

Allah's Revelation (Wa'hi) to His Messengers



Whatever history of past nations and divine messengers the Quran has described, it makes one thing absolutely clear: that its goal is *not* subject to random events or circumstances; that the struggle between the truth and falsehood is perpetual, not incidental ([17:81](#); [21:18](#)). The Quran gives history of past nations to highlight the workings of its eternal principles and to emphasize the goal of Allah's *Deen*. It has described the condition and the state of past nations so that we can learn from their history; so that we can deduce the underlying principles and values from their history for our own good.

Allah sent His revelation according to His divine plan, not according to certain circumstances and random events that occurred during the life of the Prophet (PBUH):

فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ

(53:10) –And thus did [God] reveal unto His servant whatever He deemed right to reveal. [Asad]

But our compilers of narrations tried to come up with their own descriptions which they called “reasons for revelation” – commonly referred to as “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” – about which the Quran says absolutely nothing. If we accept this idea of “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” then the only conclusion we can arrive at is this: if an event did not occur then the corresponding revelation would not have come down. If we accept this scenario then it also means that the content of the Quran becomes doubtful in contradistinction to the Quran’s proclamation that there is absolutely no doubt in this Book (2:2). Also, these events were limited to Prophet’s life. Therefore, if the Prophet (PBUH) had lived longer then more events would have occurred and, consequently, the Quran’s size would have increased if we believe in the idea of “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*”.

Compilers of “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*”

This is an important question to ponder. Events, after all, will continue to occur forever but revelation would not, because Allah ended His revelation with the Prophet (PBUH). Thus, the guidance obtained through event-based revelation became restricted to specific events and circumstances bounded in space and time; and, consequently, the meaning of the Quran became dependent on those past events and conditions. Those events are *not* recorded in the Quran, but, nevertheless, they are considered crucial for understanding the Quran according to this idea of “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*”. The question is: where *are* they recorded? Well, they are recorded in narrations (hadiths) and history books that were compiled more than 200 years after the Prophet (PBUH). Imams from Bukhara, Nishapur, Tirmiz, Sistan, Qazwin, Tabaristan, and Khorasan (all from Iran) collected and compiled their narrations. These Imams gave details of events that supposedly led to the revelation of verses of the Quran; and

the meanings of the Quranic verses were primed in the light of those events.

The guidance of the Quran was thus made subject to events that these Imams, on their own, recorded in their narrations more than 200 years after the Prophet (PBUH), based on chain of oral narrations. Here are some illustrative examples:

Clear-Cut Guidance of the Quran in Case of Slander and Rumor

This is mentioned in verse 11 of Surah Noor ([24:11](#)). It is popularly known as the event “*Ifk*” of A’isha (R). “*Ifk*” means to slander someone or spread rumor against someone:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ

([24:11](#)). Verily, numerous among you are those who would falsely accuse others of un-chastity [Asad].

And the result?

لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

Awesome suffering awaits any of them. [Asad]

The next verse gives guidance that in case someone brings news of slander to you then: Do not accept it on its face value; do not believe it as true; do not spread it – but, first, find out the facts about it yourself before you reach any conclusion; or if it is related to the community, then refer it to proper authorities to investigate and to find out the truth about it. Do not start spreading it because this will cause the spread of malevolence in society:

لَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَأَنفُسِهِمْ خَيْرًا وَقَالُوا هَذَا إِفْكٌ مُّبِينٌ

([24:12](#)) – Why do not the believing men and women, whenever such [a rumor] is heard, think the best of one another and say, “This is an obvious falsehood”? [Asad]

ا سُبْحَانَكَ هَذَا بُهْتَانٌ عَظِيمٌ لَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ مَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهِذَا

([24:16](#)) – And [once again]: Why do you not say, whenever you hear such [a rumor], “It does not behoove us to speak of this, O

Thou who art limitless in Thy glory: this is an awesome calumny”?
[Asad]

These are the verses of the Quran. The Quran did not tell who that person was against whom the slander was propagated. The name has not been mentioned anywhere in the Quran. It was not necessary to give the name and details against whom this slander was propagated because the Quran has given the principle and guidance in such matters. There is no need of names and details because the principle given by the Quran will apply equally to all such cases for all time.

The Quran Did Not Give Any Name in Connection With Slander

Is there any difficulty or confusion in understanding the meaning of these verses without the name of the person involved in this slander? Does it cause any doubt in understanding the principle the Quran has enunciated about slander? The Quran did not mention any name. But it is sad – really sad – what does the hadith say? It says that this slander was against ‘Aisha (R); and that she got sick because of it, so much so that she was near death. Then a revelation from Allah came down to the Prophet (PBUH) which provided proof of her chastity. Only then the Prophet (PBUH) brought her home from her father Abu Bakr’s place, to where she was summarily consigned by the Prophet (PBUH) after hearing the news of slander against her. This episode has been described in detail in hadith.

But the Quran is completely explicit about it. It says that your first reaction should have been: “On the face of it this looks like slander and rumor; that this is an awesome calumny” ([24:12](#), [24:16](#)). **The Quran orders that you should investigate the truth when you hear rumor of slander from someone**; that you must ask him to produce four witnesses to support his claim; and that if he does not produce four witnesses then you must punish him ([24:4](#)). This is all mentioned in the Quran regarding rumor of slander. But the Prophet (PBUH) does not follow any of these

Quranic instructions according to this hadith. There is rumor of slander against 'Aisha (R), the wife of the holy Prophet (PBUH) but the Prophet did not investigate its truth. He did not ask for four witnesses from those who brought to him the rumor of slander. He did not say that, on the face of it, it looks like slander and rumor; that this is awesome calumny. He did not do any of these as instructed by the Quran, and he (PBUH) sent 'Aisha (R) to her father Abu Bakr's place. Rumors kept on flying about her. According to this hadith 'Aisha (R) narrates that women kept coming and talking to her about it; and she kept on crying for a month. And according to this narration the Prophet (PBUH) did not investigate the truth of this slander for a month. Then, finally, Allah sent revelation and cleared 'Aisha (R) of any wrongdoing. Now, consider this: Prophet's life is a role model for all Muslims until the Day of Judgment. What kind of role model appears in front of us of the Prophet (PBUH) according to this hadith? What kind of Prophet's Sunnah appears before us according to this hadith? – That you should leave aside all the Quranic instructions about slander and rumor and follow the narration that has been reported in Bukhari? Unfortunately, *this* has become the Prophet's Sunnah now: Do not investigate the truth; just send your wife to her father's place. But there is a problem here. It was not the Prophet (PBUH) who reached conclusion after investigating the truth, but, it was Allah who sent revelation about this matter to the Prophet (PBUH) clearing 'Aisha (R) of any wrongdoing? So, if we practice this Sunnah and send our wives to their fathers' places, their lives, then, will be ruined because we are not going to receive any revelation. This is the result of "*Asbāb al-nuzūl*"; this is the result of event-based revelation; this is the meaning of circumstantial revelation!

Sanctity of the Mother of Believers

Did the narrators not know the sanctity of Prophet's life? 'Aisha (R) is the mother of all believers. Did they not think of their "mother" 'Aisha (R) when they narrated these things about her,

based on hearsay *after* more than 200 years after the supposed incident? Did they not pay attention to the explicit orders of the Quran about slander and rumor? Did they not know that the Quran has ordered to investigate the truth before jumping to any conclusion about slander and rumor? Did they not know that the Quran has ordered that four witnesses be produced ([24:4](#))? Did they not know that one must consider the victim of this kind of slander to be innocent unless the truth is found and the witnesses have given their testimonies? Did they not know that unless the crime is proven in a court of law to be true, until then nothing of the sort reported in this hadith is to be carried out? Did they not know that *this* will be the *real* Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH)? These people boast that Allah guaranteed the chastity of ‘Aisha (R) but they forget that what kind of opinion people will form about the Prophet (PBUH)?

The Case of Zayd (R) and Zainab (R)

Zayd (R) and Zainab’s (R) marriage was arranged by the Prophet (PBUH). This was an extraordinary marriage between a freed slave and Prophet’s own cousin sister from the family of *Banu Hashim* of the tribe of Quraysh. The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to provide an example of what he was preaching about human equality and brotherhood. But somehow the marriage did not work out and Zayd (R) divorced her. This event is mentioned in the Quranic verse ([33:37](#)). The Quran says that the Prophet (PBUH) tried his best to persuade Zayd (R) not to divorce her because the Prophet (PBUH) went against the tradition of the Quraysh to marry her cousin from the high tribe of Quraysh and its elite family of Banu Hashim to a freed slave in order to establish the principle of equality of human beings. So, he wanted this marriage not to fail. He didn’t want this to become a counterexample for the Quraysh to attack him – and to become a heartbreak for her cousin. But Zayd *did* divorce her. Zainab (R) became so distraught after this heart-wrenching event that the Prophet (PBUH) married her in order to ease her pain.

But listen to the *events* surrounding this verse as reported in hadith? It says that the Prophet (PBUH) went to Zayd's house after the marriage. When Zainab opened the door the Prophet (PBUH) became infatuated with her beauty! Please note that she was the same cousin with whom the Prophet (PBUH) had lived all his life; she was the same cousin whom he had married to Zayd – but the hadith gives the impression as if he had seen a stranger and fell in love at first sight, and wanted to marry her! That is the reason the Prophet (PBUH) told Zayd to divorce her, according to this hadith. The Quran is saying that the Prophet (PBUH) was telling him not to divorce her, and, here is this hadith, saying completely the opposite? This is because of the “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” mentioned in Bukhari as the reason for revelation. What kind of character this presents of the Prophet (PBUH)? When non-Muslims give references to these kinds of hadith then Muslims become furious. But when these get recorded in Bukhari and Muslim, and other hadith books which our scholars and jurists have embraced for thousand years, then, no one says anything about it. **In fact, these narrations have gotten so entrenched in our collective psyche that these are taught in schools and universities and have become part of Islamic curriculum.**

As for the names, the Quran mentions only the names of Zayd and Abi Lahab. The name of Zayd has been mentioned in the Quran in connection with the story in which the Prophet (PBUH) was asking him not to divorce his wife:

أَمْسِكْ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ

([33:37](#)) – Hold on to thy wife [Asad]. Don't divorce her.

We do not need these stories of events and “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” to understand the Quran. The Quran is complete by itself. It explains itself. To see the Sun, one does not need a lamp. The Quran has said that one needs knowledge, intellect, wisdom, and deep thinking to understand it. The Quran is complete *Deen*. It provides the complete system of life. The Quran is light.

<https://www.islamicity.org/21598/the-quran-nurtures-intellect-and-shapes-reason>)

The Blind Person and the Prophet (PBUH)

Let us take another example of event-based revelation.

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى; أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى

([80:1-2](#)). He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him! [Asad]

This is what the Quran says. It does not say who frowned and turned away or who the blind man was. But, the “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” comes here to fill this missing piece: The Prophet (PBUH) was sitting among the elites of Quraysh and preaching Islam to them, and then one of his followers came and sat among them. His name – Abd Allah ibn Shurayh – is also given in the narration related to this verse ([80:2](#)). The Prophet (PBUH) then frowned and turned away from him. This is given as the *reason for revelation* of this verse. Think about it: On one side are the wealthy and most influential chieftains of Quraysh, and on the other side a poor blind follower of the Prophet (PBUH) – and the Prophet (PBUH) frowned and turned away from him. *This* is the behavior of the Prophet (PBUH) this narration is depicting as the *reason for revelation* of this verse!

A Constant Theme Running Through the Quran About Allah’s Messengers

The Quran says that the chain of revelation started with Noah (PBUH) and ended with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ([42:13-14](#)). In the entire chain of revelation involving all the Prophets (PBUT), a constant theme emerges that those who initially accepted the message of the messengers were the society’s poor and downtrodden and those who initially rejected the message were the elites and the powerful of the society. In the story of Noah (PBUH) the Quran mentions that powerful elites asked him to get rid of the poor and the downtrodden that had joined his mission. Only then the elites said they will join him because they cannot

tolerate these wretched of the society sitting alongside them. But Noah (PBUH) told them that he will do no such thing. He said to them: These, whom you call the wretched, are the most sincere in accepting my message and they are the most respectful to me unlike the elites like you ([11:27-38](#)).

Wealth, power, exclusivity, influence – these are *not* the criteria for status in the eyes of the Quran. The only criterion for status in the eyes of Allah is conviction in His message and sincerity with which it is carried out. Noah said: Those who come to Him like this, have all the respect and dignity. They are closest to me. They will sit with me. If I drive them away because of you, the elites, then Allah will drive me away and from His blessing. This was the case from the first to the last messengers. All messengers had the same message for the influential elites: If you want to accept this message then do it with truth and the sincerity of your heart. If not, then you can go away. It is not the case that I will become successful if I include in my party big and powerful people. There is no question of this. **Here, acceptance is based on truth and the sincerity of the heart.** This has been the message of all the Prophets, and this is their Sunnah. This is the foundation of the teachings of the Quran. It is to create a society based on equality of all humankind for which the Quran was given to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last chain of this divine message. And no prophet is going to come after him – and, neither any book after the Quran.

Allah's Certificate Bestowed on the Prophet (PBUH)

The Quran says about the Prophet (PBUH):

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

([68:4](#)) – And thou (stands) on an exalted standard of character [Yusuf Ali].

The Quran has given this certificate to the Prophet (PBUH). Could we ever imagine that if a poor blind person comes and sits in our Prophet's gathering, then he will frown and turn away; that he will

feel bad; that he will ask him why did he come; that he will ask him to get out? Well! The Prophet (PBUH) will *never* do such a thing. But, Alas! Our “*Asbāb al-nuzūl*” of this verse says that he did exactly do that. May Allah protect us!

Allah’s final Revelation (the Quran) is universal. It is according to exclusive divine plan, not subject to circumstances and events that took place during Prophet’s (PBUH) life. It is meant for all humanity for eternity. This is not meant only for those who call themselves “Muslims.” Nothing will happen to the Revelation if we don’t internalize within our hearts and don’t follow it. After their failed experiments, nations will be ready to ponder and think in the revelation if it is brought to their attention at their level of thought; and they will ultimately come to the conclusion that if the Quran’s universal permanent values get implemented then it *will* solve life’s problems facing the world, as indeed it did as practically demonstrated by the Prophet (PBUH).

It is Quran’s promise that nations will adopt it ultimately as a system of life after due thought and diligence if they are honestly and sincerely searching for solution to life’s problems ([9:33](#)).

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

O our Sustainer! Accept our humble efforts because you are fully aware of what we speak and what is hidden in our hearts ([2:127](#)).