

Ma^ʿrifah, ʿIlm and Waḥy

CONCEPTS ARE clarified through the study of words' lexical meanings. We begin by ascertaining the root and derivations of the word being studied in keeping with the rules of the language we are dealing with. We then examine the ways in which words are used in order to determine their practical significations.

I have gleaned both practical and interpretative approaches from the following works: *Al-Mufradāt* by al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Ta^ʿrīfāt* by al-Jurjānī, *Al-Kullīyyāt* by al-Kufawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn* by al-Tahanawī, *Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh* by al-Dāmīghānī, *Nuzhat al-A^ʿyun wa al-Naḏā'ir* by Ibn al-Jawzī, and *Wujūh al-Naḏā'ir* by Sulaymān al-Qar^ʿāwī. Based on a study of the features that distinguish various epistemological concepts from a Qur'anic perspective, I have divided them into three groups based on whether they are related to ʿilm, ma^ʿrifah, or waḥy.

FIRST: CONCEPTS RELATING TO Ma^ʿrifah

1) *The concept of ma^ʿrifah*

There are two basic meanings derived from the trilateral root ʿ-r-f. The first of these is that of a continuous succession of entities, while the second relates to quietness and tranquility. The verb ʿarafa, from which we derive the verbal noun ma^ʿrifah, means to know or perceive something as it is, the assumption being that this perception was preceded by ignorance, or that one had forgotten some or all of one's initial perception or realization. Some have defined it as the perception of something through reflection on its effects. Someone who knows something (*al-ʿārif bi al-shayʿ*) is someone who had a clear perception of it previously, after which he denied it due to some ambiguity or uncertainty. Hence, the term ma^ʿrifah, which is associated with sensation, the 'seeing' of the heart, and the distinction between what is known and what is not,

is both more specific and more complete than the word *ilm*, which is taken from the world of abstract thought. Scholars hold that it is not permissible to attribute *maʿrifah* to God due to its association with a previous lack of knowledge and denial, and due to the fact that it entails an incomplete knowledge that has been arrived at via reflection and contemplation.

The word *maʿrifah*, which appears less often in the Qurʾan than the word *ilm* and its derivatives, occurs 24 times as a verb with various practical meanings. These meanings may be divided into seven groups: (1) physical recognition (*al-maʿrifah al-ḥissiyyah*). *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:146 reads, “They unto whom We have vouchsafed revelation aforetime know it (*yaʿrifūnahu*) as they know (*yaʿrifūna*) their own children.” The word *maʿrifah* signifies the opposite of denial or disavowal. As we read in *Sūrah al-Muʾminūn*, 23:69, “Or is it, perchance, that they have not recognized (*lam yaʿrifū*) their Apostle, and so they disavow him?” (2) Identification (*taʿrif*), as when one identifies a goal sought. This sense of the word is found in *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:6, where we are told that God “will admit them [believers] to the paradise which He has brought them to know (*ʿarraḥabā lahum*).” (3) Mutual acquaintance (*taʿāraf*). This sense is illustrated in *Sūrah al-Hujurat*, 49:13, where God declares, “Behold, We have...made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another (*li taʿārafū*).” (4) Acknowledgment or confession (*iʿtirāf*). In *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:102 we read, “And [there are] others – [people who] have become conscious of their sinning (*iʿtarafū bi dhunūbihim*) after having done righteous deeds side by side with evil ones.” (5) An act of goodness (something that people generally acknowledge to be a source of blessing and righteousness) (*maʿrūf*, *ʿurf*). As God declares in *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān*, 3:110, “You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right (*al-maʿrūf*) and forbid the doing of what is wrong,” while in *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:199, God tells the Prophet to “enjoin the doing of what is right (*al-ʿurf*).” (6) Mount Arafat (*ʿarafāt*): “And when you surge downward in multitudes from Arafat, remember God at the holy place” (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:198). (7) *Al-aʿrāf*, which refers to an elevated place on the earth. This use is found in *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:48,

Qur'anic Terminology

where we read, “The men on the heights (*aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf*) will call to certain men whom they will know from their marks, saying: ‘Of what profit to you were your hoards and your arrogant ways?’”

The verb form translated above as mutual acquaintance (*taʿāruf*) is based on what is accessible to the mind and the senses. As for that which is concealed from human perception, it is known to God alone. As we read in *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:30, “And God knows (*yaʿlamu*) all that you do.” As for the act of acknowledgment (*iʿtirāf*), it derives from knowledge that is certain, but acquired through experience rather than possessed inherently, such as the knowledge of God. The words *maʿrūf* and *ʿurf* both refer to actions and words that are generally agreed to be virtuous and beneficial. Whatever actions or words are not explicitly forbidden by the Divine Law are agreed to be permissible; this principle contributes to the preservation of peoples’ cultures, traditions and distinctive identities even when they are ruled by Islamic Law.

A summary of the uses of the term *Maʿrifah* in the Qur’an

The term *maʿrifah* is employed in the Qur’an in the sense of an acquired perception. In numerous places it is accompanied by mention of a visible sign, either in the face, in which case the instrument of perception will be the eye, or in speech, in which case the instrument of perception will be the ear. The Qur’an contains numerous examples of this phenomenon, including God’s statement that “upon their faces you will see (*taʿrifu*) the brightness of bliss” (*Sūrah al-Muṭaffifīn*, 83:24).

At times *maʿrifah* reaches the level of complete certainty, as in God’s declaration in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:146 that “They unto whom We have vouchsafed revelation aforetime know it (*yaʿrifūnahū*) as they know (*yaʿrifūna*) their own children: but, behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth.” It might also be noted that most occurrences of the term *maʿrifah* in the Qur’an are coupled with something that stands opposed to it. In *Sūrah al-Nahl*, for example, it is contrasted with denial: “They [who turn away from it] are fully aware of God’s blessings, but none the less they refuse to acknowledge them [as such], since most of them are given to denying the truth” (16:83). In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:89, *maʿrifah* is contrasted with unbelief: “whenever there

came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it (disbelieve in it).” In *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:68, we find *maʿrifah* being contrasted with ignorance: “behold, thanks to what We had imparted unto him, he was indeed endowed with the knowledge [that God’s will must always prevail]; but most people know it not.” In the case of the Prophet, on the other hand, the polytheists’ denial of him was a result of lying and knowing denial of the truth he had brought. Moreover, *maʿrifah* as mentioned in the Qur’an is described in different terms depending on whether it is attributed to polytheists or to those who affirm God’s oneness. When attributed to the former, it refers simply to acknowledgment – something that is common to the righteous and the unrighteous, the obedient and the disobedient. But when it is attributed to those who worship God in His oneness, it refers to a knowledge that prompts humility before God, love for Him, attachment to Him, and longing for His presence.

Whether supporting evidence is derived from the written Revelation or the Creation, it fosters inward certainty. The written Revelation is being alluded to in the statement, “whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it” (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:89). Concerning rational evidence, God declares, “And say: ‘All praise is due to God! In time He will make you see [the truth of] His messages, and then you shall know them [for what they are]’” (*Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:93). There are thus two doors to *maʿrifah*: (1) contemplation of the verses of the Qur’an, and (2) reflection on the visible signs in the created order and the divine wisdom, power and mercy reflected therein (cf. *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:30).

2) *The concept of nakirah*

The Arabic word *nakirah* is derived from the triliteral root *n-k-r* meaning not to know, to be ignorant of, to disavow or to deny, while the related noun, *munkar*, meaning a wrong or bad deed, is the opposite of *maʿrūf*, meaning a righteous or good deed.

Derivatives of the root *n-k-r* occur 36 times in the Qur’an. God declares in *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān*, 3:110, “You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right (*al-maʿrūf*) and forbid the doing of what is

Qur'anic Terminology

wrong (*al-munkar*).” The word *munkar* refers to whatever a prudent, sound-minded person would find abhorrent, and everything that is forbidden by Islamic Law. The root *n-k-r* is used in contrast to knowledge in the Qur'anic account in which, when Abraham received certain angelic guests, he had misgivings, saying to himself (51:25), “They are strangers (*qawmun munkarūn*).” Similarly in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:58 we are told that although Joseph recognized his brothers (*‘arafahum*), they did not recognize him (*wa hum lahu munkirūn*). The active participle *munkirūn* in this context conveys the sense of ignoring or disregarding, as if to say that Joseph’s brothers related to God’s blessings as though they were unaware of their Source. This disregard is a result of ingratitude, which is likewise one of the meanings of the word *kufr*. Another instance of the root *n-k-r*, also in contrast to knowledge, is found in *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:41, where Solomon commanded the jinn to “alter her [the Queen of Sheba’s] throne so that she may not know it as hers (*nakkirū lahā ‘arshahā*).” This use is consistent with the original meaning of the root *n-k-r* as referring to whatever is contrary to trustworthy knowledge.

3) The concept of *kufr*

The trilateral root *k-f-r* means to cover or conceal, and the intensified passive participle *mukaffar* is used to refer to a man covered in armor. The verbal noun *kufr*, often translated as unbelief, is used in contrast to *īmān*, or faith, since the action of *kufr* in relation to God’s blessings involves not only denying them, but concealing them as well. The active participle *kāfir*, often translated as unbeliever, originally referred to a dark night (which conceals what would otherwise be visible). Derivatives of the root *k-f-r* occur 503 times in the Qur’an in four different senses: (1) Ingratitude, as in the statement, “Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth – it is all one to them whether you warn them or not: they will not believe” (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:6). (2) Denial. This sense is found in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:89: “whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it (*kafarū bihi*).” (3) Disavowal or repudiation. In *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:22, Satan is quoted as saying to idolaters on the Day of Resurrection, “I have [always] refused to admit (*kafartu*) that there

was any truth in your erstwhile belief that I had a share in God's divinity. Verily, for all evildoers there is grievous suffering in store." (4) Turning away. In *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:13, we read that "they who had turned away from the message (*al-ladhīna kafarū*) spoke [thus] unto their apostles: 'We shall most certainly expel you from our land, unless you return forthwith to our ways!'"

All four of these meanings are related in one way or another to the act of covering or concealment. As we read in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:88, the unbelievers said of themselves, "Our hearts are the wrappings [which preserve God's Word: we need no more]." In other words, their hearts are closed to whatever truth or knowledge others might attempt to introduce to them.

4) *The concept of idrāk*

The trilateral root *d-r-k* conveys the sense of something's reaching, or catching up with, something else. When one's mind "reaches" or "catches up with" an idea, it has understood it. This root occurs ten times in the Qur'an in four different senses: (1) Restraining, reining in. *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:90, for example, speaks of Pharaoh's being overwhelmed, and restrained, by the waters of the sea (...*adrakahu al-gharaq*). (2) Overtaking. *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:61 relates that when Pharaoh's army approached, Moses' company cried out, "Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken (*innā la mudrakūn*)!" (3) Coming together (as those at the front of a line and those at its end). Describing the state of those who have rejected God as they approach the hellfire, *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:38 tells us that "when they all shall have passed into it, one after another (*ḥattā idhā iddārakū fihā jamī'an*), the last of them will speak [thus] of the first of them: 'O our Sustainer! It is they who have led us astray – give, them, therefore, double suffering through fire.'" (4) Seeing. Speaking of God, *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:103 tells us that "No human vision can encompass Him (*lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār*), whereas He encompasses all human vision (*wa huwa yudriku al-abṣār*)."

The meaning of the verb *adrak/yudriku* as used in the Qur'an is consistent with its lexical definition relating to overtaking, catching up with, and the coming together of successive elements. As for its epistemological signification, it consists in the formation of a mental image

Qur'anic Terminology

devoid of judgment, in which case it is referred to as conceptualization. When it is accompanied by judgment, by contrast, it is referred to as affirmation. *Idrāk* is the representation of something's image to the mind of the person engaging in the *idrāk*; in other words, he/she 'witnesses' the entity perceived via said image.

5) *The concept of dirāyah*

The trilateral root *d-r-y* is more or less synonymous with the verb *ʿalima*, to know in a theoretical sense. It occurs thirteen times in the Qur'an as part of the phrase *mā adrāka*, or *mā yudrīka*. One of these occurrences is in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:63: "People will ask you about the Last Hour. Say: 'Knowledge thereof rests with God alone; yet for all you know (*wa mā yudrīka*), the Last Hour may well be near!'" Like the verbs *ʿarafa* and *ʿalima*, *darā* refers to an act of knowing that follows a state of not knowing. *Dirāyah*, or knowledge, exists in varying degrees; hence, it may be more or less complete. As such, the Arabic term for agnosticism, *lā-dirāyah*, refers to the position taken by someone who holds that the human mind is incapable of grasping the true nature of things.

6) *The concept of šidq*

Implying power or strength, the word *šidq* refers to the opposite of falsehood, which has no strength or power inherent within it. Other derivatives of this root include the word *šidāq*, which refers to a woman's dower, since this is something rightfully hers; *šiddīq*, an intensive form referring to someone who is always truthful; *šidq*, which refers to the correspondence between a person's words and the reality to which they refer in the belief of the speaker; and *mišdāq*, which refers to the criterion by which the truth of a statement is determined. Derivatives of the root *š-d-q* occur 127 times in the Qur'an. These include *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:32-33: "And who could be more wicked than he who invents lies about God, and gives the lie to the truth (*al-šidq*) as soon as it has been placed before him? ... But he who brings the truth (*jā'a bil-šidqi*), and he who wholeheartedly accepts it as true (*wa šaddaqa bihi*) – it is they, they, who are [truly] conscious of Him!" *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:23 reads, "And if you doubt any part of

what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon Our servant [Muhammad], then produce a surah of similar merit, and call upon any other than God to bear witness for you – if what you say is true (*in kuntum ṣādiqīn!*)” In *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:74, the inhabitants of Paradise exclaim, “All praise is due to God, who has made His promise to us come true (*ṣadaqanā waḍdahu*), and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion.” We are asked in *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:122, “whose word could be truer (*aṣḍaḍu*) than God’s?” In *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:41, the Prophet Abraham is described as “a man of truth” (*ṣiddīq*). Other derivatives of this root include “friend” (*ṣadīq*), which occurs in *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:61, alms (*ṣadaqah*) in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:196, and bridal dowers (*ṣaduqāt*) in *Sūrah al-Nisā’* 4:4.

7) *The concept of ḥaqq*

The trilateral root ḥ-q-q conveys the sense of validity, rightness, justice, duty, worthiness, and truth. Derivatives of this root occur 267 times in the Qur’an. *Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*, 23:71 reads, “But if the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin,” while in a reference to the Qur’an, *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:48 relates, “And yet, now that the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) has come unto them from Us, they say, ‘Why has he not been vouchsafed the like of what Moses was vouchsafed?’” In a reference to Islam, *Sūrah al-Isrā’*, 17:81 reads, “The truth (*al-ḥaqq*) has now come [to light], and falsehood has withered away.” In a reference to justice, *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:25 declares, “On that day God will pay them in full their just due (*dīnahum al-ḥaqq*).” *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*, 37:37 tells us that “he [whom you call a mad poet] has brought the truth (*al-ḥaqq*),” where “the truth” refers to affirmation of the oneness of God. In *Sūrah al-An‘ām*, 6:73, the word *al-ḥaqq* is used to refer to truthfulness (“whenever He says, ‘Be,’ His word comes true (*qawluhu al-ḥaqq*); and His will be the dominion...”). Set in contrast with falsehood, we read in *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:62, “Thus it is, because God alone is the Ultimate Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) so that all that men invoke beside Him is sheer falsehood.” In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:282, the word *al-ḥaqq* is used to refer to money: “let him who contracts the debt (*alladhī ‘alayhi*) dictate...” *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:247 uses the superlative *aḥaqqu* to mean

Qur'anic Terminology

“having a better claim to.” *Sūrah al-Ma‘ārij*, 70:24 uses the root ḥ-q-q to mean an acknowledged share of someone’s possessions (*ḥaqqun ma‘lūm*). The word *ḥaqq* is used to mean “need” in *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:79, “we have no use (*ḥaqq*) whatever for thy daughters.” In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:71, the word *ḥaqq* refers to plain truth, while in *Sūrah al-Ra‘d*, 13:14 it refers to the affirmation that there is no god but God. *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:111 uses the word *ḥaqq* as an adverbial meaning “in truth.” *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:61 speaks of how certain prophets were slain “without right” (*bi ghayri ḥaqq*). All of the aforementioned usages of this root are close to its lexical meaning. For when the Qur’an speaks of God as “the Ultimate Truth (*al-ḥaqq*)” (*Sūrah al-Mu‘minūn*, 23:116), it is affirming that God is the One with the right to rule and govern, who always has been and always will be. Similarly, the Qur’an addresses someone whose belief conforms to reality with the words, “that in which you believe is truth self-evident (*innaka ‘alā al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*)” (*Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:79). The word *ḥaqq* is likewise used in contexts that describe a person’s words and actions as conforming to what they ought to be. Thus God declares in *Sūrah al-Sajdah*, 32:13, “that word of Mine has come true (*ḥaqq al-qawlu minnī*),” while *Sūrah al-Anfāl*, 8:8 speaks of how God wills to “prove the truth to be true...” (*li yuḥiqqa al-ḥaqq*), where proving the truth to be true involves a dual aspect of: (1) revealing evidence and signs, and (2) fulfilling the Divine Law.

8) The concept of *yaqīn*

The trilateral root *y-q-n* refers to an end to doubt and uncertainty. Derivatives of this root occur 28 times in the Qur’an in four different senses: (1) Certain truthfulness. *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:22 quotes the hoopoe bird as saying to Solomon, “I have come to you from Sheba with a tiding sure! (*ji’tuka min saba’in bi naba’in yaqīn*).” This sense is also found in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:4, where God praises those “who in their innermost are certain of the life to come (*wa bi al-ākhirati hum yūqīnūn*).” (2) Death. *Sūrah al-Ḥijr*, 15:99 refers to death with the word *yaqīn*, saying, “worship your Sustainer till death comes to you (*ḥattā ya’tika al-yaqīn*).” (3) The certainty of an eyewitness. *Sūrah al-Takāthur*, 102:7 warns unbelievers that they will see reality clearly on

the Day of Resurrection, when they will surely “behold it with the eye of certainty (‘*ayn al-yaqīn*).” (4) Knowledge. The word *yaqīn* is used adverbially in this sense in *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:157, where we are told that “of a certainty, they did not slay him (*mā qatalūhu yaqīnan*).”

Al-yaqīn is the term with which the Qur’an speaks of verification and the elimination of doubt, a confident realization untainted by illusion, surmise, conjecture, or skepticism. The verb *tayaqqana* cannot be ascribed to God, because *yaqīn* is the knowledge of something that one attains after a state of uncertainty, and after one has accumulated sufficient evidence to make a solid conviction possible. *Yaqīn* is associated with ‘*ilm*, but not *ma‘rifah* or *dirāyah*. Common collocations containing the term *yaqīn* are ‘*ilm al-yaqīn*, ‘*ayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, among which there are certain distinctions.

The person with *yaqīn* has arrived at a clear belief. The hoopoe introduces his report to Solomon with evidence and signs that what he is about to relay is fully truthful and will yield certain knowledge based on the nature of its source and the reliability of its transmission. He begins by saying, “I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with yours].” Only then does he go on to add, “- for I have come to you from Sheba with a tiding sure (*ji’tuka min saba’in bi naba’in yaqīn*)” (*Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:22). The phrase “have encompassed” (*aḥaṭṭu*) used by the hoopoe communicates a sense of comprehensiveness, while the noun used for “tiding” (*naba’*) is one generally reserved for a report of weighty significance or a warning of some grave and imminent danger. The hoopoe then describes his tiding with the word *yaqīn*, or “sure.” In this way he seeks to demonstrate the veracity of what he is saying and to offer an excuse for his absence.

9) *The concept of kadhib*

The trilateral root *k-dh-b* is associated with untruth, either in the sense of communicating an untruth, usually with the intent to deceive, or of attributing untruth to a statement, a person, one’s senses, etc. The Qur’an employs derivatives of this root in 251 places, and in six differing senses. (1) Hypocrisy. The root *k-dh-b* is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:10, which states that “grievous suffering awaits

Qur'anic Terminology

them [the hypocrites] because of their persistent lying” (*bi mā kānū yakdhibūn*). (2) Slander. *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:7 uses this root to refer to the act of bringing a false accusation against one’s spouse. (3) Rebuttal. *Sūrah al-Wāqī‘ah*, 56:2 uses the noun *kādhibah* to refer to evidence that would disprove the reality of the Resurrection. (4) Denial. Speaking of a vision which the Prophet had, *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:11 states: “The [servant’s] heart did not give the lie to (*mā kadhdhaba*) what he saw.” (5) Disbelief. *Sūrah Qāf*, 50:5 speaks of those who “have been wont to give the lie to this truth (*kadhdhabū bi al-ḥaqq*) whenever it was proffered to them.” (6) Fabrication of untruths. *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:60 speaks of those “who invented lies about God” (*kadhabū ‘alā Allāh*).

The word *kadhib* refers to a verbal report or behavior that does not correspond to reality. The Qur’an thus describes hypocrisy (*nifāq*) as a type of lying, or *kadhib*, since a hypocrite’s words and actions do not reflect the reality within his or her conscience. In other words, hypocrisy is to put on an appearance of faith to conceal unbelief and thereby deceive others. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:8-10 states that

there are people who say, “We do believe in God and the Last Day,” the while they do not [really] believe. They would deceive God and those who have attained to faith – the while they deceive none but themselves, and perceive it not. In their hearts is disease, and so God lets their disease increase; and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persistent lying (*bi mā kānū yakdhibūn*).

Of this group of people we read in *Sūrah al-Mujādalah*, 58:14 that “they swear to a falsehood (*yaḥlifūna ‘alā al-kadhib*) the while they know [it to be false],” and in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:78 that “they tell a lie about God, being well aware [that it is a lie].”

10) *The concept of ifk*

The trilateral root *i-f-k* refers to the act of reversing something or diverting it from its course, and is used in a sense similar to that of *kadhib*. *Al-Mu’tifikāt* is a term that refers to the cities inhabited by the people of Lot and that were overthrown, while the term *ma’fūk* refers to someone who is weak-minded.

Derivatives of the root *i-f-k* occur 30 times in the Qur'an with seven different senses: (1) Lying. *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:11 speaks of unbelievers who describe God's message as "an ancient falsehood (*ifkun qadīm*)."
 (2) False worship. In *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*, 37:86, idolaters are asked, "Is it a lie that you want [to worship] as deities besides God (*a'ifkan ālihatan dūn Allāhi turīdūna*)?"
 (3) Claiming that God has a son. We read in *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*, 37:151-152, "Oh, verily, it is out of their own [inclination to] falsehood (*min ifkihim*) that some people assert, 'God has begotten [a son].'"
 (4) Accusing chaste women of indecent behavior. *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:11 refers to "those who would falsely accuse others of unchastity" (*al-ladhīna jā'ū bil-ifk*).
 (5) Delusion. This sense of the word is found *Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt*, 51:9, which speaks of how "such as would be deluded...are deluded [away from the Truth]" (*yu'faku 'anhu man ufika*) (Yusuf Ali).
 (6) Overturning. *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:53 speaks of "cities that were overthrown" (*al-mu'tafikah*).
 (7) Sorcery. In relating the account of Moses' encounter with the sorcerers of Pharaoh who caused ropes to appear as though they were serpents, *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:45 tells us that when Moses cast down his staff, "it swallowed up all their deceptions (*mā ya'fakūn*)."

11) *The concept of iftirā'*

The verb *iftarā* is derived from the trilateral root *f-r-y*, one meaning of which is to cut or split something. The verb form *farā* refers to the act of cutting something in a way that distorts or mars it. It can also be used in connection with the fabrication of lies, as in the phrase, *farā al-kidhb*, he invented a lie. When speaking of tanned leather, the verb *afra* refers to the act of cutting it in order to ruin or destroy it, while the verb form *farā* refers to the act of cutting it in order to repair or improve it.

The verb *iftarā* occurs 60 times in the Qur'an, most frequently in relation to lies or falsehoods. *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:94 speaks of those who "invent lies about God" (*man iftarā 'alā Allāhi al-kadhīb*). In some cases it is associated with wrongdoing, as in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:48, which speaks of someone who worships idols as having "contrived an awesome sin" (*iftarā ithman 'aẓīman*). *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:37 declares that the Qur'an "could not possibly have been devised by anyone save God" (*mā kāna hādha al-qur'ānu an yuftarā min dūmi Allāh*). It may

Qur'anic Terminology

also be used in connection with some unheard-of action, as in *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:27, which relates that after Mary gave birth to Jesus, her people said to her, “O Mary! Thou hast indeed done an amazing thing (*la qad ji'ti shay'an fariyyan*)!” It is used in *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:36 in connection with the word for magic (*al-siḥr*), which Muhammad Asad translates as “spellbinding eloquence.” We are told that Pharaoh and his entourage described Moses' message from God as “nothing but spellbinding eloquence devised [by man] (*mā hādha illā siḥrun muftaran*).” Similarly, some people of the Prophet's day described the Qur'an as being “nothing but a falsehood invented [by human beings] (*mā hādha illā ifkun muftaran*)” (*Sūrah Saba'*, 34:43). And in *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥanah*, 60:12, the verb is linked to slander. We are told that women wanting to join the Muslim cause must pledge not to “indulge in slander, falsely devising it out of nothingness” (*lā ya'tīna bi buhtānin yaftarīnahu bayna aydīhinna wa arjulihinna*).”

12) *The concept of buhtān*

The word *buhtān* refers to baseless slander, the act of accusing someone wrongly of something he or she did not do. Other senses of the verb *bahita* or *bahuta* include: to be bewildered and confused, to be defeated in an argument, or to fade (said of a color). Derivatives of the root *b-h-t* occur six times in the Qur'an in four different senses: (1) Sexual immorality. The verse quoted above from *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥanah*, 60:12 is translated by Muhammad Sarwar as stating that women must not “bring false charges against anyone (such as ascribing others children to their husbands)” (*lā ya'tīna bi buhtānin yaftarīnahu bayna aydīhinna wa arjulihinna*). (2) Falsehood. In *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:16, God tells the Muslim community that they should not believe a vicious rumor but, rather, view it as “an awesome calumny” (*buhtānun 'azīm*). (3) Dishonest gain. *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:20 tells the man who intends to divorce one wife and take another that he must return the first wife's dower no matter how much it may have been, since otherwise, he will be guilty of a serious wrong (*buhtān*). (4) Bewilderment or confusion. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:258 describes the denier of truth who disputed with Abraham as being “confounded” (Yusuf Ali) or “dumb-founded” (Asad) (*buhita alladhī kafara*).

13) *The concept of sihr*

There are three distinct meanings associated with the trilateral root *s-h-r*. When vowelized as *sahr*, it refers to the pulmonary region of the body immediately next to the esophagus and the trachea. When vowelized as *sihr*, it refers to the act of deceiving or charming by causing something unreal to appear as real; as such, it relates to magic or sorcery. And when vowelized as *sahar*, it refers to the early dawn hours.

Derivatives of this root occur 61 times in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) Knowledge. In *Sūrah al-Zukhruf*, 43:49, the word *sāhir*, normally translated as “sorcerer,” is used in the positive sense of one with knowledge. (2) Delusion. *Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:2 tells us that if deniers of the truth were confronted with some miraculous sign of the coming judgment, they would deem it to be “an ever-recurring delusion (*siḥrun mustamirr*).” (3) Deception of the eye. We are told in *Sūrah al-A'raf*, 7:116 that when Pharaoh's magicians cast down their staffs, “they cast a spell upon the people's eyes (*saharū a'yun al-nāsi*).” (4) A person who has been charmed or had a spell cast upon him or her. *Sūrah al-Furqān*, 25:8 tells us that some of the Prophet's enemies described him as “a man bewitched (*rajulan mashūran*).” (5) Being blinded to the truth. *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, 23:89 asks those who refused to believe in spite of the evidence, “How, then, can you be so deluded (*fa'annā tusharūn*)?”

14) *The concept of qirā'ah*

The trilateral root *q-r-y* or *q-r-'* refers, among other things, to the act of collecting, bringing together. The Qur'an was named thus because it brings together precepts, judgments, stories and the like.

Excluding the terms *al-qur'ān*, *al-qir'*, and *al-qaryah*, forms of the verb *qara'a* appear approximately 17 times in the Qur'an. The term *al-qur'ān* occurs 70 times, while the same term as applied specifically to the speech revealed by God through the Prophet occurs 68 times. It occurs twice in the sense of recitation in *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah*, 75:17-18, where God says to the Prophet concerning the Qur'an: “Behold, it is for Us to gather it [in thy heart,] and to cause it to be read [as it ought to be read] (*alaynā jam'ahu wa qur'ānahu*). Thus, when We recite it, follow its wording (*fa idhā qara'nāhu, fattabi' qur'ānahu*).” In *Sūrah*

Qur'anic Terminology

al-A'la, 87:6, an intensive form of the verb is used in the sense of “teach”. God tells the Prophet, “We shall teach you (*sanuqri'uka*), and you will not forget.” The knowledge gleaned through recitation or reading depends on whether the reading is superficial or deep. Having read and recited the revelation to Moses, the Children of Israel were aware of the validity of what God had revealed to His Prophet Muhammad. Hence, we read in *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:94 that God said to him, “if you are in doubt about [the truth of] what We have [now] bestowed upon you from on high, ask those who read the divine writ [revealed] before your time.”

The verbal noun *qirā'ah* refers to the act of combining letters and words in recitation of something either written or memorized. The word is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:98, which instructs the Muslims, when reading or reciting the Qur'an, to “seek refuge with God from Satan, the accursed.” Similarly, individuals brought before God on Judgment Day are instructed to “read” the book that contains their deeds on earth (*Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:14). And in *Sūrah al-ʿAlaq*, 96:1, the Prophet was commanded to “read” in the name of his Sustainer.

15) *The concept of dirāsah*

The trilateral root *d-r-s* denotes hiddenness; the word *dars* means, among other things, a hidden path. The verb *darasa* can refer to the act of threshing, as of wheat, which in olden times was done by tramping the plants with the feet in order to separate them from the grain. The verb *darasa* can also refer to the act of studying, since the person who engages in the act of *dirāsah* is ‘treading over’ or tracing what was previously read, as one treads on or traces a path. Hence, another meaning of the noun *dars* is a lesson. The verb *darasa* occurs six times in the Qur'an in the present and past tenses, and as a verbal noun. In a challenge to those who disbelieve in the Islamic message, God asks, “Have you, perchance, a [special] divine writ which you study (*tadrusūn*)?” (*Sūrah al-Qalam*, 68:37). In *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:156, the verbal noun is used in the sense of studying and passing on what one studies, while *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:105-106 uses the verb *darasa* in the sense of thorough study and application. God says to the Prophet, “And to the

end that they might say, ‘You have taken [all this] well to heart (*darasta*) ... follow what has been revealed to you by your Sustainer.’” The name of the Qur’anic prophet Idrīs is said to be a derivative of the verb *darasa* based on his intensive study of the Divine Revelation.

16) *The concept of taḥṣīl*

The trilateral root *ḥ-ṣ-l* denotes gathering, acquiring and preservation. From this root we get the word *ḥawṣalah*, which refers to the craw of a bird where it stores food it has gathered. It is said that the verb *ḥaṣṣala* originally referred to the act of extracting gold or silver from rock or soil, while the noun *ḥāṣil* refers to the final, enduring outcome of a process. When connected to speech, the verb *ḥaṣṣala* refers to the act of glean meaning from what one has heard. The verb *ḥaṣṣala* occurs once in the Qur’an in the passive voice. We read in *Sūrah al-‘Ādiyāt*, 100:10 about the Day of Resurrection, when “all that is [hidden] in men’s hearts is bared (*ḥuṣṣila mā fī al-ṣudūr*),” that is brought out for all to see. In modern-day usage, the verb *ḥaṣṣala* refers not simply to the acquisition of material wealth, but to the acquisition and retention of academic knowledge; hence, it is sometimes used alone to refer to academic performance.

17) *The concept of iḥṣā’*

There are three distinct semantic ranges associated with the root *ḥ-ṣ-y*. The first of these has to do with prevention, and the second with enumeration, comprehension and confinement. As for the third, it takes the form of the noun *ḥaṣā*, which refers to gravel or pebbles.

Derivatives of the root *ḥ-ṣ-y* occur eleven times in the Qur’an in two different senses: (1) Enumeration and computation. This sense is illustrated in *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:34, where we read, “should you try to count God’s blessings, you could never compute them (*lā tuḥṣūhā*),” and *Sūrah al-Ṭalāq*, 65:1, which speaks of “reckoning” (computing, keeping track of) a divorced woman’s waiting period. (2) Recording and exhaustive accounting. In *Sūrah Yāsīn*, 36:12 God declares that on Resurrection Day He will say, “We shall record whatever [deeds] they [those who have died] have sent ahead” (*wa kulla shay’in aḥṣaynāhu fī imāmin mubīn*).” We are told in *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:49 that upon seeing

Qur'anic Terminology

the record of their unconfessed wrongs on Judgment Day, people will cry out, “Woe unto us!...It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account (*lā yughādiru ṣaghīratan wa lā kabīratan illā aḥṣāhā*)!” The sense of comprehensive accounting is likewise found in *Sūrah al-Jinn*, 72:28, which reminds us that God “takes count, one by one, of everything [that exists].”

18) *The concept of taqdīr*

The trilateral root *q-d-r* has to do with an entity's extent, scope, and essential nature. The noun *qadar* refers to divine foreordainment and God's power over the creation, while the verbal noun *taqdīr* refers to the act of settling or disposing of affairs, or assessing something or someone with reference to something or someone else.

This root occurs 146 times in the Qur'an in various forms, and in four different senses: (1) Appreciation or assessment. In *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:67 we are told that idolaters have “no true understanding of God (*mā qadarū Allāha ḥaqqā qadrihi*).” (2) Scanty apportionment. *Sūrah al-Ra'd*, 13:26 tells us that “God grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure (*wa yaqdiru*), unto whomever He wills.” (3) Power. *Sūrah al-Balad*, 90:5 asks concerning the arrogant and self-sufficient: “Does he...think that no one has power over him (*ayaḥṣabu an lan yaqdiru 'alayhi aḥadun*)?” (4) Determination of human beings' formation in the womb, the cycles of nature, and the measure of everything in existence. In *Sūrah al-Mursalāt*, 77:23 God says, “Thus have We determined [the nature of man's creation] (*faqadarnā*): and excellent indeed is Our power to determine [what is to be]! (*fa ni'ma al-qādirūn*).” In *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:5 we read about how God has “has determined for it [the moon] phases (*qaddarahu manāzila*)” to enable people “to compute the years and to measure [time].” Similarly in *Sūrah al-Muzzammil*, 73:20 we are told that it is “God who determines the measure of night and day” (*yuqaddiru al-layla wal-nahār*).” *Sūrah al-Furqān*, 25:2 tells us that God has made everything and determined its nature (*fa qaddarahu taqdīran*), while *Sūrah al-Ṭalāq*, 65:3 reminds us that “unto everything has God appointed its [term and] measure (*ja'ala Allāhu li kulli shay'in qadran*).”

19) *The concept of baḥṭh*

In its original meaning, the trilateral root *b-ḥ-th* denotes the act of seeking something in the ground. Its meaning has since been extended to the act of searching for anything or anyone, investigating a matter, or exerting effort in connection with an issue or concern. In more recent times the verb *baḥṭha* has been associated more narrowly with academic or scientific research, since it is a process that strives to reveal what has been hidden or unknown. *Sūrah al-Tawbah* (also known as *Sūrah Barā'ah*) has sometimes also been referred to as *Sūrah al-Buḥūth* because of its references to the search for hypocrites in the Muslim community and their secrets.

20) *The concept of kashf*

The trilateral root *k-sh-f* refers to the removal of something from something else in such a way as to reveal it. The noun *kashaf* refers to a bald spot on a horse's forelock; the verb *takashshafa* is used of lightning when it appears in the sky, and the noun *kāshifah* refers to something that reveals or removes something else. Derivatives of this root appear 20 times in the Qur'an. In *Sūrah Qāf*, 50:22 God addresses the godless on the Day of Judgment, saying, "You have been unmindful of this [Day of Judgment]; but now We have lifted from you your veil (*kashafnā 'anka ghitā'aka*), and sharp is your sight today!" Used in nominal form, *k-sh-f* is found in *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:58 which, speaking of the Last Hour, says that "none but God can unveil it" – literally, it has no unveiler but God (*laysa lahā min dūn Allāhi kāshifah*). Similarly, *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:17 tells us that if God allows misfortune in our lives, no one can remove it but He (*fa lā kāshifa lahu illā huwa*). Similarly, we are told in *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:41 that if He so wills, God can remove affliction when we call upon Him (*fa yakshifu mā tad'ūna ilayhi*).

21) *The concept of naqīb*

The trilateral root *n-q-b* refers generally to an opening in something, or to the act of boring a hole. Another sense of the word is to traverse, as in traversing a country in flight from a pursuer. The noun *naqīb* can refer to a woodwind instrument resembling the oboe (a mizmar) which has

Qur'anic Terminology

holes bored in it, while the noun *naqībah* refers to a person's soul or spirit, or to penetrating vision or insight. The same noun can refer to a large-uddered she-camel, while the verb *naqqaba* can be used to refer to the act of digging up news.

The root *n-q-b* occurs three times in the Qur'an. One of these is found in *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:12, where it is used in the sense of leader (*naqīb*). In *Sūrah Qāf*, 50:36, the verb *naqqaba* is used in the sense of wandering the land in search of refuge (*fa naqqabū fī al-bilādi hal min mahīṣ*). In *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:97, the root *n-q-b* is used in the sense of piercing a hole in something (*naqb*). This root had the original denotation of digging; the meaning then shifted to the broader sense of searching, so that a scholar or anyone who is intelligent and insightful may be referred to as a *naqqāb*, one who digs or searches for knowledge. The fact that the *n-q-b* root is associated with digging and penetration to reach the heart, or innermost aspect of something, the soul, spirit or mind has been referred to as *al-naqībah*.

22) The concept of *ba'tharah*

The original root associated with this root is *b-th-r*, the letter *ʿayn* being a later addition. Its basic meaning has to do with looking and examining. The verb *ba'thara* means to dissipate, scatter, strew about, or throw into disorder. It can also refer to the act of turning upside down, overturning, or extracting. This root occurs only twice in the Qur'an. One of these instances is in *Sūrah al-Infiṭār*, 82:4, which speaks of graves being overturned (*wa idhā al-qubūru bu'thirat*). A similar usage is found in *Sūrah al-ʿĀdiyāt*, 100:9, which speaks of that which is in the graves being "raised and brought out" (*idhā bu'thira mā fī al-qubūr*). The reference in these two verses is to the swift transfer of those lying in their graves to a place of harsh judgment for what is hidden in their hearts. In both verses the verb is in the passive voice, which serves to draw our attention to the action or movement itself. A point to be noted is that the second verse cited speaks not of *those who* are in the graves, but of *that which* is in the graves. The reason for this might be that most of what lies underground is non-living, hence, the neuter reference. Another way of explaining the use of the neuter is to suppose that when they are raised from their graves, the dead are not conscious,

but only become so again after they have been brought out. And in fact, the resurrection is referred to in the Qur'an as *al-ba'ṭh*.

23) *The concept of kitābah*

The root consisting of the letters *k-t-b* denotes the act of joining one thing to another. Derivatives of this root occur 319 times in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) Prescribe. Addressing the Muslim community, God says, "O you who have attained to faith! Fasting is prescribed for you (*kutiba 'alaykum al-ṣiyāmu*) as it was prescribed for those before you (*kamā kutiba 'alā alladhīna min qablikum*)" (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:183). (2) Ordain. In *Sūrah al-Mujādalah*, 58:21 we read: "God has thus ordained (*kataba Allāhu*): 'I shall most certainly prevail, I and My apostles'..." (See also *Sūrah al-Hijr*, 15:4 and *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:235). (3) Inscribe. Speaking of the believers, *Sūrah al-Mujādalah*, 58:22 tells us that God "has inscribed" (*kataba*) faith in their hearts. When the Qur'an says that God has "inscribed faith" in believers' hearts, it means that God has caused, or enabled, them to believe in what they should believe in. (4) Promise. In *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:21, Moses tells his people to enter the holy land which God has promised (*kataba Allāhu*) them. (5) Write. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:79 speaks of those "who write down..." (*lilladhīna yaktu- būna al-kitāb*)."

In keeping with the meaning mentioned earlier, the process of writing involves joining letters to one another in the form of script. The image of writing, or a book, is used metaphorically to refer to God's speech even though God's speech is not actually written down (cf. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:2). Similarly, as we see in the verses quoted above, the image of writing or a book is used metaphorically to speak of divine command, divine ordainment, and divine promise. The basis for this metaphor lies in the fact that before something is written down, it is willed, then spoken. The process begins with an act of will and concludes with an act of writing. *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:157 states that the Prophet is "mentioned" (*maktūban*) in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. We find the word *kitāb* used to refer to the revelation given to Moses and to the Christian scriptures, just as it is used to refer to the Qur'an (*Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:12; cf. *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:3 and *Āl*

Qur'anic Terminology

‘*Imrān*, 3:78). The word *kitāb* is also used in ways that go beyond its original sense. In *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:28 and *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:49, it is used in the sense of an accounts ledger containing a record of people’s deeds for which they will be held accountable on Judgment Day.

24) *The concept of zubur*

The root consisting of the letter *z-b-r* is associated with two distinct meanings. One of these is that of securing or reinforcing something. One might use the verb *zabara* to speak of reinforcing a well with stones, for example. A derivative of this sense of the root is the noun *zubrah* (plural, *zubar*), which refers to a piece of iron. The noun (or adjective) *zubayr* refers to a cunning, self-possessed person. The other set of meanings related to the root *z-b-r* has to do with reading and writing. From this we derive the word *zabūr*, which is used to refer to the Psalms of David, the word *mizbar*, or a pen, and *zubur*, or holy scriptures.

This root occurs nine times in the Qur’an in four different senses: (1) Books of divine wisdom. The word *zubur* is used in this sense in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:184 and *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:44. (2) The revelation given to David. God states in *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:163, “We vouchsafed unto David a book of divine wisdom (*zabūr*).” (3) The divine record of people’s deeds (*Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:52). (4) Pieces of iron (*Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:96). In *Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*, 23:53, the word *zubur* is used to mean “pieces” in a metaphorical sense.

25) *The concept of sifr*

The trilateral root *s-f-r* conveys the sense of unveiling, exposure, openness and clarity. The noun *safar* is used to refer to travel because, when traveling, people leave their homes and are exposed to new places and people. The verbal noun *safr* refers to writing, since it yields (reveals, brings to light) written material that is needed. As for the noun *sifr* (plural, *asfār*), it refers to a large book or to a section of the Jewish scriptures, while the plural noun *safarah* means “writers” or “messengers,” in which sense the word is used in *Sūrah ‘Abasa*, 80:15. The word *safarah* as used here may refer to the angels who “travel” back and forth between God and God’s messengers as bearers of revelation. It

bears noting that the Arabic word for ambassador is *safīr* (plural, *sufarā'*), the ambassador being one who seeks to promote reconciliation among different parties.

Derivatives of this root occur in twelve places in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) Journey-stages (*asfār*; see *Sūrah Saba'*, 34:19). (2) Books (*asfār*; see *Sūrah al-Jum'ah*, 62:5). (3) Brightness. *Sūrah 'Abasa*, 80:38 describes the faces of the righteous on the Day of Resurrection as "bright" (*musfirah*). (4) Daybreak. *Sūrah al-Muddaththir*, 74:34 uses the verb *asfara* to refer to the breaking of dawn. (5) Travel. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:184 uses the noun *safar* to refer to being "on a journey" (*'alā safar*).

26) *The concept of 'ahd*

The root consisting of the letters *'-h-d* has numerous shades of meaning. It has to do with knowledge and familiarity, assignment and commitment, pledge and promise. One meaning of the noun *'ahd* (plural, *'uhūd*) is a dwelling to which a tribe returns again and again. The noun *ma'had* (plural, *ma'āhid*), defined in modern parlance as 'institute' is likewise a familiar, well-known location. From this root we derive words such as *mu'āhadah* (a treaty or agreement), *al-ta'ahhud* (contracting), and *'uhdah*, a contract of sale or other contractual obligation. All of the meanings mentioned thus involve a commitment of some sort, as they are entities that need to be adhered to. As such, this root is related to the concepts of sacredness, safety, responsibility, and protection.

Derivatives of this root occur in 46 places in the Qur'an, and in three broad senses: (1) Enjoining or commanding. *Sūrah Yāsīn*, 36:60 uses the verb *'ahida* in the sense of enjoining or commanding. See also *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:125, where God declares, "thus did We command Abraham and Ishmael: 'Purify My Temple...' (*wa'ahidnā ilā Ibrāhīma wa Ismā'īla an ṭahhirā baytī...*)." The same sense of the verb *'ahida* is found in *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:115 with respect to Adam. (2) Covenant. In *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:134, we read that the Children of Israel cried out to Moses in the wilderness, saying, "O Moses, pray for us to your Sustainer on the strength of the covenant [of prophethood] which He has made with you" (*bi mā'ahida 'indaka*). (3) Promise or pledge. *Sūrah*

Qur'anic Terminology

al-Baqarah, 2:177 praises those “who keep their promises whenever they promise” (*al-mūfūn bi ‘ahdihim idhā ‘āhadū*). Similarly, *Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*, 23:8 praises those who are faithful to their pledges (*‘ahdihim*). (Cf. *Sūrah al-Ma‘ārij*, 70:32, *al-Baqarah*, 2:80, and *Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:76. For the verbal form, see also *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:1, *al-Nahl*, 16:91, and *al-Fath*, 48:10).

27) The concept of *kalām*

The root consisting of the letters *k-l-m* denotes two sets of meanings, one of which has to do with meaningful speech, and the other with wounds. In its former sense, the *k-l-m* root yields derivatives such as *kalām*, ‘speech’, and *kalimah*, ‘word’. In its latter sense, the *k-l-m* root yields the words *kalm*, ‘wound’ (plural, *kilām* or *kulūm*). The word *kulām* refers to rugged land.

Derivatives of the root *k-l-m* occur 75 times in the Qur’an in two overall senses: divine speech and human speech. (1) Divine speech. *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:164 tells us that God spoke His word to Moses (*kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīman*), *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:75 speaks of “the word of God” (*kalām Allāh*) coming to those who reject it, and *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:109 states that even if twice the seas’ measure were ink for God’s words (*kalimātu rabbī*), the seas would be exhausted before God’s words were exhausted. Referring specifically to the Qur’an, *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:6 instructs Muslim fighters to grant protection to any polytheist who might request it so that he might “hear the word of God” (*ḥattā yasma‘a kalām Allāh*). We are told in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:37 that “Adam received words [of guidance] (*kalimātin*) from his Sustainer,” and in a reference to the trials Abraham passed through in connection with circumcision and the possible sacrifice of his son, *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:124 states that God “tried Abraham by [His] commandments” (*bi kalimātin*). (2) Human speech. *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:29 quotes the people of Mary’s day asking how they can talk to (*nukallimu*) a newborn infant. Speaking of someone approaching death who cries out to God simply because he fears judgment, we are told in *Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*, 23:100 that this is merely “a word he has spoken” (*innahā kalimatun huwa qā’iluhā*) without meaning what he says. *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:5 contains a criticism of those who disseminate

distorted spiritual teachings, saying, “dreadful is this saying (*kaburat kalimatan*) that comes out of their mouths (*takbruju min afwāhihim*).”

Jesus is also said to be “the word of God” (*Sūrah al-Nisā*, 4:171), having been brought into being directly by the creative command, “Be.” The title “the word of God” (*kalimat Allāh*) may have been given to Jesus due to the statement he is reported by the Qur’an to have made from the cradle, saying, “Behold, I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a prophet” (*Sūrah Maryam*, 19:30).

The Qur’an states that recipients of former revelations “distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context” (*yuharrifūna al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihi*) (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:13). Some have understood the phrase *yuharrifūna al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihi* to mean that the words of divine writ were actually changed. However, once manuscripts of a scripture have been widely disseminated, it becomes extremely difficult to do such a thing. Hence, this phrase is best understood to refer to distorted interpretations of scriptures.

28) *The concept of qawl*

The root consisting of the letters *q-w-l* relates to the act of speaking or verbal articulation. The noun *qawl* (plural, *aqwāl*, *aqāwīl*) refers to something said, or to the act of saying it, and can be associated with both good and evil; as for the expression, *al-qīl wa al-qāl*, it is associated with evil, as it bears the sense of harmful innuendo or gossip. Similarly, the expression *taqawwala ‘alayhi* means to fabricate lies or spread rumors about someone, while the verbs *qāwala* and *taqāwala* have to do with negotiating and conferring with.

Derivatives of the root *q-w-l* occur 1,722 times in the Qur’an. The word *qawl* is used in a number of senses, the most prevalent of which have to do with combinations of letters made accessible to the hearer through spoken language, whether in the form of single words, or of complete statements. The verb *qāla* can be used to refer to the thoughts one thinks to oneself. Hence, we read in *Sūrah al-Mujādalah*, 58:8, “They say to themselves... (*yaqūlūna fī anfusihim*).” The verb *taqawwala* is used in *Sūrah al-Hāqqah*, 69:44 in the sense of attributing one’s own sayings to someone else. What one says might, of course, be

Qur'anic Terminology

inconsistent with what one believes and does. Hence, *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:167 tells us that the hypocrites uttered “with their mouths something which was not in their hearts,” while we read in *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:226 that poets “say what they do not do.”

29) *The concept of nuṭq*

The trilateral root *n-ṭ-q* comprises two basic semantic fields, one of which has to do with speech and articulation, and the other with a type of apparel known as a *niṭāq*, which is a kind of sash or belt. The verb *nataṭqa* refers to the act of articulating meaningful sounds.

Derivatives of the root *n-ṭ-q* occur twelve times in the Qur'an in two basic senses: (1) Sounds that issue from one's mouth. In *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*, 37:92, for example, Abraham mocks his people's idols, saying to them, “What is amiss with you that you do not speak (*mā lakum lā taṭiqūn*)?” (2) Written speech. In *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, 23:62, God declares that on Judgment Day there will be “a record that speaks the truth (*kitābun yaṭīqu bil-ḥaqq*).”

The adjective *nāṭiq*, which refers to an entity capable of producing meaningful sound, is applied most often to human beings; when applied to other entities, it is used in a qualified or metaphorical sense. In *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:16, where Solomon states that he has “been taught the speech of the birds” (*‘ullimnā maṭīq al-ṭayr*), the Qur'an refers to the sounds made by the birds as “speech”, since this is how these sounds were perceived by Solomon, who understood what birds such the hoopoe communicated to him. This was something unique to Solomon. To Solomon, then, the birds were “speaking”, since he understood their language, whereas to someone who did not understand their language, they would have been, for all intents and purposes, “silent.” Similarly in *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:29, God tells those gathered on Resurrection Day, “This Our record speaks (*hādha kitābunā yaṭīqu*) of you in all truth.” Though in written form, the divine record of people's works “speaks” by communicating a message that is deciphered by the eye; similarly, spoken words can be referred to as a “book” that is deciphered by the ear. God's record bears witness against people, causing them to remember the things they have done.

30) *The concept of lisān*

The root consisting of the letter *l-s-n* denotes a body part that is connected to the rest of the body from one end, and which is of a length appropriate to its location and function. The tongue (*lisān*, plural, *alsun* or *alsinah*) is a known example of such an organ. Derivatives of this root occur 24 times in the Qur'an in four different senses: (1) Language. *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:103 uses the word "tongue" to refer to human language. See also *Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:22. (2) Words. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:78 tells us that those of the Children of Israel who had rebelled against God were "cursed by the tongue (words) of David and of Jesus, the son of Mary" (*'alā lisāni Dāwūda wa 'Īsā Ibni Maryam*). (3) The actual tongue. The word *lisān* is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah*, 75:16, God instructs the Prophet not to move his tongue in haste when he is receiving the Qur'an. (4) The ability to convey truth (*lisāna šidqin*) (*Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:84; cf. *Maryam*, 19:50; *al-Shu'arā'*, 26:195). A similar sense of the word *lisān* is also found in *Sūrah Tāhā*, 20:27, where Moses prays for God to "loosen the knot from my tongue" (*waḥlul 'uqdatan min lisānī*), where the word 'tongue' refers not to the physical member of his body, but to his ability to convey God's message. A related shade of meaning is that of eloquence (see *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:34). The tongue is likened also to a sword "smite you with sharp tongues" (*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:19), to the person speaking (*Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:116), and to an instrument for distorting truth (*Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:78).

31) *The concept of bukm*

The trilateral root *b-k-m* refers to the inability to speak, whether partial (for example, a stammer) or complete. Derivatives of this root occur six times in the Qur'an in association with deafness. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:18 and 171, for example, associate it with deafness and blindness. In *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:97, being "blind and dumb and deaf" is described as the punishment in the afterlife for having refused to use one's faculties in obedience to God during one's life on earth.

32) *The concept of ḥadīth*

The trilateral root *ḥ-d-th* denotes coming to pass or coming to be, as

Qur'anic Terminology

well as newness. Speech, being something from which other realities come to be, is referred to with the verbal noun *ḥadīth*, which can also mean a conversation, or an account of something that the Prophet did, said, or approved. As an adjective, the word *ḥadīth* means new or recent, while the verbal noun *muḥādathah* means conversation or the act of conversing.

Derivatives of the root *ḥ-d-th* occur 36 times in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) To inform. The verb *ḥaddatha* is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:76: "Do you inform them of what God has disclosed to you? (*atuhaddithūnahum bi mā fataḥa Allāhu 'alaykum*)?" (See also *Sūrah al-Taḥrīm*, 66:3). (2) What one says. *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:87 asks, "Whose word could be truer than God's (*man aṣḍaḡu min Allāhi ḥadīthan*)?" (3) Discourse. In *Sūrah al-Tūr*, 52:34, scoffers are challenged to produce "a discourse" (*ḥadīth*) that can compare in eloquence with the Qur'an. (4) Teachings. *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:23 tells us that God has revealed "the best of all teachings" (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth*) in the form of the Qur'an. (5) A tale of things past that serves as an example to others. This sense is found in *Sūrah Saba'*, 34:19, where God states that He scattered the once great people of Sheba, causing them to become "[one of those] tales [of things long past] (*ja'alnāhum aḥādītha*)." (See also *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:101 and *al-Najm*, 53:59).

33) *The concept of khabar*

The trilateral root *kh-b-r* has two primary denotations. The first is knowledge of something. From this denotation we derive the noun *khabar*, meaning report or tiding. The term *khabar* is broader than that of *naba'* in that it implies a more intimate knowledge of the true nature of something. From the same root we derive the adjectives *khābir*, *khābir*, and *khābir*, meaning knowledgeable or experienced. Used with the definite article and applied to God, the adjective *al-khābir* means the All-Knowing. The words *khibrāh*, *khubr*, and *mikhbarah* all refer to knowledge or experience of something, while the verbs *istakhbar* and *takhabbar* refer to the act of gathering knowledge or information. The second denotation is that of softness, affluence, and prosperity. The term *khabrā'* refers to soft soil, while the noun *khābir* refers to a plowman, because he softens and prepares the soil for planting.

Derivatives of the root *kh-b-r* occur 52 times in the Qur'an, all of which have to do with knowledge in some way or another. In *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:7, we read that Moses, having seen a fire in the distance, told his family that he would investigate it and bring back some "tiding" (*khabar*) concerning what he found (cf. *Sūrah al-Qasaṣ*, 28:29; for the plural, "tidings," see *Sūrah al-Zalzalah*, 99:4). *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:94 uses the plural *akhbār* in a similar sense, while *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:31 uses the plural *akhbār* to refer to the "assertions" of those who did not want to go to war for the cause of Islam. *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:68 and 91 use the nominal form *khubr* to refer to knowledge or experience of something.

The word *khabīr* occurs 45 times in the Qur'an as one of the 99 names of God, Whose knowledge encompasses everything that is, has been, and will be, and all aspects of what is, both outward and inward. The word *khabīr* is applied in the Qur'an to no one but God Himself. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:234 reads, "God is aware of all that you do" (*Allāhu bi mā ta'malūna khabīr*; cf. *Sūrah Fāṭir*, 35:14), while God is described in *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:1 as the One Who is "Wise, All-Aware" (*ḥakīmīn khabīr*). God is "unfathomable [in His wisdom], All-Aware" (*latīfun khabīr*) (*Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:63); "All-Knowing, All-Aware" (*'alīmun khabīr*) (*Sūrah Luqmān*, 31:34) and "Fully Aware, All-Seeing" (*Sūrah Fāṭir*, 35:31).

34) *The concept of balāgh*

The root consisting of the letters *b-l-gh* conveys the idea of reaching something, whether temporally or spatially, in a tangible sense or an intangible sense. The verbal noun *balāgh* can mean, among other things, a communiqué or statement, while the verbs *ablaghā* (verbal noun, *iblāgh*) and *ballaghā* (*tablīgh*) mean to convey a message. Derivatives of this root occur 77 times in the Qur'an; of these instances, twenty-five have to do with the conveyance of knowledge. In ten of the Qur'anic uses of this root, it conveys the sense of delivering the divine message. In *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:67, God instructs the Prophet to communicate everything he has received by way of revelation, and that if he does not he will "not have delivered His message" (*fa mā ballaghta risālatahu*). In *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:106, the word *balāgh* is used to

Qur'anic Terminology

refer to God's message to human beings (cf. *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:52), and *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:20 uses the same term to refer to the act of delivering the message. *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:6 instructs Muslim fighters who have been asked for protection from a polytheist to grant his request and “convey him to a place where he can feel secure” (*abliḡhu ma'manahu*). The word *balāgh* is most often qualified in the Qur'an by the adjective *mubīn*, meaning “clear”, since a clear message places more of an onus on the message's recipient. Using the verb *balagha* in the sense of ‘reaching’, *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:22 speaks of when Joseph “reached full manhood” (*balagha ashuddahu*).

35) *The concept of bushrā*

The trilateral root *b-sh-r* is related to the emergence of something good and pleasant. The root is occasionally associated with bad tidings; when it is, however, this must be specified by the context. Otherwise, it is assumed that the event concerned is a welcome one. The noun *bushrā* refers to good news, and the verb *bashshara* to the announcement of good news. The words *tabāshīr* and *bushrā* may also refer to the first fruits of date palms or some other plant to be harvested.

Derivatives of the root *b-sh-r* occur in 123 places in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) Good news. The verb *bashshara* (*bashshartumūnī*, *tubashshirūn*, *bashsharnāka*) is used in *Sūrah al-Hijr*, 15:54-55. (2) Sexual intercourse. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:187, the verb *bāshara* is used to refer to sexual intercourse in the sense of one person's skin being in direct contact with another's. (3) Nourishing rain. *Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:46 speaks of God sending winds that “bear glad tidings” (*yursila al-riyāḡa mubashshirāt*) by heralding rain's arrival. (4) Someone who brings good news. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:119 speaks of God's Messenger as a “bearer of glad tidings” (cf. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:19). (5) Human beings (the word *bashar* being both singular and plural). The word *bashar* is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:18.

Human beings are referred to as *bashar* in Arabic based on the appearance of hair on their skin (*al-basharah*) as opposed to fur, wool and the like. The association between the verbs *bashshara* and *abshara* and pleasant tidings is that when you give someone good news, it causes the features of his or her face (*basharah*) to brighten and relax. As for

the use of the verb *bashshara* in association with unpleasant or dreaded news, this is the exception to the rule (see *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:21; *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:59, and *Sūrah al-Zukhruf* 43:17).

36) *The concept of nuṣḥ*

The trilateral root *n-ṣ-ḥ* refers to harmony or reconciliation between two entities; hence, the verb *naṣaḥa* has been used to refer to the act of sewing (which involves joining pieces into a harmonious whole), being pure, and watering or giving to drink. In origin, the active participle *nāṣiḥ* once referred to a tailor. The words *nuṣḥ* and *naṣiḥah*, which refer to heartfelt, sincere advice or counsel, denote the opposite of fraud, deceit or deception. Genuine repentance is thus referred to as *al-tawbah al-naṣūḥ*.

Derivatives of the root *n-ṣ-ḥ* occur thirteen times in the Qur’an and in two primary senses: (1) To admonish or advise. This sense is found in *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:62, which relates Noah’s statement to his people, “I am...giving you good advice” (*anṣaḥu lakum*), while *Sūrah al-A‘rāf* 7:79 narrates that the Prophet Ṣāliḥ told his people, “I...gave you good advice” (*naṣaḥtu lakum*), the implication being that the advice has been proffered in good will, and with the sincere hope of helping the person to whom it is addressed. (2) Purity and sincerity. *Sūrah al-Taḥrīm*, 66:8 enjoins those who believe to “turn unto God in sincere repentance” (*tūbū ilā Allāhi tawbatan naṣūḥan*).

37) *The concept of qaṣaṣ*

In its origin, the root *q-ṣ-ṣ* refers to the act of following or tracking. From this we derive the word *qiṣāṣ*, which refers to the legal practice of exacting retribution for physical harm done to others by inflicting similar harm on the perpetrator, since it is as if the person being punished is “following in the tracks” of the one whom he had injured at an earlier time. The verb *qaṣṣa* means to relate or narrate, while the word *qiṣṣah*, or story (plural, *qiṣaṣ*) involves ‘following’ the events being related.

This root occurs 30 times in the Qur’an in five different senses: (1) To mention or name. In *Sūrah al-Nisā*, 4:164, God tells the Prophet about messengers He has “mentioned” to him before. There are “apostles whom We have mentioned to you before this...” (*rusulan qad*

Qur'anic Terminology

qaṣaṣnāhum ^{alayka min qablu}). (2) To relate or tell (a story). *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:25 tells us how Moses came to his future father-in-law “and told him the story [of his life]” (*wa qaṣṣa* ^{alayhi al-qaṣaṣ}). See also *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:176 and *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:99. (3) To explain. *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:76 tells us that the Qur’an “explains to the children of Israel most [of that] whereon they hold divergent views” (*inna hādha al-qurʾāna yaquṣṣu* ^{alā banī isrāʾīla akthar alladhi hum fihi yakhtalifūn}). (4) To follow a trail. *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:64 tells us that Moses and his servant “turned back, retracing their footsteps” (*irtaddā* ^{alā āthārihimā qaṣaṣa}). (5) Just retribution (*qiṣāṣ*) in cases where murder has been committed. See *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:178.

38) The concept of *jalw*

The trilateral root *j-l-w* is used to speak of the act or process of becoming clear or visible. It might be used in a statement such as, “I unveiled the bride” (*jalawtu al-ʿarūs*). The feminine adjective *jalwāʾ* can be used to describe a clear sky (*samāʾun jalwāʾu*). Followed by the preposition ^{an}, the verb *jalā/yajlū* can mean to leave or evacuate a place: *jalā al-qawmu* ^{an manāzilihim}, “The people evacuated their homes.” As a transitive verb, *jalā* can mean to polish, as in “he polished the sword” (*jalā al-sayf*), to relieve someone of a concern (*jalā* ^{anhu al-hamm}), or reveal a matter (*jalā al-amr*).

This root occurs five times in the Qur’an in two different senses: (1) Coming to light or making visible. This sense is found in *Sūrah al-Shams*, 91:3, which tells us to consider “the day as it reveals the world” (*al-nahāri idhā jallāhā*), in *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:187, which tells us that none but God will reveal the Last Hour when the time comes (*lā yujallihā li waqtihā illā huwa*), and in *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:143, which uses the verb *tajallā* to refer to God’s revelation of his glory on Mount Sinai. (2) Leaving home. *Sūrah al-Hashr*, 59:3 uses the verbal noun *jalāʾ* to refer to banishment from one’s homeland.

39) The concept of *indhār*

The root *n-dh-r* revolves around the notion of fearing or causing to fear. The verb *andhara*, of which *indhār* is the verbal noun, means to inform someone of something that is to be feared – in other words, to

warn. Derivatives of the root *n-dh-r* occur 130 times in the Qur'an, and in four different senses: (1) Warning. In *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:2, God commands to “warn the people” (*andhir al-nās*). The word *andhar* in the sense of warning is also found in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:21, which tells of a prophet sent to the tribe of ʿĀd who “warned his people” (*andhara qawmahu*). (See also *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:13). (2) A warning. *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:56 states, “This is a warning (*hādha nadhīrun*) like those warnings of old (*min al-nudhuri al-ūlā*).” (3) Messengers from God who came as “warners” (*nudhur*, *Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:23). *Sūrah Fāṭir*, 35:37 tells how those who were unrepentant in their lifetimes plead with God to be released from their chastisement in the afterlife, only to be reminded that “a warner” (*nadhīr*) had come to them, leaving them without excuse. (4) A vow. Those engaged in the pilgrimage to Makkah should “perform their vows” (*yūfū nudhūrahum*) (*Sūrah al-Hajj*, 22:29; *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:270).

40) *The concept of taḥdhīr*

The trilateral root *ḥ-dh-r* conveys the sense of vigilance and wariness. The noun *ḥadhar* denotes avoidance of something out of fear. The adjective *ḥadhir* means cautious, vigilant, on one's guard (cf. *ḥādhir*, “at the ready”), while the noun *taḥdhīr* refers to a warning. Derivatives of this root occur 21 times in the Qur'an, and in three different senses: (1) Instilling fear. In *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān*, 3:28 and 30, we read that “God warns you to beware of Him” (*yuhadhḥirukumū Allāhu nafsahu*). (2) Exercising caution. See *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:41, “be on your guard” (*iḥdharū*). (3) To dread. Addressing the hypocrites who sought to do the Muslim community harm, *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:64 declares, “God will bring to light the very thing that you are dreading” (*innā Allāha mukhbrijun mā taḥdharūn*). Similarly, *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:9 uses the verb *ḥadhara* in the sense of reverent awareness when it speaks of someone who, “ever-mindful of the life to come (*yaḥdharu al-ākhirah*),” spends part of the night in prayer, while *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:71 uses the noun *ḥidhr* in the sense of precautions in war time, saying, “Take your precautions” (*khudhū ḥidhrakum*).

Qur'anic Terminology

41) *The concept of balā'*

The root *b-l-y* (or *b-l-w*) has two primary denotations: (1) to become worn out, or to wear something out (*baliya/yablā*), and (2) to put to the test (*ibtalā/yabtālī* or *balā/yablū*). The testing or affliction (*balā'*) might come in the form of either evil or good; if in the form of evil (*miḥnah*), it tests a person's faith and patient endurance, and if in the form of good (*minḥah*), it tests one's gratitude.

Derivatives of this root occur 37 times in the Qur'an, and in six different senses: (1) Testing or affliction. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:155, God tells believers, "Most certainly shall We try you by means of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods" (*wa la nablūwannakum bi shay'in min al-khawfi wal-jū'i wa naqṣin min al-amwālī*). Similarly, God declares in *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:31, "most certainly We shall try you all (*wa lanablūwannakum*)... We shall put to a test [the truth of] all your assertions" (*wa nablūwa akhbārakum*). The sense of testing is found also in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:11, where we are told that the believers were "tried" (*ubtuliya al-mu'minūn*). *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:124 tells us that God "tried Abraham" (*ibtalā ibrahīma rabbuhu*) through the commands He had given him. In a related sense, the word *yablū* is used in *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:30, which tells us that on Judgment Day, each soul will "prove [the fruits of] (*tablū kullu nafsin*) the deeds it sent before (*mā aslafat*)." (3) To be made visible. *Sūrah al-Tāriq*, 86:9 tells us that on the Day of Resurrection, secrets will be "laid bare" (*tuḅlā al-sarā'iru*).

SECOND: 'Ilm-RELATED CONCEPTS

1) *The concept of 'ilm*

The trilateral root *'-l-m* denotes an effect by which something is distinguished from other entities. From it we derive the noun *'alāmah*, which refers to a sign or indication, the word *'alam*, which refers to a flag or banner, and *'ilm*, sometimes translated as 'science', and at other times simply as 'knowledge', and which is contrasted with ignorance, or *jahl*. The active participle *'ālim* (plural, *'ulamā'*), which means 'knowing,' refers to a scientist or scholar. It is used of God in *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, 23:92, where we read that God is the One Who knows both what is

hidden and what is accessible to human perception (*‘ālimu al-ghaybi wa al-shahādah*); similarly we have the noun *‘alīm*, meaning highly knowledgeable and which, when joined to the definite article (*al-‘alīm*) is one of the Divine Names meaning All-Knowing. The verb *‘alima* means to know or discover something, while the intensified form *‘allama* means to teach (verbal noun, *ta‘līm*), and the verbal noun *ma‘lam* refers to a landmark or guidepost (something by means of which a road or path is known, or recognized).

Derivatives of the root *‘l-m* occur 856 times in the Qur’an, and in four basic senses: (1) Marking or distinguishing. In *Sūrah Muḥammad*, 47:31, God declares that He will test people in order to “mark out (*na‘lama*) those of you who strive hard [in Our cause] and are patient in adversity” (*al-mujāhidīna minkum wa al-ṣābirīn*). (2) Knowledge. We are assured in *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:19 that “God knows (*Allāhu ya‘lamu*) all that you keep secret as well as all that you bring into the open” (*mā tusirrūna wa mā tu‘linūn*). Similarly, the noun *‘ilm* is used in *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:14, where we are told that the Qur’an was revealed by God’s knowledge (*unzila bi ‘ilmi Allāh*). (3) Teaching. This derivative of the root is found in *Sūrah al-Mā’idah*, 5:4 to refer to the training of hunting animals. The active participle, *mu‘allim*, or “teacher,” does not occur in the Qur’an. However, the passive participle, *mu‘allam*, is used in *Sūrah al-Dukhān*, 44:14, which tells us that the Prophet’s opponents accused him of having been taught the Qur’an by others. (4) Learning. The verb *ta‘allam*, meaning to learn, is used in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:102 in relation to people who have been learning about sorcery.

2) *The concept of ḥibr*

The trilateral root *ḥ-b-r* is related to happiness, delight, and beauty, and is used to speak of the remaining traces of something positive and good. The noun *ḥibr* is used to refer to ink, the substance used in writing (a process which may be seen as a form of beautification), while the noun *ḥabr* or *ḥibr* (plural, *aḥbār*) refers to the person who does the writing. (Scholars have disagreed over whether the noun should be written as *ḥibr* or as *ḥabr*; according to al-Jawharī, if the word refers to ink, it is more proper to write and pronounce it as *ḥibr*, whereas if it is associated with learning and prose, it should be pronounced *ḥabr*).

Qur'anic Terminology

More specifically the noun *ḥabr* is used to refer to a Jewish or Christian scholar or cleric, or simply an upright person. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, the fifth surah in the Qur'an, is also known as *Sūrah al-Aḥbār*. Other forms of the noun include *ḥabrah*, *ḥubrah*, *ḥibir*, and *ḥibirah*, while the act of improving or beautifying one's written script or poetry is referred to as *taḥbīr*.

The plural form *aḥbār* occurs four times in the Qur'an in reference to scholars (see, for example, *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:63), and twice in other senses. Scholars are referred to as *aḥbār* due to the traces of their learning which remain in the form of both written works and memories in people's minds and hearts.

3) *The concept of rabbānī*

The *r-b-b* root conveys a number of different meanings: (1) to repair and/or maintain something. From this sense we derive the noun *rabb*, which refers to an owner, proprietor, master, creator, or caretaker. Hence, the verb *rabba* can also mean to raise or bring up (a child). (2) To remain with (someone) or in (a place). If we speak of land as *marabb*, for example, it implies that it continues to receive rain, and for this reason clouds are sometimes referred to as *rabāb*. (3) To include and embrace something. The noun *rabbānī* refers to someone who has knowledge of God Almighty. It has been said that the word *rabbānī* was introduced into Arabic from Syriac or Hebrew with the meaning of deified, divine, or heavenly.

The word *rabbānī* occurs four times in the Qur'an. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:44, for example, refers to "...the [early] men of God (*al-rabbāniyyūn*) and the rabbis (*wa al-aḥbār*).” (See also *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:63). These were scholars to whom God's word was entrusted, who bore witness to its truth, and who were assigned the task of nurturing people spiritually, teaching them, issuing them rulings based on the Jewish law, and acting in the capacity of prophets and compassionate caregivers. As for the term *al-aḥbār*, it referred to highly influential, leading scholars whose teachings were authoritative and who were known for speaking the truth among their peoples. Those described as *rabbāniyyūn*, being of a higher status than the rabbis, or *aḥbār*, were highly knowledgeable, deeply steadfast individuals

endowed with insight into how to guide people, manage their affairs and serve their interests. It has been said that they were the scholarly descendents of Aaron who adhered to the path of the prophets. One notes that while the terms *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār* are linked in the two verses just quoted from *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, the term *rabbāniyyūn* appears alone in *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:146.

4) *The concept of kursī*

The trilateral root *k-r-s* refers to the process of being accumulated, gathered or compressed on top of something else. From this root we derive the noun *kurrāsah* (plural, *karārīs*), meaning notebook or copy-book, which consists of pages stacked on top of one another. The noun *kursī* (plural, *karāsīn*) can refer to knowledge, or to a seat, chair, throne or bed. The verb *inkīras* means to apply or dedicate oneself to something; the noun *kīras* refers to piled up ruins or remnants, as well as to something's cause or origin; while the noun *karkasah* refers to repetition or intonation.

The term *kursī* occurs twice in the Qur'an in two different senses. In one of these instances it connotes knowledge, as when we are told in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:255 that God's *kursī* – that is, His knowledge or rule – encompasses the heavens and the earth. In the second instance, and in keeping with the lexical definition of *kursī* as something firm which one sits on, the word is used to refer to Solomon's throne (*Sūrah Ṣād*, 38:34).

Lastly, it has been proposed that the word *kursī* refers to the celestial sphere that encompasses the heavenly bodies.

5) *The concept of athārah*

The trilateral root *a-th-r* conveys three primary meanings: (1) the presentation of something, (2) the mention of something, and (3) the remaining effect of something. The word *athārah* (plural, *athārāt*) refers to a remainder or lasting effect. The words *uthrah*, *ma'tharah* and *ma'thurah* refer to an honorable deed, accounts of which are passed down from one generation to another. The word *athar* refers to what remains of something – a trace or effect; the noun *uthr* refers to a scar, that is, the trace that remains from a wound that has healed, and

Qur'anic Terminology

the noun *ithr* refers to clarified butter extract. In a similar vein, the word *athar* can refer to a protrusion on a camel's hoof which leaves tracks that others can follow, while the noun *athīrah* refers to a pack animal whose hoofs leave large tracks.

Derivatives of the root *a-th-r* occur in 31 places in the Qur'an, and in four different senses: (1) Enduring effects or legacy. *Sūrah Ghāfir*, 40:21 refers to bygone peoples whose lasting impact (*āthār*) on earth was greater than others' (cf. *Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:9). In *Sūrah Yā Sīn*, 36:12, God speaks of how, on Judgment Day, He will have recorded "the traces [of good and evil]" that people have left behind (*āthārahum*). (2) Footsteps. *Sūrah al-Şāffāt*, 37:70 criticizes polytheists for being so eager to follow in their forefathers' footsteps (*āthārihim*). (3) Preference. *Sūrah al-Ḥaşhr*, 59:9 praises those who offer others refuge from harm and "give them preference over themselves" (*yu'thirūna 'alā anfusihim*). (4) Unique favor. *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:91 relates how Joseph's brothers, upon discovering the high position he has attained in Egypt, exclaim, "Most certainly has God raised you high above us" (*la qad ātharaka Allāhu 'alaynā*).

The verb *athara* denotes the action of transmitting something or passing it on, particularly teaching and knowledge. The word *athārah* or *atharah* refers to a place about which accounts have been told or written with the result that its effects remain to subsequent generations, while the phrase *athāratin min 'ilm* (literally, "vestige of knowledge" – *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:4) may also be used to refer to a scholar with an enduring, effective legacy.

6) The concept of *qabas*

The root *q-b-s* in its origin was used in relation to fire, and was then employed in relevant metaphors. In connection with knowledge, one might say that someone *iqtabasa 'ilmān*, that is, he sought out or acquired knowledge, or that he passed on or shared knowledge with someone else (*aqbasahu 'ilmān*). This root occurs three times in the Qur'an. *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:10 relates how, when Moses sees a fire in the wilderness, he tells his family that he may be able to bring them "a brand therefrom" (*minhā biqabasin*; cf. *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:7) And in *Sūrah al-Ḥadīd*, 57:13, we are told that on the Day of Resurrection, the

hypocrites will say to the believers, “Let us borrow from your Light (*unẓurūnā naqtabis min nūrikum!*)” Hence, the original meaning of *qabas* was related to fire; its meaning was then extended metaphorically to refer to guidance and light.

7) *The concept of rusūkh*

The original denotation of the root *r-s-kh* has to do with firmness, rootedness, and penetration of the soil. When applied to a stream or pond, the verb *rasakha* means for its water to dry up due to its having soaked into the ground. The adjective *rāsikh* means stable, firmly rooted or well-grounded. Hence, *al-rusūkh fī al-‘ilm* that is, well-groundedness in knowledge, refers to a grasp of knowledge based on established and credible evidence and/or irrefutable arguments. The word *rāsikh* occurs twice in the Qur’an. *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:7 refers to those who are “deeply rooted in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-‘ilm*), while *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:162 uses the term in the same manner. Abū ‘Amr quotes al-Mubarrad as saying that “those who are deeply rooted in knowledge are those who study together.” According to al-Mubarrad, only those who have memorized the Qur’an can become deeply rooted in knowledge, while Ibn ‘Abbās interprets the reference to *al-rāsikhūn fī al-‘ilm* in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:7 as meaning “those who are so fully realized in knowledge that nothing could cast doubt upon it.”

8) *The concept of sayyid*

The word *sayyid* is derived from the root *s-w-d*, meaning to rule over/govern. This meaning was in turn derived from the fact that a *sayyid* is someone who rules or governs the majority of a people – that is, the common people (*sawād al-nās*). The word *sayyid* (plural, *sādah*) is thus used to mean a leader, a master, a ruler and, more generally, someone who is discerning, understanding, and possessed of wealth and beneficial influence. The term *sayyid* occurs three times in the Qur’an in reference to a ruler who is magnanimous and knowledgeable. (1) In *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:25, the word is used to refer to a husband. (2) *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:67 uses the plural form, *sādah*, in the sense of “leaders.” (3) Noble or outstanding among men. It is in this sense that the word is used in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:39 in reference to the prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist).

Qur'anic Terminology

9) The concept of *ḥujjah*

The root *ḥ-j-j* conveys four basic senses: (1) to intend – specifically, to intend to reach a given goal or destination. From this we derive the noun *mahajjah*, which can refer to a destination, a place of pilgrimage, a shrine, or a road, as well as the noun *hajj*, which refers to the pilgrimage to Makkah. (2) To argue or dispute with (*ḥājaja*). From this verb we derive the noun *ḥujjah*, meaning evidence, proof, or an argument in favor of a given position. (3) The orbital bone, which is referred in Arabic as the *ḥijāj*. (4) Retreat or withdrawal, referred to as *ḥajhajah*. Related to this is the word *mihjāj*, meaning argumentative.

Derivatives of the root *ḥ-j-j* occur 20 times in the Qur'an in two different senses. The first of these is that of enmity or opposition. This sense is found in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:139, which asks the Jews and Christians, “Do you argue with us about God?” (*a tuḥājjūnanā fī Allāh*). Similarly, *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:66 says, “You are the ones who would argue (*ḥājjatum*) about that which is known to you (*fīmā lakum bihi 'ilm*).” And the second is that of clear evidence. This usage is found in *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:149, which reminds us that “the final evidence [of all truth] rests with God alone” (*falillāhi al-ḥujjatu al-bālighah*). Similarly, the evidence advanced by those bent on wrongdoing holds no validity in argumentation. As we read in *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:16, “And as for those who would [still] argue about God (*yuḥājjūna fī Allāh*) after He has been acknowledged [by them] (*min ba'di ma ustujjiba lahu*) – all their arguments are null and void in their Sustainer's sight” (*ḥujjatuhum dāḥiḍatun 'inda rabbihim*). Each side's aim is to dissuade the other side of the stance for which it is arguing, and everything cited in support of one's claims is referred to as a *ḥujjah*, even if it is invalid, as we saw in the quote above from *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:16 (“...all their arguments are null and void...” – *ḥujjatuhum dāḥiḍatun*).

There are two different types of *ḥujjah*. One of these, referred to as a persuasive argument (*ḥujjah iqnā'iyyah*), is helpful for people who lack the ability to deal with complex rational proofs, and might lead them to certainty by providing multiple types of evidence. The second type, referred to as a *ḥujjah burhāniyyah*, is a well-established argument based on irrefutable evidence. An example of this type of argument is found in *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:22: “had there been in heaven or

on earth any deities other than God, both [those realms] would surely have fallen into ruin!” If there were multiple deities, they would be in competition for control over all that exists, which would plunge the Cosmos into complete disorder. However, if we define ‘God’ as the Being that possesses ultimate power, then no alternate deity could even exist, still less compete for control and authority with the one God.

10) *The concept of burhān*

The root of this verbal noun is *b-r-h-n*, which means to establish proof for something. The verb *abraha* likewise means to support proof. The term *burhān* occurs in the Qur’an eight times in four different senses: (1) A manifestation of the truth. We read in *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:174: “O mankind! A manifestation of the truth (*burhān*) has now come unto you from your Sustainer.” And in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:24, we are told that when Joseph was tempted to succumb to the seductive advances of his master’s wife, he “saw an evidence of his Sustainer’s truth” (*burhāna rabbihī*) that strengthened him to resist. (2) Evidence. We are told in *Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*, 23:117 that there is no evidence (*burhān*) for the existence of any god but God. (3) A sign of divinely granted authority. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:32 states that after giving Moses the ability to perform two types of miracles before Pharaoh, God referred to these as “two signs” (*burhānān*) that Moses had come bearing a divine message.

The noun *burhān* is on the pattern *fu^llān* based on the trilateral root *b-r-h*, which means to turn white. The word *burhān* refers to the most certain of all evidence, and denotes uncompromising truthfulness. According to scholars of the principles of jurisprudence, *burhān* is what separates truth from falsehood, the sound from the corrupt.

11) *The concept of sultān*

This word is derived from the trilateral root *s-l-t*, which has to do with power, force, authority, and mastery. The word *sultān* can refer to a powerful argument or proof, or to the power of a monarch or governor. The *sultān* of something is its strength or intensity. Used as a verbal noun, *sultān* cannot be pluralized. When used to refer to a ruler, however, its plural is *salātīn*.

Qur'anic Terminology

The word *sultān* occurs 35 times in the Qur'an and in two different senses: (1) Power and authority. *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:22 uses the word in this sense when it states that on the Day of Judgment, Satan will confess to his erstwhile followers, "I had no power (*sultān*) at all over you" (cf. *Sūrah Saba'*, 34:21). (2) Proof or evidence of an assertion. It is used in this sense in *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:68, as well as in 28 other places. The word *sultān* is used to mean evidence or proof (*ḥujjah*) because of the force that is sometimes exercised on people's minds and hearts by powerful arguments or evidence, particularly if they are knowledgeable, discerning people of faith. As for its use to denote governing power or sovereignty (*mulk*), the word *sultān* points to God's authority over the Earth.

12) *The concept of āyah*

The word *āyah* is derived from the root *a-y-y*, which may refer to sight or consideration, or to the intention to address a particular person. The noun *āyah* refers to a sign. According to al-Aṣma'ī, a man's *āyah* is his person. Hence, in an example cited by al-Khalīl, if we say that the tribe went out with its *āyāt* (plural of *āyah*), we mean that it went out with all its people together (*kharaḥa al-qawmu bi āyātihim*). The word *āyah* can also be used to refer to a unit of the Qur'anic text (plural, *āy*), a moral lesson, or time.

The word *āyah* occurs 382 times in the Qur'an in the following senses: (1) A sign. "And among His wonders (signs – *āyātihī*) is this: He creates you out of dust" (*Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:20; cf. *Sūrah al-Ankabūt*, 29:44). Such "wonders" or "signs" give people access to greater or lesser degrees of knowledge of God depending on their individual capacities or their willingness to reflect and learn. In a divergent but related sense, *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:128 refers to pagan altars as "signs" of wanton folly and idolatry. (2) A unit of the Qur'an. The word *āyah* can refer to any phrase in the Qur'an that communicates a divine ruling, whether this phrase takes up an entire surah or only part of one; the word *āyah* can also be used to refer to each of the units set apart by numbers in the Qur'anic text. For this sense, see *Sūrah Āl Imran*, 3:7 and *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:8. (3) A miracle. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:36 refers to the miracles Moses wrought as *āyāt*. (4) A sign of God's

grace. Jesus is referred to in *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:21 as an *āyah*. (5) A command or prohibition. For this sense, see *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:187.

13) *The concept of jidāl*

The meaning associated with the root *j-d-l* is that of a growing rivalry or opposition. The noun *ajdal* is a name for a hawk, while the noun *jadal* can refer to the vehemence of opposition. The verb *jadala* refers to the act of tightly weaving or twisting, as well as to the strengthening and growth of grain in the ear. Similarly, the phrase *jaddalahu* (passive, *injadala*, *tajaddala*) means, “he wrestled him to the ground” (*šara‘ahu ‘alā al-jidālah*).

Derivatives of the root *j-d-l* occur in the Qur’an 29 times in the sense of wrangling, quarreling, debating and discussing. *Sūrah al-Ra‘d*, 13:13 speaks of those who “stubbornly argue about God” (*yujādilūna fī Allāh*), *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:197 states that those engaged in the pilgrimage to Makkah must abstain from quarrelling (*jidāl*), and *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:54 describes human beings as being primarily “given to contention” (*al-insānu akthara shay’in jadalan*). *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:125 instructs the Prophet to “argue” (*jādil*) with those who disagree with him in a kindly manner. Dialogue or discussion for the purpose of persuasion might be likened to the act of knotting or braiding (*al-jadal*) in the sense of weaving or “plaiting” one’s arguments together in such a way that they are strong enough to draw one’s opponent to one’s side.

14) *The concept of sū‘āl*

The root *s-’-l* conveys the notion of a question or inquiry. Derivatives of this root occur 128 times in the Qur’an in the following senses: (1) A request for a legal ruling. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:189 tells us that “They will ask you about the new moons (*yas’alūnaka ‘an al-ahillah*).” (See also *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:215, 217, 219 and 220). (2) Asking for assistance – begging. *Sūrah al-Duḥā*, 93:10 refers to the person who asks for material aid with the active participle *sā’il*, ‘one who asks’. (3) Supplication. The word *sā’il* is also used to refer to someone who makes supplication to God (see *Sūrah al-Ma‘ārij*, 70:1). (4) Petition, request or seek. When Noah asks God to save his unbelieving son from

Qur'anic Terminology

the great flood, God tells Noah not to ask of Him things of which he has no knowledge (*lā tas'alni mā laysa laka bihi 'ilmun* – *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:46). A similar sense of the word is used in *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*, 55:29, which describes how everything in existence seeks God out of need. (Cf. *Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt*, 51:19). (5) Call to account. This sense of the word is used in *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:6, where God declares, “We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a [divine] message was sent (*falanās'alanna al-ladhīna ursila ilayhim*), and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers [themselves] (*walānas'alanna al-mursalīn*).” (6) To dispute among one another (see *Sūrah al-Naba'*, 78:1).

The verbal noun *sū'āl* refers to the act of seeking knowledge or the means of acquiring it. We are urged to seek knowledge in this way (see *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:7). Similarly, it can refer to the act of seeking out material wealth or the means of acquiring it (see *Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt*, 51:19, cited above). It would be contradictory for God to seek knowledge when He is the All-Knowing. Hence, when asking is predicated of God, its purpose is to rebuke, to alert the person questioned to something, or to induce him or her to acknowledge, approve, or do something. In *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:116, for example, we are told that God asked Jesus son of Mary whether he had told people to worship him and his mother as deities beside God. God asked this question not in order to acquire knowledge, of course, but rather, to communicate something to those around them, to rebuke people for false teachings, and to induce them to acknowledge a truer doctrine.

A question resembles a wish. However, whereas a wish (*umniyah*) has to do with the hope of fulfilling something one has identified as a possibility, a question (*sū'āl*) involves a request for an answer. A rhetorical question may be exactly the same as its answer. However, in the case of a question which is asked in order to learn something or to seek guidance, one's teacher will be like a doctor who strives to heal a sick person. In this role, he pays attention to what the illness requires, not to what the patient says. When answering a question such a teacher may refrain from giving the information that has been requested and instead give the information that the inquirer should have requested or which the inquirer actually needs. This approach is referred to by some

as “the sage’s approach.” When this approach is being employed, the answer will be more general than the question. In *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:17-18, for example, God asks Moses what he is holding in his right hand. To this Moses replies, “It is my staff.” Then he adds, “I lean on it; and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and [many] other uses have I for it.” In *Sūrah al-Shu‘arā’*, 26:70-71, we are told that Abraham asked his father and his people what it was that they worshipped. To this they replied, “We worship idols.” Then, as if to anger Abraham, they added, “and we remain ever devoted to them.” Answering a question with more information than what was requested might also be intended to motivate the questioner to action. This sort of situation is illustrated in *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*, 7:113-114, where Pharaoh’s sorcerers ask him whether they will be rewarded if they prevail over Moses, and he replies, “Yes; and, verily, you shall be among those who are near unto me.” In some situations, the answer might be terser than what the questioner hopes it will be, while in others, the person asked may not answer the question at all, particularly if the query has been posed not with a desire to know, but simply out of obstinacy.

15) *The concept of jawāb*

The trilateral root *j-w-b* conveys two primary meanings. The first is that of piercing, penetrating or traversing. One might say, *jubtu al-arḍa* (“I traversed the land”). In this case, the verbal noun will be *jawb*, while the active participle will be *jā’ib* or *jawwāb*. The second meaning is to reply to something that has been said. One might say, *ajābahu* (“He replied to him”). From this root we derive the nouns *jawāb* (answer, reply), *jā’ibah* (plural, *jawā’ib*), meaning unexpected or extraordinary news, the verb *jāwaba* (verbal noun, *mujawabah*), meaning to respond to or cooperate with and *tajāwaba* (verbal noun, *tajāwub*), meaning to be responsive or interact harmoniously (with). Still other derivatives include the verb *istajwaba* (verbal noun, *istijwāb*) meaning to interrogate, *istajāba* (verbal noun, *istijābah*), meaning to answer (a prayer), or respond to.

Derivatives of the root *j-w-b* occur 43 times in the Qur’an in the following senses: (1) To cut or penetrate. In *Sūrah al-Fajr*, 89:9 we are told that the people of Thamūd “hollowed out rocks in the valley”

Qur'anic Terminology

(*jābū al-ṣakhra bi al-wād*). (2) To answer, comply with, respond to. God says of Himself 2:186, “I respond to (*ujību*) the call of him who calls” (*daʿwata al-dāʿi idhā daʿāni*). See also *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:89. (3) To obey. *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 46:31 reads, “Respond to God’s call” (*ajībū dāʿīa Allāhi*), while *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān*, 3:172 speaks of the believers “who responded to the call of God” (*istajābū lillāhi*). (4) Response to a question (*jawāb*). See *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:82.

If a question mentioned in the Qur’an has already been asked of the Prophet, the answer he is given to say is preceded by the command, “Say” (*qul*) without a preceding *fa*, or “then.” In *Sūrah al-Isrāʾ*, 17:85, for example, we are told that people have asked the Prophet about the nature of inspiration (*yasʿalūnaka ʿan al-rūḥ*), and he is commanded to answer them with the word *qul...*, “Say...” (cf. *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:187). Elsewhere, by contrast, the question cited is one that has not yet been asked; hence, the present tense used in the Qur’an actually refers to the future. In *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:105, for example, we read, “And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then...” In this case, God’s command concerning what to say is preceded by *fa*, meaning “then” (*faqul...*). The meaning is thus: If they ask you...then say...

16) *The concept of fatwā*

The root consisting of the letter *f-t-y* denotes two basic meanings. The first is that of youth, newness and freshness, from which we derive the noun *fatā* (plural, *fityah* or *fityān*), meaning a youth or a young camel. The second is that of clarifying a legal ruling. The verb *aftā* is used to describe the action undertaken by a jurist who rules on a legal question or issue.

Derivatives of the root *f-t-y* occur 21 times in the Qur’an, and in two different senses. (1) A young man. We read in *Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ*, 21:60 about Abraham, to whom the people of his day referred as “...a youth” (*fatā*) who had spoken scornfully of their gods. (2) Clarification of a legal ruling. In *Sūrah al-Nisāʾ*, 4:127 the word *aftā* is used in the sense of providing a legal ruling, as we are told that God Himself would provide the people with a ruling (*Allāhu yuftīkum*) concerning the women of their day. It is the second of these two meanings that concerns us in this context.

The verbal form of *f-t-y* occurs eleven times in the Qur'an in the sense of seeking knowledge and understanding of a specific issue or question. It is in this sense that the word is used in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:43 where, after having a mysterious dream, the king asks his noblemen to explain it to him, saying, *aftūnī fī ru'yāya*: "Enlighten me about [the meaning of] my dream." The word *fatwā* is used to refer to the answer given by a legal scholar concerning a problematic legal matter, while the verbal noun *iftā'* refers to the process of providing such an answer.

17) *The concept of bayān*

The root *b-y-n* yields the verb *bāna/yabīnu*, which refers to a process of separating or distancing one thing from another, or of being exposed, becoming clear, or coming to light. Other verbal derivatives are *abāna*, *bayyana*, *istabāna*, and *tabayyana*, while the words *bayān* and *tibyān* (see *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:89) are verbal nouns from the same root.

Derivatives of this root occur 258 times in the Qur'an in the following senses: (1) to give something long, thorough consideration. In *Sūrah al-Hujurat*, 49:6 God tells believers, "If any iniquitous person comes to you with a [slandering] tale (*in jā'akum fāsiqun bi naba'in*), use your discernment (*fa tabayyanū*)." (2) Evidence and arguments. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:185 uses the plural noun *bayyināt* to refer the "clear signs" revealed in the Qur'an (for the singular, *bayyinah*, see *Sūrah al-An'am*, 6:57). (3) To become clear or manifest. In *Sūrah Ibrahim*, 14:45, God tells those who are resisting His message how "it was made obvious" (*tabayyana*) to them how He had dealt with disobedient peoples before them. (4) To become distinguishable. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims may continue to break their fast until a black thread is distinguishable from a white one (*hattā yatabayyana... al-khayṭu al-abyaḍu mina al-khayṭi al-aswadi*), 2:187. (5) Clear. God's revelation consists in "messages clearly showing the truth" (*āyātīn mubayyinātīn*) (*Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:34). (6) The capacity for self-expression. We are told in *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*, 55:4 that God has granted human beings "articulate thought and speech" (*‘allamahu al-bayān*).

The quadrilateral form appears either with a hamzah in the beginning (*abāna*), or with a doubled second consonant (*bayyana*), whereas the trilateral form does not occur in the Qur'an in the sense of revealing

Qur'anic Terminology

or clarifying. Rather, we have the quadriliteral (*abāna*, *bayyana*) and quintiliteral (*tabayyana*) forms in past and present. We also have the active participle *mubayyin* in *Sūrah al-Nūr*, 24:34, and in *Sūrah al-Ṭalāq*, 65:11. As for the imperative voice, it occurs only three times in the form of *tabayyanū* (twice in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:94, and once in *Sūrah al-Hujurāt*, 49:6).

Another active participle derived from this root is *mubīn* (from the verb *abāna/yubīnu*), meaning clear or manifest. *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:1, for example, describes the Qur'anic revelation as “a revelation clear in itself and clearly showing the truth” (*mubīn*). The verb form *tabayyana* occurs eighteen times in either the past tense (*Sūrah Saba'*, 34:14), the present tense, or the imperative voice.

The verbal noun *bayān*, used in the sense of revealing or clarifying something, is more general in meaning than the word *nuṭq*, which is used exclusively in relation to human beings and not to other creatures. The process of elucidation entailed in *bayān* can involve either speech or action. Speech can be referred to as *bayān* because it reveals a meaning which a person intends to express. In *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah*, 75:19, God declares that He is the One who will clarify the Qur'an, saying, “It will be for Us to make its [the Qur'an's] meaning clear” (*'alaynā bayānuhu*). Indeed, whatever specifies the general or clarifies the obscure, be it speech or action, can be referred to as a kind of *bayān*. In *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:138, for example, events from the past are described as a *bayān*, or “a clear lesson.”

There are five different ways in which the process of *bayān* can take place through speech and action. The first is referred to as *bayān al-taqrīr*, that is, an act which clarifies and confirms the meaning of something that has been said. In *Sūrah al-Ḥijr*, 15:30-31, we are told that when God commanded the angels to bow down before Adam, all of them did so with the exception of Iblīs. By their action, these angels confirmed the binding nature of what God had commanded. This type of *bayān* is also illustrated in *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:38, which refers to a bird that “flies on its two wings.” This is a confirmation of the literal import of what has been said due to the possibility that the statement might have been metaphorical, since it is possible to say, for example, that a person “is flying with enthusiasm,” or some such thing. In the

present context, the reference to the bird's wings confirms that the Qur'an is speaking here about literal, not figurative, flight. The second is referred to as *bayān al-tafsīr*, that is, interpretation or explanation of words whose meaning may be vague due to the use of homonyms, generalities, or ambiguous expressions. The third is referred to as *bayān al-taghyīr*, which is the act of changing the import of a word or expression through stipulation, exception, or specification. The fourth is known as *bayān al-tabdīl*, which is the same as abrogation. And the fifth is referred to as *bayān al-ḍarūrah*, or clarification by necessity. This type of *bayān* is a clarification which takes place despite a silence about the matter at hand due to some necessity in the surrounding context.

Bayān al-ḍarūrah, or clarification by necessity, is in turn divided into four subtypes: (1) That which is discerned not only by what is stated but by what is unstated. This is illustrated in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:11 which in a discussion of inheritance rights and distributions, tells us that if the deceased "has left no child and his parents are his [only] heirs, then his mother shall have one-third..." Although it is not stated in the text, we can infer through *bayān al-ḍarūrah* that the remaining two-thirds of the bequest go to the father. We infer this not simply based on the silence concerning the father's portion, but based on the necessary import of what has been said about the need for the inheritance to be shared. (2) That which is made clear by virtue of the identity or specialization of the person speaking (or writing) on the subject in question. (3) That which demonstrates the necessity of protecting the buyer from harm. (4) That which is clarified based on the meaning of the linguistic context. Someone might say, for example, "I owe him one hundred and three dirhams (103) (*labu 'alayya mi'atun wa thalāthatu darāhim*)," "three robes (*thalāthatu athwābin*)", "horses (*afrāsin*)," or the like. The phrase *thalāthatu darāhim*, "3 dirhams", which is conjoined via the word "and" (*wa*) to the preceding *mi'atun* (one hundred), makes it clear that the number 100 is associated with dirhams, not with robes or horses. If, by contrast, the person had said, "103 robes (*mi'atun wa thalāthatu athwābin*)," then the phrase "three robes" (*thalāthatu athwāb*), being conjoined by the word "and" (*wa*) to the preceding *mi'atun*, or 100, would make clear that the speaker means 103 robes, not dirhams or horses.

Qur'anic Terminology

18) *The concept of sharḥ*

The trilateral root *sh-r-ḥ* denotes the act of opening, laying bare, expanding, and clarifying. The verb *sharaḥa* can mean to explain or make clear, while the intensified form *sharraḥa* means to slice (cheese, meat, etc.). Derivatives of the root *sh-r-ḥ* occur five times in the Qur'an in the sense of spreading out or expanding. If one uses the verb *sharaḥa* in relation to the chest, it refers to the act of opening the mind and heart to receive something, such as guidance, knowledge of the truth, and obedience to God, and making it a receptacle of wisdom, self-composure, and courage. The word is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:22, which speaks of the one whose heart has been opened to Islam (*man sharaḥa Allāhu ṣadrahū lil-islām*) and who has received enlightenment (*fa huwa 'alā nūrīn min rabbihī*). (See also *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:125, *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:25, and *Sūrah al-Inshirāḥ*, 94:1). The Arabic word *ṣadr*, though it refers anatomically to the chest, is used to refer in such situations to the heart and mind (cf. *Sūrah al-Nās*, 114:5). The chest can also be seen as the 'fortress' (*ḥiṣn*) within which the heart is shielded from attack by evil forces.

Lastly, it should be noted that the verb *sharaḥa* can also be used to refer to the act of opening someone to evil influences. *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:106, for example, refers to someone who has opened his heart to a denial of the truth (*sharaḥa bil-kufri ṣadran*). The verb *sharaḥa* thus refers originally to a physical act, and is used to refer metaphorically to spiritual realities.

19) *The concept of tafṣīr*

The trilateral root *f-s-r* denotes the act of clarifying, uncovering, or bringing to light. The quadrilateral verbal form, *fassara* (verbal noun, *tafṣīr*), has been said to be synonymous with the verb *awwala* (verbal noun, *ta'wīl*), which means to interpret, to reveal what is intended by speech that is ambiguous or problematic. *Ta'wīl* is the process of determining which understanding of a word or phrase reflects the meaning it was intended to express in its particular context. The word *fasr* (or *tafṣīr*) refers to a physician's examination of water and the act of rendering a judgment concerning it, while the verbal noun *tafsarah* is the process of diagnosing a disease. The noun *tafṣīr* occurs once in the

Qur'an in *Sūrah al-Furqān*, 25:33, in which God assures the Prophet that He will provide Him through the Qur'an with "the best explanation" (*aḥsana tafsīran*). Similarly, anything by means of which one comes to know what something means is referred to as *tafsarah*. The difference between *ta'rīf* and *tafsīr* is that while *ta'rīf* refers to an explication of a word's meaning, *tafsīr* is the clarification of a word or phrase through the use of terms that are better understood or more familiar. As for the difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, *tafsīr* operates on the level of the apparent meanings of terms or words, while *ta'wīl* operates on the level of hidden or symbolic meanings.

20) *The concept of ḥikmah*

The root *ḥ-k-m* denotes the act of curbing or checking. From this root we derive the noun *ḥukm*, or rule, which refers primarily to the curbing of evil through the prevention of injustice. Similarly, the noun *ḥikmah*, generally translated as 'wisdom', refers to the prevention of ignorance. The active participle *ḥākim*, or ruler, refers to someone who carries out legal rulings (*aḥkām*, singular, *ḥukm*). More generally the word *ḥikmah* is associated with justice (*ʿadl*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), magnanimity (*ḥilm*), prophecy (*nubuwwah*), and revealed scriptures. The verb *aḥkama* is more or less synonymous with the verb *atqana*, which means to master, to do skillfully or properly, or to make something so sound and strong that it cannot be corrupted or undermined. Accordingly, speech described with the derivative adjective *muḥkam* is unambiguous speech whose words and meanings are subject to neither doubt nor equivocation.

Derivatives of the root *ḥ-k-m* occur eleven times in the Qur'an and in five different senses: (1) A means of admonition. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:231 God urges the recipients of the Qur'an to take seriously "the revelation and the wisdom which He has bestowed on you from on high in order to admonish you thereby" (*mā anzala ʿalaykum min al-kitābi wa al-ḥikmati yaʿizukum bihi*). (2) Understanding and knowledge. Speaking of John the Baptist (Yaḥyā), God declares in *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:12: "We granted him wisdom (*ātaynāhu al-ḥukm*) while he was yet a little boy." Similarly, God declares in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:54 that He has granted "revelation and wisdom (*al-kitāba wa al-ḥikmah*) unto the House of Abraham." (See also *Sūrah al-Baqarah*,

Qur'anic Terminology

2:269). (3) The act of ruling on legal matters. Thus God commands the Prophet (5:42), “if you judge, judge between them with equity” (*fa in ḥakamta, faḥkum baynahum bi al-qist*).”

The word *ḥakīm*, meaning “wise” or “a wise man,” conveys several different senses. One of these is that of a scholar or learned individual, it being said that in order to be described as *ḥakīm*, one must combine knowledge with action. As *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:33 asks: “Who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto God, and does what is just and right, and says, ‘Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to God?’” Another is that of someone who masters (*aḥkama*) the work he does. A third sense conveyed by the word *ḥakīm* is that of ‘manifest’ or ‘clear.’ Given the fundamental sense of the root *ḥ-k-m* as that of prevention or curbing, it came to be used to speak of regulating the precision of knowledge and action via direct examination of the meanings of things and the kind of keen observation that comes with accumulated experience. The Arabs once called their nobility *ḥukamā'*, or sages, in recognition of their sound opinions, prudence, and integrity. *Al-Ḥakīm* is also one of the 99 names of God, whose notice nothing escapes, and Who controls, regulates and rules the Universe with His almighty power and knowledge (cf. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:118, *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:18, etc.). In this sense, the word *ḥakīm* is more or less synonymous with *ḥākim*, meaning ruler or governor, although the term *ḥukm* (rule, governance, judgment) is broader than *ḥikmah* (wisdom, sagacity).

One proposed definition of *ḥikmah* is knowledge of things as they are. In order to be classified as *ḥikmah*, knowledge must also be accompanied by balanced attitudes and actions, that is, with an avoidance of both excess and neglect. This is consistent with the fact that according to the majority of scholars, *ilm* is not simply abstract understanding, but a balance of knowledge and action, with one or the other of the two taking priority depending on the nature of the situation.



The foregoing has been an overview of the Qur'anic terms relevant to the concept of *ilm* in its various facets. Other terms might have been included; however, given the length of this study, I have chosen simply to mention them without discussing them in detail. These additional terms include: *hilm* (intelligence, understanding), *rushd* (prudence, maturity, sensibility), *lutf* (subtlety), *ihsān* (virtue, action on others' behalf), and *īmās* (perception, discernment, observation); *khawf* (fear), *khishyah* (apprehension), and *inābah* (return, repentance); *faṣāḥah* (eloquence, skilled verbal expression) and *lahn* (grammatical incorrectness); *alan* (public disclosure), *istikhrāj* (extraction, deduction) and *haṣḥaṣ* (to become clear, plain, manifest), all of which relate in one way or another to speech and to information presented to a listener or reader.

21) *The concept of hudā*

The root consisting of the letters *h-d-y* denotes two basic meanings. The first is that of guidance along a path, with the active participle, *hādīn*, referring to someone who goes ahead of others to show them the way. As such, the nouns *hidāyah* and *hudā*, meaning right guidance, denote the opposite of error. The second basic meaning of this root is that of a bestowal of grace, that is, a gift (*hadiyyah*). The term *al-hādī* is one of the names of God (*Sūrah al-Hajj*, 22:54), who grants sight to His servants and shows them the way of knowledge so that they can perceive and acknowledge His lordship and divinity.

The term *hudā* with its various general and specific meanings occurs in 316 places in the Qur'an. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:5 speaks of those "who follow the guidance (*hudan*) [which comes] from their Sustainer." Similarly in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:120, God instructs the Prophet, "Say: 'Behold, God's guidance is the only true guidance'" (*inna hudā Allāhi huwa al-hudā*). For a contrast between *hudā* and *ḍalālah*, guidance and error, see *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:16. The verbal form is found in *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:52, where God tells the Prophet, "you will guide [others] onto a straight path" (*wa innaka la tahdī ilā ṣirāṭin mustaqīm*). (See also *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:38, *Sūrah Tāhā*, 20:50, *Sūrah al-A'lā*, 87:3, *Sūrah al-Jinn*, 72:2, and *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:35, and *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:56). In *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:41, another

Qur'anic Terminology

form of the verb occurs (*tahtadī, yahtadūn*), meaning 'to allow oneself to be guided.'

All of the aforementioned uses of the derivatives of *h-d-y* thus revolve around the notions of guidance and inspiration. As used in the Qur'an, the word *hidāyah* refers to the act of granting understanding and success, steering others away from the path of error and onto the path of faith which leads in turn to goodness and blessedness. When ascribed to human beings, the word describes the acts of supplication and of showing others the right path. Some apply the word *hidāyah* whether one's efforts to guide others are successful or not, while others apply it only if one's efforts succeed, since *hidāyah* is contrasted with *ḍalālah*, or error.

As for the guidance ascribed to God, it may take one of four different forms. The first form is that which is granted to every morally accountable human being in the form of insight and the ability to reason (see *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:50 and *Sūrah al-Balad*, 90:10). The second is the type of guidance given to the prophets through a special divine call, the revelation of the Qur'an, and the like (see *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:73 and *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:90). The third type is the success granted specially to those who have allowed themselves to be guided, and which is denied to those who reject faith. And the fourth is guidance to Paradise in the afterlife.

22) *The concept of ittibā'*

The root *t-b-'* denotes the act of following or succeeding. Derivatives of this root occur 175 times in the Qur'an, and in the following eight senses: (1) Accompanying. In *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:66, Moses asks a figure of great knowledge and wisdom if he can "follow" him in the sense of traveling with him (*hal attabi'uka*). (2) Emulating. In *Sūrah Yāsīn*, 36:21 we read the admonishment to emulate (*ittabi'ū*) "those who ask no reward of you" (*ittabi'ū man lā yas'alukum ajran*). (3) Adhering to. People are urged in *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:123, to adhere to (*ittabi'*) "the creed of Abraham." (See also *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:48). (4) Following a path. *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:115 speaks of someone who "follows (*yattabi'*) a path other than that of the believers (*ghayra sabīli al-mu'minīn*). (See also *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:153). (5) Engaging in. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:102

speaks disapprovingly of those who engage in (*ittaba[‘]ū*) certain evil practices that were prevalent during the days of Solomon, (*Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:157). (6) Adopting, turning toward. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:145, God speaks to the Prophet about how the Jews and Christians have not adopted (*tabi[‘]ū*) his direction of prayer. (7) Obedience. *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:83, God tells the believers that were it not for His grace and generosity, most of them would have obeyed (*laittaba[‘]tum*) Satan. (8) Seeking. We read in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:162 about the one who “strives after God’s goodly acceptance” (*man ittaba[‘]a riḍwān Allāh*). (See also *al-Mā’idah*, 5:16). (9) Chasing. Moses is warned in *Sūrah al-Shu‘arā’*, 26:52 to move quickly with the Children of Israel as they flee Egypt, since they will be pursued (*innakum muttaba[‘]ūn*).

23) *The concept of shūrā*

The root *sh-w-r* denotes two basic meanings: (1) to reveal or express something, and (2) to take something. One might say, for example, *shurtu al-dābbah*, “I took the pack animal,” while the noun *mishwār* refers to the path along which an animal is taken. The same verb might also be used in association with honey, as in *shāra al-‘asal*, or *ashāra al-‘asal* (he took the honey) where the beehive from which the honey is taken is referred to as a *mishār*. Another verbal derivation is the verb *shāwara*, meaning to consult with someone (see *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:159). The meaning is derived from the verb *shāra* in the sense of taking because, when one consults with another person, one seeks to “take” his or her point of view on something. Similarly, the verb *istashāralyastashīru* means to seek someone’s counsel (*shūrā*), while the noun *shūrā* can refer to the act of mutual consultation (see *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:38). The noun *mustashīr* may also refer to a camel that can distinguish a pregnant she-camel from one that is not pregnant. The verb *ashāralyushīru* can mean to point or gesture with one’s hand, as in *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:29.

24) *The concept of fiṭrah*

The trilateral root *f-ṭ-r* denotes several different notions. These include (1) opening and making visible, (2) creation and newness, (3) breaking fast, (4) granting something a particular nature or constitution.

Qur'anic Terminology

Derivatives of this root occur 20 times in the Qur'an: (1) Creation. This sense is found in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:101, which uses the active participle to refer to God as the “Originator of the heavens and the earth” (*fāṭir al-samāwāti wal-ard*). (2) Fault or weakness. This sense is found in *Sūrah al-Mulk*, 67:3, which tells us that we will see no “flaw” (*fuṭūr*) in God's creation. (3) Innate constitution or temperament. *Sūrah al-Rūm*, 30:30 refers to “the natural disposition which God has instilled into people” (*fiṭrat Allāhi allatī faṭar al-nāsa ʿalayhā*). (4) Splitting or cleaving lengthwise. *Sūrah al-Infīṭār*, 82:1 speaks of the Day of Resurrection as the time when the sky will be “cleft asunder” (*idhā al-samāʿu infāṭarat*).

25) The concept of ḥayy

The root consisting of the letter ḥ-y-y has two primary meanings. The first is that of being alive, while the other is that of shame, timidity, or bashfulness. In relation to the former sense of the root we have the derivatives *ḥayāh* (life) and *ḥayawān* (animal, living creature, derived from *ḥayayān*). Rain has sometimes been referred to as *ḥayy* due its association with life on Earth and its renewal and sustenance. A clear path is sometimes referred to as *ṭarīq ḥayy*, while the verb *ḥayiyal/yahyā* is synonymous with *istabānalyastabīnu*, meaning to become plain or evident, or to see, perceive, notice.

The words *ḥayy/ahyāʿ* occur 35 times in the Qur'an, *ihyāʿ* (bringing to life) 50 times, and *istahyā* four times. It occurs once in the sense of living one's life (*Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:97), 44 times in the sense of greeting (*taḥiyyah*), four times in the sense of keeping someone alive in order to make a prisoner of war (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:49; *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:127 and 141; *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:6), and twice in the sense of being alive (*ḥayy*) (see *Sūrah Yāsīn*, 36:70 and *Sūrah al-Anʿām*, 6:122).

26) The concept of zann

The root consisting of the letters z-n-n actually denotes two opposite meanings: certainty and doubt. The verb *zanna/yazunnu* can be synonymous with the verb *ayqanalyūqinu*, to be certain. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:249, for example, refers to certain men “who knew with certainty (*alladhīna yazunnūn*) that they were destined to meet God

(*annahum mulāqū Allāh*).” This use of the verb is frequent in the Qur’an. On the other hand, this same verb can mean to doubt or suspect. From this sense of the root we derive the word *ẓinnah*, meaning suspicion, misgiving, or accusation. As for the verbal noun *ẓann*, it can refer either to knowledge, or to vacillation between two unconfirmed beliefs.

The term *ẓann* occurs 69 times in the Qur’an, and in four different senses: (1) Cautious certainty with a consciousness of God. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:230 states that a formerly married man and woman may return to each other “provided that both of them think (*ẓannā*) that they will be able to keep within the bounds set by God.” (2) Doubt or unconfirmed belief. *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:32 quotes skeptics saying about the Last Hour: “we think it is no more than an empty guess (*in nazunnu illā ẓannan*), and [so] we are by no means convinced! (*wa mā naḥnu bi mustayqinīn*).” (A similar sense is found in *Sūrah al-Inshiqāq*, 84:14). (3) Paranoid or vain thoughts. *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:10 addresses those who were near death on the battlefield, saying, “conflicting thoughts about God passed through your minds” (*tazunnūna billāhi al-ẓunūna*). The words *ẓann* and *shakk* are related in meaning. However, the word *ẓann* implies that one possibility is more strongly weighted than the other. A person may have reason to believe that a certain thing is true, though he also holds out the possibility that the opposite is true. His belief (*ẓann*) that something is a possibility (rather than a certainty) distinguishes it from knowledge (*‘ilm*), while the existence of evidence supporting a given possibility distinguishes it from mere suspicion (*shakk*).

27) *The concept of ḥasab*

The root *ḥ-s-b* relates to four basic denotations: (1) counting or computation (*ḥasaba/yaḥsubu*), (2) considering, regarding, or supposing (*ḥasaba/yaḥsibu* or *ḥasiba/yaḥsibu*), (3) a small pillow referred to as a *ḥusbānah* (plural, *ḥusbān*), and (4) a disease that causes whitening of the skin and damage to the hair, the person afflicted with it being referred to as *aḥsab*.

Derivatives of this root occur 110 times in the Qur’an, and in five different senses: (1) Counting or computing. *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:5 uses

Qur'anic Terminology

the word *ḥisāb* in relation to the measurement of time. (2) Holding accountable. This sense of the word is found in *Sūrah al-Ṭalāq*, 65:8, which refers to a severe accounting (*ḥisāban shadīdan*) to which God subjected those who despised His commands. (3) Sufficiency. In *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:129, God instructs the Prophet to say to those who refuse to believe, “God sufficeth me. There is no god but He. In Him have I placed my trust.” (4) One who takes account of human beings’ actions. The word *ḥasīb* is used in this sense in relation to God in *Sūrah al-Nisā’*, 4:6. (5) Thinking, supposing. The verb *ḥasaba* is used in this sense in *Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt*, 29:2 and *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:142.

We are told in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:37 that when Zachariah visited Mary in the sanctuary and found her with food whose source he could not identify, he asked her where she had gotten it, and she replied, “It is from God; behold, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (*bi ḡhayri ḥisāb*).” The phrase *bi ḡhayri ḥisāb*, translated here as “beyond all reckoning,” can be understood to mean that what God grants, He grants without its being deserved. It can also be understood to mean that what God gives, He does not take back again. Thirdly, it can mean that God gives more than human beings could ever measure.

28) *The concept of jahl*

The root *j-h-l* denotes two primary meanings. The first is opposed to knowledge, while the second is opposed to stillness. Used in the first sense, we derive the noun *majhal* (plural, *majābil*) meaning an unknown, unexplored region or territory, and *mijhalah*, which refers to something that leads to ignorance. The verbal noun is *jahl* or *jahālah*; the verb *tajāhala* means to feign ignorance or lack of knowledge, while the active participle, meaning ‘ignorant’, is *jāhil* or *jahūl* (plural, *juhḡāl* or *juhālā’*). A she-camel with no identifying markings is referred to as a *nāqah majhūlah*; the verb *istajhala* means to regard someone as ignorant or uneducated.

Used in the second sense, we derive the noun *mijhal*, which refers to the poker used to stir embers. Similarly, the statement, *istajhalat al-rīḡu al-ḡhuṣna* means that the wind stirred a branch as it blew over it.

Derivatives of the root *j-h-l* occur 24 in the Qur'an. In all these cases they relate in one way or another to a lack of knowledge. In many cases the lack of knowledge is viewed as willful and blameworthy (cf. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:67), but in some cases it is not. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:273, the word *jāhil* is used simply to mean “unaware,” without any criticism implied. *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:17 states that God accepts the repentance of those who do wrong “out of ignorance” (*bi jahālah*). *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:154 refers to “pagan ignorance” (*jāhiliyyah*), while *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:64 records words addressed by the Prophet to unbelievers as “O you who are unaware [of right and wrong]” (*ayyuhā al-jāhilūn*).

29) *The concept of bāṭil*

The root consisting of the letters *b-t-l* denotes something's departure or the brevity of its stay or duration (the verb being *baṭala/yabṭulu*, verbal noun *buṭull/buṭūl*). It is frequently used in opposition to the concept of truth. The active participle, *bāṭil* (plural, *abāṭil*), is used to refer to that which is false, null, void, or invalid.

Derivatives of this root occur in approximately 36 places in the Qur'an, and in three different senses: (1) Falsehood. The word *bāṭil* is used in this sense in *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:42. See also *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:81, *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:62, which describes all that people worship other than God as “falsehood” (*al-bāṭil*) and *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:42, where people are commanded not to “overlay the truth with falsehood” (*lā talbisū al-ḥaqqā bil-bāṭil*). (2) Nullification. People are exhorted in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:264 not to “nullify” their good works (*lā tubṭilū ṣadaqātikum*) by reminding others of how good they have been to them. (3) Injustice. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:188 urges people not to consume each other's resources “wrongfully” (*bil-bāṭil*).

30) *The concept of hawā*

The trilateral root *h-w-y* denotes the idea of falling, and of emptiness. From this root we derive the noun *hawā'*, which refers to air due to its apparent emptiness. The verb *hawā/yahwī* means to fall (verbal noun, *hawā*), from which we derive the noun *hawiyah*, meaning pit or chasm (something into which one falls). With the definite article, this noun

Qur'anic Terminology

also refers to Hell (*al-hāwiyah*, the pit into which the denier of truth falls). Another sense of the noun *hawā* is caprice, craving, and passion, which are viewed as being devoid of all benefit. Similarly, the word *hawā* can refer to romantic love in both its positive and negative aspects.

Derivatives of this root occur in 38 places in the Qur'an, and in the following senses: (1) To fall. *Sūrah al-Najm*, 53:1 refers to God's message as it "comes down" (*idhā hawā*). Using the verb in a more metaphorical sense, *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:37 contains Abraham's prayer that people's hearts would "incline" (*tahwī*) toward the inhabitants of the valley where he has settled. (See also *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:31). (2) Craving. *Sūrah al-Nāzi'āt*, 79:40 uses the term *hawā* to refer to "base desires." (3) To perish. *Sūrah Ṭāhā*, 20:81 employs the verb *hawā* in this sense, telling us that he who brings divine condemnation upon himself "has thrown himself into utter ruin" (*fa qad hawā*). (4) Empty space. *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 14:43 describes the hearts of evildoers as "an abysmal void" (*af'idatuhum hawā*), so terrified and confounded are they from what they witness on the Day of Judgment (cf. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:10). (5) Hell. This sense of the word is found in *Sūrah al-Qāri'ah*, 101:9, which, in an indirect reference to Hell, speaks of the "abyss" (*hāwiyah*) in which sinners find themselves. (6) Whim, caprices. For this use, see *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:145, where the plural *ahwā'ahum* is translated by Asad as "errant views" (cf. *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:48).

THIRD: *Wahy*-RELATED TERMS IN THE QUR'AN

1) *The concept of Wahy*

The root consisting of the letter *w-ḥ-y* refers to the act of communicating knowledge of some kind in a rapid, subtle manner. The noun *wahy* refers to a signal, sign or rapidly delivered message. As for the noun *wahā*, it refers to an inspiration or quiet voice. The verb *tawahḥā* means to hurry or act quickly, while the adjective *wahīyyun* means hurried or hasty. As for the verb *istawḥā*, it means to call someone and send him out and to seek understanding, insight, or understanding from him. Similarly, the verb *wahḥā* means to hasten someone or something.

Derivatives of the root *w-ḥ-y* occur 79 times in the Qur'an in five different senses: (1) Sign, signal or gesture. *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:11 tells us how Zachariah came out of the temple and gestured to his people (*awḥā ilayhim*) to praise God morning and evening. (2) To suggest thoughts, whisper. *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:112 describes evil forces that “whisper unto one another” in attempts to deceive and mislead. (3) Inspiration. In *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:7 God declares, “We inspired [thus] the mother of Moses (*awḥāynā ilā ummi mūsā*): Suckle him [for a time], and then, when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river.” (4) God-given instincts. *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:68 tells us how God has “inspired the bees” (*awḥā...ilā al-naḥl*) to build dwellings for themselves in mountains and trees. (5) Divine revelation. The verb *awḥā* is also used to describe God's communication of His revelation to the prophets, as in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:163, where God states, “We inspired (*awḥaynā ilā*) Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants.” The noun *waḥy* is also found in *Sūrah al-Shūrā*, 42:51 in the sense of “sudden inspiration.” The process of *waḥy* – sudden inspiration, or revelation – occurs by seeing a messenger from God and hearing what he says, such as when Gabriel delivered God's messages to the Prophet. In other cases, however, one may hear a message without seeing a messenger, such as when Moses heard God speak, yet without seeing Him. The Qur'an warns against claiming falsely to have received divine inspiration; hence we read in *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:93, “And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about God, or says, ‘This has been revealed unto me’ (*qāla ūḥiya ilayya*), the while nothing has been revealed to him (*wa lam yūḥa ilayhi shay'un*)?” The verb *awḥā* can also refer to God's inspiration of people to do good works. In speaking of Isaac and his son, God states in *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'*, 21:73, “We inspired them [with a will] to do good works” (*awḥāynā ilayhim fī'l al-khayrāt*). God inspired Jesus' disciples to believe in him (*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:111). This same verb, however, can be used to refer to evil insinuations (see *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:121). The Arabic word most often used to refer to inspiration given to people other than the prophets is *ilhām*, while the inspiration granted to other creatures – the bees, for example – is *taskhīr*.

Qur'anic Terminology

2) *Ilhām*

The trilateral root *l-h-m* denotes the act of devouring, consuming, or swallowing up. Hence, the verb *alhamā/yulhimu* in the sense of inspiration is a metaphorical expression derived from the image of 'feeding' someone something that is good. It can describe the act of introducing a good thought into someone's mind with a view to carrying it out in action, or the thought of something evil with a view to avoiding it. The only derivative of the root *l-h-m* found in the Qur'an is the verb *alhamā* in *Sūrah al-Shams*, 91:7-8, which tells us that God has 'enlightened' the soul concerning both its vices and its virtues. In other words, He has shown the individual what he or she should pursue by way of goodness and obedience to God, and what to avoid by way of evil and disobedience. Every believer has been a recipient of *ilhām* to some degree by the mere fact of having been guided to faith without his or her having sought out evidence or proof. *Ilhām* thus consists in the knowledge that inspires an individual to undertake whatever action is necessary to achieve the good and provide guidance for others in society.

The process of *ilhām* involves the introduction of ideas into the mind and heart such that the individual immediately grasps their meaning and significance. If we say someone is *mulham*, 'inspired', we mean that he or she comes to know things by virtue of his or her astuteness and intelligence without necessarily having witnessed them directly. *Waḥy* is specific to prophets, while *ilhām* is more general. And whereas *waḥy* takes place through the mediation of an angel or direct communication from God, *ilhām* takes place through the introduction of a thought into one's mind or heart in such a way that the individual realizes the truth without having exerted a special effort to investigate the matter at hand or research evidence for and against it. As for *i'lām*, meaning notification, it is more general than *ilhām*, since it consists simply in announcing or conveying information to someone about something.

3) *Lutf*

The root *l-ṭ-f* denotes gentleness, daintiness, and delicacy. When preceded by the definite article, the adjectival form *laṭīf* is one of the 99 names of God (cf. *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:103; *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*, 22:63), and

translates roughly as “unfathomable” (Muhammad Asad) or “above all comprehension” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali). The divine name *Al-Laṭīf* often appears in conjunction with *Al-Khabīr* which, as we saw earlier, denotes God’s knowledge of all things. *Sūrah al-Mulk*, 67:14 reads, *alā ya‘lamu man khalaqa wa huwa Al-Laṭīf Al-Khabīr?* This is rendered by Asad as, “How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yea, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom] (*wa huwa Al-Laṭīfu*), Aware (*Al-Khabīr*)!”, and by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as, “Should He not know – He that created? and He is the One that understands the finest mysteries (*wa huwa Al-Laṭīfu*) [and] is well-acquainted [with them] (*Al-Khabīr*).”

As applied to God, the word *laṭīf* describes God’s goodness to His servants, which is demonstrated by His gracious, gentle provision of the blessings they need. It also points to God’s nature as the One who knows that which is concealed, the intricacies of things. When applied to speech, *laṭīf* means mysterious, vague and subtle, and when one says *talatṭaftu bi fulān*, it means, “I gained access to his secrets through subterfuge.”

Derivatives of the root *l-ṭ-f* occur eight times in the Qur’an. In *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:100, Joseph states: *rabbī laṭīfun li mā yashā’u*. This is translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as, “Verily my Lord understands best the mysteries of all that He plans to do,” and by Muhammad Asad as, “Verily, my Sustainer is unfathomable in [the way He brings about] whatever He wills.” Both translations bring out the element of mystery and “beyondness” conveyed by the term *laṭīf* when applied to the Divine. The word *laṭīf* describes someone who operates so covertly and discreetly that his actions escape others’ notice. This sense of the root *l-ṭ-f* is found in *Sūrah al-Kahf*, 18:19, where we are told that one of the “Companions of the Cave” is sent out to bring food from the nearby town with instructions that he should “behave with great care (*wal-yatalatṭaf*) and by no means make anyone aware of you (*wa lā yush‘iranna bikum aḥadan*).” Similarly, the plural *laṭā’if* refers to realities that are too subtle to be perceived by the senses.

4) *Risālah*

The root *r-s-l* denotes emanation and extension. The noun *rasl* refers to

Qur'anic Terminology

a leisurely gait, while the verb *tarassal* means to proceed leisurely, take one's time. The noun *rasl* can also refer to sheep that have been sent out to pasture. The plural of *rasl* is sometimes used as an adverb, as in *jā' al-qawmu arsālan*, "the people came in one group after another." The noun *rasūl* (plural, *rusul*) refers to a messenger or apostle, while winds are sometimes referred to as *mursalāt*, "sent ones." As for the verb *rasala* (verbal noun, *tarsīl*), it is more or less synonymous with the verb *rattala* (*tartīla*), meaning to chant or sing.

Derivatives of the root *r-s-l* occur 513 times in the Qur'an, and in the following senses: (1) To let loose upon. This sense is found in *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:83, where God declares that He has "let loose all [manner of] satanic forces upon those who deny the truth" (*arsalnā al-shayātīna 'alā al-kāfirīn*). (See also *Sūrah al-Qamar*, 54:27). (2) To send a person out. In *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:79 God tells the Prophet, "We have sent you as an apostle unto all mankind" (*arsalnāka lil-nāsi rasūlan*). Similarly, we read in *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:53 that in the time of Moses, Pharaoh "sent heralds unto all cities" (*arsala fir'awnu fī al-madā'ini ḥāshirīn*). Used in the sense of release from bondage, the word *arsala* is found in *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:17, where Moses tells Pharaoh to "Let the children of Israel go with us!" (*arsil ma'anā banī isrā'īl*). (3) One who releases from affliction (*mursil*). See *Sūrah Fāṭir*, 35:2. (7) To provide. This sense is found in *Sūrah Nūḥ*, 71:11, where we are told that God "will send rain to you in abundance" (*yursili al-samā'a 'alaykum midrāran* – more literally, will release the sky upon you).

The original meaning of the root *r-s-l* is that of gradual emission or sending out, as in reference, for example, to camels sent out little by little. A similar sense is conveyed by the word *rasūl*, a messenger who is sent out. (In *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:128, the word *rasūl* is used to refer to a single person, while in *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, 26:16 it is used to refer to more than one). The plural form *rusul* is used to refer both to God's prophets (*Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:144) and to His angels (see *Sūrah Hūd*, 11:81).

5) *Naba'*

The root *n-b-'* denotes movement from place to place. The noun *naba'* refers to a report or piece of news that has been brought from one place

to another, the active participle *munbi'* refers to a person who brings the report, and a *nabī*, or prophet (plural, *anbiyā'*) is someone who brings a report on God's authority. The verb *tanabba'a* can mean either to claim to be a prophet, or to prophesy or predict something, while the verbal noun is *nubū'ah* or *tanabbu'*. Another sense conveyed by this root is that of being raised, elevated or prominent. When attributed to a sound or voice, the verb *naba'a* denotes softness, and means to make a low sound. Hence, the noun *naba'* refers to a report that is critical in its importance, that is delivered discreetly, or in a low voice, and that is devoid of all untruth. In order for a *khabar* to be described as a *naba'*, it must display these three qualities.

The root *n-b-*, derivatives of which appear in 160 places in the Qur'an, occurs as a verb in past and present tenses, and as a noun, plural and singular. All of its occurrences are consistent with the root's lexical definition as a true report. These include, for example, *Sūrah al-Taḥrīm*, 66:3 (*nabba'at bihi*, "she divulged it"), *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:15 (*a'ūnabbi'ukum*, "Shall I tell you...?"), and *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:15 (*la tunabbi'annahum bi amrihim hādhā*, "Of a surety you shall [one day] tell them the truth of this their affair").

6) *Nubuwwah*

The word *nubuwwah* is derived from the root *n-b-* discussed above. *Nubuwwah*, or prophethood, is a kind of ambassadorship among thoughtful souls for the purpose of enlightening them concerning both their present life and the life to come. A prophet (*nabī*) is someone who conveys a message that brings peace to those with astute, perceptive minds. The prophet occupies a rank below that of an apostle or messenger (*rasūl*). However, the role of prophet is one for which the individual is chosen, not one he acquires by dint of his own efforts, since the knowledge this station brings is divine in nature and is not dependent on human knowledge in any way.

7) *Īmān*

The root *a-m-n* denotes two basic meanings: (1) faithfulness and honesty that bring inward peace, the verb being *amina/ya'manu*, and the verbal noun being *amānah*, meaning integrity; and (2) affirmation of

Qur'anic Terminology

someone else's truthfulness, the verb being *āmana/ya'minu*, and the verbal noun being *īmān*, or faith (see *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:5). One of the names of God is *Al-Mu'min*, "the Preserver of Faith" (*Sūrah al-Ḥashr*, 59:23) who, by preserving people's faith, protects them from chastisement in the life to come. As for *īmān*, or faith, it refers to confidence in God demonstrated through reverence and submission to God's Law.

Derivatives of the root *a-m-n* occur 875 times in the Qur'an, and in the following senses: (1) Expression of faith in public, and disbelief in private. This use of the root is found in *Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn*, 63:3, which speaks of certain individuals who "[profess that] they have attained to faith (*āmanū*), whereas [inwardly] they deny the Truth (*thumma kafarū*)." (2) Affirming the truth of Islam both in public and in private. *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*, 98:7 praises those "who have attained to faith, and do righteous deeds" (*alladhīna āmanū wa 'amilū al-ṣāliḥāt*). (Cf. *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:62). (3) Faith in the one God combined with polytheism (*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:106). (4) Affirming the truth of what some other human being says (*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:17). (5) Believing in falsehoods that can provide no salvation (*Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:51).

Īmān whose object is God entails an affirmation of divine truth which stands opposed to *kufr*, or denial of this truth (cf. *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:106). When its object is God, the verb *āmana/ya'minu* is generally followed by the preposition *bi* in parallel with its opposite, *kafara/yakfuru*, which takes the same preposition. By affirming God's existence and oneness, the believer (*mu'min*) renders himself or herself secure (*fī ma'man*) from divine chastisement. When the object of the verb *āmana/ya'minu* in the Qur'an is something or someone other than God, it is generally followed by the preposition *li*, which conveys the sense of not only affirmation, but following and emulation. *Īmān* customarily refers to belief that goes beyond one's knowledge (which is also true of God-consciousness, or *taqwā*). *Īmān* involves confession with the lips, belief in the heart, and action (cf. *Sūrah al-Naḥl*, 16:106 and *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:143). The greater the knowledge that accompanies faith (*īmān*), the more action one will engage in, and the more the action, the greater the certainty. Certainty thus waxes with obedience to the All-Merciful One, and wanes with obedience to evil or

destructive impulses. One can only attain to *īmān* by receiving the light of knowledge from the lantern of prophethood, stripping oneself of base desires and caprices, and ceasing to acquiesce in the will of others. Believers' knowledge is derived from the flame of divine revelation, while their will is devoted to God and the life to come. Firmly established in knowledge and right action, such individuals will be among the leaders who guide others based on God's commands, and successors to His Apostle in guiding his community worldwide.

8) *Ghayb*

The root *gh-y-b* denotes the act of vanishing from sight. It is used of the sun when it sets, for example. We say *ghābat al-shams*, that is, "the sun vanished from sight." The verbal noun *ghayb* denotes doubt or uncertainty, as well as low or depressed parts of the earth. Similarly, the noun *ghayābah* refers to the bottom of a well, pit, etc.

Derivatives of this root occur 60 times in the Qur'an in the following senses: (1) "That which is beyond the reach of human perception," including: the Day of Judgment (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:3) and death (*Sūrah Saba'*, 34:14). God is identified as the One who knows "all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception (*al-ghayb*) as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind (*wa al-shahādah*)" (*Sūrah al-Ra'd*, 13:9 and *Sūrah al-Sajdah*, 32:6)." See also *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:188, *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 6:59, *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:78, and *Sūrah al-Jinn*, 72:26. (2) The "dark depths" of a well (*ghayābati al-jubbi*, *Sūrah Yūsuf* 12:10). (3) Confidentialities, the privacy of one's home life. *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:34 speaks of righteous women who act as guardians of "what Allah would have them guard" (*lil-ghaybi bi mā ḥafīza Allāhu*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali)." In other words, they behave in their husbands' absence as they would behave in his presence. (4) Backbiting (which involves saying hurtful things about people in their absence). See *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*, 49:13. (11) Knowledge of the unseen (i.e., divine revelation received). We are told in *Sūrah al-Takwīr*, 81:24 that God does not "withhold grudgingly a knowledge of the Unseen" (*wa mā huwa 'alā al-ghaybi bi ḍanīn*).

Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:3 states that the God-conscious are those "who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of

Qur'anic Terminology

human perception” (*alladhīna yu'minūna bil-ghayb*) and which, therefore, can only be known through divine revelation. This verse has been interpreted by some to mean that they believe whether they are present to you, or absent (in other words, they are not hypocrites). This relates to *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:94, which speaks of pilgrims to Makkah being tempted by the game animals available to them (hunting being prohibited during the pilgrimage) such “that God might mark out those who fear Him although He is beyond the reach of human perception” (*li ya'lama Allāhu man yakhāfuhu bil-ghayb*, Asad), or, as rendered by Yusuf Ali, “that He may test who fears Him unseen” (*man yakhāfuhu bil-ghayb*).

9) Qaḍā'

The root *q-ḍ-y* relates to the action of mastering or completing something; bringing it to pass, carrying out, executing, and ruling or judging concerning the law. The verbal noun *qaḍā'* can refer variously to a legal ruling or judgment, or the judiciary. From this root we derive the active participle *qāḍī*, meaning judge or magistrate, who issues rulings and implements them. The related noun *qaḍīyyah*, meaning lawsuit, case, cause or legal question, points to a process of settling, resolution, and clarification, while the feminine active participle, *qāḍīyyah*, is used to refer to death (which finalizes and concludes a life).

Derivatives of the root *q-ḍ-y* occur 63 times in the Qur'an in the following senses: (1) To command, instruct, enjoin as a duty. *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:23 tells us that God “has ordained (*qaḍā*) that you shall worship none but Him” (*allā ta'budū illā iyyāhu*). (2) To decree or make known. This meaning of the verb *qaḍā* is found in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:4 and *Sūrah al-Ḥijr*, 15:66. (3) To finish or conclude. In *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 4:103 God tells believers, “when you have finished your prayer (*idhā qaḍaytum al-ṣalāh*), remember God...” (*fadhkurū Allāh*). (4) To bring about, accomplish. This sense of the verb *qaḍā* is found in *Sūrah al-Anfāl*, 8:42. (5) To kill, put an end to. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:15 tells us that Moses struck a man with his fist and thus “brought about his end” (*qaḍā 'alayhi*). (6) To settle, decide. *Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:41 tells us that a certain matter “has been decided [by God]” (*quḍiya al-amru*). Of Jesus' miraculous conception, *Sūrah Maryam*, 19:21 tells us that “it

was a thing decreed [by God]” (*kāna amran maqḍiyyan*), while, speaking of how each soul must come within sight of the hell fire, 19:71 describes this reality as “a decree that must be fulfilled” (*kāna... ḥatman maqḍiyyan*). (7) To fulfill a term of service. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:29 tells us of when “Moses had fulfilled his term” of service (*qaḍā mūsā al-ajala*) in Midian. (8) To rule, pass judgment on. Describing the Day of Judgment with the use of the past tense (for rhetorical emphasis), *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:69 tells that when people appear before God, “judgment will be passed on them all in justice” (*quḍiya baynahum bi al-ḥaqq*). (See also *Sūrah al-Zumar*, 39:75, and *Sūrah al-Naml*, 27:78). (9) To form or create. The verb *qaḍā* is used in this sense in relation to God’s creation of the heavens in *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*, 41:12.

The divine action indicated by the word *qaḍā’* is more concrete than that referred to as *qadar*. *Qadar* has to do with divine foreknowledge or predetermination, while *qaḍā’* has to do with the fulfillment, in real time, of such divine knowledge or predetermination.