

# Understanding the Qur'an with Logical Arguments Discussion on 'Abd al-Jabbār's Reasoning

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## ملخص

ظهرت المعتزلة في تاريخ الفكر الإسلامي كجماعة تسعى دوما إلى فهم الدين بالعقل. وهذه الدراسة تقوم بالمحاولة للمعرفة عن كتب ما إذا كان أحد مفكريهم الكبير في عهد فمضتهم بعد أن اقلعهم الخليفة المتوكل من بلاط الخلافة العباسية، يعني القاضي عبد الجبار، يحاول أن يأتي بالجواب عن مسألة فهم الآيات المتناقضة ظاهريا في القرآن، من أمثال التناقض بين الآيات التي تقول بحرية الإنسان في جميع أفعاله وبين التي تقول بقضاء الله وقدره في كل ما حدث وسيحدث في العالم.

وتدرس كذلك ماذا قال هذا الشيخ المعتزلي عن كون القرآن دليلا في الأمور الكلامية. وذلك لأن العقل لا يقبل التسلسل في دلالة ما حواه القرآن على وجود الله بوصف هذا الكتاب الكريم كلامه تعالى وبناء صدق خيره على صدق المتكلم به تعالى. وانتهت الدراسة إلى النتيجة: ان علينا عند هذا المفكر أن نستعمل الدلائل العقلية في وضع القرآن موضعه في بناء الفكر الكلامي الإسلامي، وكذلك في فهم كل عباراته.

## Abstrak

Mu'tazilah terkenal sebagai aliran pemikiran logis dalam sejarah pemikiran Islam. Mereka selalu berusaha untuk membangun paham

keagamaan atas dasar kerja logis akal. Dalam melakukan kerja itu mereka mau tidak mau bertemu dengan kesulitan memahami Alquran yang dalam banyak tempat memberikan keterangan yang secara sepintas terasa tidak logis. Misalnya, bacaan-bacaan yang memberikan pengertian kebebasan manusia dalam menentukan perbuatannya sendiri, ketika dihadapkan dengan ketentuan-ketentuan Allah yang tidak dapat diubah manusia

Keberadaan al-Qur'an sebagai dasar ajaran Islam bagi kaum Sunni tidak diragukan sama sekali, namun bagi kaum Mu'tazilah terdapat beberapa catatan. Kalau al-Qur'an itu firman Allah, apakah beritanya dapat dipakai untuk menjadi bukti keberadaan-Nya. Secara nalar, memang pertanyaan ini tidak dijawab dengan positif. Kandungan berita tidak dapat menerangkan keberadaan pemilik berita, karena itu berarti akan terjadi lingkaran syetan: kandungan berita hanya dapat dianggap benar jika pemilik berita tidak berbohong, sementara keberadaan pemilik berita itu sendiri diterangkan oleh kandungan berita. Dengan demikian al-Qur'an tidak dapat memberikan keterangan pertama tentang Allah sendiri, kata 'Abd al-Jabbār yang terkenal dengan sebutan al-Qādī atau Qādī al-Qudlāh (320/932-415/1025), seorang tokoh Mu'tazilah pada kebangkitannya setelah dijatuhkan dari lingkaran kekuasaan politik oleh Khalifah al-Mutawakkil (847-861). Lalu bagaimana kitab ini dapat merupakan dalil bagi pemikiran teologis Islam?

Tulisan ini membahas pemikiran 'Abd al-Jabbār mengenai hal-hal itu dan yang berkaitan dengannya. Kesimpulannya adalah bahwa menurut tokoh ini orang mesti menggunakan penalaran logis dalam mendudukan al-Qur'an dalam struktur pemikiran teologis dan dalam memahami keseluruhan bacaan-bacaannya.

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**I**t is known in the history of Islamic thought that in their effort to defend their belief that God is always good and does no evil, the Mu'tazila used rational arguments to make the Quran speak of itself logically. When they came across passages which gave contradictory literal meanings, they tried accordingly to find a way in which those passages would give one line of meaning. According to them, contradiction means inconsistency which, if found in the Word of God, will only reduce His goodness. This brought them to the discussion of how they could prove that there is no contradiction in scripture. As an example many verses may be found that speak about man's freedom to choose and do his own deeds and many others that speak about

the contrary, i.e., that God decrees all things in the universe, including man's actions.

This article discusses how one prominent figure of the Mu'tazila, Qādhī al-Qudhā 'Abd al-Jabbār (320/932-415/1025) argued the necessity of using rational arguments (*al-dalā'il al-'aqliya*) in understanding the Qur'ān. The main source of this discussion is his book, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*. Three questions are treated here: 1) how to know anything related to God as "hidden" reality, 2) what is meant by the rational arguments and 3) what the reason that the Qur'ān can be a proof for any judgement related to God.

### **The Present World (*al-shahid*) as Basis of Knowing the Hidden World (*al-ghayb*)**

One of the main questions which occupies the Mu'tazila concerning their wish to explain as clearly as possible all elements of faith, is how man can grasp things of the *al-ghayb* (the hidden world) which relate to God. Man cannot grasp them with his sensory organs, so there must be another way to know them and they cannot be known from any information, unless it is known for sure that neither the informant nor his source lies in providing it.

In the context of our discussion, the information is the Qur'ān and al-Sunna, the informant is the Prophet while the source is Allah. That the Prophet did not lie can be proved, according to 'Abd al-Jabbār, by the occurrence of miracles, i.e. things which break natural laws. However, that God does not lie can only be known by way of inference. The content of the information can never be a proof for the existence of the source and for its truthfulness, because if the latter two points must be proved by the former, while the former cannot be regarded true unless the latter two points have been proved, there will be a vicious circle: each becomes a ground for the other. This is, of course, rejected.

The hidden world can never be known directly by man. He can only know it through inference based on his knowledge of what before occurred him (*al-ma'lūm fī-mā baynana*)<sup>1</sup> which is called a *dalīl* (an indication).<sup>2</sup> To infer

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<sup>1</sup>See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīl bi-l-Taklīf*, compilation of his pupil, al-Hasan bn Ahmad bn Mattawaih, ed. 'Umar S. 'Azmi (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Ta'līf wa-l-'Inbā' wa-l-Nashr, 1965), I:167.

<sup>2</sup>Taking Marie Bernand's word, "C'est la méthode d'inférence s'appuyant sur le

from an indication (*al-istidlāl*), is the way 'Abd al-Jabbār suggests to know the hidden world. As these indications are everything which is present before us (*al-syahid*) while what is aimed at is something hidden (*al-ghayb*), this method is called *al-istidlāl bi-l-shāhid 'alā al-ghayb* (inference from the present world concerning the hidden one).

This method was applied and discussed long before 'Abd al-Jabbār and caused many problems that disturbed Muslim thinkers, such as the opinion that God resembles His creatures. However, this did not lead to the conclusion that man might not use it to solve the problem of knowing the hidden world. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, it is true that this method, if applied to things other than what it is meant for, can cause such problems. Therefore, it must be applied thoroughly only within its proper domain.

Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933)<sup>3</sup> defined it as "inferring things not yet known from things known." This definition was rejected by 'Abd al-Jabbār, for it would follow that every inference was of this kind. In every inference, the indication is always known while the indicated is not yet known. *Al-istidlāl bi-l-shāhid 'alā al-ghayb* is a case of its own. It is to infer things which are not present from things present around us, and this on one condition only: that the former cannot be known directly, but only by way of inference.<sup>4</sup>

There are four ways of coincidence between the present and the hidden world that can be admitted as grounds for such an inference:

1. That both the apparent and the hidden share the same indication or can be known in the same manner.<sup>5</sup> An example is to infer that God is Powerful from the possibility of His actions, for in this present world the power of a man is indicated by his action. Most of God's attributes are

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raisonnement par analogie pour aboutir à la connaissance de Dieu et des ses attributs." See her *Le Problème de la connaissance d'après le Muḡnī du cadī 'Abd al-Gabbār* (Alger: Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion, 1982), 247.

<sup>3</sup>Abū Hāshim 'Abd as-Salām bin Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī is son of Abū 'Alī Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī and belongs to the ninth generation of the Mu'tazila. Like his father, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/916), he was the most important figure of his generation and took the burden of leading the Mu'tazila in those difficult years after it was deprived of its political place by Khalif al-Mutawakkil.

<sup>4</sup>Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīt bi-l-Taklīf*, I:168.

<sup>5</sup>*Al-ishtirāk fī al-dalāla* or *al-ishtirāk fī tarāqī ma'rifa al-ḥukm*. See ibid. J. R. T. M. Peters, in his *God's Created Speech; a Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazila Qāḍī l-Qudāt Abū al-Hasan 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Ahmad al-Hamadānī*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 229-30, has "the having in common of an indication," while Bernard in *Le Problème*, 250, has "une démarche logique valable ici et là".

- inferred in the same way.<sup>6</sup>
2. That both share the same cause (*al-mushāraka fī al-'illah*).<sup>7</sup> Sometimes a judgment in this present world is known necessarily, but we need an indication to know its cause. So if we know a cause concerning the hidden world, we must infer the same judgment for it.<sup>8</sup>
  3. That they share something analogous to the cause (*mā yajrī majrā al-'illa*).<sup>9</sup> There is a certain judgment for our being willing. We know this attribute (being willing) by necessity. Therefore, when we find the same judgment in this world and in the hidden world, we must infer the existence of the same attribute in the hidden world.<sup>10</sup>
  4. The existence of a more intense thing in the hidden world than the same one on which a judgment in this world depends.<sup>11</sup> An example is the imposing of duties upon someone from whose conditions it is known that he will refuse them. In this present world knowledge and supposition are alike in anything the goodness of which comes from the fact that it causes benefits or prevents losses.<sup>12</sup> If such a thing is good by way of supposition, it must be so by way of knowledge, for knowledge is stronger. For instance, if it is regarded as good to serve a meal to someone of whom it is known by way of supposition that he will not eat it, it is so, too, if that is known for sure.<sup>13</sup>

All these four points can be condensed to forms of analogy between what is known of our present world and what is attributed to God which cannot be known directly. Such an analogy will not cause supposition of

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<sup>6</sup> Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīṭ*, I:168.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 167. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, has "a having in common of the cause" and Bernand, *Le Problème*, has "un procédé d'explication causale, vérifiable ici et là."

<sup>8</sup> Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīṭ*, I:168.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 167. See also Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 231.

<sup>10</sup> Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muhīṭ*, I:168.

<sup>11</sup> ... *yata'allaq al-hukm fī al-shahīd bi-amr thumm yūjad fī al-ghā'ib mā huwa ablagh min dhālik al-amr (Muhīṭ, I:168)*. Peters' translation, *ibid.*, reads: "In this world the judgment is connected with something; then there exists in the other world something that is intenser than this thing."

<sup>12</sup> It must be kept in mind that by the goodness of an action 'Abd al-Jabbār means the absence of any blame for one who performs it. See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tauhīd wa-l-'Adl*, ed. Ibrāhīm Madkūr *et al.* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, al-Idāra al-'Amma li-l-Thaqāfa, 1960-1969, VI/1:7.

<sup>13</sup> Idem., *al-Muhīṭ*, I:168. It is likely that this example is not of 'Abd al-Jabbār but of Ibn Mattawaih, judged from its naïve syllogism.

God's resemblance to His creatures, if it uses rational axiomata, such as the axiom that anything which can be united or separated was brought into existence (*muhdath*), and right reasoning. The idea of resemblance between God and His creature can only happen if man follows his superficial imagination, abandons reasoning, and clings blindly to others' opinion (*taqlīd*).<sup>14</sup>

### The meaning of Dalā'il al-'aql

The word *dalīl* means originally something which brings us rightly to what is concerned (*dallahu 'alā al-shay' saddadahū ilaih*). It is said as well that *dalīl* is something used as an indication (*mā yustadall bih*) [in looking for another].<sup>15</sup> But for 'Abd al-Jabbār, *dalīl* or *dalāla* is a way by which one may know something which cannot be known by way of necessary knowledge (*darūrī*).

For 'Abd al-Jabbār, there are two kinds of knowledge: necessary knowledge (*darūrī*) and acquired knowledge (*muktasab*). The former is what exists in us not because of our effort but we can not throw it away from ourselves at all (... *al-'ilm al-ladhī yahsul fīnā lā min qibalinā wa lā yumkinunā nafyuh 'an al-nafs bi-wajhin min al-wujūh*).<sup>16</sup> The latter is what is acquired by him by reflecting upon indication(s).<sup>17</sup>

Each *dalīl* means something which will carry anyone reflecting upon it to another knowledge, provided that it is meant for that purpose by him who poses it. Thus, the trace left by a thief is not a *dalīl*, for he does not mean it to be so.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that 'Abd al-Jabbār, when saying this, had in mind that Allah indeed posed indications in order that the human being on whom is imposed the duty of knowing Him would manage to do so. This imposing of duties, which is called *al-taklīf*, was defined by 'Abd al-Jabbār, thereby concluding the definition of Abū Hāshim, as "wanting something from the *mukallaf* which causes him hardship." (*irāda mā 'alā al-mukallaf fih mashaqqa*).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār *Fadhl al-I'tizāl wa Tabaqāt al-Mu'tazila wa Mubāyanatuhum li-Sa'ir al-Mukhalifīn*, in Fu'ād Sayyid (ed.), *Fadhl al-I'tizāl wa Tabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūniṣiyya li-l-Nasyr, 1393./1974), 149.

<sup>15</sup> See Ibn Manzḥūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Misriyyat li-l-Ta'līf wa-l-Tarjama, nd.) XIII:264. See also Ibrāhīm 'Anīs et al., *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīl* (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1392/1972), 294.

<sup>16</sup> See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-Uṣul al-Khamsa*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1965), 48.

<sup>17</sup> See idem, *al-Mughnī*, XII:67.

<sup>18</sup> Idem, *Sharh*, 87 and 88.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, *al-Mughnī*, XI:295.

Abū Hāshim, in his definition, had added “*amr*” (order) to the word “*irāda*” (wanting, willing)<sup>20</sup> and this, for ‘Abd al-Jabbār, was permitted, because an order is the clearest indication of a will.<sup>21</sup> In another place it is said that *taklīf* is “informing the *mukallaf* that he will deserve a benefit or a harm for performing or not performing an action, with a hardship he will meet therein, if that does not bring him into the domain of constraint (*i`lām al-mukallaf ann `alaih fi`an yaf`al aw lā`yaf`al naf`an au dararan ma`a mashaqqatin talhaquhu`bi-dhālik, idhā`lam tablugh al-hal`bih hadd al-`iljā`*)”.<sup>22</sup> The imposing of duties can be done either by creating knowledge within the *mukallaf* or by posing an indications before him.<sup>23</sup>

There are two kinds of *taklīf*: that of knowledge and that of action. There are three sorts of knowledge imposed upon the *mukallaf* as duties:

1. knowledge of the acts imposed upon him, their qualities and the ways in which they must be performed,
2. knowledge of the One who imposes the duties (*al-mukallif*), His attributes and His justice,
3. knowledge of the benefits and harms deserved for performing the actions.<sup>24</sup>

There is no satisfying information explaining the *taklīf* of action,<sup>25</sup> but from the explanation of that of knowledge it can be concluded that it boils down to the performance of the Commandments of the *Shari`a* taught by the Prophet. ‘Abd al-Jabbār mentions prayer (*al-sala`*), alms (*al-zaka`*), etc.<sup>26</sup>

Then, there are four indications which, for ‘Abd al-Jabbār, are posed before the *mukallaf* by God in order that he know what is imposed upon him. They are: (1) rational proofs (*hujja al-`aql*), (2) the Book (the Qur`ān), (3) the Tradition of the Prophet (*al-sunna*), (4) consensus (*ijma`*), including analogy (*qiya`s*).<sup>27</sup> The first is very important for, as mentioned in the previous section,

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<sup>20</sup>So Abū Hāshim’s wording is “*irāda mā`fih kulfatun wa ma-shaqqatun wa-l-`amr bih* ([*taklīf* is] wanting and ordering something containing difficulty and hardship). See *ibid.*, XI:293-4.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, XI:295.

<sup>22</sup>Idem, *al-Muhit*, I:11.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>25</sup>Abd al-Jabbār mentions two kind of action (*al-`amal*) comprised by the *taklīf*. They are teaching (*al-ta`līm*) and the obligations derived by reasoning (*mā`yalzam al-mukallaf min al-`aqliyya`*). See his *al-Mughni*, XX/2:245 and 259.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>27</sup>Idem., *Sharh*, 88.

it is only by it that it can be known that the others are indeed indications.

Before discussing 'Abd al-Jabbār's concept of reason, his concept of knowledge must be discussed, for the former is based on the latter. For him, knowledge is a conviction which necessitates the tranquility of the soul (*al-i'tiqād al-ladhī yaqtadhī sukūn al-nafs*). A conviction cannot necessitate the tranquility of the soul unless it corresponds with the reality of its subject.<sup>28</sup>

As for sensible subjects, it is not difficult to demonstrate the correspondence, but, as for the insensible ones, it can never be proved without any difficulty. 'Abd al-Jabbār did not give any explanation of the latter, but from what he did when he applied reflection in his book, it can be concluded that he used coherence as the criterion of the truth as for knowledge arrived at by way of reflecting upon indication(s) of reason. According to the theory of coherence, a statement is true if it "can be shown to cohere, or fit in with, all other statements we are prepared to accept."<sup>29</sup>

As an example of how 'Abd al-Jabbār treated such a subject, we can read the following translation of a passage of his *Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*.

If it is said, "What indication indicates that He is Alive?" it will be answered with that every subject for which it is valid to be powerful and knowing is alive.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in order to accept the truth of the statement that God is Alive, we need to have accepted the other statement that He is Powerful and Knowing. Unless we accept this latter one, we cannot accept the former. How did 'Abd al-Jabbār demonstrate the truth of the latter? He said,

If it is said, "What indication indicates that He is Powerful?" it will be answered with that it is because every act, in this present world (*al-shahid*), can only happen from a powerful subject. Meanwhile, we cannot deny the possibility of acting for Him. Therefore, it must be said that God is Powerful.

If it is said, "What indication indicates that He, the Elevated, is Knowing?" it will be answered with that it is because every confirmed action (*al-af'āl al-muhkamah*), such as writing and handicraft, can only happen from a knowing subject. Meanwhile, it is clear that it is possible for Him to do a more confirmed action than

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<sup>28</sup> Idem., *al-Mughnī*, XII:13.

<sup>29</sup> This is W.H. Walsh' wording in his *Philosophy of History; An Introduction* (New York dan Evanston: Harper & Row, 1967), 76.

<sup>30</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, in Daniel Gimaret, "Les Usūl al-Ḥamsa du Qādhī 'Abd al-Gabbār et leurs commentaires" dalam *Annales Islamologiques*, no. 15/1979, 83.

those two ones, i.e. the creation of mankind with many wonderful things within. So, it must be concluded that He is knowing.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the truth of the two statements, that God is Powerful and that He is Knowing, is established upon the possibility (*sihha*) of action from Him, such as the creation of mankind. It is because of the truth of the statement that acting is possible for Him that the content of the three other statements is said to correspond with their objects.

For 'Abd al-Jabbār who speaks about *al-'aql* in the framework of his discussion on *al-taklīf*, *al-'aql* is "an aggregate of certain knowledge by completeness of which in a *mukallaf* it will be possible for him to reflect, to infer and to perform what is obligated upon him." (*jumlatun min al-'uluwīm makhsūsātun mataḥsalat fī al-mukallaf sahh minh al-nazar wa-l-istidlaāl wa-l-qiyām bi-ada' mā kullif*).<sup>32</sup> In other words, *al-'aql* consists of various knowledge with which man can acquire other knowledge and perform actions which are his duties.<sup>33</sup>

It is said here that the other knowledge is acquired, whereas for 'Abd al-Jabbār there are two kinds of knowledge: (1) that created by God within us which we can discard, which is called *al-'ilm al-dharūrī* (necessary knowledge) and (2) what is acquired by mankind through reflection, which is called *al-'ilm al-muktasab* (acquired knowledge). For him, too, there is knowledge which is regarded as belonging to the completeness of reason (*mā yu'add min kamāl al-'aql*).<sup>34</sup>

As a consequence, if it is said that reason is knowledge by which man can get further knowledge, it must be said inevitably that such knowledge is of the first kind (the necessary knowledge), though not all of such knowledge belong to the completeness of reason. Those which belong to the completeness of reason, for 'Abd al-Jabbār, are the following.

1. That of how an indication indicates to what it indicates (*an yakuw 'aliman bi-l-dalīl 'alā al-wajh al-ladhī yadull*).
2. That of certain conditions of the *'āqil* (the rational being), such as those of willing, hating and being convinced.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p 82-3.

<sup>32</sup>Idem., *al-Mughnī*, XI:375.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 379.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 386.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 382.

3. That of the nature or conditions of sensible things, such as that they are united and separated, and that it is impossible for them to be in two places at the same time etc.<sup>36</sup>
4. That of the bad as bad, the good as good and obligation as obligation.<sup>37</sup>
5. That of many motives (*al-'ilm bi-kathīrin min ad-dawa'i*).<sup>38</sup>

There are at least three things related to the use of the indications of reason to arrive at the knowledge of the hidden world. First, *nazar* or speculation which is the activity of the *mukallaf*. Second, reason which constitutes basic knowledge or axiomata existing in him inevitably and enabling him to do the speculation. Third, the indications of reason which are all that man can grasp from this present world, save the Qur'ān, Tradition of the Prophet and consensus of the Muslims (*ijma'*). Thus, here the *mukallaf* speculates, using axiomata of speculation, upon the data of the present world in order to find another knowledge which cannot be proved, by way of correspondence with the subject. This knowledge can only be inferred and its category of truth is only that of coherence.

### The Way in Which the Rational Argument is Applied

In reflecting and inferring to arrive at knowledge of the hidden world, man finds before him indications of the reason which consist of natural phenomena and axioms built upon them. In relation to his attempt to understand the *mutashābihā*-verses of the Qur'ān, 'Abd al-Jabbār finds Arabic passages, and, therefore, he has to base his understanding of them on the customs of the Arabs in using their language, especially what concerns the existence of original real sense (*al-haqīqa*) and figurative secondary sense (*al-majāz*). The shift of a word or sentence from its original real sense to its figurative one can only be known from its context (*al-qarīna*) and conventions of the Arabs in using their language (*al-ta'arūf*).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 385. For the Mu'tazila, there can not be any constraint of the *mukallaf* to perform or not the duties imposed upon him, but sometimes he finds himself face to face to what was induced by his own desires. Therefore, he needs something which will enable him to overcome this, so that he can perform what is imposed upon him. 'Abd al-Jabbār calls it *al-dā'i* (what invites or motive). See *ibid.*, 400-1.

<sup>39</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Adnān M. Zarzūr (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1969), 39.

One may easily misunderstand the meaning of the *mutashabihāt*-verses. This misunderstanding is perhaps because one is not capable or does not want, for some reasons, to take into consideration the figurative senses. Besides, some Arabic words bear more than one original meaning. So, one needs to be able to catch the intended sense to understand the meaning of verses using such words.

The scope of what is meant by a word usually causes problems leading into misunderstanding or at least obscurity of the verses of the Qur'ān. The role played by logic, therefore, is great to make possible the right understanding of this revealed book. It is likely that a word used in its real meaning does not cause any confusion in understanding the passage where it is used. This is true unless the word has more than one meaning. However, there are many Arabic words which bear more than one meaning (*al-lafzh al-mushtarak*). It is not always easy to decide which one is meant in a *mutashabiha* verse. Sometimes such a difficulty calls into existence various opinions each of which can be, and even actually are, used to support certain teachings. To ensure that a certain real meaning belongs to a certain word, one needs a proof (*al-shāhid*) taken from the use of the word bearing that meaning in the Qur'ān, classical Arabic poetry or other classical Arabic texts. Without such a proof, that real meaning can not be accepted. Sometimes 'Abd al-Jabbār uses such a proof to justify real meanings he is using or to deny those which were used by his opponents.<sup>40</sup>

For example, we can see his denial of inferring that God is a material being from predication of the word *istawā* to Him. This word, for the opponents, means "to sit", and, according to rational axioms, it is only material being which can sit. So, conclude the opponents, God is a material being. In denying this, 'Abd al-Jabbār comes with several meanings belonging to this word: (1) to overcome (*al-istīlā' wa-l-iqtidār*), (2) completeness of bodily organs (*tasāwī al-ajza'*), (3) intention (*al-qasd*), (4) to be sound (*zawāl al-khalal wa'l-saqam*, and (5) to be upright, either sitting, riding or standing (*al-intisāb jalīsan au rakīban au qa'imān*). For the first meaning he even mentions as a proof a verse of classical poetry.<sup>41</sup>

*Majāz* is the use of word, phrase or sentence not in the meaning for

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<sup>40</sup>See, for example, his denial of interpreting the word *hudā* as "belief" (*īmān*), for there is no proof in classical Arabic texts for such an interpretation, in *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 72-4.

which the Arabs created it, or predication of a word or a phrase to another one not in its natural way.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, there are two kinds of *majāz*: lexical (*al-majāz al-lughawi*) and rational (*al-majāz al-'aqlī*). In the former, the word is shifted from its original sense to another one for the similarity between the two or for there are attachment and conjuncture (*silā wa mulābasa*) between them.<sup>43</sup>

For example, in the expression *li-tukhrij al-nās min al-zhulumaṭ ilā al-nūr* (in order that you take out people from darkness to light),<sup>44</sup> the words *al-zhulumaṭ* and *al-nūr*, whose original meanings are "darkness" and "light", are used in the meaning of "going astray" and "guidance", because of the similarity between those original meanings and the figurative ones. That is not the case in the use of *asabi`a-hum* in *yaj`aluṅ asabi`ahum fī ādhānihim* (they put their fingers into their ears).<sup>45</sup>

Here the figurative meaning for the original one "their fingers" is "their fingertips". The relation between "finger" and "fingertip" is not similarity but a close connection between the two. The first kind of *majāz* is called *isti`āra* (metaphor) while the second *majāz mursal* (which is freed or disconnected). Despite the difference between the two, both take place in individual words.

In sentences like *Wa-l-layl idhā saja`* (By the night, when it becomes calm),<sup>46</sup> each word is used in its original meaning, but the predication of *al-layl* (the night) with *saja`* (to become calm) is not natural. It is not the night which becomes calm but movements and man's activity therein.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in this kind of *majāz* the being figurative does not take place in the use of individual words but in the structure of the sentence.

The use of *majāz* is common in Arabic. What matters then is whether it is found in the Qur'ān or not. There are some who reject its existence in the Qur'ān for many reasons, among which is that it is a kind of lie. The Mu'tazila, who frequently use it to explain the meaning of the Qur'ān, hold accordingly its existence in the Qur'ān. It is a matter of fact that words in their real

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<sup>42</sup> See Badawī Tabāna, *al-Bayān al-'Arabī: Dirāsa fī Tatawwur al-Fikra al-Balāghīyya 'ind al-'Arab wa Manahijihāwa Masaḍirihā al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Anjū al-Misriyya, 4<sup>th</sup> impression, 1388/1968), 27.

<sup>43</sup> See Ahmad Matlūb, *Funūn Balāghīyya* (Kuwait: Dār al-Buhūth al-'Ilmiyya, 1395/1975), 92.

<sup>44</sup> Sūra 14 (Ibrāhīm): 1.

<sup>45</sup> Sūra 2 (al-Baqara): 19.

<sup>46</sup> Sūra: 93 (al-Duhā): 2.

<sup>47</sup> See Matlūb, *Funūn Balāghīyya*, 106.

original meanings, which are limited, are not enough to express absolute meanings. Apart from that, in Arabic, *majāz* is often used to embellish the speech and to strengthen the expressed meaning.<sup>48</sup>

For the Mu'tazila, if man may shift a word from its original meaning to another, figurative one, God has an even greater right to do so.<sup>49</sup> And then, if the use of *majāz* in Arabic often makes a speech more eloquent (*ablagha*), whereas the Qur'ān is believed to be a miracle in Arabic, it is just only natural that there are some *majāzāt* which embellish and make eloquent its expression. To take 'Abd al-Jabbār's or his pupil's expression, "God wants the Qur'ān to be in the highest level of eloquence in order that it be indication of the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad. He knows that it cannot happen if He uses words in their real original meanings only and that He must use them in their figurative meanings and metaphors. Therefore, He takes this latter way in order that the Qur'ān be more similar to the way in which the Arabs speak and also more miraculous."<sup>50</sup>

'Abd al-Jabbār, in dictating this book, does not deal with those who reject the existence of *majāz* in the Qur'ān. From what is written therein, it is clear that the opponents do use figurative meanings in understanding verses in discussion. 'Abd al-Jabbār states frequently that it is impossible for the to maintain the literal meaning of certain verses or that they hold fast the figurative meaning of the verses without any justification. Or, he will say that as a matter of fact they do not maintain the literal meaning of the verses.

An example is when they, says 'Abd al-Jabbār, have the opinion that God prevents the infidels from the possibility of getting God's guidance, basing it on verse 39 of sūra 6 (al-'An'ām).<sup>51</sup> The opponents say that with this verse Allah states that He brings the infidels to be prevented or not to be prevented, whichever He wants to do. 'Abd al-Jabbār rejects this opinion, saying that God does not mention the time they are in such a condition. Therefore, continues 'Abd al-Jabbār, one may not think that the verse gives

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<sup>48</sup> See Abū Zayd, *al-Manhā al-'I'tizālī fī-l-Bayān wa 'I'jāz al- Qur'ān* (Rabat: Maktaba al-Ma'ārif, 1986), 216.

<sup>49</sup> Concluded from al-Jāhiz by Abū Zayd in *ibid.*, 215.

<sup>50</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharh*, 600.

<sup>51</sup> *Wa'l-ladhīna kadhdhabū bi-āyātina summun wa bukmun fī al-zulmāt. Man yasha' Allah yudlilhu wa man yasha' yaj'alhu 'alā sirātin mustaqīm* (Those who have rejected Our Signs are deaf and dumb, in utter darkness. Whom Allah wills He lets go astray and whom He wills He places on the right path).

unlimited meaning for its literal form does not suggest that. God restricts it with the word "in utter darkness", whose meaning cannot be grasped from its literal form. This restriction prevents it from having its absolute meaning. So, it is not legitimate that they hold fast the literal meaning of the verse.<sup>52</sup>

One can shift the meaning of a word, a phrase or a sentence from the real original one to another figurative one provided that there is a connection between the two and that there is something in the context which prevents the possibility of intending the former (*li-'alāqatin ma'a qarīnatin māni'atin min irādat al-ma'nā al-'aslī*).<sup>53</sup> In other words, the shifting is only legitimate if it is illogical to intend the real meaning, while, for the legitimacy of the figurative meaning, it is needed to find logical connection between the two meanings (real and figurative).

What is the criterion for saying that the real meaning is not intended? It is conventions of the Arabs in using their language and common sense. If it is said *jidāran yurīd an yanqadd* (a wall wants to fall dawn), common sense may not accept the literal meaning of this sentence, for it is illogical that a wall "wants". Therefore, the phrase *yurīd 'an yanqadd* must be interpreted with a figurative meaning.

In showing the opponents' misunderstanding, 'Abd al-Jabbār utilizes frequently the Arabs' customs in using their language or Arabic principles, in using either the real original meaning or the figurative one. Apart from that, he uses also logicity, such as that if someone asks God to give him assistance, it means that he is an actor of his act. If he is not an actor, as a logical consequence, to request does not mean anything.<sup>54</sup>

It can be taken as an example, when 'Abd al-Jabbār denies a conclusion drawn from the verse *iyyāka na'bud wa 'iyyāka nasta'in*<sup>55</sup> (Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we implore for help), saying that God's help, understood as man's power to do an act, is created by Him every time an action is performed. The reason which the opponents have for this conclusion is: if the help is there in the man before the performing of the act, the asking for it will mean nothing.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, 246. Find another example in *ibid.*, 51, 165 and 248.

<sup>53</sup> Tabāna, *al-Bayān al-'Arabī*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Sūra 1 (al-Fātiha): 5.

<sup>56</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, 41.

To reject this, 'Abd al-Jabbār says that to shift the meaning of "assistance" or "help" to "power" is not legitimate, for it is only stated there "we implore help". It is not stated there what kind of help it is. Besides, if we accept such a shift, what can be concluded is that the power comes and goes every time (*tatajaddad*), not that it happens any time the act comes into existence (only). Then he says that the existence of an asking, however good it may be, does not necessitate the happening of what is asked. Thus, although it may be possible to accept that the help consists of power and that the power comes and goes, it is not known for sure that the power for which man asks God every time may be given to him.<sup>57</sup>

It is clear from the last conclusion that 'Abd al-Jabbār uses logical premises and conclusions, and so does he when he discusses the opponents' refutation of giving the meaning of guidance and indication to the word *huda*. For them, *huda* or *hidāya* is belief. This is based on a statement in the Qur'ān that it is a *huda* for the righteous men (*al-muttaqīn*).<sup>58</sup>

For 'Abd al-Jabbār, it is illogical that they base themselves on this verse, remembering that to state specially that the Qur'ān is a *huda* for the righteous men does not mean that it cannot be a *huda* for others. According to logical rules, to mention specially one thing does not mean a judgment of other things (*takhsīs al-shay' bil-dhikr la yadull 'ala hukm mā'adah*).

After that, he says that God only states there that the Qur'ān is *huda* for the righteous men. If it is meant to denote belief, the verse will mean that the Qur'ān is a "belief" for them. This makes no sense and is, therefore, rejected by 'Abd al-Jabbār. The Qur'ān is a book revealed for the man on whom duties are imposed (*mukallaf*), while the first duty imposed upon him is to speculate or to see by his heart<sup>59</sup> indications of reason in order to know God.<sup>60</sup>

For this reason, the Qur'ān may not contain any contradiction either between its verses or between its statements and the indications of reason. In addition to that, although for the Mu'tazila it need not to be stated specially, there may not be any contradiction between its statements and the principles of their teachings. It is not important to mention specially, because for them those principles are laid down on the basis of speculating the indications of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-2.

<sup>58</sup> Sura 2 (al-Baqara): 2.

<sup>59</sup> It is *nazar al-qalb* which is another term for thinking. See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mugh'nī* XII:4.

<sup>60</sup> See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Kitab al-Usul*, 79 and *Sharh*, 39.

reason and therefore, they will say, they are in accordance with those indications. In other words, the intelligibility which 'Abd al-Jabbār uses in explaining the *mutashabihāt* verses, is based partly on common sense and partly on the principles of Mu'tazilite teachings.

Here it can be seen that the solution offered by 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Mu'tazila in general for the problem of *mutashabihāt* verses of the Quran, and the use of the non-*mutashabihāt* ones, are not intended to establish their teachings. It can happen by chance that in what they say one can find justifications of their teachings, but what they primarily want to prove is that the Quran cannot be used to support their opponents' opinions. It is not so important that they (the Mu'tazila) find in the Quran something which supports their teachings for these latter are strongly supported by rationalistic arguments. This is in accordance with their opinion that God's revelation, except concerning ritual rules or *sharī'a*, functions only as additional support and reminder for man of what he can reach by his own reflection upon the indications of reason.

### **Why The Qur'ān is a Basis for Theological Arguments?**

'Abd al-Jabbār opens his book with a statement that the validity of an action and of that it is an indication cannot be known save that the condition of whoever performs it is known. An action can never be used as an indication to prove the existence of the actor or his other qualities. It can only be used to indicate other things.<sup>61</sup>

The reason is that if the action indicates the existence of the actor, while the validity of his action can only be known after he is known, that will mean that the action only indicates the existence of the actor after he is known. If something is known, no indication is needed to know it. If the validity of the Qur'ān, says 'Abd al-Jabbār, is only known after that God is known, while God is known after that the Qur'ān is known, this means that each indicates to itself. This vicious circle must be rejected.<sup>62</sup>

As for the validity of the Qur'ān, 'Abd al-Jabbār says that an information, which bears possibility of being true and false, can only be known for its truthfulness or its falsity after that the state of the informant is known. We know that what is informed by the Qur'ān is not preceded by our knowl-

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<sup>61</sup>Idem., *Mutashabih*, 1.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

edge of the state of its informant. Therefore, we have to know first the state of the informant and that He is Wise, before we know that the Qur'ān is true in what it informs.<sup>63</sup>

Here one can say that we are able to judge its truthfulness or its falsity by fitting its content to the reality of the subject spoken about. We can affirm this if the information concerns things which can be known from another source or by another way. However, much of what was informed by the Qur'ān cannot be known from another information and by any other way. In addition, if we can know them from another information or by other ways, we do not need the Qur'ān any more

As for whether the Qur'ān is an indication, it is said that it can be an indication only if it comes from the Wise who does not choose to lie and order bad actions. If the Qur'ān does not come from someone who has these qualities, its status of being an indication cannot be detected. Thus, it must be known first that God does not choose bad action, in order that the Qur'ān can be used as indication of what it indicates. This means that it cannot be used as indication for the existence of God and His wisdom.<sup>64</sup>

Anyone who disagrees with that can, for 'Abd al-Jabbār, only be of one of two opinions: (1) that the information of the Qur'ān are indications, suspending judgment as to whether it is true or false (*akhbār al-Qur'ān tadull ma'a al-tawaqquf fī kawnihā min qabīl al-sidq*) and (2) they can be indications only if it is known that the Qur'ān is true (*innahā lā tadull illāwa qad 'ulima annahā sidq*).<sup>65</sup>

The first must be denied for a false information cannot be an indication of the one who brought it into existence. Suspending the judgment concerning its truthfulness or falsity, cannot ensure that it will not be false, and if it happens to be false, all that it indicates must be so, too. Thus, it is only the second which can be accepted. This means that the truthfulness of the Qur'ān must be known before its information can be used as indications. This knowledge, says 'Abd al-Jabbār, cannot come into existence but from reference either to itself or to other information or to indication of reason. It is impossible that the truthfulness of an information comes from itself. An information cannot be indication of its own state; it can only indicate the

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

cannot be used as indications?

Allah tells us all these things, says 'Abd al-Jabbār, in order to bring man who wants to know into reflection and inference (*li-yab'ath al-sā'il 'alā al-nazhar wa al-istidlāl*). It is possible, too, that He tells us that information because He knows that a *mukallaf*, when hearing and reflecting upon it, is closer to inferring His existence than if he does not hear it. If someone invites another to know Allah by teaching him the way to know His existence, His Unity and His Justice, his invitation may not be judged useless, even though the invited cannot know God by this means only. He has to do himself reflection and speculation. If someone has a conviction, by way of following other(s) blindly (*taqlīd*), that the Qur'ān is God's speech and that He never lies, this conviction will invite him to reflect more than what is told by an inviter who has no conviction of His greatness. For this, the Prophets, when their peoples asked them about God, mentioned how He created the heavens, the earth etc.<sup>69</sup>

For 'Abd al-Jabbār, the Qur'ān cannot be used as indication either to know what is allowed and what is prohibited by God, until it is known that it is impossible for the speaker [God] to lie in all that he speaks, to speak cryptically (*yu'mī*), or to order what is bad and to prevent what is good. However it is possible to know Islamic laws from the Qur'ān without any preliminary knowledge (*min ghayr muqaddima*), if the knowledge of God has come first. It cannot be known, from His speech, *lais ka-mithlihī shay'un*<sup>70</sup> (nothing resembles Him), that He does not resemble anything, unless it is known that He is not a material being (*jism*). It has been said that the actor and his wisdom could not be known from his action, if its validity and its being indication had to be referred to his condition.<sup>71</sup>

The information of the Qur'ān, for 'Abd al-Jabbār, can be grouped into three groups:

1. those which can only be known by revelation, i.e. the religious rules and obligations (*sharī'a*),
2. those which are possible to be known by either reason or revelation, such as that God cannot be seen and many things related to His threats,
3. those which can only be known by reason, i.e. His justice, His unity and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 4-5. See as well idem., *Fadl al-'Itizāl*, 139.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Qur'ān, sūra 42 (al-Shūrā):11.

<sup>71</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashabih*, 5.

any other things related to these two things.<sup>72</sup>

Does this mean that the Qur'ān is only argument for the first two kinds of knowledge? 'Abd al-Jabbār will say yes, but he does not refuse the function of this scripture as guide in matters related to the last category. He says that what the scripture inform about them is a grace (*lutf*) God gives to humankind in order that they do their own thinking and reasoning.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that one has to use rational argument or logical reasoning in understanding the Qur'ān. This reasoning is based primarily on logical understanding of the passage and the Arab convention on the meaning of Arabic word and expression. The Qur'ān, accordingly, must give consistent meaning and without any contradiction therein. The apparently contradictory passages must be treated on one logical basis of God's impossibility to lie. This will call up all instruments of interpretation such as figurative meanings, grammatical considerations and multi-interpretability of expression.

As the function of the Qur'ān as the basis of Islamic theological thought, 'Abd al-Jabbār does not hesitate to say that it cannot be used to prove the existence of God. Otherwise, there will be vicious circle of two things being each leaning on the other. This goes true for a category of knowledge which must be based on rational reasoning. This scripture can only be used for things which can only be known by revelation, i.e. the religious rules and obligations (*shari'a*) and for those which are possible to be known by either reason or revelation, such as that God cannot be seen and many things related to His threats.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 35-7.

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