

**RESEARCH TITLE**

**Comprehending the Goals of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān and its Significance in Addressing Challenges**

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**Abstract**

This study conducts a critical analysis of the themes present in Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān, aiming to uncover its diverse purposes and their relevance in addressing various challenges. The researcher explores the significance of the surah's name and presents evidence supporting its direct connection to its overarching purposes. Additionally, the study delves into the historical and social context in which the young Islamic society underwent significant changes and developments. Through a profound analysis, the researcher identifies several challenges faced by the believers, encompassing intellectual, logical, faith-related, psychological, internal, external, and societal conflicts. By reflecting on the signs of the universe and the verses of the Holy Quran, believers acquire the strength to confront adversity, and hardships while steadfastly upholding virtuous values.

**Key Words:** Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān, Purposes, Challenges

## مقاصد سورة آل عمران وأهميتها في التعامل مع التحديات

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### المستخلص

تهتم هذه الورقة بالبحث في المقاصد والأغراض الأساسية لسورة آل عمران وأهميتها في التعامل مع التحديات المختلفة. وتؤكد دور اسم السورة والسياق التاريخي والاجتماعي الذي تنزلت فيه السورة في الكشف عن هذه الأغراض. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستكشف الدراسة السياق التاريخي والاجتماعي الذي مرّ به المجتمع الإسلامي الفتحي الذي شهد العديد من التغيرات والتحديات التي واجهها المسلمون عن طريق التأمل في آيات الكون وآيات القرآن الكريم، ليكتسبوا القدرة على مواجهة الصعاب والمحن مع الحفاظ على القيم الفاضلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سورة آل عمران، الأهداف، التحديات

## Introduction

One of the salient issues in understanding and reflection on the Holy Qur'ān is the detection of the purposes of Sūrahs, sometimes expressed as the unity of Sūrah. Dr. Themes of Surahs in the Quran are diverse and cover a wide range of topics, including theology, morality, law, history, guidance for personal conduct, and narratives of past prophets and nations. Each Surah carries its unique message and provides valuable insights for believers.

Deducing the theme of a Surah (chapter) in the Quran requires careful analysis and understanding of its content, context, and structure. Scholars and interpreters use various principles and guidelines to deduce the theme. Here are some main rules to deduce the theme of a Surah in the Quran, Which have been highlighted in this paper as follows:

- Contextual Analysis: Understanding the historical context in which the Surah was revealed can provide valuable insights into its theme. Knowledge of the events, circumstances, and audience to whom the Surah was addressed helps in interpreting its message.

- Linguistic Analysis: Analyzing the linguistic features, vocabulary, and style of the Surah can offer clues about its central theme. The repetition of certain words or phrases and the use of metaphors and analogies can provide insights into the Surah's subject matter.

- Thematic Unity: Analyzing the coherence and unity of the content within the Surah can reveal its underlying theme. Often, a Surah will have a central theme that is developed and reinforced throughout its verses.

- Identifying parallel verses or similar themes in other parts of the Quran can help in understanding the overarching message of a Surah.

- Divine Titles: The Surahs' names given by the Prophet Muhammad or the companions, although not part of the Quranic text, can offer some insights into the central theme.

- Prophetic traditions (Hadith) related to certain Surahs can shed light on their intended meanings and themes.

- Examining the structure and organization of the Surah, such as the division into verses and sections, can reveal thematic patterns.

- Recognizing universal themes in the Surahs, such as the oneness of God, moral teachings, and guidance for humanity, can also help in understanding their overarching message.

It is important to note that deducing the theme of a Surah requires a deep understanding of the Arabic language, Islamic history, and theological concepts. Different scholars and interpreters may have varying interpretations, leading to diverse perspectives on the themes of certain Surahs. As such, the process of deducing the theme requires careful scholarship and consideration of various perspectives.

## Literature Review

Understanding the purposes and themes of the Surahs (chapters) in the Holy Qur'an is a critical aspect of Islamic studies, offering profound insights into its theological, moral, and legal dimensions. This literature review explores the principles and methodologies scholars use to deduce the themes of Surahs, emphasizing the importance of contextual, linguistic, and thematic analyses.

Contextual analysis is fundamental in deducing the themes of Qur'anic Surahs. Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Abdel Haleem emphasize the significance of historical context in understanding the Qur'an's message. Fazlur Rahman asserts that the context in which a Surah was revealed, including the socio-political environment and the audience addressed, is crucial for interpreting its meaning<sup>1</sup>. This approach aligns with the classical exegetical tradition, which considers the *Asbab al-Nuzul* (occasions of revelation) to understand the circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific verses.

Linguistic analysis is another vital tool for scholars to uncover the themes of Surahs. The works of Toshihiko Izutsu and Arthur Jeffery provide a comprehensive exploration of the Qur'anic vocabulary and its semantic fields. Izutsu highlights the importance of understanding key Qur'anic terms and their usage within different Surahs to grasp their thematic essence. The repetition of certain words and the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and analogies are examined to reveal the underlying message of the Surahs.<sup>2</sup>

Thematic unity within a Surah is often analyzed to determine its central message. Scholars like Nevin Reda and Amin Ahsan Islahi argue that each Surah, despite its diverse content, often revolves around a central theme. Reda suggests that the coherence and unity of the content within a Surah can be discerned through a holistic reading, where the development and reinforcement of the theme across verses are examined<sup>3</sup>. Farrāhī, (1968) concept of "nazm" (coherence) in the Qur'an also underscores the interconnectedness of verses within a Surah, providing a structural understanding of its theme<sup>4</sup>.

Recognizing universal themes such as the oneness of God, moral guidance, and the prophetic narratives is also essential. Seyyed Hossein Nasr discusses the universal themes present in the Qur'an, asserting that these overarching messages provide a framework for understanding the specific themes of individual Surahs<sup>5</sup>.

This study is essential as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted approaches used by scholars to deduce the themes of Qur'anic Surahs. By examining contextual, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and structural analyses, it offers valuable insights into the theological, moral, and legal teachings of the Qur'an. Such an in-depth exploration not only enhances our comprehension of the Qur'an but also underscores how understanding the themes of the Surahs can be instrumental in applying their meanings effectively. This makes it an indispensable resource for scholars and students alike, emphasizing the practical relevance and significance of the Qur'an in contemporary Islamic studies.

### Methodology of the study

This study employs a comprehensive methodology to deduce the themes of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān by integrating several analytical approaches. It includes a literature review of key scholarly works, contextual analysis of the historical and socio- background, linguistic analysis of Qur'anic vocabulary and rhetorical devices, and examination of thematic unity within the Surah. Additionally, it uses comparative analysis to cross-reference themes across the Qur'an,

<sup>1</sup> - Rahman, F. (2009). **Major Themes of the Qur'an**. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup> - Izutsu, T. (2002). **Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an**. McGill-Queen's University Press. See also: Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2010). **Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style**. I.B. Tauris. Al-Azami, M. M. (2003). **The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation**. UK Islamic Academy.

<sup>3</sup> - Reda, N. (2017). **The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions**. Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> - Al-Farrāhī, 'Ā. Ḥ. (1968). *Signs of System*. Under the care of Mr. Badr Ad-dīn Al-Iṣlāhī, Director of the Ḥamīdīyah Department. India, 2008, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> - Nasr, S. H. (2015). **"The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary"**. Harper One.

explores divine titles and prophetic traditions for added insights, and applies structural analysis to identify thematic patterns. The synthesis of these methods aims to enhance the understanding and practical application of Surah meanings.

### 1. The Surah as Part of a Whole

The revelation of each Surah in the Quran serves specific purposes and aims that align with the overall objectives of the Quran as a whole. While a Surah is not an independent subject, section, or research, it is uniquely revealed to fulfill its intended purposes. The challenge of producing a Surah like those in the Quran is not merely about matching the number of verses, but rather replicating the inimitable aspects of the Quran, which encompass various elements that can only be fully understood through a comprehensive understanding of the Surah's intended purpose.

According to Ibn 'Āshūr, the inimitability of the Quran lies in its ability to achieve specific purposes through its Surahs. Each Surah is revealed with distinct objectives, and therefore, it is crucial to consider the specific characteristics, beginnings, and endings of the Surah in light of its intended audience and purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Interpreters and scholars may use different terms to define the purpose of Surahs, such as context, thematic unity, general subject, essence, or goal. Some have referred to the "axis" of a Surah as the key to understanding its system, but identifying this axis requires deep contemplation and careful examination of the surrounding Surahs to discern the Surah's central theme and purpose.<sup>7</sup> Once the axis is understood, the entire Surah becomes illuminated, and the arrangement of its verses falls into place, leading to a more definitive explanation of its meaning.

#### 1.1. The Identification of Surah's Purposes

The benefits of knowing the purpose of the Sūrah are mentioned by Imam 'abdul Ḥamīd Al-Farrāhī who says: "You should know that our goal of the system is that each Sūrah has an embodied image. If the meanings of the speech are linked to each other and rotate around one axis, and the speech is coherent, the speech will then have an embodied image. If you look at the speech this way, you will see what beauty, perfection and clarity it has."<sup>8</sup>

#### 2.1. Name of the Surah:

The names given to the Sūrah are of utmost importance in understanding their purposes. These names hold significant signs and symbols representing the meanings and objectives of the respective Sūrah. It is widely agreed among scholars that the names of the Sūrah are divinely prescribed (tawqīfīyah), as supported by various Hadiths and reports.

The act of naming a Sūrah is often closely related to its content or one of its specific objectives. According to most scholars, the Prophet (PBUH) personally assigned distinct names to each Sūrah, indicating their individual purposes. While some Sūrah may have multiple names, certain names have become more renowned among scholars, all of which are linked to the purposes of the respective Sūrah.

Al-Biqā'ī emphasizes that understanding the meaning behind a Sūrah's name leads to comprehending its purpose, and in turn, enables one to recognize the coherence and interconnectedness of its verses, stories, and components. Each Sūrah revolves around a central purpose, and its underlying principles are arranged in a profound and innovative

<sup>6</sup> -Ibn 'Āshūr, M. A.-ṭ. The Verification and Enlightenment (At-Taḥrīr wat-Tanwīr). Volume:3, p. 14

<sup>7</sup> - Al-Farrāhī, 'Ḥ. (1968). Signs of System. Under the care of Mr. Badr Ad-dīn Al-Iṣlāhī, Director of the Ḥamīdīyah Department. India, 2008, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> - Al-Farrāhī, p. 105.

manner. Any aspect requiring evidence can be inferred accordingly. The mastery of understanding Munāsabah (Correlation) in the Quran depends on comprehending the intended purpose of the Sūrah, as such knowledge plays a fundamental role in its interpretation.<sup>9</sup>”

Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān is one of the two Sūrahs which the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned and recommended to learn. He said: “Learn the Qur'ān, because it will intercede on behalf of its people on the Day of Resurrection. Learn the two lights, Al-Baqarah and 'Āl 'Imrān, because they will come in the shape of two clouds, two shades or two lines of birds on the Day of Resurrection and will argue on behalf of their people on that Day.<sup>10</sup>”

This Sūrah has a verse about which the Prophet - peace be upon him - said, “Woe to those who read it without reflecting upon it: Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding.” (Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān: 190). This Sūrah, as mentioned earlier when we talked about Sūrah Al-Baqarah, argues on behalf of its people and defends them [on the Day of Resurrection] and they, Al-Baqarah and 'Āl 'Imrān, are called the two lights.

## 2.2. Spatial and Temporal Context of the Surah

Added to these means which help to understand and reflect on the purposes of the Sūrahs is the knowledge of the spatial and temporal context in which the Sūrah was revealed.

Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān is Madanīyah [revealed after Hijrah]. Determining whether the Sūrah is Makkīyah or Madanīyah directly affects the understanding of the Sūrah. The meaning when linked to the events that took place in Makkah differs from that one linked to the events that took place in Madīnah. The Madanī Sūrahs and verses came mostly to show the legislative provisions and the conditions of the people of the scripture (Jews and Christians) with the people of faith (Muslims); to enact systems to form a good society based on the principles of Islam and determine what is permissible and what is forbidden in such society; and to build an Islamic family based on the fear of Allāh Almighty and His pleasure and mercy<sup>11</sup>.

They also addressed the challenges faced by Muslim communities internally or externally which is clear in Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān.

Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān is unanimously revealed in Madīnah. When observing the environment in which Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān was revealed, we realize that it was revealed during the second and third year of Hijrah, the year in which the society witnessed fundamental shifts in the organization and development of the young Islamic nation.

It was revealed after a long period in the life of Muslims, in which their conditions fluctuated between victory and defeat in multiple battles and they mingled clearly with the people of the scripture<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, Muslims experienced various events fluctuating between peace and war. Even when they were in the state of peace, they were not spared from the machinations of hypocrites and others who oppose the call of Islam in Madīnah.

<sup>9</sup> - Al-Biqā'ī, I. I. (1987). Maṣā'id Al-Nazar Lil-Ishrāf 'alā Maqāṣed Al-Suwar. Riyadh: Dār Al-Ma'ārif. P. 2. See also: - As-Suyūṭī, J. E. (1988). At-Taḥbīr Fī 'ilm At-Tafsīr [The Composition in the Science of Interpretation]. Beirut: Dār Al Kutub Al-'ilmiyyah.p. 45

<sup>10</sup> - Ibn Ḥanbal, A. I. Musnad of Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.

<sup>11</sup> - Abū Zahrah, M. b. Zahrat At-Tafsīr. Dār Al-Fikr Al-'arabī.p. 15

<sup>12</sup> - Shaltūt, M. (2004). Interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān. Dār Ash-Shurūq. P. 24

### ***2.3. The impact of the spatial and temporal context on understanding the purposes of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān***

Whoever reflects on this great Sūrah, the authentic Hadiths narrated about its virtue and position, and the narrations of the companions and their followers on learning and observing it, realizes that it has very important purposes and goals, which are consistent with its lofty position. Then, if the spatial and temporal context accompanying its revelation is well-considered, such purposes, in whole or in part, will be clear to those reflecting on it.

It should be noted here that the detection of the purposes of the Qur'ān Sūrahs is one of the fields of Ijtihād [independent reasoning or thorough exertion of a jurist's mental faculty in finding a solution to a legal question], which can differ according to different minds. This is called for by the Qur'ān as it orders worshippers to reflect on, ponder and meditate in more than one place.

However, there are means by which those who reflect on can understand and detect the purposes of the Sūrahs, including the spatial and temporal context. Whoever looks closely at the time when the Sūrah is revealed finds it to be a time full of conflict between the Muslims on the one hand and the infidels of Quraysh and their allies on the other hand. At the same time, the machinations of the hypocrites and what their hearts conceal appeared in their malicious actions and statements. So, the verses came to show that conflict, the reasons for victory and defeat and the soul diseases such as the love of the world and its wealth, amusements and luxuries which may destroy the nascent state and be the greatest cause of its defeat.

The impact of the Qur'ān on the life of that community, was very clear in this Sūrah. The force and vitality of the Qur'ānic text brings into sharp focus the images of that period, the life of the community, and the interactions and circumstances in which that life was engulfed. It penetrates deep into the Muslims' consciences, exploring their innermost thoughts, feelings and sensibilities; so much so that the reader feels those events in the same way that members of that community experienced them.

### ***3. Challenges in the Surah***

The impact of the spatial context on the understanding of the Qur'ānic text is reflected when looking at the events that the Muslims faced at the time and what the Sūrah provided them with. The great Qur'ānic Sūrahs were revealed to address a human reality in all its dimensions. It might be wondered what is most needed for the individual and society when they face internal and external challenges.

The answer comes in the same Sūrah, explaining that the steadfastness and the means of achieving it are one of the most important purposes and goals of this Sūrah. This is evident when reflecting on the time when the noble Sūrah was revealed. It teaches Muslims to remain steadfast in confronting the internal challenges, the lower desires of the soul and the external challenges of the enemies.

Such steadfastness and firmness on the truth and guidance may not be gained without proper and enough insight, prudence, meditation, reasoning and understanding which emphasize to the human the importance of the steadfastness and firmness on the truth, no matter how serious the challenges, because the people of truth are usually exposed in this world to all kinds of trials, good and evil. This is the nature of life. The firmness is therefore important and there can be no firmness without a human being who thinks, ponders and reflect on. People who are endowed with insight, who have great minds and pure and clear wisdom, are mentioned frequently in Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān.

Therefore, one of the most prominent qualities of the people of sound minds with which the verses of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān started is their supplication to Allāh Almighty, calling upon Him in humility and turning themselves with devotion to Him, as in the verse: “Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us” [’Āl 'Imrān: 8]. Deviation here means departing from the path of truth and drifting away from it.<sup>13</sup> It is a disease that first ails the heart and then is reflected in the human behavior and conduct. Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān treats the disease of deviation as being the antithesis of steadfastness and firmness.

These supplications and invocations to Allāh Almighty reflect the believer’s fear and concern about being afflicted by deviation, trials, relapse and drifting away from the way of guidance and the path of truth established by Sūrah Al Baqarah in the heart of believer. Therefore, the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) used to supplicate frequently: “O Controller of the hearts, make my heart steadfast in Your religion”.<sup>14</sup>

Steadfastness is the main focus around which Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān revolves. Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān defends those believing in it as much as they believe in its approach and apply it.

The first part of the Sūrah dealt with the internal challenges of the soul. Then the conclusion of the Sūrah summarized how to face the challenges. Between the beginning and the end, it presented examples of prophets, sincere lovers of truth and believers who remained steadfast on the approach despite all the challenges they faced in their lives. Accordingly, the naming of the Sūrah as Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān reflects this fact.

Just as Sūrah Al-Baqarah began, Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān began with “Alif Lām Mīm” and with the main foundation in the heart of the believer, namely: steadfastness and guidance. However, how can this foundation be gained? There is no doubt that this is achieved by monotheism which is the fundamental issue of the believer as provided for by Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān. Moreover, it did not stop at the issue of monotheism, but it showed the believer many things, means and challenges that he might face in life, such as intellectual challenges, logical challenges, challenges related to faith, religion and monotheism, psychological challenges, internal challenges, external challenges and conflict with certain groups in society and in real life.

### ***3.1. Overcoming Challenges in the Surah***

Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān, with its great verses, provided the believer with the truly effective weapon by which he can overcome all these challenges and difficulties. It did not leave the believer in vain, but it explained to him the challenges of different types and the ways by which he can confront these challenges.

The Sūrah dealt with various forms of challenges, summarized in its first verses, and then detailed in the middle of the Sūrah. It presented several examples and situations including those happened to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions. It explained how to deal with those challenges.

Hence, the reader of these challenges must recall that these events are not only historical stories to read, but also a reality that can happen in the lives of individuals and communities at any time and place.

<sup>13</sup> For more details see: Ruqaiya Taha Alalwani, The contextual and structural aspects and their impact aid in understanding the objectives of the chapters (Surahs) of the Holy Quran( in Arabic), India: Majalla Kirala, January - I Issue - II .Vol 2018, pp.104. Many parts of this paper are originally written and published in Arabic.

<sup>14</sup> It is narrated by Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, At-termezi and Al-Ḥākim that Anas Ibn Mālik said: “The Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) often used to say: O Allāh, make my heart steadfast in (adhering to) Your religion. A man said: O Messenger of Allāh! Do you fear for us when we have believed in you and in the Message that you have brought? He said: Hearts are between two of the fingers of the Most Merciful, and He controls them.”



A number of scholars have linked the detection of the purposes of the Sūrahs with the name that such Sūrahs are known for. 'Āl 'Imrān [the family of 'Imrān] after whom the Sūrah is named is the family of Mary and Jasus. 'Imrān is most likely the father of Mary<sup>15</sup>.

Hence, Allāh says, "Truly, Allāh chose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imrān above all people" ('Āl 'Imrān: 33). The first example presented by the Sūrah about those who remain steadfast and firm on the truth is a model of a woman, the wife of 'Imrān, who had great hopes, goals and ambitions. She became pregnant with a child and made it her mission to bring up the child. This normal natural process for any woman has been given new meanings and values by this woman. She turned herself with devotion to Allāh imploring Him to accept her vow, make what in her womb free of assignments and burdens and dedicate it to the service of the Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem and the worship of Allāh alone.

The wife of 'Imrān faced a difficult challenge and test. She gave birth to a female. It was a common practice in her community that whoever dedicates himself to serving the Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem and the worship of Allāh must be male and not female; nevertheless, this great woman did not give up her dream and goal. This is an example of remaining steadfast and firm under the pressure of society and the prevailing cultural environment which is recurrent today and in every age. Many people may collapse under such pressure because of lack of steadfastness and firmness.

The wife of 'Imrān turned herself again with devotion to Allāh Almighty and said, "I do commend her and her offspring to Your protection from satan, the accursed" ('Āl 'Imrān: 36). The award of her heart's steadfastness and firmness was the acceptance, "So her Lord accepted her (Mary) with a gracious acceptance and made her grow into an excellent form and assigned her to the care of Zachariah." ('Āl 'Imrān: 36). The more a person keeps steadfast on the commands of Allāh, the more he will become firm and confident in the commands of Allāh. This is one of the norms presented by Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān.

The verses then proceed to show the position of the truthful daughter and blessed virgin Mary who grew up in the atmosphere of chastity and purity, and show her steadfastness before tests and trials.

Mary was known for her remembrance and worship of Allāh and her praying, bowing and prostration to Allāh Almighty. Allāh Almighty wanted to give her good tidings through a prophetic word from Him about the birth of a son whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. But these good tidings came in the midst of a great ordeal that Mary, the truthful, was exposed to.

The verses in Sūrah Maryam describe the condition of Mary, the human, and the fear, panic, anxiety, ordeal and distress that afflicted Mary to the point where she cried, "Ah! would that I had died before this! would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" (Maryam: 23). That was where the Mary's steadfastness came into play. This young woman who used to bow and prostrate to Allāh Almighty must keep obedience to Allāh's commands and comply with his orders even when she faces the most difficult trials. "She (Mary) said, 'My Lord! how can I and whence shall I have a child while no man has yet touched me (in conjugal relationship)?' (The Lord) said, 'Such are the ways of Allāh, He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing, He simply commands it, 'Be' and it comes to be.'" ('Āl 'Imrān: 47). When Mary realized that this was Allāh's command, she obeyed Him which fact took firm root in her heart. So, she remained steadfast and committed herself unto Allāh, the one and only God.

<sup>15</sup> - Shaltūt, Ibid, p. 45.

She entrusted her affair to Allāh and took her son, Jesus, to her people carrying him while her heart was full of steadfastness and certainty. Mary, who is pure, chaste and innocent of all evil, was fully aware of the accusations, fabrications and abuse with which her people would face her. Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, faced her community and people with steadfastness. The reward for her steadfastness, certainty and obedience to Allāh's commands was that Allāh made her and her son a sign for all the nations and sent down clear verses in the Holy Qur'ān about her.

### **3.2. External challenges in the Surah**

The Sūrah then moved to external challenges as it was revealed at a time when Muslims were at the height of the conflict with Quraysh and its allies who were waiting for the opportunity to annihilate that new state, especially after the crushing defeat suffered by the polytheists in the Battle of Badr.

Therefore, the beginning of this Sūrah was about the delegation that came up arguing the divinity of Jesus. It served as a prelude and a message to the Muslim community at that difficult time to instill in them the meanings of faith and belief and that the end is for those who are righteous. So, the verses came to prove that Allāh is the one and only God and disprove the misguidance of those worshipping gods other than Allāh and ascribing to Him partners or sons.

Allāh grants firmness unto the believers through threatening polytheists that they will suffer decline and they should not be deceived by their extravagance as the law of Allāh amongst the creatures is an everlasting and absolute decree.

What Allāh has prepared for the believers is better for them. Allāh threatens the polytheists that they will lose their power. He reveals the Jews' delusions, misinformation, falsehood in their religion and concealment of what was revealed to them. He reminds the Muslims of His grace bestowed upon them that He sent to them the religion of Islam. He orders them to reconcile and unite. He underestimates the alliance of their opponents of the people of the scripture and the polytheists. He orders them to take every precaution against their guile and the cunning of those who pretend to be Muslims and then reject faith giving an example of distinguishing and separation between the wicked and the good. He also orders them to take pride in themselves and bear patiently adversity, scourge and hurt of the enemy. As a reward, He promises them victory and support and that He will instill terror into the hearts of their enemy<sup>16</sup>.

### **3.3. . External Challenges for the Muslim Community**

Then the Sūrah presented examples of external challenges that the Muslim community could face and showed the means of steadfastness on the truth; hence, patience was mentioned in the Sūrah in a number of great verses and positions at the individual and community levels. Patience means thinking about the future, foresight, planning, forethought and prudence, i.e. to take into account the value, importance, aim, purpose and consequence of everything, to think about an act before doing it, and to try to anticipate the results of the act. Patience here does not mean passivity as some people might think; rather it is to wait positively and work productively with genuine intention, sincerity and supplication to Allāh Almighty taking into account all possible causes.

So, the verses moved to talk about certain battles such as the Battle of Uḥud and the Battle of Badr, and some practical positions that the Prophet - peace be upon him - and his companions had faced.

<sup>16</sup> - Ibn 'Āshūr, Ibid, V.3. p. 145.

The verses accurately describe the Battle of Uḥud, “And recall the time when you (O Prophet!) went forth early in the morning from your family assigning to the believers their battle-posts (in the Battle of Uhud). And Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 121). It is both a material readiness through the preparation of combat equipment and a spiritual readiness through the promotion of piety at the core of the confrontation, “And Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.” So recalling that Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing and aware of the intentions, purposes and goals behind going forth instills piety in the heart and the soul.

The believer’s steps and moves are all for the sake of Allāh alone which is one of the greatest reasons for victory. He therefore reminded the believers in that position, “Surely, Allāh had already helped you at (the Battle of) Badr while you were utterly weak, therefore take Allāh as a shield so that you may give Him thanks.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 123).

Speaking on the purpose of steadfastness, the main objective of the Sūrah, the verses provide examples of the proper understanding of the trials and mechanisms of dealing with the calamities of life, “That Allāh may distinguish those who really believe and so that He may raise martyrs from among you; and Allāh does not love the unjust. And so that Allāh may purge all the impurities of those who truly believe and so that He may bring to nought those who deny the truth.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 140-141).

The trials, tribulations and calamities have lessons that separate and distinguish between the believers, hypocrites and disbelievers. It is a process of scrutiny that purifies faith, screens elements of steadfastness in the lives of individuals and nations and sorts out weaknesses and strengths.

So after that, the reasons for failure and defeat were explained, “Until you lost heart, quarreled about the matter and disobeyed, after He had shown you that which you loved. Some among you wanted the world, and some among you wanted the Everlasting Life.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 152). These are causes of defeat: the failure of the soul, the internal failure, the dispute and conflict to have worldly possessions, the disobedience and violation of the order of Allāh and His Messenger, going astray from the path of Allāh, and deviating from the commands of Allāh. The believer cannot be defeated by his enemy, but may be defeated by himself when he deviates from the path of Allāh, “And yet, I am not trying to absolve myself: for, verily, man's inner self does incite him to evil. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful!” (Yūsuf: 53).

Therefore, the verses of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān, which spoke about the battle of Uḥud, explain the reasons for defeat and analyze the positions without attempting to bring the believers into a stage of self-blame and passive regrets for what they missed.

The believer, as a human, looks forward and may commit mistakes, errors and violations but he does not keep trapped in such violations. The Qur’ān provides him with an approach to handle mistakes by trying to take advantage of the mistakes that occurred and draw lessons from them to move forward.

Thus, after these verses, the Qur’ān presents different types of people, types of hypocrites who retreat and fall back in extremely difficult situations, and do not hold firm against them, “They say: Have we any hand in the affair? Say: Surely the affair is wholly (in the hands) of Allah. They conceal within their souls what they would not reveal to you. They say: Had we any hand in the affair, we would not have been slain here. Say: Had you remained in your houses, those for whom slaughter was ordained would certainly have gone forth to the places where they would be slain, and that Allāh might test what was in your breasts and that He might purge what was in your hearts; and Allāh knows what is in the breasts.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 154).

Such is the saying of the hypocrites who retreat, fall back and turn others away (from fighting). Such is their saying and attitude in trials and tribulations. When they see death with their eyes, they do not realize that the death is by Allāh's command. And that fighting, steadfastness and endurance for the sake of the truth in trials, tribulations and battles have nothing to do with the inevitable time of death, "Say: Had you remained in your houses, those for whom slaughter was ordained would certainly have gone forth to the places where they would be slain, and that Allāh might test what was in your breasts and that He might purge what was in your hearts; and Allāh knows what is in the breasts." ('Āl 'Imrān: 154).

#### 4. The Universal Challenges

Thereafter, the verses of Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān move on to the conclusion, to one of the greatest acts of worship without which no believer can keep steadfast, which is reflection. It is reported in an authentic Hadith from the Prophet (PBUH) that he said, "Tonight this verse was revealed to me, so woe to those who read it without reflecting upon it: (Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding)." ('Āl 'Imrān: 190).<sup>17</sup>

The greatest means is the one that brings together all means of steadfastness mentioned by the great Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān. By reflection, the believer's heart beholds the great signs of Allāh in the universe. So, he becomes aware of the absolute power of Allāh and then falls down in humility and prostration before Allāh Almighty. He remembers Allāh standing, sitting and lying on his sides and reflects upon the creation of Allāh.

Reflection on the signs spread throughout the universe generates remembrance of Allāh and thanksgiving to Him. The condition of the believer may not improve until he reflects on the signs of the universe spread in the heavens and the earth and the verses of the Holy Qūran, "Our Lord! You have not created (all) this in vain. Glory be to You, save us from the punishment of the Fire." ('Āl 'Imrān: 191)

Reflection leads him to the fact that Allāh has created the heavens and the earth to suit the requirements of truth and, therefore, the believer should apply truth to himself and his life.

Ibn Al Qayyim - May Allāh have mercy on him - says, "Reflection moves the believer from the death of acumen to the life of insight, from the hardships to the liked and desirable things, from the prison of this world to the wide-open space of the Hereafter, and from the illness of doubtfulness to the unshakeable peace of certainty. All in all, the origin of all acts of worship is reflection. Reflection and self-reflection are one of the greatest acts of hearts. An hour of reflection is better than sixty years of worship without reflection."<sup>18</sup>

Reflection is an activity that arises from the heart, mind and conscience and stimulates the senses. Allāh Almighty says, "And thus their Lord has accepted of them and

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Hibbān recorded in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that 'Atā' said, 'I and 'Ubayd Ibn 'Umayr visited 'Ā'ishah. She said to 'Ubayd Ibn 'Umayr, 'What prevents you from visiting us? He said, 'what the poet said, 'Visit every once in a while, and you will be loved more.' She said, 'let's not have any gibberish'. Ibn 'Umayr said, 'Tell us about the most unusual thing you witnessed from the Messenger of Allāh - peace be upon him -. She paused and then said, 'One night, he said, 'O 'Ā'ishah, let me worship my Lord tonight'. I said, 'I swear by Allāh that I love your company and I love what pleases you.' She said, 'He then made ablution and started performing Ṣalāh. He kept weeping until his lap became wet, and kept weeping until the floor became wet. Bilāl then came to inform him about the Fajr Ṣalāh and found him still weeping; he said to him, 'O Messenger of Allāh, you are weeping when Allāh has forgiven all your past and future sins?!' He said: 'Then may I not become the most grateful servant of Allāh; tonight this verse was revealed to me, so woe to those who read it without reflecting upon it: "Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding." (Sūrah 'Āl 'Imrān: 190).

<sup>18</sup> - Al Jawziyyah, I. Q. *Miftāḥ Dār As-Sa'ādah*. Beirut: Dār Al Kutub Al-'ilmiyyah.P. 123.

answered them: Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: You are members, one of another.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 195).

Mental reflection and emotive contemplation has generated work and conduct in real life. It has generated migration for the cause of Allah and sacrifice for the sake of the truth. It has generated the ability to face adversities, calamities and hardships and to keep steadfast on good values, “Those who have left their homes, or been driven out therefrom, or suffered harm in My Cause, or fought or been slain...” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 195).

Thus, Sūrah ’Āl ‘Imrān is revealed to render reflection that generates good deed and steadfastness on it, no matter how severe the challenges are. This makes the believer say: “Our Lord! certainly, we heard a crier calling to the faith, saying, ‘Believe in your Lord,’ and we have believed. Our Lord! protect us against our sins, rid us of our evils and cause us to die with the righteous.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 193). The righteous are people of pure understanding and good conscience who are endowed with insight and thus reforming the world, society and souls and dedicating their life to good deeds and welfare of humanity and keeping steadfast on that whatever the strutting about of the unbelievers through the land is, “Let it not delude you, that the disbelievers go to and fro in the land. It is a brief provision, then Hell shall be their abode. What an evil place of rest!” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 196-197).

The believer is not deceived and his faith is not wavered when he sees the coming and going in the land of those who disbelieve, because he knows that it is but a brief enjoyment and that Allāh has prepared for those who remain conscious of Him an abode of glory, “But those who took their Lord as a shield shall have Gardens served with running streams, therein shall they live forever, an entertainment from Allāh Himself; and that which is with Allāh is better still for the virtuous.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 198).

Who reflects on the conclusion of Sūrah’Āl ‘Imrān becomes aware that it is a message of universal call for all believers to the values, truth and principles that the world is thirsting for. It is an open call to keep steadfast on these values whatever the sacrifices are. Thus, the dialogue with the people of the scripture is particularly important.

Sūrah ’Āl ‘Imrān concludes with these mechanisms and means of steadfastness, which have been asserted and encouraged by the Sūrah from the beginning to the last verse of it, “O you who believe! be patient and excel in patience and remain steadfast, and be careful of (your duty to) Allāh, that you may be successful.” (’Āl ‘Imrān: 200).

The truth cannot be attained without the steadfastness of its followers on it. Also, the truth, ideals and values that the Divine Books and all the Prophets came with may not exist without keeping patient, firm and steadfast on the truth and faithful to it, and without fear of Allāh that makes the faith a living reality reflected in good conduct, calling to good, forbidding indecency and protecting the gains of truth, values and ideals.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, understanding and deducing the themes of Surahs in the Holy Qur’ān is a complex and task. The diverse range of topics covered in the Quran, including theology, morality, law, history, guidance for personal conduct, and narratives of past prophets and nations, highlights the richness and depth of its messages. To deduce the theme of a Surah, scholars and interpreters employ various principles and guidelines, such as contextual analysis, linguistic analysis, thematic unity, identification of parallel verses, consideration of divine titles, Prophetic traditions, examination of the Surah's structure, and recognition of universal themes.

It is evident that interpreting the themes of Surahs requires not only a deep

understanding of the Arabic language but also extensive knowledge of Islamic history and theological concepts. The interpretative process is not without its challenges, and different scholars may offer varying perspectives, leading to diverse interpretations of certain Surahs. Hence, deducing the theme of a Surah necessitates meticulous scholarship and a willingness to consider multiple viewpoints.

Despite the complexities involved, the pursuit of understanding the themes of Surahs remains crucial for believers seeking to gain valuable insights and guidance from the Quran. The Quran's profound messages, combined with the scholarly efforts of interpretation, continue to enrich the spiritual and intellectual journey of those who engage with its sacred text.

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