

**The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of  
Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân Barêlwî  
(1856-1921), with special reference  
to the Qur'an translation  
*Kanz ul-Imân***

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
M. A. by research

The University of Leeds  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures

September, 2010

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## **Acknowledgements**

I am sincerely grateful to my M.A. supervisor, Mr Mustapha Sheikh, for the support and guidance he showed me throughout my dissertation writing. I am sure it would have not been possible without his help. I would also like to thank Shaykh Asrar al-Haq for his valuable comments and suggestions on my thesis.

Lastly, I offer my regards and blessings to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of the project.

Mohammed Ali



## Abstract

Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân Barêlwî (1856-1921) was a renowned Muslim theologian and polymath. He was also a leading Muslim figure of the *Sunnî/ Sûfî* community of the Sub-Continent of India during his lifetime. He was a Muslim revivalist and a social reformist who challenged the Muslim reform movements who had threatened what he saw as the age old orthodoxy of traditional Islam.

The Qur'an translation of Imâm Raza is a magnificent piece of literature. This translation is like no other in respect to its theological approach as he bases the translation on Qur'anic exegesis instead of presenting a literal translation of the text. This is most probably why his translation stands out from other more literal translations available in the market today.

To understand Imâm Raza's translation of the Qur'an, it is first of all important to be able to understand his Prophetology and the issues which would in turn affect the way he translated certain passages with theological connotations. Therefore I have examined his Prophetology first, to be able to further understand the reason for his translating in such a manner and the significance it plays in his translation of the Qur'an.

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## Introduction

Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân Barêlwî was a Muslim scholar with great insight into and interest in the development of the Muslim community around the world and, specifically, in British India. Apart from his expertise in the Islamic sciences, he was known for his contributions to Science, Mathematics, Algebra, Numerology, Astrology, Astronomy, Medicine, History, Poetry, Geometry and Philosophy among others. He was a polymath.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara D. Metcalf has said the following about Imâm Ahmad Raza: ‘He was outstanding from the very beginning on account of his extraordinary intelligence. He enjoyed a divine gift of deep insight in Mathematics. It is said that he solved a mathematical problem for Dr Zia-Uddîn for which the learned Mathematician was intending to visit Germany. Ahmad Raza himself was a towering figure, revered for his extraordinary memory, mental ability, and intellectual capacity, and honoured as a *Mujaddid* and a *Shaykh*. Guarded in his relation to the British Government, he sought above all to guard what he saw as correct practice and make religion vital in the personal life of Muslims of his day.’<sup>2</sup>

It is said that Imâm Raza always gave preference to his job as a Muftî, rather than spending time travelling, orating and even writing books.<sup>3</sup> His religious edicts would eventually become compiled as books. For the most part, his answers to problems were concise, and he would only reply in lengthy answers when he thought there was a need for such and there was a benefit to be secured in doing so for the wider Muslim community.

In a time when people are becoming more and more interested in the Qur’an, scant attention has been paid to the Qur’anic translation and interpretation of Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân by Western Muslim scholars. For example Mofakkar Hussain Khân has written an article ‘English translations of the Holy Qur’an’<sup>4</sup> yet totally neglects to mention Imâm Raza’s Urdu translation of the Qur’an, *Kanz-ul-Imân*, and its English rendering, even though it is widely read and well known in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan. It is inexplicable that such a

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst Imam Raza’s contributions to the Islamic intellectual tradition are his works in exegesis (*tafsîr*), theology (*aqâ'id*), Prophetic tradition (*hadîth*) and the principles of Hadîth, Islamic law (*fiqh*), legal theory (*usûl al-fiqh*), lexicology, inheritance law (*farâ'id*) and Qur’anic recitation (*tajwîd*), Sufism (*tassawwuf*), Morals (*akhlâq*), Arabic grammar (*nahw*), history, Poetry, Inspired knowledge (*jafar*), Astrology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Geometry, Philosophy and logistics.

<sup>2</sup> *The life and work of the Muslim revivalist*. p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Usha, Sanyal Ahmed Riza Khan Barelwi; *In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld 2006), p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *The Koran; Critical concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. By Colin Turner (Oxford: Routledge Curzon. 2004) p. 25.

significant work is neglected when, in contrast, the works of Deobandî ‘Ulama enjoy widespread attention within academic circles.

There are several reasons as to why Imâm Raza’s translation deserves attention. Many translators of the Holy Qur’an were not scholars of the Islamic faith but rather Arabists. Their translations are often literal in places where a more nuanced rendering would have more aptly conveyed the spirit of the scripture. Imâm Raza’s translation takes into consideration not just linguistic issues but also theological ones. This thesis shall examine the Qur’anic translation of Imâm Ahmad Raza in comparison with other translations to see the difference in content and styles of translation and how theological issues are resolved therein. While many translators have relied upon exegetical comments or footnotes to explain certain verses, Imâm Raza provides an explanatory translation of that specific verse which serves to disclose much more of the latent meaning than a literal rendition.

Prophetology played a major role in the life and works of Imâm Ahmad Raza. This was due, in part, to his attempt to respond to what he saw as challenges from movements like that of Muhammad b. Abdul Wahhâb and his later interpreters, who were clearly a threat to the creedal system of the Ash’arîs and Mâturîdîs. In particular, it was what Imâm Raza considered to be the open attacks on the Prophetic personality, character and the esteemed station (*khasâ’is al-nabuwa*) by the Wahhâbîs,<sup>5</sup> a central and fundamental pillar of the

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<sup>5</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza loosely uses the term Wahhâbî in reference to those who agree with the ideas of Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhâb, whether they be Ahlê-Hadîth, Deobandî or Nadvî. Another reason could be due to the fact that Imâm Raza did not see this group as a new sect. When Imâm Raza was once asked if the Wahhâbî sect had existed during the time of the Prophet and his companions, he said, “they did indeed (exist in the time of the Prophet and his companions) [...] It has been reported in a hadith that one day the companions (*Sahâba*) were gathered around the Prophet in the Prophet’s Mosque (*Masjid al-Nabawî*), when suddenly a man entered the Mosque while the Prophet was engaged in teaching the companions. This man then stood at one end of the gathering for a while and then proceeded to another part of the Mosque. Suddenly at this point the Prophet turned his attention to this man and said, “Who among you will go and kill this man?” Abû Bakr Al-Siddîque stood up and said, “I will go and kill this man.” He then went to the place where this man was engaged in praying. When Abû Bakr got close to this man and saw him engaged in worship, he did not have the courage to kill him and returned to the Prophet of Allah and explained the whole situation. The Prophet again announced, “Who will go and kill this man?” This time Umar ibn Al-Khattâb stood up and said, “I will go and kill this man.” He then went to the place where this man was engaged in praying. When Umar got close to this man and saw him engaged in worship, he did not have the courage to kill him either and he too returned to the Prophet without completing this task. And the Prophet called out again and this time Alî ibn Abî Tâlib came forward but the Prophet said, “you will only manage to kill him if you find him, but you will not be able to kill him as he has already left.” Yet again Alî went to find this man and he too returned unsuccessful as the man had already left and was nowhere to be found. The Prophet then said, “Had you killed this man, a great discord and misguidance would have been erased from my Ummah.” This man had been the father of Wahhâbism, all of those insolent, heretical, misleading and blasphemous cults and persons, who will follow and appear in the latter days [...] Before the revolt of the Kharajites against Imâm Alî, the Prophet had informed Alî, “They will revolt against you and against Islâm and they will be staunch and indulged in external obligations such as fasting, reciting the

Islamic faith in the view of Imâm Raza, that led him to take up the pen in response. Shah Ismaïl Dehlawî (1779-1831) had already aroused much tension<sup>6</sup> through his controversial book *Taqwiyyat-al-Imân* in which he accused the majority of Muslims of polytheism (*shirk*).<sup>7</sup> In the same book he made derogatory statements about God and the Prophet Muhammad, some of which would have significant theological repercussions. At one point, Shah Ismaïl said ‘the power of this King (God) of Kings, is so great, that in a twinkling [...] he can, if He likes, create thousands of apostles, saints, jinns, and angels, of similar ranks with Gabriel and Muhammad.’<sup>8</sup> This statement created two theological problems: the first was termed the issue of *Imkân-ê-Nazîr*, the possibility that God could create another like the ‘Seal of the Prophets’, after stating that Muhammad is the last Prophet until the Last Day; the corollary of this problem is that God, if he were to contradict His own words, would be essentially lying. This second theological problem was termed *Imkân-ê-Kizb*, the possibility that God can lie.<sup>9</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, who was the leading figure of such a critique and whom both Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhâb and Shah Ismaïl Dehlawî seem to follow, said ‘The angels do not help anybody in *shirk* neither in life or after death, but Satan does by appearing in the form of a human being claiming that he is Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, Khidr, Abû Bakr, Umr, Uthmân or Ali.’<sup>10</sup>

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Qur’an and regular worship, but they will leave Islam as an arrow leaves the bow never to return.” [...] After gaining victory in the battle with the Kharajites, Imam Ali said, “Do you think this cursed cult has been totally exterminated from the face of the earth? Absolutely not! Some of them are still in the wombs of their mothers and some of them in their fathers’ sperm. When one of these cults will be exterminated, another will follow suit and the last of them will join the ranks of the anti-Christ (*Dajjâl*).” As this cult emerged in the past, so to will it emerge in every age in different names, shapes and disguises. In this age, this cult has appeared in the name of reform of Islam, and they are called Wahhabis. Islam is not in need of reform but revival. All the signs foretold by the Prophet and his companions in authentic reports will undoubtedly be found in the present day cult of the Wahhabis!” Khân. Ahmad Raza. *Did Wahhabiyyah exist in the time of the Prophet and Sahaba?* trans by. Dr Muhammad Raza (Stockport: Raza Academy International 2005) p. 20-41

<sup>6</sup> Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi has related that Shah Ismaïl Dehlawî said upon writing *Taqwiyyat al-Imân*, ‘I have written this book and I am aware that I have at times used strong and aggressive words, for example, those matters which were *shirk-e-khafî* (inconspicuous polytheism) I have said them to be *shirk-ê-Jallî* (open polytheism). I suspect due to these matters there will be much commotion due to its publication [...] I have written this book in spite the commotion it will cause, but I hope that after the discord and friction, the matter will be resolved, this is what I think.’ Ashraf, Ali, *Arwâhê-Thallâtha* (Karachi: Dar ul-Isha’at) p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Ismail, Mohammed, *Taqwiyyat al-Imân* trans. by Badar Azimabadi (Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors 1995) p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Harlon O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and revival in nineteenth century India; The Tariqah-e-Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi: Yoda Press 2008) p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> This argument may seem to resemble the argument between the Mu’tazzilites and the Ash’arites on the justice of God, but when looked upon in detail it is possible to see the differences. Here the problem is not justice but making derogatory statements towards Allah and His Prophet by making such statements about the Prophet, there being a possibility of God creating another like Prophet Muhammad, thus helping to make way for people like Ghulâm Ahmad Mirzâ of Qâdian to proclaim their Prophethood.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Wasîla* trans by. Ihsân Ilâhî Zahîr (Lahore: Idara Tarjuman al-Sunnah) p. 41.

Alongside the rise of the Ahlê-Hadîth movement which rejected as binding the adherence to any of the four Sunnî schools, a new form of Wahhâbism arose in the guise of the Hanafî School of Law, yet following some of the central ideas of Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhâb in creedal matters (*aqâ'id*). The movement would come to be known as the Deobandî school of thought.<sup>11</sup> Imâm Raza would refer to them as Wahhâbîs on account of their extremely austere approach and their harsh condemnation of many of the popular *sûfi* practises in India.<sup>12</sup> According to Imam Raza, several eminent Deobandî scholars had made statements which were of a derogatory nature about the Prophet’s knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

According to Imâm Ahmad Raza, Wahhâbîs could be categorised into two groups: The *Muqqalid* (imitators) Wahhabis (i.e. the Deobandîs) and those that were *Ghayr Muqqalids* (i.e. The Ahlê-Hadîth, who are non imitators).<sup>14</sup>

Other challenges included the Qâdianîs who believed that Mirza Ghulâm Ahmad (d. 1908) was a Prophet. Unsurprisingly, they drew upon Deobandî arguments<sup>15</sup> to prove their case that it was possible for another prophet to come after the Prophet Muhammad. There was also Sir Syed Ahmad Khân (d. 1898), founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf wrote, ‘the Deobandîs, for example, deplored a range of customary celebrations and practices, including what they regarded as excesses at saints’ tombs, elaborate lifecycle celebrations, and practices attributed to the influence of the Shi’a. There were rival Islamic reformist schools in the quest for true Islamic practice. One group, the Ahlê-Hadîth, for example, in their extreme opposition to such practices as visiting the Prophet’s grave, rivalled that of the Arabians typically labelled ‘Wahhabi’. The ‘Wahhabis’ were followers of an iconoclastic late 18th-century reform movement associated with tribal unification who were to find renewed vigour in internal political competition within Arabia in the 1920s. From colonial times until today, it is worth noting, the label ‘Wahhabi’ is often used to discredit any reformist or politically active Islamic group. Another group that emerged in these same years was popularly known as ‘Barêlwî’, and although engaged in the same process of measuring current practice against hadîth, it was more open to many customary practices. They called the others ‘Wahhabi’.’ Metcalf, Barbara D. ‘Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs’ (Netherlands: ISIM 2002) 29 September 2010 <https://www.openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/1887/10068/1/>

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth, Sirriyeh, *Sufis and anti Sufis* (London: Routledge Curzon 2003) p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> Eminent Deobandi scholar Shaykh Khalîl Ahmad Anbêthvî (d. 1927) and approved by Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Ghangohî wrote in his book, ‘*Barâhînê-Qâtia*’ on page 123, “The extensive knowledge of Satan and the angel of death are evident from the Qur’an and Sunnah, but no such proof exists in regards to the Prophet’s knowledge, that we should not acknowledge authentic evidence and instead prove something (i.e. extensive knowledge for the Prophet) that is Shirk.” And Shaykh Ashraf Ali Thanvi wrote in his book, ‘*Hifz al-Imân*’ on page 15, “For the Prophet, is the knowledge of totality or partial? Of totality, this is impossible and if it is partial, then every child, mad man, animal and four legged creature possesses this type of partial knowledge, in that, what is the speciality of the Prophet.”

<sup>14</sup> Allah, Buksh, *The Ahlê Sunnat Movement in British India 1880-1921* (Lahore: Islamic propagation centre) p. 225.

<sup>15</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Qâsim Nanôtawai (1852-1901) has stated in his book, ‘*Tahzîr al-Nâs*’, “If a Prophet was born after the time of Prophet Muhammad, it would thus not affect the finality of the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad”, page-43. This is also related in the Urdu Qâdianî works, ‘*Ayat Khatam-an-Nabiyîn aur Jamâte-Ahmadiyyah ka Maslak*.’ p. 23.

Aligarh (later named Aligarh Muslim University), a liberal- rationalist scholar who denied the possibility of miracles, interpreted beliefs in angels metaphorically rather than literally and was critical of Hadith literature, dismissing it as being inauthentic.<sup>16</sup> The other major group were those referred to as the pluralists (*Sulla Kullîs*) such as the scholars of *Nadwat-ul-Ulamâ* (Council of Ulamâ).<sup>17</sup> These were only some of the sects which were prevalent in British India with whom Imâm Ahmad Raza wrestled through his refutations in his writings. His main confrontation, however, would always be Wahhâbîsm and its sub branches.

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries saw increasing differences amongst the scholars of different sects, groups and reformist movements in India, but Imâm Raza saw the Ahlê-Hadîth and Deobandî movements as being the most offensive to the Ahlê-Sunnat movement.<sup>18</sup> They criticised the Prophetic personality in respect of the knowledge attributed to him of the Unseen, his miracles, his Prophetic rights and his role as a Prophet, all of which were dismissed, thus leaving the Prophet as a mere heroic figure of history, with no religious significance.<sup>19</sup> One Sir Syed Ahmad Khân contributed to this since he was against the dominant role that the Prophetic traditions played in Muslim society and gave preference to the Qur'an as the only authentic source. He eventually came to reject almost all hadith as unreliable, but this is not to say that he rejected the *Sunnah* altogether. Thus, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of the so-called Ahlê-Qur'ân sect, a group in India that opposed the Hadîth literature and emphasised the Qur'an, through the influence of Syed Ahmad Khân who laid the foundations of Qur'anic universalism.<sup>20</sup>

Imâm Ahmad Raza saw it as his duty to dispel what he considered as false propaganda by replying to the Deobandîs on theological issues while dealing with the Ahlê-Hadîth on issues of both theology and law, the Qadianî's on theology and his economical strategies for the

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<sup>16</sup> Ahmed Riza Khan Barelwi; *In the footsteps of the Prophet*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> The Nadwat al-Ulama (Council of Ulama,' known as Nadwah, for short) was founded in the 1890's in the hope of bringing Sunni and Shi'i differences together on a single platform, despite their differences of opinion'. (This extract taken from Ahmed Riza Khan Barelwi; *In the Path of the Prophet* by Usha Sanyal, p. 39.)

<sup>18</sup> In the Subcontinent the Barelwis ascribe themselves with the title of Ahlê-Sunnat or Ahl-us-Sunnâh-wal-Jammâ, showing their belonging to the wider Sunni majority of the Muslim world. The Barelwis differentiate themselves from the Deobandis and the Ahle-Hadith movements as Wahhabis and do not recognise them as mainstream Ahl-us-Sunna.

<sup>19</sup> Shah Ismail Dehlawi writes in *Taqwiyyah-tul-Imân*, 'All the Prophets, Saints and Friends of Allah are lesser than the smallest of the particles in the sight of Allah', (p. 74.) and, 'one should be cautious in eulogizing a respectful person (i.e. including Prophets, saints, etc.) and thus praise him as of his human worth and even reduce this,' p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Nasr, Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A critical Historical analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) p. 29.

survival of Muslims under non-Muslim rule. On the one hand Imâm Ahmad Raza spent most of his time writing edicts, continuing a long family tradition, which would at times result in the authorship of entire monographs. In all the works of Imâm Ahmad Raza, it is possible to see the love for the Prophet Muhammad flow through each written statement. He writes, ‘O Raza! I refuse to praise the men of power, why should I sell my poetic talent to the rich? I am but a servant of God’s last Messenger, I do not want to fall into this golden ditch.’<sup>21</sup>

It has been reported that amid all this confusion and differences amongst Muslims, Shaykh Amjad Alî Azamî (d. 1948), who was a deputy of Imâm Raza, had once requested that the Imâm should write a translation of the Holy Qur’an as in his view no orthodox translation of the Holy Qur’an existed in the Urdu language, as the earlier Urdu translations of the Qur’an by Shah Rafî al-Dîn (d. 1818) and Shah Abdul Qâdir<sup>22</sup> (d. 1814) had been corrupted by the Wahhâbîs. Due to the Imâm’s busy schedule, he could not commit any time to this task, so Shaykh Amjad Alî had already decided to visit the Imâm during the time of midday rest (*qaylûla*). While the Imâm would take rest during noon, Shaykh Amjad Alî would come with a pen and paper in his hand. Imâm Raza would dictate the translation of the Qur’anic verses while Shaykh Amjad would write them down, and this was completed in the year 1330/1911. This Qur’anic translation was named ‘*Kanz-ul-Imân*’ (the treasure of faith), by Imâm Ahmad Raza himself.<sup>23</sup> Translation of the Holy Qur’an requires much study and research. By virtue of Imâm Raza’s insight into the Islamic sciences and due to his photographic memory, he was able to recall and remember vast amount of books he had studied and thus translate without having to consult them during the work of translating the Qur’an.

One of the qualities of his Qur’anic translation is that it is an exegesis in itself; he sought to bring out the esoteric meaning of the Holy Qur’an, which had been overlooked in existing translations. It informs the reader about verses that Imâm Raza considered might be misunderstood as being applicable to believers but were actually revealed for the pagan Arabs and polytheists. Examples of these will be supplied in a later chapter.

The contributions of Imâm Ahmad Raza have for long been ignored within academic circles, that is until recent times when his life and works have started to be researched and studied in

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<sup>21</sup> Ahmad R. Khân *Imam Ahmed Raza’s Religious Poetry* trans. by Prof G.D. Qureshi, (England: Stockport 1996) p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Shah Rafî al-Dîn and Shah Abdul Qâdir were both sons of Shah Walî Allah (d. 1762)

<sup>23</sup> Sanyal, U. "Aḥmad Rizâ Khân Barelwî." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE.

institutes around the world. Over the last century much negative propaganda has been circulated about this personality of Muslim India. He is, as one might describe, the ‘neglected genius’ of the East and he was also noted for his exceptional scholarship and spiritual advancement.<sup>24</sup> Imâm Raza’s contribution to the Islamic sciences is little known outside of the sub-continent; it is for this reason that I have decided to bring his contribution to the intellectual tradition to the surface, with a specific focus on his contribution to Qur’anic hermeneutics.

The following is a study of Imâm Ahmad Raza’s hermeneutics, specifically in connection with his theological positions and his Prophetology. This shall then serve as a basis for comparison between Imâm Raza’s translation and the Qur’an translations of later translators.

I have had the privilege of translating from the original Urdu works of Imâm Ahmad Raza for this thesis as little of his work has been published in the English language. I have generally used the English translation of the Qur’an by Abdullah Yusuf Ali but where Imâm Raza has done an interpretative translation of a verse, I have personally translated that specific verse.

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<sup>24</sup> Sufis and Anti-Sufis, p. 49.

## The Life of Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân Barêlwî

Imâm Ahmad Raza was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Shawwal 1272 A.H. (14<sup>th</sup> June 1856)<sup>25</sup> in the province of Uttar Pradêsh in the town of Barêlly in India.

Imâm Raza was born a year before the Indian mutiny, the first war of independence against the British in 1857. A time of great upheaval, the period is marked by the emergence of several reformist movements each of which propagated a distinct ideology amongst the Muslim masses. In all the confusion in British India, the colonial rulers encouraged new sects and gave them a sense of security and freedom to propagate their ideas in the once unified Muslim India.<sup>26</sup> It is said that after the Indian Mutiny, during 1857, the British came up with different answers for not just what had gone wrong politically, but also for what they saw as imperfections and weaknesses that had crept into the practice of Islam in India. Their prescriptions for religious reform (*tajdîd*) spawned a variety of movements in the course of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Barêlwî movement being one of them.<sup>27</sup> It should be understood that the Barêlwî movement was not one of reform but one that sought to revive the beliefs and traditions of the *Sunnîs* of India before the arrival of the British and Wahhâbism in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan.

Imâm Raza belonged to a family of Muslim scholars who were trained in the Islamic sciences and known for their issuing of religious verdicts (*fatâwa*). He had a remarkable memory from an early age, and would only have to read through a book once in order for it to be memorised. It is said that at the age of four he completed the recitation of the Holy Qur'an; by the age of six he spoke the Arabic language fluently; at the tender age of eight during his studies Imâm Raza wrote a commentary on the book of Arabic grammar *Hidâyat al-nahw* and by ten he wrote the footnotes for the book *Musallam al-thubût* in *Usûl al-Fiqh*. By the age of thirteen he had studied the full range of religious sciences and began to teach, taking responsibility at the same time of the *Dâr al-Ifta*.<sup>28</sup>

At the age of twenty one, accompanied by his farther and Shaykh, Allâma Abdul Qâdir Badayûnî, a close associate during 1877, he travelled to Mehrârî Sharîf (a Sufi lodge) and it

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<sup>25</sup> Ahmad, Abdul Mubîn & Sâlik ed., *Jahânê-Mufti-ê-Azam*, (Mumbai: Raza Academy 2007) p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad, Zia Ullah, *Najd se Qâdiân barasta Deoband* (Siâlkot: Qâdri Kutub Khâna) p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Sanyal, U. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE

<sup>28</sup> *Jahânê-Mufti-ê-Azam*, p. 141.

was here that Imâm Ahmad Raza was initiated into the Qadirî Sufi Order by the Grand Shaykh Syed Âle Rasûl (d. 1879) Mehrârî. After initiation Syed Âle Rasûl also granted Imâm Raza the Successorship (*khilâfa*) and Permission (*idhn*) to continue instruction in the *Sûfi* Order. It is said that Syed Âle Rasûl saw at once that this young man was capable of leading the masses and was a master of religious law and Sûfism and he only required the link of a Master to continue the divine mission.<sup>29</sup>

Imâm Raza continued teaching Islamic theology, but he always held the issuing of legal verdicts to be a particularly important responsibility. He would diligently deal with everyday problems and questions which were sent to him from Europe, Africa and even America. His influence spread far and wide on account of his reputation as a legal scholar and *sûfi* master.<sup>30</sup> He was also involved in apologetics, refuting Muslim reformists and exposing the beliefs of new sects and belief systems.

During 1318/1900 Shaykh Shah Amîn Firdausî<sup>31</sup> (d.1903), the son of Shaykh Sharf Uddîn Ahmad Yahya Munîrî, who was the chief guest of the event in Patna, Imâm Ahmad Raza was proclaimed the reviver of the century (*Mujadid-ê-Mi'ato-Hâdirrah*) by the leading figures of the Ahlê Sunnat movement in India.<sup>32</sup> The scholars of Makka and Madîna, the two holy cities of the *Hijâz* in present day Saudi Arabia also acknowledged his status and accepted his position and honoured him with due respect during his second visit to the Hijâz in 1330 / 1906.<sup>33</sup>

Imam Ahmad Raza passed away on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Safar 1340 (28<sup>th</sup> of October 1921) at the age of 65 years.

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<sup>29</sup> Badr-Uddîn, Ahmad, *Sawâneh Imâm Ahmad Raza* (Sakar: Maktaba Nurîa Rizwiyya) p. 133

<sup>30</sup> Sanyal, U. Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE

<sup>31</sup> Shah Amîn Firdausî is the thirty fourth descendant Shaykh Sharf Uddîn (d. 782/1500) who was the son of Makhdûm Yahya manerî b. Tâj Faqîh from Al-Khaleel (Palestine). Shaykh Sharf Uddîn is said to have had a love for knowledge and religion. He acquired the traditional Islamic sciences under Shaykh Sharf Uddîn Towama Bukhârî, and later decided to travel for spiritual advancement, visiting many spiritual centres around India. He was initiated by Shaykh Najîb Uddîn Firdausî. Shaykh Sharf Uddîn was said to be equally proficient in secular learning and esoteric knowledge and known to have performed many miracles. His tomb at Bihâr is still resorted to as a place of sanctity and pilgrimage by Muslims and non-Muslims.

<sup>32</sup> Sanyal, U. Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE

<sup>33</sup> Jahânê-Muftû-ê-Azam, p. 142.

## Chapter 1

### Imâm Ahmad Raza's Prophetology

Prophethood plays a vital role in the Qur'anic message, as Prophets were the mediators between God and His servants. In the Islamic tradition, ordinary people do not possess the cognitive ability to reach knowledge about God; selected persons are elected by God to deliver His message and to guide them to the straight path. According to the Prophetic Tradition, Prophets receive Divine revelation from God in several ways.

The Prophet Muhammad stated that revelation sometimes came to him as a sound of metal being beaten, of bees humming near his face, or the ringing of a bell. It could also be an angel speaking to him as a man whose words he would retain. Or revelation would approach him in the form of a young man handing it down to him.<sup>34</sup> In cases of indecision over difficult choices, Muslims were advised by the Prophet to let God inspire them during their sleep after a prayer called *istikhârâ* (search or request for what is better). The Prophet affirmed that the vertical dream-vision of the believer is one forty-sixth part of prophecy.<sup>35</sup> In effect, not all revelation was sent through the mediation of the archangel Gabriel, but was through different methods as stated in the Prophetic traditions mentioned above.

The Qur'an states there are levels of Prophethood in which the Prophets differ in rank. Furthermore, Imâm Raza gives examples from the Qur'an of the distinctive qualities which are required by Prophets while discharging the duty of trust and communication:

1. Endurance<sup>36</sup>
2. Patience<sup>37</sup>
3. Humility<sup>38</sup>
4. Leniency and tenderness<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: University Press UK 2008) p. 184.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> Allah said, 'and obey not (the behests) of the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and heed not their annoyances, but put thy Trust in Allah. For enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.' (Q. 33:48)

<sup>37</sup> Allah said, 'Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) apostles of inflexible purpose.' (Q. 46:35)

<sup>38</sup> Allah said, 'And lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee.' (Q. 26:215)

<sup>39</sup> Allah said, 'It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's)

5. Mercifulness<sup>40</sup>
6. Bravery<sup>41</sup>
7. Benevolence and Generosity<sup>42</sup>
8. Forgiveness and forbearance<sup>43</sup>
9. Contentment and indifference to wealth<sup>44</sup>
10. Fairness in judging<sup>45</sup>
11. Intellectual perfection.<sup>46</sup>

In Arabic, God's elect are referred to in two ways:

1. The term *nabî* is of the root *naba'*, which means 'news'. A *nabî* is a person chosen by God to remind his people of their religious duties and he also has access to the world of the unseen, the realm of the angels. *Nubuwwa* (prophecy) is a substantive derived from *nabî* (prophet), a term denoting the precognition given by the divinity to the prophet and the prediction made by the latter of future contingencies.<sup>47</sup> The English linguistic equivalent is prophet or messenger. It should be noted that a prophet is not necessarily the bearer of scripture.

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forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).’ (Q. 3:159)

<sup>40</sup> Allah said, ‘among them are men who molest the Prophet and say, "He is (all) ear." Say, "He listens to what is best for you: he believes in Allah, has faith in the Believers, and is a Mercy to those of you who believe." But those who molest the Messenger will have a grievous penalty.’ (Q. 9:61)

<sup>41</sup> Allah said, “"Now do thou throw thy rod!" But when he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it had been a snake, he turned back in retreat, and retraced not his steps: "O Moses!" (it was said), "Fear not: truly, in My presence, those called as apostles have no fear.’ (Q. 27:10)

<sup>42</sup> Allah said, ‘Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.’ (Q. 17:29)

<sup>43</sup> Allah said, ‘But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard; they change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them- barring a few - ever bent on (new) deceits: but forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds): for Allah loveth those who are kind.’ (Q. 5:13)

<sup>44</sup> Allah said, ‘Strain not thine eyes (wistfully) at what We have bestowed on certain classes of them, nor grieve over them: but lower thy wing (in gentleness) to the believers.’ (Q. 15:88)

<sup>45</sup> Allah said, ‘We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (No better than) wrong-doers.’ (Q. 5:45)

<sup>46</sup> Imam Raza states concerning this Prophetic attribute: ‘This verse refers to the fact that those who live in deserts and country areas, who are by nature callous and hard hearted, have never been Prophets. Only men of cities have been considered capable of receiving Divine revelation as from the Qur’anic verse concerning which Allah said, ‘Nor did We send before thee (as Messengers) any but men, Whom We did inspire,- (Men) from the peoples of the towns.’ (Q. 12:109). Similarly noble descent, excellent character and a lovely countenance are the beautiful virtues which a prophet must undoubtedly possess. In short, these verses are granted to these real kings, and those whose dominion is greater shall surely have treasures beyond imagination.’ Ahmad Raza, *Khân Tajalli-e-Yaqîn*, (Lahore: Hâmid and Company 1980) p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> Fahd, T. "Nubuwwa." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.

2. 'The term *rasûl*. Account must be taken of the use of the word apostle in Christianity [...] One is tempted to imagine a distinction between *rasûl* and a *nabî* as such, as is found in Christian literature: the apostle is at the same time a prophet, but the prophet is not necessarily at the same time an apostle [...] If one difference can be pointed out, it is that the *rasûl*, in contrast to the people, is a law-giver and provided with a book.'<sup>48</sup>

The term *nabî* is usually translated as prophet, meaning one who foretells concerning future events. In the Arabic language it also connotes one who has access to the knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*). Ismaîl Dehlawî and his followers rejected the Prophetic attribute of knowledge of the unseen,<sup>49</sup> so to enforce this belief of Prophetic knowledge Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the word *nabî* wherever it appears in the Qur'an as 'O knower of the Unseen', emphasising that characteristic which he deems to be distinctive of prophets. The Qur'an is clear about the prophets having access to the knowledge of the Unseen, and thus rejecting the knowledge of the Unseen for the prophets is unbelief (*kufîr*), and thus it is an important part of the *sunni* creed to affirm the prophet's knowledge of the Unseen, according to the beliefs of Imâm Ahmad Raza.

The total number of Prophets and Messengers sent to the different nations of the world to deliver God's message is not known. However, there is a Prophetic Tradition that states some 124,000 Prophets were sent for the deliverance of every nation. The Qur'an states; 'There are some of them that We have mentioned to you and there are others whom We have not mentioned to you' (Q. 40:78). Amongst those mentioned are the twenty five Prophets in the Qur'an. The Qur'an further states, 'See You; How We have preferred one over the other' (Q. 17:21) and then mentioned the five who are known as the Arch Prophets (*ul al-azm*) in the Qur'an thus, 'He has directed you to the religion which He enjoined upon Noah and that which We revealed to you and that which we enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus saying, Set the religion right and cause not dissension therein' (Q. 42:13).

So the Holy Qur'an states that among the Prophets, five were of particular distinction:

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<sup>48</sup> Rubin, Uri. "Prophets and Prophethood." Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an.

<sup>49</sup> Ismail Dehlawi writes, 'It is clear from the above verse (Q. 6:59) that whosoever claims to have knowledge of the hidden things and of having knowledge of future happenings, he is a great liar, because he claims to have divine power. Moreover, one who attaches such a power to any prophet and friend of Allah or jinn and angel, religious leader or son of religious leaders or spiritual guides and martyr or astrologer and foreteller or charms-maker and soothsayer or Brahmin or ghost or fairies, is bound to become a polytheist.' Taqwiat al-Imân, translated by Badr Azimabadi, p. 24

1. Nûh (Noah)
2. Ibrâhîm (Abraham)
3. Mûsa (Moses)
4. Îsa (Jesus)
5. Muhammad (Mohammed)

Amongst these five distinguished Prophets, the most honoured and elevated according to Muslim tradition is the Prophet Muhammad. In his scholastic research paper ‘*Tajallî al-Yaqîn bi Anna Nabîyyina Sayyida'l Mursalîn*’, Imâm Ahmad Raza uses Qur’anic verses to prove the superiority of the Prophet Muhammad above other Prophets. This monograph was written originally as an answer to a question sent to Imâm Raza stating that some Wahnâbîs were denying that prophet Muhammad was the most elevated and honoured amongst the rank of the prophets. The questioner requested an answer from the Qur’an and Sunna upon which Imâm Raza states, ‘That the Prophet Muhammad’s elevated rank is not only for the prophets but also for those who came before him and after him, is a belief for which there is no doubt, evident from the Qur’an and Sunna and upon which there is agreement [...] I find it strange that there should be a request for evidence for such a clear matter.’<sup>50</sup> It seems there was little available and this must have been the first available on the topic in the Urdu language. The argument is divided into ten sections with many sub-sections containing over one hundred verses from the Qur’an showing the status of the Prophet Muhammad amongst other Prophets and men. Even though Imâm Ahmad Raza used *ahadîth* and *tafasîr* in his exegesis of these verses, I have only used the Qur’anic verses he has mentioned and only used his exegetical notes where I thought they were necessary.

### **Superiority from time eternity**

Imâm Ahmad Raza begins by using the Qur’anic verse, ‘Behold! Allah took the covenant of the prophets, saying: "I give you a Book and Wisdom; then comes to you an apostle, confirming what is with you; do ye believe in him and render him help." Allah said: "Do ye agree, and take this my Covenant as binding on you?" They said: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses. If any turn back after this, they are perverted transgressors” (Q. 3:81-82). Here the verse deals with the exalted status and

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<sup>50</sup> Ahmad Raza, Khan, *Tajjalî-al-Yaqîn* (Lahore: Hâmîd and Company) p. 9.

superiority of the prophet Muhammad among other prophets from time eternity. Imâm Raza further mentions, ‘the Hadîth related by Imâm Abû Ja’far al-Tabarî and others that Imâm Alî b. Abî Tâlib had reported that Allah had taken an oath from all the Prophets from the time of the Prophet Adam until the last of them that if they live to witness Prophet Muhammad, they should bring faith upon him and help him and they should also take allegiance from their followers in concerning this. Several exegetes from the Classical period agree on this interpretation, including Imâm Ja’far as-Sâdiq, Abdullâh ibn Abbâs, Ibn Jarîr, Ibn Asâkir and others, while Imâm Badr Uddîn Zarkashî, Hâfidh Imâd Uddîn ibn Kathîr and Imam Ibn Hajr Asqalânî have attributed this Hadîth to Imâm Bukhârî.’<sup>51</sup>

### **Superiority of the Prophet Muhammad over all creatures**

There is a Qur’anic verse, ‘We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures’ (Q. 21:107) which deals with the Prophet Muhammad being superior to all of God’s creatures. Imâm Ahmad Raza Khan quotes Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî who said, ‘If Prophet Muhammad is a Mercy unto the whole universe, this makes it a necessity that he is also superior to everything except Allah.’<sup>52</sup>

### **The universality of the Prophet Muhammad’s Messengership**

In a verse of the Qur’an one reads, ‘We sent not an apostle except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them’ (Q. 14:4). Imam Raza cites the following Qur’anic examples in relation to the Qur’anic verse mentioned above: ‘We sent Noah to his people. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah. Ye have no other god but Him. I fear for you the punishment of a dreadful day!’ (Q. 7:59),<sup>53</sup> and then he mentioned the universality of the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad. Allah said, ‘We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not’ (Q. 34:28)<sup>54</sup> While commentating upon Q. 34:28 Imâm Ahmad Raza states, ‘God sent him (i.e. Prophet Muhammad) to man and jinn. The *Ulamâ* in regard to Prophet Muhammad, is that his Prophethood includes all men, Jinn and angels [...] The Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad enjoys jurisdiction over trees, stones, earth, heaven, mountains, seas and all other existence, as the word worlds (*â’lâmîn*) implies [...]

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Similar verses can be found in the following Qur’an references (7:65), (7:73), (7:80), (7:85), (7:103), (6:83), (37:147), (3:49)

<sup>54</sup> And similar verses can be found in the following Qur’an references (7:158) and (25:1)

For many reasons the above verse is proof enough of the absolute excellence of the Prophet.<sup>55</sup>

### **Status amongst other Prophets**

About the Qur'an verse, 'those apostles We endowed with gifts, some above others: To one of them Allah spoke; others He raised to degrees' (Q. 2:253), Imâm Raza said, 'The great Imâms of Islam assert here that 'Some above others', means the Holy Prophet, who has excellence over the other Prophets by the grace of Allah. Following this definite statement, Imâm Baghawî, Baydâwî, Nasâî, Suyûtî, Qastalânî, Zarjânî, Shâmî, Halabî and others have agreed upon the excellence of Prophet Muhammad over other Prophets of God. There is a short account of it in the *tafsîr of Jalâlayn* which confirms this version. The fifth verse is, 'It is He Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion: and enough is Allah for a Witness' (Q. 48:28). After addressing the believers who deserve Allah's Mercy, Allah said, 'You are the best community (*Ummah*) sent for mankind' (Q. 3:110). These verses are clear that the religion of Islam is a complete faith and above all other religions, and the *Ummah* of the Prophet is superior to all other nations and consequently the leader and master of this *Ummah* is superior to all the Prophets of all religions and peoples.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza states the following reasons in showing the absolute excellence of the Prophet Muhammad: '(a) This comparison itself reveals that the previous Prophets were only administrators of a certain city whereas the Holy Prophet is the prince of the seven dominions and in fact the king of the heavens and earth. (b) The mantles of Prophethood are the heaviest and bearing them is extremely difficult according to the following Qur'anic verse: 'Soon shall We send down to you a weighty message' (Q. 73:5). Accordingly, men of the greatest resolution, like Prophet Moses and Prophet Aaron, were both given serious warnings that they should not fall short in their remembrance of God, and similar verses can be found in the following Qur'an reference (Q. 20:42). If the responsibility of Prophethood for a specific nation is so dire, then how much greater will be the burden and difficulty of the Messengership of Prophet Muhammad, which includes men and Jinn, the east and the west. And the greater the burden, the greater will be the reward, the more the work and service, the greater the worth and dignity. (c) The greater the noble task, the greater is the nobility of the agent. The king sends his subordinates to handle minor enterprises, but to carry out big and important campaigns, the chamberlain and magnates are sent. So the difference between particular Prophethood and a general commission which leads to the obvious difference between the particular Messengers who is sent to a particular nation, whereas Prophet Muhammad's Prophethood is not limited to any race or region but is universal and encompasses all God's creatures. (d) The wise always appoint a dignified person for a lofty task. The minor chief cannot succeed in discharging a major duty. Similarly the appointment of a higher magnate for a minor duty will show he is belittled. (e) The more the work, the more elaborate are the arrangements which are required. A duke requires an army and treasure according to his capacity, but a king, if he is in charge of the seven dominions, would require arrangements for boarding, lodging, administration and control in accordance with his status. Here arrangements mean Divine support and training which is imported to the Prophets. The knowledge and wisdom which were sent down into the heart of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad] should, under all circumstances, be more abundant and plentiful than the knowledge and wisdom of other Prophets.' Tadjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Tadjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 24.

## **Superiority of Apostleship and religion**

In this section Imâm Ahmad Raza presents a comparison between the manner in which Allah called upon earlier Prophets compared with His address to the Prophet Muhammad:-

1. ‘Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden.’ (Q. 2:35)
2. ‘O Noah! Go down with peace.’ (Q. 11:48),
3. ‘O Ibrahim! You had already fulfilled the vision.’ (Q. 37:105),<sup>57</sup>

In short, the Qur’an usually addresses all the Prophets by their names, but whenever the Prophet Muhammad is addressed, he is mentioned by one or more of his special qualities and virtues. For instance:-

1. “O Prophet! We have sent you as a glorified Messenger” (Q. 33:45),
2. “O Messenger! Make known that which has been revealed to you” (Q. 5:67),
3. “O you wrapped up in your raiment keep vigil the night long” (Q. 73:1),<sup>58</sup>

In this same section Imâm Raza gives some Qur’anic examples of how earlier nations used to treat their Prophets:-

1. “And they said: O you to whom the reminder is revealed” (Q. 15:06).
2. “On the contrary, the insults of the unbelievers have been mentioned in the same words in respect of the previous Prophets, for instance; ‘O Noah! You have disputed with us” (Q. 11:32).<sup>59</sup>
3. ‘The disciples said, “O Jesus son of Mary! Is your Lord able to send down for us a table” (Q. 5:112). [...] how interesting it is to see how the followers of earlier Prophets would address these men of God, by using their personal names and in the manner and tones used by these people of the past but, contrary to the above, Allah has declared it prohibited upon the Muslims to address Prophet Muhammad by name. The Qur’an states, ‘Make not the calling of the messenger as your calling one

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<sup>57</sup> Further examples can be found in the Qur’an sections: (28:30), (3:55), (38:26), (19:7) and also (19:12).

<sup>58</sup> Further examples can be found in the Qur’an sections: (74:1) and (20:1).

<sup>59</sup> Further examples can be found in the Qur’an sections: (21:62), (7:134), (7:77), (11:91) and (2:61).

another' (Q. 24:63). Imam Abû Nu'aim has reported the following Hadith on the authority of Abdullah bin Abbas, as a commentary on the above mentioned verse: 'They used to call the Prophet by name, i.e. *Yâ Muhammad, Yâ Abal Qâsim*, 'but Allah forbade them to address him out of respect for this Prophet'. The scholars entail it is forbidden to call the Prophet by his personal name and justice also demands this, when his Lord does not call him by his name, how can then a slave and servant dare to transgress the limits!'<sup>60</sup>

### **God swears by Prophet Muhammad**

In the Qur'an, God swears by the city<sup>61</sup> and life<sup>62</sup> of the Prophet Muhammad. He has also sworn by the blissful time<sup>63</sup> of Prophet Muhammad. Commentating on the verse (Q. 15:72) Imam Ahmed Raza states, 'Ibn Jarîr, Abû Ya'la, Bayhqi, Abi Nu'aim, Ibn Asâkir and Baghwî have all reported that Allah never created anyone more venerated than the Prophet Muhammad nor swore by the life of anyone other than his.'<sup>64</sup>

### **God replies on behalf of Prophet Muhammad**

In this section Imâm Ahmad Raza shows the superiority of Prophet Muhammad by comparing verses from the Qur'an on how earlier Prophets would reply to insults and absurdities with prophetic clemency and grace and then he mentions other Qur'anic verses where not Prophet Muhammad but Allah replies on his behalf. Firstly, it is worth examining how the Prophets before Prophet Muhammad would reply to the unbelievers:-

1. 'The disbelievers said, 'The leaders of his people said: "Ah! we see thee evidently wandering (in mind)"' (Q. 7:60). And the Prophet replied, "O my people! No wandering is there in my (mind): on the contrary I am an apostle from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds! (Q. 7:61).
2. The unbelievers said, "Ah! we see thou art an imbecile!" and "We think thou art a liar!" (Q. 7:66) And the reply by the Prophet, "O my people! I am no imbecile, but (I am) an apostle from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds!" (Q. 7:67).

<sup>60</sup> Tajjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Allah said, 'I do call to witness this City. And thou art a freeman of this City.' (Q. 90:1-2)

<sup>62</sup> Allah said, 'Verily, by thy life (O Prophet).' (Q. 15:72)

<sup>63</sup> Allah said, 'By (the Token of) Time (through the ages).' (Q. 103:1)

<sup>64</sup> Tajjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 27.

3. The disbelievers remarked, "O Moses! I consider thee, indeed, to have been worked upon by sorcery!" (Q. 17:101) followed by the Prophet saying, "Thou knowest well that these things have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth as eye-opening evidence: and I consider thee indeed, O Pharaoh, to be one doomed to destruction!" (Q. 17:102).<sup>65</sup>

Imâm Raza said, ‘some verses of the Holy Qur’an where the infidels have used bad language and absurd words made against the chief of all the Prophets, were, however, replied to and disapproved of by the King of the heavens and the earth. By refuting the accusations of the enemies of the Prophet, Allah was altogether making His love more apparent for His elect Prophet and Messenger. Such is the bounty of Allah, which He bestows upon who He wills. A few examples are as follows;

1. ‘The infidels said, "O thou to whom the Message is being revealed! truly thou art mad (or possessed)! (Q. 15:6). And Allah replied, ‘Nun. By the Pen and the (Record) which (men) write - Thou art not, by the Grace of thy Lord, mad or possessed. Nay, verily for thee is a Reward unfailing’ (Q. 68:1).<sup>66</sup>
2. When there was some gap in receiving divine revelation, the pagans said that his Lord had forsaken him and hated him. Allah replied to them in the most beautiful way saying, ‘By the Glorious Morning Light, And by the Night when it is still, Thy Guardian-Lord hath not forsaken thee, nor is He displeased. And verily the Hereafter will be better for thee than the present. And soon will thy Guardian-Lord give thee (that wherewith) thou shalt be well-pleased. Did He not find thee an orphan and give thee shelter (and care)? (Q. 93:1-6).
3. When the pagans said, “No apostle art thou" (Q. 13:43) Allah replied with, ‘Thou art indeed one of the apostles’ (Q. 36-3).
4. Âs bin Wâil was a callous man, who at the death of the son of the Prophet called him, ‘Without posterity’, upon which Allah replied, ‘Lo! We have given you abundance’ (Q. 108:01).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> Also see: 68:1-2-3 and also see 68:5-6

<sup>67</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza further states concerning this, ‘the drum of your (i.e. Prophet Muhammad’s) praise will be beaten in all places till the day of resurrection and the sermons of your name shall be read in heavenly heights and the horizons of the earth. You will be given many children whose lives will help the life of this world. All believers are your posterity and have a kind of father in you. Truly, the entire world is your spiritual posterity because if you had not been created, nothing would have come into being. Your light is essential to the birth of

5. When Prophet Muhammad invited his kith and kin to embrace Islam and warned and lectured them, Abu Lahab, the callous uncle of the Prophet said, ‘Woe be to you always, was this your objective?’ upon which Allah revealed the chapter (Q. 111:00).<sup>68</sup>

### **Intercession of Prophet Muhammad**

About the Qur’an verse, ‘for thee: soon will thy Lord raise thee to a Station of Praise and Glory!’ (Q. 17:79). Imâm Raza said, ‘Imâm al-Bukharî and al-Tirmidhî have reported on the authority of Abdullâh ibn Umar that the Prophet was asked about the ‘Praised station’ (Q. 17:79), upon which he replied that it was intercession. Similarly Imâm Ahmad b. Hanbal and Bayhaqî have both reported on the authority of Abû Huraira that the Prophet was asked about the same verse and he said that it was intercession. This Hadîth is mentioned in the six authentic books of Hadîth (*sehâ-sitta*). Imâm Baghawî has reported in his commentary on the Qur’an Ma’alim-al-Tanzîl, a Hadîth reported on the authority of Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar, that Allah made Ibrahîm His friend but your Master Muhammad is more venerable to the friend and nearer to Him than all creatures. He then recited the verse (Q. 17:79).’<sup>69</sup>

### **Prophetic receival without request**

Imâm Ahmad Raza said, ‘if we look at the explicit commandments, maxims, and transcriptions of sayings and mention of other affairs, we find that Prophet Muhammad had, in all sorts of ways, the edge in excellence and dignity over all previous Prophets. The honour and dignity of Prophet Muhammad was the deepest ocean which required writings in plenty to explain. The greatest of the Imâms as Imâm Abû Nu’aim, Ibn Farûq, Qâdhî Ayâd, Jalâl Uddîn Suyûtî, Shahâb Uddîn Qastalânî and others have also referred to some of these fragments and I will firstly mention some of their deductions with distinctions which have come to my mind after some deliberation.’ Thus, Imâm Raza mentions the following examples:

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all creatures. Allâma Ibn-al-Hâjj in his Madkhal related that the Prophet Adam used to remember Prophet Muhammad saying, ‘You are physically my son but spiritually my father.’ Tadjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza further states concerning this, ‘Prophet Joseph and Lady Mary were absolved of the suspicion of the people by the evidence of a miraculous speaking baby, Prophet Jesus. But when Lady Aisha, the wife of the Prophet was accused, Allah Himself gave evidence by revealing seventeen verses in support of her chastity and purity. If Allah had so willed, He would have made every tree and every stone duty bound to stand testimony but God Himself gave evidence for the purification and chastity of the beloved wife of the Beloved Apostle increasing the heights of his reputation.’ Tadjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Tadjali-al-Yaqîn, p. 34.

1. 'A reference from Prophet Ibrahim has been given to a prayer, 'O our Lord! and accept Thou my Prayer' (Q. 14:40). But in favour of Prophet Muhammad, Allah said 'And your Lord says: "Call on Me; I will answer your (Prayer)' (Q. 40:60).
2. The station of ascension of Prophet Moses was a worldly tree according to the Qur'an, 'But when he came to the (fire), a voice was heard from the right bank of the valley, from a tree in hallowed ground: "O Moses! Verily I am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds" ' (Q. 28:30). But the ascension of Prophet Muhammad was reported to the lote-tree and the point which none may pass, 'Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass: Near it is the Garden of Abode' (Q. 53:14-15).
3. Prophet Moses received the manifestation of Allah from the veil of the fire, 'But when he came to the (fire), a voice was heard: "Blessed are those in the fire and those around: and glory to Allah, the Lord of the worlds" ' (Q. 27:8). But Prophet Muhammad came closer to Allah in the manifestation of light and brightness and this thing took place in the clearest state of the highest veneration: 'Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!)' (Q. 53:16). Ibn Jarîr, Ibn Abî Hâtim, Ibn Mardawiyah, Bazzâz, Abu Ya'la and Bayhqî have all reported on the authority of Abu Huraira who said, 'The Prophet reached the lote-tree, the divine shadow covered his head. The Lord spoke to him and said, "Seek anything that thee desireth!" '.
4. There is a clear injunction in the Qur'an that the Prophet Jesus will be questioned about the activities of others. 'Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah.?"' (Q. 5:116). But when the venerable Prophet of Islam decided to fight the battle in Tabûk and the hypocrites sought permission to stay at Medina by making false pretexts, the Prophet was also questioned on this occasion, but here the show of love, kindness and clemency is worth considering: 'Allah give thee grace! why didst thou grant them?' (Q. 9:43). Allah be glorified, here the words of perfect love came first then the questioning came second.'

Imâm Ahmad Raza makes his belief quite apparent about the prophet Muhammad being the best of creation and this being the belief amongst the Muslim masses, but this does not seem to be the case when we take a close look at the works of Shah Ismaîl Dehlawî who states, 'All the prophets, saints and friends of Allah, are lesser than the smallest of the particles in the

sight of Allah,<sup>70</sup> Ismaïl further states, ‘during Salah, it is far better to concentrate in making love with your wife on the intention of adultery than to contemplate the thought of the prophet (i.e. Muhammad) which is worse than overwhelming oneself in thought of donkeys and cattle.’<sup>71</sup> With so many derogatory statements being made in the name of reform and religion, Imâm Ahmad Raza began to present works of early classical scholars to show that his position on the matter was not a new one and that such open attacks on the prophet of Islam were not seen or heard of in the history of Islam prior to this, especially when said to be used in the name of religion itself.

### **Prophetic knowledge of the Unseen**

Prophetic knowledge *Ilm-al-Ghayb* is a matter much disputed amongst Muslim scholars mainly due to the ambiguity of Qur’anic verses relating to it and theological concepts, but the Deobandîs and the Ahlê-Hadîth<sup>72</sup> reject *Ilm-al-Ghayb* for the Prophet and this is why Imâm Ahmad Raza discusses and explains that the misconception on this matter of knowing of the Unseen is something which is explicitly referred to in the Qur’an. Imâm Ahmad Raza scorns the limited scope of the Wahhâbîs on matters concerning the Unseen<sup>73</sup> which he considers to be beyond the capability of any ordinary human being.

Imâm Raza provides many Qur’anic verses that make evident the extent of the Prophet’s knowledge according to the Scripture.<sup>74</sup> The Deobandîs and the Ahlê Hadîth seem to reject the Qur’anic texts and insist upon the following verses which seem to contradict the Qur’anic verses in opposition to the position of Imâm Raza; ‘It is Allah who has the keys (*mafâtîh*) of the Unseen (*ghayb*), besides Allah no one has the knowledge of it’ (Q. 6:59). And also, ‘And for Allah are the keys (*maqâlîd*) of the skies and the earth’ (Q. 39:63). After mentioning these Qur’anic verses Imâm Ahmad Raza provides an interesting esoteric interpretation:

<sup>70</sup> Taqwiyat al-Iman trans by. Badr Azimabadi) p. 73

<sup>71</sup> Dehlawi, Ismail, Sirâtê-Mustaqîm, trans by. Maulana Muhammad Akram (Lahore: Islamî Academy) p. 169.

<sup>72</sup> Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Ghangohi, the founder of Madrasa e-Deoband states in his Fatawa Rashîdiyya in response to a question about the Ilm-ul-Ghaib of the prophet, ‘Anyone who ascribes the knowledge of the unseen to anyone besides Allah and also believes it equal to Allah is indeed a kafir (apostate).’ p. 65

<sup>73</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza said, ‘Some knowledge of the unseen is even known by the ordinary people, as is evident from the fact that Muslims believe in the resurrection, in heaven, hell, Allah and his attributes. These are all essentially from the knowledge of the unseen because we believe in the existence of Allah but we do not see him, so knowing of His existence is in effect to possess knowledge of the unseen.’ Ahmed Raza, Khân, Ulûm e-Mustafa (Lahore: Nazeer Sons publishers) p. 75.

<sup>74</sup> God says, ‘The Knower of the unseen reveals not His secret to anyone. Except to His chosen Messengers’ (Q. 72:27), and also, ‘And it is not befitting of Allah O general people! He let you know the unseen. Yes, Allah chooses from amongst His messengers whom He pleases’ (Q. 3:179), and also, ‘And he is not niggardly as to the disclosing of the unseen’ (Q. 81:24).

‘The first letter of the word *mafâtîh* is *mîm* and its last letter is *hâ*. The first letter of the word *maqâlîd* is also *mîm* and its last letter is *dhâl*. When all four letters are joined they form the word Muhammad (in the Arabic language). This can only point to two things; either all the secrets keys of *shahâdah*<sup>75</sup> and *ghayb*<sup>76</sup> are given to him and are under the Beloved’s supreme control or the mysteries of *shahâdah* and *ghayb* were locked in the Arcane Chambers. The keys to open these secret chambers and bring them from non-existence (*adam*) to existence (*zuhûr*), is the personality of our Master Muhammad. Had the Lord not created him, then all the treasures of Allah would have still been concealed in the Arcane Chambers and unknown to the world.’<sup>77</sup>

Imâm Ahmad Raza wrote one of his important works on the subject of Prophetic knowledge, namely ‘*Dawlat al-makkiyya bil-mâ-dat al-ghaybiyya*.’<sup>78</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza said that he completed this book over two days; the first section he spent a total of seven hours on and during the second day a little over an hour.<sup>79</sup> This piece was thus completed at Makkah during his second Hajj in 1909. This book was written in response to a question raised by some Wahhâbîs<sup>80</sup> sent to the court of the Sharîf of Makkah during Imâm Raza’s pilgrimage to Makkah on the topic of the Prophet’s knowledge of the Unseen.

Throughout the centuries scholars have treated the matter of Prophetic knowledge of the Unseen but nothing concrete or systematic was written to prove categorically the extent of the *Ilm al-Ghayb* of the Prophets and especially that of the Prophet Muhammad. Below I shall analyse the book in question, its arguments and citations from the Qur’an, to demonstrate the

<sup>75</sup> The seven skies and seven earths is Duniyah. Dar-adduniyyah is Shahadah (i.e. that which can be witnessed), and the keys of the Shahadah are Maqâlîd. (taken from Al-Mafuz Al-Sharif, vol-4, pg-523)

<sup>76</sup> The Sidrah-tul-Muntaha, the Arsh and Kursi is Dar-ul-Akhirah and this is Ghayb (i.e. that which is hidden), and the keys of the Ghaib are called Mafateh. (taken from Al-Mafuz Al-Sharif, vol-4, pg-523)

<sup>77</sup> Khan, Mustafa Raza, Al Mafuz Al- Sharif trans. by Shaykh Abu Mohammed Abdul Hadi (Durban: Barakaat-e-Raza Publications 2007), Vol. 4, p. 524.

<sup>78</sup> If the Arabic letters of the name of this book are added together according to their numerical values in Abjad (numerology) to be numerically calculated, the words that would come add up to the date 1323/1902, the year the book was written

<sup>79</sup> Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 167.

<sup>80</sup> In the introduction of Ulûm ê-Mustafa it is written, ‘The question on the knowledge of the Unseen for the Prophet Muhammad was sent deliberately to the Sharîf of Makkah, knowingly that Imâm Raza was in Makkah for the pilgrimage and he was without his books and that he would not be able to answer this question on this occasion.’ p. 3. It doesn’t however mention if the questioners were Deobandîs or from the Ahlê Hadîth, but it would have been most likely from the Deobandîs as their scholars were also in Makkah for the Hajj that same year.

vastness and ever increasing knowledge of the Prophet as it was delineated in the theology of Imâm Ahmad Raza.

One misconception that is usually cited by Ismaîl Dehlawî,<sup>81</sup> Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Gangohî<sup>82</sup> and their followers is that Allah alone has access to the knowledge of the Unseen, and they also believe that Satan and the angel of death also have extensive knowledge as is evident from the statement of Shaykh Khalîl Ahmad Ambetvî, ‘The extensive knowledge of Satan and the angel of death are evident from the Qur’an and Sunnah, but no such proof exists in regards to the Prophet’s knowledge, that we should not acknowledge authentic evidence and instead prove something (i.e. extensive knowledge for the Prophet) that is polytheism (*shirk*).’<sup>83</sup> Shaykh Ashraf Alî Thanvî at the same time makes mockery of prophetic knowledge by associating it with that of children, mad men and animals. Firstly such arguments are unjustifiable because it is essentially going against explicit verses of the Holy Qur’an and thus needs addressing. Imâm Ahmad Raza made the following distinctions between the knowledge of God<sup>84</sup> and his creation:

‘Allah’s knowledge is intrinsic (*dhâtî*) while man’s is gifted (*atâ’î*); Allah’s knowledge is necessary (*wajib*) while man’s is contingent (*mumkin*); Allah’s knowledge is pre-existent, everlasting, ancient, while man’s knowledge is an accident (*hâdith*) since all created beings themselves are accidents [...] Allah’s knowledge is uncreated, while man’s knowledge is created. Allah’s knowledge is omnipotent, while man’s knowledge is in Allah’s power and subject to Him. While Allah’s knowledge never changes in any way, man’s is changing all the time. Given these differences, there can be no suspicion of equality. While

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<sup>81</sup> There are two sub-sections in his book *Taqwiyat al-Imân* (Urdu) namely: No one knows the unseen and Only Allah is knowledgeable. p. 54-55

<sup>82</sup> *Fatawa-e-Rashîdiyya*, p. 65

<sup>83</sup> Ahmad, Khalil, *Barahîn-e-Qâtia* (U.P: Dar-ul-Kutub Deoband) p. 122

<sup>84</sup> Imam Raza says on the comparison between the knowledge of God and his creation: ‘God’s knowledge is eternal and will always remain infinite and therefore His knowledge cannot be known in its entirety by any one of creation because this is not possible according to reason or religion (i.e. the Shariah). If it is said that all the knowledge’s of the past and future are combined and even then this knowledge will not be related to God in reality (as it is finite) because the example of this knowledge is that of a thousandth part of one drop from one part of ten thousand oceans, and this is because even this part of the drop is finite and so are the oceans from which it flows. Each finite thing is thus related to another finite thing. When a person begins to take this part of a drop from the oceans then surely even they will come to an end sooner or later as they too are finite in their essence. But no matter how much finite knowledge you take from the infinite, the conclusion will always be finite and there will always remain the infinite and therefore there can be comparison between them and this is our belief concerning the knowledge of Allah.’ *Ulûmê-Mustafa*, p. 72

there is distinction between Creator and His creation, it is believed that knowledge of the Prophets was nevertheless vast.<sup>85</sup>

Taking the concept of the knowledge of the Unseen a step further Imâm Raza states;

‘What is that thing which is called time? There is no such thing as time. In reality, Almighty Allah has surrounded and restricted us within time and direction. Therefore, we cannot understand anything without time. Although Almighty Allah is not confined to time and space, yet we say that He is present as He was from time eternity and will be till eternity. Allah is free from time but this detachment from time can be explained only in the mind. There is no other mode of understanding this concept.’<sup>86</sup>

Just as God is not restricted by time and space, His attributes such as His divine and infinite knowledge cannot be limited within the confinement of time and space and thus limiting God’s infinite knowledge to the finite knowledge of the past (*mâkâna*) and the future (*mâyakûn*) would be sheer ignorance and lack of understanding of Allah’s existence as the creator.

Imâm Ahmad Raza states, ‘Our belief is not that the Prophet’s knowledge encompasses all of God’s knowledge, this is impossible for the creation. But rather it is that the Prophet Muhammad was taught through the revelation in piecemeal as the whole Qur’an was not revealed in one go but in stages, thus the Prophetic knowledge was increasing over time.’<sup>87</sup>

Imâm Ahmad Raza, in his investigation into the nature of Prophethood in the Qur’an, posits a reason why the Deobandîs and the Ahle Hadîth reject *Ilm-al-Ghayb* of the Prophets: for him, it is because they consider the Prophets of God to be ordinary human beings like themselves.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The Ahle Sunnat Movement in British India, p. 239.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Malfuz Al-Sharif, Vol-4, p. 528.

<sup>87</sup> Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 92.

<sup>88</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza states, ‘The reason for such rejection is because they think of the Prophet as themselves as was the habit of the ancient polytheists who used to say to their Prophets ‘You are not, but a man like us’ (Q. 26:186), see also (21:3), (23:24), (26:154), (36:15). But these Wahhabis are worse than those polytheists because their reason for rejection was because they believed the Prophets to be like themselves and as a consequence of this they did not believe the Prophets to have received divine revelation. So when the polytheists totally rejected revelation and the Prophetic status, thus there was nothing left of the supernaturalism in them but

It is clear from Imâm Ahmad Raza's Prophetology that revelation is the source of knowledge for the Prophet. As it is revealed, so does his knowledge grow. Now we have to determine what exactly the Prophet learnt from the Qur'an over the 23 years of the revelation?<sup>89</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza said that the Prophet had knowledge of all that was in the heavens and the earth and what is contained in the *lawhê-mahfûz*.<sup>90</sup>

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their humanity, in which all are equal, but the Wahhabis believe in Prophethood and they still hold the Prophets to be like themselves. Pure is He (Allah) who turns hearts and eyes and they are diseased that the contexts in which we mention knowledge of the past and future (*mâkâna wa mâkûn*) seem a lot to them and they reflect on the Prophets according to their own intellects and the things which they don't understand, they reject. We the Ahl-al-Haqq (those upon true guidance) are aware that all that has past from the first day of creation until the last day (resurrection) is only a small part of the knowledge given to the Prophet Muhammad and our evidence for this is that Allah says, 'And (Allah) has taught you what you did not know, and great is the grace of Allah upon you' (Q. 4:113). It is clear from this verse that Allah informed his beloved of all that which he was not aware of and this was the greatness of the grace of Allah upon him that the Prophet was informed of *mâkâna wa mâkûn* in the sense that every person's details are found in the *lawhê-mahfûz*, nothing but of this world is contained in it because the hereafter will come after the resurrection, and Allah's reality and attributes are beyond the world and the hereafter which are neither in the *lawhê-mahfooz* or the *qalam* and Allah says about the world, 'say you, the enjoyment of the world is little' (Q. 4:77), so the thing which Allah calls little, what can one do with such a thing and that which Allah calls great, then surely it will be greater and thus the knowledge of Prophet Muhammad is far beyond that of the day of resurrection such as the judgement, the gathering of people, reward and punishment and beyond this to the extent that people will enter their stations in heaven and hell and all that Allah wanted his beloved to know and undoubtedly the Prophet recognised his Lord from which he was informed. Imam Sharf Uddîn Busîrî (d. 695/1296) wrote (in praise of Prophet Muhammad), 'For verily amongst your bounties is this world, and the hereafter. And a part of your knowledge is knowledge of the preserved Tablet (*lawh*) and the Pen (*qalam*). The reason why the knowledge's of the *lawh* and the *qalam* are only a small part of the Prophet's knowledge is because he has many types of knowledge. The formulae, the particulars, the facts, the subtleties, the cognizance of things are from the knowledge of Allah's essence and attributes and the knowledge's of the *lawh* and *qalam* are but a line in the book of the Prophet's knowledge, like a stream running from an ocean.' *Ulûmê-Mustafa*, p. 94.

<sup>89</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza states, 'The revelation came in piecemeal or in chapters to the Holy Prophet with which the knowledge of the Prophet also increased until the completion of the Qur'an revelation and so the clear explanation of all things was also clear upon this and Allah had completed his favour upon His beloved Prophet about which He had promised. If before the completion of the Qur'anic revelation, it was said to Prophet Muhammad that we have not informed you of some of the Prophets and said about the hypocrites that you do not know them or the Prophet delayed a matter until he received any revelation which would inform him of the matter, this is neither contrary to the verses we have presented nor is it contrary to the vastness of the knowledge of the Prophet. All the verses and stories which the Wahhabis use as source of evidence, if the date of that event is not known, then to bring that as evidence, are the ignorance of the foolish and the stupidity of the ignorant. This is because the event which they may refer to could have taken place before the completion of the Qur'anic revelation, and if this is the case then to use such evidence is total madness. And if we are to believe that such a tradition exists of an event which occurred after the completion of the Qur'anic revelation and affirms that at that time the Prophet was still not aware of a specific thing, then one comprehensive answer is enough and would also remove any doubt that when weak traditions are contradicting a verse of the Qur'an and there is no means of interpreting them in line with the Qur'anic verse, then they are of no use and nor will they be accepted. *Ulûmê Mustafa*, p. 109.

<sup>90</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza said that Allah said, 'And We have sent down this Qur'an on you in which everything is clearly explained' (Q. 16:89), and, 'It is not a discourse concocted, but a confirmation of what went before and a detailed explanation of everything' (Q. 12:111), and also, 'We have left out nothing in the book' (Q. 6:38). [...] 'and the word *tibyân* is used for that which has been explained clearly and that which is detailed, in which there is no longer anything hidden. The excessiveness (richness) of the word is evidence of excessiveness of its meaning and for an explanation, one needs an explainer, in this case it is Almighty God himself and the other is for whom it is being explained, in this case it is Prophet Muhammad, upon whom the Qur'an was revealed. According to the Ahl-us-Sunnah, the word *shaiy* means that which is existent, so every existent thing is included

Despite this explanation of the vastness of the Prophetic knowledge of Prophet Muhammad of the Unseen which encompasses the heavens and earth and all that is contained in the preserved tablet,<sup>91</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza was still not surprised after his in-depth explanation that someone could still ask if the five things, otherwise referred to as the knowledge of the five particulars (*ulûmê-khamsa*) that are mentioned in the Qur'an which are said to be exclusive to the knowledge of God, were also included within the Prophetic knowledge.<sup>92</sup> The verse in question is, 'Undoubtedly, with Allah is the knowledge of the Hour, and he sends down rain and knows what is in the wombs of the mothers and no soul knows what it will earn tomorrow and no soul knows in what land it will die. Undoubtedly, All is All-knowing, All-Aware' (Q. 31:34). The five aspects of knowledge thus mentioned are:

1. Knowledge of the day of resurrection.
2. Knowledge of the time of rain.
3. Knowledge of what is in the wombs of mothers.
4. Knowledge of what a person will earn in the future.

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in this from the heavens to the earth from east to west, the realities, the circumstances, alternate movements and rests, the twinkling of the eye, the glances, the dangers of the hearts, ones intentions and all that is besides this are all written as existent things in the lawhê-mahfûz, then it is of surety that all these things are explained in detail in the Holy Qur'an. And we can thus ask the Holy Qur'an as to what is contained in the lawhê-mahfûz.,Allah says, 'And everything, small or big has been written down' (Q. 54:53) and 'We have already kept counted everything in a clean book' (Q. 36:12), and also, 'And there is not any grain in the darkness of the earth, and nor anything wet and nor dry which is not written in a luminous book' (Q. 6:59). There are many authentic hadiths which state that from the first day of creation until the last day, all that has come to pass and all that will come to pass, is all written in the lawhê-mahfûz and to the point that people will enter their heavenly abodes.' *Ulûmê Mustafa*, p. 104.

<sup>91</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza states: 'There are many things that are from the Unseen besides these five things and even if these five things were to be put together they would not make a thousandth part of things that are from the Unseen. For example, Allah is from the Unseen and is witness upon everything, His every attribute is Unseen, Barzakh, Heaven and Hell are all unseen, judgement and the resurrection and the angels are of the Unseen. Besides this your Lord's army is unseen and there are things besides from this that we cannot even enumerate that are of the Unseen. And all these are more than the five things mentioned in the above verse and Allah has only mentioned these five from amongst the vastness of the world of the Unseen, and the reason for specifically mentioning these five things was because the unbelievers were said to have knowledge of the Unseen through oracles, astronomy, zodiac signs and fortune-telling. The things we have mentioned earlier, like the attributes and reality of Allah, the Hereafter or angels, held no prominence in their circles except talking in vain of when it will rain and where, if the child in the womb is a girl or a boy, the outcome of travel and trade and their gains and or losses, and if the traveller will return home or die in another land, and it were essentially these four things that they would lie of knowing about through their satanic knowledge, but the knowledge of these four things is with Allah and without Him informing another, knowing of such things is impossible. With these four matters Allah has also included the knowledge of resurrection because this was also amongst the things these people would discuss. Eschatology is the death of a person and thus the death of all humanity is resurrection [...] and the reason why resurrection is also stated is because the unbelievers believed they knew the times and places of death through their wrong knowledge so, in comparison to individual deaths, they should have knowledge of the day of the resurrection, but they know not and they try to predict these events without divine intervention.' *Ulûmê-Mustafa*, p. 122.

<sup>92</sup> *Ulûmê Mustafa*, p. 114.

## 5. Knowledge of where and when a person will die.

Even amongst the Deobandis and the Ahlê Hadîth, we find a difference of opinion on the matter of knowledge of the Unseen for the Prophets and saints. These groups seem to contradict themselves, as they can't agree to how they want to deal with the issue of *Ilm-al-Ghayb* for the Prophets and Saints. In their works, Ismaîl Dehalwî and Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Gangôhî state that the prophet was given news or was informed<sup>93</sup> (i.e. knowledge of the Unseen) but they are reluctant to use the term *Ilm-al-Ghayb* and even then, they limit the Prophet's knowledge to the bare minimum<sup>94</sup> while in other places they contradict themselves in saying that only Allah knows the Unseen. It seems that if they use the term *Ilm-al-Ghayb* for the Prophets and saints, they would be contradicting their own ideology on the subject.<sup>95</sup> Thus, by using the term *Ilm-al-Ghayb* only for Allah whereas Allah uses the term Unseen (*ghayb*) for the *Ilm-al-Ghayb* of the Prophets,<sup>96</sup> they limit the critical analysis of their creed on this matter by using knowledge of the Unseen for Allah. Those who totally reject knowledge of the Unseen for the Prophets do so by going against the Qur'anic verses mentioned above. Imâm Ahmad Raza states:

‘One should be aware that it is important to have faith in the whole Qur’an if one is to be upon true guidance. The majority of the misguided sects have come to be as they bring faith upon some verse while they reject others such as the *Qadaria* (who thought of their actions as their own), they believed in the following Qur’an verse, “We did them no wrong, but they were used to doing wrong to themselves” (Q. 16:118), and rejected the following verse, “But Allah has created you and your handwork” (Q. 37:96). And the *Jabaria* (who think of man as forced to do things) put faith in the Qur’an verse, “But ye shall not will

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<sup>93</sup> Ismaîl Dehlawî states in *Taqwiyat-ul-Imân* (Urdu), ‘Allah, the Almighty ‘informs’ whoever with however much He wishes them to know.’ p. 53. And Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Gangohi states in his *Fatawa Rashîdiyyah*, ‘To prove *Ilm-ul-Ghayb* for other than Allah is open Shirk but when Allah ‘informs’ his apostles through revelation or inspiration, then he becomes aware of that thing.’ p. 61.

<sup>94</sup> Shaykh Rashîd Ahmad Gangohi states in his *Fatawa Rashîdiyyah*, ‘when Allah ‘informs’ his apostles through revelation or inspiration, then he becomes aware of that thing and whoever he informs he also then knows of it for example the knowledge of the existence of Heaven and Hell, etc. of which Allah has informed His Prophets who then inform their believers in return.’ p. 61.

<sup>95</sup> The contradiction could be due to the reason that Allah does not limit the word *ghayb* to Himself but also uses it for those who he has informed of it and if it is to be believed that it is amongst God's attributes then what will be said of the other attributes of God which are also used for man, for example *Shahîd* (witness), *Rabb* (lord) and *Basîr* (seer).

<sup>96</sup> Allah said, ‘And it is not (the purpose of) Allah to let you know the unseen. But Allah chooseth of His messengers whom He wills (to receive knowledge thereof).’ (Q. 3:179)

except as Allah wills, the Cherisher of the Worlds” (Q. 81:29) but they refuse to put faith in the following verse, “this in recompense for their wilful disobedience: for We are true (in Our ordinances)” (Q. 6:146). And the *Kharajites* (who state major sin to be unbelief) put their faith in the Qur’an verses, “And the Wicked - they will be in the Fire, Which they will enter on the Day of Judgment” (Q. 82:14-15) but failed to accept the Qur’an verse, “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth” (Q. 4:48). But the misguided *Murji’a* (who claim that a Muslim’s sin does not affect him) put faith in the following Qur’an verse, “O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (Q. 39:53) and then they reject the verse, ‘whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly’ (Q. 4:123). There are very many such examples and famously known in the books of *Kalâm*, and the Qur’an verse in which Allah says, “None in the heavens or on earth, except Allah, knows what is hidden” (Q. 27:65) and He (i.e. Allah) also clearly states, “He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make any one acquainted with His Mysteries, except an apostle whom He has chosen” (Q. 72:26-27) and also the verse, “nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the Unseen. But He chooses of His Messenger (For the purpose) whom He pleases” (Q. 3:179) and also, “Neither doth he withhold grudgingly a knowledge of the Unseen” (Q. 81:24) and also, “For Allah hath sent down to thee the Book and wisdom and taught thee what thou Knewest not (before): And great is the Grace of Allah unto thee” (Q. 4:113) and also, “Such is one of the stories of what happened unseen, which We reveal by inspiration unto thee; nor wast thou (present) with them then, when they concerted their plans together in the process of weaving their plots” (Q. 12:102) and also the following verse, “Such are some of the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto thee” (Q. 11:49). There are other verses besides these that can also be mentioned. It is our Lord whose denial is such that it cannot be withdrawn and His verifying is such that therein remains no doubt. We have faith in both those verses which deny and verify (the knowledge of the *ghayb* for the Prophet). Anyone who denies any one of these has renounced the Qur’an. A person who rejects knowledge of the Unseen for other than Allah in its generality and does not accept it as it is, then he is

clearly committing *kufr* as there are those verses which verify it. And one who totally confirms it in such a manner that he does not negate it in its generality, then he is committing *kufr* as there are those verses which do deny it. And a Muslim has faith in them all and does not get into disputation concerning it.<sup>97</sup>

Those who believe in the knowledge of the Unseen are close to the Prophetology of Imâm Ahmed Raza, because it is through the Qur’anic revelation that he proves the various forms of knowledge of the Prophet. The other misconception is the role of *lawhê-mahfûz* and the reason for its existence. It is agreed that the angels use the Tablet as a source of information about future events, so they are aware of who deserves what and what is to become of so and so according to their deeds. This is also an affirmation of their renewal of faith when things take place according to that which is recorded in the Tablet. And Imâm Raza states that the saints (*awliyâ*) also have access to the knowledge of the Tablet through which they are informed of future events and occurrences.<sup>98</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza concludes his study of Prophetic knowledge:

‘To say that the knowledge of the Prophet encompasses everything from pre-eternity (*azal*) until post-eternity (*abad*),<sup>99</sup> this would include everything in the universe and these terms (i.e. *azal* and *abad*) which are used by the Theologians (*Mutakalims*) in their terminology, meaning that which is without a beginning and that which is forever lasting. In such context all creation would be included, but as I have informed you before that to believe that the knowledge of all creation (*jami’ ashya*) is only with Allah and to believe this for a person is not possible by reason nor evidence, nevertheless these terms of *azal* and *abad* are also used to mean the past and extensive future in detail as this is stated in the meaning of *abad* by Qadhi Baydawi in his Tafsîr.’<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 64

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>99</sup> S.H. Nasr explains the terms *azal* and *abad* thus: “the three terms *sarmad*, *azal* and *abad* refer to the same reality, namely, the Eternal, but under three different rapports: *sarmad* being eternal in itself, *abad* eternity with respect to what stands “in front of” the present moment of experience, and *azal* what stands behind and before this moment. *Azal* is related to the Eternal from which man has come and *abad* to the Eternal to which he shall journey after death, while from the point of view of eternity itself there is no before or after, all being *sarmad*.” Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, Knowledge and the sacred (Albany: State University of New York Press 1989). p. 247.

<sup>100</sup> Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 162.

And concerning the continuous growth of the Prophet's Knowledge, Imâm Ahmad Raza states,

‘It indisputably has a beginning because the knowledge of the creation is recent (*hâdith*) and contingent (*mumkin*) and if it is said that the extent of Prophet Muhammad's knowledge is comprehensible in each era, which Allah knows and that which is beyond the knowing of any man or angel, then this is without doubt also correct and if it is said that the knowledge of the Prophet has a limit and therefore stops at a specific place and does not grow then this is unacceptable and even wrong and unacceptable to Allah<sup>101</sup> because the knowledge of Prophet Muhammad about the Reality and Attributes of Allah is ever growing.’<sup>102</sup>

Imâm Ahmad Raza has gone to great lengths to explain his concept of prophetic knowledge. Though I have resorted only to mentioning key points that Imâm Raza refers to from the Qur'an, but in his book, '*Dawlat al makkīyya*' he also cites references from the Sunna and classical exegesis therein to support his conceptualisation of the *Ilm-al-Ghayb* of the Prophet of Islam. Imâm Raza has in this work explained that the Prophets have access to the Unseen and should not be restricted according to our intellects, but instead we can think of it as a vast dimension, as is the ever expanding universe of which we know so little, but that does not mean it does not exist. In the same way, the world of the Unseen is not comprehensible to us and we do not know of God's secrets. It is not impossible for Him to inform whomsoever He likes from his servants. This is why Imâm Ahmad Raza states that the knowledge of the *Lawhê-Mahfûz* is only a small part of his knowledge and it is ever growing because the Unseen is beyond our understanding, and maybe this is why people reject it because they cannot comprehend its vastness. We can now understand why Imâm Ahmad stresses translating the term '*nabi*' as 'O knower of the unseen', in his Qur'an translation of '*Kanz-ul-Iman*': it is so that people are aware that a prophet is one who prophesies and is one who has access to the world of the Unseen. Also in translating the word *nabi* in such a manner, we see Imâm Raza protesting against those who he considered had rejected *Ilm-al-Ghayb* for the

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<sup>101</sup> This can probably be explained by the interpretation of Imâm Ahmad Raza of the Qur'an verse, 'O Beloved! Undoubtedly, We have bestowed on you an abundance of good.' (Q. 108:1) Here the word Kauthar means abundance of everything (*kathîrun min kullî shaiy*). This would include knowledge of the eternal abode of heaven and the ever growing knowledge from the ocean of God's infinite attributes and reality which have no limits or bounds.

<sup>102</sup> Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 165.

Prophet Muhammad. Neil Robinson who writes in his article, 'Barelwis believe that Muhammad had knowledge of the Unseen, and this belief is reflected in the phrase "the communicator of the Unseen" which is frequently inserted (in the Qur'an) without any justification.'<sup>103</sup> Robinson was probably not aware of the theological connotations the phrase has and that it was being translated in a more theological manner, as a Prophet is one who prophesies, thus the Unseen is knowledge. So it was justified and written so people can determine the meaning of the word *Nabî* as it has been elaborated upon above.

This work of Imâm Ahmad Raza was typical of his writing edicts. Generally elaborations on subjects are not needed due to the general acceptance of those matters amongst the Muslim masses. Only when there occur differences of opinion are further study and insight needed to defend and clarify the issue further. This is what we have in this work of Imâm Raza, where he has clarified his position on the knowledge of the Unseen for the Prophet with reference to the Qur'an and Sunna on the vast dimensions of the Prophet's knowledge in comparison to the rest of God's creation, i.e. amongst the angels, jinn and men.

### **Prophetic Intervention in the world**

The concept of Intercession and mediation (*Tawassul/ Shafa'a*) can be found in the Hebrew or Christian Bibles as well as in the Islamic tradition of the Qur'an and Sunna. Though there is consensus upon the matter amongst the majority of Muslims regarding the intercession of the Prophet on the Day of Judgement, there is a difference of opinion concerning the worldly intervention of the Prophets and saints. Visiting graves had been prohibited during the early days of Islam and then later it was made permissible, and the Prophet Muhammad would also visit the graves of the Sahaba in the graveyard of Baqî in Madîna. We can find evidence of the Sahaba asking for prophetic intercession after his death in the Hadîth literature and also Traditions in which the 'people of Allah' were asked to help those who lost their way when travelling.<sup>104</sup> Little is known about opposition against erecting domes over the graves of the pious except by a few individuals, and specifically until the controversial legal opinions of Ibn Taymiyya and later his followers and the Deobandîs and the Wahhabis who were influenced by his religious thought. It is stated in the Encyclopaedia of Islam:

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<sup>103</sup> Robinson, Neil. *Sectarian and Ideological Bias in Muslim translations of the Qur'an* (Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, vol-8, No.3, 1997) p. 263

<sup>104</sup> Naîm al-Dîn, Muhammad, *Atyab al Bayân Radd Taqwîyyat al-Imân* (Karachi: Madîna Publishing company) p. 55.

‘Shī’īs placed greater emphasis on ziyâra ritual than did Sunnīs. In fact, no Shī’ī theologian opposed making a ziyâra. The institutionalisation of ritual contributed to the formation of pilgrimage centres in the towns and cities of Irâq. Similarly, the devotional role ascribed to the Shī’ī Imâm and the Family of the Prophet in Fâtimid Egypt continued with the successor Sunnî dynasties [...] One of the earliest Ḥanbalî condemnations of ziyâra came from the Baghdâdî jurisconsult and resident of Damascus, Ibn ‘Aqîl (d. 513/1119) [...] who castigates the ignorant and wretched (i.e. the common people) for practices “which they created for themselves”, namely, glorifying tombs and physically coming in contact with them [...] Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) was one of the foremost critics of the cult of saints and the author of several highly controversial legal opinions (*fatâwâ*) and treatises concerning ziyâra, which provide insight into the rituals of saint devotion among Muslims.’<sup>105</sup>

Due to the condemnation of Ziyâra by the Deobandis and Ahlê-Hadîth, who had been influenced by the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abdul Wahhâb, Imâm Ahmad Raza rose to the challenge in defence of medieval Sufism, bringing forth evidence from the Qur’an and Sunna to prove the intervention of Prophets and saints from the most authentic sources. He does his utmost to show his arguments are not based on mere fairy tales but are from the word of God and that of the Prophet himself. Imâm Ahmad Raza believed in the intervention of the spiritual realm in this world, which is a common belief amongst the Sûfîs. Due to the statements of the likes of Ismaîl Dehlawî, Imâm Raza felt compelled to respond. Dehlawî said, ‘Thus even now one who considers any creature to be having partnership in the administration of Allah and take him to be his advocate, he is liable to commit polytheism; though he may not consider him equal to Allah and a power equal to Him.’<sup>106</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza also brought new light to this subject of *Tawwassul* (intercession) with verses from the Qur’an and then traditions from the Ahadith literature.

Mediation of the dead is a perennial controversy widely disputed in Muslim scholarly circles. Some scholars reject the listening of the dead (*sama al-mawta*), while the Ahlê-Hadîth reject the addressing of the Prophet or pious men in their graves in the days of *barzakh* with the aim

<sup>105</sup> Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.

<sup>106</sup> Taqwiyat-ul-Imam (Urdu), p. 61.

of obtaining their intercession (*shafâ'a*) as *shirk*.<sup>107</sup> Ismaïl Dehlawi said, 'Only Allah knows how He will deal with His servants, whether it be in this world, in the grave or the Hereafter. No one knows the reality of these things, whether he be a Prophet or a saint, and even they do not know what will become of themselves or others. And if any of His servants is told a thing through revelation or inspiration, that is still incomplete and to know more than that is not in their power.'<sup>108</sup>

The Deobandis and the Ahlê-Hadîth, continue to argue upon issues like the knowledge of the Unseen, whereas the Muslim masses believe in the difference between the personal knowledge of God and that granted to the Prophets and saints, the latter not being equal to God's knowledge, and thus not understanding the concept of personal and given knowledge. It is also in similar cases that Wahhabis term the average Muslims as apostates<sup>109</sup> because they do not understand the concepts<sup>110</sup> of help and mediation of the Prophets and saints and their having knowledge of the Unseen and being distributors of God's bounties and listening of the dead and calling upon them for help and assistance. Imâm Ahmad Raza explains that Prophetic intervention is after all metaphoric and not in reality a personal attribute of the Prophets and saints and nor is this the belief of any Muslim and it is not strictly prohibited by the Qur'an or Sunnah. To have mistrust in fellow Muslims when they have faith in the ones of Allah should have been enough to convince a person of their faith.<sup>111</sup> Upon the error of the Wahhabis regarding the above concepts, Imâm Ahmad Raza argues that by using the term *shirk* to describe them they are in effect labelling Allah and His Prophet as committing *shirk* if they apply their ideas literally. In his book, '*Al-Amnu-wal-Ulla-li-Na'at-il-Mustafa-bi-Daafi-il-Balaa'*' (With the name of the remover of calamities, the praiser of the Prophet and

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<sup>107</sup> Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.

<sup>108</sup> Taqwiyat-ul-Iman (Urdu), p. 60.

<sup>109</sup> Ismail Dehlawi writes, 'Polytheism is spreading fast among people. The concept of Oneness of God is now hard to find. But, generally, people do not fully understand the real meaning of the unity and plurality of God in spite of claiming themselves to be believers. In most cases they are found to be immersed in polytheism.' (Taqwiyat-al-Iman, English Trans) p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Here the concept which is being discussed is of those attributes which are personal to God i.e. knowledge of the unseen, help from other than Allah and terms which are essentially used for God but can also be used for humans like the attribute of hearing and seeing can be used for both man and God. The difference Imâm Ahmed Raza is referring to is those words which are the same but the concept does not necessarily have to be the same, i.e. God does not require an instrument like an ear to hear, God is free from needs but man needs an ear to be able to hear, without it he cannot hear, so there is difference in the hearing of man and that of God's but the word Samîh (hearer) will be used in a different context when referring to man and God and this is what the Wahhabis fail to understand. And when using terminology like the use of the word Rabb (Lord) other than God Himself, there are many of these examples in the Holy Qur'an, i.e. Prophet Yusuf said, 'Aziz (Pharaoh of Egypt) is my Rabb (Lord) and he kept me well' (Q. 12:23). And similar examples can also be found in the following Qur'anic references (12:41), (12:42), (12:50).

<sup>111</sup> Ahmed Raza, Khân Al-Amnu wal Ulla, (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers) p. 18.

His esteemed status), Imâm Ahmad Raza deals with these theological problems of prophetic intervention and he also gives examples from the Qur'an and Sunnah to clarify his position on these issues. This book was written in response to the Wahhabis's assertion that it was *shirk* to call the Prophet Muhammad the remover of calamities, even if it was said metaphorically. Imâm Ahmad Raza presents irrefutable evidence from the verses of the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the commentaries of exegetes of the Qur'an that help can be attributed to the Prophets, angels and saints as they do so in accordance with the divine will of God and not their own. They have been made administrators of the world because this is *Alam-al-Asbâb* (the world of means).

About the Prophet Muhammad being the remover of calamities Imâm Ahmad Raza presents the following verse from the Holy Qur'an, 'And Allah is not to chastise them, till you are in their midst' (Q, 8:33).<sup>112</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza presents verses from the Qur'an as evidence to show that even the Qur'an testifies to his belief in the Prophets and the saints interceding during their lives and after their physical demise.<sup>113</sup>

Regarding the Qur'anic verse, 'Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid his (cause), for verily Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will)' (Q. 22:40) Imâm Raza explains it thus, 'The scholars of Tafsîr have stated that due to the presence of believers and the pious, punishment was not sent upon the sinners.'<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> He then presents similar verses as further evidence from the Qur'an (21:107), (4:64), (22:40), (2:251), (48:25)

<sup>113</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza mentions the following verse and then explains his belief from his understanding of its content, 'If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful' (Q. 4:64) clearly stated that for the acceptance and forgiveness of sins, the sinner must visit the Prophet, who is the remover of torment and punishments, and curer of sick hearts and remover of calamities is evident from this verse. In reality, Allah the Almighty is capable of forgiving without any intervention or mediation, but He has chosen and favoured this practise of intercession of the Prophet and He said if you want to be forgiven then present yourself before the Beloved Prophet of Allah. *Al-Amnu wal Ulla*, p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza said, 'And the Qur'anic example of the verse, 'They are the ones who denied Revelation and hindered you from the Sacred Mosque and the sacrificial animals, detained you from reaching their place of sacrifice. Had there not been believing men and believing women whom ye did not know that ye were trampling down and on whose account a crime would have accrued to you without (your) knowledge, (Allah would have allowed you to force your way, but He held back your hands) that He may admit to His Mercy whom He will. If they had been apart, We should certainly have punished the Unbelievers among them with a grievous Punishment' (Q. 48:25) This verse was revealed before the event of Fathê-Makkah (conquest of Makkah), when

Taking the matter of mediation further Imâm Ahmad Raza refers to the following Qur'anic verse: 'And there is no victory except with the help of Allah' (Q. 8:10). It is true that there is no victory but by God's help and it is also God who sends His Prophets and Messengers and angels to intervene in man's life. He has created a system of Prophetic and angelic intervention for man. Imâm Raza provides examples of verses as evidence of angelic intervention in the life of man.<sup>115</sup>

After providing Qur'anic evidence of angelic intervention in the world, Imâm Ahmad Raza then gives examples of Prophetic intervention<sup>116</sup> and Prophets being removers of calamities but also cleaners of sin and purifiers of the heart.<sup>117</sup> Not only do Prophets intervene and

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the Prophet went to Mecca to perform Umrah but the polytheists stopped them at the place of Hudaibiyah and did not let the Muslims enter the Holy city of Mecca. A treaty was agreed but upon the surface it was not a sensible move, but in reality it was to bring victory soon upon which Allah said, 'Undoubtedly, We have given you a clear victory' (Q. 48:1). This verse was revealed to assure the Muslims of a great victory, but there was much wisdom due to which entry to Mecca was stopped. There were many converts to Islam, who had not openly declared their faith due to the prosecution of Muslims in the city. And if the Muslims were to attack Mecca, then these converts would have also been victimised in-between the fighting, and there were also those unbelievers who would soon bring faith to Islam and their death would not be acceptable either. It had been due to these reasons that punishment was halted upon the unbelievers of Mecca, and if these had separated themselves from the unbelievers surely they would have received the wrath of God. How clear is the Qur'anic evidence that even the unbelievers are freed from calamities because of Muslims.' *Al-Amnu wal Ulla*, p. 21.

<sup>115</sup> 'For man there are angels in succession before and behind him that protect him by Allah's command' (Q. 13:11). The succession of angels is from morning to Asr prayer and then from Asr to the next morning. And Allah says, 'And He sends guardians over you' (Q. 6:61). In this verse Allah is calling the Angels our protectors and guardians. Another example from the Qur'an is, 'O communicator of the Unseen! Allah is enough for you and those among the Muslims who follow you' (Q. 8:64). Here Allah has joined with his name those of the Companions (Sahâbâ) and said, 'O Prophet, Umr has now brought faith, now Allah and the forty believers are enough for you.' *Al-Amnu wal Ulla*, p. 42.

<sup>116</sup> Here are a few Qur'anic examples used by Imam Raza in his book *Al-Amnu-wal-Ulla*: 'And Allah said to Prophet Jesus, 'And make a clay figure like a bird by My command, then you breathe into it, then it begins to fly by my command, and you cure the born blind, and the leper by My command, and you bring forth alive the dead by My command' (Q. 5:110). And similar Qur'anic examples can be found in (Q. 3:49) and in (Q. 3:50). And Allah said, 'Those who will ..... the Messenger, unlettered, the communicator of the unseen, when they will find with them written in the Tawrah (Torah) and Injil (Gospel). He will bid them to do good and forbid evil, and will make lawful for them clean things and will forbid for them unclean things, and will take off from them the burden and shackles which were upon them' (Q. 7:157). The prophet is one who removed our heavy burden and the shackles from around our necks. Now justice demands this is called being the remover of calamities.' *Al-Amnu wal Ulla*, p. 38.

<sup>117</sup> Imam Raza presents the following Qur'anic examples of this: 'And Prophet Ibrahim prayed to his Lord, 'O our Lord, and send us a Messenger from among themselves, who may recite to them Your signs and teach them Your book and wisdom and may purify them well. Surely, You are alone the Predominant, the Wise' (Q. 2:129). The Prophet said, 'I am the prayer of my father Ibrahim.' And similar Qur'anic examples can be found in (Q. 2:151), (Q. 3:164) and also in (Q. 62:2-4). Imam Raza argues that it is clear from these verses of the bestowing of the Prophet that he does not only purify and cleanse the Sahaba but the believers until the day of resurrection, and the Muslim Ummah will benefit from and stay under his watchfulness. It is stated in *Tafseer Baydawi*, 'And these are others after the Sahaba until the day of reckoning that the Prophet gives knowledge and purifies them from evils.' And it is also mentioned in *Ma'alim-al-Tanzil*, 'Imam Ibn Zaid said they are others of the Ummah of the Prophet until the day of reckoning and this has also been recorded by Imam Mujahid, who is a student of Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas, and this has been related by Ibn Abî Najîh.' Imam Raza states, 'How much praise

intercede but angels and saints also do this, and more, in the spiritual realm, as Imâm Ahmad Raza points out from his interpretation of the Holy Qur’anic text.<sup>118</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza presents many Qur’anic examples to explain his belief that Allah does indeed cause death, but it is stated in the Holy Qur’an, ‘Say you; the angel of death who has been appointed over you causes you to die’ (Q. 32:11). If the angel of death causes death and not Allah, would this also be shirk according to the Wahhâbîs? Imâm Raza also mentions the story of Mary where *Jibrâil* appears to her and says, ‘I will grant you a pure son’ (Q. 19:19). Here Imâm Raza argues that this would also be in the category of *shirk* according to both the Deobandîs and the Ahlê-Hadîth because here *Jibrâil* is granting a son and not God. Thus keeping names such

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has been granted for the leader of creation, Prophet Muhammad, that his attributes have been mentioned in far places, from amongst which two are found in Surah al-Baqarah, a third in Surah-Âlê-Imrân and the fourth in Surah al Jummuah. Another example is of Abû Labbâba, when he and some of the Sahaba could not attend Battle of Tabûk, they then fastened themselves to the pillars of the Prophet’s Mosque and said that they would not move until the Prophet opened the ropes. Upon this the following verse was revealed, ‘O beloved Prophet! Release the poor due (zakah) out of their wealth. To purify them and cleanse them therewith and pray good for them. No doubt, your prayer is solace for their hearts’ (Q. 9:103). Again it is evident that the Prophet cleansed them from sin and removed the calamity of sin from their hearts and if the Prophets prayer is solace for their hearts then what else is being the remover of pain and grief.’ Al-Amnu wal Ulla, p. 41.

<sup>118</sup> The following verses are mentioned: ‘When (O beloved Prophet) Your Lord was revealing to the angels that, I am with you’, keep ye firm the Muslims’ (Q. 8:12). And another example is the verse, ‘Those angels manage the affairs of the world’ (Q. 79:5). To manage these affairs is also an attribute of Allah. It is stated in Ma’alim al-tanzîl that Abdullah ibn Abbâs said, ‘The angels have been appointed to manage those affairs that Allah has taught them about’. Abdul-Rahman ibn Thâbit said, ‘There are four angels who manage the affairs of the world; Gabriel (*Jibrâil*), Michael (*Maikail*), Raphael (*Israfil*) and Azrael (*Izra’il/ malakul-maut*). Jibrâil is trusted with the winds and armies and he guides the winds, and it is he who gives victory or failure to armies, while Maikail is entrusted with rain and growth of vegetation and greens, that he gives forth rain and also maintains the plants, trees and grasses. Izra’il’s duty is to remove souls from the bodies and it is Israfil who brings orders to the other three. It is stated in the hadith of the Prophet, ‘the Holy Qur’an holds many meanings’ (Al-Qur’ânô dhû wujûhin). This hadith is related by Abû Naîm who said it is reported by Abdullah ibn Abbas who heard it from the Prophet. The Ulama have said that the Qur’an is authorized by each of its meanings. And this lets us take the other meaning of this verse as stated in Tafsîr Baydâwî, “In these verses, Allah is mentioning the souls of saints, that when they leave this mortal world, the soul goes beyond the realms of the body towards the heavens where it joins the ranks of the angels and due to its elevated status they become involved in the managing of affairs.” Allâma Ahmad ibn Muhammad Shihâb Khajâfî has said in his book, ‘Innâyat-ul-Qadî-wa-Kiffâya-tul-Râzî’, to strengthen his case that Imâm Ghazâlî and Imâm Fakhr Uddîn Râzî have also said similarly, “For this reason, when you become bewildered then go and ask help from the saints at their shrines. This is not hadith as some have wondered, and it is for this reason that visiting the shrines of the Salaf-as-Saliheen (pious predecessors) and asking for their intercession is an agreed upon matter amongst the Muslims, even though in our times there are some heretics and astray who have objected to it and their mischief is with Allah.” Allah said, ‘Only Allah is your friend, and His messenger and the believers and that they establish prayer and pay the poor due and are bowed down before Allah’ (Q. 5:55). Here Allah, the Prophets and the pious are said to be the helpers only, then surely this is not an exclusive type of help, limited to the pious, which the general and ordinary believers cannot give. As for the ordinary masses, Allah says, ‘And the believing men and believing women are helpers of one another’ (Q. 9:71). And yet He (God) says in another place, ‘They have no protectors besides Him’ (Q. 18:26). All this will be Shirk according to the Wahhabis as the attribute of help is for Allah alone, and the Qur’an is stating that the Prophet and the pious are also be helpers. The people of the Ahl-us-Sunna-wal-Jamma place their faith in some types of verses by understanding the difference between Personal (attributes of God) and that which is granted. Allah is in essence and initially the real helper. This does not belong to any other, and the Prophets and saints are helpers with the will of Allah, by His command. Help is there for the removal of calamities, and when the Holy Qur’an says that the Prophets and His saints are helpers of the believers then surely there will be a difference between the help of the creator and the created.’ Al-Amnu wal Ulla, p. 48.

as Muhammad Bakhsh,<sup>119</sup> Ahmad Bakhsh, while the Qur'an said about the prophet Isa as being Jibrâil Bakhsh (granted by Jibrâil).<sup>120</sup> Ismaïl Dehlawî and his later followers belonging to the Deobandîs and the Ahlê-Hadîth of the sub-continent are resolute that all affairs are managed by Allah himself whereas Imâm Raza holds the belief that Prophetic intercession is open for all times, during the Prophets lifetime and after his physical demise.<sup>121</sup>

Belief in the world of the Unseen is part of the Islamic creed as expressed by Allah in the Qur'an, 'Who believe in the Unseen' (Q. 2:3). Imâm Ahmad Raza sees no harm to Islamic theology from the belief in the spiritual intervention of the Prophets and saints as most of them acquire positions above some of the angels who have already been given duties to carry out in the worldly realm, yet they are not seen by human eyes. As a *Muftî* Imâm Raza delves into the Qur'an and Sunnah to provide answers to all received enquiries and uses *ijtihâd* (independent reasoning) where none can be found.

The Taqwiyyat al-Imâm of Shah Ismaïl Dehlawî was also widely circulated by both the Deobandîs and the Ahlê Hadîth during the lifetime of Imâm Raza as this was causing widespread confusion among Muslims by condemning all practises which Shah Ismaïl saw as *shirk*, especially those beliefs relating to the Prophet Muhammad or the saints. Imâm Raza sees this as an important issue to deal with as Muslims were being called polytheists by reformist groups such as the Deobandîs and Ahlê Hadîth because they held beliefs such as the Prophets and saints could intervene in the worldly affairs of man with God's permission, and such a belief was not contrary to the Sunnî belief system according to Imâm Raza.

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<sup>119</sup> The word Bakhsh is an Urdu word meaning 'being granted.' The Wahhabis argue that having such names is erroneous and not allowed because they mean that you were not granted by Allah but by a human, which is according to them open blasphemy, but according to what Imam Raza has stated 'it is the same argument of personal and given attributes, so in effect it is not Shirk but rather within the boundaries of Islam.'

<sup>120</sup> Al-Amnu wal Ulla, p. 45.

<sup>121</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza's belief in the Prophet being able to intercede and intervene in the affairs of the world is present in his Qur'an translation. While Yusuf Ali and others translate the Qur'an verse 4:64 as 'If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful', this translation obviously privileges the prophetic intercessions during his physical lifetime, therefore the use of past tense in the translation of the verse. But Imam Raza translates the verse using the present tense to express his belief in the prophetic intercession and intervention in the world. He translates the verse thus, stating 'And if, then, after having wronged themselves, O beloved Prophet Muhammad, they present themselves before you and then seek forgiveness from Allah, and the Apostle intercedes for them, they will certainly find Allah as the Most Acceptor Of Repentance, the Most Merciful.' Imam Raza is clearly interpreting this verse in accordance with his conviction that this intercession is open for all times.

## The Prophet as Lawgiver

The Deobandîs and the Ahlê-Hadîth, according to Imâm Raza, took lightly the importance of the Prophetic station (*maqâm al-Nubuwa*) which Imâm Ahmad Raza defended against all odds. The Deobandîs and the Ahlê Hadîth saw the Prophet as one who has no authority to be able to make things prohibited or otherwise, he only does as he is commanded. This was because they did not recognise the Prophet as a vicegerent of God on earth but rather thought of him as a mere postman who had come to deliver the book of God to the human race with no other purpose. This issue concerning Prophetology is called *Ikhtiyaar* (authority). The Prophets have been given authority by God to change laws. In this regard, Imâm Ahmad Raza presents the following verses: ‘*Alif, Lâm, Râ*, this is a book that We have sent to you so that you may bring the people from darkness to light by the command of their Lord towards the path of the Honourable, the Praiseworthy’ (Q. 14:01) and also, ‘And, We did send Musa with Our signs that bring your people from darkness into the light’ (Q. 14:05). The possible rejection by the Deobandîs and the Ahlê-Hadith of the Prophet having authority to change laws could be linked to worldly intervention, which can be loosely linked to the giving of authority by God to his chosen servants. Imâm Ahmad Raza states about these verses:

‘Darkness is a metaphor here for unbelief and corruption whilst light is a metaphor for faith and guidance towards the truth which is the path of honour, praise and worthiness. There is no relation between belief and unbelief (which are two opposites), it is a necessity to remove one from the other. And it is clearly mentioned in the above verses that the Prophet Moses removed them from unbelief and brought them towards faith and Prophet Mohammed released the believers from unbelief and gave them faith. And if this was not the duty of the Prophets then surely they would not have power to do so. Allah commanding them to bring their people out of unbelief would have been an undue burden upon them. It is striking how at variance the following statement of Shah Ismaîl Dehlawî is with the Qur’anic conception of Prophethood: “If the Prophet has said that he has no power, nor any knowledge of the unseen, and that his own state is that he is not able to benefit himself, then what am I to say about anyone else. (The Prophet said) I have no power whatsoever except the proclamation of Prophethood, and the job of a Prophet is that he warns about evil and gives tidings regarding good. (The Prophet said) To convince is not my job to intervene in the world and that to fulfil peoples wishes or gives

victory or loses or enrich or put faith in one's heart and in all these affairs. Big or small are all weak and have no freedom.”<sup>122</sup>

Imâm Ahmad Raza provides plentiful examples from the Qur'an and classical sources to clarify his belief.<sup>123</sup> Imâm Raza also presents many authentic *Ahadith* to show that the Prophet had commanded or otherwise forbidden things of his own accord.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza is summarising the Wahhabist belief found in the book written By Ismail Dehlawi called *Taqwiyya-tul-Imaan*. This can be found in the English translation of *Taqwiyya-tul-Imaan*, p. 29. (al-Amnu wal-Ulla, p. 128)

<sup>123</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza presents two further Qur'anic verses: 'Fight those who believe not in Allah, and in the last Day, and accept not as lawful what Allah and His Messenger made unlawful' (Q. 9:29) and also, 'And it is not befitting to a Muslim man or Muslim woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed something, that they would have any choice in the matter, and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he undoubtedly has strayed away manifestly' (Q. 33:37). Imam Ahmad Raza continues to explain his Prophethology of Ikhtiyâr: 'The Muslim Exegetes in their Qur'anic commentaries have mentioned that the occasion of revelation (Asbâb al-Nuzûl) of the verse (33:37) was that the Prophet purchased Zaid ibn Haritha and then freed him and had also adopted him as a son. Zainab bint Jahsh, was the daughter of the Prophet's aunt Ummayyah bint Abdul Muttalib. The Prophet sent a proposal of marriage to Zainab on behalf of Zaid. As she thought it was from the Prophet, she accepted, but when she was informed it was for Zaid, she rejected it and sent the following message, 'O Prophet of Allah, I am the daughter of your aunt, I do not like to wed such a man.' Her brother Abdullah b. Jahsh also rejected the proposal on the same grounds. It was then that the following verse was revealed. Upon hearing the words of God, both brother and sister repented and thus the marriage was arranged. It is obvious that Allah has not made it compulsory for any women to marry any specific person, and especially when he is not from the same tribe or her social equal, and especially when her status is from the nobility, but it was upon the refusal of the Prophet's words that Allah commanded, as though one had left or missed something obligatory. God has placed the name of His beloved besides His own name, and now if the Prophet tells you to do something that is not from the commandments of the Lord, then even his saying will be obligatory upon the believers and there is no freedom or choice in obeying him. One who does not obey is accordingly astray. Commandments from the Prophet can also become obligatory (*fard*) upon his saying, even if they are not from Allah. It is for this reason the scholars of the religion do not differentiate between the commandments of Allah and His Prophet. The commands of Allah are more than the commandments of the Prophet and the Muhaqiqîn Ulama (research scholars) state that the affairs of the law have been given to the Prophet and it is in his authority if he wants to make something necessary and whatever he wishes, he may prohibit and if he wants he can excuse one from a compulsory duty. Imam Syed Abdul Wahhab Sha'rani (d. ) has written in his book 'Asharia-tul-Qubra', in the chapter of Wudhu, 'Imam Abu Hanifa was among those scholars who had more respect towards Allah than others, and it is for this reason that he did not make the intention for ablution obligatory and referred to the *Witr* prayer as compulsory (*wâjib*). Both these are evident from the Sunnah and not from the Qur'an, and the Imam intended from this that there should be a distinction between the fard commanded by Allah and the fard commanded by the Prophet because the thing which is fard by Allah is more emphatic than that which the Prophetic has made fard from himself, whereas it was Allah who gave the Prophet the authority that he could make whatever he wished obligatory and if not he did not have to'. Al-Amnu wal Ulla, p. 132.

<sup>124</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza presents the following examples from the *Ahadith* literature: 'Once the Prophet of Islam was asked if the Hajj was compulsory every year, the Prophet replied by saying, 'If I said yes, then it would become obligatory upon you every year'. Anas bin Malik has reported that the Prophet said to him, 'If I say something it becomes wajib (obligatory) and if it becomes obligatory and you don't do it then you will be in sin'. This is reported by Anas b. Malik and related by Ibn Majah, Sahêh Muslims, and Sunan Nisâi has related the same hadith reported by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said, 'If I had said yes, then it would become compulsory upon you annually and then you surely would not have been able to do it.' Al-Amnu wal Ulla. p. 135[...]. Imam Qastallânî has written in his book *Mawahib-ul-laduniyyah*, 'among his (i.e. The Prophet's) specialities is that he could exempt anyone and anything from minal-ahkâm (general rulings)', while Allâma Zarqânî commented upon minal-ahkaan, 'It is not related to rulings. He had the authority to specify anything and anyone at anytime'. And Imam Jalâl Uddîn Suyûtî in his book *Khasâis-ul-Qubra* has dedicated a whole chapter on the subject with the heading, 'Ikhtisasihi-bi-annahu-yakhussu-man-shaa'a-bi-ma-shaa'a-minal-ahkaam' (the chapter concerning the speciality of the Prophet that he can specify whatsoever and whosoever

It is evident from the Qur'an and Sunna, according to Imâm Raza, that Prophet Muhammad had this superiority and that he was given leave to do as he saw fit in matters of religion because the Prophets are the most honoured of God's creation, and this should not be taken lightly. They are not ordinary men. Imâm Ahmad Raza points out that the Prophets played a major role in the affairs of the people to whom they were sent and they even intervened when they saw fit. Imâm Raza makes clear his standing on the matter of prophetic intervention as nothing controversial or a matter of dispute as he gives plentiful examples from the Qur'an, the Sunna and Muslim exegetes as well as theologians. Thus he expands the topic of discussion to emphasise that his views and beliefs are anything other than unorthodox.

The authority of the Prophet was another matter which Imâm Ahmad Raza dealt with, as Shah Isma'îl had again said, in his *Taqwiyyat al-Imân*, that anyone who 'even considers the sayings of the Apostle to be the code of Islam and thinks that the Apostle could say of his own whatever he liked, is a polytheist.'<sup>125</sup> The Prophet Muhammad was thus seen as a person who had been sent to deliver the Qur'anic message with no powers of vice-regency. Imâm Ahmad Raza mentions works of earlier classical *Sunnî* personalities who codify the Sunna as Law and such a statement and innovation in belief is probably not heard of before Isma'îl Dehlawî of Delhi, India. Objecting to the prophetic authority on matters of religion is raising serious questions and objecting to the authority of the Sunna and its codification as Law. Thus Imâm Raza saw the extent to which such statements could damage the religion of Islam as a whole, and Imâm Raza did not hesitate to place over 69 charges of *kufr* (unbelief) upon Shah Isma'îl Dehlawî.<sup>126</sup>

### **The Ontological Status of the Prophet**

*'Nûr ê-Muhammadî* is one of the most prominent names given to the pre-existent entity of Prophet Muhammad which preceded the creation of the Prophet Adam. Not all Muslim scholars and theologians agreed on the nature of Prophet Muḥammad's pre-existence.

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from any of the rulings he wants).' *Amnu wal Ulla*. p. 136 [...] 'It is narrated in Musnad Imam Ahmad through a strong chain, narrated by trustworthy men cited by Sahêh Muslim. Muhammad bin Ja'far has narrated to us that Shu'ba has narrated from Qatada who in turn narrated from Nasr bint Ásim, who narrated from a companion that he came to the Prophet and accepted Islam on the condition that he could only pray twice a day (instead of five) and the Prophet agreed to this'. *Amnu wal Ulla*. p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> *Taqwiyyat-ul-Iman* trans. by Badar Azimabadi. p. 53.

<sup>126</sup> Ahmad Raza, Khân, *Al-kawkab al-shahâbîa fi kufriyyât ab al-wahhâbiyya* (Lahore: Nûrî Book Depot) p. 53.

Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) claimed that the primordial creation (*khalq*) of Prophet Muḥammad did not signify pre-existence at all, only predestination (*taḳdîr*). They were opposed by Taḳî al-Dîn al-Subkî (d. 756/1355), who supported the dogma of Prophet Muḥammad's pre-existence as predestination is not a special privilege and not in favour of the Hadith of Jâbir. There was also disagreement on whether Prophet Muhammad was pre-existent in body, soul or otherwise. The controversy brought about the adoption of a somewhat neutral name for the primordial entity of Prophet Muḥammad: *al-ḥaqîqa al-Muḥammadîyya*, the latter term meaning "the Muḥammadan reality", emerges also in the discussions about *al-Insân al-Kâmil*, i.e., the Perfect Man, the archetype of the universe and humanity, which is identified with Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>127</sup>

A Question was sent to Imâm Raza concerning the creation of the *Nûr* of the Prophet Muhammad and the existence of the rest of creation and which hadith this was from and what the category of this hadith was. Imâm Raza replied:

‘Abdul Razâq Abû Bakr ibn Hamâm, who is the student of Imâm Mâlik and the teacher of Imâm Ahmâd ibn Hanbal, Imâm Bukhârî and Imâm Muslim. He has stated in his *Mussannaf* that Jâbir ibn Abdullah Ansârî has reported that he once asked the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Can you inform me of the first creation of Allah?’, and that the Prophet of Allah replied, ‘O Jâbir! Undoubtedly, the first creation is the *Nûr* of your prophet which God created from His *Nûr*.’ That *Nûr* (the Prophet) then encircled space as Allah had willed during which time there was neither the *lawh*, nor the *qalam* (the Pen). Neither Heaven nor Hell nor the angels were created at this point, nor was there any sky, the earth and nor were the sun, moon, jinn or man created yet. When Allah wanted to give form to the universe, He made four parts of that *Nûr* from which the *qalam*, the *lawh*, the *arsh* and then another four parts were then created from which the angels who carry the *arsh*, the *kursi* and the rest of the angels were created. Then again another four parts were made from which the sky, the earth, and heaven and hell were created. And then another four parts were made [...] (until the end of the hadith).<sup>128</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Rubin, U. "Nûr Muḥammadî." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

<sup>128</sup> Ahmad Raza, Khân, *Majmua Rasa'il: Masala Nûr aur Saya* (Mumbai: Raza Academy) p. 8.

Imâm Raza said: ‘This hadith is related by Imâm Baihqi in his *Dala’il al-Nubuwwa* and other such prominent scholars such as Imam Qastalani in his *Muwâhib-al-lidunya* and Imâm Ibn Hajr Makkî in his book *Afdal al-Qurra* and Allâmâ Fâsî in his book *Mutâle al-Mussarrât* and Allâma Zarkânî in his book *Sharh Muwâhib* and Allâmâ Hussain ibn Muhammad Diyâr Bîkrî in his book *Tarîkh al-Khamîs* and Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhadith Dehlawî in his book *Madârij al-Nubuwwa*. All of these eminent scholars have reported this hadith and trusted it and have also made interpretations (*ta’wîl*) of it. As these personalities are authoritative and also held in high regard, this hadith can undoubtedly be accepted as reliable in the category of Hassan Sâleh. After the acceptance of a hadith by such Ulamâ, the need of a sanad is no longer an issue, even if it is weak (*daîf*) in its chain of narration (*sanad*). Shaykh Abdul Ghanî, Nablûsî in his book *Hadiqat al-Nadiyya Sharh Tarîqat al-Muhamadiyya*, said ‘Undoubtedly everything was created from the *Nûr* of the Prophet as it has been reported in the authenticated (*Sahîh*) traditions in meaning.’<sup>129</sup>

And when Imâm Raza was asked to give an explanation about the *Nûrê-Muhammadî* and how best to describe it, he gave the example of the light of the sun reflecting upon different mirrors, which reflect the light of the sun and yet are not apart of it.<sup>130</sup> The example of the

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<sup>129</sup> *Majmua Rasa’il*, p. 9.

<sup>130</sup> Imâm Raza said, ‘Abdul Razzâq has related in his *Mussannaf* that Jâbir ibn Abdullah has reported that the Prophet Muhammad said, “O Jâbir! Undoubtedly, the first creation is the *Nûr* of your prophet which God created from His *Nûr*.” Allah is above the state that something could be separated from Him and become a creation. But the validity of it is based upon its ambiguity as neither Allah nor the Prophet Muhammad has informed us as to how his Prophetic *Nûr* was made and neither can we know the whole truth without being told and this is what is known as something that is ambiguous (*Mutashâbehât*).’ *Majmua Rasa’il*, p. 11 [...] ‘To believe that Allah is a part (*Juz*) of Allah or that any creation is the very essence (*Ain*) or the being of God (*Nafs Dhât-e-Ilâhî*) is unbelief (*kufr*).’ *Majmua Rasa’il*, p. 18 [...] ‘The actual meaning of this creation (i.e. *Nûrê-Muhammadî*) is only known to Allah and His prophet. No one else knows the reality of the person of the Prophet Muhammad. It has been reported in a hadith that the Prophet said, “O Abu Bakr! No one except my Lord knows the essence of my reality” (*Ya Aba Bakrin lam yarifni haqiqâto ghaira rabbî*). The purpose of the creation of all things that exist is the person of the Prophet Muhammad. Had he not been created, nothing would have been created (*Lawlakama khalaktad dunya*). And it was said to the Prophet Adam (by Allah), “Had Muhammad not been created, I would not have created you, the earth or the sky” (*Lawla Muhammadan walâ arda walâ samâ*). The whole creation was created by Allah through the agency of the Prophet.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*, p. 18 [...] ‘For explanations sake, an imperfect example can be said to be of the sunlight reflecting upon a mirror. The sun’s rays reflected upon a beautiful and magnificent mirror due to which it became luminous and the light from this mirror illuminated further mirrors, the springs of water and the winds were all illuminated and this light not only became manifest in the mirrors and springs but they too according to their own capacities illuminated others. Some rays of light shone upon the walls. The range of the *Nûr* is troublesome as it is not able to go beyond the wall where the sunlight cannot reach, for example the inner wall of the veranda, which was not affected by the light. The first mirror was illuminated by the sun directly, whereas the other mirrors and the springs were illuminated by the medium of the first mirror. The ray of light from the sun which illuminated the first mirror was without the sun or any of its part becoming the mirror, thus the other mirrors and springs were

sun and its light reflecting upon mirrors is there to help understand the Hadith of the *Nûr* of Prophet Muhammad, but Imâm Ahmad Raza does not like this example as he mentions that it is imperfect,<sup>131</sup> there being a possibility that people may not have a clear idea about the *Nûr* of the Prophet being an attribute of the prophet or if he was indeed *Nûr* as a creation.<sup>132</sup> When a question was raised upon the use of the word ‘personal *Nûr*’ for the prophet, which stated, ‘to say the *Nûr* of the prophet is his personal *Nûr* is to say that it is a part or piece of Allah, thus being unbelief and this would mean that the prophet is also eternal’, Imâm Raza clearly dismissed the claim that this could be the belief of any Muslim.<sup>133</sup>

Imam Ahmad Raza accepts the reality of the prophet Muhammad to be *Nûr* and the first creation of God and everything is reliant upon the creation of the *Nûr* of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>134</sup> This *Nûr* was the Prophet in his original form, but he was then also born

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illuminated by the first mirror due to which they further illuminated others. Indeed the light of all these is essentially from the sun. The mirrors and springs are themselves only means of receiving, they are neither *Nûr* and nor do they take any part in illuminating. For the purpose of understanding, Allah says, “The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp” (Q. 24:35), otherwise what comparison is the light of the lamp to the *Nûr* of Allah. Only two things need to be made clear, firstly that all things are essentially illuminated by the sun and not that the sun becomes the mirror or that a part of it has been separated to form the mirror and secondly one mirror becomes luminous directly from the sun while everything else receives it through the means of the first mirror. All this is only for explanation, thus not befitting the majesty of God. The sun is in a veil and Allah is above all that is manifest. The sun is in need of means for the furtherance of its light and Allah is not in need of anything, so there is no comparison nor is any such possibility and the means is not even the same.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> Imam Raza states: ‘It is only correct to say that such an example (i.e. that given above about the sun and the mirrors) is incorrect because if it is to be believed as such then creation from the *Nûr* of the prophet will not be possible as such a statement will be against the apparent statement of the hadith. I say that a possible answer would be that Allah gave excessive illumination to the *Nûr* of the Prophet, some of that excess light was taken and thus distributed (according to the words of the hadith to form the creation, from which it came into existence).’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 27.

<sup>132</sup> Imam Raza states: ‘If *Nûr* for the Prophet is to be believed as having the attribute of light, then the prophet will be an attribute and will not be the first creation. How is it possible for the attribute to be existent before the person? Rather the prophet is that *Nûr* which was the first creation of God.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> Imam Raza said, ‘It is not the belief of any Muslim and nor can such be imagined that a Muslim would believe that the *Nûr* of the Prophet or anything is a piece or part of God’s essence and being, God forbid! This would be clear unbelief and apostasy. To express that the *Nûr* of the prophet is God’s personal *Nûr* does not necessitate that it is part or the essence of God, and nor is it permitted to suspect a Muslim as such. Nor do the Ulama or the people mean such a thing in the use of the term which is used commonly (Urf). The term personal is thus used in the common meaning as a figure of speech, such as, ‘I am saying this from my personal knowledge’, meaning it is not from elsewhere or it can be said, ‘I built this Mosque from my personal funds, meaning it has not been built by money from donations and or other communal contributions’ [...] And if it is said to be God’s House (Bayt Ullah), God’s She-camel (Nâqât Ullah) or the Soul of Allah (Rûh Ullah), so then what is wrong is expressing the *Nûr* (i.e. Prophet Muhammad) as his personal *Nûr* which has been elevated and which occupies a special place by his Lord.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 38.

<sup>134</sup> Imam Raza said, ‘As was in the beginning, the universe was reliant upon the *Nûr* of the Prophet Muhammad. Had he not been created then nothing would have come into being and not only this, but the continuation of everything is due to him, and if he were to be removed from the picture, then everything would diminish [...] These things are clear from the example of the sun. Everything was illuminated by the light of the first mirror. So long as they are illuminated, it is with the help of the mirror, but when they turn away from the sun this will cause ultimate darkness to spread everywhere and no matter how hard they try to shine they cannot be anything

amidst man in the human form, thus he was both *Nûr* and human (*Nûr wal-Bashr*). Imâm Raza affirms his belief in the Prophet being both *Nûr* and man, though we are aware that Jibraîl and other angels visited the world in the form of men, even though this was not their real form, thus Imâm Raza also believes in the mystical attributes of the Prophet and that he was *Nûr* in his reality but came to the earth to guide man in the appearance of a man, and this is not difficult for God to do. Another issue which is usually related about the Prophet being *Nûr* is him not possessing a shadow [...]. Concerning the issue of the Prophet having a shadow, Imâm Raza perceives it to be logically possible as angels are made from light and don't possess a shadow and also appear in the form of men.<sup>135</sup>

When Imâm Raza was once asked if the prophet possessed a shadow or not, Imâm Raza thus replied by presenting an exhaustive list of classical scholars of Sunni Islam,<sup>136</sup> after which he provided examples from the works of these scholars.<sup>137</sup> Imâm Raza is showing his clear

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compared with the sun. This is the state of every little atom, the Mighty Throne (Arsh), the earth and all that is existent within and all that is within the world and the hereafter, the jinn, men, angels, the sun, the moon and all that is present and hidden and all the prophets and every creation from its beginning and for its continuation is reliant and in need of the Prophet Muhammad' Majmua Rasa'il. p. 29. [...] 'It is clear from my speech that the Prophet Muhammad is himself Nûr. It has been reported in the hadith, "The Nûr of your prophet" (Nûra Nabiyika), is in reference to "from His (i.e. Allah's) Nûr" (min Nûrehî). The Prophet, while showing gratitude towards his Lord, said "Make me Nûr" (Wajalânî Nûran), and God Himself said in the Qur'an, "There hath come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book" (Q. 5:15). Therefore, what doubt is there of the Prophet being Nûr?' Majmua Rasa'il. p. 32.

<sup>135</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza states, 'The angels are created from the Nûr of the Prophet Muhammad and they (i.e. the angels) do not possess any shadows whereas the prophet is the origin (of their existence), from whose brightness they had been created without a shadow. Then how be it that the prophet who is made from the Nûr of his Lord casts a shadow?' [...] 'It has been reported in a hadith that there is no place in the sky where an angel is not in prostration. If angels had shadows then surely the light of the sun would not reach us or if it would then it would be as partial sunlight through the thick and overshadowing branches of an overgrown tree.' Majmua Rasa'il. p. 47.

<sup>136</sup> Imam Raza said, 'That the prophet Muhammad did not have a shadow is evident from the Ahadith literature and from the statements and those eminent personalities such as Hafiz Razzain Muhadith, Allama Ibn Sabâ who is the writer of Shifâ al-Sudoor, Imam Qadhi Ayâd in his Kitâb al-Shifâ, Imam Muhammad Balkhi Rûmî, Allama Hussain ibn Muhammad Diyâr Bakrî (d. 3rd c). From the Ashâb-e-Sîrâh: Sîrat-e-Shâmî (Ibn Abidîn Shâmî d. 1320), Sîrat-e-Halabî (Ali ibn Burhân al-Dîn d.1044), Imam Jalâl al-Dîn Suyûtî, Imam Shams al-Dîn Abû al-Farâz ibn Jawzî Muhadith in his book Kitâb al-Wafâ, Shihâb al-Haqq wal-Dîn Khajâfî writer of Nasîm al-Riyâdh, Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad khatîb Qastalânî (d. 923) writer of Muwahîb al-Lidunya and Minhâj al-Muhammadîyya, Allama Muhammad Zarqânî Mâlîkî (d.) who is the commentator of the Muwâhîb, Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhadith Dehlawi (d. 1052), Mujaddid-alf-e-Thânî Sarhandî, Bahr-ul-Ulloom Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi.' Majmua Rasa'il. p. 52.

<sup>137</sup> Imam Raza said: 'Hadrat Abdullah ibn Mubarak and Hafidh, Allama Ibn Jawzî Muhadith have both related that Hadrat Abdullah ibn Abbâs reported, 'the prophet did not cast a shadow. If he ever stood in the sunlight, his light would be overshadowing the light of the sun, and if he was ever standing before a lamp, his radiance would lessen the glow of the lamp' [...] 'Qadhî Ayâd says, It is from the signs of Prophethood that the prophet did not cast a shadow in the sunlight or in the moonlight, the reason being that he himself is Nûr' [...] Imam Nasfî has stated in his Tafsîr al-Madarîk, under the Qur'an verse, 'Why did not the believers - men and women - when ye heard of the affair - put the best construction on it in their own minds' (Q. 24:12). He mentioned the following hadith that Hadrat Uthmân ibn Affân had said to the prophet: 'Undoubtedly! Allah has not placed your shadow upon the earth so that no one can put their feet upon it.' Majmua Rasa'il. p. 52/54/58.

position on the matter of the Prophet being *Nûr* and not having a shadow, which affirms the fact of his mystical status and his special status before God.<sup>138</sup> It is possible that rejection of these miraculous features of the prophet had not been a thing of debate or a matter of controversy as we find the mention of the *Nûr* of the prophet in the *Mussanaf* of Abd al-Razzâq (d. 211 AH). Imâm Ahmad Raza does not find any thing from the classical authorities in Sunni Islam that challenges the aspect of the *Nûr* of Prophet Muhammad or his non-existent shadow.<sup>139</sup>

According to Imâm Raza, when something is not found in the hadith literature, it will not be rejected unless it goes against a hadith which is stronger than it and is saying otherwise and contradicts the weaker hadith. The scholars of hadith do not reject narrations which are usually related to the traditions of virtue, merit, praise<sup>140</sup> and to showing the speciality (*khasâis*) of the Prophet.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Imam Raza said, ‘It is the belief of the Muslims that the Prophet is *Nûr* and this does not require any evidence but I will point out for those who reject such belief, Allah says, ‘O Prophet! Truly We have sent thee as a Witness, a Bearer of Glad Tidings, and Warner. And as one who invites to Allah’s (grace) by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light’ (Q. 33:45-46), the word ‘lamp’ (*sirâj*) either means lamp, lustre or the sun, all these meanings are possible as the Qur’an itself addresses the sun with the word *sirâj*, Allah says, ‘And made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a (Glorious) Lamp?’ (Q. 71:16) and also, ‘There hath come to you from Allah a light and a perspicuous Book’ (Q. 5:15). The scholars have said that in the verse (Q. 5:15), the word light (*Nûr*) refers to the Prophet Muhammad. While Imam Ja’far al-Sâdiq states about the verse, ‘By the Star when it goes down’ (Q. 53:1) and other exegetes state about the verse, ‘And what will explain to thee what the Night-Visitant is? (It is) the Star of piercing brightness’ (Q. 86:2-3), some exegetes have said that the word star (*najm*) and the star of piercing brightness (*najm al-thâqib*) is meant for the Prophet Muhammad. Sahêh Bukhârî and Sahêh Muslim and others have related on the authority of Hadrat Ibn Abbâs that the prophet used to say the following supplication, ‘O Allah grant me light (*Nûr*) in my heart, my eyes, my ears, my nerves, my flesh, my blood, my hair, my body, and light upon my right and left, from above and below, from ahead and from behind and in my every part and make me also *Nûr* (filled with light)’ [...] Ibn Abbâs has also reported, ‘When the Prophet used to speak, it would be possible to see light coming from between his teeth.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 65.

<sup>139</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza said, ‘O dearest! Take the path of the pious predecessors (Salaf-al-Sâleh) with your every step. It has always been acceptable by the scholars of the faith that when a reliable and trustworthy person relates a miracle or speciality (of the prophet), that it is welcomed with open arms and this has been given precedence. And if I did not find the origin of it (i.e. a miracle or speciality of the prophet which was related in another book) in the Prophetic Traditions, I would see that as a fault of my personal search and never would I declare the relation to be false or fabricated. Because it is not mentioned in a hadith and there is no evidence of it found therein, should we refrain from accepting it? Such narrations have always been recorded due to the trustworthiness and reliability of the narrators and why shouldn’t they be so when such matters are acceptable to any rational person.’ *Majmua Rasa’il*. p. 78.

<sup>140</sup> Imâm Raza said in his *Fatwa; Munîr al Ain fi Hukmê taqbûl al-Ibhâmain* in his collection of 30 volumes of *al-Attaya al-Nabbawiyya fil al-Fatâwa al-Razawiyyah*, ‘if it is said that a hadith is not authentic, it does not mean it is incorrect [...] Imâm Ibn Hajr Asqalânî said, “If a hadith is said not to be authentic (*sahêh*), this does not anticipate it being fabricated (*mawdû*).” The weak hadiths which come under virtues (*fadâ’il*) and praise (*manâqib*) are accepted by all the scholars of hadith (*muhadithîn*) [...] For example a practice which has been given persuasion that whosoever does this, he will attain so many good deeds or it contains a praise of a companion that Allah has given him such a status, then to believe in a report of this nature, even if the hadith is weak (*daif*), it would be enough [...] Maulâna Alî Qârî has stated in his *Mawdû’ât al-Kabîr* about the practice of wiping (i.e. to do *mass* of) the back of the neck to be weak but after saying this he said, “it is an agreed upon matter that practices of virtues (*fadâ’il al a’mâl*) are done with weak narrations.” [...] So it will be said when the

lie (*kizb*) of a narrator is not provable (or in doubt) and he says the Prophet said this or there is nothing against it in the Qur'an and Sunna or ijma, then what reason is there for not accepting? [...] Aus b. Mâlik has reported that the Prophet said, "if anyone finds some hadîth of virtue and he has trust in it and has hope of reward of that practice, then he should act upon it and Allah will grant him that reward, even though it was not true." And it is reported in Dâr Qutnî, "Allah will grant him the reward even though the hadîth which has reached him is incorrect." And Ibn Habbân said, "may that hadîth be from me or not." And Ibn Abdullah said, "Even though the narrator of that hadîth is a liar." Imâm Ahmad and Ibn Majah and Aqîl have reported on the authority of Abû Hurairah that the Prophet said, "if you hear of any good attributed to me, may I have said it or not, then I have said it but if you hear of any bad attributed to me, then know that I do not say such things." And the wording of Ibn Majah is, "a good word attributed to me, is from me", and Aqîl reported it thus, "act upon it, may it be from me or not." Such has been reported by the free slave of the Prophet, namely Thawbân, and also by Ibn Abbâs. Khîlî has related from Hamza ibn Abdul Majîd, "I saw the Prophet in my dream at the *Hatîm* at the Holy Ka'ba and requested, "my mother and father be sacrificed upon you O Prophet of Allah! A hadîth has reached us that you have said, "if anyone of you hears a hadîth which speaks of reward and if a person practices upon that hadîth with hope (of receiving a reward) then Allah will reward him, even if that hadîth is wrong (*bâtil*)." The Prophet replied, "Yes! By the Lord of this city, undoubtedly, this report is from me and I have said this." Abû Ya'lâ and Tabrânî in Mujam Ausat have reported on the authority of Syeduna Abî Hamza Anas that the Prophet said, "if someone receives a report of a virtue and he does not believe it, then he will be deprived from that blessing (*fâdl*)." Abu Umr ibn Abdul Bir after relating the above hadîth said, "All the scholars of hadîth (Muhadithîn) are lenient upon the hadîth of virtues and they take these reports from any person, but they are strict upon the hadîth which form the law (*Ahadith al-ahkâm*)." It is obvious from these hadîth that if a person acts upon these ahadîth which state a certain benefit for practicing them, then he should do this with a good intention without searching for the authenticity of the report, then God willing, due to his good intention, he will gain the reward (as promised). [...] with the granting of such a reward, it is apparent that God deals with his servants as they think of Him. This has been reported by the Prophet on the authority of Anas ibn Mâlik in Bukhârî, Muslim, Tirmidî, Nisâi and Ibn Majah. [...] When a person sincerely acts upon something and has hope upon it, then surely, he will not let his hope go to waste, no matter what the state of the hadîth is [...] Even a liar too will sometimes speak the truth, then who knows if he may have reported it truthfully. It is mentioned in Taqrîbo Tadrîb, "when any hadîth is said to be weak, this would mean that its chain of narration has not reached satisfactory and that the report was a lie and it is possible that a liar may have told the truth" [...] it is mentioned in Mawdû'ât al-Kabîr, "the Muhaqiqîn have said that the authenticity, reliability and weakness are all based upon the apparent, but it is possible that an authentic report be fabricated and a fabricated report be authentic, as has been stated by Shaykh Ibn Hajr Makkî in his *Ifâda*." The benefit of the Prophetic traditions (*ahadîth*) reported by the *Awliya*: it is for this reason that there are many Prophetic traditions that the scholars of hadîth have said to be weak and not trustworthy, yet the scholars of the hearts, the knowers of the supreme reality (*Urafâ*), the scholars of Sufism (*Ârifîn*), the leaders of the Sûfis (*Sâdât al-Mukâshifa*) accept these reports as trustworthy and reliable and attribute them to the Prophet. Besides this they bring many new Prophetic traditions which the scholars of hadîth do not find in their large and voluminous records, even though they fear Allah more than those who mock them and they have more knowledge of Allah and it is they (i.e. the *Awliya*) who were careful in attributing any statement towards the Prophet of Allah. Allah said, "Each party rejoicing in that which is with itself" (Q. 30:32) and, "He knoweth best who they are that receive His guidance" (Q. 6:117). And the hadîth related in Mîzân Mubâarak is, "My Sahaba are like the stars, whichever you follow among them, you will be guided." And it is said about this hadîth, "even though there is disagreement upon the scholars of hadîth about this Prophetic tradition, it is authentic according to the *Ahlê Kashf*." It has been stated in *Kashf al Ghumma an-Jamî al-Umma*, "The Prophet said, "One who sends blessings (*salawât*) upon me, his heart will be purified from hypocrisy as the clothes are cleansed by water". The Prophet is also known to have said, "Whoever recites '*Salalâho alâ Muhammad*', then he has opened for himself seventy doors of mercy (*rahmah*), Allah will place his love in the hearts of men and no one will hate him except that person whose heart is filled with hypocrisy." Our elders (*Shuyûkh*) have said, "This hadith and the one before it, we have related them from some of the *Awliya* and they have related it from Syeduna Khidr who in turn reported it from the Prophet himself. Both these ahadîth are very authentic according to us even though the scholars of hadîth may not see them as provable according to their technical terminology (*Istilâh*). It has been related by Shaykh Ali Khawath in Mîzân Sharîf, "In the manner it is said that whatever the scholars of hadîth have reported with an uninterrupted authentic chain or narration (*Sanadê Sahêh Mutasil*), its chain can be traced back to Allah Almighty, in the same way it will be said that whatever the *Ahlê Kashf* have reported from the knowledge of the ultimate reality (*Ilmê-Haqîqat*) Syeduna Abû Yazîd Bustâmî said to those who denied and mocked the Sûfis, "You have gained your knowledge from those who have died and we have gained our knowledge from the one who never dies (i.e. Allah)." [...] Imâm Jalâl Uddîn Suyûtî had been blessed 75 times with the vision of the Prophet Muhammad and he also gained much insight about the Prophetic traditions, especially those which had

All Muslim theologians agree to the validity of the belief that Prophet Muhammad is the light of guidance (*nûr al-hidâyâ*) in a symbolic or metaphorical (*ma'nawî*) sense. The contention is related to the belief that the Prophet Muhammad was the first creation of God and this, too, not in the form of the soul or the body, but in actual form of light. Here the word should be taken ambiguously as it is not possible to know how the word light is being used. Imâm Ahmad Raza believed the Prophet Muhammad to be the embodiment of light. His reality is not known to any person even though he was human in his appearance, because the Muhammadan reality is only known by God. Similar ideas can be found in the Christians scriptures.<sup>142</sup> Here the light or word are both directed towards God, He created His word or light from which all things came into existence as explained in the Ahadîth literature about all creation coming into existence from prophet Muhammad. From this we can understand why

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been classified as weak by the scholars of hadîth, he clarified and authenticated them. Further details of this can be found in the book *Mîzân al-Sharîat al Kubrâ* written by Imâm Abdul Wahhab Sha'rânî. [...] No matter what is said about the chain of narration, or its weakness etc., no fault can be placed upon the hadîth as it is possible that the report was true and when there is doubt of truth, the person who sees benefit in practicing it does no harm (to anyone). The works of religion and the world are all based upon hope and then what logic is there in refraining from an act due to a problem in the chain of narration. It is possible that the hadîth maybe true and then he has become deprived of its blessings and, if it was fabricated, then what harm is done by acting upon it. But understand this well and stay strong upon this and do not be among those who are arrogant. [...] when we find that there is so and so benefit from practicing this hadîth and the sharia has not prohibited these practices, then why should we indulge in any further scholarly endeavours, if the hadîth is authentic. Otherwise act upon it with a good intention and reap the reward. Allah said, "Say: "Can you expect for us (any fate) other than one of two glorious things." (Q. 9:52). Khan, Ahmad Raza. *al-Attaya al-Nabbawiyya fî-al Fatâwa al Razawiyah* (Gujrat: Markaz-e-Ahle sunnat Barâkate Raza 2006)

<sup>141</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza states, 'For those with little insight into the works of hadith and *Sîra*, who are unaware, here are a few examples, 'A fly never sat upon the sacred body or blessed clothes of the prophet', Allama Ibn Sabâ has recorded this narration in the prophet's specialities (*khasa'is*) and he has also expressed that the narrator (*râvî*) of this report is unknown, still the scholars continued to relate this in their books without any hesitation or suspicion. Qâdhî Ayâd has related, 'Flies would never sit upon the sacred body and blessed clothes of the prophet'. Imam Jalâl al-Dîn Suyûtî stated in his *Khasa'is al-Kubra*, 'Qâdhî Ayâd in his *Shifâ* and *Irâqî* in his *Mawlid* have related that it is one of the specialities of the prophet that no fly would sit upon him'. Shaykh Mullâ Ali Qârî (d. 1014) has said in his *Sharh Sham'il-e-Tirmidhî*, 'Râzî has related that flies would not sit upon the prophet's clothes and nor would mosquitoes bite him.' Allama Khajâfî has stated in his book *Nasim al-Riyâdh* that scholars have said that the narrator of this report is unknown, however they still relate that it is significant and some scholars of the *ajam* have also stated due to this report that the statement of 'Muhammad al-rasullullah' (as written in the Arabic language), does not have any dots. As no fly would sit upon the prophet's body or clothes, this is also symbolised by no dots on the letters upon this statement, as the dots are the likeness of flies.' *Majmua Rasa'il*. p. 79.

<sup>142</sup> The Christian Bible says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.' (John 1:1-5). This is a similar case, but here the term word is used instead of light. The Christians believe Jesus to be the second person in the Trinity but in Islam prophet Muhammad is seen as the beloved servant of God, the pride of creation, as there is no greater station than that of servitude in Islam. It is also reported in the Gospel of Barnabas, 'Jesus answered, 'the name of the Messiah is admirable, for God himself gave him the name when he had created his soul, and placed it in the celestial splendour. God said: 'Wait Muhammad; for thy sake I will to create paradise, the world, and a great multitude of creatures, whereof I make thee a present, insomuch that whoso shall bless thee shall be blessed.' Gospel of Barnabas, ed. by M.A.Yusuf (Lahore: Muslim Educational Trust) p. 105.

Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the following verses keeping in mind these theological aspects instead of the literal translation as others have done. Robinson says, ‘the most noteworthy characteristic of *Kanz-ul-Imân* is the enhanced status which it ascribes to the Prophet. When Allah addresses him directly in the second person singular, the translator frequently inserts the words ‘O beloved’ (Q. 2:150,186,243,246; 33:3; 107:1 etc.) or ‘O beloved prophet!’ (e.g. Q. 2:137), despite the absence of anything corresponding to them in the Arabic text.’ Here Imâm Raza is corresponding to the Qur’anic verse (Q. 2:150) The reason why Imâm Raza addresses the prophet in second person by stating, ‘And O Beloved Prophet, wherever you come from, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque.’ Throughout Imâm Raza’s translation, when Allah addresses the prophet directly in the second person singular, the translator frequently inserts the words ‘O Beloved’ despite the absence of anything corresponding to them in the Arabic text. This is due to the reason that Imâm Ahmad Raza keeps in mind, that there is a difference between the speech of God and Man. God can speak to his servants as He pleases but Imâm Raza keeps the aspect of respect (*adab*) for the prophet in mind. As Allah said in the Qur’an, ‘Do not raise your voices higher than the voice of the knower of the Unseen (Prophet), nor speak to him loudly the way you shout to one another, lest your deeds go to waste whilst you are unaware’ (Q. 49:2). And when Imâm Ahmad Raza rendered the verse (Q. 103:1) as, ‘By the era of the beloved (Prophet)’, as Imam Raza believed that prophet Muhammad is the first of God’s creation, so here time would refer to the blessed life time of the prophet Muhammad, as no time is better than his. But Yusuf Ali generalises it to, ‘By (the Token of) Time (through the ages).’ To understand the translation of Imâm Raza of other such verses, e.g. (Q. 55:1-4), one needs to understand his theology, and only then can these verses be put in context.

Imâm Raza sees the Prophet Muhammad as him being the reason of creation, and his existence the purpose of creation as God is not in need or reliant upon anything. This is most probably why he uses the language of utmost respect towards the Prophet even when translating verses of the Qur’an because he sees his work as a translation and is aware that it can in no way resemble the Qur’an itself in Arabic; after all it is only a rendering of the original. His realisation of the status of the Prophet Muhammad before Allah made him even more humble towards the Prophet. This is why we probably find that Imâm Raza does not restrict himself to just a literal translation, but also includes terms and words which are based upon his theology, thus his translation is an interpretive translation of the Qur’an.

## Chapter 2

### The Qur'anic Translation of Imâm Ahmad Raza

Qur'anic translation and interpretation not only literally translates the Qur'an word for word but also requires a person to be familiar with what can be called the Qur'anic sciences (*Ulûm al-Qur'an*) which contribute to the proper understanding of the message of the Qur'an. Having gradually developed based on the earliest Islamic sources it serves as the primary guideline for historical, technical, linguistic, stylistic, jurisprudential, interpretative and exegetical issues in the study of the Qur'an.<sup>143</sup> Professor Abdal Rahmân Doi says, 'As the matter of exegesis (*tafsîr*) writing is no ordinary work meant for anyone, we find strict ordinances and regulating of this science. Some scholars have discussed the qualifications of a *Mufasssir*. The following criteria maybe applied: philology of language (*Ilm al-lugha*),<sup>144</sup> syntax (*Ilm al-nahw*),<sup>145</sup> etymology (*Ilm al-sarf*),<sup>146</sup> derivatives (*knowledge of ishtiqaq*),<sup>147</sup> knowledge of semantics (*Ilm al-Ma'ânî*),<sup>148</sup> knowledge of figures of speech (*Ilm al-Bayan*),<sup>149</sup> knowledge of rhetoric (*Ilm al-Badî*),<sup>150</sup> knowledge of the art of pronunciation (*Ilm al-Qira'a*),<sup>151</sup> knowledge of the fundamentals of faith (*Ilm al-Aqa'id*),<sup>152</sup> principles of jurisprudence (*Usûl al-Fiqh*),<sup>153</sup> knowledge of circumstances or revelation (*Asbâb al-Nuzûl*),<sup>154</sup> knowledge of commandments and abrogations (*Al-Nâsîh wal-Mansûkh*),<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Al-Bayan journal of Al-Qur'an & al-Hadith. Vol. 6 (May 2008), p. 87

<sup>144</sup> This helps in understanding the appropriate meanings of words (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an)

<sup>145</sup> A branch of Arabic grammar, which helps in understanding the relationship of a part of the sentence with another, also known as *Ilm al-I'râb* (knowledge of vowel sounds and diacritical symbols) of the letter of a word. A change of *I'râb* often implies change in the meaning. Doi, Abdal Rahmân. Introduction to the Holy Qur'an (Pretoria: Al-Madinah Publishers, 1998).

<sup>146</sup> This is also a branch of Arabic grammar, which helps to identify the roots and conjugations. The meaning of a word changes with the change in the root and with a change in conjugation. (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an)

<sup>147</sup> It is necessary to have knowledge of derivatives and their root words, because if a word has been derived from two different root words, it will have two different meanings, e.g., the word 'masih' is derived from 'masah' which means to touch or move wet hands over, and also from 'masahah' which means measurement (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>148</sup> As phrase constructions are understood from their meanings. (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an)

<sup>149</sup> Knowledge of similes and metaphors, due to which expressions or shades of meanings or similes and metaphors become known (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>150</sup> The knowledge which reveals the beauty of language and its implications (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>151</sup> This knowledge is important because the different methods of pronunciation can sometimes convey different meanings, and sometimes one meaning is to be preferred over the other (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>152</sup> This is important to be able to explain certain analogies (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>153</sup> Knowledge of this is important for reasoning out and finding arguments in the basic support of statements (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>154</sup> The meaning of a verse will be better understood if we know how and when it had been revealed. Sometimes the true meaning of a verse is understood only if we know the circumstances in which the verse was revealed (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>155</sup> Knowledge of commandments that have subsequently been abrogated or changed, so that abrogated commandments maybe distinguished from standing ones (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ilm al-Fiqh*),<sup>156</sup> knowledge of the Prophetic Traditions (*Ilm al-Hadîth*),<sup>157</sup> and gifted knowledge from Allah (*Ilm al-Mawhibâh*)<sup>158, 159</sup>

Below I have divided the verses for examination into several sub-sections: translation, language, Islamic monotheism and prophetology. It is possible to observe the distinctive features of the translation of Imâm Ahmad Raza and their contrast to other modern day Muslim and non-Muslims alike.<sup>160</sup> The translation of the *basmallah*<sup>161</sup> is a feature of Imâm Raza's insight into Qur'anic translation.<sup>162</sup> Below we can appreciate his expertise and method of translation, taking into consideration exegesis and other matters before translating.

- 'In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful' (Yusuf Ali.).
- 'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful' (N.J. Dawood).

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<sup>156</sup> Only through this knowledge that we can arrive at a better understanding of general principles (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>157</sup> Knowledge of the Prophetic Traditions that happen to be a commentary on certain brief verses of the Qur'an.(Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>158</sup> The gifted understanding bestowed by Allah upon His selected ones (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an).

<sup>159</sup> Introduction to the Holy Qur'an. p. 59.

<sup>160</sup> Though the original interpretive translation of Imâm Raza is in the Urdu language, several English renderings of it are available in the market place today. The reason for my choice of other English translations was due to the fact that translations which are available in the Urdu language are similar to those of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's etc. For example, Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English translation of the Qur'an has been printed alongside the Urdu translation of Shaykh Ashraf Ali Thânvî. Many scholars are now comparing the modern English translations with that of Imâm Raza's, so it is only correct to make a comparison between the modern English translations of the Qur'an and that of Kanz ul-Imân.

<sup>161</sup> The Basmallah is an Arabic language noun which is used as a collective name of the recurring phrase '*bismillah-irrahma-nirra-heem*', in Islamic terminology. It is recited before beginning the recitation of a chapter of the Holy Qur'an except the ninth chapter.

<sup>162</sup> 'The preposition 'Ba' has several connotations in the Arabic language but the most appropriate here are the following: Contiguity, to seek aid, to seek blessings. The Word 'Ism' would be translated as name and the word 'Allah' is the great name (*al-Ism al-A'zam*) of God and not an attribute as His other names are and it refers to Him personally and cannot be given to anyone else. This is why the word does not have a plural or dual as Allah has no associate. Thus, the phrase '*Bismillahi*' has these three respective significations according to the three connotations of the preposition 'Ba': (a) With the name of Allah, (b) With the help of the name of Allah, (c) With the blessing (*barakah*) or benediction of the name of Allah. But, in all the three forms, the phrase obviously remains incomplete unless one mentions the work which one intends to begin with the name of Allah or with its help or benediction. So, according to the rules of grammar, some verb is taken to be understood here which should be suitable for the occasion e.g., 'I begin or recite with the name of Allah.' Propriety demands that even this verb should be understood to occur after the phrase, so that one does actually begin with the name of Allah and the verb does not precede His name. The preposition 'Ba' has, however, to be placed before the name of Allah, for it is an exigency of the Arabic language.' Muftî Shafî Usmâni, Ma'âriful Qur'an [online]. [www.central-mosque.com](http://www.central-mosque.com) [cited on 14 September 2010]. Available from: <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/7345435/Maariful-Quran>>. It was this for reason that Imam Raza translated the Basmallah in the Urdu language beginning with the name of Allah, thus saying, '*Allah kê nâm sê*'. The equivalent of this would be 'In Allah's name', as it would not be grammatically correct to actually begin in Allah's name as it is possible to do in the Urdu language and he is the first and only scholar to have used it as such in his native language. All other translators before or after him have all begun with '*Shurû karta hoen Allah kê nâm sê*'. No other translation of the Qur'an is available with such a translational approach.

- ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful’ (Taqî ud-Din Al-Hilâlî and Muhammad Muhsin Khân).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the verse as, ‘In Allah’s Name, the Most Affectionate, the Merciful.’<sup>163</sup>

It is possible from this to see the insight of Imâm Raza. He did not translate the ‘*basmallah*’ with ‘in the Name of’, but instead began with the name of Allah. It is important to understand that the *basmallah* is composed of three letters ‘*Ba*’, ‘*Ism*’ and ‘*Allah*’. Where other translators have translated the *basmallah* very literally, Imâm Raza explores all possibilities of translating it and finally achieves the essence of the *basmallah* by actually beginning with God’s name without having to say ‘in the name of’ and instead shortening it to ‘in Allah’s name’. To actually begin in Allah’s name is the essence of *basmallah* and with him being a *sûfi*, everything begins and ends with Gods blessed name.<sup>164</sup>

In the Chapter of Fâtiha, verse five, we may compare the standard translations with that of Imâm Raza:

- ‘Guide us to the straight path’ (T. M.).
- ‘Show us the straight way’ (Y. A.).
- Imâm Raza translates it thus, ‘Guide us whilst on the straight path.’

The difference in translation is quite visible; Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Dr Muhsin Khan’s translations start with ‘Guide us’ and ‘show us the straight path’, whereas the translation of Imam Raza is in line with the Qur’anic concept of guidance;<sup>165</sup> he is aware that the translation

<sup>163</sup> The Urdu translation of Imâm Raza of the Basmallah begins with the name of Allah, making it distinct from other translations. As doing so is not possible in the English language, the closest translation would be ‘In Allah’s name.’

<sup>164</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza said, ‘The Prophet of Islam had undoubtedly propagated the truth stating, ‘Listen! There is no reality except that of Allah’s. And it is common today that the ordinary folk say that the first half of the shahadah means ‘There is no one worthy of worship except Allah’, and the exclusive say it means ‘there is no purpose except that of Allah’, and the more superior say it means, ‘There is none visible except Allah’, and those who have reached the utmost station says it means, ‘There is none existent except Allah’. All these meanings are correct but the testimony of faith relies upon the first and piety is dependant upon the second while the way of the Sâlik is the third and realisation of God is dependant upon the fourth. Ulûmê-Mustafa, p. 122.

<sup>165</sup> Shaykh ul-Hadîth wal-Tafsîr Ghulâm Rasûl Saîdî has stated, ‘[...] Allah said about the guidance of intuition, the senses and also the intellect, “Did We not make two eyes for him? And a tongue and two lips? And did We not guide him to the two elevated things? (Q. 90-8-10), and then Allah said concerning guidance upon the religion and law, ‘And regarding the Thamud, We showed them the right path - so they chose to be blind above being guided’ (Q. 41:17) and then said about the being graced with guidance by Allah, ‘guide on whilst on the

of the Holy Qur'an is not a mere translation; it should be understood that to show and to guide are something which the Qur'an has commanded the Prophet Muhammad to also inform the non-believers about, so asking to be shown the straight path would not suffice, as the Holy Qur'an is a source of Guidance. Thus the correct prayer is to ask to stay firm on the guidance of the Qur'an, for anyone can be shown the straight path, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Example three: Q. 2:48:

- 'Nor shall intercession be accepted for her, nor will compensation be taken from her nor will they be helped (from outside).' (Y. A.).
- 'When no intercession matter nor ransom avail, nor help reach them. ' (Ahmad Ali).
- 'Nor will intercession be accepted from him nor will compensation be taken from him nor will they be helped.' (T. M.).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates it thus, 'And nor will any intercession be accepted for the infidels and nor shall his soul be freed for any compensation and nor shall they be helped.'

When looking at the different translations of the above Qur'anic verse, the differences in the translations is obvious. This verse was explicitly revealed for non-Muslims and knowing this for the ordinary Muslims would be impossible as they don't have access to Qur'anic commentaries and thus would beat the objective of a good translation. While translators have not taken this into account when translating the verse, Imâm Raza has also included the word infidels to highlight and inform the reader that this verse is for the infidels and not for the Muslims, while the other reason for him doing this would have been the theological significance of intercession in Islamic thought.

This is yet another example of the faithful rendering of the Qur'anic verse and the insight of Imâm Ahmad Raza into the art of translation by not just taking the literal meaning of the

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straight path' (Q. 1:5). Our goal is the vision of Allah and the destination is heaven, for us to reach our goal Allah has given us the guidance of intuition, the senses and the intellect and then he sent Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an for us that we may have the guidance of the religion and law. Only after that do we pray, 'O Allah! Guide us in the religion of Islam and grace us with your infinite Mercy that we may be given a way to heaven.' [...] In the Qur'an where guidance (*hidâyat*) has been mentioned in reference to the Prophet, it is used in terms of the Prophet being the one who shows the path as the Qur'an says, 'and indeed you surely do guide to the Straight Path' (Q. 42:52).' *Tibyân al-Qur'an*. Vol. 1. p. 219

Qur'anic words but also considering the theological aspect and understanding the classical exegetes of the Qur'an. The translation of Imâm Raza, is self-explanatory and also kept in mind the original text and the flow of the translation. Imâm Raza has made exegetical explanations within the translations rather than having exegetical notes at the bottom of the pages of the Holy Qur'an; this also helps the reader to gain full understanding of the context of the verse instead of having to refer to Qur'anic commentaries.

Example four: Q. 3:54:

- 'And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah' (Y. A.).
- 'And they (disbelievers) plotted (to kill Jesus), and Allah planned too. And Allah is the best of planners' (T. M.).
- 'But they (unbelievers) contrived a plot, and God did the like; and God's plan is the best' (A. A.).
- Imâm Raza translates it thus, 'And the infidels plotted and Allah secretly devised for their destruction and Allah is the best of secret devisers.'<sup>166</sup>

In the translation of the above verses, the words plot and planned are used for both the non-believers and then also for God. Imâm Raza did not see the words plot and plan befitting the Majesty of Allah Almighty and thus decided to use the equivalent of devise in the original Urdu language. Imâm Raza is very selective for the vocabulary and the usage of words to explain and give them their fullest meaning when a word has several meanings in the Arabic language.

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<sup>166</sup> The late chief Justice of Pakistan and eminent Barêlwî scholar, Shaykh, Pîr Karam Shah al-Azharî, said with regard to the problematic word '*makr*' in his tafsîr, 'In every language there are words which have various meanings and the people of these languages use these words in their different uses. When one of the meanings becomes popular in the use of another language and one of its variants is used, we become puzzled because we only know the meaning which has been popularly used rather than its other forms and this is the case with the word '*makr*', which is used in the Arabic language for plotting but is also used with the meaning of secretly devising to make the plots of the conspirator unsuccessful.' Muhammad Karam Shah, Tafsîr Zia ul-Qur'an (Lahore: Zia al-Qur'an Publications) Vol. 1. p. 234

## Monotheism & Polytheism in the Qur'an

The topic of monotheism (*tawhîd*) and polytheism (*shirk*) is at times misinterpreted by the followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab.<sup>167</sup> This can cause many theological problems because of the translations and their understanding by literalists who at times do not favour the interpretation of classical exegetes of the Holy Qur'an. The problem with the Wahhabist movement and its kind is that they not only misquote Qur'anic verses but also deliberately translate specific words of the Holy Qur'an in an unsuitable manner; we shall examine this in the forthcoming examples:

Example one; Q. 89:14

- 'For thy Lord is (as a guardian) on a watchtower' (Y. A.).
- 'Your Lord is certainly in wait' (A. A.).
- 'Verily, your Lord is ever watchful (over them)' (T. M.).
- Imâm Raza translates it thus, 'Undoubtedly, nothing is absent from the sight of your Lord.'

The translation of this verse by Imâm Raza is exemplary and here he not only translates the verse without losing the meaning of it, but also keeps in mind the reasons for revelation and his choice of words which would be disrespectful or not befitting the Majesty of God. When Imâm Raza does not find a suitable word to fit the original word, he uses the sentence structure to give full meaning of the word through the expression of the verse cited. Here he refrains from using watchtower, wait and watchful and instead uses 'the sight of Allah.'

Example two; Q. 68:42

- 'The day that the shin shall be laid bare' (Y. A.).
- 'On the day the great calamity befalls' (A. A.).
- '(Remember) the day when the shin shall be laid bare (i.e. the day of resurrection)' (T. M.).

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<sup>167</sup> The problem here is the same as is found in the earlier chapters where the debate is a matter of understanding the concepts from a broad view rather than limiting everything in the sphere of *tawhîd* to literal and outer meaning of the Qur'an and Sunna.

- Imâm Raza translates it thus, ‘The day when a leg shall be exposed (the meaning is known to Allah).’

The above translations of the verse are quite different from each other, the reason being that this verse is among the ambiguous verses (*mutashâbihât*) and cannot be understood due to its nature. The translations above do not give any information about this verse which could confuse the reader as the translations do not have footnotes for this verse to explain its ambiguous nature which is only known to Allah, whereas Imâm Raza mentions this in brackets next to the verse. This verse is ambiguous and mentions a body part for God, but we are well aware that Allah does not have a physical body like humans and his existence is unknown to finite beings because of His infinite nature.

Imam Raza translated the Qur’anic verse of Allah’s *Istawa* (being established) upon the Throne as ‘He, the Most Affectionate, is established on the Throne (befitting His dignity)’ (Q, 20:5). This verse is also ambiguous and the exact meaning of the word *Istawa* is about God and thus cannot be understood by humans, because Allah says in the Holy Qur’an ‘Nothing is like Him’ (Q, 42:11). Imâm Raza explains in detail here that the *Kursi*<sup>168</sup> is a creation of Allah as well as the Throne, so these things are not infinite but finite and should not be thought of as with Allah or a part of His being and existence but should be seen as separate entities. Many of the anthropomorphists have erroneously stated that the stool is the place of Allah’s feet and people could interpret the fact as if the distance between God’s legs is 500 hundred years, whereas Imâm Ahmad Raza has carefully stated that this is the distance between the thighs and feet of the angels, because if we thought of God in such a manner it would be limiting Him to time and space, and they cannot contain Him due to His infinite nature.

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<sup>168</sup> Imam Ahmad Raza is very careful when attributing anything to God without evidence. In the case of the reality of the kursi, Imam Ahmad Raza said, ‘The Hadith literature and the Shariah have not given a clear description of the Kursi [...] However, with the assistance of the Ahadith literature (we are able to know the following from it), the Kursi encompasses the entire earth and skies. It has legs made of rubies. Presently four angels are carrying it on their shoulders and eight angels will carry it on the Day of Resurrection. This is clearly proclaimed in the Holy Qur’an, ‘And the angels will be at its sides, and eight (angels) will carry the throne of your Lord above them on that day’. The distance between the thighs and feet of these angels is equivalent to 500 years journey, Allah is great! The reason why the verse is called Ayat-ul-Kursi is because the chapter speaks about the Kursi, ‘His (Allah’s) Throne encompasses the earth and skies’. One cannot imagine the vastness of the skies [...] Allah’s Majesty is infinite and eternal and the rest of His creation is finite and non-eternal. Hence, comparison between eternal and non-eternal is impossible.’ *Al-Malfuz Al-Sharif*, p. 525.

Imam Abu Jafar at-Tahâwî (d. 321 A.H) said the beliefs of the Muslims concerning the Arsh and the Kursi, ‘*Al-Arsh*’ (the Throne) and *Al-Kursî* (the Stool) are true. He (Allah) is independent of the Throne and what is beneath it. He (Allah) encompasses everything and is above it, and what He has created is incapable of encompassing Him.<sup>169</sup>

Example three; Q. 16:20

- ‘As for those they call besides Allah, they cannot create a thing, and have themselves been created’ (A. A.).
- ‘Those whom they invoke besides Allah create nothing and are themselves created’ (Y. A.).
- ‘Those whom they (*Al-Mushrikûn*) invoke besides Allah have not created anything, but are themselves created’ (T. M.).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates it thus, ‘And those whom they worship besides Allah create nothing but they are themselves created.’

In the above verse, the majority of the translators made a literal rendering of the Arabic word ‘*Yad’ûna*’ as ‘to invoke’ or call upon, instead of using the term ‘to worship’ as had Imâm Raza.<sup>170</sup> The significant difference between using the words invoke, call or worship is that to invoke or call anyone is not unbelief (*kufr*) or polytheism (*shirk*) unless it is associated with worship, so the appropriate translation here according to Imâm Raza would have been the word worship. Even though literally it may be correct to translate it with the words to invoke or call, theologically it would be incorrect and defeats the object of the translation as the people would not understand the context in which it is revealed and for this reason many have misunderstood the meaning of this and other similar verses.

An example of calling upon other than Allah, from the Holy Qur’an is, ‘And our Messenger was calling you in another group’ (Q. 3:153). And an example of calling upon the dead is,

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<sup>169</sup> Ahmed, Muhammad, *Islamic Belief* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy. 1995) p. 11.

<sup>170</sup> Mufti Ahmad Yâr Khan Naîmî (d. 1971) a prominent Bareilwi scholar, while commentating upon the above verse said, ‘There are many verses of this kind where calling upon others than Allah is prohibited and the callers are even called polytheists (*mushriks*). If calling in general is prohibited then to call those who are present, absent, dead or alive would also be forbidden, and if it was thus, then this would be against reason and also the Holy Qur’an.’ *Ilm-al-Qur’an*, p. 16.

‘(O’Ibrahim after slaughtering the birds) thereafter call them, they will come running with their feet’ (Q. 2:260).

To call generally upon someone near or far, dead or alive is not prohibited unless it is done with the intention of worshipping those who are being invoked, and this is also forbidden according to the Holy Qur’an. God said, ‘And whoever invokes besides Allah, any other god, for which he has no proof, then his account is with his Lord’ (Q. 23:117).

To prohibit calling generally would be to contradict the Qur’an and Prophetic Traditions, so this calling which is prohibited in the Qur’an should be categorised and differentiated from general calling. It can be said that any calling associated with idols or deities is prohibited because calling upon a god other than Allah is in effect worshipping them as they are seen equal unto Allah and are also worshipped. This is why Imâm Raza used the word worship in place of call or to invoke so that the general readers do not become misled by Wahhabis who say it is *shirk* to call upon the dead, even though they are not seen as gods, nor are they worshipped, but are seen as God’s beloved friends whom Allah has favoured.

### **Enhancement of the Prophet's Status**

Prophetology is an important branch of the Islamic creed which deals with the belief of Prophethood and all aspects related to the Prophets and Messengers of Allah. For example, the Bible states ‘sin is primarily a wrong against God Himself.’<sup>171</sup> The Bible has many examples of the Prophets of God sinning, which is probably acceptable in Judaism and Christianity as they believe that though these men of God had been blessed and raised above other men they were born with human qualities, which allowed them to become the victims of sins, and examples of this can be found in the following chapters: Genesis 2:17, Genesis 19:30-38, Genesis 27, Genesis 38:14-27, 2-Samuel 11:4, 1-Kings 11:1-6, Jonah 1:3, Lamentations 4:13 and John 2: 3-4. But according to Islamic theology it is not so and the most probable reason why many Muslim theologians and translators have attributed sin to the Prophets of Allah could be the effect of taking information from the Judeo-Christian

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<sup>171</sup> Psalms 51. 4.

(*israîlîyyât*) sources. Let us examine some of the standard translations and that of Imâm Ahmad Raza concerning these issues and his approach in Qur'an translation.

The first example is of the Prophet Adam mentioned in the Qur'an translation by Yusuf Ali: 'Thus did Adam disobey His Lord, and allowed himself to be seduced' (Q. 20:121). And Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the same verse thus, 'And Adam slipped<sup>172</sup> the commandment of his Lord then what he had desired, did not get the way to it.' The difference in the translations is obvious where Abdullah Yusuf Ali and others use the word disobeyed for the Prophet Adam, Imâm Ahmad Raza uses the word slip as if it was not intentional but an accidental error, and when something is done unintentionally, it is not counted as a sin as it is stated in 20:115 of the same chapter of the Qur'an that Prophet Adam had forgotten and Satan had tricked him in thinking it not to be a sin.

It is seen as erroneous by Imâm Raza to attribute *shirk* upon the Prophets of Allah even before they announce their Prophethood and this is a common feature found in many of the translations of the Qur'an. The following Qur'anic verse is used as evidence, which is translated as done by Abdullah Yusuf Ali: 'When the night covered him over, he saw a star, he said: 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said: 'I love not those that set.' When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: 'This is my Lord.' But when the moon set, he said: 'Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.' When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said: 'This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).' But when the sun set, he said: 'O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah' (Q. 6:76-78).

But Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the verses in this way: 'When the darkness of the night came to him, he saw a star, he said, 'you take this as my lord!' Then when it set, said he, 'I do not like the setting ones'. Then when he saw the moon shining, said he, 'you tell this to be my Lord', then when it set, said he, 'if my Lord had not guided me, I would also have been of the same who have gone astray.' Then when he saw the sun shining, said he, 'you say this is my

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<sup>172</sup> Allah says, 'Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord Turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.' (Q. 2:37). Shaykh Ghulâm Rasûl Saîdî states in his tafsîr 'Tibyân al-Qur'ân' concerning this verse, 'Prophet Adam was instructed to do Tawba. The tawba of an ordinary person is that he repents from sin and becomes obedient. The answer to this is that Prophet Adam was repentant upon his unmindfulness of Gods command which he forgot, and it was due to this unmindfulness that he would spend much time crying and asking for forgiveness. This is the tawba of the Prophets and to be repentant upon sin is the tawba of the ordinary people.' (Tibyân-al-Qur'ân, Vol-1. p. 376)

Lord! This is the biggest of all’, when it set, said he, ‘O people, I am quit of all those things which you associate with God.’

These two variant translations contradict each other because, firstly, Abdullah Yûsuf Ali was not a theologian and was probably of the idea that Prophets are not immune from sin before their announcement of Prophethood, and secondly the verse where Prophet Ibrahim is saying ‘this is my Lord’, is a negative question and for this reason Imâm Ahmad Raza has translated it thus, ‘you take this as my Lord!’ because, according to him, it is not befitting the status and dignity of Prophets and Messengers to be stained with the sin or polytheism even before they openly announce their Prophethood to the people, because they are immune from sin (*ma’sûm*) from birth. So there are differing opinions upon the immunity of the Prophets amongst the different schools of thought.

A similar example concerning Prophet Muhammad can be found from the Qur’an in Q. 2:145:

- ‘If thou, after knowledge hath reached thee, were to follow their (vain) desires – then were thou indeed (clearly) in the wrong.’ (Y. A.).
- ‘And if you follow their whims after all the knowledge that has reached you, then surely you will be among the transgressors’ (A. A.).
- ‘Verily, if you follow their desires after that which you have received of knowledge (from Allah), then indeed you are one of the *Zâlimûn* (polytheists, wrong-doers etc.)’ (T. M.).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates the same saying, ‘and (O listener, whoever he maybe) if you should follow their desires after the knowledge that has been given to you, then at that time, you shall surely be of the transgressors.’

If the first three translations of the above verse are believed to be correct, then it must be accepted that this verse was directed at Prophet Muhammad personally. Such reminders, according to Imâm Raza, for the Prophets are not for them, though they may seem to be directed at them. Rather they are aimed at the onlookers and listeners. The Prophets receive information from the Unseen and this is due to the reason that they are chosen by God as a vehicle for transmitting sacred knowledge. After receiving divine guidance from God, they have no reason to turn their backs on God because they have not only been told but are aware

of the realities and spiritualities not visible to ordinary humans. It could in this case only mean that this verse and those which are similar to it - e.g. (Q. 10:94), (Q. 18:110), (Q. 53:55), (Q. 39:23) and (Q. 33:37) - are directed to the Prophet but are in reality implying to the believers that they should not transgress the limits of God, but this does not imply that there are no verses that are directed at the Prophets themselves, examples of which can be found in the verses given above.

Another example is of another verse (Q. 48:2) which, if translated or taken literally, could be misunderstood and thus lead to the erroneous belief that Prophets could sin. Imam Fakhr Uddîn also gives many examples of the Prophets being immune from sin.<sup>173</sup> Let's examine the verse with the various translations;

- 'That God may save you from earlier and subsequent blames, and complete His favour on you, and guide you to the straight path' (A. A.).
- 'That Allah may forgive thee, thy faults of the past and those to follow; fulfil His favour to thee; and guide thee on the straight way.' (Y. A.).
- 'That Allah may forgive you your sins of the past and the future, and complete His favour on you, and guide you on the straight path' (T. M.).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates it thus; 'That Allah may forgive the sins of your formers and of your latter's on account of you and may complete His favour upon you and may show you the straight path.'

It is believed that the Prophets and the Messengers are the hand pieces of God. Another verse of a similar nature appears in which Allah said, 'And be ye not like those who forgot Allah' (Q. 59:19). Imâm Ahmad Raza has dealt with all such verses similarly where translation takes a theological role as a more literal translation just would not do.

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<sup>173</sup> Imam Fakhr Uddîn Râzî has provided overwhelming evidence of the Prophet being immune from sin based upon theology and reason as stated below: (a) If a Prophet could commit a sin, then he would be below the status of his followers because the more pious a person, the bigger his sins will be thought of, so this is not permissible because a Prophet is not less in status than the pious person amongst his followers. (b) If a Prophet could commit sins, then his statement as a witness could not be accepted, as Allah has said if any sinners bring news to you, then do enquire of its reality, whereas the Prophet is accepted witness before Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an, 'And this Messenger your guard and witness' (Q. 2:143). (c) Another reason is if a Prophet could commit sin then it would be a necessity to follow him in it because Allah said to the Prophet to inform the believers, 'Then follow me' (Q. 3:31). In other words, O beloved Prophet! say to your followers, 'follow me', in those circumstances which maybe forbidden or commandments, and if these are combined together then surely this would be impossible. (d) When the word sin (dhanb), is mentioned in the Qur'an for the Prophet, it would mean 'the sins of your family and the believing men and women' and pray for their forgiveness. Taskîn-ul-Janân, p. 281.

## Linguistic translation

Sometimes verses of the Qur'an can be interpreted from other verses when there are many meanings of one word. Imâm Ahmad Raza is very careful when selecting words and phrases that are to be attributed or associated with Allah or His Messenger. Theology plays an important role in the translation and interpretation of the Qur'an in the Qur'anic translation of *Kanz-ul-Îmân* of Imâm Ahmad Raza Khan.

A verse from the Qur'an which has linguistic and theological significances shows how Imâm Ahmad Raza translates, keeping in mind both factors while choosing the words for translation for this specific Qur'anic verse. Before delving into the translation of Imâm Raza, it is possible to see how other translators have not done justice to it according to the Prophetology of Imâm Raza. The verse in question is (Q. 93:7).

- 'And He found thee wondering, and He gave thee guidance.' (Y. A.).
- 'Did He not find you perplexed, and show you the way' (A. A.).
- 'And He found you unaware (of the Qur'an, its legal laws and Prophethood, etc.) and directed you?' (T. M.).
- Imâm Ahmad Raza translates it thus, 'And He found you drowned in His love, therefore gave way unto Him.'

The Arabic word in question here is '*Dhâl*', which has numerous meanings including wondering, perplexed, lazy, idle and unaware of, and the ignored meaning which most people are unaware of (probably due to it no longer being used in the same context) is that of being drowned or madly in love respectively.<sup>174</sup> And those who think of Prophet Muhammad's past life as being in vain do not appreciate his early life from childhood to his announcement of his Prophethood as miracle, for he never worshipped any idols or did wrong to anyone and the Qur'an affirms the purity of his early life, 'A whole life-time before this have I tarried amongst you: will ye not then understand?' (Q. 10:16).

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<sup>174</sup> Muhammad Karam Shah, *Tafsîr Zia al-Qur'an*. Vol. 5. p. 589

The word '*Dhâl*' is used in the same context in (Q. 12:95).<sup>175</sup> Before discussing the historical aspects connected to the story of this verse, let us compare the translations of this verse:

- 'They said, 'By God, you are still persisting in your old delusion' (A. A).
- 'They said, By Allah! Truly thou art in thine old wondering mind.' (Y. A).
- 'They said! By Allah! Certainly, you are in your old error!' (T. M).
- Imam Ahmad Raza translates it thus, 'The sons said, "By Allah, you are infatuated with the same old love".'

The other translations which use the words old delusion, wondering mind and error are not befitting the status of a Prophet because prophets have insight into the world of the unseen and surely the *Asbâb-al-nazûl* also point towards this. This verse is of the Qur'anic chapter of Surah Yusuf, when Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) sent his shirt in the hands of his brothers to his father Yaqûb (Jacob) who had become blind due to continuous crying and longing for his beloved son. Joseph told his brothers upon their return to place his shirt upon the eyes of his father's eyes and his eyesight will be restored. When Jacob received the shirt and smelt the fragrance of Joseph on it and informed his family that Joseph was alive and it was upon this that his sons said to him that he was indeed infatuated in the same old love for his son.

A similar interpretation of the words '*Dhalâlik-al-Qadîm*' meaning '*the same old love of Prophet Joseph*', of which his elderly father Prophet Yaqûb is neither forgetting nor leaving it in the past as a past memory of old can also be found in many of the books of Qur'anic exegesis, including Tafsîr Madarak and Tafsîr Kabîr.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, commenting on the word *Dhâl* in Surah twelve, verse ninety five said, 'The Arabic root *dhalla* has various shades of meaning, in verse seven I have translated it by the verb "astray" or straying in mind.'<sup>176</sup> Thus Abdullah Yusuf Ali agrees that there are several meanings to the word and the word can be used for different expressions in the Arabic language, one of them being infatuated in the same love rather than straying or erring in any way, as many translators choose due to the literal contexts and popular meanings for translations.

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<sup>175</sup> Allah said, 'The sons said, "By Allah! Truly thou art infatuated by thine old love."

<sup>176</sup> The Holy Qur'an: text, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, pg-1725

## Conclusion

Prophetology is an integral part of the Muslim faith, as through the Hadîth we learn about the religion and the life and works of the Prophet, and through the Sunnah we learn of the law and Islamic etiquette. Indeed Allah commands, “Obey Allah and His Messenger” (Q. 3:32). Imâm Ahmad Raza’s Prophetology is based on total love and obedience to the Prophet at all times, to the extent that it is said that when he went to sleep he would position himself in the shape of the name of the Prophet Muhammad as it is spelt in the Arabic language. He would sleep moulding both his hands together under his head and he would join his feet together, making his head into the shape of the Arabic letter ‘*mîm*’, and his elbows would be shaped as the ‘*ha*’, and his waist as the second ‘*mîm*’, and the feet would serve as the letter ‘*dhâl*’.<sup>177</sup> Imâm Raza’s love for the Prophet Muhammad was paramount and can be seen in light of his Qur’an translation and a few examples of this can be seen in the following translations of verses: The standard translation of the verse (Q. 105:1) is, ‘Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the Companions of the Elephant?’ But Imâm Raza, keeping the lofty status of Prophet Muhammad in mind, does not translate it as ‘Seest thou not’, but instead has used the words ‘O beloved! have you not seen.’ Usually the standard English translation of the word *Qul* is said to be ‘say’ but Imâm Raza, deliberately keeping in mind the Prophetic status, translates it with the words ‘say thou’, and the standard English translation of the verse (Q. 3:124) is usually, ‘Remember thou saidst to the Faithful’, but Imâm Raza chooses to address the Prophet with the most respectful of words, thus translating the verse, ‘When O beloved you would say to the believers.’ These are but a few of the examples from his Qur’an translation from which one can admire the pearls he has showered in his translation, thus bringing the love of the Prophet back into word of God. From this analysis one can now understand why Imâm Raza devised the name of his Qur’an translation as *Kanz-al-Imân* (the treasure of faith), because for him at least the greatest treasure was the love of Prophet Muhammad. He not only keeps the matter of prophetic immunity (*isma*) in mind, but also the honour of the Prophets’ families while translating. An example of this can be found in verse (Q. 15:71), where the standard translation in English is: ‘He said: “There are my daughters (to marry), if ye must act (so).”’ Imâm Raza translates it in the following manner: ‘He said: “These women of my people are my daughters if you must do so.”’<sup>178</sup> As Imâm Raza keeps in mind the

<sup>177</sup> Sawáneh Ímám Ahmad Ríza. p. 118.

<sup>178</sup> The late Mufti Ahmad Yâr Khan Naímî stated concerning this verse, ‘This means yours wives who are the daughters of my people are in reality my daughters’. The commentary of this verse is the following verse, ‘And

exegesis while translating, many people for this reason have not been able to comprehend the translation of specific verses. For example, the standard English rendering of the verse (Q. 53:1) is ‘By the Star when it goes down’, but Imâm Raza’s translates the verse as ‘By the lovely shining star Muhammad, when he descended from the Ascension (*me’râj*).’ The reason for such a different translation to the norm was due to the fact that this chapter (*surah*) contains details about the Prophets bodily ascension to the heavens and this is why Imâm Raza has attributed the star to Prophet Muhammad, because he first ascended to the heavens and then descended back to earth.<sup>179</sup> It is possible to see the Prophetology of Imâm Raza in different places within his translation, making it stand out from the many standard translations found in the market today.

The main opponents of Imâm Raza were the Wahhâbîs. This movement condemned matters which he thought to be creedal issues surrounding different aspects of Prophetology, including: the knowledge of the Unseen (*ghayb*) of the Prophet, where he does an in-depth analysis of what is Unseen and uses logic to provide answers to some of the questions regarding this issue, explaining it by saying that we cannot limit the Unseen to our intellect and only then can we realise the vast dimension of the world which is not visible to the naked eye. The other issue surrounding the Prophet was his being both *Nûr* and human (*bashr*). This issue was one of great debate as the reformists objected to believing the Prophet was anything but human and the *Sûfîs* of India believed otherwise, but Imâm Raza explained the matter with clarity and provided evidence from credible sources in favour of the argument he was so passionate about. The other aspects of his Prophetology are based around the Prophet’s immunity (*isma*) and he strictly denied all sins, including “slips” (*zallât*). No difference was made between the time before and after the mission.<sup>180</sup> Imâm Raza also believed in the

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leave your wives whom your lord has created for you’ (Q. 26:166). From this we understand that the venerable man of the people can refer to the young as his sons and daughters even if there is a difference in their religious beliefs. Furthermore, the Prophets are like the fathers of their people and not like their brothers.’ Khan, Ahmad Yâr. *Nûr al-Irfan alâ Kanz al-Imân* (Pretoria: Darul Uloom Pretoria 2005) p. 828.

<sup>179</sup> The late Mufti Ahmad Yâr Khan Naîmî, states concerning this verse, ‘The word *Najm* either denotes the star and *Hawa* denotes to be inclined towards the setting. Or *Najm* means shrubs spread on the ground, while *Hawa* would mean the coming into motion. Or *Najm* denotes the Holy Prophet and *Hawa* denotes his returning from *Mi’râj*. The third meaning is stronger because the discussion (verses) which follow are about the Holy Prophet.’ *Nûr al-Irfan alâ Kanz al-Imân*. p. 668.

<sup>180</sup> Imâm Ahmad Raza was a *Mâturîdî* and this is possibly why he believed in the total immunity of the prophet. The encyclopaedia of Islam states that *Mâturîdî* doctrine was generally more positive in claiming a lack of sin for the prophets. Although some *Mâturîdî* scholars admitted minor sins in prophets, others, especially those of Samarkand, strictly denied all sins including “slips” (*zallât*). No difference was made between the time before and after the mission. The importance given to the doctrine of ‘*isma*’ is reflected by the fact that it is usually included in *Mâturîdî* creeds in contrast to Ash‘arî and *Ĥanbalî* creeds. Madelung, W. "‘*Isma*." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P.

Authority (*Ikhtiyâr*) of the Prophet's in this world and in the *Barzakh* that the Prophets and saints only die for a split second and then become alive again, and like the angels they too carry out tasks entrusted to them in the spiritual realm by God, which is part of the Unseen. And not only this, when the finality of Prophethood was challenged by the Qadiani who believed that Mirza Ghulâm Ahmad (d. 1326/1908) was another Prophet who came after Prophet Muhammad as a helper, they believed that this did not affect the doctrine of Prophet Muhammad being the seal of Prophethood. The matter of concern was not only the Qadiani but the Deobandîs who according to Imâm Raza were no longer Muslim as they were initially making way for such sects through their writings.<sup>181</sup> The most probable reason why these issues were at the heart of Imâm Raza's theology was the fact that these were surrounding the person and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad. As a scholar he was also mindful of his duty as a community leader. He did all he could by issuing fatâwa and writing in defence of what he saw as the right path, and he saw himself as belonging to the wider community of Ahl-us-Sunnah-wal-Jamma.

His Qur'an translation of '*Kanz al-Imân*' is based around his theology and his conception of what he defines as the *Ahl-us-Sunnah-wal-Jamma*. Issues surrounding orthodoxy and creedal matters can be found layered in this translation in his defence of medieval Sufism and what he thought to be the *Sunnî* orthodoxy of the four *Sunnî* schools of thought (*madhabs*). He brings balance between the doctrines of Sufism and Sunnîsm by not going to any one extreme but keeping balance between the two schools of theology (*sharia*) and mysticism (*tassawuf*). The other feature of *Kanz-al-Imân* is how the translation is simple to understand for the average person and the continuous flow of the translation from one verse to another is constant throughout the whole Qur'an translation.

Imâm Ahmad Raza Khân Barêlwî was an outstanding Muslim theologian who also had an interest in the secular sciences of Maths, Science, Astronomy, Astrology. This shows how much interest he had in the world around him during the colonial period in India. There is little available in English in terms of translations of the works of Imâm Raza and scholarly research in regard to his theological, political and scientific works. He is hardly known in the

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Heinrichs. Brill, 2010. Brill Online. University of Leeds. 14 September 2010 <[http://0-www.brillonline.nl.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-3643](http://0-www.brillonline.nl.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-3643)>

<sup>181</sup> Shaykh Qasim Nanotwi said, 'Considering the Holy Prophet as "*Khâtim-un-Nabiyîn*" is done so by common people but it is not true in eyes of wise people [...] Even if it were assumed that a new Prophet can come during the era of the Holy Prophet or after the Holy Prophet, it would not have an effect on the finality of our Holy Prophet'. *Tahzîr-al-Nâs*, p. 25.

academic circles in the Western world and the majority of research on him has been carried out in Pakistan and India, with a few theses from the al-Azhar University in Egypt.

There is further need of academic translations of his works with research on his theological concepts and even a study of his life and influences on Islamic theology.

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