasons for this may be because they themselves are jurists (those that have the title ‘Ayatollah’), or they have studied Islamic law for many years (the study of jurisprudence being a key part of Shi’i seminary studies).
Philosophical	✓	✗	Philosophy was not mentioned by the Biblical scholars as a distinct approach.
Sociological	✓	✗	The Biblical scholars did not discuss this as a distinct approach.
Intertextual	N/A	✓	This only applies when there are multiple books, as is the case with the Biblical Canon.
Literary Criticism (Narrative Criticism and Poststructuralism)	✗	✓	The works of the traditional Shi’i scholars did not discuss this approach.



Techniques of interpreting special literary forms, such as Biblical poetry, Genres of the Old Testament (Narrative, Law, Poetry, Prophecy, and Wisdom), and Genres of the New Testament (the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation)	N/A	✓	These have been developed for interpreting special literary forms in the Bible.
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### 6.3.1 Reflection

✓	Eight of the methods/approaches are shared.
✓ ✗	Six methods/approaches are discussed only by the scholars of the Qur'an.
✗ ✓	Four methods/approaches are discussed only by the scholars of the Bible.
✓ N/A	Three of the methods/approaches are not applicable to one tradition or the
N/A ✓	other.
'Scientific' and Social-Scientific Approaches' are defined far too differently by the two sets of authors to be considered a shared method/approach.	
Despite placing huge significance on the historical and cultural contexts, 'Historical-Cultural' is not discussed as a distinct approach by the traditional Shi'i authors, which I have addressed in my work (5.2.7).	

## 6.4 Objective 3

*To critically discuss some of the most popular classifications of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches.*

In 5.2.6, I critically discussed four classifications presented by leading Shi'i authors in the field of exegetical methods and approaches. I consider these classifications unsatisfactory. What follows is a summary of the reasons why I hold this view.

### 6.4.1 Classification 1: Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī

1. Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that 'methods' are 'based on a source', and that a 'source' is one of four things: the Qur'an, Tradition, *'aql*, and science. 'Sources', critical rationalists maintain, are reservoirs of knowledge claims. As such, only the Qur'an and Tradition can be considered sources.
2. Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that 'science' as a source refers to only those findings from the natural and human sciences that are definitive and give us certainty. They argue that certainty does not help us get to the truth as it is a personal psychological state rather than an epistemological category, and so it does not advance our knowledge at all.
3. Among the 'invalid' methods identified in the classification are 'some scientific' and 'some allegorical' methods. However, *any* method that is not used correctly can just as well be deemed invalid.
4. The distinction between an exegetical 'approach' and an exegetical 'method' is unclear because the definitions given to these terms are extremely broad.

5. The 'interpretive reasoning method' is defined as using rational proofs and evidence in exegesis. But it is unclear why then 'philosophical' is classified as an exegetical 'approach', seeing that the philosophical way uses "rational proofs and evidence in exegesis".
6. 'Aql as 'reason' should not be considered a distinct category on its own/the base of one particular method. Rather, it is employed as a method in *all* approaches as it distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones.

#### 6.4.2 Classification 2: Ayatollah 'Abbas'ali 'Amīd Zanjānī

1. No distinction is made between 'foundations' and 'methods'. These terms mean different things and should not be used synonymously. And it is not always clear whether the author is referring to 'methods' or 'methodologies'.
2. Exegetical 'styles, orientations, and approaches' are said to be of little significance when in fact they play an important role in the interpretive process.
3. 'Hermeneutics' is incorrectly placed as a separate category at the same level as the other foundations/methods.
4. Hermeneutics is incorrectly defined as "the interpretation and exegesis of a text in order to acquire its meaning".
5. An incorrect assertion is made that hermeneutics cannot be used for interpreting the Qur'an because it requires one to interpret beliefs as though they are relative and changeable according to the conditions of time and place.
6. 'Interpretive reasoning' is incorrectly held to be a separate foundation/method.

### 6.3.3 Classification 3: Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥādī Maʿrifat

1. Placing of 'by the words of the Companions' and 'by the words of the Followers' at the same level as the Qur'an and Sunna in group of their own gives the wrong impression that all four are considered valid and authoritative sources on which to base exegesis.
2. Placing 'by reports' and 'rational endeavour' opposite each other gives the wrong idea that there is no rational endeavour in doing exegesis by reports.

### 6.4.4 Classification 4: 'Alī 'Akbar Bābā'ī

1. The classification is overcomplicated and uses unfamiliar terms, such as 'tradition-based-rational endeavour', 'esoteric-rational endeavour', 'purely esoteric', and 'purely by traditions'.
2. The use of the word 'purely' in two of the categories and placing these two categories opposite 'rational endeavour' is problematic, as there is an element of rational endeavour in every type of exegesis.
3. Some important types of exegesis are not represented by the classification.

### 6.4.5 Reflection

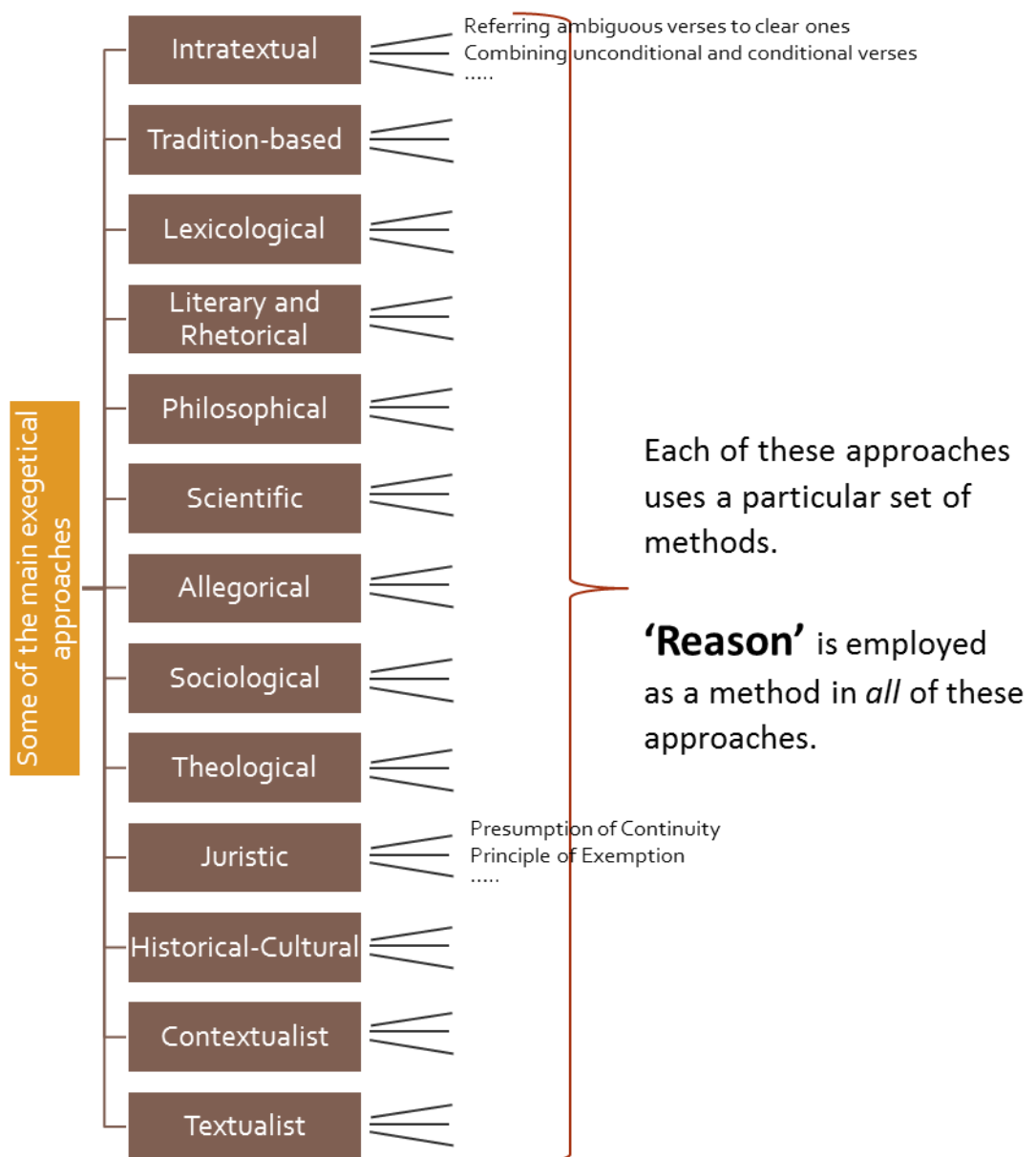
We can get closer to a true understanding of reality by learning through our own mistakes and by reflecting on the mistakes of others (Popper, [1963] 2002). In the design of my own classification, which I shall discuss in the next section, I have sought to avoid the shortcomings I discovered in the four classifications above. I hope, in the same spirit, that someone will

make improvements to my work or point out its shortcomings to me so that I can make the necessary improvements.

## 6.5 Objective 4

*To present an alternative classification of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches.*

My alternative classification of Qur’anic exegetical methods and approaches, which I presented in 5.2.7, is reshown below.



## 6.5.1 Key Features of the Classification

### 1. Meaning of 'methods' and 'approaches':

- Methods are tools (i.e. procedures and techniques) for obtaining data and testing the claims of theories.
- Methods are not knowledge themselves but tools for obtaining data and assessing conjectures, which, in the field of exegesis, are expressed in the form of explanations/interpretations of the verses.
- Methods are not susceptible to our intuitions.
- Methods vary according to the approach taken by an exegete. Every approach uses a constellation of methods.
- An approach is the particular paradigm and perspective that an exegete adopts in his or her interpretation.
- Each approach uses its own terminology, concepts, principles, basic assumptions, and axioms.
- The approach an exegete chooses will depend on their academic specialisation, interests, and aims.
- Exegetical approaches may not be mutually exclusive; an exegetical work may use more than one approach.

### 2. Explanation of the role of '*aqīl*'

- The word '*aqīl*' refers to two distinct cognitive faculties, which are represented in English by two different terms: 'reason' and 'intellect'.
- '*Aqīl*' as 'reason' distinguishes valid arguments from non-valid ones. It is a tool for assessing the logical soundness of the form (as opposed to the content) of conjectures/interpretations.
- '*Aqīl*' is employed as a method in *all* approaches and should not be considered a distinct category on its own.
- In its meaning of 'intellect', '*aqīl*' is not a method as the intellect seeks to understand reality by producing conjectures and applying them to reality.
- '*Aqīl*' cannot be a 'source', as 'sources' are reservoirs of knowledge claims. As such, only the Qur'an and Tradition are sources. '*Aqīl*' as 'reason' cannot be a

source because it does not make any knowledge-claims. And although *'aql* as 'intellect' does make knowledge-claims, it does so in the form of formulating conjectures; *formulating* conjectural knowledge claims is different from being a *source* of knowledge.

### 3. Synchronisation with step-by-step guide

- As a result of my investigations into Biblical exegetical methods and approaches, I realised it would be more accurate to divide the very wide-ranging 'linguistic' category into two: 'lexicography' and 'syntax and rhetoric'. This has resulted in better synchronisation with the eight-step model: lexicography is dealt with in Step 3 and the literary and rhetorical approach in Step 4.

### 4. Addition of historical-cultural approach

- This is omitted by all the other classifications by Qur'anic scholars. I had initially thought of adding only the 'historical' approach, but once I studied the works of Biblical scholars, I realised the importance of adding 'cultural' to the name of this category.
- This has helped to better synchronise the classification with the step-by-step model as well, as a large part of Step 2 is what this approach seeks to do.

### 5. Addition of contextualist and textualist approaches

- These are two more categories which other classifications do not include. They play a highly significant role in the interpretation of verses, as seen, for example, in the way Islamic feminist scholars of the Qur'an who adopt a contextualist approach interpret Al-Nisā' 4:34, compared with how traditional Shi'ī scholars who favour a textualist approach see the verse.

### 6. Uncomplicated yet precise

- Unlike some of the other classifications, this classification is uncomplicated and easy to understand, as testified by my students. At the same time, it accurately represents the main exegetical methods and approaches used in the interpretation of the Qur'an. No major flaws with it were pointed out when it was subjected to scrutiny at an academic conference.

## 6.6 Objective 5

*To generate rich qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eminent scholars of the Qur'an on the classification of methods and approaches used in Qur'anic exegesis, and to analyse the data.*

In the sections that follow, I shall present a summary of the conclusions I came to from having interviewed the three scholars (4.3).

### 6.6.1 Dr Muḥammad 'Alī Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī

- Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī made very important clarifications about the expressions used in his book: a) 'methods' are 'based on a source' and not 'a source'; and b) in his definition of the 'comprehensive' method, what he meant by a 'complete' conclusion was relative, i.e. as opposed to a method that is 'incomplete on its own'.
- Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that 'methods' are 'based on a source' and that a 'source' is one of four things: the Qur'an, Tradition, 'aql, and science.
- Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that 'science' in the classification refers to only those findings from the natural and human sciences that are definitive and give us certainty.
- His book does not explain why from among the invalid methods he has singled out 'some scientific' and 'some allegorical' methods.
- The definition of 'method' that he subscribes to is the one given to it by experts in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. It is very different to the definition suggested by critical rationalists.
- He defines the terms 'exegetical approach' and 'exegetical method' very broadly and the boundary between them is indistinct.



- It is unclear why he considers ‘philosophical’ an approach given his definition of the ‘interpretive reasoning’ method.
- He maintains that for every source, we must have evidence for its authority.
- There are epistemological differences in how traditional Shi’i scholars such as himself and critical rationalists view the nature and role of *‘aql*.
- In his opinion, ‘historical’ could only be a method if ‘method’ was taken to mean ‘procedures and techniques’, i.e. the critical rationalist definition of it.
- His assertion that ‘literal’ and ‘rational endeavour’ could not be placed opposite each other is helpful.
- From among the two alternative classifications he suggested, the one in which he identified the three things that Qur’anic exegesis is based on is useful.
- The second of his alternative classifications is not very easy to understand but has the merit of incorporating the two different definitions of ‘method’.
- He maintains that we would not be able to level the same type of critique to Prophet Muhammad as we would to an exegete.
- He agrees with the critical rationalist theses that all justificatory approaches are invalid, and all observations and understanding are theory-laden.
- His comments about essential assumptions are important.

### 6.6.2 Dr Ḥusayn ‘Alawī-Mihr

- ‘Alawī-Mihr does not see any problem with defining ‘methods’ in a way that is more in line with Western definitions.
- Critical rationalists would disagree with his opinion on what constitutes a ‘method’ and an ‘approach’.
- The second type of philosophical approach that ‘Alawī-Mihr described corroborates my theory that there is a problem in the way ‘interpretive reasoning’ and ‘philosophical’ are defined by him and Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī.
- Critical rationalists would disagree with his view that *‘aql* is a source and that sources are methods because the religion considers them credible and authoritative.

- Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that only science that is certainly correct is a method.
- Critical rationalists would agree with him that intuition is not a source.
- He disagrees with authors such as Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī on the meaning of ‘rational endeavour’.
- He accepts my view that *ijtihādī* could be separated into ‘juristic’, ‘philosophical’ etc., and suggests that the categories could be called ‘incomplete rational endeavour’ and ‘complete rational endeavour’, which is similar to Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s suggestion.
- He agrees with me that the definition of the ‘comprehensive method’ in Riḍāyī-Iṣfahānī’s book could be worded better.
- He regards differences in understanding as natural and healthy but maintains we cannot suffice with suppositions and conjectures when it comes to religion. Critical rationalists would say the method of conjectures and refutations is a *means* to an end, not the end itself.
- Critical rationalists would disagree with his claim that in religious matters, the criterion for getting to the truth is different to the criterion in scientific matters.
- He asserts that in religion, we are after exculpatoriness, i.e. that we have an answer on the Day of Resurrection, and that some things, even if they are not true in reality, will be authoritative evidence for us on that day. Critical rationalists would say that only if we had done our best and we had not been able to refute the view we had adopted will we be deemed exculpable on the Day of Resurrection.

### 6.6.3 Sayyid Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī

- Ḍiyā’ī-Raḍawī maintains that it is very good to learn from other traditions and that this is supported by the Qur’an.
- He saw overlaps between ‘literal’ and ‘rational endeavour’ in my initial classification. This was pointed out by the other two scholars as well and was a valid criticism.
- On the use of critical rationalism in the exegesis of the Qur’an, he maintains that rationality is supported by the Qur’an.

- He made important points about the impact of one's spirituality on understanding.
- He agrees with the critical rationalist view that all observations are theory-laden.
- He made important points about the need to understand words as they were understood at the time of revelation and about beginning our investigation by finding out the meaning of words.
- His exposition that our level of purity determines how much guidance from the Qur'an we a) receive; and b) accept, is useful.
- His explanation that there is an inner and an outer way of understanding the Qur'an is beneficial.

## 6.7 Objective 6

*To introduce a new approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an, namely the critical rationalist approach, and carry out a preliminary test of its effectiveness through classroom and conference presentations.*

### 6.7.1 Classroom Presentations

Throughout my project, my epistemic attitude has been to try to falsify my conjectures, not to justify or confirm them. Therefore, when I presented my new classification and the critical rationalist approach to exegesis to my class, I asked them to think of flaws in the arguments (4.4).

From this preliminary test, I felt I could conjecturally conclude that:

1. It was going to take time for critical rationalism to become an established approach for interpreting the Qur'an.
2. The new classification was based on stronger arguments, was easier to understand, and made more sense.
3. The critical rationalist approach was effective.

4. The first way proposed by the critical rationalist approach – i.e. that the Qur’an acts as a judge for assessing our conjectures – needed to be explained in clearer and simpler terms.<sup>186</sup>
5. The second and third ways proposed by the critical rationalist approach – i.e. that the Qur’an helps us to discover new ideas for solving our problems, and it assists us to expand our knowledge base in new areas – were relatable to personal experience.

### 6.7.2 Conference Presentation

My ideas about the critical rationalist approach to Qur’anic interpretation were scrutinised by a larger and more academic audience when I presented my paper ‘*Is tafsīr ‘aqlī a method in Qur’anic exegesis?*’ at the Fifth Annual Conference on Shi’i Studies in April 2019 (4.5.1).

Feedback from scholars at the conference indicated that there were no major flaws in my research and that it was a new and important contribution to the field of Qur’anic exegeses.

## 6.8 Objective 7

*To apply the most appropriate methods and approaches used in Qur’anic and Biblical exegesis in the design of a practical step-by-step guide for understanding and using the Qur’an.*

The step-by-step guide presented in 5.3 has drawn upon many methods and approaches used in the exegesis of both sacred texts, as I have illustrated in the table below.

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<sup>186</sup> I have tried to do this in 5.3.10.2.

Step	Method/Approach Used	Explanation
<b>1: Gathering General Information About the Text</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tradition-based</li> <li>2. Lexicological</li> </ol>	<p>The examples I used for the names of the text, the text's status and rewards, and whether a text is Makkī or Madanī, were all taken from traditions (5.3.3.2 – 5.3.3.4). I used lexicology to find out the meaning of the names of 'al-Ḥamd' (5.3.3.2).</p>
<b>2: Knowing the Context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Historical-Cultural</li> <li>2. Tradition-based</li> <li>3. Literary and rhetorical analysis</li> <li>4. Lexicological</li> </ol>	<p>For the examples I gave to explain the Reason for Revelation and the Occasion of Revelation, I used the historical-cultural and tradition-based approaches (5.3.4.2). Literary and rhetorical analysis was used for the three types of literary context (5.3.4.3). Lexicology was used for the '<i>al-dīn</i>' example (5.3.4.3).</p>
<b>3: Finding out the Meaning of Words</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lexicological</li> <li>2. Morphological analysis</li> <li>3. Homonym analysis</li> <li>4. Comparing and contrasting synonyms</li> <li>5. Etymological analysis</li> <li>6. Allegorical</li> <li>7. Theological</li> </ol>	<p>This step is largely about lexicology. Under the lexicological approach, I used morphological analysis for the '<i>al-raḥmān</i>' and '<i>al-raḥīm</i>' example (5.3.5.2). I used homonym analysis for the '<i>jahl</i>' example (5.3.5.3).</p>

	<p>8. Tradition-based</p> <p>9. Intratextual</p> <p>10. Textualist / literal</p>	<p>Comparing and contrasting synonyms was used for the '<i>fatā</i>' example (5.3.5.4). And I used etymological analysis for the '<i>munāfiq</i>' example (5.3.5.5).</p> <p>The allegorical method was used to understand the meaning of 'His countenance'. This was coupled with the theological approach. The tradition-based approach was used to find traditions that strongly denounce anthropomorphizing and corporealizing God (5.3.5.1).</p> <p>The intratextual approach was used to help get a better understanding of the meaning of '<i>rahmān</i>', '<i>rahīm</i>' and '<i>fatā</i>' (5.3.5.2 and 5.3.5.4).</p> <p>The textualist / literal approach was used in the '<i>qawwām</i>' example (5.3.5.2).</p>
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<p><b>4: Examining Sentences and Style</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grammatical-structural analysis</li> <li>2. Juristic</li> <li>3. Literary and rhetorical analysis</li> <li>3. Lexicological</li> <li>4. Textualist / literal</li> <li>5. Contextualist</li> </ol>	<p>I used grammatical-structural analysis for the al-Ra'd 13:28 and 'the verse of <i>wuḍū</i>' examples (5.3.6.1).</p> <p>I used the juristic approach for the 'the verse of <i>wuḍū</i>' example (5.3.6.1).</p> <p>For the al-Zumar 39:53 example, I used literary and rhetorical analysis (5.3.6.2).</p> <p>Grammatical-structural analysis, and lexicological, juristic, textualist / literal, and contextualist approaches were used for the al-Nisā' 4:34 example (5.3.6.3).</p>
<p><b>5: Investigating Structure</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grammatical-structural</li> <li>2. Lexicological</li> <li>3. Theological</li> <li>4. Outlining</li> </ol>	<p>For the al-Raḥmān 55:1-4 and the 'Verse of the Throne' examples, I used the grammatical-structural, lexicological, and theological approaches (5.3.7.2 and 5.3.7.3).</p> <p>Under the grammatical-structural approach, the method of outlining was used for the Ṣād 38:21-26 example (5.3.7.4).</p>

<b>6: Evaluating Opinions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Morphological analysis</li> <li>2. Grammatical-structural analysis</li> <li>3. Historical-Cultural</li> <li>4. Intratextual</li> <li>5. Tradition-based</li> </ol>	<p>For the al-Qadr 97:1 example, I used morphological and grammatical-structural analysis, and the historical-cultural, intratextual, and tradition-based approaches (5.3.8.2).</p>
<b>7: Examining Traditions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tradition-based</li> <li>2. Intratextual</li> <li>3. Lexicological</li> <li>4. Theological</li> </ol>	<p>To explain the importance of traditions, I used the tradition-based, intratextual, lexicological and theological approaches (5.3.9.1).</p> <p>For the Maryam 19:31 example, I used the tradition-based, intratextual, and lexicological approaches (5.3.9.2).</p>
<b>8: Applying the Text to Our Lives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conjectures and refutations</li> <li>2. Principlizing</li> <li>3. Inner dimension method</li> </ol>	<p>For the Yūsuf 12:23-25 example, I used the method of conjectures and refutations (5.3.10.2).</p> <p>For the Hūd 11:85 example, I used principlizing and the inner dimension method (5.3.10.3).</p>



## 6.9 Objective 8

*To present the guide in a series of lectures and conduct a questionnaire survey on each step.*

The guide was presented in a series of 7 lectures in Sydney, Australia in September 2019 (4.6.1). A questionnaire survey was conducted on each step of the guide. The individual and consolidated analysis of the surveys are presented in 4.7.1 and 4.7.2 respectively. The questionnaire surveys and my analysis of them can be found in the Appendices as follows:

- ❖ Appendix C: Questionnaire Surveys
- ❖ Appendix D: Analysis of Individual Surveys
- ❖ Appendix E: Consolidated Analysis of Surveys

In the section below, I shall present my conclusions on the survey results.

### 6.9.1 Questionnaire Survey Conclusions

The model was very successful. The community not only liked it but felt it was important, unique, realistic to achieve, and relevant to their lives. They said they would use it themselves.

The community felt they understood the series. Two indicators led me to concur with them on this: firstly, after each lecture, refreshments would be served, and people would get together and socialise. This was the time when some of the congregation would discuss certain parts of the lecture with me and ask questions. From these interactions, I ascertained that the material had been well grasped, at least by those with whom I spoke. Secondly, before each new lecture, one of the youths was tasked with presenting to the audience a summary of the previous lecture. These summaries were excellent; the young presenters succinctly and accurately conveyed the content of my lectures, even adding a few insights and observations of their own from time to time.

It was important that I made a few adjustments to the content I had originally planned to deliver so that there was something for everyone. In particular, I included more stories and chose verses and examples that had spiritually uplifting messages and heart-warming morals. Feedback from the organisers and attendees indicated that this had been an effective strategy.

Disappointingly, some of the surveys and questions were completed by only a few respondents. Naturally, a higher number of respondents would have produced data that more accurately represented the attitude of the audience towards the model. But, given the very positive scores that the model received across the seven surveys from those who did respond, I believe the conclusions I draw are valid, even after allowing for a margin of error and taking into account the low number of responses to some of the surveys and questions.

I found the whole experience extremely useful and rewarding. I not only managed to test out the model but received constructive feedback on it as well. The positive scores and comments, and the feedback I received in person, corroborated my view that the model makes an important contribution to my field of practice.

### 6.9.2 Recommendations

The recommendations from the survey feedback and their implementation status are summarised in the table below:

Recommendation	Status
1. To explain in the Introduction to the model that the methods in Step 1, and indeed all the steps, can be applied to <i>all</i> sentences and chapters of the Qur'an, whatever their length.	Implemented (5.3.2)

2. To state in Step 1 that insofar as the number of verses gives the reader an idea of the size of the chapter in question, it is worth mentioning; but anything more than this is not required.	Implemented (5.3.3.1)
3. To clarify in the Introduction to the model that some parts of the model will be easier to apply to some texts of the Qur'an than to others.	Implemented (5.3.2)
4. To explain how Step 1 helps one to understand the purpose of each chapter, which in turn helps to understand how that chapter contributes to the overall purpose of the Qur'an.	Implemented (5.3.3.2)
5. For Step 2, to use different, less well-known examples.	Implemented (5.3.4.3)
6. To suggest resources in English for each step.	Not fully implemented. I have suggested a few resources in the guide but not a comprehensive list for each step. This is something I will be doing.
7. To provide further examples for each step.	Not fully implemented. I have added a few more examples for some of the steps but I need to do this for the other steps as well.
8. For Step 3, to either replace the <i>basmalah</i> example or add another example alongside it to illustrate the importance of morphology.	Implemented (5.3.5.2)

<p>9. For Step 3, to explain from the outset that this step is about the Arabic language and those who know Arabic will find it easier to accomplish. Having said that, although this step facilitates a greater depth of understanding about the words used in the Qur'an, one should not feel that if they do not know Arabic they cannot use the step at all; there are resources in English that provide information about the words, and Step 3 can be accomplished by referring to them.</p>	<p>Implemented (5.3.5.1)</p>
<p>10. For Step 8, to give more information on how to combat <i>riyā'</i> (ostentatiousness).</p>	<p>Not implemented. Instead of continuing with the ostentatiousness example, I have used two other, more effective examples: 1) on resisting temptation (5.3.10.2); and 2) on always being fair (5.3.10.3).</p>

I believe the implementation of three other recommendations would enhance the handbook further:

<p>1. To include a few exercises for each step, with suggested answers at the back of the book.</p>
<p>2. To make more links between the classifications part of the work and the step-by-step guide part.</p>
<p>3. To add a glossary of terms.</p>

As a result of my very rewarding experience with the surveys in Sydney, I have realised that conducting similar surveys in other places would be beneficial in two ways: firstly, they

would further my knowledge about the needs of Shi'i communities and inform me of the adjustments I would need to make in my presentations in order to effectively address those needs. And secondly, such surveys increase self-awareness among the respondents; i.e. they make the respondents introspect and press them to assess their own knowledge, understanding, and perspectives about the material presented, which may alert them to aspects of their belief systems that they may not have thought about.

# Chapter 7: Reflexive Account

7.1 MY CHOICE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT.....	243
7.2 BIBLICAL WORKS.....	244
7.3 TURN IN DIRECTION.....	244
7.4 RESPONSIBILITY .....	245
7.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	246
7.6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.....	246

## 7.1 My Choice of Research Subject

The world is constantly changing, whereas the text of the Qur'an always remains the same. As a result, certain 'gaps' have developed over the centuries:

- A historical gap (between us and when the verses were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad).
- A cultural gap (between the culture of seventh century Arabia and ours).
- A philosophical gap (concerning views on life and the nature of the universe).
- A linguistic gap (between the original language and the languages we use today).<sup>187</sup>

As a practicing Muslim and an imam, these gaps pose significant challenges for me, just as they do for millions of other Muslims around the world. My foremost research question since starting the DProf has been: *'How can I help bridge these gaps so that my community and I can understand and apply God's Word to our lives more effectively?'*

In response to this question, I decided to undertake a comparative study of the main methods and approaches used for interpreting the Qur'an and the Bible. There is nothing in the English language from a Shi'i Muslim perspective on this. I aimed to draw upon the relatively larger quantity of works on hermeneutics by Biblical authors, and the longer history of Biblical interpretation, to make a lasting and meaningful contribution to the field of Qur'anic interpretation. I have always been one 'to do something about it' when I see there is an important need that is just not being met. This was one of the major reasons why I decided to stop pursuing a career in Law and went to study in the Qum Seminary instead; and why I decided to become an imam; and why I spent two years translating and annotating the manual of Islamic laws of one of the leading Shi'i jurists today, to cite but a few examples.

This sense of responsibility grew all the stronger now that I had the *opportunity* to do something about it as an insider-researcher. My own positionality as an imam, as a graduate of academic institutions in both the East and the West, and as a speaker of languages used by leading authors in both traditions, were all important factors in determining the aims, objectives, and intended outcome of my research project.

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<sup>187</sup> Adapted from Virkler and Ayayo (2007, pp. 19-20).

## 7.2 Biblical Works

During this project, I have benefitted tremendously from studying the works of Biblical scholars. Sometimes, I used the new ideas and insights I gained from them directly in my research, as I have shown in several places in my classification and step-by-step guide. At other times, my study of these works would trigger reminders about Islamic teachings on the subject I happened to be reading about. I found this extremely useful as I probably would not have thought about many of the ideas that I used in my project had it not been for those triggers. An example of this was when I read Perter Masters' (2012) recommendation to begin the study of the Bible with "*prayer, genuine reverence and humility... We must pray for illumination.*" This was not only Christian; it was also Islamic! But for some reason, I had missed this point. I believe it is essential to study other traditions to find such flashes of inspiration even if one's own tradition says the same thing – we may have just missed it, or it may not have meant that much to us when we did come across it. Sometimes, what others say about their traditions enhances our understanding of our own. From a critical rationalist perspective, studying diverse opinions prompts us to construct better conjectures: challenges presented to people in their World 2s, either through what happens in W1 or by what appears in W3, may prompt us to come up with solutions (Popper, [1994] 2012, Ch. 1).

## 7.3 Turn in Direction

On the subject of critical rationalism, I believe that becoming acquainted with this methodological framework has been one of the most rewarding aspects for me on this DProf. I have to thank Professor Ali Paya for this. Professor Paya was my initial adviser when the programme was jointly run by The Islamic College and Middlesex University. After the programme transferred completely to Middlesex University, Dr Mehmet Ali Dikerdem became my adviser, and Professor Paya effectively became my consultant. This transfer did cause some disruption, however. Neither of them was to blame for the disruption of course,



and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to benefit from the wisdom and experience of both scholars.

My DProf project took a turn at this stage. It had become a little too theoretical and PhD-like. I needed to bring it in line with the ethos of the DProf, and this is where the idea of a practical step-by-guide began to grow in significance. Once I had designed the guide, I felt it would be beneficial to conduct questionnaire surveys on it to find out its effectiveness, how it could be improved, and what the community's attitude towards it was. As this had to be done after I had created and presented the model, it pushed the project back. But, on reflection, I am delighted I did the lecture series and the questionnaire surveys: the lectures enabled me to test out the model while the surveys provided me with a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data in a short period of time. As critical rationalists maintain, through feedback from others, we are able to critically assess our interpretations and move closer to a truthful understanding of reality.

## 7.4 Responsibility

The semi-structured interviews were a highly valuable source of information as well. It was a both intellectually rewarding and a pleasure to interview the three eminent scholars of the Qur'an in Qum in the summer of 2017. They were extremely accommodating and generous with their time. They demonstrated humility when I challenged their views and open-mindedness when I suggested new ideas. I learnt a great deal from what they said and how they said it.

I felt the scholars had the same overarching concern as I did, which was to fulfil a responsibility to God. This sense of duty has underpinned my approach throughout my DProf, and I am cognisant of the influence it has had on my project.<sup>188</sup> It has been a source of motivation when things have gone wrong and has helped me keep my feet on the ground when things have gone well! It has kept me focused on pursuing the truth about the most

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<sup>188</sup> Just as Costley and Armsby (2007, p. 346) found in their study on research influences on candidates undertaking professional doctorates: "...an important influence was their existing experience, their current work practices and their position within it. Reflexivity was often discussed as a key component to practitioner research. In general, essays showed that practitioners' particular beliefs and unique understanding about their own professional fields affects their research and development activities and therefore needs to be addressed."

effective ways to understand and use the Qur'an. This is one of the main reasons why critical rationalism has been such a useful methodology for my project: it is essentially a quest for knowledge and truth:

Truth, as critical rationalists explain, is the property of all those knowledge claims that correspond to reality. The aim of all knowledge pursuits is to attain a truthful account of reality (Paya, 2018, p. 108).

## 7.5 Ethical Considerations

Of particular inspiration for me during my DProf was learning about the ethical dimensions of critical rationalism; I found these to be similar to Islamic ethical teachings. For example, critical rationalism urges us to regard all human beings with whom we interact as equals and unique sources of knowledge who can point out our epistemic blind-spots. This corresponds with a famous tradition from Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in which he describes people as being of two types: "They are either your brother in faith or your equal in humanity."<sup>189</sup> I believe this spirit and attitude towards people with different perspectives and beliefs was a crucial factor in my choice of comparative study. I hope that such ethical teachings will continue guiding me so that I become a better, more ethical practitioner-researcher.

## 7.6 Concluding Thoughts

I am excited at the prospect of being able to make a positive and meaningful contribution to my community of practice. In the introduction to this report, I wrote about what the Qur'an means to me personally and professionally, and to think that I am a step closer to producing something that will enable people to understand and use it better is an enormous source of motivation for me to bring my book to fruition. I am grateful to the management at The Islamic College, to Middlesex University and its DProf staff, and to my current and previous advisers, for helping me get this far.

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<sup>189</sup> Al-Raḍī (compiler) (1993, Letter 53).

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# Appendices

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH ETHICS FORM .....	257
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES.....	260
APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS .....	261
Survey 1.....	261
Survey 2.....	276
Survey 3.....	293
Survey 4.....	311
Survey 5.....	329
Survey 6.....	343
Survey 7.....	365
APPENDIX D: ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL SURVEYS .....	381
APPENDIX E: CONSOLIDATED ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS .....	386

# Appendix A: Research Ethics Form

The Islamic College - ICL 4541 Module Guide  
Planning a Practitioner Research Programme

## Candidates and students

Your name	MOHAMMED ALI ISMAIL
Which programme (MProf or DProf)	DPROF
Your adviser's name	ALI PAYA
Date of submission	THIS RESUBMISSION: 10/04/2017
Date you wish to commence your project	01/03/2017

## Declaration

I agree that the Ref form attached has been completed accurately to the best of my knowledge at the time.

Student/Candidate signature *M. AlisMAIL* Date *10/04/2017*

I agree that the attached REF is accurate based on the evidence supplied by the student/candidate.

Adviser signature *Ali Paya* Date *10.04.2017*

## Research Ethics form (REF –formerly ethics release form Appendix 3)

Any work-based research project is likely to raise ethical issues, especially where people are directly involved. Research ethics involves understanding the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research participants or contacts.

It is important that you are aware of the ethical issues that may arise from your proposed project and how you might respond to them. For example, ethical problems are likely to arise if there are conflicts of interest. These may be between the demands of confidentiality or anonymity and those of legality or professionalism. The development of a proposal for your project work and the research process you will go through in undertaking your project is, in part, about negotiating a viable route between these interests.

12	If <b>Yes</b> have you sought permission from the individuals concerned/ followed the protocols required.			X
13	Have you made yourself aware of intellectual property issues regarding any documents, materials you wish to use?	X		
14	Have you clarified with participants the ownership of data?		X	
15	Is there provision for the safekeeping of written data and video/audio recordings of participants?	X		
16	Are there safekeeping strategies for electronic data and correspondence. Refer to the Data Protection Act on keeping personal information on computers.	X		
17	If any specialised instruments, for example psychometric instruments are to be employed, will their use be controlled and supervised by a qualified practitioner, such as a psychologist?			X
<b>Effects/Impact</b>				
18	Have you explored the impact of change that may result in your project activity on any participants/people/sentients involved directly or indirectly in the project?	X		
19	If applicable is there provision for debriefing participants after the intervention or project?			X
20	Have you engaged with your sponsor/employer about any ethics relating to how this research will be used?			X
<b>Ethical approval from other bodies</b>				
21	Does your project require ethical approval from another body?		X	
22	If <b>Yes</b> have the proper approval documents been attached ?			X
<b>General</b>				
23	Is there any ethical issue/potential issue you have/may have difficulty managing on which you would like more input? If <b>Yes</b> please attach a summary		X	

NOT YET,  
BUT I WILL



## Research Ethics form (REf)

If you place an "X" in any of the white boxes, please provide further information if it is not already contained in your proposal. **Please answer all of these questions**

Research Ethics form		Yes	No	NA
1	Has the draft project proposal and ethical considerations been completed and submitted to the adviser?	X		
<b>Participant's wellbeing</b>				
2	Does your proposed activity involve the participation of human/sentient beings?	X		
3	Have participants been given information about the aims, procedure/processes and possible risks involved in easily understood language?		X	NOT YET, BUT THEY WILL BE
4	Will any person's position or treatment be in any way prejudiced if they choose not to participate in the project?		X	
5	Can participants freely withdraw from the project at any stage without risk or harm of prejudice?	X		
6	Have all necessary steps been taken to protect the privacy of participants and the need for anonymity?	X		
7	Will the project involve working with or studying minors (under the age of 16 years)?		X	
8	If Yes, will signed parental consent be obtained?			X
9	Have you considered the ethical implications of selecting data and the obligations to accurately represent participants' views?	X		
<b>Research methods</b>				
10	Are there any questions or procedures likely to be considered in any way offensive or inappropriate?		X	
11	Does your research involve access to confidential/personal records?		X	

## Appendix B: Letter to Interviewees

18 July 2017

Dear Shaykh,  
Salam alaykum.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by me for my DProf project.

As discussed over the phone, my project investigates the most commonly used methods in Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis. I have been working on a new classification of Qur'anic exegetical methods and approaches, and I have conducted my research using the methodology of critical rationalism. It is on these areas that our interview will focus.

I would like to a) record the interview; b) mention you by name in my project; and c) attribute the views you express to me in the interview to you.

The recordings will be treated as confidential and will not be shared with anyone without your explicit written consent. They will be kept in archives in an electronically secure and protected form.

By agreeing to do the interview, you are giving your consent to the above.

Kind Regards,

Mohammed Ali Ismail



# Appendix C: Questionnaire Surveys

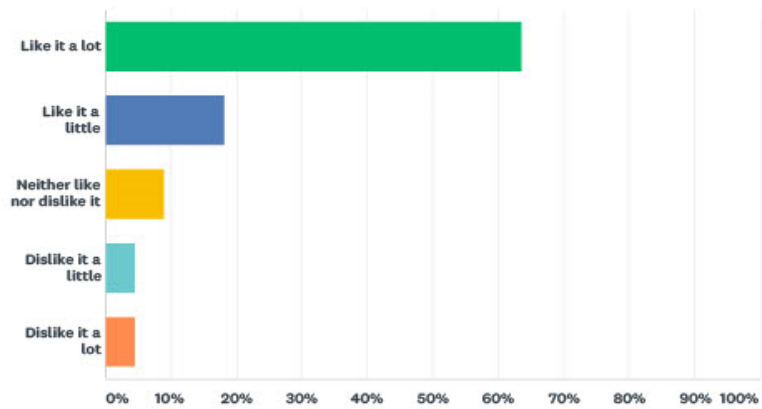
## Survey 1

Survey on Step 1

SurveyMonkey

### Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 1?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

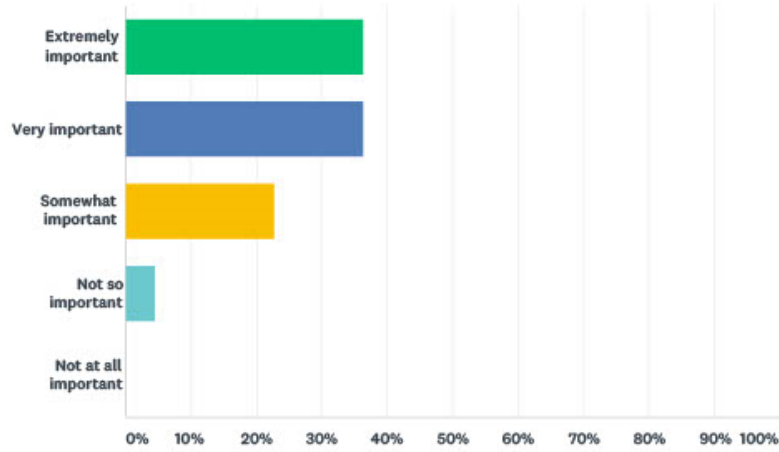


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Like it a lot	63.64% 14
Like it a little	18.18% 4
Neither like nor dislike it	9.09% 2
Dislike it a little	4.55% 1
Dislike it a lot	4.55% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Id like it to be more about ashura and less about the Quran E.G. the stories of the imam and there lessons	9/2/2019 1:44 PM
2	The shiek have spoken about surah fatiha but how do we go about the second surah bakara.	9/1/2019 6:17 AM

### Q2 How important is Step 1?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

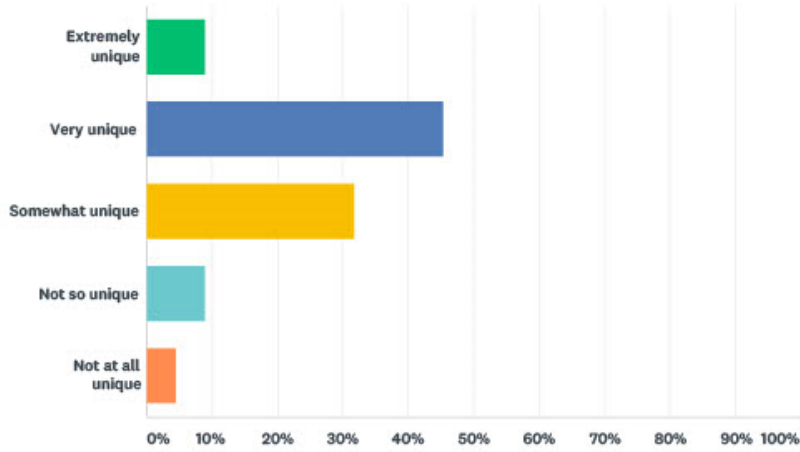


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	36.36%	8
Very important	36.36%	8
Somewhat important	22.73%	5
Not so important	4.55%	1
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	I'm not sure how much the number of verses can help us to better understand the holy Quran	9/2/2019 2:57 AM
2	It's gives the surah a purpose and a meaning	9/1/2019 6:45 AM

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 1?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

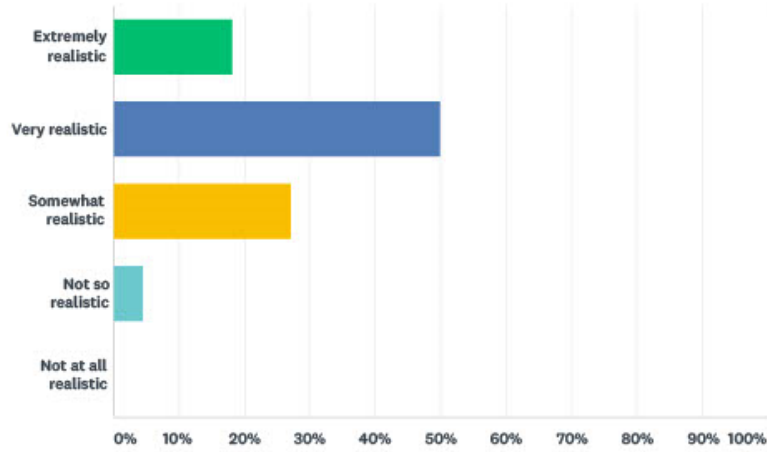


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	9.09% 2
Very unique	45.45% 10
Somewhat unique	31.82% 7
Not so unique	9.09% 2
Not at all unique	4.55% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 1?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

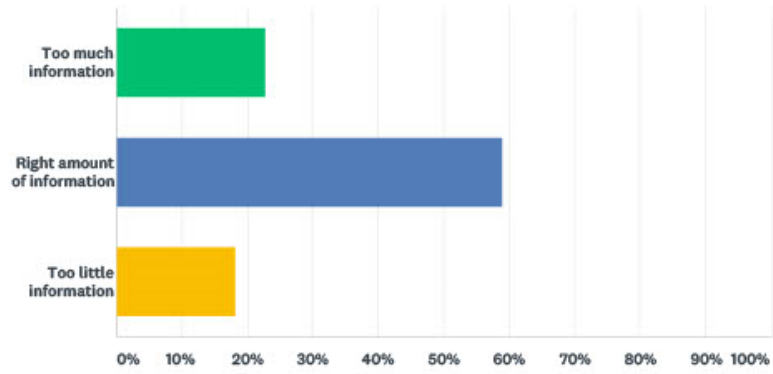


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	18.18%	4
Very realistic	50.00%	11
Somewhat realistic	27.27%	6
Not so realistic	4.55%	1
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Some surahs are easier then others.	9/1/2019 6:17 AM

### Q5 For Step 1, did I provide:

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

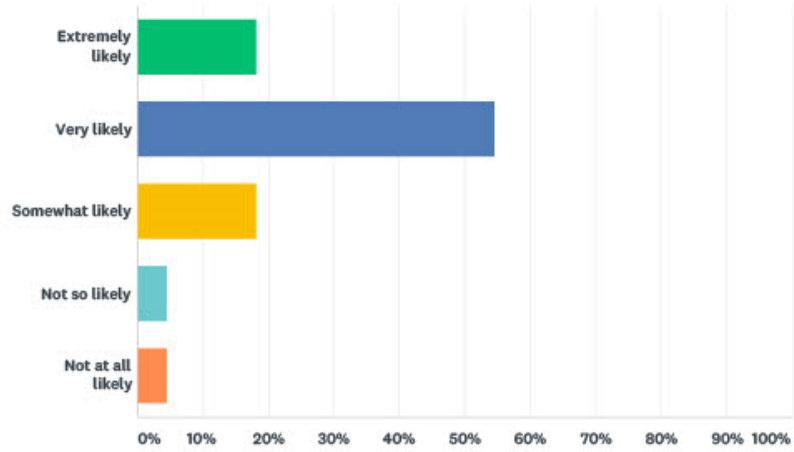


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Too much information	22.73%	5
Right amount of information	59.09%	13
Too little information	18.18%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Majority of the audience is children and struggle to understand	9/2/2019 1:44 PM

### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 1?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

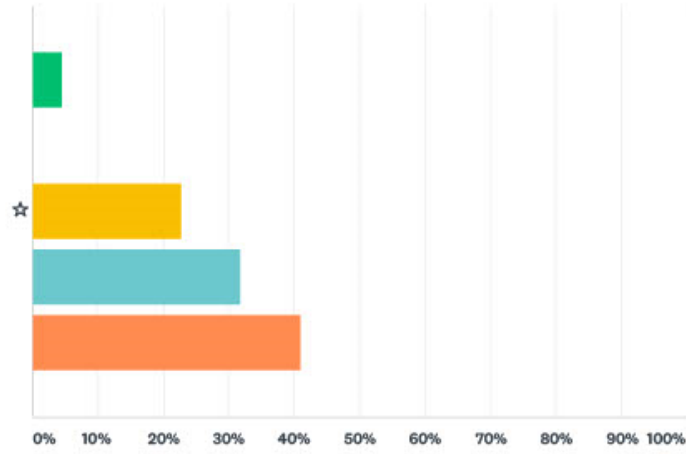


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely likely	18.18%	4
Very likely	54.55%	12
Somewhat likely	18.18%	4
Not so likely	4.55%	1
Not at all likely	4.55%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q7 How clear was Step 1 for you?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	4.55% 1	0.00% 0	22.73% 5	31.82% 7	40.91% 9	22	4.05

## Q8 What did you like the most about Step 1?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 7

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I liked how simple and general it was, but also understanding the importance of why it must be thoroughly considered.	9/2/2019 10:39 AM
2	The importance of knowing the meaning of the name, the various names gives a lot of insight and depth in understanding prior to reading the Surah	9/2/2019 5:29 AM
3	The meaning of Surahs	9/2/2019 2:57 AM
4	Gives you an idea of the Surah before you actually start reading it.	9/1/2019 11:12 AM
5	Saying bismillah before everything I do in life.	9/1/2019 9:29 AM
6	Step 1 is rather a simple element of the Quran. For me, I would like in depth information something tangible and meaningful.	9/1/2019 9:28 AM
7	The explanation of how Surah Fateha is the 'Mother of the Book' and 'The Opening' because it is actually a summary of the Qura'an as it looks at the main principles that are discussed in the Qura'an.	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
8	It's a prevalent issue amongst young people	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
9	Giving each part of Quran a purpose rather than the whole Quran as a book	9/1/2019 6:45 AM
10	New way of lectures in muharam	9/1/2019 6:39 AM
11	Bits of info like the different schools of the number of ayaat	9/1/2019 6:29 AM
12	How the name of a surah can be a whole intro to the surah.	9/1/2019 6:17 AM
13	The value of names and meanings e.g. the value of surah fatiha, starting everything with bismillah	9/1/2019 6:09 AM
14	It is a good starting point for understanding the Quran	9/1/2019 6:07 AM
15	everything was very eye opening	9/1/2019 5:55 AM



## Q9 What did you like the least about Step 1?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Nothing	9/2/2019 10:39 AM
2	The amount of verses, I feel was too in-depth and was not as important as other pieces of information, maybe it is good to know when refuting critics of the Quran but not so much in gaining an insight, I may be wrong but I feel like the other pieces of information allow for greater understanding relative to knowing how many verses	9/2/2019 5:29 AM
3	The number of verses	9/2/2019 2:57 AM
4	Liked everything.	9/1/2019 11:12 AM
5	It is not very important I'm my opinion	9/1/2019 9:28 AM
6	Nothing. I actually really enjoyed the entire talk.	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
7	Not relevant to Muharram or imam Hussein	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
8	Nothing	9/1/2019 6:45 AM
9	Need more information linking between quran and our life	9/1/2019 6:39 AM
10	Little hard to keep up with the flow of the speech because it's like a classroom topic/lecture	9/1/2019 6:29 AM
11	Na	9/1/2019 6:17 AM
12	Repeating of certain info, giving a bit too much time to info e.g. diff schools of thought on pausing/number of ayaat	9/1/2019 6:09 AM
13	Nothing really wrong with it.	9/1/2019 6:07 AM
14	Nothing everything was great	9/1/2019 5:55 AM

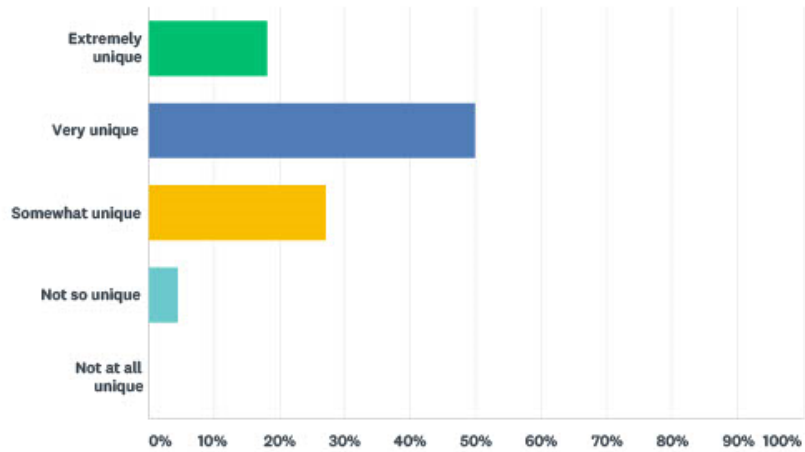
## Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 1?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 9

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I don't have any suggestions, as I have limited knowledge on this topic.	9/2/2019 10:39 AM
2	Nothing, it is essential in gaining insight into the surah, but in the lecture the reasoning of why no. verses was explained to deeply	9/2/2019 5:29 AM
3	Deeper knowledge about the general knowledge of the holy Quran e.g. reality of revelation.	9/2/2019 2:57 AM
4	...	9/1/2019 9:28 AM
5	Use personal examples, or incidents from peoples' lives to allow us to build a unique connection with the Qura'an	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
6	Breaking down an actual ayaa would have helped	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
7	More examples	9/1/2019 6:45 AM
8	Non	9/1/2019 6:39 AM
9	Acronyms or mnemonics to remember each part of the lecture	9/1/2019 6:29 AM
10	How we apply that to few surahs.	9/1/2019 6:17 AM
11	More about linking quraan to everyday life	9/1/2019 6:09 AM
12	Nothing comes to mind	9/1/2019 6:07 AM
13	Thank you everything was great	9/1/2019 5:55 AM

### Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

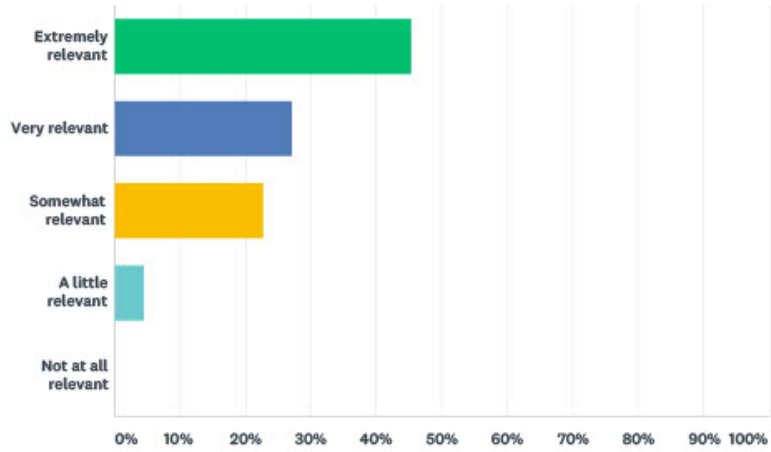


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	18.18% 4
Very unique	50.00% 11
Somewhat unique	27.27% 6
Not so unique	4.55% 1
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	I would say very unique because I haven't heard of this sort of model before. However, I've also got limited knowledge on this topic so I am unaware if there are other models of understanding.	9/2/2019 10:39 AM
2	It is essential and if a framework or guideline system created, it will be very useful for all Muslim communities, Shia Sunni, young or old, it can be taught in schools, and it is very good to see this process being worked on and developed.	9/2/2019 5:29 AM

### Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

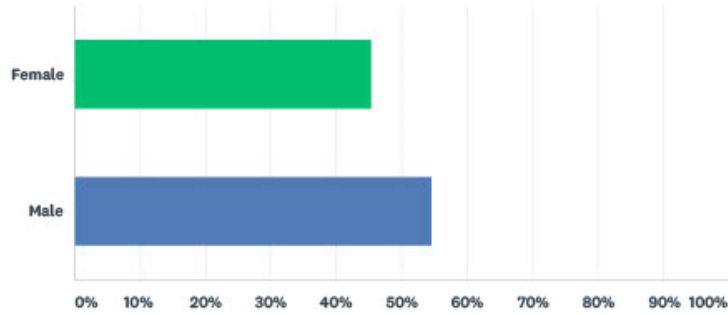


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely relevant	45.45%	10
Very relevant	27.27%	6
Somewhat relevant	22.73%	5
A little relevant	4.55%	1
Not at all relevant	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	As someone who just this year started consistently learning how to read the Qur'an, and reading translation and a bit of tafsir alongside it, this topic is very relevant for me individually and captures my attention very well.	9/2/2019 10:39 AM
2	Not very relevant my life nor the Muharram program	9/1/2019 9:17 AM
3	It's so great to see someone has finally made a difference in their lectures during Muharram. This time of the year people tend to attend mosques a lot more and understanding the Quran is the best way to learn about our religion better and be able to apply it in to our daily lives. Thank you for your great work	9/1/2019 5:55 AM

### Q13 What is your gender?

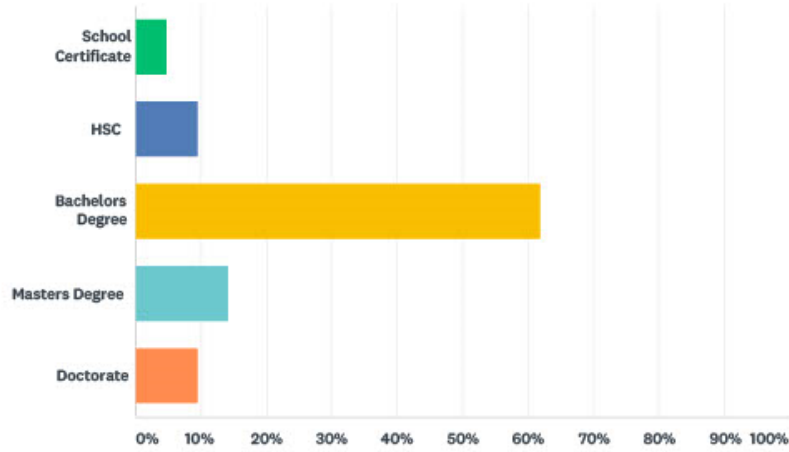
Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	45.45%	10
Male	54.55%	12
TOTAL		22

### Q14 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

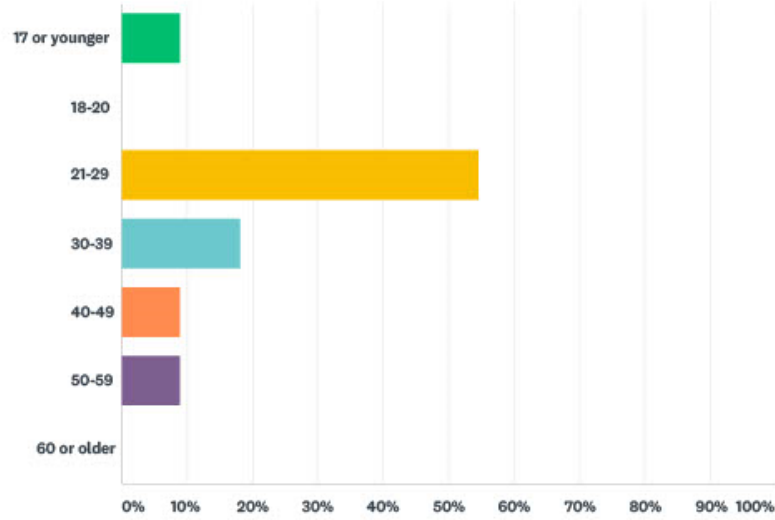
Answered: 21 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	4.76%	1
HSC	9.52%	2
Bachelors Degree	61.90%	13
Masters Degree	14.29%	3
Doctorate	9.52%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>21</b>

### Q15 What is your age?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	9.09%	2
18-20	0.00%	0
21-29	54.55%	12
30-39	18.18%	4
40-49	9.09%	2
50-59	9.09%	2
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>

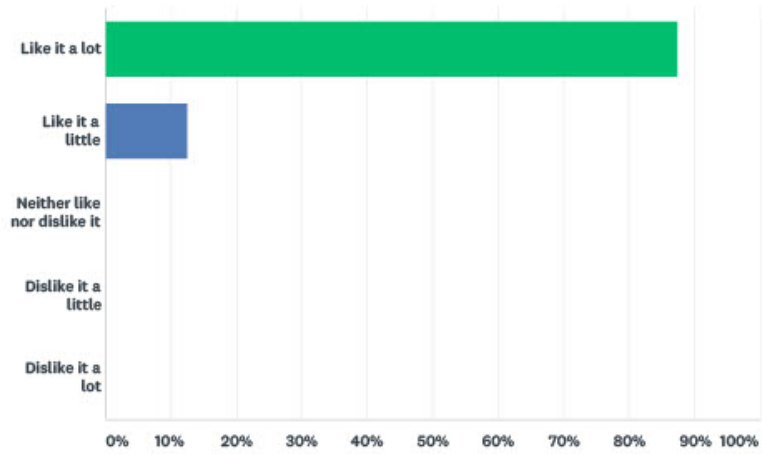
# Survey 2

Survey on Step 2

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



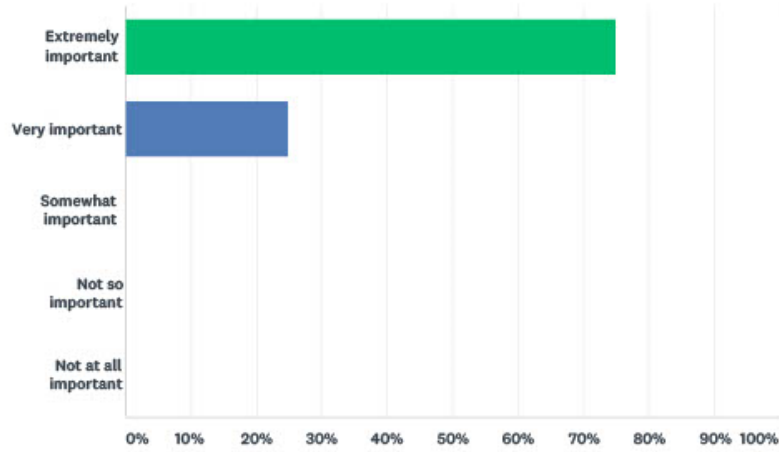
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Like it a lot	87.50% 7
Like it a little	12.50% 1
Neither like nor dislike it	0.00% 0
Dislike it a little	0.00% 0
Dislike it a lot	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	



### Q2 How important is Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

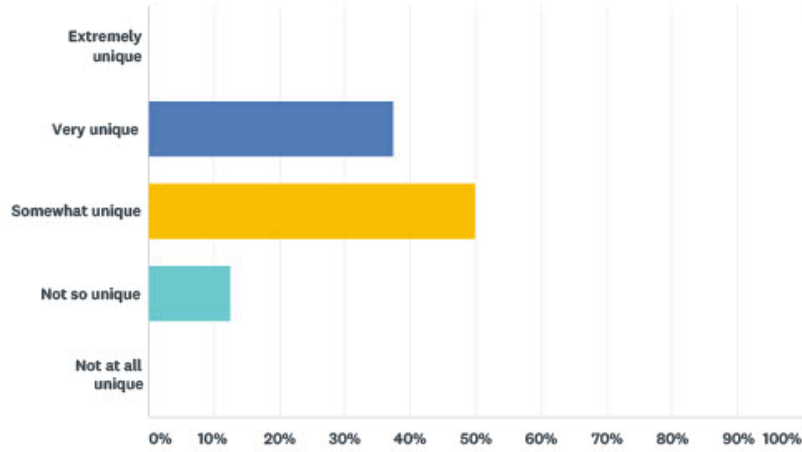


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	75.00%	6
Very important	25.00%	2
Somewhat important	0.00%	0
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Context and insight into revelation maybe allow for avenues to strengthen spirituality and understanding or the beauty of Islam and its divinity	9/2/2019 9:39 AM

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

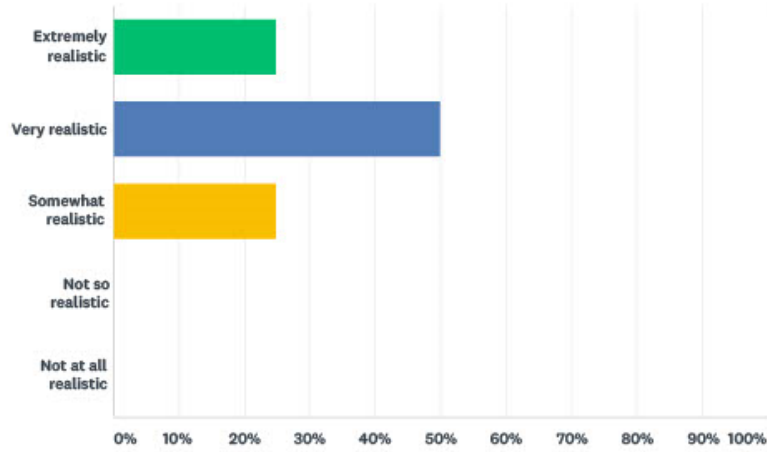


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	0.00%	0
Very unique	37.50%	3
Somewhat unique	50.00%	4
Not so unique	12.50%	1
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

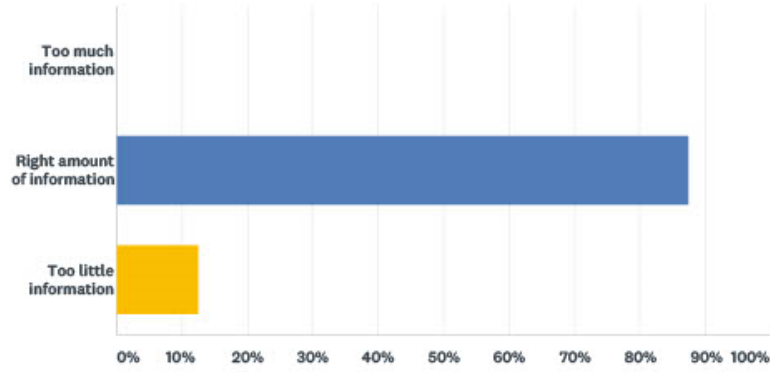


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	25.00%	2
Very realistic	50.00%	4
Somewhat realistic	25.00%	2
Not so realistic	0.00%	0
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Maybe difficult for some people to navigate and find reliable sources for this information	9/2/2019 9:39 AM

### Q5 For Step 2, did I provide:

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

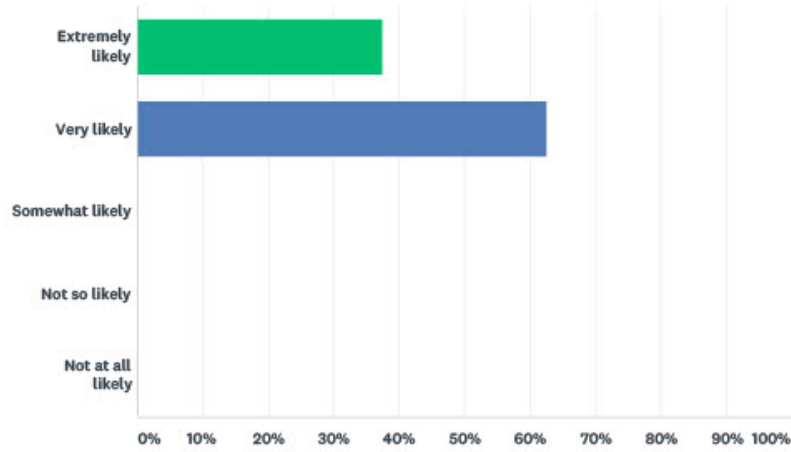


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Too much information	0.00%	0
Right amount of information	87.50%	7
Too little information	12.50%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

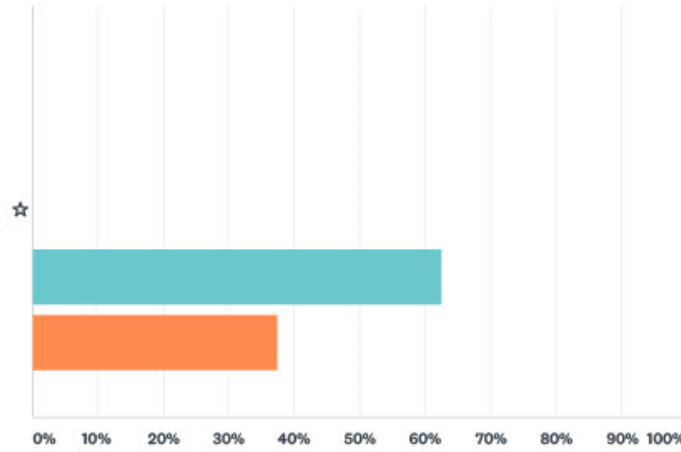


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely likely	37.50%	3
Very likely	62.50%	5
Somewhat likely	0.00%	0
Not so likely	0.00%	0
Not at all likely	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q7 How clear was Step 2?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

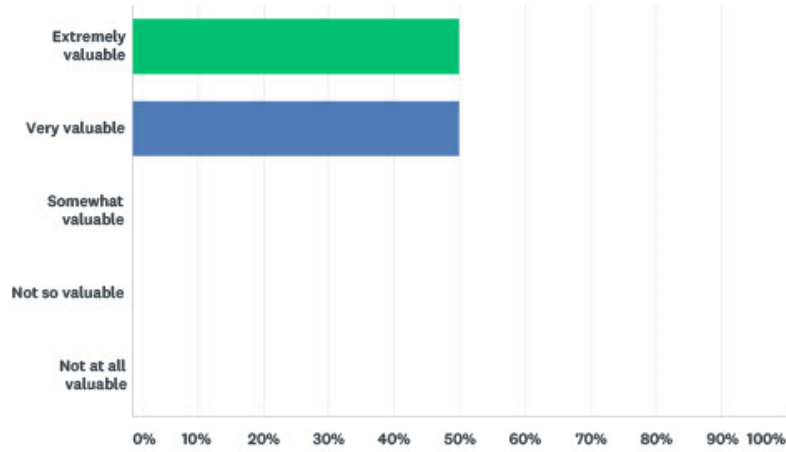


■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62.50% 5	37.50% 3	8	4.38

### Q8 How valuable is it to know the 'Reason for Revelation' and the 'Occasion of Revelation'?

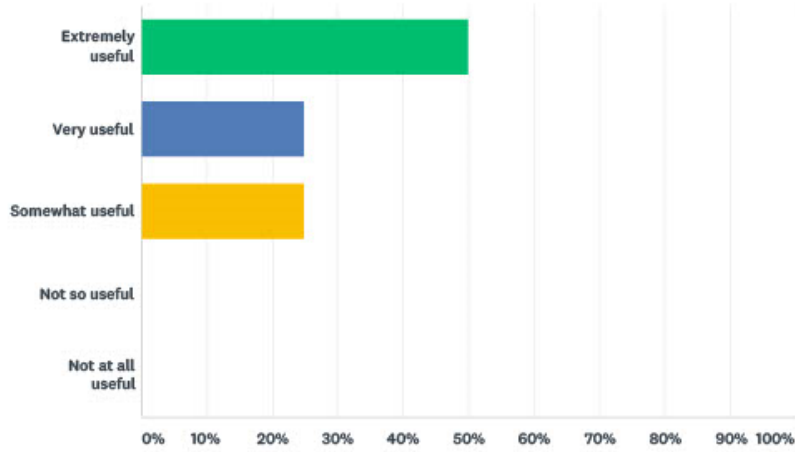
Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely valuable	50.00%	4
Very valuable	50.00%	4
Somewhat valuable	0.00%	0
Not so valuable	0.00%	0
Not at all valuable	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

### Q9 How useful is the 'Principle of Flow and Application'?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely useful	50.00%	4
Very useful	25.00%	2
Somewhat useful	25.00%	2
Not so useful	0.00%	0
Not at all useful	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>



## Q10 What did you like the most about Step 2?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	All three steps. I would like to have more examples for better understanding.	9/8/2019 11:53 AM
2	The importance of reason and occasion of revelation and how different some views can be to the same verse	9/2/2019 9:39 AM
3	Always useful to be able to apply verses related to a particular time and place to our lives today.. Just by changing the object etc	9/2/2019 9:22 AM
4	Principle of Flow and Application was interesting	9/2/2019 8:21 AM
5	highlighting mportance of context.	9/2/2019 8:19 AM

### Q11 What did you like the least about Step 2?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 5

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The important of these three steps. Actually, I was amazed at how these steps are extremely important to avoid misunderstandings.	9/8/2019 11:53 AM
2	Too much info about application and flow	9/2/2019 9:39 AM
3	More discussion is required on "Principle of Flow and Application". It was very short and wasn't very deep.	9/2/2019 8:21 AM

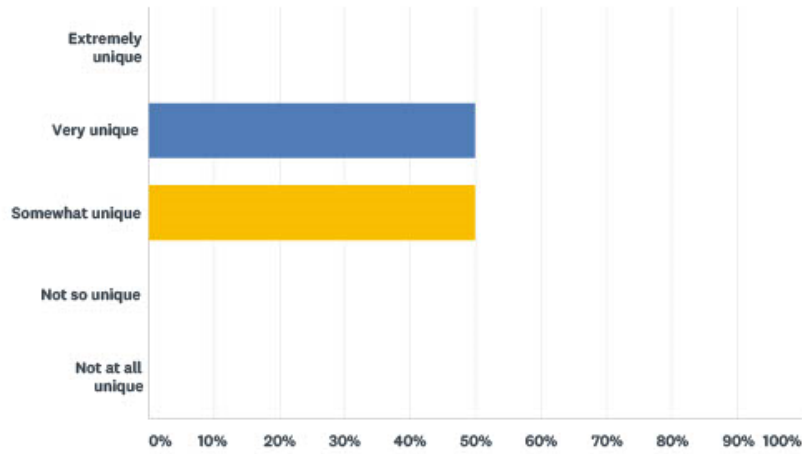
## Q12 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 2?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Some examples you gave are easier to arrive at an understanding.. i.e ghadeer or imam Ali giving charity while in rukoo. It almost seems too simple because we already have a brief background on this particular subject. How practical/easy is it to arrive at a deep understanding using these steps when you come across any random ayah? Maybe a live demo of this whilst applying these steps would be great.	9/2/2019 9:22 AM
2	More discussion is required on "Principle of Flow and Application". It was very short and wasn't very deep.	9/2/2019 8:21 AM

### Q13 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

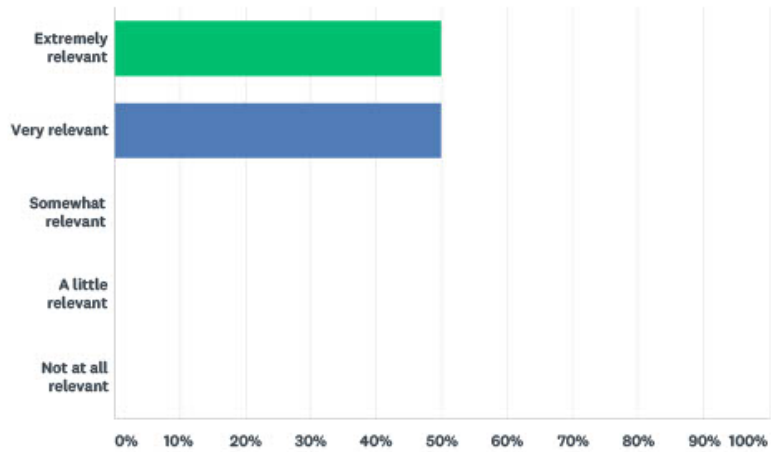


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	0.00% 0
Very unique	50.00% 4
Somewhat unique	50.00% 4
Not so unique	0.00% 0
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q14 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

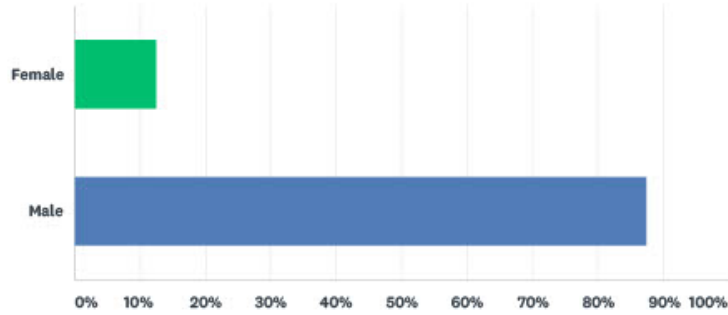


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely relevant	50.00% 4
Very relevant	50.00% 4
Somewhat relevant	0.00% 0
A little relevant	0.00% 0
Not at all relevant	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q15 What is your gender?

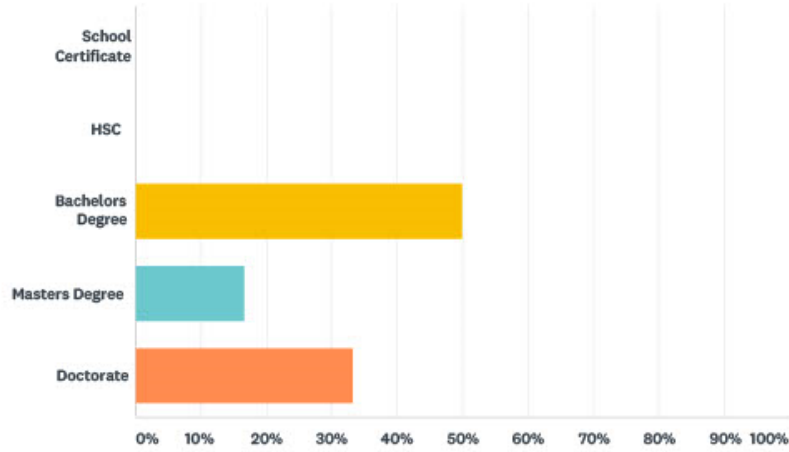
Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	12.50%	1
Male	87.50%	7
TOTAL		8

### Q16 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

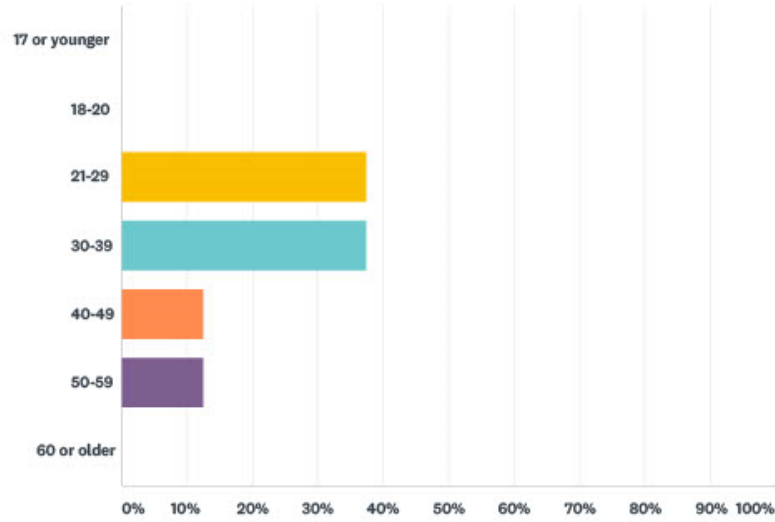
Answered: 6 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	0.00%	0
HSC	0.00%	0
Bachelors Degree	50.00%	3
Masters Degree	16.67%	1
Doctorate	33.33%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

### Q17 What is your age?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	0.00%	0
18-20	0.00%	0
21-29	37.50%	3
30-39	37.50%	3
40-49	12.50%	1
50-59	12.50%	1
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>



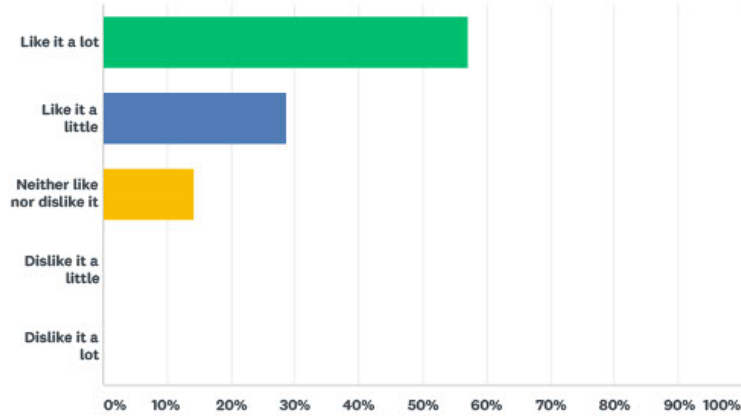
# Survey 3

Survey on Step 3

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

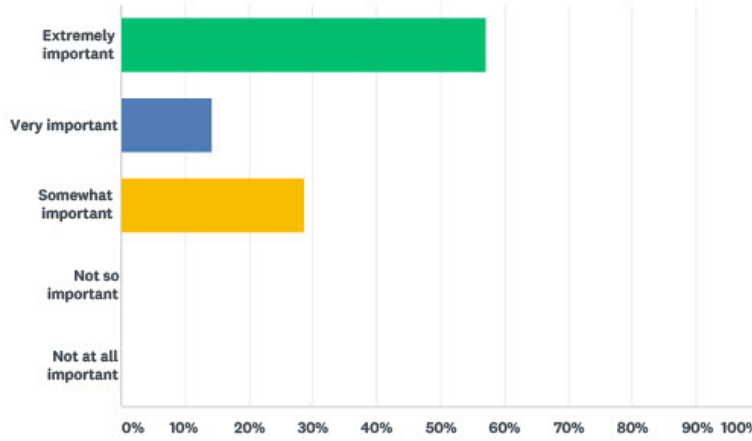


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Like it a lot	57.14%	4
Like it a little	28.57%	2
Neither like nor dislike it	14.29%	1
Dislike it a little	0.00%	0
Dislike it a lot	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q2 How important is Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

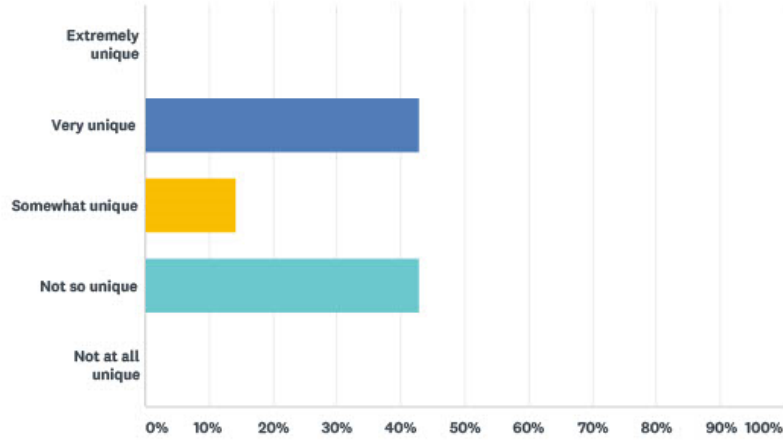


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	57.14%	4
Very important	14.29%	1
Somewhat important	28.57%	2
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

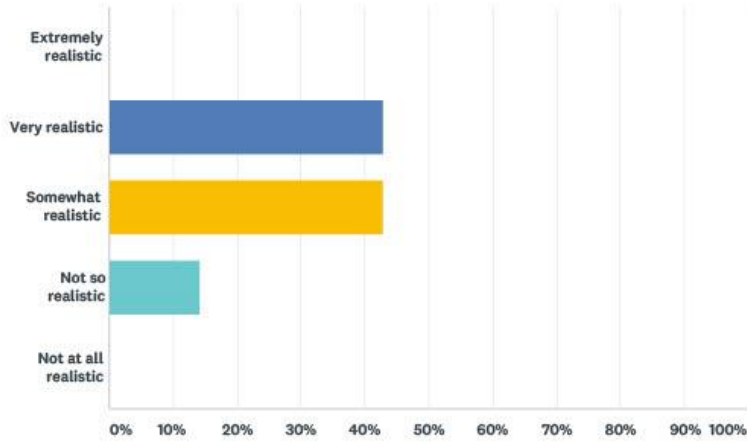


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	0.00% 0
Very unique	42.86% 3
Somewhat unique	14.29% 1
Not so unique	42.86% 3
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

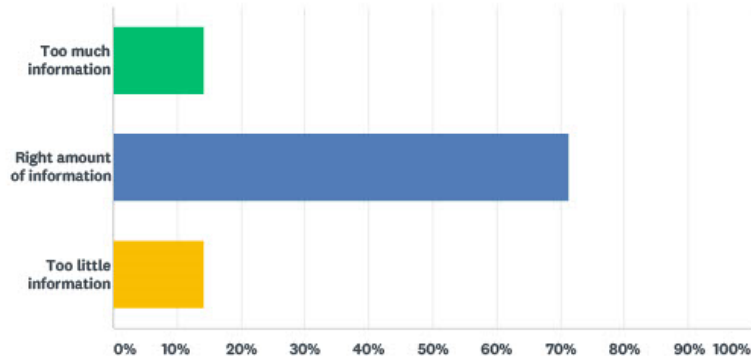


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	0.00%	0
Very realistic	42.86%	3
Somewhat realistic	42.86%	3
Not so realistic	14.29%	1
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Rather than being only somewhat realistic, it really just depends on the individual. As someone who speaks more English and broken dari, it becomes difficult to truly understand certain words. It's realistic, however takes a lot more time and effort in understanding the Arabic language.	9/3/2019 10:19 AM

### Q5 For Step 3, did I provide:

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

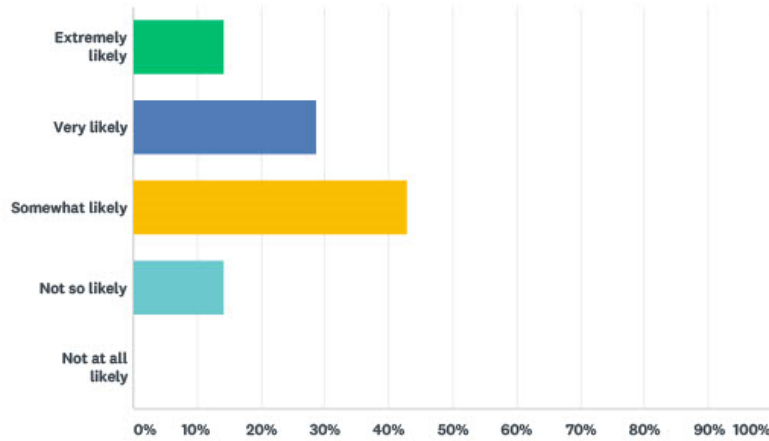


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	14.29% 1
Right amount of information	71.43% 5
Too little information	14.29% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

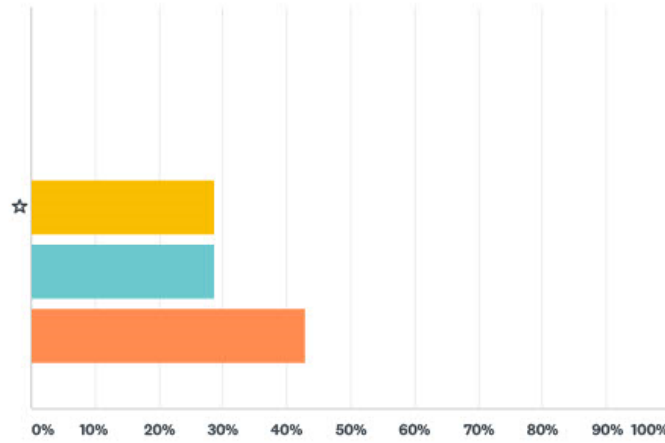


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely likely	14.29%	1
Very likely	28.57%	2
Somewhat likely	42.86%	3
Not so likely	14.29%	1
Not at all likely	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Again only somewhat likely due to my lack of understanding arabic.	9/3/2019 10:19 AM

### Q7 How clear was Step 3?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

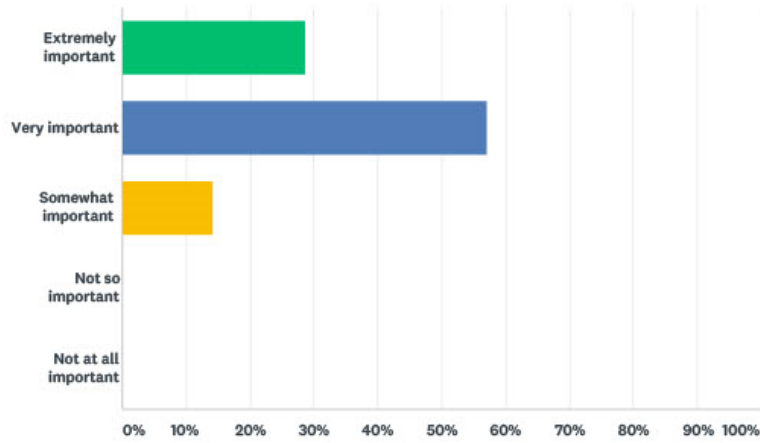


■ 1
 ■ 2
 ■ 3
 ■ 4
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	7	4.14

### Q8 How important is the role played by morphology when it comes to understanding the meaning of words?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0



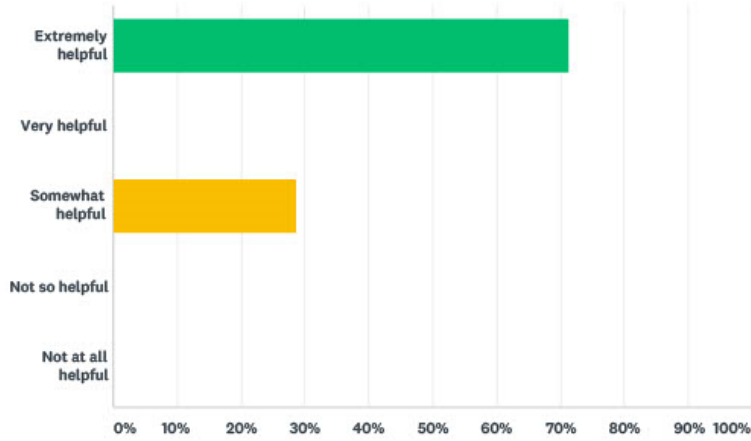
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	28.57%	2
Very important	57.14%	4
Somewhat important	14.29%	1
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	



### Q9 How helpful is it to know the meaning of homonyms in the Qur'anic text?

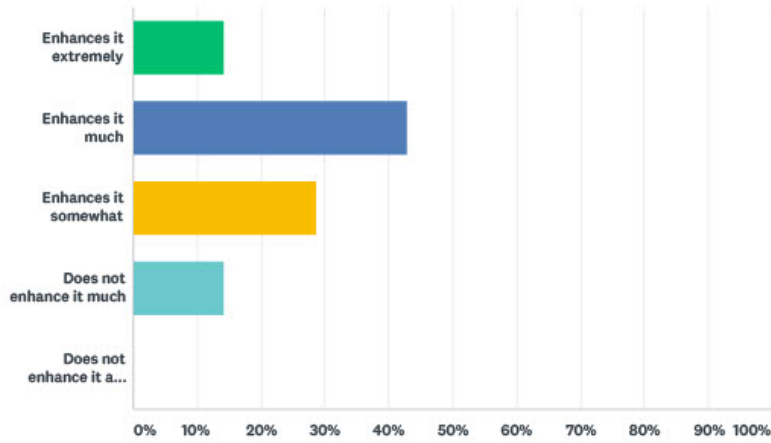
Answered: 7 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely helpful	71.43%	5
Very helpful	0.00%	0
Somewhat helpful	28.57%	2
Not so helpful	0.00%	0
Not at all helpful	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

### Q10 How much does etymology enhance our understanding of the meaning of words?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Enhances it extremely	14.29% 1
Enhances it much	42.86% 3
Enhances it somewhat	28.57% 2
Does not enhance it much	14.29% 1
Does not enhance it at all	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q11 What did you like the most about Step 3?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Nothing in particular	9/3/2019 10:19 AM
2	Understand Quran text	9/3/2019 4:27 AM
3	Explanation of homonyms	9/3/2019 1:55 AM

## Q12 What did you like the least about Step 3?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	While it's obvious and can't be helped, the complete understanding of the Arabic language is necessary for further understanding. This makes it much more difficult for people who dont have this skill.	9/3/2019 10:19 AM
2	homonym	9/3/2019 4:27 AM
3	Word morphology	9/3/2019 1:55 AM

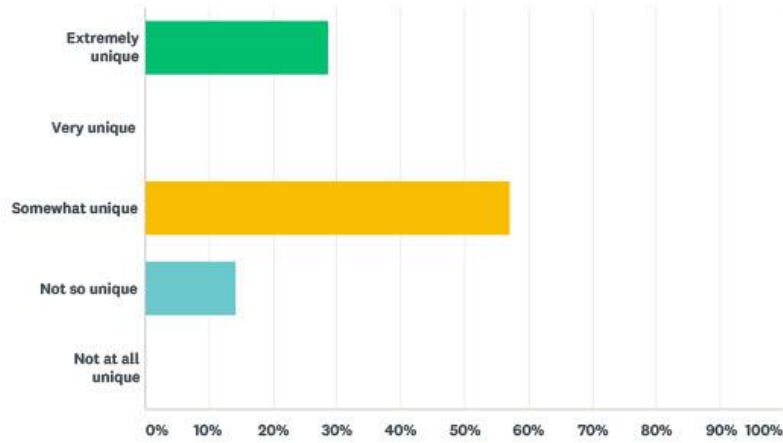
## Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 3?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Great lecture series and topic. Needs more stories and examples to keep the muharam crowd engaged. Noticed my kids getting quite bored. Linking the examples to imamt and ghadeer on night 2 was very good	9/3/2019 10:23 AM
2	Nothing due to my limited knowledge.	9/3/2019 10:19 AM
3	More samples	9/3/2019 4:27 AM
4	In general, the step by step guide may be a complex topic to discuss in Muharram. While doing it in Muharram helps outreach, it is important to remember Muharram brings in a lot of irregular attendees into Islamic centres who may not be able to grasp this topic and hence get bored of it.	9/3/2019 1:55 AM

### Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

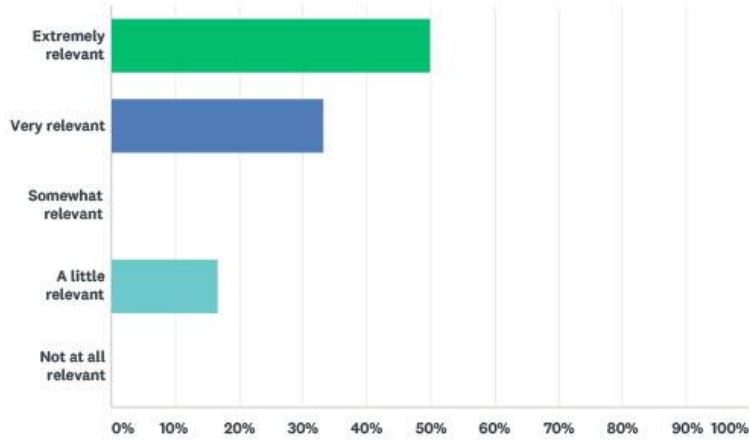


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	28.57% 2
Very unique	0.00% 0
Somewhat unique	57.14% 4
Not so unique	14.29% 1
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

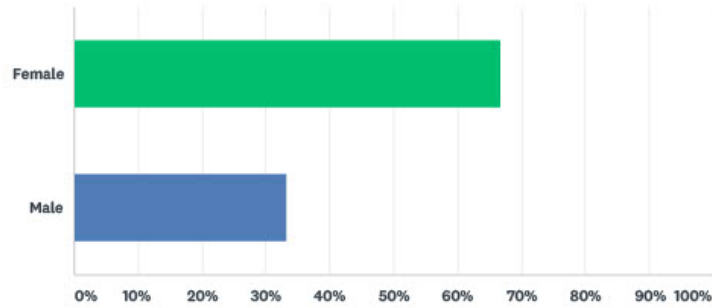


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely relevant	50.00%	3
Very relevant	33.33%	2
Somewhat relevant	0.00%	0
A little relevant	16.67%	1
Not at all relevant	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q16 What is your gender?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

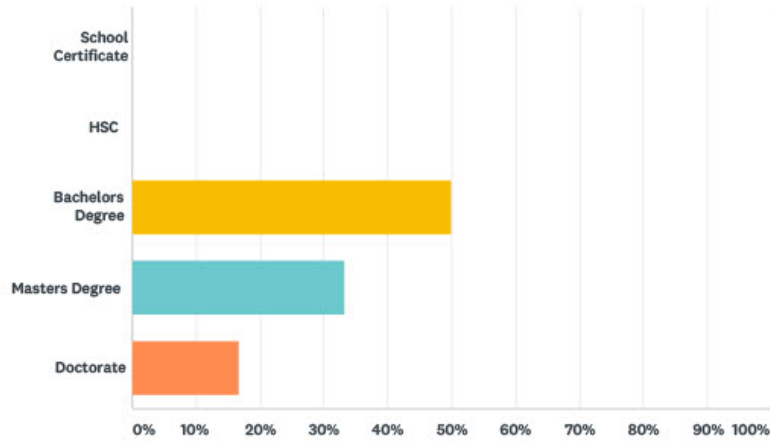


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Female	66.67% 4
Male	33.33% 2
TOTAL	6



### Q17 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

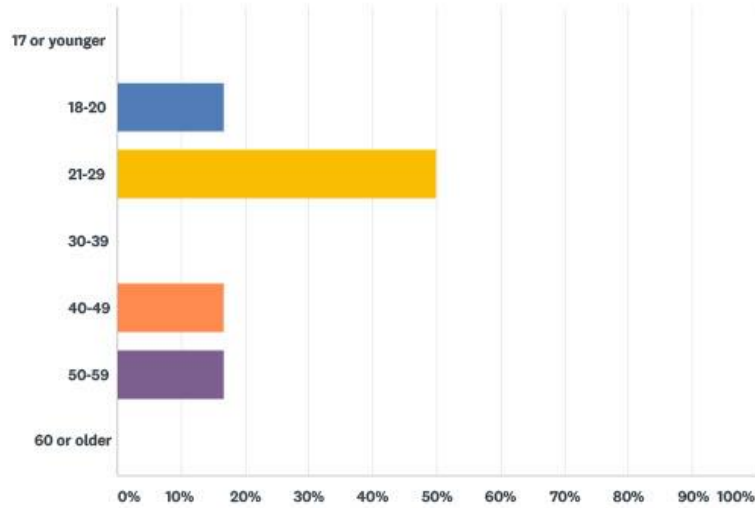
Answered: 6 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
School Certificate	0.00% 0
HSC	0.00% 0
Bachelors Degree	50.00% 3
Masters Degree	33.33% 2
Doctorate	16.67% 1
TOTAL	6

### Q18 What is your age?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	0.00%	0
18-20	16.67%	1
21-29	50.00%	3
30-39	0.00%	0
40-49	16.67%	1
50-59	16.67%	1
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

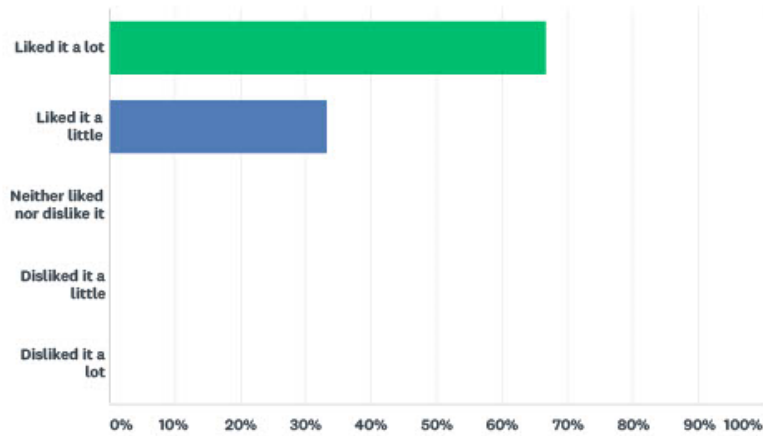
# Survey 4

Survey on the Application of Steps 1-3, and on Step 4

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much did you like the application of Steps 1-3?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

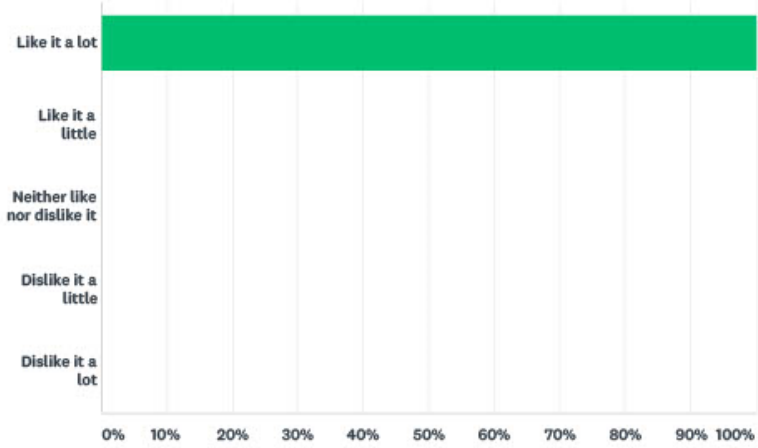


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Liked it a lot	66.67% 2
Liked it a little	33.33% 1
Neither liked nor dislike it	0.00% 0
Disliked it a little	0.00% 0
Disliked it a lot	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	We need more informations	9/3/2019 1:21 PM

### Q2 Overall, how much do you like Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

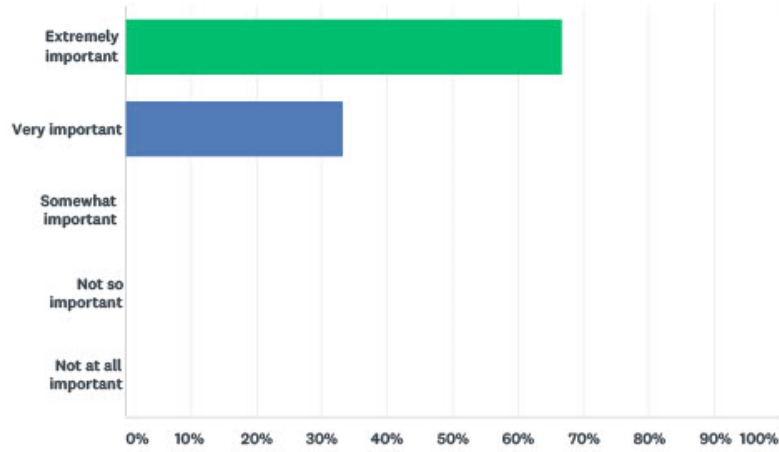


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Like it a lot	100.00%	3
Like it a little	0.00%	0
Neither like nor dislike it	0.00%	0
Dislike it a little	0.00%	0
Dislike it a lot	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q3 How important is Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

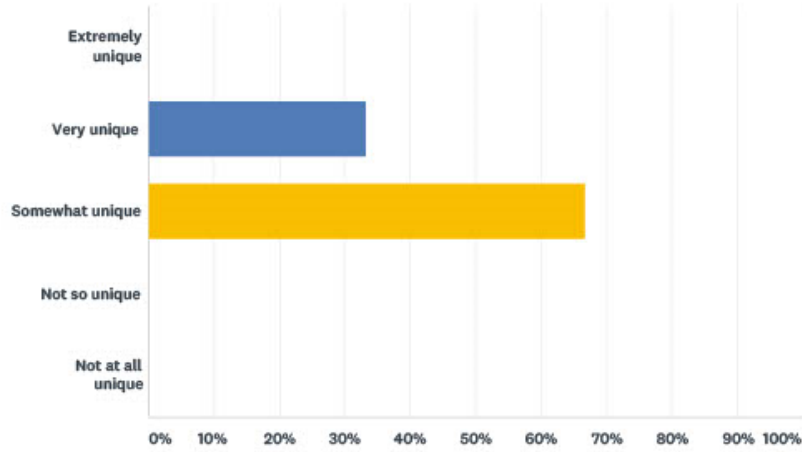


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	66.67%	2
Very important	33.33%	1
Somewhat important	0.00%	0
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How unique was the material presented in Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

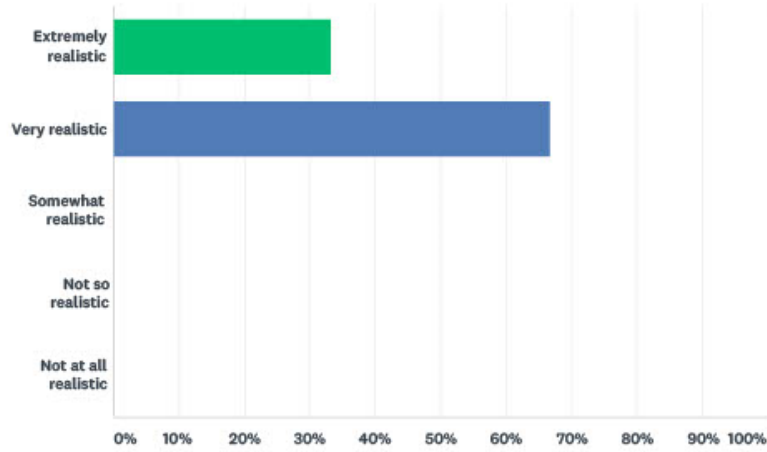


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	0.00% 0
Very unique	33.33% 1
Somewhat unique	66.67% 2
Not so unique	0.00% 0
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q5 How realistic is it to achieve Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

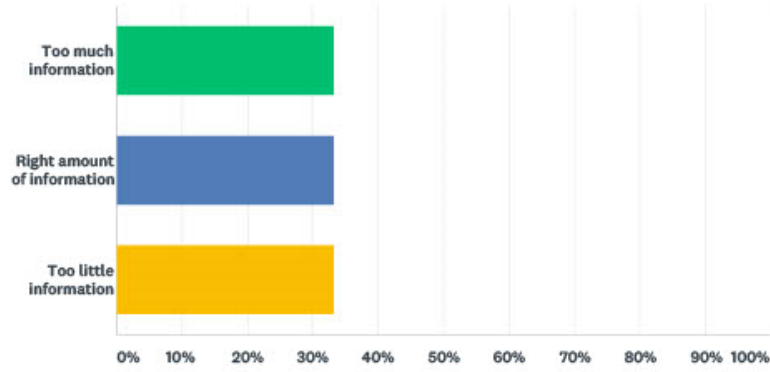


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	33.33%	1
Very realistic	66.67%	2
Somewhat realistic	0.00%	0
Not so realistic	0.00%	0
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q6 For Step 4, did I provide:

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0



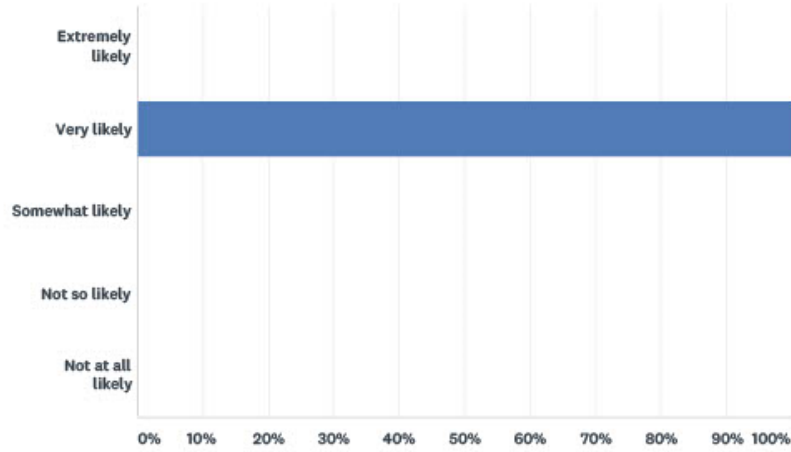
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	33.33% 1
Right amount of information	33.33% 1
Too little information	33.33% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	



### Q7 How likely is it that you would use Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

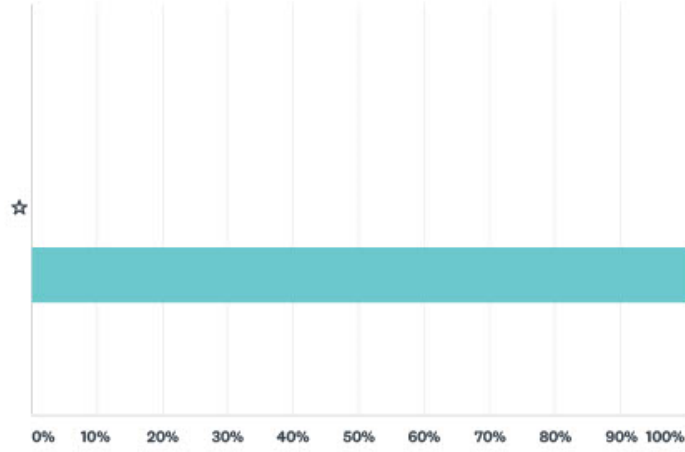


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely likely	0.00% 0
Very likely	100.00% 3
Somewhat likely	0.00% 0
Not so likely	0.00% 0
Not at all likely	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q8 How clear was the application of Steps 1-3?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

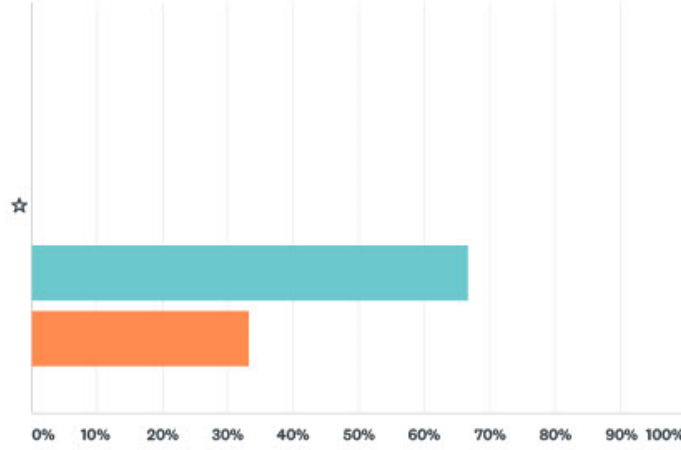


■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 3	0.00% 0	3	4.00

### Q9 How clear was Step 4?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

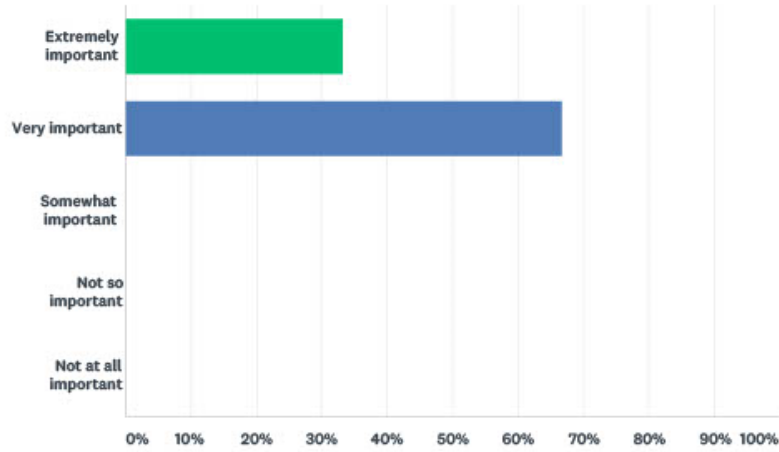


■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	66.67% 2	33.33% 1	3	4.33

### Q10 How important is Arabic Syntax and Arabic Rhetoric when it comes to understanding the Qur'anic text?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely important	33.33% 1
Very important	66.67% 2
Somewhat important	0.00% 0
Not so important	0.00% 0
Not at all important	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q11 What did you like the most about the lecture?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 2

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Was useful	9/3/2019 1:21 PM

### Q12 What did you like the least about the lecture?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 2

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It's short	9/3/2019 1:21 PM

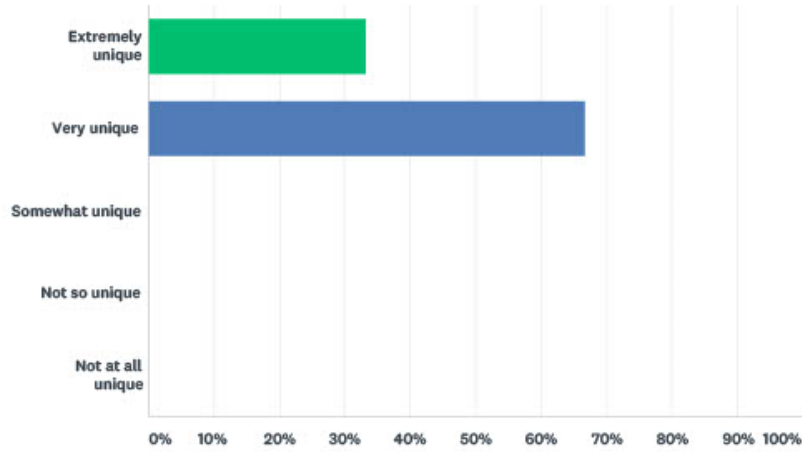
## Q13 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 4?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Maybe include some thing about Ashura and imam Hussain , so we don't miss the opportunity of learning and commemorate the occasion .. I suggest to have 2 thirds on Quran and the last third of your lecture time dedicated to imam Hussein. Or maybe just try to highlight some links between the topic of the night and between imam Hussein or Ashura ... jazak allah khayr sheikh.	9/4/2019 11:55 AM
2	More verses and examples	9/3/2019 1:21 PM

### Q14 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0



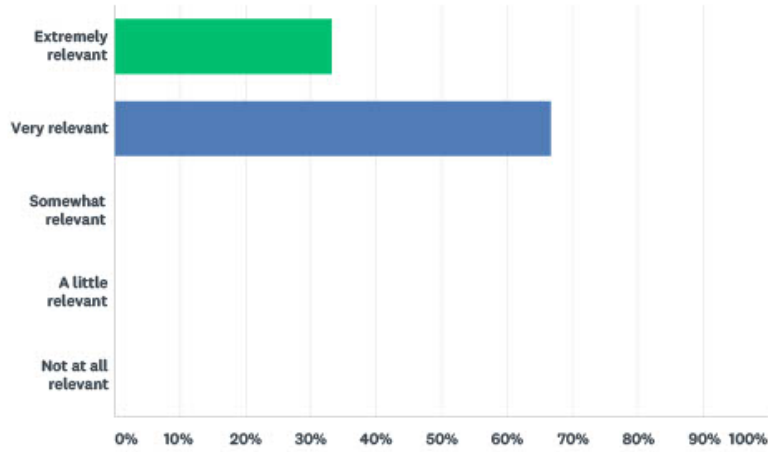
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	33.33%	1
Very unique	66.67%	2
Somewhat unique	0.00%	0
Not so unique	0.00%	0
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	



### Q15 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0

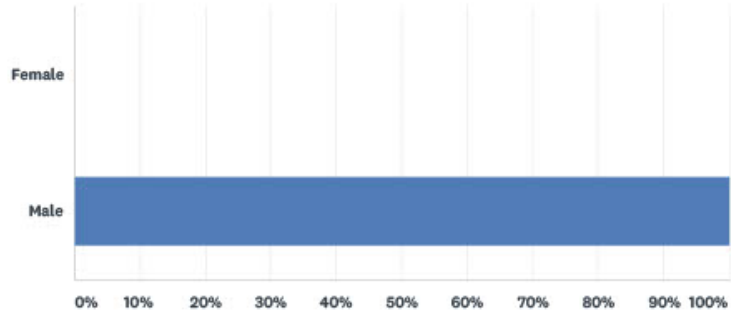


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely relevant	33.33% 1
Very relevant	66.67% 2
Somewhat relevant	0.00% 0
A little relevant	0.00% 0
Not at all relevant	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q16 What is your gender?

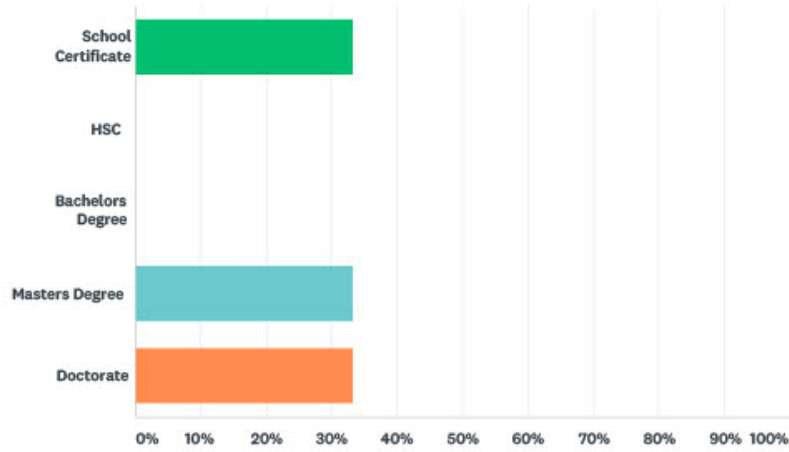
Answered: 2 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	0.00%	0
Male	100.00%	2
TOTAL		2

Q17 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

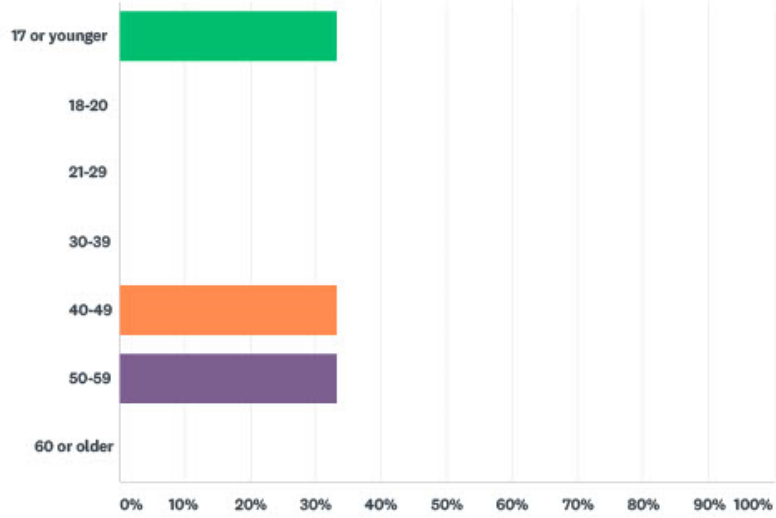
Answered: 3 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	33.33%	1
HSC	0.00%	0
Bachelors Degree	0.00%	0
Masters Degree	33.33%	1
Doctorate	33.33%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

### Q18 What is your age?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	33.33%	1
18-20	0.00%	0
21-29	0.00%	0
30-39	0.00%	0
40-49	33.33%	1
50-59	33.33%	1
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

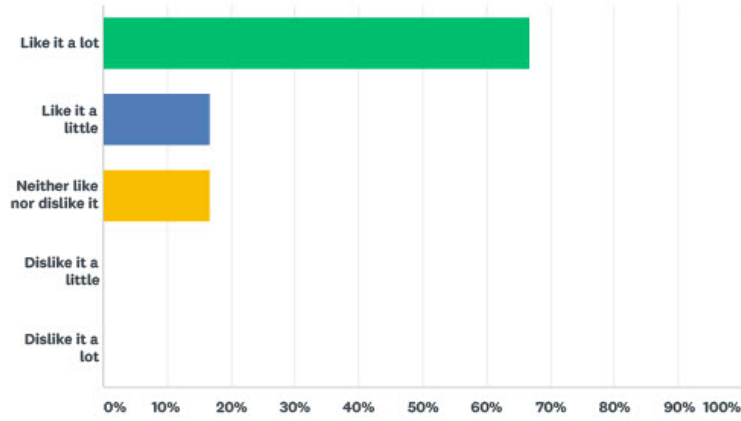
# Survey 5

Survey on Step 5

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 5?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

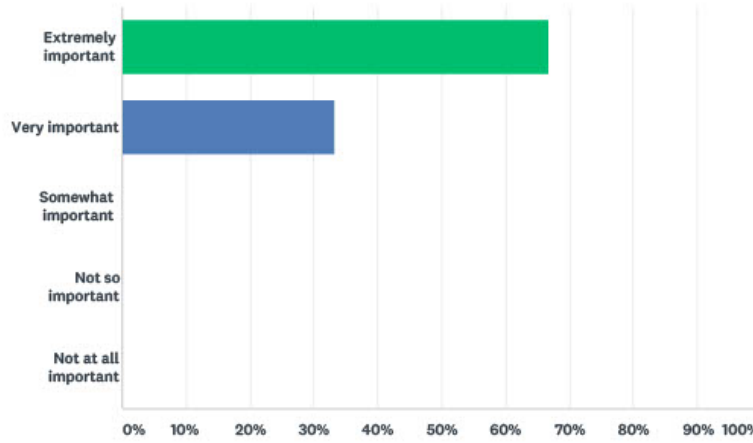


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Like it a lot	66.67% 4
Like it a little	16.67% 1
Neither like nor dislike it	16.67% 1
Dislike it a little	0.00% 0
Dislike it a lot	0.00% 0
TOTAL	6

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q2 How important is Step 5?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

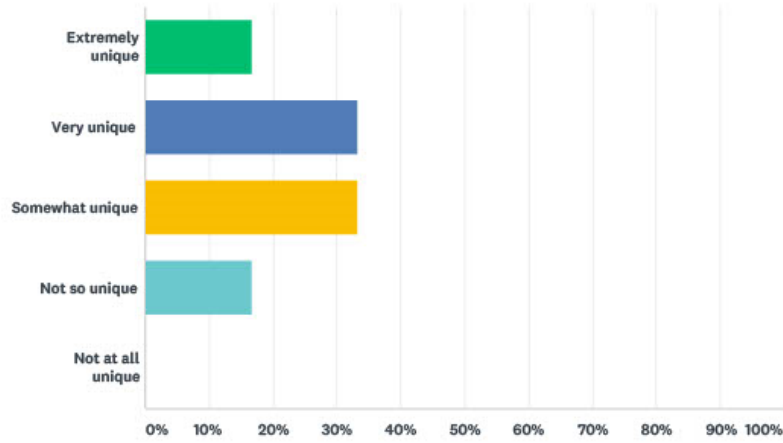


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	66.67%	4
Very important	33.33%	2
Somewhat important	0.00%	0
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 5?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

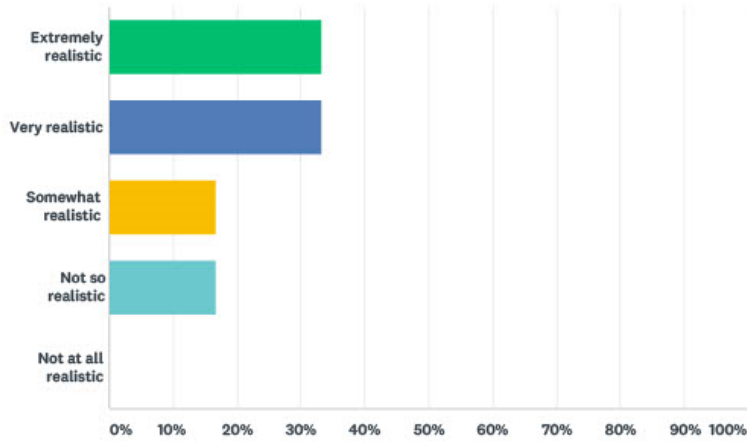


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	16.67% 1
Very unique	33.33% 2
Somewhat unique	33.33% 2
Not so unique	16.67% 1
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 5?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1



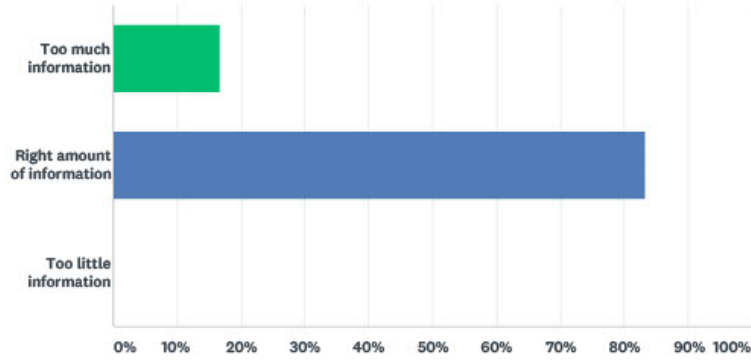
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	33.33%	2
Very realistic	33.33%	2
Somewhat realistic	16.67%	1
Not so realistic	16.67%	1
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	This aspect is quite academic and really only practical for speakers of Arabic.	9/7/2019 11:00 AM



### Q5 For Step 5, did I provide:

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

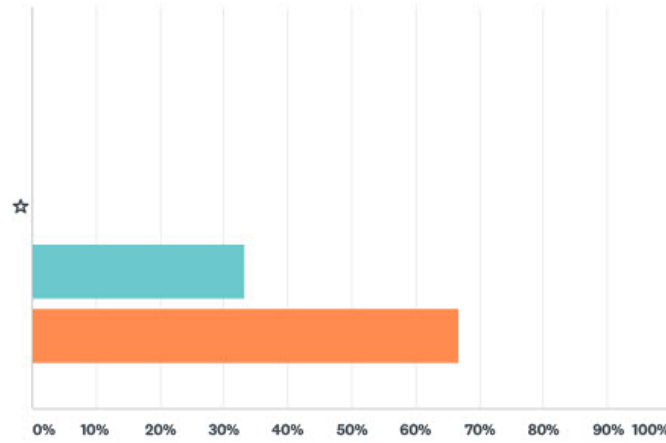


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	16.67% 1
Right amount of information	83.33% 5
Too little information	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q6 How clear was Step 5?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1



1 2 3 4 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	4.67

### Q7 What did you like the most about Step 5?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I liked the explanation on the differences in language and concepts - example inzai and tanzil.	9/7/2019 11:00 AM
2	Providing clear examples from the holy Quran	9/5/2019 12:34 AM
3	Greatly improves depth of understanding of meaning of ayat	9/5/2019 12:26 AM

### Q8 What did you like the least about Step 5?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 5

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	N/a	9/7/2019 11:00 AM
2	None	9/5/2019 12:34 AM

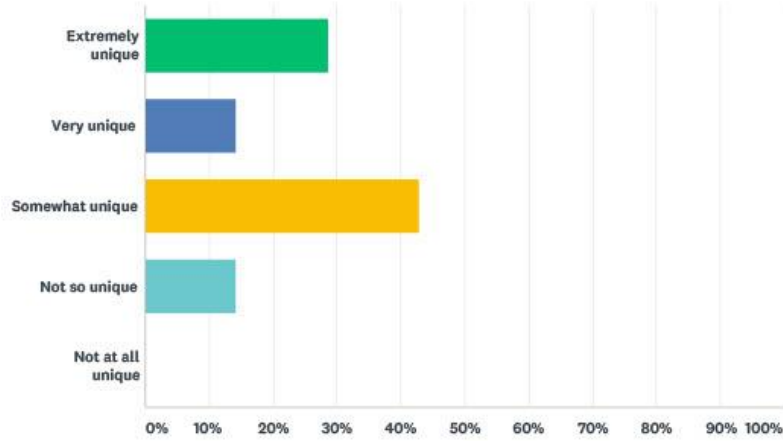
### Q9 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 5?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It requires deeper discussion about the structure of the text of the holy Quran	9/5/2019 12:34 AM

### Q10 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

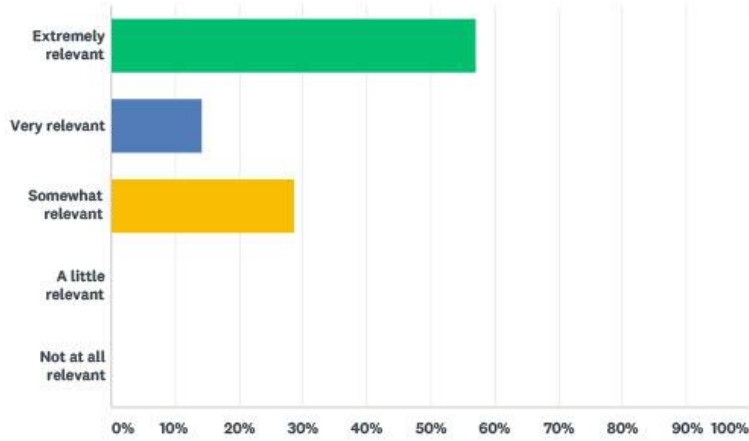


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	28.57%	2
Very unique	14.29%	1
Somewhat unique	42.86%	3
Not so unique	14.29%	1
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q11 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

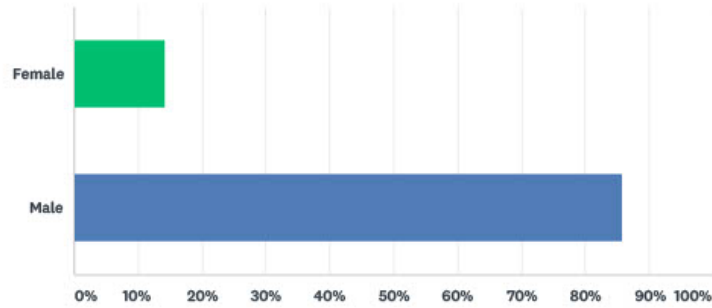


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely relevant	57.14%	4
Very relevant	14.29%	1
Somewhat relevant	28.57%	2
A little relevant	0.00%	0
Not at all relevant	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q12 What is your gender?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0

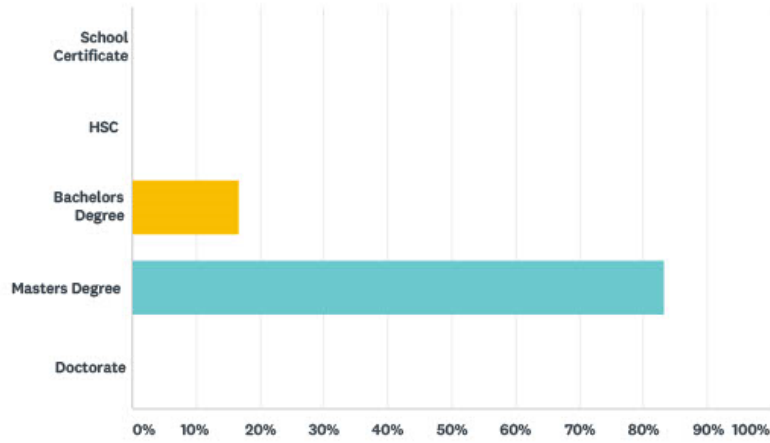


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Female	14.29% 1
Male	85.71% 6
TOTAL	7



### Q13 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

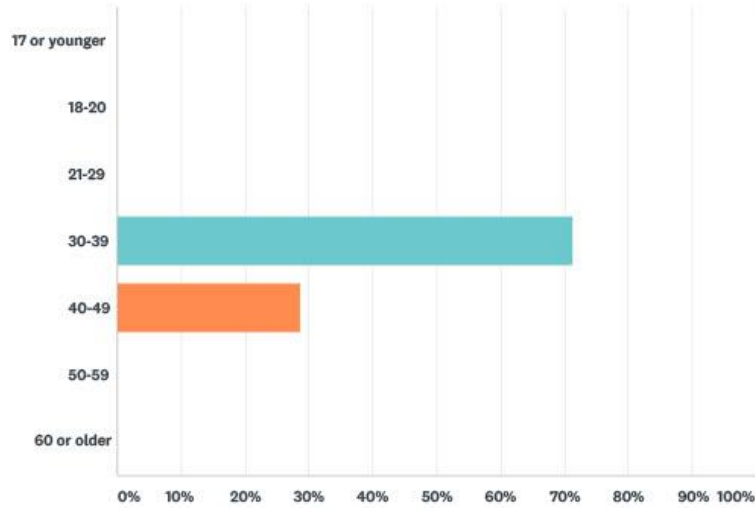
Answered: 6 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	0.00%	0
HSC	0.00%	0
Bachelors Degree	16.67%	1
Masters Degree	83.33%	5
Doctorate	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

### Q14 What is your age?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	0.00%	0
18-20	0.00%	0
21-29	0.00%	0
30-39	71.43%	5
40-49	28.57%	2
50-59	0.00%	0
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>

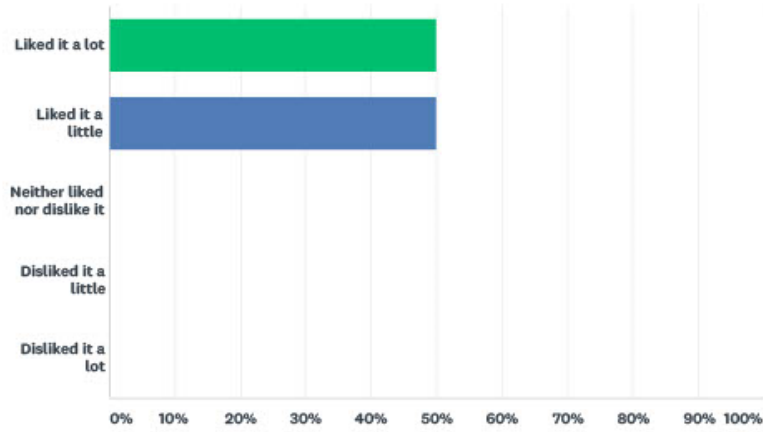
# Survey 6

Survey on Steps 6 and 7

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much did you like Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

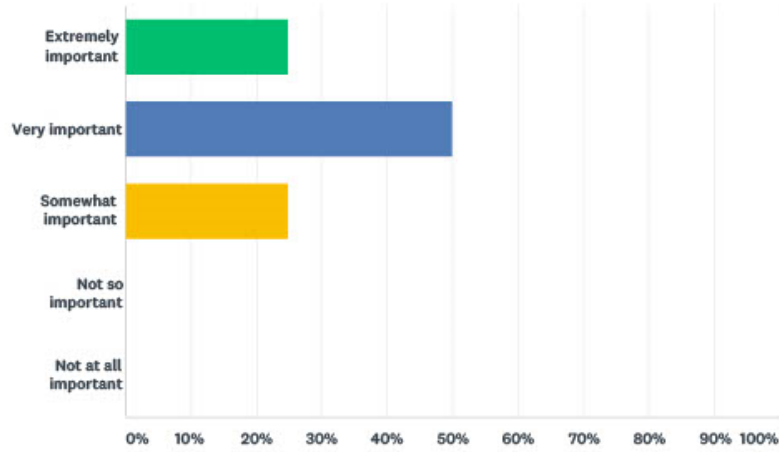


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Liked it a lot	50.00%	2
Liked it a little	50.00%	2
Neither liked nor dislike it	0.00%	0
Disliked it a little	0.00%	0
Disliked it a lot	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q2 How important is Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

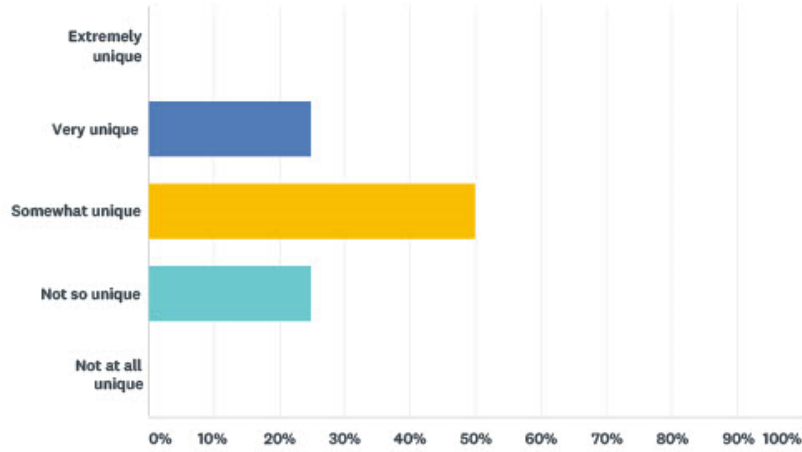


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	25.00%	1
Very important	50.00%	2
Somewhat important	25.00%	1
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Expert opinions are generally in themselves a source of knowledge that can bring us one step closer to the truth of a matter.	9/7/2019 10:55 AM

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

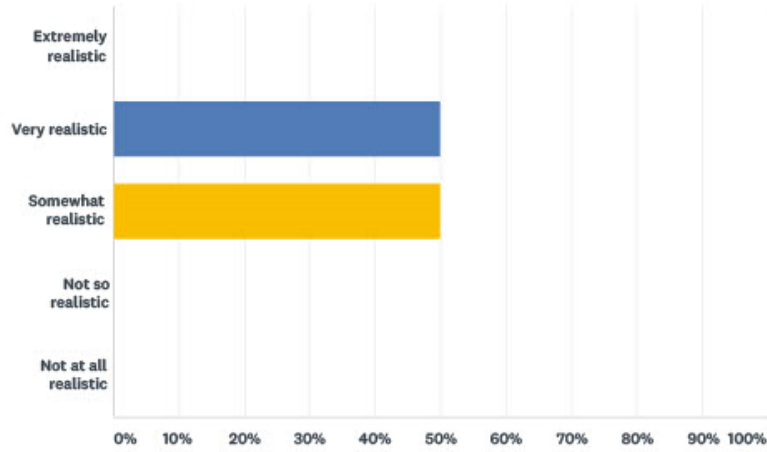


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	0.00% 0
Very unique	25.00% 1
Somewhat unique	50.00% 2
Not so unique	25.00% 1
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

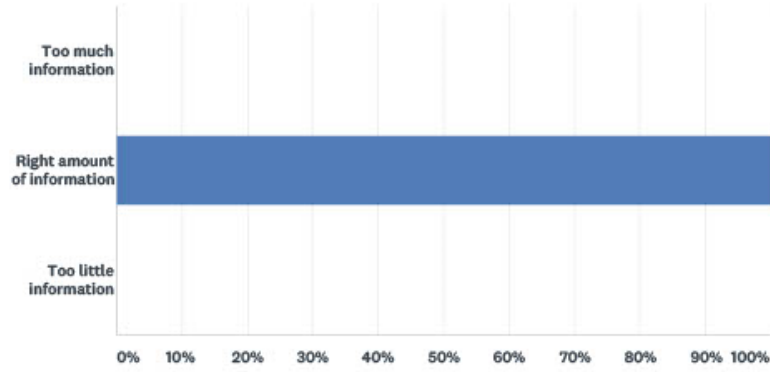


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely realistic	0.00% 0
Very realistic	50.00% 2
Somewhat realistic	50.00% 2
Not so realistic	0.00% 0
Not at all realistic	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q5 For Step 6, did I provide:

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

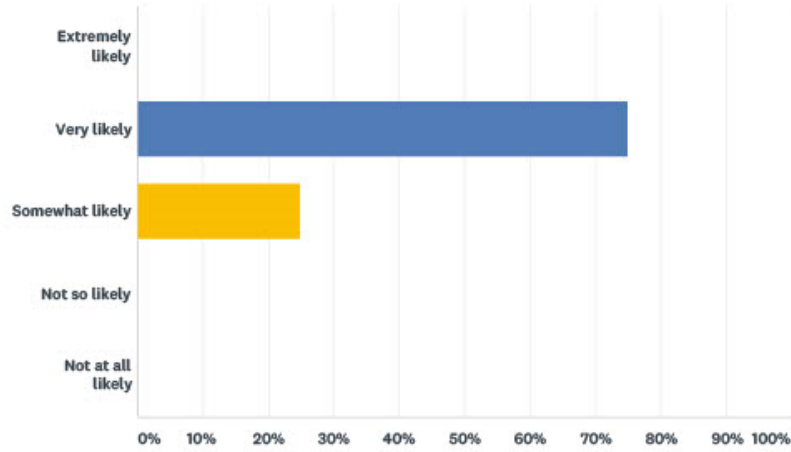


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	0.00% 0
Right amount of information	100.00% 4
Too little information	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q6 How likely is it that you would use Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0



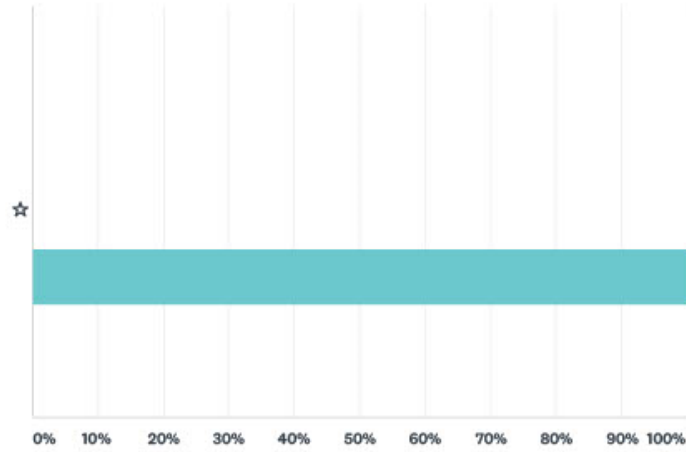
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely likely	0.00% 0
Very likely	75.00% 3
Somewhat likely	25.00% 1
Not so likely	0.00% 0
Not at all likely	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	



### Q7 How clear was Step 6?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

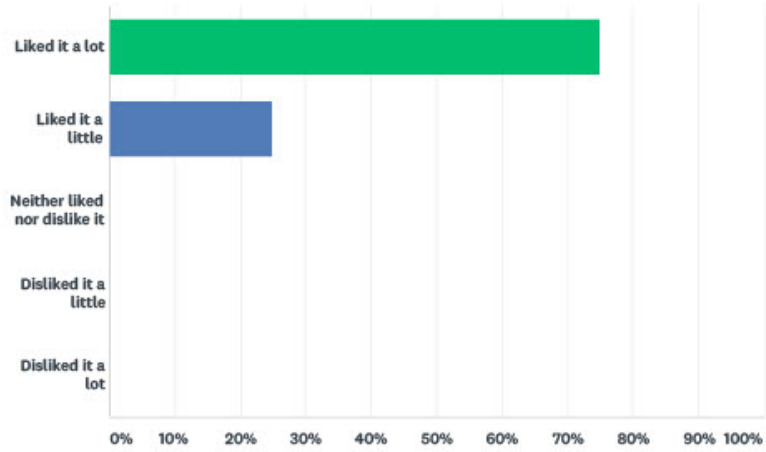


■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 4	0.00% 0	4	4.00

### Q8 Overall, how much did you like Step 7?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

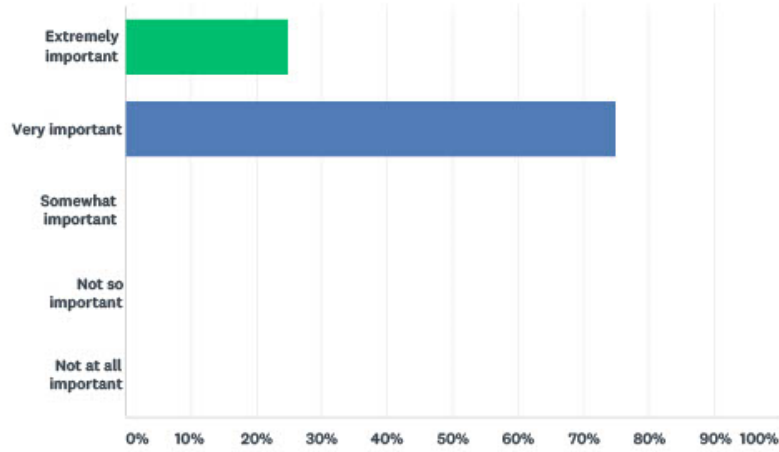


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Liked it a lot	75.00%	3
Liked it a little	25.00%	1
Neither liked nor dislike it	0.00%	0
Disliked it a little	0.00%	0
Disliked it a lot	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q9 How important is Step 7?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

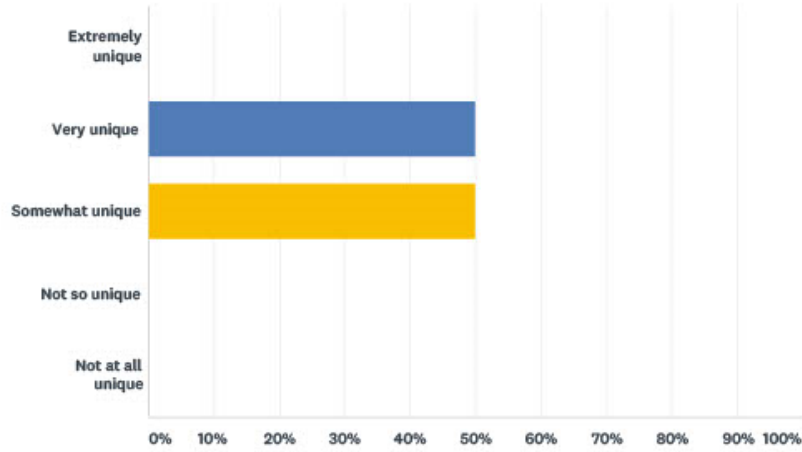


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	25.00%	1
Very important	75.00%	3
Somewhat important	0.00%	0
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q10 How unique was the material presented in Step 7?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0

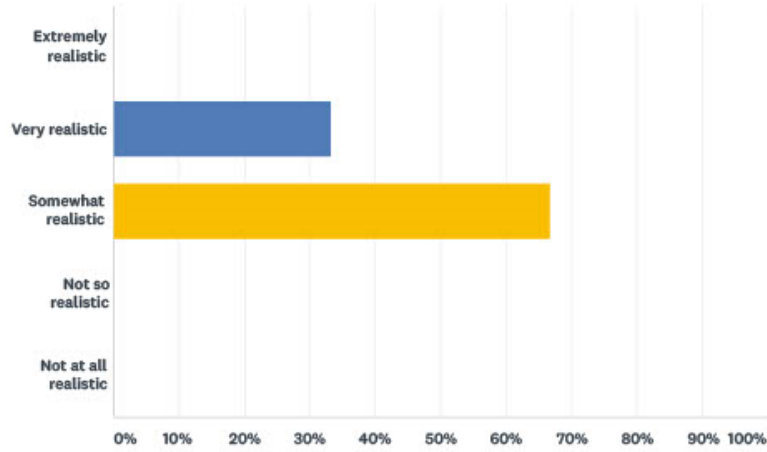


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely unique	0.00% 0
Very unique	50.00% 2
Somewhat unique	50.00% 2
Not so unique	0.00% 0
Not at all unique	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q11 How realistic is it to achieve Step 7?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 1

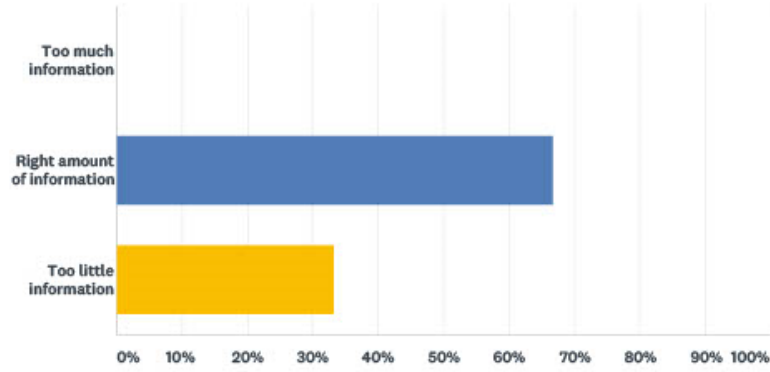


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	0.00%	0
Very realistic	33.33%	1
Somewhat realistic	66.67%	2
Not so realistic	0.00%	0
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q12 For Step 7, did I provide:

Answered: 3 Skipped: 1

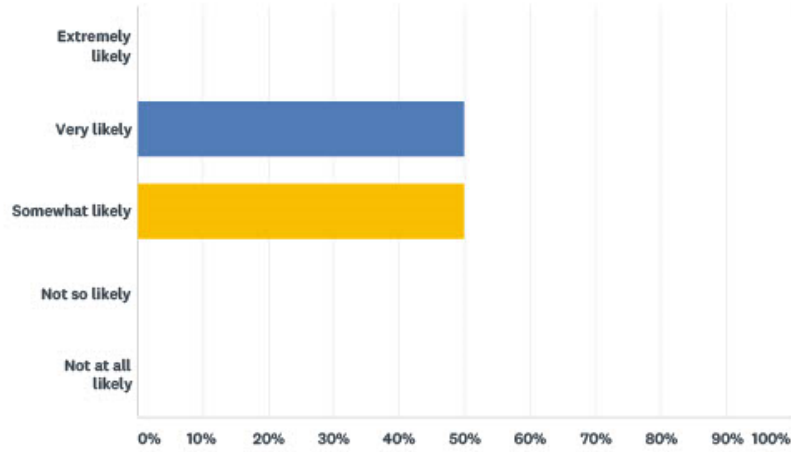


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	0.00% 0
Right amount of information	66.67% 2
Too little information	33.33% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q13 How likely is it that you would use Step 7?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 2

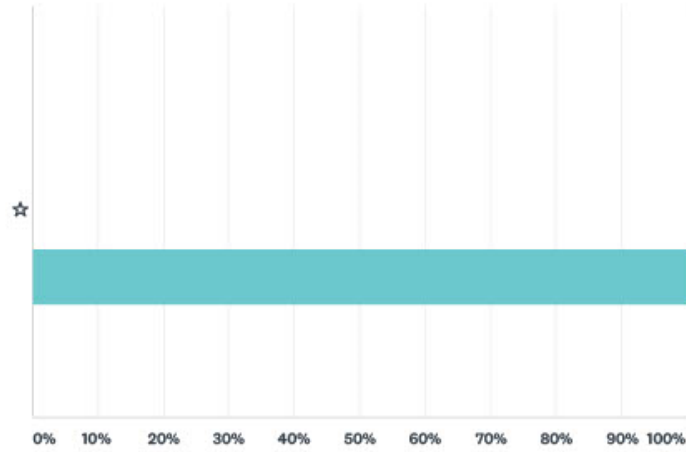


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely likely	0.00% 0
Very likely	50.00% 1
Somewhat likely	50.00% 1
Not so likely	0.00% 0
Not at all likely	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q14 How clear was Step 7?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 1



■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 3	0.00% 0	3	4.00



### Q15 What did you like the most about the lecture?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The information was delivered clearly and articulately with relevant examples.	9/7/2019 10:55 AM

## Q16 What did you like the least about the lecture?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 2

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Considering the audience, it may have been a little impractical and academic in nature.	9/7/2019 10:55 AM
2	When you give your story . Try to blend it in your lecture . Don't have it as a appendix or an Attachment as a after thought .. I think it's better if you have it within your lecture .and that is the art of Khidabah	9/6/2019 12:02 PM

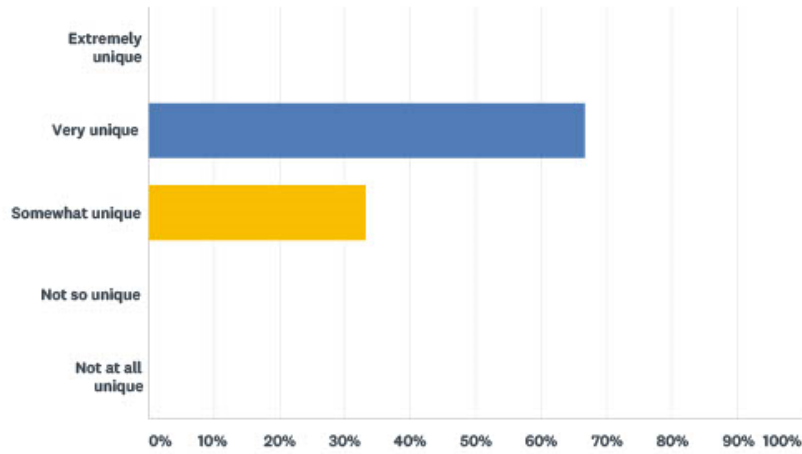
### Q17 What suggestions do you have for improving Steps 6 and 7?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Good luck and thank you so much	9/6/2019 12:02 PM

### Q18 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 1

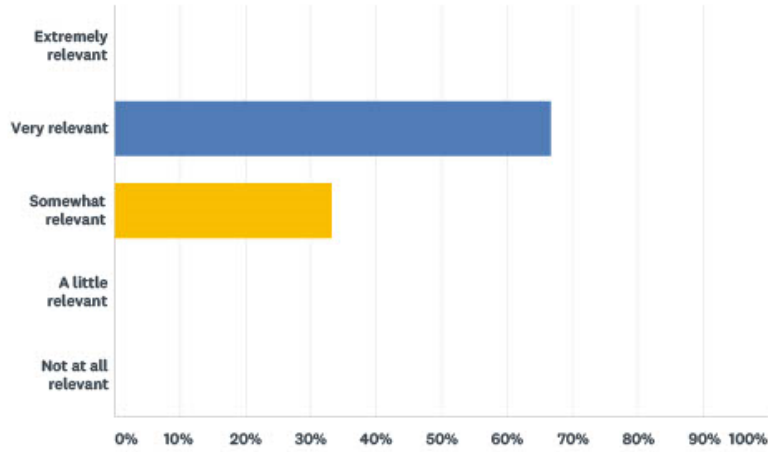


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	0.00%	0
Very unique	66.67%	2
Somewhat unique	33.33%	1
Not so unique	0.00%	0
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q19 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 1

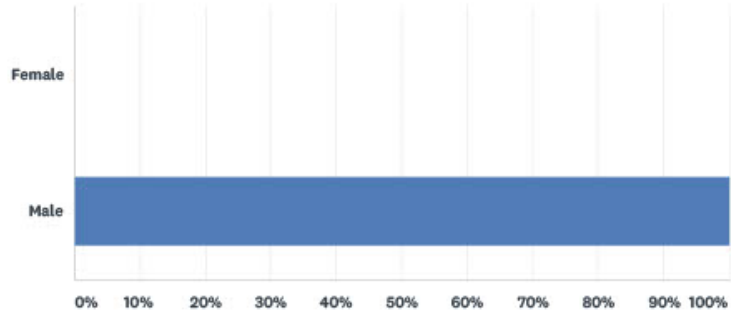


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely relevant	0.00%	0
Very relevant	66.67%	2
Somewhat relevant	33.33%	1
A little relevant	0.00%	0
Not at all relevant	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q20 What is your gender?

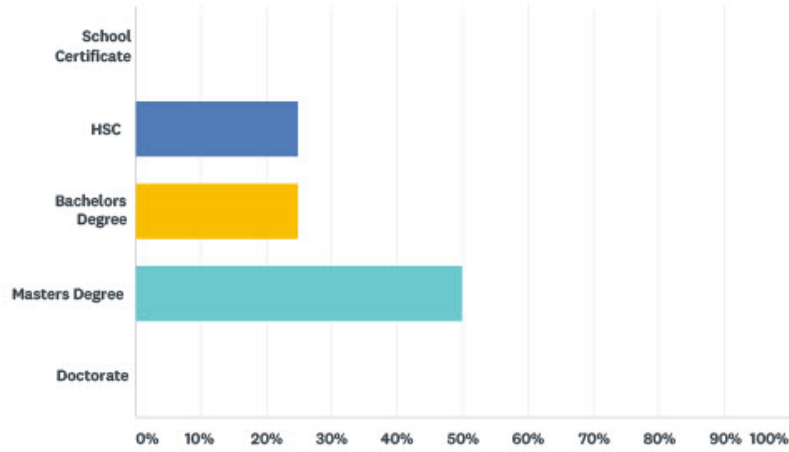
Answered: 3 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	0.00%	0
Male	100.00%	3
TOTAL		3

### Q21 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

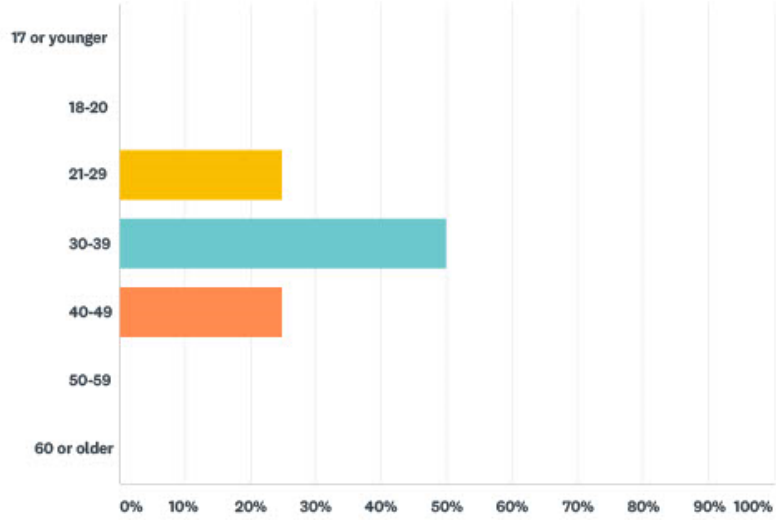
Answered: 4 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	0.00%	0
HSC	25.00%	1
Bachelors Degree	25.00%	1
Masters Degree	50.00%	2
Doctorate	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

### Q22 What is your age?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
17 or younger	0.00% 0
18-20	0.00% 0
21-29	25.00% 1
30-39	50.00% 2
40-49	25.00% 1
50-59	0.00% 0
60 or older	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>



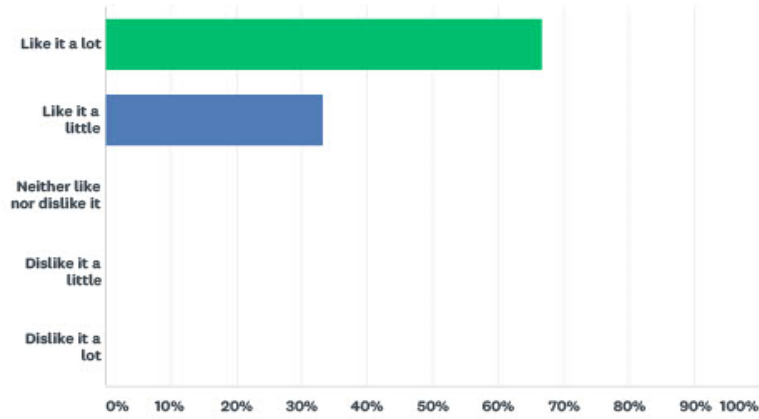
# Survey 7

Survey on Step 8

SurveyMonkey

## Q1 Overall, how much do you like Step 8?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0

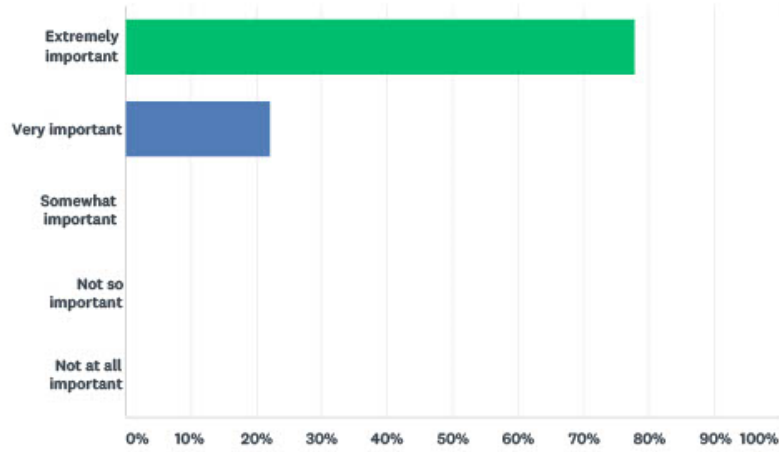


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Like it a lot	66.67%	6
Like it a little	33.33%	3
Neither like nor dislike it	0.00%	0
Dislike it a little	0.00%	0
Dislike it a lot	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q2 How important is Step 8?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0

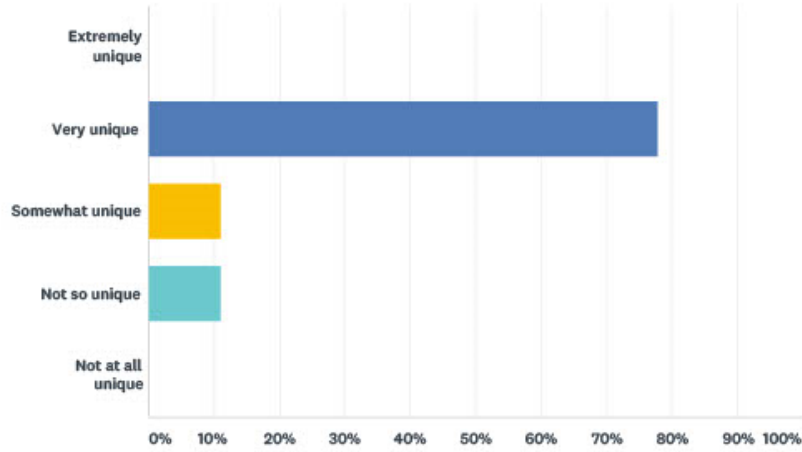


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely important	77.78%	7
Very important	22.22%	2
Somewhat important	0.00%	0
Not so important	0.00%	0
Not at all important	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Step 8 allows Muslims to have an understand on why it is important to be grateful and have gratitude.	9/8/2019 1:01 PM

### Q3 How unique was the material presented in Step 8?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0

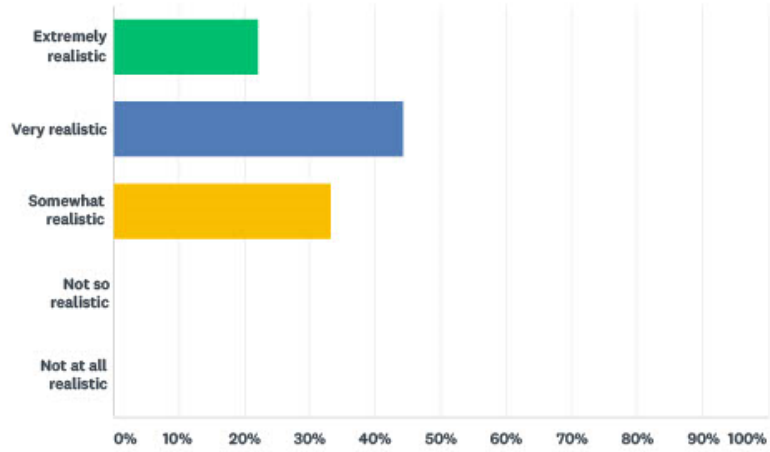


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	0.00%	0
Very unique	77.78%	7
Somewhat unique	11.11%	1
Not so unique	11.11%	1
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q4 How realistic is it to achieve Step 8?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 0

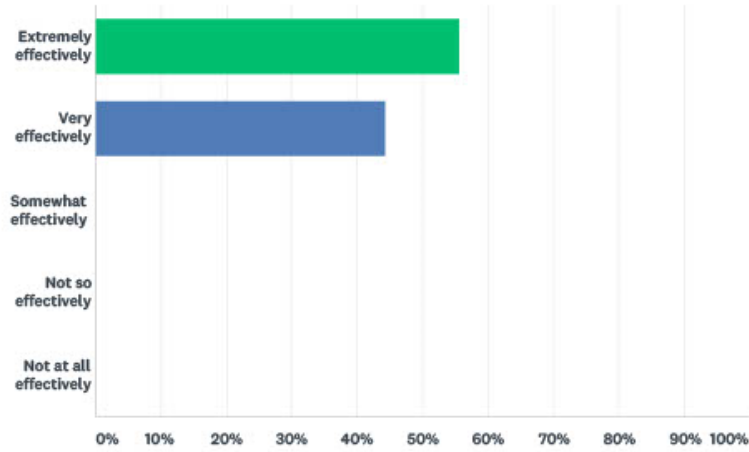


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely realistic	22.22%	2
Very realistic	44.44%	4
Somewhat realistic	33.33%	3
Not so realistic	0.00%	0
Not at all realistic	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	With constant zikr of Allah swt and understanding of the Quran, it's achievable. All about the individual themselves and how they apply gratitude into their everyday lives.	9/8/2019 1:01 PM

### Q5 How effectively were the lessons on gratitude derived from the story of Prophet Sulayman and the ant?

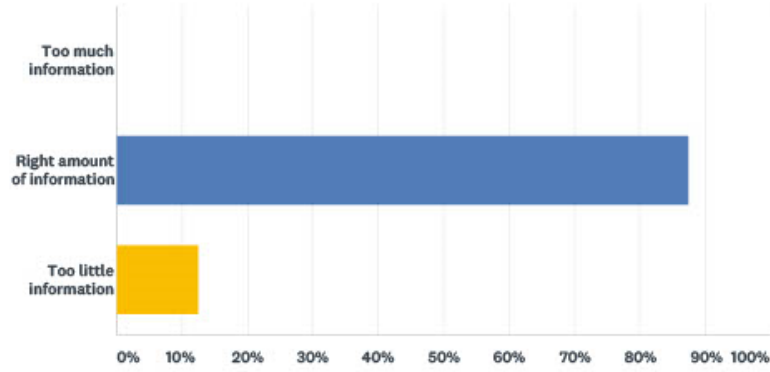
Answered: 9 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely effectively	55.56%	5
Very effectively	44.44%	4
Somewhat effectively	0.00%	0
Not so effectively	0.00%	0
Not at all effectively	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>

### Q6 For Step 8, did I provide:

Answered: 8 Skipped: 1

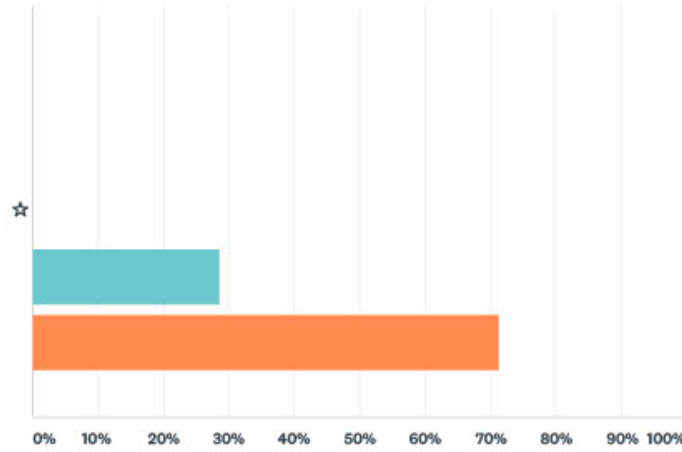


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Too much information	0.00% 0
Right amount of information	87.50% 7
Too little information	12.50% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
	There are no responses.	

### Q7 How clear was Step 8?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 2



■ 1 
 ■ 2 
 ■ 3 
 ■ 4 
 ■ 5

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	71.43% 5	7	4.71

### Q8 What did you like the most about Step 8?

Answered: 3 Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The story of prophet suleyman and the examples you addressed	9/8/2019 1:01 PM
2	How to treat riya	9/8/2019 11:47 AM
3	The use of a story	9/8/2019 11:15 AM



### Q9 What did you like the least about Step 8?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	N/A	9/8/2019 1:01 PM

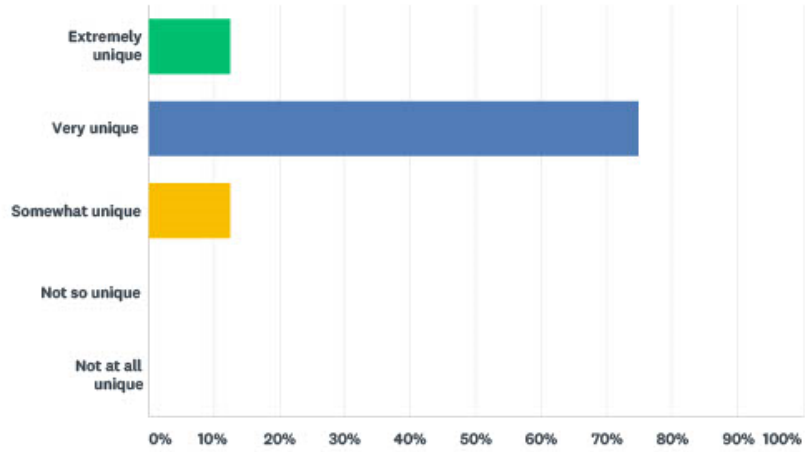
### Q10 What suggestions do you have for improving Step 8?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	More info about how to treat riya	9/8/2019 11:47 AM

### Q11 How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 1

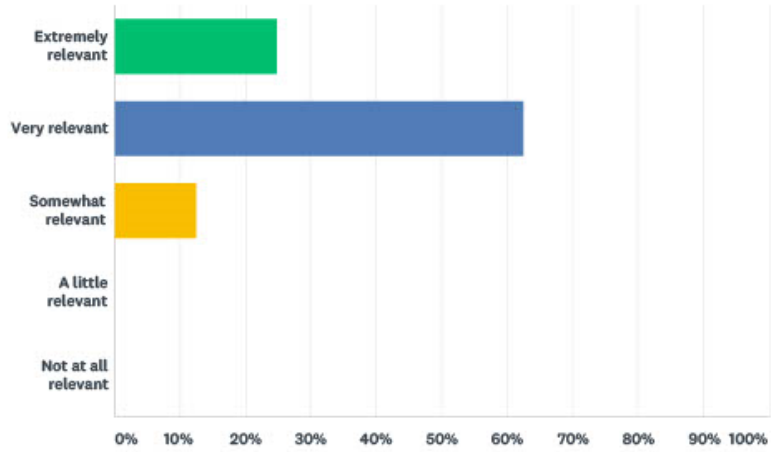


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely unique	12.50%	1
Very unique	75.00%	6
Somewhat unique	12.50%	1
Not so unique	0.00%	0
Not at all unique	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	The topic is one I feel isn't touched upon enough by other speakers.	9/10/2019 5:32 AM
2	Honestly never heard such an amazing down to earth lecture/lecturer	9/8/2019 1:01 PM

### Q12 How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely relevant	25.00%	2
Very relevant	62.50%	5
Somewhat relevant	12.50%	1
A little relevant	0.00%	0
Not at all relevant	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

#	COMMENT	DATE
1	Something that is definitely needed and lacking within our community.	9/10/2019 5:32 AM

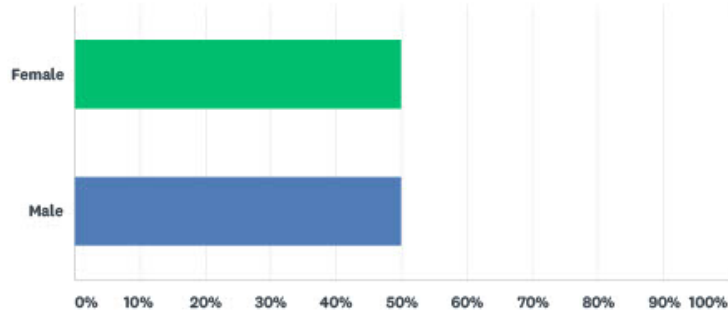
### Q13 Overall, how can the Step-by-Step Model be improved?

Answered: 1 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It was very enjoyable. It may be interesting to trial it in a classroom format - was very interesting and insightful nonetheless. Jazakallah	9/10/2019 5:32 AM

### Q14 What is your gender?

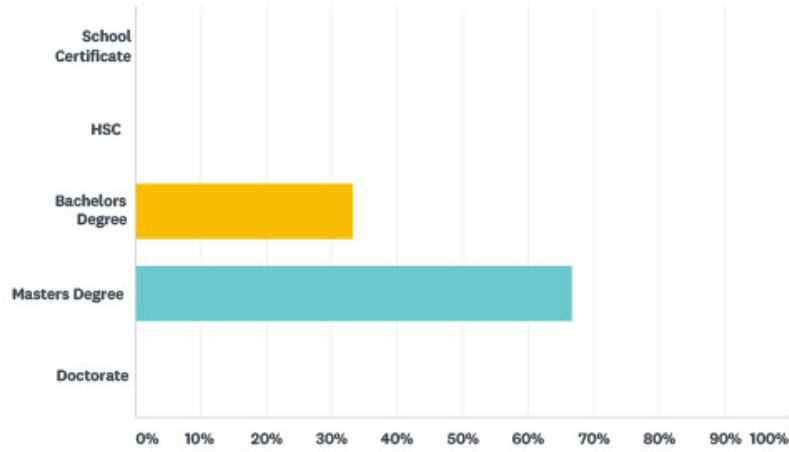
Answered: 8 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	50.00%	4
Male	50.00%	4
TOTAL		8

### Q15 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

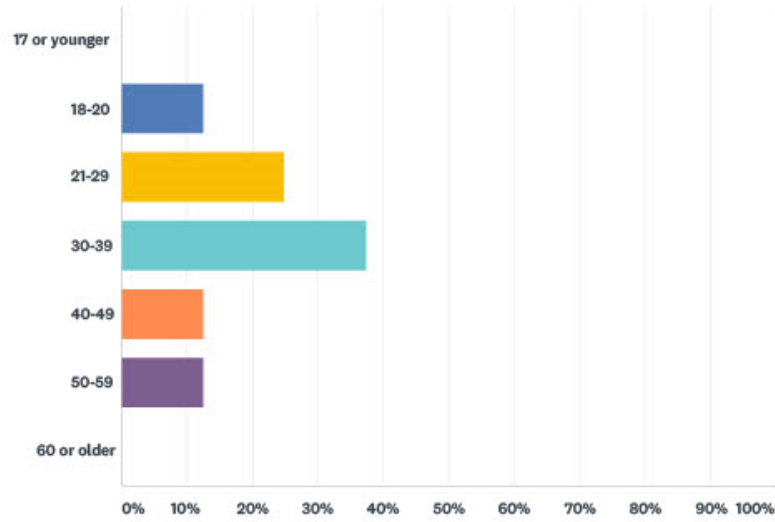
Answered: 6 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School Certificate	0.00%	0
HSC	0.00%	0
Bachelors Degree	33.33%	2
Masters Degree	66.67%	4
Doctorate	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

### Q16 What is your age?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
17 or younger	0.00%	0
18-20	12.50%	1
21-29	25.00%	2
30-39	37.50%	3
40-49	12.50%	1
50-59	12.50%	1
60 or older	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>



## Appendix D: Analysis of Individual Surveys

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Average
<b>Overall, how much do you like the step?</b>	Liked it a lot	63.64%	87.50%	57.14%	100.00%	66.67%	50.00%	75.00%	66.67%	70.83%
	Liked it a little	18.18%	12.50%	28.57%	0.00%	16.67%	50.00%	25.00%	33.33%	23.03%
	Neither liked nor disliked it	9.09%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.01%
	Disliked it a little	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%
	Disliked it a lot	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%
<b>How important is the step?</b>	Extremely important	36.36%	75.00%	57.14%	66.67%	66.67%	25.00%	25.00%	77.78%	53.70%
	Very important	36.36%	25.00%	14.29%	33.33%	33.33%	50.00%	75.00%	22.22%	36.19%
	Somewhat important	22.73%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.54%
	Not so important	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%
	Not at all important	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>How unique was the material presented in the step?</b>	Extremely unique	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.22%
	Very unique	45.45%	37.50%	42.86%	33.33%	33.33%	25.00%	50.00%	77.78%	43.16%
	Somewhat unique	31.82%	50.00%	14.29%	66.67%	33.33%	50.00%	50.00%	11.11%	38.40%
	Not so unique	9.09%	12.50%	42.86%	0.00%	16.67%	25.00%	0.00%	11.11%	14.65%
	Not at all unique	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%
<b>How realistic is it to achieve the step?</b>	Extremely realistic	18.18%	25.00%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	16.51%
	Very realistic	50.00%	50.00%	42.86%	66.67%	33.33%	50.00%	33.33%	44.44%	46.33%
	Somewhat realistic	27.27%	25.00%	42.86%	0.00%	16.67%	50.00%	66.67%	33.33%	32.73%
	Not so realistic	4.55%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.44%
	Not at all realistic	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Average
<b>Did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?</b>	Too much information	22.73%	0.00%	14.29%	33.33%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10.88%
	Right amount of information	59.09%	87.50%	71.43%	33.33%	83.33%	100.00%	66.67%	87.50%	73.61%
	Too little information	18.18%	12.50%	14.29%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	12.50%	15.52%
<b>How likely is it that you would use the step?</b>	Extremely likely	18.18%	37.50%	14.29%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%		11.66%
	Very likely	54.55%	62.50%	28.57%	100.00%		75.00%	50.00%		61.77%
	Somewhat likely	18.18%	0.00%	42.86%	0.00%		25.00%	50.00%		22.67%
	Not so likely	4.55%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%		3.14%
	Not at all likely	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%		0.76%
<b>How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?</b>	Extremely unique	18.18%	0.00%	28.57%	33.33%	28.57%		0.00%	12.50%	17.31%
	Very unique	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	66.67%	14.29%		66.67%	75.00%	46.09%
	Somewhat unique	27.27%	50.00%	57.14%	0.00%	42.86%		33.33%	12.50%	31.87%
	Not so unique	4.55%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	14.29%		0.00%	0.00%	4.73%
	Not at all unique	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?</b>	Extremely relevant	45.45%	50.00%	50.00%	33.33%	57.14%		0.00%	25.00%	37.27%
	Very relevant	27.27%	50.00%	33.33%	66.67%	14.29%		66.67%	62.50%	45.82%
	Somewhat relevant	22.73%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.57%		33.33%	12.50%	13.88%
	A little relevant	4.55%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	3.03%
	Not at all relevant	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>What is your gender?</b>	Female	45.45%	12.50%	66.67%	0.00%	14.29%		0.00%	50.00%	26.99%
	Male	54.55%	87.50%	33.33%	100.00%	85.71%		100.00%	50.00%	73.01%
<b>What is the highest level of education you have completed?</b>	School Certificate	4.76%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	5.44%
	HSC	9.52%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		25.00%	0.00%	4.93%
	Bachelor's Degree	61.90%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	16.67%		25.00%	33.33%	33.84%
	Master's Degree	14.29%	16.67%	33.33%	33.33%	83.33%		50.00%	66.67%	42.52%
	Doctorate	9.52%	33.33%	16.67%	33.33%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	13.26%

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Average
<b>What is your age?</b>	17 or younger	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	6.06%
	18-20	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	12.50%	4.17%
	21-29	54.55%	37.50%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%		25.00%	25.00%	27.44%
	30-39	18.18%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%	71.43%		50.00%	37.50%	30.66%
	40-49	9.09%	12.50%	16.67%	33.33%	28.57%		25.00%	12.50%	19.67%
	50-59	9.09%	12.50%	16.67%	33.33%	0.00%		0.00%	12.50%	12.01%
	60 or older	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>How valuable is it to know the 'Reason for Revelation' and the 'Occasion of Revelation'?</b>	Extremely valuable		50.00%							50.00%
	Very valuable		50.00%							50.00%
	Somewhat valuable		0.00%							0.00%
	Not so valuable		0.00%							0.00%
	Not at all valuable		0.00%							0.00%
<b>How useful is the 'Principle of Flow and Application'?</b>	Extremely useful		50.00%							50.00%
	Very useful		25.00%							25.00%
	Somewhat useful		25.00%							25.00%
	Not so useful		0.00%							0.00%
	Not at all useful		0.00%							0.00%
<b>How important is the role played by morphology when it comes to understanding the meaning of words?</b>	Extremely important				28.57%					28.57%
	Very important				57.14%					57.14%
	Somewhat important				14.29%					14.29%
	Not so important				0.00%					0.00%
	Not at all important				0.00%					0.00%

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Average
<b>How helpful is it to know the meaning of homonyms in the Qur'anic text?</b>	Extremely helpful			71.43%						71.43%
	Very helpful			0.00%						0.00%
	Somewhat helpful			28.57%						28.57%
	Not so helpful			0.00%						0.00%
	Not at all helpful			0.00%						0.00%
<b>How much does etymology enhance our understanding of the meaning of words?</b>	Enhances it extremely			14.29%						14.29%
	Enhances it much			42.86%						42.86%
	Enhances it somewhat			28.57%						28.57%
	Does not enhance it much			14.29%						14.29%
	Does not enhance it at all			0.00%						0.00%
<b>Overall, how much did you like the application of Steps 1-3?</b>	Liked it a lot				66.67%					66.67%
	Liked it a little				33.33%					33.33%
	Neither liked nor disliked it				0.00%					0.00%
	Disliked it a little				0.00%					0.00%
	Disliked it a lot				0.00%					0.00%
<b>How important is Arabic Syntax and Arabic Rhetoric when it comes to understanding the Qur'anic text?</b>	Extremely important				33.33%					33.33%
	Very important				66.67%					66.67%
	Somewhat important				0.00%					0.00%
	Not so important				0.00%					0.00%
	Not at all important				0.00%					0.00%
<b>How effectively were the lessons on gratitude derived from the story of Prophet Sulayman and the ant?</b>	Extremely effectively								55.56%	55.56%
	Very effectively								44.44%	44.44%
	Somewhat effectively								0.00%	0.00%
	Not so effectively								0.00%	0.00%
	Not at all effectively								0.00%	0.00%

		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Average
<b>How clear was this step?</b>	*	4.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%
	**	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	***	22.73%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	6.41%
	****	31.82%	62.50%	28.57%	67.67%	33.33%	100.00%	100.00%	28.57%	56.56%
	*****	40.91%	37.50%	42.86%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	71.43%	36.59%
<b>How clear was the application of Steps 1-3?</b>	*				0.00%					0.00%
	**				0.00%					0.00%
	***				0.00%					0.00%
	****				100.00%					100.00%
	*****				0.00%					0.00%

## Appendix E: Consolidated Analysis of Surveys

		<b>Average</b>
<b>Overall, how much do you like the step?</b>	Liked it a lot	70.83%
	Liked it a little	23.03%
	Neither liked nor disliked it	5.01%
	Disliked it a little	0.57%
	Disliked it a lot	0.57%
<b>How important is the step?</b>	Extremely important	53.70%
	Very important	36.19%
	Somewhat important	9.54%
	Not so important	0.57%
	Not at all important	0.00%
<b>How unique was the material presented in the step?</b>	Extremely unique	3.22%
	Very unique	43.16%
	Somewhat unique	38.40%
	Not so unique	14.65%
	Not at all unique	0.57%
<b>How realistic is it to achieve the step?</b>	Extremely realistic	16.51%
	Very realistic	46.33%
	Somewhat realistic	32.73%
	Not so realistic	4.44%
	Not at all realistic	0.00%
<b>Did I provide too much / right amount / too little information?</b>	Too much information	10.88%
	Right amount of information	73.61%
	Too little information	15.52%

		Average
<b>How likely is it that you would use the step?</b>	Extremely likely	11.66%
	Very likely	61.77%
	Somewhat likely	22.67%
	Not so likely	3.14%
	Not at all likely	0.76%
<b>How unique is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an?</b>	Extremely unique	17.31%
	Very unique	46.09%
	Somewhat unique	31.87%
	Not so unique	4.73%
	Not at all unique	0.00%
<b>How relevant is the Step-by-Step Model for Understanding the Qur'an to you?</b>	Extremely relevant	37.27%
	Very relevant	45.82%
	Somewhat relevant	13.88%
	A little relevant	3.03%
	Not at all relevant	0.00%
<b>How clear was this step?</b>	*	0.57%
	**	0.00%
	***	6.41%
	****	56.56%
	*****	36.59%
<b>What is your gender?</b>	Female	26.99%
	Male	73.01%

		<b>Average</b>
<b>What is the highest level of education you have completed?</b>	School Certificate	5.44%
	HSC	4.93%
	Bachelor's Degree	33.84%
	Master's Degree	42.52%
	Doctorate	13.26%
<b>What is your age?</b>	17 or younger	6.06%
	18-20	4.17%
	21-29	27.44%
	30-39	30.66%
	40-49	19.67%
	50-59	12.01%
	60 or older	0.00%