

The Miracle of Influence: An Analysis of the Core of the Quran's Challenge (Taḥaddī) at the Time of Revelation

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Abstract

Readers of the Quran acknowledge that this book, besides conveying knowledge and expressing divine teachings, stirs the emotions and feelings of its audience. Therefore, in addition to the function of imparting knowledge, the language of the Quran also has a motivational function. The question that the present study addresses is whether the stirring and influential nature of the Quran's language can be one of the aspects of its miracle. Although many topics such as eloquence and rhetoric, guidance, informing about the unseen, and so on have been mentioned as criteria of similarity in the challenge verses in both Shia and Sunni exegeses, a historical approach to this issue has generally not been considered in these writings. Therefore, in this study, based on a historical method, an effort has been made to clarify the axis of the Quran's challenge by re-reading the mindset of the contemporaries of the revelation and uncovering the reason of their helplessness before the Quran. The results indicate that based on historical evidence, the characteristic that made the opponents of the Quran feel helpless and desperate during its time of revelation, and due to which they were called to compete, was the stirring and influential nature of the Quran.

Keywords: Quranic Language, Motivational Function, Challenge, Stirring, Similarity.

1 Introduction

Language is one of the human mind's abilities, used for communication and message transmission. Linguistic studies have shown that the functions of language go beyond mere message transmission and have diverse impacts. Based on such effects, some have defined language as an effective tool for communication, both spoken and written, considering the effect to mean creating some change in all or one of the mental, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of the audience (Sajedi, 2013, p. 222). Therefore, language does not merely play the role of transmitting mental concepts from one person to another; it can have various roles by influencing different aspects. Linguists have differentiated these roles under titles such as interpretive role, persuasive role, referential role, meta-communicative role, empathy role, and literary role (Ghaemina, 2010, pp. 93-94). Aside from the differences between these roles, the number of which has been counted as many as twenty, (Saidi Roushan, 2012, a, p. 22) one of the most important functions of language is to arouse emotions and feelings. A speaker or writer can influence their audience to the extent that, they become filled with emotions such as sadness/happiness, fear/courage, jealousy/generosity, resentment/regret, arrogance/humility, etc.

The Holy Quran, as a book that has been the source of many spiritual transformations throughout history, has fully utilized such a function. Similarly, Martyr Motahari, in explaining the reasons for the rapid advancement of Islam, identifies the Quran's inspiring and attractive nature as the primary factor (Motahhari, 2012, p. 205). Recent Quran scholars have referred to this role of the Quranic language as a motivational function (Sa'idi-Roshan, 2012, b, p. 196). Although the motivational function of the Quran has been discussed in recent works, none of them has regarded the extent to which the Quran utilizes this function as a unique characteristic of God's word. Therefore, the present study addresses the question of whether the Quran's inspiring and attractive nature can be one of the aspects of its miracle. While many issues such as eloquence, guidance, news of the unseen, etc. have been mentioned in Shiite and Sunni commentaries as criteria for similarity in the verses of challenge (see:

Hosseinzadeh, 2009, vol. 7, p. 282) and the article "Criteria for Similarity in the Verses of Challenge of the Quran" (Najjarzadegan, Shahmoradi, 2012, pp. 117-131) specifically addresses this topic, the previous writings generally lack a historical approach aimed at examining the mindset of contemporaries at the time of revelation in confronting the Quran.

۲ The Challenge (Taḥaddī) of the Quran

To clarify what the challenge of the Holy Quran precisely pertains to, it is essential first to explain the concept of challenge and to specify the audience of the challenge, its objective, its method, and its topic. The term "taḥaddī" linguistically derives from the root "ḥadv" and "ḥoda" which means to push a camel forward with a call, and it signifies fighting against another and overcoming them, such that "taḥaddī" is considered a call to battle (Ibn Manzur, 1993, vol. 14, p. 168). In technical terms, "taḥaddī" refers to the Almighty God's challenge to the opponents of the Messenger of God (S) (Hosseini-Zadeh, 2009, vol. 7, p. 283), which is presented in several verses of the Quran (for the verses, see: Quran 17:88; 10:38; 11:13; 52:33-34; 2:23-24). Phrases like "yaqūlūna iftarāho", "yaqūlūna taqavvalahū" and "in kontom fī raybin memmā nazzalna alā 'abdina" in the mentioned verses indicate that the audience of the challenge consisted of those who either doubted the divine origin of the Quran or denied it and believed that the Quran was fabricated by the Prophet (S). Therefore, God called them to challenge in order to demonstrate their incapacity and helplessness, revealing the divine nature of this book .

This exposure of incapacity could have been through something within the Quran or outside of it; for instance, it was possible for the Almighty God to grant extraordinary power to the Prophet (S), calling those doubting the Quran's sanctity to contend with his power so that their defeat against the Prophet (S) would serve as evidence of the divine nature of his book. However, phrases like "lā yatūna bi mithliḥī", "fa' tū bi sūratin mithliḥī", "fa' tū bi 'ashr sowarin mithliḥī" and "falya' tū bi ḥadīthin mithliḥī" in the aforementioned verses indicate that the challenge pertains to the Quran itself, and the deniers and doubters have been asked to bring forth something comparable to the Quran, or ten chapters thereof, or a single chapter. Thus, uncovering the central theme of the Quran's challenge depends on determining the criteria for similarity; that is, it must be specified in what way the opponents were called to present something similar to the Quran.

۲,۱ Criteria for Similarity

In order to determine the criteria for similarity, it is essential to refer to the understanding of the contemporaries at the time of revelation regarding the verses of challenge. This is because, unlike some verses whose meanings do not depend on the understanding of people from the time of revelation and whose divine purpose may be much higher or even different from their interpretations, which can be uncovered in later periods through the guidance of the Imams (AS) or the reflections of scholars, the meaning of the verses of challenge is entirely dependent on the mindset of the people of the Prophet's era. God addresses them and calls them to something they were required to respond to and take a position on. Therefore, since the initial audience of these verses is the contemporaries of the revelation, the criteria for similarity is based on what they understood. If they had not apprehended the challenge and did not grasp how what they were called to produce should be similar to the Quran, the purpose of the challenge, which was to prove the sacredness of the Quran, would not have been achieved.

It is also clear that they did not feel incapable of responding to all the features of the Quran, because the Quran is a balanced Arabic speech, consisting of sentences, phrases, verses and chapters and containing accounts of the past, commands, prohibitions, instructions, recommendations, and so on, which the deniers had the ability to create like it. Hence, they stated, "If we wished, we could say like this; this is nothing but the tales of the ancients" (Quran 8:31). Therefore, in discovering the criteria for similarity, it is necessary to see from what aspects the opponents felt helpless and powerless in the face of the Quran at the time of revelation.

٢,٢ The Aspect of the Opponents' Powerlessness before the Quran

Based on what has been discussed, the correct method for uncovering the aspect of similarity is to examine historical evidence to clarify how the deniers of the Quran became helpless and overwhelmed when facing it at the time of revelation. It is noteworthy that referring to the mindset of the contemporaries of the revelation to discover the criteria for similarity does not limit the challenge of the Quran to a specific period. This criterion could be one of the characteristics of the Holy Quran that, throughout history, humankind has always felt incapable of confronting, and will continue to do so. Thus, the understanding and perspective of the contemporaries of the revelation regarding the challenge, despite its importance, only reveals the aspect of similarity and does not make the Quran's challenge confined to a specific era.

Numerous pieces of evidence indicate that the transformation caused by hearing the verses of the Quran affected the hearts and souls of the idolatrous people of that time to such an extent that it astonished the leaders of disbelief and polytheism, leaving them terrified. In various ways, they sought to confront it, including accusing the Quran of being magic and trying to prevent people from hearing it.

٢,٢,١ The Accusation of Sorcery against the Quran

The late Tabarsi narrates regarding the context of the verses 11 to 31 of Surah Al-Muddathir (Quran 74) that when Walid ibn al-Mughayrah asked the opinions of the Quraysh about the Quran in *Dar al-Nadwa*, they said, "He is a poet", but Walid became angry and replied, "We have heard poetry; his words do not resemble poetry". The Quraysh then said, "He is a soothsayer". Walid responded, "When you come to him, you will find that he does not speak like the soothsayers". They continued, "Let us declare him mad." Walid said, "When you meet him, you will not find him in any way mad". Finally, they said, "We will call him a sorcerer"; Walid asked, "What is a sorcerer?" The Quraysh replied, "Someone who causes friendship among enemies and enmity among friends". Walid liked this idea and said, "Then, he is a sorcerer". After that, all of them left the gathering, and none of them met the Prophet (S) without saying to him, "O sorcerer, O sorcerer" (Tabarsi, 1993, vol. 10, pp. 583-584).

The title of "sorcerer" that the polytheists chose to slander the Prophet (S) clearly demonstrates their powerlessness. They found themselves facing a speech that, upon hearing it, transformed individuals to the extent that they set aside old ties, attachments, and prejudices and established their relationships on a new basis. Old enmities turned into friendships centered on monotheism, while friendships based on disbelief and polytheism turned into enmities.

In another account, it is mentioned that upon hearing the initial verses of Surah Fussilat (Quran 41), Walid's skin trembled, and his hair stood on end, to the point that he returned home and did not go back to the Quraysh. This incident caused great sorrow and distress among the Quraysh until his nephew Abu Jahl went to him and reproached him. When he asked for Walid's opinion about the Quran, Walid described it as follows: "It is magic, for it captivates the hearts of people" (Ibn Shu'bah Harrani, 1983, pp. 465-466; Qutb al-Din Rawandi, 1988, pp. 319-320).

This report also clearly shows that the prominent characteristic of the Quran in the eyes of the polytheists, which made it superior to the words of jinn and humans, was its sweetness and charm combined with its magical effect. The polytheists had repeatedly seen that individuals transformed upon hearing the Quran, abandoning their previous beliefs to the extent that they would leave their family's ways and willingly submit their hearts and souls to the Prophet (S). One of these individuals was a young man named Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, who was honored and respected by his parents and lived a luxurious and splendid life. However, he became enamored with the Quran and the Prophet (S), departing from the teachings of his ancestors, which led his parents to mistreat him and drove him away (Tabarsi, 1970 AH, p. 57).

The susceptibility of individuals like Walid ibn al-Mughayrah shows that the stirring power of the Quran had an impact not only on the common people but also on the passionate elites. It is reported that Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and Akhnas ibn Shariq, without each other's knowledge, secretly listened to the recitation of the Prophet (S) around his house for three consecutive nights until dawn. Each time they met on their way back and agreed not to do it again, but the allure and charm of the divine speech drew them back the following night (Ibn Hisham, n.d. vol. 1, p. 315).

The accusation of magic against the Quran and the sorcerer against the Prophet (S), which is also mentioned in numerous verses (see: Quran 74:24; 54:2; 38:4; 10:2; 34:43; 43:30; 46:7; 21:3), shows that the helplessness and powerlessness of the polytheists in the face of the Quran was due to its motivational aspect. In reality, since they could not resist the extraordinary influence of the Qur'an on hearts, they found the best way to deny the divine origin of this effect by calling the Qur'an magic and the Prophet (S) a magician (Sharifi Nasab & Tayyeb Hosseini, 2015, p. 66). In their view, such transformation and creation were similar only to the magic of sorcerers. As it was reported from Walid ibn al-Mughayrah, he told the Quraysh: "The best thing to say about him is that he is a magician" (Abu Na'im al-Asbahani, 2000, vol. 1, p. 232). However, they themselves admitted that this book was not truly magic, as 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah described the Qur'an to his companions as beyond poetry, magic, and soothsaying, saying: "I have heard a word, and by God, I have never heard anything like it. By God, it is neither poetry, nor magic, nor the words of a soothsayer" (Muhammadi Reyshahri, 2012, vol. 1, p. 374).

In another example, Ibn Kathir narrates the story of the conversion of Dhimaḍ, a man from the tribe of Azd Shanu'a. When he came to Mecca, he heard from the foolish men of Mecca that Muhammad (S) was mad. Therefore, in hopes that God would heal the Prophet (S) through him, he visited the Messenger of God (S). Upon hearing verses from the Qur'an, he was astonished and transformed, stating: "By God, I have heard the words of the soothsayers, the words of the magicians, and the words of the poets, but I have never heard anything like these words." He then pledged allegiance to the Prophet (S) and embraced Islam (Ibn Kathir, 1976, vol. 1, p. 452).

۲,۲,۲ Preventing the Qur'an from Being Heard

The impact of the Qur'an was so frightening and distressing to the disbelievers and polytheists that, apart from slandering and waging psychological warfare against the Prophet (S), they saw the only solution in preventing people from listening to the Qur'an. Consequently, whenever the Prophet (S) recited the Holy Qur'an, they would drive people away from him, telling them to whistle and raise their voices in poetry so that his words would not be heard (Maraghi, n.d., vol. 24, p. 125). The Holy Qur'an reports their malicious actions as follows: "And those who disbelieved said, 'Do not listen to this Qur'an and speak noisily during its recitation that perhaps you will overcome'" (Quran 41:26).

As'ad ibn Zurarah is among those who, despite being prohibited from listening to the Qur'an, decided to hear the words of the Prophet (S) and, as a result, embraced Islam under the influence of the Qur'an's allure. According to Tabarsi, during a trip to Mecca, he stayed at the house of 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah. During conversations with him, he learned about Muhammad's (S) claim to be a prophet, and due to news he had heard from the Jews of Medina about the appearance of the last prophet, he wished to see him. Thus, he asked 'Utbah for the location of the Prophet (S). 'Utbah showed the Prophet's place in the Masjid al-Haram and warned As'ad: "Do not hear anything from him and do not speak to him, for he is a magician who will enchant you with his words." As'ad replied, "I have come for Umrah, and there is no way for me but to perform Tawaf." 'Utbah said: "Put cotton in your ears." As'ad entered the Masjid al-Haram with cotton in his ears and began to perform Tawaf. Upon seeing the Prophet (S), he regretted his foolish behavior, removed the cotton, approached the Prophet (S), and inquired about his message. The Messenger of God (S) recited verses 151 and 152 of Surah Al-An'am to him. When As'ad ibn Zurarah heard these divine verses, he embraced Islam and recited the Shahada (Tabarsi, 1970, pp. 55-57).

Another example of those who were prevented is Tufayl ibn Amr al-Dawsi. When he came to Mecca, some of the Quraysh approached him, mentioning that the words of the Prophet (S) were magic and pointing out the extraordinary effects of his message, such as disrupting family ties. They forbade him from listening to the Qur'an. Although Tufayl initially accepted not to listen to the Prophet's words and, out of fear, placed cotton in his ears, he decided to listen to the Prophet (S) after seeing him in the Masjid al-Haram. He approached the Prophet and asked about his mission. The Prophet (S) recited some verses from the Qur'an, and upon hearing them, he embraced Islam and recited the Shahada. Moreover, he decided to invite his people to Islam and requested prayer from the Messenger of God (S) for his success (Ibn Hisham, n.d., vol. 1, pp. 382-383).

Considering the evidence mentioned, it can be concluded that what had led the infidels and polytheists to helplessness and powerlessness in the face of the Quran was the extraordinary and transformative effectiveness of the divine word. Thus, the analogy they understood from the challenging verses was functional, meaning bringing forth a word that would have effects and functions similar to those of the Qur'an. Therefore, among the various aspects of the Qur'an's miracles, the aspect that was highlighted in the challenging verses at the time of revelation was the miraculous influence of the divine word.

۴ The Miracle of Influence

This aspect of miracle was first acknowledged by al-Khattabi. He wrote: "The miracle of the Quran has another aspect that people have neglected and only a few recognize, that is the effect it has on hearts and souls; because there is no speech except the Quran, whether poetry or prose, that when it reaches the ear, the heart feels complete sweetness and pleasure in some cases and fear and terror in others." (Rumani, Khattabi, Jorjani, 1958, p. 70). He then cited the following verses to support his view: "If We had sent this Qur'an down upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and split apart from the fear of Allah" (Quran 59:21); "Allah has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture composed of similar motifs, whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and hearts soften to Allah's remembrance" (Quran 39:23); "And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth" (Quran 5:83).

Al-Khattabi's view met with relative acceptance among those studying the Qur'an afterward, and various scholars referenced it in their works (Ma'muri, 2003, p. 570). The miracle of influence, as defined by researchers, is a heartfelt and transcendent attraction in the divine word that is not found in any human work. Its foundation is based on the sender and the text, and its perception is related to the speaker's circumstances (Jawaheri, 2014, p. 138).

It is noteworthy that while linguistic factors such as eloquence and rhetoric play a role in the miraculous influence of the Qur'an, the main factor in its effectiveness is its sacredness. This book has such function because it is the divine and revealed word, and eloquence and rhetoric are not the sole causes of its effectiveness (Jawaheri, 2014, p. 147). Meanwhile, some have attributed the analogy in the challenging verses to the eloquence and rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an and have considered the miracle of the Qur'an from this angle (Tabarsi, 1993, vol. 5, pp. 167, 222).

In evaluating this view, it must be noted that the opponents of the Qur'an at the time of its revelation did not perceive the challenging verses in this way. If they did, they would have gathered poets, literati, and rhetoricians to form a council to contest the Prophet (S), just as Pharaoh did by calling sorcerers to confront the miracle of Moses (A). The disbelievers did not arrange a gathering for poets and literati to confront the Prophet (S) because they fundamentally did not attribute their defeat against the Qur'an to its literary and rhetorical aspects. They recognized their submission to the Qur'an's effectiveness and inspiring nature, and since no speech among the Arabs had such qualities, forming a council to contest it was futile. Thus, to divert public attention, they labeled the Qur'an as magic. This accusation itself

demonstrates that their incapacity and powerlessness in the face of the Qur'an stemmed from its transformative and revolutionary nature, rather than its eloquence and rhetoric.

Furthermore, the perspectives of thinkers such as al-Nazzam al-Mu'tazili, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, Seyyed Murtaḍha, and Shaykh al-Mufid, who, despite being fully familiar with the Arabic language, adhered to the theory of preservation (*ṣarfah*) regarding the miracle of the Qur'an (see: Ma'rifat, 1994, pp. 137-190), further supports the notion that the divine speech was not rhetorically overpowering to its deniers. Thus, these thinkers gravitated towards the theory of preservation in explaining the miracle of the Qur'an (Jawaheri, 2019, vol. 2, p. 16).

۳,۱ The Accompaniment of Epistemic and Motivational Functions

The Quran intertwines the epistemic and motivational roles of language, reason, and emotion to impact various dimensions of human existence. Compared to statements found in philosophical, scientific, historical, etc. texts, the statements of the Quran carry greater functionality. In the Quran, the language of science and the language of love coexist. Thus, the Quran is not merely a source of knowledge that connects only with the mind; it penetrates the hearts of individuals. This is why, during the recitation of verses about punishment, fear engulfs the believer, and when reciting verses about rewards, his enthusiasm, trust, and hope increase (Sajadi, 2013, pp. 231-232).

The essential point is that the emotional impacts of the Quran do not negate its epistemic nature and its realism; there is no contradiction between providing knowledge and having an emotional impact. In our era, the function of Quranic statements in ensuring the mental health of individuals and society, reducing crime, and implementing economic justice has been repeatedly observed and proven, while the realism of the statements has been preserved (Rezaei Isfahani, 2014, vol. 4, p. 293).

In contrast to the aforementioned view, which sees the language of the Quran as embodying both epistemic and motivational functions, there are perspectives that consider religious language as non-epistemic and solely motivational. For example, expressivism regards religious language as merely an expression of emotions, lacking any objective reality or intrinsic essence. Instrumentalism also has nothing to do with the reality of religious statements; instead, it views them instrumentally, seeing religion as a useful tool for directing human emotions and life (Sajedi, 2004, p. 162).

In response to these views, Quran scholars provide examples of common and scientific statements that, while emotionally impactful, are also knowledge-giving and realistic. They assert that stirring emotions in religious propositions does not hinder their epistemic value; rather, it is a prerequisite for knowledge-sharing. Thus, considering those statements as real provides the conditions for emotional stimulation (Rezaei Isfahani, 2014, vol. 4, p. 293). A significant point here is the concomitant relationship between epistemic and motivational functions. Contrary to the views of expressivism and instrumentalism, which see the motivational and emotional roles of language as unrelated to its epistemic role, the motivational function is inherently tied to the epistemic function and cannot fundamentally be separated from it.

Accordingly, one can interpret the description given in the verse "O mankind! There has certainly come to you an advice from your Lord, and a cure for what is in the breasts, and a guidance and mercy for the faithful" (Quran 10:57) as encompassing both mentioned functions. The Quran's nature as an advice and its healing for hearts refer to its emotional and affective aspect, while its guiding role pertains to its cognitive dimension. Allameh Tabatabai considered this verse a comprehensive expression of the Quran, believing that it serves as a counselor who heals the ailments of the heart on one hand and guides to the straight path on the other (Tabatabai, 1970, vol. 10, p. 81).

Beyond the fact that the Quran's motivational function is also referred to as "healing" in other verses (see Quran 17:82, 41:44), numerous hadiths have emphasized that the divine word is a cure for hearts (Hilli, 2000, p. 465). Imam Ali (S) introduces the Quran as "the beneficial healing" (Sharif al-Razi,

1993, p. 219), calling upon people to seek healing from it, stating: “Seek healing from your ailments through it. Indeed, in it is a cure for the greatest of diseases, which is disbelief, hypocrisy, deviation, and misguidance” (Ibid., p. 252). In another statement, the Imam associated the Quran's role as a source of knowledge and motivation, saying: “Learn the Book of Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, for it is the most eloquent teaching, and understand it, for it is the spring of hearts, and seek healing from its light, for it is a cure for what is in the breasts” (Ibn Shu'bah Harrani, 1984, p. 150). The term “understanding” shows that the Quran is a book of knowledge, as recommending deep understanding would be meaningless if there were no knowledge gained from it. The term “spring of hearts” also indicates that the divine word brings life to hearts, which is due to its emotional and motivational dimension, just as the expression of the Quran being a healing also refers to this aspect.

Similarly, the Messenger of God (S) said that hearts rust like iron, and when the companions asked about their polish, he mentioned that it comes through the recitation of the Quran (Qutb al-Din Rawandi, 1987, p. 237). In this regard, it is narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (S) that he told Anas ibn Malik: “Do not neglect the recitation of the Quran in the morning and evening, for the Quran brings the dead heart to life” (Bahrani, 1995, vol. 1, p. 19).

All these statements of the infallibles (AS) emphasize the inspirational nature of the divine word and its effects on human emotions, feelings, and inclinations. They illustrate how the excitement of the Quran, alongside its knowledge-giving quality, paves the way for human transformation and elevation—two characteristics that the Prophet (S) referred to while describing the Quran as “the truest speech and most effective advice” (Saduq, 1992, vol. 4, p. 402).

Based on the above, the criterion of similarity in the verses of challenge, as understood by the people of the time of revelation, was the extraordinary influence of the Quran. This characteristic has led to numerous internal transformations throughout history. A look at the history of the Quran's influence shows that to this day, no human word has been able to be the source of such individual and social transformations. Therefore, the challenge of the Quran, as indicated by the phrase “you will never be able to” in the verses “And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a surah like it... And if you do not do it—and you will never be able to do it” (Quran 2:23-24), remains eternal. In order to confirm this idea, examples of the influence of the Qur'an throughout history are mentioned below.

۳,۲ The Inspiring Influence of the Quran throughout History

Ibn Mas'ud narrates that when the verse “O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe” (Quran 66:6) was revealed, the Prophet (S) recited it for his companions. Suddenly, a young man was so affected by this verse that he lost consciousness and fell to the ground. The Messenger of Allah (S) placed his blessed hand on the heart of that young man and realized that his heart was about to burst from the intensity of his anxiety. He then said: “O young man, say: ‘There is no god but Allah’” The young man moved and said this phrase, and as a result, the Prophet announced him to be among the people of Paradise (Huwaizi, 1994, vol. 2, p. 530).

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (AS) that one day Salman was passing through the alleys of Kufa when he reached a blacksmith's workshop and suddenly heard the lamentation of a young man who had fallen unconscious to the ground. Salman approached him, and when the young man saw Salman, he regained his composure and said: “O Abu Abdullah, I do not have the illness of fainting as these people say. Rather, the secret of what happened is that I was passing by the blacksmiths when I saw them striking iron with their hammers. As soon as I saw this, I suddenly remembered these verses: ‘and there will be clubs of iron for them. Whenever they desire to leave it out of anguish, they will be turned back into it [and told]: Taste the punishment of the burning!’ (Quran 22:21-22), and from my intense fear and terror, I could not control myself and fainted, losing all sense” (Mufid, 1992, p. 136).

It is reported that Zubaydah, the wife of Harun al-Rashid, had a precious Quran that she adorned with gold, jewels, and ornaments, and she had great affection for it. One day, while reciting from that very Quran, she came across the noble verse: "You will never attain good until you spend from that which you love. And whatever you spend of anything – indeed, Allah is Knowing of it" (Quran 3:92). Upon reading this verse, she fell into deep thought and said to herself: "Nothing is more beloved to me than this Quran, and I must spend it in the way of God." She then sent someone to look for jewelers, sold the adornments and jewels off it, and used the proceeds to provide water for the Bedouins in the deserts of Hijaz (Makarem Shirazi et al., 1992, vol. 3, p. 4).

In Basra, there was a woman named Sha'wana, who would attend any assembly of immorality and debauchery. One day, she coincidentally entered a gathering where preaching was taking place and heard the following verses: "But they have denied the Hour, and We have prepared for those who deny the Hour a blazing Fire. When it sees them from a distant place, they will hear its fury and roaring. And when they are thrown into a narrow place therein, bound in chains, they will cry out thereupon for destruction. [They will be told], 'Do not cry this Day for one destruction, but cry for much destruction'" (Quran 25:11-14). Upon hearing these verses, she repented. She then left the assembly, freed her male and female slaves, and devoted herself to worship to the extent that her body became thin and weak. She reached a point where ascetics and worshippers attended her preaching sessions (Naraqī, 1999, p. 685).

Another well-known example of those who underwent an internal transformation under the influence of divine words is Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād. He was initially a dangerous highwayman whose name caused people to tremble until he became infatuated with a female slave. One night, as he was climbing the wall of her house for the purpose of sin, he heard the recitation of the Quran by one of the neighbors, who was reciting the verse: "Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah's remembrance and to the truth which has come down [to them]" (Quran 57:16). This verse struck Fuḍayl's heart like an arrow, awakening him from his slumber of heedlessness. Following this incident, Fuḍayl repented, left the ranks of the wicked, and joined the righteous (Qummi, 1993, vol. 7, p. 103).

The renowned Sunni commentator Sayyid Qutb recounts an astonishing incident that happened to him in his commentary, describing it as the miracle of the Quran. Sayyid Qutb says that during a sea voyage to New York on a ship mostly filled with non-Muslims, they decided to hold Friday prayers. During the sermons and prayer, non-Muslims surrounded them and observed the performance of Friday prayers. After the prayer, a Christian woman who was deeply affected and in tears approached them and said: "I didn't understand a word of what you were saying, but I clearly saw that these words had a strange melody, and in between the sermon of your Imam, there were sentences that were distinct from the rest and had an incredibly effective and profound melody that made me shiver. Surely, these sentences were something else, and I think your Imam was filled with the Holy Spirit when he uttered these sentences." Sayyid Qutb says: "We thought for a moment and realized that these sentences were the verses from the Quran that I was reciting during the sermon and in the prayer." He then adds that although such influences are not a general rule and do not apply to all individuals, this incident and similar ones indicate that the Quran contains a secret and a symbol that captivates hearts and conquers them (Qutb, 2004, vol. 3, p. 1786).

Instances of the Quran's influence and transformative power are so numerous that most Muslims have heard or seen examples of them. For example, it is well known that Pickthall, one of the most famous English translators of the Quran, converted to Islam under the influence of the exciting and magical words of the Holy Quran (For more examples, see: Muhammadi Reyshahri, 2012, vol. 2, p. 428; Muhammadi, 2003, pp. 257-299). Therefore, the Quran's inspiring influence has persisted throughout history, and its intensity and frequency have been so great that, as one of the aspect of miracle, it proves the divine nature of this book.

ξ Conclusion

- ١- Discovering the Quran's challenge hinges on determining the aspect of similarity based on the mindset of the contemporaries of its revelation. For this purpose, it must be specified in what aspect the disbelievers and polytheists felt unable and incapable against the Quran.
- ٢- Historical evidence suggests that the cause of the opponents' inability and helplessness was the stirring and influential nature of the divine word; therefore, the criterion of similarity in the verses of challenge is the Quran's miraculous influence.
- ٣- Language does not merely play the role of transferring mental concepts from one person to another; it can also play various roles by influencing different aspects.
- ξ- Since the Holy Quran is a book of guidance and guidance requires attention to both dimensions of thought and feeling, intellect and heart, its language has both the function of imparting knowledge and motivation.
- ο- Given the connection between motivational and informative language in the Holy Quran, it is necessary to pay attention to the motivational aspect in interpreting descriptive verses and to the factual context in understanding normative verses.

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