

SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES OF AAYATUL KURSI AND THE FIRST REVELATION

Analysis and Explication

By

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FOREWORD

The syntactic structures of Aayatul Kursi and of the first Revelation (Wahi) are the titles of Oosman Muhammad Ismail and Oosman Abdul Haque Endowment Lectures for the year 2002 2003. I delivered these lectures under the auspices of the Department of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, University of Madras. As the themes of the lectures may be of interest to people in general Muslims in particular, these lectures are being published after revising and enlarging them.

The Registrar of the University of Madras has been kind to accord necessary permission to publish them without any financial commitment on the part of the University. (Vide his communication No. E 11- Endowment Section/ Publish EL 2-3/2037 dated 12 May 2003)

Two passages of the Quran have been selected for an innovative fresh and creative analysis and explication. One passage is pre-eminently popular among the Muslims and another is of unique historical value. Some of the latest critical tools employed discourse analysis have been pressed into service in these lectures Focus has been placed on the foregrounding features of the two passages. In order to highlight the binary elements of the selected passages, and the internal relationship of various parts, an unconventional and paradigmatic/ vertical design has been followed without disturbing the original syntax.

The passages are divided into units and layers. Repetitions of words single use of certain parts of speech, similarities and contrasts syntactic shifting of prepositional phrases, additions of clauses, prominence of certain structures, binary patterns, transitive verbs used intransitively, semantic variations in the words repeated, points of convergence, selections of certain words in preference to others are some of the foregrounding features which needed to be prominently displayed. This objective has been realized through the structural designs as visual aids preceding the explication. The novelty of the aids is meant to clarify and not to distract.

An attempt at a close, cogent, and concentrated study of the words and sentences in the passages concerned has been made. Any lapse in this attempt is due to my inadequacy and I seek Allah's forgiveness. However, no attempt is made to interpret the Quran with ulterior motives or to derive principles of jurisprudence or to collect sectarian material. These lectures are purely academic in nature and approach.

The lecture on Aayatul Kursi was largely translated into Urdu and published in the October 2005 issue of Zindagi-e-Nau, New Delhi. A part of the lecture on the First Revelation (Wahi) of the Quran appeared in Radiance Viewsweekly, dated 14-20 Jan. 2007, New Delhi.

What could not be justifiably accommodated in the main texts of the lectures and yet have some relevance to the themes of the verses under discussion have been added as

appendices. These form comparative studies and it is hoped that they will enhance the value of the textual analyses.

I am deeply indebted to my student, Javeed Chida, B.E., (USA) for the interest he has taken in publishing this book. May Allah reward him abundantly for all the help he has given me. Amen.

January 7, 2009

U. MUHAMMAD IQBAL

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Foreword	
2. Aayatul Kursi -Arabic Text, English Translation	
a. Introductory Remarks	8
b. Explication	11
c. al-Hayy	13
d. Al-Qayyum	14
e. God's Knowledge	15
f. God's Throne	16
g. God is the most High	18
h. Intercession after permission	19
Appendix - I Verbal and Semantic Parallels	22
Appendix - II Aayatul Kursi and the Bible	24
Appendix III- Versified Version	25
3. First Revelation (Wahi) Arabic Text and English Translation	26
a. Introductory Remarks	27
b. Repetitions	28
c. Modifications	29
d. Omissions	29
e. Additions	30
f. Explication	31
g. Aspects of the First Revelation	38
Appendix - I - The First Revelation and the Bible	43
Appendix - II - The First Revelation and Caedmon	44
Appendix - III - The choice of `Alaqa'	45

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذِي الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

1
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اللَّهُ

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ

الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

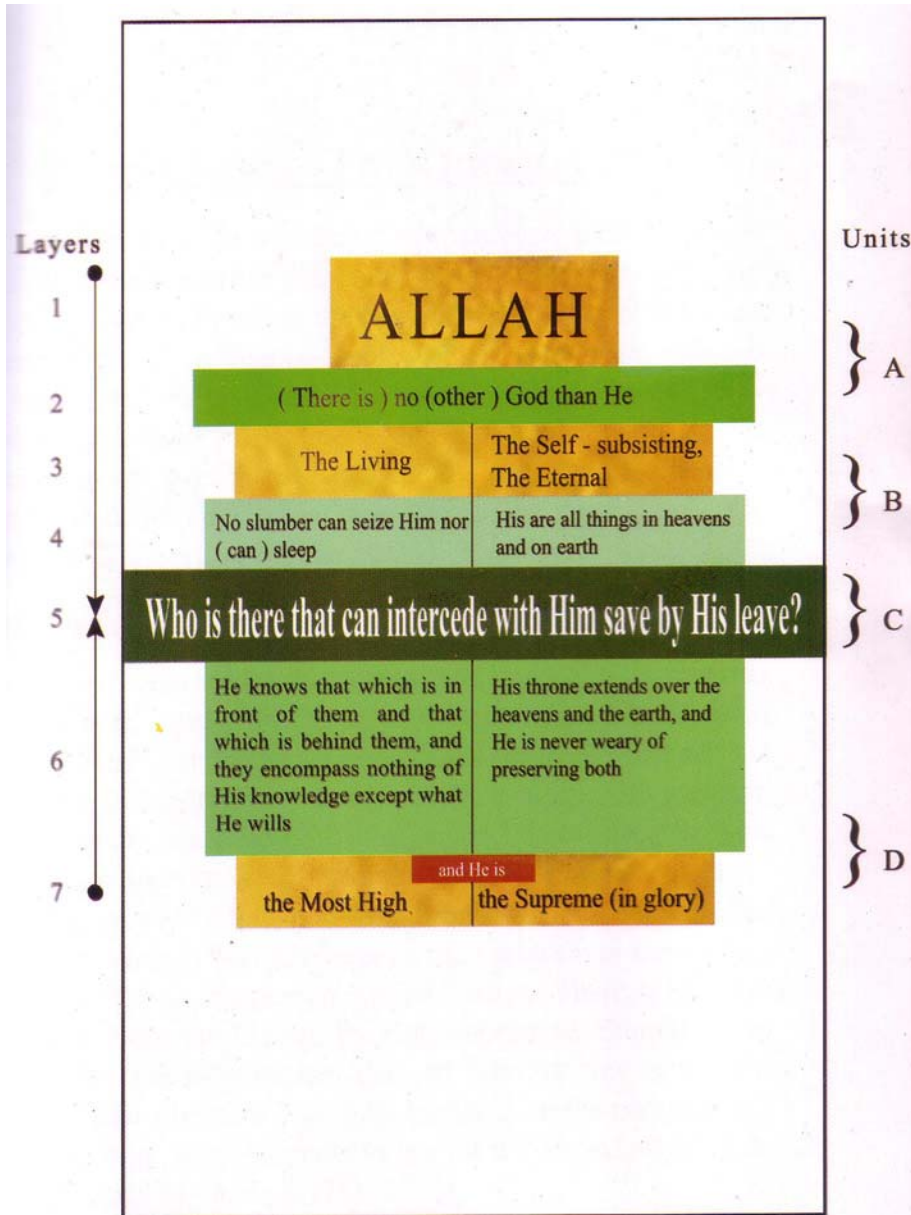
لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ

مَنْ ذِي الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ

وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

} A
} B
} C
} D



Ayatul Kursi (The Quran, 2:255)

Allah! There is no other God than Him, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor (can) sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who can intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows that which is in front of them and that which is behind them; and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. And He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory). The Quran, 2:255

Introductory Remarks:

The Prophet (May Allah bless and greet him) is reported to have said, “Ayat-ul-Kursi holds its own among the Quranic verses.” Here is an exchange on this verse between him and his companion, Hadrat Ubayy bin Ka’ab. The companion narrates: The Prophet (peace be with him) once asked him, “Do you know, Abu Munthir, which verse is the greatest in the Quran?” and he replied, “Allah and His Prophet know better.” The Prophet persisted, “Which verse in the Scripture is supreme in your view?” The companion replied, “Allah! There is no other God than Him, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal.” The companion narrates further that on hearing this reply, the Prophet (peace be with him) kept his hand on the companion’s chest and said, “Compliments to you on this knowledge!” (I.A. Qadri, Fadaail-ul-Quran,p.171)

Consequent upon these observations, this verse enjoys great prominence and popularity in all Muslim homes and shops.

Though this verse begins with the name ‘Allah’, it is not the only verse beginning thus. There are thirty-five verses in the Quran which begin with the name ‘Allah’. They are as follows: 2: 15,255,257; 3:2; 4:87; 13:2,8,26; 14:2,32; 20:8; 22:69,75; 24:35; 27:26; 29:62; 30:11,40,48,54; 32:4; 37:46,126; 39:23,42,62; 40:61,64,79; 42:17,19; 45:12; 64:13; 65:12; and 112:2. In these verses Allah is presented in different ways, as Light, as the Creator, as the Benefactor, as the Guide and Teacher. In Ayat-ul-Kursi, 2:255, Allah is presented as the Owner of the Day of Judgment, the Wisest and Most Conclusive of judges, and the Lord of Throne Supreme. A Muslim life in its entirety is but a single-minded preparation for a momentous meeting with Him on the Day of Judgment leading to everlasting consequences. This accounts for the unique distinction of this verse.

The verse preceding Ayat-ul-Kursi reads as follows: “O ye who believe! Spend out of (the bounties) We have provided for you, before the Day comes when no bargaining (will avail), nor friendship nor intercession. Those who reject Faith- they are the wrong-doers.”(2:254) The reference to intercession here is significant because it is this issue and its various dimensions that comprise the central theme of Ayat-ul-Kursi. Allama Yusuf Ali draws our attention to verses 2:48 and 2:123 which deal with the theme of intercession in a thorough manner. Vide his Commentary, note 295.

The structure given above has seven layers. The first two layers form one unit-A. The second two layers form another unit-B. The third layer is single and singular in more ways than one. This unit is C. The fourth unit – D comprises two layers-6 and 7- again. Units B and D have four parts each, and their binary pattern is highlighted by a dividing line. In these two units, there are six declarative sentences. There is one interrogative sentence in unit C. This unit is at the centre of the binary pattern and is fore grounded on account of the rhetorical question it comprises and on account of the fact that it is both preceded and succeeded by declarative sentences. Three of the declarative sentences are positive and three are negative in units B and D. Thus a wonderful symmetry is conjured up. There are five names of God in this verse.

The centrality of the rhetorical question (Unit C) in this verse is elucidated in the following table.

	Before the Question	After the Question
1	Names of God precede their elucidation.	Elucidation precedes the names of God.
2	A negative sentence precedes an affirmative one.	An affirmative sentence invariably precedes a negative one.
3	Simple sentences are used.	Compound sentences are used.
4	God is the theme.	Creation (animate and inanimate) is the theme.
5	Each name of God relates to both the negative and the affirmative sentences.	One name of God relates to the negative sentences preceding it and another name of God relates to the affirmative sentences preceding it.
6	One negative+ one affirmative	Two affirmatives+ two negatives.
7	Vertical (personal) aspects and attributes of God are highlighted.	Horizontal (in relation to Creation) aspects and attributes of are highlighted.

This centrality per se requires that the four parts of Unit B and Unit D should converge on Unit C. The convergence of Unit D demands an upward semantic movement.

Justification of the upward semantic movement:

1. “Allah! There is no (other) God but He –the Living, the Self- subsisting, Eternal.” This is one complete verse. It is found in 3:2. In 2:255, the two names of God, “the Living, the Self-subsisting/ Eternal” belong to Unit A as much as they belong to Unit B. Thus the two names of God have both upward and downward connections.
2. “To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: and He is Most High, Most Great.” (42:4) This verse combines two parts of Ayat-ul-Kursi- Unit B, part 4 and Unit D, parts 3 and 4. In this way, the two names of God at the end of Ayat-ul-Kursi have upward connection with Unit B, part 4 as much as the latter has the downward connection with the end of the verse.
3. “He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they offer no intercession except for those who are acceptable.” (21:28) In this verse, it is asserted that God knows everything about “Ibadul Mukramoon”, servants raised to honour. This knowledge of God is mentioned first and the topic of intercession is mentioned later. In Ayat-ul-Kursi, the theme of intercession precedes the reference to God’s knowledge about His most favoured servants. This transposition of the two themes both in 2:255 and in 21:28 justifies the application of the concept of the upward semantic movement.

Roman Jakobson says, “Every linguistic sign is located on two axes: The axis of simultaneity and that of succession.” It is this axis of simultaneity that I wish to lay stress on by justifying the upward movement.

4. The thematic similarity between “No slumber can seize Him nor sleep” (Unit B, part 3) and “He is never weary of preserving both” (Unit D, part 4) justifies the upward and downward semantic movements. References to heaven and earth before and after the rhetorical question in Unit C emphasize their interconnection even though their symbolic function differs from unit to unit. In Unit B heaven and earth symbolize God’s property and in Unit D they symbolize God’s legal and administrative jurisdiction.

In the light of these reasons, Unit C deserves to be treated as a point of convergence for Unit D.

EXPLICATION:

Unit A. “Allah! There is no other God than Him.” This is a variation of Kalima-e-Tayyiba. It is the holiest proposition. The Kalima is usually written as “There is no other God than Allah.” By transposing the name ‘Allah’ to the first position in the statement, the emotional impact of the holy name is immeasurably increased.

Mathew V. Kuzhuvellil, in his essay “Has God a name?”, writes, “No proper name of God has been revealed in any religion. The One God of all religions and of the whole world may be acknowledged as the Real One.” (Intertextuality of the Holy Books, 2004, p.62) Etymologically, Allah means the Real God.

Allah is the One and Only Deity. The Arabic word used in this Ayat is ‘Ilaha’. The underlying assumptions enshrined in this Arabic word are: 1. God takes care of us and ministers to our needs and fulfils our wishes. 2. He has the omnipotence to lend strength and protection to us in times of need and danger. 3. He calms the agitated mind and brings peace to us when we are harassed and worried. 4. He is supreme, second to none, and executes His will unhindered by any force. 5. He is dominant, invincible, all-prevailing, all-encompassing. 6. He is in possession of all powers and privileges and, on account of this possession, He is expected to render help, to remove obstacles, to give shelter, and to supply what we need. 7. He is invisible, wrapped in mystery, and beyond our ken. 8. Man is naturally curious about, emotionally fond of, and temperamentally inclined towards Him. This elucidation is based on and taken from “Alfaze-Qurani ki Tafheem, Syed Abul Ala Maudoodi, compiled by Talha Ayub Islahi, (New Delhi: Quran-Wo-Sunnat Academy, 2005, p.15) These assumptions enrich the connotation of the word ‘Ilaha’ or the Deity- an object worthy of worship, surrender, and glorification.

Monotheism, pure and simple, is embedded in the statement that there is no Deity other than Allah. A more elaborate statement is found in 44:8. “There is no other God but Him; it is He who gives life and gives death- The Lord and Cherisher to you and your earliest ancestors.” No mythical or historical figure can be identified with Him. He is unique, supreme and above all needs. (112:1, 2) “He it is that feeds and is not fed.” (6:14) “No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me.” (51:57) “We ask you not to provide sustenance. We provide it for you.” (20:132) “No vision can grasp Him. But His grasp is over all vision. He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.” (6:103) “Allah knows and you do not know.” (16:74) “He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs).” (21:23) “He is the Omnipotent over His slaves.” (6:18, 61) “Doer of what He wills.” (85:16) “He protects while against Him there is no protection.” (23:88) “It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him!” (19:35) “He begets not nor is He begotten.” (112:3) “Adore not the sun and the moon, but adore Allah, who created them, if it is Him you wish to serve.” (41:37) “Whatever is in the heavens and on earth does declare the praises and glory of Allah: to Him belongs the dominion and to him belongs praise: and He has power all things.” (64:1) “And there is none comparable unto Him.” (112:4)

Unit B1 and B2: Al-Hayy ,Al-Qayyum- The Living,The Self-Subsisting/Eternal

“Allah! There is no other God but Him! To Him belong the most beautiful names.” (20:28)The beautiful names vary after the statement, “There is no other God but Him.” For example, in 2:163 and 59:22, it is stated, “There is no other God but Him, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” Again, in 3:6 and 18, it is stated, “There is no other God but Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise.” In 2:255 and 3:2, it is stated, “There is no other God but Him, the Living, the Self-Subsisting/ Eternal.”

In the verses quoted above, the names of God are provided in pairs. There are exceptions to this literary device. For example, in 27:26, only one name is provided: “There is no other God but Him, the Lord of the Throne Supreme.” In 59:23, four pairs of names of God are given at a stretch: “There is no other God but Him, the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Supreme.”

Al-Hayy, Al-Qayyum: The central theme of this verse (2:255) is intercession on the Day of Judgment. The relationship between these two names of God and the Day of Judgment is highlighted in 20:111. “(All) faces shall be humbled before (Him)- the Living, the Self-Subsisting/Eternal.” These two names have a direct link to the rhetorical question in Unit C. The bent heads symbolize utter helplessness and humility and this state of humility is bereft of the qualities of self-confidence and gumption needed to make a vigorous legal defence of the accused and the guilty.

Allah is not the Deity of the yesteryear. He is the Living God. He is the First and the Last. (57:3) “All that is on earth will perish: but will abide (for ever) the Face of thy Lord- full of majesty, bounty, honour.” (55:26, 27) “The Alive who dies not.” (25:58) “He who created Death and Life.” (67:2) The One who created life would have existed without and before the conditions conducive to existence and survival were brought into play. “The principal things necessary for the life of man are water, fire, and iron, salt, milk, and bread of flour, and honey, and the cluster of grape and oil, and clothing.” (Ecclesiasticus, 39:31) God does not depend upon these things for His life. Biologists enumerate the following characteristics for living objects: motion, energy-releasing process, increase in size and weight, protoplasm, reproduction, metabolism, cellular organization, digestion/assimilation, etc. God is free from and above all these characteristics and yet He lives in a unique way, without the features which plague human existence, like sleep, loss of consciousness, disease, loss of limbs, and death.

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes, “The attributes of Allah are different from anything we know in our present world: He lives, but his life is self-subsisting and eternal: it does not depend upon other beings and is not limited to time and space. Perhaps the attribute of Qayyum includes not only the idea of “Self-subsisting” but also the idea of “keeping up and maintaining all life.” (Commentary, Note 296) This idea of maintaining is clearly stated in the following verses: “Do they not look at the birds, held poised in the midst (of the air and) the sky? Nothing holds them up but the power of Allah.” (16:79) “It is Allah who sustains the heavens and the earth, lest they cease (to

function): and if they should fail, there is none- not one- that can sustain them thereafter.” (35:41)

The Living vis-a vis No slumber can seize Him nor sleep:

Allah alone enjoys pure and perfect life. His life is absolutely distinguished from the life of the objects He has created. He is the Creator of Life and He has given to Life its identity and characteristics. Allah remains awake, alert, and active day in, day out. His life is not sicklied over with the pale cast of light or deep sleep even for the twinkling of an eye. The denial of ‘sushupti’ (sleep) to God does not come into conflict with the geographical discoveries. When the Quran was revealed, the New World was not discovered. This discovery proved that God should not go to sleep. When the night falls in one hemisphere, a new dawn breaks at that time in another hemisphere. So, God who has to take care of both hemispheres has to remain wide awake all the time.

Al-Hayy is a glorious name of God denoting that He will not be deprived of His life either for a moment or for three days. God does not merely exist. “Every day in (new) splendour does He shine.” (55:29) His powers remain undiminished. “My Lord never errs, nor forgets.” (20:25) “And We are never unmindful of (Our) creation.” (23:17) “And enough is thy Lord to note and see the sins of His servants.” (17:17)

Al-Hayy vis-à-vis His are all things in heaven and on earth:

Dead people forfeit their right to ownership. Their assets pass on to their legal heirs. As God is alive and eternally alive, the entire universe which He created will continue to remain His property for ever and He has unrestricted rights of ownership and He will continue to exercise them for all times to come. “His are all things in heaven and on earth.” All the treasures, all the assets, all forms of life are owned by Him. “To Allah belong the treasures of the heavens and the earth; but the hypocrites understand not.” (63:7) “To Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth.” (3:180) “Allah is the One free of all wants, worthy of all praise.” (35:15) “To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: for verily Allah – He is free of all wants, worthy of all praise.” (22:64) “To Him belong all things.” (27:91)

Prophet Muhammad (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) guides mankind to the Straight Way, “The Way of Allah, to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth.” (42:53)

Al- Qayyum vis-à-vis the two statements in Layer 4:

Similarly, the name ‘Al- Qayyum’ is elucidated in the two statements-‘ No slumber can seize Him nor (can) sleep’, and , ‘His are all things in heaven and on earth’. Eternal vigilance is the price of management and administration. He who has to maintain the vast universe, comprising countless galaxies, can ill-afford to doze off, turn away, look askance, snatch forty winks, or shut eyes. It is but the primary duty of the proprietor to maintain and protect his property at all times and at all costs. In the capacity of Al- Qayyum, Allah has remained vigilant and has been in full control of His universe for billions of years. “Then praise be to Allah, Lord the heavens and Lord of the earth- Lord and Cherisher of all the worlds! To Him be glory throughout the heavens and the earth: and He is exalted in power, full of wisdom.” (45:36, 37)

The Relationship between Layer 4 and Layer 5:

There is a denial of utter insouciance on God’s part in the statement, ‘No slumber can seize Him nor (can) sleep’ and there is an element of happy assertion in the claim, ‘His are all things in heaven and on earth.’ Both ideas are combined in the statement, ‘We are never unmindful of (Our) creation.’ (23:17) God is not lackadaisical towards His creation. “Enough is He to be acquainted with the faults of His servants.” (25:58)

The implications of the statement ‘No slumber can seize him nor sleep’ are: 1. Allah knows what people conceal and what they reveal.(2:77) 2. Allah sees well all that they do. (2:96) 3. Allah hears and knows all things. (2:181) 4. He is well-acquainted with and watchful over His servants. (42:27) 5. Is it not enough that thy Lord does witness all things? (41:53) 6. Allah knows (all) that is in your hearts. (33:51) These implications make it clear that God does not stand in need of advocates and police when He is an eye-witness to all that is happening in the universe.

The implications of the statement, ‘His are all things in the heaven and on earth’ are as follows: 1. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all between them, and all beneath the soil. (20:6) 2. God is rich and we are poor. (35:15) His riches in heaven are mentioned separately and so are his riches on earth. The infinite quality of his riches is thus brought home. So He will not be interested in barter or ransom. “The Day comes when no bargaining (will avail).” (2:254) “If it offered every ransom, (or reparation), none will be accepted.” (6:70) More details follow.

“(The Day) no friend will ask after a friend.” (70:10) “No intimate friend or intercessor will the wrong- doers have, who could be listened to.” (40:18) “Nor will it be open to them to put forth pleas.” (77:36) “Every soul that has sinned if it possessed all that is on earth would fain give it in ransom.” (10:54) “Those who respond not to Him- even if they had all that is in the heavens and on earth, and as much more, (in vain) would they offer it for ransom.(13:18) “The sinner’s desire will be: would that he could redeem himself from the penalty of that Day by (sacrificing) his children, his wife and his brother, his kindred who sheltered him, and all that is on earth- so it could deliver him.” (70:11-14)

These excerpts make it clear that the payment of ransom will be considered most seriously as a possible alternative to avoid the penalty on the Day of Judgment but it will be rejected by Allah most sternly. The question of paying ransom in the form of money, sacrifice, blood or life centuries before the Day of Judgment or the possibility of its acceptance is not envisaged in the Quran.

Layer 6.1: “He knows that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He wills.”

The plural third person pronouns, ‘them’ and ‘they’, in this sentence may refer to prophets and angels who are expected to play the role of intercessors. The angels say, “To Him belongs what is before us, and what is behind us, and what is between: and thy Lord never does forget.” (19:64) About the prophets, it is stated in the Quran, “Nor does He make anyone acquainted with His mysteries- except a messenger whom He has chosen, and then He makes a band of watchers march before him and behind him.” (72:27) “Allah chooses messengers from angels and from men for Allah is He who hears and sees (all things). He knows what is before them and what is behind them.” (22:75, 76)

The Quran waxes eloquent while throwing light on the perfect and infinite knowledge of God. “We do know all things.” (21:81) “Verily Allah knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth and Allah sees well all that you do.”(49:18) He knows His prophets well. “Allah knows best with whom to place His message.” (6:124) “And well were We acquainted with him (Abraham).” (21:51) “It is your Lord that knows you best.” (17:54) “He knows the doings of every soul.” (13:42) “He knows what is manifest and what is hidden.” (87:7) “My Lord knows (every) word (spoken) in the heavens and on earth. He is the One that hears and knows all things.” (21:4)

It goes without saying that, had people fully appreciated this infinite knowledge of God, this appreciation would have strengthened their piety and put a leash upon their base promptings. The limbs and faculties of the sinners address them on the Day of Judgment thus: You did think that Allah knew not many of the things that you used to do. But this thought of yours which you did entertain concerning your Lord has brought you to destruction.” (41:22, 23)

The same knowledge and testimony of God are invoked to authenticate the claim to prophethood advanced by Prophet Muhammad (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him). “And We have sent you (Muhammad) as a Messenger to (instruct) mankind. And enough is Allah for a witness.” (4:79) “Allah bears witness that what He has sent unto you He has sent from His (own) knowledge, and the angels bear witness: but enough is Allah for a witness.” (4:166) “Enough is Allah for a witness between me and you: He knows what is in the heavens and on earth.” (29:52) “The Unbelievers say, “You are by no means a Messenger.” Say: Enough for a witness between me and you is Allah, and such as have knowledge of the Book.” (13:43)

These prophets and angels encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He wills them to encompass. The angels say, “Glory to Thee: of knowledge we have none save what Thou hast taught us.” (2:32) One of God’s servants tells Moses, “How can you have patience about things about which your understanding is not complete?” (18:68) Jesus Christ tells God, “You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours.” (5:116) The Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) is made to say, “I do not know what will be done with me or with you.” (46:9) The narrative of some prophets only is given to him. “We did aforetime send Messengers before you: of them are some whose story We have related to you, and some whose story We have not related to you.” (40:78)

“None can know the forces of your Lord except Him.” (74:31) “Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone).” (31:34) “With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none know except Him.” (6:59)

The urge to intercede, plead, and recommend on behalf of the sinners comes naturally and spontaneously to angels and prophets. “Those who sustain the Throne (of Allah)...implore forgiveness for those who believe.” (40:7) “And Abraham prayed for his father’s forgiveness.” (9:114) “He began to plead with Us for Lot’s people.” (11:74) The Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) prayed for the forgiveness of the people of Taif who turned the day of his visit to their place into the most distressful day of his life.

In order to understand at first hand the human frailties, the complex factors which characterize the human predicament with regard to seductions and temptations and the factors which render him helpless in the matter of resisting sin and crime, He does not need to assume human form and human flesh. Moreover, this incarnation alone does not oblige Him to temper His justice with mercy. Without this transmogrification, God knows thoroughly each human being and all his traits that He Himself has endowed him with. So the Quran asks: Should He not know- He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries (and) is well acquainted (with them) (67:14) “It was we who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein.” (50:16)

Layer 6:2 :His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving both of them.

It is in this section that the word, ‘Kursi’ occurs and the entire verse takes its name from it. The exegetes have given four interpretations of this polysemic word-1. God’s footstool, 2.God’s Throne, 3.The symbol of His knowledge, and 4.The symbol of His authority and sovereignty. In a Hadith narrated by Abu Tharr, a distinction has been made between the footstool and the Throne, and the Bible corroborates the distinction. The verb, ‘Wasi’a’, (extend) is applied in the Quran to other attributes of God. For example, “My Lord comprehends all things His knowledge.” (6:80) The angels say, “Our Lord! Your reach is over all things, in mercy and knowledge.” (40:7) As Allah is ‘the

King or Ruler of mankind' (114:2), "the Wisest of Judges" (95:8), 'the Best to Decide' (10:109), and as 'the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to Him' (57:2), the 'Kursi' is the symbol of his authority and sovereignty. It is also a pointer to the fact that He has no co-sharer of authority in His dominion. (17:111)

We intercede with men at the helm of affairs on behalf of the underdogs and the weaklings. As the central theme of this verse is intercession, the word 'Kursi' is most likely to symbolize judicial authority and executive power with which intercession is possible. The primary duty and the job number one of the ruler is to maintain law and order. In several places, the Quran indicates this. "My Lord has care and watch over all things." (11:57) "We have indeed decked the lower heaven... for guard against all obstinate rebellious spirits." (37:7) "And We have made the heavens as a canopy well guarded." (21:32) This theme is mentioned in 15:17 and 41:12 also. In recent times only, the function of the ozone layer as a protective shield for the earth was discovered. Modern science is yet to discover how galaxies are protected. The duty of maintaining and monitoring is being done on a very huge scale. "For each (person) there are (angels) in succession before and behind him. They guard him by command of Allah." (13:11) "There is no soul but has a protector over it." (86:4)

The act of creation did not make God weary. "We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six Days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us." (50:38) "(He) created the heavens and the earth, and never wearied with their creation." (46:33) Similarly, the task of protecting the heavens and the earth does not tire Him out. (It is a matter of great rejoicing that God has taken upon Himself the duty of protecting the Quran. "We have, without doubt, sent down the Message: and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)." (15:9) "Nay, this is the Glorious Quran, (inscribed) in a Tablet preserved." (85:21, 22))

Notwithstanding the vast expanses, the whole universe is administered from one Kursi as one unit. The heavens and the earth are joined together as one unit whereas in Layer 4.2, they are mentioned separately to emphasize God's vast riches. The 'Kursi' makes it clear that the entire universe is fully integrated and that God remains God in both places. "It is He who is God in heaven and God on earth." (43:84)

The Relationship between Layer 6 and Layer 5:

In Layer 6.1, a sharp contrast between God's knowledge about the prospective and exalted intercessors and their own knowledge of men and matters is intended. What the intercessors know is what God has permitted them to know and they have no other source of knowledge beside God. In such a situation, God does not stand in need of intercession through angels and prophets. They cannot add an iota of information to the knowledge of God and thereby put Him under an obligation to revisit His own judgment. (21:28)

In Layer 6.2, it is stated that God runs His private property in a professional manner. "He directs the ordinance from the heaven unto the earth." (32:5) From the time

He created the universe, God has been in constant control. "It is He who created the heavens and the earth in truth." (6:73) He established control with this communication. "He said to the sky and to the earth: "Come Ye together willingly or unwillingly." They said: We do come (together), in willing obedience." (41:11) At the time of Noah's deluge, God demonstrated His power over the sky and the earth with this communication: "Then the word went forth: O Earth! Swallow up thy water, and O Sky! Withhold (thy rain)!" And the water abated, and the matter was ended." (11:44) As a demonstration of His authority, God appointed man His vicegerent on earth. (2:30) None can frustrate God's plan or prevail against Him in any part of the universe, including the earth. (29:22, 42:31) The Jinns are quite aware of this fact. (72:12) His grip over the universe never relaxes and hence the impossibility of cosmic anarchy. In such a situation, there will be no chance of defending the guilty on the technical plea that the scene of crime was beyond the administrative jurisdiction of God and it would be ultra vires for God to take cognizance of the crime. Further, there will be no chance of defending the guilty on the technical plea that the crime was committed when the law and order machinery had totally broken down and no single crime committed in a situation of total anarchy could be selected for judicial appraisal.

Reading Between The Lines:

In order to establish a link between Layers 4, 5, and 6, I have resorted to reading between the lines. The verse begins with the name of Allah and it is His perspective that is highlighted at every Layer. How this perspective affects us can be driven home by making explicit what is implicit. The facts of God being the Eye-witness and the Owner of the universe take precedence over the facts that the angels and the prophets are mere subjects and that the universe is the domain of His sovereignty. These four facts bring into broad relief the absolute authority that God possesses and will display on the Day of Judgment beyond a shadow of doubt. "(It will be) the Day when no soul shall have power (to do) aught for another. For the Command, that Day, will be wholly with Allah." (82:19) "The Day, whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail." (26:88)

Layer 7: And He is the Most High, the Supreme (in Glory).

According to Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, these two attributes (Al- Ali, Al-Azeem) encompass the affirmation all the positive aspects and the total negation of the defects in the character of God in order to highlight His greatness and perfection.

He is the Most High in the sense that He grants as much knowledge as He wishes to the angels and the prophets and in the sense that He protects the universe without growing weary. In 42:51, it is stated that Allah grants knowledge through wahi (revelation) and through a Messenger and that Allah is the Most High. In 41:12 and in 15:17, references to the protection of the universe are made.

How supreme in glory God is can be easily understood from the fact that God "knows what is in front of them and what is behind them," and from the fact that God's Throne extends over the heavens and the earth ! "It is Allah who sustains the heavens and

the earth, lest they cease (to function): and if they should fail, there is none – not one- that can sustain them thereafter.” (35:41)

The last Arabic letters in ‘Al-Hayy’ and in ‘Al-Ali’ are the same. Similarly, the last Arabic letters in ‘Al-Qayyum’ and in ‘Al-Azeem’ are the same. These pairs of names thus become linguistic markers flanking the three main Layers- 4, 5, and 6.

LAYER 5: Who is there that can intercede with Him save by His leave?

This rhetorical question is the fore grounded nucleus of this verse because it the only interrogative sentence in the midst of six declarative sentences. Even though this question does not require an answer, the answer is clearly stated, “No intercessor (can plead with Him) except after His leave (has been obtained.” (10:3) The principle and efficacy of intercession are not totally rejected but conditionally confirmed. The promise, “You will be sent back to the Knower of things secret and open,” (62:8) will be fulfilled on the Day of Judgment.

Intercession belongs to Allah exclusively. (39:44) This is a matter of principle. However, it does not exclude God’s right to grant the privilege of intercession to those He proposes to honour.

“All power and honour belong to Allah.” (10:65, 35:10) Still, God honours the Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) and his followers by saying, “Honour belongs to Allah, and to the Messenger, and to the Believers.” (63:8) Similarly, Allah can extend the privilege of intercession to whomsoever He likes. However, the Quran does not recognize those people whom the polytheists regard as intercessors. “They serve, besides Allah, things that hurt them not, nor profit them, and they say: These are our intercessors with Allah. Say: Do you indeed inform Allah of something He knows not, in the heavens or on earth?” (10:18) “No intercessor will they have among their ‘Partners’ and they will (themselves) reject their ‘Partners’.”(30:13)

“No intercession can avail in His presence except for those for whom He has granted permission.” (34:23)

“How many so ever be the angels in the heavens, their intercession will avail nothing except after Allah has given leave for whom He pleases and that he is acceptable to Him.” (53:26)

The central theme of this verse is intercession or mediation. The Arabic equivalent of this word is ‘Shafa’at’. It is derived from three Arabic letters sheen, fay, and ’ain. These letters denote bonding or symbiosis of two things. Shafa’at, therefore, implies assistance rendered by a strong man to bail out a vulnerable person from a precarious situation. This assistance is recommendation, intercession, mediation, advocacy in other words. In this act of recommendation for remission, release, emancipation, the one who recommends bonds with the man in distress and is therefore known as “Shafee” and the man for whom recommendation is made is called

“Mashfoo” In Islamic lore, “Shafa’at” is the recommendation made by an angel or a prophet or a saint in God’s presence for the total forgiveness and remission of a sinner on the Day of Judgment. (Vide ‘The Islamic Concept of Shafa’at’, Mustaqeem Farooqi Modhavi, in Zindagi-e-Nau, New Delhi, February 2006, p.23)

The attitude of the recommending authorities towards God is reflected in these verses: They speak not before He speaks and they act (in all things) by His command...and they stand in awe and reverence of His (glory). (21:27, 28)

On the Day of Judgment, Allah will requite each soul according to its deserts. (14:51) “As to those who reject faith and die rejecting- never would be accepted from any such as much gold as the earth contains, though they should offer it for ransom.” (3:91) The Prophet (Blessings of Allah and peace be with him.) is asked, “Can you rescue him who is in the Fire?” (39:19)

Muhammad Riaz Kirmani’s article, ‘The Islamic Concept of the Universe’, explains that Allah’s will in its absolute and pure form is reflected in five Arabic words in the Quran- Sha’a, Irada, Qada, Amr, and Ithn. (Vide Uloom-ul-Quran (Urdu), Aligarh, Jan.2004- Feb. 2005, p.362) Of these five words, two-Sha’a and Ithn- are found in Ayat-ul- Kursi, and both are preceded by the Arabic word,‘illa’. He says that though ‘Ithn’ means permission, it connotes order, commandment, will power, and divine pleasure too. ‘Ithn’ can play a decisive role in tilting the balance in favour of one party when two equally equipped parties engage themselves in a mortal combat. It produces a phenomenon akin to a miracle against the established order of things and defying predictability and credulity. “It was never the part of a Messenger to bring a sign except as Allah permitted (or commanded).” (13:38)

It has been contended that intercession with permission is ‘an unintelligent concept.’ (Major Themes of the Quran, p.32) This contention may be valid in this world, as Prophet Abraham interceded on occasions without permission and without much success. On the Day of Judgment intercession without permission is preordained to fail. “Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them.” (74:48) “To Allah belongs (the right to grant) intercession.” (39:44) Intercession with God’s permission carries the guarantee of acceptance. “No intercession can avail in His presence, except for those for whom He has granted permission.” (34:23)

The theme of accountability will become prominent on the Day of Judgment. Preparations for it are afoot for it. “Soon shall We settle your affairs, O both ye worlds!” (55:31) The sole Arbiter of the destinies of all will be God Himself. “For the Command, that Day, will be (wholly) with Allah.” (82:19) As a demonstration of that Command and Authority, He will honour our beloved Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) with the privilege of advocacy and intercession: ‘Only he who bears witness to the Truth (will have power of intercession) and they (the Quraysh) know him.’ (43:86)

It has to be borne in mind that our Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) came into this world as a manifestation of divine mercy. “As a command from Our

Presence- We are ever sending- a mercy from your Lord.” (44:5, 6) “We sent you not, but as a mercy for all creatures.” (21:107) The aspect of mercy that he represented was channelized through his guidance to mankind in this world, and in the next, the same aspect of his mercy will make its everlasting impact through his gracious act of intercession and mediation. “The Day when no protector can avail his client in aught, and no help can they receive, except such as receive Allah’s mercy.” (44:41, 42) (This statement is reminiscent of what Noah told his son. 11:43) Allah bears witness to the fact that the Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) is most kind and merciful to the Believers (9:128) This testimony’s validity will be extended to the next world too.

Sincere allegiance to the Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) will make us eligible to be blessed with his intercession. Our conduct in this world should reflect our single-minded and sensitive submission to the demands of monotheism. We should be very careful in our speech and other acts of communication in order that no life is endangered, no reputation is sullied, no false allegations are made, no false testimony is given, no communal harmony is disturbed, no disagreement is shown in unparliamentary language, no deception is practised. We should ensure that the family tree is protected through the institution of marriage and its sanctity is not violated through pre- or extra-marital contacts. The Prophet’s teachings on these and other matters should be upheld individually and collectively and the Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be with him) will pray to Allah and his prayer will be granted. Allah usually answers our prayers (40:60) and, when the Prophet’s prayer of intercession is Arsh-mandated, it will be most willingly and most readily granted on the Day of Judgment. We will be saved from hell-fire and by God’s grace we will be admitted to His mercy. “He will admit to His mercy whom He will.” (76:31) We pray, “Save us from shame on the Day of Judgment”. (3:194) In response, it is stated, “The Day that Allah will not permit the Prophet and those who believe with him to be humiliated.” (66:8) This will be in keeping with what is stated in 40:51. In sharp contrast, “On the Day of Judgment,... those endued with knowledge will say: This Day, indeed, are the Unbelievers covered with shame and misery.” (16:27) “No intimate friend nor intercessor will the wrong-doers have, who could be listened to.”(40:18)

The concept that Allah is going to be the Sole Arbiter on the Day of Judgment (1:3), the Most Conclusive of Judges (10:109, 95:8), and the Lord of Throne Supreme (9:127, 27:26) finds its most artistic and symmetrical form of expression in the Ayat-ul-Kursi. According to Qurtubi, Allah is mentioned by His different names or pronouns 18 times in this verse. Zamakhshari is of the opinion that this verse has the unity of Allah as the main theme.

Appendix 1

Verbal and Semantic Parallels

There are several verbal and semantic parallels of the different sections of this verse (2:255) in the rest of the Quran which, when viewed holistically, provide an interesting and integrating network that holds the different sections together vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. Examples are given below.

Verbal and diagonal connection:

Layers 4.2 and 7 are combined as one verse in 42:4- His are all things in the heavens and on earth, and He is the Most High, the Supreme in Glory.

Verbal and vertical connections:

Layers 1, 2, 6:1: Allah! There is no (other) God but Him. To him belong the most beautiful names. (20:8)

Allah, There is no (other) God but Him, He comprehends all things in His knowledge. (20:98)

He knows what is before or behind them; and they shall not compass it with their knowledge. (20:110)

Semantic and vertical connection:

Layer 7.1 and 6.1: It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills for He is the Most High. (42:51)

Layer 7.2, 6.2: Allah, no (other God but Him)- Lord of the Throne Supreme. (27:26)

Allah suffices me- no (other) God but Him...Lord of the Throne Supreme. (9:129)

Layers 6 and 5: By His command does He send the spirit (of inspiration) to any of His servants He pleases

It may warn (men) of the Day of Mutual Meeting.(40:16, 17)

Layer 3 and 5: (All) faces shall be humbled (on the Day of Judgment) before Him- the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal.(20:111)

Semantic and horizontal connection:

- Layer 4: And We have made above you seven tracts, and We are never unmindful of (Our) creation. (23:17)
- Layer 7: Raised high above ranks, He is the Lord of the Throne of Authority.(40:15)

Verbal and horizontal connection:

- Layer 3: The Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal.

Semantic and vertical connection:

- Layer 4.1, 5: You were the Watcher over them and You are a Witness to all things (5:117) (Jesus' speech on the Day of Judgment)
- Layer 4.2: Soon shall We settle your affairs, (O ye men and Jinns!) (55:31)
- Those who respond not to Him- even if they had all that is in the heavens and on earth, and as much more (in vain) would they offer it for ransom.(13;18)

Verbal, semantic, and upward vertical connection:

- Layer 6.1 and Layer 5: He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they offer no intercession except for those who are acceptable. (21:28)
- Layer 6. 2 and Layer 5: Ideas of Kursi and Intercession:
- In an assembly to Truth in the presence of a Sovereign Omnipotent (54:55)
- One Exalted in Power, Able to carry out His will (54:42)

Verbal and upward vertical connection:

- Layer 3 and Layer 2: He is the Living One, no (other) God but Him. (40:65)
- Layer 6 and Layer 5: Allah taught David whatever (else) He willed. (2:251)
- Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds...thy Lord is ample in forgiveness. He knows you well. (53:32)
- Allah knows well those that do wrong. (62:7)

Appendix 2: Ayat- ul- Kursi and the Bible

Nothing is said to thee that was not said to the Messengers before thee. (41:43)

Sl no	Ayat- ul- Kursi, 2: 255	The Bible
1	Allah! There is no (other) God but Him-	Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. (Deuteronomy, 6:4) There is none other God but one. (1 Corinth. 8:4)
2	The Living, The Self- Subsisting, Eternal	He is the living God and an everlasting king. (Jeremiah,10:10)
3	No slumber can seize Him nor (can) sleep.	Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalms 121:4) Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah,32:19) The Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (St. Matthew, 6:6)
4	His are all things in the heavens and on earth. (vide, 3:180)	All that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. (1 Chronicles 29:11) Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. (Deuteronomy, 10:14) For thine is the kingdom. (St. Matt., 6:13, 1 Chronicles, 29:11) God, possessor of heaven and earth, (Genesis, 14:19) The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine. (Psalms, 89:11)
5	Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He Permits?	The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king; he will save us. (Isaiah, 33:22)
6	He knows what is before and behind them.	Thou hast beset me behind and before. (Psalms, 139:5)
7	Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He wills.	Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. (St. Mark, 13:32)
8	His Throne does extend over the heavens and the earth.	Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. (Isaiah, 66:1) Heaven, it is God's throne. The earth, it is his footstool. (St. Matthew, 5:34,35)
9	And He feels no fatigue in guarding	Where is the place of my rest? (Isaiah, 66:1)

	and preserving them.	Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, nor is weary. (Isaiah, 40:28)
10	For He is the Most High,	Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory and the majesty. (1 Chronicles, 29:11)
11	The Supreme (in glory)	There is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. (Jeremiah, 10:6)

Appendix 3: Versified Version of the Verse

Allah: There is no other God but Him;
 The Living God sustains the world supreme;
 He neither nods in sleep nor falls asleep;
 What is in the skies and what the earth doth keep
 He owns them all, the Lord whom we do need.
 Without His leave, who dares to intercede,
 To plead with Him, (for those who shun His path,
 For those who sin, for those who earn His wrath?)
 He knows both what betwixt their hands they hold,
 And what behind them future will unfold.
 We know but what He permits us to know,
 We learn what He is pleased to teach, to show.
 The earth and skies His Throne spans; He doth guard
 Them, sans fatigue, the Highest, Greatest Lord!

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ
 مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ
 بِالْقَلَمِ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝

12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
	مِنْ عَلَقٍ	الْإِنْسَانَ	خَلَقَ		الَّذِي	خَلَقَ		رَبِّكَ	اسْمِ	اقْرَأْ	بِ	A
مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ		الْإِنْسَانَ	عَلَّمَ	بِالْقَلَمِ	عَلَّمَ	الَّذِي	الْأَكْرَمُ	رَبِّكَ		اقْرَأْ	وَ	B

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A	Read	in	the name of	thy Lord and Cherisher		who	created		(who) created	man	out of a mere clot of blood	
B	Proclaim	and		thy Lord and Cherisher	most bounti- ful	who	taught	with the pen	(who) taught	man		that which he had not known

Syntactic Structure of the First Revelation (96: 1-5)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A	Read	in	the name of	thy Lord and Cherisher		Who	created		(Who) created	man	out of a leech-like clot of blood	
B	Read and proclaim	and		thy Lord and Cherisher (is)	Most bountiful and exalted	Who	taught	the use of the pen	(Who) taught	man		that which he knew not

A: Introductory Remarks

The first five verses of chapter 96 of the Quran are by and large most incontrovertibly acknowledged as the first revelation of the Quran vouchsafed to Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless and greet him) through the agency of archangel Gabriel in the cave of Hira during the month of Ramadan in c. A.D. 610. I have arranged these five verses in two horizontal scales (A and B) without disturbing their syntax. The verses are so arranged as to ensure that the same words recurring are accommodated in the boxes one below the other along the two scales. Consequently, some gaps emerge and they have their own significance. The same words repeated twice in the whole passage are thus accommodated in boxes A1, B1, A4, B4, A6, B6, A10, B10. The verbs in the subordinate clauses repeated twice are kept in boxes A7, A9 and B7, and B9. The two scales, in my humble opinion, refer to different periods of time scale. God knows better.

This arrangement brings out clearly the artistic complexity of the syntactic structure of the first Quranic revelation. The sequence of the words is not disturbed. At the same time, it becomes clear that the syntactic structure A comprises an imperative sentence (boxes 1-5) with a subordinating clause (boxes 6-7). This clause has a relative pronoun and an atelic verb. It is followed by another subordinating clause without an explicit relative pronoun but with a telic verb and a prepositional phrase (boxes 9-11).

The second scale begins with an imperative sentence (vidhi vakya) comprising a holophrastic and then a coordinating clause (boxes 2, 4, 5) and then a subordinating clause (boxes6-8), ending with a prepositional phrase. The subordinating clause has a relative pronoun and an atelic verb. Box 9 begins with another subordinating clause without the presence of a relative pronoun but has a telic verb bounded with an object. Box 12 functions as a direct object of the telic verb in the form of a noun clause.

Both the structures are triggered by the same word “Iqra”. They comprise repetitions, modifications, omissions, and additions.

These five verses (96:1-5) constitute a pair by another consideration too. The first two verses end in words like (khalaq/ alaq) which rhyme. The remaining three verses end in words such as akram/ qalam/ ya'lam which form a different rhyme scheme.

I. Repetitions:

The structural arrangement as devised above brings into focus the initial repetition of 'Iqra' twice. It is to be borne in mind that the formal repetition of a word carries a subtle shift of semantic nuance and more often than not the Quran does not repeat words just for the sake of repetition. Allama Yusuf Ali says, "Iqra" may mean read or recite or rehearse or proclaim aloud." (Footnote 6203 of his Commentary.) The first use of 'Iqra' may mean 'read' and the second use may include the meaning of 'proclaim' in addition to 'read'. Thus the concept of communication is envisioned in the word 'Iqra'. The word 'Quran' is etymologically related to 'Iqra'. The scripture thus becomes God's message to man through the medium of Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him). The act of reading and proclaiming the divine message is at once a conversation with God and an act of conveying the message to mankind.

Similarly, the word 'Rabbuka' (Your Lord and Cherisher) is the object of a preposition in A4, whereas the same word functions as a subject in B4.

A6 and B6 have the relative pronoun 'who' but the verbs following them are different and this difference influences its connotation.

In the boxes A10 and B10, the word Insan/ man occurs. Like other words repeated in this passage, this word also denotes two different objects belonging to two different periods. It is significant that the reference to the pen precedes the second use of the word 'Insan'.

Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say on Homo Sapiens. "Homo Sapiens is distinguished from earlier Hominid species by characteristics and habits such as bipedal stance and gait, brain capacity averaging about 1350cc, high forehead, small teeth and jaw, defined chin, construction and use of tools, and ability to use SYMBOLS."

The four words that are repeated are used each time a little differently. The second use of Iqra and Insan has semantic enlargement. Similarly, the other two words, Rabbuka and Allathi have different functions, either as a subject and an object or as a subject to two different verbs. Thus the four words are divided equally and the two pairs are symmetrically used. The repetitions are not inane. History repeats itself but with nuanced differences.

ii) Modifications:

There is a syntagmatic repetition of words in A7 and A9 and in B7 and B9. The verbs used are different at the paradigmatic level and so this may be described as a modification of the pattern of repetition discussed in the preceding unit.

There is a modification in another sense. The first use of each verb (created/taught) is intransitive and atelic whereas the second use of the same verb is invariably transitive as well as telic.

The reiteration of the verbs highlights the two important functions of God. He alone has created the universe and at present man is the last species of mammals in the chain of creation. He may replace man with another creation, if He so desires. (35:16)

The second function so lovingly discharged by Him is to provide man with the logistic support and the syllabus for the education of the whole human race because it naturally follows that the Creator alone and none else can inform the created objects about the purpose of their creation and instruct them how they can fulfil the purpose of their creation and justify their existence.

“Khalaaqa” is used as a verb and its noun form with its heightened connotation is “Khallaqaq”. “Aleem” (noun) is similarly related to allama / taught. These two verbs ‘created’ and ‘taught’ are used twice in this passage; their noun forms ‘Khallaqaq’ and ‘Aleem’ are paired equally twice in the whole of the Quran in 15:86, and 36:81. “He is the supreme Creator, of infinite skill and knowledge.” Thus the relationship of the first revelation to the rest of the Quran revealed during a span of twenty-three years is again reinforced.

Other examples of modification are as follows: A3 and A4 constitute a construct (mudaf) and a genitive (mudaf ilaih) whereas B4 and B5 constitute a sentence comprising a subject and a complement. Its pattern is S(V)C.

A2 and B2 comprise structure words – one, a preposition and the other, a conjunction respectively.

iii) Omissions:

Terence Hawkes says in his book, “Structuralism and Semiotics”(p.27) “The absence of certain words refines the meanings of those words that are present.”

A5 and B3 are empty boxes to show that A1-4 is a combination of an imperative verb and a prepositional phrase and B1 is a holophrastic functioning as a main clause and is followed by a coordinating word. This structural design differentiates semantically the use of “Iqra” in boxes A1 and B1. A5 makes the use of an adjective in B5 conspicuous and B3 highlights the new function of “Rabbuk” in B4.

The empty box A8 is most significant, as it represents a pause where an object is warranted. The absence of the object is to denote that the list of the created objects is beyond enumeration and so beyond mention, and this pause may also signify a huge temporal chunk when the process of creation had continued and man had not made his terrestrial appearance. This may be the reason why ‘created’ (box A7) is an atelic verb. This revelation avoids the listing of objects created during the First Six Days unlike Genesis chapter 1.

The empty box B11 requires a prepositional phrase similar to A11 and this prepositional phrase is present but significantly positioned at B8. This shift is a powerful foregrounding feature and requires an elaborate elucidation which is provided in an appropriate place.

The empty box A12 is a substitute for a full stop and indicates the completion of the second verse of the revelation.

iv) Additions.

In fact, there is only one addition and it appears in the form of a noun clause in the box B12. The noun clause “what he had not known” functions as a direct object of ‘taught’ in B9. The verb ‘taught’ is ditransitive with ‘man’ (box 10) as an indirect object and the noun clause as the direct object.

Summary:

	Structure A	Structure B
1	Imperative verb+ Prepositional phrase (Boxes, 1-4)	Imperative verb (repeated) + conjunction+ Another main clause (Boxes,1,2,4,5)
2	Relative pronoun + Atelic verb (Boxes, 6,7)	Relative pronoun (repeated) + Atelic verb + Prepositional phrase (Boxes, 6-8)
3	Understood relative pronoun + Atelic verb repeated as a telic verb + Object + Prepositional phrase (Boxes, 9-11)	Understood relative pronoun + Atelic verb repeated as a telic verb + Indirect object + Direct object (Boxes,9,10,12)

This table shows that each structure has three units and so there is holistic symmetry in the first revelation. However, each unit in Structure A differs from its counterpart in Structure B somehow or the other and thus each unit has an identity of its own. The sophistication of the syntactic structure warrants a still deeper explication and exploration.

Structure A is a complex sentence comprising one main clause and two subordinate clauses, i.e., adjective clauses. Structure B is a complex- compound sentence with two main clauses and three subordinate clauses. It is now obvious that the first instalment of the revelation of the Quran comprises eight clauses.

According to Terence Hawkes,” If the communication is angled towards the receiver of the message, the addressee, then the conative (or vocative or imperative) function dominates.” (p.85) The first Quranic revelation is clearly orientated towards the Prophet (May Allah bless and greet him) and this fact is borne out by the repeated use of the imperative ‘Read’ or ‘Proclaim’ and the recurrent use of the word ‘Your’ in “Your Lord and Cherisher” containing the deictic function.

By inaugurating the Quranic revelation with the imperative ‘Read’, God makes it abundantly clear that the Quran is a ‘readerly’ text and not a ‘writerly’ text. Consequently, clarity to secure human comprehension will be its chief characteristic. The Quran will be Quran-e-Mubeen

Terence Hawkes observes, “There also exists the writer for whom the verb ‘to write’ is intransitive; whose real concern is ...to produce ‘Writing’.” (p.112) In this Quranic revelation, ‘Read’ is used intransitively. The real concern is to produce ‘Reading’. The skill of reading and the Quran are not distinguished from each other. Instead, they are made identical. This is to emphasize that what should be read primarily is the Quran if the activity of reading has to justify itself. That is why the order ‘Read’ is not external to the text of the Quran but integral to and inherent in it.

There is one instance in the Quran where this word ‘Iqra’ occurs transitively. That passage is as follows: Read thine (own) record; sufficient is thy soul this day to make an account against thee. (17:14) If people disdain to read the Quran and secure guidance from it here to regulate their lives, the end-result will be far from happy. They will be compelled to read the record of their own activities on the Day of Judgment. There will be no escape from it. The guilty will read the book containing the record of their activities and exclaim, “Ah, woe to us! What a book is this! It leaves out nothing small or great, but takes account thereof!” (18:49) True welfare of one’s own self demands that the Quran should be read often for self-improvement and salvation.

‘Iqra’ is used twice here and its variant form ‘Faqraoo’ is also used twice in 73:20.

EXPLICATION

Section A: 1-4: “Read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher”. This is the main clause. As God is invoked in the act of reading, the act becomes value-based and highly sanctified. It becomes a part of the life-long glorification of and dedication to God. Reading the scripture then will not be a passive activity but will be elevated into an active communication with God.

“In the name of your Lord and Cherisher” is a significant phrase. The Lord and the Cherisher (Rabb) is also a name and an attributive function of God. He has ninety-nine names which in reality are His attributes. Among them “Allah” is considered to be a unique personal name of God. Etymologically, it means “The only Real and Genuine Deity”.

The Quran (87:15) advises the Muslims to begin their Prayers by glorifying the name of the Lord; similarly it advises them (22:28) to sacrifice animals during the Festival of Sacrifice by celebrating the name of the Lord. These two examples are enough to show that the reading of the Quran in the name of God is as much an act of worship as Prayers and the sacrifice of animals are.

William Barclay says, “In Hebrew the name means much more than merely the name by which a person is called. The name means the whole character of the person.” (His commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke, p.143) “Make mention that his name is exalted”. (Isaiah, 12:4)

According to Hindu scholars, each yuga has its own peculiar source of liberation. Meditation, for the people of Kritayuga; penance, for the people of Tretayuga; archana, for those of Dwaparayuga; and Nama Sankirtana, for those of Kaliyuga. The act of reading the Sruti (Quran) should be done in the name of the Lord, as this book was revealed in the Kaliyuga.

The one particular name selected in this revelation is ‘Rabb’ which connotes as follows in Arabic: (1) Owner and employer; (2) Well-wisher, provider, care-taker, protector; (3) Ruler, sovereign, policy-maker, administrator, chief executive. This name is so comprehensive in its wide-ranging semantic wealth.

The order to read is in consonance with and a natural corollary of this multi-layered relationship that God has with every human being. The first addressee of this order is Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) who is employed by the Sovereign of this universe to convey the divine scheme of prosperity for the whole of mankind in this age and the age to come.

“Read” is a command which implies that the text in a written form exists before reading could begin. The Prophet (blessings and peace to him) is commanded by Allah to be a reader of the Quran through the very first word of the revelation and so it follows that he is not the author or writer of the Quran. He has to read God’s word by invoking God’s name.

Section A: 6, 7: “Who created”

This is a non-restrictive adjective clause which gives additional information about “Rabb”. The combination of ‘Creator’ and ‘Owner’ is to highlight the fact that God, by virtue of being the Creator of the universe, is its Owner too. In the capacity of the Owner, He protects and manages the universe and all that it contains. As a part of this management programme, He had been sending scriptures and prophets to different nations from time to time and, ultimately, He sent the Quran to the whole human race through Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him). The era of global communication, addressed to humanity as one family, began with ‘Iqra’.

A transitive verb ‘created’ is used here intransitively or without a specific object or objects. The verb is atelic in nature with its nominalization ‘creation’ as a mass/uncountable noun. “He created (the whole creation)”. As all created things, extinct or otherwise, cannot be listed exhaustively, the use of an atelic verb is quite justified. Moreover, the act of creation requires a time stretch which is inherently indefinite, the use of an atelic verb is linguistically most appropriate.

God creates what He likes. (24:45; 30:54; 42:49) In other parts of the Quran, some specific objects created are briefly mentioned. “He who created Death and Life.” (67:1) “Verily, when He intends a thing, His command is ‘Be’ and it is!” (36:82) “Say: Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One the Supreme and Irresistible.” (13:16) “Praise be to Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light.” (6:1) “Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six Days.” (7:54) “Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the earth, and all that is between!” (21:16) “And Allah has created every animal from water.” (24:45) “And of every thing We have created pairs.” (51:49) “It is He who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love).” (7:189) “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other, (not that you may despise each other).” (49:13)

Section A8: The pause or period here is not only spatial but also temporal. The process of creation is an on-going process. New stars are born. New plants grow. This process has been going for a long, long time. The age of the universe, according to one estimate is 13.7 billion years. At one stage during this period God decided to introduce man, the last of the extant species, into the earthly scheme of things. The pause (A8) is a syntactic device to indicate a pre-human phase of earth’s history.

Section A9,10 : “(who) created man.”

In this passage, ‘who’ is implicit. By omitting the relative pronoun, the Quran makes use of a rhetorical device called Anadiplosis. The same word, ‘Khalafa’, is used as the last word of the first verse and the first word of the second verse. The verb ‘created’ is telic here because it is bound by an object and its nominalization will be ‘creatures’, a countable noun. Man is the last mammal to make his appearance on the face of the earth. As the crown of creation, his advent was an epoch-making event. The world has never been the same thereafter as he has been endowed with certain properties not gifted to many other creatures. “We have conferred on the sons of Adam special favours above a great part of Our creation.” (17:70)

‘Al-Insan’ is a generic term for mankind. Research is needed to find out why this term is preferred in certain passages of the Quran in preference to other alternative synonyms.

“He created man” is a statement repeated in 55:3.

Section A11: Min Alaq- out of (leech-like) clot of blood which clings.

Man has various stages of physical growth. “Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay). Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed. Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood, then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump, then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh, then We developed out of it another creature.” (23: 12-14)

“Do you deny Him who created you out of the dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed...” (22:5)

“He created you all from a single person.” (39:6)

Out of these several stages of development the stage of ‘Alaqa’ alone is highlighted in the first Quranic revelation. This choice of and preference for ‘Alaqa’ has a miraculous significance. (See Appendix 111 for further elucidation.)

Section B1: Iqra

An alternative meaning of ‘Iqra’- Proclaim- has been preferred by me here because reading is usually an individual- oriented activity. It may be carried on silently and with concentration. It is a process of self- improvement and of establishing rapport with the authors of mighty intellect. There is ‘a network of flexible readings, re-readings, misreadings, surreadings, unreadings, irreadings and antireadings’. (Andrew Wicking, Intertextuality of the Holy Books. 2004, p.94). ‘Iqra’ refers to the compulsive and clear reading par excellence with the intention of securing eternally blissful life, through the Quran-oriented existence here and now.

However, the act of proclamation involves more individuals than one. It goes beyond self to society. It is the first step towards mass communication. In Section B, the subject of literacy, education, and enlightenment is the core subject. And so to meet the needs of socialization, a loud and clear proclamation is indispensable.

The semantic nuances of ‘Iqra’ differ from Section A to Section B to the extent of treating the two sections as two different texts, making intertextuality a distinct possibility.

This proclamation, as a part of educating mankind, should lay stress on the concept of God. In Section A4, Rabb has the connotation of the Owner. God owns the universe because He has created it. God owns all living creatures, including man, because he is their Creator. (Vide Section A:7,9,!0) In Section B4, Rabb has the connotation of Cherisher, Care-taker, Protector, Provider, and in combination with Al-Akram (B5) has the additional meaning of the exalted and bounteous Ruler, Sovereign, and Administrator. If this concept of God is seen as the source of His educational policy, it becomes clear that He takes care of us, He protects us, He provides for our survival and success in more

ways than one, and He expects us to discharge our duties as His vicegerents on earth. His educational policy aims at the elevation and empowerment of the human race in this world and at the restoration of paradise to it in the other world. All through human history His educational policy has mirrored His scheme of welfare for us when He sent prophets and scriptures to all nations from time to time and ultimately it is mirrored in the well-preserved Quran and the well-documented life and times of Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him).

Section B2; “And”

This is a conjunction which makes this syntactic structure (Section B) a complex-compound sentence. An imperative sentence in the form of a holophrastic precedes the conjunction and a simple existential sentence- S(V)C- follows it. This coordinating conjunction treats an imperative sentence and a declarative sentence as units of equal status and is both paratactic and a formal efficiency marker, i.e., the decoder is enabled to achieve maximum understanding with the least effort.

Section B4,5: Rabbukal Akram (Your Lord And Cherisher is most exalted and most bountiful.)

When Allah asks the Prophet (blessings and peace to him) to read, He proposes to initiate him into that art of living which will sustain him through thick and thin and train him to cope with vicissitudes and to evolve into the noblest icon of humanity.

‘Akram’ is the first complementary adjective used in the first revelation and it is the only adjective in the passage. It denotes both status and character, God is exalted and generous. A similar adjective, ‘Kareem’, occurs in 82:6,7. “O man! What has made you careless concerning your Lord, the bountiful, who created you, then fashioned, then proportioned you?”

Variants of this adjective are applied to the Quran (56:77), to scriptures (80:13), to the prophets (21:26), and to worshippers (70:35) to emphasize the fact that He confers this quality on them because of their association with Him.

The effect of this proclamation is to impress upon man the fact that God is most exalted and most generous and, instead of being careless and indifferent towards Him, who cares, who loves, and who grants blessings and favours and rewards, man should be deeply indebted to Him for his very existence and survival.

God extends His bounties to man in general, irrespective of their beliefs and attitudes. “We have honoured (Karramna- an expression related to Akram) the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea, given them for sustenance things good and pure, and conferred on them special favours above a great part of our creation.” (17:70)

Section B6-12: “who taught the use of the pen, (and who) taught man what he did not know”

This section introduces God as the Teacher and Guide of mankind. His bounty manifests itself in the supply of the infrastructure for the dissemination of knowledge, and in the preparation of the curriculum and the syllabus, and in the recruitment of human teachers (prophets) for the sole benefit of mankind- the target group. Prophets are appointees of God and definitely not self-appointed.

Section A7, B7 and A9, B9: “Khlaqa/ Allama” (He created/ He taught)

The two statements are repeated twice. Once these verbs are used as atelic verbs without objects and then these verbs are used as telic verbs with ‘Insan’/man as the only object for both verbs. Thus the repetition has an inbuilt variation. Though repetition is a device of textuality here, its function is not disruptive but connotatively expansive and enriching.

It may not be sheer coincidence that the hyperbolic noun forms of ‘Khalaqa’ and ‘Allama’- ‘Khallaq’ and ‘Aleem’- are found in juxtaposition in two places only in the whole Quran, revealed piecemeal over a period of twenty-three years. The places are 15:86, and 36:81. The two main verbs in the subordinate clauses are repeated twice in the first instalment of revelation and their intensive noun forms are also repeated together twice in the whole Quran.

Section B7: “Allama”/ (He) taught.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali observes,” The Arabic words for ‘teach’ and ‘knowledge’ are from the same root.” (Footnote, 6206 in his commentary.)

The Quran lays stress on the fact that God imparts knowledge to His creation and does not want to keep the knowledge of good and evil beyond human reach. God wants knowledge to be disseminated. For example, God teaches the angels and they acknowledge that they do not know more than what God has taught them. (2:32) One of the angels, Gabriel, teaches Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him). “He was taught by one mighty in power.” (53:5) And, Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) in his turn is duty- bound to teach all those who look upon him as the officially appointed Messenger of God. “We have sent unto you a messenger from among you, who recites unto you Our revelations and causes you to grow, and teaches you the scripture and wisdom and teaches you that which you knew not.” (2:151) “Allah has sent down to you the Book and wisdom and taught you what you did not know (before).” (4:113)

God taught Adam. (2:31) God taught Noah how to construct an ark. (11:38) God taught Abraham and so he said, “O my father! To me has come knowledge, which has not reached you.” (19:43) God taught Lot. (21:74) God taught Jacob as this verse shows, “He was, by Our instruction, full of knowledge.” (12:68) God taught Joseph who says to God, “You have taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events.”(12:101)

Moses was ordered to meet one of the servants of God whom God had given knowledge from His own presence. (18:65) “Therein (in the Torah) were you taught that which you knew not.” (6:91)

“And Allah gave him (David) power and wisdom and taught him whatever (else) He willed” (2:251) God taught David how to make iron soft. (34:10) “It was We who taught him (David) the making of the coats of mail for your benefit to guard you from each other’s violence.” (21:80) God showered His blessings on Solomon. (21:81; 27:16)

This process of teaching is extended to all creation. “And your Lord taught the bee to build its cells in hills, on trees, and in (men’s) habitations.” (16:68)

“It is Allah who teaches you.” (2:282) “Allah knows and you know not.” (16:74) “Should He not know- He that created?” (67:14) “He is the Creator supreme, of skill and knowledge (infinite).” (36:81) “Allah is One who hears and knows all things.”(2:224) In these verses, a triangle of God’s knowledge, His creativity, and His duty of teaching and guiding mankind emerges clearly.

Section B8: Bil Qalam/ (the use of) the pen.

The pen marks the transition from an anthropological society to a historical one. The pen marks all the difference between primitivity and civilization. The pen makes it possible to preserve the intellectual heritage of one generation and to transmit it to the succeeding generations. Mark Twain praises the printing press in these words, “the incomparably greatest event in the history of the world.” This compliment is equally, if not more, applicable to the invention of the pen which is as much a precursor of the printing press as it is of the teleprinter, of Waterman’s fountain pen, Laszlo Biro’s ballpoint pen, the computer, the Digital Pen, and the Long Pen.

In Islamic lore the credit of inventing the writing tool goes to Sheeth (alaihissalam). Legend has it that Cadmus, a mythical Phoenician prince, introduced writing to the Greeks. It is believed that the art of writing began in Mesopotamia and Egypt followed suit a hundred years later. According to an Urdu bulletin broadcast by the BBC on October 7, 1998, the finding of German research is that Egypt taught Mesopotamia the art of writing.

The pen is an important ingredient of the infrastructure of education and symbolizes education technology. It is an external aid, symbolizing an integration of technology with education, something which modern age can easily appreciate. The internal aids of education are mentioned in the following verse: “ It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection, that they may give thanks (to Allah).”(16:78)

The tongue reads what the pen writes. By giving importance to the pen, the Quran seems to reject Plato's idea of writing "as a childish invention, an affront to mature wisdom." (Christopher Norris, "Deconstruction: Theory and Practice", p.65)

Section B9, 10:"Allamal Insan" (He) taught man.

As the word 'man' occurs after a reference to 'Qalam /pen', it may be presumed that this man is one who has learnt the use of the pen and has been able to record events and experiences and what he has heard and seen and thought and felt. The structural placement of 'bil Qalam' in B8 and not in B11 where it should belong gives rise to a new perspective on 'al- Insan' or 'man'. The 'al-Insan' of Section A10 is thus subtly and historically distinguished from the 'al-Insan' of Section B10.

The word 'man' is explicitly repeated as the same object of the two verbs, 'created' and 'taught'. It is a clear indication that the whole of the Quran is going to address all those members of humanity that it has been sent to address as its target group and to identify what constitutes prosperity and perdition for them

Section B12: "Malam Yalam"/that which he (man) knew not.

The purpose of teaching is to produce learning. One learns what one does not know. Man begins his life in this world in a state of ignorance but with the inborn potential for mobility towards know ledge. Vide 16:78.

The need for a curriculum and a syllabus is emphasized here. The duties and powers of God form the core of this syllabus. God proposed to create a vicegerent on earth. (2:30) A manual of guidance for such a vicegerent is another major part of this syllabus.

"Say: 'It is Allah who gives you life, then gives you death, then He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment about which there is no doubt' but most do not understand." (45:26)

"Then as to those who believed and did righteous deeds, their Lord will admit them to His mercy: that will be the Achievement for all to see.

But as to those who rejected Allah, (to them will be said): 'Were not Our signs rehearsed to you? But you were arrogant were a people given to sin!' (45:30, 31)

Prophets are role models (2:124, 33:21, 60:4) and scriptures are regulators and sources of divine guidance and mercy (10:57, 11:17)

g. Aspects of the First Revelation:

Now there arises a question how these five verses justify themselves as the first choice for revelation. If the revelation had to begin with the instruction of reading only,

then there are verses like the following which would have served the purpose equally well.

“Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee.” (29:45)

“And recite (and teach) what has been revealed to thee, of the Book of the Lord; none can change His words.” (18:27)

“And I am commanded to be of those who bow in Islam to Allah’s will and to rehearse the Quran.”(27:91,92)

The selection of verses 96:1-5 for the first revelation serves many more purposes than the mere instruction to read. One purpose seems to be to foster a scientific temper. This is done by laying emphasis on the “How” aspect of the three main verbs used in the revelation-read, create, teach. How should one read? The answer is that one should read in the name of God. (Section A2-4) How did God create man? The answer given is that God created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood. (Section A11) How did God teach man? The answer to this question is that the pen was put to good use as a tool for instruction. (Section B8)

The answer to the first ‘How’ refers to a mental cause; the answer to the second ‘How’ refers to a material cause; the answer to the third ‘How’ refers to an efficient cause. This reiterative emphasis on ‘How’ is to encourage the use of technical devices, to cultivate the spirit of curiosity, and to develop scientific temper and enquiry.

There is the question, “What did God teach man?” The answer is- what man did not know and could not have known but for God’s explicit role. The properties and constituents of any given object implicit in the question ‘What?’ are stressed. The biological taxonomy of any living creature is implicit in the question ‘What?’

The cheek- by- jowl allusion to God’s creation and knowledge, the allusion to the invention of the pen, and to the repeated references to ‘Man’ seem to emphasize the need for technology and inventions, the areas of scientific study, and man’s role in expanding the horizon of scientific progress under divine guidance.

Another aspect of the first revelation seems to reveal a comprehensive historical perspective of the Author of the revelation. In human history, the first stage ought to be the ultimate advent of man. The statement ‘He created man’ marks the first stage. The second stage commenced when the foundation for the era of communication technology was laid with the invention and use of the pen. The statement, ‘He taught the use of the pen’ refers to that landmark invention. God had been reaching out to mankind through the medium of prophets and scriptures in different parts of the world and at different times. The definitive and seminal revelation of the Quran preserving for ever in a nutshell all the timeless and genuine teachings and precepts revealed through the preceding prophets and scriptures of the world commenced with the order “READ” to Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) in the Cave of Hira. This order marks

the third and final epoch-making stage in human history. The day was Monday and the month was Ramadan. There will be no other Scripture to be revealed by Allah after the Quran. Muslims, therefore, celebrate this revelation throughout the month of Ramadan, year after year.

“This Quran is not such as can be produced by other than Allah; on the contrary, it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book- wherein there is no doubt- from the Lord of the worlds.” (10:37)

“Say: ‘In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy- in that let them rejoice’: that is better than the (wealth) they hoard.” (10:58)

As the Quran conveys Allah’s bounty and mercy, its revelation has a significance which will stand the test of time and which will remain unsurpassed by any future development. It will remain a most widely read Book; the human voice should bring forth its concealed melody; and the art of governance should hold up to view the splendid spectacle of social justice and harmony.

Carl Sagan offers another perspective on human history and it refers to three stages too. Talking about extra- terrestrial intelligent beings and their tentative presence, he says in his book ‘Cosmos’, “Might they somehow have an inkling of the long evolutionary progression from genes to brains to libraries that has occurred on the obscure planet Earth?” The three landmarks which he prefers are genes, brains, and libraries. When he mentions ‘genes’, he may have in his mind Charles Darwin’s concept of random genetic mutation which led to the emergence of men as a new species in different parts of the world. The Quran refers to the advent of man too as the first stage and the presence of the word ‘Alaq’ or the clot of blood is indicative of the father’s and the mother’s genomes coming into balance and preserving their hereditary factors but the Quran makes it clear that this takes effect not as a result of random genetic mutation but as a result of God’s role as the Creator. Ignoring other stages of creation, the Quran prefers the stage of ‘Alaqa’ here to emphasize the factor of hereditary genes. Isn’t this choice of ‘Alaqa’ miraculous?

When Carl Sagan refers to ‘brains’, he may have in his mind the definition of Aristotle that man is a rational man. This definition exalts intellect as the key to the sustained promotion of human capabilities and development. The Quran prefers a verb ‘taught’ to the noun ‘brains’ that Carl Sagan uses. Teaching is directed towards the cultivation of the brains. The Quran presents God as the Teacher of mankind and Carl Sagan thinks of ‘brains’ without any reference to God.

When Carl Sagan refers to the ‘libraries’, he may have in his mind the outcome of the cultivation, education, and enlightenment of the brains. The libraries preserve and store this outcome and make it accessible to and retrievable for posterity, advancing and enriching this outcome thereby. What Carl Sagan calls ‘libraries’ is anticipated by the use of the term ‘Qalam/the pen’; it is a mechanism which makes the emergence of libraries possible.

No.	Carl Sagan	The Quran
1	Genes	Alaqa/ clot of blood
2	Brains	Allama/ taught
3	Libraries	Qalam/ pen

The chart above shows how the first revelation of the Quran anticipated in a miraculous manner Carl Sagan's interpretation of human history and his definition of modern progress. The element of modernity in the Quranic revelation is too pronounced to be ignored. The supremacy of the Quranic approach to human history lies in its emphasis on the role of God and of the scriptures, and of the Quran in particular. It is unfortunate that such a brilliant astro-physicist like Carl Sagan denied himself the blessings of the Quran and died in that state of privation.

Besides dealing with science and history, the first revelation deals with the theory of education too. God is presented as the teachers' Teacher who prescribes the syllabus, selects the scriptures, revises and updates them, and recruits the prophets as human teachers according to His will and pleasure. The prophets are not self-appointed. Their role is to expound the scriptures and to elevate humanity to a high level of intellectual enlightenment and ethical excellence.

According to the educationists, there are three components of the human personality and they are known as the cognitive, the psycho-motor, and the affective components.

These components are taken care of in the first revelation as follows:--

Cognitive component: Knowledge of the name of the Lord, knowledge of His attributes, teachings of God, removal of ignorance.

Psycho-motor component: Reading, writing- "a dance of the pen"

Affective component: God's affection, bounty, and grace as shown in the words 'Rabb' and 'Akram', and in His sustained campaign to spread knowledge. Attention should be drawn to the use of the single adjective 'Akram' in connection with God as the Teacher.

Constant increase in knowledge, generous quantum of wisdom, the company of people endowed with moral excellence, and the avoidance of ignorance, superstition, and prejudice are some of the ideals of the Quranic theory of education. Uprightness in social behaviour is given a pride of place. A Muslim is sensitized against indecorous, shameful, unnatural, and obscene conduct.

The Quran trains a Muslim to function efficiently as a vicegerent of God on earth, as a cautious consumer of resources, as a responsible member of society, and as a generous contributor to the welfare and well-being of one and all

Moreover, the first revelation is an excellent introduction to the doctrinal base of Islam. There are three important beliefs- belief in one God, belief in Prophethood, and belief in the life hereafter. With regard to the first belief, the first revelation has the following details:- God is one and He has created all things. The scientists lump life into three categories- bacterial, archaean, and everything else. He is the Creator of man and He feeds him and takes care of him in several ways. God is most knowledgeable, most beneficent, and most bounteous and honourable. One of the ways in which He takes care of man is that He teaches and guides him and tells him what is good and what is evil and how he should promote goodness and eradicate evil in all walks of life. In this task of shaping human personality, He makes use of education and technology (as represented by 'Qalam'), of parents (Alaq), of scriptures and prophets (Iqra), and prescribes the universe and man for study (represented by 'Khalafa' and 'Insan' here and 'Aafaq' and 'Unfus' in 41:53.)

Belief in Prophethood is emphasized. The order to proclaim, communicate, and teach mankind is given to Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) in the expression "Thy Lord and Cherisher". "Thy" refers to Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him). The duties of a prophet as listed in the first revelation are: reciting revealed verses, proclaiming the message of God to mankind, bringing mankind closer to their one and only Creator, explaining how God is bounteous, obeying God's orders, and becoming instrumental in God's plan to educate and enlighten mankind. The agglutinative nature of Arabic script comes in handy to stress the symbiosis between Allah and His messenger by writing 'Rabbuka/Thy Lord and Cherisher' as a single word.

Belief in Akhirat/Hereafter has a unique educative and purifying value and so the Prophet (blessings and peace to him) has given it due importance in his teachings. What man did not know is a broad area which includes ignorance about life after death. The Quran says, "They know but the outer (things) of the life of this world but of the end of things (Aakhirat) they are heedless." (30:7) In another place, the angels' question put to the unbelievers is given as follows:- "Did not the messengers come to you from among yourselves, rehearsing to you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?" (39:71) This belief poses a problem to them. "Still less can their knowledge comprehend the Hereafter." (27:66)

These verses make it clear that God and the prophets have been foretelling mankind about the true life (89:24) for which this life is but a preparation and this prophecy has been a vital component of divine instruction imparted down the ages, and particularly from the time the pen began to play its role in divine teaching. Indifference to the concept of the Day of Judgment/Resurrection may qualify for divine wrath and for spiritual benightedness. In fact, the Quran says that those who believe in that Day are truly men of faith and knowledge and this foreknowledge puts them in an advantageous position over those who did not possess this knowledge. (30:56) The pen was used and the scriptures were sent to convey this knowledge. "The Hereafter is better and more enduring. And this is in the Books of the earliest revelations- the Books of Abraham and Moses." (87:17-19)

APPENDIX- 1 The First Revelation and the Bible

According to Hazrat Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her), the first revelation came to Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) when he was all alone, engrossed in prayer and meditation in the Cave of Hira near Mecca. Archangel Gabriel (salutation to him) appeared like a human being before him, and asked him to read. He replied, "I don't know how to read." The archangel hugged him with suffocating force and then let him off. This encounter was gone through three times in all its details. Afterwards the archangel read out aloud the first five verses of Chapter 96 which the Prophet could read and remember.

The sudden appearance of an unfamiliar figure, the three hugs, and the delivery of an epoch-making message shook the Prophet's composure and he became unnerved. He rushed back home to the affectionate and reassuring company of his wife, Hazrat Khadija (May Allah be pleased with her) and requested her to cover his trembling body with some cloth for warmth.

The Prophet's reaction is a testimony to the fact that his appointment to Prophethood was an experience for which he was totally unprepared, and it was as natural as the reactions of Manoah (Judges, 13:22) and of Zacharias (St. Luke, 1:12) and of Virgin Mary (ibid.,1:29) when each one of them had a chance encounter with an angel.

The circumstances leading to the delivery of the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace to him) bring to mind an excerpt from Isaiah (29:12). "And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; And he saith, I am not learned." The circumstances as narrated by Hazrat Ayesha seem to clarify what is vague in the excerpt from Isaiah. The book in question is the Quran, and the delivering agent is the archangel Gabriel. The Prophet said to the angel, "I don't know how to read" and in Isaiah, 29:12 the same statement is given as "I am not learned." The Biblical passage confines itself to the instruction 'Read' but the first revelation of the Quran, though it begins with the same instruction 'Read', goes further and what follows in just twenty words or so of Arabic is nothing less than a miracle as the word of God cannot but be a miracle. In Isaiah, the instruction to read is external to the book whereas in the Quran, the verb 'Read' is intransitive and an internal part of the scripture, the Quran.

APPENDIX 2- The Choice of “Alaqa”

The First Revelation tells us that God created man out of a leech-like clot of blood. In other places in the Quran, the origin of life and of human life in particular, is discussed. “We made from water every living thing.” (21:30) “From (the earth) did We create you.” (20:55) “We created you out of dust, then out of a leech-like clot (Alaqa), then out of a morsel of flesh.” (22:5) “Man We did create from a quintessence of clay; then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; then We made the sperm into a clot congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature.” (23:12-14)

There are several material causes for the origin of man, as explained in the verses above. Out of these material causes, one particular material cause, ‘Alaqa’, has been selected. Why? One reason may have been the necessity of maintaining the rhyme scheme. The first verse ends in ‘Khalaq’ and so for the sake of the rhyme, the second verse ends in ‘Alaq’ ‘Alaqa’ is singular and ‘Alaq’ is plural.

There may be a more important reason to reject ‘dust’ and ‘a drop of sperm’ and to select ‘Alaqa’. In the condition of ‘Alaqa’ the genes and the hereditary factors, both from the male and the female lines fuse and merge. Carl Sagan’s choice of ‘genes’ is in sync with the Quran’s choice of ‘Alaqa’. The parental duty of training the children is enshrined in that expression.

The following observation may be applicable to all mammals. It is quoted in the hope that it will be of interest to many and it may enable us to appreciate the choice of ‘Alaqa’.

“How the cell brings the two genomes (father’s and mother’s) into balance is still not known. Thomas Haaf of the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics in Berlin and his colleagues have part of the answer. Using a technique that made male DNA glow blue, they looked at mouse eggs that had just been fertilized. To their surprise the two genomes kept well apart until at least the third cell division. This separation makes it easier for enzymes to revive the paternal (genes) chromosomes.” (The Hindu, December 2, 1999, p.27)