

The Concept of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an – A Semantic Study

By

Fahed Masalkhi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(Languages and Cultures of Asia)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2021

Date of final oral examination: 04/12/2021

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Anna M. Gade	Professor, Languages and Cultures of Asia
Asifa Quraishi-Landis	Professor, Law
Uli Schamiloglu,	Professor, Languages and Cultures of Asia
Anthony Cerulli	Associate Professor, South Asian Studies

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ابن خلدون

Abstract

The Qur'anic concept of *ittiba'* – usually rendered as followership- is one of the core themes in the sacred book. Applying the methodology developed by Toshihiko Izutsu, this study conducts a semantic analysis of the concept of *ittiba'* and its use in the Qur'anic discourse. The analysis reveals that *ittiba'* in the Qur'an establishes a productive tension for the follower. For while the Qur'an invites following of God's guidance, the risks of followership are exhibited in stark terms. The study demonstrates this through the analysis of Qur'an's position on two issues connected to *ittiba'*: the position from inherited knowledge, and a new conceptualization of the relationship the Qur'an establishes between *ittiba'* and oppression.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Followership is the true engine of history. Without followership nothing, good or bad, could have taken hold in human history. Our susceptibility to agree to relegate our judgment, partially or wholly, to other human beings is what opens us to the glory or disgrace of followership.¹ If followers are absent, any movement, no matter how meritorious, is threatened to languish in obscurity. Followership, or *ittiba'*² in Arabic, is the main factor behind the imprint that any movement, religious or otherwise, makes on human existence. For religious traditions, it can be argued that followership is the essence of religious activity. Luther, for example, was not the first church reformer, but he was the first reformer to whom people have responded; it is the fact that enough people became followers of his reforms that gave Luther's movement its impact. No case illustrates this truism more clearly than that of biblical and Qur'anic Prophet Noah, who is said to have lived close to millennium³. In the short chapter that bears the Prophet's name we are given an account of the incessant exertion with which he carried his call. Throughout, Noah called his people day and night⁴, publicly and privately, and openly and in secret⁵, but to no avail. It was God that called an end to this venture: 'It

¹ Kelman, Herbert C., and V. Lee Hamilton. *Crimes of obedience: Toward a social psychology of authority and responsibility*. Yale University Press, 1989.

² The Arabic word *ittiba'* (*it - tea - baa*) is the noun gerund of the verb *taba'*, which means to follow, to shadow, to walk behind. It also means: to adhere to, to comply to, to conform, and to be subordinate to. I will continue to use the Arabic *ittiab'* instead of the usual English rendering of 'Following' to allow us to summon any of these component meanings as needed.

³ Qur'an 29:14.

⁴ Qur'an 71:5.

⁵ Qur'an 71:8-9.

was revealed to Noah: "None of thy people will believe except those who have believed already! So grieve no longer over their (evil) deeds."⁶ And those who agreed to follow him were not many: 'But only a few believed with him.'⁷ One thing that the story of Noah makes clear is that *ittiba'* (followership) is what makes or breaks a movement, religious or otherwise. Without followers, prophets, saints, and reformers have seen their accomplishments diminished.

Another thing that this story makes clear is the link between *ittiba'* and revelation. In his book *God and Man* Izutsu argued that without revelation there would be no true religion in the Muslim sense.⁸ It could be similarly said that without revelation (*wahy* in Arabic) there would be no *ittiba'*. *Wahy* (revelation) is the reason for *ittiba'*, this connection between *wahy* and *ittiba'* is made early on in the text of the Qur'an. In chapter two toward the end of the narrative about the creation of man:

*'We said: Go down, all of you, from hence; but verily there come unto you from Me a guidance; and whoso follows My guidance, there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.'*⁹

A word about the idea of revelation before we continue our exploration of its causal relationship to *ittiba'*. The Qur'an links Revelation to the attribute of 'belief in and the

⁶ Qur'an 11:36.

⁷ Qur'an 11:40.

⁸ Izutsu, Toshohiko. "God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung. 1980." Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust (2002). 164.

⁹ Qur'an 2:38. فَلَمَّا أَهْبَطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (البقرة 38)

awareness of the unseen.¹⁰ The longest chapter of the Qur'an, *al Baqara*, opens with description of those to whom this Revelation was sent: '*This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah. (2) Who believe in the Unseen ...*' (*al Baqara* 2:2-3)¹¹. In line with this is the fact that the Arabic term *wahy* is said to be applied to forms of communication that have an element of mysteriousness about them.¹² However, this mysteriousness is only about the method of communication, for in the Qur'anic sense, through *wahy*, God 'revealed Himself through language, and ... not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear humanly understandable language.'¹³ In the logic of the Qur'an; God in His benevolent care and mercy did not leave His creation without guidance.

*Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a messenger of their own who recite unto them His revelations, and cause them to grow, and teach them the Scripture and wisdom; although before (he came to them) they were in flagrant error.*¹⁴

As the Qur'an makes clear in this verse and more directly in 2:38 above, the promised benefits of this guidance can only be realized through *ittiba'*, that is by following the revealed guidance. *Ittiba'* is then a response to God's initiative. Without God's act of revealing Himself through *wahy* there is no need for a response, there is no issue of *ittiba'*, as there would not be any specific thing to follow. It is thus through *ittiba'* that all

¹⁰ Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. 1.

¹¹ Qur'an 2:2-3.

¹² Loynes, Simon P. *Revelation in the Qur'an: A Semantic Study of the Roots nzl and w-h-y*. Brill, 2021. 2.

¹³ Izustu, *God and Man*, 164.

¹⁴ Qur'an 3:164. قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِسْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينًا آل عمران (١٦٤)

the revealed tenets, beliefs and doctrines of the faith are realized. It is also through *ittiba'* that other core concepts of the Qur'an are recognized. *Iman* (belief), *Islam*, *taqwa* (God's consciousness), *kufur* (disbelief)...etc. are actualized, manifest, and modulated through *ittiba'*. It is this fact that makes *ittiba'* a principal constituent of religious practice as it is through *ittiba'* that religion gets done. So, there can be no *ittiba'* (no response), little *ittiba'* (not enough response), or too much *ittiba'* (extreme response). One important difference that distinguishes *ittiba'* from other major concepts of the Qur'an and makes it unique among other related concepts like *iman* and *taqwa* is the case of 'extreme response,' as there is no real conception of there being too much *iman* (belief), or too much *taqwa* (God consciousness), unlike with *ittiba'*. Too much *ittiba'* has been a problematic force in human societies throughout human history, because once people find religion, once they become religious, their answer to any problem is usually more religion.

It can thus be argued that the Qur'an in its entirety is a call to, and a justification for *ittiba'*. When the Qur'an speaks about the purpose behind existence, and behind the act of creation it speaks of *ittiba'*,

*Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and, He is Able to do all things. (1) Who has created life and death that He may try you which of you is best in conduct; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving,*¹⁵

¹⁵ تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمَلَكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (١) الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ الْمَلِكُ (٢)

Ittiba' is mainly about man's relationship to man. All *ittiba'* verses are about the relationships humans have with each other. There is no conception of following God, the Qur'an speaks only of following God's guidance. Everything that is involved with the act of following is a human function, or a human-to-human relationship. As we will see in the course of our investigation, the Qur'an has a lot to say about how these functions and relationships are perceived and performed. This brings us to the heart of the issue of this study: the paradox of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an. But before we try to formulate this paradox, we will first lay out its two conceptual elements. The first is that in the Qur'an, the human's relationship to God and His revelation is very personal. Consequently, responsibility and accountability for actions is always individual in the Qur'an.

The following verse in chapter 17: *al Isra'* is one of the most direct and emphatic verses on how lonely responsibility and accountability is:

Every man's fate We have fastened on his own neck: on the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open. (13) (It will be said to him:) "Read thine (own) record: sufficient is thy soul this day to make out an account against thee." (14) Who receive guidance, receives it for his own benefit: who goes astray does so to his own loss: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would We visit with Our Wrath until We had sent an messenger (to give warning).¹⁶

¹⁶ Qur'an 17:13-15.

All deeds that one commits in life, even if it seems they are done to or for others, are in actuality done for or against one's self

*Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul: nor is thy Lord ever unjust (in the least) to His servants.*¹⁷

*Nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden. If one heavily laden should call another to (bear) his load, not the least portion of it can be carried (by the other) even though he be nearly related. Thou canst but admonish such as fear their Lord unseen and establish regular Prayer and whoever purifies himself does so for the benefit of his own soul; and the destination (of all) is to Allah. (18) The blind and the seeing are not alike;*¹⁸

The formula *لا تزر وازرة وزر أخرى* (*la taziru waziratun wizra ukhra*) 'no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another' appears also in *al An'am* 6:164 and *al Isra'* 17:1 and *al Zumar* 39:7 and *al-Najm* 53:36-38. It is a repeated assertion of the individuality of reckoning, and a reminder that the possibility of burden sharing is nonexistent.¹⁹ Family bonds and ties of kinship will not offer support because on the day of reckoning, everyone, including parents, spouses, and children will be pre-occupied with their own fate.

¹⁷ Qur'an 41:46. فصلت (٤٦) مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ

¹⁸ Qur'an 35:19. فاطر بِالْعَتَبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَمَنْ تَزَكَّى فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّى لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ (١٨) وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ (١٩)

¹⁹ AlSuyuti, *AlDurr Manthur* الدر المنثور في التفسير بالماثور. IslamKotob, 1896, Vol. 2, 272

*That Day shall a man flee from his own brother. (34) And from his mother and his father. (35) And from his wife and his children. (36) Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others.*²⁰

Even one's own skin and limbs will turn against him and foil his attempt to escape the dreadful prospect of accountability

*At length, when they reach the (Fire), their hearing, their sight, and their skins will bear witness against them, as to (all) their deeds. (20) They will say to their skins: "Why bear ye witness against us?" They will say: "Allah hath given us speech— (He) Who giveth speech to everything: He created you for the first time, and unto Him were ye to return.*²¹

*That Day shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to Us and their feet bear witness, to all that they did.*²²

Individual responsibility is also affirmed in a number of other verses including *al Najm* 53:41, *al Hijr* 15:93, *al Isra'* 17:36, *al Baqara* 2:284, *al Nisa'* 4:111, and *Luqman* 31:33.

To segue us into the discussion of the second element of the paradox we should note that, as can be clearly seen in the verses cited above, most of the verses instituting personal responsibility and individual accountability are not addressed to the

²⁰ *يَوْمَ يَقْرَأُ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ (٣٤) وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ (٣٥) وَصَلَاتِيهِ وَبَنِيهِ (٣٦) لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ مِّنْهُم يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ (٣٧) عبس* Qur'an 80:34-37.

²¹ *حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَاءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٢٠) وَقَالُوا لَجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا فَوَلَّتْ قَالُوا أَنْطَقْنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (٢١)*

²² *لَيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (٦٥) يس* Qur'an 36:65.

individual but rather, are addressed to the collective. In later chapters we will see similar verses where groups of those condemned to the fire are hurling accusations at each other. I would like to suggest that this is not because they are brought to account collectively, but is rather a subtle sign that *ittiba'* is very contagious. The collective walk of regret toward the fire, that these verses describe, occurs because these groups have allowed themselves to be led to that dreadful end. I will address this more elaborately in chapter 5, for now let us go back to considering the other side of the paradox; it is that *all*²³ human actions and deeds cannot in reality be done individually. We are born into a social environment, and throughout our life we live in a socially connected and interdependent existence. The reality of the matter is that our individual acts, of piety or of any kind for that matter, cannot be performed independently from the formative influences of our environment, the fact is "human beings are social, historical, and changing subjects whose subjectivity and identity depend on and are the expression of their social context."²⁴ This is of course true on many levels beginning with the ontological level. But that is not the level of our concern here. We are concerned with the willing acts of acceptance and followership that the Qur'an invites the human subject to undertake in response to God's guidance. These acts of acceptance, as in the case of *iman* (belief), or rejection as in the case of *kufr* (disbelief), cannot be deemed to be

²³ I will explain the sweeping statement shortly.

²⁴ Cabrera, Miguel A. *A genealogical history of society*. Springer International Publishing, 2018, 2.

purely individual acts as they are not totally free from influence, mainly because of *ittiba'*.²⁵

The paradox of *ittiba'* that the Qur'anic subject faces is, then, being fully responsible and solely accountable without having the full independence of action. The necessary interdependence of their social existence will eventually ensnare the Qur'anic subject in the decisions and actions of others. The Qur'an, as we will see, is very blunt: this necessity does not excuse or diminish the burden of individual accountability.

In terms of *ittiba'*, the paradox is related to the extent to which we can protect the independence of our individual acts of followership under circumstances of inescapable social dependency. In the logic of the Qur'an, followership is something we give, it is something we willing offer to our object of following and that is where the responsibility and accountability issues from. I can now, I think, lay down my working hypothesis for this study. It is that *ittiba'* in the Qur'an produces a productive tension through which the Qur'anic subject can balance the act of offering their following, which is made necessary because we are social beings, with their need to distance themselves from their social environment enough to preserve their ability for the independent free acts for which they will become solely accountable.

²⁵ There is some resemblance between this understanding of *ittiba'* and the notion of non-sovereignty which 'stress the ways in which thinking, language, and ultimately one's very survival depends on social relationships'. It is seen as 'a condition that ... communities and singular individuals cannot overcome.' See Kelz, Rosine. *The non-sovereign self, responsibility, and otherness: Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, and Stanley Cavell on moral philosophy and political agency*. Springer, 2016, 1.

Genesis

I think we would profit from backtracking a little bit to commence the story of *ittiba'* from the beginning. The first occurrence of *ittiba'* in the text of the Qur'an comes within the account of the creation of man and his descent to earth. The verses begin at *al Baqara* 2:30 and end at 2:39. For reasons that will become clear as we proceed, it will benefit our inquiry to divide these verses into three parts: 2:30–33, 2:34, and 2:35–38. The first part starts with ' و ' ; the Arabic letter for conjoining parts of speech. It indicates that this account, of the creation of man, continues the account in previous verses of the creation of the earth and heavens.²⁶

Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on the earth." They said "Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not." (30) And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels and said: "Tell Me the names of these if ye are right." (31) They said: "Glory to Thee: of knowledge we have none, save that Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom." (32) He said: "O Adam! tell them their names." When he had told them their names, Allah said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?" (33)

Commentators have pondered over the interjection of the angels, and their response after they heard what God intended. Ibn Ashur points out that the concerns of the

²⁶ ibn Ashore, Muhammad al-Tahir. " *Tafsir al Tahrir wa al-Tanweer.*" Vol. 1, 395.

angels come from their assessment that the actions of this new creature were somehow not in line with what they understood the earth was intended for. Ibn Ashur suggests that this proves that what God desired for creation is other than mischief and the spilling of blood. It is proof that God's will is for the world to flourish and prosper.²⁷

What the philosopher Jawdat Said (b. 1931) found most worthy of attention is what the angels did not complain about. He thought it noteworthy that the charges leveled by the angels against this new creation were not about the possibility of renouncing God and giving the lie to a return to Him on Judgement Day. In other words, the charges against man were not theological, as would be expected. Instead the angels were worried about the risk that this new creature might engage in shedding blood and causing mischief, proof, according to Said, that had there been greater condemnation than these charges, they would have been leveled at man by the angels.²⁸ I would like to argue that, throughout human history, the instances where these two terrible accusations came true in their worst manifestations- world wars, Inquisitions, Holocausts, etc.- happened due to *ittiba'*, or in other words, due to followership. In each of these instances, countless sane, and rational human beings allow other human beings just like them to lead them into acts of bloodshed and mischief. In chapter five we will see how the Qur'an's treatment of this issue is focused on our proclivity to carelessly

²⁷ Ibid., 402.

²⁸ Said, Jawdat. "Be as the Son of Adam." Damascus. (Arabic) (1996), 67.

offer our followership, and place it where it is undeserved, and the consequential risks embedded in what drives us to do so.

In examining these verses, our focus on *ittiba'* is richly served by Amina Wadud's (b. 1952) exploration of the word *khalifah*, an Arabic term that is usually rendered as trustee or agent. To Wadud, every human being is a *khalifah*, so that in discussing these verses, for her 'gender inclusiveness is taken for granted.' Both women and men share in the 'mutual function or role the Qur'an designates for all humankind,' namely, being a *khalifah* (a trustee), or put differently, to be a *khalifa* 'is fundamental and essential for being human.'²⁹ In other words, trusteeship, is the task for which humans were created. Wadud adds '[t]hroughout the Qur'an, fulfilling the terms of this trust necessarily involves: (1) (voluntarily) obeying the will of Allah – alternatively interpreted as surrendering to the will of Allah, another term for "Islam"; and (2) participating in that obedience while here on earth. This implies responsibility: we are charged to manage our affairs on the earth in a fashion that demonstrates our surrender.'³⁰ In my view, there is intense friction between trusteeship and *ittiba'*. Both are essential to the subject the Qur'an is fashioning, but to fulfill both requires diligence and awareness.

Part of what Wadud attempted to show³¹ is that in the Qur'anic narrative women are primordially as essential to the human story as men are. They are not an addendum to men, who are perceived wrongly to be the main and real part of the story. *Ittiba'* by

²⁹ Wadud, Amina. "Inside the gender jihad: womens reform in Islam." (2006), 33.

³⁰ Ibid., 34.

³¹ Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

definition implies the state of being an addendum that the follower is an appendix to the followed, they come in the wake of the principal mover. One of the meanings the Arabs attached to the word *ittiba'* is that of the 'shadow', it is a supplement to the original form, and *follows* it wherever it goes.³²

This struggle with the meanings that the word *ittiba'* connotes is another rendering of the tension I described in my hypothesis above. *Ittiba'* is very risky for a *khalifah*, it eats away at their ability to carry their burden, and it subordinates them and puts their role as a trustee in jeopardy.

Moving to the second part of the verses, a new character in the human saga on earth enters the scene. Still, until now, named *Iblis*, the whole event of creating man and making him *khalifa* was not to his liking. So when the command is issued to bow to Adam, *Iblis* could not get himself to comply:

And behold We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam"; and they bowed down: not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty: he was of those who reject Faith. (34)

It is worthy to note that the first lesson for humans was not in the garden (the subject of the third part of the verses). The first lesson, and the first test, was here with *Iblis*. The lesson has two elements to it: one is disobeying God, the second, and the more important lesson, is to disobey God driven by arrogance (*istikbar*); a heightened sense of self-importance. In *al A'raf* 7:12 an explicit elucidation of the same event is given:

³² Ibn Mandhūr, Muḥammad. "*Lisan al-Arab*." Vol. V, Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah (2000).

*(Allah) said: "what prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?" He said: "I am better than he: thou didst create me from fire, and him from clay."*³³

This perceived self-importance exists nowhere but in *Iblis's* head, it has no reality outside of that. It is completely made up. *Istikbar*³⁴, haughtiness, is the attribute that turned *Iblis* into *Satan*, and it spelled his undoing. That, I think, is the first lesson in this narrative. Adam is, of course, present. He should have learned from this. He might have learned, but he will forget³⁵. On display for Adam here was a lesson about free will. Adam was not the only one with free will, as *Iblis* also enjoyed that aptitude. *Iblis* clearly had the capacity to decide whether to obey or disobey and Adam should have taken note of the choice being made and its consequences.

The final part of the narrative is in the garden. Sharawi (d. 1998) has an interesting take on this episode. He believes that the whole setup was a rehearsal for life on earth.³⁶ It was a case of learning by doing.

We said: "O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression." (35) Then did Satan make them slip from the (Garden) and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: "Get ye down all (ye people) with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of

³³ Qur'an 7:12. قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ (١٢) الاعراف

³⁴ In chapter 5 we will elaborate on the meaning of *istikbar* in the Qur'an, and its relationship to *ittiba'*.

³⁵ In chapter 4, this characteristic of human reality, namely that lessons learned are forgotten will help explain the relationship that the Qur'an forges between *ittiba'* and inherited knowledge.

³⁶ al-Sha'rāwī, Muḥammad Mutawallī. "Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī." (1991), 258.

livelihood for a time." (36) Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration and his Lord turned toward him; for He is Oft-Returning Most Merciful. (37) We said: "Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me" whosoever follows My guidance on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (38) "But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein." (39)³⁷

Like earth later on, this place has everything the couple needed.

"There is therein (enough provision) for thee not to go hungry nor to go naked" (118) "Nor to suffer from thirst nor from the sun's heat."³⁸

Then, there is the test: this one tree you should not approach, they were told. The test is surprisingly plain, simple, and totally achievable. Now, we reach the elements of the rehearsal that are most relevant to *ittiba'*. In chapter 20 of the Qur'an: *Taha* the 'message' or 'guidance' that was given to the couple is spelled out in clearer terms:

Then We said: "O Adam! verily, this is [satan] an enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you both out of the Garden so that thou art landed in misery."³⁹

Then comes the temptation(s):

³⁷ Qur'an 2:35-39. البقرة. وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اسْجُدُوْا لِاٰدَمَ فَسَجَدُوْۤا اِلَّاۤ اِبْلِیْسَۙ اَبٰی وَاَسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكٰفِرِیْنَ (۳۴) وَقُلْنَا یٰۤاٰدَمُ اسْكُنْ اَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْبَقْرَةَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَیْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هٰذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُوْنَا مِنَ الظَّٰلِمِیْنَ (۳۵) فَاَزَلَهُمَا الشَّیْطٰنُ عَنَّا فَاَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كٰنَا فِیْهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوْا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِی الْاَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ اِلٰی حَیْنٍ (۳۶) فَتَلَقٰیۤ اٰدَمُ مِنْ رَّبِّهِۦۙ كَلِمٰتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَیْهِۙ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِیْمُ (۳۷) قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوْا مِنْهَا جَمِیْعًا فَاِمْا یَأْتِیْكُمْ مِّنِّیْ هُدًی فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدٰیۙ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَیْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ یَحْزَنُوْنَ (۳۸) وَالَّذِیْنَ كَفَرُوْۤا وَكٰذَبُوْۤا بِآیٰتِنَاۙ اُولٰٓئِكَ اَصْحٰبُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِیْهَا خٰلِدُوْنَ (۳۹)

³⁸ Qur'an 20:118-119. طه. اِنَّ لَكَ اَلًا تَجُوْع فِیْهَا وَلَا تَعْرِی (۱۱۸) وَاَنْتَ لَا تَطْمَۤؤُا فِیْهَا وَلَا تَنْصَحٰی (۱۱۹) طه

³⁹ Qur'an 20:117. (۱۱۷). فَقُلْنَا یٰۤاٰدَمُ اِنَّ هٰذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وِلِزْمِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجُكُمَا مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقٰی (۱۱۷)

Then began satan to whisper suggestions to them, in order to reveal to them their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said "Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest ye should become angels or such beings as live forever." (20) And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser.⁴⁰

Now comes the final and most pivotal element regarding the concept of *ittiba'*, namely, deciding where followership should be placed, or deciding what to follow. At this instant Adam is experiencing the moment of decision that is usually the key element in *ittiba'*: what is one to do? Follow God's guidance, or follow temptation, Satan, desire, etc.

Here, we arrive back at the point we started from, rendered here in its second appearance it makes in *Taha*

He said: "Get ye down both of you— all together from the Garden, with enmity one to another; but if, as is sure there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way nor fall into misery. (123) "But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."⁴¹

The point is clear by now, I hope, but I will repeat it none the less. Without *wahy* i.e. *Revelation* there is no *ittiba'*. In the logic of the Qur'an, the caring, and merciful Creator

⁴⁰ Qur'an 7:20-21. فَوسَّوسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِدْوَى لَهُمَا مَا وَرَىٰ غَنَبًا مِنْ سَوْءِٰتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ (٢٠) وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَلنَّاصِحِينَ (٢١)

⁴¹ Qur'an 20:123-124. قَالَ أَهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ (١٢٣) وَمَنْ طَهَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ (١٢٤)

detailed for the benefit of His creation all the things that can come between them and following His Guidance, and although the position of the Qur'an strongly advocates Divine Guidance as the only way to garner the pleasure of God, the choice whether to do that or not is ultimately for the human being to make. In chapter three, we will take a detailed look at the elements that the Qur'an warns will make this choice harder when we conduct a semantic analysis of *ittiba'*. We will then take a deep dive into the two elements with the most social impact in chapters four and five.

Followership and Followers

A simple search for works on followership will immediately make evident the near complete dominance of organizational and business management concerns over the conversation⁴². Furthermore, within this disciplinary dominance reigned another dominance of leadership-centric approaches. More recently a number of works claimed groundbreaking status for shifting the focus onto followers and followership studies.⁴³ Even works in other disciplines like education or healthcare remained focused on the organizational and managerial aspects of followership. Considering that this dissertation is exploring the Qur'anic view of followership (*ittiba'*) my interest in these studies was focused on what light they can shed on the characteristics of followers. The

⁴² Another focus area that appeared in the search was of works that discussed followership in devotional and pastoral studies. See for example Huan, Philip. *Enduring Church Growth: Issues on Discipleship, Leadership, and Followership*. ARMOUR PUBLISHING PTE LTD, 2011. See also Jones, Timothy Paul, and Michael S. Wilder. *The God who goes before you: Pastoral leadership as Christ-centered followership*. B&H Publishing Group, 2018.

⁴³ See for example: Kellerman, James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership Barbara, and Kellerman, Barbara. *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*. United Kingdom, Harvard Business School Press, 2008. Also, Armstrong, Tracey. *Followership: The Leadership Principle that No One is Talking About*. N.p., Destiny Image, Incorporated, 2010.

study that I found to be usefully relevant to my investigation was a study by Melissa Carsten et al.⁴⁴ that explored individuals' perceptions of themselves when acting in a follower role. The study found that follower's perceptions of their roles fall along a passivity-proactivity continuum. The more passive followers emphasized the importance of obedience, and deferring to the knowledge and expertise of those in leadership. They stressed their comfort with the relative lack of accountability that came with the follower role. The study differentiated between the active and proactive follower. However, they both stressed initiative, taking ownership, and the importance of expressing their opinions. The proactive followers differed from both by their willingness to challenge their superiors.⁴⁵ It should be noted that these studies are conducted in hierarchical organizational structures that are based on a top-down conception of leadership. As a consequence, it is an accepted belief in these structures that followers are less responsible, and, more importantly, are less accountable than superiors or leaders.⁴⁶ We will see in chapter five that this notion will be challenged and turned on its head by the Qur'anic view of *ittiba'*.

Chapter Description

Chapter two is the methodology chapter. It will elaborate the elements of Qur'anic semantic analysis, as developed by the Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu, and the

⁴⁴ Carsten, Melissa K., et al. "Exploring social constructions of followership: A qualitative study." *The leadership quarterly* 21.3 (2010): 543-562.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 550.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 546.

methodological concepts it employs. Two works that used the methodology in their analysis of Qur'anic concepts will be reviewed: *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. By Daniel Madigan (2000), and *Never wholly other: A Muslima theology of religious pluralism*. By Jerusha Tanner Lamptey (2014).

Chapter three will conduct a semantic analysis of the concept of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an. It will map the details of the semantic field that the word *ittiba'* constructs around itself within Qur'anic discourse. The resulting topology of the field suggests that the Qur'an identifies a number of impediments that stand between the Qur'anic subject and following God's guidance. Of these, two are selected for further exploration and analysis. The first is the keyword '*the fathers*', and the second is a keyword comprised of the pair: *al-mustakbirun* and *al-mustad'fun* or *the oppressors* and *the oppressed*. Both keywords were chosen for their impact on the social environment of the Qur'anic subject and their impact on her ability to distance herself from its pull.

Chapter 4 analyzes the concept of '*the fathers*' as it is used in the Qur'an. This word is chosen for further analysis due to the fact that it designates, what is arguably, the most profound formative force in the life of every individual. This status allows it to contribute to our understanding of *ittiba'* since the verses in which it appears in the text are primarily preoccupied with the issue of following. Beyond the semantic analysis of this word/concept the chapter will explore this word's relationship to the development of the concept of *taqlid* and its impact on how *ittiba'* was perceived and practiced.

Chapter 5 conducts a semantic analysis of the pair of keywords *al-mustakbirun* and *al-mustad'fun*. This chapter has two main sections. In the first section the basic meaning of the concept will be explored. Drawing on the development of an 'Islamic Liberation Theology' by Farid Esack this section corroborates Esack's notion that the Qur'an includes 'a favorable option for the poor'. It makes clear that the Qur'an is invested in empowering the weak against the oppressive status quo they struggle against. In the second section I show that when *ittiba'* is included in the verses alongside the pair oppressor-oppressed the picture changes drastically. When *ittiba'* is part of the verses a new relational meaning develops that introduces an understanding of the oppressor-oppressed dynamic for which oppression loses its explanatory power.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion chapter.

Chapter 2 - Methodology and Literature Review

We seldom pause to restore the deserved sense of wonder about some aspects of our quotidian living. I marvel at how you, my reader, can hear my thoughts by running your eyes over this text. What is probably even more astonishing is how speech-and language-determined our life seem to be. Words form the dominant connections between us. Nothing matches words in their ability to shape our social interactions and the ways they allow us to build the relationships that define our communities and societies. We converse, convince, argue, dispute, love, and care through the exchange of words. Even our most intimate conversations, I mean our conversation with ourselves, can only happen through words even when their sole mode of existence is their unuttered reverberations in the deepest recesses of our psyche. It is hypothesized that the power of words extends to shaping our thinking. This claim is the subject of much debate. We do not know the extent to which our thinking is influenced by words.⁴⁷ In his exploration of the vocabulary of the Qur'an, Izutsu based his fundamental premise on the relationship between the vocabulary of a spoken language and life of the people who speak it.

In two of his seminal works *God and Man in the Qur'an* (1964) and *Ethico-Religious*

Concepts in the Qur'an (1966) Izutsu styled and implemented an innovative methodology

⁴⁷ McWhorter, John H. *The language hoax: Why the world looks the same in any language*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014. A truism has to be noted here, which is that we – on a personal level and collective levels- do not make language. Language is something we inherit, so if what is said about its dominion over thought and movement in the world is true, we are then relegated to reliving the life inscribed in these words and sentences. That this is not how things actually work is not in dispute. But this suggests the need for a more nuanced examination of this idea.

of semantic analysis of the text of the Qur'an. It does seem that the study of language came naturally to Izutsu. It is remarkably claimed that 'if there was a book he wanted to read, he would learn the language in which it was written.'⁴⁸ Izutsu's story with Arabic is linked to his encounter with two Tatars: Abdur-Rashid Ibrahim (1857-1944), also known as Abdurresid Ibrahim, and Musa Jarullah (1875-1949), whose name in many references was rendered Musa Bigiev. Ibrahim came into the picture first. They met around 1937, right around the time Izutsu became a teaching assistant at Keio University. Ibrahim advised the eager Izutsu that there was no point in studying only Arabic; he should study Islam along with it. Later on, Ibrahim took Izutsu to the Tokyo mosque a remarkable scholar 'that has just arrived.' He took him to meet Bigiev.⁴⁹

The fundamental analytic move for which Izutsu is known is the extension of meaning from what the words say (basic meaning) to what words say in unison (relational meaning). Many have found that Izutsu's method rewards careful implementation and opens the semantic space of words and concepts.

The Qur'an demonstrates a high degree of self-awareness.⁵⁰ It is a text that uses a significant portion of its sentences and words to speak about itself and its views on things. More than any other, the methodology developed by Izutsu allows us to listen to the Qur'an directly. Izutsu's is 'a method which will let the Qur'anic terms explain

⁴⁸ Wakamatsu, Eisuke, and Jean Hoff. *Toshihiko Izutsu and the philosophy of word: in search of the spiritual Orient*. International House of Japan, 2014, 41.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ See Madigan, Daniel. *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

themselves."⁵¹ This remarkable capacity is a primary reason for choosing this methodology to conduct this study of the concept of *ittiba'* as it is viewed in the Qur'an. One of the most succinct illustrations of the core idea behind Izutsu's method of semantic analysis came in the final paragraphs of chapter three of his book *God and Man in the Qur'an*. Izutsu convincingly showed, what I expect, would come as a surprise to many Muslims, that pre-Islamic Arabs had known eschatological concepts like 'Heavenly Record (*kitab*)', a 'Day of Reckoning (*yawm al-hisab*)⁵², and entities like the 'Angel of Death'. The common knowledge among Muslims, I presume, is that these were part of the worldview that came into the consciousness of the Arabs with the advent of Islam. For example, Antara, one of the most renowned poet warriors of pre-Islamic Arabia, in one of his renowned poems says to his beloved 'abla: *Ask the battle hardened brave about me. He will inform you that on the lance of my sword, the Angel of Death is ever present.*⁵³ However, Izutsu explains that these eschatological concepts did not have a significant imprint on the worldview of *Jahili* Arabs because they were 'stray concepts', meaning they were orphan notions with no supporting overall structure. They were semi isolated and strewed in a desert of meanings. These same words when given an abode within a new field of meaning, as we will see in the case of the Qur'an,

⁵¹ Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Vol. 1. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2002, 295.

⁵² Izutsu, Toshihiko. "God and man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung." *Studies in the humanities and social relations* (1964) 92.

⁵³ Khamees, Nadya Atta. "Morals of Chivalry in Antara Bin shaddad Poetry." *The Arabic Language and Literature* 1.10 (2010).

سَأَلِي يَا عُيْبَةَ عَنِّي خَبِيرًا * وَشَجَاعًا قَدْ شَبَّيْتَهُ الْحُرُوبُ
فَسُئِبِيكَ أَنْ فِي حَدِّ سَفْيِي * مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ حَاضِرٌ لَا يَغِيْبُ

a new entirely rearranged eschatological semantic field, they acquire new connotative potency that amplifies their impact and their contribution to that field of meaning.

Izutsu has made this point repeatedly, namely, that semantic analysis is concerned with the mapping of semantic fields as they are demonstrably able to bring a term from the depth of obscurity to the height of influence by placing it into a well-structured set of relationships within a new field of meaning.

The semantic methodology provides 'new outlook'⁵⁴ on the Qur'anic text. The assumption is that our language is a repository of the concepts that we live by, and that an understanding of our worldview can be achieved by 'means of a methodological analysis' of the key-words we produce to express the key concepts that comprise our worldview. Izutsu takes that concept and applies it to the Qur'an itself, so his analysis is an attempt to arrive at the Qur'anic worldview through mining the meanings and concepts crystalized in the Qur'anic language.⁵⁵

Izutsu considered it important to focus on the Qur'an and to 'try not to read into it thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Qur'anic ages'⁵⁶. That this method allows the Qur'an 'to speak for itself'⁵⁷ can be easily discerned from the phrases Izutsu uses throughout, phrases like: 'in the Qur'anic

⁵⁴ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁷ Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. University of Chicago Press, 2009, xi.

thought'⁵⁸, 'according to the Qur'an'; in the Qur'anic view'; 'the Qur'an itself declares'⁵⁹; 'the Qur'an is very conscious of'; and of course the 'Qur'anic vision of the universe.'⁶⁰ His declared goal is to 'try to grasp the structure of the Qur'anic world conception in its original form' fully aware that such a goal remains 'an unattainable ideal.'⁶¹ The result, as Fazul Rahman stated, is that 'the Qur'an has been allowed to speak for itself.'⁶²

I would like to stop at this statement by the late Fazul Rahman. Can a text actually speak for itself? And if it does what does it say? This question, I believe, comes from the idea that texts speak as they are read, and reading is an act of interpretation. In that case, can we really say that a text is speaking for itself? I cannot speak to what the late Fazul Rahman meant by his statement, however, within the logic of semantic analysis, I think we can still claim that the Qur'an can be seen to speak for itself. My statement relies on something already raised above concerning the transformations that were introduced by the Qur'an to the language and vocabulary of the Arabs. My point is that if we are able to trace, like Izutsu has done, how the Qur'an takes the very same words that already existed in the vocabulary of the Arabs and rearranges them into new configurations and puts them into new relationships with each other. That, I argue, is how the Qur'an speaks for itself. The Qur'an, as Izutsu has shown in multiple examples some of which we will exhibit below, brought about an entirely different worldview

⁵⁸ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 80.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶² Rahman, *Major Themes*, xi.

without using new words. That, I would like to suggest, is a clear sense of the Qur'an speaking for itself. Again, this is a feature that is brought to life by the manner in which this method, semantic analysis of the Qur'an, is able to map these concept-producing relationships, both of which were largely new and distinct from what was there before.⁶³

As we said above, semantic analysis provides 'new outlook'⁶⁴ on the Qur'anic text. It should be noted here that the traditional method of atomistic verse by verse interpretation is possibly what fueled the quest for such a 'new outlook', for something more wide lensed and less verse-centric. A similar case in point is Amina Wadud's criticism of atomistic interpretation. As she writes: "My criticism of the limitations in the atomistic approach of almost all traditional exegesis remains. To help move beyond its limitations, I propose a hermeneutics of tawhid to emphasize how the unity of the Qur'an permeates all its parts. Rather than simply applying meanings to one verse at a time, with occasional references to various verses elsewhere, a framework may be developed that includes a systematic rationale for making correlations and sufficiently exemplifies the full impact of Qur'anic coherence."⁶⁵

⁶³ An example that speaks to this point, although not incorporated in semantic analysis, is what is known as *al-Huruf al-Muqatta'at*, translated as the 'isolated letters'. These are groups of one to five letters that appear at the beginning of 29 of the Qur'anic chapters. There is no consensus on what these letters mean. Scholars, jurists, and mystics and puzzled over what to say about these letters. Again, the Qur'an did not invent the letters, but it used them to 'speak for itself'. Glassé, Cyril. *The new encyclopedia of Islam*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 187.

⁶⁴ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 2.

⁶⁵ Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1999, xii.

In the view of Fazlu Rahman the 'atomistic approach' resulted in 'a general failure to understand the underlying unity of the Qur'an, coupled with a practical insistence upon fixing on the words of various verses in isolation.'⁶⁶ The difficulty, I believe, partially came from the fact that the structure of the Qur'an defied linear conceptualization since 'the Qur'an is not divided into neat chapters dealing with specific subjects.'⁶⁷ I would speculate that it is the non-linear features of semantic analysis that gives it an edge as a non-atomistic approach to Qur'anic hermeneutics. What I mean by non-linear features here will become evident by using the most cursory examination of any example of semantic analysis in order to show that that verse sequence and chronological order are not at all factors in how concepts and words are grouped for analysis. Furthermore, non-linear features can be said to rest on two inter-related characteristics of how semantic analysis is structured: first is that the specific semantic field sprouts/grows from the focus word at its core like a fully branched and expanded tree sprouts from a seed. The second is the built in flexibility that allows a focus word to play the role of a key word in another field that has its own different focus word. These features, coupled with the fact that words that belong to a semantic field 'represent a relatively independent conceptual sphere,'⁶⁸ help create a system that

⁶⁶ Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and modernity: Transformation of an intellectual tradition*. Vol. 15. University of Chicago Press, 1984, 2.

⁶⁷ Esack, Farid. *The Qur'an: A user's Guide*. Oneworld, 2008, 146.

⁶⁸ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 20.

is both very complex and very flexible at the same time, and is a system that is very accommodating of the non-linearity present in the Qur'an.⁶⁹

It is quite ironic that to exit the confines of the atomistic method prevalent in classical Qur'anic exegesis we move from interpreting a verse in its entirety to focusing on the single word. This idea was, more or less, addressed by Izutsu as he explained that not all words have the same impact on their surroundings. Furthermore, focusing on words is a feature of thematic Qur'anic analysis because major concepts such as truth are mostly expressed by single words. A good illustration of this is Fazul Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1984). If one takes a look at how his search for themes proceeded, it is clear that each theme is constructed around a single word. The themes and their dependent concepts sprout from a single word. In *The Major Themes of the Qur'an* Fazul Rahman does not offer a clear criteria for how these themes, and not others, were selected. And although the book is an elaboration of the features of each theme, there is no clear attempt to reveal how these come together into a unified structure. Such an amalgamation is assumed but is not demonstrated. Semantic analysis on the other hand is primarily preoccupied with mapping the connections each word/theme makes, and the placement they occupy within such a structure.

Again, for Izutsu, meaning does not reside in the isolated word but rather in the entire system of interdependent relations that the word is part of and belongs to. However, he

⁶⁹ This notion refers to the fact that the Qur'an does not conform to our common idea of a book with a beginning, an end, and a middle. It does not present itself in an account that moves step by step in a recognizable narrative stream.

also regards Qur'anic Arabic to be different from Arabic as a language, an important part of his analysis has been to track the conceptual change brought about by the Qur'an to the words and phrases used in Arabic.⁷⁰ Equally important to note is that the difference between Qur'anic Arabic and *Jahili* Arabic is not in vocabulary or words, for 'none of the key-terms ... [were] a new coinage.'⁷¹ What was new was rather the systems and networks of relations within which the Qur'an embedded these words, a change that in turn effected a 'transposition of concepts, and [a] fundamental displacement and rearrangement of moral and religious values [that] radically evolutionized the Arab conception of the world and [of] human existence.'⁷² To illustrate the extent of the evolution and transposition that took place to the words and concepts of the Arabic language Izutsu aptly refers to the most central word in the Qur'an: *Allah*. The word, the name, and the concept was not new to the Arabs. The name featured prominently in their compound names and their poetry. The concept of Allah as an exceptional deity was also related to their understanding of the world as the Qur'an itself makes clear.⁷³ The transformation brought about by the Qur'an to the concept of the word Allah was so sweeping that it 'affected profoundly the whole structure of the vision of the universe. ... The elements of the universe came, without one single exception, to be uprooted from their old soil, and transplanted into a new field; each one of them was assigned a new place, and new relationships were

⁷⁰ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³ Qur'an 39:36. *And verily, if you ask them: "Who created the heavens and the earth?" Surely, they will say: "Allâh (has created them).*

established between them.⁷⁴ The metaphor of a field allows for the visualization of the transformation of the meanings of words and concepts that is brought about based on their position in the field and on which other words and concepts they are surrounded by in that field.⁷⁵

This brings us to another 'major methodological concept' of Izutsu's analytical tools, namely, his differentiation between what he calls the basic meaning of a word or concept and its relational meaning. The basic meaning of a word is context independent, it is the conceptual content that the word contributes regardless of where it appears, it is the 'constant semantic element which remains attached to the word wherever it goes and however it is used'.⁷⁶ Izutsu calls the other type of meaning the relational meaning of the word. Within the Qur'anic context a word contributes semantic elements that it assumes by virtue of the position it takes within a semantic field, and a word has the ability to induce these acquired semantic elements in other words due to its ability to establish a new relationship relative to its placement within the field.

⁷⁴ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 7.

⁷⁵ Although the notion of 'semantic fields' explains the impact that a word or a concept can have in shaping a worldview, I feel more has to be said about how such an effect comes about. In other words, concepts (signified by words) can be present in a society but are weak, ineffective, or dormant. So, when and how do concepts become determiners of worldviews? A related problem is when a concept is present but not the word that denotes it, how do we then account for its contribution to worldview. Take for example the concept of freedom, the word itself does not show up in the Qur'an, and the only derivative is a subjective noun that appears in a legal issue in 2:178, the centrality of the concept to the unencumbered will to act that is the basis of accountability of the individual is well established in the entire text of the Qur'an, so how is this situation accounted for in the semantic field methodology?

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

Izutsu explains that words differ in their impact on and within a relational field. He also suggests that such impact does not necessarily correlate with the frequency with which a word appears in the Qur'anic text. It might be useful here to couple these concepts with another helpful attribute that might be assigned to a word's ability to effect the field where it is located. If we think of a word as able to induce its basic meaning into another word it has forged relational connections with, the intensity and power of that induction correlates with the degree to which the word is able to modify or pull the field in its direction. The word *Allah* here is probably most useful in illustrating the proportionality of relational effect exercised by a certain word, as it possess the ultimate inductive power into its relations.

We can probably also gauge relational power by weighing the relations themselves. Izutsu in his diagrams seems to suggest that all relational connections are of the same magnitude. So, in attempting to uncover the relational meaning of a word two aspects should be examined: to which other words or concepts is the word placed in proximity, and what sorts of relations does it make with them. The purpose is to be able to ascertain to what extent did this placement into this particular field affects or modifies the basic meaning of the word. We can think of this second aspect in spatial terms. The distance between the basic meaning of a word and its relational meaning is greatest when this process creates, in effect, a new word. A good example of this is the change that befell the Arabic meaning of *kufr*. The basic meaning of the word is ingratitude, and it is employed as an opposite of the word *shukr* which means to be thankful or grateful.

The Qur'an, as Isutzu illustrated, places *kufir* in proximity to words and concepts that emphasize rejection and disbelief, and the word gradually becomes associated with the denial of the message rather than being unthankful. *Kufir* becomes the opposite of *iman* much more than being understood as the opposite of *shukr*.

One thing to keep in mind is that a 'basic' meaning 'is in reality but a methodological concept,' meaning it does not exist 'in this abstract form in the world of reality.'⁷⁷ Put differently, one can say that Izutsu is more or less saying that all word meanings are, in reality, relational. I have found that this methodological distinction is useful in ways that Izutsu mentioned but did not emphasize. One way the basic meaning is useful is by giving us a 'base point' from which to measure the change brought about by the relational meaning. We can imagine a distance between the basic meaning and the relational meaning that is wider in some transformations than it is in others. If we recall again the transformation that the word *kufir* went through we can say that the distance between the 'basic' meaning of ingratitude and the resulting relational meaning of disbelief is quite large. We will see that other concepts or words will exhibit different distances between these two meanings that might indicate the degree of the transformation. The benefit of this methodological measure will probably appear more evident in the changes brought about to the 'cultural situation[s]' of the communities receiving this revelation, or as Isutzu states: 'For, after all, what we call the 'relational' meaning of a word is nothing other than a concrete manifestation, or crystallization, of

⁷⁷ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 16.

the spirit the culture, and a most faithful reflection of the general tendency, psychology and otherwise, of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary.”⁷⁸ In the end, according to Izutsu, the proper application of these methodological measures should ‘bring to light ... facet[s] of culture as it was, or is, being experienced consciously by those belonging to that culture.’ One by one these key-words, when they are properly analyzed, will add up to a ‘whole structure’ that represents the ‘semantic *weltanschauung*’ of that culture.

Key-words are ‘words that play a really decisive role in making up the basic conceptual structure of the Qur’anic world-view.’⁷⁹ The choice of key-words suffers ‘a certain amount of arbitrariness’ however this issue ‘does not offer a real problem’ since these, according to Izutsu, are not in reality prone to much disagreement. The crucial thing about these key-words is that they form connections with each other in complex ways that overlap on multiple levels forming ‘relatively independent conceptual spheres’ or ‘semantic fields’, which are defined as ‘a whole body of words arranged in meaningful pattern representing a system of concepts ordered and structured in accordance with a principle of conceptual organization.’⁸⁰ Izutsu notes that the manner in which a semantic field colors the meaning of a word or concept is evident from the fact that key-words that were in use in Arabia before the arrival of the Qur’an assume completely different ‘semantic value’ in the Qur’anic system of meaning. This allows for an

⁷⁸ Ibid., 17. َ

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 20.

assessment of how 'new ideas arose, ... how old ideas were modified, ... and how history acted upon and molded the thought of the people' of Arabia.⁸¹

So, how are semantic fields detected, identified and isolated? Within Izutsu's methodology this is the function that is served by another methodological tool: the 'focus-word' which is defined as a key-word that 'indicates and delimits a relatively independent and distinctive conceptual sphere i.e. a 'semantic field.'⁸² Finding the 'focus' word is 'difficult' since it amounts to choosing the first among equals. Izutsu's admittance of a measure of arbitrariness in this process has been perceived, undeservedly, as a weakness in the methodology. Interestingly enough, the majority of scholars who have chosen to implement Izutsu's methodology did not have to deal with this problem in the same manner as Izutsu, because Izutsu's goal was to discover that the Qur'anic worldview was not, as far as I know, repeated. Subsequent applications of Izutsu's methodology were more narrowly focused, and were usually explorations of a specific concept in the Qur'an, not unlike what is done in this present study.

To show the kind of work done by a semantic field on a word in the Qur'anic text Izutsu chose *yawm* (day) and *sa'ah* (hour, or the hour). He showed how both acquire an eschatological tint when they are thrust in to the Eschatological semantic field. The 'proper-neutral' basic meaning of 'day' is transformed to denote the Day of Resurrection, the Last Day, or the Day of Judgement. With *sa'ah*, Izutsu explains that a

⁸¹ Ibid., 21.

⁸² Ibid., 22.

word can be colored by the tint of the semantic field to the point where it can convey a strong relational meaning without needing to 'actually occur in special combinations with other words that have more explicit ... associations' with that specific field. In this specific example *sa'ah* by itself is quite sufficient to convey all the necessary eschatological implications as long as it is known that the word is operating within this specific semantic field. In effect, within a semantic field, like the Eschatological field, that has a distinct and pronounced atmosphere a word like *sa'ah* can invoke a relational meaning by establishing a relationship to itself.

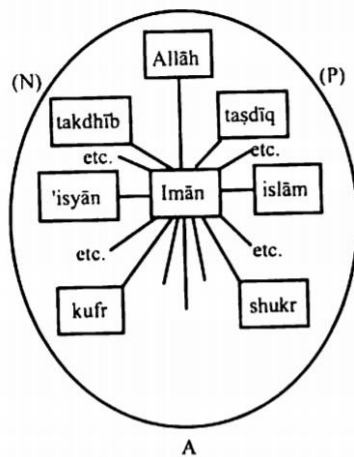
Words characterize how we see the world, but they do not all contribute to that vision or impact it in the same way. A central part of Izutsu's methodology is to bring to the fore those words that play a 'decisive' part in characterizing the worldview of the speakers of the language.⁸³ Concepts and values are known to us through the words that represent them, so they are not mere words; they shape, divide, and characterize the world for us. Isolating these words is what Izutsu described as 'the most important task of a semanticist', its unavoidable measure of arbitrariness notwithstanding.

Isolation, is of course necessary but it should not obscure the fact that these words do what they do precisely because they are not isolated. In effect we need to be able to focus on a word and examine it while its connections to the rest of the system are intact. In other words, we want to focus on a word while being able to see it in action: that is,

⁸³ Ibid., 18.

as an element of a highly organized and interdependent system of semantic associations.⁸⁴

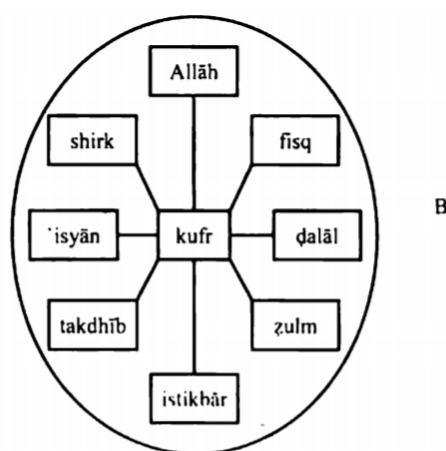
Izutsu makes significant use of diagrams illustrating the relational space of Qur'anic vocabulary, and these usually depict a focus word and the multiple connections it establishes with key words in a designated semantic field. These are undoubtedly helpful in visualizing the wide-ranging effects that the field inscribes onto a word's basic meaning. Following is a reproduction of Izutsu's depiction of the semantic field of *iman*.



Enough of the key words are themselves of a level of import to qualify as focus words of other semantic fields in their own right. This property of Qur'anic vocabulary tell us two other features of the system: it renders it highly flexible but makes it exceptionally complex at the same time. Although, as we mentioned earlier, diagrams in the manner used by Izutsu help us visualize the relational connections in a semantic field, the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 19.

complexity of the system of relations cannot be completely appreciated using these two dimensional layouts. I think this point can be readily appreciated by examining the extent to which fields overlap, and by depicting the multiple of points of contact running between them. To give a sense of this attribute of semantic analysis we recall Izutsu's analysis of the semantic field of *kufr* (disbelief) shown in the diagram below:



As depicted in the diagram, the words clustering around the focus word of this semantic field are words that 'signify partial and particular aspects of the concept itself ... or those that stand for concepts closely related' to it.⁸⁵ If we focus in on the key-word *ḍalāl* (which carries meanings of deviating from the right path, of being perverse, delusional, and in error) we see clearly how it bonds the two semantic fields by playing the same role in both. At the heart of what this key word connotes is one of 'the most

⁸⁵ Ibid., 25.

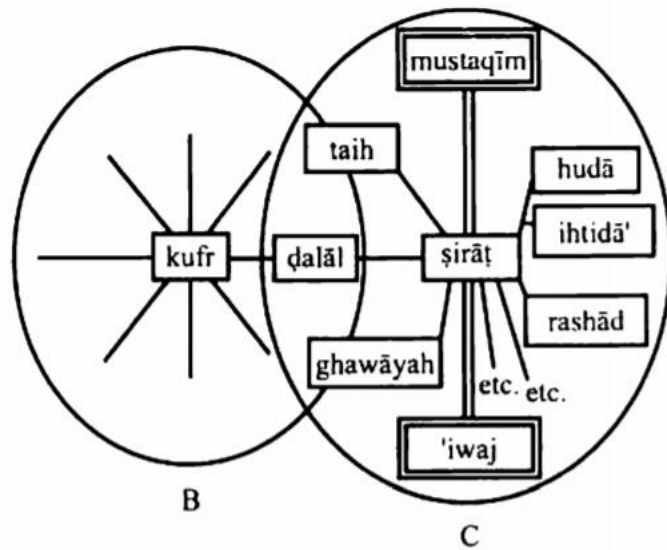
remarkable religious conceptions of the Qur'an⁸⁶ namely, that *Allah* has designated a path, a way that leads to Him and His pleasure, and will lead to deliverance if followed, and that most people choose not to heed the call.⁸⁷ This concept of the Path, Way or in Qur'anic vocabulary *sirat*, *sabil Allah*, *sabil Al Haq*, *sabil al-Rushd* or *sabil al-Mu'mineen* in its positive connotations and *sabil al-Ghay*, *sabil al-dalal*, *sabil al-Mujrimeen*, *sabil al-Mufsideen* in its negative connotations is one of the most important conceptions governing the Qur'anic worldview.

In the diagram below, the focus word *sirat* sits in the center of the field, and clustered around it are words denoting concepts that relate to *Way* or *sirat* grouped into three main sub-clusters: concepts relating to the nature of the Way depicted in an opposing pair of being straight or crooked, concepts related to *dalal* as a product of human choice and concepts of *dalal* of straying from or the path or way of God. Izutsu points out that the two depictions of the semantic field of *kufur* and *sirat* show that the key word *dalal* is part of both in 'exactly the same capacity' and 'does establish a link between the two systems.'⁸⁸ Izutsu depicts the connection made between the two semantic fields by the key word *dalal* in the following diagram:

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁷ Rejection is one of the consistent responses faced by the prophets and messengers whose stories are told in the Qur'an. The best example is Prophet Noah who kept at it the longest. In Qur'an 71:5-7 is says: 'He said: "O my Lord! I have called to my People night and day: (5) "But my call only increases (their) flight (from the Right)." (6) "And every time I have called to them, that thou mightest forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance. (7)'

⁸⁸ Ibid., 26.



Izutsu remarks that this should serve only as an illustration of how one and same key word can establish a connection between two independent fields. He further notes that these two specific fields include within them a number of shared key words that play the same connecting role as that played by the key word *dalal*.

When admitting the unavoidable measure of arbitrariness that is involved in choosing a focus word, Izutsu states that such probability 'must not be allowed to make us blind to the methodological utility of such a concept.'⁸⁹ I never quite saw the necessity of worrying about the arbitrariness involved in such a choice if one is putting into use the methodological process of analyzing any word's relational mapping within a system of any vocabulary. If one did not set out to uncover the worldview of a system of

⁸⁹ Ibid., 22.

vocabulary in its entirety as Izutsu did, then the choice of what to consider as a focus word should be unconstrained by worries of arbitrariness. The merits of the choice, or lack thereof, will be borne by the analysis itself, and, as Izutsu himself advised, this should not diminish our sense of the utility and force of the methodological process.

Izutsu's methodology was received with interest judging by the number of studies that found its implementation rewarding⁹⁰. The methodology was criticized for mostly procedural shortcomings but was nevertheless adopted for studies that set out to explore Qur'anic view on different matters.

Izutsu's methodology was used by Daniel Madigan in his book on the Qur'an's perception of itself.⁹¹ Madigan was right to caution against the notion of 'correct' meaning that appears in Izutsu's description of the methodology. However, the notion itself has coexisted for a long time with a well-established concept of Qur'anic polysemy.⁹² But he further writes that it is doubtful that a word can have 'a real meaning, a precise meaning or, still less, one permanently valid meaning'.⁹³ This sweeping denial of the stability of meaning could be equally dangerous. This could also

⁹⁰ See for example Albayrak, Ismail. "The Reception of Toshihiko Izutsu's Qur'anic Studies in the Muslim World: With Special Reference to Turkish Qur'anic Scholarship." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 14.1 (2012): 73-106.

⁹¹ Madigan, Daniel. *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

⁹² Mutaz al Khateeb gave an illustrative account of how traditional Qur'anic exegesis embraced the multiplicity of interpretations, he traces the how exegetes interpreted the meaning of 'al kawthar' in Q:108-1 through the ages and shows that it begins as a simple direct interpretation in the exegesis of Muqatil bin Sulaiman (d.150) - the earliest extant *tafsir* of the entire Qur'an- to around 16 interpretation in the exegesis of al Razi (d. 660) passing through four meanings for *Kawthar* offered by al Tabari in his *al-tafsir al kabir*. See for example "معتز الخطيب. "" آيات الأخلاق": سؤال الأخلاق عند المفسرين *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 1.1-2 (2017): 83-121.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

explain Madigan's criticism of Izutsu's definition of the 'basic' meaning of a word, which he regards as a point of 'weakness' in Izutsu's analytic system, namely, that 'the basic meaning of a word inheres in the word itself and can remain independent of its cultural context.'⁹⁴ Madigan faults Izutsu for not noticing that a word like '*kitab*', Madigan's focus word, brings into the Qur'anic vocabulary a basic meaning that has already picked up relational elements 'acquired in other contexts.'⁹⁵ Based on his consideration of the impact of 'other contexts' on the shaping and development of Qur'anic vocabulary Madigan states that 'we must recognize that there can be no such thing as 'the word *kitab* in an ordinary context showing the basic meaning of 'book' pure and simple.'⁹⁶ While acknowledging Izutsu's disclaimer that the use of basic meaning is a methodological device employed for analytical utility, and that it does not indicate the presence of a word that can solely carry or indicate a basic meaning, Madigan regards such a disclaimer as inadequate. This is because whatever meaning of a word one considers, that meaning is already relational due to the effect of 'other environments'. I feel that this dismissal or weakening of the existence, even theoretically, of a basic meaning of a word deprives the examiner of a useful tool of analysis, even if we grant the instability of meaning brought about by the change of context over time. Madign is probably right to raise the need for accounting for the effects of relational meanings gained from other environments, and to ensure that such meanings are included in the semantic analysis of a word, but I feel that this attack on

⁹⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 83.

the notion of a basic meaning is unhelpful. I see the notion of a 'basic' meaning as necessary and useful in anchoring an important element in the analysis proposed by Izutsu, namely, the ability to isolate a term and begin to gauge the many transformations it went through due to the effect of semantic forces or pressures. Without some 'basic' point of departure such analysis would be compromised.

In his book, Madigan goes on to explain his choice of the focus word *kitab* by noting the central role this word plays in our understanding of the book, the message and the messenger.⁹⁷

Madigan classified the verses into two major sections: *Kitab* as a verb indicating an action by God Himself, and *kitab* as the action of human beings. *Kitab* when it is the act of God is either *kitab as hukum* 'God writes to determine' (judgement, verdict, ordination ...) or *kitab as 'Ilm* 'God writes to record'⁹⁸ (recording, keeping account, ...etc.). *Kitab* as a human action in the Qur'an occurs once in the regulation of recording of debts⁹⁹, and the rest of the occurrences are 'negative and polemical.'¹⁰⁰ When these occurrences are examined in conjunction with revelation it shows that *kitab* is used and understood in the Qur'an 'more in terms of process than fixed content' and that it unfolds throughout the Qur'an in descriptions of 'divine-human engagement' in which the leading suggested motive is mercy. These together, writes Madigan, 'actually

⁹⁷ Madigan, *The Qur'ans Self-image*, 91. Here is an example of choosing a focus/keyword that can hardly be described as arbitrary. Again, as I noted above worrying about the arbitrariness of the choice of focus and key words is needlessly exaggerated.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁹⁹ Qur'an 2:282. 'O you who believe! When you negotiate a debt for a designated term, record it in writing.'

¹⁰⁰ Madigan, *The Qur'ans Self-image*, 118.

constitute and define *kitab* far more than any content.’¹⁰¹ Considering the logic of the Qur’an it is impossible that it would regard *al-kitab* to be a book or a fixed text since the Qur’an itself attests to the claim that *al-kitab* was given to more than one group.¹⁰² To regard *al-kitab* as an ‘open-ended process of divine engagement with humanity’¹⁰³ would represent a position that is far more consistent with how the Qur’an views it.

There are 232 incidents of *kitab* in the text of the Qur’an.¹⁰⁴ Of the Qur’anic verses containing the word *kitab* Madigan identified a cluster of four verses (two in *al-Baqara*, one in *al-Imran* and one in *al-Jum’a*). While a measure of arbitrariness is evident in this selection, Madigan justifies the choice of these four verses by the probability that ‘a creedal formula lies behind them.’¹⁰⁵ These verses formulaically repeat a pattern of words that describe the ‘mission’ of the prophet as constituting three connected actions toward those he is sent to deliver the message to: recite *يَتْلُوا* (*yatlu*) to them the signs *آيات* (*ayat*) of God, purify them, and teach them (or in Madigans translation: make known to them) the *kitab* and the *hikma*. Madigan begins with the last action first. He suggests that this formula – *alkitab* and *al-hikma* – should be read as a hendiadys.¹⁰⁶ His semantic analysis of this formula identifies the word *hikma* as a key word in the semantic field of *kitab*. The most common rendering of this key word, as Madigan tells us, is ‘wisdom’,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰² Ibid., 177.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁴ The overwhelming majority of these appear as *kitab* and *al-kitab* with other forms appearing only a few times, these appear as *كتاباً*, *كتابك*, *كتابه*, *بكتابه*, *بكتابه*, *كتابها*, *كتابتنا*, *كتابكم*

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 94.

which Madigan insists carries esoteric connotations that are risky for the task at hand since it fails to account for meanings such as restraining, judging, ruling, confining, and defining.¹⁰⁷ But he then discounts this usual rendering from being included in the words derived from the root for *h-k-m*. As a result, *h-k-m* in Madigan's analysis seems to lack its *wisdom* component and to be confined to matters of rule: 'judgment, decision, law, control, governance.'¹⁰⁸ It is not entirely clear why would the most common rendering of the root *h-k-m* is not allowed to contribute to the meaning of this key-word. It could also be that the possible esoteric connotations of the formulaic part represented by the word *يُزَكِّيهِمْ* (*uzakeyhem*) 'to purify them' is behind its absence from consideration as relevant to the understanding of the semantic field of *kitab*.

Madigan emphasizes that the proximity of *hikma* to *hokum* should decisively bring it closer to judgement and away from wisdom. This labor to ensure that wisdom is excluded from a decisive influence on the meaning of *hikma* is to ensure that no esoteric elements are picked up by the relational meaning of *hikma*. For what reason this dissociation is necessary is not quite clear, for it does not seem to impact his identification of the root *h-k-m* (words that have to do with judgement, decision, law, control, governance) as the first major component of the semantic field of his focus word *kitab*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 96.

The second formula within the four verses chosen by Madigan as basis for his exploration of the semantic field of the focus word *kitab* is *ويتلوا عليكم آياته* 'he will recite to you/them Our/Your/His signs.'¹¹⁰ To appreciate its power as a focusing concept, *aya*, has to be seen 'in action'. To achieve that Madigan lays out and details the intricate network of nouns and verbs working through the characteristically Qur'anic motif of common and frequently recurring verse-endings like *la'alla-kum (-hum) ...*'so that perhaps you (they) might ...'; '*a-fa-la ...* 'will (you, they) not then ...?' or 'can (you, they) not then ...?'¹¹¹ , and '*aya (ayat) li-qawmin ...*'sign(s) for people who ...'¹¹² The pattern of usage of all of these refrains is similar throughout the text: the majority of the verses speak of natural phenomena, others deal with historical incidents, past profits and peoples, legal instructions, or revelation.¹¹³ Noting the overwhelmingly intellectual verbs used with these refrains, Madigan convincingly suggests that the '*ayat* are intended to challenge people to reflect, to reason, to learn and finally to come to faith.'¹¹⁴ And the *aya(t)* accomplishes this task in their capacity as gestures of divine communication that 'takes on the aspect of a challenge'¹¹⁵ to the people calling on them to heed the call of their Creator. These vehicles of divine communication bestow divine knowledge mainly through the work done by the next key term in the formulaic verses chosen by Madigan: '*allama al-kitab* 'to make known or to teach the *kitab*'.¹¹⁶ The

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 98.

¹¹² Ibid., 99.

¹¹³ Ibid., 100.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

adjective *'alim* 'knowing' in Qur'anic discourse is the prerogative of God as He is the subject of 134 occurrences of the term (out of a total of 140), and as two of the four chosen verses; Q 3:164 and Q 62:2 make clear that without sending the Prophet(s) to teach *al-kitab* the people would be, as they were before his arrival, 'in manifest error'. *'ilm* 'knowledge' becomes the second key-word that defines the field of which *kitab* is the focus word, and the *'ayat* that comprise in their totality *al-kitab* are 'the record of both God's knowledge and the authoritative divine will'.¹¹⁷

The fundamental pattern of the semantic field of *kitab* then, has the twinned focus of *hikma / hukm* (authority) and *'lm* (knowledge). The uses of the verb *kataba* (to write or to write down), and its derived forms in the Qur'an, are found to be entirely exclusive for God's activities.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, when these verbs are mapped out they are found to largely correspond to the hypothesized pattern; *kitab as Hukm* (God's Determinations)¹¹⁹ indicating God's authority, and *kitab as 'lm* (God's Recordings) indicating God's knowledge.¹²⁰ This understanding is put to the test in chapter six by listing all the Qur'anic terms that could belong to the semantic field of *hukm* and pairing them to all the Qur'anic terms that belong to the semantic field of *'ilm*. The resulting words emerging from such pairing will be seen to be associated with the word *kitab* in the vocabulary of the Qur'anic text. What is demonstrated by doing this, Madigan argues, is that: 'the term *kitab* functions primarily – almost exclusively – as a unifying symbol of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 113.

[*hukm* and '*ilm* as] two aspects of divine activity.'¹²¹ It is this understanding of *kitab* as 'the writing activity of God' that gives it the perpetual, dynamic and active sense that Madigan suggests.¹²² It is to be understood as a process rather than a closed and finished scriptural corpus.

In essence these four verses comprise the focus *ayat* (akin to the methodological tool focus word but at the level of the verse). The remaining chapters are to explore these and the work they do on the focus concept of *kitab*. In effect, these four verses (out of the other 248 in which the focus word appear) are the focus verses that the analysis will be built around.

Izutsu's methodology was used by Jerusha Lamptey in her exploration of 'difference' as it is presented in the Qur'an. Her analysis convincingly brings to light the complexity of the Qur'an's conception of religious difference, and how modern women interpreters of the Qur'an dealt with difference. Lamptey found in Izutsu's methodology a 'suitable resource' for 'explicating dynamic and complex relationality'¹²³ of Qur'anic views on religious difference. She found that Izutsu's stance on the Qur'an paralleled the stance taken by women interpreters in two respects: 'the polysomic and dynamic nature of the Qur'anic text.'¹²⁴ Semantic analysis is the method favored by Lamptey because, among other things, it provides a method that can consider aspects of sameness and difference

¹²¹ Ibid., 151.

¹²² Ibid., 182.

¹²³ Lamptey, Jerusha Tanner. *Never wholly other: A Muslima theology of religious pluralism*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014, 123.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 132.

simultaneously¹²⁵, and also for its deemphasizing of concepts and tools that have had detrimental effect on Islamic views of religious diversity. For example, Izutsu's method paid little attention to exegetical devices like *asbab al-nuzul* (the occasions of the revelation) and *naskh* (verse abrogation) due to its emphasis on relational connections of verses.¹²⁶ Although, as Lamprey recognizes, there are areas of overlap between her analysis and those of Izutsu, especially his elaborations on the concepts of *islam*, *iman*, and *kufur*, there are also areas of divergence. The first matter that Lamprey takes issue with in Izutsu's analysis is the manner in which he regards conceptual opposition to characterize the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*. The problem with conceptual opposition, Lamprey offers, is that 'it emphasizes radical difference only.'¹²⁷ She speculates that Izutsu's focus on conceptual opposition results from his conviction that the Qur'an is primarily concerned with the issue of salvation, which leads him to backproject the eschatological endpoints of *al-janna* (the final abode of the believers) and *al-jahannam*¹²⁸ (the final abode of the *kuffar*) onto humanity in this life. This emphasis results in solidifying the difference between categories like *mu'mins* (believers) and *kuffar* (unbelievers) as solid, clear cut, and dichotomous. Lamprey proposes an understanding of difference (religious difference in particular) that is relational rather than divisive.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid., 133.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹²⁸ More correctly *Jahannam*, as far as I know the definite article is never used with this noun in the Qur'an.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 136.

Lamprey extends Asma Barlas's notion of lateral and hierarchal difference into religious difference. Barlas, Lamprey explained, regards attributes like sexual difference as forms of lateral difference; these differentiate without ascribing value, and since they are congenital they are considered to be divinely inscribed and are not to be targeted for elimination. Hierarchal difference, on the other hand, is assessed and evaluated based on a human activity, namely, the degree of God consciousness or *taqwa* one attains. The central attribute of this difference is that, like *taqwa*, it is personal and is assessed on an individual basis, yet it is manifested socially and mostly unfolds through relational expressions.¹³⁰

In her own examination Lamprey builds on Izutsu's analysis of *iman*, *islam*, *kufr*, and *nifaq*, all considered central to the Qur'anic discourse on difference, in spite of the fact that she views Izutsu's analysis to be constrained by the his depiction of these concepts as the inverse of each other, completely opposite, with no overlap between them. To move beyond this conceptual opposition, both *iman* and *kufr* are placed in the proximity of the concept of *taqwa*. This alternate positioning will deconstruct the absolute oppositional stance these concepts had been conceived through. This move will also bring other concepts important to conceptualizing hierarchal difference, like *islam*, *nifaq* and *hanif* out from the shadow of *iman* and *kufr*. By positioning them in the semantic field of *taqwa* as key words their contribution to the hierarchal difference can be brought into relief.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 140.

Lamprey explores how the groups mentioned in the Qur'an were identified by exegetes, and the fact that who the exact referents of these groups were is a contested issue among them. This leads to a discussion about the term Islam and Muslims in the Qur'an, and whether these terms could be confined to the historical community that was established by the prophet Muhammad in Arabia. Following Esack's questioning of whether group ascriptions in the Qur'an could be made to individual affiliates of these groups, Lamprey argues that groups should be regarded as manifestations of lateral religious difference. They are, furthermore, associated with a distinct semantic field that is anchored by the focus concept of *umma*,¹³¹ defined here as 'a human community associated with revelation, messengers, and judgement'. According to Lamprey it is the dynamic, multiple, and partial intersections of these two semantic fields that offer the key to understanding Qur'anic discourse on religious difference.¹³²

In the following chapter we will conduct a semantic analysis of the word/concept *ittab'*.

¹³¹ Ibid., 156.

¹³² Ibid., 171.

Chapter 3 – Semantic Field of *Ittiba'*

Our concern in this chapter is to take a closer look at the semantic structure of the notion of *ittiba'* as it appears in the Qur'an. As we have seen in the methodological sections above, this will involve inspecting the semantic field for which *ittiba'* is the focus word. We will be interested in examining the keywords that cluster around *ittiba'* in this field, and to investigate how this field and these words work on this focus word, and what meanings they induce in it.

Ittiba' appears in the Qur'an in 38 verses. In a number of these verses the word seems to function within the bounds of its basic meaning: to come next or to come after, to follow, to shadow, to track or trace. This basic meaning is in 24 verses. For example:

*Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. Allah is free of all wants, and He is Most Forbearing.*¹³³

So, kindness in words and deed that preserves the dignity of the poor is preferred to charity that is given and followed by an abusive insult:

*If he belonged to a people with whom ye have a treaty of mutual alliance, compensation should be paid to his family, and a believing slave be freed. For those who find this beyond their means (is prescribed) a fast for two months, one following after the other: by way of repentance to Allah: for Allah hath all knowledge and all wisdom.*¹³⁴

¹³³ Qur'an 2:263. قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتَّبِعُهَا أَذَىٰ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ (٢٦٣)

¹³⁴ Qur'an 4:92. وَإِنْ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمٍ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ مِّيثَاقٌ فَدِيَةٌ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ وَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مُّؤْمِنَةٍ فَمَنْ لَّمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامٌ شَهْرَيْنِ مُتَتَابِعَيْنِ تَوْبَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٩٢)

This act of ritual redemption is to be performed by sixty consecutive days of fasting.

This basic meaning is of course pre-Qur'anic. See for example this verse by the famous

Jahili poet Antara:

لا أتبع النفس اللجوج هواها اني امرؤ سمح الخليفة ماجد

la utbi'u nafsa lajuja hawaha inni umru'un samhu lkhlikati majidu

Antara here is saying that he is a high minded man of lenient nature, and that he will not allow his 'self' to be dragged behind its desires and inclinations no matter how insistent it becomes. The following of whims, inclinations, and desires, as we will see, is a major theme of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an.

Another verse by Hassan who lived in both *Jahili* times and in Islam, and was a poet in both, talks about followership of others:

و الزم مجالسة الكرام و فعلهم و اذا اتبعت فأبصرن من تتبع

wa ilzam mujalasata lkiram wa fi'lahum wa itha taba'ta fabsirna man tatb'u

Hassan says: stick to the honorable company, and if you follow discern who it is you are following.

In the Qur'anic discourse *ittiba'* is an act that is connected to a number of concept like belief, commitment, and allegiance especially in a religious sense. *Ittiba'* in the Qur'an is understood to come after belief (*iman*), it assumes that one has already accepted the veracity of the message, and they are ready to follow its tenets as is clear from this verse:

So warn mankind of the Day when the Wrath will reach them: then will the wrongdoers say:

“Our Lord! Respite us (if only) for a short Term: **we will answer Thy Call, and follow the messengers!**” “What! Were ye not wont to swear aforetime that ye should suffer no decline?”¹³⁵

This idea, that *iman* precedes *ittiba'* is even clearer in the following verse:

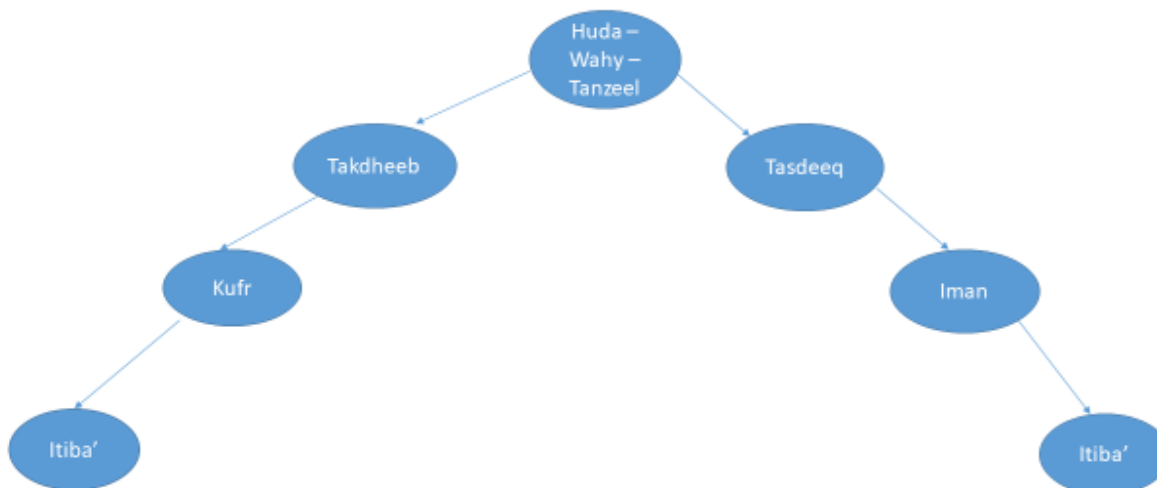
“Those who **follow** the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures);— in the Law and the Gospel;— for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil: he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. **So it is those who believe in him honour, him, help him, and follow the Light which is sent down with him— it is they who will prosper.**”¹³⁶

The topology of *ittiba'* in relation to other important Qur'anic concepts, like: *Huda* (guidance), *wahy* (revelation), and *tanzeel* (another word for revelation), is depicted in

¹³⁵ Qur'an 14:44. وَأَنْذِرِ النَّاسَ يَوْمَ يَايُسُفُهُمُ الْعَذَابُ فَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رَبَّنَا أَخْرَجْنَا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ نُسَبِّحُ دَعْوَتِكَ وَنَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ أُولَمْ تَكُونُوا أَقْسَمْتُمْ مِّنْ قَبْلِ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ زَوَالٍ (٤٤)

¹³⁶ Qur'an 7:157. الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْنُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُجِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (١٥٧)

the following diagram:



As the diagram makes clear, *ittiba'* assumes the stages that come before it. A person at the stage of *ittiba'* has already made their choice between *tasdeeq* (acceptance) - which leads to *iman* (belief)-, and *takdhib* (rejection) which leads to *kufr* (disbelief). It should also be noted that *ittiba'* is a functional concept through which other concepts like *iman* and *kufr* are actualized, so it can be used for either positive or negative assertions. An example of the Qur'anic usage of *ittiba'* as a negative act is in the following verse:

And when came to them a Messenger from Allah, confirming what was with them, a party of the people of the Book threw away the Book of Allah behind their backs, as if (it had been something)

they did not know! (101) They followed what the evil ones gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon; the blasphemers were not Solomon but the evil ones, ¹³⁷

Ittiba' is thus, a concept that has to be observed in action. In order to get the full measure of its impact on the meaning of the verses in which it appears, we should pay attention to the words and concepts that attach themselves to it. That is why the basic meaning of *ittiba'* – to follow, to track, or to shadow – does not change in any remarkable way anywhere it appears until it gets colored by the relational connections it makes with other concepts. As a consequence *ittiba'* does not have a clear opposing term in the same manner we see with opposing pairs like *iman* and *kufr*. The opposing meaning of *ittiba'* will instead be manifested in the emphatic negation as in 'do not follow' لا تتبعوا (*la tat tabi'u*). For example, one of the main conceptual oppositions we will see in the following chapters is between الذين اتبعوا (*al latheena ittiba'u*) – those who followed, and الذين اتبعوا (*al latheena utubi'u*) – those who were followed. These two groups are put in direct opposition in many situations in the text. It is self-evident but it is worth stressing nonetheless: the Quri'an is much more focused on the activity of those who follow than those who are followed.

The concept of *ittiba'* appears in positive and negative usage in the Qur'an. Positive statements of *ittiba'* are mostly in emphatic form.

¹³⁷ Qur'an 2:102. وَأَتَّبِعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيْطَانُ عَلَىٰ مَلِكٍ سُلَيْمَانَ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَفُرًا

Positive *ittiba'*

A frequent use of the *ittiba'* verses is in a call, or an invitation to the following of revelation – *whay*. This emphatic call appears in a number of ways:

A general address to all creation from God about his benevolent initiative that is demonstrated by the fact that He, unprompted, sent down His guidance (هدى)

*We said: "Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me" whosoever follows My guidance on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (38) "But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein."*¹³⁸

*He said: "Get ye down both of you— all together from the Garden, with enmity one to another; but if, as is sure there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way nor fall into misery."*¹³⁹

A command to the prophet concerning the revelation (*whay*) appears in two formats.

The first is a command to the prophet to follow the revelation sent to him:

*Follow what you are taught by inspiration from your Lord: there is no god but He: and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah. (Qur'an 6:106)*¹⁴⁰

*Follow the inspiration sent unto you, and be patient and constant, till Allah doth decide: for He is the Best to decide.*¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Qur'an 2:38. البقرة (٣٨) فَلَمَّا أَهْبَطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

¹³⁹ Qur'an 20:123. طه (١٢٣) قَالَ أَهْبِطْ مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا بَصُلَ وَلَا يَتَّقَى (١٢٣) طه

¹⁴⁰ Qur'an 6:106. الانعام (١٠٦) أَتَّبِعْ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ رَبِّكَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (١٠٦) الانعام

¹⁴¹ Qur'an 10:109. يونس (١٠٩) وَأَتَّبِعْ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَأَصْبِرْ حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ (١٠٩) يونس

*But follow that which comes to you by inspiration from your Lord: for Allah is well acquainted with (all) that ye do. (2)*¹⁴²

The second is in verses in which the Prophet debates with those arguing with him about his message, or aspects of his mission. In these verses the Prophet responds by restating that his primary charge is to keep to the revealed guidance:

*Say: "I tell you not that with me are the Treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden, nor do I tell you I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me. (50)*¹⁴³

*But when Our Clear Signs are rehearsed unto them those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, say: "Bring us a Reading other than this or change this." Say: "It is not for me, of my own accord to change it: I follow not but what is revealed unto me"*¹⁴⁴

Two more verses repeat the formula 'I but follow what is revealed unto me': *Younes* 10: 109; *al-A'raf* 7:203; and *al-Ahqaf* 46:9.

The same formula is also repeated in the only verse in which the word *Shari'a* appears in the Qur'an:

*Then We put thee on the [Shari'a] (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), and follow not the desires of those who know not.*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Qur'an 33:2. وَأَتَّبِعْ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا (٢) الأحزاب

¹⁴³ Qur'an 6:50. قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ إِن أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ الْأَنْعَامُ وَالْأَبْصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ (٥٠)

¹⁴⁴ Qur'an 10:15. وَإِذَا تَنَزَّلَتْ عَلَيَّمْ ءآيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا أَأَنْتَ بِفُرْعَانَ غَيْرٍ هَذَا أَوْ بَدَّلَهُ قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُ مِن يُونُسَ تَلْقَايَ نَفْسِي إِن أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِن غَضِبْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ (١٥)

¹⁴⁵ Qur'an 45:18. ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (١٨) الجاثية

In a verse that is directed to all people, the Prophet calls to the belief in God and to following him as His messenger:

*Say: "O people! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah, to Whom belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He: it is He that give both life and death. **So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believed in Allah and His words: follow him that (so) ye may be guided.**"*¹⁴⁶

In *al-Zukhruf* 43:61 there is a similar call. In another verse the Prophet declares that the love of God is found in following him:

*Say: "If ye do love Allah, **follow me**: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."*¹⁴⁷

To follow the religion of Ibrahim is a call in two verses. In one the command is addressed to the Prophet and in the other it is an open call to all:

*So We have taught thee the inspired (message), "Follow the ways of Abraham the True in **faith**, and he joined not gods with Allah."*¹⁴⁸

*Say: "Allah speak the Truth: **follow the religion of Abraham, the sane in faith; he was not of the pagans.**"*¹⁴⁹

Ibrahim himself tried to guide his father and get him to believe and follow:

¹⁴⁶ Qur'an 7:158. قَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَأَمَّا نُوا الْعَرَفِ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأَمِيِّ الَّذِي يُلْمُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَاتَّبَعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (١٥٨)

¹⁴⁷ Qur'an 3:31.

¹⁴⁸ Qur'an 16:122-123. وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١٢٢) ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (١٢٣)

¹⁴⁹ Qur'an 3:95.

"O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: **so follow me**: I will guide thee to a Way that is even and straight." ¹⁵⁰

Aaron was himself tested as he unsuccessfully tried to make his people realize that they were being tested:

*Aaron had already, before this said to them: "O my people! ye are being tested in this: for verily your Lord is (Allah) Most Gracious: **so follow me and obey my command.**"* ¹⁵¹

In two verses the call to believe and follow is made by two unnamed men who are not considered to be prophets. In the first verse the man is one of the Egyptians, he was concealing his belief and keeping it secret but could not stay silent when Pharaoh was lobbying his followers to sanction the killing of Prophet Musa (Moses):

*The man who believed said further: "O my People! **follow me**: I will lead you to the Path of Right."* ¹⁵²

The second man is also unnamed and is described only as he who came from the distant outskirts of the city:

*Then there came running, from the farthest part of the City, a man saying "O my people! **follow the messengers**: (20) "**Follow those who ask no reward of you (for themselves), and who have themselves received Guidance.**"* ¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Qur'an 19:43.

¹⁵¹ Qur'an 20:90.

¹⁵² Qur'an 40:38. وَقَالَ الَّذِي ءَامَنَ يَتْلُوْمَ اَتَّبِعُوْنِ اِهْدِكُمْ سَبِيْلَ الْرُّشْدِ (38) غافر

¹⁵³ Qur'an 36:20-21.

It is evidently clear that instances of positive *ittiba'* are mostly in the form of an invitation to follow. So, on the positive side of *ittiba'* we find two keywords so far: هدى (*huda*) which can be translated as 'guidance', and وحي (*wahy*) which means 'Revelation'. It is worth noting that for our purposes these two phrases can be considered to refer to the same thing: that which God sent down and revealed to the Prophet.

Negative *ittiba'*

In the following we explore the negative side of *ittiba'* which will produce a number of keywords and concepts.

Hawa

This word is usually translated as passion, whim, or fancy. It also means falling, or emptiness.¹⁵⁴ Scanning its usage in the Qur'an one would be justified in thinking that this concept cannot ever denote anything good or positive. There are, of course, instances of *hawa* being used for positive things, but not in the Qur'an. There are verses in which the term is used in one or the other of its basic meanings. For example in the following verse it is used to mean emptiness or nothingness:

*They are running forward with necks outstretched their heads uplifted their gaze returning not towards them, and their hearts [hawaa'] a (gaping) void.*¹⁵⁵

In the following verse it has the meaning of falling or descending:

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Mandhūr, Muḥammad. "Lisan al-arab.", Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah (2000), 290.

¹⁵⁵ Qur'an 14:43. مُهْطِعِينَ مُقْبِعِي رُءُوسِهِمْ لَا يَرْتَدُّ إِلَيْهِمْ طَرْفُهُمْ وَأَفْتِنَتْهُمْ هَوَاءُ (٤٣) ابراهيم

*lest My Wrath should justly descend on you: and those on whom descends My Wrath do [fall and] perish indeed!*¹⁵⁶

Aside from these instances of basic usage, all other references of the term in the Qur'an are negative. Such reputation dominates the lexical entries in language references too, for example, *Jurjani* defined *hawwa* as 'the inclination of the self to desires or wants that are disapproved by *Shari'a*'.¹⁵⁷ There is a strong relationship between *ittiba'* and *hawwa*. Out of 39 occurrences of *hawwa* and its derivatives in the Qur'an *ittiba'* is in 22 of them. This total means that this concept appears in connection with *ittiba'* more than any other word in the Qur'an, and it touches on a number of creedal as well as behavioral issues.

A good number of these verses follow a formula. The verses are addressed to the Prophet, and they are cautioning him against following *hawwa*. But it is not following his own *hawwa* that he should guard against, it is rather the *ahwa'* (pl. of *hawwa*) i.e. the inclinations and desires of those he is engaged with that should concern him.

This formulaic warning of following the inclinations and desires of others is repeated in a number of verses, each aimed at a certain aspect of the problems that the Prophet faces with those arguing with and against him. Consider the example in the following verse:

¹⁵⁶ Qur'an 20:81.

¹⁵⁷ *Jurjani*, Ali Ibn Muhammad, and Al-Sayyid Al-Sharif. *Kitab al-Ta'rifat*. Al-Hakawati, 2014, 257.

Now then, call (them to the Faith), and stand steadfast as thou art **commanded nor follow their vain desires**; but say: "I believe in the Book which Allah has sent down; and I am commanded to judge justly between you."¹⁵⁸

Then We put thee on the (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), **and follow not the desires of those who know not**.¹⁵⁹

In a number of other verses the focus shifts to issues of governance and judgement between disputants. The *hawwa* in question here is again of those seeking to disturb the balance of justice and fairness in their favor:

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, **and follow not their vain desires**, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.¹⁶⁰

And this (He commands): Judge thou between them by what Allah hath revealed **and follow not their vain desires**, but beware of them lest they beguile thee from any of that (teaching)

¹⁵⁸ Qur'an 42:15.

¹⁵⁹ Qur'an 45:18. ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (١٨) الجاثية

¹⁶⁰ Qur'an 5:48.

*which Allah hath sent down to thee. And if they turn away, be assured that for some of their crimes it is Allah's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.*¹⁶¹

Similar advice is given to Prophet/king Dawood (David). *Hawa* is recognized as a severe impediment to a fair and just verdict that he should guard against in dispensing his judgments:

*O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice): nor follow thou the lusts, (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah: for those who wander astray from the Path of Allah, is a Penalty Grievous, for that they forget the Day of Account.*¹⁶²

Focused still on the same theme, the following verse the Qur'an is cautioning the believers against false testimony especially if they are called to testify against parents or blood relations.

*O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts) lest ye swerve and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.*¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Qur'an 5:48-49. المائدة. وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمَنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ (٤٨) وَأَنْ أَحْكَمَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَأَحْذَرُوا أَنْ يَبَغِضُوا إِلَيْكَ فَبِغْضِ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ ذُنُوبِهِمْ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ النَّاسِ لَفَاسِقُونَ (٤٩)

¹⁶² Qur'an 38:26. ص. يَدَاؤُ دُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا الْآجِسَابَ (٢٦)

¹⁶³ Qur'an 4:135. ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِنْ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَآلَهُ النَّسَاءُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَوُّا أَوْ نَسُوا فإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا (١٣٥)

Note that *hawa* here is manifested in something that might in other contexts be regarded as good, i.e. the desire to assist the poor, but in this frame such desire is seen as corrupt because it violates the higher principle of establishing fairness and justice.

In the following verse *hawa* is taken as the reason behind disbelief in the 'the hour' *al-Sa'a* and the Day of Judgment. The verse cautions against being swayed away from the belief in the certainty of it by those disbelieving in it because they follow their whims:

"Verily the Hour is coming— My design is to keep it hidden— for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its Endeavour. (15) "Therefore let not such as believe not therein but follow their own lusts, divert thee therefrom, lest thou perish!"¹⁶⁴

Zann

This key-word defies translation. Most of the Qur'an translators rendered it as 'conjecture' (Pickthal, Mushin, Daryabadi), while Yusuf Ali opted for the less likely meaning of 'fancy', less likely mainly because it makes it a synonym of *hawa* which is inaccurate. The word combines a number of meanings that are close to words like doubt, thinking, assuming, or suspecting. The Qur'an uses it in a wider range of meanings than these. For example, it uses the word to mean conviction or belief as in the following verse:

¹⁶⁴ Qur'an 20:16. إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ أَكَادُ أَخْفِيهَا يُخَزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا تَسْعَىٰ (١٥) فَلَا يَصُدُّكَ عَنْهَا مَن لَّا يُؤْمِنُ بِهَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ فَتَرْدَىٰ (١٦) طه

Who [had Zann i.e.] know that verily they are going to meet their Lord, and that verily unto Him they are going to return,¹⁶⁵

Zann in this verse means certainty: it speaks of those who are certain that they will meet their Lord.¹⁶⁶ When *zann* appears with *ittiba'* it begins to signify a number of negative connotations. For example, in the following verse it characterizes most of what those doubting the Qur'an follow. In essence it is saying that the currency of their knowledge is baseless assumptions, they are never fully sure of what they are propounding.¹⁶⁷

Most of them follow not but zann. Assuredly zann can by no means take the place of truth. Lo! Allah is Aware of what they do.¹⁶⁸

This lack of basis for the claims of the idolaters is called out more forcefully in the following verse:

They who are idolaters will say: Had Allah willed, we had not ascribed (unto Him) partners neither had our fathers, nor had we forbidden aught. Thus did those who were before them give the lie (to Allah's messengers) till they tasted of the fear of Us. Say: Have ye any knowledge that ye can adduce for Us? Lo! ye follow not but [Zann] an opinion, Lo! ye do but guess.¹⁶⁹

Al Tabari commented that in this verse the Qur'an is challenging the idolaters and demanding from them that which they are not used to face, that is to explain on what

¹⁶⁵ Qur'an 2:46. البقرة (٤٦) الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَّفُوا رَبِّمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

¹⁶⁶ Al Tabari, *Tafsir Jami' al-Bayan*, 722.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 722.

¹⁶⁸ Qur'an 10:36. وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلَّا ظَنًّا إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ (٣٦) يونس

¹⁶⁹ Qur'an 6:148. سَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَا آبَاؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ كَذَلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ دَافُوا الْأَنْعَامَ بِأَسْنَانِهِمْ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذْرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَخَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَمِنْ ثَمَرِهَا عَابُوا النَّبِيِّينَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَا آبَاؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ كَذَلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ دَافُوا الْأَنْعَامَ بِأَسْنَانِهِمْ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذْرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَخَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَمِنْ ثَمَرِهَا عَابُوا النَّبِيِّينَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَا آبَاؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ كَذَلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ دَافُوا الْأَنْعَامَ بِأَسْنَانِهِمْ (٤٨) (١)

basis do they say what they say, and what source of knowledge do they draw from to make these claims, affirming with that unanswered challenge that their claims issue from baseless conjecture.¹⁷⁰ It is interesting that the Qur'an seems to extend this tendency to follow claims built upon baseless conjecture to most people:

*If you obey most of those on earth they would mislead you far from Allah's way. They follow not but [Zann] an opinion, and they do but guess.*¹⁷¹

This view of most people, that conjecture and speculation has wide currency among them, adds to the general sense of the Qur'an's treatment of the practice of *ittiaba'* as one that is very risky mainly because as we asserted above, *ittiaba'* is a contagious social practice. Al Razi explains this sweeping view in this verse to be due to the propensity of most people to follow ancestors without seeking to explain the basis for such following.¹⁷² We will say more about this Qur'anic view of *ittiaba'* in chapter 4 below.

The challenge in 6:148 above continues in this next verse with the argument that what idolaters believe in has no bases in reality. Their gods, mentioned by name, are fabrications of their fathers that they have unjustifiably continued to believe in. Such basis for belief, the verse tells them, is no more than guesswork:

Have ye thought upon Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza (19) And Manat, the third, the other? (20) Are yours the males and His the females? (21) That indeed were an unfair division! (22) They are but

¹⁷⁰ Al Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, Vol.8, 79.

¹⁷¹ Qur'an 6:116. وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ (١١٦) الأنعام

¹⁷² Al Razi, *Mafateh al Ghayb*, Vol. 13, 133.

names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allah hath revealed no warrant.

*They follow but zann and that which (they) themselves desire. And now the guidance from their Lord hath come unto them.*¹⁷³

Lo! it is those who disbelieve in the Hereafter who name the angels with the names of females.

*(27) And they have no knowledge thereof. They follow but a guess, and lo! a guess can never take the place of the truth.*¹⁷⁴

Shahawat

This word means desires. There is something unique about this keyword of *ittiba'* and that is that the Qur'an has a somewhat clear definition of what *al-Shahawat* are:

Beautified for mankind is love of [Shahawat] the joys (that come) from women and offspring; and stored-up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land.

*That is comfort of the life of the world. Allah! With Him is a more excellent abode.*¹⁷⁵

In another verse it is cautioned that the pursuit of these desires in excess can lead to undesirable consequences:

*Now there hath succeeded them a later generation whom have ruined worship and have followed [Shahawat] lusts. But they will meet deception.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Qur'an 53:19-23. النجم (٢٢) تِلْكَ إِذْ قَسَمْتَ صَبْرَى (٢١) أَلَمْ أُنزِلْ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ نَارًا تَلْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَبَابًا ۚ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ الْهُدَىٰ (٢٣)

¹⁷⁴ Qur'an 53:27-28. النجم (٢٧) وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا (٢٨)

¹⁷⁵ Qur'an 3:14. عمران ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهِ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَتَابِ (١٤)

¹⁷⁶ Qur'an 19:59. مريم فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ فَسُوفَ يَلْقَوْنَ عَذَابًا (٥٩)

In commenting on the following *Shahawat* verse al Tabari describes a social process of push and pull that is involved between those who want to live for the sake of fulfilling these desires and those trying to keep them under control:

*And Allah would turn to you in mercy; but those who follow vain desires would have you go tremendously astray.*¹⁷⁷

Istikbar

This word is derived from *kibr*, a word that is rendered as making great, or magnifying. This form of the word means to self-magnify, or self-aggrandize. It is used in the Qur'an in connection with arrogance, and haughtiness that is linked to disbelief in God and in Revelation. In the Qur'an this concept is closely connected to *ittiba'* as we will see in chapter 5 below. In the Qur'an, *istikbar* is a general attribute of disbelievers, and the following verse is expressive of the sentiment of *istikbar*:

*The chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: We see thee but a mortal like us, and we see not that any follow thee save the most abject among us, without reflection. We behold in you no merit above us - nay, we deem you liars.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Qur'an 4:27. وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الشَّهَوَاتِ أَنْ تَمِيلُوا مَيْلًا عَظِيمًا (٢٧) النساء

¹⁷⁸ Qur'an 11:27. قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا تَزَلُكَ إِلَّا بَشْرًا مِثْلًا وَمَا تَزَلُكَ أَتَّبِعُكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَادِبُوا بِالرَّأْيِ وَمَا نَزَى لَكُمْ هُودِ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلِ بَلْ نَنظُرُكُمْ كَذِبِينَ (٢٧)

In the next verse is a description of an exchange between a group of deniers rejecting the prophet sent to them and arguing with those who followed him:

*The leaders of those who grew arrogant among his [prophet Salih] people said to those who were reckoned powerless— those among them who believed: "Know ye for certain that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?" They said: "We do indeed believe in the revelation which hath been sent through him." (75) Those who grew arrogant said: "For our part, we reject what ye believe in."*¹⁷⁹

The arrogant have always represented the party that stood against the prophets and in opposition to their efforts:

Moses said: "I seek refuge in my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant one who believes not in the Day of Account!" 27¹⁸⁰

The next verse is representative of the relationship between *istikbar* and *ittiba'*, those followed in disbelief and denial of revelation are the arrogant.

¹⁷⁹ Qur'an 7:75-76. الاعراف. قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوهُ لِمَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ اَتَعْلَمُونَ اَنْ صَالِحًا مُرْسَلًا مِّن رَّبِّهِۦۙ قَالُوا۟ اِنَّا بِالَّذِيۥۙ كَفَرُوۡنَۙ بِمَاۤ اُرْسِلَۤ بِهِۦٓ مُؤْمِنُوۡنَ (٧٥) قَالَ الَّذِيۥنَ اسْتَكْبَرُوۡا اِنَّا بِالَّذِيۥۙ ءَامَنۡتُمْۢ بِهِۦۙ كٰفِرُوۡنَ (٧٦)

¹⁸⁰ Qur'an 40:27. وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ اِنِّيۤ اَعُوۡذُ بِرَبِّيۥ وَرَبِّكُمْۙ مِّنۡ كُلِّ مُتَكَبِّرٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُۙ بِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ (٢٧).

*They all come forth unto their Lord. Then those who were despised say unto those who were arrogant: We were unto you a following, can ye then avert from us aught of Allah's doom? They say: Had Allah guided us, we should have guided you. Whether we rage or patiently endure is (now) all one for us; we have no place of refuge. (21)*¹⁸¹

In the Qur'an, the arrogant have always rejected revelation, and they deterred others from believing in and following it.

The Fathers

The number of verses in which the Qur'an brings up issues related to *the fathers* should serve as evidence of this issue's importance. In these verses *the fathers* (in all its iterations: our fathers, their fathers, the fathers ...etc.) are depicted as what keeps people away from revelation. They are the reason for rejecting God's guidance. They stand between a person and following God's path. These verses show that a call to follow Revelation is rejected for what *the fathers* supposedly left for or passed on to them:

*Nay, for they say only: Lo! we found our fathers following a religion, and we are guided by their footprints. (43:22)*¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Qur'an 14:21. وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا فَقَالَ الضُّعَفَاءُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُعْتَدُونَ عَنَّا مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ قَالُوا لَوْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هَدَيْنَا اللَّهُ لَهْتَدَيْنَاكُمْ سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْنَا أَجْرٌ عَلَيْنَا أَمْ صَبَرْنَا مَا لَنَا مِنْ مَّجِيبٍ (٢١)

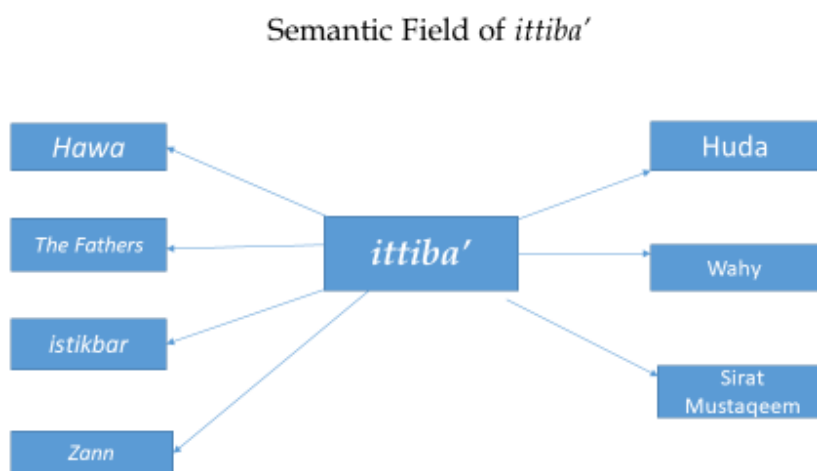
¹⁸² Qur'an 43:22. بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِمْ مُهْتَدُونَ (٢٢) الزخرف

In a number of verses the Qur'an shows how the legacy and inheritance of *the fathers* has been frequently used by those rejecting revelation and delegitimizing the prophets, and their attempts to deliver their messages:

*But the chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: This is only a mortal like you who would make himself superior to you. Had Allah willed, He surely could have sent down angels. We heard not of this in the case of our fathers of old.*¹⁸³

This aspect of *ittiba'* will be explored in detail in chapter 4.

By now we are able to layout the semantic field of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an. The following diagram is a representation of the keywords that cluster around this focus word:



¹⁸³ Qur'an 23:24. فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُوا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً مَا سَمِعْنَا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِشَيْءٍ فِي آيَاتِنَا الْأُولَى (٢٤)

It is clear from the above examples of both the positive and the negative instances of *ittiba'* that this word does not change its connotations in significant ways from verse to verse. However, there is something quite unique about this word that should not be overlooked if we are to arrive at a real sense of the nature of the role it plays in the Qur'an. That is, true to its meaning, *ittiba'* seems to set everything around it in motion. This should become clear if we notice that in all the ways this word is rendered-- whether in the physical sense of following, tracing, coming after, shadowing, or in the more figurative sense of obeying, submitting, adhering or listening-- in all of these meanings there is a sense of movement, a sense of advancing, proceeding, and taking steps, one after the other. More importantly this sense of movement is not aimless, but rather is tied to another very important concept, that of *Way*. In short, *ittiba'* is organically linked to the concept of *way, path, or road*. The relationship of *ittiba'* to *way* is not like its relationship to other concepts, even those deemed close to it. What I mean by that is whatever relationship *ittiba'* has to other concepts, like *huda* or *wahy* for example, embedded in that relationship is a relationship with the concept of *way*. It would not be an exaggeration to say that *ittiba'* and *way* appear inseparable in the Qur'anic discourse. To get a sense of this connection one has only to remember the place the concept of *way* occupies in the opening chapter of the Qur'an. *Al Fatiha*, literally 'the opening', is the first chapter of the Qur'an, it occupies the first page of the book, and at the heart of its seven verses is the most oft repeated supplication of Muslim ritual: *ihdina al Sirat al*

Mustaqeem that is 'Show us the right way'¹⁸⁴, meaning: show us the right way to follow, or show us the straight path to You. Any Muslim who keeps the five daily prayers will repeat this supplication at a minimum 17 times a day. It is a powerful testament to the centrality of this idea of a *way* in the relationship to God. Thus, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the concept of *ittiba'* it will be unavoidable to explore the concept of *way* in the Qur'an.

The Semantic Field of Way

In the Qur'an there are two words that are used for *way*: *sabil* (156 times), *sirat* (45 times).¹⁸⁵ Izutsu observed the centrality of this concept in the Qur'an: 'The concept of Way, *sirat* or *sabil*, plays a most prominent part informing the religious conception peculiar to the Qur'an. Even a casual reader will notice that the Qur'an from beginning to end is saturated with this idea.'¹⁸⁶ In the following we take a close look at the keyword *sirat* and the kind of path it describes for the followers.

¹⁸⁴ Qur'an 1:5.

¹⁸⁵ There are actually three: *sabil*, *sirat*, and *tariq*. The third one *tariq* appears in the Qur'an only 7 times, and in contexts that do not contribute much to our analysis, so it is left out. Furthermore, the analysis here will focus on *sirat* since *sabil* is rendered in the Qur'an in many manifestations; like *sabil of truth*, *sabil of error*, not only the path to God.

¹⁸⁶ Izutsu., *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 25.

The Semantic Field of *Sirat*

Basic Meaning of *Sirat*

The following verses show two examples of the basic meaning of *sirat*.

*And squat not on every [sirat] road, breathing, threats, hindering from the path of Allah those who believe in Him and seek to make it something crooked; but remember how ye were little, and He gave you increase. And hold in your mind's eye what was the end of those who did mischief. (86)*¹⁸⁷

This verse is an admonishment to the disbelieving group among the people of prophet *Sho'ab*. They were in habit of interdicting his followers and those interested in listening to him.¹⁸⁸ It is clear from the language that *sirat* here means the physical pathway or highway on which people travel. This is the basic meaning of the word. In another verse the road or highway to the fire is mentioned as the place that the wrongdoers are gathered toward and led along to their fate:

*-Bring ye up" it shall be said "The wrongdoers and their wives, and the things they worshipped— (22) "Besides Allah, and lead them to the Way to the (Fierce) Fire! (23)*¹⁸⁹

Sirat in the Qur'an

¹⁸⁷ Qur'an al-a'raaf 7:86. وَلَا تَقْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَتَصُدُّونَ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِهِ وَتَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَدْعُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلًا فَكُتِرْكُمْ وَأَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٨٦)

¹⁸⁸ Al Tabari, *Tafsir al Tabari*, Vol. 12, 557.

¹⁸⁹ Qur'an al-Saffat 37:22-23 (٢٣) أَحْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٢٢) مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ

This key word appears in verses where the Qur'anic text introduces to itself as a *path* and wants this *path* to be unmistakably identified as *straight*. The verses use the definite pronoun *hatha* هذا to explicitly point to it, and explicitly describe the *sirat* with the formula 'This is a *sirat mustaqeem*' هذا صراط مستقيم, which means: this is a straight path.

It is remarkable that the Qur'an chooses to demonstrate this concept mainly through Jesus and his prophecy. The first four instances of this formula either come from the mouth of Jesus or is about him and his call. In the first of these Jesus affirms the continuity with the message before him and concludes with the fundamental message of all the prophet in the Qur'an: the worship of the One and only God:

*And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me. (50) Lo! Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. This is a straight path. (51)*¹⁹⁰

The 'straight path' is, as it is clear from these verses, focused on the call to worship the one and only God, it is the message of *tawheed*¹⁹¹, the call that all the prophets in the Qur'an share.

190 Qur'an 3: 44-51. إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ (44) قَالَتْ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرًا قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ (45) وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ (46) وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلَقْتُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيْرِ فَطَيْرًا فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَبْرَأُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْإِبْرَصَ وَأُخِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَتَّبِعُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدْخُرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (47) وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلِأَجْلِ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا (48) إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَأَعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (49)

191 Tawheed is the principle of the Oneness of God.

The second time is in verses that describe the virgin birth and mission of Jesus. The verses begin with the tiding of a son coming to an astounded and unassuming young Mary, the excerpt here begins after she gave birth and she comes back home carrying the child:

*Then she brought him to her own folk, carrying him. They said: O Mary! Thou hast come with an amazing thing. (27) O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother a harlot. (28) Then she pointed to him. They said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy? (29)*¹⁹²

The baby then defends his mother and proves his identity by miraculously speaking from the cradle:

*He spake: Lo! I am the slave of Allah. He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet, (30) And hath made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and hath enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive, (31) And (hath made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. (32) Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive! (33)*¹⁹³

Then comes a creedal statement about the position of the Qur'an from the claim that Jesus is the Son of God, and affirming that God neither begets nor is begotten:

¹⁹² Qur'an 19:27-29.

¹⁹³ Qur'an 19:30-33.

Such was Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. (34)

It befitteth not (the Majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him!

When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. (35)¹⁹⁴

Then the formula makes an appearance announcing the call to worship the one and only God and that it is the straight path. The flow of the narrative of these verses runs through many of the issues that have clouded the concept of *tawheed* in the minds of many, such as the virgin birth of Jesus, his defense of his mother in the cradle, and most importantly the claim that God has taken a son. All of these confusions about God and his relationship to humans get the final emphatic affirmation of *tawheed* followed by what looks like the seal of veracity: *this way is what is straight*:

*And lo! Allah is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. **This is a straight path.** (36)¹⁹⁵*

Another set of verses follow in the pattern of the first two, Jesus's story is again the backdrop for the final declarative formula repeated as in the previous two verses: *this is a straight path* that is prefaced by the all to worship the one and only God.

And when the son of Mary is quoted as an example, behold! the folk laugh out, (57) And say: Are our gods better, or is he? They raise not the objection save for argument. Nay! but they are a contentious folk. (58) He is nothing but a slave on whom We bestowed favour, and We made him a pattern for the Children of Israel. (59) And had We willed We could have set among you angels

¹⁹⁴ Qur'an 19:34-35.

¹⁹⁵ Qur'an 19:36. (٢٨) أَنْتَ بِهِ قَوْمَهَا تَحْمِلُهُ ' قَالُوا يَا مَرْيَمُ لَقَدْ جِئْتِ شَيْئًا فَرِيًّا (٢٧) يَا خَتَّ هَزُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكَ أَمْرًا سَوِيًّا وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكَ بَغِيًّا (٢٨) فَأَنْشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نَكَلِمُكَ مِنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا (٢٩) قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ أَتَانِي الْكَتَنُ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا (٣٠) وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا (٣١) وَيَرَا بَوَالِدَتِي وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا (٣٢) وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا (٣٣) ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ (٣٤) مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ مِنْ وَلَدٍ سُبْحَانَهُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ ' كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (٣٥) وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٣٦)

to be viceroys in the earth. (60) And lo! verily there is knowledge of the Hour. So doubt ye not concerning it, **but follow Me. This is the right path.** (61)¹⁹⁶

And let not Satan turn you aside. Lo! he is an open enemy for you. (62) When Jesus came with clear proofs (of Allah's Sovereignty), he said: I have come unto you with wisdom, and to make plain some of that concerning which ye differ. So keep your duty to Allah, and obey me. (63) Lo! Allah, He is my Lord and your Lord. So worship Him. **This is a straight path.** (64)¹⁹⁷

In the last of these God is speaking in the first person. The worship of the one and only God is again stated as the straight path:

Did I not charge you, O ye sons of Adam, that ye worship not the devil - Lo! he is your open foe! - (60) **But that ye worship Me? That is the straight path.** (61)¹⁹⁸

It should be noted here that these verses establish a link between the concept of *ittiba'* and the concept of *'bada* or warship. The formula is repeated four times, and in only one do we see the verb *ittiba'*. However, the formulaic repetition establishes that one of the meanings of *ittiba'* is worship or more correctly *ittiba'* implies, or includes worship.

Sirat attributed directly to God

Some of the verses in which this key word appear attribute the *sirat* directly to God, or we can say that God takes ownership of the *way*. Our first example is from *al-Ani'am*

¹⁹⁶ Qur'an 43:57-61.

¹⁹⁷ Qur'an 43: 57-64 ﴿وَلَمَّا ضُرِبَ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ مَثَلًا إِذَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْهُ يَصِدُونَ (٥٧) وَقَالُوا ءَاللهِئِنَّا خَيْرٌ أَمْ هُوَ مَا ضَرَبُوهُ لَكَ إِلاَّ جَدَلًا بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ خَصِمُونَ (٥٨) إِنْ هُوَ إِلاَّ عَبْدٌ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ مَثَلًا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ (٥٩) وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً فِي الْآرَاضِ يَخْلُقُونَ (٦٠) وَإِنَّهُ لَلْعَلْمُ لَلْسَاعَةِ فَلَا تَمْتَرُنَّ بِهَا وَاتَّبِعُون هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦١) وَلَا يَصُدَّنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (٦٢) وَلَمَّا جَاءَ عِيسَى بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالَ قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَلِأُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي تَخْتَلَفُونَ فِيهِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَإِنِ اللَّهُ هُوَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦٤)

¹⁹⁸ Qur'an 36: 60-61 (٦١) صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦٠) وَأَنْ أَعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦١)

chapter. This set of verses begins with a command to the prophet to 'say' (proclaim), and goes on to enumerate a set of ten things God has forbidden to believers:

*Say: Come, I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a Sacred duty for you: that ye ascribe no thing as partner unto Him and that ye do good to parents, and that ye slay not your children because of penury - We provide for you and for them - and that ye draw not nigh to lewd things whether open or concealed. And that ye slay not the life which Allah hath made sacred, save in the course of justice. This He hath command you, in order that ye may discern. (151) And approach not the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better, till he reach maturity. Give full measure and full weight, in justice. We task not any soul beyond its scope. And if ye give your word, do justice thereunto, even though it be (against) a kinsman; and fulfil the covenant of Allah. This He commandeth you that haply ye may remember. (152) And (He commandeth you, saying): **This is My straight path, so follow it.** Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way. This hath He ordained for you, that ye may ward off (evil). (153)¹⁹⁹*

Note the use of the possessive pronoun 'My' instead of the indefinite pronoun used in the previous formula. These verses are very important to us, especially verse 153 as will become clear in our discussion of it below. The final statement uses again the indefinite indicative pronoun *hatha* هذا and declares that 'this' is the straight path of God and to God. Al-Tabari says: after enumerating the nine things to be avoided in the previous

¹⁹⁹ Qur'an 6: 151-153 قُلْ تَعَالَوْا أَتْلُ مَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا شَرَكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ مِمَّنْ إِمْلَيْنِ نَحْنُ نَزَرُكُمْ وَإِيَاهُمْ وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ذَلِكَمْ وَصَلَكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (١٥١) وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَيْلِ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ لَا تَكْلِفْ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا وَإِذَا قُلْتُمْ فَاعْدِلُوا وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ وَبِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ أَوْفُوا ذَلِكَمْ وَصَلَكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (١٥٢) وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَن سَبِيلِهِ ذَلِكَمْ وَصَلَكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (١٥٣)

two verses, He states the pronoun (*hatha*) هذا 'this' i.e. those things mentioned above comprise the straight path that should be followed and kept to.²⁰⁰

The second statement of this kind comes in the same chapter al-Aln'am:

*This is the path of thy Lord, a straight path. We have detailed Our signs for a people who take heed. (126)*²⁰¹

Al-Tabari considers the pronoun *hatha* هذا 'this' to encompass the totality of the message of the Qur'an, as the verse is saying *Oh Muhammad all that God has revealed to you in this Qur'an is His path.*²⁰² The meaning becomes that God is saying: this path that Muhammad has brought to you is the way to me.

In the following verses God is speaking in the first person, in the narrative He is answering Satan's promise to lead astray (away from God's path) all but God's most faithful followers.

*He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them in the earth, and shall mislead them every one, (39) Save such of them as are Thy perfectly devoted slaves. (40) He said: This is a straight path leading to Me: (41) Lo! as for My slaves, thou hast no power over any of them save such of the froward as follow thee, (42) And lo! for all such, hell will be the promised place. (43)*²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Al Tabari, *Jami' al Bayan*, Vol. 9, 672.

²⁰¹ Qur'an 6: 126. (١٢٦) وَهَذَا صِرَاطُ رَبِّكَ مُسْتَقِيمًا قَدْ فَصَّلْنَا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

²⁰² Al Tabari, *Jami' al Bayan*, Vol. 9, 553

²⁰³ Qur'an 15: 39-43. قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَعُوذُ بِهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (٣٩) إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ (٤٠) قَالَ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ عَلَيَّ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٤١) إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ إِلَّا مَنْ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْغَاوِينَ (٤٢) وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمَوْعِدُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (٤٣)

In the other verse Satan says *la aq'udana lahum sirataka al mustaqeem* لا قعدن لهم صراطك المستقيم. *Satan* attributes *sirat* to God and calls it straight, he promises thought and to dwell on it. The contemporary exegete Sharawi makes an interesting concerning the statement attributed to *Satan*, he says that: *Satan* is placing himself at God's *straight path* where the faithful and the pious dwell and are to be found, he says: and that is exactly the point. *Satan*, he adds, is not really found in places of sin or dens of mischief, his work there is done and is already bearing its fruit, he is, rather, in places of obedience and worship since according to this verse he vowed to sway the obedient away for this path of God, and lead them astray.²⁰⁴

He said: "Because thou hast thrown me out of the Way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on Thy straight Way. (16) ²⁰⁵

So far we have seen the *straight path* to denote *tawheed*, the main things to avoid (for convenience we can call these *shari'a*)²⁰⁶, and the thing *Satan* wants to sway people away from.

It is only God who can guide to the *Straight Path*

The Qur'an is very clear that the source of guidance *huda* 'هدى' to the *straight path* is God and no one else. This comes through from a number of verses. Note that the keyword *huda* هدى meaning 'guidance' is one of the keywords in the semantic field of *ittiba'* as

²⁰⁴ Saharawi, *Tafsir*, Vol. 20 "خواطر الشعراوي-ج 20", (2008), 7704.

²⁰⁵ Qur'an 7:16. قَالَ فِيمَا أُغْوِيْتِي لِأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ (١٦)

²⁰⁶ The term *Shari'a* has come to be used to denote Islamic law. But the term is in fact used for much more than law, simply put 'Sharia is the way to God.' See, Ali-Karamali, Sumbul. *Demystifying Shariah: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It's Not Taking Over Our Country*. United States, Beacon Press, 2020, 9.

well, this we established in a number of verses discussed in chapter 1 (e.g. Qur'an 2:38).

The following verses extend this connection to the concept of *way* or 'the straight path'.

The following example was in verses that were revealed during the at the point when the direction of prayer (*qibla*) was changed from facing Jerusalem to turn toward the *Ka'ba* in Mecca:

*The foolish of the people will say: What hath turned them from the qiblah which they formerly observed? Say: Unto Allah belong the East and the West. He guides whom He will unto a straight path. (142)*²⁰⁷

Changing the direction of prayer caused an uproar at the time it happened, this change was loaded with meaning for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-Baydawi in his tafsir relates that the old direction of the *qibla*: Jerusalem was still revered by the Muslims, so the change was not driven by any sense of displeasure, but the *Ka'ba* was where hearts of the Muslims were attached.²⁰⁸ Qutb wrote a long discussion about this incident. He emphasized the need that the nascent community of Muslims felt for independence in all its facets. The change in direction of prayer enhanced their sense of distinctiveness and of a unique identity.²⁰⁹ Note here that the principal of *ittiba'* is a significant part of the problem and the solution of the change of direction of the *qibla*. Aside from the continued reverence that Muslims felt for Jerusalem, or their passionate attachment to

²⁰⁷ Qur'an 2:141. سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّيْتُمْ مَا وَوَلَّيْتُمْ أَلَيْسَ إِنَّكُمْ تُجِيبُونَ ۗ قُلْ كَانَ اللَّهُ الْمَشْرُقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ يَبْدَىٰ مِنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (١٤٢)

²⁰⁸ Al-Baydawi, *Tafsir al Baydawi*, Vol. 4, 326.

²⁰⁹ Qutb, Sayyid. "Tafsir fi Zilal al-Qur'an." Beirut: Ahyal, Juz XV (1986). Vol. 1 p. 125 إن الاختصاص والتميز ضروريان للجماعة المسلمة: الاختصاص والتميز في التصور والاعتقاد؛ والاختصاص والتميز في القبلة والعبادة. وهذه كذلك لا بد من التميز فيها والاختصاص. وقد يكون الأمر واضحاً فيما يختص بالتصور والاعتقاد ولكنه قد لا يكون بهذه الدرجة من الوضوح فيما يختص بالقبلة وشعائر العبادة

the *Ka'ba*, it was unfitting for a new project like the one the Prophet was immersed in building to 'follow', which was clearly becoming a rival community of faith, in a visible symbol of religious devotion like the direction of prayer. There are matters that 'following' is not good for.²¹⁰ On the other hand *ittiba'* was the appropriate and expected response from the believers to this new directive of the revealed message.

That the relationship with the other religious communities did not need to be contentious, at least in the mind of the Qur'an, is evident from the following verses. These are addressed to the Jews and Christians of Arabia in an attempt to get them to consider the message of Muhammad in light of God's guidance that they received before and that manifest itself now in the Qur'an.²¹¹ God promises good things will come from a positive response to the invitation culminating in putting them on the *straight path*:

*O People of the Scripture! Now hath Our messenger come unto you, expounding unto you much of that which ye used to hide in the Scripture, and forgiving much. Now hath come unto you light from Allah and plain Scripture, (15) Whereby Allah guides him who seek His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He bring them out of darkness unto light by His decree, and guide them unto a straight path. (16)*²¹²

²¹⁰ This is an important aspect of the Qur'anic understanding of *ittiba'* as we will see in both chapters 4 and 5.

²¹¹ (1946). "أحمد مصطفى المراغي. تفسير المراغي-ج 5. Tafsir Al Maraghi, Ahmad Mustafa, AlMaraghi, Ahmad Mustafa, Tafsir Al Maraghi, Vol.5

²¹² Qur'an 5: 15-16. يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ (١٥) يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (١٦)

The following verse alludes to the guidance that God bestowed on His creation as part of the history of humanity

*Mankind were one community, and Allah sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another. And Allah by His Will guided those who believe unto the truth of that concerning which they differed. Allah guides whom He will unto a **straight path**. (213)²¹³*

This verse challenges interpretation, the part that we are concerned with is the last sentence which affirms again that *huda* (guidance) to *the straight path* comes only from God. However, as verse 2:213 above states, God bestows such guidance through the prophets he sent to mankind. In fact the Prophet is frequently described to be on the straight path as well as guiding to the straight path:

Ya Seen. (1) By the Qur'an, full of Wisdom— (2) Thou art indeed one of the messengers. (3) On a Straight Way. (4)²¹⁴

But verily thou call them to the Straight Way; (73) And verily those who believe not in the Hereafter are deviating from that Way. (74)²¹⁵

²¹³ Qur'an 2:213. كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٢١٣)

²¹⁴ Qur'an 36: 1-4. سَنَ (١) وَالْقُرْءَانَ الْحَكِيمِ (٢) إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣) عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٤)

²¹⁵ Qur'an 23: 73-74. وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ عَنِ الصِّرَاطِ لَنُكَرِبُونَ (٧٤) وَإِنَّكَ لَتَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٧٣)

Say: "Verily my Lord hath **guided me to a way that is straight**— a religion of right— the path (trod) by Abraham the true in Faith, and he (certainly) joined not gods with Allah." (161)²¹⁶

And thus have We, by Our command, sent inspiration to thee: thou knew not (before) what was Revelation, and what was Faith; but We have made the (Qur'an) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; **and verily thou dost guide (men) to the Straight Way**—

(52) The Way of Allah to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth: Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allah! (53)²¹⁷

So hold thou fast to the Revelation sent down to thee: **verily thou art on Straight Way.** (43)

The (Qur'an) is indeed the message for thee and for thy people; and soon shall ye (all) be brought to account. (44)²¹⁸

All of these verses attest to the strong link between the concept of *the straight path* to the concept of revelation and to the mission of the prophets.

Ittiba' - Sabil - Sirat

There are two verses that have the distinction of combining our focus word with the two key-words denoting *Way: sirat* and *sabil*:

Verily, this is My Way leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His path: thus doth He command you, that ye may be righteous. (al An'am 6:153)²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Qur'an 6:161. لَ اِنْنِي هَدَيْتَنِي رَبِّي اِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قَبِيْمًا مِلَّةَ اِبْرَاهِيْمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِيْنَ (١٦١)

²¹⁷ Qur'an 42: 52-53. وَكَذٰلِكَ اَوْحَيْنَا اِلَيْكَ رُوْحًا مِّنْ اَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِيْ مَا اَلْكِتٰبُ وَلَا الْاِيْمٰنُ وَلٰكِنْ جَعَلْنٰهُ نُورًا لِّتَهْدِيَ بِهٖ مَنْ نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَاِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِيْ اِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيْمٍ (٥٢) صِرَاطِ اللّٰهِ الَّذِيْ لَهٗ مَا فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِى الْاَرْضِ اِلَّا اِلَى اللّٰهِ تُصِيْرُ الْاُمُوْرَ (٥٣)

²¹⁸ Qur'an 43: 43-44. فَاسْتَمْسِكْ بِالَّذِيْ اُوْحِيَ اِلَيْكَ اِنَّكَ عَلٰى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيْمٍ (٤٣) وَاِنَّهٗ لَذِكْرٌ لَّكَ وَلِقَوْمِكَ وَسَوْفَ تُسْئَلُوْنَ (٤٤)

²¹⁹ Qur'an 6:153. وَاَنْ هٰذَا صِرَاطِيْ مُسْتَقِيْمًا فَاتَّبِعُوْهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوْا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيْلِهٖ ذٰلِكُمْ وَصَلَّوْكُمْ بِهٖ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ (١٥٣) الانعام

*Wherewith Allah guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His Will, unto the light,— guideth them to a Path that is Straight. (al Ma'ida 5:16)*²²⁰

The word *sabil* came in the Qur'an in both the singular and plural forms (*subul* pl.), while *sirat*, came only in the singular. There is another aspect that distinguishes verse 6:153, that is the presence of a *hadith* (a saying of the Prophet) in which he comments on this verse.

Narrated by Ibn Masud that the Prophet (PBUH) drew a line using his hand, then said: this is the straight path of God. He then drew lines to its right and lines to its left, and said: these are the *subul* (the ways), not one of these but has a satan calling for it to be followed. He then recited: " *Verily, this is My Way leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His path.*" ²²¹

خط رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم خطأ بيده ثم قال : هذا سبيل الله مستقيماً، وخط خطوطاً عن يمينه وشماله، ثم قال : هذه السبل ليس منها سبيل إلا عليه شيطان يدعو إليه، ثم قرأ : وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَن سَبِيلِهِ.

This was one of the few narrations that involves a description of the Prophet adding an illustration to his speech. Our depiction of the semantic field above can be combined with this visual from the Prophet. What described as *subul* to the right and left of the

²²⁰ Qur'an 5:16. المائدة (١٦) المستقيم إلى صراط مستقيم (١٦) المائدة

²²¹ 'Abd-al-'Azīz Ibn-'Abdallāh Ibn-Bāz, 'Abdallāh Ibn-'Abd-ar-Raḥmān Āl-Ġibrīn, and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-'Utaimīn. "Fatāwā Islāmīya: Fatawa Islamiyah." Vol. 1, 239. This *hadith* was narrated by Ahmad (4141), Al Nasa'i in *Al Sunan AL Kubra* (11174), and Al Darimi (202)

straight way can each stand for one of the keywords on the left side of the field. So, each of the negative key-words of *ittiba'* sits at an end of a path that leads to it. And following that path will lead one away from the *straight path of God*.

I think verse 6:153 can combine with the *hadith* to provide us with an organizing frame that can encompass the main features of our three words: *ittiba'*, *sirat*, and *sabil*. Positive *ittiba'* unfolds along *the Straight Path* or is *al-Sirat al Mustaqeem*. It is the only path that leads to God. Negative *ittiab,'* on the other hand, unfolds along a multitude of *subul* (pl. of *sabil*). Each of the keywords in the semantic field of *ittiba'*: *hawa*, *the fathers*, *the steps of Satha*, *Istikbar*, *Zann*,*etc.* unfolds along a *sabil* that leads to whatever it promises, but that will effectively sway the seeker away from *Straight Path of God*. In effect, each of these concepts on the negative side of *ittiab'* will 'scatter' the seeker and lead him astray and away from *al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*. Taken in this manner, our explorations in the following chapters will shed light on the words that stand for the *subul* with the most social impact on the seeker or believer.

Chapter 4 – *The Fathers*

Our semantic analysis of *ittiba'* in chapter three identified four keywords that represent four factors that can derail man's journey to follow and keep to *the straight path* that leads to God (*al Sirat al Mustaqeem*). In the following chapter we take a closer look at two of these factors: the concept of *the fathers* in this chapter, and the twin concepts of *al-mustakbirun* and *almustad'afun* translated as 'the arrogant' and 'the weak' in chapter 5. These two factors have been chosen for closer scrutiny because they are deemed to have significant social impact in comparison to the other factors. It should be noted that both concepts are in the subjective form. They point to social actors participating in the fashioning of lived reality. They are not abstract concepts.

The map of this chapter is as follows: we begin by examining the verses in which the *fathers* are mentioned. To understand the phenomenon better we appeal to the process of cultural evolution, as this comparison will give us an understanding of the specific features of the phenomenon of the *fathers*. We then explore what the Qur'anic interpreters say about the *fathers* verses which will force us to take a closer look at the concept of *taqlid* since, as we will see, it gradually becomes the standard interpretation of what the *fathers* verses mean. I will then conclude with an attempt to bring all these pieces together to show how (or that) the Qur'anic view of *the fathers* shape our understanding of the paradox that this study is exploring.

The fathers in the Qur'an

The combination **آباء** that denotes 'fathers' appears 58 times in the Qur'an. 45 of those are verses connected to the act of following, belief, obedience, resurrection, and connected topics.²²² The rest are on issues of inheritance, family and similar topics.²²³

Clearly, in the Qur'an the concept of *the fathers* is linked to matters of guidance and belief, and it can be argued that there exists an organic link between *ittiba'* and fathers.

Founding fathers, church fathers, or ancestral fathers are all natural and favored targets for followership. Reverence, and a feeling of indebtedness mixed with gratitude solidify this connection of followership (*ittiba'*) between 'fathers' and subsequent generations. It is easy to conclude that the Qur'an shares little with this favorable stance from 'the fathers'. The Qur'an balances this negativity with an ethic of gratitude towards the parents. Parents are beneficiaries of verses that counsel kindness and mercy, even when belief comes in between one and her parents.

And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command) "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal. (14) "But if they strive to make the join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge obey them not; Yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration) and follow the way of those who turn to Me (in love): in

²²² Qur'an 2:133,170,200; 5:105; 7:28,70,173; 9:24; 10:78; 11:62,87,109; 12:38,40; 13:23; 14:10; 17:5; 18:53,54; 23:24,68,83; 25:18; 26:26,74,76; 27:67,68; 28:36; 31:21; 34:43; 36:6; 37:17,69,126; 40:8; 43:22,2,24,29; 44:8,36; 45:25; 53:23; and 56:48.

²²³ Qur'an 4:11,22; 6:87,91,148; 7:95; 16:35; 18:44; 24:31,61; 33:5,55; and 58:22

*the End the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did."*²²⁴

In matters of belief, *the fathers* do enjoy favorable mention, but only in verses that are exclusively about the prophets. There are only two of these. Both are statements of affirmation of the pledge to follow the revelation that God sent to them, and to their fathers before them.

*And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons and so did Jacob; "O my sons! Allah hath chosen the faith for you; then die not except in the state of submission (to Allah)." (132) Were ye witnesses when death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: "What will ye worship after me?" They said: "We shall worship thy God and the God of **thy fathers**—of Abraham Isma`il and Isaac,—the one (true) God to Him we bow (in Islam)."*²²⁵

The second is by Yousef (Joseph). When he is asked to interpret the dreams of his prison mates he begins with a statement upholding his followership to the faith of his fathers.

*I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allah and that (even) deny the Hereafter. (37) "And I follow the ways of my fathers— Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and never could we attribute any partners whatever to Allah: that (comes) of the grace of Allah to us and to mankind: yet most men are not grateful."*²²⁶

²²⁴ Qur'an 31:14-15. لقمان (١٤) إِلَى الْمَصِيرِ (١٤) وَإِنْ جَلَّذَكَ عَلَى أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبَتُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (١٥)

²²⁵ Qur'an 2:133. وَوَصَّيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعْبُدُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهُهَا وَاجِدْ لَهَا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ (١٣٣)

²²⁶ Qur'an 12:38. إِيَّا تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ (٣٧) وَأَتَّبِعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَا يَوْسُفُ كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٣٨)

Save for these two verses, in matters related to belief or revelation there is not a single favorable statement about 'the fathers' in the remainder of the Qur'an.²²⁷ The opposite is true; in all other verses that include a mention of 'the fathers' – a bit shy of thirty- the consistent intimation is that those adhering to the legacy of *their fathers* are in error.

In a number of Qur'anic narratives the case against 'the fathers' is made plainly and directly. The accounts of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) debating his father and his people are most representative of this type:

*We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his rectitude of conduct, and well were We acquainted with him. (51) Behold! He said to his father and his people, "What are these images, to which ye are (so assiduously) devoted?" (52) They said "We found our father worshipping them." (53) He said "Indeed ye have been in manifest error-ye and your fathers."*²²⁸

And rehearse to them (something of) Abraham's story. (69) Behold, he said to his father and his people: "What worship ye?" (70) They said: "We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them." (71) He said: "Do they listen to you when ye call (on them) (72) "Or do you good or harm?" (73) They said: "Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus (what we do)." ²²⁹

²²⁷ In *Yasen* 36:6, *al A'raf* 7:95, *al An'am* 6:87, and *al Ra'd* 13:23 we find mention of 'the fathers' that is mostly descriptive. The rest are verses related to matters of family and family law, inherence ...etc.

²²⁸ Qur'an 21:51-54. وَالْقَدَّاءَاتِنَّا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُسُدَهُ ' مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَالِمِينَ (٥١) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَذِهِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا الْإِنْبِيَاءُ (٥٢) قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا لَهَا عَابِدِينَ (٥٣) عَالِفُونَ

²²⁹ Qur'an 26:69-74. وَأَتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (٦٩) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٧٠) قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَنْظِلُ لَهَا عَالِفِينَ (٧١) قَالَ الشُّعْرَاءُ (٧٢) هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُم إِذْ تَدْعُونَ (٧٢) أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُم أَوْ يَضُرُّونَ (٧٣) قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ (٧٤)

Prophet Ibrahim is addressing his own father, but *'fathers'* is clearly a term used for his and his peoples' ancestry both close and distant. The formula *'we found our fathers following'* is repeated in *al Ma'ida* 4:104 *'they say: "Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following.'* And in *al A'raf* 7:28 *'they say: 'We found our fathers doing so''*; in *Luqman* 31:21 *'they say: "Nay we shall follow the ways that we found our fathers (following)"*; in *Yunes* 10:78 *They said: "Hast thou come to us to turn us a way from the ways We found our fathers following;* and twice in *al Zukhruf*

*Nay! they say: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and We do guide ourselves by their footsteps." (22) Just in the same way, whenever We sent a Warner before thee to any people, the wealthy ones among them said: "We found Our fathers following a certain religion, and We will certainly follow in their footsteps."*²³⁰

Note that with the word *'whenever'* verse 43:23 elevates this type of interaction to the level of being a behavior characteristic all human societies in all epochs. In two other verses the folks of the messengers consider it unbecoming of them to ask that they forsake the ways of their fathers. They express disappointment in the prophets for suggesting that such a move should be expected of them.

²³⁰ Qur'an 43:22-23. الزخرف. قَالَوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِم مُّهُتَدُونَ (٢٢) وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن قَبْلِكَ فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ الزخرف. إِلَّا قَال مُّتَرْفُوهَا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِم مُّغْتَدُونَ (٢٣)

*They said: "O Salih! Thou hast been of us! A center of our hopes hitherto! Dost thou (now) forbid us the worship of **what our fathers worshipped**? But we are really in suspicious (disquieting) doubt as to that to which thou invite us."*²³¹

*They said: "Oh Shuayb! does thy (religion of) prayer command thee **that we leave off the worship which our fathers practiced** or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? Truly, thou art the one that forbearth with faults and is right-minded!"*²³²

In a number of other verses the call to consider following revelation is rejected by those addressed, replying with an accusation that, as they see it, the sole purpose of such an invitation is to stand between them and 'that on which they found their fathers'. There is an added challenge to the prophets here. Those rejecting the call of the prophet are standing up for their inherited tradition while casting doubt on the credibility of the prophet's claim to be sent from God. This is then followed by a demand for proof that God did indeed send those claiming to be prophets.

*They said: "Ah! ye are no more than human like ourselves! Ye wish to **turn us away from that which our fathers used to worship**: then bring us some clear authority."*²³³

The accusation in the previous verse intensifies to an outright assault on the message itself.

²³¹ Qur'an 11:52. هود (٦٢) هود قَالَوٓا۟ يٰصٰلِحُ قَدْ كُنْتَ فِىنَا مَرْجُوٓا۟ قَبْلَ هٰذَا اَتْنَهَلْنَا اَنْ نَعْبُدَ مَا يَعْبُدُ ءَابَاؤُنَا وَاِنَّا لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُوْنَآ اِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ (٦٢) هود

²³² Qur'an 11:87. هود (٨٧) هود قَالَوٓا۟ يٰشُعَيْبُ اَصْلُوْكَ تَاْمُرُكَ اَنْ تَنْتَرِكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ ءَابَاؤُنَا اَوْ اَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِىۡ اَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَآءُ اِنَّكَ لَآنتَ اِلْحٰلِىْمُ الرَّشِيْدُ (٨٧) هود

²³³ Qur'an 14:10. ابراهيم (١٠) ابراهيم قَالَوٓا۟ اِنْ اَنْتُمْ اِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا تُرِيْدُوْنَ اَنْ تَصُدُّوْنَآ عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ ءَابَاؤُنَا فَاتُّوْنَا بِسُلْطٰنٍ مُّبِيْنٍ (١٠) ابراهيم

When Our Clear Signs are rehearsed to them they say "This is only a man who wishes to hinder you from the (worship) which your fathers practiced." And they say "This is only a falsehood invented!" And the Unbelievers say of the Truth when it comes to them "This is nothing but evident magic!"²³⁴

In all of these verses, the refusal or rejection of the message could have been expressed in a variety of ways, and this incessant reference to *the fathers* is instructive.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that the issue at the heart of these verses is followership (*ittiba'*). Following the new message is rejected, and continuing to follow *the fathers* is expressed in a conservative stand to preserve their ways. From among these verses, the two in which the derivative of the root *t b 'a* appears are the following two verses.

When it is said to them: "Follow what Allah hath revealed" they say: "Nay! we shall follow the ways of our fathers." What! even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?²³⁵

When they are told to follow the (revelation) that Allah has sent down, they say: "Nay we shall follow the ways that we found our fathers (following)." What! even if it is Satan beckoning them to the Penalty of the (Blazing) Fire!²³⁶

²³⁴ Qur'an 34:43. وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرٍ وَقَالَ سِبَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (٤٣)

²³⁵ Qur'an 2:170. وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا آَلَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْلَوْا كَانُوا آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ (البقرة ١٧٠)

²³⁶ Qur'an 31:21. وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْلَوْا كَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ يَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (٢١) لقمان

To conclude that the Qur'an is gravely concerned about the matters of followership in general, and of following 'the fathers' in particular is, I think, clearly established based on the evidence so far. But how should we understand this concern? Why would the position from 'the fathers' be so sweepingly negative? First, we will attempt to better understand what the concept of *the fathers* actually stands for.

The fathers and the Social Collective Brain

It has been suggested that the theory of biological evolution can be brought to bear on problems of culture, and that it can help explain issues related to cultural evolution.²³⁷

Other practitioners examining the relationship between biological and anthropological evolution have described such suggestions as wrong-headed.²³⁸ This is not a debate that concerns us. Our interest here is to appeal to a number of concepts and ideas developed for describing cultural evolution in the hope of arriving at a better understanding of the collective, intergenerational face of *ittiba'* as it is manifested in the concept of 'the fathers'.

In his book *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* Joe Henrich argues that we are a cultural species that is 'addicted to culture' to the point that culture directs the path of our evolution.²³⁹ Over eons we built and grew 'large bodies of cumulative cultural

²³⁷ Mesoudi, Alex, Andrew Whiten, and Kevin N. Laland. "Towards a unified science of cultural evolution." *Behavioral and brain sciences* 29.4 (2006): 329.

²³⁸ Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. Routledge, 2013, 1.

²³⁹ Henrich, Joseph. *The secret of our success: How culture is driving human evolution, domesticating our species, and making us smarter*. Princeton University press, 2016, 20.

knowledge.’²⁴⁰ This ‘vast pool of culturally inherited know-how and practices’²⁴¹ exert ‘influence [on] what we attend to, perceive, process, and value.’²⁴² Our imbibing, or in Henrich’s preferred term, ‘downloading’ of knowledge and know-how occurs ‘often outside conscious awareness.’²⁴³ This knowledge surrounds us as we grow up. Hienrich explains how the individual member of society – the follower – fits into this schema: each individual “probably received a massive cultural download while growing up that included a convenient base-10 counting system, handy Arabic numerals for easy representation, a vocabulary of at least 60,000 words (if [they] are a native English speaker), and working examples of the concepts surrounding pulleys, springs, screws, bows, wheels, levers, and adhesives. Culture also provides heuristics, sophisticated cognitive skills like reading, and mental prostheses like the abacus.”²⁴⁴ These individual experiences influences us to the point where we ‘[p]sychologically’ begin to ‘put greater faith in what we learn from our communities that in our own personal experience or innate intuitions.’²⁴⁵ Thus, ‘[t]he secret of our species’ success resides not in the power of our individual minds, but in the collective brains of our communities.’²⁴⁶ It is this *collective brain* that represents what Hienrich considers to be the main factor behind our success as a species: “Our collective brains arise from the synthesis of our cultural and social natures – from the fact that we readily learn from others (are cultural) and can,

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 326.

²⁴² Ibid., 14.

²⁴³ Ibid., 52.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 24.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

with the right norms, live in large and widely interconnected groups (are social)”.²⁴⁷ So, we can begin to see the similarities with the concept of *the fathers*: collective brains are social and operate over generations.²⁴⁸ Both concepts aggregate the human experience and allow productive cumulative group wisdom to be passed on to the next generation. The ‘cultural download’ then, is the gift bestowed on us from *our fathers*, and it accounts for the accumulated knowledge that is responsible for our success. Success here is defined as all the functions, tools, and know-how that we have accumulated over centuries, and that we, when we become *fathers*, are obliged to pass on through the generations. Like the *collective brain*, *the fathers* are ‘important information sources’, that participate in ‘cultural transmission ... [b]y opening the informational floodgates between generations,’ and molding’ the relationship between younger and older individuals.’²⁴⁹

Let’s pause and ask: is there enough similarity between the concept of *the fathers* and the concept of the *cultural brain* to justify their treatment as the same thing? The *cultural brain*, as we saw, is the accumulated know-how in the experiences of social actors that is successfully preserved and transferred to both cohorts and offspring. This description is in line with the linguistic and conceptual understanding of *the fathers* and the social role they play. In fact the description above is reasonably representative of what can be considered the traits and duties of *the fathers*. The only possible incongruity here is the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁴⁸ Muthukrishna, Michael, and Joseph Henrich. "Innovation in the collective brain." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 371.1690 (2016): 20150192. P 3.

²⁴⁹ Henrich, *The secret of our success*, 145.

filial and devotional elements that are the purview of the relationship between fathers and descendants. The process of cultural evolution, as it is described in Henrich, is technical in nature and too cerebral and mechanical. It works through 'cooperative instincts', 'specialized mental abilities', and 'mental processing power[s]'.²⁵⁰ It is dominated by an instrumentalist logic that is devoid of the emotive content that notions of *the fathers* contribute to the bequeathing process. Fathers do not just bestow information, they usually do so with a spirit of care and filial affinity²⁵¹. Nonetheless, based on the comparison above, we can conclude that the concepts of *the fathers* and the *collective brain* have enough functional similarity such that, for our purposes, they can be considered to signify one and the same phenomenon. They both stand for the source of our 'vast pool of culturally inherited know-how and practices.'²⁵² So, if they can be considered similar, and are seen to perform the bequeathing of inheritance in a similar manner, what then can account for the drastically different assessments attached to each? In *cultural evolution* they are acclaimed as a success factor, while in the Qur'anic discourse they are to be avoided and regarded with suspicion.

In other words, if the concept of *the fathers* is at least an important part of our success as it is argued with much evidence here, why would the Qur'an see in *the fathers* something blameworthy and risky that should be abandoned? Why does it repeatedly

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

²⁵¹ The assumption here is that even if the concept of *the fathers* is used to denote a legacy that can span centuries, e.g. *The Founding Fathers*, the elements of care and concern for the well-being of descendants are implicit in the use of the term.

²⁵² Henrich, *The secret of our success*, 326.

posit that following *the fathers* is taking a path that leads away from the straight path of God – *al sirat al mustaqeem*?

There two things to note in attempting to answer this question: the first thing to consider is that religions are not focused on instrumental inheritance. As we clearly saw in the details of the *cultural brain*, there is a dominance of an instrumentalist view of the world. Scripture, on the other hand, is not concerned with what tools we develop to cope with life, but rather with how we manage relationships to Creator and creation. The similarity we established between the *cultural brain* and the concept of *the fathers* was mainly in process. We are learning agents, we are social agents, and we face life with all its complexities together. We build on the experiences of those before us, and transfer them, augmented by our added experiences, to those after us.

These elements of this process are the same in both concepts, but these are not what is human about us. To begin to see the difference between the logic of the Qur'an and that of cultural evolution, we need to take a closer look at the assumption undergirding the idea of cultural evolution. This is namely that past experiences are learned, and that learning is cumulative, and that it progressively leads, always, to improved states of affairs. The important distinction to note is that knowledge and experience is cumulative but only in science and technology. On the other hand, the distinctively human aspects of our group, like ethics and politics lessons, are learned but do not stay learned, and they are regularly forgotten. In these disciplines the same problems and dilemmas face humanity a new. 'Whatever they are called, torture and slavery are

universal evils; but these evils cannot be consigned to the past like redundant theories in science. They return under different names: torture as enhanced interrogation techniques, slavery as human trafficking.’²⁵³ In spite of modern advancements in the means of production, communication, transportation, agriculture, medicine, and many other aspects of life; we are still unable to deal with problems of human relationships like: inequality, poverty, and racism. This is in part because whatever we might learned in dealing with problems in the past does not seem to hold.

The second thing to consider is that there are differences in the conception of life that each of these notions come out from. The notion of *cultural evolution* comes out of a conception of life that forefronts the inevitability of material advancement through science as ‘something boundless, in keeping with the infinite perfectibility of mankind.’²⁵⁴ It is boundless but it is also directionless. From the perspective of cultural evolution, history is a story of human advancement with no particular aim or purpose beyond mere survival.²⁵⁵ The concept of *the fathers*, on the other hand, is situated in a view of life that forefronts virtue and moral praxis guided by a Creator, a Higher Power that will bring each and every human to account. This is a difference of far reaching consequences, because ‘moral’ is not a currency that cultural evolution dabbles with, but survival is what determines good and bad. Henrich described what is considered

²⁵³ Gray, John. *The silence of animals: On progress and other modern myths*. Macmillan, 2013. 41.

²⁵⁴ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Vol. 241. No. 2. Random House Digital, Inc., 1986, 260.

²⁵⁵ “The most important feature of natural selection is that it is a process of drift. Evolution has no end-point or direction, so if the development of society is an evolutionary process it is one that is going nowhere.” Gray, *The silence of animals*, 47.

'good': "Over time, combinations of these intergroup processes will aggregate and recombine different social norms to create increasingly prosocial institutions. To be clear, by "prosocial institutions" I mean institutions that lead to success in competition with other groups. While such institutions include those that increase group cooperation and foster internal harmony, I do NOT mean "good" or "better" in a moral sense."²⁵⁶

Thus, there is a difference in the way the cumulative process is perceived. In cultural evolution all experiences and know how add to, and enrich, the ability of the collective brain to navigate life, and successfully overcome challenges. As the subtitle of Henrich's book declares: culture 'Makes Us Smarter', and the conclusion of the entire enterprise is summed up by the assertion that 'Generation 5' is smarter than 'Generation 0'.²⁵⁷ This understanding is not shared by the Qur'an, because the criteria are simply different.

To get a sense of what this difference looks like let us consider the following verses:

*Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the `Ad (people)— (6) Of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars, (7) The like of which were not produced in (all) the land? (8) And with the Thamud (people) who cut out (huge) rocks in the valley?-- (9) And with Pharaoh, Lord of Stakes? (10)*²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Henrich, *The secret of our success*, 182. Caps are in original.

²⁵⁷ Henrich, *The secret of our success*, 75.

²⁵⁸ Qur'an 89:6-10. الفجر الصنجر جابوا الذين جابوا الصنجر الفجر (٧) التي لم يخلق مثلها في البلاد (٨) وثمود الذين جابوا الصنجر الفجر (٩) وفرعون ذي الأوتاد (١٠) الذين طغوا في البلاد (١١) فأكثروا فيها الفساد (١٢) بالواد

This verse is about three historic communities that appear in other verses beside these throughout the text. The tribe of 'Ad, inhabited the vast desert region known as Al-Ahqaf, between 'Uman and Hadramawt, in southern Arabia and was noted for its great power and influence.²⁵⁹

Thamud or “people of Thamūd,” an ancient Arab community that lived in northwestern Arabia on the trade route to Syria.²⁶⁰ Thamud is in a number of verses in the text.²⁶¹ And lastly, the formidable Egyptian civilization is represented in the verse by its figure head: Pharaoh. Ad’s distinction as a spectacular civilization is attested to by the Qur’an’s description of it: “*the like of whom has never been reared in all the land*” (89:9). As for Thamud, one has only to visit *Wadi Saleh* and the general area of *al-Mu’alla* in northwest Arabia (currently in Saudi Arabia) to recognize the sophistication and prosperity that this community has achieved. Most visible is their ability to carve entire palaces, and neighborhoods into the rock formations of their area. The Egyptian example is too familiar to require introduction, for even with our advanced knowledge in engineering and architecture, we still do not have a clear understanding of how were these ancient people able to erect the astounding monuments, and spectacular structures in Luxor and Giza. The point of all of this is to indicate the relative state of advancement and sophistication that their *cultural brains* has apparently reached. Judging by the criteria of cultural evolution, including abilities like ‘cooperative

²⁵⁹ Asad, M., *The Message of the Qur’an*, 295.

²⁶⁰ Asad, M., *The Message of the Qur’an*, 1281.

²⁶¹ Qur’an 7:73–9; 11:61–8; 26:141–59; 27:45–53; 51:43–5; 53:50–1; 54:23–31; 69:4–5; and 91:11–15.

instincts', 'specialized mental abilities', and 'mental processing power[s]', these communities represent successful human endeavors. In fact these civilizations would have given convincing alibi for the evolutionary achievements of *cultural brains*.

However, as is very clear from the text, these are examples of human failures in the Qur'anic view. Again, the failure is not in any of the categories that cultural evolution considers barometers of success, for there is little doubt that these communities were smarter than those who came before them. In fact, it appears they were smarter than many of the generations that came after them since we do not have evidence of comparable feats of engineering or architecture that were achieved since they made their indelible marks. So, in what sense then were they failures? In the Qur'an the evaluative lens appears to be focused differently. The evolutionary success of these communities was not enough for their survival, and something else was at play. In the Qur'an, these communities are examples of moral failure. This raises again the need to understand the reason behind the negative view that the Qur'an holds of *the fathers* as sources of guidance and knowledge.

What we have established through the comparison with the concept of *the cultural brain* is that the processes represented by the concept of *the fathers* are indispensable for human survival and development. The fact that we are social beings, and that we accumulate knowledge that we pass along through the generations makes the negative position from the Qur'an towards *the fathers* paradoxical in the extreme. In fact, the paradox that this study is investigating has its origin in this paradoxical position that

the Qur'an holds from inherited knowledge represented by *the fathers*. I was quite surprised to see that the Qur'an, which is known to boast brevity, clarity and economy of form, dedicated numerous verses to war against this concept. In all of these verses the Qur'an puts itself, and its message in opposition to *the fathers* and what they represent. That this is a puzzling position should be obvious from asking: where else can anyone get their knowledge from? If one of the things the concept of *the fathers* represent is tradition, construed as the sum of a society's accumulated wisdom, then how are we to imagine a society continuing without that? And how do we understand the implied advice in these verses to be wary of it at the same time? I believe it is necessary at this point to examine how the exegetes of the Qur'an interpreted these verses, and what they had to say about this apparently paradoxical position from *the fathers* and what they represent. But first I think it is useful for our inquiry to see that when Islam appeared on the stage of history, the *fathers* were in the crosshair of this nascent religion.

The fathers at the Dawn of Islam

One of the most jarring aspects of change that Islam brought about to the Arabs was the devaluing of lineage (consanguinity) and ancestry as sources of identity, knowledge and worldview. One of the ways it did this was by affirming the individual as the accountable agent addressed by the Qur'an. This was a significant departure from how things were before the advent of Islam, for it is arguable that the individual did not exist

in Arabia before Islam. The coming of Islam to Arabia effectively gave birth to a new sense of individuality. Before the advent of Islam, a person derived their sense of existence from their clan. Belonging to the tribe is what gave life purpose, and life outside the clan or tribe had little to no meaning²⁶². Probably nothing illustrates the absence of individuality in pre-Islamic Arabia better than the vendetta system of retribution through which the tribes arbitrated conflict and regulated warfare. In this system, the life of any member of an offending tribe could be taken in retribution of a murdered member of another tribe, the murderer was not necessarily the one sought after. The killing of the tribe member could be avenged by killing any member of the killer's tribe. The individual had value only as a member of their tribe.

When Muhammad began openly inviting people to the new faith and calling on them to abandon the inherited idolatry "Quraysh [frequently complained] to abu Talib [his uncle and protector] ... 'By God, we cannot endure that our fathers should be reviled, our customs mocked and our gods insulted.' ²⁶³ The passion behind this outcry could not be exaggerated. For even Abu Talib, who never wavered in his protection of his nephew, in his last moments on his deathbed could not bring himself to renounce the 'ways of the fathers' in the presence of his intransigent kin folk, even as the Prophet pleaded with him: give me even a word "that may allow me to argue on your behalf",

²⁶² Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious*, 56.

²⁶³ Ishaq, Ibn. "*The life of Muhammad*." (1989), 167.

“will you forsake the ways of your fathers” came the warning reprimand from present Meccans.

Ibn Ishaq narrates that abu Jahl, who effectively led the opposition of Meccans to the new faith, was known to say: ‘when we heard that a man had become a Muslim, if he was a man of social importance and had relatives to defend him, we reprimanded him and poured scorn on him, saying:’ you have forsaken the religion of your father who was a better man than you. We will declare you as a blockhead and brand you as a fool, and destroy your reputation.”²⁶⁴ In the minds of the combative Meccans this accusation summed up their case against the new religion and its adherents. When Amr ibn Al-‘As , known among the Meccans for his shrewd and witty intellect, was sent to Abyssinia to bring the Muslims who fled the abuse in Mecca back, he told the Negus:’ Great king, some rabble from our land has come to your country. They have left the religion of their ancestors.’²⁶⁵

In 628, six years after his move to Madina, Prophet Muhammad sent messages to the rulers of his time, one of those messages arrived in Byzantium. When the message was given to Heraclius, his interest seemed to reach a point where he felt the desire to know more about this man and his message. The tribes of Arabia frequented the lands ruled by the emperor in their trade expeditions, so when he asked if some of the Prophet’s cohorts were in presence, Abu Sufian bin Harb was led into the audience of the

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁶⁵ Emerick, Yahiya. *The life and work of Muhammad*. Penguin, 2002, 81.

emperor. Abu Sufian was from the Umayya clan, one of Quraysh's most powerful and influential clans, and a central force in the opposition to the new faith. The interview was elaborate. From the beginning, Abu Sufian realized that he should not perjure himself in the presence of the emperor, and his answers were deliberate and cautious. When the emperor asked Abu Sufian: what does he ask of you? Abu Sufian answered: To associate none with God, and to forsake the ways of our fathers."²⁶⁶ We can see by Abu Sufian's choice of words that this issue of the *fathers* was present in the conversation the Meccans engaged in with the new message. The encounters relayed thus far are reflected in *the fathers* verses, and that is to be expected. What is incongruent and discordant with the nature of the Qur'an is the messages (?) dedicate close to thirty verses merely to reflect this particularity of its reception. It is part of my argument in this study that the Qur'an puts forth this matter of the legacy of the fathers as a serious question for all generations to grapple with. So, how did the Muslims throughout history understand these verses? To that we turn to the exegetes.

The fathers Qur'anic commentary

In exploring how the exegetes regarded and interpreted *the fathers* verses, I made two choices: the first concerns which Qur'anic works of interpretation to consult, and the second which of *the fathers* verses to focus on. As for the first choice, I decided to choose these four works of Qur'anic exegesis: the first is *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*

²⁶⁶ Bukhari, I. "Sahih Bukhari." (1986). Vol. 1, No. 7. Also, Glassé, Cyril. *The new encyclopedia of Islam*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 177.

The second is *جامع البيان عن تأويل آي القرآن* (923-Tabari (838-al Muhammad ibn Jarir by *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* الجامع لأحكام القرآن by Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Qurtubi (1214-1273). The third is *Min Wahy al-Qur'an* من وحي القرآن by Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935-2010). And the last one is *Tafsir al Sharawi* تفسير الشعراوي by Muhammad Metwalli al-Sha'rawi (1911-1998). The decision to use these four works of exegesis came after examining over 200 works of exegesis. These included mostly works in the Arabic language with a few in English. Within these works I looked at, the following four are from *the fathers* verses 2:170, 5:104, 31:21, and 43:22-24. Most of the exegetes up to Al Tabari treated these verses as reflecting the first encounters between the new revelation and two groups: the Meccans of Arabia in the sixth century, or their Jewish cohorts. After the time of Al Tabari, as we will see below, the verses begin to be taken to institute the prohibition against *taqlid* – a technical term in Islamic jurisprudence that denotes the acceptance of an opinion without evidence- a feature that continues to be prevalent even in contemporary works of exegesis like the last two in our chosen works. Based on the outcome of my examination of these works (the 200 plus works of *tafsir*) I chose the four listed above. The group includes both early classical works represented by al-Tabari, and middle period works represented by al - Qurtubi, and finally modern works of exegesis represented by both Fadlahal and Sharawi. The choice of these last two allows us to cover the sectarian landscape as well. As for the verses, I have decided to write about the exegesis of only the first two verses in the group of *the fathers* verses: 2:170, and 5:104. The choice is based on the fact that the majority of exegetes tended to refer to what they already said about 2:170 and 5:104

when encountering the subject of *the fathers* in later chapters (suras). To include more verses would have been repetitive without adding much substantive gain.

Altabari on 2:170²⁶⁷ and 5:104²⁶⁸

After proposing two possibilities for the meaning of the verse in 2:170, al-Tabari was most likely stating the response of a group of the Jews of Arabia in response to an invitation for them to accept Islam and join the Prophet. In commenting on 5:104 al-Tabari linked the verse to the verse preceding it which was focused on the falsification of God's law by the Arabs at the time when Islam first appeared in Arabia. As many have shown,²⁶⁹ the advent of Islam into Arab life made sweeping changes, but did not change everything. Some norms and customs were incorporated into the medium of Islamic practices, others were rejected. Close attention was given to any practices that were connected to rituals of consecration or sanctification due to the prevalence of these in idol worship and sacrifice to the false gods of Jahiliya. Any of the Arab customs that might be regarded or construed as legislation, the area within religion that was declared to be the sole prerogative of the Creator, received extra scrutiny. The verse preceding 5:104 is an example of pre-Islamic customs of sanctification: "*It was not Allah Who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work; it is*

²⁶⁷ Al Tabari, Muhammad bin Jarir. *Jame al-Bayan*. Dar Ibnu Azam, 2002. Vol. 2, 41-44.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, 42-43.

²⁶⁹ See for example Amin, Ahmad. *Fajr al-Islam*. 10th ed. Cairo: Lajnat al-ta'Ilf wa al-tar jamah wa al-nashr, 1965.

blasphemers who invent a lie against Allah, but most of them lack wisdom."²⁷⁰ In these pre-Islamic practices, selected livestock was marked by slitting its ear or letting it loose to wonder uninhibited in an act of sacrifice or devotion. Al-Tabari links verse 104 to verse 103. In commenting on 5:104, al-Tabari states that the verse is displaying both the intransigence and ignorance of those attempting to preserve these practices, although an attempt to elevate them above this superstition was made by the call of the prophet. The main argument in the verse, then, is this forceful rebuke for holding on to these irrational and illegitimate practices in spite of the guidance that came from God. Beyond stressing this point, al-Tabari does not elucidate the verse further.

Al Qurtubi on 2:170²⁷¹ and 5:104²⁷²

The central point in both verses for al-Qurtubi is *taqlid*.²⁷³ He reiterates a standard definition of *taqlid* as adopting a position or taking a stand without requiring evidence or proof. Al-Qurtubi explained that the word is derived from the name of the camel's harness *البعير qiladat al ba'eer* قلادة , so the practitioner of *taqlid* is pulled by whomever they surrendered the reins of their harness to. In other words, they go wherever the object of their imitation chose to take them. Al-Qurtubi seems to hold a dogmatic position from the rejection or acceptance of *taqlid*. In the third of seven points he deduced in from these verses he says: " Some clung to this *aya* [verse] in censuring *taqlid* because God

²⁷⁰ Qur'an 5:103.

²⁷¹ Qurtubi, Muhammad Bin Al-Ansari. "Jami'Li Ahkam Quran (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi)." Muassasah Al-Risalah. 2006 Vol. 3, 15-19.

²⁷² Ibid., Vol. 8, 248-250.

²⁷³ This Arabic term usually refers to imitation. It became to denote the acceptance of a legal opinion without knowing what it is based on. We will elaborate this idea further later in this chapter.

almighty denounced the unbelievers for following the example of their fathers in sin and disbelief” he then says “this is true in the case of falsehood باطل” however, in the case of truth (following of the true faith); *taqlid* is then one of the foundations of religion, and a source of inerrancy within it, to which the unknowing, or the one unable to discern can resort.” This practitioner of *taqlid*, whom al-Qurtubi calls ‘*ammi* عامي is a commoner who is illiterate or unlearned and has no other way to answer his questions concerning matters of religious practice. So, he seeks a fatwa (religious opinion), but in order to do so, according to al-Qurtubi, he must “find the most knowledgeable person in his land”. Ironically, al-Qurtubi burdens this commoner, who has no recourse but to be a practitioner of *taqlid* with the obligation to practice *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), because al-Qurtubi obliges this unlearned commoner to decide who among the available scholars is this knowledgeable person. Al-Qurtubi does not stop at requiring the illiterate follower to perform this act of *ijtihad*; he also requires the Mujtahid (the scholar practicing *ijtihad*) to become himself a practitioner of *taqlid* by obliging him to follow other scholars in problems that he could not resolve himself.

Al-Qurtubi states that there is near consensus among the scholars that ‘*taqlid* is not a path to knowledge, especially in seeking knowledge about the fundamentals of practice, or the smaller and derivative details within it.’ However, this accepting stance toward *taqlid* does not extend to matters of creed; al Qurtubi states that no reputable scholar nor any school sanctioned the practice of *taqlid* in *tawheed* ²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Tawheed is the belief the Oneness of God

Al-Qurtubi concludes his commentary on these verses in a manner that renders the concept of *the fathers* with constrained and limited meaning, since he goes back to state that these verses do not apply to the 'true faith'. His position is saying that to follow *the fathers* cannot be blameworthy if those fathers are Muslims guided by the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet. As evidence al-Qurtubi quotes a verse in the chapter of Joseph where his proclamation that he follows his fathers is praised: "*I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allah and that (even) deny the Hereafter. (37) "And I follow the ways of my fathers— Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and never could we attribute any partners whatever to Allah: that (comes) of the grace of Allah to us and to mankind: yet most men are not grateful. (38)"*"²⁷⁵ We have already noted in this chapter above that this verse in chapter 12 titled Yousuf is one of two verses where a positive position from following the fathers is stated. However, we also indicated that both instances were about Prophets praising their parent Prophets and cannot indicate a general case for regarding the following *the fathers* a praiseworthy practice. What should be noted here is that al-Qurtubi is writing during a time when the legal schools of Islamic jurisprudence became established and the issue of *taqlid* claimed near monopoly on the interpretation of these verses.

²⁷⁵ Qur'an 12:37-38.

Allama Muhammad Fadlillah on 2:170²⁷⁶ and 5:104²⁷⁷

Unlike the classical *tafsirs* of al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi, where the commentary on each verse is a number of unbroken remarks, Fadlallah organizes his interpretation of the verses into sections, each beginning with a descriptive title. In commenting on 5:104 he begins with a section titled: 'Blind commitment²⁷⁸ to the past'. These verses, he opens, speak of a type of people who follow in the steps of Satan in their way of thinking.

Fadlallah is unique in his treatment of the behavior of the group he deems to be addressed by the verse. He not only characterizes them by uncritically inheriting beliefs and ways of living, but he also attributes such behavior to what he calls their 'simplistic passion.' It is this passion that drives them to see the past they belong to as sacred. Such a position, according to Fadlallah, *a priori* defines the set of views and issues that are agreeable to them, as well as those issues to which they will object or outright reject.

For Fadlallah, those described in these verses live life through the reverence they develop for the sacred past on which they base both thought and action. The past is made sacred and adherence to it not negotiable. Fadlallah adds: as an example of what the Qur'an describes as following in the "footsteps of Satan" in which emotive reverence of a past that is made sacred places these convictions beyond dialogue or discussion. He notes

²⁷⁶ Fadlallah, S. M. H. "Tafsir min wahy al-Quran (Vol. 2)." Beirut: Dar al-Melak-o-ltebaa publications (1998). Vol. 3, 170-180.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., Vol. 8, 365-368.

²⁷⁸ Fadlallah uses the verb form of the Arabic *'sabiya عصبية*, a notoriously difficult concept to translate, and that was made famous by Ibn Khaldun. Interestingly, the term can be translated: "to do with nerves" (or neurons). Fadlallah uses the term here as an indicator of filial attachment or solidarity that is based on filial relationships that are usually based on kin, tribal, or other affiliations. It has a hierarchical consciousness that is strongest at the core of the family, clan, or tribe and weakens as the relationship moves away from such center.

that this “personal behavior” has historically contributed to the difficulties that were faced by the prophets and messengers in calling out to their people to listen to them and follow their lead since it cloisters people into closed cocoons that prevent them from interacting and or responding to new ideas. It also shackles society to the past, and stifles its path to progress, and restricts it in a position that holds errors in reverence, with no other justification for holding on to them but save the fact that they were inherited from the fathers and the forefathers.

The Qur’an, according to Fadlalla, fought fiercely against this course of action. It called for deliberate thought free from filial passions, a thought that rationally examines the legacy of the fathers. If one does that, writes Fadlallah, one will find that most of those fathers know little if any, and live in a state restrained by superstition and various forms of ignorance.

After this elaborate preface, Fadlalla begins a section with a new heading “The call of the Qur’an to take a rational position from the past.” It is here where Fadlalla begins commenting on the verse itself.

Fadlalla says that the indefinite article ‘them’ at the beginning of the verse points to the unbelievers *al Kafireen* الكافرين. In an elaboration that suffers a fair amount of prolixity, Fadlalla rephrases the expression in the verse reiterating in the end the rhetorical question that appears at the end of the verse casting doubt on the legitimacy of blind adherence of inherited knowledge as an acceptable answer.

In another section under the heading “Between Truth and Emotional Connections” Fadlalla suggests that the verse in no small measure is attempting to bring into relief the emotional and filial pressures brought to bear upon the individual to conform to the path followed by those they are emotionally attached to, like the fathers , the family, close friends, and the close group. In this section Fadlalla says: the Qur’an here is charting the path through which man can come to realize his convictions. With this verse, Fadlalla concludes, the Qur’an wants to raise the issue of the attachment to the fathers as an example of the emotional filial pressures that compels individuals to submit to the path of those he is attached to, whomever they may be.

The Qur’an, Fadlalla says, is laying down for man the path that if followed, allows one to arrive at his intellectual convictions. Fathers or forefathers in the verse stand for or represent the kind of pressures, especially emotional ones that are exerted on one to hold true to one’s heritage. Fadlalla gives primacy to the term “emotional attachments.” To him they are not limited to the fathers, and he extends the phenomena to pressures and influences exerted by cohorts and friends. The way he talks about this here says that the verses could have said fathers, or sons, or tribe, or friends. He is probably right to note that pressure can come from a variety of attachments, but to equate all of such attachment in intensity is not understandable given that social connections do vary widely in strength. From this generalization, Fadlalla, restates that the verses are confirming that the filial connections are not a good path to arrive at

Truth. And more importantly they could not be held up as a justification for adopting certain convictions and beliefs.

Fadlalla goes back to stating that the effect of, what he calls, the 'fathers phenomenon' are the ideas of the fathers' generation as well as the emotional memory they preserve and pass on. He explains that children, to a large extent, are product of how the fathers choose to bring them up. Elements of love and hatred, friendship and enmity are not formed without input from nurture by 'the fathers'. All these aspects of the phenomenon make it unrepresentative of rational human choice, or he possibly means that due to the strong emotional and filial component of such phenomenon, its adoption is not/cannot be rational. 'Intellectual matters,' he continues, are based on knowledge, and considerations of objective elements that might be different for different times and different places, or through experiencing different social pressures that befall humans or their relatives. All of this might change the nature of such elements from one time to another or one environment to another.

"The issue is that" says Fadlalla, emotional /filial attachments are not a sign or a clue to knowing truth, and do not justify or determine the type of intellectual commitment one is or should be committed to.

This "fathers phenomena", Fadlalla ads, makes its weight felt over the public conscious, both at the level of thought as well the le

vel of ideas, and of emotions that are generated from the shared expressions in the social public and private spheres. This phenomena, Fadlalla continues, does not

provide a rational choice, and emotional attachment might affect relationships between individuals, and might be affected by cultural or historical memory. On the other hand, intellectual matters, says Fadlalla, are much more specific to historical and temporal locations.

Sharawi on 2:170²⁷⁹ and 5:104²⁸⁰

The matter of imitating the habits of the fathers or forefathers is of great import for Muslim societies according to Sharawi. Sharawi casts *taqlid*, especially of one's elders, fathers and forefathers as a primordial function, necessary for life and for its continuity.²⁸¹ Sharawi seems to talk about *taqlid* as both an element of the nature of human sociability as well as their nurture by fathers and forefathers. He states: "that generations that follow, imitate generations that pass is dictated by the nature of existence." The verse then, adds Sharawi, commands that people manage this necessary function by following that which was revealed to the prophets, and to refrain from following in the footsteps of their fathers in all matters.

The reason for this, offers Sharawi, is another fact of life and of normal social existence, namely, that divergence and deviation will befall the ways of the fathers, by their own

²⁷⁹ Sha'rawī, Muḥammad Mutawallī. Tafsīr al-Sha'rawī. Akhbār al-Yawm, Idārat al-Kutub wa-al-Maktabāt, 1991. Vol. 3, 700-709.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., Vol. 6, 3431-3433.

²⁸¹ I will make an attempt at giving this idea a more scientific grounding in the section on 'Kuhn Paradigm Shift and *taqlid*' below.

actions, or simply that the passage of time might cause them to forget.²⁸² God is thus calling to us to seek the source of guidance that was revealed to the prophet, and not the ways of the fathers and forefathers since deviation and divergence is always a present risk.

Sharawi then goes into explaining how such divergence happens. If each generation is indoctrinated in the ways and beliefs of their predecessors, then it should be expected that this process will preserve said ways from generation to the next, how then, asks Sharawi, do these successive generations end up deviating from that 'original' path of their ancestral fathers? Inquiring about the social process is intriguing; Sharawi, however, is hindered by the dogmatic manner in which he sets up the question. In the logic that Sharawi lays out the story it begins with Adam, the first man, the first prophet, and the first father according to Muslim belief. Like all fathers after him, Adam taught his children the revealed truth that is he puts them on the *Path of God* which is *al Sirat al Mustaqeem* that leads to the pleasure of God. His offspring in turn, taught their offspring. Now if this offspring were true to the ways of their fathers, Sharawi explains, they would be following both the revealed truth (the *Path of God*) while also, and at the same time, following their fathers. The process should theoretically continue and be repeated with successive generations. So where, asks Sharawi, does the deviation happen? How do we end up with the situation described

²⁸² We have alluded to this idea in our discussion of the difference between cumulative scientific learning and the absence of this in social human affairs. In the way we manage life we seem to forget and repeat the same mistake over and over.

in the verses, where following the fathers is no longer the same as following the *Path of God* or *al Sirat al Mustaqeem* and become instead the blameworthy thing one should not do?

Sharawi looks at the problem as a form of deliberate human action that might result from innate weaknesses or failings, such as inaccuracy, jealousy, motivated bias, or simply normal human forgetfulness especially over long durations. The way Sharawi speaks of the matter is symptomatic of Islamic revivalist thinking, prevalent throughout the final decades of the last century. Such thinking references the presence of a pristine and unadulterated state of religious existence that should be revived if lost, or should be recovered if it was deviated from. For Sharawi such a state is denoted by the part of the verse that spoke of 'that which God has revealed'. Humans, or Muslims in this case, in Sharawi's logic, have the task of always finding their way back to this state, the state of being on the *Straight Path of God*. Sharawi does not state it explicitly, but it seems that his understanding of these verses involves a process that reoccurs with successive generations of believers.

But how do people come to the realization that corrective action is needed? This question is at the heart of the idea of the paradox this paper is concerned with. The commentators in general view the dialogue in the verses at the moment of revelation, when the subjects in this dialogue have to take a position from the new information revealed to the prophet. Beyond this prophetic moment, it is understood by most commentators that the demand is made in relation to the revelation itself, as it is

imperfectly applied and practiced by men and women throughout the ages. This is the moment recognized in the verse by '*and when it is said to them*'. What traditional commentators do not discuss, and modern ones barely touch on, is what kind of realization is described in the verse?

If this can be accepted as what the verses actually do, there can be no certainty that those addressed actually realized what is being offered here. How do people get to the point of realizing that adhering to the ways of the forefathers becomes a problem? It should be noted here that the verses are speaking about a process; the verses seem to setup a dynamic by which the group is faced with new information, that is in the form of revelation, or new information presenting them with the possibility that a serious deviation might have taken place, at which point they are called to effect a correction and reach beyond it to '*that which God has revealed*'. The other side of the process is what seems to be a reflexive resort to the reactionary (or conservative) position of conserving their way of life and upholding their inherited heritage. A position the verses declare as blameworthy.

In another part of his discussion, Sharawi, gyrates between insisting that successive generations gradually corrupt the original teachings revealed from heaven and deviate from them, and between admitting that each successive generation will possess personality and traits that are different from their fathers, and will perceive and view them differently.

So we end up with a situation in which the generation of the sons is admonished for keeping to the traditions of their fathers. On the other hand, Sharawi asserts that due to the peculiarity of each generation's character, no generation of sons actually follows completely in the footsteps of their forefathers. This discussion in Sharawi appears a bit confused.

When he arrives at the part of the verse where the rhetorical question is posited: " *What! Even if their fathers know not anything and have no guidance?*" The judgment is of course passed by the Qur'an itself, the commentators usually take somewhat a condescending position by highlighting the irrationality of such behavior.

Like Sharawi, the commentators repeatedly rebuke the addressees in the verses based mainly on the dogmatic position that pits them against the revealed truth. However, a more careful examination of the verses will show the neutral language of the verses.

The verse, it can be argued, does not make a judgment about the response of those addressed. The verse, it can be argued again, is descriptive and not prescriptive. When *this* is said, the answer is *that*. The thought can be completed without the condescending scolding the exegetes reiterate echoing one another.

Discussion of this part brings Sharawi to make a statement on blind following of someone by others, i.e. *taqlid*, he says, blind following is acceptable only if one is trusted and tested in his judgment. But again, the matter slides into the discussion of *taqlid* proper. The discussion/commentary on this part is mechanical in nature. How does one follow someone who has no knowledge? How could someone be guided by those who

have no guidance, and are not themselves guided? These rhetorical questions echo what is thought to be the language in the verse. Beyond the paraphrase, not much insight is added.

Sharawi then branches into a discussion about the point at which a person is held responsible for their deeds, i.e. the onset of personal accountability. When he gets back to the verse, he concludes this discussion by stating that the intent of the Creator is to cultivate in each person a 'selfhood', the attainment of which obligates independent judgment on the part of each person, and by corollary renders the act of *taqlid*: the act of subordinating this judgement to that of someone else unacceptable, or forbidden.

Sharawi follows this assertion of the necessity of independent judgement by negating the logic of total imitation. He proposes that no one follows another in all manners and matters of life. So he asks: since no one imitates another exactly in all manners and in all ways, then why would those admonished in the verse differ with their fathers and refrain from following their fathers in many aspects of their livelihood while insisting to imitate them in the issues of belief? He concludes that only motivated bias could bring one to such an inconsistent position.

Sharawi does not provide examples or proofs of these assertions. He seems to rely on what he describes as human behavior deemed or characterized as natural or normal.

The impact of his method of delivery is fairly obvious. This however should not detract from the utility of the points he raises concerning these verses.

Sharawi then makes a profound statement about the verses. He says: God aims to rid man from the shackles of this following, and dissuade his servants from imitating one another: “you who became possessor of your own selfhood and reason, exercise your intellect.” He then adds one of his idea/statements that recurs frequently, namely, that sound use of the faculty of reason leads one to the Creator, the One and only.²⁸³

Sharawi then reiterates that one should realize the necessity of outgrowing from the state of dependence on the father(s) as one comes into their own. Sharawi speaks of this as connected to dogma which robs the idea of its revivalist spirit, in spite of that the general contours are definitely helpful. It is in this context that he further declares that if, or especially when, the father(s) have lost their way or gone astray, then, what position should the sons take? What stand should they make? It is their duty, he says, to correct their ways by going down the path that God has revealed.

Sharawi once again puts his finger on the relevant question. He asks, so if (the verses) accuse the fathers of the inability to reason, what then of their offspring? Indeed the verses in their logic seem to be addressed to the indoctrinated, to those who are subject to the efforts (of fathers) to conserve and pass down the accumulated knowledge, sentiments, and worldview.

²⁸³ This idea echoes a Qur’anic position. In *Saba’* 34:6 it says: ‘*And those to whom knowledge has come see that the (Revelation) sent down to thee from thy Lord— that is the Truth, and that it guides to the Path of the Exalted (in Might), Worthy of all praise.*’ This expresses Sharawi’s and others conviction that any fair and balanced examination of what was ‘*sent down*’ will conclude that it is the ‘*Turth.*’

At this point in his commentary, Sharawi combines his commentary on 2:170 with remarks his commentary on its sister verse 5:104. The comparison is largely linguistic and lexical. Sharawi sets out to prove the harmony in form and aptness of response to the manner in which each verse expresses the idea of the position from inherited knowledge.

In his attempt to tell a cohesive and complete story, Sharawi launches again into the discussion about the point at which a person becomes accountable. He answers this question from the point of the view of Islamic jurisprudence, stating that this occurs when one reaches puberty.

It is somewhat odd for Sharawi to equate the ability to propagate the human species with the maturity of the intellect. For possessing enough physical maturity does not translate in a teenager to the ability to contemplate the error or correctness of their ways. Such is not a common ability that the young are known for. And yet Sharawi makes a clear statement in reference to the idea: in his view “God wants to cultivate in the human being their selfhood at the same time they are physically able to propagate their kind.” So in the view of Sharawi since one becomes a possessor of “complete selfhood”, “God then wants to end their following to someone else.”

Taqlid in the Qur'an

It is clear from the contemporary commentaries that these verses are seen as calls for mental maturity, and self-reliance that is coupled with an implied invitation to build a relationship with Revelation that is original. Furthermore, the general sentiment in the commentaries affirms the general view gleaned from the verses of the problematic reliance on the inheritance of the *fathers* to address issues of faith and belief. The commentaries also show the development of the link between the *fathers* verses and the term *taqlid*. By the time of Al Qurtubi this link was firmly established. It should be noted that *taqlid* does not appear anywhere in the text of the Qur'an. The link between these verses and *taqlid* is not a development in Qur'anic exegesis, but it is rather a development in jurisprudence and debates over law-making. Using a conceptual-historical approach, Ahmad Fekry Ibrahim²⁸⁴ traced the evolution of the term *taqlid*, and how it gradually begins to stand for the idea of following precedent. The link between *fathers* and precedent is axiomatic. In our discussion above we have seen that the *fathers* encompasses the aggregate knowledge and know-how that passes between generations. In matters of jurisprudence and law-making the idea of precedent is rooted in the question of how much deference should be directed toward the opinions and judgements of predecessors. Should a lawmaker be bound by the decisions of his predecessors? Or can they adjudicate each decision free from previous verdicts as if

²⁸⁴ Ibrahim, Ahmed Fekry. "Rethinking the Taqlid-Ijtihad Dichotomy: A Conceptual-Historical Approach." *Journal of American Oriental Society* 136.2 (2016): 285-303.

working on a blank slate?²⁸⁵ The question of precedence featured prominently in the development of the idea and meaning of *taqlid*. For example, one of Ibrahim's contentions is that although both al-Shafi'i²⁸⁶ and Ibn Hanbal disliked following precedent, as *taqlid* as a technical term that meant precedent-following was not available to al-Shafi'i like it was for Ibn Hanbal. And although al-Shafi'i used the term *taqlid*, he did not employ it in its later technical sense of precedent-following (accepting a view without evidence) 'which was a conceptual evolution of the term *taqlid* that did not exist in al-Shafi'i's time'.²⁸⁷

Both the *fathers* and the *collective brains* encompass precedence as a concept within their fabrics. In a sense they are both constituted through the contribution of precedence. In the Islamic tradition these ideas have found unique manifestation in Imam Malik's²⁸⁸ principal of Madinese Praxis (*'Amal ahl al Madina*). This is a composite term that incorporated the Qur'an, *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), but what distinguished it was the incorporation of the preferences of the Madina scholars, judges, governors and all notables. The collective sum of their opinions, verdicts, actions, and decisions constituted a 'higher criterion that Malik used for ascertaining the 'correct' judgement on a legal issue.'²⁸⁹ Malik 'consistently relie[d] on Medinese praxis to accept, reject, generalize, delimit, qualify, and otherwise expand upon received legal texts from the

²⁸⁵ Gerhardt, Michael J. *The power of precedent*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

²⁸⁶ Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shāfi'ī (d. 820) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) are both eponyms of two of the schools of Sunni jurisprudence.

²⁸⁷ Ibrahim, 292.

²⁸⁸ Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) eponym of the second Sunni school of jurisprudence.

²⁸⁹ Dutton, Yasin. "SUNNA," ḤADĪTH", AND MADINAN" 'AMAL." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 4.1 (1993): 1-31. P. 5.

Qur'ān, Prophetic ḥadīth, and post-Prophetic reports (āthār).²⁹⁰ For our purposes, what is unique about 'amal is that it stands for the *cultural brain* of Madina where 'each generation builds on the knowledge passed down by its predecessors, modifying and refining collective practice through consultation and personal reasoning.'²⁹¹ As a theory of law 'amal appeared to al-Shafi'i as too polysomic to produce coherent verdicts. But his real problem with it was that the amorphous judgment of the community decided what is normative and what is not. These judgments were not based on the sources but were based on whether the community chose to follow them or not. So, 'one could not trace the reasoning that led to the particular ruling; one could only follow it blindly.'²⁹² In other words, in the view of al-Shafi'i this was another form of the prohibited *taqlid*. For our purposes this shows that the *fathers* verses cannot be quarantined behind the kufr-belief divide. *Ittiba'* of the *fathers* is risky. It also shows that *taqlid* is more complexly nuanced than we think. For that, I am going to take a short segue before making a last point.

Kuhn's Paradigm Shift and *taqlid*

Why is Kuhn here? Kuhn will help us gauge the true measure of *taqlid* and how formidable it is as a force in the social dialectic of continuity and change. It is not a congruent relationship because Kuhn's logic is built on observations of science and

²⁹⁰ Abd-Allah, Umar F. *Mālik and Medina: Islamic legal reasoning in the formative period*. Brill, 2013, 3.

²⁹¹ Shamsy, Ahmed el. "Rethinking" Taqlid" in the Early Shāfi'i School." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128.1 (2008): 1-23. P. 3.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

scientific change, not those of social or human sciences. This is an important point for what I am trying to show here. We already made this point earlier in this chapter when we differentiated between the logic that the *collective brain* works within, and the logic *the fathers* verses work within. So, while I am using Kuhn to show why *taqlid* was able to overcome the prohibition on its practice, including the clear *anti-taqlid* position of the Qur'an and its commentaries (see above), this discussion will further clarify the point that extending scientific processes to social problems has its limits and is fraught with gaps.

Kuhn was attempting to explain shifts and turns that the flowing river of scientific progress makes: why do these changes happen when they do? His focus on change made me think of *taqlid* and its popular juxtaposition to *ijtihad*.²⁹³ In this popular pair of opposites *taqlid* stands for continuity. Kuhn provided an explanatory framework that answered his question in a way that many found to be useful. However, what we learn from his framework is that shifts are the exception, and the vast spaces between shifts are filled with normal life, the overwhelming feature of which is continuity and stability. That is why this explanatory framework is helpful in understanding the role of *taqlid* and explaining why it is so formidable. The Qur'an's anti *taqlid* position is designed, I believe, to save us from the submerging force of *taqlid* as it fills normal life. It is designed to sustain a state of tension that keeps the possibility of change alive.

²⁹³ *Ijtihad* is a legal term in Islamic Jurisprudence that refers to independent reasoning through exertion.

Kuhn's formulation is apt here because it shows that even in the most innovative and change seeking of human sciences the normal (i.e. *taqlid*) triumphs in the end.

In his book²⁹⁴ Kuhn suggests that changes in science follow four phases: the pre-paradigmatic phase, the normal phase, crisis, and finally revolution. With the exception of the pre-paradigmatic phase, science cycles through the other three phases in its journey of progress until the need arises anew to go through what he calls, 'a paradigm shift', at which point the cycle begins again with the pre-paradigmatic phase. The normal phase, which is the one important for our purposes here, is what can be called the default phase, it is the longest in duration, and the one that most scientists work within for most of their time. Even when science is met with a crisis (the third phase) and is compelled by its severity to go through a revolution (the fourth phase) Kuhn argues that with time the effects of these two phases are integrated anew into the knowledge and practice of science after which we arrive back again at the normal phase.

In the normal phase, argues Kuhn, scientists go about their business of solving problems, by building on previous knowledge; thus, in this phase scientists are usually not very critical, in some sense they are not critical at all. Kuhn writes: "Normal Science, the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost." Within normal science a consensus over

²⁹⁴ Kuhn, Thomas S. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago press, 2012.

fundamentals is established that “suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments.”²⁹⁵

The activity that the scientists are engaged in during Normal science is reaffirmation, protection, and propagation of the status quo: ‘Scientists in a field rarely disagree over fundamentals, since they all have accepted the same paradigm. They share the same rules and standards. The agreement it produces is necessary for normal science – for the creation and continuation of a research tradition.’ Interestingly, innovation, the thing that science, especially in our time, is most known for, is not sought after in the normal phase, and what is new is probably not welcome; ‘Normal science does not aim at novelties of fact or theory and, when successful, finds none.’²⁹⁶

These features of the normal phase: taking things for granted, accepting things without criticism, building on the knowledge and experience inherited from previous practitioners without being critical of them, and a rigid adherence to the paradigm of the time, are a very good representation of what *taqlid* is. If this analogy is valid, we might be able state that in reality *taqlid* represents what is normal, or that *taqlid* represents normal life. *Taqlid* is how life is lived for most of the time, by most people.

The point I am hoping to make here is very simple: the nature of *taqlid* as a stage of social development, and a feature of normal life, cannot be nullified even in the development of science which is thought to be the most dynamically changing and self-

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

critical of human activities. What Kuhn's scheme help us establish is that even in scientific development, normal activity is based on this manifestation of the concept of *taqlid*. What I am suggesting in other words is that *taqlid*, to a large extent, describes many of the essential features of what Kuhn called a paradigm.

Many have pointed out the ways in which Kuhn's scheme does not work for social science, one of which is that Kuhn's model envisions the presence of only one paradigm at a time in any discipline. However, a more important difference that interests us here is how changes to a paradigm happen, or the manner in which a paradigm, in Kuhn's phraseology, shifts. In the sciences the crisis is imposed by the strict laws of nature, when faced with what Kuhn calls an anomaly, science must respond, either by creating a solution within the paradigm or by beginning the road to revolution which will effect a change in the paradigm.

Just like Normal science is a "highly cumulative enterprise, eminently successful in its aim, the steady extension of the scope and precision of scientific knowledge,²⁹⁷ *Taqlid* similarly is a "highly cumulative enterprise" also 'eminently successful in its aim' in ensuring the slow, deliberate, constant heartbeat of inherited social existence. In this sense, *taqlid* stands for continuity, for preserving the life of *the fathers*. The anti-*taqlid* position of the Qur'an, channeled through *the fathers* verses, is declaring both the inevitability of *taqlid* and cautioning its readers of the risks embedded in surrendering to it. However, our examples from the schools of jurisprudence proved that for systems

Ibid., 53.

of law-making, the need for consistency, predictability, accommodation of precedent, and legal reasoning that can aggregate individual opinions into communal legal thinking, all conspire to make *taqlid* inevitable on the communal and society level. On the other hand, what we learn from *ittiba'* is that *taqlid* it should still be deemed problematic for individuals.

The Paradox and *the fathers*

I would like to recall Sharawi's interpretation of the *father* verses, specifically the question he posed as to where do the divergences of knowledge between generations come from? All *fathers* in all epochs are eager to preserve their treasured legacies and to pass them on to their children. If this process is done conscientiously as is expected, then legacies should be preserved from one generation to the next. If that is the case, then where does the divergence from these preserved legacies come from? How does an effort to preserve knowledge end up preserving some deviating form of it? I am not posing these questions to try to answer them. I merely want to point out that *the fathers* verses, in my view, are included in the Qur'an largely due to this phenomenon. It is a fact that when those addressed in the verses say "Nay, but we follow that on which we found our fathers", they are in fact unknowingly following some variant of what was preserved by *their fathers*. Furthermore, we have established in chapter 4 that the Qur'an has a negative position from inherited knowledge of *the fathers* and we have posed the question of why it would have such a position. I would like to argue that the answer

lies in this phenomena.²⁹⁸ The Qur'an in essence is saying that divergence is unavoidable, and such the risk that what one is receiving from *the fathers* has diverged partially or wholly into error is always present.

My inclusion of both Kuhn and Henrich in this chapter might have been construed as ancillary to my argument. I do not believe that they were, since including them allowed me to fulfill the goal of speaking to this phenomena of divergence. I wanted to establish an understanding of how human knowledge is generated, developed, preserved, passed on, and then corrected. I reasoned that both of those works can help me make a point that the Qur'an is very adamant about, namely, that no human knowledge will ever avoid divergence or corruption. Scientific processes of cumulative knowledge, as we saw from both the examples of Kuhn and Henrich, do not accurately describe learning in human affairs. There are no cumulative effects when we are talking about human behavior and human social interactions. The lessons we learn are regularly forgotten. Our amazing scientific advances cannot begin to tell us how to end inequality, violence, racism, or the multitude of problems that we create by repeating the same mistakes committed by other human beings a millennia ago. I would like to argue that *the fathers* verses is how the Qur'an represents this phenomenon.

²⁹⁸ I also think that *taqlid* gained a firm foothold within Islamic practice because it was believed it was the best way to deal with this phenomena. See Fadel, Mohammad. "The social logic of taqlid and the rise of the Mukhataṣar." *Islamic Law and Society* 3.2 (1996): 193-233. And the introduction to Mustafa, Abdul-Rahman, and Mustafa Abdul Rahman. *On Taqlid: Ibn Al Qayyim's Critique of Authority in Islamic Law*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Furthermore, through the numerous self-confident proclamations it makes about itself, the Qur'an claims that it is the only true guidance that leads to God. In other words, it is claiming that Revelation is the only remedy to this problem:

*Verily this Qur'an does guide to that which is most right (or stable)*²⁹⁹

*This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt*³⁰⁰

*(It is) a Qur'an in Arabic, without any crookedness (or divergence therein)*³⁰¹

In the first chapter we recounted the genesis story that summed up the view of the Qur'an of the creation of man and the purpose behind it. The Qur'an says that man was created to be a *khalifa*, to be an agent of God on this earth, to care for it and carry it as a trust should be carried (Qur'an 2:38). And the only way that this target will be met is for man to be guided by Revelation. Anything else will suffer divergence and will result in a mix of truth and error that will not allow the human *khalifa* to achieve that goal.

Seeking any other path (*hawa*, *the fathers*, ... etc.) will take him to some other end:

Verily, this is My Way leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His path: thus doth He command you, that ye may be righteous. (al An'am 6:153)

At the heart of our paradox is the question of what to do with the entangled web of influences and dependencies that the individual has to live with. Of the paths that the Qur'an 6:153 above is cautioning about, *the fathers* is the one that is most impossible to avoid. What the paradox seems to suggest is that the Qur'anic subject has to constantly

²⁹⁹ Qur'an 7:9.

³⁰⁰ Qur'an 2:2.

³⁰¹ Qur'an 39:27.

strive to create a distance between themselves and the formative influences they have to depend on, the role of *kahlifa* would be beyond their reach otherwise.

Chapter 5 – *ittiba'* and Oppression

In this chapter we take a close look at another of the four factors our semantic analysis of *ittiba'* in chapter three identified as *the paths*. If followed, *the paths* will lead one into a divergent path away from *the straight path* that leads to God (*al Sirat al Mustaqeem*) as stressed in Qur'an 6:153. This fourth factor is represented in the Qur'an by the twin concepts of *al-mustakbirun* and *almustad'afun* translated as 'the arrogant' and 'the weak'

This chapter is in four main parts:

- First, we examine the keywords themselves, bringing to light the significance of their grammatical and lexical constitution and how their basic and relational meanings enables the pair to do their work in the verses they are part of.
- Second, we will explore the basic meaning of the pair under examination as it appears in the Qur'an. For this part I am drawing on Farid Esack's development of an 'Islamic Liberation Theology' in the Qur'an. The analysis in this part will corroborate Esack's proposition of the existence of 'an option for the poor' in the Qur'anic discourse on oppression.
- Third, the analysis will show that there is a relational meaning for this pair in the Qur'an that offers a completely different view of this pair of keywords relate to each other and how they as a pair related to the concept of oppression. It will be shown that this relational meaning casts the problem of oppression in a different light from the one it had under the basic meaning.
- Fourth, some concluding remarks.

Part 1 - *al-mustakbirun - al-mustad'afun* Basic vs. Relational Meaning

The pair *al-mustakbirun al-mustad'afun* translated as 'the haughty- the feeble' or 'the arrogant-the weak', are an interesting pair of keywords in the semantic field of *ittiba'*. These two words frequently appear as an inseparable pair in a number of verses, some of which are verses related to or including *ittiba'*. In a number of these verses the pair is used in the basic meaning of their words. In such verses the pair is indicating a power and wealth differential that exists between those rejecting God's message- usually affluent and influential members of a society- and those who accepted God's message – usually those who are weak and disadvantaged. However, when the pair is used in expressions that include *ittiba'* they exhibit relational meanings that casts the pair in a different light. This relational meaning allows, as I will try to show, for the development of a relationship between *ittiba'* and oppression outside the usual oppressor-oppressed association that usually characterizes the way this pair is usually construed.

What I hope will become evident in the following pages is that the Qur'an's treatment of the dynamic created by this pair of concepts is multileveled. On one level, the relationship is in line with the moral partiality towards the weak and oppressed, as is established in works by Esack and others. In these works the Qur'anic discourse is unequivocally and unambiguously on the side of empowering the weak and destitute against the oppressive status quo. On another level thought, it will become evident that this pair of terms is used in the Qur'an to speak to the nature of the oppressive process

itself, and to the conditions that the relationship between the two parties of the pair signify when *ittiba'* is the basis of such relationship.

When *ittiba'* is present in these verses the lines of delineation between oppressors and oppressed are no longer neatly demarcated, or more correctly, oppression is no longer an adequate description of the problem these verses are working with. In these verses, the pair of *al-mustakbirun al-mustad'afun* can no longer be understood to represent an oppressor-oppressed relationship mainly because both parties are on the same side of the problem, they are both implicated in whatever overbearing behavior is under scrutiny. This new word arrangement and its resultant relationships will enable us to ask different questions about this important part of Qur'anic discourse. Very briefly, when *ittiba'* enters the picture, the resultant meaning goes against the common perception that leaders carry more accountability than followers. Through emphasizing and foregrounding its condemnation of the followers, the Qur'an seems to deprive the followers of the opportunity of investing their subordinate status to claim victimization.

Lexical Meaning of *al-Mustad'afun al-Mustakberoon*

The Qur'an uses words like the weak, the oppressed, and the poor to speak about the groups of the marginalized. The pair *al-Mustad'afun* (the oppressed) and *al-Mustakbirun* (the arrogant/oppressors) appear together in the text of the Qur'an in the following chapters: *Ibrahim* 14:21; *Ghafer* 40:47; *al A'raf* 7:75; and *Saba'* 34: 31, 32, 33.

Both words in the pair are rendered in the verb pattern *istaf'ala* استفعل. This pattern produces many meanings in the verbs it is used for. The most apt for how it is used here

is: to demand something to be so; to will something into becoming. For example the verb *abada* عبد is translated as: to worship, to adore, to idealize. When applying the pattern *istaf'ala* to the verb it becomes *ista'bada* إستعبد and the meaning becomes to make one a servant, to make one a slave (or to enslave). In the same way, the verb *da'oufa* ضعف means to lose strength, to grow weak, to become enfeebled. When the trilateral verb is molded into the pattern *istaf'ala* استفعل by adding the prefix *ist* it becomes *istad'afa* استضعف which is to regard someone as weak, as vulnerable, as less, and as devoid of the will or ability to stand for oneself. *Al-Mustad'afoon*, then, are those deemed weak, vulnerable, and are targeted with oppression and derision.

Weakness here is not physical, but is rather a lack of status and social influence or social weight. This type of format is the objective name of the verb. Adding the three letters *ist* to the verb indicates a will behind the verb, a will that wants to see it happen or be. For example, the verb *fahima* فهم means to understand, when the three letters *ist* are appended to the verb they bring the verb into the pattern *istaf'ala* استفعل and the word becomes *istafhama* . It then means to ask for understanding, to make something understood. Thus to say *istad'afa alfatat* استضعف الفتاة means to regard the girl as weak, which does not mean she is actually weak, but she is treated as weak, or she is deemed to be weak, or she is weakened.³⁰² The linguistic meaning makes clear the geography of this type of verb. The will to actualize the verb, or the state that the verb is indicating is

³⁰²Manzur, Ibn. *Lisan al-'arab*. Vol. 15. Dar Ihya Turath Arabiy, 1997, 5/305. لكنّه من المستضعف: من الضعف مقابل القوة، لكنّه لا يعني الضعيف، فإضافة الميم والسين والتاء تفيد طلب تحقّق الشيء، فالمستفهم عنه هو الذي يُطلب تحقّق فهمه، وليس معناه المفهوم، وعليه فإنّ المستضعف هو من وقع تحت ضغط متسلّطين أو ظروف معيّنة، أو ما شابه بهدف إضعافه، وقد يجتمع ذلك مع قوّته تارة، ومع ضعفه أخرى.

initiated by the subject, the *mustakber* (pl. *mustakbirun*) is a state of haughtiness that is claimed and seek to be realized. However, its realization requires the contribution of the target of the verb, I will explain what this means shortly.

Similarly, the trilateral verb *kabura* كبر means to be big; to be grand; to be great; to be large; to glorify; and to prize. Applying the verb pattern *istaf'ala* استفعل produces the verb *istakbara* استكبر which means to praise oneself; display ostentatiously; be arrogant; be proud and haughty.

Similarly for the other part of the pair, *al-Mustad'afun* (pl.) and the singular form *mustad'af* come from the root *d.'f*. A *mustad'af* is one who is perceived and deemed to be weak, a person who is viewed as an easy target to project power over. *Al-mustad'afun* are perceived to be a group or a population that are unable to defend themselves.³⁰³ No threat of retribution or retaliation can come from oppressing them. Similarly, a *mustad'af* is thought to be one who is weak, helpless, and vulnerable. Furthermore, this specific verb pattern also hints at the fact that whatever state is willed to be can only be achieved through the acquiescence of the object of the verb. This dual responsibility is not a point that is easily accepted. In fact whenever the argument is made, namely, that when people come under conditions of oppression, and that these conditions can only be sustained by their leave, it is faced with indignant rejection. Surely one cannot blame the oppressed for being the target of oppression and suggest that they contributed to being under a most adverse and undesirable condition as that. This idea is not making

³⁰³ Ibn Ashur *Al Tahrir wa Al Tanwir* Vol. 5, 122.

light of the severity and harshness of the circumstances faced by oppressed people. And it is not suggesting that solutions to such problems can obtain by simply refusing these unjust impositions. Human history is, unfortunately, filled with examples that make the error of such view manifest. Yet, this idea becomes more evident when we consider the fact that in most of human history, conditions of oppression do not usually end due to a change in the minds of oppressors; they are rather brought to their end as a result of the oppressed ending their acceptance and acquiescence to oppressive conditions and thus forcing a change.

A verse in *al-A'raf* 7:150 will help us pin down the meaning of the verb *istad'afa* and its subjective participle form *istad'af* and clarify how it is used. The story, this particular verse is part of, speaks of the events following the rendezvous between prophet Musa (Moses) and God during which the tablets were given to Musa. The verse conveys prophet Musa's reaction upon returning and finding that his people reverted to idolatry and have fashioned a Golden Calf that they began to worship:

When Moses came back to his people angry and grieved, he said: "Evil it is that ye have done in my place in my absence: did ye make haste to bring on the judgment of your Lord?"— He put down the Tablets seized his brother by (the hair of) his head, and dragged him To him. Aaron said: "son of my mother! The people (istad'afuni) did indeed

reckon me as naught, and went near to slaying me! Make not the enemies rejoice over my misfortune, nor count thou me amongst the people of sin."³⁰⁴

The verses show that due to threat of violence by the people around him, and the fear for his life, Aaron was rendered a *mustad'af*. The thing to note here is that both the projection of power and the victim's acquiescence produce this *al-mustad'afun* effect. Consider for example that those who did this to Aaron could not do the same to Musa, he simply would not allow it. Musa is not a good target for *istid'af* (oppression), and it would be difficult to make him a *mustad'af* (an oppressed person). Here I am partially disagreeing with Esack when he states that: 'One can only be a *mustad'af* as a consequence of the behavior or policies of the arrogant and powerful.'³⁰⁵ This is the dual responsibility noted above, and it is a feature of the Qur'anic understanding of oppression that I hope to explore further below.

The other part of the pair: *al-Mustakberun* (the arrogant) comes from the root *k b r*. The concept of *kibr* (arrogance, haughtiness) experienced a radical change from its pre-Islamic *Jahili* usage. Before the Qur'an *kibr* was a desirable attribute, it went along with the fierce independence of the Arab tribesmen. To be *mustakber* (to be haughty) is to project strength, and display rank and noble character. The Qur'an, on the other hand, gave it a complete reconceptualization. To be *mustakber* is to exhibit attributes that are

³⁰⁴ Qur'an 7:150. *وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ بِئْسَمَا خَلَفْتُمُونِي مِنْ بَعْدِي أَعَجَلْتُمْ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَلْقَى الْأَلْوَاخَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُ إِلَيْهِ قَالَ ابْنَ أُمَّ إِنَّ الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضَعُّوْنِي وَكَادُوا يَقْتُلُونَنِي فَلَا تُشْمِتْ بِيَ الْأَعْدَاءَ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١٥٠)*

³⁰⁵ Esack, Farid. *Qur'an, liberation & pluralism: an Islamic perspective of interreligious solidarity against oppression*. Oneworld, 1998, 98.

antithetical to the humbleness and gentility of a true believer. A few examples will suffice to note the change:

And behold We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam"; and they bowed down: not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty (istakbar): he was of those who reject Faith.³⁰⁶

To be *mustakber* is tied to disobeying God and sharing an attribute with Satan. In the following example, to be *mustakber* is to reject the signs of God.

Only those believe in Our Signs, who when they are recited to them fall down in adoration, and celebrate the praises of their Lord, nor are they (ever) puffed up with pride [la yastakbirun].³⁰⁷

In the *ittiba'* verses the word is frequently an attribute of those who gave the lie to the prophets and rejected their messages.

The chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: We see thee but a mortal like us, and we see not that any follow thee save the most abject among us, without reflection. We behold in you no merit above us - nay, we deem you liars.³⁰⁸

This is corroborated by a hadith that enumerates the attributes of both those destined to heaven and those destined to the fire. Narrated by Haritha bin Wahb Al-Khuza'i, he said:

³⁰⁶ Qur'an 2:34. وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ (٣٤)

³⁰⁷ Qur'an 32:15. إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرُوا بِهَا حَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

³⁰⁸ Qur'an 11:27. قَالَ أَلَمْأَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا تَرَلْكَ إِلَّا بَشَرًا مِثْلَنَا وَمَا تَرَلْكَ أَتَّبِعُكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَادْنَا بِآدَى الرَّى وَمَا تَرَى لَكُمْ هُودَ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلِ بَلْ نُنظِّكُمْ كَادِبِينَ (٢٧)

I heard the Prophet saying. "May I tell you of the people of Paradise? Every weak and poor obscure person whom the people look down upon but his oath is fulfilled by Allah when he takes an oath to do something. And may I inform you of the people of the Hell-Fire? They are all those violent, arrogant and stubborn people."³⁰⁹ .

With the verb *istakbara*, the same dynamic that worked with its pair *istad'afa* is at play but with an interesting twist. Both subject and object of the verb reside in the same entity (singular or plural, one person or a group). This is perfectly in line with the nature of the verb *kibr*. It is a self-projected feeling of prominence and greatness, it is one becoming buffed up with pride, and unable to contain his feeling of self-importance. The problem here, of course, is that this feeling can only be realized if projected over other human beings. Here again, though somewhat differently, is the dual responsibility brought about by the dual nature of how this verb actually unfolds in social reality.

It is useful to reiterate that this form of the verb pattern *istaf'ala* استفعل has the meaning of willing something into being. This can add an emancipatory dimension to the language the Qur'an uses for both of the groups designated by the pair by suggesting that the state of weakness or strength, of these groups, is not wholly founded on the reality of their circumstances. In other words, this is partly a battle of wills, and this relationship

³⁰⁹ Bukhari, I. "Sahih Bukhari." (1986). Book 65, No. 4967.

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو نُعَيْمٍ، حَدَّثَنَا سَعْيَانُ، عَنْ مَعْبُدِ بْنِ خَالِدٍ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ حَارِثَةَ بْنَ وَهَبِ الْخَزَاعِيَّ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ " أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِأَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ كُلِّ ضَعِيفٍ مُنْضَعِفٍ لَوْ أَهْنَمَ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِأَبْرَهُ، أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِأَهْلِ النَّارِ كُلِّ عَثَلٍ جَوَاطِ مُسْتَكْبِرٍ

is due in significant measure to a feature of *kufr* (disbelief) that can be described as the 'inborn arrogance of the mind.' It is a projection onto the oppressed by the arrogance of the oppressor, and is not necessarily reflective of the ability of the oppressed to overcome.

There exists, then, a sort of symbiotic relationship between this pair of words *al-mustad'fun* and *al-mustakbirun*. In essence, the existence of one implies the existence of the other. In other words, either can only exist if the other is also extant. However, noting this relationship is not sufficient to bring into relief the shared responsibility for the condition of oppression that, I believe, the Qur'an is putting forth in its treatment of the state of oppression.

Part 2 - Al- Mustad'afun - A Theology of Islamic Liberation

The Qur'anic expression *al-Mustad'afun fi'l-ard* (the oppressed on the earth) was employed by Esack as one of six hermeneutical keys in weaving a theological theory and hermeneutics of liberation, which Esack defined as "one that works towards freeing religion from social, political and religious structures and ideas based on uncritical obedience and freedom of all people from all forms of injustice and exploitation including those of race, gender, class, and religion." An important feature of this theology for Esack is that it is participatory. That is, this theology 'is formulated by, and in solidarity with, those whose socio-political liberation it seeks and whose personal liberation becomes real through their participation in this process."³¹⁰ It is a theology

³¹⁰ Esack, *Qur'an, liberation & pluralism*, 83.

inspired by the Qur'an's 'option for the oppressed (*al-mustad'afun*)' and it is a form of 'theology by doing'.³¹¹ The theology's main tenet is an establishment of the concept of 'the preferential option for the marginalized.'³¹²

The pair *al-mustad'fun* – *al-mustakbirun* and the relationship between them are central to the development of this theology. The organizing logic in Esack's treatment of the pair *al-mustad'fun* – *al-mustakbirun* is that these two groups are always in confrontation. Their relationship is that of a struggle of one against the cruelty, exploitation, and injustice of the other. Furthermore, through 'the preferential option for the marginalized' it is established that the Qur'an always takes the side of *al-mustad'afun*. 'The Qur'an makes a clear choice for the *mustad'afun* [the oppressed] against the *mustakbirun* [the oppressors] even though the former may not be Muslim.'³¹³ The verses that Esack deems most significant for the 'Qur'anic discourse on liberation' are the opening verses of chapter 28 *al-Qasas*, especially verses 4-6:

Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them he oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! he was of those who work corruption. (4) And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors, (5) And to establish

³¹¹ Ibid., 83.

³¹² Ibid., 84.

³¹³ Ibid., 98.

them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts that which they feared from them. (6)³¹⁴

According to Esack, these verses reflect 'God's preferential option for the oppressed' irrespective of their faith commitment.³¹⁵

That God is on the side of the weak and downtrodden is clear from the history and legacy of the founders of the major religions. In the monotheistic faiths the prophets are never in a position to announce themselves in their societies flanked or supported by the rich and powerful. In fact, it is an axiom of scriptures and of religious history that all the prophets sent by God have consistently come to empower the weak and the disadvantaged against the status quo, which is usually unjust, unfair, and abusive to those without power or wealth.

Furthermore, in this confrontation there is no doubt on which side God stands as far as the Qur'an is concerned:

And We wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed in the land to make them leaders (in faith) and make them heirs (5)³¹⁶

And We made a people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both East and West lands— whereon We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of thy

³¹⁴ Qur'an 28:4-6. إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْ أَهْلَهَا شِيْعًا يَسْتَضْعِفُ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ يُدْبِحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٤) وَتُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَيْمَةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ (٥) وَنَمَكِّنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ (٦)

³¹⁵ Esack, *Qur'an, liberation & pluralism*, 102.

³¹⁶ Qur'an 29:4-5. إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْ أَهْلَهَا شِيْعًا يَسْتَضْعِفُ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ يُدْبِحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٤) وَتُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَيْمَةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ (٥) القصص

Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy, and We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected (with such pride).³¹⁷

The leaders of those who grew arrogant among his [prophet Salih] people said to those who were reckoned powerless— those among them who believed: “Know ye for certain that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?” They said: “We do indeed believe in the revelation which hath been sent through him.” (75) Those who grew arrogant said: “For our part, we reject what ye believe in.”³¹⁸

Saleh is the prophet here but the arrogant among his people, who have taken a position of denial of his call, and who behaved with haughtiness towards him and his followers, chose to address those who followed Saleh and believed his message instead of talking to Saleh directly. In the verse these followers are described as the oppressed (*al-mustad'afun*). The question posed by the arrogant group to those oppressed masquerades as a genuine request to know, however, the answer affirms the haughty position from which the inquiry issues. The arrogance and haughtiness is coded into the answer as it declares rejection of whatever the oppressed believed in. So, in the verse there is a pairing between the believer and oppressed on the one hand and the disbeliever and *mustakberun* on the other. These are connections that are firmly established in the Qur'anic vocabulary. Arrogance and haughtiness are firmly opposed

³¹⁷ Qur'an 7:137. وَأَوْزَنَّا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضَعُونَ مَشْرِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغْرِبَهَا الَّتِي بَلَرْنَا فِيهَا وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ الْحَسَنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَدَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانَ يَصْنَعُ فِرْعَوْنُ وَقَوْمُهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ (الاعراف ١٣٧)
³¹⁸ Qur'an 7:75-76. قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِن قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِمَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ صَالِحًا مُّرْسَلٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُمْ بِهِ كَفِرُونَ (٧٦)

to *tasdiq* i.e. accepting as true the claim of the prophets, and belief (*iman*) in their message.

*Moses said: "I seek refuge in my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant one who believes not in the Day of Account!"*³¹⁹

*They said (to Moses): "whatever be the signs Thou bringest, to work therewith the sorcery on us, we shall never believe in thee." (132) So We sent (plagues) on them; wholesale Death Locusts, Lice, Frogs, and Blood: signs openly Self-explained; but they only grew in arrogance, for they were a people given to sin. (133)*³²⁰

*Except those who are (really) weak and oppressed—men, women, and children who have no means in their power, nor (a guide-post) to direct their way. (98) For these, there is hope that Allah will forgive: for Allah doth blot out (sins) and forgive again and again.*³²¹

This last verse puts the concept of the oppressed in an interesting light, as it complicates the picture of the state of being oppressed or *mustad'af*. In this single verse there are two groups designated as oppressed. One is condemned to hell while the other is relegated to God's forgiveness. The majority of the works of exegeses say that these were the group of Meccans who stayed behind after the Prophet and his companions immigrated to Madina. After the Hijra (immigration) of the Prophet, all Muslims with means were

³¹⁹ Qur'an 40:27. وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ إِنِّي عُذْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مِن كُلِّ مُتَكَبِّرٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ (٢٧).

³²⁰ Qur'an 7:132-133. وَقَالُوا مَهْمَا تَأْتِنَا بِهِ مِنْ آيَةٍ لِتَسْحَرَنَا بِهَا فَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٣٢) فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ وَالْجَرَادَ وَالْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالْدَّمَ ءَايَاتٍ مُّفَصَّلَاتٍ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ (١٣٣)

³²¹ Qur'an 4:97-99. إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّيْتُمْ أَلْمَلِكَةَ ظَالِمِي أَنفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا فِيمَ كُنْتُمْ قَالُوا كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَأَسْعَىٰ فَتُهَاجَرُوا فِيهَا فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَأْوَلُهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا (٩٧) إِلَّا الْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ جَبَلَةً وَلَا يُهْتَدُونَ سَبِيلًا (٩٨) فَأُولَٰئِكَ عَسَىٰ اللَّهُ أَن يَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا (٩٩) النساء

required to follow him to Madina and openly join the rest of the Muslims³²². These two groups of *mustad'afun* were both Muslim and both stayed in Mecca during the period it became obligatory to move to Madina.³²³ One group though was comprised of able Meccans who could afford to leave and had the means to do so but did not, mainly because they yielded to the pressure from their kin folks who were still among the disbelieving *Kuffar* of Mecca. The other group are those who lacked this ability to leave the city and exit from under the oppressive conditions that were imposed by the Meccans. The verse is severely admonishing the first group, and although it did not deny their status as *mustad'afun* it never the less rebuked them for not escaping these circumstances although they were able to do so. For that, they were condemned. Again, this complicates the notion of *mustad'afun* as it is seen in the verses so far especially in the development of the 'option for the oppressed'. The difficulty in this example is that although oppression is present and is experienced by the first group, there is, nonetheless, a denial of the 'option for the oppressed' for them. This goes to show, I think, that the responsibility for oppression is more nuanced than a simple condition that is produced by a power differential. There is here a responsibility for one's condition that is not abrogated by the presence of oppressive circumstances. The following verse is, according to the exegetes, about the second group mentioned in verse 99:

³²² Al-Tabari, *Al Tafsir Alkabir*.

³²³ According to Ibn Aashur, this obligation ended with the takeover of Mecca in the 8th year of hijra. *Al Tharir wa Al Tanwir*, Vol. 5, 177.

And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)?— men, women, and children, whose cry is: "Our Lord! rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect; and raise for us from Thee one who will help!"³²⁴

Part 3 -The oppressed who are oppressors or Blaming the Victims?

As we saw above, will is an important element in the conceptualizing of the pair *Mustad'af – Mustakber* or oppressed-oppressor. In the conceptualization of the Qur'anic rendering of this relationship there was a clear criterion that tied haughtiness (*istikbar*) to disbelief (*Kufr*), and rejection (*taktheeb*) on the one hand, and tied acceptance (*tasdiq*) and belief (*iman*) of the message on the other. The oppressors and oppressed were separated by the belief-disbelief divide; the oppressors were always on the side of disbelief, and the oppressed were always the believers.

In this section we will demonstrate how the Qur'anic conception of followership (*ittiba'*) will completely re-align these concepts and change the established criterion above.

When *ittiba'* enters the picture it changes the geography of oppression. The relationship of the *mustad'afun* to the *mustakbirun* is no longer oppositional. The *mustad'afun* (oppressed or those deemed weak) become part of the war on belief and its adherents.

The thing that distinguishes them in these verses, as we will see, is that they were followers of the *mustakbirun* (the arrogant) and aided in their quest to reject the message

³²⁴ Qur'an 4:75. وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَوْلَاهَا وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا (٧٥) النساء

and deject others from following the prophets or coming into the fold of belief. With *ittiba'* both the oppressor and the oppressed are on the same side. They both become connected to *kufr* (disbelief). In short, *ittiba'* creates a completely new dynamic, and it tells a different story from the one we saw above.

The new topology is most evident in this verse:

The disbelievers say, 'We will believe neither this Quran nor the Scriptures that came before it.' If only you could see [Prophet] how the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, hurling reproaches at one another. Those who were oppressed will say to the oppressors, 'If it were not for you, we would have been believers.' 32The oppressors will say to them, 'Was it we who prevented you from following right guidance after it had reached you? No! You yourselves were sinners.' The oppressed will say to them, 'No, it was your scheming, night and day, ordering us to disbelieve in God and set up rivals to Him.' When they see the punishment, they will fall silent with regret, and We shall put iron collars on the disbelievers' necks. Why should they be rewarded for anything other than what they have done?325

Ittiba' here is implied in verse 33. It is manifested through another key concept that is related to *ittiba'*; that of *ta'a* – obedience. The conversation is self-explanatory, and what is important to note though is how the relationship of oppressed to oppressors is completely reconfigured. The first thing to identify here is the rising incongruence of

³²⁵ Qur'an 34:31-33. وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَوْ نَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْتُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٣١) قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا أَنْحُنَّ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ (٣٢) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرَ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٣٣)

meaning we get from choosing to translate *mustakbirun* as oppressors and *mustad'afun* as oppressed, because it clearly leads to a circular pattern of interpretation. What is being said is in essence something like this: the oppressor and oppressed are both actively involved in the act of oppression. The concept of oppression, though found convenient by most translators, seems to hit the ceiling of its explanatory power. It is simply pointing in too many directions to be able to guide us to the next step. I do not think it should be abandoned completely, but we do have to supplant it with something that will restore clarity of interpretation.

Another point to note is the changed format in speaking about the *mustad'afun*. In this verse, and the rest of the verses in which the concept of *ittiba'* is involved, instead of using the derivative *mustad'afun* which designates a state of existence or a state of being, the verses use the indefinite pronoun *allathena ustud'ifu* (those who were deemed weak). The point is subtle but it will reward reflection; if we note that with the combination of the verb pattern *istaf'ala* استنفعَلَ and the indefinite pronoun الذين *allathena* the Qur'an is describing a group that seems to have abdicated its responsibility to stand up and uphold what is just and right. In this case the acquiescence of those targeted by oppression is at the center of this state they find themselves in, which we will still designate as oppression for now.

Clearly, we are here presented with a different story from the one we saw used for the development of the Islamic Theology of the Oppressed by Esack and others. Although the Qur'anic discourse is employing the same phrases it is not dealing with the same

problem of empowering the oppressed against the unjust status quo. What we see here is rather a severe rebuke of those described as the ones deemed weak, the underdogs, the ones who enjoyed no power or rank, who yet, as followers of the oppressors, contributed to establishing and maintaining the state of oppression. So, on top of their destitute state of being as oppressed they are targeted for scorn first, even before those they accuse of being behind the dreadful state they find themselves in. The Qur'an in essence is prioritizing for its admonition and reproof the very group it describes as the weak and oppressed, or more correctly, those who accepted to be deemed weak and helpless, and who allowed themselves to be lead astray by obeying the orders of the haughty and arrogant. The depth of the abyss of destitution they fell into is profoundly expressed in the Qur'an's description of them as they eye the unwelcome sight of the torment they have landed themselves in as it says: 'they concealed regret.' Nothing could be said, eyeing the pending doom they find nothing to say, the despair in this expression feels unbounded and without end.

Again, *ittiba'* is implied here through the close relation with the concept of obedience - *ta'a*. Both concepts point to the risk undertaken by those who choose to go down this route. Those who were oppressors and haughty deserved their fate as a consequence of their arrogant rejection of the truth, but those who were weak, dispossessed and oppressed landed themselves in this fate through no other means but obedience and *ittiba'*. It is clear that the Qur'an holds the oppressed (understood as followers) in more

contempt than the oppressors in this case. It is important to examine the multiple ways in which the text of the Qur'an puts forth this particular understanding of oppression.

He said: Enter into the Fire among nations of the jinn and humankind who passed away before you. Every time a nation enters, it curses its sister (nation) till, when they have all been made to follow one another thither, the last of them say unto the first of them: Our Lord! These led us astray, so give them double torment of the Fire. He says: For each one there is double (torment), but ye know not. (38) And the first of them say unto the last of them: Ye were no whit better than us, so taste the doom for what ye used to earn. (39)³²⁶

In these verses there is no clarity on the groups hurling accusations at each other. The relationship between these groups is not characterized as that of oppression, and the only difference between them is that one preceded the other, but they know each other and are able to recognize who each are. When the last of them complains that it is the first group that landed them where they are, and for that they should suffer a doubling of torment. It should be noted that their claim is not denied, but it will not help them, and their request comes back to affirm a doubling of torment for them too. Clearly, the responsibility for leading others astray does not fall only on the leaders; those led astray carry the burden of this state as well. The relationship is clearly that of *ittiba'*, the punishment is then for following the first group, and there is no indication here

³²⁶ Qur'an 7:38-39. قَالَ ادْخُلُوا فِي أُمَّةٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ فِي النَّارِ كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَهَا حَتَّى إِذَا ادَّارَكُوا فِيهَا جَمِيعًا قَالَتْ أَخْرَجْنَاهُمْ لِرَبِّنَا هُنَالِكَ أَصْلَوْنَا فَنَاتَبَهُمُ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا مِنَ النَّارِ قَالَ لِكُلِّ ضِعْفٍ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٣٨) وَقَالَتْ أُولَئِكَمُ لِأَخْرَجْنَاهُمْ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ فذوقوا العذاب بما كنتم تكسبون (٣٩)

Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them he oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! he was of those who work corruption. (4) And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors, (5) And to establish them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts that which they feared from them.³³⁰

And he and his hosts were haughty in the land without right, and deemed that they would never be brought back to Us. (39)³³¹

The logic of liberation, as in liberation theology, centers on the oppressor as the main force behind the state of oppression. As can be seen from the verses above, this logic is reoriented by the Qur'an where a focus on the contribution of the oppressed (in the new relational sense of the word) to the state of oppression bears the first, and arguably, the more important burden for such a state.

There are two *ittiba'* verses that are astonishing in their clarity about this point:

They all come forth unto their Lord. Then those who were despised say unto those who were scornful: We were unto you a following, can ye then avert from us aught of Allah's

³³⁰ Qur'an 28:4-6. القصص إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضَعِفُ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٤) وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعَفُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَيْمَةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ (٥) وَنَمَكِّنْ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ الْمَعْسُودِينَ (٦) وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ

³³¹ Qur'an 28:39-40. القصص وَأَسْتَخِيرَ هُوَ وَجُنُودُهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا يُرْجَعُونَ (٣٩) فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَجُنُودَهُ فَنَبَذْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الظَّالِمِينَ (٤٠)

doom? They say: Had Allah guided us, we should have guided you. Whether we rage or patiently endure is (now) all one for us; we have no place of refuge. (Ibrahim 21)³³²

(On the day) when those who were followed disown those who followed (them), and they behold the doom, and all their aims collapse with them. (166) And those who were but followers will say: If a return were possible for us, we would disown them even as they have disowned us. Thus will Allah show them their own deeds as anguish for them, and they will not emerge from the Fire.³³³

These are probably the most distilled statements about *ittiba'* – i.e. followership in the Qur'an. The two groups mentioned in these verses are designated as those who followed and those who were followed. Nothing else is said or known about them. It is a condition of pure *ittiba'*. Connecting these verses to the preceding or following verses in the chapter might offer some suggestion as to who the groups are that will not diminish the force of this warning about the risks involved in the act of following. It is interesting how the leading sentiment here is vengeance. As those who followed beheld the torment to come with their own eyes, all that they asked for was a turn to get back at those they have followed, and get the chance to get their revenge and disown them as they themselves were disowned. But the real punch of the verse is the last two statements that in effect combine the dread of the eternity of this torment with the admonishing statement: it is thus that Allah demonstrates how these actions of theirs

³³² Qur'an 14:21. وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا فَقَالَ الضُّعَفَاءُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُعْتَدُونَ عَنَّا مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ قَالُوا لَوْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هَدَيْنَا اللَّهُ لَهَدَيْنَاكُمْ سِوَاءَ عَلَيْنَا أَجْرٌ عَلَيْنَا أَمْ صَبَرْنَا مَا لَنَا مِنْ مَّجِيبِينَ (٢١)

³³³ Qur'an 2:167. إِذْ تَبَرَأَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا رَبَّأُوهُمُ الْعَذَابِ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ الْأَسْبَابُ (١٦٦) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةً فَنَتَّبَرَأَ مِنَ الْقِرَّةِ الْمُنْبِتِ كَمَا تَبَرَّأْنَا مِنْكَ إِذْ كُنَّا مِنَ الْإِنسَانِ الْغَافِلِينَ (١٦٧)

(manifest in the act of following) become sources of sorrow for them. This is a plain indictment of following *per se*. The fact that these two groups are not described by any attribute other than being parties to a relationship of following is both descriptive and prescriptive of the risks involved in such a relationship.

It would be understandable to relegate the meaning of these two verse to be a statement about what some writers on this matter classified as blameworthy followership.³³⁴

Although that would be consistent with general manner in which the Qur'an treats this concept, I think to do so would deprive us of an important opportunity to grasp the nuance with which *ittiba'* is discussed in the Qur'an. In my mind this unqualified, raw, and blunt description of the process of followership in these stark and detrimental terms, and with such horrifying consequences, reinforces the warning against the risks of followership as a way of expressing social affiliations, social solidarity, social alliances, and social interest, perceived or real.

Part 4 - Conclusion

As already remarked in chapter 1, by casting *ittiba'* or followership in the manner elaborated above, the Qur'an rejects the claim that followers or subordinates bare less responsibility and are less accountable than superiors or leaders. The Qur'an, I would

³³⁴ See for example Al Sayed, Mohammad. *Al Ittiba' الاتباع* Al-Muntada edition, Riyadh, 2002; see also Al Khaldi, Salah Abdelfattah. *Al Ittiba' wa Al Muttabi'un*. Al Manar Publishing. Amman, 1998. In these studies and most of discussions of *ittiba'* the concept is given a positive state and a negative one. There is good *ittiba'* or praiseworthy *ittiba'* الاتباع المحمود and bad *ittiba'* or blameworthy *ittiba'* الاتباع المذموم. Although it is never established as such, in some sense this categorization points to the state of tension the Qur'an puts in place for the practice of *ittiba'*.

like to argue, flips this concept on its head by prioritizing its contempt for followers and what appears to be their attempt to abdicate responsibility for the moral and ethical consequences of the unjust reality they helped create and put in place.

This point deserves further consideration. However, in order to appreciate the gravity of this reversal of accountability it is useful for us to bring back the individual and his responsibility as it is described in our paradox. Recall that the paradox of *ittiba'* in the Qur'an considers the individual fully responsible and solely accountable even in conditions where they do not possess full independence of action. Hierarchical settings, (chain of command, leadership and managerial ranks) in contrast, are assumed to open a space where the individual is no longer responsible for the consequences of their actions. Hierarchical settings represented by the military chain of command offer stark real life examples of the ramifications of opening this space. In the aftermath of World War II, a number of Nazi officers were tried for war crimes at Nuremberg. These officers unsuccessfully attempted a defense that was based on the fact that they were merely following orders. However, some forty years later, this same defense of the "superior order" was somewhat successfully relied upon by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. In spite of the different outcomes, both of these defenses relied on the space created by hierarchy, and that obliges an individual to obey orders without questioning,

and without upholding their personal ethical and moral responsibility for the consequences of such and order.³³⁵

Probably the most famous theorization of the failures of this individual moral responsibility is in the thesis known as the 'banality of evil'. The words 'banality of evil' come from the title of the book by Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil* first published in 1963 in which she reported on the trial of Adolf Eichmann. A Nazi officer during WWII, he was tasked with planning and managing logistics for the mass deportation of Jews to extermination camps as part of the plan called 'the final solution'.

What was astonishing from her point of view was that the monstrosity of the Holocaust did not find the expected embodiment in the defendant. It slowly became clear that the monstrous acts did not need a monster. Arendt reported that 'Despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a "monster."³³⁶ The person who sent millions to their death was an ordinary man. Ordinary, normal human being like us. What 'the *banality of evil* is telling us is that we are all Eichmann that, there is an Eichmann in each of us waiting only for the correct sociohistorical conditions to be released.'³³⁷ Whence then does this evil emanate from? Eichmann's capacity for evil, according to Arendt, came from 'a failure to think ... That is the banality of evil.'³³⁸ But

³³⁵ Isenman, Michael Kenneth. "Crimes of Obedience: Toward A Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility." (1990): 1474-1482. P. 1474.

³³⁶ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Penguin, 2006, 87.

³³⁷ Bergen, Bernard J. *The banality of evil: Hannah Arendt and 'the final solution'*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, ix.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

what does that mean? Surely, a person in charge of such a complex system of logistics is capable of thinking, so what can we make of Arendt's characterization of Eichmann's failures? Not surprisingly there was a lot of debate on this point by both her friends and foes, these views are still subjects of controversy.³³⁹ What can do justice to her and serve our purposes is to say that what she probably meant was that Eichmann's inability to think meant that he lost the ability for moral judgement. Needless to say that this assessment does not sit comfortably with our paradox, and its assertion that accountability and personal responsibility are predicated on the ability to make a moral assessment. Also, this assessment is not born by the actions of the defendant. For example, at the special conference convened to discuss the 'Final Solution' called the Wannsee Conference, Arendt reports the following: "There was another reason that made the day of this conference unforgettable for Eichmann. Although he had been doing his best right along to help with the Final Solution, he had still harbored some doubts about "such a bloody solution through violence," and these doubts had now been dispelled. "Here now, during this conference, the most prominent people had spoken, the Popes of the Third Reich." Now he could see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears that not only Hitler, not only Heydrich or the "sphinx" Müller, not just the S.S. or the Party, but the élite of the good old Civil Service were vying and fighting with each other for the honor of taking the lead in these "bloody" matters. "At that moment, I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt." Who

³³⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 31.

was he to judge? Who was he “to have [his] own thoughts in this matter”?’³⁴⁰

Eichmann clearly had moral worries, and he clearly became adept at finding excuses to suppress them. I believe his demise, and that of many Nazis, was because he accepted to be a follower, an uncritical follower who muzzled the voice of his inner moral compass. In the end he discovered that he offered his followership to an undeserving cabal of criminals. In reporting his last statement Arendt wrote: ‘His guilt came from his obedience, and obedience is praised as a virtue. His virtue had been abused by the Nazi leaders. But he was not one of the ruling clique, he was a victim, and only the leaders deserved punishment.’³⁴¹

The parallels with some of the *ittiba’* verses are uncanny, especially that Eichmann thought ‘he was a victim’. About his last statement Arendt wrote: ‘He did not go quite as far as many of the other low-ranking war criminals, who complained bitterly that they had been told never to worry about “responsibilities,” and that they were now unable to call those responsible to account because these had “escaped and deserted” them – by committing suicide, or by having been hanged.’³⁴² The similarity between the statements of these ‘low-ranking war criminals’ and *al-Mustad’afun* (those deemed weak or oppressed) in the verses we examined in this third part of our examination of *ittiba’* is chilling. In the statement of these ‘low-ranking war criminals’ and their expressed sentiment is an embodiment, a bringing to life, of the scenes described in Qur’an 2:167

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 144.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 271.

³⁴² Ibid., 271.

'And those who were but followers will say: If a return were possible for us, we would disown them even as they have disowned us.'

Ittiba' (followership) is how we get ensnared in things that some of us cannot imagine to be without. Probably the clearest example of such things in our time would be political affiliation. I write these lines at the turn of the decade, in the midst of what is described as a unique moment in American history. 'Followers' of the 45th president of the United States on the one hand, and their opponents on the other, are a good example of the risks this concept carries in social interactions. Religious affiliation is, of course, even more lethal and consequentially detrimental. Think of the numerous 'followers' of Sunni or Shi'a groups that became fodder for the regional conflicts that are still raging in MENA³⁴³ as we speak. Now, what makes followership in any of these examples blameworthy or praiseworthy is a matter of perspective. In light of the examples we exhibited in this chapter, an important element implied by the paradox should be reiterated, followership is something each person owns, we as *kahlifas* or God's agents on earth, have full sovereign power over who gets it from us and for what aim. Life can place us in situations where we are obliged to do things that we do not wish to do. Followership, I would like to argue, one of those things we keep control over most of the time, and should dispense it with wisdom and care. *Ittiba'* in the Qur'an suggests that followership is necessary and also very risky, it should be handled with care.

³⁴³ Middle East and North Africa.

Glossary of Terms

‘ammi	Illiterate, colloquial, public, common, general, vulgar, plebeian, ignorant.
Al huruf al muqatta’a	letters in combination of 1-5 letters. They are in the beginning of 29 chapter in the Qur’an. There is not agreement on their function or meaning.
Asbab al nuzul	Occasions of revelation. It is tool of exegesis and Qur’an interpretation.
Aya	Sign something that stands in relation to something else such that cognizance of the sign leads to the cognizance of the thing represented by the sign.
Ayat	Plural of Aya.
Dalal	Error, delusion.
Ghay	Temptation; enticement; sin; error; seduction
Haq	Truth, veracity. Right.
Hikma	Wisdom.
Hukum	Judgement, verdict.
Ijtihad	Intellectual reasoning. Opposite of <i>taqlid</i> .
‘ilm	knowledge.
Iman	Belief, conviction.
Islam	Submission, surrender (to the will of God).
Ittiba’	Followership.
Jahiliya	Ignorance. The historical period before the advent of Islam.
Janna	Heaven, paradise.
Jahannam	Fire, hell.
Kitab	Book, scripture, revelation.

Kufr	Disbelief, ingratitude.
Mu'mineen	Believers.
Mufsideen	Corruptors, spoilers.
Naskh	Abrogation.
Rushd	Right guidance. Right path. Absence of coercion.
Sa'ah	Hour, the last day.
Sabil	Path.
Sirat	Path.
Sura	Chapter of the Qur'an.
Taqwa	Consciousness of God.
Taqlid	Imitation.
Tawhid	Oneness of God. Belief in the One God.
Tafsir	Exegesis, interpretation of the Qur'an.
Wahy	Revelation.
Yawm	Day

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