

Tafakkur: A Forgotten Talim of the Qur'an.

By: Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany al-Waleed

PhD (USA), NDI, Shahadat al Aalamiyah (Al Hawzah al 'ilmiyyah, Najaf, Iraq), M.A, LLM (Shariah)

Musheer: Fed. Shariat Court of Pakistan

Member: Ulama Council of Pakistan

Chairman: The Guardian Pakistan

The Writer is an Attorney at Law & a Religious Scholar

Website: www.durrenajaf.com

Academia: <https://durrenajaf.academia.edu/QaziBorhany>

Contact for spiritual help: najafspiritualcenter@gmail.com

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This article is dedicated to my ancestors, the great Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Du'at of "Al Waleed" dynasty of Yemen, who spent their lives to communicate Talim of the Qur'an as explained by the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Abstract: *This article revisits a central yet frequently neglected Qur'an mandate: the divine purpose is not fulfilled by Tilawah (recitation) or Hifz (memorisation) alone, but by understanding, reflective engagement - Tafakkur/Tadabbur, and lived implementation. Drawing upon Qur'ani exhortations, Nabawi Hidayah, and the Talim of Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) and the Aimmah of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), the study argues that ritual proficiency without moral and intellectual discernment may coexist with grave deviation. Historical illustrations-such as Qur'an-memorisers among the Khawarij and perpetrators of atrocities in the Umayyad era-are employed to demonstrate that outward religiosity is not a reliable barometer of Taqwa. The paper extends this critique to contemporary realities where extremist ideologies may emerge even from environments of formal religious learning when the Qur'an is reduced to a ceremonial text rather than a transformative lifelong constitution. The conceptual distinction between Tadabbur and Tafakkur is clarified: Tadabbur connotes consideration of consequences and penetration beyond surface meaning Zahir to Ba'in, whereas Tafakkur is purposive, disciplined thinking-especially over divine signs in the cosmos and within the self. Qur'ani passages that explicitly call believers to reflect are highlighted, presenting reflection as a means of unlocking "hearts" that are otherwise sealed. The Nabawi tradition elevating an hour of meaningful reflection above extended supererogatory Ibadah is discussed as a qualitative measure: Ibadah becomes alive through cognition - Marifah and intentionality. The article further frames the human being as Aalam Saghir (microcosm) and the universe as Aalam Kabir (macrocosm), arguing that reflection over creation leads to recognition of the Creator while guarding against speculative excess about the Divine Essence. Finally, the article critiques cultic religiosity and clerical exploitation that suppress questioning and dialogue, portraying such patterns as antithetical to Qur'ani education. It concludes that Muslim renewal depends upon restoring an organised culture of Qur'an understanding, reflective inquiry, ethical reform, and communal accountability in harmony with the Nabawi model.*

Keywords: *Tafakkur; Tadabbur; Tilawat; Hifdh al-Qur'an; Aql; Marifah; Ahl al-Bayt; Sunnatullah; moral formation; extremism; cultic religiosity; Qur'ani education.*

1). Introduction of Tafakkur:

This article communicates the neglected message of the Qur'an, Rasulullah(S), Amir al-Mumineen, Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), and the Aimmat of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) that the mere Tilawat (recitation) of the Qur'an or Hifdh (to learn by heart) is not the ultimate aim of this divine message. Sayyiduna Al Qadi al-Nauman (ra) has mentioned in his celebrated work, "Sharh al-Akhhb'ar" that Rasulullah (S) described a cult of terrorists who would observe Taqwa but would be out of the fold of Islam. He says: [1]

"In my Ummah a cult of Khawarij will be separated from my religion just like an arrow shot from the bow. Practically, they would offer Fard Salaat, along with Tahajjud and they would also remember the Qur'an by heart."

Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muljim (L) who was hired to assassinate Amir al-Mumineen Ali al-Murtada (as) by the Shami Empire was from the cult of Khawarij and was even a Hafidh al-Qur'an. Shimar Zil-Jawshan (L), the brutal killer of Moula Abi Abdillah al-Husayn Ibn Ali (as) was Hafidh al-Qur'an as well besides having performed sixteen Haj. Thirty five thousand Hafidh al-Qur'an were also present in the force of Yazid Maloon who persecuted Moula Abi Abdillah al-Husayn ibn Ali (as) at Karbala al-Mualla, Iraq. Hence, the Talim of Madaris (singular: Madrasah) and Hifdh al-Qur'an is not a barometer to ascertain an upright Muslim. Several examples of Ulama al-Su (immoral-clerics) is on record who completed their Talim from Madaris but due to their malicious character and extremist ideology, millions of Muslims have gone astray. An example is the destruction in Sham, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan by militant Muslim ISIL consisting of Hafidh al-Qur'an, whose suicide bombing and terrorist operations have afflicted the entire world.

It is necessary that first one should understand the message of the Qur'an from the authentic sources and then carry out Tafakkur on its Talim. Then finally comes its implementation in daily life; alas, Muslims have forgotten to do this. Regrettably, Muslims have made Qur'an a book that is to be read for the reward for their deceased, or for Fa'al or some other rituals. Muslims start their work from the Tilawat of the Qur'an but many a time go against its Talim in their practical life. In the Qur'an all the Ayaat which carry warnings of severe punishment for the Bani Israel are perfectly applicable for the Muslims of today because earlier the Bani Israel who were bestowed divine scriptures did not follow it so they became liable for punishment and Lanah (curse). Today, Muslims are following in the footsteps of the Bani Israel in corruption only (not in education and evolution) and neglecting the injunctions of the Qur'an. Their practices are repugnant to the injunctions of the Qur'an and their fate shall be like the Bani Israel, as per the "Sunnatullah" which means: The Law and Policy of Allah which is immutable or unchangeable.

The Qur'an educates:[2]

i). [This is] the established way of Allah which has occurred before. And never will you find in the policy of Allah any change.

ii). [This is] the established Law of Allah with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the Law of Allah any change.[3]

iii). [Due to] arrogance in the land and plotting of evil; but the evil plot does not encompass except its own people. Then do they await except the way of the former people? However you will never find in the strategy of Allah any change, and you will never find in the strategy of Allah any alteration.[4]

Tafakkur or reflection and Tadabbur (pondering) are taken from different rootwords but they have roughly the same meaning. Tadabbur connotes to come from behind; when one contemplates, one should not just look at the outward meaning but where the word originated from. 'Tadabbur' is linguistically derived from the Arabi word 'Dubur' which is the rear part of anything (and a hidden part of the human body). 'Tadbir' (Plural:Tadabbur) translates to consideration of the consequences of the affair, i.e. to consider what the end result will lead to. Tadabbur is thinking/reflecting, to deduce an outcome from the acquirement of two pieces of information. Therefore, Tadabbur is thinking and understanding. We must do Tadabbur on the Talim of Qur'an. We shouldn't just recite the Qur'an, but also think and go into its depth and see the Zahir (exterior) and Batin (interior) aspect of the Ayaat of the Qur'an. An Ayah states: [5] "Do they not think over the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked?"

This proves that Tadabbur unlocks the hidden meaning which is kept in severe secrecy from the ignorant. Tafakkur is more general and the root comes from 'Fikr' - thinking and to meditate. The roots are different but the outcome is the same. The term Tafakkur is derived from the root word 'Fa-ka-ra-Yaf-ku-ru' (to think deeply) and is used in numerous Ayaat in different senses. Tafakkur, on the other hand, has various meanings according to different Arabi-English dictionaries. In the context of the Qur'an, Tafakkur means to ponder on the creation of Allah, to think deeply on the Ayaat and to be considerate of whatever is in the 'Aflaak' (cosmos). The first-ever address of Allah was to "Aql", commanding it to come forward and it advanced, and then ordering it to leap backward and it went backward. Allah informed the Aql that it was the noblest and foremost of all His creations. Rasulullah (S) declared:[6]

"One Sa'at spent in Tafakkur (deep and meaningful thought) is of greater value than an entire year's 'ibadah."

Time, or Sa'at, takes many forms; it can be calculated in terms of years, months, hours, minutes, and seconds, to name a few.

All depends on Aql because Aql (intellect) attained 'Sabaqah' (priority) amongst all creation due to Tafakkur (purposeful thinking). Allah distinguished 'ins'an with the 'Naimah' (bounty) of Aql over all His creation; therefore, Tafakkur became a 'Sharaf' (honor) for Aql. Al Shakhs al-Fadil, Saheb al-Rasail, the 9th Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) has explained in "Ikhwan us Safa": [7]

"Achievement of Aql is such (high) that it is not dependent on Aalam al-Tabiyyah (physical world) due to the Quwwah (power) of Fikr (thought)".

The place of Aql is akin to a crown that is fixed on the head of 'ins'an. The 'Jawhar' (Jewel) that leads the true believer towards Jannah, according to the Qur'an, is the faculty of Aql which helps each 'ins'an to recognize and walk on the path of 'Siraat al-Mustaqeem'. Al Shakhs al-Fadil, Saheb al-Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa Al Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) says:[8]

"Know my brother, the most praiseworthy virtue of 'ins'an is Aql and his greatest quality is 'ilm".

This ideology supports our Aqidah further when we read a Dua of Jum'ah (Friday) compiled by the founder of Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah and Jame al-Azhar, 14th Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam Al Muiz (as), in which he says: [9]

"Verily, Aql is above the Nafs (Soul), since the latter is simple while the former is more subtle.....and the Aql is originated by Allah".

The great 17th Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam, Ali al-Zahir (as) discussed a unique point of the perfect creation of Aql in his Dua for 'Sulasa' (Tuesday): [10]

"Lord who created Aql (intellect) of the world of creation with extreme perfection and completion and has made the medium for creation to achieve glory and attain perfection".

The noted Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Da'i and intellectual, Sayyiduna Abi Yaqub al-Sijistani (ra), who was appointed in the Iranian province of Khurasan and Sijistan as 'Hujjah Jazirah' (high rank in the Ismaili Daw'ah hierarchy) during the 10th century, further elucidated: [11]

"Allah has not bestowed upon creation a Naimah greater than the Aql. Therefore, it is Wajib upon them ('ins'an) to offer Shukr to Him for it".

According to the Nabaw Talim, the performance of 'ibadah with true Ma'arifah (cognition) can only be secured in Tafakkur. Allah has granted the Jawhar (Jewel) of 'Fikr' to each 'ins'an through which one can enjoy Tafakkur, especially on the creation of the universe, skies, earth, day and night, seasons, and think about the intricacies and subtleties in their constitution and realize the greatness of their Mudabbir (Creator). We should do Tafakkur on the creation of plants, fruit-laden trees, and medicinal herbs and the harmony between stars and planets. Our Aql has the power to travel to extreme limits of imagination. The brain of 'ins'an is an anchor to a very limited conscience, as it was observed by the great Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Muiz (as) (as): [12]

"The heart imparts sensation to the brain; the brain is the essence of head and storehouse of Aql."

That we are cosmic, and our mind itself works on cosmic functions, suggests that there is indeed another plane of tangible interaction with all that is around us. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) explains this issue aptly in his Diw'an: [13]

*Kayfiyyatu al-mar'i laysa al-mar'u yudrikuhā;
fa-kayfa kayfiyyatu al-Jabbāri fī al-qīdam(i).*

*If an 'insan cannot understand his own reality;
How is it possible for him to understand the reality of the Creator?*

Ma'arifah of the 'Mudabbir' is not possible without the correct understanding of 'Tawhid' with Tafakkur, which in turn leads us towards Naj'at. Shia Fatimi Ismaili Du'at encouraged contemplating over the 'Makhlūq' (creation), and not the 'Khaliq' (Creator), as the creation is

the bridge for the true recognition of the Creator. This Ma'arifah illuminates the spirit of 'ins'an and helps him reach his final destination. In the body of 'ibadah, Tafakkur is like a spirit without which 'ibadah is akin to a dead body.

2. Qur'an instructs performing Tafakkur:

Rasulullah(S) was ordered by Allah to relate Qasas al-Anbiya (the tale of the previous Anbiya and their communities) to his Ummah so that they may get Sabaq (lesson) from these parables of the Qur'an. Study the following Ayaat:[14]

i). "Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has every fruit? But he is afflicted with old age and has weak offspring, and it is hit by a whirlwind containing fire and is burned. Thus does Allah make clear to you [His] Ayaat that you might give thought".

The above mentioned Ayah is especially discussed at the beginning of Muharram Majlis, with a special reference to Moula Abi Abdillah Al Imam al-Husain (as) and Al Khamsat'il Ath'ar (as).

ii). Ayah 50 of Surah al-Anam - 6 says:[15]

"Is blindness equal to seeing? Do you then not ponder?"

Likewise, a blind follower and an intellectual are not equal. In the following Ayah, Tafakkur is used in the sense: [16]

iii). "And if We had willed, we could have elevated him thereby, but he adhered [instead] to the earth and followed his own desire. So his example is like that of the dog: if you chase him, he pants, and if you leave him, he [still] pants. That is the example of the people who denied Our signs. So relate the stories that perhaps they will give thought".

People should use their Aql so that they may understand signs, proofs, evidence, revelations, and Talim of the Qur'an. In Surah Yunus Ayah 24 informs:[17]

iv). "Verily, the likeness of this worldly life is as the rain (water) which we send down from the sky.... Thus do we explain the Ayah in detail for a people who reflect (or who think or ponder)" In the above Ayah, Tafakkur is used in the sense that this world is temporal and mortal. No one knows except Allah what will happen at a given time so the use of your Aql makes you understand what reality is. Qur'an gives us a good example of explaining the nature of our present life. The rain comes down in drops and the earth absorbs it. The earth is covered with green and gold and all kinds of colors, but a hailstorm or a blast, a frost or a volcanic eruption comes and the beauty of yesterday is destroyed. The end of each person in this world is left in ashes and dust. What more can we attain from this physical and material life?

v). Ayah 3 of Surah al-Raad -13[18] invites us on purposive thinking on the creation of the earth, mountains, rivers, every kind of fruit and night as a cover over the day are described as signs of Allah for a people who reflect and think.

vi). In Ayah 44, Surah al-Nahl-16 Tafakkur is used in [19] the sense that Allah has sent Books upon Anbiya with clear signs as well as divine messages upon Rasulullah(S). People are advised to study and follow Zikar (Qur'an) and Ahl al-Zikar (Ahl al-Bayt) so that they may understand what is advised.

vii). Ayah 42 of Surah al-Zumar - 39 [20] declares that one should understand life and death.

3. Nabawi instructions for Tafakkur:

Rasulullah (S) never gave the Talim of blind following, nor adopted a policy of brainwashing to spread the Daw'ah of Islam, but he always invited people to think and to use their Aql (intellect) which Allah has gifted them. Miqdad (ra) was one of the dearest Ash'ab of Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as). He once heard a Hadith from a Sahabi: [21]

i). "Tafakkur for an hour is better than the 'ibadah of one year".

Miqdad (ra) then heard another Sahabi say that Rasulullah(S) has said:

ii). "Tafakkur for an hour is better than seven years of 'ibadah".

He (ra) again heard from the third Sahabi that Rasulullah(S) said:

iii). "Tafakkur for an hour is better than seventy years of 'ibadah".

Not knowing which Hadith was true, Miqdad (ra) came to Rasulullah(S) and informed him of the three different versions of his Hadith that were being quoted by his three different Ash'ab. Rasulullah(S) informed him that all three versions were correct. In order to prove his point, Rasulullah(S) summoned all three Ash'ab. He (S) asked the first:

"How do you do Tafakkur?"

First Sahabi replied by reciting the Ayah: [22]

"Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, there are signs for those who have intellect".

He said: I too do Tafakkur over the wonders of the heavens and the earth.

Rasulullah (S) told him:

i). "One hour of your Tafakkur is better than the (Nafl) 'ibadah of one year".

Then the Nabi (S) asked his second Sahabi as to how he did Tafakkur?

He replied: I reflect upon death and the horror of the Qiyamah.

Rasulullah(S) told him:

ii). "One hour of your Tafakkur is better than the (Nafl) 'ibadah of seven years".

He (S) then asked his third Sahabi about Tafakkur.

The Sahabi informed:

I reflect upon the fire of Jahannam and its dreadfulness and severity.

Rasulullah (S) told him:

iii). "One hour of your Tafakkur is better than the (Nafl) 'ibadah of seventy years".

4. Imami instructions for Tafakkur

Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) declared: [23]

"There is no 'ilm and science like Tafakkur, and there is no prosperity and advancement like knowledge and science".

The human heart is like a house and Tafakkur is the lamp that luminates it. The heart is steeped in darkness without the light of Tafakkur. Islam stresses upon the building of 'Duniya' and

A'akhirah' side by side; this in itself carries a deep Fikr. It gives us Talim to live in this Duniya as a 'Musafir' (passenger) and to contribute to it in a manner that helps us in our final destination of the A'akhirah. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) has described it in one of his poems as follows: [24]

*Kun fi al-dunyā bi-badanika;
wa fi al-āakhirah bi-qalbika wa 'amalika.*

*Be in this world with your body;
And remain hereafter with your soul and deeds.*

Al Shakhs al-Fadil Saheb al-Rasail Al Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) has elaborated this philosophy as follows: [25]

"Understand my brother! 'ibadah does not consist of Salaat and Siy'am alone; but it is to seek prosperity in both the spheres, spiritual and temporal".

It is required for each person, male or female, that they fulfill the assigned duties to them and that their hearts be detached from the worldly matters. In this way, one may continue to gather 'Hasan'at' (good deeds) for the A'akhirah. The following five methods of Tafakkur draw attention:

- 1. Tafakkur about the beautiful creations and its benefits which causes one to believe in Allah and love Him.*
- 2. Tafakkur about the rewards promised by Him for the 'ibadah on the basis of which one has to perform it.*
- 3. Tafakkur about the punishments informed by Allah that leads one to fear Him and thereby abstain from committing sins.*
- 4. Tafakkur about one's enslavement to their 'Nafs' and committing sins and living in a state of heedlessness, regardless of all the 'Barakah' bestowed by Him. This attitude forces one to do Tafakkur and feel 'Nadim' (ashamed) and do 'istaghfar. Mudabbir (Creator) loves those who observe the terrestrial and celestial creatures and take Talim from them.*
- 5. Tafakkur in the divine revelations of Allah and sending of the 'Anbiya' (prophets) for the guidance of humanity to the path of righteousness.*

Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) has said: [26]

"Extensiveness in Salaat and Sawm is not 'ibadah, rather extensiveness in Tafakkur is true 'ibadah".

The Imam has also informed: [27]

"The mother of Abu Zarr al-Ghaffari (ra) was asked about the 'ibadah of Abu Zarr (ra). She said: 'He would isolate himself from the people and spend his day in Tafakkur".

5. 'insan - Aalam'e Sagheer and Aalam 'insan'e Kabeer:

Tafakkur is not just confined to the knowledge of the creation of this Universe because 'insan is Aalam'e Sagheer (small universe), while the universe is 'insan'e Kabeer (the large universe). Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) has compared the Universe with 'insan - human body and said:[28]

"You think you are a small entity, but the entire Universe is concealed in you".

Look at your body; perhaps, you did not notice what an amazing factory it is. For Tafakkur on the power and command of the Mudabbir, it is enough that one should recognize his own body which is a small universe in itself. This can only be understood when one has knowledge of the body and religion, as knowledge is divided into two categories, as per Ikhwan al-Safa:[29]

i). 'ilm al-Ady'an (science of religion)

ii). 'ilm al-Abd'an (science of bodies)

We learn from the Qur'an that the Universe has been designed by the Mudabbir in a way that it may become a source of spiritual inspiration for 'ins'an. Qur'an provides us vision that has given two different directions to 'insan which is al-Anfus (soul – inner world) and al-Afaq' (universe - external world). If a person does not have fingers, writing for him is not possible. Or if the fingers do not bend, or if one has no hands or eyes, or any organ of the body or even a vein which is thinner than one hair goes out of order, what a difficult situation would we face? Suppose if the human teeth grow continuously like nails, what would that be like? If they did not separate from the jaw bone, how would they be pulled in case of decomposition? We should even do Tafakkur over the fact that the eyebrows and eyelashes do not grow as long as the hair on the head. What would happen if 'insan grew taller day by day? We are highly grateful and indebted to the Mudabbir (the Architect) who has created this Universe with utmost perfection. These are but a few simple expressions of our short worldly life which opens our mind towards the Ma'arifah which ultimately lead towards Najaat. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) says: [30]
"A'akhirah is the outcome and product of this world".

The great Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili intellectual and commentator of the Qur'an, "Bab al-Abw'ab" (the highest rank of the Ismaili Daw'ah hierarchy), Sayyiduna Jafar bin Mansur al-Yemen explained: [31]

"When a person labors in this world for material gain without any consideration for the A'akhirah, his efforts are misguided because they neither have significance nor a favorable outcome. When a person endeavors in this world for the A'akhirah while firmly believing in it, only then do his endeavors have significance and a favorable outcome; therefore, they are truly meritorious".

According to the Qur'an, this world is a farm for the A'akhirah: [32]

"The one who wants the harvest of A'akhirah will be given increased harvest; and the one who wants the harvest of this world will have it but with no more shares in the A'akhirah".

Do Tafakkur on this point - if we do not sow the seeds of Hasan'at (good deeds) in the few days of our worldly life, the opportunity will be lost forever. When we reach the threshold of the other world and death seizes us, Aam'al (deeds) come to an end and hopes are turned off. If one continues to remain in the slavery of lusts and the captivity of various carnal desires until death arrives, it is possible that Shait'an may achieve his ultimate objective of grappling one's faith. Shait'an may treat one in such a manner that one may depart from the world as an enemy of Allah and His Awliya. If that happens, only Allah knows what Az'ab (calamities) and terrors await.

6. Ignorance of Tafakkur Causes Downfall:

Religious congregations today are not promoting specific and categorized Talim of Tafakkur amongst the Muslim communities, except for a few. Undoubtedly, religious congregations, especially the Salaat of Jumua, have major influence over Muslim communities worldwide. Its consistency can provide opportunities to communicate the message of the Qur'an which can in turn lead towards peace, tolerance, harmony, unity and the road to prosperity. The professional clergy is interested in money minting activities hence it is foolish to expect any guidance related to the Islam of Muhammad (S) from them. It is unfortunate that instead of using the Naimah of Aql, the majority of those converted by mass conversion remain deaf and dumb, and void of Tafakkur, following the path of their religious cum political leaders. If we study the Qur'an, we can derive that it strictly teaches us to follow the religion with its meaningful understanding. On consulting the Sirah Literature, one can find that Ahl al-Bayt (as) and Ash'ab (ra) frequently asked Rasulullah (S) regarding day to day affairs as per the Shariah and followed it with complete Ma'arifah. Blind following and practice of Bidaat (innovation in religion) is a fatal disease that leads towards destruction, shame, and disgrace. This is the result of a lack of Talim of the Qur'an with Tafakkur.

Real Islam is the Islam of Muhammad (S) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as), free from all Najis (impure) influences of monarchy, democracy, theocracy, autocracy, dictatorship, secularism etc. Muslims are not ready to realize and judge the causes of their downfall but are still intoxicated by their thousand-year-old glorious era when they were the Superpower of the World. How is the dream of renaissance feasible in such a situation when Muslims have ignored the Talim of the Qur'an and Saheb al-Qur'an? They are practicing alian to Islam rituals and customs, old traditions, offer Dua, and wait for the emergence of the divine guide, who will return to them their lost glory, as per legend. Muslim communities are still not ready to prepare the ground for the divine-guide - the Imam al-Zaman (as) through higher education. The Dua of the emergence is meaningful only when everything matches with the preparation of the Imam's appearance, as per the need of the time.

An organized study has shown that some Muslim communities of the Indian Subcontinent were converted through mass-conversion, especially seeking some sort of easy routes of insurance and assurance of Najaat (liberation) in the A'akhirah - an easy escape from the guilt of one's actions and deeds. This is the fate of systematic brain-washing and the fabricated campaign of the established interests of power and command who assume themselves as predestined agencies with divine power to emancipate their community from worldly distress and repentance. The fate of such straying communities is nothing but a divine curse due to blindly following the wrong interpretations of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (as), dished out by their self assumed spiritual guides. Shariah is not the Milke-Yameen (concubine) of any spiritual leader who can interpret it as per his whims. If you find the action and deeds of any such leader repugnant to the Nabawi Sunnah and Alavi Sirah, then understand that to be a curse. May Allah increase our Tawfiq to distinguish right from wrong, black from white, day and night in today's deceitful world.

The beauty of Islam is that it does not only consist of instructions and warning but also invites followers to question and to do Tafakkur. Qur'an addresses Muslim communities and welcomes healthy dialogue appreciating the unity in diversity. Multicultural Muslim communities are the richness of the Ummah, which allows us to do Tafakkur on how to build mutual understanding among various communities. Communities that are away from the primary Talim of Islam and want to remain contained in their narrow circle are 'cults'. The dictionary defines a cult as "a system of religious worship or ritual"; devoted attachment to, or extravagant admiration for, a person, principle, etc.

Furthermore, according to this definition:

"A follower is a member of a cult. A cult is typically defined as a bunch of religious fanatics "controlled" by a manipulative organization or individual. This kind of cult is usually portrayed as deceptive, requiring absolute loyalty from its followers. Members are often removed from their prior lives altogether, including their jobs, homes, and families. Cult creates certain rules for their survival like dress-code, the resemblance in outer appearance, practice as per constricted directives, a system of religious admiration and fake devotion directed towards a particular figure".[33]

In cults many things are restricted; members are not allowed even to ask "what how" questions even as this practice is repugnant to the Talim of the Qur'an. The cult leadership discourages and hates communication with outsiders and imposes several restrictions. It wants to isolate its members and cuts off all kinds of dialogue with everybody else. It brainwashes by barring listening to outside voices because the cult believes that this will corrupt minds. In their opinion the only way to remain safe is to listen to them only. Don't read this or that, attend only our gatherings and listen to what we say; don't go outside of our bond otherwise you'll get lost. These are some of the warnings made publicly to the members.

Moreover, the cult leadership always discourages members to discuss its practice, rules, and rituals due to several fears. A cult also tries to divide members into their villages and small-towns and prevents harmony. This narrow mentality is completely against the philosophy of Islam and the Talim of the Qur'an, the canvas of which is quite wide.

These kinds of restrictions one would not have found in the ideal state of Madinah of Rasulallah(S) and in a perfectly designed "Madinah Fadilah Ruhaniyyah" of "Ikhwan us-Safa".

7. Concluding Remarks:

Sirah Literature and the Talim of Ahl al-Bayt (as) provides us with ample guidance that if anyone commits a mistake, they must be guided and forgiven. Let's help those wrongdoers by guiding and supporting them until they arrive on the Right Path. Contrary to this constructive approach, a cult not only harasses its members but also kills them. Do Tafakkur on the Qur'an which inculcates in us the Talim of tolerance and acceptance and contains space for open dialogue. A member of the Ummah has the right to ask questions to the leadership without being afraid. A careful study of "Nahj al-Balagha"[34] provides supporting evidence for the above arguments.

Study the Nabawi era with Tafakkur and you will not find any systematic campaign of money collection anywhere. Contrarily, the cult leadership remains busy round the year in seizing the wealth of the members in the name of religion. These so-called merchants of Jannah frequently arrange warm-up sessions for its members in which they prepare their minds to give away the maximum amount of their wealth in the name of religion. Such smart brainwashing sessions prepare bonafide financiers who are devoid of the Naimah of Aql. Only the sleeping communities of the Muslim world do not study the Qur'an with Ma'arifah because they remain arrested in the clutches of socio-political and religious leaders who exploit them for their own nefarious purposes. This slavish mentality is a result of the systematic brainwashing. Due to various self-implemented fears, these communities have adopted mental slavery which is worst than physical slavery. The Qur'an says very clearly: [35]

"Allah has not so far changed the condition of any Nation which has no desire to change on its own".

To regain our thousand years old lost glory, we, the Muslims have "Masal al-A'ala" (The Highest Example)[36] for following: Rasulullah (S), whose character is according to the Qur'an "Uswat al-Hasanah" (role model)[37]. Therefore, Rasulullah (S) is the ideal criterion not only for Muslim communities but for the entire humanity in terms of practice till the day of the Qiyamah. May Allah grant us Taufiq of Tafakkur, in the Qur'an, A'ameen.

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