On the Subject of *yashā'* in Some Qur'ānic Verses

Bazı Kur'an Âyetlerinde *yashā'* Konusu Üzerine

Rashid AL-BALUSHI[a,b]

[a]Department of English Language and Literature,
College of Arts and Social Sciences,
[b]Sultan Qaboos University,
Muscat

ABSTRACT This paper investigates a number of Qur'ānic verses that feature the verb *yashā'*, meaning 'to will' or 'to wish', preceded by the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ', in relation to the concepts of guidance and misguidance. The available interpretations of these verses maintain that *Allāh* guides whom He wishes and misguides whom He wishes. In other words, these standard interpretations assign *Allāh* the status of the subject of *yashā'*, and assign the relative pronoun *man* the status of an object. I claim that these interpretations are not accurate with regard to the subject of *yashā'*. I argue that the relative pronoun *man* should be analyzed as the subject of *yashā'*, not as an object. Using evidence from the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah, I show that the subject of *yashā'* may not be Allah Almighty, but rather the human being himself/herself. To show how the new interpretation is derived, I provide a syntactic analysis of the sentence that contains the free relative clause *man yashā'*, according to which *man* 'مَنْ' moves from a subject position, which means that it should be construed as a subject. The observed structural ambiguity thus results from an interpretation where *man* moves from an object position. The proposed linguistic analysis supports the view that the human being chooses the path, good or evil, that he/she wants to pursue; that is, Allah does not lead the human being along a predetermined path, which is the position adopted by Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Thus, this paper provides evidence against the Jabriyya doctrine, according to which human beings are compelled to follow a specific path.

Keywords: *yashā'; man* (who/whom); subject; object; movement; Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah; Jabriyya; Qadariyya

ÖZ Bu makale, 'istemek' veya 'dilemek' anlamına gelen yeshā' fiilinin, başında man 'مَنْ' zamirinin geldiği bazı Kur'ân âyetlerini hidâyet ve dalâlet kavramlarıyla bağlantılı olarak incelemektedir. Bu ayetlerin mevcut yorumları, Allah'ın dilediğini hidayete erdirdiğini, dilediğini de saptırdığını ileri sürer. Başka bir deyişle, bu standart yorumlar Allah'a yeşā' öznesi, man izafi zamirine ise bir nesne statüsü verir. Bu yorumların yashā'nın öznesi hususunda doğru olmadığı iddia edilmektedir. İzafi man zamirinin bir nesne olarak değil, yashā''ın öznesi olarak analiz edilmesi gerektiği ifade edilmiştir. Kur'an-ı Kerim ve Sünnet'ten deliller kullanarak, yeshā''ın öznesinin Yüce Allah değil, insanın kendisi olabileceğini göstermektedir. Yeni yorumun nasıl üretildiğini göstermek için, man 'مَنْ' zamirinin bir özne konumundan hareket ettiği, yani onun bir özne olarak yorumlanması gerektiği anlamına gelen man yashā' serbest bağıl tümcesini içeren cümlenin sözdizimsel bir analizini belirtmektedir. Dolayısıyla, gözlemlenen yapısal belirsizlik, man zamirinin bir nesne konumundan hareket ettiği bir yorumdan kaynaklanmaktadır. Önerilen dilbilimsel çözümleme, insanın izlemek istediği yolu, iyiyi ya da kötüyü seçtiği görüşünü desteklemektedir; yani Allah, insanı önceden belirlenmiş bir yola yönlendirmez ki bu, Ehl-i Sünnet ve'l-Cemaat'in de benimsediği bir görüştür. Bu makale, insanın belirli bir yolu takip etmeye mecbur bırakıldığı düşüncesini savunan Cebriyye doktrinine karşı delil teşkil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *yashā';* man (kim/kime); özne; nesne; hareket; Ehl-i Sünnet ve'l-Cemaat; Cebriyye; Kaderiyye

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper examines Qur'ānic verses that involve the verb *yashā'*, which means 'to wish' or 'to will', in relation to the concepts of guidance and misguidance. The available interpretations state that Allah Almighty is the subject of *yashā'* in these verses, guiding whom He wishes and misleading whom He wishes. I argue that the subject of *yashā'* in these verses is the human being, not Allah. Section 1 introduces the relevant religious doctrines, and shows that the Jabriyya and Qadariyya doctrines are deviant, since the former assigns the human being no role in his/her deeds and the latter assigns Allah no role in the human being's life; thus the paper advocates the view held by Ahl Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jamā'ah. It also introduces the current study, the verse it is concerned with, and the interpretations assigned to this verse in the main exegesis books. This section also states the main claim of the paper, namely that the human being is the decision-maker about the path to follow, good or evil, and argues that this understanding become visible when we construe the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ' in the relevant verses as a subject of *yashā'*, not as an object, as commonly believed. Section 2 presents another two relevant verses, together with the interpretations assigned to them in the main exegesis books, showing that they all argue that Allah is the decision-maker about guidance and misguidance, that is, the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ' is being construed as an object. Section 3 provides four arguments that the subject of *yashā'* in these verses is not Allah. The first argument is based on the fact that the human being is an observing, thinking, learning creature, one that can use its intellect to reach conclusions from facts, and so he/she should not be treated as a passive creature, especially that Allah has inspired his/her soul with inclination for both good and evil. The second argument is based on the fact that there is no reason for Allah to guide some people and mislead others, since no human being is closer or more important to Allah than another human being (with the exception of prophets), since neither does He need us, nor are we able to cause Him harm. The third argument is based on a more linguistically viable analysis of some related verses. The fourth argument is based on verses that say that 'if Allah wanted, He would guide all mankind'; basically, the fact that Allah has not guided all mankind means that He is not concerned about this decision, that is, the right to this decision is assigned to human beings. Section 4 provides two counterarguments and shows that neither of them constitutes a threat to the proposal advocated in the paper. Section 5 provides a syntactic analysis of one of the relevant verses, and shows that the ambiguity regarding the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ' (i.e. being ambiguous between 'whom', on the old interpretation, and 'who', on the new interpretation) is a result of the position it starts in. If *man* 'مَنْ' starts in the object of 'guide' position, then it is construed as an object, 'whom', but if it starts in the subject of 'will/wish', then it is construed as a subject, 'who', providing the relevant syntactic tree diagrams and showing the relevant movement operations. Section 6 argues that pragmatics must be involved in the interpretation of Qur'ānic verses and that grammar alone may not provide accurate interpretations. Section 7 uses a recent understanding (based on linguistic properties) of a famous Ḥadīth to support the proposal of the paper, as well as concluding the paper.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. AHL AL-SUNNAH WA AL-JAMĀ'AH VS. JABRIYYA AND QADARIYYA DOCTRINES

It is well-established in the mainstream Islamic thought (i.e. Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah) that human beings are created free to choose the path they like, good or evil, a decision that they make early on in their mature life (i.e. puberty/adulthood), one that is reversible. This explains why they are held accountable for their choices and deeds, on the Day of Judgment. This view, however, does not entail that human beings have full control over what might happen to them or what deeds they might do. In other words, they can only choose the path (guided or misled) and the subsequent decisions and deeds. While human beings' decisions and choices are not predetermined by fate, Allah Almighty, given His Absolute Eternal Omniscience, knows what they will decide even before they make the decisions. Besides, given His Absolute Omnipotence, He is capable of preventing them from performing some evil deeds.[1] Two schools of thought disagree with this standard view, the Jabriyya and the Qadariyya, each of which has developed into a creed with followers.[2]

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[1] Abū l-ʿAbbās Taqiyy al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Waṣiyyah al-Kubrā*, Aṭ-Ṭāʾif, Maktabat al-Ṣadīq for Publications and Distribution, 1987, p. 54.
[2] The discussion will not include the origins and sociopolitical backgrounds of these deviant schools.

The Jabriyya school is based on the belief that "human actions are created by God, and forced upon human beings, thus defining God as the real agent of human actions".[3] It is based on the doctrine of *jabr*, an Arabic word that literally means 'compulsion'. These theologians argue that if Allah knows about human beings' choices and decisions before they are made, then He decides which paths they choose, and human beings have no authority to act, as their decisions and deeds are predetermined by fate.[4] The proponents of this sect, therefore, question the legitimacy of accountability on the Day of Judgment, since human beings must be considered innocent. One reason for this deviant view, which is considered heretical, is the misunderstanding of verses like the ones that this study examines and provides a linguistic analysis to, an analysis that shows that the human being is the decision-maker about the path to follow.

Unlike the proponents of the Jabriyya creed, the advocates of the Qadariyya doctrine deny Allah's power over human beings' fate, and some of them maintain that Allah does not know human beings' deeds until they happen.[5] These theologians deny predetermination (i.e. *Qadar*) altogether; for them, the human being creates his/her own fate, and events happen without the will and permission of Allah. They attribute no role to Allah and His Omnipotence in managing human beings' lives and leading them through the paths that they choose, and ascribe all power to the human being. For them, the human being makes the *Qadar*, hence the label *Qadariyya*.[6] To draw Muslims' attention to the corruption in the Qadariyya's faith, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said the Ḥadīth in (1), translated as in (2).

1. " الْقَدَرِيَّةُ مَجُوسُ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ، إِنْ مَرِضُوا فَلَا تَعُودُوهُمْ وَإِنْ مَاتُوا فَلَا تَشْهَدُوهُمْ "

2. "The Qadariyyah are the Magians of this community. If they are ill, do not pay a sick visit to them, and if they die, do not attend their funerals." (*Sunan Abū Dāwūd* 4691)[7]

Therefore, the Qadariyya creed is the right opposite of the Jabriyya creed, the former attributing no role to Allah Almighty, and the latter attributing no role to the human being. Besides the aforementioned sources, the Qadariyya and Jabriyya doctrines have been criticized and declared deviant factions (i.e. as innovations in religion or *bidaʿ*) by many scholars.[8] Avoiding both extremes, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah adopt the middle view, which states that human beings are free to choose the path that they like, good or evil, but that Allah has a role in their lives. The Divine role is manifested in several ways, among which helping human beings along the path they choose, providing tests to their faith, and also in making the right path more attractive to them, as well as in sending them messages to prompt them to re-consider their decisions and choices about the path to follow. Besides, despite the free will assigned to the human being, his/her actions and deeds are known to Allah in advance, and are still constrained by the will of Allah, who may allow them or hinder them. Given His Absolute

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[3] Livnat Holtzman, "Debating the doctrine of jabr (compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya reads Fakhr al-Din al-Razi" In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, De Gruyter, 2013, p. 61.

[4] This is stated in several sources, e.g., Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad bin ʿAbdi al-Karīm Al-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah Publication Company, Beirut 1992, p. 72-74; ʿAbdu al-Jabbār bin Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Sharḥ al-ʾuṣūl al-Khamsa*, Cairo, Maktabat Wahba, 1996, p. 324.

[5] William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburg 1973, p. 94.

[6] This is stated in many sources, e.g., ʿAbdu al-Qāhir bin Ṭāhir Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq wa bayān al-Firqa al-Nājiya minhum*, Dār al-ʾāfāq al-Jadīda, Beirut 1982, p. 93-94; Yaḥyā bin Abī al-Khayr Al-ʿUmrānī, *Al-ʾintiṣār fī al-radd ʿalā al-Muʿtazila al-Qadariyya al-ʾashrār,* (vol. 1), Maktabat ʾaḍwāʾ al-Salaf, Riyadh 1999, p. 62-69.

[7] Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān bin al-Ashʿath al-Sajistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd,* (vol. 3), Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah Publication Company, Beirut 1996, p. 227. The translation is form: https://Sunnah.com/abudawud:4691

[8] For example, Abū al-ʿAbbās Taqiyy al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shīʿa al-Qadariyya*, Riyadh, Al-ʾimām Muḥammad bin Saʿūd Islamic University, 1986; ʿAbdullah bin Muḥammad Al-Qarnī, "Naqd ʾasās Shubhat al-Qadariyya wa al-Jabriyya fī ʾafʿāl al-ʿibād", *Umm al-Qura University Journal of Sharia Sciences and Islamic Studies*, 2011, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 381-420.

Omnipotence, He can guide all human beings or even misguide them all, but He has left this crucial decision to them. The current study, to be introduced in the following subsection, provides linguistic evidence for this view, which is held by Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʻah.

1.2. INTRODUCING THE CURRENT STUDY

The verb *yashā'*, meaning 'to will' or 'to wish', appears in many verses in the Holy Qurʾān; consider verses 49-50 of sūrat al-Shūrā (Consultation, 42) in (3), translated as in (4).

3. "لِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ يَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ إِنَاثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ الذُّكُورَ (49) أَوْ يُزَوِّجُهُمْ ذُكْرَانًا وَإِنَاثًا ۖ وَيَجْعَلُ مَن يَشَاءُ عَقِيمًا ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ (50)."

4. "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He grants daughters to whomever He wills, and He grants sons to whomever He wills (49). Or He combines them together, males and females; and He renders whomever He wills sterile. He is Knowledgeable and Capable (50)."[9]

In these two verses, it is undoubtedly the case that the subject of *yashā'* is Allah Almighty, since it is Him who decides on whom to have only female children and whom to have only male children, as well as on whom to have both male and female children and whom to be sterile. Evidence for this comes from the fact that some people have only boys when they prefer girls, for example, and the fact that some people cannot have children though they want to. Thus, this is by no means a choice that human beings can make or something that they can have control over, as it is related to fate, and therefore, *man*, 'مَنْ', is analyzed as an object pronoun, meaning 'whom', as appropriately translated, reflecting an accurate interpretation. That Allah Almighty decides on this matter, through fate (i.e. *Qadar*), is supported by the fact that the last clause in the second verse makes reference to Allah's knowledge and capability (i.e. His Omniscience and Omnipotence).

This paper is concerned with another class of verses that also feature the verb *yashā'*, ones where there is good evidence that the subject is not Allah Almighty, and, as a result, *man*, the relative pronoun, must be analyzed as the subject of the verb *yashā'*; that is, *man* must be interpreted as 'who', *not* 'whom'. Consider verse 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28) in (5), translated as in (6).

5. "إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ."

6. "You cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills, and He knows best those who are guided."[10]

As the translation of the second clause (i.e. "but Allah guides whom He wills") of this verse shows, Allah Almighty is construed as the subject of *yashā'*, 'to will', and the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ' is interpreted as an object, meaning 'whom'. In other words, Allah is assigned the role of the decision-maker about guidance and misguidance, guiding whom He wishes (and misguiding whom He wishes).

The standard exegesis books, which inspired this and other translations, assign Allah the status of the subject of *yashā'*. For example, Al-Ṭabarī states that this clause (i.e. "وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ") of verse 56

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of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ means "Allah guides whom He wills to guide from His creation, by leading them to believe in Him and His messenger".[11] Likewise, Ibn Kathīr states that this part of the verse means that "Allah guides whom He wills, and He has the profound wisdom and irrefutable proof … and He knows who deserves guidance and who deserves misguidance".[12] Also, Al-Baghawī states that Allah tells His Prophet (pbuh) that he will not guide those that he wants to guide, but that Allah guides those who were destined for guidance, given Allah's knowledge.[13] Similarly, Al-Saʿdī states that the verse means that Prophet "Muḥammad cannot guide whom he wants, as this matter is not in the hands of human beings …but is in the hands of Allah, He guides whom He wishes. And He knows who is good for guidance and so He guides him, and [knows] who is not good for guidance, and so He leads him astray".[14]

Al-Qurṭubī maintains that this verse was revealed to inform the Prophet that his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, will not embrace Islam "because Allah knows, through fate, that he will die as a disbeliever", and so Allah will not guide him. But Allah guided the Prophet's other uncle, Al-ʿAbbās, because He knows, through eternity, that Al-ʿAbbās was going to convert to Islam.[15] This understanding, nonetheless, gives the impression that Allah Almighty decides in advance on whom to guide and whom to mislead, and that human beings have no choice, which contradicts the mainstream thought of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah. This is because this understanding depicts the human being as an innocent powerless creature that should not be accountable for Allah's decisions, which is the essence of the Jabriyya doctrine.

Therefore, I believe that the human being should be viewed as the one who wills to be guided or not, a decision that is followed by Allah Almighty either providing guidance or withholding it. In other words, the human being should be interpreted as the subject of *yashā'*, and the interpretation of this part of the verse should be 'Allah guides who wills', for reasons to be discussed in section 3. Differently stated, given the fact that there is no reason for why Allah would choose to guide a human being and mislead another one without prior 'will' or 'desire' on the part of that human being, the subject of *yashā'* should be construed as referring to the human being, not to Allah Almighty.

This linguistic proposal that attributes to the human being full freedom with regard to the path that he/she follows, nonetheless, does not challenge the fact that Allah Almighty knows beforehand about our choices, given His Eternal Omniscience. Also, despite this freedom, Allah can still interfere in our lives by sending us messages that present the guided path as the more reasonable one, as well as by preventing us from committing sins. Indeed, a novel understanding of verse 37 of sūrat al-Qiyāma (Resurrection, 75) and verse 24 of sūrat al-Ḥashr (The Mobilization, 59) shows that although the human being is created with an inclination for conflicting paths, good and evil, Allah Almighty creates human beings according to the *fiṭra* (i.e. true nature, straight path, الصراط المستقيم).[16] This prompts human beings to prefer the guided path and dislike the misled one, thus providing an argument against the Qadariyya creed, which denies the Divine role in the human being's life. The new understanding of these two

[11] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, Muʾassasat al-Risālah, Beirut 1994, vol. 6, p. 36.

[12] Abū al-Fidā Ismael bin Omar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, Dār Ṭaibah for Publication and Distribution, Riyadh 1999, vol. 6, p. 246.

[13] Abū Muḥammad Al-Ḥusain bin Masʿūd Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr Al-Baghawī: Maʿālim Al-Tanzīl*, Dār Ṭaibah for Publication and Distribution, Riyadh 1989, vol. 6, p. 215.

[14] Abdul Raḥmān bin Nāsir Al-Saʿdī, *Taysīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām Al-Mannān*, Darussalam for Publication and Distribution, Riyadh 2002, p. 728.

[15] Abū Abdullah Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-ʾAḥkām Al-Qurʾān*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2006, vol. 16, p. 297-298.

[16] Rashid Al-Balushi, "The Linguistic Reanalysis and Reinterpretation of Verse (Q. 75:37)". *Islamic Studies*. Submitted on April 10th, 2022 and accepted.

verses indicates that, even before human beings are born, Allah gives them His *blessings* by creating them *cleansed from dirt and sins* and making them *inclined to prefer the guided path.*

It, however, might be argued that the decision about guidance and misguidance can be attributed to Allah, and that it is applied in accordance with His Eternal Will, which is associated with His Knowledge, and that the human being still has the freedom to choose the path. And so, Allah will guide whom He wishes (i.e. those whom He knows will choose the guided path), and will lead astray whom He wishes (i.e. those whom He knows will choose the misguided path).[17] Nonetheless, the mere attribution of the decision about guidance and misguidance to Allah automatically leads to the deviant belief that Allah decides beforehand on whom to guide and whom to misguide, and so He is responsible for human beings' choices and deeds. As the syntactic analysis in this paper shows, it is the human being that decides on whether to be guided or misled, by choosing the path, which makes him/her responsible for their decisions and choices.

Section 2 presents some relevant Qur'ānic verses. Section 3 provides evidence from Qur'ān and Sunnah that the subject of *yashā'* must be the human being. Section 4 presents apparent counterarguments and responds to them. Section 5 provides a syntactic analysis of one of these verses and shows that the relative pronoun *man* in such verses may linguistically be analyzed as either the subject or the object of *yashā'* (thus explaining the ambiguity), but that interpreting *man* as the subject is more plausible given previously provided evidence. Section 6 looks into one of the factors that determine the meaning of Qur'ānic verses. Section 7 concludes the paper. The translations of the Qur'ānic verses come from internet websites and a paper translation of the Holy Qur'ān.

2. OTHER RELEVANT VERSES

This section presents two more relevant verses, 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16) and 8 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35). It also provides the interpretations assigned to these two verses in five of the main exegesis books. These interpretations, as well as translations, assign Allah Almighty the role of the decision-maker on whom to guide and whom to misguide. But this, as we have shown, goes against the fact that human beings are accountable for their deeds and should therefore be the decision-makers on whether to seek guidance or not. Verse 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl is in (7), translated as in (8).

7. "وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (93)"

8. "Had Allah willed, He would have made you one congregation [with one religion], but He leaves astray whom He wills, and He guides whom He wills. And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do."[18]

This verse is interpreted such that Allah chooses whom to guide and whom to mislead. For example, Al-Ṭabarī interprets this verse to mean that "Allah made mankind follow different creeds, by leading some to believe in Him and behave in obedience to Him, and so they became believers, and letting others down by depriving them of His help, and so they became disbelievers".[19] Al-Qurṭubī states that "Allah misleads those whom He wishes by letting them down, being fair to them, and guides whom

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[17] This understanding was pointed out to me by an anonymous *JIR* reviewer.
[18] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/16/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-48-b/v/93
[19] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, 1994, vol. 4, p. 554.

He wishes, by leading them to the right path, as a favor from Him", and argues that this verse refutes the claims of the Qadariyya creed proponents.[20] Ibn Kathīr does not really provide an interpretation of the relevant clause in the verse, but seems to understand it in exactly the same way that Al-Qurṭubī explains it.[21] Al-Baghawī states the same understanding provided by Ibn Kathīr and Al-Qurṭubī.[22] Al-Saʿdī states that "Allah is the decision-maker about guidance and misguidance, and His guidance and misguidance are among His decisions which follow His knowledge and wisdom, giving guidance to those who deserve it, as a favor, and withholding it from those who do not deserve it, being fair [to them]".[23]

The main exegesis books have the same interpretation for verse 8 of sūrat Fāṭir in (9), translated as in (10), with regard to the decision-maker about guidance and misguidance (i.e. the subject of *yashā'*).

9. "فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ."

10. "Indeed Allah leads astray whomever He wishes, and guides whomever He wishes."[24]

Al-Ṭabarī states that Allah addresses prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) saying that "He lets down whom He wishes so they will not believe in Him and follow and believe you [the Prophet], by misleading them away from guidance to the truth. And He leads whom He wishes to believe in you and accept your message, so you guide them to the right path".[25] Al-Qurṭubī, who also assigns Allah Almighty the role of the decision-maker about guidance, argues that this verse refutes the Qadariyya creed.[26] Ibn Kathīr states that "Allah guides and misguides according to fate, and that Allah is wise about His fate; He misguides whom He misguides and guides whom He guides, given His irrefutable proof and absolute knowledge".[27] Although Al-Baghawī does not provide a specific interpretation for this clause of the verse, his discussion seems to adopt the same view that is prevailing in the other exegesis books.[28] Al-Saʿdī states, "but guidance and misguidance are in the hands of Allah".[29] The fact that these sources interpret the subject of *yashā'* in these verses (and similar ones) to be Allah Almighty indicates, at least to non-Muslims, that Allah is being unfair, which is untrue, a point discussed in the next section.

Linguistically speaking, on the available interpretations and translations, the subject of the verb *yashā'* is understood as referring to the noun *Allāh*, which precedes it in the same sentence, and where *man*, the relative pronoun, is construed as an object relative pronoun, meaning 'whom'. On the proposed understanding, the subject of the verb *yashā'* is interpreted as the human being, and construed as referring to the relative pronoun *man*, which precedes it in the same sentence, but as a subject pronoun, meaning 'who', yielding a reading like 'Allah guides those who will/wish (to be guided)'. In other words, the linguistic difference boils down to how *man* is construed, as a subject (i.e. who) on the proposed interpretation, or as an object (i.e. whom) on the available standard interpretations. Analyzing *man* as an object gets us into the issue of who decides on the guiding and misleading. Besides avoiding this nontrivial issue, analyzing *man* as a subject is in line with the very nature of the human being, as illustrated in the next section.

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[20] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-ʾAḥkām Al-Qurʾān*, 2006, vol. 12, p. 421.
[21] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, 1999, vol. 4, p. 600.
[22] Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr Al-Baghawī: Maʿālim Al-Tanzīl*, 1989, vol. 5, p. 40.
[23] Al-Saʿdī, *Taysīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām Al-Mannān*, 2002, p. 520.
[24] https://al-quran.info/#35
[25] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, 1994, vol. 6, p. 241.
[26] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-ʾAḥkām Al-Qurʾān*, 2006, vol. 17, p. 348-350.
[27] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, 1999, vol. 6, p. 535.
[28] Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr Al-Baghawī: Maʿālim Al-Tanzīl*, 1989, vol. 6, p. 413.
[29] Al-Saʿdī, *Taysīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām Al-Mannān*, 2002, p. 804.

Differently put, the three verses in (5), (7), and (9) should be understood such that Allah Almighty guides those who wish to be guided, and withholds guidance from those who do not wish to be guided. That is, it is the human being who chooses to be guided or misled, and then takes some action in that direction, and as a result, Allah Almighty helps him/her along the path he/she chooses with his/her full freedom. No other will is imposed on the human being in this regard, despite the fact that Allah's Will is capable of reversing a human decision, and the fact that Allah creates us in a nature that favors the guided path.

3. WHY THE SUBJECT OF *YASHĀ'* IS *NOT* ALLAH

This section provides four arguments for the claim that the subject of *yashā'* is not Allah Almighty, but rather the human being. The first argument is based on the very nature of the human being. When Allah Almighty decided to create the human being, the angels asked 'why would You [Allah] create a human being, a violent and corrupt creature, when we are more obedient and better worshippers?' The answer was that, unlike the angels, who are fully submissive to the will of Allah, the new creature, the human being, is a 'learning creature' (since he was able to learn the names of all things/concepts), one that is able to observe, think, and make choices and decisions accordingly.[30] This is stated in verses (30-33) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) translated as in (11):

11. "When your Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a successor on earth." They said, "Will You place in it someone who will cause corruption in it and shed blood, while we declare Your praises and sanctify You?" He said, "I know what you do not know (30). And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then he presented them to the angels, and said, "Tell Me the names of these, if you are sincere (31). They said, "Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is you who are the Knowledgeable, the Wise (32). He said, "O Adam, tell them their names." And when he told them their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal? (33)"[31]

Therefore, assuming that Allah guides the people whom He wills and misleads the ones whom He wishes contradicts the nature of the human being and the very purpose behind creating him/her, which is using his/her endowed intellect to discover about Allah, through signs and evidence for His existence, to ultimately reach Him. These 'signs' are placed everywhere for the human being to observe and contemplate them, as many verses of the Qur'ān stress. Verse 164 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) in (12) provides an example.

12. "Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail at sea with profit to men, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky -with which He revives the earth after its death, and scatters therein every kind of animal- and the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for a people who apply reason (164)."[32]

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[30] This is argued in Rashid Al-Balushi, "Belief in Allah is the Researchers' Natural Path", *Al-Jumuah Online Magazine*, 2020.
[31] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/2/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/33
[32] https://al-quran.info/#2

And this new creature, the human being, is free to use these and other signs to reach Allah as the God worthy of worship, or deny this conclusion that his/her senses and intellect should lead him/her to. This freedom is, again, an essential component of the build-up of the human soul, as clearly stated in verses 7 and 8 of sūrat al-Shams (The Sun, 91) in (13), translated as in (14):

13. "وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا (7) فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (8)."

14. "And the soul and He who proportioned it (7) and inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness (8)."[33]

In other words, Allah has inspired the human soul with both good and evil; that is, the human soul was designed to take either of two conflicting paths, and the human intellect was designed to help the soul make the right choice. Thus, unlike the angels, the human beings are endowed with an observing, thinking, learning and deciding intellect that is designed to help them to draw conclusions based on facts and evidence, and then to make choices. This reflects the nature of the mission assigned to the human being, which is harder than that assigned to the angels, who are designed to obey Allah only, and are thus saved the test of life that human beings have to undergo. This explains why Allah asked the angels to prostrate to Adam, the father of the race with the harder and more demanding mission, as stated in verse 34 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) translated as in (15).

15. "[34]And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam,' they prostrated, but not Iblis; he refused and acted arrogantly, and he was one of the faithless."

And therefore, it makes the most sense that the human being, the learning, observing, and thinking creature, is responsible for his/her choices and deeds, which is the point made in verse 38 of sūrat al-Muddaththir (The Enrobed, 74) in (16), translated as in (17).

16. "كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ (38)."

17. "Every soul is hostage to what it has earned (38)."[35]

The second argument is based on the fact that there is no reason why Allah Almighty would choose to guide some people and misguide others, since He does not favor a human being over another one, except for the path that they choose. In other words, if we followed the available interpretations and translations, we would be attributing injustice to Allah, and Allah is not unjust. In fact, 'Al-ʿadl' (The Just) and 'Al-Muqsiṭ' (The Equitable) are among His Attributes/Names. He states this clearly in verse 44 of sūrat Yūnus (Jonah, 10) in (18), translated as in (19):

18. "إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَٰكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ (44)."

19. "Allah does not wrong the people in the least, but the people wrong their own selves (44)."[36]

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[33] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/91/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/7

[34] https://al-quran.info/#2

[35] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/74/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/38

[36] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/10/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/44

Therefore, the merest thought that Allah decides on whom to guide and whom to leave astray (even based on His Eternal Knowledge), without genuine desire for either path on the part of the human being, is against belief in Allah, since it contradicts some verses in the Holy Qurʾān. Logically speaking, there is no reason for Allah to be unfair to us, human beings. This is because neither does He need us, as verse 133 of sūrat al-ʾanʿām (Livestock, 6) in (20) states, nor do we count as counterparts to Him in any sense (dispute or agreement), as verse 4 of sūrat al-ʾikhlāṣ (Monotheism, 112) in (21) states, nor are we able to cause Him harm, as verse 32 of sūrat Muḥammad (Muhammad, 47) in (22) states.

20. "Your Lord is the Rich Beyond Need, the Possessor of Mercy. If He wills, He can do away with you, and substitute whomever He wills in your place, just as He produced you from the descendants of another people (133)."[37]

21. "And there is none comparable to Him (4)."[38]

22. "Those who disbelieve, and hinder from the path of Allah, and oppose the Messenger after guidance has become clear to them-they will not hurt Allah in the least, but He will nullify their deeds (32)."[39]

The third argument is based on a more plausible analysis of some relevant Qurʾānic verses. That the subject of *yashāʾ* in the verses in (5), (7) and (9) may not be Allah Almighty may be concluded from the structure of the following verses. Consider verse 27 of sūrat al-Raʿd (The Thunder, 13) in (23) and its translation in (24).

23. "قُلْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ أَنَابَ (27)."

24. "Allah leads astray whomever He wills, and He guides to Himself whoever repents (27)."[40]

Although the subject of 'to will' is *Allāh* according to the main exegesis books that inspired this translation, the subject of 'to repent' is the human being.[41] Nonetheless, if the second occurrence of *man* is understood as the subject of the verb 'to repent', then there is no reason not to consider the first occurrence of *man* to be the subject of the verb 'to will'. In other words, if the subject of 'to repent' is the human being, then the subject of 'to will' should also be construed as the human being. In fact, this is a more plausible interpretation since it achieves parallelism in terms of structure and meaning. Differently stated, if the second part of the verse says 'Allah guides those who repent', then the first part of the verse should say 'Allah leads astray those who will (to be led astray)'. On the available interpretations, this parallelism is missing. The same applies to verse 13 of sūrat al-Shūrā (Consultation, 42) in (25), translated as in (26):

25. "اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ (13)."

26. "Allah chooses to Himself whom He wills, and He guides to Himself whoever repents (13)."[42]

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[37] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/6/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/133

[38] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/112/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/4

[39] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/47/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/32

[40] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/13/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/27

[41] Al-Ṭabarī, 1994, vol. 4, p. 423; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006, vol. 12, p. 64-65; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, vol. 4, p. 454; Al-Baghawī, 1989, vol. 4, p. 315; Al-Saʿdī, 2002, p. 483.

[42] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/42/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/13

Traditional exegesis books maintain that Allah chooses whom He wishes, an interpretation that seems to miss the parallelism in the structure of this verse.[43] If Allah Almighty is the subject of 'to choose' in the first conjunct and the subject of 'to guide' in the second conjunct, then the subject of 'to will' in the first conjunct and the subject of 'to repent' in the second conjunct should be the human being. That is, in both occurrences, *man* 'مَن' is a subject pronoun of the verb that follows it. This way, another more plausible interpretation is as in (27):

27. "Allah chooses those who will/wish [to be chosen, by seeking guidance], and guides to Himself those who repent."

The fourth argument for our view that it is the human being who decides on whether to be guided or not is provided by verse 31 of sūrat al-Raʿd (The Thunder, 13) in (28), translated as in (29):

28. " (31).‏"لَّوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ لَهَدَى النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

29. "Had Allah wished He would have guided mankind all together (31)."[44]

Basically, this means that it is beyond dispute that if Allah Almighty wanted to guide mankind, He would have done it, but He wants to leave it up to mankind, to the individual human being. Human beings first wish to be guided, and then Allah guides them. When they do not wish to be guided, guidance is withheld from them (and so they become easy prey for the Devil).

Evidence that the decision about guiding a human being is a human, not a Divine, one comes from the fact that if a human being really wishes to be guided, guidance will automatically be provided by Allah. However, if Allah wants to guide a human being (which Allah wants for all mankind), but that human being rejects guidance (despite the evidence for the right path) or does not seek it, then Allah withholds guidance from him/her, and leaves him/her to suffer the consequences of his/her own decision. If Allah would guide a human being who rejects guidance, then He might as well guide all mankind, which He can do, but will not do it. In fact, the standard understanding of the first and third clauses of verse 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16), repeated in (30), indicates that the relative pronoun *man* is the subject of the verb *yashā'*.

30. "Had Allah willed, He would have made you one congregation [with one religion], but He leaves astray whom He wills, and He guides whom He wills. And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do (93). [45]

This is because if Allah were the decision-maker about whom to guide and whom to misguide, He would have guided all mankind, by making them one ummah, with one religion (i.e. first clause). But, since this is against the concept of *taklīf* (i.e. imposition or assignment of a religious duty), He left it to human beings to decide on whether they want to be guided or misled (i.e. second clause), since He is going to hold them accountable for their deeds, on the Day of Judgment (i.e. third clause). People choose their paths and deeds, and therefore destinies. Section 5 shows how this suggested interpretation is also linguistically possible. Before that, the next section presents two apparent counterarguments and shows that they are untenable.

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[43] Al-Ṭabarī, 1994, vol. 6, p. 486; Al-Qurṭubī, 2006, vol. 18, p. 453; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, vol. 7, p. 195; Al-Baghawī, 1989, vol. 7, p. 187; Al-Saʿdī, 2002, p. 888.
[44] https://al-quran.info/#13
[45] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/16/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-48-b/v/93

4. APPARENT COUNTERARGUMENTS

A possible counterargument to the view advanced in this paper may be presented by verse 26 of sūrat ʾāl-ʿimrān (The Family of Imran, 3), in (31), translated as in (32). I will show, however, that it is invalid.

31. "قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَن تَشَاءُ وَتَنزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّن تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَن تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَاءُ (26)."

32. "Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty. You grant sovereignty to whom You will, and You strip sovereignty from whom you will. You honor whom you will, and You humiliate whom you will (26)."[46]

The relevant part of the verse is the last clause, "تُعِزُّ مَن تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَاءُ." An opponent might argue, 'why would Allah honor some people and humiliate others?' Given the logic advocated in this paper, shouldn't the human being be the one to decide on whether to be honored or humiliated? But the verse says that it is Allah who decides on whom to honor and whom to humiliate. And, by the way, this is the only possible interpretation since the verb 'to will' is in the second person in Arabic, *tashā'*, referring to Allah Almighty, and may never be construed as referring to the human beings.

To address this possible counterargument, I would say that it is Allah Almighty who honors and humiliates, exactly as the verse reads, but that this happens, again, according to the human beings' will/wish. To explain, Allah Almighty has left it to the human beings to choose whether to take the guided path or the misled one, and based on this decision, Allah provides His guidance to those who wish to get it and withholds His guidance from those who do not wish to get it. And based on this initial decision by the human being, Allah decides on whom to honor and whom to humiliate.

In other words, 'those whom Allah honors' are 'those who have chosen the right path', the guidance, and the eternal honor (in the hereafter, and in this life as well). By contrast, 'those whom Allah humiliates' are 'those who have chosen the wrong path', straying, and the eternal humiliation (in the hereafter, though may enjoy some false dignity in this life). Basically, the 'honoring' or 'humiliating' stage, by Allah, comes after the 'wishing the guidance' or 'rejecting it' stage, by the human being; there is no third option. Thus, in the end, it is the human being who decides on whether to be 'honored' or 'humiliated', a consequence of 'seeking guidance' or 'rejecting it', respectively. This understanding is supported by verse 8 of sūrat al-Munāfiqūn (The Hypocrites, 63) in (33), translated as in (34):

33. "وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَٰكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (8)."

34. "But honor belongs to Allah and His Messenger, and to the Believers; but the Hypocrites know not (8)."[47]

Basically, honor or "الْعِزَّة" (also translated as 'power' and 'might') is in the company of Allah and His Messenger, which requires 'willing/wishing' the guided path.

Another apparent counterargument may be posed by the following Holy Ḥadīth, in (35) translated as in (36); prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said:

35. "يَا عِبَادِي إِنِّي حَرَّمْتُ الظُّلْمَ عَلَى نَفْسِي وَجَعَلْتُهُ بَيْنَكُمْ مُحَرَّمًا فَلَا تَظَالَمُوا، يَا عِبَادِي كُلُّكُمْ ضَالٌّ إِلَّا مَنْ هَدَيْتُهُ فَاسْتَهْدُونِي أَهْدِكُمْ."[48]

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[46] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/3/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/26
[47] http://search-the-quran.com/search/Surah+Al-Munafiqoon/8
[48] Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj al-Nīsābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Cairo, al-Maknaz al-Islāmī Association, 2000, p. 1994.

36. "O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another. O My servants, all of you are astray except for those I have guided, so seek guidance of Me and I shall guide you." (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 2577)[49]

Unless we believe that Allah is 'The Just' (a notion that the first clause of the Ḥadīth stresses) and so will not decide on whom to guide and send to Paradise, and whom to mislead and send to Hellfire, this Ḥadīth could be understood as showing contradiction. This is because the Ḥadīth says 'Allah is not unjust' (having forbidden oppression for Himself), and also says 'all of you are astray except for those I have guided'. The second part (i.e. 'all of you are astray except for those I have guided') gives the impression that Allah decides on the 'guiding' and 'misleading' of human beings, but this might have been a possible understanding without the very last clause of the Ḥadīth. This clause, which is a command for seeking guidance, says 'so seek guidance of Me and I shall guide you', and thus points out that the 'guiding' by Allah is not achieved unless first sought by the human being, which is in line with the main claim of this paper. This shows that there is no contradiction in the Ḥadīth; that is, Allah is just, and therefore He will provide guidance to those who seek it.

The view that the human being, and not Allah, decides on whether to do good deeds (and so be guided) or do evil deeds (and so be led astray) is also supported by the Ḥadīth in (37), translated as in (38). Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said:

37. "تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا مَا تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا: كِتَابَ اللهِ وَسُنَّةَ نَبِيِّهِ."[50]

38. "I have left two matters with you. As long as you hold to them, you will not go the wrong way. They are the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet." (*Muwaṭṭa' Mālik* 1628)[51]

The meaning of this Ḥadīth makes it clear that it is in the hands of Muslims to be guided, or to avoid the wrong way, which is basically through holding fast to Qur'ān and Sunnah. In other words, human beings are created with a free will to make choices (i.e. مُخَيَّرون), and are not compelled to act in a predestined manner (i.e. not مُسَيَّرون), despite the fact that Allah Almighty knows about their decisions and choices before they are made, given His Absolute Eternal Omniscience.[52]

5. THE SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

This section provides an analysis of the sentence in (39), which is a simpler statement of the relevant parts of verses 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28), 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16), and 8 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35), which is 'يهدي اللهُ مَن يشاء'. It is simpler because it represents the canonical word order of Arabic, which is Verb-Subject-Object. Though displaying both SVO and VSO orders,

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[49] https://sunnah.com/qudsi40/17

[50] Abū 'Abdullah Mālik bin Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa,* (vol. 1), Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī Publication Company, Beirut 1985, p. 899.

[51] https://sunnah.com/urn/516070

[52] It might run counter to human beings' common sense that Allah Almighty knows about our decisions and deeds before they happen. I believe that this is because we attempt to apply to Allah the rules that apply to ourselves. We, therefore, should view the Divine Being in a different way. To illustrate, when a human being invents a machine or a device (e.g. a cellphone), he/she knows how it will behave because he/she has equipped it with a chip with all the instructions and information necessary for it to work efficiently. And the machine or device has no control over its behavior; that is, it can only behave as instructed, or just die. Likewise, Allah Almighty knows how his creation (i.e. mankind) will behave, but the crucial difference is that the creation of Allah has control over their choices and decisions. Allah Almighty draws our attention to the fact that there are differences between what He creates and what we create or invent in verses like 11 of sūrat Luqmān (Luqmān, 31) translated in (i), and 14 of sūrat Al-Mu'minūn (The Believers, 23) translated in (ii).

i. "Such is God's creation. Now show me what those besides Him have created."

ii. "Most Blessed is God, the Best of Creators."

Arabic has been argued to be a VSO language.[53] As the discussion in the preceding sections has shown, this sentence is ambiguous between two interpretations, one where the Noun Phrase (NP) *Allāh* is the subject of both 'to guide' and 'to wish', and one where the NP *Allāh* is the subject of 'to guide' and the human being is the subject of 'to wish'; (39) shows both interpretations are possible.

39. yahdī   Allāhu   man   yashā'u

    guides   Allah   whom/who   wishes

    'Allah guides whom He wishes.'

    'Allah guides who wishes.'

This ambiguity arises because the relative pronoun *man* is analyzed as an object, meaning 'whom', on the first (i.e. old) interpretation, and as a subject, meaning 'who', on the second (i.e. new) interpretation.[54] On both interpretations, however, the verb *yashā'* has a clausal complement, one that reads like *'an yahdiya-hu (Allāhu)* ('to guide' or 'to be guided (by Allah)', depending on the perceived meaning), but this clausal complement is phonetically null, that is, it is not pronounced.

Thus, the whole sentence reads as in (40); the strikethrough indicates that this part is silent (i.e. unpronounced). The provided syntactic analysis assumes the principles of generative syntax.[55] It is worth mentioning that the analysis of how the two interpretations arise from the relevant verses (difference being related to the position that *man* 'مَن' starts from, as I will show soon) is not contingent on any specific analysis of free relative clauses. The index i (i.e. subscript i) on the phonetically null pronoun, '*pro*', and the NP *Allāh* in the earlier clause means that the pronoun refers to *Allāh*, since Allah Almighty is the subject of 'to guide' on both interpretations.

40. yahdī   Allāhu$_i$ man   yashā'u   [~~'an   yahdiya hu~~]   *pro*$_i$

    guides   Allah   whom/who   wishes   Comp guides-him

    'Allah guides whom He wishes to guide.'
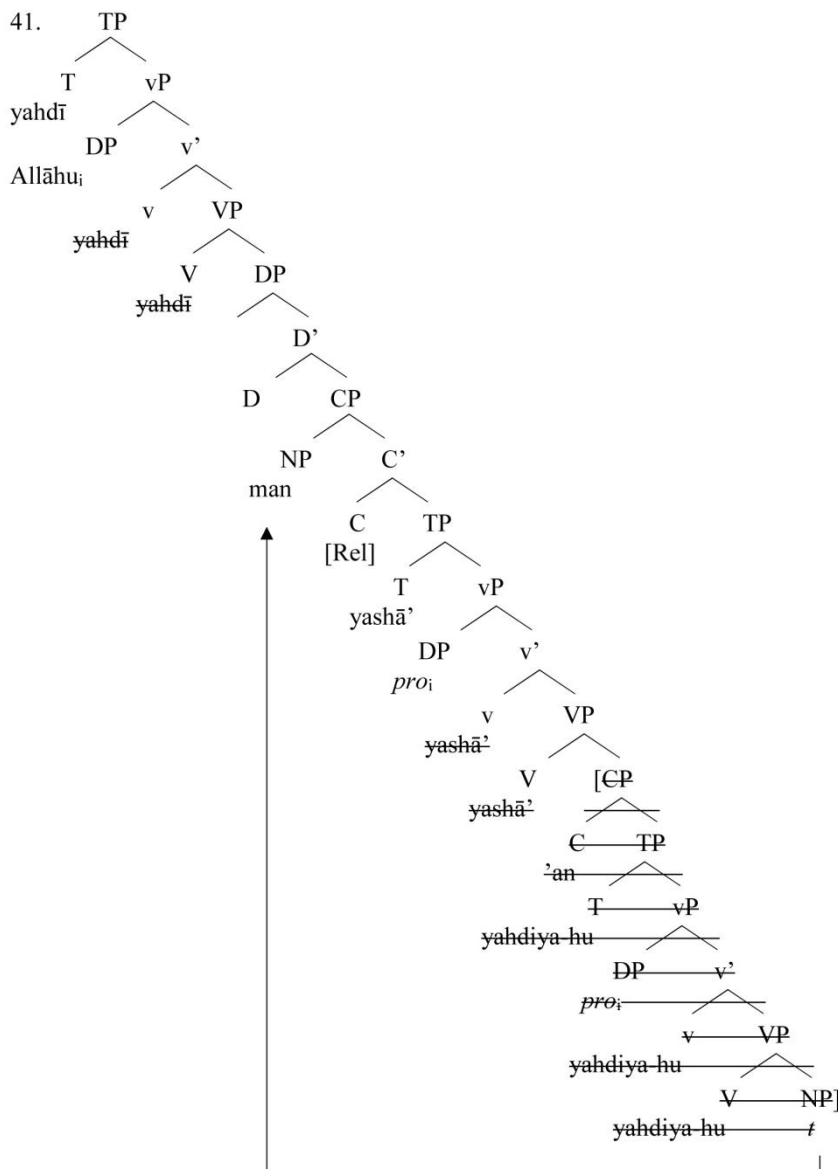
    'Allah guides who wishes to be guided by Him.'

Therefore, on the first/common interpretation, *man*, interpreted as 'whom', starts as the *object* of the lower verb *yahdiya-hu* (i.e. as the complement of 'to guide' in the silent clause), whose subject is *Allāh* (marked with '*pro*' that refers to *Allāh*, through co-indexation). Then, *man* moves to the Specifier position of the Complementizer Phrase (CP) layer of the free relative clause, which is the position relevant for this type of element and movement, as illustrated in the tree in (41).

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[53] Usama Soltan, *On Formal Feature Licensing in Minimalism: Aspects of Standard Arabic Morphosyntax,* PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2007, p. 50-61; Rashid Al-Balushi, "Why Verbless Sentences in Standard Arabic are Verbless", *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, 2012, vol. 57, no.1, pp. 1-30.

[54] English has two relative pronouns corresponding to Arabic *man*, 'who', which is used for subject, and 'whom', which is used for object, as (i-ii) show, thus revealing the grammatical function; *man* in Arabic does not reveal this information.

     i. ra'ay-tu   *man*   yu-ḥibbu-nī

      saw-I   who   he/she-love-me

      'I saw who loves me.'

     ii. ra'ay-tu   *man*   'u-ḥibbu

      saw-I   whom   I-love

      'I saw whom I love.'

[55] E.g., Peter W. Culicover, *Principles and Parameters: An Introduction to Syntactic Theory,* Oxford University Press, New York 1997, p. 179-217.

41.   TP
          /   \
         T   vP
       yahdī   / \
             DP   v'
          Allāhuᵢ / \
                  v   VP
                yahdī / \
                      V   DP
                    yahdī |
                           D'
                          / \
                         D   CP
                        NP   C'
                       man   / \
                            C   TP
                          [Rel] / \
                                T   vP
                             yashā' / \
                                   DP   v'
                                  proᵢ / \
                                       v   VP
                                    yashā' / \
                                           V   [CP
                                         yashā' /\
                                              C   TP
                                             'an   /\
                                                 T   vP
                                            yahdiya-hu /\
                                                      DP   v'
                                                    proᵢ   /\
                                                          v   VP
                                                     yahdiya-hu /\
                                                              V   NP]
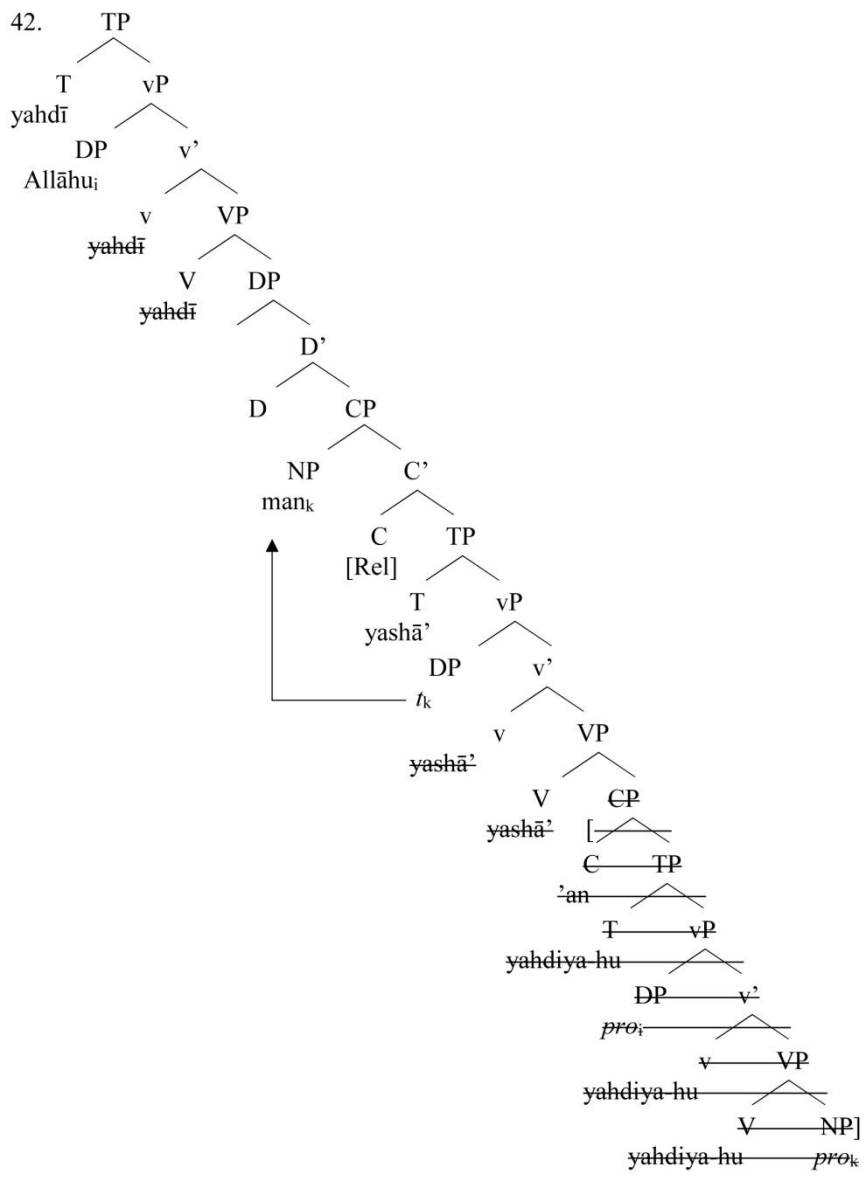   yahdiya-hu   t

And this is how *man* gets to be construed as an object, where *Allāh* is construed as the subject of *yashā'*, meaning in total, 'Allah guides whom He wishes', since the subject of *yashā'*, which is the earlier silent pronoun, '*pro*', is also co-indexed with the NP *Allāh*.

The '*t*' in the lowest NP position refers to the 'trace' that the relative pronoun *man*, meaning 'whom', leaves behind after it moves. The index i (i.e. subscript i) on the NP *Allāhu* and the two occurrences of '*pro*' means that these occurrences of '*pro*' must be interpreted as referring to the NP *Allāhu*. In simple terms, this means that the subject of the main clause verb *yahdī*, 'to guide', which is *Allāh*, is the same as the subject of the verb *yashā'*, 'to wish', in the free relative clause *man yashā'*, and is also the subject of the verb *yahdī*, 'to guide', in the silent complement clause *'an yahdiya-hu*. This leads to the understanding that *Allāh* is the subject of both 'to guide' and 'to wish', and that the human being is just the object of 'to guide', which refers to the common interpretation of these verses.

On the second/proposed interpretation, *man*, construed as 'who', starts as a subject of the verb *yashā'* (i.e. Specifier of *yashā'* position in the free relative clause), and then undergoes movement to the same position as in the common interpretation, the Specifier of the CP layer of the relative clause, as illustrated in the tree in (42). So, on both interpretations, *man* moves to the same position, and the distinction in the interpretation is derived based on its base-generation position (i.e. where it starts), as an *object* of *yahdiya-hu* in the unpronounced clause, or as a *subject* of *yashā'* in the relative clause.

In other words, unlike in the tree in (41), where *Allāh* is the subject of *yashā'*, 'to wish', the subject of *yashā'* in the tree in (42) is the human being. On both interpretations, the subject of *yahdī* 'to guide' is *Allāh*, and the object of *yahdī* is the human being. This is achieved through the co-indexation (through the index k, subscript k) between the object of *yahdiya-hu* in the unpronounced clause in (42), which is '*pro*', and the subject of *yashā'*, which is *man*, which later moves to the Specifier position of the free relative clause, leaving a trace '*t*' in the subject position of *yashā.*

42.

Therefore, when *man* 'مَنْ' originates as an object, as in (41), it is interpreted as 'whom', and when it originates as a subject, as in (42), it is construed as 'who'. This shows that the ambiguity resulting from verses like 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28), 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16), and 8 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35) is accounted for by the base-generation (i.e. starting) position of the relative pronoun *man*, whether an object position or a subject position.

Now, one main reason why scholars were tempted to assign Allah Almighty the role of the subject of *yashā'*, that is, favoring the old interpretation, might be traced to the belief that everything in the universe happens with the permission, or *mashī'ah*, of Allah. But, then, I think, they overlooked the fact that, though Allah Almighty controls everything and knows everything, including our future actions, He would not cause a human being to do good or bad, because then He would have influenced their choice. And, I think this should not happen. Although Allah controls the *mashī'ah* of everything, given His Absolute Omnipotence and Eternal Omniscience, He has left the *mashī'ah* for belief or disbelief in Him to the human beings to decide about, as He states in verse 29 of sūrat al-Kahf (The Cave, 18) in (43), translated as in (44).

43. "وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِن وَمَن شَاءَ فَلْيَكْفُرْ."

44. "And say, "The truth is from your Lord. Whoever wills—let him believe. And whoever wills-let him disbelieve."[56]

Now, if the right of the *mashī'ah* for belief in Allah, or the lack thereof, is granted to the human being, then the *mashī'ah* for seeking guidance (or the lack thereof), which will lead to the belief (or the lack thereof), must be assigned to the human being as well.

6. WHAT DETERMINES THE MEANING?

The discussion in the previous sections leads to the question about the factors that determine the meaning of Qur'ānic verses. In other words, if the subject of *yashā'* in verse 22 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35), in (45-46), must be Allah Almighty, what makes the subject of *yashā'* in verse 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28), repeated in (47-48), the human being, despite the syntactic similarity, manifested in the word order?

45. "وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَلَا الْأَمْوَاتُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَن يَشَاءُ ۖ وَمَا أَنتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَّن فِي الْقُبُورِ."

46. "Nor are equal the living and the dead. Allah causes whomever He wills to hear, but you cannot make those in the graves hear."[57]

47. "إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ."

48. "You cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills, and He knows best those who are guided."[58]

To address this nontrivial question, I suggest that pragmatics be also utilized in the interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, and that grammar (i.e. syntax and morphology) on its own is not sufficient. In fact,

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[56] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/18/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/29
[57] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/35/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/22
[58] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/28/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/56

this conclusion has already been reached by many scholars.[59] Pragmatics is defined as the "study of how context affects language use: both whether or not a particular utterance is felicitous in a given context and how the context affects that utterance's meaning or interpretation".[60] It is also defined as the "speakers' and addressees' background attitudes and beliefs, their understanding of the context in which a sentence is uttered, and their knowledge of how language can be used for a variety of purposes".[61]

This, therefore, means that context and beliefs affect how a sentence, or a Qurʾānic verse in this case, may be interpreted. In other words, pragmatics points out that Allah Almighty is the subject of *yashā'* in verse 22 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35), but that the human being is the subject of *yashā'* in verse 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28), given the reasons and relevant beliefs outlined in the previous sections.

The inevitable involvement of pragmatics in the interpretation of the Holy Qurʾān explains why the first sentence of verse 144 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) receives the desired interpretation (i.e. the one in line with our beliefs), though the grammatical properties point to another interpretation, one which contradicts verses in the Holy Qurʾān. Verse (2:144) is in (49), and examples of its translation are in (50-52):

49. "قَدْ نَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ"

50. "We have seen your face turned towards the heaven."[62]

51. "We certainly see *you* turning *your* face about in the sky."[63]

52. "We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens."[64]

All three translations state that Allah Almighty says 'We (certainly) see/have seen …', despite the fact that the grammatical elements and properties in this sentence point out to an interpretation that reads 'We might see …'. This is because when *qad* is followed by a present tense verb (like *narā* 'we see'), it implies possibility. When *qad* is followed by a past tense verb, it implies confirmation.[65] This is illustrated by the examples in (53-54).

53. qad   ʾa-qra'u   l-kitāba

    QAD   I-read.present   the-book

    'I might read the book.'

    ≠ 'I (have) read/will read the book.'

54. qad   qaraʾ-tu   l-kitāba

    QAD   read.past-I   the-book

    'I (have certainly) read the book.'

[59] E. g., Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*, Routledge Press, London 2001, p. 14; Ahmad Mahmoud Saidat, *The Syntax of Quranic Classical Arabic: A Principles and Parameters Approach,* PhD Dissertation, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006; Nawfal Saeed Majeed, "A Pragmatic Analysis of Some Polite Expressions in the Glorious Qur'an with References to Their Realization in English", *Journal of Tikrit University for the Humanities*, 2009, vol. 16, no. 12, p. 11.

[60] Hope Dawson and Michael Phelan, *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2016, p. 707.

[61] William O'Grady and John Archibald, *Contemporary Linguistic Analysis: An Introduction*, Pearson, Toronto 2016, p. 517.

[62] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/2/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/144

[63] https://al-quran.info/#2

[64] The Holy Quran, p. 14, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Goodword Books, India 2007.

[65] Karin C. Ryding, *A Reference Grammar of Modern Standard Arabic*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2005, p. 450-451.

This thus shows how the pragmatic factors, namely the fact that Allah *always sees*, and that there is no single moment in which Allah does not see everything in the universe (being Al-Baṣīr, the All-Seeing), contribute to providing a plausible interpretation to verse (2:144). Following an interpretation based solely on the grammatical properties of this sentence (according to which Allah might see!) contradicts many verses in the Holy Qur'an, like verse 18 of sūrat al-Ḥujurāt (The Chambers, 49) in (55), translated as in (56).

55. "إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ"

56. "Allah knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is seeing of everything you do."[66]

A possible question is then, why Allah Almighty did not say the statement in (57), with the verb in the past tense, *ra'aynā*, translated as in (58)?

57. 'قد رأينا تقلب وجهك في السماء'

58. 'We saw/have seen your face turning towards the heavens.'

It is simply because this statement indicates that Allah *saw* prophet Muḥammad's face turning towards the heavens, and might imply that He *no longer does* (i.e. describing a past event only), which is incorrect. Therefore, the structure that Allah Almighty masterfully chose was one with the confirmation particle, *qad*, and also with the verb tense which "denotes a stative or habitual or eternally true action", which is present tense.[67] This combination (with this meaning/function) is clearly not available in Modern Standard Arabic, given the examples in (53-54) (maybe because the resulting meaning is only true of Allah Almighty).

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the preceding sections, we provided evidence from both the Qur'ān and Sunnah, as well as from the scientific study of sentence structure (i.e. syntax), that the subject of *yashā'*, meaning 'to will' or 'to wish', in relation to seeking guidance and going astray, is the human being, not Allah Almighty. Allah does not impose a preference on the human being, nor does He favor one human being over another (except for the Messengers and Prophets, whom He chose for His religions). It is our fully free choices, whether good or evil, that inform Allah about our preferences, guidance or the opposite.

The rationale behind the interpretations proposed for the relevant parts of verses 56 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28), 93 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16), and 8 of sūrat Fāṭir (Creator, 35) receives support from Dr. Muḥammad Hidāyah's interpretation of the Ḥadīth in (59), translated as in (60).[68] Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said:

59. "إِذَا جَاءَ رَمَضَانُ فُتِّحَتْ أَبْوَابُ الْجَنَّةِ، وَغُلِّقَتْ أَبْوَابُ النَّارِ، وَصُفِّدَتِ الشَّيَاطِينُ."

60. "When Ramadan begins, the gates of Jannah are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are chained." (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1079)[69]

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[66] https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/49/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-itania/a1/alafasy-64/a2/itania-64/v/18

[67] https://www.learngrammar.net/english-grammar/present-tense

[68] Muhammad Hidāyah, Khaṭa' shā'i' fī fahm ḥadīth fatḥ 'abwāb al-Jannah wa 'ighlāq 'abwāb al-Nār wa taṣfīd al-shayāṭīn fī Ramaḍān, 2017. [youtube video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH7o5DFvc-s, accessed in May 2021.

[69] https://Sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/9/230

Dr. Hidāyah says that it is incorrect to think that it is Allah who 'opens the gates of Paradise', and 'closes the gates of Hell' and 'chains the devils'. For one thing, the wording of the Ḥadīth does not mention an agent/doer; the three verbs are all in the passive voice. Secondly, argues Dr. Hidāyah, if Allah chains the devils, who were created to provide tests to the human beings' faith (by trying to mislead them), then why should the human beings get the great reward of fasting, which is 'entering Jannah through the gate of al-Rayyān', according to the Ḥadīth translated as in (61); prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said:

61. "There is a gate in Paradise called al-Rayyān, and those who observe fasts will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection and none except them will enter through it. It will be said, 'Where are those who used to observe fasts?' They will get up, and none except them will enter through it. After their entry the gate will be closed and nobody will enter through it." (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1896)[70]

Thirdly, as Dr. Hidāyah argues, the fact that some Muslims commit sins as atrocious as adultery during the daytime in Ramadhan proves that the devils are not chained by Allah. This is because if Allah Almighty chains the devils, His chaining would be perfect (as perfect as Allah is), and so no devils would be able to escape those chains. However, the fact that they were able to escape and mislead some Muslims indicates that those Muslims' faith was not strong enough to chain those devils. This indicates, argues Dr. Hidāyah, that it is the Muslims' decisions and choices (and consequently deeds) that open the gates of Paradise and close the gates of Hell for them, and also chain the devils.[71]

Now, it is vitally important that the interpretations of these and similar verses be amended in a way that reveals the intended meaning, the one in line with the various pieces of evidence provided in this paper. Equally important, we also need to correct the translations of these Qurʾānic verses, in both the paper and online translations, as well as TV ones, to reflect the reality of the situation. Telling people, especially non-Muslims who appeal to online exegesis sources as well as translations of the Holy Qurʾān, that Allah decides on whom to guide and whom to mislead conveys a false view about the duty and role of the human being in this life, and also about the Divine role in the life of human beings. This false view has implications for how people in general, and non-Muslims in particular, view this religion. It must therefore be clear that human beings are free to make their decisions and choose their deeds, and so be accountable for what they choose to do.

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[70] Abū Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ lil-Bukhārī,* (vol. 2), al-Salafiyya Press, Cairo 1980, p. 29. Translation from: https://sunnah.com/bukhari/30/6

[71] A possible counterargument here is that if it is the Muslims who chain the devils in Ramadhan, it is still the Muslims who chain them outside Ramadhan; and so, what is special about Ramadhan, and what is the logic behind the Ḥadīth? Basically, during Ramadhan, Muslims are fasting during the daytime, and are (or rather should be) busy during the night with Qiyām and other forms of worship, including visiting relatives and neighbors, which provides a good opportunity for them to stay away from sins, thus chaining the devils during Ramadhan, hence this Ḥadīth.

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